

Hamlet

Study Guide Act III

1. Look closely at Hamlet's famous soliloquy that begins "To be or not to be." Paraphrase the meanings of the soliloquy.
2. In his soliloquy, does Hamlet mention why he wants to kill himself? Does he use the pronoun "I" or "me"? Explain.
3. In his conversation with Ophelia, how does Hamlet seem? Does he show signs of insanity as expected by Claudius and Polonius? Why does he tell her that he did love her once but that he doesn't love her anymore? Is this part necessary to his revenge against Claudius?
4. Does Claudius seem convinced of his madness by the conversation between Hamlet and Ophelia? What does he decide to do? What does Polonius suggest they do first? Why?
5. Consider Polonius' words to Ophelia (Scene 1 lines 192-194). What do you think Ophelia's emotional stance is now? What kind of support does she get from her father?
6. In Scene 2, what does Hamlet admire most in Horatio? See lines 76-79.
7. Comment on the role women have in Elizabethan times based on Ophelia's replies in this scene. Quote two relevant examples.
8. What story does the play-within-the-play tell?
9. Compare the dumbshow with the Mousetrap. Are there significant differences? To which does Claudius react? Why?
10. Does Hamlet seem mad or cruel in his conversation with Ophelia? Why does he make so many sexual innuendoes?
11. In Scene 3, the audience realizes it is the perfect time for Hamlet to get his revenge: Claudius has confessed to his crime, he is unaware of Hamlet's presence, and there is nobody around. Yet, Hamlet doesn't kill him. Why? If so far he has waited for the certainty that Claudius is the killer of his father, now that he has that knowledge he looks for a different certainty he has to have. What is it?
12. In Scene 4, as Hamlet suspects Claudius is hiding behind the arras in Gertrude's bedroom, does he take the same philosophical precautions as he did in Scene 3? What has changed? What is Hamlet's hamartia?
13. Gertrude appears haughty and reprimanding in the beginning of the scene. Does she change as she listens to Hamlet? Compare her role in the royal family to Ophelia's. Is Gertrude stronger than Polonius's daughter?
14. Does Hamlet abuse his mother? Explain.
15. How does Hamlet feel about killing Polonius? Consider lines 194-196.