

FREE PRINTABLE QUIZ

Hamlet

Act 3, Scene 1 — “To be, or not to be”

William Shakespeare · 23 questions with a full answer key and explanations

What's inside

- **23 multiple-choice questions**, including passage analysis with the original text printed above it — the way your English class asks it.
- **Answer key** on its own page so you can take the quiz first.
- **Explanations** for every question, so a wrong answer teaches you something.
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The quiz

Hamlet — Act 3 · Scene 1. Answers begin on the answer key page.

PLOT & EVENT

1. What immediate consequence does Hamlet's behavior during his interaction with Ophelia have on Claudius's plans?

- A. It convinces Claudius that Hamlet is truly mad and needs immediate medical attention.
- B. It leads Claudius to believe Hamlet's madness is not caused by love, prompting a new plan to send him to England.
- C. It confirms Claudius's suspicion that Hamlet is aware of his father's murder.
- D. It causes Claudius to immediately confront Hamlet about his erratic behavior.

PLOT & EVENT

2. Prior to Hamlet's entrance, what specific instruction does Polonius give Ophelia to facilitate the King's observation?

- A. To engage Hamlet in a debate about philosophy.
- B. To pretend to be ill and seek Hamlet's comfort.
- C. To read from a prayer book to provide a natural excuse for her solitude.
- D. To confess her true feelings for Hamlet to him.

CHARACTER

3. Which of the following best describes Claudius's primary motivation for arranging Hamlet's encounter with Ophelia?

- A. To genuinely help Hamlet overcome his melancholy through love.
- B. To confirm Polonius's theory that Hamlet's madness stems from unrequited love.
- C. To publicly expose Hamlet's feigned madness to the court.
- D. To provide Ophelia with an opportunity to reconcile with Hamlet.

CHARACTER

4. Hamlet's harsh treatment of Ophelia in this scene most strongly suggests which of the following about his state of mind?

- A. He is genuinely angry at Ophelia for her past actions.
- B. He is attempting to protect Ophelia from the corrupting influence of the court and his own dangerous situation.
- C. He is using her as an outlet for his broader disillusionment with women and humanity, exacerbated by his mother's actions.
- D. He is trying to convince the hidden observers that he is truly insane and therefore not a threat.

MICRO-DETAIL

5. What specific type of entertainment do Rosencrantz and Guildenstern report has piqued Hamlet's interest?

- A. A fencing match
- B. A troupe of actors
- C. A musical concert
- D. A hunting expedition

MICRO-DETAIL

6. What does Hamlet suggest a man might use to make his 'quietus' (end his life)?

- A. A cup of poison
- B. A bare bodkin
- C. A hangman's noose
- D. A fall from a great height

MICRO-DETAIL

7. What does Ophelia attempt to return to Hamlet during their confrontation?

- A. A letter he wrote her
- B. A lock of his hair
- C. Several keepsakes or 'remembrances'
- D. A ring he gave her

MICRO-DETAIL

8. Claudius, in his aside, compares his 'deed' to what specific visual metaphor?

- A. A festering wound
- B. A harlot's cheek, beautied with plastering art
- C. A serpent in a garden
- D. A ship lost at sea

MICRO-DETAIL

9. Where does Polonius propose to hide himself during Gertrude's future conversation with Hamlet?

- A. Behind a tapestry
- B. In an adjoining chamber
- C. Within earshot of their conference
- D. Under a table

ANALYTICAL

10. The 'To be, or not to be' soliloquy primarily explores which of the following philosophical dilemmas?

- A. The conflict between love and duty.
- B. The nature of political power and usurpation.
- C. The existential choice between enduring suffering and seeking oblivion, complicated by fear of the unknown afterlife.
- D. The moral implications of revenge versus forgiveness.

ANALYTICAL

11. Hamlet's dialogue with Ophelia in this scene, particularly his accusations and commands, serves to reinforce which recurring motif in the play?

- A. The importance of filial loyalty.
- B. The corrupting influence of power.
- C. The theme of appearance versus reality, as Hamlet's 'madness' is performed for an audience.
- D. The inevitability of fate.

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

KING. Love? His affections do not that way tend, Nor what he spake, though it lack'd form a little, Was not like madness. There's something in his soul O'er which his melancholy sits on brood, And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose Will be some danger, which for to prevent, I have in quick determination Thus set it down: he shall with speed to England For the demand of our neglected tribute: Haply the seas and countries different, With variable objects, shall expel This something settled matter in his heart, Whereon his brains still beating puts him thus From fashion of himself. What think you on't?

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

12. The King's use of the phrase 'his melancholy sits on brood' employs which literary device to describe Hamlet's state?

