

# hamlet

chicago  
shakespeare theater  
on navy pier



Ghost of Hamlet, rendering by Susan E. Mickey, 2019

# teacher handbook

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This Teacher Handbook grew out of a team effort of teachers past and present, Chicago Shakespeare Theater artists, interns, educators, and scholars. Jessica Bonnem, an English teacher from Smyrna, GA, created the content for this handbook as an Education Intern in summer 2018. Chicago Shakespeare Theater gratefully acknowledges the groundbreaking and indelible work of Dr. Rex Gibson and the Cambridge School Shakespeare Series, whose contributions to the field of teaching have helped shape our own work through the years.

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Chicago Shakespeare Theater is Chicago's professional theater dedicated to the works of William Shakespeare. Founded as Shakespeare Repertory in 1986, the company moved to its seven-story home on Navy Pier in 1999. In its Elizabethan-style courtyard theater, 500 seats on three levels wrap around a deep thrust stage—with only nine rows separating the farthest seat from the stage. Chicago Shakespeare also features a flexible 180-seat black box studio theater, a Teacher Resource Center, and a Shakespeare specialty bookstall. In 2017, a new, innovative performance venue, The Yard at Chicago Shakespeare, expands CST's campus to include three theaters. The year-round, flexible venue can be configured in a variety of shapes and sizes with audience capacities ranging from 150 to 850, defining the audience–artist relationship to best serve each production. Now in its thirty-second season, the Theater has produced nearly the entire Shakespeare canon: *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *As You Like It*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Cymbeline*, *Edward III*, *Hamlet*, *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2*, *Henry V*, *Henry VI Parts 1, 2, and 3*, *Henry VIII*, *Julius Caesar*, *King John*, *King Lear*, *Love's Labor's Lost*, *Macbeth*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, *Pericles*, *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Tempest*, *Timon of Athens*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and *The Winter's Tale*. Chicago Shakespeare Theater was the 2008 recipient of the Regional Theatre Tony Award. Chicago's Jeff Awards year after year have honored the Theater, including repeated awards for Best Production and Best Director, the two highest honors in Chicago theater. Since Chicago Shakespeare's founding, its programming for young audiences has been an essential element in the realization of its mission. Team Shakespeare supports education in our schools, where Shakespeare is part of every required curriculum. As a theater within a multicultural city, we are committed to bringing Shakespeare to life for tens of thousands of middle and high school students each year. Team Shakespeare's programming includes free teacher workshops, student matinees of main stage shows, post-performance discussions, comprehensive teacher handbooks, and an abridged, original production each year of one of the "curriculum plays." Team Shakespeare offers a region-wide forum for new vision and enthusiasm for teaching Shakespeare in our schools. In 2012 the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC, honored that vision with the prestigious Shakespeare Steward Award. The 2018-19 Season offers student matinees for two of Chicago Shakespeare Theater's full-length productions: in the winter, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by Joe Dowling, and in the spring, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* directed by Artistic Director Barbara Gaines. Also this winter, a 75-minute abridged version of *Macbeth* will be performed at the Theater on Navy Pier and will tour to schools across the region. We hope that you and your students will enjoy our work—and Shakespeare's creative genius brought to life on stage. 🏰

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# hamlet

written by william shakespeare | directed by barbara gaines

The world's most famous drama of murder and revenge? *Hamlet*, hands down, every time. A king is murdered. His assassin—and his brother—Claudius, sits on Denmark's throne and sleeps in the queen's bed. The old king's restless ghost walks upon the castle battlements, commanding his son, Hamlet, to avenge his death. And Ophelia, Hamlet's love, thrusts his letters and gifts at him, no longer desired. As his known world is turned upside down, Hamlet is ensnared by the politics of the royal court and the prisons of his own mind. Lies, suspicion, and revenge permeate the land. Something is, indeed, rotten in the state of Denmark.

Set design by Scott Adam Davis and projection design by Mike Tutaj for CST's 2019 production of *Hamlet*.

# introduction



## Living Art, Creating Community

**[Theatrical performance] is essentially a sociable, communal affair. This is important. To resist this is, I think, to ruin one of the very important parts of the theatrical experience. Let the play and let the fact that temporarily you are not your private self, but a member of a closely fused group, make it easy for the performance to 'take you out of yourself.' This, I suggest, is the object of going to a play...to be taken out of yourself, out of your ordinary life, away from the ordinary world of everyday.**

—TYRONE GUTHRIE, 1962

**A**s a *living art*, a play is performed for a group of people who gather and, at each performance, create a unique and singular audience, experiencing a story together as a community—just as you will soon at Chicago Shakespeare Theater. Drama not only tells stories about human communication, it *is* human communication. Different from television or film, theater creates a two-way communication between the actors and their audience. You are not simply on the receiving end of this communication: the audience is also a participant. Here at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, you become part of the story.

During Shakespeare's time, playhouses were gathering places for Londoners from all walks of life to experience a story, together. Because most of Shakespeare's plays were written to be performed outdoors in daylight, the actors and the audience could see each other. The audience was part of the performance—they didn't sit in a darkened theater as they typically do today. In Chicago Shakespeare's Courtyard Theater, the actors and their audience are so close together that the actors can see almost everyone in the audience—and they can *hear* everyone. Sitting this close to the stage and actors, the audience becomes part of the world of the play.

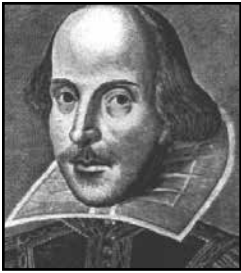
## How can you help us give you the best performance we can?

- ▣ **Please, no talking during the performance.** It distracts the actors as well as the people sitting nearby.
- ▣ **Respond naturally to our play.** Emotions are part of drama. We hope that you'll laugh, cry, and even gasp—but as a natural response to the story, and not in order to distract attention from the stage.
- ▣ **Please leave all “noisemakers”**—food, gum, cell phones, iPods, etc.—back at school or on the bus. In a quiet theater, wrappers, munching—and even a phone's vibration—are heard by all, the actors included.
- ▣ **No photographs of any kind, please.** Flashbulbs can make the actors lose their focus and can be dangerous. Digital cameras, along with all other kinds of recording devices, are prohibited, as is text-messaging.

You know Sir Patrick Stewart from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*—but Stewart spent most of his illustrious career on *stage*. He said once that most “audiences don't understand how essential they are to the experience, and what an impact they can have on it.” Theater can't exist without an audience. Actor Cristina Panfilio, who played Helena in Chicago Shakespeare's recent production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, explained to students at a performance: “I never find myself until the audience shows up.” Film and Broadway actor Jason Robards once said, “An audience is really another performer in the play.” We are used to thinking about the *actors'* roles in a play, but may find it strange to imagine ourselves, the audience, playing a role—and a leading one, at that.

Because theater is art that lives and breathes, each performance is guaranteed to be unique—because each audience and what it brings is unique. The success of a live performance depends upon its audience and their honest responses. When an audience is unengaged, the story is less dynamic and compelling. And when the actors experience a responsive, interested audience, their work is at its best—full of animation and energy. We hope you'll enjoy *your* role as a member of this storytelling community—and will help us create a dramatic experience that you'll always remember. 👑





## Bard's Bio

**T**he exact date of William Shakespeare's birth is not known, but his baptism (traditionally held three days after a child's birth) was recorded on April 26, 1564. His father,

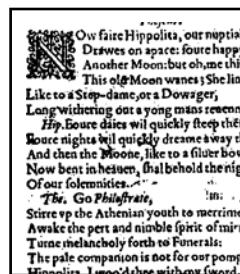
John Shakespeare, was a tanner, glover, grain dealer, and prominent town official of the thriving market town of Stratford-upon-Avon. His mother, Mary Arden, was the daughter of a prosperous, educated farmer. Though the records are lost, Shakespeare undoubtedly attended Stratford's grammar school, where he would have acquired knowledge of Latin and the classical writers, training in rhetoric and analysis of texts, and gained a smattering of arithmetic as well as instruction in the articles of the Christian faith. There is no record that Shakespeare acquired a university education of any kind.

At the age of eighteen, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior. They had one daughter, Susanna, followed by twins, Hamnet and Judith. Hamnet, Shakespeare's only son, died at age eleven. From 1585, the year in which the twins were baptized, until 1592 when he is first referred to as a dramatist in London, we know nothing of Shakespeare's life. Consequently, these seven so-called "lost years" are filled with legend and conjecture. We may never know what brought Shakespeare to London or how he entered its world of the theater. The first reference to Shakespeare as an actor and playwright appears in 1592 and was made by Robert Greene, a rival playwright and pamphleteer, who attacked Shakespeare as an "upstart crow" for presuming to write plays (when he was only a mere actor) and for copying the material of established dramatists.

By the early 1590s Shakespeare had emerged as a rising playwright in London, where he continued to enjoy fame and financial success as an actor, playwright, and part-owner of one of London's leading theater companies for nearly twenty years. Subsequent references to Shakespeare indicate that as early as 1594 he was not only an actor and a playwright, but also a shareholder in a new theatrical company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which soon became one of London's two principal companies. With the accession of James I in 1603, the company's name changed to the King's Men, and it thrived until the Commonwealth closed the theaters in 1642.

During his career, Shakespeare wrote or collaborated on what most scholars now agree upon as thirty-eight plays. His earliest plays—including *Love's Labor's Lost*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Richard III*, *King John*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*—were written between 1589 and 1594. Between 1594 and 1599, Shakespeare wrote both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar* as well as other plays, including *Richard II*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Twelfth Night*. His great tragedies—*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*—were composed between 1599 and 1607, and were preceded by his last plays traditionally categorized as comedy, *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well*. The earlier histories, comedies, and tragedies made way for Shakespeare's final dramatic form—the plays commonly termed "romances" or "tragicomedies" for their blending of the comic and tragic forms. Written between 1606 and 1611, the romances include *Cymbeline*, *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*. These were the plays of a playwright no longer bound by the constraints of his earlier forms.

Although some quarto versions of the plays were printed in Shakespeare's lifetime, there is no definitive extant evidence to suggest that he directly oversaw their publication. It was not until 1623, seven years after his death, that his complete plays were published in the First Folio. However, we do know that Shakespeare did oversee the publication of two narrative poems and a collection of 154 sonnets during his lifetime. Shakespeare retired ca. 1611 to live as a country gentleman in Stratford, his birthplace, until his death on April 23, 1616. 🍀



## The First Folio

**T**hroughout much of the Renaissance, plays did not occupy the same high cultural status that we attribute to them today. In fact, theatrical texts were not viewed as "literature" at

all. When a play was published (if it was published at all) it was printed inexpensively in a small book, called a "quarto," the sixteenth-century equivalent of our paperbacks. It was not until 1616, the year of Shakespeare's death, when a contemporary English poet and dramatist, Ben Jonson, published his own plays in a large-format book called a "folio"—the format traditionally reserved for the authoritative texts of religious and

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The Players in the Globe Theater's 2014 Globe-to-Globe production of *Hamlet*, touring to Chicago Shakespeare and directed by Dominic Dromgoole and Bill Buckhurst. Photo by Liz Lauren.

classical works. Jonson sought to challenge the pervasive understanding of theatrical texts as holding little literary value, that plays began to be understood as literature worthy of publication. Jonson was chided as bold and arrogant for his venture for many years.

During Shakespeare's lifetime, only half of his plays were ever published, and those were printed as quartos. He did, however, oversee the publication of two narrative poems and a collection of 154 sonnets. It was not until seven years after the playwright's death that two of his close colleagues decided to gather his plays for publication in a move of threefold significance: as a gesture of homage to a long-time friend and colleague; as a promotion of the King's Men as a theater company of the highest cultural prestige; and as a financial venture with lucrative potential.

In 1623 what is now known as the First Folio, a book containing thirty-six of Shakespeare's estimated thirty-eight plays, was published. Modern textual scholars maintain that the First Folio was likely compiled from a combination of stage prompt books and other theatrical documents, the playwright's handwritten manuscripts (no longer extant), and various versions of some of the plays already published. Shakespeare's First Folio took five compositors two-and-one-half years to print. The compositors manually set each individual letter of type, memorizing the text line by line to increase efficiency as they moved down the page. There was no editor overseeing the printing, and the compositors frequently altered punctuation and spelling. Errors caught in printing would be corrected, but due to the high cost of paper, earlier copies remained intact. Of the 1,200 copies

of the First Folio that were printed, approximately 230 survive today, and each is slightly different. Chicago's Newberry Library contains an original First Folio in its rich collections.

Chicago Shakespeare Theater traditionally utilizes the First Folio as the basis for its play scripts. The First Folio still serves as a manual for many Shakespearean actors nearly 400 years after its publication because the editors of the First Folio took theatrical documents as their basis for printing. Its punctuation, capitalizations, variant spellings, line breaks, and rhetorical structures all give clues to actors and directors about what words to emphasize and about what ideas are important—helping them to break open and examine the language. In Shakespeare's own theater company, with only a few days to rehearse each new play, these built-in clues were essential and provided information for members of the entire company. Today, these textual clues still help modern actors make the language easier to break apart—even though they're speaking language that's 400 years "younger" than ours. 👑

**This is the book that gave us Shakespeare (or most of Shakespeare)[...] But the way it presented Shakespeare was carefully calculated to make a collection of theatre works look plausible as what we would now call works of literature. The book not only gives us the texts; it gives us Shakespeare as a cultural icon.**

—JOHN JOWETT, 2007



## Shakespeare's England

**E**lizabeth I—daughter of Henry VIII and his second wife Anne Boleyn—ruled England for forty-five years, from

1558 to 1603, in a time of relative prosperity and peace. “Few monarchs,” says Shakespearean scholar David Bevington, “have ever influenced an age so pervasively and left their stamp on it so permanently.” He maintains that “[her] combination of imperious will and femininity and her brilliant handling of her many contending male admirers have become legendary,” and resulted in a monarchy that remained secure in the face of religious and political threats from many sides. In choosing not to marry, Elizabeth avoided allying herself and her throne with a foreign country or an English faction which may have threatened her broad base of power and influence.

Throughout early modern Europe—the period that spans the timeframe from after the late portion of the Middle Ages (ca.1500) through the beginning of the Age of Revolutions (ca.1800)—governments were centralized, assuming the power that once belonged to city-states and feudal lords, but the rule of monarchs like Queen Elizabeth I was still absolute, just as it had been understood in earlier historical periods. The monarch was seen as God’s deputy on earth, and the divine right of kings (the theory that the monarch derives his/her power to rule and authority from God alone) was a cherished doctrine. It was this doctrine that condemned rebellion as an act of disobedience against both the state and God.

The politics of religion constantly threatened Elizabeth’s reign, even though it was one of the most secure that England had known for hundreds of years. As the daughter of Henry VIII’s marriage following his divorce from Catherine of Aragon, Elizabeth was regarded by many Catholics as an illegitimate child—and thus an illegitimate monarch. Upon her ascension to the throne, Elizabeth I inherited the rule of a country that, in the wake of the Protestant Reformation, was engaged in the process of attempting to make sense of its own history. Religious power changed hands during the early modern period with astonishing rapidity.

Stephen Greenblatt reminds us that within living memory, England transformed from a highly conservative Roman

Catholic State (in the 1520s Henry VIII fiercely attacked Martin Luther and the pope awarded him with the title “Defender of the Faith”). England then shifted first to a wary, tentative Protestantism; subsequently to a more radical Protestantism; later to a renewed and militant Roman Catholicism; and then, with Elizabeth and James, to Protestantism once again.<sup>1</sup> The English were living in a world where few people had clear memories of a time without religious confusion. Under Elizabeth, England had returned to Protestantism, and the Church of England’s government was held under the direct authority of the crown (and England’s conforming Protestant clergy).

In addition, Elizabethan England was a smaller, more isolated country than it had been previously or would be subsequently. The country withdrew from its extensive empire on the Continent, and its explorations of the New World were just beginning. There was a period of internal economic development as Elizabeth ignored the counsel of her advisors and kept out of war until the attempted invasion by Spain and the Great Armada in 1588. England’s economy was still based in agriculture, and its farmers were poor and embittered by strife with rich landowners who “enclosed” what was once the farmers’ cropland for pastures. Uprisings and food riots were commonplace in the rural area surrounding Stratford-upon-Avon, where Shakespeare grew up. London, then the largest city of Europe, was a city of contrasts: the richest and the poorest of England lived there, side by side. While many bettered themselves in a developing urban economy, unemployment was a serious problem. As England eventually began what would be a long transition from an economy based mostly in agriculture to one of increased reliance upon trade and the manufacture of goods, both cities and social structures would evolve rapidly—it was a time of change and social mobility. For the first time in English history, a rising middle class aspired to the wealth and status of the aristocracy.

As Elizabeth had no heir, the politics of succession posed a real threat to the nation’s peace throughout her reign, and Elizabeth I died childless in 1603. The crown passed to her cousin James VI, King of Scotland, who became England’s King James I. Ruling from 1603 to 1625 (Shakespeare died in 1616), James I was famously responsible for overseeing a new translation of the English bible—the 1611 King James Version—which, with its powerful syntax, remains a legacy of this fertile time, just as Shakespeare’s canon has. But national peace was never quite secured, and the reign of James I was troubled

<sup>1</sup>Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*, (New York: Norton, 2004): 93-94



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with political and religious controversy. James's son, Charles I, would be beheaded in the English Civil War of the 1640s for tyrannically abusing what he believed was his divinely ordained power. 🏰



## The English Renaissance Theater

A time of historical transition, of incredible social upheaval and change, the English Renaissance provided fertile ground for creative innovation. The early modern period stands as the bridge between England's very recent medieval past and its near future in the centuries commonly referred to as the "Age of Exploration," or the Enlightenment. When the English Renaissance is considered within its wider historical context, it is perhaps not surprising that the early modern period produced so many important dramatists and literary luminaries, with William Shakespeare as a significant example.

Because of its unique placement at a crossroad in history, the English Renaissance served as the setting for a number of momentous historical events: the radical re-conception of the English state, the beginnings of a new economy of industry, an explosion of exploration and colonialism, and the break with traditional religion as the Church of England separated from the Catholic Church. It is perhaps this last example of cultural upheaval—the changes brought from Continental Europe by the Protestant Reformation—that provides us with a useful lens to examine the culture of theater in England during this period, in particular.

It is held by scholars today that Shakespeare as a boy would have witnessed in his hometown the acting troupes that were still traveling from town to town—the early modern successors to a long heritage of English theater carried over from the Middle Ages. Troupes often enacted important stories from the Bible, staged tales of mystery and miracles, or presented their audiences with the stories of the lives of saints and heroes of the faith.

These companies would travel in flatbed, horse-drawn carts, which did triple duty as transportation, stage, and storage for their props and costumes. They would pull into a town square, into an inn yard, or the courtyard of a

country estate or college, and transform that space into a theater. People gathered around to watch, some standing on the ground in front of the players' stage, some leaning over the rails from balconies above to view the action on the impromptu stage below.

But during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as the Protestant Reformation gained surer footing in England, the English theater was caught between conflicting ideas about the value and purpose of drama. Many officials of the Protestant Reformation were determined to outlaw these traveling performances for their strong Catholic sensibilities; and even as late as 1606 James I passed legislation to remove all treatment of religious matters from the English playhouses.

But as the stories enacted in the newly constructed public theaters became more secular, public officials scorned the theater as immoral and frivolous. The theaters just outside London's walls came to be feared as places where moral and social corruption spread. The authorities frequently shut them down during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries when the city was menaced by the plague and, frequently too, by political rioting. When the theaters were open, the Master of the Revels had to read and approve every word of a new play before it could be staged. But the practical enforcement of such measures was often sketchy at best, and playing companies themselves found plenty of ways around the strictures of the theatrical censors.

A man who would later become an associate of Shakespeare's, James Burbage, built the first commercial theater in England in 1576, in the decade prior to Shakespeare's own arrival on the London theater scene. Burbage skirted rigid restrictions governing entertainment in London by placing his theater just outside the city walls, in a community with the unglamorous name of "Shoreditch." Burbage was not the only one to dodge the severe rules of the Common Council of London by setting up shop in Shoreditch. His neighbors were other businesses of marginal repute, including London's brothels and bear-baiting arenas. Actors in Shakespeare's day were legally given the status of "vagabonds." They were considered little better than common criminals unless they could secure the patronage of a nobleman or, better still, the monarch.

Shakespeare and his fellow actors managed to secure both. They provided popular entertainment at Queen Elizabeth I's court as the Lord Chamberlain's Men, and



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they continued to enjoy court patronage after James I came to the throne in 1603, when they became the King's Men. Their success at court gave Shakespeare and his fellow shareholders in the company the funds to build the new Globe playhouse in 1599. The Globe then joined a handful of other theaters located just out of the city's jurisdiction as one of the first public theaters in England.

All kinds of people came to plays at the Globe, and they came in great numbers—a full house could accommodate as many as 3,000 people. The audience typically arrived well before the play began to meet friends, drink ale, and snack on the refreshments sold at the plays. An outing to the theater was a highly social and communal event and might take half the day. It was more like tailgating at a football game, or going with friends to a rock concert, than our experience of attending theater today.

Affluent patrons paid two to three pence or more for gallery seats (like the two levels of balcony seating in Chicago Shakespeare's Courtyard Theater), while the “common folk”—shopkeepers, artisans, and apprentices—stood for a penny, about a day's wages for a skilled worker. The audience of the English Renaissance playhouse was a diverse and demanding group, and so it is often noted that Shakespeare depicted characters and situations that appealed to every cross-section of early modern English society. Audience appeal was a driving force for the theater as a business venture, and so during this period most new plays had short runs and were seldom revived. The acting companies were always in rehearsal for new shows and, because of the number of ongoing and upcoming productions, most plays were rehearsed for just a few days.

There was, of course, no electricity for lighting, so all plays were performed in daylight. Sets and props were bare and basic. Since English Renaissance plays were written to be performed without scene breaks, a throne, table or bed had to be brought on stage during the action or lowered from a pulley above. For example, when stage directions in *Macbeth* indicate that “a banquet is prepared,” the stage keepers likely prepared the banquet in full view of the audience. From what scholars can best reconstruct about performance conventions, Shakespeare's plays were performed primarily in “contemporary dress”—that is, the clothes of Shakespeare's time—regardless of the play's historical setting. Company members with tailoring skills sewed many of the company's stock costumes, and hand-me-downs from the English aristocracy often provided the elegant costumes for the play's nobility. Because women



Barbara Robertson as Gertrude and Ben Carlson as Hamlet in Chicago Shakespeare Theater's 2006 production of *Hamlet*, directed by Terry Hands. Photo by Steve Leonard.

were not permitted to act on the English stage until 1660, female roles were performed by boys or young men, their male physique disguised with elaborate dresses and wigs. The young actors were readily accepted as women by the audience.

After an extremely productive creative period spanning about 100 years—often called the “Golden Age” of the English theater—the Puritans, now in power of the government, succeeded in 1642 in closing the theaters altogether. The public theaters did not reopen until the English monarchy was restored and Charles II came to the throne in 1660. A number of theaters, including the Globe, were open long before the Great Fire of London destroyed them in 1666. The fire, combined with the eighteen years of Commonwealth rule—the so-called Interregnum (“between kings”)—led to the loss of many of the primary sources that would have provided us with further evidence of the staging traditions of Shakespeare's theater. The new theater of the Restoration approached plays, including Shakespeare's, very differently, often rewriting and adapting original scripts to suit the audience's contemporary tastes. It is left to scholars of early modern English drama to reconstruct the practices of Renaissance theater from clues left behind. 🏰

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## Courtyard-style Theater

**C**hicago Shakespeare Theater's unique performance space reflects elements of both the first public playhouses in

London and the courtyards of inns temporarily transformed into theaters, in which the young Shakespeare might first have acquired his love of the stage. The interior of the Globe playhouse, opened in 1599, was simple, and similar to that of Chicago Shakespeare Theater—a raised platform for the stage surrounded by an open, circular area, with seating on three levels, one above the other. Both theaters use a thrust stage with an open performance area upstage; basically, the entire performance space is in the shape of a capital “T.” With the audience seated on three sides of the thrust stage, the play is staged in the middle of them. An architect for Chicago Shakespeare Theater describes the experience of theater staged in this way: “You’re the scenery. You’re the special effects. And the people you see performing this play are performing it in front, and out of, you.”

If you think about a more traditional theater’s proscenium arch “framing” what is (not literally) a two-dimensional stage picture behind it, the thrust stage by contrast creates a three-dimensional picture for an audience that surrounds it on three sides. The people sitting in the side seats have the closest interaction with the performers, and the performers with them. The play unfolds between the audience members seated along the sides, and the actors draw upon the responses of the audience (laughter, gasps, nervous shifting in chairs when tension mounts) as they perform. As an audience member, your facial expressions and body language serve both as the focal point of the actors’ energy and the backdrop for the other audience members seated across from you. Architect David Taylor and his company, Theatre Projects Consultants, worked closely with Chicago Shakespeare Theater to design this courtyard theater. “It’s important that we don’t lose the performer among the faces, but it’s essential to understand that every single face is a live piece of scenery reflecting and framing what’s going on,” Taylor explains. “That’s the reason why the courtyard theater shape is such a wonderful historical springboard for modern theater design.”

“The backdrop and the scenery for Shakespeare is the human race,” Taylor notes, “so we’re putting Shakespeare into its proper context by making human faces the backdrop for those sitting in any seat in the theater.” According to Taylor:

*This close, close relationship with the performers on stage is the very essence of the courtyard experience. The courtyard experience was about leaning out of windows. It was about throwing open the windows in the courtyard when the stage was brought through on a cart and leaning out and interacting.*

Audience members seated in the galleries at Chicago Shakespeare Theater are encouraged to use the “leaning rails” to watch the players below—like those watching from an inn’s balconies centuries ago when traveling troupes set up their temporary stages.

The actors and the audience share the experience of seeing and interacting with one another. Taylor thinks that actors benefit tremendously from the courtyard design: “They’re not looking at people sitting in straight rows, disconnected from everybody around them in big seats. There’s a sense of community in the space, a sense of embracing the performer on stage.” Actors are always fed by the energy generated from their audience. The design of Chicago Shakespeare Theater offers a feast of feedback to the actors on its stage.

Other theaters have been modeled upon the Elizabethan experience of courtyard theater, perhaps most notably the Royal Shakespeare Company’s Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon. The Swan served as a model for Chicago Shakespeare’s Courtyard Theater. Besides their deep thrust stages that were designed to create an intimate relationship between actors and audience, prominent architectural elements in both theaters are the brick walls that surround the audience and natural wood that creates a feeling of warmth. Brick is an aesthetic choice but, due to its particular design, it also serves as an acoustic choice. The angle of the bricks in the side walls helps diffuse sound, sending it in different directions throughout the theater. The sound, lighting, and rigging systems are all state-of-the-art. Chicago Shakespeare Theater’s design accommodates a wide array of possibilities for structuring and using the performance space. 🏰



## 1300

- 1326** Founding of universities at Oxford and Cambridge
- 1348** Boccaccio's *Decameron*
- 1349** Bubonic Plague kills one-third of England's population
- 1387** Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

## 1400

- ca. 1440** Johannes Gutenberg invents printing press
- 1472** Dante's *Divine Comedy* first printed
- 1492** Christopher Columbus lands at Cuba
- 1497** Vasco da Gama sails around the Cape of Good Hope

## 1500

- 1501-4** Michelangelo's *David* sculpture
- 1503** Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*
- 1512** Copernicus' *Commentariolus* published, theorizing that Earth and other planets revolve around the sun
- 1518** License to import 4,000 African slaves to Spanish American colonies granted to Lorens de Gominzot
- 1519** Ferdinand Magellan's trip around the world
- 1519** Conquest of Mexico by Cortez
- 1522** Luther's translation of the New Testament

## 1525

- 1531** Henry VIII recognized as Supreme Head of the Church of England
- 1533** Henry VIII secretly marries Anne Boleyn, and is excommunicated by Pope
- 1539** Hernando de Soto explores Florida
- 1540** G.L. de Cardenas "discovers" Grand Canyon
- 1541** Hernando de Soto "discovers" the Mississippi

## 1550

- 1558** Coronation of Queen Elizabeth I
- 1562** John Hawkins begins slave trade between Guinea and West Indies
- 1564** Birth of William Shakespeare and Galileo
- 1565** Pencils first manufactured in England
- 1570** Pope Pius V excommunicates Queen Elizabeth
- 1573** Francis Drake sees the Pacific Ocean

## 1575

- 1576** Mayor of London forbids theatrical performances in the City  
Burbage erects first public theater in England (the "Theater" in Shoreditch)
- 1577** Drake's trip around the world
- 1580** *Essays* of Montaigne published
- 1582** Marriage license issued for William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway  
Daughter Susanna Shakespeare christened

## Shakespeare's Plays ca. 1592-1595

### Comedies

- Love's Labor's Lost
- The Comedy of Errors
- The Two Gentlemen of Verona
- A Midsummer Night's Dream
- The Taming of the Shrew

### Histories

- 1,2,3 Henry VI
- Richard III
- King John

### Tragedies

- Titus Andronicus
- Romeo and Juliet

### Sonnets

- Probably written  
in this period

# timeline

- 1585** Christening of son Hamnet and twin Judith
- 1587** Mary Queen of Scots executed
- 1588** Destruction of the Spanish Armada
- 1592** Shakespeare listed with the Lord Chamberlain's Men
- 1593-4** Plague closes London playhouses for 20 months
- 1595** Coat of arms granted to Shakespeare's father, John
- 1596** Death of son Hamnet, age 11  
Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*
- 1597** Shakespeare, one of London's most successful playwrights, buys New Place, one of the grandest houses in Stratford-upon-Avon
- 1599** Globe Theatre opens, as home to the Lord Chamberlain's Men, with Shakespeare as part-owner

## 1600

- 1602** Oxford University's Bodleian Library opens
- 1603** Death of Queen Elizabeth, coronation of James I  
Lord Chamberlain's Men become the King's Men upon endorsement of James I
- 1603-11** Plague closes London playhouses for at least 68 months (nearly 6 years)
- 1605** Cervantes' *Don Quixote Part 1* published
- 1607** Marriage of Susanna Shakespeare to Dr. John Hall  
Founding of Jamestown, Virginia, first English settlement on American mainland
- 1608** *A true relation of such Occurances and Accidents of Note as hath passed in Virginia* by John Smith  
Galileo constructs astronomical telescope
- 1609** Blackfriars Theatre, London's first commercial indoor theater, becomes winter home of the King's Men
- 1611** "King James Version" of the Bible published
- 1613** Globe Theatre destroyed by fire
- 1614** Globe Theatre rebuilt
- 1615** Galileo faces the Inquisition for the first time
- 1616** Judith Shakespeare marries Thomas Quinney  
Death of William Shakespeare, age 52
- 1618** Copernican system condemned by Roman Catholic Church
- 1619** First African slaves arrive in Virginia
- 1623** The First Folio, the first compiled text of Shakespeare's complete works published

## 1625

- 1625** James I dies, succeeded by Charles I
- 1633** Galileo recants before the Inquisition
- 1636** Harvard College founded in Cambridge, Massachusetts
- 1642** Civil War in England begins
- 1642** Puritans close theaters throughout England until the Restoration of the monarchy, 18 years later, with Charles II
- 1649** Charles I beheaded
- 1649** Commonwealth declared

## ca. 1596-1600

### Comedies

Much Ado About Nothing  
The Merry Wives of Windsor  
As You Like It  
Twelfth Night

### Histories

Richard II  
1, 2 Henry IV  
Henry V

### Tragedies

Julius Caesar

### Problem Plays

The Merchant of Venice

## ca. 1601-1609

### Comedies

Troilus and Cressida

### Tragedies

#### Hamlet

Othello  
King Lear  
Macbeth  
Antony and Cleopatra  
Timon of Athens  
Coriolanus

### Problem Plays

All's Well That Ends Well  
Measure for Measure

## ca. 1609-1613

### Romances

Pericles  
Cymbeline  
The Winter's Tale  
The Tempest  
The Two Noble Kinsmen

### Histories

Henry VIII



# shakespeare's hamlet

## Dramatis Personae



**HAMLET**



**OPHELIA**



**CLAUDIUS**



**GRAVEDIGGER**



**LAERTES**



**POLONIUS**

**HAMLET** *Prince of Denmark*

**CLAUDIUS** *King of Denmark, Hamlet's uncle*

**GERTRUDE** *Queen of Denmark, Hamlet's mother*

**GHOST OF KING HAMLET**, *Hamlet's father*

**POLONIUS** *Counselor to the King*

**OPHELIA** *Polonius's daughter*

**LAERTES** *Polonius's son*

**REYNALDO\*** *Polonius's military attaché*

**OSRIC, LORDS, GENTLEMAN** *courtiers*

**FORTINBRAS\*\*** *Prince of Norway*

**VOLTEMAND** *Ambassador to Norway*

**CAPTAIN** *in Fortinbras's army*

**MARCELLUS** and **BARNARDO**

*Officers of the Watch*

**SOLDIERS** and **GUARDS**

**HORATIO** *Hamlet's friend*

**ROSENCRANTZ** *Hamlet's fellow student*

**GUILDENSTERN** *Hamlet's fellow student*

**FIRST PLAYER** *Actor visiting Elsinore*

**OTHER PLAYERS** *Actors visiting Elsinore*

**GRAVEDIGGERS**

**PRIEST** *at Ophelia's funeral*

*\* Played as Reynalda in CST's 2019 production of Hamlet*

*\*\* Character cut from CST's 2019 production of Hamlet*

*Renderings by Costume Designer Susan E. Mickey for  
CST's 2019 production of Hamlet.*

# shakespeare's hamlet



## The Story

**T**he ghost of Denmark's king walks upon the battlements of his castle, Elsinore. Hamlet, his son and namesake, returns home from his studies abroad to attend his father's funeral, but finds himself instead the reluctant guest at a royal wedding: his mother's to his uncle, Claudius, who is now the new king. The ghost reveals to Hamlet the horrifying details of murder at the hands of a usurping brother. "Remember me," the ghost exhorts his son. Hamlet swears to avenge his father's horrible death.

Feigning madness, Hamlet withdraws from all around him, including Ophelia, whom he has loved. Ophelia's father Polonius, a courtier and advisor, suggests to the king and queen that their son is merely lovesick for his daughter. Claudius suspects otherwise, and summons Hamlet's school friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to spy on the troubled prince.

Hamlet wrestles with the ghost's edict—could it be a devil sent to trick him? Seizing upon the arrival of a troupe of traveling players, Hamlet stages a re-enactment of the ghost's story before the assembled court—and Claudius's violent reaction is all the proof he needs. Confronting his mother with her adultery, Hamlet hears a noise behind a curtain and, believing it to be Claudius, lunges his sword into him, before revealing instead the corpse of the meddling Polonius.

Bereft of father and her love, Ophelia is driven mad with grief. Claudius orders Hamlet to England, escorted by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who unwittingly carry the prince's death warrant to the English king. Discovering the sealed orders, Hamlet escapes and returns to Elsinore. There, he finds Ophelia dead and her brother Laertes desperate to avenge the deaths of a sister and father. Laertes conspires with Claudius in staging a fencing match with the prince "for sport," but with the stakes now infinitely higher. 🏰



## Act-by-Act Synopsis

### ACT ONE

**I**t is a cold and dark night in Elsinore, Denmark's royal palace. With the advance of Norwegian forces led by Fortinbras, the castle guards' nerves are on edge. And for the past two nights a ghost has revealed itself during their night watch. It appears again, this time in the presence of Prince Hamlet's friend Horatio, who confirms that it looks like Denmark's dead king, Old Hamlet. Still, the Ghost refuses to speak, and Horatio vows to return with Hamlet. The royal court is presided over by the new king: Hamlet's uncle, Claudius, who has recently married the queen, Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, widow of the dead king—Claudius's brother. Claudius refuses Hamlet's request to return to university, and urges his stepson to end his protracted mourning for his dead father. Hamlet acquiesces but inwardly curses his uncle, his mother, and their "incestuous" union. Horatio's visit to Elsinore surprises the prince, as does the news of his father's ghostly appearance. The next night, Hamlet stands watch and sees the apparition. "Remember me," the Ghost exhorts, claiming that Claudius murdered the king, his own brother, and making Hamlet swear to avenge this "foul and most unnatural murder." Hamlet consents, vowing to feign madness as he pursues revenge.

### ACT TWO

**P**olonius, a high-ranking, long-winded, courtier, sees his son Laertes off to France to continue his studies—but not before he can fill his son's ears with plentiful advice. He fears Laertes will turn profligate, and sends his servant to France for a spot of spying. With his son's departure, Polonius now turns his attention to his daughter Ophelia who, at his command, has broken off her relationship with Prince Hamlet, whom she loves. She reports to her father that the prince recently burst into her room, acting strangely. To Polonius, this can only mean that Hamlet has been driven mad by Ophelia's rejection—a notion that he wastes no time sharing with Claudius and Gertrude. In fact, the king and queen have expressed their growing concern over the prince's behavior, and



# shakespeare's hamlet

have invited Hamlet's school friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to Elsinore for a "visit" (in reality, to spy upon their son). Hearing Polonius's theory, Claudius agrees to his plan: to arrange a meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia and to observe their interaction. But Hamlet has plans of his own, and they involve a troupe of actors visiting the castle. The actors perform a scene for the prince: the classical story of Pyrrhus and Priam. Pyrrhus, like Hamlet, is bent on avenging his father's death. Hamlet is so affected by the scene that he berates himself for his delay in pursuing revenge—delay that stems at least in part from Hamlet's uncertainty about the Ghost's claim. Was his father really murdered? Is there proof of Claudius's guilt? Hamlet hatches a plan: to ask the actors to perform a play—one that includes a scene, written by him, that echoes the Ghost's story of the old king's murder. Hamlet hopes Claudius's response to the play will reveal the truth of his father's death.

## ACT THREE

**H**amlet and Ophelia's paths cross—just as her father has orchestrated. She attempts to return Hamlet's love letters and gifts. Enraged, Hamlet cruelly insults Ophelia—and womankind in general—commanding, "Get thee to a nunnery!" Ophelia grieves, seeing her lover so changed. Claudius is more pragmatic, telling Polonius that Hamlet's behavior is not that of a man gone mad for love. Claiming the prince's instability has gone too far, Claudius vows to send Hamlet to England. Before he can enact his plan, the actors come before the royal court to perform their play: *The Murder of Gonzago* (which Hamlet nicknames "The Mousetrap"), in which the king is murdered precisely as the Ghost has claimed that Claudius murdered him—by pouring poison in his ear. Watching the story unfold, Claudius storms out of the room in agitation.

Hamlet's exultation at seeing the Ghost's accusation proved true is interrupted by a summons from his mother. On his way to her chamber, he sees Claudius in the court chapel, apparently praying. Hamlet has every opportunity to take vengeance, and pulls out his sword against the unaware king—before stopping himself with the possibility that, to kill a man while in prayer, might guarantee his place in Heaven. Frustrated by his own inaction, Hamlet enters his mother's bedchamber. When he hears a noise that he assumes to be Claudius behind a curtain, Hamlet lunges

with his sword, killing not the king but Polonius, who was, once again, there to spy. Amidst Hamlet's confusion and his mother's grief, heightened by the insults he now hurls at her, the ghost of the dead king reappears. Hamlet believes his father is there to chastise him for his delay. Gertrude, unable to see the Ghost, fears that her son is, indeed, mad, especially when he leaves her room, dragging Polonius's body behind him.

## ACT FOUR

**T**he fallout from Polonius's death ensues at a breakneck pace: Hamlet hides the corpse, Claudius sends the prince to England, the Norwegian army enters Denmark, and Ophelia is driven mad at the news of her father's death. The state of Denmark has grown so rotten that its people even champion a new king—Laertes, who returns from France to avenge his father's death. But Hamlet manages to escape his guardians, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and is on his way home to Denmark. Desperate, Claudius seizes the opportunity presented by Laertes' arrival, persuading Polonius's son to kill the prince in a fencing match with a rapier sharpened for murder, not sport. Laertes agrees. The two men devise a couple of back-up plans to ensure their success: poison on Laertes' rapier and a cup of laced wine. Laertes' appetite for revenge quickens when Gertrude reports that his sister Ophelia is dead, tragically drowned in a nearby brook.

## ACT FIVE

**A**ccompanied by his friend Horatio, Hamlet returns to Elsinore. Passing through the castle cemetery, they come upon two gravediggers, surrounded by the decayed bones of the dead and the tools of their trade as they dig a new grave. Hamlet picks up a skull and, discovering that it was once his beloved childhood jester Yorick, comes face-to-face with the reality of human mortality. Moments later, he understands that it is Ophelia's grave that they are digging. He bursts onto the funereal scene, filled with grief and declarations of love that enrage Laertes further, and set the stage for the final fencing match. No one emerges unscathed. Gertrude, Laertes, and Claudius—finally killed by Hamlet—all die. So, too, does the prince. Hamlet's life ends as he begs Horatio to "tell my story." Into this scene of death Fortinbras of Norway makes his entrance, to be crowned Denmark's king. 🏰

# shakespeare's hamlet

## Something Borrowed, Something New... Shakespeare's Sources

Shakespeare's plays were rarely original creations. If that's at all surprising, know that like other playwrights of the time, Shakespeare repurposed histories, tales, and poems that he may have learned in grammar school, or seen performed, or heard told. His *Hamlet* is no exception.

