

STUDY GUIDE



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Study Guide Objectives

This study guide serves as a classroom tool for teachers and students, and addresses the following Common Core Standards and Connecticut State Arts Standards:

Reading Literature: *Key Ideas and Details.*

- Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text (Grades 9-10).
- Analyze how complex characters (e.g. those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the themes (Grades 9-10).
- Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop related elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed) (Grades 11-12).

Reading Literature: *Craft and Structure.*

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone) (Grades 9-10).
- Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement) (Grades 11-12).

Reading Literature: *Integration of Knowledge and Ideas.*

- Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare) (Grades 9-10).
- Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist) (Grades 11-12).

Theatre

- **5: *Researching and Interpreting.*** Students will research, evaluate and apply cultural and historical information to make artistic choices.
- **6: *Connections.*** Students will make connections between theatre, other disciplines and daily life.
- **7: *Analysis, Criticism and Meaning.*** Students will analyze, critique and construct meanings from works of theatre.
- **8: *History and Cultures.*** Students will demonstrate an understanding of context by analyzing and comparing theatre in various cultures and historical periods.

Guidelines for Attending the Theatre

GUIDELINES FOR ATTENDING THE THEATRE

Attending live theatre is a unique experience with many valuable educational and social benefits. To ensure that all audience members are able to enjoy the performance, please take a few minutes to discuss the following audience etiquette topics with your students before you come to Hartford Stage.

- How is attending the theatre similar to and different from going to the movies? What behaviors are and are not appropriate when seeing a play? Why?
 - Remind students that because the performance is live, the audience can affect what kind of performance the actors give. No two audiences are exactly the same and no two performances are exactly the same—this is part of what makes theatre so special! Students' behavior should reflect the level of performance they wish to see.
- Theatre should be an enjoyable experience for the audience. Audience members are more than welcome to applaud when appropriate and laugh at the funny moments. Talking and calling out during the performance, however, are not allowed. Why might this be?
 - Be sure to mention that not only would the people seated around them be able to hear their conversation, but the actors on stage could hear them, too. Theatres are constructed to carry sound efficiently!
- Any noise or light can be a distraction, so please remind students to make sure their cell phones are turned off (or better yet, left at home or at school!). Texting, photography, and video recording are prohibited. Food and gum should not be taken into the theatre.
- Students should sit with their group as seated by the Front of House staff and should not leave their seats once the performance has begun. If possible, restrooms should be used only during intermission.

A Synopsis of *Hamlet*

By Scott Bartelson

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, is home from school to mourn the death of his father, King Hamlet, who has died two months earlier. Hamlet is disgusted by the marriage of his newly widowed mother, Queen Gertrude, to his uncle, Claudius (King Hamlet's brother), who now has the throne.

A ghost has appeared to guards on nightly watch, as well as to Hamlet's good friend Horatio, who thinks the spirit has a likeness to the former King Hamlet. When prompted to speak by Horatio, the ghost will not. Horatio asks Hamlet to wait for the ghost and see if it will speak to him. The ghost of his father beckons Hamlet to follow him and reveals that his brother Claudius murdered him by pouring poison in his ear. Hamlet vows to avenge his father's murder.

Meanwhile, Laertes, son of Polonius (the King's advisor), is set to return to France. Before he leaves, he tells his sister Ophelia to be wary of Hamlet's affections towards her. Polonius gives Laertes advice on how to act abroad and orders Ophelia to stay away from Hamlet.

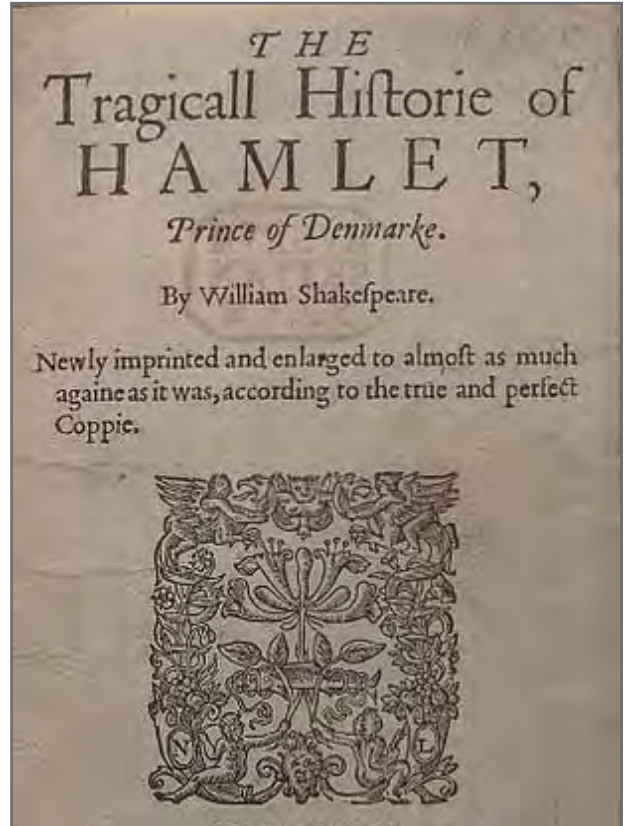
Hamlet begins to act strangely, and everyone starts to question his sanity. Claudius and Gertrude are both concerned; Polonius suggests it is Ophelia's rejection of his advances. Claudius and Polonius decide to spy on Hamlet and Ophelia. Claudius further employs Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two childhood friends of Hamlet, to spy on him further. Hamlet quickly realizes their intentions.

A troupe of players happens to be in town and Hamlet employs the actors in a plan to determine the truth about his father's murder. He will have them perform the very act of King Hamlet's murder, killing a king through poison in the ear. He asks Horatio to watch Claudius' reaction throughout the play. While the court is watching, Claudius is enraged and leaves the play, convincing Hamlet that he is the murderer.

Hamlet comes upon Claudius in the chapel, kneeling down to pray. He considers killing him then and there, but since Claudius is in mid-prayer, and will therefore go to heaven if he dies, Hamlet decides to wait until Claudius is committing some sin.

Hamlet meets Gertrude in her room and an argument ensues. Polonius, who is hiding behind the curtain, shouts for help, and Hamlet stabs him through the curtain, thinking he is Claudius. The ghost appears to Hamlet to refocus him on the task of killing Claudius.

The King learns that Fortinbras, Prince of Norway, whose father's lands were seized by the late King, is headed toward Denmark. Claudius demands that Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern head for England. Claudius sends a letter with them ordering Hamlet's execution during the trip. While at sea, however, Hamlet discovers his planned murder and switches the orders, so that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are instead executed. Hamlet returns to Denmark.



