

BRETT DEAN /
LIBRETTO BY MATTHEW JOCELYN

Hamlet

A Guide for Educators



The Met
ropolitan
Opera



Hamlet

Hamlet, the prince of Denmark, is haunted in every sense of the word. His father, the king of Denmark, recently died under mysterious circumstances, and Hamlet's uncle (his father's brother) promptly married Hamlet's mother and ascended the throne. Now, the old king's ghost has appeared to demand that Hamlet avenge his untimely death—a command that will wreak havoc on the prince's conscience, the members of the court, and everyone Hamlet holds dear.

William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* is one of the most famous works in all of English literature. The source of the iconic "to be or not to be" monologue, this tale of heartbreak and revenge has been adopted, adapted, and retold countless times since it first graced the London stage more than 400 years ago. It has also been reimaged by numerous composers, and this season, a stunning new operatic rendition comes to the Met. In this contemporary retelling of Shakespeare's tragedy, composer Brett Dean and librettist Matthew Jocelyn—who drew on the unusual first publication of the play in crafting their text—have distilled the drama into 12 richly detailed scenes. The major plot points are all there, but students and viewers familiar with Shakespeare's work may be surprised by how the composer and librettist have transformed the Bard's play. Grappling with issues of identity, belonging, and loyalty, this modern Hamlet is a figure at once tragic and profoundly recognizable—and is a protagonist with whom many teenagers will be able to empathize.

This guide outlines the central themes of the original play and its musical adaptation, inviting teachers and students alike to consider the historical influence of Shakespeare's work, the intertwined practices of drama and music, and the continued relevance of the human conflicts that arise from honor and duty. The materials on the following pages include an overview of the opera's characters and plot, an introduction to Jocelyn's and Dean's creative process, and classroom activities that will bring the opera's music and story to life. By delving into *Hamlet's* music, drama, and design, this guide will forge interdisciplinary classroom connections, inspire critical thinking, and help students explore this modern rendition of a literary classic.

THE WORK

An opera in **two acts**, sung in English

Music by **Brett Dean**

Libretto by **Matthew Jocelyn**

Based on *Hamlet* by **William Shakespeare**

First performed **June 11, 2017**,
at the **Glyndebourne Festival, England**

PRODUCTION

Neil Armfield
Production

Ralph Myers
Scenic Designer

Alice Babidge
Costume Designer

Jon Clark
Lighting Designer

Denni Sayers
Movement Director

Nicholas Hall
Fight Director

PERFORMANCE

The Met: Live in HD
June 4, 2022

Brenda Rae
Ophelia

Sarah Connolly
Gertrude

Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen
Rosencrantz

Christopher Lowrey
Guildenstern

Allan Clayton
Hamlet

David Butt Philip
Laertes

William Burden
Polonius

Jacques Imbrailo
Horatio

Rod Gilfry
Claudius

John Relyea
Ghost

Nicholas Carter
Conductor

Hamlet is a Glyndebourne production.

Production a gift of
Lynne and Richard Pasculano

Additional support provided by
The Walter and Leonore Annenberg
Endowment Fund, and the National
Endowment for the Arts

Opera in the Classroom

The Metropolitan Opera's Educator Guides offer a creative, interdisciplinary introduction to opera. Designed to complement existing classroom curricula in music, the humanities, STEM fields, and the arts, these guides will help young viewers confidently engage with opera whether or not they have prior experience with the art form.

On the following pages, you'll find an array of materials designed to encourage critical thinking, deepen background knowledge, and empower students to engage with *Hamlet*. These materials can be used in classrooms and/or via remote-learning platforms, and they can be mixed and matched to suit your students' individual academic needs.

Above all, this guide is intended to help students explore *Hamlet* through their own experiences and ideas. The diverse perspectives that your students bring to opera make the art form infinitely richer, and we hope that your students will experience opera as a space where their confidence can grow and their curiosity can flourish.

