



GUTHRIE
THEATER

Theater in Focus

FILM CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS



Hamlet

Inside

Hamlet

by WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
directed by JOSEPH HAJ
April 8 – May 21, 2023
Wurtele Thrust Stage

This play was produced at the Guthrie Theater and filmed by HMS Media for distribution. The curriculum in this guide was developed by Guthrie Education for educators to use in their classrooms. Although designed with grades 6–12 in mind, the curriculum may be adapted for higher education.

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The Guthrie creates transformative theater experiences that ignite the imagination, stir the heart, open the mind and build community through the illumination of our common humanity.

Guthrie Theater Film Curriculum Guide

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PHOTO: JOHN CATRON AND REGINA MARIE WILLIAMS (DAN NORMAN)

A Note to Educators

We are excited to share the Guthrie Theater's filmed production of *Hamlet* with you and your students. This curriculum is designed to support educators in making Shakespeare's language accessible and the play's dramatic structure relatable. Activities and discussion questions may be modified and adapted to your unique classroom or educational environment. Feel free to adjust the length of an activity or modify discussion questions to meet your needs. The curriculum was written to cover the play sequentially in its entirety, but it is flexible enough to be applied in sections.

This curriculum contains various media resources and bonus digital content compiled in the appendix to this guide. Our hope is that these digital materials are easily accessible for you and your students. Students will need to access these media resources to complete At Home assignments over the course of the curriculum. In the classroom, we recommend using a projector or large TV screen to share the *Hamlet* film and digital resources, and we recommend using a Bluetooth speaker or other audio device to share the audio.

We hope this guide will be a useful addition to your existing curriculum and offer a deep dive into William Shakespeare's enduring tragedy. If you have questions, please email us at education@guthrietheater.org.

Thank you and enjoy!
Guthrie Education Team

Prologue: Guiding Principles

FOR EDUCATORS

Studying Shakespeare elicits a wide array of reactions, feelings and opinions. Establishing a safe, nonjudgmental, rigorously honest space is key. The objective of the first unit is to take the temperature of the class and reflect on their relationship with Shakespeare. This will offer a clearer idea on how to proceed with the curriculum and, optimally, start from a place of open-mindedness, curiosity and excitement.

FOR STUDENTS

Review the following guidelines with your students before answering some general questions (noting that these principles may be applied to the entire curriculum moving forward).

- **Anonymity is acceptable.** In certain activities, you will have the option to keep your responses anonymous if you prefer.
- **Your level of knowledge on the subjects does not matter.** It's okay to know nothing about Shakespeare and/or *Hamlet*, it's okay to know some things about them and it's okay to know a lot. There is always more to learn; Shakespeare scholars are continuously making discoveries!
- **All feelings are welcome and valid.** Some of you may feel dread or confusion. Some of you will feel overwhelmed. Maybe even the mention of Shakespeare seems scary or intimidating. Conversely, you may be excited or, at the very least, curious. Wonderful! Or perhaps this whole subject just feels uncool. All are normal responses. The point is: No feelings will be judged.
- **Learn and practice nonjudgmental self-awareness.** This includes your own feelings and the feelings of others. Feel free to ask: "Can I name this feeling? What are the thoughts that accompany it? What might it be trying to tell me?" Any answers to those questions are more valuable than no answers. By practicing nonjudgmental self-awareness, you may surprise yourself with discoveries about what you connect with and enjoy.
- **Ask questions and ask for help.** Parts of the play may make perfect sense, and some parts may leave you scratching your head. This happens to everyone! The language is 400 years old and can be very dense. Even people who have spent years reading, studying and performing Shakespeare's plays don't understand everything. Everyone needs help with it from time to time. You don't need to pretend like you get it.
- **Critical thinking is strongly encouraged.** There are no bad or wrong answers to questions concerning feelings and thematic comprehension. Similarly, no matter what may sound or feel like the best or right answer, what's most important is that you give an honest answer.
- **Speak with generosity and kindness.** When hearing the answers of your peers and responding to them, it is vital to keep feedback and discussions constructive and collaborative.



THE KEY PRINCIPLE

Honesty is the best policy.



PHOTO: THE CAST OF HAMLET (DAN NORMAN)

Getting Started

“The readiness is all.”

– Hamlet (*Hamlet*, Act Five, Scene Two)



ACTIVITY: TEMPERATURE CHECK

Suggested Time: 15 minutes

Use as many of the following prompts and questions as needed for the activity options below.

Prompts

- I have heard of *Hamlet*.
- I know a lot about *Hamlet*.
- I have no feelings, thoughts or opinions about Shakespeare.
- I am a beginner when it comes to Shakespeare, but I am interested to learn more.
- When I hear the word “Shakespeare,” I get excited.
- I am an expert when it comes to Shakespeare.
- Shakespeare plays are boring.
- Shakespeare’s language makes perfect sense.

Questions

- What was your first thought, feeling or opinion when you heard the word “Shakespeare” today?
- What was your first thought, feeling or opinion when you heard the word “Hamlet” today?
- Does the idea of studying classical literature excite or dismay you? Why?
- How familiar are you with Shakespeare? Which Shakespeare plays, if any, are you familiar with?
- How familiar are you with *Hamlet*?
- Have you ever seen a Shakespeare play performance or film adaptation? If so, which one? Did you enjoy it?
- Have you ever read or studied Shakespeare before? If so, which plays? When?
- What questions do you have about Shakespeare? About *Hamlet*?



