SHAKESPEARE THEATRE COMPANY
FIRST FOLIO
Curriculum Guide

HAMLET
BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
DIRECTED BY MICHAEL KAHN
Consistent with the Shakespeare Theatre Company’s central mission to be the leading force in producing and preserving the highest quality classic theatre, the Education Department challenges learners of all ages to explore the ideas, emotions and principles contained in classic texts and to discover the connection between classic theatre and our modern perceptions. We hope that this Curriculum Guide will prove useful to you while preparing to attend Hamlet.

This curriculum guide provides information and activities to help students form a personal connection to the play before attending the production. It contains material about the playwright, their world and their works. Also included are approaches to explore the play in the classroom before and after the performance.

We encourage you to photocopy these articles and activities and use them as supplemental material to the text.

Enjoy the show!

The First Folio Curriculum Guide for the 2017-2018 Season was developed by the Shakespeare Theatre Company Education Department:

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Hamlet Synopsis

The ghost of the recently deceased king of Denmark has been appearing at night, seen by sentries on watch. Horatio, a friend of Prince Hamlet’s, sees it and suggests they tell him at once. Meanwhile, the dead king’s brother Claudius introduces himself as the new head of state and as the new husband of his dead brother’s wife, Gertrude. He asks Hamlet not to return to school and the prince reluctantly agrees. When Horatio tells Hamlet about his father’s ghost, he decides to join them that evening.

Laertes, son of the king’s advisor Polonius, has been allowed to return to school, but first warns his sister Ophelia about her relationship with Hamlet. Agreeing, Polonius orders her to cut off all communications. That night, the ghost appears, tells Hamlet he was murdered by Claudius and demands Hamlet take revenge. Hamlet swears the others to secrecy about the ghost and says he’ll don an “antic disposition” in the near future.

Hamlet’s bizarre behavior begins to prompt concerns. Claudius and Gertrude recruit Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet’s school friends, to spy on his “madness,” which Polonius theorizes stems from Ophelia’s rejection of his advances. After baffling Polonius and his former schoolmates, Hamlet greets his favorite company of actors and decides to stage a play designed to provoke Claudius into revealing his guilt. Claudius and Polonius spy on an arranged encounter between Hamlet and Ophelia. After witnessing Hamlet berate her with accusations, Claudius is troubled. That night, the actors perform a scene very much like the dead king’s murder and Claudius rises, stopping the play.

Convinced of Claudius’s guilt, Hamlet is nevertheless still unable to kill him and goes instead to his mother’s chamber, as Polonius hides behind a curtain. Hamlet threatens his mother and, when Polonius cries for help, kills him. Wheeling on Gertrude again, Hamlet is stopped by the ghost, who appears and reminds him to seek revenge. Hamlet apologizes and shoves off Polonius’s body. After a chase, Claudius apprehends Hamlet and sends him to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and a letter demanding he be put to death.

A vengeful Laertes returns to confront Claudius, who denies responsibility for Polonius’ death. Seeing Ophelia, who has gone mad, Laertes blames Hamlet. When a letter comes saying Hamlet is returning, Claudius plots with Laertes to kill him. Laertes will challenge him to a fencing match but use a poison-tipped sword, while Claudius will ensure success by having a poisoned drink on hand. Gertrude enters and tells them Ophelia has drowned.

On their way back, Hamlet and Horatio come upon a gravedigger. They hide when a funeral procession approaches, and Hamlet realizes with horror Ophelia is being buried. When a grief-stricken Laertes leaps into her open grave, Hamlet emerges and reprimands him, professing his love for Ophelia. The two men must be separated and, once back in Elsinore, Laertes challenges him. During the fencing match, Hamlet and Laertes both wound each other with the poisoned blade and Gertrude drinks from the poisoned cup. As she dies, Laertes exposes Claudius, and Hamlet forces him to drink the poison. Hamlet dies as Fortinbras, prince of Norway, arrives to lay claim to the empty throne.
Who’s Who in Hamlet

Former King Hamlet
Dead and now a tormented ghost

Old Fortinbras
Ruler of Norway, killed by King Hamlet

Gertrude
Queen of Denmark, King Hamlet’s widow

Claudius
New King of Denmark, King Hamlet’s brother

Polonius
King’s Advisor, Chief Minister of State

Hamlet
Prince of Denmark

Fortinbras
Prince of Norway

Ophelia
Daughter of Polonius

Horatio
A Scholar and Hamlet’s closest friend

Rosencrantz & Guildenstern
Courtiers and former school friends of Hamlet

Laertes
Son of Polonius
This has been a big year for Michael Urie. He's had two huge successes in New York recently and, at least according to the New York Times, he's the new comedic genius of the American theatre. I've known Michael ever since I taught him at Juilliard, and as I've watched him blossom I have been struck by the depth and emotional intelligence of his acting, the serious side alongside the playful, physical, comedic side. You need all of those tools to play Hamlet, and Michael has them. I also told myself that I would direct Hamlet again if Michael was available, and so here we are.

While I was thinking about this play over the past year and a half, the world changed. It's not just happening here in the United States, but all over the world—people are seeking power in strongmen. There is the serious possibility of a return to autocratic governments in a manner that seemed inconceivable just a few years ago.

I've done this play twice, and I already knew the family relationships that lie at the heart of Hamlet are crucial to the piece. This time, however, I found myself thinking anew about the politics of the world in the play. Now, Hamlet is not a political play, but the situation in the play is a political one. This is a play where everybody spies on everyone else, a society where trust is meaningless, in large part because there is a cover-up going on of a very serious crime that has been committed. Hamlet comes home to encounter a new regime with everyone either over-praising Claudius or remaining wary of him. The precariousness of his rule has led to a kind of paranoid surveillance state.