WHAT'S IN THIS GUIDE:

Philosophical Chairs: A series of questions that introduce the opera's main themes while sparking creativity and encouraging debate

Who's Who in *Hamlet*: An introduction to the opera's main characters

Synopsis: The opera's plot

The Source: Information about the literary sources and/or historical events that inspired the opera

Timelines: Timelines connecting the opera to events in world history

Deep Dives: Interdisciplinary essays offering additional information and context

Active Exploration: Classroom-ready activities connecting the opera to topics in music, the humanities, STEM, and the arts

THROUGHOUT THE GUIDE, YOU'LL ALSO FIND:

Critical Inquiries: Questions and thought experiments designed to foster careful thinking

Fun Facts: Entertaining tidbits about *Hamlet*



Kronborg Castle
ARTICO2/WIKICOMMONS

FUN FACT

The setting of *Hamlet*, Elsinore Castle, is a real place that still exists today. Known as Kronborg Castle, the Renaissance fortress is a UNESCO World Heritage Site located in Helsingør, Denmark.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS AND HAMLET

This guide invites students to explore the opera through:

Literature
Poetry
Drama
Creative Writing
Music
Critical Thinking
Social and Emotional Learning

Philosophical Chairs

Philosophical Chairs is an activity designed to foster critical thinking, active inquiry, and respectful dialogue among students. To play, participants agree or disagree with a series of statements, but the game doesn't end there. The most crucial element is what happens next: Participants discuss their points of view and can switch sides if their opinions change during the discussion. (For more tips on using Philosophical Chairs in a classroom or via a remote-learning platform, see the activity description in your Google Classroom.)

Each topic statement is deliberately open-ended yet ties into a number of the themes present in *Hamlet*—including the complexities of grief, the challenges of attaining justice, and the cycles of violence that can be triggered by a thirst for revenge. Set the stage for this conversation mindfully. Offer students a brief overview of the opera's plot, setting, and context, and remind them how to build a safe space for productive conversation. Some of the topics might be confusing or hard—that's okay! As you and your students explore and learn about *Hamlet*, you can return to these statements: What do they have to do with the opera's story? How might these questions help us explore the opera's story, history, and themes?

THE STATEMENTS

- All weddings are joyful occasions.
- Everyone experiences grief in the same way.
- If you've been hurt, the best thing to do is seek revenge.
- Revenge always creates a cycle of retaliation.
- Violence is inevitable.
- Eradicating corruption is easy.
- Justice will always prevail.
- Justice means the same thing to everybody.
- Everyone lies.
- Everything happens for a reason.



Keep in mind that the process of this activity is just as important as the statements themselves. Philosophical Chairs is designed to nurture civil dialogue, and students should be encouraged to listen actively, honor one another's contributions, and show respect for a diversity of opinions and ideas.

Who's Who in *Hamlet*

CHARACTER	PRONUNCIATION	VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
Hamlet The prince of Denmark	HAM-let	tenor	Hamlet is the son of Old Hamlet, the former king of Denmark, who has just died. Hamlet's belief that his uncle, Claudius, is responsible for his father's death fuels much of the play's narrative.
Ghost Hamlet's father, the deceased king (Old Hamlet)		bass	A specter of the former king, the Ghost appears before Hamlet to relate how he died at his brother's hands and to ask Hamlet to avenge his murder.
Gertrude Hamlet's mother, the queen of Denmark	GHER-trood	mezzo-soprano	Very shortly after the death of her husband, Gertrude marries his brother (who is also the man responsible for his murder).
Claudius Hamlet's uncle, the new king of Denmark	CLAW-dee-us	bass-baritone	After killing his brother, Claudius marries his brother's widow and assumes the throne of Denmark.
Ophelia A young noblewoman	Oh-FEE-lee-yah	soprano	Ophelia is the daughter of the new king's counselor, Polonius, and the sister of Laertes. She is in love with Hamlet and is driven mad by his rejection of her love and his murder of her father.
Polonius Counselor to Claudius	Po-LOH-nee-us	tenor	Chief Counselor to the new king, Polonius does not trust Hamlet and warns his daughter, Ophelia, to stay away from him. He misjudges several situations and is killed by Hamlet while eavesdropping on the queen from behind a curtain.
Laertes Polonius's son and Ophelia's brother	LAY-ehr-teez	tenor	Concerned for his sister, Laertes warns Ophelia not to trust Hamlet. He departs for France to study but returns to Elsinore when Hamlet kills his father.
Horatio Hamlet's friend	Ho-RAY-shee-oh	baritone	Hamlet's only true friend, Horatio remains loyal to the prince throughout the play. He is the only person other than Hamlet who sees Old Hamlet's ghost.
Rosencrantz Guildestern Hamlet's friends	ROH-zen-krantz GHILL-den-sterne	counter-tenors	Friends of Hamlet's, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are employed by Claudius to find out what is bothering the prince. (In Shakespeare's play, these characters are friends from Hamlet's childhood; in Matthew Jocelyn's libretto, they are identified as friends from university.)

