

## Hamlet Comprehension Questions

Act I, Scene i: Elsinore. A platform before the Castle.

“Is it not like the King?”

1. What is the atmosphere of the scene? What evidence is there that adds to the atmosphere?
2. What is the story of King Hamlet as told by Horatio?
3. Why would Horatio tell Hamlet and not Claudius or Gertrude?
4. Why do you think the ghost has come?

Act I, Scene ii: Elsinore. A room of state in the Castle.

“Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off, and let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark”

1. Summarize the King’s first speech in two main ideas.
2. What does the King grant Laertes?
3. What is Hamlet’s first line? What does it mean? What does his next line mean?
4. Hamlet’s first soliloquy is “O, that his too, too solid flesh would melt”. What is he angry about? Why didn’t he express this to his mother and Claudius?
5. What and where is Wittenberg?
6. What does Hamlet say to Horatio about his parents’ marriage?
7. What is Hamlet’s reaction to hearing his father is walking around as a ghost?

Act I, Scene iii: Elsinore. A room in the house of Polonius.

“This above all- to thine own self be true”

1. Who are Polonius, Laertes, and Ophelia?
2. What is Laertes’ advice to Ophelia?
3. What is Polonius’ advice to Laertes?
4. What is his most famous line and what does it mean?
5. How is Polonius’ advice to Ophelia different from that of Laertes? How is it the same?
6. How is Ophelia’s response to her brother different than to her father?
7. Why do we feel it necessary to give advice? What are some of the positive and negative consequences of advising people?

Act I, Scene iv: Elsinore. The platform before the Castle.

“Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.”

1. What evidence is there to support the theme of the diseased and the unnatural in this scene?

Act I, Scene v: Elsinore. The Castle. Another part of the fortifications.

“I am thy father’s spirit”

1. Why is King Hamlet not in heaven?
2. What is King Hamlet’s message to Hamlet about his brother? About Gertrude?
3. What does Hamlet say to make us think he will act on his father’s advice immediately?
4. How did King Hamlet die?
5. What does Hamlet make the others promise?

Consider the whole act:

Act II

Act II, Scene i: Elsinore. A room in the house of Polonius.

“I did repel his letters and denied his access to me”

1. What is Polonius’ plan to find out what Laertes is doing? What does this suggest about Polonius? How does this support or contradict what we already know of him?
2. What is Ophelia’s complaint about Hamlet?
3. What are the possible reasons for Hamlet acting this way? Consider what has just happened to him?
4. Is Ophelia a reliable character? Can we trust her account of what happened? Why or why not?
5. Why does Polonius think Hamlet is acting this way? What is his plan?

Act II, Scene ii: Elsinore. A room in the Castle.

“Words, words, words”

1. Who are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? Why have they come to Elsinore?
2. What is Voltmand’s message? What significance does it have to the overall play?
3. What do you think of the contents of Hamlet’s letter to Ophelia? Do you think he is being honest or sarcastic? Do you think he intends her to see it or does he know that she will show it to her father?
4. What can you surmise by the interaction between Polonius and Hamlet?
5. What insight does Hamlet’s next conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern give you about Hamlet’s state of mind?

6. What is Hamlet's opinion of the world according to his "What a piece of work is man" speech?
7. What is the significance of the player performing a piece about Pyrrhus and Hecuba?
8. What does this speech inspire Hamlet to do?
9. Considering that a soliloquy is a character talking to himself, what do we learn about what Hamlet is thinking by his last lines?

Consider the whole Act:

1. What are the 5 most important lines of this Act? Just justification for each.

Act III

Act III, Scene i: 1. Elsinore. A room in the Castle.

"To be or not to be"

1. What do Rosencrantz and Guildenstern report to the King? Is this accurate?
2. Who is spying on Hamlet and Ophelia?
3. Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" soliloquy is one of the most famous speeches in literature. Summarize what it means. What are some other possible interpretations of this speech?
4. What happens in the exchange between Hamlet and Ophelia? What does he tell her to do? What are some reasons for his behaviour?

Act III, Scene ii: Elsinore. hall in the Castle.

"What, frightened with false fire?"

