

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) Study Guide

Biographical Outline

1. When and where was William Shakespeare born?
2. What were the occupations of his parents?
3. Who did Shakespeare marry and how many children did they have?
4. What year did Shakespeare's theatre company open? What was its name? How was it named?
5. What year was *Hamlet* written? What were two significant events in Shakespeare's life that happened that year?

Chronology of the Plays

1. How were most of Shakespeare's plays published?

Shakespeare's Reputation

1. Shakespeare's works are the second most published works. What is the most published?
2. How many film versions of *Hamlet* have been produced since the Second World War?
3. Name two actors who have played *Hamlet*.

The Language of Shakespeare

1. Name one expression from *Hamlet* that has worked its way into everyday language.
2. Explain what the author means by “Shakespeare has survived all the ages.”

HAMLET

The Play’s Historical Sources

1. Explain two different theories or sources of the origin of *Hamlet*.

Themes

1. What do you think a “revenge tragedy” is? (Not in handout, use a dictionary or your own previous knowledge)

2. Explain three themes found in *Hamlet*.

3. What did Laurence Olivier mean when he said that he could have played Hamlet for a hundred years and still found something new in him on each performance?

Dilemma and Indecision

1. What is Hamlet’s dilemma?
2. What are two theories about why Hamlet has “So much emotion and so little action?”

Hamlet and Metaphysical Doubt

1. In your own words, explain what Henri Fluchere (a French Shakespearean scholar) says about the tragedy of Hamlet's consciousness?

Hamlet and Madness

1. Why is there such uncertainty about whether Hamlet is truly mad or not?

2. Is Hamlet truly mad?

Hamlet and Oedipus

1. Define or describe what is meant by an "Oedipus complex." (you may need a dictionary)

2. Explain how this relates to Hamlet.

Hamlet and Ghosts

1. What other Shakespearean plays have ghosts as characters?

2. What is the role of the ghost in *Hamlet*?

The Soliloquies

1. What is a soliloquy? (you may need a dictionary)

2. How many soliloquies are in *Hamlet*? Name at least three themes the soliloquies relate to.

3. List the four most important soliloquies in *Hamlet*.

4. List and explain 3 reasons why the soliloquies are so remarkable.

5. Read the soliloquies provided. Choose one to discuss and explain the importance of it and if you feel it “lives up to the hype” so to speak.

Hamlet and Theatre

1. List and explain four reasons *Hamlet* is considered “pure theatre” and considered by some to be the epitome of true “theatre” (The best play ever written, by the best playwright who ever lived)