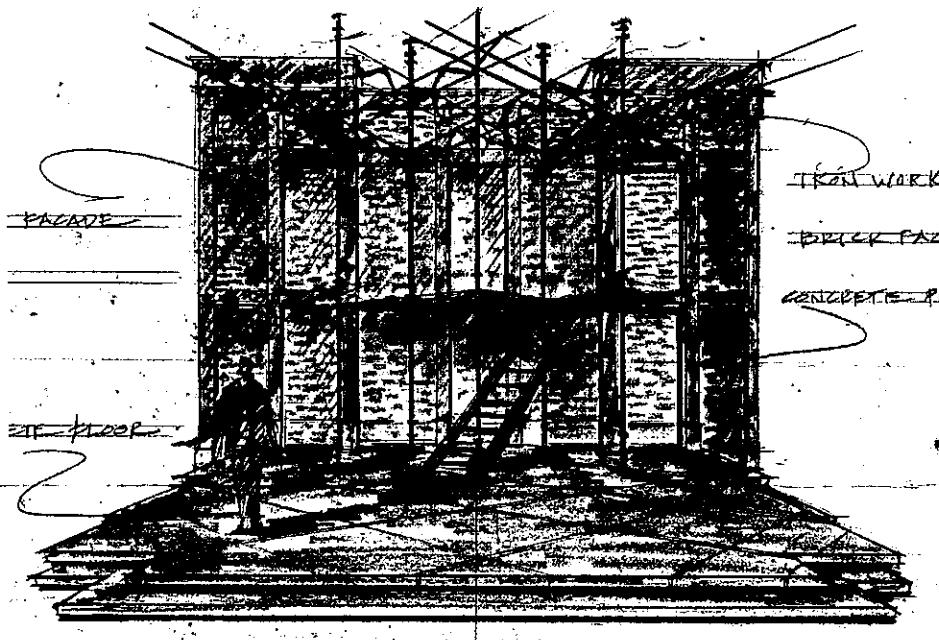


# SHAKESPEARE IN OUR LIVES

Why do we study the plays of William Shakespeare? He lived and died almost 400 years ago. He wrote about kings and queens and other people far from our own time. His use of poetry is strange to our ears, and his vocabulary is full of words we don't understand and can't pronounce. How could Shakespeare possibly be relevant to our lives today?

To answer these questions, you only need to look at the way Shakespeare's work has woven its way into the fabric of our world. He has shaped our language (see "Words, Words, Words," page 2). His plays are produced more than those of any other playwright who ever lived. There are many theatre companies for whom Shakespeare is their central and defining focus. Every year, more movies are made based on his works; the Internet Movie Database (IMDB.com) lists 108 just since 2000. Today's writers are continually inspired by his works. *West Side Story* is *Romeo and Juliet* with street gangs in New York City. *O* is *Othello* at a prep school. *She's the Man* is *Twelfth Night* in a locker room. All theatre artists strive to measure their skills against Shakespeare's works, both on stage and on film.

The characters Shakespeare created may live in exotic places and have fancy titles attached to their names, but they are deeply human characters who experience love, grief, joy, jealousy, and pain, just as we do today. Some of the words he used may have faded from our language over the years, but a minimum of effort to understand these terms yields a maximum of benefit, for Shakespeare's understanding of the human condition is extraordinary. To quote Hamlet himself, Shakespeare's plays "hold as 'twere the mirror up to Nature to show Virtue her feature, Scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."



## "THE PLAY'S THE THING..." —Hamlet

**H**amlet is Shakespeare's longest play. The IRT's production trims this length to a lean, mean 90 minutes. Admittedly some nuance is sacrificed, but the core of this powerful story is intact. Robert M. Koharchik's brick-and-steel set suggests a traditional Elizabethan stage with a stark, contemporary veneer, while Joel Ebarb's costumes accentuate the clashing viewpoints of opposing generations. Director Andrew Tsao, equally versed in both theatre and television, utilizes both skills in this production: Hamlet's play-within-the-play will be a video.

**THE STORY:** Hamlet returns home from his university in Wittenberg for the funeral of his father, the King of Denmark. Almost immediately thereafter, Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, marries her dead husband's brother, Claudius, who is now the new king.

At court, we meet Polonius, Denmark's Lord Chamberlain or prime minister—second in command to Claudius. Polonius's son, Laertes, receives permission from the new king to return to France, but Gertrude and Claudius ask Hamlet to stay. Hamlet's close friend Horatio tells him that he has seen the Ghost of Hamlet's father.

As he prepares to depart, Laertes advises his sister, Ophelia, to be wary of Hamlet's romantic interest. When Ophelia's father, Polonius, learns of their conversation, he instructs her to cut off all further contact with Hamlet.

