

Hamlet

by William Shakespeare

A Shakespeare in the Ruins Study Guide

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TO BE OR NOT TO BE



HAMLET

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Introduction

**To sum up:
your father, whom you love, dies,
you are his heir,
you come back to find that hardly was the corpse cold
before his young brother popped on to his throne and into his sheets,
thereby offending both legal and natural practice.
Now why exactly
are you behaving in this extraordinary manner?**

These few lines spoken by Rosencrantz to Guildenstern in Tom Stoppard's modern absurdist play, *Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead*, just about cover it all.

Well, not really, of course, but they do get to the heart of Hamlet's main problem. They don't, however, explain the Ghost. And that becomes another problem because even though it looks like Hamlet's father, how can Hamlet be sure it really *is* his father? Perhaps it's just a demon in disguise, trying to "play" Hamlet and use him as a tool to create chaos in the very orderly Elizabethan world...

Hamlet is "the first of [Shakespeare's] great tragedies" (Wood 222), and it has everything: "plot, action and speed; intrigue, love and murder" (Wood 239). An uncut theatrical presentation can take up to four-and-a-half hours, but that was long for Shakespeare's audiences even in his own time.

What you and your students are soon to experience is a specially scripted production from *Shakespeare In The Ruins*' "Stripped Down" program, created especially for students and teachers and brought directly to their schools.

The running time of the play is approximately 60 minutes. The time period is the 1950's. With only four actors, we can expect some creative staging to be sure. According to director, Sarah Constible, "R & G are dead. So are Osric and Fortinbras. And, alas, poor Yorick...Horatio has polio...The 1950's setting helps to contrast Hamlet's newly (as far as he knows) dysfunctional family with the societal standard of the dawn of the 'nuclear family', making him appear even more isolated/alienated."

This study guide is meant to give you a choice of activities to use with your students whether you have only a few days or the luxury of several weeks or more. As I write this, my students and I are pondering the soliloquy which begins,

“O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!” (2.2.577), in which Hamlet bemoans the fact that this one actor, who merely recites some memorized words, is able to emote with great intensity and even “tears in his eyes” while Hamlet, “the son of a dear father murdered”, can conjure no more than another round of angst. And on his way out of class, one of my students, a bit of an actor himself, let me know that he was working hard to prepare his recitation of “To be, or not to be” for the next day. What more can a teacher ask?

Near the end of Act 1, Hamlet says to Horatio, “There are more things in heaven and earth...than are dreamt of in your philosophy” (187-188). This is not a play for only our best and brightest students, but for them all. I have found that every year, even my weakest students are willing to give it a try, and although they need some coaching, once they start, they want to see it through to the end.

Thanks to Kenneth Clark and Ray Grynol for their excellent notes, activities and suggestions; and thanks to Allison Kvern, a Grade 12 reader and thinker extraordinaire, for her suggestions on internet links.

The play's the thing...

Enjoy the show!

Pamela Lockman for *Shakespeare In The Ruins*, October 2009

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Hamlet Commentary from Folger On-line

Hamlet is the most popular of Shakespeare's plays for readers and theater audiences. Superficially, it follows the well-worn path of a "revenge tragedy." This popular type of play centered on a heroic figure—in this case, Hamlet, prince of Denmark—and his quest for vengeance against his father's murderer—here, Hamlet's uncle Claudius, now the king of Denmark in his dead brother's place. Much of the play's enduring fascination, however, lies in the uncertainties that Shakespeare chose to weave through this familiar plot. In the end, *Hamlet* is not only Shakespeare's most popular work, but also his most puzzling.

Many questions about the play continue to fascinate readers and playgoers. What is this Ghost that appears to Hamlet? Is it Hamlet's murdered father returned from the everlasting fire to demand justice upon his murderer? Is it a "goblin damned"—that is, a demon bent on claiming Hamlet's soul by tempting him to assassinate his king? Or is the Ghost "a spirit of health," an angelic messenger revealing to Hamlet that the young man's mission in life is to cleanse the kingdom of Denmark of its corrupt king?

And what happens to Hamlet after the Ghost commands that the throne of Denmark be cleansed? Does Hamlet actually go mad, becoming unhinged by the accusation that his uncle murdered his father or by the ugly picture the Ghost paints of Hamlet's lustful mother? Or does Hamlet merely pretend to be mad, pretend so well that he makes us wonder if we can tell the difference between sanity and madness? Why is he so hostile to women, both to his mother and to the woman whom he once courted and whom he claims to have loved dearly? Why does he wait so long to confirm the guilt of the king after the Ghost has accused the king of murder? And once he is convinced that the king is a murderer, why does Hamlet not act immediately?

And what about Gertrude? Was she unfaithful to her husband during his lifetime? Was she complicit in his murder? What does she come to believe about Hamlet's madness? And about her new husband?

Beyond such questions about the play and its characters lie deeper issues about the rightness of revenge, about how to achieve an ethical life, and about how to live in a world where tears of sorrow, loving smiles, and friendly words are all suspect because all are "actions that a man might *play*." Hamlet's world is bleak and cold because almost no one and nothing can be trusted. But his world, and Hamlet himself, continue to draw us to them, speaking to every generation of its own problems and its own yearnings. It is a play that seems particularly pertinent today—just as it has seemed particularly pertinent to any number of generations before us.

Shakespeare is thought to have written *Hamlet* in 1599–1601. It was published as a quarto in 1603. In 1604–05 a second quarto containing another, much fuller text superseded this first printing. The Folio version of 1623 is much closer to this second quarto than to the first, but differs from the second by hundreds of lines. There are thus three texts of the play. A major source for the plot may have been an earlier Hamlet play, mentioned in contemporary documents, but now lost. Shakespeare also may have drawn on several other contemporary works, including accounts of drinking at the Danish court and of "melancholy."

Adapted from the New Folger Library Shakespeare edition, edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine. © 1992 Folger Shakespeare Library

<http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=916>

Main Characters

The Ghost	of Hamlet's father, previous King of Denmark and husband to Gertrude
Hamlet	Prince of Denmark, son of the late King Hamlet and Queen Gertrude.
Queen Gertrude	Widow of King Hamlet, now married to Claudius
King Claudius	Brother to the late King Hamlet
Ophelia	Hamlet's (sometimes) love interest
Laertes	Ophelia's brother
Polonius	Father of Ophelia and Laertes, councillor to King Claudius
Horatio	Hamlet's friend and confidant

Synopsis

(Adapted from *Hamlet By William Shakespeare*, edited by Barbara A. Mowatt and Paul Werstine. New York: Washington Square Press New Folger Edition, 1992.

ACT 1

1.1 On the guard's platform at Elsinore, Horatio waits with Barnardo and Marcellus to question a ghost that has twice before appeared. The Ghost, in the form of the late King Hamlet of Denmark, appears but will not speak. Horatio decides to tell his fellow student, Prince Hamlet, about the Ghost's appearance.

1.2 In an audience chamber in Elsinore, Claudius, the new king of Denmark, holds court. After thanking his subjects for their recent support, he dispatches ambassadors to Norway to halt a threatened attack from Fortinbras. He gives Laertes permission to return to France but denies Hamlet's request to return to the university in Wittenberg. Hamlet, mourning for his father's death, is left alone to vent his despair at what he regards as his mother's all too hasty marriage to his uncle, Claudius. The audience learns that the marriage took place "within a month" of the former king's death.

Horatio, Barnardo, and Marcellus arrive and tell Hamlet about the Ghost. Hamlet, aroused by the news, agrees to join them that night.

1.3 In Polonius's chambers, Laertes says good-bye to his sister, Ophelia, and tells her not to trust Hamlet's promises of love. Polonius joins them, sends Laertes off, then echoes Laertes's warning to Ophelia, finally ordering her not to see Hamlet again.

1.4 While Claudius drinks away the night, Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus are visited by the Ghost. It signals to Hamlet. Hamlet's friends try to stop him from following the Ghost, but Hamlet will not be held back.

1.5 The Ghost tells Hamlet a tale of horror. Saying that he is the spirit of Hamlet's father, he demands that Hamlet avenge King Hamlet's murder at the hands of Claudius. Hamlet, horrified, vows to "remember" and swears his friends to secrecy about what they have seen.

ACT 2

2.1 Polonius sends his servant Reynaldo to Paris to question Laertes's acquaintances. Ophelia enters, deeply disturbed about a visit she has just had from an apparently mad Hamlet. Polonius decides that Hamlet has become insane because Ophelia is refusing to see him. Polonius rushes off to tell the king.

2.2 Claudius and Gertrude set Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two boyhood friends of Hamlet, to spy on him to discover the cause of his apparent madness. After the returned ambassadors announce their success in stopping Fortinbras's planned invasion of Denmark, Polonius reports his "discovery" that Hamlet is mad for love. Claudius is not persuaded but agrees to join Polonius in spying on Hamlet.

