1. What (if anything) is Hamlet's fatal flaw? Why does he hesitate to act after promising his father's ghost that he will avenge his murder?
2. Note the various familial relationships in Hamlet. Compare and contrast the family unit of Polonius / Laertes / Ophelia with Hamlet's relationships to the Ghost of Hamlet Sr., to Gertrude and to Claudius. Like Hamlet, Laertes and Fortinbras are sons confronted with a father's death. To what extent do they function as foils to Hamlet? What do they have in common? How do they differ?
3. Why does Hamlet wait so long to kill Claudius? What are the reasons for his hesitation? How valid are they? How many times does he have the opportunity to attack Claudius? What are his reasons for not doing so?
4. Hamlet is a play in which nothing can be taken at face value: appearances are frequently deceptive, and many characters engage in play-acting, spying and pretense. What deliberate attempts are made at deception? Are the intended audiences deceived? While some deceptions are perpetrated in order to conceal secrets, others aim to uncover hidden truths. Which are which? To what extent are they successful? Note references to appearances, disguises, pretense, seeming, masks, acting, etc.
5. Is Hamlet's disgust at Gertrude's sexuality justified? To what extent is Gertrude guilty? Was she "in on" her husband's murder? Has Claudius confided in her since the murder? How does Hamlet's perception of his mother affect his behavior or attitude toward Ophelia? Why does he tell Ophelia to go to a nunnery? Does Hamlet really love Ophelia? If so, why is he cruel to her?
6. Hamlet claims that his madness is feigned, an "antic disposition" which he puts on for his own purposes (I.v.172). Why would Hamlet want to feign madness? How can an appearance of insanity help him achieve his ends? (Compare the role of Touchstone, the "fool" in AYLI.) Is he really sane throughout the play, or does he ever cross the line into madness? What about Ophelia's mad scene? Is it real or feigned? Is there "method in her madness" as well, or is she entirely irrational? Why has she gone mad? (What two reasons do her songs suggest?)