

The Tragedy of *Hamlet*

Lesson plan

Topic: Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet*

Level: B1

Time: 75 minutes

Aims:

- to develop students' knowledge of the story plot and themes of *Hamlet*
- to develop students' ability to listen for specific and general information and to take notes
- to give practice of reading for information and sharing this information with other students

Introduction

This lesson is about one of Shakespeare's most popular plays, *Hamlet*. Students learn about the characters and listen to a summary of the plot. They listen for general and specific information and also make notes on what they heard. In a final discussion, students talk about the play and some of the themes it touches on.

Preparation and materials

Make one copy of the **student worksheets** for each learner.

Make and cut up one copy of **Events to cut up for Task 3** for every group of 3–4 students in the class.

Procedure

Warmer – *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (15 minutes)

- The first part of this lesson is designed to get students to become familiar with the plot of *Hamlet* and also to think about what they might do in his situation.
- Ask students to read through the box of text in pairs and get them to discuss the questions.
- Read the text on Shakespeare and tragedy together.
- Note: the full title of the play is *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, although it is most commonly referred to simply as *Hamlet*.

Task 1 – *Hamlet: the characters* (10 minutes)

- Here, students get to find out about the main characters in *Hamlet*. There are many characters in the play but this lesson focuses on just seven of them.
- Ask students if they have ever read *Hamlet* and if they know any of the characters.
- You could watch a trailer on YouTube by searching for 'Hamlet trailer'. There are lots of famous film versions from the last forty years.
- Ask students to read the text and then identify the characters before feeding back the answers as a class.

Answers

- a. *the ghost*
- b. *Hamlet*
- c. *Ophelia*
- d. *Claudius*
- e. *Polonius*
- f. *Gertrude*

Task 2 – vocabulary (5 minutes)

- Ask students to match the words and their meanings. This will help them to understand the plot summary of *Hamlet* that they will hear in the next section.

Answers: 1.c 2.a 3.e 4.d 5.f 6.b

Task 3 – listening and ordering the plot summary (15 minutes)

- Put the students in groups of three or four, and distribute the cut-up copies of **Events to cut up for Task 3**.
- If students are already familiar with the story of *Hamlet* then they can put the sentences in order before they listen to the audio.
- If not, then get students to read through the sentences making sure that they understand the vocabulary.
- When they are ready, play the audio once through, and then allow students to work in pairs and work out the answers before feeding back the answers to the class as a whole.

Answers:

1. c Hamlet's uncle, Claudius, marries his mother, the queen, and becomes the king of Denmark.
2. j Hamlet is told by a ghost that his father was murdered. .
3. d Hamlet pretends to be 'mad' so he can find out if his father was killed by his uncle.
4. g Hamlet puts on a play where a king is killed by his brother.
5. h Hamlet accidentally kills the clerk of the court, Polonius.
6. a Hamlet is sent away to England.
7. e Hamlet's girlfriend Ophelia kills herself.
8. i Laertes dies in a fight with Hamlet.
9. b Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, drinks from a poison cup meant for Hamlet. She dies.
10. f Hamlet kills Claudius and then dies from his wounds.

Task 4 – listening to the plot summary and taking notes (10 minutes)

- Explain that students are going to listen to the audio again and listen out for specific information. The idea is that they take brief notes on the specific subject they are focusing on, so students shouldn't write down everything they hear, just the important information. Split them into groups of three and assign a different topic to each student.

When students have finished ask them to share their ideas on the subjects they have listened out for before eliciting the answers. Below are suggested answers, but there may well be more.

Suggested answers:

Sadness and depression. What makes Hamlet sad or depressed?	Depression and madness. Apart from Hamlet, who is depressed or mad in the play and why?	Conflicts and fights between characters – who fights with whom and why?
<p>His father has died.</p> <p>His mother got married too quickly and to his uncle.</p> <p>He's seen a ghost.</p> <p>He finds out his father might have been murdered by his uncle.</p> <p>He finds out his mother might have known about the murder.</p> <p>Hamlet finds out his uncle did kill his father.</p> <p>He kills Polonius.</p> <p>Ophelia kills herself.</p> <p>Hamlet finds the skull of a court jester.</p> <p>He kills Laertes (?)</p> <p>Hamlet's mother dies.</p> <p>He kills Claudius.</p>	<p>The ghost of the king is depressed because it was murdered.</p> <p>Ophelia is depressed and goes mad because she is in love with Hamlet and he has gone mad – or so she thinks. Her father is also killed.</p> <p>Polonius is unhappy because his daughter is in love with Hamlet.</p> <p>Laertes is depressed because his father is killed by Hamlet.</p>	<p>Hamlet fights with his mother over her marriage to Claudius.</p> <p>Hamlet wants to kill Claudius for the murder of his father, the king.</p> <p>Claudius is angry with the actors and Hamlet for the play.</p> <p>The ghost is angry with Hamlet for not killing Claudius.</p> <p>Hamlet kills Polonius by accident.</p> <p>Laertes fights with Hamlet to avenge his father's death.</p> <p>Hamlet fights with Claudius after he finds out the truth about his father's murder.</p> <p>The Norwegians fight with the Danes.</p>

Task 5 – using your notes (10 minutes)

- Students work together in this section to match the beginnings and endings of the sentences using the notes they made in the previous section. Encourage students to work together and share their ideas from their notes.

