

# Hamlet Unit Plan

Grade 12 English 30-1

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## **Authors' Note**

This unit is a collaboration effort. Although it strives to have an underlying sense of unity, there are some minor differences, such as the layout of the daily lesson plans.

## **Overview**

This unit is specialized to cover a Shakespearean play which is mandatory for the Grade 12 English 30-1 curriculum. The focus will be to engage students to an Elizabethan play and further educate them in the challenging style of writing and language use that was previously used in English literature. Along with reading a text with challenging language, the themes of revenge, family, love, madness, the development of personal conflict, mortality, and existentialism that are in this text will be explored too. The emphasis of the unit will be to engage the students with a more challenging type of literature, while, at the same time, being able to comprehend the complex themes that are presented within the play. Throughout the unit, students will engage with the play in several ways including reading to self, acting, listening to audio-recordings, watching films and other forms as well. Students will be formatively assessed in their comprehension of both plot and language, and they will be summatively assessed in their ability to express their understanding of the play on a personal level through art and on an academic level through writing.

## **Rationale**

Hamlet is a play worth teaching high school students as the themes present within the play are themes still very relevant to present day literature and life. The issues presented within the play are heavy and quite serious, but they are issues that are common to the adolescent student. By addressing these issues through literature, we will also be able to probe the students to search within themselves to see how they deal with issues similar to those discussed in Hamlet. Themes such as anger, revenge and madness are popular conversation prompts when studying the play, and the goal is that students will be able to contextualize these themes in their own lives and in the world they live in.

## **Essential Questions/Objectives/Goals**

Perhaps most importantly, this unit seeks to make the five hundred year old play relevant to the lives of Canadian Grade Twelve students. We believe that just as Hamlet has few friends he can trust, so too do many of our students; just as Hamlet feels he has to perform a callous role in a world of insincerity, so too do many young people today; just as Hamlet sometimes finds existence meaningless and considers suicide, so too do many Canadian youths; just as Hamlet takes his frustration out on Ophelia, so too do adolescents often express their frustrations destructively through their sexuality; and, finally, just as Hamlet has difficulty deciding how to navigate through a complex and difficult situation, so too do people in the twenty-first century have difficulty deciding how to navigate a complex and difficult world.

*Essential Questions:*

What is a true friend?

How can anyone be “true to themselves” when situations often make it necessary to perform many different roles?

What is the philosophical basis of existentialism and how can meaning be found?

Why do we take our frustration out on those we love the most?

How does one decide how to live?

*Essential Learning Outcomes:*

Students will...

Recognize qualities of sincerity and insincerity in relationships.

Explore the idea of essential identity and performative roles.

Summarize an existential argument.

Refute an existential argument.

Discuss the nature of romantic and sexual expression and how this expression can be corrupted.

Explain how to choose a lifestyle of higher consciousness and how to then live such a life with conviction.

*Program of Studies:*

From “Discovering Possibilities” students will “draw from a repertoire of effective strategies to form tentative understandings, interpretations and positions [for example, record initial thoughts, feelings and observations about a novel in a dialogue journal].” Regarding this, our students will have time each class to write journals expressing their tentative understandings of the play.

From “Constructing Meaning from a Text” students will “assess the contributions of setting, plot, character and atmosphere to the development of theme when studying a narrative.” Regarding this, our students will write a formal in-class essay at the end of the unit which demonstrates how the play’s themes are expressed through different elements.

From “Work within a Group” students will “reflect on and describe strategies used to negotiate, coordinate and cooperate with others; select appropriate strategies for negotiating, coordinating and cooperating with others; monitor selected strategies; and modify selected strategies as needed to accomplish group goals.” Regarding this, on Fridays students will perform in groups a scene from the play. They will be assessed and given constructive feedback. The group will be self-selected (unless that does not work) each week. The class will together reflect and comment on what they liked about each other’s performances.

*Learning Outcomes:*

Students will...

Compose written personal responses in blogs that deal with the themes of Hamlet.

Reflect on the clarity of their expression and grammar usage in their written assignments after assessment.

Reflect on themes and plot developments covered in a journal each class.

Create an artistic response to the play in a way that suits them best.

Translate Shakespearean language into modern-day English.

Discuss themes of the play and how these themes relate to their lives.

Compare the movie text to the audio text of the play.

Create an essay that has an argument and uses textual evidence to defend that argument.

Implementation References:

Here is a link to Alberta Guide to Implementation for Hamlet. There are multiple resources on this page.

<http://www.education.alberta.ca/apps/lrdb/qlist.asp>

## Assessment Methods

Weekly quizzes on Fridays - Week one will be on Act 1, week two will be on Act 2 and Act 3, week three will be a quiz on Act 4 and Act 5 (if Act 5 is not finished by the end of week three, a quiz can be given on just Act 4).

Week four will be a written in class essay, in which the students will be given a list of 5 essay topics a week before, and then on the day of the in-class essay they will be given three topics to choose from.

Possible Assignments:

Re-creating Hamlet in cartoon panels: can either make everyone in the class be responsible for a couple panels that will be put together to create a larger piece, OR each student can be assigned to do a specific scene, OR students can be put into groups and they need to make the whole play into a comic. No less than 4 panels, no more than 20 (if doing the whole play). Cartoons will be graded by accuracy to the plot of the play, as well as the incorporation of the key scenes, making sure that they got all of the important scenes in the cartoon strip. (make a guideline sheet saying which scenes must be incorporated)

At some point in the unit, it would be useful to have to students consult with you about their marked writing. They could individually come and meet with you while the class is working on something else. In a gentle manner, they could look at ways they would improve and set goals for the future. Also, students could have some form of an anonymous peer-editing session.

60 Second News Article

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/shakespeare/60secondshakespeare/themes\\_hamlet.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/shakespeare/60secondshakespeare/themes_hamlet.shtml)

Formative Assessment Methods

- Think-pair-share: giving the students key quotes to discuss
- Journals as exit slips - 10 minutes at the end of every class
- Blog entries once a week, more personal and less academic. Loose guidelines; at least one picture per entry, at least 250 words, etc.

**Weighting:**

Weekly Quizzes 25%

In-class essay 25%

Artistic Response 20%

Journal 10%

Blog 10%

Other assignments 10%

**Resources / Materials**

Possible Essay Questions:

1. Why does Hamlet delay so long in avenging his father's murder?
2. What is the role of theatre within Hamlet? What is the purpose of the Hecuba speech, the play-within-the-play, and Hamlet's advice to actors? What practical purposes do theatrical moments serve in the plot? What symbolic purposes do they serve? Does theater "hold, as twere, a mirror up to nature" (3.2.2)?
3. Hamlet is full of madness, both real and feigned (maybe). What is the difference between the mad and the sane characters in the play, especially in what they say and how they say it? What are the similarities and differences between Hamlet's madness and Ophelia's?
4. The conflicts of Hamlet take place in the context of a single family's domestic problems, and also in the context of political decisions that affect an entire country. How do the family and political levels of Hamlet interact? Where do they reinforce each other, and where, if ever, do they contradict each other?
5. Almost from his opening lines, Hamlet reveals an obsession with suicide. He never carries out the impulse to take his own life, but it remains with him for much of the play. How do Hamlet's reasons for avoiding suicide – and his attitude towards his own death – change throughout the play?
6. One of the more famous lines in Hamlet is, "To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man" (1.3.1). Which of the characters in Hamlet are true to themselves? Does that prevent them from being false to one another? Does the meaning of this quote change for you when you consider that it's spoken by Polonius, one of the play's most frequently mocked characters?
7. Hamlet seems to have a disgust of his mother's sexuality. Why does he dwell so obsessively on the "incestuous sheets" of her marriage bed? Is his strange relationship to his mother's sexuality related to Hamlet's order that Ophelia get herself to a nunnery?
8. It seems like half the characters in Hamlet are foils for Hamlet, and the rest of them are foils for each other. How do the different foils bring out different aspects of Hamlet's character? What other effects does all this doubling produce?
9. Is Hamlet's reaction to his mother's remarriage reasonable, or are his standards of fidelity too high? In the play-within-the-play, which Hamlet himself revised, the player Queen vows never to marry again. "Such love would need be treason in my breast" (3.2.2). Does Hamlet expect his mother to remain single for the rest of her life?

10. As he is dying, Hamlet begs Horatio to tell his story. Do you think the story Horatio will tell is the same one the readers or the audience have just experienced? Is Horatio capable of telling Hamlet's true story?

*External Sources:*

<http://www.shmoop.com/hamlet/>

The essay questions above were extracted from this site, but there are also quizzes, plot breakdowns, thematic breakdowns and many other useful tools. This website would also be helpful to give to your students as a means of practicing quiz questions and going the extra mile to understand Hamlet in-depth.

<http://www.webenglishteacher.com/hamlet.html>

There are many pre-made lesson plans for activities on this website, as well as Shakespeare information, Hamlet summaries and teacher's guides.

[http://artsalive.ca/pdf/eth/activities/hamlet\\_guide.pdf](http://artsalive.ca/pdf/eth/activities/hamlet_guide.pdf)

This guide offers a play summary, summary of all the characters, key thematic issues, key passages for discussion and more. A great resource to familiarize yourself with the text, or to refresh your memory.

## **Extension/Enrichment/Special Considerations/Differentiated Instruction**

### Struggling Students

There are many secondary sources available for students who are having difficulties reading the play. Many students struggle with Shakespearean language, which ends up being the biggest hindrance in understanding the plot of the play. Sparks-Notes has published No Fear Shakespeare text renditions on their website, which offers the play of Hamlet in modern English alongside the traditional text. Students will be able to compare and contrast the modern day translation of the text to the original plot. If you do not wish to send your students along to a website to follow the readings, there is also a whole line of books written in the same manner. There is also a graphic novel version of Hamlet which may work well for students to visualize the scenes while they are trying to grapple with the language as well.

If students are really struggling in the Drama Fridays and you feel they would benefit from acting it out in modern English, you should allow them to do this. The trouble with this is they may falsely feel unintelligent if you give them this option. With this delicate situation in mind, you can respectfully find pairs that both struggle and give them modern English translations to practice and perform, or you could select a specific day where everyone uses the modern English version so that students do not feel isolated.

Hamlet (No Fear Shakespeare Series)  
ISBN: 9781586638443

Hamlet (No Fear Shakespeare Graphic Novels)  
ISBN: 9781411498730

One way to encourage student's engagement with the text is to do small group work where the groups have been previously selected, placing some of the stronger people amongst the students who are struggling. By allowing students to discuss key passages in small groups, they are able to talk their way through the scene and work amongst their peers to come to a conclusion about the text. This takes the pressure off of them being afraid to ask questions in front of the class, where they can discuss amongst their peers and work together to find the answer.

### Extension

Some students may be able to work through the play with ease and may wish to take a more challenging project under their wing. If there are a couple students who are in this boat, you may get them to recreate a scene or two from the play with full costume, set, and props, and video tape their performance. This would be an activity to engage the excelling students, as well as being able to show the video to the class you can spark a class discussion on the scene, and ask the students to justify why they filmed their scenes the way they did. This allows the students to think about the story as being a play, and what aspects of a play are important to highlight within the work that we don't necessarily see when we're reading (such as characters who are in a scene but not saying anything).