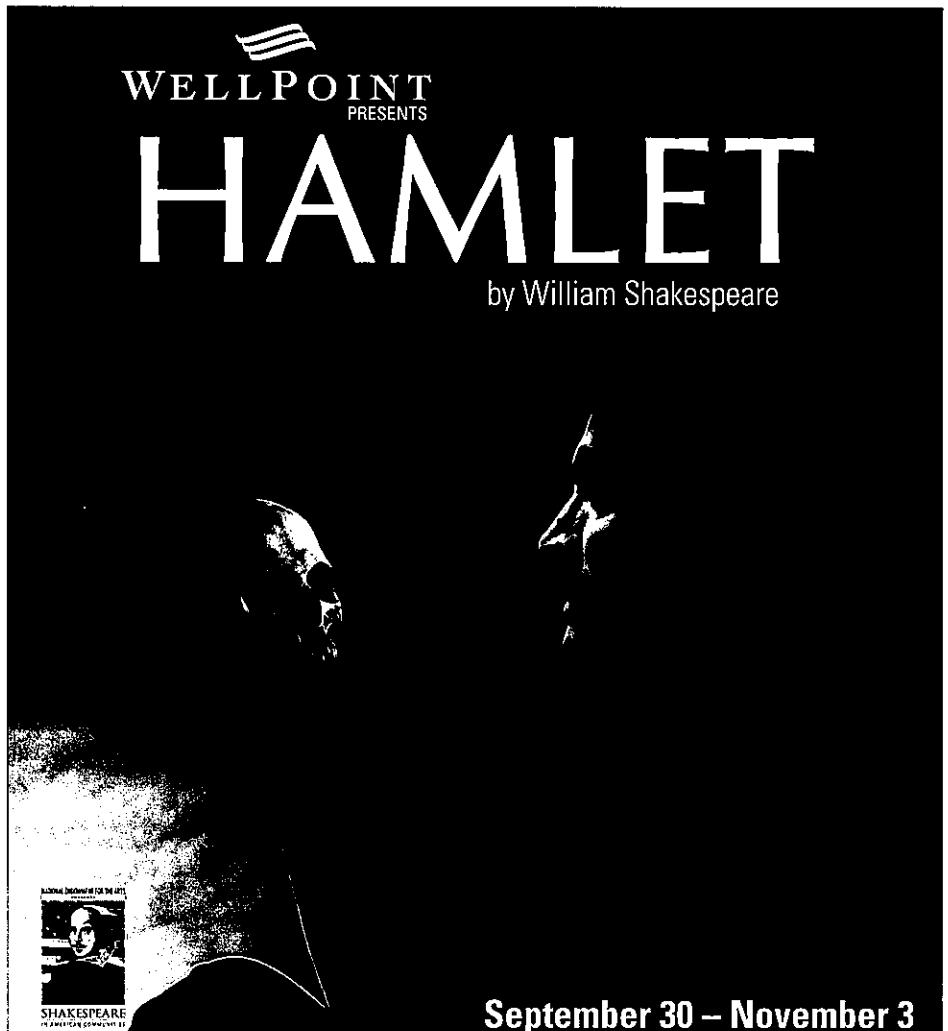
On the castle ramparts, Hamlet and Horatio encounter the Ghost, who informs Hamlet that he was murdered by Claudius and demands that Hamlet avenge his death. Hamlet warns Horatio that he may

start behaving strangely and swears him to secrecy.

Ophelia encounters Hamlet, and indeed his behavior is strange. Polonius decides that love for Ophelia is the cause of Hamlet's madness.

Claudius and Gertrude welcome Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, old friends of Hamlet, and ask them to spend some time with him and try to figure out the cause of his odd behavior. Polonius shares with the King and Queen a love letter from Hamlet to Ophelia, and suggests that he and the King hide and observe Hamlet and Ophelia together. Polonius encounters

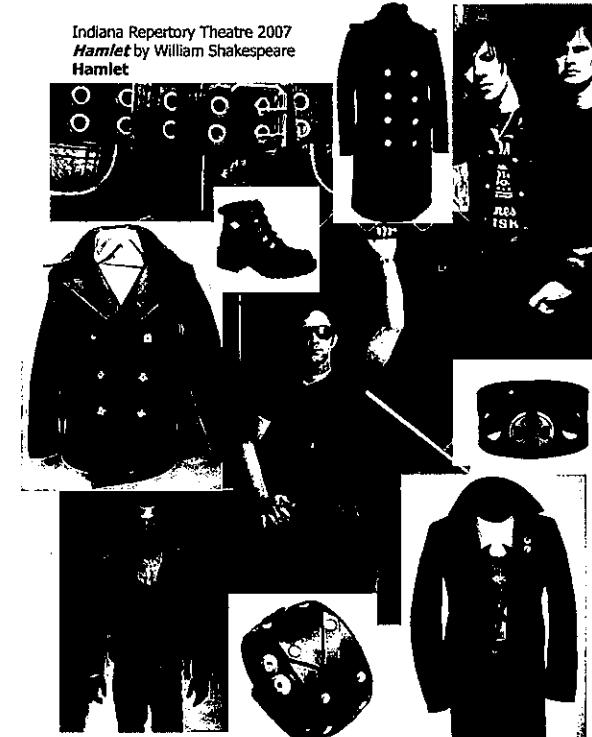
# iRT EXPLORING ...



