

Shakespeare and Film: How Hamlet Speaks to Teenagers

Gretchen Kay Lutz
Cesar E. Chavez High School

INTRODUCTION

Imagine that you are away at college, having a great time, no money worries, no big family worries, just you and your best friend Horatio. Suddenly you get word that your father has died, utterly unexpectedly. By the time you get home for the funeral, your mother has remarried, and the man she has married is your uncle, a man you cannot stand. If you can put yourself in this situation, then *Hamlet* is for you—or at least that is what I tell my students by way of introduction to Shakespeare’s play.

Interestingly, that adolescent nature of the character Hamlet is something that my college classes have deplored. When the gravedigger reveals that Hamlet is thirty years old, frequently my students at the open-admissions college have been outraged. How could someone be that immature at age thirty? Perhaps Hamlet simply has never been called upon to face adult problems and responsibilities. Yet the apparent youth of Hamlet gives me a “hook” to use when presenting the play at the high school level.

Hamlet speaks especially to problems often faced by teenagers: How do you live up to your parents’ expectations? How do you deal with being dumped by a girlfriend or boyfriend? How do you cope with having a new stepparent? How do you go on living when you are so depressed you think of suicide? Is it right to get even when you have been wronged? What is your obligation to your family? How do you deal with the death of a family member? And even, what are you going to be when you grow up?

THE PLOT

Hamlet opens with guards on the parapets discussing recent political events. Now that King Hamlet is dead and has been replaced by his brother, young Fortinbras of Norway threatens to take back land that the late king won in battle from old Fortinbras. The officers, Marcellus and Bernardo, have seen an apparition in the form of King Hamlet who has recently died. They are now accompanied by Prince Hamlet’s best friend, Horatio, who also sees the ghost.

In the next scene in a room of state in the castle, we meet Prince Hamlet, who is still in mourning for his father. His mother, Gertrude, encourages him to cheer up, telling him that to mourn so hard and long is against nature. He answers his mother sarcastically, saying that his mourning is genuine. Hamlet has come home from college in Wittenberg, home of Protestant intellectual movements. The new king, Hamlet’s uncle Claudius, prevails on Hamlet not to go back to school but to stay in Denmark. In contrast, King Claudius grants permission to Lord Chamberlain Polonius’ son Laertes to go back to his studies in Paris, a Catholic stronghold. Claudius’ action of hearing and granting Laertes’ request can be seen as an insult to Hamlet, inasmuch as Laertes is not of the rank of Hamlet and deserves less consideration. Hamlet, in soliloquy, wishes that he could simply disappear, die without any consequences. He regrets that God has set “His canon ‘gainst self-slaughter.”

In the next scene, we see Ophelia, Hamlet's beloved and daughter to Polonius, being cautioned by her brother Laertes to avoid the suit of Hamlet. Laertes tells his sister that Hamlet is not to be trusted. Polonius joins to also tell his daughter to stop seeing Hamlet.

Meanwhile, Horatio has told Hamlet about the ghost of Hamlet's father. Hamlet joins Horatio and the officers on the platform of the castle, where the ghost confronts his son. He tells Hamlet that Hamlet's suspicions are justified; Claudius has killed his brother, the king, by pouring poison into the king's ear as he lay napping in the garden. Now King Hamlet, sent to his death without the last rites, must wander the earth at night and endure torturous fires during the day. The ghost of King Hamlet charges his son with avenging his murder. Act I ends with Hamlet's saying, "The time is out of joint. Oh, cursed spite/That ever I was born to set it right!"

Act II begins in the home of Polonius, where Polonius is paying Reynaldo to follow his son Laertes to Paris to spy on the young man, sending back reports to his father. Ophelia reports to her father that Hamlet has come to her, disheveled and distraught, acting mad. Polonius is not the only one sending spies. King Claudius summons friends of Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to find out why Hamlet is acting so strange, why he has "an antic disposition." Hamlet tells his friends that he is merely pretending to be mad, but his behavior is so remarkable that he does not convince them that he is sane. Telling his friends that nothing in life pleases him, least of all man, Hamlet is heartened by the arrival of a company of actors. After watching one of the actors produce real tears as he recites a part, Hamlet chides himself for not moving quickly to avenge his father. He is not absolutely sure the ghost is to be trusted. He may be a demon sent to take Hamlet's soul. Hamlet devises to test the veracity of the ghost by having the players perform a scene similar to the murder of King Hamlet. Hamlet will watch to see how his uncle Claudius reacts to the depiction of his crime.

