

Hamlet Study Questions
ACT 1

Directions: Please answer each question in **complete sentences**. All Act 1 questions will be due the day after we finish reading it in class. For this reason, you'll want to keep up with the questions scene by scene to avoid having a lot of homework one night.

1.1

1. Who are Francisco, Bernardo, and Marcellus? What are they doing at the start of 1.1?

Why do Marcellus and Bernardo want Horatio with them? (Note: Horatio is not a guard; he is a classmate of Hamlet's)

2. What is Horatio's initial response to the story of the apparition?

Describe what happens when the ghost appears for the first time (1.1.42).

Notice that the men reference the ghost as "it," and Horatio addresses it as "thou." Remember that "thou" is the form of address used with friends or inferiors. Shakespeare's audience would have been much more attuned to the difference than we are. What is the effect of these words, "it" and "thou"?

3. What does Horatio first assume the appearance of the ghost means (1.1.71)?

Why are there such intense war preparations in Denmark? (Read 1.1.72-109 carefully to get the international background of the play.)

4. What happens when the ghost appears for the second time?

Why does it leave so abruptly?

What do we know so far about the nature of the ghost? Do we know yet if it is a "good" ghost (i.e., "really" the spirit of the person it appears to be) or a "damned" ghost (a devil or evil spirit in the shape of the person it appears to be)?

5. Give a two-word tone combination for 1.1. Pay special attention to the nature of the dialogue between the men here. Support your tone choice with evidence from this first scene.

1.2

1. What is Claudius telling the court in the first part of his speech (1.2.1-16)?

What does he say about young Fortinbras and his uncle, King of Norway (1.2.17-41)?

How is Claudius choosing to respond to this threat?

2. Based on his first 64 lines in office (1.2.1-64), how would you rate Claudius as a ruler? In what ways does he already differ from old Hamlet as king? (Consider how old Hamlet would have responded to young Fortinbras.)

3. In 1.2.66-119 what are Claudius and Gertrude requesting of Hamlet (hint—there are really two things)?

How do you react to their requests of Hamlet? Do they seem reasonable to you? Why or why not?

4. How seriously do you take Claudius' argument against Hamlet's "prolonged" mourning (1.2.86-108)?

Roughly how long has Hamlet been mourning? (The normal mourning period of a noble or gentle woman for a dead husband at this time [ca. 1600] was a year or more.)

5. Read Hamlet's first *soliloquy* (1.2.129-159) carefully (and note the spelling of "soliloquy"). What is it that is really bothering him about what has happened since his father's death? How would you describe the tone of his feelings—detached, impassioned, rational, ironic, or what?

6. What is Hamlet's reaction to the news of this ghost appearing in his father's likeness?

What can we take from the final four lines of the scene (1.2.252-255)?