Even though neither of the authors here have read it, *The Story of Edgar Sawtelle* by David Wroblewski is supposed to be a great reworking of the Hamlet plot. It is on the Oprah Book Club and has received much praise. The modern prairie setting may appeal to Albertan students. Also, for dog lovers, these animals play a big role in the novel. Excelling students could either read this book for enjoyment, or they could do a compare-contrast written assignment with it and the Shakespearean text. That, or students could respond artistically to it somehow.

If you're living in a city, theatre companies often put on Shakespearean plays. If possible, try to arrange for your class to view a live performance of the play. Along with theatre companies, many high schools or universities also put on these plays, so if you can find one of these educational facilities doing a performance, you can often arrange for your class to stop in and see a dress rehearsal (free of charge!).

## Lesson Plans

### Possible Sponge Activities

- Students can rewrite any key passages from the current act being worked on in modern English.
- Act out a scene in front of the class, getting volunteers to read and do their best to physically act out the scene as well.
- Get students to draw a scene from Hamlet in a comic style. It can be drawn with any kind of interpretation, with the characters as people, stickmen, or even animals.
- Students can write in their journal (or to hand in separately) which character in Hamlet they feel like they can relate to the best and why.

### **Lesson #1A: Introduction to Hamlet – Timeless Themes and Hopeless Dreams**

*(in-depth lesson plan attached)*

Introduction Activity:

Concept Web: Ask students to work independently or in small groups to create a word web or other graphic organizer that explores one or more of the following concepts: fate, revenge, ambition, guilt, mortality, or indecisiveness. You might encourage students who are having difficulty in getting started to define the concept, give examples that illustrate it, and list

their personal reactions to the concept.

Introduction to the new unit: Hamlet

Why does this play matter?

Brief history of Hamlet and Shakespeare; suggest some of the main themes throughout the play (which are discussed in the concept webs).

How do our ideas about these themes fit how they might be seen in the play? Make a KWL Chart about these themes and what we already know about Hamlet. At the end of the unit we can revisit the chart. See if students learned anything about the similarities in human emotion between now and then.

### **Lesson#1B: The Shakespeare Experiment: Discovering the Importance of Speech in Plays**

Introduce students to the reading of the literature, now that they've discussed the themes present in the play and how these themes may be elicited, we're going to focus on the importance of speech within a play.

Activity: The Shakespeare Experiment - 40 mins approx.

[http://www.pbs.org/wnet/dancin/resources/lesson\\_plan-t2.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/dancin/resources/lesson_plan-t2.html)

Have class discussion about the importance of language and tone/mood.

Listen and Read Act 1.1

Journal Question: How do you feel about Shakespeare? Why do you think that we still read Shakespeare today?

Homework: Read Act 1.2

### **Lesson #2: Sensible Mourning**

Set the tone of the class by walking in quite sad and mopey. Address the class with a dismal situation that has left you feeling in the dumps (lost your wallet, pet died, etc.).

- How do you deal with your sadness?
- Why is Hamlet so sad?
- Do you feel that Hamlet's sadness over his father's death and mother's remarriage is justified? Why or why not? Do you think that this has anything to do with the time and place of the play?
- What is Hamlet's idea of a perfect marriage? What roles would the husband and wife play? What is your definition of an ideal marriage? What roles should husband and wife play?
- Is Laertes' advice for Ophelia useful? Is this similar advice that an older brother would give to a younger sister? Is this trait of 'wisdom' something that he may have received from his father? Why or why not?

Listen and read along with Act 1.2 of the play

Activity: Get into partners or groups and re-write the advice that Laertes gives Ophelia. If this was your sibling, would you give them the same advice? What would your advice be instead of his, or how would you word his advice in modern day

English. Groups will be asked to share one or two of their pieces of advice with the class.

Journal Question: "I must hold my tongue." Why do you think Hamlet feels he must hide his thoughts? Do you think he's right? Describe an occasion when you were very upset with someone but decided to keep your thoughts to yourself. Why did you hide your feelings? Did concealing the problem change your relationship with that person?

Homework: Read Act 1.3-1.4

### **Lesson #3: Family Matters**

- Who do you normally go to for advice?
- Is Laertes' advice for Ophelia useful? Is this similar advice that an older brother would give to a younger sister? Is this trait of 'wisdom' something that he may have received from his father? Why or why not?

Listen and read along to Act 1.3-1.4

Activity: Review Polonius' advice to Laertes (1.3 58-81). Make a list of Polonius' values concerning love, money, clothing, friendship and entertainment. Ask the students to arrange these values from what they value most to what they value least. Get the students to include their gender on the sheet as well, but not their names.

To present to the class the next day:

Collect all of the anonymous information and place it into a graph to show your findings (pie chart, bar graph, etc.). Show the class which gender chose which value as being most important. Discuss.

Journal Question: Write about a time when an older person gave you advice which you knew that person would not follow themselves. What were the results? How did you feel afterwards?

Homework: Read Act 1.5

### **Lesson #4: How Super is the Supernatural**

At the beginning of class discuss your findings from the values survey done the day before. Why do you think we value things the way we do? Do our values differ from those of Polonius? How? Why?

This scene is focused around the supernatural, as Hamlet encounters his father's ghost. If possible, arrange for someone to either dress like a ghost and interrupt your classroom or set up a tape recorder to 'spook' your class.

- If your best friend told you that a ghost appeared to them and asked for them to seek out revenge, what would you do?
- Would you be Hamlet's ally in this scenario? From what you know of his characteristics, why do you think Horatio and Marcellus choose to follow him?
- Taking revenge for his father's death would be seen as Hamlet "taking the law into his own hands." How do you feel about vigilantism in the play? What about in present day?



Listen and read along to Act 1.5

Activity: By avenging his father's death, we see Hamlet "taking the law into his own hands". Allow students to brainstorm about other scenarios in the media where people have done the same thing. If possible, bring students to a computer lab so that they can research some people who have indeed 'taken the law into their own hands'. Find at least one case and print off your findings.

