



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2015 Volume II: Explaining Character in Shakespeare

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## **To Thine Own self Be True: the Uncovering the Hamlet in You**

Curriculum Unit 15.02.04, published September 2015  
by Chenise Gregory

### **Introduction**

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After thirteen years, one would think that teaching character would be easy. In a sense, it is. Year after year, I hear myself chanting: “the seven types of character are...” and “what three character traits are seen in that line?” However, in an effort to go deeper, I must deal with the flip side of this literary element. More and more I find it necessary to get at more applicable aspects of character, the part that really matters, and has a more indelible impact on the lives of my future college graduates, intellectuals, workers, parents, and leaders.

I grew up in Brooklyn, N.Y. in the 80’s, otherwise known as the “crack era”. It would be fine, I guess, if I were telling a story of drugs and defeat, or of loss and redemption. Those common themes my students could accept. What they couldn’t understand was what happened before Brooklyn. In Harlem, where I was born, I was raised in a two bedroom apartment with my two brothers and mother. My father passed away from an overdose shortly after my younger brother’s birth, **so** I don’t recall him. Left to raise three children (the oldest being six), my mother did what she could-I guess. I recall being five years old when my mother announced that she was going to the store and would soon return. We were often left in the apartment for her “quick runs” so this wasn’t unusual. What was unusual was her delay in return. One hour turned into one day, one day became one week, and one week became two. My mother never returned to take care of us and, to make a long story short, we grew up in foster care. Transported to Brooklyn, my brothers and I were raised by a woman who would eventually adopt us and change our last name and lives forever. It was by the grace of God that we were in a good home and raised by a wonderfully strict stranger, who had no education past the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, but had the faith of a Disciple and the strength of Samson. This woman, affectionately known as Nana, instilled in me the morals and values of the church, the importance of education, and, laughingly, the aggressiveness of a lioness. Unfortunately, I didn’t see the link among these qualities and lost the ground under me. I floated on the wind-uncertain of who I was and where I belonged. Both the development and the knowledge of my character came after I became a teacher.

Calvin Coolidge Senior High School sits in the Northwest district of Washington DC. The North side is the more affluent side and thus, Coolidge is an urban school with urban problems residing behind a façade. On the outside, green grass, beautiful trees, and attractive homes surround the building. It has the largest gym on the East Coast (competing only with the University of Maryland), and many tournaments along the coast are held here. It is a widely popular and well known school, with widely popular and well known urban issues. Just

past the metal detectors, seven security guards, (two police officers when necessary), and the dean of students, is my class where I teach 12<sup>th</sup> grade English. I love teaching English. It is a required subject for graduation and one that allows me to peer into other arenas of life and tie it back into literature (the ole “art imitating life” spiel). My students are predominantly black- many with backgrounds in Ethiopia, Ghana, Senegal, and Cameroon. I have a few sprinklings of Hispanic students- mainly from El Salvador. Ironically, my students who are black American are my lowest performing students. With this particular group, homework is rarely done, class work is not completed with focus, and enduring understandings are not quite...enduring. They love me and the way I teach, but don't share my affinity for learning. I find that this particular population of students needs the most tutoring, discipline, and overall mentoring. I stick with Shakespeare for this reason. Believe it or not, it is the one time of the year when my students are locked in and fight to stay above water in class. Shakespeare will be the only death on their watch.

## Rationale

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The one thing I've noticed about teaching in a Title I, high needs, urban High School is that children really want to do well, but may not have the character traits or wherewithal to execute the necessary tasks. Upon first observance, they would be considered “unruly”, “rude” “degenerates”. They give off an air of irresponsibility and anger. They've been dealt an ugly hand and they intend on dealing it back or, as Richard III would say, “proving to be a villain”. And yet, for the most part, these appearances are far from the truth. With the proper guidance, structure, and engagingly accessible lessons, these children become students with goals, inner pride, and most of all: character.