Second Quarto cover page of *Hamlet*.

Back at Elsinore, Ophelia has gone mad with grief over her father's death. Laertes returns from France and learns it was Hamlet who killed Polonius. Claudius suggests that Laertes duel with Hamlet, and poisons the tip of Laertes' foil for a fatal blow. If Laertes loses the duel, Claudius will put poison into a drink for Hamlet. Gertrude enters and announces that Ophelia has drowned.

In the graveyard, Hamlet reminisces on a friend whose skull he has found. When the processional arrives with Ophelia's corpse, Laertes and Hamlet argue. A duel is scheduled.

During the fight, Gertrude accidentally drinks from the poisoned chalice and dies. Hamlet is wounded with the poisoned sword, but in a scuffle, the foils are switched and Laertes is also wounded with the poisoned foil. In dying, Laertes confesses Claudius' plot to kill Hamlet. Hamlet stabs Claudius, and Hamlet dies asking Horatio to tell his story. The Norwegian forces arrive at Elsinore, and Prince Fortinbras seizes control of Denmark.

WHO'S THERE?

BERNARDO- a watchman who sees the King's ghost

FRANCISCO- a watchman who does not see the King's ghost

MARCELLUS- a student with Horatio and Hamlet

HORATIO- friend of Hamlet from college

CLAUDIUS- King of Denmark

GERTRUDE- Queen of Denmark and mother to Hamlet

HAMLET- son of the late King and nephew of the present King

POLONIUS- Lord Chamberlain and advisor to Claudius

LAERTES- son of Polonius

OPHELIA- daughter of Polonius

VOLTIMAND- messenger sent to Norway by the King

CORNELIUS- messenger sent to Norway by the King

OSRIC- a courtier, messenger serving the King

GHOST- of Hamlet's father, the previous King of Denmark

REYNALDO- servant of Polonius

ROSENCRANTZ- childhood friend of Hamlet

GUILDENSTERN- childhood friend of Hamlet

FORTINBRAS- Prince of Norway

TWO CLOWNS- grave diggers

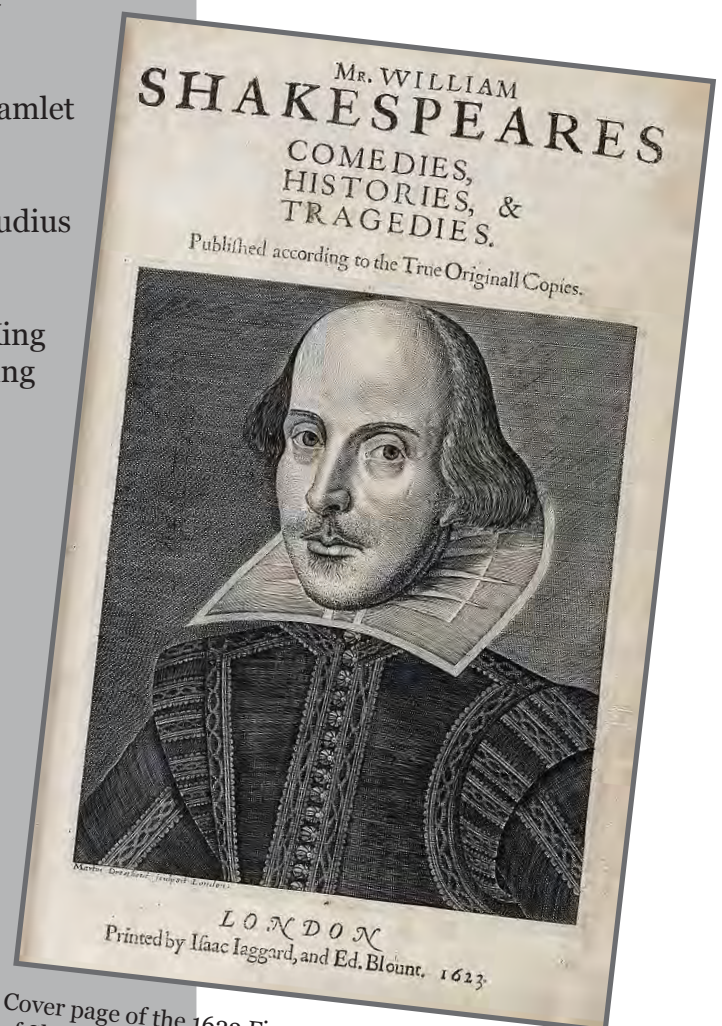
THE PLAYERS- performers in the King's household

LORDS OF DENMARK

CAPTAIN

SOLIDERS

PRIEST



Cover page of the 1623 First Folio, the first anthology of Shakespeare's plays. Engraved portrait of William Shakespeare. Engraving, Martin Droeshout.

What is Rotten in the State of Denmark?!

By Natalie Pertz

- **What** is a ‘hamlet’?

A ‘hamlet’ is defined as ‘a small village without a church of its own’. The word originated in the Middle English language during the 1300s, which means it has been around longer than the infamous play of the same title!



Oberwil, a hamlet in Waldkirch, St. Gallen, Switzerland.

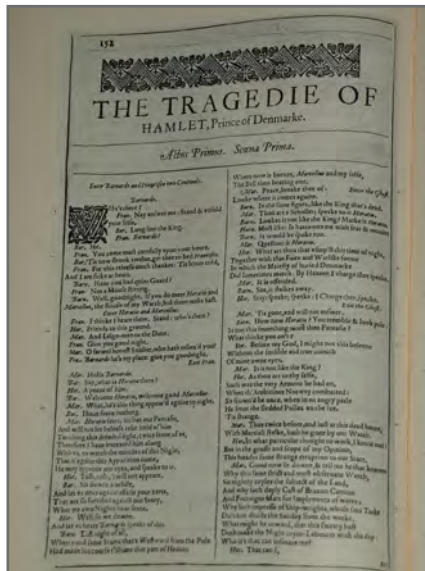
- **Which Hamlet?**

When people talk about the play *Hamlet*, they often refer to the great play by William Shakespeare. However, there is no real definitive text of *Hamlet*—there are actually three very different versions that were published in three different years.

- The First Quarto – 1603
- The Second Quarto – 1604
- The First Folio – 1623

Each of these survived and influence the versions of *Hamlet* we read today. Some editors stick to one version, while other editors create a composite text of all three. This Hartford Stage production uses the order of scenes found in the First Quarto, but uses most of the lines from the Second Quarto and the First Folio.

