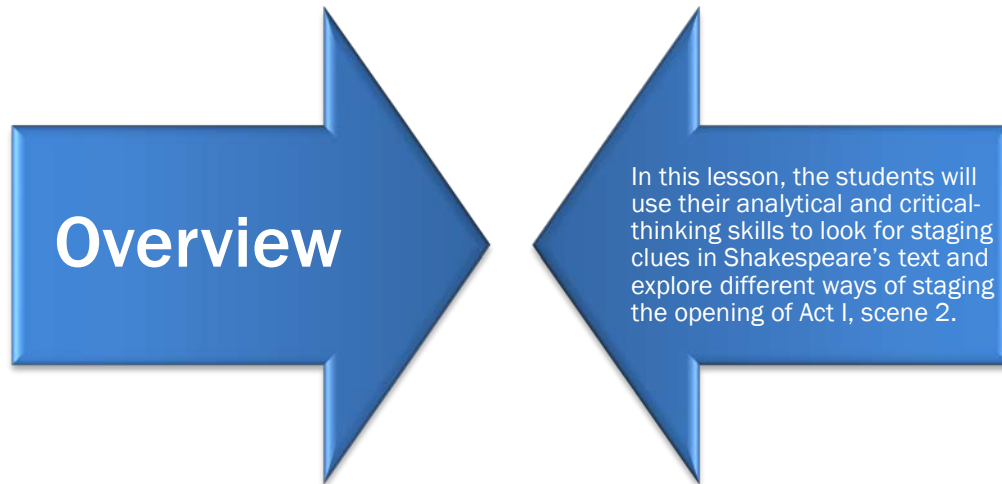


## ***HAMLET* – Staging a Large Scene or... Mining the Text for Clues**



Grade Level	Subject Area	Curriculum Expectations and Learning Outcome			Time Needed	Space	Materials
7-12	English, Drama	Identify the important information and ideas in the text, focusing on Shakespeare's clues for staging;	Analyse the text and explain how they help communicate meaning and enhance effectiveness;	Use a variety of conventions to develop character and shape the action in ensemble drama presentations.	2-3 class Periods	Desks in groups, then open spaces for exploring the text	Handouts: Act I scene 2 Excerpt; Worksheets: Staging on the Stratford Festival; Staging a Large Scene

### **Snapshot Activity**

- Depending on the size of your class, divide into 3 or 4 groups, ensuring that there are at least 8 or more people per group.
- Distribute the four-page handout (Act I scene 2 Excerpt) to the class and read the excerpt together.
- Have the students underline and discuss unfamiliar words and their meaning.
- Handout the Student Worksheets: Staging a Large Scene or Mining the Text for Clues and have each group study the questions and answer them as if they were the director of this scene.
- Handout 'Staging on the Stratford Festival' and still working as a group, have the students work out the staging of the scene, using a variety of methods.
- Their culminating assignment will be to write a blog as a courtier, recording the royal Danish court and family activities.

## **STAGING A LARGE SCENE OR ...MINING THE TEXT FOR CLUES**

You are the directors of this scene, work out how you envision each character to behave and respond.

Consider the following check-list before staging the scene and discuss with your group:

### **You Be the Director!**

#### **About Claudius**

- ☐ Do the people in his court respect him?
- ☐ Do they perhaps fear him?
- ☐ Is Claudius honest and self-assured? Is he a manipulator?
- ☐ Do you believe he is being sincere? Are there clues in the text that might suggest otherwise?
- ☐ Is there a reason why he uses 'we', 'us', 'our' to refer to his royal person?
- ☐ Is he deliberately testing Hamlet? How does he respond/react to Hamlet?

#### **About Gertrude**

- ☐ Where would you place Gertrude in relation to her husband, Claudius, and her son, Hamlet?

#### **About Ophelia**

- ☐ If you choose to present Ophelia in this scene, although she has no speaking lines, how would you portray her?
- ☐ Where would you place her on stage and what would be her reactions?

#### **About Hamlet**

- ☐ Hamlet does not speak for quite some time in this scene. Is he engaged in what is going on? If so, is he actively or passively listening? How alert is he to what others are saying around him? Are there clues in the text to suggest this?
- ☐ Where would you place him on stage?

#### **About the Court and the Scene**

- ☐ Your social status and rank at court is often denoted by where you stand in relation to the king. Look at the list of characters in this scene, who has a higher social status and where would you place them? Where would you place those of lower ranks and why?
- ☐ Study the photograph of Stratford Festival thrust stage with the accompanying stage directions. Notice the audience is on three sides and there are many entrances. Where do the characters enter from and where would you place them on stage?
- ☐ How genuine are people's responses?
- ☐ What would their facial expression, body language and movement be like?
- ☐ Some characters flatter – how would you portray their type of flattery? How far would you go as a director in portraying this?
- ☐ Is this both a public and private scene or is it all public (for show), and if so, why?

