



# Heart of America Shakespeare Festival

3619 Broadway, Suite 2, Kansas City, MO, 64111. phone: 816-531-7728. fax: 816-531-1911 [www.kcshakes.org](http://www.kcshakes.org)

## The Play's the Thing! Hamlet

### Teacher guide

#### Shakespeare in Education

At the Heart of America Shakespeare Festival we present education programs that nurture an early appreciation for the art of theatre and the work of William Shakespeare. We teach Shakespeare through performance in order to enhance understanding of language arts, Renaissance history and theatre performance. Hamlet is filled with dynamic, famous quotes. Students will explore the rich language of the play to enhance their classroom study of one of William Shakespeare's most famous plays.

Grades: 7-12

"To be or not to be,  
that is the question."  
Hamlet

"Something is rotten in the state of  
Denmark." Marcellus

#### Pre-Class Activities

##### Famous Quotes

- Identify the most famous quotes in the play.
- Discuss the meaning of the quote and make a list of them for the workshop.

##### Characters in the play

- Make a list of the characters in the play.
- Assign each student or a small group of students a character and give them a few traits for the character. Have students create a photo and word collage for the character. Here are some suggestions for the characters.
  - Hamlet: sad, questioning, determined, learned
  - Ophelia: strong, kind, loving, overwhelmed
  - Gertrude: stoic, strong, cold
  - Claudius: power hungry, demanding
  - Polonius: talkative, not wise, follower
  - Laertes: hot-headed, fighter, brash
  - Horatio: thoughtful, intelligent, loyal
  - Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: friendly, outgoing, follow orders
  - Ghost of Hamlet: warning, tormented, beseeching
- As a group, present each character and create a chart showing the relationships between the characters by posting the collages on the white board or sheet of paper so the connections can be drawn between the characters.

## **Post-Class/Post-Reading Activities**

### Character Totems

- Assign each student a character or characters from the play (or let them choose)
- Have them write down their impressions of the characters.
- Ask each student to select an item that represents the character to them. (It should be small and not a weapon)
- On a piece of paper the student should describe the object and how it relates to the character. The student should then pick two quotations from the play that reinforce his or her selection of the object.
- Have each student present objects to the class.

### **Questions for Discussion**

- What is the subject of Hamlet's second soliloquy, the famous "To be or not to be" speech?
- Why is he so cruel to Ophelia immediately thereafter?
- What happens in the "play-within-a-play"? How do the speeches and actions reflect on events in the kingdom of Denmark? How does the king respond?
- Is Hamlet really mad in this play, or is merely pretending to be mad? (Find lines that support your answer.)
- A foil is a character who is like the protagonist in some respects but who has contrasting qualities that "reflect" or illuminate the traits of the main character. Who are Hamlet's foils, and in what ways do their characters shed light on his?
- Why is Ophelia mad? Does anything she says make sense? What happens to her at the end of Act IV?
- Look at the scene with Laertes and Claudius (IV.vii). What plans do they have for Hamlet? How does this scene establish Laertes as a foil for Hamlet?
- Who is alive at the end of the play, and how do the others meet their ends?

### **Online Resources**

[www.kcshakes.org](http://www.kcshakes.org)

[artsedge.kennedy-center.org](http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org)

[www.nosweatshakespeare.edu](http://www.nosweatshakespeare.edu)

[nfs.sparknotes.com](http://nfs.sparknotes.com)

pre and post class activities from the Utah Shakespearean Festival: [www.bard.org](http://www.bard.org)

[www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu)- Totem activity found here

<http://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/hamletques.htm>- Discussion questions found here

For further questions or activities contact Director of Education for HASF: 816-531-7728