A Study Guide for

Hamlet

Written by William Shakespeare
Directed by Gordon Reinhart

Presented by Shakespearience a program of the Idaho Shakespeare Festival
table of contents

Section one: WELCOME!

Special thanks..............................................................pg 4
Using this study guide...................................................pg 4
About the Idaho Shakespeare Festival............................pg 5
A note from the director................................................pg 5

Section two: BEFORE THE SHOW

Meet the Cast..............................................................pg 6
About WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.................................pg 7
Hamlet Synopsis..........................................................pg 8
Character Connections................................................pg 9
Did You Know? Facts....................................................pg 10
Activity: “the play’s the thing”.................................pg 11
Discuss: Popularity of Hamlet.....................................pg 11
Vocabulary Words.........................................................pg 12
Activity: Word Search................................................pg 13
Activity: The 15-Minute Play........................................pg 14-17

Section three: AFTER THE SHOW

Activity: Breaking News!.............................................pg 18
Activity: Character Comparison.................................pg 19
Activity: Shakespearean Shorts.................................pg 20
Activity: Sound Check................................................pg 21
Activity: Exploring Hamlet..........................................pg 22
Theme: Mortality.........................................................pg 22
Theme: Misogynyny......................................................pg 22
Activity: Art of the Insult.............................................pg 23
Activity: #2Borno2B.......................................................pg 24
Activity: Think Like a Critic.........................................pg 25
Theme: Parent/Child Conflict.................................pg 25

Section four: APPENDIX

Resources.................................................................pg 26
Suggested viewing/reading.......................................pg 26
End Quote.................................................................pg 27
Festival History.........................................................pg 28
Dear Teachers,

Welcome to the Shakespearience study guide for Hamlet! This collection of materials has been designed to expand your students’ engagement with the performance as well as provide background knowledge on William Shakespeare and the influential literature he wrote.

This resource includes a range of information, discussion topics, and activities that can stand on their own or serve as building blocks for a larger unit. The activities are designed to be mixed, matched and modified to suit the needs of your particular students.

Inside, you’ll find activities to share with your students both before the show and after the show, indicated by headings at the top of the page. These are designed to help focus your students’ engagement with the performance by giving them specific themes to watch out for, as well as topics for discussion following the performance. Each activity is designed to meet Idaho Standards of Education to foster critical thinking and problem solving skills.

We encourage you and your students to share your thoughts with us! Any of the artwork or activities your students send will be shared with the artists who created Hamlet, and any feedback from you will help to improve our study guides for future audiences! Our mailing address is located on page 25.

Thank you so much!

Using This Guide...

As a part of Idaho Shakespeare Festival’s educational programming, Shakespearience performances have enriched the lives of well over one million students and teachers since 1981 with productions that convey the unique and impactful voice of theater arts. The magic of this art form is brought to schools across the State of Idaho each Winter/Spring semester with assistance from a generous group of underwriters:

Idaho Commission on the Arts
Idaho Humanities Council and National Endowment for the Humanities
Laura Moore Cunningham Foundation
Idaho Community Foundation and the following funds:
  o Children’s Charities of Idaho, Unrestricted Southwest Region
  o F.M., Anne G. & Beverly B. Bistline Philanthropic Fund
  o James A. Pinney Memorial Fund
  o Statewide Education Philanthropic Gift Fund
Wells Fargo
Idaho Power Foundation
The Whittenberger Foundation
Target
About Our Education Programs:

The Idaho Shakespeare Festival has become an integral part of arts education throughout Idaho. The Festival’s annual Shakespearience tour brings live theater to more than 25,000 high-school students in more than 50 Idaho communities each year. Since it began touring in 1986, Shakespearience has enriched the lives of nearly 500,000 students.

