



# Education Resources Pre-Production

STC Ed presents

## HAMLET

By William Shakespeare



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Education Resource written by Kerreen Ely-Harper and compiled by Education Coordinator Toni Murphy

#### KEY



AIM of exercise or section



Extension Exercises



Download and watch



Drama Exercises



English Exercises



Play online

### HAMLET

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### CREATIVE TEAM

**Director** – Naomi Edwards

**Set & Costume Designer** – Andrew Bellchambers

**Lighting Designer** – Verity Hampson

**Composer** – Steve Francis

### CAST

**Hamlet** – Sophie Ross

**Claudius/Ghost** – Lech Machiewicz

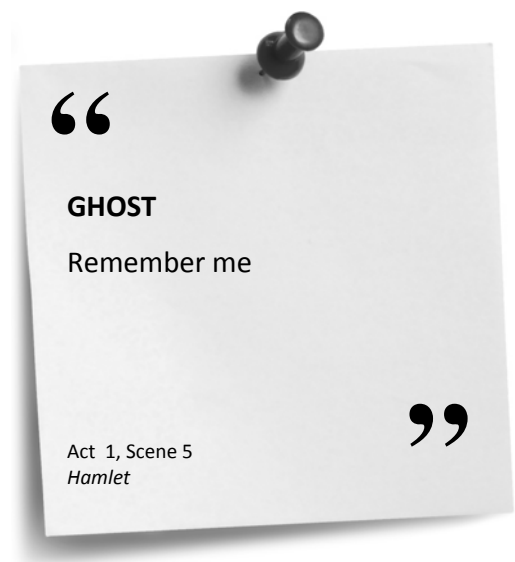
**Gertrude** – Sarah Woods

**Ophelia/Man** – Julia Ohannessian

**Polonius/Gravedigger/Osric** – Andrew James

**Laertes/Guildenstern** – Cameron Goodall

**Horatio/Rosencrantz** – Holly Austin



### THEMES

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Intergenerational Conflict

Revenge

Mortality

Gender & Power

### HAMLET

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## SYNOPSIS

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Prince Hamlet's father the late King Hamlet of Denmark has died two months before the start of the play. After King Hamlet's death, his brother, Claudius, becomes king, and marries King Hamlet's widow, Gertrude. The young Hamlet despises his mother's hasty marriage to his Uncle.

Hamlet is a student at Wittenberg University. His friend and fellow student Horatio investigates a reported appearance of a ghost by two night watch officers Marcellus and Barnardo. Later Hamlet joins them to see the ghost himself. The ghost takes Hamlet aside and tells him that Claudius murdered his father by pouring poison in his ear. Hamlet is enraged and begins plotting how to avenge his father's death. He is caught between a moral battle wanting to kill his Uncle outright and needing more proof before he can act within the law and within his own conscience.

In anger and frustration Hamlet seems to act like a madman, prompting Claudius and Gertrude, and their advisor Polonius to send for two of his student friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to spy on Hamlet and figure out why he is acting so strangely. Polonius's son Laertes is suspicious of Hamlet's interest in his sister Ophelia. Before leaving for school in Paris he advises her to be wary of the fickle Hamlet. When Hamlet meets with Ophelia he is openly hostile toward her. Hurt and confused she reports back to her father on Hamlet's bizarre behaviour. Polonius tells Claudius that Hamlet must be lovesick for Ophelia. Ophelia is ordered by her father not to associate with Hamlet anymore. Claudius fearing what Hamlet might do plans to send him to England. Before leaving, however, Hamlet engages an acting company to reenact King Hamlet's death before Claudius, in the hope of causing Claudius to admit to the murder of his father. Claudius flees the performance in an outrage but does not admit to the murder. Hamlet finds Claudius alone praying and goes to kill him but retreats at the last moment. Gertrude tries to reason with her son while Polonius is hiding from him behind a curtain in her room. Hamlet mistaking Polonius for Claudius kills him through the curtain. Claudius responds by sending him immediately to England, accompanied by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with orders from Claudius that the English kill Hamlet as soon as he arrives.

After Hamlet leaves, Laertes returns from France, enraged over Polonius' death. Ophelia descends into madness over the loss of her father and Hamlet's affection. While picking wild flowers by a stream she falls and drowns. Laertes seeks revenge for his father and sister's death by plotting to kill Hamlet. On route to England, Hamlet finds the orders for his murder and changes them to order Rosencrantz and Guildenstern deaths. Hamlet is then kidnapped by pirates who return him to Denmark for a ransom. Claudius is now desperate to remove his troublesome nephew and arranges a sword duel between Laertes and Hamlet. He gets Laertes to agree to poison the tip of his sword. As a backup precaution, Claudius also poisons the victory cup just in case Hamlet wins. During the fight, the poisoned drink is offered to Hamlet, he declines, and instead Gertrude, drinks it despite Claudius attempts to stop her. Laertes, losing to Hamlet, scratches him with the poisoned sword to ensure Hamlet's death. Hamlet then switches swords with Laertes, and cuts and poisons him. Gertrude screams that she has been poisoned and Laertes, dying, admits of Claudius' treachery. Hamlet then kills Claudius and Laertes dies. Horatio wants to commit suicide out of sorrow, but Hamlet entreats him to tell the story of King Hamlet's death and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's deaths to the court. Fortinbras, the prince of Norway, arrives from conquest of England, and Hamlet's last dying wish is that Fortinbras become the new King of Denmark.

