

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](http://www.qldshakespeare.org)



## Education Notes – *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*

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## 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.

## *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*

Inspired by *Hamlet* and a classic in its own right, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* sees 2 'minor' characters take centre stage. Witness the comic horror as these ordinary folks vacillate between witty banter and philosophical ponderings on the point of their existence all while being flung in and out of the orbit of the Prince of Denmark. A tale for anyone who has ever felt out of their depth and in over their head!

<b>Performance season:</b>	24 August – 9 September, 2018 (Alternating with <i>Hamlet</i> ) Wed – 6.30pm; Thurs & Fri – 7.30pm Sat – 2pm & 7.30pm; Sun – 6.00pm
<b>Location:</b>	Roma Street Parkland Amphitheatre
<b>Length:</b>	2 hours and 30 minutes (including 20 minute interval) <i>AND 30 minutes of live music prior to the show</i>
<b>Suitability:</b>	Years 10 – 12
<b>Please be advised:</b>	The performance contains adult references to sex, death and theatricalised violence.
<b>Key themes:</b>	The incomprehensibility of the world Passivity – the ramifications of not making decisions Fate versus free will Mortality The relationship between theatre and life
<b>Key Questions:</b>	How do we face the uncertainties of life?  How do we choose to face the certainty of death?  To what degree do fate and chance control our lives?  What are the consequences when we consciously choose not to exercise our ability to choose?  What is the relationship between art and life?

## **Cast:**

*Rosencrantz*  
*Guildenstern*  
*The Player*  
*Alfred (Player Queen)*  
*Player (King)*  
*Player (Villain)*  
*Player (Spy) / Fortinbras*  
*Player (Spy)*  
*Hamlet*  
*Ophelia*  
*Claudius*  
*Gertrude*  
*Polonius / English Ambassador*  
*Horatio*

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

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

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

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

## **Key Creatives:**

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

Rebecca Murphy  
Kat Dekker  
Rob Pensalfini  
Kaylee Gannaway  
James Elliot  
Steven Tibbets  
Kyli Davies  
Georgia Cooper

## 'Audiencing' at Roma Street Parklands

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. 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



## Context of the Play

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* was Tom Stoppard's breakthrough play. It was a huge critical and commercial success, making him famous practically overnight. Though written in 1964, the play was published in 1967, and it played on Broadway in 1968, where it won the Tony for best play.

The play cleverly re-interprets Shakespeare's *Hamlet* from the point of view of two minor characters: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The Laurel-and-Hardy-like pair are totally incidental to the action of *Hamlet*, subject to the whims of the King Claudius – who gets them to betray Hamlet – and then tricked by Hamlet into delivering a letter that condemns them to death. Stoppard's play turns *Hamlet* on its head by giving these two the main roles and reducing all of Shakespeare's major characters (including Hamlet) to minor roles. Written around and in-between the lines of Shakespeare's play, Stoppard brilliantly takes the main concerns of contemporary theater – absurdism, the inevitability of death, breakdown in communication and feeling – and inserts them into the text of a much earlier play.

It is worth noting that Stoppard himself denies writing in the absurdist tradition; however, absurdist conventions are unmistakable in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. The writing suggests another enormous influence: Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1952). Beckett's play is just as important to *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* as *Hamlet* is. *Waiting for Godot* consists of two tramps sitting on-stage bantering back and forth and waiting for someone named Godot, who never comes.

*Waiting for Godot* changed theater by undermining many of its traditional values: plot, characterization, and dialogue that move the action of the play forward. By portraying the act of "waiting" on stage, Beckett's play also opened up new ideas about meta-theatrics (plays that are about plays – how they're made, how they're seen, and/or how they interact with society). Since the characters in *Godot* are in the same position as the audience – waiting for something to happen – much of their dialogue works on multiple levels and seems to hint at awareness on the part of the tramps that they're actually two characters in a play.

Stoppard wrote *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* in this absurdist and meta-theatrical tradition. It is very much influenced by Beckett, and much of the silly dialogue between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern simply would not have been seen in the theater before *Waiting for Godot*. It's as if Stoppard uses the innovations that Beckett brought to contemporary theater in order to pry open the minor Shakespearean characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

<https://www.shmoop.com/rosencrantz-and-guildenstern-are-dead/>

## About the play

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern wander through a featureless wilderness, flipping coins, which keep coming up heads. Each time a coin lands on heads, Rosencrantz wins it. While Guildenstern worries about the improbability of a coin landing on heads so many times in a row, Rosencrantz happily continues flipping. Guildenstern wonders if they have entered a world where the laws of chance and time are absent. The pair struggles to recall why they are traveling and remember only that a messenger called them. They encounter a troupe of actors, known as the Tragedians. The leader of the group, called the Player, indicates that the Tragedians specialize in sexual performances and gives Rosencrantz and Guildenstern the chance to participate for a fee. Guildenstern turns the improbable coin-flipping episode to their advantage by offering the Player a bet. The Player loses but claims he cannot pay. Guildenstern asks for a play instead. Guildenstern starts to leave as the Tragedians prepare, and Rosencrantz reveals that the most recently flipped coin landed tails-up.

The scene changes suddenly. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are now inside Elsinore, the royal castle of Denmark, watching as Hamlet and Ophelia burst onstage and leave in opposite directions. Mistaking Rosencrantz for Guildenstern, Claudius explains that he sent for the pair so that they could ascertain what is bothering Hamlet, their childhood friend.

Bewildered, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern discuss how they might probe Hamlet for the cause of his supposed madness. They play a game of question-and-answer, further confusing themselves about their purpose and even their identities. Guildenstern suggests that he pretend to be Hamlet while Rosencrantz questions him. They realize that Hamlet's disturbed state is due to the fact that his father, the former king of Denmark, has recently died, and the throne has been usurped by Hamlet's uncle, Claudius, who also has married Hamlet's mother, Gertrude. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern overhear Hamlet speaking riddles to Polonius.