The first precursor to *Hamlet* appears in a Latin account of Danish history, called the *Gesta Danorum*. The author of the sixteen-book history, Saxo Grammaticus, mentions the story of "Amleth." The account is set in a time well before Christianity in Denmark. In Shakespeare's play, the names are modified from their Latin-Danish hybrid forms. Hamlet stems from "Amleth," and "Gerutha" is anglicized to Gertrude. According to Grammaticus, the prince's father is murdered by his brother Feng, who then proceeds to marry his widowed sister-in-law. Amleth, like Shakespeare's Hamlet, feigns madness to appear harmless, but has no qualms about taking revenge against his uncle—or even killing a foolish old counselor, hacking his body into pieces, and dumping them in a pigpen. In the Grammaticus account, Feng's treachery is not a secret: he openly admits it, and it takes no ghostly appearance to incite Amleth's bloody revenge. Amleth's mother is confronted with her sinful act and subsequently allies herself with her son, while Shakespeare's Gertrude is more ambiguous in her allegiances. With Gerutha's help, Amleth gets his uncle and his followers drunk, then kills his uncle and sets the palace on fire, the treacherous courtiers left inside to burn alive.

Another early version of the story appears in a French translation by Francois de Belleforest. The 1570 history, found in Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques*, is nearly a word-for-word translation of Saxo's account printed in Paris in 1514. However, Belleforest's version asserts that "Gertrude" and "Fengon" commit adultery *before* the murder of "Hamlet's" father, making their crime still more heinous. Appearing for the first time in Belleforest, the ghost of the dead king is sighted on the battlements of the castle, as it is in Shakespeare. And Belleforest's Hamlet is, like Shakespeare's, melancholic. The publication date of Belleforest and its transmission to England makes it a

likely source text for Shakespeare; editions of Belleforest were reprinted as late as 1601, two years before the first Quarto of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was published.

Margrethe Jolly's scholarship notes similarities between Belleforest and Shakespeare. Both begin the story with a reference to Hamlet's father having challenged the king of Norway in battle. Both texts describe the marriage of Gertrude and Claudius as "incestuous," and both place the conversation between Hamlet and his mother in her chamber, leading to the death of a conniving counselor. Shakespeare gives Belleforest's counselor a name—Polonius. He does the same for Ophelia, who is an unnamed woman in *Histoires*.

Other contemporary sources also inspired *Hamlet*. Revenge tragedies were popular in Shakespeare's day—perhaps the most popular among them was Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, featuring a vengeful ghost and a play-within-a-play used to trap a murderer (for more on revenge tragedies and *The Spanish Tragedy*, see page 19). In fact, some scholars believe that it was Kyd who wrote what is commonly called the *Ur-Hamlet*, a version of *Hamlet* staged at the Burbages' Shoreditch playhouse in 1587, fifteen years before Shakespeare's company first performed *Hamlet*. Little is known about *Ur-Hamlet* and its now lost script—including its rightful author—except that it featured a principal character named Hamlet and a ghost who cried, "Hamlet, revenge!" The so-called *Ur-Hamlet* may have been written by Kyd and borrowed by Shakespeare. But it *may* have been an early draft of the play written by Shakespeare himself.

Why does Shakespeare use stories from history and literature—only to add characters (like Laertes, whose character is not even hinted at in any source we know of) and reshape the facts? We can't be certain, but this literary genealogy provides a glimpse into Shakespeare's creative process. Reflecting on Shakespeare's prowess in adaptation reveals the evolution of the Hamlet saga, from historical report to theatrical imperative. 🏰



# shakespeare's hamlet

## Shakespeare's Original "Hamlets"

We can't talk about *Hamlet* without talking about which *Hamlet* we mean. Not only are there multiple earlier versions of the story that inspired Shakespeare's creative process, but there are also three distinct versions of his own "finished" work: published as two different quartos, Quarto 1 and Quarto 2, and as the First Folio—the first (almost) complete edition of Shakespeare's plays. (For more on the history of quartos, folios, and printing practices in Shakespeare's time, see "The First Folio" on page 3.) The First Folio, printed after Shakespeare's death and containing thirty-six of his plays, is usually considered the source for the definitive version of the Bard's plays, but the conversation surrounding *Hamlet* is more complicated.

The earliest printing of *Hamlet* is the one now known as "Quarto 1" (Q1). First published in 1603, it was not actually discovered until 1823, when an aristocrat named Sir Henry Bunbury stumbled upon a copy in the closet of his manor house! A second copy was unearthed thirty years later in Dublin. Q1's discovery caused quite a stir. It is just about half as long as either the Q2 or First Folio (F1) editions—which were published later than Q1 but were known for well over a hundred years previously. What's more, Hamlet's most famous of speeches—"To be, or not to be"—appears in an entirely different place in the text. In addition to the textual variations in this earliest of printed editions, Gertrude in the 1603 quarto denies knowledge of King Hamlet's murder—and vows to help her son seek revenge! Some scholars have argued that it was no doubt a "pirated" text, most likely penned by actors who rushed to write down as much of the text as they could remember in order to publish fast and make some quick cash. Whether that's true or not, Q1 is widely considered an unauthorized version of the play—or, in the provocative words of early nineteenth-century critic Richard Grant White, a copy "cruelly maimed and ridiculously perverted."

Quarto 2 (Q2) and the First Folio are less controversial. Q2 was published in 1604 and is considered an authorized text because it was probably printed from Shakespeare's own manuscript of the play. The publishing house may have used the abbreviated Q1 to clarify language in places where Shakespeare's original manuscript was illegible. Q2 is the longest of the three early publications



Fu Xiru as Zi Dan (Hamlet) in Chicago Shakespeare Theater and Shanghai Jingju Theatre's 2016 WorldStage production of *The Revenge of Prince Zi Dan (Hamlet)*, directed by Shi Yukun. Photo by Xinhua/Zou Zheng.

of *Hamlet*; and while quite similar to the 1604 Q2, the First Folio is approximately 200 lines shorter. This 1623 edition seems to be deliberately abridged, *perhaps* to ensure that London audiences could return home before dark. Minor wording alterations between Q2 and F1 occur throughout. While it is possible these revisions were made by Shakespeare as he tinkered with the play in subsequent performances, they may also be a result of a copier's intervention, publishing house style, and simple printing mistakes.

Scholars have debated these questions for years, searching for "the" definitive version of *Hamlet*. Depending on which modern edition you read, you might see printed indicators of that particular editor's search: brackets, slashes, and glossary notes that distinguish between the text of Q1, Q2, and F1 (or more likely just Q2 and the Folio, since Q1 is often dismissed as the ugly stepsister of the bunch). *Hamlet's* publication history has exciting implications for any reader of Shakespeare. It reminds us that plays are performed scripts, not fixed texts. They are "mutable," evolving as a playwright continues to edit their work or groups of actors perform them. There is room to cut, adapt, and interpret, to personalize, and to play. Do not fear the "slings and arrows" of others' opinions, or of an authoritative text that, in truth, does not exist. Play around with *Hamlet*, and even with the different versions of the text itself. Our Classroom Activities section contains specific ideas and strategies to help you, so be on the lookout! 🏰

# shakespeare's hamlet

## A few differences across the three early editions

	QUARTO 1	QUARTO 2	FIRST FOLIO	QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER
<p><b>To be, or not to be:</b> Where does it belong?</p>	<p><b>Sequence of events:</b> Polonius tells Claudius and Gertrude that Hamlet is mad for love</p> <p>"To be, or not to be"</p> <p>Hamlet toys with Polonius in the "fishmonger" scene</p> <p>Rosencrantz and Guildenstern present themselves to Hamlet for the first time</p> <p>Hamlet insults Ophelia and tells her, "To a nunnery, go!"</p> <p><b>Wording:</b> Starts "To be, or not to be, I there's the point"</p>	<p><b>Sequence of events:</b> Polonius tells Claudius and Gertrude that Hamlet is mad for love</p> <p>Hamlet toys with Polonius in the "fishmonger" scene</p> <p>Rosencrantz and Guildenstern present themselves to Hamlet for the first time</p> <p>"To be, or not to be"</p> <p>Hamlet insults Ophelia and tells her, "To a nunnery, go!"</p> <p><b>Wording:</b> Starts "To be, or not to be, that is the question"</p>	<p><b>Sequence of events:</b> Same as Q2</p> <p><b>Wording:</b> A few minor differences to the Q2, mostly is considered copying mistakes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* What is the impact of the speech's placement in Q1 vs. Q2 and F1? How, if at all, does it change Hamlet's character arc?</li> <li>* Depending on the placement of the speech, who (if anyone) might be watching Hamlet as he speaks? Is he aware of their presence?</li> <li>* What do you make of the wording differences, especially between Q1 and Q2? Do they change the content and/or tone of the speech? Which differences are the most meaningful?</li> <li>* Is there anywhere else you could imagine placing this speech? Imagine you were charged with moving it to a new place in the play. Where would you put it? What are the implications of your choice?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stage directions:</b> A ghost in a nightgown? A girl with a lute?</p>	<p>In scene 11, the Ghost appears in Gertrude's chamber. The stage direction reads: <i>Enter Ghost in his nightgown.</i></p> <p>In scene 13, Ophelia enters for her second scene of madness. The stage direction reads: <i>Enter Ofelia playing on a lute, and her hair down, singing</i></p>	<p>In 3.4, the Ghost appears in Gertrude's chamber. The stage direction reads: <i>Enter Ghost.</i></p> <p>In 4.5, Ophelia enters for her second scene of madness. The stage direction reads: <i>Enter Ophelia</i></p>	<p>Same as Q2</p> <p>Same as Q2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Henry Irving was the first to clothe the ghost in a nightgown in his 1874 production. The Q1 stage direction became increasingly popular with the rise of Freud's psychoanalytic theory. It's one of the major reasons why 3.4 is now usually set in Gertrude's bedroom, even though all three versions of the text only call the room her "chamber," not her "bed chamber." Why do you think this stage direction has become so powerful in the theatrical world? How does it impact our understanding of the play's themes and characters?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Osric:</b> How much stage time is he worth?</p>	<p>In scene 17, an unnamed "Braggart Gentleman" invites Hamlet to fence with Laertes. Their conversation lasts for 27 lines.</p>	<p>In 5.2, Osric invites Hamlet to fence with Laertes. Their conversation lasts for 80 lines.</p>	<p>In 5.2, Osric invites Hamlet to fence with Laertes. Their conversation lasts for 63 lines.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Compare all three versions. What is gained and lost in each one?</li> <li>* Some critics believe that Osric is an accessory to the plot to murder Hamlet, that he is "in on it," so to speak. Is there one of the versions that makes this interpretation more convincing than the others?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Hamlet's apology for Polonius's death:</b> Does it end with "brother" or "mother"?</p>	<p>In scene 17, Hamlet apologizes to Laertes for killing Polonius. The apology ends like this: <i>And all the wrong I e'er did to Laertes / I here proclaim was madness. Therefore let's be at peace, / And think I have shot mine arrow o'er the house / And hurt my brother.</i></p>	<p>In 5.2, Hamlet apologizes to Laertes for killing Polonius. The apology ends like this: <i>Let my disclaiming from a purposed evil / Free me so far in your most generous thoughts / That I have shot my arrow o'er the house / And hurt my brother.</i></p>	<p>In 5.2, Hamlet apologizes to Laertes for killing Polonius. The apology ends like this: <i>Let my disclaiming from a purposed evil / Free me so far in your most generous thoughts / That I have shot mine arrow o'er the house / And hurt my mother.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* How does the rationale for Hamlet's apology change if "brother" is swapped with "mother," or vice versa?</li> </ul>

# shakespeare's hamlet

## Shakespeare, Tragedy, and Us

**W**e all know something about tragedy: we lose someone we love; we have to leave a place we have called home; we make a decision that leads to consequences we never wanted. Tragedy is a part of our lives as humans, despite all of our attempts to keep it at arm's length.

But what's the point of picking up a book we know to be full of doom and, by choice, entering so dark a world? Clearly, it's more "fun" to spend time with an episode of *Modern Family* than with Act 1 of *Hamlet*. So why do it?

We read tragedy for many of the same reasons we read other literary genres—because we respond to stories that show us people who are somehow like us, versions of ourselves under other circumstances. When we feel that characters bear some resemblance to us—are relatable to us in some way, although they may be very different—we become interested in them and can empathize with them. But when a story communicates a certain kind of emotional truth to us, it goes beyond touching our sympathy. As we come to understand the people in it, we can also reach some understanding about our world, about ourselves and the people we know, and about the tragedies we may face in our own lives.

None of us will ever face the same tragedy that Hamlet, a royal prince in Denmark, faces. We don't live in castles. We don't honor kings. We don't think about killing them. And many may not believe in the existence of ghosts. So where do we find our story in his?

Shakespeare's tragedies move in and out of joy and sorrow, farce, and gravity, in the same manner that we, in a single day, experience emotional extremes. Characters face some very difficult choices—as we sometimes must—and the story follows them as they wrestle with making their choices. In tragedy, the hero faces some "fearful passage"—a path traveled for the first time where old answers and old behaviors don't work. The stakes are high and the risk to the individual—and sometimes to an entire society, as in *Hamlet*—is great.

As we follow characters on their journey, we may be tempted to hunt for the hero's "tragic flaw"—the character trait, or even error in judgment, that one may say leads



Mariann Mayberry as Ophelia and Robert Petkoff as Hamlet in Chicago Shakespeare Theater's 1996 production of *Hamlet*, directed by Barbara Gaines. Photo by Liz Lauren.

to the hero's downfall. Critic Russ McDonald, however, warns against labeling the hero as inherently weak and not up to the challenge, as someone who gets what he deserves. The heroes of tragedy typically display great strengths, says McDonald. Their tragedy lies not so much in a weakness of character, but in a "kind of tragic incompatibility between the hero's particular form of greatness and the earthly circumstances that he or she is forced to confront."<sup>1</sup> McDonald points out how differently the heroes of Shakespeare's tragedies speak, not only from us, but also from all the other characters around them. Their poetic language, he says, expresses their "vast imaginations." They see the world more completely than the rest of us do.

The tragic hero imagines something out of the ordinary, seeking to transcend the compromises of the familiar. We both admire this imaginative leap and acknowledge its impossibility. The contest between "world" and "will" that exists for those characters brings misery, sometimes insanity, and often death; however, it also produces meaning and magnificence. Through their journeys, tragic heroes and heroines learn something about themselves and about their lives, but it is an understanding which comes from a great deal of loss and pain. It has been

<sup>1</sup> Russ McDonald, "The Flaw in the Flaw," *Shakespeare Set Free: Teaching Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Peggy O'Brien (New York: Washington Square Press, 1993): 9.



# shakespeare's hamlet

noted by some scholars that in Shakespeare's earlier tragedies—such as *Romeo and Juliet*—the hero and heroine do not gain insight from their fated tragedies. Instead, it is the suffering of those left behind who gain wisdom by facing the consequences of their own actions. In his later tragedies, lessons are internalized into the consciousness of Shakespeare's heroes and heroines through their tragic journeys.

We will never face the same choices Hamlet does. But we are likely to face choices in our lives that seem too big for us. That we will be required to go through some “fearful passage” of our own, where old ways of thinking and behaving don't work. That we will face

head-on the consequences of choices we've made—and wish desperately that what's done could somehow be undone.

What makes theatrical art different from life is precisely its transient nature: what was done on stage dissipates when we emerge from the theater. The damage that is permanent and irreversible to tragedy's heroes is temporary for us. We close the book. We leave the theater. But if we enter that world for a time and come to know its characters, we may really come to know ourselves more deeply—we learn. And when our own “fearful passage” comes along, something we have learned along the way about ourselves and the nature of others may help us make our choice. 🏰



Naeem Hayat as Hamlet, Keith Bartlett as the Gravedigger, and Beruce Khan as Horatio in and the Globe Theater's 2014 Globe-to-Globe production of *Hamlet*, touring to Chicago Shakespeare, and directed by Dominic Dromgoole and Bill Buckhurst. Photo by Liz Lauren.

# shakespeare's hamlet

## "Hamlet" and the Revenge Tragedy

It's not simply a tragedy—it's a revenge tragedy. Revenge tragedies were all the rage in Shakespeare's day. In fact, critic René Girard compared them to the thrillers that populate the television landscape today. (See the Critic Quotes section on page 23 for more from Girard and the other scholars referenced in this essay.) There's a thriller on every channel and streaming service, and in the Elizabethan era there was a revenge tragedy in every playhouse.

Coining the term "revenge tragedy" in 1900, Shakespeare scholar Ashley H. Thorndike identified many conventions characterizing the genre...

- A ghost appears, sometimes calling for revenge.
- The protagonist pursues revenge, but is delayed.
- During the delay, the protagonist exhibits real or feigned signs of madness.
- The protagonist degenerates morally and often kills innocent people.
- A play within the play reveals aspects of the original crime or serves as a way to carry out the revenge.
- The act of revenge leads to chaos but eventually establishes the nominal and/or questionable restoration of order. The protagonist dies.
- The protagonist is a sympathetic figure who has suffered wrongs, often the murder of a family member by the leaders of a corrupt society.
- The person responsible for the murder often outranks the protagonist in class and/or power.

The list of Elizabethan plays that tick those boxes is lengthy: *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Antonio's Revenge*, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*—and, of course, *Hamlet*. It's not hard to see the framework of Shakespeare's plot structure in Thorndike's list of conventions. In many ways, the play is a typical revenge tragedy—but in several crucial aspects, it is anything but.

The crucial difference lies in Hamlet and his delayed revenge. In a typical revenge tragedy, the avenger is firmly bent on seeking justice. The delay of that revenge—a plot device necessary to ensure the play doesn't end in Act 2—comes from outside circumstances and unforeseen events. But for Hamlet, the delay comes from within. He has the opportunity to kill Claudius; he even wields a sword over his unarmed uncle at prayer. Yet he hesitates and

even blames himself for his passivity. It is this fundamental difference that leads critic Kiernan Ryan to argue that *Hamlet* is not a play about enacting revenge—but about "spectacularly failing" to enact revenge.

René Girard argues that Shakespeare turned the conventions of the revenge tragedy on their head in order to show just how derivative the genre had become. In his reading, *Hamlet* mimics the conventions of revenge tragedies in order to critique them as formulaic and tedious, the way TV thrillers can become predictable today. Of course, if Shakespeare is critiquing revenge tragedies for their tedium, he certainly does not do so with brevity. *Hamlet* is long. Most Elizabethan plays were approximately 3,000 lines long. *Hamlet* clocks in at 4,042—with a whopping 1,480 of them belonging to the play's titular character.

Giving Hamlet the stage as much as its author does hints at another distinguishing—and truly groundbreaking—characteristic of the play: *Hamlet* focuses significantly on the psychology of its protagonist. That's what the title character is famous for—his seven soliloquies, his anguished questioning of his sanity and emotional state. The father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, was so fascinated with the character that Hamlet became the emblematic example of the so-called "Oedipal complex." A century later, Harvard critic Harold Bloom published *The Invention of the Human*, in which he argues that Shakespeare invented the modern conception of what it means to be human: to have an inwardness—an ability to think about and reflect on the self. Hamlet is a key character in Bloom's argument as his consciousness is "infinite, unlimited, and at war with itself."

Some scholars say that *Hamlet* is two plays in one. That is true, literally: it features a play-within-a-play, after all. But it is also two types of plays in one: it is both a revenge tragedy and a psychological exploration, one of the first to be so deeply invested in the innermost workings of a protagonist's mind. In Shakespeare's hands, the conventional revenge tragedy became the unconventional: an exploration not only of a man's actions but also of his psyche.

*Hamlet* is a play about more than revenge—it's about a human trying to understand himself. It asks deeply human questions. How do we grieve? Whose words can we trust? How do we respond when we're betrayed? And, on a larger scale, what does it mean to be human? Are we anything more than the quintessence of dust? Is it better "to be, or not to be?" Who will remember us? And, in the end, who will tell our story? 🏰

# shakespeare's hamlet

## CELEBRATING "CPS SHAKESPEARE!"

In its ten-year history, this transformational arts program brought Chicago Public School teachers and students together to perform Shakespeare as an intergenerational ensemble, working together for six weeks of intensive workshops and rehearsals. *CPS Shakespeare! Hamlet* was staged in the Courtyard Theater, fully realized with the help of a team of professional artists working alongside Director Kirsten Kelly and the entire Chicago Shakespeare education team. In 2014 CPS Shakespeare! received the highest honor in the US for arts after-school programming, honored at the White House by First Lady Michelle Obama. Taking the expanse of learning from *CPS Shakespeare!*, Chicago Shakespeare developed and launched a new program in 2017 called the Chicago Shakespeare Slam, which brings students together from across the region's public, private and parochial schools to celebrate Shakespeare and our diverse community in a slam-style arena.

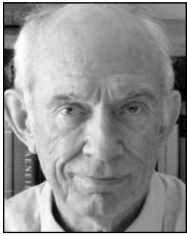


Chicago Public School Students in Chicago Shakespeare Theater's 2013 production of *CPS Shakespeare! Hamlet*, directed by Kirsten Kelly. Photo by Liz Lauren.



# scholars' perspectives

## Who's There?



**ALEXANDER LEGGATT**, who contributes this essay, is Professor Emeritus at the University of Toronto. His many distinguished publications include *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy* and *Shakespeare's Tragedies: Violation and Identity*.

**H**amlet opens with a question, “Who’s there?” and as the play goes on the questions multiply. They begin with the problem of a ghost that appears on the ramparts of Elsinore, persistently described as a “thing” that *looks* like the late King Hamlet. What is it really? Under repeated questioning it maintains an eerie silence. When it finally speaks it is to young Hamlet, giving its identity—“thy father’s spirit”—and a mission. Hamlet, who has been brooding on his father’s death and his mother’s hasty marriage to his uncle Claudius, now learns that Claudius killed the older Hamlet, and the prince’s task is to revenge his father’s murder. Hamlet believes the ghost—for a while. But Hamlet thinks in digressions—even his promise to “sweep my revenge” is delayed by a subordinate clause, “with wings as swift / As meditation of the thoughts of love”—and he spends much of the play getting sidetracked from his mission. The Ghost’s final command is not “Avenge me” but “Remember me,” and for a while Hamlet seems to have forgotten.

The questions now center on Hamlet. He plans to feign madness, but when he gets excited it is not always easy to tell the difference between performance and actual derangement. Other characters try to interpret him: his uncle Claudius sees him as a political threat, Polonius thinks he has gone mad for love of his daughter Ophelia; Ophelia herself simply laments the breaking of “a noble mind.” *Hamlet* criticism, now a multi-national industry, begins within the play, as everyone has a theory about Hamlet, and the theories are all different.

Hamlet tried to fix an uncertain reality in aphorisms, but this habit of mind creates more problems. “Frailty, thy name is woman” not only summarizes Hamlet’s disgust with his mother’s marriage to Claudius, but indicates a general disgust with female sexuality of which Ophelia becomes the target: because one woman is corrupt, they all are. The energy Hamlet should spend on avenging his father he diverts, instead berating his mother and his lover.

Is Hamlet’s phrasemaking a way of understanding reality, or a way of misreading it?

Theater is another way to fix reality—with the paradox that theater is an illusion. By Hamlet’s own admission his role as mourning son is constructed from externals—the inky cloak, the sighs of grief—that “a man might Play”; but he insists that these outer shows reflect an inner truth. Mistrusting the Ghost, he tries to confirm Claudius’s guilt not by subjecting him to interrogation but by making him watch a play. *Hamlet* itself is full of ideas about theater, and is flamboyantly theatrical. It is not just five acts of philosophizing about the meaning of life: it is full of comedy, surprise, suspense, plot and counter-plot, and it ends with a fencing match rigged to produce a murder. Drums and trumpets sound, cannons fire. No wonder people living near playhouses in Shakespeare’s time complained about the noise.

Yet the play’s final reality—and there is one—is embodied in silence. One of its enduring images is of Hamlet holding a skull in his hand. In the end Hamlet can act because, having come to terms with death, he has come to terms with life. For Hamlet as he dies, “the rest is silence”: the silence of death, the silence of the Ghost, the silence of Yorick’s skull under repeated questioning. But as the silence returns, so do the questions. Hamlet gives his dying voice to Fortinbras, the man of action, as the next king of Denmark. Fortinbras in turn orders a military funeral for Hamlet, as though Hamlet were a soldier like himself. He too has a theory about Hamlet, and the theory seems a bit off. Finally, what do we make of the fact that Fortinbras, who is now Denmark’s king, has been Denmark’s enemy? *Hamlet* is a play that begins with spoken questions and ends with unspoken ones. 🏰



Mariann Mayberry as Ophelia, Greg Vinkler as Polonius, and Christopher Gerson as Laertes in Chicago Shakespeare Theater’s 1996 production of *Hamlet*, directed by Barbara Gaines. Photo by Liz Lauren.

# scholars' perspectives

## Between the Lines



**STUART SHERMAN** *who contributes this essay, is a professor of English at Fordham University, focusing on Restoration and eighteenth-century theater and the histories of both prose style and popular music. In addition to numerous essays on subjects such as the autobiography and the diary, he has also authored the book Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form, 1660-1785.*

We are stuck on Hamlet, and he stays with us, haunting us as speech and memory, part somehow of our own experience. Why this centuries-long attachment?

We owe much of it to actors, who in their devotion to the prince and the play have made its wonders available to sense, something we can see, hear, and feel in the perpetual present of the playhouse. Actors, in turn, are fascinated by Hamlet, partly because he is so fascinated by them. "Let them be well used," he instructs Polonius when the traveling players arrive at Elsinore: treat them luxuriously. He speaks out of fellow feeling; he half-thinks himself one of them. In all of Shakespeare there is no other character so intoxicated with the workings of the theater, so eager to map them onto his own life and conduct. For Hamlet, actors are a source of both pleasure and self-reproach. At a pivot point, he excoriates himself for failing to act upon the abundant "motive and cue for passion" that his father's murder has provided for him; a stage actor working from the same resources would perform so stunningly as to "amaze indeed the very faculties of eyes and ears."

Hamlet is selling himself short; amazement is what he does best. At root, to "amaze" is to plunge the mind into a maze, and no piece of theater manages this more efficiently than the play Shakespeare shapes around the prince. Shakespeare builds his maze out of many materials matchlessly deployed; language and spectacle, intrigue, delay, reversal. But he builds it also from a theatrical element we tend to take for granted: the audience itself. He constructs a labyrinth of spectators.

In *Hamlet*, everyone watches everyone. King, queen, and counselor spy on Hamlet; Hamlet watches the king watch the play within the play; and the whole tragedy culminates in four killings at a fencing match—spectator sport. At one point the usurping king Claudius says about sorrows, "They come not in single spies but in battalions." The same holds true in this play for audiences, too. We as audience

are only one among many, drawn into the dynamic of the play by the mere act of watching: we are doing what we see being done. We enter the maze inexorably, by the very faculties of our eyes and ears.

"But look," urges the Ghost, revisiting his troubled son in his once-wife's bedchamber: "amazement on thy mother sits." The line encompasses ourselves as well as Gertrude, for in this moment (as throughout) there is abundance of amazement, and only we as outermost audience can absorb it all: a mother stares astonished at her son, who stares baffled at the spectre of his murdered father, whom she does not see. On the floor lies the new corpse of another father, Polonius, killed because while indulging himself as audience (eavesdropping on the encounter) he was mistaken for a principal player: her new husband, the murderous king. Within minutes her son's poisonous upbraids will change into a terrifying tenderness.

Gertrude watches Hamlet, we Hamlet, but all of us, onstage and off, are entangled in the same endeavor, trying to make sense of the passionate traffic between loving and loathing, of the ties among the living and the dead. In the end, we offstage watchers survive, virtually alone, to reckon loss: the deaths of virtually all the audiences on stage, and of the luminous princely performer, "the observed of all observers," on whom their eyes and ours have been long trained. Since this last loss is ultimately incalculable, we willingly return to the maze eager to puzzle our way through it, once again in the prince's company.

Shakespeare preceded us into the labyrinth, and lingered there a good while. Hamlet's is the longest role he wrote and *Hamlet* the longest play—far too long for uncut performances at the Globe Theatre (or at Chicago Shakespeare). The tangled textual evidence (itself one of scholarship's favorite mazes) suggests that even after the tragedy's initial success, Shakespeare went on adding new material to a play already overextended. It is as though, succumbing to the fascination he had himself created, Shakespeare continued to find new topics for Hamlet to take up, new things for the prince to think and say. The first one stuck on Hamlet was his maker.

From the middle of the maze, Shakespeare beckons us like the royal ghost, whom he may have played at the first performance. Like the prince—and with the prince—we cannot help but follow. 🍷

# what the critics & artists say

It's no secret that *Hamlet* is one of the most discussed literary works of all time. In the 1600s-1700s, critics debated the nature of Hamlet himself. Noble or weak? Hero or . . . something else? But even as they were fascinated by the character, they critiqued the play. Despite its popularity, could *Hamlet* really be considered *good*, violating as it did the rules of decorum and Aristotelian unities (that a play follows a single action in a single place in the course of one day) that the neoclassical period held dear? By the 1800s, *Hamlet*'s status as a great work of art was largely, though not entirely, secure. Critical attention turned to Hamlet's delayed revenge and often found reasons for it within Hamlet's consciousness, a development mirroring the emergence of psychology as a field of study. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, scholarly attention has widened significantly to focus on characters beyond *Hamlet*—Polonius, Ophelia, Gertrude, Claudius, the Ghost, and even Fortinbras—as well as broader thematic concerns.

## 1600s & 1700s

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Modesty . . . is the *Character* of Women. To represent them without this Quality is to make Monsters of them, and throw them out of their Kind . . . Had *Shakespeare* secur'd this point for his young Virgin *Ophelia* the Play had been better contriv'd. Since he was resolv'd to drown the lady like a Kitten he should have set her swimming a little sooner. To keep her alive only to sully her Reputation, and discover the Rankness of her Breath, was very cruel.

—JEREMY COLLIER, 1698

Whatever defects the Criticks may find in this Fable [*Hamlet*], the Moral of it is excellent. Here was a Murder privately committed, strangely discover'd, and wonderfully punished. Nothing in Antiquity can rival this Plot for the admirable distribution of Poetick Justice . . . The Moral of all this is very obvious. It shews us *That the Greatness of the Offender does not qualify the Offence, and that no Humane Power or Policy are a sufficient Guard against the Impartial Hand and eye of Providence.*

—JAMES DRAKE, 1699

Tho' I look upon [*Hamlet*] as the Master-Piece of *Shakespeare* according to our Way of Writing yet there are abundance of Errors in the Conduct and Design which will not suffer us in Justice to prefer it to the *Electra* of *Sophocles* . . . This Play indeed is capable of being made more perfect than the *Electra* but then a great deal of it must be thrown away . . . all the comical Part entirely and many other things which relate not to the main Action.

—CHARLES GIDDON, 1710

I am persuaded that our Author was pleas'd to have an Opportunity of raising a Laugh now and then, which he does in several Passages of *Hamlet*'s satirical Reflections on Women; but I have the same Objections to this Part of the Prince's Madness, that I have before mentioned, viz. that it wants Dignity . . . I cannot think [these reflections] agreeable in such a Piece as this; they are not suitable to the Dignity of the Whole, and would be better plac'd in a Comedy.

—SIR THOMAS HANMER, 1736

Far be it from me to justify everything in that tragedy; it is a vulgar and barbarous drama, which would not be tolerated by the vilest populace of France, or Italy. Hamlet becomes crazy in the second act, and his mistress becomes crazy in the third; the prince slays the father of his mistress under the pretense of killing a rat, and the heroine throws herself into the river; a grave is dug on the stage, and the grave-diggers talk quodibets worthy of themselves, while holding skulls in their hands; Hamlet responds to their nasty vulgarities in silliness no less disgusting . . .

—ARTHUR MURPHY, 1754

Hamlet is, through the whole play, rather an instrument than an agent. After he has, by the stratagem of the play, convicted the King, he makes no attempt to punish him, and his death is at last effected by an incident which Hamlet has no part in producing . . . The apparition left the regions of the dead to little purpose; the revenge which he demands is not obtained but by the death of him that was required to take it; and the gratification which would arise from the destruction of an usurper and a murderer, is abated by the untimely death of Ophelia, the young, the beautiful, the harmless, and the pious.

—SAMUEL JOHNSON, 1765



# what the critics & artists say

## 1600s & 1700s

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We feel not only the virtues, but the weaknesses, of Hamlet as our own; we see a man, who in other circumstances would have exercised all the moral and social virtues, placed in a situation in which even the amiable qualities of his mind serve but to aggravate his distress and to perplex his conduct. Our compassion for the first, and our anxiety for the latter, are excited in the strongest manner; and hence arises that indescribable charm in Hamlet which attracts every reader and every spectator, which the more perfect characters of other tragedies never dispose us to feel.

—HENRY MACKENZIE, 1780

*The time is out of joint: O cursed spite,  
That ever I was born to set it right!*

In these, words, I imagine, will be found the key to Hamlet's whole procedure. To me it is clear that Shakespeare meant, in the present case, to represent the effects of a great action laid upon a soul unfit for the performance of it...There is an oak tree planted in a costly jar, which should have borne only pleasant flowers in its bosom; the roots expand, the jar is shivered. A lovely, pure, noble, and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which forms a hero, sinks beneath a burden which it cannot bear and which it must not cast away.

—JOHANN VON GOETHE, 1795

## 1800s

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With respect to Hamlet's character: I cannot, as I understand the poet's views, pronounce altogether so favorable a sentence upon it as Goethe does...in the resolutions which [Hamlet] so often embraces and always leaves unexecuted, his weakness is too apparent: he does himself only justice when he implies that there is no greater dissimilarity than between himself and Hercules. He is not solely impelled by necessity to artifice and dissimulation, he has a natural inclination for crooked ways; he is a hypocrite towards himself; his far-fetched scruples are often mere pretexts to cover his want of determination: thoughts, as he says on a different occasion, which have

*...but one part wisdom  
and ever three parts coward...*

—AUGUSTUS WILHELM VON SCHLEGEL, 1811

Ophelia is a character almost too exquisitely touching to be dwelt upon. Oh rose of May, oh flower too soon faded! Her love, her madness, her death, are described with the truest touches of tenderness and pathos. It is a character which nobody but Shakespear [*sic*] could have drawn in the way that he has done...

—WILLIAM HAZLITT, 1817

In *Hamlet* [Shakespeare] seems to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of a due balance between our attention to the objects of our senses, and our meditation on the workings of our mind—an

*equilibrium* between the real and the imaginary worlds. In Hamlet this balance is disturbed . . . The effect of this overbalance of the imaginative power is beautifully illustrated in the everlasting broodings and superfluous activities of Hamlet's mind, which, unseated from its healthy relation, is constantly occupied with the world within, and abstracted from the world without—giving substance to shadows, and throwing a mist over all commonplace actualities . . . Hamlet's character is the prevalence of the abstracting and generalizing habit over the practical. He does not want courage, skill, will, or opportunity; but every incident sets him thinking; and it is curious, and, at the same time strictly natural, that Hamlet, who all the play seems reason itself, should be impelled, at last, by mere accident to effect his object.

—SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, 1819

It hurts me to hear [Ophelia] spoke of, as she often is, as a weak creature, wanting in truthfulness, in purpose, in force of character, and only interesting when she loses the little wits she had. And yet who can wonder that a character so delicately outlined, and shaded in with touches so fine, should be often gravely misunderstood?

—HELENA FAUCIT MARTIN, AN ACTOR WHO PLAYED OPHELIA  
(OPP. WILLIAM CHARLES MACREADY'S HAMLET) IN PARIS IN

THE LATE 19TH CENTURY, 1888

# what the critics & artists say

## 1900s

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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.

—SIGMUND FREUD, 1900

[Coleridge's] theory describes, therefore, a man in certain respects like Coleridge himself, on one side a man of genius, on the other side, the side of will, deplorably weak, always procrastinating and avoiding unpleasant duties, and often reproaching himself in vain; a man, observe, who at *any* time and in any circumstances would be unequal to the task assigned to Hamlet. And thus, I must maintain, it degrades Hamlet and travesties the play. For Hamlet, according to all the indications in the text, was not naturally or normally such a man, but rather, I venture to affirm, a man who at any *other* time and in any other circumstances than those presented would have been perfectly equal to the task; and it is, in fact, the very cruelty of his fate that the crisis of his life comes on him at the one moment when he cannot meet it, and when his highest gifts, instead of helping him, conspire to paralyze him.

—A.C. BRADLEY, 1904

The Queen was not a bad-hearted woman, not at all the woman to think little of murder. But she had a soft animal nature and was very dull and very shallow. She loved to be happy, like a sheep in the sun . . . It was pleasant to sit upon her throne and see smiling faces around her, and foolish and unkind in *Hamlet* to persist in grieving for his father instead of marrying Ophelia and making everything comfortable . . . The belief at the bottom of her heart was that the world is a place constructed simply that people may be happy in it in a good-humored sensual fashion.

—A.C. BRADLEY, 1904

So far from being Shakespeare's masterpiece, the play is most certainly an artistic failure.

—T.S. ELIOT, 1921

[Hamlet] realizes that his emotions are often going to rush beyond his control. The fiction that he is mad will not only cloak his designs against the King, but will also free him from any necessity to control the uncontrollable. During the rest of the play, Hamlet's feigned madness is merely his acquiescence in the two-fold intensities of his melancholy . . . the depressed phase is to be marked by brooding inaction . . . the heightened phase will be characterized by violent lunges towards action.

—OSCAR JAMES CAMPBELL, 1943

The action of *Hamlet* is concentrated at Elsinore; and this though there is much external interest, and the story abounds in journeys. As a rule in such a case, unless they are mere messengers, we travel with the travelers. But we do not see Laertes in Paris, nor, more surprisingly, Hamlet among the pirates; and the Norwegian affair is dealt with by hearsay till the play is two-thirds over. This is not done to economize time, or to leave space for more capital events . . . Shakespeare is deliberately concentrating his action at Elsinore . . . The double dramatic purpose is plain. Here is a tragedy of inaction; the center of it is Hamlet. The concentration at Elsinore of all that happens enhances the impression of this inactivity, which is enhanced again by the sense also given us of the constant coming and going around Hamlet of the busier world without.

—HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER, 1946

[Shakespeare] gives us in Gertrude the woman who does not mature, who clings to her youth and all that belongs to it, whose charm will not change but at last fade and wither; a pretty creature, as we see her, desperately refusing to grow old . . . She is drawn for us with unempathetic strokes, and she has but a passive part in the play's action.

—HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER, 1946

Hamlet, the one inactive character, is not well integrated into the play and not adequately motivated, though the active characters are excellent. Polonius is a pseudo-practical dispenser of advice, who is a kind of voyeur where the sex life of his children is concerned. Laertes likes to be a dashing man-of-the-world who visits all houses—but don't you touch my sister! And he is jealous

# what the critics & artists say

## 1900s

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of Hamlet's intellect. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are yes men. Gertrude is portrayed as a woman who likes to be loved, who likes to have romance in her life. And Horatio is not too bright, though he has read a lot and can repeat.

—W.H. AUDEN, 1946-47

On the stage the madman was once a regular comic figure: that was how Hamlet got his opportunity before Shakespear [sic] touched him. The originality of Shakespear's version lay in his taking the lunatic sympathetically and seriously, and thereby making an advance towards the eastern consciousness of the fact that lunacy may be inspiration in disguise, since a man who has more brains than his fellows necessarily appears as mad to them as one who has less.

—GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, 1947

Hamlet is not a man in whom 'common humanity' is raised by great vital energy to a heroic pitch, like Coriolanus or Othello. On the contrary, he is a man in whom the common personal passions are so superseded by wider and rarer interests, and so discouraged by a degree of critical self-consciousness which makes the practical efficiency of the instinctive man on the lower plane impossible to him, that he finds the duties dictated by conventional revenge and ambition as disagreeable a burden as commerce to a poet. Even his instinctive sexual impulses offend his intellect; so that when he meets the woman who excited them he invites her to join him in a bitter and scornful criticism of their joint absurdity, demanding 'What should such fellows as I do crawling between heaven and earth,' 'Why would'st thou be a breeder of sinners?' and so forth, all of which is so completely beyond the poor girl that she naturally thinks him mad.

—GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, 1947

Hamlet's way of employing images is unique in Shakespeare's drama. . . They are mostly very concrete and precise, simple and, as to their subject matter, easy to understand; common and ordinary things . . . All this, the wealth of realistic observation, of real objects, of associations taken from everyday life, is enough to prove that Hamlet is no abstract thinker and dreamer. As

his imagery betrays to us . . . he is capable of scanning reality with a keener eye and penetrating the veil of semblance even to the very core of things.

—W.H. CLEMEN, 1951

There is no doubt that Shakespeare endowed Hamlet with the best he had acquired up to the time he conceived him. He inherits the virtues of a score of his predecessors—and some of their weaknesses. Yet he is no mere recapitulation of them. In him, rather, they recombine to make a man as individual as he is universal . . . For what was such a man made? Plainly for the ultimate things: for wonder, for curiosity and the pursuit of truth, for love, for creation . . . for religion and philosophy, for love and art, for liberty to 'grow unto himself' . . . And this man is called upon to kill.

