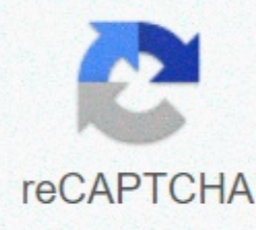




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In the first act of William Shakespeare's Hamlet , the Ghost of the dead King of Denmark appears to his son, setting off a chain of events that culminates in the play's notoriously bloody finale. But how would this mysterious figure have been understood in Shakespeare's time? Harvard professor Stephen Greenblatt guides learners through an exploration of the Ghost's uncanny theatrical power and the historical contexts from which the character emerged. You will be introduced to the narrative sources of Hamlet, the religious convictions that shaped how Renaissance England understood the afterlife, and how the Ghost would have thrilled and challenged its original audience. By focusing on the Ghost, you will see how the play grapples with issues like death, mourning, remembrance, and the power of theatre. Through short video lectures, readings from the play as well as later works by Coleridge and Joyce, and conversations with experts, you will develop critical tools with which to "unlock" the play's possible meanings. If you're reading Hamlet for the first time, this course is a great introduction. If you're reading it for the hundredth time, it is the perfect chance to revisit and refresh your "take" on Shakespeare's greatest tragedy. The many meanings of Hamlet revealed through the central figure: the Ghost of Hamlet's murdered father. The historical context that shaped how Shakespeare wrote the play and how his audiences interpreted it. How to challenge the assumption that the play is only about revenge. The importance of themes like remembrance, death, and mourning. How the Ghost has been interpreted on stage, on screen, and in writing. Part 1: Spirit? Apparition? Illusion? In Part 1, we read Acts 1-2, analyzing how Shakespeare introduces the mysterious figure of the Ghost and builds up to Hamlet's encounter with it. By the end of this unit, you will be able to: Examine how Shakespeare sets the stage for Hamlet through the Ghost's dramatic appearance in the opening of the play Situate the Ghost in the play's broader themes, motifs, and patterns of language Discuss how Shakespeare builds on source materials, the work of other playwrights, and his own earlier plays in creating Hamlet Assess different interpretations of what the Ghost "is," as well as how these interpretations are borne out in performance Part 2: Imagining the Afterlife In Part 2, we continue our reading with Acts 3-4 and look closely at the religious controversies following the Protestant Reformation. By the end of this unit, you will be able to: Interpret Hamlet in the context of the English Reformation, evaluating its complicated legacy on institutional practices and individual beliefs Examine the religious controversy of Purgatory during Shakespeare's time as well as its significance for the Ghost and Hamlet Discuss the relationship between rituals such as prayer, last rites, communion, and the purchase of indulgences with the theater Apply historical and anthropological methods to Hamlet, considering what it says about death in its own time and throughout time Part 3: The Theater of Mourning As we finish reading the play, we weigh the idea that the play is "about" revenge with the idea that it is "about" remembrance. By the end of this unit, you will be able to: Use primary source documents to understand ideas of death and mourning in the early modern period Discuss how Shakespeare built upon the theatricality of mourning rituals to make Hamlet meaningful for its first audiences Weigh the emphasis on revenge in the play with that on remembrance, which resonates with religious belief and practice Assess different viewpoints on how Hamlet is universal and particular, depending on the context **Part 4: The Texts of _Hamlet_ In Part 4, we turn to the earliest printed texts of the play, situating them in a broader understanding of early modern print and manuscript production. _ _ **By the end of this unit, you will be able to: Use primary documents to understand the mechanics of early modern print and manuscript culture Analyze how different early texts of Hamlet shape how we understand and interpret the play Connect Hamlet 's meditations on death and remembrance to the "life" of the play itself Consider Hamlet 's impact on other texts through the examples of Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead and Dogg's Hamlet Receive an instructor-signed certificate with the institution's logo to verify your achievement and increase your job prospects Add the certificate to your CV or resume, or post it directly on LinkedIn Give yourself an additional incentive to complete the course edX, a non-profit, relies on verified certificates to help fund free education for everyone globally How is the honor code upheld? HarvardX requires individuals who enroll in its courses on edX to abide by the terms of the edX honor code. HarvardX will take appropriate corrective action in response to violations of the edX honor code, which may include dismissal from the HarvardX course; revocation of any certificates received for the HarvardX course; or other remedies as circumstances warrant. No refunds will be issued in the case of corrective action for such violations. Enrollees who are taking HarvardX courses as part of another program will also be governed by the academic policies of those programs. How does