

Sacramento Theatre Company

Study Guide



Hamlet

By: William Shakespeare

Study Guide Materials Compiled by Anna Miles

Sacramento Theatre Company

Mission Statement

The Sacramento Theatre Company (STC) strives to be the leader in integrating professional theatre with theatre arts education. STC produces engaging professional theatre, provides exceptional theatre training, and uses theatre as a tool for educational engagement.

Our History

The theatre was originally formed as the Sacramento Civic Repertory Theatre in 1942, an ad hoc troupe formed to entertain locally-stationed troops during World War II. On October 18, 1949, the Sacramento Civic Repertory Theatre acquired a space of its own with the opening of the Eaglet Theatre, named in honor of the Eagle, a Gold Rush-era theatre built largely of canvas that had stood on the city's riverfront in the 1850s. The Eaglet Theatre eventually became the Main Stage of the not-for-profit Sacramento Theatre Company, which evolved from a community theatre to professional theatre company in the 1980s. Now producing shows in three performance spaces, it is the oldest theatre company in Sacramento.

After five decades of use, the Main Stage was renovated as part of the H Street Theatre Complex Project. Features now include an expanded and modernized lobby and a Cabaret Stage for special performances. The facility also added expanded dressing rooms, laundry capabilities, and other equipment allowing the transformation of these performance spaces, used nine months of the year by STC, into backstage and administration places for three months each summer to be used by California Musical Theatre for Music Circus.

Sacramento Theatre Company can accommodate 292 patrons in the proscenium-style auditorium of its Main Stage, while the Pollock Stage offers a more intimate experience with only 87 seats in a black box-style theatre. Both provide good acoustics and sight-lines. This professional, Equity theatre presents seven professional productions per season with a reputation for excellent stage adaptations of classic literature. Three annual productions in the Cabaret Stage, which seats 100, round out the experience with high-quality Broadway musical revues.

The Young Professionals Conservatory, a training program for young theatre artists, was founded in 2003. The program, as well as the entire STC School of the Arts, is directed by Michele Hillen-Noufer.

For further information about the Sacramento Theatre Company please visit us online:

<http://www.sactheatre.org>

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Synopsis: *Hamlet*

By Isabel Smith-Bernstein

Something is rotten in the state of Denmark. Hamlet's father, King Hamlet, has died suddenly. King Hamlet's brother, Claudius, has been elected as king and married King Hamlet's wife, Gertrude. Hamlet is told by his best friend, Horatio, that the ghost of his father has been seen on the Elsinore Castle walls, and Hamlet goes with Horatio to see for himself. Sure enough, the ghost of Hamlet's father appears and tells young Hamlet that he was murdered by his own brother. Shaken to the core, Hamlet vows to seek the truth and revenge for his late father. Hamlet tells Horatio his plan of putting on an "antic disposition" in order to confuse the nose-Elsinore court as to his motives.

The love of Hamlet's life is a woman named Ophelia, who shares his wit and desire for truth and authenticity. Ophelia's father is Claudius's most trusted advisor, Polonius keeps his daughter under strict control. Ophelia's only other friend at Elsinore, her brother Laertes, leaves to go to school in France. On his way out, Laertes warns Ophelia not to get too involved with Hamlet as he is unlikely to marry her. Polonius overhears and orders his daughter not to see her love any more.

Meanwhile, Norwegian powers encroach on Denmark's land. Denmark has a long history with Norway and the old King Hamlet killed the old King Norway, leaving Prince Fortinbras of Norway angry and vengeful. Claudius does what he can to keep a tremulous peace between the two nations.

Hamlet feigns madness in front of Claudius, Polonius, and his own mother. Gertrude blames his madness on her sudden marriage to Claudius. Polonius, on the other hand, believes it is because Ophelia has followed his command and refused to see Hamlet. Polonius shows the royal couple a love letter Hamlet wrote to Ophelia, which convinces Gertrude and Claudius of this. Trying to help her son, Gertrude calls Hamlet's two old friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to Elsinore to try to uncover the cause of the madness from Hamlet himself.

Hamlet, wary of deceit in Elsinore, sees immediately through his old friends having been summoned and doesn't open up to them like his mother planned. However, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern brought a company of actors along with them hoping to cheer Hamlet up.

Polonius, still convinced of Hamlet's madness as a result of his love for Ophelia, sends his daughter into a chamber where he knows Hamlet will be and hides himself with Claudius to eavesdrop on their conversation. Hamlet contemplates life and death before noticing Ophelia, and they have a tearful parting as they realize that their relationship cannot thrive in Denmark's rotten state.

The players arrive, and, always a fan of theatre, Hamlet devises a plot for the players to put on a play that mirrors the murder of his father. The players perform for the court, and at the moment when the king-character is murdered by the king's brother-character, Claudius rises in a rage and storms out of the room. Hamlet takes this as proof of what the ghost told him and from this moment on is ready to kill Claudius for revenge.

Gertrude was watching the play with her husband and realizes that she must do what she has been avoiding: talk to her son one-on-one. On his way to his mother's room, Hamlet passes Claudius praying. Hamlet almost kills him right there, but worries Claudius's soul would go to heaven if he were murdered while praying.

Gertrude and Hamlet fight about his dead father, and Hamlet gets so passionate that Gertrude fears he will kill *her*. She cries out, causing Polonius—who has been eavesdropping behind the drapes—to cry out as well. Hamlet, thinking that it's Claudius, stabs through and kills him. In response, Claudius sends Hamlet to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. He also sends missives with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for the English to kill Hamlet, but Hamlet discovers the plot and replaces his name with those of his old friends.

Weighed down by grief, Ophelia stops communicating in a typical way. Instead, she spends her time outside singing old songs to convey how miserable and utterly trapped she is. Laertes returns upon hearing of his father's death only to find his sister's antic disposition. Ophelia makes a series of pointed remarks that make it clear to those who witness her speech that she is a danger to Claudius's rule. Laertes vows revenge for her condition, and Claudius manipulates him into placing his hate onto Hamlet instead of on the king. Gertrude interrupts their meeting to tell Laertes that his sister has drowned.

