

# Hamlet

## TWO MAIN MUST DO'S

1. - It is extremely important to make those explicit links to the

question in all essays -

**2.** - Be sure ALSO to LINK  
EACH PARAGRAPH TO  
THE NEXT, fluency in the  
response -

## **HAMLET**

**(1) CRITICAL STUDY OF TEXT**

**GENERIC ESSAY:**

**GENERIC INTRODUCTION:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_\_\_

- The prominence of the revenge tragedy in the Elizabethan era, gave rise to Shakespearean works that were deliberately written to break conventions of the time and explore the delightful truths of \_\_\_\_ [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_\_.
- Examining human vulnerability and exposing foolish and unfortunate behaviour, Shakespeare's, Hamlet is centred on the \_\_\_\_ [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_\_\_. The play thoroughly examines various aspects that support this including:
  - **mortality,**
  - **corruption**
  - **and the struggle between the emotional and the rational**
- Shakespeare uses an array of profound language, forms features and structures combined with theatrical techniques to continuously bring the audience back to \_\_\_\_\_ [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_\_\_.

# **ELEMENTS OF EACH**

## **PARAGRAPH**

- 1. IDENTIFY CHARACTER  
FOCUS**
- 2. LINK TO QUESTION**
- 3. ACT/SCENE**
- 4. LANGUAGE TECHNIQUE**
- 5. DRAMATIC TECHNIQUE**
- 6. CONTEXTUAL LINK**
- 7. VALUE/THEME**

### **HAMLET PARAGRAPH ONE:**

- 1. IDENTIFY CHARACTER FOCUS**

- Hamlet is an extremely complex character, who is confronted with a labyrinth of tribulation. \_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_.

Hamlet examines \_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_ through his own personal sentiments, ranging from the extremes of being hesitant and impulsive to sensitive and callous, but further takes on his own examination of human life investigating death and making critical evaluations about the worth of life.

In the aftermath of his father's death, Hamlet is confronted with not only the marriage of his mother, but further an apparition holding the truth of his father's death, and demanding Hamlet take accurate steps towards revenge. \_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_.

## **2. VALUE/ THEME:**

- While social codes and the codes of revenge tragedy demand that Hamlet seeks vengeance, his inner self hesitates and the clash between the head as rational and the heart as emotional. \_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_. The audience is able to see the conflict between the demands of repressing his feminine side demonstrating; mercy, reason and feeling, in lieu of his masculine side, which is violent and assertive. \_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_.

## **3. ACT SCENE EXAMPLE:**

- This becomes most evident in Hamlet's most famous soliloquy that questions, whether he should live with the pain of his father's murder "*the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune*" or "*take arms against his sea of troubles*" and seek revenge or live with the pain of his father's murder; "*to be or not to be: that is the question:*". \_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_. In addition, he contemplates whether it is better to stay alive or die; "*To die, to sleep--/No more--and by a sleep to say we end*" and thus escape all of his troubles.

\_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_. However, soon evaluates that if death represented nothing to be feared, then the choice would be simple but that is the “rub” - death remains an unknown entity: “the dread of something after death” (3.1.58. 50). It is through this soliloquy that Hamlet tackles one of the biggest questions behind what it means to be human – the mystery of life after death. \_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_.

#### **4. CONTEXTUAL LINK**

- Hamlet's thoughts relate to an artistic motif of the Renaissance: the theme of Vanitas. \_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_. According to many Renaissance artists, the splendour of life was ultimately transient. Wealth and status were meaningless in the grave, something which many people still believe today in an age occupied with materialism. Many question the importance of such consumerist ideals, particularly in death. \_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_.

#### **5. TECHNIQUE:**

- Hamlet knows that what he wishes to do to his uncle is sinful and wrong, however he is still compelled to fulfil his goal. \_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_. By using inclusive expressions Shakespeare, adheres directly to the human experience, by creating an abstract rather than a personal evaluation. The pronouns “we” and “us”, the indefinite “who”, and the fact that he speaks explicitly of “us all”, emphasises the continual tension between freedom and constraint, action and inaction metaphorically the head and the heart, to all human beings. This is a dilemma which all humans experience, a dilemma that creates much frustration for audiences from any era, making it possible for this message to transcend time and remain applicable for a contemporary audience.