At the beginning of Act III, Claudius and Polonius plot against Hamlet, arranging for Ophelia to visit Hamlet while Polonius hides to overhear. Hamlet, still, thinking of suicide, makes his famous "to be or not to be" speech, ending by saying that despite all reasons to act, he simply cannot. His soliloquy is ended with the entrance of Ophelia, whom Hamlet has not seen since her father commanded her to stay away. Ophelia returns Hamlet's love tokens. Hamlet claims he never gave her anything, that she would be well off to go to a nunnery, a real one or the bawdy meaning, a house of prostitution, because in the world where they now live, all that is left for her is to become a breeder of sinners. Ophelia goes away convinced that Hamlet is mad.

In the next scene, Hamlet's play "The Mousetrap," causes Claudius to break up the gathering, thereby convincing Hamlet that Claudius is indeed guilty of the murder. Following the play, Hamlet has an opportunity to kill Claudius while he is praying in the chapel, yet Hamlet does not kill, saying that he wishes to send Claudius to the next life while all his sins are on his head. Hamlet then goes to confront his mother with what he knows. Because the ghost appears to Hamlet to stop him from harming his mother, Gertrude becomes convinced that Hamlet is seeing things and is quite mad. Polonius, hiding behind the curtains, makes a noise. Hamlet, believing Polonius to be Claudius, stabs through the curtains, killing Polonius.

Act IV begins with Claudius's arranging for Guildenstern and Rosencrantz to take Hamlet to England, ostensibly to avoid repercussions over the death of Polonius. Claudius, however, sends a request to the King of England that he kill Hamlet. As Hamlet waits to board the ship for England, he sees the forces of Fortinbras. He declares that here a man willing to go to their death for nothing really, for "a trick of fame," while he has great cause to act, yet he does not.

Made mad by the death of her father, Ophelia comes to Gertrude, distributing flowers to all the company there and singing a bawdy song about a maid who is no longer a maid. Later, word comes that Ophelia has died by drowning herself.

Outraged by the deaths of his father and sister, Laertes comes seeking revenge. Claudius, however, convinces Laertes to kill Hamlet by trickery. Word has come that Hamlet is on his way back home to Denmark. With Hamlet back, Claudius devises a fencing match between Laertes and Hamlet. He plots with Laertes to treat Laertes' foil with a poison to kill Hamlet. Laertes is mollified by this plan.

Act V opens in the graveyard, where a comic gravedigger is preparing Ophelia's grave. He comments that if Ophelia were of lower status, she would not be buried in sanctified soil. Hamlet and Horatio happen along, and Hamlet, still focusing on what it means to "not be," examines the skull of his old friend Yorick, the clown. When Hamlet hears Laertes lamenting the death of his sister, Hamlet confronts him, vowing that he has loved Ophelia more than "forty thousand brothers."

Following the scene in the churchyard, Hamlet and Horatio talk. Horatio cautions that if anything about the fencing match appears dangerous, he should avoid it. Hamlet replies philosophically. Throughout the play he has considered the meaning of death. He says to Horatio, "If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all." If Hamlet's time has come, he will face it.

At the fencing match, the foils get mixed so that both Laertes and Hamlet are mortally wounded. What is more, the Queen drinks a poisonous drink that Claudius has prepared for Hamlet. Finally, Laertes, with his dying breath says that the king is to blame. Hamlet runs the king through, killing him. Just as the royal house of Denmark has destroyed itself, young Fortinbras of Norway and his troops appear to take over the kingdom.

THE STUDY OF HAMLET

My curriculum unit will employ film versions of *Hamlet* so that students can see how the different presentations of the character of Hamlet answer the questions posed at the end of my introduction. The unit will be designed for regular twelfth grade English and also for Advance Placement Literature and Composition. The Advance Placement students will write AP-type questions about Hamlet and will write a documented literary analysis. The regular English IV students will study the play but will rely more of the film versions to produce their compositions, which will focus on comparison and contrast techniques.

The multitude of film versions of *Hamlet* offers a wealth of possibilities for students. Starting back as far as 1900, *Hamlet* has been the subject of or source for forty-six films, ranging from Sarah Bernhardt's portrayal of the protagonist to Steve Martin's appropriation of the Grave Digger's scene in *LA Story*. I will show students how Hamlet has influenced popular movies, such as *The Lion King*, *The X-Files*, *Star Trek VI*, and Schwarzenegger's *Last Action Hero*. Finally, students will see how *Hamlet* is translated to their own times in the 2000 Almereyda productions set in twenty-first century New York. As students read the play, we will rely on the BBC Derek Jacobi *Hamlet* as a base text. It is interesting to note that Kenneth Branagh's interest in Shakespeare began by his seeing Jacobi play Hamlet (Branagh xii). Though low-budget, the BBC presentation includes the entire text and gives a fairly straight-forward interpretation of the play. Then, using other versions, notably Laurence Olivier's Freudian *Hamlet*, Mel Gibson's action hero *Hamlet*, Kenneth Branagh's high-budget *Hamlet* and Ethan Hawke's post-modern 'meta-elctronical' *Hamlet*, (Rothwell 256), I will show them how different productions have interpreted the same scene. To answer the question of what do you do when your girlfriend dumps you, I will show scenes with Hamlet and Ophelia, notably the "get thee to a nunnery" speech, Hamlet's suggestive words to Ophelia at the play, and then the duel of words between Hamlet and Laertes in Ophelia's grave.

