

THEATRE  
ROYAL

*Windsor*

# HAMLET

## Education Pack

Production by Bill Kenwright Ltd &  
Theatre Royal Windsor 2021

# HAMLET EDUCATION PACK 2021



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## ABOUT US

Theatre Royal Windsor is an exciting and thriving regional theatre and we are proud to be the only unsubsidised producing theatre to operate all year round in Britain.

The theatre hosts a busy programme of shows and events focusing on drama and musicals, supported with live music comedy and dance. The auditorium seats 633 and the building is grade 2 listed.

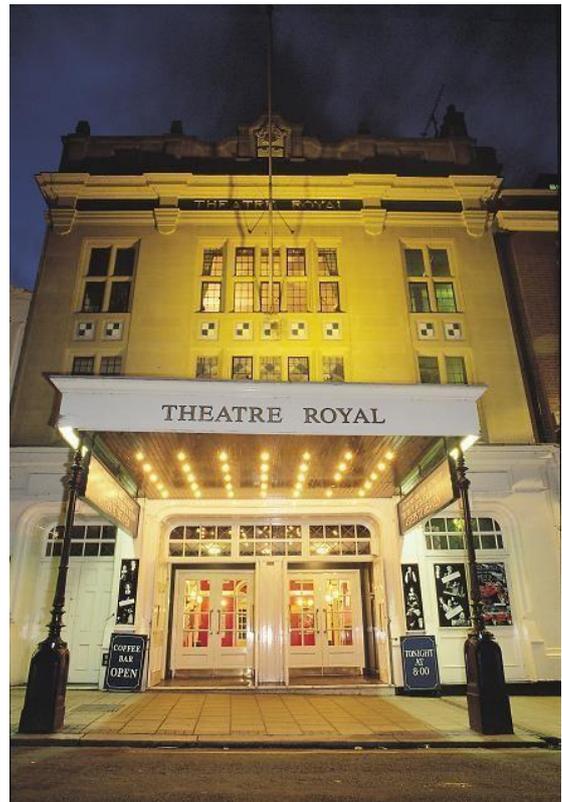
We are operated as part of Bill Kenwright Ltd. One of the largest commercial theatre producers in the UK. The theatre produces and opens many Bill Kenwright touring productions, in addition to its own in-house productions and the annual pantomime.

Theatre Royal Windsor was founded in 1793 in its original home on the town's High Street. That building was later sold and turned in to a chapel. A new building was built on Thames Street (where we are still housed today) in 1815 but was devastated by a fire in 1905.

George III was a frequent visitor, and Royal visits have continued through to this day with many of the current Royals attending regularly.

Work started on our current theatre in 1908 and it opened in 1910. Following the outbreak of Covid-19 where theatres have been closed for over a year, we are extremely excited to be re-opening our beautiful and historic venue with Hamlet.

Hamlet will be performed during the dates of June 21<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> September 2021.



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## CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

### Cast

Ben Allen  
Francesca Annis  
Steven Berkoff  
Emmanuella Cole  
Llinos Daniel  
Alis Wyn Davies  
Ashley D. Gayle  
Alison Halstead  
Nick Howard-Brown  
Jonathan Hyde Asif Khan  
Lee Knight *Alis and Steven during rehearsals*  
\*Credit Sean Gleeson



Missy Malek  
Ian McKellen  
Jenny Seagrove

### The Creatives

Director – Sean Mathias  
Assistant Director – Sophie Drake  
Set Designer – Lee Newby  
Costume Designer – Loren Elstein  
Wigs & Make-Up Designer – Susanna Peretz  
Lighting Designer – Zoe Spurr  
Composer & Sound Designer – Adam Cork

Alongside the actors and creative team there is a whole world of other roles and teams who make a theatre production happen and help the theatre run. Below are just a few examples of the different roles at the theatre, including behind-the-scenes, office and front of house roles– do you know what they all do?

