

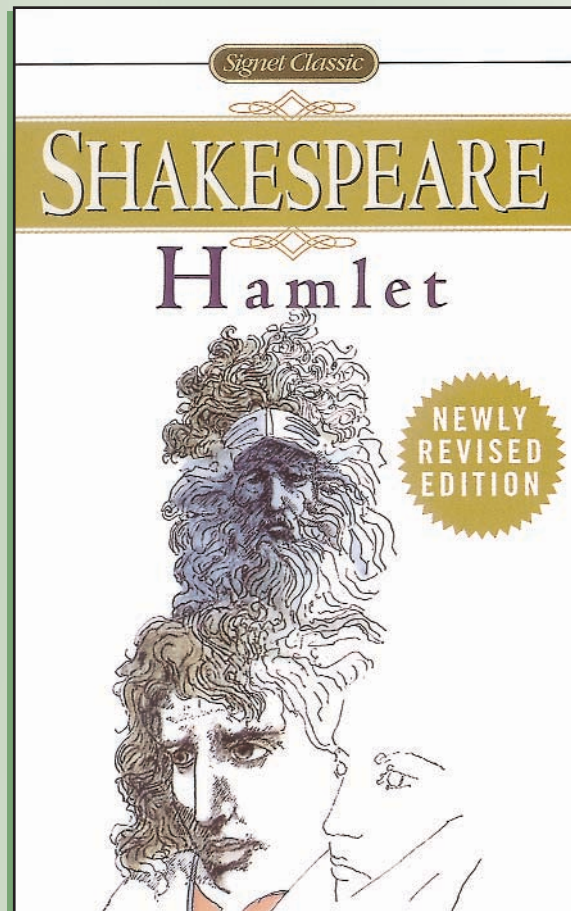


A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE SIGNET CLASSIC EDITION OF

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S

HAMLET

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INTRODUCTION

The enigmatic qualities of Shakespeare's Prince *Hamlet* make this drama an appropriate choice for high school students who can evaluate and analyze the complexity of Hamlet's situation, his motivations, and the choices and decisions he makes. Students are immediately intrigued by the play, especially if teachers introduce them to the complicated dilemma of Prince Hamlet before they begin reading. Once students are aware of Hamlet's tragic story, they are compelled to learn what he decides to do and the consequences of his decisions.

Hamlet is a monument of Shakespeare's talent, and as such. Teachers have the exciting opportunity to proceed in infinite directions in their teaching of the work. The most meaningful focus, however, is to be found in studying the character of Prince Hamlet. As a young man, he is not much older than many of the teenagers who will the play. He is uncertain about how to deal with the loss of his father, confused about what his actions should be, and angry at most of the adults in his life. Students of all ability levels should be encouraged to interact with *Hamlet* on personal and analytical levels, providing a multi-dimensional reading experience.

Included in this guide are activities for students of varying abilities, background on the play, an act-by-act synopsis, suggestions for organizing instruction, a list of journal writing topics, discussion questions, and activities for use before, during and after reading the play.

HAMLET: AN OVERVIEW

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

Most of the action of play occurs in and around the castle at Elsinore in Denmark. King Hamlet is dead, and Prince Hamlet has returned to Denmark from school in Wittenberg, Germany, only to discover that Queen Gertrude, his mother, has married his Uncle Claudius. Claudius has had himself crowned king.

Hamlet is informed that what is apparently the ghost of his dead father has appeared to the palace guards (I, ii). When he later confronts the ghost, Hamlet learns that Claudius murdered his father and hastily married Queen Gertrude (I, v).

Throughout the play, the ongoing border disputes and political machinations amongst Denmark, Norway, and Poland serve as a backdrop for the action in the Danish court (I, ii; II, ii; IV, iv; V, ii). Prince Fortinbras, whose father was killed by Hamlet's father, is a man of action, and his character serves as a foil to the contemplative Prince Hamlet.

