

List of characters

The Royal House of Denmark

HAMLET Prince of Denmark
 CLAUDIUS King of Denmark, Hamlet's uncle
 GERTRUDE Queen of Denmark, Hamlet's mother
 GHOST of King Hamlet, Hamlet's father

The Court of Denmark

POLONIUS Counsellor to the king	OSRIC	} Courtiers
OPHELIA his daughter	LORDS	
LAERTES his son	GENTLEMAN	
REYNALDO his servant	MESSENGER and ATTENDANTS	

VOLTEMAND	} Ambassadors to Norway
CORNELIUS	
MARCELLUS	} Officers of the Watch
BARNARDO	
FRANCISCO	
SOLDIERS and GUARDS	

Former fellow students of Hamlet

HORATIO Hamlet's friend
 ROSENCRANTZ } Sent for by Claudius to inform on Hamlet
 GUILDENSTERN }

Norway

FORTINBRAS Prince of Norway
 CAPTAIN in Fortinbras's army

Other characters in the play

First PLAYER } actors visiting Elsinore
 Other players }
 English AMBASSADORS
 SAILORS
 CLOWN gravedigger and sexton
 SECOND CLOWN his assistant
 PRIEST at Ophelia's funeral

The action of the play is set in and around the Danish royal palace at Elsinore.

Francisco is on sentry duty on the gun platform of Elsinore. It is midnight and freezing cold. Barnardo comes to relieve Francisco. Horatio and Marcellus arrive to join Barnardo.

Stagecraft

To experience the tense and uneasy atmosphere of the play's opening, the best thing to do is take parts and act out the first nineteen lines. As you rehearse, talk together about the following points. Remember, your aim is to make the opening moments of the play gripping and dramatic.

- What will be the first thing the audience sees? For example, is Francisco on sentry duty, patrolling the stage, before the first members of the audience enter?
- Barnardo, the newcomer, challenges Francisco. This is contrary to military practice (Francisco should challenge him). How can you use that error to intensify the nervous atmosphere?
- What effect do the short, staccato ('rapid fire') verbal exchanges have?
- How can you show the audience that the night is bitterly cold?
- Francisco is never seen again in the play, but his remark 'And I am sick at heart' forecasts the troubled melancholy that Hamlet feels when he appears in the next scene. How might Francisco speak and behave during his brief time on stage? What would be the effect if Hamlet and Francisco were played by the same actor?
- In Shakespeare's day, plays were staged in broad daylight. Identify all the words and phrases in the script that help create the impression of night and darkness.

1 Horatio

This is the first time we meet Horatio, who will turn out to be an important character in the play.

- Look at Horatio's lines in the script opposite and on the following page, and start making notes on his character, based on the attitude he takes towards the Watch and the Ghost. Write down the range of emotions he displays. As you progress through the play, your first impressions of his character will inform your notes on Horatio, and the role he plays in relation to Hamlet.

X
NB

Do this
Today's task

What range of emotions
does Horatio present
in this opening scene?

Nay answer me go ahead –
answer me

unfold yourself identify yourself,
give the password

Long live the king! (the password,
which will prove ironic as the play
reveals the death of King Hamlet)

most carefully precisely

relief (both 'relief' in the
modern sense, and replacement
on the watch or guarding of
the battlements)

rivals partners

Stand ho! stop and
declare yourself

this ground this castle
and country

liegemen to the Dane
loyal followers of the Danish king

Give you I wish you

A piece of him a characteristically
laconic, witty or modest statement
from Horatio

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

Act 1 Scene 1

A gun platform on the battlements of
Elsinore Castle

Enter BARNARDO and FRANCISCO, two sentinels

BARNARDO	Who's there?	
FRANCISCO	Nay answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.	
BARNARDO	Long live the king!	
FRANCISCO	Barnardo?	
BARNARDO	He.	5
FRANCISCO	You come most carefully upon your hour.	
BARNARDO	'Tis now struck twelve, get thee to bed Francisco.	
FRANCISCO	For this relief much thanks, 'tis bitter cold And I am sick at heart.	
BARNARDO	Have you had quiet guard?	
FRANCISCO	Not a mouse stirring.	10
BARNARDO	Well, good night. If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus, The rivals of my watch, bid them make haste.	
FRANCISCO	I think I hear them.	

Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS

	Stand ho! Who is there?	
HORATIO	Friends to this ground.	
MARCELLUS	And liegemen to the Dane.	15
FRANCISCO	Give you good night.	
MARCELLUS	Oh farewell honest soldier, Who hath relieved you?	
FRANCISCO	Barnardo hath my place. Give you good night.	<i>Exit Francisco</i>
MARCELLUS	Holla, Barnardo!	
BARNARDO	Say, What, is Horatio there?	
HORATIO	A piece of him.	

Marcellus reports that he and Barnardo have seen the Ghost twice. Horatio doesn't believe them, but is struck with fear and amazement when the Ghost of Hamlet's father appears.

Stagecraft

'Enter GHOST' – dead King Hamlet appears (in pairs)

The entry of the Ghost of Hamlet's father is a thrilling moment in the theatre. Each new production attempts to ensure that the entrance is as electrifying and memorable as possible. Imagine you are directing the play. You will keep a Director's Journal in which you consider stagecraft, how to advise the actors, tone and other features of the production.

- a Talk with your partner and write notes on each of the following:
 - What does the Ghost look like? Horatio gives a clue in lines 47–9 (and see the pictures in the photo gallery and on pp. 10 and 146).
 - Suggest how the Ghost might enter. Slowly or suddenly? From which direction? Decide whether he makes any gestures, what sound effects you might use and how he leaves the stage.
 - Sometimes, as the Ghost appears, the bell strikes. Would you have it strike if you were directing the play? Why, or why not?
- b In some productions, the Ghost does not appear physically. The audience has to imagine its presence through lighting, sound and characters' reactions. How effective do you think this style of presenting the Ghost would be? Have two groups present the scene, one with the Ghost on stage and the other with him off stage, to compare dramatic effect.

1 An inner ghost? (in pairs)

In a production at the Royal Court Theatre in London in 1980, the actor Jonathan Pryce played Hamlet, with the Ghost appearing to speak from inside him. At times he was bent double with the pain of the Ghost's voice coming through him; at other times the Ghost appeared to speak in a horrible voice that cut through Hamlet's own voice, bubbling up in an uncontrolled fashion. Discuss the following points:

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of having the Ghost come from within a character?
- How could this first scene be presented if the Ghost is an internal rather than an external presence?
- What does an inner Ghost imply about the nature of ghosts, and the purpose of this particular Ghost in the play as a whole?

but our fantasy
only our imagination

Touching concerning
entreated requested and urged

apparition vision, ghostly sight
approve our eyes
believe our story

Tush, tush (equivalent to a combination of 'ssh' and 'tut tut')
assail your ears tell you forcefully

yond yonder (far distant)
pole pole star (North Star)
t'illumine to illuminate

scholar student (ghosts were believed to speak Latin)

harrows tortures, tears

usurp't wrongfully seizes


buried Denmark the dead King Hamlet
charge order

language of drama
clois

X

BARNARDO Welcome Horatio, welcome good Marcellus. 20
 MARCELLUS What, has this thing appeared again tonight?
 BARNARDO I have seen nothing.
 MARCELLUS Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,
 And will not let belief take hold of him
 Touching this dreaded sight, twice seen of us. 25
 Therefore I have entreated him along
 With us to watch the minutes of this night,
 That if again this apparition come
 He may approve our eyes, and speak to it.
 HORATIO Tush, tush, 'twill not appear. ←
 BARNARDO Sit down awhile, 30
 And let us once again assail your ears,
 That are so fortified against our story,
 What we two nights have seen.
 HORATIO Well, sit we down,
 And let us hear Barnardo speak of this.
 BARNARDO Last night of all, 35
 When yond same star that's westward from the pole
 Had made his course t'illuminate that part of heaven
 Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,
 The bell then beating one – ←
 Enter GHOST ←
 MARCELLUS Peace, break thee off. Look where it comes again. 40
 BARNARDO In the same figure, like the king that's dead.
 MARCELLUS Thou art a scholar, speak to it Horatio.
 BARNARDO Looks a not like the king? Mark it Horatio.
 HORATIO Most like. It harrows me with fear and wonder. ←
 BARNARDO It would be spoke to.
 MARCELLUS Question it Horatio. 45
 HORATIO What art thou that usurp'st this time of night,
 Together with that fair and warlike form
 In which the majesty of buried Denmark
 Did sometimes march? By heaven I charge thee speak.
 MARCELLUS It is offended.
 BARNARDO See, it stalks away. 50
 HORATIO Stay! Speak, speak, I charge thee speak!

