Hamlet Act III, scene 1

1. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern don’t have much helpful information to share with the royal couple, so King Claudius and Polonius move forward with their plan to spy on Hamlet and Ophelia. Right before Hamlet enters, Polonius says that people who are sinners often use “devotion’s visage and pious action” to “sugar o’er the devil himself.” What does Polonius mean?

2. Claudius replies to Polonius’ statement with a brief aside comment. In this passage, to what does Claudius compare himself? Why is this an apt comparison? What does this show us about Claudius’ state of mind?

3. In Hamlet’s famous “To be or not to be” soliloquy, what is his main point/idea?

4. In his soliloquy, Hamlet briefly lists an assortment of pains that people have to endure in their daily lives. In your own words, list four of the indignities that Hamlet mentions.
5. As he’s finishing his speech, Hamlet says, “Thus conscience does make cowards of us all, and thus the native hue of resolution is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought...” He’s speaking in general terms about mankind here, but this line also directly applies to his own life. How so? Explain.

6. While Hamlet is talking to Ophelia, he loses his cool and rails against women, saying, “God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another. You jig, you amble, and you lisp; you nickname God’s creatures and make your wantoness your ignorance. Go to, I’ll no more on’t! It hath made me mad.” While we’d all likely agree that he’s being unreasonably harsh with Ophelia, let’s look at his greater message about the nature of women. Is there any truth to any of his complaints? Explain your thoughts about this passage.

7. What line shows us that Hamlet suspects he’s being spied on by Polonius?

8. What line shows us that Hamlet suspects he’s being spied on by King Claudius, as well?

9. At the end of the scene, what does Claudius want to do with Hamlet? What is Polonius’ suggestion?