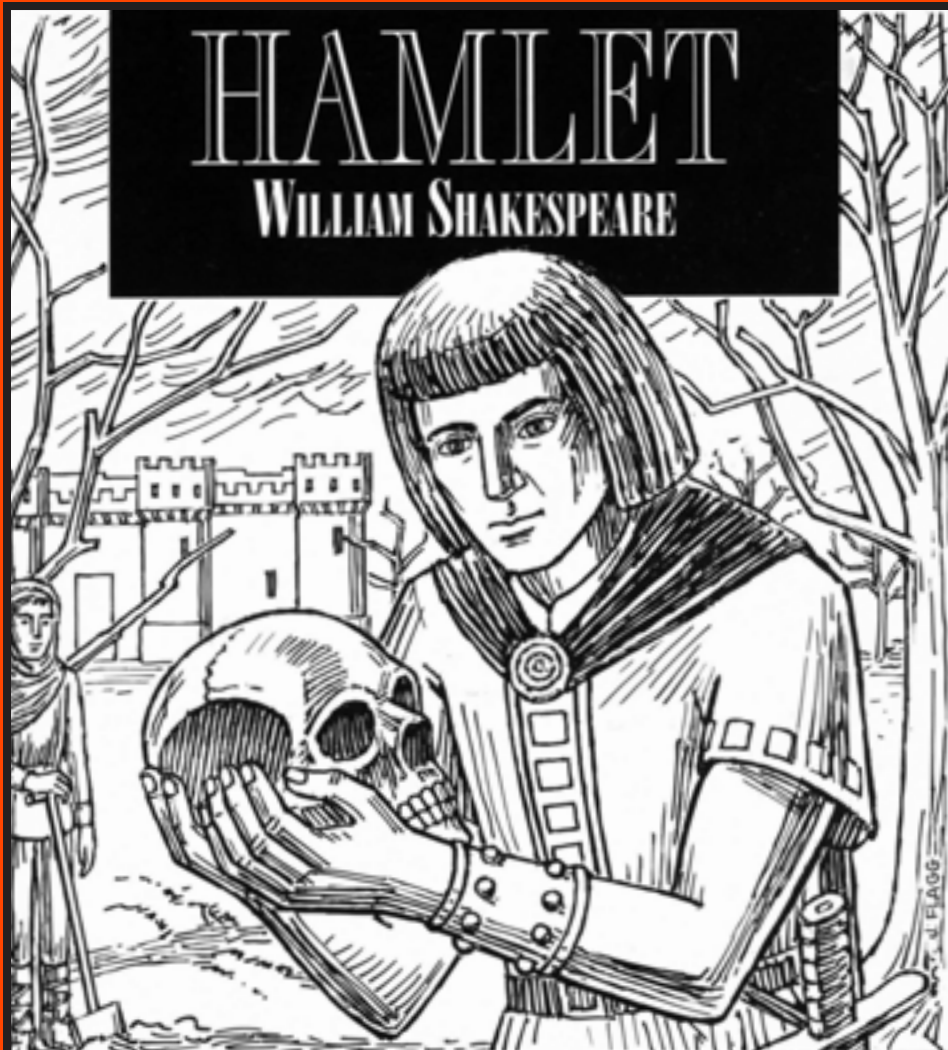


Novel·Ties



## A Study Guide

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**LEARNING LINKS**

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Synopsis . . . . .	1 - 2
Background Information: Elizabethan Age . . . . .	3 - 4
Biographical Notes . . . . .	5
Pre-Reading Activities . . . . .	6 - 7
Act I . . . . .	8 - 11
Act II . . . . .	12 - 14
Act III . . . . .	15 - 18
Act IV . . . . .	19 - 21
Act V . . . . .	22 - 24
Post-Reading Activities . . . . .	25 - 26
Suggestions For Further Reading . . . . .	27
Answer Key . . . . .	28 - 30

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## For the Teacher

This reproducible study guide consists of lessons to use in conjunction with the play of *Hamlet*. Written in chapter-by-chapter format, the guide contains a synopsis, pre-reading activities, vocabulary and comprehension exercises, as well as extension activities to be used as follow-up to the novel.

In a homogeneous classroom, whole class instruction with one title is appropriate. In a heterogeneous classroom, reading groups should be formed: each group works on a different novel at its reading level. Depending upon the length of time devoted to reading in the classroom, each novel, with its guide and accompanying lessons, may be completed in three to six weeks.