### **Consider**

Beneath the revenge plot lies a story about a son's grief for the loss of his father.

In the first half of the play Hamlet is consumed by guilt and fear of retribution for crimes he has not committed yet.

Hamlet is a son obligated to satisfy his father's ghost's request not to be forgotten.

All Shakespeare plays consistently examine family conflict through dramatizing the efforts of parents to control their children and the dilemma of children on whether to suffer obedience or rebel.

The endings of Shakespeare's tragedies involve multiple deaths and the old leadership being replaced by the new.

### **HAMLET**

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## HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

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*Hamlet* was first staged around 1601. The play is considered to be a turning point in Shakespeare's career with the creation of a hero of such subtlety and complexity not seen before on the Elizabethan stage. Theorist Harold Bloom declared Hamlet as 'the invention of the first human'. Hamlet's internal examination of the actions of his mind (rather than just the sword) marked the beginning of three-dimensional characterization.

Shakespeare was living and writing in uncertain times. *Hamlet* signified the accompanying uncertainty of a new century with a conflicted and questioning character 'sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought' in a politically corrupt, turbulent and changing society. For both Hamlet and Shakespeare there was always something 'rotten in the state'. Queen Elizabeth 1 was nearing the end of her reign, capitalism was fast emerging, and the threat of religious war between Catholics and Protestants at home and abroad was ever present.

An actor and company 'sharer' (shareholder) Shakespeare's theatre company the Lord Chamberlain's Men operated in a highly competitive and uncertain market. Theatre companies relied on patronage of the wealthy for survival. Although the Chamberlain's Men became London's premier acting troupe with permanent residence at the Globe Theatre they were under constant scrutiny by government authorities and plays were closed (or edited by demand) should they be deemed offensive or threatening to the ruling authorities.

Shakespeare's only son Hamnet died in 1596 at the age of eleven of the bubonic plague. There are no recorded elegies or records left by Shakespeare of his feelings toward Hamnet or any of his other children (daughters Susanna and Judith). There is much speculation about the connection between the writing of *Hamlet* and the death of Hamnet. Was the play a homage to Shakespeare's son? Was the writing of *Hamlet* (a son lamenting his father's death) a grieving father's way of dealing with the loss of his only son? With any work of art the relationship between the work and the author's personal life is complex and speculative. And in Shakespeare's case with so little evidence remaining about his private life we are left to wonder and imagine.

Shakespeare was around forty years old when *Hamlet* was first staged and befitting his age (the average life span for an Elizabethan was around forty seven years old) he is cited as having played the part of the ghost in one production.

What kind of actor do you think Shakespeare was?

How would he have approached playing the role of the ghost?

### **Consider**

Hamlet's words to the players "Suit the action to the word and the word to the action"

References: *The Lodger: Shakespeare on Silver Street* Charles Nicholl

*In Search Of Shakespeare* Michael Wood

*Shakespeare: the Invention of the Human* Harold Bloom

*The Death Of Hamnet and the Making of Hamlet* Stephen Greenblatt

### **The 'Female Hamlet'**

The 'female Hamlet' has become an enigma. Ever since the late eighteenth century, leading actresses such as Sarah Bernhardt (also the first Hamlet on film, 1899), Sarah Siddons, Asta Neilson and more recently Diane Venora (1983) and Angela Winkler (1999) and have played the role of Hamlet. Many of these performers have been involved in radical politics and theatre movements in Stalinist Russia, Poland, and Germany.

In theatre, film, and radio women have challenged the notion of Hamlet as exclusive to the male gender. The opportunity to play this cultural icon for many is viewed as a political act drawing attention to gender inequity, the lack of substantial roles for women and the often unspoken 'femininity' of Hamlet.

Reference: *Women As Hamlet: Performance & Interpretation in Theatre, Film & Fiction*  
Tony Howard, 2007

## Additional Resources



Read the Directors Notes: Why A Female Hamlet

<http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/hamlet>

*Elizabethan Education*

<http://www.elizabethan-era.org.uk/elizabethan-education.htm>

*Male Hamlets on film*

*Hamlet* Lawrence Olivier 1948

*Hamlet* Mel Gibson 1990

*Hamlet* Kenneth Branagh 1996

*Famous Productions of Hamlet by the Royal Shakespeare Company*

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/hamlet/past\\_productions/rsc\\_stage\\_1997.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/hamlet/past_productions/rsc_stage_1997.shtml)

<http://www.rsc.org.uk/explore/past-productions/hamlet/1948-2008.aspx>

*Ten Best Portrayals of Hamlet*

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2010/aug/22/10-best-hamlets-david-tennant>



*Sarah Bernhardt on film as Hamlet* 1899

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mp\\_v\\_dP8s-8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mp_v_dP8s-8)



**AIM: To understand and appreciate Shakespeare's use of language.**

POLONIUS: What do you read, my lord?

HAMLET: Words, words, words ...

*Hamlet Act 2, Scene 2*

Shakespeare loved words and so did his audience. Literacy significantly increased during the sixteenth century. By 1600, at least one-third of the male population could read. Education was available to boys of the upper and middle-classes but not for girls. Girls of the noble classes were educated by home tutors (see *Taming of The Shrew* for Shakespeare's hilarious dramatization of home tutoring for girls), however not to the extent, as were their male peers. Hamlet and his friends are University students. Ophelia's brother Laertes is also at University while she remains at home under her father's watchful eye.

