Character in Hamlet: Family & Loss

Guide for Curriculum Unit 15.02.05, published September 2015
by Sarah A. Weidmann

This unit for upper middle school students is titled Character in *Hamlet*: Family & Loss. The focus is how four characters (Hamlet, Gertrude, the Ghost of Old Hamlet, and Horatio) deal with family and loss. The content follows an interpretation of these four characters' emotional journeys throughout the play. Evidence for changes in their emotions is shown with lines of text characters speak themselves as well as what other characters say about them. Many school communities have dealt with a lot of loss from violence and family disruption. Our middle school students have not experienced the reading and interpretation of Shakespearean text, a perfect example of complex literature. Combining social-emotional learning with text interpretation will allow text access through personal connection. Students are asked to consider how a person might perform emotions rather than truly feel them. They are also asked to consider what family is, and then go farther by examining how family ties (blood-related or chosen) might intensify our experiences of loss. Aided by a plot map, students will dissect the first lines of the play, short phrases, and sections of scenes that feature our four characters. After reading the text students will write scenes from current times based on scenes from *Hamlet* that show difficult choices being made.

(Developed for Reading, grade 7; recommended for Reading and Social Studies, grades 6-8, Drama, grades 6-9, and Literature, grades 9-10)