

William Shakespeare

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark



free Audiobook



William Shakespeare

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

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First edition: January 2016

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ISBN 978-88-530-1552-5

Printed in Italy by Litoprint, Genoa

Contents



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE		4
CHAPTER ONE	A ghost at Elsinore	11
CHAPTER TWO	Forbidden love	21
CHAPTER THREE	Friends or spies?	36
CHAPTER FOUR	A play to catch a king	47
CHAPTER FIVE	Mistaken identity	59
CHAPTER SIX	Hamlet's punishment	69
CHAPTER SEVEN	The return of Laertes	83
CHAPTER EIGHT	Bitter revenge!	96
DOSSIERS	Revenge in Elizabethan Drama	30
	London in Shakespeare's times	78
CINEMA	<i>Hamlet</i> on the screen	106
ACTIVITIES	10, 16, 20, 26, 35, 42, 46, 54, 58, 65, 68, 74, 82, 90, 95, 103	
AFTER READING		110
FIRST	FIRST-style activities	19, 26, 29, 45, 54, 56, 57, 58, 67, 76, 77, 90, 92, 93, 105
T: GRADE 7	Trinity-style activities (Grade 7)	29, 77



These symbols indicate the beginning and end of the passages linked to the listening activities.



William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was born in the Warwickshire market town of Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564. Although the exact date of his birth is not known for certain, his birthday is traditionally celebrated on the 23 April, which is also known to be the date of his death.

William was one of eight children and the oldest son. His father, John Shakespeare, was a successful businessman and an important member of the community. In 1568 he became a chief magistrate – an official similar to a judge who works in local courts. William's mother, Mary Arden, was a wealthy farmer's daughter. William probably attended King Edward VI School, the local grammar school, but we cannot be completely sure of this because the school records have not survived. In those days pupils at grammar schools studied plays in Latin and sometimes performed them too. After leaving school at the age of fourteen, they often went to university if their family could afford it. There is no evidence, however, that William did.

Little is known about Shakespeare's early life. Records show that, a few years after leaving school, he married a local girl called Anne Hathaway in November 1582. He was eighteen and Anne was twenty-six. Just six months later, on 26 May 1583 their first child, Susanna, was born. Three years after that in 1585 Anne had twins: a boy Hamnet, who died aged 11, and a girl Judith.

The seven years of Shakespeare's life after the birth of the twins are known as 'The Lost Years' because there are no records of what he was doing. Some people think that he spent the time travelling around England or even to foreign countries. Other people have suggested that he worked as a teacher in the north of England, but there is no evidence to support this. Although these years of Shakespeare's life are a mystery, we know that by 1592 he was living and working in London. He had managed to establish himself as an actor and playwright, and had already written *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Henry VI Parts I, II & III*, and *Titus Andronicus*. When the theatres were closed in 1593 because of the plague,¹ Shakespeare wrote poetry instead of plays. He chose Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton, a rich young courtier² and a favourite of Queen Elizabeth, as his patron³ and dedicated two long narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, to him. He probably started to write the sonnets about this time as well, although they were not published until 1609.

