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Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

Hamlet

by William Shakespeare

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To The Teacher

In order to allow the teacher maximum flexibility in his or her approach, we have grouped the prompts by sections. The teacher may, therefore, assign specific prompts or allow the students to select one or more prompts from each section

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To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Class Record Sheet

25.	24.	23.	22.	21.	20.	19.	18.	17.	16.	15.	14.	13.	12.	11.	10.	9.	8.	7.	6.	5.	4.	3.	2.	1.
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Response Sheet

Name	Section	Date

Act 1, Scene 1

- 1. In the first scene of *Hamlet*, Shakespeare creates an eerie atmosphere with the presence of a ghost. Although people in the twenty-first century generally do not believe in ghosts, most people in Elizabethan times did, including the characters in this play. Look up Elizabethan ghost-lore, and write a paragraph explaining what people believed about ghosts during that time.
- 2. Because Horatio is a scholar, the guards rely on his opinion of the ghostly apparition.
 - A. Explain Horatio's various opinions of this apparition throughout the scene.
 - B. Why has Horatio's opinion changed much from the time that he first heard of the ghost's appearance?
 - C. What does he think the appearance of this ghost means to the state of Denmark?
- 3. Marcellus asks Horatio to explain why the people of Denmark are involved in preparations for war. Horatio answers him, explaining the relations between Norway and Denmark. In your own words, explain why these countries are fighting.
- 4. Horatio also tells the guards frightening things about Rome before the fall of the "mightiest Julius."
 - A. What does he tell them that is frightening?
 - B. We often hear about the fall of Rome and the great Julius Caesar. Do some research on Julius Caesar. Who was he? When did he rule? Why is he famous? Why did Rome decline in power during his reign?

Act I, Scene II

- 5. With scene II, the plot begins to move forward. It opens with the King Claudius and Queen Gertrude entering, accompanied by Hamlet, Polonius, Laertes, Voltimand, and Cornelius, along with various lords and attendants of the court. The king addresses them all formally.
 - A. Make a list of the points King Claudius makes in his opening statement.
 - B. What does Laertes ask of the king?
 - C. What does the king ask of Hamlet?
 - D. What is Hamlet's answer, and what do you think Hamlet means by that?
- 6. Queen Gertrude tells Hamlet that she is upset with him because he continues to wear black. How does Hamlet answer her?
- 7. Afterwards, the king lectures Hamlet about his appearance and behavior. Pretend you are Hamlet and have just been reprimanded. Write an email to a friend telling him everything the king has just said to you. Include your feelings about being scolded and your feelings towards the king.
- 8. After everyone exits, Hamlet delivers his first soliloquy. Rephrase it in modern English. If you were his friend and he were telling this to you, what would you say to him?
- 9. In this soliloquy, Hamlet mentions Hyperion and, a satyr, Niobe, and Hercules. Research these figures in Greek mythology, and explain what they are. How do each of these figures relate to what Hamlet is saying?

Act I, Scene III

- 10. Scene III introduces a new dramatic element. Hamlet loves Ophelia; however, Laertes has some reservations, which he expresses to his sister. In your own words, tell Ophelia how Laertes feels and how she answers him.
- 11. As we know, Laertes will be leaving for France. In this scene, Polonius gives his son advice.
 - A. Make a list of the points Polonius makes.
 - B. Make a list of the points that your own parent or guardian might make to you.
 - C. Are the points similar or different?
 - D. What do you think of Polonius' advice?
 - E. What do you think of your parent's or guardian's advice?
- 12. Polonius then gives Ophelia advice. Her response is, "I shall obey, my lord." Pretend your own parent or guardian gave you similar advice and that you answered as Ophelia did. Write an email to a friend expressing your true feelings about what you have just been told.

