



# HAMLET

## A summary of the story:

**Find out what happens in the story and then test your knowledge with the Triptico games.**

One night, whilst on guard, soldiers at Elsinore Castle, along with Horatio (a student), see the ghost of the recently dead king. Unable to make him speak they decide to tell his son, Hamlet what they have seen.

Meanwhile, the new king, Claudius - the old king's brother, has married the old queen (and Hamlet's mother). He allows Laertes, (the son of the king's advisor) to return to France but persuades Hamlet to stay in Denmark rather than return to University. When he is alone, Hamlet reveals to the audience how angry he is at his mother marrying his uncle so soon. Hamlet is told about the ghost by his friend Horatio and agrees to see the ghost.

Laertes says goodbye to his sister, Ophelia, and warns her not to get too close to Hamlet. Her father, Polonius, reinforces this, forbidding her to speak to him.

Later that night, on the battlements the ghost speaks to Hamlet alone and tells him he was poisoned by his brother Claudius so that he could become king. Because they are both suspicious of one another, Hamlet and Claudius watch each other closely from this point and it makes Hamlet look a bit mad. Ophelia reports to her father, Polonius, that Hamlet is behaving "madly" and he deduces that Hamlet is lovesick.

The king has roped in two friends of Hamlet (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) to keep an eye on him, but also agrees to Polonius's plan to "overhear" Hamlet and Ophelia. Hamlet sees that his two friends (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) are spying on him and takes advantage of the visit to test his uncle's guilt with the help of some touring actors. The trap is set for Hamlet and Ophelia to be overheard and Hamlet delivers the "To be or not to be..." speech.



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Hamlet sends mixed messages to Ophelia and a direct message of threat to Claudius, who grows more suspicious and decides to banish Hamlet to England. The players act out a story similar to the ghost's story of being poisoned. Claudius stops the play and storms off, which Hamlet takes as proof of his guilt. After arranging for Hamlet to be taken to England, Claudius admits his guilt to the audience and prays. Hamlet, seeing him praying, decides not to kill Claudius.

Polonius hides so he can overhear Hamlet talking to his mother. When Hamlet appears to threaten his mother, Polonius calls out and Hamlet stabs him before establishing his identity. Hamlet is sent to England,

Laertes comes back from France and partly because of her father's death, Ophelia goes mad. Laertes sees how the death has affected Ophelia and, when unexpected news arrives of Hamlet's return, Claudius ropes in Laertes for his plan to kill Hamlet.

News of Ophelia's drowning arrives. Hamlet meets Horatio and fills him in on his trip. Horatio breaks the news of Ophelia's death and then a messenger arrives with a challenge for Hamlet to duel with Laertes. Hamlet and Laertes duel. The Queen dies, Laertes dies, the King dies and Hamlet dies. Horatio is left.

## Triptico Games

**Play our digital Triptico games by following the hyperlinks.**

- **Story starter:** Put the events of the story into the correct order [here](#).
- **Guess the question:** Challenge yourself to see just how well you know the story. You have the answers, but what are the questions? Play it [here](#).
- **Find the answer:** A challenge of knowledge AND memory. You've got all of the answers, you just need to remember where they are. Play it [here](#).
- **True or false:** Thinking about the relationship between Hamlet and Claudius, sort these cards into True or False [here](#).





# HAMLET

## Show us your story

Using the Shakespeare Storytime version of Hamlet below, pick your favourite moment in the story and retell it any way you like – paint it, act it, sing it, dance it, build it.

## Shakespeare Storytime

### Chapter One – A Ghostly Encounter

Elsinore castle perches on the summit of a sharp crag. Above it, the pale moon fleetingly appears, then vanishes behind ever moving clouds. Far beneath lies the eddying sea, swirling black and purple in the wild winter night.

Just visible on the castle battlements is a solitary figure, first rubbing his hands together and then hugging himself tightly to keep out the biting cold. This is Bernardo. If he looks a little anxious, and turns on his heels rather too quickly at the sound of a creaking branch or a screeching owl, then he has very good reason.

Because, every night for the last three nights, Bernardo has seen something terrifying on the castle battlements.

Every night, for the last three nights, an armoured figure has emerged from the rolling mist.

Every night, for the last three nights, Bernardo has met the ghost of Hamlet, the dead King of Denmark .

Tonight, though, he has seen absolutely nothing. The watch has been silent: not a mouse stirring.

But it's only two hours past midnight, and the ghost has never yet appeared before three o' clock at night. Bernardo whispers secretly to the whistling wind.





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There's still time, he whispers. I must remain on guard.

A sudden noise! Crunch! Snap!

"Who's there?"

"Bernardo?"

"Yes, it's me!"

The mist clears to reveal – not a ghostly figure at all – but Bernardo's fellow night-watchman Marcellus, and his friend, the young student, Horatio. Marcellus has seen the ghost too, and tonight the two of them have invited the sceptical Horatio to join them to witness the awful sight for himself.

Horatio steps out from the shadows. He laughs. "Tush, tush. It will NOT appear!" Marcellus has dragged Horatio out into the bitter cold to see this ghost – this fantasy of Marcellus and Bernardo's minds. But Horatio is a scholar. He knows that ghosts are the stuff of children's fairy tales and campfire stories. Nothing more.

"Well, sit we down and let us hear Bernardo speak of this..." he says, mockingly. Horatio and Marcellus sit themselves down on the turret wall as Bernardo begins his story... "Last night," he says, "Marcellus and I were keeping guard as usual. The only light was that given by the bright star, just west of the Pole. All was quiet and still. Then, suddenly, the clock struck three and..."

Barnardo stops abruptly, as if his last words had caught in his throat. Baffled, Horatio shakes his head and motions disbelievingly to Marcellus. As Barnardo gestures towards a space beyond the battlement walls, Horatio turns to look, and sees something truly magnificent, yet truly horrible, emerging from the hazy night.



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The ghost – for there is no doubt that this IS a ghost - fixes Horatio with a cold, dead stare. Its face etched with a frown, it marches forward in full armour; its visor up to reveal a furrowed brow and a silver, grizzled beard. Sword hanging at its side, it brandishes a shield in its left hand, emblazoned with the crest of the royal house of Elsinore. Behind the dead eyes, Horatio thinks he sees a whole world of torture and pain.

Plucking up courage, Horatio edges towards the apparition and speaks in a faltering voice. "What art thou? Speak! Speak, I charge thee speak!"

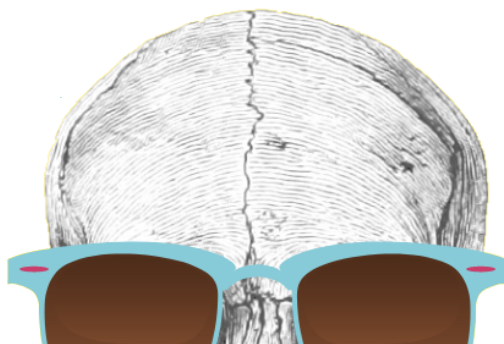
For a moment it seems that the ghost is going to answer. It raises its head, as if to speak, unfurrows its brow, and stretches out its right hand towards Horatio. But before the apparition can utter a single word, a distant cockerel crows in the East, signalling the arrival of daytime.

As anyone knows, a ghost cannot be seen by daylight. Such creatures must live in dark corners; hiding in the shadow of night, and always hovering between life and death. So, at the sound of this crowing cockerel, the ghost slowly turns, and sadly marches away, vanishing into the misty night air, just as it had appeared.

For a moment, there is complete silence. Horatio breaks it.