## HAMLET PARAGRAPH TWO (If needed)

### 1. IDENTIFY CHARACTER FOCUS – DONE

- Done previously

### 2. VALUE/ THEME:

- Hamlets struggle between action and inaction is incessant during the course of the play gradually mounting towards the end of the play and forcing him to enter deeper and deeper contemplations of mortality, further examining \_\_\_\_\_ [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_\_\_.

### 3. ACT SCENE EXAMPLE:

- After being captured by pirates on his voyage to England, Hamlet returns to Denmark, still a man of little action. Shakespeare highlights this by simultaneously juxtaposing Hamlet at this point with two men of action, Polonius and Laertes, who are at the same time conspiring Hamlets death. For these men, *“revenge shall have no bounds”*. \_\_\_\_\_ [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_\_\_. In the next scene holding Yorick’s skull, Hamlets childhood Jester, he explores the brevity and futility of the human condition and the inevitability of death: He urges the skull to *“get you to my lady’s chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor she must come”*—no one can avoid death (V.i.178–179). \_\_\_[\[INSERT LINK TO](#)

THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_.

#### 4. CONTEXTURAL LINK:

- Hamlet muses on the nothingness of life and of fame as well, seeing existence for all, as ending without returning to dust, whether court jester or conquer – reference to Alexander the Great: the most celebrated member of the Argead Dynasty, creator of one of the largest empires in ancient history: ***“Alexander/ was buried, Alexander returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam,”*** (5.1.173 - 5) \_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_.

#### 5. TECHNIQUE:

- The use of the skull in this scene is not only a dramatic prop that heightens dramatic tension, but further acts as evidence of what Hamlet is saying. It confirms the reality of death for the audience. As Hamlet holds the skull in his hand he is literally and directly looking death directly in the face, increasing even further the meaning of his words. \_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_.



## CLAUDIUS PARAGRAPH ONE:

### 1. IDENTIFY CHARACTER FOCUS

- Hamlets character provides the audience with notions of action and inaction, contemplation and mortality, each of which make up only one fragment of the complex and multidimensional human condition. \_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_ . Claudius extenuates the concept by illustrating another dimension of this multifarious concept – the human capability for deception and knavery; the fact that what one seems to be is not always what they are. \_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_ .

### 2. VALUE/ THEME:

- Claudius appears as a dignified and competent statesman, performing his ceremonial duties with appropriate regal decorum, despite this the underlying truth is that he is a multiple offender, guilty of the acts of regicide, fratricide and marrying his brother's wife; as Hamlet states: *“That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain”* – Claudius' verisimilitude is further emblematic of not only its presence in each of the plays characters, but further allows the audience to recognise it as a human condition – a part of the human experience. \_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_ .

### 3. ACT SCENE EXAMPLE:

- Act 3, scene 3; presents Polonius' personal soliloquy, in which Shakespeare, as in the case of Hamlet reduces him to contemplate notions of his own humanity - the dramatic tension of this scene is heightened by the previous

“The Mousetrap” scene where Hamlet received confirmation of Claudius’ guilt. \_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION]. As Claudius is praying in the chapel he comes to the realization that he can never be forgiven for the heinous crime he has committed; *“O, my offence is rank it smells to heaven; / It hath the primal eldest curse upon’t”* (3.3.36 – 37). He reveals that he in fact does feel guilt over the crime he has committed although his guilt does not outweigh his desire to claim the throne and Queen, *“Yet what can it when one cannot repent!”* (3.3.66). It is through this that the audience is again able to witness another level of Claudius’s verisimilitude - the Kings appearance of control is merely a mask for his inner turmoil. At this point in the play Claudius is racked by guilt over what he has done to his brother: *“Help, angels! - Make assay!”* (3.3.69).