Polonius (Lord Chamberlain), his son Laertes and daughter Ophelia are also important characters in this drama. Polonius and Laertes are concerned about Ophelia's romantic involvement with Prince Hamlet and caution her against such a relationship. Polonius also provides fatherly advice to Laertes as he leaves for Paris (I, iii).

ACT II

Hamlet's emotional turmoil over his father's murder has left him in a visibly agitated condition, which some members of the court have interpreted as madness. Claudius and Gertrude, concerned for his welfare, summon two of Hamlet's oldest friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in the hopes that they can learn what is troubling him. (II, ii). Hamlet is immediately skeptical about their surprise visit.

Anxious to confirm his own suspicions regarding the source of Hamlet's trouble, Polonius arranges a meeting between Ophelia and Hamlet, as he is convinced that Hamlet's love for Ophelia is the cause of his suffering (II, ii). When Polonius approaches Hamlet, Hamlet answers his questions although he believes Polonius to be a foolish old man.

When a group of players arrives at the Danish court to entertain, Hamlet arranges for them to perform *The Murder of Gonzago* with the addition of lines Hamlet has written. What Hamlet hopes is to prove Claudius's guilt in the murder by watching his reaction to the drama the players will stage (II, ii).

ACT III

When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern report back to Claudius that they have no explanation for Hamlet's strange behavior, Claudius decides to eavesdrop with Polonius on the meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia. Although Hamlet treats Ophelia irrationally, Claudius is suspicious of his behavior and makes plans to send Hamlet to England (III, i).

The players perform their drama in which the events portrayed, with Hamlet's alterations, almost duplicate the circumstances surrounding King Hamlet's death. Hamlet observes that Claudius is visibly upset by the play. When he leaves abruptly, Claudius confirms his guilt in the eyes of Hamlet and his friend, Horatio (III, ii).

Out of concern for Hamlet's welfare, Queen Gertrude meets privately with her son in her chambers. Polonius, however, is eavesdropping behind a wall tapestry. Hamlet's rebukes cause Gertrude to cry out, and Polonius cries out as well, fearful for her welfare. Believing he has heard Claudius, Hamlet stabs through the tapestry, killing Polonius (III, iv).

ACT IV

Polonius's death provides Claudius with the opportunity to send Hamlet to England, under the false pretense of protecting his life, when in reality, he has asked the King of England to kill Prince Hamlet (IV, iii). Grief-stricken by their father's death, Laertes and Ophelia solicit Claudius's assistance in finding his murderer (IV, v). Meanwhile, Hamlet sends word to Horatio that he has been taken prisoner by pirates who have returned him to Denmark and asks Horatio to join him (IV, vi). In order to remove Hamlet as a threat, Claudius now plans an exhibition duel in which Laertes will use a sword tipped with poison (IV, vii).

ACT V

Ophelia's madness and subsequent drowning (IV, v; IV, vii) precipitate a confrontation between Laertes and Hamlet at her grave (V, I), but Claudius intervenes, privately assuring Laertes that his revenge will come in the duel which has been arranged. Hamlet seals the fate of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern by substituting another letter in the envelope which originally contained his own death orders, requesting that the King of England put them to death (V, ii). In spite of Horatio's concern, Hamlet agrees to the duel with Laertes and appears before the court as requested. Not only does Claudius poison the tip of the sword, he also offers Hamlet a drink from a poison cup. Instead, Gertrude drinks from the cup and swoons from the effect of the poison, her dying words warning Hamlet of the plot against him. As the duel progresses, Laertes and Hamlet inadvertently exchange swords during a scuffle; consequently, both are mortally wounded, although Hamlet manages to fatally wound Claudius as well.

As the play closes, Fortinbras arrives, victorious over Poland, and the dying Hamlet names him as the new king. Fortinbras pays tribute to Hamlet and arranges for an appropriate burial.

ELEMENTS OF TRAGEDY IN HAMLET

By Shakespeare's time, the characteristics of tragedy in drama had been redefined. In the plays of the early Greeks, the tragic hero was a noble man who rose to the heights of success only to be plummeted to defeat and despair by his own tragic flaw, or *hamartia*. The plot structure in these early tragedies was relatively straightforward; the motive of the dramatist was to elicit pity and terror from the audience through empathy with the tragic hero.