Journal Question: Do you believe in the supernatural? Why or why not? Have you ever had an encounter with the supernatural?

Homework: If they didn't find a media source in the computer lab, they need to find one to hand in for the next day. Quiz on act one next class.

### **Lesson #5: Quiz and Play Day**

*(in-depth lesson plan attached)*

Introduction: Here is the painful but necessary reality: a quiz.

Objective: Students will recognize passages from text. Students will recall plot details from the text. Students will work together to practice a play. Students will perform the play in front of the class.

Concepts: Why drama?

Activities: This is referenced in the lesson plan. Students read from scripts; there is no memorization.

Homework: Read Act 2.1-2.2.

### **Lesson #6A: Crazy in Love?**

Before the class starts, place this quote on the board to generate discussion:

"The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars."

- Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*

- Initial thoughts on the presented quote?
- Have you ever had an encounter with someone who is mad in this sense? How does this differ from someone who is seen as being mad in the sense of being insane?
- Do you believe that Hamlet has truly gone mad from Ophelia denying his love? If he is merely acting, what do you think his ulterior motives are?
- Reynaldo is closer to Laertes' age and seems to sympathize with him. If you were in Reynaldo's situation, would you follow your orders or ease up on the questioning of Laertes?
- Why do you think Polonius is getting Reynaldo to 'spy' on Laertes? Is it because he's truly wondering how his son is

doing, or is it because he doesn't trust him?

Listen and read along to Act 2.1

Activity: "Blocking" is a theatre term which decides where each actor will be positioned on the stage and what their movements will be. In groups, discuss how you would block the exchange between Polonius and Reynaldo (lines 1-73). Some things to consider when blocking a sequence: Which character(s) is closest to the audience? How far apart are these characters? Does this distance change? Does one character move first, followed by the other, or do they move independently of one another? You should also consider body language and facial expressions that each character should use. Take turns experimenting with different movements in the roles of Polonius and Reynaldo. Get the students to practice these for the remainder of the class, and they will perform them at the beginning of the afternoon class.

### **Lesson #6B: What are friends for?**

Start off the class with getting a handful of the groups from the morning activity to act out their scene (do as many as your time will allow for).

In 2.2, Claudius and Gertrude are persuading Hamlet's friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to spy on Hamlet for them.

- Are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern being deceitful, or do you think they are agreeing to spy on Hamlet because it will be for his own benefit in the long run?
- Have you ever been put in a situation where an authoritative figure has made you go against your personal morals to do something? (ie: working at a coffee shop where you must throw away the baked goods at the end of the day, even though there is a homeless man outside who would greatly benefit from having some of the food given to him.)
- What qualities do you look for in a good friendship? Do you think Rosencrantz and Guildenstern elicit this?

Listen and read Act 2.2

Journal question: Have you ever felt helpless under an authoritative figure? What other emotions were brought up? What would you have done if you could have changed the situation?

Homework: Read Act 3.1

### **Lesson #7: Life is Beautiful!**

This is the scene with Hamlet's famous soliloquy "To be, or not to be", where Hamlet contemplates his own suicide. We are also introduced to some sexist language through the dialogue between Ophelia and Hamlet.

- Hamlet lists off troubles of the world, not just his own that make him want to die. If he was a present-day character, what other factors of the world do you think would be bothering him? Wars? Homophobia? Corporations? Technology?
- Claudius mentions that he has a guilty conscience to the audience in this scene. Does this confession change your point of view on his character?
- Hamlet insults Ophelia by insulting all women in general. Are the stereotypes and claims he makes towards women still seen now? Have the stereotypes changed? Have they disappeared?

Listen and read Act 3.1

Activity: Give your students some options on how to convince Hamlet that life is beautiful and he should not kill himself. Ask them to give persuasive reasons and to treat Hamlet like they would treat a close friend. Options could include writing Hamlet a letter, getting into groups to make an “intervention” scene (either to be filmed or acted out in front of the class), students getting into groups to make an “It Gets Better” video, explaining how his situation will turn around and how others have gotten through similar tragedies (students could mention historical/media related stories to back up their claims). They will have this afternoon to work on it, as well as the afternoon of Lesson #8.

Sponge Activity: Show a trailer from the movie from *Life is Beautiful* and explain the basic idea of the plot. Generate ideas further ideas to convince Hamlet.

Journal Question: Why do you think life is beautiful? What is it that makes life worth living to you?

Homework: Read Act 3.2, work on your letter to Hamlet or script for your video

### **Lesson #8: All the World's a Stage**

This is the scene where Hamlet plans for *The Mousetrap* to be shown to the court. This is the classic example of metatext in literature, where there is a play within a play, which basically is summarizing the larger play.

- There is a heightened importance on acting in this scene, with Hamlet giving advice to the players before they are to perform. Where else in the play can we see the importance of the theme of acting? (Hamlet's madness, Claudius' lies, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's false friendship motives...)
- Do you think that Claudius can be seen as a guilty character after storming out in the middle of the play? Why or why not?
- Hamlet changed some of the lines within *The Mousetrap*. Which “dozen or sixteen lines” do you think he had an influence in rewriting? Why?
- Hamlet says that the purpose of drama has always been “to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure” (21-26). Do you think that serious drama on television or in movies today does “hold the mirror up to nature”?

Listen and read Act 3.2

Activity: Continue working on the projects that were underway the previous class

Journal question: As a man, whom would you prefer to have as a best friend, Horatio or Hamlet? As a woman, which of the two would you be more likely to fall in love with? Explain your answer by describing the qualities you admire and those you dislike in each character.

Have you ever felt a sense of guilt that mirrors Claudius's? How did you manage the situation?

