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**Act I Notes**

**Scene 1**

* Hamlet’s father’s ghost (King of Denmark) appears to guards and Horatio (Hamlet’s school friend); Horatio will tell Prince Hamlet.
* Claudius, Hamlet’s uncle, has married Gertrude, Hamlet’s mother, shortly after the king’s death.
* Young Fortinbras (son of defeated King of Norway) wants revenge for his father’s death.

**Scene 2**

* Claudius (brother of King Hamlet) allows Laertes to return to France but requests that Hamlet *not* return to Wittenberg.
* Claudius sends courtiers (noblemen) to stop threatened attack by Norway.
* Hamlet agrees to see ghost.

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**Scene 3**

* Polonius (Ophelia’s father) and Laertes (Ophelia’s brother) warn Ophelia NOT to trust Hamlet’s promise of love; Hamlet is bound by his duty to Denmark.
* Polonius gives Laertes fatherly advice before he leaves to return to France.
* At scene’s end, Polonius demands Ophelia no longer see Hamlet.

**Scene 4**

* Claudius drinks the night away (custom for the time) while Hamlet, Horatio, and others visited by ghost.

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**Scene 5**

* King Hamlet’s ghost tells Hamlet of his murder by poison at Claudius’s hands.
* Asks Hamlet to avenge his death but leave Gertrude to Fate.
* Hamlet makes Horatio and others swear secrecy of what they have seen. *Remember* that Horatio and others have *NOT* seen what Hamlet has seen.

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**Act 2 Notes**

**Scene 1**

* Polonius has Reynaldo spy on Laertes.
* Polonius reports to Claudius and Gertrude that Hamlet has gone insane because of Ophelia’s rejection.

**Scene 2**

* Claudius and Gertrude have Hamlet’s boyhood friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, spy on Hamlet to find cause of his strange behavior.
* Acting troop arrives and Hamlet angry at himself because actor’s performance is so rich with passion and determination while he still vacillates on whether or not to take action against Claudius.
* Hamlet hatches plan (has actors insert lines that he has written) to observe Claudius during performance of “murder play” to see if he can determine Claudius’s guilt.

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**Act 3 Notes**

**Scene 1**

* Rosencrantz and Guildenstern report to

Claudius failure to uncover cause of Hamlet’s

sadness.

* Polonius and Claudius spy on Hamlet and Ophelia from behind arras (hanging tapestry).
* Hamlet denies ever having loved Ophelia, attacks womankind, and tells her to enter a convent.
* Claudius decides Hamlet’s behavior *not* from lovesickness and plans to England as ambassador.
* Polonius asks Claudius to wait on plan until after Gertrude has a chance to speak to Hamlet.

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**Scene 2**

* Hamlet gives directions to actors.
* Hamlet asks Horatio to observe Claudius’ reaction to play.
* Hamlet makes inappropriate comments to Ophelia.
* Claudius stops play and rushes out after king in play is murdered.
* Hamlet is summoned by Gertrude and he vows not to harm her but “speak daggers”.

**Scene 3**

* Claudius orders Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to take Hamlet to England.
* Polonius tells Claudius he will spy on Hamlet during his conversation with Gertrude.
* While praying, Claudius reveals remorse for killing his brother Hamlet.
* Hamlet decides NOT to kill Claudius yet but wait until his “cleansed” soul is once again “filthy” with sin.

**Scene 4**

* Hamlet brutally murders Polonius believing him to be Claudius.
* Hamlet verbally attacks Gertrude for marrying Claudius.
* Ghost returns to remind Hamlet of his real purpose: avenging his death by killing Claudius.
* Gertrude pities Hamlet’s apparent madness.
* Hamlet urges Gertrude to abandon Claudius’ bed and tells her of his suspicion that the plan to send him to England is, in fact, a plot to kill him but he vows to counter violently.

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**Act 4 Notes**

**Scene 1**

* Gertrude reports Polonius’ death.
* Claudius orders Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to find Hamlet and recover Polonius’ body.

**Scene 2**

* Hamlet refuses to divulge (give away; disclose) where Polonius’ body is hidden.
* Rosencrantz’s and Guildenstern’s deaths are foreshadowed.

**Scene 3**

* Hamlet is brought to Claudius where he is told that he will immediately be sent to England.
* Claudius, in soliloquy, reveals that he is sending Hamlet to England and his death. (English king, out of fear of Danish King Claudius, will follow Claudius’ order.)

**Scene 4**

* Fortinbras and his army cross paths with Hamlet on army’s way to Poland.
* Fortinbras’s enthusiastic action against Poland serves as a model for Hamlet and inspires him to finally take action and avenge his father’s death.

**Scene 5**

* Claudius and Gertrude meet with the mad Ophelia who sings of death and betrayal.
* Claudius agonizes over her madness and the commotion her state will create for Laertes.
* Upon Laertes’s return, Claudius vows their innocence in Polonius’ death.
* When Laertes sees Ophelia, he is devastated and vows revenge.

**Scene 6**

* Hamlet receives letter from Hamlet advising of prince’s boarding of a pirate ship and his return to Elsinore Castle.

**Scene 7**

* Claudius receives letter from Hamlet announcing return to castle.
* Claudius recruits Laertes in a plan to challenge Hamlet to a fencing match and ensure his death with a poisoned rapier.
* As a back-up plan, Claudius will poison cup of wine, which he will give Hamlet to drink during match.
* Gertrude interrupts their plotting with news that Ophelia has drowned.

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**Act 5 Notes**

**Scene 1**

* Hamlet comes upon gravediggers before reaching castle.
* Hamlet, while trying determine grave’s occupant, reflects on other skulls being dug up.
* Hamlet realizes it’s Ophelia’s grave.
* Laertes curses Hamlet for his sister’s death.
* Hamlet reveals himself and he and Laertes struggle, with Hamlet protesting his love for Ophelia.

**Scene 2**

* Hamlet tells Horatio of Claudius’ plot to have him killed in England but explains how he turned tables on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and had them killed instead.
* Osric enters with Claudius’ wish to have Hamlet and Laertes fence, and Hamlet agrees despite misgivings.
* Hamlet winning match when Gertrude drinks poisoned cup in a toast to her son’s victory
* Laertes wounds Hamlet.
* Hamlet then wounds Laertes when rapiers are exchanged.
* As Gertrude dies, Laertes reveals his and Claudius’ plot to kill Hamlet.
* Hamlet kills Claudius.
* Before Hamlet dies, however, he asks Horatio to tell the full story and gives Fortinbras his support for kingship.
* Fortinbras arrives, claims crown, and orders a full military funeral for Hamlet.