

HAMLET

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These notes are created for teachers and leaders wishing to introduce their group to *Hamlet* and in particular the RSC's 2008 production directed by Gregory Doran. A director and actors together make interpretive choices. These are negotiated through rehearsal and result in a unique interpretation of the story and the characters - their motivations and relationships. We have created the following activities directly from our experience in the rehearsal room.

For some of the activities, you will need a large space to work in. The activities are differentiated by outcome and most of them would work from Key Stages 3 to 5.



In the early stages of rehearsals actors were asked to explore descriptions of the characters of Old Hamlet (the dead King) and Claudius. The purpose was to discover whether the court would consider Claudius to be a preferable King to Old Hamlet.



This exercise will allow your students to do the same.

- Explain that students will be creating statues or still images of Claudius and Old Hamlet.
- Split the group into pairs. In each pair give one student the character facts for Claudius and the other student the character facts for Old Hamlet (on page 5)
- Ask the students to mould their partner into the character they have the facts for.
- Split the group in half in their roles. So one half of the room are Claudius and the other Old Hamlet and ask them to strike their poses.
- Ask the students to reflect on what the differences are between the two characters.
- Who would they prefer their country to be ruled by?



In this production the actors decided that they preferred the rule of Claudius, a peace-keeping King who enjoyed a good party! This is important in the staging as it is when we, the audience, and the Court first see Claudius as King. The staging of this opening court scene is instrumental in revealing the relationships between the characters in *Hamlet*.

When developing the world of the play the designer, Rob Jones, was inspired by photographs of contemporary European Royal Families in *Hello Magazine*.

Rob Jones talking about his design for the production.



www.bbc.co.uk/hamlet/making_of/on_stage_creating_the_world.shtml



This exercise explores the relationships in the opening scene of the play using one of the design inspirations for the production. Students will create a *HELLO!* magazine shoot for the Court Scene and explore the relationships between the characters. This exercise also offers an opportunity to develop their characters as new information is revealed to the students.

- Explain that in this exercise the group is going to be creating a photo shoot for *HELLO!* magazine.
- Ask them to think about what their responsibilities are as members of a court – how should they behave? Also ask them to think about what they might want to show the public in a photo-shoot. A more confident group might want to choose whether any of the characters would try and sabotage the shoot.
- Split the group into groups of six.
- Allocate a character to each person (Gertrude, Claudius, Laertes, Hamlet, Ophelia) or the role of photographer.
- Give each character their character facts (see page 6).
- Ask them to create a pose for the beginning of the scene before any words have been said. They should show their feelings towards the other characters by standing near to or far away from them. They can also choose who they are looking at, or not, and what facial expression they have.
- The photographer needs to make sure that they are all in the frame; if possible they should have access to a digital camera and take a picture of the scene.
- After each group has created an initial image explain that you are going to be the voice of Claudius. Give the first piece of news that Claudius delivers (news items on page??). Ask the characters to move accordingly – how do they feel about this news? Does it change their opinion of Claudius or any of the other characters? Ask the photographers to take another picture (news sheet is on page 7).
- Continue with each new piece of news.
- Ask groups either to present their image sequences to each other, or to use the pictures that they have taken to create a magazine spread for *HELLO!*
- Ask the students to reflect on each others' images - what are they saying about each of the characters?



The actors talking about the Court Scene

www.bbc.co.uk/hamlet/making_of/on_stage_backstory.shtml

Ask the group to reflect on the film clip. What have the actors in this production chosen? What are the similarities/differences?



Finally, ask the students to compare this production to other, earlier stage productions. What does the positioning of characters do to reveal the relationships within a scene?

1997: www.bbc.co.uk/hamlet/past_productions/rsc_stage_1997.shtml#court

2004: www.bbc.co.uk/hamlet/past_productions/rsc_stage_2004.shtml#court



The Court Scene from 2008
Stage Production © RSC

COMPARING CLAUDIUS TO OLD HAMLET

CLAUDIUS

- Sends out diplomats rather than fighting Norway
- Has thrown big celebrations to celebrate his wedding
- Wants to keep Hamlet close to keep an eye on him

OLD HAMLET

- Has led many battles
- Was away from home fighting a lot of the time
- Is known to be a vicious fighter
- Allowed Hamlet to go away to university

CHARACTER FACTS

Gertrude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your husband has died • You have married his brother • You are the Queen of Denmark • You have one son, Hamlet
Claudius	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You are the brother of the dead King • You are now the King of Denmark • You are Hamlet's Uncle
Laertes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You are the son of the King's top advisor, Polonius • You are at university but have returned to pay your respects to the dead King • You have a sister, Ophelia
Hamlet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You are the son of the dead King • You are at university and have returned for your father's funeral • You are still wearing your mourning clothes despite the fact that since the funeral your mother has remarried. • You are struggling to get over your father's death • You have been friendly with Ophelia recently
Ophelia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You are Laertes' sister • You are the daughter of the King's top advisor, Polonius • You have been friendly with Hamlet recently
Polonius	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You are the King's top advisor. • You have two children, Laertes and Ophelia • You are keen for your son to return to university

CLAUDIUS' SPEECH

This is Claudius' opening speech. The headlines are designed to give the news in a concise way but we would recommend that you also use Shakespeare's words with your students in this activity.