What once had been a relatively simple form was gradually altered by playwrights to allow for more depth in characterization, more flexibility in plot structure, and the element of comic relief. Hamlet's situation, for example, is considered a tragic one although it differs from the relatively simple plots found in the earlier Greek tragedies. He is a nobleman, revered by his countrymen, who strives to alter the world around him. Ultimately, he must forfeit his own life to see justice done. The plot that unfolds in Shakespeare's drama includes politics, murder, and domestic strife, but still evokes pity and terror in the audience, precisely as intended by the early tragedians.

Students can analyze the elements of tragedy in *Hamlet*, comparing and contrasting Prince Hamlet's plight with that of tragic heroes in Greek tragedies and in modern tragedies. Suggested modern tragedies for such a comparison include *Death of a Salesman*, by Arthur Miller, and *Mourning Becomes Electra*, by Eugene O'Neill.

Note: More detailed information about Elizabethan tragedy can be found in the Introduction by Edward Hubler in the Signet Classic edition of *Hamlet*.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF HAMLET

Students will be interested to know that the story of Prince Hamlet was not original with Shakespeare's version. The basic plot was found in ancient stories which eventually made their way to Scandinavia, specifically Denmark. The Signet Classic edition contains more specific background on the origins of this story in "A Note on the Sources of *Hamlet*" and in Sylvan Barnet's prefatory remarks. Barnet also includes more general information about Shakespeare, the Elizabethan theater, and the various texts of *Hamlet*. Suggested teaching strategies utilizing this information are included in the activities for use before reading the play.

SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE

The enormous contribution which William Shakespeare has made to the English language is evidenced in the volumes of scholarly endeavor devoted to his body of works and in the direct and indirect allusions to his words in contemporary language and culture. A richness in imagery and an ability to tap the depths of meaning in every word make the reading of a Shakespearean play more than memorable.

Students who read *Hamlet* after reading other plays by Shakespeare have often previously studied Elizabethan language and have some awareness of the changes which have taken place in word meaning and usage over the centuries. This background should serve them well as they become involved in the power of the language of *Hamlet*. The suggested activities which follow are intended to involve students in discovering the historical impact of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and appreciating his extraordinary talent.

ACTIVITIES FOR DISCOVERING AND APPRECIATING SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE

The imagery in the play which supports the impression of decay and corruption in Denmark is woven throughout the speeches and dialogue. Students can be divided into groups, each group assigned a different act and instructed to locate as many references to decay and corruption as possible. Students should then explore the context of these references and determine to what extent these specific images enhance the overall meaning of the play. (Note: An activity such as this will sometimes necessitate a review of figurative language, the terminology and the purpose of literary devices such as symbol, metaphor, simile, etc. Teachers should assess the extent to which students need such a review prior to assigning this group activity.)

Groups should share their findings with the class, with all students noting and discussing the pattern of these images as they recur throughout the play.

Structure group research activities devoted to the study of Elizabethan language, its unusual conventions and forms. Students can build on prior knowledge or begin new investigations. The publication by Randal Robinson cited at the end of this guide is an exceptional collection of classroom activities designed to assist students in understanding Shakespeare's language.

The most impressive evidence of Shakespeare's power over the English language, even today, is the abundance of allusions to his works which have become permanent fixtures in our language. Students should be challenged to listen and watch for these allusions in all forms of media, in the language of people around them, and in the literature they study. A list of possibilities follows:

- Absent thee from felicity awhile (V, i)
- All is not well (I, ii)
- The bird of dawning singeth all night long (I, i)
- Brevity is the soul of wit (II, ii)
- Frailty, thy name is woman! (I, ii)
- Give me that man/That is not passion's slave (III, ii)
- Give thy thoughts no tongue (I, iii)
- How all occasions do inform against me (IV, iv)
- I am sick at heart (I, i)
- I could a tale unfold (I, v)

