***HAMLET* Response Journal Suggestions**

The ***Response Journal Collection*** on these first seven sets of questions will be on

Act I, Scene i

1. What do we learn in this scene about the setting and the political situation to open the play? In other words, how does Shakespeare handle the *exposition*?
2. What are your impressions of Horatio? What kind of a man is he?
3. What kind of *atmosphere* does Shakespeare give this scene, and how does he achieve that atmosphere?

Act I, Scene ii

1. What are your first impressions of the new king, Claudius? What kind of a man is he?
2. How is Hamlet introduced to us? What are your first impressions of him?
3. In what ways does Shakespeare draw out the drama of the revelation of the ghost to Hamlet by Horatio and the guardsmen?

Act I, Scenes iii-iv

1. What do you think of Polonius’ advice in Scene iii, lines 58-80? Is it good advice? What do you think of the *source* of the advice (i.e. – Polonius)?
2. Speculate on the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia. What do you think of the status of this relationship, based on Ophelia’s conversations with Laertes and Polonius?
3. Hamlet’s “**mole of nature**” speech (Act I, Scene iv, Lines 23-38) is often taken as a good definition of a tragic hero. We know Hamlet is the tragic hero of this story, so what do you think his “**mole of nature**” might be, and why?
4. What might Marcellus mean by the line “**Something is rotten in the state of Denmark**” (Shakespeare I, iv, 90)?

Act I, Scene v

1. What do the details of the murder of old Hamlet (the cover story about the serpent, the use of poison in the ear) tell us about Claudius?
2. What do you think Hamlet writes down during the stage direction on line 109 of this scene (“**[*Writes.*]**”), and why do you think he makes a point of writing it down?
3. Why would Hamlet want to pretend to be insane?
4. What do you think Hamlet means when he says, “**The time is out of joint. O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right!**” (Shakespeare I, v, 188-189)?

Act II, Scenes i-ii (to line 222 – Polonius’s exit)

1. Outline in your own words what you think Polonius wants Reynaldo to do. Why is he doing this?
2. Give examples from both scenes that illustrate Polonius’ peculiar way of speaking.
3. What might some of the reasons be as to why Claudius is so concerned about finding out the cause of Hamlet’s alleged madness?

Act II, Scene ii (from line 222 – Polonius’s exit)

1. How do you interpret Hamlet’s attitude towards the visit of his schoolmates, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern?
2. Why do you think Hamlet wants to hear the speech about Pyrrhus’ murder of Priam in front of Hecuba? Basically, the question is, why *that* speech?
3. What plan does Hamlet reveal at the end of the scene involving the players? *Why* does he want to do this?

Act III, Scene i

1. Why do you think Rosencrantz and Guildenstern lie to Claudius about their meeting with Hamlet?
2. What is the gist of Hamlet’s “**To be or not to be**” speech (Shakespeare III, i, 56-90)? A good Shakespearean monologue has three parts: the presentation of the problem, an outline of the pros and cons of the problem, and a solution. Identify each of these three elements in this famous speech.
3. What does Hamlet have against women? Why is he so cruel to Ophelia?

***HAMLET* Response Journal Suggestions, cont’d**

The ***Response Journal Collection*** on these last six sets of questions will be on.

Act III, Scene ii

1. What is Hamlet’s basic advice to the actors? Is it still good advice today for modern actors? Why or why not?
2. Why does Hamlet cherish Horatio’s friendship so much?
3. What is the purpose of the play-within-a-play, *The Mousetrap*? Who are we meant to be watching during its performance?

Act III, Scenes iii-iv

1. Why does Hamlet not take the opportunity to kill Claudius in III, iii?
2. What is Hamlet’s point in showing his mother the pictures of his father and Claudius? If you were in Gertrude’s place, what would your response be to Hamlet?
3. Why do you think Shakespeare has Gertrude not see the Ghost?

Act IV, Scenes i-iv

1. What evidence do we have in these scenes that Claudius now knows that Hamlet is aware of his guilt in the murder of his brother?
2. What is Hamlet’s opinion of Fortinbras? How is Fortinbras different from Hamlet? Why do you think Shakespeare introduces Fortinbras back into the play at this point?

Act IV, Scenes v-vii

1. Why, in your opinion, has Ophelia gone mad? Why are many of her songs so crude and sexual in nature?
2. Laertes is one of several characters in this play who act as *foils* to Hamlet. (Fortinbras and Horatio are others.) In what ways are Laertes’s differences from Hamlet shown in Scenes v and vii?

Act V, Scene i

1. Hamlet, in speaking with the Clown (a.k.a. “First Gravedigger”), says, “**We must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us**” (Shakespeare V, i, 119-120). What is *equivocation*, and how is the Clown being equivocal?

*NOTE: Students who read Macbeth last year may wish to refer to issues brought up in that play to help answer this question.*

1. What conclusions does Hamlet reach about the nature of death in this scene? Are they at all consistent with the fact that he has encountered the Ghost on several occasions during the play?
2. What is Hamlet’s reaction to the news of Ophelia’s death?

Act V, Scene ii

1. How does the Hamlet of this scene compare with the Hamlet of the rest of the play? How has he changed since his return from the trip to England? Provide evidence of your opinion.
2. What does Hamlet want Horatio to do after Hamlet dies? Why?
3. At the close of the play, has Hamlet achieved his revenge? Why or why not?
4. Why does Shakespeare reintroduce Fortinbras at the end of the play?