(left) Preliminary sketch by scenic designer Robert M. Koharchik

(below) Collage for Hamlet by costume designer Joel Ebarb

The Indiana Repertory Theatre's production of Hamlet is part of *Shakespeare for a New Generation*, a national theatre initiative sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts in cooperation with Arts Midwest.



Hamlet, whose strange behavior and odd remarks seem insane to Polonius. Hamlet welcomes Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but he immediately suspects they have been summoned by his mother and stepfather. Hamlet develops a plan to test the Ghost's accusation: he will present a play similar to the Ghost's story and see if Claudius reveals his guilt.

While Claudius and Polonius observe from a hiding place, Hamlet grows violent with Ophelia. The King determines that some action must be taken. Polonius plans to spy on Hamlet with his mother.

During Hamlet's play, Claudius's horrified reaction convinces Hamlet of his guilt. Hamlet encounters Claudius alone, but decides not to kill him because he is praying. Hamlet visits his mother and berates her for her hasty remarriage. Hearing a noise, Hamlet kills Polonius, thinking it is Claudius. The Ghost visits Hamlet again, but Gertrude does not see it and is convinced Hamlet is mad.

Unhinged by her father's death, Ophelia wanders the castle singing snatches of tunes. Laertes returns, demanding vengeance for his father's death, only to be further shattered when Ophelia drowns. Claudius and Laertes concoct a scheme to kill Hamlet. Plans go awry and plots backfire as *Hamlet* draws to its dark conclusion.

### TO LEARN MORE

Visit these websites:

<http://absoluteshakespeare.com/>

<http://www.tk421.net/hamlet/hamlet.html>

# SHAKESPEARE, HIS TH

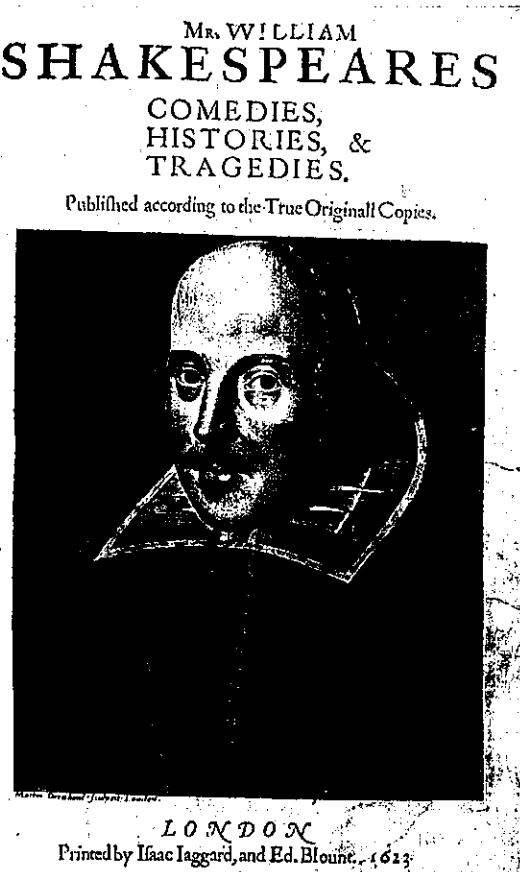
**A**lthough William Shakespeare is generally considered the greatest dramatist in the English language, few facts are known about his life. Only a handful of legal documents verify his existence. Tradition has it that he was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, a small market town, on April 23, 1564. His father was a glove maker who became High Bailiff of Stratford, a position similar to our mayor.

As the son of a leading citizen and public official, Shakespeare would have gone to school as soon as he learned to read and write. The Stratford grammar school was excellent by comparison to similar schools in bigger towns. School was in session year round, and students attended for nine hours a day. The curriculum was limited, consisting almost entirely of Latin: grammar, reading, writing, and recitation. By the time Shakespeare was a youth, many traveling theatre companies of significance had visited Stratford, so it is fair to guess that Shakespeare had seen some of them and admired their art.

