

# HAMLET

## Character Notes

### 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 played 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.

### 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.

**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.