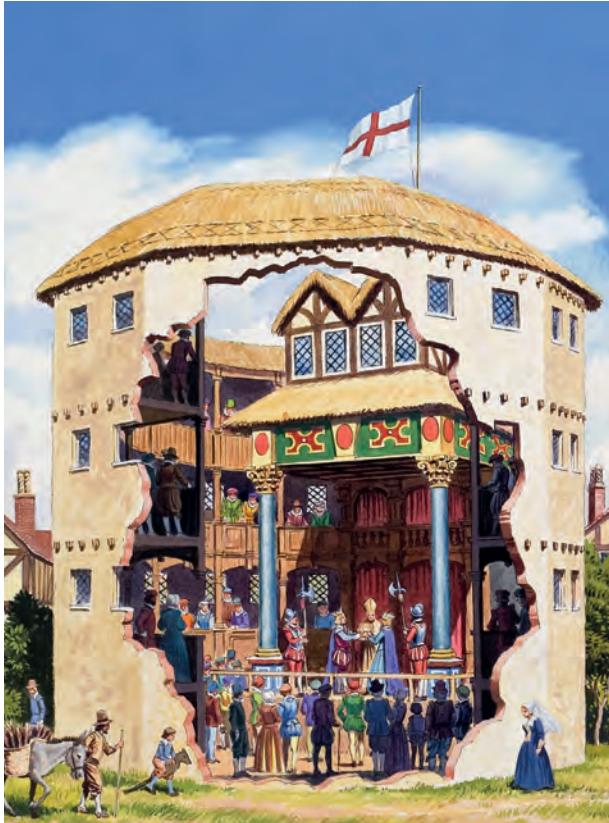


Henry Wriothesley (1573-1624) in a portrait of about 1600.

1. **plague** : disease that spreads quickly and usually ended in death in the past.

2. **courtier** : someone at the court of a king or queen.

3. **patron** : someone who supports the work of artists, writers, musicians etc. especially by giving them money.



A typical Elizabethan theatre.

In 1594, when the theatres re-opened and the acting companies were able to start performing again, Shakespeare became a founding member,⁴ actor, playwright and part owner of the Lord Chamberlain's Men (renamed the King's Men when James I came to the throne in 1603). With extremely talented actors like Will Kempe, who played comic and female roles, and Richard Burbage, considered to be the best tragic actor in those years, the company quickly became a favourite of the theatre-going public in London. They performed

mainly at well-established theatres like the Swan, the Curtain, and the Theatre, but they were also in great demand at the royal court, where they performed more often than any other company. In 1599 the Lord Chamberlain's Men built their own theatre on the south bank of the river Thames. It was called the Globe and it was the most magnificent theatre the people of London had ever seen. Ten years later they bought the Blackfriars, an indoor theatre, where the company, now called the King's Men, performed in the winter months.

Shakespeare was a good businessman and knew how to manage his money. In 1597, when he was only thirty-three, he had made enough money to buy the second largest house in Stratford – New Place – for his family and his parents. Later on he bought more land in Stratford.

4. **founding member** : one of the people who was a member of a group when it first started.

At some time between the opening of the Globe in 1599 and 1602, Shakespeare wrote *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, or *Hamlet* as it is generally known. There are no references to early performances of the play, but if it was written around 1600, it is most likely that it was first performed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men at the Globe. The role of Hamlet was almost certainly played by Richard Burbage, for whom Shakespeare wrote the part.

Like the manuscripts of all of Shakespeare's other works, the original playscript⁵ of *Hamlet* was never published. However, several versions of it based on transcripts⁶ that were made during or after the performances started to appear in 1603 and were sold without Shakespeare's permission. These unofficial playscripts of Shakespeare's plays are called quarto editions. Then in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, two actors and friends of Shakespeare from the King's Men published a collection of 36 of his plays (including *Hamlet*) in a volume that is known as the First Folio. It is the version of *Hamlet* from the First Folio that is usually used for performances today, although some parts from a second quarto (1604) are often included. At the time of the publication of the First Folio, there were four *Hamlet* quartos (appearing in 1603, 1604/05, 1611, and 1622). A fifth and final quarto of the play appeared in 1637.

In 1611 Shakespeare, by then a rich man, decided to retire. He sold his part in the Globe Theatre and returned to Stratford, where he spent the next five years with his family. He died on the 23rd of April, 1616, at the age of 52, and was buried at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford. His wife, Anne, died in 1623 and was buried next to him. The Shakespeare family line came to an end with the death of his granddaughter Elizabeth in 1670.

1 Comprehension check

Answer the questions.

- 1 How many plays had Shakespeare written before 1592?
- 2 Why were the London theatres closed in 1593?
- 3 Who was Richard Burbage?
- 4 When did Shakespeare write *Hamlet*?
- 5 What are the quarto editions of Shakespeare's plays?