Synopsis

ACT I *Elsinore Castle, Denmark*

Hamlet is alone beside his father's grave following the old king's funeral. He thinks about his father's virtues. The wedding of his mother to his uncle (his father's brother) suddenly interrupts his contemplations.

Claudius, Hamlet's uncle and the new king of Denmark, celebrates his wedding to Hamlet's mother, Gertrude. Among the wedding guests are Polonius, Claudius's counselor, and his children, Ophelia (who is in love with Hamlet) and Laertes. Hamlet's friends arrive to join the celebrations, but Hamlet is understandably upset by the sudden wedding. He sees a vision of his dead father and makes a plan with his friend Horatio, who has had a similar vision, to watch for the Ghost later that night.

The Ghost appears to Hamlet again and tells him that he was murdered by Claudius. He orders Hamlet to avenge his murder, and Hamlet agrees.

Claudius has invited two of Hamlet's college friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to Elsinore in the hope that they will be able to figure out what is bothering Hamlet. Polonius claims Hamlet is acting strangely because he is in love with Ophelia. But when Ophelia startles Hamlet, he angrily denies ever having loved her.

A group of actors arrives at Elsinore. Hamlet convinces them to insert a scene into their performance mimicking Claudius's murder of the king. He hopes that Claudius's reaction will reveal his guilt. Claudius is indeed troubled by the scene in the play and gets up to leave, bringing the performance to an abrupt close.

Claudius, alone, is praying. Hamlet overhears him confess to murdering his brother. Although his suspicions are now confirmed, Hamlet decides not to kill Claudius while he is in prayer. Instead, he will find another moment to seek his revenge. He goes to tell his mother the truth about her new husband.

In Gertrude's room, Hamlet and his mother argue. Polonius hides behind a curtain so that he can listen to their conversation. Hamlet hears a noise and, thinking it is Claudius, plunges his sword through the curtain, killing Polonius. Hamlet tells his mother of Claudius's part in his father's death. The Ghost reappears, demanding to know what is delaying Hamlet's revenge. Gertrude, who cannot see the Ghost, is convinced that her son has gone mad.



ACT II

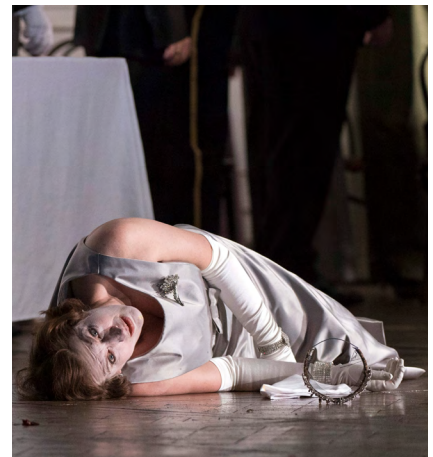
Laertes, who has been traveling in France, comes home to avenge his father's death. Claudius tells him that Hamlet killed Polonius and persuades Laertes to kill Hamlet. Ophelia, who has been driven mad by Hamlet's rejection and her father's murder, enters. Rather than expressing sympathy, Laertes is angered by Ophelia's behavior. She exits, and a short while later, Getrude enters with the news that Ophelia has drowned herself in a nearby stream.