Hamlet returns from England and falls into the trap that Claudius has set. The king has arranged for Hamlet and Laertes to duel, and he has poisoned Laertes' blade. In case of Hamlet's victory, Claudius has also prepared to drop a poisoned pearl into the victor's cup. Laertes wounds Hamlet in the fencing match, poisoning him. To his dismay, Hamlet and Laertes swap weapons during their fight and Laertes is hit with the poison. When Hamlet will not drink from the cup Claudius offers, Gertrude drinks it instead and dies. Hamlet realizes the treachery and kills Claudius.

Just as Hamlet dies in Horatio's arms, Fortinbras and his army enter Elsinore in conquest. Fortinbras makes it clear that Hamlet's dying wish, "tell my story," will be carried out. The audience perhaps hopes that the cycle of revenge is broken and a reign of authenticity has begun.

Characters: *Hamlet*

Hamlet, the son of the late king and the nephew of the present king. A student and a philosopher by nature.

Claudius, the king of Denmark and brother to the former king. A masterful politician.

Gertrude, the queen of Denmark and Hamlet's mother. A compassionate queen and mother.

Polonius, a politician and Claudius's most trusted advisor. Father to Ophelia and Laertes. A Machiavel.

Ophelia, Hamlet's true love, Polonius's daughter. Quick-witted, headstrong, and intelligent.

Laertes, Polonius's son and Ophelia's brother. A student in France, dedicated to family, and a gifted fencer.

Horatio, Hamlet's best friend and fellow student at Wittenberg. A great thinker guided by reason.

Voltemand and **Cornelia**, Danish ambassadors who are skilled diplomats and seek to negotiate peace with Norway.

Marcellus, a Danish military officer and casual friend of Hamlet's. A no-nonsense skeptic.

Francisco and **Bernardo**, members of the Danish guard.

Ghost, an other-worldly presence who has taken the form of old King Hamlet.

Rosencrantz and **Guildenstern**, two of Hamlet's friends from long ago.

Reynaldo, Polonius's servant who sees all that happens in Elsinore.

Players, a group of actors who come to Elsinore to perform a play partially written by Hamlet.

Fortinbras, the prince of Norway whose father was skilled by Old King Hamlet.

Osric, a courtier and duel referee.

Gravediggers, a pair of church groundskeepers who know a thing or two about life and death.

The Text: *Hamlet*

By Isabel Smith-Bernstein

There is much debate surrounding the history of Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*. It was first performed between 1598 and 1602, depending on which source you believe. The first *published* text was the First Quarto in 1603. This Quarto is often known colloquially as "The Bad Quarto" because it differs significantly from the more accepted Folio text. The Second Quarto was published in 1604 or 1605 still lacking some seventy-seven lines found in the Folio but is much closer to what was published in 1623 in the First Folio.

There are many possible explanations for the differences in the texts, one of them being that the First Quarto is an actor's recollection of a performance. Another theory is that the text is actually that of *Ur-Hamlet*, a play by an unknown author which no longer survives but featured a character that is known to have said, "*Hamlet*, revenge!"

Since the eighteenth century, editors have worked to create a "definitive" version of the text, often combining the three published versions. Ultimately, we will never know what Shakespeare intended and what precise words Shakespeare's audiences would have heard. What we do know is that our sources leave us with a beautiful and masterful play.

Hamlet was likely written after *Julius Caesar* and before *Twelfth Night*. Our record of publication puts it between *Macbeth* and *Measure for Measure*, which are both plays performed (and likely written) for the new King James. *Hamlet*, then, is a piece that straddles both Queen Elizabeth and King James, and we can see elements of each ruler reflected within the play. The fact that *Hamlet* mirrored both rulers (for instance, King James fashioned himself a scholar and so might have seen some of himself in the noble Hamlet) is a possible reason for its popularity and continued production under the Lord Chamberlain as well as the King's Men—the Masters of Revels approved of the play on behalf of their monarchs.

Elizabethan Context

By Isabel Smith-Bernstein

Religion: Cold Civil War

Hamlet was written towards the end of Queen Elizabeth's rule when the English people were nervous about succession. Queen Elizabeth's long reign represented a time of peace after lengthy turmoil. The turmoil was largely religious in nature as Queen Elizabeth's father, King Henry VIII, had broken with the Catholic Church and created the Church of England. Henry VIII's heir and only son died young leading to the bloody rule of Mary Queen of Scots—who forcibly converted England back to Catholicism. After Mary was deposed, Elizabeth took the throne and yet again reverted England to Anglicanism. Elizabeth was less violent than her sister, but still executed hundreds of Catholics. The Virgin Queen, Elizabeth had no heir and as she grew ill there was great uneasiness in England over who the next monarch would be and what kind of religious atmosphere they would create.

We know now that Shakespeare's father was likely a Catholic, so Shakespeare himself would have grown up in a religiously tense household. This is also notable because as a writer Shakespeare could draw on both Catholic and Anglican traditions. Shakespeare's plays often reflected the atmosphere of the time, and so *Hamlet* includes the uneasiness about religion and succession. What exactly *Hamlet* is trying to say about these major themes is up for debate, and that is part of the mastery of Shakespeare's play.

Shakespeare's audiences thought about the afterlife frequently—a reason that the Ghost in this play would be frightening to them. The presence of the Ghost early in *Hamlet* foreshadows death yet to come and begs the question of the fates of each of the title characters in the play.

Ghosts: Purgatory and Beyond

Hamlet's best friend and fellow-student Horatio is skeptical of the Ghost when it first appears; Horatio warns Hamlet not to go with it lest it make him mad. Hamlet approaches the Ghost nonetheless but is determined to verify the Ghost's story before taking action.

The fear of ghosts was very real in Shakespeare's England; they were believed to be capable of driving those who saw them to madness or leading them into Hell. The Ghost in *Hamlet* would not only be chilling because of its spookiness but also because it reminded the audience of one of their worst fears.

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare blends Catholic and Protestant traditions surrounding ghosts. Catholics believe in purgatory, while Protestants do not. The historical Catholic belief about ghosts was that they were the souls of the recently departed, often with unfinished business. The Protestants believed (generally) that ghosts were spirits (usually evil) that took over the bodies of the recently deceased or created convincing illusions targeted at specific people.

