*Hamlet* with Bah © 2015

These are only some discussion prompts. More may follow and discussion topics will be introduced in class as we go along.

As you read consider how you might discuss these prompts. Some of your responses will change as you read more, your understanding of the characters develops, and the play progresses.

In “preparing responses,” be able to refer to the text (Act, Scene and Lines), and have adequate notes. Also, look for connections between the focus of any scene, the corresponding prompt and the rest of the play, and note these.

ACT ONE

Act One establishes **conflicts, tensions** and **themes**. For instance, note these elements of the play and consider them:

1. Denmark is preparing for war. Why? How is it described (details)?
2. The ghost of Prince Hamlet’s father is seen stalking the castle. Is this really the ghost of the late King Hamlet? Why might it not be? How do others respond to the ghost? What is the ghost’s impact on Prince Hamlet?
3. What is the opinion other nations hold of Denmark?
4. Hamlet’s mother has remarried soon after the king’s death. How does Hamlet feel about this?
   * Be prepared to list all the ways—metaphors, allusions, references, analogies, direct descriptions, indirect ways, puns, etc.—that Hamlet uses to describe his **mother**.
   * Do the same for his uncle, King **Claudius**.
   * Do the same for his **father**, the **late King Hamlet**.
5. What are the relationships (characterization) among the members of the Polonius (adviser to the king) family? Note the advice given to daughter Ophelia from father Polonius.
6. Fortinbras, Laertes and Horatio as foils to Hamlet.

* Compare each to Hamlet.  
  What is revealed? And more importantly (go beyond characterization to theme and philosophy) address the theme of “Discretion verse Nature.” Is Reason an enemy of right (correct) and righteous (justifiable) behavior? Does Hamlet not act sooner because he is not of pure soul?

1. Start to note all the ways deception and mistrust are introduced as themes. Who is spying on whom? Who is asking whom to keep secrets? (In the Branagh version of the film, note how the director develops this theme with secret passages, people ducking behind doors, one-way mirrors. Find evidence in the text that Branagh’s interpretation is reasonable—find text to support these themes.)
2. Hamlet’s relations with women.   
   Oedipal fixations and obsessions with incest. Who’s fixated and disturbed? Do the women bear any fault—what if anything have they done wrong? (Coming later—Include the “Get thee to a nunnery” scene.)
3. “O, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt” 1.2.133  
   Note that some texts print “sullied” as “solid.”  
   Speeches and scenes. Meanings (translations), Metaphors, allusions, imagery and devices, and connections to the rest of the play (text to text—context—put any scene or speech you focus on in dramatic as well as thematic context)
4. Finally, Act One ends with Prince Hamlet making a determination as to the authenticity of the ghost, and coming up with a plan of action (inaction?). What is Hamlet’s plan?