

## **Hamlet Reading Guide, Act II**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

- 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 II

#### **Rising Action & Complication**

1. Which **conflicts** have been established in Act I of the play? What would you say is the main conflict driving the plot of the play?
2. Which incidents in Act II further complicate the conflict or add “fuel to the fire”? Make note of these as you read.

#### Scene 1

3. What does Polonius ask Reynaldo to do? How does he propose to get “the truth” about Laertes? What reason could Polonius have for spying on his son this way? Pay attention to Polonius’ attitude toward his children, the king, and Hamlet in Act II & how Shakespeare further characterizes him.
4. Watch for parallels between Laertes and Hamlet in Act II.

#### Scene 2

5. Why were Rosencrantz and Guildenstern invited to the Danish court?
6. What is the news from the King of Norway? What has young Fortinbras promised?
7. Read some of Polonius’ lines (85-) out loud. What tone of voice do you think is appropriate to them? What does the Queen tell him to do in line 95?

8. How does Polonius explain Hamlet's odd behavior? Is there evidence to support his opinion? Revisit question seventeen from Act I of this reading guide. Is Hamlet's behavior all an act in your opinion?
9. Note some of the **irony** and **foreshadowing** in the exchanges between Hamlet and Polonius. Also, record a few of the **puns** that Hamlet uses.
10. What does the audience learn about Hamlet's character when he speaks with Polonius? What do we learn about him when he speaks with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? Record a couple lines from each conversation and explain what they show the audience about Hamlet.
11. Read aloud the famous passage that starts halfway through Hamlet's speech, "What [a] piece of work is man . . ." What do you think he is saying about humans?
12. What is the gist of the speech (in italics) that Hamlet begins and the first player continues? (It's a story from the Latin epic poem, Virgil's *Aeneid*.) Why do you think Shakespeare might have chosen this piece for the two men to recite?
13. How does the first player look after reciting Hecuba's reaction to her husband's murder? (515-516)
14. What does Hamlet ask the first player to do for him? (530-537)
15. Read Hamlet's soliloquy (544-) out loud. Notice that he contrasts his reaction to the player's reaction. Why do you think Hamlet is upset with himself?
16. What is Hamlet's plan? (584-601) How does he think this plan will help him?