5. **playscript** : written version of a play.

6. **transcripts** : written copies.

The Characters



From left to right: Prince Hamlet, Ophelia, Horatio, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the ghost of King Hamlet, Laertes, Polonius, Queen Gertrude, King Claudius.



Before you read**1 Vocabulary**

Match the words (1-6) to the pictures (A-F). Use your dictionary if necessary.

1 armour

3 battlements

5 Great Hall

2 banquet

4 coronation

6 helmet



A



B



C



D



E



F

2 Reading pictures

Look at the picture on page 15. Answer the questions.

- 1 What time of day is it?
- 2 Which characters can you see in the picture?
- 3 What has just happened?
- 4 What is going to happen next?

**3 Listening**

Listen to the beginning of Chapter One and look at the sentences below. You will hear about some recent events at Elsinore Castle, home of Hamlet. Decide if each sentence is correct (A) or incorrect (B).

A B

- 1 Hamlet was at Elsinore when his father died.
- 2 Hamlet isn't happy about his mother's second marriage.
- 3 Denmark is planning to attack Norway.
- 4 Laertes would like to return to France.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



CHAPTER ONE

A ghost at Elsinore

O

If King Hamlet of Denmark was dead. His death had been sudden and unexpected, so his son, Prince Hamlet, had not been with him. He was at university in Wittenberg when it happened. As soon as he received the news, he hurried back to be with his mother, Queen Gertrude. Hamlet had loved and respected his father very much and he was deeply upset. However, he was only allowed a little time to mourn¹ his father. Less than two months after King Hamlet's death, Gertrude remarried. The new king was called Claudius and he was the old king's brother and Hamlet's uncle.



Hamlet was shocked by his mother's decision. How could she marry again so soon? It wasn't right. It was an insult to the memory of his father. Even worse, she had married his uncle Claudius! Hamlet didn't approve of that at all! He refused to join in the wedding celebrations and continued to dress in black to show that he, at least, was still in mourning. As the days passed he became more and more silent and withdrawn.² On the day of the king's first official meeting with the members of his court in the Great Hall, he stood in a corner by himself. He had no interest at all in listening to Claudius.

1. **mourn** : feel very sad because someone has died.
2. **withdrawn** : very quiet and preferring not to talk to other people.

When the huge doors were finally closed, Claudius stood up and began his speech.

‘My brother was a good king,’ he said. ‘We all miss him. But life goes on and we can’t mourn him forever.’ He turned to the queen with a smile and continued.

‘I decided to marry Gertrude because I know it’s what you all wanted.’

There was a short pause before everyone clapped politely.

‘Thank you,’ the king said. ‘Now, let’s get down to business. The Norwegians are still causing trouble. Young Prince Fortinbras keeps threatening to attack Denmark if we don’t give him back the land that my dead brother took from his father. Well, the threats of that young man don’t frighten me! I’ve written a letter to his uncle, the king of Norway, demanding that he puts a stop to his nephew’s plans for once and for all. Cornelius and Voltemand! I’m giving you two the job of delivering it. Here it is. You can leave immediately!’

The two courtiers went up to the king, took the letter and hurried away.

‘Now, Laertes,’ Claudius went on. ‘I believe you have a favour to ask. Is that right?’

Laertes was the son of Polonius, the Lord Chamberlain.³

‘Yes, my lord,’ replied the young man. ‘I’d like to return to France to continue my education. My father ordered me to come back to Denmark for your coronation. I have done my duty, so now I’m asking for your permission to leave.’

‘What does your father say?’ said Claudius turning to his Lord Chamberlain. ‘Polonius! Will you let him go?’

‘He’s asked me so many times, my lord, that in the end I have agreed.’

‘In that case, you may go, Laertes. Now, where’s Hamlet? I have something to say to him.’

‘I’m here, sir.’