In 1999, the Festival assumed the operations of Idaho Theater for Youth. This alliance has more than doubled the Festival’s annual educational programming, resulting in the Festival becoming the largest provider of professional, performing arts outreach in the state of Idaho. In addition to the statewide Idaho Theater for Youth school tour, which brings professional productions to nearly 30,000 students in grades K-6 across Idaho, the Festival oversees year-round School of Theater programs. This series of classes in acting, playwriting and production, for students of all ages, enrolls over 300 Treasure Valley students each year, and includes our one-of-a-kind Apprentice Company. Look for upcoming student productions throughout the summer, fall and spring.

For more information on any of the Festival’s educational activities, please contact the Education Manager at the Festival offices or by email at rose@idahoshakespeare.org.

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR...

Hamlet by William Shakespeare would be a very short tale were it not for one thing: the hero’s conscience. The Ghost of Hamlet’s dead father tells him that he was murdered, who did it, and that Hamlet must avenge his father’s murder. Many modern stories have this essential premise, where vengeance equals justice and courage and so it is unquestioned. Soon the bullets are flying from the hero’s gun and from his clear conscience, but does vengeance equal justice? Does it equal courage? Is it the right thing to do?

In Hamlet, Shakespeare explores the knotty problem of how to fight evil without becoming evil. Claudius feels justified in killing his brother, the king and Hamlet’s father, for the power to lead a Christian empire. Hamlet is charged to avenge this murder of his father by murdering his uncle to restore justice. The battle between these two, Claudius and Hamlet, plays out in the royal court of Denmark but more importantly in each man’s stormy conscience. It is literally a battle between heaven and hell. Both men struggle with eternal questions: “Does hesitation make me a coward?” “Is redemption possible after murder?” In the end, Claudius opts to pursue his original course: murder to maintain power; but Hamlet arrives at a very different place, articulated in his littlest speech, a few words near the end about the “fall of a sparrow” (which references the book of Matthew) when he determines that to “Let be” is a better strategy than being obsessed with “to be or not to be” and taking up arms. Honoring, rather than fighting your conscience is a better state than chaotic action in service of a call to avenge one murder with another. Hamlet finally lets his conscience – not the Ghost of his father – guide him and it takes him to a perfect, though tragic, end.

-Gordon
meet the artists!

Before the show, meet the artists of the cast of *Hamlet*:

- **Rod O’Toole** as Laertes
- **Dakotah Brown** as Hamlet
- **Chris Canfield** as Claudius
- **Sasha Allen-Grieve** as Queen Gertrude
- **Tess Gregg** as Ophelia
- **Rod Wolfe** as Polonius
William Shakespeare was born in April 1564 in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon, on England’s Avon River. Because of poor record-keeping in small towns, his exact day of birth is unknown; it is traditionally celebrated on April 23rd. When he was eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway (who was 26 at the time). The couple had three children, one of whom died of the plague in childhood.

The bulk of Shakespeare’s working life was spent in London. He enjoyed success not only as a playwright, but also as an actor and shareholder in the acting company, Lord Chamberlain’s Men (later known as the King’s Men). In 1593 Shakespeare became a published poet; at the time theaters had been closed due to the plague, a contagious epidemic disease that devastated the population of London. He wrote many of his plays on English history as well as several comedies and at least two tragedies (Titus Andronicus and Romeo and Juliet). It is assumed that Shakespeare’s sonnets were also written during the 1590s. When the theaters reopened in 1594, Shakespeare continued his career as an actor, playwright, and acting company shareholder. His career would span over the next twenty years.

In 1599, Lord Chamberlain’s Men built a theater for themselves across the river from London, naming it The Globe. The plays that are considered by many to be Shakespeare’s major tragedies (Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth) were written while the company was residing in this theater, as were such comedies as Twelfth Night and Measure for Measure. Many of Shakespeare’s plays were performed at court (both for Queen Elizabeth I and her successor King James I), some were presented at the Inns of Court (the residencies of London’s legal societies), and some were doubtless performed in other towns, at the universities, and at great houses when the acting company went on tour.