Begin using NOVEL-TIES for reading development by distributing the novel and a folder to each child. Distribute duplicated pages of the study guide for students to place in their folders. After examining the cover and glancing through the book, students can participate in several pre-reading activities. Vocabulary questions should be considered prior to reading a chapter; all other work should be done after the chapter has been read. Comprehension questions can be answered orally or in writing. The classroom teacher should determine the amount of work to be assigned, always keeping in mind that readers must be nurtured and that the ultimate goal is encouraging students' love of reading.

The benefits of using NOVEL-TIES are numerous. Students read good literature in the original, rather than in abridged or edited form. The good reading habits, formed by practice in focusing on interpretive comprehension and literary techniques, will be transferred to the books students read independently. Passive readers become active, avid readers.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION: ELIZABETHAN AGE

The period during which Shakespeare lived and worked is known as the Elizabethan Age, after Queen Elizabeth I, one of the most acclaimed of English monarchs. It was a time of great change in English society. As with all social upheavals, these changes brought elements of both good and bad to the people of England.

### Government

Elizabeth ruled from 1558 until her death in 1603. During her reign, Elizabeth did much to strengthen England and make it independent. Elizabeth, a Protestant, established the Church of England as the official church. Church and state were much entwined throughout Europe at this time, and Elizabeth's decision helped to make the English government independent of the Catholic Pope in Rome.

Elizabeth tried to disentangle England from conflicts with other European nations. England was poor and could not afford to wage war or suffer internal conflict. Elizabeth ended a war with France begun by her Catholic predecessor, Mary I. Known as "bloody Mary," she had also led the persecution of English Protestants. This persecution ended under Elizabeth, who did not retaliate by persecuting Catholics.

During this period, marriage for royalty was more a social and political tool than an expression of love. Elizabeth used this tool skillfully. She encouraged both Catholic and Protestant suitors, but did not commit to anyone. This helped to protect England from attack by foreign monarchs and helped to keep the peace at home between Catholics and Protestants.

As an island nation, England needed a strong navy in order to grow politically and economically. Spain was the dominant force at this time, but Elizabeth had her "sea dogs" such as Sir Francis Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh. They were raiders not directly connected to Elizabeth but encouraged by her to prey on the Spanish fleet. By 1588 these and other events led King Philip II of Spain to approve an invasion of England. But the mighty Spanish Armada was defeated by the smaller and swifter English ships. Many of those Spanish ships that escaped were wrecked by fierce storms off the coasts of Ireland. This event marked the beginning of a strong English navy and the decline of Spain as a sea power.

### Society

Shakespeare's writings reflected the life and times of the Elizabethan period. Many people believed in ghosts, witches, and magicians. Life was brief and death was ever-present. People lived in constant fear of the plague, which could break out into an epidemic at almost any time. Doctors did not know its cause and had no cure. Victims were carted away to common graves. At times in the early 1600s, the disease was so rampant that the theaters had to be closed. The successor to Elizabeth, James I, could not enter London in 1603 because of the severity of the epidemic.

Elizabethans were attracted to public displays of violence. Many believed in revenge, although this naturally went against Church teachings. They flocked to public beheading of traitors, watching as the heads were put on poles. The public hangings of criminals were also popular, and the lifeless corpses of the victims were often allowed to hang for days.

The achievements of Elizabeth helped fuel optimism in the English people. But by her death in 1603, that optimism had faded. England was suffering from economic and

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

William Shakespeare was born in 1564, in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. Although the exact date of his birth is not known, there is a record of his baptism. He was baptized on April 26, and it was customary to baptize infants two to three days after birth.

William's father, John, was a man of some social standing in Stratford. Therefore it is likely that William attended the Stratford grammar school. There he would have studied Latin, which was necessary for a career in law, medicine, or the church, as well as drama, poetry, and history.

In 1582 Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway. Their first child, Susanna, was baptized on May 26, 1583. In 1585 Anne gave birth to twins—a boy, Hamnet, and a girl, Judith. There is no information about Shakespeare from the time the twins were baptized in 1585 until 1592. This period is sometimes referred to as “the lost years.”

A 1592 pamphlet notes Shakespeare as a well-known actor and playwright in London. By 1594, at least six of his plays had been produced. In 1594, he was a shareholder of a company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, one of the most popular acting companies in London. Shakespeare was a leading member of the group. In 1599, his company became owners of the new Globe Theater, one of the largest outdoor theaters in London.

The period from 1599 to 1608 was one of great activity for Shakespeare. Many of his most famous plays were written during this time, including *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Othello*.

Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616. His son, Hamnet, had died in 1596 at the age of eleven. His daughter Susanna had one child, Elizabeth, who had no children. His daughter Judith had three boys, but they died young. Elizabeth, Shakespeare's last direct descendant, died in 1670.