Answers

1.d 2.a 3.f 4.b. 5.e 6.c 7.h 8.g

Task 6 – discussion (10 minutes)

- In pairs or small groups (perhaps different from in the previous tasks), ask students to discuss the questions together. Give them five minutes (or less if they aren't talking).
- Get students to feed back their ideas to the class and develop any interesting topics of conversation that spring from these discussions.

The plot of *Hamlet* – transcript

The main character in the play is of course Prince Hamlet himself; in fact, the full title is *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. He's the son of old King Hamlet, who died very recently. Hamlet's uncle is Claudius, his father's brother, and the man who became king when the old King Hamlet died. But as well as becoming king, Claudius quickly married King Hamlet's widow, Gertrude, Hamlet's mother.

Denmark is facing crisis. The neighbouring country of Sweden is about to send its army to invade.

The play starts on a cold winter night in the King of Denmark's castle. Guards outside see a ghostly figure and decide to tell Prince Hamlet that his father's ghost is around.

Hamlet is feeling very depressed about his father's death, and so both his uncle, King Claudius, and his mother, Gertrude, try to cheer him up. Hamlet still feels sad and he talks to the audience about the cause of his depression – the fact that his mother has married his uncle. For Hamlet, it has all happened too quickly.

Claudius and Gertrude send two friends to see Hamlet so that they can discover the reason why he is so sad. Hamlet greets his friends warmly, but soon understands that they are working for Claudius and his mother and are, in fact, spies.

That night, the ghost of the dead king appears to Hamlet and tells him that Claudius murdered him by pouring poison into his ear while he was sleeping. The ghost demands that Hamlet avenge him. Hamlet isn't sure if the ghost is telling the truth, so he decides to pretend to be mad to find out what really happened.

Polonius is Claudius's trusted chief counsellor. He has a son, Laertes, who is about to go back to his studies in France. He also has a daughter called Ophelia, who is planning to marry Hamlet. Polonius and Laertes don't like the idea of her marrying Hamlet and advise her against it. Ophelia meets Hamlet secretly and she is frightened by his madness – which the audience know is fake. She loves Hamlet desperately, but he sends her away.

Hamlet still doesn't believe the ghost. When a group of actors arrive, he decides he will stage a play in which they will re-enact his father's murder. Hamlet will be able to tell if Claudius is guilty by his reaction to the play.

The royal family and the entire court watch the play, and when Claudius sees the king murdered with poison in the ears, he runs out of the room angrily. For Hamlet, this proves that he is guilty of his father's murder. Hamlet decides to kill the king and sneaks into his bedroom. However, he finds Claudius in prayer, and so does not kill him.

Hamlet is furious with his mother, and they have a row in her bedroom. Hamlet hears a noise behind a curtain and, believing it to be Claudius, he stabs the figure behind it. But he has made a terrible mistake and has killed the king's advisor Polonius by accident. Now, the ghost of Hamlet's father suddenly appears, and is angry with Hamlet for not killing Claudius. Gertrude, who can't see or hear the ghost, thinks that Hamlet must be mad.

Claudius is now worried that Hamlet will kill him, so he sends Hamlet to England with two of his friends. He also sends a note to the King of England ordering Hamlet's immediate execution.

Ophelia, Polonius's daughter, takes the news of her father's death very hard, and it drives her mad. Her brother, Laertes, arrives back from France, enraged by his father's death and his sister's madness. Claudius convinces Laertes that Hamlet is the cause of all this.

Claudius and Laertes decide that they will kill Hamlet. Laertes will ask Hamlet for a duel where they will fight to the death. To make sure that Laertes wins and that Hamlet dies, he will use a sword that is covered with poison. Claudius will also offer Hamlet a drink of

poisoned wine. They now find out that Laertes's sister Ophelia has committed suicide by drowning herself.

While they are digging her grave, two gravediggers talk about Ophelia's suicide. Hamlet arrives with his friend and they talk to the gravediggers. Here, Hamlet finds a skull which, he finds out, is from a court jester from the time when he was a child. Hamlet holds up his skull, and this is the scene where he makes his famous 'To be or not to be' speech.

Back at the castle, Hamlet receives an invitation to fight a duel with Laertes, and later, with the Norwegian army close to invasion, the two begin to fight. Laertes cuts Hamlet with a poisoned blade, but in the fight they somehow change swords and Hamlet stabs Laertes with his own poisoned sword. Sadly, and even though she was warned by Claudius, Gertrude accidentally drinks the poisoned wine meant for Hamlet, and she dies. Laertes tells Hamlet about the plot to murder him in the fight with poisoned swords, and then Laertes himself dies. So, a bitterly angry Hamlet attacks and kills Claudius with the poisoned sword, as he blames Claudius for his mother's death. Wounded in the fight, Hamlet dies soon afterwards.

When the Norwegian army arrives, the royal family of Denmark lies dead. The Prince of Norway is moved by the story of what happened, and takes the crown of Denmark for himself. The tragedy of *Hamlet* is complete.