QUESTIONS TO ANSWER WHILE READING HAMLET

ACT ONE QUESTIONS:

1. Why are their sentry watchmen on guard at night at the castle at Elsinore?
2. Why does Barnardo cry out “Who’s there?”
3. What does Hamlet hope to see? And why?
4. Why are they unsure the ghost is the Old Hamlet? Does it look like Old Hamlet?
5. Why is the ghost dressed in battle armor? What is the interpretation by Marcellus and Horatio?
6. Why does Marcellus wonder why there’s such a strict schedule of guards? And why so many bronze cannons are being manufactured in Denmark? What is Hamlet’s response?
7. What does Horatio believe the appearance of the ghost foretells?
8. Why does the ghost disappear as the rooster crows?
9. How does Claudius react to the threat of Young Fortinbras?
10. What does Laertes want to do? Why must he ask permission of his father, Polonius?
11. What does Claudius and Gertrude want of Hamlet? Why does she address his manner of dress? What does she want him to do? Why doesn’t Hamlet return to college in Wittenburg?
12. What is Hamlet’s opinion of his mother, Gertude? How could you make a case for your opinion?
13. What color does Horatio say Old Hamlet’s beard is? Why did Hamlet ask him about his father’s beard?
14. Why does Laertes warn his sister Ophelia about Hamlet? How does Laertes view Hamlet? What advice does Laertes give Ophelia?
15. What advice does Polonius give Laertes as he is about to leave? Do you recognize the advice? Is it sound advice? Why is this advice so ironic?
16. What advice does Polonius give his daughter Ophelia? Why? What does he suspect?
17. Why does Horatio warn Hamlet about following the ghost? What is he afraid of? What is Hamlet’s response? And why?

18. What does the ghost tell Hamlet? Where is he during the day? Why is he haunting the castle at night? What does he ask Hamlet to do? And why?

19. What does Hamlet tell Horatio he is prepared to do? Why does this concern Horatio?

20. Why does Hamlet make Horatio and the sentry guards swear to keep news of the ghost to themselves? Why is there a need for such secrecy? And what is their response? What prompts that response?

HAMLET – ACT TWO QUESTIONS

1. Why does Polonius want Reynaldo to “spy” on Laertes?

2. What does he tell him to do to get the “truth”?

3. Why did Polonius have Ophelia break things off with Hamlet?

4. Why does he regret it? What does Polonius think is really bothering Hamlet?

5. Why does King Claudius invite Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to court? Who are they? What does Claudius want them to do and why?

6. What does Voltemand secure for Young King Fortinbras from King Claudius?

7. Why does Polonius go to Hamlet in the library?

8. What does Hamlet do when Polonius approaches him? Why? What is his strategy and why?

9. Why does Hamlet tell the lead actor of the acting troupe he’ll give the actors some extra lines to insert into the play they’ll perform before the court that night?

10. What does Hamlet hope to accomplish?

HAMLET - ACT THREE QUESTIONS

1. What does King Claudius want Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to do? Why?
2. What is Hamlet contemplating with his famous “To be or not to be” soliloquy? What is a soliloquy?

3. What does Ophelia think has happened to Hamlet?

4. What does Hamlet add to the play? Why?

5. What happens to King Claudius when the play is performed?

6. What does it reveal to Hamlet?

7. Why doesn’t Hamlet take action against King Claudius when he finds him praying?

8. Why does Polonius spy on Hamlet when he visits his mother, Gertrude? What happens? Why does it happen?

9. How does Hamlet confront his mother about her choices? What is Gertrude’s response?

10. What happens that leads Gertrude to believe Hamlet has gone mad?

HAMLET, ACT FOUR QUESTIONS

1. What does Gertrude tell Claudius about Hamlet’s state of mind? What is Claudius’ response to Polonius’ body being missing?

2. What does Claudius want the King of England to do? Why does Claudius believe the King of England should do what he asks?

3. What does Fortinbras want of Claudius? What is Hamlet’s response to Fortinbras’ request/ action?

4. What is Hamlet’s opinion of himself for not acting on his feeling of revenge? What does he believe men should do in like situations?

5. What has happened to Ophelia in light of Hamlet’s scornful rejection and the killing of her father?

6. What is Claudius’ regret about Polonius’ funeral? What does he think he should have done? Why?

7. What motivates Claudius to draw Laertes into his schemes? Why?

8. What happens to Hamlet after he’s been sent to England? How and why does he return?
9. Where are Hamlet’s friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern?

10. What happens that puts Laertes into Claudius plan for revenge? Why?

**HAMLET, ACT FIVE QUESTIONS**

1. Why do the gravediggers question whether or not Ophelia should be buried in the church yard? Is there a class system or economic angle – as well as religious – to their questions?

2. Why does Hamlet fixate on the bones and skull from the unearthed grave? Why is he consumed with death?

3. The exchange between Hamlet and the gravedigger sports some of the most clever dialogue in the play? Why is that? Why would Shakespeare have a common, unlearned man hold his own with the Prince?

4. What is the purpose of Hamlet’s fascination with poor old Yorick’s skull?

5. What happens when the court comes to bury Ophelia? How does Laertes respond to his sister’s death? Why?

6. What happens when Hamlet discovers the grave is for Ophelia? How does he respond? How does Laertes respond? What stills their conflict – for the moment?

7. How does Hamlet explain to Horatio how he left Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? Why is he so unconcerned for his fellow travelers and friends?

8. What is the ruse used to get Hamlet to duel Laertes? Why?

9. What role does Claudius play in the duel? What is his plan? How does he respond when Gertrude drinks the “special” wine?

10. When Hamlet finally reacts to Claudius, how does he do it? Calmly? Insanely?’ And why does Hamlet pardon Laertes – and vice-versa? And why does Hamlet prevent Horatio from committing suicide?

11. What is the point of the play? What did you derive from it? How do you respond to the ideas in the play?