

BAIM

Education

GRADES 9—12

SCHOOL-TIME
SCREENINGS

Study Guide

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Hamlet

Dear Educator,

Welcome to BAM's Shakespeare on Film and to the study guide for Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* from the play by William Shakespeare. The film sets the play in 2000 in a sleek, corporate Manhattan rife with cell phones and laptops, and casts Hamlet, played by Ethan Hawke, as a brooding film student. Whether or not your students have studied the play, Almereyda's bold cinematic approach will immerse them in Shakespeare's story of corruption and revenge.

Prior to attending the screening at BAM, you and your students will receive an in-school pre-screening workshop with a BAM teaching artist. Immediately following the screening, there will be a 30- to 45-minute discussion with the filmmakers. Please arrange for your class to remain for the talk and prepare your students for this question and answer session. It is a rare occasion to engage in an open discussion with other New York City students and teachers, as well as professional filmmakers.

THIS GUIDE aims to help you prepare your students for viewing the film. Each section offers a unique lens into the film, and provides background information and activities to use in your classroom. Many of the activities require no previous knowledge of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, while others will deepen a classroom study of the play. Please use the activities that most align with your curricular goals, and consider adapting one or more when studying other films or Shakespeare plays. Our goal is to develop your students' film literacy so that they will become educated, critical, and inspired viewers of *Hamlet* and other films.

All the activities align with and incorporate the methodology of **Common Core State Standards**, encouraging critical thinking that goes deep into the directorial intent and nuance of the film. Additionally, this guide aligns with the **NYC Department of Education's Blueprints for the Arts** (BP).



SYNOPSIS OF THE FILM

Prince Hamlet returns from college following the mysterious death of his father King Hamlet, the CEO of Denmark Corporation. Hamlet is troubled and suspicious. His mother Gertrude has hastily remarried his father's younger brother, Claudius. Claudius has, in turn, taken over as King and CEO of Denmark Corporation. Meanwhile, Hamlet and Ophelia (his girlfriend) try to work out their relationship, but Ophelia's father Polonius and brother Laertes keep them apart. Hamlet's father appears to his son as a ghost and reveals that his brother Claudius murdered him. The Ghost demands that Hamlet seek revenge. Hamlet grows more and more agitated as he devises a complicated plan to prove his uncle's guilt.

CAST

Hamlet
Gertrude
Claudius
Polonius
Ophelia
Laertes
Ghost

Ethan Hawke
Diane Venora
Kyle McLaughlin
Bill Murray
Julia Stiles
Liev Schreiber
Sam Shepherd

FILMMAKERS

Director
Screenplay
Composer
Director of Photography
Production Designer
Editor

Michael Almereyda
Michael Almereyda
Carter Burwell
John de Borman
Gideon Ponte
Kristina Boden

GREAT LITERATURE ON FILM: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET*

Filmmakers have been adapting Shakespeare's plays for the big screen ever since cinema began in the late 1800s. The timeless stories make for great movies. Some fans argue that film is the ideal way to experience Shakespeare because the sound and cinematography give audiences the best access to the plays' language and emotional intensity.

The Internet Movie Database lists ninety-four versions of *Hamlet*, making it the most frequently produced Shakespeare play on film. In addition to Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet*, other well-known versions include:

YEAR	DIRECTOR	HAMLET
1948	Laurence Olivier	Laurence Olivier
1964	Bill Colleran	Richard Burton
1990	Franco Zeffereilli	Mel Gibson
1996	Kenneth Branagh	Kenneth Branagh
2000	Campbell Scott	Campbell Scott

A film director is the creative force behind a movie. He/she is responsible for how the filmmaking elements (cinematography, set, costumes, sound, acting, editing) work together to achieve a specific vision for the film.

A director's vision is the overall concept of a film (look, feel, meaning, and impact).

Shakespeare's dramatic texts invite endless interpretation, and film versions of *Hamlet* vary greatly depending on the director's vision for the play on screen. In filming Shakespeare in particular, an essential part of the director's vision is how he or she chooses to edit the language and interpret the original text.