"Let us impart what we have seen tonight unto young Hamlet. For upon my life, this spirit – dumb to us – will speak with him!"

The others nod in agreement, and the three shaken comrades dash off into the night to find the dead king's only son – Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.





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## Shakespeare Storytime

### Chapter Two – A New King and A Sad Prince

The whole of Denmark is in mourning for King Hamlet. He was a truly wonderful man, loved by all his subjects and known far and wide for his benevolence and kindness. And what a horrible way for a great man to die! Stung to death by a serpent in the castle orchard, as he slept.

Unsurprisingly, there had never been a state funeral quite like it. People lined the streets to pay their respects and to see the funeral procession. But they also lined the streets to catch a glimpse of the desperately sad young man who trailed behind the coffin, head in his hands, and dressed in black from head to toe. “Poor Prince Hamlet,” they said. He loved his father so much. It was as if a part of him had died alongside his father that day. He was just an empty shell now; a once-lively prince whose mirth and happiness had disappeared the moment that King Hamlet breathed his last.

Then, what a shock! To hear that Queen Gertrude - Prince Hamlet’s mother and the wife of the dead King – was to marry again! And her new husband was to be Claudius, the brother to dead King Hamlet. How, people asked, was young Prince Hamlet to feel about this? Claudius would become the new King, and the whisper was that Prince Hamlet despised Claudius with almost as much passion as he had loved his dear father.

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In the great throne room of Elsinore Castle, the court gather to celebrate the wedding of Queen Gertrude and the new King. Little do the King, Queen and courtiers know that the ghost of dead King Hamlet had been pacing the battlements just the previous night!

As the courtiers gather to welcome the new King and his bride, one person is conspicuously absent from the celebrations. Prince Hamlet sits alone in the shadows in the corner of the room, almost invisible in his suit of solemn black.





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As the courtiers cheer for Gertrude and Claudius, the new King looks around for Hamlet.

“And now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son...”

Hamlet sighs as he emerges from the shadows. No son of yours, he thinks as he looks at Claudius angrily.

“Hamlet. You must know. Your father lost a father. That father lost, lost his .... But to persevere in grief for so long... it is unnatural!”

Queen Gertrude turns to her son. “You know it is common. All living things must die. Why seems it so particular with you?” “Seems? Nay, it is! It is not alone my inky cloak, good mother. I do not play a part. No – I have that within which passes show. My clothes are but the trappings and the suits of woe”

Everyone shifts a little uncomfortably as Hamlet speaks. It is rather embarrassing for him to behave in this way, at the reception of the great royal wedding!

“Hamlet. Please. Stay here with us. Do not return to university. Let not your mother lose her prayers, my dear Hamlet” “I will, in all my best, obey YOU madam” says Hamlet, as he casts another disdainful glance at his uncle.

And with that, the King and his train all disappear, leaving Hamlet alone to think about what his life has become. He wishes that his flesh would melt away or that he could dissolve into dew on the grass. He wishes that he could stop seeing his father’s face in his mind. He wishes that he could forgive his mother for marrying his Uncle Claudius before the funeral tears had even dried on her cheeks.



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He is so lost in thought that he barely even sees his greatest friend enter the room and approach him. As he looks up, he spots Horatio. They have been studying at University together for two whole years and have become the very best of friends.

“Horatio? Or I do forget myself” Hamlet dashes across to his friend, nodding a quick greeting to Marcellus and Barnardo along the way. “The same my Lord!” says Horatio as he hugs Hamlet tightly. “But what are you doing here Horatio? Did you come for my mother’s wedding?”

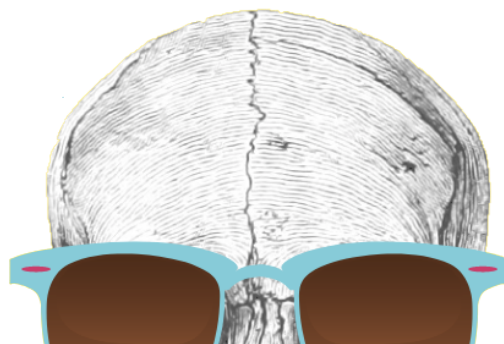
Horatio looks down at the floor and then back up at Hamlet with a sincere sadness in his eyes. “My lord. I came to see your father’s funeral” The time has come for Horatio to tell Hamlet what he knows. “My Lord,” he says. “I think I saw him last night” “Saw who?” “The king, your father”

Hamlet stops dead. He glares, first at Horatio and then at Marcellus and Bernardo. Surely, they can’t be making fun of him when they know how sad and bereft he is at the loss of his father? Horatio shakes his head. This is no joke, he seems to say.

And then Horatio unfolds the tale of the ghostly vision from the previous night: the arrival of the ghost, its grizzled features and majestic presence, and its sudden disappearance at the crowing of the cockerel.

Hamlet hangs on every word. And at the end of the story, he looks at Horatio with a steely determination.

“I will keep the watch with you again tonight. In case it comes again...”





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## Shakespeare Storytime

### Chapter Three – Hamlet meets the Ghost

“It nears the time when the spirit holds his wont to walk” whispers Horatio. It is a still, quiet night. Tonight, the sea below does not swirl purple and black. Tonight, the wind does not whistle and wail through turrets. Tonight, the ivory moon sails calmly through an unbroken, inky sky. But the quietness feels ominous. It seems to herald the arrival of something otherworldly.

The clock strikes three as Hamlet, Marcellus and Horatio watch.

And as the last chime of the clock dissolves into the air, like ripples in water, the spirit comes.

“Angels and ministers of grace defend us!” yells Hamlet in terror as the armoured figure walks slowly towards him. Frozen to the spot, he opens his mouth wide and lets his sword drop to his side. The figure is unmistakably his father: the grey beard, the heavily lined face, the stern look, but with a hint of loving recognition behind the cold, grey eyes. The ghost stretches out his right hand and beckons Hamlet to follow him into the cold, quiet blackness.

“Lead me on! I’ll go with you!” says Hamlet “No, my Lord!” Horatio grabs Hamlet and tries to stop him. “What if it tempts you towards the flood or to the terrible summit of the cliff...and there assumes some other horrible form!”

But there is no stopping Hamlet. The ghost is beckoning him to follow and, despite the best efforts of Marcellus and Horatio, Hamlet is determined that he will accompany the spirit wherever it may lead him. He MUST know whatever it is that his dead father wants to tell him.

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Hamlet follows the ghost for what seems like an age. Eventually, they stop at the craggiest summit of the cliff, where the rock juts and slices into the sea beneath. A thin mist hangs in the still night air. There is not a single sound. It feels like there is nobody in the world except Hamlet and the ghost. And then, the ghost speaks.

“My son Hamlet.” It is a deep, sonorous voice – just like the voice of the dead King, but tinged with a layer of sorrow and wretchedness. “I am your father. Doomed to walk the night until I have paid for my sins on Earth. Hamlet. Hamlet, my son, you must avenge my foul and unnatural murder!” “Murder?” gasps Hamlet. “My son. I sense the morning to be near. I must be quick. For soon I must disappear into sulphurous flames and torture.” “Speak. I’ll listen!” “It is given out that, sleeping in my orchard in the afternoon, a serpent stung me. But know, my Hamlet, that the serpent that did sting your father’s life now wears his crown!” “My uncle!!”

Hamlet sinks to the ground and weeps as his ghostly father explains everything.

One sunny afternoon, King Hamlet was asleep in his orchard. That much was true. But he was not bitten by a snake. That is just a lie! Rather, the evil Claudius, jealous of King Hamlet’s crown and his queen, sneaked into the orchard with a vial of poison, and poured it into the sleeping King’s ear. The revolting liquid transformed the King’s blood into a thick, curdled milk, and soon King Hamlet was convulsing and choking, sapped of life, of crown and of Queen. King Hamlet was murdered by his brother!

