

**Title:** Hamlet's State of Mind

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**Grade Level:** 11-12

**Subject/Content:** English/Hamlet

**Summary of Lesson:** Students study various excerpts from Hamlet and read articles relating to the character as means to develop an argument about his sanity. They then write an argument essay.

**Focus Question:** Is William Shakespeare's character Hamlet insane?

**Databases(s):** *Student Resources In Context*

**Procedures:**

**Steps/Activities by teacher:**

1. Asks students to describe someone who is "mad." Help students make the connection between madness and insanity. Encourage students to give examples of fictional characters who are categorized as mad, crazy, or insane. Explore the literary "job" a mad character has within a piece of literature.
2. Begin the discussion of Hamlet's madness by reviewing Act II Sc.1 lines 85-131. Ask students what behaviors of Hamlet's Polonius and Ophelia identify as peculiar. Ask students why Polonius and Ophelia think that Hamlet is acting this way (they think he is going mad because he can't be with Ophelia). Ask students if there are any other reasons for Hamlet's behavior (many believe Hamlet is faking madness to help execute his plan of killing Claudius). The text of *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare can be accessed through the *Student Resources In Context* database.
3. Have students access and read "Essay on Madness (Hamlet)" and "Hamlet's Enemy: Madness and Myth in Hamlet" from *Student Resources In Context* database.
  - Lidz, Theodore. "Hamlet's Enemy: Madness and Myth in Hamlet." *EXPLORING Shakespeare*. Detroit: Gale, 2003. *Student Resources in Context*.
  - Strachey, Edward. "Essay on madness (Hamlet)." *EXPLORING Shakespeare*. Detroit: Gale, 2003. *Student Resources in Context*.

4. Instruct the students to formulate an opinion on whether or not they think Hamlet is truly mad or feigning madness. Have them find an example from the play to support their opinion.
5. Allow students to share their opinions and points of support with the class.
6. Instruct students to write an essay arguing Hamlet's state of mind.

**Steps/Activities by student(s):**

1. Describe someone who is "mad."
2. Participate in discussion based on Act II Sc. 1 lines 85-131
3. Access and read "Essay on Madness (Hamlet)" and "Hamlet's Enemy: Madness and Myth in Hamlet" from the Student Resources In Context database.
4. Formulate an opinion on whether or not you think Hamlet is truly mad or feigning madness. Find an example from the play to support your opinion.
5. Share opinions and points of evidence with you classmates.
6. Write an essay arguing your take on Hamlet's state of mind.

**Outcome:** Students will study William Shakespeare's character Hamlet. They will focus on his mind and the control or loss of control of it. They will write an argument essay clearly communicating their argument with support from the play.

**Related Activities:** Students expand their study of the human mind to the characters of Ophelia and Gertrude.