

# HAMLET

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

### PRIMARY TEACHER PACK

#### ABOUT THIS PACK

This Primary Teachers' pack supports the RSC's 2016 production of *Hamlet*, directed by Simon Godwin, which opened on 12 March 2016 at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon.

The activities in this pack have been specifically designed for younger pupils and focus on Hamlet and his behavior throughout the play. If you are looking for more activities we also have a Teacher Pack aimed at KS3-4 with extension activities that you could adapt for KS2 learners.

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These symbols are used throughout the pack:

	<b>READ</b> Notes from the production, background info or extracts
	<b>ACTIVITY</b> An active classroom or open space activity
	<b>WRITE</b> A discussion or writing activity
	<b>LINKS</b> Useful web addresses and research activities

#### ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

The 2016 production of *Hamlet* is set in a West African inspired setting. In this interpretation, the character of Hamlet has been away at University in Europe but has to go back home when his Father dies.

A lot of West African communities still have a king or leader and in this play Claudius has just taken over that responsibility from his dead brother. In the opening of the play we see Hamlet at his graduation ceremony in Wittenberg which then moves to show the King's funeral. These scenes, not normally shown in the play, focus in on the themes of family and loss helping to show how much grief Hamlet is suffering at the start of the play.

# KNOWING THE STORY



## ACTIVITY 1: THE STORY IN IMAGES

One thing that the actors in the 2016 production of *Hamlet* did was to spend time looking at the story together first as part of their rehearsals. The following activity will help your pupils to understand what happens as well.

- Organise pupils into groups of four or five.
- Ask them to take one of the Act descriptions in the Resource materials and to create a freeze frame or still image that shows what happens in their scene.
- Encourage each group to then use the lines they have been given to bring the Act to life.
- Allow pupils the opportunity to watch each of the Acts, and lines, being performed in order so that they can see the whole story.
- Reflect with pupils on what they have seen. Is this the ending they would have expected? What would they have expected to happen differently?

Discuss with pupils why they think the 2016 production opens with Hamlet's graduation and shows the King's funeral.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

When Hamlet comes back to Denmark, his home, lots of things have changed: his Dad is dead, his Mum has married his Uncle straight away and there's a new King on the throne. Ask pupils to spend some time imagining how the characters in Hamlet's family feel at the start of the play.

- How does Hamlet feel towards his Uncle? How does he feel towards his Mum?
- How does Gertrude feel about her son coming home? What might she be worried about?
- How does Claudius feel about Hamlet coming home? Is he worried?



Tanya Moodie as Gertrude and Clarence Smith as Claudius in the 2016 production of *Hamlet*. Photo by Manuel Harlan.

In any version of *Hamlet* the actors can answer these questions differently. In the 2016 version Gertrude and Hamlet are very close and she's excited to see him come home from University, but in a different version she might not be excited to see her son. In rehearsal they also spent a lot of time thinking about the questions:

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- How did Gertrude find out her husband had died?
- Why does she then marry Claudius?
- Does she know or think Claudius might have killed her old husband?

In this production Tanya Moodie, who plays Gertrude, talked about leading the family and making the right decision to protect the family's future, but she made the decision that her character did not know Claudius had murdered old King Hamlet. How would it change it if she did?.

## EXPLORING THE CHARACTERS

The following activities are designed to help you and your pupils become more familiar with the characters in the play.



### ACTIVITY 2: CHARACTER TRAITS

In the following activity pupils can explore the different characters in the play.

- Organise pupils into pairs and provide each pair with a character profile.
- Ask the pairs to work together to create a statue of their character, with one person being the statue and the other being the sculptor.
  - Encourage the sculptors to think carefully about how the person might be positioned, what they might care about and how they can show their attitude and feelings in a single pose.
- Encourage pupils to form a larger group by finding other pairs who have a character in their 'group'.
  - Explain that the acting company spent a lot of time thinking about the same groups of characters:
    - The Royal Family of Denmark
    - Polonius' Family
    - Hamlet's Friends

They also thought about the Players and the court/security, but the characters in this exercise only fall into these first three.

- Invite pupils to then create a statue gallery of their group of characters that the rest of the group can walk through.
- Allow pupils to experience each gallery, discussing each one as they experience it. Which character really stands out in each gallery? What can they work out about the character from the pose that the sculptor has chosen? How might the characters interact with each other?

- Discuss with pupils after seeing all of the galleries whether there were any cross overs. Which characters appear in more than one gallery? Are they different in one compared to the other? Why might that be? Which gallery feels more intimidating and which more comfortable? Are their answers what they expected? If you were Hamlet walking through the gallery do they think everyone would look the same, or do some characters pretend to be something different? Would Claudius look the same to Hamlet, would some of Hamlet's friends?
  - Ask pupils to then think about how these reactions might be different if the play was set in different places. If the Royal family of Denmark were actually a ruling family in West Africa, how might the other groups be different?