Stage Crew Box Office staff Front of House Staff  
Education & Outreach Co-Ordinator  
Theatre Administrator Costume Makers Deputy Stage Manager  
Lighting Programmer Wigs Supervisors Company Stage Manager  
Theatre Directors Dressers Producers Costume Supervisor  
Public Relations (PR Team)  
Production Sound Engineers Wardrobe Mistress  
Props Buyer Theatre Technicians  
Assistant Stage Managers Wigs Makers  
Wigs Mistress Graphic Designer Finance Manager  
Marketing manager Production Manager

**FUN FACT:** Disney's The Lion King is an adaptation of Hamlet!

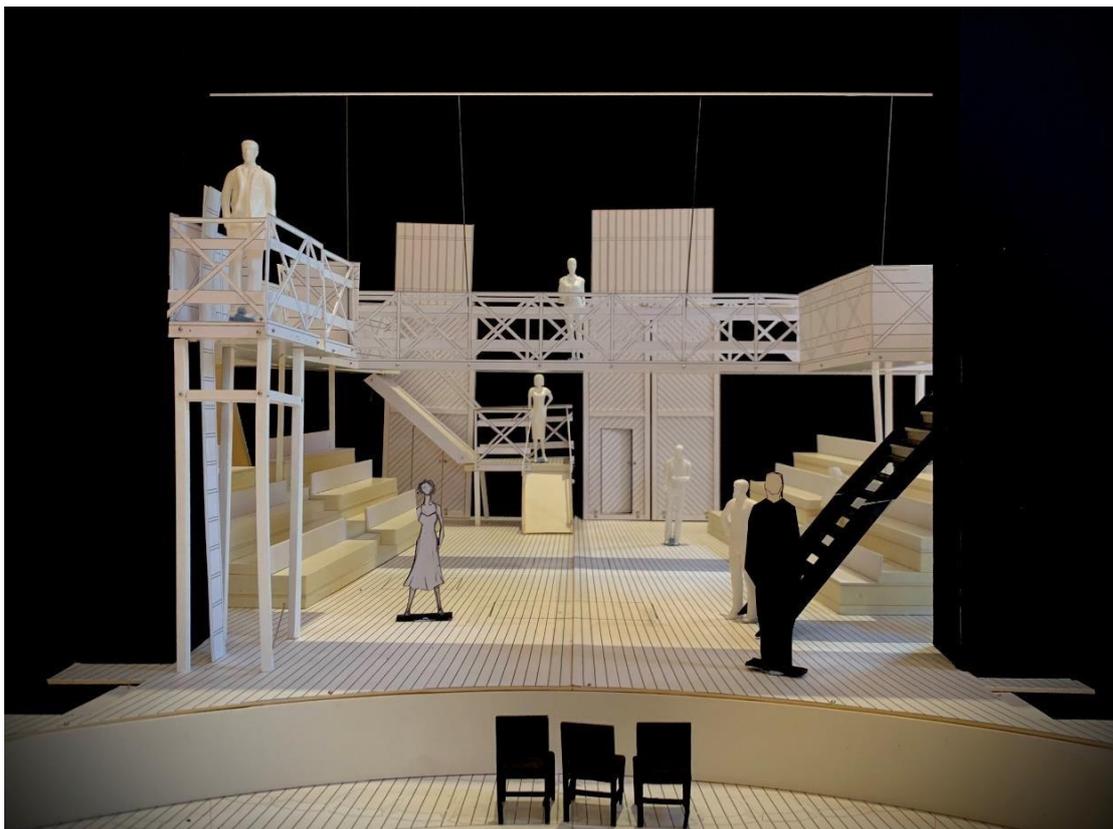
## THE SET

Designing the set for any production is a long and detailed process. This generally begins with the director and set designer having discussions around not only the way they would like the set to look, but also how it will work in a practical sense, where it might be set, and what time period it should reflect. Questions they have to consider might include: Are we being naturalistic and setting this in real life? Is the time period based in Shakespearean times or modern times? What are we trying to reflect from the story in the scenery and costumes? Where will actors exit and enter? Where will furniture and props appear? What will sightlines for the audience look like? If the actors are on a higher level or platform, will the whole audience be able to see them? And of course, they are limited to achieve all of this within a budget.

