HAMLET REVIEW QUESTIONS

Content:

Act I
1. Which characters first see the Ghost (in Scene I, i)? What do they think the sighting means?
2. What is Hamlet's state of mind when we first see him? Why does he feel he is "too much i' the sun"?
3. Why does Ophelia resolve to reject Hamlet?
4. What does the Ghost tell Hamlet? What order does he give him? Why must Hamlet leave his mother alone?
5. How does Hamlet react to his new suspicions? Why can he not be sure they are true? What does he make his friends swear?

Act II
1. What effect do Polonius's instructions to Reynaldo have on our opinion of Polonius?
2. What cause does Polonius see for Hamlet's apparent madness? (See I, v, 170--Hamlet has decided to pretend to be insane, though it is far from clear that all his madness is pretence.)
3. What tasks do Rosencrantz and Guildenstern take on for the King and Queen?
4. How does Hamlet treat Polonius? How does he treat Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? How does he treat the Players?
5. What special arrangement about their performance does Hamlet make with the Players?
6. What is Hamlet's idea in doing this? (See his final soliloquy in Act II and also III, ii, 27-39.)

Act III
1. What do we learn from Claudius's speech in III, i, 49-54?
2. What is the subject of Hamlet's famous "To be, or not to be" soliloquy?
3. How does Hamlet treat Ophelia when he meets her in Act III, scene i? How does Ophelia react?
4. Does Claudius believe Hamlet is in love? Does he believe he is mad?
5. What happens in the pantomime and the play which the Players present? Is there any hint in the "play within the play" that Gertrude is guilty of either murder or adultery? How does Claudius react?
6. What does Gertrude do after the play?
7. What plans do the King and Polonius make?
8. What does Claudius do and say when Polonius leaves him? Why doesn't Hamlet kill Claudius at this point?
9. How does Hamlet happen to kill Polonius?
10. How does Hamlet accuse Gertrude? How does she react? Why does she think Hamlet is mad? What promise does she make?

Act IV
1. Why does Claudius claim he wants to send Hamlet to England? What is his real reason?
2. How does Ophelia react to her father's death? Whom does the King ask to watch over her?
3. What does Laertes do when he hears of his father's death?
4. How does Claudius quiet Laertes? What do they plan to do?
5. What happens to Ophelia? How do we hear about it?

Act V
1. What is the first topic the two clowns discuss? What do they decide?
2. What does Hamlet talk about while he and Horatio watch the clowns dig the grave?
3. Who was Yorick?
4. What does Laertes do as Ophelia's funeral ends? What does Hamlet do then? (Remember that Hamlet has just returned from sea.)
5. How has Hamlet escaped Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? What will happen to them? Why?
6. What do Hamlet and Laertes do in the final scene? What does Hamlet say to Laertes before they begin?
7. How is the Queen poisoned?
8. How are Hamlet and Laertes both killed?
9. What does Laertes do before he dies?
10. How does Claudius die?
11. What does Hamlet persuade Horatio to do?
12. Who will restore order in Denmark? How has his arrival been prepared for? (You may need to review some of the earlier scenes, particularly I, ii, II, ii, and IV, iv.)
Analysis:

1. 'The spirit that I have seen / May be a devil'. Can we be quite sure about the ghost in Hamlet? What are your own conclusions on this matter?

2. One famous critic described Gertrude as 'sheep-like'. Do you find anything to admire in Hamlet's mother?

3. Has Hamlet changed, at all, upon his return from England?

4. What different kinds of acting have you found in the play? What different purposes do these performances have?

5. One critic has written of Claudius that he is 'a good king, but a bad man'. Is this true in your opinion?

6. Are the king's agents, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and Polonius, villains themselves?

7. Why does Hamlet delay his revenge?

8. What does your reading of the play lead you to think about revenge? Account for your opinions carefully.