

Act 2 Vocabulary

Rebuke (v.): an act or expression of criticism and censure 2.2.73

Brevity (n.): the attribute of being brief or fleeting 2.2.97

Discretion n.) **Discrete** (adj.): the power or right to decide to act according to one's own judgment; judicious in one's conduct or speech, especially with regard to privacy or maintaining silence about something delicate in nature. 2.2.130

Contrive (v.): make or work out a plan for; devise 2.2.230

Tedious (adj.): lacking in interest to such an extent as to cause mental weariness 2.2.237

Visage (n.): the appearance conveyed by a person's face 2.2.581

Act 2 Scene 1 (2.1)

Summary: Polonius sends his servant Reynaldo to Paris to question Laertes's acquaintances (friends/ people he knows). Ophelia enters, deeply disturbed about a visit she has just had from an apparently mad Hamlet. Polonius decides that Hamlet has been made insane by Ophelia's refusing to see him. Polonius rushes off to tell the king.

1. What does Polonius' use of Reynaldo say about his Polonius' relationship with Laertes? What seems to be a running theme in this play in regards to trust?
2. How does Ophelia describe Hamlet's recent behavior?
3. What do you think accounts for or motivates Hamlet's behavior? Is this the "mad" act he referenced before? Is Hamlet using Ophelia in his "crazy" act? Is this a genuine reaction to Ophelia's rejection? Explain your reasoning.
4. How does Polonius explain Hamlet's recent behavior? Provide a quotation. Do you agree? (2.1.103)

Act II Scene 2 (2.2)

Summary: Claudius and Gertrude set Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two boyhood friends of Hamlet, to spy on him. When Hamlet himself enters, he is confronted first by Polonius and then by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, whom he quickly identifies as Claudius's spies. As they talk, a company of touring actors enters. Hamlet persuades one of them to deliver a speech, and recognizes, to his shame, that he has shown less intensity in avenging his father's murder than the actor has done in performance. Hamlet hopes that when the players stage *The Murder of Gonzago* for the court, he can determine whether Claudius is guilty of King Hamlet's death.

5. What do King Claudius and Polonius plan to do to confirm the origin of Hamlet's madness? Again, what does this say about the theme of secrets and lack of trust?

6. Explain the meaning of this statement made by Polonius: "Though this be madness, yet there is method in it" (2.2.223).

7. What does Hamlet suspect regarding the recent return to Denmark of his friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? How do his friends respond? What do you think of this? (2.2.285)

8. At 2.2.327-334, Hamlet delivers a famous, brief monologue regarding the nature of humanity – "What a piece of work is a man...". Line by line, try to interpret the meaning of Hamlet's words. Use your resources as needed.

<i>What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason</i>	
<i>how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how</i> <i>express and admirable;</i>	
<i>in action how like an angel,</i> <i>in apprehension how like a god</i>	
<i>the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals –</i>	
<i>and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?</i>	
<i>Man delights not me,</i>	
<i>no, nor women neither,</i>	
<i>though by your smiling you seem to say so.</i>	

Now, characterize and analyze Hamlet's current perspective on humanity. Explain why he may feel this way.

Skip 2.2.342 – 575 Rosencrantz and Guildenstern tell Hamlet that a troupe of “players” (actors) are arriving to perform. This lifts Hamlet’s spirits (why?). He asks the players to perform a scene from Virgil’s Aeneid (Greek mythology) that tells the story of the death of Priam, King of Troy, who was killed by Pyrrhus seeking revenge for the death of his father Achilles (sound familiar?). Hamlet also wants to see the performance of Priam’s wife, Hecuba, and her extremely emotional reaction to her husband’s death. Hamlet is greatly moved by the performance. He asks the players if they are able to perform the play *The Murder of Gonzago* and if he could write and add some lines to the play. They agree, and will perform it the following night.

- 9. 2.2.576 After viewing these deeply emotional performances, Hamlet delivers a soliloquy regarding his lack of action regarding avenging his father’s murder.
 - a. Based on his words, how does Hamlet feel about his lack of action thus far?

 - b. What do you think is actually preventing Hamlet taking action? Is it something in his nature that may be preventing him? Is this part of greater plan?

10. Describe Hamlet's plan regarding the play.

a. Do you think Hamlet's plan to use the play to reveal the guilt of the King will be effective?

b. In life, what do you think might be the psychological effect on a person forced to face an image similar to their own evil deed?

Word and definition	Memory Cue (picture or words)	Sentence (definition of word should be clear by your sentence)
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Discretion n.) Discrete (adj.): the power or right to decide to act according to one's own judgment; judicious in one's conduct or speech, especially with regard to privacy or maintaining silence about something delicate in nature.		
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