

Film Worksheet 2.2

Hamlet

Knowledge base

1. Review your knowledge of the play.
 - a. Read the brief summary of the storyline.
 - b. Say who is dead, who Hamlet is disgusted with and who Hamlet wants to kill and why.

Summary

Prince Hamlet's father, the King of Denmark, has died and his mother, much to Hamlet's disgust, has married her brother-in-law, Claudius, who has ascended to the throne. Hamlet is visited by his father's ghost who tells him that his death was not of natural causes but murder at the hands of Claudius and that Hamlet must avenge his killing. Hamlet swears to take revenge but wants to make sure that he is acting morally despite the corruption that surrounds him. He ascertains Claudius' guilt by using a play scene as bait and also tries to tempt his mother away from her new husband's bed. Claudius, fearing Hamlet, plots to have him put to death in England but his plan fails when Hamlet escapes and returns to Elsinore. In the final catastrophe, Hamlet succeeds in killing Claudius but not before he, himself, is fatally injured and his mother is also slain.

2. The clip you will watch concerns the moment when Hamlet discovers that his father did not die of natural causes.
 - a. Which characters appear in the scene?
 - b. What will be asked of Hamlet in this moment?
3. Read the script which corresponds roughly to the text on page 100 of your book.
 - a. What kind of tone do you think the 'Ghost' should use? And Hamlet?
 - b. Read the script in pairs, using the tones you have chosen.

First impressions

GHOST	[...]	List, Hamlet, list, O, list!
		If thou didst ever thy dear father love —
HAMLET	O God!	
GHOST	Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.	
5 HAMLET	Murder!	
GHOST	Murder most foul, as in the best it is;	
	But this most foul, strange and unnatural.	
HAMLET	Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift	
	As meditation or the thoughts of love,	
10	May sweep to my revenge.	
GHOST	I find thee apt;	
	And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed	
	That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf,	
	Wouldst thou not stir in this. Now, Hamlet, hear:	
	'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,	
15	A serpent stung me; so the whole ear of Denmark	
	Is by a forged process of my death	
	Rankly abused: but know, thou noble youth,	

		The serpent that did sting thy father's life Now wears his crown.
20	HAMLET	O my prophetic soul! My uncle!
	GHOST	Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast, With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts, — O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power So to seduce! — won to his shameful lust
25		The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen: O Hamlet, what a falling-off was there! [...]



Hamlet

(see film clip
on the Class Video DVD)

In more detail

Montage

Shots

Conclusions

4. Watch the clip for the first time. Did the film version match your expectations in terms of the tone of delivery of the speeches?

5. Watch the clip again.

- The shots of Hamlet and the Ghost in the woods are interspersed with other, interior shots. What do they show?
- How is continuity achieved between the different sequences?

6. Different types of shot are used. Watch the clip again.

- When are close ups and extreme close-ups used and to what effect?
- When are detail shots used and to what effect?
- What do high angle and low angle shots emphasise?

7. Read the information about the film adapted from *Wikipedia* and answer the questions.

- Which actors and actresses names do you recognise?
- Which aspects of the original play did Branagh adapt and change?
- How much did the film production cost and which particular distinction does the film hold?
- Which cinematographic technique does it exploit?
- Basing your answer on the clip you have seen, which of the critics do you agree with?



Hamlet is a 1996 film version of William Shakespeare's classic play of the same name, adapted and directed by Kenneth Branagh, who also stars in the title role as Prince Hamlet. It co-stars Derek Jacobi as King Claudius, Julie Christie as Queen Gertrude, Kate Winslet as Ophelia, Michael Maloney as Laertes,

Richard Briers as Polonius, and Nicholas Farrell as Horatio.

The film, whose budget was \$18 million, is notable as the first unabridged theatrical film version of the play. Although the dialogue is unchanged, the play's setting is updated to the 19th century. *Hamlet* also has the distinction of being the last major dramatic film to be filmed entirely in 70 mm film. Despite using a full text, Branagh's film is also very visual; it makes frequent use of flashbacks to depict scenes that are only described but not performed in Shakespeare's text. The film also uses very long single takes for numerous scenes.

Some critics, notably Stanley Kauffmann, declared the film to be the finest motion picture version of *Hamlet* yet made, and online film critic James Berardinelli has gone so far as to declare the Branagh *Hamlet* the finest Shakespeare adaptation ever. The film did have its detractors however, with Lloyd Rose of "The Washington Post" calling it "the film equivalent of a lushly illustrated coffee-table book" and Desson Howe criticised Branagh's performance.

The film was nominated for four Academy Awards.