‘Hamlet! Still looking miserable!’ Claudius said, rather impatiently. ‘You can’t spend your whole life mourning, you know. Everyone has to die sooner or later.’

‘Claudius is right, Hamlet,’ said Gertrude. ‘It’s time to take off those black clothes.’

‘And as for going back to Wittenberg, I don’t think it’s a good idea,’ said Claudius. ‘Both I and your mother want you to stay here, don’t we, Gertrude?’

3. **Lord Chamberlain** : official in charge of the royal household.



end

A ghost at Elsinore

‘Yes, Hamlet. Please say you’ll stay.’

‘If you ask me to, mother, then I must obey you,’ replied Hamlet.

‘Good! That’s decided, then,’ said Claudius. ‘Business is finished for today. Come on, Gertrude.’

The king and queen, followed by all the courtiers, left the Great Hall and Hamlet was left alone with his thoughts.

‘I’d prefer to be dead!’ he cried. ‘Life has no meaning any more. I can’t believe it! My father’s only been dead for two months and my mother’s already married again! Oh, women are so weak! Even an animal would have mourned for longer. And she’s married Claudius! A man who is the exact opposite of my father! How could she? It’s sure to end badly.’

Just at that moment, the door opened and Horatio, his old friend from university, came in. There were two castle guards with him.

‘Horatio!’ Hamlet exclaimed, a smile brightening his face for once. ‘How good to see you! But why aren’t you in Wittenberg?’

‘I wanted to come to your father’s funeral, Hamlet.’

‘My mother’s wedding, you mean,’ replied Hamlet bitterly.

‘It’s true. There wasn’t much time between them.’

‘They were so close together that we ate the leftovers⁴ from the funeral at the wedding banquet!’

‘Your father was a great king,’ said Horatio.

‘He was a perfect human being,’ said Hamlet, sinking back into melancholy.⁵ ‘I’ll never know a man like him again.’

‘Hamlet, I have to tell you something,’ said Horatio very seriously. ‘I think I saw him last night.’

‘Who? My father?’

Hamlet’s melancholic expression quickly turned to one of shock, then suspicion.

‘Is this a joke, Horatio? My father’s dead.’

‘Calm down and I’ll explain everything.’

Horatio took hold of his friend’s arm and, as they walked around the Great Hall, he told him what had happened.

‘Those two guards over there told me they had seen a ghost while they were

4. **leftovers** : food remaining at the end of a meal.

5. **melancholy** : sadness.



CHAPTER ONE

keeping watch. They begged me to come and see it for myself. I didn't believe them at first, but I went. And I saw it too! It was your father, Hamlet. He was wearing his armour and helmet. I asked him if he wanted to give me a message, but he didn't say anything. I'm sure he'll speak to you, though.'

Hamlet had turned very pale and was trembling with fear.

'I'll keep watch with you tonight,' he said making a great effort to overcome his emotion. 'Maybe the ghost will come back. If it does, I'll speak to it.'

That night Hamlet and Horatio joined the guards on the battlements.

'This is when it usually appears,' said Horatio quietly.

The castle clock was striking twelve when they saw a pale glow⁶ in the darkness. It was moving silently towards them. It was the ghost! As it got nearer, Hamlet recognised his father's helmet. He was terrified.

'Father?' he managed to say. 'Is that you? What do you want?'

The ghost beckoned⁷ to him.

'He wants you to follow him, Hamlet,' whispered Horatio.

'Don't go, sir!' one of the guards said. 'It's too dangerous!'

'I must go. It's my father and he wants to say something to me,' replied Hamlet following the ghost into the darkness.

When they were alone together the ghost spoke.

'I am your father's ghost,' it said. 'But I will suffer and will not be able to rest in peace until the wrongs done to me are put right.'

'Wrongs? What do you mean?'

'If you love me, Hamlet...'

'Of course I do. With all my heart!'

'... then you must avenge⁸ my murder!'

