

# 'Hamlet: A Shakespeare Story' by Andrew Matthews and Tony Ross

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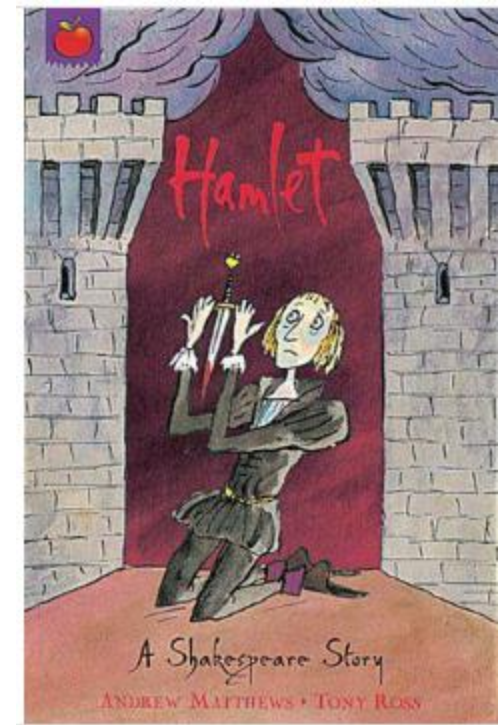
Ages 7-11

## Reasons for selection and synopsis

*A ghost, a tortured prince and an evil uncle come together in this explosive story about revenge, family and madness.*

The story opens on a frosty night, when the ghost of Hamlet's father visits him. Many believe the late king was killed by a poisonous snake bite. However, the spirit reveals to Hamlet that he was murdered by his brother, Hamlet's uncle who now sits on the throne, married to his mother. Told from Hamlet's point of view, this is an accessible re-telling of one of Shakespeare's most popular tragedies.

You can watch a re-telling of the play here:  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03f5fjr>



# Cast list

The Ghost of Hamlet's father



Gertrude

Queen of Denmark  
Mother to Hamlet



Claudius

King of Denmark



Hamlet

Son to the former King  
Nephew to Claudius



Horatio

Friend to Hamlet



Laertes

Son to Polonius



Ophelia

Daughter to Polonius



Polonius  
Lord Chamberlain



A troop of travelling players

The Scene

Denmark in the thirteenth century.



## Hamlet

Many years ago in Denmark there was a prince called Hamlet.

One day Hamlet's father, the king, dies suddenly and Hamlet is very sad.

After this, Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, gets married again very quickly. She marries her husband's brother, Claudius, and Claudius is now the king!

'Aargh! How could you do this to me!'

One night Hamlet's friend, Horatio, tells him that there is a ghost in the castle. It is the ghost of Hamlet's father!

'Claudius killed me with poison! Hamlet, you must punish Claudius for me!'

Hamlet is confused. He doesn't know if he believes the ghost and he doesn't know what to do.

Hamlet now acts very strangely. He is mean and angry, and he upsets his girlfriend, Ophelia.

'Go away! Leave me alone!'

'Oh, he is so mean!'

One day a group of actors come to the castle and Hamlet makes a plan. He asks the actors to change their play. The new play will show a king poisoned like Hamlet's father.

'With this play I will catch the king.'

## Shakespeare



When Claudius watches the play he looks very worried and runs away. Hamlet sees him and he knows the truth.

Claudius is very worried about Hamlet now and makes a plan with Ophelia's brother, Laertes.

'You will fight him and we will put poison on the sword and in his drink too.'

Laertes and Hamlet fight. Laertes cuts Hamlet, but in the fight Hamlet takes Laertes' sword and cuts him with it too!

'Here, Hamlet, drink this.'

'No, thank you, Mother. I'm not thirsty.'

'No, don't!'

'It was him! He poisoned us all!'

Finally, Hamlet knows he must stop Claudius.

'Aargh! Have this and this!'

All the royal family are now poisoned and Hamlet tells his friend that there must be a new king.

'Goodbye, my prince.'

