

Hamlet: Student Workbook

Core Dialogue Translation, Reflections & Notes

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Act I

Scene 1 — The Ghost Appears

Summary: On the castle walls at night, guards and Horatio see the ghost of the dead King Hamlet. It looks like the old king in armor but does not speak. They decide to tell Prince Hamlet.

Barnardo: Who's there?

Barnardo asks: Who is out there?

Francisco: Nay, answer me: stand, and unfold yourself.

Francisco says: You answer first. Say who you are.

[Enter Ghost]

The ghost of King Hamlet appears.

Horatio: Stay! speak, speak! I charge thee, speak!

Horatio commands the ghost to speak.

[Exit Ghost]

The ghost leaves without speaking.

Student Reflections

- What mood does the appearance of the ghost create?
- Why do the men decide to tell Hamlet about the ghost?
- How does the ghost's silence build suspense?

Notes for Students

Horatio says, "Stay! speak, speak! I charge thee, speak!"

Simple English: Horatio begs the ghost to speak.

→ This shows the men's desperation for answers and builds mystery.

The ghost looks like King Hamlet in armor

Simple English: The ghost wears armor like the dead king.

→ This suggests Denmark is facing war or unrest.

Scene 2 — Hamlet's Grief

Summary: Inside the palace, Claudius celebrates his marriage to Gertrude, Hamlet's mother. Hamlet is upset about the marriage and still mourning his father's death. Alone, he wishes he could die.

Claudius: Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen, have we... taken to wife.

Claudius explains he married his brother's widow, Queen Gertrude.

Hamlet (aside): A little more than kin, and less than kind.

Hamlet mutters: He is more than my uncle now, but not like a true father.

Gertrude: Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off...

Gertrude asks Hamlet to stop wearing black and grieving.

Hamlet: Seems, madam! Nay, it is; I know not 'seems'.

Hamlet insists his grief is real, not just an appearance.

Hamlet (alone): O, that this too too solid flesh would melt...

Hamlet wishes he could die and escape his pain.

Student Reflections

- How does Hamlet feel about his mother's marriage to Claudius?
- What do Hamlet's words reveal about his state of mind?
- Why does Hamlet wish to die in his soliloquy?

Notes for Students

Hamlet says, "Seems, madam! Nay, it is; I know not 'seems'.

Simple English: My grief is real, not just for show.

→ This shows Hamlet's honesty and isolation in mourning.

Hamlet says, "O, that this too too solid flesh would melt..."

Simple English: I wish my body could disappear.

→ This reveals Hamlet's despair and thoughts of suicide.

Scene 3 — Ophelia Warned

Summary: Laertes warns his sister Ophelia not to trust Hamlet's love, because as a prince, Hamlet cannot choose freely. Their father Polonius orders her to stay away from Hamlet.

Laertes: For Hamlet... his choice depends on Denmark's voice.

Laertes warns: Hamlet's marriage will be decided by politics, not love.

Polonius: Affection! pooh! you speak like a green girl.

Polonius mocks Ophelia: Love? Nonsense — you're being silly.

Polonius: Do not believe his vows.

Polonius warns: Don't trust Hamlet's promises of love.

Ophelia: I shall obey, my lord.

Ophelia agrees to obey her father.

Student Reflections

- Why do Laertes and Polonius mistrust Hamlet's love?
- What does this show about Ophelia's position in her family?
- How might this affect her relationship with Hamlet?

Notes for Students

Laertes says, "His choice depends on Denmark's voice."

Simple English: Hamlet's marriage is about politics, not love.

→ This shows how power controls personal choices.

Ophelia says, "I shall obey, my lord."

Simple English: I will obey you, father.

→ This highlights Ophelia's obedience and foreshadows her struggles.

Scene 4 — Hamlet Follows the Ghost

Summary: Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus see the ghost again. The ghost beckons Hamlet to follow. Despite warnings, Hamlet goes after it.

[Enter Ghost]

The ghost appears again.

Hamlet: Angels and ministers of grace defend us!

Hamlet is shocked and frightened by the ghost.

Horatio: What if it tempt you toward the flood...

Horatio warns: What if the ghost lures you to drown yourself?

Hamlet: It waves me forth again: I'll follow it.

Hamlet insists he must follow the ghost.

Horatio: What if it tempt you to destruction?

Horatio fears the ghost will lead Hamlet to his death.

Hamlet: I do not set my life at a pin's fee.

Hamlet says his life is worth little to him — he is not afraid to risk it.

Student Reflections

- Why does Hamlet follow the ghost, even though it may be dangerous?
- What does this reveal about Hamlet's state of mind?
- Would you have followed the ghost? Why or why not?