This poisonous atmosphere positively surrounds the play, and it has a great deal to do with the tremendously mysterious emotional life that develops inside of Hamlet. One of the reasons he puts on his “antic disposition” is that it provides a way for the spied-upon to become a spy himself. After all, if you're crazy people might say more things in front of you than they would otherwise, and they might also tolerate you behaving in ways that would otherwise seem quite strange. The madness, of course, also means something else. It is central to Shakespeare’s extraordinary study of a disturbed consciousness, of an amazingly intelligent mind that is deeply troubled.

This is one of the greatest and most complex plays ever written, a play that I believe also says something profound about politics. In this context the play-within-the-play is quite important. It is at once a family drama of the most powerful kind lying at the center of this play and also the most explosive kind of political theatre. I am taking it seriously, as something Shakespeare might write today. For all these reasons, I have decided that this play works best for our purposes in modern dress. We are setting it in an unnamed country. It may feel all too familiar.

See you at the theatre,
Michael Kahn
Artistic Director
Making Connections

Power and Government in *Hamlet*

STC’s production of *Hamlet* explores a political world in transition, with the qualities of government shifting under Claudius’ rule. What evidence in the production tells the audience how the government is changing? Study these possible forms of government to find out:

**Elective Monarchy**
The rulership of a king elected by a group of nobles. Although the king’s son is normally elected to succeed the throne, it is not always the case. Other noblemen may feel the desire to murder the king if they feel they have the political support of others.

**Representative Democracy**
A government founded on the principle of officials representing the people who elect them. Representative democracies can take many forms, such as a constitutional monarchy where a king exists but whose power is limited by a constitution, or a federal republic where power is divided between state and federal bodies of government.

**Plutocracy**
A system dependent upon the influence of the rich. Even a republic can be plutocratic if elected representatives are significantly dependent upon financial support from wealthy sources.

**Theocracy**
A government ruled by the religious elite in which the state and the church are traditionally the same body.

**Autocracy**
A system run by a single entity with absolute power, with no legal or electoral restraints. Autocracies can take many forms such as a dictatorship with a civilian or military leader, a corporatocracy ruled by a powerful corporation, or a totalitarian state where all land and wealth are controlled by a state authority of one political party.

Classroom Activity

For each of the following scenes from the story of *Hamlet*, write an essay or journal entry, discuss with the class, create a comic strip or story board, or create a matrix outlining how each moment might be impacted if the government of Denmark under Claudius is either an elective monarchy, representative democracy, plutocracy, theocracy, or autocracy:

1. Soldiers Barnardo and Marcellus decide to tell Prince Hamlet about seeing the ghost of his murdered father rather than report to the newly elected King Claudius. (e.g. In a plutocracy, the soldiers might expect some financial reward from Horatio for this information.
2. Claudius enlists Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to spy on Hamlet’s behavior and in return Hamlet decides to use a touring company of actors to test Claudius’ reaction to a staged murder.
3. Hamlet debates whether he should revenge his father’s death by murdering his uncle Claudius.
4. Claudius attempts to pray for forgiveness for murdering his brother, but then enlists Laertes to murder Hamlet in a fencing match.
5. After Hamlet’s death, Fortinbras and his army arrive to claim the Danish crown for Norway.
The Consent of the Surveilled
by Dr. Paolo Gerbaudo

After the revelations made by the American information analyst Edward Snowden about the operations of the American National Security Agency (NSA), and of its UK equivalent Government Communication Headquarters (GCHQ), many have claimed that we live in a present that closely resembles the nightmare scenario of Nineteen Eighty-Four.

Indeed the details about the Prism program of collecting, storing and analysing information about millions of Internet users in their daily interactions with social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and even online video games such as Angry Birds, casts an alarming picture of the degree of intrusion by state security agencies in our digital lives.

Never has it been so clear that the extent to which those very digital services and tools we associate with our personal freedom and sociability are also a means through which our actions can be monitored, our behavior scrutinized and sanctioned – the intensity and systematic character of which has no historical precedent.

In the world of neoliberal capitalism, and a society dominated by gigantic corporations rather than by totalitarian governments, surveillance is not an operation forced upon us by a police state. Rather it is an activity, the success of which entails some degree of reluctant and unconscious cooperation on our part, a sort of half-hearted consent and indifference from those who are subject to surveillance.

Naturally, none of us would wilfully accept having our personal details controlled by state authorities. But we frequently accept online consent forms that allow companies like Facebook and Google to store enormous amounts of information about our everyday interactions, allowing them to use the data to conduct sophisticated market research and wage-targeted advertising campaigns that aim at micro-niches of consumers.

This is the ‘pact with the devil’ that we have struck with digital corporations. We have accepted the practice of giving away our personal data in exchange for free services, fully knowing (unless we were completely naïve) that these services would use our data to make money. What we did not realise was that this arrangement with corporations would also be one with the state security agencies, which want to use our data for very different reasons.

In the past, surveillance agencies would have autonomously collected information about their suspects. Now, agencies such as the NSA and the GCHQ act as parasites on the information economy, capturing data collected by commercial enterprises for their own marketing purposes, and turning it into a means of surveillance. We are exposed to surveillance precisely by virtue of our choices – or better by virtue of our illusory choices, such as the acceptance that we expressed when we press the “yes” button to accept a digital service’s terms and conditions. We have become the consenting surveilled, people who by accepting the system of Internet communication and its “free” economy, have ended up unwittingly accepting the surveillance of state security agencies.