Hamlet confuses Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with an enigmatic speech. Polonius comes in to tell Hamlet that the Tragedians have arrived. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern despair about how little they learned of Hamlet's feelings. They cannot decide whether he is insane.

Polonius, Hamlet, and the Tragedians enter, and Hamlet announces that there will be a play the next day. Hamlet leaves, and Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and the Player discuss the possible causes of Hamlet's strange behavior. The Player departs while Rosencrantz and Guildenstern discuss what happens after death.

As Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, and Ophelia enter, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern explain that Hamlet wants them all to attend the play. The group leaves, but Hamlet enters. Not noticing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet wonders whether he should commit suicide. Ophelia enters, praying. After a short conversation, she and Hamlet exit. Alfred, one of the Tragedians, arrives dressed as Gertrude. The other Tragedians enter to rehearse their play, which parallels Claudius's rise to power and marriage to Gertrude. Ophelia enters, crying, followed by an angry Hamlet, who tells her to become a nun, then



quickly departs. Claudius and Polonius enter and leave with Ophelia. The Player explains the tragic aspects of the Tragedians' play, which metaphorically retells the recent events at Elsinore and foreshadows the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They discuss whether death can be adequately represented on stage. The scene goes black.

In darkness, voices indicate that the play has disturbed Claudius. The next day, Claudius and Gertrude ask Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to find Hamlet, who has killed Polonius. Alone again, the pair concocts a plan to trap Hamlet with their belts, but they fail as Hamlet enters from an unexpected direction and immediately leaves, carrying the dead Polonius. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern call Hamlet back, but he refuses to say what he has done with Polonius's body. Hamlet accuses Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of being Claudius's tools. Hamlet escapes as Claudius enters, only to be brought back onstage under guard. The scene shifts outdoors, where Guildenstern tells Rosencrantz that they have to escort Hamlet to England. Hamlet arrives in conversation with a soldier. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern reluctantly depart.

On the boat to England, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern wonder where they are and whether they might be dead. They notice Hamlet sleeping nearby, remember their mission, and consider what to do when they arrive. Guildenstern has a letter from Claudius, which reveals that Hamlet is to be executed in England. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern cannot decide what to do.

As the pair sleeps, Hamlet switches the letter they were carrying with one he has written. The next morning, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern awake and hear music coming from barrels onboard the ship. To their surprise, the Tragedians emerge from the barrels just before pirates charge the ship. Hamlet, the Player, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern jump into the barrels, and the lights go down.

When the lights come back up, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and the Player come out of the barrels. Hamlet is gone. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern tell the Player about the letter and rehearse what they will say to the English king. Guildenstern discovers that the letter now states that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are to be executed. The Tragedians encircle the pair. Despairing about his fate, Guildenstern takes a knife from the Player and stabs him. The Player cries out and falls, apparently dead. The Tragedians clap as the Player jumps up. He says that his death was a mediocre performance while showing Guildenstern that the knife was actually a stage prop.

The Player describes the different deaths that his troupe can perform while the Tragedians act out those deaths onstage. Rosencrantz applauds, and the light shifts, leaving Rosencrantz and Guildenstern alone. Rosencrantz breaks down and leaves as he realizes his death is near. Guildenstern wonders how they were caught in this situation, lamenting that they failed to seize an opportunity to avert their fate. Guildenstern exits. The light changes, revealing the dead bodies of Claudius, Gertrude, Hamlet, and Laertes. Horatio arrives and delivers the final speech of Shakespeare's Hamlet, as the music rises and lights fall.

<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/rosencrantz/summary/>

## Why engage with *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*?

### Rebecca Murphy - Director's Note

On an individual level I was drawn to *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* as a bit of a Shakespeare nerd and someone who enjoys words. I find great joy in reading clever, beautifully put together words and hearing those words spoken by actors who delight in and understand the rhythms of a well-written script. As a company we've been interested in playing with these 2 plays (*Hamlet* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*) for quite some time; to experiment with the theatrical tradition of performing in 'rep' and to explore what new light could be shone on each play by exploring the other and how our Ensemble's way of working would translate from Shakespeare to a very different (but equally heightened) text.

In an interview once, when asked what the play is about, Stoppard replied with "I've never had any doubt about that — it is about two courtiers in Elsinore. That's my story and I'm sticking to it..." – not particularly deep and meaningful! So, why do it? *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* is not at all didactic, which is something it has in common with Shakespeare's works. It is not written to teach us a specific lesson and Stoppard has often denied any philosophical agenda in the play. In the spirit of Stoppard, we hope the audience goes away with many more questions than answers! We hope it's a conversation starter. In the rehearsal room we chose to approach the process with questions including ...

### What makes us us?

We initially find Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in "a place without any visible character". They have a shared memory of being awakened and summoned by a messenger, and throughout the play they attempt to glean what they can from encounters with members of the Danish Court and the troupe of Tragedians led by the Player, but they have no real past on which to build. If you woke up tomorrow morning with none of your memories at all (childhood home, first day of school, parents, pets embarrassing moments...) would you still be you?

### Are our lives fated or random?

The title of this play gives away its ending. We know Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will die, just as we know we all will. How does this knowledge that we can't alter our final destination affect our actions between now and then? How do we fill the time?

*I think one of the things about it that somehow chimes right is that it mimics its subject matter, by which I mean that the author is in the same predicament as the two characters — which is to say that the next bit of time has to be filled with something, and nothing seems to be happening, nobody is coming on, what do you actually do to stop being dead?" - Tom Stoppard.*

## **What is choice? When do we exercise it? And what happens when we don't?**

Are we the main characters in our own lives? There is an old theatrical joke... A man playing the nurse in Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet* is enjoying a pint in a pub, when somebody asks him what the play is about. "Well," he begins, "there's this nurse..." The self-centeredness of his reply is comical, but what happens if we function purely in support?