## HAMLET'S REVENGE



### ACTIVITY 3: HAMLET'S DILEMMAS

In this activity pupils will have the opportunity to explore Hamlet's speech in Act 1 Scene 2 where he struggles to know what to do after returning home to find his Mother remarried to his Uncle and his Father dead.

- Arrange pupils so that they are standing in a circle.
- Ask them to listen as you read through the speech and then ask them to repeat back any words or phrases that stuck in their head. At the end ask them to think of one word or phrase that jumped out at them and that they remember.
- Ask pupils to then create a single movement or gesture to represent their remembered word or phrase.
- Allow pupils to share their movement or gesture, moving round the circle until everyone has shown their movement or gesture.
- Reflect with pupils on how they think this person is feeling. What do the movements reveal about their state of mind? Are they content or troubled? How can they tell?
- Provide each pupil with one line from the speech and ask them to walk around the room reading their line out loud. Encourage them to ignore everyone else, as they will all be reading different parts of the speech at the same time.
- Invite pupils to then read their line in a number of different ways. For example, as if they are telling a child a story, as a sports presenter, as a criminal talking to a partner in crime.
- Ask pupils to then move back into the circle, arranging themselves in the correct order.
- Allow pupils to read out the speech, choosing tone that they think fits well with the speech. During this reading, check with pupils to make sure they understand the meaning behind the language.

- Arrange pupils into small groups of three or four.
- Ask one pupil in each group to play Hamlet and challenge them to read the speech while keeping the attention of the other people in their group. Inform the other group members that they must start off by listening and then turn away.
- Reflect with the groups on how easy it was to get other people's attention. What tactics did the Hamlet's use? What kind of attention do they think Hamlet wants at this point in the play? What is it he is struggling with? What would he want from others at this point?
- Discuss with pupils what they think his next steps might be, just based on this speech? Does this match up with everything else they know about the play?



#### ACTIVITY 4: HAMLET AND THE GHOST

- Organise pupils into two lines, facing each other and provide each of them with an edited copy of Hamlet's first meeting with his Father's ghost. Ask one line to read Hamlet's part and the other to read the part of the Ghost.
  - Encourage the pupils playing Hamlet to hold out an arm every time they ask a question.
  - Encourage the pupils playing the ghost to place a hand over their heart every time they use the words I, mine, my or me.
- Reflect with pupils on how they think Hamlet is feeling. Did he ask a lot of questions or not very many? Why do they think that might be? What did they notice about the way the ghost spoke? Is it what they would expect of a ghost?
- Ask pupils to then work in threes to look at the bold section of the scene where the ghost of Old hamlet explains what happened to him and how he died.
- Invite each group to look at each line of the speech and create a freeze frame for that line, telling the story of what happened to the old king.
- Allow some of the groups the chance to perform their images for each line of the speech.
- Reflect with pupils on what the images remind them of. What do they think Old Hamlet expects his son to do? Do they think Hamlet will listen to the ghost?
  - Ask pupils to think about whether they would listen to a ghost, or if they believe in ghosts. One of the reasons Simon Godwin set this production in a West African setting is because of the cultural attitudes to the supernatural in some communities there. Can pupils think of any historical settings or places they've been where they think people would believe in ghosts or listen to what one said?



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



## ACTIVITY 5: CHANGES IN HAMLET

Lots of the characters in the play talk about how much Hamlet has changes and how strange his behaviour becomes, compared to how he used to be. Most of them see this and think he's gone mad.

- Organise pupils into pairs.
- Provide each pair with one of the quotes and explanations from the list. Explain that all of these are things that Hamlet does after meeting the ghost that he didn't do before.
- Invite each pair to create a movement, lasting no more than 20 seconds, which represents that behaviour.
- Allow each pair to share their movement, before asking the rest of the group what they think the behaviour is and why they think it might make Hamlet look mad to his family and friends.
- Ask them to think about what they would do if they were trying to convince the people around them they were mad; would they use any of Hamlet's strategies? Which ones do they think would worry his friends and family the most?



Paapa Essiedu as Hamlet and Tanya Moodie as Gertrude in the 2016 production of *Hamlet*. Photo by Manuel Harlan.



## ACTIVITY 6: THE PLAY WITHIN THE PLAY

Other than pretending to be mad, Hamlet also tries to get Claudius to confess to murdering his brother by staging a play. In the play a man murders his brother to marry his wife and take his throne, exactly as Claudius has done.

