

11) In lines 133 – 164, Hamlet gives his first soliloquy. What do we learn about Hamlet's inner thoughts? What is meant by the allusion to Hercules? What does Hamlet mean when he says, "Frailty, thy name is woman!" in line 150?

12) After hearing from Horatio, Marcellus, and Barnardo about the ghost of his late father, how does Hamlet respond? What does Hamlet mean when he says, "Foul deeds will rise, / Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes" (I.ii.279-280)?

Act 1, Scene 3

13) This scene includes long monologues from Laertes (lines 13 – 48) and Polonius (lines 57 – 87) in which each character is giving advice.

A) First, summarize the advice that Laertes is giving his sister Ophelia about Hamlet.

B) Next, summarize the advice that Polonius is giving to his son Laertes.

14) After Laertes leaves for France, Polonius seems concerned about his daughter and her relationship with Hamlet. He asks her: “You do not understand yourself so clearly / As it behoves my daughter and your honor / What is between you?” (I.iii.105-107). What is he worried about that is similar to what Laertes mentioned?

15) What are some of Polonius’ lines that show that he is not very sympathetic to his daughter’s feelings towards Hamlet and Hamlet’s towards her? What do these lines mean?

16) What advice is Polonius basically giving to Ophelia concerning Hamlet?

Act 1, Scene 4

17) As Hamlet keeps watch outside the castle with Horatio and Marcellus, he explains in lines 15 - 41 the tradition that the king is taking part in. Does he seem to be for or against this tradition? Why?

18) The ghost beckons Hamlet to follow it out into the night. Hamlet's companions urge him not to follow, begging him to consider that the ghost might lead him toward harm. Why does Hamlet decide to follow the ghost? What does he threaten if his friends won't let him go?

Act 1, Scene 5

19) What does the ghost tell Hamlet that he must be prepared to do after he listens to what it has to say?

20) Why is Hamlet's father "Doomed for a certain term to walk the night / And for the day confined to fast in fires" (lines 15 – 16)?

21) What does the ghost say about his presumed death and the actual murder?

22) The ghost has a long monologue in which he talks about his feelings towards Claudius, Hamlet's mother, and his own death. Summarize what he tells Hamlet about each of these.

Claudius –

Gertrude –

His death -

23) What does the ghost mean when he tells Hamlet that he was killed “in the blossoms of my sin / Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled. / No reckoning made, but sent to my account / With all my imperfections on my head” (lines 83 – 86)?

24) Although the ghost does not care how Hamlet goes about his revenge, what does he not want Hamlet to do?

25) What does Hamlet make the other men (especially Horatio) promise at the end of this scene?

- 5) Remember at the end of Act 1 that Hamlet made Horatio promise not to tell about Hamlet speaking with the ghost even if he started to act crazy? (1.5.190 – 192). Do you think that Hamlet is faking this crazy scene with Ophelia or is he really distraught that she has been ignoring him?

Act II, Scene 2

- 6) In this scene we are introduced to the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two of Hamlet's friends from Wittenberg. Why have these men been summoned to Denmark? In lines 1 – 26, what do the king and queen say to these two characters?
- 7) How is the problem of young Fortinbras solved? What concession has Norway made to quiet young Fortinbras?
- 8) Fortinbras and Hamlet are similar because both young men's fathers were kings and were both killed. How are the two foils to one another? In other words, how are the two different?

- 9) After Polonius declares that Hamlet is “mad” in lines 99 – 101 and reads a letter that Hamlet wrote to Ophelia in lines 123 – 132, how does he explain Hamlet’s love-sickness to the king and queen? Take a look at lines 140 – 160)
- 10) What is Polonius’s plan for testing his theory that Hamlet is love-crazy? (lines 173 – 174 & 176 – 181).
- 11) How does Hamlet appear mad as he is speaking to Polonius beginning on line 185? What is revealed in the conversation?
- 12) What is said in the conversation between Hamlet and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (lines 241 - 315)?
- 13) How does Hamlet describe his personal problems to his friends? What does he tell them? (lines 316 – 334).

14) After Hamlet and his friends talk about the players who are coming to perform a play for Hamlet, what does Hamlet mean when he says, “But my uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived... / I am but mad north-north-west. / When the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw” (lines 399 – 400 & 401 – 402)?

15) Why is Hamlet interested in hearing a “passionate speech” about "Aeneas' tale to Dido, . . . especially when he speaks of Priam's slaughter?" What is interesting about this speech? (lines 470 – 489, 493 – 522, 527, & 530- 544).

