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**William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*:
Creating Excitement and Understanding of Shakespeare in the Classroom**

Throughout high school students are forced to read what scholars to believe one of the great playwrights/author William Shakespeare. Unfortunately many of these experiences with students are not positive. They are sometimes thrown into Shakespeare's unique language without a solid foundation. The teacher does not need to be a Shakespearean scholar or a theatrical obsessed individual to give students the help they need to successfully read, understand, and enjoy Shakespeare. By the time students get to *Hamlet* they are usually Seniors, which means in theory they should have read three Shakespearean plays before this one, however, this might not be the case. I believe that in order to best understand one of my personal favorite plays there should be fun, hands on experiences involved. Anyone can read through Shakespeare and get the gist of what is going on, but to really understand Shakespeare you have to be able to see it. In this unit of study for Shakespeare's *Hamlet* I have provided a number of tools and exercises to make Shakespeare interesting and all focus on the language that he uses. Whether it be a simple game, an unanswered question, or a worksheet, taking the time to really read the language is very important. I believe that this connection with the classics makes for well-rounded students as well as students that want to read and understand the classics. Instead of making Shakespeare a groaning game of 'why do we have to read this?' and 'I don't understand anything he is saying' it is easily made understandable with a few extra steps than

just reading the play out loud and hoping that they understand the basic plot. Using *Hamlet* for this is perfect because *Hamlet* offers a lot of discussion points for characterizations, motives, personalities, and storyline.

Launching the unit

To start my unit on Hamlet I would first start with William Shakespeare himself. Since Hamlet is traditionally read during the end of high school, I assume my students have had previous experience. Nevertheless, I do want to provide as much support to make the material easily digestible.

A) Shakespeare himself: his contribution to literature

1) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMkuUADWW2A>

2) Words we use now because of Shakespeare

3) Shakespearean Insult Game

I would start out my unit of *Hamlet* by briefly talking about William Shakespeare's contributions to literature, focusing on the many different words we use now courtesy of his plays. To hopefully spark some excitement from the students I would introduce the Shakespearean Insult Game:

SHAKESPEAREAN INSULT GAME

MATERIALS NEEDED: one large piece of coloured construction paper per student, markers (at least one per student), scissors, one list of words per student

1. Print off the list of words
2. Photocopy enough copies for your class
3. Each student receives a list, a large piece of construction paper, scissors
4. Students choose one or more words from each column to create insults, and write them down, with markers, on the construction paper. Preface the insults with the word "thou." Students do ten insults each
5. Instruct students to cut out each insult, creating ten different strips
6. Collect strips. Mix them up, and re-distribute, ten to each student.
7. Ask for two volunteers. Give ten random strips to each volunteer. Have volunteers stand in front of the class, facing one another.

8. Have them "duel" using the insults. One person says insult. The other one rebuts, using another insult back.
9. Have all students find a partner, and duel using their ten strips.
10. At the end, create a display with the best insults, titled "Shakespearean Insults." Use the actual strips created by students. For further engagement, have students involved in putting up the strips themselves.

Shakespeare Insult Kit

Combine one word from each of the three columns below, prefaced with "Thou":

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
artless	base-court	apple-john
bawdy	bat-fowling	
baggage		
beslubbering	beef-witted	barnacle
bootless	beetle-headed	bladder
churlish	boil-brained	boar-pig
cockered	clapper-clawed	bugbear
clouted	clay-brained	bum-bailey
craven	common-kissing	canker-blossom
currish	crook-pated	clack-dish
dankish	dismal-dreaming	clotpole
dissembling	dizzy-eyed	coxcomb
droning	doghearted	codpiece
errant	dread-bolted	death-token
fawning	earth-vexing	dewberry
fobbing	elf-skinned	flap-dragon
froward	fat-kidneyed	flax-wench
frothy	fen-sucked	flirt-gill
gleeking	flap-mouthed	foot-licker
goatish	fly-bitten	fustilarian
gorbellied	folly-fallen	giglet
impertinent	fool-born	gudgeon
infectious	full-gorged	haggard
jarring	guts-gripping	harpy
loggerheaded	half-faced	hedge-pig
lumpish	hasty-witted	horn-beast
mammering	hedge-born	hugger-mugger
mangled	hell-hated	joithead
mewling	idle-headed	lewdster
paunchy	ill-breeding	lout
pribbling	ill-nurtured	maggot-pie
puking	knotty-pated	malt-worm
puny	milk-livered	mammet