Between 1608 and 1612, Shakespeare wrote several plays — among them The Winter’s Tale and The Tempest — presumably for the company’s new indoor Blackfriars theater, though the plays seem to have been performed at the Globe and at court as well. Shakespeare wrote very little after 1612, widely thought to be the year he wrote King Henry VIII. It was during a performance of Henry VIII in 1613 that the Globe theater caught fire and burned to the ground. Shakespeare retired from the stage sometime between 1610 and 1613 and returned to Stratford, where he died on April 23rd, 1616.

Until the 18th Century, Shakespeare was generally thought to have been no more than a simple, rough and untutored genius. Theories were advanced that his plays had actually been written by someone more educated, perhaps statesman and philosopher Sir Francis Bacon or the Earl of Southampton, who was Shakespeare’s primary patron. However, he was celebrated in his own time by English writer Ben Johnson and others who saw in him a brilliance that would endure. Since the 19th century, Shakespeare’s achievements have been more consistently recognized, and throughout the Western world he has come to be regarded as the greatest dramatist ever.
Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, has multiple woes. The ghost of his father haunts Elsinore; his uncle, Claudius, has married Queen Gertrude, his mother, and assumed the throne; and Denmark is being threatened with an invading army from Norway. Hamlet meets the ghost of his dead father who reveals that Claudius poisoned him—and the ghost demands Hamlet exact revenge. In order to carry this out, Hamlet feigns madness; as part of his insanity, he scorns the affections of Ophelia, daughter of Polonius, to whom he had made romantic overtures. Polonius grows concerned over Hamlet’s apparent insanity and reveals it to the King and Queen. Meanwhile, Hamlet struggles to convince himself that Claudius is the murderer of his father, and in an attempt to "catch the king's conscience," Hamlet convinces a traveling troupe of actors to perform a play in which the action closely resembles the events related to him by the ghost.

While Hamlet, judging the reaction of Claudius, is convinced of the new king's guilt, he can't bring himself to slay him outright. Instead, Hamlet confronts Gertrude with the news that she is sleeping with the killer of her husband. Unfortunately, Polonius—who is hidden behind a tapestry in the Queen's chamber, eavesdropping—panics and cries for help; Hamlet stabs him, thinking it is Claudius. Of course, when this news is given to Claudius, the King sends Hamlet to England with the ostensible purpose of securing Hamlet's safety and the recovery of his senses. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two childhood friends of Hamlet's who are now spying for Claudius, are to accompany him. The trick is that Hamlet will bear a letter to the King of England in which Claudius asks England to sentence Hamlet to death.

In the midst of these events, Ophelia loses her own sanity; she is driven to madness by Hamlet's condition and the death of Polonius. Laertes, her brother, returns to Denmark from his studies and vows vengeance upon Hamlet for what the prince has done to his family. News is brought that Hamlet has returned to Denmark, much to the surprise of Claudius, and that Ophelia has drowned herself in a river. Claudius now plots with Laertes to kill Hamlet upon his return to Elsinore. Meanwhile, Hamlet meets Horatio, his best friend, and tells how he altered the letter so that the execution order was for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern instead of him. At the end of Hamlet's tale, Ophelia's funeral procession enters, and Laertes and Hamlet confront one another. Laertes challenges Hamlet to a duel.

This is all part of Claudius's plot; instead of dull blades, Laertes will select a sharp one. In addition, Laertes is to poison the tip of his blade so that a wound will kill the prince. And, just in case the previous measures are not enough, Claudius will keep a poisoned chalice from which Hamlet will drink. The plan goes awry from the beginning; Laertes is unable to wound Hamlet during the first pass. Between rounds, Gertrude raises a toast to Hamlet with the poisoned chalice. Then, in the heat of the duel, Laertes manages to wound Hamlet but loses the poisoned rapier to him, and Laertes himself is poisoned as well. Gertrude swoons to her death; Laertes falls and reveals the plot against Hamlet, telling him he has "not a half-hour's life" in him. Enraged, Hamlet stabs Claudius with the poisoned blade and makes him drink from the chalice that slew Gertrude. This done, Hamlet collapses and dies in Horatio's arms as Fortinbras, King of Norway, enters the castle. Fortinbras is left to rule Denmark, as the entire royal family is dead, and he bids his men give Hamlet and the rest a proper funeral.
Get familiar with the various characters of *Hamlet* before you see the show, or use this character map as a reference afterwards!
At the Globe theater house, there was not one restroom for all three thousand spectators; nor were there any intermissions in the plays...

