

Act V Questions:

- 1) At the beginning of this scene, two gravediggers are shoveling out a grave for Ophelia. What are they debating about? (Lines 1 – 32).
- 2) One of the purposes of the grave-diggers scene is to provide some “comic relief” in the tragedy. How is this accomplished in lines 1 – 56?
- 3) Hamlet and Horatio enter at a distance and watch the gravediggers work.
 - a) What do the two talk about as they watch? (Lines 67 – 72)
 - b) As he continues to watch the gravedigger, Hamlet says, “the first murder! / It might be the pate of a politician, which this ass / now o'erreaches, one that skull had a tongue in it and could sing / once. How the knave jowls it to the ground, as if / it were Cain's jawbone, that did would circumvent God, / might it not?” in lines 75 – 82. What is annoying/troubling him in this scene?
- 4) Hamlet decides to speak/joke with the gravedigger.
 - a) When Hamlet asks the gravedigger whose grave he digs, how does the gravedigger respond? (lines 120 - 139).
 - b) What does Hamlet think of the gravedigger's response? (lines 140 – 146)
 - c) During this scene the gravedigger (obviously not recognizing Hamlet) reveals the public's opinion of Hamlet and what they have heard of his disappearance. Explain this. (Lines 151 – 167).
 - d) After Hamlet discovers the skull of Yorick, King Hamlet's jester, Hamlet dwells on the subject of death. What does he say? (Lines 190 – 223).
 - e) Aside from providing comic relief and providing the public's viewpoint on Hamlet's exile, this scene also provides a contrast to Hamlet's world-view. How does the gravedigger's view of death seem to differ from Hamlet's and vice versa?
 - f) Critics have spent a considerable amount of time debating Hamlet's age. Hamlet here is thirty years old, as the gravedigger makes clear (line 167). However, "young Hamlet", as he is referred to earlier in the play is still attending university and courting Ophelia. Laertes says that Hamlet's love is like "a violet in the youth of primy nature" (1.3.8). How important is Hamlet's age to our understanding or enjoyment of the play? Do you think Hamlet's age have been an issue for play-goers at Shakespeare's Globe?
- 5) Laertes thinks that Ophelia should have a better funeral service. What is the priest's (doctor's) answer? (Lines 233 – 242).
- 6) What does Laertes mean when he says, “Lay her i' th' earth, / And from her fair and unpolluted flesh / May violets spring! I tell thee, churlish priest, / A ministering angel shall my sister be / When thou liest howling” to the priest/doctor performing the funeral in lines 248 – 252?

7) Hamlet finds out that the grave is in fact Ophelia's.

- a) What prompts Hamlet to jump into Ophelia's grave? (Lines 253 – 271). B) What do Hamlet and Laertes say to one another when Hamlet reveals himself and they begin to fight? (Lines 267 – 301).
- b) In this scene Hamlet talks of his great love for Ophelia. Would you agree that Hamlet's reaction to finding out Ophelia is dead (particularly his poignant cry, "What! the fair Ophelia!" (line 253)) is further proof of his love, or is it just a gut reaction to Laertes' expression of grief?

8) What does the King say to Laertes to console him after Laertes and Hamlet are separated? (lines 312 – 319).