\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_.

#### **4. CONTEXTUAL LINK**

- Claudius on many levels epitomizes the Faustian Legend, which tells of a man who sells his soul to the devil for power and knowledge. \_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_. In a modern context, society, has interpreted the Faustian legend to included those who sacrifice their morals in order to gain advancement of some form whether, economic, political or social; it is through this that again Hamlet can be taken out of the Elizabethan context and placed in a 21<sup>st</sup> C one, with its messages still reaming relevant.

\_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_. Claudius’s character shows the audience that humanity is capable of evil and corrupt actions, yet the spirit still yearns for grace. Claudius brings forward the notion that humans are creatures “crawling between earth and heaven”, with natures both bestial and intellectual. \_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_.

#### **TECHNIQUE:**

- Humans are ultimately separated from beasts in that they have reason, the ability to look forward to consequences and the ability to articulate thought. Shakespeare heightens the significance of this message, with the use of metatheatrical conventions, the first of which is the use of soliloquy. \_\_\_\_ [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_\_ . In terms of stagecraft, Claudius is featured alone and kneeling in a position of prayer; this encapsulates the full attention of the audience and makes clear his intention to pray. Additionally Elizabethan soliloquies were recognised as revealing the characters true thoughts and feelings; this legitimizes Claudius' repentance and the words which he says, this is important for a character like Claudius who spends majority of the play feeding the audience direct falsehoods. \_\_\_\_\_ [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_\_\_. Finally, the nature of the soliloquy, a reflective piece epitomising the ability of humans to ponder their own actions with complexity and rationalisation, again the audience is confronted with notions of the head and the heart. \_\_\_\_\_ [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_\_\_.

## WOMEN IN THE PLAY (GERTRUDE)

### PARAGRAPH TWO

#### 1. IDENTIFY CHARACTER FOCUS – DONE

- Claudius, like Hamlet displays even further the plays ability to explore the complexity behind what it means to be human, enabling the audience not only to realise its complexity but further its differentiation for each person. The women of the play, Gertrude and Ophelia, build on another facet of the human condition – frailty. \_\_\_\_\_ [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_\_\_.

#### 2. VALUE/ THEME:

- From the very beginning of the play, women are portrayed as frail: ***“frailty thy name is woman”***. \_\_\_\_\_ [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_\_\_. Hamlet was written during a time when women were subservient to men. It was very common for women to be used merely as pawns for their fathers, brothers, husbands, or lovers; this is exactly the case for both women in the play. Through their submissiveness their behaviour portrays the frailty of their characters. They are similar in the sense that they are frail; however, they display distinct aspects of frailty. Gertrude lacks moral fibre and Ophelia exhibits emotional weakness and weak character. Gertrude demonstrates moral frailty, as she does not contend to common rules and beliefs. She hastily marries Claudius, longing for the affection she loses when her husband is murdered. \_\_\_\_\_ [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_\_\_.

### **3. ACT SCENE EXAMPLE:**

- The true essence of Gertrude’s moral frailty comes to a head, in Act 3, Scene 4. Hamlet tries to make his mother aware of her wrongful actions, but she is unable to withstand the confrontation and breaks down. \_\_\_ [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_. Hamlet points out her wrongdoings, verbally attacking her, by saying ***“Nay, but to live/ in the rank and sweat of an enseamed bed,/ Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love/ Over the nasty sty”***. Gertrude’s knowledge that her actions were immoral is confirmed in her guilt as pleas for Hamlet to stop insulting her relationship with Claudius and cries, ***“O speak to me no more./ These words like daggers enter in my ears./ No more, sweet Hamlet”*** (iii.iv. 92-96). \_\_\_\_\_ [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_\_\_. Gertrude is fully aware that what she has done is immoral. Again the audience is confronted with the moral downgrade, of the human condition. This is foreshadowed by the following scene in which Claudius confesses his moral wrong, in the same way this scene acts as a confession of Ophelia’s moral wrong doing. ***an inch thick, to this favor she must come”***—no one can avoid death (V.i.178–179).

