

Investigate!

Hamlet: Act I

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❖ **Act I, Scene i:**

- Analyse the language of the opening lines (to line 25):
 - How does Shakespeare create a sense of tension?
 - Why do you think he starts the play here, rather than with scene two?
- Focus on the role of Horatio throughout this scene:
 - What kind of man does he seem to be?
- Remind yourself of the picture of Denmark that is drawn in this scene:
 - Why might Shakespeare wish to depict a country on the brink of war?

❖ **Act I, Scene ii:**

- Read out loud the opening speech by Claudius:
 - How does Shakespeare create the sense of smooth diplomacy and stateliness in Claudius's speaking voice?
 - How does this contrast in style and tone with the opening scene?
- Read Hamlet's soliloquy.
 - Highlight all the exclamations and short phrases.
 - What mood do they convey when read aloud?
- Why does Shakespeare create such a contrast between the apparent calm reasonableness of Claudius and his court, and the feelings of Hamlet?
- Look at Hamlet's welcome of Horatio:
 - What does this suggest about their friendship?
- How does Shakespeare change the mood when Horatio and the guards discuss the Ghost?

❖ **Act I, Scene iii:**

- Notice that this is a 'triangular' family – father, son, female – which echoes Hamlet's own situation
- Look at Polonius' long speech of advice to Laertes:
 - What impression do we gain here of Polonius?
 - Is he offering very good sense, or is he garrulous? Or both?
- What do you notice about Ophelia's reaction to:
 - the advice given her by her brother and father?
 - her father's command?
- What does it show you about the power-structure within this family?

❖ **Act I, Scene iv:**

- Compare Hamlet's speeches in this scene. In his discussions with Horatio he appears to have a thoughtful and philosophical nature.
- How does his language change when the Ghost appears?

❖ **Act I, Scene v:**

- Hamlet is asked to take action against Claudius for his sins but to leave Gertrude to heaven.
 - Is there any contradiction in this?
- Compare Hamlet's initial reaction to the Ghost's desire for vengeance, and his reluctance at the end of the scene:
 - How do we see this vacillation continuing throughout the play?
 - What might make Hamlet reluctant to kill Claudius?
- Remind yourself of the structure of the Act 1:
 - Why did Shakespeare not suggest Claudius's guilt right at the start of the play?
 - Can you identify at which point in Hamlet we become certain that Claudius is guilty?