The design tends to be quite fluid at this stage and will often change throughout the process.

Many set designers continue the process by sketching outline ideas of how things might look. Once the director and set designer have their initial concept, the set designer will go away and make what we call a 'White Card model'; this is where they build the set to-scale out of white card, so that all creatives and producers can give further input and get a better idea of how the set will look on stage.

\*White card model box by Hamlet Set Designer Lee Newby



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Again, at this stage things will invariably change, with further elements added or removed. This step would then be followed up with a detailed 'Model Box' which is made to-scale and is usually decorated in the colour and textures that the designer would like to use in the actual set. The designer will then send this off to the set builders, along with scale drawings and measurements, so they can begin building the actual set that audiences will see on stage.

\*Final model box by Hamlet Set Designer Lee Newby



We asked set designer Lee Newby some questions about his process when designing the Hamlet set:

***Lee, what were your inspirations when coming up with ideas for the set?***

Initially there was a conversation with Sean (the director) and Ian (Hamlet) to create a space that was not only the vast castle of Elsinore but also an intimate playing space for the company of actors. Hamlet refers to Denmark as a prison in the play which also inspired the staircases and the gantry (upper) level. Most of the initial reference images were prison staircases, castles or found spaces. There was a mutual aspiration to build an extra area of stage into the auditorium to get the actors closer to the audience, this involved removing seats which were replaced with bleacher style seating on the stage to get the audience closer to the actors.

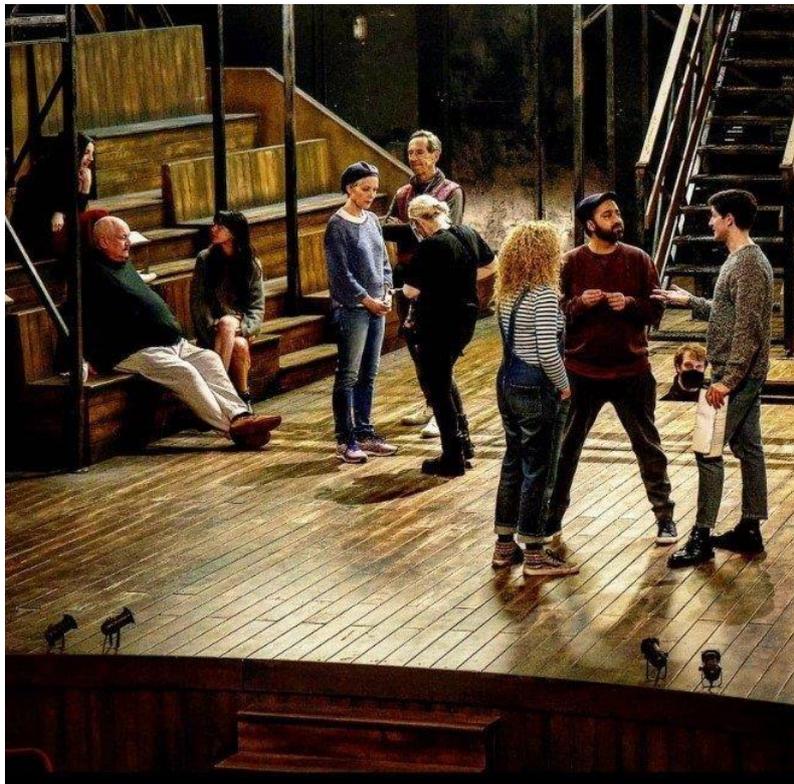
***Were there any obstacles that changed your ideas because you had to adapt them to fit the play?*** The set was designed to sit on the empty stage at Windsor. In doing this, every aspect of the theatre needed to be considered with many things being removed from the walls and the flies. All the soft black masking was removed to expose the bare theatre walls and the fly tower. There was also a design to have an exposed lighting rig above the set. The curved front edge of the stage had to be carefully designed to fit in front of the stage, leaving enough space for the audience seating and to follow the curve of the theatre's auditorium walls.