Character, from its Latin roots refers to a distinct mark; a symbol or, one would say, a representation. According to Webster's definition, Character is “The way someone thinks, feels and behaves: someone's personality.” I like these definitions because they do two things. They give both the clear sense of who one is and the more complex idea of “representation,” or of who one is marked as and marks oneself as. The focus of my unit is to help students understand this idea of “character” beyond the mere term for an actor in their text, and identify with the more complex issue of being a “distinct mark/representation.” The goal is to read *Hamlet*, identify character traits that are like those of Prince Hamlet, Gertrude, King Claudius, Laertes, etc. and unlearn these characteristics and become true to themselves (as prompted by Polonius). After the last four years of teaching *Hamlet*, I find that the best way to execute the often seemingly futile duty of character building is through character dissection.

## Objective

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*Hamlet* proves to be a difficult read. Year after year, my students complain, and grapple, and stutter, and quit, and do everything in between in order to understand the plot. However, there is urgency behind teaching such a compelling text. In his article, “Teaching *Hamlet*”, Robert Ornstein says:

...*Hamlet* is the Shakespearean play which comes closest to mirroring the random

casual form of daily experience which turns on unexpected meetings, conversations, and such accidents as the arrival of the players. And if we do nothing else in class but convey as accurately as we can the immediate sense of life which Hamlet offers, we will perform a valuable service because so much of recent criticism falsifies it. <sup>1</sup> (Ornstein 1964)

My objective is to do as Ornstein implies and get students to understand that Hamlet and the other characters have experiences and those experiences add to or take away from their personas or *character*. After completing a thorough reading of the text, students spend time looking over the major characters of the play and logging the words, actions, beliefs, and thoughts that influence their sense of who the character really is. I would want all the students in the class to keep a log or a journal only on the components that make up or influence the behaviors of Prince Hamlet. This way, while we are reading, they will keep a record of his behaviors and use them later for discussions. Individually, the students would then be able to use that same method to analyze the character of Gertrude, King Claudius, Polonius, Laertes, and Ophelia. With proper questioning directed toward those characters, students will be able to answer questions such as:

- What makes a character?
- How are we shaped by our environment or experiences?
- How much influence do our parents have on who we become?
- What are character traits?
- What specific traits do Prince Hamlet and you, the student, share?
- What can we trust about Gertrude/Claudius/Polonius?
- Is Ophelia necessary to the play? Why or Why not?
- Which character is truest to him- or herself?
- How true are you to yourself?

There are many more questions that will be listed in the Strategies section of this Unit, but these are the understandings and the connections that I would like students to make while reading and to discuss and perform a task on, during the unit.

Another objective would obviously be for my students to strengthen their reading levels and to interpretation skills while reading *Hamlet*. Because of the rigorous unfamiliar language of Shakespeare, my students find him difficult to understand. In my classroom, if they could master the verbal complexities well enough to understand the plot and the themes located within, their ability interpret and analyze any text would be stronger. They would develop essential reading skills such as making inferences, improving reading comprehension, and having the ability to reason about textual information (probably the most difficult task for my students). All in all, I want my students to not only have an understanding of the text, but to learn from it as well.

## Content

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In an effort to bring ease to the uneasy, I feel I should say something about the life of William Shakespeare and his works. To help make my students more comfortable with this “monster” of a playwright (yes, my students refer to him that way), I would refer to movies, classic and contemporary, that have related themes and or ideas found in Shakespearean plays. This should allow students to see that Shakespeare is not as far removed from modern culture as they think he is.

### **William Shakespeare**

The following information on the actor/playwright/poet was drawn from multiple sources and acquired knowledge from my studies of Shakespeare and is briefly summarized below:

William Shakespeare was born in April of 1564 and died in April of 1616. He grew up in Stratford-upon-Avon. There is not much known about his life, outside of his plays. The question of his education remains unanswered. There are documentations that lead scholars to believe that he may have attended The King’s New School in Stratford-upon-Avon. This school was considered to be the one of the most excellent grammar schools in that area during that time. Shakespeare’s Latin texts in his poems and his writings resemble the texts that schoolboys from that school were forced to memorize. Another indication of his schooling comes from knowledge of his father’s position as an Alderman and Bailiff in Stratford, which would suggest that young William had a “top-notch” education. More commonly known is his marriage at 18 to Anne Hathaway and the birth of his three children. Unfortunately, one of his sons, Hamnet (a twin to his younger daughter, Judith) died in boyhood.

