

Hamlet (Folger)

by William Shakespeare

Teacher's Guide

Written By Mary Ellen Snodgrass

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Synopsis

Act I, Scene 1

In Elsinore, Denmark, two months of official mourning concludes after the sudden death of King Hamlet. Horatio, a student at Wittenberg University and friend of Prince Hamlet, investigates a late-night apparition on the palace battlements reported by officers Marcellus and Bernardo. Shortly before cock-crow, the ghost returns, clad in battle armor as it was during a past war with Norway. Horatio fears that the menace of Fortinbras of Norway has caused unrest in the former King's spirit.

Act I, Scene 2

Dressed in black out of respect for his dead father, Hamlet perches glumly in the council hall. The new king, Hamlet's uncle Claudius, who has hastily married Hamlet's widowed mother Gertrude and seized the throne, urges his stepson not to return to Wittenberg. Hamlet agrees, revealing in veiled words his repugnance at Gertrude's unseemly haste in remarriage. He chooses to repress his criticisms. Horatio and the two officers tell Hamlet about the ghost's appearances. The prince arranges to join them that night to see for himself.

Act I, Scene 3

Meanwhile, Laertes, son of Polonius, the Lord Chamberlain, prepares to depart to enroll at school in Paris. Laertes warns his sister Ophelia to avoid Hamlet's wooing and to guard her reputation. Polonius gives fatherly advice about values and adds his own warning to Ophelia about too close an association with Hamlet.

Act I, Scene 4

Shortly before midnight, Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus stand atop the castle when the ghost appears. The prince addresses his father's perturbed spirit and asks why his soul returns to earth. The ghost beckons his son aside.

Act I, Scene 5

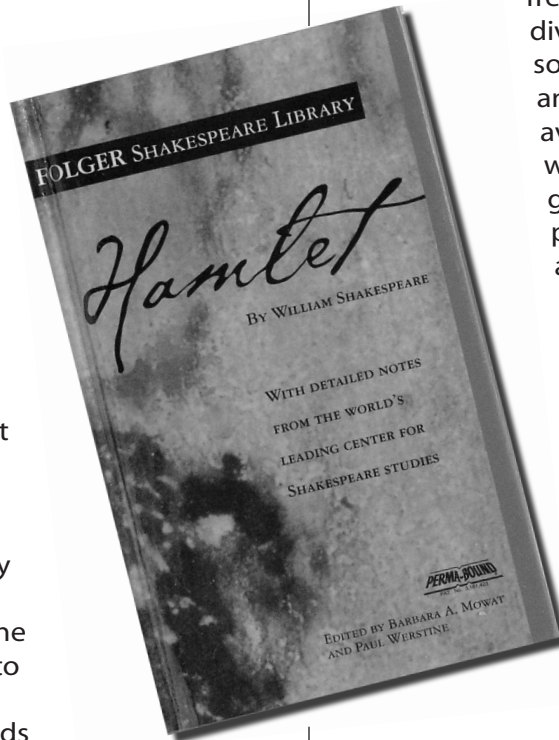
Alone with Hamlet, the ghost confides that, by serving time in Purgatory, he must free himself of earthly sin. The ghost divulges how Claudius poured poison in his ear, then stole both throne and Queen. The prince vows to avenge his father's foul murder, which deprived him of priestly forgiveness and cost him a lengthy penance. Hamlet pledges Horatio and Marcellus to secrecy while he investigates the ghost's allegations to determine if the spirit was truly the former King Hamlet.

Act II, Scene 1

Several weeks later, as Polonius sends money and messages to Laertes and dispatches Reynaldo to spy on him in Paris, Ophelia reports unsettled behavior in Hamlet. Ophelia and her father conclude that the prince suffers from love-sickness rather than outright madness.

Act II, Scene 2

Claudius and Gertrude interview Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two of Hamlet's classmates, to learn the cause of his bizarre antics. Polonius conducts a tedious audience with Claudius, reporting that Fortinbras has been upbraided by his uncle, the King of Norway, and has halted the drive against Denmark. Set to attack Poland, Fortinbras requests permission to pass through Denmark on his way to war. Claudius grants the request. Polonius then introduces his second issue: Prince Hamlet's seeming insanity. Polonius produces love letters to Ophelia to substantiate his belief that love-sick-



ness is causing Hamlet's malaise. Polonius and Claudius agree to conceal themselves behind an arras to observe Hamlet's private conversation with Ophelia.

The Prince, reading a book, arrives in the hall. Polonius tries to converse with him, but finds him too daft, too unpredictable to make sense. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern appear and attempt a diagnosis of Hamlet's madness. The Prince discerns that the King has enlisted his friends as spies and regales them with oratory. As a diversion, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern announce good news—an acting company is approaching Elsinore Castle.

Hamlet welcomes the troupe and requests a performance of a favorite passage about the fall of ancient Troy. A player performs the part with emotion. Hamlet instructs Polonius to take charge of the company so that they can set up for a performance the following evening. To the troupe manager, Hamlet requests the inclusion of a speech from *The Murder of Gonzago*. Left alone, Hamlet reveals in a soliloquy his real worry—that the ghost may have been a demon. To verify that Claudius is guilty of murder, usurpation, and adultery, he plans to observe the King's reaction to the added segment of the drama.

Act III, Scene 1

Claudius continues to question Rosencrantz and Guildenstern about Hamlet's peculiarities. Claudius and Polonius hide behind the hall curtain to observe Ophelia and Hamlet. The Prince ponders suicide as an answer to his difficulties. On greeting Ophelia, he suffers a mood swing and berates her for immodesty. After Hamlet withdraws, the King ponders the danger of his stepson's mental unrest and decides to send him on a diplomatic mission to England to collect Denmark's tribute. Polonius suggests that Gertrude should question her son about his increasingly difficult behavior.

Act III, Scene 2

The next night, the players meet with Hamlet to discuss acting. After their departure, the Prince and Horatio plot to keep watch on the King to find some proof of guilt in Claudius' behavior. The court assembles for the show, which Hamlet calls *The Mousetrap*. He continues to play the crazed role he has assumed and complains of the royal family's disrespect of the late king.

A pantomime demonstrates a loving royal couple. While the King sleeps, a usurper steals the royal crown and pours poison in the King's ear. The Queen finds her husband dead and mourns him. The killer pretends to console her. After the King's corpse is removed, the killer wins the Queen's love with gifts and blandishments. Claudius asks Hamlet if the play is intentionally offensive. Hamlet assures him that the play is harmless, but Claudius, wracked by conscience, rushes out, his entourage following in alarm.

Hamlet, left with Horatio, exults that the ruse worked and vows to take action against the guilty usurper. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern report that Gertrude wishes to confer with Hamlet in the privacy of her boudoir. Hamlet toys with the spies until Polonius summons him to the Queen. Hamlet, obeying the ghost's admonition against harming Gertrude, promises to use harsh words but no violence. Polonius hurries away to eavesdrop on the confrontation.

Act III, Scene 3

Claudius, left to his uneasy conscience, prays for forgiveness for killing his brother and stealing his brother's wife. Hamlet, who observes the kneeling King, considers dispatching him with a rapier thrust, but refrains from killing him at his prayers so Claudius may damn himself to hell.

Act III, Scene 4

In the privacy of her chamber, Gertrude upbraids her son for his perverse behavior. Hamlet retaliates so spiritedly that Gertrude is shaken by his accusations of complicity with Claudius and cries out in alarm. Polonius, lurking behind the arras, answers her call. Hamlet, mistaking the voice for Claudius, thrusts his sword into the fabric and skewers Polonius. The event fails to deter Hamlet's revilement of his lustful mother. The ghost returns to remind Hamlet to keep his promise to avenge his murder, but not to harm his mother. The Queen, who sees no ghost, believes Hamlet truly mad in addressing a vision. Hamlet, hauling Polonius' corpse behind him, departs with a reminder that he must accompany the King's spies to England.

Act IV, Scene 1

Badly shaken, Gertrude interrupts Claudius' conference with his spies and reports the events leading to Polonius' murder. Claudius realizes that Hamlet's

thrust at the unseen eavesdropper was meant for him. The King dispatches his spies to recover the corpse.