At age 18, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, who was eight years his senior. Six months later,

Shakespeare's eldest child, Susanna, was born. Two years later he became the father of twins, Hamnet and Judith. Little is known of Shakespeare's life at this time. It is clear that by the early 1590s, however, Shakespeare was a part of the theatrical scene in London, although we know nothing of the circumstances by which he left Stratford and his family to become an actor and playwright in the city. By 1594 Shakespeare was established at the center of the theatrical activity, for he is recorded as a shareholder in the Globe Theatre.

Over the next fifteen years, Shakespeare wrote



37 plays, several narrative poems, and over 150 sonnets. He became the most popular playwright in London's highly competitive theatrical world. He was granted a coat of arms, thus officially making him a gentleman, and he bought sizeable pieces of real estate in and around Stratford with his earnings. His plays exhibit not only a fine sense of poetry and stagecraft, but also an excellent awareness of the political and literary atmosphere in which he lived. These were tempestuous times socially and politically, and Shakespeare used his plays metaphorically to suggest how in a changing society order could be made out of chaos.

Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616—his 52nd birthday—and was buried in the church chancel in Stratford. A tribute to his genius occurred in 1623, when two of his fellow actors and a London printer published a collected edition of his plays. This kind of publication was rare in its day, as plays were valued for their commercial appeal on the stage, with little thought of them as literature to be preserved. No doubt some of the texts were reconstructed from memory or from a stage manager's promptbook. In any case the *First Folio*, as this collection has come to be called, is a document of great historic and literary importance, for it preserved for posterity some of the greatest writing in the English language, allowing us to study and perform Shakespeare's plays more than 400 years later and for generations to come.

#### TO LEARN MORE

Visit this website:

<http://www.folger.edu>

Check out these books:

*Essential Shakespeare*

*Handbook*

by Leslie Dunton-Downer  
and Alan Riding

*Shakespeare A to Z*

by Charles Boyce

Watch this DVD series:

"In Search of Shakespeare"

**I**n Shakespeare's day, playgoing was enormously popular for all classes of people, and new theatres were springing up across London. None was more popular than Shakespeare's home theatre. The Globe functioned in many ways as a metaphor for contemporary concepts of society, civilization, and the universe at large. The name of the theatre itself—the Globe—suggested that the events portrayed on its stage were symbolic of events happening in the world. The building's shape, an octagon, suggested the round shape of the world itself.

The Globe was located on the south bank of the River Thames in a disreputable part of London. Built in 1599, the wood-and-plaster building held more than 2,000 spectators, and popular plays often sold out. The public entered through a narrow door located at the base of a small tower. Inside, the building was open to the sky, and performances took place in the afternoon sun.

The audience surrounding the stage was arranged to reflect society at large. Standing on the ground around the stage itself, in the area known as the Pit, were the penny groundlings—those of the lowest classes who paid the least for admittance. Three surrounding levels of balconies rose above them, with correspondingly rising admission prices; Elizabethan society, from top to bottom, was clearly divided and arranged for all to see. Thus an audience member at the Globe could not help but feel his or her place in the world order.

The stage itself jutted out into the center of the yard. On each side of the stage, two tall columns, known as the Pillars of Hercules, were carved and brightly painted. Underneath the roof, the "heavens" were painted sky blue and decorated with starry signs of the Zodiac. Tucked under that ceiling was a small balcony where the theatre's musicians played "the Music of the Spheres." At the rear of the stage, on each side, were doors to the backstage area, known as the tiring house, through which the players made their entrances and exits. Between the doors, a brightly painted curtain hid a small alcove, the "discovery" area; above was an often-used balcony.

## "WORDS, WORDS, WORDS" —Hamlet

**S**hakespeare began his career about 100 years after Columbus landed his first ships in America. It was a time of world exploration; trade, diplomacy, and colonization, and wars created new contacts between peoples of many different languages. The increase in publishing and literacy placed a new focus on language. The English language was undergoing a great transformation, more than at any other time in its history, before or since.

It is easy today for us to view language as something fixed, or permanent—a dictionary full of meanings to learn and spellings to memorize. But think about the new words that have been created in the last few years just from the development of computer technology: e-mail and Internet and Emoticon and down-load, just to name a few. Hip-hop culture has developed almost an entire new language of slang.

In his day, Shakespeare himself coined, or invented, some 1,500 words used for the first time in his plays. Some words he adapted from other languages, such as *bandit* from the Italian *bandito*. From Greek words, he developed *dialogue* and *mimic*. From Latin roots, he created *negotiate* and *manager*. From German, he originated *eyeball* and *puke*.

