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❧ ACT 1 ❧

PRE-GRAMMAR | Preparation

Prepare the student for understanding the Central One Idea by drawing upon his or her prior knowledge or experience.

1. Imagine seeing the ghost of a deceased family member or loved one. How would you respond? Would you believe it is real? Would you be able to trust it?

GRAMMAR | Presentation

The student is presented with and discovers essential facts, elements, and features of the play.

READING NOTES

Scene 1

1. **cross it** (1.1.127) – Horatio crosses the path of the Ghost, and/or makes a cross with his arms to protect against an evil spirit.
2. **Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated** (1.1.158-159) – just before Christmas
3. **This bird of dawning singeth all night long** (1.1.160) – The rooster crows throughout the night.
4. **But look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill.** (1.1.166-167) – Early dawn appears from behind a tall hill, personified by wearing a reddish-brown cloak. Dawn typically represents rebirth, but here it foreshadows pending trouble. The color russet is often associated with sorrow or grave seriousness. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, expecting a lifetime of remorse, the character Biron laments, "*Henceforth my wooing mind shall be express'd/In russet yeas and honest kersey noes.*" The breaking dawn mantles or cloaks the Earth with its doleful color.
5. **dumb** (1.1.171) – mute; speechless

6. **mood** – The general emotional feeling that prevails in a piece of literature. If **tone** means the author's attitude toward a subject in a work of literature, then **mood** is the emotional feeling aroused in the reader by the work.
7. **setting** – the time and place of a literary work
8. **symbol/symbolism** – A word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in turn signifies something, or has a range of reference, beyond itself.¹

Scene 2

1. **mirth** (1.2.12) – merriment; joy
2. **dirge** (1.2.12) – a lament for the dead; a funeral song
3. **filial** (1.2.91) – of or relating to a son or daughter
4. **peevisish** (1.2.100) – fractious; spiteful; petty
5. **Fie!** (1.2.101) – a somewhat humorous expression of disgust
6. **Wittenberg** (1.2.113) – The University of Wittenberg in Wittenberg, Germany – which was the great center in the West for classical studies, theology, and philosophy. Wittenberg was also the city of Martin Luther, the theologian who initiated the Protestant Reformation by nailing his *Ninety-Five Theses* on the Church door in Wittenberg in 1517. This reference would surely have resonated with Shakespeare's audiences. The University of Wittenberg is also the university of Dr. Faustus in Christopher Marlowe's 1592 play.
7. **A truant disposition** (1.2.169) – a tendency to be lazy
8. **pun** – A play on words by using different meanings of the same word, or different words with the same sound. Example from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: "A mender of bad soles" (souls)²
9. **adianoeta** – an expression that, in addition to an obvious meaning, carries a second, subtle meaning (often at variance with the ostensible meaning)³

[1] M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Seventh Edition (Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1999), 311.

[2] Austin M. Fox, *A Glossary of Terms for the Understanding and Enjoyment of Literature*. (Cambridge, MA: Educators Publishing Service, 1955), 34.

[3] "Adianoeta." <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Figures/A/adianoeta.htm>.

10. **emotive language** – specific words or phrases chosen to evoke an emotional response in the reader or listener
11. **apostrophe** – A figure of speech in which a speaker directly addresses a person, thing, or idea who is absent or dead. The apostrophe often begins with the exclamation "O" or "Oh."
12. **parallelism** – Similarity of structure or grammatical form in a pair or series of words, phrases, or clauses. Example from *Jane Eyre*: "The ground was hard, the air was still, my road was lonely."
13. **antithesis** – A rhetorical device that features contrasting words or phrases in a strong parallel structure. Example from Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."
14. **irony** – (or **verbal irony**) When a *discrepancy* exists between the literal words and the meaning; when words say one thing but mean another.
Note: Irony differs from sarcasm in that it is usually lighter and less harsh in its wording – though often more cutting in its effect because of its indirectness.
15. **foreshadowing** – the arrangement of events and details in the plot so that later events are hinted at or shadowed beforehand
16. **theme** – an important idea, truth, or insight that a literary work reveals
17. **Central One Idea** – The central, most important idea in a poem, novel, or play. The soul of the work; the *essence* from which the work derives its being. The Central One Idea gives the work its ultimate meaning and its greatest expression. The COI is discovered by the reader through close reading, then crafted into a complete proposition (subject and predicate), and then defended with evidence in discussion or in an essay.
18. **soliloquy** – the convention in drama in which a character, usually alone onstage, utters his or her thoughts aloud

