



# HAMLET

THE COMPLETE GUIDE AND RESOURCE

**SAMPLE  
SECTION**

When brother kills brother, the betrayal must be avenged.

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2014/2015  
Syllabus



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the  
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experience

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# **HAMLET**

**THE COMPLETE GUIDE  
AND RESOURCE FOR GRADE 12**

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# FOREWORD

## ABOUT THE ENGLISH EXPERIENCE

**The English Experience is an independent South African publishing house that specialises in developing high-quality IEB English educational resources for educators and learners. The team of passionate, talented experts behind The English Experience works tirelessly to ensure that every resource encourages insight, growth and debate — enriching and challenging both educators and learners — without losing sight of the important goal of examination readiness and success.**

Focused on bringing the subject to life, every resource The English Experience publishes incorporates a range of features — including content, contextual and essay questions, tear-out rubrics and stimulating enrichment materials — designed to encourage a critical appreciation of the subject and to inspire the higher order thinking for which examiners are always looking.

The world-class English Experience team includes highly experienced educators, some with over 20 years of classroom experience, passionate literary experts in various fields, such as historical fiction, poetry and Shakespeare, fanatical historians and researchers, creative writers, skilled editors, picky proofreaders and obsessive fact checkers — together with spirited university lecturers and enthusiastic young minds who help ensure our approach remains unique and fresh.

While examination readiness and success is a non-negotiable, our aspiration is to inspire a genuine interest in, and love of, English literature.



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## OUR APPROACH TO SHAKESPEARE

**The toughest challenge with Shakespeare can be overcoming the preconceived ideas many learners have about how dull and tedious he is to study. Making sense of the language in which the plays are written can be hard going for learners so it's perhaps not surprising that many of them find studying Shakespeare an alienating experience and consider his plays works through which they have to slog to pass an examination.**

This resource has been written with this reality in mind and particular attention has been paid to breathing new life into Shakespeare and his world. Not only have we worked hard to make sure the content in this resource is fresh and engaging, we have also divided it into accessible, digestible sections and included numerous quirky, interesting and fun facts.

We have endeavoured to make both the man and his play as accessible and entertaining as possible. We start with the man, exploring his extraordinary life and achievements, and then put these into context by bringing the dirty, dangerous and vibrant world of Elizabethan England to life.

Having armed learners with an understanding and appreciation of Shakespeare's intentions and world, we tackle the play. Again, we do so with one goal in mind at every step: to make it as accessible and entertaining as possible for modern Matric learners, while remaining academically sound and accurate.

We start by providing learners with a detailed literary background, helping them to understand the genre and conventions on which the play is based. The play is also presented as a short story to help students grasp the plot, before we tackle the characters, themes and structure in detail.

We have not only worked very closely with the text of the play, adjusting punctuation and spelling and providing explanatory annotations to help learners grasp its meaning, we have also incorporated act-based learning into the structure of the resource as we believe that working through the play act by act ensures that a solid foundation of knowledge is laid. Learners can then build on this foundation methodically and effectively, only dealing with the whole play once they have worked through it scene by scene.

In the end, we have approached Shakespeare in the same way we approach every author and text: with two, interrelated goals in mind. The first, non-negotiable, objective is to ensure examination readiness and success, and the second is to inspire a genuine interest in, and appreciation of, the work being studied.

## USING THIS RESOURCE

**This comprehensive resource includes: the full text of the play; an extensive introduction to Shakespeare and the Elizabethan era; a guide to Shakespearean language; a detailed literary background; accessible summaries; rich literary analyses; diverse content-related short questions and essay questions (act-specific and general), together with challenging enrichment tasks. In short, everything needed to study the play intensively and to bring the text to life.**

We recommend working through the **Introduction to Shakespeare** section first (even before watching a live/recorded performance) so that learners become familiar with the man himself, Elizabethan England and the theatre for which he wrote.

Some learners might have preconceived ideas about Shakespeare and even a block about studying him. This resource has been written with such students in mind and particular attention has been paid to breathing new life into Shakespeare and his world.

To complete the introduction to the playwright, work through the **Shakespearean language** and **Background to the play** sections next. These will deepen learners' understanding of the play — the characters, themes and plot — before they tackle the text itself.

By working through the comprehensive introductory section first, learners will be prepared, engaged and able to approach the play with the right mindset.

Once learners have been introduced to Shakespeare and his play, prepare them for working with the actual text by arranging for them to **watch it being performed**. Attending a live performance is often the most effective approach, though not always possible. If it is not, then watching one of the recent film versions of the play — such as Franco Zeffirelli's 1990 interpretation, Michael Almereyda's contemporary adaptation or Kenneth Branagh's excellent 1996 version — is a more than adequate substitute.



With the learners properly prepared and primed, it is time to **read through the play**. This can be done either act by act or in its entirety. The version of the play included in this resource also features relevant annotations to help learners understand the meaning and nuances of the text.

Once learners have read through the play, work through the act-based **Summaries and Analyses** section. Working through the play act by act ensures that a solid foundation of knowledge is laid and then built on gradually and effectively. Learners are not required to deal with the whole play until they have worked through it scene by scene.

Each act is broken down into its constituent scenes, each of which is summarised and analysed separately. Learners are required to engage with each scene through scene-specific questions.

At the end of each act, there are also act-specific essay questions and a series of enrichment tasks (marking rubrics are provided after the Mini Essay section).

In the **Mini Essay** section, there is also a wide selection of rigorous essay topics, ensuring that students deal with the play in its entirety.

We hope you enjoy using this resource as much as we enjoyed putting it together. If you have any comments, queries or suggestions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

**KEY TO USING THE BOXES IN THIS RESOURCE:**



**Definition or Glossary**

Provides the meanings of words and terms used in the text



**Information**

Provides additional details or facts about a topic



**Alert**

Something to which you need to pay attention



**Quirky Fact**

Fun, interesting, extraneous information

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# INTRODUCTION TO SHAKESPEARE

## MEET WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



Chandos *Portrait of William Shakespeare*  
(National Portrait Gallery, London)

**Who was William Shakespeare? Sadly, we know very little about the man considered to be one of the best English dramatists ever to have lived, which is all the more astonishing given the fame and fortune he achieved. In this section, we bring him to life by piecing together what we do know about his life and achievements.**

By 1600, the man Voltaire described as ‘a drunken savage, with some imagination’ was enjoying the height of his fame and success. He had hit the big time a few years earlier — as part of the hip group of actors, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men — and made enough money to buy the second biggest house in his hometown, but now he was also co-owner of the rowdy, successful Globe Theatre, which was attracting huge audiences of over 1 500 paying customers to each performance.

Shakespeare was working hard for his success, though; in addition to acting and directing performances, running the business side of the theatre, commuting between his work in London and his family in the country, he was churning out a brand new play every few months.

Not bad for a high school dropout from a small obscure town who married a scandalously older woman whom he had made pregnant as a penniless, lusty 18 year old.

Shakespeare seems to have been hungry for success. Around the time of his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, he left his wife and three children with his parents and headed to London to seek his fortune.

The movies of their time, plays were rapidly growing in popularity and the theatre was a booming industry — the Hollywood of its day. Whether it was his intention when he left home or not, it’s perhaps not surprising that a young man like Shakespeare should be attracted to such an exciting, vibrant new industry — where fame could be won and vast amounts of money could be made.

**Say what?** You may not realise it, but you probably use words and phrases invented by Shakespeare every day as he made up over 1 500 English words and countless phrases. Feel you ‘wear your heart on your sleeve’? Want to ‘break the ice’ with someone you’ve just met? Feeling a little ‘faint-hearted’ or ‘heartsick’? Talking about ‘your own flesh and blood’? Think it’s a ‘foregone conclusion’? Well, you have Shakespeare to thank for that.

**Why do we call him ‘The Bard’?** Bard is a mediaeval Gaelic/British term for a professional poet. Shakespeare is often called ‘The Bard’ in recognition of his stature and (unofficial) standing as the greatest poet of England.

It’s likely he spent his first few years in the industry learning his craft by acting and writing for several companies of actors, including Lord Strange’s Men and the Queen’s Men. It didn’t take him long to make his mark, though, and he penned the first of his plays — *Henry VI, Part One* — a couple of years later around 1591, when he was in his mid-twenties.

The play was met with huge acclaim and was the start of a prolific writing career that produced an incredible 37 plays and 154 sonnets before his death in 1616.

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While the mystery of Shakespeare’s genius is something we will probably never solve, it seems likely that he must have been writing poems and stories from a young age. It’s slightly improbable to think he could suddenly write something as accomplished and insightful as the three *Henry VI* plays in his early twenties without years of practice beforehand.

## THE EARLY YEARS

Despite being one of the most popular and widely read English language authors ever to have lived, Shakespeare remains a man shrouded in mystery. He achieved tremendous fame and fortune, frequently performed for both Queen Elizabeth I and James I, and yet we know very little about him and his life.

We don’t know his date of birth, only that he was baptised at the Holy Trinity Church in the town of Stratford on 26 April 1564. As baptisms usually took place a couple of days after a birth, many people like to celebrate his birthday on 23 April, which is also the day he died on in 1616.



Portrait of Benjamin Jonson, a rival and friend of Shakespeare’s. Although he mocked and scoffed at his friend’s work, Jonson praised Shakespeare when he died, observing that he was ‘not of an age, but for all time’. (National Portrait Gallery, London)

His parents were financially comfortable and lived in a wealthy part of town. His father, John, was a glove-maker and prominent local businessman who performed several public offices, including becoming the town’s bailiff (mayor). His mother, Mary, came from an affluent family of landowners.

It’s likely that young William Shakespeare attended the local grammar school (King’s New School, Stratford), but he might not have been the most devoted student. His good friend and fellow playwright, Ben Jonson, clearly wasn’t overly impressed with his schooling as he said that he had ‘small Latin and less Greek’.