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In a similar manner, the on-stage seating had to be placed to fit with the upper level and the central trap door in the floor.

***Did you come up with any pre-existing ideas which you have had to change because of the casting?*** Most of the casting was known at the point of designing the play so most of the decisions were factored into the design from the beginning of the process. The most interesting notes on the design came from Ian McKellen who has acted on many more sets than I have designed and has a very good understanding of space and his relationship with the audience. We modified parts of the upper level to create a better relationship with the boxes and the circle level of the auditorium.

\*Cast members on the set during Hamlet rehearsals \*Credit Sean Gleeson



## Why not...

Choose a scene from the play and think about a design concept for it.

Think about how the design process works. Ask questions to get your brain working.

**E.G Where does the scene take place?**

If it is set outside, what do you need to add to make that obvious to your audience?

**When does it take place?** (Are you setting it in the modern day or another period of history?)

**What is needed in the scene to help the actors and what special effects might be needed?**

Lighting/Colour/Props/Furniture etc.

**Look online for images that help convey your ideas.** You could collect pictures of rooms, fabrics, buildings, flowers etc. that inspire you.

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**Create a mood board** with your pictures, scraps of fabrics, sketches, colours etc. so that you can start looking at how all these things might come together.

Mood boards can be a really good way to share ideas. Not all designers are brilliant artists who draw amazing sketches, some use mood boards or computer-aided design as an alternative to hand-drawn designs.

**When you have a concept**, get some of your group to act as the director and question you about your reasoning behind your design ideas.

\*The Empty stage at Theatre Royal Windsor



## WORDS, WORDS, WORDS

### William Shakespeare 1564-1616

**FUN FACT:** The text of Hamlet has been fully translated into 75 different languages including Klingon which is the language used in Star Trek!

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford upon-Avon. His mother was the daughter of a wealthy farmer and his father was a glove maker and wool merchant. He is arguably the world's most famous playwright, probably the greatest writer of our times!

During his lifetime he wrote 39 plays, 154 sonnets and 3 narrative poems. Shakespeare's work has been translated into every major living language and his plays are performed more often than any other playwright's.

Hamlet was written in 1603 which is believed to be the same year that Twelfth Night was written.

One of the toughest aspects of Shakespeare's plays to grasp can be the language used.

**Why not...** Break down some of those language barriers and look at what Shakespearean phrases might mean in modern day terms. There are many words and phrases still used today that come from Shakespeare's work. Have a google and see what you can come up with in your groups.

Look at the way you speak to your friends and teachers. It is probably different for each. Which words do you and your friends use that your teachers and parents do not?

For example: In the 60s the word 'Cool' was used to describe something good. Over the years this has evolved into many words used by young people to mean the same thing eg. 'ace', 'sick'. How many similar examples can you find?

**Create a short scene using modern phrases and words as many as you can. Why do we come up with new words?**

Just like the characters in the play, we are always experiencing new things, and new thoughts, emotions and feelings. Especially in today's digital world - there weren't words for the internet and social media platforms until they were invented. There probably wasn't Twitter, Facebook or even texting when your parents were your age.

**Could you take a soliloquy from Hamlet and translate the whole thing into text speak and perform them to each other? Do they make any sense as spoken words?**

William Shakespeare created over 10,000 words and phrases that we still use today. Often he would put two known words together to create a new expression.

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For example, he invented the expressions 'worm-hole' 'hot-blooded' and 'watch-dog'.

**Try creating your own new expressions by bringing together two words.** For example, Hungry + Angry = Hangry - the mood you are in when you are really grumpy because you need to eat NOW! GaGa + Adoration = Gagadoration – A massive appreciation of Lady GaGa!

