



PERFORMING  
ARTS SOCIETY  
OF ACADIANA

OCTOBER 11  
2005

[www.pasa-online.org](http://www.pasa-online.org)

BACKSTAGE PASS

STUDENT GUIDE

## All About Aquila

Want to know more about **Aquila Theatre**, the touring company which will present *Hamlet* to PASA's audiences? Here's what the artistic director, Peter Meineck, says, "...Aquila believes that the greatest works should be seen by the greatest number."

"That means that Aquila performances are always interestingly costumed and staged, with obvious current fashion trends," says PASA executive director Jackie Lyle, "And while the performances might differ visually from classic portrayals, Aquila's mastery of the Shakespearean literature is world-class. The combination of British and American theatrical techniques makes Aquila performances easy to understand and entertaining."

A few other things to know about Aquila Theatre Company:

- The company was founded in 1991
- Although Aquila was originally headquartered in London, it is now based in New York City
- Each year Aquila's touring company visits between sixty and seventy American cities, as well as an annual New York season
- Although Aquila Theatre presents classical plays, it strives to make them accessible to modern audiences
- In addition to presenting performances, Aquila Theatre conducts a number of educational programs and theater-training workshops

**AQUILA  
THEATRE  
COMPANY**

# WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S HAMLET

**No.1**  
IN A SERIES

William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* just may be the most famous play in the English language. Aquila Theatre Acting Company illuminates this vitally important milestone tragedy in which Hamlet struggles between moral integrity and the need to avenge his father's murder. Exciting, innovative, and accessible, The *New York Times* says that Aquila "makes Shakespeare perfectly comprehensible." Aquila's modern production of *Hamlet* should not be missed.

## HAPPENINGS IN HAMLET

### The Aquila Theatre Company Summary

Hamlet is away at University when he hears that his father, the King of Denmark, has suddenly died, and his mother, Gertrude, has married his Uncle Claudius. He is recalled to Denmark where he seethes, consumed with grief and anger. Haunted by the ghost of his father, Hamlet becomes obsessed with the idea that his uncle murdered his father and that his mother has been disloyal, and that he must avenge his father's death. His strange behavior at court leads to his family believing that his love for Ophelia is driving him to distraction. When Hamlet has a traveling group of actors perform a scene that closely resembles the murder of his father, Claudius arranges to have him sent to England and killed.



The plan is thwarted and in the mean time Ophelia, confused, heartbroken and bereft of her father Polonius - who has been accidentally killed by Hamlet - drowns herself. Claudius convinces her brother Laertes to challenge Hamlet to a duel, and the play concludes with a frantic swordfight laced with poisoned wine and the tragic deaths of Laertes, Claudius, Gertrude and Hamlet.

**The Twenty-Five  
Words or Less  
SUMMARY**

**Hamlet sees a ghost, fears his mother and uncle are criminals, arranges for a guilt-inducing play, and outwits his family and friends.**

**Many people die.**

# SPEAKING SHAKESPEARE STYLE

Shakespeare's characters speak in a form of English that we no longer use, so many people have trouble understanding his plays when they first begin reading them. It is important to remember, however, that if a character from one of Shakespeare's plays would enter our world, they too would hear many things they would not understand.

Examine these famous lines from Hamlet below. Then try to match the Shakespearian quote on the left with its "interpretation" on the right. Practice makes perfect when learning to speak like Shakespeare. Try this out and see how foreign our own language can sound.

## WHAT IT SAYS

1. \_\_\_\_\_ My lord, he hath importuned me with love in an honorable fashion.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Though this be madness, yet there is method in't.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ The play's the thing, wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ To be, or not to be, that is the question.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?
7. \_\_\_\_\_ The lady doth protest too much, me thinks.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ My word fly up, but my thoughts remain below. Words without thoughts never to heaven go.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Is she to be buried in a Christian burial when she willfully seeks her own salvation?
10. \_\_\_\_\_ Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio: a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy.

## WHAT IT MEANS

- A. Queen Gertrude feels that the actress playing the queen in "The Mouse-trap" is too dramatic.
- B. Ophelia assures her father that Hamlet has flirted with her in an honorable fashion.
- C. Hamlet decides to use a play (based on the suspected murder of a king) to determine if Claudius is guilty of killing Hamlet's father.
- D. Hamlet tells Horatio about the great court jester Yorick (whose skull he is holding in his hand. Hamlet believes that Yorick is one of the few people in his life who has spoken only the truth to him.
- E. A grave-digger wonders why Ophelia will be buried in the church-yard if she committed suicide. He reasons that she must be well-connected to get such special treatment.
- F. Polonius believes that Hamlet may be faking insanity because he seems odd at some times and normal at others.
- G. Hamlet tries to decide whether it is better to live and suffer or die and end his pain.
- H. Marcellus expresses his belief that something suspicious is going on in Denmark.
- I. Hamlet offends Ophelia by suggesting she become a nun rather than marrying and having imperfect children.
- J. Claudius prays, but is not entirely truthful, and then says "My words rise up, but my thoughts remain here on earth. Words spoken without sincerity seldom reach heaven."

