

- **Intended Audience**

AP English Literature and Composition (College Level Course)
English 12

- **Brief summary and educational significance**

Upon the death of his father, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, embarks on a psychological journey of self-discovery and vengeance. His uncle and mother marry; his lover, Ophelia breaks his heart before committing suicide, he accidentally kills her father and he is sent to his death in England. After escaping, he returns to Denmark and participates in a violent duel whereupon he himself, his opponent, Laertes, his uncle, mother, and a servant are all killed.

- **Purpose of teaching the work and how it will be used**

According to Jennifer Stump, “And so while on the surface Shakespeare's works may appear to be stale and unrelated to popular culture, the fact that they continue to be snapped up by the public when made accessible through mediums other than the original plays suggests that these "arcane" pieces of literature still have something to say to high school students. In the play Hamlet, there are several levels on which a student may psychologically identify with the characters portrayed. One such way is through Hamlet's inability to be decisive about a course of action, and though he realizes this inability himself, he still feels helpless to overcome this inability. Many students in the high school age range have to cope with inner struggles comparable to those of Hamlet's, whether they are dealing with social or economic struggles, or perhaps even struggles within their own families. Regardless, many students may feel that they, like Hamlet, are helpless to change their situations because they may lack the ability to make decisions and see them through to their ends.” Hamlet is the second most quoted work in all of literature; teaching this work allows students to see Shakespearean allusions in pop culture as well as in other canonical works. Stump continues, “The work of Hamlet is of course also of high literary significance, not only because ‘The Bard’ wrote it, but also because of the many literary devices that it employs from which students can learn. Some of these devices are - the concept of what a tragedy is in relation to other types of plays (historical and comical), what blank verse is, and the usage of soliloquies and asides. Also important because of the rudimentary nature is Shakespeare's employment of tone, irony and also metaphors and similes. A working knowledge of these basic devices is absolutely essential if students are to be expected to be successful lifelong readers.”

- **Potential problems: supernatural, incest, violence, teen sex and pregnancy, suicide, fratricide**

- **Addressing potential problems**

Class discussion includes: understanding the Elizabethan concept of incest, textual support for and against Ophelia's pregnancy, considering if Hamlet's most famous soliloquy is about suicide or action, and examining the supernatural events as real or figments of the characters' imaginations. The violence is addressed when students examine character motivation and ensuing fallout.