



hamilet

Det Lille Turnéteater

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE 

Teachers Notes
HOUSE: ED 09

SUITABILITY
Years 9 – 12

DATES
August 12 – 14

Introduction



A. Introduction

These teacher's notes have been designed to assist you with classroom preparation and extension work in relation to the production of Hamlet. We hope that this resource will assist you to further enjoy your performing arts experience back in the classroom. The activities are designed for students from Years 9-12. Drama educator Mathew Clausen, has prepared the notes.

Included in these notes are a number of activities that you can use with your students. These activities provide an opportunity for students to explore the broad themes and style of the performance.

Syllabi written by NSW Board of Studies have been used as a guide for the planning of these activities. You should consider rephrasing the questions and activities to suit the particular terminology, curriculum foci and outcomes used in your school.

Some websites are suggested in this kit. It is recommended that before setting activities based on these, that teachers first visit the sites and assess the suitability of the content for your particular school setting.

B. Classroom Context and Curriculum Links

This production of Hamlet, offers many valuable opportunities for educators to integrate themes, issues and performance techniques and style into a range of classroom topics and units of work. The activities provided in these notes provide extension and enrichment work in a range of curriculum areas including English, Drama, PDHPE and Music.

These notes suggest ways in which you might address the themes in Hamlet; revenge, tragedy, madness and corruption. The suggested activities also provide practical teaching strategies to help your students develop their knowledge and understanding of Elizabethan Theatre, Shakespeare the playwright and some of the performance techniques of Elizabethan theatre.

C. Performance Event Description and Synopsis

Denmark's Det Lille TurnŹteater have created a seventy five minute adaptation of Hamlet that maintains the gripping elements of the full length play. Devastated by the loss of his father, Hamlet's sense of self, family and his place in the world further crumbles when the man his mother remarries is shown to be his father's murderer. As the Prince of Denmark's reality falters, his dealings with those who love him, suffer the consequences. This intimate production draws on the conventions and techniques of Elizabethan Theatre where a bare stage, a few props and the skills of the performer were all that was needed to tell a story and captivate the audience.

Pre Performance



Curriculum Links

English/Drama

Activity 1 - The Story of Hamlet

Your students may not be familiar with the plot of Hamlet. This activity is designed to help your students understand the key events in the play.

1.1 The following websites provide a synopsis of the play, *Hamlet*.

You may need to facilitate a deconstruction of this information depending on the age group of your students.

Absolute Shakespeare

http://absoluteshakespeare.com/guides/hamlet/summary/hamlet_summary.htm

The RSC Shakespeare - Hamlet

<http://www.rscshakespeare.co.uk/hamlet.html>

1.2 Ask your students to answer the following questions using the Wikipedia links below:

Wikipedia - Shakespeare

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare

Wikipedia - Hamlet

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamlet>

1. When and where was Shakespeare born?
2. For what theater company was Shakespeare both a stockholder and an actor?
3. Over what period did Shakespeare write his plays?
4. His acting company performed at and made famous what outdoor theater?
5. Shakespeare's plays have been traditionally divided into three categories. Name these categories, and give two examples of each.
6. When did Shakespeare die?
7. What type of play is Hamlet? (Under which category from question #5 does it fall?)
8. Where is the setting of the play?
9. In the beginning, Hamlet is mourning the death of _____.

Pre Performance



10. Hamlet's mother marries _____. What is his relation to Hamlet before he marries Hamlet's mother?
11. _____ is Hamlet's love when the play begins.
12. How does Hamlet's love die?
13. Who is Polonius?
14. A well known line from one of Hamlet's soliloquies is _____

1.3 After your students have completed activities 1.1 and 1.2, write up or project the following character list:

Hamlet
Claudius
Gertrude
Polonius
Horatio
Ophelia
Laertes
Fortinbras
The Ghost
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern
Osric
Voltimand and Cornelius
Marcellus and Bernardo
Francisco
Reynaldo

Divide the class into small research groups. Each group must find out as much as they can about the characters including personality, purpose in the play, relationship to Hamlet and any other useful information. The following websites may help their research:

Spark Notes- Hamlet- Characters

<http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/hamlet/characters.html>

Wikipedia - Hamlet - Characters

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Characters_in_Hamlet

When your students have completed their research, ask each group to report back to the class.