The question of how do you live up to your parents' expectations runs throughout the play, notably in the scenes with the ghost, culminating in Hamlet's decision to act because "the readiness is all." I will show five or six directors' interpretations of these scenes, letting the students compare and contrast the various treatments. The question of how do you deal with having a step-parent brings in the whole question of one's parents' sexuality, a topic few teens are comfortable confronting, but one which can be addressed through Hamlet as he seems fixated on Gertrude's "incestuous sheets." Students will view several film versions of the closet scene in which Hamlet confronts his mother with her apparent complicity in the murder of his father.

The issue of suicide—or more precisely the issue of what to do when one's family seems to betray one—is addressed particularly in the "To be, or not to be speech." I will show several versions, allowing students to consider the settings the directors have chosen for what is probably the most famous speech in English. I am thinking particularly of Mel Gibson's delivery in the family crypt, an apt place for one to consider what it is to "not be."

Although we may not like to think so, revenge is an issue teens face. Various scenes showing Hamlet's desire yet delay in avenging his father's death will speak to this question. I expect students to be especially interested in how the ghost is presented and how Hamlet responds to it. Students are often aware of their responsibility to uphold the family's honor. *Hamlet* addresses the issue of how far one should go toward fulfilling his parents' wishes.

In examining the same scene as presented by several different film versions, I will also consider the Elizabethan world view in contrast to our own. I will explain the Great Chain of Being in which God has ordained the roles that people play on earth. A king has the responsibility to rule. When he refuses to live up to his responsibility, as in *Richard II*, chaos ensues. Likewise, if someone who is not the ordained king takes the throne, as in *Macbeth*, chaos also results until the rightful king takes control. The responsibility of the rightful king is demonstrated in the final act of *Hamlet*, allowing for the rather anticlimactic arrival of Fortinbras to be king after Hamlet has been killed. I will ask the students to consider how Hamlet speaks to our times as presented in the Ethan Hawke portrayal.

For Hamlet the question of what to become when he grows up is problematic. He is not ready to take over the kingdom. "The time is out of joint." Yet it is his "cursed spite" to set it right. After struggling with his reluctance to take over Denmark—which will mean avenging his father—he finally decides the readiness is all. Being or not being will not matter to one who is ready to face whatever comes. From my curriculum unit, which will take three to four weeks, students will examine how Hamlet answers the questions that are both his and theirs by seeing how various directors have fashioned Hamlet's answers.

WHO'S THERE?

Hamlet opens with commoners giving voice to one of the major questions of the play, as Bernardo asks, "Who's there?" That question is one the whole play asks, who is someone, really? Can he be trusted? What is his motive? Whose side is he on? Students often ask themselves questions of personal identity as they try to determine who is to be trusted, what is the true identity of a person, or even what is really going on. Although he does not read this line, Bernardo in the *Almeryda* film is a security guard, a common person who is confronted by the ghost of the former CEO of Denmark, Inc. The regular people must face what a change of management means to them. The new CEO, Claudius, looks like a movie star, has all the soothing talk, but is he to be trusted?

Hamlet has been leading an apparently idyllic life away at college, not involved in the intrigues at home. When he is called home, his normal world, where Mom and Dad love each other and will live long and be in charge, has disappeared. He must make his way among the

older generation, none of whom are to be trusted. He is thrust into the adult role, but he resists, saying, “The time is out of joint. Oh, cursed spite/That ever I was born to set it right!” (I.iv.189-90).

The thing that galls Hamlet the most, though, is his sense of betrayal by his mother. He thought his mother was true to him and to his father, but now he is not sure “who’s there.” Gertrude, Queen of Denmark, has married her husband’s brother, Claudius, someone Hamlet believes to be far inferior to his father. I will tell the students that Henry VIII married his brother’s wife as well. Hamlet suspects his uncle Claudius of foul play, and his suspicions are confirmed by the ghost of his father, who assigns Hamlet the responsibility of avenging his murder. Hamlet is torn between wanting to be loyal to his father and carry out the ghost’s bidding and wanting to please his mother. In both the Mel Gibson and Almereyda versions, Gertrude seems quite smitten with Claudius. It seems the royal couple cannot keep their hands off each other, a circumstance that upsets Hamlet. No young person wants to think of his mother as a sexual being, as students will agree, whether they admit their squeamishness or not.