ACTIVITY OPTION ONE: ONLINE TOOL

Using a data-sourcing classroom application of your choice, gather student responses to any/all prompts and questions above. Then have a class discussion about what came up. The suggested tools below allow students to remain anonymous if they choose:

- FigJam: www.figma.com/figjam
- Mentimeter: www.mentimeter.com
- Padlet: padlet.com

Step One: Input any/all selected prompts and questions into your chosen online application.

Step Two: Have the students submit their answers to as many as time allows.

Step Three: When all responses are collected, review them as a class.

Step Four: Reemphasizing our guiding principles, open the floor to a class discussion about the results: what they noticed; what, if anything, has changed for them, individually or collectively; and what additional questions, thoughts, feelings or opinions may have arisen from the activity.

Step Five: Sum up what was learned and how it will inform you moving forward.



ACTIVITY OPTION TWO: OPINION SPECTRUM

Designate two opposing sides of the classroom: 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Strongly Disagree and halfway between the two points = Neutral. Following each prompt/question from above, have the students place themselves anywhere between the points that best reflects how they feel.

Step One: Have everyone start in the neutral location. Proceed with the first prompt, instructing students to move to a point between the two ends of the spectrum that best fits their response. Take a moment to assess. We recommend beginning with a few rounds of warm-up prompts such as “Chocolate is the best ice cream flavor” or “I care about a specific sports team.” **OPTIONAL:** Ask the students to explain why they chose the point they did with the entire class or with a partner.

Step Two: Proceed with the rest of your selected prompts — or as many as time allows — one by one.

Step Three: When finished, reemphasize the guiding principles and have a class discussion about what was learned: what they noticed; what, if anything, has changed for them, individually or collectively; and what additional questions, thoughts, feelings, or opinions may have arisen from the activity.

Step Four: Sum up what was learned and how it will inform you moving forward.



ACTIVITY OPTION THREE: ONLINE TOOL

Choose a few prompts from the list above, and write each one on a large piece of paper or other surface around the room. Students will write responses to the prompts on sticky notes and place them on the section of wall or large piece of paper with the corresponding prompt.

Step One: Designate areas of the classroom for each of the prompts you choose.

Step Two: Read each prompt aloud and have students write their responses on sticky notes (one response per sticky note).

Step Three: Have the students place their sticky notes around the room near the respective prompts.

Step Four: Give students an opportunity to walk around the room to see their classmates' responses.

Step Five: Reflect on the activity by asking the students if they saw responses that were surprising, that they connected with or that were the same as their own.

Step Six: Sum up what was learned and how it will inform you moving forward.



READ: WHO IS SHAKESPEARE OR WHAT IS SHAKESPEARE?

Suggested Time: 15 minutes

As well known as William Shakespeare (1564–1616) is, we do not know much about him. We do know that he wrote 37 plays and 150 poems from 1585 to 1613 that are still taught and celebrated around the world to this day. Most of his plays were performed at The Globe Theatre in London in the late 1500s and 1600s, with anyone from merchants to monarchy in attendance. The most affordable tickets were standing room only — an area that encircled the stage like a concert venue with no seats that was exposed to the elements. People would stand and watch plays for up to four hours. The rich could afford to sit higher in comfortable galleries separated from the groundlings. Royalty would often occupy this area, and eventually the court would start inviting Shakespeare's company to perform personally for their own entertainment.

Shakespeare wrote about and in response to his political and social climate. Many plays were written during or after a transfer of political power. Case in point: *Hamlet* was written in the final years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, and the play parallels the fear and uncertainty that accompanies this shift. Shakespeare's work is often considered universal because it reflects recognizable archetypes based on real historical events and figures as well as themes such as war, family and power dynamics.

With history repeating itself, we see these same themes present in our world today. However, there is debate as to whether his plays can truly be considered universal because they were written from a Eurocentric perspective that excludes much of the global south. Women were not allowed to perform during Shakespeare's time, and characters were portrayed primarily by white men. Are Shakespeare's plays relatable to a 21st-century audience? Can women and people of the global majority really see themselves within the world of Shakespeare's plays?

Additional Reading in the *Hamlet* Play Guide (see appendix)

- Synopsis, setting, characters (page 4)
- Scene by scene (pages 5–6)
- Character map (pages 7–8)
- Selected glossary of terms (page 17)



AT HOME: TO TEACH OR NOT TO TEACH?



LINK

- Identify what traditional modes, clichés and tropes the podcast might be referring to. What is Shakespeare known for? What do we think is Shakespearean? Is there anything we do or see today that can be labeled Shakespearean?
- Nour El Gazzaz talks about using color-conscious casting in Shakespeare productions as one way to actively decolonize Shakespeare's work. There is debate on the use of color-conscious casting vs. color-blind casting — what is the difference? Are there advantages and disadvantages to both? Why do you think conscious and blind are the terms used to differentiate these two concepts? How does that simple adjustment in language change the meaning so drastically? How does this relate to the distinction between diversifying Shakespeare versus decolonizing?
- The podcast shares the perspectives of eight different scholars in less than 20 minutes. Most of them name a few different ways we can decolonize Shakespeare. Whose idea do you think would be most effective and why? Do you have any alternative thoughts or ideas on how to expand on one or more of the scholars' suggestions?

