

HAMLET

by William Shakespeare
directed by Daniel Fish

Resource Guide Created in conjunction
with the McCarter Theatre production
May 3 - June 19, 2005

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INTRODUCTION

Few plays have a history as long and rich as Shakespeare's Hamlet. The story of a court in crisis, a young man at a crossroads, ghosts, swordplay, betrayal and madness, it has captured the interest of audiences for more than 400 years. This dynamic classic is as famous as a play can be, and yet each encounter with it can reveal something new. We hope the activities in this guide will help you as you experience this complex and profound work, whether for the first time or the hundredth.

Note from the Artistic Director:

I'm delighted to welcome you to *Hamlet*, the final play of McCarter's 2004-05 season. Many of us come to Shakespeare's plays, and to *Hamlet* in particular, with decades of theatrical tradition associated with them. How many times have we heard Hamlet's famous soliloquies pedantically intoned, or seen Elsinore conjured up through looming battlements and royal robes? Daniel Fish's vision of *Hamlet*, on the other hand, excites me because he invites us to look at the play as if it were brand new. With a company of eight actors—whose double-casting is a means of storytelling—and a nearly bare stage, he strips the play down so that artists and audiences can hear and see it in a new way. The opportunity to experience *Hamlet* in this intimate and spontaneous way will, I hope, allow us all an invigorating interior view of this endlessly fascinating play.

-Emily Mann
Artistic Director
McCarter Theatre

PLOT SUMMARY

The action of the play begins two months after the sudden death of the Danish king, who has been succeeded by his brother Claudius. Soon after the funeral, Claudius married Gertrude, the dead king's widow. Hamlet, the dead king's son, has returned to the court at Elsinore from his studies. The ghost of his father appears to tell him he was murdered by Claudius, and asks his son to avenge his death.

Polonius, Claudius's chief counsellor, forbids his daughter Ophelia to see Hamlet. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two childhood friends of Hamlet's, are summoned by Claudius and Gertrude to keep an eye on Hamlet. Ophelia, obeying her father's instructions, rejects Hamlet's advances in an arranged meeting while Polonius and Claudius eavesdrop.

A company of actors arrives at Elsinore. Hamlet asks them to perform a play called *The Murder of Gonzago*, hoping that its plot, which bears some similarities to the circumstances of his father's murder, will force Claudius to reveal his guilt. After the play, which Claudius interrupts, Hamlet is summoned to his mother's chamber. He chastises her for her marriage to Claudius and accidentally kills Polonius, who is hiding behind a curtain. Claudius sends Hamlet to England, planning to have him murdered.

Laertes, Polonius's son, returns to Denmark from France demanding revenge for his father's death. Claudius plots with Laertes to kill Hamlet in a fencing match. Ophelia goes mad, and Gertrude relates the story of her drowning. Hamlet, having escaped his captors, returns from England and witnesses Ophelia's

funeral. The fencing plot miscarries and Laertes is killed. Gertrude drinks from a poisoned cup intended for Hamlet and dies. Hamlet, wounded by Laertes's poisoned sword, kills Claudius, then dies himself.

Fortinbras of Norway enters and lays claim to the Danish throne.

CHARACTER PROFILES

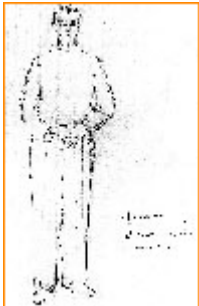


Hamlet

Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, is the son of Gertrude and the late king. His father's death forced him to interrupt his studies at the German university of Wittenberg to return to Elsinore. He is romantically involved with Ophelia.

*"'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
That can denote me truly."*

Act I, Scene 2



Claudius

Claudius, the newly crowned King of Denmark, is Hamlet's uncle and the late king's brother. He married Gertrude shortly after his brother's death.

*"We prey you throw to earth
This unprevailing woe, and think of us
As of a father"*

Act I, Scene 2



The Ghost

The Ghost of Hamlet's father. He reveals to Hamlet that he was murdered by Claudius and appeals to him for vengeance.

*"List, list, O list!
If thou didst ever thy dear father love—
Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder."*

Act I, Scene 5



Gertrude

Gertrude, the Queen of Denmark, is Hamlet's mother and the late king's widow. She married Claudius shortly after her husband's death.

*"O Hamlet, speak no more.
Thou turn'st my eyes into my very soul,
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct."*

Act III, Scene 4



Polonius

Polonius, Chief Counsellor in the Danish Court, is the father of Laertes and Ophelia and one of Claudius's closest advisors.

*"My liege and madam, to expostulate
What majesty should be, what duty is,
Why day is day, night night, and time is time,
Were nothing but to waste night, day, and time.
Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit,
And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes,
I will be brief."*

Act II, Scene 2



Laertes

Laertes, a nobleman of the Danish Court, is Polonius's son and Ophelia's brother. He is currently studying in France. He disapproves of Hamlet's relationship with his sister.

*"For Hamlet, and the trifling of his favour,
Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood,
Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,
The perfume and suppliance of a minute,
No more."*

Act I, Scene 3



Ophelia

Ophelia, noblewoman of the Danish Court, is Polonius's daughter and Laertes's sister. She is romantically involved with Hamlet.

*"O woe is me
T'have seen what I have seen, see what I see."*

Act III, Scene 1



Horatio is Hamlet's closest friend from school and only confidant. He brings Hamlet the news of the ghost's appearance.

*"What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles o'er his base into the sea,
And there assume some other horrible form
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason
And draw you into madness. Think of it."*

Horatio

Costume designs for *Hamlet* by
Kaye Voyce. Act I, Scene 4

Rosencrantz and **Guildenstern** are childhood friends of Hamlet's and have been brought to Elsinore by Claudius to observe Hamlet's behavior.

Fortinbras, Prince of Norway, is the commander of the Norwegian army. He lays claim to the Danish throne at the end of the play.

Osric is a courtier in Claudius's service.

The Player is a member of a traveling troupe of actors. Hamlet arranges for him to play the king in a court performance of *The Murder of Gonzago*.

GLOSSARY

Apparition: A ghostly figure; a specter.

"That if again this apparition come he may approve our eyes and speak to it"
Act I, Scene 1 Line 28

Arrant: Completely such; often without qualification or exception.

"But he's an arrant knave"
Act I, Scene 5 Line 124

Beseech: To request earnestly; to beg for.

"And he beseech'd me to entreat your majesties to see and hear the matter"
Act III, Scene 1 Line 22

Bodkin: A short dagger.

"When he himself might his quietus make with a bare bodkin"
Act III, Scene 1 Line 76

Countenance: To give or express approval to, to condone.

"And this vile deed we must with all our majesty and skill both countenance and excuse"
Act IV, Scene 1 Line 32

Dalliance: A general sense of careless pleasure.