Act IV, Scene 2

Hamlet enters and refuses to cooperate with the search for the body. He informs Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that Claudius is merely using them.

Act IV, Scene 3

The King questions Hamlet before the court. Hamlet prattles on in mockery of his interrogator and reports that Polonius' remains are stored beneath the steps. Claudius sets Hamlet on the journey to England. In private, Claudius, determined to rid himself of his wily stepson, reveals that Hamlet carries to England sealed orders for his own execution.

Act IV, Scene 4

After a brief exchange with Fortinbras' Captain, who marches toward a pointless war in Poland, Hamlet is left to ponder his inability to strike against Claudius.

Act IV, Scene 5

Days later, news reaches Gertrude that Ophelia has suffered mental breakdown over Polonius' death. The girl appears, disheveled and disoriented, singing snatches of ballads and calling for Laertes, who has returned to exact vengeance. A Danish faction shouts for Laertes to assume the throne. Claudius, believing Hamlet on his way to certain death in England, tries to mollify Laertes.

Act IV, Scene 6

Hamlet communicates by letter with Horatio to tell how pirates kidnapped him and returned him to Denmark. Horatio carries the news to Claudius.

Act IV, Scene 7

That same day, Claudius reveals to Laertes that he must indirectly quell Hamlet's threat to the throne. Laertes, hot to avenge his father's death and his sister's sufferings, promises to fight Hamlet in a fencing match. Laertes vows to poison his sword. Claudius, eager to make certain of Hamlet's death, proposes to poison a cup if the Prince calls for drink during the match. Gertrude interrupts Claudius and Laertes' plotting with news of Ophelia's drowning. The King is doubly certain that the angry Laertes will kill Hamlet for this second death in his family.

Act V, Scene 1

Outside Elsinore, grave diggers prepare for Ophelia's burial. Hamlet and Horatio come to the cemetery and muse over the skull of Yorick, the royal jester. Hamlet overhears the rites for Ophelia. Laertes grapples with Hamlet until Horatio and the queen separate them. In private, Claudius reiterates his plan for Laertes to best Hamlet in a duel.

Act V, Scene 2

In the castle, Hamlet tells Horatio of the plot of Claudius' spies to have him killed. Hamlet replaced the King's letter with new instructions for the spies to be killed. Horatio urges Hamlet to cancel the duel, but Hamlet is ready to face his father's killer. Before the duel, Hamlet makes a formal apology for wrongs done to Laertes's family. Claudius pretends to support Hamlet by betting on him to win the duel. On the first round, Hamlet scores a point. He refuses a drink. Gertrude, unaware of the poisoned pearl in the cup, raises the glass in pledge to her son and swallows lethal wine.

The second round begins. Laertes makes an illegal jab and nicks Hamlet. The two fight heatedly and exchange foils in the fray. Hamlet scores a second hit with the poisoned tip. Gertrude collapses, blaming the poisoned drink. Hamlet calls for attendants to lock the doors. Laertes discloses his part in the plot and the fact that Hamlet is doomed. Hamlet stabs Claudius with the poisoned foil and forces his treacherous uncle to drink from the cup.

Laertes, near death, exonerates Hamlet for killing members of his family. Hamlet, himself weakened by poison, commissions Horatio to tell the truth about the tragedy. Horatio tries to drink the poisoned wine, but Hamlet grabs it away. Cannon fire announces Fortinbras' return from a successful campaign in Poland, and English couriers bear news of the executions of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet selects Fortinbras as future Danish king. As Fortinbras enters the gory scene, he is unnerved by the carnage. Horatio promises to explain. Fortinbras orders appropriate honors to the dead Prince.

Timeline

- 1538** Luigi Gonzago, a barber-surgeon, kills the Duke of Urbino by putting poison in his ear.
- 1558** Elizabeth I becomes queen of England.
- 1564** April 23: Shakespeare is born, the son of John and Mary Shakespeare.
- 1570** Shakespeare attends a Latin grammar school.
- 1576** London's first theater is built.
- 1577** John Shakespeare suffers failing finances.
- 1582** Nov. 28: Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway of Shottery.
- 1583** May: Susanna Shakespeare is born.
- 1586** February: The twins, Judith and Hamnet, are born.
- 1587** Shakespeare moves to London.
- ca. 1588** The *Ur-Hamlet* is written.
- 1592** Shakespeare receives critical acclaim.
- 1596** Hamnet dies.
- 1597** Shakespeare builds New Place, a country estate.
- 1599** The Globe Theatre is built.
- ca. 1600** *Hamlet* is written.
- ca. 1601** *Hamlet* is first performed.
- 1603** James VI of Scotland becomes King James I of England.
Hamlet is published.
- 1605** Shakespeare buys real estate.
- 1606** A law forbids foul language on the English stage.
- 1608** Shakespeare holds stock in Blackfriars Theatre.
Mary Shakespeare dies.
- 1611** Shakespeare retires to Stratford.
- 1612** Shakespeare writes *Henry VIII*, his last play.
- 1613** The Globe Theatre burns.
- 1616** late March: Shakespeare revises his will.
April 23: Shakespeare dies.
- 1623** *The First Folio* is published.

Author Sketch

William Shakespeare (ca. April 23, 1564–April 23, 1616) attended a Latin grammar school in his hometown of Stratford-on-Avon. At eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway of Shottery, eight years his senior, and fathered a daughter, Susanna, and



twins, Judith and Hamnet. He moved to London at the age of 23 or 24, joined the Lord Chamberlain's company, later known as the King's Men, and remained active in theater until 1611. Much about his early adulthood is a mystery, but it is clear that he obtained a thorough knowledge of his chosen field—acting—and was well-known by 1592.

Shakespeare gained the approval of Elizabeth I and her Scottish successor, James I, both regular theatergoers. His success as an actor-playwright enabled him to invest in real estate, to build the popular Globe Theatre, and to purchase a coat of arms for his father, John Shakespeare, a glover and bailiff in Stratford. Having written and produced thirty-seven plays, a sonnet sequence, and two long poems, Shakespeare retired to a large house in Stratford. As a country gentleman, he lived out his life in harmony with his family and was buried in the chancel of Holy Trinity Church.

Critic's Corner

With consummate skill, around 1600 Shakespeare crafted the plot of *Hamlet*, one of the touchstones of English literature and his longest work. He appears to have been influenced by Thomas Kyd's *Ur-Hamlet* and *Spanish Tragedy* and on material drawn from 9th-century Norse tales of Amleth. The themes of procrastination, madness, incest, murder, usurpation, and unrequited love surface in Shakespeare's source material as well as in an actual crime committed in Italy in 1538.

Beloved by readers and audiences in Germany, Russia, Spain, and Italy, *Hamlet* is treasured in world literature and also is considered a test of the range and ability of such actors as Thomas Betterton, David Garrick, John Kemble, Edwin Booth, Lawrence Olivier, and Mel Gibson, as well as female players Kitty Clive, Sarah Bernhardt, Judith Anderson, and Eva Le Gallienne. As the subject for 25 film versions, the play continues to intrigue audiences with its tightly crafted plot and intense examination of the psychological forces of greed and revenge.

In the 1990s, *Hamlet* resurged in popularity in American film. In 1991, Mel Gibson starred in an emotion-charged Franco Zeffirelli production adapted to an actual castle of the correct period. In

1996, Kenneth Branagh starred in his own production of the play, which was set in a dazzling court setting. A star-heavy cast included Derek Jacobi, Julie Christie, Kate Winslet, Robin Williams, Gerard Depardieu, Charlton Heston, Judi Dench, and John Gielgud.