We are entangled in part because we desire to be exposed, because we want to share our lives with distant others, expressing our everyday activities, our successes and our disgraces, our happy moments and our sad times. When we post on Facebook, when we Tweet, when we comment on a YouTube video, we should never forget something that was very clear to Winston in front of his telescreen: the machine does not only transmit; it also receives.

Or – to adapt this proposition to the case of social media – whatever we write, whatever we do, will not be seen just by its intended receivers, but also by other parasitical receivers, who want to know about what we do. If we are lucky, this is to sell us products and services; if we are unlucky, it could be to lock us in jail.

Dr. Paolo Gerbaudo is a lecturer in Digital Culture and Society at King’s College London. This article was commissioned by and is reprinted courtesy of Headlong Theatre.

DISCUSSION

Are you conscious when you post something to Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or Snapchat that someone is watching your content other than your intended audience? How does your awareness or lack of awareness impact what you post? Have you ever experienced feedback to your social media presence that was unintended?

How do you feel knowing that the government can access your phone records and track your use of social media?

What freedoms and privacy are you willing to give up and what freedoms are you unwilling to lose?

When is violation of personal privacy necessary and when is it not?
The world of our production is one of distrust and heavy surveillance. The goal of this activity is to explore how people's behavior changes when they are in private, versus, when they know someone is spying on them. It's also meant help your students relate to the characters in *Hamlet* by putting them into similar situations as the characters.

“Improvisation” is an acting technique. You “improvise” when you make up a scene as you go along. It helps to have a few given circumstances to spark ideas. Invite two students to come up in front of the class. The pair will "improvise" a scene two times. The first time they will act it out as if they were alone, in a private setting. The second time they will act it out as if someone was spying on them. Here's a list of given circumstances.

**Scene 1**
Relationship: Person A & Person B have a crush on each other.
Setting: A private place
Situation: Person A is going to ask Person B out on a date.
Second Time: Person B’s parent is spying on them.

**Scene 2**
Relationship: Boyfriend and Girlfriend.
Setting: A private place
Situation: The girlfriend has been told to break up with her boyfriend by her parents.
Second Time: The girlfriend's father is spying on them.

**Scene 3**
Relationship: Old Friends
Setting: A private place
Situation: Friend A has come to visit Friend B, unexpectedly.
Second Time: Friend B has been sent to spy on Friend A by his/her parent.

**Scene 4**
Relationship: Parent & Child
Setting: A private place
Situation: The parent has remarried someone one month after their spouse's death.
Second Time: The new step-parent is spying on them.

**Scene 5**
Relationship: Parent & Adult child
Setting: A private place
Situation: The child has committed a crime.
Second time: The place is bugged.
In trying to prove Claudius’ guilt, Hamlet recognizes the role of art as a means for social justice—a medium that prompts its audience to look within and provoke reflection. The purpose of theatre, as Hamlet states, is to hold “the mirror up to nature” (III.ii.23-24) and to reveal the most profound truths about humankind. He instructs the troupe of Players to present a play about the murder of a king in the hopes that Claudius will show some sign of guilt while watching his own corrupt actions played out onstage.

Directions:
1) Read Act 3 Scene 2 of Hamlet, the scene where the Players present “The Murder of Gonzago” upon Hamlet’s request.
2) As a class, brainstorm issues facing your school, neighborhood or larger communities.
3) Narrow the list down to several specific issues and divide the class into groups of 4-5 and assign each group an issue to work on. (Alternatively, let each group brainstorm and choose their own issue.)
4) Each group should think of a specific event or story related to their issue that they can adapt into a short skit, in the style of “The Murder of Gonzago”. As a group, write and rehearse a 3-5 minute skit with a clear narrative structure (beginning, middle and end) that reveals something about the issue at hand.
5) Share out: Each group performs their skits. After each skit, the audience asks questions and shares their reactions to the skit.
6) Reflect: How can art be used as a tool for social change? What qualities made each skit effective in terms of audience impact? What other plays, movies, songs, etc. seek to address social issues, and what tools do they use (i.e. satire, humor, metaphor, etc.)?

Classroom Activities

The Play’s the Thing

In trying to prove Claudius’ guilt, Hamlet recognizes the role of art as a means for social justice—a medium that prompts its audience to look within and provoke reflection. The purpose of theatre, as Hamlet states, is to hold “the mirror up to nature” (III.ii.23-24) and to reveal the most profound truths about humankind. He instructs the troupe of Players to present a play about the murder of a king in the hopes that Claudius will show some sign of guilt while watching his own corrupt actions played out onstage.

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Valley of Public Opinion/To Be or Not To Be

Hamlet is a young man paralyzed by indecision, constantly wrestling with himself. From the first act of the play we know that Hamlet wants to avenge his father’s murder, but it takes another four acts and seven soliloquies for him to actually kill Claudius. In this activity, students will use textual evidence to explore Hamlet’s inner struggle and his path from decision to action.