"Whilst, like a puff'd and reckless libertine, himself the primrose path of dalliance treads"
Act I, Scene 3 Line 50

Dirge: A funeral hymn or lament.
"With mirth in funeral and dirge in marriage"
Act I, Scene 2 Line 12

Dole: Grief
"In equal scale weighing delight and dole"
Act I, Scene 2 Line 13

Doth: Does.

Entreat: To make an earnest request of.
"Therefore I have entreated him along with us to watch the minutes of the night"
Act I, Scene 1 Line 26

Expostulate: To list, to discuss.
"My liege, and madam – to expostulate what majesty should be"
Act II, Scene 2 Line 86

Knave: A deceitful and unreliable scoundrel.
"But he's an arrant knave"
Act I, Scene 5 Line 124

Lauds: Songs of praise.
"She chanted snatches of old lauds"
Act IV, Scene 7 Line 178

Liegemen: Loyal supporters, followers or subjects.
"And liegemen to the Dane"
Act I, Scene 1 Line 15

Mirth: Gladness and gaiety, especially when expressed by laughter.
"I have of late, — but wherefore I know not, — lost all my mirth"
Act II, Scene 2 Line 307

Mischance: Ill-fortune.
"Sleep rock thy brain, and never come mischance between us twain"
Act III, Scene 2 Line 238

Nay: No.

Obsequious: Attempting to win favor from influential people by flattery.
"And the survivor bound, in filial obligation, for some term to do obsequious sorrow"
Act I, Scene 2 Line 92

O'er: Over.

O'ercrows: Triumphs over.
"The potent poison quite o'ercrows my spirit,"
Act V, Scene 2 Line 364

Painted: Artificial, counterfeit, unreal.

"My most painted word"

Act III, Scene 1 Line 53

Pernicious: Evil; wicked.

"O most pernicious woman"

Act I, Scene 5 Line 105

Prithee: I pray thee. Please. Used to express a polite request.

Repent: To feel remorse, contrition or self-reproach for what one has done or failed to do; to be contrite.

"Confess yourself to heaven; repent what's past" Act III, Scene 4 Line 173

Sinew: Vigorous strength; muscular power.

"And you, my sinews, grow not instant old, but bear me stiffly up"

Act I, Scene 5 Line 94

Strumpet: A prostitute.

"O, most true; she is a strumpet"

Act II, Scene 2 Line 240

Thou: The change from *you* to *thou* expresses friendly intimacy.

Thy: 'Your' or 'belonging to thee'.

'Tis: Contraction of *it is*.

Usurp: To seize or take or assume falsely or against right.

"What art thou that usurp'st this time of night" Act I, Scene 1 Line 46

Vantage: A favorable opportunity.

"I have some rights of memory in this kingdom, which now, to claim my vantage doth invite me" Act V,

Scene 2 Line 501

Wanton: Playful, frolicsome, often in an unchaste or licentious manner.

"Such wanton, wild, and usual slips as are companions noted and most known to youth and liberty"

Act II, Scene 1 Line 22

Wilt: Will.

Woe: An expression of deep distress or misery, as from grief; misfortune.

"O, woe is me, to have seen what I have seen, see what I see"

Act III, Scene 1 Line 168

WHOSE HAMLET IS IT ANYWAY?

By Janice Paran



David Garrick as Hamlet. 1754

There is no such thing as *Hamlet*, but there are countless *Hamlets*, a different one for every production ever mounted, every review or scholarly article ever written, every mind that has ever encountered the play in the privacy of an armchair or the clamor of a classroom. One of Shakespeare's richest, thorniest and most enduring works, it is frequently performed, endlessly quoted and tirelessly dissected. Everyone agrees that it's a masterpiece, but no one can lay claim to a definitive interpretation.

To begin with, the story of Hamlet wasn't original to Shakespeare. The tale of a Danish prince seeking to avenge his father's murder was recorded in a twelfth-century narrative called *Historica Danica*, and later retold by François de Belleforest in his *Histoires Tragiques*, which appeared in 1576. The Belleforest version of the Hamlet saga, many scholars believe, provided the source material for a lost English play of the 1580s which may have directly influenced Shakespeare.



Henry Irving, as Hamlet, in an illustration from *The Idler*. 1893.

There's also the question of which of the surviving Renaissance texts of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the most reliable. It is generally believed that Shakespeare wrote the play in 1600/1601, but the three extant versions of the text differ enormously from one another. A first Quarto (Q1), probably reconstructed from an actor's memory, appeared in 1603. Once dismissed as corrupt and unreliable, Q1 has gained adherents in many quarters. A second Quarto (Q2), nearly twice as long as Q1 and based, it seems, on Shakespeare's rough drafts, followed in 1604/05, and a Folio version, collected with most of Shakespeare's other plays, was published in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death. Most modern-day editions of the play incorporate elements of both Q2 and the Folio, but a forthcoming Arden edition will include all three versions of the play, leaving us right back where we started.

Each new production of *Hamlet* tells a different story than its predecessors, depending on which text or combination of texts is chosen, how much additional editing is done to suit the director's vision and the audience's patience (the uncut text runs well over four hours in performance), and what interpretative choices are brought to bear by actors, directors and designers. The notion of a "traditional" *Hamlet* is relative to the point of meaninglessness. There exists—both in England and around the world—a long tradition of non-traditional *Hamlets*, including, for instance, amateur performances aboard an English merchant ship in 1607, German-language adaptations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and nineteenth century Indian productions that incorporated folk songs and indigenous characters from the Parsi tradition.

By the same token, the role of Hamlet has invited an enormously diverse range of readings since Richard Burbage, the leading man in Shakespeare's company, first assayed it. Thomas Betterton, the best-known Hamlet of the Restoration age, kept the part in his active repertoire from 1661 to 1709. David Garrick, the titanic eighteenth-century actor/manager, also enjoyed a lengthy tenure (more than 30 years) as the melancholy Dane, and while he is credited with reinstating material traditionally cut (the advice to the players, for instance), he later produced his own adaptation, which included a radically revised ending. Garrick's *Hamlet*, like all *Hamlets*, was a product of its time, and included such audience-stirring special effects as a trick wig that allowed his hair to stand on end when he saw the Ghost.



Sarah Bernhardt as Hamlet. 1899.

John Philip Kemble, whose *Hamlet* bridged the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, gave the role a more romantic reading, and he also took the unusual step of performing the play in Elizabethan costume rather than modern dress, as had been the custom. Kemble's sister, Sarah Siddons, an esteemed classical actress in her own right, was the first female Hamlet. Her performance may have been greeted as a novelty, but it set a precedent for other actresses through the ages, Sarah Bernhardt, Judith Anderson, Eva La Gallienne, Diana Venora and Frances de la Tour among them.

Edmund Kean, William Charles Macready and Henry Irving (famous also as Mathias in Leopold Lewis's *The Bells*, a forerunner of the play seen at McCarter earlier this season) staked their claims to the role in the nineteenth century, but English actors faced increasing competition from European and American performers—including Thomas Salvini and Edwin Booth—who began to mold *Hamlet* to their talents and temperaments. A who's who of noteworthy Hamlets of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries would feature not only such lionized leading men as Barrymore, Gielgud and Olivier, but also the talents of Stacy Keach, the German actor Bruno Ganz, the Swedish actor Peter Stormare, the English actor Adrian Lester and the American avant-garde figure Robert Wilson, to name just a few.



