

## Hamlet: Act I

The following is the basic plot line to each scene in Act I of Hamlet. Even though you are expected to have read, I find it necessary to do this since Act I is vital to understanding the entire play.

ACT I, i: exposition: setting, mood, foreshadowing, characters, theme

Horatio, the voice of reason, joins the guards, Bernardo and Marcellus, on the platform of the castle to watch for the Ghost who is in the figure of the late King Hamlet.

setting: castle of Elsinore, midnight, foggy, cold, dark

mood: eeriness, unnaturalness, apprehension of guards

foreshadowing: the ghost

ghosts in 16th c: evil spirits, a wrong committed against them that must be corrected;  
a source of warning

I, ii: Claudius is elected king of Denmark, marries Queen Gertrude and is having a festive celebration. Hamlet provides a conflict by wearing black and having a melancholy disposition. Shows excessive grief through his first soliloquy (O, that this too, too, solid flesh). Horatio and Marcellus inform Hamlet about the ghost.

foil: showing opposite characteristics e.g. setting, mood, characters

theme: "all is not well" "tis an unweeded garden that grows to seed"

I, iii: Laertes is leaving to France (considered to be very loose) says goodbye to his sister Ophelia, Hamlet's love interest. Laertes warns her to stay away from him since Hamlet cannot marry her for he is subject to his birth (arranged marriage). Polonius gives his son advice before he leaves (never a borrower or lender be; for thine own self be true). Polonius then advises Ophelia to stay away from Hamlet altogether. This scene releases the dramatic tension of scene ii.

I, iv: Hamlet is on watch with the guards and Horatio. King Claudius is having yet another party which Hamlet lambasts since he has a puritanical view of life (vicious mole of nature). The ghost appears and motions Hamlet to go with him  
mood/theme: unnaturalness "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark"

I, v: Hamlet now converses with the ghost who tells him he is his father's spirit condemned to purgatory; he could tell him tales of how he is punished. Calls for revenge. "Revenge my foul and unnatural murder" Scene/dialogue is saturated with images of corruption "fat weed" "rankly abused" "serpent". Hamlet's second soliloquy responds to the news of murder by devoting his entire heart and soul to revenge. No hesitation. His plan? to put on an antic disposition (to go mad, act crazy) question? is he or is he not mad? CONFLICT BEGINS

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The call for revenge is basic to all primitive societies but at odds with Christianity. Here it is the emotional response of a murdered man's restless spirit. If Hamlet were to kill Claudius, he would be a murderer, not an avenger. Hamlet must work with Providence, an unseen power to decide the time and place for his final act.