*Hamlet* has both comic and tragic elements that reflect many of the contrary qualities of the characters and the world represented. Formal verse typical of classical Greek and Roman revenge tragedy is juxtaposed against sharp witty puns, word play and satirical banter. Shakespeare has Polonius summarize the popular genre 'hybrids' available to him and other Elizabethan dramatists.

POLONIUS: The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable or poem unlimited. Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light...

*Hamlet Act 2, Scene 2*

Shakespeare's characters often speak both verse and prose.

**Blank verse (Iambic Pentameter)** consists of the alternation of light and strong stresses. Ten syllables, with light and strong stresses alternating, five light one and five strong ones. This rhythm is very close to our natural everyday speech.

### HAMLET

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**Prose** has no set rhythm. You need to follow the rhythm of a prose speech just as you would a speech in verse. Look for where the emphasis is and sense the rhythm from that. Apply the common sense rule.



### **Hamlet's Acting Lesson**

When a travelling group of Players visit Elsinore Hamlet instructs them in how to speak their lines and act their parts:



Speak the speech I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue:

But if you mouth it as many of our players do, I had lief the town crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus. But use all gently.

For in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness.

*Hamlet Act 3, Scene2*

What is Hamlet's message to the Players?

Why does Hamlet speak prose and not verse on this occasion?



### *Word At a Time*

**Stand** in a circle, speak one word per person – 'speak' 'the' 'speech' etc – aim to make sense and maintain the flow of thought.

**In threes – link arms**, speak three words to make a phrase - 'Speak the speech' 'I pray you' and so on.

**Repeat** but keep changing groups of three to keep the words moving around the circle.

**Try** different variations with groups of five, seven etc

**What** do you notice about the rhythm of the speech?

**Where** is the emphasis?

**Test** out your ideas on the correct rhythm by putting the emphasis on the wrong word (for example 'speak THE speech').


+ **Extension** – one phrase per person (use punctuation as a guide), one sentence per person.  
**Play** with each word and say it in different ways. Fast, slow, whisper ...  
**Speak** the text as a whole group in unison.

**How** does it feel to say these words?

**Devise** physical gestures to accompany these words

+ **Extension** – In pairs: A - you are the 'bad actor'  
B – you are Hamlet instructing them how to perform.  
Repeat & Swap roles

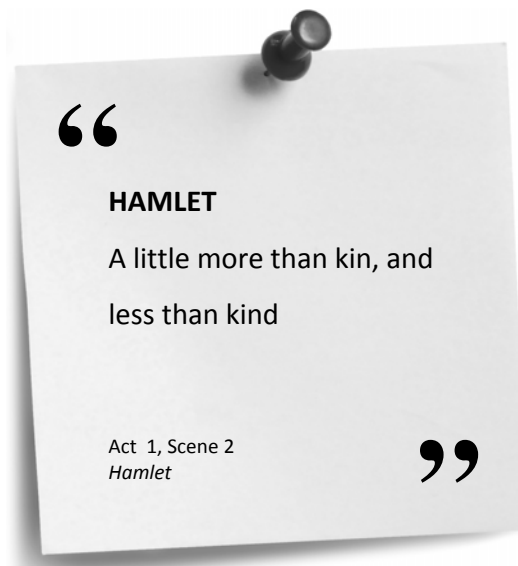
Reference: *RSC in Playing Shakespeare* by John Barton

 **AIM:** To be able to identify and understand how meaning is constructed in Shakespeare's text with reference to word usage, image and poetic metaphor.

HAMLET

To be, or not to be - that is the question:  
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune  
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles  
 And by opposing end them. To die, to sleep -  
 No more - and by the sleep to say we end  
 The heartache and the thousand natural shocks  
 That flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation  
 Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep -  
 To sleep - perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub.  
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come  
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil  
 Must give us pause. There's the respect  
 That makes calamity of so long life.

*Hamlet Act 3, Scene 1*



**Copy & put** up the text onto a whiteboard, sheets of paper up or project onto a screen so that everyone can see it.

**Give** out a copy of text to each member of the group.



**Walk** around the space, whisper the words to yourself.

**Allow** images and thoughts to emerge.

**Listen** to the words being spoken by others in the group.

**How** do the words make you feel?

**Discuss** the speech as a group.

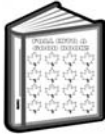
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**Refer** to the list of word definitions provided.

*Fortune* chance

*consummation* death

*rub* obstacle, impediment, hindrance

*mortal coil* death, fatal

*shuffled* get rid of, evade, thrust off, put aside

*pause* hesitation, suspense

*respect* fact, motive

*calamity* chaos

**Look** up the meaning of any other unfamiliar words not in the above list.

**CUT** up your text into key words and phrases.

**Place** your pile of words and phrases into the centre of the space (or in a empty container).

\*NB: key words and phrases can be pre-cut and provided to students



**Choose** words to play with (at least 10 per person, pending size of group). Choose words that interest you and you feel a personal connection with.



**Re-construct** a new version of Hamlet's speech with your group of words.

**Find** a physical action to accompany each word/phrase and say it in different ways.

**Present** your new version to the class.

OR

**Stick** the words/phrases onto a large sheet of paper.

**Pin up** for others to observe & discuss 'art gallery' style.

OR

**Collect/Film** images and create an iMovie/video clip – you may include the written words or have them spoken as part of a sound scape to accompany your movie version of the speech.