Listen to this story <https://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/short-stories/hamlet>

[www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglishkids](https://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglishkids)

# Lesson 5

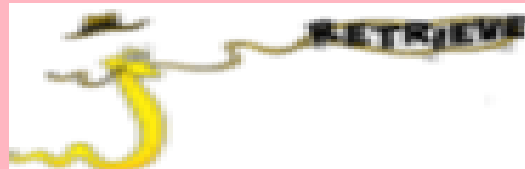
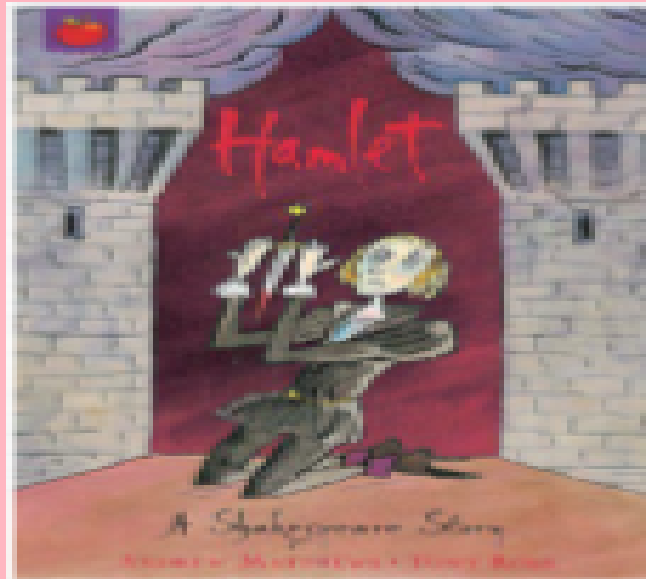
Summer 2

Week 2

L5 Friday 12th June, 2020.

LO: To retrieve and infer answers from a text.

Read p 38 - 45 then p46 - 58





They bundled me into a windowless carriage and locked the doors and I was driven speedily through the night.



I could see nothing, and could hear only the rattling of the wheels and the cracking of the driver's whip, keeping the horses at full gallop.

After several hours, the carriage arrived at a port, and I was placed on a ship that set sail almost as soon as I was aboard. I made no attempt to escape. It was all over: my father was unavenged, Claudius had outwitted me, and I was as good as dead.





Just before dawn broke, my life seemed to become some strange dream, for the most unlikely thing happened: I was rescued by Danish pirates. They captured the ship and murdered most of the crew, but when they discovered who I was, panic seized them. Fearing that they would be hunted down by the Danish fleet, the pirates sailed back to Denmark and put me ashore at a little fishing village.

There I found lodgings and wrote letters to Horatio, and to my mother. I told her that I would return to Elsinore and right all the wrongs that had been done – though I did not tell her what those wrongs were.





The next day, I bought a horse and set off, certain that Fate had returned me to Denmark to complete my revenge. There was no more doubt in my mind – Claudius was guilty, and I would make him answer for his crime.



I was still some way from the castle when I was met by Horatio, who had ridden out to find me. There was a darkness in my friend's face, and I knew he was the bearer of ill tidings.



"My lord," he said, "the Lady Ophelia is dead. Claudius told her that you had killed her father, and the grief drove her so mad that she drowned herself."





Tears blurred my sight. What had I done to my beloved Ophelia! In another time and place, our love might have grown into happiness...

"Ophelia's brother, Laertes, has sworn to kill you for the deaths of his father and sister," Horatio went on, "but Claudius persuaded Laertes to settle his differences with you in a fencing match, in front of the whole court. I have seen the King whispering to Laertes in private, and I am sure they are plotting against you. Turn back, my lord! Escape while you can to somewhere you will be safe!"

"No, I must go to Elsinore," I told him. "My destiny awaits me there. We cannot escape our destinies, Horatio, we can only be ready for them, and I am ready."



\* \* \*

And so the ghost, Claudius, the pirates and my destiny have brought me back, to the torch-light and candles of the Great Hall at Elsinore. Courtiers and nobles chatter idly and make wagers on the outcome of the



duel. There, on the royal thrones, sit my uncle and my mother. She smiles at me and looks proud; he is anxious, and keeps glancing slyly at Laertes. Laertes is filled with a cold hatred that makes his eyes shine like moonlight on ice.





Horatio takes  
my cloak and  
hands me a  
rapier. His face is  
pale and worried.  
He leans close and  
whispers, "Have a  
care, my lord! There  
is death in Laertes' look."