Exit Ghost

 **Horatio agrees that the Ghost is the exact image of the dead King Hamlet. He thinks it foretells disasters for Denmark. Horatio begins to explain why there are so many urgent preparations for war.**

1 A battle? Or an angry gesture? (in small groups)

Do lines 62–3 tell of Denmark's king defeating the Polish army ('Polacks') in a battle on the ice ('sledged' = on sledges)? Or do they mean that the king, in an angry discussion ('parle') with the Norwegians, struck his battle-axe on the ice like a sledgehammer (= 'sledged'). Sometimes the word 'Polacks' is printed as 'polax' (poleaxe).

- Stage two tableaux (frozen pictures) showing each interpretation. Decide which version is more imaginative and dramatic.

Write about it

Denmark prepares for war (in pairs)

In lines 70–9, Marcellus questions why Denmark is feverishly preparing for war. Guards are mounted everywhere. 'Brazen' (brass) cannons roll off the production line daily. Weapons are bought in foreign countries and imported ('foreign mart for implements of war'). Ships are being built by forced labour ('impress'), working night and day, even on Sundays (unusual in a Christian country).

- Write six additional lines, in Shakespearean verse or in modern prose, listing more of Denmark's frantic war preparations. Use the same urgent style as Marcellus does.

Language in the play

'Doubling' – a feature of the play

In the script opposite there are several examples of a language device that recurs through the play. It is the use of 'and' between two verbs, nouns or noun phrases, or between adjectives, to achieve a 'doubling' effect: 'tremble and look pale', 'sensible and true avouch', 'gross and scope', 'strict and most observant'.

- As you read on, list other examples (there are at least seven in Horatio's lines 80–107). The technical term is **hendiadys** (pronounced 'hen-die-a-dees'). You will find information about its dramatic importance on page 267.
- What is the linguistic and dramatic effect of such doubling?

sensible and true avouch
evidence

Norway King of Norway

parle exchange of words leading
(in this case) to violence

Polacks forces from Poland

jump exactly

martial stalk military stride

In what particular ... work
how to think about it

gross and scope general view

bodes ... state is ominous for us
and for Denmark

Good now now then (deriving
from 'In the name of God' or 'For
God's sake')

mart market

impress employment

toward in preparation

emulate jealous

sealed compact treaty

ratified confirmed

law and heraldy laws of chivalry

- MARCELLUS 'Tis gone and will not answer.
- BARNARDO How now Horatio? you tremble and look pale.
Is not this something more than fantasy?
What think you on't? 55
- HORATIO Before my God, I might not this believe
Without the sensible and true avouch
Of mine own eyes.
- MARCELLUS Is it not like the king?
- HORATIO As thou art to thyself.
Such was the very armour he had on 60
When he th'ambitious Norway combated;
So frowned he once, when in an angry parle
He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.
'Tis strange.
- MARCELLUS Thus twice before, and jump at this dead hour, 65
With martial stalk hath he gone by our watch.
- HORATIO In what particular thought to work I know not,
But in the gross and scope of mine opinion
This bodes some strange eruption to our state.
- MARCELLUS Good now sit down, and tell me he that knows, 70
Why this same strict and most observant watch
So nightly toils the subject of the land,
And why such daily cast of brazen cannon,
And foreign mart for implements of war,
Why such impress of shipwrights, whose sore task 75
Does not divide the Sunday from the week.
What might be toward, that this sweaty haste
Doth make the night joint-labourer with the day?
Who is't that can inform me?
- HORATIO That can I –
At least the whisper goes so. Our last king, ✓ 80
Whose image even but now appeared to us,
Was as you know by Fortinbras of Norway,
Thereto pricked on by a most emulate pride,
Dared to the combat; in which our valiant Hamlet – *King Hamlet*
For so this side of our known world esteemed him – 85
Did slay this Fortinbras; who by a sealed compact,
Well ratified by law and heraldy,
Did forfeit (with his life) all those his lands
Which he stood seized of, to the conqueror;