As Hamlet listens to the terrible and tragic tale, his heart pounds, and his blood boils. Tears of sadness and rage pour down his thin, pale cheeks. “Poor Ghost! Poor Ghost!” he mutters and wails. “But Hamlet. Never harm your mother!” says the Ghost. “She does not know what Claudius has done!”

Hamlet shakes his head. Only Claudius, he thinks. Only Claudius...

“Remember me!” says the ghost, as it disappears into the thin fog, back to the flames and torture of its hellish existence.







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## Shakespeare Storytime

### Chapter Four – Polonius, Ophelia and Laertes

Back at Elsinore, bumbling old courtier Polonius is fussing. His son (and Hamlet's good friend) Laertes is travelling to France. He must not miss the boat! Are all his necessities packed? Has he got enough money in his purse? What clothes is he taking? (It wouldn't do to dress too fancy!)

But Laertes is busy in another part of the castle, talking to his sister Ophelia. Ophelia is Hamlet's secret girlfriend and they have spent many hours together in recent weeks and months.

Laertes knows the secret – and he is not impressed.

He tells Ophelia that Hamlet is a great prince. He cannot choose any girlfriend he wants. The choice will be made for him by the King and Queen. Ophelia is bound to have her feelings hurt if she is not careful.

Ophelia listens to the advice, but she loves Hamlet very much and does not want to believe Laertes. Hamlet would never harm her. Hamlet has sent her long letters and given her beautiful love tokens and gifts. Laertes can think what he wants. She and Hamlet are meant to be together.

"Remember, Ophelia, what I have said to you..."

Just as Laertes utters these words, Polonius enters the room. Laertes! There he is! He hugs his son and wipes away a tear as he gives his longwinded advice. Be a good man, he seems to say. Don't cheat people or be unkind. And look after yourself!



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Laertes bids a final farewell to Ophelia and heads off to the port to board the ship to France. But Polonius has a question for Ophelia.

“What is it, Ophelia, that he has said to you?” “Oh – just something touching the lord Hamlet.” replies Ophelia. “I see...” says Polonius. For Polonius has heard about Hamlet and Ophelia too.

And he wants to make something very clear. From this time forward, Ophelia should spend no time with Hamlet whatsoever. He is not an appropriate boyfriend for his daughter. And he will hear no arguments to the contrary.

Ophelia is devastated, but in Elsinore a daughter must always obey her father. So she will not see Hamlet anymore, even if it breaks her heart.

## **Chapter Five – Hamlet's Madness and the Play within a Play.**

Some months pass – and everybody is talking about Hamlet.

Hamlet is acting so strangely, they say. He spends hours in the depths of the castle, pacing the corridors and reading from the same old book. He makes fun of harmless old courtiers like Polonius, for no good reason. He calls them fishmongers and fools! He is mean to his friends and he glares at his mother. He hasn't spoken a word to King Claudius in months.

Some even say that when Ophelia tried to return love letters and poems to him, Hamlet threw them in her face and told her he had never sent them in the first place. Could it be true that he even told Ophelia to get out of his sight, join a convent and become a nun? How cruel and unnatural that young prince has become!

But what nobody knows is, Prince Hamlet has a plan.





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He cannot go around accusing Claudius of murder. It would cause mayhem in the court. He might be imprisoned in a tower for treason! And what if the ghost is wrong? Or what if the ghost is actually an evil spirit and not his father at all? No. Hamlet decides that he must have further evidence. He must find a way of proving that Claudius is a killer, once and for all.

Acting strangely is one way of throwing people off the scent. Everyone will be so obsessed with Hamlet's cruel and childish behaviour, that no-one will suspect him of looking for murder clues and planning the death of Claudius!

But Hamlet is struggling to find a single clue that points to Claudius's guilt. He can't trust the ghost's word completely, and he needs SOMETHING else to help him out...

What, he thinks, is the missing piece of the jigsaw?

And then, by chance, something remarkable happens, like a gift from the heavens.

A group of travelling actors – and friends of Hamlet – come to the court.

Hamlet knows the actors well, but it is years since he has seen them. They have come to Elsinore for a special occasion: they are due to put on a play for King Claudius and Queen Gertrude that very night. Could they do something very special for their old friend Hamlet? Could they possibly change the play that they are due to perform? Hamlet knows of a play called The Mousetrap, and he thinks it would be just PERFECT for King Claudius. It's a cunning little tale about a wicked man called Luciano, who kills his cousin to become King of Italy. If Hamlet makes a few changes and tweaks to the story, he can make it look very like the murder of his own father. All he needs to do is add in a vial of poison, poured into the victim's ear, and a grieving wife who soon marries the murderer. It would be an almost perfect match. I wonder, thinks Hamlet, how Claudius would react to such a scene?

"The play's the thing..." thinks Hamlet, "wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King!"





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## Shakespeare Storytime

### Chapter Six - The play within a play

The courtiers gather for the performance of the play. The stage is set. Ornate candelabras hang from the ceiling and cast a golden glow on the palace theatre stage. Golden panels line the walls, and decorative arches frame the stage.

Hamlet is already in position. He winks at Horatio, who is sitting in the front row. Hamlet has told Horatio all the details of the plan. He must watch Claudius very carefully to see if he reacts. If he blushes or moves an inch in his throne when the Player Poisoner pours the liquid in the Player King's ear, then Hamlet and Horatio will know that the ghost was telling the truth. They will know for sure that Claudius is a killer.

Now Claudius and Gertrude arrive. Claudius leads Gertrude by the hand, and they take their seats on two raised thrones, with a perfect view of the stage. Gertrude spots her son, and beckons him over to sit with her, but Hamlet has spotted Ophelia in the second row, and wants to spend time with her. Ophelia, however, is less sure. Hamlet has been so cruel to her, and her own father has forbidden her from spending any time with him. Nevertheless, she reluctantly allows Hamlet to sit with her. To nobody's surprise, Hamlet is once again acting strangely and giddily. He makes silly jokes and pulls faces. He asks to lie with his head in Ophelia's lap, instead of sitting properly in his seat.

"You are merry my lord" says Ophelia, with some impatience in her voice. She never knows how to take Hamlet these days. He changes from one minute to the next. "Why not be merry? For look how merry my mother looks and my father only died in the last two hours!" "My lord, it is four months!" "Four months! Really? Well. Perhaps my father won't be completely forgotten in half a year!" Hamlet says this with a big laugh, very deliberately and very loudly, so that both Claudius and Gertrude can hear him perfectly. His mother casts him an angry glance, and Claudius simply pretends that he hasn't heard.



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Now, as the audience settles, the lights dim and the play begins...

The actors file on to the stage and the audience quietens. An air of excitement and expectation fills the air.

The play begins with a King and Queen, in the orchard of a castle. It surely can't be a coincidence that the Player King is wearing a grizzled beard, just like dead King Hamlet. And the Player Queen has her hair in a long, silver plait, just like Queen Gertrude. Hamlet glances at the real King and Queen in the audience, but he cannot spot any reaction yet...

Now, the Player King tells his wife that he will love her forever and will never leave her. The Queen says the same. But what if I die, asks the King? Will you marry again? Never! She answers.

"In second marriage let me be accursed. None wed the second but who KILLED the first!"

Hamlet glances up at Claudius. Did he shift very slightly in his seat? It was difficult to tell, but not to worry, for there are many more chances to catch Claudius out. The play has only just begun!