Directors edit *Hamlet* both for artistic purposes, and because the full text runs more than four hours. Kenneth Branagh's 1996 version is notable in that it includes all of Shakespeare's language. Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* is a fast 113 minutes. He cuts half the text, reorders some scenes, and intersperses lines from different parts of the play. Shakespeare purists may question why the film omits key scenes such as the opening (1.1), Ophelia's report of Hamlet's visit to her (2.1), and the dialogue of the "play within a play (3.2)." Almereyda has exchanged the edited text with carefully crafted cinematic choices. He also includes wordless scenes that do not occur in Shakespeare's original to extend the plot and meaning.



This activity has been adapted from a lesson designed by Michael LoMonico with his permission.

Overview

Students view several film versions of the same scene and analyze the effect of filmmaking elements and the influence of the director's vision. *If your students are studying the play, this is an opportunity to compare the original text of the play to the adaptations. However, students need not know the play to do this activity.

Objective

Students will understand the elements of filmmaking and grasp how directorial choices influence a film.

Supplies

Several films of Hamlet cued to the same scene.

Suggested clips (click names below):

- 1.2 **Kenneth Branagh**
David Tennant
Lawrence Olivier
- 3.4 **the closet scene—Lawrence Olivier**
David Tennant or
- 5.1 **Ophelia's funeral: Kenneth Branagh**
David Tennant

Copies of the original text of the scene. Download free at www.opensourceshakespeare.org.

Instructions

Explain the role of the director and the director's vision defined above. Divide the class into five Expert Groups outlined below and assign each group the related viewing task. Ask students to take notes as they view each scene. After each viewing, discuss the scene overall and ask for input from each group. Rotate expert groups for each version.

Expert Group Viewing Tasks:

Screenwriting (optional*): compare the text of the play to the film. Note missing or added lines.

Cinematography: Note/describe camera movement, angles, lighting, and the effect of editing.

Costume and Set Design: Note/describe sets, costumes, and props. Notice style, color, details, and symbols.

Sound Editing: Listen for and describe all music, background sounds, and sound effects.

Acting: Note/describe the varying performances. Note accents, subtext, and emphasis of words.

Closing questions: How did each director's vision differ? Which version did you find most effective and why?

Blueprint: Arts Making and Literacy in the Arts

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1d Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1d Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.



UNDERSTANDING SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE THROUGH PERFORMANCE

Shakespeare wrote his plays for actors to perform and for audiences to see and hear. When students act Shakespeare's words before seeing stage or film versions of his plays, they make important personal connections to the dramatic text and discover they can understand and enjoy the complex language.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Synopsis Circle

Note: the synopsis below aims to outline the film's story without revealing the more unexpected plot points.

Overview

This activity gets students up on their feet reading, analyzing, and speaking Shakespeare's text. Students may recognize their quote in the film. The activity can be a springboard into discussing Shakespeare's language.

Blueprint: [Theatermaking](#)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3 Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

Objective

Students will speak Shakespeare's language and become familiar with the plot of the film. The order of the lines in the film differs slightly from the play.

Supplies

Photocopied quotes cut apart.

Instructions

Give each student a numbered quote. Double up or omit quotes to accommodate numbers of students.

1. Students consult with one another to decide what their line means. The exact meaning is not important.
2. Students with copies of the play may find their quote in the play.
3. Students move around the room and practice their lines aloud at the same time.
4. Students add a simple gesture to go with the line.
5. After ten minutes of rehearsal, students gather in a circle in quote number order to present *Hamlet*. Teacher reads the narration aloud (be dramatic!), stopping to call out each quote number. As each student hears his/her number, he/she steps forward and reads out his/her quote with added gesture (loud, clear, and bold)
6. At the screening, listen and watch for your quote.

