

## 11.1.2

## Lesson 11

## Introduction

In this lesson, students explore Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” soliloquy. Students read lines 64–84 of Act 3.1 (from “To be or not to be—that is the question” to “might his quietus make / With a bare bodkin”), focusing on how Shakespeare’s word choice impacts the meaning of the passage, and paying attention to his use of beautiful and engaging language to examine Hamlet’s concern with life and death.

For the lesson assessment, students discuss how Shakespeare’s uses language to convey Hamlet’s tone in the soliloquy. For homework, students choose to either revisit Act 1.2 in which Hamlet says “O God, God, / How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable / Seem to me all the uses of this world!” (lines 136–138) and examine how this statement is further developed in this soliloquy, or view a brief video and explain how Shakespeare uses figurative language to develop central ideas.

## Standards

Assessed Standard(s)	
RL.11-12.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)
Addressed Standard(s)	
W.11-12.9.a	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Apply <i>grades 11–12 Reading standards</i> to literature (e.g., “Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics”).</li> </ul>
L.11-12.5.a	Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Interpret figures of speech (e.g., hyperbole, paradox) in context and analyze their role in the text.</li> </ul>

## Assessment

Assessment(s)
<p>Student learning will be assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson. Students answer the following prompt, citing textual evidence to support analysis and inferences drawn from the text.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze Hamlet's attitude toward life and death, noting Shakespeare's specific use of metaphor and language that is fresh, engaging, and beautiful.</li> </ul>
High Performance Response(s)
<p>A High Performance Response should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify Hamlet's use of metaphor and language that is fresh, engaging, and beautiful.</li> <li>Explain Hamlet's varied use of negative imagery associated with life.</li> <li>Recognize Hamlet's contrasting views of life and the relative quiet of death.</li> <li>Convey an understanding of Hamlet's belief that the uncertainty surrounding death forces one to endure suffering in life.</li> </ul>

## Vocabulary

Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>contumely (n.) – insulting display of contempt in words or actions; contemptuous or humiliating treatment</li> <li>consummation (n.) – completion</li> <li>calamity (n.) – a great misfortune or disaster</li> <li>heir (n.) – a person who inherits or has a right of inheritance in the property of another following the latter's death</li> </ul>
Vocabulary to teach (may include direct word work and/or questions)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fortune (n.) – chance, luck</li> <li>quietus (n.) – account; from the Latin “quietus est,” meaning “he is quit.” “His quietus make” means “settle his account.”</li> <li>bodkin (n.) – dagger</li> </ul>

## Lesson Agenda/Overview

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
<b>Standards &amp; Text:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standards: RL.11-12.4, W.11-12.9.a, L.11-12.5.a,</li> <li>Text: <i>Hamlet</i>, Act 3.1, lines 64–84 (Masterful Reading: lines 64–98)</li> </ul> <p>① In order to provide additional context, the Masterful Reading extends beyond the lines students read and discuss during the lesson.</p> <b>Learning Sequence:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction of Lesson Agenda</li> <li>2. Homework Accountability</li> <li>3. Discussion of Hamlet's Character</li> <li>4. Masterful Reading</li> <li>5. Lines 64–84 Reading and Discussion</li> <li>6. Quick Write</li> <li>7. Closing</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 5%</li> <li>2. 10%</li> <li>3. 5%</li> <li>4. 5%</li> <li>5. 60%</li> <li>6. 10%</li> <li>7. 5%</li> </ol>

## Materials

- Student copies of the 11.1 Common Core Learning Standards Tool (refer to 11.1.1 Lesson 1)
- Student copies of the Short Response Checklist and Rubric (refer to 11.1.1 Lesson 1)
- Student copies of the *Hamlet* Central Ideas Tracking Tool (refer to 11.2.1 Lesson 7)
- Video: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/shakespeare-uncovered/video/hamlet-with-david-tennant> (from 16:25 through 21:45)

## Learning Sequence

How to Use the Learning Sequence	
Symbol	Type of Text & Interpretation of the Symbol
10%	Percentage indicates the percentage of lesson time each activity should take.
no symbol	Plain text indicates teacher action.
	<b>Bold text indicates questions for the teacher to ask students.</b>
	<i>Italicized text indicates a vocabulary word.</i>
►	Indicates student action(s).
☞	Indicates possible student response(s) to teacher questions.



Indicates instructional notes for the teacher.

## Activity 1: Introduction of Lesson Agenda

5%

Begin by reviewing the agenda and assessed standard for this lesson: RL.11-12.4. Inform students that today they are reading the first part of Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” soliloquy, one of the most well known passages in English literature.

- ▶ Students look at the agenda.

Ask students to take out their copies of the 11.1 Common Core Learning Standards Tool, or distribute if necessary. Inform students that they will be working with two new standards: W.11-12.9.a and L.11-12.5.a. Ask students to individually read these standards and assess their familiarity with and mastery of them.

