

Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble
presents two plays in rep

Hamlet

By William Shakespeare

Directed by Rob Pensalfini



Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead

By Tom Stoppard

Directed by Rebecca Murphy

23 - 26 Aug, 29 Aug - 2 Sep, 5 - 9 Sep

The Amphitheatre Roma Street Parkland

Buy tickets: www.qldshakespeare.org



Education Notes - *Hamlet*

Contents	Page
About the Company	3
The Production at a Glance	4
Cast and Creatives list	5
'Audiencing' in Elizabethan Style	6
Synopsis of the Play	7
Director's Note	9
Pre-show: discussion questions	10
Advice for listening to Shakespearean language	11
Practical Activity: Narrative Tableau / Living Synopsis	12
Plot Summary Chart	17
Character map	18
Character Synopses and Discussion Questions	20
Conventions of Elizabethan Theatre	25
Advice for Interpreting Shakespeare for Performance	29
Practical Exercises from the Rehearsal Room	30
Presenting (Drama) Activity – Half Hour Hamlet	34
Preparing for Performance – An Actor's Warm Up	36
Back Stage Pass – Interview with the Actors	37
Preparation for Responding (Drama)	40
Responding Activity – Scaffolding Notes Table	42
Structuring a Responding Essay	43
Further Resources	44

The Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble – Who are we?

The Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble (QSE) was founded in 2001. Since its inception, the Ensemble has gained a reputation for energetic, accessible and unique productions of Shakespeare's plays. We use Shakespeare as a platform for positive change, via our ongoing programs. These include:

- Mainstage performances for the general public at Roma Street Parklands
- A Night at the Theatre ticket distribution program
- The Apprenticeship program, supporting emerging artists
- Dare 2 Share showing of company training, at the company's home base – the Geoffrey Rush Studio, UQ
- Shakespeare's Shorts, touring to schools, festivals and events
- The Shakespeare Prison Project
- Youth Justice Shakespeare workshops
- In schools workshops in voice, Forum Theatre, and performing Shakespeare
- Actor training, including: Linklater Voice Work, Speaking Shakespeare in Your Own Voice, Theatre of the Oppressed, and the Young Actors Shakespeare Intensive

Our mission as an ensemble is to bring the language of Shakespeare to communities. QSE strives to strengthen the connections between and within communities by:

- sharing epic and eternal stories with a live audience
- creating evocative, engaging experiences in communities
- making Shakespeare accessible to all
- giving a voice to the marginalised
- reflecting the contemporary human condition

We believe:

- that Shakespeare's language demands an intense intellectual-emotional-physical-spiritual connection, and is the ultimate actor training and community building tool. Created when theatre was a rhythmic, physical, and aural experience, Shakespeare's plays insist on a whole-body relationship to words, challenging those who perform them to act boldly and speak with passion.
- that performance is most potent when it is embodied by actors who train together, exchanging skills and experiences, and sharing a sense of belonging with one another. We consider the human voice to be the ultimate vehicle for embodied expression and communal exploration.
- in the principles of Ensemble Theatre, and seek to develop a team of artist-managers who create an inspirational artistic and business environment to which others aspire.

Although the Ensemble performs the works of other playwrights and authors, particularly local ones, Shakespeare will always be the home from which we travel.

Hamlet

Prince Hamlet is having a rough time. After his father's death, he is overlooked for the crown in favour of the guy who killed his Dad and, even worse, married his mum. Caught between cultures and philosophies, Hamlet careens between paralysis and unconsidered action. Part philosopher, part improvised explosive device, Hamlet is the anti-hero we are all afraid we might become, and secretly want to.

Performance season: 23 August – 9 September, 2018
(Alternating with *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*)
Wed – 6.30pm; Thurs & Fri – 7.30pm
Sat – 2pm & 7.30pm; Sun – 6.00pm

Location: Roma Street Parkland Amphitheatre

Length: 2 hours and 40 minutes (including 20 minute interval)
AND 30 minutes of live music prior to the show

Suitability: Years 10 – 12

Please be advised: The performance contains adult references to death and suicide, supernatural themes and theatricalised violence.

Key themes: Revenge
Delay and Inaction
Moral Corruption
Madness and Mental Illness
Lies and Deceit
Death and Beyond

Key Questions: **Universal (what does it mean to be human?):**
How can we function in a harsh, unpredictable world and remain conscious of our thoughts and actions?

Political (how must we act towards each other?):
What are our obligations to family and duty in a changing world?

Individual (what should I do?)
What actions can we take when who we want to be clashes with who we were raised to be?

Cast:

Hamlet
Claudius / Ghost
Gertrude
Polonius / Grave digger / English Ambassador
Ophelia / Norwegian Soldier
Laertes / Player
Horatio
Rosencrantz
Guildenstern
Marcellus / Fortinbras
Cornelius / Grave digger
Voltemande / Player King / Norwegian Soldier
Osric / Player Queen
Bernardo / Player Villain / Priest / Norwegian Soldier
First Player / English Ambassador

Silvan Rus
Ben Prindable
Liliana Macarone
Frances Marrington
Sarah Doyle
Nicholas Rijs
Dudley Powell
Ellen Hardisty
Paige Poulier
Sam Valentine
Rebecca Murphy
Josh Lyons
Rebekah Schmidt
Riley McNamara
Colin Smith

***His Mother's Closet* (Band):**

Clarinet / Guitar
Drums / Guitar
Guitar / Bass guitar
Violin
Bass guitar
Accordion / Saxophone
Trombone
Guitar / Harmonica

Rob Pensalfini
Liliana Macarone
Silvan Rus
Ellen Hardisty
Colin Smith
Josh Lyons
Sam Valentine
Nicholas Rijs

Key Creatives:

Director
Costume Designer
Set designer
Lighting Designer
Production Manager
Stage Manager
Assistant Stage Manager

Rob Pensalfini
Kaylee Gannaway
James Elliot
Steven Tibbits
Kylie Davies
Josie Dodson
Georgia Cooper

'Audienicing' in the Elizabethan Style:

We'd like to welcome you to the experience of attending a live performance in a non-traditional setting. While all of our mainstage shows are produced in the Amphitheatre at the beautiful Roma Street Parkland, we set our audience on stage with us, and use the parkland itself as the background to the action. Just like in any theatre, there are most of the usual expectations – and while we know you get all the etiquette stuff, here's a reminder of some simple information you can pass on to your students.

1. Elizabethan audiences could be quite vocally involved in a show. In a similar way, we would love you to get involved in the performances by applauding and laughing at appropriate moments. If you have a specific question – ask your teacher at the interval/end of the show or ask one of the cast, if you have a chance for a Question & Answer session (which can be held with prior arrangement after any show within the season).
2. You are welcome to eat during the show, but please be mindful of other patrons. Snacks and drinks (including water) can be purchased at front-of-house prior to the show and during interval, and you are welcome to take these back to the audience space with you. Please be mindful of placement of drinks, and keep all bottles closed when not being used.
3. Live theatre is different to TV – the actors on stage can hear and see you and there are other members of the audience to think about. If you need to leave the performance for any reason, please ensure this is done quickly and quietly and at an appropriate break in the action
4. Switching your phone to silent isn't the only thing to do. Please ensure that you switch off your mobile phone and leave it in your bag before the performance begins; and if you wear a smart-watch and are not wearing long sleeves to cover this, consider removing it also. The glow of the iPhone screen and even a watch (which can be set off whenever you shift your arm) is obvious to others and can be very distracting!
5. Additionally, because of our beautiful open-air performance space, and despite the warmth of our actors' marvelous performances, evening shows can be a little chilly. We do provide some blankets for our audience, but please remember to wear warm clothes, bring a jacket, and feel free to bring your own blanket too!
6. Lastly, a reminder that there will be 30 minutes of live music performed by the band prior to the show. Audience seating will be open during this time, so you can enjoy from the audience space on stage, or it is also a popular audience tradition to bring dinner and/or a picnic blanket to enjoy the music from the grounds in and around the amphitheatre. We would just ask that if you do choose to sit in the audience seating, that you keep conversation to a non-intrusive volume level. Thank you for your consideration of the band's and other audience members' enjoyment

About the play

On a dark winter night, Denmark prepares for a possible conflict with Norway, led by the Norwegian king's nephew, Fortinbras, whose father – the previous King of Norway (making Fortinbras' usurped position synonymous with Hamlet's) – lost borderlands to old King Hamlet that Fortinbras intends to reclaim. Meanwhile, a ghost walks the ramparts of Elsinore Castle. Discovered first by a pair of watchmen, then by the scholar Horatio, the ghost resembles the recently deceased King Hamlet, whose brother has inherited the throne and married the king's widow, Queen Gertrude. When Horatio and the watchmen bring Prince Hamlet, the son of Gertrude and the dead king, to see the ghost, it speaks to him, declaring ominously that it is indeed his father's spirit, and that none other than his own brother murdered him. Ordering Hamlet to seek revenge on the man who usurped his throne and married his wife, the ghost disappears with the dawn.

Prince Hamlet devotes himself to avenging his father's death, but, because he is contemplative and thoughtful by nature, he delays, entering into a deep melancholy and even apparent madness. The King (his uncle) and Queen Gertrude worry about the prince's erratic behavior and attempt to discover its cause. They employ a pair of Hamlet's friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to watch him. When Polonius, the King's senior advisor, suggests that Hamlet may be mad with love for his daughter, Ophelia, the King agrees to spy on Hamlet in conversation with the girl. But though Hamlet certainly seems mad, he does not seem to love Ophelia, at least not any more: he orders her to enter a nunnery and declares that he wishes to ban marriages.

Meanwhile, the King (of Denmark) has sent ambassadors to the elderly King of Norway to inform him of his nephew Fortinbras' unlawful menacing of Denmark's borderlands. The King of Norway has acted to preserve his diplomatic relationship with Denmark by providing Fortinbras with a commission to lead his army against Poland instead, and has requested safe passage for the soldiers through Denmark for this purpose. The King of Denmark has readily agreed to this diplomatic solution.

A group of traveling actors comes to Elsinore, and Hamlet seizes upon an idea to test his uncle's guilt. He will have the players perform a scene closely resembling the sequence by which Hamlet imagines his uncle to have murdered his father, so that if his uncle is guilty, he will surely react. When the moment of the murder arrives in the theater, the King leaps up and leaves the room. Hamlet and Horatio agree that this proves his guilt. Hamlet goes to kill the King but finds him praying. Since he believes that killing him while at prayer would send his soul to heaven, Hamlet considers that it would be an inadequate revenge and decides to wait. The King, now frightened of Hamlet's madness and fearing for his own safety, orders that Hamlet be sent to England at once.

Hamlet goes to confront his mother, in whose bedchamber Polonius has hidden behind a tapestry. Hearing a noise from behind the tapestry, Hamlet believes the King is hiding there. He draws his sword and stabs through the fabric, killing Polonius. For this crime, he is immediately dispatched to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Moreover, the King has given Rosencrantz and Guildenstern sealed orders for the King of England demanding that Hamlet be put to death.

In the aftermath of her father's death, Ophelia goes mad with grief and drowns in the river. Polonius's son, Laertes, who has been staying in France, returns to Denmark in a rage. The King convinces him that Hamlet is to blame for his father's and sister's deaths. When Horatio and the king receive letters from Hamlet indicating that the prince has returned to Denmark after pirates attacked his ship en route to England, the King concocts a plan to use Laertes' desire for revenge to secure Hamlet's death. Laertes will fence with Hamlet in innocent sport, but will first poison his blade. As a backup plan, the King decides to poison a goblet, which he will give Hamlet to drink during the match.

Hamlet returns to the vicinity of Elsinore just as Ophelia's funeral is taking place. Stricken with grief, he attacks Laertes and declares that he had in fact always loved Ophelia. Back at the castle, he tells Horatio that he believes one must be prepared to die, since death can come at any moment. A foolish courtier named Osric arrives to arrange the fencing match between Hamlet and Laertes.

The sword fighting begins. Hamlet scores the first hit, but declines to drink from the king's proffered goblet. Instead, Gertrude takes a drink from it and is swiftly killed by the poison. Laertes succeeds in wounding Hamlet, though Hamlet does not die of the poison immediately. First, Laertes is cut by his own sword's blade, and, after revealing to Hamlet that the King is responsible for the Queen's death, he dies from the blade's poison. Hamlet then stabs the King and forces him to drink the rest of the poisoned wine. The King dies, and Hamlet dies immediately after achieving his revenge, but not before giving his support to the Norwegian Prince Fortinbras as the next King of Denmark.

At this moment, Fortinbras, who is returning home from battle in Poland, arrives, as do the Ambassadors from England, bearing the report that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been executed. The gruesome sight of the entire royal family lying sprawled on the floor dead stuns Fortinbras. Nevertheless, he swiftly moves to take power of the kingdom. Horatio, fulfilling Hamlet's last request, tells him Hamlet's tragic story. Fortinbras orders that Hamlet be carried away in a manner befitting a fallen soldier.

Based on: <http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/hamlet/>



Why engage with *Hamlet*?

Rob Pensalfini - Director's Note

For us, Hamlet is caught between two worlds, raised to think and act in one way and then educated to think and act in completely new ones. It is a scenario we see reflected in many forms around us. Any second-generation immigrant would recognise it. Anyone who has spent long years abroad and then come home. Anyone whose ideology or lifestyle is different from those in which they were raised. Our newfound identities, ideas, habits, and customs are laid over the old ones. The old ones never disappear.

Hamlet is divided, that much is no surprise to anyone who has ever encountered the play. The result of this is not, as many of us had been told by teachers or productions, an inability to act, a lack of Will. Rather it is the separation of Hamlet's Will from his Wit (which together make up Reason), which is the source of the destructive spiral, the mortal coil, we see in the play.

Hamlet swings from deep and long consideration without action to rash and unconsidered action. Consider the suddenness and unpremeditated nature of Polonius' stabbing. Or the way he describes how he set Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's deaths in motion without premeditation ("ere I could make the prologue to my brains, they had begun"). Or the extremity of his dealings with the two women in his life. And then there is the unprovoked attack on Laertes at Ophelia's grave, for daring to think a brother has more right to grieve than the ex who spurned her.

Much has been made of Hamlet's mental health. Is he mentally ill, or are his responses reasonable? If he has a diagnosable mental illness (and diagnoses can be limiting), it is not the depression so often portrayed in productions of *Hamlet*, but a bi-polar disorder, with extreme bouts of rage and physical violence.

Hamlet's Denmark is a country undergoing great change. Old King Hamlet is described as warlike, and very similar to the Old Norwegian King, Fortinbras. Young Fortinbras is a warrior-king in much the same vein, suggesting Norway maintains the old culture, perhaps still worships the Norse Gods. The new King of Denmark, on the other hand, appears to be a savvy politician. And the country's crown prince has been sent to get a German education. The God of Denmark is the Christian God, but yet the old culture still lies beneath that. The spectre of Norway is ever-present. Thus the political picture, of a nation in transition, one foot in the Viking world and one in the Middle Ages, mirrors or envelops the individual struggles that Hamlet faces. This is why we have chosen to maintain most of the text that talks about Denmark's international relations, where many productions cut or shorten these (we have made cuts elsewhere).

I have long been perplexed, in the light of this, by Hamlet's final action, which is to effectively give Denmark away to Norway, the very fate that both his father and his uncle spent their reigns avoiding. Was this final act rash or considered? Is his father's death truly avenged? Is it possible to integrate the old and the new, or are we destined to be torn apart by the contradictions?

Questions to Ponder

- Have you ever felt caught between two worlds or two important choices – perhaps parents wanting something different for you than you want for yourself; or being torn between desires for two mutually exclusive experiences?
- Can you think of something that you were raised to believe, that you then discovered wasn't well founded (and therefore you had to change your belief)?
 - Discuss what the moment of realization or confrontation (above) felt like.
- Have you ever had to say a final goodbye to someone or something important? What was this experience like?
- Can you think of a time when someone else was given something valuable that you believed belonged to you? How did this feel?
- Rob Pensalfini, the director, proposes that if Hamlet's wildly swinging moods are due to mental illness, it could be something like bi-polar disorder. What do you know about how this condition affects a person's behaviour?
 - Can you think of any other representations of characters with this mental illness in movies or books?
- Can you think of any current international political situations that mirror the conflict between Norway (a warrior state) and Denmark (which is in the process of becoming a 'civilised' diplomatic state)?
- If you were in Hamlet's position (you come home from university to discover that your father has died, your mother has married your uncle, your uncle has taken your throne, and your uncle was the one who killed your father!), would you have acted differently? How? What do you think the outcome would have been?

QSE's advice for listening to Shakespearean language

When watching a production of Shakespeare's work, there are a few things to keep in mind to get the most out of the experience:

If you walk away feeling like you didn't understand what was happening, or who was generally doing what to who and more or less why, rest assured that the fault lies not in you, but (most probably) in the production.

Don't seek to understand every word - there will be words that you probably don't understand. If it's true that Shakespeare invented a lot of words, then there are words that his audience would not have understood in isolation either. But the words are never in isolation: the context, the sound of the word, the action, and the actor's intonation and intention will, in a good production of a Shakespearean play, allow you to glean what the word is doing. Seek to understand the gist.

Let the words wash over you and into you. Don't focus so hard on the meaning that you miss the images, the thoughts and mental pictures that your own mind makes out of them, the things they remind you of. Let the rhythms and sounds of the language in. The play is every bit as much yours as it is Shakespeare's or the actors'.

Pre-show activity: Narrative tableau

Materials: Plot points and associated quotes (below) printed on individual slips of paper
Blue tack

Arrange students in groups of 4 – 5. Divide below plot points among groups (for a shorter and more simplified version, use the points from the Plot Graphic on p. 17). Have them devise a freeze-frame to represent each plot point. Encourage them to have an engaging use of proxemics / spatial relationships and a heightened use of shape to portray the characters and action of each ‘scene’.

Extension: The freeze-frame must animate for 5 – 10 seconds, during which time the relevant lines will be delivered. Encourage students to consider use of their voice and movement to create the atmosphere of the scene, and to clearly demonstrate relationships and characters’ relative status.

Have the class perform their tableau in order (either provide them with the order, or get them to work out as a whole group what the correct order is, by arranging the slips of paper in the designated order on the ground or a wall). You could have one student read all the narration (in bold), or a student from each group could do this from within the tableau.