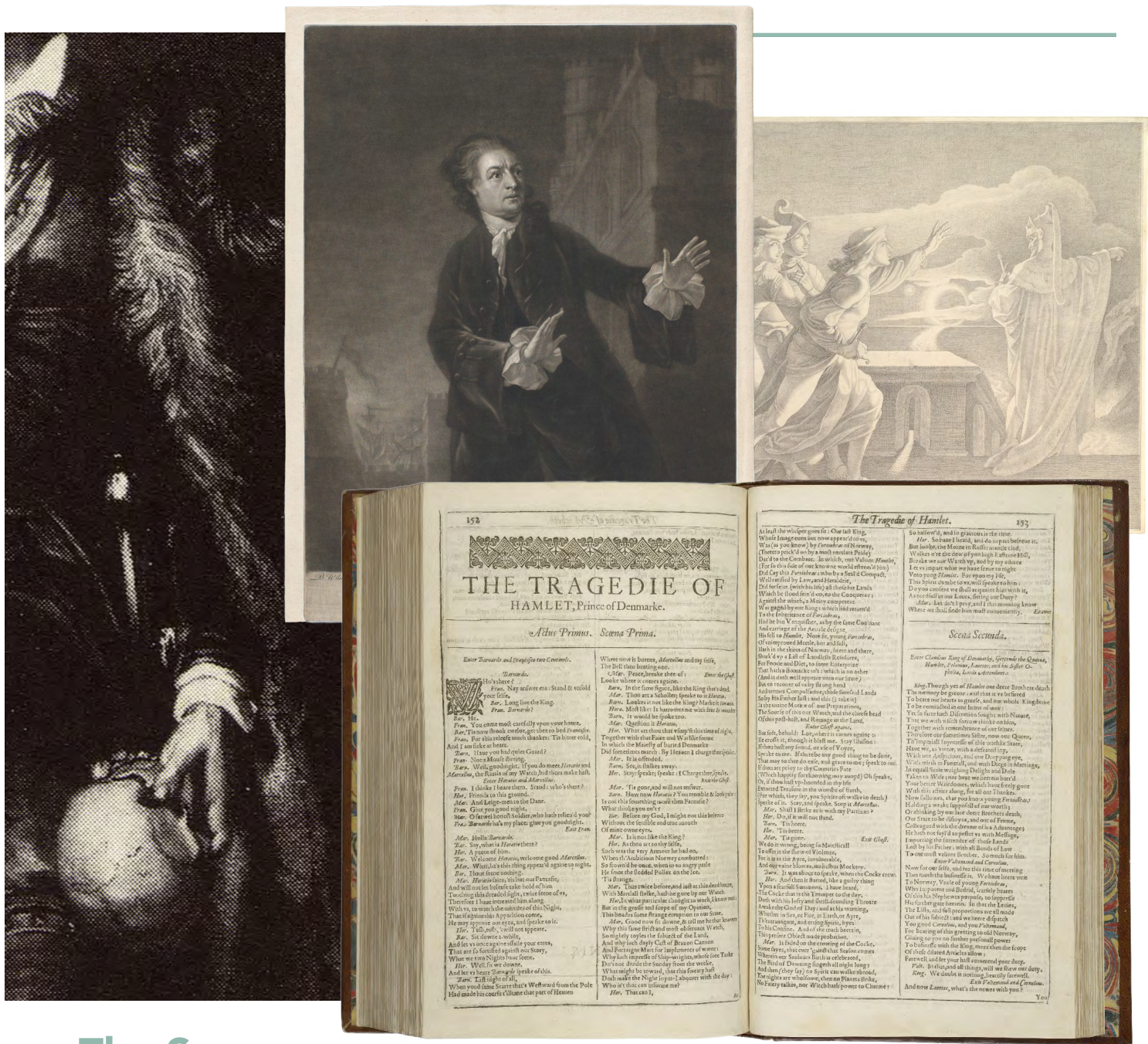
Hamlet and Horatio stumble upon a gravedigger preparing for Ophelia's funeral. When Laertes sees Hamlet, he becomes enraged, despite Getrude's efforts to calm the situation.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern tell Hamlet that Claudius has bet that Hamlet can beat Laertes in a duel. Hamlet accepts the challenge to fight Laertes, and members of the court gather to watch the duel.

Claudius is determined to use this opportunity to kill Hamlet. He has arranged for Laertes's sword to be dipped in poison. He has also prepared a cup of poisoned wine, which he will offer to the prince. Unfortunately, Gertrude drinks the wine before Claudius can stop her. Laertes wounds Hamlet, but they have inadvertently picked up each other's swords. Hamlet now wields the poisoned foil, and when he stabs Laertes, the wound is fatal.

The queen dies. Laertes dies. Hamlet tries to stab Claudius but kills Rosencrantz and Guildenstern instead. He finally manages to kill Claudius before dying of his own wound.





The Source

THE TRAGEDY OF HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare's play *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, most commonly referred to as just *Hamlet*, was written around 1600 (the exact date is uncertain). The story itself comes from a Norse legend transcribed by the Danish author Saxo Grammaticus in Latin in about 1200, although a theatrical setting of the story—referred to as the *Ur-Hamlet* and thought to be written by Thomas Kyd in 1587—is likely the text through which Shakespeare became familiar with the plot. While this *Ur-Hamlet* does not survive today, we do know that it was performed in London and included a ghost who cried, “Hamlet, revenge!”