When he was 14, Shakespeare had to drop out of school and help his father support the family as John had somehow fallen out of favour and into financial difficulties.

We don’t know when Shakespeare decided he wanted to be an actor, but it could have been at a young age as the local school put on a classical play at the end of each term and travelling troupes of actors would have visited Stratford regularly.

**From stage to screen:** Think Shakespeare’s plays are only found on dusty shelves in old libraries? His work has been the basis for many aspects of popular culture. If you’ve watched films like *10 Things I Hate About You*, *She’s the Man*, *Romeo Must Die* and *O*, you’ve seen stories originally created by The Bard himself.

## SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE

On 27 November 1582, Shakespeare hastily married Anne Hathaway, a local woman eight years his senior. She was 26 at the time and would have been considered an ‘old maid’, past her prime. Anne was three months pregnant on her wedding day and it would have been difficult times for the newlyweds because William was a penniless teenager and his family had fallen on hard times. Some scholars suggest that Shakespeare may have had affairs, but there is no reliable evidence of these and he remained married to Anne until the day he died, 34 years later.

**Is Shakespeare in Love a true story?** No. It is a work of plausible fiction. There is no historical record of such a love affair ever having taken place. If it happened while he was writing *Romeo and Juliet* in 1595, it’s not likely he was short of cash, either, having already written nine plays and being just about to buy one of the largest properties in Stratford.

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## TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

Inadvertently, we know that Shakespeare was an established, successful playwright by 1592 because a rival, Robert Greene, jealously attacked him in one of his pamphlets, calling him an ‘upstart crow’. It wasn’t all plain sailing for the talented Shakespeare, however; an outbreak of the bubonic plague in 1592 led to the closing of the theatres for two years and this meant that the actors had to take on far less profitable and more gruelling tours around the country to earn money.

Shakespeare would have been terrified of the bubonic plague. Most Elizabethans lived in fear of the illness also known as ‘the Black Death’. It was a horrible way to die (see p.13) and Shakespeare had lost brothers and sisters, as well as close friends and fellow actors, to the disease. It broke out again in 1603, killing over 33 000 people in London alone, and, yet once more, in 1608.

His only son, Hamnet, died at the age of 11 in 1596 and the Globe Theatre burnt down in 1613. A cannon was fired to mark the entrance of the king on stage during a performance of his latest play, *Henry VIII*, and a stray spark set the thatch roof alight (see p.20). This would have been even more of a serious financial setback as insurance didn’t exist in those days.

Shakespeare would also have had to put up with regular copyright theft as there were no laws recognising or protecting an artist’s rights. Rival theatre companies would send their members to watch popular plays and secretly take notes, producing unauthorised copies and performances of them as quickly as possible.



Portrait of Anne Hathaway, taken from *Shakespeare A Documentary Life*, written by Nathaniel Curzon, 1708

**Conspiracy theory:** For sheer longevity, no conspiracy theory can match the belief that Shakespeare did not write the plays that have been attributed to him. The usual arguments are that his education and social standing weren’t good enough to have produced such extraordinary literary works. Almost every prominent Elizabethan has been suggested, at one time or another, as the real author of his plays.

## THE LIFE OF THE PLAYWRIGHT

The public’s insatiable appetite for plays meant that there was constant demand for new material. As if finding creative inspiration wasn’t hard enough, the physical act of writing was slow and laborious as well. Playwrights had only quill and ink, and weak candlelight at night. Working alone, they would be hard pushed to produce more than two plays a year. As a result, most playwrights worked in teams of up to five writers. Solo artists, like Shakespeare, were the exception.

**The Spurs connection:** Formed in 1882, London football club Tottenham was originally named after Harry Hotspur, a character in *Henry IV*.

The new theatre industry needed a new breed of playwright and the majority of them wouldn’t fit our modern image of poets and intellectuals. Like Shakespeare, most were self-made men from modest backgrounds. (There were no professional female dramatists because few women were educated or allowed to enter such professions in those days (see p.13).)

One of William’s best friends and a successful and famous dramatist in his own right, Ben Jonson was a rowdy ex-soldier who killed a fellow actor in a duel and was notoriously thrown out of the royal court in 1603 for ‘unruly behaviour’.

**Six times a day:** *Macbeth* is thought to be one of the most produced plays of all time, with a performance beginning somewhere in the world every four hours.

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Another of Shakespeare's highly successful contemporaries, Christopher Marlow, was a flamboyant celebrity who had been a spy before he started writing and was killed in an apparent tavern brawl — although some suggest he was assassinated by government agents for his publicly professed atheism and for publishing a pamphlet pointing out inconsistencies in the Bible.

## ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

In 1605, Shakespeare made another astute property investment in his hometown, which doubled in value and earned him a significant annual income. A few years later, his career started drawing to a close. His final solo play, *The Tempest*, was produced in 1611 and, sometime shortly afterwards, he ceased to be a writer for his company. He retired from the theatre and returned to Stratford, where he enjoyed the last few years of his life as a well-off country gentleman and one of the town's leading figures.



**The curse:** In his epitaph, Shakespeare put a curse on anyone daring to move his body from its final resting place. Even though it was customary to dig up the bones from previous graves to make room for others, Shakespeare's remains are still undisturbed.



**Was Shakespeare on drugs?** South African scientists have analysed fragments of seventeenth century pipes found on the floor of Shakespeare's home and found traces of cannabis, cocaine and hallucinogenic nutmeg extracts high in myristic acid. If he did use any drugs, he wasn't the only literary genius to do so.

William died around the time of his fifty-second birthday, on 23 April 1616. We don't know the exact cause of his death, but we know that in the days leading up to it he suffered from a fever. It is comforting to know that he spent the last week or so of his life socialising and celebrating with his good friends Ben Jonson and Michael Drayton (some argue perhaps a little too hard).

In an elegant and neat dénouement of which the great writer himself may have approved, his journey ended where it began, at the Holy Trinity Church in the small town of Stratford, where he lies buried within the chancel rail.

## TIMELINE

**Please note that this timeline is offered only as a rough guide as the dates of many of the events are only approximate and speculative.**

- **1564** — born in Stratford, England (birthday assumed to be 23 April)
- **1582** — marries Anne Hathaway on 27 November (aged 18)
- **1583** — first child, Susanna, is born
- **1585** — twins, Judith and Hamnet, are born
- **1587-88** — heads to London (aged 22) and starts his theatrical career
- **1589-92** — establishes his career and begins to make a name for himself — writes *Henry VI, Parts 1, 2 and 3*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Richard III*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Titus Andronicus*
- **1593** — writes *Venus and Adonis*, and begins writing the *Sonnets*, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*
- **1594** — founding member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men (an acting company)

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- **1596-97** — Hamnet dies; purchases *New Place*, a large house in Stratford, and writes *Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard II* and *Romeo and Juliet*
- **1598-99** — writes *As You Like It*, *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*, *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Much Ado About Nothing*
- **1599** — Globe Theatre is built (Shakespeare is a shareholder); writes *Troilus & Cressida* and *Twelfth Night*
- **1601** — Shakespeare's father dies; writes *Hamlet*
- **1602** — writes *All's Well That Ends Well*
- **1603** — The Lord Chamberlain's Men become The King's Men and perform regularly at court
- **1604** — writes *Measure for Measure* and *Othello*
- **1606** — writes *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra*
- **1608** — Shakespeare's mother dies; The King's Men begin playing at the Blackfriars; writes *Coriolanus* and *Timon of Athens*
- **1609** — the *Sonnets* are published
- **1609-11** — writes *Cymbeline*, *Pericles Prince of Tyre*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*
- **1612** — retires from the theatre (aged 48) and returns to live in Stratford
- **1612-16** — works on new plays with his friend, John Fletcher. They write *Cardenio*, *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*
- **1616** — dies on 23 April

## THEMES, MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS

### THEMES AND MOTIFS

**The central subject or topic in a work of literature (or art) is referred to as its theme. A sophisticated work will usually explore several, interrelated themes. A motif is a recurring idea or contrast examined in a work of literature and these will usually relate to the themes being explored. There are several major themes and motifs in *Hamlet*.**

#### ACTION VERSUS INACTION

One of the central themes in *Hamlet* is action versus inaction. Hamlet is the epitome of inaction in many ways. He is asked to take action (to kill King Claudius) by the Ghost, but he struggles to do so. He debates his options and hatches a plan to verify the Ghost's story first. Once he is certain of the king's guilt, Hamlet seems ready to act, but, yet again, opts against doing so when he hesitates to kill the king while the monarch appears to be praying.

Hamlet's inaction is contrasted with the two other men who have also lost their fathers: Laertes and Fortinbras. Both of these men are of quick resolve and action. Laertes immediately wants revenge and only exercises a degree of patience at Claudius' urging (and when Hamlet apologises to him for his father's death). Fortinbras is also eager to avenge his father's death and has to be dissuaded by the King of Norway and offered another fight.

Critics explain Hamlet's inaction in many ways. Some blame his youth, others the indecisiveness of his personality and many suggest it is his strong sense of morality that holds him back (he is worried that taking revenge is an immoral act). Perhaps it is a combination of all three?

There are also occasions when Hamlet is quick to act, lending weight to the argument that his inaction is not a character flaw, but a response to the specific task of revenge. Unfortunately, one of those instances is when he murders Polonius at the end of Act III, thinking he is killing the king — a mistake that perhaps serves only to heighten his caution and hesitancy.

#### MADNESS

Madness is a key theme in *Hamlet*. On hearing the Ghost's story, Hamlet decides to 'put an antic disposition on' (Act 1, Scene 5, line 191). His madness begins as a ruse to elude the suspicious king and his prying spies, Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and to be left free to investigate the truth of the claims made by the Ghost.