Here are just a few more of Shakespeare's new words:

advertising	embrace	investment	outbreak	roadway
cater	employer	laughable	partner	soft-hearted
circumstantial	engagement	luggage	premeditated	traditional
cold-blooded	fashionable	misquote	petition	watchdog
courtship	glow	mountaineer	retirement	wormhole
drug	gossip	numb	rival	zany

Shakespeare not only invented words, he combined words into new phrases that over the years have become part of our everyday language:

a fool's paradise	I have not slept a wink	play fast and loose
a foregone conclusion	in my heart of hearts	pomp and circumstance
a tower of strength	into thin air	puppy dog
budge an inch	it was Greek to me	shooting star
come full circle	love is blind	skim milk
dead as a doornail	love letter	sorry sight
elbow room	milk of human kindness	too much of a good thing
for goodness sake	my own flesh and blood	well-behaved
good riddance	never-ending	what the dickens
hold a candle to	one fell swoop	wild goose chase

#### TO LEARN MORE • Check out these books:

*Coined by Shakespeare* by Jeffrey McQuain & Stanley Malless  
*Brush Up Your Shakespeare* by Michael Macrone



# THEATRE,

# & HAMLET

There was very little scenery. Most of the company's expense went into costumes. Audiences loved noise and spectacle, so the plays had lots of action and violence. Thunder was created by rolling a cannonball across the wooden floor above the stage. Ghosts and other spirits could be raised from below the stage through trap doors or lowered from the "heavens" by a small crane.

At the center of the Globe was the actor. Men played all the parts, since it was against the law for women to act on the stage; young teenage boys played the female roles. The groundlings crowded close to the stage, and the actor-audience relationship was an intimate one.

Shakespeare wrote for an audience who was largely illiterate; most people obtained their news, religious instruction, and entertainment by ear. Without modern stage and lighting effects, location, time, and atmosphere, as well as emotions and ideas, had to be communicated through dialogue.

Shakespeare's plays were very popular, appealing to a wide spectrum of society. Yet his use of language clearly shows that he expected his audience to understand and appreciate puns, paradoxes, and nuances of meaning, complex metaphors, and innovative vocabulary. It may be a bit more challenging in our highly visual age to tune in our ears, but theatregoers of all ages still thrill to Shakespeare's eloquent exploration of the human condition.

## TO LEARN MORE

### Visit this website:

<http://www.shakespearesglobe.org>

### Check out these books:

*William Shakespeare & the Globe*

written & illustrated by Aliki

*Eyewitness: Shakespeare* by Peter Chrisp

*The Usborne World of Shakespeare*

by Anna Claybourne and Rebecca Treays

**C**ritic-editor-author Harold Bloom says, "After Jesus, Hamlet is the most cited figure in Western consciousness." At the dawn of the last century, scholars noted that there were around 400 available books on *Hamlet*; today, approximately 400 titles on *Hamlet* are published every year. Like Don Quixote, Ebenezer Scrooge, and very few others, Hamlet has transcended literature to become a legend, an icon, a figure of speech as well as a figure of modern myth.

How is it that a fictional character created nearly half a millennium ago still holds such fascination? Many readers and theatregoers over the centuries have felt a strong kinship with the melancholy Dane. Who hasn't had conflicts with their parents? In today's world, how many of us must deal with a stepparent? Who among us has been passed over for an honor that was rightly ours? How often have we wondered if we can trust our friends?

Midway through the play, Ophelia tells us about the Hamlet she knows and loves:

*O, what a noble mind...*  
*The courtier's soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword,*  
*Th'expectation and rose of the fair state,*  
*The glass of fashion and the mold of form,*  
*Th'observed of all observers ...*

Unfortunately, we in the audience never get to meet that Hamlet. Already when the play begins, Hamlet is freefalling. Underneath his superior exterior, Hamlet has "that within which passes show." Today we might call it clinical depression. (Does Hamlet need his meds?) In Shakespeare's day they called it melancholia.

The Elizabethans believed in something called the four humours, a system of bodily fluids which governed the four temperaments: sanguine (cheerful, energetic), choleric (ambitious, easily angered), phlegmatic, (calm, reliable) and melancholic (thoughtful, creative, obsessive, often depressed). Dressed in black, brooding on ghosts, hanging out in graveyards, Hamlet was an easily recognized type to the Elizabethans—and, honestly, isn't he still today?

Shakespeare uses language to further define his central character. When Hamlet is asked a question, he almost invariably twists the meaning of the words so that his reply answers the question, but not exactly the question that was asked:

**POLONIUS** *What do you read, my lord?*  
**HAMLET** *Words, words, words.*  
**POLONIUS** *What is the matter, my lord?*  
**HAMLET** *Between who?*  
**POLONIUS** *I mean, the matter that you read, my lord.*

Hamlet uses language differently from everyone else in his world. Shakespeare's use of antitheses and oxymorons—paired words with opposing meanings—is particularly evident throughout this play: *dread pleasures, accidental judgments, casual slaughters, defeated joy*.