- A. Metaphor
- B. Simile
- C. Personification
- D. Hyperbole

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

13. The King's proposed solution to Hamlet's condition ('he shall with speed to England') reveals his primary concern to be:

- A. Hamlet's personal well-being and recovery.
- B. The political stability of Denmark and his own security.
- C. Re-establishing diplomatic ties with England.
- D. Providing Hamlet with a change of scenery.

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

14. The King's language in this passage, particularly 'I do doubt the hatch and the disclose Will be some danger,' conveys a tone of:

- A. Paternal concern
- B. Philosophical contemplation
- C. Suspicious apprehension
- D. Resigned acceptance

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

To be, or not to be, that is the question: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, And by opposing end them? To die—to sleep, No more; and by a sleep to say we end The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks That flesh is heir to: 'tis a consummation Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep. To sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there's the rub, For in that sleep of death what dreams may come, When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, Must give us pause. There's the respect That makes calamity of so long life. For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, The pangs of dispriz'd love, the law's delay, The insolence of office, and the spurns That patient merit of the unworthy takes, When he himself might his quietus make With a bare bodkin? Who would these fardels bear, To grunt and sweat under a weary life, But that the dread of something after death, The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn No traveller returns, puzzles the will, And makes us rather bear those ills we have Than fly to others that we know not of? Thus conscience does make cowards of us all, And thus the native hue of resolution Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, And enterprises of great pith and moment, With this regard their currents turn awry And lose the name of action.

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

15. The opening lines, 'To be, or not to be, that is the question: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer... Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,' primarily employ which rhetorical device?

- A. Anaphora
- B. Paradox
- C. Antithesis
- D. Apostrophe

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

16. The extended metaphor of 'sleep' and 'dreams' in this soliloquy primarily serves to explore the concept of:

- A. The comfort of unconsciousness.
- B. The uncertainty of the afterlife and its impact on human action.
- C. The fleeting nature of life's pleasures.
- D. The psychological effects of insomnia.

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

17. The phrase 'The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn No traveller returns' functions as a powerful example of:

- A. A classical allusion
- B. A biblical reference
- C. A euphemism for death
- D. A geographical description

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

HAMLET. Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest; but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me. I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves all, believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. Where's your father?

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

18. Hamlet's repeated command, 'Get thee to a nunnery,' functions primarily as:

- A. A genuine piece of advice for Ophelia's spiritual well-being.
- B. A sarcastic dismissal of Ophelia's virtue and a condemnation of female sexuality.
- C. A coded message to Ophelia about his true intentions.
- D. A desperate plea for Ophelia to join him in his madness.

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

19. The phrase 'breeder of sinners' is an example of which literary device?

- A. Understatement
- B. Litotes
- C. Hyperbole
- D. Synecdoche

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

20. Hamlet's self-description ('I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious...') and his subsequent declaration 'We are arrant knaves all, believe none of us' reveal a tone of:

- A. Confident self-assurance
- B. Profound self-loathing and universal cynicism
- C. Playful irony
- D. Genuine humility

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

OPHELIA. O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown! The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword, Th'expectancy and rose of the fair state, The glass of fashion and the mould of form, Th'observ'd of all observers, quite, quite down! And I, of ladies most deject and wretched, That suck'd the honey of his music vows, Now see that noble and most sovereign reason, Like sweet bells jangled out of tune and harsh, That unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth Blasted with ecstasy. O woe is me, T'have seen what I have seen, see what I see.

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

21. Ophelia's repeated use of descriptive phrases like 'The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's,' 'Th'expectancy and rose,' and 'The glass of fashion' primarily serves to:

- A. Highlight Hamlet's diverse talents and idealized former image.
- B. Criticize Hamlet for his past arrogance.
- C. Suggest that Hamlet was merely a superficial figure.
- D. Emphasize the political power Hamlet once held.

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

22. The simile 'Like sweet bells jangled out of tune and harsh' vividly conveys Ophelia's perception of Hamlet's current state as:

- A. A melodious but complex personality.
- B. A harmonious blend of intellect and emotion.
- C. A discordant and ruined version of his former self.
- D. A quiet and contemplative individual.

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

23. The concluding lines, 'O woe is me, T'have seen what I have seen, see what I see,' primarily express Ophelia's profound sense of:

- A.** Anger and betrayal.
- B.** Confusion and bewilderment.
- C.** Grief and despair over Hamlet's transformation.
- D.** Relief that she is no longer involved with him.

Answer key

Check your answers here, then read the explanations on the next page.