As the play develops, however, and Hamlet remains stuck in his own confusion and inaction, there are times where he appears to stray into genuine madness and doubts arise about the actual soundness of his mind. Certainly, it would not be unreasonable for his circumstances to make him paranoid and to weaken his mental state. The pressure of feeling obliged to kill Claudius, in spite of his strong moral and philosophical objections to the act, combined with the fact that he knows he is surrounded by people he cannot trust and who are constantly plotting against him, would test the psychological stability of any character.



*Hamlet debates killing King Claudius while he appears to be praying because the prince believes doing so will save the king from his sins and allow his wicked soul to enter heaven. Painting by Eugène Delacroix (1843) (Published by Gihaut Frères, Paris) (Wikimedia Commons)*

In this manner, Shakespeare adds a fresh new dimension to the theme of madness (which was a common theme in revenge tragedies at the time). He makes Hamlet's madness ambiguous and keeps the audience guessing to what extent it remains a subterfuge or has become real.

The theme of madness also informs the character of Ophelia. Overwhelmed by her grief at her father's sudden death, she appears to lose her grip on reality and wanders about, singing songs and handing out flowers. Interestingly, the flowers she chooses to give each person are aptly symbolic, despite her mental instability. Her grief-driven madness ends, tragically, in suicide when she drowns in the river. Ophelia's madness becomes a foil to Hamlet's. Her madness is genuine and without ambiguity, whereas his is an ambiguous deception, driven by an ulterior motive.

### **DISEASE AND DECAY**

Images of decay and disease are used repeatedly throughout the play. These images relate to the corrupt state of Denmark as a result of the unnatural death of the old king and unnaturally quick marriage of the queen to her dead husband's brother.

This theme is introduced very early on in the play through Francisco's claim that he is 'sick at heart' (Act 1, Scene 1, line 9). This sense of unease or dis-ease intensifies with the appearance of a ghost, prompting Marcellus to exclaim 'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark' (Act 1, Scene 4, line 99).

The imagery of rotting and decay is used again and again; for example, when Hamlet uses the imagery of a worm's supper in his conversation with the king about Polonius' dead body (Act 4, Scene 3).

There are also references to Denmark descending into a state of decay. Hamlet laments that the country has become '... an unweeded garden / That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature' (Act 1, Scene 2, lines 137-138).

The many references to diseased and contagious bodies — mentions of ulcers and cankers marring the skin, in particular — and to images of decay in nature and even the celestial bodies, all amplify the concept that the state of the physical world is a reflection of the state of the spiritual realm.

The idea is that the moral fabric of society is rotting because of the dishonest and corrupt behaviour of the leaders of the nation. The king is a usurper who 'stole' the throne dishonestly and this corrupt state of affairs is compounded by the queen's swift decision to marry her husband's brother.

This is contrasted with the ascension of young Fortinbras to the throne at the end of the play. The audience is given a glimpse of a hopeful future in which the country might begin to heal.

### **APPEARANCE VERSUS REALITY**

Closely linked to the theme of madness versus feigned madness is the theme of appearance versus reality. This idea is introduced in Act One. Queen Gertrude asks Hamlet why he is still so heavily mourning the death of his father, claiming that he seems to be grieving more than is necessary. He responds to this by saying 'Seems, madam! nay it is, I know not 'seems'' (Act 1, Scene 2, line 78), highlighting the idea that there can be a schism between what things appear to be and what they really are.

This theme is also reflected in all of the plotting by the characters. Almost all of the schemes are, ultimately, attempts to uncover what other characters are really thinking and doing since nearly everyone in the play is hiding his or her true feelings and intentions. The king and Polonius are trying to figure out what might lurk beneath Hamlet's madness, for instance, while the prince is feigning the appearance of madness to obscure his secret mission to reveal the king's true murderous nature and to kill his deceitful uncle. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern also appear to be Hamlet's old



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friends, but this is merely a ruse to conceal their secret assignment to spy on the prince. Polonius sends his servant, Reynaldo, to spy on his son in France as well, convinced that Laertes is not the respectable young man he appears to be, but actually embroiled in activities of a dubious nature. (Yet, contrary to this, he pretends to be a trusting parent when Laertes asks him for advice.)

The Ghost is another investigation of this theme. Is it an apparition, is it real or is it somehow both? It appears to be the previous king, but can its appearance be trusted? The sensational claims made by the Ghost appear to contradict reality (the belief that Hamlet's father was bitten by a poisonous snake and not deliberately poisoned by Claudius), but the Ghost is, in fact, exposing Hamlet to the real truth.

The 'play within the play' is also an exploration of this theme, and a great example of **metafiction**. The very nature of acting is the putting on of an appearance and this is wonderfully illustrated when Hamlet asks the actors to make the play as realistic as possible. In this instance, the actors are trying to make a fictional play (that actually accurately reflects the reality of the previous king's murder) as realistic as possible.

### HONOUR AND REVENGE

As a revenge tragedy, one of the central themes in *Hamlet* is vengeance. Closely related to revenge is the idea of honour. Hamlet's duty to avenge his father is tied to his honour as a 'good son'. When speaking to the Ghost, for example, Hamlet declares, 'Speak, I am bound to hear', to which the Ghost responds: 'So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear' (Act 1, Scene 5, lines 10-11). This exchange highlights the relationship between revenge and honour, and the accepted duty of a son to take revenge on behalf of his father.

This theme is emphasised and expanded through the inclusion of Laertes and Fortinbras, two other sons who feel it is their duty to avenge their fathers' deaths. The fact that both men are portrayed as highly honourable and dutiful reinforces how acceptable and established this duty was considered.

### THE SUPERNATURAL

Shakespeare, like many Elizabethan playwrights, often made use of the supernatural in his plays and *Hamlet* is no exception. The opening scene takes place at midnight, traditionally 'the witching hour' and the time when supernatural creatures are most likely to appear.



*The Play Scene in 'Hamlet': King Claudius is about to leap to his feet and, in doing so, reveal his guilt. Painting by Daniel Maclise (1842) (Tate National Gallery, London) © Tate, London 2013*

**Metafiction** describes writing that self-consciously or deliberately examines itself. A play within a play is a way of examining and exploring the convention of plays. This can apply to any genre or medium and other examples include poems about writing poetry, novels about writing novels and television shows about making television shows. By discussing the nature of plays (*The Murder of Gonzago*) and acting, Shakespeare is simultaneously commenting on the nature of the play (*Hamlet*) as well.

Hamlet's lengthy debate regarding **the morality of revenge** reflected the very real divide in opinion on the subject in Elizabethan society. On the one hand, the Ghost's command to take revenge would not have shocked Elizabethan audiences as many people believed that 'blood revenge' was not only acceptable, but a duty; however, from a religious point of view, revenge was considered a type of blasphemy that could condemn a person to hell.

The appearance of a ghost sets the tone of the play, invoking a sense of foreboding and fear. The same technique is still used in horror and suspense stories today. When a movie starts with an ominous looking house, at night, against a stormy sky, the audience immediately knows something eerie or scary is about to happen.

The presence of a ghost would have conveyed the idea that ‘all is not well’ to Elizabethan audiences and Shakespeare uses its appearance in *Hamlet* as the catalyst for the action in the play — revealing the murder of the previous king and inciting Hamlet to take revenge.

Shakespeare establishes that the Ghost is not just an illusion by having several people witness it, including the ever-rational Horatio. In Elizabethan times, ghosts could be either good or evil spirits and so the audience would have been intrigued to find out this one’s intentions. The ambivalent nature of ghosts is why it would have been perfectly natural for Hamlet to question its purpose and to devise a way of confirming that it is telling him the truth.

## SYMBOLS

**Symbols are objects, characters, shapes or colours used to represent something else, usually an abstract idea or quality. Symbols usually represent something else by association, resemblance or convention. Shakespeare employs symbolism throughout his plays, using physical things to represent intangible or invisible ideas or qualities in particular.**

### YORICK’S SKULL

The appearance of Yorick’s skull in the final act of the play symbolises death and its inevitability. Hamlet knew Yorick, the court jester, as a child and his fond memories of the man lead him to ponder the idea that death serves as an equaliser among people, whether rich or poor, good or bad, lower class or highborn. He wonders out loud where the remains of Alexander the Great ended up, concluding that we all share the same fate in the end and return as dust to the earth.

During his rumination, Hamlet is, quite literally, staring death (in the form of Yorick’s skull) in the face. This is particularly poignant when one considers the death surrounding the prince: his plans to kill the king, the king and Laertes’ plans to kill him, and the funeral about to take place for Ophelia.

This symbol of death and its inescapability appears at a critical moment in the play: shortly before its catastrophic ending when most of the major characters will meet their deaths.

It should also be noted that the idea of death recurs throughout the play: Hamlet explores the idea in his famous ‘To be, or not to be’ soliloquy (Act 3, Scene 1); the presence of a ghost; the murder of the previous king; the enacting of murder

in the play within the play (*The Murder of Gonzago*), the repeated use of poison and, of course, the many deaths. The use of a skull at this point in the play is a way of physically representing this recurring idea of death.

**Staring death in the face:** Actor David Tennant used a real skull as a prop in the gravedigger scene in the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) production of *Hamlet* in 2009. The skull had belonged to the composer André Tchaikowsky, who bequeathed it to the RSC when he died in 1982 ‘for use in theatrical performance’.



*Hamlet contemplates Yorick's skull and the nature of death in the graveyard. Painting by Eugène Delacroix (1893) (The Louvre Museum, Paris)*

**OPHELIA'S FLOWERS**

The tragic scene during which Ophelia hands out flowers exploits the symbolism of the flowers. The rosemary she gives to Laertes represents remembrance and was traditionally worn at weddings and funerals. She also gives her brother pansies, which represent grief — a very apt gesture considering his circumstances. The fennel and columbines she gives to Claudius represent flattery, deceit and ingratitude, respectively.



