“Hamlet” – Act IV

Ugh. I am so tired of you teenagers and your morbid T-shirts, Hamlet.
As a reminder, Act Three is the **turning point** of the play, whereas Act Four is where the characters’ fates are bound to their unavoidable outcomes.

Shakespeare’s Act Four: Where problems spiral out of control and grow wildly more complex and difficult to overcome.
Act Four

As we look at the scenes in this act, ask yourself: In what way do each of the characters solidify their place in destiny?
Today’s Objectives

- Analyze the role of the pirates: revenge, accidental death, and symbolism

- We’ll also look at an example of Deus Ex Machina (DEY-UHS EKS MAH-KUH-NUH)
Act 4.6: The Pirates Appear

Or is this a case of Deus Ex Machina, which means God from a machine? (dey-uh s eks mah-kuh-nuh)

Deus Ex Machina is any artificial or improbable device that is introduced to resolve the difficulties of a plot. In other words, if an author writes himself into a jam, he might use a Deus Ex Machina device to get himself out of it. Sound like the pirates?
Scene 1:

- Queen Gertrude tells King Claudius that she’s just witnessed Hamlet kill Polonius.

- Claudius wonders aloud how he will be able to handle this public crisis without damaging his hold on Denmark. He tells Gertrude that they must ship Hamlet to England at once and find a way to explain Hamlet’s misdeed to the court and to the people.

- Claudius asks Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to find Hamlet and bring back the body of Polonius.
Scene 2:

- Rosencrantz and Guildenstern go to retrieve Hamlet for the king.

- Insulted, Hamlet calls Rosencrantz a “sponge . . . that soaks up the king’s countenance, his rewards, his authorities,” and warns him that “when he needs what you have gleaned, it is but squeezing you, and, sponge, you shall be dry again” (IV.ii.11–19).
Scene 2:

- Hamlet eventually agree to be escorted to Claudius.

- “The body is with the King, but the King is not with the body. The King is a thing —” … “Of nothing.” ~Hamlet

  - Claudius is a good-for-nothing

  - King Hamlet is a ghost

  - The idea of the “king” is just a concept…nothing
Scene 3

R & G appear with Hamlet, who is under guard. Eventually, Hamlet reveals that Polonius’s body is under the stairs near the castle lobby.

The king tells Hamlet that he must leave at once for England. Hamlet agrees.
Scene 3 (quotes):

- Claudius expresses that he has sent letters to the King of England asking him to have Hamlet killed immediately upon his arrival.

- “Diseases desperate grown/By desperate appliance are relieved, or not at all” ~Claudius

- “A man may fish the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.” ~Hamlet
Scene 4:

- On a nearby plain in Denmark, young Prince Fortinbras marches at the head of his army, traveling through Denmark on the way to attack Poland.

- Fortinbras, and soldiers are on a field in Denmark.

- Norway is fighting to get a worthless patch of land from the Poles. Both countries have stationed troops to fight for this “cause”
Scene 4:

- Astonished by the thought that a bloody war could be fought over something so insignificant, Hamlet marvels that human beings are able to act so violently and purposefully for so little gain.

- “How all occasions do inform against me, and spur my dull revenge.” ~Hamlet
“How stand I... that have a father kill’d, a mother stain’d, excitements of my reason and my blood, and let all sleep, while to my shame I see the imminent death of twenty thousand men, that for a fantasy and trick of fame go to their graves like beds...”
Scene 5:

- Ophelia has gone mad.

- Claudius exclaims, “O, this is the poison of deep grief; it springs all from her father’s death.”

- He shows sympathy and compassion for Ophelia and seems to understand that grief can cause strange behavior. He did not, however, understand it in Hamlet, proving that he never had any compassion or care for Hamlet.
Scene 5 continued:

- Laertes arrives and is informed of his father’s death. He sees his sister’s insanity firsthand.

- He INSTANTLY thinks of REVENGE, thus serving as a foil to Hamlet.
  - FOIL - A character who is so different from another that when compared is able to bring out the characteristics of the other all the more.
Scene 6:

- Horatio receives a letter from Hamlet.

- The letter informs him that Hamlet has been taken prisoner by pirates at sea and that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are still on course to England. He says he has much to tell Horatio about Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
Scene 7:

- Claudius and Leartes speak in private.

- Claudius tells Leartes that it was Hamlet who killed Polonius.

- The reasons why he could not punish Hamlet by death:
  - The Queen
  - The people
Scene 7 continued:

- They receive a letter from Hamlet saying that he is coming to Denmark, asks pardon, and will explain his return upon arrival.

- What is the real reason for Hamlet’s return?
- What opportunity will Leartes and Claudius take from Hamlet’s return?

The Plan:

- Hamlet has always wanted to have a swordfight with Leartes and his famous sword.
- Leartes will place a poison on the tip of the sword which will kill Hamlet upon contact.
- If it does not work, they will poison his drink.
Scene 7 continued:

- The Queen brings news that Ophelia has committed suicide (she drowned herself).

- Leartes is very grief-sticken.

- Claudius LIES to Gertrude: “How much I had to do to calm his rage. Now fear I this will give it start again.”