HOW DO YOU LIVE UP TO YOUR PARENTS’ EXPECTATIONS?

Hamlet is confronted by the ghost of his father, who expects him to exact revenge, but he is also confronted by his mother, who wants him to get over the death of Hamlet, Sr. Gertrude tells Hamlet, “Cast thy knighted color off/And let thine eye look like a friend of Denmark” (I.ii.68-69). Hamlet is confronted with conflicting loyalties: He wants to be true to his mother, but she has betrayed the memory of his father by marrying too soon—not to mention marrying the wrong man. Gertrude implies that the tranquility of the state is connected to Hamlet’s accepting her marriage, but Hamlet, even before he hears from the ghost, believes that accepting the marriage to Claudius would make him disloyal to his dead father. He cannot win. He cannot please both parents. He cannot be the dutiful son. He must decide which parent is “right” in order to choose which side to take. And that is problematic. One parent wants him to accept a stepfather whom he finds repugnant, and the other parent wants him to commit a revenge murder. Hamlet longs for those days before the “time [was] out of joint.”

Students will explore the nature of the ghost, whether he is an “honest ghost” or a demonic power intent on damning Hamlet’s soul. We will see the very Freudian ghost in Laurence Oliver’s movie, where one is never sure the ghost is not all in Hamlet’s head, to Ethan Hawke’s ghost, where the ghost is a corporeal being who embraces Hamlet and runs his/its fingers through his hair. Hawke’s Hamlet recites the lines doubting the ghost, but the audience is made to believe the ghost through the corporeal appearance, showing up once at the apartment of Horatio, an addition to the original version.

Hamlet is not the only one who is faced with trying to please his family. Ophelia is confronted by both her father and her brother, who counsel her that Hamlet is not to be trusted, that he is interested only in her “chaste treasure,” that he is out of Ophelia’s star and must marry according to the needs of the state and not his own desires. Ophelia, after kidding her brother about taking his own advice, agrees to stop seeing Hamlet. In the meantime, Hamlet has decided to act mad so that he can plot revenge. He goes to Ophelia privately, knowing that she will tell her father that he is acting crazy.

Yet it is Ophelia herself who goes mad. In the BBC version, an angry, sarcastic Ophelia distributes her flowers, rue, pansies, and the like, telling the recipient off as she explains the meaning of each flower. Mel Gibson’s innocent Ophelia has gone quite mad, yet she sits with her feet up in the queen’s throne, indicating that the sane Ophelia saw herself becoming queen. The Almereyda Ophelia translates well into the twenty-first century, as she presents Polaroid photographs of flowers to Gertrude and Claudius. The moment between the mad Julia Stile’s Ophelia and her brother Laertes is especially touching. Later, the poignancy is made greater by

the dead Ophelia's being fished out of the fountain by a security guard, reminding the audience of the connection of the common people with the mighty in repetition of the guards' knowing before anyone else that "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark." I will have students investigate the symbology, the meaning, of each flower that Ophelia hands out.

Hamlet tries to rely on his girlfriend, Ophelia, but Ophelia is convinced by her father, Polonius, and her brother, Laertes, to be the obedient daughter, thereby forsaking Hamlet, yet being dutifully obedient is Ophelia's undoing. Students will be able to bring their own family situations to the question of what it means to be a dutiful child. Where does Shakespeare stand? In the AP classes, I will bring in *Othello* to contrast the obedient daughter Ophelia with the disobedient daughter Desdemona. Considering that both characters die as a result of their decisions to obey or not to obey, what lesson, if any, does Shakespeare wish the viewer to take away?

HOW DO YOU GO ON LIVING WHEN YOU ARE SO DEPRESSED YOU THINK OF SUICIDE?

Students will meet the "To be or not to be" speech first through the Jacobi reading, done on a simple stage. We will do a close reading of the text so that the students understand. Then we will look at other versions. In the Mel Gibson version, students will see how the mise en scene, the setting in the family crypt, contributes to meaning. In the Olivier speech students will see a Hamlet that agonizes overtly. In the Ethan Hawke, students will see how the theme of suicide is linked to Hamlet's delay. Hamlet keeps repeating to himself in voice over "To be or not to be," as he walks through a video store through racks and racks of videos marked "Action," suggesting that Hamlet is merely an observer, unable to act himself.

