

Act II

Act II

responding to the situation

Act II presents events that occur some time after the ghost has appeared to Hamlet. At the end of the preceding act, Hamlet vowed to take revenge, saying "thy commandment all alone shall live / Within the book and volume of my brain." Has Hamlet kept his word in this matter? What has he done in response to the experience with the ghost? What do you think, in general, of Hamlet's response? How do you feel about his actions toward Ophelia? toward Polonius?

Reviewing the Selection

Recalling and Interpreting

1. R: What does Polonius send Reynaldo to do?
2. I: What do Polonius's instructions to Reynaldo reveal about Polonius's character? about what he thinks his son capable of? about what Polonius himself might have been like as a youth?
3. R: Why does Ophelia come to see her father in the middle of act II, scene 1? How do both Polonius and Ophelia interpret Hamlet's visit?
4. I: Do you agree with Polonius and Ophelia's assessment? Is Hamlet's scene in Ophelia's chamber a sign that he has been driven crazy by love for her, or is it a sign of something else? If something else, then what?
5. R: What is the relationship between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and Hamlet? Why do Claudius and Gertrude bring Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to court?
6. I: What similarity exists between the action of the king and queen with regard to Hamlet and the action of Polonius, in the preceding scene, with regard to Laertes?
7. R: What is the news from Norway? What does Norway request of Claudius?
8. I: In the matter of Fortinbras, does Claudius behave in a wise, kingly manner? Explain.
9. R: What suggestion does Polonius make to the king and queen to explain Hamlet's madness? What stratagem does Polonius suggest they employ to test his theory?
10. I: What do you think of Polonius's method of testing his hypothesis? Is it moral to do what Polonius suggests that they do?

Earlier in the scene, what does he tell Polonius that he should do in regard to his daughter?

12. I: What reason might Hamlet have for calling Polonius what he does in scene II, line 400?

13. R: What does Hamlet tell Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that Denmark is like? About what does he demand that they be truthful with him?

14. I: What is Hamlet's mood in act II? Why does Hamlet not treat his old companions with genuine warmth and welcome?

15. R: When speaking to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, what does Hamlet tell them that the earth and the air are like to him? How does he say that he feels about men and women?

16. I: Do you believe that Hamlet really has the opinions that he shares with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? If so, what is Hamlet's state of mind? If Hamlet does not have these opinions, why does he say these things?

17. R: What speech does Hamlet ask the player to recite? How does Hamlet react to hearing the speech?

18. I: Why does Hamlet ask that this particular speech be recited? Why does Hamlet react as he does on hearing it?

Synthesizing

19. What do you believe to be Hamlet's state of mind in act II? Give evidence from the text to support your opinion.

20. Why does Hamlet think it necessary to pretend madness? Why does he think it necessary to stage a play to test Claudius? Why does Hamlet delay taking his revenge?