


Investigate!


Hamlet: Act III

 refers to links on www.crossref-it.info

❖ Act III, Scene i:

- Note down:
 - the various instances of spying and betrayal in this scene
 - references to pretence and hypocrisy
 - How much honesty is there in the Danish court?
- Look carefully at Hamlet's soliloquy
 - What is his attitude to life?
 - Why does he appear to decide that it is better to endure a 'weary life' than to end it?
- Consider Hamlet's treatment of Ophelia.
 - Why does Hamlet treat her so harshly?
 - Is she to be blamed for obeying her father?

❖ Act III, Scene ii:

- At the centre of a play about acting (in both senses of the word) Shakespeare places a 'play-within-a-play' (c.f. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*).
 - As the audience, we are therefore viewing at least two simultaneous fictions. What effect does this have?
- Consider Hamlet's speech to Horatio.
 - Why might Shakespeare wish at this point in the play to stress the virtues of a balance between reason and passion?
 - What is the role of Horatio throughout the play?
- Look at the way Shakespeare uses rhyme to suggest that the 'play within a play' is not part of the main action. (See  Text in detail > Hamlet > Shakespeare's language > Blank verse, prose and rhyme).
- Look at the exchanges between Hamlet and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Contrast:

- the way that they are prepared to betray him, with
- the behaviour of Horatio.

❖ Act III, Scene iii:

- Look carefully at Claudius' soliloquy.
 - What impression do we have of him?
 - Why might Shakespeare show us a murderer who feels racked by guilt?
- Look at Hamlet's speech when he finds Claudius praying. Is his desire to send Claudius to hell:
 - a valid and equitable justice?
 - or a vindictive desire to continue vengeance beyond the grave?
 - or could it simply be an excuse for Hamlet to prevaricate yet again?

❖ Act III, Scene iv:

- Is Gertrude's failure to see the Ghost:
 - a sign of her sinfulness, and spiritual blindness, or
 - is the Ghost now only there in Hamlet's mind?
- Contrast:
 - this appearance of the Ghost, with
 - Act I scenes i and iv, where several people saw it.
- By killing Polonius, Hamlet is now both the murderer of a father and also a son seeking revenge for the murder of a father. Think about the impact this has on:
 - our attitudes to revenge
 - our attitude to Hamlet
 - the structure of the play.