Shakespeare's Other Works

Titus Andronicus, ca. 1588-1594
Henry VI, Part 1, ca. 1589
Comedy of Errors, ca. 1580s-1594
The Taming of the Shrew, ca. 1589
Richard III, ca. 1589
King John, 1590
Henry VI, Part 2, ca. 1590-1591
Henry VI, Part 3, ca. 1590-1591
Shakespeare's Sonnets, ca. 1592-1598
Venus and Adonis, 1593
A Midsummer Night's Dream, ca. 1593-1595
Romeo and Juliet, ca. 1593-1595
Love's Labours Lost, ca. 1593-1595
The Rape of Lucrece, 1594
Richard II, ca. 1595-1596
Henry IV, Part I, ca. 1596
The Merchant of Venice, 1596-1598
The Merry Wives of Windsor, ca. 1597
Henry IV, Part II, ca. 1597-1598
Much Ado About Nothing, ca. 1598
Henry V, 1599
Julius Caesar, ca. early 1599
As You Like It, ca. 1599
Twelfth Night, ca. 1599 to 1601
Troilus and Cressida, ca. 1602
Othello, ca. 1603-1604
King Lear, ca. 1603-1606
Measure for Measure, 1604
All's Well That Ends Well, ca. 1604
Macbeth, ca. 1603-1606
Antony and Cleopatra, ca. 1605
Coriolanus, ca. 1605-1609
Pericles, ca. 1606-1608
Timon of Athens, ca. 1606-1608
Cymbeline, ca. 1608-1610
The Winter's Tale, ca. 1610-1611
The Tempest, ca. 1610-1611
Henry VIII, ca. 1612-1613
Two Gentlemen of Verona, ca. 1613
Two Noble Kinsmen, possibly written by Shakespeare and John Fletcher in 1613

Related Reading

Jean Cocteau, *The Infernal Machine*
 Alexandre Dumas, *The Count of Monte Christo*
 Euripedes, *Medea*
 Erik Christian Haugaard, *The Revenge of the Forty-Seven Samurai*
 Henrik Ibsen, *The Master Builder* and *A Doll's House*
 Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*
 Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*
 Jean Paul Sartre, *The Flies*
 J. Neil Schulman, *The Rainbow Cadenza*
 Sophocles, *Electra*
 Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*
 Mark Twain, "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg"
 John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*

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 Kroll, Jack, "London's Brave New Globe," *Newsweek*, June 23, 1997, p. 77.
 McMurtry, Jo. *Understanding Shakespeare's England*. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1989.
 Muir, Kenneth, and Samuel Schoenbaum. *A New Companion to Shakespearean Studies*. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1971.
 Sandler, Robert, ed. *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1986.
 Stearns, David Patrick, "Reconstructed Globe Provides Theater in the Real," *USA Today*, June 12, 1997, p. 4D.
 "A Study Guide to William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*," Time-Warner Audio Books, 1998.

Tillyard, E. M. W., and Elizabeth Tillyard. *The Elizabethan World Picture*. New York: Macmillan, 1943.

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General Objectives

1. To experience a Shakespearean tragedy
2. To identify and explain dramatic conventions, particularly pantomime, asides, and soliloquies
3. To place *Hamlet* in the Shakespeare canon of tragedies
4. To envision the staging of a complicated play
5. To experience the beauty of Elizabethan poetry
6. To isolate and explain examples of Elizabethan language in context
7. To set the play in its social and geographical context
8. To comprehend the power of vengeance as a motivation
9. To evaluate the Elizabethan concept of court treachery
10. To discuss justice as a unifying factor.

Specific Objectives

1. To determine why Hamlet suffers extensive emotional torment
2. To analyze the importance of *The Murder of Gonzago* to the plot
3. To evaluate Polonius as a secondary character
4. To account for advice warning Ophelia not to accept Hamlet as a potential husband
5. To discuss Shakespeare's concept of woman's place in society
6. To analyze the martial milieu in which the story takes place
7. To enumerate poetic devices that play a major role in the dialogue
8. To contrast the friendship of Hamlet and Laertes with that of Hamlet and Horatio
9. To describe the effect of the falling action
10. To enumerate the circumstances for each death, including those of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

The Importance of Setting

The milieu of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a suitable mix of European court and exotic locales. Playgoers would have recognized the seaport area and the use of courtiers, messengers, public courtesy, and court entertainment. The predawn meeting on the battlement with the ghost would have appealed to an Elizabethan audience accustomed to romantic touches in stage drama. Likewise, the set-up of a portable stage and arrangement of players for an evening's performance varies the setting to play-within-a-play. The addition of a drowning, sea voyages, legate to England, purloined letter, and capture by pirates, although they occur offstage, create lively mental pictures that relieve the heavy dialogue of Shakespeare's longest play.

The genius stroke of Shakespeare's setting is the brief respite from the castle when the royal procession approaches a hallowed grave for the suicide Ophelia. The shift in point of view from courtiers to simple working men provides a break in somber dealings and offers some comic relief in the workers' comments. Their prattle prefaces the arrival of Hamlet to his love's funeral and his identification of Yorick's skull, a reminder of old times at court when Hamlet was a child. The upsurge of emotion that pushes Laertes to attack Hamlet by Ophelia's



grave intensifies Laertes' need to avenge himself on the man who has cost him a father and sister. Gertrude's gentle gift of flowers to toss onto the corpse is an ironic reminder of her desecration of her own first marriage, which ended in murder.

The final scene, a masterpiece of complex shifts of position, props, and antipathies, places the main characters in full view of the audience. Although the action is still set in the castle, the change from formal court to duel presses the falling action into desperate mode as Hamlet fights a losing battle against the connivance of Laertes and Claudius. A double focus is the placement of two forms of poison, which ultimately kill four characters. The outer setting impinges on Denmark as Fortinbras enters in triumph over the Poles to discover a more insidious confrontation of family and friends that has resulted in multiple deaths.

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of William Shakespeare's style, present the following terms and applications to the play:

chiaroscuro: a deliberate contrast of light and dark to highlight movement or intensify a particular figure or setting, for instance, alternating scenes of light and dark that reflect the light and dark within human morality. Shakespeare illuminates the murky circumstances of King Hamlet's murder by having his ghost pace the battlements of the castle before dawn and confer with his son and heir on the necessity of vengeance. In contrast, brightly lighted court scenes imply that the illusion of clarity obscures the fact that Claudius is a dark-souled murderer and usurper. Hamlet's thrust into the dark kills Polonius, the lurking snoop who suffers for his indiscretion. Appropriately, Hamlet stores the corpse under the stairs in the dark. The full staging of the duel brings an end to dark secrets at the same time that it extinguishes Hamlet's light and replaces him with the hero Fortinbras.

Round Character: a realistic being who possesses a complex or multifaceted array of traits. The description fits Hamlet, a youth thrust into a dire national emergency when he realizes that the king, his uncle and step-father, must be deposed and

executed. The psychological and emotional weight of so much responsibility places Hamlet in an untenable dilemma over how and when to perform the deed. His escape into feigned madness suggests that the feigning contains elements of reality. Slightly unhinged by terror of the political and dynastic situation, he finds himself at fault for killing an innocent man and for triggering a fatal breakdown in his love. Hamlet's vulnerability is the endearing factor that has kept him vital and poignant to fans of English drama.

Tragedy: a serious drama in which the main character, usually a prominent, noble, or royal person, falls or dies as a result of some human failing, which the Greeks called by the archery term *hamartia*, a missing of the mark. In the case of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, human failing applies to most of the characters. Hamlet is an untried youth who carries more grief and vengeance than he is capable of managing. His mother, a weak-willed widow, marries in haste to an unworthy second husband. Ophelia, also out of her element in dealing with Hamlet's madness, dies by accident and by choice when she makes no effort to save herself from an unforeseen fall into a stream. Laertes is both concerned family member and seething plotter, a mix of the extremes into which he is forced. The combined human failings echo the theme of missing of the mark and suffering the consequences.

Cross-Curricular Sources

For more information about *Hamlet*, its film version, humanism, Elsinore Castle, Shakespeare, medieval ships, and the new Globe Theatre, consult these sources:

Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, a history of women's lives from 1500-1800

J. R. Mulryne, *Shakespeare's Globe Rebuilt*

Wolfgang Riehle, *Shakespeare, Plautus, and the Humanist Tradition*

Mary Ann Roser, "Scholars See Supernova's Traces in 'Hamlet,'" *Austin American-Statesman*, Oct. 10, 1998.