\_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_.

#### **4. CONTEXTURAL LINK:**

- As in Claudius's Faustian bargain, Gertrude's moral frailty can be likened to human weakness for what seems desirable. Shakespeare heightens Gertrude's moral corruption, throughout the play, via the use of prolific imagery.

\_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_.

#### **5. TECHNIQUE:**

- The Hamlet refers to his mother's sin as "an ulcerous place" which "infects" and "blisters". Figurative language such as this enables the audience to form vivid images of incestuous, grotesque relations brings to life the extent of Gertrude's wrong doing for the audience.

\_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_.

# WOMEN IN THE PLAY (OPHELIA)

## PARAGRAPH TWO

### 1. IDENTIFY CHARACTER FOCUS – DONE

- Done previously.

### 2. VALUE/ THEME:

- Ophelia's frailty doesn't come through desire but rather through, her wanting to always please those around her, thus she loses self-confidence and becomes widely dependent on the men in her life.

\_\_\_\_\_ [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_\_\_.

### 3. ACT SCENE EXAMPLE:

- Although she truly loved Hamlet, she becomes a puppet and follows her father's orders for confronting him; it is in this scene that not only Ophelia's frailty, but the frailty of women overall is highlighted in its rawest form. \_ [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_ This scene follows Hamlet's "*To be or not to be*" soliloquy, where Hamlet questions mortality and foreshadows Ophelia's later death. Bitterly commenting on the wretchedness of humankind, he urges Ophelia to "*get thee to a nunnery*", rather than become a "*breeder of sinners*" (III.i.122-123). [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#)\_. What the audience must recognize is the fact that Ophelia takes all of these comments with no retaliation or defence. Like Gertrude in Act 3, Scene 4 Ophelia does not speak up and defend herself. \_\_\_\_\_ [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_\_\_.

### 4. CONTEXTURAL LINK:

- Shakespeare presents women that are simply frail and weak, however not without purpose. \_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_. Many feminist would argue that Shakespeare is taking a misogynistic approach in his presentation of women; this may have made sense in the Elizabethan era in which women were treated as subordinate to men. Gertrude and Ophelia play a vital role in the play as they are used to highlight the weakness and frailty of males just as much as showing their own human weakness. \_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_. For example, Gertrude's weakness in marrying Claudius, amplifies Claudius' weakness in killing his brother, whilst Ophelia shows the ability of Hamlet to take action, and thus makes the audience questions why he hasn't then taken action against Claudius. \_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_. The frailty of the female figures, in each instance highlight other characters weaknesses, revealing the frailty of not only females but of all human beings another immutable element of the human condition; one which is still recognised in modern society. \_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_.

## 5. TECHNIQUE:

- The way in which Shakespeare features Hamlet with wordplay and imagery: *"If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure snow, thou shalt not escape calumny"* demonstrates his wit and intelligence, highlighting Ophelia's frailty even further, juxtaposing her short, exclamations: *"O heavenly powers, restore him"* \_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION] \_\_\_\_\_.

## **GENERIC CONCLUSION:**

Shakespeare has created a play that displays the pinnacle of [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_:

- Hamlet [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_\_\_:
- Claudius [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_\_\_:
- Gertrude [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_\_\_:
- and Ophelia [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_\_\_:

### **Notions of:**

- contemplation,
- the head and the heart,
- the capability of humans for evil; deceit and knavery
- and further the weakness



- Shakespeare's, prolific ability to write with illuminating language forms features, structures, as well as an array of dramatic techniques, enables a clear and real exploration of the \_\_\_\_ [\[INSERT LINK TO THE QUESTION\]](#) \_\_\_\_.

