

Understanding Hamlet's ghost scene

(NB: Wordsworth Classics line numbers are used in both activities.)

When Hamlet and his father's ghost finally meet in Act 1 Scene 5, the ghost must:

- convince Hamlet that his story is worth listening to
- explain how he was murdered by his brother.



In the following two activities you will imagine how Hamlet could use the ghost's words to prepare the Players to re-enact the murder as a way of trapping Claudius.

Activity 1 - Use the following quotations to design the text and images for a poster that will create suspense for the audience and advertise the play to be performed in Act 3 Scene 2:

What the text says:	What it really means:	Illustration for the Players' poster:
'I am thy father's spirit, Doomed for a certain term to walk the night,' (Act 1 Scene 5 lines 9/10)	E.g. 'I really am your father's ghost and I must walk every night.'	You could draw the ghost in armour with a moon above him to show it is night.
'And for the day confined to fast in fires,' (line 11)		
'I could a tale unfold whose lightest word/ Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood' (Lines 15/16)		
'Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres,' (Line 17)		
'Thy knotted and combined locks to part,' (Line 18)		
'And each particular hair to stand an end, Like quills upon the fretful porpentine.' (Lines 19/20)		

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Activity 2 - Next, the ghost tells Hamlet (and the audience) how he died. Use the following quotations to **storyboard the ghost's explanation** of how he was killed for the Players' rehearsal of 'The Dumb Show' and 'The Mousetrap':

What the text says:	What it really means:	Illustration for the Players' rehearsal:
'... sleeping within my orchard,/ My custom always of the afternoon, ... thy uncle stole/ With juice of cursed hebonon in a vial,' (Lines 59-62)	'When I was having my usual afternoon sleep in the garden, your uncle crept up on me with a bottle of poison ...'	
'And in the porches of mine ears did pour/ The leperous distilment,' (Lines 63-64)		
'... swift as quicksilver it courses through/ The natural gates and alleys of the body.' (Lines 64-67)		
'And with a sudden vigour it doth posset/ And curd, like eager droppings into milk,/ The thin and wholesome blood;' (Lines 68-70)		
'... so did it mine, And a most instant tetter bark'd about/ Most lazar-like with vile and loathsome crust/ All my smooth body ... (Lines 70-73)		
'Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand,/ Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatch'd,' (Lines 74/75)		

Remember to look up in a dictionary or Shakespeare study notes any unfamiliar words so that you understand:

- the effect the story is expected to have on the audience
- the effect the poison had on old King Hamlet.

Next, look at how the Players re-enact this scene in Act 3 Scene 2 (Lines 133-138) (stage directions for The Dumb Show) & Lines 242-270 (The Mousetrap).