*Although mentally unstable, Ophelia hands out poignantly symbolic flowers to the other characters. Painting by Henrietta Rae (1890) (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool)*

The rue she hands to the queen — keeping some for herself as well — represents repentance and was often worn in church in order to gain God's mercy. Ophelia also says to the queen, 'There's a daisy: I would give you / some violets, but they withered all, when my father / died' (Act 4, Scene 5, lines 195-197). Daisies represent false appearances and violets are used to symbolise faithfulness, making it quite apt that these had withered, considering the queen's lack of faithfulness towards her late husband.

Despite the fact that she is so stricken with grief that no one can reason with her, Ophelia's handing out of flowers is uncannily appropriate. She gives each person a flower that is most suited to his or her situation. The flowers become a way of emphasising the qualities different characters are expressing at that particular moment in the play.

The flowers also take on extra meaning shortly after this scene as Ophelia drowns trying to hang her flowers on a tree and will then be the one who is 'receiving flowers' when they are strewn across her grave. As the queen scatters flowers on Ophelia's grave, she observes that she had always thought she would be laying flowers on Ophelia and Hamlet's wedding bed, rather than on Ophelia's grave.



**THE ‘PLAY WITHIN THE PLAY’**

The modified version of *The Murder of Gonzago* — the play within the play — also serves as a symbol for the actual murder of the old King Hamlet by King Claudius. As the ‘play within the play’ is a physical representation of the original murder, the symbolism is direct and straightforward: the ‘king’ in the play represents the old King Hamlet, the ‘queen’ represents Queen Gertrude, and the ‘poisoner’ represents King Claudius.

**KEY FACTS**

**FULL TITLE:** The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

**AUTHOR:** William Shakespeare

**TYPE OF WORK:** Play

**GENRE:** Revenge Tragedy

**LANGUAGE:** English

**COMPOSED (TIME AND PLACE):** England, between 1599 and 1602

**PUBLISHED:** 1603: condensed version published in the *First Quarto*. The full-length version was published a year later in the *Second Quarto*.

**TOPE:** Dark, brooding, contemplative and violent

**SETTING:** Denmark, during the late middle ages, although precise time is unclear.

**PROTAGONIST:** Hamlet

**ANTAGONIST:** Claudius

**CONFLICT:** Hamlet’s duty to kill King Claudius to avenge his father’s murder.

**RISING ACTION:** Hamlet feigns madness to hide his intentions, while the king and Polonius plot to uncover the cause of his madness. Hamlet sets a trap for the king, using a re-enactment of the murder of his father to bait a damning reaction from him.

**CLIMAX:** After successfully confirming the king’s guilt, Hamlet is resolved to take action. He mistakenly kills Polonius behind the arras, which gives the king a pretext to send him away and prompts the return of Laertes from France. Laertes’ loathing of Hamlet helps the king to orchestrate the prince’s murder.

**FALLING ACTION:** Hamlet is sent away to England, but events allow him to return. He and Laertes have an altercation at Ophelia’s grave, which leads to a fencing match between them and, ultimately, the deaths of Hamlet, Laertes, the king and the queen.

**FORESHADOWING:** The Ghost and his warnings regarding the state of corruption in Denmark.

**THEMES AND MOTIFS:** Action and inaction, madness, decay and disease, appearance versus reality, honour and revenge, and the supernatural.

**SYMBOLS:** Yorick’s skull, Ophelia’s flowers and the ‘play within the play’.



# SUMMARIES AND ANALYSES

## USING THIS SECTION

**Working through the play act by act ensures that solid foundations of knowledge are laid and then gradually and effectively developed. Learners are not required to deal with the whole play until they have worked through it step-by-step. In this section, each act is broken down into its constituent scenes, each of which is summarised and analysed separately. Learners are then required to engage with each scene directly through scene-specific questions that require them to refer to the text closely.**

At the end of each act, learners will find essay questions pertaining to that act, accompanied by a selection of enrichment tasks. At the end of Act Five, there is also a wide selection of rigorous essay topics, ensuring that students also tackle the play in its entirety. (The marking rubrics for the enrichment tasks and essays can be found on p.93.)

## ACT ONE

### SUMMARY OF ACT ONE

Act One begins on the battlements of Elsinore Castle in Denmark (called 'a narrow platform in front of the castle' in the stage directions). The castle guards have already encountered a ghost twice and have brought Horatio with them this time to confirm the nature of their sightings. Sure enough, the Ghost appears and they realise that it looks just like 'Old Hamlet', the king who has recently died. When it will not speak to them, they decide that the young prince Hamlet needs to be informed of this event as they are convinced that the Ghost will speak to him because it looks like his father.

The second scene provides background on the situation in Denmark. The new king, Claudius, the brother of 'Old Hamlet' (the recently deceased king), has just married his brother's widow. King Claudius gives a speech to justify his quick marriage. He also establishes himself as a capable leader in the eyes of the public by sending ambassadors to Norway to deal with the growing threat of Prince Fortinbras. The Norwegian prince is preparing to go to war with Denmark to reclaim the lands lost when his father was defeated. This scene also introduces the king's chief councillor, Polonius, and the councillor's son, Laertes, who is given permission by the king to return to France.

We also meet Prince Hamlet, the protagonist, for the first time. The king, having dealt with everyone else first, reprimands Hamlet for his ongoing show of grief. It is soon clear that there is a very tense relationship between Hamlet and the king, and that Hamlet is deeply upset by his mother's marriage to his uncle. After a soliloquy in which he denounces both his uncle and his mother, Hamlet is joined by Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo. They tell him about the Ghost and he decides he needs to see it for himself.

The focus shifts to the king's advisor, Polonius, and his family. Laertes prepares to leave for France, although not before giving his sister, Ophelia, a lecture on how she should behave around Hamlet. After receiving some last minute fatherly advice from Polonius, Laertes departs, leaving Ophelia to be lectured a second time. This time by her father.

Back on the battlements, Hamlet joins Marcellus and Horatio at midnight to test their story. He is not disappointed as the Ghost appears again. The Ghost speaks to Hamlet in private. He tells Hamlet that he is his father and that he was murdered by Claudius, who poured poison in his ear while he was sleeping. He commands Hamlet to take revenge. Hamlet agrees, swears his friends to secrecy, and alerts Horatio to his plan to feign madness. The stage is now set for the action of the play.

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## SCENE ONE

### SUMMARY

The play opens on a cold night in Denmark as the clock strikes midnight. Francisco is on watch on the battlements of Elsinore Castle. He is jumpy and on edge. Bernardo arrives and reveals that he, too, is nervous by asking ‘who’s there?’ The reason for their fear is revealed when Marcellus enters, asking whether the Ghost has appeared again. He has brought Horatio with him this time to confirm the sighting of the Ghost. As an educated man and scholar, Horatio brings reason to the situation and he can speak Latin, should he need to exorcise the spirit.

As Marcellus and Bernardo start telling a sceptical Horatio about their previous two encounters with the ghost, it appears. The Ghost marches in, wearing soldier’s armour, and all three men observe that it bears an uncanny resemblance to the recently deceased king. The guards ask Horatio to speak to it. Try as he might, Horatio is unable to elicit a response from the apparition and it vanishes.

Horatio is visibly shaken and remarks that the apparition not only looked like the dead king, but was also wearing the armour worn by him when he defeated the King of Norway. He declares that the disturbing appearance of the ghost of the dead king ‘bodes some strange eruption to our state’.

As they debate the reason for the Ghost’s appearance, Marcellus asks Horatio to tell them more about the current state of affairs in Denmark. The guards have noticed preparations for war being made and are aware that something is afoot.

Horatio explains how, a while ago, the King of Norway challenged the dead king, ‘Old Hamlet’. The Norwegian monarch was defeated in battle and had to cede ownership of some of his lands to ‘Old Hamlet’ as part of the spoils of war. Now, the defeated King of Norway’s son, Prince Fortinbras, who has an appetite for fighting, is gathering troops in order to claim these lands back. Consequently, Denmark has to prepare to repel the assault. Horatio wonders whether the Ghost’s manifestation, dressed and armed for war, is an omen about the pending conflict.

As they discuss the potentially ominous nature of the apparition, the Ghost reappears. Horatio again tries to get it to speak. Aware that ghosts often appear to ask the living to do things to help them pass through to the afterlife, Horatio asks the Ghost if he can do anything to ease its passage. It looks as if it is about to speak, then a cockerel crows and it disappears once more.

Dawn starts to break over the horizon. They decide that Prince Hamlet should be told about this strange manifestation, convinced that the spectre will be more likely to talk to his living son. They resolve to speak to Hamlet that morning.

### ANALYSIS

Much like the way a scary movie will start with a scene of a creepy house at midnight, buffeted by rain, thunder and lightning, the play opens with an eerie setting. The purpose of this is to set the mood and tone for the rest of the play. The audience knows immediately that something is not right in Denmark.

This tone of dread and uncertainty is established in the first lines of dialogue, before we even know about the Ghost. Bernardo and Francisco are clearly jumpy and on edge as they call out ‘Who’s there?’ when they hear approaching footsteps.

This feeling of unease is heightened by the foreboding appearance of a ghost dressed for war and by Horatio’s confirmation of an impending war with Norway.

The theme of corruption and decay is also introduced into the story. The feeling that something is amiss is backed up by Horatio’s statement that the Ghost’s appearance ‘bodes some strange eruption to our state’. This imagery of an eruption evokes the idea of turmoil and of disease.

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The asking of ‘who’s there?’ also introduces the theme of appearance versus reality. The characters seek confirmation of who is approaching, not trusting who or what will appear. This theme is repeated in the appearance of the Ghost. While the apparition seems to take on the form of old King Hamlet, the guards are worried it might actually be a demon disguising itself as a more benign spirit. Either way, the guards believe this supernatural presence is a bad omen.

This scene also establishes the Norwegian subplot through the discussions regarding the preparations for war. It is also the first indication of the revenge motif as Horatio explains the motives behind Fortinbras’ invasion and how he is seeking to avenge his father’s death and loss of lands.

