

# Hamlet: Act III, Scenes III and IV

## Analyzing Shakespeare's Characters Through Dialogue



Arguably Shakespeare's greatest tragedy, *Hamlet* addresses regicide and its terrible consequences. As the prince of Denmark and heir to the throne, Hamlet returns home from Wittenberg to find that his father, King Hamlet, has died and his mother, Queen Gertrude, has married Claudius, the king's brother, who now rules Denmark as an illegitimate but powerful monarch. Intensifying Hamlet's shock and horror is learning that Claudius murdered King Hamlet to usurp the throne and satisfy his lust for Gertrude. Grieving for his beloved father and despising Claudius, Hamlet is driven by the need to avenge his father's murder and by his conflicting feelings about Gertrude; he loves his mother but condemns her for marrying Claudius almost immediately after his father's death. The toxic relationships among Hamlet, Claudius, and Gertrude developed throughout the play are underscored in act III, scenes III and IV, when Hamlet secretly observes Claudius in prayer and later confronts Gertrude in her bedchamber to unleash his fury over her betrayal of King Hamlet and their marriage. In these scenes, Claudius's and Gertrude's characters, as well as Hamlet's, are revealed more fully.

Through dialogue in a drama, playwrights reveal a character's motivations, personality traits, and relationships with other characters. Diction (word choice) plays an essential role in writing dialogue because it creates mood in the scene while developing characters and establishing events in the plot and subtexts in the play. Because Shakespeare's theaters lacked elaborate sets and lighting and his scripts have sparse stage directions, dialogue is one of the few tools we can employ in understanding his characters. The following worksheet will help students analyze passages of dialogue and determine how they inform scenes in the play.

### Skills

- Character analysis
- Drawing inferences from text
- Interpreting diction for connotative meaning

### Learning Objectives

By using this worksheet, students will:

- Analyze passages of dialogue to identify the speaker's character traits, conflicts, and motivations
- Examine the diction in passages of dialogue to interpret the connotations of key words and explain how they create mood in the scene
- Determine from passages of dialogue characteristics of the speaker's relationship with another character in the play

## Examining and Analyzing Examples of Dialogue

Examine the examples of dialogue in act III, scenes III and IV of *Hamlet* that are indicated in the Passage column below. Identify some key words in the dialogue and their connotations, and the mood created by the key words in the dialogue. Identify what the dialogue reveals about the selected character's traits, conflicts, and/or motivations and what the dialogue suggests about the selected character's relationship with another character or characters. Record your answers to complete the chart.

Passage	What are some keywords in the dialogue and their connotations?	What mood is created by the keywords in the dialogue?	What does the dialogue reveal about the selected character's conflicts, motivations, and/or traits?	What does the dialogue suggest about the selected character's relationship with the other character or characters?
1. Claudius				
2. Hamlet				
3. Hamlet				
4. Hamlet				

## Examining and Analyzing Examples of Dialogue

Passage	What are some keywords in the dialogue and their connotations?	What mood is created by the keywords in the dialogue?	What does the dialogue reveal about the selected character's conflicts, motivations, and/or traits?	What does the dialogue suggest about the selected character's relationship with the other character or characters?
5. Gertrude				
6. Gertrude				
7. Hamlet				

NOTES

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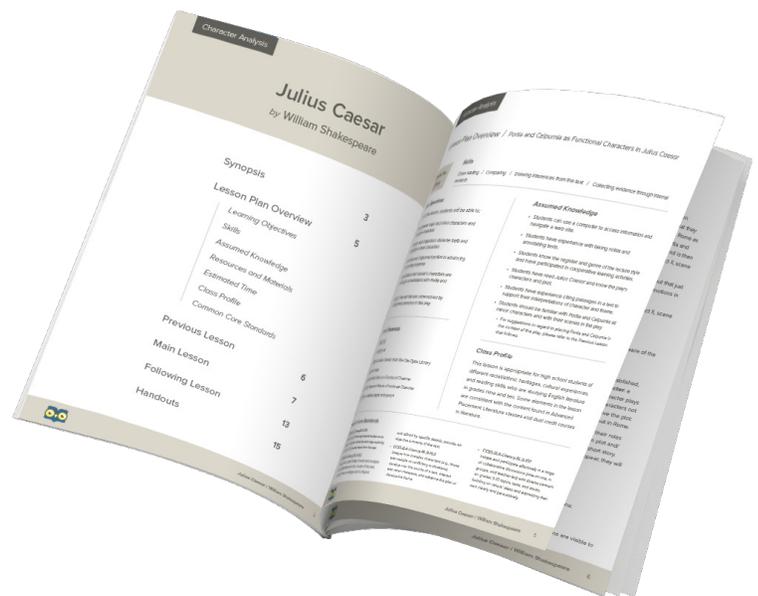
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