The link below will take you to a sketch that was filmed at the RSC in Stratford-upon-Avon as part of an event in commemoration of 400 years since Shakespeare's death. It includes many actors who have played Hamlet previously, discussing and trying to work out which word to put emphasis on in the famous 'To be or not to be' speech.

[Hamlet with Prince Charles and Benedict Cumberbatch | Shakespeare Live! From the RSC - BBC - YouTube](#)

Iambic pentameter is the rhythm that Shakespeare uses in his poetry writing.

Historically iambs consist of 5 beats per line. The rhythm is in groups of syllables called "feet". An iamb is the type of foot used, meaning there is an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one. "Pentameter" is a line of five "feet" so five times  $\times 2 = 10$ . This does not apply when a character is talking in prose.

Shakespeare used iambic pentameter to stress certain words to make the lines make sense. Hamlet is written mainly in verse but over 30% of the lines in the play are prose, so iambic pentameter is not used in those instances.

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## WORDS, WORDS, WORDS

**FUN FACT:** In the first folio of Hamlet, the famous line “To be or not to be, that is the question” was originally different and read “To be or not to be, I there’s the point”, before evolving over the years into one of the most famous Hamlet lines!

To be, or not to be, that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles  
And by opposing end them. To die—to sleep,  
No more; and by a sleep to say we end  
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to: 'tis a consummation.  
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;  
To sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there's the rub:

Is the below how you would interpret this famous soliloquy? What might you say differently?

The question is: is it better to be alive or not?  
Is it braver to put up with the bad thing's life throws you or to fight against them and put an end to them all?

Dying, sleeping - that is all dying is!  
A sleep that will end all the heartache and shocks life on earth gives us. To die, to sleep  
To sleep, maybe to dream- but there is a catch.

<https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMd6xWUsk/>

Click the link above to head over to the Theatre's Tik-Tok where we're hosting an exciting competition! Entrants can record themselves performing Hamlet's 'To be or not to be' speech to be in with a change of winning on-stage tickets to our production of Hamlet!

## GRIEF & THE CHARACTERS OF HAMLET

### Character list:

**Hamlet-** The protagonist of the story, and the Prince of Denmark.

**Claudius-** Hamlet's Uncle, the new King of Denmark, and the villain of the story.

**Gertrude-** Hamlet's Mother, recently married to Claudius.

**Polonius-** father to Laertes and Ophelia, Lord Chamberlain of Claudius's court

**Horatio-** Hamlet's closest friend, studied at Wittenberg with him. He is very loyal to Hamlet throughout.

**Ophelia-** Daughter to Polonius, with whom Hamlet has been in love. She listens to her father and brother when talking about Hamlet.

**Laertes-** Polonius' son who spends most of the play in France and returns to see his sister Ophelia struggle with her mental health.

**Fortinbras-** The young Prince of Norway whose father was killed by Hamlet's Father.

He wants to attack Denmark to avenge his father's death.

**The Ghost-** Hamlet's recently deceased father, who claims that Claudius' (his brother) killed him by putting poison in his ear. The question of where the Ghost came from or what the ghost is remains unresolved.

**Rosencrantz and Guildenstern-** former friends of Hamlet's from Wittenberg who are called upon when Hamlet's behaviour becomes increasingly unnerving.