 **QUESTIONS**

1. What is Horatio’s initial response to the reports of the apparition? How does his response change during the scene? (2)
2. According to Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo, why do ghosts usually appear? (3)
3. What do the men fear that the ghost’s appearance might mean? (3)
4. What is the significance of the crowing of the cockerel? Compare the explanations given by Horatio and Marcellus. (3)
5. Identify the mood of the play at this point and suggest how this tone (or atmosphere) is created. (4)

**[15]**

**SCENE TWO**


**SUMMARY**

The setting shifts to the inside of the castle, where the whole royal family is gathered, along with the king’s advisor, Polonius, and his son and daughter. King Claudius is giving a speech. He starts by paying homage to his dead brother. Changing his tone, he shifts from a theme of mourning to one of celebration and announces his marriage to his brother’s wife, Gertrude. He then turns to the matter of war. Confirming Horatio’s observations in the previous scene, he announces Fortinbras’ desire to reclaim the lands his father lost. He dispatches two ambassadors, Cornelius and Valtemand, to undertake a diplomatic mission to Norway to convince the Norwegian king to dissuade Fortinbras of his intentions.

Once the ambassadors have been dispatched and official business has been completed, the king turns to Laertes, son of Polonius. The king is aware that Laertes has some matter he wishes to discuss with him. Laertes wishes to return to France now that the wedding ceremony is over. The king gives him leave to return, after checking that Polonius is happy for his son to depart, revealing the close relationship between the king and Polonius.

After addressing these matters, the king turns, at last, to Hamlet, addressing him as ‘cousin’ and ‘son’. The king and queen express their concern that Hamlet is still so gloomy. Hamlet tells them that he is still genuinely grieving his late father. The king brushes this off, telling Hamlet that all sons lose their fathers eventually. The king argues that to show his grief makes Hamlet a dutiful son, but to continue to grieve for so long is merely to be stubborn. He then asks Hamlet not to go back to university in **Wittenberg**, but to stay in Denmark. The queen supports this request, begging her son not to leave her. Hamlet agrees to stay. He pointedly remarks that he will obey her, implying that he is not obeying the king, but complying with his mother’s wishes. Happy with this result, the king calls for a celebratory feast and everyone leaves, except for Hamlet.

Left alone, Hamlet launches into his first **soliloquy** of the play. His speech is dark, with yearnings that he could simply evaporate into thin air, as well as laments

 A **soliloquy** is a speech made by a lone actor to reveal his thoughts to the audience.

about God's rule against suicide. He brings up the idea that there is something very rotten in the garden that is Denmark, with his mother's quick marriage to her brother-in-law. In his speech, he suggests that the king is to his father what a **satyr** is to Hyperion, the sun god, clearly showing his disdain for his uncle, turned stepfather. He reveals his anger towards his mother as well, crying out angrily against her incestuous behaviour.

As Hamlet broods over his mother's behaviour, Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo arrive. Hamlet welcomes Horatio like an old friend and it becomes clear that Horatio also studies at Wittenberg. Horatio tells him that he came back for the late King Hamlet's funeral. Hamlet points out bitterly that it was probably for the wedding as well, given how closely it followed, and makes an offhand remark about seeing his father. Horatio seizes this opportunity to tell him about the appearance of the ghost of his father. Hamlet is shocked and wants to hear more. Horatio recounts in detail his encounter with the armour-wearing ghost and the previous encounters of the guards. Hamlet asks Horatio details about the ghost's appearance, to assess whether the apparition does indeed look like his father. He resolves to join the guards on their watch that night to see for himself. He ends the scene with the observation that 'all is not well'.

### ANALYSIS

Scene Two introduces the audience to the Danish Court. King Claudius is introduced and information is shared about what he has done since his brother's death. The subplot of the unrest in Norway and Fortinbras' plans for revenge are explained further, indicating their importance in the play.

This scene reveals a fair amount about the new king as a character. The first thing he does is to justify his marriage to Gertrude so soon after the death of his brother. He chooses his words carefully to smooth over his actions and he balances his emotions between happiness, satisfying those who are in a mood to celebrate the marriage, and sadness, remaining sensitive to those who are still grieving over the dead king. He is clearly a 'smooth talker' and knows how to work an audience.

By dealing openly with the problem of Fortinbras, the king also establishes himself as a strong and capable leader in the eyes of the public. His close relationship with Polonius is also revealed through the attention he pays to Laertes' plans and movements. (It is also worth noting the lecture Claudius gives Hamlet on expected natural behaviour for a son at this point. Consider the irony of his speech as you read further in the play.)

A **satyr** is a mythological woodland creature that is half-man and half-goat. As a result of their unrestrained love of wine, women and physical pleasure, satyrs were often associated with licentious, lecherous behaviour.



Two Satyrs by Peter Paul Rubens (1619) (Alte Pinakothek, Munich)

**Wittenberg** is a university in Germany. Its full name is the Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg. Two other famous names are associated with the university: Martin Luther, who was a professor there, and the fictional character Doctor Faustus, the protagonist of a play by Christopher Marlowe.

The theme of appearance versus reality is also introduced. Hamlet speaks of his 'inky cloak'; in other words, his outward appearance of grief.



He points out that there is a significant difference between what something 'is' and what it 'seems'. He tells his mother that his grief is not just an act, but something that he is truly feeling. The speech by the king also suggests that everything is in order in Denmark, with a happy royal wedding and a plan to address Fortinbras, but Hamlet reveals the more sinister reality present in Denmark as soon as the king has left.

This scene is our first introduction to Hamlet as a character. His first soliloquy is important and fundamental to our understanding of his personality and to the development of certain themes. Hamlet is presented as a brooding young man, deep in mourning for his father, despite the objections of the king and queen. He is outwardly obedient to his mother, although his soliloquy reveals his deep anger and disgust at her recent behaviour. He has little regard for his uncle, shown in his behaviour towards him and in his unfavourable comparison of him with his father.

Hamlet's speech also develops the theme of corruption and decay. He draws on the image of an 'unweeded garden' that is 'rank' and 'gross'. This enhances the imagery of an eruption in the state of Denmark that was introduced by Horatio in the previous scene. Hamlet places the blame for Denmark's decay on the actions of his uncle and mother. He describes Claudius in animal terms, comparing him to a satyr. He also suggests that his mother is a slave to her more animal needs, namely, lust. He projects the idea of decay and disease on to his mother when he talks of the 'flushing of her galled eyes'. The implication in all of this is that the king and queen's corrupt behaviour is infecting the moral fabric of the Danish state. (It is worth paying close attention to the continued use of images to develop this theme of decay as you read further in the play.)

## QUESTIONS

1. At this point in the play, what has been revealed about the conflict with Norway and how has the king responded to this threat? (4)
2. How does King Claudius feel about Hamlet's mourning? Why does the king feel this way and what tactics does he use to try to change Hamlet's behaviour? (4)
3. Identify the comparison Hamlet offers when describing and contrasting his father and the king. What does this comparison reveal about each man? (4)
4. Identify the imagery in Hamlet's soliloquy that relates to the theme of corruption and decay. (5)
5. How does Hamlet respond to the news that his father has appeared as a ghost? Offer sound reasoning for his response to this news. (3)

**[20]**

## SCENE THREE

### SUMMARY

This scene focuses on the family of Polonius, Laertes and Ophelia. Laertes is about to leave for France and is talking to his sister. He decides to give her some last minute advice regarding Hamlet. He warns Ophelia that she should not mistake Hamlet's careless attention and lust for anything more.

Laertes reminds Ophelia of Hamlet's position as a prince and the obligation he will have to marry someone of a certain rank. He warns her not to do anything foolish and not to give in to her heart or lust. Ophelia thanks him for his concern and, in return, tells him not to preach one thing to her and practise something else in his own life.

The Ghost then disappears and Hamlet falls to his knees in shock. He curses his mother and resolves to forget everything else, all books and knowledge, and to fill his brain with only the knowledge of this murder and with his plans for revenge. He quickly writes the Ghost's description down and swears to his revenge.

Horatio and Marcellus enter, finding him at prayer. They are relieved to see him alive and want to know what has happened. Hamlet is reluctant to tell them because he is worried that they won't be able to keep the knowledge to themselves. He hints that there is a villain in Denmark. Horatio retorts that he did not need a ghost to tell him that.

Hamlet is not willing to impart the Ghost's tale, but reassures Horatio that the Ghost is an honest creature and not a demon. He then asks Horatio and Marcellus never to speak of this night to anyone. Not satisfied with simply their word, he gets out his sword and makes them swear an oath to it. Once they have sworn their oaths to secrecy, Hamlet tells Horatio that he is going to assume an 'antic disposition' and feign madness. He makes Horatio swear that he will play along and pretend that Hamlet really is mad. With that, Hamlet thanks his friends for their loyalty and they leave together.

### ANALYSIS

This scene is the catalyst for the action of the play. The reason for the Ghost's appearance is revealed at last. The audience is made aware of the cause of the 'corruption' in Denmark and the theme of appearance versus reality is developed further. In revealing the truth behind Old Hamlet's death, the Ghost also exposes the real motivation for King Claudius' smooth-talking, PR performance: that it is an attempt to obscure the reality of his foul deeds.

The Ghost's tale of old King Hamlet's murder and his direct command to Hamlet to seek revenge is what drives the rest of the action in the play. He tells Hamlet that to hear his story and not to act would be the height of laziness. At this point in the play, Hamlet is so enraged by this revelation that he seems to be utterly resolved to carry out the act of revenge.

This scene is also crucial in establishing *Hamlet* as a revenge play. The Ghost requires Hamlet to agree to seek revenge before he has told him the reason. This also reinforces the commonly held belief at the time that a son has an honour-bound duty to avenge his father, especially if the father has been wronged. Perhaps helped by his dislike for the king, Hamlet seems extremely willing and motivated to carry out his father's wishes.

### QUESTIONS

1. At this point in the play, would you characterise Hamlet as a man of action or inaction? Offer reasons for your response by referring to the text closely. (3)
2. What do we learn about old King Hamlet's death in this scene? (2)
3. At this point, what can we tell about Hamlet's future plans? Consider his decision to assume an 'antic disposition' and suggest why he decides to do this. (3)

**[8]**

### ESSAY QUESTIONS ON ACT ONE

1. What is rotten in the state of Denmark? Discuss the theme of decay and corruption as it is introduced in Act One.
2. 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.
3. Do you think Hamlet will be successful in carrying out the revenge commanded by the ghost of his father? Refer to his relationships with his mother and his uncle and consider the evidence of his action and/or inaction.

## ENRICHMENT TASK FOR ACT ONE

**This task is an oral and visual presentation. Your presentation should be a speech of 4-5 minutes in length, to be delivered in front of the class. You should make liberal use of visual materials, such as DVD footage (movie clips), Power Point Presentations, posters and diagrams, to make points clearer to your audience. You may work singly or in pairs. Remember to refer to the accompanying rubric on page 93 to ensure that you are familiar with the marking criteria. Choose from one of the tasks below:**

### OPTION 1: *HAMLET* REMIXED

There have been many film adaptations of *Hamlet*. More recent ones include: Franco Zeffirelli's 1990 production, featuring action hero Mel Gibson; Kenneth Branagh's 1996 film, which is four hours in length and includes every word and scene of the original; and Michael Almereyda's 2000 production set in contemporary New York.

Each of these directors chose to introduce the story in a different way. In your speech, compare and contrast the opening scenes in any two of the above productions.

Your focus should be on how the tone of the film is set in each one and how the opening scenes differ from each other. Consider how effective (or not) they are as introductions to this tale of 'murder most foul' and also how closely they relate to the atmosphere created in Scene One of the play (set on the battlements of Elsinore Castle in Denmark).

Consider the following aspects: camera angles and shots, editing, lighting, setting, *mise-en-scène*<sup>1</sup> and any other features you might like to include.

Your presentation needs to be illustrated so use clips from the films whenever possible to illustrate the points you wish to make.

### OPTION 2: A SERPENT STUNG ME

In 2012, director Ang Lee turned Yann Martel's amazing novel, *The Life of Pi*, into a movie. The main character, Pi Patel, is a teenage boy who survives a shipwreck only to find himself in a lifeboat with an assortment of animals: a zebra with a broken leg, an orangutan, a spotted hyena and a Bengal tiger. Pi later explains the symbolic significance of these animals, the hyena, for instance, represents the violently aggressive ship's cook.

Your task is to find animal equivalents for the main characters who we meet in Act One, Scene Two. The visual element of this exercise will entail finding appropriate images of these central characters and then pairing these up with visuals of the animals that you believe represent them best. In your speech, you need to present and justify your selection of images. To do this, you should draw on the words and deeds of the characters.

### OPTION 3: THE LOVE TRIANGLE

The public loves a good scandal involving love, sex and betrayal. If you opened a gossip magazine today and saw the headline: 'Woman Marries Dead Husband's Brother', you might be shocked, but you would probably find it believable.

In your speech, you need to discuss how this storyline of love, sex and betrayal is still relevant today. The visual element of this exercise will entail finding appropriate images of contemporary examples (from soap operas, reality television shows and movies to real life celebrity entanglements). You will need to present and justify your selection of images. To do this, you should compare the words and deeds of the characters in the play with your contemporary examples. Be sure to demonstrate how, and explore why, this storyline is as relevant and entertaining today as it would have been when *Hamlet* was first performed.

<sup>1</sup> When applied to the cinema, *mise-en-scène* refers to everything that appears before the camera and its arrangement, for example, composition, sets, props, actors, costumes and lighting. The term also refers to the positioning and movement of actors on the set, which is called 'blocking'.

# THE MINI ESSAY

## GUIDELINES

The purpose of writing a mini essay is two-fold. The first reason is to demonstrate an understanding of the text in question. The second is to show that you can write about a topic in a focused and sustained way. In other words, a mini essay is not a rambling, disjointed collection of your thoughts regarding a topic, but an integrated and interconnected discussion that develops a clear argument. This section offers some basic guidelines on writing a mini essay, two annotated examples from which to learn, and a selection of essay topics.

Some of the things to consider when writing a mini essay include:

- Your essay should be reasoned, well-planned and concise.
- You are required to include a one page plan with your essay (no longer than one page), which outlines the structure of your argument and the links between your ideas.
- Your thesis statement should clarify the issue or question that will be discussed in your essay. It should also indicate what points you will make and in what order.
- Each paragraph of the body of your essay should support or refute your thesis statement.
- Any statements you make must be supported with concrete, plausible examples and evidence from the text.
- Your essay should not be more than 400 words in length (essays longer than 450 words will be penalised in the examination) and you are required to provide an accurate word count.
- Your essay should be written in the present tense using the active voice. This ensures a more convincing stance.
- Examiners prefer that you write in the third person.

## PLANNING AND STRUCTURING YOUR ESSAY

**It is important to plan your essay before you start writing your response. Doing so will improve your marks, not only by helping you clarify your ideas and structure your argument logically, but also because the plan itself is worth five marks in the final examination.**

### STEP 1: ANALYSING THE QUESTION

The most important thing to do when writing an essay is to read and analyse the question carefully. You need to make sure you understand clearly what is being asked. The first step is to identify the **task word** or words (i.e. the instruction) in the question. Let's look at the following example:

*Is Hamlet a coward? Examine this question in a well-substantiated essay of 350-400 words.*

In the preceding example, the task word is 'examine', which means that you are being asked to evaluate or weigh up the available evidence and come to a logical judgement or conclusion based upon it. Other common task words include 'identify', 'discuss', 'compare' and 'contrast'.

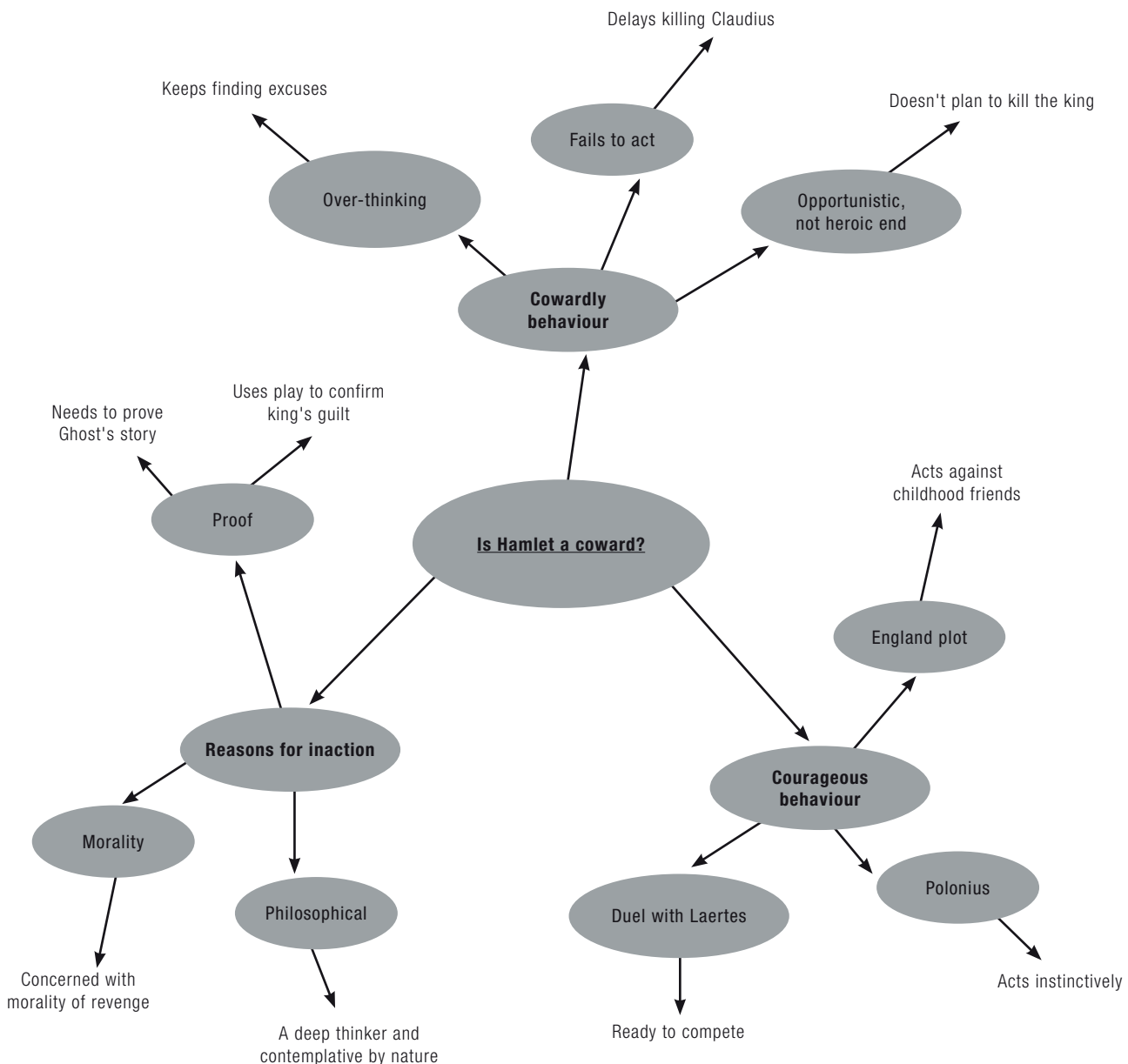


Once you have identified the task word, look closely at the **topic** of the essay. The topic tells you the theme or subject matter on which to focus. Common topics include the characters in the text, their psychological motivations and relationships, the themes and motifs that impel and illuminate the text, and the author's use of language and dramatic techniques.

In the example, the topic is Hamlet's bravery and whether his lack of action is a result of his cowardice. In order to answer the question, you need to consider what evidence there is to show that he is a coward and what evidence there is to suggest that there are other reasons behind his inaction. You also need to decide what evidence is the most compelling. Whatever conclusion you reach about Hamlet's character and motivations, make sure that you provide evidence to support your opinion in your essay.

### STEP 2: MAPPING YOUR ANSWER

Although you can plan your essay using any method you prefer, 'mapping out' your response has been shown to be an effective way of generating, clarifying and linking ideas. An effective technique to use is a concept map. The following is a model **concept map** for the example question.



- FOREWORD
- INTRODUCTION TO SHAKESPEARE
- SHAKESPEAREAN LANGUAGE
- BACKGROUND TO THE PLAY
- SUMMARIES AND ANALYSES
- THE MINI ESSAY
- PERFORMED RUBRICS
- THE PLAY
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### STEP 3: FORMULATING YOUR THESIS STATEMENT

Once you have mapped your response and weighed up the evidence, it is time to formulate your **thesis statement**, which is the main point you want to prove. A thesis statement will show the reader/marker that you have a clearly formulated argument and are not just rambling. It can be more than one sentence if necessary and should express the opinion/argument that you are going to present clearly.

Let's say that you have mapped your response to the previous example question about Hamlet's cowardliness and decide that *Hamlet is not a coward; rather, he fails to act because of the moral dilemma he faces*. Then this is your thesis statement.

**i**

Your **thesis statement** should be included at the end of your introduction and it ought to accomplish the following three things:

1. Refer to the main topic (*state whether Hamlet is or is not a coward*)
2. State the main point/thesis (*Hamlet fails to act not because he is a coward, but for other reasons*)
3. Outline the body of the essay (*discussion of the reasons for Hamlet's lack of action*)

### STEP 4: LINKING YOUR IDEAS TOGETHER

The final task is to link your ideas together. Your essay will need an introduction, two to four body paragraphs (depending on the number of ideas you have and your word count) and a conclusion.

#### THE INTRODUCTION

Remember that an introduction should achieve three things:

1. Establish context/background
2. Outline the problem you are trying to resolve, and
3. State the main point you are arguing (your thesis statement)

#### THE BODY PARAGRAPHS

Use a paragraph for each of your main ideas. Remember that a body paragraph should begin with a **topic sentence** (stating the point of the paragraph), followed by the evidence for, and explanation of, your point: **Point Evidence Explanation (PEE)**.

#### THE CONCLUSION

Your concluding paragraph needs to summarise your argument and show that you have successfully proved the point that you made in your thesis statement.

## ANNOTATED ESSAY EXAMPLES

### ESSAY TOPIC:

**Is Hamlet a coward? Examine this question in a well-substantiated essay of 350—400 words.** (*Question 1 of the General Essay Questions on p.89*)

**INTRODUCTION**

Shakespeare's Hamlet is a complex character. He struggles to act against his uncle and avenge his dead father. This has led many critics to call him a coward. This essay will show that his inaction is not because he is weak or cowardly, but is a result of his internal conflict over the morality of revenge and his lack of proof against his uncle.

**Context**

**Problem statement**

**Thesis statement**

**BODY**

Hamlet is slow to take action. Months pass after the ghost of his father gives him the task of revenge. He has the perfect opportunity to kill Claudius when he finds the king praying alone, yet still he does not act. Hamlet eventually does kill the king, but only after being mortally wounded himself. There is ample evidence, however, suggesting that Hamlet fails to act because of a moral dilemma. Many of his soliloquies ponder the morality of the act of revenge and reveal that he needs evidence of the king's guilt before he can act.

**Point**

**Evidence**

**Explanation**

Once he has corroborated the Ghost's story, Hamlet is ready to act. He is prepared to kill the king when he finds him vulnerable at prayer, only stopping when he realises that killing the king then would mean the king would go to Heaven. Hamlet wants the king to face up to his crimes and for this the king needs to be punished in the afterlife as well. This shows that Hamlet is serious about getting revenge.

While Hamlet is slow to kill the king, he does take other action. He is continuously focused on revenge, putting on an 'antic disposition' to conceal his plans. He is also quick to act when he kills Polonius and plots the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. This shows that Hamlet is a man capable of action.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, Hamlet's failure to kill the king until the very end of the play is not because he is a coward. He struggles to act because of the moral dilemma posed by the task of revenge and by the circumstances that prevent him from getting to the king. His inaction is not because he is cowardly or weak. On more than one occasion, Hamlet proves that he is more than capable of action and by finally getting his revenge and killing the king.

**Summary of main point**

**Restatement of thesis**

**Closing remarks**

**Word count: 377**

- FOREWORD
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## ACT 1

## SCENE 1

[Denmark. A narrow platform in front of the castle at Elsinore. A cold star-lit night. The bell tolls twelve.]  
[FRANCISCO, a sentry, is at his post. Enter BERNARDO]

BERNARDO

Who's there?

FRANCISCO

Nay, answer me. Stand, and *unfold* yourself.

*reveal*

BERNARDO

Long live the king!

FRANCISCO

*Bernardo?*

BERNARDO

**5** He.

FRANCISCO

You come *most carefully upon your hour*.

*on time*

BERNARDO

'Tis now struck twelve. Get thee to bed, Francisco.

FRANCISCO

For this relief much thanks. 'Tis bitter cold,  
And I am *sick at heart*<sup>1</sup>.

*scared*

BERNARDO

**10** Have you had quiet guard?

FRANCISCO

Not a mouse stirring.

BERNARDO

Well, good night.  
If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus,  
The *rivals of my watch*, bid them make haste.

*those that guard with me*

[Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS]

FRANCISCO

[Listens]

**15** I think I hear them. Stand ho! Who is there?

HORATIO

*Friends to this ground.*

*Your friends*

<sup>1</sup> Francisco's exclamation anticipates the later statement of 'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark' (1.4), indicating all is not well, and introduces the imagery of disease.



FOREWORD

MARCELLUS  
And *liegemen* to the Dane. *subjects*

FRANCISCO  
Give you good night.

INTRODUCTION TO SHAKESPEARE

MARCELLUS  
O, farewell honest soldier,  
**20** Who hath *relieved* you? *replaced*

FRANCISCO  
Bernardo hath my place.  
Give you good night.

SHAKESPEAREAN LANGUAGE

[FRANCISCO *off*]

MARCELLUS  
*Holla*, Bernardo! *Hey!*

BACKGROUND TO THE PLAY

BERNARDO  
Say,  
**25** What, is Horatio there?

SUMMARIES AND ANALYSES

HORATIO  
A piece of him<sup>2</sup>.

BERNARDO  
Welcome Horatio, welcome good Marcellus.

THE MINI ESSAY

HORATIO  
What, has this thing appeared again to-night?

PERFORMED RUBRICS

BERNARDO  
I have seen nothing.

MARCELLUS  
**30** Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,  
And will not let belief take hold of him  
*Touching* this dreaded sight twice seen of us. *Regarding*  
Therefore I have *entreated* him along *asked him earnestly / begged*  
With us to watch the minutes of this night,

**35** That if again this *apparition* come,  
He may *approve our eyes* and speak to it. *ghost or ghostlike image*  
*confirm what we've seen*

THE PLAY A.I.Sc.I

HORATIO  
*Tush, tush*, 'twill not appear. *Nonsense*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BERNARDO  
Sit down awhile,  
And let us once again *assail* your ears, *attack*  
**40** That are so *fortified* against our story, *strengthened defensively*<sup>3</sup>  
What we have two nights seen.

<sup>2</sup> He jests with them. It is so cold his whole body is numb.

<sup>3</sup> By fortifying his ears, Horatio has essentially stopped listening to or taking note of the continual stories of the other guards about this apparition. Note the imagery of battle in both 'assail' and 'fortify'.

HORATIO

Well, sit we down,  
And let us hear Bernardo speak of this.

BERNARDO

Last night of all,  
**45** When *yon* same star that's westward from the *pole*  
Had made his course to *illumine* that part of heaven  
Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,  
The bell then beating one...

*that*<sup>4</sup> *Pole star*  
*illuminate*

[Enter GHOST clad in armour and carrying a truncheon]

MARCELLUS

Peace! Break thee off. Look where it comes again!

BERNARDO

**50** In the same figure like the king that's dead.

MARCELLUS

Thou art a scholar<sup>5</sup>; speak to it, Horatio.

BERNARDO

Looks it not like the king? *Mark it*, Horatio.

*Look at it*

HORATIO

Most like; it *harrows* me with fear and wonder.

*causes me to feel distress*

BERNARDO

*It would be spoke to.*

*It wishes to be spoken to.*

MARCELLUS

**55** Question it, Horatio.

HORATIO

What art thou that *usurp'st* this time of night,  
Together with that fair and warlike form  
In which the *majesty of buried Denmark*  
Did sometimes march? By heaven I charge thee speak.

*seizes*<sup>6</sup>  
*the Danish King who was buried*

MARCELLUS

**60** It is offended.

BERNARDO

See, it stalks away.

HORATIO

Stay! speak, speak! I charge thee, speak!

[The GHOST vanishes]

<sup>4</sup> Referring specifically to something in the distance.

<sup>5</sup> Because Horatio was a scholar, he would be able to speak Latin and so exorcise any evil spirits.

<sup>6</sup> To usurp is to take a place that belongs to another, illegally or by force.

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MARCELLUS

'Tis gone and will not answer.

BERNARDO

How now Horatio? You tremble and look pale!

**65** Is not this something more than fantasy?  
What think you *on't?*

*of it*

HORATIO

Before my God, I might not this believe  
Without the sensible and true *avouch*  
Of mine own eyes.

*affirmation*<sup>7</sup>

MARCELLUS

**70** Is it not like the king?

HORATIO

As thou art to thyself.  
Such was the very armour he had on,  
When he the ambitious *Norway* combated.  
So frowned he once, when in an angry *parle*

**75** He smote the *sledged Polacks* on the ice.  
'Tis strange.

*King of Norway*  
*conference between two leaders*  
*using sleds or sledges*      *Poles*

MARCELLUS

Thus twice before, and *jump* at this dead hour,  
With martial *stalk* hath he gone by our watch.