- Explain that in the 2016 production this scene is staged in Hamlet's rooms, where he paints and expresses how he feels.
  - This room is almost like a den where he can create art and as his character becomes more and more 'mad' Paapa Essiedu, who plays Hamlet, dresses in clothes which are covered in paint. You can see this in the image on this page, and it makes him stand out compared to other members of the court who are well presented.

The play is performed on a stage in the middle of this room or den. In this scene, Hamlet's intention is to watch Claudius to see how he reacts, so where everyone is sitting is really important and the players or actors are shown as travelling storytellers who Hamlet already knows really well.



In the image on the next page they can see where the play was staged and where Hamlet, Gertrude and Claudius watched from.



The Company of Hamlet in the 2016 production. Photo by Manuel Harlan.

- Invite pupils to draw a design for their own room. It might be Hamlet's room, as in the production, or perhaps the throne room or banqueting hall with lots of guests. Ask them to include:
  - A stage
  - The positions of Claudius, Gertrude and Hamlet
- Ask pupils to present back their designs. What do they think the advantages of Hamlet's plan are and what are the disadvantages?

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The Royal Shakespeare Company  
3, Chapel Lane  
Stratford on Avon  
Warwickshire  
CV37 6BE  
[www.rsc.org.uk](http://www.rsc.org.uk)

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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 (Royal Court)**

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 (Royal Court)**

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 (Royal Court and Hamlet's Friends)**

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 (Hamlet's Friends)**

Prince Hamlet's friend from university

Loyal to Hamlet, he doesn't seem to know Hamlet's family very much

### **Polonius (Polonius Family)**

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 Family)**

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 Family)**

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 (Hamlet's Friends)**

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.

## HAMLET'S DILEMNA

### Act 1 Scene 2 – Edited by RSC Education

#### HAMLET

○ that this too too sullied flesh would melt,  
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,  
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed  
His cannon 'gainst self-slaughter. ○ God, God,  
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of this world.  
Fie on't, ah, fie - 'tis an unweeded garden  
That grows to seed - things rank and gross in nature  
Possess it merely. That it should come to this:  
But two months dead - nay not so much, not two -  
So excellent a king, that was to this  
Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother  
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven  
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,  
Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him  
As if increase of appetite had grown  
By what it fed on. And yet within a month  
Let me not think on't - Frailty, thy name is Woman,  
A little month, or e're those shoes were old  
With which she followed my poor father's body,  
Like Niobe, all tears. Why, she -  
○ God, a beast that wants discourse of reason  
Would have mourned longer - married with my uncle,  
My father's brother - but no more like my father  
Than I to Hercules. Within a month,  
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears  
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,  
She married. ○ most wicked speed! To post  
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets,  
It is not, nor it cannot come to good;  
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

# HAMLET AND THE GHOST

## Act 1 Scene 5 - Edited by RSC Education

Hamlet: Speak. I am bound to hear.

Ghost : I am thy father's spirit,  
Doomed to walk the night,  
And for the day confined to fast in fires.  
If thou didst ever thy dear father love-

Hamlet: Oh God!

Ghost: Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

Hamlet: Murder?

Ghost: Murder most foul. But know, thou noble youth,  
The serpent that did sting thy father's life  
Now wears his crown.

Hamlet: My uncle?

Ghost: **Sleeping within my orchard,  
My custom always of the afternoon,  
Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole  
With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,  
And in the porches of my ears did pour  
The leperous distilment; whose effect  
Holds such an enmity with blood of man  
That swift as quicksilver it courses through  
The natural gates and alleys of the body.  
Thus was I sleeping by a brother's hand  
Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched.  
O, horrible! O, horrible! O, horrible!  
If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not.**

## **HAMLET'S ACTIONS**

The King and Gertrude think he is 'transformed' from his old self, with new habits. For example, 'Sometimes he walks four hours together There in the Lobby'

Ophelia is scared by the way he looks when he tries to speak to her, telling her Father about it afterwards.

'Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced,  
No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,  
Ungartered and down-gyved to his ankle,  
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,  
And with a look so piteous in purport  
As if he had been loosed out of hell  
To speak of horrors, he comes before me.'

Hamlet realises Rozenkrantz and Guildenstern, his old friends, have been sent for because of how he is behaving, seeming miserable, and he tells them 'I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercise'

The Queen agrees to help Polonius talk to Hamlet, hoping her son is behaving so strangely because of love. They find him in the lobby and she sees him and says : 'The poor wretch comes reading'.

Polonius tries to talk to Hamlet about Ophelia but Hamlet calls him a Fishmonger. Polonius thinks this is evidence Hamlet is mad with love. 'He knew me not at first, he said I was a fishmonger! He is far gone; and truly, in my youth I suffered much extremity for love'