Question: Have you read *Hamlet*? Do you have access to a copy now? Take a look at the editor’s notes either in the forward or in the footnotes. If they reference “Q1, Q2, or F,” they are talking about the Quartos and the Folio!



The 1623 First Folio facsimile of *Hamlet*.

- **Hamnet: The Tragedy of Shakespeare’s Son**

Did you know that Hamnet was the name of Shakespeare’s only son who died at age eleven? Hamnet had a twin sister named Judith. By the time of Hamnet’s death, Shakespeare was a well-known playwright. Scholars debate whether *Hamlet* is a reflection on the loss of his son.

Question: Do you think that the death of Hamnet influenced Shakespeare as he wrote *Hamlet*? Why or why not?

TIMELINE OF HISTORICAL EVENTS

Compiled by Krista DeVellis

- 13th century- *Gesta Danorum* (“Deeds of the Danes”) is published, including a story called *Vita Amlethi* (“The Life of Amleth”) which contains many similarities to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, such as a king murdered by his brother, a prince that feigns madness, and the prince killing a spy hidden in his mother’s chamber.
- 1558- Elizabeth I, daughter of Henry VIII, assumes the throne and rules for the next 45 years over England.
- 1564- April 23, William Shakespeare is born in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, to John Shakespeare, an established glove maker, and Mary Arden, a leather dresser.
- 1570-The Catholic Church excommunicates Queen Elizabeth; there is a change in religion to Protestantism.
- 1576-London creates its first permanent theatre, The Theatre, which forms a new appreciation for theatre in the community.
- 1582-William, at 18 years old, marries 26-year-old Anne Hathaway in Warwickshire.
- 1583-William and Anne’s first child, Susanna, is born.

- 1585-Twins, Hamnet and Judith, are born to William and Anne Shakespeare.
- 1588-London is swept by the plague. There are thousands of deaths and all theatres are closed.
- 1588-Famous playwright Christopher Marlowe publishes *Doctor Faustus*.
- 1589-1594-Shakespeare writes many of his early plays, including *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Henry VI Parts I and 3*, *King John*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Titus Andronicus*.
- 1593-Shakespeare writes the poem *Venus and Adonis* and the play *Richard III*.
- 1594-Shakespeare establishes himself as both an actor and playwright for the newly created acting company, The Lord Chamberlain's Men.
- 1594-Shakespeare writes the poem *The Rape of Lucrece*, the plays *Romeo and Juliet* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, and his Sonnets.
- 1595-Shakespeare writes *Richard II* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
- 1596-William and Anne's son Hamnet dies, presumably from the plague; Shakespeare writes *The Merchant of Venice* and *Henry IV, Part I*.

- **Where** in the World is Denmark?

Denmark is a Scandinavian country located in Northern Europe. Some of the countries in Denmark's neighborhood include Germany, Norway, and Sweden. Interested in some swimming? Denmark borders both the Baltic and North Sea. Fun fact: While it is not that large in diameter, today Denmark is often considered 'the happiest country in the world'!



Denmark lies just south of the Scandinavian countries of Norway, Sweden, and Finland.

- **When** Does This Play Take Place?

This Hartford Stage production is set in Denmark during the Elizabethan Era (1558-1603). The Elizabethan Era is named after Queen Elizabeth I, who ruled England at this time. This is the same era in which Shakespeare lived and first wrote and performed his plays.



Painting by Joris Hoefnagel depicting a street scene in Elizabethan England. Circa 1569.

Elizabethan Theatre

The Curtain, the Globe, the Rose, and the Swan were all public theatres during the Elizabethan Era. With up to 15,000 people attending the theatre each week in London (then a city with a 150,000-250,000 population), the theatre was a democratizing space. Though seating was segregated by price of admission, up to 3,000 audience members from all walks of life could attend a show at one time. The cheap seats were actually closest to the stage.

"Groundlings" stood at the foot of the stage throughout the show and could express their excitement or distaste during the show. Audience etiquette was very different than it is today. Famous actors at the time included Richard Burbage, who played the original Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Richard III, and Will Kemp, one of Shakespeare's company members and clowns. William Shakespeare's company was called the Lord Chamberlain's Men. They performed



Sketch of The Swan theater by Dutch humanist scholar Johannes de Witt. Circa 1596.

plays in the public theaters, and on special occasions, performed privately for the Queen and her court. Women were not allowed to perform in plays, so boy actors played female roles. Actors wore elaborate costumes in lavish, upper-class styles, rather than costumes which would fit each character's status. This Hartford Stage production of *Hamlet* is set in the Elizabethan Era. Look for the lavish styles of dress in Elizabethan costuming on our stage!

THEMES FOR DISCUSSION

In Horatio We Trust: Breaking and Building Trust in *Hamlet*

By Krista DeVellis

All of Hamlet's friends and relations break his trust during the play, except for one. Where he finds deceit and fickleness in all others, Hamlet finds an honest friend in Horatio. Horatio is a good friend because he aligns himself, in word and in deed, with Hamlet's priorities. When Hamlet's father dies, Horatio comes to Elsinore on his own to pay his respects. When Hamlet asks why Horatio is visiting, Horatio states simply, "My lord, I came to see your father's funeral" (1.2.175). Horatio further proves to be worthy of Hamlet's trust by fulfilling all of Hamlet's requests, and even claims himself "your poor servant ever" (1.2.163) to Hamlet. Due to Horatio's unwavering support of Hamlet, he is the only person that Hamlet confides in with the truth of his father's murder, and Horatio does not tell anyone until Hamlet wants him to. With Hamlet's dying breath, he tells Horatio:

If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story.
(5.2.344-347)

Claudius and Gertrude, however, are the first to break Hamlet's trust. Claudius marries Gertrude very quickly after the King's death and from the beginning of the play, it is clear that Hamlet resents them both for this. In act 1, scene 2, when Claudius tries to relate to Hamlet, he calls him "cousin" and "son." Hamlet responds with, "A little more than kin, and less than kind" (2.2.65), not hiding his disapproval of the fact that Claudius is now his uncle and step-father. Once the ghost of Hamlet's father reveals that Claudius murdered him, Hamlet cannot trust Claudius at all. The Ghost also warns Hamlet not to act in anger against Gertrude by saying "...Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive/Against thy mother aught"



Horatio. Costume design by Fabio Toblini.

