

**Plot Summary**

<http://www.rscshakespeare.co.uk/hamlet.html>

* Old Hamlet, King of Denmark, is dead and has been succeeded by his brother.
* The new king has also married Gertrude, the widowed queen.
* Hamlet, Gertrude's son, is already distressed by his father's death and the hasty remarriage
* When his father's ghost appears to tell him that he was murdered by his own brother, Hamlet vows revenge.
* To cover his intentions, he feigns madness.
* Polonius, councillor to the court, whose daughter Ophelia is all but betrothed to Hamlet, believes that his madness is caused by love.
* Spied on by Polonius and the king, Hamlet encounters Ophelia and violently rejects her.
* A company of actors arrives and Hamlet asks them to perform a play, hoping that its similarity to the murder of his own father will force the king to reveal his guilt.
* Hamlet's suspicions are confirmed.
* He visits his mother, reviling her for her hasty marriage, and accidentally kills Polonius, who is hiding in the chamber.
* The king sends Hamlet to England, planning to have him murdered.
* Laertes, Polonius' son, demands revenge for his father's death.
* His sister, Ophelia, maddened by grief, has drowned.
* Hamlet returns and confronts Laertes at her funeral.
* The king, meanwhile, has plotted with Laertes to kill Hamlet in a fencing match in which Laertes will have a poisoned sword.
* The plot miscarries and Laertes dies.
* Gertrude drinks from a poisoned cup intended for Hamlet, and also dies.
* Hamlet, wounded by the poisoned sword, kills the king before he, too, dies.
* Young Fortinbras of Norway arrives and lays claim to the throne of Denmark.

**CHARACTERS – HAMLET**

**Hamlet**

* he is enigmatic (difficult to interpret)
* even the most careful and clever readers come away with the sense that they don’t know everything there is to know about this character
* A university student whose studies are interrupted by his father’s death
* Hamlet is extremely philosophical and contemplative.
* Hamlet becomes obsessed with proving his uncle’s guilt before trying to act.
* He is equally plagued with questions about the afterlife, about the wisdom of suicide, about what happens to bodies after they die
* behaves rashly and impulsively.
* he stabs Polonius through a curtain without even checking to see who he is.
* seems to step very easily into the role of a madman,
* Hamlet is extremely melancholy and discontented with the state of affairs in Denmark and in his own family—indeed, in the world at large.
* extremely disappointed with his mother for marrying his uncle so quickly,
* His words often indicate his disgust with and distrust of women in general.
* he contemplates his own death and even the option of suicide.

**Gertrude**

* beautiful Queen of Denmark
* Was she involved with Claudius before the death of her husband? Did she love her husband? Did she know about Claudius’s plan to commit the murder? Did she love Claudius, or did she marry him simply to keep her high station in Denmark?
* Does she intentionally betray Hamlet to Claudius, or does she believe that she is protecting her son’s secret?
* extremely dependent upon the men in her life.
* Hamlet’s most famous comment about Gertrude is his furious condemnation of women in general: “Frailty, thy name is woman!”
* Gertrude does seem morally frail.
* when her natural grace and charm seem to indicate a rich, rounded personality.

**Ophelia**

* a beautiful young woman with whom Hamlet has been in love.
* Polonius’s daughter
* sweet and innocent young girl
* obeys her father and her brother, Laertes
* Dependent on men to tell her how to behave
* Even in her lapse into madness and death, she remains maidenly, singing songs about flowers and finally drowning in the river amid the flower garlands she had gathered

**Laertes**

* Polonius’s son and Ophelia’s brother
* Passionate and quick to action,
* clearly a foil for the reflective Hamlet
* spends much of the play in France.