—HAROLD C. GODDARD, 1951

Hamlet's world is preeminently in the interrogative mood. It reverberates with questions, anguished, meditative, alarmed. There are questions that in this play, to an extent I think unparalleled in any other, mark the phases and even the nuances of the action, helping to establish its peculiar baffled tone. There are other questions whose interrogations, innocent at first, are subsequently seen to have reached beyond their contexts and to point towards some pervasive inscrutability as a whole . . . Thus the mysteriousness of Hamlet's world is of a piece. It is not simply a matter of missing motivations, to be expunged if only we could find the perfect clue. It is built in. It is evidently an important part of what the play wishes to say to us.

—MAYNARD MACK, 1952

When the play opens it is by no means certain Claudius is a villain . . . no ordinary mortal looking at Claudius and his loving queen, surrounded with a joyful court, a picture of all that is healthily vital in human beings, could be expected to peer beneath the smile and find the villain . . . From one point of view, then, the progress of the play is a revelation of the quality of Claudius' villainy; only gradually do we come to a true experience of his real nature.

—BERTRAM JOSEPH, 1953



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For some deep-seated reason, which is to him unacceptable, Hamlet is plunged into anguish at the thought of his father being replaced in his mother's affections by someone else. It is as if his devotion to his mother had made him so jealous for her affection that he had found it hard enough to share this even with his father and could not endure to share it with still another man.

—ERNEST JONES, 1954

'Lust'—in a woman of forty-five or more—is the key word here. [Other critics] misunderstand Gertrude largely because they are unable to see lust, the desire for sexual relations, as the passion, in the Elizabethan sense of the word, the flaw, the weakness which drives Gertrude to an incestuous marriage, appalls her son, and keeps him from the throne. Unable to explain her marriage to Claudius as the act of any but a weak-minded vacillating woman, they fail to see Gertrude for the strong-minded, intelligent, succinct, and, apart from this passion, sensible woman that she is.

—CAROLYN HEILBRUN, 1957

T.S. Eliot judged *Hamlet* a defective tragedy. He was right; as tragedy it is defective. He was wrong, though, in judging the play as a tragedy . . . Shakespeare made something else, something quite as extraordinary as a tragedy . . . for the first time in the history of drama, the problem of the protagonist is that he has a playwright's consciousness . . . What Eliot did not take into account is that none of us, no matter what our situation, really knows the form of the plot he is in, and Hamlet was the first theatrical figure who expressed this fact fully . . .

—LIONEL ABEL, 1963

*Hamlet* is a sponge. Unless it is produced in a stylized or antiquarian fashion, it immediately absorbs all the problems of our time. It is the strangest play ever written, by its very imperfections.

—JAN KOTT, 1964

Yet if Polonius is a fool, what does that make Claudius, who employs him and obviously relies on his judgment, or the Queen, who refers to him as a 'good old man' and trusts him in her bedchamber? Eric Shorter, in an article in the *Daily Telegraph* in August 1980 ('Getting to the Heart of Polonius') says 'In recent years the character has

come to be recognized more and more as an important political figure', but is this recognition so recent? I believe there have always been actors who have known the measure of the man—more often than critics.

—TONY CHURCH, WHO PLAYED POLONIUS AT THE ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY IN 1965 AND 1980

It is appropriate that for modern critics *Hamlet* should be Shakespeare's greatest dramatic enigma for misunderstanding is the unavoidable condition of Hamlet's quest for certainties. Not only is he baffled by riddling visions and by commands seemingly incapable of fulfillment, but he is the victim of misinterpretation by those around him. Well may the dying Hamlet urge his friend Horatio to 'report me and my cause aright / To the unsatisfied', for no one save Horatio has caught more than a glimpse of Hamlet's true situation. We as omniscient audience, hearing the inner thoughts of Claudius as well as of Hamlet and learning of Polonius' or Laertes' secret plottings with the king, should remember that we know vastly more than the play's characters, and that this discrepancy between our viewpoint and theirs is one of Shakespeare's richest sources of dramatic irony.

—DAVID BEVINGTON, 1968

Hamlet is incensed at Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for supposing they can sound his inner nature more easily than one might play a recorder. 'You would play upon me, you would seem to know my tops, you would pluck out the heart of my mystery,' he accuses them, adding with a pun, 'though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me.' Hamlet here expresses one of the most profound bases of our identification with his loneliness. Every human being is unique and believes that others can never fully understand or appreciate him. And every human being experiences some perverse delight in this proof of the world's callousness.

—DAVID BEVINGTON, 1968

Laertes expects Ophelia to heed his counsel that 'best safety lies in fear.' Her whole education is geared to relying on other people's judgment, and to placing chastity and reputation for chastity above even the virtue of truthfulness. Ophelia has no chance to develop an independent conscience of her own, so stifled is she by the authority of the male world.

—JULIET DUSINBERRE, 1975

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[Ophelia's] history is an instance of how someone can be driven mad by having her inner feelings misrepresented, not responded to, or acknowledged only through chastisement and repression. From her entrance on, Ophelia must continually respond to commands which imply distrust even as they compel obedience . . . She is a play within a play, or a player trying to respond to several imperious directors at once. Everyone has used her: Polonius, to gain favour; Laertes, to belittle Hamlet; Claudius, to spy on Hamlet; Hamlet to express rage at Gertrude; and Hamlet again, to express his feigned madness with her as a decoy. She is valued only for the roles that further other people's plots.

—DAVID LEVERENZ, 1978

We can imagine Hamlet's story without Ophelia, but Ophelia literally has no story without Hamlet.

—LEE EDWARDS, 1979

*Hamlet* belongs to the genre of the revenge tragedy, as hackneyed and yet inescapable in Shakespeare's days as the 'thriller' in ours to a television writer . . . The weariness with revenge and catharsis which can be read, I believe, in the margins of the earlier plays must really exist because, in *Hamlet*, it moves to the center of the stage and becomes fully articulated. . . . Shakespeare can turn this tedious chore into the most brilliant feat of theatrical *double entendre* because the tedium of revenge is really what he wants to talk about, and he wants to talk about it in the usual Shakespearean fashion; he will denounce the revenge theater and all its works with the utmost daring without denying his mass audience the catharsis it demands, without depriving himself of the dramatic success which is necessary to his own career as a dramatist.

—RENÉ GIRARD, 1984

The complexity of attitudes towards the feminine can be analyzed in their fullest cultural and historical frame. The alternation of strong and weak Ophelias on the stage, virginal and seductive Ophelias in art, inadequate or oppressed Ophelias in criticism, tells us how these representations have overflowed the text, and how they have reflected the ideological character of their times, erupting as debates between dominant and feminist

views in periods of gender crisis and redefinition. The representation of Ophelia changes independently of theories of the meaning of the play or the Prince, for it depends on attitudes towards women and madness . . .

—ELAINE SHOWALTER, 1985

Bob Goody [who played the Ghost in the same Royal Shakespeare Company production] was creating a crippled, asthmatic Ghost, doubled up with pain and begging for revenge with, as it were, his last gasp. I had never thought of the part like this, yet suddenly it seemed to make perfect sense. Hamlet constantly refers to the Ghost in compassionate terms: 'Alas, poor ghost,' 'ay, thou poor ghost,' 'this piteous action,' 'tears perchance for blood'—all these phrases leapt into prominence and with them a more complicated set of responses than I had anticipated. To see a strong, authoritative father brought so low and desperate provoked a far deeper unease and guilty responsibility than a might armed Commendatore figure would have done. Seeing misery and, more important, weakness in a parent for the first time is profoundly unsettling.

—PHILIP FRANK, WHO PLAYED HAMLET AT THE RSC IN 1987.

An important aspect of Hamlet's despair is his sense that resolution is man's more natural state and that its subjugation by an overweening conscience is a form of sickness. These sentiments are emblematic of modern heroes who seem time and again to recognize their inability to resolve any crisis; such futility becomes, as Hamlet knows, an illness of the modern age . . . Not only is the modern hero unable to act with the uninhibited spontaneity of his predecessors, but the very nature of his preoccupation with conscience leads him to doubt the efficiency of action in ways that would never have occurred to earlier heroes.

—DANIEL J. ROSS, 1989

The gentle Ophelia, it seems, cannot absorb her father's murder. However, it is not her father's murder that has driven her mad, but, rather, his murder by Hamlet, the person she loves and upon whose love she has placed her hopes. Now, she can never marry him, and worse still, she has an obligation to hate him; indeed she must feel hatred toward him for depriving her of her beloved

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father, her original love. Shakespeare, then, has not only placed Ophelia's insanity in apposition to Hamlet's but has emphasized the same crucial human frailty as the cause of the emotional disturbance in both the hero and the heroine.

—THEODORE LIDZ, 1990

Gertrude believes that quiet women best please men, and pleasing men is Gertrude's main interest.

—REBECCA SMITH, 1992

The female sexuality largely absent from the comedies invades *Hamlet* in the person of Gertrude, and, once there, it utterly contaminates sexual relationship...In her presence, Hamlet sees his task as the disruption of marriage itself: 'I say we will have no more marriage' (3.1.149), he says to Ophelia as she becomes contaminated in his eyes, subject to the same "frailty" that names his mother's. As he comes to identify himself with his cuckolded father . . . he can think of Ophelia only as a cuckold-maker, like his mother: 'if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them' (3.1.139-41). Moreover, Ophelia fuses with Gertrude not only as potential cuckold-maker but also as potential mother . . . It is no wonder that there can be no more marriage: Ophelia becomes dangerous to Hamlet insofar as she becomes identified in his mind with the contaminating maternal body, the mother who has borne him.

—JANET ADELMAN, 1992

In the play Hamlet belongs to two worlds. One is the world he identifies with through his father, who appears, the Ghost in armour, pretty much as Hamlet has projected his image, the great warrior with martial stalk, deified as the god who gives 'commandments.' The old world he represents is one of violence, in which quarrels are settled by war or combat. Hamlet's nostalgia is for hierarchy, order, command, a simple world where the sword is law. But he has been educated at college to think, to use words rather than weapons, and his appropriate place is in the new world of diplomacy represented by Claudius and his court. The play shows us Hamlet's reluctant adaptation to that world, the modern political world of deceit, spying, equivocation and plotting; and he is successful in outfoxing Claudius at the end.

—R.A. FOAKES, 1993

Both [Queen] Elizabeth and [King] James had frequent recourse to an identical formula. When they needed to put off answering delicate questions, they argued that God alone knew all secrets and could bring them from the gloom where they lurked into brightness . . . There is not the merest suggestion of such justice informing *Hamlet*. The last scene offers little divine comfort to dispel the grim truths it reinforces. Towards an intensification of confusion and a thickening of mystification is the direction in which the play tends. Hamlet's spiritual fate is in doubt, as Horatio's worried invocation of the flight of angels indicates. Horatio muddles his unfolding of the secrets of Elsinore, and Fortinbras' political programme remains chillingly sketchy and enigmatic. No final word of judgment cuts through the clouds of uncertainty. No revelation is at hand, no key available to unlock the contents of the heart. The only assurance is engulfment by an ineluctable darkness.

—MARK THORNTON BURNETT, 1994

In his reply to his mother, his first extended utterance in the play, Hamlet distinguishes between the elaborate external ritual mourning and an inner, invisible anguish. His black attire, his sigh, his tears fail to denote him truly not because they are false—Hamlet's sorrow for his father is sincere—but because they might be false, because some other person might conceivably employ them deceitfully. Even reliable indicators or symptoms of his distress become suspect simply because they are defined as indicators and symptoms. It is hard to imagine what could possibly count as 'true denotation' for Hamlet.

—KATHARINE EISAMAN MAUS, 1995

Shakespeare chose not to follow his source by naming Hamlet's father Horwendil but gave father and son the same name...the Ghost is a warrior fit for an Icelandic saga, while the prince is a university intellectual, representative of a new age. Two Hamlets confront each other, with virtually nothing in common except their names. The Ghost expects Hamlet to be a version of himself, even as young Fortinbras is a reprint of Old Fortinbras.

—HAROLD BLOOM, 1998

There is no 'real' Hamlet, as there is no 'real' Shakespeare: the character, like the writer, is a reflecting pool, a spacious mirror in which we need see ourselves.

—HAROLD BLOOM, 1998



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Hamlet describes the world as a splendidly ordered cosmos with man, "the beauty of the world," at its center. In both man and the cosmos, there is a fundamental harmony between the visible exterior and the invisible interior. In both, outward beauty reflects inner goodness, motion follows order, and change takes place within the permanence of a rational, ordered whole. No gulf separates the best in man from the natural world. Hamlet mentions this view, however, only to say he no longer holds it. Instead of reason governing the world, he now sees only fortune and inconstancy—only chance and change. In his view, everything is mutable, nothing in the world abides.

—JAN H. BLITS, 2001

Hamlet has kept pace with the advancing time; he is *timeless* in value precisely because he is found timely by each successive age. He remains perennially at the vanguard of the contemporary, anticipating back in 1600 the cutting edge of the most recent now. Quite a feat—especially for a character famous as a procrastinator.

—MARGRETA DE GRAZIA, 2001

*Hamlet* opens on a state of incipient alarm, with martial vigilance on the battlemented 'platform' of Elsinore and conspicuous 'post-haste and rummage of the land.' For the sentries, this apprehension is heightened by the entrance of the Ghost—a figure whom Horatio eventually associates with a threat to the 'sovereignty' of reason. In the immediate context, loss of 'sovereignty of reason' entails 'madness.' In turn, madness is here associated with the disastrous inability to control emotional impulse . . . Thus, as formulated on the platform, the fundamental danger posed to reason in the world of the play is that it might lose sovereignty over emotion.

—ERIC LEVY, 2001

The entire play exudes the aura of a traumatized environment. We, in the audience, must in turn live with a discomfiting set of ambiguities, awaiting further clarification, which comes only partially by the end of the play. Granted, we learn that the Ghost told the truth about having been murdered by Claudius, his brother. But we do not know for sure whether there was any complicity, direct or indirect, on the part of Gertrude

or whether the Ghost's account of his murder can be believed. We likewise do not know whether the union of Gertrude and Claudius was indeed incestuous or whether Hamlet was only feigning madness. Nor can we expect that Horatio's promise at the close, 'All this I can / Truly deliver,' will answer these questions.

—BENNETT SIMON, 2001

To 'take arms,' like his father, would mean to kill, which was accepted as part of a heroic code, but is rejected by Christian commandments. Hamlet is trapped in the contradictions between the two codes, which make him a great exponent of the problem of violence. There is no solution; having passed up a chance to revenge himself on Claudius and worked himself into a passionate state on his way to confront his mother, he spontaneously stabs through the arras to kill Polonius. This act is a rite of passage, and makes it easy for him to send Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths, and to resign himself to his own.

—R.A. FOAKES, 2002

Oddly enough, then, the play begins with Marcellus' anxious request of Horatio to tell the story of Denmark's need for military preparation and ends with Hamlet's anxiously commanding Horatio to tell his own: that is, the drama begins and ends in narrative . . . very often key scenes are reports or accounts rather than the encounters that constitute the very stuff of drama. Why might this be so? . . . The major conflict in *Hamlet*, I suggest as one basic premise for class discussion of the play, is the conflict . . . between the desirability and even adequacy of drama and those of narrative. Shakespeare imports one form to judge another, one genre to expose the strengths and limitations of another.

—ARTHUR F. KINNEY, 2002

What story about Hamlet will Horatio tell? One story follows: the embedded story of Fortinbras, that had Hamlet lived, he would have made a fine soldier. Of course he wouldn't have. Is Fortinbras struggling to find a way to pay sincere tribute to a prince he does not even know? Is he attempting to make his adversary, now his predecessor, his equal? Or in framing a story about Hamlet, is his use of his own perspective finally a fiction,

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even a lie, about Hamlet, a way to appropriate Hamlet to help claim authority in Denmark?

—ARTHUR F. KINNEY, 2002

The skull's fascination transcends what one might call 'The *Hamlet* Effect' or even 'The Shakespeare Effect.' Skulls fascinate because of their sheer uncanniness, their disturbing ability to oscillate between subject and object. Unlike virtually any other prop, the skull is the physical remains of the deceased human subject. And once it is a universal human attribute, the skull insists on identification as well as fragmentation...In John Caird's production of *Hamlet* mounted by the Royal National Theatre, featuring Simon Russell Beale as the prince, Yorick's skull was outfitted in a jaunty cap, a gag at once amusing and deeply unsettling. Neither quite person nor thing, the skull bore a unique charge on the stage, its mirthless grin only compounding its macabre effect.

—ANDREW SOFER, 2003

The world of the play is itself 'distracted,' maddened, diseased. Old Hamlet has been poisoned, and the poison affects not only the King, but the state. We know from plays like *Richard II* and the *Henry VI* plays, and even from *Julius Caesar*, a play written in the same years as *Hamlet*, that when the king is weak, so too is the kingdom. When there is corruption at the top, the land and its people are likewise corrupted and infected. This in this play the madness that Hamlet assumes is a madness already present in the state, for the king is the state. Hamlet's 'antic disposition,' his feigned temperament of the fool and madman, is an objective correlative for the condition of his country and its world... The world of the play is in a sense a metaphor for the consciousness of its protagonist.

—MARJORIE GARBER, 2004

...the play is about the whole question of boundaries, thresholds, and liminality or border crossing: boundary disputes between Norway and Denmark, boundaries between youth and age, boundaries between reality and imagination, between audience and actor. And these boundaries seem to be constantly shifting. The most inexorable boundary possible would seem to be that between life and death, yet the play opens with the appearance of a ghost.

—MARJORIE GARBER, 2004

We might compare 'To be, or not to be' with a similar kind of construction—say, 'To do, or not to do.' This is the kind of quandary that afflicts Macbeth... 'To do, or not to do' is also the problem that confronts Othello, as he trembles on the brink of a dreadful deed. But although Hamlet likewise contemplates action, contemplates murder, contemplates revenge, it is being, not doing, that has made this character the mirror that subsequent writers, philosophers, and critics have held up to nature. Being—and remembering—because the essence of the human animal, and the pain and joy of the human condition, are in this play linked directly to memory. 'Remember me,' cries the Ghost—and later, when Hamlet is in his mother's closet, 'Do not forget.'

—MARY FLOYD-WILSON, 2006

Shakespeare's crucial breakthrough in *Hamlet* was the discovery that he could immeasurably deepen the effect of his plays, that he could provoke in the audience and in himself a peculiarly passionate intensity of response, if he took out a key explanatory element, thereby occluding the rationale, motivation, or ethical principle that accounted for the action that was to unfold. The principle was not the making of a riddle to be solved, but the creation of a strategic opacity. This opacity, Shakespeare found, released an enormous energy that had been at least partially blocked or contained by familiar reassuring explanations.

—STEPHEN GREENBLATT, 2004

The play *Hamlet* is a Renaissance meditation on death. The play is essentially about death and about a highly complex human being coming to terms with his own demise. No other play is as death-haunted a work as *Hamlet*. Other plays might be more violent, more bloody, more grim in their depiction of human suffering, but no other play so profoundly explores the psychological state of a man facing death.

—BRIAN PEARCE, 2007

Gertrude's sexuality seems to be an unresolved problem. Of course, directors of productions of *Hamlet* and actors who take the role of Gertrude usually do not leave it that way, since they usually feel that they should give her a coherent (and interesting) personality and a clear motivation, so many of them have opted for a

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sensual or even lascivious Gertrude . . . Unfortunately for her, Gertrude is the victim of a bad press, not only on the stage and screen and in the critical arena, but also within Shakespeare's text, since she and her libido are constructed for us by two men who have grievances against her and so much be considered hostile and therefore unreliable witnesses, while she herself is given no opportunity to testify on her own behalf.

—RICHARD LEVIN, 2008

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is often seen as a text that looks forward, anticipating some of the psychological dilemmas of modern existence in its depiction of the young prince's morbid self-consciousness . . . Alongside this proto-modernity, however, the play moves in a quite different direction: towards retrospection and the

past. Like its hero, the play looks backwards. Hamlet's own instincts are towards undoing, rather than doing. In his opening scene, his agreement not to return to university fixes him in the role of a child, contrasted with Laertes who is leaving his family for adventure in Paris . . . Re-venge, like re-mem-bering, takes on the quality of repetition, just as the play repeats images and moments from its own past. . . . Fortinbras, son of Fortinbras, is the military echo of the cerebral Hamlet, son of Hamlet: both men struggle with the emotional inheritance from their powerful fathers . . . Memory reverberates in a play preoccupied with the past, and when Fortinbras steps forward at the end to take up the empty throne of Denmark, he does so in the name of history: 'I have some rights, of memory in this kingdom' (5.2.389).

—EMMA SMITH, 2012



Andrew Ahrens as Laertes and Ben Carlson as Hamlet, with Barbara Robertson as Gertrude and Bruce A. Young as Claudius looking on, in Chicago Shakespeare Theater's 2006 production of *Hamlet*, directed by Terry Hands. Photo by Steve Leonard.



# a play comes to life

## "Hamlet" in Performance

**H**amlet is always going on somewhere." So said the acclaimed Shakespearean director Tyrone Guthrie, and it only takes one look at the play's lengthy performance history to detect truth in his statement. Simply put, this is one of the—if not the—most performed plays in the world. *Hamlet* is popular among audiences, but perhaps even more so among actors, who leap at the chance to be in a play where even the mid-size parts and cameos are vivid and colorful, brimming with scene-stealing potential. But it is the title role that defines *Hamlet*—and often the careers of those who play him. The Danish Prince is "a hoop through which every actor must sooner or later jump," according to nineteenth-century critic Max Beerbohm. And talk of *Hamlet* has, throughout the centuries, been dominated by talk of Hamlet, and the actor playing him.

The first recorded performance of *Hamlet* is an unusual one: a 1607 production off the coast of Sierra Leone, aboard a ship (the *Dragon*) heading to the East Indies. Under its captain's orders, the crew banded together to stage the play as entertainment for a visiting dignitary named Captain Hawkins. So enthralled were the sailors with acting that, according to their captain, it kept them "from idleness and unlawful games, or sleep."

Little is known of the London stagings that surely predated this one. The play was first written and performed ca. 1599-1601. Critics assume Shakespeare wrote the play with the actor Richard Burbage in mind as his Hamlet—a performer famed for his emotional range, capacious memory, and physical stamina. In early performances, Shakespeare may have played the Ghost. Some scholars propose that the story was inspired by the 1596 death of Shakespeare's own son, the eleven-year-old Hamnet, and that the playwright poured his own grief into the play and, eventually, the Ghost's anguished character.

In early modern England, theater was eyed with suspicion by public authorities, who feared not only the spread of the plague among the gathered crowds, but also its influence upon an impressionable population. To religious extremists, the theater's pageantry was viewed as sacrilege, an unnecessary evil that should be outlawed. Theater performances were banned in 1642 following Oliver Cromwell's overthrow of King Charles I (son to King James I, who reigned after Queen Elizabeth I's death).

When, eighteen years later in 1660, theater was once again declared legal after the restoration of the monarchy, Shakespeare's plays were considered old-fashioned—and ripe for adaptation. Two rival theater companies—the King's Company and the Duke's Company—fought for the rights to pre-Interregnum plays. The King's Company snatched the lion's share of pre-Restoration plays by the likes of Beaumont, Fletcher, Jonson, and Shakespeare. Ironically, *Hamlet* was a "leftover" play, cast off to the Duke's Company and its leader, William Davenant (reportedly Shakespeare's godson, who also claimed to be the Bard's illegitimate son).

But soon, it was *Hamlet* that allowed the Duke's Company to eclipse its rival and cement its status as the most popular—and prosperous—of the Restoration theater companies. The Restoration was a time of great spectacle, known for productions involving elaborate masques and movable set pieces. But that's not how Davenant staged *Hamlet* in the latter half of the seventeenth century. He saw the play as a boy and was so moved by it that he strove to replicate his memories "in every particle" of the production, even in the actors' performances. The production intensely focused on character, especially Hamlet. Reviewers praised actor Thomas Betterton for his ability to make the audience feel what Hamlet felt, so much so that his performance would "certainly affect their behavior on any parallel occasions in their own life." Betterton's Hamlet was natural and human, and it was *the* Hamlet—until David Garrick came along.

Garrick played Hamlet in Drury Lane in the mid-1700s. His Hamlet was active and decisive, sharply swerving from anguished to vengeful in an instant. The character's moments of hesitation—as when Hamlet fails to kill Claudius at his prayers—were cut from the script, and Hamlet's decisiveness clearly sprang from deep devotion to his father, whose ghostly effect on his son inspired the play's most iconic moment: a terrified Garrick knocking over a chair at the Ghost's appearance in a complex mixture of terror, awe, respect, and deep pathos.

With the rise of Romanticism in the 1800s came the rise, too, of a new interpretation of Hamlet's character, emphasizing his introspection and irresolution, his melancholic genius as well as his emotional depths. Edwin Booth's long-running turn as Hamlet in New York (1860s-1880s) fully embodied the Romantic lens. Staged at the height of America's Gilded Age, a time known for

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Adrian Lester as Hamlet and Natasha Parry as Gertrude in Chicago Shakespeare Theater and C.I.C.T./Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord's 2001 WorldStage production of *Hamlet*, touring to Chicago Shakespeare Theater and directed by Peter Brook. Photo by Pascal Victor.

its corrupt materialism, Booth's Hamlet was a prince too refined, too sensitive, too gentle and self-reflective for the time. He was the anti-robber baron, nothing like the captains of industry driving America forward at any cost. In fact, he was so sensitive that, at the end of the play, he was appalled by his own successful revenge.

Brother to the infamous John Wilkes Booth, Edwin Booth called this a "womanly and refined interpretation" of the character, and he was not alone in seeing Hamlet as a feminine figure. The production history of *Hamlet* is full of instances of women playing the title role. Perhaps the most famous was Sarah Bernhardt in Paris in 1899. Her casting was polarizing, partially due to her gender and partially, to her advanced age of fifty-four. When negative reactions swelled—how could a fifty-four-year-old woman convincingly play a twenty-something man?—Bernhardt argued that Hamlet is a man of twenty with a mind of forty. Therefore, an older woman "more readily looks the part, yet has the maturity of mind to grasp it." Like Bernhardt herself, her Hamlet was logical, firm, and resolute. The most spectacular moment of her performance was when she stood on her tip-toes, looking "like a great black exclamation mark," and slew Polonius. So climactic was her shout of "C'est le roi!"—and the ensuing sword strike—that at least one reviewer remarked that "for a tingling second it seemed the play itself must be over."

It was in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that *Hamlet* performances became known for more than just the titular character. Other thematic concepts and characters began to stand on their own as creative hallmarks of a production. One of the non-Hamlet actors to receive acclaim was Ellen Terry as Ophelia in the 1870s. The production, staged at London's Lyceum Theatre and

starring Henry Irving as Hamlet, highlighted both Hamlet and Ophelia's madness. Terry visited a psychiatric hospital to prepare for the role and found her inspiration in one of the patients: a girl, "very thin, very pathetic, very young" who did nothing but stare vacantly at the wall, until she suddenly threw her hands in the air and "sped across the room like a swallow," in a manner "as poignant as it was beautiful."

In 1881 the groundbreaking English director William Poel staged a stripped-down, concept-driven revival. The playscript was based on the controversial Quarto 1 text of *Hamlet* (see page 15 for more on Quarto 1), and featured a stage devoid of set and scenery. The costumes were Elizabethan—as they would have been on Shakespeare's stage—and Ophelia was played by a boy, as she would have been in Shakespeare's time. In returning to the play's Elizabethan roots, Poel sought to highlight Shakespeare's artistry over highlighting the powers of his leading actor.

In continental Europe other directors were pursuing similar conceptual paths. Seminal Russian director and theater practitioner Konstantin Stanislavski teamed up (tumultuously, but ultimately successfully) with the famous English scenic designer Gordon Craig for a 1911 production that highlighted the corrupt nature of the Danish court. Tarnished gold costumes and décor sprawled across the stage. Craig had, in fact, pictured the entire court covered in one golden cape, with slits for the characters' heads to poke through. This proved impractical, so instead the characters wore individual mantles that, when spread and joined together, created "the impression of a monolithic golden pyramid" representing an oppressive feudal hierarchy. So striking was this choice that, in its first performance before a live audience, the introduction of the Danish royal court (in 1.2) received an unheard-of standing ovation from the usually chilly audience of the Moscow Art Theatre.

In 1925 Birmingham Repertory, in the English Midlands, stunned its audiences with unusual design—this time of an entirely modern variety. Though common in today's theater, contemporary costuming was shockingly avant-garde in the early twentieth century. The costumes were the talk of the town, and were reproduced in fashion magazines. They were simply so . . . modern. The play was set in a pre-Balkan war court. The men wore monocles, the ladies were overdressed, and Hamlet lounged around looking at his wristwatch. Clearing away old-fashioned costumes and conventions, the production insisted upon treating *Hamlet* as a modern play, "a real conflict of credible human beings."

# a play comes to life

**The rise of film inevitably continued to modernize *Hamlet*.** The most influential early film version was Laurence Olivier's iconic 1948 portrayal of the royal Dane. Brooding and baroque, the film was set in a Gothic Elsinore, full of dark corridors, winding staircases, and dizzying vistas onto a tumultuous sea—a haunted place, where secrets could fester. Olivier's film was followed by many more, including Derek Jacobi's 1980 version. Jacobi, forty-two at the time, had already played Hamlet many times as a younger man. Here, his Hamlet was older, a man who had failed to mature—an interpretation made more striking by the fact that Patrick Stewart, who played Claudius, was himself only forty.

More recent film versions have been just as star-studded. Franco Zeffirelli's 1990 film boasted the likes of Mel Gibson (Hamlet), Glenn Close (Gertrude), Alan Bates (Claudius), and Helena Bonham-Carter (Ophelia). The film traded on paradox, asking viewers to reconcile Hamlet's hesitation with Gibson's action-figure reputation. Zeffirelli also cut the text significantly. It ran at a quick 134-minute clip—a far cry from Kenneth Branagh's uncut 1996 adaptation, which clocked

in at 246 minutes. Branagh's version was noted for its sumptuous setting, often shot in wide angles to emphasize the lush opulence of the court, and for a series of flashbacks that imagine the romantic backstories of Claudius/Gertrude and Hamlet/Ophelia. A 2000 film of *Hamlet* (also known as *Hamlet 2000*), directed by Michael Almerayda, uses Shakespeare's original language but is set in modern-day New York City. Film star Ethan Hawke plays the title role as a film student, with Julia Stiles as Ophelia, Kyle MacLachlan as Claudius, Bill Murray as Polonius, and Sam Shepard as Hamlet's father—whose corporation has been taken over by his Claudius, his brother and murderer.

In 2009 the Royal Shakespeare Company released a film version of its 2008 production, starring David Tennant as Hamlet. Tennant earned accolades for milking the role for all its comedic worth, vocally and physically. His costuming was also playful, as he sported a red muscle-print t-shirt. Tennant's Hamlet was keenly aware of the surveillance and paranoia seething in Elsinore. Surveillance cameras dotted the set, and some of the action appears as if viewed through CCTV.

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century continued, inventive psychological and political interpretations flooded the stage. Tyrone Guthrie's 1937 production at London's Old Vic leaned heavily on Sigmund Freud and Ernest Jones's Oedipal interpretations of Hamlet's relationship with his mother, sexualizing their scene in Gertrude's chamber. During World War II, the fictionalized state of Denmark became a mirror for political situations around the world. In 1941 Czechoslovakia, Vinohrady Theatre staged a production that "emphasized, with due caution, the helpless situation of an intellectual attempting to endure a ruthless environment." In 1942 in China, Jiao Juyin set the play in a Confucian temple in which the government had fled from advancing threats of a Japanese (rather than a Norwegian Fortinbras) invasion. Decades later, immediately after protests in Tiananmen Square, Chinese director Lin Zhaohua presented the play as the story of an ordinary individual tortured by his own meaninglessness amidst a world he cannot change.

In the United States, Maurice Evans directed and starred in what has become known as *G.I. Hamlet* (1944). Evans performed the play specifically for US troops, whose situations he saw as parallel to the Prince's: like Hamlet,

the American soldier was "groping for moral justification and the physical courage demanded of him." At the same time, Gustaf Grundgens played the role of Hamlet in Nazi Germany. According to a 1988 *New York Times* retrospective, Grundgens' Hamlet was "a hero that the Third Reich could be proud of: dynamic, a man of action and, most important, a full-blooded Nordic."

Later in the twentieth century, directors continued to push the boundaries of *Hamlet*. In 1979 in Cologne, director Hansgunther Heyme explored the nebulous line between illusion and reality. Electronic gadgets—transistors, walkie-talkies, microphones, cassette recorders—filled the stage and theater. Actors videoed each other with hand-held cameras in the midst of the production, the images multiplied and projected on a wall of eighteen television monitors. Two actors shared the role of Hamlet, one speaking the lines and the other remaining wordlessly onstage, an alter ego trapped in the prison of his mind.

Richard Eyre's 1980 production at London's Royal Court focused on *Hamlet*'s interior landscape by cutting the Ghost as a physical presence. Instead, the Ghost's



# a play comes to life



Beruce Khan as Horatio, Miranda Foster as Gertrude, Phoebe Fildes as Ophelia, and John Dougall as Claudius in the Globe Theater's 2014 Globe-to-Globe production of *Hamlet*, touring to Chicago Shakespeare and directed by Dominic Dromgoole and Bill Buckhurst. Photo by Liz Lauren.

terrifying speeches came from Hamlet himself, seemingly ripped from actor Jonathan Pryce's psyche. Was Hamlet possessed or deranged? The production left this question unanswered, just as its bold decision to completely cut Act 1, scene 1 (which confirms the Ghost's reality through the witness of Horatio and the castle guards) left unanswered the question of the Ghost's objective reality.

In 2015 twenty-five-year-old Paapa Essiedu became the first black man to play *Hamlet* at the Royal Shakespeare Company—and earned high praise for his refreshing re-imagining of the character. The play was set in a modern, fictional African nation ruled by Claudius's military dictatorship and bursting with vibrant colors, some of them created on stage by Hamlet, who gleefully shook up cans of spray paint and covered the walls with graffiti in his “antic disposition.”

*Hamlet* has also inspired new narratives—just as Shakespeare was once inspired by prior narratives of the story he rewrote. Perhaps the most famous is Disney's *The Lion King* (1994)—the story of a lion cub, Simba, whose father, King Mufasa, is killed by his treacherous uncle, Scar. This family version of Shakespeare's story treats the death of Mufasa as a tragedy, but it also famously redeems

it as part of the “circle of life,” in a stirring musical number. The ending also takes a redemptive turn, as Simba (the Hamlet stand-in) does not die, but instead assumes his rightful place as king.

Far more bleak is British playwright Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, first staged in 1966. In this existential dark comedy, Hamlet's university friends take center stage. Though the play includes some minor scenes from *Hamlet*, taken directly from Shakespeare's text, most of it takes place “in the wings,” where Rosencrantz and Guildenstern attempt to understand their role in the story. They find themselves in Elsinore, called upon to spy on Hamlet and uncover the cause of his malady, but remain uncertain about everything else. Who are they? What is their purpose? Who controls their existence? What is the relationship between fate and free will? And, most chillingly, is there any way to avoid the inexorable approach of death?

Chicago Shakespeare Theater first produced *Hamlet* at its first artistic home, the Ruth Page Theatre, in 1996, under the direction of Artistic Director Barbara Gaines. She set the story in 1807, on the fault line of the seismic shift between the Classical and Romantic ages. Hamlet

# a play comes to life

was a Byron-esque Romantic figure, a rebel deeply attuned to the underlying chaos that the older, seemingly orderly generation of Claudius and Polonius, in their eighteenth-century style powdered wigs and red velvet coats, refused to acknowledge. The production was noted for its clarity of vision and the “arching excellence of its ensemble.”

In 1999 CST collaborated with Chicago's Second City for an original creation, *Hamlet the Musical*. Just a year later, CST's WorldStage welcomed the world-renowned Peter Brook's C.I.C.T./Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord production from France. Brook's interpretation was driven by “To be, or not to be”—the most famous line in all of Shakespeare. Brook transposed Hamlet's famous speech to follow the murder of Polonius, to match Hamlet's linguistic turning point (as Brook interpreted the speech) with his behavioral turning point. The performance was staged simply and geometrically on a rectangular blood-orange Indian cloth—with inset rugs and green, yellow, and indigo cushions. Horatio emerged as a key figure, both in his deep friendship with Hamlet and his presence at the opening and closing of the production. In 2006, Terry Hands directed a minimalist *Hamlet* in Chicago Shakespeare's Courtyard

Theater, complete with a blank stage shellacked in shiny, reflective black—and little else. The production was fast paced, suitable to a Hamlet portrayed as much smarter than everyone else on stage.

In 2014 CST hosted as part of its WorldStage, performances of the Globe Theatre's “Globe to Globe” traveling production of *Hamlet*. On April 23, 2014—the 450th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth—the Globe launched a tour to 197 countries . . . over the course of two years. The tour was the first cultural visitor to Iraq and Somaliland in decades, and the first company to put women and men on stage together in Saudi Arabia.

CST's 2019 production will mark Artistic Director Barbara Gaines's return to *Hamlet* after a 20+-year hiatus from this most famous of plays—a play that has been understood and brought to life in countless ways over four centuries. In Act 2, Hamlet famously claims that the purpose of theater is to “hold the mirror up to nature”—to reflect the people and events not just of an age, but of every age. Perhaps no play does that better than *Hamlet*. As actor Philip Franks said, “There are as many Hamlets as there are people”—and many more will follow. 👑



Mariann Mayberry as Ophelia and Robert Petkoff as Hamlet, with the royal court in the background, in Chicago Shakespeare Theater's 1996 production of *Hamlet*, directed by Barbara Gaines. Photo by Liz Lauren.

# a play comes to life

## Conversation with the Director

**Barbara Gaines, director of *Hamlet* and artistic director of Chicago Shakespeare Theater, met with the Education Department team to talk about her production.**

### **Q** Why *Hamlet*? Why now?

**Barbara Gaines:** I did *Hamlet* once before, over twenty years ago when we were still performing at our first home before moving to Navy Pier. I knew it was time that I did it again, but differently. Time moves on, and we all change—as does Shakespeare.

### **What will be different about this production?**

**Gaines:** The first time I directed *Hamlet*, it was about politics—and Hamlet, of course, but Fortinbras was an important character. This time, I've cut Fortinbras out entirely, except for his name, and the play is much more intimate. It's about people who feel deeply about each other, but then events rip them apart. 'The time is out of joint'—everything is out of joint.

### **How did you personally enter into the world of this play?**

**Gaines:** I didn't have a way into this play at first. I sat at my desk at home and spent hours looking at the first words of the script. I was in that first scene for hours. Then I went ahead a little bit and I still had zero inspiration. So I put my music on shuffle and this song popped up: 'I Could Never Say Goodbye' from one of Enya's albums. It really struck me and triggered a memory within me of when my dad died. When I heard this song, on the day I was trying to get into this play, I realized for the first time that I had never properly mourned for my dad, who died suddenly in 1987. At that moment, I thought, 'Oh, the beginning of this play is about my father's death.' The play opens and we see *Hamlet* is grieving for the sudden loss of his dad. I thought, that through this play, I could learn something about grief. And of course, you learn about life as well as grief. Shakespeare's plays never let you just learn about one thing.

### **What other 'big ideas' are important to your production?**

**Gaines:** Friendship, especially the friendship between Hamlet, Horatio, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern. I think they've all known each other since childhood, and they were close going through school—and we watch as

those friendships dissolve. But when they reunite initially, we've added a song they'll share about their schooldays. That's how they'll greet each other because, even though your father has died, when your friends come to visit unexpectedly, you're overjoyed—it's a distraction for a few moments. There will be many more moments of joy, I hope, because early on in the story, we don't know it's a tragedy, do we? I'm not going to 'assume' that we have a tragedy when we're just beginning to move through the play.

### **When does the play become a tragedy, then?**

**Gaines:** For me, when Polonius dies. It's difficult to excuse Hamlet for killing Polonius. I do not forgive him for killing another human being. And then of course he orders Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's deaths. Yes, he understands their actions as betrayal, but is that a reason for death? I don't think so—not 400 years ago or today.

### **Do you think Hamlet's own actions are more forgivable if the result of madness? In your mind, is he mad?**

**Gaines:** I don't believe that Hamlet is crazy. Ever. My view of 'madness' or mental illness is a naturalistic one. We all experience moments of madness. We are all made mad with grief. We can suffer madness from heartache. We're all unbalanced at moments of our lives. We share that with everybody we see on the street. Everyone can feel they are going crazy from loss, from cruelty, from politics. Madness is a part of every one of us. If you haven't felt it yet, it will come. We must go through it. You can't run the other way. You have to go through. Being an adult is not being reactive when someone has hurt you and you want to strike back. But Hamlet can't do that at the beginning of the play. He responds to all his pain in an impulsive way.

