

11.1.2

Lesson 18

Introduction

In this lesson, students read Hamlet’s final soliloquy (Act 4.4, lines 34–69), focusing on lines 34–56 from “How all occasions do inform against me” through “To all that fortune, death, and danger dare, / Even for an eggshell.” Students examine how Shakespeare continues to develop Hamlet’s character in this passage, paying particular attention to the use of comparisons and Fortinbras’s role as a foil for Hamlet. Students first read closely for comprehension and then work in pairs to consider larger ideas related to Hamlet’s character that the soliloquy raises. Throughout the lesson, students continue to annotate the text and gather evidence for writing assignments. A Quick Write at the end of the lesson assesses students’ understanding of how the comparison of Hamlet and Fortinbras develops Hamlet’s character. For homework, students reread the soliloquy and paraphrase the second portion of the text.

Standards

Assessed Standard(s)	
RL.11-12.3	Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
Addressed Standard(s)	
W.11-12.9.a	<p>Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.</p> <p>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”).</p>
L.11-12.4.c	<p>Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on <i>grades 11–12 reading and content</i>, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.</p> <p>c. Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning, its part of speech, its etymology, or its standard usage.</p>

L.11-12.5.b	<p>Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</p> <p>b. Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.</p>
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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"> How does the comparison of Hamlet to Fortinbras develop the character of Hamlet?
High Performance Response(s)
<p>A High Performance Response should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify an important aspect of Hamlet’s character, such as his difficulty choosing action versus inaction; his interest in distinguishing between right and wrong; his concern with cowardice; etc. Discuss the relationship of Hamlet’s character to Fortinbras (as a foil).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> discourse (n.) – (in this context) power of thought fust (v.) – become moldy exhort (v.) – urge
Vocabulary to teach (may include direct word work and/or questions)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> dull (adj.) – not sharp; blunt occasions (n.) – particular times, especially as marked by certain circumstances or occurrences inform against (v.) – denounce; condemn; accuse bestial oblivion (n.) – mindlessness like beasts craven scruple (adj.) – cowardly hesitation gross (adj.) – very obvious or noticeable

Lesson Agenda/Overview

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
Standards & Text: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standards: RL.11.12.3, W.11-12.9.a, L.11-12.4.c, L.11-12.5.b Text: <i>Hamlet</i>, Act 4.4, lines 34–56 (Masterful Reading: lines 34–69) <p>i In order to provide additional context, the Masterful Reading extends beyond the lines students read and discuss during the lesson.</p>	
Learning Sequence:	
1. Introduction to Lesson Agenda	1. 5%
2. Homework Accountability	2. 10%
3. Masterful Reading	3. 15%
4. <i>Hamlet</i> , Act 4.4, Lines 34–56 Reading and Discussion	4. 35%
5. Small-Group Discussion	5. 20%
6. Quick Write	6. 10%
7. Closing	7. 5%

Materials

- Free audio resources for “How all occasions do inform against me...” John Gielgud reading: http://www.naxos.com/catalogue/item.asp?item_code=NA341712
- Student copies of the Hamlet Central Ideas Tracking Tool (refer to 11.1.2 Lesson 7)
- Student copies of the Speaking and Listening Rubric and Checklist (refer to 11.1.2 Lesson 3)
- Student copies of the Short Response Rubric and Checklist (refer to 11.1.1 Lesson 1)
- Copies of the Paraphrase Tool *Hamlet*, Act 4.4, Lines 56–69 for each student

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.
	Bold text indicates questions for the teacher to ask students.
	<i>Italicized text indicates a vocabulary word.</i>

▶	Indicates student action(s).
🗨️	Indicates possible student response(s) to teacher questions.
ℹ️	Indicates instructional notes for the teacher.

Activity 1: Introduction to Lesson Agenda

5%

Begin by reviewing the agenda and assessed standard for this lesson: RL.11-12.3. In this lesson, students listen to a Masterful Reading of the soliloquy and analyze the first half of the soliloquy through a full-class discussion before working in small groups to examine how Shakespeare develops Hamlet’s character in this passage. After a brief, full-class discussion, students respond to a prompt for a Quick Write that requires them to explain how the comparison of Hamlet and Fortinbras contributes to the development of Hamlet’s character.

- ▶ Students look at the agenda.

Activity 2: Homework Accountability

10%

Instruct students to review their annotations for a central idea in Act 3.4.