[illegible]



PHOTO: DAVID WHALEN AND MICHAEL BRAUGHER (DAN NORMAN)

Hamlet, Part One

“It harrows me with fear and wonder.”

– Horatio (*Hamlet*, Act One, Scene One)



ACTIVITY: SHARE AND REFLECT FROM UNIT A

Suggested Time: 10 minutes

Use as many of the following prompts and questions as needed for the activity options below.

Option One: Divide into small groups where you have at least one person for each question. Have the students share reflections from the At Home question they chose, and encourage them to learn from their peers about the other topics.

Option Two: Divide the students into three groups by the At Home question they chose. Invite them to compare and contrast their findings with those who responded to the same question. Then have each group share their reflections with the class.

Option Three: Have a class discussion where students can openly share what they learned and discuss any of the questions. This provides an opportunity for an open forum discussion or to answer clarifying questions.



WATCH: HAMLET, PART ONE

00:00:00–00:36:20

We invite you to pause the film at the timestamps below and have the students engage the plot points and themes of the play as they watch the story unfold. These pause points may be used as prompts for class discussions, partnered conversation or individual journaling.

Pause at 00:15:00

- Describe Hamlet's feelings toward King Claudius.

Pause at 00:25:55

- What can you infer about Ophelia's relationships with her brother and father from this scene?
- How does Ophelia respond to the advice she receives? How do you think the advice from Laertes and Polonius supports or contradicts Ophelia's goals or ambitions?

Pause at 00:36:20

- Why does Hamlet doubt or distrust the ghost of his father?



ACTIVITY: MODERNIZE SHAKESPEARE

Suggested Time: 20 minutes

Step One: Read Polonius' advice to Laertes in Act One, Scene Three:

*The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail,
And you are stayed for. There, my blessing with thee,
And these few precepts in thy memory
Look thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue,
Nor any unproportioned thought his act.
Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.
Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel,
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
Of each new-hatched, unfledged comrade. Beware
Of entrance to a quarrel, but, being in,
Bear't that th'opposèd may beware of thee.
Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice.*

*Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment.
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
But not expressed in fancy (rich, not gaudy)
For the apparel oft proclaims the man,
And they in France of the best rank and station
Are of a most select and generous chief in that.
Neither a borrower nor a lender be,
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
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.*

Step Two: Translate or modernize Polonius' advice. What is he advising Laertes to do or not do? Paraphrase the whole monologue or translate line by line.

Step Three: Discuss the following: Do you agree or disagree with the advice? Which parts feel relevant today and which parts feel outdated or like bad advice? What kind of advice have you received from a caregiver or elder in your life?



OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: COMPREHENSION CHECK

Suggested Time: 3-5 minutes



Watch

For a fun recap and comprehension check, scan the code and watch *only 0:00-1:02* of the “Kids Explain Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*” video from the Great River Shakespeare Festival. **NOTE:** The Guthrie’s production differs slightly from the one being discussed in the video.



[LINK](#)



OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: CLASS GLOSSARY UPDATE

Review any new words that the students wrote down from this unit and add them to your class glossary.



AT HOME: FRAILTY, THY NAME IS ...

People debate whether Shakespeare’s plays are misogynistic or a commentary on misogyny. Misogyny is defined as the “dislike of, contempt for or ingrained prejudice against women.” In Act One, Claudius calls Hamlet’s sorrow “unmanly grief,” and Hamlet exclaims, “Frailty, thy name is woman.” These are just two phrases using powerfully gendered language within the first act.

- Can you find any other moments and/or quotes where gender seems to be a potent theme in Act One?
- If you were able to find any examples, does that give you a clearer opinion on whether Shakespeare’s plays are misogynistic or a commentary on misogyny? If you didn’t find any examples, does that affect your opinion?
- At the time this play was written and performed, women were not allowed to act onstage, so men were playing all the roles. With that in mind, how different would these moments be with male actors, including Gertrude and Ophelia?
- Today, theater companies gender-bend Shakespeare plays all the time. If Hamlet was played by a female or nonbinary actor, or if Ophelia or Gertrude was played by a male actor, would these moments mean anything different to you?

NOTES



PHOTO: MICHAEL BRAUGHER (DAN NORMAN)

Hamlet, Part Two

“Though this be madness, yet there is method in’t.”

– Polonius (*Hamlet*, Act Two, Scene Two)



ACTIVITY: SHARE AND REFLECT FROM UNIT B

Suggested Time: 15 minutes

Step One: Divide into three groups:

- Those who believe Shakespeare is probably misogynist.
- Those who believe Shakespeare is commenting on misogyny.
- Those who are not quite sure or have not formed an opinion yet.

Step Two: Give the students five minutes to share their work from home with their group members. Each group will collect their answers to support whether Shakespeare is a misogynist, is commenting on misogyny or why it is unclear.

Step Three: Each group should assign one representative who will have one to two minutes to defend their opinion in front of the class.

Step Four: After each group presents, discuss as class. Work to reach a conclusion or understand the differing conclusions within the class.



WATCH: HAMLET, PART TWO

00:36:20–01:13:16

We invite you to pause the film at the timestamps below and have the students engage the plot points and themes of the play as they watch the story unfold. These pause points may be used as prompts for class discussions, partnered conversation or individual journaling.