The treatment of the Ghost in *Hamlet* is a masterful combination of different religious traditions, making the Ghost more mysterious and frightening as we cannot be certain what it is. It also means that the Ghost likely would have symbolized different things to the varying members of Shakespeare's audience.

Espionage: Lawful Espials

Hamlet has a lot of spying, in almost every scene.

Both Queen Elizabeth and her successor, King James, used many spies in order to make sure that there were no plots of uprising. Elizabeth had a large spy network that James broadened. It was legal for the monarch to spy on his or her subjects, but illegal for subjects to spy on the monarchy—this would be treasonous. Spying was so common in Shakespeare’s England that everyone knew to watch what they say in public.

Hamlet also likely underwent some revisions between the First Quarto and the First Folio, one of those being the addition of the phrase “lawful espials.” Claudius says “lawful espials” in reference to him and Polonius hiding to eavesdrop on Hamlet and Ophelia—meaning that they are spies with the law on their side. It is possible that this phrase was added to the Folio by the editors as a result of King James’s increase in kingly spying.

Themes: Ophelia's Garden

By Isabel Smith-Bernstein

We can find many of the themes of *Hamlet* hidden in the plants Ophelia hands out during her “mad scene.” The plants that Ophelia hands out are indicative of Shakespeare's genius, each has a hyper specific meaning and use that Shakespeare and his audiences would have known about. These plants also come together to make the garden that is what is rotting in Denmark.

Rosemary is for remembrance, a plant used in weddings and funerals in Elizabethan England. “Remember me,” says the ghost to Hamlet. And Hamlet responds, “Remember thee! / Ay, thou poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat / In this distracted globe.” This suggests in the context of it being 1600 in the Globe Theatre that Hamlet's act of remembrance will become the focus of the theatre event. Revenge is a form of remembrance. Hamlet's call to remember calls him back to life. Hamlet leaves lurking in the shadows of the court to take action against Claudius. He casts aside his inky cloak and instead develops an “antic disposition” and “wild and whirring words.”

Fennel is for false flattery. That association grew from fennel's use as an appetite suppressant by fasters—it's a plant that appears to give sustenance but does not. Many things in the court of Denmark are not as they seem. In a play about a search for authenticity, it takes investigation to find the truth. Often, that manifests in unlawful spying. This is a play filled with spying. It highlights the distinction between public versus private; exterior and interior.

Pansies are for thoughts. They were also used to predict the future of your love life: Four veins meant hope; seven, constancy in love; eight, fickleness; nine, a change of heart; and eleven, disappointment in love and an early death. *Hamlet* is simultaneously a play that is obsessed with the past and with the future. Hamlet lives in the past in order to have a future; Gertrude tries to focus on her future, but Hamlet is a remembrance of the past; Ophelia returns Hamlet's remembrances so that both may have a chance to continue.

Daisies are symbols of purity and innocence, a flower that Ophelia does not hand out with the others because daisies no longer have a place in Denmark. She keeps it, perhaps as a hopeful gesture that Denmark could improve.

Columbine is a symbol of forsaken love. So many bonds go awry in the world of Hamlet. Hamlet is already a very interior play, the attention directed inward as people in the Renaissance developed English humanism. Hamlet's relationships with his love, his mother, his father, his uncle, his best friends, all go haywire as a result of the Ghost's request “Remember me.” As the relationships break down in Hamlet, many characters are left isolated.

Violets are for melancholy and early death because they are one of the flowers Persephone gathered when she was kidnapped by Hades. Every character who dies and appears within Hamlet has met an early death. Violets come to represent the danger in the world of rotting Denmark.

Rue is documented in every herbal book from Shakespeare's period and before as an herb that causes abortion. From the *Batman Herbal*, rue “. . . putteth a dead childe out of the wombe and cleanseth the mother [uterus] and bringest out filth and uncleanness thereof, and purgeth and cleaneth the mother full clean.” This is the plant that Ophelia notably gives to herself, which would signal to Elizabethan audiences that she needed rue. This relates to Hamlet telling Ophelia to get to a nunnery, and their love for each other which goes far beyond that of courtship. Rue is also the herb of bitterness of repentance. In this way, rue is indicative of Hamlet as a whole because it is also rooted in the past. Its job is to fix past wrongs, and provide a glimmer of hope for the future.

Hamlet does end on a hopeful note. In Hamlet's final words he is finally fully in the present, demanding that Horatio tell his story—sounding just like his late father, proving that past is prologue.

Shakespeare: Words, Words, Words

By S. S. Moorty

“No household in the English-speaking world is properly furnished unless it contains copies of the Holy Bible and of The Works of William Shakespeare. It is not always thought that these books should be read in maturer years, but they must be present as symbols of Religion and Culture” (G.B. Harrison, *Introducing Shakespeare*. Rev. & Exp. [New York: Penguin Books, 1991], 11).

We, the Shakespeare-theater goers and lovers, devotedly and ritualistically watch and read the Bard’s plays not for exciting stories and complex plots. Rather, Shakespeare’s language is a vital source of our supreme pleasure in his plays. Contrary to ill-conceived notions, Shakespeare’s language is not an obstacle to appreciation, though it may prove to be difficult to understand. Instead, it is the communicative and evocative power of Shakespeare’s language that is astonishingly rich in vocabulary—about 29,000 words—strikingly presented through unforgettable characters such as Hamlet, Macbeth, Lear, Othello, Rosalind, Viola, Iago, Shylock, etc.

In the high school classroom, students perceive Shakespeare’s language as “Old English.” Actually Shakespeare’s linguistic environment, experience, and exposure was, believe it or not, closer to our own times than to Chaucer’s, two hundred years earlier. Indeed, the history and development of the English language unfolds as follows: Old English, 449-1100; Middle English 1100-1500; and Modern English 1500-present. Shakespeare was firmly in the Modern English period.