See last page for answers.

## WHO'S WHO in HAMLET

### HAMLET

The Prince of Denmark, the title character, and the protagonist. He is the son of Queen Gertrude and the late King Hamlet, and the nephew of the present king, Claudius. Hamlet is thoughtful, emotional, and his moods change often.

### CLAUDIUS

The King of Denmark, Hamlet's uncle, and the play's antagonist. Claudius wants power and will do anything to get it.

### GERTRUDE

The Queen of Denmark, Hamlet's mother, recently married to Claudius. Gertrude loves Hamlet deeply, but she is a shallow, weak woman who seeks affection and social status more urgently than morals or truth.

### POLONIUS

The Lord Chamberlain of Claudius's court; this man is a schemer. Polonius is the father of Laertes and Ophelia.

### HORATIO

Hamlet's close friend, who studied with the prince at the university in Wittenberg. Horatio is loyal and helpful to Hamlet throughout the play. After Hamlet's death, Horatio remains alive to tell Hamlet's story.

### OPHELIA

Polonius's daughter, a beautiful young woman with whom Hamlet has been in love. Ophelia is a sweet and innocent young girl, who obeys her father and her brother, Laertes. She is confused by her feelings for Hamlet and her family's request that she spy on him. Many see Ophelia as having little motivation of her own, instead she is manipulated by men.

### LAERTES

Polonius's son and Ophelia's brother. Laertes is passionate and quick to act. Laertes is often seen as the polar opposite of the reflective Hamlet.

### FORTINBRAS

The young Prince of Norway, whose father the king (also named Fortinbras was killed by Hamlet's father (also named Hamlet)). Now Fortinbras wishes to attack Denmark to avenge his father's honor.

### THE GHOST

The specter of Hamlet's recently deceased father. The ghost, who claims to have been murdered by Claudius, calls upon Hamlet to avenge him.

### ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN

The play's comic relief, these former friends of Hamlet from the University of Wittenberg are summoned by Claudius and Gertrude to discover the cause of Hamlet's strange behavior.

### OSRIC, VOLTIMAND, CORNELIUS, MARCELLUS, BERNARDO, FRANCISCO AND REYNALDO

Various soldiers and messengers.



### ARISTOTLE'S POETICS

## A Definition for Tragedy

Centuries before Shakespeare ever wrote, the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote a treatise called *Ars Poetica*. Aristotle separated all plays into one of two types: comedy or tragedy. Comedies were meant to be funny (and sometimes even silly) and tragedies were meant not just to be sad but to teach lessons about life. Although later writers and thinkers have argued that Aristotle was too strict when he defined tragedy, his definition is still in use. Several components of Aristotle's formula for tragedy are shown here. Consider these when you see *Hamlet* presented onstage. Some scholars have argued that *Hamlet* is one of the most perfect examples of a tragedy ever written. What do you think?

### According to Aristotle. . .

#### Imitates life

(i.e. "Keeps it real")

#### + Universal

(Deals with feelings and situations that everyone, everywhere knows about or can understand)

#### + Pity and Fear

(Arousing pity and fear in the audience, they understand what the main character is going through and feel sorry for them, but at the same time they don't want to be them and fear what would happen to them if...)

#### + Leads to catharsis

(a purging and purification of the spirit)