Eventually, Shakespeare left Stratford for London, and began his career as a poet, playwright, and actor. He is the author of 154 Sonnets. These “Shakespearean Sonnets” consist of three quatrains and a rhyming couplet. Common themes in these Sonnets are love, time, and beauty. He also wrote more than thirty plays divided as Comedies, Histories and Tragedies in the Folio published after his death.

### **Hamlet**

Now that we’ve gotten the facts about our star Bard out in the open, it is important to give students information about the play, before having them delve in. Many say it is important to let students dive right into the text without any explanation. I say, if that is really true and even beneficial, why, then, would the synopsis of any book be located on the back cover of said book? I really think that it benefits our students to have an idea about the plot of the play. Furthermore, I feel that front loading vocabulary, characters (without characteristics), themes, and ideals are equally important to know beforehand. It not only helps to relieve the anxiety of working through such a play, it also allows some connectivity to occur organically.

Why do I find this play to be so demanding and yet so timely? There is just so much to discuss when we delve into Denmark! Sure, it appears to be just a story of Prince Hamlet who lives in a castle and is called home from school after the death of his father, King Hamlet. The new king is young Hamlet’s Uncle, King Claudius who has further rocked the boat by marrying Prince Hamlet’s mother, Gertrude. Already we have a story of a strange family dynamic in which a man has killed his brother and has taken over his kingdom and his wife! Hamlet is then visited by his father, in ghostly form, and is commanded to get revenge for his untimely murder. While Hamlet struggles with this plea for revenge, a series of events follow and ultimately lead to the

death of two entire families, one of which is Hamlet's. We are talking betrayal, revenge, murder, depression, uncertainty, family, religion, love, secrets, emotional imbalances-everything a teenager, and dare I say an adult, has to endure.

Appropriately, this play is categorized as a tragedy. It starts tragically and ends in the same manner.

*Hamlet* is a tragedy, a type of drama that presents a heroic or noble character with conflicts that are difficult or impossible to resolve. Maurice Charney, in *How to Read Shakespeare*, comments that in a tragedy the characters involve themselves inextricably in that web of circumstances that will constitute their doom. Things change in tragedy, usually for the worse, and there is a sense that no one can resist the tragic momentum.<sup>2</sup>

The "tragic momentum" is what makes this play so unforgettable and so relatable. *Hamlet* is filled with a series of unfortunate events that leads to class discussions of themes and characters and their evolution towards self destruction. It is the type of play that lends itself to self reflection and to infinite complications of our understanding of why people take action and don't take action. This too is relatable. The neighbor lets his dog wander in my yard. Should I take action? Hard to say, there are pros and cons. A drug lord has killed my father (not everybody knows it but I have it on reliable authority) and is dating my mother. What should I do? Even now there are pros and cons.

## Themes

As a teacher, I find it necessary to separate my own encounter with the play from that of my students. It is important for me to address this play in terms of understanding; that is to say, the level of understanding I know my students will have. And so begins the process of funneling the many to the few. In order for me to relay my ideas in terms of Unit planning, I will limit the themes to the two that I would discuss with my students:

### *Death:*

There are several scenes in which death is not metaphoric, but rather, literal. Soon enough we learn that King Hamlet is dead by way of poisoning from his own brother. In Act 3 scene 4, Polonius is hiding behind a curtain and murdered by Prince Hamlet. In Act 4 scene 7, we hear from Gertrude of Ophelia's drowning, after Hamlet has *dumped* her and her father dies. In Act 5 scene 2, Queen Gertrude, Laertes, King Claudius, and Prince Hamlet are all poisoned wither by cup or sword and all die.

