

Pre-reading Exercise for *Hamlet*

Before we begin to read *Hamlet*, take some time to think about the following themes. Take just a few minutes to write out some of your thoughts/feelings or your personal experiences with the following:

- 1) Revenge: What purpose does revenge serve? Is it always a good thing to seek revenge on someone who you feel has done you wrong? Can you always determine what the outcome of revenge will be? List just a couple of times when revenge would be warranted and a couple of times when you would be better off to forgive and forget. Have you ever sought revenge on someone and ended up hurting yourself more, in the long run, than if you would have left the situation as it was?
- 2) Fighting: There are verbal fights and there are physical fights. When is it acceptable to fight? Are verbal fights okay? Do verbal fights inflict pain like physical fights do? Is it sometimes better to walk away than to get in a fight with another person?
- 3) Grieving: Grief is something all humans will experience at some point in their life. Tell me, briefly, of a time when you experienced the pain of grief. Grief is usually associated with death, but you can grieve over any type of loss: a pet, a friendship/relationship, a failure to do something that you hoped to do, loss of personal items or material things.
- 4) Forgiveness: It is often hard to forgive someone when you feel that they have done you wrong in some way, but we often desire forgiveness when we have made mistakes and have done bad things. How hard is it to forgive other people? What things are forgivable and what things are not forgivable? How do you decide (for yourself) whether you can or cannot forgive someone? How often do we do things and then seek forgiveness? What do you normally do when you are trying to get someone to forgive you? Do you beg for forgiveness? Do you cry? Do you try to make the person feel guilty or become angry with them?
- 5) Insanity: Madness – both real and feigned – is at the heart of the play. How do you determine whether someone is truly mad? How accountable are they for their actions if they are mad? Is madness genetic or an environmental illness? How do we cure or stop madness?