

**FOLGER THEATRE**

William Shakespeare's

**HAMLET**

Directed by Joseph Haj

April 21 - June 6, 2010

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Folger SHAKESPEARE  
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# The Court of Norway

# Hamlet

# The Players



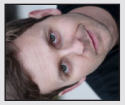
Fortinbras  
Dan Crane\*



Player King  
Todd Scofield\*



Player  
Michael Glenn\*



Player  
Jonathan Lee Taylor

# Character Connections



King Hamlet (Ghost)  
Todd Scofield\*



Claudius  
David Whalen\*

Brothers

Spouse 2

Spouse 1



Gertrude  
Deborah Hazlett\*

Son



Hamlet  
Graham Hamilton\*



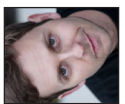
Voltemand  
Michael Glenn\*

Courtiers

Advisor



Polonius  
Stephen Patrick Martin\*



Osric  
Jonathan Lee Taylor



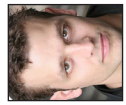
Rosencrantz  
Billy Finn



Guildenstern  
Dan Crane\*

Childhood Friends

College Friend



Horatio  
Lea Coco\*



Francisco  
Michael Glenn\*



Bernardo  
Dan Crane\*



Marcellus  
Billy Finn



Ophelia  
Lindsey Wochley\*

Girlfriend

Daughter

Son



Laertes  
Justin Adams\*



Gravedigger 2  
Stephen Patrick Martin\*



Gravedigger 1  
Todd Scofield\*

# The Danish Court

# The Soldiers

Che Wernsman\* Production Stage Manager  
\*Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

# The Graveyard

# Synopsis

**H**amlet, Prince of Denmark, is home from school to mourn the death of his father, King Hamlet, who died two months earlier. Only a month after his death, Hamlet's mother, Queen Gertrude, married the late king's brother, Claudius, and the two continue to reign in Denmark.

Shortly after, the ghost of the late King Hamlet appears to the soldiers and Hamlet's friend Horatio but disappears without speaking. Horatio describes the Ghost to Hamlet, who insists on seeing it for himself. When he is alone with Hamlet, the Ghost reveals that Claudius killed him. Hamlet promises to avenge his father's murder.

Meanwhile, Laertes, son of the King's advisor Polonius, is about to return to France. He bids farewell to his sister, Ophelia, warning her not to be swayed by Hamlet's attempts to woo her. Polonius gives Laertes a long-winded good-bye and orders Ophelia to cease all contact with Hamlet.

Hamlet begins acting strangely towards everyone in the castle. Claudius and Gertrude are greatly alarmed by this, but Polonius insists that the cause of Hamlet's apparent madness is Ophelia's rejection of him. Claudius and Polonius plot to spy on Hamlet in discussion with Ophelia. The conversation between the two is bitter, ending with Hamlet renouncing any love he ever had for Ophelia.

The King and Queen then ask Hamlet's friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to determine what is wrong with him. Hamlet quickly realizes that the royal couple set up the pair to spy on him. His friends confess to their assignments. In passing, they mention that a troupe of actors is at the palace. Hamlet decides to have the troupe stage a play similar to his father's murder. He will observe Claudius' reaction in order to determine his guilt.

The court watches the play, which depicts a murderer poisoning the king and marrying the queen. Enraged, Claudius orders the play to cease and everyone to leave. Once alone, Claudius kneels to pray, consumed

by guilt for his crime. Hamlet almost kills him but decides against it, afraid that if Claudius dies mid-prayer he will go to heaven.

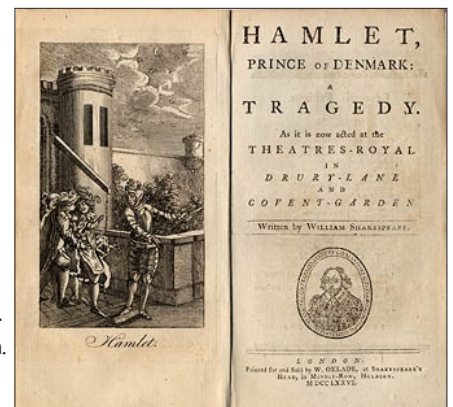
Hamlet meets Gertrude in her room and an argument ensues. Hidden behind a curtain and afraid for Gertrude's well-being, Polonius shouts for help. Hamlet, thinking the hidden figure is Claudius, stabs Polonius. The Ghost reappears to Hamlet to refocus him on the task of killing Claudius.

On the King's command, Hamlet, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern leave for England. While at sea, Hamlet learns that Claudius has sent a letter to the King of England with orders to kill Hamlet. Hamlet replaces these orders with letters requesting the executions of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet then returns to Denmark.