Homework: Read Act 3.3-3.4, finish the letter to Hamlet, script or filming process (to be presented the next day).

## Lesson #9: When Death is At Your Fingertips

Hamlet stumbles across his uncle praying for forgiveness to attempt redemption of his guilty conscience, although he knows this will not save him. Hamlet has the perfect opportunity to strike his uncle down but passes it up. In 3.4 Hamlet and his mother have a confrontation, which is being eavesdropped by Polonius. Hamlet ends up stabbing Polonius (who is behind a curtain) thinking that it is his uncle. Gertrude claims Hamlet's murder was caused by insanity.

- Why do you think Hamlet spared Claudius' life? Is Hamlet unable to commit such a crime? Does Hamlet feel sorry for his uncle? List all the reasons you can think.
- After reading Claudius' prayer, do you sympathize with him or identify with his predicament because you have experienced a similar conflict?
- Do you think the ghost should have spoken more to Hamlet and Gertrude? What might he have said?
- Would you consider this to be the climax of the play so far? Why or why not? Do you think it is still to come?
- Do you think Gertrude should feel guilty about Polonius' death? Would you?

Listen and read 3.3-3.4. Possibly do discussion questions for 3.3, listen to 3.3, then do questions for 3.4 and listen to 3.4

Activity: Review for the quiz the next day. Select five key characters that have important lines within the last two acts (Claudius, Hamlet, Polonius, Ophelia, Gertrude) and write up four key passages from each character. Put all of the passages in a hat and let students pick one each. Students will then have to mingle about the room and read their lines to each other to find out if they are talking to the same character as they are. Students should be able to identify what passages are said by which characters, and they will then slowly form a group once they find everyone who has lines from the same character. The first group who reassembles will "win", and they will read some of their lines to the class to see if the class can figure out which character they are.

Journal: How do you feel about Hamlet's argument with his mother in 3.4? Do you feel his anger is justified, or should he be treating his mother with a greater deal of respect? What would you do?

Homework: Study for the quiz, assign a blog entry to be finished for Monday, writing on the question "Have you ever found yourself in a situation that escalated quicker than you could handle? How did you recover?"

## Lesson #10: Quiz and Creative Writing Assignment

After the students finish the quiz they will be asked to work on a rewrite of the play. The way that students will be rewriting the play is in the form of a "Facebook Newsfeed". Students will be asked to write about the key events in the play that have occurred so far in the style that is equivalent to how information is organized on the homepage of Facebook.

This is a sample of one student who has summarized the whole play in the Facebook Newsfeed style. You could also hold off on this assignment until the end of the play because doing it now would only allow them to summarize Acts 1-3. Either way, the assignment should have at least 20 plot elements in it.

<http://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/hamlet-facebook-news-feed-edition>

Homework: Read Act 4.1-4.4, finish Facebook Newsfeed project.

## Lesson #11A: Oops!

Introduction: What just happened last time? Hamlet killed Polonius. The scene that you read over the weekend deals with how Hamlet is misrepresented by Claudius and Gertrude.

What motivation does Claudius have to misrepresent his relationship with Hamlet? (\*\*4.1.12-20 is an example of this).

He can't be too harsh on Hamlet because he is trying to impress his mother. We're going to watch a video of how bad misrepresentation can be from the movie *Miss-Representation* (be careful of suggestive images)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gkliV6konY>.

Objective: Explore the repercussions of Hamlet's accidental murder of Polonius.

Concepts: Misrepresentation and conniving; also insincerity

Listen and read Act 4.1 – 4.2

Synopsis: Gertrude and Claudius discuss what to do with Hamlet now that he is a murderer. Rosencrantz talks to Hamlet about letting them know where the body is. Hamlet accuses him of being a "sponge."

Activities: Role-playing. Set up scenarios such as, "you two, boy and girl, are talking about someone who just got caught stealing from Wal-Mart. The girl wanted to date this boy, but the boy talking to her secretly likes her and is trying to make the thief look even worse when he exaggerates the story." Allow them space to create their own interpretation, and ask them to keep in mind the play when creating it. Have a few present the scenario to the class.

Reflections: Is it honest to exaggerate? How is this comparable to Hamlet? What are Claudius's motivations for misrepresenting his relationship with Hamlet? Do you think Hamlet actually loves his mother?

Journal: Is Hamlet right in calling Rosencrantz a "sponge"? What does that mean? What are some examples of this in your life?

## Lesson #11B: Decisive Greatness

Introduction: In today's readings, Hamlet struggles to commit to avenging his father. All of us, at some time or another, have trouble committing to something.

- Have you ever had a huge assignment due and put it off to the last minute? What caused this indecisiveness and procrastination? Were you afraid you weren't going to complete it? Maybe this fear itself paradoxically made it so you could not get it done.
- I'm sure you can think of relevant times in relationships where, for whatever reason, you could not commit to a relationship. Do you, then, empathize with Hamlet? Why or why not?

Objective: Students will compare Hamlet's vision of greatness with someone who they consider great.

Concepts: Indecisiveness, greatness

Listen and read Act 4.3 - 4.4 in class

Synopsis: The king discusses how difficult it is to punish Hamlet. Hamlet is sent to England and resolves to commit to his father's revenge.

Activities: Class discussion of who they find great. Why are these people great? Are they ever indecisive? Hamlet's view of greatness is being won over by arbitrary means: "But greatly to find a quarrel in a straw" (4.4.54). Is this greatness the same as for what you find great? (Use gangster rap possibly for an example of arbitrary greatness). Write one page in class comparing Hamlet's greatness to what you believe greatness is.

Journal: No journal; writing instead.

Homework: Greatness exploration written assignment, and read Act 4.5-4.7

### **Lesson #12: My Goodness**

Big day today, so there will be lecturing throughout the readings and then pausing for discussion.