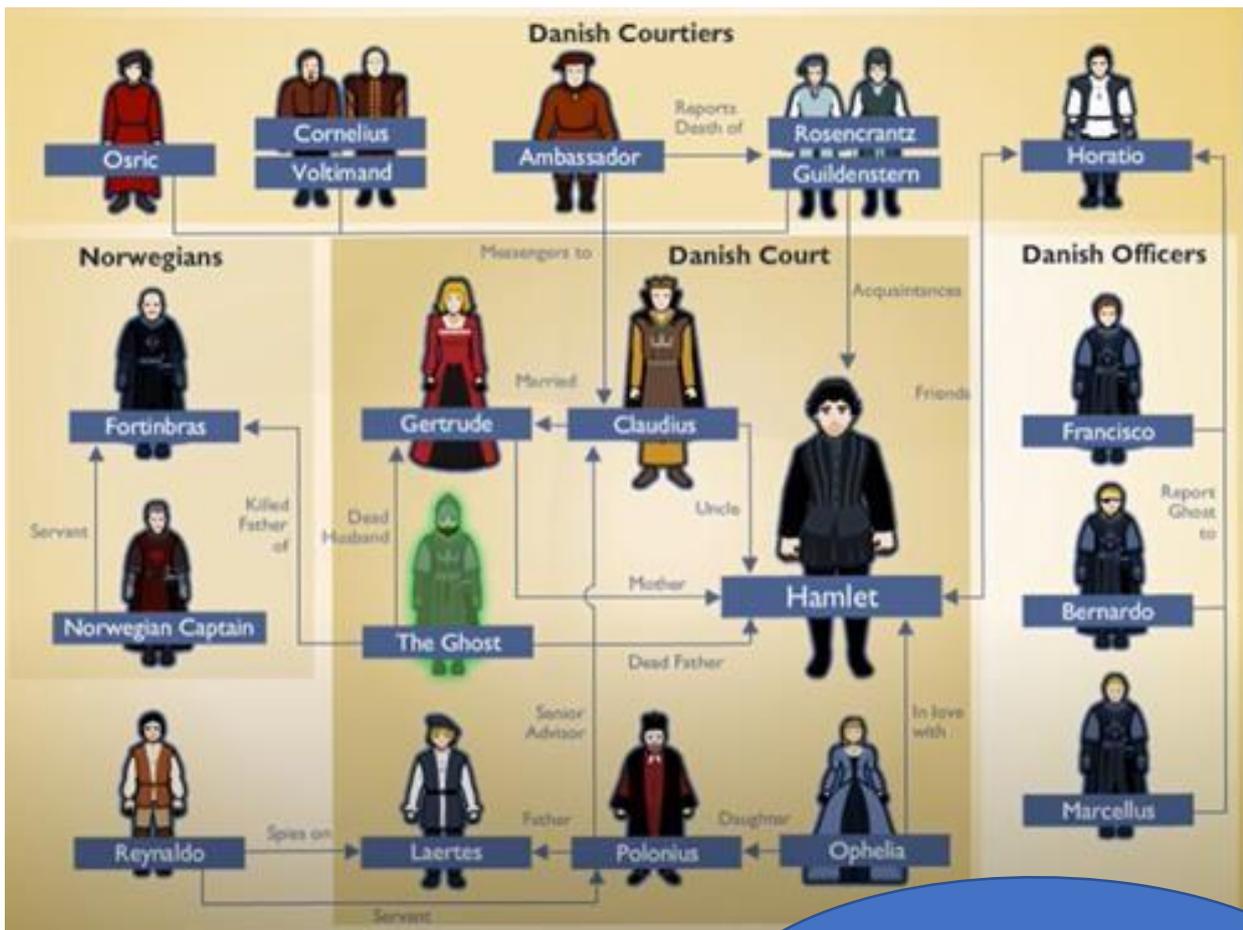
**Osric-** A courtier who summons Hamlet to his duel with Laertes.

**Voltemand and Cornelius-** sent off to Norway to prevent Fortinbras from attacking Denmark.

**Marcellus and Bernardo-** The officers who first see the ghost and alert Hamlet to the sighting.

**Reynaldo-** Polonius' servant who is sent to France by Polonius to spy on Laertes.

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Source: Hamlet - ELA B30 (weebly.com)

The play of Hamlet portrays grief in many ways through different characters and how they behave throughout the play.

At the beginning of the play, we meet Hamlet who has taken the death of his father badly.

Gertrude (Hamlet's Mother, who has recently remarried Hamlet's Uncle Claudius) tells him "Good Hamlet, cast thy nightly colour off" when he is unpleasant to Claudius.

