Lesson plan

Resources
- Copies of Hamlet texts
- Resource A – Film Clip of Hamlet Act 1 Scene 5
- Resource B – Extract from Act 1 Scene 5 with corresponding Bible passages
- Sugar paper

Learning objectives
- To consider the character of the Ghost and different interpretations of / responses to the Ghost
- To consider the context of production and reception in Hamlet

Starter activity – recapping responses to the Ghost
- By the time the audience hears the Ghost speak in Act 1 Scene 5, we have already seen him three times. Briefly recap the Ghost’s appearances by either watching clips eg. from a DVD or from youtube, or allocating students to quickly re-read the relevant sections and feedback ideas.
  - Make a note of what are the different responses to the Ghost so far (e.g.
    - In Act 1 Scene 1 the guards are frightened, Horatio is disbelieving but then afraid, Ghost reappears to further disturb characters and audience
    - In Act 1 Scene 4 Hamlet questions whether the Ghost is good or evil, whilst Horatio and the guards don’t want Hamlet to follow the Ghost in case the Ghost has evil designs).

Introduction - the controversial nature of the Ghost
- The Ghost is clearly a fear-inducing and controversial character. Explain that Elizabethan views on ghosts were mixed, as after the Reformation, people were more likely to think that souls went straight to heaven or hell (as opposed to the prior Catholic belief in purgatory - a sort of in between waiting room), so ghosts must therefore be demons, not tormented waiting souls.
  - If a projector is available, the above could be done by showing the crossref website, Hamlet, themes and significant ideas > Heaven, hell and judgement (http://m.crossref-it.info/textguide/Hamlet/1/52)
  - Understanding more about what Shakespeare and the original audience thought is called by the exam boards the context of reception. Their ideas may be different from a modern audience’s views, especially on religious ideas such as the nature of ghosts, so we need to think carefully about ways in which the Ghost is presented and can be interpreted.

Main activity 1 – Reading
- Read Hamlet Act 1 Scene 5 up to the point at which Horatio and Marcellus enter (or watch the scene e.g. on DVD or Youtube and follow along in texts). Establish basic understanding of the conversation/information revealed:
  - Ask students to identify things the Ghost says which might be controversial for the Elizabethan audience
    - This could be done by encouraging students to ‘buzz in’ when they hear something they find controversial, and awarding points for correct ideas. (For example, the description of the afterlife, the instruction to get revenge, perhaps the definition of incest if the class has already touched upon the Leviticus/Henry VIII idea.)
Intertextuality and the context of reception: 
*Hamlet* – Act 1 scene 5 by William Shakespeare

- Highlight and annotate text with ideas.

**Main activity 2 – using the Bible to consider context of production and reception**
- Explain that many things that the Ghost says make reference to ideas in the Bible, which again means the original audience may have interpreted them differently from the way a modern audience does.
  - Watch the film clip [Resource A]
- Divide students into small groups and give out extracts from Act 1 Scene 5 with corresponding Bible passages and discussion questions.
  - These could be mixed ability groups, using higher ability students as leaders to guide the discussion
  - Students read the Bible passages and use the discussion questions as prompts to consider the context of production (the ideas of the Elizabethans) and to add to annotations on their texts
  - Feedback ideas/any questions and mop up any problems.

**Homework**
- Students write a page of analysis, looking closely at the Ghost’s speech and considering why he was such a controversial and powerful character for the Elizabethan audience
- Students should try to include at least two Bible references.

**Plenary – brainstorming carousel and reflections**
- Divide class into three groups with a group leader and sugar paper.
  - Assign the following tasks, one per group:
    1. What have we learnt about possible different responses to and interpretations of the Ghost?
    2. What have we learnt about the context of production and reception in terms of understanding *Hamlet*?
    3. What have we learnt about the way in which the Bible can help us to understand literature?
- Allow two minutes per question before group moves on to next piece of sugar paper and adds ideas. Then another two minutes before moving on to third and final piece/question
- Stick sugar paper up at front of class so students can read all responses.
Intertextuality and the context of reception: 
*Hamlet – Act 1 scene 5* by William Shakespeare

**Resources**


*Resource B*

**Hamlet Act 1 scene 5**

**HAMLET**

Speak; I am bound to hear.

**Ghost**

So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear.

Romans 12: 19 avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

- Discuss: Why would the Elizabethan audience have found the Ghost’s instruction shocking and dangerous?

**Ghost**

I am thy father's spirit,  
Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,  
And for the day confined to fast in fires ...  
If thou didst ever thy dear father love--  
Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

Genesis 4:8-9  
And ... Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.  
And the LORD said unto Cain, ‘Where is Abel thy brother?’  
And he said, ‘I know not: Am I my brother’s keeper?’

- Discuss: Why would Claudius’ murder of King Hamlet seem more controversial to an Elizabethan audience than to a modern audience?

**HAMLET**

Murder!

**Ghost**

Murder most foul, as in the best it is;  
But this most foul, strange and unnatural.

**HAMLET**

Haste me to know't ...
Intertextuality and the context of reception:
Hamlet – Act 1 scene 5 by William Shakespeare

Ghost

Now, Hamlet, hear:
'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,
A serpent stung me;

Genesis 3:1 ¹Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made.

➢ Discuss: How does King Hamlet’s description of Claudius make him sound so crafty and evil to the original audience?

so the whole ear of Denmark
Is by a forged process of my death
Rankly abused: but know, thou noble youth,
The serpent that did sting thy father’s life
Now wears his crown.

HAMLET
O my prophetic soul! My uncle!

Ghost
Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts,—
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce!—won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen …

Leviticus 20:21 ²¹And if a man shall take his brother’s wife, it is an unclean thing: he hath uncovered his brother’s nakedness; they shall be childless.

➢ Discuss: Why would Claudius and Gertrude’s relationship be so shocking to an Elizabethan audience?

Brief let me be. Sleeping within my orchard,
My custom always of the afternoon,
Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole,
With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,
And in the porches of my ears did pour
The leprous distilment …

Genesis 3:14 ¹⁴And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed … ; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life:
Intertextuality and the context of reception: 
*Hamlet – Act 1 scene 5* by William Shakespeare

- Discuss: What impressions would the Elizabethan audience have formed of Claudius?

Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand  
Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatch'd:  
Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,  
Unhouse'l'd, disappointed, unanel'd,  
No reckoning made, but sent to my account  
With all my imperfections on my head:  
O, horrible! O, horrible! most horrible!...

1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*  
Psalm 32:2 *Blessed are those whose sin the LORD does not count against them...*

- Discuss: Why is it so terrifying for the original audience that King Hamlet was not given an opportunity to repent of his sins before he died?

But, howsoever thou pursuest this act,  
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive  
Against thy mother aught: leave her to heaven  
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,  
To prick and sting her.