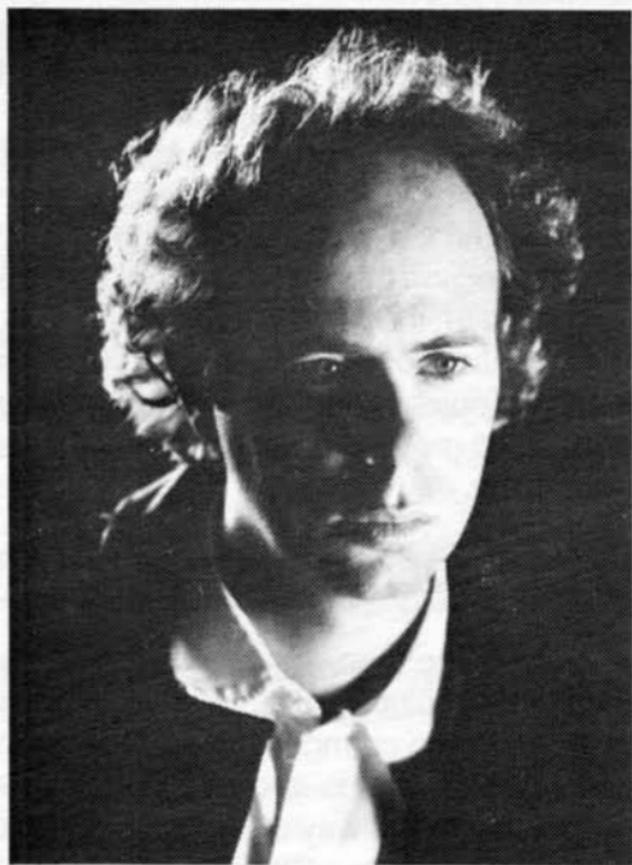


*A Taste of Shakespeare*



**Companion to**

**HAMLET**

## **THE VIDEO SERIES**

A Taste of Shakespeare is a series of half hour videos based on the Shakespeare plays most frequently taught in high school and college. In each video, actors tell the story of a specific play and act out key scenes, which reveal the attitudes and relationships of the main characters. The purpose of the series is to connect students to the people in Shakespeare's plays; to dissolve difficulties with Shakespeare's language; and to create a forum for discussion of problematic situations found in the plays. The video is intended as an introduction to the high school or college Shakespeare unit, but will serve equally well at any point in the study of a Shakespeare play. The Discussion Topics included with each video may be used for small group discussion, essay topics, or test questions.

## **THIS EPISODE: HAMLET**

The Hamlet video tape was produced with four actors playing multiple roles, each role being indicated by some change of costume and method of presentation. The point of this was to show how little is needed in the way of props and set design to understand and enjoy a Shakespeare play. We videotaped our production in a high school auditorium, using the stage, seats, stairs, and door to the outside. We even shot one scene in the narrow space between the back curtain and the back wall.

## THE CHARACTERS

**King Claudius of Denmark** - Hamlet's uncle, who became his step-father by marrying Hamlet's widowed mother. Claudius is played by Brian Tree wearing a white shirt, black pants, and a dark velvet cloak.

**Queen Gertrude** - Hamlet's mother now wife to his uncle. Gertrude is played by Tanja Jacobs wearing a white shirt, green skirt, and gold scarf.

**Hamlet, Prince of Denmark** - Son of Queen Gertrude and her first husband: the former king of Denmark. Hamlet is played by Eric Weinthal wearing a white tuxedo shirt, black pants, and sometimes a dark jacket. (Eric is the only actor who does not play a multiple role, or act as narrator).

**The Ghost of Hamlet's father** - Played by Brian Tree in a kind of armour. (You won't have any trouble identifying the ghost).

**Horatio** - Hamlet's school friend - played by Karyn Dwyer in green jacket and pants and a cap over her red hair.

**Ophelia, Hamlet's girl friend** - Played by Karyn Dwyer in a long dress, and (later) in a long night dress.

**Laertes, Ophelia's brother** - Played by Tanja Jacobs in a white shirt, black pants, and a black vest.

**Polonius, father of Ophelia and Laertes**, and counsellor to the king and queen - played by Brian Tree wearing a black turtle neck, black pants, and black hat, a red cloak, and glasses.