Back at the palace, Ophelia goes mad with grief. Laertes returns and learns that Hamlet killed his father, Polonius. Claudius, determined to kill Hamlet, convinces Laertes to avenge Polonius' death by dueling Hamlet with a poisoned blade. Claudius will also poison Hamlet's wine. Gertrude arrives and announces that Ophelia has drowned.

Hamlet agrees to duel Laertes, thinking it is only for sport. Gertrude mistakenly drinks the poisoned wine and dies. Hamlet is struck by Laertes' poisoned sword, but manages to cut Laertes with the same blade. Laertes reveals Claudius' plot. Hamlet kills Claudius and, knowing he is dying, asks Horatio to tell his tale. Hamlet and Laertes reconcile. Prince Fortinbras of Norway enters and conquers Denmark, but honors the dead Hamlet.

*William Shakespeare.*  
Hamlet, Prince of Denmark: A Tragedy. As it is now acted at the Theatres-Royal in Drury-Lane and Covent-Garden.  
London, 1776. Folger Shakespeare Library.



# About the Production

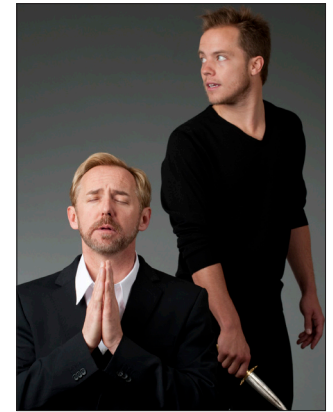
When imagining the environment for *Hamlet*, some people may think of a dark and winding castle, with fog swirling through its parapets. Joseph Haj, however, envisioned quite the opposite. Since Claudius is a man full of secrets which he does not want exposed, Haj believed the King would choose to live in a castle where it would be possible for him to know every event as it took place, “a bright world where secrets can’t live.” Haj saw the famous castle of Denmark as being “cold, hard, antiseptic, and scrubbed clean.”

Using Haj’s concept as a springboard, scenic designer James Kronzer created a set that is almost entirely white, with clean lines and a straightforward appearance. Props, furniture, and accessories are minimal and only used so far as function requires, thus eliminating any unneeded excess. Lighting designer Justin Townsend worked with Kronzer to light the stage with bright recessed panels that are built into the set.

Likewise, costume designer Jan Chambers chose to give the characters in the play a style that reflects the same clean and polished look. Characters are well-dressed, with a modern European edge to their fashion. And how does the ghost of Hamlet’s father (played by actor Todd Scofield) look other-worldly and separate from the rest of the characters of the play? Haj’s production team also includes a video designer, Francesca Talenti. Talenti worked with Chambers to incorporate a projector into Scofield’s costume - watch and see how the team chose to portray the ghost. Is it what you expected?

The music in the play is an interesting variation from the norm as well. Jack Herrick, a longtime collaborator with Haj, extensively researched Norwegian and Danish folk music. From his findings, he composed original music for this production of *Hamlet* that has Scandinavian roots but with a modern feel. Herrick and sound designer Matt Nielson worked together to blend Herrick’s live music onstage with Nielson’s recorded sound and other effects.

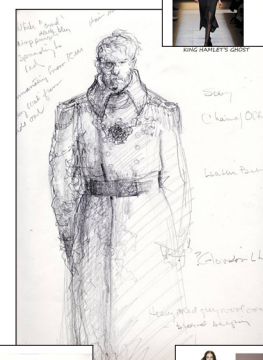
How will this bright, clean concept affect the story of *Hamlet* differently than a set more prone to dimly-lit corners and secretive hallways? Part of the beauty of theater is that the same story may be retold thousands of ways each time it is produced. Haj believes there is “no absolute *Hamlet*, just the exploration of it,” and it’s “the wrestling [that] is the point of the matter.”



David Whalen (Claudius) and Graham Hamilton (Hamlet) in *Hamlet*. Photo by James Kegley, Folger Theatre, 2010.



Left: Set rendering by James Kronzer for *Hamlet* at Folger Theatre, 2010. Bottom Right: Costume renderings by Jan Chambers for *Hamlet* at Folger Theatre, 2010. Characters top to bottom, left to right: Gertrude, Ghost, Hamlet, and Ophelia.



# Hamlet's Complicated Journey



George Cruikshank. Caricature of Charles Kemble as Hamlet confronting the Ghost. 1835. Folger Shakespeare Library.

Hamlet's journey through the play goes from one complication to another. What is going on in his mind? To examine Hamlet up close, audience members should listen carefully to his soliloquies (discourses in which characters reveal their thoughts without addressing a specific listener). As he moves through the play, Hamlet's soliloquies provide the audience with a glimpse of Hamlet's innermost thoughts.