- ▶ Students read and assess their understanding of standards: W.11-12.9a and L.11-12.5a.

Instruct students to talk in pairs about what they think the standards mean. Lead a brief discussion about these standards.

💬 Student responses may include the following for W.11-12.9.a:

- It is asking us to use evidence from reading in our writing.
- It is asking us to use evidence for further research and reflection.

💬 Student responses may include the following for L.11-12.5.a:

- Understand the relationship between words.
- Use context clues to determine meaning.
- Understand how parts of speech work in a text.

Remind students of their work in 11.1.2 Lesson 5 with RL.11-12.4 and particularly of their work with “fresh, engaging, and beautiful” language and ask them to recall what the phrase means.

💬 Student responses should include the following:

- Language that is fresh is new.
- Engaging and beautiful language tends to stand the test of time.

## Activity 2: Homework Accountability

**10%**

Instruct students to talk in pairs about how they can apply their focus standard, RL.11-12.3, to their text. Lead a brief share out on the previous lesson's AIR homework assignment. Select several students (or student pairs) to explain how they applied their focus standard to their AIR text.

- ▶ Students (or student pairs) discuss and share how they applied their focus standard (RL.11-12.3) to their AIR text from the previous lesson's homework.

## Activity 3: Discussion of Hamlet's Character

**5%**

Lead a brief discussion in which students share out some of their responses from the Mid-Unit Assessment. Ask students what they know about Hamlet's character so far through the reading they have completed.

- 💬 Student responses may include the following:
  - Hamlet has trouble making a decision about how to avenge his father's death.
  - He is depressed.
  - He is angry with his mother and uncle and with the world in general.

## Activity 4: Masterful Reading

**5%**

Have students listen to or view a masterful reading of the "To be or not to be" soliloquy (Act 3.1 lines 64–98, from "To be or not to be— that is the question" to "Nymph, in thy orisons / Be all my sins remembered").

Inform students that they will be assessed on their ability to recognize the contrasts set up in the first 20 lines of the soliloquy. Ask them also to pay attention to particularly engaging or beautiful language.

- ▶ Students follow along, reading silently.

## Activity 5: Lines 64–84 Reading and Discussion

**60%**

Engage students in a discussion about the meaning of the line "To be or not to be—that is the question" by asking them the following question:

**Is Hamlet asking the question in a personal or universal sense?**

- 💬 It could be either. Hamlet could be asking, is my life worth living or is life worth living in general? He is saying that it is the most important question of all.

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Have students reread lines 65–68 (“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”) in small groups and answer the following questions in discussion. Circulate and support as necessary.

**What does *fortune* mean on line 66?**

💬 It means “chance or luck.”

**What are the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” (line 66)?**

💬 The troubles or bad things that life throws at you.

**What might “a sea of troubles” be in line 67, and what does ending them mean?**

💬 It seems like another way of saying “outrageous fortune.” To end them would mean making life’s troubles go away.

① Consider drawing students’ attention to their application of standard L.11-12.5.a through the process of interpreting figurative language.

**How would you summarize the problem Hamlet describes in these first five lines (lines 64–68)?**

💬 He is trying to decide whether one should suffer life’s troubles or end one’s life.

**With what issue is Hamlet struggling?**

💬 He is trying to decide what the place of suicide or death is in life. He is also dealing with the role of fate in one’s life.

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Instruct students to annotate for figurative language regarding mortality. Remind students that annotating helps them keep track of evidence they will use in the lesson assessment. This focused annotation supports students’ engagement with W.11-12.9.a, which addresses the use of textual evidence in writing.

① Remind students that they should be keeping track of central ideas in the play using the *Hamlet* Central Ideas Tracking Tool provided in 11.1.2 Lesson 7. Encourage students to record related concepts in the right-hand column of the Tool, noting how these concepts support the development of larger central ideas. Related concepts that arise in this lesson include family duty and cowardice.

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Reread with the class from “To die, to sleep— / No more—and by a sleep” to “’tis a consummation / Devoutly to be wished” (lines 68–69). Lead a class discussion of the following questions:

**How are death and sleep related to the problem Hamlet describes?**

- ☞ Hamlet is supposing that in death one sleeps and that therefore troubles end. Sleep is a metaphor for death.

**Look at line 71. An *heir* is “a person who inherits or has a right of inheritance in the property of another following the latter’s death.” To what does Hamlet refer with the phrase “flesh is heir”?**

- ☞ He refers to the “the heartache and the thousand natural shocks” that humans suffer (line 70). He is saying heartaches and shocks are a part of everyone’s lives.