**Extension - Add** additional words from the original speech

OR

**New words** of your own choice

**Discuss** the different versions of the speech.

**Compare and contrast** the new with the original version.

By deconstructing & reconstructing Hamlet's speech you have gone through the same process as the writer – having to make decisions about word choice and placement, narrative structure and the problem of how to convey meaning.



**Reflection Question:**

How are Shakespeare's characters created through the words they speak?

**Compare and contrast** two different characters way of speaking. For example Hamlet and Polonius, Hamlet and Ophelia.

**Compare and Contrast** two different speeches by the same character. For example Hamlet when he is speaking to the Players in prose V's when he is speaking a soliloquy in verse)

**Consider Shakespeare's**

**Choice & Placement** of words – to make logical sense, to create an image, a poetic metaphor

**Use of Repetition** – look for patterns – what effect does repetition have?

**Rhythm & Pace** – slow, fast, moderate – when does the rhythm change?

**Flow of thought** – length of phrases - look for contrasts to indicate changes of thought, changes of mood.

“

**POLONIUS**

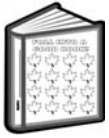
I will be brief. Your noble son  
is mad.

Act 2, Scene 2  
*Hamlet*

”



**AIM:** To examine issues of performance and interpretation of the role of Hamlet within a historical and social context.



There have been 'female Hamlets' from the late 1800's through to the present day.

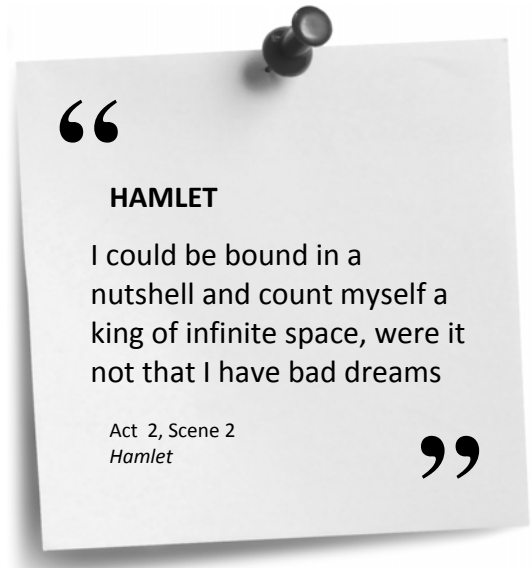
**Research** actresses who have played Hamlet

**Select** one/three actors for a close study.

**Collect** biographical information, opinions, images

**Share** your findings with others

**What** are there common elements between the actors?



### Reflection Question:

Why has Hamlet been played by female actors more than any other male character from Shakespeare's plays?

**List** the qualities demonstrated by Hamlet in the play that enables the character to be played by both male and female actors.

**Refer** to Naomi Edward's *Director's Notes* on her rationale for casting a female Hamlet:

'By making Hamlet female, we read the relationships, the metaphors, the struggle of someone trying to make sense of their emotions, a new world order and a call to action in a new and vibrant way'.

### DEBATE Who's For Vs Against a Female Hamlet



**When viewing the STC performance consider:**

**What** new things can you see in this Hamlet?

**How & Why** does a female Hamlet challenge ideas about how the role of Hamlet should be performed and interpreted?

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**AIM:** To make personal connections and explore Shakespeare's language through engaging with the text in a physical and active way.



*Shakespeare is Sexy*

**Form** two lines facing each other so that everyone is paired up. Groups form pairs in line facing each other as close as possible.

**Say** the line "Shakespeare is Sexy" in low volumes (a whisper) to each other simultaneously while stepping back, getting progressively louder (without shouting!).

**Repeat** stepping forward progressively becoming lower in volume. On repeating task ask for alternative phrases from the group "Shakespeare is ..."



**Extension** - Replace "Shakespeare" with "Hamlet is ...." and extend to other characters "Claudius is ..." etc



*Hamlet Sound Circle*

**Stand** in a circle. One person offers a movement action that is repeated by the next person & so on around the circle

**Add** a sound with the action & pass it around

**Repeat** the sound and action but this time the next person makes it bigger & louder each time

**Reverse** the direction of the circle progressively getting smaller & lower in volume

**Extend** into making a sound and action for Hamlet and then add in other characters

**Discuss** the different offers and interpretations of various sounds & actions to represent specific character traits.

**Replace** the sound with a word from the play & create an accompanying action to match the word i.e. 'question'

**Repeat** changing direction, and moving from big to small action, loud to soft in volume.

**Extend** into whole phrases 'to be or not to be that is the question'



Augusto Boals' *Hamlet Machine Variation*

**One person** goes into the space and makes a movement – a mechanical rhythmic movement that can be repeated and sustained and adds a vocal sound to go with it.

**Everyone** watches and listens in a circle around the machine.

**Another** person goes up and adds another movement and sound with their body to the machine. And so on until everyone is part of the machine.