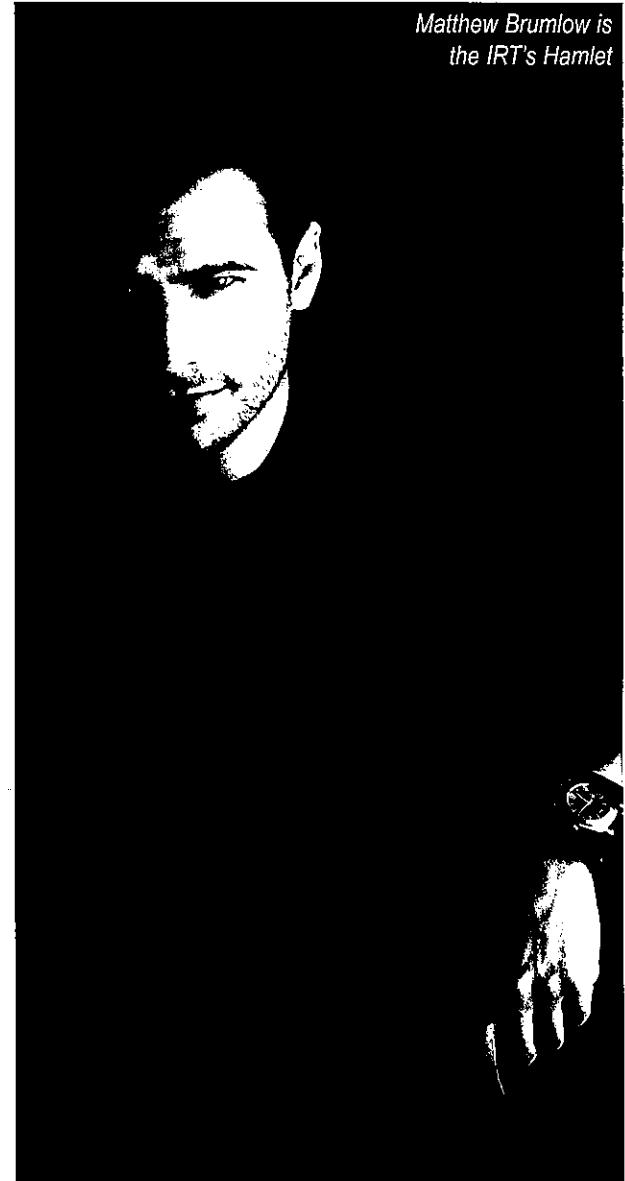
Shakespeare wrote during the Renaissance, an era when continents and solar systems were being discovered, when knowledge was expanding rapidly and jostling for space with old ideas and methods. Less than fifty years had passed since Henry VIII had abolished the Catholic Church in England, and religious conflicts still simmered. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare created a Danish court rife with corruption and secrecy, threatening wars, and angry citizens demanding new leadership.

Today, with our own information age expanding beyond our reach, religious wars abroad, religious disagreements at home, political polarization—when Hamlet says, "The time is out of joint," we know what he means. Since the bombing of Hiroshima in 1945, whole generations have spent their entire lives under the

threat of nuclear extinction. Hamlet's "To be or not to be" is no longer the existential pondering of an individual—it is the essential question of civilization.

Hamlet's self-obsessed, self-critical self-analysis is familiar to anyone in our modern age. Freudians have often focused on Hamlet's supposedly Oedipal relationship with his mother. But what about his father? How distant was the generation gap between the warrior-king father and the university intellectual son? How much of Hamlet's slowness to take revenge is his lack of aptitude as a fighter, and how much is his lingering suspicion that there might be a different way, a better way, a more modern way to handle the situation?