### **Socio-political context**

*Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* was first written and performed in the 60s. I imagine that the meta-theatricality and re-visioning of a 'classic' had an intense effect on audiences at the time; contemporary audiences are perhaps more accustomed to these things. But there are ideas in the play that are heightened for us in the now.

In the world of the play, waiting is absurd – equal parts comedic and tragic – but it is a stark reminder of the many people who are currently sitting in prisons waiting on unknown sentencing dates and asylum seekers kept, by our own government, in indefinite detention uncertain of how long they will be there or when their claims will be processed. For these people – and so many others in such circumstances – the silence must be, as the Player says, "obscene".

The play also explores the desire for and the power of being seen and heard; "the single assumption which makes our existence viable – that somebody is watching...". This human need existed when Stoppard was writing of course but somehow, 50 years later, in our culture of reality TV, social media and the almost consistent sharing of our lives the lines ring even truer!








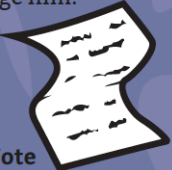

## *Hamlet – a brief plot summary*

*Knowledge of the key events of Hamlet will greatly assist in understanding the situations that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern find themselves in. Below is a brief synopsis of Hamlet in both dot-point and graphic form.*

- King Hamlet of Denmark is dead. Prince Hamlet, his son, returns from study in Germany to mourn his death.
- Claudius, King Hamlet's brother, marries Queen Gertrude and ascends the throne. Hamlet is not happy.
- Polonius, the king's counselor, and Laertes, his son, warn Ophelia, Polonius' daughter, against Hamlet.
- King Hamlet's ghost appears tells Hamlet that he must avenge his father's murder at the hands of Claudius.
- Hamlet asks a group of actors to act a play that shows events similar to the killing of King Hamlet in front of Claudius and Gertrude.
- Hamlet becomes sure of what the ghost told him.
- Hamlet wants to kill the king, but finds him praying.
- Hamlet confronts his mother and kills the hidden (eavesdropping) Polonius.
- King Claudius sends Hamlet to England, accompanied by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who carry order for the King of England to kill the prince.
- Ophelia becomes mad and drowns herself.
- Hamlet returns to Denmark to discover Ophelia's funeral. He fights with Laertes at the graveside.
- Claudius makes a plan with Laertes to kill Hamlet by challenging him to a duel and having Laertes poison his unbated sword.
- After the first bout, King Claudius offers Hamlet a poisoned drink, but he refuses it. The Queen drinks it instead.
- Hamlet is wounded with the poisoned sword, and Hamlet wounds Laertes with the same sword.
- As Laertes is dying, he tells Hamlet that King Claudius is to blame for the treachery. Hamlet stabs the king and forces him to drink from the cup.
- Hamlet urges Horatio to tell his story. He says that he wishes Fortinbras to be made King of Denmark; then he dies.
- Fortinbras arrives and declares he will assume leadership of Denmark. He orders Hamlet's body to be carried away like a brave soldier.