- 1597-1598-London builds The Globe Theatre, which provides access to theatre for people of all different socio-economic status.
- 1597-Shakespeare purchases New Place in Stratford as a home for his wife and children; he also completes *Henry IV, Part 2*.
- 1598-Shakespeare completes the play *Much Ado about Nothing*.
- 1599-The Globe grants Shakespeare a financial share in the theatre; he writes *As You Like It*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Henry V*.
- 1600-1603- In three years, Shakespeare completes the following plays: *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, and *Othello*.
- 1601-*Hamlet* is thought to have been first performed.
- 1603-March 24, Queen Elizabeth I dies; her cousin, James VI of Scotland, becomes king of England and unites the two countries. He reigns as King James I of England until 1625.
- 1603-The Lord's Chamberlain's Men is renamed The King's Men and commissioned to perform at the court for James I; Shakespeare completes the play *Measure for Measure*.

- 1603-After King James I becomes leader of England, there is continual tension between Catholics and Protestants; Catholicism is actively disapproved of and suppressed by the state.
- 1604-1606-Shakespeare writes *Timon of Athens* and *King Lear*.
- 1606-1608-Throughout two years, Shakespeare writes *Macbeth*, *Pericles*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*.
- 1609-Shakespeare writes *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* in one year.
- 1610-1611-Shakespeare completes *The Tempest*.
- 1611-Shakespeare writes *The Two Noble Kinsmen* with John Fletcher, who would later become resident playwright for The King's Men after Shakespeare's death.
- 1611-James I dissolves the English parliament; the King James Bible is published in England, promoting Protestantism.
- 1613-William Shakespeare and John Fletcher (allegedly) write *The Famous History of the Life of King Henry VIII*.
- 1613-On June 29, The Globe Theatre is destroyed by a fire when a special effect involving a cannon goes wrong during a performance of *King Henry VIII*.

(1.5.86). However, Hamlet cannot bring himself to trust Gertrude while she is still Claudius' wife. He tries to sway her from Claudius' side when he entreats her:

O, throw away the worser part of it,
And live the purer with the other half.
Good night: but go not to mine uncle's bed;
Assume a virtue, if you have it not (3.4.159-162)

Gertrude does not listen to him, and continues to be faithful to Claudius. Her loyalty to her new husband seems greater than her loyalty to Hamlet's father and to Hamlet himself, proving to him that he cannot trust her.

Even a small breach of trust is enough to make Hamlet guarded. When Ophelia tells her father and brother of Hamlet's affection towards her, both Laertes and Polonius warn her to stop her involvement with him. Indeed Polonius goes so far as to say "I would not....Have you so slander any moment leisure,/ As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet" (1.3.132-135). She obeys both of their commands and does not talk to Hamlet for some time. Hamlet then sees how her loyalty lies with her family rather than with him. Although Ophelia may not have any ill-will against Hamlet, her behavior towards him is inconsistent. Because of his mother's actions, he is already wary of women and he proclaims, "Frailty, thy name is woman!" (1.2.146), dismissing Ophelia as weak and untrustworthy.

When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet's childhood friends, pay him a visit, he is initially glad to see them. Yet while Horatio traveled home to be at the King's funeral, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern claim their reason for leaving school is "To visit you, my lord; no other occasion" (2.2.271). Hamlet is clever enough to find it odd that they would visit him for no reason, so he inquires if Claudius is behind it. He senses that his two so-called friends are avoiding the question:

HAMLET

Were you not sent for? Is it your own inclining? Is it a free visitation? Come, deal justly with me: come, come; nay, speak.

GUILDENSTERN

What should we say, my lord?

HAMLET

Why, any thing, but to the purpose. You were sent for; and there is a kind of confession in your looks which your modesties have not craft enough to colour: I know the good king and queen have sent for you. (2.2.274-281)

Hamlet realizes that their allegiance is with Claudius, and does not trust them with any important information.

While almost all of Hamlet's closest friends and family members fail him, Horatio never speaks or acts in a way that causes Hamlet to distrust him. When Claudius and Gertrude show no courtesy for the King's death, Horatio is considerate of Hamlet's feelings and travels to pay his respects. When Ophelia confides in her father and brother, Horatio keeps his conversations with Hamlet confidential. Finally, when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern blindly follow the Claudius's wishes, Horatio is loyal only to Hamlet. Horatio proves himself to be an honest friend through kind acts of his own volition and by fulfilling Hamlet's requests.

Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever had a friend or family member betray you? Did you trust them again? How did you communicate after the fact?
2. What qualities does Horatio have that make him a good friend? Is Hamlet a good friend in return? What qualities do you look for in a good friend?
3. Is it possible to earn trust back once it has been lost? Why or why not? Reflect on a time that you had to earn someone's trust back, or that someone tried to regain your trust.

- 1614-The Globe Theatre is rebuilt after its destruction a year prior.
- 1616-William Shakespeare dies of old age and illness.
- 1623-The First Folio of Shakespeare's work is published by his fellow actors John Heminges and Henry Condell.
- 1870's- Sir Henry Irving plays Hamlet, bringing a sincerity to the character.
- 1899- Sarah Bernhardt takes on the role of Hamlet in Paris, London, and New York. She is also the first Hamlet on silent film.

Adolescence in *Hamlet*

By Ayla Kapiloff

When King Hamlet dies, his son Hamlet is thrown into a state of distress that can only be attributed to a son losing his father. Hamlet is without a role model, mentor, and father. The man who takes his father's position has stolen both the late King's crown and wife. The people and his family expect Hamlet to make this transition to the new King Claudius and honor the title. However, Hamlet is defiant toward his superiors, unable to make his own decisions, and ultimately fails to uphold his responsibilities as Prince of Denmark.

Over two months after the King's passing, Hamlet is still melancholy and will not recognize King Claudius as his father, stating that King Claudius is, "but no more like my father/ Than I to Hercules" (1.2.13). He wishes to leave Denmark and return to school in Wittenberg. Like many young adults, Hamlet wishes to leave the town where he grew up, saying, "Denmark's a prison" (2.2.53). However, Hamlet is not allowed to make his own decision. Both King Claudius and his mother, Queen Gertrude, entreat him to stay. Hamlet obediently stays in Denmark on his mother's wishes: "I shall in all my best obey you, madam" (1.2.12). He is bound by the times and his respect for his mother to stay in Denmark.



Hamlet. Costume by Fabio Toblini.

