chichester festival theatre

A resource pack for A-Level teachers and students to accompany the production of

Hamlet

By William Shakespeare

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Hamlet

By William Shakespeare

Foreword

Hamlet is one of Shakespeare's most studied plays, yet its dense language, complex characters, and weighty questions can feel daunting when students encounter it only on the page. Shakespeare wrote for the stage, and his work comes alive when spoken, acted, and performed. This guide places practical exploration and performance at the heart of teaching, helping students break through barriers and engage with the play in a hands-on, meaningful way.

We know learning is most effective when it is collaborative, interactive, and connected to students' experiences. This resource offers a variety of practical strategies and ideas for exploring themes, language, characters, and staging. By using the strategies outlined in this guide, students will gain not only a deeper understanding of the text but also a broader appreciation of its relevance, resonance, and the skills they can apply beyond the classroom.

By using this practical teaching and learning approach, students will:

- **Experience** Shakespeare's language in action to deepen comprehension
- **Explore** motives and dilemmas, gaining insight through both performance and discussion
- **Embody** different perspectives to build empathy
- **Connect** themes to contemporary life (revenge, betrayal, indecision, mortality)
- **Engage** with the text in inclusive and accessible ways, beyond reading and writing
- **Participate** actively to stay motivated and involved
- **Develop** confidence in speaking, listening, and collaboration

We believe Hamlet is best taught as Shakespeare intended: through performance. Bringing the play to life in the classroom helps students gain a richer understanding of the text while developing the insight, skills, and confidence to support ongoing learning and progress.

Sue Webb
Schools Improvement Adviser

Contents

Warm-up tasks

The below tasks are intended as warm-up activities for practical approaches to studying the play. They are designed for A-Level students studying ***Hamlet*** but can be adapted to students of other ages studying other texts. Teachers may wish to use these activities in isolation or as part of more developed practical lessons on the play.

1. Tableaux

Ask the group to walk around the room. Advise them that the teacher will announce a number ("Three!") and students will need to gather in a group of that size. The teacher will then provide a title for a tableau which students have to create over a countdown of ten.

Shout "**Freeze!**" when the countdown is over.

***Hamlet* related titles:**

- 'A Royal Wedding'
- 'I don't believe you!'
- 'People think I'm crazy'
- 'Did you see that?'
- 'I never loved you'
- 'I miss him'
- 'A night at the theatre'
- 'Are we being watched?

Observe and reflect

The leader (and others) walk around the image and discuss:

- What is happening in this scene?
- Who might the characters be?
- What story is being told?

Extension

Extend rehearsal time to polish the image (focusing on dynamics in the tableaux).

Introduce props or costume items.

'Unfreeze' the image for a short passage of improvised action.

Adaptations

Possible adaptations for inclusive practice:

1. Offer alternatives to physical movement and grouping: Instead of walking or quickly forming groups, allow students to signal choices with cards, point to peers, or be paired in advance. Use visual timers or verbal countdowns with clear prompts to reduce anxiety or processing pressure.

2. Provide flexible participation roles: Students can take part in creating the tableaux through gesture, facial expression, seated or supported positions, or by directing others if physically participating isn't suitable. Let students choose to be in the image or contribute as a visual director or narrator.

3. Use visual aids and simplified language: Display titles with images or symbols and offer simple explanations or examples. Clarify abstract phrases like "I never loved you" with emotional prompts or synonyms (e.g., "Someone feels rejected or angry").

4. Model and scaffold: Demonstrate one or two tableaux as a group first to build confidence. Offer emotion or posture cards to spark ideas for body language or facial expressions. Use role cards (e.g., king, friend, ghost) to help assign character choices.

5. Flexible reflection options: Allow students to reflect verbally, through drawing, writing, or choosing from pre-written responses when discussing what's happening in each tableau. Provide sentence stems or visual prompts to support comprehension and expression.

2. Bomb and shield

Ask the group to walk around the room. Explain that in this story there are characters who have people in their lives they trust, and people they are suspicious of. Invite each member of the group to notice one person in the room who is a 'bomb'; ask them to move around the space keeping as far away from the 'bomb' as possible. Invite the participants to notice another person who is now their 'shield'. Their aim is to keep their shields between their bomb.

Questions for reflection:

- How does it feel to be in this world?
- Which version was most challenging and why?
- Which characters could we imagine in this situation?
- What might this reveal about stories, the characters' needs and desires and the difficulty of achieving them?
- For each character in ***Hamlet*** – who is their 'bomb' and who is their 'shield'?

Adaptations

Possible adaptations for inclusive practice:

- Offer alternatives to physical movement: Instead of walking around the room, students can use small figurines, whiteboards, or drawn avatars to show the relationship between their bomb and shield. Students with mobility needs can indicate direction or positioning using gestures, eye gaze, or a support partner.
- Use visual supports and simplified instructions: Provide visual diagrams, symbols, or step-by-step illustrations to explain the idea of “bomb” and “shield.” Clarify the metaphor using accessible emotional language (e.g. “someone who makes you feel unsafe” vs. “someone who makes you feel protected”).
- Flexible participation roles: Students who find physical tracking or quick decision-making difficult can observe and narrate, act as co-directors, or focus on identifying characters’ bombs and shields emotionally or symbolically.
- Provide structured reflection options: Use sentence starters, emotion cards, or character charts to support students in exploring how this relates to Hamlet’s characters. For example, “I think Ophelia’s shield is… because…” or “This activity made me feel…”
- Create a safe emotional space: This activity involves themes of trust and fear, so always clarify it is metaphorical. Allow students to opt out of choosing peers and instead assign characters from the play or fictional tokens to represent “bomb” and “shield” relationships.

3. Exploring secrets and conspiracy in the play

a. Invite the group to move around the space and shake hands with others as they pass them. Choose one of the options below when you shake hands with your partner:

- You're delighted to see them
- You've just made a deal with them
- You don't trust them
- You are more powerful than them

b. Pause the activity to explain and discuss the following.

There are lots of lines in the play that have a double-sided quality to the them (often in the form of a particular rhetorical device called 'hendiadys'). Ask for examples. Introduce the group to these examples:

- [A little more than kin] [and less than kind]
- [To be] [or not to be]
- [One may smile, and smile,] [and be a villain.]
- [My words fly up,] [my thoughts remain below.]
- [I must be cruel] [only to be kind].

Discuss each line and what it might mean or suggest.

c. Beginning with one of these lines ("To be or not to be" is likely to be most familiar and easiest to remember), ask the group to move around the space and offer their hands to a partner to initiate a handshake. Before shaking, one must say "To be" and their partner has three options: (1) respond as an echo, delivering the same line, and shake hands; (2) complete the line by saying "or not to be" and shake hands; (3) complete the line "or not to be" and walk away without shaking hands.

Observe and reflect

- How does the first speaker feel in each situation when their partner responds? Which feels most safe and most dangerous? What might happen next?
- When is the most dangerous moment? Before anyone speaks or after? How might this feed into creating a world full of suspicion?

Extend and challenge

Play the same game but with all five lines at play. The first speaker can initiate a handshake with the first part of any line and the second speaker can reply in the same three ways as above. Discuss – do these five lines suit a different tone of delivery? How sinister or suspicious does each of them sound for both first and second speakers?

