

Hamlet

Act II study questions:

1. Polonius sends his servant Reynaldo to Paris with money and letters for his son Laertes. What is the true purpose of Reynaldo's mission? What instructions does Polonius give him?
2. Ophelia enters in a very frightened condition and describes her incident with Hamlet. Describe Hamlet's appearance when he entered Ophelia's room. How does Polonius react to Ophelia's story?
3. What is your opinion of Polonius at this point?
4. Claudius and Gertrude greet Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. These gentlemen are boyhood friends of Hamlet whom Claudius has recalled to Denmark in the hope that they may be able to help him investigate the nature of Hamlet's increasing mental disorder. Meanwhile, what news is brought by the ambassadors who have returned from Norway?
5. What does Polonius think Hamlet's problem is? What evidence does he provide? What is Polonius' plan?
6. What does Polonius say that indicates that he has some doubt about Hamlet's madness?
7. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter. They do not lie well and Hamlet soon discovers that they were brought to Elsinore by the king. In one of the most beautiful speeches in the play, Hamlet explains to them why they were sent for. Summarize lines 309-325 of Scene 2.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern now tell Hamlet of the coming of a company of actors and there is some discussion between them of acting companies which reflects conditions in the Elizabethan theatre at the time. Before the players enter, however, Hamlet tells R and G that they are welcome to Elsinore. More than this, he also tells them that Claudius and Gertrude are deceived about his madness, that he is only mad when he feels like it and can otherwise be perfectly sane, as indeed has been shown in this scene with them. Polonius now enters with the players. He introduces them with comical pretentiousness which leads Hamlet once again to make fun of him in the role of madman. Hamlet now welcomes the players and asks them as a proof of their quality to recite a speech from one of their plays about the death of Priam, which he begins. Polonius praises Hamlet's delivery. Hamlet is delighted with the player's recitation and asks him whether the company could play "The Murder of Gonzago" that night with an insertion of a speech of "some dozen or sixteen lines" which he would write himself.

8. Hamlet takes stock of himself in the last speech of the act. What is the result of his self-revelation? Do you agree with him?

9. A picture of Hamlet as lover, poet, lunatic, devoted fan of the theater, actor, and private detective emerges from Act II. Use appropriate quotations from this act to prove this statement.