Headline	Speech
<p>Although we are still in morning for the Old King, I would like to present you with my new wife, Queen Gertrude.</p>	<p>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. Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen, The imperial jointress to this warlike state, Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy, -- With one auspicious and one dropping eye, With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage, In equal scale weighing delight and dole, -- Taken to wife: nor have we herein barr'd Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone With this affair along.</p>
<p>Voltemand and Cornelius to make peace with Norway</p>	<p>Now follows that you know, young Fortinbras, Holding a weak supposal of our worth, Or thinking by our late dear brother's death Our state to be disjoint and out of frame, Colleagued with the dream of his advantage, He hath not failed to pester us with message, Importing the surrender of those lands Lost by his father, with all bonds of law, To our most valiant brother. So much for him. Now thus the business is: we have here writ To Norway, uncle to young Fortinbras That he suppress his nephew's further march And threatening enterprise toward our state. We here dispatch you good Cornelius And Voltemand for bearers of this greeting To old Norway</p>

<p>Laertes to return to university</p>	<p>Take thy fair hour, Laertes: time be thine, And thy best graces spend it at thy will!</p>
<p>Hamlet, next in line for the throne, is to stay in Denmark and not return to university</p>	<p>(Hamlet) You are the most immediate to our throne; And with no less nobility of love Than that which dearest father bears his son, Do I impart towards you. For your intent In going back to school in Wittenberg, It is most retrograde to our desire: And we beseech you bend you to remain Here, in the cheer and comfort of our eye, Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.</p>

EXPLORING MAKING POLONIUS' FAMILY OF CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE



Greg Doran, the director of the 2009 film, believes that every actor should understand exactly what they are saying in order to make the most of their role.



Rehearsal: Approaching the Text Greg and the actors talk about how they went about this in rehearsals.

www.bbc.co.uk/hamlet/making_of/on_stage_rehearsal.shtml



Firstly, Greg asked the actors to read the Shakespearean text aloud, and then they would discuss the meanings of the words and any misunderstandings. Finally, the actors were asked to paraphrase their speeches in their own words to see if they discovered anything new.



This exercise allows students to explore this rehearsal technique and also consider the relationship between Polonius, Laertes and Ophelia.

- Ask the students to get into groups of three.
- Ask each trio to read the scene (page 9-10) through and underline any words that they don't understand.
- As a whole group, discuss the difficult words.
- Ask the groups of three to paraphrase their speeches in modern English.
- What were the clear messages that came out of this second reading?
- Finally, ask the students to return to the Shakespearean text.
- Ask them to reflect on how the final reading is different from the first.
- What have they discovered about the relationships within this scene?
- Of course, this is only the first step in making decisions about playing a scene.



Rehearsal: Playing the Family Polonius Oliver Ford Davis, who plays Polonius, describes what the actors did to add more life to the scene:

www.bbc.co.uk/hamlet/making_of/on_stage_playing_family_polonius.shtml

ACT 1 SCENE 3 (EDITED)

LAERTES My necessaries are embarked, farewell:
And, sister, as the winds give benefit
And convoy is assistant, do not sleep
But let me hear from you.

OPHELIA Do you doubt that?

LAERTES For Hamlet and the trifling of his favour,
Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood,
No more.

OPHELIA No more but so.

LAERTES Think it no more,
Perhaps he loves you now, but you must fear,
His greatness weigh'd, his will is not his own;
For he himself is subject to his birth:
Be wary 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 ungracious pastors do
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven;
Whiles, like a puff'd and reckless libertine
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,
And recks not his own rede.

LAERTES O, fear me not.
I stay too long. But here my father comes.

Enter POLONIUS

POLONIUS Yet here, Laertes! There; my blessing with thee!
And these few precepts in thy memory
See thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue,
Nor any unproportioned thought his act.
Neither a borrower nor a lender be;
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
This above all: to thine own self be true,
Farewell: my blessing season this in thee!

LAERTES Most humbly do I take my leave, my lord.
Farewell, Ophelia, and remember well
What I have said to you.

OPHELIA 'Tis in my memory locked,
And you yourself shall keep the key of it.

LAERTES Farewell.

Exit

POLONIUS What is't, Ophelia, he hath said to you?

OPHELIA So please you, something touching the Lord Hamlet.

POLONIUS Marry, well bethought:
'Tis told me, he hath very oft of late
Given private time to you; and you yourself
Have of your audience been most free and bounteous:
What is between you? give me up the truth.

OPHELIA My lord, he hath importuned me with love
In honourable fashion.

POLONIUS Ay, springes to catch woodcocks. I do know,
When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul
Lends the tongue vows: these blazes, daughter,
Giving more light than heat, extinct in both
You must not take for fire. From this time
Be somewhat scanted of your maiden presence;

OPHELIA I shall obey, my Lord



There are often fine details within a production which the audience may not notice but which help the actors immensely with developing their character. In Greg Doran's 2008 production, the company wanted to create a clear difference in the relationships Hamlet has with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and with Horatio.