Adaptations

Possible adaptations for inclusive practice:

- Provide alternatives to handshakes and movement: For students with physical or sensory needs, offer non-contact greetings (e.g. eye contact, nods, gestures) or symbol cards representing different interaction types (e.g. trust, power, suspicion). Students can remain seated and use vocal expression, props, or assistive tech to participate.
- Use visual aids and simplified language: Present each rhetorical line on a card with pictorial cues or simplified meanings. Break down unfamiliar language (like “hendiadys”) and offer real-life or fictional examples to ground the idea in accessible terms.
- Model and scaffold responses: Practice the different response options as a group first, using scripts, sentence stems, or visual response cards (“echo,” “complete and shake,” “complete and walk away”) so that all students can prepare and choose how they’ll engage.
- Support emotional understanding and choice: Clarify the metaphor of trust and danger in a safe, imaginative context. Provide emotion cards, mood meters, or drawing prompts to help students reflect on how each interaction feels, especially for those with complex needs or social anxiety.
- Flexible reflection and extension: Allow students to explore the tone and emotional weight of each line using voice recordings, facial expressions, drawings, or written captions. When extending the activity with all five lines, offer cue cards or visual sorting tools to help students choose lines based on tone (e.g. “suspicious,” “powerful,” “sad”) before they act.

Practical tasks

1. Soliloquy study

This exercise will require students to have copies of Hamlet's first soliloquy from Act 2, Scene 2: 'O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!' The exercise focuses on the structure of Shakespeare's writing (which some students find challenging) and invites students to rewrite soliloquies in their own words using Shakespeare's structure.

a. Briefly contextualise the soliloquy if necessary: Hamlet has just watched one of the players deliver an impassioned speech about Priam's slaughter (part of the story of the fall of Troy, told in Homer's *Iliad*). He is impressed by the actor's ability to conjure visible emotion and intensity in response to this fictional story and so feels disappointed in his own inability to enact his father's command to revenge.

b. Read / watch / listen to the soliloquy once uninterrupted for familiarity.

c. As a group, read the soliloquy through once again, swapping readers at each strong punctuation mark: full stops, exclamation marks, question marks (ignore commas).

d. Discuss: what does this add to our understanding of the speech? How might the frequency of punctuation reflect his mood or state of mind? How does it help us to understand the structure of Hamlet's thoughts?

e. Marking their own scripts, students break the soliloquy into sections and give each section a title (suggestions below):

- "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" — Self-Loathing
- "What's Hecuba to him?" — The Power of Performance
- "Yet I…" — Self-Doubt
- "Bloody, bawdy villain!" — Rage and Vengeance
- "Why, what an ass am I!" — Self-Mockery
- "I have heard that guilty creatures…" — The Plan

f. Working in pairs, in each section highlight a few of the most powerful or evocative words that strike you as important (e.g. "rogue", "peasant", "monstrous").

g. On a separate sheet of paper, copy out the title of each section and your chosen key words only.

h. Using these notes, rewrite the soliloquy yourself following the Shakespeare's structure and key words but with your own words for everything in-between. Perform them for each other!

i. Discuss: what has been learned or understood about the structure of this soliloquy? How do Hamlet's feelings change from the start to the end? What are the key turning points? Can we see any patterns of language in each of the section (e.g. word types, connotations, sound patterns like alliteration).

Extend and develop

Repeat the exercise with Hamlet's final soliloquy ('How all occasions do inform against me", Act 4, Scene 4). In some ways, this is a similar speech (observing another man doing something he cannot) but there are some important differences. How do this soliloquy show the character's development since Act 2?

Adaptations

Possible adaptations for inclusive practice:

- Offer multimodal access to the soliloquy: Provide audio recordings, video performances, visual storyboards, or simplified modern-English versions alongside the original text. This helps students with reading, language, or processing needs engage with the material.
- Support reading aloud with alternatives: For students who may struggle with reading aloud or decoding Shakespearean language, offer roles such as following along with a visual tracker, underlining punctuation, or using a communication device. They can also echo lines read by a peer or adult.
- Use colour coding and visual scaffolds: When breaking the soliloquy into sections, highlight text in different colours, pair each section with an icon, emotion word, or simple summary, and support key word identification with visual cue cards or word banks.
- Flexible rewriting formats: Students can rewrite the soliloquy using drawings, comic strips, spoken monologue, movement, or audio recordings instead of written words. Scaffold writing with sentence starters, fill-in-the-blank structures, or labelled templates to help structure ideas.
- Offer differentiated performance options: Allow students to perform in pairs, with scripts, using gesture, sound, or assisted speech. They might also choose to direct others, record their soliloquy, or present visually if live performance is not suitable.
- Scaffold analysis and discussion: Use emotion wheels, discussion sentence stems, or sorting activities to help students reflect on tone shifts and emotional progression in the speech. Offer graphic organisers or visual timelines to map Hamlet's changing thoughts.

2. Staging the play's unseen events

There are many important events that occur as part of this play's story that Shakespeare has alluded to but not written text for. Directors sometimes choose to show some of these otherwise unseen events.

They include:

- Old Hamlet's defeat of King Fortinbras of Norway
- The murder of Old Hamlet by Claudius
- Old Hamlet's funeral
- Claudius and Gertrude's marriage
- Prior appearances of the Ghost
- Claudius and Polonius spy on Hamlet and Ophelia
- Hamlet's trip to England
- Hamlet's escape on a pirate ship
- Ophelia's death
- Hamlet's childhood games with Yorick

a. In groups, choose one or more of these off-stage events to prepare a short performance. If detail is available in the text to help then use it, otherwise it can be entirely invented. Depending on their confidence, performers can either prepare or improvise dialogue or mime these scenes.

b. Discuss: Why does Shakespeare leave some of these scenes out of the play? No doubt there were pragmatic reasons (the unedited script runs to over 4 hours in length!) but why might he have chosen to exclude these scenes especially? If you were to direct an adaptation of the play would you add any of these scenes?

c. To extend this, encourage students to prepare to consider two characters who would tell the story of this scene differently. For example, the story of Old Hamlet's murder would be narrated very differently by Claudius compared to how Hamlet would tell the story. Now prepare two contrasting versions of the scene/s they have chosen to reflect each of the characters' thoughts/feelings/biases.

Adaptations

Possible adaptations for inclusive practice:

- Flexible performance formats: Allow students to present their scenes in a range of ways, including live action, mime, still images/tableaux, shadow theatre, audio recordings, puppetry, or animation tools. This supports students with physical, sensory, or performance anxiety needs.
- Use visual and multimodal prompts: Provide storyboards, character cards, visual scene summaries, or mood boards for each off-stage event to help students choose and imagine their scenes. Use images, diagrams, or short video clips to support understanding of complex scenes or historical references.
- Support dialogue development: Offer sentence starters, speech bubbles, or simplified scripts to scaffold student-generated dialogue. Students with communication needs can create their script through drawing, typing, voice recording, or using AAC devices.
- Offer non-performance roles: Students who prefer not to act can participate as narrators, directors, prop makers, sound designers, or visual interpreters of the scene. All roles should be equally valued in the collaborative creation of the scene.
- Scaffold the extension task with structure: When creating contrasting versions of a scene, provide comparison templates, emotion charts, or perspective maps to help students explore how character viewpoints differ. Use role-on-the-wall or thought bubbles to support exploration of internal thoughts and bias.