Pause at 00:49:16

- “These tedious old fools!” Hamlet tells Horatio he is going to put on an “antic disposition” and pretend to be mad. From this point forward, start to note where Hamlet may be pretending.
- What in the text or the actor’s performance indicates where he may be putting on this “antic disposition”?

Pause at 00:53:15

- “Denmark is a prison.” What does Hamlet mean by this?
- Sometimes the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern get cut from productions of *Hamlet*. Why do you think that is? What do these characters offer to the play?

Pause at 01:13:16

- What does placing the intermission at this moment mean versus somewhere else in the story? Why do you think the director made that choice?
- Why do you think the Guthrie chose to put the intermission in the middle of Act Three rather than at the end of a complete act? If you had to make a different choice, where would you place it?



ACTIVITY: SCANSION AND IAMBIC PENTAMETER

Suggested Time: 20 minutes

Shakespeare writes his plays with two primary rhythmic styles: verse and prose. Verse follows a set structure and rhythm — in the case of Shakespeare, iambic pentameter. Contrastingly, prose does not follow this same notion of set structure and rhythm.

The word “iamb” is defined by Merriam-Webster as “a metrical foot consisting of one short syllable followed by one long syllable or of one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable.” The prefix “penta-” indicates that there are five of something — that is to say, there are five iambs in iambic pentameter. Each line in Shakespearian verse then achieves a perfect 10 beats, which mimics the rhythm of the human heartbeat.



Watch

To learn more about iambic pentameter, scan the code to watch Act Three, Scene One from *Hamlet* performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon in England. **FUN FACT:** This is the town where William Shakespeare was born.



[LINK](#)

Step One: After watching the video, have the students get on their feet.

Step Two: With this idea of the heartbeat, start by taking your hand to your heart and tapping out five iambs (dee-DUM dee-DUM).

Step Three: Use the iambic pentameter to create a gallop motion on the “dee-DUM” or “bah-BUM.” The sounds, much like a beating heart, can be physicalized by replicating the gallop of a horse.

Step Four: After practicing, gallop the iamb with the following lines from this section of *Hamlet*:

*And, with his head over his shoulder turned,
He seemed to find his way without his eyes.*
(Ophelia, Act Two, Scene One)

Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz.
(Gertrude, Act Two, Scene Two)

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
(Hamlet, Act Two, Scene Two)

*My honored lord, you know right well you did,
And with them words of so sweet breath composed.*
(Ophelia, Act Three, Scene One)

Step Five: Lastly, using the “To be or not to be” speech from Act Three, Scene One, explore Shakespeare’s use of iambic pentameter:

*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 a 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.*

Step Six: Discuss the following questions: What did you discover when scanning the text? When lines were not exactly 10 beats, what might that represent within Hamlet’s emotional life? His heartbeat falling out of rhythm? Or did he want this line to stand out from the rest?



OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: COMPREHENSION CHECK

Suggested Time: 3–5 minutes



Watch

For a fun recap and comprehension check, scan the code and watch **only 1:02–2:26** of the “Kids Explain Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*” video from the Great River Shakespeare Festival. **NOTE:** The Guthrie’s production differs slightly from the one being discussed in the video.



[LINK](#)



OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: CLASS GLOSSARY UPDATE

Review any new words that the students wrote down from this unit and add them to your class glossary.



AT HOME: MOVED BY ART

Just like we saw in Act Two, Scene Two, Hamlet was so struck by the First Player's speech of Aeneas' tale to Dido that it led to one of his most famous soliloquies: "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" In this speech, Hamlet realizes just how deeply a work of art — in this case, an actor's performance — can affect a person. Hamlet marvels at the skill of the First Player and asks him to make an adjustment to their performance of *The Mousetrap* to "catch the conscience of the King." What does that mean? What might Hamlet do next?

Option One: At home, think about a work of art — a performance, a movie, a song, a painting, a piece of writing, a dance, etc. — that has had a deep impact on you and your life. Write a brief description of the piece itself, how it affected you and why. If you feel comfortable doing so, bring it in tomorrow and share with the class.

Option Two: Pick your favorite moment from the play so far — something that elicited a strong visual or emotional response — and at home, create a work of art (a drawing, painting, collage, vision board, a song, a movement piece, a sculpture, a poem, etc.) that represents the moment you chose. Write a brief description of your work and why you chose both this moment from the play and the particular artistic medium you used to represent it. If you feel comfortable doing so, bring it in to share.

For both options, consider these questions to help guide your choice of art or the creation of your new art piece.

About my chosen work of art:

- Who created it?
- What about it moves me? What thoughts or feelings does it evoke?
- What, if anything, has it inspired me to do or change about myself or my life?
- Do I believe this work can change others? If so, why?
- Do I believe art is capable of changing the world? If so, why and how? What are some examples?
- Do I believe art is capable of harm? If so, why and how? What are examples of hurtful, destructive art?
- How has this work — or art in general — made my life better?
- What would I do without this work of art?
- What if there was no art in the world? What would life be like?
- What are my feelings on censorship?

About my personal creative process:

- Where do my ideas come from?
- Why do I want or need to create art?
- What does my art offer to others? What am I attempting to express with my work?
- Do I believe in art for art's sake? Or does art always have to have a purpose or message?
- How do I start my creative process? What questions arise, and how do I answer them?
- Do I seek perfection in my work? Am I okay with flaws, mistakes or imperfection?
- Am I competitive with my peers? Am I collaborative with my peers?
- Do I believe that all art is subjective?
- Am I proud of my finished piece? Do I need everyone to like my art?
- Does sharing my art make me uncomfortable?