**Repeat** the structure this time exploring accelerating and de-accelerating the rhythm – speed up, explode, slow down, collapse, break down

**Extend** to characters and scenes in *Hamlet*.

**Make** a Hamlet machine, Gertrude machine, Rosencrantz & Guildenstern – replace sounds with words and lines of text.

**Discuss** the different machines and interpretations of character.



**Extend** to themes in *Hamlet* - for example, love & hate, oppression & rebellion, action & inaction.

Reference: *Games For Actors And Non-Actors* Augusto Boal





**AIM: To explore and examine the editorial and interpretive choices made by the director and production designer.**

*The Old World Order*

Hamlet comes back home to find her father's office is being packed up and all her father's things are being boxed up and moved out to make way for the new regime which arrives in the form of Gertrude and Claudius' brand new mattress/marriage bed.

Hamlet hides away in the office as throughout the play the old is removed and the new comes in.

The play starts with a familiar and realistic space and gradually changes to reflect the transforming of Hamlet's world.



**Discuss** the symbolism of the marriage bed opening up to reveal the graveyard.

The petal drop when Ophelia dies.

The design shift from a recognizable world to the heightened and cosmic.

*Dumb Show*

A 'dumb show' was a term used in the Elizabethan theatre in reference to a pantomime where the actors performed without speaking words.

*The Murder Of Gonzago* is performed in the style of a dumb show.

Shakespeare's unedited script begins with the two sentinels on the battlements of the castle and the appearance of the ghost to Horatio.



**Discuss** the editorial decision to cut this scene.

How effective is the opening scene in the STC production played as a dumb show?

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*HAMLET arrives home.*

*HAMLET hears the party.*

*HAMLET goes into her dad's office.*

*HAMLET contains her grief.*

*OPHELIA comes from the party to find HAMLET*

*OPHELIA enters the office, observes HAMLET for a moment.*

*OPHELIA comforts HAMLET*

*OPHELIA tries to make HAMLET laugh.*

*HAMLET gives OPHELIA a present with a note*

*HORATIO comes from the party, enters the office, welcomes HAMLET.*

*The removalists arrive and begin emptying office.*

*GERTRUDE follows the removalists, carrying white lilies to store in the office.*

*GERTRUDE and HAMLET face one another. Neither speaks. GERTRUDE places the lilies on the desk.*

*CLAUDIUS and POLONIUS enter the office.*



**Discuss** the significance of the opening scene.

What story is being told?

**Consider**

Inner Thoughts of the characters

Body Language

What is written on the note to Ophelia?

Why do Gertrude and Hamlet not speak?



**Write** the missing dialogue for the characters following the stage directions.

The Dead Can Talk



**Compare and contrast** Act 5, Scene 1 in Shakespeare's original version where the scene is played by the two gravedigger CLOWNS with the adapted text from the STC production.

*Enter DEAD POLONIUS and DEAD OPHELIA*

DEAD OPHELIA            Is she to be buried in Christian burial, when she wilfully seeks her own salvation?

DEAD POLONIUS        How can that be, unless she drowned herself in her own defence? If I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act, and an act hath three branches – it is to act, to do, to perform. Argal, she drowned herself wittingly. Will you ha' the truth on't? If this had not been a gentlewoman she should have been buried out o'Christian burial.

DEAD OPHELIA        Why, there thou sayst, and the more pity that great folk should have countenance in the world to drown or hang themselves, more than this even Christian.

DEAD POLONIUS        Come, my spade. There is no ancient gentlemen but gardeners, ditchers and grave-makers.

DEAD OPHELIA        Who builds stronger than a mason, a shipwright or carpenter?

DEAD POLONIUS        When you ask this question next, say a grave-maker: the house he makes lasts till doomsday. Go get thee in and fetch me a stoup of liquor.

*Sings*

In youth when I did love, did love,

Methought it was very sweet

To contract-a the time for-a my behove,

O, methought there-a was nothing-a meet!



**Discuss** the directors' intention in having the words of the gravediggers/clowns spoken by the ghosts of Ophelia and Polonius?

How does it change the tone of the scene?

What is the dramatic irony being played out between the characters over the graves?

## + Extension

**Read/Perform** the scene continued with Hamlet jesting with the Dead Polonius.

HAMLET I think it be thine, indeed, for thou liest in't.

DEAD POLONIUS You lie out on't, sir, and therefore 'tis not yours.

For my part I do not lie in't, yet it is mine.

HAMLET Thou dost lie in't, to be in't and say it is thine.

'tis for the dead, not for the quick. Therefore  
thou liest.

DEAD POLONIUS 'Tis a quick lie, sir, 'twill away again from me to you. 120

HAMLET What man dost thou dig it for?

DEAD POLONIUS For no man, sir.

HAMLET What woman, then?

DEAD POLONIUS For none, neither. 125

HAMLET Who is to be buried in't?

DEAD POLONIUS One that was a woman, sir, but rest her soul, she's  
dead. Here's a skull now hath lien you i'th' earth three

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and twenty years.

HAMLET Whose was it?

DEAD POLONIUS This same skull, sir, was, sir, Yorick's skull, the King's jester.

HAMLET This?

DEAD POLONIUS E'en that.

HAMLET Alas, poor Yorick. I knew him, Horatio: a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath bore me on his back a thousand times, and now how abhorred in my imagination it is. 175



**Who** could the dead 'woman' be?

**Repeat** the scene playing the part of Dead Polonius as the gravedigger/Clown

**Discuss** the differences between the scenes when played in different character voices.

### To Cut or Not to Cut ?

Which ending to the play do you prefer?

HAMLET The rest is silence.

