

Hamlet's father, the king of Denmark, has died suddenly. But instead of grieving, his mother Gertrude has married the dead king's brother, Claudius.

One dark night, Hamlet sees a ghost. It is his dead father, who claims he was murdered by Claudius, the new king. But did Hamlet really see a ghost, or did he just imagine it? And if he did see a ghost, was it telling him the truth?

Hamlet plans to avenge his father by killing Claudius. But the man he stabs isn't Claudius, as he thinks, but his girlfriend's father. So the wrong man dies.

So much tragedy, but there is more to come. Who else will die an untimely death? And who will live to tell the tale?

Lexile® Level	AR Level	Word Count
610L	4.6	5,115

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HAMLET

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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THE CHARACTERS

Hamlet

The Prince of Denmark can't get over the fact that his father died and his mother then married his father's brother. Will his grief and anger lead to something worse?



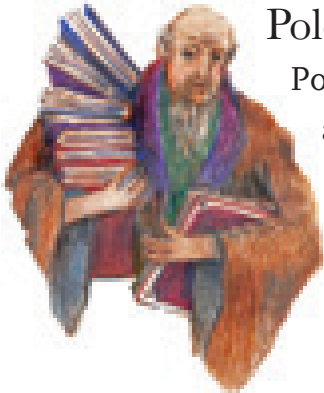
Claudius and Gertrude, king and queen of Denmark

Now that Claudius has everything – his brother's wife, crown and kingdom – he should be happy. But what is his guilty secret?



Polonius

Polonius is the bumbling busybody advisor to the king. He is keen to solve the mystery of Hamlet's behaviour but will things turn out bad for him?



Laertes and Ophelia

Polonius's son and daughter. Hamlet loves Ophelia and respects Laertes, but his actions turn their worlds upside down.



Horatio

Hamlet's loyal friend. After he tells what he saw one night, all sorts of tragedies unfold. But what was it that he saw?



Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

They are asked to spy on their old school friend, Hamlet. How far will they go to keep the king's favour? As far as England? As far as the gallows?





HAMLET

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE THE CASTLE AT ELSINORE

Claudius, the new king of Denmark, addresses the royal court.

King

Good friends, though yet of my dear brother's death
The memory be green and it is right to bear our hearts
In grief, yet we must bear remembrance of ourselves,
And so in sorrow and in joy have we our sometime
sister wed to be our queen.

But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son,
How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

Hamlet

Not so, my lord. I am too much in the sun.

Queen

Good Hamlet, cast thy gloomy colour off
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.
Do not forever with thy downcast eye
Seek for thy noble father in the dust.

King

'Tis unmanly grief to grieve so long.
Throw down to earth this woe and think of us

As of a father. For let the world take note,
You are the most immediate to our throne.
And as to your desire to go from here –
We do beseech you to remain at court.

Queen
I pray thee stay with us. Go not to Wittenberg.

Hamlet
I shall in all my best obey you, madam.

King
Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply.
Be as ourself in Denmark. Madam, come.

All leave except Hamlet.

Hamlet
Oh, that this too, too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,
Or that the great almighty had not fixed
His laws against self-slaughter. O god, god,
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable
Seems to me all the uses of this world!
'Tis but an unweeded garden that grows to seed.
That it should come to this! But two months dead –
Before her shoes were old with which she walked
Behind my father's body, my mother

Married with my uncle with wicked speed.
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

Horatio enters.

Horatio
Hail to your lordship.

Hamlet
Horatio – what brings you here to court?

Horatio
My lord, I came to see your father's funeral.
I saw him once. He was a goodly king.

Hamlet
I shall not look upon his like again.

Horatio
My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.

Hamlet
The king, my father?

Horatio
Aye, my lord, the king.
His ghost, or else his like, was seen to walk
Upon the battlements, but would not speak.

Hamlet
Then I will watch with you tonight. Perhaps
'Twill walk again. If so, I'll challenge it.

seat on the stage itself. Unlike today's theatre-goers, Elizabethan audiences were noisy and sometimes fighting broke out.

There were no sets or scene changes in these plays. It was up to the playwright's skill with words to create thunderstorms or forests or Egyptian queens in the imagination of the audience.

Shakespeare wrote mostly in blank verse, in unrhymed lines of ten syllables with a te-tum te-tum rhythm. But unlike most writers of his time, he tried to make his actors' lines closer to the rhythms of everyday speech, in order to make it sound more naturalistic. He used poetic imagery, and even invented words that we still use today.

His plays are mostly based on stories or old plays that he improved. *Hamlet* is a reworking of an earlier play from Elizabethan times, but the story can be traced to a twelfth-century true story of Amleth whose uncle, Feng, murdered Amleth's father and married his mother.

Finding out more

We recommend the following books and websites to gain a greater understanding of William Shakespeare and Elizabethan England:

Books

- Marcia Williams, *Mr William Shakespeare's Plays*, Walker Books, 2009.
- Leon Garfield, *Shakespeare Stories*, Victor Gollanz, 1985.
- Stewart Ross, *William Shakespeare: Writers in Britain series*, Evans, 1999.
- Felicity Hebditch, *Tudors, Britain through the Ages series*, Evans, 2003.
- Dereen Taylor, *The Tudors and the Stuarts*, Wayland, 2007.

Websites

- www.shakespeare.org.uk
Good general introduction to the life of Shakespeare. Contains information and pictures of the houses linked to him in and around Stratford.