

The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

William Shakespeare

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The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

William Shakespeare

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The Tragedy of Hamlet: Introduction

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



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The Tragedy of Hamlet: Introduction



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.



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The Tragedy of Hamlet: Introduction

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.



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The Tragedy of Hamlet: Introduction



What should Hamlet do?

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

and then starts acting very strange.

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The Tragedy of Hamlet: Introduction

He starts talking in riddles.

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

He's suspicious of everyone.



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The Tragedy of Hamlet: Introduction

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?

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The Tragedy of Hamlet: Background

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.

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The Tragedy of Hamlet: Background

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.

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The Tragedy of Hamlet: Background

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.

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The Tragedy of Hamlet: Background

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.

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The Tragedy of Hamlet: Background



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.

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The Tragedy of Hamlet: Background

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.

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The Tragedy of Hamlet: Background

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



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

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The Tragedy of Hamlet: Background

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



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The Tragedy of Hamlet: Background

Hamlet is filled with imagery of:

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



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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?

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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?

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