**How does your understanding of lines 70–71 deepen the meaning of the phrases “outrageous fortune” and “sea of troubles”?**

- ☞ It shows again that in Hamlet’s view, life always involves suffering and there seems to be nothing we can do about it.

***Consummation* means “completion.” To what *consummation* is Hamlet referring?**

- ☞ He is referring to the sleep of death and wishing it were true that it would end his troubles.

**What contrast has Hamlet set up in this soliloquy?**

- ☞ He has set up the suffering of life versus the peace of death.

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Ask students to return to their groups, reread lines 72–76 (from “To die, to sleep— / To sleep, perchance to dream” to “off this mortal coil / Must give us pause”), and answer the following questions:

**What is Hamlet afraid will happen in death?**

- ☞ Dreams.

**What is “the rub”?**

- ☞ Hamlet is worried that he doesn’t know what kind of dreams there might be after death—that is, what kind of life there might be after death.

**In this context, what might Hamlet be saying with “When we have shuffled off this mortal coil” (line 75)?**

- ☞ When we have let go of or shaken off life.

Which word gives us a hint?

☞ Mortal.

What is the effect of talking about death by using the phrase “shuffled off this mortal coil”?

☞ Student responses may include the following:

- Coil sounds like something binding.
  - It sounds like the shedding of skin or clothing, something snakes do or people do when they are undressing. It shows the impermanence of life by drawing a comparison to the shedding of skin.
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Lead a class discussion of the following questions:

**A calamity is “a great misfortune or disaster.” Reread lines 76–77: “There’s the respect / that makes calamity of so long life.” What does this mean?**

☞ That fear of death and what comes after makes us suffer in life.

**How do lines 76–77 shape your understanding of Hamlet’s view of life?**

☞ Student responses may include the following:

- He is calling life a calamity and providing a reason for the suffering.
- He is saying that the respect for the unknown is why we continue to suffer.

**How do the things that are listed in lines 78–82 (from “For who would bear the whips and scorns of time” to “the spurns / That patient merit of th’ unworthy takes”) support Hamlet’s statement: “There’s the respect / that makes calamity of so long life” (lines 76–77)?**

☞ He mentions all bad things as part of the world that we endure because we are afraid to die.

**Look at lines 83–84 “When he himself might his quietus make / with a bare bodkin.” Refer to the explanatory notes. What do *quietus* and *bare bodkin* mean here? What is your understanding of the sentence?**

☞ *Quietus* comes from the Latin “quietus est,” meaning “he is quit.” “His quietus make” means “settle his account.” A bare *bodkin* is “an unsheathed dagger.” He is talking of killing himself in order to settle his account with life, or be done with life through death.

① Remind students they can refer to the text’s explanatory notes for definitions of most unknown words.



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Ask students to return to their small groups for a discussion to review annotations for figurative language. To prepare students for the Quick Write, instruct them to compile evidence collaboratively around the use of figurative language in the soliloquy.

- ▶ Student responses may include the following:
  - Hamlet talks about life as a “mortal coil” to be shed.
  - Hamlet refers to “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” to show how angry and upset he is with fate.
  - He calls life a “calamity.”
  - He thinks of death as “sleep” but worries about dreams.

### Activity 6: Quick Write

**10%**

Instruct students to respond briefly in writing to the following prompt:

**Analyze Hamlet’s attitude toward life and death, noting Shakespeare’s specific use of metaphor and language that is fresh, engaging, and beautiful.**

Instruct students to look at their text and notes to find evidence. Remind students to use the Short Response Checklist and Rubric to guide their written responses.

① Display the prompt for students to see, or provide the prompt in hard copy.

- ▶ Students independently answer the prompt using evidence from the text.
- 🗣 See the High Performance Response at the beginning of this lesson.

① The next lesson will require students to refer to their Quick Writes from this lesson for evidence of Hamlet’s views on death.

### Activity 7: Closing

**5%**

Display and distribute the homework assignment. For homework, instruct students that they can choose either to revisit Act 1.2 in which Hamlet says “O God, God, / How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable / Seem to me all the uses of this world!” (Act 1.2, lines 136–138) and examine how this statement is further developed in the “To be or not to be” soliloquy, or to view a brief video and explain how Shakespeare uses figurative language to develop central ideas.

- ▶ Students follow along.

## Homework

Choose one of the following activities:

In Act 1.2 Hamlet says “O God, God, / How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable / Seem to me all the uses of this world!” (lines 136–138). How is this statement further developed in the “To be or not to be” soliloquy?

OR

View <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/shakespeare-uncovered/video/hamlet-with-david-tennant/> (from 15:45 through 21:45) and explain, based on the video, how Shakespeare uses figurative language to develop central ideas.

Also for homework, continue your AIR through the lens of your focus standard (RL.11-12.3) and prepare for a 3–5 minute discussion of your text based on that standard.