In my mind's eye (I, ii)
 It cannot come to good (I, ii)
 It started like a guilty thing (I, i)
 The lady doth protest too much (III, ii)
 Lay not that flattering unction to your soul. (III, iv)
 Leave her to heaven (I, v)
 Like sweet bells jangled, out of tun and harsh (III, i)
 Man delights not me;/nor woman neither (II, ii)
 More honoured in the breach than the observance (I, iv)
 More in sorrow than in anger (I, ii)
 More matter, with less art (II, ii)
 Neither a borrower, nor a lender be (I, iii)
 Not a mouse stirring (I, i)
 Now cracks a noble heart, Good-night, sweet prince,
 And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest? (V, ii)
 O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven (III, iii)
 O my prophetic soul! (I, v)
 The primrose path of dalliance treads
 And recks not his own rede (I, iii)
 The rest is silence (V, ii)
 Rosemary, that's for remembrance IV, v)
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune (III, i)
 Something is rotten in the state of Denmark. (I, v)
 So much for him (I, ii)
 Sweets to the sweet; farewell! (V, i)
 That it should come to this! (I, ii)
 There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
 Than are dreamt of in your philosophy. (I, v)
 There's a divinity that shapes our ends (V, ii)
 This too too solid flesh (I, ii)
 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all (III, i)
 'Tis bitter cold (I, i)
 'Tis true: 'tis true 'tis pity,
 And pity 'tis 'tis true (II, ii)
 To be, or not to be: that is the question (III, i)
 To die, to sleep—No more (III, i)
 T' have seen what I have seen, see what I see! (III, i)
 To sleep; perchance to dream (III, i)
 To thine own self be true (I, iii)
 'Twas/caviare to the general (II, ii)
 We know what we are, but
 know not what we may be (IV, v)
 What a piece of work is man (II, ii)
 When sorrows come, they come not single spies,
 But in battalions (IV, v)

Students can write paraphrases of *Hamlet's* soliloquies or translate them into contemporary language either as individuals or in small groups. These can be "performed" for the class.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ORGANIZING INSTRUCTION

A motivating introduction and activities designed for all ability levels can make *Hamlet* accessible to every student. The following are suggestions for organizing the instruction for any ability level of student, and then more specific recommendations for use with those with advanced and nonacademic ability levels.

ALL ABILITY LEVELS

- A. Journal writing is an essential part of an English classroom, especially with works of literature. At a glance, teachers can readily assess whether a student has read and understood a work. Students should be encouraged or required to write in their journals throughout the study of the play, detailing their personal reactions to particular characters or situations or writing in response to assigned topics like those below. Have students relate each topic they write on to characters or situation in the play.

Journal Topics

- How common do you believe the act of revenge is in everyday life? Write about specific incidents, including any in which you were involved or have witnessed.
 - Find magazine/newspaper articles, short stories, plays, poems, or novels containing events motivated by revenge. How might events have been changed had someone not sought revenge?
 - Characterize yourself as a "thinker" or a "doer." In this respect what character in the play are you most like? How would you like to be different, or would you like to be different?
 - Have you or anyone you have known ever seen or claimed to have witnessed some kind of supernatural being? Explain the circumstances surrounding the even. Do you believe in the supernatural? Explain.
 - In Act I, scene iii of *Hamlet*, Polonius gives Laertes a great deal of "fatherly advice" about how to live his life. Look at this section and find advice you have heard from your own parents. How valuable is this advice? Have you used it? Have you been involved in any situation to which this advice was applicable?
 - To what extent do parents have the right to "spy" or check up on their children? What circumstance might allow or prevent this?
 - How are relationships between stepparents and stepchildren generally depicted in fiction or film? Do you have any experience with or knowledge of step-relationships? What conflicts and barriers must be overcome? What are the advantages, the positive aspects of these relationships?
 - Are parents generally blind to their children's faults? Why or why not?
 - King Claudius states "Madness in great ones must not unwatched go." (III, i) How is this true in any age? What evidence can you find in recent news stories to support this statement? How do societies keep checks and balances on their "great ones?"
 - So you know what an "apple polisher" is? Have you every known one or been one yourself? Why do you think people do this? How do you feel about it?
 - Have you ever been the victim of unrequited love? How did you feel? Have you ever been the recipient of affection from someone whom you did not care about? How did you feel about this situation?
 - Write about a time when you discovered that someone was purposefully plotting against you for some reason. Explain the situation—how you felt, how it turned out.
- B. Using small groups in the regular classroom can serve several functions. Groups containing mixed ability levels can work on study questions, summarize scenes, prepare presentations, work on projects, and aid each other in deciphering more difficult sections of the play. These same groups can also serve as peer groups for various writing activities.