Finally, Hamlet decides to act, but to act indirectly. He will test the honesty of the ghost through the play, "The Mousetrap." At this point, I will have the students discuss how they will have Claudius react to the play within a play. We will note in particular Patrick Stewart's response in the BBC *Hamlet*. Unlike the typical Claudius, who panics—"frighted with false fire"—Stewart asks that the light be brought to him. He holds to torch up to Hamlet as if to say, "I know what you think you know, but it does not matter; I am in charge." Then students will see the Ethan Hawke video version of "The Mousetrap," noting especially Gertrude's reaction, which is more one of guilt than the panicky response demonstrated by Claudius. It will be interesting to note whether the students will see resorting to art is a healthy alternative to thoughts of "self slaughter." If the class is especially mature, I may have them write a storyboard for a video they would show their parents if they wanted to communicate their displeasure with the parents' behavior.

Students will also consider the value of communicating directly with parents. To conclude the scenes on suicide, we will view a number of versions of Act V, scene ii, where Hamlet says to Horatio: "If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. Since no man has aught of what he leaves, what is it to leave betimes? Let be." Students will see that Hamlet has come out of his depression, deciding, rather fatalistically, to live. In the AP classes, students will learn the theory of the four humours, the belief that one's mental make-up was caused by a preponderance of fluid, or humour, determined by one's Zodiac sign. Hamlet is possessed of too much of the humour melancholy, consistent with his Capricorn birth, giving him a depressive personality.

IS IT RIGHT TO TAKE REVENGE?

On the issue of revenge, I will let the students know that Shakespeare was working in a tradition of revenge plays. Students will think over the movies they have seen to realize that the theme of revenge still sells. But does Hamlet do the right thing? What are his motives?

Ostensibly, he is avenging the murder of his father, but does he have the right to do so? Students will see the Olivier Hamlet, who is conflicted with his Oedipal feelings for his mother. Then they will see the Mel Gibson and the Ethan Hawke Hamlets, who are more in the revenge tradition. Students will consider whether it is right—or wise—to take the law into one’s own hands, even when family honor is at stake.

While students are viewing the films, they will also be learning comparison-contrast techniques. After students have demonstrated a familiarity with the content of the play, they will be introduced to (or reminded of) comparison-contrast constructs, through the use of graphic organizers, such as the Venn diagram, the outline, and others. Students will be told that each of them is required to produce a comparison-contrast essay of at least five solid paragraphs, following the A then B pattern or the Point by Point pattern. In addition, each student will participate as part of a literary circle in a project in which each of them will have designated responsibilities. For the AP classes, students will incorporate documented research sources into both their individual essays and into a group project. In addition to comparison-contrast essays, students will make posters of key scenes.

Working in groups, students will also set key scenes into contemporary language and will act out the scenes for the class. Also working in groups, students will perform peer editing. Students will provide copies of their paper for each group member. Then each student will read his or her paper aloud while the group marks his or her paper. After the reading, each group member will be required to give both accolades and suggestions for improvement. Finally, students will complete a rubric checklist for each paper. Students will then bring in polished, finished papers to turn in at the beginning of the next class.

After the papers are complete, students will view selected scenes from two video versions of the play. Then students will form up in their groups again to defend their group’s choice for the more compelling version of that groups designated scene.

Finally, students will write a one-page evaluation of the unit, evaluating their own contributions and making suggestions for fine-tuning the assignment to be used by future classes.

IMPLEMENTATION

I will introduce the play *Hamlet* by asking students to imagine they are away at school when they get word that their father has died, quite unexpectedly. I will tell them that they soon learn that their mother has married their uncle, a man whom they cannot stand. I will ask them to write what they are thinking on the trip home for the funeral. Then I will tell them the plot, using excerpt from Charles and Mary Lamb’s prose version of *Hamlet*. Next we will read the play scene by scene, first watching the Derek Jacobi BBC performance and then going over the text, translating key passages.

After reading Act I, we will take a virtual tour of the Globe. Then we will read Act II, following the procedure of watching the Jacobi performance and studying the text scene by scene. After reading Act II, we will go to the library to investigate Shakespeare’s life. Students will find events in Shakespeare’s life that are reflected in the play.

Before reading Act III, students will examine the questions that they share with the character Hamlet. Students will write down the questions that Hamlet has and then will write in their journals their own answers to the same questions as they apply to their lives. The questions are as follows: How do you live up to your parent’s expectations? How do you deal with being dumped by a girlfriend or boyfriend? How do you cope with having a new step-parent? How do you go on living when you are so depressed you think of suicide? Is it right to get even when you have been wronged? What is your obligation to your family? How do you deal with the death of a family member? What are you going to be when you grow up?

