

3 - THE CHARACTERS

What kind of people live in the world of this play?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Some pieces of paper, or a notebook and something to write and draw with.
- A copy of Act 1 Scene 2 of Hamlet, on the page or on screen to read.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit this [page](#).

ACTIVITY

- Visit the Who's Who page on the RSC Learning Zone using [the link](#) above.
- Tear up some pieces of paper and use one scrap for each character. Write the character name and key information for Hamlet on the first piece. Continue until you have one piece for each character.
- Group these characters into The Royal Family of Denmark, Polonius' family, Hamlet's friends. Are there any characters who do not fit into these groups? Place those characters outside, as observers.
- Read the stage directions at the opening of Act 1 Scene 2. Several of the main characters enter. Which are not included? Place these characters as observers.
- Shakespeare includes 'others' in Act 1 Scene 2. Add two new pieces of paper to be courtiers, two to be guards and two to be servants. Make half of these characters loyal to the old King, and half loyal to the new King. Write this information on their pieces of paper.
- Now place Claudius in the middle, and re-arrange all the characters around him, according to how close to him you think that character is. Bear in mind the power relationships between the characters. If you can, take a photo once you are happy with the image you've created.
- Read through Act 1 Scene 2 up to Claudius' line, 'Come away' when everyone except Hamlet leaves the scene. As you read the scene, move your characters as if they are reacting to Claudius. Remember to include the observers when appropriate.
- Take a photograph of where all the characters have ended up.
- Ask yourself: How have the relationships between characters changed during this section? What has changed that might be dangerous for Denmark? Where did you place Hamlet by the end of the section, and why?
- Note down what you have found out during the activity.
- You can also return to this activity later on and do the same thing. Looking at the last scene of the play, compare the relationship we see in Act 1 Scene 2 with the one we see at the end of the play. How has this changed?

EXTENSION

- Choose the character who you are most interested in now.
- Design a private room for your chosen character. Now you know more about them, their social status, their relationships and what they are like, see if you can imagine how they would live.
- If you feel very ambitious, you can build a model box of this room and make their personal possessions and clothes out of modelling clay or scrap material or paper. Don't forget to make your character too and put them in it! Photograph or film your character in their room. How do they behave in their own space?