*HAMLET dies.*

OR

FORTINBRAS Let four captains  
Bear Hamlet, like a soldier, to the stage;  
For he was likely, had he been put on,  
To have proved most royally: and, for his passage,  
The soldiers' music and the rites of war  
Speak loudly for him.  
Take up the bodies: such a sight as this  
Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss.  
Go, bid the soldiers shoot.

*Exeunt marching, after which a peal of ordnance are shot off*

HAMLET

5

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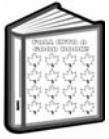
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In the STC production Hamlet has the last word. Why?

Many productions end with what has popularly become known as the 'first ending' with Hamlet's death.

**Discuss** the reasons why a director might choose ( or not ) to end the play at this point.



“

**HAMLET**

Rest, rest, perturbed spirit.

Act 1, Scene 5  
*Hamlet*

”



**AIM: To explore character point of view and the use and abuse of power in *Hamlet*.**

Exploring different points of view, missing characters and scenes can assist in increasing your understanding of the choices made by the dramatist in formulating and shaping the narrative point of view.

### Shakespeare's Point of View



'Shakespeare is sympathetic to Hamlet's right to avenge her father's murder'.

**Discuss** this statement with reference to Hamlet's choices and the circumstances surrounding the deaths of Polonius and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.



### Whose Point of View?

Groups of 4 sit in a close circle and name themselves ABCD.

A tells the story of Hamlet in past tense.



The others listen closely and ask questions to clarify and prompt the teller.

Teacher calls 'Stop' and asks B to take over the story etc.

Each person tells the story from a character point of view. Polonius talking to the court/  
Ophelia to her maid/Player telling his children/Claudius talking to his doctor/Gertrude to her  
hairdresser etc

Ref: Jonathan Neelands & Royal Shakespeare Company

### Spectators & Missing Voices

In Tom Stoppard's absurdist play '*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead*' the story of *Hamlet* is told from the point of view of minor 'spectator' characters.



**Write/Present** a scene that explores Ophelia's (OR Laertes) point of view.

**Consider**

Hamlet is not the only child grieving for a dead father.



### **HAMLET**

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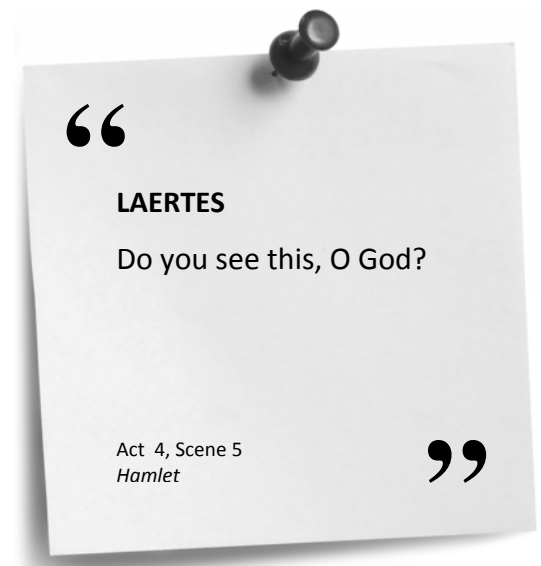


## Extensions

**Write/Present** a scene between Ophelia and Laertes immediately after they learn of their father's death.

**Write/Present** a soliloquy in iambic pentameter where Ophelia debates Hamlet's contradictory behaviour.

**Write/Present** a scene of a 'missing character' who does not appear in the play.  
For example, a servant, Ophelia's mother, Yoric.

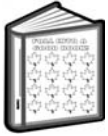






**AIM: To increase understanding of the cause and effect tragedy-revenge plot structure in *Hamlet* through another text based form.**

### *Creative Coroner's Report*



**Prepare** a written report for the Chief Coroner of Elsinor, Denmark on the unexplained death of OPHELIA.

Was Ophelia's death a suicide, accidental, due to illness, the effects of drugs or alcohol? How did she die and why?

You must prove causality 'sufficient causal link' between the cause and effect of the death of the character, Ophelia.

NB: Causality is the relationship between an event (the *cause*) and a second event (the effect), where the second event is understood as a consequence of the first.

Your report you must include:

Manner of Death;

Contributing Factors;

Describe the events and circumstances leading to the event of death;

Specify any concerns of abuse, neglect, or suspicious circumstances;

Any relevant additional information that may assist the Coroner in determining the cause of Ophelia's death.

Include evidence such as:

-Witnesses statements – characters who knew Ophelia, were members of her family, attendants of the Court etc

-Direct quotes from Shakespeare's text to support the characters witness statements (including quotes from Ophelia herself)

-Expert witness statements – psychologist, doctor, clairvoyant etc

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### Creative DPP (Director of Public Prosecutions) Report

**Prepare** a written report to the DPP on the criminal deaths of Hamlet, King Claudius, Queen Gertrude and Horatio.

As this is a posthumous investigation (due to the fact that all the suspects are deceased) you must prove beyond reasonable doubt the cause of death and those responsible.

