

The Tragedy of *Hamlet*

Student Worksheet

Warmer – The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

Read this text with a partner and discuss the questions.

Imagine that you are the prince of Denmark. Your father, the king, has recently died. His brother, your uncle, has just married your mother. It's been a very difficult time for you. Then, one night, the ghost of your father appears to you. He tells you that your uncle has murdered him and married your mother. You don't know if the ghost is telling the truth. If he is, could your mother have helped in the murder too? After all, she did marry your uncle soon after the death of your father. You're also concerned that if you tell anyone about the ghost, people will think you have gone mad.

What would you do? Would you ...

- a) call the police and tell them about the ghost?
- b) tell your mother about the ghost?
- c) speak to your uncle and accuse him of the murder?
- d) murder your uncle?
- e) do something completely different?



Task 1 – Hamlet: the characters

Shakespeare and tragedy. Shakespeare wrote many unhappy plays called tragedies. They usually deal with tragic events and have an unhappy ending, often the downfall of the main character. Hamlet is perhaps Shakespeare's most famous tragedy, and is one of his most

Read this text about the characters from Hamlet.

The new King of Denmark is called **Claudius**, and his queen is **Gertrude**. Claudius's brother, who was also the king, has died, leaving a son, a man called **Hamlet**. Claudius is a cruel king who has spies all over his castle. One of these spies is **Polonius**. Claudius worries about his nephew, Hamlet, especially when he hears that Hamlet has seen **the ghost** of the dead king. The king's spy, Polonius, also has a daughter called **Ophelia**, who is Hamlet's girlfriend. Ophelia's brother **Laertes** and her father



Hamlet (played by Laurence Olivier) fights with Laertes (Terence Morgan) in the 1948 film of *Hamlet*

Write the characters' names (in **bold** in the bottom text on page 1) next to descriptions a–g.

- a) the spirit of Hamlet's dead father the ghost
- b) the prince of Denmark
- c) Polonius's daughter (Hamlet wants to marry her)
- d) Hamlet's uncle. The ghost claims he murdered the king.
- e) a member of the court. He spies on Hamlet.
- f) Hamlet's mother and the queen
- g) Polonius's son. He hates Hamlet and wants to kill him.

Task 2 – vocabulary

Match these important words from the story of Hamlet to the definitions.

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 1. guilty | a. kill yourself |
| 2. commit suicide | b. a person who watches someone else to find out secrets about them |
| 3. poison | c. when you have committed a crime |
| 4. sword | d. a weapon people used to fight |
| 5. stab someone | e. a liquid that can kill if it gets inside your body |
| 6. a spy | f. hit someone with a knife or sword |

Task 3 – listening and ordering the plot summary

Read these sentences about the plot of Hamlet. Can you put them in order?

- a. Hamlet is sent away to England.
- b. Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, drinks from Hamlet's poison cup. She dies.
- c. Hamlet's uncle, Claudius, marries Hamlet's mother and becomes the king of Denmark.
(1)
- d. Hamlet pretends to be 'mad' so he can find out if his father was killed by his uncle.
- e. Hamlet's girlfriend Ophelia kills herself.
- f. Hamlet kills Claudius and then dies from his wounds.
- g. Hamlet puts on a play where a king is killed by his brother.
- h. Hamlet accidentally kills the clerk of the court, Polonius.
- i. Laertes dies in a fight with Hamlet.
- j. Hamlet is told by a ghost that his father was murdered.



Now listen to the summary of the plot and check your answers.

Task 4 – listening to the plot summary and taking notes

Split into groups of three and listen to the plot of Hamlet again. As you listen this time you are going to take notes on a different aspect of the story.

Sadness and depression. What makes Hamlet sad or depressed?	Depression and madness. Apart from Hamlet, who is depressed or mad in the play and why?	Conflicts between characters. Who fights with whom, and why?

Task 5 – using your notes

Share your notes from Task 4 to complete the sentences.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Hamlet is depressed ... | a. Claudius did kill his father. |
| 2. Hamlet finds out that ... | b. the actors and Hamlet for the play. |
| 3. Polonius is unhappy ... | c. to avenge his father's death. |
| 4. Claudius is angry with ... | d. due to the death of his father. |
| 5. Hamlet fights with Claudius ... | e. after he finds out the truth about his father's murder. |
| 6. Laertes fights with Hamlet ... | f. because his daughter is in love with Hamlet. |
| 7. The ghost is angry with Hamlet ... | g. over her marriage to Claudius. |
| 8. Hamlet fights with his mother ... | h. for not killing Claudius. |

Task 6 – discussion

Discuss these questions.

- Do you think Prince Hamlet does the right things? Does he deserve our sympathy?
- Hamlet* is arguably Shakespeare's most popular and famous play. Why do you think audiences like it so much?
- Is it ever acceptable to kill someone?