Denmark fortifies itself against a possible attack from Norway. Claudius sends ambassadors to the King of Norway to ask him to call off his nephew Fortinbras, whose army is threatening.

Claudius: ... Young Fortinbras,
He hath not fail’d to pester us with message,
Importing the surrender of those lands
Lost by his father, and so have we writ
To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras –
Who, impotent and bed-rid, scarcely hears
Of this his nephew’s purpose...

Claudius declares Hamlet his successor to the throne. He and Gertrude ask Hamlet not to leave Elsinore for University in Wittenberg.

Claudius: ... Pray you, throw to earth
This unprevailing woe, and think of us
As of a father: for let the world take note,
You are the most immediate to our throne...
Gertrude: Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet:
I pray thee, stay with us; go not to Wittenberg.

Laertes advises and Polonius orders Ophelia to disentangle herself from a romance with Hamlet.

Laertes: For Hamlet and the trifling of his favour,
Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood...
He may not, as unvalued persons do,
Carve for himself...

Polonius: I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth,
Have you so slander any moment leisure,
As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet.

Hamlet encounters the Ghost on the ramparts and discovers that Claudius may be guilty of his murder.

Hamlet: King, father, royal Dane: O, answer me!
Ghost: I am thy father's spirit,
Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.
... The serpent that did sting thy father's life
Now wears his crown.

Hamlet visits Ophelia uninvited in her dressing room. He appears unkempt and upset, but says nothing. She tells her father Polonius of the encounter.

Polonius: Mad for thy love?
Ophelia: My lord, I do not know;
But truly, I do fear it.
Polonius: This is the very ecstasy of love.
Come, go with me: I will go seek the king.

Claudius and Gertrude employ Hamlet's old school friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to find out what is causing his unhappiness.

Claudius: I entreat you both,
To draw him on to pleasures, and to gather,
Whether aught, to us unknown, afflicts him thus.

Gertrude: Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz.
Guildenstern: Heavens make our presence and our practices
Pleasant and helpful to him!

Polonius advises the King and Queen that he believes Hamlet's distress is caused by unrequited love of Ophelia

Polonius: Since brevity is the soul of wit
I will be brief: your noble son is mad.
... If he love her not
And be not from his reason fall'n thereon,
Let me be no assistant for a state,
But keep a farm and carters.

Claudius: We will try it.

Players arrive at the castle, and Hamlet hatches a plan to test Claudius' guilt by staging a play that will mirror Claudius' murder of his father.

Hamlet: ... I'll have these players
Play something like the murder of my father
Before mine uncle: I'll observe his looks;
I'll tent him to the quick: if he but blench,
I know my course. The play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.

Claudius and Polonius eavesdrop on Hamlet's encounter with Ophelia. Claudius concludes that his erratic actions are not caused by love. He determines to send Hamlet away to England.

Hamlet: I did love you once.

Ophelia: Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

Hamlet: You should not have believed me: I loved you not. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? Get thee to a nunnery, go.

Ophelia: O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!

Claudius: Love! His affections do not that way tend.
Nor what he spake, was not like madness, no.
He shall with speed to England
For the demand of our neglected tribute.

The players perform *The Murder of Gonzago (or The Mousetrap)*, and Claudius flees upon seeing the murder. Hamlet and Horatio conclude that he is indeed guilty.

Hamlet: He poisons him I' the garden for's estate. You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife.

Claudius: Give me some light: away!

Hamlet: O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound.

Hamlet discovers Claudius praying. He decides not to kill Claudius until he is doing something less virtuous, so that he will not go to heaven.

Claudius: O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;
O wretched state! O bosom black as death!
Bow stubborn knees; all may be well.

Hamlet: Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;
And now I'll do't. And so he goes to heaven.
O, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

Polonius hides in Gertrude's dressing room to overhear her discussion with Hamlet, and during the encounter is murdered by him.

Polonius: He will come straight. I'll sconce me even here.

Hamlet: Mother, mother, mother!

Gertrude: What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me?

Polonius: What, ho! Help, help, help!

Hamlet: How now! A rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead!

Gertrude: O, what a rash and bloody deed is this!

Hamlet: A bloody deed! Almost as bad, good mother,
As kill a king, and marry with his brother.

Gertrude: These words, like daggers, enter in mine ears;
No more, sweet Hamlet!

Claudius sends Hamlet to England, chaperoned by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern who carry orders for Hamlet's death.

Claudius: Hamlet, this deed must send thee hence.
Prepare thyself; everything is bent
For England.

[Hamlet exits]

And England, pay homage to us with
The present death of Hamlet. Til I know 'tis done
Howe'er my haps, my joys were ne'er begun.

Hamlet's ship is attacked, and he is returned back to Elsinore by pirates. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern continue on to England, unaware that Hamlet has changed Claudius' letter to order their deaths.

Horatio: *[reads]* 'Ere we were two days old at sea, a pirate of very warlike appointment gave us chase. In the grapple I boarded them: on the instant they got clear of our ship, so I alone became their prisoner. They have dealt with me like thieves of mercy: but they knew what they did; I am to do a good turn for them.'

Laertes returns from Paris looking for revenge for his father. Claudius convinces Laertes to kill Hamlet during a fencing match by sharpening and poisoning his blade.

Laertes: Where is this king? O thou vile king,
Give me my father!

Claudius: You do desire to know the certainty
Of your dear father's death. So you shall;

Hamlet comes back: what would you undertake,
To show yourself your father's son in deed
More than in words?

Laertes: To cut his throat I' the church.

Ophelia is driven mad at the loss of her father, and drowns.

Ophelia: There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; and there's pansies, that's for thoughts. I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died... *[Exits]*

Claudius: Oh, this is the poison of deep grief; it springs
All from her father's death.

Gertrude: *[Enters]* One woe doth tread upon another's heel,
So fast they follow; your sister's drown'd, Laertes.

Hamlet and Laertes fence. Claudius pauses the match to attempt to give Hamlet a poisoned drink; Gertrude drinks from it instead and dies.

Hamlet: Give us the foils. Come on.

Laertes: Come, one for me.

Claudius: Stay; give me drink. Hamlet, here's to thy health. Give him the cup.

Hamlet: I'll play this bout first; set it by awhile. Come.

Gertrude: The queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet.

Claudius: *[aside]* It is the poison'd cup; it is too late.

During the fencing match, Hamlet grabs Laertes' blade and hits him with the poisoned edge. He is then injured by Laertes with the same blade. Laertes reveals that Claudius is to blame for Gertrude's and their own deaths before he dies.

Horatio: They bleed on both sides. How is it my lord?

Laertes: Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe. I am justly kill'd with mine own treachery.

Hamlet: O villainy! Treachery! Seek it out.

Laertes: It is here, Hamlet: Hamlet, thou art slain.
I can no more: the king, the king's to blame.

Hamlet stabs Claudius with the poisoned blade and then makes him drink the rest of the poisoned drink. Claudius dies.

Hamlet: The point! Envenom'd too!
Then venom, to thy work.
[stabs Claudius]
Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane,
Drink off this potion. Follow my mother.

Hamlet declares Horatio must live to tell his story, and that he predicts the Norwegian prince Fortinbras will inherit Denmark. Hamlet dies.

Hamlet: Horatio, I am dead;
Thou livest; report me and my cause aright
To the unsatisfied.
I do prophesy the election lights
On Fortinbras: he has my dying voice.

Horatio: Now cracks a noble heart. Good night sweet prince.






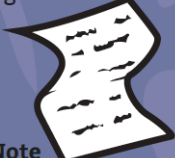

Fortinbras arrives on his way back from a battle in Poland, finds the royal family dead, and declares he will take power.

Fortinbras: For me, with sorrow I embrace my fortune:
I have some rights of memory in this kingdom,
Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me.
Take up the bodies: such a sight as this
Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss.

Plot Summary Chart

Hamlet

Here's how this bloodbath goes down:

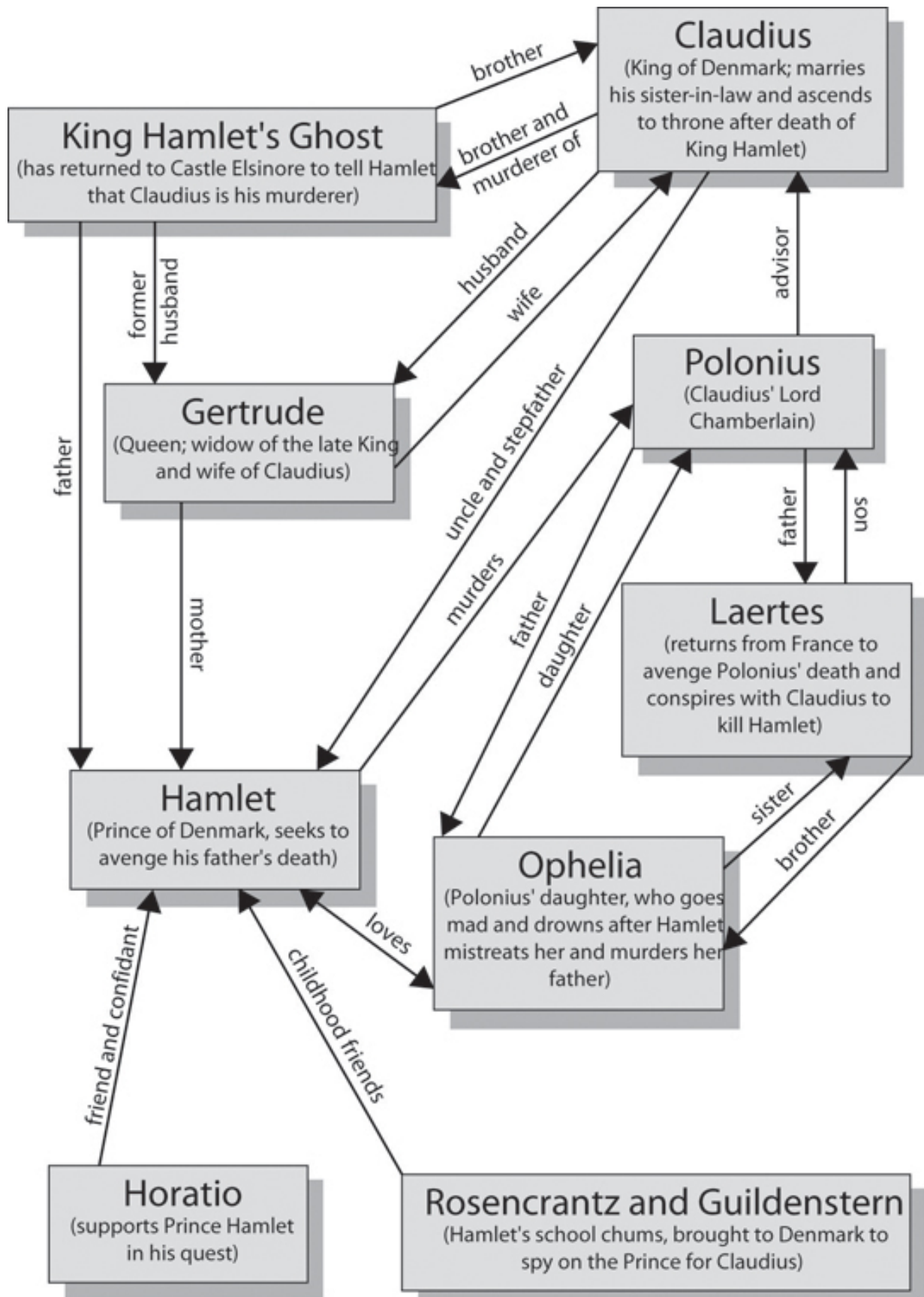
- **1 Ghost**
A ghost is seen flying around the walls of Elsinore castle.
- **2 Revenge**
The ghost tells Hamlet he's his dad and that he was killed by poison. He then asks Hamlet to avenge him.
- **3 Crazy**
Hamlet begins to act crazy. No one is sure if it's real or just an act.
- **4 Theater**
Hamlet puts on a play to determine if his ghost dad was telling the truth.
- **5 Oops**
Hamlet kills Ophelia's dad by mistake. Enraged, Ophelia's brother wants a duel.
- **6 Note**
Hamlet finds a letter written by his "friends" with instructions to kill him.
- **7 Duel**
At the duel, Hamlet, Claudius, and Laertes all die from the same poisoned sword.

shmoop

© 2015 SHMOOP UNIVERSITY. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

<https://www.shmoop.com/hamlet/chart-plot-summary.html>

Character Map – the Danish Court



Pre-performance activity: Making character connections

Materials:

Character cards & glue (optional)

Poster-sized sheets of paper (or work as a whole class on the whiteboard)

Markers

Once students are familiar with Hamlet's narrative, have them work in groups of 3 – 4. Rather than (or before) giving them the character map, have them create their own. Provide them with a list of the key characters and ask them to draw the relationship connections between the characters.

Key Characters – Synopses and Discussion Questions

Character summaries below are sourced from the websites:

<http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/hamlet/>

<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/h/hamlet/hamlet-at-a-glance>

Questions listed below each character are some of the questions the actors playing the characters were asked to consider throughout the rehearsal process, and may provide stimulus for discussion either pre or post-show viewing. They may be useful for students to consider if completing a forming task inspired by or presenting task based on extracts from the script.

Hamlet

Hamlet has fascinated audiences and readers for centuries, and the first thing to point out about him is that he is enigmatic. There is always more to him than the other characters in the play can figure out; even the most careful and clever readers come away with the sense that they don't know everything there is to know about this character. Hamlet actually tells other characters that there is more to him than meets the eye—notably, his mother, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—but his fascination involves much more than this. When he speaks, he sounds as if there's something important he's not saying, maybe something even he is not aware of. The ability to write soliloquies and dialogues that create this effect is one of Shakespeare's most impressive achievements.

A university student whose studies are interrupted by his father's death, Hamlet is extremely philosophical and contemplative. He is particularly drawn to difficult questions or questions that cannot be answered with any certainty. Faced with evidence that his uncle murdered his father, evidence that any other character in a play would believe, Hamlet becomes obsessed with proving his uncle's guilt before trying to act. The standard of "beyond a reasonable doubt" is simply unacceptable to him. He is equally plagued with questions about the afterlife, about the wisdom of suicide, about what happens to bodies after they die—the list is extensive.

But even though he is thoughtful to the point of obsession, Hamlet also behaves rashly and impulsively. When he does act, it is with surprising swiftness and little or no premeditation, as when he stabs Polonius through a curtain without even checking to see who he is. He seems to step very easily into the role of a madman, behaving erratically and upsetting the other characters with his wild speech and pointed innuendos.

It is also important to note that Hamlet is extremely melancholy and discontented with the state of affairs in Denmark and in his own family—indeed, in the world at large. He is extremely disappointed with his mother for marrying his uncle so quickly, and he repudiates Ophelia, a woman he once claimed to love, in the harshest terms. His words

often indicate his disgust with and distrust of women in general. At a number of points in the play, he contemplates his own death and even the option of suicide. But, despite all of the things with which Hamlet professes dissatisfaction, it is remarkable that the prince and heir apparent of Denmark should think about these problems only in personal and philosophical terms. He spends relatively little time thinking about the threats to Denmark's national security from without or the threats to its stability from within (some of which he helps to create through his own carelessness).

Questions to consider:

- *Is Hamlet an ingenious dissembler, or does he indeed slip at some point into true 'madness'?*
- *Does Hamlet himself want, or have any aspirations, to be King – or is his rage at Claudius and at his mother motivated only by the desire to revenge his father and satisfy the Ghost?*
- *What was Hamlet's relationship with his father like when he was alive?*
- *How has Hamlet's study at the university in Wittenberg changed him? Did he lean towards contemplation and philosophy over action even before becoming a student?*
- *Why is Hamlet so 'favoured by the people' – what has he done or what does he represent to the people of Denmark that Claudius does not?*
- *Does Hamlet love Ophelia – and if so, what motivates his violent rejection of her?*
- *What does Hamlet believe Gertrude is guilty of (is it only the marriage to Claudius following his father's death)?*

Claudius

Hamlet's major antagonist is a shrewd, conniving king who contrasts sharply with the other male characters in the play. Whereas most of the other important men in Hamlet are preoccupied with ideas of justice, revenge, and moral balance, Claudius is bent upon maintaining his own power. The old King Hamlet was apparently a stern warrior, but Claudius is a politician whose main weapon is his ability to manipulate others through his skillful use of language. Claudius's speech is compared to poison being poured in the ear—the method he used to murder Hamlet's father. Claudius's love for Gertrude may be sincere, but it also seems likely that he married her as a strategic move, to help him win the throne away from Hamlet after the death of the king. As the play progresses, Claudius's mounting fear of Hamlet's insanity leads him to ever greater self-preoccupation; when Gertrude tells him that Hamlet has killed Polonius, Claudius does not remark that Gertrude might have been in danger, but only that he would have been in danger had he been in the room. He tells Laertes the same thing as he attempts to soothe the young man's anger after his father's death. Claudius is ultimately too crafty for his own good. In Act V, scene ii, rather than allowing Laertes only two methods of killing Hamlet, the sharpened sword and the poison on the blade, Claudius insists on a third, the poisoned goblet. When Gertrude inadvertently drinks the poison and dies, Hamlet is at last able to bring himself to kill Claudius, and the king is felled by his own cowardly machination.

Curiously, the King is never actually called 'Claudius' in the play, only ever 'King' or 'Denmark'. The supposed name comes from the list of characters at the start of the script.

Questions to consider:

- *Does Claudius have any altruistic motives for becoming King? Does he believe he can serve the country well as it's monarch – or is he solely power-hungry?*
- *What was Claudius' relationship with his brother like when old Hamlet was alive?*
- *Does Claudius intend to keep his word when he says Hamlet will succeed him (Act I Sc 1) or is this only a political move?*
- *Does Claudius truly feel guilty for his actions – or is he only trying to pray for forgiveness in order to safeguard his future in the afterlife?*
- *Does Claudius love Gertrude or is she simply another means to retaining power?*

Gertrude

Few Shakespearean characters have caused as much uncertainty as Gertrude, the Queen of Denmark. The play seems to raise more questions about Gertrude than it answers, including: Was she involved with Claudius before the death of her husband? Did she love her husband? Did she know about Claudius's plan to commit the murder? Did she love Claudius, or did she marry him simply to keep her high station in Denmark? Does she believe Hamlet when he insists that he is not mad, or does she pretend to believe him simply to protect herself? Does she intentionally betray Hamlet to Claudius, or does she believe that she is protecting her son's secret?