PHOTO: ANYA WHELAN-SMITH AND MICHAEL BRAUGHER (DAN NORMAN)

Hamlet, Part Three

**“The purpose of playing, whose end ... was and is to hold,
as ‘twere, the mirror up to nature.”**

– Hamlet (*Hamlet*, Act Two, Scene Two)



ACTIVITY: SHARE AND REFLECT FROM UNIT C

Suggested Time: 10 minutes

Give students the opportunity to show and tell their classmates about the piece of art they chose or created for their At Home activity. This can be done in groups or as a class. If you want to continue the conversation and/or don't have many people who would like to share, discuss how art affects and imitates life or what art means to you. How can art inspire or affect change? How has this piece of art (*Hamlet*) affected you?



WATCH: HAMLET, PART THREE

01:13:16-01:40:07

We invite you to pause the film at the timestamps below and have the students engage the plot points and themes of the play as they watch the story unfold. These pause points may be used as prompts for class discussions, partnered conversation or individual journaling.

Pause at 01:21:32

- Why do you think this production of *Hamlet* chose to have the players depicted through projections and animations rather than people onstage?
- How does this shift your focus and understanding of the whole scene?

Pause at 01:29:38

- Why does Hamlet decide not to kill Claudius in this moment?

Pause at 01:40:07

- What do you think the consequences will be for Polonius' death? Why did Hamlet kill him?



ACTIVITY: THE PLAY'S THE THING

Suggested Time: 30–90 minutes

The Guthrie's production of *Hamlet* chose to use voiceover and projections to tell the story of *The Mousetrap* rather than have the “play within a play” onstage. Give your students the opportunity to become the theater troupe and put on their own performance of *The Mousetrap*!

Step One: Assign each student a role: actor, director, designer (costumes, set, props, sound), stage crew, etc.

Step Two: Using the text from the script, stage and rehearse *The Mousetrap* to perform in class.

Step Three: Debrief the performance and discuss how theater is a collaborative art form where many artists' ideas come together. What elements from the Guthrie's production does the class want to keep? What might your class collectively decide to do differently? Are there any clues in the text to help you make staging or acting choices? How will you reach a final decision?



OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: COMPREHENSION CHECK

Suggested Time: 3–5 minutes



Watch

For a fun recap and comprehension check, scan the code and watch *only 2:26–3:30* of the “Kids Explain Shakespeare's *Hamlet*” video from the Great River Shakespeare Festival. **NOTE:** The Guthrie's production differs slightly from the one being discussed in the video.



[LINK](#)



OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: CLASS GLOSSARY UPDATE

Review any new words that the students wrote down from this unit and add them to your class glossary.



AT HOME: GERTRUDE'S CLOSET

Watch some different interpretations of the intense scene between Hamlet and his mother Gertrude. Choose two or three scenes below, and identify the similarities and differences between your selected scenes and what you remember from the Guthrie's production.



Watch

1990 feature film: Directed by Franco Zeffirelli, starring Mel Gibson, Glenn Close and Ian Holm



[LINK](#)



Watch

1996 feature film: Directed by Kenneth Branagh (who also plays Hamlet), starring Julie Christie and Richard Briers



[LINK](#)



Watch

2009 Royal Shakespeare Company stage production: Directed by Gregory Doran, starring David Tennant, Penny Downie and Oliver Ford Davies

CONTENT WARNING: GUN VIOLENCE



[LINK](#)



Watch

2018 BBC film: Directed by Robert Icke, starring Andrew Scott, Juliet Stevenson and Peter Wight

CONTENT WARNING: GUN VIOLENCE



[LINK](#)

Questions

- Do you prefer one version over another? Why or why not? Give specific examples.
- Notice how each Hamlet enters the scene with a different energy. How would you describe the way these actors enter? Compare and contrast the entrances from the scenes you have chosen. What kind of intensity do they have? How does the emotion and energy they start with affect the rest of the scene?
- What would you do differently if you were to stage this scene? What elements would you keep from these productions, if any?
- You may have noticed that all these examples include white male actors playing the role of Hamlet. If you were to cast a production of *Hamlet*, who would you cast in the titular role? It could be anyone from these video examples, from pop culture or someone from your own life — maybe even you!



PHOTO: THE CAST OF HAMLET (DAN NORMAN)

Hamlet, Part Four

“How all occasions do inform against me, and spur my dull revenge!”

– Hamlet (*Hamlet*, Act Four, Scene Four)



ACTIVITY: SHARE AND REFLECT FROM UNIT D

Suggested Time: 10 minutes

Step One: Have the students find a partner or group who watched at least one of the same scenes in Gertrude’s closet.

Step Two: Have them discuss the elements from each version that stood out the most, using the questions from the At Home activity in Unit D as a guide for discussion.

Step Three: Invite each pair or group to share at least one main takeaway from the different interpretations or a key theme from their discussion.



WATCH: HAMLET, PART FOUR

01:40:07–02:04:07

We invite you to pause the film at the timestamps below and have the students engage the plot points and themes of the play as they watch the story unfold. These pause points can be used as prompts for class discussions, partnered conversation or individual journaling.