16) What arrangement does Hamlet make with Player 1 in lines 566 – 569? Why do you think he asks this of the actor? What are his intentions?

17) Hamlet's "O what a rogue and peasant slave am I" is the first of his soliloquies in Act 2.

A. What is he saying in lines 576 – 623?

B. Why can't Hamlet kill Claudius?

C. What does he resolve to do?

D. What is he saying in the How does this soliloquy contribute to the plot, characterization and atmosphere of the play so far?

Hamlet Discussion Questions, Act 3

Act III, Scene 1

- 1) What do we learn from the King and Queen's interaction with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in lines 1 – 16? What does Claudius seem to think of Hamlet's odd behavior?
- 2) What does Claudius hear from Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern that delights him? What is the dramatic irony in this? (lines 17 – 29)
- 3) When Polonius is instructing Ophelia how to act towards Hamlet so that he and Claudius can spy on her interactions with Hamlet, what does Claudius reveal? (lines 56 – 62) How can these lines make the audience have a bit of sympathy for Claudius?
- 4) Hamlet then speaks his most famous soliloquy in lines 64 – 98. What is he saying? How does he seem to be feeling?

- 5) How does Hamlet respond when Ophelia approaches him, wishing to return his tokens of love? (lines 102 – 130).
- 6) In the exchange between Hamlet and Ophelia, he bitterly tells her to go to a nunnery.
- A) What subject(s) did he just discuss with her that relate to a nunnery? (lines 117 – 129)
- B) The explanatory note in your book suggests that the word *nunnery* was sometimes used to refer to a brothel (house of prostitution). How does this alternate meaning impact your understanding of what Hamlet could be saying? How could Hamlet be using both meanings of *nunnery* in this context?

C) In lines 131 – 132 Hamlet asks Ophelia, “Why wouldst thou be / a breeder of sinners?” What evidence in lines 132–140 does Hamlet use to support this question?

D) Why might Hamlet ask about Ophelia’s father at this point? (line 141)

E) Hamlet tells Ophelia, “If thou dost marry, I’ll give thee this plague / for thy dowry” (lines 146 – 147). Why might Hamlet say something like this?

F) Explain what Hamlet is saying in lines 154 – 162.

7) How does Ophelia respond? What does her response reveal about her attitude towards Hamlet? (lines 145 & 163 – 175)

8) After spying on Hamlet, Claudius and Polonius have a discussion in lines 176 – 203.

A) What does Claudius feel is wrong with Hamlet?

B) What plan does Claudius hatch to protect himself?

C) How does Polonius respond?

Act III, Scene 2

9) Why does Hamlet give instructions to the players in lines 1 – 15 & 17 - 37 & 40 – 47? What is he advising them?

- 10) What kind of words does Hamlet say to his friend Horatio in lines 69 – 79? What does Hamlet explain to him in lines 80 – 92? How does Horatio respond to Hamlet at the end of his monologue?
- 11) As others are coming to see the play, Hamlet tells Horatio in line 96 that “I must be idle.” According to your text, the word “idle” in this instance means “out of one’s mind, delirious.” How does Hamlet seem to act in lines 99 – 105 to Claudius?
- 12) In between lines 116 – 279, Hamlet speaks/torments Ophelia with sexual jokes and innuendos. What are some of the things that he is saying to her?
- 13) As the actors are acting out the play, Claudius asks Hamlet what the play is about. In lines 265 – 267 Hamlet says, “Your majesty and we that have free / souls, it touches us not. Let the galled jade wince; / our withers are unwrung.” What does Hamlet mean by this and how is it ironic?

14) The actors basically reenact King Hamlet's death on the stage.

A. What is Claudius' reaction?

B. What is Hamlet's reaction?

C. In the actual play, the king was killed by his nephew. So, think about Claudius' reaction. Does it show his guilt over killing the king or does it show something else?

15) What is the point of Hamlet's analogy of the recorders in lines 393 – 402 when he is speaking with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern?

16) How does Hamlet's treatment of Polonius in lines 404 – 418) differ from the way he treats Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? Why the difference?

17) At the end of the scene, Hamlet has another soliloquy in lines 419 – 432.

A. How does Hamlet indicate he is ready to kill the King?

B. What does he say he will do when he meets with his mother? Explain his conflicted feelings about his mother.

Act III, Scene 3

18) What does the King order Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to do? Why? How do the two respond to his wishes? (lines 1 – 28)

19) Polonius then tells the king that Hamlet is going to his mother's room to speak to her. Polonius is going to spy and then report back to Claudius. After Polonius leaves, what does Claudius say while he is alone? (lines 40 – 76)

20) Hamlet sneaks up on the king and draws out his sword. The king is alone, so this would be the perfect time to kill him. (Lines 77 – 100).

A. So why doesn't Hamlet kill him at this moment?

B. What does this tell us about Hamlet's character?

C. When does he decide to kill him?

D. Does Hamlet use this as an excuse to further delay the killing of Claudius? Do you think that his conscience will not allow him to commit premeditated murder?

Act III, Scene 4

21) How does Hamlet verbally attack his mother in lines 11 – 27?

22) Hamlet believed Claudius was behind the arras (see line 32) when he killed Polonius instead. Why do you think in this pivotal moment he acts quickly, without the hesitation that has otherwise plagued him?

23) How does Hamlet react to killing Polonius by mistake? How remorseful does Hamlet appear?

24) Gertrude then asks Hamlet: “What have I done, that thou darest wag thy tongue / In noise so rude against me?” (lines 47 – 48). How does he respond? (lines 49 – 60).

25) Hamlet then presses contrasting pictures of the late King Hamlet with his brother Claudius in Gertrude's face. (lines 63 – 98).

A. How does he compare the two men?

King Hamlet -

Claudius –

B. How does he question his mother?

C. How does she react? (lines 99 – 102)

26) The Ghost reappears and has a conversation with Hamlet in lines 122 – 131.

A. What does it say to Hamlet?

B. In lines 121 – 159 Gertrude is unable to see the ghost of her late husband and believes Hamlet to be mad. Why do you think she cannot see the ghost when Horatio and the other guards could in Act 1?

27) In lines 157 – 159, Gertrude tells Hamlet: “This the very coinage of your brain. / This bodiless creation ecstasy / Is very cunning,” telling him that he is going mad.

A. In lines 161 - 170 how does Hamlet try to prove to his mother that he is not insane?

B. What does Hamlet instruct Gertrude to do and to avoid doing? (lines 170 – 218)

C. Will Gertrude follow what Hamlet is asking of her? What does the queen not promise or reveal to Hamlet (what does she not say)?

D. What advantage, if any, is there now that Gertrude understands Hamlet and where his madness is coming from?

28) After Hamlet asks his mother if she knew that he was to be sent off to England, what does he say about Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and his plans? (lines 225 – 240)?

29) Why do you think that Hamlet confronted his mother in this scene? What was his point in doing this?

30) What are your thoughts about Gertrude from this scene? Is she guilty of helping Claudius kill King Hamlet? What do we learn about her in this scene?

- 9) How do you feel about the way that Hamlet talked about Polonius's dead body with Claudius?
- 10) Why is Claudius' last speech in this scene a soliloquy? (lines 63 – 77) What does Claudius ask of England and why does he think England will help him carry out his plan?

Act IV Scene 4

- 11) What information do we learn about Fortinbras from the conversation between the Norwegian captain and Hamlet? (lines 1 – 30)
- 12) Hamlet's soliloquy at the end of this scene shows the effect this conversation had on him in lines 33 – 69.
- A) Why does Hamlet admire Fortinbras?

B) What does Hamlet believe has kept him from acting decisively against Claudius?

C) What is Hamlet's resolve at the end of this scene?

Act IV Scene 5

13) Take a look at the discussion between the Gentleman, Horatio, and the Queen in lines 1 – 25.

A) According to the Gentleman and Horatio, what is going on with Ophelia?

B) Why do you think the Queen does not wish to see Ophelia?

C) Why does the Queen finally agree to speak with her?

- 14) The fear of Polonius and Laertes has prevented Ophelia from sharing her true feelings throughout the play; however, in her insanity, she speaks freely. Do Ophelia's explicit songs give us a better sense of her relationship with Hamlet? (lines 26 – 71)
- 15) Is the death of Polonius the only reason for Ophelia's insanity, as Claudius believes in lines 80 – 81? To what extent do you think her betrayal of Hamlet weighs on her mind?
- 16) What are the problems Claudius lists in lines 82 - 103?
- 17) What news does the messenger bring Claudius? (lines 108 – 118)
- 18) Describe what Laertes, Claudius, and Gertrude speak about after Laertes storms in (lines 122 – 177).

19) What is remarkable about the political deal Claudius offers Laertes at the end of his scene? (lines 226 – 245).

20) Laertes and Fortinbras are both considered to be foils of Hamlet. How is Laertes seen as a foil to Hamlet in this scene?

Act IV Scene 6

21) Horatio receives a letter from Hamlet (lines 13 – 31).

A) What happened to Hamlet during his voyage to England?

B) What does he ask Horatio to do?

22) It is plausible that Hamlet's encounter with the pirate ship was part of the counter plot Hamlet alludes to earlier when talking with Gertrude at the end of Act 3 when he spoke of Claudius' plan to send him to England.

A) Do you think Hamlet's capture truly a coincidence?

B) If Hamlet did have a counter plot ready, why would he not reveal it to Horatio?

Act IV Scene 7

23) After Claudius has convinced that Laertes that Hamlet killed Polonius and that Hamlet wants to kill him (Claudius), Laertes asks why Claudius didn't take immediate action against his Hamlet.

A) What is Claudius' response? (lines 11 – 26 & 32 – 37)

B) What does this show us about Claudius' character? Why does he need Laertes on his side?

24) Claudius reads the letter from Hamlet and learns that he is alive. Laertes says, “It warms the very sickness in my heart / That I shall live and tell him to his teeth, / Thus diddest thou” (lines 61 – 63). We know that Laertes wants revenge for his father’s murder. Think about how Claudius uses this for his own gain.

A) What does Claudius initially say about his plans for getting rid of Hamlet? (lines 69 – 76)

B) How does Claudius flatter Laertes? Why does he flatter him? (lines 80 – 86 & 108 - 120)

C) Claudius asks Laertes if he loved Polonius; how does Claudius manipulate Laertes in lines 126 – 143?

25) Claudius tells Laertes that “revenge should have no bounds” in line 146.

A) What scheme is Claudius’s scheme for Laertes? (lines 145 – 158)

B) What does Laertes add to the plan? (lines 159 – 168).

C) And what is Claudius' back-up plan? (lines 169 – 186)

D) To what degree do you feel that Claudius is using Laertes?

26) What news does the Queen bring? Recount the scene she describes.

27) Do you believe Ophelia's death was an accident or suicide? Explain.

28) At the end of the scene, Laertes is obviously upset over hearing about his sister's death. Claudius tells Gertrude: "Let's follow, Gertrude. / How much I had to do to calm his rage! / Now fear I this will give it start again. / Therefore let's follow" (lines 218 – 221). Do you think that Claudius is concerned over Laertes' feelings? Could he have any other concerns?

4) Hamlet decides to speak/joke with the gravedigger.

A) When Hamlet asks the gravedigger whose grave he digs, how does the gravedigger respond? (lines 120 - 139).

B) What does Hamlet think of the gravedigger's response? (lines 140 – 146)

C) During this scene the gravedigger (obviously not recognizing Hamlet) reveals the public's opinion of Hamlet and what they have heard of his disappearance. Explain this. (Lines 151 – 167).

D) After Hamlet discovers the skull of Yorick, King Hamlet's jester, Hamlet dwells on the subject of death. What does he say? (Lines 190 – 223)

E) Aside from providing comic relief and providing the public's viewpoint on Hamlet's exile, this scene also provides a contrast to Hamlet's world-view. How does the gravedigger's view of death seem to differ from Hamlet's and vice versa?

F) Critics have spent a considerable amount of time debating Hamlet's age. Hamlet here is thirty years old, as the gravedigger makes clear (line 167). However, "young Hamlet", as he is referred to earlier in the play is still attending university and courting Ophelia. Laertes says that Hamlet's love is like "a violet in the youth of primy nature" (1.3.8). How important is Hamlet's age to our understanding or enjoyment of the play? Do you think Hamlet's age have been an issue for play-goers at Shakespeare's Globe?

5) Laertes thinks that Ophelia should have a better funeral service. What is the priest's (doctor's) answer? (Lines 233 – 242).

6) What does Laertes mean when he says, "Lay her i' th' earth, / And from her fair and unpolluted flesh / May violets spring! I tell thee, churlish priest, / A ministering angel shall my sister be / When thou liest howling" to the priest/doctor performing the funeral in lines 248 – 252?

7) Hamlet finds out that the grave is in fact Ophelia's.

A) What prompts Hamlet to jump into Ophelia's grave? (Lines 253 – 271).

B) What do Hamlet and Laertes say to one another when Hamlet reveals himself and they begin to fight? (Lines 267 – 301).

C) In this scene Hamlet talks of his great love for Ophelia. Would you agree that Hamlet's reaction to finding out Ophelia is dead (particularly his poignant cry, "What! the fair Ophelia!" (line 253)) is further proof of his love, or is it just a gut reaction to Laertes' expression of grief?

8) What does the King say to Laertes to console him after Laertes and Hamlet are separated? (lines 312 – 319).