Robert Helpmann, as Hamlet, and Claire Bloom, as Ophelia, in Michael Benthall's production. 1948.



Vladimir Vysotsky, as Hamlet, in Yuri Lyubimov's Soviet production. 1971

Throughout its history, *Hamlet* has been subject to extensive interpretative license, a trend that continues to this day. Marathon uncut-text productions vie with fast-paced first Quarto mountings and eclectically edited performance scripts. Modern dress goes in and out of fashion. Directors embrace or eschew specific cultural or historical contexts, with results as varied as William Poel's minimalist 1917 production, a radical departure from the opulence of most nineteenth-century Shakespeares; Michael Benthall's 1948 Victorian-era *Hamlet* with Paul Scofield; Joe Papp's 1967 counter-culture staging for the New York Shakespeare Festival (which starred a young Martin Sheen and clocked in at a breathless 90 minutes); Yuri Lyubimov's provocative 1971 Soviet production (which featured a well-known protest singer in the title role); and Ingmar Bergman's celebrated 1986 rendition, whose contemporary milieu suggested a society on the brink of collapse. The past 100 years have offered Hamlets of every stripe: Oedipal Hamlets and existential Hamlets,

athletic Hamlets and bespectacled Hamlets, patrician Hamlets and pajama-clad Hamlets, Hamlets on film, Hamlets in prison, and even a flash animation Hamlet: all proof that Shakespeare's play, despite four centuries of overexposure, hasn't finished tasking us. "The genius of *Hamlet*," the great Polish scholar Jan Kott wrote, "consists in the fact that the play can serve as a mirror. An ideal *Hamlet* would be one most true to Shakespeare and most modern at the same time." Ay, there's the rub.



Bob Wilson from *Hamlet, a Monologue*. 1995. Photo by Marc Enguerand.

SHAKESPEAREAN VERSE

What is the “language” of Shakespeare? How does it work? Most of the playwrights in Shakespeare’s time were writing in a metrical form of verse known as iambic pentameter. In this form, each line consists of five poetic units called “feet” and each foot is equal to two syllables. The second syllable of each foot is accented. Sometimes these lines rhyme, as they do in Puck’s dialogue in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. However, Shakespeare more often used unrhymed iambic pentameter. This is known as blank verse. Blank verse closely resembles the natural rhythms of speech in English, which allows the speaker greater freedom of tone, while still having a specific rhythmic structure within the line, which would be lacking in prose.

A line such as, “But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?” from *Romeo and Juliet* provides an excellent example of the use of iambic pentameter because it can easily be broken up into its five feet, five stressed and five unstressed syllables.

But, **soft**/what **light**/through **yon**/der **win**/dow **breaks**/

Whether or not a character speaks in iambic pentameter is often attributable to his or her station in life. People who are of a higher position in the class structure of the play (kings, queens, noblemen and women) often speak in the meter, while the lesser subjects (peasants, farmers, fools) speak in prose. However this is not always the case.

Shakespearean Verse: Some Basics

Scansion: the analysis of verse to show its meter.

Meter: the systematically arranged rhythm in verse — rhythm that repeats a single basic pattern of STRESSED and unstressed syllables.

Foot: the basic unit of verse meter.

TYPES OF FEET

An **Iamb**- a metrical foot consisting of one unstressed syllable followed by one STRESSED syllable.
(aBOVE, MeTHINKS, The NIGHT)

A **Trochee**- a metrical foot consisting of one STRESSED syllable followed by one unstressed syllable.
(MEtal, FEELing, FLOWer)

“We know that this form, the iambic pentameter, was evolved by the Elizabethan dramatists as being as near to ordinary speech as possible, yet having a definite pulse to drive the writing forward . . . The beat is absolutely firm, and there is something palpably exciting about its pulse. Because it is so close to everyday speech, it is organic to the thought, and when the rhythm breaks or jumps in any way it means there is something dramatic happening, either within the action of the play or with the feeling and behaviour of the character.”

Cicely Berry, *The Actor and His Text*

“Speak the speech I pray you as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue; but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town crier had spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and

A **Spondee**- a metrical foot consisting of two STRESSED syllables.
(ILL MET, WELL SAID)

TYPES OF VERSE

Pentameter- a form of verse consisting of 5 feet, 10 syllables.

Iambic Pentameter- a form of verse consisting of five iambs.
(and IN / the SPIC/ ed IN/ dian AIR,/ by NIGHT)

Irregular meter: often Shakespeare will break the pattern of stresses to create moments of interest, to highlight themes and word choices, to create a rest or pause, or to underline the specific intention of the character.
(I know a BANK where the WILD THYME BLOWS)

Feminine endings: lines of verse that have an “extra” unstressed syllable which can occur at the end of a verse line or within a verse line at the end of a phrase.
(The LU/ naTIC,/ the LOV/er AND/ the PO/ et)

as I may say, whirlwind
of your passion, you
must acquire and beget
a temperance that may
give it smoothness...”
Hamlet, Act Three,
Scene Two

“Shakespeare tells the actor when to go fast and when to go slow; when to come in on cue, and when to accent a particular word or series of words. He tells the actor much else; and he always tells him when to do it (provided the actor knows where to look). But he never tells him why. The motive, the why, remains the creative task of the actor. He has to endorse feelings in himself which support the form that Shakespeare’s text has given him. For instance, the words may tell the actor to speak slowly because they are monosyllabic; but they will not tell him why. The actor’s emotions must do that....So form comes first and, if it is observed, it helps provoke the feeling....

Some actors confuse verse with ‘poetry’—which they take to be the indulgent and often sentimental use of high emotion to support lyrical lines. ‘Purple passages’ they may with justice call them. But verse is not necessarily ‘poetical’ or even ‘purple.’ And it certainly isn’t in Shakespeare. The main purpose of his verse is to represent ordinary speech and tell a story lucidly. At its best, it is quick and clear. And if it is delivered with five accents as written, and with a tiny sense break (not a stop) at the end of each line, communication with the audience is immediate. That is why Shakespeare wrote in iambic pentameters; he didn’t want to be ‘poetic,’ he wanted to be understood. He earns his poetry and his metaphors when the emotions become intense. He can then move from plain speech to intricate images with ease. And he is able to use the most banal things—Lear’s button, or Cleopatra’s corset—to break our hearts. Most of his great moments are based on the mundane and the concrete, rather than the hyperbolic.”

—Peter Hall, *Shakespeare’s Advice to the Players*

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT SHAKESPEARE?



How much do you know about Shakespeare? While not every detail of the Bard's life is a known fact, we do have a great deal of information about his life. The following are some frequently asked questions with information provided courtesy of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

William Shakespeare

When and where was Shakespeare born?