my participation contribute to research? By registering as an online learner in our open online courses, you are also participating in research intended to enhance HarvardX's instructional offerings as well as the quality of learning and related sciences worldwide. In the interest of research, you may be exposed to some variations in the course materials. HarvardX does not use learner data for any purpose beyond the University's stated missions of education and research. For purposes of research, we may share information we collect from online learning activities, including Personally Identifiable Information, with researchers beyond Harvard. However, your Personally Identifiable Information will only be shared as permitted by applicable law, will be limited to what is necessary to perform the research, and will be subject to an agreement to protect the data. We may also share with the public or third parties aggregated information that does not personally identify you. Similarly, any research findings will be reported at the aggregate level and will not expose your personal identity. Please read the edX Privacy Policy for more information regarding the processing, transmission, and use of data collected through the edX platform. How are non-discrimination and anti-harassment supported? Harvard University and HarvardX are committed to maintaining a safe and healthy educational and work environment in which no member of the community is excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination or harassment in our program. All members of the HarvardX community are expected to abide by Harvard policies on nondiscrimination, including sexual harassment, and the edX Terms of Service. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact harvardx@harvard.edu and/or report your experience through the edX contact form. Kurtis Garbutt/Flickr/CC-BY-2.0 William Shakespeare's work has shaped English literature, language and thought for over 400 years. Scholar Alan Craven names him the "greatest dramatist, the greatest poet and the greatest prose writer" in the English language. Shakespeare's coined words are incorporated into the language today as common parlance; his genres led to modern literary genres and his plays transformed theater. Most importantly, Shakespeare's work changed the way Westerners think about humanity, ethics and themselves. T.S. Eliot once said that Shakespeare and Dante divide the modern world between them. In other words, all literature and thought in the Western world today derives either from Shakespeare's passionate, broad understanding of humanity or Dante's equally passionate but strictly moral understanding. MIT's Professor Alexander Huang points out that Shakespeare's work informed and influenced the founding fathers of the United States from Jefferson to Lincoln. He was the most influential English-language writer of the English-speaking world. Beyond that, Shakespeare shaped the English language itself. When he wrote his plays, French was considered the language of culture and English literature consisted of only a handful of works. Shakespeare modernized the English language. He introduced or recorded for the first time in his plays thousands of new words, many of which became household words. Hundreds of phrases and aphorisms - including the phrase "household words" - were also introduced in his work. We all know that Shakespeare's sonnets and plays are full of romance, so it makes sense that Shakespeare is a natural fit for wedding readings. If you are looking for a reading for your wedding, consider these words from Shakespeare. Sonnet 116 is known as the marriage sonnet, as it's a very popular choice. But there are some less well-known verses which are also great for ceremonies joining lovers of the Bard. I particularly like Sonnet 115, which is a fun example of Shakespearean humor. Sonnet 116 Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments. Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds, or bends with the remover to remove: Oh, no! It is an ever-fixed mark. That looks on tempests and is never shaken; it is the star to every wandering bark, whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken. Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks within his bending sickle's compass come; love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, but bears it out even to the edge of doom. If this be error and upon me proved, I never writ, nor no man ever loved. Sonnet 18 Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate: Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May, And summer's lease hath all too short a date: Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines, And often is his gold complexion dimm'd; And every fair from fair sometime declines, By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd; But thy eternal summer shall not fade Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest; Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade, When in eternal lines to time thou growest: So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, So long lives this and this gives life to thee. "Sonnet 115" Those lines that I before have writ do lie, Even those that said I could not love you dearer: Yet then my judgment knew no reason why My most full flame should afterwards burn clearer. But reckoning Time, whose million'd accidents creep in 'twixt vows, and change