Although he stays, Hamlet's disposition worsens after seeing the ghost of his late father and learning the true nature of his demise. He becomes disrespectful and ornery, speaking rudely to his mother, the new King, Ophelia, and Laertes. Having lost his father, Hamlet wanders through life led only by the directions he is receiving from the ghost of his father. Hamlet prepares himself to confront his mother about her quick marriage to his father's brother. His anger over this is still burning and he tries to calm his rage before going to see her:



Laertes. Costume by Fabio Toblini.

O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom:
Let me be cruel, not unnatural:
I will speak daggers to her, but use none;
(3.1.79)

Despite his attempt to calm himself, Hamlet's rash response to a sound behind the closet results in him killing Lord Polonius. Queen Gertrude exclaims, "O, what a rash and bloody deed is this!" and yet Hamlet's temper is not tamed (3.3.85). He speaks those daggers to his mother and even goes as far as to wish that she were not his mother.

When Hamlet so forcefully returns from England to regain his place as the Prince of Denmark, he fails at obtaining the title. King Claudius has arranged for a duel between Laertes and Hamlet wherein Hamlet will be fatally wounded with a poisoned foil, or fencing blade. What results is a tragedy

where no one survives; Hamlet ultimately succumbs to his grief and is killed, having never fully sought the revenge his father's ghost requested, nor the honor and position his mother and new King commanded.

This behavior would be considered childish and adolescent in present-day society; in Hamlet's world, his superiors see him as an indecisive and weak Prince. King Claudius calls it "unmanly grief" (1.2.11) and goes as far as to comment that "madness in great ones must not unwatched go" (2.2.49). Without his father's guidance and support, Hamlet is left to his own devices. He struggles between doing what he believes is right (avenging the spirit of his father) and honoring his new parents' choices. This challenge and indecision ultimately lead to Hamlet's death. It is unknown whether Hamlet would have been a good Prince or not, but Fortinbras honors his royal potential by ending the play with this order:

Let four captains
Bear Hamlet, like a soldier, to the stage;
For he was likely, had he been put on,
To have proved most royal (5.2.138).

Questions for Discussion

1. Think about how Hamlet treats his mother, Queen Gertrude, and his new father, King Claudius. Do you think his behavior is justified? Why do you think Hamlet is behaving this way?
2. Consider the other characters of the play of Hamlet's generation including Laertes, Ophelia, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Do they behave more like adolescents or adults? Where in the play do you see proof of your answer?
3. As the Prince of Denmark, Hamlet was in line to become the next King. If the play had not ended as a tragedy, what kind of leader do you think Hamlet would have been? Use evidence from the play to support your response.
4. Think about teenagers and adolescents living in the 21st century. Do you think they have more or less responsibilities than Hamlet did? In what ways are their responsibilities the same and in what ways are they different?

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Speak the Speech! Language in *Hamlet*

By Aurelia Clunie

“Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue.”

-*Hamlet* 3.2.1-2

Meter = the arrangement of a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables to create rhythm in a verse

Foot = the basic unit of meter

Iamb = a metrical foot consisting of one unstressed followed by one stressed syllable

Trochee = a metrical foot consisting of one stressed followed by one unstressed syllable

Prose = common language resembling everyday speech, which has irregular rhythm and lacks metrical structure

Verse = text (song, poetry, or dramatic text) written in metrical lines; it may rhyme

Blank Verse = text (song, poetry, or dramatic text) written in iambic pentameter that does not rhyme

For over four hundred years, the language of Shakespeare’s plays has moved audiences, inspired actors, and baffled many. Shakespeare’s complex texts can be confusing at first, but can also be decoded and spoken by all. With a little work, everyone from third grade students to seasoned actors like Patrick Stewart can perform Shakespeare’s text with confidence.

Shakespeare did much of his writing in a form called *iambic pentameter*, in which each line of text contains ten alternately stressed syllables (five pairs/feet). There are five iambs in each line. A full line of iambic pentameter has the rhythm:

da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM

Or, for example:

- but SOFT what LIGHT through YONder WINdow BREAKS (Romeo, act 2, scene 2, *Romeo and Juliet*)
- A LITtle MORE than KIN, and LESS than KIND: (Hamlet, act 1, scene 2, *Hamlet*)

Some say this rhythm echoes the human heartbeat and is a naturally spoken rhythm in English. Actors generally do not speak it in a sing-song fashion, emphasizing the rhythm or meter, but are aware of it and allow it to influence which words are stressed in the context of a scene.

Shakespeare primarily wrote in blank verse for his tragedies and history plays. However, blank verse, like life, is not perfect. Sometimes Shakespeare’s lines have extra syllables, or are short some syllables. Many scholars and actors believe variation in blank verse offers insight into a character’s state of mind, emotional state, or reaction to what is happening onstage. Does he or she rush to get the whole line out? Does the character pause? If so, why? *Hamlet* is also a unique play because often characters speak partial or shared lines. One character may begin a line of iambic pentameter but not finish it, suggesting an extended pause. Or, another character may finish the line, indicating no pause at all. Here, after Horatio describes the ghost that looks like Hamlet’s father, Hamlet grills his friend for more information:

HAMLET

Did you not speak to it?

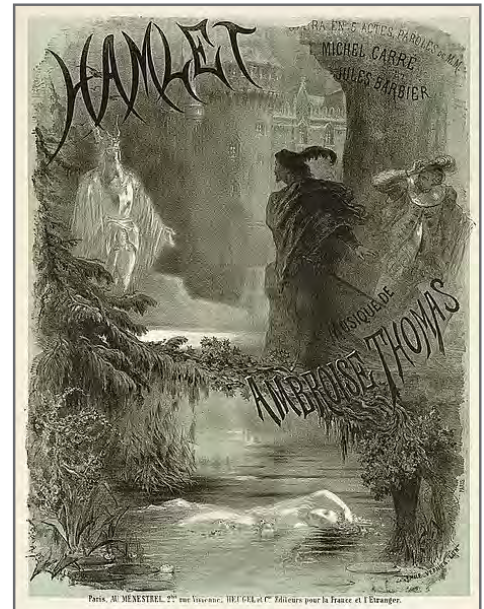
HORATIO

My lord, I did;
But answer made it none. Yet once methought
It lifted up its head and did address
Itself to motion, like as it would speak.
But even then the morning cock crew loud,
And at the sound it shrunk in haste away
And vanished from our sight.

HAMLET

'Tis very strange.

(1.2.207-209)



Poster for 1868 Australian opera adaptation of *Hamlet*.