**“O, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt, / Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew...” – 1.2.133-164.**

Hamlet is faced with his feelings towards his mother concerning his father's death and Gertrude's marriage to his uncle. He laments the current state of things at court. He is troubled by the contradiction between his sense that his parents were very much in love and his mother's hasty marriage only one month after his father's death.

**“O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I...” – 2.2.577-634.**

By 2.2, Hamlet has seen his father's ghost, who has told him of his murder and has charged Hamlet to kill Claudius in revenge. Hamlet admonishes himself for not acting on the news. He observes that an actor can summon up a depth of feeling for something he barely knows about, while Hamlet has such a powerful motive to act and yet has done nothing. By the end of the soliloquy Hamlet has worked out his first step towards action: he will plot a trap for Claudius that will expose him as a murderer.

**“To be or not to be – that is the question...” – 3.1.64-98.**

By this point, Hamlet's inner-conflict is almost too much to bear. Here, Hamlet contemplates suicide in order to bring an end to the pain of life, particularly the pain he is experiencing. Yet he ultimately reasons it is better to live than face the fear of the unknown: death.

**“How all occasions do inform against me / And spur my dull revenge...” – 4.4.34-69.**

By 4.4, Hamlet has found the courage to avenge his father by killing Claudius, no matter the consequences. On observing the reckless abandon in which Fortinbras pursues his goals for honor's sake, Hamlet is ready to do what must be done. He resolutely concludes, “My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth!”

Watch and listen to Hamlet. Is he avoiding taking any action to avenge the murder of his father until the very last moment possible? Or is he working through all of the questions and inner-conflicts he has before taking his revenge?

## **Why doesn't Hamlet automatically become King of Denmark?**

There are many arguments as to the nature of Hamlet's succession. It was typical in an elective monarchy, such as Denmark's was at the time, that the eldest son of the former king would be elected to the throne by a counsel of nobleman. However, in this case the counsel may have believed Hamlet unfit to rule, either under the manipulative influence of Claudius or based on their own assessment. Some say that Shakespeare may not have been aware of Denmark's elective monarchy, therefore intending to imply that Hamlet's right to the throne was unfairly seized by Claudius. In a hereditary monarchy this would have been the case, as by right of male primogeniture (the eldest son automatically taking the crown) Hamlet should have been king. In either case, Shakespeare makes it clear that Hamlet feels slighted and has all the more reason to plot his revenge.

# Hamlet's Friends: Honest Horatio and the Two-Faced Twosome



Robert Smirke. *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene 4. Ink drawing, ca. 1783. Folger Shakespeare Library.

Sometimes the only people left to turn to in times of trouble are your friends, but what if those friends aren't really friends at all? How do you know whom you can trust?

Hamlet has three friends in the play: Horatio, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern grew up with Hamlet at Elsinore, and Horatio is a friend from Wittenburg, where Hamlet studies. Horatio is the friend that Hamlet chooses to trust, asking him to keep the secret of his father's ghost, and Hamlet's "antic disposition." He leaves Horatio the hard task of telling Hamlet's story to the masses after his death. When Horatio brings Hamlet to the ramparts to view the ghost, he tries to keep Hamlet from following the specter, worried that Hamlet might be harmed physically or mentally. Horatio seems to genuinely care about Hamlet, going so far as to try to kill himself when Hamlet's death is inevitable.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, on the other hand, are no better than Claudius' henchmen. They might have grown up with Hamlet, and he enjoys their wit, but they are in Claudius' employ to watch Hamlet and glean information from him. Hamlet picks up on this, and takes offense that they think he is so easy to manipulate. They are sent after Hamlet when he kills Polonius, but they do not appear to really care about Hamlet's mental state after committing a murder; they're just following orders. When they attend him on the ship to England, he snatches their letter from Claudius and remorselessly rewrites it so that they will be sentenced to die.

Hamlet seeks truth and honesty in those around him – he asks Ophelia if she is honest, and he wants his mother to confess her guilt – so the behavior his friends exhibit is important to him. Horatio doesn't hesitate to say why he has come to Elsinore, and cares about how Hamlet is doing. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern show their falseness just as quickly by lying to Hamlet about their purpose. Based on our production, whom would you trust if you were Hamlet?

## Who is this Fortinbras guy, anyway?

Prince Fortinbras of Norway has raised an army to reclaim lands lost by his father to Hamlet's father. Hamlet observes the progress of the Prince of Norway and implies a desire to be more like Fortinbras: Hamlet admires Fortinbras' willingness to do battle while he has not yet avenged his own father's murder. Hamlet admires the qualities of nobility and honor that Fortinbras exhibits, qualities Hamlet feels he lacks. At the end of the play, Hamlet recommends Fortinbras be named the next king of Denmark. With Fortinbras we are reminded that there is a world beyond the castle, a world of mass political relations and manipulations which are juxtaposed against the interpersonal relations and manipulations. Their stories have some parallels in that, like Hamlet, Fortinbras' father was a king and both are nephews to the current rulers of their respective lands.