decrees of kings, Tan sacred beauty, blunt the sharp'st intents, Divert strong minds to the course of altering things; Alas! why, fearing of Time's tyranny, Might I not then say, 'Now I love you best, When I was certain o'er uncertainty, Crowning the present, doubting of the rest?' Love is a babe, then might I not say so, To give full growth to that which still doth grow? "Sonnet 75" So are you to my thoughts as food to life, Or as sweet-season'd showers are to the ground; And for the peace of you I hold such strife As 'twixt a miser and his wealth is found; Now proud as an enjoyer and anon doubting the filching age will steal his treasure, Now counting best to be with you alone, Then better'd that the world may see my pleasure; Sometime all full with feasting on your sight And by and by clean starved for a look; Possessing or pursuing no delight, Save what is had or must from you be took. Thus do I pine and surfeit day by day, Or gluttoning on all, or all away. An excerpt from the poem Venus and Adonis Love comfortheth like sunshine after rain, But Lust's effect is tempest after sun; Love's gentle spring doth always fresh remain, Lust's winter comes ere summer half be done; Love surfeits not, Lust like a glutton dies; Love is all truth, Lust full of forged lies. (Some choose to only use the lines about love as their wedding reading: :Love comfortheth like sunshine after rain, Love's gentle spring doth always fresh remain, Love surfeits not, Love is all truth) "Sonnet 29" When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes, I all alone beweep my outcast state And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries And look upon myself and curse my fate, Wishing me like to one more rich in hope, Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd, Desiring this man's art and that man's scope, With what I most enjoy contented least; Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising, Haply I think on thee, and then my state, Like to the lark at break of day arising From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate; For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings For a beginner, Shakespeare can sometimes seem like a bunch of strange words put together in no sensible order. Once you learn to read and understand Shakespeare, you'll understand the beauty of the language and find out why it has inspired students and scholars for centuries. JannHuizenga/Getty Images It is impossible to overstate the importance of Shakespeare's work. It is clever, witty, beautiful, inspirational, funny, deep, dramatic, and more. Shakespeare was a true word genius whose work helps us see the beauty and artistic potential of the English language. Shakespeare's work has inspired students and scholars for centuries, because it also tells us so much about life, love, and human nature. When you study Shakespeare, you find that human beings haven't really changed all that much over the past several hundred years. It's interesting to know, for example, that people from Shakespeare's time had the same fears and insecurities that we experience today. Shakespeare will expand your mind if you let it. James D. Morgan/Getty Images Shakespeare really makes more sense when you see the words come to life on stage. You won't believe how much expressions and movements of the actors can demystify Shakespeare's beautiful but complex prose. Watch the actors in action and gain a deeper understanding of your text. Jann Huizenga/Getty Images As you progress in school and into college, you must realize that every subject gets more challenging. Literature is no different. You're not going to be successful in your studies if you think you can get through anything quickly—and that is triply true for Shakespeare. Don't try to get by on one reading. Read once for a basic understanding and again (and again) to do it justice. This is true for any book that you read as a learning assignment. People Images/Getty Images Shakespeare is different from any other piece of literature, in that it requires some engagement and active participation. It was written to be acted. When you actually say the words out loud, they start to "click." Just try it—you will see that you can suddenly understand the context of the words and expressions. It's a good idea to work with another person. Why not call your study partner and read to each other? Roy JAMES Shakespeare/Getty Images Let's face it—Shakespeare is tough to read and understand, no matter how many times you go through the book. After you have read the work, go ahead and read a summary of the piece you're working on if you're completely baffled. Just read a summary and then read the actual work again. You won't believe how much you missed before! And don't worry: reading the summary doesn't "ruin" anything when it comes to Shakespeare, because the importance lies partly in the art and beauty of the work. If you are worried about your teacher's opinion of this, be sure to ask about it. If your teacher has a problem with you reading a summary online, you should not do it! Shakespeare's writing is challenging because it comes from a time and place that is completely foreign to you. Don't feel too bad if you have a hard time getting through your text or you feel like you're actually reading a foreign language. This is a challenging assignment, and you are not alone in your concerns.

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