



HAMLET

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A BROADCAST GUIDE: Preparing for the Schools' Broadcast

GETTING STARTED

In order for your students to enjoy the broadcast and have a positive experience watching the play, it is essential that they are prepared. If you haven't had a chance to look at one of our Teacher Packs, but are keen to make the most out of the broadcast for your students, this short guide should help you to introduce the text.

To make it as clear as possible to use we've organised in to two sections:

BEFORE WATCHING THE BROADCAST

Which contains activities for you to do with students before taking part in the broadcast. Understanding the plot of the play and the key events is really important for students and we recommend you spend at least one lesson exploring the play before the day of the broadcast.

WHILE WATCHING THE BROADCAST

Which contains a breakdown of activities and discussion points which will help students to engage with the play and the choices in this production on the day of the broadcast. These discussions will help students to participate in our live Q&A.

The schools broadcast of Hamlet 2020 will be available from **16 – 23 November**. You can access the production at any time during the week and watch the play on demand.

In order to access the production you will need to have registered your school. Registration will give you access to:

- **Preparation resources and materials including videos and teaching activities**
- **A link to the broadcast**
- **A link to a follow up live Q&A with RSC creatives**

PRODUCTION INSIGHTS

The 2016 production of Hamlet is set in a West African inspired setting, although they still call it 'Denmark'. In this context, Hamlet has been educated abroad and has been away from his home for a long time, going to university in Wittenburg, in Europe. One of the main reasons for choosing this setting was the relevance of witchcraft and superstition in many West African cultures. Director Simon Godwin felt that old King Hamlet's ghost was one of the most difficult things to make sense of in a contemporary setting, but by moving it to West Africa it helped to explain why Hamlet might listen to a ghost and not question its appearance. Paapa Essiedu, who plays Hamlet, also talked about the idea of a young student returning home to reconnect with his roots.

Within this setting, Tanya Moodie, who plays Gertrude, described the queen as being a woman in her prime who remarries for the strength of her country. She sees it as her responsibility to step up and look after her people by marrying Claudius and doesn't imagine that Hamlet will struggle with this, that he will realise it's for the good of their family and people. Both Tanya and Clarence Smith, who plays Claudius, used the rehearsal process to think about the relationship between the new King and his Queen, agreeing that the two have been close for some time and that this marriage had felt like the natural course for the two of them. Within this context, Simon Godwin and his team have made some very specific choices which you will see throughout the broadcast. We have noted some key things to look out for throughout this broadcast guide.

BEFORE WATCHING THE BROADCAST

If you've got limited time, but want your students to feel prepared, we suggest that you focus on the following:

- **Understanding the plot of the play**
- **Knowing the characters and their relationships**
- **Introducing the context of the play's opening scenes**

UNDERSTANDING THE PLOT

In order for students to enjoy the production, it helps to have an overview of the plot before watching for the first time. The following activity requires the 'Story in Five Acts' resource from the end of this pack and will allow you to explore the story practically.

- Divide students into small groups. It will be easier for them to work in a socially distanced way if the groups are no larger than four.
- Using the 'Story in Five Acts' resource in this pack, assign an Act to each group. Some groups may have the same Act as another group.
- Ask each group to create a series of tableaux or freeze frames for their Act. They will need to break it down into two or three scenes.
 - Encourage them to narrate their Act, explaining what happens in each scene before we see it and trying to use the lines from the play to bring some of the freeze frames to life.

Depending on school guidance and the space available, this work can be adapted so that students are recreating their two or three scenes as short digital animations, flip books or narrated presentations.

- Allow each group the time to perform their Act, or share their recreations, in the correct order.
- Encourage each group to summarise what happens in their Act in one sentence.
- Ask each group to then share their one sentence summaries and discuss what has happened just before the play starts. Explain to students that the company spent a lot of time in rehearsal discussing this, to help them understand each characters' actions. Invite them to do the same, thinking specifically about:
 - Hamlet: where has he been while away from home and what was his relationship with his mother like before the play starts? He is clearly angry about her re-marrying Claudius.
 - Gertrude: does she know or suspect Claudius killed her old husband? Could she even be part of covering it up and did she know her actions in re-marrying would upset Hamlet?
 - Claudius: we learn in the play that he did kill his brother and become King. How did he kill him and does anyone else know? How well does Claudius know Hamlet and how does he expect him to react?
 - Ophelia: How does Ophelia know Hamlet and what kind of relationship have they had in the past? How does Ophelia feel about him coming home? She also appears to only have one parent so how might she feel about what has happened to Hamlet now he has lost his father?
- You may also want to discuss with students why it might be important to ask these questions. During the rehearsal process, each of the actors created a detailed backstory to help them think about their character's mind-set at the start of the play and what their attitude might be to the characters around them.
 - A **BACKSTORY** is the story of what happened to any of the characters before the start of the play.