Act I, Scene IV

- 13. In this scene, Hamlet is pondering what causes that "vicious mole of nature" in people, which leads to their downfall. It could be, he says, something they were born with or the result of "Fortune's star." Alternatively, it could be caused by the "o'ergrowth of some complexion/ Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason." In this context, "complexion" means humor or trait. In the Renaissance, one's personality was often attributed to an overabundance or a particular body fluid, which was referred to as a "humour." Research the Renaissance theory of the four humours and briefly define each one.
- 14. In this scene, the ghost finally appears to Hamlet. Why do you think Hamlet insists on following the ghost despite Horatio's fear that it will "draw [him] into madness.
- 15. Examine your own thoughts about lunacy, loss of reason, and madness. Make a list of things that might cause someone's mental abilities to become distorted. Compare them with Shakespeare's and the general Elizabethan reasons for an onset of madness. In a short letter, explain to a classmate, who doesn't quite understand, how Shakespeare must have viewed mental illness.

Act I, Scene V

16. Imagine you are Hamlet. In a journal entry, record your feelings about what the ghost has just told you. Use the ghost's and/or Hamlet's own words to help you express your feelings. End your journal entry with the two lines of Hamlet's dialogue that best express his intense frustration.

Act II, Scene I

- 17. As Act II begins, Polonius tells Renaldo to inquire about Laertes in Paris. Is this a good way for a father to check up on a son? Pretend you are Laertes and you have somehow found out what your father has told Renaldo to do. Write a letter to Polonius telling him how you feel about it.
- 18. In this scene, Ophelia tells her father how Hamlet has frightened her. Suppose you are a psychologist, and you have just been told the same story. Write a report you might share with the chief counselor of your clinic, giving your assessment of Hamlet's actions, related by Ophelia.

Act II, Scene II

19. This scene, occurring in a room in the castle, is actually a series of "miniscenes;" each occurs when characters enter and leave the room. Divide the whole scene into its various sections, and explain who is in each "mini-scene" and what is happening. Use the format below:

CHARACTERS

1. King, Queen, Rosencrantz Guildenstern & Attendants

"MINI-SCENE" SUMMARY

- 1.King Claudius welcomes
 Rosencrantz and Guildenstern
 and asks them to figure out why
 Hamlet is so melancholy. The
 queen says she'll be very grateful
 for their help. They declare
 themselves the obedient servants
 of the king and queen. The
 queen tells the attendants to take
 the two to Hamlet.
- 20. Hamlet calls Polonius a "fishmonger," someone who deals in the catching and selling of fish. Polonius finds this bizarre, but is it really? Think creatively. What "fish" is Polonius trying to catch or sell in this play? What kind of bait does he use? Also consider that a fishmonger may merely work for another fisherman. Who is Polonius working for? What kind of fisherman is that person?
- 21. When Hamlet talks to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he utters a line which has become very famous: "For there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." Think of a situation in your own or a friend's life to which that same statement could apply; then write a diary entry or a letter about the situation.

- 22. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern admit that they didn't just come to visit Hamlet but were sent for by the king. Hamlet begins to explain himself to them and then speculates on the nature of man himself. Write in modern English what he says starting with the words, "I have of late."
- 23. Act II, Scene II ends with a long speech by Hamlet, beginning, "Now I am alone." Suppose that he were not alone and that you had overheard him. What would you say to Hamlet? The dialogue might begin:

You: I couldn't help overhearing you, Hamlet, when you called your self a "rogue and peasant slave." You haven't done anything wrong, and you are certainly not a slave. In my opinion...

Act III, Scene I

- 24. Early in Act III, Hamlet delivers his third and most famous soliloquy. Go through the speech carefully, briefly jotting down the meaning of each phrase to be sure you understand it. Now that you are familiar with the soliloquy, say it out loud to yourself a few times. Next, write an email to a cousin or friend who is also studying Hamlet and is complaining about having to memorize this soliloquy. What encouraging comments could you give about the reasons why the speech is famous and why it might be worth memorizing?
- 25. Pretend you are a writer of soap operas and your boss has just given you the assignment to rewrite the scene with Hamlet and Ophelia, starting with the words, "Good my lord" for a modern audience. You are aware that your employer has given the same assignment to other writers in your department and plans on giving a big promotion to the writer whose scene is the best, so be creative, interesting, and stay within the facts of the play.