qualling	motley-minded	measle
rank	onion-eyed	minnow
reeky	plume-plucked	miscreant
roguish	pottle-deep	moldwarp
ruttish	pox-marked	mumble-news
saucy	reeling-ripe	nut-hook
spleeny	rough-hewn	pigeon-egg
spongy	rude-growing	pignut
surly	rump-fed	puttock
tottering	shard-borne	pumpion
unmuzzled	sheep-biting	ratsbane
vain	spur-galled	scut
venomed	swag-bellied	skainsmate
villainous	tardy-gaited	strumpet
warped	tickle-brained	varlot
wayward	toad-spotted	vassal
weedy	unchin-snouted	whey-face
yeasty	weather-bitten	wagtail
http://www.pangloss.com/seidel/shake_rule.html		

The goal of the introduction and the game is to show that although Shakespeare's language may seem long, unnecessary, boring etc. it actually is a beautiful and more creative way to express emotions than today's language.

Prepping for *Hamlet*

In preparation for reading the play *Hamlet* I would have my students do a Pre-Reading of the play

SEE ATTACHED SHEET

While reading *Hamlet*

To further help students understand *Hamlet*, I will use a series of “Unlocking Shakespeare’s Language” Worksheets to be paired with the reading. This method was found in Randal Robinson’s *Unlocking Shakespeare’s Language: Help for the Teacher and Student*

An example of this worksheet would look like this:

Unlocking Shakespeare’s Language

1. Unusual Word

Order: _____

Example Quote	Translation
1. That handkerchief	
2. A glooming peace this morning with it brings.	
3. Thy shape visible retain thou still.	
4. Your high self The gracious mark o’ the land, you Have obscured with a swain’s wearing...	
5. Away from light steals home my heavy son And private in his chamber pens himself.	

2. Separation of Related

Parts: _____

Example Quote	Translation
6. So the whole ear of Denmark Is by a forged process of my death Rankly abused.	
7. As easy mayst thou the intrenchant air With my keen sword impress as make me bleed.	
8. No sooner justice had with valor armed Compelled these skipping kerns to trust their heels, But the Norwegian lord, surveying vantage With furbished arms and new supplies of men	

3. Omitted Syllables and

Letters: _____

o’fire= _____ be’s’t= _____ e’er= _____ i’= _____ to ‘t= _____
ta’en= _____ o’the= _____ is’t= _____ was’t= _____ I’= _____
done’t= _____ kind’s’t= _____ i’ th’ orchard= _____
God ‘a mercy= _____ I take’t= _____
God b’w’ye= _____
will you ha’ the truth on’t= _____

4. Omitted

Words:

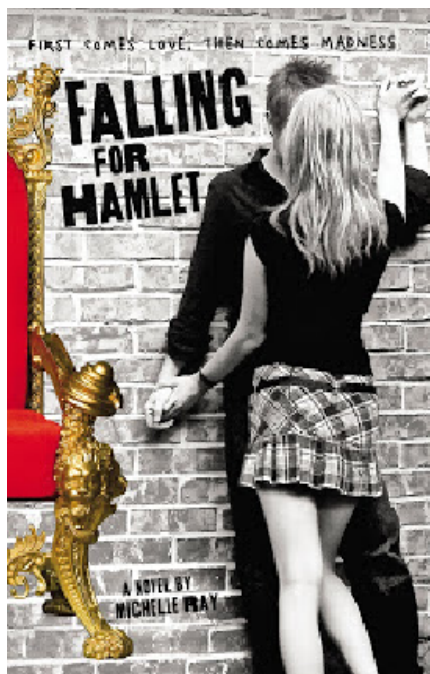
Example Quote	Translation
9. If it be a suit from the Count, I am sick, or not at home. What you will to dismiss it.	
10. But of that tomorrow...	
11. "I'll to England." "To Ireland, I"	

Each worksheet would reflect the current reading assignment to help enhance the capture of the language. There would also be:

- A) In-class readings/staging
- B) Assigned parts
- C) Possible costumes or props

Extending *Hamlet* with YA Literature

A) YA Novel: *Falling for Hamlet* by: Michelle Ray



SOMETIMES LOVE CAN MAKE YOU CRAZY

Meet Ophelia, high school senior, daughter of the Danish king's most trusted adviser, and longtime girlfriend of Prince Hamlet. She lives a glamorous life, has a royal social circle, and her beautiful face is splashed across magazines and TV. But it comes with a price -- her life is dominated not only by Hamlet's fame and his overbearing royal family but also by the paparazzi who hound them wherever they go.

