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Grade 12

MIND THE GAP!

English Home Language

Hamlet

W. SHAKESPEARE

Study Guide

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English Home Language Paper 2: Literature
Hamlet
Study Guide

English Grade 12-HAMLET- **ISBN 978-1-4315-3370-1**

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Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) Grade 12 English Home Language Mind the Gap study guide for the Drama: ***Hamlet*** *by W Shakespeare.*

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Ministerial Foreword

Matsie Angelina Motshekga, MP
Minister of Basic Education

The Department of Basic Education remains steadfastly committed to innovative strategies aimed at enhancing learner attainment. Consistent with the government's commitment in promoting the indigenous languages that form the tapestry of our democratic landscape, this Mind the Gap Self study guide is a concrete demonstration of this commitment.

The release of this self-study guide incorporates all the official African Home Languages focusing on the novel genre at this stage. Not only does the study guide incorporate the African languages, but it also incorporates South African Sign Language Home Language, Afrikaans Home Language and English First Additional Language.

The Mind the Gap Literature Self Study Guide is responding to the broader sectoral reading challenges that the country is experiencing. It seeks to strengthen the following strands of the National Reading Sector Plan: Teacher Development and Support; Direct Learner Support; and Provisioning and Utilisation of the Learning and Teaching Support Materials. Its interactive nature will make it easier for both teachers and learners to read, to learn or study. It is hoped that through this Study Guide, the reading and learning outcomes will be achieved.

Key terminologies are explained or illustrated in a simplified manner and examples of the types of questions as a learner you may expect to be asked in an examination, are included in this study guide. In order to build your understanding, specific questions and possible responses forms part of the study guide package.

The study guide is designed to appeal to any learner offering Grade 12, whether as a part-time or a full-time candidate. Educators in the field will also find it an invaluable resource in their practice.

Every learner is a national asset, all you need now is to put in the hours required to prepare for the examinations and excel!
We wish each and every one of you good luck and success.

MRS AM MOTSHEKGA, MP
MINISTER
DATE: 14 NOVEMBER 2019

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Table of contents

	Dear Grade 12 learner	4
	How to use is study guide	4
	Top 7 study tips	5
	On the exam day	6
	Overview of Paper 2	7
	What is a contextual question	9
	What is a literary essay	9
	What are the examiners looking for	11
	Question words	12
	Back to the past	15
1.	**Introduction**	18
1.1	**Setting**	18
1.2	**Facts about the play**	18
1.3	**Background: antecedent action**	19
1.4	**The great chain of being**	20
1.5	**Points to remember when reading *Hamlet***	21
1.6	**Chronological timeline of *Hamlet***	22
2	**Structure, plot and sub-plot**	23
2.1	**The plot summary**	23
2.2	**Characters**	25
	Classes of characters	26
	Characters in *Hamlet*	27
	Diagram of relationships	29
2.4	**Themes**	31
2.5	**Act-by-act summary, analysis and activities**	33
	Act 1	33
	Act 2	34
	Act 3	35
	Act 4	36
	Act 5	39
3	**Stage-directions in *Hamlet* and activity**	41
4	**The soliloquies of Hamlet**	47
5	**Contextual questions**	51
	Activity 1	51
	Activity 2	53
	Activity 3	55
6	**Literature Essays**	51
	Activity 1	51
	Activity 2	58
7	Themes	58
	Act-by-act activities	58
	Act 1	59
	Act 2	60
	Act 3	61
	Act 4	61

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Act 5 61
Stage-directions 62
Contextual questions 64
Activity 1 65
Activity 2 66
Activity 3 66
Literature essays 67
Activity 1 68
Activity 2 68
Activity 3 69

Rubric for Literature essays 70

References

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Dear Grade 12 learner

This *Mind the Gap* study guide helps you to prepare for the end-of- year Grade 12 English Home Language (EHL) Literature exam.

There are three exams for EHL: Paper 1: Language in Context; Paper 2: Literature; and Paper 3: Writing.

Paper 2: Literature involves the study of novels, drama, seen and unseen poetry. A *Mind the Gap* study guide is available for each of the prescribed literature titles.

This study guide focuses on William Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet*, one of the set works in Paper 2: Literature.

How to use this study guide

In the introduction to the guide (pages 18), you will find information about the author and the events that influenced his writing. There is also an overview of how the story is told.

From page 33 to 40 you will get the Act-by-act notes to help you understand:

- The characters;
- What happens and who is involved;
- The themes;
- The symbols, diction and figurative language.

NB	Pay special attention		Activities with questions for you to answer
hint	Hints to help you remember a concept or guide you in solving problems.		

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Top 7 study tips

1. Divide your workload into manageable sections. This will help you to focus. Take short breaks between studying one section and going onto the next.

2. Have all your materials ready before studying a particular section of your work – pencils, pens, highlighters, paper, glass of water, etc.

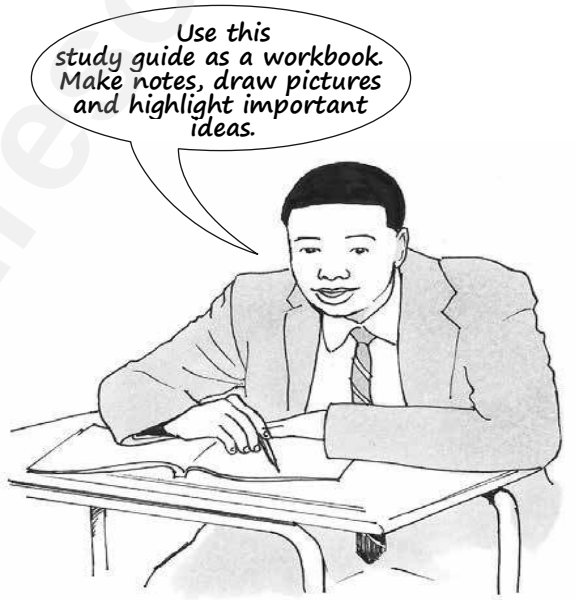
3. Be positive. It helps you to retain information.

4. You learn better when using colours and pictures. Try to use them whenever you can.

5. Repetition is the key to remembering information you have learnt. Constantly go over your work, until you can work with ease.

6. Work with a partner. Teach each other what you have learnt. It is definitely worth reading your revision notes aloud.

7. Sleep for at least eight hours every night. Eat healthy food and drink plenty of water to stay refreshed. Studying for exams is like exercise, so you must be prepared both physically and mentally.



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On the exam day

1. Make sure you have pens that work, sharp pencils, a rubber and a sharpener. Make sure you have your ID document and examination admission letter. Arrive at the exam venue at least an hour before the start of the exam.

2. Go to the toilet before entering the exam room. You don't want to waste valuable time going to the toilet during the exam.

3. It is a must to know how many questions from each of the three sections of the paper, you will be answering. Use the 10 minutes' reading time to read the instructions carefully, as a reminder of what is expected of you.

4. Break each question down to make sure you understand what is required of you. Misunderstanding any part of the question will lead to loss of marks. Focus on the key words for a better understanding of the question. You will find a list of some of question words on page xiv of this study guide.

5. Manage your time carefully. Start with the question you think is the easiest. For the contextual questions, check the mark allocation for each question so you give the correct number of points in your answer.

6. Do not panic during the exam. All questions are linked to what you learnt in the course of the year. Don't get stuck on questions you are finding difficult to understand; move on and come back to those if time allows. Try to answer as many questions as possible, though.

7. Write neatly so the markers can read your answers easily.

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Overview of paper 2

Here is a summary of the Paper 2 Literature exam paper:

Question number	Question	Type of question	Number of marks
Section A: POETRY ***Answer questions on TWO prescribed poems AND the questions on the unseen poem (compulsory).***			
1	*Prescribed poem*	Poetry Essay	10
2	*Prescribed poem*	Contextual	10
3	*Prescribed poem*	Contextual	10
4	*Prescribed poem*	Contextual	10
5	***Compulsory****: Unseen poem*	Contextual	10
Section B: NOVEL Answer ONE question.*			
6	*The Picture of Dorian Gray*	Essay	25
7	*The Picture of Dorian Gray*	Contextual	25
8	*Life of Pi*	Essay	25
9	*Life of Pi*	Contextual	25
		Total	**25**
Section C: DRAMA Answer ONE question.*			
10	*Hamlet*	Essay	25
11	*Hamlet*	Contextual	25
12	*Othello*	Essay	25
13	*Othello*	Contextual	25
14	*The Crucible*	Essay	25
15	*The Crucible*	Contextual	25
		Total	**25**

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In Sections B and C, answer ONE ESSAY and ONE CONTEXTUAL question. You may NOT answer TWO essay questions or TWO contextual questions.

- If you answer the **ESSAY** in **Section B**, then you must answer the **CONTEXTUAL** question in **Section C.** If you answer the **CONTEXTUAL** question in **Section B,** then you must answer the **ESSAY** in **Section C.**

- You may NOT answer TWO contextual questions or TWO essay questions.

- During the reading time at the beginning of the exam, find the questions on the set-works you have studied for **Sections B and C** and read through the questions.

- Choose the **essay question** you will answer from **Section B/C** and the **contextual question** you will answer from **Section B/C**.

- Number your answers correctly – according to the numbering system used in the exam paper – for the two sections you have chosen.

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What is a contextual question?

In a contextual question, you are given an extract (about 25–30 lines) from the drama. You will then have to answer questions based on the extract. Some answers can be found in the extract. Other questions will test your understanding of other parts of the drama: plot, characters, symbols and themes. Some questions will require that you express ask your own opinion about the drama.

What is a literary essay?

Writing a literary essay is a skill requiring preparation, planning and practice. When answering literary essays, you do not re-tell the story. Instead, you need to focus on the specific requirements of the question.

The following table guides you through the preparation and planning processes for the literary essay. It can be used when preparing for writing the literary essay and when doing the **activities** given later in this guide.

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PREPARATION	
THE QUESTION Rewrite the question given.	
QUESTION FOCUS What aspect (e.g. **theme/character/plot/style**) does the question need you to write about.	
QUESTION REQUIREMENT Write down the key instruction words (e.g. **discuss, analyse, explain**) in the question	
PLANNING	
INTRODUCTION Write your topic statement for the essay.	
BODY	For each paragraph write a topic sentence and fill in key-words according to the **PEEL** method of writing.
Paragraph	
	Point
	Explanation
	Evidence
	Link
Paragraph	
	Point
	Explanation
	Evidence
	Link
Paragraph	
	Point
	Explanation
	Evidence
	Link
Paragraph	
	Point
	Explanation
	Evidence
	Link
CONCLUSION Write your concluding sentence, and make sure it links with the topic statement in your introduction.	
PRACTICE	
Use the information you have written in the table above to assist you in answering your literary essay.	

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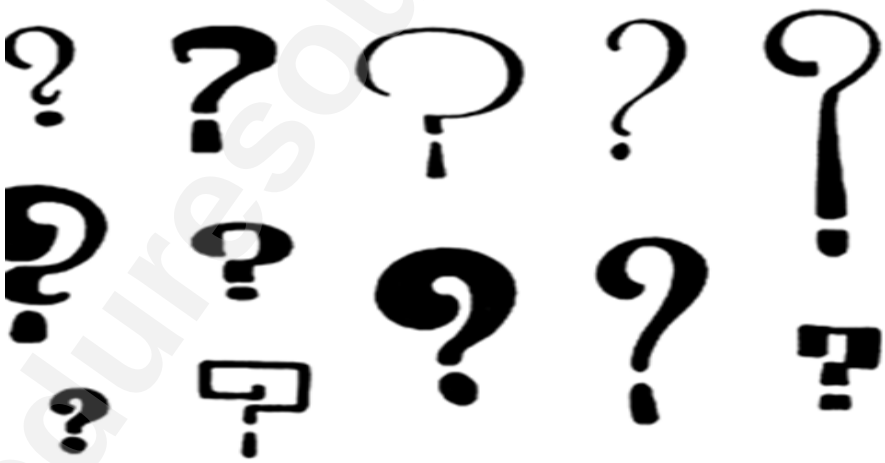
What are the examiners looking for?

Examiners will assess your answers based on:

- Your understanding of the plot (story line).
- Your ability to **reorganise** information. For example, you may be asked to summarise key points or to compare and contrast character traits.
- Your ability to provide information that may not be clearly stated in the extract using what you already know about the text. This process is called **inference**. This may include explaining how a figure of speech affects your understanding of the drama, explaining themes or comparing the actions of different characters.
- Your ability to make judgements about aspects of the text and presenting your opinions based on information given in the play. This process is called **evaluation**. For example, you may be asked if you agree with a statement or to discuss a character's motives.
- Your ability to respond to the characters in the text and how this appeals to your emotions. This is called appreciation. For example, you may be asked how you think a certain characters feel, or what you would have done if you were in their situation. You may also be asked to discuss how the writer's style clarifies your understanding of the drama.