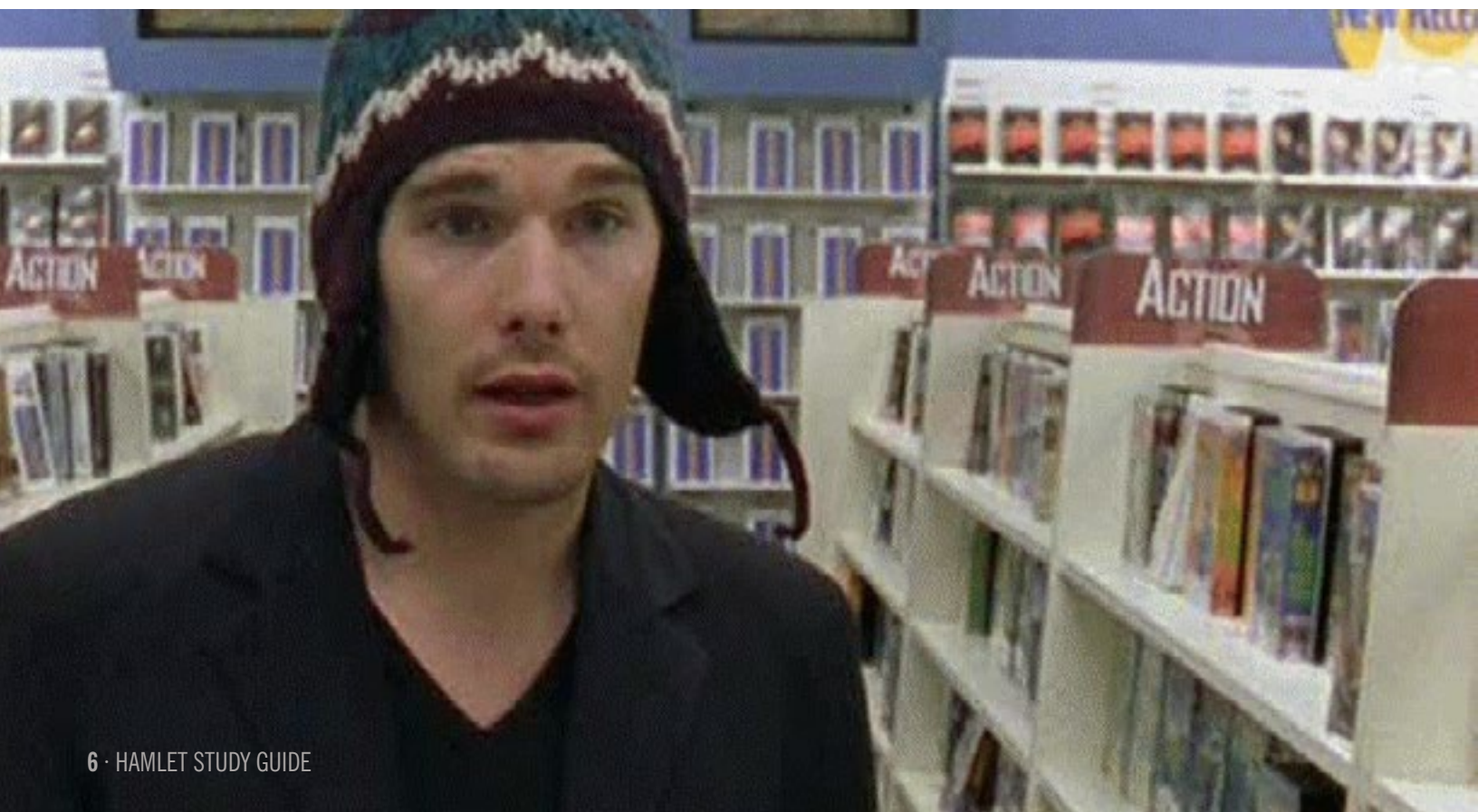
Synopsis of Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* from the play by William Shakespeare

New York City 2000, Hotel Elsinore. The King and CEO of Denmark Corporation is dead. The king's son Hamlet returns from school suspecting foul play.