# TRAGEDY



## Modern Theater vs. Shakespeare's Theater:

### A Breakdown of Performance Practices

SHAKESPEARE'S TIME	MODERN TIMES
Shakespeare's theater, The Globe, was round, three stories high, and had a thatched roof that was open in the center.	Modern audiences do not like to be rained on while watching plays. Theaters tend to be square or rectangular one-story buildings with tiers of seats. Modern theater-goers often dress up to attend performances, and expect a full roof to protect them from the weather.
Acting was NOT a respectable profession in Shakespeare's day. The Globe theater was built in a part of London called "The Liberties" near pubs, brothels, and other unsavory places.	Acting is a respectable profession – and a likely way to get your picture on the cover of many magazines.
Women could NOT appear onstage. Instead, a young boy or a specially trained male actor took a female part.	Audiences like women to look and sound their best, so with a few exceptions, women play women's parts.
Religious groups objected to the content of some plays.	Some things never change.
Nobles who attended performances could sit on the stage and view the action up close.	Nope, not any more. The stage is now strictly for the actors.
Less fortunate people paid the equivalent of one penny to stand in the courtyard in front of the stage and watch plays. These people were called groundlings. They ate chestnuts during performances and sometimes hissed, booed, and threw things at the actors.	People have now realized that the seats on the floor in front of the stage are some of the best. These seats cost a great deal more than a penny. Good behavior is expected; throwing things at the stage is taboo.
Electric lights did not exist, so plays were usually performed in the afternoon.	Since the invention of electric lights, plays can be performed at any time. Most take place in the evening, although an afternoon show called a matinee is often presented on Sunday.
Plays in The Globe were presented without scenery or highly technical special effects. Instead, Shakespeare presented setting through language. If he wanted a play to take place at night, he had a character say something like "It's very dark tonight, isn't it?" Audiences learned to use their imaginations to create sets.	Detailed sets and flashy special effects are frequently used in plays. We're used to movies, after all...
Actors in Shakespeare's day seldom wore costumes. Instead, they performed in everyday clothes.	Today, a costume is considered essential.

## What's Your Hamlet I.Q.?

Test your knowledge by answering these questions after you have read this entire program. Fill in the blanks in the questions, and then find the answers in the word search puzzle.

N H A F U H O Z B Z E C K K H  
 E E R Z F T R U X M A I R Q G  
 U D I W O M E N O T P O O W R  
 M E S J A C U E H E H Q Y V X  
 I A T G B K T A I T N Q W I C  
 J T O C B R R R K E V R E V W  
 C H T E Q S S T V U I H N J D  
 D O L P I K P E W B F R Y B Z  
 O E E S X K L Y H E K D Z N L  
 C B S B C E R W L P G J N G E  
 A Y D G R G Q A X T G L A Q V  
 I A D G O G W Z M Y P Z O F D  
 L C Q Y W J H S U N L C O B S  
 T T S U I D U A L C E U O F E  
 R C L W A F S O U P R D X K G

- The antagonist of the play *Hamlet* is \_\_\_\_\_, Hamlet's uncle.
- Hamlet* is set in \_\_\_\_\_. (Hint: Marcellus says "There's something rotten in the state of \_\_\_\_\_.")
- Shakespeare wrote the play *Hamlet* in a dark psychological period following the death of his son Hamlet. How old was Hamlet when he died? \_\_\_\_\_
- In Shakespeare's day, this group of people could not perform onstage. \_\_\_\_\_
- Shakespeare's theater was named The \_\_\_\_\_.
- Aquila Theatre Company has their headquarters in this city. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ is the Greek philosopher who wrote the treatise *Ars Poetica*.
- Hamlet* was written over \_\_\_\_\_ hundred years ago.
- According to Aristotle, the audience should experience a purging of emotion, or \_\_\_\_\_, after viewing a tragedy.
- When *Hamlet* says "To be or not to be, that is the question" he is pondering \_\_\_\_\_.

# FAST FACTS

About Hamlet



**WHO:** William Shakespeare, who has been called the greatest playwright the English language has ever known, is the author of Hamlet. This is the same man who wrote Romeo and Juliet, A Mid-Summer Night's Dream, Macbeth, Othello, and quite a few other plays you might have heard of.



**WHAT:** According to Aquila Theatre Company's webpage, Hamlet is "A compelling tale of familial discord, personal ambition, love and revenge." Hmm...in other words, as many issues as you need to make a soap opera.



**WHEN:** Shakespeare wrote Hamlet in 1602. This year, the play celebrated its 403<sup>rd</sup>

birthday. Talk about a long and successful life!



**WHERE:** Although no one can say for sure where Shakespeare sat when he wrote the play, it is known that he often took his papers and quill to a pub in the evenings, where he got a drink, a meal, and a warm, well-lit place to work. Shakespeare, of course, lived in London; Hamlet is set in Denmark.



**WHY:** Hamlet was written in the period of time immediately following the death of Shakespeare's eleven-

year-old son Hamlet. Shakespeare was deeply saddened by his son's death and wrestling with some very dark psychological issues.



**HOW:** Shakespeare brought this play to stage himself. Hamlet's father took the role of the ghost of Hamlet's father, and

appeared in many performances during his lifetime.

## THEATER ETIQUETTE

### What to Do, How to Act, and What to Expect

With special guidance from William Shakespeare or at least some semblance of him.