# 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.

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

## 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)*

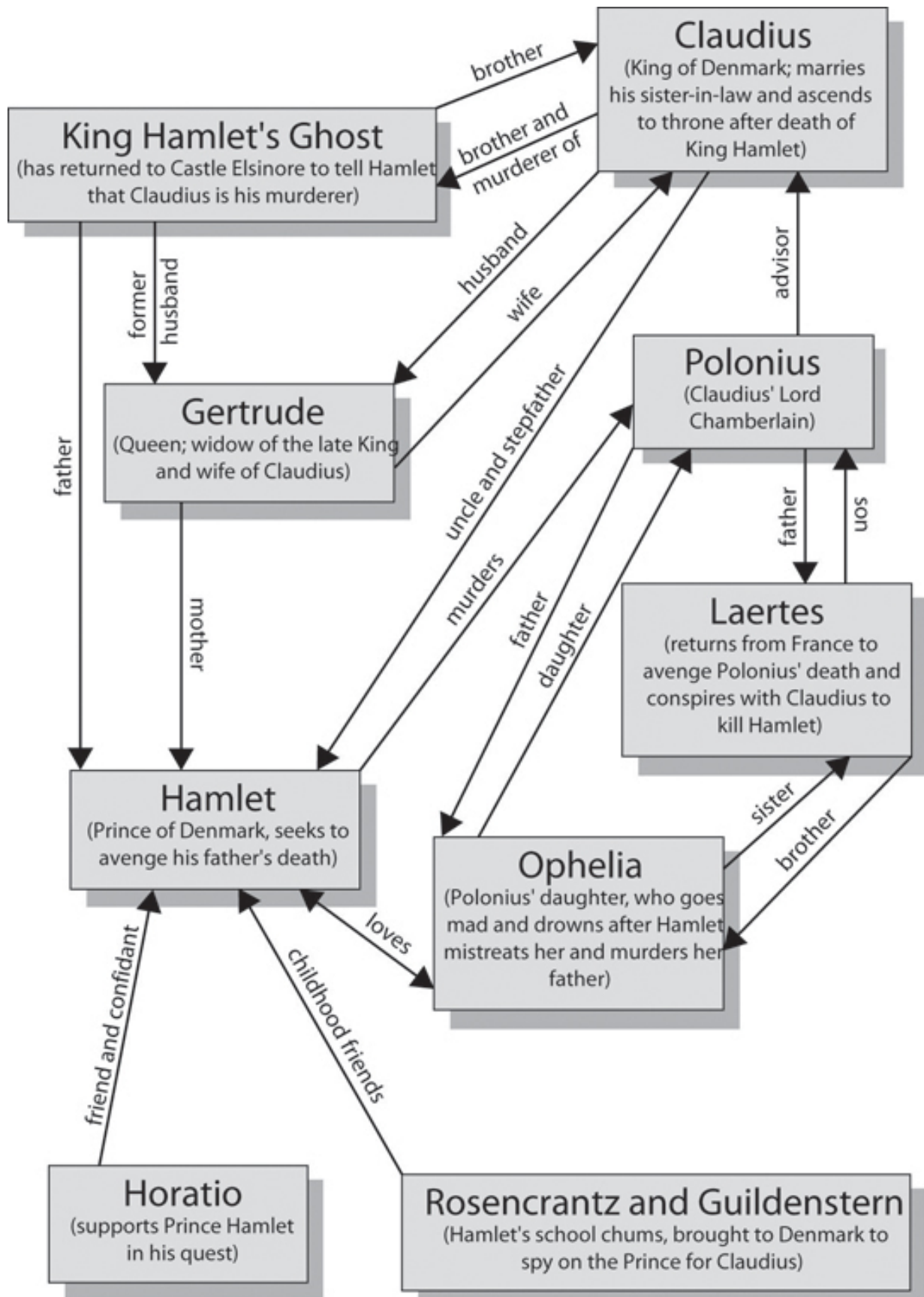
*Markers*

In order to understand the context of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, students will benefit from having a clear understanding of the relationships between the key characters of the Danish Court (true to both Stoppard's play and William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*). 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 (below), 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.

Have them add the Players in to their character map – acknowledging the hierarchy of the troupe, and their relationship to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (developed within Stoppard's play).



## Character Map – the Danish Court



## Key Character Descriptions

*Tom Stoppard describes his two main characters within the script itself as:*

Two ELIZABETHANS passing time in a place without any visible character.

They are well dressed - hats, cloaks, sticks and all.

Each of them has a large leather moneybag.

Guildenstern's bag is nearly empty.

Rosencrantz's bag is nearly full.

The reason being: they are betting on the toss of a coin, in the following manner: GUILDENSTERN (hereafter 'GUIL') takes a coin out of his bag, spins it, letting it fall. ROSENCRANTZ (hereafter 'ROS') studies it, announces it as "heads" (as it happens) and puts it into his own bag. Then they repeat the process. They have apparently been doing it for some time.

The run of "heads" is impossible, yet **ROS betrays no surprise at all - he feels none. However he is nice enough to feel a little embarrassed at taking so much money off his friend. Let that be his character note.**

**GUIL is well alive to the oddity of it. He is not worried about the money, but he is worried by the implications ; aware but not going to panic about it - his character note.**

*Further character summaries below are sourced from the website:*

<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/rosencrantz>

### Rosencrantz

Stoppard deliberately refrains from giving much description of either of his main characters. Both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are meant to be "everyman" figures, more or less average men who represent humanity in general. Nevertheless, both men have specific character traits. Rosencrantz is decidedly the more easygoing of the two, happy to continue flipping coins with little concern about the possible implications of their pattern of landing heads up. Rosencrantz spends a great deal of the play confused by both what is happening around him and Guildenstern's reactions to their situation, but he rarely engages in the overt despair that is characteristic of Guildenstern. Rosencrantz is pragmatic and seeks simple and efficient solutions to the pair's problems

rather than philosophical explanations of them, a trait that leads Guildenstern to believe that his friend is complacent and unwilling or unable to think seriously and deeply.

Rosencrantz reveals himself to be more complicated than Guildenstern believes, however, and his apparently straightforward attitude of pragmatism and breezy bewilderment peels back to reveal deeper feelings, both positive and negative. Despite their continued frustrations and problems, Rosencrantz does not lose sight of Guildenstern's feelings, and he awkwardly tries to cheer his friend up by offering him the opportunity to win several easy bets. Rosencrantz also tries to help Guildenstern in a more serious and sophisticated way by encouraging him to find personal happiness and to soldier on in the face of apparent chaos. Rosencrantz's positive attitude is not the limit of his feelings, and twice he feels terror at the realization of his own mortality. First, he gets afraid during his discussion of what it would be like to be in a coffin. Later, at the end of the play, he feels fear as he realizes that he is about to die. Rosencrantz may not be an actively philosophical man like his friend Guildenstern, but he is nevertheless capable of sensitive thought.

## **Guildenstern**

On the surface, Guildenstern seems to be the polar opposite of his friend Rosencrantz. Guildenstern is markedly more anxious than Rosencrantz about the strange circumstances in which they find themselves, beginning with his deep concern about the coin-flipping episode. Unlike Rosencrantz, Guildenstern wants desperately to understand their situation, and he tries to reason his way through the incidents that plague them. Guildenstern's belief that there is a rational explanation for their predicament leads him to sudden bursts of strong emotion as he grows increasingly frustrated by his inability to make sense of the world around him. Guildenstern's frustration is heightened by what he sees as Rosencrantz's jovial indifference, and he lashes out at his friend on several occasions. Guildenstern's angry despair reaches its peak near the end of the play. His realization that he and Rosencrantz are about to die without having understood anything leads him to attack the Player in a fit of fury and hopelessness.

Guildenstern is not simply a blend of rationality and passion. Subtle gestures within the play show him to be capable of compassion and sympathetic understanding. Although Guildenstern is certainly angry at Rosencrantz at numerous points, he quickly consoles and comforts his friend when the need arises. After arriving at Elsinore and becoming even more confused by Claudius's reception of the pair, Guildenstern soothes a tongue-tied Rosencrantz and promises him that they will be able to return home soon. Similarly, after belittling Rosencrantz for failing to say anything original when they are onboard the ship to England, Guildenstern recognizes his friend's suffering and promises him that everything will turn out okay. Though he often acts as if he would rather be alone than be with Rosencrantz, Guildenstern's final speech in the play has him alone onstage, turning to look for his friend, unable to tell which one of them is which.