- (1). Hamlet's uncle Claudius has taken over the company and married Hamlet's widowed mother Gertrude
- (2). Although shocked and angry, Hamlet promises his mother he will try to cheer up
- (3). The more he thinks about it, the more upset Hamlet is about his father's death and his mother's marriage
- (4). Hamlet's friend Horatio tells him he has seen his father's ghost
- (5). Horatio tries unsuccessfully to speak to the terrifying ghost
- (6). Hamlet decides to find out what the ghost wants and knows it's probably bad news
- (7). Meanwhile, Hamlet's girlfriend Ophelia gets a lecture from her older brother Laertes not to trust Hamlet
- (8). Polonius gives his son Laertes unsolicited advice.
- (9). Hamlet encounters the Ghost
- (10). The Ghost tells Hamlet he must avenge his murder by Claudius
- (11). The Ghost sums up the awful situation
- (12). Hamlet realizes that life can be very strange
- (13). He feels overwhelmed by the responsibility of avenging his father's death
- (14). Polonius forbids his daughter Ophelia to see Hamlet
- (15). Later, Polonius catches Hamlet and Ophelia together and confiscates a letter Hamlet wrote to her
- (16). Furious, Polonius reports Hamlet's behavior to Claudius and Gertrude
- (17). Hamlet becomes more agitated and contemplates life and death
- (18). Claudius hires Hamlet's friends to spy on him but his conversation confuses them
- (19). Hamlet hatches an elaborate plan to make a film that will prove Claudius is a murderer
- (20). Polonius forces Ophelia to break up with Hamlet
- (21). Ophelia's meeting with Hamlet does not end well
- (22). Hamlet screens his film "The Mousetrap," the story of a murdered King. Claudius reacts in horror when he realizes that Hamlet knows he did it
- (23). Hamlet accuses his mother of adultery
- (24). Then, Hamlet makes a terrible mistake
- (25). He manages to escape Claudius' plan to have him killed, but things get much worse
- (26). Claudius sets up a duel between Laertes and Hamlet
- (27). Hamlet finally takes revenge on Claudius but not without tremendous loss
- (28). At last, Hamlet's story ends
- (29). Was this Hamlet's destiny

SYNOPSIS CIRCLE QUOTES

1. I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth. —Hamlet, 2.2.303-304
2. Therefore our sometime sister, now our Queen, have we taken to wife. —Claudius, 1.2.8-14
3. I shall in all my best obey you, madam. —Hamlet, 1.2.120
4. It is not, nor it cannot come to good. —Hamlet, 1.2.158
5. My lord, I think I saw him yesternight. —Horatio, 1.2.189
6. Stay illusion. If thou hast any sound or use of voice, speak to me. —Horatio, 1.1.127-129
7. Would the night were come, til then still my soul. Foul deeds will rise. —Hamlet 1.3.256-257
8. Perhaps he loves you now...but you must fear...his will is not his own. —Laertes, 1.3.114-117
9. This, above all, to thine own self be true. —Polonius, 1.3.78
10. I am thy father's spirit, doomed for a certain term to walk the night. —Ghost 1.5.9-10
11. Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder. —Ghost 1.5.25
12. O, horrible! O, horrible! Most horrible! —Ghost 1.5.25
13. There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in our philosophy. —Hamlet, 1.5.166
14. The time is out of joint. O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right. —Hamlet, 1.5.188
15. Lord Hamlet is a prince, out of thy star. This must not be. —Polonius, 2.2.141-142
16. O dear Ophelia...I love thee best, most best, believe it. —Hamlet, 2.2.120
17. Your noble son is mad. —Polonius, 2.2.92
18. To be or not to be that is the question. —Hamlet, 3.1.56
19. There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so. —Hamlet, 2.2.253-254
20. The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king. —Hamlet, 2.2.617
21. My lord, I have remembrances of yours that I have longed long to redeliver. —Ophelia, 3.2.92-93
22. Get thee to a nunnery. —Hamlet, 3.1.121
23. Give me some light. Away! Lights, lights, lights! —Claudius, 3.2.275
24. You shall not budge. You go not till I set you up a glass to see the inmost part of you. —Hamlet, 3.4.19-21
25. What a rash and bloody deed is this? —Gertrude, 3.4.28
26. O heavens, is possible a young maid's wits should be as mortal as an old man's life? —Laertes, 4.5.159-160
27. A hit, a very palpable hit. —Osric, 5.2.281
28. I am dead. —Hamlet, 5.2.339-340
29. Good night, sweet prince. And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest. —Horatio, 5.2.359-360
30. Our wills and fates do so contrary run that are devices still are overthrown; our thoughts are ours. Our ends none of our own. —Player King, 3.2.217-219



THE WORLD OF FILM

gritty	hard-edged
chilly	somber
cool	lush
glistening	saturated
fortress-like	paranoid
brooding	futuristic

Film critics used these words to describe Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet*. As the director, he achieved the mood, style and look—or “the world of the film”—by choosing specific elements of setting, cinematography, lighting, sound, and costumes. His choices affect how the audience experiences the story, characters, and themes. Through analyzing the world of the film, students begin to interpret the film's meaning and start to understand how a director's choices affect the audience.