As the Player Queen says farewell to her husband, to allow him to take his afternoon nap in the orchard, the villain Luciano enters. He creeps towards the sleeping King, brandishing a tiny bottle. This, he explains, contains a special potion that will curdle the blood of the sleeping King. Soon, the King will be dead, and Luciano can try to win the favour of the grieving Queen!

Some of the audience start to boo. What a wicked character! Who would do such a thing?





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Just as Luciano crouches close to the sleeping Player King and lifts the vial of liquid to the Player King's ear, there is an almighty crash!

Claudius has knocked over his goblet of wine.

Now, Claudius has risen from his seat.

Now, Claudius is staring directly ahead, in abject horror. The colour has drained from his fat, red cheeks. He looks like he has seen a ghost!

"Lights, Lights! King Claudius is not well!" shouts Polonius, as Claudius wobbles and staggers from the great chamber.

Everyone is panicking. What is wrong with the King? Why did he rush out like that? Is he unwell? Was it something he ate? Is he angry or sick?

As people rush back and forth, only Hamlet and Horatio are left standing still at the side of the stage. Alone, Hamlet casts a look at Horatio that says, "I told you!"

Now Hamlet knows that the ghost was telling the truth.

Now Hamlet knows that his uncle is a killer.

Now Hamlet knows that he must kill Claudius.

## Chapter Seven – A Rat! A Rat!

Hamlet has been called to visit his mother in her bedchamber. She is 'astonished' that her son has behaved so badly. Why did he ask the actors to perform a different play? How could he upset his uncle like that? He has really gone too far this time!





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As Hamlet makes his way to the bedchamber, he spots Claudius in the corridor, with his head in his hands. He is muttering a prayer and looking skyward to the heavens. Is he asking forgiveness for the murder of Hamlet's father?

"Now! Now I might do it!" thinks Hamlet.

Hamlet draws his dagger and creeps up behind the treacherous and cowardly killer. This is his chance to kill the evil Claudius and get revenge for his father's death!

But – wait a minute. If Hamlet kills Claudius now, then that can only mean one thing. With Claudius praying to God, his soul will go to heaven. He will be forgiven all his evil sins. He will be forgiven for murdering Hamlet's father and for marrying Hamlet's mother. He will be forgiven for stealing the crown and making Hamlet's own life a misery. Hamlet does not want Claudius to go to heaven.

Claudius must go to hell and burn for all eternity for his horrible crimes. No, thinks Hamlet. Now is not the time after all. He will choose another time. Perhaps when Claudius is drunk or gambling or behaving cruelly towards his servants. THAT will be the best time to strike and kill. That way it is guaranteed that Claudius will go to the place he deserves, kicking his heels in the air as he goes tumbling to hell! Hamlet moves along the corridor, creeping past Claudius on the way to his mother's bedchamber.

"My words fly up," says Claudius to himself. "My thoughts remain below. Words without thoughts never to heaven go." ++++++







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In the Queen's bedchamber, nosey-parker Polonius is determined to find out what is going through Hamlet's mind. He is convinced that Hamlet's madness is all linked to his darling daughter Ophelia. Didn't Hamlet only start acting strangely when Polonius prevented Ophelia from seeing him? This is the very ecstasy of love, thinks Polonius. But Gertrude is not convinced. Hamlet's madness does not seem like unrequited love. She is sure that it is nothing but the obvious: his father's death and Gertrude's hasty marriage to Claudius. But, just to keep the old man quiet, she agrees that Polonius can hide in the bedchamber and listen in to her conversation with Hamlet. Polonius is good at listening to other people's conversations. You might almost say it is his favourite hobby. If there is some court gossip to be heard, then Polonius is never far away. Sometimes hiding behind a wall, or listening intently from a quiet corner, Polonius is the nosiest old man you could ever wish to meet.

He examines the Queen's bedchamber to find a suitable hiding place. He soon finds an embroidered curtain in the corner of the room. Even though he is a little chubby, the curtain is wide enough to hide him. The curtain falls all the way to the ground, so you won't even be able to see my feet, thinks Polonius. Yes, he thinks with some smug satisfaction, this will make the perfect hiding place. Perhaps it is his very best hiding place yet!

"Quick!" says Gertrude, "I think I hear Hamlet coming!"

Polonius takes up his position behind the curtain and settles down to listen. He can barely wait to hear all the juicy gossip!

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As Hamlet approaches his mother's chamber, he takes a deep breath. He MUST tell her about Claudius. He must tell her about the evil King who has stolen her heart. But how will he begin? How will he possibly convince her that the dead King – her old husband – is walking the castle battlements at night? How will he convince her that the new King – her husband – is a murderous, treacherous, beast? She will never believe him.







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“Now mother,” says Hamlet as he enters the bedchamber. “What’s the matter?” “Hamlet – you have offended King Claudius. And you have offended me too!” Gertrude is sitting on her bed, brushing out her long hair and peering into the dressing table mirror. Her face is streaked with tears and etched with weariness. The curtain rustles slightly in the corner as Polonius twitches at it. He is getting a little hard of hearing in his old age, and he needs to be able to hear every single word!

“Mother – you have offended both me and my father!”

Queen Gertrude turns to her insolent son. She looks down at her hands and, for a moment, it seems that she may burst into tears. But she composes herself and, instead, turns to Hamlet with anger in her eyes. She hardly recognises him anymore. He was a loving son, but he has become so strange and unkind. Where is the son that she once knew?

Hamlet, meanwhile, is fiddling anxiously with the locket around his neck. He has it with him always. It is his most treasured possession, for inside this locket, is a portrait of Hamlet’s father. He opens the locket and looks at the picture inside. Glancing at his mother’s dressing room table, he sees another portrait – this time of the new king Claudius. How can his mother have gone from THIS to THAT? he thinks.

He will ask her that very question!

He goes to his mother and grabs her by the wrist.

“What will you do Hamlet? You will not murder me?” she wails.

From behind the curtain, Polonius hears the word ‘murder’ and panics.

“Murder! Murder!” he cries.

Hamlet’s eyes dart from his mother to the heavily embroidered velvet curtain.





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Who is behind the curtain? Is it Claudius?

With hardly a thought, Hamlet jumps up, draws his sword and rushes to the curtain. Slash! Stab! He slices through the curtain and into the flesh behind.

A crimson stain spreads across the surface of the curtain, like a blooming flower, and Polonius lets out a gasp of pain, sliding heavily to the bedroom floor.

“What have you done?” cries Gertrude in horror. “I know not. Is it the king?” asks Hamlet wildly. He unrolls the curtain. Please let it be true! The king is dead! The king is dead!

But Hamlet doesn’t find the king at all. Instead, he finds the lifeless body of Polonius – the father of his great friend Laertes and of his girlfriend Ophelia. He has killed the poor nosey fool. He is truly sorry.

Hamlet sobs. Gertrude sobs.

And as they weep together, Hamlet tells Gertrude all about Claudius. He isn’t sure that she fully believes him, but he is telling the truth. Claudius is a murderer. Claudius should not be trusted!

## Chapter Eight – The Poor Ophelia

News soon spreads through the court that Hamlet has killed the good old man Polonius. What will he do next? What can be done to stop this crazy young man? And Claudius is worried.

Hamlet knows something. How could he have staged a play that so perfectly mimicked the way that Claudius killed old King Hamlet? I covered my tracks so well, thought Claudius. Nobody suspected a thing. Everybody believed that a poisonous snake had bitten the old King.





