

Hamlet: (d) What is the play about?

- ❖ **Lesson focus:** In this complex play, what is the central meaning? Is it possible to identify one?
- ❖ **Opening exercise:** The following list of possible themes is read out, one by one:
 - The list: families, love, power, individual choice, revenge, corruption in high places, inaction, kingship, order and disorder, sanity and insanity, religious belief, responsibility, evil, fate, the generation gap, duty. You could add others
 - The students stand in the centre of the room, and move in one way if they agree that the theme is significant, the other if they don't think it is important in the play. The closer they are to a particular end of the room, the more strongly they feel.
 - Brief discussion can follow, particularly where there is strong agreement, or considerable disagreement or uncertainty.
- ❖ **Discussion ideas:** Choose the possible themes in the above list which attracted most agreement. Allocate them around the group (perhaps in pairs).
 - For their theme, assuming that they are planning for a production which will emphasise this particular theme, each student/pair will research the following:
 - a key scene or passage
 - three or four key speeches from other parts of the play
 - suggestions about how the thematic emphasis could affect the playing of Hamlet himself
 - some thoughts about costume/ historical setting/ other staging ideas.
 - Reporting back to the class will be as a presentation, which could be quite elaborate, if there is time.
- ❖ **Textual examination:** If possible, watch the Animated Tales version of *Hamlet*.
 - What theme or themes are noticeable here?
- ❖ **Recreative task:** As a director, ask the students to pitch a strong interpretation of the play, based on a particular theme, as if to a theatre manager.
- ❖ **Critical task:** 'Hamlet is such a complex play, with so many underlying themes, that it is impossible to perform. It is best simply read.'
 - To what extent do you think this is a fair assessment?
- ❖ **Extension task:** Write up in essay form the theme you researched and presented. Or do this with a theme that someone else presented.

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