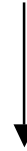


# Hamlet: Guided Reading Questions – Act 1

## Description

A scene-by-scene list of guided reading questions, organized by topic or theme. Use them as prompts for discussions; investigate follow-up questions. Have students answer them as they read, alone or in groups. For best results, use **Critical Response Templates** (see: **Model**) to practice citing textual evidence and persuasive writing.



Question	
How would you describe Hamlet's attitude toward the world in Act 1?	
Response	Evidence (Quote)
Hamlet seems disgusted and hateful towards the world in Act 1. He seems to think everyone and everything in it is garbage.	"How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable / Seem to me all the uses of this world! / Fie on 't, ah fie! / 'Tis an unweeded garden / That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature possess it merely." (1.2.137-141)

## **Act 1, Scene 1**

### **1. Mood & Atmosphere**

- a) How would you describe the mood or atmosphere at the start of the play?
- b) Which 3 phrases best establish the opening mood?
- c) What other things work to establish this mood?

### **2. Supernaturals**

- a) What is the characters' main focus or preoccupation in 1.1?
- b) How does the characters' focus create suspense?
- c) Why do you think the ghost seems "like a guilty thing" (163)? Speculate.

### **3. Foreshadowing & Imagery**

- a) Why do the guards think the ghost presages bad things to come?
- b) How does Horatio's speech (124-137), which talks about events in the past, foreshadow things to come?
- c) What other examples of foreshadowing can you find in the opening scene?

### **4. Social / Political Context**

- a) What happened between Hamlet Sr. (Denmark) and Fortinbras Sr. (Norway)?
- b) Why has young Fortinbras "sharked up a list of lawless resolute" (110)?

### **5. Literary Devices**

- a) What literary device do you see in Horatio's line 35?
- b) What literary device do you see in Horatio's lines 181-182?

### **6. Synthesis**

- a) What are the 3 most important things Shakespeare establishes in this scene?
- b) What would you title this scene?

## **Act 1, Scene 2**

### **1. Political Rhetoric**

- a) What 3 purposes does Claudius (King) have in his opening speech?
- b) Why might you call Claudius's opening speech an oxymoronic speech? How many oxymorons can you identify?
- c) What 2 events are these oxymorons founded upon?

## **2. Royal Relationships**

- a) What's weird about the relationship between the King and the Queen?
- b) How does Hamlet feel about the King (and his mirth)? Quote evidence and speculate why.
- c) How does the King feel about Hamlet (and his sadness)? Quote evidence.
- d) How does Hamlet feel about the Queen (and her actions)? Quote evidence.

## **3. Hamlet's Depression**

- a) Why, exactly, is Hamlet so upset? List the combination of reasons.
- b) What "solution" to his troubles does Hamlet suggest?
- c) Why doesn't Hamlet follow through with his "solution"?
- d) How would you describe Hamlet's attitude towards the world? Quote evidence.
- e) How would you describe Hamlet's attitude towards women? Quote evidence.
- f) Which seems to trouble Hamlet more: his mother's marriage or his father's death? Explain.

## **4. Foreshadowing**

- a) What 2 examples of foreshadowing can you find in this scene? Quote them.
- b) What kind of things do these examples hint to? Speculate.

## **5. Synthesis**

- a) What are the 3 most important things Shakespeare establishes in this scene?
- b) What would you title this scene?

## **Act 1, Scene 3**

### **1. Love v. Lust**

- a) How sincere does Laertes think Hamlet's affection is for Ophelia?
- b) Why does Laertes think Hamlet's affection is dangerous, even if he's sincere?
- c) How sincere does Polonius think Hamlet's affection is for Ophelia?
- d) Why does Polonius feel this way?
- e) How would you summarize the similarities between Laertes and Polonius's advice?

### **2. Character of Polonius**

- a) How would you characterize Polonius's tone with Laertes?
- b) How would you rate Polonius's advice to Laertes? Explain.
- c) How would you characterize Polonius's tone with Ophelia?
- d) How would you rate Polonius's advice to Ophelia? Explain.
- e) Do you think Polonius is a good father? Explain.

### **3. Synthesis**

- a) What are the 3 most important things Shakespeare establishes in this scene?
- b) What would you title this scene?

### **Act 1, Scene 4**

#### **1. Mood & Atmosphere**

- a) How would you describe the mood at the opening of this scene?
- b) How does Shakespeare establish this mood?

#### **2. Suspense & Supernaturals**

- a) Why does Horatio fear Hamlet talking to the ghost?
- b) Why does Hamlet not fear talking to the ghost?

### **3. Synthesis**

- a) What are the 3 most important things Shakespeare establishes in this scene?
- b) What would you title this scene?

### **Act 1, Scene 5**

#### **1. Revelation & Mandate**

- a) What revelation does the ghost give Hamlet?
- b) What mandates does the ghost give Hamlet?
- c) How would you describe Hamlet's attitude at the end of the scene? How has it changed? Quote evidence.
- d) Does the ghost deny or affirm Hamlet's cynical worldview? Explain.
- e) Why is it so important to the ghost that Hamlet "remember"?

#### **2. Synthesis**

- a) What are the 3 most important things Shakespeare establishes in this scene?
- b) What would you title this scene?