These questions can be answered in numerous ways, depending upon one's reading of the play. The Gertrude who does emerge clearly in *Hamlet* is a woman defined by her desire for station and affection, as well as by her tendency to use men to fulfill her instinct for self-preservation—which, of course, makes her extremely dependent upon the men in her life. Hamlet's most famous comment about Gertrude is his furious condemnation of women in general: "Frailty, thy name is woman!" (I.ii.146). This comment is as much indicative of Hamlet's agonized state of mind as of anything else, but to a great extent Gertrude does seem morally frail. She never exhibits the ability to think critically about her situation, but seems merely to move instinctively toward seemingly safe choices, as when she immediately runs to Claudius after her confrontation with Hamlet. She is at her best in social situations (Act 1 Scene 2 and Act 5 Scene 2), when her natural grace and charm seem to indicate a rich, rounded personality. At times it may seem that her grace and charm are her only characteristics, and her reliance on men appears to be her sole way of capitalizing on her abilities.

Questions to consider:

- *What was Gertrude's relationship with old Hamlet like?*
- *What was Gertrude's relationship with Claudius like while old Hamlet was alive?*
- *Was Gertrude involved in the plan to murder old Hamlet or is she innocent of this guilt?*
- *Why does Gertrude marry Claudius so soon after old Hamlet's death? Is it for love or is it so that she can remain Queen?*
- *How has Gertrude's relationship with Hamlet changed (or not) since he's been in Wittenberg, and more recently, since she married Claudius?*

- *Is Gertrude's greater loyalty to her husband Claudius, or to her son Hamlet? Who would she choose if she had to choose between them?*

Polonius

Casting Polonius in a demeaning light is a common danger. While he is a blowhard, and he does spout aphorisms that were, even in the 16th century, clichés, his clichés constitute sound advice and his observations prove themselves prophetic.

Polonius may be elderly and potentially in the early stages of dementia, he must have been at least politically adept. He admits that he is not a man of great prestige, and yet he has risen to be counselor to the King. Presumably, he counseled King Hamlet as well.

Much of Polonius' actions and motivations are open to interpretation, and will be answered differently in each production. They include questions such as: is he first and foremost a devoted father or a ruthless politician? Does he sacrifice Ophelia to his ambitions and/or his fear of being discarded by the King? Does he send Bernardo to spy on Laertes because he cares about his son, or is he worried about what Laertes' possible behavior might reflect back on his own character? Is he more concerned with his position in Denmark than with the welfare of his children? Is he then the victim of his own contrivances?

Questions to consider:

- *What is Polonius' relationship with his children like? How much does he value them?*
- *What happened to Ophelia and Laertes' mother? How has this affected the family?*
- *What was Polonius' relationship with old King Hamlet? How is his relationship with Claudius different?*
- *Was Polonius at all involved in the murder of old King Hamlet?*
- *How does Polonius regard Hamlet's continued mourning for his father?*
- *Why does Polonius decide to use subterfuge to discover Laertes' actions in Paris? Is it out of care for Laertes, or is it to proactively protect his own reputation?*
- *Does Polonius 'sacrifice' Ophelia to his own ambitions; or is he keen to discover and correct his error in judgement of Hamlet's intentions for his daughter's sake?*

Ophelia

Ophelia is a difficult role to play because her character, like Gertrude's, is murky. Part of the difficulty is that Shakespeare wrote his female roles for men, and there were always limitations on them that restricted and defined the characterizations devised. We do know that Ophelia is torn between two contradictory poles. Her father and brother believe that Hamlet would use her, that he would take her virginity and throw it away because she could never be his wife. Her heart has convinced her that Hamlet loved her, though he swears he never did. To her father and brother, Ophelia is the eternal virgin, the vessel of morality whose purpose is to be a dutiful wife and steadfast mother. To Hamlet, she is a sexual object, a corrupt and deceitful lover. With no mother to guide her, she has no way of deciphering the contradictory expectations.

Just like Hamlet, the medieval precept that the father's word is unquestionable governs Ophelia. But her Renaissance sense of romantic love also rules her. How can she be obedient to her father and true to her love? When she lies to Hamlet and tells him that Polonius is home when he is concealed in the room eavesdropping, Ophelia proves she cannot live in both worlds. She has chosen one, and her choice seals her fate. The dilemma also forces her into madness. She has no way to reconcile the contradictory selves her men demand that she be and still retain an equilibrium. Ophelia's desperation literally drives her crazy, and she has no means with which to heal herself.

Questions to consider:

- *What does Ophelia hope for from her relationship with Hamlet? How does her father's commands affect her?*
- *Does Gertrude's view of the potential relationship between Ophelia and Hamlet differ from Polonius' and Laertes'?*
- *What is the effect of Hamlet's apparent madness on Ophelia?*
- *How does Ophelia feel about being used by her father and King Claudius as bait to test Hamlet's motivations?*
- *Is it only Polonius' death that leads to Ophelia's spiral into 'madness'? How much is it that Hamlet killed him – and / or that Hamlet is now banished to England – contribute to this?*

Laertes

Hamlet and Laertes presumably grew up together, fencing with one another and confiding in one another. Then Hamlet went away to Wittenberg and Laertes to Paris, parting the friendship. Still, Hamlet refers to Laertes as "a very noble youth."

Hamlet recognizes what Shakespeare has made abundantly clear throughout the play, that Laertes is Hamlet's foil. He mirrors Hamlet but behaves in the opposite manner. Where Hamlet is verbal, Laertes is physical; where Hamlet broods, Laertes blusters. Laertes' love for Ophelia and duty to Polonius drive him to passionate action, while Hamlet's love for Gertrude and duty to King Hamlet drive him to passionate inaction. In Laertes resides the picture of what Hamlet could be if the sound of his own words did not mesmerize him.

Questions to consider:

- *What has Laertes' relationship with Hamlet been prior to the events of the play?*
- *What is Laertes doing in Paris? Why does Polonius agree to let him return there?*
- *Does Laertes misbehave in Paris, as Polonius suspects?*
- *Does Laertes himself have any ambitions to become King?*
- *Does Laertes feel any remorse at agreeing to Hamlet's murder with Claudius?*

Conventions of Elizabethan Theatre

A brief summary, drawn from the website:

<http://www.thedramateacher.com/elizabethan-theatre-conventions/>

with examples from Hamlet referenced below.

Soliloquy

This popular Elizabethan convention is a literary or dramatic technique in which a single character talks aloud inner thoughts to him or herself, but not within earshot of another character. Typically, a soliloquy is lengthy with a dramatic tone.

There are many good examples of soliloquies within *Hamlet* (not all of them Hamlet's!) but arguably the most famous is of course Hamlet's speech, "To be or not to be..." (**Act 3 Scene 1**).

Aside

The aside existed in Shakespeare's times, and continued into the melodramas of the 19th century many years later. An aside is a convention that usually involves one character addressing the audience "on the side", offering them valuable information in relation to the plot or characters that only the audience is privy to. The audience now feels empowered, knowing more about the events on stage than most of the characters do.

Perhaps one of the most well known asides from *Hamlet* occurs in **Act 2 Scene 2**, when Polonius says to the audience (of Hamlet), "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't". This scene is in fact a good one to examine for the use of asides.

Boys Performing Female Roles

Acting in Elizabeth's England was frowned upon by many in society as a profession unsuitable for women, as it was rough and rowdy instead of genteel. As a result, Shakespeare and his contemporaries cast boys and younger men in the roles of women.

QSE holds gender parity as one of its core values (both on and off stage), and casts characters across gender. Given the majority of roles in *Hamlet* (like most Shakespearean plays) are male, this more commonly means that female actors play traditionally male roles in the company's productions (although the company has also had male actors play female roles - for example, in the schools touring production of *Instant Romeo and Juliet*, the actor playing Romeo also plays Lady Capulet (Juliet's mother)). In this production of *Hamlet*, female actors play the core characters of Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. In a contemporary reference to Elizabethan traditions, rather than changing the gender of the characters (and the language of the original text), these characters are all still identified as male.

Eavesdropping

Eavesdropping was a dramatic technique that sat neatly between a soliloquy and an aside. Certain characters would strategically overhear others on stage, informing both themselves and the audience of the details, while the characters being overheard had no idea what was happening. This convention opened up opportunities for the playwright in the evolving plot.

Polonius is the pre-eminent eavesdropper in *Hamlet*, and it is inferred that he may regularly use this practice to keep an eye on the king's (and his own) interests. He convinces the king to join him in eavesdropping on Hamlet's meeting with Ophelia, to determine whether love for her is what has sent him mad (**Act 3 Scene 1**); while his eavesdropping on the Queen's confrontation of Hamlet increases the dramatic tension of the plot when it leads to his sudden demise and seals Hamlet's exile to England (**Act 3 Scene 4**).

Presentational Acting Style

It is generally agreed by scholars that Elizabethan acting was largely presentational in style. Plays were more overtly a "performance" with clues the actors were aware of the presence of an audience instead of completely ignoring them as part of their art. Movements and gestures were more stylised and dramatic than one might ordinarily expect in a modern naturalistic or realistic drama, speech patterns were heightened for dramatic effect, and the use of conventions such as the aside, prologue, epilogue and word puns directly connected characters to the audience watching. The aside, the prologue, the soliloquy and the epilogue were all variations on a characters' direct address to the audience when staged.