Act III, Scene II

- 26. After first complimenting Horatio on his excellent qualities, Hamlet tells him of his plan to prove the validity of the ghost and the guilt of Claudius.
 - A. List three qualities that Hamlet admires in Horatio.
 - B. Briefly explain Hamlet's plan and the reasons why he thinks it will work.
 - C. Express your opinion as to whether the plan will succeed.
- 27. Just before the "play within the play" begins, Hamlet's behavior appears strange to the people around him. Pretend you are in the room with all of them and you are looking around trying to figure out their reactions. Write a one-sentence summary of what you think each of the following is thinking:

King:
Queen:
Polonius:
Ophelia:

- 28. When Hamlet asks his mother how she likes the play, her answer is that famous line, "The lady doth protest too much, methinks." What does this one line mean? Set up a scene in which you are able to use the quotation correctly as the last line in the situation.
- 29. Next, the king asks the queen, "Have you heard the argument? Is there offense in it?" It is obvious he wasn't paying attention to the dumb show preceding the play, which illustrated the circumstances of the murder. However, he does not miss the point during the actual play. What line of dialogue shows his guilt?

- 30. Even though he is annoyed, Hamlet has some fun with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, beginning with his question, "Will you play upon this pipe?" What kind of game is Hamlet playing? How does his reference to the pipe or recorder reveal his attitude towards them?
- 31. Pretend you are in the hall of the castle throughout this scene, waiting for the play to begin and watching Hamlet. How would you describe his moods in the various situations listed below? Pick out a section of Hamlet's dialogue that illustrates that mood.

<u>SITUATION</u> <u>MOOD</u> <u>DIALOGUE</u>

- A. When he first talks to the players
- B. When he speaks to Horatio
- C. When he speaks to the King, Polonius, and Ophelia beforethe play
- D. When he speaks to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern
- E. When he speaks to Polonius near the end of the scene
- F. His own soliloquy

Act III, Scene III

- 32. King Claudius tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern he has commissioned them to take Hamlet back to England, since it is not safe "to let his madness range." How do Rosencrantz and Guildenstern justify to themselves what they are about to do?
- 33. In this scene, Claudius feels the pangs of conscience. Pretend he is on the psychiatrist's couch rather than praying. What would a psychiatrist advise Claudius to do? Write down a short list that might help the king feel better.
- 34. Since Claudius is alone, Hamlet has a chance to follow the orders of his father and seek revenge. Despite the evidence, Hamlet does not kill Claudius. What would you have done? Support your actions with reasons in a paragraph or two.

Act III, Scene IV

35. In this scene, Polonius hides behind the curtain while Hamlet berates Gertrude. Write a very quick email off to the queen attempting to help her understand Hamlet's points. Write no more than 25 words.

36. On the last page of this scene, Hamlet identifies Claudius with certain animals. What animals are they, and what do they tell you about Hamlet's feelings towards Claudius? Try to determine what qualities the animals have in common. First, make a list of each animal and across from each one write a word or phrase that the Elizabethans might have associated with that animal.

Example:

1. Bat

- 1. lives in the dark
- 37. In the final speech, Hamlet talks to his mother about his two ex-friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. What would you say to Hamlet if you were Gertrude and wanted to give him some advice?
- 38. Assume the king has been told of Hamlet's killing of Polonius. As Horatio, advise Hamlet on his next course of action.

Act IV, Scene I

39. Act IV, Scene I begins with the king and the queen discussing the death of Polonius. In a short paragraph, explain the major concerns of the king and the queen. Are they similar or different?

Act IV, Scene II

40. As directed by King Claudius in the previous scene, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern ask Hamlet what he has done with the body of Polonius. Hamlet first avoids answering them but then calls Rosencrantz a sponge. What characteristics do a sponge and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have in common?

Act IV, SCENE III

41. King Claudius begins this scene determined to send Hamlet away then asks Hamlet where Polonius is, to which Hamlet replies, "At supper." What is your opinion of the dialogue that follows between Hamlet and the king? What is Hamlet trying to accomplish with his talk of maggots, fish, and worms? Do you find the dialogue between the two enemies humorous? Why or why not?