There are also scenes in which death is pondered upon. In Act 1 scene 2, King Claudius reprimands Hamlet for mourning his father's death:

'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet, to give these mourning duties to your father. But you must know your father lost a father...But to persevere in obstinate condolment is a course of impious stubbornness. 'Tis unmanly grief. It shows a will most incorrect to heaven, a heart unfortified, a mind impatient an understanding simple and unschooled.<sup>3</sup>

In that same scene, young Hamlet replies in one line that he will do as told. Then, he speaks with no one present: "O, that this too too solid flesh would melt / Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!"

Here we see Hamlet's first feelings about death and how he wishes to deal with the death of his father. In Act

3 scene 1, Hamlet gives us his most famous soliloquy contemplating the idea of living or dying and ultimately choosing life for the fear of hell: "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..."

## Revenge

Just as death is an ever present and ever rampant theme in the text, so equally is the concept of revenge. The action of the play is pointed toward revenge by the ghost of King Hamlet and thus is the impetus for the actions that follow. Every act of the play brings up the theme of revenge; whether through the action of vengeance, the contemplation of it, or admiration for an avenger. Below is a list of Acts and scenes that deal with this theme and a brief synopsis of the thoughts or actions within. This information was found in varying study guides for students including Sparknotes.com and Cliffnotes.com:

- Act 1 Scene 5: Hamlet promises his father to avenge his murder but laments the responsibility he now bears.
- Act 2 Scene 2: Hamlet berates his own passivity and contrasts it with the passion of the first actor for long-dead, legendary figures.
- Act 3 Scene 3: Coming upon Claudius confessing the murder while trying to pray, Hamlet thinks the better of killing the king when he is penitent.
- Act 3 Scene 4: The ghost visits Hamlet while he is with his mother and reminds him he has not yet avenged his murder.
- Act 4 Scene 4: After his encounter with Fortinbras, Hamlet marvels that people kill one another over so slight a gain as 'a little patch of land' and resolves that from now on all his thoughts will be 'bloody.'
- Act 4 Scene 5: In contrast with Hamlet's reflectiveness, Laertes determines on revenge without hesitation.
- Act 5 Scene 2: Claudius's plot results in the death of most of the major characters. Before he dies, Hamlet kills Claudius.

There are several important factors to note here. One is that Hamlet is *foiled* by Laertes and Fortinbras. Laertes has found out about the murder of his father and the death of his sister and does not hesitate to avenge his father. Hamlet spends the majority of the play contemplating and vacillating between his methods or time of revenge. Here is a prince with a murdered father and a murderous Uncle, with much less *heart* than Laertes, the son of Polonius, a councilor to the current king. It is not a question for him or a matter of morals and ethics-or even fear. It is a matter of honor and respect for his family. In the situation involving Fortinbras, Hamlet is in awe of his haste to action. Fortinbras did not have his father murdered, but shows valor and courage in getting what his family wants: land. Fortinbras employs thousands of men to the "valley of death" for property and has no fear of death or his possible elimination.

## Prince Hamlet

As the purpose of my unit is finding inner character, it would behoove me to discuss the various characters found in this play. For the purpose of driving the unit, I will focus on the main character of Hamlet. He will serve as the basis and the impetus of having students dissect, connect, and later, reject the behaviors and characteristics found in him. "The primary characteristic of Hamlet is not a complexity that tantalizes intellect but a variety and richness of imagined life-a multiplicity of character... ." <sup>4</sup> Hamlet, the namesake of the play, is not as complicated as the plot. He displays multiple traits, all familiar to us, but not infinite ones, and thus

could be easily accessed by students. He is the son of a King (whose name is also Hamlet). His age is unclear, but we do know that he comes home from a university after hearing of his father's death. He walks around the castle in mourning and is reprimanded by his Uncle/Stepfather/King. It is in his first Soliloquy (found in Act 1 scene 2) that we hear of his desire to die along with his father. Equally important is his revelation of his feelings about his mother marrying his uncle: "Why, she would hang on him as if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on. /And yet within a month (Let me not think on't; frailty, thy name is woman!)"

