

The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

By William Shakespeare

Study Guide Questions for Act IV—Complete on your own paper (word process or handwritten)

Scene i

1. Does Gertrude keep the promise she makes to Hamlet at the end of Act III, when she meets with Claudius at the beginning of this act?
2. How do R & G help Claudius in this scene?

Scene ii

1. Explain Hamlet's meaning when he calls Rosencrantz a sponge. Do R & G understand him? Is Hamlet talking sense or madness here?

Scene iii

1. What accusations does Claudius make about Hamlet?
2. What jokes does Hamlet make about the corpse of Polonius? Why does he joke about it? What are his feelings about his actions (killing Polonius) in this scene?
3. Why does Hamlet call Claudius "mother"?
4. What parallel does Claudius make between Hamlet and his own "blood"?

Scene iv

1. What dramatic purpose is there in Fortinbras' appearance at this point in the action?
2. What comparison does Hamlet make between himself and Fortinbras? To what decision does this comparison lead Hamlet?
3. What is your reaction to Hamlet's view of himself and Fortinbras?

Scene v

1. Why does Gertrude at first refuse to see Ophelia? Who persuades her (according to the script)? How?
2. What are the subjects of Ophelia's songs?
3. What anxieties does Ophelia provoke in Claudius?
4. Why does the crowd declare, "Laertes shall be king"?
5. Describe Laertes' reaction to his father's death and to Ophelia. What is signified by her references to flowers? What is the subject of her song at this point in the scene?
6. What promise does Claudius make to Laertes? What motivates him to make such an extreme gesture?

Scene vi

1. Describe exactly the contents of Hamlet's letter to Horatio.
2. What is implied by the action of the pirates and the sailor's delivery of Hamlet's letter to Horatio?

Scene vii

1. What proposal does Claudius make to Laertes? What subjects of discussion does Claudius use to lead up to and prepare for his daring proposition?
2. How do Claudius and Laertes react to Hamlet's letter? Does the letter suggest that Hamlet is still feigning madness?
3. What happens to Ophelia? Discuss the symbolism of the descriptive details in Gertrude's telling of the events.
4. How does Laertes express his grief? How is this a contrast to Hamlet?