### **So, you think that Hamlet changes by the end of the play?**

**Gaines:** Yes, he does evolve. Near the end of the play, right before the fencing match with Laertes, he says to Horatio that, 'there's a special / Providence in the fall of a sparrow.' That, to me, is an enlightened moment. There's meaning in every life—a sparrow's, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's, Polonius's, even Claudius's. Life is this very moment that we are in. Hamlet finally understands that. There's a great deal of wisdom, sorrow, and regret in those words. And then, just a few lines later, he says, 'Let be.' 'Let be'—no more manipulations, no more lies, no more listening to ghosts. Let people be who they are. Let go of agendas. Just let be.



# a play comes to life

**They're so different from the words 'To be, or not to be.'**

**Gaines:** Yes, that's right. At the end of the play, Hamlet accepts that he can only live and see what happens now. He finally deals with the madness of the world: 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will.'

**Does he ever deal with his hatred of Gertrude, how cruel he is to his mother?**

**Gaines:** He's terrible to her, but she's also thoughtless of him. Her marriage within a month of his father's death—and to his father's brother—that would present a challenge for most people to accept. When the Ghost talks to Hamlet, he refers to Hamlet's 'seeming virtuous' mother. To the Ghost, she's not Hamlet's virtuous mother. She's his *seeming* virtuous mother. And that likely adds to Hamlet's venom against her—that and her own behavior.

**Do you think Hamlet is aware of the implications of that one word?**

**Gaines:** He certainly understands that his mother has betrayed his father. He spends the whole play trying to come to terms with his mother's lust. He believes that lust has made his mother disloyal to his father. That's the premise of his cruelty towards her: infidelity. You get that sense from his first soliloquy. He starts off with, 'O that this too too solid flesh would melt'—he's so depressed that he wants to die. And what's the reason? It's not his father's death he's dwelling on here. He dwells upon his mother, how she remarried 'within a month.' And she didn't marry just anybody—his mother married his uncle. She has 'posted with such dexterity to incestuous sheets.' All this is more appalling to him than the death of his father. It seems like he cannot mourn for his father because he's so consumed with thoughts about his mother's lust and betrayal.

**While we're on the subject of women, what about Ophelia? How do you see her character?**

**Gaines:** Ophelia never had a chance in this world. Her life has been ruled by men. Because of circumstances beyond her control, she doesn't get the chance to grow into who she could be. And so when the men in her life leave her—in death, in their travels beyond Elsinore, or through rejection—she implodes in on herself. It's an old story. She is a pawn, who has been denied her basic human rights. There's no other way for that story to end, not for someone as fragile as Ophelia.

**This is clearly a very personal, very emotional *Hamlet* for you. How will the design of the production convey those emotional depths?**

**Gaines:** I'm trying to create a visual world for this production as simply as I can for our actors. I'd like everything we do to have some kind of emotional resonance. This production is intimate—about characters and their situations, and its design is meant to help convey those things. We use fabric against the black, reflective set: its colors and forms are emotional, metaphorical elements of the design. In fact, the only realistic element of the set is two graves.

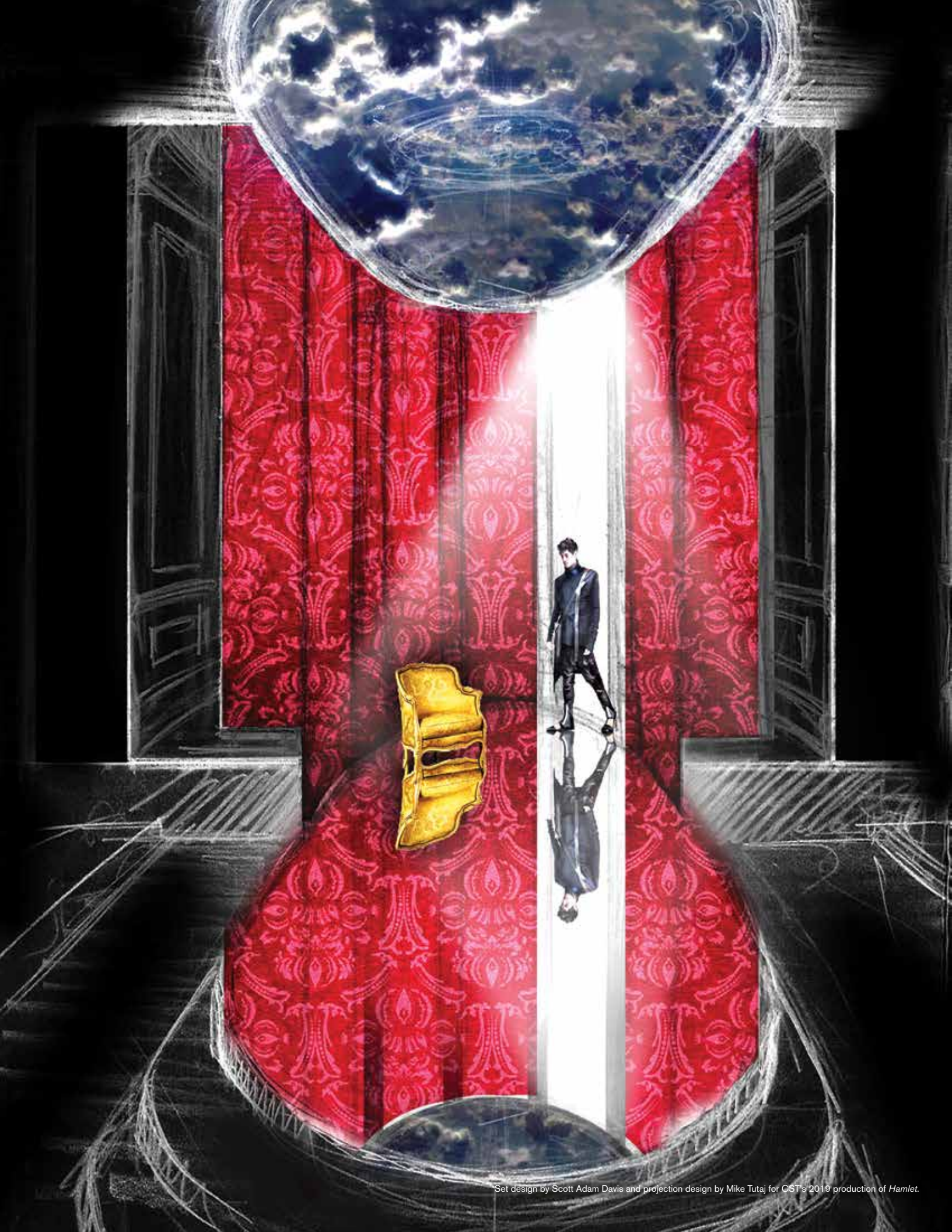
**Is the ending your favorite moment of the play?**

**Gaines:** I'm not going to answer that—that's like saying which is your favorite child! [Laughs] Sorry, I can't do that.

**Come on, you can tell us!**

**Gaines:** All I'll say is that so many of the scenes surprise me, and how they appear on stage isn't just up to me. It's up to the actors, to everyone who works to make a production happen. The quote I use most in rehearsal is, 'I don't know. Let's try it.' We're working with extraordinarily talented, brilliant people. And so it matters a great deal what *they* think and feel. Now, if once we run an idea a few times and see that it doesn't work, we will try other ideas. But that's the rehearsal process. It's give-and-take. You keep what's good and then you work to pare everything down to its essence, to the point where it feels authentic to me, to the actors, and hopefully to the audience. 🏰





Set design by Scott Adam Davis and projection design by Mike Tutaj for CST's 2019 production of *Hamlet*.

# classroom activities & resources

## Before You Read the Play

This first section of activities can help you and your students actively preview *Hamlet*. We've broken them down into four categories—PLOT, CHARACTER, Shakespeare's rich—and complex—LANGUAGE, and a few of the major THEMES that run through the play. Front-loading the text in these four areas can help to build students' confidence before diving into the meat and potatoes of the play.

### EXPLORING PLOT

#### 1. BARD BLOG

*[To the teacher: Don't yet have a class blog? Check out <http://www.kidblog.org> or [www.edublogs.org](http://www.edublogs.org), two free and simple websites for teachers to create class blogs. You may also want to explore <http://wordpress.com/classrooms>, another resource for building a classroom website.]*

Create the beginning of a *Hamlet* blog on your class website to which you can add as you read and discuss the play. Start your class blog by posting images or words that represent any information you already know or have heard about *Hamlet* or Shakespeare. What words or images come to your mind when you hear *Hamlet* or think about Shakespearean tragedy? What do you already know about this play? What words would you list to best describe Shakespeare? As you study the play, add videos, headlines, articles, songs, etc. that remind you of characters, events, key objects, words, or anything else you feel is relevant to your reading. Give a short explanation about why your post is relevant to the play, or note the line or lines that prompted you to share it. You'll find more Bard Blog suggestions through this "Classroom Activities" section.

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS SL1, W6, W10**

#### 2. HAMLET: A MOVIE TRAILER

*This pre-reading activity is modeled on an activity introduced at CST teacher workshops over the years by Dr. Tim Duggan, associate professor in the College of Education at Northeastern Illinois University. Consider using this movie trailer as a way to get energized about the coming reading experience.*

Consider using this movie trailer as a way to get energized about the coming reading experience. Choose roles and do a readers' theater rendition with the music playing. After reading the entire script, you may want to create your own movie trailer, complete with movie-making technology.

#### Sound Effects

**In a rotten land where the ghosts of dead kings haunt the living . . .** (cue dramatic music)

*Ghost noises*

Horatio: Stay! Speak, speak, I charge thee speak!

Marcellus: Is it not like the king?

**Where a new king takes his dead brother's throne . . .**

Claudius: But now my cousin Hamlet, and my son—

**One mourning prince . . .**

Hamlet: That it should come to this!

**. . . unhappy with his uncle's reign . . .**

Hamlet: My father's brother, but no more like my father than I to Hercules



# classroom activities & resources

## Sound Effects

*Ghost noises*

### **Must face his father's ghost . . .**

Hamlet: My father's spirit, in arms! All is not well  
Ghost: If thou didst ever they dear father love –  
Hamlet: O God!  
Ghost: Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

### **. . . learn a terrible truth . . .**

Ghost: The serpent that did sting they father's life now wears his crown  
Hamlet: O my prophetic soul! My uncle?

### **. . . and seek revenge!**

Hamlet: Now to my word: It is 'Adieu, adieu, remember me.' I have sworn't

*Cheering*

### **But not yet!**

Hamlet: O cursed spite, that I ever was I born to set it right

### **Has the prince gone mad?**

Ophelia: He took me by the wrist, and held me hard  
Polonius: This is the very ecstasy of love

### **OR... Is it all an ACT?**

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

*Ooooo....*

### **Watch as the prince devises a plot to prove his uncle's guilt . . .**

Hamlet: I'll have these players play something like the murder of my father before mine uncle

### **...and avenge his father!**

### **But not just yet!**

Hamlet: The plays the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king

*Cheering*

*Aw . . .*

### **See the king burdened by his evil deeds and seek repentance...**

Claudius: Oh, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven

### **And see the prince finally exact his revenge . . .**

Hamlet: Now might I do it pat, now a is a-praying

*Cheering*

### **. . . but not just yet!**

Hamlet: Up sword, and know thou a more horrid hent

*Aw . . .*

### **Watch as the prince kills the wrong man . . .**

Hamlet: How now, a rat? Dead for a ducat, dead.  
Polonius: Oh, I am slain!

*Shouts*

### **Which angers the dead man's son . . .**

Laertes: I'll be revenged most thoroughly for my father

### **Who plans a poison duel fit with a poisoned chalice . . .**

Laertes: For that purpose I'll anoint my sword

### **To avenge his father and sister!**

Gertrude: Your sister's drowned Laertes  
Laertes: Drowned!

# classroom activities & resources

## Sound Effects

### See two men bent on revenge . . .

Laertes: The devil take thy soul  
Hamlet: Yet have I in me something dangerous

### Hear a confession too late . . .

Hamlet: I loved Ophelia

### Witness a deadly duel . . .

*Shouts*

Laertes: Have at you now!  
Hamlet: Nay, come again

### And a plot gone wrong . . .

Claudius: Gertrude, do not drink!  
Gertrude: The drink, the drink—I am poisoned

### Will the prince finally exact his revenge?

Hamlet: The point envenomed too! Then, venom, to thy work!

### Find out in Shakespeare's revenge tragedy: *Hamlet*!

Coming soon!

*Cut Music*

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, SL2

### 3. TRAGEDY AND REVENGE

Tragedy and revenge: both are familiar words, and both are part of the human experience. But what exactly are tragedy and revenge? How do we define them and experience them in literature and drama? Split into two large groups, one focused on the word “tragedy” and the other “revenge.” Take a few minutes in your group to brainstorm what you know about your word.

For tragedy, what are the elements that make a book or play truly tragic (and not just sad)? Consider other tragedies you have read, like *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, or (for some non-Shakespearean variety) *Death of a Salesman*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Of Mice and Men*. Come up with a group definition of “tragedy” by listing four or five tragic characteristics.

It's easier to define what revenge is. For this word, come up with four or five books, movies, or television shows that are focused on revenge. What common elements do these stories share, besides the basic desire to avenge a wrong? Come up with a group list of four or five elements that characterize revenge stories.

Share your answers with the class. *Hamlet* is a specific type of play: a revenge tragedy. (For more on the popular Elizabethan genre of revenge tragedy, see page 19.) What they would expect from a story called a “revenge tragedy.” What might happen? What types of characters might be in it? What questions might such a play raise? Are there any overlaps between our class definitions of “tragedy” and “revenge?” Any contradictions that will have to be reconciled? After brainstorming as a class, read the list of the conventions of a revenge tragedy found on page 19. Is there anything there that surprises you? Anything that seems to be missing?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS W7, SL1, SL2

# classroom activities & resources

## EXPLORING CHARACTER

### 4. WALK THE SPACE

*[To the teacher: As you call out any of the situations below, ask students to walk for 10-15 seconds, then call out a new character type. To coach students as they move from one character to the next, consider asking them to vary their pace—is this character moving at a 2 or a 5? And posture—how does the character walk? With hunched shoulders? Proudly upright? Dragging one foot behind the other? Swinging their arms jauntily? As if holding something in their arms?]*

One way that actors warm up for a rehearsal is to “walk the space.” Move your desks against the wall to create an open space in the classroom—or claim the auditorium, gym, or an out-of-the-way hallway! Silently walk through the space naturally and normally, trying not to follow any pattern, but just moving to empty areas. Keep eyes up; stay aware of your surroundings. As you hear different cues, continue walking the space, but time this as someone else. How do your bodies, pace, and facial expressions change as you take on a new role? Here are some types of people that relate in some way to *Hamlet*:

- a young person whose best friend has just surprised them with a visit
- a guest carousing at a royal banquet
- a debater who has just proven their argument beyond a doubt
- an armed guard who has just seen a ghost
- a boy whose father just died
- a girl whose boyfriend just broke up with her
- a girl whose boyfriend hurled insults at her
- a politician hatching a scheme
- a man worried that his evil actions will be brought to light
- a mother worries about the well-being of her son
- a father spying on his daughter
- a king who's insecure about his claim to the throne
- a general invading a foreign country
- a ghost who wants revenge
- a man gone mad
- a man pretending to have gone mad

Return to your normal posture and walk the space as yourself for 10-15 more seconds. Then gather as a class to discuss the activity.

#### Guiding Questions:

- How did your physicality change as you embodied different types of people? Were any of the types of people particularly interesting to embody? Challenging? Why? After going through the whole activity, would you change any of your physical choices?
- These are all situations characters experience in *Hamlet*. What do you imagine the play might be about? Are there any of these situations that particularly interest you? Do you imagine that any of these situations could happen to the same character? Which ones?
- What do we gain from physicalizing the characters? How can we continue to do this as a class and on our own?

#### CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, SL1



# classroom activities & resources

## 5. PICTURES INTO WORDS

*[To the teacher: find about five images of different moments from various productions/movies of Hamlet and give each group a set of pictures. A Google image search for “Hamlet production photos” will turn up well more than you’ll need. The Guardian also published a list of forty-five images of Hamlet for Shakespeare’s 450th birthday, which includes pictures from stage and film: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/gallery/2014/apr/23/45-hamlets-shakespeares-450th-birthday-in-pictures>.]*

Read your line aloud a few times. Identify a word or phrase in each line that evokes a strong visual image, and draw a picture of your figurative language, showing a literal interpretation.

In small groups, examine each of the five images in your packet. What’s going on and what do you imagine is the relationship between the people in the picture? Where might the scene take place? What is happening? Take turns looking at the photos and write your responses down by each picture. You can also respond to comments your other group members have already made. After you’ve all had a chance to look at each image, try to arrange the pictures in the order in which you think these scenes occurred. Have fun making predictions about the play before you read it, and don’t worry about getting the “right” answers—just use your imagination!

### Guiding Questions:

- Did any of your classmates write something that helped you to make your own connection to a photo?
- How might these scenes be connected? Why does one picture come before another?
- How did your groups’ decision about the order compare with other groups? Would you change your order after hearing the thought process of other groups?

### CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R7

## EXPLORING LANGUAGE

## 6. DISEMBODIED LINES

*[To the teacher: Excerpt from the play one line for each student. Choose lines that are rich in Shakespeare’s language or are descriptive of character/setting—or use our suggested lines below. Distribute a line to each student on a slip of paper, not revealing the character who spoke it. Since the students have not yet begun to read the play, the focus here is not on the characters themselves but rather on the language that the characters speak.]*

How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

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

‘Tis an unweeded garden / That grows to seed.

They, distilled / Almost to jelly with the act of fear, / Stand dumb and speak not to him.

Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven.

And each particular hair to stand an end / Like quills upon the fretful porpentine.

With vile and loathsome crust, / All [over] my smooth body.

These are but wild and whirling words.

This brain of mine / Hunts not the trail.

My news shall be the fruit to that great feast.

These words like daggers enter in my ears.

# classroom activities & resources

His sword, / Which was declining on the milky head / . . . seemed i'th'air to stick.

He feeds on his wonder, keeps himself in clouds.

I'll ope my arms / And . . . repast them with my blood.

He wants not buzzers to infect his ear / With pestilent speeches.

Your skill shall like a star i'th'darkest night / Stick fiery off indeed.

- Look at your line(s), and as you begin to walk around the room, say it aloud again and again without addressing anyone. Let the nature of the line and the way you say it affect the rhythm and pace at which you walk around the room. Then, say your line for at least five other people, and listen closely as they share their line with you. Continue walking around the room, silently, making eye contact with each person you pass. Now begin investigating different ways of moving with these prompts:
- Pick up and slow down pace. If "1" is slow motion and "5" is running, start at a "3." Each time you take on a new pace, say your line to at least one other student. Slow down to a "2." Speed up to a "4." Back to "3." Down to "1," etc.
- Alter your posture. Walk upright with your chest out. Hunch your shoulders. Strut with swagger. Shuffle your feet. Fold your arms. Swing your arms freely by your side. Each time you explore a new posture, say your line to at least one other student.
- Choose an action to incorporate each time you say your line. Punch your fist in the air, stomp your foot, rub your eyes, cross your arms, etc. Choose a specific moment in the line to perform the action. Does it belong at the very beginning of the line? The end? Or when you say a specific word within the line? Only do the action once, then return your body to its natural stance.
- Change your status. If "1" is the lowest status in a society and "10" is royalty, begin walking at a "5." Now change to a "10." What does a "1" feel like? Continue repeating your line to a fellow student each time you switch your status.

Now regroup in a circle, each student in turn delivering your line to a classmate opposite you in the circle, at the pace, posture, and status level that feels best to you. Sit down as a group and discuss the lines. Remember that this is an idea or brainstorming session; begin to imagine the world of the play you've just entered.

## Guiding Questions:

- What do you imagine about the character who speaks your line?
- Are there lines that might possibly have been spoken by the same character?
- What pace felt best with your line? What size? What status? Did any sounds of the words you spoke aloud in your line tell you anything about the emotions of the character?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R4, SL1

## 7. FIGURATIVE DOODLING

*[To the teacher: Choose a number of examples of figurative language from the text and print them on strips of paper to distribute. See suggestions below.]*

Read your line aloud a few times. Identify a word or phrase in each line that evokes a strong visual image, and draw a picture of your figurative language, showing a literal interpretation. Form a small group (about 4-5) with others who have the same line as you. Analyze each doodle, comparing and contrasting, and looking for greater meaning in the text. Work together to create a tableau, or frozen image, that's inspired by your group's doodles. Share your tableau and the corresponding lines with the class.

# classroom activities & resources

Oh that this too too solid flesh would melt, / Thaw and resolve itself into a dew. (Hamlet, 1.2)

Something is rotten in the state of Denmark. (Marcellus, 1.4)

I could a tale unfold whose lightest word / Would . . . freeze thy young blood, / Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres. (Ghost, 1.5)

For who would bear the whips and scorns of time? (Hamlet, 3.1)

Oh what a noble mind is here o'erthrown! / . . . Like sweet bells jangled, out of time and harsh. (Ophelia, 3.1)

I will speak daggers to her but use none. (Hamlet, 3.2)

Oh my offense is rank; it smells to heaven! (Claudius, 3.3)

My two schoolfellows, / Whom I will trust as I will adders fanged. (Hamlet, 3.4)

When sorrows come, they come not single spies / But in battalions. (Claudius, 4.5)

## Guiding Questions:

- How do visualization and doodling help in comprehending the language?
- What was revealed by seeing others' interpretations?
- What was gained by physicalizing the figurative language?
- Why do you think characters use this sort of language? What do they achieve with this kind of heightened language?
- When you come across figurative language when you're reading the play, what can you do to help make sense of those passages?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L5, R4, SL2

## 8. DECODING DIFFICULT PASSAGES

*Hamlet* can be tough to read, even compared to other Shakespeare plays. If you want some tools for parsing the difficult language, practice using some basic text work. Look at the excerpt below from Claudius's opening speech in Act 1, scene 2. In *Hamlet*, there are lots of long sentences and long speeches. A subject and its verb are often separated by long chains of modifiers or qualifying interjections. Subjects and verbs may not appear until the end of a long sentence—or they'll be inverted, so that the verb comes before the subject. If you get confused, you're not alone! Try these steps to figure out the subject and verb, and then think through how the qualifier/modifiers contribute to the meaning.

Read "Sentence A" aloud 2-3 times. Read slowly and circle the subjects and verbs you can find. *[To the teacher: The sentence is long and complex; you might have to read it aloud several times before students feel comfortable identifying subjects and verbs.]* As a class, share what you've found, and mark your text for those that your classmates found. While one student reads the text aloud, everyone chimes in on the subjects and verbs you've circled, so that those words are "punched" with a chorus of voices as you listen to the speech. Now that you've read through the text several times, paraphrase as a class. How do the modifiers work with the subject and verb? What is the overall sense of the entire sentence? Note that you may have to re-order words or phrases to get them to make sense of things.

Repeat the process in partners or small groups for "Sentence B." Check as a whole class. Then try "Sentence C" on your own. Again, check as a whole class. After exploring all three examples, what have you learned about reading difficult passages? What strategies are most helpful?



# classroom activities & resources

## **Sentence A (as a class)**

Though yet of *Hamlet* our dear brother's death  
The memory be green, and that it us befitted  
To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom  
To be contracted in one brow of woe,  
Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature  
That we with wisest sorrow think on him,  
Together with remembrance of ourselves.

## **Sentence B (in partners or small groups)**

Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,  
Th' imperial jointress to this warlike state,  
Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy,  
With one auspicious and one dropping eye,  
With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,  
In equal scale weighing delight and dole,  
Taken to wife.

## **Sentence C (on your own)**

Now follows that you know: young Fortinbras,  
Holding a weak supposal of our worth,  
Or thinking by our late dear brother's death  
Our state to be disjoint and out of frame,  
Colleagued with this dream of his advantage,  
He hath not failed to pester us with message  
Importing the surrender of those lands  
Lost by his father, with all bands of law,  
To our most valiant brother.

## **CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R10, R11**

## **9. PUNS AND WORDPLAY AS TEXT CLUES**

One of the hallmarks of *Hamlet* is its ample use of puns. Understanding them not only accesses the humor of the play, but also reveals crucial information about character, plot, and theme. First, what exactly is a pun? How do you know one when you hear it or see it on the page? What are some modern examples of word puns? Look at this pun-filled example from the Gravediggers' scene in Act 5:

### **GRAVEDIGGER 1**

There is no ancient gentleman but gardeners, ditchers, and grave-makers: they hold up Adam's profession.

### **GRAVEDIGGER 2**

Was he a gentleman?

### **GRAVEDIGGER 1**

He was the first that ever bore arms.

### **GRAVEDIGGER 2**

Why, he had none.

### **GRAVEDIGGER 1**

What, art a heathen? How dost thou understand the Scripture? The Scripture says 'Adam digged:' could he dig without arms?

# classroom activities & resources

Read the excerpt as a whole class, with one student reading Gravedigger 1 and another student reading Gravedigger 2. Underline the word that is being punned on. Underline the word once the first time it is used, twice when it is used again and its meaning changes, a third time if the meaning changes yet again. How does the meaning of the word change as it is used? What makes it funny? If you have trouble understanding how the meaning changes, check out the notes in your edition of the play. They can be really helpful in clarifying archaic wording. Then, as a class, think like actors. If you were playing these roles, how could you help audiences “get” the joke? How could you say the line and what gesture could you pair with it? Take suggestions from your classmates and try each one out. Which ones work? Why?

Now split into pairs and complete the activity again with a second example from the Gravediggers' scene:

**HAMLET**

Whose grave's this, sirrah?

**GRAVEDIGGER 1**

Mine, sir.

**HAMLET**

I think it be thine, indeed; for thou liest in't.

**GRAVEDIGGER 1**

You lie out on't, sir, and therefore 'tis not yours: for my part, I do not lie in't, and yet it is mine.

**HAMLET**

'Thou dost lie in't, to be in't and say 'tis thine: 'tis for the dead, not for the quick; therefore thou liest.

**GRAVEDIGGER 1**

'Tis a quick lie, sir; 'twill away again, from me to you.

Remember to annotate by underlining whenever you come across repeated words in the play, and to understand how the meaning of the word changes, and how it brings comedy into this very tragic play!

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R4, R6

### 10. EMBEDDED STAGE DIRECTIONS AS TEXT CLUES

Shakespeare didn't include frequent or lengthy stage directions the way that many contemporary playwrights do. Instead, the language spoken by his characters often give clues to actions that could occur on stage. As you're reading the play, you'll “see” it better if you're aware of those clues and trying to visualize the actions they could inspire. Even before starting to read the play, you can get some practice with the following examples:

*Example 1:*

**HORATIO**

But soft, behold! lo, where it comes again!

*Re-enter Ghost*

I'll cross it, though it blast me.

Read these lines as a whole class and act out what you might do to accompany these lines. If you are Horatio, what might it mean to “cross” the Ghost? (Walk through it? Cross swords with it? Hold up a cross and attempt to dispel it?) If you are the Ghost, what does it look like for it to “blast” Horatio? After you act out and discuss several possibilities, turn to a partner and act out these lines together, with one playing Horatio and one playing the Ghost. How do different physical choices affect your understanding of the characters?

# classroom activities & resources

*Example 2 (Hamlet is speaking to his mother, Queen Gertrude)*

**HAMLET**

Come, come and sit you down, you shall not budge.  
You go not till I set you up a glass  
Where you may see the inmost part of you.

Repeat the same process outlined above, working in pairs. Take turns with the roles of *Hamlet* and Gertrude. Share your scene with other groups and discuss the impact of different choices.

*Example 3 (the very beginning of the play):*

**SCENE I. Elsinore. A platform before the castle.**

*FRANCISCO at his post. Enter to him BERNARDO*

**BERNARDO**

Who's there?

**FRANCISCO**

Nay, answer me: stand, and unfold yourself.

**BERNARDO**

Long live the king!

**FRANCISCO**

Bernardo?

**BERNARDO**

He.

**FRANCISCO**

You come most carefully upon your hour.

Follow the same process outlined above. Afterwards, you may wish to watch the clip of this scene in Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996), which can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/hamletopening>. How is his interpretation similar to and different than yours?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R4, R6, R7**



Robert Petkoff as Hamlet and Lisa Dodson as Gertrude in Chicago Shakespeare Theater's 1996 production of *Hamlet*, directed by Barbara Gaines. Photo by Liz Lauren.



# classroom activities & resources

## EXPLORING THEME

### 11. FOCUSED FREE-WRITE AND COLLABORATIVE POEM

*[To the teacher: You may wish to have your students share their work in small groups, if you think your class would be comfortable sharing personal material with one another. If not, simply keep the entire activity personal and private.]*

Before you read *Hamlet*, it's helpful to think about some of the play's central ideas as they relate to your own life and personal experience. Take a moment to free-write some of your thoughts about one of the following situations:

- Think about a time when you lost someone you loved. Maybe the person (or a beloved pet) died. Maybe it was because you or they moved away, or you experienced a deep and permanent hurt. When did you first realize that they were gone forever from your life? What specific images or objects do you remember from that moment? How did you respond to the realization? How did you feel? What did you do? What do you miss most about them? Is there anything you don't miss? Now that time has passed, how do you remember that person? Are your feelings and thoughts the same as they were when you first realized they were gone?
- Have you ever been betrayed by someone you trusted? Maybe it was a close friend, a teacher, a family member—even one of your parents. How did you realize you had been betrayed? What did you do? Did you consider any other possible reactions? How was the situation resolved? Do you still see the person who betrayed you? How do you feel or act when you do? Have you forgiven the person? Why or why not?
- Have you ever been so unsure of yourself that it was almost paralyzing? Have you ever had so many competing thoughts, desires, and voices in your head that you didn't know what to do? Describe the situation and your feelings. What did you do in the end and how did you decide to do it? Looking back, can you see any other choices you could have made?

#### Guiding Questions:

- What predictions can you make about the play based on this activity?
- Were there any repeated ideas or themes in the collaborative class poem?

#### CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, SL6, W10

**Themes of grief, betrayal, and indecision run throughout the play. There are plenty of other themes you can explore through *Hamlet*, too. Here are a few that run through our activities section:**

#### **Infected ears, Assailing Words**

*See activities #6, 13, 17, 19, 46*

#### **To thine own self be true? Public selves vs. private selves**

*See activities #8, 14, 22, 23, 30, 31, 50*

#### **Your fat king and your lean beggar: the relationship between royalty and the common man**

*See activities #12, 18, 28*

#### **The purpose of playing: to hold the mirror up to nature**

*See activities #4, 11, 25*

# classroom activities & resources

## As You Read the Play

All line citations reference the Cambridge School Shakespeare edition.

### AS A CLASS

#### 12. BARD BLOG

As you begin to enter Shakespeare's text, continue building on your Bard Blog. Use these ideas to get you started, or modify other activities in this section to a blogging format:

- Choose a character to follow through the play. Keep a running list of text references for that character—both their lines and other characters' lines about them. What does your character feel about the other characters? How do others feel about them? How much does your character reveal about themselves through their own words and how much did you learn from other characters? Based on the notes you've taken, write a short summary of your character, such as one you would find in a contemporary script. What qualities do you think are most important to highlight about your character?
- At the end of each act, list five of the major characters in *Hamlet*. Write a single sentence for each that begins, "What I most want is..." Take a risk—there's not just one right answer! Then write a sentence for each character that begins, "What I'm most afraid of is..." (Is there ever a situation when what one most wants is also what one most fears?) Keep track of your sentences and look at how and why the characters' motivations evolve over the course of the play.
- One of the best ways to get at the "through-line" or dramatic progression in a play is to give each scene a name or title that captures the heart of the action. Directors often use this technique to help actors (and themselves) during the rehearsal process. As you read, give each of the scenes a name or title that you feel gets at the essence of the scene. Be as creative and specific as you can in naming each scene.
- *Hamlet* is a play full of uncertainties and questions. The characters themselves are always asking questions, and the play creates questions for its readers, too. As you read, keep a list of all the unanswered questions the play raises. Some of these questions may be voiced by the characters themselves. Some may be questions you imagine the characters asking. Some may be questions you have about what is true. Which questions can you answer as the play goes on? Which are still unanswered even after Act 5 concludes?

### CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, R3, W3, W6, W10

#### 13. CREATIVE DEFINITIONS

Shakespeare uses words in his plays that are no longer part of modern American English. He was also making up many words new to the English language—and to his own audiences, who wouldn't have known their meanings either! But in performance actors use vocal expression as well as body language to help communicate meaning to their audience. As you're reading, jot down three words not commonly used today. Then look your words up in the text's glossary or in a lexicon specific to Shakespeare's plays—<http://www.shakespeareswords.com>, developed by Ben and David Crystal, is a free online Shakespeare lexicon.

Now, standing in a circle, say one of your words and its definition. Say your word again, this time making a strong verbal choice that helps your fellow classmates understand the meaning through your delivery. Pass the word to the person next to you, who repeats that word with the same inflection. Wondering how to make a strong verbal choice? Try playing with the sounds of the words, perhaps with the following prompts:

# classroom activities & resources

- Stretch out the vowel sounds.
- Exaggerate the consonant sounds.
- Speed through the word, or go in slow motion.
- Whisper the word, or say the word at full volume.

Once the word makes its way around the circle, the person who “owns” it will repeat the definition one last time and then the next student continue on with their word and definition.

## Guiding Questions:

- What definitions surprised you? Were there any that you expected?
- What sorts of different choices did you and your classmates make with inflection? How did these choices help you understand the words?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L4, R4, SL2**

## IN SMALL GROUPS OR PAIRS

### 14. ADOPT A CHARACTER

*[To the teacher: Select several students to lie on large sheets of paper to trace their profile.]* In small “adopt-a-character” groups, draw, cut-and-paste, or attach costumes to these life-size portraits. As you read through the play, use “caption bubbles” to attach quotes from the text that have particular significance for this character. Continue to costume the portrait and add caption bubbles, developing your character throughout the study of the play.

## Guiding Questions:

- How did your ideas about the character change as you read the play?
- What in the text did you use to guide your costume choices? How did thinking about costumes develop your understanding of your character?
- Think about choices people make about how they want to be perceived (someone applying for a job, TV show characters, celebrities, people you know). What sorts of messages do they convey through their clothing? What sorts of messages might your character convey through their costume?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R3**

### 15. SHARED SYNOPSIS

This is a good refresher to do after you've finished reading an act—or after you've read the entire play. Sitting in a circle, choose a leader. The leader begins to describe the action from Act 1 (or 2 or 3...) until they've come up with three plot points, or can't think of what comes next. Then the story passes to the next person, who adds the next few actions. You can use the “Act-by-Act” synopsis included in this book as a place to check your own story against!

## Guiding Questions:

- How did hearing the story from different narrative voices affect your understanding of the play?
- What aspects of the play or what characters were more difficult to recall or to describe? Why do you think this was the case?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, SL4**



# classroom activities & resources

## ON YOUR OWN

### 16. FIRST IMPRESSIONS

First—and last—impressions are often great insights into character development and relationships. Using the *dramatis personae* and the text, make a list of a character's first lines and their context as you come across each new important character. Come back to this activity after having finished the play to examine how the characters have changed over the course of the play.

#### Guiding Questions:

- What predictions were you able to make from the first lines? How close were your predictions?
- In what ways have the characters changed by the end of the play? What do you understand about the lines and about the characters after having read the entire play?

#### CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R3

## Act 1

### AS A CLASS

### 17. ASSAILING EARS

Act 1 is teeming with imagery of ears being attacked by language—"assailed," to use Bernardo's word (1.1.29). And all of *Hamlet* is teeming with verbal assaults. Select slip of paper with a line from *Hamlet*—the kind of line that could "assail" your ears. Choose your own lines, or use these:

Get thee to a nunnery!

A little more than kin and less than kind

Frailty, thy name is woman!

Think yourself a baby

He's very wild, addicted so and so

These tedious old fools!

I will be brief. Your noble son is mad.

More matter with less art.

What is this quintessence of dust?

A foul and pestilent congregation of vapors!

Many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose-quills.

My uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived.

That great baby you see there is not yet out of his swaddling clouts.

A dull and muddy-mettled rascal.

Bloody, bawdy villain! Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!

I loved you not.

# classroom activities & resources

God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another.

I will speak daggers to her.

Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear.

Walk around the room, saying the lines to yourself. Experiment with different ways of saying the lines to make them as “assailingly” as possible—remember that yelling is only one way of many to assail someone verbally. How can you vary their tone, volume, and pace?

Then continue to walk through the space, facing off with a partner whenever you make eye contact. Assail your partner’s ears! (If you’re comfortable, add a gesture to the line reading.)

## Guiding Questions:

- What are some different ways that ears can be attacked? Feel free to bring in personal experience and current events.
- Based on your understanding of the characters so far, which ones seem likely to “assail” ears? How might this motif continue through the play?
- Skim through Act 1. How many different direct references to ears (and ears being attacked) can you find? Does the imagery or its significance change at all in Act 1? How can you mark references to ears/hearing in the play as you continue to read?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, R4

## 18. HORATIO’S STORY

*[To the teacher: You may want to pre-select these readers and give them advance notice so they can practice and prepare—the speech can be difficult to read. You can also position yourself outside the circle and tap a new student on the shoulder every time a new character is mentioned.]* Horatio delivers a lot of backstory in 1.1.80-107—and a lot of figurative language to bring to life. As a class, stand in a circle. As one or two volunteers stand in the center of the circle to read for Horatio. Each time Horatio mentions a new character, a new student moves to the center of the circle and starts to act out the new part, using their body to bring the figurative language to life

The bolded words are ones that introduce a new character or other element that can be brought to life. Be sure to clear the circle at the period in the middle of line 95 and again at the period in the middle of line 104, where Horatio’s story takes a turn. And don’t be afraid to stop and re-read a small section, if you have trouble understanding the figurative language or sequence of events.

At least the <b>whisper</b> goes so. <b>Our last king</b> ,	80
Whose image even but now appeared to us,	
Was as you know by <b>Fortinbras of Norway</b> ,	
Thereto pricked on by a most emulate pride,	
Dared to the combat; in which our valiant Hamlet—	
For so <b>this side of our known world</b> esteemed him—	85
Did slay this Fortinbras; who by a sealed compact,	
Well ratified by law and heraldry,	
Did forfeit (with his life) all those <b>his lands</b>	
Which he stood seized of, to the conqueror;	
Against the which a moiety competent*	90 *moiety competent: equal amount
Was gaged by our king; which had returned	
To the inheritance of Fortinbras	

# classroom activities & resources

Had he been vanquisher; as by the same comart*,	*comart: treaty
And carriage of the article design,	
His fell to Hamlet. Now sir, <b>young Fortinbras</b> ,	95
Of unimproved mettle hot and full,	
Hath in the skirts of Norway here and there	
Sharked up a list of <b>landless resolute</b> s	
For food and diet to some enterprise	
That hath a stomach in't; which is no other,	100
As it doth well appear unto our state,	
But to recover of us by strong hand	
And terms compulsory those foresaid lands	
So by his father lost. And this, I take it,	
Is the main motive of our preparations,	105
The source of this our watch, and the chief head	
Of this post-haste and romage* in the land.	107 *romage: frantic, activity

## Guiding Questions:

- Summarize the backstory that Horatio has just provided. What happened? How does it relate to Denmark's current situation?
- Which pieces of language particularly stood out? How do they shape our understanding of the characters and situation? Are there any words that you would act out differently? Any other choices you could have made?
- Do you trust Horatio's narration of these events? Why or why not? Consider his role in the story as well as his use of language. Are there any patterns in the types of images he crafts?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R4, L4, L5

## 19. CHORAL READING: HORATIO'S SHORT LINES

There's something that stands out visually on the page as Horatio fails in his attempt to get the Ghost to speak in 1.1—a lot of short lines. Shakespeare's verse lines are usually in iambic pentameter. When a line is significantly shorter than 10 syllables, it's a text clue for his actors, and for us as readers, as well. Why such a short line at that moment in the play? Is it for emphasis? Should there be a pause or action at the end of the line, to take the place of the missing syllables?

To investigate these possibilities, stage a choral reading of Horatio's lines in 1.1.126-139. Here's the text:

### HORATIO

*Enter Ghost*

I'll cross it though it blast me. Stay, illusion.

*It spreads his arms.*

If thou hast any sound or use of voice,  
Speak to me.

If there be any good thing to be done  
That may to thee do ease, and grace to me,  
Speak to me.

If thou art privy to thy country's fate,  
Which happily foreknowing may avoid,  
Oh speak.



# classroom activities & resources

Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life  
Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,  
For which they say you spirits oft walk in death,  
Speak of it. Stay and speak! Stop it Marcellus.

Read through the text as a whole class several times. The first time, everyone reads together chorally. The second time, one student reads most of the lines, but everyone joins in on the short lines. Repeat that process several times. Can you change your tone or pacing? Draw out the vowels or over-enunciate the consonants? Have only one person say the short lines, while the whole group says all the rest? What actions could be added to the short lines?

After this whole group activity, split into small groups and stage this speech, making sure everyone is involved vocally and/or physically.

## Guiding Questions:

- What is the significance of Shakespeare switching up iambic pentameter for writing in these short lines? How should actors, directors, and readers respond to them? How do they impact our understanding of the character speaking them?
- Which interpretive decisions were most interesting to you? Why? Was anything challenging about the process?
- What other text clues have you noticed in the play so far? Are there any other ways Shakespeare uses language that we should pay attention to and investigate?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6, SL2, L3**

## IN SMALL GROUPS OR PAIRS

### 20. THE FIRST NINETEEN LINES

The very first lines of *Hamlet* are famous ones because they so quickly create a mood of tension and unease. Split into groups of four and act out these lines. Use your voice and body to create as much atmosphere as possible. Consider varying your volume—whispering, calling out loud—and changing your physicality, by (for example) recoiling in fear, rubbing your hands together, saluting, or marching in place.

Share your performances of the first nineteen lines, and discuss the different interpretations made by the groups. Can you think of any other choices that could have been made?

## Guiding Questions:

- What will the audience see first? An empty stage? Francisco patrolling? Consider the impact of your choice.
- Why does Bernardo, the incoming guard, challenge Francisco, who was already on duty? How does this seeming reversal of custom contribute to the atmosphere? How can you use your voice and bodies to make this error come alive for the audience?
- How can you remind the audience that it is “bitter cold?” How does the temperature affect the characters and the mood?
- Francisco never appears again in the play, but he has a very meaningful line: “And I am sick at heart.” How might Francisco speak and act while he is on stage? Why is he so sick at heart?
- These lines feature several “shared lines,” where a line of iambic pentameter is shared between two or more speakers. What is the effect of those shared lines? What do they convey about the relationships between

# classroom activities & resources

characters? There is often little or no pause between shared lines when actors speak them aloud. Try that—does that decision fit this scene?

- How might Horatio enter at the end of this moment? What do Bernardo and Marcellus think of him, and how could they respond to his entrance? What does Horatio think of them, and how might that affect how he speaks and acts?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R4, R7, SL1, SL4**

## 21. ENTER GHOST

The Ghost's appearance is often considered one of the most striking moments in the play. But what kind of ghost actually appears? Most productions present him as a "great warrior with martial stalk, deified as the god who gives 'commandments'" (as critic R.A. Foakes has described him). But there are other interpretations. In 1987 Bob Goody played the Ghost at the Royal Shakespeare Company. Fellow actor Philip Frank described Goody's as "a crippled, asthmatic Ghost, doubled up with pain and begging for revenge with, as it were, his last gasp." This interpretation is inspired by how often *Hamlet* seems to pity the Ghost, calling him "thou poor ghost" and lamenting the "piteous action" that calls for "tears perchance for blood."

Explore the impact of these two different ways of representing the Ghost by staging the Ghost's first entrance, in 1.1.35-56, in groups of four. Decide who will play Marcellus, Bernardo, Horatio, and the Ghost. Run through the scene twice. (Switch roles the second time around, if you want.) The first time, make the Ghost as strong and war-like as possible. The second time, make him weak and pitiable.

### Guiding Questions:

- What physical choices did you make to convey the two interpretations of the Ghost? Can you think of any other choices you could have made?
- How does the way the Ghost enters affect the way the other characters respond to them? How did your body and voice change in your two stagings of the scene? Did any of the lines take on different meanings in the different stagings?
- Hamlet isn't present for the Ghost's initial appearance, but he will meet the Ghost soon. Discuss how Hamlet might react to each of these different manifestations of his father.

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R9, L3**

## 22. ENTER CLAUDIUS AND GERTRUDE . . . ENTER HAMLET

The very beginning of 1.2 forms a first impression of Denmark's new power couple, Claudius and Gertrude. Split into small groups, with each one staging a wordless entrance to precede Claudius's speech.

### Guiding Questions:

- First consider the "moment before" the entrance. Who else is on stage? What are they doing? What is the mood? How can your scene embody those characteristics? Because Claudius and Gertrude enter at the beginning of a scene, each group has a lot of freedom to imagine the "moment before." What choices fit what you know about the characters and the situation in Denmark so far?

# classroom activities & resources

- Then consider the characters about to enter. How do you want them, and their relationship, perceived? Are they feared? Respected? Expected? Unwelcome? Unseen at first? Ignored? How do they interact with one another? Discuss different possible interpretations and make a strong choice that can be supported by the text.
- Now consider the entrance itself. How can Claudius and Gertrude enter in such a way as to make your interpretation clear?
- After staging your scene and watching your classmates' scenes, discuss different interpretations. What surprised you? What was the impact of different choices? Were there any other choices you considered? Why did you decide to move in a different direction?
- Extend the activity by considering Hamlet, as well. Stage directions don't tell us where he is at the beginning of 1.1. How would you stage his entrance? Insert Hamlet into the staging you created. What different choices can you make? How do they affect the interpretation of Hamlet's character and the relationship between him, his uncle/stepfather, and his mother?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS SL1, SL3, R3

### 23. HOW DOES HAMLET TALK IN STRANGE SITUATIONS?

In Act 1, Hamlet has a couple of out-of-the-ordinary conversations. First, he has to talk to his mother and uncle/stepfather . . . probably in front of a room full of people. Then he chats with the Ghost of (presumably) his dead father. How does his language change in these situations? Split into small groups and look at very specific pieces of the text: 1.2.65-76 (Hamlet talks to Claudius and Gertrude) and 1.1.4.39 (Hamlet's first words to the Ghost). Read both pieces of text as a group, alternating readers at each punctuation mark. What do you notice about Hamlet's language? Debrief as a class. Make sure to note two specific **text clues: wordplay** and **antithesis**. Define the terms as necessary. (Look at page 41 for a "Before You Read" activity on wordplay. Antitheses are words, phrases, or ideas set up in opposition with one another; they make sentences more memorable and emphasize contrasting words and ideas.) If you didn't notice these clues the first time, read the texts again and identify them. Then go through some activities to activate these text clues.

For **wordplay**, which dominates 1.2.65-76, underline the words that are being punned on. Underline the word once the first time it is used, twice the second times it is used, etc. How does the meaning of the word change as it is used, and why does it become funny? If you have trouble understanding how the meaning changes—some of the words/definitions might be unfamiliar—check out the side notes in your edition of the play. Then, as a class, think like actors. If you were playing these roles, how could you help audiences "get" the joke? How could you say the line and what gesture could you pair with it? Take suggestions from the class and try each one out. Which ones work? Why? And, most important, why does Shakespeare give *Hamlet* so many puns at this moment in the text? What does the language reveal about him, his relationship with Claudius and Gertrude, and his relationship with the royal court (which, remember, is watching this entire exchange!)?

For **antithesis**, circle the pairs of words that create the antitheses, and draw a line connecting the two. Read the lines as a group and pick a gesture to go with each antithetical term. Also, think about emphasizing the antithesis vocally by stressing the opposing words. How can the gestures and vocal choices match the text and draw out the contrast of the lines? What does the use of antithesis at this moment reveal about Hamlet, his response to the Ghost, and his relationship with Horatio and Marcellus (who, remember, are also on stage!)?

After you've worked with both scenes, try reversing Hamlet's use of text clues. What if he spoke to Claudius and Gertrude in antithesis? To the Ghost with puns and wordplay? Have each group re-write one scene, and then have other groups act out the new scenes. How do the changes in language affect our understanding of Hamlet and his relationships with those around him?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R4, R6, W3, W5, L3

# classroom activities & resources

## ON YOUR OWN

### 24. WRITING STAGE DIRECTIONS

Stage directions—notes about the movement and/or position of the actors—appear in almost every play. There are three types of stage directions you'll see in any Shakespeare play:

- Stage directions included in the original manuscript: In many editions of the play, these are typically written in italics and look like this: *Enter Ghost*.
- Stage directions added by the specific editor of that version: These are typically written in italics, as well, but often have brackets around them to indicate that they weren't in the original edition published in the late 1500s or early 1600s. They look like this: [*Exit Polonius*]. Sometimes stage directions from the early published versions and ones added by the current editor are combined, in a way that looks like this: *Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern [and some Attendants]*.
- Embedded stage directions: Language spoken by the characters that *implicitly* gives clues as to their movements. (See "Before you Read" activity on embedded stage direction on page 41.)

This is a quick writing activity playing with embedded stage directions. Look at how Marcellus, Bernardo, and Horatio react to the Ghost's first entrance in 1.1.140-142:

**MARCELLUS**

Shall I strike at it with my partisan?

**HORATIO**

Do, if it will not stand.

**BERNARDO**

'Tis here!

**HORATIO**

'Tis here!

**MARCELLUS**

'Tis gone!

Using the embedded stage directions that Shakespeare writes into the characters' language, write your own, explicit stage direction before each line of text, including Marcellus's first line. Also write a stage direction after Marcellus's last line. Put them in brackets, just like any editor does in adding a stage direction to the script. Your stage directions don't need to be long, but they should be clear and specific in guiding an actor. Consider how you want the audience to experience this scene. Should it be funny? Terrifying? Write your stage directions to evoke a particular audience response. After you write, act out another group's stage directions. What was the impact of different staging choices? Which ones were most surprising? Remember that in modern editions of Shakespeare, you can always tell which stage directions were added by the editor—they're pretty much always in brackets. Take a look back at your edition and you'll see just how many of "Shakespeare's" stage directions were added by an editor along the way!

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R7, SL4, W2, W3**



# classroom activities & resources

## 25. UNPACKING A SOLILOQUY

Take a close look at Hamlet's first soliloquy—"O that this too too solid flesh would melt" in 1.2. Hamlet has so many important—and famous!—soliloquies that it can be helpful to spend some quality time deeply engaging with the language of his first one. Using a clean copy of the speech that you're given, slowly read the speech aloud. As you read, split the text into complete thoughts. Certain punctuation marks—periods, semi-colons, question marks, and exclamation marks—usually signify the end of a complete thought, but in this speech, there are a lot of "em dashes" (elongated hyphens). Sometimes, a complete thought might be set within em dashes. Discuss as a class and come to consensus. Then number each complete thought, and divide up the thoughts amongst the class.

Get up and choose a place in the room to stand—it could be on the floor in the middle of the room, on a chair, on a desk, or inside a classroom closet. Say your complete thought over and over again, so that everyone is speaking at the same time, with the following prompts:

- Speak as slowly (or as quickly) as possible
- Exaggerate the consonant or vowel sounds
- Change your physicality as you speak. Stand up, sit down, curl into a ball—whatever makes sense for your line(s)
- Speak as loudly (or as softly) as possible
- Choose one place within the line to pause

After you play with several interpretations on your own, pick your favorite reading of the line. Create a class reading of the soliloquy by reading your lines one after the other, in the order they appear in the speech. Make sure to stay wherever you are in the room, and maintain your commitment to your choices! You can repeat the whole-class reading several times—and if anyone wants to make a new choice with their lines based on how it fits into the sequence of the entire speech, go for it! Get ready to be surprised by what you come up with as you shape the speech together.

### Guiding Questions:

- Are there any pieces of the text that you don't understand? Anywhere that the thought progression is unclear?
- How is the speech structured? How does it move and change as it goes on? How does Hamlet's thought process—his whole character—move and change?
- Which pieces of the text stand out as especially significant, impactful, or creative? Why? How can you use your voice and body to make those pieces of the text stand out?
- What do you need to keep in mind as you read Hamlet's other soliloquys later in the play? How can you enhance your comprehension of the text as we read together and as you read alone?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, R5, L3, L4, L5**



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# classroom activities & resources

## Act 2

### AS A CLASS

#### 26. INTRODUCING SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE

Actor Michael Tolaydo developed the following exercise as a way to introduce Shakespeare's language and style to students unfamiliar with his work. Tolaydo emphasizes that Shakespeare's plays are not always just about the plot, but are an exploration of human nature and the use of language. Most importantly, his plays were written to be performed, not simply read.

*[To the teacher: This activity may take two class sessions to complete, but is well worth it! The exercise is a performed group scene, involving five or more characters from the play. This is not a "staged" performance, so there should be no heavy focus on acting skills; rather, this should be approached as a learning experience involving exploration of plot, character, language, play structure, and play style. For our purposes, 2.2.1-169 of Hamlet will work very well. The script should be photocopied and typed in a large font [at least 13 point], with no text notes or glossary, and enough copies for every student in the classroom. In selecting readers for the speaking roles [with as many "attendants" as you can handle] it is important to remember that the play is not being "cast," but rather that the students are actively exploring the text; your students need not be aspiring actors in order to learn from this exercise!]*

While the scene is being read for the first time, the rest of the class listens rather than read along, so no open books. Don't worry about the correct pronunciation of unfamiliar words or phrases. Say them the way you think they would sound. (Later, you can take a class vote on the pronunciation of any words that cannot be located in the dictionary.) Follow the first reading with a second one, with new readers for each part—not to give a "better" reading of the scene but to provide an opportunity for others to expand their familiarity with the text, and possibly gain new information or clearer understanding of a particular passage. After this second reading, engage in a question-and-answer session. Answers to the questions asked should come only from the scene being read, and not rely on any further knowledge of the play outside the scene at hand. Some examples of the questions to be discussed: Who are these guys? Where are they? Why are they there? What are they doing? What are their relationships to each other? What words don't we understand? What else is confusing in this scene? If there is disagreement, take a class vote. Majority rules! Remember, there is no one right answer, but a myriad of possibilities—as long as the conclusions are supported by the text. After this, you may choose to read the scene a few more times, with new sets of readers, followed by more questions.

The "fast read-through" is next. Stand in a circle; each student reads a line up to a punctuation mark (commas don't count) and then the next student picks up. The point of this is to get as smooth and as quick of a read as possible, so that the thoughts flow, even though they are being read by more than one person—much like the passing of a baton in a relay race.

The final step is to put the scene "on its feet." Select a cast to read the scene, while the rest of the class directs. No one is uninvolved. There are many ways to explore and stage this scene—there is no one "right" way, and everyone's input is important. Some questions to consider during this process are: Where does the scene take place? What time of year? What's around them? Use available materials to set up the scene. Establish entrances and exits. (This should all come from clues in the text!) In making your decisions, remember to use the ideas you discovered from the earlier readings. After the advice from the "directors" has been completed, the cast acts out the scene. After this first "run-through," make any changes necessary, then do the scene again using the same cast or a completely new one. Ask the students to comment on the process.

# classroom activities & resources

The process of getting the scene off the page and on its feet enables students to come to an understanding of Shakespeare's text on their own, without the use of notes or explanatory materials. A familiarity with the scene and the language is developed, beginning a process of literary analysis of the text and establishing a relationship with the play and with Shakespeare.

## Guiding Questions:

- What aspects of hearing (or reading) the script out loud helped in understanding the text?
- What ideas, themes and language did you notice in the process?
- What clues did you use from the text to understand the scene without the use of a glossary or other notes?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R7, SL1, SL2

## 27. PYRRHUS, PRIAM, AND HAMLET

*[To the teacher: Inside the circle, pre-set a desk with pieces of construction paper matching the colors that will appear in the text and a few fake swords, or objects that can stand in for fake swords—with a little imagination, anything will do!]* Shakespeare's extended allusion to Pyrrhus and Priam gives us an important window into *Hamlet's* character development; he even has a soliloquy in response to it at the end of Act 2. The lengthy retelling of the story—which Hamlet starts and the First Player concludes—is full of backstory, vivid colors, haunting sounds, and images that will re-occur later in the play, as when Hamlet stands over Claudius's praying form, lifts his sword, and yet cannot swing it down to kill. Staging a class reenactment of the scene will help you understand and deeply engage with this ancient Greek story.

Stand up and form a large circle. One student starts by standing in the circle as Pyrrhus. More of you will be tapped to join the circle as new characters appear in the story. The story is also full of colors and sounds. When a color comes up, grab a matching piece of construction paper. Hold it up until the next color is mentioned, then drop the old color and hold up a piece of construction paper that matches the new color. When a sound comes up, it's up to you to create the soundscape!

Start to read around the circle, switching readers at each punctuation mark. The student in the center of the circle acts out what is described in the text. As new characters appear in the story, new students are tapped into the center of the circle to embody those roles. You can even act out the nameless townspeople and the raging fire. Don't be afraid to stop the reading to ask questions, or to provide more direction to the students in the center. After going through the entire story, debrief with the following questions.

## Guiding Questions:

- Can you retell the story in your own words? What are the most significant moments? What is the central idea? What effect do the colors have? Which details/images were particularly striking? Why?
- What similarities do you see between the Greek story and the characters, events, and big ideas of *Hamlet*? What differences?
- What is the effect of hearing this story at this moment in *Hamlet*? How would the story's impact be different if it happened earlier or later? What if other characters saw the players enact this story? How would Claudius, Gertrude, Laertes, or Ophelia respond, for example?
- How does Hamlet respond? What does his response tell us about his view of himself, and his view of theater as a whole? You may choose to link this activity with the "O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" activity on the following page to further explore Hamlet's response.

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, R4, R5, L4, L5

# classroom activities & resources

## 28. SOCIAL STATUS

By the end of Act 2, social class status has become a key element of *Hamlet*. Claudius has moved up, Hamlet seems to have moved down, and almost everyone else is angling for power. As a class, rank the characters in terms of social status. Select students to stand in the front of the room, with each student representing one character—even minor characters like Francisco and Reynaldo. Arrange the characters in a line, from highest status (or most powerful) to lowest (or least)—remember that power and status may not always align. Debate, disagreement—and text-based defense—of your opinions are encouraged! After working together as a class, select a character whose status was debated and write a paragraph to argue where that character truly stands in terms of social status.

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS SL1, W1, W4**

### IN SMALL GROUPS OR PAIRS

## 29. INSIDE OPHELIA'S SEWING CLOSET

Ophelia relays the story of Hamlet's shocking intrusion into her sewing closet in 2.1.72-98. Though the action happens offstage, Ophelia's re-telling is so vivid that it begs to be brought to life. Split into groups of 4, and divvy up your roles. One will be Ophelia in 2.1, as she narrates the story. Another will be Polonius as he listens to the story. The other two group members will be Hamlet and Ophelia, enacting out the scene in the sewing closet. Act out the scene, and then come back together as a class to view several different interpretations.

### Guiding Questions:

- Why does Ophelia tell this story to Polonius? Is she frightened? Seeking comfort? Asking for advice? Looking for Polonius to defend her? Trying to prove that Polonius's advice to repulse *Hamlet* was foolish?
- How does Polonius respond? What might he be thinking of at that moment? Consoling his daughter? Protecting her from Hamlet? Leveraging this information with the king? Make sure to consider the shared lines between Polonius and Ophelia—a shared line is one line of iambic pentameter shared between two characters. What might this text clue imply about the characters' relationship at that moment? How does knowing they are shared lines affect your vocal and physical choices?
- Why does Hamlet act so strangely? Try different interpretations. Is he slyly putting on his “antic disposition,” knowing that Ophelia will tell Polonius and Polonius will tell Claudius? Is he genuinely upset by the appearance of his dead father's ghost and wants to talk to the woman he loves, but stops himself? Are his violent words about women turning into violent actions?
- After seeing all the groups perform, discuss as a class. What is at stake in choosing how to present this scene? How do different choices affect our understanding of the characters, their relationships, and the development of themes like gender, madness, and power? Have any of the characters changed since the beginning of the play? If so, how and why?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R3, R4, SL1**



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# classroom activities & resources

## 30. O WHAT A ROGUE AND PEASANT SLAVE AM I!

With a partner, read this soliloquy slowly and carefully, paying careful attention to the text clues that guide actors and interpretations. Stand back-to-back with your partner. Read the speech, alternating readers after each complete thought. Standing back-to-back will help you concentrate on the text. The first time you read, go slowly. When you're listening to your partner, annotate those pieces of the text you are hearing. Mark **text clues**.

A few suggestions:

- Circle all the **question marks**.
- Draw a square around all the **exclamation marks**.
- Mark a diagonal line at the end of a **short line** (one significantly fewer than 10 syllables).
- Place accent marks over consonant sounds that are repeated several times (**alliteration**).

After reading the speech once, turn around, face your partner, and compare annotations. Can you add anything to your partner's reading? What patterns do you notice? Are there any pieces of the text you don't understand? Any words you need to look up?

Then read the speech at least once more, turning back-to-back and using a new way to alternate readers. This time, make vocal and physical choices to highlight the text clues you've identified. Here are a few to try:

- At every question mark, shrug your shoulders.
- At every exclamation mark, clap your hands once.
- At the end of a short line, kneel down and pause for a few beats before standing up and continuing.
- When you read alliteration, over-exaggerate the repeated sound. These exaggerated sounds can reveal a lot about how a character is feeling.

Read the soliloquy one final time to focus on structure. This time, take a few minutes to split the speech into sense units—places where there is a change in thought. This can be signaled by a new topic or significant change in tone. Focus on bringing that change to life. After reading the speech, create a graph charting the speech's rises and falls, twists and turns. What does this speech look like represented visually? Can you match specific points on the diagram with specific pieces of the text?

### Guiding Questions:

- Overall, how does this soliloquy impact your understanding of Hamlet's character?
- How has he developed and/or changed over the course of the first two acts?
- Any predictions for his future character arc?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, R3, R4, R5, SL1, SL2, L3**

## 31. PUBLIC SELVES, PRIVATE SELVES

By the end of Act 2, one thing is obvious: many characters, if not all, have a public self and a private self—and like the rest of us, they often struggle keeping those selves separate. Some characters, like Polonius, leverage private details for public, political purposes. Maybe that's what Hamlet is doing by putting on an "antic disposition"—or maybe he is truly mad, and the self he shows in public is a real manifestation of his private emotional upheaval.

Explore this theme by working with two brief moments in Act 2. The first is in 2.2.54-58. Here, Claudius and Gertrude share a short private interlude in between their public affairs of state. How could you stage this moment to emphasize the difference between their public selves and their private selves? What different choices could they make with their voices, postures, and physical proximity to show who they are—and what their relationship is like—when no one is watching?

# classroom activities & resources

The second moment comes from one of Claudius's remarks about Hamlet to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, when he defines "Hamlet's transformation—so call it, / Sith nor th'exterior nor the inward man / Resembles what it was" (2.2.5-7). These lines also introduce the idea of an exterior self and an inward self, of a public and private life.

Split into groups of 4-6 to create tableaux inspired by these lines. A tableau is a visual picture of a piece of text—like a frozen snapshot—that you create with your bodies. Half of the groups will create a tableau of Hamlet the "exterior" man, and half will do the same with Hamlet the "inward man." How can you physicalize Hamlet's external actions and internal mental/emotional state? Be creative, and be sure to compare interpretations! Debrief as a class afterwards.

A few tips:

- Use different levels—low, medium, high
- Find depth in the tableau. (Avoid the straight line...)
- Use proximity and distance as tools to convey meaning

Use every member of the group in your tableau—they may represent characters, objects, or even incorporeal forces

## Guiding Questions:

- Which characters seem to have a public and a private self? Are there any characters who don't—who are the same in public as they are in private? Refer to specific moments in the text when the characters display their public and private selves.
- What motivates different characters as they navigate the public and the private? Why do they choose to act differently in each world? Or, why do they choose not to act differently?
- Do you have any predictions about how the characters might change as the play goes on? Which characters might experience a conflict between their public and private selves? How can such a conflict be resolved?
- What conclusions might you draw about this theme's significance to the play as a whole (so far)?
- How do you understand Hamlet's character, in particular? What is his plan for revenge right now, as far as you can make out? What is the nature of his "antic disposition?" When is he performing for others and when is he truly himself? What are his primary motivations at this point in the play?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS SL2, R2, R3, R5

### 32. VERBAL FENCING

Split the class into groups of 3 to explore Hamlet's exchange with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in 2.2.234-252. Hamlet's friends are presumably following Claudius and Gertrude's command to investigate Hamlet's apparent madness. They do so by digging into his "ambition," a word frequently repeated in the exchange. Read these lines several times, with each group member taking on one of the three roles. First, read slowly and annotate. Does the meaning of "ambition" change, as in other examples of wordplay in the play? How do you know? What is the significance?

Then, experiment with different ways of reading the lines—as quick-fire comedy; as a police investigation, and as a fencing match where Rosencrantz and Guildenstern thrust forward with questions and Hamlet fends them off. Stand up and use fencing motions as you say the lines. Afterwards, discuss how the different readings impacted your understanding of the text. Are there any pieces of it you don't understand? What is the relationship between the three characters at this point? What is going through their minds as they speak? Does anyone "win" the exchange? How does this exchange relate to the way language is used (especially by Hamlet) elsewhere?

*Thanks to the Cambridge School Shakespeare edition of Hamlet for the inspiration for this activity.*

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R4, R6, SL1, L3

# classroom activities & resources

## 33. POLONIUS TALKS . . . AND TALKS

Polonius tells Laertes that “brevity is the soul of wit,” but he doesn’t seem to follow his own advice. To see just how far from brief Polonius is when he speaks, partner up with someone and jointly read his speeches in 2.2.85-95 and 2.2.96-107. Switch readers every time Polonius repeats a word. For example, look at line 88: “Why day is day, night night, and time is time.” Break up the reading like this:

Partner 1:           Why day is . . .  
Partner 2:           day, night . . .  
P1:                 night, and time is . . .  
P2:                 time [then continue into the next line; only use repeated words, not line breaks or punctuation, to switch readers]

Do this several times—see how quickly and seamlessly you can switch readers. Then, repeat the process, this time switching readers every time there is a punctuation mark. What do you notice about the punctuation in these lines? What impact do repeated pieces of punctuation—or interruptions in the punctuation pattern—have on the text’s language and sentence length? How do those text clues affect your vocalization and understanding of the character?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R4, L3**

## 34. TRAGICAL-COMICAL-HISTORICAL-PASTORAL

By the end of Act 2, it’s clear that Polonius loves to talk and be seen as intelligent . . . and that Polonius’s own words sometimes mock his pretensions. Use this brief activity to point out how Shakespeare uses Polonius’s own language to mock classifications of plays in general, and Polonius in specific. Work in small groups with Polonius’s classification of play genres in 2.2.363-365: “tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral [set in the country, often involving shepherds], pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral.” One group member reads the words while the others mime each category. Try doing this several times, faster and faster each time. You’ll probably have a comedy of your own by the end!

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R4, SL1, L4**

## 35. WARMING UP WITH QUOTATION MARKS

Actors and readers have to pay attention to everything in a text: punctuation, wordplay, antithesis, alliteration . . . and even quotation marks. Sometimes there are implied quotations within a character’s lines. In the earliest editions of the play, these quotations weren’t set off in quotation marks—actors were expected to simply figure out that they were there. Modern editors have helped us by inserting quotation marks around them. This is a quick warm-up activity that helps us attend to the impact of quotation marks within a character’s dialogue. In pairs, read Polonius’s instructions to Reynaldo in 2.1.6-23. You can skip Reynaldo’s lines. Instead, one student reads all the lines in quotation marks, as Polonius imagines the conversations Reynaldo will have in France to probe Laertes’ reputation. Vary your vocal choices when reading the words in quotation marks. How different can you make those words sound from Polonius’s natural speaking voice? Switch roles and do the exercise again so that both partners have the chance to play with the quotation marks.

Though this is a short activity and a small moment in the text, it points to a big idea. Here, Polonius is facile in speaking in other voices—even imaginary voices—to get someone to do what he wants, the way he wants it done.

# classroom activities & resources

## Guiding Questions:

- Does Polonius employ this rhetorical strategy in other parts of the play? What is his “true” voice and when do we hear it?
- Are there any other characters who seem comfortable taking on new voices at the drop of a hat? How does honing in on this small moment in the text reveal about the character of Polonius? The larger themes of the play?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R4, L3**

## ON YOUR OWN

### 36. BREVITY IS THE SOUL OF WIT

In keeping with Polonius's famous line, concisely (and, if you dare, wittily) sum up your thoughts on the play so far. Write 2-3 statements summing up the action of the play. Focus on using strong, active verbs—and maybe even some of the prominent text clues Shakespeare gives us in *Hamlet*, such as wordplay and antithesis. Repeat the activity for the major characters and the big ideas/themes you've identified so far. Compare your brief, witty statements with those of your classmates. Are there any that stand out? Why?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS W4, L3**

### 37. LOVE LETTERS

Polonius reads Hamlet's love letter (and love poem!) to Ophelia in front of Hamlet's mother, his new stepfather, and Ophelia herself. It's a young man's worst nightmare, and it's only made slightly better by the fact that Polonius doesn't read the entire letter. Re-read 2.2.109-122 in preparation for writing a complete version of the letter/poem.

## Guiding Questions:

- Why doesn't Polonius read the whole letter? Infer several possible reasons based on clues from the text. Consider Polonius's character and words, as well as Gertrude's response/role in the scene.
- What are the features of Hamlet's letter? How does he use language? How is this similar to and different than the ways we've seen him use language so far? What reasons might account for the differences, especially? (Be sure to consider the possibility that the letter is essentially fake—that Hamlet wrote it, but for his own purposes, in keeping with his “antic disposition.” What is Hamlet's plan for revenge? How might this letter fit in?)
- What are the features of Hamlet's poetry? Think technically—does he write in iambic pentameter? Rhyme? Use figurative language? Wordplay? Antithesis? If you had to rank the quality of the poem on a scale of 1-10, what score would you give it? What conclusions can you draw about Hamlet's (and his relationship with Ophelia) based on the poem?

Now it's time to write the entire letter and poem. After you finish, switch with a partner. Read your partner's aloud, in your most lovesick voice, and let your partner return the favor. You can even join with another pair to stage a new, improvised version of the scene where Polonius reads one of your entire letters aloud and Gertrude responds.

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, W3, W4, L5**



# classroom activities & resources

## Act 3

### AS A CLASS

#### 38. "THE MOUSETRAP"

The scene where Hamlet introduces the actors, they perform "The Mousetrap", and Claudius hastily exits is all about character motivations. We know why Hamlet's is staging the play—to satisfy himself that Claudius is guilty. But so many other motivations are less clear, and more open to interpretation.

Because this scene features a play-within-a-play, there are two sets of motivations to understand: first, the characters in *Hamlet*—Hamlet, Ophelia, Gertrude, Claudius, Polonius; and second, the motivations of the characters in "The Mousetrap"—the Player King, the Player Queen, and Lucianus. Because the characters in *Hamlet* are responding to the characters in "The Mousetrap," we can't understand one set of motivations without understanding the other.

To untangle this complex web, use the clip of this scene from Kenneth Branagh's 1996 uncut version of *Hamlet*. As a class, watch the clip several times. The first time, just watch it straight through, to familiarize yourself with the scene. Feel free to stop and ask questions to clarify what is happening. Then watch it again, focusing on the characters of *Hamlet*. What does each one of them want? When and how do their motivations change as the scene goes on? As a class, write a running list of "I want" statements for each character. The format could look something like this:

##### **Hamlet**

I want to look idle, so no one suspects my plan.

I want to sit next to Ophelia.

I want to hurt my mother and Ophelia.

I want to make it clear that this moment in The Mousetrap shows my mother in a bad light.

etc.

Go through this exercise for Hamlet, Ophelia, Claudius, and Gertrude. You'll have to pause the film every time you see a character's motivation change. Be proactive in signaling that there's a new motivation to record—you might consider a class-wide signal, like raising your hand when you spot a motivation change.

Watch the scene again, this time focusing on the characters in the play-within-the-play. Follow the same process. Afterwards, consider how the two lists relate. When do the motivations overlap, or inform one another? On your own, write one clear, concise sentence explaining each relationship you see between these two sets of characters and their motivations.

Afterwards, watch another film version of this scene. Good versions to compare include Franco Zeffirelli's from 1990 ([https://youtu.be/b\\_n9r7NVYwU](https://youtu.be/b_n9r7NVYwU)) and Laurence Olivier's from 1942 ([https://youtu.be/b\\_n9r7NVYwU](https://youtu.be/b_n9r7NVYwU).) What different choices are made? How do those choices impact your understanding of the scene? Do any of them change your understanding of character motivation(s)? Can you think of any different choices that you would make if you were directing the scene?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, R3, R5, R9**

# classroom activities & resources

## 39. INSIDE GERTRUDE'S CHAMBER

The exchange between Hamlet and Gertrude (and Polonius! and the Ghost!) is one of the most action-packed in the play. It has been called the turning point of Hamlet's character development, as it is the first scene where he takes violent and bloody action. Imagine you are directing this scene. How would you handle the questions all directors must face?

### Guiding Questions:

- Where is the scene set? The stage directions stipulate it is in "Gertrude's closet." In Elizabethan times, a closet was simply a private room. In many interpretations, the scene is set in Gertrude's bedroom. What are the implications of such a staging decision? Can you imagine any other distinctive staging choices? Can you imagine creating a private room that isn't a bedroom, but still contributes to the meaning of the scene and the character dynamics?
- In 3.4.19, Hamlet shows Gertrude her face in "a glass." A glass is another word for mirror. Where does the mirror come from? Is it an actual mirror?—because it could be any kind of mirrored surface, like a large metallic plate, or even the blade of a sword. How many different ways can you imagine staging this moment? What is the impact of each of the choices?
- In 3.4.53, Hamlet shows his mother two pictures: one of King Hamlet and one of Claudius. Where do these pictures come from? Is one hanging on the wall, or in a frame on the mantle? Inside a locket? Held in Hamlet's wallet? On the cover of a magazine? Remember that the two pictures don't have to come from the same place. What different possibilities can you imagine? What is the effect of each one—including on Hamlet himself? What would he have to do to access the picture and place it before Gertrude?
- What about the Ghost's appearance? This scene is different from 1.1 and 1.4 because only Hamlet interacts with the Ghost; Gertrude neither sees nor hears it. Is the Ghost a corporeal presence in this scene? If so, does he appear in armor, as before, or does he now look different? Is he not the same Ghost who appeared in Act 1? How could that be possible? If the Ghost is not a corporeal presence, what other ways could it be manifested?

After discussing numerous options as a whole class, split into groups, with each group acting out a moment from the scene. [To the teacher: You can choose the specific scene moments in advance, or have students choose them after the whole-class discussion.] Share your scenes with the class and be ready to explain and defend your choices. How do they fit with the development of the characters as a whole?

### CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R5, SL1, L3

## IN SMALL GROUPS OR PAIRS

## 40. THE "LOOSING" OF OPHELIA

In 2.2, Polonius volunteers to "loose" his daughter on Hamlet as a ploy to uncover the cause of the prince's apparent madness. In 3.1, Ophelia is loosed. How aware is she of the way Claudius and Polonius are using her? Does she overhear Claudius's words in 3.1.28-37? That's a question that every production must answer, and the answer significantly impacts our understanding of Ophelia.

Imagine that Ophelia does overhear Claudius. How would she respond? Explore this question with a partner. Ask one person to read Claudius's lines. Read slowly and pause frequently, at least at each punctuation mark. In the pauses, the other partner speaks as Ophelia, voicing her response to what she has heard when compelled to do so. Switch roles and repeat the activity. Then show your interpretation to another pair or two. Discuss the different interpretations. Would you do anything differently? Are there any other choices you can think of? If you were directing Hamlet, would you have Ophelia overhear? How would that decision affect Ophelia's reaction to Hamlet during the rest of their meeting?

# classroom activities & resources

As an extension, you can also consider if Ophelia overhears Hamlet's famous "To be, or not to be" speech before the closet scene. Repeat this activity with "To be, or not to be," this time with one person reading Hamlet's lines aloud and the other voicing Ophelia's thoughts (and perhaps her nonverbal physical reactions) in the pauses.

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R3, SL1**

## 41. PLACEMENT OF A SOLILOQUY, THAT IS THE QUESTION

"To be or not to be" is the most famous—and sometimes most controversial—speech in *Hamlet*. In the earliest published edition that we have of the play, this speech occurs much earlier in the text. (See page 15 for more information.) Modern directors have also played with moving this speech around. In 2015 Lynsey Turner's London production with Benedict Cumberbatch as Hamlet) opened the show with Hamlet alone on stage, speaking the famous soliloquy. The move created such outrage among preview audiences that Turner decided to return the speech to Act 3, scene 1 just days before opening night.

### Guiding Questions:

- Look at some of the news coverage of the 2015 production; it's easy to find online. Why were audiences and reviewers so upset at the decision? What's at stake in the placement of the speech? How does opening the show with that speech change the audience's experience of *Hamlet*?
- Though audiences were upset by the Barbican's decision, the textual history of *Hamlet* hints that Shakespeare himself might have toyed with the placement of this famous speech. So, in the vein of the Bard himself, consider your own new placement for "To be, or not to be." Split into groups. Each group must move the speech to a new place in the play. Be very specific with your placement, and be ready to explain your choice. Then read the soliloquy as a group, switching readers at each punctuation mark. How does your placement change the speech's impact, what Hamlet already knows, the interpretation of the character, and the actor's vocal/physical choices? Ask each group to present its interpretation to the class and compare the impact of each group's choices.
- Just for fun, watch the "To be, or not to be" comedy sketch created by the Royal Shakespeare Company, which features stars like Cumberbatch, David Tennant, Ian McKellen, Judi Dench, and Paapa Essiedu (the first black man to play Hamlet at the RSC) arguing over the proper interpretation. The video can be found at <https://vimeo.com/174434551>.

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, SL1. SL3**

## 42. "YOU WOULD PLAY UPON ME"

Hamlet's relationship with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern runs through the play and changes significantly. When he first sees them in Elsinore, he seems overjoyed . . . and also a little suspicious that they have been "sent for" by Claudius and Gertrude. By the time "The Mousetrap" has been performed, those suspicions have grown, and perhaps transformed into something else.

In groups of 3, look at 3.2.318-336, where Hamlet insists that his friends to play a "pipe," an instrument similar to a recorder. First slowly and carefully read the scene as a group, with each person reading for one character. How does the scene build and progress? How can you use your voice to show how the relationships between the three characters develop over the course of the scene? Where are they excited? Joyful? Suspicious? Afraid? Impatient? Angry? Pleading? What emotions do they feel when they are listening to other characters? What emotions do they try to convey when they are speaking? Feel free to pause after one character speaks to discuss what the other characters would be thinking/feeling as they listen.

# classroom activities & resources

Then, put the scene on its feet. Grab a prop to use as the “pipe”—it could be something as simple as a ruler. How can you use the prop to convey the characterization and relational dynamics you see in this scene? Act out the scene three times. Each time, try to make Hamlet’s use of it more threatening in each successive enactment. Also play with the staging, considering:

- the characters’ proximity to one another. Staging characters close together can enhance the intensity of a scene.
- the levels of characters—high, medium, and low. How can the power dynamics between characters be demonstrated through the height—or lack thereof—of one character’s position in relation to the others onstage?

Compare your scenes with other groups. Afterwards, debrief as a whole class.

## Guiding Questions:

- Why does Hamlet grow so incensed with his friends at this particular moment in the play? How do Hamlet’s words and actions in this scene relate to what has happened before, particularly the successful staging of “The Mousetrap”? How do they relate to Hamlet’s plans for the immediate future, especially his avowal to “speak daggers” to his mother?
- Imagine you are Rosencrantz or Guildenstern. What report would you deliver to Claudius and Gertrude after this scene? You can even write out a new scene where Rosencrantz and Guildenstern report to the king and queen. What would they say? How honest would they be? Why? How would Claudius and Gertrude respond?
- What do you make of Hamlet’s character development so far? Take some time to chart how he has changed over the course of the play. You could select 6-8 key moments and write a one-sentence description for each, starting with the words, “Here, Hamlet is \_\_\_\_.” Or you could chart his progression visually—is his progression linear, or does it zigzag? At which moments are you certain of his thoughts, emotions, and motivations? At which points are you forced to make inferences and choose your own interpretation? How can you tell the difference?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, R5, SL1, L3

### 43. FIGURATIVE DOODLING

In 3.3.15, Rosencrantz ponders the “cess”—the cessation, or death—of majesty (the king). This is a play all about the death of kings—the death of King Hamlet and the plan to kill King Claudius—and the consequences of those deaths. How does Rosencrantz understand that seminal moment in a kingdom? How do his thoughts reflect (or perhaps contradict) the action of Hamlet thus far? To understand Rosencrantz’s speech, we have to dig into his use of vividly visual figurative language. On your own, go through the speech (particularly lines 15-23) closely. Pause after each punctuation mark to gauge your understanding of what you’ve read, and to use the side notes and a dictionary for help with unfamiliar words. Then draw a picture (or a series of pictures) of the figurative language, showing a literal interpretation.

Then form a small group with classmates who have done the same activity. Analyze your doodles, comparing and contrasting, and looking for greater meaning in the text. Work together to create a tableau, or frozen image, that’s inspired by your group’s doodles. Share tableaux as a class and discuss.

## Guiding Questions:

- What do Rosencrantz’s words mean, both literally and figuratively? Which images were particularly striking? How does the figurative language affect our understanding of his speech?
- Is Rosencrantz a trustworthy commentator? Is he speaking what he believes to be true, or is it possible there are other forces motivating his words? If he is speaking what he believes to be true, should we accept his version of truth? Why or why not?
- How does this speech relate to the concept of kingship in the text as a whole? How does the play thematically treat the death of kings, and the way kings are related to the common people? What other characters/events come to mind? How are they related to Rosencrantz’s speech?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, R4, L4, L5



# classroom activities & resources

## 44. A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRINCE AND HIMSELF

Claudius is in his chapel, praying and unarmed. Hamlet creeps up behind him clutching a sword. The time is ripe for revenge. And then Hamlet. . . delays. Why? The answer lies inside Hamlet. It's as if his mind is at war with itself. Embody the conflict within Hamlet by turning his speech in 3.3.73-96 into a conversation between two sides of his own mind. Find a partner. Read the speech 2-3 times together, alternating readers in a different place each time. (You can consider switching readers after each line, at every punctuation mark, at the end of every complete thought, or anytime you think the speech moves in a new direction.) Together, discuss and ask questions to make sure you understand what Hamlet is saying.