I smile: death is everywhere in the castle  
of Elsinore tonight,  
and I can feel my  
father's spirit  
hovering over me.  
Claudius raises  
his right arm.  
"Let the contest  
begin!" he  
commands.

The blades of our rapiers snick and  
squeal. Our shadows, made huge and  
menacing by the torches, flicker on the  
walls as we duck and dodge. Laertes is a  
skilled swordsman, but rage and hate have  
made him clumsy. He drops his guard to  
strike at me, I flick my wrist, and the  
point of my rapier catches his arm.





One of the marshals shouts, "A hit! First hit to Prince Hamlet!"

Laertes bows, his forehead slick with sweat. "Let us take a cup of wine and catch our breath, my lord," he says.



The wine cups are on a table near the thrones.

Laertes and I step towards them, and my mother suddenly snatches up one of the cups. "A toast, to honour my beloved son!" she announces.

"No!" hisses Claudius. He reaches out as if to dash the cup from my mother's lips, but he is too late: she has drunk the wine down to the dregs.



There is just time for me to see a look of horror on Claudius's face, and then, without warning, Laertes wheels around and slashes at me with his sword. I parry the blow, realising that this is no longer a contest – I am fighting for my life.



I see Laertes' eyes, blind with fury. I watch his mouth twist itself into an ugly snarl. He clutches at me and tries to stab under my arm, but I catch the sword in my left hand and I wrench it from his grasp. A pain like fire burns against my palm, and my fingers are wet with blood.

I step back, throw Laertes my rapier and take his in my right hand. "*En garde!*" I say.





We fight on, but something is wrong. Laertes looks terrified, and his breath comes in sobs. The pain in my hand is fierce, throbbing up into my forearm – I have suffered from sword-cuts before, but none as painful as this.

Laertes lunges desperately at me, and the point of my sword scratches through his shirt; a spurt of red stains the whiteness of the linen.



Laertes reels back. "We are dead men!" he groans. "The King spread poison on the blade – the same poison that he poured into your wine cup!"



I see all now. I understand the hot agony that is creeping through my left arm and across my chest.



Laertes cries out, "The King is a murderer!" and crumples to the floor. At the same time, my mother screams and topples from her throne.



There is no time left. I must act quickly, before the pain reaches my heart. I stagger towards Claudius and he cringes in his throne, covering his face with his hands.

"Traitor!" I say, and drive the poisoned sword deep into his heart.

Voices shout...people are running. I fall back, and someone catches me. I think it is Horatio, but I cannot see him clearly, for a darkness is falling before my eyes...coming down like the snow falling, that night on the battlements...



Through the darkness, I seem to see  
a light...and my father's face...and  
everything drops away behind me...

Horatio's voice whispers, "Farewell,  
sweet Prince!"

And the rest is silence.




*There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will.*

Hamlet; V.ii.



## Task 1: p 38 - 45



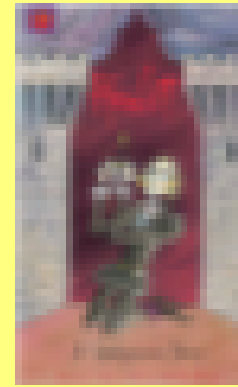
1. What is a 'port' (pg 39)?
  2. Why is 'Fate' (pg 42) written with a capital letter?
  3. Write a definition for the following words: beloved, plotting, destiny, grief
- 
4. What happens after Hamlet is bundled into the carriage?
  5. Who rescues Hamlet from the ship?
  6. Ophelia has drowned herself because she discovered that Hamlet killed her father. True or false.
  7. What has Laertes sworn to do?

## Task 1:



1. What might Hamlet be thinking and feeling in the carriage on page 38?
2. What evidence is there on pages 38 and 39 that Hamlet has given up?
3. Why don't the pirates kill Hamlet?
4. Explain Look at this quote, describing Ophelia's death: "Her clothes spread wide, And, mermaid-like awhile they bore her up, Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds, As one incapable of her own distress Or like a creature native and endued Unto that element. But long it could not be Till that her garments, heavy with their drink, Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay To muddy death..." (Act IV, Scene VII) What has happened to Ophelia? Does Ophelia struggle or put up a fight when she falls into the 'weeping brook'? What are 'old lauds'?