# HAMLET



There is only one thing to be done. Claudius decides that he will send Hamlet away. He will banish him to England and he will never be seen again. Claudius is good friends with the English King. He will hide a letter on Hamlet's person that tells the King to behead Hamlet as soon as he arrives on English soil. That way, Hamlet will be dead and nobody else will find out what Claudius has done. It's a watertight plan!

So, Hamlet is sent away to England.

Meanwhile, in Denmark, something is wrong with poor Ophelia.

The shock of her father, Polonius's, death has been too much for her. She wanders Castle Elsinore at night, singing snatches of old tunes and talking to herself. She greets friends and strangers with the same sad eyes and doesn't even seem to recognise her closest friends. She doesn't even have her brother Laertes to confide in or to cry with. He is still in France. She is totally alone in the world.

One morning, she finds the King and Queen in the great hall of Elsinore Castle. She walks up to Gertrude.

"Where is the beautiful Queen Gertrude of Denmark? I need to speak with her" says Ophelia as she looks Gertrude directly in the eye. "Do you know where I can find her?"

Poor Ophelia. Gertrude meets her sad gaze and strokes her hand to provide some comfort. But Ophelia shakes her off angrily and begins to sing a song.

"He is dead and gone lady  
He is dead and gone  
At his heels a grass green turf  
At his head a stone"

Ophelia spots Claudius now and makes her way over to him. In her confused state, does she think Claudius is her missing boyfriend Hamlet? Who knows, but she soon begins to sing Claudius a delicate love song.





# HAMLET

“Tomorrow is St Valentine’s day, all in the morning betime  
And I am a maid at your window, to be your Valentine!” “Pretty Ophelia...” urges Claudius.

Ophelia’s face changes. She abruptly stops singing her Valentine’s melody and her face becomes twisted and torn with anger.

“My brother shall know of this!”

And with that, she leaves the room, singing her tunes and laughing to herself distractedly. Claudius looks at the Queen. There are tears in Gertrude’s eyes. Here is another woe to add to Claudius’s list of worries. He certainly does not want Ophelia to tell Laertes about the death of Polonius. What if she suggests that Claudius is somehow to blame? This would be disastrous. It would be better if Ophelia was dead and gone. One trouble piles on top of another. How fast they are growing!

And now – what is that noise?

“Laertes for King! Laertes for King! Laertes for King!”

There is a terrible banging on the heavy oak door of the castle. It feels as if Elsinore is being rocked to its foundations.

“Laertes for King! Laertes for King!” shout the angry crowd.

It is too late! Laertes has returned from France. He must have heard of his father’s death and he is come back for his revenge. Claudius panics. Laertes is a strong, young man. And he has roused a rabble of other strong young men, all banging and shouting at the gate of Castle Elsinore. What can be done?

Suddenly, Laertes bursts through the door. The young man’s face is contorted with a fiery rage.





# HAMLET



"Where is my father!?" he screams.

"Dead." Says Claudius

"But not by King Claudius!" cries Gertrude, stepping between the two men.

"How came he dead?" yells Laertes, brandishing his sword with a menacing glare, his eyes darting between Gertrude and Claudius.

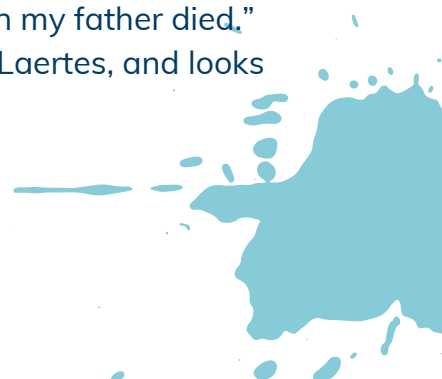
"Good Laertes," says Claudius, raising his arms defensively, "I am guiltless of your father's death and I am most sensibly in grief for it..."

The sound of manic laughter and song interrupt Claudius's explanation. Ophelia bursts again through the door. The last time Laertes saw her, he was joking with her on his departure to France, and laughing with her about her relationship with Hamlet. She had been full of life; but now her beautiful face is wan and grey, her hair bedraggled and decked with wild flowers, her clothes torn and frayed, and she has a crazed look on her face, as if she has been raised by wolves and does not know how to speak human language. In her arms she carries a bundle of wild flowers and weeds, probably picked from the muddy banks of the river.

"Oh heat! Dry up my brains!" yells Laertes as he grabs Ophelia and hugs her tight. Does she even recognise him? She gives no sign that she knows who he is, but she drops her bundled weeds and clings tightly to him, as she continues to sing her songs. How could a young girl's wits be so mortal?

Suddenly, Ophelia lets go of Laertes and stares wildly around the room, first at Gertrude, then Claudius. She picks up the scattered weeds and flowers from the chamber floor and moves slowly but purposely towards Gertrude. She picks the prettiest of her flowers and gives them to the Queen. "There's a daisy!" she says with glee, like an excited child. Gertrude smiles sadly and thanks Ophelia, but the young woman has already moved on to Claudius.

"I wanted to give you violets," she says. "But they all withered when my father died." Claudius does not know how to respond. He feels the cold stare of Laertes, and looks up to see Ophelia's brother's face contorted in grief and anger.





# HAMLET

Laertes runs to Ophelia once again, embracing her firmly and securely in his arms. He wishes that he could make her safe. He wishes that he could restore the happy-go-lucky girl that he knows so well. But he can see that she is far gone. The old Ophelia is never coming back.

Ophelia wriggles free from Laertes' embrace, and winds her way to the chamber door, scattering the remains of her wild flowers and weeds as she trails out of the room. Gertrude rushes from the room in pursuit.

Laertes sinks to the floor and beats the ground with his fist. "Do you see this? Oh, God!" he bellows to the heavens.

As he composes himself, he raises his eyes again to the evil King. Claudius can see the rage and fire in Laertes' eyes and feels certain that Laertes will kill him with his bare hands.

Claudius thinks quickly. Blame Hamlet for everything, he thinks.

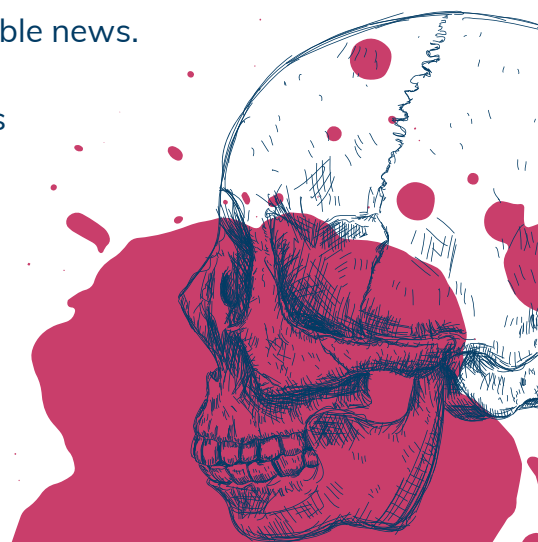
Just at that moment a messenger arrives with a letter. A letter from Hamlet! But how is Hamlet still alive? Why has the King of England not put him to death?

Hamlet writes that he has returned from England and that he is safe ashore in Denmark once again.

This fills Claudius with terror. Hamlet is still alive and knows of Claudius's guilt.

Hamlet is still alive, and a great friend of Laertes. This is terrible news.

A plan begins to form in the murky mind of evil King Claudius





# HAMLET



“Did you truly love your father Laertes or are you more like a painting of grief?”

“Why do you ask this?” roars Laertes.

“To find out whether you would truly do anything to revenge him!”

“Anything! I would cut my father’s murderer’s throat in the church!” yells Laertes.