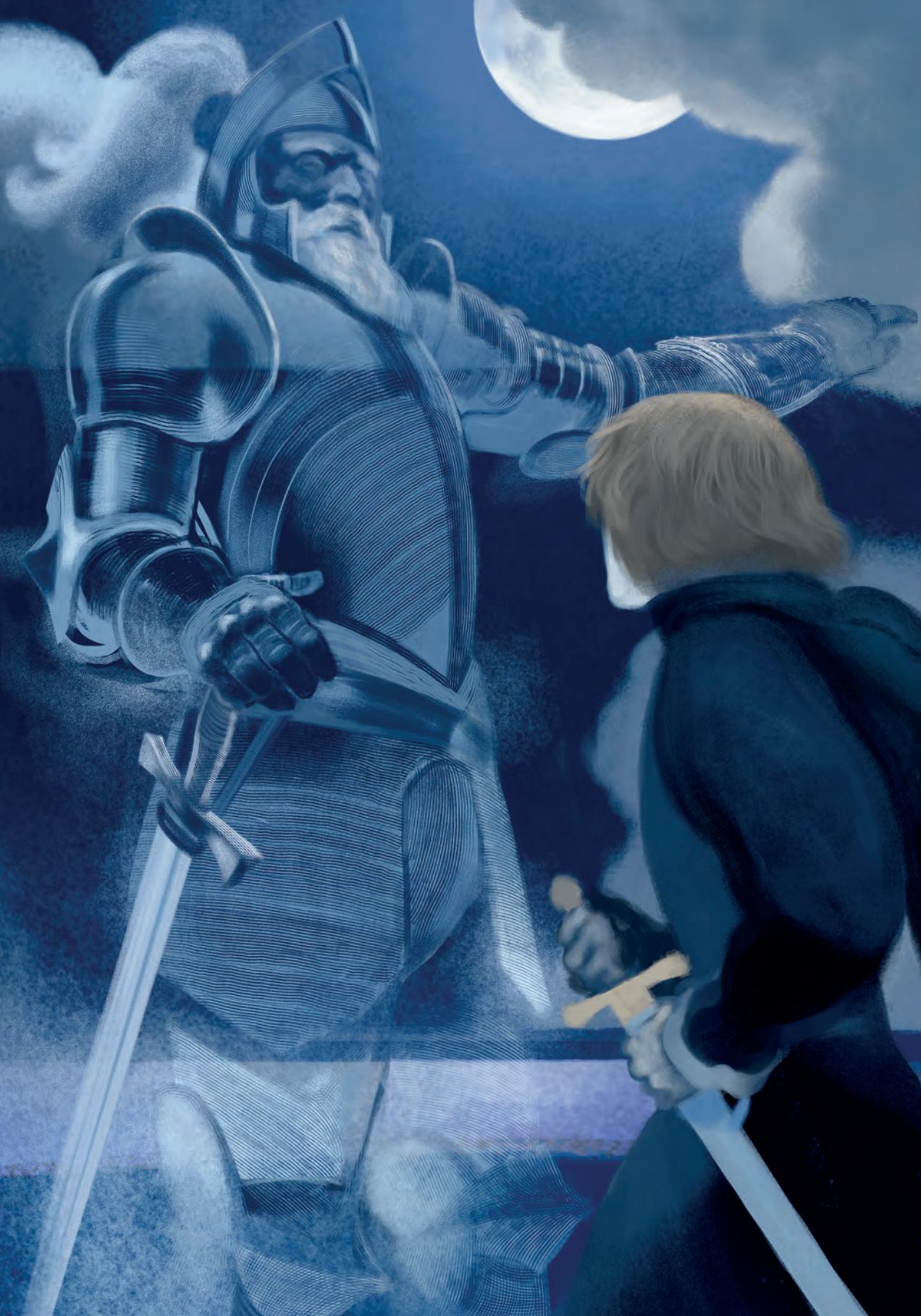
Hamlet's blood froze.