According to the church records, Shakespeare was baptized at Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, on April 26, 1564. His father, John Shakespeare, was an affluent glove maker, tanner and wool dealer who owned property in Stratford, though he was struck with financial difficulties around 1576. His mother, Mary Arden, was the daughter of a prosperous farmer. In the 1500s Stratford was a market town of about 200 households. Famous for its fairs, Stratford was two days from London on horseback.

How many children did Shakespeare have and what were their names?

William Shakespeare and his wife, Anne Hathaway had three children — Susanna baptized on May 26, 1583, and twins, Judith and Hamnet, baptized on February 2, 1585. Hamnet contracted black plague and died in August 1596.

Was Shakespeare famous in his own lifetime?

During his lifetime, Shakespeare provoked the envy and admiration of fellow writers, as we know from their surviving comments in print. The First Folio, an unprecedented collection of a playwright's work, is the best illustration of the pre-eminence awarded to him. The statue erected to his memory in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, by his family also demonstrates his status as a prosperous man of property as well as a famous poet.

What was Shakespeare's relationship with Queen Elizabeth?

Elizabeth I was an active and generous patron of the theater. She had her own acting company called the "Queen's Men," and stood against the Puritans who wished to close down the theaters. Without her support the Elizabethan theaters would not have survived. In the 1590s court performances by acting companies became popular and Shakespeare's company was selected more than any other.



Queen Elizabeth

When did Shakespeare die, from what did he die, and where was he buried?

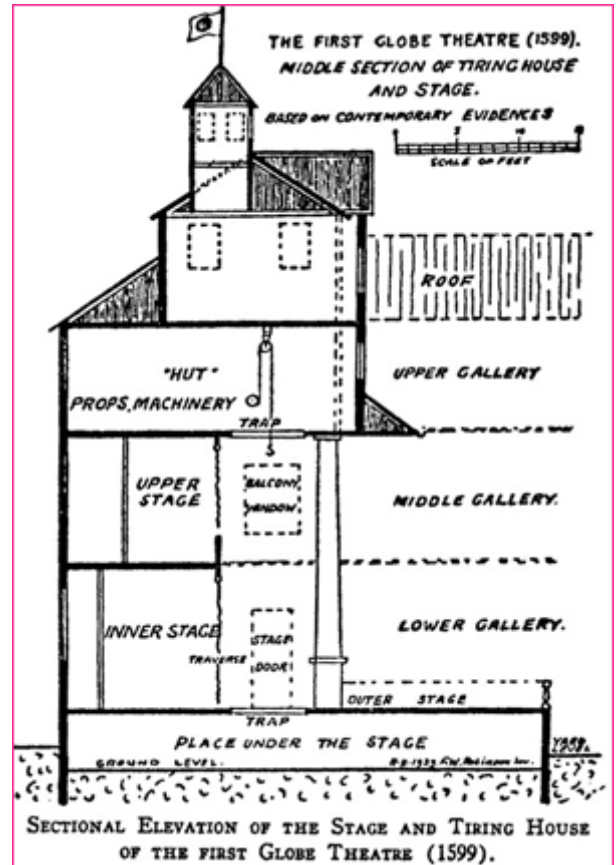
Shakespeare's burial is recorded in Stratford's parish register as having taken place on April 25, 1616. On his monument, inside Stratford's parish church, we read that he died on April 23. We do not know the cause of Shakespeare's death. He made his will on March 25, almost a month before he died, in which he describes himself as "in perfect health & memorie, god be prayesd." However, this was a conventional phrase and does not necessarily mean he was not already experiencing symptoms of an illness which later proved fatal. Moreover, his will of March 25 is, apparently, a re-drafting of one made in the January before, suggesting he may have been ill over an even longer period. What this illness may have been, however, we just do not know.

THEATER IN SHAKESPEARE'S TIME



In Shakespeare's time, the professional theater was a booming business, and a popular entertainment for people of all backgrounds, from royalty to illiterate apprentices.

Shakespeare wrote plays for a specific company, known first as the Lord Chamberlain's Men and later as the King's Men. His company performed in the courts of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I, and in churches and guildhalls in the countryside, but most frequently performed in its own theaters. From 1599 onward, that theater was the Globe. An outdoor theater, the Globe stood about 36 feet high and had a diameter of about 84 feet. The inside of the structure contained three tiers of galleries that surrounded an uncovered yard about 56 feet in diameter. Actors performed on a stage space that thrust into the yard area and had three sides where audience members could stand to watch the action. There was a roof over the stage but no curtain, and while there were occasional props or furniture, there was no scenery. Audience members could pay a penny if they chose to stand in the yard (these people were known as groundlings); if they chose to sit in one of the side galleries, they had to pay extra. Plays were performed without an intermission, and the audience was far more casual and unruly than we would expect, often milling about, talking with each other, and commenting on the action as the play was being performed.



Elizabethan acting companies contained no women—it was not thought proper for women to appear on stage. Therefore, all the women's parts were played by boys or young men. The actors in the company wore contemporary Elizabethan clothing no matter in what country or period the play took place—indeed, actors often wore their own clothes. Although Shakespeare frequently sets his plays in different settings, the way his characters speak and act is the way English people in the sixteenth and seventeenth century would have spoken and acted. So for his audience they were in every sense contemporary plays.

WHO'S WHO IN THE PRODUCTION

ACTING COMPANY



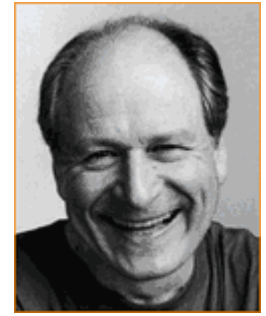
Rob Campbell
Hamlet



Michael Emerson
*Ghost / Claudius /
Osric*



**Stephanie Roth
Haberle**
Gertrude



David Margulies
*Polonius /
Gravedigger*



Jesse J. Perez
Laertes



Carrie Preston
*Ophelia /
Gravedigger*



Haynes Thigpen
Horatio



Frank Wood
Player / Fortinbras

Other roles played variously by company members.