SYNOPSIS

A full synopsis of the play is available at: <http://www.rsc.org.uk/hamlet>

KNOWING THE CHARACTERS

In the 2016 production, Hamlet begins the play as a student at Wittenberg University who returns home to Africa when his father dies. As part of the events of the play, we encounter five distinct groups of people:

- The Royal Family of Denmark
 - Polonius' family
 - Hamlet's friends
 - The Players
 - The Court/Security
- Divide students into five groups, assigning each of them one of the groups of characters just as they did in rehearsal.
 - Allow each group some time to look through the character profiles in their group and ask them to assign each character to a person.

- In some groups they will have fewer characters than group members; reassure them that this is fine. They should first of all make sure that each character is represented and the rest of the group will be 'photographers' or additional members of the court.
- Ask each group to take turns reading out the information about each character.
- Invite the groups to then create a still image, or photograph, of their family or group. All of the characters should appear in the image so any students without character profiles, the 'photographers', can help shape the image.
 - In arranging the picture, students should think about how each character is seen in relation to the rest of their group. For example, who are they close to, who are they distancing themselves from and how do they see themselves?

This could also be done as an individual exercise, with students drawing images of their assigned group of characters, or placing the names into diagrams depending on school guidance around practical work, and the space available.

- Allow each group to show their family/group photograph to the rest of the group and encourage the audience to guess which character is which before asking the 'photographers' from that group to explain their choices. Based on the information they had, why did they choose to place each character where they are and what instruction did they give?
- Encourage students to reflect on the images as a whole, once they have seen them all. What connections can they see between the groups? Which characters appeared in multiple groups? Are they the same in each group or do they seem different?
 - As Hamlet is the title character, ask students to think about how and why Hamlet might affect groups he doesn't appear in, like Polonius' family for example, as well as drawing out how he seems among friends and family.

THE OPENING SCENE

This production opens very differently. At the start of the play you will see the set for Wittenburg University, with Hamlet receiving his degree alongside his university friend Horatio.

Before watching the broadcast, invite students to watch the trailer for the production in which Hamlet receives a call to tell him his father has died, during the graduation party. What effect does this have on how we see Hamlet? Does it make it easier to relate to him or make his emotions/actions more understandable? If you were him, what would be your next steps?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjeWOydcCUU>

Ask a Question:

As you explore the play, and then watch the production, you can send in your questions about the play and its characters to schools.broadcast@rsc.org.uk

We will be holding a live Q&A with RSC creatives to explore some of these questions in November 2020. Please see your registration confirmation for details.

WHILE WATCHING THE BROADCAST

DISCUSSION POINTS

Below are some key things to look out for in each part of the broadcast as well as some questions to reflect on. For Primary school pupils we have provided work sheets in the resources section which will help them consider these same questions, although some older learners may also prefer to use these.

We have separated our discussion points into three parts, but you can choose to watch the broadcast in smaller sections, or as a full production. Please note the broadcast will be available on demand between 16 and 23 November 2020.

Throughout the discussion points we have included some questions about the 2016 production and some of the choices they have made.

PART ONE

In the first part of the play there are lots of important things to look out for; the ghost of old King Hamlet appears for the first time, Hamlet returns home and his father's ghost asks him to avenge his death, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (Hamlet's old school friends) are sent for and Hamlet unveils his plan to 'catch the conscience of the king' using a play.

As you watch PART 1 ask students to think about:

- How Hamlet comes across in this part of the play. Does he seem anxious, confident, troubled or mad? How would you describe him and does your description change?
- What the relationship between the new King, Claudius, and his court is like – including with Hamlet
 - In Part 1 you will hear one of Hamlet's famous soliloquies in which he talks about the changes in his family. What are his difficulties in dealing with this situation and how does this show in his behaviour?
- How Hamlet reacts to the appearance of his Father as a ghost.