There are three extant early versions of Shakespeare's play: the First Quarto (published in 1603), the Second Quarto (published in 1604), and the First Folio (published in 1623). These publications differ in content, and each has elements that are missing from the others. The First Quarto is by far the shortest of the three, and since Brett Dean's opera *Hamlet* necessarily sets only a portion of the original text, the composer and his librettist, Matthew Jocelyn, used the First Quarto as their primary source.

This was a somewhat controversial choice, as the First Quarto is sometimes called the "Bad Quarto." In the preface to the First Folio (published shortly after Shakespeare's death by a group of his friends), the 1603 version is dismissed as a pirated text, one of the "stol'n and surreptitious copies, maimed and deformed by frauds and stealths of injurious impostors." Scholars now believe that the First Quarto was in fact reconstructed from the memory of actors who had previously performed the play, more a bootleg of sorts than an out-and-out fake. Today, these many versions of *Hamlet* also invite us to consider what, exactly, *Hamlet* really is: A single written text? A performance piece with a long and varied history? An 800-year-old story that has inspired writers, composers, and other artists in a variety of genres? Or perhaps all of the above?



John Taylor
Chandos Portrait of Shakespeare, 1610
Oil on canvas
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Previous page
Clockwise from left:

Thomas Lawrence
John Philip Kemble as Hamlet, 1802
Engraving from painting
FOLGER SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY

James McArdell, after Benjamin Wilson
David Garrick in Hamlet, 1754
Print
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Adam Vogler
Hamlet and the Ghost of his Father,
mid-19th century
Drawing
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

First page of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*,
First Folio of 1623
FOLGER SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY

FUN FACT

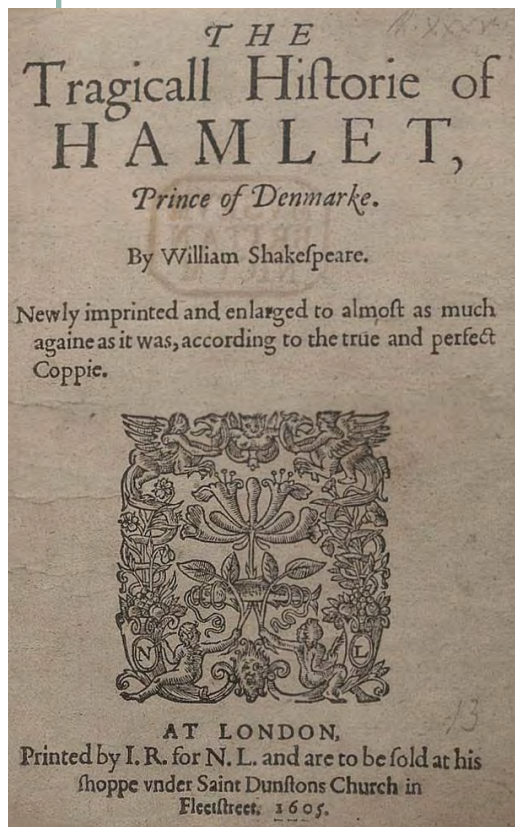
Many famous phrases and expressions come from *Hamlet*, including "To be or not to be—that is the question"; "The lady doth protest too much"; "Brevity is the soul of wit"; "To thine own self be true"; "What dreams may come"; "Method in [one's] madness"; and "The rest is silence." Shakespeare's play has also been hugely influential in popular culture. References to *Hamlet* appear in every narrative genre, from horror to science fiction to comedy, including in episodes of *Star Trek* and *The Simpsons*, as well as in the plot of the Disney's *The Lion King*. The text has even been translated into the *Star Trek* language of Klingon.



AMADA44/WIKICOMMONS

Timeline

THE COMPOSITION OF HAMLET



ca. 1600

William Shakespeare writes *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. The precise date of the play's first performance is unknown but has been estimated to fall between 1599 and 1601. The play will be published for the first time in 1603.

1961

Brett Dean is born in Brisbane, Australia. He begins studying the violin at age eight before switching to the viola. He graduates from the Queensland Conservatorium in 1982.