At the time Shakespeare wrote, most of the grammatical changes from Old and Middle English had taken place; yet rigid notions about “correctness” had not yet been standardized in grammars. The past five centuries have advanced the cause of standardized positions for words; yet the flexible idiom of Elizabethan English offered abundant opportunities for Shakespeare’s linguistic inventiveness. Ideally it is rewarding to study several facets of Shakespeare’s English: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, wordplay, and imagery. The present overview will, however, be restricted to “vocabulary.”

To Polonius’s inquisitive question “What do you read, my lord?” (Hamlet, 2.2.191) Hamlet nonchalantly and intriguingly aptly replies: “Words, words, words” (2.2.192). This many-splendored creation of Shakespeare’s epitomizes the playwright’s own fascination with the dynamic aspect of English language, however troubling it may be to modern audiences and readers. Shakespeare added several thousand words to the language, apart from imparting new meanings to known words. At times Shakespeare could teasingly employ the same word for different shades of thought. Barowne’s single line, “Light, seeking light, doth light of light beguile” (Love’s Labour’s Lost, 1.1.77), as Harry Levin in his *General Introduction to The Riverside Shakespeare* (9) explains, “uses ‘light’ in four significations: intellect, seeking wisdom, cheats eyesight out of daylight.”

Another instance: Othello as he enters his bedroom with a light before he smothers his dear, innocent Desdemona soliloquizes: “Put out the light, and then put out the light” (Othello, 5.2.7) Here ‘light’ compares the light of Othello’s lamp or torch to Desdemona’s ‘light’ of life.

In both instances, the repeated simple ordinary word carries extraordinary shades of meaning. “Usually such a tendency in a Shakespeare play indicates a more or less conscious thematic intent.” (Paul A. Jorgensen, *Redeeming Shakespeare’s Words* [Berkeley and Los Angeles; University of California Press, 1962], 100).

Living in an age of the “grandiose humanistic confidence in the power of the word” (Levin 9), Shakespeare evidently felt exuberant that he had the license to experiment with the language, further blessed by the fact that “there were no English grammars to lay down rules or dictionaries to restrict word-formation. This was an immeasurable boon for writers” (Levin 10). Surely Shakespeare took full

advantage of the unparalleled linguistic freedom to invent, to experiment with, and to indulge in lavishly.

However intriguing, captivating, mind-teasing, beguiling, and euphonious, Shakespeare's vocabulary can be a stumbling block, especially for readers. "In the theater the speaking actor frequently relies on tone, semantic drive, narrative context, and body language to communicate the sense of utterly unfamiliar terms and phrases, but on the page such words become more noticeable and confusing" (Russ McDonald, *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare: An Introduction with Documents* [Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996], 184).

Unlocking the meaning of Shakespeare's vocabulary can prove to be an interesting challenge. Such words include those which "have dropped from common use like 'bisson' (blind) or those that the playwright seems to have created from Latin roots . . . but that did not catch on, such as 'conspicuities' (eyesight or vision) or 'unplausible' (doubtful or disapproving). Especially confusing are those words that have shifted meaning over the intervening centuries, such as 'proper' (handsome), 'nice' (squeamish or delicate), 'silly' (innocent), or 'cousin' (kinsman, that is, not necessarily the child of an aunt or uncle)" (McDonald 184). Because of semantic change, when Shakespeare uses 'conceit,' he does not mean 'vanity,' as we might understand it to be. Strictly following etymology, Shakespeare means a 'conception' or 'notion,' or possibly the 'imagination' itself.

Perhaps several Shakespeare words "would have been strange to Shakespeare's audience because they were the products of his invention or unique usage. Some words that probably originated with him include: 'auspicious,' 'assassination,' 'disgraceful,' 'dwindle,' 'savagery.'" Certainly a brave soul, he was "a most audacious inventor of words." To appreciate and understand Shakespeare's English in contrast to ours, we ought to suspend our judgment and disbelief and allow respect for the "process of semantic change, which has been continually eroding or encrusting his original meaning" (Levin 8).

Shakespeare's vocabulary has received greater attention than any other aspect of his language. Perhaps this is because it is the most accessible with no burdensome complications. Whatever the cause, Shakespeare's language will forever be challenging and captivating.

Not of An Age, But for All Mankind

By Douglas A. Burger

After an enormous expenditure of money and effort, Shakespeare's Globe Theater has risen again, four centuries later, on London's south bank of the Thames. Designed as a faithful reconstruction of the original, it uses the building methods of the time and traditional materials (oak timbers, plaster walls, wooden pegs, water-reeds for thatching the roof). From above, the shape seems circular (actually, it is twenty-six sided) with three covered tiers of seats surrounding a central area which is open to the sky.. There the "groundlings" may stand to see the action taking place on the stage, which occupies almost half of the inner space. There are no artificial lights, no conventional sets, no fancy rigging.

Seeing a Shakespeare play in the afternoon sunlight at the new Globe must come very close to the experience of those early-day Londoners, except, of course, that we in the twentieth-century behave better. We don't yell insults at the actors, spit, or toss orange peels on the ground. We also smell better: the seventeenth-century playwright, Thomas Dekker, calls the original audience "Stinkards . . . glewed together in crowdes with the Steames of strong breath" (Shakespeare's Globe: The Guide Book [London: International Globe Center, 1996], 42). And we are safer. The first Globe burned to the ground. The new theater has more exits, fire-retardant insulation concealed in the walls, and water-sprinklers that poke through the thatch of the roof.

That hard-headed capitalists and officials would be willing, even eager, to invest in the project shows that Shakespeare is good business. The new Globe is just one example. Cedar City's own Utah Shakespeare Festival makes a significant contribution to the economy of southern Utah. A sizable percentage of all the tourist dollars spent in England goes to Shakespeare's birthplace, Stratford-on-Avon, which would be a sleepy little agricultural town without its favorite son. The situation seems incredible. In our whole history, what other playwright could be called a major economic force? Who else--what single individual--could be listed along with agriculture, mining, and the like as an industry of a region? Why Shakespeare?

The explanation, of course, goes further than an attempt to preserve our cultural traditions. In an almost uncanny way, Shakespeare's perceptions remain valuable for our own understandings of life, and probably no other writer remains so insightful, despite the constantly changing preoccupations of audiences over time.