Then, assign yourselves different roles. You'll each be one side of Hamlet's mind. One of you is the side who wants to kill Claudius, who remembers the Ghost's command and is ready to act. The other is the hesitating Hamlet, who has qualms and delays. Turn the speech into a conversation between the two Hamlets by dividing up the text—one side is trying to convince the other to kill, but the hesitator wins in the end. Be thoughtful in how you distribute lines—or phrases, or even single words—to each character. You can even experiment with sharing certain words or phrases, echoing words, and other creative techniques.

Act out the scene, pretending Claudius is kneeling before you and using your voice and body to make the relationships between the two characters clear. Compare your interpretation with that of other groups. Ultimately, do you think this is a convincing way to stage this scene? Do you think Hamlet is at war with himself? If so, what will it take to resolve his internal conflict? If not, how do you reconcile his seemingly contradictory actions? Ultimately, why does Hamlet delay? Take a stand and support your interpretation, either orally or in writing.

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, R6, L3, L5, SL1**

## ON YOUR OWN

## 45. A SHORT LINE, LONG ON INTENTION

It's 3.1. Hamlet and Ophelia meet (while they are being spied on, of course). She tries to return his gifts. Heartbreaking. He refuses to accept them and claims, "I never gave you aught." Even more heartbreaking.

Play with that simple line: "I never gave you aught." It's a break in the iambic pentameter pattern, since it's an entire line with only 6 beats. Stand up. Speaking aloud to yourself, try five different ways of stressing the words in that line. Choose the reading that you prefer and find a partner. Share your choice with each other. Then talk to your partner. How did you choose your preference? What was the impact of stressing different words? How might different choices affect the progression of the whole scene? With your partner, discuss what possible actions Hamlet and/or Ophelia might do to fill those 4 extra beats—and if that action comes before or after Ophelia's short line. After you've tried several possible actions, choose your favorite way of saying this line and the proceeding action. As a class, view several examples. Which interpretations of the line are particularly effective? Why?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, L5**

# classroom activities & resources

## 46. “I WILL SPEAK DAGGERS”

At the end of 3.2, Hamlet vows to “speak daggers” to his mother. Throughout the play, the way Hamlet talks changes based on the situation he’s in, who he’s speaking to, who is (or is not) watching him, etc. Sometimes he speaks in prose, sometimes in verse. Sometimes his words are full of evocative figurative language or shifty wordplay; sometimes they feature the clear separation of antithetical opposites.

Use this moment in the text to bring together your thoughts on Hamlet’s use of language. After reading 3.2 and before moving on to 3.3 and 3.4, write a monologue in which Hamlet “speaks daggers” to Gertrude. After writing, swap monologues with a partner and read them aloud, comparing and discussing your choices and their impact.

### Guiding Questions:

- First, look back at Hamlet’s use of language earlier in the text. What characterizes his use of language? When does his language change? Can you detect any patterns in the ways he uses language in certain different situations?
- Then, compare what you know about Hamlet’s use of language earlier in the play to his use of language in his speech at the end of 3.2. Many critics say that this “witching time” speech is very uncharacteristic for Hamlet. Why might they come to that conclusion? What is different about his use of language here? Do you agree with their evaluation? Can you think of any reasons why his manner of speaking might be very different at this moment in the play? How does his language relate to his character development?
- Lastly, use your thoughts on Hamlet’s use of language to compose a monologue where he “speaks daggers” to Gertrude. Carefully consider your use of language. Will you write in prose or verse? What text clues will you incorporate? Why? Be ready to defend your decisions with careful reference to the development of Hamlet—and of the play as a whole.

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, R4, W3, W9, L3**

## Act 4

### AS A CLASS

## 47. PARIS, A PIRATE SHIP, AND ELSINORE

In every play, Shakespeare makes decisions about what action to put on stage and what action to simply talk about on stage. In *Hamlet*, he never stages the action aboard the pirate ship (much as we might want him to!). The same goes for whatever happens in Paris, where Reynaldo spies on Laertes at college. Yet the pirate ship and Paris are still entire worlds that are connected to the events of this play. And the interesting thing is that those worlds might actually be more active than the world Shakespeare puts on stage: the royal castle at Elsinore. That’s the claim the Harley Granville-Barker makes about the play. He says that Elsinore is a world of watching and waiting, and that its role as the central staged setting emphasizes that *Hamlet* is “a tragedy of inaction”—that “the concentration at Elsinore of all that happens enhances the impression of this inactivity, which is enhanced again by the sense also given us of the constant coming and going around *Hamlet* of the busier world without.”

Dig into this interpretation of the play by creating tableaux—frozen, wordless visual images—of Paris, the pirate ship, and Elsinore based on Granville-Barker’s argument. Paris and the pirate ship must be active (yet frozen in time); Elsinore must be inactive. Split into three groups, one for each of these settings. Each group will create a tableau of their world in front of the class, while the other students act as directors, helping to guide the creative process.

# classroom activities & resources

## Guiding Questions:

- Before creating the tableaux, brainstorm as a class words associated with the action and atmosphere of each location. What happens (or what is it like to be on) a pirate ship? In Paris? At Elsinore?
- As you are creating the frozen tableau, consider just how active (or inactive) you can make it. How can you incorporate different levels and movements?
- What did you learn about the play after going through this exercise? Why are these three settings—and Shakespeare's choice to only stage one of them—important? How would the play be different if he had staged scenes in Paris, or on the pirate ship? How could those scenes impact our understanding of characters like Laertes, Hamlet, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, L3

### 48. “DO IT, ENGLAND”—KILL HAMLET!

At the end of 4.3, in lines 54-64, Claudius hatches a plan to have Hamlet killed in England. In fact, he directly addresses England, or commanding that the English king or the country—which apparently has recently been defeated by Denmark in battle—“do it” and therefore “cure” Claudius's raging blood. This is a rare moment when Claudius is alone, when we get to see his private self. As a class, experiment with different ways he might speak. Stand in a big circle and read the soliloquy chorally several times.

## Guiding Questions:

- First, read the whole speech out loud as a class, slowly and carefully. What do you understand? What is still unclear? Then, go back and read it sentence by sentence. Circle the periods. (There are three.) Then read the first sentence out loud as a class. What does it mean? What is the subject? What is the verb? How do the modifiers contribute to the meaning? (For more on untangling difficult syntax in the play, see the activity on page 47.) After parsing the meaning, read the sentence out loud again, to restore fluidity. Then repeat the process for the other two sentences. After going through the whole soliloquy, what do you notice about how the syntax develops? What does this tell you about Claudius's thought process and character development?
- Then read the whole speech out loud as a class again. This time, concentrate on who Claudius is addressing. Imagine there is a map of England in the center of your class circle. Imagine you are addressing the map. Does that change any of your vocal decisions? Are there any physical choices you would also make?
- Next, imagine you are talking to the king of England himself, and that the word “England” refers directly to him. (You may even want to have one student in the center of the circle, embodying the king of England. And remember that, according to Claudius, England has so recently been defeated by Denmark that England's battle-scar still “looks raw and red.” How does that affect your vision of England's king?) How does addressing the king of England affect your vocal choices? Are there any physical choices you would also make?
- Finally, imagine that Claudius is *not* alone during this speech. Create a smaller circle within your whole-class circle. Imagine that the students in the inner circle are Claudius, and the students in the outer circle are members of the royal court listening to him speak. Try to speak these words as Claudius, but as if he were delivering them publicly. How would his delivery change? Could he still say these words? How would his listeners respond?
- Take a step back from the soliloquy and think about Claudius's character over the course of the entire play. Does he develop, or is he static? What motivates him at different moments in the play? What is the relationship between his private self and his public self? How do you think his character arc will progress and conclude in the final act?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R4, R6, L5

# classroom activities & resources

## 49. “LAERTES SHALL BE KING!”

Polonius is dead. Hamlet is sent to England. Claudius is starting to think he might have things under control. And then in storms Laertes.

Use the whole class to stage this dramatic entrance, where issues of family and state collide. Clear a large space in the classroom. Assign roles: Gertrude, Claudius, the messenger, Laertes, and “the rabble” that wants Laertes to be king. Make strong physical and vocal choices as you enact 4.5.98-117.

### Guiding Questions:

- Especially consider the role of the rabble. When can Gertrude and Claudius hear them? How loud are they at different points in the scene? How are they moving and what are they doing with their bodies? Explore different options. What are the impacts of different choices?
- How might Gertrude and Claudius’s reactions change over the course of this scene? How might they relate to and respond to one another?
- This is the second time in Act 4 that Claudius has been forced to confront the opinion of his subjects—in 4.3, he acknowledges that Hamlet is “beloved of the distracted multitude,” and that Claudius must therefore deal with the prince carefully. Why might the people be drawn to Hamlet, and now to Laertes? What do we know about their life under Claudius’s reign? What is the role of those surrounding the royals—whether they are castle guards, gravediggers, or members of the royal court—in the play? What is being said about the relationship between royals and the non-royals? What would the play be like if it were told from the perspective of the castle guards, or people outside the royal court?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, SL1.**

## IN SMALL GROUPS OR PAIRS

## 50. CLAUDIUS AND GERTRUDE: A PRIVATE SCENE

4.1 is the only scene where Claudius and Gertrude spend time alone together. However, that doesn’t mean they feel free to say everything they’re thinking and feeling. This scene is full of subtext—thoughts and feelings that run beneath the surface of the words that are being said. Get in groups of three to explore the subtext. Choose one person to read Claudius’s lines and one to read Gertrude’s lines. The third group member holds two pieces of paper, one with “thoughts” written on it and one with “feelings.” Read through the scene. The third group member follows along and picks three moments in the scene to hold up “feelings” or “thoughts,” at which point the scene freezes. If the third group member has held up “thoughts,” the other two will say what they think their characters are really thinking at that moment. Is it the same as what the characters say aloud or not? If the third group member holds up the piece of paper saying “feelings,” the other two will say what they think their characters are really feeling.

Repeat the exercise several times and switch roles, so that everyone gets to play each role. If you are holding up the pieces of paper, try not to hold up the papers at the same moments that your other group members have already chosen. Discuss the impact of different choices. What else might Claudius and Gertrude be thinking and feeling in this scene? Are there any other possibilities you didn’t try?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R4, SL1**



# classroom activities & resources

## 51. KEPT LIKE AN APE IN THE CORNER OF THE KING'S JAW

In 4.3, Hamlet uses vivid figurative language to compare Rosencrantz to a sponge. With a partner, explore this scene. One person slowly reads Hamlet's explanation of the comparison in lines 15-19. The other person mimes the words Hamlet is speaking, making the actions as exaggerated as possible. Then, switch roles.

### Guiding Questions:

- What is Hamlet saying about Rosencrantz? Which pieces of figurative language are particularly striking?
- Is Hamlet's comparison accurate? Fair? Use evidence from the text to support your reasoning.
- One of the themes running through the play is the relationship between the royals and the common man. How do the royals—especially Claudius and Hamlet—treat those of lower status, such as castle guards, soldiers, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and even Polonius?
- Create a new metaphor for Rosencrantz and write an extended explanation of the metaphor, using vivid figurative language as Hamlet does. Or create metaphors and extended descriptions for other characters in the play: Ophelia, Gertrude, Claudius, Horatio, and Polonius are good options. After you write metaphors/descriptions individually, team up with a partner and repeat this exercise with your metaphors. Did you see any of the characters in a new light?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, R3, L5**

## 52. THE TWO WORLDS OF HAMLET

Act 4, scene 4 is a military scene. It introduces a Norwegian army captain and features the militant Fortinbras's first appearance on stage. Norway is clearly a martial world with a martial prince. However, the world of Denmark (and its prince) is less clear-cut. In fact, critic R.A. Foakes claims, "*Hamlet* belongs to two worlds." One of those worlds is a world of violence, where "quarrels are settled by war or combat." The other is a world of diplomacy that values "words rather than weapons." The armor-clad ghost of Hamlet's father embodies the former; the treaty-making court of Hamlet's uncle represents the latter. And as for Hamlet, he is caught in the middle, pulled between violence and language, action and thought.

As a class, split into two groups. One group will create a tableau representing the world of war and combat. The other group will create the world of diplomacy and language. A few thoughts to consider:

- Choose a line from the play that, in your opinion, represents the world you are creating. Use it to help inspire the creation of your tableau.
- Make sure to think about levels—have at least one person standing, one person sitting, and one person lying on the ground. Consider the impact of your choices.
- Each tableau must include Hamlet. Consider how he fits into the world you are creating. Where is he situated? Who/what is he close to, or even touching? What is his facial expression? Would someone seeing your tableau be able to tell who Hamlet is, even without being told?
- Bring your tableau to life by having each member of the group think of one line (not necessarily from *Hamlet*; feel free to create it yourself) that describes how they feel about the world they are part of. When you share your tableaux, be ready for your classmates in the audience to point to you as a way of asking you to share your line.

After seeing both tableaux, discuss the relationship between these two worlds in *Hamlet*. Which characters belong to which worlds? Is one stronger than the other? Do they ever overlap? Are there any other "worlds" in the play that you would add to Foakes's argument?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R9**

# classroom activities & resources

## 53. GERTRUDE'S "SIN" . . . AND OPENING STATEMENT

Though Gertrude is a major presence in *Hamlet*, she doesn't talk much, and she certainly doesn't get any soliloquies. Her aside in 4.5.17-20 is one of the few moments in the play when she voices her inner thoughts, when no one else is present. In these lines, she speaks of her "sick soul," troubled by guilt for an unnamed "sin." What "sin" is she speaking of? Scholars have long debated her complicity in Claudius's scheme. Were she and Claudius having an affair before King Hamlet's death? Did she know of—or even help carry out—the murder? Or does her guilt stem from more recent events? Does she believe that her remarriage caused her son's madness? Partially blame herself for Ophelia's madness? After all, Ophelia's father was killed in Gertrude's chamber by Gertrude's son, and she has helped to cover up Hamlet's crime.

Consider the possibilities. Then imagine that you are a lawyer in a courtroom trial—Gertrude's courtroom trial. Split the class into four groups. Have each group prepare an opening statement, one for each of the following courtroom possibilities:

- You are the prosecuting attorney trying to prove Gertrude is implicated in King Hamlet's murder.
- You are the prosecuting attorney trying to prove Gertrude is implicated in Polonius's murder.
- You are the defense attorney trying to prove Gertrude is innocent in King Hamlet's murder.
- You are the prosecuting attorney trying to prove Gertrude is innocent in Polonius's murder.

As a group, write a 3-minute opening statement for your scenario. Use evidence from the text, and inferences based on the text, and scholarly perspectives on Gertrude (see Critic Quotes on pages 23-32 for some options) and be as persuasive as possible. Have each group share its opening statement. Which ones were most convincing? Can you think of other evidence or strategies you could have used? Is it possible to come to a conclusion based on the text? If you were directing a production of *Hamlet*, how would you decide how to interpret Gertrude's character? What impact do different choices have on other characters, and on the play as a whole?

### CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, W1, W4, W9

## 54. STAGE DIRECTIONS

The Quarto 1 text of *Hamlet* includes an interesting stage direction: *Enter ghost in nightgown*. Quarto 2 and the First Folio simply say *Enter ghost*. Though many deride Q1, even calling it the "bad" quarto (see "Shakespeare's Original *Hamlets*" on page 15), this stage direction has captured theatrical imaginations since the late nineteenth century, when Henry Irving became the first modern director (that we know of) to clothe the ghost in a nightgown. It is this stage direction—coupled with Freudian interpretations of Hamlet and Gertrude's relationship—that led to the now-commonplace decision to set this scene in Gertrude's bedroom, though the text merely sets it in her "chamber," not her "bed chamber."

This isn't the only powerful evocative stage direction in Quarto 1. In 4.5, when Ophelia enters for her second scene of madness, Q1 reads *Enter Ophelia playing on a lute, and her hair down, singing*, Q2 and the Folio merely say *Enter Ophelia*. Based on these stage directions, consider the following:

- What makes these stage directions so powerful? Why might some actors and directors have accepted them when so much of Q1's text is rejected? What do they offer to actors and directors? To offer to theater makers? To readers?
- Some critics believe the specificity of these stage directions is further proof that Q1 was penned by actors. What do you think?

# classroom activities & resources

In small groups, choose 1-3 moments from the text that have captured your imagination. As a group, write a stage direction for each one. Follow the model of these Q1 stage directions—they don't have to be long or incredibly specific, but they need to be powerful, evocative, and capable of capturing the imagination. Consider costumes, props, blocking, and vocals. Then exchange stage directions with another group. Act out the other group's stage direction and discuss the impact the stage direction had on your interpretation of the scene. Share your stage directions as a class and comment on the most interesting.

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R4, R6, SL1, L3**

## 55. "PRETTY OPHELIA"

(To the teacher: You may want to consider giving each group one or two specific paintings to look at, for the sake of variety.) Ophelia's madness and death are among the most evocative moments in *Hamlet*. In small groups, experiment with different ways of reading Gertrude's description of the death:

- Read the whole speech together as a group. Then alternate readers at every line break; every punctuation mark; or at every word that evokes flowers, water, or song.
- Play with volume. Whisper the speech. Choose moments to crescendo and decrescendo.
- No play with who speaks when. Choose moments to only have one person speak and moments for the whole group to join. You can also play with echoing—are there are words or lines that the whole group could echo as Gertrude speaks?

Then look at some artistic renderings of Ophelia, both before and at the moment of her death. There are plenty to choose from. Consider the following, which are all easy to find with a quick Google image search:

- Andrey Aranyshchev's *Ophelia* (2004)
- Leopold Burthe's *Ophelia* (1851)
- Salvador Dali's *La Morte di Ofelia* (1967)
- Eugene Delacroix's *La Mort d'Ophelie* (1853)
- Paul Deroche's *The Young Martyr/Ophelia* (1855)
- Carlos Ewerbeck's *Ophelia at the River's Edge* (1900)
- Antoine-Auguste-Ernest Hebert's *Ophelia* (1817-1909)
- Cheryl Johnson's *Ophelia Alive* (1947-present)
- Margaret Macdonald's *Ophelia* (1908)
- John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* (1851-1852)
- Odilon Redon's *Ophelia among the Flowers* (1908)
- Paul A. Steck's *Ophelia* (1895)

Discuss the image(s). How do they represent Ophelia and the language of the text? What details do you notice and how do they impact our understanding of her death? Select the image you find most striking. With it as your inspiration, go back to Gertrude's speech and read it again, as if Gertrude is describing the Ophelia featured in your painting. Which vocal choices suit the painting? Does the painting inspire any new possibilities? As a group, present your painting and reading of Gertrude's speech to the class. What do you notice about different interpretations? Which choices were particularly striking? Is there anything you would do differently?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R7, R9, SL1**

# classroom activities & resources

## 56. OPHELIA AND HER RELATIONSHIPS

Ophelia is a character whose fate seems tied to others and the relationships she has with them. Critic David Leverenz proposed a metaphor for her relationships with others: she is “a player trying to respond to several imperious directors at once.” To Leverenz, everyone commands her and uses her, as if she is a puppet and they are her master. Keep this in mind as you consider Ophelia’s relationships with five other characters from the play: Polonius, Laertes, Hamlet, Gertrude, and Claudius. Split into five groups, one for each of those characters. As a group, explore Ophelia’s relationship with that character.

First, decide if you think Leverenz’s metaphor fits Ophelia’s relationship with your character. Is your character an “imperious director,” who commands and controls Ophelia? If your answer to that question is yes, go back to the text and find 3-5 quotes in which your character is either talking to or talking about Ophelia. Select the best one and use it as inspiration to “sculpt” a two-person statue—a frozen, statue-like visual image, with one person in your group embodying Ophelia and another person embodying your character. Make sure the group member representing your character is ready to speak the line of text you chose as inspiration when you present your statue to the class!

If you don’t think the metaphor of actor and “imperious director” fits Ophelia’s relationship with your character, create a different metaphor that, in your opinion, more accurately represents the relationship. Once you’ve created your metaphor, go through the same process outlined above, culminating in the creation of a two-person statue. Afterwards, create a line of statues at the front of the room with each group’s work. Before the statues say their lines of text out loud, see if you can imagine what the characters in the statue might be saying to each other. Call out your imagined lines of dialogue—they don’t have to be from Shakespeare’s play (or sound Shakespearean in any way). They just have to fit the relationship that the statue depicts. See how your imagined lines compare with the actual line that inspired each statue.

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, R3, R8**

## ON YOUR OWN

## 57. CUTTING A SOLILOQUY

Shakespeare’s soliloquies usually have a beginning, middle, and end. They are not static; they show characters growing, developing, thinking through ideas, and coming to conclusions. Finding shifts—moments when the tone, topic, or thought process change—and splitting the soliloquy into sections can help us better understand the character who is speaking and the speech’s significance in the development of the play as a whole. Shakespeare’s soliloquies often split nicely into three sections; many scholars believe Hamlet’s “How all occasions do inform against me” has five distinct sections. Read the soliloquy out loud to yourself, slowly. Look and listen for places where the tone, topic, or thought process shifts. Then read it a second time, this time splitting the soliloquy into five sections as you go. Compare with a partner or small group afterwards. Discuss your reasoning, and remember that it’s okay to disagree—just learn from others’ decisions and defend your own choices!

Afterwards, work with the same small group to cut this text. The soliloquy does not appear in the first Folio and is often cut from the play entirely. (See page 15 for more on discrepancies between the First Folio and earlier editions of the play.) Use that fact to play with cutting the text in several different ways.

### Guiding Questions:

- First, consider the impact of cutting the speech in its entirety. Read the rest of 4.4 out loud, with different group members taking on different roles. End the scene before Hamlet’s soliloquy. How does that change the impact of the scene? What is lost? Is anything gained? If you cut the soliloquy, would you consider cutting all of 4.4? (Remember that the Norwegian subplot is often cut from the play entirely, as well.) What is lost and gained—in plot, in character development, in theme—by cutting the entire scene?



# classroom activities & resources

- Then, consider keeping the soliloquy, but cutting it in half. The full text is 35 lines. Make it 17 or 18. You might cut an entire section of the text; you might distill each section to its essence. For you, what are the most important words for the audience to hear at the end of this scene? Why? After you cut, read the scene aloud again, this time ending with your cut version of the soliloquy. How do your choices affect the interpretation of Hamlet's character and the development of the play as a whole?
- Finally, make the soliloquy even shorter—8 lines or less. Repeat the process outlined above.
- Now that you've gone through this process, imagine you are directing *Hamlet*. What would you do with 4.4 and the soliloquy that ends it? Which option outlined above would you choose? Or do you have a different idea?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, R5, L3**

## Act 5

### AS A CLASS

#### 58. THE GRAVEDIGGER AND HAMLET

The Gravediggers provide some darkly comic relief before the tragic end of the play. This quick activity gives you the chance to vocally and physically play around with their wordplay. Use the following condensed version of Hamlet's exchange with Gravedigger 1:

**HAMLET**

Whose grave is this, sirrah?

**GRAVEDIGGER 1**

Mine, sir.

**HAMLET**

What man dost thou dig it for?

**GRAVEDIGGER 1**

For no man, sir.

**HAMLET**

What woman, then?

**GRAVEDIGGER 1**

For none, neither.

**HAMLET**

Who is to be buried in't?

**GRAVEDIGGER 1**

One that was a woman, sir; but rest her soul, she's dead.

Split the class into two groups. Stand on opposite sides of the room. Instead of handing out sheets of paper with the text (or looking in your book), post the lines on the board, big enough for everyone to read. First, read through the lines aloud about five times, until everyone has their part memorized. (They're short—memorizing them won't be too hard!) One group reads and memorizes Hamlet's lines. The other does the same for Gravedigger 1.

Once everyone has the lines memorized, you're free to play around with them. With each group still standing on opposite sides of the room, experiment with different ways of saying the lines:

# classroom activities & resources

- Shout them—be as loud as possible!
- Whisper them, just loudly enough to be heard.
- Pick up your cue as quickly as possible—start saying your line a second before the previous line ends.
- Get as close to the center of the classroom as you can, without crossing over to the other group's side. Find one person on the opposite side of the room and make eye contact. Say your lines directly to that person. How does that change your delivery?

Then split into pairs, making sure each pair has a Hamlet and a Gravedigger 1. Each pair continues to speak through the scene together, this time with these cues:

- Each partner picks one place to insert a long pause in a line. Don't think too much about it—just go for the first place that pops into your head!
- Each partner picks one word to say as slowly as possible.
- Each partner picks one moment to clap once.
- Each partner picks one moment to jump in place once.
- One partner starts sitting down; the other stands. The sitting partner picks a moment to stand up. The standing partner picks a moment to sit down. Repeat this exercise, switching starting positions.
- Each person selects a moment to tap his/her partner's shoulder.
- Each person thinks of his/her own gesture to incorporate into the lines. Again, don't think about it too much—just pick the first thing that comes into your head!

Watch each pair perform the scene once. Which choices accentuate the humor of the scene? How and why? What is the function of the gravediggers at this moment in the play? Why do they appear? How do they relate to the development of plot and theme? How do they affect our understanding of Hamlet's character?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, SL1

### 59. STAGING CLAUDIUS'S DEATH

The whole play has been leading up to Claudius's death at Hamlet's hands. In Act 5, it finally happens—and it happens in public. When Hamlet stabs Claudius, the text indicates that “all” the observers shout, “Treason, treason!” (5.2.302). Then Claudius says, “Oh yet defend me friends, I am but hurt.” After that, there is no indication of what the crowd does. How do they respond to being referred to as the king's “friends?” Do they defend Claudius, verbally or physically? Does someone stop them from doing so? Do they move to defend their king, but then see or hear something that changes their mind? Does the whole crowd act as a unit, or are they divided amongst themselves? Did they shout “Treason!” out of horror, or with excitement? Who is watching this scene, anyway? Is it members of the royal court? Castle guards? Servants? Might different observers have different motivations and reactions?

As a class, work together to stage Claudius's death and the crowd's reaction, from 5.2.301-310. You may even wish to stage the scene several times, interpreting it differently each time. Discuss the impact of different choices.

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R3, SL1

# classroom activities & resources

## 60. ONE FINAL IMAGE

[To the teacher: You can also do this as a small group activity, where each group shares its tableau with the class and you compare interpretations afterwards.] Imagine your class is directing and starring in a production of *Hamlet*. You've reached the end of the script—all the deaths have happened, all Shakespeare's words have been said, and Fortinbras is ready to assume the throne. All that remains is for you to create the final image your audience will experience before everything fades to black. As a class, work together to create a tableau of that final image. Everyone in the class must have a role. Some will be the named characters, of course. Some could be soldiers or members of the Danish court. Some could create a soundscape to accompany the tableau.

### Guiding Questions:

- What mood or atmosphere do you want your tableau to create? What fits the themes and overall progression of the play, as you interpret it?
- How close should the characters physically be in your tableau? Which characters are touching one another? Which are distant and removed?
- What sounds do you imagine accompanying your scene? Anything you can create is fair game, whether it involves military marches, hooting owls, or an echoed line from the play. Be creative!

### CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R2, R3

## IN SMALL GROUPS OR PAIRS

## 61. TAG-TEAMING A GRAVESIDE FIGHT

Who is Ophelia's chief mourner, her brother or her ex? That is the heated question that turns Ophelia's funeral rites into a seething competition between Laertes and Hamlet, and eventually into an actual fist-fight. With a small group of 4-6 students, explore the language of their exchange in 5.1.213-251.

### Guiding Questions:

- Read the exchange slowly, switching readers at the end of each complete thought. Make sure you understand and can paraphrase each thought. What are the characters literally saying? What does their figurative language mean?
- Then go back and read the exchange again. This time, pay attention to who the characters are speaking to. When is Laertes speaking to Ophelia's grave? To another mourner? To the heavens? To Hamlet? Ask the same questions of Hamlet. When is he speaking to Ophelia's grave? To (or for the benefit of) other mourners? To himself? To Laertes? Sometimes the answers to these questions are explicit and obvious; sometimes they require inference and interpretation. Record your thoughts in the margin of your text.
- Read the text one final time. This time, focus on the conflict between Laertes and Hamlet. When does their conflict intensify? What text clues—specific words, stage directions, perhaps even punctuation—highlight their increasingly competitive attitudes? Circle any pieces of text that intensify the relationship between the two men.

Now that you've parsed the language of this scene, "tag team" an active reading of it to physicalize what you've discovered about the language of the text. Imagine you're in a boxing ring. Ophelia's grave is in the center. Laertes is next to it; Hamlet is ready to enter. The other members of your group are split up, half on "Team Hamlet" and half on "Team Laertes." They stand on the outside of the ring.

Laertes starts the scene with line 213, making a physical choice that fits the intensity of the scene at that moment. For example, if it is a moment of low intensity, he might kneel by the grave. If it is high intensity, he might jump up and down, like a fighter in a ring, or stand on a chair. When the intensity level changes—which could be signaled by any of the textual elements you worked with above—one of his teammates runs into the center of the ring, tags him out, and replaces him in the scene, making a new physical choice to represent the character's new intensity level. (Each team member will probably enter and exit the ring several times.) "Team Hamlet" does the same.

# classroom activities & resources

Run through the scene several times. The first time will probably be pretty rough, but it will get cleaner each time. See how many different ways you can physicalize the intensity level. Also consider your vocal choices. When should the characters speak loudly or softly? Watch other groups perform their interpretations and evaluate the impact of different choices.

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R4, L3, L5**

## 62. HAMLET FINDS A LETTER

None of Hamlet's adventures at sea are directly staged. Instead, they come to us through characters' narration of the events. In 5.2.12-25, 29-37, 38-47, and 48-55 Hamlet describes the moment when he finds Claudius's letter to the King of England, ordering Hamlet's death, then substitutes it with a new letter, ordering the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern instead.

With a partner, read and enact Hamlet's narration. One partner begins by reading lines 12-25, while the other person physicalizes the actions Hamlet describes. (You can skip Hamlet and Horatio's brief exchange in lines 25-28.) At line 29, when a new chunk of narration begins, switch roles so that the reader is now physicalizing the action, and vice versa. Continue moving through the narration this way, switching roles every time a new chunk starts.

At the end of Hamlet's narration, Horatio responds with one line: "So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to't." Take turns saying that line as a response to the story Hamlet has told. How would Horatio respond to his friend? Think of different possibilities and try them out. Which one feels most accurate to these characters and their relationship at this point in the text? Has their relationship changed over the course of the play? If so, how? If not, what elements of their friendship have remained constant?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R3, L5**

## 63. HOW MUCH TO CUT?

Osric's first appearance on stage (in 5.2.81-161) is significantly different in the versions of *Hamlet*—Quarto 1, Quarto 2, and the First Folio—that we have from the early seventeenth century. In Quarto 1, Osric is unnamed; stage directions refer to him as a "Braggart Gentleman." His conversation with Hamlet only lasts for 27 lines. In Quarto 2, that conversation balloons to 80 lines, which the First Folio cuts down to 63. Compare the three different versions of this scene by visiting [www.internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/Texts/Ham/](http://www.internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/Texts/Ham/). You can even split the class into three groups and have each group act out one of the versions. What is lost and gained in each version? How does each version affect pacing—remember, the revenge tragedy is finally coming to a head here—and characterization, especially of Osric? If you were staging the play, which version would you use?

Use this scene to explore the idea of cutting Shakespeare. Based on your work with this scene, propose some criteria for cutting Shakespeare. What determines when you should and shouldn't cut lines? A few criteria that you might consider:

- CUT . . .
  - o to enhance clarity
  - o to create more energy by upping the pace
  - o to get rid of archaic words or obscure allusions
  - o to focus on a specific theme or aspect of character
- KEEP . . .
  - o action and ideas that move the plot forward or make character relationships clear
  - o familiar and famous lines
  - o the meter (at least as much as possible!)



# classroom activities & resources

Then work on cutting a scene yourself. You probably picked up on one of the reasons that the Osric scene is often cut—it goes on (and on), slowing down the anticipated revenge. As a class, choose a scene that, in your opinion, slows down the pace of the play. *[To the teacher: Act 4, scene 7—where Claudius convinces Laertes to kill Hamlet—is a good option. You could work with the whole scene or with just a piece of it, like lines 60-125.]* Split into small groups and cut the scene, seeing how efficiently and effectively you can convey key elements of plot and character while quickening the pace.

Afterwards, ask each group to stage its version of the scene. What choices did different groups make? Which ones were particularly effective? What did you lose in cutting the scene? Is there anything you would do differently if you did this exercise again?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R5, L3

### ON YOUR OWN

#### 64. “THERE’S A DIVINITY THAT SHAPES OUR ENDS...”

This famous line is crucial to understanding Hamlet’s development as the play draws to a close. Work with Hamlet’s two-line thought here on your own. Get up and choose a place in the room to stand—it could be on the floor in the middle of the room, on a chair, on a desk, or inside a classroom closet. Say these two lines over and over again, so that everyone in the class is speaking to themselves, but at the same time. Consider the following prompts:

- Speak as slowly (or as quickly) as possible
- Change your physicality as you speak. Stand up, sit down, curl into a ball—whatever makes sense for your line(s)
- Speak as loudly (or as softly) as possible
- Choose one place within the line to pause

Then picture Hamlet saying these lines at different points in the play. How would your reading of the lines change if they occurred at a different moment in Hamlet’s development? What if the lines were said when:

- Hamlet first speaks to Claudius and Gertrude in front of the royal court?
- Hamlet first greets Horatio at Elsinore?
- Hamlet is commanded by the Ghost to avenge his murder?
- Hamlet meets with Ophelia and she returns his gifts?
- Hamlet sees Claudius react to “The Mousetrap”?
- Hamlet fails to kill Claudius at prayer?
- Hamlet kills Polonius?
- Hamlet receives word of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s deaths?

Afterwards, discuss as a class. How has Hamlet changed over the course of the play? Has he always believed that “there’s a divinity that shapes our ends?” If so, defend your reasoning. If not, what key moments bring him to this new belief? Do you think these lines accurately reflect the world of the play? In *Hamlet*, are there forces beyond human control that shape our ends, or do the characters make their own fates?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, R3, R6

# classroom activities & resources

## 65. INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR . . . YOU!

Imagine you are directing a production of *Hamlet*. In a rehearsal of Act 5, the actors ask you two questions:

- Is Hamlet suspicious of the drink Claudius tries to give him in line 260?
- How should Claudius say, “Gertrude, do not drink!” in line 268?
- How should Gertrude say, “I will my lord, I pray you pardon me” in line 269?

Write your replies, giving specific reasons to justify your answers. Then, get in a group of four. Share your answers and come to a consensus. Stage the scene—each person taking on the role of Hamlet, Laertes, Gertrude, or Claudius—and compare your choices with those of other groups.

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R4, L5**

## 66. “TELL MY STORY”

Among Hamlet’s final words is a plea to Horatio. “Tell my story,” the prince begs, vaguely echoing King Hamlet’s ghostly command, “Remember me!” Horatio is Hamlet’s best friend. But in this plot, he’s not given much of a chance to be a storyteller. He’s an observer, and he keeps his observations to himself unless they are explicitly requested. Imagine how he would handle Hamlet’s dying request. Write a speech for Horatio—of perhaps a dozen lines—in which he tells Hamlet’s story.

- Is Hamlet suspicious of the drink Claudius tries to give him in line 260?
- How should Claudius say, “Gertrude, do not drink!” in line 268?
- How should Gertrude say, “I will my lord, I pray you pardon me” in line 269?

Write your replies, giving specific reasons to justify your answers. Then, get in a group of four. Share your answers and come to a consensus. Stage the scene—each person taking on the role of Hamlet, Laertes, Gertrude, or Claudius—and compare your choices with those of other groups.

### Guiding Questions:

- What events would he choose to tell? Which ones would he avoid mentioning? Why? Which characters other than Hamlet would he include in his version of the story? Again, why?
- How would Horatio present Hamlet? What is Horatio’s interpretation of his friend’s character and development over the course of the play? Essentially, as scholar Arthur F. Kinney asks, “What story about Hamlet will Horatio tell?”
- As you’ve seen throughout the play, lengthy Shakespearean speeches are rarely static. They move and develop. They take turns, and they treat the character who is speaking as a real person who is thinking and coming to new realizations. What turns would Horatio’s story take? What might he realize as he tells the tale?
- How does Horatio use language? Would he speak in prose or verse? Use antithesis, wordplay, short lines, or any of the other text clues you’ve seen throughout the play?

After writing your version of Horatio’s speech, switch with a partner and read each other’s work aloud. Discuss the choices you made. Is there anything you would do differently if you were to write the speech again?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, R4, R6, W3, W5**

# classroom activities & resources

## After You Read The Play

### AS A CLASS

#### 67. FOUND POETRY

In thinking back upon the journey that Hamlet takes, from the moment we meet him to his dying words to his friend, his emotional world undergoes a seismic shift—as does his language. Consider two very different moments in the play for Hamlet: the first in Act 3, scene 3, lines 73-96, as he stands behind Claudius and debates murder then and there, and the second in Act 5, scene 2, lines 192-196, when he reassures Horatio about the impending fencing match with Laertes, arranged by Claudius. Now that you’ve finished the play, return to these two distinct passages and, as a class, read through both aloud, switching readers at the end of each full sentence. Repeat one more time, continuing on where you left off among your classmates, reading aloud both passages again.

Individually, return to the two passages, and underline the single words, phrases, or sentences that jump out for you. Then, again as a group, offer your underlined words, phrases, or sentences to create a poem with the the rest of your class. Here’s how...

- There is no order that the words—or the poets—must follow. You are creating something original and your own.
- No one “owns” a word, phrase, or sentence—they can be repeated by others.
- Anyone can contribute to the poem at any time.
- Listening is key: the sound of this poem, like a song, should guide you as much as its meaning.

After composing and listening to this group poem, what does it conjure up about Hamlet and the journey he has taken? What has he learned? Has he learned what he needs to, or is there more you would have wished that he had? Do your thoughts about him and his character shift at all in listening to his own words transposed upon each other?

#### CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R4, SL2

#### 68. CHARACTER QUESTIONS

Hamlet is a play that is filled with people asking questions—to one another and to themselves. Maynard Mack suggests that this “interrogative mood” is crucial to the play. “It reverberates with questions, anguished, meditative, alarmed,” writes Mack. “There are questions that in this play, to an extent I think unparalleled in any other . . . The mysteriousness of Hamlet’s world is evidently an important part of what the play wishes to say to us.” Retrace the questions that people ask throughout the course of the play’s action, and choose one question that you feel is essential to the story. As a class, begin reading the questions aloud, listening closely to avoid speaking on top of your classmates. Several people may choose the same question and that is okay—no one “owns” a question, and there is no prescribed order in which questions are to be spoken. Together, see if you can re-create the mysteriousness that Mack describes.

#### Guiding Questions:

- What questions did you have as you read *Hamlet*? Do your questions in any way mirror those asked by the characters? What questions do you still have after reading the play? Can those questions be answered?
- Are there any characters in the play who don’t ask any questions? What else distinguishes these characters from the more “doubtful” characters?

#### CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, SL2

# classroom activities & resources

## 69. EMPATHIZING WITH YOUR CHARACTER

It's easy to empathize with some of *Hamlet*'s characters. Who doesn't feel pity for Ophelia? Or perhaps Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? It's more difficult to empathize with Claudius's character, or even Gertrude, who may or may not have helped kill her former husband (and who certainly married her husband's brother so soon after his death). But actors playing any role, in fact, have to empathize with their characters—to see the story from their point of view and understand their motives at every moment in the play. That's what prompted actor Tony Church, who played Polonius (perhaps another hard-to-like character?) at the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1965 and 1980, to say, "I believe there have always been actors who know the measure of the man [the character they are playing]—more often than critics."

In the spirit of Tony Church (and all the actors like him), choose either Claudius or Gertrude. Put yourself in their shoes and imagine the story from their point of view. What kind of person are they? Why do they do what they do? Then go back to the text. Pick a specific moment to explore and expand upon. [For Gertrude, a good option might be after the scene in her chamber with Hamlet (3.4), or as she listens Polonius read Hamlet's love letter to Ophelia (2.2). For Claudius, consider the moment before he first appears on stage with Gertrude (1.2), or as Gertrude tells him that Hamlet has killed Polonius (4.1).] Adopt the voice of your character and write a diary entry from their point of view at that specific moment in the text.

### Guiding Questions:

- What does your character actually say and/or do in the scene you've chosen? Do you think they are saying what they truly believe? Doing what they actually want to do? Or are they dissembling their true thoughts and feelings for some reason?
- What might your character be thinking or feeling that doesn't get said aloud? What has happened to your character before this moment in the play? What factors might influence their inner thoughts?
- How will you write your character's diary entry? Don't worry about writing in iambic pentameter, or "sounding Shakespearean." But do think about the voice and style your character might use when writing. Do they use long sentences or short ones? Fancy vocabulary or simple words? Will they ask questions, issue commands, let their sentences trail off, or throw in some sentence fragments?
- After writing, get in a small group and read each other's diary entries. Discuss the different choices you made.