ARTISTIC STAFF

William Shakespeare

Playwright

Daniel Fish

Director

John Conklin

Set Designer

Kaye Voyce

Costume Designer

Scott Zielinski

Lighting Designer

Darron L. West

Sound Designer

Polly Pen

Composer

J. Steven White

Fight Director

Peter Pucci

Movement Director

Deena Burke

Vocal Coach

Janice Paran

Dramaturg

Mara Isaacs

Producing Director

David York

Director of Production

Alison Cote

Production Stage Manager

Mindy Richardson

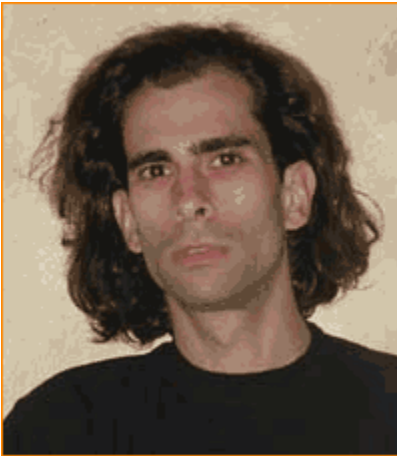
Stage Manager

Emily Mann
Jeffrey Woodward

Artistic Director
Managing Director

INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL FISH

By Tracy Campbell



Daniel Fish is the resident director this season at McCarter, where he has previously directed *Loot*, *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *The Learned Ladies*. His recent work includes the world premiere of Joanna Laurens's *Poor Beck* for the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford and London, Sarah Ruhl's *The Clean House* at The Wilma Theater and David Mamet's *Speed-the-Plow* at Baltimore's Center Stage. He directed the English language premiere of Charles L. Mee's *True Love* (Zipper, NYC), *Ghosts* (CSC with Amy Irving), the world premiere of *The Black Monk* by David Rabe (w/ Sam Waterston, Yale Rep), *Measure for Measure* (California Shakespeare Theatre), *Eurydice* by Sarah Ruhl (La Jolla/UCSD). He has directed plays by Shakespeare, Moliere, Strindberg, Chekhov, Goldoni, Wilde, Orton, Mee, Mamet and Blessing at theaters throughout the US. Other Shakespeare productions include *Twelfth Night* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Shakespeare Theatre, Washington DC) and *Romeo and Juliet* (Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival). He has worked as Associate Director with Michael Kahn and Sir Peter Hall. Daniel is a graduate of Northwestern University's Department of Performance Studies, and a lecturer in directing at The Yale School of Drama.

How did you first get interested in Shakespeare?

I was first drawn to him by a teacher at Northwestern University named Leland Roloff, a Jungian analyst who taught Poetry in Performance. He was the first person who got me turned on to hearing poetry and verse out loud. It was a class on twentieth-century American poetry. He had us perform the poems, and somehow that became a way into Shakespeare a few years later when I began working on the material at The Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, D.C.

So it was the language of Shakespeare, the poetry, that drew you in?

I think it was more specific than that. It was *this* class and *this* guy who had us read it out loud. This provided a window into the sensuality and power of the language, and the difference between what it is on the page, silent, and what it can be when you hear it out loud. The muscularity of the language, the way it feels in your mouth and the way it sounds when you put it out there. Hearing it out loud, that sort of performance possibility was a way into it. Oddly or not, it was twentieth-century American poetry that gave me a way into getting excited about Shakespeare.

I know that you have a very specific approach toward the way you deal with verse, and the language of Shakespeare. Can you talk a little bit about that?

It has to do with the actor honoring the line endings in Shakespeare's blank verse. Shakespeare writes ten syllable lines and if the actor takes a little bit of a break at the end of every metrical line, that allows him, or kind of forces him, to invent the next line, invent the next thought. In addition to that, I also think

the practice often reveals a sort of inner logic or poetic logic that's sometimes different from the literal narrative logic of the speech. For example: "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...." If you run that on, it makes sense literally. But if you take a little break at the end of line, and say, "Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer/ the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" the speaker has to really think about what he's saying. It's a little bit more spontaneous, and that word, suffer, resonates in a stronger way. I learned this approach to the language from Peter Hall, who learned it from Edith Evans, who learned it, I think, from William Poel, so it's a very rich tradition.

How do you then find the visual from within that language? Where do you get the images that you put on stage?

I'm not sure there's any one way. The process tends to be very collaborative with the designers and probably rather impulsive. It's not like we say, "I think the play is about X and I think the set should be an image of that." It's more likely that an image comes either impulsively or from someone's subconscious. We don't quite know why it comes and then we test it against the play and live with it for a while. We read the play with that image in mind or, even more concretely, we build that image and then act in it and see if it has some kind of resonance.

What's a moment that you've created that still stands out for you?

When I was doing *Romeo and Juliet*, the play begins with these two households, these two families having a brawl. I usually begin by asking questions: "What's a brawl?" "What's a household?" I ask those very basic questions, trying not to make assumptions about what those things are, to the designers and out of that conversation images emerge. So with *Romeo and Juliet* we were looking at that fight and the set designer, Christine Jones, said, "You know, the first line of the play is 'Two households' so maybe the set should just be two households." On one side of the stage one household, and on the other side of the stage another household, literally replicating themselves. So, we put that into a model, two identical sets of furniture, nearly identically arranged on either side of the stage. Sometimes I think a simplistic approach like that can be incredibly resonant. We just looked at the first line of the play and went, "Two households, both alike in dignity. Okay, let's do that."

Then I thought, "What would the fight be?" I was interested in something violent, modern and immediate. And I said, "Maybe they start throwing the furniture," because I also felt that the play was very domestic and the violence in the play was as much within families as between families. It was as much about the relationship between parents and children as it was between two warring factions. So, that's what they did. The audience saw a little girl, she was shot, and then everyone just started hurling furniture at each other. The furniture was built to withstand that. There was nothing fake about it, it was very real. They were hurling metal furniture across a wooden set. It was very visceral to watch— some people were angered by it and some made kind of uncomfortable by it. And in the end the actors performed the play among that wreckage.

How is *Hamlet* different from other Shakespeare plays you've done?

You should ask me after we do it. In a very basic way, it's a different play. The actors are saying different words. It's a different story. I'm working with some different people. I'm very interested in the material being as immediate and spontaneous as it can be, and that there's the feeling that the words are being invented or discovered or minted, whatever word you prefer, every time. I think that's really key to the playing of Shakespeare. I think it's a rich tradition. He invented words. He used words for the first time. In fact in *Hamlet* a great many words were used for the first time. People actually came to his theater expecting to hear words they had never heard before, whose meaning they actually didn't understand. The notion that we should understand everything in Shakespeare because back then they understood everything is preposterous. Most likely they didn't understand it all. People came willing to hear things

that they had never heard before and I think that's a really exciting way to go to the theater. I think it is often something we're not quite in touch with. We want it to be clear, we want to know exactly what we're seeing, we want to know how long its going to be, we want to know what's going to happen, we want it all explained to us. I'm not really interested in that and I don't think that's being very true to Shakespeare. Some people see that as a kind of non-traditional approach and I would really disagree: it's a deeply traditional approach.

Why do you think people keep going back to Shakespeare?

I think people keep going back to him because his plays reveal the deepest parts of what it is to be a human being. They reveal our fears, our joys, our concerns. His plays explore the human soul. And they can be *very* entertaining.

McCarter has been developing this production of Hamlet with director Daniel Fish for over a year. This process included two workshops, which enabled Fish to work with actors and explore the text. In December 2003, following a two-week workshop, Fish recorded these thoughts on the play.