The people of past centuries, for example, looked to the plays for nuggets of wisdom and quotable quotes, and many of Shakespeare's lines have passed into common parlance. There is an old anecdote about the woman, who on first seeing Hamlet, was asked how she liked the play. She replied, "Oh, very nice, my dear, but so full of quotations." She has it backwards of course. Only the King James Bible has lent more "quotations" to English than Shakespeare.

Citizens of the late nineteenth century sought in the plays for an understanding of human nature, valuing Shakespeare's character for traits that they recognized in themselves and in others. The fascination continues to the present day as some of our best-known movie stars attempt to find new dimensions in the great characters: Mel Gibson and Kenneth Branagh in Hamlet, Lawrence Fishburn in Othello, Leonardo de Caprio in Romeo, to name just a few.

Matters of gender, class, and race have preoccupied more recent audiences. Beatrice sounds a rather feminist note in Much Ado about Nothing in her advice to her cousin about choosing a husband: Curtsy to your father, but say "Father, as it please me." Coriolanus presents a recurring dilemma about class relations in its explorations of the rights and wrongs involved in a great man's attempt to control the masses. Racial attitudes are illuminated in Othello, where the European characters always mark the hero by his race, always identify him first as the "Moor," are always aware of his difference.

London's new/old Globe is thus a potent symbol of the plays' continuing worth to us. The very building demonstrates the utter accuracy of the lines written so long ago that Shakespeare is not "of an age" but "for all time."

Mr. Shakespeare, I Presume

By Diana Major Spencer

Could the plays known as Shakespeare's have been written by a rural, semi-literate, uneducated, wife-deserting, two-bit actor who spelled his name differently each of the six times he wrote it down? Could such a man know enough about Roman history, Italian geography, French grammar, and English court habits to create Antony and Cleopatra, The Comedy of Errors, and Henry V? Could he know enough about nobility and its tenuous relationship to royalty to create King Lear and Macbeth?

Are these questions even worth asking? Some very intelligent people think so. On the other hand, some very intelligent people think not. Never mind quibbles about how a line should be interpreted, or how many plays Shakespeare wrote and which ones, or which of the great tragedies reflected personal tragedies. The question of authorship is "The Shakespeare Controversy."

Since Mr. Cowell, quoting the deceased Dr. Wilmot, cast the first doubt about William of Stratford in an 1805 speech before the Ipswich Philological Society, nominees for the "real author" have included philosopher Sir Francis Bacon, playwright Christopher Marlowe, Queen Elizabeth I, Sir Walter Raleigh, and the earls of Derby, Rutland, Essex, and Oxford--among others.

The arguments evoke two premises: first, that the proven facts about the William Shakespeare who was christened at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon on April 26, 1564 do not configure a man of sufficient nobility of thought and language to have written the plays; and, second, that the man from Stratford is nowhere concretely identified as the author of the plays. The name "Shakespeare"--in one of its spellings--appears on early quartos, but the man represented by the name may not be the one from Stratford.

One group of objections to the Stratford man follows from the absence of any record that he ever attended school--in Stratford or anywhere else. If he were uneducated, the arguments go, how could his vocabulary be twice as large as the learned Milton's? How could he know so much history, law, or philosophy? If he were a country bumpkin, how could he know so much of hawking, hounding, courtly manners, and daily habits of the nobility? How could he have traveled so much, learning about other nations of Europe in enough detail to make them the settings for his plays?

The assumptions of these arguments are that such rich and noble works as those attributed to a playwright using the name "Shakespeare" could have been written only by someone with certain characteristics, and that those characteristics could be distilled from the "facts" of his life. He would have to be noble; he would have to be well-educated; and so forth. On these grounds the strongest candidate to date is Edward de Vere, seventeenth earl of Oxford.

A debate that has endured its peaks and valleys, the controversy catapulted to center stage in 1984 with the publication of Charlton Ogburn's *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*. Ogburn, a former army intelligence officer, builds a strong case for Oxford--if one can hurdle the notions that the author wasn't Will Shakespeare, that literary works should be read autobiographically, and that literary creation is nothing more than reporting the facts of one's own life. "The Controversy" was laid to rest--temporarily, at least--by justices Blackmun, Brennan, and Stevens of the United States Supreme Court who, after hearing evidence from both sides in a mock trial conducted September 25, 1987 at American University in Washington, D.C., found in favor of the Bard of Avon.

Hooray for our side!

Shakespearean Snapshots

By Ace G. Pilkington

It is hard to get from the facts of Shakespeare's life to any sense of what it must have been like to have lived it. He was born in 1564 in Stratford-on-Avon and died there in 1616. The day of his birth is not certain, but it may have been the same as the day of his death—April 23—if he was baptized, as was usual at the time, three days after he was born. He married Anne Hathaway in the winter of 1582-83, when he was eighteen and she was twenty-six. He became the father of three children. The first was Susannah, who was born around May 23, close enough to the date of the wedding to suggest that the marriage was not entirely voluntary. Shakespeare's twins, Hamnet and Judith, were baptized on February 2, 1585. Hamnet died of unknown causes (at least unknown by us at this distance in time) in 1596. Shakespeare's career as actor, theatre owner, manager, and, of course, playwright began in the vicinity of 1590 and continued for the rest of his life, though there are clear indications that he spent more and more time in Stratford and less and less in London from 1611 on. His work in the theatre made him wealthy, and his extraordinary plays brought him a measure of fame, though nothing like what he deserved or would posthumously receive.

It's hard to get even the briefest sense of what Shakespeare's life was like from such information. It is probably impossible ever to know what Shakespeare thought or felt, but maybe we can get closer to what he saw and heard and even smelled. Perhaps some snapshots—little close-ups—might help to bring us nearer to the world in which Shakespeare lived if not quite to the life he lived in that world. In Shakespeare's youth, chimneys were a new thing. Before that, smoke was left to find its way out through a hole in the roof, often a thatched roof, and there were even some who maintained that this smoky atmosphere was better than the newfangled fresh air that chimneys made possible—along with a greater division of rooms and more privacy.

