HAMLET STUDY QUESTIONS

ACT I

Directions: Answer all questions in complete sentences on a separate sheet of paper.

Scene one
1. Describe the scene as the play opens.
2. Why are the soldiers uneasy and how does their dialogue reveal their uneasiness?
3. What conflict arises between the state of Denmark and the state of Norway?
4. What sort of man had King Hamlet been?
5. What indication of future action do you see in this scene?

Scene two
1. What do you learn in this scene about the present King of Denmark? How is he different from Hamlet's father?
2. What is Hamlet’s reaction to the queen’s marriage to the present king?
3. Cite lines that reveal Hamlet’s state of mind.
4. How does this scene advance the action concerning the conflict between Denmark and Norway?

Scene three
1. How do Laertes and Polonius regard Hamlet’s courtship of Ophelia?
2. What advice do they give Ophelia?
3. Summarize the advice Polonius gives his son.
4. Do you think Polonius’ advice is sound? Explain.

Scene four
1. What seems to be the purpose of this short scene?
2. Explain Hamlet’s comparison of the state and the individual in lines 23-38.

Scene five
1. What revelation does the ghost make to Hamlet?
2. Reread the conversation between Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus (lines 112-186). How would you describe Hamlet’s speeches in this dialogue? Upon what subject does Hamlet pledge his friends to secrecy? Do you see any connection between Hamlet’s desire for secrecy and his behavior? Do you see any connection between Hamlet’s behavior and the things that have happened to him and his family?

ACT ONE IN REVIEW

1. What major conflict is set in motion in this act?
2. What additional conflicts do you foresee?
3. What function does the ghost serve in the development of the plot?
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ACT II

Directions: Answer all questions in complete sentences on a separate sheet of paper.

Scene one
1. What is the idea that underlies Polonius' conversation with Reynaldo?
2. Does this dialogue make Polonius a more or less admirable character than you had judged him from his behavior in Act I? Explain.
3. Describe Hamlet's change in behavior towards Ophelia.
4. How does Polonius interpret this change?
5. Is Polonius correct?

Scene two
1. What request does the king make of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in the opening lines of this scene?
2. How does the ghost's revelation to Hamlet shed light on the reason behind the king's request?
4. What is Polonius' plan for testing his theory about Hamlet's mad behavior?
5. What message do Voltimand and Cornelius bring to Norway?
6. Why does the king find the message reassuring?
7. Hamlet's soliloquy at the end of this long scene indicates his state of uncertainty and his plans for determining his true course. Are there any indications of madness? Why does he refer to himself as pigeon-livered?
8. What reason does he give for his delay in avenging his father's murder?
9. What course of action does the presence of the players suggest to him?

ACT TWO IN REVIEW

1. Speaking of Hamlet's madness, Polonius says, "Though this be madness, yet there is method in it." Just as the fools and clowns in Shakespeare's other plays often prove wiser than the more "normal" characters, so Hamlet in his madness comes closer to the truth than do the "sane" characters in the play. Find indications of Hamlet's wisdom in his conversations with the following people:

A. Polonius, Act II, Scene 2
B. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Act II, Scene 2
C. His behavior as reported by Ophelia to Polonius, Act II, Scene 1

2. What is your opinion of Polonius at this point in the play? Explain.
HAMLET STUDY QUESTIONS

ACT III

Directions: Answer all questions in complete sentences on a separate sheet of paper.

Scene One
1. Just as Hamlet has resolved to use the play to discover whether the king did, in fact, murder his father, so the king is trying to determine whether or not Hamlet is a threat to him. What indications do you get that the king is uneasy at the opening of this scene?
2. Cite lines in which the king definitely admits his guilt.
3. What do you infer from the king's determination to send Hamlet to England?
4. Describe Hamlet's behavior toward Ophelia.

Scene two
1. What aspect of Horatio's character does Hamlet particularly admire? (Lines 53-75)
2. How does Hamlet show that he trusts Horatio completely?
3. What is the plot of the play within the play?
4. What is the king's reaction to the play?
5. What is the queen's reaction?
6. When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern inquire once more into the reasons for his strange behavior, Hamlet asks the players for a flutelike instrument called a recorder and uses it for the basis of his answer. (Lines 371-379) What does Hamlet mean by his answer?

Scene three
1. What is the subject of the king's conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern?
2. The king's soliloquy (lines 39-75) explains his state of mind to the audience. How does he feel about the murder he committed?
3. What stands in the way of his being forgiven?
4. What comparison does he make between earthly and heavenly justice?
5. Why does Hamlet not take advantage of this opportunity to kill the king?

Scene four
1. How does Polonius meet his death?
2. Do you think this is an appropriate end for him? Explain.
3. What does Hamlet try to accomplish with his conversation with his mother?
4. Does he believe she had been involved in his father's murder? What do you think? Why?
5. Why is Hamlet's encounter with his mother particularly dramatic?
6. What is Hamlet's plan of action as ACT III ends?

ACT THREE IN REVIEW

1. The play within the play is vital to the unfolding of the plot of Hamlet. What aspects of the acting profession does Hamlet take up in his advice to the players?
2. What does Hamlet mean when he says that the function of drama is to "hold, as twere, the mirror up to nature"?
HAMLET STUDY QUESTIONS  

ACTS IV & V

Directions: Answer all questions in complete sentences on a separate sheet of paper.

ACT IV

Scenes one - four
1. What problem does Polonius’ death pose for the king?
2. What action does he take?
3. Describe Hamlet’s encounter with the army of Fortinbras.
4. What effect does this encounter have on Hamlet?

Scene five
1. What has happened to Ophelia?
2. How have the Danish people reacted to Polonius’ death?
3. How has Laertes reacted?
4. In what way is the king responsible for the increased state of turmoil?

Scenes six & seven
1. What news does Horatio have from Hamlet?
2. What does he do when he receives this news?
3. Scene seven opens in the middle of a conversation. How do you think the king has explained Polonius’ death to Laertes?
4. How does he justify not moving more quickly against Hamlet?
5. Describe in detail the plan agreed upon by the king and Laertes when the news of Hamlet’s return reaches them.
6. With what tragic event does this act end?

ACT IV IN REVIEW

1. By the end of Act four what has happened to the conflict between the king and Hamlet?
2. What is the situation with the affairs of Polonius’ family?
3. What are the relations between Denmark and Norway?
4. When the king says that sorrows come “not in single spies,/But in battalions,” he is referring to the deaths and disorder that have already befallen the state of Denmark. What other “sorrows” are likely to lie ahead?

ACT V

Scene one
1. In the grave digger’s scene, what are the serious issues underneath the comic language? What theme of the play might the gravediggers symbolize?
2. Describe in detail the final action of the play beginning with Hamlet’s apology to Laertes. How do you feel about the ending?
3. Do you believe each character gets what he/she deserves? Explain.
HAMLET
by William Shakespeare (a worksheet)

The study of Shakespeare's play Hamlet is difficult because of the Shakespearean language which will require study to understand and because of the many characters and relationships encountered throughout the play. We will go over the language carefully as we read the play. Before we begin, however, it might be helpful to identify the play's characters: who they are, and what they mean to each other.

BERNARDO+MARCELLUS- Two guards of Elsinore Castle in medieval Denmark (where much of the action takes place) who first see a ghost dressed in armor walking on the castle's battlements at night.

KING HAMLET (The ghost)- This is Hamlet's (our hero's) father. Before the action of the play begins, he dies unexpectedly and his brother, Claudius, takes the throne and then marries his sister-in-law, Gertrude, King Hamlet's queen.

HORATIO- Prince Hamlet's best friend and confidante. He is brought to the parapets of the castle to witness the appearance of the ghost in the first scene of the play.

CLAUDIUS (King of Denmark)- Prince Hamlet's uncle who has taken the throne after the untimely death of his brother. The kingship of Denmark was an elected office, and Prince Hamlet implies early on that Claudius rigged the election so that he, rather than the king's son studying in Germany, would become king. He seems, at the start, a popular king, very much in love with his wife, and something of an alcoholic. He does have firm control of the kingdom and his duties as king which is proved by the quick way he disposes of the Norwegian petition in scene two of the play.

GERTRUDE (Queen of Denmark)- The not very bright wife of Claudius and the mother of Prince Hamlet (our hero). At the start of the play, she seems very content with her new position as Claudius' wife, giving little thought to her late husband who has been dead only a few weeks. This attitude is very upsetting to her son who feels that she has forgotten his father and married someone far beneath the late king in character and abilities.

HAMLET (Prince of Denmark)- An extremely complex character, that scholars and those interested in the theater have been writing about for centuries. He was summoned home from the University of Wittenburg with the news of his father's death. When he gets home, he finds that his mother has married his uncle, and Uncle Claudius is now the king. Needless to say he is hurt, confused, and angry. What Hamlet does or does not do in reaction to his situation is the basis of the play's action.

POLONIUS- An old and trusted advisor to the throne of Denmark. He is a man who thinks he is much smarter than he is. He has two devoted children, Ophelia and Laertes.

OPHELIA- At one point, before the action begins, Hamlet's girlfriend. Her relationship with the Prince has been discouraged by her father, Polonius, who believes that Hamlet cannot be serious about her since he is in the royal family and in line for the throne. He feels that she will only be hurt by loving Hamlet and possibly dishonored. She is an obedient daughter who generally does what her father says.