3. Playing with critical perspectives - tableaux

Some A-Level courses require students to show awareness of different critical perspectives and how different audiences might respond to the play. Popular examples of this include how feminists might respond to the play (as distinct from a critic interested in psychoanalysis or Marxist theory, for example). This practical exercise encourages students to see the play from different critical angles while engaging with the play text and critical views.

a. If necessary, begin with some critical reading to understand these critical perspectives (Elaine Showalter's widely-available essay on Ophelia is a good entry point for a feminist reading of the play). You can read it by clicking ***here***.

b. Working in groups, list the moments in the play that this kind of critic would be interested in – you may end up with 5-10 key moments. A feminist critic might, for example, be especially interested in:

- Act 1, Scene 3 when Ophelia is being told how to behave by her father and brother
- Act 2, Scene 1 when Ophelia reports Hamlet's strange behaviour to Polonius
- Act 3, Scene 1 when Hamlet rants that Ophelia should "get thee to a nunnery"
- Act 3, Scene 4 when Hamlet intrudes in Gertrude's private chamber
- Act 4, Scene 5 when Ophelia seems deeply troubled
- Act 4, Scene 7 when Ophelia's death is announced by Gertrude

c. Create a tableau to represent each of these moments.

d. Give each tableau a suitable title (like the caption of a silent movie – this could be a quotation from the play or – perhaps - from a critic). Write the title on a large piece of paper.

e. Include basic props and costume if they are available. Encourage students to adapt any available materials so they can be useful to the scene. A

f. Rehearse the sequence of tableaux so that it's swift. Add a soundtrack to your silent movie sequence if you like!

g. Perform!

h. Discuss: what did the performance/s highlight? How did different groups interpret the same brief? Why might critics with a common critical stance (feminist readers of the play, for example) be interested in different aspects of the play?

> **For we have closely sent for Hamlet hither.**
> **That he, as 'twere by accident, may here**
> **Affront Ophelia. Her father and myself,**
> **We'll so bestow ourselves that, seeing unseen,**
> **We may of their encounter frankly judge,**
> **And gather by him, as he is behaved,**
> **If 't be th' affliction of his love or no**
> **That thus he suffers for.**
> **(III.i.29–36)**

Extend and develop

Assign different groups different critical perspectives / different audience groups. Facilitate more extended discussion after sharing performances about how different audiences respond to the play.

Adaptations

Possible adaptations for inclusive practice:

- Offer multimodal access to critical ideas: Use visual aids, simplified summaries, videos, or audio recordings to introduce each critical perspective (e.g. feminism, Marxism, psychoanalysis). Provide symbol-supported definitions, key questions, or character focus cards to make abstract ideas more accessible.
- Flexible approaches to tableau creation: Allow students to create tableaux using puppets, drawn figures, props on a table, or digital avatars, not just live performance. Students with physical or sensory needs can also direct or describe the scene instead of posing in it.
- Use structured templates: Support group planning with visual scene planners, cue cards for each perspective, or “caption starters” to help generate titles. Provide sentence stems for writing captions that reflect a critical lens (e.g. “This critic sees Ophelia as…”).
- Non-performance roles and peer collaboration: Students can choose from a variety of roles, including caption writer, sound designer, narrator, or movement coach. Use peer modelling or co-creation to ensure everyone can contribute according to their strengths.
- Accessible discussion formats: Reflect using visual discussion prompts, drawing responses, character emotion charts, or guided questions with multiple-choice options. Allow students to respond through speech, writing, drawing, or assistive tech to express what each critical lens revealed about the scene or characters.
- Support understanding of abstract concepts: Break down big ideas like “the male gaze” or “class struggle” using real-world analogies, image-based scenarios, or drama-based improvisations to help students relate the critical perspective to character behaviour and plot choices..

Study tasks

Below is a selection of study tasks that may be helpful to develop some of the play's key ideas further. They would be suited to classroom or independent study.

1. Image clusters

The critic, Caroline Spurgeon, writes of "image clusters" in Shakespeare's plays ('Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us', 1935). In ***Hamlet*** she identifies images of disease and corruption as being a common motif: "There is scarcely a page of ***Hamlet*** that does not contain some reference to disease or corruption".

a. "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (Act 1, Scene 4). Build a bank of quotations from the play related to this motif of corruption and decay.

b. Practise analysing language and structure by examining how this imagery evolves over the course of the play.

i. Who or what is being corrupted?

ii. Who or what is causing the corruption?

iii. Is the corruption natural (i.e. disease) or unnatural (i.e. poisoning)?

Extend and develop

Assign different image clusters to individuals / groups (suggestions and starting points below). Search for associated image clusters and explore how the image changes or develops through the play.

Acting, Masks and the Theatre	"Seems, madam? Nay, it is. I know not 'seems'." (1,2)
Poison	"The serpent that did sting thy father's life / Now wears his crown." (1,5)
Time	"The time is out of joint. O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right!" (1,5)
Clothing and fashion	"The apparel oft proclaims the man." (1, 3)
Books, letter and reading	"What do you read, my lord? / Words, words, words." (2,2)

2. Exploring textual variations

Shakespeare's ***Hamlet*** exists in multiple early versions—known as Q1, Q2, and the First Folio—which differ in length, language, and structure, offering unique insights into how the play was written, performed, and transmitted over time. The table below summarises the key differences between the three main early texts of ***Hamlet***: Q1 (First Quarto, 1603), Q2 (Second Quarto, 1604/5), and F (First Folio, 1623).

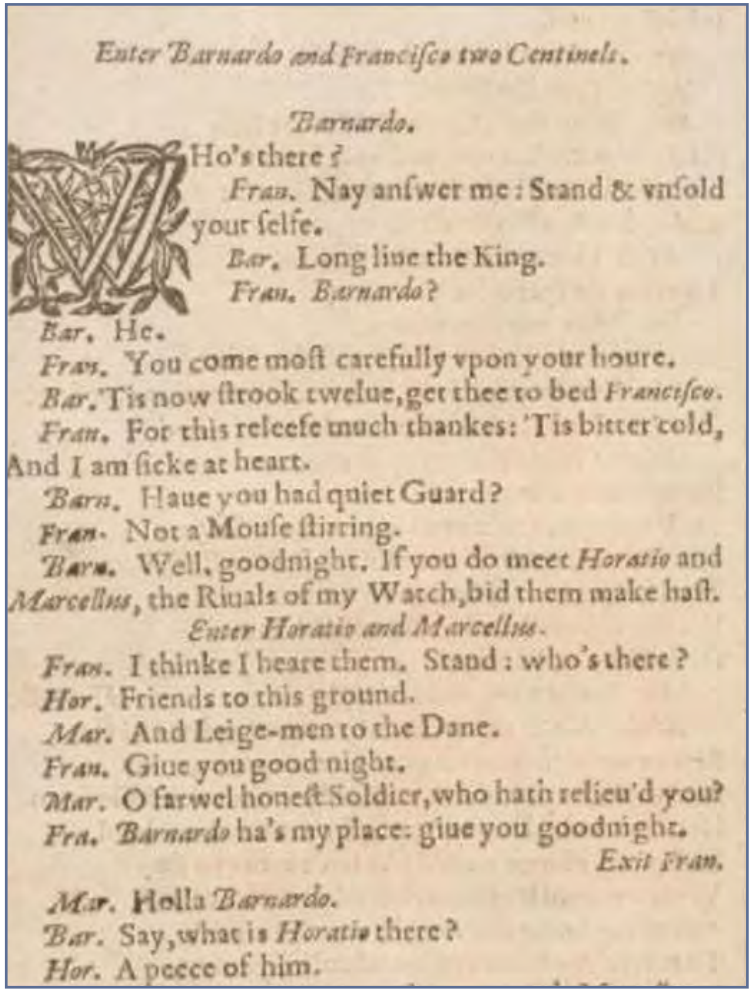
Modern editors often combine Q2 and F to produce the version of ***Hamlet*** we read today. Do some further research on the differences between these versions of the text. What impacts do these variations have upon our understanding of the play? As an editor of a modern version of the text, what are the particularly important decisions to make?