## OVERVIEW OF THE PLAY:

### ACT I.

- Shakespeare's longest play and the play responsible for the immortal lines "To be or not to be: that is the question:" and the advise "to thine own self be true," begins in Denmark with the news that King Hamlet of Denmark has recently died.
- Denmark is now in a state of high alert and preparing for possible war with Young Fortinbras of Norway. A ghost resembling the late King Hamlet is spotted on a platform before Elsinore Castle in Denmark. King Claudius, who

now rules Denmark, has taken King Hamlet's wife, Queen Gertrude as his new wife and Queen of Denmark.

- King Claudius fearing Young Fortinbras of Norway may invade, has sent ambassadors to Norway to urge the King of Norway to restrain Young Fortinbras. Young Hamlet distrusts King Claudius. The King and Queen do not understand why Hamlet still mourns his father's death over two months ago. In his first soliloquy, Hamlet explains that he does not like his mother marrying the next King of Denmark so quickly within a month of his father's death...
- Laertes, the son of Lord Chamberlain Polonius, gives his sister Ophelia some brotherly advice. He warns Ophelia not to fall in love with Young Hamlet; she will only be hurt. Polonius tells his daughter Ophelia not to return Hamlet's affections for her since he fears Hamlet is only using her...Hamlet meets the Ghost of his father, King Hamlet and follows it to learn more...
- Hamlet learns from King Hamlet's Ghost that he was poisoned by King Claudius, the current ruler of Denmark. The Ghost tells Hamlet to avenge his death but not to punish Queen Gertrude for remarrying; it is not Hamlet's place and her conscience and heaven will judge her... Hamlet swears Horatio and Marcellus to silence over Hamlet meeting the Ghost.

## **ACT II.**

- Polonius tells Reynaldo to spy on his son Laertes in Paris. Polonius learns from his daughter Ophelia that a badly dressed Hamlet met her, studied her

face and promptly left. Polonius believes that Hamlet's odd behavior is because Ophelia has rejected him. Polonius decides to tell King Claudius the reason for Hamlet's recently odd behavior.

- King Claudius instructs courtiers Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to find out what is causing Hamlet's strange "transformation," or change of character. Queen Gertrude reveals that only King Hamlet's death and her recent remarriage could be upsetting Hamlet.
- We learn more of Young Fortinbras' movements and Polonius has his own theory about Hamlet's transformation; it is caused by Hamlet's love for his daughter Ophelia. Hamlet makes his famous speech about the greatness of man. Hamlet plans to use a play to test if King Claudius really did kill his father as King Hamlet's Ghost told him...

### **ACT III.**

- The King's spies, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern report to King Claudius on Hamlet's behavior. Hamlet is eager for King Claudius and Queen Gertrude to watch a play tonight which Hamlet has added lines to.
- King Claudius and Polonius listen in on Hamlet's and Ophelia's private conversation. Hamlet suspects Ophelia is spying on him and is increasingly hostile to her before leaving.
- King Claudius decides to send Hamlet to England, fearing danger in Hamlet since he no longer believes Hamlet is merely lovesick. The King agrees to Polonius' plan to eavesdrop on Hamlet's conversation with his mother after the play to hopefully learn more from Hamlet. The play Hamlet had added lines to is performed. The mime preceding the play which mimics the Ghost's description of King Hamlet's death goes unnoticed.

- The main play called "The Murder of Gonzago" is performed, causing King Claudius to react in a way which convinces Hamlet that his uncle did indeed poison his father King Hamlet as the Ghost previously had told him... Hamlet pretends not to know that the play has offended King Claudius. Hamlet agrees to speak with his mother in private...
- King Claudius admits his growing fear of Hamlet and decides to send him overseas to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in order to protect himself. Alone, King Claudius reveals in soliloquy his own knowledge of the crime he has committed (poisoning King Hamlet) and realizes that he cannot escape divine justice...
- Queen Gertrude attempts to scold her son but Hamlet instead scolds his mother for her actions. Queen Gertrude cries out in fear, and Polonius echoes it and is stabbed through the arras (subdivision of a room created by a hanging tapestry) where he was listening in. Hamlet continues scolding his mother but the Ghost reappears, telling Hamlet to be gentle with the Queen. For her part, Queen Gertrude agrees to stop living with King Claudius, beginning her redemption....