When Hamlet himself enters, he is confronted first by Polonius and then by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, whom he quickly identifies as Claudius's spies. As they talk, a company of touring actors enters. Hamlet persuades one of them to deliver a speech, and recognizes, to his shame, that he has shown less intensity in avenging his father's murder than the actor has done in performance. Hamlet hopes that, when the players stage *The Murder of Gonzago* for the court, he can determine whether Claudius is guilty of King Hamlet's death.

ACT 3

3.1 After Rosencrantz and Guildenstern report their failure to find the cause of Hamlet's madness, Polonius places Ophelia where he and Claudius may secretly observe a meeting between her and Hamlet. Hamlet is at first courteous to Ophelia, but suddenly he turns on her: he denies having loved her, asks where her father is, attacks womankind, and tells her she should enter a nunnery. (This section is often referred to as "The Nunnery Scene".) After Hamlet exits, Claudius decides that Hamlet's erratic behaviour is not caused by love and announces a plan to send Hamlet on an embassy to England. Polonius persuades Claudius to take no action until Gertrude talks with Hamlet after the play, which is scheduled for that evening.

3.2 Hamlet gives direction to the actors and asks Horatio to help him observe Claudius's reaction to the play. When the [members of the royal] court arrive, Hamlet makes bawdy and bitter comments to Ophelia. The traveling actors perform, in the dumb show and then with dialogue, a story that includes many elements of Claudius's alleged seduction of Gertrude and murder of King Hamlet. At the moment that the Player King is murdered in his garden by his nephew, Claudius stops the play and rushes out. Hamlet is exuberant that the Ghost's word has been proved true. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern return to tell Hamlet that Claudius is furious and that Gertrude wishes to see Hamlet at once in her sitting room. Hamlet promises himself that he will not harm her, though he will "speak daggers."

3.3 Claudius orders Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to take Hamlet to England immediately. Polonius arrives to tell Claudius of his plans to spy on Hamlet's conversation with Gertrude. Left alone, Claudius reveals to the audience his remorse for killing his brother, and he tries to pray. Hamlet comes upon him kneeling and draws his sword, but then stops to think that if he kills Claudius at prayer, Claudius will go to heaven. Hamlet decides to kill Claudius when the king is committing a sin so that Claudius will instead go to hell. After Hamlet leaves, Claudius rises, saying that he has been unable to pray.

3.4 In Gertrude's room, Polonius hides behind a tapestry. Hamlet's entrance so alarms Gertrude that she cries out for help. Polonius echoes her cry, and Hamlet, thinking Polonius to be Claudius, stabs him to death. Hamlet then verbally attacks his mother for marrying Claudius. In the middle of Hamlet's attack, the Ghost returns to remind Hamlet that his real purpose is to avenge his father's death. Gertrude cannot see the Ghost and pities Hamlet's apparent madness. After the Ghost exits, Hamlet urges Gertrude to abandon Claudius's bed. He then tells her about Claudius's plan to send him to England and reveals his suspicions that the journey is a plot against him, which he resolves to counter violently. He exits dragging out Polonius's body. (This is often referred to as the "Queen's Closet Scene".)

ACT 4

4.1 Gertrude reports Polonius's death to Claudius, who sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to find Hamlet and recover the body.

4.2 Hamlet refuses to tell Rosencrantz and Guildenstern where he has put Polonius's body.

4.3 Hamlet is brought to Claudius, who tells him that he is to leave immediately for England. Alone, at the end of this scene, Claudius discloses to the audience that he is sending Hamlet to his death.

4.4 Fortinbras and his army march across Hamlet's path on their way to Poland. Hamlet finds in Fortinbras's vigorous activity a model for himself in avenging his father's murder; Hamlet resolves upon bloody action.

4.5 Reports reach Gertrude that Ophelia is mad. Ophelia enters singing about death and betrayal. After Ophelia has gone, Claudius agonizes over her madness and over the stir created by the return of an angry Laertes. When Laertes breaks in on Claudius and Gertrude, Claudius asserts his innocence with regard to Polonius's death. The reappearance of the mad Ophelia is devastating to Laertes.

4.6 Horatio is given a letter from Hamlet telling of the prince's boarding of a pirate ship and his subsequent return to Denmark.

4.7 Claudius, in conversation with Laertes, also gets a letter from Hamlet announcing the prince's return. Claudius enlists Laertes's willing help in devising another plot against Hamlet's life. Laertes agrees to kill Hamlet with a poisoned rapier in a fencing match. If he fails, Claudius will give Hamlet a poisoned cup of wine. Gertrude interrupts their plotting to announce that Ophelia has drowned.

ACT 5

5.1 Hamlet, returned from his journey, enters a graveyard with Horatio where a gravedigger is singing as he digs. Hamlet tries to find out who the grave is for and meditates on the skulls that are being dug up. A funeral procession approaches. Hamlet soon realizes that the corpse is Ophelia's. When Laertes in his grief leaps into her grave and curses Hamlet as the cause of Ophelia's death, Hamlet comes forward. He and Laertes struggle, with Hamlet protesting his own love and grief for Ophelia.

5.2 In the hall of the castle, Hamlet tells Horatio how he discovered the king's plot against him and how he turned the tables on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Osric enters to ask, on Claudius's behalf, that Hamlet fence with Laertes. Hamlet agrees to the contest, despite his misgivings.

Hamlet is winning the match when Gertrude drinks from the poisoned cup that Claudius has prepared for Hamlet. Laertes then wounds Hamlet with the poisoned rapier. In the scuffle that follows, Hamlet forces an exchange of rapiers, and Hamlet wounds Laertes. As Gertrude dies, Laertes, himself dying, discloses his and Claudius's plot against Hamlet. Hamlet kills Claudius. Before Hamlet dies, he asks Horatio to tell the full story that has led to these deaths and names Fortinbras heir to the Danish throne. After Hamlet's death, Fortinbras arrives, claims the crown, and orders a military funeral for Hamlet.

Before the Play...

1. Here are some questions and ideas for students to talk about in pairs or small groups, or to write about in a journal, and then to share in class if they (and you) are comfortable:

Do you believe in ghosts? People in Shakespeare's audiences did, but they couldn't be sure of whether the ghost was actually a loved one coming from Purgatory to warn them or to complete some unfinished business, or whether the ghost was a demon in disguise, trying to create chaos in the world for his boss, the devil. Can you imagine Hamlet's dilemma when the supposed ghost of his dead father tells him to "revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" (1.5.31)?

Imagine: You really like this boy, but your brother has warned you that he has "other" things on his mind, and your father has told you to return all his letters and gifts. What's a girl to do?

Imagine: You really like this girl, but in order to continue your secret investigation into your father's death, you need to pretend that you're crazy and tell her that you never really loved her at all. What's a boy to do?

Imagine: You are really, REALLY, **REALLY** mad at your mother for re-marrying so soon after your father's death, but your father's ghost has told you not to harm her. What's a son to do?

In what ways are men and women different in their ideas about love? Their approaches to it? Their ideas about and approaches to the opposite sex?

How much do the relationships and behaviours of our parents influence and impact upon us?

2. Read Kenneth Clark's notes (attached) on antecedent action, the Elizabethan World View, the Great Chain of Being, ghosts, Renaissance men and women, and the religious crises of 16th century Britain.

Students will appreciate the information which will help them better understand Hamlet's dilemma with the ghost and his hesitation in avenging his father's murder.

Antecedent Action:

- 30 years before the action of the play, the old king of Norway challenged the old king of Denmark, Hamlet, to do battle over disputed territory.
- old Danish king, Hamlet killed old Fortinbras and took land that had been in dispute.
- 30 years later Fortinbras' son, Young Fortinbras, plans to take back the land lost by his father.
- Fortinbras is prince of Norway because his father's kingdom fell to his uncle when Fortinbras was a baby. Fortinbras gathers an unauthorized army to invade Denmark without the knowledge of his bedridden uncle.
- 1 month before the action of the play, old Hamlet of Denmark died. He had been sleeping in the orchard when he was bitten by a poisonous snake. This statement is according to his brother, Claudius, who found him.
- Hamlet was away at the University of Wittenberg when his father died. The crown was given to Claudius.
- Queen Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, had been married to his father for over 30 years but married Claudius soon after her husband's funeral.
- Hamlet doesn't approve because:
 - he doesn't like Claudius
 - he feels the marriage occurred too soon after his father's death.
 - he feels the snake story is rather suspicious.
- Allusion to Garden of Eden.

The Elizabethan World View

- Theocentric -- religion centred life governed by religion.
- highly ordered. Fixed system of hierarchies (Great Chain of Being)
- there is a place for everything.
- For each order of entities in the universe, there is an individual entity who has authority over the others.

Great Chain of Being

Deities	God Christ Holy Spirit
Angels	Archangels Angels
Humanity	Kings Nobles Peasants
Animals	Lion other animals
Elements	Fire Air Earth Water

- Just as there is order, there are forces to destroy this order
- one angel challenged the primacy of God.
- Lucifer and a band of rebel angels attempt to organize in order to end the superiority of God in Heaven.
- God cast Lucifer and his followers into a lake of fire. Lucifer decides to rule in Hell.
- since he can't fight God directly, Lucifer decides to take revenge on God's creations.
- The way to create chaos in the universe is for individuals to attempt to rise in their position.
- The best way to achieve this is to entice one to try and get one to try to rise in his position. eg) Nobles who want to be King. The removal of God's appointed King undermines the order of the universe, and the new king becomes answerable to Satan.
- at certain times, Chaos is more easily brought into the world.

Ghosts:

- Roman Catholics believed that ghosts were the souls of dead individuals who could return from Purgatory if they had business to take care of. (atonement, etc.)
- Because Protestants did not believe in Purgatory, they believed that ghosts were the devil in disguise or demons whose jobs were to convince people to commit violent acts and disrupt the order of the universe.
- Shakespeare's audience would be divided on this matter. His characters are frightened when they see a ghost.
- The most heinous crime of the time is regicide (to assassinate a king appointed by God.)
- In Hamlet's case, he has a dilemma. His father comes to him as a ghost and tells him that he was killed by Claudius. Hamlet cannot be sure if the ghost is truly his father, or if it is a demon in disguise. By killing Claudius, would he be committing regicide, or would he be re-establishing order.

Reasons why Hamlet does not kill Claudius right away:

- He is a thinker rather than a man of action.
- Ideal man of the period (Renaissance man):
 - Scholar (Reason)
 - Courtier (Passion)
 - Soldier (Action)
- Ideally, REASON should govern the soul. Otherwise, if the hierarchy within the man is not in that order, the soul is not in order.
- Hamlet questions his passion and ability for action in the play. He holds up the ideal as a model to see how he measures up.
- Ideal Renaissance Woman:
 - Honesty (purity, loyalty)
 - Beauty
 - Passion
- the ideal woman has all of these ideals in perfect balance. Hamlet questions whether or not any woman can measure up to this ideal.
- He suffers disillusionment because of his ideals. He becomes bitter in his estimation of life.

- delays in his killing of Claudius because he is unable to follow the divine order that should lead him to action.
- he has a reason to hesitate based on the metaphysical stand-point.

Religious Crises of 16th Century Britain:

Henry VIII (r.1509-1547) In 1534 Henry breaks with Roman Catholic Church to form the Church of England with himself at the head instead of the Pope. Executes those who refuse the Oath of Supremacy including his friend Thomas More. Monasteries are seized by the crown; monks are drawn and quartered, but doctrine is not changed greatly.

Edward VI (r.1547-1553) As Edward was a child, influence fell to his uncle the Earl of Hertford (later Duke of Somerset) until 1552 when he was succeeded as Protector by the Earl of Warwick (later promoted to Duke of Northumberland). Both of these men promoted the more radical Protestantism that Henry VIII had kept at bay.

Mary I (r.1553-1558) Later known as “Bloody Mary” because she had approximately 300 leading Protestants executed in her desire to bring England back to Roman Catholicism. The burning at the stake of Protestant Bishops and Archbishop Cranmer added to her reputation. As the daughter of Henry VIII’s first wife, her claim to the throne was based on the Roman Catholic position that Henry had no right to an annulment of his first marriage. Her marriage to Philip II of Spain made her unpopular and untrusted.

Elizabeth I (r.1558-1603) Re-established the Church of England. Doctrinally Elizabeth sought compromise in the Thirty-nine Articles. Her court was at the centre of the English Renaissance, but it was nevertheless a police state as far as Roman Catholics were concerned. Fear of a Roman Catholic uprising combined with the threat of Spanish invasion made persecution of Roman Catholics a matter of political as well as religious security. The execution of her Roman Catholic cousin Mary Queen of Scots (who may have plotted against her) was her greatest crisis, and the defeat of the Spanish Armada (invading Roman Catholics) in 1588, her greatest victory.

Reading the Play...

1. Nothing takes the place of actually reading the play, and the best way for students to do this is to get up on their feet! In some classes (my own included), students are assigned to one of five groups, and each group is assigned one complete act of the play. Students read the act and scene summaries to put their assigned section in context of the whole play, and then have several days in class to prepare their specific act. We start with Act I and read all the way through, stopping at the end of each scene for questions (often in the form of “hot seat”, explained below) and discussion. Some teachers also like to give a variety of quizzes during the reading to check comprehension.

2. Hot Seat: At the end of a scene, several students are assigned the role of a character within that scene. Teacher and other students ask questions to the selected students about what’s going on in the scene just read. These students must answer the questions in the persona of whichever character they have been assigned. In other words, the students must speak “in the shoes” of the selected character.

For example, at the end of I.i.: Horatio, how are you going to tell your best friend that you have seen a ghost of his dead father? Do you think he’ll believe you? What do you think this ghost could want?

Hotseat is an excellent technique for delving into the characters and plot, and it is also a way to deal with specific lines and to explore varying interpretations. For example, I.i.79: Hamlet, why are you being so rude to your uncle and your mom? What do you mean when you tell her, “‘Seems,’ madam? Nay, it is. I know not ‘seems.’”?

3. Images, Motifs, and Allusions

As you read, look for these recurring images and motifs:

- images of disease representing sin
- the overgrowth of weeds representing sin
- Garden of Eden imagery appears throughout the play (e.g., Claudius compared to the serpent in the Garden of Eden)
- Classical allusions include references to Hercules, Niobe
- contrasting Classical allusions of Hyperion to a satyr to point out the differences between Old Hamlet and Claudius
- appearance versus reality (what “seems” as opposed to what “is”)
- alienation and disillusionment
- Hamlet’s obsession with death and the afterlife

4. Some scene-by-scene study questions for the entire play from my colleague, Ray Grynol:

ACT 1

1.1 The Ramparts of the Castle

1. Describe the prevailing atmosphere of the scene. How is that atmosphere created? What is the irony of the password “Long live the king”? What is ironic about the guard who is coming on to duty challenging the one who is already on duty?
2. Identify images of sickness or disease. What do these suggest?
3. Why does Marcellus bring Horatio to the ramparts of the castle? What background information does Horatio give about Denmark and about the reasons for the ghost’s appearance? What is the political situation in Denmark? What are the present relations with Norway and how did they come about? What reasons does Horatio suggest for the appearance of the ghost?
4. What is the importance of the actual appearance of the ghost in this scene? Explain how the central contrasts between appearance and reality become evident in this scene.

1.2 Meeting of the Royal Court

1. How does Claudius reveal himself to be a capable monarch in this scene? Consider his handling of the explanation of the situation in Denmark (including his justification of the marriage to Gertrude), the Norway affair, Laertes’ request, Hamlet’s request. Consider also Claudius’s advice to Hamlet about grieving for his dead father.
2. What qualities of Hamlet’s character are evident a) in his first words of the play? b) in his soliloquy? c) in his comments on his mother’s marriage in his soliloquy and his later comments on that marriage to Horatio (lines 137-59 and lines 176-81)? d) in his general conversation with Horatio and the sentries? What is Hamlet’s relationship with Horatio?
3. What are the contrasts between the characters of Hamlet and Laertes? Why does Claudius grant Laertes’ request and refuse Hamlet’s?
4. What lines of conflict does this scene establish?
5. Look at Hamlet’s reference to the “unweeded garden” (lines 135-36). What is the significance of this imagery in terms of the play and the character of Hamlet? What is the garden? Who or what are the weeds?

6. Explain with specific references how this scene develops the motif of appearance versus reality.

1.3 The Advice Scene

1. Why do both Laertes and Polonius warn Ophelia against Hamlet? Explain the specific reasons each one gives to Ophelia to warn her away from Hamlet.
2. Generally, what is Polonius's advice to Laertes? What does his advice to his son tell us about his values? How do Polonius's various bits of advice to his children serve to characterize him and his relationship with his children? What is Shakespeare suggesting about family relationships through this portrait of one family within the court?
3. How do Ophelia's reactions to the advice she receives from both her brother and father serve to characterize her?
4. Identify images of traps or false appearances in this scene. What is their significance?
5. What does Polonius forbid Ophelia from doing? What is the possible significance of this order?