## **The Player**

The Player is the most mysterious of the play's characters. He seems to possess a far greater understanding of the events transpiring than does either Rosencrantz or Guildenstern. The Player's witty speeches often hint at the possibility that he could reveal the truth if only Rosencrantz and Guildenstern knew how to ask the right questions. Upon first meeting the pair, the Player claims to recognize them as artists like himself, a description that implies an awareness that they are all merely actors in a drama that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do not understand and can barely acknowledge. Similarly, the Player makes several remarks that reflect on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's plight, although in a way that the pair fails to grasp, such as when he tells them that life is a terrible gamble or when he says that the normal experience of existence is one of confusion and doubt. The Player's unexplained mastery of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's experiences extends to their final moments, when he seems to have anticipated their deaths and the complicated mix of feelings they go through as their mortality descends upon them.


The Player's air of mysterious control and omniscience contrasts sharply with his shameful occupation as a pimp for the men in his acting troupe, whose bodies he will happily sell if the opportunity arises. Guildenstern holds this fact against the Player and tricks him into an unwinnable bet, partly out of disgust and a desire to punish the Player for his amoral attitude. Although the Player occasionally seems embarrassed by his profession, he generally retains a haughty attitude, secure in his knowledge of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's fate and fully aware that his troupe fills an unacknowledged social need and will therefore always be in demand. The Player's confidence is also apparent in his serious belief in the integrity of theater in general and the Tragedians' performances in particular. This belief infuriates the skeptical and philosophical Guildenstern, but the Player remains entirely unflappable in the face of Guildenstern's rage. The Player's combination of a lowly, shameful appearance with dazzling wit, mysterious power, and defiant confidence make him an unlikely but fascinating ringmaster for the play's circus of confusion.

## **Alfred**

Alfred is the only character amidst the Tragedians. He is often emasculated, and the Player plans to make him wear a skirt for *The Rape of the Sabine Women*. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern seem to have sympathy for him, perhaps because he is an early victim of the Player's tyranny.

When Guildenstern questions him, Alfred admits that he doesn't like being an actor. Guildenstern suggests that the two of them could create a "dramatic precedent". What he means is that no two actors (that we know of) have ever just walked out of a play in the middle of it. Can you imagine going to see a play and having a few of the characters just walk off the stage? This is one of those odd meta-moments in the play where Guildenstern's situation makes sense in the context of the play, but it makes even more sense when you consider the fact that he and Alfred are also two actors in a production of Tom Stoppard's play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. It's worth noting that

Alfred was not in the original production of the play, but he is a testament to the fact that not everyone is as comfortable being an actor as the Player is.



## Context and Conventions of Absurdism

*A brief summary, drawn from the websites:*

<http://theatrestyles.blogspot.com/2014/12/the-theatre-of-absurd.html>

<http://www.thedramateacher.com/theatre-of-the-absurd-conventions/>

*with examples from Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern are Dead referenced below.*

### Background

The Theatre of the Absurd was a short-lived yet significant theatrical movement, centred in Paris in the 1950s. Largely based on the philosophy of existentialism, the movement explored what happens when human existence has no meaning or purpose and therefore all communication breaks down. Absurdism was implemented by a small number of European playwrights, including Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and Eugene Ionesco. The Absurd in these plays takes the form of human beings' reaction to a world apparently without meaning, and/or humans as puppets controlled or menaced by invisible outside forces.

*Absurd* originally means “out of harmony” (in a musical context) – its meaning in the Theatre of the Absurd is different to the everyday meaning of the word as “ridiculous”.

*Absurd* in the context of absurdism can mean:

- without purpose
- illogical
- out of harmony
- useless
- devoid of reason
- meaningless
- hopeless
- chaotic
- lacking order
- uncertain

### Philosophy

Existentialism refers to a particular view of the nature of man's existence. The existentialist believes that man starts life with nothing. His life is made up of acts; through the process of acting man becomes conscious of his original nothingness. By choosing to act, man passes into the arena of human responsibility, which makes him the creator of his own existence. However, the existence inevitably ends with death. Man returns to his original state of nothingness. This existential notion eliminates the Western concept of man's exalted nature. Life becomes meaningless and useless – a condition which is in essence “absurd”. Man's only freedom in this condition is the exercise of his conscious mind. However, consciousness means conflict – between man's



awareness of the absurdity of his existence and his need for justification of his human action. (J. L Crawford: Acting In Person and in Style)

### **Conventions of Absurdist Theatre include:**

- **Anti-realistic, non linear plot**

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern repeatedly find themselves buffeted by the whirlwind of action that arises in Hamlet, swept (without segue) from one location to the next, and then returned to a no-place where no action occurs and, as Guildenstern says, they 'have no desires'.*

- **A deliberate lack of conflict**

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern spend most of the play trying to work out how to avoid confronting Hamlet; when they finally do, it happens largely off stage and the audience is given insight only into Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's befuddled reactions. When in Act 3 they discover that the King has made them bearers of a letter that condemns Hamlet to death, they actively choose not to confront the problem – or to do anything at all – and it is this passivity that one could argue ultimately seals their fate and allows Hamlet to callously sacrifice them.*

- **Blurred sense of time, place and identity**

*Not only can most of the Danish Court not tell Rosencrantz and Guildenstern apart, but Rosencrantz and Guildenstern themselves constantly appear to forget who – or which – they are. They have also apparently forgotten why they are visiting Elsinore, and spend most of the play (cyclically) trying to work out where they are, and for what reason they've been called for. Their confusion is perhaps compounded by the fact that they seem to be swept from one location to another suddenly and without causality – they may, for example, be observing the Players set up to perform a play on the road to Elsinore, and then suddenly they are within the court itself, being cajoled by the King and Queen.*

G:	Then what are we doing here, I ask myself.
R:	You might well ask.
G:	We better get on.
R:	You might well think.
G:	We better get on.
R:	Right! <i>(Pause)</i> On where?
G:	Forward.
R:	Ah. <i>(hesitates)</i> Which way do we – <i>(He turns round)</i> Which way did we –

- **Characters caught in hopeless situations, forced to do repetitive or meaningless actions**