Guiding Questions:

- Answer these questions as you view *Hamlet* (or any other film) to identify the world of the film:
- Describe the film's setting (time and place). What mood does it evoke and how?
- Consider the lighting (outdoor or indoor, natural or electric). How does it create atmosphere and what is the effect?
- Listen closely for sounds in the film. What do these noises mean in the film?
- Take note of music throughout the film. What feeling does the music inspire?
- Notice the characters' costumes. What aspect of each character does each costume emphasize?
- Pay attention to camera shots. What do the angles and speed of editing tell you about the story?
- Create a list of vivid words to characterize the world of the film.

Be Sure to Notice

As you view *Hamlet*, closely consider these three aspects of the film.

NEW YORK CITY

The film is set in Manhattan. How does Almereyda portray the city and what is the effect? Some scenes take place inside and some outside. How does location impact a scene's feeling? In what ways is the Guggenheim Museum effective for the scene that takes place there?

TECHNOLOGY

Nearly every moment of the film includes some electronic gadget: cell phones, computers, video cameras. How do the characters use each kind of technology? What does each kind of technology represent to you? What does it tell you about the characters? Almereyda made the film in 2000. If he had made the film in 2013, what newer forms of technology might he feature in the film?

MEDIA

Almereyda weaves television and movies into the background of several scenes. Notice the films playing on the monitors in the video store and the television shows playing in *Hamlet*'s room. What effect do they have? What do the crowds and paparazzi in the film represent?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Comparing the Original Play and the Film

Previous knowledge of the play is not necessary for this activity but you will need copies of Act 1, scene 1.

Overview

Almereyda entirely cut Act 1, Scene 1 from his film version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. On stage, this scene is crucial to introduce the play's mood, setting and plot points. By reading this short scene aloud before the screening, students will understand the dramatic purpose of this scene.

Blueprint: Literacy in the Arts and Making Connections

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.5 Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

Objective

Students will analyze how Shakespeare created the world of the play in Act 1, scene 1. They will consider why Almereyda omitted the scene and what he does cinematically to create the world of the film. Students will then engage in a thoughtful discussion and exchange of ideas.

Supplies

A copy of Act 1, scene 1 for each student. Free online at www.opensourceshakespeare.org

Instructions

As a class, read the scene aloud three times to become familiar with the sound, images, and meanings of the language in the scene. Give as many students as possible a chance to read. Stop between readings to discuss what is going on in the scene and the ways that the scene creates mood and setting. Why is this scene important for a stage version of the play? What words does Shakespeare use? How does Shakespeare's word choice help set the mood? When you see the movie, consider why Almereyda cut this scene and what he does to recreate the mood and setting of the missing scene. If you were to direct this scene, what would it look like? Who would you cast? Why?

To interpret a story as images on film, a director must think visually. He or she uses the visual language of film to represent a story's themes and meaning. Often directors utilize visual motif and symbolism as a way to emphasize a particular theme within the story or to connect the theme to a larger concept. For example, in *Hamlet*, technology gadgets represent the characters' inability to deal with reality. Almereyda's depiction also suggests that technology in our culture is a tool of deception.

Metaphor in film can reinforce a story's meaning by eliciting an emotional or visceral response from the audience. For example, when Ophelia imagines plunging into the swimming pool, the powerful cinematic moment simulates her feeling of isolation and need for escape. The moment foreshadows her drowning.

Directors also use visual images to raise questions and provoke thought. The chart below includes the play's major themes, examples of how Almereyda depicts these themes, and related questions that the film raises.