ACT IV, SCENE IV

- 42. On his way to England to be put unknowingly to death, Hamlet meets Fortinbras' captain and questions him. Hamlet learns something from this encounter and expresses his feelings in his last long soliloguy.
 - A. Hamlet remarks, "How all occasions do inform against me and spur my dull revenge." He gives at least three reasons to explain why his revenge is "dull." Using Hamlet's own words, list the reasons he cites:
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - B. Hamlet then says, "Examples gross as earth exhort me." What does Hamlet see that makes him think now is the time to act? What, specifically, does he think about what he sees?
 - C. What are Hamlet's exact words expressing his new-found resolution?
 - D. What do you think are the most impressive lines of this soliloquy? Why?

Act IV, Scene V

- 43. This scene illustrates Ophelia's madness. Pretend you are a psychiatrist in a mental hospital, and you are listening to Ophelia sing. Write your assessment of the possible reasons for her mental decline, in order of their importance. What, however, is the actual reason for her insanity?
- 44. The flowers Ophelia distributes are undoubtedly symbolic. Research the flowers listed below to discover what each one traditionally represents. Write down who receives each flower, or if Ophelia doesn't say, write down to whom you think she is giving that particular flower. Finally, speculate on Ophelia's reasons for giving (or, in one case, for not giving) a particular flower.

<u>FLOWER</u> <u>REPRESENTS</u> <u>CHARACTER REASON</u>

- 1. Rosemary
- 2. Pansies
- 3. Fennel
- 4. Columbine
- 5. Rue
- 6. Daisy
- 7. Violet
- 45. Write a paragraph comparing and/or contrasting the attitudes and actions of Hamlet and Laertes with regard to the deaths of their fathers.
- 46. Carefully re-read the lines of King Claudius and Queen Gertrude in this scene. Do you think Gertrude has taken Hamlet's advice he gave her in the bedroom scene? Back up your reasons with evidence.

Act IV, Scene VI

47. Condense Hamlet's explanation of how he got his freedom into a short three sentences in modern English.

Act IV, Scene VII

- 48. In this scene, Laertes asks the king why he did not proceed against the killing of Polonius by Hamlet. What two reasons does Claudius give for his restraint? How convincing are these reasons? Try to imagine two more lies Claudius could have used and write these down.
- 49. The king is a master of deceit in this scene. Pretending you are a criminologist, read the king's words carefully to determine what devices he uses to draw Laertes into his plan to rid himself of Hamlet. Make a list of Claudius' character traits, along with a line or two of dialogue to support your conclusion. The first one is done for you.

CHARACTER TRAITS

CLAUDIUS' WORDS

1.Appears affable/friendly

1. "And you must put me in your heart for friend"

Act V, Scene I

50. Hamlet and Horatio arrive at the gravesite to hear the clowns singing and to see them tossing a skull. Hamlet comments, "How the knave jowls it to the ground, as if it were Cain's jawbone, that did the first murder." Research the murder story of Cain and Abel. Are any of the circumstances similar to those in *Hamlet*?

What other types of characters does Hamlet name after mentioning Cain? What does he suggest their flaws might be? Using the chart below, list the character type and the flaw, using the words of the text to support your conclusions. The first one has been done for you.

CHARACTER TYPE	FLAW
1. politician	proud and arrogant/"one that would
	circumvent God"

- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 52. Hamlet asks the clown, "Whose grave's this, sirrah?" The clown answers, "Mine, Sir." The conversation that follows is a play on words. Explain the fun they are having with the word "lie."
- 53. Hamlet speaks of the death of Yorick, the king's jester, and several times mentions Alexander the Great several times.
 - A. What point is Hamlet making?
 - B. Look up Alexander the Great, and write a brief summary of his life.
- 54. A huge fight occurs at Ophelia's grave. Pretend you are a reporter and you are writing about the occurrence for *People* magazine. Make sure you cover all the basics: who, what, when, where, and why. Quote any of the characters, if it will help you make your article more vivid to your readers.