Act V Scene 2

1. In lines 1 – 90 Hamlet explains to Horatio what happened while he was on the ship.
 - a) Explain how he found out the King's orders.
 - b) What did Hamlet do with the King's orders?
 - c) Throughout Hamlet's conversation with Horatio, he says things like "There's a divinity that Hamlet is convinced now more than ever that divine providence governs man's life, and that things happen as they are meant to happen. Do you feel Hamlet was justified in forging the King's order? How do you feel about what he did to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? shapes our ends" and "that was heaven ordinaunt."
2. Horatio then remarks to Hamlet, "So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to't" in line 63.
 - a) How does Hamlet defend his actions to Horatio?
 - b) How have we seen Hamlet's change in character through his actions of killing Polonius and his actions of "punishing" Guildenstern and Rosencrantz?
3. Claudius' behavior horrifies Horatio who exclaims, "Why, what a king is this!" (line 70).
 - a) How does Hamlet respond?
 - b) When Horatio worries that Claudius will learn the outcome of events in England soon, Hamlet assures Horatio that he will soon eliminate the King. However, what is bothering Hamlet? If Osrice were played in modern costume, he'd probably have long blonde hair, an open shirt, and a gaudy gold chain. He believes that he is all that is charming, and loves to show his appreciation for the charm of others.
4. Osrice, a foolish courtier, arrives on the scene to bring Hamlet a letter.
 - a) Hamlet does not respect Osrice, but he explains to Horatio why Osrice is welcomed at Claudius' court. What is this reason? (Lines 97 – 101)
 - b) How does Hamlet make fun of Osrice and what is amusing about the way that Osrice responds to Hamlet during their conversation? (Lines 102 – 195).

- c) What the actual news that Osric is bringing to Hamlet? (lines 114 – 116 & 160 – 166).
 - d) What does Osric also say about Laertes? (lines 118 – 124).
 - e) When Hamlet first saw Osric coming, he asks Horatio "Dost know this water-fly?" in line 95. A "water-fly" in Shakespeare's time was the same as in our time: a tiny little creature that flits aimlessly over the surface of the water. Why do you think that Shakespeare would have a rather comedic figure such as Osric be the one who invites Hamlet to his death?
5. Hamlet tells Osric, "Hamlet does not seem to suspect any sinister purpose for the fencing match, arranged by the very man who has already tried to kill him and succeeded in killing Hamlet's father. Hamlet seems to think that if he loses the match, he will only suffer from embarrassment and not lose his life. Is this an oversight on Shakespeare's part? Or is it possible that Hamlet's high opinion of Laertes' as a "very noble youth" (5.1.331) makes him confident that no foul play will occur? Sir, I will walk here in the hall. If it please his / Majesty, it is the breathing time of day with me. Let / the foils be brought, the gentleman willing, and the / King hold his purpose. I will win for him an I can. / If not, I will gain nothing but my shame and the odd / hits" (lines 184 – 191).
 6. Horatio warns Hamlet by saying, "You will lose this wager, my lord" in line 223 and also when he says "If your mind dislike anything, obey it" in line 231.
 - a) How does Hamlet respond? Does he feel confident about his choice to take part in the match?
 - b) Hamlet then tells Horatio: "Not a whit. We defy augury. There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come—the readiness is all. Since no man of aught he leaves knows, what is 't to leave betimes? Let be." (Lines 233 – 238). What does he mean by this?
 7. The King calls Hamlet and Laertes together and has them begin the duel by clasp hands. They then speak a few words to one another before beginning the duel.
 - a) What does Hamlet first say to Laertes? (Lines 240 – 258)
 - b) What is Laertes' response? (Lines 259 – 267).
 - c) Hamlet's his desire to attain Laertes' forgiveness clearly represents an important shift in his mental state. Describe this.
 8. As Hamlet and Laertes are selecting their swords, what does Claudius tell Hamlet about the match? How will this ensure that Claudius' plan will be successful? (Lines 277 – 298).
 9. What happens during the duel to Hamlet, Laertes, and Gertrude? (Lines 299 – 343).
 10. Why do you think Gertrude disobeys her husband and drinks the wine? Why doesn't the King do more to stop her?
 11. What happens after Laertes tells Hamlet that he will also die and that the king is responsible for the set-up? (Lines 344 – 363)
 12. Describe the exchange between Hamlet and Horatio in lines 364 – 385).
 13. Sum up the events of the ending of the play beginning with line 386.

14. The final scene of the play completes the revenge triangle. Describe how all the sons of the murdered fathers (King Hamlet, King Fortinbras, and Polonius) have seen vengeance served.