THEME	EXAMPLES IN THE FILM	QUESTIONS
POWER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manhattan's corporate America: Denmark Corporation luxury apartments, expensive clothes, paparazzi 	<i>What kind of power is this? Is it good or bad?</i>
CORRUPTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Music is foreboding. The mood is eerie. Hamlet's close friends are wary of everything. 	<i>What else signals corruption? What do these signals predict?</i>
LOVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hamlet and Ophelia steal unspoken moments together. Ophelia waits for Hamlet. He watches video of her. 	<i>Do they truly love each other? What happens to love in this world?</i>
BETRAYAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ophelia wears a wire tap. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern plot by phone with Claudius. 	<i>Who can trust whom? How is technology involved in characters' mistrust of one another?</i>
REVENGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ghost physically touches Hamlet. Hamlet's uses his film to agitate Claudius. Guns become the weapon of revenge. 	<i>Is revenge required for Hamlet? Why is he successful only after he himself is done in?</i>
MADNESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Claudius ambushes Hamlet in the cramped Laundromat. Ophelia has a screaming episode at the Guggenheim. 	<i>Who is truly mad? What does it mean—in the world of the film or in your own life—to be "mad?"</i>
INACTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hamlet is obsessed with viewing video of his father. The video store has rows of "action" films. 	<i>How does the film emphasize Hamlet's procrastination?</i>

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Comparing the Original Play and the Film

Overview

When students look closely at how directors depict themes on screen, they begin to understand how films can reflect a text's meaning.

Blueprint: Literacy in the Arts and Making Connections

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text

Objective

Students will analyze themes in the film. If they choose, they will reflect these themes in visual art.

Instructions

Choice #1: Listed below are additional themes featured in the play and/or film. Choose several and explain how Almereyda depicts each in the film. How does the film extend or expand on these ideas? Note symbolism, extra scenes, and strong visual images.

Choice #2: Select two or more themes from the list below and watch for them in the film. Afterwards, capture the themes in a visual art form of your choice (drawing, painting, collage). Use symbolism, color, and image to capture your interpretation of the theme's meaning in the film.

SPYING
DISEASE
GARDENS and NATURE
DEATH and SUICIDE
RELIGION
ART vs. CORPORATISM
CHILDREN and PARENTS
INSIDE and OUTSIDE
ALONE and WITH OTHERS
DISEASE and POISON
FORTUNE and FATE
FRAILTY

INTERPRETING KEY SCENES

Adaptations of *Hamlet* often differ most in how the director interprets key scenes. Many of these scenes present challenges the director must address for the scene to be effective. Shakespeare provides dramatic devices and language to tackle the challenge onstage. In film adaptations, directors often turn to cinematic tools. Below are some key scenes, the challenges each presents, dramatic approaches suggested by the play, and Almereyda's choices in the film.

The Ghost (Act 1, Scene 4 and Act 1, Scene 5)

Challenge: The ghost entreats Hamlet to avenge his father's murder. He must be believable as a formidable spirit.

The Play: The other characters describe and react to the ghost as frightening.

The Film: Special effects make the ghost otherworldly. He is translucent and evaporates. He grabs Hamlet fiercely.

Notice: The ghost appears later in the film but does not speak. Why is he there?

The Mousetrap (Act 3, Scene 3)

Challenge: Hamlet presents a play ("The Mousetrap") that Claudius recognizes as his murder of Hamlet's father.

The Play: A troupe of actors performs Hamlet's show. Hamlet coaches the performers on acting.

The Film: The "play within a play" becomes a film within a film that Hamlet screens for a shocked Claudius.

Notice: Hamlet's film tells the story of his father's murder through image rather than narrative.

Final Swordfight (Act 5, Scene 2)

Challenge: The play culminates in a dramatic swordfight with multiple deaths by injury and poisoning.

The Play: The language of the scene is fast and describes in detail the complicated proceedings.

The Film: The swordfight is a fencing duel. A gun is used. The story is told through action and minimal lines.

Notice: Each character has powerful emotional reactions during the scene that they express silently.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Filming Ophelia's Drowning

Overview

In the play, Ophelia's drowning occurs offstage and Gertrude reports it in a speech filled with imagery. Almereyda cut this speech and replaced it with a powerful visual image that recreates the tone of the text.

Blueprint: Film Literacy and Making Connections

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.7 Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Breughel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.7 Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)

Objective

Students will explore how Shakespeare's dramatic language and imagery can inform cinematic decisions.

