*Hamlet* Act 4 study guide and questions:

In the text of *Hamlet*, find and read aloud the passages which answer the following questions and prompts. Annotate the important passages in your text. Be able to recount the importance of events, the metaphors and devices used to relate them, and the order of events so they stick in your mind.

**Act 4, Scene1**

1. Find where the Queen describes Hamlet’s killing of Polonius. Note the metaphor she uses and anything else interesting about her view of the act.
2. Find where the King expresses his fears. He has both personal concerns as well as political concerns. Note how he expresses them. These concerns are mentioned several times in Acts 4 and 5.
3. To what foul disease is Claudius referring? It comes up again in scene 3.
4. Notice how the King uses the metaphor about disease to describe the problem of keeping Hamlet around as long as he did. (Shakespeare likes to examine the idea of “one bad apple” or something small ruining the whole, using metaphors of disease, corruption, mildew, poison, decay, unweeded gardens, etc.)
5. Where in the play do we see Claudius’ plan for managing the political problems Hamlet has caused, here and in scene 3.

**Act 4, Scene 2**

1. Find where Hamlet “warns” Rosencrantz and Guildenstern how Kings treat people who seek too much to serve them. It has something to do with an ape and a jaw.

**Act 4, Scene 3**

1. Hamlet has some verbal fun regarding the stowing away of Polonius’ body. Note the word play.
2. More seriously, note how Hamlet develops the theme of Kings (maybe) being no better than regular people. What is Hamlet saying about worms and the guts of beggars. Some Gravediggers and Hamlet return to this theme in Act 5.
3. What is Claudius’ plan? What “illness” does he want the King of England to cure for him? How?

**Act 4, Scene 4**

1. What is the value or worth of the land in Poland for which Fortnibras’ army is going to fight, and according to whom?
2. **The speech, “How all occasions do inform against me.”** This is one of the speeches you need to know well, and be able to translate. It is an unusual argument, especially for our time. Make sure you understand it.

**Act 4, Scene 5**

1. Describe Ophelia in this scene, finding the words from the play that do so. Try to make sense of the song she is singing and what she is saying.
2. Why does Laertes return? How would you describe his emotional, rational state? Find the words from the play.
3. What is the mob saying?
4. What is Laertes saying about is “unsmirched…mother”? Understand this logic and compare it/him to Hamlet and his logic.
5. This part of the play probably depicts Claudius at his best. He is remarkable. He is politically astute, manipulative and powerful. Find the words in the play you would use to describe his power and skill.
6. What does Laertes say about his reuniting with his sister?
7. Laertes does not like his father’s funeral. Why? Find the words. Understand them.
8. Claudius promises to explain everything to Laertes. What does he promise to Laertes, if he can’t explain things to Laertes’ satisfaction? Find the words.

**Act 4, Scene 6**

1. Horatio meets some sailors. What do they tell him or give him? What does he come to know in this scene? Understand the words.

**Act 4, Scene 7**

1. Make sure you understand the plan Claudius and Laertes create. Find phrases that are interesting, difficult or shocking and know the meaning and who said them. It is a long discussion between them, so don’t lose focus.
2. Is Claudius tricking or manipulating Laertes, yes or no? Find the words.
3. What is Ophelia’s condition by the end of the scene (and Act)? What got her in that condition? Find some words from the play.