**The Gravedigger** - played by Tanja Jacobs, wearing a rough brown shirt over her regular clothes.

## KEY SCENES

- II.ii.306-319 - "What a piece of work is man"
- I.ii.129-58 - "O, that this too sullied flesh would melt"
- I.ii.176-81 - "My lord, I came to see your father's funeral..."
- I.ii.1-120 - "Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death..."
- I.v.11-189 - "I am thy father's spirit..."
- I.iii.5-80 - "To thine own self be true..."
- III.i.56-85 - "To be or not to be"
- III.i.93-164 - The nunnery scene
- II.ii.601-617 - "The play's the thing"
- III.iii.36-95 - "Claudius praying" scene
- III.iv.9-180 - "Closet scene"
- IV.iii.16-37 - "Where's Polonius?"
- IV.V.21-73 - Ophelia's "mad scene"
- V.i.62-188 - "Gravedigger" scene
- V.i.271-73 - "I loved Ophelia"
- V.ii.290-361 - "Final Scene"

## **QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION**

1) Your father dies and your mother remarries soon after the funeral. She marries your uncle: a man you never liked. He wants you to stay home rather than go back to university where you were when your father died. How would you feel? How would you behave toward your mother? Toward your step-father?

2) Your father dies suddenly, under suspicious circumstances. One night his ghost appears and tells you he was murdered by your uncle. Not only that, but he expects you to revenge the murder. Would you trust a ghost? How would you check out his story? What would you do about bringing your uncle to justice?

3) You are a young woman very much in love with your boy friend, who, you have always believed, loves you back. You are confident that one day you will marry each other. But your father and brother insist that you are only being "used", and tell you to break off the relationship. Do you follow your father's orders, or do you follow your heart? How would you know whether or not your father was right?

4) You are a woman who remarried soon after your husband's death. Your son hates your second husband, and believes that he murdered your first. Would you believe your son? What would you do?

5) You are in love with your brother's wife, and you are pretty sure she loves you too. You know that your brother will never agree to a divorce. What would you do?

6) You have murdered your brother and married his wife. You suspect that your step-son has somehow found out about the crime. How would you protect yourself and your marriage?

## INDEPENDENT STUDY QUESTIONS

1) Hamlet's attitude toward women undergoes a drastic change after his mother's remarriage, and his girl friend's seeming change of heart. Read what he says in I.ii.146-59, and III.i.144-49, and explain what he means.

2) Shakespeare's attitude toward the supernatural, and the world of the dead, is revealed in Hamlet's conversations with the Ghost. What is Shakespeare's attitude? What relationship between the living and the dead is implied in the play? What do you believe happens after death? What do you think we owe the dead? Read especially I.v.92-112 and III.i.56-88.

3) Hamlet's attitude toward mankind in general, and himself in particular, is revealed in II.ii.560-99, and III.i.121-30. Explain what he says and judge whether what he says is accurate. Which of his feelings do you share?

4) Although Polonius is not an admirable character, he gives some good advice to his son at the beginning of the play: I.iii.58-80. What is he saying? What do you agree or disagree with?

5) Ophelia's "mad songs" suggest that possibly her father and brother were right to warn her about her behaviour. Read IV.v.23-73 and IV.v.164-98, and rewrite the songs in modern English.

6) Read Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech III.i.56-87, and describe what you think Shakespeare is saying about suicide. What changes in Hamlet's attitude toward death occur by the end of the play?

## **DRAMATIZED READINGS**

- 1) Divide the class into small groups, each of which prepares one of the key scenes, giving a different interpretation from the one we present.
- 2) After a group of students gives a dramatized reading, each one speaks out as the character he or she portrayed, telling how he/she feels about the situation in the scene. This will involve research, thinking and discussion before parts are assigned and the scene is read or acted out.

## **RECOMMENDED TEXT**

Signet Classic Edition of Hamlet

## **RECOMMENDED READING**

Twentieth Century Interpretations of Hamlet

David Bevington, editor, (1968)

Shakespearean Tragedy

A.C. Bradley, (1904)

Hamlet and Oedipus

Ernest Jones, (1954)

Shakespeare: Hamlet

Kenneth Muir, (1963)

What Happens in "Hamlet"

J. Dover Wilson, (1951)

## **RECOMMENDED VIDEO**

Hamlet

Movie Version, starring Mel Gibson

## **Acknowledgements**

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**The Henry and Bernice Kaufmann Foundation  
&  
Mississauga Private School**

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## **Information**

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