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS W3, W9**

## 70. HAMLET SCULPTURE GARDEN

You've met all the characters throughout *Hamlet* now, and seen their progression from the story's beginning to its end. In groups of 5-6, choose the characters that you want to embody from the play—one for each person in the group. Working together as a group of "sculptors," create a statue for each of your characters that represents them in a graphic and concise way. You'll create a sculpture garden with your character statues. You may decide that a single statue represents more than character if that can help tell their shared story. Be specific in your visual choices! Then, regroup as a class for a Gallery Walk. If your classmates immediately recognize your sculpture, your piece is completed. But if there's some uncertainty, then use the Gallery Walk for some good feedback from your viewers, who can help you resculpt your character to communicate its essence. Congratulations! You've created the world's first *Hamlet* Sculpture Garden!

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, R7**



# classroom activities & resources

## 71. TRAGIC DEBATE

Based on the title of this play, we might assume that the story is about the tragedy of Prince Hamlet. And though this is certainly true, you could argue that the play is also about the tragedy of Ophelia, Gertrude, Polonius, or Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Are we supposed to accept Hamlet as the most tragic figure, even though he is arguably to blame for so many other characters' tragic ends?

Break into debate teams. Each team will represent a different character. With your team, justify and support why your character is the "most" tragic in the play. Use evidence from the play, and be prepared with passages from the script to support your argument. Hold the debate in a traditional format with time for defense, rebuttals, and closing statements. And though you're debating about tragedy, have some fun with it!

### Guiding Questions:

- What makes one character more tragic than another?
- What textual evidence can you use to prove that a character is "tragic?"
- What are the possible counter-arguments to your stance? What can you prepare as a rebuttal?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, SL1, SL3**

## 72. CHORAL POEM MONTAGE

Divide the class in half. Half of the class writes a letter from Hamlet to Horatio when Hamlet is grieving his father's death and has just learned that his mother has already remarried—and to his father's brother nonetheless. The other half writes a letter from Hamlet, also to Horatio, but now as he anticipates the staged duel with Laertes. (Keep in mind that you'll be sharing your writing with others in the class.)

Find a partner who wrote a letter from the prompt that you did not. Exchange letters and circle the phrases, words, or sentences that you feel best captures the character's voice, mood, or tone. Discuss in your pair why you chose to circle the words/phrases/sentences you did, and how they best reflect the overall tone of the letters each of you wrote.

With your own letter back in hand, join with two other groups and work on your feet (so that the words are being said and heard) to create a poem from the circled words, a phrase, or a short sentence from all six annotated texts. Edit as much as you need in order to create the most powerful poem you can that demonstrates the emotional journey Hamlet took from the start of the play to the final moments. You can repeat words, phrases or lines, and you can decide to say some in unison, but be sure to incorporate contributions from all six letters.

Each group takes a turn presenting its choral poem to the class. The rest of the class then becomes the editors of the living poem, asking the group to make whatever revisions will help strengthen the writing. Come back together as a class and discuss any new insights that were discovered through your choral poems. Discuss the varying texts' points of view and the different insights you gained from them.

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, SL2, W3**

# classroom activities & resources

## IN SMALL GROUPS

### 73. CHARACTER EPITAPHS

An epitaph is a brief statement written in memory of someone who has died, often as an inscription on their gravestone. In small groups, create epitaphs for all the characters who die in *Hamlet*. You may even wish to design the characters' gravestones, thinking about the font and other design choices that suit each character.

#### Guiding Questions:

- How do your epitaphs compare with other groups'? What do the differences reveal about different interpretations of the characters?
- Would your epitaphs be different if they were written by a different character from the play? What if Horatio were designing the epitaphs? Laertes? Fortinbras? Polonius, from beyond the grave? Consider rewriting 1 or 2 of your epitaphs from that character's own perspective. Be ready to explain your thought process!

#### CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6, W4

### 74. "THOUGH THIS BE MADNESS, YET THERE IS METHOD IN'T"

From Hamlet's plan to "put on an antic disposition" to Ophelia's tragic end, madness runs through *Hamlet*. Critics have frequently debated the nature and role of madness in the play. Here are a few of their conclusions:

- *[Hamlet] knows he ought to punish [Claudius], but wants strength of mind to exercise what he thinks right and wishes to do . . . Hamlet feign[s] himself mad, as in that way he might put his uncle to death with less fear of the consequences of such an attempt. We therefore see Hamlet sometimes like a man really mad and sometimes like a man reasonable enough, though much hurt in mind.*  
—James Boswell, 1763
- *[Hamlet] realizes that his emotions are often going to rush beyond his control. The fiction that he is mad will not only cloak his designs against the King, but will also free him from any necessity to control the uncontrollable.*  
—Oscar James Campbell, 1943
- *Lunacy may be inspiration in disguise, since a man who has more brains than his fellows necessarily appears as mad to them as one who has less . . . Even [Hamlet's] instinctive sexual impulses offend his intellect; so that when he meets the woman who excited them he invites her to join him in a bitter and scornful criticism of their joint absurdity, demanding 'What should such fellows as I do crawling between heaven and earth' 'Why would'st thou be a breeder of sinners?' and so forth, all of which is so completely beyond the poor girl that she naturally thinks him mad.*  
—George Bernard Shaw, 1947
- *[Ophelia's] history is an instance of how someone can be driven mad by having her inner feelings misrepresented, not responded to, or acknowledged only through chastisement and repression . . . She is a play within a play, or a player trying to respond to several imperious directors at once. Everyone has used her: Polonius, to gain favour; Laertes, to belittle Hamlet; Claudius, to spy on Hamlet; Hamlet to express rage at Gertrude; and Hamlet again, to express his feigned madness with her as a decoy. She is valued only for the roles that further other people's plots.*  
—David Leverenz, 1978
- *The gentle Ophelia, it seems, cannot absorb her father's murder. However, it is not her father's murder that has driven her mad, but, rather, his murder by Hamlet, the person she loves and upon whose love she has placed her hopes. Now, she can never marry him, and worse still, she has an obligation to hate him.* —Theodore Lidz, 1990
- *The world of the play is itself 'distracted,' maddened, diseased . . . When there is corruption at the top, the land and its people are likewise corrupted and infected. Thus in this play the madness that Hamlet assumes is a madness already present in the state, for the king is the state.*  
—Marjorie Garber, 2004

# classroom activities & resources

With a small group, consider closely one of these quotes. First, make sure you fully understand the quote. What does it mean? What is it saying about the definition and role of madness in *Hamlet*? Then, evaluate the quote. In what ways do you agree with it? What pieces of the text would you use to support its argument? In what ways do you disagree with it? What pieces of the text would you use to challenge or question its argument? (And yes, you must disagree with it! There are questions to ask of every argument.)

Present your ideas to the whole class. Then, after you've heard every group present their understanding and evaluation of their quote, return to your small group and create your own scholarly blurb, in the model of these quotes, asserting your interpretation of madness in the play. Feel free to focus only on Hamlet, only on Ophelia, or on both. Consider extending your argument in writing and using textual evidence to support it, either in a paragraph or a full analytical paper.

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R8, R9, W1

### 75. HAMLET IN TWENTY LINES

In small groups, look through the script to choose the most important lines (up to twenty!), making sure to illustrate all aspects of the plot. What scenes must be represented by a line to move the story along? What actions will you use to help your audience understand what's going on? Prepare a script connecting your selected lines with brief, over-the-top narration in the style of a movie trailer. Act out your trailer for your classmates, or consider filming a montage of clips or still photos to play under the recorded sound of the trailer. *[To the teacher: For a visual example of this activity, check out this movie trailer, <http://www.tinyurl.com/taftmovietrailer>, for another Shakespeare play performed by students at Taft High School in Chicago!]*

#### Guiding Questions:

- What are some strategies you can use to select lines?
- What becomes clearer in the plot when selecting only twenty lines to tell the entire story? What would you argue are the most important elements of the story?
- How can you use this concept for future use in reading?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, SL1, SL2

### 76. CREATING A BACK STORY “BACKPACK”

An actor must be as detailed as possible about the life of the character he or she will be playing. What does the character's voice sound like, how does he move? What's the character afraid of, what does he want more than anything else in the world? Actors must make choices about a character's “back story” based on what is said about them as well as by them in the text of the play.

Choose a character from *Hamlet*, and answer the questions above to begin getting inside your chosen character's head. Collect materials that you think your character would carry around in their backpack— and explain why you chose each item. Your classmates will be asking you questions, like: “Was that item a gift?” “Who gave it to you?” etc. An actor must be as specific as possible in creating his/her character!

Now that you have developed a back story for your individual character, pair up with someone who has a different character to you. Find someone who your character has a relationship with in the play. Work together to decide how your characters met and come up with three important moments in your relationship history. For some of the characters in the play, there will be clues about how they met, and what their relationships might be, in the text. Look through the play first to find any information you are given about these two characters together and then fill in any blanks with your imaginations.

# classroom activities & resources

## Guiding Questions:

- What are the most meaningful items in your own backpack? What items do you imagine your character would find valuable and want to keep with them at all times?
- How does imagining the life of your character outside of the play help you to understand the character's actions in the play?
- What did you learn about your two characters and their relationship?
- Did you find something interesting in the text which you hadn't noticed before?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, SL4

### 77. CREATING A FILM STORYBOARD

In groups of three to four, choose a key scene from the play that would adapt well to a silent film. Consider how setting, movement, costumes, and props can convey the necessary information and emotion developed in the scene. A good place to start is by storyboarding the scene. A storyboard involves a series of thumbnail sketches of individual shots of the action with captions below that describe aspects of the shot that the sketches are not unable to convey. As you rehearse your wordless scene, consider adapting the melodramatic acting style of those early films to modern audiences' tastes and expectations. Once you've planned and rehearsed your scene, film it with your phone or tablet. Add music and sound for special effects.

Directions for creating a storyboard and downloadable storyboard templates can be found here:

- Online resource – <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/what-are-storyboards>
- Online resource – <http://www.the-flying-Animator.com/storyboard-template.html>
- Print Resource – *Lessons for a Media-Rich Classroom*. Eds. Mary T. Christel and Scott Sullivan. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2007 (available in Chicago Shakespeare's Teacher Resource Center)

## Guiding Questions:

- What are some strategies you can use to select lines?
- What becomes clearer in the plot when selecting only twenty lines to tell the entire story? What would you argue are the most important elements of the story?
- How can you use this concept for future use in reading?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, SL1, SL2

### 78. HAMLET SOUNDTRACK

Create a soundtrack for the character of Hamlet. Would you use rock? Pop? Hip-hop? Would the tone and energy of your album be depressed, angry, chaotic and fast, plodding and slow, or...? Choose ten songs (lyrical or instrumental) to include on your CD. Choose songs that follow Hamlet's character arc and tell his story through the songs' lyrics or the sounds of the music itself. (Alternatively, this activity could be done with the plot instead of one specific character. How would you go about making a soundtrack for the arc of the play? What kind of songs would you use to personify different characters?)

## Guiding Questions:

- How did your soundtrack compare with your classmates'? What discoveries did you make by listening to your classmates' presentations? What choices surprised you?
- What lines or character traits guided you as you made your song choices?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, SL5



# classroom activities & resources

## ON YOUR OWN

### 79. FIVE YEARS LATER

Many modern plays have been written about what happens to the characters in a Shakespeare play after Shakespeare's story has ended. For instance, David Grieg's *Dunsinane* tells the story of what happens to the Scottish kingdom following Macbeth's demise. Try your hand at this by writing an epilogue (a short passage/essay) to *Hamlet*. What has happened to Denmark in the five years following the conclusion of Shakespeare's play? Is there still "something rotten" there? How does Fortinbras rule the country? How do the people—the "distracted multitude" who loved Hamlet; the "rabble" who clamored for Laertes to be king—respond to his rule? Where are Horatio and Laertes? Do any more ghosts appear, and if so to whom and bearing what message? Compare your epilogue with those of your classmates.

#### Guiding Questions:

- How similar or different is your epilogue to those written by your classmates?
- What aspects of the characters, plot, or themes did you pay particular attention to in order to make your epilogue consistent and plausible?

#### CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS W3



Barbara Robertson as Gertrude and Lindsay Gould as Ophelia in Chicago Shakespeare Theater's 2006 production of *Hamlet*, directed by Terry Hands. Photo by Steve Leonard.

# classroom activities & resources

## The Performance: Preparing and Reflecting

### AS A CLASS

#### 80. BARD BLOG: A TOOL FOR DISCUSSION

Before and after you see the performance, continue adding to your "Bard Blog." Use these ideas to get you started, or modify other activities in this section to a blogging format:

- Select one of the quotations from the "What the Critics Say" section of the handbook. Do you agree with the writer? Blog an argument about this quotation. Cite specific examples from the play to support your assertions. Does your argument still hold up after seeing the performance?
- Each actor brings his or her own unique quality to a character. They make specific choices based on the director's vision, chemistry with the ensemble of other actors and their own interpretation of what motivates their character to action. Choose a character to follow closely when you see CST's performance (if you already began a character diary, stick with your same character.) As you watch the actor playing your chosen character, note the acting choices he or she makes through voice, movement and "subtext"—the inner feelings beneath the spoken words. Compose a free-write of your thoughts on the actor's interpretation of the character. How does the actor in CST's production differ from what you had imagined? What choices did the actor make that enhanced your understanding of the character?
- As you read the play, how did you imagine the relationship between the Macbeths? Is it a marriage that begins as intimate and significant to the partners? Or one that has failed even before we meet them? After you see CST's production, compare your interpretation to the approach taken in the production. Productions portray the relative strength of each partner in various ways. How did Chicago Shakespeare portray the strength of each? Who dominated—and when? Did that change? If so, when? And how were you made aware of the change?

#### CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6, W6, W10

#### 81. OPHELIA

You may know already that Shakespeare rarely invented his own stories. Like writers then (and now), he borrowed from existing narratives—from history, drama, poems, legends and folklore—was inspired by them to create his theatrical art. Other artists have returned the favor, using Shakespeare's plays as the inspiration for their own art. That is especially true of Ophelia, who has captured artists' imaginations for centuries.

Critic Elaine Showalter famously claimed that the history of Ophelia is a history of interpretation—of "alternation[s] of strong and weak Ophelias . . . virginal and seductive Ophelias . . . inadequate or oppressed Ophelias." To Showalter, "there is no 'true' Ophelia . . . but perhaps only a Cubist Ophelia of multiple perspectives, more than the sum of her parts." Showalter's words rings especially true with the many different ways artists have represented Ophelia's death. If you're interested in exploring interpretations of her drowning, take a moment to do so through art. (You may have already done this as you read the play, if you used Activity #55 from Act 4. If you did, review some of the more striking images. If not, enjoy exploring these for the first time!) Look at famous paintings of Ophelia from the nineteen to the twenty-first centuries. Do a Google image search to find some, or use these:

- Andrey Aranyshchev's *Ophelia* (2004)
- Leopold Burthe's *Ophelia* (1851)
- Salvador Dali's *La Morte di Ofelia* (1967)
- Eugene Delacroix's *La Mort d'Ophelie* (1853)
- Paul Deroche's *The Young Martyr/Ophelia* (1855)

# classroom activities & resources

- Carlos Ewerbeck's *Ophelia at the River's Edge* (1900)
- Antoine-Auguste-Ernest Hebert's *Ophelia* (1817-1909)
- Cheryl Johnson's *Ophelia Alive* (1947-present)
- Margaret Macdonald's *Ophelia* (1908)
- John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* (1851-1852)
- Odilon Redon's *Ophelia among the Flowers* (1908)
- Paul A. Steck's *Ophelia* (1895)

How does each image represent Ophelia? What is similar and different about them? Do you notice any patterns or changes over time?

Every production and every director of *Hamlet* has to decide how to present Ophelia's death. How much agency does she exhibit in her drowning? Will the scene be presented onstage or offstage? What mood will it create? As you watch the play, track the development of Ophelia's character and watch specifically for this scene. What is the interpretation of Ophelia's character, especially in the moment of her death? What makes you think that? Is there a painting that the staging reminds you of? Why? Did the production change your view of Ophelia in any way?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R7, R9

### 82. THE STORY IN SHORT

If you have not read *Hamlet* in class, use these resources to become acquainted with the story and follow the performance more easily:

- Refer to the *dramatis personae* and the synopsis in the beginning of the handbook.
- Watch Video SparkNotes: Shakespeare's *Hamlet* at <http://www.sparknotes.com/sparknotes/video/hamlet>
- Use the "Before You Read the Play" activities in this handbook to become more familiar with the story, setting, characters, themes and language.

L.I.N.K. to activate any prior knowledge you may have about *Hamlet*.

- List the information you already know about the story of the play before you watch the Sparknotes video or review the handbook sections.
- Inquire about other information you would like to know.
- After you watch the video and review the handbook sections above, Note new knowledge and connections between known information.
- Finish by writing what you Know about the story including setting, characters, and themes.

Discuss what else you would like to learn about the play before going to see the performance at Chicago Shakespeare Theater. In groups, list all questions you still have about the story on large chart paper and hang them around the classroom. As you explore the play further, fill in the answers to the questions. Listen and watch closely during the performance to be able to respond to any of the unanswered questions when you return to the classroom.

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, R7

# classroom activities & resources

## 83. HAMLET'S CHARACTER

Every director must decide how their Hamlet will be portrayed. As an intellectual incapable of action? A mourning son consumed by grief? A teenager or a mature adult? A noble hero, or a small and helpless boy caught in circumstances too big for him to grasp? A man driven mad or one who is just pretending? Before you see CST's production, discuss your vision of Hamlet's character as a class.

Once you've seen CST's production, how would you characterize this Hamlet? What was he like? What motivated him? How does this production support its interpretation of Hamlet's character? Compare with your own interpretation—or with another director's vision whose Hamlet you might have watched in class. If you can, be very specific about the places where you remember the differences.

### Guiding Questions:

- What moments in the play were treated differently than you were expecting by the Hamlet in CST's production?
- Did you feel that this interpretation was consistent with the text? Why or why not?
- What insight into the play or the character did this specific interpretation give you?

### CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, R9

## 84. THE GHOST

The Ghost is a crucial—and ambiguous—character in this play. He's the catalyst of the play's central action—after all, Hamlet wouldn't seek revenge on Claudius without the Ghost's command—but we don't know much about him. Is he Hamlet's father, or a demonic impersonation? Does he visit Hamlet from heaven, hell, or purgatory? What motivates him to command Hamlet to pursue revenge—jealousy of Claudius? A desire for his son to be a warrior like him? A disinterested desire to see justice done? A devilish love of causing physical and psychological chaos in the world?

Every production has to decide how to answer these questions and how to represent the Ghost. In Kenneth Branagh's 1996 film, the Ghost is so powerful and fear-inducing that his mere voice causes the earth to shake. In Richard Eyre's 1980 production at the Royal Court, the Ghost wasn't a physical presence—he was inside Hamlet's mind, his words a manifestation of the prince's troubled psyche. (If you want to see a clip of Jonathan Pryce's performance, check out <https://youtu.be/MrMoWcHyw9c>.)

Before seeing CST's production, discuss as a class how you would present the Ghost. Does he appear in flesh-and-blood? What does he look like? How does he speak? Is his appearance in Act 1 different from his appearance in Act 3? Is it possible that he reappears in any other scenes? How much power does the Ghost have? How does Hamlet respond to him? Does their relationship change over the course of the play?

After seeing the play, compare your ideas with what you saw in the CST production. Think about the clues in the production you saw that gave you these impressions. What did the director, her actors and her designers do to play out their own particular interpretation of this question in Shakespeare's play? Have you seen other productions that handled those same elements in a different way? Which was more believable for you—and why?

### Guiding Questions:

- What was your impression of the Ghost (and of his relationship with Hamlet) after seeing the performance? What clues in the production gave you that impression? What did the director, her actors, and her designers do to play out their own particular interpretation of the Ghost?
- How did this interpretation of the supernatural compare with your own as you read the text?
- Compare your experience with the supernatural elements in the production with your classmates'. Are they consistent? How might they have impacted you differently?

### CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R7



# classroom activities & resources

## IN SMALL GROUPS OR PAIRS

### 85. WHO IS WATCHING WHOM?

*[To the teacher: Dividing the class into at least 10 small groups, distribute the five acts as evenly between the number of groups as possible.]* *Hamlet* is full of language of watching and listening. There are ears and eyes everywhere—Polonius and Claudius spy on *Hamlet* and Ophelia, *Hamlet* watches Claudius watch "The Mousetrap," Polonius peeps in on *Hamlet* and Gertrude from behind a curtain. Those are explicit scenes of spying and surveillance, clearly written into the text. But there are also many moments where it's possible for directors to take a scene or soliloquy that seems to be private, and insert a character who is secretly watching. (The 2009 film version with David Tennant as *Hamlet* does this a lot, if you want to watch an example.)

There are five acts in *Hamlet*. Each group is responsible for reviewing one act and deciding at which point, or points, it's possible for one character to be watching or listening to another. Here are some things to consider:

- Who could be watching, and when?
- What motivates the observer? Why are they there? Have they made the conscious decision to spy, or do they end up watching by accident?
- What is the effect of placing an observer in that scene? How does it affect the character who is observing, both in the moment and in their future development?

Reconvene as a class and discuss your choices. When two groups' choices vary, what impact does the presence/absence of an observer at that moment in the script have—upon the plot or upon the characters' motivations and psychology? When you encounter CST's production, watch for the specific moments where characters watch, overhear, or intentionally spy on one another. Returning to class, talk about the choices that director Barbara Gaines made. What do you think these additional, extratextual (i.e. outside the text) appearances suggest:

- about the characters themselves?
- about the world of Denmark?
- about the overall themes of the play?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3

### 86. DESIGNING A TIME AND PLACE

*[To the teacher: Place the act and scene numbers for each scene in the play on slips of paper, and mix them up in a hat. Divide your class into groups of four. One person from each group picks one scene out of the hat.]* *Hamlet* has been set in a number of periods and settings, from classical to modern times. Imagine that your class is producing *Hamlet*. Discuss as a class what period and/or setting you would choose to place it in. Do certain settings give the play a lighter or darker tone? How does a different period or setting affect the characters?

In your groups imagine that you are designing a production of *Hamlet*. What does your scenic design look like? What kinds of costumes are your characters wearing? What is the lighting like? Some questions to get you started:

- Where does the scene take place? Inside or out?
- What time period is the play set in?
- What props are helpful in setting the mood?
- What is the weather like?
- What time of day is it?
- What is the overall tone of the scene?
- Who is in the scene? Where are they from?

# classroom activities & resources

You may want to make a designer's board—a large piece of poster board with swatches of fabric, copies of paintings or photographs that have an element of what you envision, and anything else that illustrates the scene for you. Magazines and art books provide a good source for ideas. When you've finished your collage, pick the line or lines from the scene that are essential to your design concept. As a class, share your concepts in order of scenes. (Designers often do this for the cast on the first day of rehearsal.)

## Guiding Questions:

- What factors must you take into account when designing a set?
- After you see the play, think about its scenic design compared to what you saw in class. Are there similar elements to some of the designs you saw in class?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R6, SL5

### 87. CRAFTING A STORY BY STOPPING THE ACTION

Shakespeare doesn't tell a director where in the story to break the action for an intermission—in fact, in the earliest publications of his plays, there were no act and scene breaks at all. Those have been added in later editions. So a director can make the intermission break come wherever they decide to. That decision may be practical (like a massive set change necessitates the time) or dramaturgical—in other words, based on the story they're trying to tell. You can imagine that you might want to leave your audience at a moment in the story that has a big emotional impact—and sustains their interest even when they're lining up for concessions!

Now that you've finished the play, in small groups brainstorm two very different places that you as directors might place your intermission—and you don't have to pay any attention to the end of an act or scene as it appears in your text! What's going on environmentally and emotionally at the moment you propose breaking the action? When your audience comes back from intermission, will they return to that same exact place in the script, or will the world and time have changed? In your group, decide which option you think has the most resonance, and devise two tableaux (a wordless, motionless stage picture with your bodies) that reveal the beginning and end of your intermission.

Come back together as a class and compare your choices. How varied are they, and what seems the most impactful among them—and why? Then, when you see Director Barbara Gaines's choice, compare yours to the one that she made. What do you imagine was behind her decision to place the intermission where she did in the story?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6

### 88. OFFSTAGE ACTION

Often in Shakespeare's plays, you may notice that he chooses to communicate information by reporting it. We hear about it instead of seeing it enacted in front of us. *Hamlet* is filled with examples of offstage action that we learn about by another character's report—and sometimes by a letter read aloud. As a class, think back and reconstruct as many points in the play as you can where we as the audience are given information about events we don't actually witness on stage. Often, a film or stage director will choose to enact an offstage scene. In Kenneth Branagh's 1996 film version of *Hamlet*, for example, key offstage action—such as the development of Claudius and Gertrude's relationship—was staged through flashbacks. In your small groups, talk together about the possible gains and losses of staging these scenes or other examples of offstage action (another key example being Ophelia's suicide).

## Guiding Questions:

- If you were directing the play, would you choose to stage either death? Why?
- After you've seen Chicago Shakespeare's production, return to this activity. Do you agree with the director's choice to stage or not stage these scenes? Why or why not?

## CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6, R7

# classroom activities & resources

## 89. CASTING

Chicago Shakespeare Theater's casting director is responsible for finding the right person for every character you see on our stage—no small task! After you've read the play, return to the text and look for clues for each character to answer these questions: how do they look? sound? move? behave? Think of television and film celebrities who fit your image of the character and, in groups, discuss who your "Dream Team" would be for your version of the play. Print or post on your class blog images to create "headshots" for your perfect cast. Then present your cast to your classmates, explaining why you made each decision, and compare your ideas with those of your classmates, using specific textual evidence whenever possible. After you see the play, contrast your vision to that of director Barbara Gaines and the actors whom she and CST's casting director have assembled.

### Guiding Questions:

- What clues in the text should you consider when casting a character?
- Why might one director choose different actors from another?
- How is your "dream team" different than or similar to Chicago Shakespeare's cast of actors? How did the production's interpretation of the main characters compare to yours?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R7, SL5**

## ON YOUR OWN

## 90. OPENING MOMENTS

Just as a filmmaker carefully crafts the opening moments that introduce an audience to the world of the story, so, too, does a theater director—and it's not always the first lines of Shakespeare's script, as you might anticipate . . . Directors often develop what is called an "extratextual scene"—a brief, typically wordless, scene that does not exist in the original text. In the production of *Hamlet* that you're about to witness, director Barbara Gaines has created such a scene—intended to grab their audience and pull them, atmospherically and emotionally, into the world of their storytelling.

If you were directing *Hamlet* and wanted to do just that—open with a wordless scene that pulls your audience into the world—what might that be? What brief story would it tell—which may or may not be dictated by the play? What would it look? Sound like? On your own, write a paragraph—and make it as specific about every detail that you imagine on that stage—that will help your designers and actors create your extratextual scene. Then, storyboard your scene, from beginning to end. In small groups, share your ideas for these opening scenes, comparing them by responding to these questions:

- Can you get a sense of what the director may be focusing on in their production—and how it may differ from his/her colleagues' films?
- What mood is created in each opening—and how does it differ or echo the others you heard?
- What theater tools (acting, movement, lighting, sound effects, etc.) is each director using to pull you in to the story, and can you think of any other tool that might help engage you even more, right from the start?
- After seeing Barbara Gaines' production, discuss what her choice for an opening, extratextual scene communicates about the world she wants to establish.

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS SL2, R2**

# classroom activities & resources

## 91. WRITING A THEATER REVIEW

A scaffold for this activity: Before you write your review, read three different theater reviews of current plays at Theatre in Chicago's Critics Review Round-Up: <http://www.theatreinchicago.com/reviewlistings.php>. Analyze the structure of a review, identifying key elements. Based on these key elements, describe the style you found most helpful (or least helpful) in communicating a play's appeal for potential theater-goers.

Now, write your own critical review of CST's *Hamlet*. Briefly recount the plot. Discuss the parts of the production—including the casting, acting, setting, music, dance, costumes, cuts—you thought worked particularly well, or did not work well and explain how you thought each worked to tell the story. Consider publishing your piece in a school newspaper or the Bard Blog. Use some of the questions below to generate ideas for your review:

- What aspect of the play captivated your attention?
- How did the production's interpretation compare with your own interpretation of the play? Do you believe it stayed true to Shakespeare's intention?
- Were there particular performances that you believed were powerful? Why?
- Would you recommend this play to others? Who would most enjoy it?
- Based on your answers to the above questions, how many stars (out of a possible five) would you give this production?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS W1, W4**

## 92. TOOLS OF THEATER

Consider all the different tools of theater that can help bring a story to life, including:

- Acting (vocal, physical and character choices made by the actors)
- Blocking (the actors' movement and positioning on stage)
- Set design
- Costume design
- Lighting Design
- Music and sound design
- Props
- Special effects

In each of these arenas, there are countless choices made by the director, designers and actors, contributing to their unique interpretation of the story. Before you see CST's production, choose one of the above tools of theater to focus on. As you watch the performance, note the specific ways that tool is used throughout and how those choices help to support the storytelling.

After you see CST's production, write an analysis of how your chosen tool was utilized to create a unique interpretation of *Hamlet*. Outline the choices made using that tool, and how those choices either supported or didn't effectively support the storytelling.

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6, W1**



# classroom activities & resources

## Classroom Warm-ups and Community Builders

A brief physical and vocal warm-up can help your students move from a “classroom mode” to a “studio mode.” It sets the tone for a student learning Shakespeare in a theatrical sense as well as a literary sense. Try warming up every class, and you will find that after the first couple of times, your students’ nerves—and yours—will be unseated by energy and focus. A few rehearsals in the privacy of your own home can do a lot to bolster your courage!

Every actor develops his/her own set of physical and vocal warm-ups. Warm-ups help the actor prepare for rehearsal or performance not only physically, but also mentally. The actor has the chance to focus on the work at hand, forgetting all the day-to-day distractions of life, and beginning to assume the flexibility required to create a character. The body, the voice and the imagination are the actor’s (and the student’s) tools in mastering Shakespeare.

### PHYSICAL WARM-UPS

#### 1. GETTING STARTED

- creates focus on the immediate moment
- brings students to body awareness
- helps dispel tension

Begin by taking a comfortable stance with your feet shoulder-width apart, toes pointing straight ahead, knees relaxed. Inhale deeply through your nose, filling your lungs deep into your abdomen, and exhale through your mouth. Repeat this a few times. Notice how your lungs fill like a six-sided box, creating movement in all six directions.

#### 2. WARM-UP FROM THE TOP OF THE BODY DOWN *(approximately 7-10 minutes)*

- gentle movement helps increase circulation, flexibility, and body readiness
  - increases physical and spatial awareness
- a. Begin by doing head-rolls to the left and to the right, about four times each way, very slowly. Then do a series of shoulder rolls to the back and to the front, again very slowly, and emphasizing a full range of motion.
  - b. Stretch each arm toward the ceiling alternately, and try to pull all the way through the rib cage, repeating this motion six to eight times.
  - c. Next, with particular care to keep knees slightly bent, twist from the waist in each direction, trying to look behind. Again, repeat six to eight times.
  - d. From a standing position, starting with the top of the head, roll down with relaxed neck and arms until the body is hanging from the waist. Shake things around, making sure your body is relaxed. From this position, bend at the knees, putting both hands on the floor. Stretch back up to hanging. Repeat this action about four times. Then roll back up—starting from the base of the spine, stack each vertebra until the head is the last thing to come up.
  - e. Repeat the deep breathing from the beginning of the warm-up. Bring your feet together, bend your knees. Keeping your knees together, rotate them in a circle parallel to the ground six to eight times. Repeat in the other direction. Return to standing.
  - f. Pick up the right foot, rotate it inward six to eight times, and then do the same with the left foot. Repeat with outward rotation of the foot. Take a few moments and shake out the entire body.

# classroom activities & resources

## VOCAL WARM-UPS

*[Your vocal warm-up should follow your physical warm-up directly—approximately 7 minutes]*

### 3. GETTING STARTED

- helps connect physicality to vocality
  - begins to open the imagination to performance possibilities
- a. Begin by gently massaging and pat the muscles of your face. This will help wake up the facial muscles.
  - b. Stick out your tongue out as far as possible—repeat this with the tongue pointing up, down, and to each side. (This exercise will seem strange, but can be made silly and fun, while accomplishing the necessary vocal warm-up. When students see you going through these exercises with commitment, that's often all they need to draw them in.) Repeat this exercise once or twice.
  - c. Put your lips gently together and blow air through them, creating a “raspberry.”
  - d. Next, hum, quietly, loudly, and across the entire vocal range. The vocal instrument loves to hum. Explore all the resonating spaces in the body, by moving the sound around. Humming helps to lubricate.
  - e. Create the vowel sounds, overemphasizing each shape with the face –A, E, I, O, and U—with no break.
  - f. Choose two or three tongue-twisters—there are some listed below. Again overemphasizing the shape of each sound with the lips, tongue, jaw, and facial muscles, begin slowly with each tongue-twister, and gradually speed up, repeating until the speed is such that the enunciation is lost.

### 4. TONGUE TWISTERS

- red leather, yellow leather ... (focus on the vertical motion of the mouth)
- unique New York... (focus on the front to back movement of the face)
- rubber, baby, buggy, bumpers... (focus on the clear repetition of the soft plosives)
- Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers... (focus on the clear repetition of hard plosives)

**One of the actors at Chicago Shakespeare Theater likes to describe the experience of acting Shakespeare as the “Olympics of Acting.”** Shakespeare’s verse demands a very flexible vocal instrument, and an ability to express not only the flow of the text, but the emotional shifts which are suggested by the variations in rhythm and sound. In light of the sheer volume of words, some of which are rarely—if ever—used in modern vocabulary, the actor must also be prepared to help the audience with his body, as well. An actor acting Shakespeare must go through each word of his text, determine its meaning, and then express it clearly to his audience. This requires a very physically demanding style. The physical and vocal warm-up is the actor’s basis for each performance.

## COMMUNITY BUILDERS

Each of these exercises is meant to open and expand our imaginations, increase our sense of “ensemble” or teamwork, and encourage being “in the moment.” These are some of the most fundamental and crucial elements of an actor’s training—and, of course, they are fundamental, too, to the learning process in the classroom.

### 5. STAGE PICTURES *(approximately 10 minutes)*

- shows how varied interpretation is: there is no one “right” answer
- encourages the students to interpret concepts with their whole bodies
- begins to show how the body interprets emotion

You will need a list of very strong descriptive, colorful, emotional words from the script for this activity. Find your own, or use our examples on the next page.

# classroom activities & resources

To thine own self be true.	Polonius 1.3
Brevity is the soul of wit.	Polonius 2.2
Listen to many, speak to a few.	Polonius 1.3
Conscience doth make cowards of us all.	Hamlet 3.1
Sweets to the sweet.	Gertrude 5.1
One may smile, and smile, and be a villain.	Hamlet 1.5

Begin walking around the room. While walking, fill up the entire space, exploring pacing, what it would feel like to be a different weight or a different height. Move the center of your body into different places. For instance, try walking with your nose leading your body. Now try your hip, your knee, your elbow and so forth.

Shakespeare's characters are often very physically broad. He created elderly characters and hunchbacked characters; clowns, star-crossed lovers and cold-blooded killers. These characters call for the actors to figure out how they move. If the character is greedy, should his center be in his/her gut? Or perhaps his/her chin? The actor must be prepared to experiment with the character's body.

Notice if you feel any emotional differences within these changes. After about three minutes of exploring these changes, see if you notice any particularly interesting discoveries. *[To the teacher: encourage these discoveries without necessarily drawing focus to individual students, as this is a self-reflective activity, but perhaps suggest to the group they might "Try what it feels like if you slow your pace, hunch your shoulders, droop your head, and move your center into your knees."]*

After a few minutes of this exploration, find a "neutral" walk. You are now going to create a stage picture as an entire group. Chose a word, and then count down from seven. After those seven beats, say freeze, and the class must create a photograph of the word you have chosen, with their entire body, collectively. Comment on the emotional quality the stage picture exudes. After a couple of words, split the group in half—half will be in the space and half will be audience. Repeat the process, asking the observing group:

- What do you notice?
- What emotions are evoked in the stage picture?
- What questions do you have about the stage picture?
- What changes would you like to suggest to strengthen or clarify the stage picture?
- What patterns do you see emerging from the stage picture?

## 6. MIRRORING (approximately 10 minutes)

- helps build trust within the ensemble
- encourages the students to "listen" with all their senses
- helps the students reach a state of "relaxed readiness," which will encourage their impulses, and discourage their internal censors

Many actors will tell you that learning the lines is the easy part; making it come out of their mouths as if for the first time is the hard part, especially with Shakespeare. Shakespeare can sound like a song, but how do you make it sound like real people talking to each other? Actors listen to each other, and try to respond to what they hear in the moment of the play. Listening is a very important part of acting; it keeps the moment real—and the characters believable.

Find a partner, then comfortably sit facing your partner, in fairly close proximity. You and your partner will be mirrors of each other. One partner will begin as the leader, and the other partner will move as their reflection. You must begin by using smaller, slower movements, and work up to the maximum range of movement that your partner can follow. Partners should make eye-contact and see each other as a whole picture, rather than following each other's small motions with their eyes. Switch leaders and repeat.

After the second leader has had a turn, students will stand and increase their range of movement. Switch leaders and repeat. Keep going, but now there is no leader. See what happens, and then discuss.

# classroom activities & resources

## 7. **FOUR UP** (*approximately 5 minutes, but can also be extended*)

- helps the ensemble work together
- helps to slowly introduce physical activities in the classroom
- helps to bring focus to the classroom

For this game, everyone should be seated; it would be fine for the students to stay seated at their desks. The goal of this game is to have four people standing at all times. There are a few rules—everyone can stand up whenever they want, but only four should be standing at a time and they can only stand up for a maximum of 5 seconds. Finally everyone needs to pay attention to each other and everybody should participate and try to stand with a group of four.

A sense of community and having a strong focus can be the keys to a successful production (and classroom too!). This exercise can help to establish those things in a fun way that is also getting the students up on their feet.

## 8. **ZING! BALL** (*approximately 5 minutes and requires a soft ball about 8-12 inches in diameter*)

- helps the ensemble grow together
- helps the students let go of their internal “censor” and begin tapping into their impulses
- brings the physical and the vocal actor tools together

Stand in a circle, facing into the center. In this game, the ball carries with it energy. This energy is like a feedback loop that increases the energy, speed, and focus of the entire group by the amount that each actor-student puts into the ball. The idea is to keep the ball moving in the circle without letting the energy drop. There should be no space between throw and catch. There should be no thought as to whom the student will throw the ball to next. As the ball is thrown, to keep the intensity of the energy, you must make eye contact with the person you are throwing the ball to, and at the moment of release, the person throwing should say “Zing!” Experiment with the way you say “Zing!” It could be loud or soft, in a character voice, or in whatever way you wish, as long as it is impulsive and with energy.

Shakespeare has love scenes, sword fights, betrayals, and all sorts of relationships in his plays. Actors must be able to experiment, follow their impulses, and create character without the fear of failure.

## 9. **ZING! BALL (WITHOUT A BALL)** (*approximately 5-7 minutes*)

- asks the students to make their imagination clear to the ensemble
- focuses the students on physical detail

This exercise builds on Zing! Ball. Take the ball out of the circle and set it aside. Take an imaginary Zing! Ball out of your pocket. Grow this ball from a tiny rubber ball into a huge balloon. Using “Zing!,” toss the ball to someone across the circle, and as it floats down, that person will try to catch it with the same weight and speed as you threw it. Then he/she will recreate the ball into a different weight and size, making it clear to the rest of the circle how it changed. In the same way as Zing! Ball, work around the circle.

The wide range of vocabulary in Shakespeare’s plays can often be intimidating as one reads the scripts. The actor’s job is to make the language clear, and this is often accomplished by very specific physical gesturing.

## 10. **WAH!** (*approximately 5-10 minutes*)

[To the teacher: Want to see Wah! in action with a group of students? Watch this brief video, <http://www.tinyurl.com/wahwarmup>]

- facilitates physical awareness and risk-taking
- encourages vocal projection
- helps actors increase their sense of timing and decrease response time

Stand in a circle, facing in. No one in the circle is a student or teacher any longer, but rather a fearsome warrior. Press the palms of your hands flat together to become a sword.



# classroom activities & resources

To begin the game, one warrior raises his or her sword straight up, then brings it down, pointing at another warrior in the circle. Warriors must make excellent eye contact to avoid confusion. As the warrior brings down his or her sword, he or she utters a fearsome battle cry, by saying, “Wah!” (Be wary, warriors, of shouting, which comes from the throat and leads to laryngitis, a warrior’s worst enemy. Using the good support and deep breathing from your vocal warm-up will help you keep your vocal chords in top fighting condition.) When you become the recipient of “Wah!,” raise your sword up above your head. While your sword is raised, the warriors on either side of you slash towards her stomach, as they cry “Wah!” in unison. Then make eye contact with someone else in the circle, slash your sword towards them with a final defiant “Wah!” Each “battle” should therefore include three cries of “Wah!”

