

# The Nashville Shakespeare Festival



## EDUCATION GUIDEBOOK

A Resource for Teachers & Students



Directed by Denice Hicks

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# Table of Contents

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[What to Expect](#)

[Synopsis of the Play](#)

[Who's Who in the Cast](#)

[A note from the director, Denice Hicks](#)

[Shakespeare's Life — A Brief Timeline](#)

[Reading the Play in the Classroom](#)

[Hamlet in the Classroom](#)

- [General Introduction/Texts/Sources](#)
- [\*Hamlet\* and Hamlet: Play and Character](#)
- [Hamlet as Tragedy, specifically Revenge Tragedy](#)
- [Hamlet as Ghost Story and Murder Mystery](#)
- [Hamlet as Political Thriller](#)
- [Hamlet as Philosophical Inquiry](#)
- [Hamlet as Family Saga](#)
- [Set and Setting](#)
- [Madness](#)
- [The Theater](#)
- [Class Activities](#)

[About the Nashville Shakespeare Festival](#)

[Guidebook Contributors](#)

[Additional Resources](#)

[Shakespeare, Class Activities, and Tennessee English/Language Arts Standards, Grades 9-12](#)

[Sponsors](#)

## WHAT TO EXPECT . . .

### **. . . AT THE TROUTT THEATER**

The Troutt Theater on the Belmont University campus is a traditional proscenium stage theater seating approximately 300 people. The floor is raked, so all seats have a good view of the stage. The buses will drop you off at the front entrance to the building; you will go up one flight of stairs or use the elevator to take you to the second floor entrance to the theater. An usher will show you to your seats and provide with any instructions necessary as you enter the theater.



### **. . . DURING THE PERFORMANCE**

The performance will begin promptly at 10:00 AM and conclude around 12:20 PM noon. There will be one ten-minute intermission following Act One of the play. Intermission provides you with a break to use the restroom, stretch, or check you mobile devices. Once intermission ends, turn all mobile devices back off and return to your seats as quickly and as quietly as possible for Act Two.

Shakespeare's plays are powerful and moving. Please remain respectful the actors and your fellow audience members throughout the performance. **Please turn off and put away all cell phones and digital devices before the show begins.** Ushers will ask you to put them away if they see devices in use during the performance. **Also, please remain in your seats and refrain from talking or whispering while the show is in progress.** Remember: The actors can see and hear you just as well as you can see and hear them!

Immediately after the performance, you will have an opportunity for a Talkback Question-and-Answer session with the actors and crew. Our cast and technicians are eager to answer YOUR questions about the play, Shakespeare, and life and careers in the theatre! Your teachers and NSF staff will be nearby and give you instructions should any emergency arises. Following the performance and Talkback, you will return to your bus or car and return to school with your group.

### **. . . AFTER YOU LEAVE**

What new questions do you have about the characters and their story? How did the design of the production (the lighting, costumes, scenery, music and sound, etc.) help tell the story? Through colors, textures, patterns — what else?? Do you relate to any of the characters or anything that happened in this story? How? Why? Discuss these ideas with your friends and your teachers! How does this play relate to YOU?

# ***Hamlet Synopsis***

**By Denice Hicks**

Hamlet has just returned from university to his home in Denmark to discover that much has changed. His father, King Hamlet senior, has died two weeks previously, and his mother Gertrude has quickly married his father's brother, the new King Claudius. Hamlet has also struck up a romance with Ophelia, but her father Polonius and her brother Laertes both counsel her to be cautious about the relationship.

Hamlet's world is thrown into turmoil when he is visited by the ghost of his father. The ghost tells Hamlet that he was murdered by his brother Claudius, and he commands Hamlet to take revenge by killing the new king. Hamlet is shocked and confused: Is the ghost real? Is its story true? Did his mother know about the plot to kill his father? Hamlet decides to feign madness so that he can get information without raising questions at court.

Meanwhile, Hamlet's friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, have arrived for a visit, accompanied by a theatre troupe they met along the way. King Claudius and Queen Gertrude encourage the pair to try to cheer Hamlet up, but Hamlet has other ideas. He decides to use the players to stage a fictional reenactment of his father's murder. Hamlet believes that if his uncle is guilty, he will give himself away at the play.

Hamlet also begins acting distant toward Ophelia, who tells her father Polonius. Believing Hamlet is mad with love, Polonius tells Ophelia she must return the love letters that Hamlet has written her. Claudius and Polonius secretly watch as Ophelia tries to return the letters to Hamlet, but he rejects her and denies having written them in the first place. His rejection devastates Ophelia.

Later that night, the theatre troupe stages their play. Just as Hamlet planned, Claudius interrupts the performance and rushes out of the room, confirming his guilt.

After the play, Hamlet visits his mother's room, where Gertrude hopes to discover the reason for his increasingly erratic behavior. Polonius hides in the room to witness the encounter. When Hamlet arrives, he argues with his mother, alarming Polonius, who calls for help. Thinking that the hiding Polonius is actually Claudius, Hamlet kills him. Fearing for his life, Claudius sends Hamlet to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Meanwhile, Ophelia has gone mad with grief over her father and Hamlet. Her brother Laertes, who has been away in France, returns to find his father killed and his sister wandering the castle talking and singing to herself. Claudius convinces Laertes that Hamlet is the cause of both tragedies. During their conversation, Gertrude enters and announces that Ophelia has killed herself, and Laertes vows revenge.

Having managed to escape from the boat to England, Hamlet arrives back in Denmark, just in time for Ophelia's funeral. Seeing Hamlet at the funeral, Laertes attacks him, but the fight is stopped before it escalates. Laertes later invites Hamlet to a fencing match, where he plans to kill Hamlet. To ensure that Hamlet dies, Claudius gives Laertes a poisoned-tipped sword. He also poisons a glass of wine to give to Hamlet in case Laertes fails.

During the match, however, Gertrude unknowingly drinks the poisoned wine before Claudius can stop her. Laertes hits Hamlet with the sword, but they switch weapons in a scuffle, and Hamlet also wounds Laertes with the sword's poisoned tip. Gertrude dies, and Laertes reveals Claudius's plan to Hamlet. Hamlet kills Claudius as Laertes dies. Finally, Hamlet also succumbs to the poison, dying in the arms of his friend, Horatio.



# WHO'S WHO IN THE CAST



## **Hamlet** (Sam Ashdown)

The prince of Denmark. Son of Queen Gertrude and the late King Hamlet. Nephew to newly crowned king, Claudius.



## **Gertrude** (Cheryl White)

The Queen of Denmark. Married to Hamlet's father and married the king's brother shortly after his death.



## **Claudius** (Roger Csaki)

Brother of the late king of Denmark, newly married to Gertrude, and now crowned king of Denmark. Uncle to Hamlet.



## **Polonius** (Ethan Jones)

Father to Ophelia and Laertes. Lord Chamberlain of Claudius' court.



## **Laertes** (Audrey Tchoukoua)

Head servant to Leontes, is ordered by Leontes to poison Polixenes, flees to Bohemia with Polixenes and becomes his servant for 16 years before going back to Sicilia in the end.



## **Horatio** (Melinda Paul)

Best friend from college to Hamlet.



## **Ophelia** (Chelsea Bell)

Daughter to Polonius and brother to Laertes. Has a romantic relationship with Hamlet that eventually goes sour.



## **Rosencrantz** (Andy Kanies)

College friend of Hamlet, sent by Gertrude and Claudius to help Hamlet.



## **Guildenstern** (Santiago Sosa)

College friend of Hamlet, sent by Gertrude and Claudius to help Hamlet.



## **Osric** (Shawn Knight)

Courtier who summons Hamlet to his duel with Laertes.



## **Marcellus** (Lauren Berst)

Officer who first see the ghost king



## **The Ghost King Hamlet** (Brian Russell)

The late king of Denmark, Hamlet's father, who comes to Hamlet as a ghost to tell him to avenge his murder.

## ***A note from the director, Denice Hicks***

Thank you for coming to our 10th annual Winter Shakespeare show and the kick off of our 30th anniversary season! Our first Winter Shakes, January, 2008, was the last time we produced Hamlet. Think of how much has happened in those 10 years. The themes in Hamlet: life, love, truth, sanity, abuse of power, forgiveness, and death make it a timeless, ever-relevant story. The main conflict of this play is the impossible choice that Hamlet must make: either live with his father's murderer or commit murder himself. Murder, even in revenge, is wrong, but murder calls for revenge. Hamlet is frequently referred to as "indecisive" but who can say that murder is ever the right choice? Hamlet wastes not a moment of life. He never stops thinking and searching for the truth, which is not a bad way to live.

Hamlet is still in most schools' curriculums for good reasons, but teachers have too little time to cover it, and it can take over four hours to read the whole text. Presenting live performances for students is an honor. Over 4,000 students are seeing this show. If we can help even a few hundred of them think better of Shakespeare, poetry, language, theatre, themselves and each other, as my ma would say, "we've done a good day's work".

Lastly, the spirit of theatre is what makes a great production. You can have a million dollar set, spectacular costumes, exquisite actors, and six months of rehearsal, but if the ensemble isn't unified, committed and in tune, the play will just be impressive. We want the play to be effective and moving. To do that, we all need to be absolutely vulnerable, honest and brave. We need to think creatively and collaboratively, and I'm grateful that this cast and crew are the best I've ever had the pleasure of working with. I want our audiences, morning, afternoon, and evening, to leave here moved, with memories that will last, and motivated to live more fully, think more deeply, and love more completely. That's why I do theatre.

Play on.

## **SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE—A BRIEF TIMELINE:**

- 1558 Queen Elizabeth ascends to the throne
- 1564 April 23, birth of William Shakespeare, in Stratford-upon-Avon
- 1572-76 Formation of theater companies in London and building of The Theatre by James Burbage, the first free-standing commercial theatre.
- 1582 Marriage of Anne Hathaway and William Shakespeare
- 1583 Susanna Shakespeare born
- 1585 Twins Hamnet and Judith Shakespeare born
- 1586-88 (?) Sometime in the late 1580s, most likely, Shakespeare leaves Stratford-upon-Avon for London, perhaps with a company of players
- 1590 Shakespeare appears to be writing plays by this time. Early plays include *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *Henry VI, Parts 1, 2, 3*.
- 1592 Plague closes London theaters; Shakespeare turns to writing verse
- 1594 Record of performance of *The Comedy of Errors* at Christmas festivities at Gray's Inn, a residence and central site for lawyers in London
- 1598-99 The Burbages and Shakespeare and others finance the building of the Globe Theater on the south bank of the Thames, just outside the city of London. *Julius Caesar*, *Henry V*, and *As You Like It* may have been among the plays to open the Globe Theatre.
- 1603 Queen Elizabeth dies; James the VI of Scotland ascends the throne of England and becomes James I of England. James becomes the patron of Shakespeare's theater company (now known as "The King's Men")
- 1605-06 *King Lear* likely written; first record of court performance is Christmas 1606
- 1606 *Macbeth* likely written; perhaps written almost the same time as *King Lear*
- 1607 *Antony and Cleopatra* likely written; perhaps staged at the indoors Blackfriar's Theatre, and likely staged at the Globe Theatre.
- 1610-11 *The Winter's Tale* likely written; Simon Foreman records seeing a performance in May 1611
- 1612-14 Shakespeare "retires" to Stratford; however, he continues to collaborate with others writing plays
- 1616 April 23, Shakespeare dies & is buried at Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon
- 1623 First Folio—a collected "coffee table" edition of 37 plays—published by Shakespeare's fellow actors, John Hemings and William Condell

### **Useful Resources on Shakespeare's Biography:**

Bate, Jonathan. *Soul of the Age: A Biography of the Mind of William Shakespeare*. New York: Random House, 2010.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*. New York: Norton, 2004.

Schoenbaum, Samuel. *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975.

Folger Shakespeare Library website: <http://www.folger.edu/shakespeares-life>

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust: <http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/faqs.html>

## READING THE PLAY IN THE CLASSROOM



SHAKESPEARE  
Allowed!

### **1. Nashville Shakespeare Festival's Shakespeare Allowed! model:**

Often a simple exercise of reading key scenes aloud can make Shakespeare's words meaningful. The Nashville Shakespeare Festival sponsors a Shakespeare Aloud round table read of a play the first Saturday of each month at the main Nashville Public Library. In this format, everyone at the table (or in a desk in a classroom) reads in sequence, rather than taking roles. Everyone participates and gets to try his or her hand at reading the text.

Teachers may emphasize that the effort is primary. Teachers can select a scene or short segment to read aloud as an exercise to lay the groundwork for a class discussion or another class activity.

### **2. Staged readings model:**

Students with limited exposure to or experience with theater can benefit from an effort to read a scene or segment of a play aloud, using basic blocking and interaction among roles. In this model, students select a scene or part of a scene (@ 50 lines makes a good length) to read in roles. Working with their classmates, they can decide upon a few simple movements to dramatize the action. The emphasis is on students' making sense of the language and beginning to envision how interactions are shown on stage. Thus, rehearsal time should be short (15-20 minutes), and the students can rehearse and stage the scenes in one class period. One effective strategy is to have two groups of students stage the same scene, and invite the class members to comment on differences.

### **3. Creating multi-vocal readings of poetry and passages:**

Help students develop a sense of meaning and of shifts in tone or poetic diction by having students work in groups of 3-4 to read a single passage. This project can begin with a sonnet; a typical Shakespearean sonnet divides along quatrains (4 lines, with rhyme) and ends with a couplet: 4- 4- 4- 2. Students can decide pace, inflection, emphasis, and tone. Ask students to think of themselves as a jazz group, or a quartet, or a rap group, using their voices to convey meaning.



# *Hamlet*

## in the Classroom

\*Note: This section includes ideas for classroom activities, framed in gold. All quotations are from the online “Open Source Shakespeare.”

<https://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/views/plays/playmenu.php?WorkID=hamlet>

Additional resources, including online resources, are embedded in the pages below and also listed at the end.

# Hamlet in the Classroom

## 1. General Introduction/Texts/Sources

### General introduction

*Hamlet* is often one of the most fascinating plays for students. It is fascinating because it tells the story of a young person whose relatively uneventful life is suddenly interrupted by a ghost demanding revenge; that interruption will lead Hamlet through twists and turns of court politics, family relationships, a love relationship, philosophical dilemmas, stage managing a play, figuring out what his life means, and fighting a duel. While this story is told in language that is both vivid and immediate (“Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder!”) and deep and quizzical (“what is this quintessence of dust?”), its plot is generally well-known, in part because of the many film adaptations and the key lines that have made their way into our everyday speech. Indeed, *Hamlet* has a foot in today’s popular culture because of its language and its story. This guidebook is designed to capitalize on *Hamlet*’s popularity by providing ideas about how to use that popularity to give students new and deeper insights into this mysterious and intriguing play and its title character.

### Hamlet: Texts

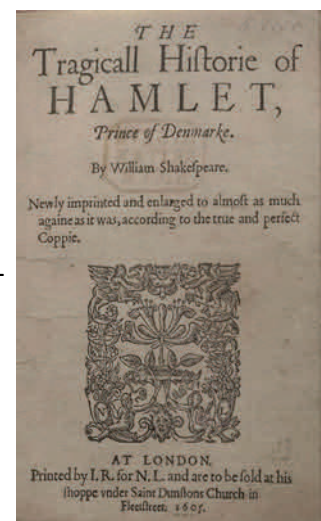
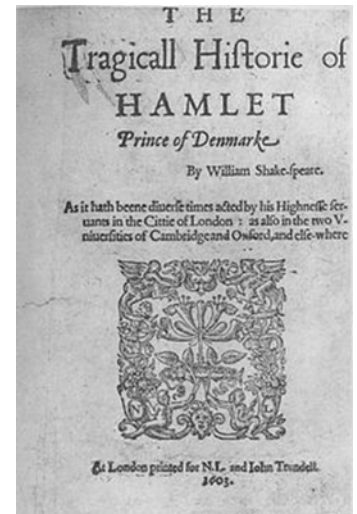
If you are teaching or reading *Hamlet* and you compare your text to that of a peer, you may quickly discover that your texts have different lines and sometimes entirely different scenes. This is because we have multiple texts of *Hamlet*, three major versions to be exact, and these three versions all have significant differences. Thus, the first mystery of Hamlet is simply, what are the words that compose this play?

We have the “Quarto One,” published in 1603. This text is thought to be a “memorial reconstruction,” that is, a script provided to or dictated to a printer from a minor character. Some scenes and passages are clear, but others seem hopelessly garbled, as these opening lines from the “to be or not to be” soliloquy illustrate:

To be, or not to be, I there's the point,  
To Die, to sleepe, is that all?

Some scholars think this version may represent a tour text, cut for traveling productions, because the title page (right) notes that the play has been acted at Cambridge and Oxford Universities. (image from Wikipedia)

Most scholars agree that “Quarto Two” (right) published in 1604-5, represents something close to Shakespeare’s original script, because it is about twice as long as Quarto One and many of the passages and scenes are more coherent. Indeed, the title page advertises the increased length. This version may have been printed to offer a “corrected edition” (as suggested by “perfect Coppie” on the title page) to the First Quarto. (image from Wikipedia)



## **Hamlet in the Classroom**

### **1. General Introduction/Texts/Sources CONT'D**

*Hamlet* is also included in the First Folio (1623), the “coffee table” edition of Shakespeare’s plays compiled by his theater colleagues, John Heminge and Henry Condell. This is yet another version, close to the “second quarto,” but with some unique lines not in either of the earlier quartos.

Directors of *Hamlet*, including Nashville Shakespeare Festival’s Denice Hicks, have the challenge of creating an acting text out of these three versions. While most acting versions follow Quarto Two’s scenes and actions, most directors create a text closer to the length of Quarto One, the only one of the three texts that could be acted within two hours. Not only is two hours the length needed for Nashville Shakespeare Festival’s *Hamlet*, it also seems to be the standard length of Shakespeare’s plays, which required afternoon sunlight at the outdoor theaters in London.

#### ***Hamlet*: Sources**

As is the case with all but two of Shakespeare’s plays (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest*), Shakespeare drew on classical and contemporary literature for plots and characters of his plays. There are references to “Hamlet,” either a character or play title for a revenge tragedy, in theatrical records of the late 1580s and 1590s in London; thus, we think Shakespeare used that earlier play as inspiration (as he also used earlier plays about Henry V and King Lear for his own later plays). He also seems to have been familiar with the story of the Nordic (northern European) hero, Amleth, retold by a French writer, Belleforest, in a 1570 collection of tales called *Historiques tragiques*. (Shakespeare likely had a reading knowledge of French.) Shakespeare’s hero Hamlet also bears striking resemblance to the Greek tragic hero Orestes, who has the burden of revenging his father’s death at the hand of his mother and her lover, from Aeschylus’s trilogy, *The Oresteia* (458 BCE). Although this play was not in English translation during Shakespeare’s time, it was available in Latin translations that Shakespeare may have seen. Thus, when we wonder why this play remains so popular in western, even world cultures, we might do well to consider Shakespeare’s blending of sources—Nordic stories (not unlike *Beowulf*, in the Anglo-Saxon tradition), fifth-century Greek heroes from a playwright (Aeschylus) with a philosophical bent, and the popular mode of revenge tragedy, one of the first great successes in the commercial theaters—the “Game of Thrones” type story of its day.

## *Hamlet* in the Classroom

### 2. *Hamlet* and Hamlet: Play and Character

“you would pluck out the heart of my mystery”

--Hamlet to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern,  
3.2.357, after the “Murder of Gonzago” play  
gets Claudius all upset.

Consider the following suggestions for understanding *Hamlet* and Hamlet “avenues into” instead of “simplifications of” the plot and character. Students can compare the various ways the plot and character can be understood and debate the validity of these interpretations. They can also try staging scenes with different genres as the guiding framework to bring out the multiple levels of the language, character, and action.

## Hamlet in the Classroom

### 3. Hamlet as Tragedy, specifically Revenge Tragedy

“Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder” (The Ghost’s command to Hamlet, 1.5)

Tragedy is often defined as the genre that depicts human beings confronting a limitation, often understood as “fate,” the outcome of which has serious and life-changing consequences for both hero and the world of the hero. “Revenge” tragedy intensifies this confrontation by injecting questions of justice and by the challenge to violate the prohibition (at least in a Judeo-Christian context) against murder.

In this context, Hamlet becomes a revenger, and not your everyday revenger, but one called upon to kill a king—that adds regicide to revenge. Hamlet recognizes this as his fate in the visit of the ghost: “The time is out of joint; Oh cursed spite / That ever I was born to set it right” (1.5.187-88).

Students can outline the plot as a “revenge tragedy” plot. This would include identifying scenes and passages that emphasize Hamlet’s efforts to enact the Ghost’s command, as well as the dilemmas this effort creates: Hamlet’s second soliloquy (“O what a rogue and peasant slave am I” 2.2.485 ff.) and fourth soliloquy (“How all occasions do inform against me” 4.4.30 ff.) make especially good texts for analysis. How does Claudius oppose Hamlet? Does Hamlet (the “philosophical” Hamlet, see below) delay his revenge, or is Claudius a skillful and wily opponent, not easily trapped? Note the surveillance society (see “political” Hamlet below) that Claudius manages—can one simply approach Claudius with a sword drawn? Note what happens when Laertes tries this (4.5.100)—Claudius calls immediately for his “Switzers,” his Swiss Guards. Revenge also places a moral burden on Hamlet; he comments that he must be a “scourge and minister” (3.4.173), and will be punished as well.

Questions for discussion: Does Hamlet achieve “justice” with his assassination of Claudius at the end of the play? Do you feel that “revenge” offers a full resolution of the play? Or is it only part of the story of Hamlet? Do you think Denmark is now “cleansed” because of Hamlet’s actions? Is the Denmark purged of Claudius a better place?



## *Hamlet in the Classroom*

### **4. Hamlet as Ghost Story and Murder Mystery**

“Be thou a spirit of health or a goblin damned” (Hamlet’s address to the Ghost, 1.4)

From the beginning of the play, the Ghost keeps the guards, Horatio, and Hamlet on edge. Hamlet’s first lines to the Ghost, above, recognize that for Shakespeare’s day, a ghost could be a good messenger from Heaven or an evil spirit wandering the earth. Thus, Hamlet’s desire to test out the Ghost’s story through the play within the play (“The Murder of Gonzago”) to see if Claudius’s reaction indicates guilt is a logical move in this cultural context. It is also an important move for the sake of Hamlet’s own soul; as he says in the second soliloquy, the ghost “may be a devil” whose goal is to “damn” Hamlet (3.2.534,37).

The Ghost itself is a fascinating character. Students can explore ways of staging the ghost (an actual figure? A voice? A visual presence, though without human features?). Likewise, some psychological interpretations emphasize the Ghost as a projection of Hamlet’s consciousness, his effort to understand his now-dead father.

The Ghost vanishes after Act 1 until Hamlet confronts his mother in 3.3. The Ghost makes a reappearance (appropriately attired in a nightgown, as suggested by a stage direction in Quarto 1) in the middle of this scene. Note what the Ghost has to say at this point. What is the effect of the Ghost’s interruption of the intense conversation between Hamlet and his mother?

Does the play provide any other evidence beyond the Ghost’s word for Claudius’s guilt? Do you consider the mystery of the death of King Hamlet solved by the end of the play?

# *Hamlet* in the Classroom

## 5. Hamlet as Political Thriller

“Popped in between the election and my hopes” (Hamlet to Horatio, 5.2.64)

We might think that Shakespeare’s original audience would be surprised to learn that Claudius, brother of deceased King Hamlet, is king rather than the son and namesake Prince Hamlet. However, as we learn in the play, and as was historically the case, Denmark had an “elected” monarchy, meaning that a noble with support of other nobles may be “elected” king. It is Hamlet who complains that Claudius “[p]opped in between the election and my hopes” as Hamlet prepares to engage Claudius at the end of the play. Indeed, the play quickly becomes a contest between “mighty opposites” (5.2.61).

Students who are “Game of Thrones” aficionados may find numerous affinities between the fantasy / political drama and Hamlet. Hamlet and Claudius each have legitimate claims to the Danish throne; if indeed the Ghost is telling the truth, Claudius achieved a remarkably successful coup d’etat with nary a ripple of controversy upon what seems to have been the sudden death of King Hamlet. Hamlet returns from studying at Wittenberg University for his father’s funeral; quickly, the play pivots from Hamlet’s despair at the loss of his father and his mother’s remarriage (see his first soliloquy, “O that this too too solid flesh would melt”) to a contest with Claudius.

Students can plot the political thriller, the contest for power between Hamlet and Claudius, by beginning with the “state” of Denmark. Marcellus’ famous line, “something is rotten in the state of Denmark,” followed later with Hamlet’s “Denmark’s a prison,” suggest a widespread corruption, as does the conversation about the production of armaments between Horatio and the watchmen as they wait for the arrival of the Ghost in 1.1. Another important angle is the “surveillance society” that is Denmark. Indeed, Polonius is the main strategist in using surveillance techniques to try to discern Hamlet’s motives and stymie his actions, and he is not above using his daughter (he will “loose” her to him 2.2.159) as bait. Ultimately, his surveillance costs him his life, as he lurks behind the arras in Gertrude’s chamber while Hamlet confronts her (3.4). Secrecy is suggested by Claudius’s description of the “hugger-mugger” (4.5.84) reasons for the burial of Polonius as he talks with Gertrude after seeing the mad Ophelia.

When read as a political thriller, does Hamlet’s famous “delay” in revenge seem problematic? Or an effective strategy for this game of “cat and mouse” with Claudius?

# Hamlet in the Classroom

## 6. Hamlet as Philosophical Inquiry

“To be or not to be” (3.1.55-87)

This most famous line from Hamlet, opening his third soliloquy (3.1), crystalizes the philosophical dilemma he faces, and that all of us must face. Can we take any truly serious action without coming to terms with our own mortality? Students should be given the opportunity to wrestle with the language of this soliloquy, getting beyond its pop-culture cliché quality. Students can work on paraphrasing the speech, line by line. Also, comparing versions of the soliloquy from various films of Hamlet can illuminate the speech’s meaning and context.

Students may want to consider whether the play resolves this “to be or not to be” dilemma. The graveyard scene is one moment to consider; Hamlet and the gravedigger joke about the skull of Yorick, a vivid symbol of death and one of the iconic images of Hamlet—holding a skull (5.1). Another speech to consider is Hamlet’s “the readiness is all,” which is in his conversation with Horatio just before the swordfight:

Not a whit, we defy augury: there's a special  
providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now,  
'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be  
now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the  
readiness is all: since no man has aught of what he  
leaves, what is't to leave betimes? (5.2.198-202)

Does this resolution for “readiness” seem to resolve the “to be or not to be” dilemma? Or is it a choice to act within a world where there are still many unknowns, or where fate, or Providence, or a Ghost, seem to be shaping your choices? Fortinbras orders that Hamlet be borne “like a soldier” (5.2.380) off the stage at the end of the play. Do you think Hamlet dies more of a soldier than a philosopher? How might you ask Hamlet to be borne off the stage if you wanted to emphasize his role as philosopher?

# Hamlet in the Classroom

## 7. Hamlet as Family Saga

“more than kin and less than kind” (Hamlet’s 1st line, his aside comment on Claudius, 1.2.65)

*Hamlet* tells the story of two intertwined families—Hamlet’s family and Ophelia’s family. The connection is political (Polonius is Claudius’s most trusted advisor), but the relationships are personal—the first act indicates that some sort of relationship has existed between Hamlet and Ophelia. Hamlet and Laertes are perfect foils for each other; Laertes leaves for Paris, and we gather from Polonius’s admonitions (including “to thine own self be true” 1.3.77) and his dispatch of “friends” to trail Laertes, that he’s not so sure about Laertes’ behavior. Polonius keeps each child on a short leash. Hamlet, on the other hand, is wearing “inky black” and mourning his dead father and his mother’s quick remarriage.

One line of interpretation turns a psychoanalytical lens onto the family relationships, proposing that Hamlet is jealous of Claudius’s marriage of his mother and their contest is as much for the affection of Gertrude as for political power. Another reading proposes that Claudius killed King Hamlet for love of Gertrude, and not for power. Such readings are less frequently put forward now, but Hamlet’s intense conversation with his mother in 3.4 is sometimes staged to emphasize his revulsion at her sexuality.

As Hamlet and Laertes are foils for each other, so Gertrude and Ophelia are often considered in tandem, as the only two female roles in the play. While each character makes an interesting study in isolation, they can be compared to discern the roles of women within this court, the way they deal with the actions and violence, and how Shakespeare depicts the impact of hierarchies on women.

Students can explore motives and emotions in speeches. Do Hamlet and Ophelia love each other (as Hamlet declares when jumping into the grave in Act 5), and are forced apart by the circumstances of the court? Or does Hamlet come to see Ophelia as like his mother, capable of betrayal of a loyal man, as Hamlet believes his late father was? Do these family emotions control the action, or are they subordinate to the political conflicts?

# Hamlet in the Classroom

## 8. Set and Setting

As each director establishes a text for Hamlet, each set designer develops a set to signal the environment of the play in line with the director's concept. The play has a clear setting: the castle of Elsinore in Denmark, a castle still standing today and known as Kronborg Castle in Helsingor. (image from Wikipedia)

Sam Lowry has designed a set to suggest the multiple layers and winding ways of the court at Elsinore. Not how the set functions to underscore the action and define the world within which the action occurs. You will also see innovative use of projections, something Shakespeare could only dream about! ("Tis here. 'Tis here. 'Tis gone."—the guards and Horatio say of the Ghost in 1.1).

Richard B. Sewall is a literary scholar who uses concepts from philosophy and theology to explore tragedy in *The Vision of Tragedy* (1959). He suggests that major tragedies take place in "boundary situations," where human beings face the unknown:

The tragic vision impels the man of action to fight against his destiny, kick against the pricks, and state his case before God or his fellows. It impels the artist, in his fictions, toward what [theologian Karl] Jaspers calls "boundary-situations," man at the limits of his sovereignty—Job on the ash-heap, Prometheus on the crag, Oedipus in his moment of self-discovery, Lear on the heath, Ahab on his lonely quarter-deck. Here, with all the protective covering stripped off, the hero faces as if no man had ever face it before the existential question . . . Lear's "Is man no more than this?"

*The Vision of Tragedy*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1959. P. 5.

Hamlet also takes place in "boundary situations," the battlements of Elsinore which, as Horatio points out, are poised between the security of the castle and the chaos of the sea:

What if it [the ghost] tempt you toward the flood, my lord,  
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff  
That beetles o'er his base into the sea,  
And there assume some other horrible form  
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason  
And draw you into madness? Think of it:  
The very place puts toys of desperation  
Without more motive into every brain  
That looks so many fathoms to the sea  
And hears it roar beneath. (1.4.69-78)



# The Winter's Tale in the Classroom

## 9. Madness

As Horatio's speech above shows, madness is, early on, an issue in the play. The play presents us with the dilemma of Hamlet's madness: An act, to distract Claudius and Polonius from thinking Hamlet is a serious threat to their power?

Hamlet speaks to Horatio and Marcellus after the Ghost disappears—he asks them to not give away his act, should he at times seem to display an “antic [crazy] disposition”:

Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,  
How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself,  
As I perchance hereafter shall think meet  
To put an antic disposition on,  
That you, at such times seeing me, never shall,  
With arms encumber'd thus, or this headshake,  
Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase,  
As 'Well, well, we know,' or 'We could, an if we would,'  
Or 'If we list to speak,' or 'There be, an if they might,'  
Or such ambiguous giving out, to note  
That you know aught of me: this not to do,  
So grace and mercy at your most need help you.

(1.5.166-178)

Note how Polonius assumes Hamlet falls “into the madness wherein he now raves” (2.2.147) because of his love for Ophelia, which he has instructed her to reject. But after eavesdropping on Hamlet's “To be or not to be” soliloquy and dialogue with Ophelia, Claudius discerns that Hamlet is not lovesick but is “brood[ing]” over “something in his soul” that is much more serious. Claudius is right: “Madness in great ones must not unwatched go” (3.1.187).

Ophelia, on the other hand, presents us with a painful example of authentic madness. You can hear it in her lines after her confrontation with Hamlet and the “get thee to a nunnery” dialogue: “O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown! . . . O, woe is me, / To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!”

We do indeed see Ophelia become “a document in madness,” as her brother Laertes describes her (4.5.171). Her “mad scenes” in 4.5 are painful to watch, yet she reveals truths about the court and the families as she seems to be singing wild snatches of verse. John Everett Millais's painting (at the Tate Gallery in London) has become the iconic image of the mad Ophelia, who falls from her swing to her death:

Millais's image is not the only one. This [website](#) links the multitude of images of Ophelia created from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries



Tate Gallery of Art

Did Hamlet's choices push Ophelia into madness? Or did her father's orders to reject Hamlet's advances have any role in rupturing Ophelia's sanity? Is Ophelia an image of what happens to women denied their own autonomy and compelled to obey the wishes, or the manipulations, of men?

## *The Winter's Tale in the Classroom*

### 10. The Theater

“The play’s the thing / Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the King” (2.2.539-40)

More than any other play, with the exception of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Hamlet* explores the purpose and function of the theater. *Hamlet* may have been played in the first two or three seasons at the new Globe theater built in 1599 and in which Shakespeare was an investor.

After the traveling players arrive in Elsinore, *Hamlet* hits on the idea of having them play “*The Murder of Gonzago*,” a play that replicates what the Ghost has told him about the murder. *Hamlet*’s theory of theater is that it can “make mad the guilty” (2.2.499) by showing their crimes—in other words, theater can pierce our consciences. Students can explore *Hamlet*’s second soliloquy as a description of how theater works—would you agree that theater is an art form that can compel us to confront truths? How does “*The Murder of Gonzago*” seem to impact Claudius?

*Hamlet* also has ideas about acting. “Suit the action to the word, the word to the action” (3.2.17-18) he tells the actors, advocating a realism, perhaps? Students, especially those in theater or interested in theater, can explore this passage (3.2.1-45) to assess *Hamlet*’s advice and consider its function in the play as a whole. Is one of *Hamlet*’s roles also “actor,” as well as philosopher, prince, detective, son, revenger, tragic hero?

# *Hamlet* in the Classroom

## Class Activities

### Shakespeare and Young Adult Fiction

Contributed by Claudia Ludwig, Vanderbilt University

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has been adapted in several young adult novels, including *Dating Hamlet* by Lisa Fiedler (2002), *Ophelia* by Lisa Klein (2006), and *Falling for Hamlet* by Michelle Ray (2011). Having students make connections between these novels and Shakespeare's play can be used to initiate conversations among them.

#### **Below are some sample discussion prompts:**

- How does Shakespeare adapt his source material for *Hamlet* and how would you compare it to the way in which the authors of these novels have adapted *Hamlet*?
- What are the benefits and limitations of writing similar stories in different forms, i.e. switching from drama to prose?
- How would you describe the writing style and cover art of these novels? Why do you think they are presented in this way?
- Is there a difference between adaptations and fan fiction? If so, what do you think this is? Why do you think readers are so interested in reading versions of stories they are already familiar with?
- How have Hamlet and Ophelia's personalities been modified in these novels? Why do you think this is?
- Why do you think Ophelia survives in all of these novels?

As a final exercise, students can adapt a single scene from *Hamlet* and reflect on the aspects of it that they kept, the ones they changed, why they made their authorial choices, and how these choices influence the readers' interpretation of their adaptations as well as Shakespeare's play.

# *Hamlet* in the Classroom

## Class Activities CONT'D

### Experimenting with Genre and Acting: The Opening Two Words

Contributed by Marcia McDonald, Belmont University

The longest of Shakespeare's plays opens with two simple words: "Who's there?" How these words are spoken can signal what's to come. Students can explore how intonation, emphasis, and simple stage movement (blocking) can suggest an interpretation of the play.

#### Activity:

Students may work individually, in pairs, or in groups of 3, with the third student serving as "director."

Students consider the immediate setting: guard on duty at the time of "changing" of the guard. The guard who should speak first to challenge anyone is the guard on duty—Francisco. However, these first words are spoken by Bernardo, the guard who is coming on duty.

Each student or group determines a context for the play as a whole to put forward (see the suggestions for revenge tragedy, ghost story, political thriller, above).

Each student or group determines how to speak the lines to convey a particular meaning or emotion of the speaker and the direction of the play; some emotions include the following: fear, confidence, questioning, defensiveness, anxiety, surprise.

Students can present their interpretations to the class, using simple stage blocking (and lighting effects, if the classroom allows this)

Classmates can interpret each students' performance and debate how this opening staging can set the tone for the play to come.

# Hamlet in the Classroom

## Class Activities CONT'D

### Text Work: Discovering Iambic Pentameter

Contributed by Jayme Marigza-Yeo, Belmont University

1. Define iambic pentameter,
2. Identify deviations from it: shared lines, short lines/pauses, and long lines, including feminine endings and hexameter.

Discuss how meter creates meaning in the lines of the play. This activity can also help students understand the major plot points of the opening.

Time: approx. 15-30 minutes, depending on level of familiarity

Text: *Hamlet* 1.5.-28 (Arden edition; copied from MIT Shakespeares below)

Activity:

1. Choose two volunteers, or ask the students to read the speech to each other without any advanced instruction. The purpose here is simply to realize how "cold reading" often begins with a lack of understanding--stumbling over the readings is the point here!
2. Explain iambic pentameter to the students, emphasizing the number of syllables per line. Have students tap the rhythm out and/or speak a couple of lines from the text that run in perfect meter.
3. Explain "shared" lines (sometimes called "split" lines), which sometimes indicate that the actors should "pick up" each other's rhythm. Shared lines tend to move more quickly.
4. Identify the shared lines in the first five lines of dialogue between Hamlet and the Ghost (up to the line "pity me not." Note that some lines in this section are long, but you can ignore this for now, or let students know you'll address it later). Why would these lines be shared? Why is the dialogue moving quickly here?
5. Explain "incomplete" lines, or lines that contain pauses. Identify the pauses in lines 8-9 (Hamlet: "What" Ghost: "I am they father's spirit.") Why would these lines contain pauses? What are the characters thinking about, and why do they pause here? What is important about these lines? How would the characters react to each other's lines during this pause?
6. Explain "long" lines--lines of hexameter or lines with feminine endings. Often, these can be more difficult to say, and actors have to wait longer before taking a breath as they are spoken. This leads to a sense of confusion or difficulty. Consequently, long lines often are places that can contain a lot of emotion.
7. Ask students to read through the ghost's long speech in the passage, identifying all the long lines. This is also a good time to explain any difficult-to-understand words in the passage as well. There are two true long lines--line 12 ("Till the foul crimes") has a feminine ending, and line 13 ("Are burnt and purg'd") is hexameter. Line 18 ("Thy knotted and combined") looks like it is short, but the -ed on "combined" is meant to be pronounced to make it regular. Line 19 ("And each particular") may be long, but it can also be regularized by shortening the 3-syllable "particular" to 2 syllables by not pronouncing the -cu in the word. This is common in Shakespeare's work. What is the significance of lines 12 and 13 (and possibly 19)? Why would these lines have more emotion than the other lines? If you were the actor, how might you deliver this speech?
8. Identify the pauses in the remaining dialogue. Why are these pauses here? How would the actors react to each other in these moments?

Have the students practice the passage with each other a couple more times. Discuss how they understand the passage differently now than they did at the beginning.



# Hamlet in the Classroom

## Class Activities CONT'D

Enter GHOST and HAMLET

HAMLET

Where wilt thou lead me? speak; I'll go no further.

GHOST

Mark me.

HAMLET

I will.

GHOST

My hour is almost come,  
When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames  
Must render up myself.

HAMLET

Alas, poor ghost!

GHOST

Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing  
To what I shall unfold.

HAMLET

Speak; I am bound to hear.

GHOST

So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear.

HAMLET

What?

GHOST

I am thy father's spirit,  
Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,  
And for the day confined to fast in fires,  
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature  
Are burnt and purged away. But that I am forbid  
To tell the secrets of my prison-house,  
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word  
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,  
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,  
Thy knotted and combined locks to part  
And each particular hair to stand on end,  
Like quills upon the fretful porpentine:  
But this eternal blazon must not be  
To ears of flesh and blood. List, list, O, list!  
If thou didst ever thy dear father love--

HAMLET

O God!

GHOST

Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

HAMLET

Murder!

GHOST

Murder most foul, as in the best it  
is;  
But this most foul, strange and  
unnatural.

## **ABOUT THE NASHVILLE SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL**

The mission of the Nashville Shakespeare Festival is **to educate and entertain the Mid-South community through professional Shakespearean experiences.**

The Festival enriches and unifies our community with bold, innovative and relevant productions along with empowering, participatory educational programs, setting the community standard of excellence in educational outreach and performances of Shakespeare's plays.

The Festival stages Shakespeare's plays in the summer at Centennial Park and in January at the Troutt Theater at Belmont University.

The Festival also sponsors numerous workshops, educational outreach programs, and public events. Please visit our website for specific information: <http://nashvilleshakes.org>

## **NSF Apprentice/Journeyman Company**

The Apprentice/Journeyman Company is a training intensive for aspiring theatre lovers age 13+ led by the Artistic Director and Education Director, along with guest artists hired from the professional talent in Nashville. Apprentices receive over 70 hours of performance training in movement, voice and diction, acting, text analysis, and character work, and then perform supporting roles in the Shakespeare in the Park production. Auditions for the 2018 Apprentice Company will be announced in February. For further information on this pro-

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## ADDITIONAL TEACHER RESOURCES

Some fine (and not so fine!) Shakespeare resources are available on the internet. Here are some of the most authoritative and useful, all with sections on *Hamlet*:

<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/>

Internet Shakespeare Editions—with introductions by major scholars and sections on biography and historical context, and links to other useful resources on the internet.

<https://www.folger.edu/teach-learn>

Folger Shakespeare Library—teachers can join the new Folger Teacher Online Community, or simply consult the website for ideas. This site has full texts as well as an extraordinary number of resources and teaching ideas.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBOI-Rnudd-b0XJsmKDIId-g>

The Folger Shakespeare Library YouTube channel—video resources for *Hamlet* and many other Shakespeare topics.

<https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/>

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, the organization located in Stratford-upon-Avon, England—this website has both educational and informational pages.

<https://www.rsc.org.uk/>

The Royal Shakespeare Company website includes an Education page, with numerous teaching resources—and information about the RSC 2018 *Hamlet*!

<http://globetoglobe.shakespearesglobe.com/>

Though the global tour of *Hamlet* is over, the website remains up and provides insight into how *Hamlet* is received worldwide.

<https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/hamlet/#.WkekUFQ-d-V>

Many useful videos here from the PBS series, “Shakespeare Uncovered,” including videos on soliloquy. This link is to the *Hamlet* page, and the series includes most of the other plays as well.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/hamlet/archive.shtml>

The BBC website linked to the production starring David Tennant.

A selection of productions available on video:

Starring Laurence Olivier, 1948.

Starring Nicol Williamson, 1969.

Starring Mel Gibson, 1990.

Starring Kenneth Branagh, 1996.

Starring Ethan Hawke, 2000.

Starring David Tennant, 2008.

Starring Benedict Cumberbatch, 2015.

## **Shakespeare, Class Activities, and Tennessee English/Language Arts Standards, Grades 9-12**

All the class activities suggested above have been reviewed in light of Tennessee's 2017-18 English/Language Arts Standards. The activities as a whole meet the following standards. Teachers using these activities may shape them to emphasize one or more of these standards as part of the overall curriculum.

TN State English/Language Arts standards:

[https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/standards/ela/stds\\_english\\_language\\_arts.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/standards/ela/stds_english_language_arts.pdf)

Language standards:

Knowledge of Language (9-10, 11-12, L.KL.3)

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use (9-10, 11-12, L.VAU.4)

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use (9-10, 11-12, L.VAU.5)

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use (9-10, 11-12, L.VAU.6)

Reading standards:

Key Ideas and Details (9-10, 11-12, RL.KID.1)

Key Ideas and Details (9-10, 11-12, RL.KID.2)

Key Ideas and Details (9-10, 11-12, RL.KID.3)

Craft and Structure (9-10, 11-12, RL.CS.4)

Craft and Structure (9-10, 11-12, RL.CS.5)

Craft and Structure (9-10, 11-12, RL.CS.6)

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas (9-10, 11-12, RL.IKI.7)

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas (9-10, 11-12, RL.IKI.9)

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity (9-10, 11-12, RL.RRTC.10)

Speaking and Listening standards:

Comprehension and Collaboration (9-10, 11-12, SL.CC.1)

Comprehension and Collaboration (9-10, 11-12, SL.CC.2)

Comprehension and Collaboration (9-10, 11-12, SL.CC.3)

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas (9-10, 11-12, SL.PKI.4)

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas (9-10, 11-12, SL.PKI.5)

Writing Standards:

The Class Activities and Class Discussion assignments all can be adapted for writing assignments, meeting Writing Standards 1-10 for 9-10, 11-12 grades.

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