Directions:
1) As a class, choose a decision that Hamlet is facing, such as whether or not to kill Claudius.
2) Students will position themselves or be placed in the room depending on the side they take in the debate. The class should be divided more or less into thirds, either by students’ opinions or by counting off: one third on one side of the room, one third on the other side of the room, and the rest in the middle. a) For example, if the question were whether or not to kill Claudius, students who support Hamlet killing Claudius would go to one side of the room, while those against it would go to the other side. Anyone who isn’t sure – the Hamlets of the class – should stay in the middle.
3) Students on each side of the debate should take 10-15 minutes to find quotes from the text to support their sides. Each student should write down 1-2 lines that they can recite when called upon. The students in the middle should look up questions related to the issue posed by Hamlet.
   a) For example, a student on one side of the classroom might use the line “Rightly to be great is not to stir without great argument, but greatly to find quarrel in a straw when honor’s at the stake” (IV.iv.56-59) while the other side might retort, “The spirit that I have seen may be a devil, and the devil hath power t’assume a pleasing shape” (II.ii.627-629).
4) When students are ready, each side should form a line, Red Rover-style, with the Hamlets in the middle.
   Students on each side should take turns delivering their lines, and Hamlets in the middle may either ask their questions if they are still undecided, or join one of the sides if they are moved to action. The game ends when there are no more indecisive Hamlets in the middle.
5) Debrief: As a class, discuss how this activity felt and what insight it gave into Hamlet’s thought process. Did the decision at hand seem harder or easier when you brought it to life in this way? Do you think Hamlet made the right decision? What would you do if you were in his shoes? Based on how the Hamlets in the middle reacted, what are the biggest arguments for and against this decision?
This production marks Michael Kahn’s (STC’s Artistic Director) third time directing Hamlet, arguably the Bard’s most famous play. Kahn’s first production in 1992 featured Tom Hulce (Amadeus) in a traditional setting that focused, primarily, on the play’s familial relationships. In 2007, Kahn cast Jeffrey Carlson (All My Children, Edward Albee’s The Goat) as the Danish prince in a more contemporary version that emphasized Hamlet’s youth in tackling the extraordinary circumstances beset on him. For Kahn’s third go, Michael Urie (Ugly Betty) takes on the title role in a production that explores Hamlet’s journey in the context of Elsinore’s darker, political world. Through the years, countless directors have mounted and adapted a vast array of Hamlet productions, whether to put forward their own idealized version of the title character or to respond to the pressing issues of their respective times. As Kahn noted, “I feel a responsibility to produce classical theatre that resonates with modern audiences and speaks to people across cultures and generations. I’m curious to see how today’s audiences respond to it.”

Here are some notable stage and screen productions and adaptations of Hamlet through the ages:

**EARLY HAMLET**
- Richard Burbage of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men originated the role at the Globe.
- Off the coast of Sierra Leone in 1607, Hamlet was performed by the crew of an East India Company gunship known as the Red Dragon.

**FEMALE HAMLET**
- Though 18th century tragedienne, Sarah Siddons, was the first female known to play Hamlet, she is certainly not the last.
- Famous French actor, Sarah Bernhardt, took on the role in a 1899 London production.
- In the 2000 Edinburgh Festival, unlike other female actors that portray Hamlet as a male, German actor, Angela Winkler, portrayed Hamlet as a woman.

**STANISLAVSKI HAMLET**
- Famous for the “system” of naturalistic acting that was named after him, Konstantin Stanislavski collaborated with scenic designer, Edward Gordon Craig, to create a ground-breaking production in which performances were grounded in realism while the costume and set pieces, including gigantic screens closing off characters and events, illustrated Hamlet’s inner psychology.

**POSSESSED HAMLET**
- At the time Hamlet was written, audiences readily believed that the dead walked among us, especially if they had been wronged. In 1980, director Richard Eyre’s production saw Jonathan Pryce’s Hamlet possessed by the ghost with the actor speaking both his lines and that of his dead father’s.

**HAMLET ON FILM**
- For many, Laurence Olivier’s Oscar-winning 1948 film portrayal cemented the idea of a brooding Hamlet.
- Years later, Mel Gibson would portray an angrier and more decisive prince in Franco Zeffirelli’s 1990 version.
- In 1996, Kenneth Branagh combined the Second Quarto with additions from the First Folio to produce a 4-hour “complete” film version of Hamlet.

**CELEBRITY HAMLET**
- It is said that Hamlet is one of the most coveted roles in theatre and the long list of A-list celebrities that eschewed the screen for a chance to play the Danish prince on stage is proof of it: Keanu Reeves (Matrix, John Wick), Christopher Walken (Deer Hunter, Pulp Fiction), Jude Law (The Talented Mr. Ripley, AI), Ralph Fiennes (Schindler’s List, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows), Daniel Day-Lewis (There Will Be Blood, Gangs of New York) and Benedict Cumberbatch (Doctor Strange, The Imitation Game).
Hamlet in Pop Culture

Perhaps no one in history has had a bigger influence on language, art, or popular culture than William Shakespeare. Check out these pieces of art that drew inspiration from Hamlet.

Did you know this Disney classic is loosely based on Hamlet?

Did you know these expressions come from Hamlet?

“Neither a borrower nor a lender be” (I.iii)
“Murder most foul” (I.v)
“The lady doth protest too much” (III.ii)
“Though this be madness, yet there is method in t.” (II.ii)
“To be or not to be: that is the question” (III.i)
“Brevity is the soul of wit” (II.ii)
“O, woe is me” (III.i)
“In my mind’s eye” (I.ii)
“Ay, there’s the rub” (III.i)

This 2015 Broadway musical takes its title from Hamlet and tells the hilarious story of Elizabethan playwrights who have to compete with Shakespeare’s wild popularity.

British musician Nick Lowe’s hit song “Cruel to be Kind” may be catchy, but we know these clever lyrics come straight from Hamlet: “I must be cruel only to be kind” (III.iv.199).

Film adaptations of Hamlet to check out:
When someone pretends to be a Shakespearean actor, what do they intone in their deepest, most serious voice? “To be or not to be...” To say the play is quotable would be a staggering understatement. *Hamlet* is not just a stand-in for the idea of “Shakespeare”—the play’s phrases are woven into the fabric of western culture, a collective reference point appearing in literature, music, drama, television, movies, even textbooks and cartoons. Read on for a very small sample.