*Hamlet* was one of the most popular works during Shakespeare’s own time and has remained his most produced play to this day.

The castle in which the play is set really exists. It is called Kronborg Castle and was built in the Danish port of Helsingør in 1420s by the Danish king, Eric of Pomerania.

All but 3 of Uranus’ 27 moons are named after Shakespeare’s characters.

*Hamlet* is Shakespeare’s longest play with 4,042 lines and an uncut production would clock up to five hours of running time! The role of Hamlet also has the most lines of any Shakespeare character, totaling 1,530 lines.

*Hamlet* is Shakespeare’s second-most filmed story in the world.

The most popular story for film? *Cinderella*!

Shakespeare had no descendants after all of his grandchildren died.

If you were to Google “Shakespeare,” you would receive over 15 million pages of results!

Did you know?

- Shakespeare is the second most quoted author in the English language.
- The only other text quoted more frequently than Shakespeare’s works is the Bible.
- *Hamlet* is Shakespeare’s most produced play.
- The role of Hamlet also has the most lines of any Shakespeare character.
- All but 3 of Uranus’ 27 moons are named after Shakespeare’s characters.
- Shakespeare had no descendants after all of his grandchildren died.
- If you were to Google “Shakespeare,” you would receive over 15 million pages of results!
The story of revenge, familial duty, and the internal struggle over right and wrong has been told countless times in television, movies, and books. Can you think of any other movies or television shows that feature this plot? What qualities or characteristics make this such a popular storyline? How do these concepts affect Hamlet’s actions (or inaction) throughout the play? 

Below are some of the most popular cinematic retellings of Hamlet. Have you seen any? Which version(s) did you enjoy the most?

1948
HAMLET
directed by and stars
Laurence Olivier;
set the “standard” for
Hamlet adaptations

1994
The Lion King
Disney production;
based on the Hamlet storyline

2000
HAMLET
directed by Carlo Carlei;
original dialogue set in
corporate New York

1990
Hamlet
directed by Franco Zeffirelli;
period setting with a more
“action-movie” style

1948
HAMLET
before the show

“the play’s the thing”

1990
themes to discuss

2008
Sons of Anarchy
FX television show;
based on the Hamlet storyline
Will’s Words

*auspicious*: adj — promising success; favorable

*bestial*: adj — without reason or intelligence; inhuman; brutal

*chide*: verb — to scold or reproach

*discord*: noun — lack of agreement between persons; dispute

*dispatch*: verb — to send off with haste; to put to death

*entreaty*: noun — an earnest request or plea

*felling*: verb — the knocking over or cutting down of something

*filial*: adj — relating to the relationship of a child to a parent

*grate*: verb — having an irritating or unpleasant effect; rough scraping

*heed*: verb — to give careful attention

*incorporeal*: adj — bodiless or immaterial; without substance

*jaded*: adj — worn out or wearied by over-exposure

*mote*: noun — a small particle or speck, usually of dust

*ostentatious*: adj — intended to attract notice or attention

*peevish*: adj — showing annoyance or irritation, causing a bad mood

*portent*: noun — indication of something important about to happen

*sovereign*: adj — having supreme rank or authority; royal

*tempestuous*: adj — tumultuous or turbulent in nature; stormy

*wanton*: adj — immoral, reckless, or lewd in behavior

Create five sentences that use a vocabulary word to help illustrate its meaning.

1. ____________________________________________

2. ____________________________________________

3. ____________________________________________

4. ____________________________________________

5. ____________________________________________
Find your vocabulary words as well as the list of characters below in the word search!