Pause at 01:41:08

- Rosencrantz and Guildenstern find themselves torn between two loyalties. How would you describe their dilemma?
- What are the multiple and maybe conflicting roles you play in your own life?

Pause at 01:53:07

- Both Ophelia and Laertes are observed as they contrastingly cope with the murder of their father. How does the world of the play compare and contrast the grieving process of women versus men?
- Does it enforce gender stereotypes? How so?

Pause at 01:57:28

- Hamlet meditates on his inaction in his personal battle with Claudius after encountering Fortinbras on his way to war. How do events of a global scale shape how we view our individual lives?
- What is a historical event that influences your own outlook on life and your own purpose?



ACTIVITY: VICTORIAN FLOWER LANGUAGE

Suggested Time: 20 minutes

Step One: In Act Four, Scene Five, Ophelia hands flowers and herbs to the people who have loved and wounded her. Read the following to the class:

*There's rosemary, that's for remembrance. Pray you, love, remember.
And there is pansies, that's for thoughts. ...
There's fennel for you, and columbines. There's rue for you, and here's
some for me; we may call it herb of grace o' Sundays. You must wear your
rue with a difference. There's a daisy. I would give you some violets, but
they withered all when my father died. They say he made a good end.*

Step Two: Read the following quote from Lucile F. Newman in *Economic Botany*:

“Previously perceived as bearers of complex meanings, [Ophelia's] references to these herbs and flowers may be better read as a shocking enumeration of well-known abortifacients and emmenagogues [substances used to terminate pregnancies and impact menstrual cycle]. The suggestion is not made here that these methods were or are effective in provoking abortion or inducing menses, or that Ophelia was meant to have used them, but that they were widely known and subjects of commonly held belief to the author and audience alike.”

Step Three: Using the following template, have the students research flowers and herbs that contain symbolism or metaphors that pertain to their own life. Have them anonymously choose someone in their life and create their own bouquet to give to them. For example, it is thought that willow represents sadness or unhappy love — perhaps Ophelia would hand this flower to Hamlet. Share the following online resources for researching natural remedies and flower metaphors:

- flowermag.com/the-meanings-of-flowers
- www.treehugger.com/language-flowers-herbs-and-trees-plants-meanings-4858536
- www.littlefarmhouseflowers.com/blog/2017/2/13/of-love-and-flowers-and-hamlet
- planterraevents.com/blog/floriography-secret-language-flowers-victorian-era

Step Four: After selecting a relationship, have the students find the plants they'd like to incorporate into the following speech:

*There's _____, that's for _____.
And there is _____, that's for _____.
There's _____ for you, and here's some for me; we may call it _____.
I would give you some _____, but they withered all when _____.*

Step Five: After having delved into a new character through this activity, how has the use of imagery and poetry influenced the students' perspectives of the people they chose?

Step Six (Optional): Have the students build their bouquets using classroom materials such as construction paper, tissue paper, markers and pipe cleaners. Then debrief with the following questions:

- How does creating a physical representation of your symbolic bouquet change the meanings of the words?
- How do the words imbue the tangible prop with emotion?



OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: COMPREHENSION CHECK

Suggested Time: 3-5 minutes



Watch

For a fun recap and comprehension check, scan the code and watch *only 3:30-4:08* of the "Kids Explain Shakespeare's *Hamlet*" video from the Great River Shakespeare Festival. **NOTE:** The Guthrie's production differs slightly from the one being discussed in the video.



LINK



OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: CLASS GLOSSARY UPDATE

Review any new words that the students wrote down from this unit and add them to your class glossary



AT HOME: INTERNAL VS. EXTERNAL TIMELINE

Step One: With the scenes you have watched so far in the classroom, ask students to create a timeline of the main events of the play. What are the plot points that are essential to the world of the play? Students should find four pictures inspired by this work that align with the timeline they have created (think one picture, abstract or literal, for each act of the play they have seen). Refer to this timeline guide from the Royal Shakespeare Company as a resource: www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone/hamlet/story/timeline

Step Two: Ask the students to create an internal timeline of Hamlet's emotional journey in the play. How has the character changed and evolved chronologically from Act One to the end of Act Four? How would you describe his internal struggle within this journey? Include quotes from his soliloquies and/or refer to his relationships with the other characters to illustrate his changing role to others and to himself. Ask students to find four images that relate to his character arc to pair with the timeline (these can be literal or abstract).

Step Three: Using the two timelines, compare and/or contrast how the political climate of Denmark and Hamlet's intrapersonal journey may parallel or influence each other. How has Hamlet influenced the world around him, and how has Denmark altered him as an individual? What are some examples of ways external factors impact your personal life and ways you may have impacted people/things around you on a more public scale?

Step Four (Optional): Invite the students to create an internal timeline for another character in the play. Using either the timeline they created for *Hamlet* or the external plot timeline, identify the correlations between the character's individual journey in accordance with what is happening around them or their relationship to Hamlet. How does this character's journey align with what is happening in the plot or to the protagonist?



PHOTO: MICHAEL BRAUGHER, DANIEL PETZOLD, AND DAVID WHALEN (DAN NORMAN)

Hamlet, Part Five

“The rest is silence.”

– Hamlet (*Hamlet*, Act Five, Scene Two)



ACTIVITY: SHARE AND REFLECT FROM UNIT E

Suggested Time: 10 minutes

Option One: Invite students to display their timelines around the classroom or on their desks. Then have everyone walk around the room and observe their timelines.