Your report you must include:

Manner of Death;

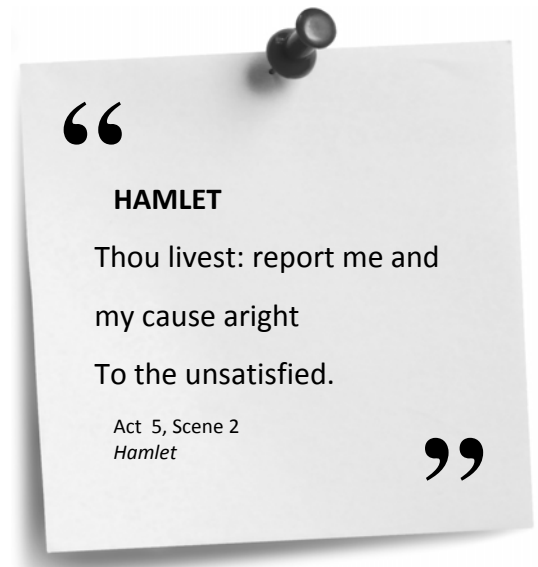
Contributing Factors;

Describe the events and circumstances leading to the event;

Any relevant additional information that may assist the DPP in determining the outcome of the case.

Include evidence such as

- Witness Interviews – characters who were acquainted with the deceased, such as members of family, friends, court attendants
- Direct quotes from Shakespeare’s text to support witness statements (including characters deceased and deceased suspects)
- Expert witness statements – guards, police, forensic pathologist etc





**AIM:** To investigate character voice and use of language in *Hamlet* through new technologies and media texts.

In *Hamlet* everyone is under surveillance, everyone is watching everyone, sending messages, making and reporting observations to one another.

### Twitter Dialogue



**Write** in the voice of one of the characters in the style of a Twitter message.

**Give** your character a twitter pseudonym name.

**Write/Send** 5 Tweets to existing and 'missing' characters, and/or the audience.

For example:

Claudius & Gertrude tweet while watching the play.

Rosencrantz & Guildenstern tweet on Hamlet's behaviour.

Hamlet tweets on her dilemma of whether to take action against Claudius.

**Write/Send** response tweets.

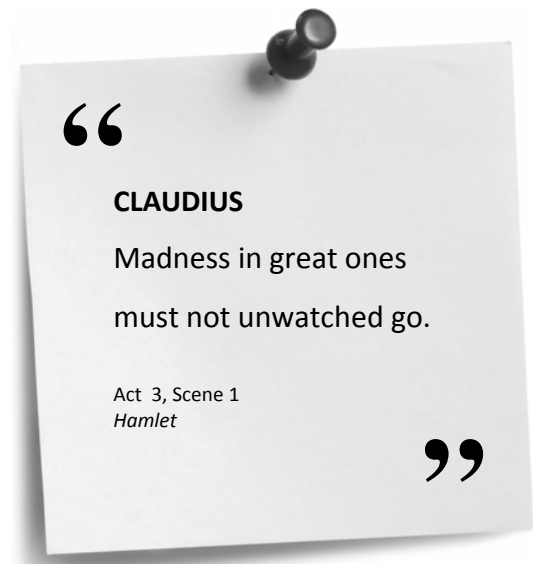
### SMS Dialogue



**Write** a dialogue in the voice of a character 4 x SMS on your mobile phone.

**Send** them, one at a time, to another class member (also in character).

**Respond** to the received messages.



### **Extension**

**Write & Perform** dialogue scenes between two characters drawing on the SMS, Twitter texts and responses to the messages.

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## Consider

Sending a message to the wrong character

A message being misinterpreted by the receiver character

Writing your messages in iambic pentameter or blank verse

Incorporating direct quotes from Shakespeare's text

## Blogging

Hamlet is one of the many of Shakespeare's characters who is popular with bloggers.



**Research** a Hamlet blogging site on the internet.

<http://thehamletweblog.blogspot.com/>

**Join in** or start a conversation.

**Share** your thoughts on a female *Hamlet*.

## Animation/Flickr Photo Stream



**View** 'Pineapple' the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Hamlet* inspired animation.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82EU4HVvKkY>

**Write/Design/Create** a 1 minute animation (video or flickr) featuring a female Hamlet.

## Director's Notes: Why A Female Hamlet?

Naomi Edwards

29.11.2010

This production of Hamlet is set now. Hamlet is a teenager now. And she's a girl. Why a female Hamlet? The reasons are personal and theatrical, not historical but reactionary.

In this production, Hamlet and her peers are Gen Y's. They have just finished school and are on the cusp of adulthood. At that incredible time of adolescence, and particularly as school finishes, the rules and structures, order and expectation that once defined your world are removed. You are asked to act and exist in an adult realm, whether you are ready or not. Then comes catastrophe. A young girl on the cusp loses a parent. The rupture to her identity and sense of self is profound, providing a powerful and psychologically rich engine for the play. The adults are no longer caring for their children. They have become an inconvenience to their plans, and functions of their treachery. To highlight the adult surveillance and manipulation of these adolescents for their own end heightens both Hamlet and Ophelia's tragedy. They are not equals in status or power to their parents and new parents. Young people today are faced with multiple truths in a corrupt world. Politicians don't offer a big vision any more, families are broken more than they are together and for the first time in history you are defined more by what generation you belong to, more than religion, culture or race. The battle between the generations for what will be inherited and to right the wrongs of the past feel especially potent for today's audience.

Everyone comes to Hamlet, both audience and artists, with an idea of who he is, why he acts - or doesn't act - the way he does, and can quote – and misquote – the famous lines, even if they have never seen or read the play. I want to free us as creatives from our previously held beliefs of what the play is about.