1. B	2. C	3. B	4. C	5. B
6. B	7. C	8. B	9. C	10. C
11. C	12. A	13. B	14. C	15. C
16. B	17. C	18. B	19. C	20. B
21. A	22. C	23. C		

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Answers explained

Why the right answer is right — and what the question is really testing.

1. B. It leads Claudius to believe Hamlet's madness is not caused by love, prompting a new plan to send him to England.

Claudius explicitly states, 'Love? His affections do not that way tend,' and quickly decides to send Hamlet to England, indicating a shift in his understanding of Hamlet's condition.

2. C. To read from a prayer book to provide a natural excuse for her solitude.

Polonius tells Ophelia, 'Read on this book, That show of such an exercise may colour Your loneliness,' to make her presence seem natural.

3. B. To confirm Polonius's theory that Hamlet's madness stems from unrequited love.

Claudius explicitly states his desire to determine if 'the affliction of his love' is what Hamlet 'suffers for,' aligning with Polonius's earlier assessment.

4. C. He is using her as an outlet for his broader disillusionment with women and humanity, exacerbated by his mother's actions.

Hamlet's sweeping condemnations of women ('frailty, thy name is woman' from Act I) and his general cynicism about human nature are projected onto Ophelia, reflecting his profound disillusionment.

5. B. A troupe of actors

Rosencrantz mentions, 'certain players We o'er-raught on the way,' and that Hamlet seemed joyful to hear of them.

6. B. A bare bodkin

In his 'To be, or not to be' soliloquy, Hamlet asks, 'When he himself might his quietus make With a bare bodkin?'

7. C. Several keepsakes or 'remembrances'

Ophelia says, 'My lord, I have remembrances of yours That I have longed long to re-deliver.'

8. B. A harlot's cheek, beautied with plastering art

Claudius laments, 'The harlot's cheek, beautied with plastering art, Is not more ugly... Than is my deed to my most painted word.'

9. C. Within earshot of their conference

Polonius suggests, 'And I'll be plac'd, so please you, in the ear Of all their conference.'

10. C. The existential choice between enduring suffering and seeking oblivion, complicated by fear of the unknown afterlife.

The soliloquy is a profound meditation on life, death, and the paralyzing fear of what lies beyond, which prevents decisive action.

11. C. The theme of appearance versus reality, as Hamlet's 'madness' is performed for an audience.

Hamlet's performance of madness, especially his harshness, is partly a calculated act for the benefit of the eavesdropping King and Polonius, blurring the lines between genuine emotion and feigned insanity.

12. A. Metaphor

'Melancholy sits on brood' is a metaphor comparing Hamlet's sadness to a bird incubating an egg, suggesting something dangerous is developing within him.

13. B. The political stability of Denmark and his own security.

Claudius's immediate concern is that 'the hatch and the disclose Will be some danger,' indicating his fear for his own position and the state, not Hamlet's health.

14. C. Suspicious apprehension

Claudius's words betray his underlying fear and suspicion that Hamlet's behavior is a calculated threat, not mere madness.

15. C. Antithesis

The passage presents a stark contrast between two opposing courses of action ('to suffer' vs. 'to take arms'), which is a classic example of antithesis.

16. B. The uncertainty of the afterlife and its impact on human action.

Hamlet's fear of 'what dreams may come' in the 'sleep of death' is the central reason he hesitates to end his life, highlighting the paralyzing effect of the unknown.

17. C. A euphemism for death

This phrase is a poetic and indirect way of referring to death and the afterlife, making it a euphemism.

18. B. A sarcastic dismissal of Ophelia's virtue and a condemnation of female sexuality.

Given the context of his broader misogynistic tirade and his accusations against women, 'nunnery' here carries a double meaning, implying both a convent and a brothel, serving as a harsh condemnation.

19. C. Hyperbole

Hamlet uses exaggerated language to express his extreme disillusionment with humanity and procreation, making it hyperbole.

20. B. Profound self-loathing and universal cynicism

Hamlet's intense self-criticism, followed by a generalization to all men, underscores his deep-seated self-loathing and cynical view of humanity.

21. A. Highlight Hamlet's diverse talents and idealized former image.

These phrases collectively paint a picture of Hamlet as a Renaissance ideal, emphasizing the tragic extent of his perceived fall.

22. C. A discordant and ruined version of his former self.

The image of jangled bells perfectly captures the sense of something once beautiful and orderly now being chaotic and broken, reflecting Hamlet's 'o'erthrown' mind.

23. C. Grief and despair over Hamlet's transformation.

The repetition and the exclamation 'O woe is me' underscore her deep sorrow and the tragic impact of witnessing Hamlet's perceived madness.

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