Feature	Q1 (1603) – "Bad Quarto"	Q2 (1604/5) – "Good Quarto"	F (1623) – First Folio
Length	~2,200 lines (shortest)	~3,800 lines (longest)	~3,500 lines
Quality	Considered corrupt or memorial reconstruction (possibly by an actor)	More complete and literarily superior	Thought to be based on a theatrical version
Opening Scene	Shortened and simplified	Full and detailed	Similar to Q2
"To be or not to be" Speech	Appears earlier (Act II), and with altered wording	Full, familiar version	Nearly identical to Q2
Character Names	Polonius is called Corambis; Reynaldo is Montano	Modern names used	Same as Q2
Scenes & Structure	Rearranged, compressed scenes; missing much soliloquy material	Rich in soliloquies and philosophical material	Omits some lines present in Q2 but may reflect stage cuts
"Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I" soliloquy	Absent	Present	Present
Final Scene (duel/deaths)	Simplified and brief	Full and elaborate	Slightly revised from Q2, similar structure
Likely Purpose	Touring version, pirated text, or actor's memory	Authorial or scribal manuscript	Theatre-adapted version

Extend and develop

Compare these images of the opening scene. Discuss the differences. Which is the better opening to the play?

First Folio



Enter Barnardo and Francisco two Centinels.

Barnardo.

WHo's there?

Fran. Nay answer me: Stand & vnfold your selfe.

Bar. Long liue the King.

Fran. *Barnardo?*

Bar. He.

Fran. You come most carefully vpon your houre.

Bar. 'Tis now strook twelue, get thee to bed *Francisco.*

Fran. For this releefe much thankes: 'Tis bitter cold, And I am sicke at heart.

Barn. Haue you had quiet Guard?

Fran. Not a Mouse stirring.

Barn. Well, goodnight. If you do meet *Horatio* and *Marcellus*, the Riuals of my Watch, bid them make hast.

Enter Horatio and Marcellus.

Fran. I thinke I heare them. Stand: who's there?

Hor. Friends to this ground.

Mar. And Leige-men to the Dane.

Fran. Giue you good night.

Mar. O farwel honest Soldier, who hath relieu'd you?

Fra. *Barnardo* ha's my place: giue you goodnight.

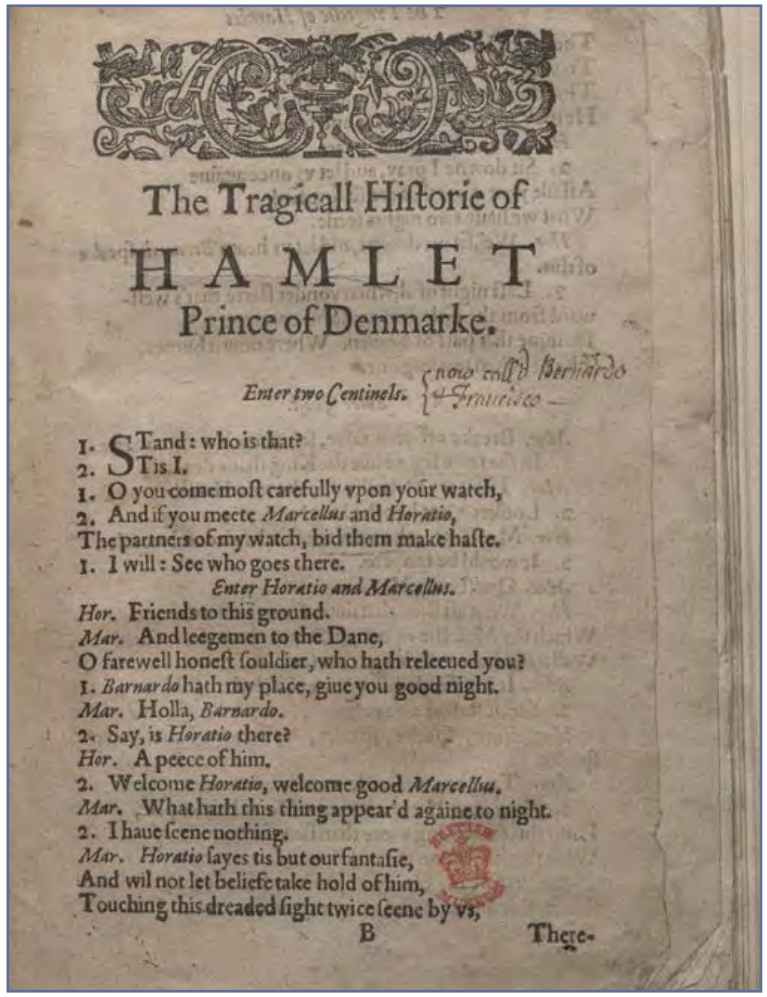
Exit Fran.

Mar. Holla *Barnardo.*

Bar. Say, what is *Horatio* there?

Hor. A peece of him.

Bad Quarto ('Q1')



The Tragicall Historie of

HAMLET

Prince of Denmarke.

Enter two Centinels. {now call'd Bernardo & Francisco}

1. STand: who is that?
2. 'Tis I.
1. O you come most carefully vpon your watch,
2. And if you meete *Marcellus* and *Horatio*,
The partners of my watch, bid them make haste.
1. I will: See who goes there.

Enter Horatio and Marcellus.

Hor. Friends to this ground.

Mar. And leegemen to the Dane,
O farewell honest Souldier, who hath releeued you?

1. *Barnardo* hath my place, giue you good night.

Mar. Holla, *Barnardo.*

2. Say, is *Horatio* there?

Hor. A peece of him.

2. Welcome *Horatio*, welcome good *Marcellus.*

Mar. What hath this thing appear'd againe to night.

2. I haue seene nothing.

Mar. *Horatio* sayes 'tis but our fantasie,
And wil not let beliefe take hold of him,
Touching this dreaded sight twice seene by vs,

B

There-

3. The lighter side of *Hamlet*

Even though many consider ***Hamlet*** to be Shakespeare's greatest tragedy, the play has plenty of comic aspects. While different performance adaptations may exaggerate different aspects of comedy, some of the common comic moments are:

Act 2, Scene 2 – Hamlet's wordplay with Polonius and the arrival of the players

Act 3, Scene 2 – The "play within a play" and Hamlet's jokes with Horatio and Ophelia

Act 5, Scene 1 – The graveyard scene with the gravediggers

a. **Examine these scenes closely and annotate for**

- Wordplay, puns or irony
- Shifts in tone or mood
- Moments where comedy is uncomfortable or dark

b. Write responses to or discuss the following:

- What kinds of comedy does Shakespeare use in ***Hamlet*** (e.g., satire, slapstick, dark humour)?
- How does Hamlet use humour as a weapon or shield?
- How does comedy affect our understanding of Hamlet as a tragic hero?
- Does the comedy provide relief, or does it reinforce the play's darkness?

> **Look you, sir,**
> **Inquire me first what Danskers are in Paris,**
> **And how, and who, what means, and where they keep,**
> **What company, at what expense; and finding**
> **By this encompassment and drift of question**
> **That they do know my son, come you more nearer**
> **Than your particular demands will touch it.**
> **(II.i.6–12)**

Extend and develop

In the productions you have seen, what other moments of comedy or lightness have there been? How have the directors and performers heightened the impact of that comedy?