*Guildenstern particularly seems to increasingly despair at the situation in which they find themselves trapped, and yet both he and Rosencrantz remain passive, allowing themselves to be manipulated by the other characters that surround them (the King and Queen, Hamlet, and the Player). Instead of making active choices, they pass the*

*time – or cheer each other up - by playing a series of repetitive games (such as the coin toss or the questions game). These both provide comedy and serve to highlight their lack of motivation and purposelessness.*

- **Characters are out of harmony or out of synch with the world in which they live**  
*This can be clearly seen in the juxtaposition of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's often fast-paced dialogue with each other and with the Player, and the fragments of poetic Shakespearean scenes with the Danish Court, which swallow Rosencrantz and Guildenstern up completely and spit them back out into their isolated fog of waiting and confusion.*
- **Mixture of realistic and non-realistic, often repetitive, movement**  
*In QSE's production, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern interact, when alone, in a heightened realism style – with moments of more presentational acting – while in the Danish Court they slot into an Elizabethan acting style. The coin game creates an incredibly repetitive movement (and dialogue) sequence that is returned to throughout the play; and at times the two main characters step out of both Realism and Elizabethan styles and freeze while action carries on around them.*

	<i>Guildenstern spins a coin. Rosencrantz studies it.</i>
R:	Heads.
	<i>He picks the coin up and puts it in his bag. The process is repeated.</i>
R:	Heads.
	<i>Again.</i>
R:	Heads.
	<i>Again.</i>
R:	Heads.
	<i>Again.</i>
R:	Heads.
G:	<i>(flipping a coin)</i> There is an art to the building up of suspense.
R:	Heads.
G:	<i>(flipping another)</i> Though it can be done by luck alone.
R:	Heads.
G:	If that's the word I'm after.

- **Elements of vaudeville**  
*Vaudeville was a popular performance style in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and involved a mix of specialty acts such as burlesque, comedy, song and dance. In Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, this is largely introduced via the travelling troupe of Players and, especially, their leader, who is reminiscent of a Ring Master or Master of Ceremonies. The Players are not true vaudevillians; however, they present the populist, sometimes bawdy spirit of that style of theatre.*
- **Juxtaposition of tragic and highly comic imagery**  
*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead is, by the classic definition, a tragedy – the main characters cannot escape their mortality. Yet the play is riddled with highly comic moments – from clever word play to the comedy gold that attempting to lick your own*

toe can bring. The comedy serves to consistently highlight the predicament these two characters find themselves trapped in.

- **Language devalued as a communication tool**

*Rosencrantz often mishears or misunderstands Guildenstern (or occasionally vice versa), and their isolated dialogue is full of clichés (such as Guildenstern’s motif, ‘give us this day our daily...’) and word play. These dialogue-based conventions serve to reinforce that verbal language is an unreliable communication tool (in the real world as well as in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s).*

R:	I’m out of my step here –
G:	We’ll soon be home and high – dry and home – I’ll –
R:	It’s all over my <i>depth</i> –
G:	- I’ll hie you home and –
R:	- Out of my head –
G:	- dry you high and –
R:	( <i>cracking, high</i> ) – over my step over my head body! – I tell you it’s all stopping to a death, it’s boding to a depth, stepping to a head, it’s all heading to a dead stop –
G:	( <i>the nursemaid</i> ) There!... and we’ll soon be home and dry... and <i>high</i> and dry...

- **Repetitive, rhythmical dialogue juxtaposed with long pauses**

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern riff off each other throughout the play, but their short, clipped, fast-paced dialogue is interspersed with confused silences. The tempo of the text delivery and duration of the dramatic pauses serves to reinforce the fact that these characters are not in synch with the world in which they live in.*

- **Minimalist, symbolic use of scenery**

*QSE’s production utilizes this convention to suggest locations through simple set and props – for example, the ship (in Act 3) is created only through sound and the inclusion of barrels onstage*

## Practical Exercises – from the Rehearsal Room

*Below are two exercises that Rebecca Murphy, the director of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, used in the rehearsal room to assist the actors with accessing the script and the style of performance.*

### 1. Questions

*Elements of Drama: Exploring **Language** and **Dramatic Tension***

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have a lot of time to fill! One of the ways they do this is by playing games; Coin Toss, Make Believe, Role Play, Questions etc. Questions is a kind of verbal tennis match that requires actors to think on their feet, we played as a full cast to warm up, focus on listening and responding and prepare ourselves for the speed of thought and delivery that Stoppard's script requires.

#### **How to Play:**

- The group divides in to 2 lines, in which the heads of the lines face each other, standing centre stage.
- One actor opens the scene with a question (you can use a prompt from the audience such as a location).
- The other replies with a question, and all lines from here on must be questions. For example:

A:     *How do I get to the water ride?*  
B:     *First time at Dreamworld?*  
A:     *How can you tell?*  
B:     *Which ride were you after?*  
A:     *Which one makes the biggest splash?*  
B:     *Are you ready to get soaking wet?*  
A:     *Why else would I be wearing this big yellow raincoat?*

- And so it goes on! If an actor says something that isn't a question, is a repetition or takes too long to respond they are buzzed out\* and the next person in their line moves to centre stage.
- At this point the actors can continue using the same scene/ characters or begin a fresh one.