John Barrymore as *Hamlet*. Autographed photo, 1922. Folger Shakespeare Library.

# The Women of Elsinore



Above: William Salter Herrick. Hamlet in the Queen's chamber. Oil on canvas, ca. 1857. Bottom Right: Samuel James Bouverie Haydon with the collaboration of Francis Seymour Haden, after a drawing by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Hamlet: Ill, I. Ophelia returning the gift to Hamlet. Print, ca. 1880. All images Folger Shakespeare Library.

For Prince Hamlet, virtue is paramount to a woman at court. Hamlet views Queen Gertrude and Ophelia, both of the women he loves, as tainted by their actions, the antithesis of the moral excellence he expects. Yet both Gertrude and Ophelia appear shocked, distressed, and heartbroken at Hamlet's verbal abuse and poor treatment. This leads to the question: do Gertrude and Ophelia's actions play in favor of Hamlet's well-being or against it?

"Frailty, thy name is woman!" Hamlet explodes at the thought of Gertrude's marriage to his uncle. Is Gertrude frail? Or does she exhibit strength in her survival instinct to accept Claudius as her husband? As a woman of the 16th century, Gertrude's wealth and power extended only as far as her closest male relation. Is Gertrude as selfish as Hamlet portrays her, or does she do it all for the love of her son? Based on Gertrude's doting at the beginning of the play, it seems she and Hamlet had a caring relationship prior to his father's death. By marrying Claudius she ensures that Hamlet, though not king today, might be the next in line. Does Hamlet's anger blind him to the possibility that Gertrude marries his uncle to preserve their lives in Claudius' kingdom? She certainly means no ill will as she takes a fatal drink to toast Hamlet's good fortune.

Ophelia's affections for her kinsmen are clear throughout the play. She is close enough to her father and brother that she heeds their advice, and she sincerely grieves the loss of Polonius. Unfortunately, Ophelia is caught in the middle of the ensuing battle between Claudius and Hamlet. She betrays Hamlet by obeying her father in the plot to spy on him. Yet Ophelia seems bewildered when Hamlet denies his love for her and then openly flirts with her during the Players' performance. Does Hamlet truly love Ophelia but reject her in order to protect her? Or does he only see her deception and fully intends to drive her mad? Is Ophelia shrewd enough to play games with Hamlet's affection, or is she simply a dutiful daughter who is also in love with the Prince? Certainly, Ophelia's loss of wits and subsequent suicide are a clear indication of a heart broken by the men who matter most to her.



The women in *Hamlet* find themselves in sticky situations at the hands of their male relations. Both may be viewed as mere pawns in the hands of the ambitious and scheming men of the play. Or perhaps they are equally calculating in their steps and missteps to protect their loved ones and themselves.

## When Ophelia goes mad, why does she obsess over flowers?

Shakespeare often mentions plants and flowers for their symbolic meaning, which an Elizabethan audience would have understood. Today, flowers are often given to loved ones to show affection, such as red roses for love. But in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare uses the flowers that Ophelia gives away to indicate her disturbed state and hidden feelings. In 4.5, Ophelia gives **rosemary** ("for remembrance") and **pansies** ("for thoughts") to Laertes in remembrance of their murdered father. More controversial flowers such as **fennel** (false flattery, deceit or frailty) and **columbine** (folly) are given to the King and Queen for their perceived offenses to Ophelia's family. The **violets** that wither away with her father's death symbolize her loss of faithfulness. And the **rue** that Ophelia gives to Queen Gertrude and keeps for herself indicates a shared sorrow. There is no indication in the text as to whom the **daisy** (for innocence) is given. Who do you think Ophelia gives the daisy to and why?

# The Endless Mirror Up to Nature: The Play within the Play



One of the most interesting plot devices in *Hamlet* is the play-within-a-play, where a troupe of actors comes to Elsinore and is employed by Hamlet to present a play of his choosing to the court. The play, he believes, will prove his uncle's guilt for the murder of the king.

Hamlet asks a player to recite a piece about the fall of Troy and marvels that the player is able to give a moving speech for people he has never met. Hamlet, on the other hand, is unable to speak to anyone about his father's murder and cannot muster the conviction to follow through with his revenge.

In the world of theater, it is from this scene that Shakespeare's inside-jokes for actors are often quoted. Hamlet is a very bossy director, going on for lines and lines about how he wants the players to perform this play exactly as it is written (no going out of the script for laughs), to perform subtly and not overact, to speak clearly and loudly, and to be as natural as possible. Do you think Hamlet is saying these lines, or is Shakespeare?