QSE endeavours to stay true to the presentational style of Shakespeare's plays by referencing, addressing and including its audience – not only in asides but also throughout the production – while also incorporating contemporary acting's focus on emotional truth. In *Hamlet* the audience join the cast as members of the Danish court throughout the play, as well as being endowed with various other characters and imagery. A good example of this can be seen during Polonius' advice speech given to his son Laertes (**Act 1 Scene 3**) – the audience is referred to as friends to 'grapple to thy soul', 'new-hatch'd, unfledged comrades', fickle friends who will be lost if given loans, and so forth.

Poetic Language

Elizabethan plays commonly consisted of dialogue that was poetic, dramatic and heightened beyond that of the vernacular of the day. Shakespeare took great care in composing dialogue that was sometimes prose but and sometimes verse – either blank (unrhymed) or rhyming (couplets) and generally using five stressed syllables in a line of dialogue (iambic pentameter).

QSE approaches Shakespeare's text using the guidelines that verse indicates heightened emotion, while the use of prose may suggest more 'every-day' dialogue or even a certain

craftiness (as in Hamlet's speech, "I have of late – but wherefore I know not – lost all my mirth", **Act 2 Scene 2**). Compare, for example, the prose spoken between the two Gravediggers and between Hamlet and Horatio in **Act 5 Scene 1**, to the blank verse spoken by Horatio and Fortinbras in describing the dead prince at the end of **Act 5 Scene 2**. While there are many other examples of beautifully crafted verse in *Hamlet*, the use of prose is particularly interesting, particularly by Hamlet himself – most notably, when he confronts Ophelia and extorts her to 'a nunnery, go!' (**Act 3 Scene 1**). He would appear to be dealing with heightened emotion; how much of this is he 'playing' for a suspected audience? It is questions such as this that the actor speaking the dialogue must explore.

Play Within A Play

This Elizabethan convention was a playwriting technique used by Shakespeare and others that involved the staging of a play inside the play itself. It was not a flimsy convention, but rather one that was used judiciously and with purpose. One of the most famous examples of this convention occurs in *Hamlet*, when Hamlet is attempting to determine whether the Ghost, who has told him of his uncle's murder of his father, is to be trusted. Hamlet's solution is to organise the conveniently just-arrived troupe of travelling performers to perform a play before the King that involves the same plot line as the events in the larger play (murder of a King), but in a different setting (**Act 3 Scene 2**)... Hamlet's (successful!) plan is to watch the King's reaction to determine whether he is indeed guilty.

Stagecraft

In terms of stagecraft, Elizabethan dramas used elaborate costumes, yet quite the opposite for scenery. Acting spaces were largely empty (bare stage) with symbolic and isolated set pieces and minimal use of props (a single tree equalled a forest, a throne for a King's palace). This explains the use of rich dialogue full of imagery, as there was no set on stage to designate the scene's location. However, Elizabethan costumes were often rich and colourful, with a character's status in society being denoted by their costume alone. There were no stage lights of any kind, with plays strictly performed during daylight hours. A simple balcony at the rear of the stage could be used for scenes involving fantastical beings, Gods or Heaven, while a trap door in the stage floor could also be used to drop characters into Hell or raise characters up from beneath. Entrances and exits were at two doors at the rear (tiring house) and not the side wings, as is the case in modern theatre. An Elizabethan actor exiting side stage may well have landed in the groundings after falling off the edge of the (three-sided) thrust stage that jutted out into the audience!

Hamlet will be performed on the Amphitheatre stage at Roma Street Parkland, with the audience on stage forming a three-sided thrust, and the parklands as an open backdrop. QSE references Elizabethan traditions with their set design, using minimal, symbolic set pieces and often referring to and including the backdrop of the parkland as part of the scenery. Characters such as the English Ambassadors and the Norwegian troops (**Act 5 Scene 2**) appear at the top of the Amphitheatre and descend to enter 'Elsinore' on the

Amphitheatre stage, while the Gravediggers move off and below the stage, into the amphitheatre, to dig Ophelia's grave **(Act 5 Scene 1)**.



Advice for interpreting Shakespeare

Rob Pensalfini (Artistic Director of QSE, and director of Hamlet), says:

1. Read the play aloud!

These plays were written down only in order to be spoken, not to be read silently from a page. There is no evidence that Shakespeare ever sought to have his plays published – and were it not for two actors from his company scrounging together all the papers they could, half of his plays would have been lost.

Speak the words – it makes it much easier to understand. Ideally, get a bunch of people together and share out the parts. Stop and help each other understand what's going on, but don't get bogged down in detail too much on a first read out loud.

2. Enjoy the physicality of the language

Once you read Shakespeare aloud, you will find that the physical stuff of speaking, the sounds and rhythms, often convey as much as the meaning of the words themselves.

When you get a line like Hamlet's "to live in the rank sweat of an enseamed bed", enjoy all those 's' sounds and the pops of the 'k', 't', 'b', and 'd'.

Enjoy the energy of the rhythms, which demand a certain degree of quickness and lightness, and carry the argument forward in terms of energy and intention.

3. Literalise the images

We all know that Shakespeare's plays are loaded with metaphors. Every situation, every relationship, every feeling, is likened to this or that natural phenomenon, commercial enterprise, plant, or animal. Rather than rushing to translate the images into what they stand for, take time to imagine the images as literally true. For example, don't replace the phrase "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" with the thought 'unpredictable disasters'. Instead, imagine being pelted with actual sling stones and arrows, ideally fired by the goddess Fortune (look her up if you have no idea what she looks like), and what the word 'outrageous' does to this image.

One way in to this is to actually physicalise the images, make your body into the shapes of the images, as you speak the words. I mean in the early stages of getting to know the text, not in performance.

4. Keep an eye out for in-text stage directions

Shakespeare often gave his actors stage directions within the words their characters spoke. If your character says, for example, "Bow, stubborn knees..." (Claudius, Act IV Sc I) that is Shakespeare giving the actor playing Claudius the instruction to kneel as he speaks the lines that follow! Do not let your character just describe an action that they are doing – incorporate this into your blocking or movement score for the scene.

Practical Exercises – from the Rehearsal Room

1. Play the Missing Scene

*Elements of Drama: Exploring **Movement, Character and Relationship***

From the director (Rob Pensalfini):

Shakespeare is notorious for starting scenes, or even plays, half way through a conversation or encounter. Scenes frequently begin with “Therefore”, or “In conclusion”, suggesting that there’s a part of the scene that we don’t get to see, but which the characters have experienced. Improvise that scene, and find the energy and state of mind that the characters have reached by the time the written scene begins.

There are also frequently actions of characters that are described, but not played on stage. For example, Ophelia describes to her father Polonius a very frightening encounter with Hamlet in her chambers. The actors playing Ophelia and Hamlet should play this scene out, taking their instructions from Ophelia’s description, but also filling in the rest of the scene with their imaginations. Then immediately play Ophelia’s scene with her father – this will help get the state of mind and body that Ophelia is in during that scene.

Suggested classroom activity:

In pairs, have students read through and act out (on their feet) **Act 2 Scene 1**, between Ophelia and Polonius.

Then have the pairs rehearse and act out the scene between Ophelia and Hamlet that takes place in her closet, as described in Act 2 Scene 1 (paraphrased in third person below).

- Get students to create very specific movement, first in a heightened and then in a ‘realistic’ style; then get them to choose their own variant along the scale of heightened to realistic movement.
- Encourage students to select a ‘soundtrack’ to underscore their ‘choreography’ with – have them choose ambient or instrumental music that enhances the mood and tension of the scene.

Finally, have students re-rehearse Act 2 Scene 1 itself, using the information discovered by playing out the previous (un-played) scene, to inform both the way Ophelia tells her father of the incident, and the way that Polonius receives this news.

You may choose to get students to present either the missing scene or Act 2 Sc 1 itself, or both. Have audience members give feedback on how the character, relationship and movement choices of the actors for the pre-scene informed the way that they received the choices made in the presentation of the scene itself.

Act 2 Scene 1a (the 'missing scene' leading into Act 2 Scene 1)

Ophelia is sewing in her room. Hamlet enters (uninvited; at this point Ophelia has dutifully obeyed her father and refused to see him or to allow him to send messengers to her). Hamlet's shirt is undone, and he's not wearing a hat. His dirty stockings are hanging around his ankles, and he is pale and shaky. (Note that, while by today's standards this doesn't sound terribly shocking, his state of undress would have been considered highly inappropriate in Elizabethan England). He looks at Ophelia as if he had been 'loosed out of hell to speak of horrors'.

Hamlet then grabs Ophelia by the wrist and holds her hard; then he thrusts her away from him and holds her at arm's length. He places his other hand on his forehead ('over his brow'), and looks for so long and so intensely at Ophelia's face that it's as if he is wanting to memorise and draw it. He stays like this for a long time; then shakes Ophelia's arm lightly and waves his head up and down three times while giving out a huge, heavy sigh that seems to 'shatter all his bulk and end his being'. Then he lets Ophelia go, and leaves the room without looking at where he is going – instead he looks over his shoulder at Ophelia and does not waver his gaze from her.

Ophelia watches Hamlet go and then abandons her sewing and runs to find her father.