*precisely*  
*proud, stately walk*

HORATIO

In what particular thought to work I know not,  
**80** But in the gross and scope of my opinion,  
This bodes some strange *eruption* to our state<sup>8</sup>.

*upheaval in*

MARCELLUS

Good now, sit down, and tell me he that knows,  
Why this same strict and most observant watch  
So nightly *toils the subject of the land*,  
**85** And why such daily cast of *brazen* cannon  
And foreign *mart* for implements of war,  
Why such *impress* of shipwrights, whose sore task  
Does not divide the Sunday from the week.

*causes the people of the land to work*  
*brass*  
*market*  
*forced service*

What might be *toward* that this sweaty haste  
**90** Doth make the night joint-labourer with the day?  
Who is't that can inform me<sup>9</sup>?

*imminent*

HORATIO

That can I,  
At least the *whisper* goes so. Our last king,  
Whose image even but now appeared to us,

*rumour*

**95** Was, as you know, by Fortinbras of Norway,  
Thereto *pricked on* by a most *emulate pride*,  
Dared to the combat; in which our valiant Hamlet

*incited*      *determined rivalry*

<sup>7</sup> I would not have believed this if I had not just seen it.

<sup>8</sup> I don't quite know what the reason for this is, but my own view is that this foretells an upheaval in our state.

<sup>9</sup> Marcellus, now that his word on the ghost has been confirmed, is asking about the war preparations in Denmark. He mentions the increased work of the people of the land, the casting of cannons, the buying of weapons and the ship workers working day and night.

- (For so this side of our known world *esteemed* him)  
 Did slay this Fortinbras; who by a sealed *compact*,
- 100** Well *ratified* by law and heraldy,  
 Did *forfeit* (*with his life*) all those his lands  
 Which he stood *seized of*, to the conqueror;  
 Against the which a *moiety competent*  
 Was *gagéd* by our king, which had returned
- 105** To the inheritance of Fortinbras,  
 Had he been vanquisher; as by the same *covenant*,  
 And *carriage of the article designed*,  
 His fell to Hamlet. Now sir, young Fortinbras,  
 Of *unimprovéd* mettle hot and full,
- 110** Hath in the *skirts* of Norway here and there  
*Sharked* up a list of lawless resolute<sup>10</sup>,  
 For food and diet to some enterprise  
 That hath a *stomach in't*, which is no other  
 (As it doth well appear unto our state)
- 115** But to recover of us by strong hand  
 And *terms compulsatory*, those foresaid lands  
 So by his father lost. And this, I take it,  
 Is the main motive of our preparations,  
 The source of this our watch, and the *chief head*
- 120** Of this post-haste and *romage* in the land.
- BERNARDO*  
 I think it be no other but e'en so.  
 Well may it sort that this *portentous* figure  
 Comes arméd through our watch so like the king  
 That was and is the question of these wars.
- HORATIO*  
**125** A *mote* it is to trouble the mind's eye<sup>11</sup>.  
 In the most high and *palmy* state of Rome,  
 A little *ere* the mightiest *Julius* fell,  
 The graves stood *tenantless* and the sheeted dead  
 Did squeak and *gibber* in the Roman streets;
- 130** As stars with trains of fire and dews of blood,  
 Disasters in the sun; and the *moist star*,  
 Upon whose influence Neptune's<sup>12</sup> empire stands,  
 Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse<sup>13</sup>.  
 And even the like *precurse* of fierce events,
- 135** As *harbingers* preceding *still* the fates  
 And prologue to the omen coming on,  
 Have heaven and earth together demonstrated  
 Unto our *climatures* and countrymen.
- [Enter *GHOST*]  
 But soft, behold! Lo where it comes again!
- 140** I'll *cross it though it blast me*. Stay, illusion!
- judged*  
*agreement*  
*formally confirmed*  
*gave up his lands, on his death*  
*possessed*  
*an equivalent amount*  
*pledged*
- agreement*  
*terms of agreement*
- untested*  
*outskirts*  
*gathered indiscriminately*
- seems to promise adventure*
- by force*
- origin*  
*commotion*
- ominous*
- speck of dust*  
*flourishing*  
*before* *Julius Caesar*  
*empty*  
*speak inarticulately*
- the moon*
- foreshadowing*  
*forerunners*<sup>14</sup> *always*
- regions*
- cross its path even if it kills me*

<sup>10</sup> Reckless outlaws.

<sup>11</sup> This is an allusion to Matthew 7:3: 'And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?'; also a cause of irritation.

<sup>12</sup> Neptune is the god of the seas; following on from the previous line, the sea is dependent on the moon, because it governs the tides.

<sup>13</sup> The moon did not give light, as if doomsday had come.

<sup>14</sup> A harbinger is one who announces the arrival or approach of someone; an advance messenger.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

[HORATIO spreads his arms]

If thou hast any sound or use of voice,  
 Speak to me!  
 If there be any good thing to be done  
 That may to thee do ease, and grace to me,

**145** Speak to me!  
 If thou art *privy* to thy country's fate  
 Which *happily* foreknowing may avoid, O, speak!  
 Or if thou hast *uphoarded* in thy life  
*Extorted* treasure in the womb of earth<sup>15</sup>,

*have knowledge of*  
*perchance*  
*gathered up*  
*Obtained illegally, by force*

**150** For which they say you spirits oft walk in death,

[Cock crows]

Speak of it, stay and speak! Stop it, Marcellus!

MARCELLUS

Shall I strike at it with my *partisan*?

*type of spear with a broad head*

HORATIO

Do if it will not stand.

BERNARDO

'Tis here!

HORATIO

**155** 'Tis here!

[GHOST off]

MARCELLUS

'Tis gone!  
 We do it wrong being so majestic  
 To offer it the show of violence,  
 For it is as the air, invulnerable,  
**160** And our vain blows malicious mockery.

BERNARDO

It was about to speak when the cock crew.

HORATIO

And then it started like a guilty thing,  
 Upon a fearful summons. I have heard  
 The cock that is the trumpet to the morn  
**165** Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat  
 Awake the god of day, and at his warning  
 Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,  
 Th' extravagant and erring spirit hies<sup>16</sup>  
 To his confine, and of the truth herein  
**170** This present object made *probation*.

*proof*<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> If you have hoarded treasure and buried it in the earth.

<sup>16</sup> The straying and wandering ghost hastens back.

<sup>17</sup> The truth of the statement has been proved by what we have just witnessed.

MARCELLUS

It faded on the crowing of the cock.  
 Some say that *ever 'gainst* that season comes  
 Wherein our *Saviour's birth is celebrated*,  
 This *bird of dawning* singeth all night long,  
**175** And then they say no spirit dares stir abroad;  
 The nights are wholesome, then no planets *strike*,  
 No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,  
 So *hallowed* and so gracious is the time.

*always just before  
 Christmas  
 rooster*

*exert an evil influence*

*holy*

HORATIO

So have I heard and do in part believe it.  
**180** But look, the morn in *russet* mantle clad  
 Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill.  
 Break we our watch up and by my advice  
 Let us impart what we have seen to-night  
 Unto young Hamlet, for upon my life  
**185** This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him.  
 Do you consent we shall acquaint him with it,  
 As needful in our loves, fitting our duty<sup>19</sup>?

*reddish-brown cloth*<sup>18</sup>

MARCELLUS

Let's do't, I pray, and I this morning know  
 Where we shall find him most conveniently.

[Off]

SCENE 2

[The Council Chamber in the castle at Elsinore]

[A flourish of trumpets. Enter CLAUDIUS King of Denmark, GERTRUDE the Queen, HAMLET, POLONIUS, his son LAERTES and his daughter OPHELIA, VALTEMAND, CORNELIUS, and Lords in attendance]

KING

Though yet of Hamlet our<sup>20</sup> 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<sup>21</sup>,  
**5** Yet so far hath *discretion* fought with nature,  
 That we with wisest sorrow think on him,  
 Together with remembrance of ourselves.  
 Therefore *our sometime sister*, now our queen,  
 Th' imperial *jointress* to this warlike state,  
**10** Have we as 'twere with a *defeated* joy,  
*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 *barred*  
**15** Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone

*fresh*                      *it was proper for us*

*political consideration*

*formerly our sister (in-law)  
 female joint holder of rights*<sup>22</sup>

*subdued  
 one eye cheerful, the other sad  
 joy                      lament  
 sorrow  
 disregarded / excluded*

<sup>18</sup> The morning is breaking, casting a red glow in the sky.

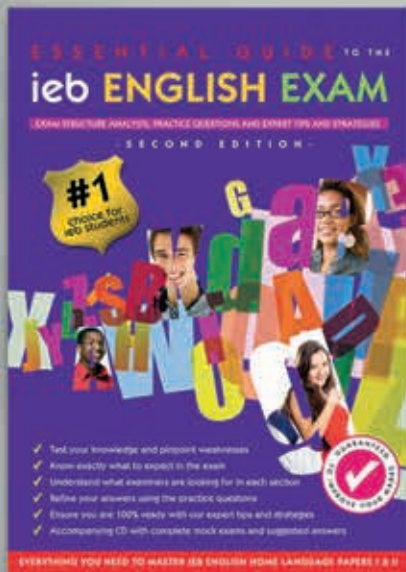
<sup>19</sup> Should we tell him (Hamlet), out of both love and duty?

<sup>20</sup> Note the use of 'our' and 'we' and 'us' – he is using the royal 'we', when he refers to himself, as he embodies the entire state of Denmark.

<sup>21</sup> Just as one's brow contracts in mourning or in pain, so it was proper for the whole kingdom to wear a look of woe.

<sup>22</sup> Joint holder of rights, usually to an estate, but in this case to the state.

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