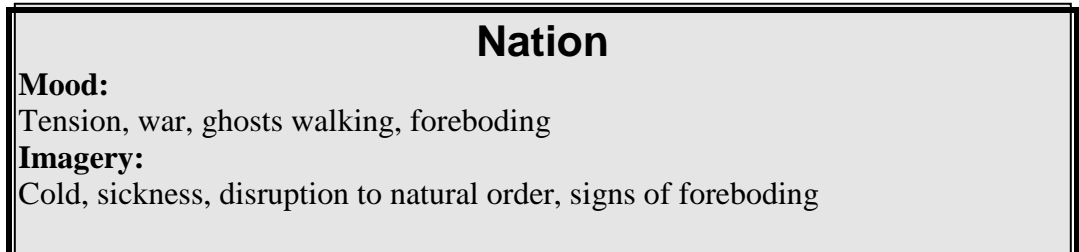
1.4 - 1.5 Meeting the Ghost

1. What is Hamlet suggesting about human nature in lines 23-38 of scene 4? What is the importance of the imagery he uses? Explain what the speech indicates about Hamlet's character.
2. Summarize the Ghost's revelations to Hamlet. How was he murdered? What does he indicate about the horrors of death and his present circumstances? What is the significance of the imagery the Ghost uses and the Ghost's instructions about Gertrude?
3. Compare Hamlet's first reaction to the Ghost's news (ll. 29-30) with his last words of the scene. Explain Hamlet's further reaction to the Ghost's news (1.5.92-112). Explain the contradiction. Consider also Hamlet's emotional state throughout the scene. What does this tell us about his character?

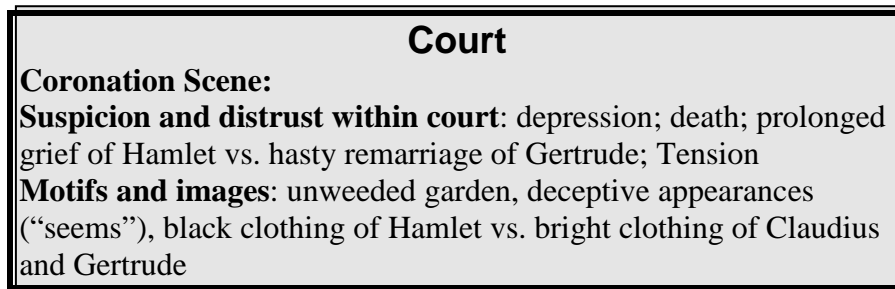
Hamlet – Act One Diagram

Suspicion and tension in the nation, court and family

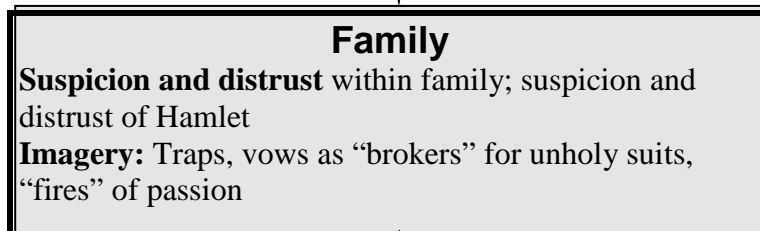
Scene One



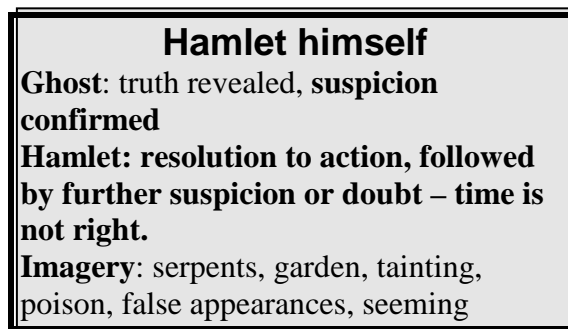
Scene Two



Scene Three



Scenes Four and Five



ACT 2

1. What are Polonius's instructions to Reynaldo? How does Polonius expect Reynaldo to gather information about how Laertes has been behaving in Paris? What do his actions tell us about his character? Consider also his words with Laertes before Laertes departs to France. What is the motif that this scene advances?
2. What news does Ophelia bring about Hamlet's behaviour? What conclusion does Polonius reach as a result of this news?
3. Explain the reason for the arrival of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at the Danish court. What is Claudius's plan for them? How does his plan illustrate Claudius's character and indicate some of the play's motifs?
4. What news do the ambassadors bring from Norway? What is the stipulation which is included in the peace treaty?
5. How does Polonius prove his theory about the cause of Hamlet's madness? What plan does he suggest in order to test his theory? How is this plan typical of Polonius?
6. How does Hamlet react to the arrival of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? What is Hamlet's attitude to them at first and then later in his conversation? What seems to be Hamlet's view of the world and of mankind in general? What does this episode indicate about Hamlet's character?
7. Compare and contrast Hamlet's treatment of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with his treatment of Polonius. What does his treatment of Polonius tell us about his character?
8. How does Hamlet react to the arrival of the Players? What use does he propose to make of them?
9. Explain how the First Player's speech spoken by Aeneas to Dido parallels the situations in Hamlet's life and in Elsinore.
10. Explain Hamlet's soliloquy "O, what a rogue." Show how it contributes to plot, characterization and atmosphere.
11. Explain how Hamlet's supposed madness dominates the act. What evidence is there of his sanity?
12. Explain how the second act is a comedy of masks.

13. In Act 2 Claudius schemes to discover the truth about Hamlet's madness while Hamlet schemes to discover the truth of Claudius's guilt. Explain what these plans have in common. If the conflict between the two is viewed as a chess match, who has the upper hand as the act ends and why does he possess the advantage?

ACT 3

3.1 (The Nunnery Scene)

1. What is Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's explanation for Hamlet's madness at the beginning of Act 3?
2. Explain how and why Claudius admits his guilt. What might this aside indicate about his character? Explain the significance of Polonius's speech that prompts the aside.
3. Analyze Hamlet's famous "To be, or not to be" soliloquy in scene 1. How does he view death? How does he view life? How does he view an afterlife? Explain the conflicts that Hamlet is experiencing between the honour code and the religious code of response.
4. The scene with Ophelia is known as the Nunnery Scene. Why does Hamlet treat Ophelia as he does? Why does he deny his love for her? Why does he curse himself? Does he know or suspect someone is watching him? How might that knowledge or supposition affect his behavior? How will it affect his interpretation of her actions?
5. Support the idea that Hamlet is becoming more cynical and disintegrating spiritually in the first scene of Act 3.

3.2

1. Summarize in a couple of sentences Hamlet's instructions to the players.
2. What does Hamlet instruct Horatio to do before the play? What qualities of Horatio does Hamlet admire?
3. Describe Hamlet's behavior at the play. How does he speak to his mother, uncle, Polonius, and Ophelia? What might this indicate about Hamlet?
4. Explain why Hamlet compares himself to a musical pipe. Think about how Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are treating him. (lines 370-402)
5. Explain Hamlet's feelings in lines 419-432. How is this soliloquy different from others? Note further images of disease.

3.3

1. Explain the king's soliloquy. Is he sorry he killed his brother? What would he have done in order to repent?
2. Why won't Hamlet kill Claudius and get revenge in this scene? (lines 77-101) Explain Hamlet's rationale. What is the irony of the king's final words in the context of Hamlet's remarks?

3.4 (The Queen's Closet Scene)

1. How and why does Hamlet kill Polonius?
2. Explain what Hamlet says to Gertrude when he compares the portraits of Claudius and Old Hamlet. This sub-scene is called the Portrait Scene.
3. Why does the ghost re-appear? What is the effect of his re-appearance on both Hamlet and Gertrude?
4. What does Hamlet explain to his mother about his madness? (lines 203-218)
5. Note images of sickness or disease.
6. What does Hamlet instruct Gertrude to do and to avoid doing?
7. What does Hamlet suggest he will do on his upcoming trip to England?

Act Three – General

1. What are the similarities and differences between Hamlet's treatment of Ophelia in the Nunnery Scene and his treatment of Gertrude in the Closet and Portrait scene?
2. State concisely the importance of each of the following episodes in terms of the plot and character relations and then consider which of these scenes may be the turning point and why:
 - a) the Nunnery Scene (scene 1)
 - b) the Play Scene (scene 2)
 - c) the Prayer Scene (scene 3)
 - d) the Closet and Portrait Scenes (scene 4)
3. What do the following add to the conception of Hamlet's character?
 - a) the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy
 - b) the advice to the Players
 - c) his speech to Horatio
 - d) his behaviour at the play
 - e) the recorder episode
 - f) the lines he speaks while Claudius prays
 - g) the murder of Polonius
 - h) the interview with his mother

ACT 4

4.1

1. How does Gertrude seek to shield Hamlet in this scene?
2. What are Claudius's chief concerns about the murder?

4.2

1. How does Hamlet reveal his "antic disposition"? What else may he reveal about his attitudes to his friends?

4.3

1. What reasons does Claudius give for not proceeding with legal action against Hamlet? What are other reasons?
2. What are the details of the King's plan for Hamlet (ll. 67-77)?
3. Note images of sickness and disease. Why are they significant?