2. Scene in gibberish

*Elements of Drama: Exploring **Language** (verbal and non-verbal), **Tension** and **Mood***

From the director (Rob Pensalfini):

Shakespeare's language is powerful and specific, but it is also visceral – the whole being speaks. These days our experience of language tends to be more disembodied, and actors approaching Shakespeare sometimes leave behind their non-textual communication skills like body language, gesture, and tone – which convey the stakes and urgency of what they are saying.

The actors in the scene play out the scene in gibberish, a made-up (on the spot) babble which sounds like language, but sounds like no specific language. They shouldn't try to replicate the scene line by line, but essentially play out the intentions and ideas and actions in the scene. They will be forced to rely on all of these non-verbal strategies to communicate and get their needs met.

Then, immediately go back and play the written scene, this time **adding** language to the non-verbal expression they have discovered. Keep encouraging them to find the level of intensity and energy they had in the gibberish version of the scene, with the mere addition of the text to further support it, not replace it.

Suggested classroom activity:

As a group, have students read **Act 1 Scene 3** – Polonius' advice to Laertes. Ensure that they understand the meaning of the words (a modern translation is provided below, drawn from:

<http://nfs.sparknotes.com/hamlet>

Workshop the scene as a class by having pairs 'present' the scene. The first pair should attempt the scene using the original text; following pairs will attempt the scene using only gibberish (there is no need to hold the script or follow the intent of each line exactly – but they should be attempting to recreate as much of the intention of the original as possible, without sensible dialogue).

After each gibberish performance, elicit feedback on which sections of the scene were clearest, and what gestures, movements, or vocal intonation assisted this. For every two or three gibberish performances, have a pair return to using the original text, incorporating as much of the useful gestures, movement and intonation as they are able.

Discuss as a class how the performance of the scene has changed through the focus on communication of dramatic meaning through non-verbal language and vocal intonation (rather than just through the meaning of the words themselves).

Act 1 Scene 3

LAERTES

A double blessing is a double grace,
Occasion smiles upon a second leave.

POLONIUS

Yet here, Laertes! aboard, aboard, for shame!
The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail,
And you are stay'd for. There; my blessing with thee!

And these few precepts in thy memory
See thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue,
Nor any unproportioned thought his act.
Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.
Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel;
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
Of each new-hatch'd, unfledged comrade. Beware
Of entrance to a quarrel, but being in,
Bear't that the opposed may beware of thee.
Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice;
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment.
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
But not express'd in fancy; rich, not gaudy;
For the apparel oft proclaims the man,
And they in France of the best rank and station
Are of a most select and generous chief in that.
Neither a borrower nor a lender be;
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
This above all: to thine ownself be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
Farewell: my blessing season this in thee!

LAERTES

Most humbly do I take my leave, my lord.

POLONIUS

The time invites you; go; your servants tend.

Modern Translation

LAERTES

What good luck, to have my father bless my leaving not once but twice.

POLONIUS

You're still here? Shame on you—get on board! The wind is filling your ship's sail, and they're waiting for you. Here, I give you my blessing again. And just try to remember a few rules of life. Don't say what you're thinking, and don't be too quick to act on what you think. Be friendly to people but don't overdo it. Once you've tested out your friends and found them trustworthy, hold onto them. But don't waste your time shaking hands with every new guy you meet. Don't be quick to pick a fight, but once you're in one, hold your own. Listen to many people, but talk to few. Hear everyone's opinion, but reserve your judgment. Spend all you can afford on clothes, but make sure they're quality, not flashy, since clothes make the man—which is doubly true in France. Don't borrow money and don't lend it, since when you lend to a friend, you often lose the friendship as well as the money, and borrowing turns a person into a spendthrift. And, above all, be true to yourself. Then you won't be false to anybody else. Good-bye, son. I hope my blessing will help you absorb what I've said.

LAERTES

I humbly say good-bye to you, father.

POLONIUS

Now go, the time is right. Your servants are waiting.

Preparation for Presenting (Drama)

In groups of 5 – 7, using minimal prop and costume items to suggest characters, have students rehearse and perform for each other the following excerpt from QSE's *Half Hour Hamlet*.

Extension: have students devise and incorporate stylized movement sequences to extend the representation of action from the original text, referred to in this shortened version.

ENCORE 2 – Two Minute Hamlet

Note: This script was originally performed by five actors, with the following doubling:

Hamlet Marcellus / Horatio Gertrude / Ophelia

Claudius / Ghost Polonius / Laertes

The original direction involved most blocking happens in one direction around a set or flat, with continual exits and entrances.

Enter GHOST, followed by MARCELLUS & HORATIO

MARCELLUS Look!

Exit GHOST, followed by MARCELLUS & HORATIO

Enter GERTRUDE & CLAUDIUS, followed by HAMLET

CLAUDIUS Sometime-sister, now our wife.

Exit GERTRUDE and CLAUDIUS

HAMLET Married with my uncle - not good.

Enter HORATIO

HORATIO My lord, I think I saw your father yesternight.

HAMLET My father?

HORATIO Your father.

Enter GHOST, Exit HORATIO

HAMLET Speak!

GHOST Brief let me be. Murder!

HAMLET My uncle!

Exit GHOST

Hereafter I shall put an antic disposition on.

Enter OPHELIA, followed by Polonius

HAMLET Nunnery! Go!

HAMLET exits, chasing OPHELIA off.

POLONIUS (*aside*) I have found the cause of Hamlet's lunacy.

Exit POLONIUS, Enter HAMLET

HAMLET I have heard that guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have proclaim'd their malefactions.

Enter CLAUDIUS, GERTRUDE, POLONIUS and sit.

HAMLET "The Murder of Gonzago"

CLAUDIUS stands.

GERTRUDE Give o'er the play!

Exit all but HAMLET

HAMLET I'll take the ghost's word.
Exit HAMLET, Enter GERTRUDE & POLONIUS
POLONIUS hides "behind the arras"
Enter HAMLET with blade drawn, yelling.

HAMLET Mother!!!

GERTRUDE Help, help, ho!

POLONIUS *[from behind 'arras']* What, ho! help, help, help!
HAMLET makes a pass through the arras. POLONIUS falls and dies.

HAMLET Is it the king? No?
Exit GERTRUDE, as HAMLET yells after her
 Well, you killed a king, and married with his brother!
Enter CLAUDIUS, threatening HAMLET with an England tour-brochure

CLAUDIUS England!
Exit HAMLET, running.
Enter LAERTES

LAERTES Where is my father?
Enter OPHELIA, mad, throwing flowers.

OPHELIA *[Sings]* Hey Nonny nonny, hey nonny.
Exit OPHELIA

CLAUDIUS Your father's dead.
Exit CLAUDIUS and LAERTES, conspiring
Enter GERTRUDE, running after LAERTES

GERTRUDE Your sister's drown'd!
Exit GERTRUDE, Enter HAMLET

HAMLET A pirate - I became their prisoner. But soft!
The Corpse of OPHELIA is thrown onstage
 The fair Ophelia!
Enter HORATIO, with two swords

HORATIO The king hath laid that Laertes shall not exceed you three hits.

HAMLET The readiness is all.
Enter CLAUDIUS, LAERTES, & GERTRUDE with cup
HORATIO gives HAMLET and LAERTES the swords.
They salute CLAUDIUS, then run at and fatally would each other.

CLAUDIUS Stay. Give me drink
CLAUDIUS takes the cup from GERTRUDE.
 Hamlet, here's to thy health.
GERTRUDE takes the cup from CLAUDIUS, drinks, and dies

LAERTES Hamlet! Blame...the King... *(dies)*

HAMLET Then, venom, to thy work.
HAMLET stabs CLAUDIUS
 Horatio, I am dead!

HORATIO Young Fortinbras comes...

HAMLET He has the election. Tell him. The rest is silence.
HAMLET dies

HORATIO Good night, sweet prince.

Preparing for Performance – An Actor's Warm Up

Rob Pensalfini, Artistic Director of QSE, says:

Warm up together as a cast. Let the warm up be a way to connect to your fellow performers so that you are all inhabiting the same world even before the performance begins.

A warm up should bring you gradually from everyday energy to performance energy. Begin with observation of how you feel (physically, mentally, emotionally), and work to free yourself of physical tension and vocal inhibition. Include plenty of yawning and humming, increasing in range and power.

Never move or make sound mechanically. You are not warming up an instrument; you are warming up the connection between your body, your thoughts, your feelings, your intentions, and your voice. Every sound you make is a release of thought, some part of your psyche speaking.

A short group warm up may include activities to:

- Facilitate self-observation (e.g. a 'body scan' visualisation; or neutral walking through the space, observing weight placement, tension points, and movement of breath)
- Connect out to members of your ensemble (e.g. Salute to the Sun, or similar repetitive movement sequences that the group works to perform simultaneously)
- Connect to the space and build energy (e.g. the 'bomb and shield' drama game)
- Activate your voice, such as:
 - Gentle yawning, sighing and humming through your range (can be done in combination with spinal rolls)
 - Massaging the jaw and the sinuses
 - Stretching the lips, tongue (roll it out over your bottom teeth), and soft palate (create an unvoiced 'k' sound on both in and out breath)
 - Stretching the ribs (can also use gentle massage / vibration on the chest)
 - A vocal scale - working through combinations of vowels and consonants at varying pitches
 - Tongue twisters (to activate articulators)

Silvan Rus (Hamlet)

1. What has helped you empathise with and inhabit the character of Hamlet?

Hamlet and I both study philosophy and have a tendency to appeal, or perhaps escape, to the wonders of the universal. We'd both probably be sorted into the house of Slytherin.