Paul Robert Walker, *The Italian Renaissance*

Also, consult these websites for additional background data on Shakespeare, the text of the play, and the Globe Theatre:
"From and to Denmark,"

The Globe Theatre

http://naples.net/ent_th/globe.htm.

The Hamlet Site

<http://vccslitonline.cc.va.us/>

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* should include these aspects:

Themes

- enmity
- murder
- deception
- intrigue
- young love
- madness
- revenge
- challenge
- loss

Motifs

- heavy responsibility on a young man
- a father's advice to a son and daughter
- a son's attempt to upbraid his mother
- the intervention of a ghost in human affairs
- misguided plots to kill an adversary
- misgivings about personal strengths and volition

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, or sentences that have a particular meaning in the play. Explain each in context. Act, scene, line, and page numbers are provided so that you can reread the passage from which the item is taken.

1. 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.
(I, 2, 1-7, p. 21)
(Speaking for the crown and people of Denmark in the authoritative and kingly first person plural pronoun, Claudius spreads unction and courtly grace over the blatant usurpation of his

brother's throne and queen. His rationalization calls for the kingdom to bear up under grief lest everyone bow down with sorrow over King Hamlet's sudden death two months earlier.)

2. Let me not think on't; frailty, thy name is woman!
(I, 2, 150, p. 29)
(Hamlet is so overwrought with the turn of events that he wishes to dissolve his flesh so that he will not be called to take action. In his telling soliloquy, he ironically reveals his own frailty while condemning the female sex for theirs. He chooses not to dwell too lengthily on his sorrow and anger, yet handily blames Gertrude and all women for weakness. This line presages his later revilement of Ophelia, who is innocent of his charge of immodesty or immorality.)
3. He took me by the wrist and held me hard.
Then goes he to the length of all his arm,
And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
He falls to such perusal of my face
As he would draw it. (II, 2, 99-103, p. 79)
(Immediately after Polonius dispatches Reynaldo to spy on Laertes and report any college-boy debauchery, Ophelia bursts in with news of Hamlet's peculiar behavior. Both Polonius and his daughter fear that he might force himself on Ophelia, thus dishonoring a courtly daughter, to whom a good reputation is a most prized possession. Polonius, who doubts that young people are capable of discretion, insists on reporting the incident to Claudius.)
4. You are welcome, masters; welcome all.—I am glad to see thee well.—Welcome, good friends.—O (my) old friend! (II, 2, 445-447, p. 109)
(Speaking freely in prose, Hamlet lavishes extensive welcome on the players and appears to shake hands all around, even with members of the boy company. Like Elizabethans, including Queen Elizabeth I and her successor, James I, playgoers were caught up in the advancements of Renaissance stagecraft and would appreciate Hamlet's interest in itinerant troupes and in his ability to recite lines from past performances. Polonius acknowledges that Hamlet speaks with "good accent and good discretion.")
5. Thus conscience does make cowards (of us all),
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is (sicklied) o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action.
(III, 1, 91-96, p. 129)
(Calmly reflective and free of his earlier rage over his father's

murder and the lustful marriage of Claudius to Gertrude, Hamlet sums up the crux of the play—his inability to put into action his resolve to avenge King Hamlet’s murder. He blames his conscience for creating a horror of murder that repels his hand from committing the act. If his personality were not so contemplative, he might be able to overrule Christian thoughts and quell the fear of punishment in the afterlife, which his father’s spirit is currently undergoing.)

6. That’s wormwood! (III, 2, 204, p. 149)
(As the players introduce the crimes that so grieve Hamlet, he is unable to stifle a remark concerning the bitterness he feels toward his mother for remarrying so soon. Wormwood, a silvery poisonous perennial formally known as artemisia, foreshadows the use of poisons in Act V by both Claudius and Laertes. Likewise, the metaphoric meaning of poison suggests that Hamlet himself is already poisoned with vengeful thoughts and an inability to forgive.)
7. O, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven;
It hath the primal eldest curse upon ’t,
A brother’s murder. (III, 3, 40-42, p. 165)
(For the first time revealing the extent of his battle with conscience, Claudius, who has carefully guarded against exposing his weakness, admits in private that he, like Cain, the murderer of Abel, killed his brother. As Hamlet’s play, “The Mousetrap,” was intended, it exposes remorse in Claudius, who fears that he is cursed to hell for his crimes, yet is unable to pray for absolution.)
8. Mad as the sea and wind when both contend
Which is the mightier. In his lawless fit,
Behind the arras hearing something stir,
Whips out his rapier, cries “A rat, a rat,”
And in this brainish apprehension kills
The unseen good old man. (IV, 1, 7-12, p. 189)
(Gertrude describes for Claudius and his spies the preceding scene, in which Hamlet, aiming his weapon at a stir behind the curtain, kills Polonius, a speaker of important lines in the play but an unappreciated character because of his piety and glib recitations of accepted behaviors in young men. The line admits a bit of dark humor in that Polonius was a rat who intended to spy on Hamlet and report to Claudius. The King, caring little for Polonius’s loss, realizes at once that this was a “heavy deed,” one intended for “us had we been there.”)
9. Sweets to the sweet . . . (V, 1, 254, p. 253)
(One of the most misquoted lines in Shakespeare, this lyric phrase denotes Gertrude’s gift of flowers to the grave of Ophelia, the maiden she had hoped would one day marry Hamlet. The line follows Laertes’ complaint that Ophelia, who is suspected of having committed suicide, deserves no formal requiem. The identification of the corpse alerts Hamlet to the fact that his love

has died during his absence on the voyage to England. The eruption of mutual emotions causes the two men to leap into the grave and further desecrate a pathetic burial scene by fighting hand to hand.)

10. I am more an antique Roman than a Dane.
(V, 2, 374, p. 283)
(Horatio refers to the Roman practice of committing suicide rather than face an unseemly demise or public humiliation. Hamlet overrules escapism in his friend and commands that Horatio remain alive to tell the tale. With winning coercion, Hamlet begs, “If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart, absent thee from felicity awhile and in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain to tell my story.”)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the play.

Questions 1-5 Literal Level

1. Discuss the information the ghost reveals about his murder.
(Before dawn on the battlements of Elsinore Castle, the ghost of King Hamlet, who died unexpectedly two months previous to Act I, beckons Hamlet to part with Horatio and the guards, Marcellus and Bernardo, and to listen to his story before he returns to “sulphurous and tormenting flames.” Hamlet utters, “Alas, poor ghost”; the spirit urges him not to pity but to listen.

Without telling too much about confinement in the fires of the afterlife, the ghost explains the details of a “foul and most unnatural murder.” Hamlet’s father, while sleeping in the orchard, was supposedly killed by a serpent’s bite. The spirit indicates that “the serpent that did sting thy father’s life now wears his crown.” The spirit compounds the case against Claudius by proclaiming him an adulterer, who won “my most seeming-virtuous queen.”

As morning nears, shortening his time among the living, the ghost explains that, while lying in the orchard taking his customary afternoon nap, King Hamlet was the unwitting victim of his greedy, murderous brother Claudius, who poured a vial of “cursèd hebona” in his ear. Like quicksilver, the poison sped through his body and killed him. The ghost exacts a vow from Hamlet to avenge the act, but to leave Gertrude to guilt and God’s punishment.)

2. How does Hamlet escape assassination?

(Claudius realizes that he must act to save himself from his stepson's vengeance. The King plots to remove Hamlet, who meant to kill him when he thrust through the arras in Gertrude's chamber and impaled Polonius. While dispatching Hamlet along with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to collect the tribute England owes to Denmark, the king encloses sealed letters calling for Hamlet's execution. Later, in a letter delivered to Horatio, Hamlet, who escapes death on a foreign shore, explains the particulars.

Only two days out to sea, the ship carrying Hamlet on his ambassadorial mission was overtaken by pirates. The Danish vessel was too slow to evade capture. Hamlet boarded the pirate ship and was the only passenger taken prisoner as the Danish vessel sailed away toward England. Promising to return the favor to the pirates who rescued him from execution, Hamlet sent letters to Claudius and summons Horatio to hear the rest of his adventures.

