

HAMLET ACT QUESTIONS – ANSWER SHEET

ACT ONE

ACT 1, SCENE 1

1. What atmosphere is created by the opening lines? What do we learn about the state of Denmark from this scene?

Atmosphere

There is a sense of unease in the opening scene of the play. The two guards speak in short, sharp quickly spoken sentences to each other:

Barnardo: "Who's there?"

Francisco: "Nay answer me. Stand and unfold yourself." (1.1.1-2)

Francisco: "... 'tis bitter cold/ And I am sick at heart" (1.1.7-8)

The sickness imagery implies that Francisco is uneasy and fearful.

State of Denmark

Denmark is preparing for war, as the army of young Fortinbras is likely to invade. Young Fortinbras wishes to regain the lands his father lost in single combat to King Hamlet.

Marcellus: "...that this sweaty haste/ Doth make the night joint-labourer with the day" (1.1.78-9)

Horatio: "But in the gross and scope of mine opinion/ This bodes some strange eruption to our state" (1.1.68-9)

ACT 1, SCENE 2

2. Hamlet "A little more than kin and less than kind" (1.2.65). How does Shakespeare employ both stagecraft and chiasmus in this quotation to explore Hamlet's feelings towards his uncle and mother?

Hamlet is expressing his dislike at Claudius who his "kin", as he feels that he is not like him. The chiasmus is important as it draws attention to Hamlet's anger towards Claudius as highlighted through the echoing effect in this technique where he is "A little more than kin" but "less than kind".

3. How does the Hamlet of this scene fit the model of a malcontent?

- Hamlet is costumed differently from the other characters i.e. Wears black throughout the play ("inky cloak")
- He's very deliberately rude and ambiguous when dealing with the king.
- Contrasted against Laertes, who is dutiful, polite and obedient to Claudius.

4. Closely read Hamlet's soliloquy (1.2.129-158). Shakespeare often adopts the techniques of repetition, short abrupt phrases, imagery and specific word choices to communicate the intensity of a character's innermost thoughts. Write down quotations for each technique:

a. Repetition

"O", "Oh", "month" – the constant repetition of "month" expresses his anger at the fact that his uncle and mother married so quickly after his father's sudden death.

b. Short abrupt phrases

"Frailty thy name is woman!", (1.2.146)

"Like Niobe, full of tears, why she, -/ O God, ..." (1.2.149-50)

c. Imagery

Classical metaphor in which Hamlet likens his father to the Sun God, "Hyperion":

"So excellent a king, that was this

Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother" (1.2.139-40)

Also compares himself unfavourably to Hercules:

"My father's brother, but no more like my father

Than I to Hercules..." (1.2.152-3)

d. Specific word choices

Words are negative and bitter in their connotation: "unrighteous", "incestuous sheets", "How weary, flat, stale and unprofitable/ seems to me the uses of the world!"

- e. Finally – How does the use of these techniques convey a sense of Hamlet's desperation to the audience?

The overall combinations of each of these techniques help create the impression of Hamlet as a typical malcontent in this soliloquy.

ACT 1, SCENE 3

5. This scene introduces the major sub-plot of Hamlet, as Shakespeare further develops the characters of Polonius and his children, Laertes and Ophelia. Employing quotations where necessary, create a table in your workbooks like the one below to summarise your findings:

Character	Polonius	Laertes	Ophelia
Personality Traits	Royal Counsellor Bossy, domineering	Domineering, elder brother	Submissive and obedient.
Techniques that reveal this to the	• Gives a long list of advice to his children. • Sees Ophelia and Hamlet's	• Advises his sister I that she must protect her "chaste treasure" (1.3.32).	• Unlike her brother and father, Ophelia says very little in this scene.

Active Study Guide Hamlet Answer Sheet

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