The way in which Hamlet handles his grief is in great contrast to his mother. After the death of her husband, Gertrude quickly marries Claudius. She finds comfort in him and does not understand why Hamlet is grieving so deeply. She does not appear too distraught about her husband's death. This is in huge contrast to Ophelia; when she hears about the death of her father (Polonius), she begins to suffer with her mental health, which eventually leads to her suicide.

**FUN FACT:** Shakespeare's tragedies often start with a celebration. His comedies often start with a potential disaster!



“Ophelia” by John Everett Millais depicting Ophelia singing as she drowns. She holds a handmade garland of flowers.

This painting is currently displayed in Tate Britain. The flowers in the painting are all depicted in the text of the play.

Some believe that Hamlet never stops grieving his father’s death throughout the play and is merely distracted by his aims of destroying Claudius. This provides him with his will to go on. Shakespeare dramatises grief in all its forms throughout the play, enabling the audience to witness how it affects each character as the plot unfolds.

Why not... re-read the “to be or not to be speech” and in your groups identify the lines in which Hamlet is referring to avenging his father’s death.

**FUN FACT:** “To be or not to be” is the most googled Shakespeare quote.

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## THE CASTING OF OUR HAMLET PRODUCTION

In a recent interview, Ian McKellen stated “is it possible to watch a play in which race, gender and age are not an issue?... Theatre is all make-believe. It should be possible for us to enjoy anybody playing any role”



**Our response to Ian, is a resounding “YES!!!”**

With our production we want to break down barriers and suspend the

audience’s disbelief from the moment the curtain is raised. For example, in our production the traditionally male roles of Hamlet’s father and Laertes are both played by women (director Sean Mathias wanted to cast the whole play not on appearance, but on the actor’s abilities and how they would work together as a company) and our Hamlet has just turned 82 years old!!!

Sarah Bernhardt broke the age and gender casting barrier in in 1899, by famously taking on the role of Hamlet. She cast herself in the role despite being 55 years old and female. It was a French adaptation of the play with only twelve scenes in its entirety. She went on to perform Hamlet in London and finally at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford. She was also the first ever Hamlet captured on film, in 1899.

**FUN FACT:** Sir Ian McKellen reprising the role of Hamlet means he is the oldest ever Hamlet to be on stage.

[1899 Hamlet, the Fencing Scene with Laertes - YouTube](#)

The reaction to her performance from her contemporaries was mixed, Elizabeth Robins stated she had “Amazing skill” in playing “a spirited boy with impetuosity, youthfulness, almost childish” whilst Beerbohm went as far as to deny women should have the power to create art!

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**Sarah Siddons 1775:** Sarah was the first known female to play Hamlet.

The show opened to outcry over a female playing the role, but the reviews were very positive.

**FUN FACT:** When Shakespeare's plays were first performed in the 1600's, females were forbidden from being actors and young men played the female roles.

**David Tennant 2005:** This was an award-winning performance from Tennant who played the title role in Hamlet at the RSC in Stratford upon Avon. This was his return to the stage after playing Doctor Who extremely successfully over a span of 5 years. The production introduced new audiences to the work of Shakespeare.