Option Two: Have students trade timelines with a partner. They should make note of images, quotes or timeline points that stand out to them as interesting, confusing or exciting. Then have the students share their observations with the class.

Option Three: Make a prediction about what will happen in the final act of the play.



WATCH: HAMLET, PART FIVE

02:04:07-02:31:00

We invite you to pause the film at the timestamps below and have the students engage the plot points and themes of the play as they watch the story unfold. These pause points may be used as prompts for class discussions, partnered conversation or individual journaling.

Pause at 02:11:37

- What purpose do the gravediggers serve in the story?
- What information do they provide to Hamlet and the audience?

Pause at 02:15:06

- Does Hamlet truly love Ophelia? Why or why not?
- What role might death play in heightening feelings beyond grief?

Pause at 02:18:32

- Who do you sympathize with more: Hamlet or Laertes? Why?



ACTIVITY: ACTIVATE THE TEXT

Suggested Time: 20 minutes

Step One: Choose a few *Hamlet* excerpts for students to engage with (see suggestions below). They do not need to work with an entire scene — a page of lines is sufficient.

- Hamlet and the Ghost (Act One, Scene Five)
- Hamlet and Polonius (Act Two, Scene Two)
- Hamlet and Ophelia (Act Three, Scene One)
- Hamlet and Claudius (Act Three, Scene Three)
- Hamlet and Gertrude (Act Three, Scene Four)
- Ophelia and Gertrude (Act Four, Scene Five)
- Hamlet, Horatio and Gravediggers (Act Five, Scene One)
- Hamlet, Laertes, Claudius and Gertrude (Act Five, Scene Two)

Step Two: In small groups, have the students read their assigned scenes to identify the key characters, action and plot points. Who is present? What are they doing? What do they want? What is the mood?

Step Three: In their groups, instruct the students to create a tableau, or a frozen stage picture, to depict the action of the scene. A tableau could also be described as a snapshot of a moment in the play without using movement or sound. Each character in the scene should be represented, and students may take the form of scenery or other objects to create specificity in the scene. Characters should freeze in the middle of an action and use their entire body and face to convey the action and tone of the scene.

Step Four: Have each group present their tableau to the class, who will guess which scene the group has depicted.

Step Five (Optional): Invite the students to offer modifications or feedback to the presenting group to make their scene even more recognizable to an audience.



OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: COMPREHENSION CHECK

Suggested Time: 3–5 minutes



Watch

For a fun recap and comprehension check, scan the code and watch *only 4:08–6:28* of the “Kids Explain Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*” video from the Great River Shakespeare Festival. **NOTE:** The Guthrie’s production differs slightly from the one being discussed in the video.



[LINK](#)



AT HOME: PODCAST REVISITED

- Now that you have read, heard and/or watched *Hamlet*, do you see yourself, anybody in your life or anybody in today's world reflected in the story of *Hamlet* or the Guthrie's production of it? If so, do you think it is a fair representation?
- Do you relate to Shakespeare's work more or less now than you did in the beginning? Why or why not? Do you think we should continue teaching Shakespeare? Explain your stance.
- Now imagine you are a theater critic writing a critical review of the Guthrie's production. Describe and evaluate the Guthrie's ability or inability to effectively tell this story, and explain what you would do differently if you were given the chance.
- **Optional:** In the second half of the #SuchStuff podcast, Michelle Terry, Artistic Director of The Globe Theatre, talks about their Shakespeare and Race Festival and how they are actively working to decolonize Shakespeare. Listen to the rest of the episode to learn more.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



PHOTO: DANIEL PETZOLD, DAVID WHALEN, MICHAEL BRAUGHER AND DUSTIN BRONSON (DAN NORMAN)

Curriculum Wrap-Up

“Let me speak to th’yet unknowing world how these things came about.”

– Horatio (*Hamlet*, Act Five, Scene Two)



ACTIVITY: SHARE AND REFLECT ON UNIT F

Suggested Time: 10 minutes

Step One: Have the students turn to the person next to them and discuss their answers from the At Home activity.

Step Two: Gather as a class and talk about the students’ critical reviews of the production.

Step Three: Make a list of the trends from their responses, and ask the students how future directors and actors might address the critiques.



ACTIVITY: ASKING BIG QUESTIONS

Suggested Time: 20 minutes

Step One: Acknowledge that the students may still have there may be some big, lingering questions worth asking, such as:

- Was Hamlet really mad or was he merely adopting an “antic disposition” in order to manipulate those around him and get to the bottom of the tangled and sordid affair he found himself in?
- Was Ophelia really pregnant?
- Did the ghost of Hamlet’s father really come back to have his son avenge his murder, or was it just an evil spirit trying to trick Hamlet into damning his own soul?
- If Gertrude was close enough to witness Ophelia drowning, why didn’t she intervene and try to save her life?

Even Shakespearean experts have debated these questions for hundreds of years. Encourage the students to ask the big questions, declare their answers and use the text to support their claims.

Step Two: Have the students write down two or three of the biggest questions they may still have about the play (or pick from the above examples) and attempt to answer each one.

Step Three: Instruct the students to search through the text to find evidence that supports their arguments. If the text provides more evidence for a different or opposing answer, invite them to consider revising their response.

Step Four: Break into small groups and have the students share their answers with their peers. If there are disagreements, encourage them to engage in friendly discussions, using their textual examples to explore each point of view.