2. What do you consider Hamlet's biggest weakness?

Not allowing himself to see things for what they are. He sees his father as the Sun God, Hyperion, which seems like a myth of the wider state but when he speaks to his father, there is absolutely no evidence of fatherly love. My Hamlet is the also the opposite of a Taoist idea that I love: *wuwei* or trying without trying. My Hamlet keeps trying, or thinking rather, and barely achieves anything in action. But the audience gets to hear the thoughts behind this trying resulting in nothing, and ultimately death.

3. If you could ask your character any one question and get a truthful answer, what would it be?

SILVAN: What would you do if you actually did become the king of a state that was about to go to war?

HAMLET: Hide in my library and read. You?

SILVAN: Same.

4. Why are you looking forward to sharing this production with the audience?

The play to me is about deception, and, ultimately, the self-deception leading to self-destruction. Shakespeare's Danish world is one of traps and people falling in their own: Laertes with his own poisoned sword, Polonius with his nosey espionage, Claudius to his ambition, and Hamlet to his plot.

Deception, or rather self-deception seems like an aspect that has been starved in other productions of *Hamlet* that I've seen - quite possibly because of this very theme of self-deception, of previous productions' refusal to see Hamlet for who he is. In general I believe that many productions over-play Hamlet's noble heart and underplay his predation.

Our production's director and music director, Rob Pensalfini, has also composed some wicked music to be performed with a live band which I think captures the play's espionage very well.

Hamlet's relevance today lies in this very theme of refusing to see ourselves for what and who we are and the self-deception in reasoning with a moral lens. Logic subjects the

world to a law of thought: the law of non-contradiction: that an apple cannot be both an apple and a non-apple; that *a* cannot simultaneously be not *a*. So what are we, and the limits of such reasoning, if we are intrinsically contradictory in character? What is Hamlet if he has both a noble heart and a villainous desire for death? To these I have no answer other than by performing this play we, as a community, could ask these questions and together, rather than in a Hamlet-like isolation, rethink thinking.

5. What is your favourite line in the play?

“Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar.”

Hamlet: Act 4, Scene 3

This is my favourite line in the play because, after a grand stream of philosophical contemplation, Hamlet comes to the conclusion that a king, within the wider scope of the cycle of life, can also be likened to poop. I love this line because it's so witty and wise a reply and it makes us question the status of a king or anyone in power. It feels as dangerous to say it now as I'm sure it would have been to say it back when *Hamlet* was first performed. Plus, a poo joke mixed with philosophy is genius.

Frances Marrington (Polonius)

1. What has helped you empathise with and inhabit the character of Polonius?

I have always loved the character of Polonius, and consider him often rather unfairly judged. This was probably a pretty good place to start from – with Rob's guidance, I (as Polonius) first developed a strong relationship with (and love for) my children, Ophelia and Laertes, and then a healthy interest in protecting my position with the King. These often-competing interests assisted me in creating a 'short-cut' into a complex character. I have definitely utilised my own experience as a parent, and I would also say that I share Polonius' love of language (sometimes, for both of us, in spite of others' frustration).

2. What do you consider Polonius' biggest weakness?

I think Polonius would probably consider his biggest weakness to be one that he most likely doesn't even admit to himself – the fact that his once sharp brain, which is essential for his job and the maintenance of his social standing, is in slow decline.

In contrast, I believe that Polonius is a good case in point for the consequences of refusing to see the damaging and self-destructive nature of what one may consider a personal strength. Polonius' truly greatest weakness is his belief that the best way forward is to skirt around issues, rather than confront them head on. This belief is what leads him to use his daughter as cruel bait for Hamlet, and to slander his son in the interest of 'keeping an eye on him'. Ultimately this weakness leads to his own death at Hamlet's hands.

3. If you could ask your character any one question and get a truthful answer, what would it be?

If there was a natural disaster and you could only save either your children or the king, whom would you choose?

4. Why are you looking forward to sharing this production with the audience?

This will be my fifth production of *Hamlet* – it seems to be the show that haunts me! Each time I approach this text, my appreciation for it grows. It is such a complex text, and the character of Hamlet himself is such a complex character. Under Rob's skilful direction, I have come to see Hamlet again in a new light – as less of a noble but unlucky tortured soul, and far more a (still tortured but very human) product of his environment. I think this production's focus on the way that the political shapes the personal – and vice versa – is intensely interesting and highly relevant to a contemporary audience.

5. What is your favourite line in the play?

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!

Hamlet: Act 1, Scene 2

These lines so exquisitely express the pain that Hamlet is experiencing at what he feels is the crumbling of his world around his feet. They beautifully and eloquently resonate with how I have felt in times of despair. I have never lost a parent to another family member, or experienced the feeling of abandonment when a widowed parent chooses to remarry, but these words instantly transport me to that emotional state. They are, for me, quite literally magic on a page and a stage.



Preparation for Responding (Drama)

Responding requires students to:

- *analyse the use of the Dramatic Languages within a production to create dramatic action and dramatic meaning*
- *evaluate the success of this creation of dramatic meaning for the audience*
- *synthesise their understanding of how the use of the Dramatic Languages worked to engage the audience.*

The Dramatic Languages include:

Elements of Drama	Skills of Drama	Conventions of Elizabethan Theatre
Characters / Roles	Acting (voice & movement)	Poetic language
Relationships	Directing (responsible for dramatic meaning)	Blank verse (Iambic pentameter)
Situation / Context	Design / Stage craft (set, lighting, costume, sound)	Rhyming couplets
Place		Prose (often spoken by lower-status characters)
Space		Presentational acting style
Movement		Soliloquies
Language		Asides
Symbol		Eavesdropping
Mood		Play within a play
Dramatic focus		Elaborate costumes
Dramatic tension		Symbolic (minimal) scenery
Contrast		

Students' process for planning a Responding essay may include these steps:

1. Decide what the overall dramatic meaning of the production was (this may change as you analyse the production further).
2. Decide on the key Dramatic Languages that effectively contributed to the creation of dramatic action and meaning throughout the production.
3. For each body paragraph - choose a moment within the play that contributed significantly to the creation of this dramatic meaning (a moment that made an impact!)
4. Analyse which of the key Dramatic Languages have been used to create this impact
5. Connect (synthesise) the use of element(s) of drama with skill(s) of drama and/or convention(s) of form and style within the chosen moment
 - You could link a key convention that was present in the chosen moment with an element of drama that has also been effectively used
 - You could link two elements of drama together where one element impacts on another e.g. dramatic tension often enhances mood
 - You could link a convention with one of the skills of drama
 - You could link an element of drama with one of the skills of drama
6. Evaluate the overall effectiveness of the creation of dramatic action and meaning within the chosen moment.
 - Evaluative words could include:
 - Successful
 - Effective
 - Engaging
 - Disjointed
 - Confusing
 - Heightened
 - Enhanced
 - Confronting
 - Well-developed

Responding Scaffolding Table

Your students may use a table similar to this one to link their notes around the use of the dramatic languages within QSE's production of Hamlet.

Elements of Drama	Conventions of Style	Skills of Drama	Purpose / Meaning	Examples in the production	Topic Sentence
Dramatic Meaning:					

Structuring a senior Drama Responding Essay

A Responding essay is not a review. There is no obligation to include plot or character summaries (beyond what may be necessary within the analysis of the use of the Dramatic Languages), and evaluation of the production is focused on how effectively the Dramatic Languages were used to create dramatic action and dramatic meaning (rather than on whether the show was well-received / liked).

The structure of a Responding essay may include:

1. Introduction

- Introduce the text (*Hamlet*) and the style (Elizabethan Theatre)
- Frame the key question of the Responding task as a statement – form a ‘hypothesis’ that takes a position (one way or the other) on answering the key question, which will be supported with evidence throughout the essay.

2. Body Paragraph - each paragraph may focus on a single key moment from the production, and will include:

- Topic sentence – introducing the focus ‘moment’ and key Dramatic Languages used within that moment
- Evidence – describe how these Dramatic Languages were used within the focus moment to create dramatic action and meaning.
- Evaluate – was the moment effectively realized, referring to the Dramatic Languages
- Link – back to your hypothesis and / or Dramatic Meaning

3. Conclusion

- Refer to each of the key points within your body paragraphs.
- Summarise your analysis with a final evaluation

Further Resources

Bell Shakespeare's *Hamlet: Out of Joint* (2016) education notes

<https://www.bellshakespeare.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/BellShakespeare-Hamlet-Out-of-Joint-Classroom-resources.pdf>

Contains relevant post-production analytical and performance-based activities

Cliff's Notes – *Hamlet*

<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/h/hamlet/hamlet-at-a-glance>

Plot and scene summaries; Character and theme analysis

Schmoop – *Hamlet*

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

This site uses informal language and modern 'slang' throughout; it encompasses plot and scene summaries, theme and character analysis, and complete text with modern interpretation.

Spark Notes - *Hamlet*

<http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/hamlet/>

Provides plot summary, theme and character analysis, and modern translation of complete text. Uses more academic language.