*War**?*

Horatio says that young Fortinbras intends to regain the lands his father lost when killed by King Hamlet. The Ghost's appearance presages violence, just as Caesar's death was foretold by ominous events.

1 Act out Horatio's story (in groups of six or more)

In lines 80–107, Horatio explains why Denmark is preparing for war. The king of Norway (old Fortinbras) had challenged King Hamlet (Hamlet's father) to personal combat. Both men wagered ('gagèd') large areas of land on the outcome of the duel. King Hamlet killed Fortinbras and so took over his territory, which was passed on to his son, Hamlet, when he died. Now young Fortinbras, with an army of mercenaries ('landless resolute'), seeks to recover his father's lost lands. The Danes are hastily preparing to defend themselves against the imminent invasion.

- Bring Horatio's story to life. One person narrates while the others enact each episode. The lines contain over twenty-five separate actions that can be shown. (For instance, 'Sharked up' is a vivid **image** of a shark feeding indiscriminately.)

Write about it

Predicting disasters

'A mote it is to trouble the mind's eye' says Horatio (line 112): the appearance of the Ghost is an irritant ('mote') to the imagination. It suggests that disasters lie ahead. Shakespeare had written *Julius Caesar* shortly before *Hamlet*. The sinister omens that preceded the death of Caesar were fresh in his mind. Horatio lists them: the living dead, comets, bloody rain, sunspots, an eclipse of the moon ('the moist star'). Horatio uses the language of classical **allusion** (referencing), which gives the speech a lofty, important style.

- Compare Horatio's style here (lines 112–39) with that of his speech at lines 148–56 in this scene. Why does he use the more florid style in the script opposite?
- Find a copy of *The Elizabethan World Picture* by E.M.W. Tillyard (first published in 1943) and write up a paragraph or two of background information on how the Elizabethans and Jacobean (people living under the reign of James I, 1603–25) saw the universe and its influence on humanity. You could also compare Gloucester and Edmond's lines in *King Lear* (Act I Scene 2, 103–33). Present your research to the rest of the class. You might wish to develop these short presentations into a wall display or some other resource that everyone in the group can refer to.

moiety competent equal amount

gagèd calculated, wagered

comart ... design treaty

unimproved mettle
untested bravery

skirts of Norway edges of the kingdom/edges of the king's influence

a stomach in't courage in it

terms compulsory
forced agreement

post-haste and romage
frantic activity and turmoil

portentous with importance and future significance

palmy (literally, with servants waving palm leaves to keep Caesar cool, but also with the suggestion of decadence and corruption)

tenantless empty

trains trails

Neptune's empire the sea

precursè forewarning of doom (pre-cursè)

harbingers messengers

climatures territories



Against the which a moiety competent 90
 Was gagèd by our king, which had returned
 To the inheritance of Fortinbras
 Had he been vanquisher; as by the same comart
 And carriage of the article design,
 His fell to Hamlet. Now sir, young Fortinbras, 95
 Of unimprovèd mettle hot and full,
 Hath in the skirts of Norway here and there
 Sharked up a list of landless resolute
 For food and diet to some enterprise
 That hath a stomach in't; which is no other, 100
 As it doth well appear unto our state,
 But to recover of us by strong hand
 And terms compulsory those foresaid lands
 So by his father lost. And this, I take it,
 Is the main motive of our preparations, 105
 The source of this our watch, and the chief head
 Of this post-haste and romage in the land.
 [BARNARDO] I think it be no other but e'en so.
 Well may it sort that this portentous figure
 Comes armèd through our watch so like the king
 That was and is the question of these wars. 110
 [HORATIO] A mote it is to trouble the mind's eye.
 In the most high and palmy state of Rome,
 A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
 The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead 115
 Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets;
 As stars with trains of fire, and dews of blood,
 Disasters in the sun; and the moist star,
 Upon whose influence Neptune's empire stands, 120
 Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse.
 And even the like precursor of feared events,
 As harbingers preceding still the fates
 And prologue to the omen coming on,
 Have heaven and earth together demonstrated 125
 Unto our climatures and countrymen.]