Group activities should be structured carefully for students on all ability levels. Teachers should provide groups with specific directions and expectation for each task, reasonable (but flexible) time limits, and follow-up activities connecting group work to the broader objectives for teaching the play.

UPPER-ABILITY LEVELS

More capable students can be assigned to read the play prior to intensive act-by-act analysis with the teacher. Students should keep a reading journal summarizing what they have read, writing down questions about any aspect of the play, and responding to the actions of the characters and the plot.

A second reading of the play is desirable. After the initial reading students may re-read each act, focusing attention on specifics through the use of study/discussion questions or group activities.

LOWER-ABILITY LEVELS

- A. With some students, reading the play aloud and summarizing the major actions scene-by-scene is necessary for comprehension. Care must be taken not to cover too much in one-class period. To avoid monotony, other teaching strategies such as the following should be used on occasion:
- Assigning manageable sections of the play to small groups, and having students prepare to read aloud and interpret these sections for the class.
 - Viewing a videotaped production of the play prior to studying the written drama, or viewing the play scene-by-scene and then summarizing and discussing.
- B. The use of study/discussion questions is appropriate with all levels of students. However, lower-ability students need to answer more surface-level comprehension questions before moving to the levels of analysis and synthesis. Such questions can establish the essentials of plot, setting, and character. Here are some examples:
- What characters are present when the play opens?
 - Where are they?
 - What have they seen that is unusual?
 - What do they decide to do?

Thought-provoking questions worded to promote understanding can be employed as well. These students can become equally involved with Hamlet's dilemma if they are afforded an appropriate entry through engaging questions and activities such as those which follow.

BEFORE READING THE PLAY

Having students consider some major conflicts in the play prior to reading can help establish a basis on which to build their knowledge of the play. Some useful activities might include one or more of the following:

Journal writing on topics related to the conflicts and events in the play is one way students can become interested and involved in the issues and topics in the play. Students should be given the opportunity to share and discuss the ideas they express in their journals. (See the topics noted in "Suggesting for Organizing Instruction.")

Bring in magazine and/or newspaper articles containing examples of people seeking revenge. Students can read these and draw parallels between the events in the articles and those in the play. This activity might be done in small groups with a follow-up journal writing and class discussion. (The second journal topic included previously asks students to bring in examples of the role revenge plays in their lives.)

Teachers talented at writing scripts might modernize the basic plot line of *Hamlet* in a simple reader's theater script, perhaps as an afternoon soap opera, and have students present the drama to the class. A follow-up to this activity might include a class discussion in which students examine how the plot unfolds. A subsequent writing assignment, in the form of a journal entry or a more structured composition, could be appropriate.

Students might be interested in reading "A Note on the Sources of *Hamlet*" included in the Signet Classic edition prior to studying the play. A succinct background on the origins of the *Hamlet* story, this information might be summarized and presented by the teacher or assigned to a small group for presentation to the class.

Note: This activity in isolation from one or more of the preceding activities will not allow students to become personally involved with the issues of the play, a necessary step for a fuller appreciation and understanding of literature.