1985

Dean joins the viola section of the Berlin Philharmonic, where he performs for 15 years under the direction of conductors Claudio Abbado and Sir Simon Rattle. Rattle will also be an important champion of his work as a composer.

1988

Dean begins composing. Much of his early work is in experimental film and radio projects and improvisatory works, although he also writes orchestral compositions and chamber music. Political, literary, and visual sources all provide frequent inspiration for his compositions.

1994

The Australian director Neil Armfield stages a production of *Hamlet* at Sydney's Belvoir Street Theatre. Richard Roxburg plays Hamlet, Geoffrey Rush plays Horatio, and Cate Blanchett later joins the production as Ophelia. Brett Dean sees the production.

1995

Dean's concerto for clarinet and orchestra, *Ariel's Music*, wins an award from the UNESCO International Rostrum of Composers, helping him gain international recognition.

2000

Deciding to pursue a career as a freelance artist and composer, Dean returns to Australia.

2005

Dean's orchestral piece *Moments of Bliss* wins Best Composition by an Australian Composer at the APRA Music Awards in Australia. Its performance by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra is nominated for Best Performance of an Australian Composition.

2009

Dean wins the Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition for his violin concerto *The Lost Art of Letter Writing*.

2010

Dean composes his first opera, *Bliss*. Based on the novel of the same name by Peter Carey, the opera premieres on March 12 at the Sydney Opera House in a production directed by Neil Armfield.

2017

Dean's second opera, *Hamlet*, premieres at the Glyndebourne Festival in East Sussex, England, on June 11.



Deep Dive

SINGING SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare has long fascinated composers. To date, almost 300 operas have been based entirely or in part on his work, including Charles Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*; Giuseppe Verdi's *Macbeth*, *Otello*, and *Falstaff*; and Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Among the operatic adaptations of *Hamlet*, one can find Luigi Caruso's 1789 *Amleto*, the French grand opera in five acts of 1868 by Ambroise Thomas, and Latvian composer Jānis Kalniņš's 1935 "musical tragedy."

One of the greatest challenges composers and librettists face in adapting plays to the opera stage has to do with length. Even in its standard spoken version, *Hamlet* takes more than four hours to perform, and since singing takes more time than speaking, most operatic adaptations of Shakespeare must undergo significant pruning. One possible solution is to set only part of the story. Another option is to focus on a single character, as in Henry Purcell's 1692 *The Fairy Queen* (adapted from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) or Francesco Maria Veracini's 1744 *Rosalinda* (based on *As You Like It*).

The earliest opera based on Shakespeare was likely an adaptation of *Macbeth* from 1664, written less than 50 years after Shakespeare's death. As Shakespeare's popularity spread beyond the British Isles, adaptations of his dramas were set by composers in Italy, France, and Austria. The 19th-century Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi, for instance, adored Shakespeare's work: In addition to the three completed operas mentioned above, he considered writing operatic versions of *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and (his favorite play) *King Lear*.



Even in the 21st century, Shakespeare continues to act as a source of inspiration for opera composers. In addition to Dean's *Hamlet*, American composer Anthony Davis's 2013 *Lear on the Second Floor* is a contemporary reimagining of the King Lear story, and British composer Thomas Adès's 2004 adaptation of *The Tempest* was staged by the Met in 2012.

The Bard, as Shakespeare is sometimes called, has exercised a staggering influence on contemporary culture, but what has attracted so many composers to his plays? According to Brett Dean, his works are "full of music"—meaning not only the musical references and songs contained in the plays but also the "rhythms and shapes" of the language itself.

CRITICAL INQUIRY

Can you think of any plays or other stories you'd like to turn into operas? What are some of the advantages or disadvantages of turning speech into song?

Deep Dive

THE OPERATIC CHORUS

The chorus has always been an integral part of opera. What we today call opera was invented in the 16th century by Italian nobles looking for a way to recreate the dramas of ancient Greece. Although none of the music of these ancient dramas survived, these scholars knew from surviving texts that the chorus played an important role in the dramatic performances of the ancient world. The first operas, written at beginning of the Baroque period, thus always included a chorus. As in ancient dramas, the operatic chorus commented on the action. Playing the part of bystanders, they could also represent society's response to the action of the drama. (Note how Ophelia tells Hamlet that he is "as good as a chorus" during the play in scene 5.)