Meet the Actress: Kate Forbes in *Hamlet*

By Aurelia Clunie

Often actors use these and other subtle clues in the text to determine how to play a specific moment. Hartford Stage Education Associate Aurelia Clunie turned to Kate Forbes, who plays Gertrude in our production of *Hamlet*, to explore her approach to Shakespeare's language and preparing for her role.

Aurelia Clunie: *How do you figure out what a character is saying?*

Kate Forbes: I read it out loud over and over, to get a sense of the way the words sound. Sometimes the character uses a lot of hard consonants in their speech; sometimes long languid vowels. Reading out loud helps me hear the rhythm that Shakespeare wrote for me to find. After I experiment with the words out loud, then I turn to "sense." Often by then I've figured out what I'm saying, mostly, but I always read the editor's notes, and look up any word I'm not absolutely sure of.

Another "trick" I use to explore the text: I walk the text as I speak it, changing direction a) when there is a punctuation mark of any kind then b) changing direction at the end of every verse line. Both exercises teach me something about character, because in Shakespeare, character is very connected to language. Sometimes the language is smooth and even, sometimes jagged and broken. I try to go to the language before nailing down "what it means" because I'll often find something surprising in the sounds of words and the choice of words, especially the rhythm or lack of it, in the blank verse.

AC: *How do you approach speaking verse differently than speaking prose?*

KF: Often we try to make Shakespeare sound "modern" by speaking his verse as if it were prose. I do understand the temptation! I try to think of my character choosing to express herself in 10 syllable bursts...sometimes there are extra syllables, sometimes less, and this is a clue! It's not accidental where Shakespeare chose to break the verse line. For example, here's a cool extra syllable on the standard iambic pentameter: "To be or not to be that is the question" (2.2.160) That extra hanging



Actress Kate Forbes.

syllable leaves the thought dangling in mid air; it feels uneven, unbalanced, which is how Hamlet perhaps is feeling.

Prose is often used for the “comic” characters, but not only for them! The gravedigger scene and Hamlet’s “advice to the players” are both in prose. Prose sounds like everyday speech. It can be spoken quite quickly, and part of its appeal lies in the different pace a prose scene or speech will have from the rest of the play.

AC: What advice do you give your students who are approaching Shakespearean text for the first time?

KF: Love the words. Read out loud....first stress the nouns, then stress the verbs, then stress the adjectives. Be bold and brave, because the language is, even when the characters are feeling hurt, anguished, afraid, in love, uncertain! His characters love to express themselves, and are very specific in their thoughts. Rise to the language, don’t pull the language down to you. Think of it like the best spoken word poetry, rap...the characters use words actively.

AC: Anything else you would like to add? What are your thoughts on Gertrude as you begin this process?

KF: The big challenge of the part I’m playing this time is how little my character says. Her mystery lies in what she does not say. Claudius has a lot of double-speak. Gertrude is interesting in what she doesn’t say--her character seems mostly described by others...Gertrude is the most hidden, the least articulate!

AC: What do you love most about performing Shakespeare?

KF: I love performing Shakespeare because I get to speak so powerfully and expressively, in a way I don’t ever get to in real life. I’m not the best speaker as just myself...speaking Shakespeare’s language allows me to touch the very best (and worst) parts of my humanity. Words have power in his plays...they can be tools of persuasion, weapons to wounds, rhymes to love.



Kate Forbes as Lady Macbeth and Matthew Rauch as Macbeth in Hartford Stage’s 2013 production of *Macbeth*. Photo by T. Charles Erickson.

Questions for Discussion

1. Many of Hamlet’s speeches are in blank verse; however in act 2, scene 2, Hamlet’s “losing all my mirth” speech is in prose. Look at the text below and read it in the context of the greater scene. Why do you think Shakespeare chose to use prose here?

HAMLET

I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o’erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me: no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so. (2.2.76-93)

2. In this excerpt from act 3, scene 4, Hamlet confronts his mother about her marriage to Claudius. What clues from the text suggest how each of them feel in the scene?

POLONIUS hides behind the arras. Enter HAMLET.

HAMLET

Now, mother, what's the matter?

QUEEN GERTRUDE

Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

HAMLET

Mother, you have my father much offended.

QUEEN GERTRUDE

Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.

HAMLET

Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.

QUEEN GERTRUDE

Why, how now, Hamlet!

HAMLET

What's the matter now?

QUEEN GERTRUDE

Have you forgot me?

HAMLET

No, by the rood, not so:

You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife;

And—would it were not so!—you are my mother.

QUEEN GERTRUDE

Nay, then, I'll set those to you that can speak.

HAMLET

Come, come, and sit you down; you shall not budge;

You go not till I set you up a glass

Where you may see the inmost part of you.

QUEEN GERTRUDE

What wilt thou do? thou wilt not murder me?

Help, help, ho!

LORD POLONIUS

[Behind] What, ho! help!

HAMLET

[Drawing] How now! a rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead!

Makes a pass through the arras.

LORD POLONIUS

[Behind] O, I am slain!

Falls and dies.

QUEEN GERTRUDE

O me, what hast thou done?

HAMLET

Nay, I know not. Is it the king?

QUEEN GERTRUDE

O, what a rash and bloody deed is this!

HAMLET

A bloody deed! almost as bad, good mother,

As kill a king, and marry with his brother.

QUEEN GERTRUDE

As kill a king!

HAMLET

Ay, lady, 'twas my word.

3. In act 3, scene 2, Hamlet gives one of the actors extra lines for the play that will be performed for the royal court. Hamlet instructs the actor how to perform the part. Read the passage below, then paraphrase, or write in your own words, Hamlet's guidelines for an actor. Then, write your own guidelines for good acting.

