

## Hamlet – Act I Study Guide

Ms. Kamrass

### I. Vocabulary:

**assail** – attack or assault

**apparition** – ghost, spirit

**harrows** – distresses, torments

**usurp’st (variation of usurp)** – to take power

**brazen** – cannons made of brass

**heraldry** – laws for battles and tournaments

**mote** – speck of dust

**harbingers** – advanced messengers

**kin** – a relative

**waxes** – to grow or increase

### II. Pre-reading Questions

- In a difficult situation, do you think it’s more important to think things over carefully or to act quickly? Explain.
- In the opening scene of this play, a ghost appears at a castle. What kind of story do you expect with an opening scene like this?
- Soon after the play opens, we learn that King Hamlet, Hamlet’s father, has been dead for less than three months. Within a month of the king’s death, his widow married his brother. How do you think young Hamlet might feel about his mother’s quick remarriage to his uncle? How would you feel?

### III. Questions

**Directions:** Answer in complete sentences. Develop with explanation and specific details from the text. You need to answer all questions to receive credit, even if you’re not sure of the answer. When we review the answers in class, fill in the correct, and complete, answers. *The symbol Q! indicates that you need to include an exact quote from the play – include the page number.*

❁scene i❁

**Q! 1.** What have the night watchmen seen the past few nights? Write the line showing that Barnardo recognizes it.

2. After the watchmen find Horatio to witnesses this phenomenon, he says, “But in the gross and scope of mine opinion / This bodes some strange eruption to our state.” What does Horatio mean by this?

3. After the comment for question 2, Marcellus speaks of Denmark’s war preparations. Explain, why Denmark is on high-alert (from Horatio’s description).

4. Horatio goes on to describe the significance of the ghost as a sign of trouble. In his monologue that begins “A mote it is to trouble ...” find the two allusions. Why does Shakespeare use these allusions?

**Q! 5.** Horatio uses personification in his last bit of dialogue in scene i. Define personification, write the line, and explain why Shakespeare uses this literary device.

6. Who does Horatio want to tell about what he’s seen and why? Write the lines here as well.

**wrap-up question:**

What is the mood in Act I? Describe at least two CDs that help create this mood.

🌸 **scene ii** 🌸

7. In this scene we first meet Claudius, the new Dane. How did he become ruler of Denmark?

8. Describe the **past** relationship between Claudius and his new queen.

**Q! 9.** What do you think of Claudius based on his first monologue? Write at least one sentence from his speech and explain why it gives you such a strong impression.

**Q! 10.** Hamlet’s first line of the play is brief, and recited as an aside: write it here:

- Describe what it reveals about his character.

**Q! 11.** Hamlet's second line is just as brief, and contains a pun on Claudius's word "clouds." Identify and explain the pun.

12. Both Claudius and Gertrude ask Hamlet to stay at Elsinore instead of returning to the university at Wittenberg. Whom does he listen to?

**Q! 13.** After Claudius and Gertrude leave, Hamlet has his first soliloquy. Summarize what he is saying in his speech.

- Write one part (line and/or sentence) from this soliloquy and explain what he is saying in your own words.

14. Horatio and the two watchmen approach Hamlet telling him that they have seen his father's ghost. After questioning everyone thoroughly, Hamlet exclaims, "My father's spirit, in arms! All is not well." What does he mean by this? (arms = battle armor)

### 🌸 **scene iii** 🌸

15. In this scene, we learn more about Laertes, and are introduced to his sister, Ophelia, and father, Polonius, who are courtiers, not royalty, in the Danish court. What warning is Laertes giving to his sister and how is it related to their non-royal status?

16. Study Ophelia's first meaningful dialogue (starts with "I shall th'effect ..."). Explain the meaning of her reply to her brother. What do you think of her?

17. Polonius gives his son *plenty* of advice before Laertes leaves for France. One of the most famous lines of the play comes from this monologue: “This above all, to thine own self be true.” Explain this line in your own words (i.e. don’t write that he means that “you have to be true to yourself”).

- Why you think this line is so famous?

**Q!** 18. When Polonius warns her about Hamlet, what is Ophelia’s final response? Explain the quote.

**wrap-up question/task:**

Describe Ophelia’s relationship with her brother and father.

🌸 **scene iv** 🌸

19. When Hamlet sees his father’s ghost he says, “Be thou a spirit of health, or goblin damned...” What is he asking?

**wrap up question:**

We read another famous line in this scene when Marcellus says, “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.” What does this quote mean?

- What other quote from this study guide has a similar meaning?

🌸 **scene v** 🌸

20. Why does Hamlet’s father (the ghost) need to speak with him?

21. At one point Hamlet yells, “O my prophetic soul!” What is he saying?

22. How did Hamlet's father die?

**Q!** 23. The ghost father tells Hamlet to leave someone alone - who? Find the lines and write them.

24. Hamlet says, "As I perchance hereafter shall think meet / To put an antic disposition on."  
What does he mean by this?

**Wrap up question:**

Describe one conflict presented in the play at this point. Describe it with full details and explanation.