## **ACT IV.**

- King Claudius speaks with his wife, Queen Gertrude. He learns of Polonius' murder which shocks him; it could easily have been him. Queen Gertrude lies for her son, saying that Hamlet is as mad as a tempestuous sea. King Claudius, now scared of Hamlet, decides to have Hamlet sent away to England immediately... He also sends courtiers and spies Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to speak with Hamlet to find out where Hamlet has hidden Polonius' body so they can take it to the chapel.
- Hamlet refuses to tell Rosencrantz and Guildenstern where Polonius' dead body is hidden. He calls Rosencrantz and Guildenstern lapdogs revealing his true awareness that they are not his friends. Hamlet agrees to see King

Claudius.

- Hamlet continues to refuse to tell Rosencrantz and Guildenstern where Polonius' body is. Hamlet is brought before the King. The two exchange words, clearly circling each other, each aware that the other is a threat. Hamlet tells King Claudius where Polonius body is. King Claudius ominously tells Hamlet to leave for England supposedly for Hamlet's own safety. With Hamlet gone, King Claudius reveals his plans for Hamlet to be killed in England, freeing King Claudius from further worry from this threat...
- Young Fortinbras marches his army across Denmark to fight the Polish. Hamlet laments that he does not have in him the strength of Young Fortinbras, who will lead an army into pointless fighting, if only to maintain honor. Hamlet asks himself how he cannot fight for honor when his father has been killed and his mother made a whore in his eyes by becoming King Claudius' wife.
- The death of Polonius leaves its mark on Ophelia who becomes mad from the grief of losing her father. Laertes storms King Claudius' castle, demanding to see his father and wanting justice when he learns that his father, Polonius has been killed. King Claudius remains calm, telling Laertes that he too mourned his father's loss...
- Horatio is greeted by sailors who have news from Hamlet. Horatio follows the sailors to learn more... King Claudius explains to Laertes that Hamlet killed his father, Polonius. Deciding they have a common enemy, they plot Hamlet's death at a fencing match to be arranged between Laertes and Hamlet. Laertes learns of his sister Ophelia's death by drowning...

## **ACT V.**

- Hamlet and Horatio speak with a cheerful Clown or gravedigger. Hamlet famously realizes that man's accomplishments are transitory (fleeting) and holding the skull of Yorick, a childhood jester he remembered, creates a famous scene about man's insignificance and inability to control his fate following death.
- At Ophelia's burial, the Priest reveals a widely held belief that Ophelia committed suicide, angering Laertes. Hamlet fights Laertes over Ophelia's grave, angered by Laertes exaggerated emphasis of his sorrow and because he believes he loved Ophelia much more than her brother.
- Hamlet explains to Horatio how he avoided the death planned for him in England and had courtiers' Rosencrantz and Guildenstern put to death instead. Hamlet reveals his desire to kill King Claudius.
- Summoned by Osric to fence against Laertes, Hamlet arrives at a hall in the castle and fights Laertes. Queen Gertrude drinks a poisoned cup meant for Hamlet, dying but not before telling all that she has been poisoned.
- Hamlet wins the first two rounds against Laertes but is stabbed and poisoned fatally in the third round. Exchanging swords whilst fighting, Hamlet wounds and poisons Laertes who explains that his sword is poison tipped.
- Now dying, Hamlet stabs King Claudius with this same sword, killing him.
- Hamlet, dying, tells Horatio to tell his story and not to commit suicide. Hamlet recommends Young Fortinbras as the next King of Denmark. Young Fortinbras arrives, cleaning up the massacre. Horatio promises to tell all the story we have just witnessed, ending the play.