*\*In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's* version you can also be buzzed out for Grunts, Synonyms, Rhetoric and Non Sequiturs!*

- *Synonym – replies that use different words but have the same meaning.*  
*e.g. 'Is the door shut?' - 'Do you mean, is it closed?'*
- *Rhetoric – figures of speech, or questions designed to be 'impressive' but lacking in meaningful content (in relation to the game so far).*  
*e.g. 'Is the door shut?' – 'Is the door a door?'*
- *Non Sequitur – a reply that does not logically follow from the previous question.*

*e.g. 'Is the door shut?' - 'Is broccoli green?'*

**Links that might be interesting/ useful:**

R&G play Questions in the film version of *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* -  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLKbS4xCmRc>

Daniel Radcliffe and Joshua McGuire attempt to play questions –  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S73ffWaFc7U>

## Questions Extension Task – Preparing for Presenting

*In pairs, have students rehearse and present the following sequence from *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Act 1. Encourage them to focus on the building rhythm and tension, and an appropriate verbal delivery style (clipped, clear but fast-paced).*

### ***Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*** **Act 1**

R: We could play at questions  
G: What good would that do?  
R: Practice!  
G: Statement! One – love.  
R: Cheating!  
G: How?  
R: I hadn't started yet.  
G: Statement. Two – love.  
R: Are you counting that?  
G: What?  
R: Are you counting that?  
G: Foul! No repetitions. Three – love. First game to...  
R: I'm not going to play if you're going to be like that.  
G: Whose serve?  
R: Hah?  
G: Foul! No grunts. Love – one.  
R: Whose go?  
G: Why?  
R: Why not?  
G: What for?  
R: Foul! No synonyms! One – all.  
G: What in God's name is going on?  
R: Foul! No rhetoric. Two – one.  
G: What does it all add up to?  
R: Can't you guess?  
G: Were you addressing me?  
R: Is there anyone else?  
G: Who?  
R: How would I know?  
G: Why do you ask?  
R: Are you serious?  
G: Was that rhetoric?  
R: No.  
G: Statement! Two – all. Game point.  
R: What's the matter with you today?  
G: When?  
R: What?  
G: Are you deaf?  
R: Am I dead?



G: Yes or no?  
 R: Is there a choice?  
 G: Is there a God?  
 R: Foul! No *non sequiturs*, three – two, one game all.  
 G: (*seriously*) What's your name?  
 R: What's yours?  
 G: I asked you first.  
 R: Statement. One – love.  
 G: What's your name when you're at home?  
 R: What's yours?  
 G: When I'm at home?  
 R: Is it different at home?  
 G: What home?  
 R: Haven't you got one?  
 G: Why do you ask?  
 R: What are you driving at?  
 G: (*with emphasis*) What's your name?!  
 R: Repetition. Two – love. Match point to me.  
 G: (*seizing him violently*) WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?  
 R: Rhetoric! Game and match! (*Pause*) Where's it going to end?  
 G: That's the question.  
 R: It's *all* questions.  
 G: Do you think it matters?  
 R: Doesn't it matter to you?  
 G: Why should it matter?  
 R: What does it matter why?  
 G: (*teasing gently*) Doesn't it *matter* why it matters?  
 R: (*rounding on him*) What's the *matter* with you?  
     *Pause.*  
 G: It doesn't matter.  
 R: (*voice in the wilderness*)... What's the game?  
 G: What are the rules?

## 2. Columbian Hypnosis

### *Elements of Drama: Exploring Space, Movement and Relationship*

This game comes from Augusto Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*.

#### **How to play:**

- Working in pairs one actor holds her hand palm forward, fingers upright, the other actor brings his face approximately 30cm away from the hand.
- From this point on he is hypnotised and must keep his face constantly the same distance from the hand of the hypnotiser (hairline level with her fingertips, chin more or less level with the base of her palm).
- The hypnotiser begins a series of movements with her hand, up and down, right and left, backwards and forwards, her hand vertical in relation to the ground, then horizontal, then diagonal, etc. – the partner must move his body to maintain the spatial relationship between face and hand.
- The hand must never do movements too rapid to be followed, nor should it ever come to a complete halt.
- After a few minutes, the two actors swap roles.

The hypnotiser may move her partner into all sorts of ridiculous, grotesque, uncomfortable positions. Her partner will thus explore the playing space in new ways and put in to motion a series of muscle structures that are not used in day-to-day life.

#### **Variation**

Double Hypnotism! In the *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* rehearsal room we played this variation with the Player hypnotising Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The same exercise, but this time the actor is guiding two fellow actors, one with each hand, and can do any movement she likes. The leader should aim to not stop moving either of her hands. She can cross her hands over each other to cause one actor to pass underneath the other. The two actors being led cannot touch; each body must find its own equilibrium without leaning on the other. The leader mustn't do any movements that are too violent; she is an ally, not an enemy.

## Columbian Hypnosis Extension task – Preparing for Presenting

*In groups of three, have students rehearse and present the following dialogue between Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and the Player. Encourage them to focus on amplifying the shifting tension of relationship between the Player and the two main characters through their use of space and movement.*

*As the performers become familiar with the scene and the dialogue, you may choose to re-introduce Columbian Hypnosis as part of the rehearsal process – first, have them play the scene while doing the exercise. How does the physical movement reflect the relationship dynamic between the three characters? When does the lead and follow or respond movement sequence feel appropriate for the moment within the scene? Can they pinpoint 2 – 3 specific moments within the scene where they can adjust and use the concept of physically leading and following (central to Columbian Hypnosis) to create blocking and a use of space that reflects the power dynamic between the three characters?*

### ***Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*** **Act 2**

- G: ...And so here you are – with a vengeance. That’s a figure of speech... isn’t it? Well let’s say we’ve made up for it, for you may have no doubt whom to thank for your performance at the court.
- R: We are counting on you to take him out of himself. You are the pleasures which we draw him on to – *(he escapes a fractional giggle but recovers immediately)* and by that I don’t mean your usual filth; you can’t treat royalty like people with normal perverted desires. They know nothing of that and you know nothing of them, to your mutual survival. So give him a good clean show suitable for all the family, or you can rest assured you’ll be playing the tavern tonight.
- G: Or the night after.
- R: Or not.
- P: We already have an entry here. And always have had.
- G: You’ve played for him before?
- P: Yes, sir.
- R: And what’s *his* bent?
- P: Classical.
- R: Saucy!
- G: What will you play?
- P: *The murder of Gonzago.*
- G: Full of fine cadences and corpses.
- P: Pirated from the Italian...
- R: What is it about?
- P: It’s about a King and Queen...
- G: Escapism! What else?
- P: Blood –
- G: - Love and rhetoric.
- P: Yes. *(Going.)*
- G: Where are you going?
- P: I can come and go as I please.