**word search**

Claudius
Fortinbras
Gertrude
Guildenstern
Hamlet
Horatio
Laertes
Ophelia
Osric
Polonius
Rosencrantz
Yorick

**did you know?**

The average American has a vocabulary of about 10,000 words – Shakespeare’s vocabulary had around 29,000!

Shakespeare invented a lot of words including: bedroom, bump, assassination, apostrophe, bloody, dislocate, frugal, majestic, and suspicious.

The average American has a vocabulary of about 10,000 words – Shakespeare’s vocabulary had around 29,000!

Shakespeare invented a lot of words including: bedroom, bump, assassination, apostrophe, bloody, dislocate, frugal, majestic, and suspicious.
The Fifteen-Minute Play is a plot summary intermingled with quotations from the play. It is typically used to introduce students to the play or prepare them to see a production. Try to keep the summary reading to fifteen minutes...

Bonus: You can also utilize this format for future summaries, altering as you see fit or having students create their own Fifteen-Minute Plays!

◊ Create cards for the quotations with the corresponding numbers, shown on the next three pages, in bold. The cards should be large enough for three to five people to read simultaneously.

◊ Divide the class into groups and distribute the cards. Each group may have multiple cards.

◊ Give the groups five to ten minutes to prepare dramatic renditions of their line(s). They can read the line(s) as a chorus, individually, or in sub-groups, but everyone must speak part of the text.

◊ Encourage students to physicalize/dramatize the line(s) in some way. Using props is acceptable, but not necessary.

◊ When the rehearsal period is over, ask everyone to stand in a circle. The leader (you, or a student) stand in the circle as well, and reads aloud the script of the story (on the next page) calling out the numbers of quotations where indicated and pausing for the group responsible for that quotation to step quickly into the center and perform it.

◊ The leader should keep a quick, steady pace and those with lines to share should pay attention — the activity is much more fun when it moves right along!

“The play’s the thing wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the King.”

-Hamlet, Act 2, Scene II
(1. Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.) A group of night watchmen and the scholar Horatio are on patrol when they are visited by a ghost of the late King Hamlet. Horatio demands, (2. Stay! Speak! Speak! I charge thee, speak!)

Hamlet is still angry with his mother (3. Frailty, thy name is woman!), who married his uncle within a month after Hamlet’s father’s death. As Hamlet is brooding over the fate of his father, Horatio arrives and tells Hamlet about the ghost. (4. My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.) Hamlet, excited by this information, vows (5. I’ll speak to it).

The court advisor, Polonius, advises his son, Laertes, on many things (6. This above all, to thine own self be true) as Laertes leaves for France. Laertes has already had words with his sister, Ophelia, about Hamlet’s attention to her (7. fear it, dear sister).

Horatio leads Hamlet to the Ghost, who motions for Hamlet to go away with it. Once they’re alone, the ghost tells Hamlet, (8 The serpent that did sting thy father’s life Now wears his crown.), meaning that Hamlet’s uncle murdered his father. The Ghost asks Hamlet to (9. Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder!) and disappears.

Hamlet begins acting strangely towards everyone in the castle. Polonius believes (10. this is madness, yet there is method in ’t) Claudius and Polonius plot to spy on Hamlet in discussion with Ophelia.

As Hamlet contemplates life and death (11. To be or not to be—that is the question), Ophelia arrives. Their conversation is bitter, and Hamlet tells her, (12. Get thee to a nunnery.)
Claudius and Gertrude have sent for Hamlet’s old friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to find out what’s wrong. Hamlet suspects correctly that his friends have been sent to spy on him. But he is delighted by the arrival of a troupe of actors. He schemes, *(13. I'll have these players play something like the murder of my father Before mine uncle.)* Hamlet plans to observe the King’s reaction to the play in order to confirm his guilt.

