

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S HAMLET (by Martin Hauck)

Plot:

Hamlet hears of an apparition of his recently deceased father visiting Elsinore Castle in Denmark. The Ghost speaks to Hamlet and informs him that his killer was his brother, Hamlet's uncle, Claudius (who has since married Hamlet's mother and gained the crown). Hamlet vows to avenge his father's death, feigns insanity, and distances himself from his love, Ophelia. In plotting to kill the king, Hamlet questions whether he can rely on the ghost and thus devises a plan: "The play is the thing wherein I will catch the king." Assured that the ghost is truthful, Hamlet again tries to kill the king at the appropriate moment. As a result of his stalling however, eight people are killed at the end of this tragedy including Ophelia, his best friend Laertes, and Hamlet, himself.

Themes and Issues:

Madness
Revenge
Trickery
Christian and Secular Morality
Duty of Son and Daughter
Death and Afterlife
Supernatural
Gender Issues
Incest and Adultery
Murder and Suicide

Language and Structure:

Play - Tragedy
Five Acts – Important for changing scenes, building tension, locating climax, etc.
Soliloquies, Asides, Etc.
Use of stage directions in written text to cue the reader as to how the play would appear on stage

Extended Resources:

Film: Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet*, Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*, the BBC's *Hamlet*, Sir Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet*, *Green Eggs and Hamlet*, Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, *Strange Brew*.
Plays: Paul Rudnick's *I Hate Hamlet*, Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Also, *Bard on the Beach* is an excellent opportunity for students in the Vancouver area.
Wide Reading: John Updike's *Gertrude and Claudius*, Arthur Asa Berger's *The Hamlet Case*, Michael S. Schiffer's *Lost Quarto of Hamlet* (wherein the cast of *Scooby Doo* appear to add a twist to the ending!).
Television: *Melrose Place*, *The Simpsons*.
Music: *The Hamlet Song* by Garrison Keillor.
Current Affairs: O.J. Simpson trial, teenagers of divorced parents who now hate their step-father/mother (just see *Jenny Jones*), Donna Marie Wisener case, Gail Marie Beazleigh case, Terrorist plots, etc.
Teacher Resources: Neil Bechervaise's class handout on Romeo and Juliet, Brenda Pinder and Ken Watson's A Workshop Approach to Hamlet (St. Clair Press).

Student Activities:

Column 1: Activity involves – (R) Reading, (W) Writing, (L) Listening, (S) Speaking, and/or (V) Viewing

Column 2: Activity Involves – (I) Individual, (S) Small Group, or (L) Large Group.

Column 3: Description of activity and (A) for Assessed or (N) for Not Assessed.

R, W	I	Read a scene in which there are observers present. In the voice of the observing character, give a written synopsis of the scene (A/N)
V, S	I, S	View the film <i>Strange Brew</i> and discuss, in small groups, whether the appropriation of the <i>Hamlet</i> plotline adds to or takes away from the humour of the film (N)
W, L, S	I, L	Interview a fellow student who will adopt the character of Hamlet and then you are to write a feature article on Hamlet's life (A/N)
L, S	I, L	Come to class with a modern variation on one of the major themes in <i>Hamlet</i> (such as the Donna Marie Wisener case, Terrorist plots, etc.). This will lead to a discussion on how these matters were dealt with in Shakespeare's times (and indeed, how HE dealt with them in his plays) and how they are dealt with in our times (N)
W	I	Write a variation on the "To be or not to be . . ." soliloquy (A/N)
R, W, S	I, L	I will give you text from the play with key words omitted. You must choose words for the blanks and discuss what impact this has on the meaning of the scene (N)
V, L, S	L	Watch <i>The Simpson's</i> episode where Bart plays Hamlet and discuss what was left out (and what had to be left out) in order for the play to make sense and remain under ten minutes (N)
R, W	I	Read the play and a criticism of it (i.e. A.C. Bradley, Northrop Frye, etc.). Then, write an argumentative paper in which you deliberately disagree with the critic (A)
L, S	L	Each day, we will have a mini debate where two of you debate a topical theme from the play (A/N)
W	I	Devise a poster advertising your "Dream Cast" in a production of <i>Hamlet</i> and explain your choice in a separate write-up (A)
W	I, L	Devise a piece of artwork or collage based on your personal interpretations of an emotion from the play. Then, explain to the class why you chose to represent the emotion in the way you did (A)
R, W, L	I	Read the text to <i>The Hamlet Song</i> by Garrison Keillor and then come up with your own <i>Hamlet Song</i> set to the tune of your choice (A/N)
V	L	As a warm up exercise, draw character names from a hat. You will then have to memorize a line from that character as the other group members try to guess who it was that said the line (N)
L, V	S, L	Watch Branagh's <i>Hamlet</i> paying strict attention to the soundtrack. Does it effectively portray Branagh's message? In small groups, devise a particular soundtrack for a specific scene (N)
R, W	I	Draw a web diagram showing the relationships between all of the characters in the play. This can be used as a study guide (A/N) (Pinder and Watson)
L, S	S	Hamlet has a tendency to repeat words ("Fie on't! ah fie!" "Very like, very like." "Except my life, except my life, except my life." etc.). Does this tendency stand out or merely add to Hamlet's "Madness?" (This should be a small group discussion) (N)
R, W	S	In small groups, transcribe short scenes into modern Canadian English and then present to the class to show the timelessness of Shakespeare's plays (A) (Bechervaise)
S, L, V	L	Assume that Hamlet did not die at the end of the play. The entire class will put on a mock trial with characters such as judge, recorder, bailiff, jury, victims' family members, etc. This is an excellent exercise to broach the subject of law in the sixteenth century (N)
R, W	S	In small groups, prepare a Power Point presentation on the issues raised in the play including extra resources on those issues (A)
W, S, V	S	In small groups, videotape yourselves acting out a scene from <i>Hamlet</i> . You will be responsible for editing the script, framing the shots, choosing the actors, editing, etc. Record these decisions in a set of production notes (A)