- What would have Hamlet and Ophelia's relationship looked like if Claudius never killed the king? Would it have been possible for Hamlet to have preserved Ophelia's relationship while still getting his revenge? Why or why not?
- Is it true that great tasks can sometimes be isolating? Examples in your own life. Maybe talk about the literary greatness of the Bronte sisters and how they lived in isolation and all died unmarried, except for Charlotte, who died from her first pregnancy.

Objective: Students will compare Laertes's revenge with Hamlet's revenge. Students will discuss the corruption of Ophelia.

Concepts: Mental health, sexuality, and revenge.

Readings: Listen to 4.5-4.7 in class.

Synopsis: Ophelia is mad. Laertes comes home and plots with the King. Ophelia drowns.

Activities: "My goodness, what a shame it is" (4.5.58 trans.). Why has Ophelia gone mad? Of course, the obvious reason is because her father's murder, but what does she have to say about it? Perhaps it is irreconcilable to have the person you love kill the parent of the opposite sex as you. Maybe this is because you construct who you are attracted to by using your opposite sex parent as an example. Any thoughts on this? (For the record, this is Sigmund Freud's idea, but, in my opinion, he takes something that is a cool idea with truth to it and he makes it gross; I'm sure you'll learn more about it if you go to university).

"To his throat in the church" (4.7.127). Compare Laertes's merciless ideal of revenge to Hamlet's spiritual consciousness which prevented him from murdering Claudius in a church. Does mercy ever make someone great? Is such a trait not considered masculine in the case of Hamlet? Is masculinity that drives one to action—"honor", as Hamlet calls it—a good thing or a bad thing? What if this "honorable" action is violent?

Journal: Describe something you did you thought exemplified greatness. Why was it great?

Hamlet does not treat Ophelia respectfully because he has ambitions he feels are greater. Do you think that in general women are treated respectfully today? What is the “collective consciousness” of women today?

Homework: Read Act 5.1.

### **Lesson #13: Infinite Jest**

Introduction: We all die. We all know that. We all decompose. Sometimes we focus on this aspect of our deaths, because, certainly, it is the most concrete fact of death. Perhaps it is also the dreariest, though. You read last night Hamlet’s ruminations on this theme. It is important to note the contrast in the scene. It is uncertain whether Ophelia will receive a Christian funeral, and such a funeral would, according to the belief at the time, ensure her salvation. So this uncertainty of eternal consciousness is contrasted to the skull of Yorick, which symbolizes material annihilation. Even though it is dreary, this scene is still a beautiful exploration of the theme of mortality.

Objective: Students will connect the ideas of nihilism, eternal consciousness, and human action in Hamlet.

Concepts: Nihilism, eternal consciousness, and human action

Lead and read Act 5.1 in class

Synopsis: Hamlet is checking out Ophelia’s grave and ruminates on life and death. At the funeral, there is a fight between Hamlet and Laertes.

Activities: Explain to the class the three terms. Nihilism is the belief that everything is meaningless because everything gets destroyed. Eternal consciousness is a belief that is self-explanatory. Human action are the things we do in the short time we are alive. Number the class off in 1,2,3. Each number takes on ones of these definitions and researches the idea of it in 5.1 during in class. Notes should be taken because there will be a class discussion with all three points. After researching--Nihilist question: Why is Yorick being a clown significant? Human action question: Why does Hamlet bring up Alexander the Great’s dead body? Eternal consciousness question: Why is the graveyard a significant setting? All: Why is it significant that they fight on top of her grave? All: Hamlet is particularly decisive in this scene. What do you think eventually drives him to be like this? “Twere to consider too curiously, to consider it so” (5.1.189) Horatio here suggests Hamlet is overthinking life and death. Do you agree with Horatio?

Journal: Big themes today... What do you think Hamlet’s tragic flaw is? Give me an honest answer, do you like Hamlet? Explain.

Homework: Read Act 5.2.

### **Lesson #14: To Tell My Story**

Introduction: This is the moment we’ve all been waiting for. So let’s just get right into it and finish the play.

Objective: Students will explain the complex episode of the final scene. Students will explore the idea of narratives being the ultimate meaning of life.

Concepts: The story we leave behind.

Listen and read Act 5.2 in class.

Synopsis: Hamlet tells his story to Horatio of how he escaped the king's plan to kill him. In a fencing match Claudius has sabotaged with poison, he, Gertrude, Laertes, and Hamlet all end up dying. Hamlet's dying words are a request for his story to be told. Fortinbras takes Denmark.

Activities: Someone please explain to me the complexities of this final scene. How did everyone die? Hamlet begins and ends the scene by "telling his own story" to Horatio. I think the text is suggesting that our legacy transcends death.

Blog assignment: You are Horatio. Write a eulogy for Hamlet. Describe his character. Include pictures of things he would have loved (try not to be too anachronistic with 21<sup>st</sup> century stuff!). Gently allude to his bad qualities and discuss why his good qualities triumph over these.

Homework: Study for quiz. Finish blog entry for Monday's class.

### **Lesson #15: Quiz and Drama Day**

Write 4.3-5.2 Quiz.

Drama: Find groups and pick one of three scenes. Yorick scene: (3) Gravedigger, Horatio, Hamlet. Ophelia's madness: (2) Ophelia, Laertes. Death scene: (4) Hamlet, Laertes, Claudius, Gertrude. Practice and perform with scripts.

### **Lesson #16: Artistic Reflection**

Artistic Reflection – see assignment attached

### **Lesson #17: Artistic Reflection**

Artistic Reflection – see assignment attached

### **Lesson #18: Ready, Set, Action!**

Introduction: We're going to watch a movie today of Hamlet. It will take us into next class. This is good we're watching the movie after your artistic response because the movie probably would have sucked all your imagination up. The assignment after watching the movie is simple. In your blog, you are going to take on the persona of a movie critic who judges whether the movie was as good as the play. Write notes as you watch it that compare the text to the movie.