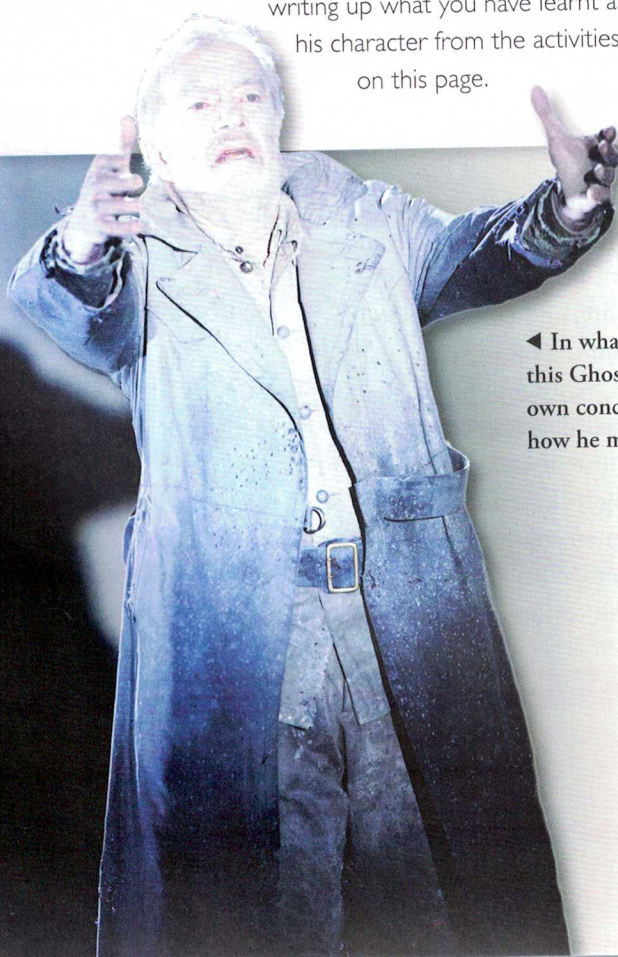
King Hamlet's Ghost.

Horatio five times demands that the reappearing Ghost speak to him. The cock crows and the Ghost vanishes without reply. Horatio says it cannot be harmed, but that it behaved like a criminal summoned to justice.

Characters

Horatio's response to the Ghost (in pairs)

- Look back at Horatio's lines in this scene, and refer to your notes on the activity about Horatio on page 2. Make a list of the different characteristics Horatio has shown, then compare them with a partner and build up a list that includes your combined ideas. Share this list with the class as a whole.
- Try reading out lines 112–25 and lines 126–39, experimenting with different styles of delivery. The two sections are clearly different, but in how many ways could you present each of the sections? Which combination works best? } NB
- Stage an interview with Horatio, questioning him about his different reactions to the Ghost. Questions could include: what was your first reaction to hearing the reports of Marcellus and Barnardo? Have you changed your position since seeing the Ghost? What do you think its presence portends (signifies)?
- Extend your notes on Horatio from the page 2 activity by writing up what you have learnt about his character from the activities on this page.



◀ In what ways does this Ghost match your own conceptions of how he might look?

soft quiet
cross address, confront

privy to knowledgeable about

uphoarded hoarded, hidden
Extorted wrrenched out by force

partisan pike, long-handled spear

invulnerable impossible to hurt
vain blows futile attempts to hit

started seemed surprised
a guilty thing ... summons
an evildoer caught red-handed

extravagant and erring
wandering
hies ... confine hurries to his
prison (cell, place of confinement)
present object
apparition (the Ghost)
made probation gave proof

Enter GHOST

But soft, behold, lo where it comes again!
I'll cross it though it blast me. Stay, illusion.

