

CliffsNotes.com® Conversation Starters for **HAMLET**

What is Hamlet's motivation behind all of his actions? Is it revenge? Or is it madness (feigned or genuine)?

Why does Shakespeare kill off every major character, except Horatio? What is the significance of everyone dying?

What benefit does Hamlet stand to gain by pretending to be crazy? What risks are there associated with feigning madness? Is it dangerous for someone, especially Hamlet, to pretend to be insane?

Who benefits if Hamlet is mad? Who benefits if Hamlet is sane?

What does this play say about grief? According to the characters, is mourning supposed to be a ritual or more of a human experience?

Polonius gives a lot of advice throughout the play. What purpose does it serve? Are his words of advice still applicable today?

What is the significance of women and femininity in this play? How does Shakespeare characterize Queen Gertrude and Ophelia? What is Hamlet's opinion of them?

Why does Hamlet confide in Horatio that he will pretend to be mad in order to spy on his uncle and mother? Why wouldn't he keep that a secret?

What does Claudius value?

Describe the importance of appearance versus reality in the play, focusing especially on the different characters and their motivations.

What is significant of the exchange between Hamlet and Ophelia in Act III, Scene 1?

What role do prayer, religion, and sin have in the play?

What is Hamlet's greatest flaw?

How does the Ghost make Hamlet crazy? How does the Ghost make him sane?

Is Ophelia's madness in Act IV, Scene 5 legitimate or is she faking, too? What would cause her insanity? And if she is feigning madness, why?

Why could you argue that Claudius is a master of emotions? Is Hamlet?

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What are the different flowers that Ophelia passes out symbolic of? Why are they important?

What kind of a King is Claudius? What evidence shows the kind of monarch he is and the kind of man he is? Is this only an appearance, or is it his true character?

What is Hamlet's conflict over the Ghost's existence? Why does he continue to doubt the "honesty" of the Ghost even after Claudius confesses his guilt?

Name the various foils Shakespeare has created for Hamlet. Why is each important to the play?

Explain the function of the Gravediggers at the beginning of Act V.

Look through the text and find five questions that drive the theme, characters, or plot of the play. Explain why the questions are important and why Shakespeare poses them as questions and not as answers.

Explain the effect Hamlet's ideas of sin and salvation have on the development of his character and the movement of the plot.

Identify the three revenge plots in Hamlet, and explain why each is important to the development of the play.
