

Analyzing the Text

Cite Text Evidence Support your responses with evidence from the selection.

1. **Infer** In the opening scene of Act II, how does Polonius want Reynaldo to check on Laertes's conduct? What does this instruction suggest about Polonius's character?
2. **Analyze** In a play, **dramatic irony** occurs when the audience knows something that a character does not know. In lines 88–111 of Scene 1, Ophelia tells Polonius what took place when Hamlet visited her. Explain why this passage is an example of dramatic irony.
3. **Infer** Reread Hamlet's exchange with Polonius in Scene 2, lines 172–219. Polonius says of Hamlet's responses, "Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't." What is the method, or purpose, of Hamlet's behavior in this interaction?
4. **Interpret** In line 246 of Scene 2, Hamlet says to Guildenstern that "Denmark's a prison." Explain that remark in the context of Hamlet's present situation, considering also the role of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
5. **Compare** In Scene 2, lines 368–371, Hamlet compares Claudius to a company of boy actors who have chased the adult actors from the city. What does Claudius have in common with the boy actors?
6. **Compare** The play discussed by Hamlet and the players (Scene 2, lines 453–526) tells the story of Pyrrhus seeking revenge on Priam. What are the parallels between this tale and Hamlet's own quest for revenge? What does the conclusion of the tale foreshadow for Hamlet?
7. **Analyze** Summarize Hamlet's comments about the First Player's performance in Scene 2, lines 558–588. What internal conflict is expressed in this soliloquy?
8. **Draw Conclusions** At the end of Act II, Hamlet reveals his plan for testing Claudius's guilt. Why might Shakespeare have chosen to have him use a theatrical performance for this purpose?

PERFORMANCE TASK



Speaking Activity: Discussion Why is Hamlet so cautious?

- Jot down ideas about Hamlet's pretending to be mad and about his plan to test Claudius's guilt.
- In a small group, discuss why Hamlet takes these measures. Consider what might happen if instead he tried to immediately take revenge.
- Summarize the group discussion and present your ideas to the class.

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1. **Interpret** What does Claudius's aside in Scene 1, lines 50–55, reveal about him?
2. **Draw Conclusions** Hamlet's command "Get thee to a nunnery" (Scene 1, line 122) can be interpreted in two ways. Either he wants Ophelia to retreat to a convent, safe from the corruption of the world, or he thinks she is so tainted that she belongs in a brothel. Choose the interpretation that is best supported by his behavior toward her in this scene, and explain your choice. What has caused him to feel this way?
3. **Analyze** Reread lines 58–76 in Scene 2. What does Hamlet admire about Horatio? How does Shakespeare use Horatio to help develop the play's plot?
4. **Analyze** When a character says one thing but means another, it is called **verbal irony**. Find an example of verbal irony in Hamlet's conversation with Claudius and Gertrude in Scene 2, lines 230–236. What message is Hamlet really conveying?
5. **Analyze** An **extended metaphor** is a metaphor in which two things are compared at length and in various ways. Review Hamlet's dialogue in Scene 2, lines 353–375. In what ways does he compare himself to a musical instrument? Is his attitude toward Rosencrantz and Guildenstern consistent with his behavior toward them in Act II, Scene 2, or does this speech signal a change? Explain.
6. **Identify Patterns** How does Hamlet's refusal to kill Claudius while he is praying relate back to what the Ghost said about the circumstances of his own death in Act I, Scene 5?
7. **Draw Conclusions** Hamlet confronts his mother in Scene 4, and she responds with expressions of guilt. Does she seem to realize that Claudius murdered Hamlet's father? Explain why or why not.
8. **Synthesize** Soon after Hamlet decides against killing Claudius while he is praying, he mistakes Polonius for the King and kills him without hesitation. What does this combination of events suggest about revenge?

PERFORMANCE TASK

Speaking Activity: Performance Act out a brief scene or a section of a longer scene.