4.4

1. Of what importance is the first appearance of Fortinbras?
2. What are the points of comparison between him and Hamlet?
3. Hamlet talks about, "Some craven scruple/Of thinking too precisely on the event." Comment on this phrase as providing the reason for Hamlet's delay. What conclusion does Hamlet come to about greatness? What is the effect of Fortinbras's appearance in the play on Hamlet?
4. Explain Hamlet's attitude at the end of the act.

4.5

1. What is the dramatic purpose of Ophelia's madness? What are its causes?
2. What are the contrasts between Laertes and Hamlet?
3. How does Claudius show himself to be resourceful, courageous and manipulative?

4.6 – 4.7

1. What qualities of Hamlet does his letter show? What has happened to Hamlet?
2. How does his return affect the plot?
3. Explain how Claudius is able to manipulate Laertes into helping him. Explain the plan they devise. How does Claudius show himself to be unscrupulous and clever at the same time?
4. Explain the significance of the poison imagery.

ACT 5

1. What are the purposes of the gravedigger scene? What themes does it bring out? Consider the issues over which the grave-diggers debate and the grave-digger's talk with Hamlet.
2. How does Hamlet show that he has changed in character somewhat? Many people remember the famous lines spoken to Yorick. Explain the significance of this particular speech and Hamlet's other speeches about death, particularly the one about Alexander.

3. What are the dramatic purposes of Ophelia's funeral?
4. What has Hamlet done to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? What is Hamlet's attitude to his actions? Quote lines to show his attitude.
5. What is the significance of the Osric episode?
6. Why does Horatio warn Hamlet about engaging in the duel with Laertes? Explain Hamlet's response, "Not a whit we defy augury....." (5.2.210).
7. How does nemesis overtake a) Claudius, b) Laertes, c) Gertrude, d) Hamlet?
8. What is the significance of the arrival of Fortinbras?

5. A SELECTION OF GREAT LINES, PHRASES, & INTERESTING SPEECHES FOR CLOSE READING AND ANALYSIS

A little more than kin and less than kind. [Hamlet – 1.2.67]

Good Hamlet, cast thy knighted color off,
 And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.
 Do not forever with thy vailèd lids
 Seek for thy noble father in the dust.
 Thou know'st 'tis common; all that lives must die,
 Passing through nature to eternity.
 Ay, madam, it is common.

If it be,

Why seems it so particular with thee?

"Seems," madam? Nay, it is. I know not "seems."

[Gertrude/Hamlet – 1.2.70 – 79]

O, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt
 Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
 Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
 His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God, God,
 How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
 Seem to me all the uses of this world!
 Fie on't, ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden

That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
But two months dead! nay, not so much, not two;
So excellent a king, that was to this
Hyperion to a satyr: so loving to my mother,
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,
Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him,
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on, and yet, within a month—
Let me not think on't— Frailty, thy name is woman!
A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she follow'd my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears; -- why she, even she, --
O God! a beast that wants discourse of reason
Would have mourn'd longer, -- married with my uncle,
My father's brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules; within a month,
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married;-- O most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not, nor it cannot come to good;
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue!

[Hamlet – 1.2.133 – 164]

My lord, I came to see you father's funeral.
I prithee, do not mock me, fellow student.
I think it was to see my mother's wedding.
Indeed, my lord, it followed hard upon.
Thrift, thrift, Horatio. The funeral aaked meats
Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.
Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven
Or ever I had seen that day, Horatio!
My father – methinks I see my father.
Where, my lord?
In my mind's eye, Horatio.

[Horatio/Hamlet – 1.2.183 – 193]

My father's spirit – in arms! All is not well.

[Hamlet – 1.3.277]

—Give thy thoughts no tongue

...

Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.

...

Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice.

Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment.

...

...the apparel oft proclaims the man,

...

Neither a borrower nor a lender be,

For loan oft loses both itself and friend,

...

This above all: to thine own self be true

[Polonius – 1.3.65 - 84]

Angels and ministers of grace, defend us!

[Hamlet – 1.4.43]

Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

[Marcellus – 1.4.100]

—Now, Hamlet, hear.

'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,

A serpent stung me. So the whole ear of Denmark

Is by a forgèd process of my death

Rankly abused. But know, thou noble youth,

The serpent that did sting thy father's life

Now wears his crown.

[Ghost – 1.5.41 – 47]

O horrible, O horrible, most horrible!

[Ghost – 1.5.87]

...one may smile and smile and be a villain.

[Hamlet – 1.5.115]

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,

Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

[Hamlet – 1.5.187 – 188]

The time is out of joint.

[Hamlet – 1.5.210]

...brevity is the soul of wit

[Polonius – 2.2.97]

More matter with less art. [Queen – 2.2.103]

–What do you read, my lord?

Words, words, words.

What is the matter, my lord?

Between who?

I mean the matter that you read, my lord. [Polonius/Hamlet –
2.2.209 – 213]

Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't.

[Polonius – 2.2.223 – 224]

...there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.

[Hamlet – 2.2.268 – 270]

O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and
count myself a king of infinite space, were it not
that I have bad dreams.

[Hamlet – 2.2.273 – 275]

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'er-
hanging firmament, this majestic roof, fretted
with golden fire—why, it appeareth nothing to me
but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors.

What a piece of work is a man, how noble in
Reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and mov-
ing 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?

[Hamlet – 2.2.318 – 332]

The less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty.

[Hamlet – 2.2.558 – 559]

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
 Is it not monstrous that this player here,
 But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
 Could force his soul so to his own conceit
 That from her working all his visage waned,
 Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
 A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
 With forms to his conceit – and all for nothing!
 For Hecuba!
 What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
 That he should weep for her? What would he do
 Had he the motive and the cue for passion
 That I have? He would drown the stage with tears
 And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
 Make mad the guilty and appal the free,
 Confound the ignorant and amaze indeed
 The very faculties of eyes and ears. Yet I,
 A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak
 Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
 And can say nothing – no, not for a king
 Upon whose property and most dear life
 A damned defeat was made. Am I a coward?
 Who calls me “villain”? breaks my pate across?
 Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face?
 Tweaks me by the nose? gives me the lie I' th' throat
 As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?
 Ha! 'Swounds, I should take it! For it cannot be
 But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall
 To make oppression bitter, or ere this
 I should have fatted all the region kites
 With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!
 Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
 O vengeance!
 Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
 That I, the son of a dear father murdered,
 Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
 Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words
 And fall a-cursing like a very drab,
 A scullion! Fie upon 't! Foh!
 About, my brains! – Hum, I have heard
 That guilty creatures sitting at a play
 Have, by the very cunning of the scene,
 Been struck so to the soul that presently
 They have proclaimed their malefactions.
 For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
 With most miraculous organ. I'll have these players

Play something like the murder of my father
Before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks;
I'll tent him to the quick. If he do blench,
I know my course. The spirit that I have seen
May be a devil, and the devil hath power
T' assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps,
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds
More relative than this. the play's the thing
Wherin I'll catch the conscience of the King.

[Hamlet – 2.2.577 - 634]

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. To die; to sleep,
No more, and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to; 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep; perchance to dream; ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause; there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life:
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despis'd love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action. Soft you now,
The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons

Be all my sins remember'd.

[Hamlet – 3.1.64 – 99]

Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be
A breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest,
But yet I could accuse me of such things that it
Were better my mother had not borne me: I am
Very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more
Offenses at my beck than I have thoughts to put them
In, imagination to give them shape, or time to act
them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling
between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves
all; believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery.

[Hamlet – 3.1.131 – 140]

It out-Herods Herod.

[Hamlet – 3.2.14 – 15]

The lady doth protest too much, methinks.

[Queen – 3.2.254]

What, frightened with false fire?

[Hamlet – 3.2.292]

Now is the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on. Soft, now to my mother.
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.
My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites:
How in my words somever she be shent,
To give them seals never, my soul, consent.