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Question words

Here are examples of question types as prescribed by CAPS for English HL

Question type	What you need to do
Literal: Questions about information that is clearly given in the text or extract from the text.	
Name characters/places/things ...	Write the specific names of characters, places, etc.
State the facts/reasons/ideas …	Write down the information without any discussion or comments.
Give two reasons for/why …	Present two reasons (this means the same as 'state').
Identify the character/reasons/theme …	Write down the character's name, state the reasons, write down the theme
Describe the place/character/what happens when …	Write down the main characteristics of something, for example: What does a place look/feel/smell like? Is a particular character kind/rude/aggressive? Write down the sequence of events …
What does character x do when …?	Write what happened – what the character did.
Why does character x do …?	Given reasons for the character's action according to your knowledge of the plot.
Who is/does…?	Write the name of the character.
To whom does xx refer …?	Write the name of the relevant character/person.
Reorganisation: Questions that need you to bring together different pieces of information in an organised way.	
Summarise the main points/ideas …	Present the main points, keeping mark allocation in mind.
Group the common elements …	Combine the things which share the same features.
Give an outline of …..	Write down the main points, keeping mark allocation in mind.
Place the extract in context…	Explain how the events of the extract fit into the sequence of the story.
Inference: Questions that need you to interpret (make meaning of) the text using information that may not be clearly stated. This process involves thinking about what happened in different parts of the text; looking for clues that tell you more about a character, theme or symbol; and using your own knowledge to help you understand the text.	

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Explain how this idea links with the theme x …	Identify the links to the theme.
Compare the attitudes/actions of character x with character y	Point out the similarities and differences.
Do you agree that the…represents the contrast between…	Point out the differences and come to a conclusion which shows your agreement or not. Whatever your choice, you need to support your answer with evidence from the text (substantiate your answer).
What do the words … suggest/reveal about…?	State what you think the meaning is, based on your understanding of the text.
How does character x react when…? Describe how something affected character x … State how you know that character x is …	Write down the character's reaction/what the character did/felt.
What did character x mean by the expression …?	Explain why the character used those particular words. Make sure that you refer to specific words.
Explain the cause/effect of …	Write the reason(s) for … /Give the repercussions of …
How does the line/metaphor/simile/figurative language/image/literary device affect your understanding …?	How does the line/metaphor/simile/figurative language/image/literary device contributes to your understanding of the text. For similes and metaphors, discuss the comparison and how it adds meaning to the text.
What, do you think, would be the outcome/effect/etc. of an action/situation …?	Explain what the consequences of the action/situation would be.
Account for …	Give the reasons for...
What does the word/line suggest / imply…?	Explain what the word/line suggests.
Evaluation: Questions that require you to make a judgement based on your knowledge and understanding of the text and your own experience. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer to these questions, but you must give a valid reason for your opinion based on specific information given in the text.	
Discuss your view/a character's feelings/a theme ...	Write down what you think about the given the given aspect of the text.
Do you think that …	What are your views/opinion on the given topic?
Do you agree with/that …	You need to state whether you are of the same opinion or not.

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In your opinion, what …	State your viewpoint and support it with evidence from the text.
Give your views on …	What do you think of...? Use evidence from the text.
In light of the poem/novel/drama as a whole, critically discuss …	Evaluate and assess both sides of the topic. / Investigate or examine by argument or debate, giving reasons for and against.
In your view, is … justified?	Give reasons, based on the text, why you/a character/the writer adopt(s) a particular standpoint.
Comment on …	What do you think of...? Provide evidence from the text to support your opinion.
Critically comment …	Give a detailed response on the required information, with evidence from the text to support your line of thought.
Appreciation: Questions that ask about your emotional response to plot, characters and style. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer to these questions, but you must give a valid reason for your opinion based on specific information given in the text.	
How would you feel if you were character x when …?	Imagine that you are character x, and describe your emotions.
What is your response to …	What effect does...have on you?
Do you feel sorry for…? / Do you identify with…?	State YES or NO and say why you feel that way. State whether or not you can relate to what is being dealt with.
Discuss the writer's use of style, diction and figurative language, dialogue …	State how the given aspects of the drama are used to give the text a specific effect.
Comment on the appropriateness/effectiveness of a figure of speech/literary device…	What is the writer's purpose for using...? (impact)

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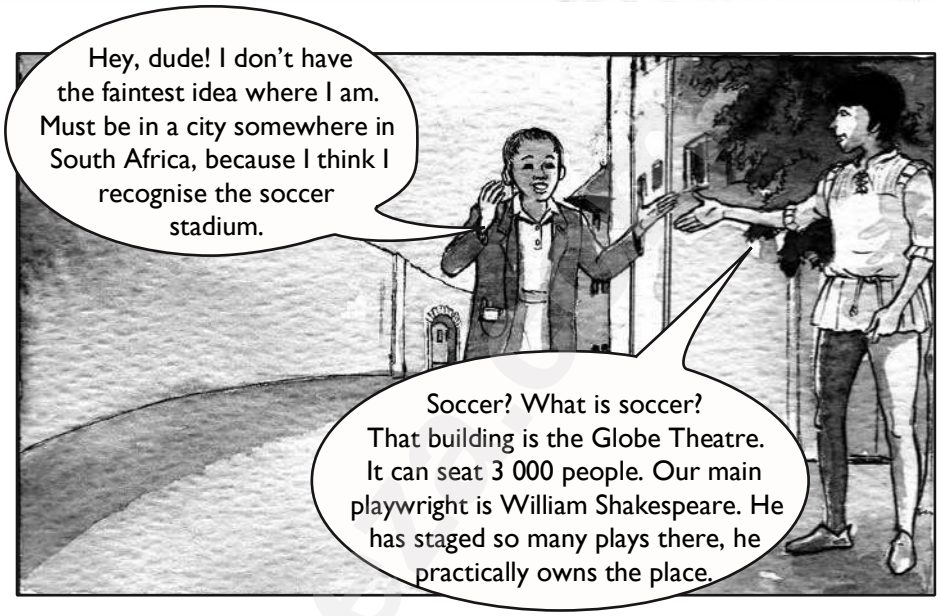
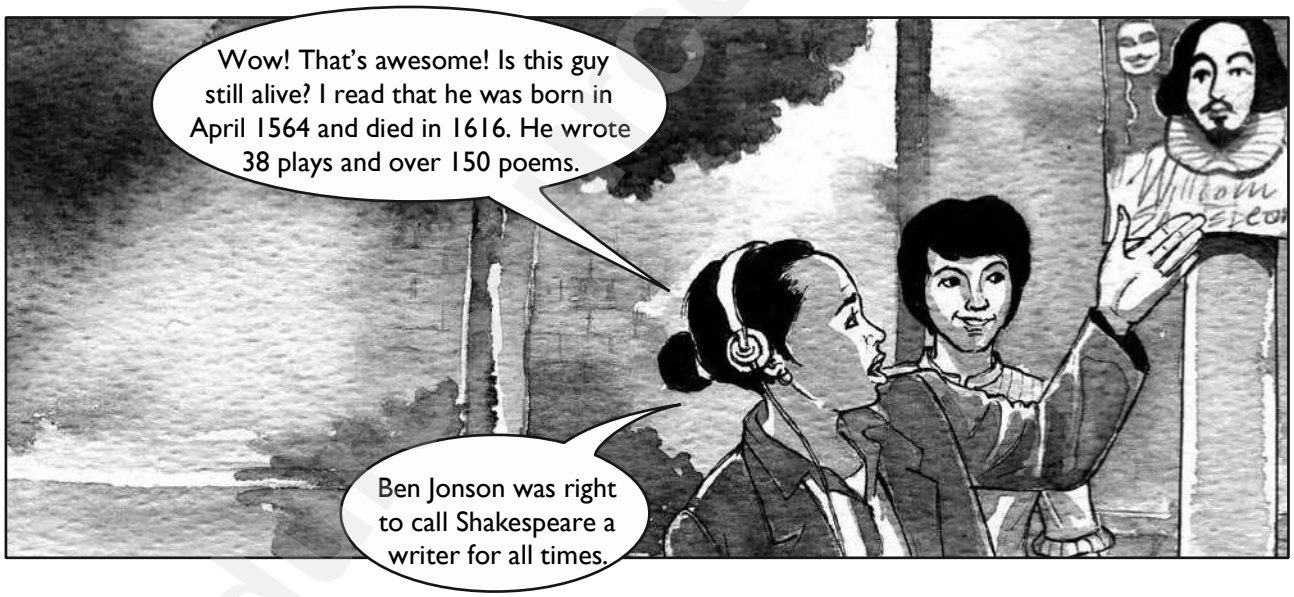
Back to the Past

Katlego took her Science Expo experiment a bit too far and before she could figure out what was happening, she was standing in a street in London, in the year 1600. She approached a boy of her own age...





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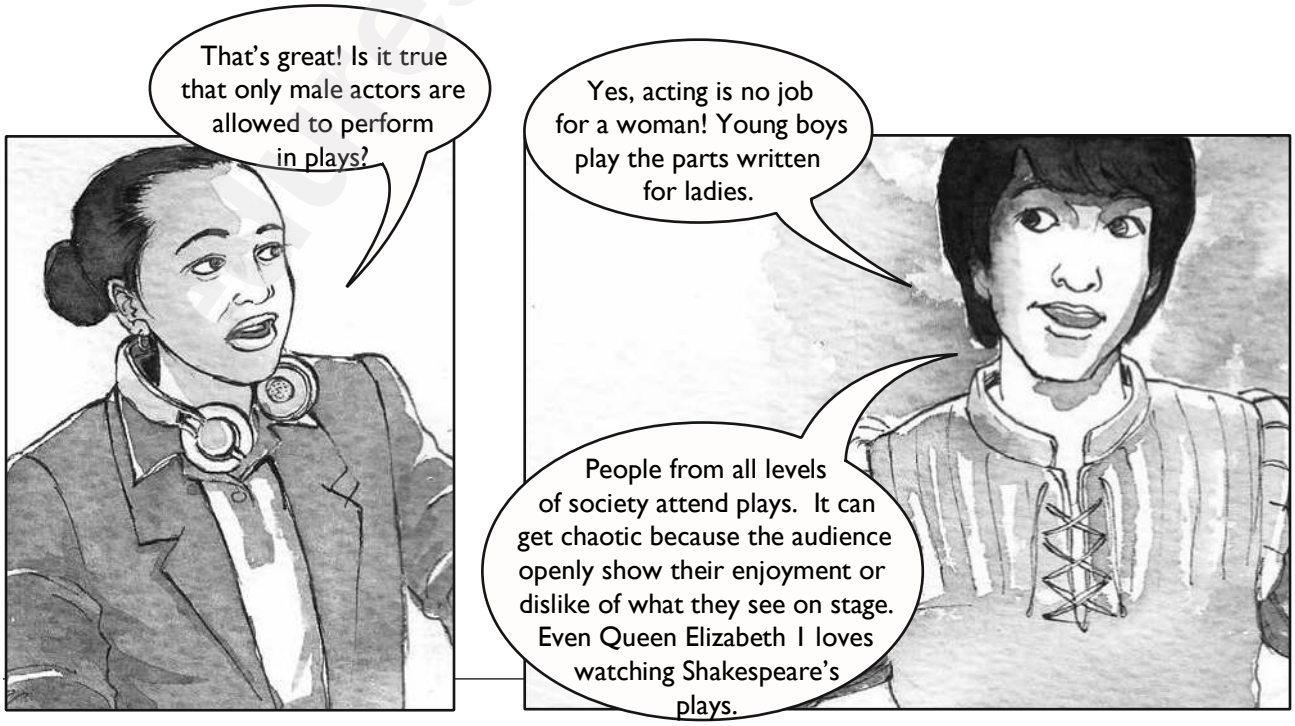

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1. Introduction

1.1 Setting

The setting is where and when the story in the play takes place.

The story of Hamlet was written between 1599 AND 1601. Itis based on a Danish revenge story first recorded by Saxo-Grammaticus in the 1100s. The setting is Denmark during the Elizabethan times. Most of the action in the play takes place in and around the royal palace in Elsinore.

1.2 Facts about the play

Full title	*The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*
Playwright	William Shakespeare
Genre	Tragedy; revenge tragedy
Protagonist	Prince Hamlet
Major conflict	Hamlet feels a responsibility to avenge his father's murder by his uncle Claudius, but Claudius is now the king and this complicates matters for Prince Hamlet. Moreover, Hamlet has doubts about whether he can trust the ghost, and whether killing Claudius is the appropriate thing to do.
Rising action	The ghost appears to Hamlet and tells Hamlet to avenge his murder; Hamlet pretends to be mad to hide his intentions; Hamlet stages the mousetrap play; Hamlet is reluctant to take the opportunity to kill Claudius while he is praying.
Climax	When Hamlet violently stabs Polonius through the arras in Act III, scene iv, he brings himself into unavoidable conflict with the king (Claudius). Another possible climax comes at the end of Act IV, scene iv, when Hamlet resolves to commit himself fully to violent revenge.
Falling Action	Hamlet is sent to England to be killed; Hamlet returns to Denmark and confronts Laertes at Ophelia's funeral; the fencing match; the deaths of the royal family.
Setting (time)	Most of the scenes take place at night or in the dark
Settings (place)	In and around (mostly) the royal palace in Elsinore, a city in Denmark.