Notes for Students

Horatio warns, "What if it tempt you toward the flood..."

Simple English: What if it leads you to the sea to drown you?

→ This shows Horatio's rational caution.

Hamlet says, "I do not set my life at a pin's fee."

Simple English: My life isn't worth much to me.

→ This reveals Hamlet's despair and recklessness.

Scene 5 — The Ghost Speaks

Summary: The ghost finally speaks to Hamlet, revealing that Claudius murdered King Hamlet by pouring poison in his ear. The ghost commands Hamlet to take revenge but not to harm Gertrude. Hamlet swears to remember.

Ghost: I am thy father's spirit... Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.
[The ghost reveals he is Hamlet's father and demands revenge.](#)

Hamlet: Murder!
[Hamlet is shocked by the ghost's words.](#)

Ghost: The serpent that did sting thy father's life now wears his crown.
[The ghost says Claudius, the new king, killed him.](#)

Hamlet: O my prophetic soul! My uncle!
[Hamlet exclaims: I suspected it — my uncle is guilty!](#)

Ghost: Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive against thy mother.
[The ghost warns Hamlet not to hurt Gertrude.](#)

Hamlet: Remember thee! Ay, thou poor ghost...
[Hamlet swears never to forget the ghost's words.](#)

Student Reflections

- How does Hamlet react to the ghost's revelation?
- Why does the ghost forbid Hamlet from harming Gertrude?
- What does Hamlet's vow to remember show about him?

Notes for Students

The ghost says, "The serpent that did sting thy father's life now wears his crown."

[Simple English: The snake that killed your father is Claudius, now king.](#)

→ This confirms Claudius as the villain.

Hamlet cries, "O my prophetic soul! My uncle!"

[Simple English: I suspected it — my uncle is guilty.](#)

→ This shows Hamlet already feared Claudius was guilty.

The ghost says, "Taint not thy mind... against thy mother."

[Simple English: Do not harm your mother.](#)

→ This complicates Hamlet's revenge, focusing only on Claudius.

Act II

Scene 1 — Polonius and Ophelia

Summary: Polonius sends his servant Reynaldo to spy on Laertes in Paris. Ophelia rushes in, upset, saying Hamlet came to her acting strangely and looking mad. Polonius decides Hamlet's madness is caused by love for Ophelia.

Polonius: Put on him what forgeries you please...

Polonius tells Reynaldo to spy on Laertes by spreading small lies to test his reputation.

Ophelia: My lord, as I was sewing in my closet, Lord Hamlet... with his doublet all unbraced...

Ophelia describes Hamlet entering her room looking wild and disturbed.

Polonius: This is the very ecstasy of love.

Polonius declares Hamlet is mad because he loves Ophelia.

Student Reflections

- Why does Polonius want to spy on Laertes?
- How does Ophelia describe Hamlet's behavior?
- Why is Polonius quick to blame love for Hamlet's madness?

Notes for Students

Polonius says, "This is the very ecstasy of love."

Simple English: This madness comes from love.

→ Polonius often oversimplifies, showing how adults misread Hamlet.

Scene 2 — Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, Hamlet, and Players

Summary: Claudius asks Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to cheer Hamlet. Polonius reports Hamlet's madness comes from love. Hamlet mocks Polonius and questions his old friends. A group of traveling actors arrives. Hamlet asks them to perform a play that will mirror his father's murder, so he can test Claudius's guilt.

Claudius: Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern!

Claudius greets Hamlet's school friends and asks them to find out what troubles Hamlet.

Polonius: Your noble son is mad. Mad I call it...

Polonius insists Hamlet is insane because of his love for Ophelia.

Hamlet: You are welcome, masters; welcome, all...

Hamlet warmly greets the traveling actors.

Hamlet: What a rogue and peasant slave am I!

Hamlet calls himself a coward for not yet taking revenge.

Hamlet: The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.

Hamlet decides to use the actors' play to reveal Claudius's guilt.

Student Reflections

- Why does Claudius call for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern?
- How does Hamlet act toward Polonius?
- Why does Hamlet plan to use the play to test Claudius?

Notes for Students

Hamlet says, "What a rogue and peasant slave am I!"

Simple English: I feel useless and cowardly.

→ This shows Hamlet's self-hatred and struggle with inaction.

Hamlet says, "The play's the thing..."

Simple English: I'll use a play to trap Claudius's conscience.

→ This shows Hamlet's intelligence — he seeks proof before acting.

