Hamlet - Learning Resources

Contrasting Hamlet's soliloquies (up to 60 mins)

This resource will enable students, particularly of English Literature, to analyse and compare Shakespeare's use of language, structure and form to create meanings. It will also develop whole-text understanding of character.

Who is it for?

This resource is designed for A-Level students of English Literature and Drama who are studying or interested in Hamlet.

Learning outcomes

Learners will:

- Closely examine two of Hamlet's soliloquies after watching them being performed as part of the National Theatre's 2010 production.
- Explore how Shakespeare's language choices serve to portray Hamlet's character.
- Express a personal response to Hamlet's character at the beginning and end of the play.
- Chart the journey of Hamlet's character across the play by comparing and contrasting the language in the two soliloquies.

You will need

- Access to the clip 'O that this too too solid flesh...' in the 'On Demand' player.
- Access to the clip 'How all occasions do inform against me...' in the 'On Demand' player
- Access to the film Hamlet: A character study in the 'On Demand' player.

Activities

1.

Show the film Hamlet: A character study using the 'On Demand' player. The film features actor Rory Kinnear and director Nicholas Hytner discussing the character of Hamlet and the interpretation of him in their 2010 production.

2.

Read through Hamlet's soliloquy from Act I, Scene 2, using the extract provided below.

3.

Using the 'On Demand' player, watch a clip of Rory Kinnear performing the soliloquy in the NT's 2010 production of Hamlet.

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4.

Lead a discussion about the key themes and imagery in this speech by using the following questions:

- What emotions can you identify in this speech?
- Where and how does Shakespeare use nature imagery here?
- Where does Shakespeare use religious imagery in this speech, and what does it describe?
- What words and ideas does Hamlet repeat, and why?
- What kind of punctuation can you find in this speech? What does it suggest about Hamlet's state of mind?

5.

Remind the class that this is Hamlet's first soliloquy, and the scene gives the audience their first impression of him as a character. **Ask each person in class to suggest three words to describe him**, and share these with the rest of the class.

6.

Read through Hamlet's final soliloquy from Act IV, Scene 4, using the extract below.

7.

Using the 'On Demand' player, watch a clip of Rory Kinnear performing the speech from the National Theatre's 2010 production.

8.

Divide the class into small groups, assigning them each one of the following topics: nature imagery, religious/mythical imagery, war, punctuation, and family.

9.

Ask each group to read carefully through the speech, focusing on their assigned topic and discussing amongst themselves the role it plays within the speech.

10.

Ask each group to share their discoveries with the rest of the class.

11.

Lead a discussion about the key differences and similarities between this speech and the last. What do these two speeches tell you about the journey Hamlet's character undertakes over the course of the play?

12.

Invite each member of the class to choose a further three adjectives to describe Hamlet at this point in the play, and share them with the rest of the class

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Extract from *Hamlet -* Act I, Scene 2

HAMLET

O that this too too solid flesh would melt, Thaw and resolve itself into a dew. Or that the Everlasting had not fixed His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. O God, God, How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable Seem to me all the uses of this world! Fie on't, ah, fie, 'tis an unweeded garden That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature Possess it merely. That it should come thus: But two months dead - nay not so much, not two -So excellent a king, that was to this Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother That he might not beteem the winds of heaven Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth, Must I remember? Why, she should hang on him As if increase of appetite had grown By what it fed on. And yet within a month (Let me not think on't - Frailty, they name is Woman), A little month, or e'er those shoes were old With which she followed my poor father's body, Like Niobe, all tears. Why, she -O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason Would have mourned longer - married with my uncle, My father's brother (but no more like my father Than I to Hercules). Within a month, Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears Had left the flushing in her galled eyes, She married. O most wicked speed! To post With such dexterity to incestuous sheets, It is not, nor it cannot come to good; But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

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Extract from *Hamlet* - Act IV, Scene 4

HAMLET

How all occasions do inform against me, And spur my dull revenge. What is a man If his chief good and market of his time Be but to sleep and feed? A beast - no more. Sure he that made us with such large discourse, Looking before and after, gave us not That capability and godlike reason To fust in us unused. Now whether it be Bestial oblivion or some craven scruple Of thinking too precisely on th'event (A thought which quartered hath but one part wisdom And ever three parts coward) I do not know Why yet I live to say this thing's to do, Sith I have cause and will and strength and means To do 't. Examples gross as earth exhort me ¬-Witness this army of such mass and charge, Led by a delicate and tender prince Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed Makes mouths at the invisible event Exposing what is mortal and unsure To all that fortune, death and danger dare Even for an eggshell. Rightly to be great Is not to stir without great argument But greatly to find quarrel in a straw When honour's at the stake. How stand I then That have a father killed, a mother stained, Excitements of my reason and my blood, And let all sleep; while, to my shame I see The imminent death of twenty thousand men That for a fantasy and trick of fame Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause, Which is not tomb enough and continent To hide the slain? O, from this time forth My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth!