

Hamlet

Week 3

In the play, there are four individuals whose fathers are murdered: Hamlet, Ophelia, Laertes, and Fortinbras. When Ophelia learns of her father's murder, she goes mad. Laertes and Fortinbras take up arms (against Hamlet and Denmark, respectively). However, Hamlet delays in exacting his revenge until nearly the end of the play.

Things to Think About:

- Why does Hamlet delay in taking revenge? What changes by the time he finally chooses to act?
- When have you procrastinated? Why did you delay?

Exercise 1:

After watching the troupe of actors deliver a speech about the fall of Troy, in which one of the actors makes himself cry, Hamlet wonders aloud how the actor can be so moved by a story, while Hamlet's own passion is not enough to make him act on the Ghost's story (2.2.575-634). Watch Hamlet's soliloquy [here](#). What resolution does he come to? Do you think it will work? Why or why not?



Exercise 2:

Take a look at Hamlet's speech in Act 3, Scene 3, in which he has an opportunity to kill Claudius. What reasons does Hamlet give for not killing Claudius? Do you think he is being truthful? Why or why not?

HAMLET

Now might I do it pat, now he is a-praying,
And now I'll do 't. And so he goes to heaven,
And so am I revenged. That would be scanned:
A villain kills my father, and for that,
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven.

Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
He took my father grossly, full of bread,
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;
And how his audit stands who knows save heaven.
But in our circumstance and course of thought
'Tis heavy with him. And am I then revenged
To take him in the purging of his soul,
When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?
No.

Up sword, and know thou a more horrid hent.
He sheathes his sword.

When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in th' incestuous pleasure of his bed,
At game, a-swearing, or about some act
That has no relish of salvation in 't—
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,
And that his soul may be as damned and black
As hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays.
This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.



Exercise 3:

Compare Hamlet's speech in 3.3 with the one below from Act 4, Scene 4. How do Fortinbras and his army challenge Hamlet to act?

HAMLET

I'll be with you straight. Go a little before.

All but Hamlet exit.

How all occasions do inform against me

And spur my dull revenge. What is a man

If his chief good and market of his time

Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.

Sure He that made us with such large discourse,

Looking before and after, gave us not

That capability and godlike reason

To fust in us unused. Now whether it be

Bestial oblivion or some craven scruple

Of thinking too precisely on th' event

(A thought which, quartered, hath but one part
wisdom

And ever three parts coward), I do not know

Why yet I live to say "This thing's to do,"

Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means

To do 't. Examples gross as Earth exhort me:

Witness this army of such mass and charge,

Led by a delicate and tender prince,

Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed

Makes mouths at the invisible event,

Exposing what is mortal and unsure

To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,

Even for an eggshell. 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. How stand I, then,

That have a father killed, a mother stained,

Excitements of my reason and my blood,

And let all sleep, while to my shame I see

The imminent death of twenty thousand men

That for a fantasy and trick of fame
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain? O, from this time forth
My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth!

Write!

Write a diary entry as Hamlet at one of the key decision-making points in the story (you can use one of the examples above or find another in your script). As Hamlet, discuss your options and the outcome you predict for your actions.



Shakespeare and Social Justice:

- What makes Fortinbras a better prince than Hamlet? What qualities do the characters in Hamlet associate with nobility? Do you agree with them?
- Why does Hamlet delay in accusing the king of regicide? What do you think would happen if Hamlet accused the king of his father's murder when Claudius hadn't done it?