Matthew Brumlow is the IRT's Hamlet



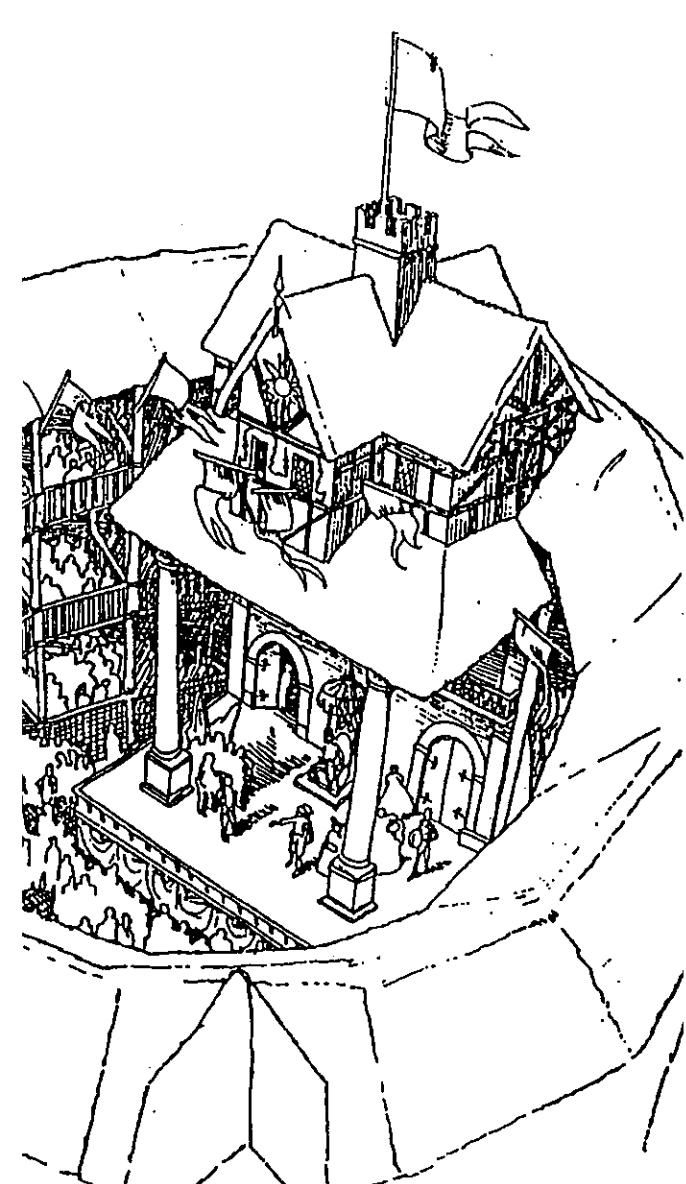
Hamlet's discovery of evil in his world sends him on a quest. In one way or another, he makes the same demand of each character in the play: How do you live in a world like this? No one is able to give him an answer, or they choose not to answer; and so Hamlet has no choice but to find his own way through the storms of life.

Hamlet's dilemma resonates in our age of over-achievement, when many have grown up certain they could do anything, only to discover unforeseen obstacles as adults.

*What a piece of work is a man—how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties; in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god; the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals. And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?*

Failure to live up to expectations—others' or our own—is a feeling to which even the most successful of us must occasionally succumb.

For most theatregoers, Hamlet's flaws count for less than his virtues—he is, after all, the hero—but it is precisely these complex personal flaws intertwined with his perceptive intellect and his dark, troubled soul, that make him so endlessly fascinating. Ever the man of mystery, Hamlet refuses to give up all his secrets—but the world keeps trying to discover them.



# QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

## BEFORE SEEING THE PLAY

What do you know, or assume, about Shakespeare and *Hamlet*? What expectations do you have of the play?

A production of the full text of *Hamlet* would run over four hours; the play is commonly cut to three hours. The IRT production will be 90 minutes. As a class, discuss what you believe must be kept in a production and what you believe could be lost without sacrificing the story. Consider the characters, plot elements, and staging.

Like many of Shakespeare's plays, *Hamlet* features the appearance of a ghost. Brainstorm about ideas for how to present this ghost on stage. Explore all possibilities, from the simplest and cheapest to the most elaborate and expensive.

## WRITING PROJECTS

Look at Hamlet's seven soliloquies in the text. Choose one or more and rewrite it in your own words, keeping the ideas but expressing them in modern language.

Write a journal from Ophelia's view of the play's events.

In the play, Hamlet and Gertrude have a major confrontation. Write a letter as Hamlet that you might send your mother rather than talking to her face to face. What do you want from her? What can you say in a letter that you might not risk saying to her face?

Write a news article about the events that occur in the final scene of *Hamlet*. What would the authorities find when they arrived? What would the witnesses say? How did this happen and why? What is important for the public to know to feel safe? Find a quote from the play to be your headline.

Compare and contrast *Hamlet* with another Shakespeare play you have studied. Take a close look at the major characters, the themes, and the imagery. Could what happens in Verona or Dunsinane or Illyria happen in Denmark and vice versa? Why or why not?

Write a eulogy for one of the characters. What should the world remember about this person? What would he/she want the world to know about his/her life?

Compare a relationship in *Hamlet* with a parallel relationship in another Shakespeare play; for example, Polonius-Ophelia and Capulet-Juliet, or Claudius-Gertrude and the Macbeths.

## AFTER SEEING THE PLAY

Hamlet calls Denmark "an unweeded garden." Where do you see signs of rottenness in the play?