Instructions

Read the lines below silently and then aloud. As you do so, visualize the images the speech describes. Discuss the mood the images evoke. Describe how you would depict this scene on film. You may choose to create a storyboard to accompany the text. If you edit the text, explain how you would visually recreate the tone of the text.

Gertrude: Your sister's drown'd, Laertes.

Laertes: Drown'd! O, where?

Gertrude: There is a willow grows aslant a brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.
There with fantastic garlands did she come
Of crowsfeet, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.
There on the pendant boughs her coronet weeds
Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke,
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide
And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up;
Which time she chaunted snatches of old tunes,
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element; but long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death. (4.7.164-183)

CREATING CHARACTERS: CASTING & ACTING

HAMLET

Actors consider the role of Hamlet to be among the most coveted of parts. Many directors choose to cast only very experienced actors as Hamlet because of the performance skills the role demands. The character allows for a range of interpretations. The type of actor cast as Hamlet has varied in age, appearance, race, and even gender.

Notice in the film: Hamlet's clothes set him apart from the world of Denmark Corporation. Almereyda makes Hamlet a film student to emphasize certain aspects of his personality. Note what Hamlet watches on television and video.

Questions: Based on the film, how would you describe Hamlet's personality? What makes Ethan Hawke a good Hamlet?

GERTRUDE

Hamlet's mother causes her son great anxiety. He is stunned that she has married his uncle thereby committing adultery. While she did not know that Claudius murdered her husband, Hamlet holds her responsible for his deceit.

Notice in the film: Gertrude seems the perfect corporate wife to Claudius. Hamlet's videos show her as a loving wife to his father. Watch Gertrude when Hamlet confronts her. Pay attention to her reactions during the fencing match.

Questions: Does Gertrude redeem herself? How would you characterize Diane Venora's interpretation of Gertrude?

CLAUDIUS

Hamlet says of Claudius, "My uncle, my father's brother, but no more like my father than I to Hercules."

Notice in the film: Almereyda utilizes camera angles and lighting to accent aspects of Claudius' devious nature. Watch the background when he is alone in a shot and consider how it relates to his character.

Questions: Is Kyle McLaughlin well cast as Claudius? What do you think is effective about his performance?

POLONIUS

Father to Laertes and Ophelia and counselor to the King, Polonius is often played as a fool although he speaks many famous lines such as "neither a borrower or a lender be;" "brevity is the soul of wit;" and "to thine own self be true."

Notice in the film: Watch how Polonius shows his feelings for other characters. He ties Ophelia's shoe as if she is a child and brings her birthday balloons. He helps Laertes pack his suitcase and secretly puts money in his jacket pocket.

Questions: Do you think Polonius is a good parent? Does Bill Murray play Polonius as a wise man or as a fool?

OPHELIA

Ophelia represents hope and love for Hamlet, but his actions lead to her demise.

Notice in the film: Water features in many of Ophelia's scenes. Unlike the other characters, Ophelia mostly uses objects that are not technological: she handwrites notes, develops her film, rides a bicycle, and keeps Polaroid photographs.

Questions: What does her avoidance of technology tell you? As Julia Stiles plays the part, why does Ophelia go mad?

LAERTES

Ophelia's brother and Polonius' son Laertes is both rival and friend to Hamlet. He appears in only a few brief scenes.

Notice in the film: Although friends, Hamlet and Laertes have contrasting personalities and styles. When Laertes bids goodbye to Ophelia, he takes a small memento from her that he holds again later in the film.

Questions: What do the differences between Hamlet and Laertes suggest about each character?



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Comparing Acting

OBJECTIVE

Students will reflect on how actors portray the characters in *Hamlet* and cast their own version.

Blueprint: Filmmaking and Film Literacy

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.7 Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Breughel's Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.7 Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)

Instructions

Compare short scenes from several film versions of *Hamlet*. Imagine you are a film director and cast your own film of *Hamlet*. Share your choices in an essay, an oral presentation or through visual art.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Write a Character Portrait

OBJECTIVE

Students will closely consider a single character in the film to understand acting and directorial choices.

Blueprint: Arts Making and Literacy in the Arts

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3d Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Instructions

Choose a character from *Hamlet*. During the screening, pay particular attention to your character. Watch for details in voice, movement, costume, props, and personality. Following the screening, choose one of the character's lines that you feel best represents your character. From this line, write a profile of your character. Explain the character's personality, citing evidence from the film. If you were to write a Facebook profile for your character, what would you write?