In the year of Shakespeare's birth, Stratford had more trees than houses—"upwards of 400 houses as well as 1,000 elms and forty ashes" (Peter Thomson, *Shakespeare's Professional Career* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 1). Peter Levi says, "The town was so full of elm trees that it must have looked and sounded like a woodland settlement. For example, Mr. Gibbs's house on Rothermarket had twelve elms in the garden and six in front of the door. Thomas Attford on Ely Street had another twelve. The town boundaries were marked by elms or groups of elms (*The Life and Times of William Shakespeare* [New York: Wings Books, 1988], 7). Shakespeare's "Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang" becomes a far more majestic image with the picture of Stratford's elms in mind. And the birds themselves had a sound which modern ears no longer have a chance to enjoy. "We must realize that it was ordinary for . . . Shakespeare to hear a dawn chorus of many hundreds of birds at once. . . . as a young man thirty years ago I have heard a deafening dawn chorus in the wooded Chilterns, on Shakespeare's road to London" (Levi 10).

Exactly what Shakespeare's road to London may have been or at least how he first made his way there and became an actor is much debated. He might have been a schoolmaster or fifty other things, but he may well have started out as he ended up—as a player. We can then, in John Southworth's words, "Picture a sixteen-year-old lad on a cart, growing year by year into manhood, journeying out of the Arden of his childhood into ever more unfamiliar, distant regions, travelling ill-made roads in all weathers, sleeping in inns, hearing and memorising strange new dialects and forms of speech, meeting with every possible type and character of person; learning, most of all perhaps, from the audiences to which he played in guildhalls and inns" (*Shakespeare the Player: A Life in the Theatre* [Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2000], 30). At some time in his life—in fact, many times—Shakespeare must have known theatrical tours very like that.

In London itself, the new Globe, the best theatre in (or rather just outside of) the city, was in an area with a large number of prisons and an unpleasant smell. "Garbage had preceded actors on the marshy land where the new playhouse was erected: 'flanked with a ditch and forced out of a marsh', according to Ben Jonson. Its cost . . . included the provision of heavy piles for the foundation, and a whole network of ditches in which the water rose and fell with the tidal Thames" (Garry O'Connor, *William Shakespeare: A Popular Life* [New York: Applause Books, 2000], 161). The playgoers came by water, and the Globe, the Rose, and the Swan "drew 3,000 or 4,000 people in boats across the Thames every day" (161). Peter Levi says of Shakespeare's London, "The noise, the crowds, the animals and their droppings, the glimpses of grandeur and the amazing squalor of the poor, were beyond modern imagination" (49).

England was a place of fear and glory. Public executions were public entertainments. Severed heads decayed on city walls. Francis Bacon, whom Will Durant calls "the most powerful and influential intellect of his time" (*Heroes of History: A Brief History of Civilization from Ancient Times to the Dawn of the Modern Age* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001], 327), had been "one of the persons commissioned to question prisoners under torture" in the 1580s (Levi 4). The opportune moment when Shakespeare became the most successful of playwrights was the destruction of Thomas Kyd, "who broke under torture and was never the same again," and the death of Christopher Marlowe in a tavern brawl which was the result of plot and counterplot—a struggle, very probably, between Lord Burghley and Walter Raleigh (Levi 48).

Shakespeare, who must have known the rumors and may have known the truth, cannot have helped shuddering at such monstrous good fortune. Still, all of the sights, smells, and terrors, from the birdsongs to the screams of torture, from the muddy tides to the ties of blood, became not only the textures and tonalities of Shakespeare's life, but also the information and inspiration behind his plays.

Characters in Depth

By Isabel Smith-Bernstein

Hamlet

Hamlet, as a play, is a cipher. The text reflects our own humanity back to us, holding up to whatever themes or ideas we apply to it. We can find in *Hamlet* whatever we want to find when we arrive at the play in that particular moment.

Hamlet the character is similar. The Prince of Denmark can inhabit endless corners of humanity. He holds up to time.

Being human is difficult. Hamlet knows this, and therefore he's on a search for authenticity throughout the play. Before the play begins, his mother betrays him by quickly forgetting his father and marrying his uncle. Hamlet knows that something is not right and the Ghost confirms this for him. Hamlet follows a desperate quest to find out the truth. In doing so he discovers his authentic self.

Hamlet has two allies in his quest for truth—Ophelia and Horatio. Other than those two, he is alone on a difficult journey. Who can Hamlet trust when so few are honest?

Ophelia

Ophelia has been the subject of interest for centuries. Her charm, intelligence, and mysterious death have sparked many harsh debates and lengthy conversations. She is Hamlet's close friend and lover, but Shakespeare gives them few scenes together.

Ophelia is Hamlet's equal and ally. She matches him in intelligence, need for authenticity, and powerful love. But unlike Hamlet, Ophelia is utterly trapped within Elsinore. She cannot leave and she knows this. When Hamlet tells her to get to a nunnery, he is telling her to leave to save herself. But she can't leave because "Denmark is a prison" for young women like her who must remain under the rule of her father.

Ophelia being trapped is what sets her apart from Shakespeare's other heroines. Ophelia's love for Hamlet is as great as Juliet's, her intelligence as great as Rosalind's, her wit that of Viola's. Yet she has no Friar on her side, no Arden to flee to, no shipwreck to free her. Instead she is isolated in Elsinore with Hamlet as her only ally. When Hamlet is taken from her, she is utterly alone.

Setting in Depth

By Isabel Smith-Bernstein

Elsinore

Hamlet is Shakespeare's only play set in Denmark. This is largely because the source texts are Scandinavian legends. Denmark and England also had some similarities—for instance, Denmark, like England, was a newly Protestant country. Unlike England, Denmark had a constitutional monarchy, which meant that the king was elected (for life) by the people. It is possible that Shakespeare saw some of his own England in Denmark, as the elected monarch of Denmark reflected the constant switching of monarchs in England over the last century.

