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**Literature**  
Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



## Hamlet

by William Shakespeare

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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# Literature Teaching Unit

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 **Prestwick House**

P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938  
[www.prestwickhouse.com](http://www.prestwickhouse.com)  
800.932.4593

ISBN: 978-1-58049-024-5

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Item No: 300448

# Hamlet

## Objectives

By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:

1. identify and discuss the characteristics of the play that mark it as a Shakespearean tragedy.
2. discuss the major themes in the play.
3. define and offer examples of allusion, aside, blank verse, figurative language, foil, malapropism, metaphor, pun, simile, and soliloquy.
4. discuss the role deception plays in the plot and character development in *Hamlet*.
5. discuss Hamlet's inability to justify revenge.
6. evaluate Hamlet's sanity at various points in the play.
7. discuss Shakespeare's style, including the use of figurative language, symbolism, and the dramatic techniques of soliloquy, aside, dramatic foil, and allusion.
8. understand the direct relation between the state of the monarchy and its subjects.
9. understand Hamlet's varying state of mind and how his condition relates to his soliloquies.
10. discuss Hamlet and Ophelia's relationship, including what aspects lead to her madness and death.
11. describe the importance of the ghost as it relates to Hamlet and the themes of the play.
12. compare and contrast characters of action, such as Fortinbras and Laertes, with characters of pensive indecision, such as Hamlet.

# Hamlet

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Does Hamlet believe in divine justice? Identify evidence of Hamlet's religious or supernatural beliefs.
2. Revenge, both sought and postponed, is a major concept in *Hamlet*. Aside from Hamlet, which other characters seek vengeance?
3. Compare and contrast the father/son relationships that appear in the play: those of Hamlet and his father(s), Laertes and Polonius, and Fortinbras and Old Fortinbras.
4. Hamlet is famous for his long, agonizing moral deliberations. Is Hamlet truly concerned with doing the right thing, or is he just indecisive? Using evidence from the play, write an essay that defends your assertion.
5. Identify instances of espionage in the play. Which characters act as spies, and why?
6. Do you think Hamlet's "antic disposition" is genuine insanity, or is it something else? Support your belief with textual evidence.
7. Look at the character of Polonius and determine whether he is a fool or simply an old man who is wise, but long-winded. Use passages from the play to support your opinion.
8. Who is Horatio, and what purpose(s) does he serve in the play? Compare and contrast his nature with that of Hamlet.
9. Why does Hamlet postpone killing Claudius? What does this incident reveal about Hamlet's character?
10. Describe Hamlet's behavior toward Ophelia and his reaction to her death. Make sure to include how Ophelia believes Hamlet feels about her and how he treats her. Why might Hamlet behave this way?
11. Discuss the motif of sickness in terms of its literal and symbolic functions in this play.
12. Analyze one of Hamlet's soliloquies. Rephrase it and make his thoughts clear.
13. The motif of destiny appears throughout the play. Explain how the characters in *Hamlet* are controlled by fate and by their own choices.

# Hamlet

## Act I, Scene i

### VOCABULARY

**impress** – draft  
**mart** – trade  
**moist star** – moon  
**partisan** – sword  
**rivals** – companions  
**sometimes** – previously

1. What exposition is provided in this scene? Include an explanation of the quarrel with Norway.

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2. What atmosphere is created by this scene? What devices or details are used to set the scene?

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3. Why has Horatio been asked to join the soldiers in the night watch? What does he decide to do?

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4. How does the reader know this ghost is not a hallucination?

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5. How could the ghost be explained as a foreshadowing of coming evil?

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**Act I, Scene v**

## VOCABULARY

**antic** – abnormal

**eager** – bitter

**globe** – mind

**lazar** – a leper

**Lethe** – In the underworld, it is the river of forgetfulness.

**matin** – sun rise

**Saint Patrick** – said to be the keeper of Purgatory

**truepenny** – honest

**unaneled** – without the sacrament

1. According to the ghost, what has happened? What does the ghost want Hamlet to do?

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2. Describe Hamlet's reaction to the ghost.

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3. In your opinion, is Hamlet mad?

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4. What possibilities does the introduction of the ghost bring to the play?

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**Act IV, Scene iii**

VOCABULARY

**England** – the King of England  
**hectic** – fever

1. How does Hamlet react to being sent to England?

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2. Where does Hamlet say Polonius' body is?

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3. What does the King's closing soliloquy reveal? What contradiction between his surface behavior and his real feelings is apparent?

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