G: You're evidently a man who knows his way around.  
P: I've been here before.  
G: We're still finding our feet.  
P: I should concentrate on not losing your heads.  
G: Do you speak from knowledge?  
P: Precedent.  
G: You've been here before.  
P: And I know which way the wind is blowing.  
G: Operating on two levels, are we?! How clever! I expect it comes naturally to you, being in the business so to speak.  
*The Player's grave face does not change. He makes to move off again. Guildenstern for the second time cuts him off.*  
The truth is, we value your company, for want of any other. We have been left so much to our own devices – after a while one welcomes the uncertainty of being left to other people's.  
P: Uncertainty is the normal state. You're nobody special.  
*He makes to leave again. Guildenstern loses his cool.*  
G: But for God's sake what are we supposed to do?!  
P: Relax. Respond. That's what people do. You can't go through life questioning your situation at every turn.  
G: But we don't know what's going on, or what to do with ourselves. We don't know how to *act*.  
P: Act natural. You know why you're here at least.  
G: We only know what we're told, and that's little enough. And for all we know it isn't even true.  
P: For all anyone knows, nothing is. Everything has to be taken on trust; truth is only that which is taken to be true. It's the currency of living.  
*The Player moves.*  
G: *(Fascist)* Nobody leaves this room! *(Pause, lamely)* Without a very good reason.  
P: Why not?  
G: All this strolling about is getting too arbitrary by half – I'm rapidly losing my grip. From now on reason will prevail.  
P: I have lines to learn.  
G: Pass!  
*The Player passes into one of the wings.*

## 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)

### Ellen Hardisty (Rosencrantz)

#### 1. What characteristics do you think you share with Rosencrantz?

Both Rosencrantz and I want to look out for our friends.

#### 2. What do you consider Rosencrantz's biggest weakness?

I mean, human mortality, but more specifically, of being buried alive in a box.

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

I'm really excited by the way QSE messes with gender. I'm a woman, playing a male character, but gender isn't terribly important to the story so I think it's great to subvert expectations around the role and the plays. I'm also super excited to see how the two plays jigsaw together.

#### 4. What is your favourite line in the play?

*Rosencrantz:* Another curious scientific fact is that the fingernails grow after death, as does the Beard.

I love this line because (in a very random way) Rosencrantz is just trying to show that he's as smart as anyone else!

### Colin Smith (The Player)

#### 1. What has helped you empathise with and inhabit the character of the First Player?

The Player is quite a gregarious and showy individual pretty much all the time, and I definitely at times have my more extroverted moments. He's also very precise, polite, and knowledgeable about his craft, and I certainly aim to be all of those things.

#### 2. What do you consider the First Player's biggest weakness?

He can be arrogant, cold-hearted, and uncaring, and he occasionally seems to have a dependence on what others think of him and needs external affirmation.

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

It'd be something metatextual like, "Do you actually know what's going to happen in this play?" He seems to be operating on multiple levels, as Guildenstern says. I haven't yet decided if I know how events are going to play out - I might change that up every night!



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

Since QSE primarily performs classical texts, I'd like everyone to know how well we handle more contemporary scripts. Also I think it will be highly engaging and entertaining for people to see the very active back-stories going on in both of the shows - the frustrations of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern already have more weight when they're interacting with the court of Elsinore in the world of *Hamlet* and I really think audiences will get a kick out of experiencing that.

#### **5. What is your favourite line in the play?**

I have one frustrated exclamation that I give in Act 2 that is amazing:

*First Player:*                    We're actors - we're the opposite of people!

It's staggeringly accurate and inaccurate depending on how you look at it - as in, actors in our professions are merely representative of humanity so aren't depicting real humans in a sense and therefore we aren't real people, but then again in our duties we express things that are often left unsaid so it could be reckoned that we're more human than we're perceived to be. There are some real gems in *R&G* where a throwaway joke line can often have profound philosophical questions behind it - much like most of Hamlet's spoken words - and that's the incredible gift of Stoppard's playwriting that he's given to us.



## 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 Absurdism
Characters / Roles Relationships Situation / Context Place Space Movement Language Symbol Mood Dramatic focus Dramatic tension Contrast	Acting (voice & movement) Directing (responsible for dramatic meaning) Design / Stage craft (set, lighting, costume, sound)	Non-realistic, non-linear plot Blurred sense of time, place and identity Characters lacking motivation / purpose Juxtaposing fast-paced, clipped dialogue and silence Mix of realistic and heightened, repetitive movement Tragic juxtaposed with comic imagery Minimalist, symbolic props and scenery Incorporation of vaudeville, acrobatics, etc.

**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 *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* 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 *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*.*

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

## 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 (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*) and the style (Absurdist Theatre)
- Frame the key question of the Responding task as a statement – 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

### **Acting in person and in style**

*Crawford, J., Hurst, C. and Luger, M. (1995). Long Grove, Ill.: Waveland Press.*

### **Questions game references:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLKbS4xCmRc>

*R&G play Questions in the film version of Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S73ffWaFc7U>

*Daniel Radcliffe and Joshua McGuire attempt to play questions.*

### **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.*

### **Schmoop – Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead**

<https://www.shmoop.com/rosencrantz-and-guildenstern-are-dead>

*See above.*

### **Spark Notes – Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead**

<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/rosencrantz>

*Provides plot summary, theme and character analysis. Uses more academic language.*

### **The Drama Teacher – Conventions of Theatre of the Absurd**

<http://www.thedramateacher.com/theatre-of-the-absurd-conventions/>

### **A Matter of Style: Theatre of the Absurd**

<http://theatrestyles.blogspot.com/2014/12/the-theatre-of-absurd.html>