

Hamlet's Dilemmas: To Read or Not to Read?

Materials Needed:

- Printed excerpts from Hamlet (Act 3, Scene 1: "To be or not to be" soliloquy; Act 1, Scene 5: Ghost's revelation; brief character descriptions)
- Notebook or paper
- Pens or pencils
- Optional: Access to online resources for Shakespearean language translation (e.g., No Fear Shakespeare)
- Optional: Art supplies (markers, colored pencils, paper for comic strip)

Lesson Activities:

1. Introduction: The Big Questions (10 minutes)

Start with a discussion: Have you ever faced a really difficult decision where you weren't sure what the right thing to do was? Or have you ever felt like someone wronged you and you wanted to get back at them? Today, we're diving into a play about a prince named Hamlet who deals with huge questions about life, death, revenge, and sanity after his father's ghost tells him a terrible secret!

2. Activity 1: "To Be or Not to Be" - Unpacking the Famous Words (20 minutes)

Read Hamlet's famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy (Act 3, Scene 1) together. Don't worry about understanding every single word at first. Focus on the big picture.

- **First read:** Read it aloud dramatically!
- **Second read:** Read it again, pausing to discuss: What is Hamlet basically debating here? (Hint: It's about life and death). What makes life difficult, according to him? Why might someone choose *not* to end their suffering?
- **Modern Translation (Optional):** Use an online resource like 'No Fear Shakespeare' side-by-side to help clarify tricky phrases.
- **Quick Write:** In your notebook, write down 3-5 words that capture the *mood* of this speech.

3. Activity 2: Ghostly Encounters & Character Deep Dive (20 minutes)

Read the excerpt where the Ghost reveals the murder to Hamlet (Act 1, Scene 5 - provide a summary leading up to it). Discuss: How would you feel if you were Hamlet? What does the Ghost ask him to do? (Revenge!)

Character Sketch: Choose ONE character (Hamlet, Ophelia, Claudius, or the Ghost) using the brief descriptions provided. In your notebook, create a mini-profile:

- Name:
- Their main goal or desire:
- Their biggest problem:
- One word to describe them:
- A modern-day equivalent (e.g., Is Claudius like a scheming politician? Is Ophelia like someone caught between family loyalty and love?):

Alternatively, write a short diary entry from the perspective of your chosen character after the events of Act 1.

4. Activity 3: Themes on Trial - Your Choice! (15 minutes)

Hamlet deals with big ideas! Choose ONE activity:

- **Theme Hunt:** Look back at the excerpts. Find one quote that relates to REVENGE, one quote that relates to MADNESS (or pretended madness), and one quote that relates to DEATH/MORTALITY. Write them down and explain briefly **why** you chose them.
- **Scene Snapshot Comic:** Choose one moment from the excerpts we read (Hamlet seeing the ghost, Hamlet's soliloquy, etc.). Create a simple 3-4 panel comic strip depicting the scene. Use speech bubbles for key lines (okay to simplify the language!).

5. Conclusion: Why Hamlet Still Matters (5 minutes)

Discuss: Even though this play was written over 400 years ago, why do you think people still read and perform Hamlet? What parts of his story feel relevant today? (Think about themes like grief, revenge, difficult choices, family drama). What was the most interesting or surprising thing you learned about Hamlet today?

Assessment:

Understanding will be assessed through participation in discussions, the quality and thoughtfulness of the quick write, the character sketch/diary entry, and the completed theme hunt or comic strip.