2BR02B, a dystopian short story by Kurt Vonnegut. (1962)

*To Be or Not to Bop: Memoirs of Dizzy Gillespie*, written by the famous jazz musician. (1979)

*To Be or Not to Be in the Party: Communist Party Membership in the USSR*, by Yuri Glazov. (1988)

*The Chemistry of Conjugated Cyclic Compounds: To Be or Not to Be Like Benzene?* by Douglas Lloyd. (1989)

*To Be, Or Not to Be, an S.O.B.: A Reaffirmation of Business Ethics*, by Ben B. Boothe. (1979)

Ernst Lubitsch’s 1942 film and Mel Brooks’ 1983 remake, both titled *To Be or Not to Be*, follow a troupe of actors in Nazi-occupied Warsaw.

*Slings and Arrows*, a Canadian television series focusing on the misadventures of staff and artists at a fictional version of the Stratford Festival—in the case of STC staff, real life on screen. (2003)

*Outrageous Fortune*, a 1987 film starring Shelley Long and Bette Midler.

In one episode of *Doctor Who*, the Doctor claims to have transcribed the original draft of *Hamlet*, assisting Shakespeare, who had a sprained wrist. He takes issue with the mixed metaphor “To take arms against a sea of troubles.”

*Natural Shocks*, an award-winning novel by Richard Stern about coming to terms with mortality. (1985)

*Flesh is Heir: An Historical Romance*, a novel by Lincoln Kirstein, an impresario and the co-founder of the New York City Ballet. (1932)


*Perchance to Dream*, a *Star Trek: The Next Generation* novel by Howard Weinstein. (1991) There are also at least four romance novels called *Perchance to Dream*.

The Electric Light Orchestra quotes the soliloquy in their song “Mister Kingdom”—“Oh, to sleep, perchance to dream / To live again those joyous scenes.”


*The Mortal Coil and Other Stories*, by D. H. Lawrence, author of *Sons and Lovers*. (1917)

*This Mortal Coil* was a music collaboration led by Ivo Watts-Russell, founder of the British record label 4AD. Watts-Russell said the name was taken from a version of Monty Python’s "Dead Parrot" sketch that referenced the *Hamlet* speech.

In a *Calvin and Hobbes* comic strip, Calvin's mystery meal suddenly comes alive and recites the soliloquy through “…must give us pause”—with dramatic relish. (1994)

“The insolence of office,” a familiar phrase in D.C., often applied to the opposing political party.

*Undiscovered Country*, a play by Tom Stoppard, author of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. (1979)

*Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, the film sequel to the *Star Trek* television series and last film to feature the entire original cast, including William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy and George Takei. Kim Cattrall and Christopher Plummer also starred in the film. (1991)

In *The Cherry Orchard* by Russian playwright Anton Chekhov, at the end of Act 3 Lopakhin teases Varya with references to Ophelia. Some versions translate his line: “Nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins dismembered!” (1904)
Activating Shakespeare’s Language

Internal Stage Directions

Modern plays have a director. A director’s job is to oversee the whole production and make sure all the elements of the production, including the acting, costumes, set, sound and lighting, work together cohesively to tell the story. Part of this job includes directing the blocking on stage. **Blocking** is all of the actor’s movement on stage. Modern plays often have **stage directions** as well. Stage directions are blocking instructions or design instructions written by the playwright.

The job of a director did not exist in Shakespeare’s lifetime and there are almost no stage directions explicitly written in Shakespeare’s plays. Instead, Shakespeare directed the actors movement through the dialogue he wrote. This device is called **internal stage directions** because the blocking is embedded in the dialogue. For example, when characters say things like, “Let me go!” or “On my knees I beg,” the actors on stage know they have to hold onto someone or be on their knees for the line to make sense.

Classroom Activity

1) Give each student a line with an internal stage direction from the list below.
2) Give everyone a chance to rehearse saying the line doing the appropriate blocking.
3) Have students perform for the class. (note: some lines may require a scene partner to do the action)

**Internal Stage Direction Lines from Hamlet**

BARNARDO. How now, Horatio? You tremble and look pale.
KING. How is it that the clouds still hang on you?
QUEEN. Do not for ever with thy vailed lids Seek for thy noble father in the dust.
HAMLET. The air bites shrewdly, it is very cold.
MARCELLUS. Look with what courteous action It waves you to a more removed ground. But do not go with it.
HAMLET. Unhand me, gentlemen. By heaven, I’ll make a ghost of him that stops me.
HAMLET. I hold it fit that we shake hands and part.
POLONIUS. What do you read, my lord?
HAMLET. There is a kind of confession in your looks, which your modesties have not craft enough to colour.

I know the good King and Queen have sent for you.

POLONIUS. I hear him coming. Let's withdraw, my lord.
OPHELIA. My lord, I have remembrances of yours that I have longed long to redeliver.

I pray you now receive them.
HAMLET. Come, come, and sit you down, you shall not budge.
POLONIUS. O, I am slain!
HAMLET. Leave wringing of your hands. Peace, sit you down, And let me wring your heart;
GRAVEDIGGER. Here’s a skull now has lain you i’th’ earth this dozen years.
HAMLET. I prithee take thy fingers from my throat,
QUEEN. O my dear Hamlet! The drink, the drink! I am poison’d

Scene Study Activity

1. Work in pairs to read a scene from *Hamlet*.
2. Underline all the clues for physical action.
3. Stage the scene with as much physical action as possible.
4. Rehearse and perform in class.
Clues for Combat

Just like an actor or a director, the fight choreographer must investigate the text for clues to the action of the play. Shakespeare provides us with internal stage directions that dictate not only the sequence of actions, but many of the actions themselves. The fight choreographer then fleshes out the text with combat choreography that articulates and illuminates the text. In *Hamlet*, the final scene presents a unique artistic challenge for the choreographer. They must mine the text for clues that tell us how the fight is proceeding from one pass to the next, while keeping the actors safe so that they can repeat the action for several performances.

