



# HAMLET

*Stratford*  
FESTIVAL

2022 STUDY GUIDE



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### HAMLET

By **William Shakespeare**

Directed by **Peter Pasyk**

### TOOLS FOR TEACHERS SPONSORED BY



Tools for Teachers includes Prologues,  
Study Guides and Stratford Shorts.

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### PROUD SEASON PARTNERS



Production support for *Hamlet* is generously provided by Phyllis & Robert Couzin and by John & Therese Gardner.

Cover: (from left) Jordan Mah, Amaka Umeh, Graham Abbey. Photography by David Hou.





Amaka Umeh. Photography by David Hou.

# HAMLET

## HAMLET

By **William Shakespeare**

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### CONTENT ADVISORY

This play explores mature themes including suicide. It depicts violence and murder. It also contains sexual innuendo.

### GRADE RECOMMENDATION

8+

### SYNOPSIS

On the battlements of Denmark's Elsinore Castle, the sentries are on edge. Twice now, a spectral figure resembling the recently deceased former king has appeared to them on their nightly watch.

Meanwhile, that king's son, Prince Hamlet, in deep mourning for his father, is disgusted by the speed with which his mother, Gertrude, has remarried – to her late husband's brother, Claudius, who now wears the crown. Hamlet considers this union between his mother and his uncle incestuous, to say nothing of the fact that it has robbed him of his own succession to the throne. That disgust turns to fury when he too encounters the ghost, which reveals to him that his father did not die a natural death but was in fact poisoned by Claudius.

Hamlet vows revenge, deciding to feign madness till he can find both proof of Claudius's guilt and a suitable opportunity to act. Polonius, the Lord Chamberlain, attributes the strangeness of Hamlet's behaviour to frustrated love for his daughter, Ophelia; meanwhile, Claudius has summoned two of Hamlet's fellow students from the university at Wittenberg to spy on him. Matters come to a head when Hamlet commissions a troupe of travelling players to re-enact the murder of his father in front of the whole court, causing the conscience-stricken Claudius to bolt from the room.

After Hamlet kills the eavesdropping Polonius, mistaking him for the King, Claudius dispatches him to England, intending to have him executed there, but Hamlet escapes and returns to Denmark for a final – and fatal – confrontation.

This production takes place in present day, with modern dress.

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

- Global Competencies:
    - ◆ Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking, Creativity, Learning to Learn/Self-Awareness
  - Grade 8
    - ◆ The Arts
    - ◆ Health and Physical Education
    - ◆ Language
  - Grades 9-12
    - ◆ The Arts
    - ◆ Canadian and World Studies
    - ◆ English
    - ◆ Health and Physical Education
  - Grades 11-12
    - ◆ Social Sciences and Humanities
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## THEMES

- Action and Inaction
- Disorder, Uncertainty and Chaos
- Existence, Death and the Afterlife
- Good and Evil, Honour and Revenge, Sin and Virtue
- Justice and Vengeance
- Love, Lust and Desire
- Madness, Appearance and Reality
- The Meaning of Life
- Power and Politics in Family, Private and Public Lives
- Responsibility as Freedom, Responsibility as a Curse
- Suicide
- The Supernatural
- Surveillance

## DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS

### PRE-SHOW QUESTIONS

- *Hamlet* is perhaps the most popular and produced of all of Shakespeare's plays. Why do you think it is so influential?
- How does our society today respond to claims of the supernatural? How do you think the Elizabethans responded to the supernatural 400 years ago?
- How far should someone go to seek revenge? Can revenge ever be justified?
- How would you define extreme parenting? Do parents have a right to check up on and even spy on their children? If so, to what extent?
- How does society keep checks and balances on their leaders and government today? In what ways do you imagine citizens were able to do so in Shakespeare's time?
- Shakespeare wrote two prominent female characters in *Hamlet*: Gertrude and Ophelia. He wrote this play 400 years ago, but this production is set in the present day. Knowing this, in what ways do you imagine these characters might be portrayed? How has the role of women changed since Shakespeare wrote the play? What still needs to be done in order to achieve gender equality?

### POST-SHOW QUESTIONS

- Is Hamlet the hero of this story? Why or why not? Who do you blame for the tragic ending of the play?
- Does Hamlet's youth play a factor in how he reacts to the events of the play? Why or why not?
- Which traits would someone classified as a "thinker" possess? What is an example of a character in this play that is a thinker, and one that is a doer, and what happened when they pushed these characteristics to the extreme?
- Did the casting choices made for this production affect your experience of the story? In what ways?
- Hamlet is a character famous for his use of soliloquy. How did Hamlet's soliloquies in this production help you understand more about the character?
- The play explores the divide between appearances and reality. What are some things in the play that are not as they seem?
- When does it feel like Ophelia has agency in this play and when does it feel like she doesn't?
- What is the significance of the play within the play put on by the travelling players?

## MINDS ON

### OBJECTIVE

This exercise invites students to explore the elements of a soliloquy and the creative choices made by actor Amaka Umeh performing Hamlet's soliloquy from Act 3, Scene 1 in the midst of the pandemic.

### MATERIALS

Video of *Hamlet's Soliloquy* featuring Amaka Umeh who plays *Hamlet* in the 2022 production, writing materials, black/white board or chalk/markers), sticky notes or highlighters, writing utensils, black/white board or chalk/markers

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### DIRECTIONS

- Before watching the video:
  - ◆ Ask your class: "What is a soliloquy?"
  - ◆ Soliloquy: A long speech in which a character shares their thoughts aloud without addressing any person but the audience. >>[Link to Definition](#)
  - ◆ Discuss how a soliloquy differs from a "monologue" and other long speeches.
  - ◆ Monologue: A long speech by one actor in a play. >>[Link to Definition](#)
- Engaging with the video:
  - ◆ Have students watch the video all the way through once as a class.
  - ◆ After watching it together, ask the students: "What did you notice? What struck you?"
  - ◆ Think, Pair, Share:
    - ◆ Give students think time and have them share with a partner.
    - ◆ On the board together, write down what the students share (i.e. production choices like lighting, camera shots or costumes; acting choices like volume, pacing or gesture; atmosphere; images; or sensations).
  - ◆ Once that list is compiled, give students a few minutes to individually write down how one of the listed elements connected them to the performance or helped them understand the character of Hamlet.
  - ◆ Invite students to discuss with a partner what they have written.
- Facilitate a larger group discussion to determine the choices that resonated the most with the class and why.

### POSSIBLE EXTENSION

- View another actor performing Hamlet's soliloquy from Act 3, Scene 1. What choices did they make that were different from Amaka Umeh's? How did those choices change the way you experienced their character?
  - ◆ Provide students with copies of the soliloquy and ask them to highlight any words they do not recognize. Invite students to look them up using [Alexander Schmidt's Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary](#). Have them watch the video of Amaka Umeh again. What new discoveries have you made? What lines have been cut from the soliloquy for this version? Has the meaning stayed the same?

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### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS

- How did Amaka Umeh's creative choices (e.g., their use of breath at the beginning and end, their choice to wear a medical mask for some of the video, etc.) affect your experience of Hamlet's soliloquy?
- What elements of the video were as you would have expected? What elements surprised you?
- After analyzing this video, what are your expectations for what you will see in the production?

## STUDY GUIDES

Study Guides for all 2022 plays are available free of charge online on our website:  
[>> Link to Study Guides](#)

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## BOOKING INFORMATION: TICKETS, WORKSHOPS, CHATS AND TOURS

### STUDENT MATINEES

You may book any available date, but selected student matinée performances for this show are at 2 p.m. on the following dates:

- Tuesday, May 17th
- Thursday, May 19th
- Wednesday, May 25th
- Thursday, May 26th
- Tuesday, June 7th
- Wednesday, June 22nd
- Thursday, September 1st
- Thursday, September 8th
- Wednesday, September 14th
- Tuesday, September 20th
- Wednesday, October 5th
- Thursday, October 13th
- Wednesday, October 19th
- Wednesday, October 26th

### WORKSHOPS, CHATS AND TOURS

Pre or Post-Show Workshops, Chats and Tours (virtual, onsite or at your school/centre) can be booked by calling the Box Office at 1.800.567.1600.

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Amaka Umeh. Photography by David Hou.



## CONNECTION TO THE ARCHIVES

The 1976 production of *Hamlet* with Richard Monette and Nicholas Pennell doubling the role demonstrated how the character of Hamlet is universally accessible. How does Amaka Umeh's casting this year echo this idea? What do you think is universal about the character of Hamlet?

The Stratford Festival Archives maintains, conserves and protects records about the Festival and makes these materials available to people around the world. Their collection contains material ranging from 1952 right up to the present and includes administrative documents, production records, photographs, design artwork, scores, audio-visual recordings, promotional materials, costumes, props, set decorations and much more. These materials are collected and preserved with the aim of documenting the history of the Festival, preserving the page-to-stage process, and capturing the creative processes involved in numerous other activities that contribute to the Festival each season. In addition to visiting the Archives in person, you can explore a selection of their holdings via their online catalogue.



Richard Monette as Hamlet in *Hamlet*, 1976. Directed by Robin Phillips and William Hutt. Designed by John Pennoyer. Lighting design by Gil Wechsler. Photograph by Robert C. Ragsdale. Stratford Festival Archives, GPO.1976.003.0149



Nicholas Pennell as Hamlet in *Hamlet*, 1976. Directed by Robin Phillips and William Hutt. Designed by John Pennoyer. Lighting design by Gil Wechsler. Photograph by Robert C. Ragsdale. Stratford Festival Archives, GPO.1976.003.0157

## RESOURCES

### IN CONVERSATION WITH AMAKA UMEH AND DONNA-MICHELLE ST. BERNARD

>> [Link to Resource](#)

### THE HAMLET PODCAST

>> [Link to Resource](#)

### SHAKESPEARE UNLIMITED EPISODE 111: THE ABC'S OF PERFORMING HAMLET

>> [Link to Resource](#)

### SHAKESPEARE UNLIMITED EPISODE 183: BLACK WOMEN SHAKESPEAREANS, WITH JOYCE GREEN MACDONALD

>> [Link to Resource](#)

### PBS MEDIA: MANY DIFFERENT HAMLETS

>> [Link to Resource](#)

### DISCUSSION WITH JONATHAN GOAD AND AMAKA UMEH ON PLAYING HAMLET AT THE STRATFORD FESTIVAL

>> [Link to Resource](#)

## SOCIAL MEDIA



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