

Hamlet: symbolism in yorick's skull

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



Symbol: Something that represents or suggests something else. Symbols often take the form of words, visual images, or gestures that are used to convey ideas or beliefs. A symbol is often a material object used to represent something invisible. Example: " Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath borne me on his back a thousand times. And now how abhorred in my imagination is it! My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now?" (Hamlet, William Shakespeare, page 252: line 158-165)

Function: Hamlet and Horatio venture into the graveyard and have a short conversation with the gravedigger. The grave digger holds up a skull sitting nearby and informs them that it is the skull of the king's old jester, Yorick, who Hamlet was very close too as a child. Hamlet, in the height of his depression and obsession with death, is greatly affected by the image of the skull and the symbols it represents. The skull brings back many memories of Hamlet's seemingly happy childhood, thus representing Hamlet's loss of happiness and innocence. At this time Hamlet stares death directly in the face, holding the skull with his own hands. The discovery of the skull also brings realization to everyone's eventual disintegration, and the fact that everyone in society, no matter how rich or poor, is brought down to the same level in death. Hamlet mentions that Polonius will be eaten by worms, that even kings are eaten by worms, and that dust from the decayed body of Alexander the Great might be used to stop a hole in a beer barrel. Alexander the Great couldn't avoid death, neither can Hamlet. The skull and its many symbols emphasize the death of Hamlet's father, Polonius and Ophelia,

expose the pitiful state that Hamlet has been reduced to and encourage his thoughts of suicide and revenge.