*Hamlet* Act 1 study guide and questions:

Act 1, Scenes 1 and 2, here in rough order—

In the text of *Hamlet*, find and read aloud the passages which answer the following questions and prompts. Annotate the important passages in your text. Write the Act, Scene and Line numbers on your answer sheet. Use this format: (*Hamlet* 1.1.1) the first time, then (1.2.2) thereafter. Be able to recount the importance of events, the metaphors and devices used to relate them, and the order of events so they stick in your mind.

Act 1, scene1

1. In at least two places the ghost and its “costume” is described. Find two.
2. Why is Denmark on watch and on guard?
3. In several places someone claims the ghost they have seen is of King Hamlet. Find at least three. These points in the text may not all come in 1.1.
4. Where and to what purpose do we here about the weekend not being divided from the weekend, and the night not being divided from the day?
5. Of what three things might the ghost be able to inform the living?
6. What point is Horatio making by discussing Julius Caesar?
7. Find two places where it is discussed what effect the rooster has on the ghost. Translate and understand in detail what is being said. Also, when, how and why is it said the rooster brings peace to the world?
8. Make sure you understand who the Fortinbrasses are and their relationships to each other (there is one unnamed old uncle as well referred to as Old Norway). Also what impact do the Fortinbrasses have on the Danish?)

Act 1, scene 2

1. Find at least three examples of antithesis.
2. Who says it is a fault to mourn too much or too long? What reasons (list at least three) are given?
3. Where and how does Hamlet suggest he is more authentic and more noble than his mother?
4. How important is Polonius to King Claudius, or at least, how important does the king say Polonius is?
5. The king has ordered the firing of canons. Why?
6. Make sure you really understand the “Oh, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt” speech (1.2.133), its metaphors, logic, meanings, etc. Who is Hamlet talking about besides himself? What are his sensibilities? Feelings? (This question is overlapped by some of the following questions.) Why does the prince say, “frailty, thy name is woman”?
7. Where does Hamlet first discuss suicide in this play? What might make life not worth living, and what rules are against the committing of suicide?
8. What is the metaphor Hamlet uses to compare his father to his uncle?
9. Why is Hamlet’s mother like Niobe? What is wrong with this analogy/mythological allusion, or what is revealing about Prince Hamlet’s psychology in it?
10. How does Hamlet describe his father’s treatment of his mother? What examples, or figurative language does he use?
11. Metaphor—what is an unweeded garden?
12. Where does Hamlet discuss with a friend the close timing between the funeral of King Hamlet and the marriage of Claudius to Gertrude? What rhetorical flourish or metaphor is used?
13. Where does Prince Hamlet tell his friends and soldiers to keep secret that they have seen a ghost? (Once in 1.2 and once in 1.5.)
14. Where in the play does Prince Hamlet believes something is amiss, some intrigue and espionage. Why does he believe this? What does he say? What is the sign?

Act 1, scene 3

1. Understand Laertes’ advice to Ophelia, both in content and in metaphor. (1.3.6)
2. Understand Polonius’s advice to Laertes (1.3.60). Note the tone and clichés. Prepare to compare it to the conversation Polonius has with Ophelia (coming up—beginning at 1.3.95). Note the difference in tone.
3. Polonius and Ophelia beginning at 1.3.95, and especially the long (angry) passage beginning at 1.3.124.

Act 1, scene 4

1. In the beginning of the scene Hamlet explains why they (Horatio asks) are hearing trumpets and canons. Note what this reveals about Hamlet’s attitude about Uncle/King Claudius.
2. Note how concerned Horatio is about Hamlet going with the ghost. What examples of hazards does Horatio give? What could go wrong? What does this scene show about Hamlet?

Act 1, scene 5

1. The whole scene. What does the ghost tell Hamlet? How does Prince Hamlet respond? Do you believe the ghost—remember the concerns Horatio has about the ghost?
2. At the end of the scene and act, Hamlet reveals a crazy plan to his friends and makes them promise to keep his secret, to ignore him at times. Make sure you understand the plan and the language he uses to reveal it.