Before the play is over, the King stands up in a rage and orders everyone out. *(14. Give me some light. Away!)* and Hamlet suspicions are confirmed. Consumed by guilt, Claudius kneels to pray. Hamlet almost kills him then but decides against it, afraid that killing Claudius mid-prayer would *(15. this same villain send to heaven.)*

When Polonius spies an argument between Hamlet and Gertrude from behind a curtain, Hamlet mistakes him for Claudius and stabs Polonius, killing him *(16. Oh, I am slain!)*

Hamlet is sent away to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Fearful, Claudius secretly sends word to England ordering *(17. The present death of Hamlet)* Hamlet learns of the plot and replaces the King’s orders with a new request that the death sentence be carried out on his two friends. Thus, *(18. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead.)* Hamlet then returns to Denmark.
Back at the castle, Ophelia has gone mad over the death of her father. (19. O, this is the poison of deep grief.) Laertes returns, angry about his father Polonius’ death and grieved about his sister Ophelia’s insanity. Laertes vows, (20. Let come what comes, only I’ll be revenged Most thoroughly).

As Claudius and Laertes plot that Laertes will kill Hamlet in a duel, Gertrude arrives and announces (21. Your sister’s drowned, Laertes.) As the royal family mourns, (22. Sweets to the sweet, farewell!) Hamlet accepts the challenge to duel Laertes. Laertes mortally wounds Hamlet, but Hamlet manages to grab the poisoned sword and strike Laertes as well. Laertes admits, (23. I am justly killed with mine own treachery).

After taking a drink from a cup of poisoned wine meant for Hamlet, the Queen dies. (24. The drink, the drink! I am poisoned.) The dying Laertes explains (25. The King, the King’s to blame), and Hamlet kills Claudius, both stabbing him and forcing him to drink the poisoned wine. Hamlet dies soon after, and Horatio mourns. (26. Flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.)

Want to continue exploring Shakespeare’s works in an easy, concise format?
Check out more 15-Minute Plays via the Folger Shakespeare Library at www.folger.edu
Use the space below to write a news story for the citizens of Denmark, reporting on an event or scene from the play. Give the details you would expect to see in a news report, and use terms from the play and your vocabulary list to tailor it to the audience. Include a catchy title for your newspaper and article!
Compare and contrast two characters in the play.
What qualities do they have in common? How are they different?
Share: How do these characteristics effect their relationship as well as the overall plot?

expanding the activity:
After every character has been analyzed by someone in the class, discuss the virtues and faults of the characters.
Rank the characters from least likeable to most likeable. What qualities did you admire/dislike in these characters?
What casting choices from the play did you find most effective?
Comics, images, and memes are all quick and easy ways to describe something or tell a story. Below are some examples of comics juxtaposing scenes from *Hamlet* with modern concepts. At the bottom of the page, create your own comic strip or image that sums up a scene from *Hamlet*. You can use your vocabulary words, pop culture references, or anything else that helps tell the story—Get creative!

**Scene:** ______________________

**Characters:** ____________________

______________________________

**expanding the activity:**

Split into groups and create a comic strip for an entire scene! Discuss which elements of your scene are most crucial for showing plot development and how you can tell the story in new, original way!
Music is a powerful tool with its ability to convey messages and moods. Now it’s your turn to create the soundtrack to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Select a scene from the play and pair it with a song that coordinates, whether with direct lyrics or the theme being evoked. Pair with friends to finish the soundtrack to the rest of the play!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCENE NUMBER &amp; BRIEF SUMMARY OF SCENE</th>
<th>KEY QUOTE OR DIALOGUE &amp; THE SPEAKER(S)</th>
<th>SONG &amp; SPECIFIC LYRICS THAT COORDINATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Major themes of *Hamlet* include a variety of ideas and emotions: revenge, corruption, reality, spirituality, and loyalty are a few among them. Use the examples and prompts below, or have students select a quote from the play and then address the theme(s) associated with their selection. Encourage students to consider the different viewpoints their theme brings up and discuss these further.