In the text, just before The Players' performance in Act 3 Scene 2, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter with Polonius but have nothing to do. Polonius answers Hamlet's inquiry that both the King and Queen are coming to watch the play and is then quickly dismissed by Hamlet with the words: "Bid the players make haste." Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have no lines and are also immediately dismissed by Hamlet with the words: "Will you two help to hasten them." What should Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do? Should they just follow Polonius on to the stage and wait for Hamlet to tell them to follow him off..?

Working with the actors Tom Davey and Sam Alexander, Greg decided this was a small moment which could reinforce who Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are and what their relationship with Hamlet is. They decided that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern think they still have a 'laddish' friendship with Hamlet and so would mess around in this situation, attempting to make Hamlet laugh. All three are dressed in dinner jackets so Rosencrantz and Guildenstern pretend they are in a Bond movie and bring on champagne and glasses. Hamlet barely notices them and they can do nothing more than shrug and walk away.

How do the actors create this detail? Greg Doran usually begins his rehearsal period with a close examination of the text. The actors read through the play, taking different parts to those they have been cast in. They discuss every section, paraphrasing and making decisions about how to interpret the text. We can examine what a character says and how he or she says it in order to make decisions about how they feel.



- Ask for two volunteers to stand at the front of the room representing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Read out '**The Facts**' (page13) – this is what we know from the text.
- Ask the players to suggest what questions arise from these facts (for examples, see below). On a board or a flipchart, write up all '**The Questions**' to keep in mind throughout the following exercises. Ask the players representing the characters to have an initial attempt at answering the questions.

THE FACTS

- They were childhood friends of Hamlet
- They were sent for by the King and Queen to find out what is wrong with Hamlet
- They have been told of Hamlet's 'madness'
- They are eager to please the King and Queen and have been promised a reward

THE QUESTIONS (examples)

- When was the last time they saw Hamlet?
- When was the last time they saw each other?
- What are the differences between them?
- Can they really be friends with a prince?
- Whose side are they on – the king's? Hamlet's? Their own?
- What do they think is wrong with Hamlet?
- What are they hoping to do?



Next in groups of three, ask each group to create two or three **tableaux** of Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Hamlet as children showing their relationship. Ask them to consider:

- What games did they play?
- Did it matter that Hamlet was a prince?

(If you have a group or two with four players, the extra person can be another old school friend of Hamlet.)



Now the group know the scene well, try these two 'Retellings' in groups of three.

Retelling 1

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern meet another old friend at court and tell this friend about their encounter with Hamlet. The friend can ask questions and offer ideas and opinions based on what they may have heard.

Retelling 2

Two players become Horatio, the other player is Hamlet. Hamlet tells Horatio about his meeting with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and the Horatios can ask questions and offer opinions as appropriate.



After these exercises, return to The Questions (see page 13) and your Rosencrantz and Guildenstern volunteers. How are your answers different now? Which interpretation seems more real?

ACT 2 SCENE 2 (EDITED BY GREG DORAN)

- GUIL** Mine honoured lord!
- ROSEN** My most dear lord!
- HAMLET** My excellent good friends! How dost thou, Guildenstern? Ah, Rosencrantz! Good lads, how do ye both?
- ROSEN** As the indifferent children of the earth.
- GUIL** Happy, in that we are not over-happy:
On fortune's cap we are not the very button.
- HAMLET** Nor the soles of her shoe?
- ROSEN** Neither, my lord.
- HAMLET** Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favours?
- GUIL** 'Faith, her privates we.
- HAMLET** In the secret parts of fortune? O, most true: she is a strumpet.
What's the news?
- ROSEN** None, my lord, but that the world's grown honest.
- HAMLET** Then is doomsday near. But your news is not true. Let me question more in particular: what have you, my good friends, deserved at the hands of fortune, that she sends you to prison hither?
- GUIL** Prison, my lord?
- HAMLET** Denmark's a prison.
- ROSEN** Then is the world one.
- HAMLET** A goodly one, in which there are many confines, wards and dungeons, Denmark being one o'the worst.
- ROSEN** We think not so, my lord.
- HAMLET** Why, then, 'tis none to you; for there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so: to me it is a prison.

ROSEN Why then, your ambition makes it one: 'tis too narrow for your mind.

HAMLET O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams. Shall we to th'court?

ROSEN/GUIL We'll wait upon you.

HAMLET No such matter: I will not sort you with the rest of my servants, for to speak to you like an honest man, I am most dreadfully attended. But, in the beaten way of friendship, what make you at Elsinore?

ROSEN To visit you, my lord; no other occasion.

HAMLET Were you not sent for? Is it your own inclining? Is it a free visitation? Come, deal justly with me: come, come; nay, speak.

GUIL What should we say, my lord?

HAMLET Why, any thing, but to the purpose. You were sent for; and there is a kind of confession in your looks which your modesties have not craft enough to colour: I know the good king and queen have sent for you.

ROSEN To what end, my lord?

HAMLET That you must teach me. But let me conjure you, by the rights of our fellowship, be even and direct with me whether you were sent for or no?

ROSEN What say you?

HAMLET Nay, then, I have an eye of you. If you love me, hold not off.

GUIL My lord, we were sent for.

HAMLET I will tell you why...

