

# Play information:

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Play Information: Name: Hamlet Date Written: around 1600 Setting: Denmark in the late medieval period Who is the play Good For: 1. Good for anyone having trouble figuring things out 2. Good play for anyone who isn't having trouble figuring things out... yet Story Overview: The story of a Danish prince whose uncle murders his dad, and marries his mother and claims the throne so he takes revenge Parts Added to the Play: Shakespeare adds; Ophelia's madness and hamlets questions triggered by events FIVE ACTS: 1. beginning : ghost orders revenge 2. rising action: hamlet acts mad 3. climax: hamlet does things (puts on a play, berates his mother, kills Polonius) 4. counterstroke: events conspire against hamlet while he sails to England 5. resolution: hamlet apologizes, kills king, dies Character Information: Hamlet: Is the prince of Denmark, the title character and is the protagonist. About 30 years old at the start of the play. Hamlet is the son of Queen Gertrude and late king Hamlet, and the nephew of the present king, Claudius. Hamlet is melancholy, bitter, and cynical, full of hatred for his uncles scheming has a disgust for his mother's sexuality. A reflective and thoughtful young man who has studied at the University of Wittenberg. Hamlet is sometimes indecisive and hesitant, but at other times prone to rash and impulsive acts. Some Questions to Think About: Why should his mother remarry her dead husband's brother and why so quickly? What does the appearance of his father's ghost mean? Why has he lost his mirth? Why doesn't he kill his uncle right away? Why do women behave the way they do? Important Quotations by Hamlet: " Oh, that this too sullied flesh would melt" (1. 2. 129) upset by his mother's remarriage to his nasty uncle hamlet contemplates suicide and see the world as an " unweeded garden" " what a

piece of work is man. how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties" (2. 2. 304) - hamlet tells R and G that he is melancholy, does not exercise, the world seems diseased, however noble seem the heavens - man delights not me--no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so " oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" (2. 2. 55) - hamlet berates himself for doing nothing, even when motivated by a ghost, in comparison to the player whose emotions run away with him due to nothing but a fiction. So he plans the trap. " Speak the speech, I pray you. as I pronounced it, trippingly on the tongue"(3. 2. 1) - hamlet instructs the actors - relevant to theme of play (words, appearances, exposure of Claudius) but not to hamlets state of mind " tis now the very witching time of night"(3. 2. 387) - hamlet is in the mood for murder (having exposed Claudius's guilt) when on the way to his mother " how all occasions to inform against me"(4. 4. 33) - just as he was moved by the player to berate himself, hamlet is moved but Fortinbras to take action, even for nothing. - Yet he meditates on the difference between men and beasts (unsaid: sense of right and wrong, which makes the play so powerful) to what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander (5. 1. 204) hamlet raises issue that too much thinking is bad for anyone. (He thinks so much) Claudius: The new king of Denmark, Hamlets uncle, and the plays antagonist. The villain of the play, Claudius is a cunning, ambitious politician, driven by his sexual appetites and his lust for power, but he occasionally shows his signs of guilt and human feeling - his love for Gertrude for example, seems sincere, and his guilt is seen when he is praying for forgiveness. Gertrude: The Queen of Denmark, Hamlets mother, recently married to Claudius, Gertrude loves Hamlet

deeply, but she is a shallow, weak woman who seeks affection and status more urgently than moral rectitude or truth. Important Quotations by Gertrude: " ay, that incestuous, that adulterous beast, with witchcraft of his wit, with a traitorous gifts,- O wicked wit, and gifts that have the power so to seduce! -- won to his shameful list the will of my most seeming virtuous queen. Polonius: The Lord Chamberlain of Claudius's court, a pompous, conniving old man. Polonius is the father of Laertes and Ophelia. He likes to talk a lot, and the reader can notice that he likes to spy. Horatio: Hamlets close friend, who studied with the prince at the university in Wittenberg. Horatio is loyal and helpful to Hamlet throughout the play. After Hamlets death, Horatio remains alive to tell Hamlets story. Ophelia: Polonius's daughter, a beautiful young woman with whom Hamlet has been in love. Ophelia is a sweet and innocent young girl, who obeys her father and her brother, Laertes. Dependent on what men tell her to do and how to behave, she gives into Polonius's schemes to spy on Hamlet. Even in her lapse into madness and death, she remains maidenly, singing songs about flowers and finally drowning in the river amid with flower she had gathered. Laertes and Fortinbras are foils of Hamlet Laertes: Polonius's son and Ophelia's brother, a young man who spends much of the play in France. Passionate and quick to action, Laertes is clearly a foil for the reflective Hamlet. Fortinbras: The young prince of Norway, whose father the king (named fortinbras) was killed by Hamlets father. Now fortinbras wishes to attack Denmark o avenge his father's Honor, making him another foul for Prince Hamlet. The Ghost of King Hamlet: The specter of Hamlets recently deceased father. The ghost, who claims to have been murdered by Claudius, calls upon Hamlet to avenge

him. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: - 2 slightly bumbling courtiers, former friends of Hamlet from Wittenberg, who are summoned by Claudius and Gertrude to discover the cause of Hamlet's strange behavior. What separates Hamlet from other revenge plays is certainty. (Being certain of what will happen) - How certain are we that ghosts exist? Themes Theme of Action: Directly related to the theme of certainty is the theme of action. How is it possible to take responsible to take reasonable action? Things to think about in this theme: \* Acting recklessly \* Certainty / uncertainty \* Death \* Aftermath of death Theme of Certainty: Hamlet waits to be certain then acts if anything happens. Ex: Hamlet does not act when the ghost tells him that his uncle killed his father. The only reason why Hamlet did not act is because he wants to be certain. How important is it to be certain? Questions to think about: do we have certainty that there was a ghost?