

Act III Study Guide Hamlet

Scene 1 Elsinore, a room in the Castle

1. Hamlet is using the play to discover whether the King did in fact murder his father; the king, too, is trying to discover whether or not Hamlet is a threat to him. What indications of the King's uneasiness do you get at the opening of this scene?
2. What do Guildenstern and Rosencrantz tell the King Hamlet wants all of them to do?
3. Find the lines where the King definitely admits his guilt to the audience. He does this in an "aside."
4. When the King and Polonius spy on Hamlet and Ophelia, they hear Hamlet say, "...those that are married already, all but one shall live; the rest shall keep as they are." Do you think that the King interprets this as the ravings of a madman or as something else? Explain?
5. Why is the King sending Hamlet to England?
6. What is Hamlet's behavior to Ophelia? Describe it.
7. Ophelia interprets to herself Hamlet's behavior. What significance will this have on the play?
8. Does Polonius still cling to his original theory about the cause of Hamlet's madness?

Scene 2 Elsinore, a hall in the Castle. Enter Hamlet and three of the players.

1. What is Hamlet telling the players?
2. Hamlet's best friend is Horatio. What especially does he admire about his friend?
3. Is Hamlet's estimate of Horatio correct?
4. How do we know for certain that Hamlet trusts him completely?
5. What is the plot of the play within the play?
6. How does the King react when he views this in the play?
7. How does the queen react?
8. When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern inquire once more into the reasons for Hamlet's strange behavior, Hamlet asks the players for a flute-like instrument called a recorder and uses it as the basis for his answer. Explain this answer.

9. At the end of the scene, Polonius tells Hamlet what?

Scene 3. The same. A room in the Castle.

1. What is the King talking to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern about?
2. There is a soliloquy by the King and in it he explains his state of mind to the audience. How does he feel about the crime he has committed?
3. What stands in the way of the King being forgiven?
4. What comparison does the King make between earthly and heavenly justice?
5. Why does Hamlet not take advantage of this opportunity for killing the King? He has the chance and he knows he is guilty.

Scene 4. The same. The Queen's closet.

1. Why is Polonius hiding?
2. How does Polonius meet his death?
3. Do you think that this is an appropriate end for Polonius? Why or why not?
4. What does Hamlet try to accomplish in his conversation with his mother?
5. Does Hamlet believe that she was involved in his father's murder?
6. Do you think she was?
7. Who entered the room while Hamlet continued speaking to his mother?
8. Why is Hamlet's confrontation with his mother especially dramatic?
9. As Act III ends, what is Hamlet going to do?

Act III in review:

1. The traveling players that appear at King Claudius' court and their performance of the "Murder of Gonzago" are interesting and vital to the unfolding of the play. But we also see various aspects of the acting profession during Shakespeare's day. What were some of those?

2. Explain Hamlet's words when he says that the function of drama is "to hold, as T'were, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."
3. What were some of the historical facts of Shakespeare's own time that we see when the players tell why they had to leave the city?
4. What position does the "play within a play" have in the unfolding of the plot of Hamlet?
5. Many playwrights use the device of a "play within a play". This gives to the larger play a greater sense of reality and makes the audience forget that they are watching fictitious events. Why does a "play within a play" bring about this effect?
6. Hamlet is searching for the truth about the King. The King is searching out the truth about Hamlet. Shakespeare devotes considerable time in this play to traveling actors and to the techniques of acting. Do you see any connection?
7. In Hamlet's speech "To be or not to be" what two alternatives of conduct is Hamlet considering?
8. Hamlet gives Ophelia another picture of himself. What is it?
9. Where did Hamlet tell Ophelia to go?
10. What does Hamlet mean by these lines that he spoke to his mother?
"You go not till I set you up a glass
Where you may see the inmost part of you."
11. What kind of a woman is Gertrude, Hamlet's mother? Do you think she is sorry for her part in the present state of things? Do you think she helped to kill her husband? Do you think she loves Hamlet?