As the group becomes familiar with the game, work to increase your speed and volume. This is a silly game; remember that warriors don’t care about “looking cool” because they’re too busy fighting unending battles. When a warrior misses his or her cue, stop the round and start it again until everyone is comfortable being loud and making big physical choices.

## 11. **ZIP ZAP ZOP!** (approximately 5 minutes)

- facilitates mental focus
- encourages eye contact and team work
- builds a sense of rhythm and pace

[To the teacher: For a demonstration of this community builder, watch this video, <http://www.tinyurl.com/zipzapzop>, for a demonstration and instructions.]

Stand in a circle, facing in. Bring your hands to your chest in a prayer pose. Make sure everyone can see each person in the circle. Eye contact is going to be very important! Point your hands like a laser, make clear eye contact at another person in the circle, and say “zip,” “zap” or “zop,” picking up your cue from the person before you. While maintaining the word sequence of zip, zap, zop as well as the rhythm, start slowly and eventually build speed.

## 12. **TO BE!** (approximately 7-10 minutes)

- helps students to listen to and work with one another, creating a supportive learning community
- brings the physical and the vocal actor tools together
- facilitates mental focus
- introduces students to some of Shakespeare’s language and characters

[To the teacher: consider using ZIP ZAP ZOP here as a scaffold to this warm-up.]

Stand in a circle, facing in. One person will start as the keeper of the energy. There are multiple ways to pass the energy, all based off Shakespeare’s plays and words. The idea is to keep the energy constantly in motion around and across the circle. Introduce each option one at a time, so students have time to experiment with each option as the game builds in complexity.

- “To be!”—make eye contact with the person to the left or right of you. Reach towards them with your hand (as if you are clutching Yorick’s skull) while speaking this line from *Hamlet*. Now that person has the energy.
- “Not to be!”—to change the direction the energy is flowing, hold up your hands in a “stop” gesture while speaking this line from *Hamlet*. The person who tried to pass you the energy now has to send it in another direction.
- “Get thee to a nunnery!”—to send the energy across the circle, point to someone and deliver this line from *Hamlet*. That person now has the energy
- “Out, damn spot!” —to “ricochet” the energy back across the circle in response to “Get thee to a nunnery!”, make an X with your arms as you speak this line from *Macbeth*. The person who tried to pass you the energy now has to send it in another direction.
- “Romeo!” “Juliet!”—to trade places with someone else in the circle, make eye contact and stretch your arm towards them as you cry, “Romeo!” They must then respond “Juliet!” Now run gracefully past each other. The person who cried “Juliet” now has the energy.

# classroom activities & resources

- “Double, double, toil and trouble!”—this line from *Macbeth* instructs everyone to change places at once, leading to a completely new circle. Whoever cried, “Double, double, toil and trouble!” keeps the energy.
- “A horse, a horse!”—Whoever has the energy may call out this line from *Richard III*. Everyone else in the circle must respond, “My kingdom for a horse!” while galloping in place like a horse. The energy stays with the person who gave the command.
- “Exit, pursued by a bear!”—point to someone across the circle as you speak this stage direction from *A Winter’s Tale*. Run through the circle to take their spot. Your classmate must now run around the outside of the circle to take your previous spot in the circle. That person now has the energy.
- Add your own rules! Choose short lines from the play you’re studying and match them with a gesture and action. Where does the energy travel?

Your goal as a group is to keep the energy moving in the circle without letting focus drop. As the class becomes more comfortable with each command, the game will get faster and faster, and you will need to think less and less about what to say next.

Experiment with the way you deliver the lines! There is no wrong way, as long as you speak the lines with energy.

## 13. WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

Form two parallel lines, and enough room in between for “action” to take place. The first student in one line, Student A, steps into the empty space between the two lines and begins miming any action (ex. bouncing a basketball). The first student in the opposite line, Student B, steps out and addresses Student A, saying their first name (a good name reinforcer!) and asking, “[Name], what are you doing?” Student A then states any action that is not what they are miming (e.g. “baking a cake”). Student B then begins miming the action that Student A has just stated, and the next student steps out to continue the exercise. 🏰



Fu Xiru as Zi Dan (Hamlet) in Shanghai Jingju Theatre's 2016 production of *The Revenge of Prince Zi Dan (Hamlet)*, touring to Chicago Shakespeare Theater and directed by Shi Yukun. Photo by Xinhua/Zou Zheng.

# classroom activities & resources

## Teaching "Hamlet" with Film

BY MARY T. CHRISTEL

Given that Shakespeare as a playwright in Elizabethan England found himself at the epicenter of popular culture, one wonders if he would be writing screenplays if he were alive today. It is up to the savvy teacher to determine how to help students “read” Shakespeare in the three ways Mary Ellen Dakin suggests: as text, as performance, and as film. Dakin’s book, *Reading Shakespeare Film First*, might seem contradictory to the approach many English/Language Arts teachers take. How can one “read Shakespeare” studying film first? Film frequently follows the reading of a play and functions as “dessert” at the unit’s end. The strategies that follow are intended to help teachers reconsider how and when film can be used in order to motivate, clarify, and enrich students’ engagement with the play.

### FILMS CAN BE USED BEFORE READING...

#### ...to preview the story, characters and themes

Many of the stories that Shakespeare dramatized were familiar, even well known, to his audience, so providing students with a broad outline of the plot prior to reading would be consistent with the knowledge that Renaissance audiences brought to many of the plays they saw performed on stage. For an easy and quick way to introduce the play, you might screen *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales – Hamlet* (1992) with your students, an animated short that aired on HBO in the 1990s and now is distributed on DVD by Ambrose Video. This twenty-five minute, condensed animation retains the play’s original language and presents the essentials of the story. To give students a viewing focus, each can be assigned a particular character or plot thread to track through the film and write a summary about the importance of their assigned element to the work as a whole. Charged with becoming an “expert” on that element, students can use their summary as a focus while reading the play or seeing the performance, helping those who may feel overwhelmed by understanding a complicated narrative or Shakespeare’s language.

#### ...to create context

Film can be utilized as an introductory element to a unit to provide context prior to reading. Historian Michael Wood takes viewers on a lively tour of various locations throughout contemporary England to explore Shakespeare’s life, times, and plays in this acclaimed four-part series, *In Search of Shakespeare* (2004). Teachers can provide context by showing a commercially released film that “sets the stage” for the Elizabethan era, enabling students to get a sense of the politics, social customs, and “look” of the times. A film like *Elizabeth* (1998) starring Cate Blanchett has little to do with Shakespeare, but provides a vivid glimpse into the monarch’s struggle to claim and maintain the throne. *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) and *Anonymous* (2011) offer glimpses into the world of early modern theater practice and Shakespeare himself, but the liberties these films take with conventional understandings of historical events may create more confusion than clarity for some students. Excerpts, however, can help students visualize the time and the occasion of attending the theater. Films Media Group (<http://ffh.films.com/>) has an extensive catalogue of films useful in providing context; many titles are available as streaming video.

### FILMS CAN BE USED DURING READING...

#### ...to clarify understanding

For students who are having difficulty visualizing the action or fully comprehending the language, it can be beneficial to watch a film adaptation incrementally, act by act, in conjunction with reading the play. A dynamic way of approaching the play in class could involve three components:

- studying and discussing key scenes and speeches
- viewing portions of a film version (to fill in the gaps between what students are reading or to revisit moments that students found confusing)
- exploring key scenes and speeches through “active Shakespeare” strategies found in the Classroom Activities portion of this handbook.

# classroom activities & resources

The "Terms to Explore the Page-to-Screen Process" and "Key Questions for Classroom Discussion" on the following pages offer students the tools to "read" films as a visual text.

## ...to make comparisons

Just as the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries adapted Shakespeare's scripts to fit the fashion and tastes of audiences Shakespeare's scripts are often transformed to support the spectacle of the cinema. Every cinematic adapter of a complex dramatic text must grapple with the question: What can the art of film visually reveal through a close-up, crosscut, or a montage that effectively augments or replaces the text? In the past thirty years, Shakespeare's plays have been transported to modern settings that maintain the broad outlines of plot and character but replace Shakespeare's blank verse with contemporary language and colloquialisms. Viewing such adaptations in class allows students to see varied interpretations of the same story, opening up the idea that Shakespeare's plays can be interpreted in a multitude of ways. See the Film Finder on page 91 for suggested adaptations.

## TERMS TO EXAMINE THE PAGE-TO-SCREEN PROCESS *(adapted from Film Adaptation, ed. James Naremore)*

**Fidelity:** Much discussion in film adaptation criticism focuses on how faithful a film is to the source material. Obviously, film and literature use different narrative strategies and tools of composition. A fruitful way to have students approach the question of fidelity is to ask them to list the scenes, characters, motifs, and symbols that are essential to telling the story of the source text. Then as they watch a film adaptation, they can keep track of how those elements are handled by the film.

**Film as Digest:** This concept acknowledges that the written text is far more detailed and comprehensive in its ability to set a scene, develop a character, reveal a narrative point of view, or create a symbol. Film works best in developing plot and showing action.

**Condensation:** In film, characters and events need to be collapsed or composited in order to fit the limitations and conventions of the film adaptation. Students can explore this term by determining which characters can be combined based on their common functions in the text.

**Immediacy:** Viewing a film is a far more "immediate" cognitive experience than reading a play. We decode visual images much faster and more readily than the printed word.

**Point of View:** The camera can express a point of view, just as the narrator of a written text. Point of view in film is visual and subtle. Here are three ways to express or describe the point of view in a film:

- Neutral: the camera is merely recording events as they happen in a reportorial fashion. Most common shot.
- Subjective: the camera assumes the point of view of one of the character so the viewer sees what the character sees.
- Authorial: the director very deliberately focuses the camera on a feature of a sequence or shot to comment on the action or reveal something.

**Shot and Sequence:** As defined by *Basic Film Terms: A Visual Dictionary*, a "shot" is the "basic unit of film structure or an unbroken strip of film made by an uninterrupted running of the camera." Think of a shot as a "still" image that is combined with other still images to create a moving picture. A shot captures its subject from a particular distance and angle. The camera can be stationary or moving as it captures its subject. Individual shots then are joined together by the editing process to create a sequence of action.

## KEY QUESTIONS FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

### **Prior to viewing:**

- What are the essential scenes that must be included in an adaptation to cover the basic plot of Shakespeare's play? What constitutes the exposition, inciting incident, central conflict, complications, climax and resolution to represent and streamline the central action?
- What point of view dominates the play? Who is the central character? Which character has the most soliloquies or asides and might have the strongest relationship with the audience as a result? How could the viewpoint of the central character or the character that has the most direct connection with the audience be represented through the use of the camera?



# classroom activities & resources

- What details does the play provide to guide the casting of principle actors for the central characters? Looking at the text carefully, which details regarding physical appearance, class, or behavior should be embodied by an actor to make an immediate impression on the viewer?
- Which supporting characters are essential to the development of the plot and main characters? Which characters serve the same functions in the story? How might several of those characters be combined in order to condense the story in helpful and necessary ways?
- Which central images, motifs, symbols, or metaphors are central to the play? How could one or two of these literary techniques be translated into visual or sound techniques to make their impact more immediate in order to support or to replace the play's language? How would they be represented on the screen or through the musical score?

## ***During viewing:***

- How much of the dialogue from the play is used in a scene?
- To what extent does the camera work seem unobtrusive, natural, obvious, or stylized?
- Which character(s) appears mostly in one shots?
- At what point in the scene are two shots used? What is the effect of their use at that point?
- What is the typical distance (close, medium, long) of the camera to the subject of the shots? To what extent does the manipulation of camera distance make the scene an intimate one or not?
- To what extent are most of the shots at eye level, slightly above, or slightly below? How do subtle changes in angle influence how the viewer perceives the character in the shot? Are extreme high or low angles incorporated at times? To what effect?
- To what extent does the camera move? When? What is the effect of the movement?
- To what extent does the sequence use music? If it does, when do you become aware of the music and how does it set a mood or punctuate parts of the dialogue?

## ***After viewing:***

- Which of the screenwriter's choices to condense or expand the events of the play are the most successful in translating Shakespeare's text to the screen? Which choices are less successful or satisfying?
- Which narrative elements (events, characters, key speeches) omitted from the screen adaptation shift the focus of the comedy, tragedy, or history in comparison to the original text?
- If any characters were composites of two or more characters, what was gained or lost by reducing the number of characters or altering the function of a particular character?
- Which actors performed their roles in expected and/or unexpected ways? Did Shakespeare's play dictate how roles should be performed?
- Which visual elements of the film made the strongest impression upon you as a viewer?
- How did the visuals help draw your attention to an element of plot, a character, or a symbol that you might have missed or failed to understand when reading the play?
- As a reader of the play, how did viewing the film help you to better understand the overall plot, a particular character, or specific symbol/theme?

# classroom activities & resources

## "Hamlet" Film Finder

BY MARY T. CHRISTEL

### TOP FIVE FILMS TO INVITE INTO YOUR CLASSROOM:

1. **Shakespeare: The Animated Tales - Hamlet** (1992 NR 25 min) Ambrose Video  
This twenty-five-minute condensation of the play provides the perfect overview of the characters and plot.
2. **Shakespeare Uncovered: Hamlet** (2012 NR 55 min) PBS  
David Tennant discusses the play with various actors who have portrayed Hamlet and develops into the play's enduring themes.
3. **Discovering Hamlet** (1990 NR 53 min) Acorn Media  
Behind-the-scenes look at the Renaissance Theatre Company's production of *Hamlet* directed by Derek Jacobi and starring an "up-and-coming" actor, Kenneth Branagh in the title role. Stream through Amazon Prime as well as at <http://fmovies.yt/watch/RGbLBvY-discovering-hamlet.html>
4. **Thug Notes Summary and Analysis: Hamlet** (2013 NR 4:55 min, explicit language)  
Series host Sparkey Sweets, Ph.D. presents a concise, informative, and irreverent summary and brief analysis of the play. Available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A98tf9krihg&v=en>
5. **The Lion King** (1994 G 88 min) Walt Disney Studios  
Disney famously used *Hamlet* as the inspiration its musical coming-of-age tale of Simba, his wise father, and his treacherous uncle.

### NOTABLE ACTORS AND DIRECTORS INTERPRET HAMLET

These versions offer diverse approaches to the play in terms of adapting the source material and developing a design concept.

#### Stage productions on video

David Tennant	2009	Gregory Doran/Royal Shakespeare Company
Maxine Peake	2015	Sarah Frankcon, Margaret Williams/Manchester Royal Exchange
Jonathan Goad	2016	Antoni Cimolino, Shelagh O'Brien/Stratford Festival
Paapa Essiedu	2016	Simon Godwin/Royal Shakespeare Company

#### Cinematic adaptations

Laurence Olivier	1948	Laurence Olivier/Two Cities Films
Mel Gibson	1990	Franco Zeffirelli/Canal +, Icon Productions
Kenneth Branagh	1996	Kenneth Branagh/Castle Rock Entertainment
Ethan Hawke	2000	Michael Almereyda/Double A Films

### OTHER TIMES, OTHER PLACES

1. **Hamlet** (1921) silent era version directed by Svend Gade  
The first film to feature the "melancholy Dane."
2. **The Bad Sleep Well** (1960)  
Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa sets a loose adaptation of *Hamlet* in the corporate world.
3. **Hamlet** (1964)  
This Russian language adaptation from the Soviet era emphasizes the political turmoil that embroils *Hamlet* and visually presents the castle as a prison.

# classroom activities & resources

4. **Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead** (1990)

Playwright Tom Stoppard places *Hamlet*'s college chums at the center of their own existential comedy as they encounter the characters we know from Shakespeare's tragedy. This is a cinematic adaptation of Stoppard's 1966 play.

5. **Last Action Hero** (1993)

Can you imagine Arnold Schwarzenegger as *Hamlet*? Early in the film, a short clip shows a young fan falling asleep watching Olivier's famous film. He dreams of his favorite brawny action movie star portraying the ambivalent prince in a more decisive, cartoonishly violent manner.

6. **Royal Deceit** (aka *Prince of Jutland* 1994)

Christian Bale and Helen Mirren star in a retelling of *Hamlet* that draws on the historical Danish source material. Characters may be changed but the basic scenario and themes remain the same.

7. **The Fifteen Minute Hamlet** (1995)

Tom Stoppard edits the play to its bare bones for comedic effect. Various productions are available on YouTube and Vimeo.

8. **A Midwinter's Tale** (aka *In the Bleak Midwinter* 1995)

Director Kenneth Branagh presents an out-of-work actor mounting a Christmastime production of *Hamlet* to save his sister's financially strapped church in a village called Hope. A gentle, quirky comedy ensues.

9. **The Banquet** (aka *Legend of the Black Scorpion* 2006)

Combining elements of both Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Ibsen's *Ghosts*, a Tang Dynasty empress seeks revenge against her treacherous husband who is responsible for his brother's death. In this adaptation Gertrude takes center stage.

10. **Hamlet 2** (2008)

This R-rated comedy follows the travails of an unhinged high school drama teacher who writes, directs, and stars in a musical version of *Hamlet* with hilariously profane and catastrophic results.

11. **Haider** (2014)

The third film in Indian filmmaker Vishal Bharadwaj's Shakespeare trilogy sets *Hamlet* in Kashmir during the 1995 insurgency. The adaptation allows the audience more time to meet Haider's father than Shakespeare's play and reimagines the ghost of *Hamlet*'s father. The major structural elements of Shakespeare's play remain intact until the final act.

12. **Ophelia** (2018)

Based on Lisa Klein's YA novel and starring Daisy Ridley, the film focuses on Ophelia's point of view as she serves as Gertrude's lady-in-waiting and captures *Hamlet*'s romantic attention.

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MARY T. CHRISTEL taught AP Literature and Composition as well as media and film studies courses at Adlai E. Stevenson High School from 1979 to 2012. She has published several works on media literacy, as well as contributing articles a number of edited collections on teaching.

# techno shakespeare

## Chicago Shakespeare Theater

### **Chicago Shakespeare Theater's website**

Access articles and teacher handbooks for twenty-two of Shakespeare's plays, as well as information on introducing your students to Shakespeare in performance. Also online are a number of teacher handbooks for other plays, like *Shakespeare in Love*, that CST has staged.

[www.chicagoshakes.com/teacherhandbooks](http://www.chicagoshakes.com/teacherhandbooks)

## Comprehensive Link Sites

### **Absolute Shakespeare**

Access a comprehensive collection of Shakespeare's work, including full texts and summaries, a timeline, and lists of film adaptations.

[absoluteshakespeare.com](http://absoluteshakespeare.com)

### **Shakespeare in Europe Sh:in:E**

Access an array of web links categorized into criticism, theater and film, music, adaptation, education, and more. Website created and maintained by Basel University in Switzerland.

[shine.unibas.ch/metasite.html](http://shine.unibas.ch/metasite.html)

### **Shakespeare Resource Center**

A collection of links and articles on teaching Shakespeare's plays.

<http://bardweb.net/index.html>

### **The Reduced Shakespeare Company: The Complete Works of William Shakespeare Abridged**

A comedy performance of abridged versions of all of Shakespeare's works.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vd4h16DWpdU>

## Teaching *Hamlet*

### **A Teacher Guide to the Signet Edition**

This teachers' guide provides summaries of each act in addition to study questions to consider while reading the play and follow up writing prompts.

<http://www.penguin.com/static/pdf/teachersguides/hamlet.pdf>

### **Shakespeare Online**

The full text of the play is provided with accompanying activities and information.

<http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamletscenes.html>

### **Internet Shakespeare Editions: *Hamlet***

This site contains the full text of all three different "original" versions of *Hamlet*, along with a collection of articles on key issues and links to descriptions of over 190 productions.

<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/Texts/Ham/>

### **Absolute Shakespeare Art**

Paintings depicting scenes from *Hamlet* are linked to relevant excerpts from the text.

<https://absoluteshakespeare.com/pictures/hamlet.htm>



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## **Royal Shakespeare Company Education Resources: *Hamlet***

This resource from the RSC provides a wealth of information on the play, including reviews of notable productions.  
<https://www.rsc.org.uk/hamlet/education>

## **Royal Shakespeare Company Past Productions: *Hamlet***

This site has information about past Royal Shakespeare Company performances dating back to 1962, including twelve performances of *Hamlet*.  
<https://www.rsc.org.uk/about-us/history/past-rsc-productions>

## ***Hamlet* Background and Plot Summary/Study Guide**

This resource provides a summary of the play along with information about characters and themes.  
<https://cummingsstudyguides.net/xHamlet.html>

## **Teaching Resources for *Hamlet***

This resource provides a summary along with study guides, descriptions of adaptations, and additional helpful links.  
<http://www.shakespearehigh.com/library/surfbard/plays/hamlet/>

## **Lesson Plans for *Hamlet***

This site links to many creative lesson plan ideas for teaching *Hamlet* and includes resources like interviews with actors and directors, a *New York Times* project asking students to submit videos of themselves performing *Hamlet*, and even Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy presiding over a “trial” of *Hamlet* for PBS.  
<https://www.shakespearehelp.com/hamlet-lesson-plans/>

## **An Analysis of Shakespeare’s Sources for *Hamlet***

This site provides a discussion of the sources Shakespeare used for writing *Hamlet*.  
<http://www.shakespeare-online.com/sources/hamletsources.html>

## **Saxo Grammaticus’s *Amleth*, *Prince of Denmark***

This site provides the full text of the earliest source that inspired Shakespeare’s play. Relevant for a fuller understanding of how Shakespeare adapted from his sources.  
<https://www.pitt.edu/~dash/amleth.html>

## **Folger Library Educational Resources**

This site provides extensive resources and links for teaching *Hamlet*.  
<https://www.folger.edu/hamlet>

## **BBC Shakespeare Animated Tales *Hamlet***

This animated version of the play covers the entire story in about 20 minutes.  
<https://youtu.be/OtNMjZoZNbM>

# Texts and Early Editions

## **The First Folio of William Shakespeare (University of Virginia)**

Access *Hamlet* and others of Shakespeare’s plays online in their first folio additions.  
<http://search.lib.virginia.edu/catalog/003081548>

## **Folger Digital Texts**

All of Shakespeare’s plays are available to download here in a variety of file formats from this site. Great for downloading plays into a Word document and cutting the text!  
<http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/download/>

# techno shakespeare

## **The Internet Shakespeare Editions**

This website has transcriptions and high quality facsimiles of Shakespeare's folios and quartos, categorized by play with links to any articles written about the play that can be found on the website.

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

## **Introduction to the First Folio: Creating the First Folio**

This video by the Royal Shakespeare Company explains how Shakespeare was published during his lifetime and the creation of the First Folio after his death.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6\\_vCC9coaHY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_vCC9coaHY)

## **Making a Folio**

This video demonstrates how to make a folio like Shakespeare's First Folio.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MmGmv6Ys1w>

## **Shakespeare's First Folio**

This page from the British Library provides an easy to understand introduction to the First Folio.

[bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/landprint/shakespeare/](http://bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/landprint/shakespeare/)

## **Shakespeare Online**

The full text of the play is provided with accompanying activities and information.

<http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/tamingscenes.html>

## **Treasures in Full: Shakespeare in Quarto**

A copy of the quartos, available to compare side-by-side, as well as background information. This website was created and is maintained by the British Library.

<https://www.bl.uk/Treasures/SigDiscovery/UI/search.aspx>

## **What Is a Folio?**

This image shows how to read a Folio text; part of Massachusetts Institute of Technology's website "Hamlet on the Ramparts."

<http://shea.mit.edu/ramparts/newstuff3.htm>

# Words, Words, Words

## **Open Source Shakespeare Concordance**

Use this concordance to view all the uses of a word or word form in all of Shakespeare's works or in one play.

<http://www.opensourceshakespeare.com/concordance/findform.php>

## **Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary**

Part of Tufts University's Perseus Digital Library and created by Alexander Schmidt.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.03.0079>

## **Shakespeare's Words Glossary and Language Companion**

Created by David Crystal and Ben Crystal, this site is a free online companion to the best-selling glossary and language companion, Shakespeare's Words.

[shakespeareswords.com](http://shakespeareswords.com)

# techno shakespeare

## Shakespeare and Elizabethan England

### **The Elizabethan Costuming Page**

Read articles on what Elizabethan woman and men wore, with drawings.

<http://www.elizabethancostume.net/>

### **Elizabeth I: Ruler and Legend**

This web-based exhibit is a companion to The Newberry Library's 2003/2004 Queen Elizabeth exhibit.

<https://www.newberry.org/elizabeth-i-ruler-and-legend>

### **The Elizabethan Theatre**

Read a lecture on Elizabethan Theatre by Professor Hilda D. Spear, University of Dundee, held at Cologne University.

<http://www.uni-koeln.de/phil-fak/englisch/shakespeare/>

### **Life in Elizabethan England: Betrothal and Wedding**

This site contains information on marriage contracts of the time, as well as links to other aspects of Elizabethan life.

<http://elizabethan.org/compendium/9.html>

### **The Map of Early Modern London Online**

This resource includes a detailed, searchable map of Shakespeare's London and an evolving encyclopedia of the places listed.

<http://mapoflondon.uvic.ca/index.htm>

### **Proper Elizabethan Accents**

A guide to speaking like an Elizabethan.

<http://www.renfaire.com/Language/index.html>

### **Queen Elizabeth I**

Learn more about Queen Elizabeth and the people, events and concepts key to the study of the Elizabethan Age.

<http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/eliza.htm>

### **The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust**

Learn more about Shakespeare's life and birthplace through an extensive online collection.

<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/home.html>

### **Shakespeare's Globe Theatre**

The Encyclopedia Britannica's entry includes a detailed biography, contextual articles on Elizabethan literature, art, theaters and culture, and brief entries on famous Shakespearean actors, directors and scholars.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Globe-Theatre>

### **Designing Shakespeare Collections**

This link offers many production photos focusing on design practice at the Royal Shakespeare Company and other British theaters. The photos can be enlarged and used for a myriad of classroom activities and research. *Hamlet* has eighty-two productions listed.

<http://ahds.rhul.ac.uk/ahdscollections/docroot/shakespeare/playlist.do>

### **The History of Costume by Braun and Schneider**

View costume illustrations of different social classes and cultures from various historical times.

<http://www.siue.edu/COSTUMES/history.html>

# techno shakespeare

## **The Internet Broadway Database**

This online database of Broadway plays is a great place to search for "Shakespeare" and learn about some productions of the Bard's works. This will only give information about shows performed on Broadway.

<https://www.ibdb.com/>

## **The Internet Movie Database**

Similar to IBDB, utilize this online movie database to search for "Shakespeare" and learn about the different cinematic versions of his plays.

<http://www.imdb.com/>

## **Shakespeare's Staging**

This website surveys staging of Shakespeare's plays, from Shakespeare's lifetime through modern times.

<http://shakespearestaging.berkeley.edu/>

# Shakespeare in Art

## **The Faces of Elizabeth I**

Access a collection of paintings of Queen Elizabeth spanning her lifetime.

<http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/elizface.htm>

## **Folger Shakespeare Library Digital Image Collection**

In August 2014, over 80,000 images from Folger's collection were released for use in the public domain. Images include production photos, books, manuscripts and art.

<http://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/view/all>

## **Shakespeare Illustrated**

Harry Rusche, English professor at Emory University, created this website that explores nineteenth-century paintings depicting scenes from Shakespeare's plays. *Hamlet* has ten linked works of art; the website is searchable by play title and artist name.

[english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare\\_Illustrated/Shakespeare.html](http://english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare_Illustrated/Shakespeare.html)

## **Tudor and Elizabethan Portrait Gallery**

England's National Portrait Gallery's Tudor and Elizabethan collection contains portraits from 1485 to 1603. These portraits are viewable on this website.

<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/explore/by-period/tudor.php>



# suggested reading

**Barton, John. *Playing Shakespeare*. London: Methuen, 1986.** A bible for Shakespearean actors, this classic book by John Barton (of Royal Shakespeare Company fame) offers any reader with an interest in Shakespeare's words an insider's insight into making Shakespeare's language comprehensible.



***Basic Film Terms: A Visual Dictionary*. Dir. Sheldon Renan. Pyramid Films, 1970.** This short film was created with the purpose of teaching film technique and film appreciation in schools. Basic terms are explored and defined, which can aid in the classroom analysis of a film.

**Bevington, David, ed. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. 4th edition. New York: Longman, 1992.** A compendium of Shakespeare's complete works, with an excellent, readable introduction and clearly written footnotes.

**Bevington, David, ed. *Murder Most Foul: Hamlet through the Ages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.** This book is an account of Hamlet from its sources in Scandinavian epic lore to the way it was performed and understood in its own day, and then how the play has fared down to the present including performances on stage, television, and film.



**Boose, Lynda E., and Richard Burt. *Shakespeare, the Movie: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, and Video*. London: Routledge, 1997.** A valuable resource in teaching a wide variety of film adaptations, and especially the film adaptations of the 1990s. The first chapter provides an examination of the proliferation of film adaptations in the '90s that appeal to both teachers and students, and a useful overview of the styles of film adaptations that have evolved.

**Brockbank, Philip, ed. *Players of Shakespeare: Essays in Shakespearean Performance, Volumes 1–6*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.** Written by famous actors about the Shakespearean roles they have performed on the English stage, this collection of personal essays offers the reader a privileged look inside the characters and the artist's craft.

**Bullough, Geoffrey, ed. "Hamlet." *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare. Vol VII: The Tragedies*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1973.** The classic reference detailing Shakespeare's sources. Out of print, this multi-volume resource is well worth searching for in a library.

**Chrisp, Peter, and Steve Teague. *Shakespeare*. New York: DK Publishing, 2002.** Part of DK Eyewitness Books' "children's book series," this title, plus a number of others (Costume, Arms and Armor, Battle, Castle, Mythology) offers students of any age beautifully illustrated background information to complement a classroom's Shakespeare study.



**Christel, Mary T., and Scott Sullivan. *Lesson Plans for Creating Media-rich Classrooms*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2007.** This book provides sample lesson plans for incorporating media literacy into the curriculum. Particularly interesting are Scott Williams' lesson plans for creating movie trailers.

**Crystal, David, and Ben Crystal. *Shakespeare's Words: A Glossary and Language Companion*. London: Penguin Books, 2002.** An informative, easy-to-use one-volume dictionary devoted to Shakespeare.



**Dakin, Mary Ellen. *Reading Shakespeare with Young Adults*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2009.** This book offers practical strategies for how and why to teach Shakespeare.



**Davis, James E., and Ronald E. Salomone. *Teaching Shakespeare Today: Practical Approaches and Productive Strategies*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1993.** This text is similar in format to *Teaching Shakespeare into the Twenty-first Century*. In combination, they provide the greatest wealth of teaching ideas, including the use of film.

# suggested reading

**Frye, Northrop. *Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespeare Tragedy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973.** Frye's work is a classic in Shakespearean scholarship. This work examines tragedies and the role that the inevitability of death shapes the plays' focus on time.

**Gibson, Rex, ed. *Cambridge School Shakespeare: Hamlet*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014.** This unparalleled series, used extensively as a resource in CST's education efforts, includes most of Shakespeare's plays, as well as a book devoted to the Sonnets. Chicago Shakespeare Theater gratefully thanks Cambridge University Press for its permission to include various classroom activities annotated throughout this Teacher Handbook.

**Gibson, Rex. *Teaching Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.** The founder of the "active Shakespeare" movement worldwide, Rex Gibson compiles into one incomparable resource activities that encourage students to playfully and thoughtfully engage with Shakespeare's language and its infinite possibilities.

**Goddard, Harold C. *The Meaning of Shakespeare*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951.** A classic, post-war critical analysis, which is both readable and humanistic, devoting a chapter to each play.

**Greenblatt, Stephen. *Hamlet in Purgatory*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.** One of the great scholars of our time, Greenblatt explores the beliefs around death and Purgatory, which radically changed just decades before Shakespeare wrote one of the great ghost stories of all times.

**Grun, Bernard, and Werner Stein. *The Timetables of History*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991.** This book is a must-have resource for anyone who loves to place Shakespeare, his writing, and his royal characters in an historical context.

**Gurr, Andrew. *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.** This text provides a discussion of Elizabethan audiences and play-going conditions based on historical materials.

**Hapgood, Robert. *Shakespeare in Production: Hamlet*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999.** This excellent series combines the complete text with copious historical notes on production choices from the sixteenth to twenty-first centuries. It's a great resource for a teacher interested in performance choices.

**Hills, Wayne F., and Cynthia J. Ötchen. *Shakespeare's Insults: Educating Your Wit*. New York: Crown Trade Paperbacks, 1995.** The editors combed the canon for lines that will incite any classroom to speaking Shakespeare with wild abandon.



**Krueger, Ellen, and Mary T. Christel. *Seeing and Believing: How to Teach Media Literacy in the English Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers-Heinemann, 2001.** Providing the vocabulary of film analysis, this resource helps acquaint teachers with various ways to teach film adaptations as a cinematic text.

**Moncrief, Kathryn M., Kathryn R. McPherson, and Sarah Enloe, eds. *Shakespeare Expressed: Page, Stage, and Classroom in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013.** This collection contains various classroom activities, along with accessible essays.

**Mullaney, Steven. *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.** Among the myriad of books written about the Elizabethan stage, Mullaney's is one of the best.

**O'Brien, Peggy. *Shakespeare Set Free*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1993.** The Folger Library's revamping of teaching practice, encapsulated in this three-volume set (*Hamlet* is included in the second of three volumes.) has helped teachers approach Shakespeare as the performative script it was written to be. It is a treasure chest of creative and comprehensive lesson plans.

# suggested reading



**Naremore, James. *Film Adaptation*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000.** The opening chapters outline the strategies that filmmakers use in adapting literature into film, which include “cinema as digest” and issues of fidelity to the literary source.

**Neill, Michael and David Schalkwyk, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Tragedy*. Oxford University Press, 2016.** This collection of essays offers a dynamic and comprehensive understanding of Shakespeare’s tragedies from both literary and performance-based perspectives.

**Parsons, Keith, and Pamela Mason. *Shakespeare in Performance*. London: Salamander Books, 1995.** A beautifully illustrated book detailing the performance history of Shakespeare’s plays, both on the stage and in cinema.

**Partridge, Eric. *Shakespeare’s Bawdy*. London: Routledge, 2000.** Not for the prudish, Partridge’s classic work offers an alphabetical glossary of the sexual and scatological meanings of Shakespeare’s language. It will help the reader (including even the most Shakespeare-averse) understand another reason for this playwright’s broad appeal on stage.

**Peacock, John. *Costume: 1066 to the Present*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2006.** Among the many excellent costume books available, Peacock’s offers hundreds and hundreds of annotated sketches—an essential resource (from our point of view) for every English classroom’s study of Shakespeare.

**Poole, Adrian. *Tragedy: Shakespeare and the Greek Example*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1987.** Poole’s book is an erudite and a challenging read, but is well worth the effort, particularly in light of an exploration of *Hamlet*.

**Rosenthal, Daniel. *Shakespeare on Screen*. London: Hamlyn, 2000.** An excellent illustrated resource.

**Salomone, Ronald, ed. *Teaching Shakespeare into the Twenty-First Century*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997.** This collection of essays by high school teachers and college professors offers a wide range for strategies to teach Shakespeare, including several essays on the use of film and film adaptation in the classroom.

**Schmidt, Alexander, and Gregor Sarrazin. *Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary*. New York: Dover Publications, 1971.** No self-respecting cast of Shakespearean actors would be left alone in a rehearsal room without this fundamental, two-volume tome. Also online free of charge.

**Scott, Mark W. *Shakespeare for Students*. Detroit: Gale Research, 1992.** This excellent three-volume set (Book One includes *Hamlet*) is a collection of critical essays on 23 of Shakespeare’s plays plus the Sonnets, and edited for secondary school students.

**Stone, Lawrence. *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800*. New York: Harper & Rows, 1992.** This abridged version of Stone’s magnum opus presents his treatise about the evolution of the family in England from the impersonal, economically tied group to the smaller, affectively tied nuclear family.

**Watts, Cedric. *Twayne’s New Critical Introductions to Shakespeare*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988.** This reliable, accessible series of Shakespearean criticism is a good resource for many plays in the canon. Each volume is written by a single scholar, as opposed to a representing a collection of essays by a number of writers.

**Thompson, Ann and Neil Taylor, eds. *Hamlet: A Critical Reader*. London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016.** This collection of essays offers an overview of *Hamlet* through past critical lenses as well as new writing from today’s leading Shakespearians, with a final chapter dedicated to teaching resources.

## suggested reading

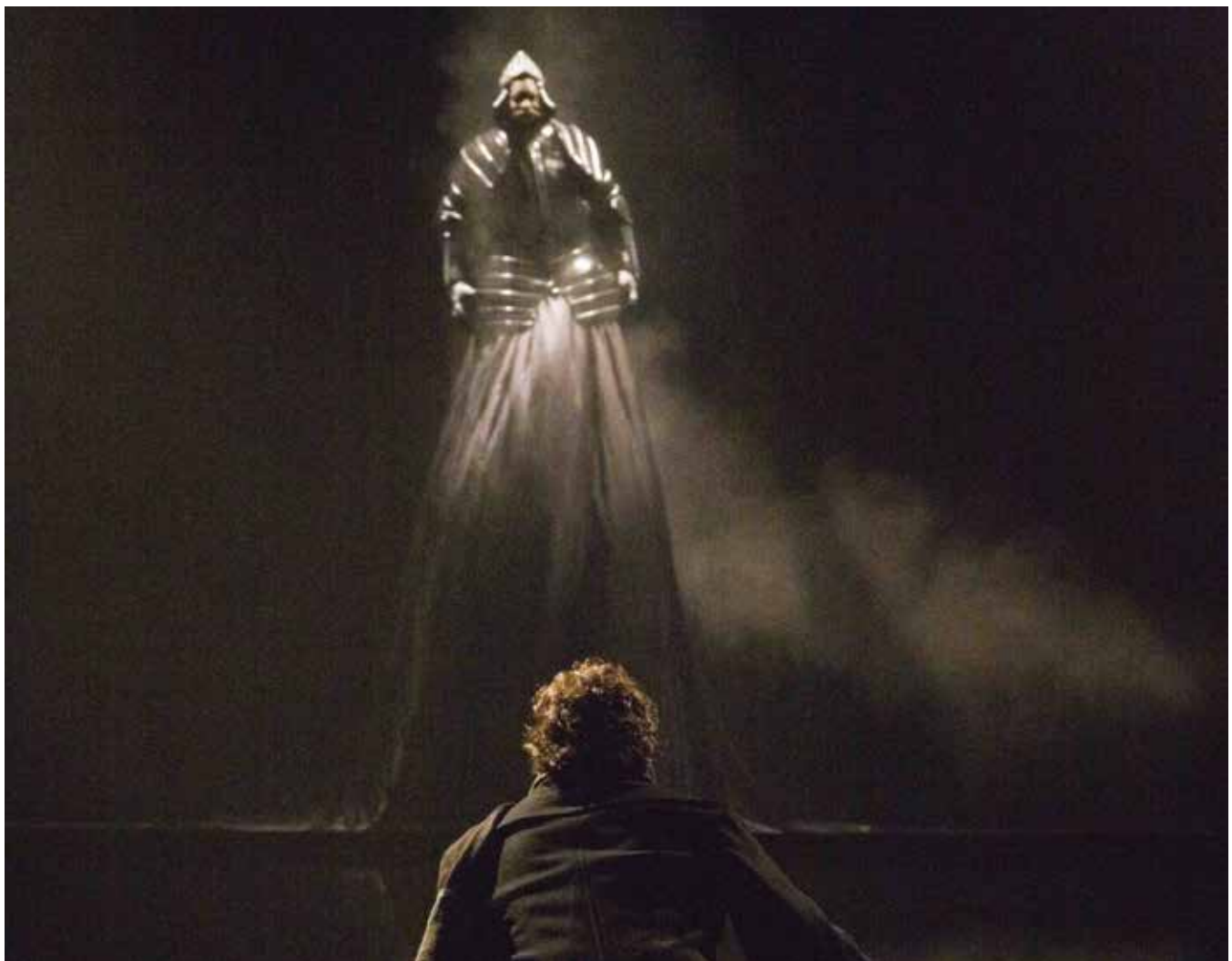
Thompson, Ayanna and Laura Turchi. *Teaching Shakespeare with Purpose: A Student-Centred Approach*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016. This book equips teachers to enable student-centered discovery of Shakespeare's complex texts by showing them how to teach Shakespeare's plays as living, breathing, and evolving texts.

Wilson, Edwin, ed. *Shaw on Shakespeare: An Anthology of Bernard Shaw's Writings on the Plays and Production of Shakespeare*. New York: Dutton, 1961. George Bernard Shaw was one of Shakespeare's most outspoken critics—and also one of the most humorous. Students who know of Shaw's work, too, may enjoy having him as an ally!

Wilson, Jean. *The Archeology of Shakespeare: The Material Legacy of Shakespeare's Theatre*. Gloucester: Far Thrupp, 1995. Among many books on early modern theater in England, this one is particularly interesting as it traces the roots of the first public theaters in England.



indicates a focus on methods for teaching Shakespeare through film



Ben Carlson as Hamlet and Bruce A. Young as the Ghost in Chicago Shakespeare Theater's 2006 production of *Hamlet*, directed by Terry Hands. Photo by Steve Leonard.



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