'They told you a poisonous snake bit me, but it isn't true,' the ghost went on. 'The snake was my own brother, who was in love with the queen and wanted to have her and my kingdom. While I was sleeping in the garden, he poured poison in my ear and killed me. I was murdered without a chance to say goodbye to you. Avenge my death, Hamlet! The sun will rise soon and I must go now. Goodbye! Goodbye! Remember me!'

6. **glow** : soft light.

7. **beckoned** : made a sign for someone to come nearer.

8. **avenge** : punish a person responsible for something bad done to you.



The text and **beyond**

1 Comprehension check

Match the beginnings of the sentences (1-6) to the endings (A-F).

- 1 Two months after old King Hamlet died
- 2 Claudius gave his permission for
- 3 Hamlet couldn't understand why
- 4 Horatio saw the old king's ghost but
- 5 Hamlet was afraid when
- 6 His father's ghost told Hamlet that

- A his mother had married again so soon.
- B he had been poisoned by his brother.
- C his wife married his brother Claudius.
- D it didn't say anything to him.
- E Laertes to return to France.
- F the ghost told him to avenge his murder.

2 Reference

Who, what or when do the underlined words refer to? Write the answers in the spaces (1-6) below the sentences.

- 1 Claudius: 'We all miss him.'
- 2 Claudius: 'Will you let him go?'
- 3 Horatio: 'There wasn't much time between them.'
- 4 Hamlet: 'He was a perfect human being.'
- 5 Horatio: 'This is when it usually appears.'
- 6 Ghost: 'While I was sleeping in the garden, he poured poison in my ear and killed me.'

1	3	5
2	4	6

3 Characters

Work with a partner. Decide together which adjective in the list best describes the character. Choose one word only.

- 1 Hamlet: arrogant • brave • cheerful • rude • sensitive
- 2 Claudius: ambitious • jealous • patient • realistic • selfish
- 3 Laertes: creative • determined • easy-going • independent • shy

My father ordered me to come back to Denmark for your coronation.

Look at these common verb patterns:

1 verb + to + infinitive

Hamlet refused to join in the wedding celebrations.

2 verb + object + to + infinitive

Gertrude wanted Hamlet to stay at Elsinore.

3 verb + -ing form

Young Prince Fortinbras keeps threatening to attack Denmark.

4 verb + object + infinitive without to

'Will you let him go back to France?' Claudius asked Polonius.

4 Verb patterns

Look at the verbs below. Which pattern do they follow? Add them to the correct column in the table. Some verbs can follow more than one pattern. Use your dictionary if necessary.

agree allow ask decide enjoy expect help hope make (not) mind
offer persuade practise seem spend time stop suggest tell

1 verb + to + infinitive (refuse to do)	2 verb + object + to + infinitive (want somebody to do)	3 verb + -ing form (keep doing)	4 verb + object + infinitive without to (let somebody do)

5 Gap filling

Complete the text with appropriate verbs from exercise 4 in the correct form. There is an example at the beginning (0).

Two months after the old king's death, his brother Claudius (0)asked..... Queen Gertrude to marry him. Gertrude (1) waiting a bit longer, but Claudius eventually (2) her to agree. Prince Hamlet (3) not to attend the wedding because he disapproved of the marriage. He also (4) to (5) wearing mourning clothes even after the wedding. He never joined in the festivities at court preferring instead to (6) his time reading. The Lord Chamberlain's son Laertes was different. He (7) being active and was good with his sword. He (8) to return to France and was happy when the king gave him permission to go.

6 Word formation

Complete the table with the verbs from which the nouns are made.

Verb	Noun	Verb	Noun
1 act	action	11	education
2	appreciation	12	explanation
3	celebration	13	expression
4	competition	14	hesitation
5	conclusion	15	information
6	confession	16	invitation
7	confirmation	17	permission
8	conversation	18	reaction
9	coronation	19	satisfaction
10	decision	20	suspicion

7 Words in context

Complete the sentences with nouns or verbs from exercise 6 in the correct form. There is an example at the beginning (0).