Act III

Scene 1 — 'To Be or Not to Be'

Summary: Claudius and Polonius use Ophelia to spy on Hamlet. Hamlet delivers his famous soliloquy about life and death. Hamlet then harshly rejects Ophelia, telling her to go to a convent. Claudius decides Hamlet must be sent away to England.

Hamlet: To be, or not to be: that is the question...

[Hamlet wonders if it is better to live and suffer, or die and face the unknown.](#)

Hamlet: To die, to sleep—no more... perchance to dream... ay, there's the rub.

[Hamlet fears what dreams may come after death.](#)

Hamlet: Get thee to a nunnery!

[Hamlet cruelly tells Ophelia to go to a convent and stay away from men.](#)

Claudius: Madness in great ones must not unwatch'd go.

[Claudius fears Hamlet's madness is dangerous and must be watched.](#)

Student Reflections

- What does Hamlet mean in his 'To be or not to be' soliloquy?
- Why does Hamlet tell Ophelia to go to a nunnery?
- What does Claudius realize about Hamlet?

Notes for Students

Hamlet says, "To be, or not to be..."

[Simple English: Should I live or kill myself?](#)

→ This shows Hamlet's deep despair and fear of the unknown.

Hamlet says, "Get thee to a nunnery."

[Simple English: Go to a convent — stay pure and away from men.](#)

→ This shows Hamlet's cruelty, but also distrust of women.

Claudius says, "Madness in great ones must not unwatch'd go."

[Simple English: Powerful people must be watched if they act mad.](#)

→ This shows Claudius now fears Hamlet.

Scene 2 — The Play Within the Play

Summary: Hamlet instructs the players how to act. During the play, Claudius reacts with guilt when the murder of a king is shown. Hamlet and Horatio are convinced of Claudius's guilt.

Hamlet: Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you...

Hamlet tells the actors to perform naturally, not overact.

Player King: In second husband let me be accurst...

The Player King says he would never remarry if his wife died.

Player Queen: Both here and hence pursue me lasting strife, If, once a widow, ever I be wife!

The Player Queen swears she will never remarry.

Hamlet: What do you call the play?

Hamlet slyly calls the play 'The Mousetrap'.

[Claudius rises in anger]

Claudius storms out, proving his guilt.

Hamlet: What, frightened with false fire?

Hamlet mocks Claudius for reacting to a play.

Hamlet: I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound!

Hamlet now believes the ghost — Claudius is guilty.

Student Reflections

- Why does Hamlet call the play 'The Mousetrap'?
- How does Claudius react to the play?
- Why does this confirm Hamlet's belief?

Notes for Students

Hamlet says, "Speak the speech..."

Simple English: Act naturally, not too much.

→ This shows Hamlet's intelligence and love of theater.

Hamlet says, "The play's the thing..."

Simple English: I'll use the play to test the king.

→ This shows Hamlet's cleverness in seeking proof.

Claudius storms out of the play.

Simple English: Claudius cannot hide his guilt.

→ This confirms Claudius killed King Hamlet.

Scene 3 — Claudius at Prayer

Summary: Claudius tries to pray, admitting his guilt for murdering King Hamlet. Hamlet sees Claudius alone and considers killing him, but decides not to because Claudius might go to heaven if killed while praying.

Claudius: O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven...

Claudius admits his crime is terrible and cries for forgiveness.

Hamlet: Now might I do it pat, now he is praying...

Hamlet considers killing Claudius while he prays.

Hamlet: And so he goes to heaven... No!

Hamlet decides not to kill Claudius during prayer.

Claudius: My words fly up, my thoughts remain below...

Claudius admits his prayer is worthless because he won't give up the crown.

Student Reflections

- Why does Hamlet refuse to kill Claudius while he is praying?
- What does Claudius admit in his prayer?
- What does this scene reveal about Hamlet's hesitation?

Notes for Students

Claudius says, "O, my offence is rank..."

Simple English: My crime is so bad heaven can smell it.

→ This shows Claudius knows he is guilty.

Hamlet says, "Now might I do it pat..."

Simple English: I could kill him now, but he might go to heaven.

→ This shows Hamlet's obsession with justice, not just revenge.

Claudius says, "My words fly up..."

Simple English: My prayers mean nothing without true repentance.

→ This shows Claudius is unwilling to repent.

Scene 4 — The Closet Scene

Summary: Hamlet confronts Gertrude about marrying Claudius. He kills Polonius, who is hiding behind the curtain. The ghost appears, reminding Hamlet to focus on revenge and not harm Gertrude. Gertrude is shaken by Hamlet's words.

Gertrude: Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

Gertrude says Hamlet has offended Claudius.

Hamlet: Mother, you have my father much offended.