ACTIVITY: *HAMLET* PLAYLIST

Suggested Time: 15 minutes

Step One: Ask the students: If you were given a chance to underscore *Hamlet*, what would it sound like? If *Hamlet* was a musical, what kind of music would be included? If Hamlet or Gertrude — or even Rosencrantz and Guildenstern — had a solo, what song would they sing?

Step Two: Work together to create a class soundtrack. Choose at least five songs per act or one song per scene. This can be an individual assignment or done in groups. This could be a list of songs that follow the general arc of the play or songs from the perspective of one character that follow their journey through the play. Think of songs that could be sung by a character or multiple characters and/or songs that could underscore a monologue or scene. You could even write your own songs as a class. Have fun with it!

NOTE: The timelines created previously may help the students identify where these songs could possibly go in the play.

NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

Resources

KEY CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY



Hamlet

Prince of Denmark
Played by Michael Braugher



Claudius

King of Denmark,
Hamlet's uncle and
brother to the late king
Played by John Catron



Gertrude

Queen of Denmark, Hamlet's
mother and Claudius' new wife
Played by Regina
Marie Williams



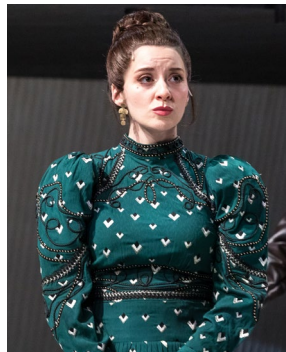
Ghost (Old Hamlet)

Late king of Denmark
and Hamlet's father
Played by David Whalen



Polonius

Advisor to Claudius
Played by Ray Dooley



Ophelia

Polonius' daughter and
romantic interest of Hamlet
Played by Anya
Whelan-Smith



Laertes

Polonius' son
Played by Grayson DeJesus



Horatio

Loyal friend of Hamlet
Played by Daniel Petzold



Rosencrantz

School friend of Hamlet
Played by
William Sturdivant



Guildenstern

School friend of Hamlet
Played by
Dustin Bronson



Voltemand

Danish ambassador
sent to Norway
Played by James Rodríguez



Osric

Courtier
Played by
Max Wojtanowicz

HAMLET PLAY GUIDE

Scan the code to view or download the digital version.



LINK



MEDIA RESOURCES

Below is a compiled list of links to the online resources referenced in this curriculum guide. They are organized chronologically by unit.

ACTIVITY: TEMPERATURE CHECK

Suggested data-sourcing classroom applications for this activity:

- FigJam: www.figma.com/figjam
- Mentimeter: www.mentimeter.com
- Padlet: padlet.com

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: COMPREHENSION CHECK

"Kids Explain Shakespeare's Hamlet" video from the Great River Shakespeare Festival:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=EtJiU7RdCpc

AT HOME: TO TEACH OR NOT TO TEACH?

#SuchStuff podcast

(S6 E5: How do we decolonize Shakespeare?):

www.shakespearesglobe.com/discover/blogs-and-features/2020/09/09/suchstuff-s6-e5-how-do-we-decolonise-shakespeare

ACTIVITY: SCANSION AND IAMBIC PENTAMETER

Clip of Act Three, Scene One from the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *Hamlet*:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tWffBTyqM

AT HOME: GERTRUDE'S CLOSET

Clips of Act Three, Scene Four in various *Hamlet* films and stage productions:

- 1990 feature film: www.youtube.com/watch?v=a38HZFbhB-M
- 1996 feature film: www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBCNHq7zRCK
- 2009 Royal Shakespeare Company stage production: www.youtube.com/watch?v=jPmIn85Mj7w
- 2018 BBC film: www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOEu0Uhv0e8

ACTIVITY: VICTORIAN FLOWER LANGUAGE

Websites for researching natural remedies and flower metaphors:

- flowermag.com/the-meanings-of-flowers
- www.treehugger.com/language-flowers-herbs-and-trees-plants-meanings-4858536
- www.littlefarmhouseflowers.com/blog/2017/2/13/of-love-and-flowers-and-hamlet
- planterraevents.com/blog/floriography-secret-language-flowers-victorian-era

AT HOME: INTERNAL VS. EXTERNAL TIMELINE

Timeline guide from the Royal Shakespeare Company:

www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone/hamlet/story/timeline

BONUS DIGITAL CONTENT

Hamlet Script from Folger Shakespeare Library

<https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/hamlet/read/>

Royal Shakespeare Company Homework Help:

David Tennant on Hamlet's soliloquies

www.youtube.com/watch?v=cn36PXrvBg

"To be or not to be" Soliloquy (Act Three, Scene One)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=hx6BUVj60Qc

Almeida Theatre: *Hamlet* in the 21st Century

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jrgopimh3XU

"Slings and Arrows" TV Series:

Darren Nichols directing *Hamlet*

www.youtube.com/watch?v=aw32d8Z_2xc

"Slings and Arrows" TV Series: Geoffrey fires Darren

www.youtube.com/watch?v=xo3wB-qXlvg

Ethan Hawke on *Hamlet*

www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwufQe_P_Vw

Sara Clark TEDx Talk: "Hamlet, Thy Name Is Woman"

www.youtube.com/watch?v=hw3Ncpzvlls



818 South 2nd Street, Minneapolis, MN 55415
guthrietheater.org