Act V, Scene II

- 55. Two of Hamlet's reflections in this scene have been frequently quoted: First, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends/Rough-hew them how we will," and second, a paraphrase from the Bible, "There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all." What do you think of these philosophies? Do you feel Hamlet's philosophy has changed from the beginning of the play until now? Why?
- 56. Fortinbras and Horatio are the last to speak in this play. What do they have to say? Write ten additional lines of dialogue that express what you think Fortinbras might say if the play did not end when it does. You may write in Shakespearean form or in modern English.

Wrap-Up

57.	This is your chance to give an honest opinion of <i>Hamlet</i> . Number your feelings 1 to 6 (1 would be your strongest positive feeling):										
	rechings I to 0 (I would be your strongest positive reching).										
	I loved this play										
	This play is difficult to read, but I learned a lot										
	I think I would like this play even better if I saw it on stage										
	There is too much violence in this play										
	I am so happy to have read one of Shakespeare's greatest plays										
	I hated this play										
	Now write two sentences about the reason you made choice number one,										
	and two sentences about the reason you made choice number six.										

- 58. Which character in *Hamlet* would you like to have as part of your own family? Which character would you not like to have? Write your answers in paragraphs of at least six sentences long.
- 59. Now that you have read *Hamlet*, why do you think many people believe Shakespeare to be the greatest playwright who ever lived? Write your answer in a paragraph of at least six sentences long.
- 60. If you were to tell a friend what you think the message of this play is, what would it be?
- 61. Why do you think great actors want to play Hamlet?
- 62. Write a will for any of the characters who died or were killed during the play.

TEST

- 1. Who told Hamlet, "The serpent that did sting thy father's life now wears his crown"?
 - A. Claudius
 - B. Polinius
 - C. the ghost
 - D. Laertes
 - E. Fortinbras
- 2. The Danish courtiers who are sent as ambassadors to the court of Norway are
 - A. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
 - B. Francisco, Marcellus and Bernardo.
 - C. Voltimand and Cornelius.
 - D. None of the above
- 3. In this play, those who saw the ghost think it might be
 - A. a hallucination.
 - B. a good spirit.
 - C. an evil spirit.
 - D. the devil himself.
 - E. All of the above
- 4. Polonius forbids that Ophelia see Hamlet because
 - A. he is above her station in life.
 - B. he doesn't believe Hamlet is sincere.
 - C. Hamlet's will is not his own.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. All of the above
- 5. Hamlet thinks Fortinbras' invasion of Poland is
 - A. a smart thing.
 - B. fraught with danger for the men involved.
 - C. a foolish errand.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. Both B and C

- 6. What does Hamlet accuse himself of in failing to revenge his father's death?
 - A. lethargy
 - B. cowardice
 - C. villany
 - D. None of the above
 - E. All of the above
- 7. Who said, "Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit, and tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes, I will be brief"?
 - A. Hamlet
 - B. Horatio
 - C. Laertes
 - D. Polonius
- 8. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern went to England with Hamlet
 - A. with full knowledge that he would be put to death.
 - B. with no knowledge that he would be put to death.
 - C. because even Horatio said it was best for Hamlet.
 - D. because they thought Ophelia would be better off without him.
- 9. Ophelia's first reaction when Hamlet rejects her is to
 - A. run and tell the queen.
 - B. express regret for Hamlet's mental state.
 - C. give out flowers to the people around her.
 - D. stay in her room.
- 10. Who said the following lines: "Good night, sweet prince, And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest"?
 - A. Gertrude
 - B. Ophelia
 - C. Horatio
 - D. Fortinbras

Hamlet Test Student Answer Sheet

Name:	
1	6
2	7
3	8
4	9
5.	10.

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Hamlet Test Answer Key

1.__<u>C</u>_

6.__E__

2.__<u>C</u>__

7.__<u>D</u>__

3.<u>E</u>_

8.<u>B</u>

4.__<u>E</u>__

9.__<u>B</u>__

5.__E__

10.__<u>C</u>__

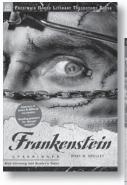
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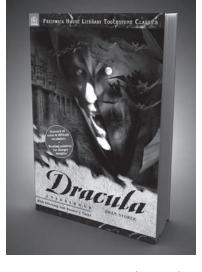
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