

Reading a Shakespearean play can be difficult. It is best to take it slow and continuously seek to recap what you have learned from the evidence provided, thus creating a summary of main events in your mind (or on paper). Essentially, you are working on close reading skills. For now, we're mostly concerned with Plot and Characters. To get you started, I will provide the CONCLUSION, you provide the EVIDENCE and the LOCATION. For each statement, write the quote/quotes that FIRST give you, the reader, this bit of information. Put the act, scene and line(s) and speaker, as well. An example is provided.

BEFORE you begin, carefully read THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY. Note that Prince Hamlet's father is also named Hamlet!

Example:

Conclusion: The play opens with two guards exchanging the watch at midnight.

Evidence: Opening stage directions AND Barnardo "Tis now struck twelve. Get thee to bed, Fransisco." I.i.7 (AKA: Act I Scene I line 7)

Scene 1

Conclusion: The watchmen have been seeing a ghost.

1. Evidence/Speaker/location:

Marcellus: What, has this thing appeared again tonight? I.i.21

Conclusion: Just when Horatio seems to make progress with the ghost, the sun started coming up and the ghost leaves.

2. Evidence/Speaker/location:

Horatio: O, speak!/Or if thou has uphoarded in thy life/Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,/For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death,

The cock crows.

Speak of it. Stay and speak. Stop it, Marcellus.

Marcellus: Shall I strike at it with my partisan?

Horatio: Do, if it will not stand.

Barnardo: 'Tis here.

Horatio: 'Tis here.

Marcellus: 'Tis gone.

Exit Ghost.

I.i.135-142

3. Extend and predict: I predict that the ghost is the ghost of the dead King and that they will eventually get him to speak and share his message.

Scene 2

King Claudius has replaced the Dead King Hamlet and has married his Queen (his former sister-in-law)

4. Evidence/Speaker/location:

King Claudius: Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death/The memory be green, and that it us befitted/ To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom/To be contracted in one brow of woe,/Yet so far hath descretion fought with nature/The we with wisest sorrow think on him/Together with remembrance of ourselves./Therefore our sometime sister, now our Queen,/Th'imperial jointress to this warlike state,/Have we, as 'twere, with a defeated joy,/With an auspicious and dropping eye,/With mirth in funeral, and with dirge in marriage,/In equal scale weighing delight and dole,/ Taken to wife.

I.ii.1-14

There are tensions between Denmark and Norway which are remnants of a previous war.

5. Evidence/Speaker/location:

King Claudius: Now follows that you know young Fortinbras,/Or thinking by our late dear brother's death/Our state to be disjoint and out of frame,/Collegued with this dream of his advantage,/He hath not failed to pester us with message,/Importing the surrender of those lands/Lost by his father, with all brands of law,/To our most valiant brother. So much for him.

I.ii.17-25

Conclusion: Hamlet's mother Gertrude doesn't seem overly upset about her first husband's death.

6. Evidence/Speaker/location:

Queen: Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted color off,/ And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark./Do not forever with thy veiled lids/Seek for thy noble father in the dust./Thou know'st 'tis common; all that lives must die,/Passing through nature to eternity.

I.ii.68-73

Conclusion: Hamlet privately reveals how angry and upset he is at his mother for remarrying so quickly.

7. Evidence/Speaker/location:

Hamlet: But two months dead, nay, not so much, not two,/So excellent a king, that was to this/Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother/That he might not beteem the winds of heaven/Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,/Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him/As if increase of appetite had grown/By what it fed on; and yet within a month—/Let me not think on't; frailty, thy name is woman—/A little month, or ere those shoes were old/With which she followed my poor father's body/Like Niobe, al

tears, why, she—/O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason/Would have mourned longer—married with my uncle,/My father’s brother, but no more like my father/Than I to Hercules. Within a month,/Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears/Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,/She married. O, most wicket speed, to post/With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!/ It is not, nor it cannot come to good./But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

I.ii.138-159

Conclusion: While speaking with his friend Horatio, Hamlet is told Horatio has seen his father adorned in armour, and as a ghost.

8. Evidence/Speaker/location:

Horatio: My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.

Hamlet: Saw? Who?

Horatio: My lord, the King your father.

Hamlet: The King my father?

Horatio: Season your admiration for a while/With an attent ear till I may deliver/Upon the witness of these gentlemen/This marvel to you.