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1.3 Background: Antecedent Action

- 30 years before the action of the play, the old king of Norway challenged the old king of Denmark, Hamlet, to a fight to resolve issues over disputed territory.
- The old Danish king (Hamlet) killed old Fortinbras in an unfair combat and took the land that had been the cause of their dispute.
- 30 years later, Fortinbras' son, (Young Fortinbras) plans to take back the land lost by his father, and avenge his father's death.
- Fortinbras is prince of Norway because his father's kingdom fell to his uncle when Fortinbras was still too young to rule. Fortinbras gathers an unauthorized army to invade Denmark without the knowledge of his bedridden uncle.
- One month before the action of the play, old Hamlet of Denmark died. He had been sleeping in the orchard where it is said he was bitten by a poisonous snake. This statement is according to his brother, Claudius, who found him dead.
- Hamlet was away at the University of Wittenberg when his father died. Claudius took over kingship.
- Queen Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, who had been married to his father for over 30 years, marries Claudius soon after her husband's funeral.
- Hamlet doesn't approve because: -he doesn't like Claudius -he feels the marriage occurred too soon after his father's death, -he feels the snake story is rather suspicious.

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1.4 The great chain of being

The main concept of the Great Chain of Being is that **every existing thing in the universe has its "place" in an outlined hierarchical order**.

Deities	God Christ Holy Spirit
Angels	Archangels Angels
Humanity	Kings Nobles Peasants
Animals	Lions other animals smaller creatures
Elements	Fire Air Earth Water

The results of any change in this order are tragic. In ***Hamlet*,** Shakespeare dwells on the results of the disruption of order in this chain.

- Social order is disrupted, resulting in human beings' inability to live peacefully.
- The Great Chain of Being is brutally disturbed in ***Hamlet***, and until the very end, there is never a point in the play when there is serenity.

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1.5 Points to remember when reading *Hamlet*

1. **Nothing takes the place of actually reading the play**.
   Read the play Act-by act with a friend and summarise each act, paying attention to its context in the play.

2. **The Hot Seat Game.**
   At the end of each scene, ask each other questions about what happens in that scene. Present your answers as if you are one of the characters in that scene.
   For example:

   QUESTION: Horatio, how are you going to tell your best friend that you have seen a ghost of his dead father?

   ANSWER: It is my duty as Hamlet's friend, to speak about what we witnessed tonight. Since the ghost did not speak to us, maybe it will speak to him. What choice does that leave me with? I have to approach him at the most convenient time this morning. (Act 1. Sc. 1. L. 145:153)

3. **Quizzes to check comprehension.**
   You can design these with a friend and use them to check each other's understanding of the different aspects of the play.

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1.6 Chronological Timeline of *Hamlet*

Old Hamlet's battle with Old Fortinbras	29 years				
Young Hamlet's birth					
King Hamlet's murder	1-2 months	2 months			
Wedding of Claudius and Gertrude					
Court Scene			4 months		
Ramparts					
Laertes leaves for Paris					
The "mousetrap" play				6 months	
Hamlet leaves for England		Less than 2 months			30 years
Hamlet is taken by pirates					
Hamlet's 30th birthday					
Laertes returns. Ophelia's madness					
Hamlet returns. Graveyard.		1 day			
Swordfight. Death of Hamlet.		1 day			

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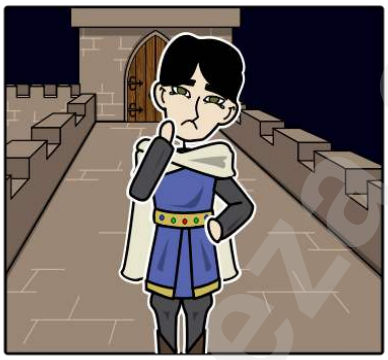
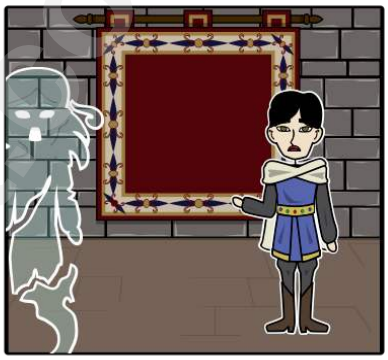
2 Structure, plot and sub-plot

Hamlet is a five-act play divided into scenes. It has a main plot (the story of Hamlet avenging his father's death) and a sub-plot (the story of Polonius and his family).

2.1 The plot summary

EXPOSITION	CONFLICT	RISING ACTION
		
The former king of Denmark has died. The guards inform Prince Hamlet about the appearance of his father's ghost. The ghost tells him about the poisoning by Claudius, who has usurped the throne and married Gertrude	Hamlet has to avenge his father's death. However, he is not sure if the ghost was indeed the late king. He is undecided on what action to take. It is here that he decides to pretend to be mad so that he can gather all the facts without making Claudius suspicious.	Hamlet's main concern here is to prove that Claudius is guilty of killing King Hamlet. He uses the 'mouse trap' play by the theatre troupers as a means to see Claudius's reaction of innocence or guilt.

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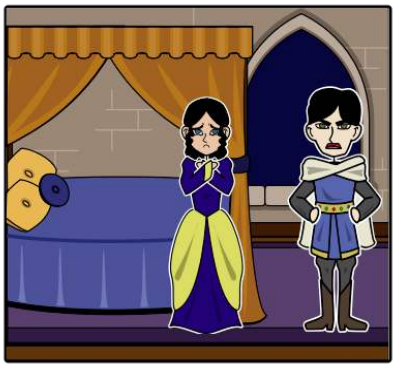
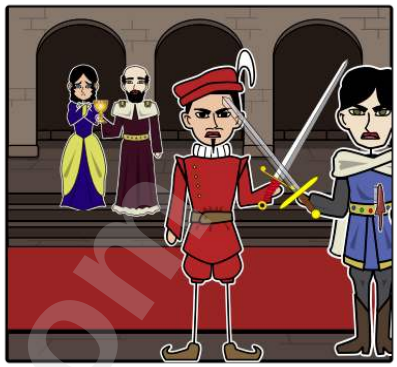
CLIMAX	FALLING ACTION	RESOLUTION
		
Hamlet confirms that Claudius is guilty when he leaves the play anxiously. Hamlet follows him and finds him praying for forgiveness. Hamlet hesitates to kill Claudius because he thought by doing so at this moment, Claudius will go to heaven. Hamlet decides to wait for another opportunity to kill Claudius.	Hamlet confronts his mother in her room and accidentally kills Polonius, who materializes from behind the arras. Claudius banishes Hamlet and plots his death. Ophelia loses her sanity because of grief after her father's death, and drowns. Hamlet finds his way back to Denmark, only to be challenged into a fencing match by Laertes who blames Hamlet for the death of his father and sister.	During the match, Laertes has the tip of his sword poisoned. Claudius has a poisoned cup to offer Hamlet. Un fortunately, Gertrude drinks from the cup and dies. The poisoned sword kills Hamlet, but not before Hamlet has scratched Laertes with it, leading to his death as well. Claudius dies too. Only Horatio lives to tell the story.

[Adapted from www.teachingcompanion.com]

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2.2 Characters

In this play, the protagonist is Prince Hamlet. His actions and the decisions drive the action of the play. Other characters in the play take the role of antagonists – they stand in opposition to the main character.

One of the roles of the antagonists is to help create tension or conflict in the plot and to keep the action of the play going. Examples of antagonists in this play include Claudius and Polonius.

Minor characters support the protagonist and give the readers more information about him. For example, Horatio, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern give us more information about Hamlet's state of mind, his character and actions.

Classification of Characters According to Social Status

In *Hamlet*, the characters' social standing plays an important role, especially in relation to the Great Chain of Being.

The nobility
This is the noble class, made up of the royal family and the courtiers, whose wealth and position in society were inherited. They had political power and owned most of the land. The nobles in the play include Prince Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, King Hamlet and the Fortinbrases.

The commoners
These are people who had no inherited titles or wealth. Most of them had little chance of improving their social status except through their relationships with the nobility. For example, Horatio, Hamlet's university associates (Guildenstern and Rosencrantz), Polonius and his children, the guards and the grave diggers, all belong to this class.

Some of the commoners are used to provide humour and to comment on the actions of the other characters are doing, e.g. in the graveyard scene.

Clergy
The clergy in Elizabethan times were given a special role in society. In Hamlet, the priest performs the last rites and burials, as seen during Ophelia's burial.

Source: www. etc. ufs.edu	**Source:**www.medievaleurope.mrdonn.org	**Source**:www.shakespeare-art-museum.com

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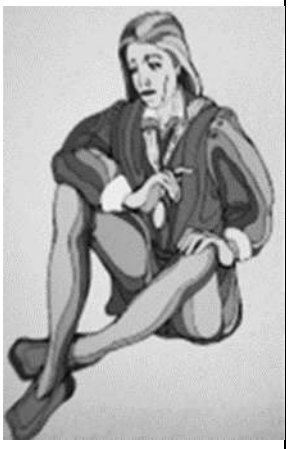
Characters in *Hamlet*

Major Characters	
Hamlet- Prince of Denmark 	• Nobility- a prince • Protagonist • Son of Queen Gertrude and the dead, old King Hamlet; 30 years old. • A scholar at a university in Wittenburg. • A thinker and slow in action (always prioritizing reasoning before action) • Melancholic • Passionate • Turns into an impulsive character as a result of the events in the play
Claudius- King of Denmark 	• Nobility – King. • Antagonist • Hamlet's uncle (his father's brother) and Gertrude's second husband. • He is power-hungry and lustful. • Slick and suave politician. • Manipulative and convincing. • He is remorseless and easily threatened. • His love for Gertrude, however, seems genuine. • He is also a hedonist- takes up any excuse to party.
Gertrude 	• Nobility – Queen • Hamlet's mother. • She is naïve. • Gertrude clearly loves her son, but does not understand his disgust at her hasty marriage to Claudius.

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Polonius	• King's advisor • Father of Laertes and Ophelia. He loves them dearly and wishes to protect them even going to the extent of spying on them. • Ambitious, pompous schemer, social upstart.
Horatio	• A scholar • Hamlet's loyal friend from university, supportive of Hamlet • Trustworthy • Empathetic • Reasons better than the others • After Hamlet's death, he livesto tell Hamlet's story.
Ghost	• Noble – King • Spirit of the late King Hamlet • Vengeful and wants Hamlet to avenge his murder. • Manipulative
Laertes	• Commoner • Polonius' son and Ophelia's brother. • Came to Denmark from Paris for King Hamlet's funeral and stayed for Claudius' wedding. • Short- tempered, passionate and loves his family dearly. • The opposite to Hamlet in thought and action.

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Ophelia 	• Commoner • Polonius's daughter, Laertes's sister and Hamlet's love. • She obeys the social conventions of the time relating to women. • Her loyalty to her father and resulting estrangement from Hamlet ultimately results in her losing her mind. • She is seen as a kind of female “double” of Hamlet- mirroring Hamlet's half-madness with her own full-blown insanity but she takes his obsession with suicide a step further and actually commits it. • Even in her lapse into madness and death, she remains “innocent”, singing songs about flowers and finally drowning in the river amid the flower garlands she had gathered
Fortinbras 	• Nobility – Prince of Norway • Son of Old Fortinbras, who died in battle with Old Hamlet and lost lands to Denmark. • Prince Fortinbras seeks to avenge his father's death and re-claim the lost lands. • As another son seeking revenge for his father, Fortinbras offers another "double" of Hamlet.
Minor Characters	
Osric	• Courtier who plays a minor role as the King's messenger and as referee of the fencing match between Hamlet and Laertes.
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern	• Classmates of Hamlet's in Wittenberg. Claudius uses them to spy on Prince Hamlet. • Disloyal to Hamlet, hence Hamlet’s lack of remorse when he discovers they have been of service to Claudius and sends them to England to die in his place.
Voltimand and Cornelius	• Danish courtiers whom Claudius sends to Norway, as ambassadors, to persuade the king to prevent Fortinbras from attacking Denmark.
Marcellus and Barnardo	• Danish officers on guard at Elsinore. • The officers who first saw the ghost and summoned Horatio to witness it. • Marcellus is present when Hamlet first encounters the ghost.
Francisco	• Danish soldier on guard at Elsinore.
Reynaldo	• Polonius’s servant, whom he sends to Paris to observe and report on Laertes' conduct.
Two Clowns (the Gravediggers)	• Two rustics (identified as clowns) who dig Ophelia's grave.

[**Sources:** www.slideshare.net/hamlet.characters; www.alamy.com]

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[Source: https://hamletispforgrade12english.wordpress.com]

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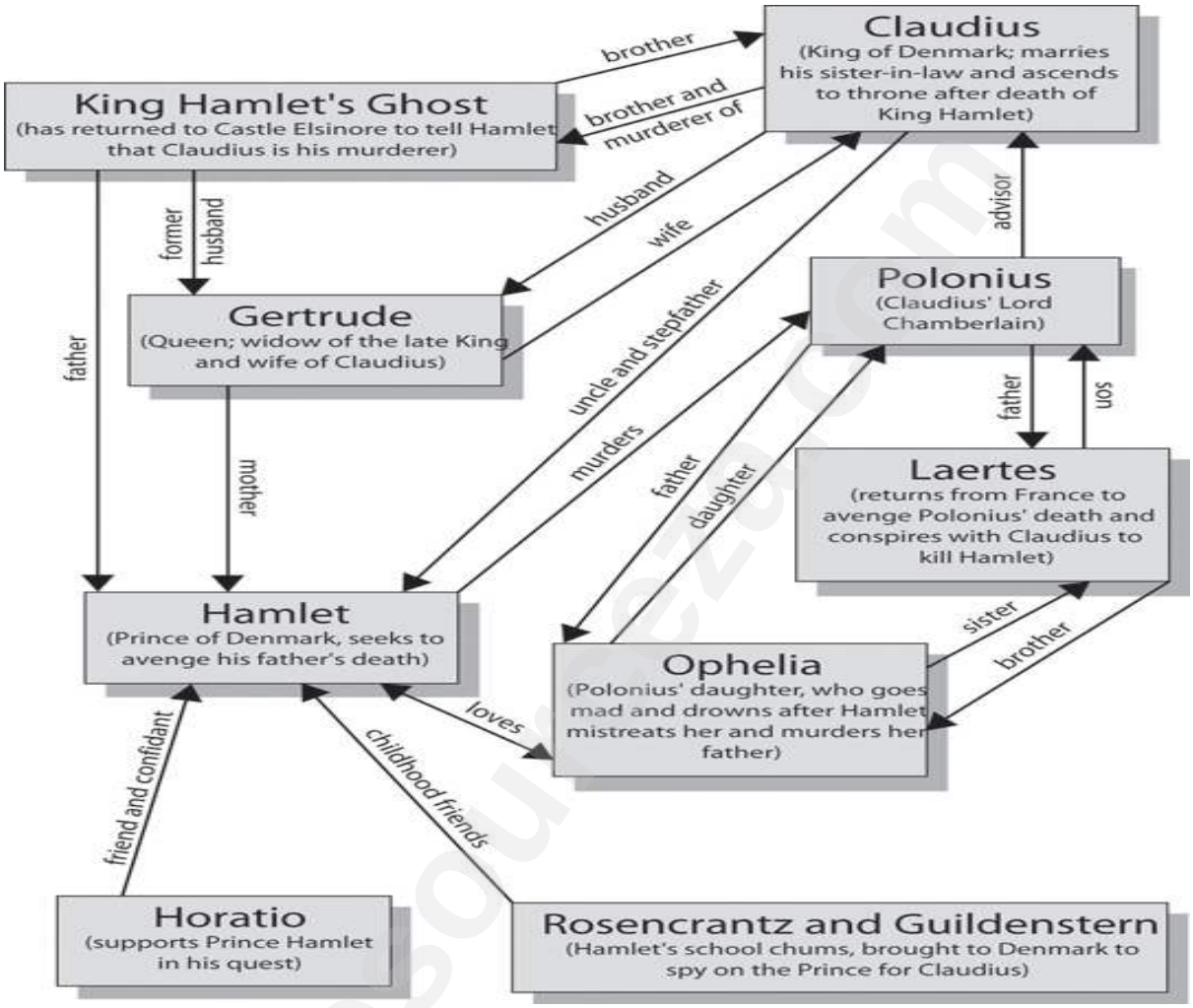
Diagram Showing How the Characters Are Related in *Hamlet*



[**Source:** Houghton, Mifflin and Harcourt, *Cliff Notes*]

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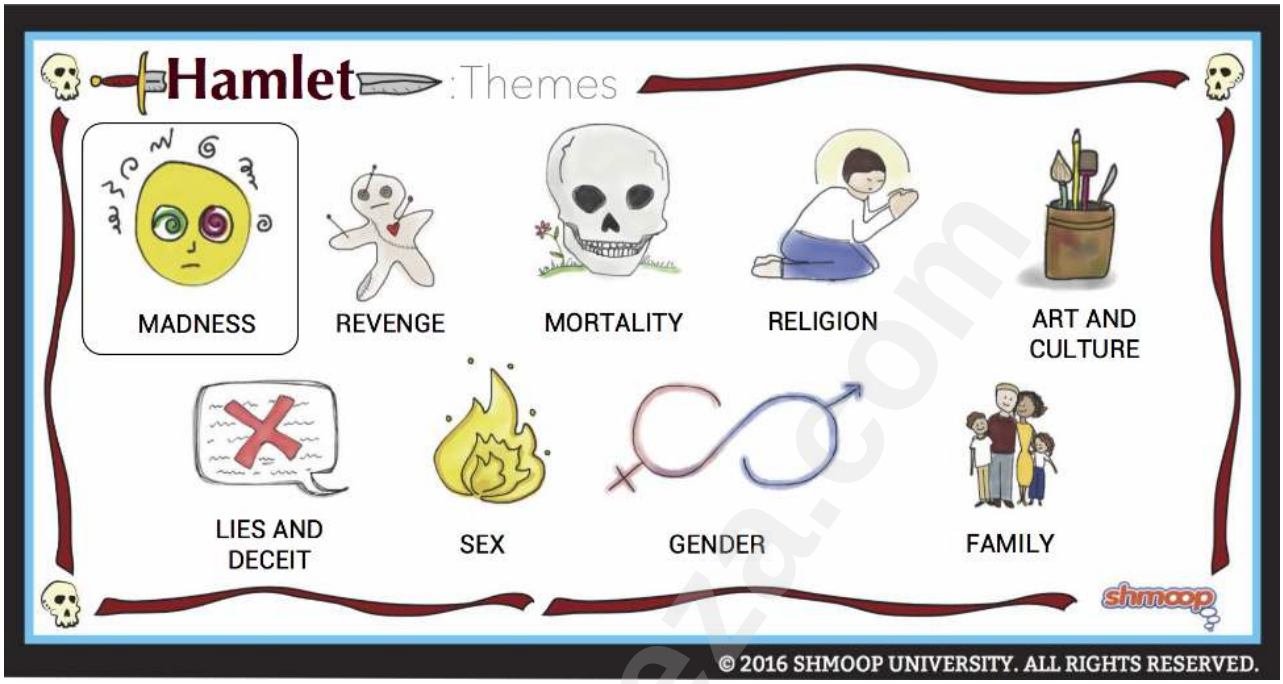
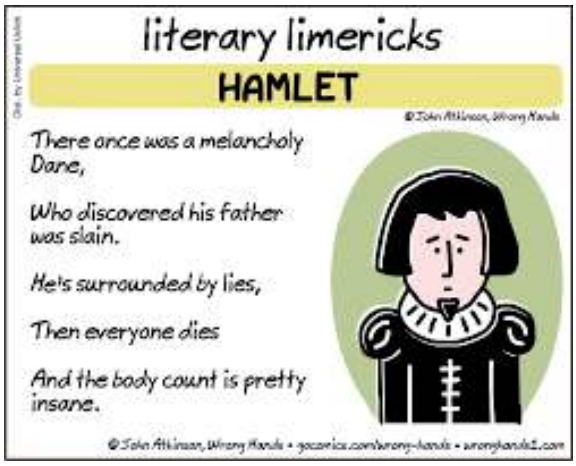
2.4 Themes



A theme is a dominant message with universal relevance. Major themes in Hamlet include:

- Corruption and Disease
- Death and Mortality
- Appearance vs Reality
- Insanity and Reasoning
- Revenge
- Religion
- Family and Gender
- Love and Lust (Sex)

NB: Every character in the play stands for a specific theme.



[**Source**: https://wronghands1.com]

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Activity 1

Consider the following themes of *Hamlet* and complete the textual references. As you read through the play, be encouraged to add any other relevant references

THEME	EXPLANATION AND EXAMPLES	TEXTUAL REFERENCES
Corruption and Disease	Constant reference to power struggles, ambition, scheming and decay. E.g. the usurping of the throne, manipulation of others, and the moral decay in Denmark.	Act 1, scene 4, line … Act 1, scene 5, lines… Act 2, scene 2, lines ... Act 3, scene 3, lines … Act 4, scene 7, lines …
Death and Mortality	Death by murder and suicide, and reflection on mortality. E.g. King Hamlet's murder, the deaths of Ophelia, Gertrude, Claudius, Laertes and Hamlet.	Act 1, scene 5, lines … Act 4, scene 7, lines … Act 5, scene 1, lines … Act 5, scene 2, lines …
Appearance vs Reality	The contrast between what seems to be reality and the actual reality. E.g. Hamlet's madness; the play-within-the play; Claudius's marriage to Gertrude; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's friendship with Hamlet.	Act 1, scene 2, lines … Act 1, scene 5, lines … Act 2, scene 2, lines … Act 4, scene 3, lines …
Insanity and Reasoning	Hamlet's "antic disposition"; Hamlet's inaction, Ophelia's madness.	Act 1, scene 5, lines … Act 3, scene 3, lines … Act 4, scene 5, lines …
Revenge	Sons avenging their fathers' deaths E.g. Hamlet, Fortinbras and Laertes	Act 1, scene 5, lines … Act 4, scene 7, lines Act 5, scene 2, lines …
Religion	"Garden of Eden Imagery", Hamlet's religious beliefs causing his inaction; references to heaven, hell, purgatory and judgement.	Act 1, scene 2, lines … Act 1, scene 5, lines … Act 2, scene 2, lines Act 3, scene 3, lines … Act 3, scene 4, lines … Act 5, scene 2 lines …
Family and Gender	Parent-Child relationships, sibling relationships, patriarchy, Hamlet's misogyny (intense dislike of women)	Act 1, scene 2, lines … Act 1, scene 3, lines … Act 1, scene 5, lines … Act 2, scene 2, lines … Act 3, scene 1, lines … Act 3, scene 4, lines … Act 5, scene 2, lines …
Love and Lust (Sex)	Hamlet and Ophelia, Claudius and Gertrude.	Act 1, scene 2, lines … Act 1, scene 2, lines … Act 3, scene 1, lines … Act 3, scene 4, lines … Act 5, scene 1, lines …

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2.5 Act- by- Act Summary and Analysis

Act 1: 'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark'.

Did You Know?
At the time this play was written, ghosts and hauntings often appeared in literature and in theatre productions. Ghosts returned to seek vengeance, reclaim property, or give warning of looming trouble. Shakespeare used ghosts in several of his works. In *Hamlet,* the ghost returns to warn Hamlet about Claudius' deeds.

Summary

The play opens at midnight: in the dark, the cold, and the fog of the castle walls. From the start, there is a sense of melancholy. On the surface, all looks well in the court of Denmark, where there is an efficient new King making calculated political decisions and in love with his new wife. But under the surface, something unfinished and unresolved is looming. And as the play opens, it is starting to rise.

Analysis

Act 1 introduces us to the main characters of the plot (the story of Hamlet avenging his father's murder) and sub-plot (the story of Polonius and his family). The appearance of the Ghost serves as an omen that "something is rotten in the state of Denmark", caused by the subversion of the Great Chain of Being when Claudius kills King Hamlet.

The act introduces the key themes of **corruption and disease**, **death**, **appearance vs reality**, **revenge**, **religion**, **family and gender**, **love and lust**.

Activity 2

Essay Question: Discuss what has been revealed about the character of Hamlet thus far in the play. Pay particular attention to his soliloquy in Scene Two in your response.

[25]

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Act 2: 'By indirections find directions out'.

Did You Know?
When Hamlet meets with the acting troupe that visits Elsinore Castle, he asks a player to give a speech about the death of King Priam, a figure in Greek mythology. In this speech the player describes the brutal murder of King Priam at the hands of Pyrrhus, witnessed by Priam's wife, Hecuba. Priam was the last ruler of Troy, a city conquered by forces from mainland Greece at the end of the legendary Trojan War. Pyrrhus led the final attack on Troy to avenge the death of his father, Achilles, who was killed by one of Priam's sons.

Summary
Hamlet starts to act strangely because of the "antic disposition" that is part of his plan to expose Claudius. To be convincing, Hamlet rejects Ophelia, while Claudius and Polonius spy on him in order to find out the reason for the sudden change in his behaviour. Claudius summons Hamlet's university friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and tasks them with observing Hamlet closely and to report all they discover to him. Their arrival coincides with a group of travelling actors that Hamlet happens to know well. Hamlet decides to use this troupe in his scheme to expose Claudius and writes a play including scenes that mimic the suspected murder of his father. Hamlet asks the actors to present the Mouse-trap play as entertainment for the King and Queen.

Analysis

This act is full of deception and intrigue. Hamlet's "antic disposition" causes, confusion, tension and further plotting within the Danish court.

Key themes developed are those of **corruption, appearance vs reality** and **revenge.**

Activity 3

Imagine that you are Claudius. You are suspicious of Hamlet's strange behaviour ("antic disposition"). Write a diary entry in which you share your thoughts and feelings.

Begin your diary as follows:
Dear Diary

Hamlet is acting so strangely. Should I be worried? …

Act 3: 'The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king'

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Did You Know?
In act 3, scene 2, Hamlet's play is preceded by a scene without dialogue, called a "dumb show." A dumb show was a common feature of pre-Shakespearean tragedies. Its purpose was to preview what was to happen in the upcoming play to provide audience members with background information and enhance their understanding of the play.

Sanity Versus Madness
Hamlet's sanity is a point of discussion throughout the play. As the play progresses, it is difficult to determine whether Hamlet's "antic disposition" is in fact real madness. As you read the play, judge Hamlet's state of mind for yourself.

Summary

At the performance, Hamlet and Horatio observe Claudius' reaction to the play. Claudius is provoked by the action and his guilt causes him to leave in haste to pray. He realises that Hamlet knows the truth, so decides to banish him. Hamlet is summoned by his distraught mother, and on his way to her, he comes upon Claudius, attempting to pray. Hamlet is in a quandary, for if he kills Claudius as he prays, his soul may go to heaven rather than hell. Hamlet decides to spare his life for the time being.

Analysis

The focus of this act is the play-within-the-play and its impact on the lives of the main characters.

This act strengthens the following themes: **corruption and disease**, **death**, **appearance vs reality**, **revenge**, **religion**, **family and gender**, **love and lust**.

Activity 4

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The following extract is from Act 3, scene 2.

HAMLET Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out 380
Contagion to this world: now could I drink hot blood,
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on. Soft! now to my mother.
O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom: 385
Let me be cruel, not unnatural:
I will speak daggers to her, but use none;
My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites;
How in my words soever she be shent,
To give them seals never, my soul, consent! 390

[Exit]

You are the director of *Hamlet.* Write notes on how you would stage this speech by Hamlet, focusing on: his tone and body-language (gestures).

Director's Notes

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Act 4: 'Diseases desperate grown by desperate appliance are relieved, or not at all'

Did You Know?
How many times have you heard the line "To be, or not to be—that is the question"? Many of the lines that Shakespeare wrote have become a part of our everyday language and culture. Here are some of the often-quoted lines you've read so far. How many of them have you heard before?

- "This above all, to thine own self be true" (act 1, scene 3)
- "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (act 1, scene 4)
- "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't" (act 2, scene 2)
- "Get thee to a nunnery" (act 3, scene 1)

Tragic Heroes
The central character of a tragedy is a tragic hero, a noble character who meets his or her death typically because of a character defect or an error in judgment. The problem that causes a character's downfall is called a fatal flaw. This concept was first introduced by the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who referred to the flaw or error in judgment that causes a hero's suffering. Hamlet is one of Shakespeare's tragic heroes. As you read play from now onwards, try to identify Hamlet's tragic flaw.

Summary

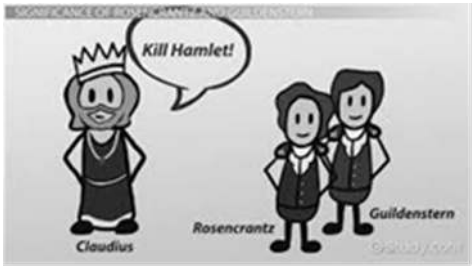
Hamlet is sent to England, supposedly as an ambassador, just as Fortinbras of Norway crosses Denmark with an army on his way to attack Poland. During his journey, Hamlet discovers a letter from Claudius to the English king, instructing for Hamlet to be killed once he arrives in England. Hamlet returns to Denmark alone, after sending his companions Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths in his place.

Ophelia is desolate at Hamlet's rejection and the loss of her father. She goes mad and drowns.

Analysis

Betrayal and desolation are central to this act. Claudius conspires against Hamlet, who discovers his betrayal by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and Ophelia descends into madness and dies.

In this act, the theme of sons avenging their fathers' deaths is predominant as Laertes seeks revenge for Polonius, and Fortinbras' action contrasts with the earlier inaction of Hamlet. The themes of **corruption** and **death** are further developed.



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Activity 5

The following extract, from Act 4, scene 5, is often called Ophelia's "mad-scene":

OPHELIA There's **rosemary**, that's for remembrance; pray,
love, remember: and there is **pansies.** that's for thoughts.

… 159

OPHELIA There's **fennel** for you, and **columbines:** there's **rue**
for you; and here's some for me: we may call it
herb-grace o' Sundays: O you must wear your rue with
a difference. There's a **daisy:** I would give you
some **violets**, but they withered all when my father
died: they say he made a good end,--

Source: http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet_4_5.html

The flowers mentioned in the above-extract are symbolic. Write notes on what each one of them symbolises in the context of the play.

Notes

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Act 5: 'The readiness is all'

Did You Know?

Shakespeare's tragedies frequently include characters that provide comic relief in the midst of seriousness. Their role is to relieve the emotional intensity generated by the other events of the play. The gravediggers in act 5 serve this purpose.

Think about how the gravediggers provide contrast to the serious events of act 5 and help Hamlet to gain new insight into life and death.

Summary

Hamlet meets Horatio in the graveyard, along with a gravedigger. They discuss the realities of life and death. Ophelia's funeral procession arrives at graveyard. Hamlet confronts Laertes, who has taken his father's place at the court. Laertes wants to avenge his father's death.

Hamlet and Laertes agree to a duel. Claudius conspires with Laertes to kill Hamlet. They plan that Hamlet will die either on a poisoned sword or with poisoned wine. The plans go wrong, when Gertrude unwittingly drinks from the poisoned cup and dies. During the scuffle, Laertes is scratched by his own poisoned sword, with which he wounds Hamlet as well. Laertes dies.

Shortly after killing Claudius, Hamlet dies, leaving his friend Horatio to tell the story to Fortinbras, who is proclaimed King, based on an ancient claim to the Danish throne.

Analysis

Act 5 is the resolution to all the chaos and disorder in Denmark. The extent of Claudius' deception is revealed to all and the deaths of the fathers are finally avenged. This act shows how life is snuffed out by death, as the play ends with a stage littered by corpses. Good triumphs over evil, poetic justice prevails and order is restored.

Themes prevalent here are: **death**, **revenge** and **religion.**

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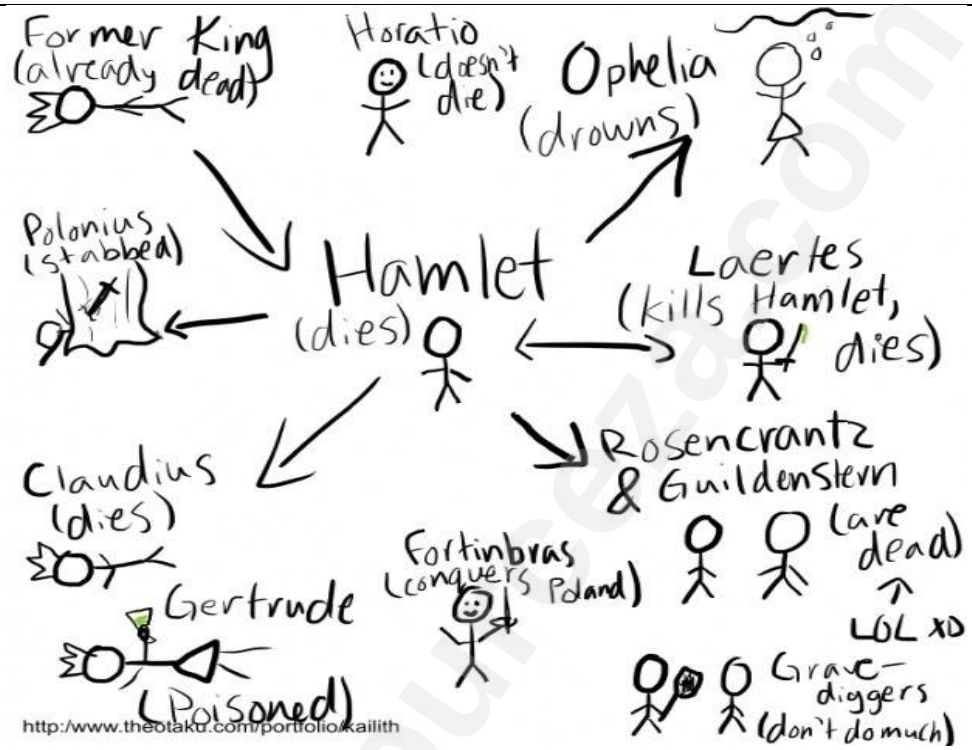
Activity 6

Study the following picture depicting the theme of **death** in *Hamlet*.



Write a paragraph stating how each character dies. Your narrative should present the deaths in chronological order.

The theme of Death in Hamlet

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3. Stage-directions in *Hamlet*

Shakespeare wrote his plays to be performed. The company which performed Shakespeare's plays, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, became known as the King's Men when James I succeeded Elizabeth I as monarch. Actors did not receive the full script. Instead they were given a collection of pages with their lines only in the form of cue-scripts. Stage directions were sparse, and it was up to the actors themselves and the directors to fill in their own stage directions according to their interpretation their original scripts. In modern versions of *Hamlet,* stage directions are entered within the full-script, either in brackets or printed in italics.

GRAVEDIGGER 1
(Digs and sings)

Stage Direction

In you when I did love, did love, Me thought it was very sweet,

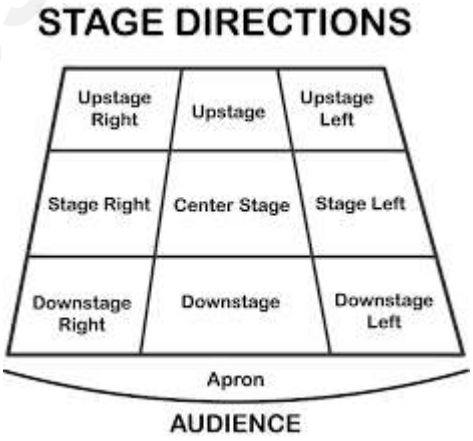
(HAMLET and HORATIO enter centre, cross to the side steps, and watch him, amused)

Stage Direction

GRAVEDIGGER 1
(Digs and sings)

To contract, oh the time for a-my behove, O me thought there-a was nothing a- meet.

[**Source:** www.researchgate.net]



[**Source:** http://7.poison.mrvpfotografie.de/stage-directions-diagram.html]

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Activity 7

The tables which follow contain the cue-scripts of Laertes, Claudius, Polonius, Hamlet and Gertrude for **Act 1, scene 2, lines 50 – 86**. In groups, read the given cue-scripts and fill in relevant stage-directions.

[Source:www.cleanpng.com]

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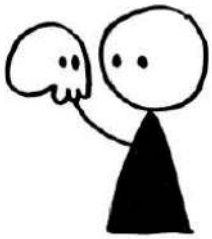
Cue Script:

Claudius, Gertrude, Hamlet,

Laertes and Polonius



Working on a scene with the help of a cue script is not only a great way to understand the historical context of rehearsing and acting in Shakespeare's time, it also forces students and actors alike to listen attentively to what the other characters are saying in order not to miss their cue. In addition, Shakespeare's plays contain very few explicit stage directions, as most of the clues are in the lines they speak. As a consequence, cue scripts are great for a two- stage exercise.

Step one: read the script together and listen out for cure; think about the characters and their relationships to each other, plus their mood (does it change over the course of the scene, or does it stay the same?)

Step two: think about inserting the stage directions- what do the characters do at which point in the scene? Do they enter the stage at the same point, or do they go off?

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Cue Script Act 1, Scene 2

LAERTES

Laertes. My dread lord'
Your leave and favour to return to France,
To show whence though willingly I came to Denmark,
To show my duty in your coronation,
Yet now. I must confess, that duty done,
My thoughts and wishes bend again towards France
And bow them to your gracious leave and pardon.

Cue Script Act 1, Scene 2

CLAUDIUS

gracious leave and pardon.
Claudius. Have you your father's leave?

give him leave to go.
Claudius. Take thy fair hour, Laertes: time be thine,
And thy best graces spend it at thy will!
But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son, -

and less than kind.
Claudius. How is that the clouds still hang on you?

and the suits of woe.
Claudius. 'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,
To dive these mourning duties to your father.

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Cue Script Act 1, Scene 2
POLONIUS

What says Polonius?
Polonius. He hath, my lord, wrung from me my slow leave
By the laboursome petition, and at last
Upon his will seal'd my hard consent:
I do beseech you, give him leave to go.

Cue Script Act 1, Scene 2
HAMLET

and my son, -
Hamlet. [Aside] A little more than kin, and less than kind.

still hang on you?
Hamlet. Not so, my lord; I am too much in the sun.

Passing through nature to entity.
Hamlet. Ay madam, it is common.

Why seems it so particular with thee?
Hamlet. Seems, madam! nay, it is; I know not 'seems'.
'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor the dejected 'haviour of the visage,
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
That can denote my truly: these indeed seem,
For they are actions that a man might play:
But I have that within which passeth show;
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

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Cue Script Act 1, Scene 2
GERTRUDE

too much in the sun.
Gertrude. Good Hamlet, cast thy knighted colour off,
And let thine eye a friend to Denmark.
Do not forever with thy vailed lids
Seek for thy noble father in the dust:
Thou know'st 'tis common; all that lives must die,
Passing through nature and eternity.

Ay, madam, it is common.
Gertrude. If it be,
Why seems it so particular with thee?

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4. The soliloquies

Hamlet has six key soliloquies. Through careful analysis of the soliloquies, one can trace the crisis that Hamlet underwent. Thus, the six key soliloquies are relevant because they allow you to follow the progression of his predicament. The soliloquies reveal Hamlet's complex emotional state. The tension between Hamlet's need for revenge and the question of morality, guilt, justice as well as his uncle and mother's position, are vividly presented in the soliloquies.

1. Hamlet's First Soliloquy

O that this too too solid flesh would melt,

Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!... (Act 1, Scene 2)

Summary

Hamlet's first soliloquy shows that he is angry with his mother and upset over his father's death. It also expresses Hamlet's deepest thoughts. Through suicide, he feels that he can escape all of his problems. His problems seem to increase: his father's death, his widowed mother marrying his uncle so soon and his confusing relationship with Ophelia. The first soliloquy introduces Hamlet's first thoughts of suicide. It also enables you to know how much he disproves of his mother and uncle's relationship.

Key points

• Hamlet's meditative nature which contributes to the delay in avenging his father's death.

• You get to know how excellent a king Hamlet's father was compared to Claudius.

• Theme of death.

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2. Hamlet's Second Soliloquy

O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else?
And shall I couple hell? O, fie! — Hold, my heart... (Act 1, Scene 5)

Summary

This soliloquy comes after Hamlet has spoken to his father's ghost. This is when he decides that he will forget everything he has learned ever since he was a child so he may remember his father's ghost. He makes revenge his main purpose from now onwards.

Key points

- Hamlet's reaction to the ghost's revelation of how his father died
- Hamlet's resolution to avenge his father's death
- His views of his mother and uncle

3. Hamlet's Third Soliloquy

Now I am alone.
O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!... (Act 2, Scene 2)

Summary

Hamlet bitterly rebukes himself for his continuing failure to execute his revenge. The player is shedding tears while reciting a speech descriptive of Hecuba's grief over the death of her husband.

Key points

- Hamlet's inaction and his realisation that by now he should have taken steps to avenge his father's death.
- The theme of revenge is further developed in this soliloquy.

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4. Hamlet's Fourth Soliloquy

To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?... (Act 3, Scene 1)

Summary

This is one of the most popular and important soliloquies from Shakespeare's plays because of its moralistic nature. Hamlet undergoes a considerable mental debate and finds himself on the horns of a dilemma; "To be or not to be: that is the question". It is this dilemma that he focuses on in this soliloquy: suicide versus the injustices and ills we have to endure in life.

Key points

- Hamlet's academic character: - reason and logic as key points in decision making
- Hamlet's contemplation of suicide
- The explanation for his delay in carrying out his purpose
- The mental torture because of failure to avenge his father's death so far in the play.

5. Hamlet's Fifth Soliloquy

'Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world...
Soft! now to my mother...
Let me be cruel, not unnatural;
I will speak daggers to her, but use none... (Act 3, Scene 2)

Summary

At this moment, Hamlet is in a mood in which he could "drink hot blood and do such bitter business as the day would quake to look on." (Act 111, iii).

Key point

Hamlet decides to confront his mother and 'speak daggers', but not use any.

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6. Hamlet's Sixth Soliloquy

Now might I do it pat now he is praying,
And now I'll do it, and so he goes to heaven.
And so am I revenged, that would be scanned... (Act 3, Scene 3)

Summary

This is when Hamlet reasons against killing Claudius when he finds him praying, lest he sends him to heaven. For him, killing his father's murderer at this moment, when directly communicating with God, would defeat his purpose of revenge. Hamlet decides to wait for an opportune moment when Claudius is "drunk asleep, or in his rage, or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed, at gaming, swearing, or about some act that has no relish of salvation in it". (Act iii, iv)

Key points

- Hamlet finds reason not to kill Claudius again.
- Hamlet's moral/ ethical dilemma
- More on Hamlet's inaction

CONCLUSION

- The soliloquies are important in that they help you to understand Hamlet's most intimate thoughts.
- They also reveal Hamlet's philosophical nature.
- Reasons for his delay to avenge his father's death come out clearly in the soliloquies.
- You get an insight to why Hamlet has the ability to think and failure to act.
- Each soliloquy reveals a different aspect of Hamlet's state of mind.
- A close analysis of the soliloquies helps to trace Hamlet's dilemma in the play.

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5 Contextual Questions

QUESTION 1

EXTRACT A

CLAUDIUS Sweet Gertrude, leave us too;
For we have closely sent for Hamlet hither,
That he, as 'twere by accident, may here
Affront Ophelia:
Her father and myself, lawful espials, **5**
Will so bestow ourselves that, seeing, unseen,
We may of their encounter frankly judge,
And gather by him, as he is behaved,
If 't be the affliction of his love or no
That thus he suffers for. **10**

GERTRUDE I shall obey you.
And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish
That your good beauties be the happy cause
Of Hamlet's wildness: so shall I hope your virtues
Will bring him to his wonted way again, **15**
To both your honours.

OPHELIA Madam, I wish it may.

[Exit GERTRUDE]

POLONIUS Ophelia, walk you here. Gracious, so please you,
We will bestow ourselves.

[To OPHELIA]

Read on this book; **20**
That show of such an exercise may colour
Your loneliness. We are oft to blame in this,--
'Tis too much proved--that with devotion's visage
And pious action we do sugar o'er
The devil himself. **25**

CLAUDIUS *[Aside]* O, 'tis too true!
How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!
The harlot's cheek, beautied with plastering art,
Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it
Than is my deed to my most painted word: **30**
O heavy burthen!

POLONIUS I hear him coming: let's withdraw, my lord.

[Act 3, scene 1]

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1 Apart from general concern about Hamlet's state of mind, what other reason might Claudius have for being involved in this matter? (2)

2 What do Polonius and Claudius want to prove while they spy on Hamlet? (2)

3 Explain the irony of 'lawful espials' in line 5. (2)

4 From what Gertrude says in lines 10–15, discuss her feelings towards Hamlet and Ophelia. (3)

5 Refer to the extract. Critically discuss what type of father Polonius is. (3)

6 The King refers to a harlot using make-up on her cheeks to hide her ugliness (lines 24–27). How is this metaphor a reflection of his life? (3)

AND

EXTRACT B

Laertes leaps into the grave

LAERTES	Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead,	
	Till of this flat a mountain you have made,	
	To o'ertop old Pelion, or the skyish head	
	Of blue Olympus.	
HAMLET	*Advancing.* What is he whose grief	5
	Bears such an emphasis? whose phrase of sorrow	
	Conjures the wandering stars, and makes them stand	
	Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I,	
	Hamlet the Dane.	
	Leaps into the grave.	10
LAERTES	The devil take thy soul!	
	Grappling with him.	
HAMLET	Thou pray'st not well.	
	I prithee, take thy fingers from my throat;	
	For, though I am not splenitive and rash,	15
	Yet have I something in me dangerous,	
	Which let thy wiseness fear: hold off thy hand.	
CLAUDIUS	Pluck them asunder.	
GERTRUDE	Hamlet, Hamlet!	
All	Gentlemen,--	20
HORATIO	Good my lord, be quiet.	
	The Attendants part them, and they come out of the grave.	
HAMLET	Why I will fight with him upon this theme	
	Until my eyelids will no longer wag.	
GERTRUDE	O my son, what theme?	

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HAMLET	I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers	25
	Could not, with all their quantity of love,	
	Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her?	
CLAUDIUS	O, he is mad, Laertes.	
QUEEN	For love of God, forbear him.	
	[Act 5, scene 1]	

7 Place the extract in context. (3)

8 Comment on Hamlet's state of mind. Quote in support of your answer. (3)

9 GERTRUDE: 'I shall obey you' (Extract A: line 11)
GERTRUDE: 'For love of God, forbear him.' (Extract B: line 27)
Explain how you would direct an actress to say and act these lines. (4)

[25]

QUESTION 2

Extract A

Enter CLAUDIUS, GERTRUDE, HAMLET, POLONIUS, LAERTES, VOLTIMAND, CORNELIUS, Lords, and Attendants]

CLAUDIUS	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	5
	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,--	10
	With an auspicious and a 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	15
	With this affair along. For all, our thanks.	
	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,	20
	[Act 1, scene 2]	

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1 This spectacular scene opens showing Prince Hamlet dressed in black.
Explain the dramatic effect that is created by presenting Hamlet in this way. (3)

2 Refer to line 1: 'our dear brother's death'. Account for the irony in this line. (3)

3 Refer to line 9: 'this warlike state'. Discuss how this line may have both a literal and figurative interpretation. (3)

4 'Now follows that you know young Fortinbras,
Holding a weak supposal of our worth,' (lines 17–18)
In these lines Claudius indicates that Fortinbras is not a threat to Denmark nor to Claudius. How is this assumption proven to be incorrect at the end of the play? (3)

AND

EXTRACT B

LAERTES I will do't:
And, for that purpose, I'll anoint my sword.
I bought an unction of a mountebank,
So mortal that, but dip a knife in it,
Where it draws blood no cataplasm so rare, 5
Collected from all simples that have virtue
Under the moon, can save the thing from death
That is but scratch'd withal: I'll touch my point
With this contagion, that, if I gall him slightly,
It may be death. 10

CLAUDIUS Let's further think of this;
Weigh what convenience both of time and means
May fit us to our shape: if this should fail,
And that our drift look through our bad performance,
'Twere better not assay'd: therefore this project 15
Should have a back or second, that might hold,
If this should blast in proof. Soft! let me see:
We'll make a solemn wager on your cunnings: I ha't.
When in your motion you are hot and dry--
As make your bouts more violent to that end-- 20
And that he calls for drink, I'll have prepared him
A chalice for the nonce, whereon but sipping,
If he by chance escape your venom'd stuck,
Our purpose may hold there.
Enter GERTRUDE.

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	How now, sweet queen!	25
GERTRUDE	One woe doth tread upon another's heel,	
	So fast they follow; your sister's drown'd, Laertes.	
LAERTES	Drown'd! O, where?	
	[Act 4, scene 7]	

5 Why does Claudius align himself with Laertes at this point in the play? (3)

6 Comment on the significance of Gertrude's appearance at this stage. (3)

7 Refer to Laertes' response to his sister's death in line 28: 'Drowned? O, where?'

If you were the director of a production of *Hamlet*, how would you instruct the actor to deliver these lines? Pay specific attention to body language and tone. Motivate your instructions. (3)

8 Show how deception ultimately leads to tragedy by referring to both extracts in your response. (4)

[25]

QUESTION 3

EXTRACT A

Ghost	My hour is almost come,	
	When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames	
	Must render up myself.	
HAMLET	Alas, poor ghost!	5
Ghost	Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing	
	To what I shall unfold.	
HAMLET	Speak; I am bound to hear.	
Ghost	So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear.	
HAMLET	What?	10
Ghost	I am thy father's spirit,	
	Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,	
	And for the day confined to fast in fires,	
	Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature	
	Are burnt and purged away. But that I am forbid	15
	To tell the secrets of my prison-house,	
	I could a tale unfold whose lightest word	
	Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,	

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	Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,	
	Thy knotted and combined locks to part	20
	And each particular hair to stand on end,	
	Like quills upon the fretful porpentine:	
	But this eternal blazon must not be	
	To ears of flesh and blood. List, list, O, list!	
	If thou didst ever thy dear father love--	25
HAMLET	O God!	
Ghost	Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.	
HAMLET	Murder!	
Ghost	Murder most foul, as in the best it is;	
	But this most foul, strange and unnatural.	30
HAMLET	Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift	
	As meditation or the thoughts of love,	
	May sweep to my revenge.	
	[Act 1, scene 5]	

1 Place the extract in context. (3)

2 Comment on the dramatic effect the ghost would have on an Elizabethan audience. (3)

3 Refer to lines 10–24. How does the ghost try to persuade Hamlet to avenge his murder? Mention two things. (3)

4 Why does the ghost refer to his murder as 'strange and unnatural' (line 29)? (3)

5 Explain how Hamlet's intention in lines 30–32 is ironic. (3)

AND

EXTRACT B

HAMLET	How does the queen?	
CLAUDIUS	She swounds to see them bleed.	
GERTRUDE	No, no, the drink, the drink,--O my dear Hamlet,--	
	The drink, the drink! I am poison'd.	
	Dies	5
HAMLET	O villany! Ho! let the door be lock'd:	
	Treachery! Seek it out.	
LAERTES	It is here, Hamlet: Hamlet, thou art slain;	

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	No medicine in the world can do thee good;	
	In thee there is not half an hour of life;	10
	The treacherous instrument is in thy hand,	
	Unbated and envenom'd: the foul practise	
	Hath turn'd itself on me lo, here I lie,	
	Never to rise again: thy mother's poison'd:	
	I can no more: the king, the king's to blame.	15
HAMLET	The point!--envenom'd too!	
	Then, venom, to thy work.	
	Stabs CLAUDIUS.	
All	Treason! treason!	
CLAUDIUS	O, yet defend me, friends; I am but hurt.	20
HAMLET	Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane,	
	Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?	
	Follow my mother.	
	[Act 5, scene 2]	

6 What do you think Gertrude implies when she calls for her son and not the King just before she dies? Mention two things. (3)

7 Suggest how an actor should act and speak Laertes's words in lines 7–14. (3)

8 Refer to lines 19–21. Hamlet is a man of action in this scene. How does he finally avenge his parents' deaths? (4)

[25]

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6 Literature Essays

QUESTION 1

In a carefully planned essay of 400–450 words (2–2½ pages) in length, discuss to what extent women influence the outcome of Hamlet's life. **[25]**

QUESTION 2

Critically discuss to what extent Hamlet is both a victim and a villain.

Your response should take the form of a well-constructed essay of 400–450 words (2–2½ pages). **[25]**

QUESTION 3

'A tragic hero is a character who comes to misfortune through a fatal character flaw.'

In a carefully planned essay of 400–450 words (2–2½ pages) in length, discuss to what extent the quotation is true about Hamlet. **[25]**

7 Suggested Answers

Activity 1

N.B. The given textual references are only some of the many which illustrate each theme. As you read the play, should you find further references, be encouraged to add them to the table.

THEME	EXPLANATION AND EXAMPLES	TEXTUAL REFERENCES
Corruption and Disease	Constant reference to power struggles, ambition, scheming and decay. E.g. the usurping of the throne, manipulation of others, and the moral decay in Denmark.	Act 1, scene 4, line **67** Act 1, scene 5, lines **27-28; 35-36; 39-40; 42-46; 74-75; 110-113; 172-173** Act 2, scene 2, lines **10-18; 28-31; 162-164; 540-542; 604-605** Act 3, scene 3, lines **73-88;** Act 4, scene 7, lines **101-121**
Death and Mortality	Death by murder and suicide, and reflection on mortality. E.g. King Hamlet's murder, the deaths of Ophelia, Gertrude, Claudius, Laertes and Hamlet.	Act 1, scene 5, lines **39-40** Act 4, scene 7, lines **101-111-121; 135-155** Act 5, scene 1, lines **202-211** Act 5, scene 2, lines **49-57; 254; 261; 263-263; 274-279; 305-311**

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Appearance vs Reality	The contrast between what seems to be reality and the actual reality. E.g. Hamlet's madness; the play-within-the play; Claudius's marriage to Gertrude; Rosencrantz and Guidenstern's friendship with Hamlet.	Act 1, scene 2, lines **1-7; 87-117; 143-145** Act 1, scene 5, lines **172-173** Act 2, scene 2, lines **604-605** Act 4, scene 3, lines **57-61**
Insanity and Reasoning	Hamlet's "antic disposition"; Hamlet's inaction, Ophelia's madness.	Act 1, scene 5, lines **172-173** Act 3, scene 3, lines **73-88** Act 4, scene 5, lines **21-70; 154-198**
Revenge	Sons avenging their fathers' deaths E.g. Hamlet, Fortinbras and Laertes	Act 1, scene 5, lines **27-28; 110-113** Act 4, scene 7, lines **100-112** Act 5, scene 2, lines **274-279; 343-346; 349-358**
Religion	"Garden of Eden Imagery", Hamlet's religious beliefs causing his inaction; references to heaven, hell, purgatory and judgement.	Act 1, scene 2, lines **135-137;** Act 1, scene 5, lines **10-13** Act 2, scene 2, lines **598-603** Act 3, scene 3, lines **73-88; 97-98** Act 3, scene 4, lines **142-143** Act 5, scene 2 lines **313-315**
Family and Gender	Parent-Child relationships, sibling relationships, patriarchy, Hamlet's misogyny (intense dislike of women)	Act 1, scene 2, lines **143-146** Act 1, scene 3, lines **31- 38; 57-81; 123-136;** Act 1, scene 5, lines **9-23** Act 2, scene 2, lines **572-574** Act 3, scene 1, lines **139-142** Act 3, scene 4, lines **14-16; 52-86** Act 5, scene 2, lines **343-346; 349-358**
Love and Lust (Sex)	Hamlet and Ophelia, Claudius and Gertrude.	Act 1, scene 2, lines **135-137; 143-145;** Act 3, scene 1, lines **139-142** Act 3, scene 4, lines **142-143** Act 5, scene 1, lines **265-267**

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Activity 2

Act 1

The following are some of the points you can use to deduce what has been revealed about Hamlet's character in Act I

- **Melancholic**- dressed in black; mourning the death of his father.
  - The 'clouds still hang' on him. He is still in the 'nightly hour'.
  - Gertrude and Claudius are concerned and would like his 'eye to look like a friend on Denmark.' (Act 1: Scene 2: 62-73).
- **Bitter and disgusted**- his mother's 'wicked speed' marriage to Claudius, barely two months after the death of her husband. (Act 1: Scene 2: line 150-152)
- Cynical- He suspects that his father was murdered and does not trust Claudius at all (Act 1: Scene 2: 65)
- **Reflective and thoughtful**: in the soliloquy he questions the purpose of being alive when in the end one is bound to die.
  - He toys with thoughts of suicide
  - He reflects on what a good man his father was compared to Claudius.
  - He also reflects on the love his mother had for his father and how this seems to have changed straight after his death. ('…frailty, thy name is woman…' line 146).
- **Indecisive and hesitant-** After the Ghost has confirmed his suspicions about Claudius, Hamlet still goes on to 'up an antic disposition' to gather more evidence on whether the Claudius was indeed guilty.

NB: THERE ARE MORE EXAMPLES FROM THE ACT 1 WHICH HIGHLIGHT KEY ASPECTS OF HAMLET'S CHARACTER, WHICH ARE TYPICAL OF HIM THROUGHOUT THE PLAY.

Activity 3

Your answer needs to be in the form of a Diary entry.

Dear Diary

Hamlet is acting so strangely. Should I be worried? …

Mention needs to be made of **Hamlet's strange behaviour**: Hamlet comes to Ophelia room, his clothes all awry. He trembles uncontrollably; then takes Ophelia by the wrist, studies her face intently and just stares at her without saying anything; he then shuts his eyes and walks out of her room, almost in a trance. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern recount how Hamlet rambles on in seeming riddles about Denmark being a prison. Hamlet also keeps speaking to the company of actors. All this strange behaviour makes Claudius very suspicious, and he wants to know what Hamlet is up to, as he feels very threatened by Hamlet, whom he knows is the rightful heir to the Danish throne

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Activity 4

Your director's notes need to focus on both the TONE of Hamlet and his gestures (body language). The following answer is merely a guide. You are encouraged to use your imagination, but to back up your opinions with reference to the text.

Tone: In this soliloquy, Hamlet's tone is philosophical and reasonable. He is rational, knowing that the darkness of the night cloaks the evil and unnatural things that often happen in the dead of night. When he speaks of his mother, his tone becomes compassionate, as he knows he needs to be harsh to save her, but will not be commit heinous, unnatural acts towards her as he loves her. When he speaks of the revenge he needs to carry out for his father, his tone is resolute.
Gestures (Body Language): Hamlet would stand tall and proud; as this is a soliloquy we would stand centre stage, speaking out to the audience. As he ponders the darkness of the night he would point out towards the darkness of the auditorium, or else up stage, where there is no light; when his conversation changes to his mother, he would use forceful hand gestures when speaking about having to act harshly towards her, but would then hold his hands in a prayer-like gesture when he asks that he still be able to be compassionate toward her.

Activity 5

The extract tells you what some of the flowers symbolise. You are encouraged to give substantiated responses as you consider how these flowers add to the message of the play as a whole.

Flower	Symbolism	Significance
Rosemary	Remembrance	These flowers allude to those whom she has lost through death (Polonius) and rejection (Hamlet). They also remind us of those in the play who have died (Old Hamlet and Old Fortinbras)
Pansies	Thoughts	As these are associated with loving thoughts, they stir up memories of the love she has for Hamlet, for her brother, and her late father.
Fennel and columbines	Flattery and Infidelity	Gertrude falls victim to the flatter of Claudius and agrees to an incestuous marriage to Claudius. So these flowers are very appropriate to her.
Rue	Grace / Forgiveness/ Repentance	Claudius is most in need of forgiveness, so these flowers would be appropriate for his. He needs to repent of his sins if he is to escape eternal damnation in hell.
Daisy	Innocence and purity	The innocence and purity reflect Ophelia's innocence. She is so pure in heart and is therefore so crushed by the evil committed around her and causes Hamlet to abandon her for the sake of avenging his father's death.
Violets	Innocence, modesty, true and everlasting love	Ophelia is modest and has true, eternal love for Hamlet, and her late father.

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Activity 6

Your answer needs to be written in a prose paragraph (i.e. full sentences should be used) and give the chronological order of how the deaths occur. **Old Hamlet** is poisoned by his brother, Claudius. **Polonius** is stabbed by Hamlet in error. Hamlet thinks it is Claudius hiding behind the arras in Gertrude's chamber, and lunges forward with his dagger, only to discover it is Polonius and not Claudius he has killed. **Rosencrantz and Guildenstern** meet their deaths in England, after Hamlet substitutes their names for his on the death warrant written by Claudius to the King of England, instructing Hamlet to be killed as soon as he lands in England. **Gertrude** dies during the duel, when she drinks from the poisoned cup, that Claudius meant for Hamlet. **Claudius** dies after Hamlet stabs him with the poisoned sword, that Claudius and Laertes plotted to use to kill Hamlet during the duel. **Laertes** dies from the poison on his own sword. During the scuffle of the duel, he was scratched with the sword on which he, himself, had administered the poison meant for Hamlet. As **Hamlet** was wounded by Laertes' poison-tipped sword, he dies as well.

Activity 7: Stage-Directions

The stage directions you fill in on your cue-scrips will depend on your discussions with your group members. Be guided, though, by the following:

CLAUDIUS	***(in muted tones to show his fake support concern for Laertes, as he is trying to won support)*** What wouldst thou have, Laertes?	50
LAERTES	***(Respectfully, as he needs the King's permission to return to France)*** My dread lord, Your leave and favour to return to France; From whence though willingly I came to Denmark, To show my duty in your coronation, Yet now, I must confess, that duty done, My thoughts and wishes bend again toward France And bow them to your gracious leave and pardon.	55
CLAUDIUS	Have you your father's leave? What says Polonius? ***(in a questioning tone, as he does not want to upset Polonius. He needs Polonius's support and advice)***	
POLONIUS	He hath, my lord, wrung from me my slow leave ***(regretful but accepting, as he would prefer his son to stay in Denmark, but he accepts that Laertes needs to return to his life in Paris)*** By laboursome petition, and at last Upon his will I seal'd my hard consent: I do beseech you, give him leave to go.	60

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CLAUDIUS	Take thy fair hour, Laertes; time be thine, ***(with friendly tone and open gestures as he wishes Laertes well)***	
	And thy best graces spend it at thy will!	
	But now, ***(with a tone of concern, and with gentle gestures, as he does not want to offend Gertrude by upsetting Hamlet, and does not want to give Hamlet cause for suspicion)*** my cousin Hamlet, and my son,--	65
HAMLET	**[turns away from Claudius and speaks as an *Aside to the audience*]** A little more than kin, and less than kind.	
CLAUDIUS	How is it that the clouds still hang on you?	
HAMLET	Not so, my lord; I am too much i' the sun.	
GERTRUDE	***(with a tone of concern, as Hamlet's melancholy disturb her…she has moved on and does not want to be reminded of her late husband)*** Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off,	
	And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark. ***(pleading, as she needs her son and husband to be at peace with each other)***	70
	Do not for ever with thy vailed lids	
	Seek for thy noble father in the dust:	
	Thou know'st 'tis common; all that lives must die,	
	Passing through nature to eternity.	
HAMLET	Ay, madam, ***(with passive aggression, as he is hurt by his mother's hasty re-marriage)*** 'tis common.	75
GERTRUDE	If it be,	
	Why seems it so particular with thee? ***(pleading and concerned)***	
HAMLET	Seems, madam! nay it is; I know not 'seems.' ***(cold and distant, and turning away from his mother towards the audience, as this signals the tension between them)***	
	'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,	
	Nor customary suits of solemn black,	80
	Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,	
	No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,	
	Nor the dejected 'haviour of the visage,	
	Together with all forms, modes, shapes of grief,	
	That can denote me truly: these indeed seem,	
	For they are actions that a man might play:	
	But I have that within which passeth show;	
	These but the trappings and the suits of woe.	

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Contextual questions

Contextual Question 1

1 Claudius *has murdered Hamlet's father.*
He might worry that Hamlet has some inkling that he had done it.

2 *His 'antic disposition' might be because he is so in love with Ophelia.*

3 Spying cannot be 'lawful'; it is by its nature wrong.

4 She approves of Ophelia, and of her 'relationship' with Hamlet – she expresses the wish that Hamlet's irrational behaviour is the result of his love for her.
She wants Hamlet to return 'to his wonted way again'; she does not want her son to be unhappy. She cares for him.

NB In order to get the full 3 marks, both Ophelia and Hamlet should be discussed.

5 He is using his daughter to get the results that he wants.
She is a puppet in his hands; she listens to him, knowing that she is doing something dishonest.
He is a domineering father, who uses his daughter to manipulate her boyfriend./He does not see his daughter as a human being.

6 Just like the harlot wants to hide the fact that she is ugly, he has to hide the fact that he had murdered his brother.
What he has done is also ugly, and he is a 'harlot' who sold his soul.

7 Ophelia has died, probably of a broken heart.
Hamlet has just returned from England.
Hamlet and Horatio happen upon Ophelia's funeral.

8 He announces himself using a royal term – 'This is I,/Hamlet the Dane.' He is indirectly challenging Claudius's position.
He confidently confesses his love for Ophelia – 'I loved Ophelia…'. He is sincerely moved by her death.
He is actively present in the moment – he jumps into the grave and 'grapples' with Leartes.

9 **Extract A:** Her tone is friendly; agreeable. She would be quick to leave to show her obedience.
Extract B: Her tone would be demanding; assertive. She would face Claudius and look him In the eye.

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Contextual Question 2

1 Hamlet stands aloof in contrast to the glitter and brilliance of the court. Hamlet, dressed in black in this context, emphasises his isolation and it highlights his suffering. The colour, black, is funereal. It is evident that he is still in mourning for his father.

2 Claudius conveys his love ('dear') for his brother who has died but he is not sincere. He has shown no love when he cruelly killed his relative in order to usurp his position.

3 The state is literally at war since Fortinbras has prepared to avenge the loss of Norwegian lands to Hamlet's father when he was king. Figuratively, the state is 'disjointed' since Claudius usurped the throne and caused confusion in the natural order of things. Denmark is thrown into disarray.
Hamlet, too, experiences an emotional battle as he vacillates between reason and avenging the death of his father.

4 Claudius is over-confident and arrogant. He views 'young Fortinbras' as immature yet it is Fortinbras who becomes the next Danish king. He proves to be a good leader, deserving of Hamlet's endorsement at the end to restore stability and morality to Denmark.

5 Hamlet has killed Laertes' father, Polonius. Laertes is devastated. Claudius uses Laertes' grief to his advantage by convincing Laertes to avenge his father's death. Hamlet is a threat to Claudius maintaining the throne. He wants Hamlet killed before Hamlet exposes Claudius.

6 Claudius convinced Laertes that he is unable to take action against Hamlet because of the love that Gertrude has for Hamlet. Gertrude's appearance at this stage highlights the horror of the lengths Claudius will go to protect himself and how truly immoral he is. He disregards the effect Hamlet's death will have on Gertrude and shows how self-serving he is. Her appearance at this stage also foreshadows her death from the poisoned cup that is part of Claudius' plan to kill Hamlet.

7 His eyes might be large to show his shock at the news. His arms may be outstretched or he may be slumped over in devastation. His curt response may indicate that he is still processing the vengeful plan against Hamlet and he is not quite prepared for more sad news. His tone might be bitter, grave or shocked.

NB Remember to refer to both body language and tone, and include a justification.

8 **EXTRACT A:**
Claudius appears to be an honourable, dutiful king who is prepared to put aside his grief for the sake of the welfare of Denmark. He deceptively shrouds his culpability in the death of his brother and sets the stage for even more devious acts leading to tragedy.

EXTRACT B:
Here Claudius deceives Laertes into believing that Hamlet is his enemy that should be eliminated. He plots what would appear to be an innocent fencing match which does ultimately lead to many deaths, including his own.
NB BOTH extracts need to be discussed.

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Contextual Question 3

1 This happens at the start of the play. King Hamlet's ghost appeared to the sentries at night. Hamlet decides to meet his father's ghost. When Hamlet encounters the ghost, it speaks for the first time.

2 Elizabethans believed that ghosts were ungodly, and an evil presence from the Underworld. They would realise that it does not bode well.

3 He identifies himself as his father's ghost. He explains that his soul is 'doomed…to walk the night' (line 11) and that he is in Purgatory. He is harbouring a secret so terrible that it would 'harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood, / Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres, / Thy knotted and combined locks to part, / And each particular hair to stand an end' (lines 17–20). Hamlet is emotionally invested and has little choice but to listen to what the ghost has to say – it is his father who is suffering and who has no peace of mind.

4 Brothers are supposed to love one another; killing a brother is therefore 'strange and unnatural'. Some believed that marrying your sister-in-law was incestuous; as 'unnatural' as killing your sibling. Murder is 'strange and unnatural'; it is inhumane and universally seen as a disgusting and loathsome act.

5 He will not act 'with wings as swift / As meditation' (line 30–31); instead, he will be plagued by an inability to act out the revenge he undertook when his father's ghost appeared to him. He will not get beyond 'meditation' in his desire to avenge his father's murder.

6 She understands too late that Hamlet was right when he urged her to leave Claudius because he was dishonest and a murderer. She realises that Claudius probably has something to do with the poisoning. She finally turns to her son, whom she had neglected up to now because she was enthralled by Claudius.

7 Laertes would probably not be upright anymore. He would speak clearly and slowly to indicate that he is dying and that he is serious and speaking the truth.

8 He stabs Claudius for murdering his father. He forces him to drink the same poison that killed his mother, and that was meant for him. The revenge could not have been more complete nor poetic. He has finally achieved what was so impossible for an agonizingly long time.

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Literature Essays

NOTE: The answers for Activities 1-3 are suggested guidelines only. It is never advisable to learn "model answers" for the essay questions. If you mention other points in your planning, use them in your essay. Remember to substantiate your opinions at all times, because a response with textual evidence will always be considered favourably by the markers

Suggested Answer for Essay Question 1

To a large extent, although not always directly, Ophelia and Gertrude bear the brunt of Hamlet's irrational and even cruel behaviour. Ultimately it is his love for them that creates so much conflict in him.
Gertrude's hasty marriage ('most wicked speed') to Claudius 'breaks' Hamlet's heart. He is most unhappy about this, but cannot confide in anybody about it. He feels alienated from what is going on in the palace.

Gertrude appears to be unaware of Hamlet's torment. She sides with her husband and tells Hamlet to 'cast thy nighted colour off'; both of them urge Hamlet to stop mourning the King's death and to join them in celebrating a new future for Denmark.
Gertrude is aware that Polonius and Claudius are spying on her son, and does nothing to prevent it.

When the Ghost asks Hamlet to avenge his murder 'most foul, strange and unnatural', Hamlet's worst suspicions are confirmed. To him, his mother is part of Claudius's plot to become king. But the Ghost urges him to 'leave (his) mother to heaven'.
He confronts her with an intense petition to leave Claudius. She begs him to stop talking because his words are like 'daggers' in her ears. Eventually she ascribes his plea to madness. She will not consider anything that might imply Claudius; that truth is too uncomfortable, even if it means that she turns her back on her son.
Just before she dies, Gertrude's last words are addressed to Hamlet, probably in an attempt to warn him that the drink is poisoned. These words reconcile her with Hamlet; she ignores Claudius and faces Hamlet instead.

Ophelia is in love with Hamlet. His feelings for her are tainted by the confusion he feels towards women. He resents women in general when he realises that his mother had been unfaithful. He is cruel towards Ophelia.

Ophelia agrees to spy on Hamlet. He sees this as a betrayal, and rejects her by demanding she goes 'to a nunnery'. He denies ever loving her. She is deeply affected by Hamlet's irrational behaviour and by his rejection.
Ophelia is not wicked and 'rank'; she is innocent and vulnerable. Hamlet's rejection and murder of her father prove to be too much. She loses her mind, and commits suicide.
Hamlet inadvertently attends her funeral after his return from England. He confesses in no uncertain terms his love for her – 'I loved Ophelia…
(more than) forty thousand brothers', but it is too late. His emotional instability was the reason he treated her so poorly, and not because he did not love her.

Hamlet's relationships with Gertrude and Ophelia reflect his state of mind. Gertrude's relationship with Claudius begins Hamlet's emotional instability. He questions his love for Ophelia during this time. He resolves his issues with them in the end; he has come to terms with whom he is. They no longer cause him anguish because he is at peace.

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Suggested Answer for Essay Question 2

You may argue that Hamlet is a victim who is helpless and suffers due to the actions of others or that he is a deliberately cruel and malicious person. You may also give a "mixed response" in which you argue that he is both a victim and a villain. Remember to support your opinions with reference to the text.

VICTIM:

Initially Hamlet is presented as a normal young man who is mourning the death of his father and distraught because of his mother's hasty marriage to his uncle. He is well educated and presented as a logical and rational man.

He is sceptical of the ghost's orders. He questions the validity of the ghost's claims, for fear it may be the devil trying to influence him towards revenge and aggression. The seeds of revenge that are planted fester in his mind.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern betray him as friends. He realises that there are very few people whom he can trust. Life becomes so meaningless to him that he contemplates suicide. He is the victim of overwhelming and confusing circumstances.

He is a victim of Claudius' attempts to have him killed but when he has an opportunity to get rid of this enemy, his conscience prevents him from doing so.

VILLAIN:

Although Hamlet claims to love his mother, he is very cruel to her and berates her in a malicious manner.

Hamlet does not apologise or show any horror when he stabs Polonius. He rather uses it as an opportunity to criticize his mother.

Hamlet is even crueller to Ophelia than he is to his mother. Through his merciless insults and the murder of Polonius, Hamlet causes Ophelia to lose her grip on reality and eventually she commits suicide.

Hamlet sets up the play within the play and puts on an 'antic disposition' in an attempt to make sense of his emotional confusion and to reveal Claudius' guilt. This shows his self-control against acting rashly.

It could be argued that Hamlet's death is heroic and he redeems himself by taking on the duties of a crown prince and bequeathing his country to Fortinbras.

Hamlet changes from a confused and deeply saddened son and crown prince, unable to cope with the dramatic changes within his close family, to a confident and purposeful young man. He realises that returning to Denmark might cost him his life. He is determined to face whatever is necessary in order to fulfil his obligation to his father. His villainous behaviour stems from his deep sense of justice rather than being evil.

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Suggested Answer for Essay Question 3

It is true, to an extent. Hamlet has to cope with an inordinately difficult situation which is not of his making.

He loses his father at a young age, and then has to contend with the fact that his mother is behaving inappropriately by marrying his uncle so soon that 'The funeral baked meats / Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables'.

He meets with his father's ghost and suspects 'some foul play'. His father requests that he avenges his murder, but it becomes such a burden that he cannot cope.

He puts on 'an antic disposition' and isolates himself from those closest to him. On the surface it might appear to be a 'character flaw', but Hamlet is clever enough to use his 'disposition' to ascertain what exactly is going on in the palace.

He proves that Claudius is guilty during the play. He confronts his mother about her infidelity, but she refuses to cut ties with Claudius; she chooses her lover over her son.

While all this is going on, Hamlet cannot do what his father asked him to do. He is torn between his filial duty to avenge his father's murder, and the belief that revenge is sinful. He cannot reconcile these opposites, and is tormented by his indecision.

He finds his mother and Claudius repulsive; he feels the same about Ophelia, who really is innocent. But Hamlet is in the grip of a situation that offers no solution. He feels powerless, and wishes to 'shuffle off this mortal coil'.

He cannot afford to share any of his doubts and suspicions with anybody, because he does not know whom to trust in the 'rotten state of Denmark'.

He has an epiphany when he is sent to England by Claudius. He realises that his fate is in his own hands and that he has to act.

While he has to avenge his father's murder, he is also a murderer. Laertes kills him to avenge Ophelia's suicide. Both young men forgive each other as they are dying, but the true murderer, Claudius, in not forgiven. In this unlikely situation, Hamlet earns the admiration of the audience; the truth is out, and he is an active witness to Claudius's demise.

Hamlet's heroism lies in the fact that he returns to Denmark to face probable death. He can only resolve his promise to his father by facing Claudius, and hopefully killing him.

He is not a hero at the start of the play, but gradually develops to become the Danish crown prince.

When he dies, he takes on his royal position and bequests his country to Fortinbras. He is Hamlet, the Dane.

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Rubric for Literature Essays

SECTIONS B AND C: Assessment rubric for literary essay: Novel and Drama (25 Marks)

Criteria	Exceptional	Skilful	Moderate	Elementary	Inadequate
CONTENT 15 MARKS Interpretation of topic. Depth of argument, justification and grasp of text.	12-15 -Outstanding response: 14-15 -Excellent response: 12-13 -In-depth interpretation of topic -Range of striking arguments extensively supported from text -Excellent understanding of genre and text	9-11 -Shows understanding and has interpreted topic well -Fairly detailed response -Some sound arguments given, but not all of them as well motivated as they could be -Understanding of genre and text evident	6-8 -Mediocre interpretation of topic; not all aspects explored in detail -Some good points in support of topic -Some arguments supported, but evidence is not always convincing -Partial understanding of genre and text	4-5 -Scant interpretation of topic; hardly any aspects explored in detail -Few points in support of topic -Very little relevant argument -Little understanding of genre and text	0-3 -Very little understanding of the topic -Weak attempt to answer the question. -Arguments not convincing -Learner has not come to grips with genre or text
STRUCTURE AND LANGUAGE 10 MARKS Structure, logical flow and presentation. Language, tone and style used in the essay	8-10 -Coherent structure -Excellent introduction and conclusion -Arguments well-structured and clearly developed -Language, tone and style mature, impressive, correct	6-7 -Clear structure and logical flow of argument -Introduction and conclusion and other paragraphs coherently organised -Logical flow of argument -Language, tone and style largely correct	4-5 -Some evidence of structure -Logic and coherence apparent, but flawed -Some language errors; tone and style mostly appropriate -Paragraphing mostly correct	2-3 -Structure shows faulty planning -Arguments not logically arranged -Language errors evident. -Inappropriate tone and style -Paragraphing faulty	0-1 -Lack of planned structure impedes flow of argument -Language errors and incorrect style make this an unsuccessful piece of writing -Inappropriate tone and style -Paragraphing faulty
MARK RANGE	20-25	15-19	10-14	5-9	0-4

NOTE: If a candidate has ignored the content completely and written a creative response instead, award a 0 mark for both Content and Structure and Language.
There must not be more than two categories' variation between the Structure and Language mark and the Content mark.

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