Take a moment to read through the text below. In the final scene, Laertes and Hamlet are just about to duel in front of King Claudius and Queen Gertrude. (Side Note: The king has a poisoned pearl that he will drop into a cup of wine if Hamlet looks like he is winning. Osric is the referee for the duel.) As you read, notice how Shakespeare is telling the actors and the choreographer what to do and how to do it with each line of text.

HAMLET
Come on, sir.

LAERTES
Come, my lord.

HAMLET
One.

LAERTES
No.

OSRIC
A hit, a very palpable hit.

LAERTES
Well, again.

KING
Stay, give me drink.—Hamlet, this pearl is thine.

Queen's to thy health.

Give him the cup.

HAMLET
I'll play this bout first. Set it by awhile.

LAERTES
A touch, a touch. I do confess 't.

KING
Our son shall win.

QUEEN
He's fat and scant of breath.—

Here, Hamlet, take my napkin; rub thy brows.

The Queen carouses to thy fortune,

Hamlet.

HAMLET
Good madam.

KING
Gertrude, do not drink.

QUEEN
I will, my lord; I pray you pardon me.

KING
It is the poisoned cup. It is too late.

HAMLET
I dare not drink yet, madam—by and by.

QUEEN
Come, let me wipe thy face.

LAERTES
My lord, I'll hit him now.

KING
I do not think 't.

LAERTES
And yet it is almost against my conscience.

HAMLET
Come, for the third, Laertes. You do but daily.

I pray you pass with your best violence.

I am afeard you make a wanton of me.

LAERTES
Say you so? Come on.

OSRIC
Nothing neither way.

LAERTES
Have at you now!

(In a scuffling they change rapiers.)

KING
Part them. They are incensed.

HAMLET
Nay, come again.

OSRIC
Look to the Queen there, ho!
Exercise #1:

Cast students in the roles and have them read the scene on the previous page out loud. Next, have them act out the scene one line at a time. Some guiding questions include: To whom are you speaking? Do you move toward the person you are talking to, or away from them? What clues does the text provide as to how you feel?

Once you have the framework for staging the scene, discuss how the physical violence in the scene fleshes out the story of the characters, yet allows the actors to stay safe. (Hint: Start slow! No one needs to get hurt, and the audience needs to see every moment of the story. That can’t happen if the fight is too fast.)

There are three rounds to the duel. The first round is won by Hamlet, but it is disputed by Laertes. How might the fight choreographer craft the combat to give Laertes cause to argue the point?

The second round is delayed by King Claudius, who is plotting to poison Hamlet. Hamlet asks that the cup be set aside and the duel resumes. After he scores another point, one that Laertes cannot dispute, his mother Queen Gertrude remarks that her son is “scant of breath.” What does this mean for the fight choreographer? If someone is out of breath they must have exerted themselves. This suggests that the second pass is much more physically demanding for the duelists, and creates an opportunity for the choreographer to exercise some artistic freedom. How long does this second pass last, and how athletic are the movements?

Before the third pass can be played, Queen Gertrude decides to toast her son’s victory, against her husband’s wishes. Gertrude has been poisoned. How does this affect her physically? How long does Gertrude have before the poison takes effect? The answer, as always, is in the text, and the choreographer is there to advise the actor and keep them safe.

The third pass becomes quite violent. We know that Laertes wounds Hamlet, they change weapons, and Hamlet wounds Laertes. But how? The fight choreographer now has some decisions to make. How are the duelists wounded? How are the weapons switched? How far out of bounds do the combatants venture? If every line is, in essence, a stage direction, how does the physical violence facilitate and enhance action of the scene?

Exercise #2:

When you change the time period in which the play takes place, Elizabethan short swords might be out of place. Have students create fight choreography suggestions based on different settings for the play. For example, what might the duel look like if it were set in present-day Denmark? How would it change for feudal Japan? What about ancient Egypt, 1980s Soviet Union, or 1880s Texas? What other time periods inspire creative solutions for the fight choreographer?
Shakespeare’s Language

STUDENT REFLECTION
Ask your students to think about how they change their language in different situations:
Do you speak differently and choose different words when you talk to your friends versus when talking to your parents or teachers? Would you speak differently at a job interview versus a family gathering? How and why does our language change in these situations?

William Shakespeare was writing scripts for specific actors in his own acting company when he created his plays. He purposely wrote lines in two different ways to communicate information about the characters to his actors. Additionally, he wanted characters to sound different from one another and to adapt their language to new situations, the way people do in real life. The two ways he writes are called **prose** and **verse**.

---

**PROSE**
The ordinary form of written or spoken language without metrical structure.
Prose can be very descriptive, but it follows the rules of grammar. Essays, news articles and novels are examples of written prose.

If a character’s lines are written in **PROSE** we assume the following information:
* The character is most likely from the lower class and not very wealthy
* The character is most likely uneducated

For example, when Hamlet had a discussion with the grave digger, their lines are written in prose to reflect the grave digger’s social status.

How can I tell if it’s **prose**? You can tell when lines are written in prose because they look like a regular paragraph. Here’s an example:

HAMLET. How long will a man lie i'th' earth ere he rot?

GRAVE-DIGGER. Faith, if he be not rotten before a die - as we have many pocky corses that will scarce hold the laying in - he will last you some eight year or nine year. Here’s a skull now has lain you i’th’ earth this dozen years.

HAMLET. Whose was it?