Over the past couple of years I have directed new plays by Charles Mee, David Rabe, Lee Blessing, Sarah Ruhl and William Shakespeare. I include Shakespeare in that list because, for me, there is no line dividing the living writer from the dead one. The more I direct, the more I understand how important it is to approach all plays as if they were new plays, and I'm fascinated by thinking about *Hamlet* in this way.

I wanted to free the play from its own reputation, in a sense; to get past the accumulated baggage that A Great Play carries with it and try to unearth its very human story. I wanted to look into the domesticity of *Hamlet*. My hunch was that the way into this play's big ideas was through the intimacy of its family drama. *Hamlet* is nothing if not domestic: it is the story of a young man, his mother, his stepfather and the recent death of his father. A kitchen table at 2am seems a truer setting for the play than fake stone battlements. I wanted to see if the story could be told with nothing more than a big table and eight actors; furthermore, I wanted to see if this choice could be one not of economy but of abundance. We've worked on *Hamlet* as if it were a new play, cutting and re-arranging the text, doubling roles in ways that revealed hidden aspects of the story and focusing on the humanity of even the most supernatural elements of the story. The question of period and setting became irrelevant as I watched the actors mint those words, penned 400 years ago, for the first time.

I seek a production that is realistic (an odd word to apply to Shakespeare) in the sense of real people and genuine, painful, unadorned human experience. I keep coming back to the notion that there is no line between the living theater and the dead writer. Artists should be able to collaborate not only across a table but across centuries. The only obstacle is a failure of the imagination, and Shakespeare's plays refuse to admit defeat.

—Daniel Fish

INTERVIEW WITH ROB CAMPBELL

by Mark Orsini

At the beginning of the rehearsal process, Rob Campbell, who plays Hamlet in this production, discussed

some of his thoughts about the play.

I notice that a majority of your most recent work has been new plays.

I intentionally choose to do a lot of new work because I really like being part of new voices brought by new writers. With new work you are involved in something that is definitely in the present tense. You really feel that you're doing a play that is very much about now, and that's very exciting to me. I enjoy helping a writer bring something into the world for the first time. I have worked a lot at the O'Neill Theater Center, which is a place where they focus on new plays. I've spent many summers there, and that's an environment where I really enjoy working.

How does this production fit in with that philosophy of new work? Is your approach different for *Hamlet*?

It is hard to do plays that are really well known as if they are being done for the first time. *Hamlet* is not a role that I've done before, but I found getting into it that there's already so much in my bones from being around the play. I don't know if it's because I'm in the theater or because it's so much a part of our group consciousness or because it's so deeply a part of our culture that the lines, the speeches and the scenes are in our bones somehow.

When you have a play, with poetic writing in particular, that appeals to you as an actor, you feel that much more allegiance and responsibility to have that poetry heard and to honor and respect it. With some other plays, there are certain parts that you are not crazy about, and you naturally have a harder time with them. With Shakespeare there is so much stuff that I love and I want people to hear it.

Many famous actors have played the role of *Hamlet*. Does that influence the work that you are doing?

At the beginning part of the play I was sitting there thinking, "This feels so much like Olivier sitting here. Is that okay?" You realize that certain things within the play you cannot do too differently. They are as they are written. The given circumstances of the scenes are there, so you don't have that much room to put a massive spin on it, even if you wanted to. You do have an urge to treat it like you're originating it. It's hard to do that sometimes because you realize how familiar you are with other actors.

Have you worked with Daniel Fish before this production?

No, I have not. It's funny because now I've been in the business long enough that you start to know everyone and it's very strange when you work with someone for the first time. Carrie [Preston] and I have worked together. David [Margulies] and I have worked together. Jesse [Perez] and I have worked together. Frank [Wood] and I have worked together. I've worked here at the McCarter before. It gets to be unusual to work with an actor or a director for the first time. I've always heard great things about him. He's someone that I started feeling like I was on the same page with from very early on. There was sort of a vibe. You know when you are hearing someone's take on something whether he is someone who you want to work with.

Can you talk a bit about the character of *Hamlet*?

I've been living with it and I really feel that it is not terribly unusual for someone to go crazy under the circumstances that he is facing. He is the only child, the son of a dear, dear father and a dear, dear mother. That nuclear unit has been exploded, distorted and maimed, internally by someone in the family in some incestuous way, which is a word that comes up often in this play. It makes perfect sense for him to go crazy. I don't see it as being a schizophrenic or manic-depressive situation. Any of us could be in this situation. He has a perfectly good reason to be depressed. I think what is tragic about *Hamlet* is his

obsession with truth and his own conscience.

He does not ever talk about forgiving, but for me that is what he struggles with. He has been given an assignment by his father; his words to him are "Revenge me." He has the strength, the will and the means to do it, but he is struggling to do it. I think it is interesting that in Shakespeare's source material for the play, the character is much younger when he discovers the crime and he really has to pretend to be crazy to grow into adulthood, just to survive childhood. I think as an adult, someone who is able to survive, it is kind of a weird time to say I'm going to pretend I'm crazy. I do think that when he finally says to his mother, "...Make you to ravel all this matter out that I essentially am not in madness but mad in craft," I don't think he's sure of that himself. I think there's a part of Hamlet that is off at the beginning of the play. It's like the entire play is a bad, bad dream. The first scene, especially the way that we're staging it now, I see it as his dream. He's been having that dream. When he does meet the ghost face to face, the "prophetic soul" that he talks about, with his uncle, he's already had the dream.

Can you talk about the process of becoming intimate with a Shakespearean text?

I recommend people pick up Shakespeare sometime and learn it. It's a different experience to actually have it in your head than to read it or hear it. My grandmother, who lived to be 102, was not well in her later years. To help her fall asleep at night, she would recite the poems and speeches that she learned as a child at school, which was something that schools used to do quite a bit. I really recommend that to people. Take an afternoon or an evening sometime and pick up a speech from any part of Shakespeare and memorize it. To have it in your bones so you experience being that close to the language and experience that kind of intimacy to the verse and poetry is really valuable.

SPOTLIGHT ON SET DESIGN, AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN CONKLIN

Having made his McCarter design debut forty years ago with As You Desire Me, internationally celebrated stage designer John Conklin returns to Princeton with Hamlet. Mr. Conklin has designed scenery for theater and opera all over the world. He is also the Associate Artistic Director at Glimmerglass Opera and teaches in the graduate program at New York University's Tisch School for the Arts. Recently, McCarter Theatre's Education Department had the opportunity to sit down with Mr. Conklin to discuss the process of collaborating with director Daniel Fish to create the set for Hamlet.

When you first found out that you were going to be doing *Hamlet* at McCarter, where, as a set designer, did you start?

I have already done two other productions of *Hamlet*, and also, I teach at NYU and we recently gave our second and third-year students the assignment to design *Hamlet*, so it was familiar. With this production, I started by talking with the director, Daniel Fish, to see what ideas he had. He had been working on it for a long time, he had already done a workshop [at McCarter], so the idea of what he might want was in his mind. I went into early discussions with a rather blank surface, I just needed to find out what he was thinking.

