Shakespeare introduces the question of who controls government, and how it is controlled, in the opening scene. He continues to explore this throughout the play. Separating the role and function of a ruler from their nature helps the audience focus on the effects that power can have on those in authority. Shakespeare also examines the role of justice in controlling the people and again makes a distinction between the function and nature of a judge. The play leads the audience to ask who is fit to judge another, and to consider when mercy should overrule justice.

Explore these themes by answering the following questions. Remember to use your text’s notes and commentary to help you understand Shakespeare’s intentions; use a dictionary to check the meanings of any words of which you are still unsure.


**Act I Scene 1**

1. What is the function of the Duke’s opening speech (lines 3-21 from ‘Of government the properties to unfold’ to ‘What think you of it?’)? Why is there an onstage audience? Why is the setting Vienna?

2. Why has the Duke chosen Angelo to take his place during his absence (lines 27-35 from ‘There is a kind of character in thy life’)?

3. What is the first warning that the Duke’s judgement in matters of government may be lacking (lines 45-6 from ‘Old Escalus’)?

**Act I Scene 2**

This scene gives us the comic characters’ view of government and authority.

1. What distinction is made in lines 162-3 (from ‘Whether the tyranny be in his place’)?

2. What reason does Claudio give for tightening the law (lines 164-70 from ‘but this new governor’)?

3. Explain Lucio’s example of how strict Angelo is (lines 171-3 ‘I warrant it is; and thy head stands so tickle on thy’).

**Act I Scene 3**

1. What disguise and type of authority does the Duke adopt?

2. What does the Duke say he has done with his authority in lines 11-13 (from ‘I have delivered to Lord Angelo’)?

3. What does ‘And liberty plucks justice by the nose’ (line 29) say about Vienna?

4. The Duke suggests in lines 40-3 (from ‘I have on Angelo imposed the office’) a separation between the office of ruler and the person. How is the Duke making use of this?

5. What does the Duke want to find out in lines 53-4 (from ‘Hence shall we see’)?
**Act II Scene 1**

1. What do the opening speeches of Angelo and Escalus tell us of their views towards the authority of the law?
2. What does Angelo mean in lines 30-1 (‘Let mine own judgement pattern out my death’)?
3. What is the function of the comic episode in this scene?
4. Explain Pompey’s argument to Escalus in lines 211-23 (from ‘Come, tell me true, it shall be the better for you.’)?

**Act II Scene 2**

1. Explain the meaning of lines 34-6 (from ‘I have a brother is condemned to die’).
2. Why is Isabella’s introduction of the word ‘mercy’ important?
3. What does Isabella mean by lines 107-9 (from ‘O, ’tis excellent’)?
4. What is the importance of Isabella telling Angelo to examine his own conscience lines 136-8 (from ‘Go to your bosom’)?
5. What is Angelo forced to realise at line 173 (‘What dost thou, or what art thou, Angelo?’)?
6. How is Angelo’s authority and moral right to govern Vienna being tested?

**Act II Scene 4**

1. How does Angelo exploit his authority over the law to satisfy his own desires?
2. What does Isabella threaten in response (lines 150-4 from ‘Seeming, seeming!’)?
3. What is Angelo’s reply in lines 155-60 (from ‘My unsoiled name’)?
4. What does line 170 (‘Say what you can: my false o’erweighs your true.’) tell you about the balance of power?

**Act III Scene 1**

1. What has happened to hypocrisy and corruption during Angelo’s rule?
2. What is Claudio’s attitude to government and authority in Vienna, e.g. in lines 111-13 (from ‘Yes. Has he affections in him’)?
3. With which character would you expect the audience to sympathise?
4. When the Duke sees Angelo has failed the test begun in II.2, and starts to reassert his power, what ‘remedy’ does he suggest to Isabella, in lines 200-6?
Measure for Measure by William Shakespeare
Power, government, justice and envy

Act III Scene 2

1. What is Lucio’s view of Angelo’s strictness lines 96-100 (from ‘Yes, in good sooth’)?
2. How do Lucio’s comments relate to Angelo’s own behaviour?
3. What do Escalus and the Duke say about Angelo’s severity in lines 241-6 (from ‘but my brother-justice’)?

Act IV Scene 2

1. What does the Duke still think of Angelo at lines 76-82 (from ‘Not so, not so’)?
2. What does Angelo’s letter in lines 117-123 (from ‘Whatsoever you’) show to be the case?
3. How does the Duke plan to deceive Angelo into believing his instructions have been followed in lines 166-75 (‘Let this Barnardine’)?
4. What do you think of the Duke using prisoners in this way; is he fit to rule?

Act IV Scene 4

1. What is Angelo still relying on to repel Isabella’s accusations against him in lines 24-6 (from ‘For my authority’)?

Act V

1. How does dramatic irony affect the audience’s understanding of this scene?
2. By what standards does Isabella want Angelo to be judged when she calls for justice at line 25 (‘And give me justice! Justice! Justice! Justice!’)?
3. When Isabella accuses Angelo in lines 37-42 (from ‘Most strange’) how is his prediction about this in Act II Scene 4 lines 151-9 fulfilled by the Duke’s reply?
4. What does the Duke say Angelo would have done to Claudio if he himself had acted towards Isabella as she claimed (lines 110-2 from ‘If he had so offended’)?
5. What does ‘practice’ mean at lines 107 and 123? With whom was Isabella’s practice?
6. What does the Duke instruct Angelo to do at lines 166-7 (from ‘In this I’ll be impartial’) and why do you think he does this?
7. Read lines 363-71 (Angelo: from ‘O my dread lord’) and compare this to what was said about him in Act II Scene 4 and Act III Scene 2. Are his beliefs and actions consistent?
8. Contrast the Duke’s definition of mercy in lines 404-7 (from ‘The very mercy’) with Isabella’s in lines 440-6 (from ‘Most bounteous sir’). What does she believe has happened to her brother?

9. What has happened to the law in Vienna?

10. How important is the concept of mercy shown to be?

11. At the end of the play, are the audience left feeling satisfied that justice has overcome evil and that authority has been restored to the rightful ruler?