

# Tragedy: Hamlet

## Context

In literary terms, tragedy is a form of drama in which there is a display of human suffering and often catharsis for the audience. Tragedy, as we know it in Western culture, has its foundation in ancient Greece about 2,500 years ago. It has evolved over the millennia and had an important role in many different cultures and eras, such as in the time of the Roman Republic, in Elizabethan England, and including up until the present day. The 15th-century Renaissance brought with it a new interest in the study of human experience and awareness. Hamlet was written in the early 17th century around 1600 or 1601 and first performed in 1602. By this time, the Renaissance had spread to other European countries, and ideas about our ability to fully understand the human experience became more skeptical. Scholars and artists purported that the human understanding of the world was based on appearance, and that it was only with great difficulty (if at all) that humans could see beyond these appearances in order to see the "real." Shakespeare's Hamlet explores this struggle. Characters constantly face difficulty in finding the truth about others, whether it be their intentions, their true characters, or even their sanity. Key areas of context relevant to this play would be: the Elizabethan Era, Gender Roles.

## Narrative Summary

Hamlet is the story of a Danish prince whose uncle murders the prince's father, marries his mother, and claims the throne. The prince pretends to be feeble-minded to throw his uncle off guard, then manages to kill his uncle in revenge. Shakespeare changed the emphasis of this story entirely, making his Hamlet a philosophically minded prince who delays taking action because his knowledge of his uncle's crime is so uncertain. Shakespeare went far beyond making uncertainty a personal quirk of Hamlet's, introducing a number of important ambiguities into the play that even the audience cannot resolve with certainty. For instance, whether Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, shares in Claudius's guilt; whether Hamlet continues to love Ophelia even as he spurns her, in Act III; whether Ophelia's death is suicide or accident; whether the ghost offers reliable knowledge, or seeks to deceive and tempt Hamlet; and, perhaps most importantly, whether Hamlet would be morally justified in taking revenge on his uncle. Shakespeare makes it clear that the stakes riding on some of these questions are enormous—the actions of these characters bring disaster upon an entire kingdom. At the play's end it is not even clear whether justice has been achieved.

## Key Vocab

Antagonist	
Catharsis	
Comic Relief	
Equilibrium	
Hamartia	
Juxtaposition	
Protagonist	
Soliloquy	
Tragedy	
Tragic Hero	

## Themes / Ideas

Tragedy	
Revenge	
Appearance & Reality	
Madness	

## Reading

Retrieve, Interpret, Infer, Consider, Evaluate, Compare\*

Analyse Methods (language), Analyse Methods (structure)

\*Non-fiction comparison is a Present Day English text with Pre 19th C text.

## Writing

Essay: Explain Point of View

Story: Narrate

Prepositions, Conjunctions

Sentences: Clauses (subordinating and coordinating)

Speech

## Assessment

HT5: Consider & Evaluate a View.

HT6: Writing: Story: Narrate

One of the greatest  
tragedies ever written.

The Guardian

One of the greatest

One of the greatest  
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The Guardian

# Tragedy: Othello

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## Key Vocab

Antagonist

Catharsis

Comic Relief

Equilibrium

Hamartia

Juxtaposition

Protagonist

Soliloquy

Tragedy

Tragic Hero

## Themes / Ideas

Tragedy

Revenge

Appearance & Reality

Truth

## Reading

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OTHELLO  
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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# Tragedy: Julius Caesar

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

## Key Vocab

Antagonist	
Catharsis	
Comic Relief	
Equilibrium	
Hamartia	
Juxtaposition	
Protagonist	
Soliloquy	
Tragedy	
Tragic Hero	

## Themes / Ideas

Tragedy	
Fate vs Free Will	
Power & Conflict	
Public vs Private	

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

## Narrative Summary

Shakespeare's political thriller tells the story of the conspiracy against Caesar, his assassination and the defeat of his conspirators. Julius Caesar has returned to Rome triumphant from the war against Pompey. The Roman republic is prepared to heap him with new honours, causing concern and dismay among some senators who fear that too much power is held by one man. Caius Cassius plots a conspiracy to murder Caesar, enlisting the support of the well-respected Marcus Brutus. Brutus has misgivings but is persuaded that Caesar's death is necessary for the good of the republic. However, he rejects Cassius' proposal that Mark Antony, close friend of Caesar, should also be killed. Brutus, Cassius and their co-conspirators stab Caesar to death at the senate house on the Ides of March. At Caesar's funeral Brutus addresses the people and successfully explains the conspirators' motives. However, Mark Antony speaks next and turns the mob against the conspirators, who are forced to flee from Rome. Mark Antony and Caesar's nephew, Octavius, take command of Rome and lead an army against the conspirators. Brutus and Cassius are defeated at Philippi where they kill themselves rather than be captured.

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