Adaptations

Possible adaptations for inclusive practice:

- Offer multiple ways to engage with text: Use audio recordings, video performances, simplified summaries, and visual aids to support students who find Elizabethan language or dense text challenging. Break down long passages into manageable, visual chunks.
- Provide scaffolded writing options: Use graphic organisers, sentence starters, writing frames, and structured templates to support students in building their analysis or response. Offer bullet-point or mind-map alternatives to full written paragraphs.
- Allow varied response formats: Accept drawings, comic strips, voice recordings, typed responses, or collage work as valid ways to explore ideas (especially for motifs or visual elements like "image clusters").
- Use accessible language and vocabulary support: Provide glossaries, word banks, emotion cards, or visual cue sheets to help with literary terms (e.g. "irony," "pun," "motif") and encourage all students to access and use key vocabulary.
- Encourage collaborative and peer-supported learning: Group tasks allow students to discuss ideas, divide roles, and play to their strengths (e.g., one student annotates, another summarises, a third presents). Peer models and discussion help deepen understanding.
- Differentiate research and reading expectations: Provide selected, pre-curated texts, simplified handouts, or teacher-led summaries for tasks involving independent reading of criticism or historical material (like Caroline Spurgeon or the Quarto differences).
- Support analysis with visual tools: Use visual metaphors (e.g. decay = rotting apple), images, or sorting activities to help students understand abstract themes like corruption, identity, or comedic tension. Visual sorting (e.g. comic/tragic moments) can help scaffold complex comparisons.
- Be mindful of tone and emotional response: When working with dark or ambiguous content (e.g. graveyard humour or poison imagery), allow students to process emotional responses creatively (through drawing, group discussion, or guided reflection). Provide content warnings where needed.
- Adapt the "Extend and Develop" tasks: Frame these as optional enrichment and provide supported entry points for all students (e.g. sentence stems like "I noticed that…" or comparison templates for evaluating different versions or productions).

Hamlet: A critical history

AO5 Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations

Since its authorship in around 1600, over 400 years' worth of opinions have been forming about Shakespeare's great tragedy. Opinions have changed with the times, reflecting the aesthetic and artistic values of the ages. Although literary criticism didn't really exist in its current form until the early twentieth century, audiences, commentators and critics have always voiced their opinions on this play.

This summary of the play's critical reception gives an overview of the various ways in which this play has been received with some notable voices and questions inviting you to engage with the critics.

17th Century: Reception and reservations

Given the limited availability – and problematic nature – of printed editions of Shakespeare's plays combined with low literacy rates, criticism of ***Hamlet*** during the 17th century focused almost entirely on its performance rather than textual analysis. Audiences admired its spectacle and emotional power, often through focusing on the role of a famous actor playing the lead role. Some audience members, however, were unsettled by the play's perceived coarseness and moral ambiguity which did not suit the artistic sensibilities of the time. Compared to the reverence later bestowed upon the text, this period found ***Hamlet*** more problematic than profound.

- **John Evelyn (1660): "The play began to disgust this refined age."**
  Evelyn suggests that the theatrical excesses of ***Hamlet*** clashed with the more restrained tastes of the Restoration audience. What might have been considered a "theatrical excess" in this play?
- **Jeremy Collier (1698): "The depiction of Ophelia was lewd and unreasonable."**
  Collier critiques Shakespeare's portrayal of Ophelia as morally inappropriate, revealing an early discomfort with depictions female madness on stage. Of the depictions of Ophelia you have seen in stage/film productions, would you describe Ophelia's portrayal as "lewd and "unreasonable"? If not, how would you describe her?
- **Joseph Addison (1711): "The appearance of the Ghost in *Hamlet* is a masterpiece."**
  Unlike many of his contemporaries, Addison praises the supernatural elements of the play, valuing theatrical impact over narrative plausibility or realism. What's more important to you when watching a play: to see something spectacular or something believable? Given the simplicity of the Shakespearean stage, how do you think the Ghost could have been performed to make it effective

18th Century: Enlightenment scepticism

As Europe entered the period known as the Enlightenment, critics increasingly evaluated ***Hamlet*** through the lens of reason, structure, and morality. This led some critics to find the play disordered or emotionally excessive compared to the neoclassical ideals which prevailed at the time..

- **Voltaire (1748): "A coarse and barbarous piece."**
  Voltaire, a French writer and critic, condemned the play for its lack of decorum and structure, reflecting Enlightenment ideals of rationality. In what ways does the play reject the values of order, logic, reason, and structure?
- **Samuel Johnson (1765): "The scenes are interchangeably diversified with merriment and solemnity."**
  Johnson admires the tonal variety but also finds Hamlet's madness more an artistic device than a genuine affliction. How does the contrasting moments of comedy and tragedy enhance the impact of this play?
- **Goethe (late 1700s): "Hamlet's lovely, pure, noble and most moral nature…"**
  The German writer, Goethe, shifts the focus to Hamlet's internal conflict, presenting him as a sensitive soul overwhelmed by duty. Goethe paints a very positive portrait of the Prince of Denmark: would you agree with his description?

Romantic period (1780–1850): The intellectual hero

Romantic critics embraced the emotional depth dismissed by Enlightenment thinkers. They celebrated Hamlet as a reflective, melancholic figure, emblematic of the modern individual painfully at odds with their circumstances. This introspective focus deviated sharply from previous concerns with morality or stagecraft to focus intensely on the character of Hamlet himself.

- **William Hazlitt (1817): "It is we that are Hamlet."**
  Hazlitt expresses deep identification with Hamlet, positioning him as a universal figure of inner turmoil. What are the universally relevant thoughts, feelings and experiences that Hamlet goes through in this play?
- **Charles Lamb (1811): "He must be thinking all the while of his appearance."**
  Lamb highlights Hamlet's self-consciousness, suggesting his actions are filtered through constant self-reflection and an acute awareness of how he is perceived by others. Is Hamlet's self-awareness a strength or a weakness in this play?
- **August Schlegel (1811): "Acts the part of madness with unrivalled power."**
  Schlegel sees Hamlet's madness as a strategic performance, not a genuine loss of sanity: he is interested in Hamlet's "antic disposition", being "mad in craft". How do you interpret Hamlet's 'madness': real or feigned? Why? Think of the film/ stage productions you have seen of the play: how do those directors interpret this issue?

> "But if you hold it fit, after the play
> Let his queen mother all alone entreat him
> To show his griefs: let her be round with him,
> And I'll be placed, so please you, in the ear
> Of all their conference. If she find him not,
> To England send him, or confine him where
> Your wisdom best shall think"
> (Act 3 Scene 4 King Claudius)

Victorian period (1850–1900): Hamlet as tragic thinker

Building on the Romantic focus on introspection, Victorian critics continued to evaluate Hamlet's emotional development but with a more moralistic and philosophical slant. In this period, many viewed Hamlet as as a figure of noble suffering, weighed down by ethical and existential dilemmas rather than just personal grief.

- **Algernon Swinburne (1863): "Condemned by fortune to madness and unhappiness**
  Swinburne frames Hamlet as a tragic victim of fate, linking genius to suffering. What role does fate have in this play? Is Hamlet fated to fail in his quest for vengeance?
- **Matthew Arnold (1853): "We witness the discouragement of Hamlet and Faust."**
  Arnold places Hamlet in the company of other philosophical wanderers such as Goethe's great character Faust, reinforcing his role as a figure of intellectual disillusionment. Do some research about Goethe's character 'Faust': what similarities can you find between these two characters?