## Mining the Text for Clues When Staging

Look for stage direction clues in the text. Plot out on the handout which entrance you would have each character come from and where they would be placed on stage. When ready try out the following:

- Step 1 ~** With your group, mime the scene – dramatize the scene with movement but no words, assigning specific roles in your group.
- What did you discover?
  - What do you think worked or should be added to the scene?
- Step 2 ~** Act out the scene, this time using your own words in contemporary English.
- What did you discover?
  - What do you think worked or should be added to the scene?
- Step 3 ~** Act out the scene, using Shakespeare's text.
- What did you discover?
  - What do you think worked or should be added to the scene?
- Step 4 ~** [Optional] Each group will present their scene to the whole class.
- What did you discover in these presentations?
  - What do you think worked or should be added to the scene?
  - What clues did you discover in the text that helped you stage the scene?
  - What did you discover about your characters?

### Written Assignment

- You are one of the courtiers in this scene, write a blog on what took place in court, recording the activities of royal Danish family. Feel free to express your opinion of the events that unfold.

## ***Hamlet, Act I, scene 2 (excerpt)***

**IN BRIEF:** The opening of this scene immediately establishes that Claudius is in recent possession of his dead brother's throne and has just married his sister-in-law, Gertrude. He quickly turns to political matters and how young Fortinbras of Norway is now threatening Denmark. He sends his messengers, Cornelius and Voltemand, to speak to the old King of Norway in the hopes of preventing Fortinbras from attacking Denmark. He then turns his attention to Polonius' son, Laertes, who asks permission to return to university in France and Claudius grants it. Claudius then sets about to criticize Hamlet for continuing to grieve the death of his father and refuses him permission to return to Wittenberg University. Hamlet's mother pleads with him to stay in Elsinore and he agrees.

### **The Great Hall of Elsinore Castle**

*Enter KING CLAUDIUS, QUEEN GERTRUDE, HAMLET, POLONIUS, LAERTES, VOLTEMAND, CORNELIUS, [possibly OPHELIA] and other Lords, and Attendants*

**CLAUDIUS**     Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death  
                     The memory be green, and that it us befitted  
                     To bear our hearts in grief and our whole kingdom  
                     To be contracted in one brow of woe,  
                     Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature  
                     That we with wisest sorrow think on him,  
                     Together with remembrance of ourselves.  
                     Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,  
                     Th' imperial jointress to this warlike state,  
                     Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy,  
                     With an auspicious and a dropping eye,  
                     With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,  
                     In equal scale weighing delight and dole,  
                     Taken to wife; nor have we herein barred  
                     Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone  
                     With this affair along - for all, our thanks.  
                     Now follows, that you know: young Fortinbras,  
                     Holding a weak supposal of our worth,  
                     Or thinking by our late dear brother's death  
                     Our state to be disjoint and out of frame,  
                     Colleaguèd with the dream of his advantage,  
                     He hath not fail'd to pester us with message  
                     Importing the surrender of those lands  
                     Lost by his father, with all bonds of law,  
                     To our most valiant brother. So much for him.  
                     Now for ourself and for this time of meeting  
                     Thus much the business is: we have here writ  
                     To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras,  
                     Who, impotent and bed-rid, scarcely hears

Of this his nephew's purpose, to suppress  
His further gait herein, in that the levies,  
The lists and full proportions, are all made  
Out of his subject; and we here dispatch  
You, good Cornelius, and you, Voltemand,  
For bearers of this greeting to old Norway,  
Giving to you no further personal power  
To business with the king, more than the scope  
Of these dilated articles allow.  
Farewell, and let your haste commend your duty.

**CORNELIUS & VOLTEMAND**

In that and all things will we show our duty.

**CLAUDIUS** We doubt it nothing, heartily farewell. *Exeunt VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS*  
And now, Laertes, what's the news with you?  
You told us of some suit; what is't Laertes?  
You cannot speak of reason to the Dane  
And lose your voice. What wouldst thou beg, Laertes,  
That shall not be my offer, not thy asking?  
The head is not more native to the heart,  
The hand more instrumental to the mouth,  
Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father.  
What wouldst thou have Laertes?

**LAERTES** My dread lord,  
Your leave and favour to return to France,  
From whence though willingly I came to Denmark  
To show my duty in your coronation,  
Yet now I must confess, that duty done,  
My thoughts and wishes bend again toward France,  
And bow them to your gracious leave and pardon.

**CLAUDIUS** Have you your father's leave? What says Polonius?

**POLONIUS** He hath my lord wrung from me my slow leave  
By laboursome petition, and at last  
Upon his will I sealed my hard consent.  
I do beseech you, give him leave to go.

