Hamlet: Unit Overview

ENG4U, Grade 12 English (University), Unit 2. 16 classes of 75 minutes (about three and a half weeks).

The big question

What stops us from acting, and what does it cost us when we wait?

Students read Shakespeare's Hamlet (public domain, complete Reading Edition included) act by act, keeping a “Denmark case file” of who knows what and when. Lessons move between close reading of the soliloquies, performance and debate: a ghost tribunal, an “Is Hamlet mad?” evidence board, three stagings of the nunnery scene, a soliloquy remix, the Mousetrap staged from three viewpoints, Ophelia's missing scenes, a graveyard memento mori and a “who is to blame?” inquiry. Students then read four centuries of criticism (Goethe, Coleridge, Bradley, Eliot and later lenses), compare film interpretations, and finish with a soliloquy showcase and a literary essay that responds to a critic.

Lessons

#	Lesson	Classes	Question	Expectations	What's inside
1	**Something Is Rotten**	1	Who's there?	R 1.1, R 2.1, OC 1.4	Revenge tragedy; cast; staging 1.1; case file
2	**Too, Too Solid Flesh**	1	What do public and private language hide?	R 1.4, R 2.3, OC 1.7	Claudius's spin; first soliloquy; press release
3	**Advice and Warnings**	1	Why is Ophelia given orders, not advice?	R 1.8, R 1.5, W 2.2	Advice audit; Ophelia's monologue
4	**The Ghost's Command**	1	Can Hamlet trust the Ghost?	R 1.4, R 1.6, OC 2.1	Ghost tribunal; antic disposition
5	**Is Hamlet Mad?**	1	Acting, real or both?	R 1.3, R 1.4, OC 1.5	Evidence board; wordplay decoder
6	**The Play's the Thing**	1	How does Hamlet argue with himself?	R 1.6, R 2.3, OC 1.3	Friends or spies; second soliloquy; the plan
7	**To Be or Not to Be**	1	Why do we endure?	R 1.2, R 2.3, OC 1.5	Paraphrase ladder; two performances; remix
8	**Get Thee to a Nunnery**	1	How does staging change Hamlet?	R 1.8, OC 2.5, OC 2.6	Three stagings; Ophelia's soliloquy
9	**The Mousetrap**	1	Can a fiction expose the truth?	R 1.6, OC 1.9, R 2.1	Advice to the players; reaction tracker
10	**Now Might I Do It**	1	Is Hamlet's problem thinking?	R 1.4, R 1.7, W 1.3	Prayer and closet scenes; two scenes, one question

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11	**How All Occasions**	1	What is a man of action?	R 1.6, R 2.3, W 2.1	Worms and kings; Fortinbras; foil paragraph
12	**Ophelia's Madness**	1	What does Ophelia finally say?	R 1.8, R 1.4, W 2.2	Language of flowers; the willow; missing scene
13	**Alas, Poor Yorick**	1	Why laugh in a graveyard?	R 1.5, R 2.3, OC 2.3	Gravediggers; Yorick; memento mori
14	**The Readiness Is All**	1	Who is to blame?	R 1.3, R 1.7, OC 1.6	The duel; chain of deaths; blame inquiry
15	**Hamlet and the Critics**	1	How do we join the conversation?	R 1.8, W 1.3, M 2.1	Critics' jigsaw; Hamlets on film; thesis
16	**Soliloquy Showcase**	1	What does performing reveal?	OC 2.3, OC 2.5, OC 2.6	Performances and commentaries (summative)

Assessment

Type	In this unit
Assessment for learning	Case file, spin doctor, advice audit, ghost tribunal, evidence board, soliloquy turns, paraphrase ladder, three stagings, reaction tracker, foil paragraph, missing scene, blame inquiry, thesis builder
Assessment as learning	Peer performance notes, staging feedback, unit reflection
Assessment of learning	Soliloquy performance with director's commentary (Lesson 16) and a literary essay responding to a critic, with rubrics in the Summative Tasks file

Texts

Included in the Start Here folder:

- **Hamlet Reading Edition:** the complete play (public domain), formatted for class
- **Hamlet Companion:** characters, plain-language summaries of all twenty scenes, sixteen key passages, a guide to the critics and MLA examples
- **Critical sources:** short public domain quotations from A. C. Bradley (1904, quoting Goethe and Coleridge) and T. S. Eliot (1919), plus original summaries of later criticism

Hamlet deals with grief, suicide, murder and madness, and contains misogynist language. Lessons 7 and 12 include care routines and support resources (Kids Help Phone; the 9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline). Students study Hamlet's argument in “To be, or not to be” and are never asked to write personally about wanting to die. Film clips should come from versions licensed through your school or board.

What's in each lesson

- Teacher lesson plan with expectations, timed sequence, differentiation, look-fors and answer guides

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- Slides with speaker notes
- Student handouts and organizers
- Editable Word and PowerPoint files, plus PDFs

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