

ACT 3

3.1

1. How much have Rosencrantz and Guildenstern learned from/about Hamlet?
2. Finally the planned meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia is arranged, spies and all. What does Polonius give Ophelia to read (3.1.46)? What response does his remark get (in an aside) from Claudius? Why is this speech of Claudius' important?
3. Read Hamlet's fourth soliloquy carefully (3.1.58-90). How is this soliloquy different from the first two? Think about the way Hamlet's mind works within the first two--is the same thing happening here? What is the main idea of this third soliloquy?
4. What happens between Hamlet and Ophelia in the so-called "Nunnery scene" (3.1.90-160)? Does Hamlet know that he's being watched? Does he determine that during the scene? Can you spot a place where he might? (Remember how he changed his way of talking to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at 2.2.267.) Who is the "one" referred to in "all but one" (3.1.147)?
5. How does Claudius respond to what he has seen and heard? Is he convinced that love is the cause of Hamlet's madness? What does he plan to do about Hamlet? How does Polonius respond? Is he willing to give up his "love" answer? What does he propose as an additional way to find out what Hamlet is thinking? Are you surprised that it includes spying?

3.2

1. Why does Hamlet say he especially likes Horatio (3.2.56-67, esp. 64-67)? Does Hamlet see Horatio as similar to him or different from him?
2. Based on 3.2.116, how much time elapsed between Act 1 and Act 2 (since the action has been continuous since the beginning of Act 2)?
3. What is Claudius' mood as he stops the play at 3.2.247? How does Hamlet respond? Hamlet has learned that Claudius is indeed guilty, but what has Claudius learned?
4. What message do Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have for Hamlet? Despite the chaos at the end of the play within the play, is this message unexpected after hearing Polonius' suggestion at the end of the Nunnery scene (3.1)? What lesson does Hamlet teach with a recorder?

5. Read Hamlet's fifth soliloquy carefully (3.2.358-69). How is it different from the other soliloquies? What is the mood of the soliloquy? How do you react to it? What about line 360? What is happening to Hamlet?

3.3

1. What has Claudius decided to do with Hamlet? Who will go with him? What "theoretical" message about kingship does Rosencrantz tell to Claudius?
2. What does Claudius admit in his attempt to pray? Has the play actually had an effect on him? Why can't he ask for forgiveness?
3. What happens when Hamlet enters? Why doesn't Hamlet kill Claudius then? What is ironic about Hamlet's decision?

3.4

1. How successful is the first part of the interview between Gertrude and Hamlet? What goes wrong (even before Polonius' death)? Who controls the conversation? Why does Gertrude call for help?
2. What device does Hamlet use to force Gertrude to consider what she has done?
3. Hamlet seems to be getting through to Gertrude when the Ghost enters. Why does the Ghost appear at this point? How is his appearance different from his appearances in Act 1? Who saw him then? Who sees him now? What is his message to Hamlet?
4. After the Ghost leaves, does Hamlet succeed in what he came to do? What is Gertrude's state when he leaves? What should she do, and what should she not do?