After the sudden and suspicious death of his father, the king, Hamlet spirals dangerously toward madness, and Ophelia finds herself torn between loyalty to her boyfriend, her father, her country, and her true self.

This is a contemporary retelling of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* from Ophelia's point of view filled with drama, romance, tragedy, and humor. And this time, Ophelia *doesn't die*.

http://www.michelleraybooks.com/Michelle_Ray_Books/Books.html

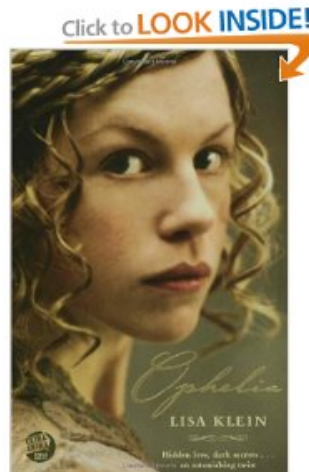
The idea behind using this book is that it takes the traditional story of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and not only provides a modern twist to the story, but also shifts from the story being a story about Hamlet to a story about Ophelia. A book that is possibly very different than the original also opens the floor for discussion about the differences and why authors (or playwrights) make the decisions they do.

Possible questions:

- How does the story change now that it is in Ophelia's point of view?
- Did Ray capture the essence of the original piece?
- Do you agree with her keeping Ophelia alive?

All of these and more get students to think critically about the decision process not only that a playwright might make for actors, but that authors make for characters.

B) YA Novel *Ophelia* by Lisa Klein



In this re-imagining of Shakespeare's famous tragedy, it is Ophelia who takes center stage. A rowdy, motherless girl, she grows up at Elsinore Castle to become the queen's most trusted lady-in-waiting. She catches the attention of the captivating, dark-haired Prince Hamlet, and their love blossoms in secret. But bloody deeds soon turn Denmark into a place of madness, and ultimately, Ophelia must choose between her love for Hamlet and her own life. In desperation, Ophelia devises a treacherous plan to escape from Elsinore forever . . . with one very dangerous secret, she is pregnant with Hamlet's child. Sharp and literary, dark and romantic, this dramatic story holds readers in its grip until the final, heartrending scene.

http://www.amazon.com/Ophelia-Lisa-Klein/dp/B0057D9KTC/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1367357472&sr=8-1&keywords=Ophelia

A more traditional twist on a classic twist, but still focusing on Ophelia, *Ophelia* would have students look at characters from different prospective. Even though not much is given through the original text of *Hamlet* about Ophelia, this book is all about her.

Possible questions:

-Do you think it is accurate?

-What do you agree/disagree with?

Concluding *Hamlet* Unit

A) Seeing a live or filmed version of Hamlet and writing a paper on the similarities and differences.

-Did you see something more because it was being acted out rather than read?

-Is the story more successful as a visual?

B) Acting out segments of the play or using *15 Minute Hamlet* by Tom Stoppard.

C) Project/Essay regarding the major similarities/differences

D) Project in theatrical elements: Design, acting, directing etc.

HAMLET
A Pre-Reading of the Play
(unfinished)
Created by: Marissa Stough

When the play opens we see Francisco

ALL:
A soldier!

Stationed at his post at Elsinore Castle.

ALL:
In Denmark!

Bernardo enters

ALL:
An officer!

With Horatio

ALL:
Hamlet's best friend!

They talk about the latest gossip: the king has died. And there have been strange sightings of a Ghost haunting the castle grounds.

ALL:
A ghost!

Much to Horatio's surprise the ghost appears just like the two had said!

ALL:
A ghost!

#1: PEACE, BREAK THEE OFF. LOOK WHERE IT COMES AGAIN.

#2: IN THE SAME FIGURE LIKE THE KING THAT'S DEAD.

Bernardo and Francisco urge Horatio to speak with the ghost.

#3: BY HEAVEN I CHARGE THEE, SPEAK!