Hamlet turns it back: She offended King Hamlet.

[Hamlet stabs Polonius behind the curtain]

Hamlet kills Polonius, thinking it might be Claudius.

Hamlet: Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!

Hamlet calls Polonius a meddling fool.

Hamlet: You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife...

Hamlet angrily condemns Gertrude for marrying Claudius.

[Enter Ghost]

The ghost appears, reminding Hamlet to focus on revenge, not his mother.

Hamlet: Do you see nothing there?

Hamlet asks Gertrude if she sees the ghost — she cannot.

Gertrude: Alas, he's mad!

Gertrude thinks Hamlet has gone insane.

Student Reflections

- Why does Hamlet kill Polonius?
- Why does the ghost appear in this scene?
- How does Gertrude react to Hamlet's words and actions?

Notes for Students

Hamlet says, "Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!"

Simple English: Nosy fool, goodbye!

→ This shows Hamlet's lack of remorse for killing Polonius.

Hamlet condemns Gertrude for marrying Claudius.

Simple English: You married your husband's brother.

→ This shows Hamlet's anger and sense of betrayal.

The ghost appears again.

Simple English: Remember revenge, not your mother.

→ This shows the ghost's guidance and Hamlet's distraction.

Act IV

Scene 1 — Gertrude and Claudius

Summary: Gertrude tells Claudius that Hamlet has killed Polonius. Claudius realizes Hamlet is dangerous and decides to send him away to England.

Gertrude: Mad as the sea and wind... In his lawless fit, behind the arras, hearing something stir, he whips his rapier out, and cries, 'A rat, a rat!' and in this brainish apprehension kills the unseen good old man.

Gertrude says Hamlet, in madness, killed Polonius behind the curtain.

Claudius: O heavy deed! It had been so with us, had we been there... His liberty is full of threats to all.

Claudius says Hamlet might have killed him and is now too dangerous to keep free.

Student Reflections

- Why is Claudius alarmed by Polonius's death?
- What does this show about Claudius's fear of Hamlet?

Notes for Students

Gertrude says Hamlet killed Polonius.

Simple English: Hamlet killed the old man by mistake.

→ This sets off the chain of events leading to tragedy.

Claudius says Hamlet's liberty is dangerous.

Simple English: Hamlet cannot be allowed freedom.

→ This shows Claudius's fear of Hamlet's unpredictability.

Scene 3 — Claudius Sends Hamlet Away

Summary: Claudius tells Hamlet he must go to England. Claudius secretly orders Hamlet's death there.

Claudius: Hamlet, this deed... cries out on the heavens... For England!

Claudius says Hamlet must go to England as punishment.

Hamlet: For England! Ay, sir, no matter what. Let come what comes...

Hamlet accepts going to England, but seems resigned or mocking.

Claudius: Do it, England; for like the hectic in my blood he rages... Till I know 'tis done, Howe'er my haps, my joys were ne'er begun.

Claudius sends a secret order for Hamlet's execution in England.

Student Reflections

- Why does Claudius want Hamlet sent to England?
- How does Claudius try to cover his true intentions?

Notes for Students

Claudius says, "Do it, England..."

Simple English: England must kill Hamlet for me.

→ This shows Claudius's determination to remove Hamlet.

Scene 5 — Ophelia's Madness

Summary: Ophelia, broken by Hamlet's rejection and her father's death, sings strange songs and behaves madly. Laertes returns, furious, demanding revenge for his father's death.

[Enter Ophelia, distracted]

Ophelia appears, singing and speaking nonsense.

Ophelia: They say the owl was a baker's daughter. Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be.

Ophelia rambles sadly — her mind is broken.

Laertes: O thou vile king, Give me my father!

Laertes storms in, accusing Claudius of killing Polonius.

Claudius: Let him come in. How dangerous is it that this man goes loose!

Claudius fears Laertes's anger, but tries to calm him.

Student Reflections

- How is Ophelia's madness shown through her songs?
- Why does Laertes suspect Claudius?
- How do grief and anger drive Laertes?

Notes for Students

Ophelia says, "Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be."

Simple English: We know who we are now, but not what we'll become.

→ This shows her broken thoughts and foreshadows death.

Laertes says, "Give me my father!"

Simple English: Give me justice for my father's death.

→ This shows his desire for revenge, like Hamlet's.

Scene 7 — Claudius and Laertes Plot

Summary: Claudius convinces Laertes that Hamlet killed Polonius. They plot together to kill Hamlet in a fencing match with a poisoned sword. Gertrude enters with news that Ophelia has drowned.

Claudius: What would you undertake, To show yourself your father's son in deed, More than in words?