- 0 Some children don't go to school but are educated at home by their parents.
- 1 Thank you so much for the advice you gave me. I really it.
- 2 In 1509 Henry VIII was king in Westminster Abbey. He was 18.
- 3 The politician her speech by thanking all the people who had voted for her.
- 4 Peter was arrested on of murder.
- 5 I could see from the on Pat's face that she wasn't pleased.

8 Opposites

These words (1-10) are all in Chapter One. Match them with their opposites (A-J).

1	<input type="checkbox"/>	dangerous	A	happy
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	dead	B	wrong
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	huge	C	noisy
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	less	D	safe
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	miserable	E	tranquil
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	pale	F	strong
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	right	G	alive
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	silent	H	more
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	upset	I	dark
10	<input type="checkbox"/>	weak	J	minute

9 FIRST Open cloze

Read the text and think of a word which best fits each gap. Use only one word in each gap. There is an example at the beginning (0).

Richard Burbage – the first Hamlet

Hamlet has rarely been off the stage in the 400 years (0) *since* it was written. The first performances in the early 1600s were at the Globe Theatre, (1) the south bank of the river Thames, with Richard Burbage in the leading role.

The son of the actor, theatre manager and owner James Burbage, Richard was a member of the Earl of Leicester's acting company, which later changed (2) name to the Lord Chamberlain's Men and eventually became the King's Men in 1603. He was considered the greatest Elizabethan actor of the time. His acting style was similar to the 'method' actors of today: he *became* the character he was playing. His influence on Shakespeare is not certain (3) it is generally believed that the playwright wrote the tragedies *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Hamlet* with Burbage in mind as the leading actor. At a time when there were (4) few dramatic roles that required the actor to memorize more than several hundred lines, Shakespeare regularly wrote parts for him with thousands of lines. *Hamlet* is still the record holder in this category, as the lead actor must learn more than 4,000 lines, or almost 30,000 words, for the part.

In 1597 Richard's father, James Burbage, died and left him and his brother Cuthbert two theatres — Blackfriars and the Theatre. When the rental contract for the site of the Theatre ran (5) in late 1598, the Burbages, together (6) some assistants, took it down piece by piece, carried the materials across the Thames and rebuilt it. The finished structure was named the Globe and (7) of the investors in the new theatre was William Shakespeare.

Richard Burbage died on 13 March 1619, and is buried in St Leonard's Church, Shoreditch, (8) this short but witty epitaph¹ was engraved on his tomb: Exit Burbage.



1. **epitaph** : short piece of writing honouring a dead person.

Before you read

1 Vocabulary

Choose the correct definition – A, B, or C – of the underlined word in the sentences.

- 1 'Don't let Hamlet's words of love deceive you!' Laertes told his sister Ophelia.
'His feelings for you won't last.'
- A trick B worry C frighten
- 2 Ophelia was flattered by the attention Hamlet had paid her and thought he loved her.
- A upset B pleased C confused
- 3 Hamlet paced anxiously up and down the room trying to decide what to do.
- A swam B walked C jumped
- 4 Ophelia wasn't concentrating on her sewing and pricked her finger with her needle.
- A hurt B broke C bent

2 Prediction

Before Laertes left for France, Polonius gave him some advice. Read the sentences below and tick [✓] the advice you think he gave his son.

- 1 Don't be too friendly with people.
- 2 Try not to start fights.
- 3 Talk to as many people as you can.
- 4 Only buy good quality clothes.
- 5 Lend your friends money if they need it.

Check your ideas after you've read Chapter Two.



3 Listening

Listen to the beginning of Chapter Two. You will hear a conversation between Laertes and his sister Ophelia. Decide if each sentence is correct (A) or incorrect (B).

	A B
1 Laertes doesn't care about his father's reputation at court.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
2 Ophelia is older than Laertes.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
3 Ophelia promises to write to Laertes often.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
4 Ophelia has no chance of becoming queen.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>