

- Use these questions to guide you in taking notes on the play. Also write down your own notes as you read, paying particular attention to anything that strikes you as interesting, confusing, surprising, funny or beautiful. Label your notes with the act and scene numbers and keep them in order in your notebook or binder. Record line numbers and short quotations as evidence for your ideas.
- Define the literary terms in your notes. They are in **boldface** on this handout. Use the dictionary of literary terms, available in the cabinet, to help you.
- Feel free to read a summary of each act before you read the act itself. These are readily available online. Story versions of *Hamlet* are available in the library.
- A note on the text notes: use them to help you understand vocabulary and cultural details that we, a twenty-first century audience, probably won't understand on our own. You are not required to read them, but you should look to them first when lines are confusing.

Act I

Exposition & Inciting Moment

1. Good **exposition** captures the interest of the audience, introduces characters, and establishes the dominant **mood** of the play. An inciting moment launches the central **conflict** of the play. Give some examples that show how act I of *Hamlet* does these things.

Scene 1

2. What happens in the first scene? Why might Shakespeare begin the play as he does?
3. Scenes one and two set up the status quo, the situation in Denmark and in the castle. What is the situation?
4. Who are the two men named Fortinbras? Who are the two men named Hamlet?
5. Notice the suggestion that the trouble in human lives is paralleled by trouble on Earth and in the heavens (lines 115-128).
6. In what ways do the men try to explain the ghost?

Scene 2

7. What are your first impressions of Claudius (the king)?

8. Hamlet's first line, shown as an **aside** in some texts, is in response to his Uncle (King Claudius) who calls him "my cousin Hamlet, and my son" (64). What do you think Hamlet means by "A little more than kin, and less than kind."? (65). What is the effect of this introduction to the **protagonist**? What is your first impression of him?

9. The parallel of the young men Laertes and Hamlet is set up here. What do they have in common? Where does each wish to go?

10. Read Hamlet's **soliloquy** out loud. Then, consider what it reveals about his character. Notice his state of mind and his attitude toward his mother. Also notice Shakespeare's technique of comparison and his use of imagery.

Scene 3

Introduces a **subplot**.

11. What is Laertes' advice to Ophelia? How does she answer him?

12. Do lines 78-80 sound familiar to you? Line 78, "This above all: to thine own self be true" is often quoted. Explain what you think it means and why the line is so famous.

13. What is Polonius' opinion of Hamlet's "tenders / Of his affection" (99-100) to Ophelia? Why do you think Polonius has this view? How does Ophelia respond?

Scene 4

Scenes four and five present **inciting moments**; watch for them.

14. What fears do the men have about the ghost?

Scene 5

15. Be sure you understand about the murder. What was especially bad about it? What does a serpent usually symbolize in western culture?

16. What does the ghost ask of Hamlet? What does it ask Hamlet to do about Queen Gertrude?

17. What does "antic disposition" mean? (180).

18. Again, describe the situation in the castle, the royal family, and in Denmark.