

## *Hamlet* Act 3 Discussion Questions

### Scene 1

- 1) First, annotate the “To be, or not to be?” speech from scene 1. What is Hamlet contemplating in this speech? Outline his argument for and against this thing he is considering.

### Scene 2

- 2) During the play, the play the actors are performing, the lead actor says these words:

*Our wills and fates do so contrary run  
That our devices still are overthrown.  
Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own.*

What do these words mean? Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer.

- 3) Does Hamlet get the proof he needs from the play within a play? Was this a good plan? Explain your answer.

### Scene 3

- 4) In scene 3, Hamlet comes across Claudius, alone. What is Claudius doing? Hamlet has the perfect opportunity to kill him in this scene. Look at the following speech and explain why Hamlet chooses not to kill Claudius in this scene.

#### **HAMLET**

Now might I do it pat. Now he is a-praying.  
And now I'll do 't. And so he goes to heaven.  
And so am I revenged.—That would be scanned.  
A villain kills my father, and, for that,  
I, his sole son, do this same villain send  
To heaven. Oh, this is hire and salary, not revenge.  
He took my father grossly, full of bread,  
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May.  
And how his audit stands who knows save heaven?  
But in our circumstance and course of thought  
Tis heavy with him. And am I then revenged  
To take him in the purging of his soul  
When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?  
No. Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent.  
When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,

Or in th' incestuous pleasure of his bed,  
At game a-swearing, or about some act  
That has no relish of salvation in 't—  
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,  
And that his soul may be as damned and black  
As hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays  
This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

#### **Scene 4**

- 5) In this scene, Hamlet confronts his mother. What does he accuse her of? Is she guilty of what he accuses her of in your opinion? Explain your answer and find some proof in the text to support your response.

**Important Speeches to Annotate**

## HAMLET

To be, or not to be? That is the question—  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And, by opposing, end them? To die, to sleep—  
No more—and by a sleep to say we end  
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to—'tis a consummation  
Devoutly to be wished! To die, to sleep.  
To sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there's the rub,  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause. There's the respect  
That makes calamity of so long life.  
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,  
Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,  
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,  
The insolence of office, and the spurns  
That patient merit of th' unworthy takes,  
When he himself might his quietus make  
With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,  
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,  
But that the dread of something after death,  
The undiscovered country from whose bourn  
No traveler returns, puzzles the will  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know not of?  
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,  
And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
And enterprises of great pith and moment  
With this regard their currents turn awry,  
And lose the name of action.—Soft you now,  
The fair Ophelia!—Nymph, in thy orisons  
Be all my sins remembered.

## CLAUDIUS

O, my offence is rank it smells to heaven;

It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,  
A brother's murder. Pray can I not,  
Though inclination be as sharp as will:  
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent;  
And, like a man to double business bound,  
I stand in pause where I shall first begin,  
And both neglect. What if this cursed hand  
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,  
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens  
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy  
But to confront the visage of offence?  
And what's in prayer but this two-fold force,  
To be forestalled ere we come to fall,  
Or pardon'd being down? Then I'll look up;  
My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer  
Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder'?  
That cannot be; since I am still possess'd  
Of those effects for which I did the murder,  
My crown, mine own ambition and my queen.  
May one be pardon'd and retain the offence?  
In the corrupted currents of this world  
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,  
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself  
Buys out the law: but 'tis not so above;  
There is no shuffling, there the action lies  
In his true nature; and we ourselves compell'd,  
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,  
To give in evidence. What then? what rests?  
Try what repentance can: what can it not?  
Yet what can it when one can not repent?  
O wretched state! O bosom black as death!  
O limed soul, that, struggling to be free,  
Art more engaged! Help, angels! Make assay!  
Bow, stubborn knees; and, heart with strings of steel,  
Be soft as sinews of the newborn babe!  
All may be well.