Analytical approach to *Hamlet*

**Focusing on Act 1, scene 1**

**Subject matter –What’s the scene about? What are the characters actually saying? What does this section add to the play as a whole?**

*Sentries on guard at night time (threat of war?) have seen a ghost, which seems to be the ghost of the dead king; atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. Horatio believes it’s just ‘fantasy’, but it appears again – refuses to speak. They hope it will speak to Hamlet – ‘spirit dumb to us will speak to him’*

*We also learn about threat of Fortinbras – seeking revenge for the murder of his father by old Hamlet*

*Creates an atmosphere of fear/ uncertainty/ begins with questions*

**The text as a drama- Imagine how it plays on the stage and what effect it will have on the audience. Where are the characters placed on the stage and why? How does their positioning give an indication of their relationship? How do they move around?**

**Visuals- What does the stage look like? Where are the characters placed on stage and how does their visual relationship help construct meaning?**

*Outside the castle as they are on sentry duty*

**Language- Are there any key words and phrases? Do specific responses stand out in any way? Why are they predominant? How do they link with each other? What do they have in common? Do different characters speak in different ways? Why? Why is prose used at certain points?**

*‘Who’s there?’*

*Noun choices to describe ghost ‘thing’ ‘fantasy’ ‘apparition’ ‘dreaded sight’ ‘illusion’ ‘guilty thing’*

*‘this bodes some strange eruption to our state’*

*Most repeated words in the scene/ lexical patterns*

*Use of doubles, for example:*

**Imagery- Look at who uses images, at both what they mean and the way in which is expressed. What do the images have in common? What is the significance of any recurrence? Are there sets of images which inter-relate?**

*‘not a mouse stirring’*

*Fortinbras – ‘hot and full,/ Hath in the skirts of Norway here and there/ Sharked up a list of lawless resolutes’*

*‘strange eruption to our state’*

*Horatio’s imagery –‘ trains of fire’ ‘sick to doomsday’ ‘omen’ ‘feared events’ ‘heaven and earth’*

**Rhythm- Look out for changes in rhythm, both by speaking the words out loud and in relation to the character. Look for short or broken lines, for caesura, or pauses, and consider the effect of these rhythmic shifts.**

*In blank verse for most part -*

*Stychomythia (short rapidly alternating lines) creates tension -*

*Most significant change is when Horatio speaks to the ghost (line 125 onwards)*

**Scenic structure- Look at the way the scene is divided up, both thematically and between characters. Decide why it is divided in this way. Are there any turning points in the scene? What is the effect of these?**

*Division of lines between sentries and Horatio is interesting…*

**Sentences – Look closely at the sentences: are they long or short? What does their structure tell us? How does it illuminate the character speaking?**

**Themes and ideas – What kind of bigger ideas are explored in the scene? For example, truth and illusion, belief, change, uncertainty, revenge, madness, politics, incest, religion, women, the theatre, families, relationships….**

*‘tis but our fantasy/ And will not let belief take hold of him…’ – truth and reality*

**Interpretations – How might you interpret this scene? What might different readers/audiences choose to focus on? If the scene was being performed, what decisions might a director need to make? Are there different ways of interpreting characters and their actions?**

*Does there need to be a contrast between Horatio and the other men?*

*Costume/clothing?*

*Atmosphere?*