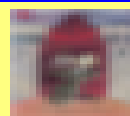



## Task 2: p38 - 45

1. Read to the end of page 41. What do you think Hamlet will do when he returns to Elsinore?
2. Who do you think will win in the fencing match?
3. Do you think Hamlet is to blame for Ophelia's death? Summarise your ideas in a paragraph.




## Task 1: p 46 - 58

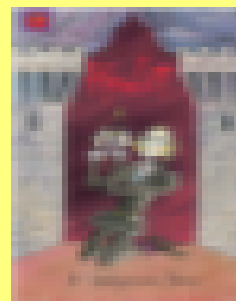


1. What does 'make wagers on the outcome of the duel (pg 47) mean?
  2. Can you find a simile on page 47? What does it mean?
  3. What is a 'rapier' (pg 48)? Which words and phrases show that Laertes is full of anger?
  4. Replace the words in bold with synonyms: Laertes looks **terrified**, and his breath comes in **sobs**.
- 
5. What has the king spread on the blades?
  6. How does Laertes die?
  7. What does Hamlet say before he kills Horatio?

## Task 1:



1. Why are Laertes's eyes full of cold hatred?
  2. What might Horatio be thinking and feeling on page 48?
  3. Why do you think Claudius knocks the wine from the queen's hand?
  4. Look at page 54. Why might the sword-cuts be so painful?
  5. Why does the queen fall from her throne?
- 
6. What does Hamlet mean when he says, 'death is everywhere in the castle' (pg 48)?
  7. How does the author create a sense of tension and excitement on page 49?
  8. Why does the author use a number of ellipses on pages 57 and 58?
  9. When Hamlet dies, Horatio says: "Now cracks a noble heart. Good night sweet prince: And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!" (Act V, Scene II)
  10. Can you explain what he means? Do you think Hamlet has a 'noble heart'?



## Task 2: p46 - 58

1. Read to the end of page 50. What do you think Laertes will do next?
2. Read to the end of page 57. What will happen to Hamlet next?
3. Task 3: What was the first thing that happened in the story? What was the last thing?
4. Gertrude is a bad wife and is blind to what is going on around her. Do you agree? Disagree?
5. The main theme in this story is madness. Do you agree? Disagree?
6. Write a summary of the most exciting part of the story.





## KEY MOMENTS

A ghost has been seen on the roof of the castle at night. Two guards and Hamlet's friend are looking out for it at midnight.

The Queen marries her dead husband's brother, Claudius, soon after he dies. Hamlet, the Queen's son, is very upset about it.

Hamlet meets the ghost of his father who tells him that it was his Uncle Claudius who killed him. The ghost asks Hamlet to take revenge.

Hamlet gets some actors who visit the castle to play the murder of his father. The actor playing Hamlet's father is asleep and he is killed by poison being poured into his ear. The new King Claudius stops the play as the actor King dies.

Hamlet goes to speak to his mother. Polonius, the King's advisor, is hiding to hear what he says. Polonius makes a noise. Hamlet thinks he is King Claudius and kills him in his hiding place through a curtain.



## Revenge in Hamlet

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare portrays a young man who has been educated to be a thinker, but who becomes a man of action, motivated by the dark force of revenge.

When Hamlet discovers from his father's ghost that the old king's death was not an accident but murder, he is torn in two. The ghost claims that the murderer is Claudius, his own brother, who has recently married Hamlet's mother. Is the ghost telling the truth, or is it a demon sent from hell to tempt the prince into an evil act? Hamlet is left confused and constantly tortured by doubt. He can't decide what to do.

In a desperate attempt to uncover the truth, Hamlet pretends to be mad. He kills Polonius by mistake, and this leads to the accidental death of

Ophelia, with whom Hamlet was once in love.

In a thrilling climax, Hamlet agrees to a fencing match with Laertes. Laertes, having lost his father and sister, is full of despair and desire for his own revenge. He fights with a poisoned sword given to him by Claudius, who suspects that Hamlet knows too much.

In Elizabethan times, this final scene of *Hamlet* would have been full of spectacularly gory visual effects. To make sword-fights seem more realistic, pigs' bladders filled with blood were hidden in the actors' costumes, and pierced with the point of a sword or dagger.

The audience would have been spellbound by the dark tale of revenge, where a prince succeeds in avenging his father's death – but at a terrible cost.