There are a few specific things to look out for in this section

- This production opens very differently from other productions of Hamlet, and shows Hamlet graduating from university before showing the opening scene from the text where the guards encounter old King Hamlet's ghost. What difference do you think it makes for us to see Hamlet in this situation before we see Denmark?
- Simon Godwin felt that locating the play in West Africa offered them a modern setting where superstition was still really apparent and a young man might believe the ghost of his father is real. This culture, and the idea of summoning spirits, has had an impact on how the appearance of old King Hamlet – the ghost – has been staged. Do you think these choices make the ghost's



Paapa Essiedu as Hamlet in the 2016 production of *Hamlet*.
Photo by Manuel Harlan.

appearance more believable? Is there anything that stands out for you in the way this is done?

- Paapa Essiedu plays Hamlet as a young artist. How do you see his art and how is it used? What does it reveal about his character? Does it help to convey any of his relationships, specifically with his mother or with Claudius?

After watching PART 1 ask students to discuss:

- **How would you describe Hamlet? What do you think is on his mind? What is worrying him?**
 - What support does he have around him and how trustworthy are his friends?
- Does Hamlet have a fatal flaw that you can see at this stage, like other tragic heroes?

FOR PRIMARY PUPILS, YOU MAY WANT TO USE THE WHAT'S ON HIS MIND SHEET TO HELP YOU THINK ABOUT THE FIRST QUESTION

PART TWO

In the second part of the play you will see some really important scenes including Hamlet's 'To be or not to be' speech, the Nunnery scene in which Ophelia gives Hamlet back all of her 'remembrances' and the arrival of the players.

As you watch PART 2 ask students to think about:

- What the dilemmas are that Hamlet faces in his opening speech. What is worrying him?
- Why he reacts the way he does to Ophelia. What kind of relationship do they have? Do Hamlet and Ophelia even seem to like each other?
- What the pivotal moments are in this part of the play.



There are a few specific things to look out for in this section

- Natalie Simpson and Paapa Essiedu, who play Ophelia and Hamlet, played the scene where he says 'get thee to a Nunnery' in several different ways, finding that the only way to make sense of her responses was for the scene to have a certain amount of violence. What do you think Ophelia feels in these moments? How does she behave in comparison to the last scene in which she told her father that Hamlet was behaving oddly?
- During rehearsal the company discussed how well they thought Hamlet would know the players and agreed that he probably knew them very well and had maybe even done work experience with them. In this world, that's why he knows their work so well and can recite the first speech from memory. Do you think it would make a difference if he didn't know and trust these visitors?

After watching PART 2 ask students to discuss:

- Paapa is very clear that he doesn't believe that Hamlet is mad, he is just acting this way. Are there any characters who doubt his act?
- Most tragic heroes have a fatal flaw, something which leads to their downfall. Do you think Hamlet has a fatal flaw?
- **Thinking about the Nunnery scene, when Ophelia returns Hamlet's love tokens, is there a moment where Hamlet's behaviour to Ophelia changes? If so, where is it and why does it cause his behavior to change?**



Paapa Essiedu as Hamlet in the 2016 production of *Hamlet*. Photo by Manuel Harlan.

FOR PRIMARY PUPILS, YOU MAY WANT TO USE THE HAMLET'S CHOICE SHEET TO HELP YOU THINK ABOUT THIS QUESTION

PART THREE

In the third part of the broadcast there are a number of key events to look out for including the death of Polonius, Ophelia's death and funeral, Hamlet's exile and return to Denmark and the clash between Hamlet and Laertes.

As you watch PART 3 ask students to think about:

- What the impact of Polonius' death is on each of the other characters.
 - How does Ophelia react and why? What does this tell us about her relationship with her father?
 - What does this event allow Claudius to do to Hamlet?
 - Why is Hamlet's reaction significant and what does it reveal about his state of mind? How does Gertrude respond to her son's lack of empathy?
- What happens while Hamlet is in exile and what draws him back.