- 🗨️ Possible annotations include annotations next to the following lines supporting the development of a central idea of madness:
 - Lines 83–86 “for madness would not err / Nor sense” to “some quantity of choice / To serve in such a difference.”
 - Line 121 “Alas, he’s mad.”
 - Lines 133–141 “Alas, how is ‘t with you / That you do bend your eye” to “Sprinkle cool patience! Whereon do you look?”
 - Lines 157–160 “This is the very coinage of your brain / This bodiless creation ecstasy / Is very cunning in / Ecstasy?”
 - Lines 162–167 “It is not madness / That I have uttered” to “That not your trespass but my madness speaks.”

Remind students that annotating helps them keep track of evidence they will use later in the Performance Assessment, which focuses on the development of central ideas. This focused annotation supports students’ engagement with W.11-12.9.a, which addresses the use of textual evidence in writing.

Collect student responses to the homework prompt to assess for individual comprehension of the play and its development of a central idea.

Instruct students to form pairs in order to discuss and share the information that they gathered about Fortinbras for homework.

- ▶ Student pairs discuss and share the information that they gathered from their review of the Dramatis Personae, or Character List, Act 1.1, and their notes and annotations from 11.1.2 Lesson 1.
- 🗨 Student responses may include the following:
 - In the Character List, Fortinbras is referred to as the Prince of Norway.
 - In lines 91–119, Horatio explained that Fortinbras’s father died in a battle against Denmark. The battle ended with Denmark gaining land from Norway.
 - In these lines, Horatio described Fortinbras as being “Of unimprovèd mettle hot and full” (Act 1.1, line 108) and explained that Fortinbras is preparing for a battle against Poland.

Activity 3: Masterful Reading

15%

Have students listen to a Masterful Reading of Act 4.4, lines 34–69, from “How all occasions do inform against me” to “My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth.” As students listen, ask them to note the comparisons Hamlet makes in the soliloquy.

- ▶ Students follow along, reading silently.

Activity 4: *Hamlet*, Act 4.4, Lines 34–56 Reading and Discussion

35%

Explain to students that several familiar words in the opening sentence have unfamiliar meanings. Instruct students to annotate the following words and explain that over the course of the lesson, they will define these terms:

- *occasions* (line 34)
- *inform against* (line 34)
- *oblivion* (line 42)
- *craven scruple* (line 42)

Instruct students to reread lines 34–49 before working in pairs to answer the following questions:

How is the word *dull* used in the beginning of the soliloquy (line 35)? In what ways is Hamlet’s revenge *dull*?

🗨️ Dull means “not sharp; blunt.” Hamlet’s revenge is harmless, like a dull knife, because he has not yet killed Claudius.

① Consider drawing students’ attention to their application of standard L.11-12.5.b through the process of analyzing nuances of word meanings.

To what *occasions* is Hamlet referring in his opening line, “How all occasions do inform against me” (line 34)?

🗨️ Student responses may include:

- Hamlet has accidentally killed Polonius instead of Claudius.
- Hamlet is being sent to England, where he will not be able to kill Claudius and where Claudius plans to have him killed.
- Hamlet sees Fortinbras marching an army toward Poland.

① **Differentiation Consideration:** If students are struggling, consider asking them to recount what important events have happened before Hamlet begins the soliloquy.

What effect are these events having on Hamlet?

🗨️ They are accusing Hamlet of not doing enough to avenge his father’s death.

Based on your answer to the question above, what does the phrase *inform against* mean as it is used in this sentence?

🗨️ It means that the events are pressuring Hamlet to do something; it means “denounce,” i.e., “condemn or censure publicly or openly.”

What comparison does Hamlet make in lines 35–37 and why?

🗨️ Hamlet compares a person who only sleeps and eats to a beast. He makes the comparison to show that people should do more than just meet their basic needs.

What comparison does Hamlet make in lines 38–41 and why?

🗨️ Hamlet compares reason to a quality of the gods. He makes this comparison to show that people should use their reason in order to live a life that is more meaningful than a basic, animal life.

① **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with definitions for the words *discourse* and *fust* if they are struggling.

How does Shakespeare develop Hamlet’s character in lines 33–41?

🗨️ Student responses may include:

- Shakespeare uses these lines to show that Hamlet wants to do more than live a very basic life.
- Shakespeare uses these lines to show that Hamlet wants to use reason to find meaning in life and to make moral decisions.
- Shakespeare uses these lines to show that Hamlet’s indecision is causing him to question what kind of life he is leading and how it is causing him agitation.