The class will continue viewing the Jacobi performance scene by scene and studying the text. When the class has finished the play, the students will work in groups of four or five, locating the passages that help answer Hamlet's key questions. The groups will each be given a film version of the play to watch. Then they will show the class scenes that they believe illustrate answers to the questions. The groups will suggest what they believe to be Shakespeare's answer to the questions. Using a fact sheet about Elizabethan England, students will speculate on how that culture would answer the questions and present their findings to the class. Students will then go to the library to research the four humours, with each student finding his own humour according to his or her birthday. Then students will write a short paper explaining how they do or do not fit the profile for them suggested by their respective humours.

After the groups have made their presentations, the entire class will view the Ethan Hawke *Hamlet*. Students will discuss how setting the play in the twenty-first century adds to or detracts from the effect. Then students will vote on whose performance of *Hamlet* is the most compelling.

Borrowing some ideas from my Chavez High School colleague, Ashley Ray, during the study, I will have students memorize speeches of ten lines and present the speech to the class, telling why they chose that particular speech. Then they will write an analysis of the speech, using at least three quotations showing what we learn about the character that made the speech.

At approximately the midpoint on the study after Act III, students will write a character diary entry for the character of their choice, telling what events happened to that character and how the character found out about them, and how he or she reacted to those events. Students will also do an online study called "Will's Words," playing games with terms coined by Shakespeare.

For extra credit, students will work in pairs, making a talk show program, with one student acting as host (Oprah, Dr. Phil, Jerry Springer,) and the other student acting as a character from the play. The pairs will give the show a theme, such as "Coping with A New Stepfather," or "When is it okay to disobey your parents?"

As another extra credit assignment, I will ask students to make billboards or posters advertising *Hamlet*. Their posters or billboards will make a graphic representation of a specific scene and will accompany that scene with an appropriate quote from the play.

LESSON PLAN ONE—HAMLET VIA A TALK SHOW

Objective

The student will come to understand a character's actions and motivation for those actions.

Materials

Chairs and a desk similar to a TV talk show set

Procedure

Students will work in pairs. They will act out interviewing one of the characters for a talk show with one student taking the part of the character and one taking the part of the interviewer (Oprah, Dr. Phil, Letterman, Jerry Springer.)

LESSON PLAN TWO—NOW PLAYING, *HAMLET*

Objective

Students will employ their artistic talent to make a theater billboard cover or movie poster.

Materials

Poster board

Colored Markers

Procedure

Students will create a theater billboard or movie poster for the play.

The billboard or poster must be in full color and a specific scene from the play.

Under the graphic depiction the student will include a direct quote from the play that relates to the picture scene.

LESSON PLAN THREE—WHO WAS SHAKESPEARE?**Objective**

The student will examine Shakespeare's life to see what events in his life may be seen in *Hamlet*.

Materials and Sources

Biographies of Shakespeare in the Cesar Chavez High School library.

Procedure

Students will do library research on Shakespeare's life, looking especially at events that have parallels in *Hamlet*, such as the death of Shakespeare's father and his son.

Students will make a timeline of at least fifteen events in Shakespeare's life.

Students will write a five-paragraph paper showing how three events in Shakespeare's life may be seen in *Hamlet*.

LESSON PLAN FOUR—THE OBEDIENT DAUGHTER, OPHELIA VS. DESDEMONA**Objective**

Students will examine the role of daughters in Elizabethan times with their own times.

Materials

A copy of *Hamlet*

A copy of *Othello*

Library resources

Procedures

Students will write a summary of what happens to Ophelia for obeying and what happens to Desdemona for disobeying.

Students will write a two-page report on the role of daughters in Shakespeare's time.

Students will take sides to conduct a debate, discussing the position Shakespeare takes on a daughter's disobeying her father. When is it appropriate, if ever, to disobey? Could Ophelia and Desdemona have avoided their respective fates?

LESSON PLAN FIVE—TOUR THE GLOBE THEATRE**Objective**

Students will see what the Globe Theatre of Shakespeare's day was like.

Procedures

Using a computer, go to the Internet.

Type the following URL into the rectangle titled "address" at the top of the Internet page:

<http://aspriations.english.cam.ac.uk/converse/acse/shakespeare.acds>

Click on the cartoon picture of the theatre that says “All around the Globe” in the top left-hand corner.

When it asks for your preference open the “low bandwidth version” of the website.

Read all of the information carefully and answer any questions that correspond to the information given.

