

Hamlet: Topics for Further Study:

* **Question:** Readers of *Hamlet* have debated whether the Ghost was indeed the spirit of Hamlet's father or instead a demon or devil that took his father's appearance to tempt Hamlet to sin and lose his immortal soul. Make a case for one interpretation or the other.

Question: Hamlet delays in taking action against Claudius. Why?

* **Question:** The play features three young men who have experienced the death of a father. How successful is each of them—Hamlet, Laertes, and Fortinbras—in striking an effective balance between a life of contemplation and a life of action?

Question: Many readers of the play find Hamlet an appealing character. Other readers do not. What makes Hamlet an appealing—or an unappealing—character?

Question: Write a "psychological profile" of Ophelia, addressing any or all of the following issues: Was she in love with Hamlet? What kind of relationship did she have with her father, Polonius? With her brother, Laertes? How does she see herself fitting into the world in which she lives? How does she actually fit into that world? Can a case be made that Ophelia, too, is not really mad but uses a pretense of insanity to make it known that she has been wronged by Hamlet? Consider the songs she sings. Can a case be made that she was seduced and abandoned by Hamlet?

* **Question:** Some readers of *Hamlet* argue that while the Prince initially pretends to be insane, at some point he actually does go mad. Is there evidence in the play to support the theory that Hamlet actually becomes insane?

Question: How do each of Hamlet's "friends"—Horatio, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern—embody the elements of true friendship? (or not?)

Question: Hamlet accuses his mother of complicity in Claudius's murder of her first husband. Of what—if anything—is Gertrude actually guilty?

* **Question:** In what way (or ways) is the downfall of the characters in *Hamlet* due to their moral failings?

Question: What, exactly, is "rotten in the state of Denmark"?