The play-within-a-play has been re-imagined in hundreds of ways in various productions of *Hamlet*. In the text, a king and queen speak to each other with many professions of love; the queen argues that, should her husband ever die, she would be as bad as his killer to marry again ("The lady doth protest too much, methinks," Gertrude comments). The king reclines for a nap and is poisoned by a relative of his who takes the crown and the kingdom. Hamlet uses the play to observe his uncle's reaction. Watch how he does so in our production. Do you think the play-within-a-play is used effectively?

## Why doesn't Hamlet just do it already?

It is a question that has been asked for centuries: after hearing of his father's murder from the visiting Ghost, why doesn't Hamlet immediately kill Claudius in revenge? There were many beliefs about the nature of spirits that would have shaped the ideas Shakespeare's audience held towards the Ghost in *Hamlet*. Protestants believed that there was no such thing as Purgatory and that, once humans passed from life to death, they went immediately to heaven or hell, never to leave again. Therefore, since a ghost could not be human, it could only be a good or evil spirit – an angel or, more likely, a demon who takes on human qualities in order to tempt the living. While Catholics would have agreed that true spirits of the departed could not come back to earth by their own free will, they did believe that such a miracle could occur if God willed it to be so. In that rare case, the consequences would be great not to heed the message the spirit brought. The only other option was that the 'ghost' was merely a hallucination of an unstable mind. With all of these factors to consider, Hamlet's uncertainty seems a little more reasonable. If you saw a ghost who looked like someone you knew, and it told you of important news to act on, would you go through with it?



Above: Alexander Christie. Hamlet finding the king at prayer. Oil on canvas, 1842. Top Left: Francis Hayman. The play scene from *Hamlet*. Pen and ink wash, ca. 1740-41. All images Folger Shakespeare Library.



# Activities



A. Duval after a design by Henry Fuseli. Hamlet and the Ghost. Watercolor, 1802. Folger Shakespeare Library.

## Exploring the Silent Scene

One of the most famous stage directions that Shakespeare leaves us is the silent scene in *Hamlet's* play-within-a-play. Exploring this story is a great way to physically engage students in *Hamlet*. Break the class into groups of four to five students each. Give each group a piece of paper that contains the stage directions to the silent scene in 3.2.145-156. Instruct groups to work together to tell the story as dramatically as possible, using their whole bodies. Every student must participate, and there is no narrator. After ample rehearsal time, reassemble everyone to perform their pieces for each other. It is helpful to play dramatic music (such as tango) as the students rehearse and perform their silent scenes. After all groups have performed, discuss the successful uses of visual storytelling in each piece and what each group's work highlighted about the story.

## Voices in a soliloquy:

### Listening to Hamlet's inner-voice

Hamlet is in such conflict in his "To be or not to be" soliloquy (3.1) that he seems to be arguing with himself. Allow students to get a sense of Hamlet's inner turmoil by splitting his lines between two readers, with each reader taking a side of his debate. Read the soliloquy aloud, and listen for the breakdown of the lines that indicate Hamlet's inner conflict. For example:

Reader 1: To be or not to be - that is the question:

Reader 2: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous  
fortune,

Reader 1: Or to take arms against a sea of troubles  
And, by opposing, end them.

Reader 2: To die, to sleep –  
No more – and by a sleep to say we end  
The heartache and the thousand natural  
shocks  
That flesh is heir to –

Reader 1: 'Tis a consummation  
Devoutly to be wished.

This activity may be done as a class, or students can work together in groups of two (for a more detailed look at this activity, consult *Shakespeare Set Free, Teaching Hamlet and Henry IV Part I*, pp.99-102). Allow groups to share their breakdown of the lines with the class and to discuss their choices.

## What if...

*Hamlet*, like many of Shakespeare's plays, is full of 'what-if's – unanswered questions that can influence choices made for a performance due to different readings of the text. For example:

"What if the ghost was really a demon in disguise, tempting Hamlet to do evil?"

"What if Gertrude helped Claudius kill King Hamlet?"

"What if Ophelia was pregnant?"

Read scenes 1.3.1-56 and 4.5.1-79. Come up with 'what-if's to influence how Ophelia's speeches could be performed by a classmate.

## Be a Director!

Shakespeare gives directors many clues to help with successful staging in the opening scene of *Hamlet*. Choose four students to be actors for 1.1.1-40 before the arrival of the Ghost. The rest of the class are the directors, offering suggestions which the actors then try out. There are no wrong suggestions; the idea is to include as many ideas as possible, then collectively make decisions about what works and what doesn't. Find words in the text that give clues to the mood, time of day, and atmosphere of the scene. Ask directors to think about the questions:

- What is the first thing the audience sees/hears?
- How do actors enter?
- How do actors move, stand, react to one another?
- Are any sound effects/music required?
- How would actors be dressed?

