

ACT I

1.1

1. What happens when Francisco and Bernardo meet at the beginning of 1.1? Where are we, and when? Why is there confusion over which one is supposed to challenge the other by asking "Who's there"? Why is Horatio with Bernardo and Marcellus? Who is he?
2. What is Horatio's initial response to the story of the apparition? What happens when the ghost appears for the first time (1.1.37.1)? Notice that Horatio addresses it as "thou." This 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 Horatio's addressing the ghost as "thou"?
3. What does Horatio first assume the appearance of the ghost means (1.1.68)? Why are there such intense war preparations in Denmark? (Read 1.1.69-106 carefully to get the international background of the play.)
4. 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)?

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 the king of Norway (1.2.17-41)? How is Claudius responding to the threat?
2. What does Laertes want from the King? How does Claudius respond to him? 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. What do Claudius and Gertrude want Hamlet to do that he doesn't want to do? Why won't they let him do it? How does he respond to them? How do they respond to the way he responds to them?
4. How seriously do you take Claudius' argument against Hamlet's "prolonged" mourning (1.2.87-108)? How long has Hamlet been mourning (1.2.138)?
5. Read Hamlet's first *soliloquy* (1.2.129-59) carefully. 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 response to the news from Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo? Notice the way Hamlet questions them. How much do we know about how his mind works at this point of the play? What does he suspect as the reason for the ghost's appearance (1.2.254-57)?

1.3

1. What does Laertes warn Ophelia about? What, apparently, has been the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia since his return from Wittenberg?
2. How seriously do you take Polonius' precepts (1.3.58-80)? Consider especially the last one (1.3.78-80).
3. How willing is Ophelia to discuss with her father what she has discussed with Laertes? What is his response to Hamlet's interest in her and her response to him? How seriously should she take their warnings about Hamlet's lack of seriousness and his inability to choose his own wife?
4. What do we know about Laertes, Polonius, and Ophelia by the end of 1.3? What sort of people are they? What sort of family are they? Who is missing from this family? How strong-willed is Ophelia?

1.4

1. Why do the trumpets and cannons sound, according to Hamlet? What does Hamlet think of the custom?
2. Read 1.4.18.7-22 carefully. What is Hamlet saying here?
3. How does Hamlet respond to the ghost? If it is a "damned ghost," is he as safe as he thinks he is in 1.4.45-48? Why don't the others want him to go? Why can't/don't they stop him? What does Marcellus still think the nature of the problem is (1.4.67)?

1.5

1. Is Hamlet surprised when the Ghost asks him to seek revenge for his father's murder? Is he surprised when he learns who the murderer is?
2. Do father and son have the same opinion of Claudius? (Compare 1.2.139-40, 152-53 and 1.5.47-52.) Would others in the court, not knowing about Claudius' crime, see Claudius as this much below his dead brother?
3. How did Claudius murder Old Hamlet?
4. What does the Ghost tell Hamlet to do about his mother?
5. Read Hamlet's second soliloquy carefully (1.5.92-113). What does Hamlet say he has learned? In other words, what general piece of wisdom does he want to save from this encounter (1.5.109). Notice how quickly Hamlet moves from the specific (Claudius) to the general ("one"). Compare the same movement he makes from the specific person Gertrude to "frailty, thy name is woman" (1.2.146). Given this soliloquy, how soon would you expect Hamlet to go for his revenge?
6. What happens when the others find Hamlet. What does he ask them to swear? What does his mention of an "antic disposition" (1.5.173) suggest about his future plans? How might you expect Hamlet to be acting when next we see him?