**“Frailty, thy name is woman!”**

**Theme to Follow:**

**Misogyny**

In *Hamlet*, the Prince becomes incredibly cynical with his view toward women. He often thinks of them as fickle and more likely to be corrupt. Think about his changing relationships with the women in the play to answer the questions below:

◊ How would you describe Hamlet’s relationship with his mother at the start of the play? How does this change by play’s end?
◊ Do you think it was just the fact that his mother married his uncle that made Hamlet so angry with Gertrude?
◊ What about Hamlet’s relationship with Ophelia? How did his actions toward her change throughout the play?
◊ Why do you think Hamlet chooses to drive Ophelia away? Did this tactic work?
◊ Do any of the other men in the play display the same kinds of ill feeling toward women? What instances can you think of?
◊ Was Hamlet’s anger toward the women in his life justified? Why or why not?

**“To be, or not to be...”**

**Theme to Follow:**

**Mortality**

From the start of the play, Hamlet is forced to continuously consider the mystery of death and life. He has to think about his own life, avenging his father’s, and ending another—eventually considering ending his own life to avoid his dilemma. Think about the various ways death is discussed in the play while considering the following questions:

◊ What is the first instance in the play that Hamlet has to consider the meaning of life and mystery of death?
◊ Pick out two to three images from the play that represent various times that Hamlet was forced to think about death. What makes these instances different from each other in what they represent and how they effect Hamlet’s thoughts?
◊ Many people consider Hamlet’s thoughts about suicide to be melodramatic. Do you think he was legitimately considering this drastic end? Would this have solved his greater dilemma?
◊ Of all the many deaths in *Hamlet*, which do you think had the most impact on the plot of the play? Was there a death that “mattered” more than another? Why?
◊ Consider the culture that Hamlet lived in—what were the social and religious implications associated with suicide? Do you think that impacted his overall decision? How does this compare to today’s world?
“I will speak daggers to her, but use none.”
- Hamlet, Act III, Scene 2

Shakespeare’s characters had colorful ways of insulting each other. Channel your inner Hamlet or Laertes for the following activity.

**Directions:** Combineth one word or phrase from each of the columns at the right and addeth “Thou” to the beginning.

Use a dictionary to make certain thou knowest the true meaning of thy strong words and thou shalt have the perfect insult to fling at the wretched fools of the opposing team.

**Mix and match to find the perfect barb from the Bard!**

**INSULT:**
Thou __________________________________________
________________________________________________
________________________________________________

**DEFINITION:**
You __________________________________________
________________________________________________
________________________________________________
In 2010, the Royal Shakespeare Company used Twitter as a means to bring the story of Romeo and Juliet to the digital age. With the project “#SuchTweetSorrow,” each character had their own Twitter identity and followers could see their story unfold in real time over the course of five weeks. Juliet - aka @julietcap16 - posted her own YouTube videos and advertised her Sweet 16 birthday party on Facebook. Romeo (@romeo_mo) went from tweeting about his Call of Duty obsession to being on the run from the police. Followers could interact with the characters and declare themselves #teammontague or #teamcapulet, sometimes receiving shout-outs from the doomed teenagers!

In a group, take a scene from *Hamlet* and make your own Twitter handles for the characters. Re-tell the action in a way fit for today’s social media!

Check out the real Twitter handles for your favorite characters below:


More information on Royal Shakespeare Company’s “Such Tweet Sorrow” project can be found here: http://wearemudlark.com/projects/such-tweet-sorrow/
Think like a critic!

This is your students’ opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions about the performance of Hamlet that they just saw! Invite them to think about their experience and answer the following questions:

1. What is the name of your school?
2. Have you ever seen a play before?
3. Would you recommend this play to your friends?
4. Do you think it is important for people to see plays? Why or why not?
5. Was the story of Hamlet clear to you?
6. Did you learn something from this play that you did not expect to learn?
7. What was your favorite part of the performance? What did you like about it?
8. Did you have a least favorite part of the performance? Why?
9. Were there any additional aspects of the show that stood out to you (i.e. music, costumes, jokes, etc.)? What did you like most about those aspects of the show?
10. Would you like for Shakespearience to perform at your school again?