Remember, you need to click on all of the characters that “light up,” then read all the information they have to offer until there is no longer a “forward” arrow offered. You will know you have reached the end of a character’s information when the only option given at the bottom of the character’s page is a “backward” arrow and a circle with the outline of the theatre inside of it.

LESSON PLAN SIX—SHAKESPEARE BASEBALL

Objective

Students will have knowledge of specific facts about Shakespeare, the Elizabethan Age, and the play *Hamlet*.

Materials

A chalkboard

A list of factual content questions about *Hamlet*, Shakespeare, and the time period.

Procedure

The teacher will serve as pitcher, asking questions of the student batter.

If the batter answers correctly, he or she will move to first base.

If the next batter answers correctly, he or she will take a base, with the batter ahead of him moving to second, and so on.

When the side that is at bat misses three questions, the other side will be up to answer the questions.

The side scoring the most points wins.

LESSON PLAN SEVEN—CHARACTER DIARY

Objective

Students will understand what a character does and why he or she does it.

Materials

Pen and notebook paper.

Procedure

After reading Act III, students will choose one character to write about.

Students will write the events of the scene of their choice from the point on view of the character of their choice.

Students will write that character’s explanation of his or her actions.

Lesson Plan Eight—What is Your Humour?

Objective

Students will come to understand the medieval and Renaissance theory of the four humours.

Materials

Library resources on the four humours and astrology

Procedure

Using their birthdates and their reference materials, students will chart their characteristic humours.

Students will then write the characteristics of their humour.

Students will evaluate the validity of the theory of the humours, telling whether they fit the profile of their respective humours or not.

LESSON PLAN NINE—WILL'S WORDS

Objective

Students will expand vocabularies to include words coined by Shakespeare.

Materials

A computer with Internet access

Procedure

Go to <http://ww/pbs.org/wghb/masterpiece/merchant/swf/words.html>

Read the paragraph and then click “begin.”

Read the instructions and then choose “Game One.”

Select the word that you think Shakespeare coined. When you have chosen the correct answer, copy the definition of the word on your notebook paper. You should have a total of ten definitions.

Choose any three of the words you defined and use them in a sentence.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Branagh, Kenneth. *Hamlet by William Shakespeare: Screenplay, Introduction, and Film Diary*. New York: Norton, 1996.

Brown, Scott. Review of *Hamlet*. *Entertainment Weekly* 593 27 Apr. 2001.
Brown thinks the issue of delay is aptly set in modern Manhattan.

Burdett, Lois. *Hamlet for Kids*. Toronto: Firefly Books, 2000.
Hamlet is made accessible to children, examining human nature.

“Craft of Reading *Hamlet*.” *Literary Cavalcade* 53.6 (Mar. 2001), 14.
This article presents an annotated scene, Act III, scene 1, as annotated by high school students.

The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film. New York: Cambridge UP, 2000.
A valuable comprehensive reference tool, including such topics as films and the marketplace, the films of Laurence Olivier, national and racial stereotypes, and Shakespeare's cinematic offshoots

Jeff, Dick. A Review of *Hamlet's Soliloquies*. *Booklist*. 99.5 (1 Nov. 2002): 511.
This reviews the videotape *Hamlet's Soliloquies: Perfecting Perfection*. The video itself is applicable to comparison and contrast projects.

