The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

William Shakespeare

Introduction

<u>Background</u>

Discussion Starters











The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

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There's something rotten in the state of Denmark . . .













Prince Hamlet returns home from university to discover that his father is dead and his mother has married his uncle Claudius.

And now Claudius has declared himself king.











As if that's not bad enough, the ghost of his father appears to Hamlet.

He tells Hamlet that he's been murdered by Claudius

and demands that Hamlet get revenge.













What should Hamlet do?

Instead of jumping into any action, Hamlet broods over his options—

and then starts acting very strange.











He starts talking in riddles.

He acts cruelly to Ophelia, a girl who loves him.

He's suspicious of everyone.











Why is Hamlet acting like this?

Is he insane? Or faking insanity?

Will he make up his mind to take action?

Should he kill his uncle?











The Tragedy of Hamlet was first performed at the Globe Theatre in England.



The theater opened in 1599.

It was the home for many of Shakespeare's plays.





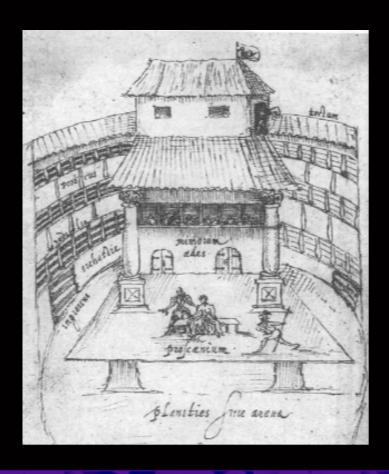






The Globe was a sixteen-sided polygon and was probably open to the sky.

▼



The stage jutted out into the audience so that the actors were very close to the spectators.









The audience expected to combine their imagination with the stage effects before them to see the play's action.

Shakespeare's plays often contain clues in the dialogue to indicate time of day or place.

However, the plays often used dramatic effects, such as flying actors on a wire above the stage, as well.



The theater had two trapdoors. One, above the stage, allowed the actors to descend from the heavens.



The other door was on the stage and often indicated a doorway to hell.

The ghost in *Hamlet* entered the play through the trapdoor on the stage.













The period in which Shakespeare wrote is called the Elizabethan period. Queen Elizabeth was the head of the royal family (1558–1603).

The queen saw many of Shakespeare's plays in special court performances.









Shakespeare may have used the Hamlet story—and other plays that featured murdered kings—to reflect the concerns of his own time.

To the Elizabethans, social order was very important, yet there had been political and religious conflicts before and during Elizabeth's rule.

Hamlet depicts a conflict over what to do when an orderly state is actually corrupt inside and there seems to be no civilized answer.



The language of the play is unrhymed. This is called blank verse.



However, it is based on a pattern called iambic pentameter.











Like dance or rock music, iambic pentameter is based on a beat that is pleasing to the ear.

▼

 It includes an unstressed syllable followed by an stressed syllable:

"To BE or NOT to BE . . . "

 It matches the sound of a beating heart: daDUM daDUM











Hamlet is filled with imagery of:

- decay and death
- corruption and dishonesty
- reality versus unreality











The Tragedy of Hamlet: Discussion Starters

Discuss (1)

Hamlet is troubled by the marriage of his uncle to his mother and by his uncle becoming king.

- Who would you expect to be king after Hamlet's father dies?
- If Hamlet were your friend, what advice would you give to him?
- How does power shift in Hamlet's family after his father's death?



The Tragedy of Hamlet: Discussion Starters

Discuss (2)

Hamlet believes that his father's ghost is asking him to get revenge for his murder.

- How would you react in this situation? Why?
- Do you think revenge is a good response to criminal acts? Why or why not?





Lesson Menu