Pre Performance



If you have any drama blocks or platforms, place them at one end of your class room to create levels that can be used as part of the tableau. Ask for volunteers to play each of the characters. You might like to choose volunteers one at a time. Explain that they will need to hold a pose that shows their character and stay very still until all the characters are in the picture. As your students come to the performance area, arrange them so that the character relationships are made clear. Repeat this activity with new volunteers and this time allow your students to make the decisions about where they place the characters and the poses they hold.

1.4 If you have access to a Smartboard, link to the Royal Shakespeare Company page and play the interviews with actors discussing their approach to playing roles in Hamlet. Ask your students to write about or discuss the challenges each actor faces in playing their character from Hamlet.

RSC - Hamlet- Characters and Relationships

<http://www.rsc.org.uk/exploringshakespeare/hcharacterrelationships/default.htm>

1.5 The following link provides some fun online games that test your students knowledge of the play, *Hamlet*.

Royal Shakespeare Company - Hamlet Games

<http://www.rsc.org.uk/picturesandexhibitions/action/viewExhibition?typeid=plays-infocus&exhibitionid=5§ionid=8>

1.6 The following links are possible extension work for students who might like to know more about Elizabethan Theatre and the social, political and artistic contexts of the period.

A Lecture on Elizabethan Theatre

<http://shakespearean.org.uk/elizthea1.htm>

Wikipedia - English Renaissance Theatre

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Renaissance_theatre

Cambridge University Press -An Introduction to Shakespeare's Life and Times

<http://www.fathom.com/course/28701903/session3.htm>

Pre Performance



Curriculum Links

English/ Drama

Activity Two - Transformation

2.1 In this activity your students will practise and apply the theatrical technique of transformation in their performance of a short extract from *Hamlet*. Before your students work with the script extract, explain that the performers in *Hamlet* use transformation to show changes of location and to suggest key objects. Now ask your students to complete the following exercise. Ask your students to divide into pairs and to choose a chair, drama box or stool for this activity. Ask each pair to find somewhere in the room to work together away from other pairs. Explain that you will call out a series of situations. The pair must create the characters in the situation using the prop as the focus of the moment. As you call each change of situation, the pair must transform their prop to become the central focus of the new scene.

If you wish, you might like to ask one pair to demonstrate how they could transform their prop.

The situations are:

- A father and his daughter unpacking a new television.
- Two teenagers push an abandoned car.
- A sculptor and their assistant install a public sculpture.
- Two soldiers clear wreckage from a bombing.
- Two council workers enter an underground drain.
- A spy eavesdrops on a government official from behind a bookcase.

2.2 The following situations are adapted from the play *Hamlet*. Ask your students to find somewhere in the room to work with their partner from the previous activity. Read the following scenarios out to your students and ask them to create a frozen picture as the characters in the situation. Encourage them to practice transformation in the creation of their freeze frame. You might want to revise the characters and their relationships for this activity:

- Two soldiers see the ghost of their dead king on the castle battlements.
- Hamlet teases his girlfriend Ophelia.
- Polonius spies on Hamlet as he talks to his mother
- A courtier finds Ophelia drowned in the river.

Pre Performance



- Gertrude tries to reason with Hamlet after the performance of the play that acts out the death of Hamlet's father.
- Laertes and Hamlet have a sword fight.

Ask your students to repeat these scenarios but this time ask them to add one word and movement for each character. Ask for volunteer pairs to show their work to the class.

Pre Performance



Curriculum Links

English/Drama

Activity Three - Language and Rhythm

3.1 Ask your students to visit the following web link to the Royal Shakespeare Company. This link provides selected moments and text from the play. Divide the class in groups and ask them to create a short presentation of the selected moment, experimenting with the delivery of the lines.

Royal Shakespeare Company - Hamlet

<http://www.rsc.org.uk/picturesandexhibitions/action/viewExhibition?typeid=plays-infocus&exhibitionid=5§ionid=7>

3.2 Ask the class to sit in a circle. Begin with an explanation of the context of the script extract below. Hamlet, Horatio and Marcellus are on the castle battlements at night when the ghost of Hamlet's father appears. In this scene, Hamlet is told by his father's ghost that he was murdered by Hamlet's uncle, Claudius.

Read the following passage aloud with your students. Ask them to pick up a sense of the rhythm of the verse based on syllables, emphasis and punctuation. It may help your students to break this extract into smaller sections before they attempt the whole speech. A link to information on iambic pentameter is provided to help you with a more advanced understanding of speaking Shakespearean verse:

Wikipedia - Iambic Pentameter

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iambic_pentameter#Simple_example

Hamlet Act 1 Scene 4

Enter Ghost

Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned,
Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou com'st in such a questionable shape

Pre Performance



That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee Hamlet,
King, father, royal Dane. Oh answer me.
Let me not burst in ignorance, but tell
Why thy canonised bones, hearsed in death,
Have burst their cerements; why the sepulchre, (cerements = grave cloths pron. seer-ments)
Where in we saw thee quietly interred,
Hath opened his ponderous and marble jaws
To cast thee up again. What may this mean,
That thou, dead corpse, again in complete steel (complete steel = full armour)
Revisits thus the glimpses of the moon,
Making night hideous, and we fools of nature
So horridly to shake our disposition
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?
Say, why is this? Wherefore? What should we do?

Ghost beckons Hamlet.

3.3 In this activity your students will rehearse and perform three or four lines from the speech above. Firstly, ask your students to find a space in the room where they can work privately. Ask them to reflect on Hamlet's state of mind when he sees his father's ghost. He is grieving and unsure about his future. Have your students stand and without moving or speaking, use their imagination to pretend they are Hamlet on the castle battlements on a cold moonlit night with Horatio and Marcellus nearby. Ask your students to rehearse the lines without speaking them aloud, creating through their actions a clear focus that shows where the ghost might be. Encourage your students to use their gestures, bodies and facial expression to communicate Hamlet's feelings in this speech. Now ask your students to practice their lines aloud. Divide the class in half. Ask one half to sit and watch the others perform and then swap. Ask for individual volunteers to show their performances. Encourage feedback from the class about the use of voice, and the belief achieved by students in their acting.

3.4 Divide your class into pairs. Each pair must re-write Hamlet's speech into a rhythm that incorporates more contemporary Hip Hop rhythms. Each pair is free to alter the words to make the text more contemporary as long as the original meaning is maintained. Allow the pairs time to rehearse and then ask for volunteers to present their work to the class.

3.5 Divide your class into groups of six. Ask each group to prepare a dramatisation of Hamlet's speech. Encourage them to identify and create physical representations of the imagery in the text and to use transformation to shift from one image to another. When presenting their work, members of the group can speak the lines of text individually, in pairs or as a whole group to add texture and dynamics to the vocal delivery.

Post Performance



Curriculum Links

English/Drama

Activity Four - Performance Evaluation and Reflection

4.1 This activity is an opportunity for your students to share their responses to the performance. The questions provided cover all aspects of the performance and you are encouraged to select those questions that will be relevant for your students. The questions could also form a scaffold for written responses.

4.2 Ask the class to divide into six groups. Each group is to prepare a short oral evaluation and analysis of the following aspects of the production:

- Evaluate the use of movement by the performers
- Evaluate one specific performer discussing their use of voice/movement and their ability to create believable character work.
- Evaluate the use of music in the performance.
- Evaluate the costume and set design.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of this adaptation of the original script.
- Evaluate the overall direction of the performance including scene transitions, style, use and control of the elements of drama and the use of space.

4.3 The following questions can be used as a guideline for a discussion or a written response to the performance:

1. Write a succinct summary of the plot in no more than 200 words.
2. What are the main themes explored in *Hamlet*?
3. Evaluate each of the actors and provide examples of moments of either strength or weakness in their performances.
4. What moments did you enjoy in the play? Why?
5. How was music used in the performance?
6. What improvements would you have made to the performance?

Post Performance



Curriculum Links

English/Drama

Activity Five - Character Interviews

5.1 In this activity your students will interview characters from the play to seek further knowledge and information about the action of the play and the character relationships. Divide the class into pairs or small groups. Give each pair or group one or two characters to write questions for. Encourage the groups to write at least four questions that are open ended. For example, a question for Claudius:

“ How did you feel about your brother as you were growing up together?”

5.2 Ask for volunteers to play the various characters in the play. Place a chair in front of the class and ask various characters to speak to the class. Remind the class that the aim of the questioning is to find out motivations, reasons for actions, feelings about other characters, not to trick the actor. If questions are asked that the actor may not be able to answer, encourage the student to use improvisation to respond without breaking focus.

5.2 Repeat the interviews but this time group character together for interviews. You may need a neutral interviewer to act as 'chairperson'. This version of the interview activity will heighten the character relationships. Encourage your students to use improvisation to speak to other characters in character and to ask questions or make statements that fit the plot of the play and the character personalities.

Post Performance



Curriculum Links

English/Drama

Activity Six - Scenes from Hamlet

6.1 As preparation for the following activity, ask your students to work with a partner. Ask the pairs to stand. Explain that each pair is to establish tension between two characters by focusing on the actions of push and pull. The use of these actions maintains the space between the characters and heightens the tension of the scene. Ask each pair to stand still. One person leans towards the other (push) and their partner leans backwards (pull) in response. Allow the pairs some time to explore this. Now ask each pair to take steps towards and away from each other using the same idea of push and pull. Once they have mastered this, ask the pairs to create a short scene where two lovers are fighting. They are not to use words but body language to communicate the tension between the characters. As one turns their head toward the other for example, the other might turn their head away and so on. Ask for some volunteer pairs to show their work and then give feedback on the effectiveness of the movements communicating the 'push' and 'pull' between the characters.

6.2 In this activity your students will prepare one of the following duologues for performance. In their preparation, ask your students to be conscious not only of the delivery of text, character objectives and motivation but to think about how the use of space and the dynamic of 'push' and 'pull' can build tension in the scene.

- Act 1, Scene 5 - Hamlet and the Ghost
- Act 2, Scene 1 - Ophelia and Polonius
- Act 3, Scene 4 - Hamlet and Gertrude (this is a long duologue and can be edited)
- Act 4, Scene 7 - Laertes and Claudius

This will require considerable preparation time and it is advisable to give your students some rehearsal guidelines so that they can make the best use of their time.

The following schedule can be adapted as a guide:

Post Performance



Week 1

Read through the scene and check your understanding of the situation and context.

Stand up with your partner and try a performed reading of the scene. Be clear about character objectives and motivations. Experiment with movement and gesture. Explore how space can be used effectively

Draw an aerial view of the location your characters are in, including any key props or furniture.

Divide the scene into sections or units of action. This will help you to see how the scene progresses from one idea or moment to another.

Week 2

Memorise lines

Experiment with character interpretation and complete a point form character profile that describes and explains your character (re-visit the RSC links where actors talk about their character interpretations).

Focus on delivery of lines especially rhythm, punctuation and subtext.

Week 3

Try to complete three or four uninterrupted run-throughs.

Ask another pair to watch and ask for comments.

Week 4

Perform for the class.

Post Performance



Curriculum Links

English/Drama

Activity Seven - Promoting Hamlet

7.1 In this activity your students will imagine they are working on a production of Hamlet. Divide the class into groups of five and allocate production roles. Two people are to be actors in the production, one a set designer, one costume designer and a publicity/marketing role. Ask each group to complete the following tasks as preparation for their production. These web sites may be a helpful resource in generating ideas:

Google - Hamlet Images (Note: many images are repeated so you may need to go through several pages to find a good variety of images.)

<http://images.google.com.au/images?hl=en&um=1&q=hamlet+images&sa=N&start=0&ndsp=18>

Royal Shakespeare Company - Hamlet Staging Choices

<http://www.rsc.org.uk/learning/hamletandmacbeth/hstagingchoices/default.htm>

Richard Finkelstein - Stage Design for Hamlet

<http://www.rfdesigns.org/hamlet.htm>

Avciar Architects - Set Design Hamlet

<http://www.avciarchitects.com/Projects/ProjectDetails.aspx?page=Hamlet>

7.2 Ask your publicity/marketing student to design a poster for a production of Hamlet.

7.3 Ask your set designer and costume designer to draw or describe a set design for one scene and to sketch or describe one costume for one character.

References



Absolute Shakespeare Hamlet

http://absoluteshakespeare.com/guides/hamlet/summary/hamlet_summary.htm

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Google Hamlet Images

<http://images.google.com.au/images?hl=en&um=1&sa=1&q=romeo+and+juliet+&btnG=Search+Images&aq=f&oq>

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Hylton, J. The Complete Works of William Shakespeare

http://shakespeare.mit.edu/romeo_juliet/index.html May, 2009

Royal Shakespeare Company Hamlet

<http://www.rscshakespeare.co.uk/hamlet.html> May, 2009

Spark Notes Hamlet- Characters

<http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/hamlet/characters.html>

Wikipedia Hamlet - Characters

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Characters_in_Hamlet May, 2009