# Activities, cont.

## Famous Lines from *Hamlet*

*Hamlet* contains some of the most famous lines in western theater. Below is a list of some important lines from *Hamlet*, lines that help to set the tone, reveal inner thoughts, and move the story forward. Assign a line to each student. Give the class time to read the line in context, think about who is delivering the line and why, and decide what it means. Then have students explore the lines on their feet, making vocal and physical choices to convey meaning. Reconvene the class into a standing circle, and allow each student to step forward on their turn and perform their line for the group. Afterwards, discuss the meanings of each line and what the students might have discovered through their performance of it. Encourage students to memorize and listen for their line during the Folger's production of *Hamlet*.



*Monogrammist T.E. Ophelia. Oil on canvas, late 19th century. Folger Shakespeare Library.*

- "A little more than kin and less than kind."  
– Hamlet, 1.2.67
- "That it should come to this." – Hamlet, 1.2.141
- "This above all: to thine own self be true, / And it must follow, as the night the day, / Thou canst not then be false to any man." – Polonius, 1.3.84-86
- "He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders / Of his affection to me." – Ophelia, 1.3.108-109.
- "...one may smile and smile and be a villain."  
– Hamlet, 1.5.115.
- "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."  
– Hamlet, 1.5.187-188.
- "This is the very ecstasy of love..." – Polonius, 2.1.114.
- "Brevity is the soul of wit" - Polonius, 2.2.97.
- "Doubt that the sun doth move, / Doubt truth to be a liar, / But never doubt I love." – Polonius, 2.2.125-127.
- "Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't." – Polonius, 2.2.223-224.
- "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." – Hamlet, 2.2.268-270.
- "What a piece of work is man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable." – Hamlet, 2.2.327-329.
- "The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King." – Hamlet, 2.2.633-634.
- "To be or not to be – that is the question."  
– Hamlet, 3.1.64.
- "Madness in great ones must not unwatched go."  
– Claudius, 3.1.203.
- "Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind."  
– Ophelia, 3.1.111.
- "Heavenly powers, restore him!" – Ophelia, 3.1.153.
- "The lady doth protest too much, methinks."  
– Gertrude, 3.2.254.
- "...do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe?" – Hamlet, 3.2.400.
- "I will speak daggers to her, but use none."  
– Hamlet, 3.2.429.
- "When sorrows come, they come not single spies, / But in battalions." – Claudius, 4.5.83-84.
- "And will he not come again? / No, no, he is dead. / Go to thy deathbed. / He never will come again."  
– Ophelia, 4.5.214-217.
- "There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow." – Hamlet, 5.2.233-234.
- "It is the poison'd cup. It is too late." – Claudius, 5.2.319.
- "O villany! Ho! Let the door be locked. / Treachery! Seek it out." – Hamlet, 5.2.342-343.

# 15-Minute *Hamlet*

The Fifteen-Minute Play is a plot summary intermingled with quotations from the play. It is typically used to introduce students to the play or to prepare them to see a production. You can alter it as you see fit, invent a version of your own for a different play, or have your students create one. Try to keep it as short and simple as possible.

- Create cards for the quotations with the corresponding numbers, shown below, in bold. The cards should be large enough for three to five people to read simultaneously.
- Divide the class into groups and distribute the cards. Each group may have multiple cards.
- Give the groups five to ten minutes to prepare dramatic renditions of their line(s). They can read the line(s) as a chorus, individually, or in sub-groups, but everyone must speak part of the text. Encourage students to physicalize/dramatize the line(s) in some way. Using props is acceptable, but not necessary.
- When the rehearsal period is over, ask everyone to stand in a circle.
- The leader (you, or a student) stands in the circle, too, and reads aloud the script of the story, calling out the numbers of quotations where indicated and pausing for the group responsible for that quotation to step *quickly* into the center and perform it. The leader should keep a quick, steady pace - the activity is much more fun when it moves right along.

(**1. Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.**). A group of night watchmen and the scholar Horatio are on patrol when they are visited by a ghost of the late King Hamlet. Horatio demands (**2. Stay! Speak! Speak! I charge thee, speak!**), but (**3. 'Tis gone and will not answer.**).

Hamlet is still angry with his mother (**4. Frailty, thy name is woman!**), who married his uncle within a month after Hamlet's father's death. As Hamlet is brooding over the fate of his father, Horatio arrives and tells Hamlet about the ghost (**5. My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.**). Hamlet, excited by this information, vows (**6. I'll speak to it**).

The court councilor, Polonius, advises his son, Laertes, on many things (**7. This above all, to thine own self be true**) as Laertes leaves for France. Laertes has already had words with his sister, Ophelia, about Hamlet's attention to her (**8. fear it, dear sister**).

Horatio leads Hamlet to the Ghost, who motions for Hamlet to go away with it. Once they're alone, the ghost tells Hamlet (**9. The serpent that did sting thy father's life now wears his crown.**), meaning that Hamlet's uncle murdered his father. The Ghost asks Hamlet to (**10. Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder!**) and disappears, crying, (**11. Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me.**).

Hamlet begins acting strangely towards everyone in the castle. Polonius declares (**12. this is madness, yet there is method in 't**) and tells the king and queen how Ophelia rejected Hamlet's romantic advances, and that is the cause of his apparent madness. Claudius and Polonius plot to spy on Hamlet in discussion with Ophelia. They hide themselves behind a curtain near Hamlet.

As Hamlet contemplates life and death (**13. To be or not to be—that is the question**), Ophelia arrives. (**14. Soft you now, the fair Ophelia.**). Their conversation is bitter, and Hamlet tells her, (**15. Get thee to a nunnery.**). Afterwards, Claudius declares, (**16. Love? His affections do not that way tend.**).

Claudius and Gertrude have sent for Hamlet's old friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to find out what's wrong. Sensing his two former friends are spying for the King, Hamlet, distrusts them. He is, however, excited

# 15-Minute *Hamlet*, cont.

by their news of the arrival of **(17. The best actors in the world.)**. He schemes, **(18. I'll have these players play something like the murder of my father before mine uncle.)**. Hamlet plans to observe the King's reaction to the play in order to confirm his guilt.

Before the play is over, the King stands up in a rage and orders everyone out **(19. Give me some light. Away!)**. Hamlet's suspicions are confirmed. Consumed by guilt, Claudius kneels to pray. Hamlet almost kills him then but decides against it, afraid that killing Claudius mid-prayer would **(20. this same villain send to heaven.)**.

Gertrude sends for Hamlet, and an argument between them ensues. Hidden behind a curtain and afraid for Gertrude's safety, Polonius shouts for help. Hamlet thinks it is Claudius behind the curtain **(21. How now, a rat?)**, and he stabs Polonius, killing him **(22. Oh, I am slain!)**.

Upon learning of Polonius' death, Claudius fears his life is greatly in danger. He decides that he will secretly send word to England ordering **(23. The present death of Hamlet.)**. Hamlet leaves for England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, yet on the way, Hamlet learns of the plot. He replaces the King's orders with a new request that the death sentence be carried out on his two friends. Thus, **(24. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead.)**. Hamlet then returns to Denmark.

Back at the castle, Ophelia has gone mad over the death of her father **(25. O, this is the poison of deep grief.)**. Laertes returns, angry about his father's death and grieved about his sister's insanity. Laertes vows, **(26. Let come what comes, only I'll be revenged most thoroughly)**.

Claudius and Laertes plot that Laertes will kill Hamlet in a fencing match. They decide to exchange the blunt sword tip usually used for sport matches with one that is pointed and, as an extra precaution, the tip will be covered in poison. They will also poison a cup of wine, so that **(27. if he by chance escape your venom'd stuck, our purpose may hold there.)**.

Gertrude arrives and announces news of the sad sight she has witnessed **(28. Your sister's drowned, Laertes.)**. As the royal family mourns, **(29. Sweets to the sweet, farewell!)** Laertes curses Hamlet **(30. The devil take thy soul!)**. Hamlet insists that he loved Ophelia more than Laertes did.

Hamlet accepts Laertes' challenge to fence against Laertes. Watching the match, the Queen unknowingly takes a drink of wine from the poisoned cup. Laertes mortally wounds Hamlet, but Hamlet manages to grab the poisoned sword and strike Laertes as well. Laertes admits, **(31. I am justly killed with mine own treachery)**.

The Queen dies **(32. The drink, the drink! I am poisoned.)**. The dying Laertes explains **(33. The King, the King's to blame)**, and Hamlet kills Claudius, both stabbing him and forcing him to drink the poisoned wine. Hamlet dies soon after, and Horatio mourns **(34. Flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.)**. Fortinbras, King of Norway, arrives and takes over Denmark **(35. I embrace my fortune.)**.

# Additional Resources

## Folger Resources

[Shakespeare Lesson Plans](http://www.folger.edu/lessonplans) - [www.folger.edu/lessonplans](http://www.folger.edu/lessonplans) - Folger Education's featured lesson plans are updated every month. Search "Lesson Plans Archive" to the left for a complete listing of all of our lesson plans listed by play.

[Folger Theatre: Hamlet](http://www.folger.edu/hamlet) - [www.folger.edu/hamlet](http://www.folger.edu/hamlet) - Behind-the-scenes background on the play, images from our collection, artists talking about the play, and more.

