

'To be, or not to be; that is the question'... says Hamlet, as he wonders whether it is better to be alive or dead. Shakespeare's most performed play makes us think about this and other big philosophical questions.

We are in Denmark, and Hamlet's father, the king, is now dead. Hamlet's uncle has married Hamlet's mother, and become the new king. A ghost appears, saying he is the dead king, and tells Hamlet he must take revenge.

Do the preparation task first. Then watch the video and do the exercises to check your understanding.

Preparation

Match the vocabulary with the correct definition and write a–h next to the numbers 1–8.

- | | | | |
|--------|-------------------|----|---|
| 1..... | poison | a. | very surprised and upset about something unexpected that happens |
| 2..... | mood | b. | a substance that causes illness or death |
| 3..... | shocked | c. | to do something to hurt someone in return for something bad they did to you |
| 4..... | in a rage | d. | to watch someone secretly |
| 5..... | to take revenge | e. | the way someone is feeling |
| 6..... | to spy on someone | f. | extremely angry |
| 7..... | to wound | g. | to die in water because of not being able to breathe |
| 8..... | to drown | h. | to hurt someone by breaking their skin |

1. Check your understanding: gap fill

Complete the sentences with a name from the box.

Claudius	Polonius	Gertrude	Ophelia
The ghost	Hamlet	Laertes	

- _____ is the Prince of Denmark, the son of the dead king and Queen Gertrude.
- _____ is Hamlet's uncle, the new king.
- _____ is Hamlet's mother and the Queen of Denmark.

4. _____ is the spirit of Hamlet's father. He tells Hamlet he was murdered by Claudius.
5. _____ is Ophelia's father and Claudius's adviser.
6. _____ is Hamlet's girlfriend, but he breaks up with her.
7. _____ is Ophelia's brother.

2. Check your understanding: multiple choice

Circle the best answer to these questions.

1. Hamlet discovers ...
 - a. his mother is dead.
 - b. his father is the new king.
 - c. his father is dead.
2. Hamlet's uncle ...
 - a. has married Hamlet's mother and is now the new king.
 - b. is very sad and angry about the death of his brother.
 - c. wants Hamlet to be king soon.
3. The ghost tells Hamlet ...
 - a. to take revenge.
 - b. not to be sad.
 - c. to investigate the crime.
4. After talking to the ghost Hamlet ...
 - a. tries to kill Claudius immediately.
 - b. gets depressed.
 - c. realises he must protect his mother.
5. Hamlet decides to find out ...
 - a. if his mother knows what happened to his father.
 - b. if Claudius really murdered his father.
 - c. if Ophelia loves him.
6. When Ophelia tries to talk to Hamlet ...
 - a. he gets angry and breaks up with her.
 - b. he cries and tells her everything.
 - c. he ignores her.

7. Hamlet thinks the play will ...
- a. create a distraction so he can kill Claudius.
 - b. help him know if Claudius is guilty or not.
 - c. take his mind off more serious worries.
8. Hamlet doesn't kill Claudius when he is praying because ...
- a. he is not sure if Claudius is guilty.
 - b. he thinks Polonius will see him.
 - c. he wants Claudius to go to hell.
9. Hamlet accidentally kills ...
- a. his mother.
 - b. Ophelia's brother, Laertes.
 - c. Ophelia's father, Polonius.
10. Ophelia ...
- a. goes mad and commits suicide.
 - b. tries to kill Hamlet.
 - c. tells her brother to kill Hamlet.
11. King Claudius hopes that ...
- a. Hamlet will commit suicide.
 - b. Laertes will kill Hamlet.
 - c. Hamlet is mad.
12. In the end ...
- a. Hamlet takes his revenge and becomes king.
 - b. Hamlet is killed before he can do anything.
 - c. Hamlet takes revenge just before he dies.

Discussion

Is it easy to sympathise with the character of Hamlet?