

Notes on Hamlet

1. Why has Horatio been asked to keep watch with the guards?
2. What three matters does Claudius deal with at the opening of the play?

At the start of I, ii, Claudius displays his power in several ways. He first reminds his audience (and tells you) that he has married his brother's widow. He next refers to Fortinbras.

1. What does he say that Fortinbras is doing?
2. What does Claudius say that he is doing about Fortinbras?
3. Look carefully at his instructions to Cornelius and Voltimand: what does Claudius reveal about his power here?
4. What does their response suggest about his power?
5. One might think that Claudius' advice to Hamlet is rather cold (hey, people die, everyone's father dies, don't take it to heart [I, ii, 101], you're unnatural and unreasonable [I, ii, 102-103]). But you might find Claudius offering a kind of comfort. What is that comfort?
6. What attitude do Claudius and Gertrude display about Hamlet's clothing at the start of the play?
7. What double meaning does Hamlet convey with his comment that "I am too much in the sun"?

At I, ii, 129 and following, Hamlet speaks to himself, presumably revealing his true thoughts.

1. Reread his statement that "How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable/Seem to me all the uses of this world." (I, ii, 133-134) Explain whether that statement is consistent with his almost immediately preceding statement to his mother that "'Tis not alone my inky cloak . . . that can denote me truly. . . ./But I have that within which passes show." (I, ii, 77-85)

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2. What does Hamlet tell Horatio and the guards to expect about his behavior after he has met the ghost in Act I?

3. What does Polonius propose as a test of Hamlet's madness?

4. Laertes, Ophelia, and Polonius give advice. Repeat one example of advice from one of these people.

5. What does the "Mousetrap" tell Hamlet?

6. Why does Claudius not succeed in his prayer scene?

7. Identify what Hamlet requests of his mother at the end of the scene in her bedroom.

At III, iii, 36 and following, Claudius attempts repentance and Hamlet almost assassinates him. Of course, neither man achieves his goal there.

8. What exactly is the offense that Claudius confesses to?

9. Claudius says that his fault is past (III, iii, 51). Explain briefly whether you agree or disagree with him.

10. In what way does Hamlet's refusal to kill Claudius at this point agree with his father's command to revenge his untimely death? That is, is Hamlet yet again delaying or is he acting reasonably (at least within the constraints of a revenge tragedy)?

11. Briefly identify an irony in Claudius saying, "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below./Words without thoughts never to heaven go." (III, iii, 97-98)

12. Hamlet spends some time with a troupe of actors. What theme does this activity bring to life?

13. What does Claudius arrange for after he hears of Polonius' death?

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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14. Describe Hamlet's behavior when he is face-to-face with Claudius after Polonius' death.

15. Who dies next?

16. List the order of death of characters after this.

17. At what point in the play did Hamlet start to take action? Explain briefly.