[Hamlet – 3.2.419 – 432]

O, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven;
It hath the primal eldest curse upon 't,
A brother's murder. Pray can I not,
Though inclination be as sharp as will.
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,
And, like a man to double business bound,
I stand in pause where I shall first begin
And both neglect. What if this cursèd hand

Were thicker than itself with brother's blood?
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy
But to confront the visage of offense?
And what's in prayer but this twofold force,
To be forestallèd ere we come to fall,
Or pardoned being down? Then I'll look up.
My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? "Forgive me my foul murder"?
That cannot be, since I am still possessed
Of those effects for which I did the murder:
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
May one be pardoned and retain th'offense?
In the corrupted currents of this world,
Offense's gilded hand may shove by justice,
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above:
There is no shuffling; there the action lies
In his true nature, and we ourselves compelled,
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
To give in evidence. What then? What rests?
Try what repentance can. What can it not?
Yet what can it, when one cannot repent?
O wretched state! O bosom black as death!
O limèd soul, that, struggling to be free,
Art more engaged! Help, angels! Make assay.
Bow, stubborn knees, and heart with strings of steel
Be soft as sinews of the newborn babe.
All may be well. [King – 3.3.40 – 76]

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below;
Words without thoughts never to heaven go. [King – 3.3.102 – 103]

O, speak to me no more!
These words like daggers enter in my ears. [Queen – 3.4.108 – 109]

Do you see nothing there?
Nothing at all; yet all that is I see. [Hamlet/Queen – 3.4.150 – 151]

Assume a virtue if you have it not. [Hamlet – 3.4.181]

I must be cruel only to be kind.	[Hamlet – 3.4.199]
Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius? At supper. At supper where? Not where he eats, but where he is eaten.	[King/Hamlet - 4.3.19 – 22]
Do it, England, For like the hectic in my blood he rages, And though must cure me. Till I know 'tis done, Howe'er my haps, my joys were ne'er begun. How all occasions do inform against me	[King – 4.3.74 – 77] [Hamlet – 4.4.34]
O, from this time forth My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth!	[Hamlet – 4.4.68 – 69]
When sorrows come, they come not single spies	[King – 4.5.83]
...poor Ophelia Divided from herself and her fair judgment, Without the which we are pictures or mere beasts;	[King – 4.5.91 – 93]
O heat, dry up my brains! Tears seven times salt Burn out the sense and virtue of mine eye! By heaven, thy madness shall be paid with weight Till our scale turn the beam! O rose of May, Dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia! O heavens, is 't possible a young maid's wits Should be as mortal as an old man's life!	[Laertes – 4.5.177 – 184]
Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia, And therefore I forbid my tears.	[Laertes – 4.7.211 – 212]
Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio	[Hamlet – 5.1.190 – 191]
Imperious Cæsar, dead and turned to clay	[Hamlet – 5.1.220]

Sweets to the sweet

[Gertrude – 5.1.254]

There's a divinity that shapes our ends
Rough-hew them how we will—

[Hamlet – 5.2.11 - 12]

There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. [Hamlet – 5.2.233 – 234]

Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince,
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.

[Horatio – 5.2.397 – 398]

After the Play...

1. Reflect on the experience of the theatre production. Was it what you expected? Were the characters as you imagined they would be? What are some of the changes you noticed between the performance and the text you read? Why do you think the director might have made these changes? If you had a chance to act in this production, which character(s) would you have liked to play? Why? If you were directing, would you have done anything differently?

2. Read and discuss the poem “This Be The Verse” by Philip Larkin. (Caution: probably just for older students.) *Hamlet* director, Sarah Constible, focuses her production on family relationships, and while she was preparing the script, this poem kept popping into her head.

Philip Larkin – This Be The Verse

They f*** you up, your mum and dad.
They may not mean to, but they do.
They fill you with the faults they had
And add some extra, just for you.

But they were f***ed up in their turn
By fools in old-style hats and coats,
Who half the time were sappy-stern
And half at one another’s throats.

Man hands on misery to man.
It deepens like a coastal shelf.
Get out as early as you can,
And don’t have any kids yourself.

(Found at <http://www.artofeurope.com/larkin/lar2.htm>)

3. Consider the Oedipal Complex. Some critics argue that this is the main reason for Hamlet’s hesitation in acting against his uncle. We think not! But read the attached related materials (they’re sized to work as overheads), do a bit of research, and decide for yourself.

4. Oral Recitations. Some of Shakespeare’s greatest soliloquies are in this play, and students enjoy memorizing and delivering them to their classmates. There are other “good parts” too! Suggestions are attached.

5. Stylistic Analysis. The soliloquies are perfect for writing essays of stylistic analysis. This is especially useful for those students who plan to take the Advanced Placement English Literature exam. Suggestions are attached.

Sigmund Freud *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900)

Source: Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Avon, New York: 1965

The play is built up on Hamlet's hesitations over fulfilling the task of revenge that is assigned to him; but its text offers no reasons or motives for these hesitations and an immense variety of attempts at interpreting them have failed to produce a result.

What is it, then, that inhibits him in fulfilling the task set him by his father's ghost? The answer, once again, is that it is the peculiar nature of the task. Hamlet is able to do anything—except take vengeance on the man who did away with his father and took that father's place with his mother, the man who shows him the repressed wishes of childhood realized. Thus the loathing which should drive him on to revenge is replaced in him by self-reproaches, by scruples of conscience, which remind him that he himself is literally no better than the sinner whom he is to punish. (299)

Jones, Ernest. *Hamlet and Oedipus*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1976

Hamlet's second guilty wish had thus also been realized by his uncle, namely to procure the fulfilment of the first -- the possession of the mother -- by a personal deed, in fact by murder of the father. (Jones 83)

In reality his uncle incorporates the deepest and most buried part of his own personality, so that he cannot kill him without also killing himself. This solution, one closely akin to what Freud has shown to be the motive of suicide in melancholia, is actually the one that Hamlet finally adopts . . . Only when he has made the final sacrifice and brought himself to the door of death is he free to fulfil his duty, to avenge his father, and to slay his other self -- his uncle. (Jones 88).

From: Harold Bloom. *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2003.

But for the ghost's second appearance, we wonder if Hamlet *would* murder Gertrude, as Nero executed his mother, Agrippina, who had poisoned her husband, another Claudius.

. . .

In the event he assuages his rage by manslaughter, skewering Polonius through a curtain, but the thrust is a displacement of his true will, which is to immolate Gertrude.

Despite the urgings of Freud, and of his hagiographer Ernest Jones, there are no traces of Oedipus in *Hamlet* (54).

Hamlet Oral Assignment

Your choice: memorized recitation from the list below.

NOTE: Only two people can do each speech. First come, first served. Some speeches will require readers (not full actors) to fill in some lines for the second part.

1. 1.2.133-164: Hamlet (first soliloquy)
2. 1.3.14-48: Laertes' advice to Ophelia
3. 1.3.60-87: Polonius's advice to Laertes
4. 1.4.9-41: Hamlet (dram of evil)
5. 2.1.85-122: Ophelia (on Hamlet's madness)
6. 2.2.576-634: Hamlet (third soliloquy)
7. 3.1.64-99: Hamlet (fourth soliloquy)
8. 3.1.113-162: Hamlet (Nunnery scene)
9. 3.3.40-76: Claudius (prayer scene)
10. 3.3.77-103: Hamlet (sixth soliloquy)
11. 3.4.142-176: Hamlet to Gertrude
12. 3.4.178-218: Hamlet to Gertrude
13. 4.4.34-69: Hamlet (seventh soliloquy)
14. 5.1.190-229: Hamlet (Alas, poor Yorick)

Oral Presentation Rubric : Hamlet recitation

Student's Name: _____

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Preparedness	Student is completely prepared and has obviously rehearsed.	Student seems fairly well prepared but might have needed a couple more rehearsals.	The student is somewhat prepared, but it is clear that rehearsal was lacking.	Student does not seem at all prepared to present.
Speaks Clearly	Speaks clearly and distinctly all (100-95%) the time, and mispronounces no words.	Speaks clearly and distinctly all (100-95%) the time, but mispronounces one or two words.	Speaks clearly and distinctly most (94-85%) of the time. Mispronounces several words.	Often mumbles or can not be understood OR mispronounces more than several words.
Volume	Volume is loud enough to be heard by all audience members throughout the presentation.	Volume is loud enough to be heard by all audience members at least 90% of the time.	Volume is loud enough to be heard by all audience members at least 80% of the time.	Volume often too soft to be heard by all audience members.
Pitch	Pitch was often used and it conveyed emotions appropriately.	Pitch was often used but the emotion it conveyed sometimes did not fit the content.	Pitch was rarely used OR the emotion it conveyed often did not fit the content.	Pitch was not used to convey emotion.

HAMLET: Stylistic Analysis Number One

After reading the soliloquy below write an analysis in which you demonstrate how effectively stylistic devices convey the speaker's attitude and/or his meaning. Stylistic devices include: shifts in tone, imagery, figures of speech, contrast, repetition, diction, sentence structure, and other rhetorical techniques.

O, that this too too sullied flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God, God,
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable 5
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't, ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
But two months dead! nay, not so much, not two; 10
So excellent a king, that was to this
Hyperion to a satyr: so loving to my mother,
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,
Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him, 15
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on, and yet, within a month—
Let me not think on't-- Frailty, thy name is woman!
A little month, or ere those shoes were old 20
With which she follow'd my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears; -- why she, even she, --
O God! a beast that wants discourse of reason
Would have mourn'd longer, -- married with my uncle,
My father's brother, but no more like my father 25
Than I to Hercules; within a month,
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married;-- O most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not, nor it cannot come to good; 30
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue!

