*Hamlet*: Act III.

1. Hamlet grapples with suicide in this act. Why does he consider this as an option? Look closely at the “To be or not to be” speech in Act III, Scene i. He repeats the word “sleep” three times: what is the significance of this? How does he refer to dreams? Analyze Hamlet’s age and status. What could Shakespeare’s point have been in making Hamlet so young and a student versus a soldier or a politician (Like Macbeth or Richard III)?
2. OPHELIA: Considering Hamlet’s contemplation of suicide directly before Ophelia tries to literally give him back his love letters, how could you interpret his treatment of Ophelia in this scene? Look at Hamlet’s discussion of Ophelia’s “paintings” in his retort directly after Ophelia says, “Heavenly powers, restore him!” (III.i.143) What is Hamlet accusing her of, and therefore, perhaps, accusing women of? Consider Shakespeare’s purpose here, and the way he typically portrays women in other plays versus this one. Look at Act 3, Scene 2, lines 112-140. Consider the way that Hamlet speaks to Ophelia: why does he speak to her this way? How does Hamlet implement verbal irony, and why? Look at lines 136-142 (in which Hamlet discusses casting a “plague” upon Ophelia for her dowry): why does Hamlet say this to Ophelia so bitterly? Consider all of this regarding your fishbowl notes, as well.
3. Look at Claudius’ soliloquy in the chapel (III.iii.36). How does it add depth and complexity to his character? Why do you think Shakespeare chose to add these layers when Claudius could have been a two-dimensional villain? What is ironic about Hamlet’s reaction?