Hamlet: For God’s love let me hear!

Horatio: Two nights together had these gentlemen,/Marcellus and Bernardo, on their watch/In the dead waste and middle of the night/Been thus encountered. A figure like your father,/Armed at point exactly, cap-a-pe,/Appears before them, and with solemn march/Goes slow and stately by them. Thrice he walked/By their oppressed and fear-surprised eyes,/Within his truncheon’s length, whilst they, distilled,/Almost to jelly with the act of fear/Stand dumb and speak not to him. This to me/In dreadful secrecy impart they did,/And I with them the third night kept the watch,/Where, as they had delivered, both in time,/Form of the thing, each word made true and good,/The apparition comes. I knew your father./These hands are not more like.

I.ii.189-212

Conclusion: Hamlet suspects foul play in his father’s death.

9. Evidence/Speaker/location:

Hamlet: My father’s spirit—in arms? All is not well./I doubt some foul play. Would the night were come!/Till then sit still, my soul. Foul deeds will rise,/Though all the eart o’erwhelm them, to men’s eyes.

Exit

I.ii.255-258

10. Extend and predict: I predict that Hamlet when Hamlet goes to see the ghost of his father, his father will tell him the truth about how he died and ask Hamlet to avenge his death.

Scene 3

Conclusion: Hamlet has a love interest in Ophelia.

11. Evidence/Speaker/location:

Enter Laertes and Ophelia,, his sister.

Laertes: My necessities are embarked. Farewell./And, sister, as the winds give benefit/And convoy is assistant, do not sleep,/But let me hear from you.

Ophelia: Do you doubt that?

Laertes: For Hamlet, and the trifling of his favor,/Hold it in fashion and a toy in blood,/A violet in the youth of primy nature,/Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,/The perfume and suppliance of a minute,/No more.

I.ii.1-9

Conclusion: Laertes' father is perhaps a "helicopter parent".

12. Evidence/Speaker/location:

Polonius: Affection pooh! You speak like a green girl,/Unsifted in such perilous circumstance./Do you believe his tenders, as you call them?

Ophelia: I do not know, my lord, what I should think.

Polonius: Marry, I will teach you. Think yourself a baby/That you have ta'en these tenders for true pay/Which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly,/Or (not to crack the wind of the poor phrase)/Tend'ring it thus you'll tender me a fool.

Ophelia: My lord, he hath importuned me with love/In honorable fashion.

Polonius: Ay, fashion you may call it. Go to, go to.

Ophelia: And hath given countenance to his speech, my lord,/With almost all the holy vows of heaven.

Polonius: Ay, springes to catch woodcocks. I do know,/When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul/Lends the tongue vows. These blazes, daughter,/Gicing more light than heat, extinct in both,/ Even in their promise, as it is a-making,/You must not take for fire. From this time/Be something scancer of your maiden presence./Set your entreatments at a higher rate/Than a command to parley. For Lord Hamlet,/Believe so much in him that he is young,/And with a larger tether may he walk/Than may be given to you. In few, Ophelia,/Do not believe his vows, for they are brokers,/Not of that dye which their investments show,/But mere implorators of unholy suits,/Breathing like sanctified and pious bonds,/The better the beguile. This is for all:/I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth/Have you so slander any moment leisure/As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet./Look to't, I charge you. Come your ways.

Ophelia: I shall obey, my lord.

Exeunt.

I.iii.101-136

13. Extend and predict: I predict that Ophelia will not listen to her father and will still see Hamlet.

Scene 4-5

Conclusion: Hamlet is eager to hear what his father's ghost has to say/reveal, but Horatio is cautious.

14. Evidence/Speaker/location:

Ghost beckons Hamlet.

Horatio: It beckons you to go away with it,/As if it some impartment did desire/To you alones.

Marcellus: Look with what courteous action/It waves you to a more removed ground./But do not go with it,

Horatio: No, by no means.

Hamlet: It will not speak. Then I will follow it.

Horatio: Do not, my lord.

Hamlet: Why, what should be the fear?/I do not set my life at a pin's fee,/And for my soul, what can it do to that,/Being a thing immortal as itself?/It waves me forth again. I'll follow it.

Horatio: What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,/Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff/That beetles o'er his base into the sea,/And there assume some other horrible form,/Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason/And draw you into madness? Think of it./The very place puts toys of desperation,/Without more motive, into every brain/That looks so many fathoms to the sea/And hears it roar beneath.

Hamlet: It waves me still./ Go on; I'll follow thee.

Marcellus: You shall not go, my lord.

Hamlet: Hold off your hands.

Horatio: Be ruled. You shall not go.

Hamlet: My fate cries out/And makes each petty artere in this body/As hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve./Still am I called! Unhand me, gentlemen. /By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me!/I say, away! Go on. I'll follow thee.

Exit Ghost, and Hamlet.

I.iv.58-86

Conclusion: The ghost speaks!

15. Evidence/Speaker/location:

Enter Ghost and Hamlet.

Hamlet: Wither wilt thou lead me? Speak; I'll go no further.

Ghost: Mark me.

I.v. 1-2

Conclusion: King Hamlet had been murdered.

16. Evidence/Speaker/location:

Ghost: Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

Hamlet: Murder?

Ghost: Murder most foul, as in the best it is,/But this most foul, strange, and unnatural.

Hamlet: Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift/As meditation or the thoughts of love,/May sweep my revenge.

I.v. 25-30

Conclusion: The murderer was Claudius.

17. Evidence/Speaker/location:

Ghost: But know, thou noble youth,/The serpent that did sting thy father's life/Now wears his crown.

Hamlet: O my prophetic soul!/My uncle?

I.v. 38-40

Conclusion: Marcellus and Horatio are sworn to secrecy about seeing the ghost.

18. Evidence/Speaker/location:

Hamlet: Never make known what you have seen tonight.

Both: My lord, we will not.

Hamlet: Nay, but swear't.

Horatio: In faith,/My lord, not I.

Marcellus: Nor I, my lord—in faith.

Hamlet: Upon my sword.

Marcellus: We have sworn, my lord, already.

Hamlet: Indeed, upon my sword, indeed.

ghost cries under the stage.

Ghost: Swear.

I.v.143-149

Conclusion: Hamlet reveals to Horatio that he will begin acting differently from now on, even “clownish”.

19. Evidence/Speaker/location:

Hamlet: And therefore as a stranger give it welcome./There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,/Than are deamt of in your philosophy./But come:/Here as before, never, so help you mercy,/How strange or odd some'er I bear myself/(As I perchance hereafter shall think meet/To put an antic disposition on),/That you, at such times seeing me, never shall/With arms encumb'ed thus, or this headshake,/Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase,/As “Well, well, we know,” or “We could, an if we would,”/Or “If we list to speak,” or “There be, an if they might,”/Or such ambiguous giving out, to note/That you know aught of me—this do swear,/So grace and mercy at your most need help you.

I.v. 165-180

Conclusion: Hamlet feels he must set right the wrong that has been done, but he isn't happy about the task.

20. Evidence/Speaker/location:

Hamlet: Rest, rest, perturbed spirit. So, gentlemen,/With all my love I do commend me to you,/and what so poor a man as Hamlet is/May do't express his love and friending to you,/God willing, shall not lack. Let us go in together,/And still your fingers on your lips, I pray./The time is out of joint. O cursed spite,/That ever I was born to set it right!
I.v. 182-189

Conclusion: Act I ends

21. Evidence/Speaker/location:

Hamlet: Nay, come, let's go together.

Exeunt.

I.v.190

22. Extend and predict: Hamlet is going to pretend that he doesn't know while he plots his uncle's death.

23. What questions has this act has evoked for you? (Bring them to a class discussion)
I don't understand why Hamlet says he is going to start acting clownish - how will this help him?

24. Which relationship most intrigues you so far and why?

I am most intrigued by the relationships between Hamlet, his mom, and his uncle. I am curious to see how his uncle treats him (either poorly or pretending to love him) and if the way they act around each other is any different when they are alone versus when they are with his mom.

25. Perhaps you noticed some of these topics. If so, jot some notes/thoughts:

- Love/lust
 - Hamlet and Ophelia have a thing but Ophelia's dad doesn't want it to happen
 - will they still pursue their relationship
- Murder
 - Dead King Hamlet was murdered by King Claudius
- Revenge
 - Hamlet's dad is asking him to get revenge for him
- Mystery
- Insanity
- Pretending ("seeming", "Playing a part", mask wearing)
 - hamlet is going to put on a mask and act differently in order to help his plan to avenge his father.