[Claudius asks Laertes how far he'll go to prove his love for his father.](#)

Laertes: To cut his throat i' the church!

[Laertes swears he would even kill Hamlet in a church.](#)

Claudius: We'll put on those shall praise your excellence... and for your rapier most especially... I'll anoint my sword with poison.

[Claudius plans for Laertes to duel Hamlet with a poisoned sword.](#)

Gertrude: One woe doth tread upon another's heel... Your sister's drown'd, Laertes.

[Gertrude announces Ophelia has drowned.](#)

Student Reflections

- Why does Laertes agree to Claudius's plot?
- What does Laertes's rage show about him?
- How does Ophelia's death affect the mood of the play?

Notes for Students

Laertes says, "To cut his throat i' the church!"

[Simple English: I'd kill Hamlet even in a holy place.](#)

→ This shows his rage and thirst for revenge.

Gertrude says, "Your sister's drown'd, Laertes."

[Simple English: Ophelia has drowned.](#)

→ This tragedy pushes Laertes further into vengeance.

Act V

Scene 1 — The Graveyard

Summary: Two gravediggers joke about death as they dig Ophelia's grave. Hamlet reflects on death when he finds Yorick's skull. Ophelia's funeral arrives, and Hamlet declares his love for her as he argues with Laertes.

Gravedigger: What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?

The gravedigger jokes: A grave lasts longer than any building.

Hamlet: Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio...

Hamlet remembers Yorick the jester, now just a skull.

Hamlet: Imperious Caesar, dead and turn'd to clay...

Even great Caesar turned to dust and patched a wall.

Laertes: Hold off the earth awhile, Till I have caught her once more in mine arms...

Laertes leaps into Ophelia's grave, grieving for his sister.

Hamlet: I lov'd Ophelia: forty thousand brothers Could not, with all their quantity of love, Make up my sum.

Hamlet declares he loved Ophelia more than anyone.

Student Reflections

- What does Hamlet realize when he holds Yorick's skull?
- How does the graveyard scene show the theme of death and equality?
- Why do Hamlet and Laertes fight at Ophelia's grave?

Notes for Students

Hamlet says, "Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him."

Simple English: I knew Yorick, the jester — now just bones.

→ This shows Hamlet facing death's reality — everyone ends the same.

Hamlet says, "Imperious Caesar, dead and turn'd to clay."

Simple English: Even Caesar is dust now.

→ This shows that power and greatness mean nothing in death.

Hamlet says, "I lov'd Ophelia..."

Simple English: I loved her more than anyone.

→ This reveals Hamlet's true feelings, though too late.

Scene 2 — The Duel and Deaths

Summary: Hamlet tells Horatio how he rewrote Claudius's letter, sending Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths. Osric invites Hamlet to fence with Laertes. During the match, Laertes wounds Hamlet with a poisoned sword, but Hamlet also wounds Laertes. Gertrude drinks the poisoned cup meant for Hamlet. Laertes, Hamlet, and Claudius all die. Fortinbras arrives to take the throne.

Hamlet: There's a divinity that shapes our ends, Rough-hew them how we will...

[Hamlet says God shapes our destiny, no matter what we plan.](#)

Hamlet: There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow... The readiness is all.

[Hamlet accepts death comes when it will — we must be ready.](#)

Laertes: Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet...

[Laertes forgives Hamlet and asks Hamlet to forgive him as well.](#)

Hamlet: The king's to blame.

[Hamlet reveals Claudius as the murderer.](#)

Hamlet: The rest is silence.

[Hamlet's final words before dying.](#)

Horatio: Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince...

[Horatio mourns Hamlet as he dies.](#)

Student Reflections

- How has Hamlet's attitude toward death changed in this scene?
- Why do Hamlet and Laertes forgive each other at the end?
- What does Fortinbras's arrival suggest about power and fate?

Notes for Students

Hamlet says, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends..."

[Simple English: God directs our fate, even when we plan.](#)

→ This shows Hamlet's acceptance of destiny.

Hamlet says, "The readiness is all."

[Simple English: What matters is being ready for death.](#)

→ This shows Hamlet has grown — from fear to acceptance.

Laertes says, "Exchange forgiveness with me."

[Simple English: Forgive me, as I forgive you.](#)

→ This shows reconciliation in death.

Hamlet says, "The rest is silence."

[Simple English: I die now — silence follows.](#)

→ This is Hamlet's final acceptance of death.

Horatio says, "Good night, sweet prince."

[Simple English: Farewell, noble friend.](#)

→ This honors Hamlet as tragic but noble.

The End