While you can argue that in Shakespeare's time, the women were played by boys as thus why not swap it, this gender reversal is placing a female into Hamlet's scenario to see what fresh truths can be revealed. By making Hamlet female, we read the relationships, the metaphors, the struggle of someone trying to make sense of their emotions, a new world order and a call to action in a new and vibrant way.

I don't believe that the dilemma of facing Hamlet is exclusively male. Women are just as capable of the expanse of thought, image and philosophy that Hamlet offers us. Both sexes of Generation Y are rich in ideas and knowledge, perspective and poise, but as a generation, they are often accused of lacking an emotional

### HAMLET

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wherewithal and courage to make their move in the world. This current generation of women are told they can do anything, they are indeed the expectancy and rose of their own fair state, and yet most will hit a point in life where politics confounds them, where they can't simply continue to grow and progress.

Flipping Hamlet's gender obviously impacts on the relationships with other characters. Ophelia remains female, and her relationship with Hamlet will be portrayed as a friendship, an inseparable bond between two best friends that is so common at this age, one of which the adult world is suspicious and worried about. With the play set now, concerns for Ophelia's chastity becomes euphemistic for suspicion of her sexuality. We only hear of Hamlet's and Ophelia's love from Polonius, he has interpreted letters and Hamlet's distraction as mad with love. With a parent questioning and challenging your sense of self so profoundly, being denied access to your best friend when they are mourning, and mercilessly being used as a pawn in Polonius' scheming against Hamlet, the rupture of Ophelia sense of self and isolation is intensified and makes more sense of her suicide than the romantic beautified image of heartbreak.

I have always identified with Hamlet when I read the play, but never in performance. I'm not sure if that is a gender based reaction, or based to the particular interpretations of Hamlet's character, or if indeed these things are intertwined. Nonetheless, I have never seen Hamlet played as a teenager, and never seen the result of a woman tackling the role. I am expectant and curious.

## **HAMLET**

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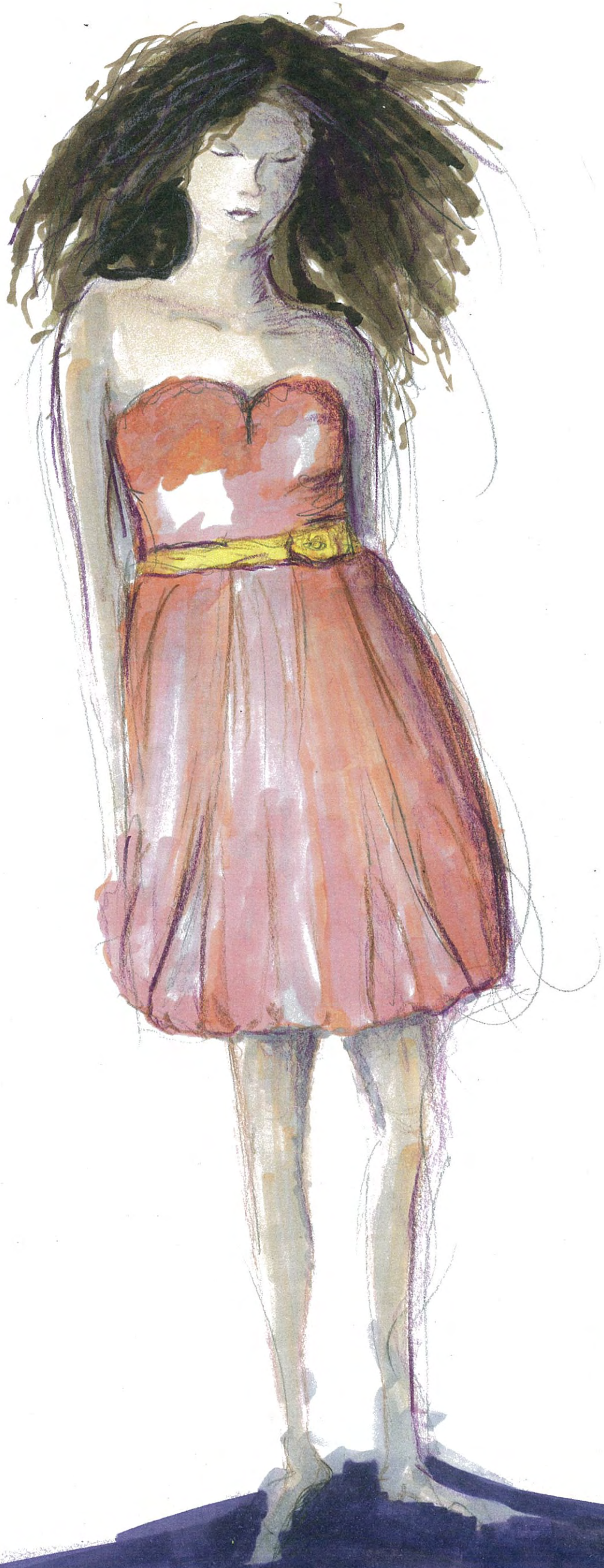
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HAMLET  
HAMLET S.T.C.  
AB



OPHELIA  
HAMLET S.T.C.  
10





HORATIO  
HAMLET  
ST.C  




LARTE'S  
HAMLET S.T.C.  
MA



ROSENCRANTZ  
&  
GUILDENSTERN  
HAMLET SITE  
AP



CLAUDIUS  
HAMLET S.T.C.  
AD



GERTRUDE  
HAMLET  
STC  
10



Polonius  
HOMLOT S.T.C

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