As the genre of opera developed over time, the presence and role of the chorus shifted. In France, the tradition of what is called "grand opera" was based in large part on spectacle and the inclusion of impressive technical elements, of which a large chorus was one. Meanwhile in Italy, when large choruses were employed they were often responsible for revealing the mood of "the people," as with the chorus of enslaved Egyptians in Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida*, or as an entertaining contrast to the individual voices of the main characters, as with the crowded Paris street scene in Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohème*.

Brett Dean's *Hamlet* takes the operatic choral tradition one step further, utilizing not one but two choruses: an onstage chorus that the audience can see, and an offstage chorus of eight specialized vocalists that performs from



A scene from Puccini's *La Bohème*
EVAN ZIMMERMAN/MET OPERA

the orchestra pit. The onstage chorus often represents the might and opinions of the Danish court, while the smaller group of unseen singers comments upon the action and enhances the drama. Sometimes they repeat or double what is said by the main characters; at other times, they provide unusual color and contrast to the traditional sounds of the chorus and orchestra. According to Dean, they thus offer "a conduit between the stage and the orchestra pit." Yet while the pit singers create a modern operatic sound, they also (coincidentally) harken back to the earliest days of dramatic choruses: In ancient Greece, the area from which the chorus performed was known as the *orquestra*.

CRITICAL INQUIRY

Given the long history of utilizing a group of voices like the chorus within a drama, what, in your opinion, is the function of these voices? If you were writing a play or opera with a choral component, who would the chorus represent?

FUN FACT

Music runs in the Dean family. Both Brett and his brother Paul, a clarinetist, have served as artistic director of the Australian National Academy of Music, and his daughter is the mezzo-soprano Lotte Betts-Dean.



John Everett Millais
Ophelia, 1851
Oil on canvas
TATE BRITAIN

CRITICAL INQUIRY

In what other ways do personal and political duties interfere in the story of *Hamlet*? Does Hamlet really love Ophelia? How might their relationship be different if they were normal people and not members of a royal court?

Deep Dive

COURTLY LIFE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Much of the drama and intrigue in *Hamlet* revolves around the dynamics and expectations of courtly life in the late Middle Ages. The entire story takes place within Elsinore Castle; Hamlet's friends, enemies, and love interests are all members of the royal court, a group that included not only the monarch and members of his family but also courtiers, bodyguards, members of the nobility, individuals with court appointments, emissaries, and visitors from other kingdoms.

Life at court could be glamorous and exciting. According to historical sources, medieval royals enjoyed lavish food and drink and dressed in expensive clothes and furs, adorned with elaborate jewels, which set them apart from the rest of society. Royals pursued courtly leisure activities such as tournaments, hunting, chess, and gambling (note the wagers discussed by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in scene 11). Courts supported the arts by hosting performers, as we see in scene 5 of the opera, and by employing court musicians. The activities and possessions of the court were not merely luxuries but expressions of the court's power and legacy. However, privilege had its limits. The bounty of courtly life came with certain expectations, the strain of which we can see affecting Hamlet, with devastating consequences.

Hamlet is trapped between his duty to his father and his duty to the Danish royal court. As a prince, he serves the king, but as a son, he seeks to avenge his father's death, which requires killing the current king. Ophelia, too, is bound by her limitations as a woman and as a member of the court, and she is further oppressed by competing demands for her loyalty that affect her relationship with Hamlet. On the one hand, she must be dutiful to her father, who wants her to stay away from Hamlet. On the other hand, she still feels love for the prince who, prior to "going mad," pursued her romantically "in honorable fashion."

When Ophelia is pressed into service by her father to find out what is bothering Hamlet, the prince sees it as a betrayal (given her father's loyalty to Claudius). Further tormented by his own competing loyalties, Hamlet becomes cruel to Ophelia, pushing her away. He criticizes her for misrepresenting herself and denies ever having loved her. His rejection, combined with his accidental murder of her father, leads Ophelia to drown herself in a nearby brook. Yet even Hamlet cannot escape the fatal consequences of courtly duty, dying at the hand of Laertes, who has sworn to avenge his own father's wrongful death.