But the ghost does not respond to Horatio

ALL:
IT IS OFFENDED

Horatio decides that he must tell his friend Hamlet about this at once

#4: THE SPIRIT, DUMB TO US, WILL SPEAK TO HIM

The new King, Claudius,

ALL:
Hamlet's Uncle!

is celebrating his wedding to the Queen, Gertrude.

ALL:
Hamlet's Mother!

Which makes Claudius Hamlet's

ALL:
Father-Uncle

Everyone is celebration and drinking and having a good time...

ALL:
Par-tay!

Except for once guest who is sitting off in the corner, alone, and wearing all black.

ALL:
Hamlet!

Hamlet's Father-Uncle

ALL:
Claudius!

And his mother

ALL:
Gertrude!

Convince Hamlet to stay at home instead of returning to school. Once they have successfully done that the party disburses and Hamlet is left alone and speaks out loud about his anger toward the situation in a soliloquy.

#5: BUT TWO MONTHS DEAD

#6: NAY, NOT SO MUCH, NOT TWO

#7: FRAILTY, THY NAME IS WOMAN

**#8: MY FATHER'S BROTHER, BUT NO MORE LIKE MY FATHER THAN I TO
HERCULES**

Horatio, Bernardo, and Marcellus

ALL:
Another officer!

Come and tell Hamlet about the ghost

ALL:
A ghost!

And he agrees to go and try to speak with it.

#9: IF IT ASSUME MY NOBEL FATHER'S PERSON, I'LL SPEAK TO IT.

#10: THOUGH HELL ITSELF SHOULD GAPE AND BID ME HOLD MY PEACE.

Next we encounter Laertes and Ophelia

ALL:
Siblings!

Ophelia has been seeing Hamlet

ALL:
In love!

But Laertes does not trust Hamlet and tell Ophelia that since he is to be King their relationship will never be serious. He also tell her to be careful and

#11: IF WITH TOO CREDENT EAR YOU LIST HIS SONGS

#12: OR LOSE YOUR HEART

#13: OR YOUR CHASTE TREASURE OPEN

#14: TO HIS UNMASTERE'D IMPORTUNITY

Basically he tells Ophelia not to fall for his tricks and give her heart, or her virginity to Hamlet. No matter what. Horatio and company take Hamlet to see the ghost. The ghost appears and Hamlet, realizing that the ghost does look like his dead father, approaches it and asks that it speak to him.

#15: KING, FATHER, ROYAL DANE. O, ANSWER ME!

At this point, Hamlet doesn't know whether or not the ghost is there for good or evil purposes. The ghost beckons Hamlet. When Hamlet considers leaving with the ghost, Horatio and Marcellus try to dissuade him. They are concerned for his safety. If the ghost is there for evil purposes, it might lead Hamlet to his death. Hamlet forces his way past them and follows the ghost.

#16: BY HEAVEN, I'LL MAKE A GHOST OF HIM THAT LETS ME. I SAY, AWAY!

Horatio and Marcellus follow Hamlet to try and protect him

ALL:

SOMETHING IS ROTTEN IN THE STATE OF DENMARK

The ghost tells Hamlet that he is indeed Hamlet's father and that he was murdered. The ghost asks Hamlet to revenge his 'most foul, strange, and unnatural murder' and Hamlet heartily agrees. Hamlet is shocked when the ghost goes on to tell him that he was murdered by his own brother, Claudius. Unlike the story Claudius told the court, that a serpent stung and killed the old king, the ghost tells Hamlet that during his afternoon nap in the orchard Claudius crept in and poured poison in the king's ear.

ALL:

The serpent that did sting thy father's death now wears his crown

The ghost goes on to tell Hamlet about how Hamlet's own mother was adulterous with Claudius, before the ghost's death. He also has Hamlet promise him that he will leave her deeds to be judged and punished by God, and that Hamlet should not take revenge on her himself. The dawn comes, forcing the ghost to leave.

#17: ADIEU, ADIEU, ADIEU. REMEMBER ME.

When Hamlet reunites with Horatio and Marcellus he makes them promise

ALL:

SWEAR!

Not to speak of what they saw tonight

ALL:

SWEAR!

And they do.

Later Ophelia goes to Polonius

ALL:

Her father!

And he sees that she is distressed, asks her what is troubling her. Ophelia relates a strange encounter she has just had with Hamlet. He came to see her in complete disarray.

