*Hamlet 2.2 – Supporting notes*

**Lines 1-40 – Claudius sets up Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to spy on Hamlet** - Is Polonius loyal or obsequious? How does the language indicate this? What do you notice about the repeated use of ‘I’?

**Lines 41-85 – The ambassadors reports on a successful visit to Norway** Notice the careful politician’s response of Claudius and how again, we are invited to compare Fortinbras and Hamlet.

**Lines 86-165 – Polonius claims Hamlet loves Ophelia and proposes to used her in a plot to spy on Hamlet** Polonius presented as both fool (e.g. the irony of his statement ‘brevity is the soul of wit’) and respected politician (e.g. response of Claudius ‘Not that I know’). His language towards Ophelia also indicates that he will ‘loose’ his daughter to Hamlet, suggesting he will set her up as a sexual bait. Hamlet’s love letters are read aloud – do you think these are his true words or something else? When might he have written them?

**166-213 – Hamlet insults Polonius, under the guide of madness (maybe)**  Polonius is not totally convinced of Hamlet’s madness here – are you? (though this be madness, there’s method in’t.’) Hamlet manages to suggest he is prostituting his daughter, is a liar and a senile old man.

**214-358 – Rosencrantz and Guildenstern tell Hamlet the players (a group of actors) are coming** Dramatic irony evident here as we know Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been sent to spy on Hamlet. When does Hamlet realise and how is the audience made aware of it? Is there any evidence to suggest how R and G are feeling/ why they might have agreed to spy on their old friend? When is Hamlet simply playing the role of madman (the ‘antic disposition’) in this section and when is he being genuine?

**359-471 – Hamlet welcomes the players and listens to a speech about Pyrrhus, a Greek warrior during the Trojan War, who kills Priam in revenge for killing his own father. He then asks for another about Hecuba, the grieving wife of Priam.** What do you notice about Hamlet’s interaction with ‘ordinary people’ of the play and what might it suggest about him? This intertextuality offers many parallels with Hamlet’s own situation – what are they? To what extent is this section typical of Hamlet’s throughout the play?

**472-485 – Hamlet asks the First Player to speak new lines at tomorrow night’s performance** This can be viewed in two ways: either Hamlet is delaying taking revenge on Claudius with his plan because he cannot face the actuality of killing him OR he is simply seeking further evidence of Claudius’s guilt before killing him – after all, the only ‘proof’ he has is the Ghost, something Christians would advise against.

**485-end – In soliloquy, Hamlet wonders at the contrast between the player’s faked emotion for Hecuba and his own ability to revenge. He plans to use tomorrow night’s play to find out if Claudius really is a murderer.** The soliloquy falls into five sections:

* Comments on players’ grief for an imaginary character
* Wonders how he would respond to a real cause for grief (such as Hamlet’s own)
* Curses himself for his inaction
* Curses himself for talking instead of acting
* Works out a plan

NB The sections are signalled by incomplete lines. Towards the end, he seems to convince himself that the ghost is not to be trusted – its aims may be to ‘damn’ him, in the religious sense.

* Is Hamlet full of self-disgust, hysteria or fury in this soliloquy?
* He accuses himself of cowardice – consider his behaviour in the play so far – to what extent is this true?
* How far does the language of Hamlet explore ‘the notion that thought is in opposition to, irreconcilable with, action.’?

**PREP**

**Create a quote map on the theme of deception, collecting quotes from Act 2 under the following headings: SURVEILLANCE, ACTING, MADNESS.**

**For each quote, include a short explanation of how it reflects upon the theme of deception/what you think Shakespeare may be suggesting about a character, Denmark, politics, relationships etc.**

**Find at least 5 quotes for each heading (not including the examples below, although you can add them to your quote map)**

**For example…**

**MADNESS**

2.1 Appearance of Hamlet ‘doublet all unbraced/No hat upon his head’ – suggests madness affects external appearance/ stops you caring about appearance and fashion

2.1 Hamlet acting like the ghost ‘loosed out of hell/To speak of horrors’ – suggests demonic possession which may suggest Ghost is a cause of madness

**SURVEILLANCE**

2.2 Claudius ‘we shall sift him’ – verb ‘sift’ is intrusive/ suggests getting inside Hamlet’s mind; no limits to deception of state in order to achieve its aims

2.2 ‘The play’s the thing/ Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of a king.’ – Hamlet’s plan also involves watching/spying

**ACTING**

2.2 Hamlet on actors ‘they are the abstract and brief chronicles of the time’ – suggest actors, even though they deceive, are able to present the condition of society itself. Maybe Shakespeare commenting on his art – only playwrights/artists tell the truth?

2.2 ‘What would he do/Had he the motive and that for passion/That I have?’ – suggestion that Hamlet is unable to play the role of revenger, even though he has more genuine motive than the visiting actors – they just ‘give forms to conceit’ – it’s an illusion.