Early 20th century (1900–1945): psychological depths

With the rising influence of Sigmund Freud's theories of psychoanalysis, criticism in the early 20th century introduced psychoanalytic frameworks, exploring new depths to the character of Hamlet. Unlike the moral or emotional focus of the Victorians, this period sought to diagnose Hamlet, often drawing on Freudian ideas..

- **A.C. Bradley (1904): "His highest gifts conspire to paralyse him."**
  Bradley identifies a tragic irony in Hamlet's character: his intellect and sensitivity become the very traits that prevent action. Can virtue become a tragic flaw?
- **G. Wilson Knight (1930): "Had it not been for Hamlet, all would have been well."**
  Knight controversially presents Hamlet as a destructive force, not a hero. Could we ever consider Hamlet to be the villain of the play?

Late 20th century to present (1945–2025): critical plurality

From the post-war period onward, criticism diversified rapidly, shaped by feminism, postmodernism, and cultural theory. Rather than seeing Hamlet as a solitary hero, critics examined gender, class, and power dynamics, often challenging canonical interpretations.

- **Elaine Showalter (2016): "Ophelia has become a heroine."** Showalter reclaims Ophelia's madness as meaningful and subversive, not decorative. Does this interpretation challenge the play's male-centric focus?
- **Jan Kott (1964): "*Hamlet* is a drama of imposed situation."** Influenced by his experiences in wartime Poland, Kott sees ***Hamlet*** as taking place in a world shaped by oppressive systems, rather than personal tragedy. If Hamlet is a victim of circumstances, is he less responsible for his choices?
- **Janet Adelman (1992): "Ophelia becomes dangerous...as she is identified with the contaminating maternal body."** Adelman exposes the psycho-sexual anxieties underpinning Hamlet's attitudes toward women. Does this reading deepen or distract from the play's central conflict?

Hamlet: A performance history

1. Early Performances (c.1600s)

2. Thomas Betterton (1635 – 1709)

3. David Garrick (18th century)

4. Moscow Art Theatre (1911)

5. Laurence Olivier (1948, film)

6. Grigori Kozintsev (1964, film)

7. Richard Burton (1964)

8. Franco Zeffirelli (1990, film)

9. Gregory Doran (RSC, 2009)

10. Robert Icke (2017)

Chichester Festival Theatre 2025

Artistic Director Justin Audibert on *Hamlet*

Thoughts from Beatie Edney playing the part of Gravedigger in CFT's 2025 production of *Hamlet*.

Interview with Stephen Kemble – Voice & Dialect Coach CFT's 2025 production of *Hamlet.*

Justin Audibert & Lily Arnold discuss set and Costume Design in CFT's 2025 production of *Hamlet*.

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Exemplar A-Level essay with examiner's commentary

The inside and outside in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

While the opening of Shakespeare's tragedy ***Hamlet*** presents the audience with significant shifts between outside and inside locations (the battlements of Act 1, Scene 1 swiftly followed by the courtroom of Act 1, Scene 2 for example), it is arguably more significant to explore the relationship between the outside and the inside on a more personal level. The relationship between outward appearances and inward realities is a motif which pervades the play and has been explored by commentators and theatre-makers since the play's earliest performances.

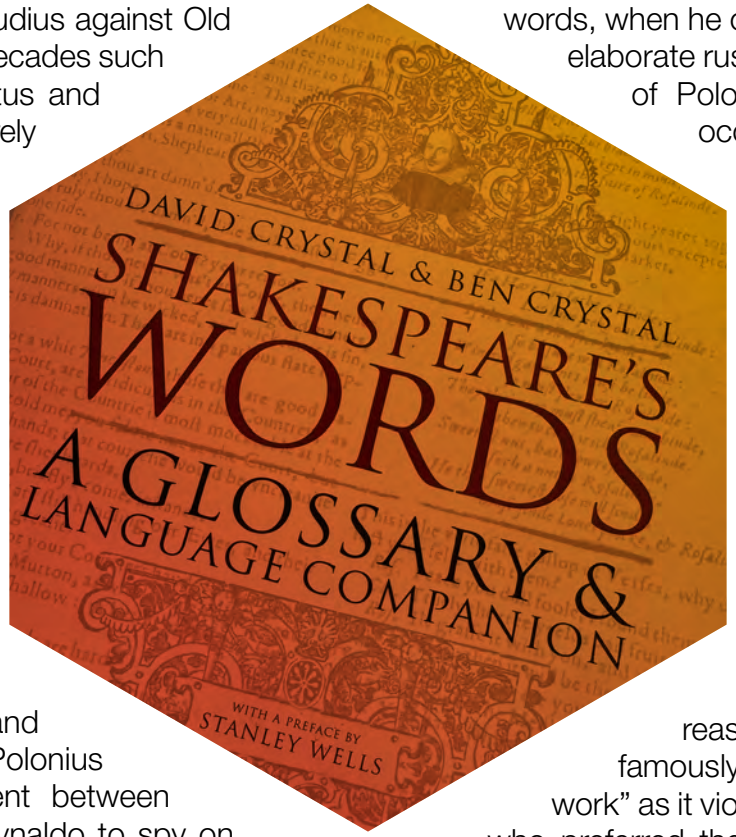
Hamlet's very first words in Act 1 Scene 2 immediately introduce the relationship between characters' outward appearances and their internal feelings. When criticised for his "unmanly grief" Hamlet responds "Seems, madam? I know not seems," and proceeds to insist that he wears his "inky cloak" not only to appear to be grieving, but because he feels his grief as an internal emotional reality. For Hamlet, internal emotions and external "presentment" must align in order to be honest (an issue that he returns to with vitriol when commanding that Ophelia gets to a nunnery in Act 3). This stands in contrast to Claudius' practised and polished speechifying in the same scene, where he acknowledges the national grief for his brother but does so in such measured and rhyming rhetoric, and proceeds so swiftly to talk of his own coronation, that an audience might see him as a sycophantic and ingenuous character. The importance of Hamlet's appearance in performance has often intrigued directors and performers. The implicit design instruction for him to wear "suits of solemn black" has meant that actors throughout the play's performance history have been costumed in an appropriate "suit of sables". In some cases – such as the 2016 RSC production starring Paapa Essiedu in the eponymous role – Hamlet's monochromatic

> "This bodes some strange eruption to our state (I.i.68)"

costume has stood in sharp contrast to the colourful garments of Claudius, Gertrude and the rest of the court which underscores his difference from the court. For Gertrude, in particular, it would seem that she disguises any sorrow she might have at her first husband's death beneath colourful robes that suit the occasion of her second royal wedding.

In Hamlet's early insistence that his inward feelings must be reflected by his outward appearance (frequently reiterated by the association of him with the noun "fashion"), he stands as an outsider in the court of Elsinore. His seven soliloquies provide the audience with numerous insights into his true feelings, when he is left alone on stage. This has been portrayed especially powerfully in productions such as Laurence Olivier's 1948 film – inspired by the psychoanalytic readings of Sigmund Freud and Ernest Jones – when his soliloquies are delivered as voice-over and the camera shots seem to enter

Hamlet's brain to reveal his thoughts and feelings. Indeed, Hamlet's frustration at Gertrude's duplicity is so powerful that, when in her chamber in Act 3 Scene 4, he presents her with a looking-glass in order that he might show "the inmost part" of her. In this way, Gertrude has frequently been seen as a conniving and deceitful character, arguably complicit with the treachery of Claudius against Old Hamlet. That said, feminist critics of recent decades such as Showalter have tried to restore her status and absolve her of guilt, arguing that she is merely a vulnerable woman in a rigidly patriarchal world. Such critics might argue that the disparity between her inward feelings and her outward behaviour is brought about merely by her obedience to a social system dominated and dictated by men. Similar arguments might be made about Ophelia who merely follows instructions given to her by her father and brother, which then precipitates her madness and what Belsey calls her "characteristically feminine death" in the brook..