He continues on to express his disgust not only with the marriage, but also the speed with which the marriage was brought about: "Within a month, ere yet the salt of the most unrighteous tears had left the flushing in her galled eyes, she married. O, most wicked speed, to post with such dexterity to incestuous sheets! It is not, nor it cannot come to good."

Thus we witness a main character who is disturbed and disgusted with his family. Hamlet is also described by critics as depressed, uncertain, emotionally imbalanced, and-- like his uncle--a murderer. This, then, is Lord Hamlet at the opening of the play, depressed and embittered, with his self-esteem and emotional balance shaken by his mother's hasty marriage to his uncle. Before the day is over, two events will occur that will greatly exacerbate his precarious state.

Shortly after, Hamlet is visited by his deceased father and informed of his father's murder and murderer. The ghost, King Hamlet, prods Hamlet to avenge his death. Hamlet contemplates this revenge and tells his friends in Act 1 scene 5, that in view of what he has learned (he says nothing yet about avenging a murder), he will put on an "antic disposition". This line causes many to question whether Hamlet's madness is feigned or genuine. The answer to this question is given when we see, in Act 3, Hamlet confronting his mother, Gertrude, about the murder of his father. When he hears a noise in his mother's bedroom, he thinks it is the king and proceeds to stab the curtain dweller, Polonius:

Queen: What wilt thou do? thou wilt not murder me? Help, help, ho! Polonius[ Behind]: What, ho! help, help, help! Hamlet: [Drawing] How now! a rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead! [Makes a pass through the arras] Polonius[Behind]: O, I am slain! [Falls and dies] Queen: what hast thou done? <sup>5</sup>

It would be easy to forgive Hamlet here; after all, he did not mean to kill Polonius. However, he did intend harm for his new stepfather, King Claudius. In the final act of the play, Hamlet does kill the king by the sword and by poison and accidentally kills Polonius' son, Laertes, while dueling.

There are many avenues to take in understanding Prince Hamlet that will be seen in the Strategies section of this unit. Hamlet based on themes in the play or Hamlet in relation to other characters has many traits and characteristics and moods and behaviors that would allow students to get a great sense of the complexity of his character.

## Strategies and Activities

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### Purpose of the Unit

The purpose of reading *Hamlet* with my students is two-fold. As a matter of mandated learning, I would want my students to become stronger, more fluent, analytical readers. Shakespeare, because of his language and

complex array of themes, fosters the type of learning I am looking to bring about. A close reading of the play, its characters, and other literary elements, galvanizes rigor and good “struggle” in my classroom. For these purposes, I think *Hamlet* would be the best text to use. Prince Hamlet undergoes such bewildering changes due to the vast number of events playing on his mood swings--there is just plenty to work with! He is also surrounded by enough characters to provide character study for all. My desire would be for students to read and interpret the play and identify characteristics found in various characters. Through various activities, students would dissect these characteristics or traits and find ones that relate to them as people. They would then come up with ways to dissolve the negative characteristics in an effort to further their selves as people, professionals, and public figures. My students are so warped by social media and facades, they lose sight as to who they are or who they were before an event or another person changed that. Helping them find their way back through a project called “To Thine Own Self Be True” will enhance the personal pursuits of this unit. The academic end assessment will consist of a Critical Lens Response arising from a quote from Archbishop Desmond Tutu: “a person is a person through other persons.”

### **My Class**

My school is set on a Block Scheduling System, meaning: I meet with one class every other day for 80 minutes. Unfortunately, this prolongs the time spent on the unit due to inconsistencies, holidays, and any senior related absences (ie, college visits, excusable job interviews, community service requirements). This unit is designed for High School Seniors ages 17-20. As in most inner city schools, my students are as varied in reading levels as they are in age. I also have Special Education students included in my class with varying degrees of needs and/or deficiencies. Thus, the degree of difficulty and the variation of given tasks will depend on those elements. In one class I could have students who read at a second grade level in the same room with those who read well and read a lot. I have students who've read Shakespeare since Middle School and students who think Leonardo DiCaprio is the writer and star of *Romeo and Juliet*. This is why the focus on character is important. No matter the level of these students or their amount of knowledge, discussing character and character traits is worthwhile.