## CHARACTERS:

- **HAMLET:**

- Son of the late King Hamlet of Denmark and nephew to the present King. Famous for the graveyard scene where holding the skull of deceased jester Yorick, Hamlet realizes man has little lasting control over his fate and also for describing man as the "paragon of animals!" Educated in Wittenburg and introduced to us in Act I, Scene II, Hamlet resents his

mother Queen Gertrude marrying King Claudius within two months of his father King Hamlet's death to which she was previously married.

- Distrustful of King Claudius, Hamlet is equally weary of the King's spies, Guildenstern and Rosencrantz who attempt to know his true intentions. When Hamlet meets King Hamlet's Ghost and learns that King Claudius murdered his father, Hamlet changes from a distrustful, disillusioned young man to one driven to avenge his father's death. To this end, Hamlet distrusts and rejects all those around him whom he believes are spying on him for King Claudius.
- Fearing that his intentions could be revealed, Hamlet invents a madness to distract and hide his true intentions from King Claudius' many spies. This includes Ophelia, the woman he loves whom he bitterly rejects when he learns she has betrayed him.
- Cunning and inventive, Hamlet changes the lines of a play performed before King Claudius to divine whether King Hamlet's Ghost told him the truth about his father's death. At the end of the play, Hamlet kills both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (indirectly), Laertes and finally King Claudius before dying himself from a wound inflicted by Laertes. |

- **HORATIO:**

- Friend to Hamlet and the one person Hamlet truly trusts. Witnesses King Hamlet's Ghost in Act I. At the end of the play, Horatio wishes to commit suicide to join Hamlet in death but Hamlet convinces him to live so he can tell his story, restoring Hamlet's name

- **CLAUDIUS:**

- The present King of Denmark, King Claudius took Queen Gertrude whom he loves as his queen and wife, much to the consternation of Hamlet who believes his mother has betrayed him and his father's memory by doing so. Cautious and suspicious, Claudius has courtiers Rosencrantz and



Guildestern and Hamlet's love interest Ophelia spying on Hamlet for him since as he says, the great ones must be watched. Distrustful of Hamlet and his "madness", King Claudius has Hamlet deported to England to be killed when he fears he has become a threat.

- Instead, Hamlet returns to Denmark, and King Claudius manipulates Laertes into killing Hamlet for him. Unfortunately, King Claudius' plan to poison Hamlet backfires, killing his beloved Queen Gertrude instead. In Act III, Scene III, King Claudius reveals his inner guilt and the knowledge that he cannot avoid God's judgment of him... Dies at the end of the play to the poison tipped sword of Hamlet.

- **GERTRUDE:**

- Queen of Denmark and mother to Hamlet, Queen Gertrude is resented deeply by Hamlet for marrying King Claudius within two months of his father, King Hamlet's death. Hamlet makes this bitterly clear throughout the play especially in his first soliloquy in Act I, Scene II.
- Queen Gertrude loves her son but when she sees a play mocking her actions, she famously says of the female character who vows never to forget her husband, "The lady doth [does] protest too much, methinks [I think]", (Act III, Scene II, Line 242) in an attempt to justify her own actions in remarrying so quickly. Clearly loving of Hamlet, she realizes her wrong when Hamlet scolds her mercilessly in Act III, Scene V.
- She agrees to no longer share King Claudius' bed, and aids her son by hiding Hamlet's true mental state from King Claudius. Dies in Act V, Scene II, to a poisoned cup of wine meant for Hamlet.

- **POLONIUS:**

- Lord Chamberlain. The father of Laertes and Ophelia, Lord Chamberlain Polonius dutifully serves King Claudius.
- When news of Hamlet's madness circulate, Polonius is certain that his daughter Ophelia is responsible, having made Hamlet lovesick. Worried that Hamlet's intentions for his daughter are dishonorable, Polonius orders Ophelia to keep her distance. Later when King Claudius needs information, Polonius uses his daughter to spy on Hamlet.
- He even has Reynaldo, a servant spy on his own son Laertes in Paris. An enthusiastic spy for King Claudius, Polonius is killed by Hamlet when he attempts to listen in on a conversation between Hamlet and Queen Gertrude in Act III, Scene IV.
- His death leads to Ophelia's madness and later drowning brought on by grief and also to Laertes' alliance with King Claudius to kill Hamlet, to avenge Polonius, his father's death.