Gertrude's deceit is just one example of duplicity and concealed intentions in the play. Indeed, treachery, secrecy and surveillance are rife in the world of Elsinore: Polonius and Claudius spy on an intimate moment between Ophelia and Hamlet; Polonius instructs Reynaldo to spy on Laertes in Paris; Polonius positions himself secretly "behind the arras" to overhear the dialogue between Hamlet and Gertrude; and Claudius initially keeps Hamlet in Denmark, arguing "madness in great ones must not unwatched go". The issue of Hamlet's madness is an interesting one to consider for – it would seem – that his progression from the mere the performance of madness (he memorably says "I will put antic disposition on") to a more unsettlingly 'real' form of madness comes about when he chooses to comply with the duplicitous and treacherous machinations of the court of Elsinore: in other words, when he chooses to play them at their own game. His elaborate ruse to stage The Mousetrap and, in the words of Polonius "by indirections find directions out", occurs at a time when his language noticeably shifts into disarming, elusive and perhaps vulgar phrasing: "I eat the air promise cramm'd, you cannot feed capons so", "Do you think I meant country matters?" It could be argued that this shift to a more deceptive approach to exacting revenge effects Hamlet's madness, dissociating his internal emotions and his external behaviour. Directors such as Gregory Doran have highlighted his increasing mental instability through costume: in the 2010 production David Tennant wears a strait jacket in Act 4. It might even be this uncomfortable and unsettling behaviour which gave critics of the Enlightenment reason to disapprove of the play, with Voltaire famously calling it "a rough and barbarous piece of work" as it violated the delicate sensibilities of an audience who preferred the refined manners of Neo-Classical French Drama. Arguably, the motif of deception runs so deep through the play that its tragic culmination is only fulfilled when the characters' various deceptions are unveiled – Gertrude's discovery of Claudius' intention to poison Hamlet, for example.

Such a focus on character would probably have typified the analysis of critics from the Romantic period to the early-twentieth century. Coleridge's famous comment that "I have a smack of Hamlet myself" and AC Bradley's well-known character criticism of the twentieth century exemplify the obsession of critics of the period with characters. More modern critics with political reading of the play may, however, pay more attention to the relationship between the inside and outside with regards to politics: the internal domestic affairs of Denmark, and the outward-looking international relations with Norway. While all the on-stage action is set in Elsinore, the audience are frequently reminded of the world that exists outside as a political and military threat; indeed, the anxious question that opens the play ("Who's there?") hints at this political instability and uncertainty. References to Poland, France, Germany and England also abound yet the play's international dimension is often overlooked in performance. This was not true of the 2015 National Theatre production, starring Benedict Cumberbatch and with set design by Es Devlin, in which a vast mountain of earth is seen to pour onto the stage through a grand, open upstage door in a dramatically symbolic manifestation of the corruption of the world beyond Elsinore irresistibly invading the court. In this way, one could agree with the statement of the question not only with reference to characters, but also with reference to the politics of North-Western Europe and it would seem that Shakespeare's writing reflects a time of increasing international awareness.

While the tragedy of Hamlet's character evidently concludes with his ironically immortalising line "The rest is silence", the tragic downfall of Denmark doesn't come until the arrival of Fortinbras in the play's final minutes - declaring his arrival is "to claim my vantage". While lots of directors have cut Fortinbras from the play, it would seem that the inclusion of this important character draws into focus another critical way in which this play explores the relationship of the inside and the outside.

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Assessment objective commentary

AO1: Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts

- The essay opens with a **confident, conceptual framing** of "inside and outside" as more than physical spaces—showing independence of thought.
- The **integration of precise textual detail** (e.g., "inky cloak", "Seems, madam?") is effective throughout.
- The response maintains **coherent structure and clarity of expression**, using terminology such as motif, duality, and performance purposefully.
- It offers **critical nuance,** e.g., "Hamlet's refusal to let the outward costume of mourning stand in place of inner truth sets him apart...".

Examiner's note: Sophisticated, fluent, and articulate – the candidate sustains a thoughtful argument with personal insight and mature control of expression.

AO2: Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts

- The essay engages closely with the text's **language and dramatic form**, e.g., analysis of Claudius' "measured and polished oratory" and Hamlet's shift into "vulgar phrasing".
- Frequent and apt **quotation analysis** (e.g., "the inmost part", "antic disposition", "rest is silence") illuminates how Shakespeare constructs ambiguity and conflict.
- It explores **stagecraft and costume** to enhance textual meaning, referencing Paapa Essiedu's and David Tennant's performances.

Examiner's note: Sophisticated awareness of how performance, language, and dramatic form shape meaning. Commentary is critically astute and often insightful.

AO3: Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of contexts

- The essay introduces a **rich array of contextual insights**: Elizabethan mourning customs; Freudian influence on Olivier's film; and political instability in early modern Europe.
- It refers to **performance history and design choices** (e.g., Es Devlin's stage design for Cumberbatch's Hamlet) to link text with reception and interpretation.
- Context is **woven seamlessly**, not appended.

Examiner's note: Excellent contextual knowledge applied with precision to enhance rather than distract from the argument.

AO4: Explore connections across literary texts

NB – AO4 would be an assessment objective achieved through comparing texts (for example ***Hamlet*** to another Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy or to a text on a related theme)

AO5: Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations

- Multiple **critical viewpoints** are integrated: psychoanalysis (Jones, Freud), feminism (Showalter), historicist/political readings, Enlightenment scepticism (Voltaire), Romantic introspection (Coleridge).
- Interpretations are **evaluated, not just referenced**, e.g., questioning the moral judgement of Gertrude and Ophelia's roles within patriarchy.

Examiner's note: A rich variety of interpretations are employed to extend understanding and stimulate debate.

Overall examiner judgement:

This is a **highly accomplished essay**, demonstrating consistent excellence across all AOs. It combines original thinking, detailed textual analysis, contextual depth, and critical plurality with sophisticated written expression. It would be a **top-band response** in any A-Level English Literature marking scheme.

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Examiner's tips

Carl Cerny is a teacher, examiner and founder of The Cambridge Tutor Company.

Examiner's tips

There are plenty of ways to impress an examiner in a literature essay on this play. Drawing on my experience as an A-Level examiner, I've broken them down into 2 categories: content and style.