Objective: Students will critically watch the movie. Students will compare movie to the text.

### **Lesson #19: That's all she wrote**

Introduction: Remember to write notes for your blog assignment where you pretend to be a critic.

Objective: Students will critically watch the movie. Students will compare movie to the text.

Activities: In their blogs, students will pretend to be a critic. They should feel free to adopt any type of critic persona (e.g. snobby). Feel free to add a picture of yourself looking critical or find a funny critic's picture online. Questions that should be addressed: What is different about the play and movie? Why were these changes good/bad? How was the acting? Did you



like the movie set?

Homework: If you want to study for in-class essay, write out the themes of the play and explore them. Also, talking about the play with others works well to clarify ideas. Explain details of test and what it will be assessed on. Give them a writing pep-talk. Mention that you are open for any questions or concerns. Blog due Monday.

**Lesson #20: In-class essay**

## Introduction to Hamlet - Timeless Themes and Hopeless Dreams

Grade: 12

Duration: 60 minutes

GLOs: Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to:

- Explore thoughts, ideas and feelings and experiences
- Manage ideas and information
- Respect, support, and collaborate with others

SLOs: Form generalizations and conclusions

Cooperate with others, and contribute to group processes

LOs: Students Will...

- Explore the themes represented in Hamlet.
- Discuss their beliefs about certain emotions with their peers (in groups) and with the larger class.
- Assist in developing a KWL chart to guide the classes progress throughout the unit.

Materials: Poster board (KWL chart and group brainstorming)  
Markers

### Procedure:

Introduction (15 to 20 minutes):

- “Today we’re going to be starting a new unit, and to get the ball rolling we’re going to start off with a little bit of group brainstorming.”
- Write the words **revenge, madness, guilt, confrontation, indecisiveness** and **identity**.
- Place the students into six groups and assign each group a word
- Ask students to conceptualize the word that they were given. What does this word mean? How do you identify with this word? What emotions are tied with these words? How does someone cope with these words? Etc. Allow students to brainstorm for five to ten minutes, then bring it back to a group discussion.
- On the board, brainstorm with the rest of the class to add to what each group has said about the word they were given.

Body (25 minutes):

- Why does this matter?
- A big part of this unit is looking what at how Hamlet is relevant in your lives. In other words, this unit will address why should you care about this play written 500 years ago.
- Well, I believe that just as Hamlet has few friends he can trust, so too do many young people today; just as Hamlet feels he has to perform a role instead of being himself, maybe some of you feel like that as well; just as Hamlet sometimes finds his life meaningless and considers suicide, so too do a lot of Canadian youths; just as Hamlet takes his frustration out on Ophelia, a girl we he loves in the play, so too do many people of our time

express their frustrations destructively through their sexuality; and, finally, just as Hamlet has difficulty deciding how to navigate through a complex and difficult situation, so too do people in the twenty-first century have difficulty deciding how to navigate a complex and difficult world. So if this is not relevant literature, I don't know what it is.

- First we need to look at some background information of the play and Shakespeare himself (even though some of this may be review). This contextual introduction will help you understand the play better, but you won't need to know it for a quiz or anything.
- This play was written in the middle of Shakespeare's career, and is known as one of his best works.
- It is a tragedy—meaning that someone *may* die at the end, and the main character *may* have one or two flaws.
- Shakespeare himself is a circumspect man. Not much is biographically known about him. He was married to Anne Hathaway. He lived in the times of two British rulers, Elizabeth and James. He had stocks in one theatre called the Globe, and this turned out to be a very wise business move.
- Some critics have suggested that Shakespeare's father was a social climber, and so was he.
- Shakespeare had three children, but his only son died. His name was Hamnet. See any significance there?
- Regarding the play, it is good to know that Hamlet is performed always wearing black.
- You may have seen famous scenes parodying someone holding a skull and talking to it. This is from Hamlet. Also, the famous line "To be or not to be" is in this play.
- So, after hearing all of the information about Shakespeare and Hamlet, it's time to collaborate and see what we know about the play in total so far, so we're going to make a KWL chart
- Ask the students what they know about the play, or themes represented in the play. Discuss them as they come up and put the ideas and concepts onto the chart.
- Once students have told you all that they know, bring up the question of what we WANT to know. See if students have any burning questions. If not, prompt the class and share some of the ideas that will be explored throughout the unit such as "how do the themes in the play relate to my personal life?" or "why is speech so important when reading a play?"

Closure (5 minutes):

- Explain to the students that throughout the unit they will be working to fill up the KWL chart with what they are learning about the play, characters, plot, or themes within the play.
- This would be a good time to talk about how the Hamlet unit is going to work. Tell your students what types of projects you'll be doing, how the tests will work (since they're going to have one on Friday!), and how they will be graded throughout the unit.
- Allow students to ask any remaining questions, if there are none, give the students a brief explanation about what they will be doing in their second block of English for the day.

## Act 1 Assessment and Drama (Day 5)

**Grade:** 12

**Duration:** 60 minutes

**GLOs:** Explore thoughts, ideas feelings, and experiences...

**SLOs:** Consider new perspective – recognize and assess strengths and limitations of various perspectives of a theme, issue, or topic...

**LOs:** Students will...

- Synergize with fellow students to create a play.
- Perform play in front of the class.
- Recall the content of the first act.
- Recognize passages of certain characters.

**Materials:** quizzes, 3 sets of scripts for the class (we do not have these made yet, but the idea is for the teacher to choose what passages they want from these recommended sections--choosing the starting and ending points, and chopping any materials unwanted with ellipses)

**Intro:** (1 min)

- Does anybody have any questions before writing the quiz?
- There will be four of these quizzes, so don't worry too much.