There are a few specific things to look out for in this section

- Laertes arrives to confront the court about his father's death in a very dramatic fashion. The company talked about this being part of his character and his way of expressing how he feels about what has happened to his family. What does this tell us about his character and does it change the way he reacts to the news of Ophelia's death?
- The role of the gravedigger is a moment of comedy in the play and allows Hamlet to reflect on how fragile life is, just before he discovers Ophelia has died. In this production the gravedigger is presented as a Calypso singer and has a very different feel to the ceremonial burying of Ophelia. How do both Hamlet and Laertes react to seeing Ophelia buried and what are the first things they say?
- The role of storytelling, particularly in African cultures, was really important in the discussions around this production. At the end of the play Horatio is tasked with telling the story of what has happened and, as a character who is there at the beginning

and at the end, he very much frames the story. How much do you think Horatio's perspective runs through the play? How would the ending seem from his perspective?

After watching PART 3 ask students to discuss:

- How do Hamlet and Laertes react to Ophelia's death? Is it always inevitable that they will face each other at the end of the play?
- Why does Shakespeare give Hamlet time to reflect on death with the gravedigger? What does this scene prepare us for?
- **Is the tragic ending of Hamlet always inevitable? If not, what do you think the most important turning points are both in this scene and the play as a whole?**

FOR PRIMARY PUPILS, YOU MAY WANT TO USE THE TURNING POINTS STORYBOARD SHEET TO HELP YOU THINK ABOUT THIS IN THE FINAL SCENE.

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RESOURCES

THE STORY IN FIVE ACTS

1. Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, returns from university for his father's funeral only to discover that his Uncle Claudius is now King and has married his mother, Queen Gertrude.

Hamlet: Married with my uncle!

Hamlet sees his dead father's ghost. The ghost tells him that he was murdered by his brother Claudius who poured poison in his ear whilst he slept. The ghost says that Hamlet must punish Claudius for the murder.

Ghost: Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

2. Claudius, Gertrude and the people of the court think Hamlet is acting strangely. Ophelia, Hamlet's girlfriend, is also very confused by the way Hamlet is acting - and he tells her that he doesn't love her while her father and the King and Queen are listening..

Hamlet: Get thee to a nunnery.

Ophelia is very upset at the changes she sees in Hamlet.

Ophelia O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!

3. A travelling group of actors have come to the court. In order to find out whether Claudius really did kill his brother, Hamlet's father, Hamlet asks these actors to rehearse a play in which a king is murdered by having poison poured into his ear. He helps the actors to prepare their play.

Hamlet: Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand.

At the performance of a play Claudius acts very guilty and rushes away.

Claudius: Give us some light. Away!

Hamlet talks to his mother Gertrude, telling her how angry he is at her for having married his uncle so soon after his father died.

Hamlet: Mother, you have my father much offended.

Hamlet and Gertrude have an argument and suddenly Hamlet hears a sound coming from behind a curtain. He thinks it's Claudius hiding there and stabs through the curtain, killing Polonius, Ophelia's father. As he dies, Polonius cries:

Polonius: O, I am slain!

4. Claudius is very worried that Hamlet knows he's a murderer and he sends him away to England with two of his friends from school - Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Claudius: I'll have him hence tonight.

These friends are told to see that Hamlet dies. But Hamlet escapes and returns home to Denmark and meets up with Horatio. While Hamlet has been away, Ophelia has gone insane with sorrow because she has lost both her father and her boyfriend.

Ophelia: I would give you some violets,

but they withered all when my father died.

Ophelia is found drowned in a river, and no-one knows whether it was an accident or suicide. Her brother Laertes

comes home from fighting to find his father and sister dead and blames Hamlet.

Laertes: I have a speech of fire that fain would blaze

5. Hamlet and Horatio find themselves at the graveyard where Ophelia is to be buried. Hamlet meets a gravedigger, and discovers a skull that belonged to the King's jester from his childhood.

Hamlet: Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio...

King Claudius arranges a duel between Hamlet and Laertes. Because he wants Hamlet dead, he gets Laertes to poison the tip of his sword. He also prepares a poisoned drink for Hamlet.

Claudius: I have prepared him/ A chalice for the nonce...

