

# **Hamlet: Character Analysis Study Guide**

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# Hamlet

**Role:** Prince of Denmark, the tragic hero.

**Personality:** Intelligent, witty, philosophical, but indecisive and emotionally torn.

**Motivations:** Wants to avenge his father's murder, but struggles with hesitation and morality.

**Key Relationships:** Son of the late King Hamlet and Queen Gertrude; distrusts Claudius; torn about Ophelia; loyal to Horatio.

**Key Quote:** *To be, or not to be: that is the question.*

**Simple English Translation:** Should I live or die? That's what I'm wondering.

**Analysis:** Hamlet represents human struggle with morality, action vs. inaction, and the search for truth.

## Learning Insights:

- Hamlet struggles with action vs. inaction.
- He represents human doubt and the weight of choice.
- His indecision drives the tragedy forward.

**Student Reflection:** Why do you think Hamlet delays taking revenge?

## Claudius

**Role:** King of Denmark, villain of the play.

**Personality:** Ambitious, manipulative, politically clever, but guilt-ridden.

**Motivations:** Power — he kills his brother to take the throne and Queen Gertrude.

**Key Relationships:** Brother of late King Hamlet; husband to Gertrude; fears Hamlet.

**Key Quote:** *O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven.*

**Simple English Translation:** My crime is so terrible it stinks to heaven.

**Analysis:** Claudius shows the danger of ambition and corruption. He is ruthless but still feels guilt.

### Learning Insights:

- Claudius represents ambition without morality.
- His guilt shows the inner conflict of corrupt leaders.
- His actions set the tragedy in motion.

**Student Reflection:** Do you think Claudius is purely evil, or just weak?

## Gertrude

**Role:** Queen of Denmark, Hamlet's mother.

**Personality:** Loving, but weak; values peace over truth.

**Motivations:** Desires stability and affection.

**Key Relationships:** Mother of Hamlet; wife of Claudius.

**Key Quote:** *The lady doth protest too much, methinks.*

**Simple English Translation:** She's insisting too strongly, I don't believe her.

**Analysis:** Gertrude may not know Claudius murdered her husband, but she chooses comfort over truth.

### Learning Insights:

- Gertrude represents weakness in the face of corruption.
- Her quick marriage raises questions of loyalty.
- She is torn between love for Hamlet and Claudius.

**Student Reflection:** Why does Gertrude marry Claudius so quickly?

# Ophelia

**Role:** Daughter of Polonius, Hamlet's love.

**Personality:** Gentle, obedient, innocent, fragile.

**Motivations:** Torn between loyalty to her father and love for Hamlet.

**Key Relationships:** Daughter of Polonius; sister of Laertes; love interest of Hamlet.

**Key Quote:** *I was the more deceived.*

**Simple English Translation:** I was fooled and betrayed.

**Analysis:** Ophelia is controlled by men in her life. Her madness and death symbolize corruption and betrayal.

## Learning Insights:

- Ophelia shows the limited choices for women.
- Her madness reveals the damage caused by betrayal.
- She is both victim and symbol of lost innocence.

**Student Reflection:** Do you see Ophelia as a victim or as someone with hidden strength?

# Polonius

**Role:** Lord Chamberlain, advisor to the King.

**Personality:** Pompous, meddling, loyal to Claudius.

**Motivations:** Wants power and influence for himself and his children.

**Key Relationships:** Father of Laertes and Ophelia; advisor to Claudius.

**Key Quote:** *To thine own self be true.*

**Simple English Translation:** Always be true to yourself.

**Analysis:** Polonius speaks in wise sayings but is a hypocrite. His meddling leads to his death.

**Learning Insights:**

- Polonius represents hypocrisy in politics.
- His spying worsens the conflict.
- He shows how pride can lead to downfall.

