


## Hamlet: (e) Hamlet's delay

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- ❖ **Lesson focus:** To look at possible explanations of Hamlet's infamous delay.
- ❖ **Opening exercise:** Give the following scenarios, and ask students to vote on their actions. Discuss why they might sometimes wait. Ideas could be linked to events in *Hamlet*.
  - (a) You have been told that a friend has been shoplifting. Would you confront them, keep out of what is not your business, *or* wait for a while to see what happens?
  - (b) Two sixth-formers, both of whom you like, have fallen out very publicly. Would you try to stay friends with both but avoid being around when they are both in the same room, try to avoid both of them until it all blows over, *or* deliberately make them face each other in your presence?
  - (c) One of your parents is behaving secretly and you fear that they are acting behind their partner's back. Would you talk to a friend but leave the two adults to their own problems, confront the 'secretive' parent, *or* inform the other parent of your suspicions?
- ❖ **Textual examination:** Read Act III, Scene iii aloud.
  - Agree a summary that encapsulates the line of argument in Hamlet's speech.
  - How convincing is this as a statement of Hamlet's view at this point?
  - Set up a debate, with half the class supporting this statement as the view that Hamlet genuinely holds, and the other half seeing it as just an excuse. Allow 10 minutes for preparation.
- How do Claudius' words both before and after this speech affect our understanding?
- In what way(s) would an Elizabethan audience react differently to Hamlet here, compared to a 21<sup>st</sup> Century audience? See  [Hamlet](#) > [Hamlet synopses](#) > [Act II I](#) > [Act III scene iii](#).
- ❖ **Recreative task:** Hamlet's counsellor writes a report on his progress. This needs to be set at a particular time, perhaps while Hamlet is on his way to England, or after Act III, Scene iii.
- ❖ **Critical task:** Toby Stephens, who played Hamlet in the 2004 RSC production said, 'The reason he can't act is because he has a conscience, he thinks things through and ponders the consequences. None of the other characters (Gertrude, Claudius, Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes) think of the consequences of their actions apart from Horatio, who's more passive.'
  - How far do you agree with this assessment and why?
- ❖ **Extension task:** Explore the notion that Hamlet does not, in fact, delay at all; he acts as soon as circumstances allow him to.
  - Argue for or against this idea, or draw up two columns to balance both sides of the argument.