Strolling in the cemetery, the two friends joke about the grave diggers' task. One of the laborers indicates that he knows that Hamlet was intentionally sent away to England because of his madness. After Hamlet's fight with Laertes, he returns to the castle and continues telling Horatio of his near execution in England. He indicates that his suspicions about the King's spies led him to steal their document pouch and return to his cabin to read Claudius' letter instructing the English to cut off Hamlet's head. Horatio starts in wonder; Hamlet produces the letter as proof.

Hamlet wrote a new letter ostensibly from Claudius to the English requesting that the friendly relationship continue between the two countries. He indicated that the English were to kill Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Using the old king's signet, which Hamlet carried with him, he folded and resealed the letter and returned the pouch to its bearers. By the next day, Hamlet departed from the vessel and the spies continued on to England without suspecting that they faced imminent death. Horatio concludes, "Why, what a king is this!")

3. What is Claudius' reaction to *The Murder of Gonzago*?

(With the approach of Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern to the players' performance, Hamlet asks if the King is also planning to attend. Polonius indicates that both Claudius and Gertrude will view the play. Hamlet calls Horatio aside and notes, "One scene of it comes near the circumstance which I have told thee of my father's death. I prithee . . . observe my uncle." Horatio promises to watch.

Claudius' arrival at the play is paralleled by Hamlet's continued banter. The trumpets announce a dumb show, which enacts the

crime for which Hamlet seeks vengeance—a player-king's murder and the romance between killer and player-queen. After the initial exchange between the two lead players, Claudius asks, "Is there no offense in 't?" Hamlet denies any offense. Claudius asks the name of the play. Hamlet snidely names it "The Mousetrap."

The play resumes with the entrance of Lucianus, the killer, who comments on "Hecate's ban thrice blasted, thrice [infected]," which he pours into the victim's ear. Hamlet notes to Claudius, "He poisons him i' th' garden for his estate . . . You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife." At this point, Claudius rises; Polonius calls for an end to the play. Claudius demands a light and rushes from the room.)

4. How does Ophelia change during the play?

(In her appearance in Act I, Ophelia, a winsome, chaste maiden of worthy lineage, seems dependent on her father and brother for advice concerning Hamlet's suit for her love. Polonius, suspicious of Hamlet's intent, instructs her to end the relationship. Laertes agrees. Obedient and docile, Ophelia returns Hamlet's letters and rejects him, triggering his spiteful outrage against her and all women. In Act II, Ophelia returns to her father to report that Hamlet acts peculiarly toward her.

During the players' performance, Ophelia, whose name suggests the Greek "Aphelia" or innocence, counters Hamlet's lewd request to lie in her lap, but allows him to place his head in her lap. Her brief exchange with him indicates that she admires his wit and is happy to see his spirits improve. After the entrance of the Prologue, Ophelia accuses Hamlet of salacious language and turns her attention from his risque banter to the play. Hamlet continues to make veiled sexual jests at her expense.

After Ophelia is cut off from fatherly and brotherly advice by Laertes' return to school and Polonius' murder, she sinks into madness, muttering verses of ballads and snatches of commentary about unrequited love, Valentine's Day, illicit sex, flowers and herbs, and death. The King and Queen regret her mental collapse. Claudius urges Horatio to watch over Ophelia and blames "the poison of deep grief," following Polonius' death. Laertes' quiet return leads to public demand for his enthronement. His lusty presence wilts to grief as Ophelia returns to court, impelling Laertes to mourn that "a young maid's wits should be as mortal as [an old] man's life."

Ophelia disappears from the play just before her offstage drowning, which Gertrude reports in Act IV. In Gertrude's summary, Ophelia was weaving garlands alongside the brook near the willow at the time of her untimely death. Although the doctor and priest assume that she committed suicide, Gertrude's recitation of the evidence insists that the branch broke, causing her to tumble into the water, and that she appeared to make no

effort to extricate herself from drowning. In Gertrude's estimation, Ophelia's clothing grew sodden and pulled her down "to muddy death.")

5. What is Horatio's role in the drama?

(Horatio, a bold and dependable friend, serves as Hamlet's sounding board. As a fellow student at Wittenberg, Horatio knows Hamlet well. Horatio demonstrates a sensible attitude, even in Act I, when he joins Marcellus and Bernardo to observe the ghost. Drawing on his knowledge of the precursors of Julius Caesar's assassination, Horatio summarizes Denmark's recent victory over Fortinbras' father and concludes that the apparition "bodes some strange eruption to our state.")

Horatio is loyal to his friend and departs from school to mourn for Hamlet's father, whom Horatio saw only once and recalls as a "goodly king." Horatio introduces his concern—that the ghost on the battlements was pale and sad. That night, Horatio remains in close attendance as revelry sounds from the hall below. As the ghost beckons to Hamlet, Horatio fears that the spirit may harm his friend and "draw [him] into madness." On Hamlet's return, Horatio continues to be the supportive friend by asking only so much as it is appropriate to know and promising to keep secret the visitation.

On Hamlet's unannounced return from the fateful voyage to England, he walks with Horatio in the cemetery. The two discuss death, then halt their reflections as the royal party accompanies Ophelia to her grave. Horatio makes an effort to separate Hamlet after the fight breaks out in the raw grave. As Hamlet withdraws, Claudius acknowledges Horatio's influence by dispatching him to comfort Hamlet.

In the castle, Hamlet continues his discussion with Horatio and tells how he foiled Claudius' plot to have him executed by the English. Horatio's role is limited to brief rejoinders, but his service as ear and comfort are crucial to Hamlet during his last hours. After the duel, Horatio attempts to drink poison and die with his friend, but Hamlet encourages him to serve as spokesman for truth. As Hamlet sinks, Horatio blesses him with "flights of angels."

In the final exchange with Fortinbras, Horatio serves as the only remaining narrator of the calamitous multiple murder that robs Denmark of its royal family and the Lord Chamberlain's family. Horatio promises to tell of "carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts, of accidental judgments, casual slaughters, of deaths put on by cunning and [forced] cause." He instructs Fortinbras on the placement of the corpses and helps restore order, "lest more mischance on plots and errors happen.")

Questions 6-8 Interpretive Level

6. How does Hamlet display both determination and self-doubt?

(Hamlet, in true human fashion, blends traits that contradict each other. He is bold and determined to face the walking apparition and, against Horatio's judgment, goes the next night to challenge it. At the ghost's direction, Hamlet swears to avenge his father's murder.

To work his plan, Hamlet feigns insanity. The role of madman comes easily to a literate, well schooled courtier who possesses talent with quips and the will to duel with words. So controlled is he in his role that he easily defies Ophelia, his weak-willed love, and remains true to the task at hand— exacting vengeance on his murderous uncle.

The emergence of self-doubt comes with the question of the ghost's identity. Hamlet ponders the mischief that a demon has made up the story of the orchard murder to lead him into wrongdoing. Thus, Hamlet's decision to set up *The Murder of Gonzago* as a test of Claudius' culpability introduces delay into the plot. After Claudius rushes from the hall, Hamlet has his proof, yet he takes no action to denounce the false King.

On the way to Gertrude's chamber, Hamlet has an opportunity to kill Claudius as he kneels at his prayers. Again, Hamlet chooses not to act. His reasoning is firm—the ghost must suffer a lengthy penance in a fiery, sulfurous underworld. If Hamlet kills Claudius at his prayers, Claudius will attain grace and an easy afterlife. Hamlet wants him not only dead, but damned.

Hamlet's famous soliloquy introduces a death wish, a sign of his desire to escape the crumbling political situation at Elsinore. He accepts Claudius' assignment of the journey to England to collect Denmark's tribute. The departure costs him Ophelia, who drowns in the meantime. The final confrontation with Laertes in the grave and during the duel separates Hamlet from his real mission, vengeance on Claudius. In his dying moments, Hamlet, no longer delaying, is able to assert himself to the task at hand and doubly insure Claudius' death from poisoned sword and cup.)

