Motif of ambiguity (beginning with the ghost and following through with questions that arise about characters and their motivations)

Perception

Motif of references to eyes and ears and other means of sensory perceptiom

How do we know what we know? How can we be sure?

The setting: The state of unrest in Denmark (parallels discord among characters and families

Man inevitably makes war, fights over land, wealth, power, etc

Parallel characters and family dynamics (Old Hamlet, Hamlet and Claudius; Old Fortinbras of Norway, young Fortinbras, Uncle Fortinbras; Polonius and Laertes) CORRELATES to themes of duty, loyalty, advice

Revenge (how to know when warranted, what is the best means?)

Juxtaposition of heaven and earth (the physical world which can be observed and the ethereal world which represents much of the unknown)

Existential questions such as Hamlet’s “To be or not to be?” Connects to major questions raised in text:

* What are we here for? What is the point?
* What is important?
* What separates man from beast
* How do we determine what is right and good?
* How do we achieve peace, love, honor, etc (and for others or ourselves)?

Hamlet’s character before “antic disposition”: loyal, loving, intelligent, curious, questions the world around him

Claudius as antagonist/villain: He is “poisonous” like the serpents he claimed killed King Hamlet, and like the actual poison he poured in his ear

Ambiguity of Gertrudes’s character…what does she know?

Repetition of words such as “seems,” “show,” “play” –typically emphasizing perception and/or deception

Acting

Illusion and/or appearance vs. reality

Duplicity/deceit/deception (typically with unfortunate results)

Hamlet considers himself an actor in the drama of his own life, and the “play within the play” emphasizes the idea of pretending

Hamlet coming to the believe that women are deceitful and fickle (uses makeup as an example)

Horatio: voice of reason and caution, loyal. Hamlet describes him as “not passion’s slave”

Ambiguity of Hamlet’s madness

Images of and refereces to “death as the great equalizer”

THINKING VS. TAKING ACTION : Hamlet gets caught up in his thoughts and fails to act out his revenge several times. When he acts RASHLY—he accidentally kills Polonius

Laertes as a foil to Hamlet: in the face of Polonius’s death, he is a decisive man of action