GRAVE-DIGGER. A pestilence on him for a mad rogue! He poured a flagon of Rhenish on my head once. This same skull, sir, was Yorick’s skull, the King’s jester.

HAMLET. Alas, poor Yorick. I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath bore me on his back a thousand times, and now-how abhorred in my imagination it is.

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**VERSE**
Verse is another word for poetry.
Verse has a rhythmic structure, like a song lyric.
We refer to the rhythm as the meter.
**Iambic Pentameter** is the name of the rhythm Shakespeare uses.

If a character’s lines are written in **VERSE** we assume the following information:
* The character is most likely from the upper class and/or nobility and very wealthy
* The character is most likely formally educated
* The character may be experiencing a strong emotion like love or jealousy and needs to use poetry

For example, in King Claudius’ court all of the upper class characters’ lines are written in verse.

How can I tell if it’s **verse**? You can tell when lines are written in verse because every line begins with a capital letter and the lines are all different lengths on the page. This is because each line is written with a metrical structure. Here’s an example:

KING. ‘Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet, To give these mourning duties to your father, But you must know your father lost a father, That father lost, lost his - and the survivor bound In filial obligation for some term To do obsequious sorrow. But to persever In obstinate condolement is a course Of impious stubbornness, ‘tis manly grief, It shows a will most incorrect to heaven. Take it to heart. We pray you throw to earth This unprevailing woe, and think of us As of a father; for let the world take note You are the most immediate to our throne, And with no less nobility of love Than that which dearest father bears his son Do I impart toward you.
# Shakespeare’s Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public = Verse</th>
<th>Noble characters in public situations must present their most formal self and speak in verse as a means to do so. Prince Hal in <em>Henry IV, Part 1</em> speaks prose when he’s hanging out with his fellow soldiers at the pub, but uses verse at court and when speaking to his father, the King.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private = Prose</td>
<td>Upper-class characters use verse in public settings, but may use prose in private settings when they are talking to family or close friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love = Verse</td>
<td>Shakespeare always uses verse when characters fall in love, regardless of their status. For example, in <em>As You Like It</em>, Silvius and Phoebe are both shepherds who live in the forest of Arden. However, even though they are lower class, both of these characters are in love and they express it through verse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect = Verse</td>
<td>Upper-class characters use verse as a form of respect. To use prose with a King or Duke or parent would be disrespectful. For example, Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, has very eloquent verse for his soliloquies. But because he is angry at his mother Gertrude and his uncle Claudius, the new king, Hamlet often speaks to them in prose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disguise = Prose</td>
<td>Upper-class characters use prose as part of their disguises, when pretending to be someone else. They are usually disguised as a lower-class character. King Henry V disguises himself as a common foot soldier the night before the battle of Agincourt to find out the true thoughts and feelings of his men. In disguise he speaks in prose, the language of the common men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madness = Prose</td>
<td>If a character descends into madness, then they have literally “lost their wits” and no longer have the capacity to speak in verse. Both Lady Macbeth and Ophelia speak in verse until they go mad. Once madness sets in, all their lines are in prose.</td>
</tr>
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## When and Why do Shakespeare’s characters switch from verse to prose?

### Classroom Activity

Hamlet is the Prince of Denmark and Shakespeare’s most famous character. One might guess that Hamlet lines would all be in verse, but his lines are in prose about half of the play. Have students identify when *Hamlet* is speaking in prose and when he is speaking in Verse. Discuss why his language changes in each circumstance.
Iambic pentameter is the main rhythmic structure of Shakespeare's verse, meaning the majority of Shakespeare's verse is written in this rhythm. One line of iambic pentameter has 10 syllables, which we divide up into five units of meter called feet. Each foot of the verse contains two syllables. Illustrate this on the board:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A foot = 2 syllables</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pentameter = a line with 10 syllables which we divide into 5 feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But soft! / What light / through yon / der win / dow breaks?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Iambic refers to the rhythm of the line. When the first syllable is unstressed and the second syllable is stressed, as in the word Hello, it is called an iamb. Iambic means push, persistency or determination. The prefix penta means five, as in pentagon, a five sided shape. Therefore, iambic pentameter is one line of poetry consisting of five forward-moving feet.

Iambic = unstressed stressed rhythm

Identifying the rhythm of a line is called scansion. Actors scan their lines so we know how Shakespeare wanted us to say them. We mark unstressed syllables with this symbol ͝ and stressed syllables with a slash /

```
But soft! What light through yon window breaks?
```

When learning iambic pentameter, many students make the mistake of unstressing & stressing every other word instead of every other syllable. To address this, you need to get the students saying all of the lines out loud, with energy and feeling the rhythm. You can explore having them say their names out loud and figure out what syllable is stressed. You can also explore saying the lines giving every syllable the same stress so they discover how slow & robotic it feels or have them say it with the opposite rhythm to see how unnatural it feels. Have students say this rhythm out loud several times. They should clap lightly on da and clap harder on DUM.

Clap the rhythm of iambic pentameter. Without specific words, the rhythm of iambic pentameter is:

da DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM

The rhythm of iambic pentameter is similar to the human heartbeat, a horse gallop, or the beat underneath a piece of music. Iambic pentameter drives and supports Shakespeare's verse, moving the language along in a forward flow that imitates natural speech patterns.

Actors also scan the text to determine how they are supposed say the lines. The stressed words are ones the actor needs to emphasize when speaking the lines. Scanning also helps us figure out how to pronounce unfamiliar words and the names of characters.