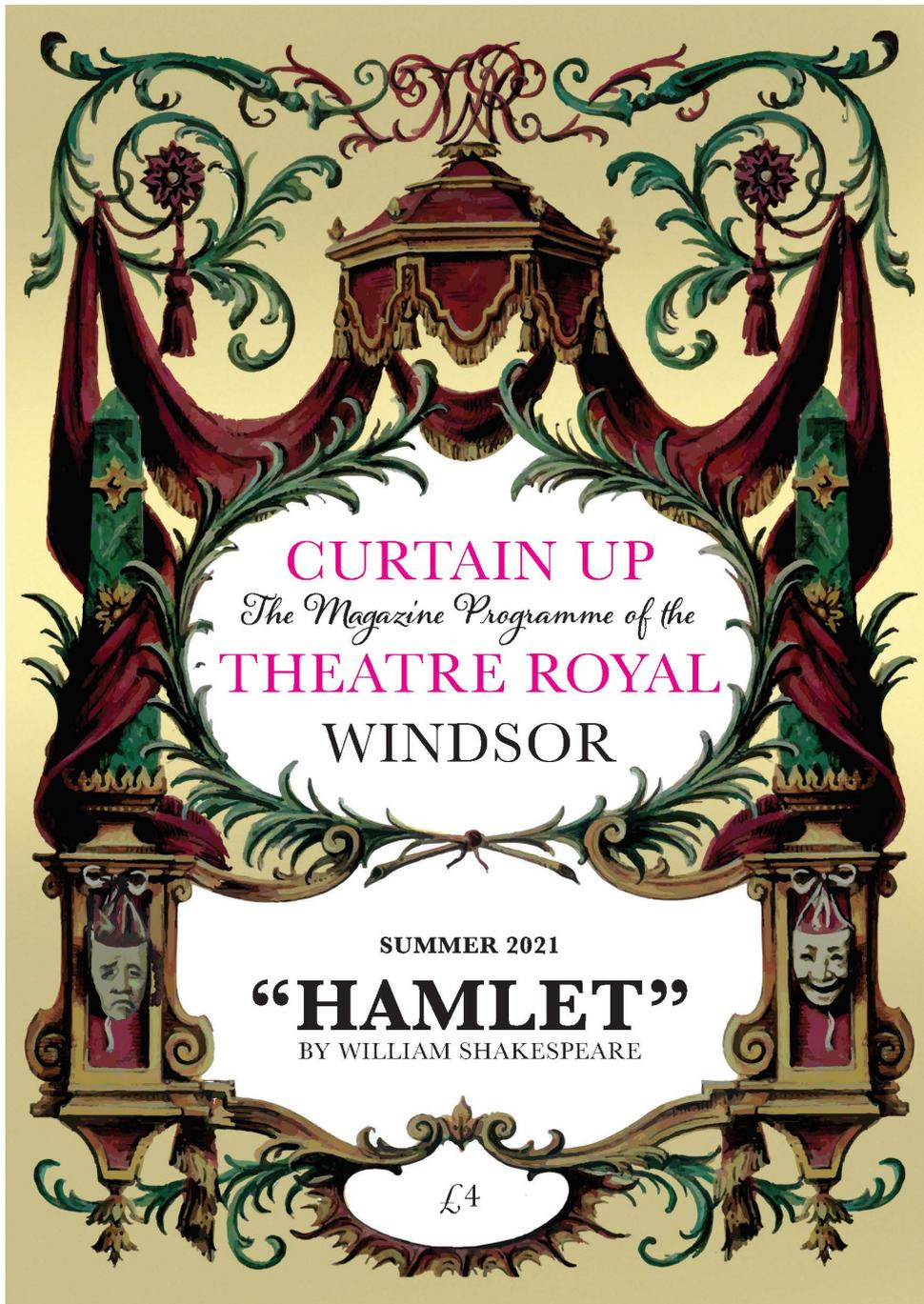


**Why not...** Watch the below versions of the "To be, or not to be" speech from two different periods in time, from two very different actors, and see how they contrast with one another. Discuss why you think that is. Is it that they put emphasis on certain words, or use certain emotions at certain points of the speech? Notice how much the delivery of the first line can change due to the emphasis on different words.

**RICHARD BURTON 1964:** [Hamlet "To be or not to be" - Richard Burton \(1964\) - YouTube](#)

**ANDREW SCOTT 2018:** [To Be Or Not To Be - Hamlet \(Andrew Scott Full Soliloquy\) - YouTube](#)

**Why not...** Work within your group to create a ten-minute performance of Hamlet? Piece together your favourite elements from the play, whilst ensuring the story is still told, and perform to the rest of the group.



We hope you find this pack useful. If you require any further information please contact Sammy at [outreach@theatreroyalwindsor.co.uk](mailto:outreach@theatreroyalwindsor.co.uk)