Act V Scene 2

9) In lines 1 – 90 Hamlet explains to Horatio what happened while he was on the ship.

A) Explain how he found out the King's orders.

B) What did Hamlet do with the King's orders?

C) Throughout Hamlet's conversation with Horatio, he says things like "There's a divinity that shapes our ends" and "that was heaven's ordinance." Hamlet is convinced now more than ever that divine providence governs man's life, and that things happen as they are meant to happen. Do you feel Hamlet was justified in forging the King's order? How do you feel about what he did to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern?

10) Horatio then remarks to Hamlet, "So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to't" in line 63.

A) How does Hamlet defend his actions to Horatio?

B) How have we seen Hamlet's change in character through his actions of killing Polonius and his actions of "punishing" Guildenstern and Rosencrantz?

10) Claudius' behavior horrifies Horatio who exclaims, "Why, what a king is this!" (line 70).

A) How does Hamlet respond?

B) When Horatio worries that Claudius will learn the outcome of events in England soon, Hamlet assures Horatio that he will soon eliminate the King. However, what is bothering Hamlet? (lines 85 – 90).

11) Osric, a foolish courtier, arrives on the scene to bring Hamlet a letter. If Osric were played in modern costume, he'd probably have long blonde hair, an open shirt, and a gaudy gold chain. He believes that he is all that is charming, and loves to show his appreciation for the charm of others.

- A) Hamlet does not respect Osric, but he explains to Horatio why Osric is welcomed at Claudius' court. What is this reason? (Lines 97 – 101)
- B) How does Hamlet make fun of Osric and what is amusing about the way that Osric responds to Hamlet during their conversation? (Lines 102 – 195).
- C) What the actual news that Osric is bringing to Hamlet? (lines 114 – 116 & 160 – 166)
- D) What does Osric also say about Laertes? (lines 118 – 124).
- E) When Hamlet first saw Osric coming, he asks Horatio ["Dost know this water-fly?" in line 95.](#) A "water-fly" in Shakespeare's time was the same as in our time: a tiny little creature that flits aimlessly over the surface of the water. Why do you think that Shakespeare would have a rather comedic figure such as Osric be the one who invites Hamlet to his death?

12) Hamlet tells Osric, “Sir, I will walk here in the hall. If it please his / Majesty, it is the breathing time of day with me. Let / the foils be brought, the gentleman willing, and the / King hold his purpose. I will win for him an I can. / If not, I will gain nothing but my shame and the odd / hits” (lines 184 – 191). Hamlet does not seem to suspect any sinister purpose for the fencing match, arranged by the very man who has already tried to kill him and succeeded in killing Hamlet’s father. Hamlet seems to think that if he loses the match, he will only suffer from embarrassment and not lose his life. Is this an oversight on Shakespeare's part? Or is it possible that Hamlet's high opinion of Laertes' as a "very noble youth" ([5.1.331](#)) makes him confident that no foul play will occur?

13) Horatio warns Hamlet by saying, “You will lose this wager, my lord” in line 223 and also when he says “If your mind dislike anything, obey it” in line 231.

A) How does Hamlet respond? Does he feel confident about his choice to take part in the match?

B) Hamlet then tells Horatio: “Not a whit. We defy augury. There’s a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, ’tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come—the readiness is all. Since no man of aught he leaves knows, what is ’t to leave betimes? Let be.” (Lines 233 – 238). What does he mean by this?

14) The King calls Hamlet and Laertes together and has them begin the duel by clasping hands. They then speak a few words to one another before beginning the duel.

A) What does Hamlet first say to Laertes? (Lines 240 – 258)

B) What is Laertes' response? (Lines 259 – 267).

C) Hamlet's his desire to attain Laertes' forgiveness clearly represents an important shift in his mental state. Describe this.

15) As Hamlet and Laertes are selecting their swords, what does Claudius tell Hamlet about the match? How will this ensure that Claudius' plan will be successful? (Lines 277 – 298).

16) What happens during the duel to Hamlet, Laertes, and Gertrude? (Lines 299 – 343)

17) Why do you think Gertrude disobeys her husband and drinks the wine? Why doesn't the King do more to stop her?

18) What happens after Laertes tells Hamlet that he will also die and that the king is responsible for the set-up? (Lines 344 – 363)

19) Describe the exchange between Hamlet and Horatio in lines 364 – 385)

20) Sum up the events of the ending of the play beginning with line 386.

21) The final scene of the play completes the revenge triangle. Describe how all the sons of the murdered fathers (King Hamlet, King Fortinbras, and Polonius) have seen vengeance served.