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## ACT 1

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### Scene 1

1. What time is it when the play opens?
2. Explain how this scene makes reference to a military/war background. Make reference to at least three different speeches.
3. What has Horatio said about 'this thing'? Describe his attitude in the very opening.
4. What speech does the ghost's first appearance interrupt?
5. What question does Horatio repeatedly ask the ghost?
6. What does Horatio say to show he is now convinced that the ghost is real?
7. What is the ghost wearing? What do the assembled company think of this apparition?
8. Explain the importance of the Norwegian context and Fortinbras (remember his name means 'strong-in-arms'). References can range across the whole play.
9. What reference does Horatio make to Julius Caesar and what is the significance of this?
10. What speculation is offered on the importance of the ghost after its final appearance?
11. Explain the thematic, dramatic and plot significance of this scene. Outline what we learn of Horatio here.

### Scene 2

1. Summarise Claudius' opening speech and the impression we initially get of his character. Be thorough.
2. Explain what relationships are illustrated in this scene; what initial impressions do we get of tension (or affection) between characters and how does the language make these things apparent?
3. How does Hamlet's language in his first few lines and speeches reveal his intellect and sense of distance from Claudius and Gertrude? How is the theme of appearance and reality illustrated? (NB: link 'Seems, madam?' speech to his observations about his mother in 'O that this too too sullied flesh ...').
4. Summarise Claudius' speech 'Tis sweet and commendable' to Hamlet. Explain the ways in which this speech is hypocritical.
5. How does Hamlet's first soliloquy reveal his distracted mind? Concentrate on the language and the construction of sentences.
6. How does Hamlet react to the news of his father's ghostly appearance?

### Scene 3

1. Why, dramatically, does Shakespeare put this scene next? (Try to answer with more than just 'for contrast'. What contrasts with what and to what effect? For example, how does Polonius' fatherly advice to his son contrast with Claudius' 'advice' to Hamlet?)
2. What points does Laertes make about Hamlet in his advice to his sister?
3. What aspects of Ophelia's existence are represented as crucial here?
4. What impression do we get of Polonius in this scene?
5. Consider how central advice to Ophelia about Hamlet is in this scene (it 'wraps' the advice given by his father to Laertes). In what ways does this act as a foreshadowing of what is to come? To answer, analyse three or four details of what is said.
6. How do Ophelia's answers illustrate her obedience?

#### Scene 4

1. How is an appropriate atmosphere re-established at the beginning of this scene? What does Hamlet have to say about Claudius and Denmark?
2. How do perspectives on religion make an important contribution to the dramatic and linguistic richness of this scene? How do they add to its potentially frightening qualities? Be thorough.

#### Scene 5

1. What do we learn of hell in this scene?
2. Choose five moments when the ghost's narration causes or might, in staging, cause a particularly vivid response in Hamlet and explain the role of the language in causing this.
3. How does Hamlet's second soliloquy compare and contrast with his first?
4. What is the dramatic and thematic importance of Hamlet making the others swear to secrecy whilst the ghost 'listens in'?
5. How do the last three lines of the act suggest Hamlet's revenge might not be one he finds easy to take?

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## ACT 2

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#### Scene 1

1. In what ways does this scene contribute to the theme of spying and surveillance?
2. What has Hamlet done to disturb Ophelia? How does this add to our impression of his state of mind?

#### Scene 2

1. How does this scene suggest hypocrisy?
2. In what ways does this scene pick up on themes established throughout act one?
3. Choose an example of Polonius' language and one of Hamlet's, and compare and contrast the 'emptiness' of one with the 'fullness' of the other.
4. What does Hamlet's letter to Ophelia reveal about his state of mind?
5. Why might this scene be considered significant from Polonius' point of view?
6. What evidence is there that Hamlet is acting when he talks to Polonius both at the beginning of the scene and when Polonius ushers in the players? (NB: 'How pregnant sometimes his replies are').
7. How is this evidence made more solid in the discussion with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern?
8. What is Hamlet's response to the news about the players?
9. What discussion is had about acting and actors?
10. What perspective on the main action do the player's speeches about Hecuba and Priam offer?
11. What insights into Hamlet's mind do we get after the players leave?

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## ACT 3

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### Scene 1

1. How do the opening few lines of this speech reveal a suspicion in Claudius and R/G about the genuine nature of Hamlet's madness?
2. What further insights are offered into Claudius' conscience in the opening of this scene? ('O tis too true').
3. Some critics have argued that 'To be or not to be' is not necessarily Hamlet contemplating suicide for himself but merely meditating on the issue in the abstract. What conclusions do you draw? Is it more effective if he is personally contemplating suicide or if he is having a philosophical discussion?
4. What is the dramatic contribution of this scene to our impression of Hamlet's state of mind?
5. How does this scene add to our impression of Hamlet's relationship with women as intrinsically problematic (i.e., that he is conflating women into merely being their gender)? Collect quotations which offer a perspective on this aspect.
6. What conclusions does Claudius draw after watching Hamlet confront Ophelia?

### Scene 2

1. What comment on his own situation might there be in Hamlet's advice to the players? Why is he anxious to give advice?
2. Note the discussion between Hamlet and Horatio here about trust. Including this exchange, list occasions when Hamlet shows how he relies on and trusts Horatio.
3. What evidence is there in this scene for Hamlet's control *and* lack of control?
4. Account for the dramatic impact of the play-within-the-play.
5. What significance is there to Hamlet's exchange with R/G and with Polonius at the end of this scene?

### Scene 3

1. Paraphrase the discussion between Claudius and Rosencrantz up until Polonius' entrance.
2. Summarise Claudius' thoughts in his soliloquy.
3. Summarise Hamlet's thoughts in his soliloquy.

### Scene 4

1. What does Hamlet confront his mother about, finally? How does his language express his thoughts?
2. How does Gertrude go from feeling chastised to thinking her son is insane?
3. Why, dramatically, does the ghost appear in this scene? How does Hamlet advise his mother after the ghost's departure?
4. Hamlet seems to accept at the end of this scene that he has to go to England. What is his overall state of mind here?

## ACT 4

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### Scene 1

Note how short the opening scenes of this act are, leading up to Ophelia's mad scenes, Laertes' return and the report of Ophelia's death.

1. How does it seem as if Claudius' grip on his world is loosening in this scene? What concerns and worries does he express?

### Scene 2

1. What puns and wordplay does Hamlet indulge in here? What is Shakespeare's intention in creating such play at this point?

### Scene 3

1. Again here, how is Claudius' loosening grip revealed and what is the function of Hamlet's wordplay? Collect examples.

### Scene 4

1. Account for the dramatic significance of Fortinbras' appearance at this stage in the play and Hamlet's response.

### Scenes 5 & 6

1. How are these scenes and their locations designed to bring about an emotional response in the audience? What emotions do they trigger?

### Scenes 7 & 8

1. How do these scenes prepare us for the ending of the play?
  2. How does Claudius manipulate Laertes, an otherwise arguably honourable man, into his plan?
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## ACT 5

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### Scene 1

1. List as many reasons as you can think of as to why this scene is considered one of the most important in the play.

### Scene 2

1. How does Hamlet's discussion with Horatio corroborate his change in inclination from hesitation and vacillation to action?
2. Do you see any dramatic arguments for playing the exchange with Osric completely for comedy?
3. In what ways does Hamlet's speech to Laertes suggest a genuine sense of dignity and apology? Is he sincere, do you think?
4. To what extent is the dénouement a natural conclusion to everything that has preceded it?