HAMLET

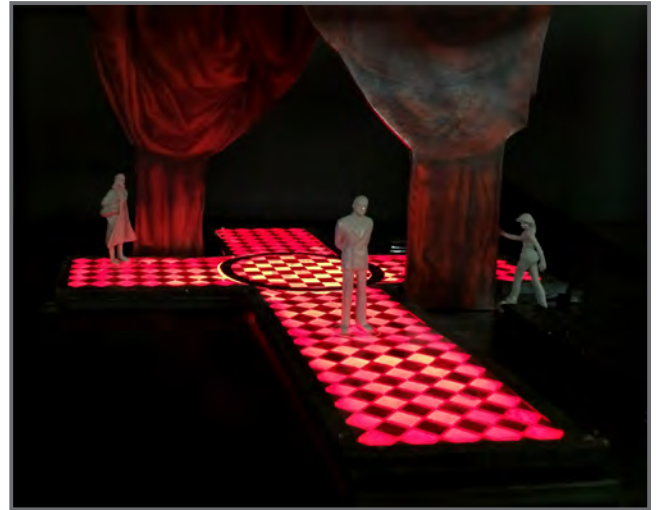
Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand thus, but use all gently, for in the very torrent, tempest, and (as I may say) whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. Oh, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise. I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant. It out-Herods Herod. Pray you, avoid it. Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now this overdone or come tardy off, though it make the unskillful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve, the censure of the which one must in your allowance o'erweigh a whole theatre of others. Oh, there be players that I have seen play and heard others praise (and that highly), not to speak it profanely, that, neither having th' accent of Christians nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably. (3.2. 190-233)

For more interviews with *Hamlet* actors and crew, videos, a list of phrases Shakespeare invented that we still use today, and more, visit <http://www.hartfordstage.org/stagenotes/hamlet> to see Hartford Stage's *StageNotes* online magazine.

Religion in Elizabethan England

by Aurelia Clunie

Queen Elizabeth I was an incredibly popular queen whose reign is remembered as a “golden age” of culture and growth even during foreign and domestic challenges. The Elizabethan Era, during which Shakespeare lived and wrote, is also known for Sir Francis Drake’s exploration of the “new world,” the English defeat of the Spanish Armada (a naval campaign to invade and bring Roman Catholicism back to England), Sir Walter Raleigh’s colonial exploration, the blossoming of theatre and poetry in England, and setting the stage for English empire and colonization. Yet it was also a time marked by war, economic depression, and complex spiritual and political conflict. Deep tensions between Protestants and Catholics came from England’s recent departure from the Roman Catholic Church, initiated by Elizabeth’s father, King Henry VIII.



Hamlet set design by Darko Tresnjak.

Unlike America, England at the time had no separation between church and state. Traditionally, the country was ruled politically by the king and spiritually by the Roman Catholic Church. However, Shakespeare’s was the first generation in which the monarch, rather than the Pope, served as the country’s spiritual head.

The shift to Protestantism came shortly before Shakespeare’s birth, during King Henry VIII’s rule. Henry desperately wanted a male heir, but had only one daughter, Mary, with his wife Catherine of Aragon. Henry decided to branch off from the Roman Catholic Church in order to divorce Catherine and, in 1533, marry Anne Boleyn. This spawned the birth of the establishment of the Church of England, of which the King was head, and created tensions between the Roman Catholic Church and England. Yet Anne Boleyn also had a daughter, Elizabeth, and when she did not have a son, Henry had her executed in 1536 on charges of treason. Henry went on to marry four more times, but only his marriage to Jane Seymour, who died in childbirth, produced a son, Edward VI.

Edward VI assumed the throne at the age of nine. He reigned as a Protestant king and bolstered the strength of the Protestant Church in England. Edward introduced the Book of Common Prayer (and with it English, rather than Latin, services), did away with stained glass in churches and Roman Catholic statues, and allowed English clergy to marry. However, Edward was never very healthy and died of tuberculosis when he was only fifteen years old.



Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I by Nicholas Hilliard. Circa 1575.

Edward VI was succeeded by his half-sister, Mary I, who ruled for five years, from 1553-1558. Mary was a devout Roman Catholic and began reinstating portions of the Roman Catholic Church. During her reign, she burned over 300 Protestant heretics. Heresy, or believing in a religion other than the one recognized by the crown, was both a spiritual and state crime comparable to treason. Mary married Phillip, King of Spain, in 1554, in hopes of producing an heir to succeed her and complete England’s conversion back to a Roman Catholic state. However, the couple had no children, and Elizabeth, her half-sister, became queen upon Mary’s death in 1558.

With Queen Elizabeth on the throne, the pendulum swung back toward Protestantism. In efforts to quell sectarian violence, Elizabeth was lenient toward practicing Catholics’, however, specific laws, such as fining those who did not attend church, kept the Church of England firmly in place. Freedom

of religion was assumed as long as laws were obeyed, but this did prevent Catholics from worshipping openly, and some sought to rise up against persecution. During her reign, Catholic factions, supported by Catholic countries including Spain, threatened the Queen's reign and even life.

Throughout this period, everyday life in England could be quite complicated. A holiday on the calendar one year might be revoked the next, only to be added a few years later. A person's religious practices were bound tightly to his or her political leanings. Landholders who developed property on what was once a monastery might have faced opposition from those seeking to reclaim the land. King James I, who succeeded Elizabeth and commissioned the King James Bible, would also experience a threat to his life in the infamous Gunpowder Plot—a conspiracy by a Catholic faction to blow up parliament while the King would be present. Father Henry Garnet, a Jesuit priest, was known for claiming confidentiality and withholding knowledge of the conspiracy confessed to him by followers, an act for which he was found guilty of treason and executed. Some Elizabethans were strong supporters of the Protestant reformation, some were staunchly Catholic, some were ambivalent, and some still practiced a stricter form of Christianity called Puritanism.

Shakespeare, along with all Elizabethans, would have been well aware of the ebbs and flows of this power struggle, and Shakespeare often referenced religion and its effects on culture and politics in his plays. In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare's characterization of Malvolio pokes fun at a strict Puritan lifestyle. The porter's speech in *Macbeth* is commentary on the act of equivocation, or not telling the whole truth in order to avoid incriminating oneself or others. Father Garnet's "equivocation" during the Gunpowder Plot trial had grave consequences. In *Hamlet*, Claudius holds a more Protestant view of grief customs and observances while Hamlet is more conservative, observing a more Catholic lifestyle. While Hamlet wears black and insists on mourning traditionally for his father, Claudius encourages Hamlet to move on from the funeral and celebrate his marriage to the Queen:

CLAUDIUS

Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,
To give these mourning duties to your father;
But, you must know, your father lost a father;
...'tis unmanly grief;
It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,
A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,
An understanding simple and unschool'd:

(1.2.87-89, 94-97)

Shakespeare's audiences would have been familiar with the Bible and Christianity, regardless of where they fell on the religious spectrum. While Shakespeare often commented on current events regarding the Protestant/Catholic debate within the action of his plays, his personal religious leanings are unknown. His plays, however, do give a clear picture of the religious climate in Elizabethan England and its effect on daily life.

