

## Study Guide – Hamlet [Know answers, but you do not have to turn this in!]

### ACT I : SCENE 1

- a. The Sentinels are very superstitious. They believe in witchcraft and ghosts. Horatio is a friend of Hamlet's. He is college educated and the sentinels look to him for leadership and guidance. The sentinels believe they have seen the ghost of Hamlet's father, Hamlet Senior.
- b. Note all the lines that make reference to the Great Chain of Being. Many of these references talk of disease and disaster because something has occurred to upset the natural order of things. Can you figure out what is wrong?
- c. p. 729, l. 78-107 – Horatio is giving a flashback to tell the history of Denmark's relations with Norway. Hamlet Sr. had captured lands belonging to Norway. Now that Hamlet Sr. is dead, the King of Norway's son, Fortinbras, has organized an army and is heading toward Denmark, with the object to regain these lost lands.
- d. What atmosphere does scene 1 establish for the play as a whole? Note contrast in tone between scene 1 and scene 2. Why does this contrast exist?

### SCENE 2: P. 730

- a. The scene opens with the new king Claudius announcing his marriage to Gertrude—widow of Hamlet I, and former sister-in-law to Claudius, since Hamlet I and Claudius were brothers. Historical note: Denmark used elections to determine who the king would be, not the law of primogeniture (inheritance of first born as England does). Also, the marriage of Claudius and Gertrude would have been considered incestuous. Note how easily Claudius skims past this.
- b. p. 732, ll 64-86 Hamlet lists three reasons why he is discontented and irritated. What are they? Note also the puns occurring in these passages.
- c. p. 732-33, ll. 65-117 . The first soliloquy. Claudius speaks. Note his true feelings. ll. 129 Hamlet's first soliloquy. Note all the "rot" images –the corruption.
- d. p. 733 l. 140 mythological allusion "So excellent a king, that was to this Hyperion to a satyr." What extra meaning does this allusion bring to this situation?
- e. p. 733, l. 146 – famous line, "Frailty, thy name is woman." What reasons does Hamlet give for being mad at his mother?

### SCENE 3: P. 736

- a. This scene opens with the introduction of the family of Polonius, chief advisor to the king. p. 737, Polonius gives advice in the form of proverbs to his son Laertes. These also constitute some of the famous lines from this play. "Neither a borrower nor a lender be." "This above all: to thine own self be true." What others do you see?

### SCENE 4: P. 738

- a. l. 90 "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark." Famous line. What does it mean for the play as a whole?
- b. Note the contrast between Hamlet and Horatio and their reactions to the ghost of Hamlet I.

### SCENE 5: P. 741

- a. Hamlet learns from his father that he was murdered by his brother Claudius. How? What instructions does Hamlet I give Hamlet regarding his mother Gertrude?
- b. What elements of foreshadowing do you find in Act I? What dramatic irony exists as yet?
- c. p. 744, l. 189-190 Famous line – Often Shakespeare will end a scene or an act with a rhyming couplet in which he will pack a strong thematic message. "The time is out of joint. O cursed spite/That ever I was born to set it right." What does this reveal about Hamlet's frame of mind?

#### Literary Terms to know - See Glossary page 818

aside	allusion
soliloquy	foreshadowing
pun	flashback

## ACT II: SCENE 1, P. 745

- a. This scene opens with Polonius paying Reynaldo to check up on his son Laertes who is in Paris. This begins another motif that runs through Hamlet—spying. Keep a list of other instances of spying in the play.
- b. l. 76. Polonius' interchange here with Ophelia, his daughter, sets the framework for the stock interpretation of Hamlet as the melancholy (look up meaning if you don't know it) lover. This also continues to develop the theme of madness that was begun in Act I after Hamlet learns the truth of his father's death.

## SCENE 2: P. 748

- a. King Claudius has invited classmates of Hamlet's to the castle. For what purpose? In 1991, a movie was released starring these two characters entitled *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, and starring Richard Dreyfus. This movie recreates the story of Hamlet from the point of view of these two characters. You may wish to rent it. The tone of the movie is satiric and tongue-in-cheek. At times it borders on slapstick as in the Three Stooges. I strongly suggest that you understand the whole of this play first, because you probably won't understand the movie otherwise.
- b. p. 758, l. 648. This is Hamlet's second soliloquy. What concerns does Hamlet express in this soliloquy? As the soliloquy progresses, Hamlet begins to decide on a course of action as opposed to the reflection he starts with. The soliloquy ends the second act. Like Act I, it ends with a rhymed couplet. What is revealed in this couplet? This couplet is also a famous line.
- c. Shakespeare's plays are written in five acts. He writes them in the traditional plot structure. Act I is the introduction; Act II, the rising action; Act III, the climax; Act IV, the falling action or denouement; and Act V, the resolution. If Act II is the rising action, what key events have occurred leading to the climax in the next act?

## ACT III: SCENE 1

- a. A popular form of drama in Shakespeare's day was the revenge tragedy, particularly that of Thomas Kyd whose *Spanish Tragedy* is an early example of the type. This dramatic type can be traced back to the first century Italian playwright, Seneca. The theme is revenge of a father for a son or vice versa, the revenge being directed by the ghost of the murdered man (sound familiar?) Other traits often found in revenge tragedies include the hesitation of the hero, the use of either real or pretended insanity, suicide, intrigue, an able scheming villain, philosophic soliloquies, and the sensational use of horrors. Do these apply to *Hamlet*? How? These tragedies appealed to Elizabethan audiences which were brought up on bear-baiting spectacles and public executions.
- b. p. 760, ll. 56-89 Hamlet's famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy.
- c. p. 762, l. 126. Hamlet to Ophelia "Get thee to a nunnery." Why does Hamlet treat Ophelia so roughly?
- d. p. 772. Claudius' soliloquy and Hamlet's soliloquy go back to back. Hamlet thinks of killing Claudius now, but delays, because "Now might I do it pat, now he is praying/And now I'll do't. And so he goes to heaven/....A villain kills my father; and for that,/ I his sole son, do this same villain send to Heaven.—/Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge." Elizabethan church leaders believed that if a man died while confessing his sins, he would go to heaven. Hamlet finds this too ironic for him to carry out his plan. But further dramatic irony exists at this point. What is it?
- e. The motifs of madness, spying, intrigue, appearance vs. reality continue to develop in this act. What new instances of these motifs appear?

### Literary Terms to Know

foil

dramatic irony

blank verse

rhymed couplet

prose (how used by Shakespeare)

comic relief

irony