***Hamlet* Discussion Questions**

By Isabel Smith-Bernstein

- 1.** Compare Hamlet's two best friends, Horatio and Ophelia. How are they different from each other? How the same? How do they help Hamlet?
- 2.** Who in our world is like Claudius?
- 3.** Hamlet is a play about a series of choices. If one thing were different how would the play have changed? For instance, if Hamlet hadn't believed the Ghost? Or if Hamlet had killed Claudius when he was praying?
- 4.** Why doesn't Hamlet share the truth with other people if he is seeking honesty?
- 5.** Why does Hamlet feign madness? Is it all feigned? What about Ophelia?
- 6.** Would Hamlet's fate in the afterlife have been an important consideration for an Elizabethan audience?
- 7.** In what ways could Hamlet be a metaphor for the English monarch?
- 8.** Is there any Shakespeare play where a heroine in love betrays her love? Please consider Jessica, Rosalind, and Juliet

Study Guide Questions: Engage With the Play

By Anna Miles

Take charge of your theatre-going experience and make it your own by asking yourself questions before, during, and after watching a play.

Questions to ask before the play:

If you **HAVE** read the play:

How did you envision the set, or the visual world of the play, while reading?

How did you imagine the characters looked while reading the play?

What themes did you notice repeating throughout the play?

What images jumped out at you while reading the play?

How would you describe the central theme of the play in one sentence?

If you **HAVEN'T** read the play:

Do you know anything about the play? If so, what do you know?

In General:

When you think about "theatre," what impressions come to mind? What does "theatre" mean to you?

What do you expect your experience to be when you watch a play? Do you expect to be bored? Excited? Engaged? Curious? Angry? Tired?

Questions to ask after the play:

If you **READ THE PLAY BEFORE SEEING IT:**

How did the production set differ from what you had imagined while reading the play? How was it similar? How did these changes affect your understanding of the story?

Did the characters look different from how you envisioned them looking while reading the play? Did they sound different? Act differently? How did these changes affect your understanding and opinion of each character? How did these changes affect your understanding of the overall story?

How did the themes and images you noticed while reading translate to performance? Did the same themes and images jump out at you? Did you notice new ones?

Did this particular production seem to have the same central theme, or a different central theme from the one you discovered while reading? What elements of the staging, acting, or design helped convey the theme?

Did they play gain or lose anything in performance? Did you enjoy reading it more, or watching it?

If you **DIDN'T READ THE PLAY BEFORE SEEING IT:**

How did the play live up to your expectations? Did it turn out the way you thought it would? Was your knowledge of the play correct?

Were you able to follow the story?

Which part of the story did you most respond to? What themes and images jumped out at you?

Which character did you most relate to? Why?

In General:

How did this production change or confirm your original impressions of "theatre"?

How did your experience watching the play differ from how you expected it would go?

In your own words, how would you summarize the plot of the play? How is the plot different from the story, or the thematic implications, in the play?

Did you feel the story was relevant to your life? How and why?

Did you feel the story said something about our society, or about the world at large? If so, what?

Do you feel this story is an important one to tell and keep telling? How and why?

What kind of stories do you most respond to?

California State Standards

Giving students the chance to experience live theater at the Sacramento Theatre Company not only gives them the chance to enrich their understanding of literature, humanity, and the world, but also includes the added benefit of fulfilling several of California's State Standards for Education, including:

California Arts Standards in Theater:

RESPONDING—Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Enduring Understanding: Theatre artists reflect to understand the impact of drama processes and theatre experiences.

Essential Question: How do theatre artists comprehend the essence of drama processes and theatre experiences?

Process Component: Reflect

PK.TH:Re7	K.TH:Re7	1.TH:Re7	2.TH:Re7	3.TH:Re7	4.TH:Re7	5.TH:Re7
With prompting and supports, recall an emotional response in dramatic play or a guided drama experience .	With prompting and supports, express an emotional response to characters in dramatic play or a guided drama experience .	Recall choices made in a guided drama experience .	Recognize when artistic choices are made in a guided drama experience .	Understand and discuss why artistic choices are made in a drama/theatre work.	Identify artistic choices made in a drama/theatre work through participation and observation.	Explain personal reactions to artistic choices made in a drama/theatre work through participation and observation.

6.TH:Re7	7.TH:Re7	8.TH:Re7	Prof.TH:Re7	Acc.TH:Re7	Adv.TH:Re7
Describe and record personal reactions to artistic choices in a drama/theatre work.	Compare recorded personal and peer reactions to artistic choices in a drama/ theatre work.	Apply appropriate criteria to the evaluation of artistic choices in a drama/theatre work.	Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a drama/theatre work to develop criteria for artistic choices.	Demonstrate an understanding of multiple interpretations of artistic criteria and how each might be used to influence future artistic choices of a drama/theatre work.	Use historical and cultural context to structure and justify personal responses to a drama/theatre work.

RESPONDING—Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Enduring Understanding: Theatre artists’ interpretations of drama/theatre work are influenced by personal experiences, culture, and aesthetics.

Essential Question: How can the same work of art communicate different messages to different people?

Process Component: Interpret

PK.TH:Re8	K.TH:Re8	1.TH:Re8	2.TH:Re8	3.TH:Re8	4.TH:Re8	5.TH:Re8
a. With prompting and supports, explore preferences in dramatic play , guided drama experience or age-appropriate theatre performance.	a. With prompting and supports, identify preferences in dramatic play , a guided drama experience or age-appropriate theatre performance.	a. Explain preferences and emotions in a guided drama experience or age-appropriate theatre performance.	a. Explain how personal preferences and emotions affect an observer’s response in a guided drama experience or age-appropriate theatre performance.	a. Consider multiple personal experiences when participating in or observing a drama/theatre work.	a. Compare and contrast multiple personal experiences when participating in or observing a drama/theatre work.	a. Justify responses based on personal experiences when participating in or observing a drama/theatre work.
b. With prompting and supports, name and describe characters in dramatic play or a guided drama experience .	b. With prompting and supports, name and describe settings in dramatic play or a guided drama experience .	b. Identify causes of character actions in a guided drama experience .	b. Identify causes and consequences of character actions in a guided drama experience .	b. Consider multiple ways to develop a character using physical characteristics and prop or costume design choices that reflect cultural perspectives in drama/theatre work.	b. Compare and contrast the qualities of characters in a drama/theatre work through physical characteristics and prop or costume design choices that reflect cultural contexts .	b. Explain responses to characters based on cultural contexts when participating in or observing drama/theatre work.
c. With prompting and supports describe how personal emotions and choices compare to the emotions and choices of characters in dramatic play or a guided drama experience .	c. With prompting and supports describe how personal emotions and choices compare to the emotions and choices of characters in dramatic play or a guided drama experience .	c. Explain or use text and pictures to describe how personal emotions and choices compare to the emotions and choices of characters in a guided drama experience .	c. Explain or use text and pictures to describe how others’ emotions and choices may compare to the emotions and choices of characters in a guided drama experience .	c. Examine how connections are made between oneself and a character’s emotions in drama/theatre work.	c. Identify and discuss physiological changes connected to emotions in drama/ theatre work.	c. Investigate the effects of emotions on posture, gesture, breathing, and vocal intonation in a drama/theatre work.