HAMLET: Stylistic Analysis Number Two

After reading the soliloquy below write an analysis in which you demonstrate how effectively stylistic devices convey the speaker's attitude. Stylistic devices include: shifts in tone, imagery, figures of speech, contrast, repetition, diction, sentence structure, and other rhetorical techniques.

'Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world: now could I drink hot blood,
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on. Soft! now to my mother. 5
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;
My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites; 10
How in my words soever she be shent,
To give them seals never, my soul, consent!

In what ways does this soliloquy foreshadow the Queen's closet scene?

Creative *Hamlet* Projects

from spierce.wikispaces.com/file/.../Hamlet+Creative+Project+assignment.doc

Option #1: Television Talk Show/ Main motif: Corruption

In a group, create an episode of a talk show (i.e., Jerry Springer) with the characters of *Hamlet* as the guests. Requirements for this option are listed on the attached page entitled "The Jerry Springer Show." The episode must either be videotaped or performed live in front of the class; although you may improvise portions of it, the episode should be clearly thought out and rehearsed ahead of time. It must be between 8-12 minutes in length. Although you will be speaking in "modern" English rather than Shakespearean English, you must incorporate at least 5 Shakespearean insults into the episode. These can be created from the attached sheet entitled "Shakespearean Insults."

Option #2: Music Video /Main motif: Appearance versus Reality

In a group or independently, create a music video that explores the secrets and lies in which the characters of *Hamlet* are involved. Choose one song that best captures the tone of the play and then videotape scenes, images, people, etc. that help you express the theme of appearance versus reality. Unless you plan to use spoken word in the video, you will need to either incorporate text into the video itself or hold up written words to get your point across. Look to the music video for "Dirty Little Secret" for an example of this. The song must be at least two minutes long, and the video should be creative as well as being clearly relevant to the play. You may choose to pantomime specific moments from the play (i.e., Claudius on his knees praying) or you may select images and scenes that represent situations or characters in the play. This video will be presented to the class and group members should be prepared to explain their creative choices at that time.

Option #3: Screenplay of One Scene/Main motif: Depends on scene selected

Independently or with one other person, imagine that you are the writing the screenplay for a new modernized film version of *Hamlet*. First, rewrite one scene from the play (any scene as long as it is clearly significant) in "modern" English. In the script, include the dialogue and stage directions. Next, write a detailed description of the set of the scene, costumes, lighting, and use of background music if applicable. This description should be approximately one page double-spaced. Finally, determine cast the actors in your scene, using famous actors and actresses. Write a brief (one or two sentences) justification of each casting selection.

Option #4: Soundtrack/Main motif: Songs should represent a variety of motifs

Independently, create a soundtrack for a modern film version of *Hamlet*. It must include a burned CD that includes 5 songs. You should have one song to represent each act of the play – you may decide to have it represent a particular scene within the act or the entire overall act. For each song, write a paragraph explanation that justifies why it is appropriate for that particular act (you will have 5 total paragraphs). Please provide a copy of the lyrics to each song (they should be typed above the paragraph explanation for that song), as well as a CD case/cover that reflects the motifs of the soundtrack.

The Jerry Springer Show

CATEGORY	9	7	5	3
Questions & Answers	Excellent, in-depth questions were asked by host and excellent answers supported by facts from the play were provided by all talk show members.	Questions requiring factual answers were asked by the host and correct, in-depth answers were provided by all talk show members.	Questions requiring factual answers were asked by the host and correct answers were provided by several of the talk show members.	Answers were provided by only 1-2 talk show members.
Costume & Props	All students wore costumes and the group used some props.	Some students wore costumes and the group used some props.	Students wore no costumes, but the group used some props.	No costumes and no props were used.
Interest and Purpose	Video emphasizes corruption and immorality in a clear and interesting way.	Video is interesting but focus on corruption and immorality is somewhat unclear.	Video is not very interesting and focus on corruption and immorality is somewhat unclear.	Video is not interesting and has no discernable purpose.
Knowledge	All students showed excellent knowledge of content, needing no cues and showing no confusion about the content of the play.	All students showed excellent knowledge of content of the play, but 1-2 students once needed note cards to talk or answer questions.	Most students either showed excellent knowledge of content of the play OR their role on the show, but not of both.	Most students seemed unprepared for their performance and seemed confused about the content of the play.
Length of Video	Show was 8-12 minutes long.	Video was within one minute of assigned length.	Video was within two minutes of assigned length.	Video was less than 6 or more than 14 minutes long.
Shakespearean Insults	At least five Shakespearean insults were used in a way that contributed to the show as a whole.	At least five Shakespearean insults were used, but they did not all make sense in the content of the show.	Three to four Shakespearean insults were used, which contributed somewhat to the content of the show.	Less than three Shakespearean insults were used.
Work Ethic	6 Points: All students contributed equally to the product and worked diligently at all times.	4 Points: All students contributed equally to the product and worked diligently at times.	3 Points: There was some discrepancy in the amount of work put forth by group members.	1 Point: Group member clearly did not contribute as much to the group as other members, as observed or reported by group.

Hamlet Music Video

CATEGORY	9	7	5	3
Soundtrack - Emotion	Music stirs a rich emotional response that matches the story line well.	Music stirs a rich emotional response that somewhat matches the story line.	Music is ok, and not distracting, but it does not add much to the story.	Music is distracting, inappropriate, OR was not used.
Images	Images create a distinct atmosphere or tone that matches different parts of the story. The images may communicate symbolism and/or metaphors.	Images create an atmosphere or tone that matches some parts of the story. The images may communicate symbolism and/or metaphors.	An attempt was made to use images to create an atmosphere/ tone but it needed more work. Image choice is logical.	Little or no attempt to use images to create an appropriate atmosphere/ tone.
Point of View - Purpose	Establishes a purpose early on and maintains a clear focus on Appearance versus Reality throughout.	Establishes a purpose early on and maintains focus on Appearance versus Reality for most of the presentation.	There are a few lapses in focus on the theme, but the purpose is fairly clear.	It is difficult to figure out the purpose of the presentation.
Use of text	Text is smoothly incorporated throughout, is easy to read, and clearly relates to the storyline of Hamlet.	Text is generally smoothly incorporated, is usually easy to read, and clearly relates to the storyline of Hamlet.	Text is not a major focus of the video, is sometimes difficult to read, or does not clearly relate to the storyline of Hamlet.	Text is not used, is very difficult to read, or does not relate to the storyline of Hamlet.
Explanation	Group members are able to use the text of Hamlet to justify all creative choices.	Group members are able to use the text of Hamlet to justify most creative choices.	Group members are only able to occasionally use the text of Hamlet to justify creative choices.	Group members are not able to use the text of Hamlet to justify creative choices.
Images Depicting Theme	Video reveals at least 8 lies and secrets from the text of Hamlet in a clear, creative way.	Video reveals at least 8 lies and secrets from the text of Hamlet in a clear way.	Video reveals 5-7 lies and secrets from the text of Hamlet in a clear way.	Video reveals less than five secrets or the secrets are unclear throughout.
Work Ethic	6 Points: All students contributed equally to the product and worked diligently at all times.	4 Points: All students contributed equally to the product and worked diligently at times.	3 Points: There was some discrepancy in the amount of work put forth by group members.	1 Point: Group member clearly did not contribute as much to the group as other members, as observed or reported by group.

Story Writing: *Hamlet* Screenplay

CATEGORY	9	7	5	3
Accuracy of Facts	All facts presented in the scene are faithful to the text of <i>Hamlet</i> .	Almost all facts presented in the scene are faithful to the text of <i>Hamlet</i> .	Some facts presented in the scene do not clearly relate to the text of <i>Hamlet</i> .	There are several factual errors in the scene.
Creativity	The story contains many creative details and/or descriptions that contribute to the reader's enjoyment.	The story contains a few creative details and/or descriptions that contribute to the reader's enjoyment.	The story contains a few creative details and/or descriptions, but they distract from the story.	There is little evidence of creativity in the story.
Setting	Many vivid, descriptive words are used to tell when and where the story took place. The modernized storyline clearly fits this setting.	Some vivid, descriptive words are used to tell the audience when and where the story took place, and the storyline is generally fitting for the setting.	The reader can figure out when and where the story took place, but the author doesn't supply much detail or it does not always seem to relate to the modernized storyline.	The reader has trouble figuring out when and where the story took place or the modernized storyline does not match the setting.
Dialogue	The modernized dialogue is realistic and clearly relates to the dialogue in the original text of <i>Hamlet</i> .	The modernized dialogue clearly relates to the dialogue in the original text of <i>Hamlet</i> .	The modernized dialogue is sometimes awkward and does not always relate to the original text of <i>Hamlet</i> .	The dialogue is not modernized or is modernized in a way that does not relate to the original text of <i>Hamlet</i> .
Description	Many vivid, descriptive words are used to describe the scenery, costumes, and lighting. These aspects can be easily visualized.	Some vivid, descriptive words are used to describe the scenery, costumes, and lighting. These aspects can be visualized.	The author doesn't supply much detail about lighting, costumes, or scenery.	The reader has trouble figuring out what the lighting and costumes look like.
Cast Justification	All characters in the scene have been appropriately casted and each decision has been convincingly justified.	All characters in the scene have been appropriately casted and each decision has been justified.	All characters in the scene have been casted and most decisions have been justified.	Characters were not casted or the decisions were not justified.
Work Ethic	6 Points: All students contributed equally to the product and worked diligently at all times.	4 Points: All students contributed equally to the product and worked diligently at times.	3 Points: There was some discrepancy in the amount of work put forth by group members.	1 Point: Group member clearly did not contribute as much to the group as other members, as observed or reported by group.