**Student Reflection:** Is Polonius a caring father or a selfish politician?

## Laertes

**Role:** Son of Polonius, brother of Ophelia.

**Personality:** Passionate, hot-tempered, impulsive.

**Motivations:** Family honor and revenge.

**Key Relationships:** Son of Polonius; brother of Ophelia.

**Key Quote:** *The king, the king's to blame.*

**Simple English Translation:** It's the King's fault!

**Analysis:** Laertes is a foil to Hamlet — he acts quickly, while Hamlet delays.

**Learning Insights:**

- Laertes highlights Hamlet's indecision.
- Quick action brings results, but also mistakes.
- He represents loyalty to family above all.

**Student Reflection:** Which approach is better: Laertes' quick action or Hamlet's hesitation?

## Horatio

**Role:** Hamlet's loyal friend.

**Personality:** Wise, calm, rational, loyal.

**Motivations:** Support Hamlet and tell his story.

**Key Relationships:** Best friend of Hamlet.

**Key Quote:** *Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince.*

**Simple English Translation:** A noble heart has broken. Farewell, Hamlet.

**Analysis:** Horatio is the voice of reason and survives to share Hamlet's story.

**Learning Insights:**

- Horatio shows the value of loyalty and reason.
- He survives because he avoids corruption.
- He ensures Hamlet's legacy is remembered.

**Student Reflection:** Why is Horatio the only main character left alive?

# The Ghost

**Role:** Spirit of King Hamlet.

**Personality:** Stern, commanding, vengeful.

**Motivations:** Wants Hamlet to avenge his murder.

**Key Relationships:** Father of Hamlet; brother of Claudius.

**Key Quote:** *Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.*

**Simple English Translation:** Avenge the evil and unnatural murder done to me.

**Analysis:** The ghost raises questions — is it real, or a devil tricking Hamlet?

**Learning Insights:**

- The Ghost pushes Hamlet into action.
- It represents justice but also revenge.
- It creates uncertainty — truth vs. deception.

**Student Reflection:** Should Hamlet trust the ghost?

## Rosencrantz & Guildenstern

**Role:** Hamlet's school friends, used by Claudius.

**Personality:** Friendly but shallow, easily manipulated.

**Motivations:** Seek royal favor by spying on Hamlet.

**Key Relationships:** Old friends of Hamlet; serve Claudius.

**Key Quote:** *My lord, you once did love me.*

**Simple English Translation:** Hamlet, you used to care about me.

**Analysis:** They show how loyalty can be corrupted by power.

**Learning Insights:**

- They represent betrayal among friends.
- They are pawns in Claudius' schemes.
- Their fate shows the cost of blind obedience.

**Student Reflection:** Are Rosencrantz & Guildenstern traitors or just foolish?

## Fortinbras

**Role:** Prince of Norway, foil to Hamlet.

**Personality:** Decisive, ambitious, action-driven.

**Motivations:** Wants to regain land lost by his father.

**Key Relationships:** Leads Norwegian army; compared to Hamlet.

**Key Quote:** *Witness this army of such mass and charge.*

**Simple English Translation:** Look at this huge army ready for battle.

**Analysis:** Fortinbras highlights Hamlet's indecision by contrast.

**Learning Insights:**

- Fortinbras acts quickly while Hamlet hesitates.
- He represents ambition and political strength.
- His survival contrasts the Danish downfall.

**Student Reflection:** Does Fortinbras' success make Hamlet look weak?

## The Gravediggers

**Role:** Comic relief, but deepen theme of death.

**Personality:** Humorous, blunt, down-to-earth.

**Motivations:** Just doing their job, even with death.

**Key Relationships:** Commoners, not tied to royalty.

**Key Quote:** *Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio.*

**Simple English Translation:** Oh, poor Yorick! I knew him once, Horatio.

**Analysis:** They remind the audience that death comes for all, noble or common.

**Learning Insights:**

- They provide humor in a dark play.
- They show equality of all in death.
- They help Hamlet reflect on mortality.

**Student Reflection:** Why does Shakespeare include comic gravediggers in a tragedy?

**THE END**

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