Scene 3

1. **trifling of his favour** (1.3.5) – Hamlet's flirtations

2. **For he himself is subject to his birth:**
He may not, as unvalued persons do,
Carve for himself... (1.3.18-20) – Hamlet is subject to the office of his (future) kingship; so he may not, like ordinary people, choose whom he wants to marry.
3. **gaudy** (1.3.71) – tasteless; ostentatious
4. **parle** (1.3.123) – discuss; negotiate
5. **beguile** (1.3.131) – charm in a deceptive way; attract

Scene 4

1. **draughts** (1.4.10) – gulps or casks of an alcoholic beverage
2. **swinish** (1.4.19) – boorish, beastly behavior
3. **toward the flood** (1.4.69) – toward the sea
4. **state of Denmark** (1.4.90) – country of Denmark
5. **hamartia** – From Aristotle's *Poetics*; often known as a "tragic flaw," a defect in character or error in judgment in a protagonist – whether innate, accidental, or deliberate – that causes his or her downfall or reversal of fortune. A fairly common example of *hamartia* in tragedy is hubris – excessive pride – which causes the tragic downfall of the hero.

Scene 5

1. **battlements** (1.5.Stage Directions) – a protective wall at the top of a castle that has evenly spaced openings for shooting through
2. **sulph'rous and tormenting flames** (1.5.2) – The fires of purgatory. The Catholic Church teaches that purgatory is an interim place between heaven and hell, where souls undergo penance for their unatoned earthly sins before entering paradise.
3. **posset/And curd** (1.5.68-69) – thicken and curdle
4. **tables** (1.5.107) – writing tablets; a small notebook
5. **antic disposition** (1.5.172) – strange behavior; appearance of insanity
6. **ambiguous giving out** (1.5.178) – indirect or ambivalent indication of something

WORDS TO BE DEFINED

1. foreshadows; indicates
2. holy; sacred
3. communicate; relay; recount
4. facial expression; appearance
5. previously; thus far
6. expose; reveal
7. principles; morals
8. generous; giving freely
9. dangerous; risky; vulnerable
10. godly; holy; saintly
11. sharply; piercingly
12. six-feet units of measurement (esp. to determine the depth of the sea)
13. shock; horrify; mortify
14. the tendons that connect one's muscles to bones
15. highly injurious; wicked

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. The guard platform of the royal castle at Elsinore; Francisco, Bernardo, Marcellus, and Horatio are all present. It is midnight (and therefore dark) in the bitter cold of winter. Beginning in the middle of the action creates suspense and action from the outset: Denmark is in a volatile state (hence the sentinels), and a ghost is lurking around Elsinore.
2. On the previous watch, the Ghost of the dead King Hamlet appeared to Francisco, Bernardo, and Marcellus. Horatio thinks it is just a hallucination, but Marcellus has convinced him to join them on this night so that he can witness the Ghost as well.
3. The Ghost appears in the very likeness of the deceased King Hamlet: *"In the same figure, like the King that's dead."* (1.1.41)
"Together with that fair and warlike form/ In which the majesty of buried Denmark/ Did sometimes march?" (1.1.47-49)
"Such was the very armour he had on/When he the ambitious Norway combated;" (1.1.60-61)
4. King Hamlet fought old Fortinbras, King of Norway, and defeated him. A compact was established that would award territory to the winner; thus, King Hamlet won a measure Norwegian territory. At present, young Fortinbras has rounded up an army (willing to fight only for subsistence) and is trying to reacquire the lands that his father lost.
5. Claudius is sending them as peace ambassadors with a message to the King of Norway, the uncle of young Fortinbras.
6. Answers will vary. Hamlet is now more kin than he was before—since he has moved from nephew to stepson—but he now feels less *"kind"* toward Claudius. As well, he feels less like Claudius' *kind*—that is, he feels no natural filial affinity with him. Adianoeta and/or pun are present when Hamlet says he is *"too much in the sun."* Hamlet feels that he is now too much of a *"son"* to Claudius, and that he is patronized by his royal sonship.