Deep Dive

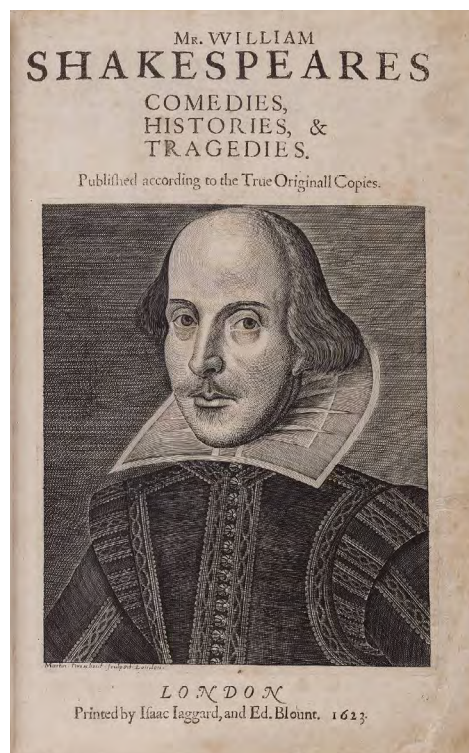
WHAT'S IN A PAGE?

Almost no copies of Shakespeare's plays in his own handwriting exist today, but three publications of *Hamlet* appeared within a few decades of the play's premiere. Two of these were published during Shakespeare's lifetime: the so-called First Quarto (1603) and Second Quarto (1604). Another version, in a collection of Shakespeare's plays referred to as the "First Folio," was published in 1623, seven years after the author's death. To a modern reader, these monikers may seem unnecessarily arcane, but understanding the terms "quarto" and "folio" can offer us vital insights into how books were printed and sold during Shakespeare's day.

Quartos were books made by folding pieces of paper in half (lengthwise) and then in half again (widthwise) to create four individual leaves of paper, each measuring about seven inches wide by nine inches tall; the name "quarto" refers to this four-leaf organization. Counting both front and back sides of the sheets, each printed sheet of paper would result in eight quarto-sized pages. A folio, by contrast, was made by folding the sheets of paper in half once to form two large leaves (four printed pages), resulting in a much larger book. The First Folio of Shakespeare's plays, for instance, measures approximately 13 inches tall by eight inches wide.

Quartos were relatively cheap to produce and purchase, costing roughly sixpence a piece (around \$5.00 in modern currency), and their small size made them easy to handle and transport. Folios, by contrast, cost between 15 and 18 shillings (\$150 to \$180 in modern terms). Treated as collector's items, folios were generally used only for highly respected work, and the decision by Shakespeare's former colleagues to print his plays in folio form is a clear indication of both their respect for his writing and their desire to keep monetizing his output even after his death.

Data about the size cost of quartos and folios adapted from William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Peter Holland (New York: Penguin, 2000), xxv.



Title page of the First Folio

CRITICAL INQUIRY

What are some of the cheapest forms of media and entertainment you consume today? What are some of the most expensive? Do you think the cost influences how you perceive the work?

FUN FACT

Brett Dean is not only a composer but also a violist. He played in the viola section of the Berlin Philharmonic for 15 years, an experience that he credits with shaping his approach to composing. He still occasionally joins the orchestra for performances.

Active Exploration

The following activities will help familiarize your students with the plot of *Hamlet*, forge connections between a variety of classroom subjects, and encourage creative responses to the opera. They are designed to be accessible to a wide array of ages and experience levels.

ART SONG AND SHAKESPEARE

Invite students to compare and contrast art-song settings of texts by Shakespeare, identifying key components of the genre and considering the power of storytelling through song. Finally, invite students to write their own art-song text set to a simple melody.

WHAT'S IN A PAGE?

Walk students through the process of folding and assembling a few sheets of paper into a quart- or folio-size notebook, teaching them about the publication process of Shakespeare's plays.

THE SOCIAL MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE

Invite students to recreate a scene from *Hamlet* using their favorite social medium. A viral TikTok video, an Instagram story, or a series of text messages are just a few of the ways that students might choose to adapt the play.

"TO BE OR NOT TO BE?"

Review the text of Hamlet's "The be or not to be" monologue with your students. Help them understand this famous soliloquy as deeply as possible: Where does it fall in the overall narrative of Shakespeare's play? What is the general sentiment it expresses? Are there any difficult words or ideas, and how might one go about investigating what they mean? Invite students to develop a brand-new scene (with a different story line from *Hamlet*) that can incorporate part (or all) of this text.



COMMON CORE STRANDS

This guide directly supports the following ELA-Literacy Common Core Strands:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9–10.9

Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11–12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11–12.7

Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9–12 .3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.