[Shakespeare Set Free, Teaching Hamlet and Henry IV Part I](http://www.folger.edu/ssf) - [www.folger.edu/ssf](http://www.folger.edu/ssf) - Our publication features lesson plans, essays, and performance-based activities.

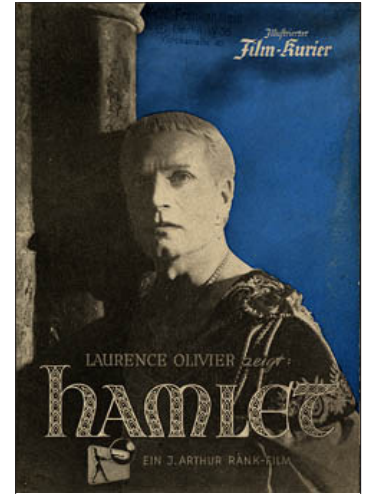
## Movies

[Hamlet](#) - Lawrence Olivier. Lawrence Olivier, 1948.

[Hamlet](#) - Kenneth Branagh. David Barron, 1996.

[Hamlet](#) - Franco Zeffirelli. Bruce Davey (exec. producer) & Dyson Lovell, 1990.

[The Lion King](#) - Roger Allers & Rob Minkoff. Walt Disney Feature Animation, 1994.



Film cover of Laurence Olivier zeigt Hamlet. Germany, 1948. Folger Shakespeare Library.

## Animation and Comics

[Shakespeare the Animated Tales: Hamlet](http://tinyurl.com/yddrcqr) - <http://tinyurl.com/yddrcqr> - Orlova, Natalya. BBC with Leon Garfield, editor, 1992.

[Manga Shakespeare: Hamlet](#) - Appignanesi & Vieceli. Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2007.

## Theatrical and Literary Adaptations

[15-Minute Hamlet](#) - Tom Stoppard. Samuel French Inc Plays, 1978.

[Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead](#) - Tom Stoppard. Grove Press, Inc., 1968.

[Elsewhere in Elsinore](#) - Caleen Jennings. Dramatic Publishing, 2008.

[The Complete Works of William Shakespear, Abridged](#) - Reduced Shakespeare Company. Applause Books, 2000.

[Gertrude and Claudius](#) - John Updike. Penguin Books, 2001.

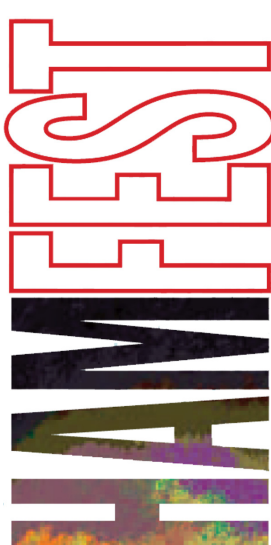
[Ophelia](#) - Lisa Klein. Bloomsbury USA Children's Books; 1st edition, 2007.

[Dating Hamlet: Ophelia's Story](#) - Lisa Fiedler. Collins Flamingo, 2003.

## For Fun

[Sesame Street's 'B' or not a 'B'](http://tiny.cc/qk4fs) - <http://tiny.cc/qk4fs> - Patrick Stewart expounds on the nature of the letter "B."

[The Klingon Hamlet](#) - Trans. Lawrence Schoen. Star Trek, 2000 - The Klingon Language Institute has translated Hamlet into the language spoken by Klingons in the film and television series *Star Trek*.



**HAMFEST** is a series of programs presented in conjunction with Folger Theatre's production of *Hamlet*. Learn more and purchase tickets at [www.folger.edu/hamfest](http://www.folger.edu/hamfest).

**Hamlet: Now I Am Alone.** Mondays, May 17 & 24 at 7:30pm. Award-winning actress **Kate Eastwood Norris** presents her one-woman workshop performance of *Hamlet*. \$15.

**Maidens Who Don't Float.** Friday, May 21 at 6:30pm. **Sarah Schmelling**, author of *Ophelia Joined the Group Maidens Who Don't Float*, discusses her humorous "retelling" of *Hamlet* inspired by Facebook. Free.

**Hamlet in Voice and Verse.** Tuesday, May 25 at 7:30pm. Shakespeare's classic is explored and sampled with actors from Folger's *Hamlet* and singers from **Washington National Opera**'s concurrent production of Ambroise Thomas' *Hamlet*. \$15.

**Discovering Hamlet.** Monday, June 7 at 7:30pm. **Derek Jacobi** and **Richard Clifford** talk with filmmaker Mark Olshaker about his documentary *Discovering Hamlet* which chronicles Jacobi's direction of Kenneth Branagh as Hamlet with Clifford as Horatio. \$30.

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