AS THE PLAY IS READ

CONSIDERING MAJOR THEMES

Through class discussion and other activities, students can discover how Shakespeare develops major themes in the play which include:

- **Revenge:** Hamlet searches continuously for the answer to the question of whether or not he should avenge his father's death. His concern with right and wrong in religious, moral, and political terms causes him much inner turmoil. (Journal Topics 1, 2)
- **Appearance vs. Reality:** The play contains many situations in which the surface appearance of things does not always match reality. Hamlet struggles to determine who his true friends are; the players in the acting troupe assume new identities; Claudius appears to be a true and just king and Gertrude his virtuous queen. (Journal Topics 4, 8, 10, 11)
- **Sanity vs. Insanity:** In many ways this conflict is intertwined with the theme of appearance vs. reality. Hamlet's sanity or insanity has baffled critics for years. Even the characters in the play discuss inconsistencies in Hamlet's behavior, sometimes assuming he is really insane, at other times amazed by his clarity of thought. (Journal Topics 3, 9)
- **Decay and Corruption:** Among the most powerful images of the play are those which reveal disintegrating situations, both in personal terms for Prince Hamlet, and in political terms for Denmark. (Journal Topics 1, 2, 9, 12)

ACTIVITIES FOR DISCOVERING THEMES

Assign appropriate journal topics for leading into the discussion of a particular theme as it is evidenced in the play. (See above list of themes.)

Provide students with a handout listing themes to be found. Advanced students can be instructed to note specific passages and situations that develop these ideas. A simpler approach for less skilled readers is to hand out a list of page numbers where important passages related to themes are found and requiring the students to locate the passages and note their significance.

Organize students into small groups, assigning each group a different theme. Allow time for groups to collaborate on a class presentation of this particular theme as it is found in *Hamlet*. Groups can present the important passages to the class, perhaps in the form of a handout or an overhead transparency. They might also include a dramatization and discussion of selected passages related to their assigned theme. Groups can develop a list of study questions, both short answer and essay, to guide others in discovering this theme in *Hamlet*.

Progressing through the Play: In lieu of a list of questions, have students summarize each scene as they read, either in writing or orally for the class. As a variation on the reading journal/log, have students make a chart for each scene in which they list primary characters, major actions and conflicts, resolutions, significant references to themes, recurring images, and questions. After students have read Acts I and II, allow small groups to write modern versions of the significant scenes or incidents in the play and present these to the class.

Using Study/Discussion Questions: Listed by the traditional elements of fiction (character analysis, plot, theme), the following study/discussion questions can be used to engage students in class discussion or writing, or small groups of students can deal with specific questions and present their observations to the class.

STUDY/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

The following phrases might be used to describe the character of Prince Hamlet. How do you think each relates to Hamlet's nature? Refer to the text for support.

- a victim of circumstance
 - a man incapable of taking action
-

- an excessively ambitious prince who lusts for power
- a person of exceptional intellect and intelligence
- a man in the grip of insanity

Consider Hamlet's behavior when he is with each of the following characters. What is revealed about him in his dealings with each of these people?

- Claudius
- Gertrude
- Ophelia
- Horatio
- Polonius
- Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

What developments and/or states of mind do each of Hamlet's six soliloquies reveal? (I, ii; II, ii; III, i; III, iii; IV, iv)

How do you explain Hamlet's inability to act in avenging his father's death?

Is Hamlet a likable character? Would you want to be his friend? Explain.

What questions do you have about the character of Hamlet? What problems do you see in analyzing his character? Do you admire Shakespeare's ability to develop a character, or do you think he leaves too many questions unresolved?

PLOT

When the play begins, a major event, the death of King Hamlet has already occurred. How does this affect the reader's understanding of the play?

What purposes do the subplots of the relationship between Polonius and his children and the political situation with Norway and young Fortinbras serve? How is the story of Prince Hamlet and his particular situation reflected in each of these subplots?

Look carefully at each act of the drama. What is the function of each? What important event or situation is developed in each act by Shakespeare?

How does Shakespeare keep his audience apprised of developments outside the primary action of the play? Why are events on the ship taking Hamlet to England not portrayed? Find other examples in the play where Shakespeare keeps his readers aware of important events, but does so without presenting the action in the drama. Is this appropriate in your opinion? Why or why not?