## Shakespeare and the Globe Theatre

Some of Shakespeare's most famous plays were first performed at the Globe Theatre, which was built on the South Bank of the River Thames in 1599.

Going to the Globe was a different experience from going to the theatre today. The building was roughly circular in shape, but with flat sides: a little like a doughnut crossed with a fifty-pence piece. Because the Globe was an open-air theatre, plays were only put on during daylight hours in spring and summer. People paid a penny to stand in the central space and watch a play, and this part of the audience became known as 'the groundlings' because they stood on the ground. A place in the tiers of seating beneath the thatched roof, where there was a slightly better view and less chance of being rained on, cost extra.

The Elizabethans did not bath very often and the audiences at the Globe were smelly. Fine ladies and gentlemen in the more expensive seats sniffed perfume and bags of sweetly-scented herbs to cover the stink rising from the groundlings.

There were no actresses on the stage; all the female characters in Shakespeare's plays would have been acted by boys, wearing wigs and make-up. Audiences were not well-behaved. People clapped and cheered when their favourite actors came on stage; bad actors were jeered at and sometimes pelted with whatever came to hand.

Most Londoners worked hard to make a living and in their precious free time they liked to be entertained. Shakespeare understood the magic of the theatre so well that today, almost four hundred years after his death, his plays still cast a spell over the thousands of people that go to see them.





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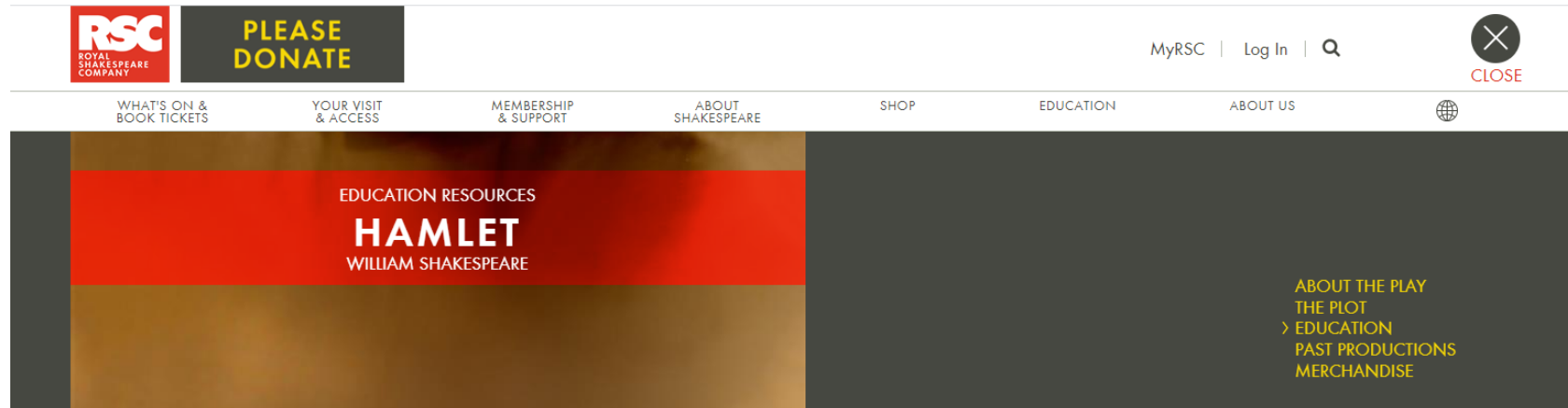
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<https://www.rsc.org.uk/hamlet/education>



*Hamlet* is a Shakespearean tragedy about a young Prince who sets out to uncover and later revenge the murder of his father, the old King, spurred on by his Father's ghost.

Hamlet is one of the biggest parts in any Shakespeare play and there are lots of opportunities to explore his choices and motivation as well as lots of themes you can use as routes into the text including:

- Corruption
- Revenge
- Appearance and Reality

You can discover more about these themes and where they appear in the text as well as others in our [Themes Resource](#).

There are so many different ways of exploring the text but you may find the following particularly useful in introducing the text:

- [Hamlet School Synopsis](#)
- [Hamlet 2016 Teacher Pack](#)
- [Hamlet 2016 Primary Teacher Pack](#)
- [Exploring Hamlet Website \(with BBC\)](#)