### **Plans**

The best way for me to communicate the idea of Character Development and discuss the ways in which Shakespeare uses characterization to shape central ideas (death, life, action vs. inaction, revenge, etc.), is to do a close reading of the dialogue, soliloquies, and monologues. In my plans, students will perform the following every class day:

- Read for details and understanding
- Annotate speeches of various kinds for comprehension and analysis
- Support analysis through textual evidence using exit slips

The list includes necessary skills for reading fluency and is required by the Common Core State Standards (see Appendix for a list of the standards and their description).

### **PreRead**

Before the actual reading of the play, students would examine the title: The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. After reading the title, students would answer following:

- What do we already know about this play?



- What is a tragedy?

At this point, depending on my population of students, I would elicit definitions of tragedy and ask for examples. Since my students tend to read well below level, it is important to make terms as accessible as possible.

Continuing with prereading strategies, students will then turn to the list of characters and read through in pairs. This will help them identify characters and plot before the play even begins. By the time they have finished work in pairs, all students should be able to tell me:

- There is a ghost in the play.
- Hamlet's father is also named Hamlet and he is dead.
- Hamlet's mother (named Gertrude) has remarried Hamlet's uncle, Claudius.
- Claudius is the new King
- Hamlet is a Prince

This is usually the point where I ask for predictions of what will happen. If, at this point, students are not yet aware of the strange love arrangement between Gertrude and Claudius (which they almost always are), I would ask direct questions.

- Who is Hamlet's father?
- Who is Hamlet's Mother?
- Who is Hamlet's mother married to?
- Who is he to Hamlet?

Once we get past the "ewww's" and "what???", we will begin reading.

### **Close Reading**

The first 5 lines in Act I begin with the very important question, "Who's there?"[]

Act I. Scene i: Elsinore. A platform before the castle.

FRANCISCO at his post. Enter to him BERNARDO

BERNARDO :Who's there?

FRANCISCO :Nay, answer me: stand, and unfold yourself.

BERNARDO :Long live the king!

FRANCISCO :Bernardo?

BERNARDO :He

I would do a close reading of these lines, including the information given. These lines are easy enough for students to understand, but it's the greater theme of "Who" that encompasses the play and my end goal for this unit. This opening gives us a setting, a part of the plot, a prevalent tone, and will introduce students to

the reason for this entire play. We now know that there are guards necessary for a watch at the castle. We know that it is dark and might be scary (Who's there?). I would pay particular interest to the "stand and unfold yourself" line, as it has a connection to my students and the unmasking that they must do in order to identify their true selves.

As we continued with reading, students will maintain a reading log in order to keep track of characters that "appear" and how those characters are linked. Later, they will use this log to create a character map in groups. An example of a Character Log can be seen below:

**Character Position/familiar line      Act, scene**

Bernardo    Guard / "long live the king"    I, i

Francisco    Guard/ "quiet watch/"      I, i

The log would be filled until all characters of Act I are identified. Students will use these logs as study guides for their assessment on each act of the play. We will only do a close reading of the first five lines. After that, either I or a recording will continue reading the rest of scene one. Students will read along silently, marking vocabulary that may need to have explained.

Scene 2 offers a great Close Read on the development of Hamlet's character through the words of Claudius. In lines 90-110, Claudius is reprimanding Hamlet for mourning his father. Students will read and analyze Claudius' words and explain how it could impact the development of the Prince. (See Appendix for reading)

There are other soliloquies that we will read closely and analyze for character development or theme. Below is a list of soliloquies and the Acts and scenes they can be found in:

- Laertes to Ophelia 1.3
- Hamlet's feelings about his father's death and mother's marriage 1.2
- Hamlet meets the ghost 1.5
- Hamlet action vs. inaction 2.2
- "To be or not to be..." 3.1
- Claudius' prayer 3.3
- Hamlet stalls again 3.3
- Hamlet's final soliloquy 4.4

Close reading gives the students a chance to focus on specific parts of the text. I am flexible enough to have questions for students to answer while they read; characteristics to identify in each soliloquy; character development through words given by the character; or even questions concerning figurative language, denotative and connotative language, etc. A close reading is a way to analyze a passage for a more in depth interpretation and analysis.