It spreads his arms

If thou hast any sound or use of voice,
Speak to me.

If there be any good thing to be done 130
That may to thee do ease, and grace to me,
Speak to me.

If thou art privy to thy country's fate,
Which happily foreknowing may avoid,
Oh speak. 135

Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life
Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,
For which they say you spirits oft walk in death, *The cock crows*
Speak of it. Stay and speak! Stop it Marcellus.

MARCELLUS Shall I strike at it with my partisan? 140

HORATIO Do if it will not stand.

BARNARDO 'Tis here.

HORATIO 'Tis here.

MARCELLUS 'Tis gone.

Exit Ghost

We do it wrong being so majestic
To offer it the show of violence,
For it is as the air invulnerable, 145
And our vain blows malicious mockery.

BARNARDO It was about to speak when the cock crew.

HORATIO And then it started like a guilty thing
Upon a fearful summons. I have heard,
The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn, 150

Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
Awake the god of day; and at his warning,
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
Th'extravagant and erring spirit hies
To his confine. And of the truth herein 155
This present object made probation.



Marcellus claims that the cockerel crows all night long at Christmas, a time when no harm can be done. Horatio seems to agree. He proposes that they tell Hamlet about the Ghost.

1 Daybreak after darkness: a change of mood

(in pairs)

Dawn is breaking. The mood of fear, tension and apprehension gives way to a different emotional climate. Lyrical, poetic language creates a sense of religious awe and wonder. To experience the atmosphere of these closing moments of Scene 1, try the activities below:

- Talk together about non-verbal ways in which the change of mood could be conveyed in the theatre (lighting, sound, posture and so on).
- Marcellus is a soldier. He may be dressed in armour for his night's vigil, but he speaks eloquently. His words are filled with poetic wonderment, and do not sound like the language of a no-nonsense military man. Experiment with ways of speaking lines 157–64: full of religious awe; bluntly and factually; conspiratorially, as a great secret. Decide how you think the lines should be spoken on stage.
- After Marcellus's eloquent description of how Christmastime prevents any evil, Horatio responds with 'So have I heard, and do in part believe it.' His remark seems tinged with scepticism. Speak line 165, emphasising 'in part'. See if you can agree on whether the actor should use the line to show that Horatio does not really believe what Marcellus says.

ever 'gainst always before
(or in expectation of)

our Saviour Jesus Christ

bird of dawning cockerel

stir abroad move around outside

no planets strike (the planets were assumed to crash into each other at times, causing disorder in the world)

takes bewitches, does harm

hallowed holy

russet mantle
reddish-coloured cloak

impart tell

spirit (the Ghost)

acquaint him with it
let him know about it

most conveniently very easily

Themes

Disorder, death and the afterlife (in pairs)

The first scene in *Hamlet* provides us with an atmospheric and dramatic start to the play. The Watch is nervous, having seen the Ghost twice already. There is a tense political situation – Denmark is in dispute with Norway over lands that have been awarded to Hamlet, following the killing of the king of Norway by Hamlet's father. The Ghost's appearance seems to foreshadow a number of disturbing themes.

- Note down as many themes as you can identify in this opening scene. Remember that a 'theme' can be captured by more than a single word. So, as well as 'fear', 'anxiety' and 'politics', for example, you can characterise a theme in a more complex way, such as 'the relationship between reason and the imagination'.
- Arrange the themes you have identified in a diagram that shows how they relate to each other.

What Themes
can you identify
in this scene?

MARCELLUS It faded on the crowing of the cock.
 Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
 Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
 This bird of dawning singeth all night long,
 And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad,
 The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,
 No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
 So hallowed and so gracious is that time.

160

*so is this night?
unwholesome.*

HORATIO So have I heard, and do in part believe it.
 But look, the morn in russet mantle clad
 Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill.
 Break we our watch up, and by my advice
 Let us impart what we have seen tonight
 Unto young Hamlet, for upon my life
 This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him.
 Do you consent we shall acquaint him with it,
 As needful in our loves, fitting our duty?

165

mood, tone

MARCELLUS Let's do't I pray, and I this morning know
 Where we shall find him most conveniently.

170

175

Exeunt