RESPONDING—Anchor Standard 9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

Enduring Understanding: Theatre artists apply criteria to understand, explore, and assess drama and theatre work.

Essential Question: How do analysis and synthesis impact the theatre artist’s process and audience’s perspectives?

Process Component: Evaluate

PK.TH:Re9	K.TH:Re9	1.TH:Re9	2.TH:Re9	3.TH:Re9	4.TH:Re9	5.TH:Re9
a. With prompting and supports, discuss and make decisions about dramatic play or a guided drama experience .	a. With prompting and supports, discuss and make decisions with others in dramatic play or a guided drama experience .	a. Build on others’ ideas in a guided drama experience .	a. Collaborate on a scene in a guided drama experience .	a. Understand how and why groups evaluate drama/theatre work.	a. Develop and implement a plan to evaluate drama/theatre work.	a. Develop multiple criteria to evaluate drama/theatre work.
n/a	n/a	b. Compare and contrast the experiences of characters in a guided drama experience .	b. Describe how characters respond to challenges in a guided drama experience .	b. Evaluate and analyze problems and situations in a drama/theatre work from an audience perspective.	b. Analyze and evaluate characters’ choices in a drama/theatre work from an audience perspective.	b. Analyze and evaluate a character’s circumstances in a drama/theatre work from an audience perspective.
n/a	n/a	c. Identify props and costumes that might be used in a guided drama experience .	c. Use a prop or costume in a guided drama experience to describe characters, settings, or events.	c. Consider and analyze technical theatre elements from multiple drama/theatre works.	c. Explore how technical theatre elements may support a theme or idea in a drama/theatre work.	c. Assess how technical theatre elements represent the theme of a drama/theatre work.

California Reading Standards in Literature:

Standards in Integration of Knowledge and Ideas for grades 6-12: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Grade 6 students: Compare and contrast the experience of reading a story, drama, or poem to listening to or viewing an audio, video, or live version of the text, including contrasting what they “see” and “hear” when reading the text to what they perceive when they listen or watch.

Grade 7 students: Compare and contrast a written story, drama, or poem to its audio, filmed, staged, or multimedia version, analyzing the effects of techniques unique to each medium (e.g., lighting, sound, color, or camera focus and angles in a film).

Grade 8 students: Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors.

Grade 9-10 students: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment.

Grade 11-12 students: Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. **(Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)**

Theatre Etiquette

- Arrive at the theater on time.
- Visit the restroom before the performance begins.
- Turn off your cell phone. Do not speak on the phone or text during the performance.
- Pay attention to announcements that are made prior to the show about the rules of the theater you are attending and the location of the fire exits.
- Don't speak during the performance unless you are encouraged by the performers to participate.
- Remember that the Overture (introductory music) in musical theater is part of the performance, so be quiet when it begins.
- Do not take pictures during the performance. It can be very distracting to the actors and can cause a mishap. It can also be a violation of an actor's contract.
- Remain in your seat for the entire performance. If you must leave, exit during intermission. In an emergency, wait for an appropriate break in the show. It is rude to get up in the middle of a quiet moment.
- Do not eat or drink in the theater.
- Do not put your feet up on the seats or balcony and do not kick the seat in front of you.
- Don't put or throw anything on the stage.
- Do laugh when the performance is funny.
- Do applaud when it is appropriate during the performance.
- Do applaud when the performance is over... this tells the performers and crew that you appreciate their work.
- Stand and applaud if you really thought the show was great (a standing ovation).
- Do not whistle, stomp your feet, or scream out to the performers except for a Bravo or Brava.

Additional Resources

ArtsEdge

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/>

ArtsEdge offers free, standards-based teaching materials for use in and out of the classroom, as well as professional development resources, student materials, and guidelines for arts-based instruction and assessment.

Utah Shakespeare Festival Education Website

<http://www.bard.org/education.html>

Expand your horizons, your outlook, your understanding with our myriad of educational resources, not just for students, but for students of life.

ProjectExplorer, Ltd.

<http://www.projectexplorer.org/>

ProjectExplorer, Ltd. is a not-for-profit organization that provides an interactive global learning experience to the kindergarten through twelfth grade community. Providing users globally the opportunity to explore the world from their own computer, it is a free, all-inclusive site that uses story-based learning to spark students' imaginations.

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare

<http://shakespeare.met.edu/>

The web's first edition of the complete works of William Shakespeare. This site has offered Shakespeare's plays and poetry to the internet community since 1993. Downloadable plays are available by scene or in their entirety.

Absolute Shakespeare

<http://absoluteshakespeare.com/>

Absolute Shakespeare provides resources for William Shakespeare's plays, sonnets, poems, quotes, biography and the legendary Globe Theatre. Absolute Shakespeare also offers a review of each character's role in each play including defining quotes and character motivations for all major characters.

Royal Shakespeare Company

<http://www.rsc.org.uk/learning/Learning.aspx>

This site provides resources materials for teachers and students from Royal Shakespeare Company.

Folger Shakespeare Library

<http://www.folger.edu/>

The Folger Shakespeare Library, located on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., is a world-class research center on Shakespeare and on the early modern age in the West. It is home to the world's largest and finest collection of Shakespeare materials and to major collections of other rare Renaissance books, manuscripts, and works of art.