Try scanning the following lines for iambic pentameter.

| Hamlet: | To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there’s the rub For in that sleep of death what dreams may come |
| Hamlet: | A little more than kin, and less than kind |
| Gertrude: | The lady doth protest too much, methinks |
Shakespeare’s Language

SUMMARY VS. PARAPHRASE

Summarizing—Concisely stating what a passage in a text says. A summary is usually stated in third person. It’s useful to demonstrate a basic understanding of reading comprehension.

Paraphrasing—Restating each line in your own words. Paraphrasing should be done in first person. Paraphrasing is an important tool that actors use to understand what their lines mean how their character feels.

Here is an example of a summary and paraphrase of a passage from Hamlet.

**QUEEN.** Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.
Do not for ever with thy vailed lids
Seek for thy noble father in the dust.

**Summary**
The Queen is trying to get Hamlet to cheer up and stop mourning for his father’s death.

**Paraphrase**
Dear Hamlet, stop wearing all black and come give the King a friendly greeting. Don’t continue to mope about like you’re looking for your Father on the ground. You know that everyone must die at some point.

ACTIVITY

**Step 1:** Select one of the speeches below and read it out loud for meaning.

**Step 2:** Look up unknown words.

**Step 3:** Paraphrase each line of text. (*put it into your own words)*

**Step 4:** Perform the speech out loud.

**HAMLET.**
O that this too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fix’d
His canon ‘gainst self-slaughter. O God! God!
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on’t, ah fie, ‘tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
But two months dead - nay, not so much, not two -
So excellent a king, that was to this
Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,
Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on; and yet within a month -
O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
Would have moun’d longer – married with my uncle,
My father’s brother - but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules. Within a month.
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married - O most wicked speed!
It is not, nor it cannot come to good;
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

**HAMLET.**
To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, ’tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish’d. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there’s the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause: there’s the respect
That makes calamity of so long life;
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law’s delay,
The insolence of office and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover’d country from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry.
And lose the name of action.
Sparking Conversation

- Some interpretations of the play conclude that Hamlet is just pretending to be insane as part of his revenge scheme, while others decide that he has actually gone mad. In your opinion, is Hamlet really mad or just pretending? What decision has Michael Kahn, the director of STC’s production of *Hamlet*, seemed to make on this point?

- Hamlet is a complex and imperfect character—one that is often unlikable but has fascinated actors and scholars alike for centuries. Is Hamlet a tragic hero? Research Aristotle’s definition and elements of a tragic hero to decide whether Hamlet qualifies.

- There is perhaps no other work of art or literature from which so many expressions and references in popular culture are derived. Why do you think *Hamlet* has endured as such a monumental work?

- In order to prove Claudius’ guilt, Hamlet concocts a scheme to have a troupe of players perform a play that mimics Claudius’ own murderous actions. Hamlet claims that the purpose of theatre (or “playing”) is “to hold, as ’twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure” (III.ii.23-26). What does this mean, and how does art function as a “mirror up to nature” in our modern world? Why is theatre such a powerful platform for social critique and self-reflection? What are some examples of contemporary works of art (plays, movies, songs, etc.) that aim to reveal truths about issues in our society?

- For a character that only appears in five scenes of the play, Ophelia has fascinated and endured in paintings, songs, books, spin-off plays, essays, and other artistic renderings for centuries. She serves as the prototype for classical female hysteria, a beautifully tragic heroine that is picturesque even in death. Outline the defining characteristics of the Ophelia archetype. What are some contemporary examples of the “crazy ex-girlfriend”, and how do they either conform to or combat this archetype? How have our depictions of female insanity changed since Shakespeare’s time?

- Hamlet has more lines than any other character in the Shakespeare canon by a large margin, delivering a staggering seven soliloquies throughout the play. What do Hamlet’s speech patterns and style of speaking reveal about his state of mind and character? What is the significance of all his long speeches?

- What were the qualities of government under Claudius’ rule in STC’s production of *Hamlet* directed by Michael Kahn? What moments of the story were highlighted to make this choice clear? What other evidence did you see in the production and performances? What about the set, costume, lighting, or sound designs made this choice clear?
The phrase “theatre etiquette” refers to the special rules of behavior that are called for when attending a theatre performance.

Above all, it is important to remember that the actors on stage can see and hear you at the same time you can see and hear them. Be respectful of the actors and your fellow audience members by being attentive and observing the general guidelines below:

**Before you go:**

- Please help us create the appropriate soundscape by turning off your cell phone and other electronic devices (iPods, games, etc.). It can be very distracting to others, not to mention embarrassing to you, when your cell phone goes off during a performance. The lights from cell phones and other electronic devices are also a big distraction, so please, no text messaging.

- We ask that you spit out your gum before entering the theatre and leave all food and drinks in the lobby or the coat check.

- We don’t want you to miss out on any of the action of the play, so please visit the restroom before the performance begins.

**During the performance:**

- We want you to have honest reactions to what is happening onstage. You may laugh, applaud and enjoy the performance. However, please don’t talk during the performance; it is extremely distracting to other audience members and the actors. Save discussions with friends for intermission and after the performance.

**Thoughts about the importance of being an audience member from Shakespeare Theatre Company Artistic Director Michael Kahn**

“When you go to the theatre, you are engaging with other living, breathing human beings, having an immediate human response. In the theatre you sense that all of this may never happen again in this particular way.

As a member of the audience, you are actually part of how that’s developing—you have a hand in it ... You are part of a community where you are asked to be compassionate, perhaps to laugh with or grieve as well as to understand people, lives and cultures different from your own.”
Standards of Learning

Participation in our student matinee program and the lessons and activities found in this curriculum guide support grade 8-12 Common Core standards in English Language Arts and The National Core Arts Standards for responding and connecting to Theatre Art. Primary content areas addressed include but are not limited to:

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