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF THE PLAYERS



During rehearsals the actors explore not only the play that they are going to perform but also other interpretations of the play and sources that it has been based on. In this rehearsal period the actors even watched The Simpson's episode that is based on *Hamlet*.

Exploring sources can help illuminate choices that the actors make and help you think about the play in a different way. The Player's speech in Act Two Scene Two is Priam's story and is based on Aeneas talking about the fall of Troy in Book II of The Aeneid. During rehearsals the actors explored this story dramatically to understand the source material.



This activity gives students an opportunity to consider the story of Priam and the impact that this story might have on the rest of the play, and on Hamlet's actions in particular.

- Split the students into groups of five.
- Explain the background to this part of The Aeneid or set this as homework. A good summary is here;
<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/aeneid/summary.html>

The section of the story that is referred to by the Player is just after the fall of Troy when Priam's son has been killed by Phyrus.

- Give them the text of Priam's story (they can either use the original on page 2 or a translation, but it should be a poetry translation). Ask them to assign roles and act it out. They can choose to have a narrator or not, or to speak or not. You might choose to give each group the full story or to split it between them.
- Watch the finished versions of the story.
- Then try adding actions to the Player's speech (page 17).
- Ask students to reflect on: Which images were the same and which were different? Why did Shakespeare use this story within Hamlet? Why do you think he emphasises particular moments? Were there any moments within the story that remind you of other events within Hamlet? Why would this speech encourage Hamlet to seek his revenge or to use the play as a way to test Claudius? (You might want to look at Hamlet's next soliloquy to explore this further.) How useful is it to know Priam's story in relation to the rest of the play?



Greg Doran decided to repeat the image of Priam hesitating with his sword in the air, as shown by the player, when Hamlet takes the dagger to Claudius.



Interpreting the Player's Speech: A clip about the Player's role within the play.
www.bbc.co.uk/hamlet/key_scenes/players_speech.shtml

SOURCE FOR THE PLAYER'S SPEECH: THE AENIAD BOOK 2

Behold! Polites, one of Priam's sons,
Pursued by Pyrrhus, there for safety runs.
Thro' swords and foes, amaz'd and hurt, he flies
Thro' empty courts and open galleries.
Him Pyrrhus, urging with his lance, pursues,
And often reaches, and his thrusts renews.
The youth, transfix'd, with lamentable cries,
Expires before his wretched parent's eyes:
Whom gasping at his feet when Priam saw,
The fear of death gave place to nature's law;
And, shaking more with anger than with age,
'The gods,' said he, 'requite thy brutal rage!
As sure they will, barbarian, sure they must,
If there be gods in heav'n, and gods be just-
Who tak'st in wrongs an insolent delight;
With a son's death t' infect a father's sight.
Not he, whom thou and lying fame conspire
To call thee his- not he, thy vaunted sire,
Thus us'd my wretched age: the gods he fear'd,
The laws of nature and of nations heard.
He cheer'd my sorrows, and, for sums of gold,
The bloodless carcass of my Hector sold;
Pitied the woes a parent underwent,
And sent me back in safety from his tent.'
"This said, his feeble hand a javelin threw,
Which, flutt'ring, seem'd to loiter as it flew:
Just, and but barely, to the mark it held,
And faintly tinkled on the brazen shield.

"Then Pyrrhus thus: 'Go thou from me to fate,
And to my father my foul deeds relate.
Now die!' With that he dragg'd the trembling sire,
Slidd'ring thro' clotter'd blood and holy mire,
(The mingled paste his murder'd son had made,)
Haul'd from beneath the violated shade,
And on the sacred pile the royal victim laid.
His right hand held his bloody falchion bare,
His left he twisted in his hoary hair;
Then, with a speeding thrust, his heart he found:
The lukewarm blood came rushing thro' the wound,
And sanguine streams distain'd the sacred ground.
Thus Priam fell, and shar'd one common fate
With Troy in ashes, and his ruin'd state:

THE PLAYER'S SPEECH

'Anon he finds him

Striking too short at Greeks; his antique sword,
Rebellious to his arm, lies where it falls,
Repugnant to command: unequal match'd,
Pyrrhus at Priam drives; in rage strikes wide;
But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword
The unnerved father falls. Then senseless Ilium,
Seeming to feel this blow, with flaming top
Stoops to his base, and with a hideous crash
Takes prisoner Pyrrhus' ear: for, lo! his sword,
Which was declining on the milky head
Of reverend Priam, seem'd i' the air to stick:
So, as a painted tyrant, Pyrrhus stood,
And, like a neutral to his will and matter,
Did nothing.

But, as we often see, against some storm
A silence in the heavens, the rack stand still,
The bold winds speechless and the orb below
As hush as death, anon the dreadful thunder
Doth rend the region, so, after Pyrrhus' pause,
Aroused vengeance sets him new a-work;
And never did the Cyclops' hammers fall
On Mars his armours forged for proof eterne
With less remorse than Pyrrhus' bleeding sword
Now falls on Priam.

'But who, O, who had seen the mobled queen—'
'Run barefoot up and down, threatening the flames
With bisson rheum; a clout about that head
Where late the diadem stood, and for a robe,

About her lank and all o'er-teemed loins
A blanket, in the alarm of fear caught up;
Who this had seen, with tongue in venom steep'd,
'Gainst Fortune's state would treason have pronounced
But if the gods themselves did see her then
When she saw Pyrrhus make malicious sport
In mincing with his sword her husband's limbs,
The instant burst of clamour that she made,
Unless things mortal move them not at all,
Would have made milch the burning eyes of heaven,
And passion in the gods.'

Registered 'Anon he finds him
Striking too short at Greeks; his antique sword,
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EXPLORING THE DESIGN OF THE GRAVEYARD IN HAMLET



The Gravediggers' scene is different to the rest of the play. It's set outside and is a much more light-hearted discussion about life and death than elsewhere in the play. In this exercise students can explore the design of the Graveyard.



Interpreting the Gravediggers' Scene:

- www.bbc.co.uk/hamlet/key_scenes/gravediggers_scene.shtml



One of the most challenging things about the scene is the scenery requirements: there needs to be a grave. On The Courtyard stage it is difficult to do big scene changes because there isn't a curtain, so the designer had to find a way to transform the stage from a court setting to a graveyard. When they are creating designs, designers make model boxes which show the different scenes in miniature.



The Set Designer To find out more about the design of the production: www.bbc.co.uk/hamlet/making_of/set_designer.shtml



In this exercise the students can work as set designers creating a graveyard for the Gravediggers' scene.

- Read through the Gravediggers' scene (page 24-25).
- All together consider what scenery or props are written into the text.
- Explain that using these fundamentals and a design brief the students will be creating the setting for the graveyard.
- Hand out the Design Challenge (page 26).
- Students can then draw or make their design. Using the template on page 6 students can make their own back wall and Courtyard stage floor to place their design onto, or they can draw a birds-eye view.
- Before the lesson, or in between two sessions working on this, you might ask the students to create a mood board for the graveyard looking at possible props, scenery, images and colours that they want to use.
- Once the students have completed their designs ask one person from each group to pitch it to the others. Ask them to include:
 - what they got from the text
 - how they chose what else to put in the scene



Compare the students' designs with the final stage design. How similar / different are they?



The Gravediggers' scene is the one that altered most dramatically in the filming of it. On stage, a grave has to be represented so the audience know that it's a grave. On film, people are much more literal so they used an outside location and actually dug a grave.



In other productions the Gravedigger scene has been used to show many different aspects of the play. Ask your group to have a look at these examples in the performance history 1948 and 1965. Compare these to the 2008 design and the decisions the students made.

www.bbc.co.uk/hamlet/past_productions/rsc_stage_1948.shtml#gravediggers
www.bbc.co.uk/hamlet/past_productions/rsc_stage_1965.shtml#gravediggers



The Gravedigger (Mark Hadfield) speaks with Hamlet (David Tennant) at the graveside Ellie Kurttz; © Illuminations/Royal Shakespeare Company

GRAVEDIGGER SCENE (EDITED)

- 1ST GRAVEDIGGER:** Is she to be buried in Christian burial that wilfully seeks her own salvation?
- 2ND GRAVEDIGGER:** I tell thee she is: and therefore make her grave straight: the crowner hath sat on her, and finds it Christian burial.
- 1ST GRAVEDIGGER:** How can that be, unless she drowned herself in her own defence?
- 2ND GRAVEDIGGER:** Why, 'tis found so.
- 1ST GRAVEDIGGER:** Give me leave: here lies the water; good: here stands the man; good; if the man go to this water, and drown himself, it is, will he, nill he, he goes — mark you that; but if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself: argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life.
- 2ND GRAVEDIGGER:** Will you ha' the truth on't? If this had not been a gentlewoman, she should have been buried out of Christian burial.
- 1ST GRAVEDIGGER:** Why, there thou say'st: and the more pity that great folk should have countenance in this world to drown or hang themselves, more than their even Christian. Come, my spade. There is no ancient gentleman but gardeners, ditchers and grave-makers: they hold up Adam's profession. I'll put another question to thee.
- 2ND GRAVEDIGGER** Go to.
- 1ST GRAVEDIGGER** What is he that builds stronger than either a mason, a shipwright, or a carpenter?
- 2ND GRAVEDIGGER** The gallows-maker for that frame outlives a thousand tenants
- 1ST GRAVEDIGGER** I like thy wit well, in good faith: the gallows does well. To't again, come.

2ND GRAVEDIGGER: 'Who builds stronger than a mason, a shipwright, or a carpenter?'

1ST GRAVEDIGGER: Ay, tell me that, and unyoke.

2ND GRAVEDIGGER: Marry, now I can tell.

1ST GRAVEDIGGER: To't.

2ND GRAVEDIGGER: Mass, I cannot tell.

1ST GRAVEDIGGER: Cudgel thy brains no more about it, and when you are asked this question next, say a grave-maker. The houses he makes lasts till doomsday.

GRAVEYARD SCENE DESIGN CHALLENGE

You have already agreed with the director that the floor of the stage will be a shiny black and that the backdrop will be mirrors.

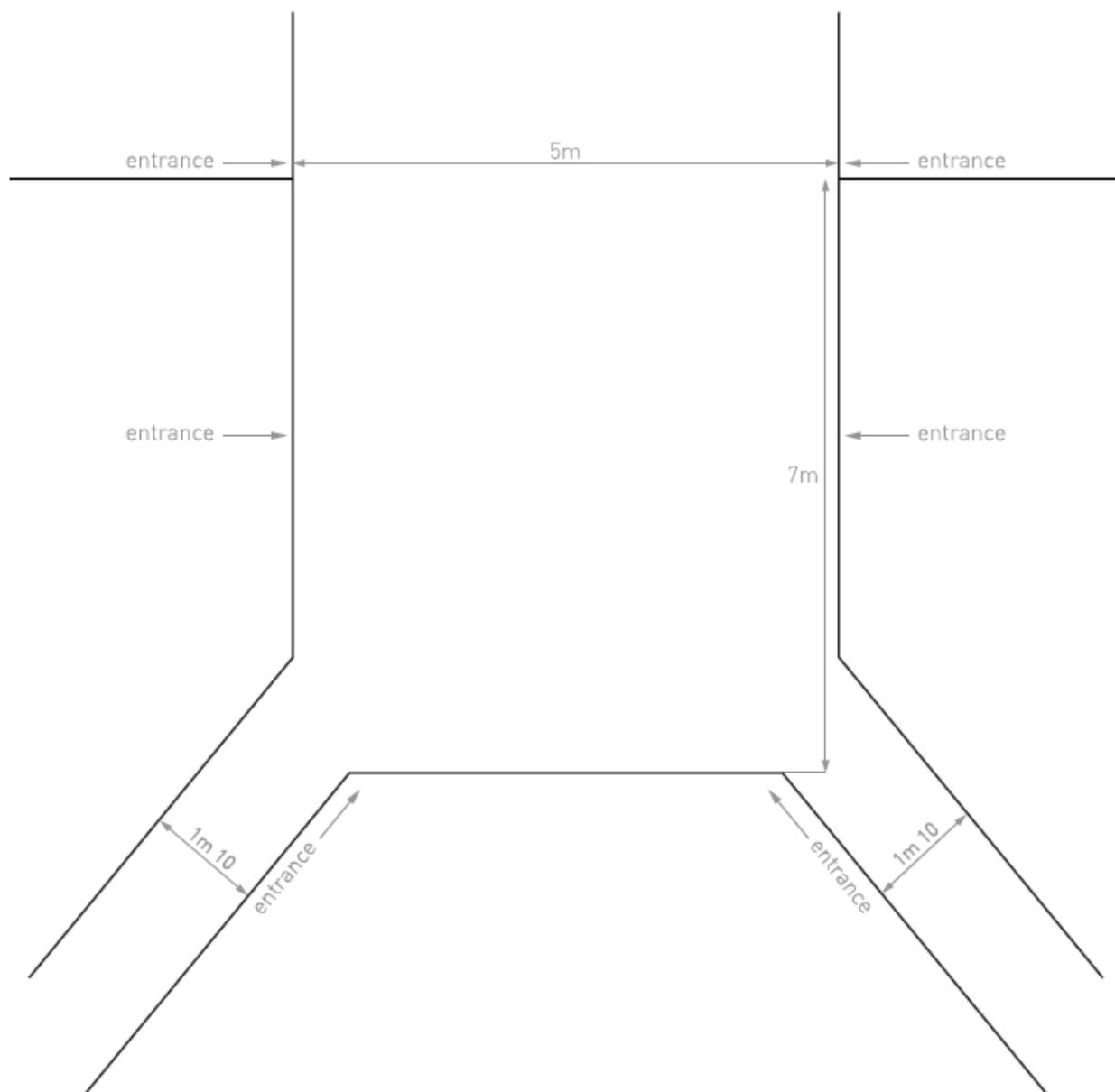


Your challenge is to create a graveyard that can be placed on top of the basic floor and backdrop design.

Use the following questions and statements to help you:

- You cannot cover the backdrop or the whole of the floor.
- You have access to one trapdoor.
-
- This is a production set in modern times.
- What sort of characters are the Gravediggers – what might they have with them while they are working? What might they wear?
- This is a scene that Hamlet enters with Horatio.
- This is a comedy scene that becomes Ophelia's funeral.
- There must be room for a lot of cast members on the stage as Ophelia's funeral party joins the scene later.

PLAN OF THE COURTYARD STAGE





The following activities investigate how an actor creates his character. Ryan Gage played Osric in Gregory Doran's 2008 production. Osric is a smaller part but has a key role in persuading Hamlet to fight Laertes. In rehearsal, Ryan and the company went into depth to create his character.



Read through the edited Act 5 Scene 2 on page X and X with the whole group. To make sure everyone understands what is happening, ask the group:

- What is the basic action in this scene?
(A servant/messenger comes to deliver a message to Hamlet. The message is from Claudius – he wants Hamlet to fight a fencing match with Laertes and he has bet on Hamlet to win. Hamlet agrees to fight.)
- Ask the players: How do Hamlet and Horatio treat Osric?
(They are making fun of him, especially his use of long words and flourishing speech. Hamlet parodies him. Horatio sides with Hamlet.)
- Osric is described by Hamlet and Horatio as: *a waterfly, a chough (a jackdaw), a lapwing with his shell on his head*
- What impression do these comparisons give us about how Hamlet and Horatio see Osric?
- Ask the players to speculate about:
Why does Shakespeare create this character of Osric?
Is this a servant simply delivering a message or is there more to this scene?
- This leads to the question: So who is Osric?



Discuss with your group:

- How long has Osric worked with the court?
- Is he a loyal family servant? Or a new employee brought in by Claudius?
- Is he ambitious or just earning a living?
- Does he admire Hamlet? Is he jealous of him?
- Does he resent how Hamlet treats him? Or does he not notice?

Explain to your group that the answers they decide on for these questions are their 'interpretive choices'. This is exactly what a director and actors have to do in rehearsals in order to bring a character to life.



Ask the group: Why did Shakespeare create this scene for the play? If you were a director, would you keep or cut this scene? This discussion may bring up points such as:

- Keep it - it tells us more about the world of the play – Osric is bringing a message from Claudius so knowing who Osric is can tell us more about what kind of court Claudius leads.
- Keep it - it tells us more about Hamlet - his cleverness with words and how he behaves towards Osric.
- Keep it - it tells us more about Hamlet's relationship with Horatio.
- Keep it - it's funny and gives some light relief before the last tragic scene.
- Cut it - the language is obscure.
- Cut it – the play is very long and this scene can be heavily cut and still make sense.

Other than movement and the words spoken, how else could you show an audience who Osric is?



In Greg Doran's rehearsals, the actors decided that Osric is a 'political flunkie' – an ambitious young employee of the court, hoping to impress Claudius. They used clothes to convey this – the production is in modern dress so the designer used clothes that a modern audience quickly understands as conveying ambition and business: a sharp suit, slick haircut and shiny shoes!

Does Osric know he is inviting Hamlet to his death? Greg's company decided that Osric *did* know that he was asking Hamlet to come to his death. He uses charm and a big winning smile to manipulate Hamlet. Later in the production, Osric makes sure he gives the correct sword to Laertes, giving the audience another clue that he is definitely aware of the plan.

Ryan's character is incredibly detailed – at the very end of the production, Osric silently shakes hands with Fortinbras because he has spotted that, now Claudius is dead, Fortinbras is his new boss.



Ask your group if they think the audience sees this fine detail. Do they think it's important for the actor to have this detail in creating their character?

ACT 5 SCENE 2 (EDITED BY RSC EDUCATION TEAM)

OSRIC Your lordship is right welcome back to Denmark.

HAMLET I humbly thank you, sir. Dost know this water-fly?

HORATIO No, my good lord.

HAMLET Thy state is the more gracious; for 'tis a vice to know him; 'tis a chough.

OSRIC Sweet lord, if your lordship were at leisure, I should impart a thing to you from his majesty.

HAMLET I will receive it, sir, with all diligence of spirit.

OSRIC Sir, here is newly come to court Laertes; believe me, an absolute gentleman: indeed, to speak feelingly of him, he is the card or calendar of gentry, for you shall find him in the continent of what part a gentleman would see.

HAMLET Sir, his definement suffers no perdition in you; in the verity of extolment, I take him to be a soul of great article; his semblable is his mirror; and who else would trace him, his umbrage, nothing more.

OSRIC Your lordship speaks most infallibly of him.

HAMLET The concernancy, sir? Why do we wrap the gentleman in our more rawer breath.

OSRIC Sir?

HAMLET What imports the nomination of this gentleman?

OSRIC Of Laertes?

HORATIO His purse is empty already; all's golden words are spent.

OSRIC You are not ignorant of what excellence Laertes is for his weapon; but in the imputation laid on him by them, in his meed he's unfellowed.

HAMLET What's his weapon?

OSRIC Rapier and dagger.

HAMLET That's two of his weapons: but, well.

OSRIC The king, sir, hath wagered with him six Barbary horses: against the which he imponed, as I take it, six French rapiers and poniards, with their assigns, as girdle, hangers and so.

HAMLET But, on: why is this 'imponed' as you call it?

OSRIC The king, sir, hath laid, that in a dozen passes between yourself and him, he shall not exceed you three hits:

HAMLET Sir, I will win for him an I can; if not, I'll gain nothing but my shame and the odd hits.

OSRIC Shall I re-deliver you e'en so?

HAMLET To this effect, sir; after what flourish your nature will.

OSRIC I commend my duty to your lordship.

HAMLET Yours, yours.

Exit OSRIC

HORATIO This lapwing runs away with the shell on his head.

SHOULD HAMLET FIGHT?



Read through the last short section of this scene, after Osric's exit.

What does Hamlet mean when he says:

But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart ?

(He is worried, uncomfortable, mistrustful.)

Why does he agree to the fight if he doesn't feel right about it?

In pairs, taking on board all that has been discussed before, ask the group to play this short extract. Ask them: How can you show the relationship between Hamlet and Horatio? Begin and end the extract on a freeze.

In the same pairs, ask the group to think of one reason why Hamlet *should* fight Laertes and one reason why he *should not* and what you would say to Hamlet to persuade him to fight or not fight.

Then ask the pairs to develop their reasons by thinking back over the events of the play. (As an advanced option, ask them to find quotes from the text to support their arguments.) For example:

- You *should* fight Laertes because otherwise you will seem like a coward. You put off killing Claudius in case the ghost was lying – you should have done it straight away.
- You *should* fight to please your mother as you have already upset her so much. She said to you in her closet: "O Hamlet thou has cleft my heart in twain."
- You *should not* fight Laertes because you have already upset him enough. You shouted at Laertes and made a fool of yourself at Ophelia's funeral.
- You *should not* fight because that's what Claudius wants. The ghost of your father said to you: "If thou did'st ever thy dear father love – revenge his most foul and unnatural murder." Don't play games just get on with it and kill him.

Ask the pairs to decide who will say which reason.

Choose two volunteers to read the short extract between Hamlet and Horatio. The others form a square around them like the four walls of a room. The volunteers play the extract, then stand still and listen as each player around the walls gives their reason why Hamlet should or should not fight.

After having heard all the reasons, ask Hamlet and Horatio whether they think Hamlet should fight or not. Which of the reasons most stood out?

Finish by discussing this with the whole group. What do they think Hamlet should do?

ACT 5 SCENE 2 (EDITED BY RSC EDUCATION TEAM)

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HAMLET That's two of his weapons: but, well.

EXPLORING THE FINAL SCENE



Shakespeare's plays don't have stage directions beyond actors' entrances and exits. This means that for every production the director and company have to make decisions about what happens in each scene. The final scene of *Hamlet* has a lot of action for the company to stage. As well as the speaking parts there are often more people on stage as observers to the scene. These observer roles are just as important as the speaking parts; their reactions can help the audience to work out what they should be focusing on.



In this activity students will explore creating stage directions for the final scene before looking at the choices made by the actors and director in this production.

- Divide the students into groups of ten (Gertrude, Claudius, Hamlet, Laertes, Horatio, Osric, and four courtiers). Ask each group to read through the scene (p3-6) and assign roles. As this is a long scene you might want to divide it amongst the groups.
- Ask the groups to read the scene again making a note of any actions that their character has on their script e.g. Hamlet hits Laertes, Gertrude takes the drink.
- Ask the groups to try the scene on its feet including the actions they have found.
- Explain that the actions written into the text are only the first clue when exploring a play. For instance, the courtiers won't do very much if they only rely on actions written into the text. The actors and directors make decisions about what they do and why they do it at key moments.
- For each character, think about actions in response to another character's action. For example, Claudius reacting to Gertrude drinking.
- Try the scene again with these gestures added. What difference does it make to the scene? Are there any changes the groups would like to make?
- Show the different versions of the scene. What elements has each group brought to life?
- Explain that it is these choices that make each production different; although the basic actions will be the same, the reactions to them can tell different stories.



Playing the Final Scene: Greg Doran and the actors talking about how they approached this scene. What are the similarities/differences?

www.bbc.co.uk/hamlet/making_of/on_stage_final_scene.shtml

ACT 5 SCENE 2 (EDITED)

KING Come, Hamlet, come and take this hand from me.

HAMLET Give me your pardon, sir: I've done you wrong;
But pardon't, as you are a gentleman.
This presence knows,
Let my disclaiming from a purposed evil
Free me so far in your most generous thoughts,
That I have shot mine arrow o'er the house,
And hurt my brother.

LAERTES I am satisfied.
I do receive your offered love like love,
And will not wrong it.

KING Give them the foils, young Osric. Cousin Hamlet,
You know the wager?

HAMLET Very well, my lord:

LAERTES This is too heavy, let me see another.

HAMLET This likes me well. These foils have all a length?

OSRIC Ay, my good lord.

HAMLET Come on, sir

LAERTES Come on, sir.

HAMLET One.

LAERTES No.

HAMLET Judgement.

OSRIC A hit, a very palpable hit

KING Stay; give me drink. Hamlet, this pearl is thine:
Here's to thy health. Give him the cup.

HAMLET I'll play this bout first: set it by awhile.
Come.
Another hit; what say you?

LAERTES A touch, a touch, I do confess.

KING Our son shall win.

GERTRUDE The queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet

HAMLET Good madam!

KING Gertrude, do not drink!

GERTRUDE I will, my lord; I pray you, pardon me.

KING It is the poison cup. It is too late.

HAMLET I dare not drink yet, madam; by and by.

GERTRUDE Come, let me wipe thy face.

HAMLET Come, for the third, Laertes, you but dally;
I pray you pass with your best violence;
I am afeard you make a wanton of me.

LAERTES Say you so? come on.

OSRIC Nothing, neither way.

LAERTES Have at you now!

KING Part them; they are incensed.

HAMLET Nay, come. Again!.

OSRIC Look to the queen there, ho!

HORATIO They bleed on both sides. How is it, my lord?

OSRIC How is't, Laertes?

LAERTES Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe, Osric;
I am justly kill'd with mine own treachery.

HORATIO

Never believe it:
I am more an antique Roman than a Dane:
Here's yet some liquor left.

HAMLET

As thou'rt a man,
Give me the cup: let go; by heaven, I'll have't.
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. The rest is silence *Dies*

HORATIO

Now cracks a noble heart. Goodnight, sweet prince,
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!