But before Claudius can put his plan into further action, there is a commotion at the door and Queen Gertrude appears, a picture of sorrow and pity.

“My dear Laertes. Your sister ... she is drowned”

“Drowned?” Laertes asks imploringly.

“There is a willow tree that grows beside the brook.” Says the Queen sadly.

“There, pretty Ophelia made daisy chains and gathered wild flowers. She climbed the tree to hang her daisy chains, but as she did, a branch gave way and she fell into the river. Her clothes spread wide, and for a moment she looked like a beautiful mermaid. But soon, as she sang a pretty song, the water pulled poor Ophelia down into the river to a muddy death.”

Queen Gertrude is sobbing.

Laertes is stony faced.

“Alas then,” says Laertes, “my beloved sister is drowned.”

## Chapter Nine - Claudius and Laertes plot

Close to the harbour at Elsinore, Hamlet – newly arrived in Denmark - has agreed to secretly meet with his friend Horatio. It is weeks since they last saw each other, on the fateful evening of The Mousetrap play, and it seems like an eternity has passed. They are so happy to see each other. As they embrace, Horatio asks Hamlet to tell everything about his adventures on the high seas.







# HAMLET

Hamlet explains that almost as soon as he set off to England, he discovered the letter from Claudius, telling the King of England to put Hamlet to death as soon as he arrived on shore. At that moment, he knew he must escape the ship and somehow get back to Denmark. Setting foot on English soil would mean certain death for Hamlet.

Then, just two days later, pirates attacked Hamlet's ship. In a flash, Hamlet decided that he stood a better chance of survival with the pirates. At least the pirates were honest about their intentions as highwaymen of the seas. They didn't hide their crimes in the shadows, like the evil Claudius. So, Hamlet allowed himself to be taken prisoner.

And surprisingly, the pirates treated Hamlet with great kindness. They listened to his story and they felt sorry for him. By the end of Hamlet's tale, they hated Claudius almost as much as Hamlet did himself. So, they agreed to return him to Denmark, and wished Hamlet well in his battle against the evil King. They even offered to lend him a cutlass or two with which to slice old Claudius from his head to his toes!

So now Hamlet was returned to Denmark. What was the news? How was his mother? What was that wicked snake Claudius up to?

Just as Horatio is about to speak, Hamlet spots a procession heading in their direction, towards the nearby graveyard. Isn't that the King, the Queen and various courtiers? Was that his young friend Laertes bringing up the rear of the procession, cradling something or someone in his arms?

Horatio and Hamlet rush towards the procession and hide behind a tree to watch.

The procession stops by a freshly dug, open grave.

It becomes clear that the something or someone that Laertes is cradling in his arms is a dead body, wrapped in a shroud.

With tears in his eyes, Laertes lowers the body into the open grave.







# HAMLET



Queen Gertrude kneels beside Laertes. She throws a posy of wild flowers into the open grave.

“Sweets to the sweet. Dear Ophelia, I thought thy bride bed to have decked, and not to have strewed thy grave!”

Hamlet looks at Horatio, open mouthed.

“The fair Ophelia!” he yells.

The gravediggers move in to toss their soil and earth upon the body of Ophelia. But Laertes is not ready to say goodbye.

“Hold off the earth awhile, til I have caught her once more in my arms!”

He jumps into the grave and pulls Ophelia’s body towards him in a final loving clinch.

Hamlet can contain himself no longer. He rushes to the graveside.

“This is I!” he yells, “Hamlet, the Dane”

Hamlet!? thinks Laertes. The murderer of my father? The reason that Ophelia went mad? Jumping out of the grave, he wrestles Hamlet to the ground and takes him by the neck in a strangling grip.

“I loved Ophelia!” screams Hamlet. “Forty thousand brothers could not love her like I loved her. What would you do for Ophelia, Laertes? Would you eat a crocodile? Because I would do it!”

As the two men tussle and roll on the ground at the graveside, the King’s courtiers move in to pull them apart.

And another plan forms in the wicked mind of Claudius...





# HAMLET

## Shakespeare Storytime

### Chapter Ten - A Poisoned Cup, A Poisoned Sword

Back at the palace, Claudius sends for Laertes.

Still hot with anger, Laertes is ready to do anything – ANYTHING - to hurt Hamlet. Claudius knows this and sees a perfect opportunity to get rid of Hamlet once and for all. If the plot to kill him in England failed, this new plan is sure to succeed, leaving Claudius free of Prince Hamlet forever!

“Laertes, you are known the length and breadth of Denmark for your excellent swordsmanship and your skill with a rapier. Let us put a wager on your head – a fencing match between you and Hamlet!”

Claudius explains his fiendish plan. He will arrange a lavish fencing match between Hamlet and Laertes in the great hall of Elsinore Castle. All the courtiers will be invited. It will be a very grand occasion, and it will seem that Laertes wants to be Hamlet’s friend again. But, Claudius will have a goblet of wine ready for Hamlet, when he is tired and calls for a drink after the first bout of the match. In that goblet, Claudius will dissolve a potion. The potion will be so poisonous that even the slightest sip will kill Hamlet within moments.

Laertes is thrilled with the plan and has his own special addition.

“I bought a poison while I was in France...” he says. “It is so mortal that, if a knife is but dipped in it and that knife used to scratch the skin, it will cause instant death!”

So, there is a main plan and a backup plan.

The poison in the goblet will kill Hamlet. And if not, the poison on the rapier will finish him off. How could it possibly fail?

+++++





# HAMLET

In the great throne room of Elsinore castle, all is set for the fencing match between old friends Laertes and Hamlet.

The room is decorated with beautiful tapestries and wall hangings, and a space has been cleared for the bout to take place. At one end of the cleared space are the great thrones of Claudius and Gertrude. They will have a perfect view of the 'friendly' match. Around the rest of the space, the courtiers will gather. Everyone has been invited. The courtiers gather excitedly. Did you hear, say some of them, about the quarrel between Hamlet and Laertes at Ophelia's funeral? Hamlet dived into the open grave and they grappled each other by the throat! This will certainly be an interesting spectacle, they think.

As the crowds jostle for a place closest to the action, the trumpets bray out and Claudius and Gertrude take their places on the throne. Claudius looks a little nervous as he enters, clutching the goblet of wine in his hand.

Hamlet and Laertes enter next. They are dressed in fencing uniforms: breeches, white over-jackets, knee high socks and white gloves. Hamlet moves in to hug Laertes.

"Give me your pardon sir. I have done you wrong. If I have hurt you, think that I have shot my arrow over the house and hurt my brother."

Laertes is suddenly pricked with doubt. Hamlet seems so sincere.

He glances at Claudius, who fixes him with a resolute stare. Do not falter. Do not give up, Claudius seems to say.

Laertes steels himself and shrugs off Hamlet's embrace.

"Give us the foils" he says.

Hamlet goes to choose his weapon. "This likes me well," he says as he tries out a few different rapiers and settles on one that seems the right weight and size for him.





# HAMLET



Laertes pretends that he is struggling to choose too, but he can see very clearly which of the rapiers he must pick. He can see the venom gleaming and glistening on the tip of one of the weapons. This is his rapier. This is the one that will put an end to the life of the man who killed his father and caused his sister to drown herself. He picks up the foil with renewed commitment and determination. Prince Hamlet must die! He looks up at Claudius and slowly nods his head. I am back on your side, he seems to say. I will go through with the plan!