7. What kind of parent is Gertrude?

(A shallow consort, Gertrude gives little evidence of evil. She loves her son, worries over his emotional absorption in grief, and attempts to brighten the court by taking an interest in her new husband. As Hamlet indicates, Gertrude is frail of character, a trait that Hamlet blames on women in general rather than his mother in particular. The ghosts' indication that Gertrude was Claudius' lover at the time of the orchard murder leads Hamlet to call her "most pernicious," but to save his strongest revilement for Claudius, the "villain, villain, smiling, damnèd villain.")

In Act III, Hamlet rivets his attention on his mother, who scolds him as though he were a naughty child. When Hamlet proves menacing, she fears that he might murder her. Hamlet indicates his knowledge of his father's murder and Gertrude's role in it. She lamely retorts, "What have I done, that thou dar'st wag thy tongue in noise so rude against me?" Hamlet's exacting re-creation of her sins leads her to admit that she is a sinful, erring woman. She begs, "speak to me no more. These words like daggers enter in my ears. No more, sweet Hamlet!"

Chastened by a recitation of her adulteries, Gertrude continues to worry that her son's mind is unhinged, particularly after he addresses the ghost, which she cannot see. So grief-stricken is she over his mental collapse that she cries out, "thou has cleft my heart in twain!" Later actions support her love for her son, especially her grief that his potential wife is dead and that Claudius has rigged the duel so that Hamlet is sure to die.

As the final scene moves the main characters closer to their deaths, Gertrude remains the doting parent, producing a cloth for Hamlet to wipe his brow and toasting his win with the poisoned cup. Obviously, she has taken Hamlet at his word and withdrawn from Claudius' adulterous touch. She is unaware of the poisoned pearl. In her death throes, her thoughts are of her son, whom she warns, "O, my dear Hamlet! The drink, the drink! I am poisoned.")

8. How does the graveyard scene alter the play? (Shakespeare was famous for blending comedy with somber moments. The graveyard scene provides comic relief from the catastrophes that strew earlier scenes and also gives a brief glimpse of lower-class attitudes. At the same time that they jest and quibble, the grave diggers indicate that harsh canonical law forbids a full service for Ophelia, who appears to have committed suicide. The laborers' garbled application of legal terms and their merry joking about Adam and the gallows conclude in a call for drink and a lusty verse.

Shakespeare frequently places in the speeches of insignificant characters a worthy commentary on theme and action. As one unidentified grave digger sings, he comments pithily on age and death as his shovel unearths the skull of Yorick. Interaction with Hamlet discloses important data, such as the fact that Hamlet was born thirty years ago on the day that his father overcame the Norwegian Fortinbras.)

Questions 9 and 10-Critical Level

9. How does Shakespeare conclude the play? (The conclusion of Hamlet's tragedy robs Denmark of two noble families. With Hamlet and his mother and stepfather gone, the line should pass to Laertes, as the people have already proclaimed. However, Laertes' demise leaves only noble Fortinbras

and Horatio. Earlier commentary suggests that Horatio is a foreign visitor and is therefore ineligible for the throne. Thus, the final scene leaves Fortinbras in line for the crown.

This ironic twist leads to the conclusion that power is an illusion. Fortinbras, who menaced Denmark until his uncle called him to heel, marches away to fight a meaningless war with Poland. Returning triumphant, Fortinbras enters Elsinore and receives a responsibility that he has no reason to expect. Shakespeare suggests that royalty obeys the whim of chance. The unproven Fortinbras, the only noble character left to shoulder Denmark's rule, promises no better governance than the people have known in the last two months.)

10. Why do critics debate Hamlet's madness? (So complex is this play that critics continue to debate its finer points. A perennial issue is Hamlet's madness, which he sets out to feign until he can avenge his father's murder. As events surge out of control, Hamlet challenges his mother, has a brief exchange with the ghost in her chamber, and withdraws, lugging "the guts" to its hiding place under the stairs. Dispatched to England, Hamlet remains wily, yet returns to Denmark much wiser in the outreach and intent of his deceitful uncle/stepfather.

As Hamlet ponders the skull of Yorick, the former king's deceased jester, he remains sensible and contemplative. Then the news that the grave is prepared to receive Ophelia seems to break his tenuous tie with logic. So incensed is he by her death and the sketchy ceremony honoring her passing that he grapples with Laertes over her corpse. From this moment on, the action winds downward toward catastrophe.

In the duel scene, Hamlet can no longer predict nor control the bloody conclusion. Obviously fighting to the death, he reckons with his mother's poisoning, but concerns himself more with righting the failed relationship with Laertes, whom he never intended to wrong. At the end of his strength, Hamlet pleads with Horatio to remain alive to report the truth to the Danish people.

Far from crazed, Hamlet is in all likelihood too sane. If he were able to recede into madness, he would not be able to proceed with court life and certainly not to journey as King's ambassador to England. Still possessing presence of mind at the end, he never loses hold on the search for justice. He demands of Claudius, "thou incestuous, [murd'rous,] damnèd Dane, drink off this potion . . . Follow my mother." Lucid to the end, he regrets that he lacks the time to explain all. Like a royal son brought up to think of Denmark, he concludes, "I do prophesy th' election lights on Fortinbras; he has my dying voice.")

Questions 11-13 Creative Level

11. Write an honest description of vengeance as you see it. Explain how vengeance distorts logic and creates violence and suffering for the innocent. Suggest ways that vengeance destroys Hamlet, Polonius, Laertes, Ophelia, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Gertrude.
12. Discuss whether Hamlet would have made a worthier king of Denmark than Laertes.
13. Compare Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* with Shakespeare's version of events in Denmark. Which playwright offers the most compassion to these courtiers?

Across the Curriculum

Math and Economics

1. Compute the distance from the Danish seaport of Elsinore to Wittenberg, Germany; Paris, France; and London, England. How far would the Norwegians have to march from Elsinore to Poland?
2. Use historical data to determine the height, width, and depth of the Globe Theater. Include figures on how many people could stand or sit to view a play. Contrast these figures to copies of the Globe, particularly the Elizabethan stage in the Folger Library, Washington, D. C.
3. Compare the worth of a ducat in Shakespeare's day to the value of English and Danish coins.

Social Studies

1. Compose a list of Shakespeare's plays and long poems and their settings, as with *The Tempest* in Bermuda, *Othello* in Venice, *As You Like It* in Arden Forest, and *Hamlet* in Denmark. Note whether the places are real or imaginary, as with Elsinore Castle. Locate real settings on a map along with the names of the plays. Place a star on Shakespeare's birthplace.
2. Research historic enmities between Denmark and Norway, Denmark and England, and Norway and Poland. Determine if there was ever a time when a Norwegian king sat on the Danish throne.

Psychology

1. Discuss the psychological problems faced by a young man attempting to avenge the death of his father plus the lust and treachery of his mother and uncle. Why might some critics have believed that Hamlet was not just pretending to be insane but was sincerely unhinged by dismaying events in his life? How does Laertes manage the same task of avenging his dead father and sister?
2. Using Ophelia as a model, create an extended definition of love-sickness. Explain how her nonsensical babbling reveals verifiable data about the play, as with a gift of rue, the herb signifying remorse, to Gertrude.
3. Contrast the parenting of Gertrude and Polonius. Determine which offers the best counsel to a troubled child. Comment on the ghost's relationship with his son.

Religion

1. Explain why Hamlet chooses not to kill Claudius during the King's prayers. Contrast Claudius' death during the rigged duel with King Hamlet's poisoning in the orchard. Why does the former King labor in Purgatory to expiate his sins?
2. Discuss why the grave digger says, "If this had not been a gentlewoman, she should have been buried out o' Christian burial." Explain the doctor's reference to "ground unsanctified."

Cinema

1. Make a list of dramatic scenes from the novel that would require intense use of lighting, costume, makeup, music, props, and stunts, particularly the grave scene, the duel between Hamlet and Laertes, Ophelia's drowning, Polonius' death, and Claudius' response to the players' presentation of *The Murder of Gonzago*.
2. Summarize the drama of movie and television versions of Shakespeare's plays that capture the sense of time and place along with his poetry, notably *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *As You Like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Henry V*.