Did you find the action in the play difficult to follow? Where? What did you find challenging about these sections?

Consider the dramatic pacing of the play. Does Shakespeare keep the audience or reader involved in the action? How? Explain your opinion.

THEME

To what extent is Hamlet's quest for revenge justifiable in terms of the situation presented? Why or why not?

Find evidence of Hamlet's religious beliefs. How do these beliefs influence his actions and decisions?

Examine the characters and events in terms of appearance and reality. Cite examples of things that are not what they seem.

Find examples of imagery that reveal decay or corruption. What effect do these images have on the reader? How would you explain Shakespeare's inclusion of these images in the play?

Explain what you think is revealed about human nature in *Hamlet*. Use characters and situations to illustrate your points.

AFTER READING THE PLAY

Provide students with a variety of topics from which they can select a focus for a writing assignment. If students have been allowed to respond to characters and events in the play on a personal level, perhaps in the form of journal writing as the play was read, they can develop these topics into a critical expository essay.

Suggested essay topics:

- Determine if, in your opinion, the character of Prince Hamlet, is a believable one.
- Compare and contrast the character of Hamlet to that of Horatio, Laertes, and/or Fortinbras.
- Consider the women in the play, and assess Shakespeare's portrayal of them.
- Analyze Shakespeare's use of subplots in this play. (Examples include the relationship between Polonius and his children and the political events in Denmark.) Discuss the strengths and/or weaknesses of this technique and determine if it was appropriate in this play.
- Of the themes presented in *Hamlet*, decide which was most important and justify your selection.

The commentaries included in the Signet Classic edition are especially useful with more advanced readers. These can be assigned for précis writing, journal responses, or both.

Note: One way to organize the journal responses is to have students divide their journal page in half vertically, with the left side reserved for jotting down interesting or controversial statements made by the critics or provocative lines from the play, and the right side reserved for their own personal observations about these statements. In this way, the information is easily referenced for later use in class discussions, group projects, and/or writing assignments.

Students can extend their learning by researching any aspect of Shakespeare's theater. If this has been done extensively in a prior study of Shakespeare, students can research broader topics related to the play. Such topics might include parent-child relationships, stepfamilies, the supernatural, or the occult.

Students can modernize selected portions of the play and perform these for class. Possible situations might include: Hamlet's first encounter with his father's ghost (I, iv), Hamlet's third soliloquy (III, i), or the final death scene (V, ii).

Involving students in artistic projects based on the play is an appropriate way to end the study. Most of the following ideas are easily adaptable to group work.

- Mini-posters containing a quotation from the play with appropriate artwork or collages.
- Collages focusing on an individual character or one of the themes of the play.
- Dioramas/shadow boxes depicting a significant scene in the play.
- Many parallels have been drawn between the character of Oedipus in Sophocles's drama and that of Hamlet. Students can read *Oedipus Rex* and compare his plight to that of Hamlet's.
- Show a videotape or film of the play. Involve students in writing movie reviews of the production or in comparison/contrast papers based on the written drama and the video production. If time allows and different videos are available, allow students to compare/contrast these in writing and/or class discussion.

Suggested questions for comparing the drama and video production:

- Did the production look like what you imagined as you read the play? How was it similar? Different?
- Which actor/actress best portrayed his/her character? Why?
- How was the production different from the written drama? What decisions did the director make about staging? Were these effective decisions?

Sylvan Barnet's "*Hamlet on Stage and screen*," included in the Signet Classic edition is an excellent overview of the different stage and film presentations of *Hamlet*. Students can read the article and discuss or write about which presentation they believe would be the most effective.

Another way to utilize this article is to organize the class into small groups and present students with the task of "cutting" the drama to a length manageable for a television production, approximately two hours. Have them decide what portions of the play could be deleted and present their views before the class.

Have students write a dialogue that might take place between Prince Hamlet and a psychologist. Small groups can write dialogue for therapy sessions that might take place at different stages during Hamlet's mental turmoil, for example:

- when he learns of his mother's marriage to his uncle.
- immediately after seeing his father's ghost for the first time.
- after killing Polonius.
- when he learns of Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's intentions.
- after Ophelia's funeral.