- Durband, Alan, ed. *Hamlet. Edited and Rendered into Modern English*. Woodbury, NY: Barron's, 1986.
This modern English "translation" should be useful with emerging readers.
- Fiedler, Lisa. *Dating Ophelia*. New York: Holt, 2002.
Written from the point of view of Ophelia, this novel tells the Hamlet story.
- Herz, Sarah. K. *From Hinton to Hamlet: Building Bridges between Young Adult Literature and the Classics*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996.
This book about bringing students "up" to reading levels required for Shakespeare shows how young adult reading can be used as a bridge to the works that are in the curriculum.
- Jess, Carolyn. "The Promethean Apparatus: Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* as Cinematic Allegory." *Literature Film Quarterly* 32.2 (2004): 90.
This article presents a critical analysis of the motion picture. "Hamlet is a filmmaker who is obsessed with observing his environs and forefathers through a camera lens."
- Kliman, Bernice W., Ed. *Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare*. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2001.
This pedagogy book is aimed at college teachers, but it can be used at the high school level.
- Lamb, Charles. *Ten Tales from Shakespeare [by] Charles and Mary Lamb*. New York: F. Watts, 1969.
This treatment of *Hamlet* comes from the famous tales for children written by Romanticism's Lambs.
- "Much Ado about Shakespeare." *Read* 54.3 (24 Sept. 2004): 23.
This article informs that Shakespeare's poetic plays have been adapted to numerous films, including Ethan Hawke's portrayal and Robin Williams in *Dead Poet's Society*.
- Nardo, Don. *Understanding Hamlet*. San Diego: Lucent, 2001.
Gives the original sources and performance history of Hamlet. "*Hamlet* never rests."
- Rothwell, Kenneth S. *A History of Shakespeare on the Screen: A Century of Film and Television*. 2nd ed. Cambridge UK: Cambridge UP, 2004.
This is a comprehensive history of Shakespeare films. Particularly useful is a chronological table of all the films made of Shakespeare's works.
- Smith, Kay. "'*Hamlet*, Part Eight, The Revenge'" or Sampling Shakespeare in a Postmodern World." *College Literature*. 31.4 (Fall 2004): 135.
This article presents samplings of *Hamlet* in the Postmodern World. "*Hamlet* can be used in more complex thematic ways to underline conflict, as in *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*..."
- Stoppard, Tom. *The Fifteen Minute Hamlet*. London and New York: French, 1976.
Absurdist dramatist Stoppard presents his version of *Hamlet*.
- Welch, Jack. "Babes in Videoland." *Louisville Magazine*. 52.4 (Apr. 2001): 39.
Reviews the Almereyda *Hamlet*. "What a cutting edge concept it was to move the setting for Shakespeare's most analyzed play across the ocean and forward eight centuries, to present-day New York City. Inspired, too, was the choice of Ethan Hawke—the gratingly self-absorbed actor or who fancies himself a modern James Dean—to play histories most perplexed (and perplexing) foot-dragger.
- Yang, Sharon. "The Truth Is Out There in Elsinore: Mulder and Scully as Hamlet and Horatio." *Literature Film Quarterly*. 32.2 (2004): 97.
This article analyzes the relationship between the drama *Hamlet*, and the television program *The X-Files* using the context of the second part of the two-part seventh-season premier, *The Sixth Extinction II: Amor Fati*.

Website Sources

- Hamlet on Film*. Brunel University, AC.UK. <<http://www.brunel.ac.uk/faculty/arts/EnterText.hamlet.hamlet.htm>>.
This is a series of essays about filmed versions of *Hamlet*. Many of the essays were given as papers at the Proceedings of the Conference "*Hamlet* on Screen."

Filmography

- Discovering Hamlet*. Dir. Mark Oshaker. Unicorn Projects, 1990.
This video follows the week-by-week progress of the Company preparing to stage a production of *Hamlet*. The actors describe stage action and the characters they portray and members of the technical crew discuss aspects of costuming, set design, lighting, and the problems of working with Shakespeare's 400-year-old text.

Great Hamlets, The. Wishupon Productions, ABC Enterprises, Inc. R.M. Productions, Ltd., 1996.

This video discusses the various forms of Shakespeare's character Hamlet. In the second program, Trevor Nunn delves into the underlying dynamics of the play, the psychological aspects of Hamlet, the oedipal conflict, Hamlet's madness, and the political questions raised by the play. The video includes interviews with Laurence Olivier, Ben Kingsley, and Maximilian Schell.

Green Eggs and Hamlet. Dir. Mike O'Neal. 1995.

Shakespeare's classic retold in Dr. Seuss-style rhyme.

Hamlet. Dir. Michael Almereyda. Starring Ethan Hawke. Double A Films/Miramax. 2000.

Hamlet. Dir. Rodney Bennett. Starring Derek Jacobi. BBC Shakespeare Plays, 1980.

Hamlet. Dir. Kenneth Branagh. Castle Rock/Columbia, 1996.

Hamlet. Dir. John Gielgud. Starring Richard Burton. Classic Cinemas, 1964.

Hamlet. Dir. Clement Maurice. Starring Sarah Bernhardt. 1900.

Hamlet. Dir. Laurence Olivier. Two Cities, 1948.

Hamlet. Dir. Eric Simonson and Campbell Scott. Hallmark Entertainment, 2000.

Hamlet. Dir. Franco Zeffirelli. Starring Mel Gibson. Warner Bros., 1990.

The Last Action Hero. Dir. John McTiernan. Columbia Tristar, 1993.

The Lion King. Disney, 1994.

Star Trek VI. Conscience of the King: The Undiscovered Country. Dir. Nicholas Meyer. Star Trek, 1991.

Scenes from Shakespeare: Fifteen Cuttings for the Classroom. Compiler, Michael Wilson. Meriwether Pub, 1993.

This is a collection of fifteen short scenes from five Shakespeare plays. Each scene is preceded by a plot synopsis and descriptions of the characters.