Another strategy would be questioning. Questions would be prepared before the lessons to assist while students are reading alone or in groups. Known as "guided questions" this task is absolutely essential in a room where there are varying levels of reading abilities. Students can also use these questions as a study guide for assessments.

Warm-ups or "Do Now's" are a great way to engage students when time has passed since your last classroom encounter. During the Warm-Up, students will see posed questions on the board (no more than two) and begin

to answer those questions in groups or as individuals. This will allow students to immediately engage in the curriculum, access prior knowledge, and stay abreast of any occurrences in the play. The question would not have to be “How was Polonius murdered?” It could be a reflective prompt: “If you were Hamlet’s mother, would you have reported your son as a murderer? Why or why not?”

## Activities

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This unit is based on character and how students can relate to the character traits found in the play. The activities, therefore, would be reflective of a student’s understanding of Hamlet and the inherent nature of the individual characters, and the student’s understanding of the play as a whole. The activities will require that students relate to the play and relay their understanding in a manner that is contemporary and infused with the use of technology.

### Activity One

While we are reading, students will create a Facebook page imitating that of the character they have selected. For example:

I am given the character of Horatio. I know that he is intelligent and logical. He is the school friend of Hamlet. He does not believe in the ghost, at first. He listens more than he speaks and he is the character who survives at the end of the play. My Facebook name would be “Horatio The Thinker” [as there will be many Horatios in the class]. My “Profile” Picture would be a stack of books to represent logic or an ear to represent listening. Everything about my Facebook page would be consistent with that of Shakespeare’s character.

This Facebook profile will be graded. It assesses the students’ understanding of specific character traits and their ability to relay Shakespeare’s character into 21<sup>st</sup> Century technology and environment. Students will be required to post weekly and respond accordingly to the posts of other characters.

### Activity Two

In order to keep students aware of the text as a whole, and not just the characters, a task directly related to the text is necessary. My idea is to have students create a movie trailer for the Act we’ve just finished. The class would be divided into five groups. At the end of each Act, one group would create a one minute movie trailer to advertise and summarize the major moments of that scene. The students would use their own cell phones and classmates to accomplish the task. Props need to be reflective of props in that scene. Modernization is allowable, but to a limit. Accompanying this movie trailer would be a thirty second commercial, advertising or selling a notion/idea/instrument in that scene. For example: In Act 5, poison is the main instrument used for murder. Thus, the group would do a commercial advertising poison in any fashion they choose. The commercial can be as modern as the students would like it to be.

Likewise, in Act 2, Polonius and Laertes have conversations with Ophelia about Hamlet and his intentions toward her. They feel she has a need to be cautious and thus warn her about relationships and lust. Students might choose to advertise a Chastity Belt in their thirty second commercial. The advertisement does not have to be found directly in the text. However, there has to be a direct correlation between what is advertised and

what is stated or inferred.

## Appendix: Implementing District Standards

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The Common Core State Standards used in this unit are listed and described below. The District of Columbia requires that all lessons follow the standards given. Below are the codes for the standards and a brief summation of each:

RL.11-12.2

RL.11-12.3

RL.11-12.4

RL.11-12.5

W.11-12.2.a-f

SL.11-12.1.

L.11-12.1

L.11-12.2

L.11-12.5.

- Read closely for textual details
- Annotate texts to support comprehension and analysis
- Engage in productive evidence-based discussions about text
- Collect evidence from texts to support analysis
- Organize evidence to plan around writing
- Revise writing according to purpose
- Determine meaning of unknown vocabulary
- Question texts during reading to deepen understanding
- Analyze the impact of an author's choice

## Bibliography

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2. (The Glencoe Literature Library n.d.)
3. (Shakespeare 2012)
4. Robert Ornstein, "Teaching Hamlet". 504
5. William Shakespeare. *Hamlet* Act III, scene iv

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