Things go very wrong at the duel. The swords get mixed up and both Laertes and Hamlet get cut with the poisoned weapon. Queen Gertrude then drinks the poison meant for Hamlet so Hamlet kills King Claudius with the poisoned sword before he dies.

Claudius: O, yet defend me, friends!

Only Hamlet's friend Horatio lives to tell the terrible story.

**Horatio: Now cracks a noble heart. Good night sweet prince:
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!**

CHARACTER PROFILES

Claudius

The new King of Denmark
Recently married to Gertrude, prince Hamlet's mother
Prince Hamlet's uncle who Hamlet comes to believe killed his Father

Gertrude

The Queen of Denmark and Prince Hamlet's mother.
Her husband the old king has died suddenly not long ago and she has just married her husband's brother, Claudius.

Prince Hamlet

Gertrude's son and Prince of Denmark.
Loyal to his father, the old king, who has recently died unexpectedly. He has come home from university for his father's funeral and his mother's wedding but he wishes his mother had not married his Uncle Claudius. Horatio is his best friend

Horatio

Prince Hamlet's friend from university
Loyal to Hamlet, he doesn't seem to know Hamlet's family very much

Polonius

The chief advisor to the royal family for many years.
Loyal to the current king, Claudius, and often seen as pompous and self important

Ophelia

Polonius' daughter and sister to Laertes.
Hamlet has been interested in Ophelia in the past and has given her gifts and spent time with her. She seems to be in love with him but is also very obedient to her Father who doesn't like Hamlet's behaviour.

Laertes

Polonius' son and Ophelia's brother.
Laertes is a loyal son and brother who goes off to fight during the play, with Claudius' permission.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

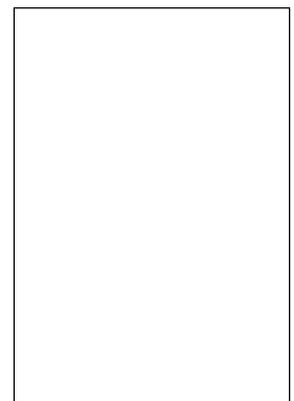
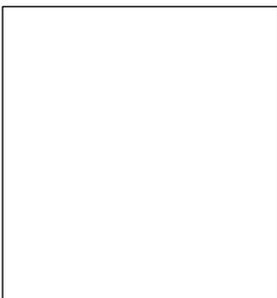
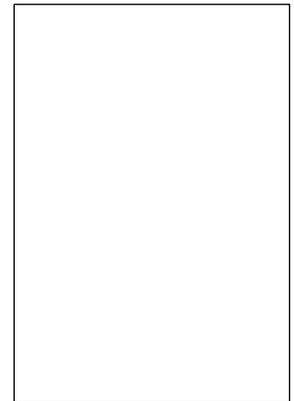
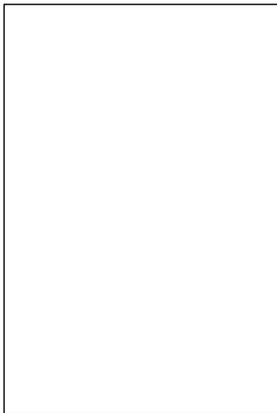
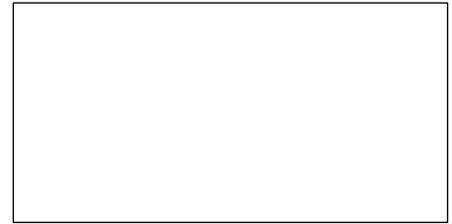
Old friends of Hamlet.

They seem to have been sent for by Gertrude and Claudius early on in the play to try and help Hamlet deal with his grief.

What's on his mind?

After watching Part 1 of the broadcast, see if you can fill in the below boxes with Hamlet's main worries. What are the things he is thinking about?