**The Basic rule of behavior:** Theater behavior falls somewhere in between that expected for a church and a movie. If you wouldn't do it in one of the above don't do it here.

**Never eat or drink unless refreshments are sold in the theater.**

**Sit in your assigned seat. The usher will help you if you need directions.**

**Your cell phone should always be turned OFF.**

Shakespeare Says, "Thou shall never enter that lovely place, thine theater, with mine cell phone on."

**Do not sing along at an opera or musical.**

Shakespeare Says, "Do thy singing in the shower, and let others listen peacefully while at the theater."

**Arrive on time. Some theaters will refuse to seat you if you arrive late.**

Shakespeare Says, "This will never do. You **MUST** arrive on time."

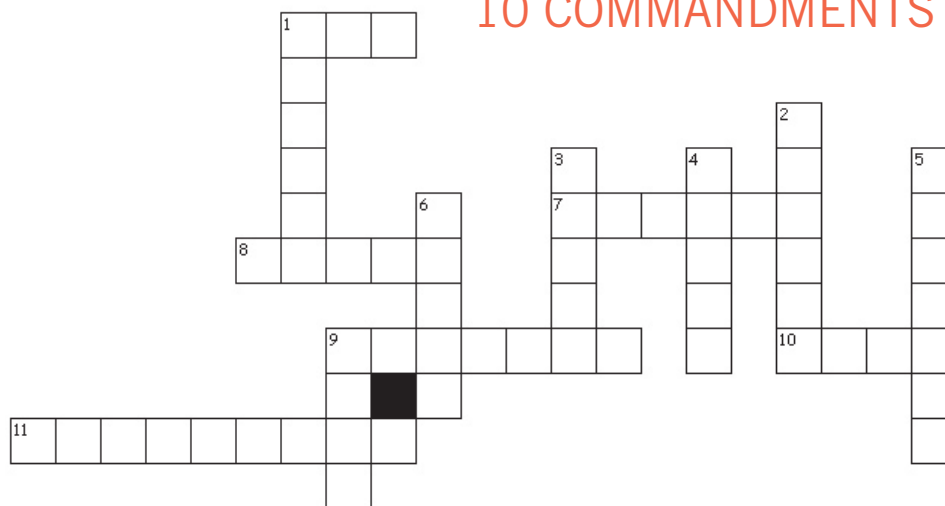
**Pay attention to the production. Even if you are not interested, sit quietly to avoid disturbing others.**

**You are welcome to leave your seat during intermission. Otherwise, stay seated.**

**Clap at the end of a scene, at the end of the play, or after an especially wonderful moment in a play (called a "show stopper"). If you are unsure of what to do, clap when others do.**

**Arrive on time. Some theaters will refuse to seat you if you And always... Enjoy thyself! Be inspired! Learn new things!**

### Good Theater Behavior: Reviewing the 10 COMMANDMENTS



ACROSS

- Clap at the end of a \_\_\_\_\_.
- Good theater behavior falls between that expected for a \_\_\_\_\_ and for a movie theater.
- Always remember to \_\_\_\_\_ new things.
- Clap after an especially amazing part in the play called a "show-\_\_\_\_\_."
- The only time you should leave your \_\_\_\_\_ is during intermission.
- Your \_\_\_\_\_ should always be turned off.

DOWN

- \_\_\_\_\_ on time.
- If you are unsure of when to clap, clap when \_\_\_\_\_ do.
- Clap at the end of a \_\_\_\_\_.
- Never eat or \_\_\_\_\_ unless refreshments are sold in the theater.
- Pay attention during the production. Even if you are not interested, sit \_\_\_\_\_ to avoid disturbing others.
- Always remember to \_\_\_\_\_ yourself.
- Do not \_\_\_\_\_ along at an opera or musical.



**STUDENT PERFORMANCE**

TUESDAY

**OCTOBER 11**

10:30 AM

**EVENING PERFORMANCE**

WEDNESDAY

**OCTOBER 12**

7:30 PM

**ANSWERS TO**

"Speaking Shakespeare Style"

1.B, 2.H, 3.F, 4.C, 5.G, 6.I, 7.A, 8.J, 9.E, 10, D

**ANSWERS TO "Hamlet I.Q."**

- |             |              |
|-------------|--------------|
| 1. Claudius | 6. New York  |
| 2. Denmark  | 7. Aristotle |
| 3. Eleven   | 8. Four      |
| 4. Women    | 9. Catharsis |
| 5. Globe    | 10. Death    |

**SPECIAL THANKS**



**WILKINSON FAMILY FOUNDATION**

PERFORMING  
ARTS SOCIETY  
OF ACADIANA

www.pasa-online.org