HAMLET'S SOLILOQUIES

Hamlet has five soliloquies in Shakespeare's play. A soliloquy is a dramatic device in which a character reveals his personal thoughts by speaking directly to the audience. Usually, the character is alone onstage during a soliloquy. Hamlet's soliloquies track his thought process throughout his ordeal and highlight his internal arguments.

In the film, Almercyda switches the order of the second and third soliloquies and omits the fourth. You will recognize the soliloquies in the film because all but one takes place when Hamlet is alone. During each soliloquy, his words are in voice-over. A voice-over is when the audience hears the voice of the actor but the character is silent, suggesting that the character is thinking to himself. One exception to this rule is Hamlet's final soliloquy in the film during which he walks—seemingly unnoticed—through a crowded plane and speaks the soliloquy aloud. Almercyda uses voice-over a few other times to capture Hamlet's private thoughts, but these instances include just a few lines and are brief compared with the much longer soliloquies.

Working with a partner or in a small group, choose one soliloquy from the five outlined below. Find the complete original text of the soliloquy online or in the library. Together, answer the pre-screening questions. Be prepared to answer the post-screening questions after viewing the film.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

PRE-SCREENING QUESTIONS

Which soliloquy did you choose and why? What is happening in the play when he speaks these lines?

Which words in the soliloquy capture Hamlet's frame of mind?

What does the soliloquy tell you about Hamlet?

POST-SCREENING QUESTIONS

Describe in detail what Hamlet was doing on screen during the soliloquy.

Describe the camera's movement in the scene and how the shots affected your understanding of the soliloquy.

Did you notice what lines Almercyda omitted?

What did Hamlet's environment, appearance, and the objects around him suggest about his frame of mind?

What aspects of the soliloquy did the film emphasize and how? Was the soliloquy effective? Why or why not?

HAMLET'S SOLILOQUIES

Opening line: O that this too too solid flesh would melt

Find it in the play: Act 1 scene 2, lines 129-159

Find it in the film: Hamlet sits at desk viewing multiple video screens showing home movies.

Opening line: To be or not to be that is the question.

Find it in the play: Act 3, scene 1, lines 56-88

Find it in the film: Hamlet starts the speech twice but delivers the complete version in a video store.

Opening line: O what a rogue and peasant slave am I

Find it in the play: Act 2, scene 2, lines 560-617

Find it in the film: Hamlet watches a James Dean movie.

Opening line: 'Tis now the very witching time of night.

Find it in the play: Act 3, scene 2, lines 396-407

Find it in the film: This soliloquy is cut from the film

Opening lines: How all occasions do inform against me and spur my dull revenge!

Find it in the play: Act 4, scene 4, lines 32-66

Find it in the film: Hamlet is on an airplane and walks the aisle.

Class Discussion: What is the cumulative effect of Hamlet's soliloquies in the play? In the film, what is the effect of the soliloquies individually and together?



POST-SCREENING

NOW THAT YOU HAVE SEEN THE FILM

See the Film Again! Get a copy of Almereyda's *Hamlet* to use in class. It is readily available to rent or purchase inexpensively. Revisit one of the sections in the study guide and view the film again to more closely analyze and understand this multilayered film. Turn on the captions. The effect of seeing Shakespeare's words on screen along with the visual images is very revealing.

Write a film review! Do online research to track down and read a critical review of the film. Do you agree? Pen your own review. Provide a brief synopsis and comment on the director's choices, the acting, and other film elements. Be sure to provide descriptive examples. Include your own opinion of the film.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1b Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns.

Resources

Folger Shakespeare Library
In Search of Shakespeare: Public Broadcasting Service
Shakespeare Subject to Change: Cable in the Classroom
Exploring Shakespeare: Royal Shakespeare Company
Museum of the Moving Image (MMI)
Reel Works, a teen filmmaking program
Interview with Michael Almereyda and Ethan Hawke
Interview with Ethan Hawke
Video interview with Michael Almereyda and Ethan Hawke
Comparing Productions of *Hamlet*, Act II, Scene ii.

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