



HAMLET: the Dead One

We are pleased to present our STUDY MATERIALS which are aimed at preparing your students for the One-person show, *HAMLET: The Dead One*. In the style of the Cambridge-British Council English tests, the materials are divided into FOUR areas of practice: READING, WRITING, LISTENING & SPEAKING, and include similar Cambridge language and preparation tasks. We also include extensive practice of vocabulary, comprehension exercises and discussions on themes.

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Reading 1

Read this introduction to "*Hamlet: the Dead One*" to practise and improve your reading skills and to prepare you for the one-person play you are going to see. Before reading, do the **preparation task** which will help you with the **vocabulary**. Then read the text and complete the task that follows.

Preparation Task: Match the definitions (a –p) with the vocabulary (1-16).

Vocabulary

Definitions

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 1. to depict | a. to plan something (usually something bad) |
| 2. struggle | b. to deceive, to mislead |
| 3. to banish | c. to fall victim to |
| 4. to trick | d. to represent or to portray |
| 5. to seize | e. the spirit of a dead person |
| 6. to avenge | f. retribution, vengeance |
| 7. revenge | g. a woman whose husband has died |
| 8. widow | h. to take vengeance or revenge; to pay someone back |
| 9. outcome | i. to expel by order from a place or a country |
| 10. to murder | j. venom, deadly toxin |
| 11. ghost | k. to take by force |
| 12. guilt | l. conflict, battle |
| 13. to doubt | m. result, conclusion |
| 14. to succumb | n. to assassinate, to kill, to commit homicide |
| 15. poison | o. to be indecisive. |
| 16. to plot | p. feeling bad about something bad that you have done |

READING TEXT 1: "An Introduction to "*Hamlet: the Dead One*", a free version Shakespeare's tragedy HAMLET.

"The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark" often shortened to HAMLET, is considered to be among the most influential works of world literature. Written by William Shakespeare around the year 1600, it is the English playwright's most performed and longest play with original versions lasting up to four hours. It is set in Denmark and depicts Prince Hamlet plotting his revenge against his uncle, Claudius, who has murdered Hamlet's father in order to seize his throne and marry Hamlet's mother.

But not to worry, our retelling of this iconic story lasts about one hour and features only one actor, video projections, chinese shadows and puppets and...rock music. It is Hamlet himself who narrates the events from beyond the grave. Yes, our Hamlet is dead and he retells his story in order to redeem his soul. In addition, much of the old English text has been modernized to enhance comprehension and to highlight the universality of the play's main themes, including betrayal, revenge, self-doubt, corruption and madness.



Reading 1 (continued)

The story in more detail... The King of Denmark is murdered by poison by his brother, Claudius. No one suspects Claudius and he assumes the throne and marries his brother's widow, Queen Gertrude. The king's death deeply saddens his son, Prince Hamlet, and he is angry that his mother has agreed to marry his uncle. One night he is visited by his father's ghost who demands that his son avenge his murder. But Hamlet's contemplative and indecisive nature paralyzes him. He is not totally sure of his uncle's guilt and he enters into a deep melancholy and apparent madness.

Eventually Hamlet tricks Claudius into revealing his guilt, but still he makes no move. Instead he confronts his mother in whose bedroom Polonius (the king's advisor) has hidden behind a tapestry. Hamlet believes it is the king, draws his sword and kills Polonius through the tapestry. For this crime, Claudius banishes Hamlet to England and orders Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to accompany the prince, giving them orders for the English king to have Hamlet killed. Meanwhile, the saddened Ophelia, Polonius' daughter, commits suicide and her furious brother, Laertes, returns from France to avenge the death of his father and sister.

Hamlet escapes from the ship bound for England and returns to Denmark, finally deciding to take action against the king. For his part, Claudius tries once again to have Hamlet killed by poison, but the outcome of his attempt could not be more tragic: Claudius, Gertrude, Laertes are all accidentally poisoned and die. As for the melancholic prince, Hamlet too succumbs to the poison and ends up dead.

In conclusion, Hamlet's internal struggle and self-doubt lead to mistakes such as Polonius' death and the subsequent death of his daughter. His inaction also gives Claudius time to react and plot against the prince.

Here is the first part of Hamlet's most famous monologue: "To be or not to be, that is the question. Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them?"

We can easily substitute the word "be" with "do": "To do or not to do? That is the question." Hamlet's doubting and failure to avenge his father is especially tragic since this lack of resolution inevitably leads to the death of so many others.

Task - (Reading 1)

Choose what you think is the best answer.

1. Shakespeare's original play, "The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark" ...

- a) ... has been staged more times than any of his other plays.
- b) ... is about a son whose dead father speaks to him.
- c) ... was written over 400 years ago.
- d) ... is extremely popular.
- e) All of the above are correct.

**Task - (Reading 1 continued)**

2. Choose the sentence that best describes Prince Hamlet.
 - a) He is happy and joyful.
 - b) He finds it easy to make decisions.
 - c) He is a serious young man and spends a lot of time thinking.
 - d) He loves his family, especially his uncle.

3. What happened to Prince Hamlet's father?
 - a) He died of natural causes.
 - b) He killed himself.
 - c) He was killed by a deadly venom.
 - d) He was stabbed.

4. What did the ghost of Hamlet's father ask the young man to do?
 - a) to take revenge for his death and kill Claudius.
 - b) to leave the country.
 - c) to kill his mother for having married Claudius.
 - d) to forgive Claudius.

5. Because Hamlet has killed Polonius, Claudius decides.... (Choose the best answer.)
 - a) to send him to prison.
 - b) to send him to England to live there for the rest of his life.
 - c) to do nothing.
 - d) to send him to England where the English king will have Hamlet killed.

6. Ophelia and Laertes are....
 - a) cousins.
 - b) Hamlet's brother and sister.
 - c) the daughter and son of Polonius.
 - d) the daughter and son of Claudius.

7. Which of these statements is the best answer? At the end of the story....
 - a) Hamlet finally decides to avenge Claudius.
 - b) Claudius plans to kill Hamlet, but he also dies.
 - c) Queen Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, is accidentally poisoned.
 - d) Laertes also dies by poison.
 - e) All the above are correct.

DISCUSSION POINT See Hamlet's famous speech in Spanish...

¿Ser o no ser? ¿Qué es más noble para el alma? ¿Sufrir los designios de la caprichosa fortuna, o armarse y luchar contra un mar de adversidades, hasta vencerlas y acabar con ellas?”

Discuss: If something is extremely difficult to do or to achieve, is it better to take the easier option and do nothing, or to take action even though life may become very difficult for yourself?