**Body:**

- Hand out quizzes and have students write them (15 min)
- Have students quietly do something else if they're done. (We have sponge activities listed in the unit plan).
- Take in quizzes
- Now we've done the boring but necessary part. Why is important to act out Hamlet? (I actually have no idea, see what students think)
- Write their brainstorming on the board.
- See if they hit empathize with characters, understand the language, and having fun.
- As a side point, understanding Shakespearean language is in some ways an intellectual exercise, because even in his time it was convoluted, and in some ways (once you understand it) it can be poetically pleasing. So it is both aesthetic and intellectual.

-For the next four Fridays, we are going to act out scenes from Hamlet. There will be usually three different scenes to choose from. You choose your groups. Try to be in different groups each week. We'll see if that works. Remember the roles are not gender specific. Most of the cool roles are male in this play (I think), so the ladies in class should not be limited by this.

-(This will not be assessed, but grades will be taken off if you do not perform and work together).

-Write these on the board:

A. Hamlet's entrance 1.2: (3) Hamlet, Gertrude, Claudius

B. Hamlet's ghost confrontation 1.5: (2) Hamlet, Ghost

C. advice and Polonius speech 1.3: (3) Polonius, Laertes, Ophelia

-Monitor if students are on task.

-With 15 minutes left, students perform their plays on a volunteer basis (teacher will note down the list of who performs to make sure that everyone at least performs once).

**Close:**

-Thanks for performing everyone! (Good job!) Have a good weekend!

-All of Act 2 has to be read over the weekend, but it's only two scenes so it's not that hard.

**Reflection:**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

## Hamlet Act 1 Quiz

### Passage Identification

Who said this? (1 mark) What does it mean? (2 marks) And what is its significance? (3 marks)

1. A little more than kin and a little less than kind.

2. That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound  
In filial obligation for some term  
To do obsequious sorrow. But to persever  
In obstinate condolement is a course  
Of impious stubbornness. 'Tis unmanly grief.

3. 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.

**Multiple Choice**

Circle the best answer. (1 mark each)

1. What do Marcellus, Barnardio, and Horatio decide they will do to the ghost when they last see it?
  - A. Attack it.
  - B. Talk to it.
  - C. Follow it.
  - D. Pray for it.
  
2. What describes Horatio best?
  - A. He plays the fool.
  - B. He is well educated.
  - C. He is deceitful.
  - D. He is very outgoing.
  
3. What was the former king's name?
  - A. Fortinbras
  - B. Polonius
  - C. Claudius
  - D. Hamlet
  
4. What does Hamlet compare life to?
  - A. A play without a director
  - B. A country without a king
  - C. An untended garden
  - D. A prison sentence
  
5. What do Gertrude and Claudius try to persuade Hamlet of?
  - A. To arise and be the king seeming his father is dead.
  - B. To get over his father's death.
  - C. To respectfully mourn for his father.
  - D. To leave Denmark and renounce any claim to be the heir of the throne.
  
6. How does Ophelia respond to Laertes's advice?
  - A. She fearfully promises to follow it.
  - B. She laughs and says it is bad advice, even though she secretly intends to follow it.
  - C. She changes the subject.
  - D. She advises him to follow his own advice also.
  
7. Where is Laertes going to study?
  - A. France
  - B. Belgium
  - C. England
  - D. Norway

8. Where does the ghost go in the day?
  - A. Heaven
  - B. Hell
  - C. Purgatory
  - D. The scene of his death
  
9. What does the ghost claim?
  - A. Gertrude was having an affair with Claudius, so they both plotted to kill him.
  - B. Gertrude was having an affair with Claudius, so Claudius plotted to kill him.
  - C. Gertrude was having an affair with Claudius, so she plotted to kill him.
  - D. Gertrude was having an affair with Claudius, so he committed suicide with poison.
  
10. What does Hamlet do after he saw the ghost?
  - A. He takes a vow of silence until he has completed his revenge.
  - B. He asks Horatio's help to assassinate Claudius.
  - C. He is paralyzed with fear.
  - D. He pretends to be mad.



## Artistic Response

This assignment is purposefully open-ended. The intention is to have you personally respond to the themes in Hamlet in a way that is relevant to your life. If the assignment demanded everyone draw a picture of the “To be or not to be” speech, then those who couldn’t draw a picture would find the assignment meaningless.

You can sketch a picture, paint a painting, write a song and sing or record it, create a movie, write a poem, make a slideshow—you can basically do anything. One requirement is that it somehow includes at least **three different passages** from the play. The assignment will be assessed on its completion, the effort put into it, the way you used your class time, a self-reflection of your experience creating it, and the relatedness of the five lines you have chosen to the theme you are exploring in your work of art. You will have two periods to work on it. You must work by yourself, as it is *your* response to the play.

There should be enough time to finish the project in class. Basic art supplies will be provided. Also, you can go to the computer lab to work on it there if you are creating a digital piece of art. You are, of course, welcome to complete the started assignment at home.

If for some reason you cannot create your artistic response in class (e.g. you are writing a song and do not have a guitar with you), then there will be an activity for you to work on in class that will count towards your class-use grade.

Remember the themes we talked about: Suicide and the meaning of life, true friendship, essential identity vs. performing roles, romance, revenge, and mental health. You can explore whatever theme you would like, as long as you can defend it with passages from the play.

Please ask if you need help with anything. I can help somewhat with the art (but this is really your area), and I can definitely help with passage location and thematic exploration.

### Requirements

- **Three related passages from the play somehow included**
- **Use of class time effectively**
- **Put your soul into it**
- **A 250 word reflection, word-processed or handwritten**
- **A finished product you can share with the class!**