The study and comparison of a modern work to that of Shakespeare can take students beyond the scope of *Hamlet*. Students can write comparison/contrast essays or prepare class presentations. An appropriate selection for such activities would *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* by Tom Stoppard, in which *Hamlet* is presented from an opposing viewpoint.

SUGGESTED REFERENCES

At the end of the Signet Classic edition is a list of suggested references on Shakespeare including biographical information, the Elizabethan theater, and *Hamlet*.

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Alling, Eliza. "Dear Will." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 25 (1974): pp. 264-271.

Dean, James S. "What's the Matter with *Hamlet* in the Schools." In *Shakespeare in the Classroom: Resources and Media Aids*, edited by A. McLean, pp. 16-30. Kenosha: UW-Parkside's Center for Teaching Excellence, 1977.

Hellenga, Robert R. "*Hamlet* in the Classroom." *College English* 35 (October 1973): pp. 32-39.

Robinson, Randal. *Unlocking Shakespeare's Language: Help for the Teacher and Student*. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1989.

Sacks, Claire, and Whan, Edgar, eds. *Hamlet: Enter Critic*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1960.

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Ashworth, John. "Olivier, Freud and Hamlet." *Atlantic Monthly* 183 (May 1949): pp. 30-33.

Halio, Jay L. "Three Filmed Hamlets." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 1 (Fall 1973): pp. 316-320.

BEYOND THE PLAY

Students who are interested in the ideas presented in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* can find adolescent novels which deal with these same ideas in more contemporary terms. The following sources are helpful to both teachers and students in locating books on various topics:

Abrahamson, Richard F. and Betty Carter, eds. *Books for You: A Booklist for Senior High Students*. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1988

Davis, James E. and Hazel K. Davis, eds. *Your Reading: A Booklist for Junior High and Middle School Students*. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1988

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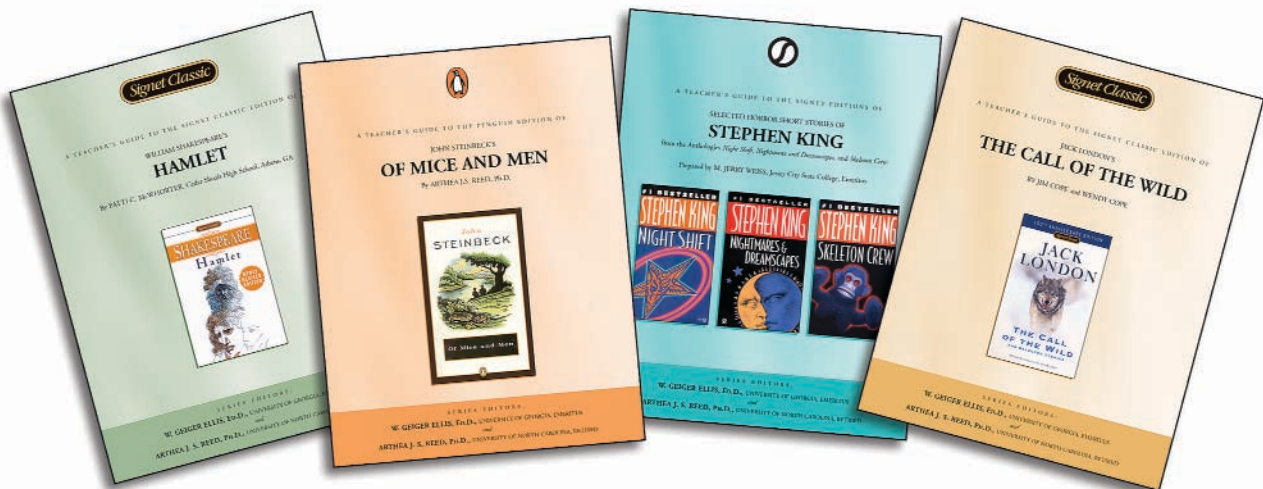
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