The genesis of this project, as you said, was a workshop done in an almost empty room with a handful of actors. How did that workshop influence the way Daniel began talking to you about this?

I think it influenced it greatly. Because of the workshops, the production had taken on in his mind a certain shape, a certain tone, a certain feeling that he wanted to recreate or reproduce even. At one point, even, we talked about presenting the rehearsal room on the Berlind stage, in every detail. So, that's an idea that we started with, and it came and went and kept resurfacing. I think eventually Daniel felt it was too artificial, too false, it wouldn't, couldn't really *be* the rehearsal room. But that premise is in the current design in a much more abstracted way. The set consists of three walls: one is a mirrored wall (there was a mirrored wall in the rehearsal room), and the other two are gray blank walls. And they are not tall (seven and a half feet high), a kind of abstraction of the rehearsal hall, a kind of empty working space, empty of meaning until it is filled with the actors' presence and the actors' spirit. We are also playing with the idea that the rehearsal hall is a kind of metaphor for being in the theater, so over the walls of this slightly abstracted space we see the empty backstage of the Berlind. There's no sense of illusion about creating some Renaissance court of Elsinore (not that that was even discussed as an option). Daniel also had, from the very beginning, an idea that at the beginning of the play the props, the furniture and whatever we're using for the production would fall from the grid, the bars and pipes used to suspend scenery and lighting instruments above the stage, crashing to the floor. And we are using a modified version of that, too.

I know that you had a day where you, Daniel and some of the members of the McCarter production team experimented with doing that, dropping things from the grid. Can you talk about that?

Daniel and I came down and we played with that idea: dropping things onto the stage from about thirty feet above, to see what would happen. We talked about having a platform crash into the stage, but we found that you have to control something like that, because of the potential for accidents. The basic idea we were playing with was something uncontrolled; indeed, that was the point of it. But, in order to make it work technically and deal with safety issues, which are obviously crucial, it had to be very physically guided, and therefore, that took away the very essence of what we were going for. But they [McCarter Production] had built a smaller version of the actual platform we were planning on using as a demonstration. After we had finished the tests in which we had discovered that our original idea wasn't working, it was kind of hanging in space, just hanging from something in the center of the stage. Suddenly Daniel said, "Well maybe it should just be that." And we proceeded to play with this object built for a technical demonstration. But it was there, we could put chairs on it when it was flown in near the ground, we could tip it over, and it could sway and swing. It became something real for us. It could do what we wanted it to – have an unpredictable, actor driven, slightly destructive quality, but still be able to be controlled. This was one of those things that just sort of happens. When I'm working on a set or trying to evolve a production, I build it in a model, but there is nothing like being in the actual theater space with things, trying to figure out what to do with them. And that's what Daniel wants – he wants it to be real; not real in the sense of "movie real," but real because it's in a space that is a real space and there are real actors. You're not trying to create an illusion; you're just creating a space in which the actors themselves can create the world.

What would you say that you and Daniel want for the world that Shakespeare's characters are living in to be? Are we supposed to be aware of actors who are playing roles? Are we constantly reminded we're watching storytellers create *Hamlet*? Or are these supposed to be characters existing in a modern world, with the rehearsal room as the setting for this story?

I think that because most of the actors are playing multiple roles, it is in part a group of actors telling a story, acting it out for us or for themselves. Also, since one of the central metaphors and images in *Hamlet* is a play within a play, the idea of actors and acting and storytelling is crucial to the play itself. But we didn't want to go too far with the idea of a group of actors opening their trunk and putting on their costumes in front of the audience, perhaps not so obvious or banal as that. Daniel has mentioned the word domestic; it is about a family and family relationships that are fractured and dysfunctional and

ultimately violent. One of the first images he mentioned was a group of people sitting around a kitchen table. And yes, they're the King of Denmark and a Ghost and a Prince, but it might be the nightmare world of *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. So there isn't a sense of court, not really a sense of a political structure, but just a group of people sitting around a table and confronting each other through these violent psychological interactions. You see recognizable objects: the costumes are mostly contemporary dress. So, we see a disturbing drama that lives not only under crowns and robes, but can exist in a room with a refrigerator and a wedding cake on the table. There's not a sense of "Shakespeare" and us being set off in an important classical serious way; it doesn't want to be distancing, it wants to be recognizable.

CORE-CURRICULUM STANDARDS

The Visual and Performing Arts are considered Core Curriculum areas for the New Jersey State Department of Education. This production of *Hamlet* is designed to give your students exposure to the specific Core Curriculum Standards listed below.

HAMLET AND CURRICULUM STANDARDS

This production of *Hamlet* and related study materials will provide students with specific knowledge and skills to address the following Core Curriculum Content Standards in the Arts:

- 1.1** All students will acquire knowledge and skills that increase aesthetic awareness in dance, music, theater and visual arts.
- 1.2** All students will refine perceptual, intellectual, physical and technical skills through creating dance, music, theater and/or visual arts.
- 1.4** All students will demonstrate knowledge of the process of critique.
- 1.5** All students will identify the various historical, social and cultural influences and traditions which have generated artistic accomplishments throughout the ages and which continue to shape contemporary arts.
- 1.6** All students will develop design skills for planning the form and function of space, structures, objects, sound and events.

***Hamlet* also addresses the following Core Curriculum Standards in Language Arts Literacy:**

- 3.1** All students will speak for a variety of real purposes and audiences.
- 3.2** All students will listen actively in a variety of situations to information from a variety of sources.

3.3 All students will write in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.

3.4 All students will read various materials and texts with comprehension and critical analysis.

DRAMA PRAXIS: ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSROOM

A study guide component by Steven Borowka

The following sections of this resource guide enable leaders, teachers and students to explore drama as a mode of learning. Adding drama to the classroom is a creative, active and process-oriented approach to education, in which the teacher and the students interact together.

Drama-in-Education seeks to synthesize the activities of creative drama, arts-based curricula and theater conventions into experiences aimed at developing imagination, awareness of self and others, aesthetic taste and life skills. Often these goals are achieved through the examination of a particular theme or topic, which contributes to critical thinking about the world in which we live. By providing structures and contexts, which both excite the interest of participants and call for creative problem-solving, Drama-in-Education promotes deeper thinking about a wide variety of issues.

This guide has been designed for teachers to utilize drama methods in an exploration of the themes and situations presented in the play. We encourage you to adapt these lessons and activities to your individual teaching situations, and thereby to discover the importance and power of drama in the classroom.

The following questions and activities are designed to help students anticipate the performance and then to build on their impressions and interpretations after attending the theater. While most of the exercises provide specific instructions, please feel free to adapt these activities to accommodate your own teaching strategies and curricular needs.