Questions for Discussion

1. Consider the separation of church and state in the United States. Research the origins of religious freedom in the U.S. and reflect on why religious freedom was important to the founders of the nation.
2. Reflect on where we see sectarian violence in the world today. Research the history of the Sunni/Shia split in Islam and reflect on how it affects current Sunni and Shia conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and Pakistan.
3. Do your beliefs and values affect the decisions you make in everyday life? How do your beliefs and values (religious or otherwise) affect what you buy, where you spend your time, and who you support politically? How do Hamlet's beliefs and values affect his actions? How do Claudius' beliefs and values affect his?

Suggested Activities for Teaching *Hamlet*

Writing Activities

1) Hamlet's Soliloquies

Many of Hamlet's thoughts are shared in the form of a soliloquy. He is alone on stage and speaking his thoughts aloud even though no one else can hear him. These private monologues often occur before Hamlet makes a big decision, or when he is debating a difficult matter.

Read the three soliloquies listed below then try your hand at writing your own soliloquy as yourself. Choose a topic you are passionate about and a matter in which you have a strong opinion. Use the soliloquy to spur your thoughts into action, to debate two given choices, or to analyze a situation. When you are ready, perform your soliloquy for a friend!

so-lil-o-quy

noun

1. An act of speaking one's thoughts aloud when by oneself and regardless of any hearers, especially by a character in a play.

Act 1, Scene 2

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!...

Act 2, Scene 2

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!...

Act 3, Scene 1

To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?...



Statue of Hamlet with Yorick's skull, Gower Memorial in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. Bronze sculpture: Lord Ronal Gower. Circa 1888. Photo by Immanuel Giel.

2) The Play's the Thing

Hamlet requests the visiting players put on the play "The Murder of Gonzago" for his mother and King Claudius. His hope is that the King will find the story too like his own and by his reaction to the play, prove himself guilty of the late King Hamlet's murder. Hamlet's plan works and the King is disturbed by the show, stopping the story early.

Think about other instances where Hamlet might use the players to send a message. There are several other characters who Hamlet distrusts. What else does he need to know? Once you have decided, write the script for the players that tests your theory. Some questions Hamlet may have could include:

- Are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern truly Hamlet's friends? Or are they conspiring with Queen Gertrude and King Claudius behind Hamlet's back?

- Does Ophelia love him? Is she playing hard to get or is she truly uninterested?
- Is the King's Ghost real? Or is it a figment of Hamlet's imagination?
- How did Queen Gertrude truly feel about the late King Hamlet and how does she truly feel about King Claudius now? Is it all about power? Or is there love, too?

Acting Activities (Part 2)

1) The Play's the Thing

In a small group, rehearse and perform one of the plays from Writing Activity #2. The playwright can also serve as the director, assigning roles and explaining the goal of his or her script. The remaining group members should be the "players" of the play. Make sure each player understands the character in Hamlet's life he or she is portraying. Rehearse the play and perform for the rest of the class. See if your classmates can guess what Hamlet is trying to do with this script.

2) The Mighty "O"

Shakespeare is known for including few stage directions in his scripts. He does not specify the movement on stage or even when characters should enter and exit a scene. Even his text, the characters' lines, gives the actor and director room for multiple interpretations. Take the letter "O" at the beginning of a line, for example. The delivery of this simple syllable can determine the character's mood and emotion, and therefore the meaning of the entire line. Below is a list of emotions and below that a list of Shakespeare's lines. Play with matching different emotions to different lines and see how different the meaning can be!

Despair	Excited
Adoring	Hysterical
Angry	Disappointed
Joy	Distraught
Exhausted	Fear
Misery	Horror
Regret	Sorrow
Confused	Loathing

O, for a stone-bow, to hit him in the eye!

O, I am out of breath in this fond chase!

O, I am fortune's fool!

O, speak again, bright angel!

O lamentable day!

O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!

O me, O me! My child, my only life.

O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?

O Weary night, O long and tedious night.

O me! You juggler! You canker-blossom!

O, I am slain!

O gentle Romeo, If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully.

O Helena, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine!

O time! thou must untangle this, not I.

Design Activities

1) The King's Ghost

One of the biggest challenges in designing *Hamlet* is how to create the Ghost of the late King Hamlet. He has lines, so the Ghost must have a voice, and more than just one person must be able to see him. What would you do if you had to design the Ghost? Would you have an actor play the ghost? Would your ghost fly? Would his or her voice be amplified or distorted? Draw a detailed design of your ghost – including costume, makeup, and any special effects and technical elements. Use the internet to research past designs from professional productions of *Hamlet*.

2) Ophelia's Tunes

Lord Polonius' daughter Ophelia sings songs in the play *Hamlet*. She sings after she has lost her father and there is much discussion as to her stability and state of mind when she is singing these songs. Although Shakespeare has written these lyrics, he does not provide the actor with sheet music. Think about Ophelia and what you think is going on with her when she is singing these songs. Next, compose a tune to accompany these lyrics. Would it be sung a cappella? Would you have a single violinist or flautist accompany her? What about the feel of the song? Is she melancholy and weary? Or is she troubled and confused? Is she trying to cheer the group up? Think about the message you are adding to the lyrics with your music.

OPHELIA (Act 4, Scene 5)

(Sings) *How should I your true love know
From another one?*

*By his cockle hat and staff,
And his sandal shoon.*

He is dead and gone, lady,

He is dead and gone,

At his head a grass-green turf,

At his heels a stone.

Larded with sweet flowers

Which bewept to the grave did go

With true-love showers.

OPHELIA (Act 4, Scene 5)

To-morrow is Saint Valentine's day,

All in the morning betime,

And I a maid at your window,

To be your Valentine.

Then up he rose, and donn'd his clothes,

And dupp'd the chamber-door;

Let in the maid, that out a maid

Never departed more.

By Gis and by Saint Charity,

*Alack, and fie for shame!
 Young men will do't, if they come to't;
 By cock, they are to blame.
 Quoth she, before you tumbled me,
 You promised me to wed.
 So would I ha' done, by yonder sun,
 An thou hadst not come to my bed.*

OPHELIA (Act 4, Scene 5)

*They bore him barefaced on the bier;
 And in his grave rain'd many a tear:--
 And will he not come again?
 And will he not come again?
 No, no, he is dead,
 Go to thy deathbed.
 He never will come again.
 His beard was as white as snow,
 All flaxen was his poll.
 He is gone, he is gone,
 And we cast away moan,
 God ha' mercy on his soul.—*



Painting of Ophelia by Arthur Hughes circa 1851.

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