**CLAUDIUS** Take thy fair hour Laertes, time be thine,  
And thy best graces spend it at thy will.  
But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son –

**HAMLET** *[Aside]* A little more than kin, and less than kind.

**CLAUDIUS** How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

**HAMLET** Not so, my lord, I am too much i' th' sun.

**GERTRUDE** Good Hamlet cast thy nighted colour off,  
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.  
Do not for ever with thy vailèd lids  
Seek for thy noble father in the dust.  
Thou know'st 'tis common, all that lives must die,  
Passing through nature to eternity.

**HAMLET** Ay, madam, it is common.

**GERTRUDE** If it be,  
Why seems it so particular with thee?

**HAMLET** Seems madam? nay it is, I know not 'seems.'  
'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,  
Nor customary suits of solemn black,  
Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,  
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,  
Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,  
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,  
That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,  
For they are actions that a man might play,  
But I have that within which passes show –  
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

**CLAUDIUS** 'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature Hamlet,  
To give these mourning duties to your father;  
But you must know, your father lost a father,  
That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound  
In filial obligation for some term  
To do obsequious sorrow; but to persevere  
In obstinate condolement is a course  
Of impious stubbornness, 'tis unmanly grief,  
It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,  
A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,  
An understanding simple and unschooled.  
For what we know must be, and is as common  
As any the most vulgar thing to sense,  
Why should we in our peevish opposition  
Take it to heart? Fie, 'tis a fault to heaven,  
A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,  
To reason most absurd, whose common theme  
Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried,  
From the first corse till he that died to-day,  
'This must be so.' We pray you, throw to earth

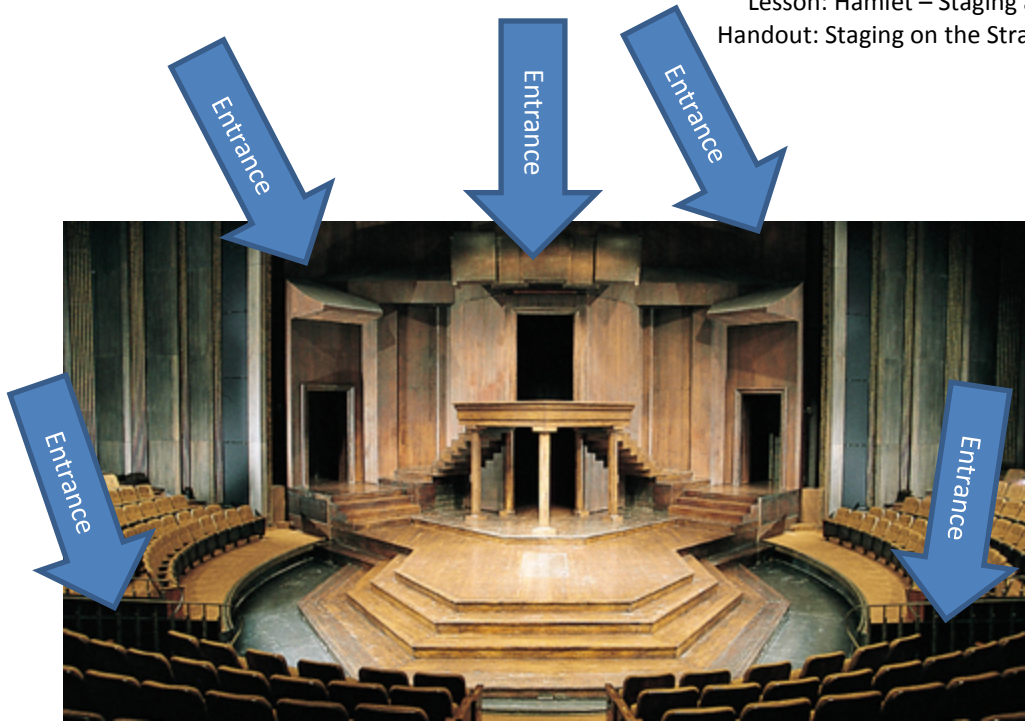
This unprevailing woe, and think of us  
As of a father, for let the world take note  
You are the most immediate to our throne,  
And with no less nobility of love  
Than that which dearest father bears his son,  
Do I impart toward you. For your intent  
In going back to school in Wittenberg,  
It is most retrograde to our desire,  
And we beseech you bend you to remain  
Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye,  
Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.

**GERTRUDE** Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet.  
I pray thee, stay with us, go not to Wittenberg.

**HAMLET** I shall in all my best obey you, madam.

**CLAUDIUS** Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply.  
Be as ourself in Denmark. Madam, come.  
This gentle and unforced accord of Hamlet  
Sits smiling to my heart: in grace whereof,  
No jocund health that Denmark drinks today  
But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell,  
And the king's rouse the heavens all bruit again,  
Re-speaking earthly thunder. Come away.

*Exeunt all but HAMLET*



Festival Theatre – Stratford Festival. Designed by Tanya Moiseiwitsch.