- In a small group, choose a scene and decide which role will be played by each member.
- Read the scene aloud. Discuss the motivation of each character.
- Decide where performers will enter or exit and where they will stand while reciting the dialogue. Read the stage directions to determine if any sound or lighting effects are needed.
- Perform the scene in front of the class.

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1. **Cause/Effect** What sequence of events is triggered by the killing of Polonius?
2. **Interpret** What does Claudius's speech at the beginning of Scene 3 (lines 1–11) reveal about the difficult situation he is in?
3. **Draw Conclusions** Reread lines 41–52 in Scene 3. Hamlet has already confided to his mother at the end of Act III that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been assigned to lead him into a trap. What does it suggest about his character that he now appears eager to go with them?
4. **Interpret** Reread lines 48–58 in Scene 4. Paraphrase the view of honor that Hamlet praises in the speech. Is this view consistent with his other comments in the scene? Why or why not?
5. **Interpret** Ophelia has fallen into madness following the death of her father. In Scene 5, do her statements and singing suggest she is only disturbed by his death, or is something else troubling her? Explain.
6. **Compare** A **foil** is a character whose traits contrast with those of another character. Very often a minor character is used as a foil to emphasize traits of the main character. Explain how the following characters serve as foils to Hamlet:
 - Fortinbras
 - Laertes
7. **Draw Conclusions** Hamlet sends two letters announcing his return to England, one to Horatio and one to Claudius. Why might Shakespeare have chosen to have him send the letter to Horatio even though it is not needed to advance the plot?
8. **Analyze** In Scene 7, lines 130–142, Claudius describes an elaborate scheme to kill Hamlet. What advantages does this scheme have for both him and Laertes? Based on what has happened so far in the play, what might be a disadvantage of the scheme?

PERFORMANCE TASK



Writing Activity: Journal Entry Write a journal entry by either Rosencrantz or Guildenstern about their mission to take Hamlet to England.

- Describe Hamlet's behavior toward his old friends and the events that led to Claudius's decision to send him away.
- Consider the limited knowledge that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have about these events. Only include information that your character would be aware of.
- Use an informal, intimate style appropriate for a journal entry.

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1. **Analyze** Review Hamlet's encounter with the Gravedigger and his thoughts about Yorick at the beginning of Act V. Why might Shakespeare have chosen to include this darkly humorous scene here?
2. **Interpret** Why does Hamlet quarrel with Laertes at Ophelia's grave? What does this conflict clarify about his feelings?
3. **Infer** In the story he tells Horatio at the start of Act V, Scene 2, what qualities does Hamlet show that he has not displayed previously?
4. **Analyze** Ideas, customs, behaviors, or institutions are ridiculed in **satire** for the purpose of improving society. Satirists often use irony, wordplay, and exaggeration to poke fun at their targets. Reread Hamlet's exchange of words with Osric in Scene 2, lines 82–184. What customs or behavior is Hamlet ridiculing? Identify examples of techniques used in this satirical passage.
5. **Compare** Reread Hamlet's speech in Scene 2, lines 219–224. How do these thoughts about fate differ from his attitude in earlier speeches?
6. **Infer** As he is dying, Hamlet urges Horatio to stay alive and tell his story. Why is this so important to Hamlet?
7. **Analyze** Choose a soliloquy in the play, such as the famous "To be or not to be" speech in Act III, Scene 1, lines 57–89. Summarize the ideas in the soliloquy, and discuss the literary techniques Shakespeare uses to express them. Provide specific examples.
8. **Draw Conclusions** A **theme** is the central idea that a writer wishes to convey to the audience. Use specific details to explain what message *Hamlet* conveys about each of these subjects:
 - revenge
 - fate
 - the human condition

PERFORMANCE TASK



Speaking Activity: Funeral Speech If you were invited to speak at Hamlet's funeral, what would you say?

- Think about your overall impression of Hamlet's character. What were his admirable qualities, and what were his flaws? What motivated his actions?
- Write a brief speech that you would deliver at Hamlet's funeral. Address the events that led up to his death. Sum up your conclusions about him in a way that fits the occasion.
- Deliver your speech to a small group of classmates.