Science and Health

1. Explain why Ophelia's heavy garments hasten her death by drowning.
2. Give an oral report on the types of poison that might be used to stain a piece of metal such as a fencing foil or to poison a victim's brain.
3. Discuss the absorption of the disintegrating soft tissue of a corpse and the likelihood that Yorick's skull would remain identifiable.
4. Using Ophelia's songs and comments, construct a scrapbook of plants and their significance or medicinal value, including rue, daisy, violet, pansies, and rosemary.

Language

1. Choose a series of lines from the play to illustrate the playwright's skill with poetry, as with Hamlet's request, "in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain to tell my story" and Horatio's farewell, "Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest." Post the phrases on the bulletin board and lead a discussion of their significance. If you have questions about how the words have changed since the English Renaissance, such as rood, refer to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.
2. List and explain mythological, literary, biblical, historical, and geographical allusions in the play. For example, refer to comments about Purgatory, Neptune, Saint Valentine, primal eldest curse, Turk, Damon, Hecate, Hymen, Phoebus' cart, hobby-horse, Vulcan, Herod, Termagant, Aeneas, Priam, Dido, Pyrrhus, Cyclops, Mars, Jephthah, Lenten, and Polacks.

Art and Music

1. Use desktop publishing or other artistic forms to create a handbill that will catch the eye of prospective audiences. Use an illustration that intrigues the illiterate reader to see the play and learn how it ends. Emphasize action and contrast in your drawing.
2. Select music to delineate the contrast between prayers, love scenes, ghostly visitations, poisoning, dueling, stabbing, burial, and other somber or fearful subjects.

3. Propose tasteful decorations for Elsinore's throne room, for example, an historic arras, sculpture, and richly textured carpet and dais.

Student Involvement Activities

1. Sketch the layout of the last scene. Emphasize the placement of the corpses. Complete a list of props to accompany the furniture, including a cup, pearl, and foils. Suggest appropriate costumes for the cast.
2. Write a report on Shakespeare's method of presenting tragedy. Include the use of different stage levels and trapdoors, dancers, musical instruments, and special effects, such as cannon fire and thunder. Comment on his selection of young men to play the role of female characters. Explain the purpose of the flag on top of the theater.
3. Write a diary entry describing a presentation of *Hamlet* as seen from the point of view of an orange-seller, groundling, visiting courtier, or James I, Queen Elizabeth's successor. Stress the parts of the play that would impress a poorly educated but thoroughly experienced playgoer.
4. Compose a scene in which pirates remove Hamlet from a ship bound for England. Explain why they choose to return him to Denmark but leave Rosencrantz and Guildenstern aboard the original vessel.
5. Write a paragraph in which you summarize Shakespeare's idea of the nature and purpose of tragedy. Contrast his methods with those described in Aristotle's *Poetics*.
6. Compose a short congratulatory telegram to Shakespeare from Ben Jonson, Anne Hathaway, John Fletcher, Queen Elizabeth, or Christopher Marlowe upon the success of this tragedy.
7. Write a note to Elizabeth I in which you invite her to the opening night of *Hamlet*. Narrate the highlights of the plot.

8. Compose an extended definition of drama in which you explain the following aspects: character, setting, plot, theme, tone, mood, aside, soliloquy, monologue, climax, literary foils, motivation, and denouement.
9. Apply the term “coming to knowledge” to the final scene. Explain the price paid by Horatio for remaining alive to tell the Danes and Fortinbras about Claudius’ treachery, Gertrude’s lust, and Hamlet’s self-destruction. Suggest the role Horatio will play in coming days as so many notables are mourned and buried and a new government established for Denmark.
10. Locate historical evidence that audiences from Shakespeare’s time until the present have enjoyed *Hamlet*. Name actors who have ennobled the roles of Polonius, Hamlet, Ophelia, Gertrude, Horatio, and Claudius.

Alternate Assessment

1. List in chronological order significant events in Hamlet’s life, particularly his father’s death, substitution of the letter, discussion with the ghost, escape with the pirates, friendship with Yorick, study in Wittenberg, murder of Polonius, King Hamlet’s successful war against Norway, duel with Laertes, Claudius’ prayers, study of Yorick’s skull, departure with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and welcome of the players.
2. Make a list of scenes from the play that express strong attitudes toward treachery, friendship, self-doubt, loss, grief, madness, valiance, love, vengeance, responsibility, deception, and guilt. Indicate what you think is Shakespeare’s personal philosophy on each subject.
3. Compose a brief definition of tragedy as it applies to *Hamlet*.
4. Summarize scenes that depict conflict, particularly the duel, Ophelia’s burial, Hamlet’s soliloquies, Claudius’ reprimand of Hamlet for excessive grief, the murder of the player-king, Hamlet’s argument with Ophelia, Hamlet’s conference with Gertrude, and the burial scene.

Vocabulary Test

Match each boldfaced synonym in the passage below with the original word from the list that follows.

affection	cautel	dalliance	mantle	thews	besmirch	censure	galls
pernicious	ungracious	blastments	chariest	habit	prodigal	unvalued	buttons
chaste	imminent	recks	wary	calumnious	circumscribed	importunity	russet
waxes	carve	credent	libertine	sustain	withal		

LAERTES

Think it no more.

For nature, crescent, does not grow alone

In **strength** (1) _____ and bulk, but as this temple **increases** (2) _____

The inward service of the mind and soul

Grows wide **simultaneously** (3) _____. Perhaps he loves you now,

And now no soil nor **lie** (4) _____ doth **dirty** (5) _____

The virtue of his will; but you must fear,

His greatness weighed, his will is not his own,

(For he himself is subject to his birth.)

He may not, as **ordinary** (6) _____ persons do,

Choose (7) _____ for himself, for on his choice depends

The safety and health of this whole state.

And therefore must his choice be **limited** (8) _____

Unto the voice and yielding of that body

Whereof he is the head. Then, if he says he loves you,

It fits your wisdom so far to believe it

As he in his particular act and place

May give his saying deed, which is no further

Then the main voice of Denmark goes withal.

Then weigh what loss your honor may **permit** (9) _____

If with too **gullible** (10) _____ ear you list his songs

Or lose your heart, or your **innocent** (11) _____ treasure open

To his unmastered **pleadings** (12) _____.

Fear it, Ophelia; fear it, my dear sister,

And keep you in the rear of your **feelings** (13) _____,

Out of the shot and danger of desire,

The **most careful** (14) _____ maid is **wasteful** (15) _____ enough

If she unmask her beauty to the moon.

Virtue itself 'scapes not **insulting** (16) _____ strokes.

The canker **destroys** (17) _____ the infants of the spring

Too oft before their **buds** (18) _____ be disclosed,

And in the morn and liquid dew of youth,

Contagious **blight** (19) _____ are most **likely** (20) _____.

Be **suspicious** (21) _____, then; best safety lies in fear.

Youth to itself rebels, though none else near.

OPHELIA

I shall the effect of this good lesson keep

As watchman to my heart. But good my brother,

Do not, as some **wicked** (22) _____ pastors do,

Show me the steep and thorny way to Heaven,

Whiles, like a puffed and reckless **playboy** (23) _____,

Himself the primrose path of **self-indulgence** (24) _____ treads

And **considers** (25) _____ not his own rede.

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Quotation Identification (30 points)

Name the speaker of each line below. You will use some answers more than once or not at all.