1. Comment on Hamlet's behaviour before the play starts.
2. What is the gist of what the Player King and Queen say to each other? Why would Hamlet write such lines?
3. What is the King's reaction to the play?
4. What is Hamlet asked to do at the end of the scene?
5. What is his plan (revealed in his final lines)?

Act III, Scene iii: A room in the Castle.

"O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven"

1. What is Claudius' first plan to get rid of Hamlet?
2. What is Polonius' plan?
3. What is revealed in Claudius' soliloquy?

4. Why does Hamlet decide to wait to kill Claudius, even though he has a perfect opportunity?

Act III, Scene iv: The Queen's closet.

“O, what a rash and bloody deed is this!”

1. What is the tone of Hamlet's conversation with his mother?
2. Why does he stab Polonius so rashly?
3. What is his reaction when he discovers it is Polonius he's killed?
4. What does he try to convince Gertrude of?
5. Why do you think the ghost returns? Why do you think Gertrude can't see him?
6. What does Hamlet tell Gertrude to do and not to do at the end of the scene? Does it echo any other advice given in the play?
7. Do you think Gertrude is convinced?
8. Why is Hamlet OK with going to England on Claudius' order?

Act IV

Act IV, Scene i: Elsinore. A room in the Castle.

“Mad as the sea and wind when both contend which is the mightier.”

1. What does Gertrude do immediately after the bedroom conversation? Does this reveal whether or not she believes Hamlet?
2. What is King Claudius' reaction?

Act IV, Scene ii: Elsinore. A passage in the Castle.

“My lord, you must tell us where the body is and go with us to the King.”

1. What does Hamlet compare Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to? Is this analogy effective?

Act IV, Scene iii: Elsinore. A room in the Castle.

“He will stay till you come”

1. What does Hamlet say about worms in this scene?
2. What does Claudius want the King of England to do?

Act IV, Scene iv: Near Elsinore.

“O, from this time forth, my thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!”

1. What is Fortinbras doing?
2. What effect does this have on Hamlet?
3. Summarize his speech at the end of this scene.

Act IV, Scene v: Elsinore. A room in the Castle.

“I would give you some violets, but they wither'd all when my father died.”

1. Summarize each of Ophelia's songs. What is her concern? What are some reasons for her losing her mind? Why couldn't she express these concerns in a more rational matter?
2. What is the King's reaction to Laertes storming the castle? Why is this the smart thing to do?

Act IV, Scene vi: Elsinore. Another room in the Castle.

“Rosencrantz and Guildenstern hold their course for England. Of them I have much to tell thee.”

1. What does Hamlet say about his trip to England in his letter to Horatio?

Act IV, Scene vii: Elsinore. Another room in the Castle.

“Your sister's drown'd, Laertes.”

1. What are the contents of Hamlet's letter to Claudius?
2. What plan do Laertes and Claudius concoct?
3. What happened to Ophelia? Can we trust Gertrude's account of what happened?

Consider the whole Act:

1. List the important action that happens off-stage in this Act? For each say who reports the action to whom and make a decision about how reliable each of the accounts are. What other important action in the rest of the play takes place off-stage?

Act V

Act V, Scene i: Elsinore. A churchyard.

“Alas, poor Yorick!”

1. What is the essence of the clowns' conversation?
2. How old is Hamlet?

3. Who was Yorick?
4. Hamlet's scene holding Yorick's skull is the most famous in *Hamlet* and very significant in literature. Why is it so significant?
5. Who is Alexander? What conclusions does Hamlet make about him?
6. What change comes over Hamlet during this scene?
7. Why can't Ophelia have a more noble burial?
8. Describe Laertes' and Hamlet's behaviour during the burial of Ophelia. Is it consistent with their behaviour so far?

Act V, Scene ii: Elsinore. A hall in the Castle.

“The rest is silence”

1. Knowing what you do about the rest of the play, does the duel between Hamlet and Laertes seem reasonable? What, if anything, doesn't seem right?
2. Summarize the events of the duel.
3. What is the significance of Hamlet's last speech? What is his last line?
4. What is the significance of Fortinbras coming in at the end and taking the crown?