In asking Hamlet to take revenge, the Ghost asks Hamlet to ignore the law and take justice into his own hands. How have moral and legal views of revenge changed in the last 400 years? Is such vigilante behavior ever justified? Why or why not?

What common family characteristics do you see among Polonius, Laertes, and Ophelia? What kind of father is Polonius? Is this family close? distant? loving? aloof? What makes you think so? How does this family contrast with Hamlet's family?

How is Ophelia used and abused by the powerful men around her? Why do you believe this happens? Does she become infected by the corruption in the Danish court? If so, how?

Discuss the differences and similarities in Hamlet's friendship with Horatio and his friendship with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Is Hamlet mad, is he pretending, or is the truth somewhere in between? What in the play supports your conclusions? Might the same moments suggest different interpretations?

Why do you suppose Hamlet gets so angry with Ophelia in the "nunnery" scene? What might have been their relationship before the play? Does Hamlet really love her?

Could Gertrude have been in on the plot to kill her husband, or has she been fooled like everyone else? What evidence in the play supports your opinion? How does Gertrude change as the truth is revealed to her?

It might be said that behind the mask of madness, both Hamlet and Ophelia can speak freely. Do you agree? Why or why not? What are the differences between Hamlet's madness and Ophelia's madness?

How are Hamlet and Laertes alike? How do they differ?

Why do you think Hamlet takes so long to avenge his father's death?

What does Hamlet mean by "the readiness is all" in the final scene? Could he have said this at the beginning of the play? What has changed in him?

Analyze the use of comedy in *Hamlet*, paying particular attention to the Gravedigger and Polonius. Does comedy serve merely to relieve the tension of the tragedy, or do the comic scenes serve a more serious thematic purpose as well?

Suicide is an important theme in *Hamlet*. Discuss how the play treats the idea of suicide morally, religiously, and aesthetically, with particular attention to Hamlet's two important soliloquies about suicide: "O, that this too too solid flesh would melt" and "To be, or not to be." Why does Hamlet believe that, although capable of suicide, most human beings choose to live, despite the cruelty, pain, and injustice of the world?

Meanings of some words have changed since Shakespeare's day. What are some of the slang words you use, and how do those words have different meanings for your parents' generation?



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Steven Stolen, Managing Director

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Study Guide edited by Richard J Roberts & Milicent Wright  
Contributors: Katie Norton, Megan McKinney,  
Anne Thompson

## UPCOMING STUDENT MATINEES

ProLiance Energy presents *A Christmas Carol*  
October 31; November 1, 2, 5-9, 12-16, 19-21, 27-30  
December 4-7, 11-13, 18, 19

St. Vincent Heart Center of Indiana presents  
*Tuesdays with Morrie*  
December 11, 12, 14, 18, 19; January 9, 10

*Doubt*  
January 23, 31; February 5, 6

Eli Lilly & Co. presents *The Power of One*  
Monday-Friday, January 30-March 7

*The Piano Lesson*  
February 27, 28; March 4, 5, 11, 12

Oxford Financial Group presents  
*Looking Over the President's Shoulder*  
April 8, 9, 10, 11, 23, 24, 29, 30; May 1

*Iron Kisses*  
April 22, 23

*The Fantasticks*  
June 4, 10, 18

## Youth Audience Development:

Pat Bebee • 317-916-4841 • [pbebee@irtlive.com](mailto:pbebee@irtlive.com)

Kara Moreland • 317-916-4842 • [kmoreland@irtlive.com](mailto:kmoreland@irtlive.com)

## Outreach Programs:

Milicent Wright • 317-916-4843 • [mwright@irtlive.com](mailto:mwright@irtlive.com)



## 3-WAY MATCH GAME

Match each character in the center column to the proper description on the left and the appropriate action on the right.

A. Hamlet's mother	<u>Hamlet</u>
B. school friends of Hamlet	<u>Horatio</u>
C. Ophelia's brother	<u>Claudius</u>
D. Ophelia's father	<u>Gertrude</u>
E. Prince of Denmark	<u>Ghost</u>
F. Hamlet's most trusted friend	<u>Polonius</u>
G. Hamlet's love	<u>Gravedigger</u>
H. the former King of Denmark	<u>Laertes</u>
I. grounds servant	<u>Ophelia</u>
J. Hamlet's uncle	<u>Rosencrantz &amp; Guildenstern</u>

1. kills Polonius
2. is stabbed and killed by Hamlet
3. gives Hamlet the skull of Yorick
4. marries Hamlet's mother after her husband's death
5. stabs Hamlet
6. drinks from a poisoned cup
7. is murdered by his brother
8. asked to spy on Hamlet
9. is instructed by Hamlet to "tell my story"
10. drowns