- | | | | | | |
|-------------|---------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| A. Claudius | B. Fortinbras | C. Gertrude | D. ghost | E. grave digger | F. Hamlet |
| G. Horatio | H. Laertes | I. Ophelia | J. player queen | K. Polonius | L. Rosencrantz
& Guildenstern |

- ___ 1. The rest is silence.
- ___ 2. The glowworm shows the matin to be near and 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire. Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me.
- ___ 3. The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral (tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral,) scene individuable, or poem unlimited.
- ___ 4. And I, of ladies most deject and wretched, that sucked the honey of his musicked vows ...
- ___ 5. And, sister, as the winds give benefit and convey [is] assistant, do not sleep, but let me hear from you.
- ___ 6. What art thou that usurp'st this time of night, together with that fair and warlike form in which the majesty of buried Denmark did sometimes march?
- ___ 7. The drink, the drink! I am poisoned.
- ___ 8. Give them the foils, young Osric. Cousin Hamlet, you know the wager?
- ___ 9. Such a sight as this becomes the field but here shows much amiss.
- ___ 10. You must know your father lost a father, that father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound in filial obligation for some term to do obsequious sorrow.
- ___ 11. So excellent a king, that was to this Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother that he might not betwixt the winds of heaven visit her face too roughly.
- ___ 12. Both here and hence pursue me lasting strife, if, once a widow, ever I be wife.
- ___ 13. These words like daggers enter in my ears. No more, sweet Hamlet!
- ___ 14. Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's day.
- ___ 15. Is she to be buried in Christian burial, when she willfully seeks her own salvation?

Part II: Fill-in (20 points)

Complete each of the following lines with a name or term.

1. Hamlet refers to *The Murder of Gonzago* as "The _____."
2. Fortinbras asks permission to march across Denmark to fight a war in _____.
3. A _____ delivers a letter to Horatio explaining how Hamlet escaped execution in England.
4. On the way out of his mother's chamber, Hamlet refers disrespectfully to _____' corpse.
5. To Horatio at the cemetery, Hamlet recalls the jests and fun he enjoyed with _____.
6. _____ tries to pray for forgiveness but fails.
7. Both Horatio and Hamlet attend school in _____.
8. Polonius dispatches _____ to spy on Laertes in Paris.
9. The king of _____ chides his nephew Fortinbras for threatening Denmark.
10. Before the duel begins, Claudius drops a poisoned _____ into a cup of wine.

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false. Rewrite false statements to make them true.

- _____ 1. Hamlet makes no effort to conceal Polonius' remains behind the arras.

- _____ 2. The pirates intervene before Hamlet reaches England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

- _____ 3. Hamlet suspects his father was murdered before he speaks with the ghost.

- _____ 4. The ghost indicates that Gertrude must suffer in hell for her treachery.

- _____ 5. During the performance, Hamlet asks to place his head in Ophelia's lap.

- _____ 6. Laertes helps Hamlet observe Claudius' reaction to *The Murder of Gonzago*.

- _____ 7. Laertes insists to the doctor that his sister deserves to go to heaven.

- _____ 8. Gertrude deliberately switches the foils so Laertes will die of his own evil plot.

- _____ 9. Horatio tries to commit suicide, but Hamlet begs him to remain alive to tell the truth about his tragedy.

- _____ 10. Hamlet is well acquainted with the visiting troupe.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two quotations and explain them in the context of *Hamlet*.

1. Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.
2. A little more than kin and less than kind.
3. The play's the thing.
4. Sweets to the sweet.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Identification (20 points)

Briefly describe the importance of each of the following locations.

1. at sea _____
2. England _____
3. Paris _____
4. under the stairs _____
5. Gertrude's chamber _____
6. battlements _____
7. Ophelia's grave _____
8. Purgatory _____
9. Wittenberg _____
10. Poland _____

Part II: Short Answer (30 points)

Supply a word or phrase in answer to each of the following questions. Place your response in the blank provided at left.

- _____ 1. Who astonishes Ophelia by pulling at her and gazing into her face?
- _____ 2. What is Claudius doing when Hamlet decides not to kill him?
- _____ 3. Who succeeds Claudius on the throne?
- _____ 4. What does the ghost wear?
- _____ 5. Who is refused a requiem?
- _____ 6. What is the name of the castle?
- _____ 7. Who substitutes a letter to be presented in England?
- _____ 8. By what name does Hamlet refer to *The Murder of Gonzago*?
- _____ 9. Who urges Laertes to be true to himself?
- _____ 10. What kills Gertrude?
- _____ 11. Whom does Hamlet leave to tell his story?
- _____ 12. Where does Claudius put poison to kill his brother?
- _____ 13. When does the ghost fade?
- _____ 14. Where was King Hamlet sleeping when he died?
- _____ 15. Whom does Hamlet call "old mole"?

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Completion (20 points)

Supply a word or phrase to complete each of the following quotations.

1. Fear it, Ophelia; fear it, my dear _____, and keep you in the rear of your affection, out of the shot and danger of desire.
2. Come, we go to the _____. This must be known, which, being kept close, might move more grief to hide than hate to utter love.
3. Whereat, grieved that so his sickness, age, and impotence was falsely borne in hand, sends out arrests on _____, which he, in brief, obeys, receives rebuke from Norway, and in fine, makes vow before his uncle never more to give th' assay of arms against your Majesty.
4. Good my lord, will you see the _____ well bestowed? Do you hear, let them be well used, for they are the abstract and brief chronicles of the time.
5. Dost thou hear me, old friend? Can you play "The Murder of _____"?
6. The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the _____.
7. To die, to sleep—to sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the _____.
8. I loved _____. Forty thousand brothers could not with all their quantity of love make up my sum.
9. Stay, give me drink.—Hamlet, this _____ is thine. Here's to thy health.
10. The rabble call him "lord," and, as the world were now but to begin, antiquity forgot, custom not known, the ratifiers and property of every word, they cry "Choose we, _____ shall be king!"

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain the part Horatio and Fortinbras play in the final scene.
2. Discuss the ways that Claudius plots against his stepson.
3. Discuss the causes of Ophelia's breakdown.
4. Analyze the private discussion that Hamlet has with Gertrude.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

- | | | |
|------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 1. thews | 10. credent | 19. blastments |
| 2. waxes | 11. chaste | 20. imminent |
| 3. withal | 12. importunity | 21. wary |
| 4. cautel | 13. affection | 22. ungracious |
| 5. besmirch | 14. chariest | 23. libertine |
| 6. unvalued | 15. prodigal | 24. dalliance |
| 7. carve | 16. calumnious | 25. recks |
| 8. circumscribed | 17. galls | |
| 9. sustain | 18. buttons | |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Quotation Identification (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. G | 11. F |
| 2. D | 7. C | 12. J |
| 3. K | 8. A | 13. C |
| 4. I | 9. B | 14. I |
| 5. H | 10. A | 15. E |

Part II: Fill-in (20 points)

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Mousetrap | 6. Claudius |
| 2. Poland | 7. Wittenberg |
| 3. sailor | 8. Reynaldo |
| 4. Polonius | 9. Norway |
| 5. Yorick | 10. pearl |

Part III: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. F |
| 2. T | 7. T |
| 3. F | 8. F |
| 4. F | 9. T |
| 5. T | 10. T |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Identification (20 points)

Answers will vary

Part II: Short Answer (30 points)

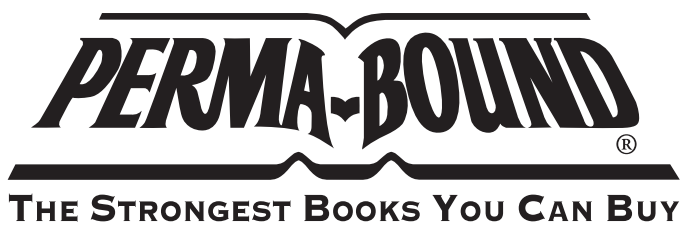
- | | | |
|---------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Hamlet | 6. Elsinore | 11. Horatio |
| 2. praying | 7. Hamlet | 12. in his ear |
| 3. Fortinbras | 8. <i>The Mousetrap</i> | 13. cock crow |
| 4. armor | 9. Polonius | 14. orchard |
| 5. Ophelia | 10. poisoned cup | 15. ghost |

Part III: Completion (20 points)

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| 1. sister | 6. King |
| 2. King | 7. rub |
| 3. Fortinbras | 8. Ophelia |
| 4. players | 9. pearl |
| 5. Gonzago | 10. Laertes |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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