

## Who is Hamlet?

### **Expanding the Web**

**Once Hamlet has been given the task of avenging the murder of his father, he must return to the court to determine his way forward. Characters in his web continue to define him.**

**Explore this exchange between Ophelia (where his relationship is described as lover) and her father, who clearly has his own opinions about Hamlet.**

### **LORD POLONIUS**

How now, Ophelia! what's the matter?

### **OPHELIA**

O, my lord, my lord, I have been so affrighted!

### **LORD POLONIUS**

With what, i' the name of God?

### **OPHELIA**

My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,  
Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced;  
No hat upon his head; his stockings foul'd,  
Ungarter'd, and down-gyved to his ankle;  
Pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each other;  
And with a look so piteous in purport  
As if he had been loosed out of hell  
To speak of horrors,--he comes before me.

### **LORD POLONIUS**

Mad for thy love?

### **OPHELIA**

My lord, I do not know;  
But truly, I do fear it.

### **LORD POLONIUS**

What said he?

### **OPHELIA**

He took me by the wrist and held me hard;  
Then goes he to the length of all his arm;  
And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,  
He falls to such perusal of my face

As he would draw it. Long stay'd he so;  
At last, a little shaking of mine arm  
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,  
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound  
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk  
And end his being: that done, he lets me go:  
And, with his head over his shoulder turn'd,  
He seem'd to find his way without his eyes;  
For out o' doors he went without their helps,  
And, to the last, bended their light on me.

### **LORD POLONIUS**

Come, go with me: I will go seek the king.  
This is the very ecstasy of love,  
Whose violent property fordoes itself  
And leads the will to desperate undertakings  
As oft as any passion under heaven  
That does afflict our natures. I am sorry.  
What, have you given him any hard words of late?

### **OPHELIA**

No, my good lord, but, as you did command,  
I did repel his fetters and denied  
His access to me.

### **LORD POLONIUS**

That hath made him mad.  
I am sorry that with better heed and judgment  
I had not quoted him: I fear'd he did but trifle,  
And meant to wreck thee; but, beshrew my jealousy!  
By heaven, it is as proper to our age  
To cast beyond ourselves in our opinions  
As it is common for the younger sort  
To lack discretion. Come, go we to the king:  
This must be known; which, being kept close, might move  
More grief to hide than hate to utter love.

*Exeunt*

**The line, "as you did command," refers to an earlier exchange between these characters. What does that suggest about these characters and their relationship with Hamlet?**

**How do Ophelia and Polonius drive his identity in the court?**

## **Finding "Friends"**

**Claudius and Gertrude, worried about the unpredictable actions of Hamlet at this difficult time, have asked two schoolmates, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to try to cheer up Hamlet and learn the reasons behind his actions.**

**Compare how he speaks with them in contrast to Horatio. When he finally shares with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern what troubles him, do you trust him? Is he revealing or hiding?**

### **GUILDENSTERN**

My honoured lord!

### **ROSENCRANTZ**

My most dear lord!

### **HAMLET**

My excellent good friends! How dost thou,  
Guildenstern? Ah, Rosencrantz! Good lads, how do ye both?

### **ROSENCRANTZ**

As the indifferent children of the earth.

### **GUILDENSTERN**

Happy, in that we are not over-happy;  
On fortune's cap we are not the very button.

### **HAMLET**

Nor the soles of her shoe?

### **ROSENCRANTZ**

Neither, my lord.

### **HAMLET**

Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favours?

### **GUILDENSTERN**

'Faith, her privates we.

### **HAMLET**

In the secret parts of fortune? O, most true; she  
is a strumpet. What's the news?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

None, my lord, but that the world's grown honest.

**HAMLET**

Then is doomsday near: but your news is not true.  
Let me question more in particular: what have you,  
my good friends, deserved at the hands of fortune,  
that she sends you to prison hither?

**GULDENSTERN**

Prison, my lord!

**HAMLET**

Denmark's a prison.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Then is the world one.

**HAMLET**

A goodly one; in which there are many confines,  
wards and dungeons, Denmark being one o' the worst.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

We think not so, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Why, then, 'tis none to you; for there is nothing  
either good or bad, but thinking makes it so: to me  
it is a prison.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Why then, your ambition makes it one; 'tis too  
narrow for your mind.

**HAMLET**

O God, I could be bounded in a nut shell and count  
myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I  
have bad dreams.

**GULDENSTERN**

Which dreams indeed are ambition, for the very  
substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream.

**HAMLET**

A dream itself is but a shadow.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Truly, and I hold ambition of so airy and light a quality that it is but a shadow's shadow.

**HAMLET**

No such matter: But, in the beaten way of friendship, what make you at Elsinore?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

To visit you, my lord; no other occasion.

**HAMLET**

Beggar that I am, I am even poor in thanks; but I thank you: and sure, dear friends, my thanks are too dear a halfpenny. Were you not sent for? Is it your own inclining? Is it a free visitation? Come, deal justly with me: come, come; nay, speak.

**GUILDENSTERN**

What should we say, my lord?

**HAMLET**

Why, any thing, but to the purpose. You were sent for; and there is a kind of confession in your looks which your modesties have not craft enough to color: I know the good king and queen have sent for you.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

To what end, my lord?

**HAMLET**

That you must teach me. But let me conjure you, by the rights of our fellowship, by the consonancy of our youth, by the obligation of our ever-preserved love, and by what more dear a better proposer could charge you withal, be even and direct with me, whether you were sent for, or no?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

[Aside to GUILDENSTERN] What say you?

**HAMLET**

If you love me, hold not off.

**GUILDENSTERN**

My lord, we were sent for.

**HAMLET**

I will tell you why; I have of late--but wherefore I know not--lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestic roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? man delights not me: no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

My lord, there was no such stuff in my thoughts.

**HAMLET**

Why did you laugh then, when I said 'man delights not me'?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

To think, my lord, if you delight not in man, what lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you: we coted them on the way; and hither are they coming, to offer you service.

**HAMLET**

He that plays the king shall be welcome; his majesty shall have tribute of me; Gentlemen, you are welcome to Elsinore. Your hands, come then: You are welcome: but my uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived.

**GUILDENSTERN**

In what, my dear lord?

**HAMLET**

I am but mad north-north-west: when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw.

**Hamlet talks about being trapped and imprisoned. But, he also shares hope and beauty in his “What a piece of work is a man” speech. Who is he?**

**Examine and consider what Hamlet reveals in his final line in the scene.**