

# 16 - THE PLAY WITHIN THE PLAY

What is the effect of the play within the play on the audience?

## WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of note paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#) and play [this clip](#).
- A copy of Hamlet Act 3 scene 2, to read either on the page or onscreen.

## ACTIVITY

- Hamlet asks a group of visiting Players to Elsinore to perform a display called The Murder of Gonzago. He says, 'The plays the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King'.
- When the players enter, they first perform a short, silent version of the whole play. Read the stage directions for this 'dumbshow' here:

*Enter a King and a Queen very lovingly; the Queen embracing him, and he her. She kneels, and makes show of protestation unto him. He takes her up, and declines his head upon her neck: lays him down upon a bank of flowers: she, seeing him asleep, leaves him. Anon comes in a fellow, takes off his crown, kisses it, and pours poison in the King's ears, and exit. The Queen returns; finds the King dead, and makes passionate action. The Poisoner, with some two or three Mutes, comes in again, seeming to lament with her. The dead body is carried away. The Poisoner woos the Queen with gifts: she seems loath and unwilling awhile, but in the end accepts his love.*

- Write down any words from this description that you find interesting.
- Create your own version of the 'dumbshow' using models of the characters that are mentioned (you could make paper cut-outs, model them from plasticine, or perhaps just use everyday household objects), using your characters to tell the story.
- Read the stage directions aloud whilst you act out your 'dumbshow'.
- Find the place in Act 3 Scene 2 which starts with Lucianus' line, 'Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit.' Read from there until the stage direction 'Exeunt all but Hamlet and Horatio'.
- Ask yourself: What does Claudius do in response to the play? What is he thinking and feeling as he rises and exits?
- Write down those thoughts and feelings.
- Visit the Hamlet Schools Broadcast Q and A [here](#) and watch from 19.10-19.30.
- Ask yourself: What is the effect of the play within the play on Hamlet? What is the effect on the audience watching the play?

## EXTENSION

- Visit the RSC Learning Zone [here](#). Click on 'analysing the imagery' and select 'performance imagery'.
- Read the information about performance imagery and see if you can find examples in the play.
- If you are feeling really ambitious, you could make a film of your 'dumbshow'. Either read the stage directions whilst you move your models, or you could choose a piece of music to create atmosphere. You could even create a stop motion version of your dumbshow.