What two possible reasons does Hamlet give in line 42 for not having made a decision? Use the explanatory notes for the definitions of *bestial oblivion* and *craven scruple*.

- 🗨️ Hamlet says he might not have decided because of his mindlessness living like a beast or because of his cowardess.

① Consider drawing students’ attention to their application of standard L.11-12.4.c through the process of defining words using a glossary.

Hamlet describes his lack of action as “but one part wisdom / And ever three parts coward” in lines 44–46. What does this phrase reveal about Hamlet’s character in relation to the central idea of revenge?

- 🗨️ Student responses may include:
 - Hamlet uses thinking as an excuse because he is afraid of acting.
 - Hamlet accuses himself of cowardice here, as he has elsewhere, for failure to avenge his father’s death.

Lead a brief full-class discussion, based on pair responses. Encourage students to add to and revise annotations and notes about Hamlet’s character, as appropriate.

- ▶ Students annotate their texts, based on the discussion of the lines.

Remind students that annotating helps them keep track of evidence they will use later in the lesson assessment, which focuses on Hamlet’s character development. 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. 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 cowardice, family duty, and morality.

Instruct students to reread lines 49–56, from “Examples gross as Earth exhort me: / Witness this army” through “To all that fortune, death, and danger dare, / Even for an eggshell”, before working in pairs to answer the following questions:

What are the “examples” to which Hamlet is referring and, according to Hamlet, what are they exhorting him to do?

- The soldiers are the examples. They are exhorting him to take action to avenge his father’s death by murdering Claudius.

① **Differentiation Consideration:** If students have difficulty answering this question, consider defining *exhort*.

To what does Hamlet compare these examples?

- He compares the examples to Earth.

How are the examples and the Earth similar, according to Hamlet?

- They are both “gross.”

The word *gross* has multiple meanings; what synonym could reasonably replace the word in this context?

- Students might offer synonyms such as *common*, *obvious*, *plain*, or *huge*.

① Consider drawing students’ attention to their application of standard L.11-12.4 through the process of defining words using multiple meanings.

Activity 5: Small-Group Discussion

20%

Prepare students for a small-group discussion by asking the following questions:

Who is the “delicate and tender prince” to whom Hamlet refers in line 51?

- Hamlet is referring to Fortinbras.

① Students should be familiar with the character of Fortinbras from the previous lesson’s homework.

Instruct students to gather their text, notes and annotations, as well as the Speaking and Listening Rubric and Checklist, to prepare for a small-group discussion. Remind students to use the Rubric and Checklist to guide their discussions.

- ▶ Students prepare materials and gather in small groups.

Display discussion prompts or provide hard copies to each group or student.

- ▶ Students respond to discussion prompts below, using text evidence and discussion norms.

How does Hamlet describe Fortinbras, his actions, and his goals in lines 50–56 (from “Witness this army of such mass and charge” through “To all that fortune, death, and danger dare / Even for an eggshell”)?

🗨 Student responses may include:

- Hamlet describes Fortinbras as a “delicate and tender prince” (line 51).
- Hamlet describes Fortinbras as “with divine ambition puffed” (line 52).
- Hamlet says Fortinbras “makes mouths” at the likely death of twenty thousand men (line 53).
- Hamlet describes Fortinbras’s objective as “an eggshell” (line 56).

① Some students may need help recognizing the phrase *makes mouths* as another way of saying *jeers*.

How do these descriptions reveal Hamlet’s attitude toward Fortinbras?

🗨 Student responses may include:

- These descriptions reveal that Hamlet does not respect Fortinbras, even though he seems to envy his ability to take action.
- Hamlet’s words reveal that he admires Fortinbras in some ways. He says, “Witness this army of such mass and charge,” revealing that he is impressed by Fortinbras’s ability and recklessness to act and to command an entire army to action.
- Hamlet seems to admire Fortinbras’s courage when he says that Fortinbras is “exposing what is mortal and unsure / To all that fortune, death, and danger dare.”

① Consider drawing students’ attention to the alliteration in this phrase as an example of beautiful language. If time permits, ask students to volunteer additional examples of beautiful language in lines 34–56, and explain why the language is beautiful.

① Consider drawing students’ attention to their application of standard RL.11-12.1 through the recognition that Fortinbras’s character is an example of where the text leaves matters uncertain.

① Fortinbras is an ambiguous character, so students may have a range of responses. Students’ interpretations of Fortinbras will shape their interpretations of Hamlet’s choice to model himself on Fortinbras.

How does Shakespeare develop Hamlet’s character in these lines describing Fortinbras?

🗨️ Student responses may include the following:

- Shakespeare uses Hamlet’s discussion of Fortinbras as a way of showing how Hamlet is trying to come to a decision. Hamlet sees Fortinbras’s current march as an “occasion” that “informs against” him, making it clear to Hamlet that if even Fortinbras can take action to gain a small piece of land that is no more than an “eggshell,” then he (Hamlet) should be able to take action to accomplish something large and important.
- Hamlet is comparing himself to Fortinbras, as he often compares himself to others.
- Hamlet is obsessed by Fortinbras’s ability to take action.
- Hamlet is urging himself to follow the example set by Fortinbras.

Instruct students to record the following definition in their notes:

- *Foil – a character used to emphasize particular qualities of another character (usually the main character) through contrast.*
- ① An understanding of the literary device *foil* supports students’ work with RL.11-12.3, as they consider the development of Hamlet’s character in relation to others.

How is Fortinbras a foil for Hamlet?

🗨️ Student responses may include:

- Fortinbras is a foil for Hamlet because both men are princes seeking to avenge their fathers’ deaths.
- Hamlet wants to avenge his father’s murder. Fortinbras wants to avenge his father’s death and loss of territory.
- Hamlet wants to avenge his father by killing Claudius. Fortinbras wants to avenge his father by taking territory in Poland.
- Hamlet has not made a clear plan to avenge his father’s death and has accidentally killed Polonius. Fortinbras has planned a march on Poland and is risking the lives of 20,000 men to reach his goal.
- Fortinbras is rash and acts boldly, but Hamlet is cautious and spends a lot of time thinking.
- Hamlet has “cause, and will, and strength, and means” to act but doesn’t, while Fortinbras does not have as great a cause, but uses his will, strength, and means to act.

Bring the class together so that small groups can share how the reading and discussion of Fortinbras as a foil for Hamlet have developed their understanding of Hamlet’s character.

- ▶ Students annotate their texts, based on the discussion.

① Teachers may choose to have students use the Speaking and Listening Rubric and Checklist for an informal self-evaluation after completing the discussion.

Activity 6: Quick Write

10%

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

How does the comparison of Hamlet to Fortinbras develop the character of Hamlet?

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

- ▶ Students listen and read the Quick Write prompt.

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

Transition students to the independent Quick Write.

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

Activity 7: Closing

5%

Display and distribute the homework assignment. For homework, instruct students to reread Hamlet’s last soliloquy (“How all occasions do inform against me... My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth”) in Act 4.4, lines 34–69 and paraphrase lines 56–69.

① Consider giving students the Paraphrase Tool to scaffold the homework activity.

- ▶ Students follow along.

Homework

Reread Hamlet’s last soliloquy (Act 4.4, lines 34–69) and paraphrase lines 56–69.

Paraphrase Tool *Hamlet*, Act 4.4, Lines 56–69

Name:		Class:		Date:	
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Lines	Shakespeare’s Language	Paraphrase	Notes
56–59	Rightly to be great...When honor’s at the stake.		
59–62	How stand I, then, ...And let all sleep,		
62–68	while to my shame I see ...To hide the slain?		
68–69	O, from this time forth / My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth!		

Model Paraphrase Tool *Hamlet*, Act 4.4, Lines 56–69

Name:		Class:		Date:	
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Lines	Shakespeare’s Language	Paraphrase	Notes
56–59	Rightly to be great...When honor’s at the stake.	To be great is to only act if you have good reason, but to act strongly, even if the matter seems small, if honor is involved.	
59–62	How stand I, then, ...And let all sleep,	Why am I doing nothing when my father has been killed, my mother has been dishonored, and my mind and body are ready for action?	
62–68	while to my shame I see ...To hide the slain?	I am ashamed that I am not avenging my father’s death when I watch twenty thousand men marching to their deaths just to gain a piece of land that is so small that it isn’t even big enough to hold all of their graves.	
68–69	O, from this time forth / My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth!	From now on if I’m not thinking about revenge, my thoughts are worthless.	