- **REYNALDO:**

- Servant to Polonius, Reynaldo is instructed to spy on his Laertes in Paris in Act II, Scene I.

- **LAERTES:**

- Polonius' son, Laertes is held in high esteem for his fencing skills. Famous for the advise, "to thine own self be true," (be true to yourself) and the advise to "Neither a borrower, nor a lender be;" in Act I, Scene III. Laertes' role in this play is minor until the death of his father Polonius.
- From this point on, Laertes emerges as rather more assertive, confronting King Claudius personally to know his father's whereabouts, arguing with a Priest for being disrespectful to his sister, fighting Hamlet

above his sister's grave and ultimately conspiring to and killing Hamlet with the help of King Claudius. We see little of Laertes' inner character however since he responds to events continuously.

- Loving of his sister Ophelia, he must watch his sister's cruel decay into madness helplessly following his father's death. Dies in Act V, Scene II, the victim of a wound inflicted upon him by Hamlet with his own poison tipped sword.

- **OPHELIA:**

- The daughter to Polonius, Ophelia is loved by Hamlet. Unfortunately as Queen Gertrude laments at Ophelia's funeral, Ophelia never marries Hamlet. Dutiful to her father, she ignores Hamlet's romantic overtures when instructed to ignore them by her father Polonius.
- Receives advice on how to live from brother Laertes in Act I, Scene III. Though loved by Hamlet, Ophelia ultimately betrays him by spying on him for King Claudius. As a result Hamlet mercilessly insults her virtue during the play "The Murder of Gonzago" in Act III, Scene II.
- A dutiful daughter, Ophelia descends into madness from the grief of losing her father Polonius and later drowns in circumstances that suggest a possible suicide.
- Her funeral is the location of a fight between Hamlet and Laertes that centers on which loved her more; Hamlet believes he did, resenting Laertes exaggerated emphasis of his sorrow...

- **FORTINBRAS:**

- Prince of Norway. The son of King Fortinbras, who was defeated by King Hamlet, Young Fortinbras has raised an army to reclaim the lands lost by

his father to King Hamlet and Denmark.

- Convinced into attacking the Polish instead, Young Fortinbras displays all the noble, honor driven qualities, Hamlet wishes he had. At the end of the play, Young Fortinbras is recommended by Hamlet to be the next King of Denmark. Parallels Hamlet's character in that like Hamlet his father was a ruler (King of Norway) and that both are now nephews to the current rulers of their lands..

- **ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN:**

- Courtiers to King Claudius, both these men grew up with Hamlet. As a result King Claudius recruits them to spy on Hamlet for him.
- Neither man has a problem trading in their friendship to betray Hamlet; they serve the King.
- Both die when the instructions they bear from King Claudius are altered by Hamlet to instruct King Claudius' English associates to kill those bearing his commission immediately (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern).

- **VOLTIMAND, CORNELIUS, OSRIC AND A GENTLEMAN:**

- Courtiers.

- **A PRIEST:**

- Introduces at Ophelia's funeral, the Priest insults Laertes by expressing his personal opinion that Ophelia does not deserve a proper Christian burial for ending her life by suicide, which was considered a sin unworthy

of proper burial.

- **MARCELLUS AND BERNARDO:**

- Officers who initially spot King Hamlet's Ghost in Act I, Scene I.

- **FRANCISCO:**

- A soldier. Famous for the lines "'tis [it is] bitter cold, / And I am sick at heart" which sets the tone of this tragedy.

- **MINOR CHARACTERS:**

- A Captain, English Ambassadors, Players, Two Clowns (Gravediggers), Lords, Ladies, Officers, Soldiers, Sailors, Messengers, and Attendants.