

## Hamlet Reading Guide, Act IV

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.

1. Act IV is the **falling action** in a tragedy. Notice how Shakespeare brings the numerous threads of the story together with the many short scenes in this act.

### Scene 1

2. How does Gertrude look when Claudius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern enter her room?

3. Remember that Gertrude has promised to keep the secret that Hamlet is “mad in craft,” not genuinely insane. Reread his lines (III. iv. 188-190 and 199-201). Find and record at least three places in scene 1 where she keeps her promise. Do you think she is being loyal to Hamlet over Claudius, or that she really thinks Hamlet is mad?

### Scene 2

4. How does Hamlet avoid telling R & G where Polonius' body is hidden? Give an example or two.

5. Hamlet runs off (like a fox being hunted) at the end of scene two. How does this physical act parallel his mental actions in the play?

### Scene 3

6. Read the whole scene. How would you describe King Claudius' tone? How would you describe Hamlet's?

7. What does Hamlet say in lines 19-31? What is the effect of his humor here?

8. (Notice that England is personified in lines 61-71.) What has Claudius arranged to happen in England? How does he arrange this?

#### Scene 4

9. According to Fortinbras and the Captain, why does Fortinbras ask to travel through Danish territory? Why are Norway and Poland going to fight? How many soldiers will be involved? What does Hamlet think of all this (25-29)?

10. Read Hamlet's soliloquy. Choose what you think are five important lines and paraphrase them (line by line) in your notes. Briefly explain why they are important.

11. What does Hamlet say in the last two lines of his soliloquy? What do you think of this?

#### Scene 5

12. Pay special attention to Ophelia's lines in this scene. Hamlet's "antic disposition" is paralleled here by Ophelia's genuine insanity. What sense can you make of her nonsense songs? Choose a couple quotes to record and explain. What do you think has caused this insanity?

13. Laertes returns and angrily seeks to revenge his father's death. Read lines 130-136 again. List some reasons why Laertes' revenge speech is significant.

14. (lines 198-216) Notice how Claudius manipulates Laertes to quell the young man's anger but also to harness it for his own purposes. How does this compare to the way that Claudius handled Hamlet's grief in act I?

#### Scene 6

15. What news does Hamlet give Horatio in his letter?

#### Scene 7

16. Claudius tells Laertes that he has not publicly punished Hamlet for Polonius' death for two reasons. What are they?

17. (lines 126-161) Claudius plans a duel between Laertes and Hamlet. How do they plan to kill Hamlet in this duel?

18. What news does Gertrude bring? Read Gertrude's description and write a few examples of Shakespeare's **imagery** in your notes. What effect does this imagery have on the death? How do you picture it?

19. Write one sentence to summarize the action in each scene of act IV (seven sentences total).