Content

When writing an essay on Shakespeare's plays, remember that they were written to be performed. The best essays tend to show an understanding of how the drama would come alive on stage — not just what is written on the page. Here are some key areas to consider:

a. Consider the design

- Set: Is the stage minimal or elaborate? Could shifting platforms, curtains, or symbolic elements (like thrones or trees) define different locations — such as a castle vs. a wilderness?
- Costume: How might a character's clothing reflect their status, mood, or transformation (e.g. Hamlet's "inky cloak" of mourning)?
- Makeup: Think about age, ghostly figures, or physical transformation.
- Lighting: How could lighting suggest time of day, tension, or supernatural elements (like the Ghost's appearance)?
- Sound: Consider music, offstage noises (e.g. thunder, knocking), or symbolic cues that drive tension.
- Props: A skull in ***Hamlet***, a dagger in *Macbeth*, or a handkerchief in *Othello* can hold deep symbolic weight.
- Special Effects: Think smoke, trapdoors, or thunder rolls to evoke otherworldliness or violence.

b. Stage dynamics and proxemics

- Discuss how actors move and relate to one another on stage (proxemics).
- Who stands close together, and who is isolated? What does that suggest about relationships or power?
- For example, if Claudius moves toward Hamlet and Hamlet steps back, that shows discomfort or resistance.
- Moments of silence, tension, or physical gesture can be as powerful as speech.
- Consider when characters enter or leave, and how that affects the dramatic impact.

c. Setting

- Is the scene set indoors or outdoors? In a public or private space?
- For example, a courtroom scene carries authority and formality, while a bedroom might suggest vulnerability or intimacy.
- In ***Hamlet***, the graveyard is both outdoor and symbolic — a place of death, reflection, and black humour.

d. What's not on the page?

- Consider things that aren't always clear when studying the text on the page:
- Are there characters who are onstage but silent?
- Are there character offstage and watching / overhearing?
- Are characters being 'honest'?

e. Genre

Consider the play's genre as an Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy and a Senecan tragedy. Do some research into others if you can – Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy, for example. Or other Shakespearean tragedies: King Lear, Othello and Macbeth. Are the aspects of these that Shakespeare subverts in ***Hamlet***?

Style

A well-written essay is often awarded under AO1 for its coherence, fluency, structure and accuracy. Here are some really effective ways to ensure you pick up all the credit you can in this area.

a. Complex sentences

Good academic writing often involves layering ideas, showing how different interpretations or techniques relate. Complex sentences let you do that.

Example:
While Hamlet appears immobilised by grief and indecision, his use of wordplay and metatheatrical reflection suggests a sharp self-awareness that complicates any simple reading of him as passive.

Notice how this sentence joins ideas: Hamlet's outward inaction is contrasted with his intellectual energy — all in one fluid sentence.

b. Tentative language

Literary interpretation is not about certainty; it's about offering thoughtful possibilities. Use language that shows you're weighing up interpretations.

Useful phrases:

- Perhaps…
- This may suggest…
- Arguably…
- Could be read as…
- It is possible that…

Example:
The Ghost may represent divine justice — a call for moral reckoning — though it could equally be interpreted as a projection of Hamlet's own fractured psyche.

c. Technical language

Using drama-specific terms shows you're engaging with the text as a play, not just as literature. Here are two highly relevant examples to ***Hamlet***:

- **Metatheatre** - This refers to moments when a play draws attention to its own theatricality.

  Example:

  Hamlet's staging of "The Mousetrap" is overtly metatheatrical, inviting the audience to reflect on the relationship between performance and truth — both within the world of the play and in their own act of spectating.

- **Dramatic Irony** - This occurs when the audience knows more than the characters, creating tension or deeper meaning.

Example:
Dramatic irony is especially powerful in Claudius's pious monologue, as the audience knows he cannot pray sincerely, despite his public appearance of repentance — further reinforcing Hamlet's sense of moral confusion.

Wider reading for A-Level students studying Hamlet

1. Related plays (style, theme, or genre)

The Spanish Tragedy by Thomas Kyd
The original revenge tragedy that heavily influenced ***Hamlet***. Includes ghosts, madness, a play-within-a-play, and a brooding avenger.

The Revenger's Tragedy by Thomas Middleton (attributed)
A dark, satirical revenge tragedy filled with violence, corruption, and theatrical self-awareness. A great comparison for genre conventions and tonal contrast.

Macbeth by William Shakespeare
Explores ambition, the supernatural, and psychological collapse. Offers parallels in tone, imagery, and themes of guilt and fate.

Tis Pity She's a Whore by John Ford
A later Jacobean tragedy exploring taboo desire, moral decay, and individual vs. society. Useful for contrasting Hamlet's moral and philosophical introspection with more visceral drama.

2. Contextual and critical material

1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare by James Shapiro
Brilliant contextual reading that situates ***Hamlet*** within the political, theatrical, and literary world of Elizabethan England. Accessible and academically rich.

WATCH 👀

Theatre Talk Discussion on the book with James Shapiro

Shakespeare After All by Marjorie Garber
A critical yet accessible guide to Shakespeare's major works, including ***Hamlet***, with insight into character, theme, and cultural context.

WATCH 👀

Lecture 1 The later plays introduction a companion to Shakespeare - Prof. Marjorie Garber, Department of English - Harvard University (Shakespeare Network)

This Distracted Globe: Worldmaking in Early Modern Drama by Marissa Greenberg
More advanced reading that examines how Shakespeare's contemporaries saw the stage as a site for world-building — useful for thinking about **Hamlet's** meta-theatrical moments.

WATCH 👀

Reimagining Shakespeare in 2020 / In Touch (11:08 Hamlet *discussed plus video game 'Elsinore') Elsinore revisits the classic political drama,* ***Hamlet*** *with a time-loop twist. It is a dialogue based game where the player takes the role of Ophelia and the player begins living through the narrative of* Hamlet.

3. Modern adaptations and reimaginings

Hamnet by Maggie O'Farrell
A lyrical novel imagining the life and death of Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, and how grief may have shaped Hamlet. Rich in emotional and historical texture.

WATCH 👀

Maggie O'Farrell on Hamnet, at Damian Barr's Literary Salon Apr 2020 (30 mins)

The Black Prince by Iris Murdoch
A postmodern novel deeply influenced by ***Hamlet***. Its narrator is obsessed with the play and slowly unravels through his own intellectual and emotional crises.

WATCH 👀

November Book of the Moth: The Black Prince by Iris Murdoch / The Booker Prize Podcast, Episode 21 (2024) (Summary of The Black Prince commences 15:26m)

Gertrude and Claudius by John Updike
A prequel to ***Hamlet***, reimagining the events leading up to the play from the perspective of its older generation. Challenges the moral simplicity of the original.

WATCH 👀

Discussion with John Updike on Gertrude and Claudius (2000) (0:00 14:54)

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead by Tom Stoppard
A brilliant absurdist spin-off focusing on two minor characters from ***Hamlet***. Explores fate, identity, and the nature of existence with wit and philosophical depth.

4. Film and performance Studies

Shakespeare on Film by Richard Dutton and Ania Loomba
Insight into how ***Hamlet*** has been adapted for screen and how meaning shifts between stage and cinema.

***Hamlet* (1996) dir. Kenneth Branagh**
The only full-text film version of ***Hamlet***, lavish and ambitious. Excellent for understanding staging possibilities and character interpretation.

***Hamlet* (2000) dir. Michael Almereyda**
A modern-day corporate Manhattan setting with Ethan Hawke. Useful for analysing how ***Hamlet's*** themes translate into contemporary culture.

5. Optional: Literary Theory Pairings

Beginning Theory by Peter Barry
An accessible introduction to key literary theories (feminism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, etc.) that students can apply to ***Hamlet*** for deeper interpretation.

Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human by Harold Bloom
A controversial but influential argument that ***Hamlet*** marks a turning point in literature, where character becomes truly psychological.

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Teaching and Learning Materials
to accompany the production of

Hamlet

By William Shakespeare

Produced by the Learning, Education and Participation Department for Chichester Festival Theatre

Educational content produced by Carl Cerny, The Cambridge Tutor Company

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