“Let us set this drink upon the table!” says Claudius. “And come. Let us begin!”  
“Come on, sir!” says Hamlet

The two young men begin their first bout. They are both expert fencers, and they dart around the space like dancers, parrying and thrusting as they move. First, Hamlet slides aside as Laertes slices the air with his rapier, and narrowly misses the Danish prince. Next, Hamlet jabs the air with a series of stabs and lunges. Laertes tries to duck away, but the tip of Hamlet’s blade brushes Laertes’ white overcoat.

“A hit!” yells Hamlet excitedly “Yes,” agrees Osric, the court adjudicator. “One point to Hamlet. Well done sir!”

Claudius stands up from his throne and motions towards the poisoned goblet on the table at his side.

“Give Hamlet the cup!” he calls down to Osric. “I’ll play this bout first, I’ll drink later.” says Hamlet.

Claudius tries to hide his disappointment.

The second bout plays out very much like the first. It’s close, and Laertes almost touches Hamlet’s bare skin with the poisoned weapon on more than one occasion. But ultimately, Hamlet wins the point.

“Two points to Hamlet!” cries Osric.





# HAMLET

Exhausted, Hamlet looks up to his mother and smiles. She beams with pride.

Suddenly a thought occurs to her.

“The Queen drinks to your health and fortune Hamlet!” She grabs the goblet from the table at the side of Claudius’s throne. “Gertrude! Do not drink!” says Claudius firmly.

The Queen laughs.

“I will my lord!” Before the horrified King can stop her, Gertrude takes a long draught of the deadly drink. Laertes and Claudius look on in absolute horror.

“It is the poisoned cup. It is too late...” whispers Claudius as he sinks wretchedly back into his throne. “Come for the third, Laertes!”

Laertes is incensed and panicked. What can he do?

There is only one thing left to do. To hell and damnation with the fencing match. He must stab Hamlet NOW!

As Hamlet turns his back to Laertes, readying himself for the final bout of the match, Laertes runs towards Hamlet with his envenomed blade gleaming. He raises it above his head and slices the air as Hamlet whips around. Hamlet has no chance to defend himself as the blade cuts through the air and opens a gash on his left cheek.

As the blood trickles from his wound, Hamlet puts his hand to his face and looks in astonishment at Laertes.

He drops his sword, and now it is Hamlet’s turn to grab Laertes by the throat. As Laertes drops his rapier, and the two men grapple for the second time, Hamlet is filled with anger. Why did Laertes stab him? Hamlet means no harm to Laertes! In his rage,

Hamlet stoops down and picks up a rapier. He will return the injury!





# HAMLET



But Laertes' eyes are filled with horror as he sees that Hamlet has picked up the wrong blade! It is Laertes' sword. He sees the foul venom glimmering on the tip of the foil. His mind races as the foil slices through the air and marks Laertes with an almost identical scratch on his left cheek.

As the confusion mounts and the courtiers begin to panic, Osric's eyes move towards Gertrude.

"The Queen!"

Gertrude is clutching her throat and gasping for air as if she was drowning. She falls to the ground

"The drink!" she cries, "The drink. O, my dear Hamlet. I am poisoned"

Hamlet rushes to his mother's side as she collapses to the floor. How has this happened? Where is this treason?

"Hamlet," calls Laertes from the floor, "The treachery is here. And you are slain. You have not even a half hour of life left in you. The treacherous blade is in your hand. Your royal mother is poisoned. The king! The king is to blame!"

"The point of the blade?" says Hamlet. "Then poison, do thy work!" and he races towards Claudius, with the poisoned sword in his hand. As he stabs repeatedly at Claudius with the envenomed tip, he reaches for the goblet of wine and pours the remains of the poisoned liquid down Claudius's throat.

"Drink of this potion and follow my mother!" screams Hamlet.

Spitting and bleeding, Claudius collapses in a heap. As he gasps his last breath, the very last thing that Claudius sees is Hamlet's solemn face, silently accusing him of the murder of King Hamlet.

"Hamlet! Exchange forgiveness with me..." cries Laertes. The two embrace, and Laertes slips into death.





# HAMLET

Hamlet looks around him. His mother, Claudius and Laertes...all dead.

Where is there a friendly face?

Horatio!

His friend rushes to him.

Hamlet sinks to the floor as Horatio holds him in his arms.

And with that, the noble Prince Hamlet slips away, dying in his friend's arms. Horatio looks around at the awful scene: King Claudius – dead, Queen Gertrude – dead, Laertes – dead, and his beloved friend Hamlet – dead.

“Goodnight, sweet prince,” whispers Horatio “And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest”.

And from that night forward, the castle battlements are quiet. There are no ghostly stirrings in the night. There is no grizzled figure marching in armour through the pale mist. For King Hamlet has finally been avenged, and the evil Claudius has been brought to justice.

Only Horatio is left to tell the story to the people of Elsinore, to his children, and to his children's children: the tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark





# HAMLET

## Character Profiles

### Create social media profiles for characters from Hamlet

*Choose a character (use our character descriptions below for a reminder) and create a social media profile for them. How do they describe themselves? What do they share about their lives? What are other characters writing about them?*

#### **HAMLET**

The Prince of Denmark. Hamlet, is the son of Queen Gertrude and the late King Hamlet, and the nephew of the present king, Claudius. Hamlet is defined by his indecisiveness and inability to act on the murder of his father. He struggles to come to terms with his mother's marriage to his uncle and is disgusted by their relationship. Hamlet is introspective and often thinks about things too much, therefore talking himself out of making decisions. Hamlet only acts out when he allows his feelings to silence his thoughts, such as when he kills Polonius.

#### **CLAUDIUS**

Claudius becomes the King of Denmark after killing his brother, Hamlet's father. He allows his political ambition to drive him to murder and his aptitude for manipulation enables him to cover up. He is very good with words, and uses them as a weapon to bring about his scheming. Claudius does have moments where he doubts himself and feels guilty, such as during the play Hamlet presents to the court.

#### **GERTRUDE**

The Queen of Denmark. Hamlet's mother, recently married to Claudius. Gertrude is torn between a mother's love for Hamlet and loyalty to her new husband Claudius. She dislikes conflict and tries to smooth over the rift between her son and new husband. She could be thought of as a woman who is making the best of her circumstances, or someone who loves the trappings of royalty more than what is right and decent.





# HAMLET

## **POLONIUS**

The father of Ophelia and Laertes. He is more interested in appearances than in being a loving father. The Lord Chamberlain at Claudius' court, he is an ambitious courtier who tries to mimic Claudius' successful speech-making but comes across as pompous and long-winded.

## **HORATIO**

Hamlet's best friend. They were students together at the University of Wittenberg. Horatio is loyal and helpful. He is Hamlet's confidante throughout the play and the only person with whom Hamlet feels he can be entirely honest - which is why he is the perfect person to tell Hamlet's story after his death.

## **OPHELIA**

Polonius' daughter. She and Hamlet were in love but their relationship is strained during the play. Ophelia is constantly told how to behave by others: her father, her brother Laertes and Hamlet. Where Hamlet cannot bring himself to make decisions, Ophelia is not allowed to make her own decisions. She reluctantly gives in to Polonius's schemes to spy on Hamlet. Ophelia's inability to carve out her own identity in this overbearing court contributes to her going mad, and ultimately drowning in a brook.

## **LAERTES**

Polonius' son and Ophelia's brother. He is in France for most of the play. Unlike Hamlet, Laertes is quick to act on his impulses and so he comes across as dynamic and earnest.



# HAMLET



## GHOST

The ghost of Hamlet's dead father. The ghost tells Hamlet that he was killed by Claudius and incites Hamlet to avenge his death. However, Hamlet shows some doubt as to whether this ghost is in fact his father's spirit or a malignant spectre tempting Hamlet to murder and inventing Claudius's crime.

## ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN

Two slightly awkward members of the court who were friends with Hamlet at the University of Wittenberg. Claudius and Gertrude summon them to investigate Hamlet's mad behaviour.

## MARCELLUS

The officer who first sees the ghost when he is on guard on the ramparts of Elsinore castle.

## GRAVE DIGGER

A comic clown figure who sings and cracks jokes while he works.





# HAMLET

## Dear Diary

**Imagine you are Hamlet when he has found out that his father was murdered by his uncle (now his step-father).**

Write a diary entry detailing what happened and how you felt.

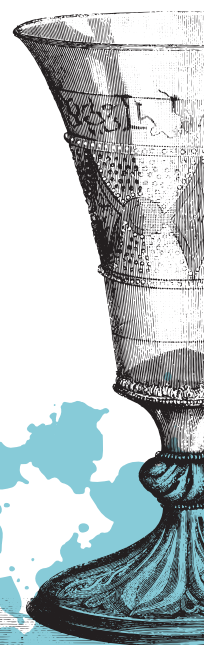
Use the key features of diary entries in your work

- Presentational/ organisational features such as the date or 'Dear diary.'
- Write in chronological order
- Use a personal, informal tone.
- Experiment with a secretive tone
- Use a combination of tenses—mainly past tense for events, present tense for current feelings and future tense for what they may do next.
- Use questions posed by the writer E.g. What will tomorrow bring? What should I do now?

Try using some key lines from the first few scenes of the play

**Hamlet:** 'O God, God! That it should come to this, but two months dead – nay, not so much, not two. Within a month, a little month – a beast that wants discourse of reason would have mourned longer – married with my uncle! My father's brother, but no more like my father than I to Hercules. But...I must hold my tongue.'

**Hamlet:** 'Thrift, thrift, Horatio! The funeral baked meats did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables'



# HAMLET

**The ghost to Hamlet:** 'Now, Hamlet, hear. 'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard, a serpent stung me. But know, thy noble youth, the serpent that did sting thy father's life now wears his crown.'

**Hamlet:** 'Remember thee! Ay, thou poor ghost.  
O, most pernicious woman!  
O, villain, villain, smiling damned villain.  
Now to my word. I have sworn't.'

**Hamlet:** 'Let us go in together.  
The time is out of joint. O cursed spite,  
That ever I was born to set it right..'



# HAMLET

## Hamlet: Right or Wrong?

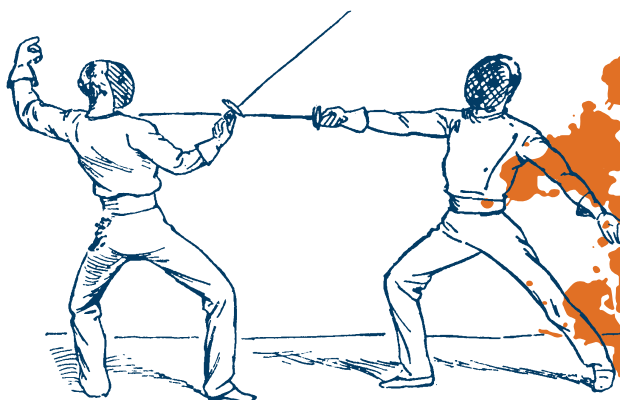
**Write a balanced argument for Hamlet's actions in the play after learning about moral responsibility and determinism.**

Philosophy is a Greek word meaning “love of wisdom.” Philosophy tries to answer some of the most basic questions about human life such as whether human beings are basically good or evil and there are many branches of philosophy.

This task looks at, a branch which deals with questions about how people behave and what is good or bad behaviour.

Hamlet challenges its audiences to questions regarding moral responsibility and determinism (in other words, the basis upon which we can be held morally responsible for things that we have done, and the extent to which we have any choice or free will in doing those things).

Take a look at each of the **Child Dilemmas** in turn and think about what your response to it is. Remember, that whilst you might have a mixture of responses, and perhaps even sympathise with some of them, the purpose of this task is to think about ethics – the philosophy of right and wrong behaviour.





# HAMLET

## Child dilemmas

1. I'm in trouble at school: My friend told me to steal a book from the school library and I did it. But I've told the teacher that my friend told me to do it. I think my friend is responsible and not me. Am I RIGHT or WRONG?
2. Yesterday, I sleepwalked downstairs to the kitchen and ate my sister's chocolate bar in my sleep. I don't remember doing it, so I shouldn't feel guilty about eating it. Am I RIGHT or WRONG?
3. My sister really annoys me. She ripped up my homework project and laughed in my face. I was so furious that I trashed her bedroom. My mum was upset and said, "That's not like you!" I agree. A red mist of anger came down over me and it was the red mist that was responsible, not me. Am I RIGHT or WRONG?

On the RIGHT/WRONG table below, note your thoughts - is it clearly RIGHT or WRONG or might it be a combination of both?

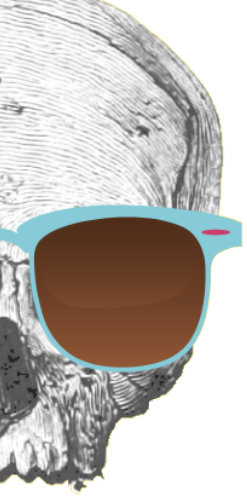


# HAMLET

**RIGHT**

**WRONG**





# HAMLET

Now take a look at the **Hamlet Dilemmas**. Each of these three dilemmas match one of the Child Dilemmas. Can you pair them up?

## Hamlet Dilemmas

- 1.If the ghost told Hamlet to kill Claudius and Hamlet thought that Claudius was behind the curtain, who is responsible for the death of Polonius? Hamlet or the Ghost?
- 2.If Hamlet is confused and cannot really remember stabbing through the curtain, is he responsible for killing Polonius?
- 3.If Hamlet is filled with anger when he stabbed through the curtain, is he responsible or is it the anger which is responsible for his crime?

Using the **Balanced Argument Sentence Starters** below, and in full sentences, write down what you think about Hamlet's behaviour...

E.g. Some people might argue that Hamlet was responsible for the death of Polonius because.... However, I feel that ....

The aim is to understand that there can be perspectives with either viewpoint (RIGHT AND WRONG) and to have a go, using the sentence starters, at writing some of these opinions down.

## Balanced Argument Sentence Starters

Some people believe that...  
Others think that...  
Whilst some argue that...  
On the one hand...  
Many maintain that...  
On the other hand...  
Alternatively...

It is certain that...  
It is clear that...  
But other facts show...  
On the contrary...  
It could be argued that...  
There is no doubt that...  
However...



# HAMLET

## Exploring further

**If you are hungry for more of Hamlet, there have been many different interpretations of the play, see below for a few ideas of places that you might want to continue with your students.**

### Free online plays

- RSC 2016 production directed by Simon Godwin with Paapa Essiedu is free on BBC iplayer as part of the Culture in Quarantine programme. Find that [here](#)

### Films

- The Lion King (1994)
- Kenneth Branagh's version (1996)
- Michael Almereyda's version with Ethan Hawke set in a modern Denmark Corporation in New York (2000)
- Stoppard's 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead' for older pupils (1990)
- Andrew Scott's Almeida production

### Books

- 'Mr William Shakespeare's Plays' animated stories and 'Tales from Shakespeare: The Bard's Greatest Plays' both by Marcia Williams
- 'The Shakespeare Stories' by Andrew Matthews and Tony Ross
- 'The Dead Father's Club' by Matt Haig (a modern novel version)
- Reading around the context of writing the play in James Shapiro's book '1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare'