Theme to Follow: parent/child conflict

In many of Shakespeare’s play, parents, and children often have life-altering conflicts. Think about Hamlet’s relationship with his parents when considering the following questions.

◊ How do you think Hamlet’s relationship with his mother changed throughout the play?
◊ What does this say about the bonds formed between children and their parents?
◊ Hamlet is clearly loyal to his father’s memory. How does this conflict with his mother’s actions? Should he have stayed loyal to his step-father, like she did?
◊ How did Ophelia and Laertes’ relationship with their father differ from Hamlet’s relationships? Do you think their family dynamic helped or hindered their relationships with Hamlet?

expanding the activity

Have your students pretend they are reviewers for a major newspaper or website critiquing the show! They can name the newspaper, format their article, add headlines and “photographs,” and then display their publications around the classroom!

Mail your reviews to the Education Department at the Idaho Shakespeare Festival!

Idaho Shakespeare Festival
Attn: Education Department
P.O. Box 9365
Boise, ID 83707
suggested reading and viewing materials

more Shakespeare:  *Othello; Julius Caesar; MacBeth; Romeo and Juliet*

other popular cinematic versions of Shakespeare’s works:

modern literature similar to *Hamlet*:

- *The Dead Father’s Club* by Matt Haig
- *The Tragedy of Arthur* by Arthur Phillips
- *Wise Children* by Angela Carter
- *Son of the Mob* by Gordon Korman

movies speculating on the life of William Shakespeare and his influences:

*sources:*

- http://www.folger.edu/Content/Teach-and-Learn/Teaching-Resources/
- http://www.johndclare.net/English/Shakespeare_facts.htm
- https://hedgerowtheatre.org/hamlet-the-facts/
- http://sportfencingpaintings.blogspot.com/
This above all — to thine own self be true;
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

-Polonius; Act I, Scene iii

the end
The Idaho Shakespeare Festival has evolved into one of the region’s premier, professional theater arts organizations, directly serving over 105,000 individuals annually. It is governed by a volunteer 40-member Board of Trustees, 2 co-equal executives, and a permanent staff of 10 employees. In addition, the Festival operates as an “artistic home” for over 150 artists and production staff, who are employed during the summer and at other times of the year or during the Festival’s spring educational tours.

At the organization’s core is its outdoor summer season which presents classical repertory, focusing on the plays of William Shakespeare, in addition to some contemporary works and musicals. The Festival’s Amphitheater and Reserve, now entering its 16th year of operation, is the venue for over 59,000 audience members who come to Boise from across Idaho and increasingly from other states and countries.

In addition to its seasonal productions, the Idaho Shakespeare Festival provides theater arts programming integrated into the curricula of approximately 95% of the school districts in Idaho, as well as serving parts of Oregon and Nevada. Through its school tours, Shakespearience and Idaho Theater for Youth, the Festival annually reaches over 50,000 children at all grade levels, particularly focusing on children in remote and rural communities.

ISFs School of Theater exemplifies the Festival’s attempts to foster life-long learning and appreciation of the theater, providing ongoing classes for students ranging in age from preschool to adult, with the Summer Apprentice Program and Residencies offered for extended theatrical training. As part of ISF’s educational outreach, the Festival donates tickets to over 100 non-profit and student groups, has created a special Access Program for both students and low-income groups in the community, and now makes low-cost access possible for children and young adults throughout the summer season with student subscription packages.

Festival staff members also participate in the community, serving on boards and assisting the activities not only of local and regional organizations, but also participating at a national level, where Charles Fee is in his 12th year heading the Great Lakes Theater (Cleveland) and sixth leading Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival (Nevada) and Mark Hofflund served a presidential appointment to the National Council on the Arts (Washington, D.C.). Both Festival executives have been community leaders in Idaho for the better part of two decades, and both maintain fulltime residency with their families in Boise.