Pre-show Discussion Questions

1. Director Daniel Fish says that *Hamlet* is a story about family. Look over the "Character Profiles" in this guide and then on a sheet of paper draw a family tree that includes Hamlet, King Hamlet, Claudius and Gertrude. What thoughts or questions come to mind when examining this family tree? How does each character feel about his or her relationship to the others? Consider the family of Polonius, Laertes and Ophelia. Compare and contrast this family to that of Hamlet and keep a list of similarities and differences. Choose one character and write a monologue from his or her point of view explaining his or her feelings and thoughts about his or her family.

2. One theme central to *Hamlet* is revenge. What other books, plays or movies deal with this theme? How is revenge treated in these other stories? How is it treated differently in *Hamlet*? What specific events require revenge? How well does Hamlet fulfill his role as avenger? Explore the concept of revenge

and write your own short story or play based on this idea.

3. Imagine that you are designing the set for *Hamlet*. What would be your design concept, the visual idea that ties the whole production together? Would you set the play in a particular time or place? Why? How can you modernize the play and still stay true to the playwright's intent? Is there a feeling or emotion that you would want to express through your design of this production? Prepare a design presentation for your class through drawings, visual aids or writing. Be prepared to field your classmates' questions about your design choices.

4. In the nineteenth century *Hamlet* was considered a problematic play due in part to the fact that, for Hamlet, there are no definitive answers to life's most daunting questions. Hamlet has been accused of being indecisive and unable to act. Do you agree? If so, why do you think Hamlet does not act upon his thoughts? What evidence in the text can you use to support your theory?

Drama Praxis

Drama praxis refers to the manipulation of theater form by educational leaders to help participants act, reflect and transform. At the core of drama praxis is the artful interplay between people, passion, and space as leaders and participants strive towards aesthetic understanding.

Drama-in-Education is a mode of learning. This form can be utilized across the curriculum and provides useful tools to teach all lessons with a dramatic skew. Through the pupils' active identification with imagined roles and situations in drama, they can learn to explore issues, events and relationships. In drama, participants can delve into circumstances as a character other than themselves. This distance allows the participant to experience metaxis; the ability to explore a situation through a character's eyes while also seeing its relevance in the participant's everyday life.

The following exercises will allow students to participate in the process of drama. This process can be fleshed out and enhanced into a 'theater' product. Again, please feel free to adapt these activities to accommodate your own teaching strategies and curricular needs.

Enhance the Performance

1. **Two Sides of Every Story:** Read aloud the following statements and allow students to choose whether they agree or disagree with the statement. After each statement, ask two or three students to justify their rational and allow other students to debate the answers. Have students use examples from their own lives as well as the text of *Hamlet* to help support their case.

- a. It is important to have a good relationship with your parents.
- b. Breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend is difficult.
- c. Adultery is always wrong.
- d. Ghosts are real.
- e. Revenge is appropriate.
- f. Murder is always wrong.
- g. There is no such thing as a "perfect" family.
- h. There is no way to know if a person is truly "crazy."

2. **All the Classroom is a Stage:** Divide students into small groups of four or five. Assign each group a scene from the text to stage. Each group needs to decide how to cast and block the scene in preparation for performing in front of the class. Give the students sufficient time to work on this project in class; also

allow them at least one night to find and bring in rudimentary props, costumes and music from home. Have a scene festival as each group performs its version in front of the class. After all the groups have performed, discuss. How was the staging similar or different? Students should feel free to set the play in any time period or location that would make sense, or they can stage their scene in classical Shakespearean fashion. Discuss different adaptations of this text and how each director has a different effect on their audience. Have a discussion with the class about different ways to direct this play and unique interpretation that they may have seen or read.

3. Hamlet II – The Sequel: In the last scene, Hamlet addresses Horatio:

If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story.

By the end of the play, however, Horatio hasn't yet told this story. In focusing on Horatio's perspective, students can explore how one might frame a post-play narrative. Discuss with your students what Hamlet asked Horatio to do. Do the students think Horatio will fulfill the request? Why? Ask students to write the post-play speech Horatio promises Fortinbras, explaining what has happened in Elsinore to result in the deaths of Hamlet and many others. Remind students that although Horatio was Hamlet's best friend, he does not necessarily know all the events of the play. Encourage students to include quotes from the play and to use an Elizabethan style of language. Have the students perform their speeches in front of the class.

4. If it's Not One Thing, It's the Mother: Have students discuss the role of Gertrude and the decisions that she has made throughout the course of the play. Ask students to write several one-page journal entries as if they were Gertrude. They will be asked to write the entries based on her state of mind at these specific times:

- The night before she married Hamlet, Sr. What were the thoughts running through her mind? Was she a willing participant? What qualities (positive and negative) did Hamlet possess? What are her hopes for the future?
- The night before her wedding to Claudius. What are her feelings about the death of Hamlet, Sr., and her upcoming marriage? Did she help in the murder, or was she innocent?
- The night that Polonius is killed, when Hamlet talks to her in her bedroom and sees the ghost of his father. What does she think about the unfolding events? What is her reaction to Hamlet's remarks and questions? What does she think will happen next?
- The moment before she dies. Does she know the wine is poisoned? Is she knowingly saving Hamlet's life? What are her feelings about Claudius now? What does she think Hamlet will do? How would she like to be remembered?

5. Hamlet's Trial: Imagine that Hamlet has been put on trial for murder and has pleaded insanity. Separate the class into four small groups. One group for the defense, one for the prosecution, one for a jury and one for the judges.

After gathering information from the text have students write and present an attorney's opening argument establishing either Hamlet's sanity or insanity. The prosecution and defense should make detailed lists of arguments for and against Hamlet's insanity. Remember, to be an effective attorney you must prepare well enough to be able to defend either position: sane or insane. Groups should also be prepared to question witness (other characters from the play) to help prove their case. Each witness will

be questioned by both sides.

After each side has given their opening statements and questioned their witness, they should summarize their case in a closing argument. The jury must then decide the fate of Hamlet's mental well being.

Post-show Discussion Questions

1. What surprised you the most in your viewing of *Hamlet*? How did this production compare to your expectations?
2. Discuss the idea of a tragic hero. A tragic hero wants to do good, means to make things well, but is ultimately flawed. What are Hamlet's flaws? Does he allow his passions to overrule his reason? Who are the tragic heroes of today? In politics, movies, sports, our own lives? What are their flaws? What other Shakespearean characters could be considered tragic heroes? Why?
3. *Hamlet* includes a great deal of plotting and planning. Who in *Hamlet* sets plans in motion? To what ends? How does each character play a part in the ultimate downfall of Hamlet? Does anyone try to prevent this ending? Was this ending unavoidable?
4. Describe Hamlet's relationship with Ophelia. Why does Hamlet insist Ophelia get herself to a nunnery? Does he love her? Is he to blame in her death? Was it suicide? Use the text to support your answers.
5. Shakespeare fills this play with an abundance of juxtapositions (dark/light, reality/fiction, Claudius/King Hamlet, etc.). See how many you can list. Choose one of these contrasting pairs and trace it throughout the play. What does it add to the story of *Hamlet*? Why does Shakespeare include it?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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