#18: WITH HIS DOUBLET ALL UNBRACED

#19: NO HAT UPON HIS HEAD

#20: HIS STOCKINGS FOUL'D

#21: AND WITH A LOOK SO PITEOUS IN PURPORT

#22: AS IF HE HAD BEEN LOOSED OUT OF HELL

She goes on to say that Hamlet grabbed her hand and studied her at arms length. He didn't say anything, but after a perusal of her face he shook his head three times and gave out a wail that was piteous and profound. He then dropped her arm and, without taking his eyes off Ophelia, walked out of the room.

Polonius, thinking that Hamlet is still madly in love with Ophelia, believes his request for Ophelia to stop seeing Hamlet is the cause of his recent apparent madness. He tells Ophelia that they must report this incident to the King.

ALL:
Two months later!

The scene opens with Claudius and Gertrude talking to two of Hamlet's friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

ALL:
Childhood friends!

It seems that Hamlet has been acting strangely for the past couple of months, and no one is able to find out why. Although Gertrude guesses it is because of the death of his father and her overhasty marriage, Claudius is not so sure this is the reason. Because Claudius and Gertrude are unable to find out the reason for Hamlet's madness they send for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with the hopes that they will be able to find out the truth. Both gentlemen agree to spy on Hamlet.

Polonius tells the King and Queen about his suspicion that Hamlet's madness is caused by Ophelia's rejecting Hamlet's affections. As proof of his suspicions, he reads a letter Hamlet wrote to Ophelia that expresses his love and feelings for her.

#23: O, DEAR OPHELIA. I AM ILL AT THESE NUMBERS.

#24: I LOVE THEE BEST, O MOST BEST, BELIEVE IT.

Seeing that the king and queen don't agree with his assumptions as whole heartedly as he does, Polonius tries to prove his theory by approaching Hamlet himself. He ushers the King and Queen out as Hamlet approaches. Although Polonius tries his best to pin down Hamlet's thoughts, he fails. Hamlet not only manages to evade Polonius' questions, but he seizes the opportunity and slanders Polonius and his foolish, meddling ways, without Polonius' realization. Polonius leaves after realizing that there is a lot of meaning in Hamlet's ranting

ALL:
THOUGH THIS BE MADNESS, YET THERE IS METHOD IN'T

After Polonius' unsuccessful attempt to corner Hamlet Rosencrantz and Guildenstern find Hamlet and start to talk and catch up. Before long Hamlet reveals that he knows why they are there and they feel guilty. He asks for their help along with their acting troupe

ALL:
Huzzah!

To help Hamlet. Because there is still doubt about whether or not the ghost was Hamlet's father asking Hamlet to avenge his death, or an evil spirit trying to get Hamlet into trouble, Hamlet decides to get proof of Claudius' guilt before proceeding further. Hamlet believes he can obtain his proof by watching Claudius' reaction to a murder acted out by the players similar to that of Hamlet's father's murder. So he stages a play mimicking the events.

Later after admitting they did not find the cause, but were treated well by Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern inform the King and Queen that Hamlet is happy that there is going to be a play presented tomorrow and he hopes that Claudius and Gertrude will attend. Pleased that there is something that amuses Hamlet, they both decide to attend the play.

ALL:
The plan moves forward!

Claudius asks Gertrude to leave so that he and Polonius can observe a clandestine meeting they set up between Hamlet and Ophelia. They tell Ophelia to pretend she is praying and they go and hide. Hamlet enters and gives a soliloquy on his thoughts about himself committing suicide.

#25: TO BE OR NOT TO BE, THAT IS THE QUESTION.

He sees Ophelia, and when she tries to return some gifts that he had given her, he claims he never gave her any. They have a discussion wherein Hamlet denies ever loving Ophelia and berating her and women in general for their trickery and pretentiousness.

#26: I DID LOVE YOU ONCE,

#27: INDEED, MY LORD, YOU MADE ME BELIEVE SO.

#28: YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE BELIEVED ME...I LOVE YOU NOT

ALL:
GET THEE TO A NUNNERY!

When Hamlet leaves, Claudius and Polonius enter. Claudius is convinced that Hamlet's madness does not stem from his love for Ophelia, but that it is something else that is afflicting his soul.