Hamlet Soundtrack

CATEGORY	9	7	5	3	1
Format	Includes recording of all songs in 1 CD; lyrics & justifications are attractively presented and free from errors	Includes all required elements in fairly organized fashion	Includes all required elements; organization is weak	Includes all required elements but songs are not in correct chronological order	Does not include all required elements
Songs and Justifications	Clearly & persuasively describe what is happening during each song & why the song is appropriate for that act	Clearly explains what is happening during each song & why the song is appropriate for that act	Explanations are clear, but writing is a bit weak (or vice versa)	Explanations OR writing is weak	Both explanations and writing
Songs and Justifications	(same as above – this section is worth double credit)				
Tone	All songs chosen clearly match the tone of each act	Most songs chosen clearly match the tone of each act	Link between tone and act is evident only after reading justification	Some songs blatantly do not match the tone of a act	Songs are inappropriate or disregard the tone of the acts
Creativity	Case is unique, attractive, & thought-provoking	Case is unique and attractive	Case includes only song names	Case is blank	Case/cover not included
Variety of Songs	The songs represent a wide variety of musical genres and topics	The songs represent some variety in genre and topic	The songs are fairly similar in genre and topic	Most of the songs are the same genre and/or topic	All of the songs seem extremely similar in genre and topic
Work Ethic	6 Points: Student worked diligently throughout each class period and clearly worked on the project outside of school as well.	4 Points: Student typically worked diligently throughout each class period and finished project at home.	3 Points: Student worked diligently at times and may have been distracted at other times.	2 Points: Student was often off-task during class and did not seem to spend much time on the project outside of school.	1 Point: Student was off-task most of the time and did not seem to spend time on the project outside of school.

Green Eggs and Hamlet

(<http://www.webenglishteacher.com/text/greenhamlet.txt>)

I ask to be, or not to be.
That is the question, I ask of me.
This sullied life, it makes me shudder.
My uncle's boffing dear, sweet mother.
Would I, could I take my life?
Could I, should I, end this strife?
Should I jump out of a plane?
Or throw myself before a train?
Should I from a cliff just leap?
Could I put myself to sleep?
Shoot myself, or take some poison?
Maybe try self immolation?
To shuffle off this mortal coil,
I could stab myself with a fencing foil.
Slash my wrists while in the bath?
Would it end my angst and wrath?
To sleep, to dream, now there's the rub.
I could drop a toaster in my tub.
Would all be glad, if I were dead?
Could I perhaps kill them instead?
This line of thought takes consideration -
For I'm the king of procrastination.

Hamlet's Cat

(<http://www.webenglishteacher.com/text/hamletscat.txt>)

To go outside, and there perchance to stay
Or to remain within: that is the question:
Whether 'tis better for a cat to suffer
The cuffs and buffets of inclement weather
That Nature rains on those who roam abroad,

Or take a nap upon a scrap of carpet,
And so by dozing melt the solid hours
That clog the clock's bright gears with sullen time
And stall the dinner bell.

To sit, to stare
Outdoors, and by a stare to seem to state
A wish to venture forth without delay,
Then when the portal's opened up, to stand
As if transfixed by doubt.

To prowl; to sleep;
To choose not knowing when we may once more
Our readmittance gain: aye, there's the hairball;
For if a paw were shaped to turn a knob,
Or work a lock or slip a window-catch,
And going out and coming in were made
As simple as the breaking of a bowl,
What cat would bear the household's petty plagues,
The cook's well-practiced kicks, the butler's broom,
The infant's careless pokes, the tickled ears,
The trampled tail, and all the daily shocks
That fur is heir to, when, of his own free will,
He might his exodus or entrance make
With a mere mitten?

Who would spaniels fear,
Or strays trespassing from a neighbor's yard,
But that the dread of our unheeded cries
And scratches at a barricaded door
No claw can open up, dispels our nerve
And makes us rather bear our humans' faults
Than run away to unguessed miseries?

Thus caution doth make house cats of us all;
And thus the bristling hair of resolution
Is softened up with the pale brush of thought,
And since our choices hinge on weighty things,
We pause upon the threshold of decision.

Ye Olde Official Shakespearean Insult Kit

(Editor's Note: Copy & paste this website into your browser to make this work. This website is *loads* of silly fun and I've spent way too much time here when I should have been marking student papers!)

<http://www.petetelevin.com/shakespeare.htm>

Hello friends.

Are you weary of giving voice to the same tired old invectives
when boorish rubes intrude upon your serenity?
Don't you wish you could inveigh your enemy
with a genuinely classic put-down?

Well, now you can.

With this handy-dandy SHAKESPEAREAN INSULT KIT,
you can have the spleen of The Bard at your disposal!

The next time someone cuts you off in traffic,
or a clerk behaves rudely,
stun them with your lexicographical command of vituperation.

Combine one selection from each of the four pull-down
lists below, and impale your unsuspecting foe.

Grow unsightly warts	▼	thou			
gleeking	▼	knotty-pated	▼	jolthead	▼

Now gentlemen, with your best Richard Burton imitation,
(ladies, Glenda Jackson will do nicely) ...
read it out loud. LOUD!

Feels good, doesn't it?

A Bit of *Hamlet* on the Web:

The first two are suggestions from my student, Allison Kvern:

<http://www.angelfire.com/art2/antwerplettuce/hamlet.html>

(Hamlet on Facebook. Maybe a printout for class?)

<http://versificator.co.uk/hamlet/>

(note: this doesn't work on (our) school's internet – it's a text game. Very fun and funny.)

<http://www.folger.edu/edulesplandtl.cfm?lpid=641>

(a 5* plan from the Folger site)

<http://www.folger.edu/edulesplandtl.cfm?lpid=546>

(a 4* plan from the Folger site)

http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/shakespeare/60secondshakespeare/themes_hamlet.shtml

(60-Second Shakespeare from the BBC)

<http://www.webenglishteacher.com/hamlet.html>

(LOADS of links and good ideas for students at all levels)

<http://www.hamletworks.org>

(a comparison of both quartos and the folio edition amongst many other things)

Lesson Plans & Web Links from *NCTE*inbox <inbox@ncte.org>

Lesson Plans

Choosing, Chatting, and Collecting: Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy

http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=296

This lesson for grades 6–8 uses an online Shakespeare text to model a vocabulary self-selection strategy.

Analyzing Advice as an Introduction to Shakespeare

http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=372

Students in grades 6–8 explore Polonius' advice to Laertes in *Hamlet*, and write advice poems.

Star-Crossed Lovers Online: Romeo and Juliet for a Digital Age

http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=857

In this lesson for grades 9–12, students examine classic literary works through a modern lens.

Introducing Shakespeare: The Bard's English

http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=1031

Middle school students are introduced to language change and dialect through the differences between Elizabethan and Modern English. In two related lessons, ***Introducing Shakespeare: Exploring Persona and Character Motivations***

http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=1032

and ***Introducing Shakespeare: Character Journals and Point of View***

http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=1033

students explore characters and point of view.

Web Links

Shakespeare is Elementary

<http://www.cps.ednet.ns.ca/pageone.htm>

This award-winning website for younger students was created by elementary students at Crichton Park School in Nova Scotia. It contains a collection of materials related to Shakespeare, including resources for teachers.

Mr. William Shakespeare and the Internet

<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/>

This site is both an annotated guide to Shakespeare resources available on the Internet and a collection of original resources, including a comprehensive timeline of Shakespeare's life and work.

William Shakespeare

<http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/122>

The Academy of American Poets provides this Shakespeare exhibit. Included are selected writings, biographical information, and links to related resources.

Folger Shakespeare Library

<http://www.folger.edu/index.cfm>

This website for the world's largest collection of Shakespeare's printed works contains authoritative articles on his life and work, as well as continually updated links to other related resources.