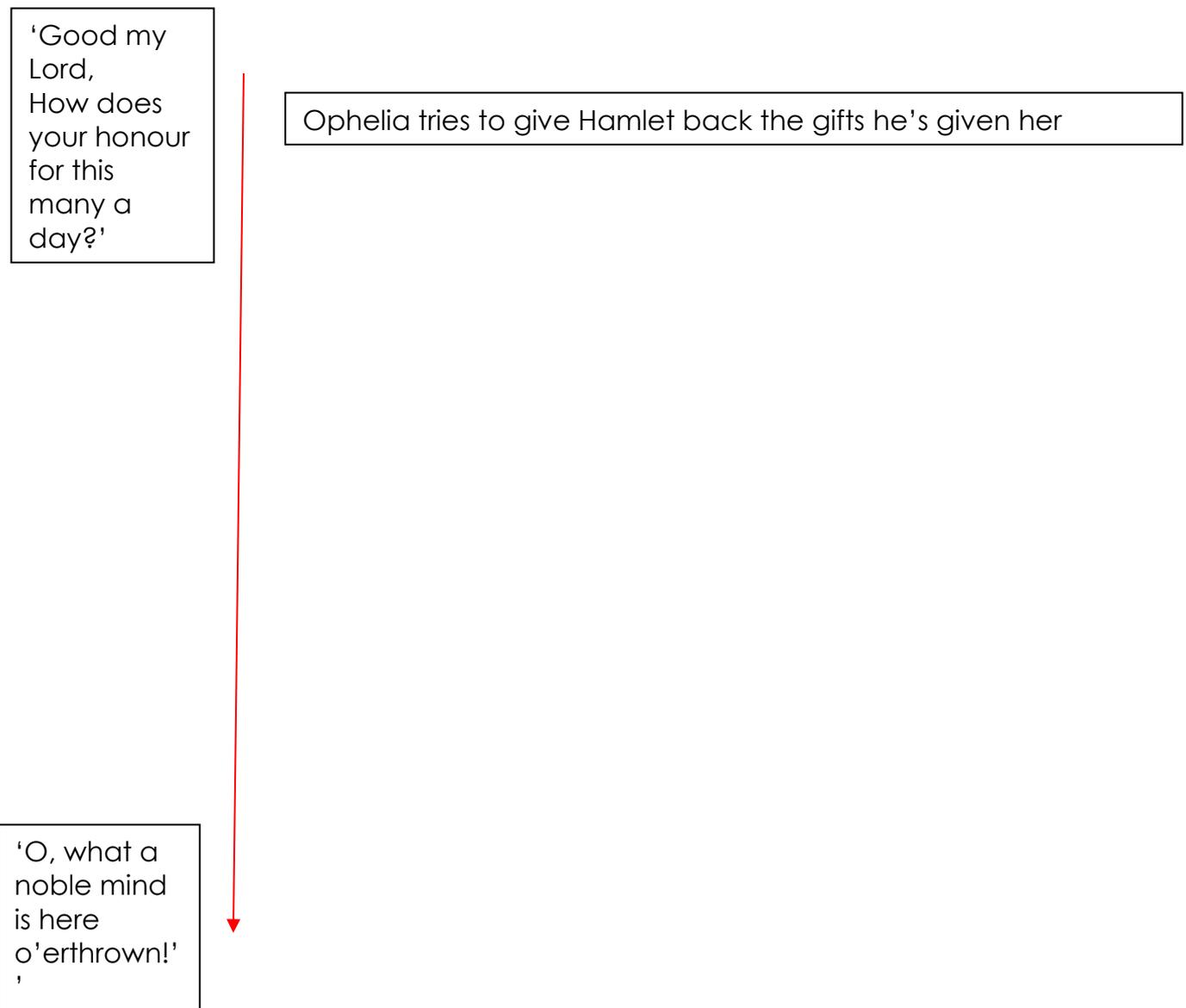
Example: Hamlet thinks his mother has married again too quickly and he doesn't like it.



Hamlet and Ophelia

In the Nunnery Scene when Ophelia returns Hamlet's love tokens, is there a moment where Hamlet's behaviour to Ophelia changes. If so, where is it and why does it cause his behaviour to change?

Using the below timeline, write down the key things that happen in this scene as you watch. The first one has been filled in for you.



Looking at your list of key events in the scene, underline any moments which you think change the way Hamlet behaves towards Ophelia.

What are these key moments and why do you think they change his behaviour?

Turning Points

Using the boxes, draw what happens in the final scene of *Hamlet*. In the last box you should include the final moment where everyone is dead, apart from Horatio.

Are there any moments in this scene where you think the deaths could have been stopped?

Put a star next to any box where you think the deaths could have been stopped. Explain why you think these boxes, or moments, are important: