

# TARRAGON



## Hamlet

By William Shakespeare

Directed by Richard Rose

Music by Thomas Ryder Payne & Ensemble

January 2 – February 11, 2018 in the **Mainspace**

Education Resource Guide by EmmaRose MacDonald

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# About the Play:

## Synopsis

The ghost of Hamlet's father returns and tells Hamlet that he was murdered by his brother, Claudius who has since claimed the throne and married Hamlet's mother Gertrude. Consumed with the thought of revenge but unsure what to do, Hamlet becomes melancholy and acts strangely. Claudius and Gertrude try to determine the source of Hamlet's state by spying on Hamlet. While a group of actors is visiting the castle Hamlet stages a play of the murder in hopes to confirm Claudius' guilt. Claudius reacts and Hamlet nearly kills him. He stops because Claudius is praying and might go to heaven if he dies in that moment. Hamlet confronts his mother and hears a noise from someone hiding behind a curtain. Believing the sound to be Claudius Hamlet strikes but the person turns out to be Polonius, who dies from his injuries. Claudius banishes Hamlet to England. Ophelia, grief stricken from her father's death by the man she loves, drowns herself. At Ophelia's funeral, Hamlet and Laertes enter into a duel. Claudius poisons Laertes' blade so that any cut will kill Hamlet. He also poisons a goblet in case the sword fails. During the duel Gertrude drinks from the poisoned cup and dies. Hamlet is wounded by Laertes but also cuts Laertes with the poisoned sword. As Laertes dies he reveals the plot and Claudius' role in planning the poison. Hamlet kills Claudius. As Hamlet dies he asks Horatio to tell his story. The play ends with Fortinbras, Prince of Norway taking control of Denmark.

## Characters

Hamlet - Prince of Denmark

Gertrude - Queen of Denmark, Hamlet's Mother

Claudius - King of Denmark, Hamlet's Uncle

The Ghost of Hamlet's Father - previous King of Denmark

Polonius - Principal Secretary of State

Ophelia - Daughter of Polonius

Laertes - Son of Polonius

Fortinbras - Prince of Norway

Horatio - Friend of Hamlet

Voltimand - Ambassador to Norway

Cornelius - Ambassador to Norway

Rosencrantz - formerly Fellow Student with Hamlet

Guildenstern - formerly Fellow Student with Hamlet

Marcellus - Officer

Bernardo - Officer

Francisco - A Soldier

Reynaldo - Servant to Polonius

English Ambassadors. A Gentleman. A Priest. A Captain. Players. Two Clowns. Grave Diggers.

Lords, Ladies, Officers, Soldiers, Sailors, Messengers, and Attendants

## About the Playwright

**William Shakespeare** was an Elizabethan playwright who was born in Stratford-upon-Avon around April 23, 1564 and died April 23, 1616. He wrote 37 plays and has been a significant force in shaping western theatre. For a detailed account of Shakespeare's life visit <http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca>.

## Resources:

### Shakespeare

This section includes resources on Shakespeare's life and works. The sites range in focusing on teaching and focusing on research and offer information on *Hamlet* specifically.

#### **Internet Shakespeare Editions**

<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca>

This website provides information on Shakespeare's life, works, and his historical context. There is information on different performances of his plays and links to articles and resources.

#### **Folger Shakespeare Library**

<http://www.folger.edu>

This website offers resources and information on Shakespeare's life and his works. The "Teach and Learn" section of the website includes classroom resources, publications, and podcasts.

#### **Teach Shakespeare Globe Education**

<http://teach.shakespearesglobe.com>

This website provides resources on teaching Shakespeare including fact sheets, videos, and interactive tools.

#### **Shakespeare Resource Centre**

<http://www.bardweb.net/index.html>

This extensive website provides links to resources on Shakespeare's biography, plays, poetry and language as well as Elizabethan History.

## **Adapting Shakespeare**

This section offers opinions on the possibilities and challenges of adapting Shakespeare.

### **Are modernized adaptations of Shakespeare's plays a good thing?**

<http://epigram.org.uk/arts/2015/12/are-modernised-adaptations-of-shakespeares-plays-a-good-thing>

This article provides two opposing opinions on modern adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. One writer argues that modern adaptations increase accessibility of Shakespeare's works and highlights universal themes. The other writer argues that adaptations are often more interested in being innovative than being impactful. Choices can become gimmicks and lose the complexity of the text.

### **To Adapt or Not to Adapt: All I'm Askin' For Is a Little R-E-S-P-E-C-T**

[http://www.shakespeareances.com/dialogues/commentary/Adapting\\_Shakespeare-150305.html](http://www.shakespeareances.com/dialogues/commentary/Adapting_Shakespeare-150305.html)

In this opinion piece, Eric Minton discusses controversies surrounding adapting Shakespeare, from the political content, to the era, to the language, or the gender of characters.

### **Why We (Mostly) Stopped Messing With Shakespeare's Language**

<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/why-we-mostly-stopped-messing-with-shakespeares-language>

This article from The New Yorker discusses adapting the language in Shakespeare's plays and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival decision to commission translations of all of Shakespeare's plays into modern English.

### **How have performances of Shakespeare changed over time?**

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/how-have-performances-shakespeare-changed-over-time>

This essay discusses compares practices of producing Shakespeare's plays over time. The writer argues that all modern plays are a type of interpretation due to the very different circumstances in which the play is rehearsed, the production tools available, and the audience's expectations.

### **Most stagings of Shakespeare don't go far enough**

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2010/jan/19/shakespeare-modern-staging>

This blog post from the Guardian is an opinion piece on conceptual stagings of Shakespearean plays. The writer argues that Shakespeare was not moderate and traditional but took risks and should be staged with this in mind.

## **Music and Politics**

This section examines the relationship between music, specifically rock music, and politics. How has music responded to significant political events? Major themes include idealism, youth culture, rebellion, protest, desire for accountability, and anti-war resistance.

### **Rock Music Timeline**

<http://www.rockmusictimeline.com>

This website provides a timeline of rock music history from the 1950s to the 1990s. Includes popular artists, albums, songs, and an archive of images.

### **Bob Dylan, the Beatles, and the Rock of the Sixties**

<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/bob-dylan-the-beatles-and-the-rock-roll-of-the-60s-19900823>

This Rolling Stone article discusses the rock and roll of the 60s and the turn towards music being viewed as a space for cultural change.

### **Music has always been a tuneful force for political change**

<http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/music-arts/music-tuneful-force-political-change-article-1.381154>

This article discusses music's relationship with political change. Significant moments in history are discussed in connection to the music and musicians of that time.

### **Music and the Politics of Resistance**

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/barrett-martin/music-and-the-politics-of\\_b\\_4087557.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/barrett-martin/music-and-the-politics-of_b_4087557.html)

This article is an opinion piece that discusses music's role in social movements. The article includes examples from mainly the United States but also Nigeria, South Africa, Chile, and Brazil.

### **The Sixties and Protest Music**

<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/sixties/essays/protest-music-1960s>

This article focuses on anti-war protest music during the 60s. A slightly more academic take, the article also includes further resources on music and social change.

## **Accountability in Politics and Media**

The play *Hamlet* involves characters deceiving and spying on each other. This production explores how *Hamlet* can relate to hypocrisy among authorities and institutions such as the government and the media. This section includes links on contemporary conversations regarding accountability and trust in the government and media.

### **Majority of Canadians distrust government: poll suggests**

<http://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-february-16-2017-1.3984460/majority-of-canadians-distrust-government-poll-suggests-1.3984577>

This article from CBC examines the results of a poll on Canadian Trust in government focusing on the implications for Justin Trudeau and the current government.

### **'Trump Effect' Sends Canadians' Trust In Institutions Plummeting**

[http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2017/02/14/edelman-trust-barometer-canada\\_n\\_14722870.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2017/02/14/edelman-trust-barometer-canada_n_14722870.html)

This article from the Huffington Post examines a poll on Canadians' trust in government post the formation of the Trudeau government and then post the American election of Donald Trump.

### **What is 'fake news,' and how can you spot it? Try our quiz**

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/community/digital-lab/fake-news-quiz-how-to-spot/article33821986/>

This Globe and Mail article breaks down the concept of fake news. The article is written in an accessible way and includes a quiz and information on critical thinking when engaging with news sources.

### **Fake news points to hunger for greater Truth**

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/fake-news-opinion-steven-zhou-1.4069798>

An opinion piece by Steven Ahou written for CBC on the concept of "Fake News" as used by Donald Trump.

## **Youth and Mental Health**

“Madness,” depression, and suicidal thoughts are all themes in Hamlet. This section offers resources on youth and mental health to explore these topics within a contemporary context.

### **Teenage Mental Health Crisis: Rates of Depression Have Soared in the Past 25 Years**

<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/features/teenage-mental-health-crisis-rates-of-depression-have-soared-in-the-past-25-years-a6894676.html>

This article explores from a sociological perspective why rates of depression among youth are currently so high. The article discusses increased rates of reporting due to lessening stigma and improved awareness. Additionally the article examines the effects of materialism, competition, pressures to succeed, gender and body ideals, and the ways the internet and social media can both positively and negatively contribute to youth’s lives.

### **11% of Canadians aged 15-24 met criteria for depression: StatsCan**

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/health/depression-suicidal-thoughts-1.3940621>

This CBC article examines levels of depression in Canadian youth and explores factors that impact youth.

### **Canadian Mental Health Association: Depression**

<http://www.cmha.ca/mental-health/understanding-mental-illness/depression/>

This website provides information on different types of depression and includes a section on youth’s experience of depression specifically. The website discusses signs of depression and the difference between “the blues” and clinical depression.

# Discussion Questions

## Pre-Show Questions

1. What are key characteristics of rock and roll? What are the main themes and topics?
2. What themes or ideas in Hamlet do you think relate to rock and roll?
3. Why do you think music has been used as a response to politics?
4. What kind of behaviour do you expect of people in authoritative or leadership positions? For instance a parent, teacher, a coach, a religious leader, a police officer, a politician... What happens when authority does not act ethically?
5. What happens when someone is not held accountable for their actions?

## Post-Show Questions

1. How did the “rock concert” setting impact the story? What strategies were used that differed from a “regular” staging of Hamlet?
2. What themes did the use of music highlight from the text?
3. Shakespeare’s plays have been adapted in many ways from changing the language, the setting, the form, the gender of characters, and the style of the performance. Why do you think artists choose to adapt Shakespeare’s plays?
4. What might be the different goals of a modernized production versus a traditional production? Do you think either style is more effective? Explain.
5. What makes a successful adaptation of a Shakespeare play?
6. This production uses rock and roll as a lens to explore Hamlet. How would you stage Hamlet?
7. Rock and Roll is often associated with youth and rebellion. What do you think Hamlet is rebelling against or rejecting?
8. Why does Hamlet struggle to avenge his father by killing Claudius?
9. Where can you see the concepts of truth and deception in the play?
10. How does Hamlet relate to our contemporary time?
11. Why do you think artists continue to produce Shakespeare’s plays?

# Activities

## Activity 1: Hamlet Playlist

Select 3 characters from Hamlet and then choose a song to represent each one. Consider genre, rhythm, lyrics, mood...etc. How might musical elements represent aspects of a character? Think about how the songs contrast with each other and how that might reflect the relationship between the characters you have chosen. Present your choices to the class or in a written assignment and give three reasons why you chose each song.

## Activity 2: Imagining Monologues - Supporting Characters

1. In the play, Hamlet shares with the audience his inner thoughts in several monologues. How would our perspectives change if we heard the inner thoughts of the other characters in the play? In this activity write a monologue from the perspective of a character other than Hamlet. Think about when in the play the monologue would take place. Imagine what scenes might take place offstage. Is the character speaking alone or are they talking to someone specific, addressing a crowd/party, writing a letter, or a journal entry? For example what might Gertrude say to a trusted servant, or alone at night with Claudius, or to the grave of her first husband?
2. In pairs read a partner's monologue and prepare dramaturgical notes. A dramaturg is someone who supports a playwright as they write, asking questions about things that are unclear, identifying where the writing is the most exciting, and providing constructive criticism. Try to come up with a strength, something the writer could work on, and a question for the writer to think about. Remember that it is brave to share your writing and be mindful of your classmate's feelings. Give specific feedback and be encouraging!
3. Share your feedback with each other and then write a second draft.
4. As a whole group discuss the experience of writing a monologue from the perspective of another character. Ask if anyone would like to read their monologue. What did you discover about the characters? What questions about the play do you have now? What was challenging?