

Objective

By the end of this lesson, the student will have a deeper understanding of the religious tensions during the Elizabethan era, specifically focusing on Protestant and Catholic beliefs, the concept of purgatory, and how these themes are reflected in Shakespeare's play "Hamlet." The student will also analyze key quotes and scenes from the play to explore these themes further.

Materials and Prep

- Notebook and pen for taking notes
- Printed excerpts from "Hamlet" (focus on relevant soliloquies and scenes)
- Access to a quiet space for reading and reflection
- Basic knowledge of the Elizabethan era (Protestant Reformation, Catholic beliefs)
- Optional: A timeline of key events in the Elizabethan era for reference

Activities

- **Reading and Discussion:** Start with reading selected passages from "Hamlet" that illustrate the themes of death, religion, and purgatory. After reading, engage in a discussion about how these themes relate to the historical context of the time.
- **Character Analysis:** Choose a character from "Hamlet" (e.g., Hamlet, Ophelia, Claudius) and create a character map. Identify their beliefs about death and the afterlife, and how these beliefs reflect the Protestant or Catholic views of the time.
- **Creative Writing:** Write a short monologue from the perspective of a character in "Hamlet" who is grappling with the concept of purgatory. Incorporate Elizabethan language and themes to make it authentic.
- **Debate:** Organize a mini-debate on whether Hamlet's hesitation to act is influenced more by his Protestant beliefs or his personal morals. Use quotes from the text to support your arguments.

Talking Points

- "The Elizabethan era was a time of great religious upheaval; how do you think this impacted Shakespeare's writing?"
- "In 'Hamlet,' we see the struggle between Protestant and Catholic beliefs, especially regarding the afterlife. What are some key quotes that reflect this?"
- "Purgatory was a significant concept for Catholics. How does Hamlet's view of death and the afterlife reflect or reject this idea?"
- "Consider how Hamlet's indecision might be a reflection of the uncertainty of the time regarding faith and morality. What does this say about human nature?"
- "How does Shakespeare use soliloquies to convey deeper philosophical questions about life, death, and what comes after? Can you relate this to modern existential questions?"