



## Hamlet: (c) What kind of tragedy?

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- ❖ **Lesson focus:** Does the play give us a traditional tragic ending, or is it possible to interpret Shakespeare's conclusion differently?
  - ❖ **Opening exercise:** Each student writes, in ordinary prose, an alternative ending for *Hamlet*. The teacher takes these in and redistributes them at random around the class.
    - Students now add a short response to the 'new ending' they have received.
    - The teacher then reads each one out, inviting discussion. Some will be humorous and can be dealt with quickly, but others should raise some interesting questions about what could provide a satisfying ending (perhaps including some of the humorous ones!).
  - ❖ **Discussion ideas:** Re-read the ending, from the moment Hamlet dies.
    - The students should block this (decide stage moves) as they read, debating their positions and what different stagings suggest about what is happening here.
  - ❖ **Textual examination:** After the disorder of the play, is order restored at the end? This partly depends on the portrayal of Fortinbras.
    - Read again the other scenes in which he appears or is mentioned. See  *Hamlet* > Characterisation > Fortinbras.
    - Draw a shape of a man, or print out a picture of a Fortinbras figure, and ask students to write comments and quotations around it as they search the other scenes. Discuss what is found.
    - Some productions omit him: what difference does this make?
  - ❖ **Recreative task:** What is Horatio's view of the final scene?
    - Write his thoughts later that day.
  - ❖ **Critical task:** In Ingmar Bergman's production of *Hamlet*, Fortinbras's words, 'Bid the soldiers shoot!' is their signal to pull out their guns and slaughter Horatio and the rest of the surviving Danish court.
    - Do you think that this is a valid interpretation?
    - What would need to be done with the rest of the play to make it work?
  - ❖ **Critical task:** A. C. Bradley wrote: 'Shakespeare seems to have determined that his hero should exhibit in his latest hour all the glorious power and all the nobility and sweetness of his nature.'
    - ❖ How far do you agree with this view and why?
- Extension task:** Watch one of the various film versions of the play and write a review of the final section.