WORDS TO BE DEFINED

Definitions Bank

communicate; relay; recount	previously; thus far
dangerous; risky; vulnerable	principles; morals
expose; reveal	sharply; piercingly
facial expression; appearance	shock; horrify; mortify
foreshadows; indicates	six-feet units of measurement (esp. to determine the depth of the sea)
generous; giving freely	the tendons that connect one's muscles to bones
godly; holy; saintly	
highly injurious; wicked	
holy; sacred	

1. This **bodes** some strange eruption to our state. *v.* (1.1.69)
2. So **hallowed** and so gracious is that time. *adj.* (1.1.164)
3. Let us **impart** what we have seen to-night, *v.* (1.1.169)
4. A **countenance** more in sorrow than in anger. *n.* (1.2.230)
5. If you have **hitherto** conceal'd this sight, *adv.* (1.2.246)
6. If she **unmask** her beauty to the moon. *v.* (1.3.37)
7. And these few **precepts** in thy memory, *n.* (1.3.58)
8. Have of your audience been most free and **bounteous**. *adj.* (1.3.93)
9. Unsifted in such **perilous** circumstance. *adj.* (1.3.102)
10. Breathing like sanctified and **pious** bonds, *adj.* (1.3.130)
11. The air bites **shrewdly**; it is very cold. *adv.* (1.4.1)
12. That looks so many **fathoms** to the sea, *n.* (1.4.77)
13. Would **harrow** up thy soul, freeze thy young blood, *v.* (1.5.16)
14. And you, my **sinews**, grow not instant old, *n.* (1.5.94)
15. O most **pernicious** woman! *adj.* (1.5.105)



Read Act 1, marking the text in key places according to the method taught in "How to Mark a Book."

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Briefly describe the opening **setting**. Who is present? What does beginning **in media res** suggest?
2. Why has Horatio joined the other sentinels?
3. Describe the appearance of the Ghost. Include a quotation.
4. Why are military preparations and nightly watches taking place? Briefly explain what happened in the past with King Hamlet, and the present situation.
5. "King. *and we here dispatch
You, good Cornelius, and you, Voltemand,
For bearers of this greeting to old Norway;*" (1.2.33-35)
Why is Claudius dispatching Cornelius and Voltemand to Norway?
6. "Hamlet. [Aside] *A little more than kin, and less than kind.
King. How is it that the clouds still hang on you?
Hamlet. Not so, my lord; I am too much in the sun.*" (1.2.65-67)
Summarize the key aspects of this important exchange.
How is **pun** or **adynata** used here?
7. "Hamlet. *O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew! ...*" (1.2.129-130)
Briefly describe the context of this **soliloquy**. What are the two main reasons Hamlet is so distressed?
8. In the first section of scene 3, what advice does Laertes give his sister Ophelia? What is her witty reply? Include a quotation.
9. What does Ophelia convey to Polonius after Laertes leaves? What is Polonius' response?
10. When Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus are on the platform and the Ghost appears, how does Hamlet react? What does he say? For your answer, include some lines that contain **antithesis** and underline the device.
11. In Hamlet's speech in 1.4.39ff, does he express some of the Elizabethan perspectives about ghosts? If so, which ones?
12. What does the Ghost tell Hamlet about who he is and where he comes from?

7. Gertrude and Claudius urge Hamlet to accept his father's death and not grieve for too long; they also urge him not to return to Wittenberg. They leave, and Hamlet remains alone with his despairing thoughts. The two reasons: first, his beloved father has died; second, his mother has married his father's brother, and married him so quickly.
8. Laertes cautions Ophelia to avoid thinking too much of Hamlet's affections. He thinks they are merely short-lived, whimsical flirtations. He reminds her to be careful. He says that Hamlet is royalty and high-rank, and thus his future is determined by his noble birth. He cannot just choose a wife as ordinary people do. The well-being and safety of the country depend on his choice.
She wisely and wittily reminds him: "Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,/ Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven,/Whiles, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,/Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads/And recks not his own rede." (1.3.47-51)
9. Ophelia tells him that Hamlet has made many formal, honorable declarations of love to her. She says that Hamlet "hath given countenance to his speech... With almost all the holy vows of heaven" (1.3.113-114). Polonius scoffs at this, asserting that Hamlet's affections are fraudulent, nothing more than lustful, youthful passions, which should not be trusted. Polonius commands that she speak to Hamlet less, avoid flirting, and keep her distance.
10. "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!/Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd,/Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,/Be thy intents wicked or charitable,/Thou com'st in such a questionable shape/ That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee Hamlet,/King, father, royal Dane. O, answer me!" (1.4.39-45)

11. Yes, Hamlet presents a couple of prevailing Elizabethan ideas about ghosts. He says that the Ghost is either a "spirit of health"—i.e., a ghost given divine permission to return in order to accomplish some good task; or it is a "goblin damn'd"—i.e., a demon from hell or the devil himself, who only appears in the form of his father in order to trick Hamlet and lead his soul to damnation.
12. The Ghost informs Hamlet that he is "thy father's spirit" (1.5.9), doomed for a certain period to walk the Earth at night and to endure purgatorial fires by day—in order to make amends for and purge his earthly sins away.