

Hamlet Key Questions 1.1 and 1.2

Hamlet Key Question for 1.1

1. In most of Shakespeare's tragedies, the main character doesn't even appear in the opening scene. And yet the scene itself sets out key **exposition** that will end up being important in the end (usually after plenty of murder and betrayal).
 - What key points do we learn about the play's plot from the sentinels in the first scene?
2. Distinguish between the following characters and places: Denmark, Hamlet, and "young Hamlet" (1.1.185). Norway, Fortinbras, and "young Fortinbras" (1.1.107).

Hamlet Key Questions for 1.2

1. Summarize the content of Claudius's opening address to the court (1.2.1-39):
 - a. What does he say about King Hamlet's death? Take note of the **antithesis** here.
 - b. Queen Gertrude (and what's especially strange about this)?
 - c. Fortinbras and Norway?
2. Paraphrase Claudius's address to Hamlet ("But now, my cousin Hamlet and my son--") and Hamlet's reply (1.2.66-69). Take note of the wordplay in Hamlet's response.
3. When the queen and Hamlet discuss his father's death, she says, "Thou knowest 'tis common. All that lives must die / Passing through nature to eternity." What is she trying to tell him by saying it's "common"? When Hamlet responds by saying, "Ay, madam, it is common," how is he using the word *common* in a different way?
4. On what grounds does Claudius criticize Hamlet's continued mourning for his father?: "'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet...Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son" (1.2.90-121)

Words to Watch for: 1.1 and 1.2

➤ **apparition**

Therefore I have entreated him along
With us to watch the minutes of this night,
That, if again this **apparition** come,
He may approve our eyes and speak to it.

➤ **commendable**

'Tis sweet and **commendable** in your nature,
Hamlet,
To give these mourning duties to your father.

➤ **incestuous**

O, most wicked speed, to post
With such **dexterity** to incestuous sheets!

➤ **kin**

A little more than **kin** and less than kind.

➤ **obstinate**

But to persever
In **obstinate** condolment is a course
Of impious stubbornness. 'Tis unmanly
grief.

Exeunt all but HAMLET

HAMLET

O, that this too too sullied flesh would melt
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
But two months dead: nay, not so much, not two:
So excellent a king; that was, to this,
Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
Must I remember? why, she would hang on him,
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on: and yet, within a month--
Let me not think on't--Frailty, thy name is woman!--
A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she follow'd my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears:--why she, even she--
O, God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason,
Would have mourn'd longer--married with my uncle,
My father's brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules: within a month:
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married. O, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not nor it cannot come to good:
But break, my heart; for I must hold my tongue.

Hamlet Key Passage Analysis for 1.2

1. This is Hamlet's first soliloquy in the play. What is a **soliloquy** and why would the device be useful for Shakespeare in this play? How is it different from an **aside**?
2. What does Hamlet wish for in the opening lines? Why can't he do it (in his own words)?
3. What images and language does Hamlet use to describe his life?
4. Based on what he reveals in this soliloquy and the events of the first two scenes, what is the main cause of Hamlet's anguish and his bleak attitude towards life?