Claudius realizes that Hamlet's actions are a danger to those around him. He decides to send Hamlet to England, hoping a change of atmosphere will settle his heart. The scene ends with Claudius stating that Hamlet should be watched.

ALL:
MADNESS IN GREAT ONES MUST NOT UNWATCH'D GO.

Hamlet confides in Horatio that he has a plan to test his uncle's guilt. He tells Horatio that he has asked the players to reenact the murder of Hamlet's father. By seeing Claudius' reaction to the murder, Hamlet will know for sure whether or not the ghost was telling the truth. Horatio agrees to watch the king's reaction.

The play, *The Mousetrap*, is introduced and gets underway. When the murder scene is enacted, Claudius calls for lights and storms out. Hamlet and Horatio discuss the king's reactions and both are convinced that Claudius killed the old king.

Later, in Claudius' soliloquy, he admits to killing his brother and starts to realize the difficulties he is in. He tries to atone for his sins by praying, but he finds that although he can say the words to ask for forgiveness, he doesn't believe what he is saying. Unbeknownst to Claudius, Hamlet enters while Claudius is at prayer. Although this seems like the perfect opportunity for Hamlet, a chance to kill Claudius after proving Claudius' guilt in the murder, Hamlet refuses to go ahead with the deed. He is afraid that because Claudius is praying, Claudius' sins will be forgiven. Because Hamlet doesn't want Claudius to have a chance to go to heaven, or to purgatory where Hamlet's father now resides, he leaves.

#30: A VILLIAN KILLS MY FATHER, AND FOR THAT, I, HIS SOLE SON, DO THIS SAME VILLIAN SEND TO HEAVEN.

Polonius hides behind a curtain as Hamlet enters into his mother's chamber. When the Queen is confronted by an angry and erratic Hamlet, she panics and screams for help. When Polonius hears her scream, he thinks Hamlet is trying to kill her and he yells out. Hamlet, who suspects that Claudius is hiding behind the curtain, draws his sword and stabs at the sound.

ALL:
O, I AM SLAIN!

Gertrude explains to Claudius that she believes Hamlet is truly mad and that as proof, he has killed Polonius and taken away the body. Claudius, after being thankful that he wasn't the one killed, asks where Hamlet went. And where the body is.

#29: THE BODY IS WITH THE KING, BUT THE KING IS NOT WITH THE BODY.

Then Rosencrantz and Guildenstern try to ask Hamlet where the body is.

#30: AT SUPPER

#31: AT SUPPER? WHERE?

#32: NOT WHERE HE EATS, BUT WHERE HE IS EATEN.

ALL:
**IF YOU FIND HIM NOT WITHIN THIS MONTH, YOU SHALL NOSE HIM AS YOU
GO UP THE STAIRS TO THE LOBBY**

Gertrude encounters a "mad" Ophelia in this scene. Unlike Hamlet's feigned madness, Ophelia really is insane. Throughout this scene she sings about death and behaves erratically. Claudius enters and Ophelia's songs hint at grief regarding her father's death. Claudius is amazed at Ophelia's condition and asks how long she has been like this. When Ophelia leaves, he asks Horatio to follow her and to protect her from doing herself harm. While Claudius laments all the misfortunes that have befallen Ophelia recently, a noise is heard outside the castle. Laertes comes back to Elsinore after he hears about his father's death.

ALL:
Meanwhile...

Sailors give Horatio a letter which recounts Hamlet's adventures on his sea voyage. It seems that pirates attacked the ship that Hamlet was on and through misadventure, Hamlet was captured and taken prisoner. Everyone else on the ship escaped unharmed and continued on to England

Claudius, concerned about Hamlet's untimely return, advises Laertes to have a dueling match with Hamlet. In this match, Claudius plans to have Laertes kill Hamlet. They plan to cover the tip of Laertes's sword with poison. Once Hamlet is struck with the sword, he will die. Hamlet's death will end Claudius' worries about anyone finding out about his involvement in his brother's death. To further ensure Hamlet's demise, Claudius intends to present Hamlet, if he scores the first "hit," with a poisoned goblet of wine. This way, Hamlet will be killed even if he wins the match.

The conspirators are interrupted by Gertrude, who informs them that Ophelia is dead. Apparently, the branch that Ophelia was sitting on broke and she fell into a stream. No one was able to save her and she drowned.