William Shakespeare – 1564-1616

-Playwright, actor, director of the Globe Theatre in London

-Considered the greatest writer in the English language

-Wrote during the Renaissance, a period of rediscovery of Greek and Roman writing and art

-Also a period of scientific discovery and global exploration

-Poetry was considered serious writing while plays were entertainment

-Few details of his life are known, conspiracy theories abound

-Was he the true author? Did he write all of the plays? Was it a noble who used his name?

-Most evidence suggests he was the sole writer of the massive volume of work

Cross section of the Globe:

 

The Globe was a cylinder shaped theater with seats surrounding the stage.

-The stage jutted out to the center

-It was a three-story, open-air amphitheater

-The rich sat under cover, and the poor could pay a penny to stand in the open, in front of the stage

(They were called groundlings)

-It is possible Shakespeare acted in his own plays, or simply wrote them, or directed them as well

American connection:

The English were the most influential explorers in the eventual creation if the United States

-The play *Hamlet* contains many of the attitudes, sentiments, and cultural knowledge of the founders.

(Views about the world, the meaning of the stars, the role of religion in government, personal freedom verses obligation to community, Divine Right, etc.)

-Also, the same Puritans who tore down the Second Globe and other theaters in the 1640’s (for blasphemy) ended up settling the Americas.

(We know them as “the pilgrims”)

Hamlet, Act I, scene 1:

**-Bernardo and Marcellus, two night guards of Elsinore Castle, have seen a ghost**

**-The scene begins with the two guards watching for the ghost with Prince Hamlet’s good friend, Horatio.**

**-Horatio does not believe there is a ghost**

**-As the three arrive on the tower platform, all remark about how dark and cold it is.** *(The audience is watching the play during the day, so they need to be reminded.)*

**-As the guards retell the ghost story, a ghost appears in the form of King Hamlet, the recently deceased King of Denmark.**

**-The ghost disappears, and Horatio is now convinced. He tells the guards why he believes the King has returned.**

**-At night and on Sundays, says Horatio, Denmark is making secret war preparations against Norway:**

*-In his youth, King Hamlet killed King Fortinbras of Norway during a war caused by a land dispute*

*-King Hamlet took over the lands, but now Prince Fortinbras is preparing for war to take the lands back.*

*-Trouble is, his uncle, named Norway, is King of Norway, and, though sick, has not yet given the throne to the Prince, so the war he wants to have is not legal.*

**-That, says Horatio, is why King Hamlet has returned in his battle armor: to warn Denmark of an impending attack.**

**-Just as Horatio is finishing the discussion, the ghost reappears; the men panic and throw spears at the ghost.**

**-The ghost disappears just as the sun rises, and the men decide to tell Prince Hamlet what they have seen.**

Scene 2:

**King Claudius, the newly coronated King of Denmark, is making a speech his marriage to his sister-in-law, Gertrude, and he thanks the church for going along with it.**

**-He then discusses the war with Norway, and vows to stop it with a letter to King Norway.**

*(The church went along with the unusual wedding to make Claudius king immediately. They believed it would make Denmark look strong after the death of King Hamlet. The idea was Fortinbras timed his attack during the death of King Hamlet because he believed Denmark would be in chaos with no king or a young, inexperienced king like Prince Hamlet)*

**-The King turns his attention to Hamlet, publicly recognizing him as his son and heir to the throne.**

**-He compels Hamlet to stop mourning the death of his father, who died a very short time ago.**

*(Everyone believes Hamlet is wearing black and acting depressed because of the death of his father.)*

**-As the wedding party leaves, Hamlet reveals to the audience that he is upset over the speedy marriage and not only the death of his father.**

**-Hamlet reveals his suicidal thoughts, but he will not follow through because it is against God’s law.**

**Horatio and the guards interrupt Hamlet’s thoughts to inform him about the ghost.**

*(Here we find out that Hamlet and Horatio are students together in Wittenberg, and Hamlet was away during his father’s death giving Claudius a chance to take the throne.)*

**-Hamlet vows to meet them at the tower platform that night.**

*“My father’s spirit in arms, all is not well, till then sit still my soul. Foul deeds will rise though all the earth o’erwhelm them to men’s eyes.”*

Scene 3

**-Laertes, son of the King’s advisor, Polonius, is leaving for France.**

**-He tells his sister, Ophelia, to beware of Hamlet since he is a prince, and he cannot marry by choice but by obligation.**

**-Laertes believes Hamlet is using her**

**-Ophelia tells her brother she will consider his advice, but she hopes he will follow the same advice while he is in Paris and not ruin some poor girl’s reputation.**

**-Polonius then says goodbye to his son leaving him with some good advice:**

*Don’t fight without cause, dress well but not gaudy, don’t borrow or lend money…*

**-When Laertes leaves, Polonius yells at Ophelia about her relationship with Hamlet.**

**-Polonius forbids Ophelia to see Hamlet again.**

Scene 4:

**Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus wait on the castle platform waiting for the ghost**

**-Hamlet explains to Horatio that Claudius has made a mockery out of Denmark since taking over as king**

**-The ghost appears and beckons to Hamlet**

**-Hamlet fights Horatio and Marcellus as they try to stop him**

Scene 5:

**-When they are alone, Hamlet learns that the ghost is King Hamlet and in purgatory**

**-The ghost tells Hamlet he was murdered by poison poured in his ear**

**-The murderer is Claudius, now King**

*(Claudius killed his brother, his king, and went against Divine Right. He also ruined the reputation of the queen by turning her unfaithful. In addition, he sent King Hamlet to purgatory by not giving him a chance to atone for his sins. Hamlet is hearing this for the first time, but suspected it all along. “Oh, my prophetic soul.”)*

**-The ghost tells Hamlet he must avenge all of these wrongs by killing Claudius immediately and taking back the throne that is rightfully his**

**-Hamlet vows to kill Claudius, then he is found by Horatio and Marcellus just as the sun rises.**

Act 2, Scene 1:

**-After sending a spy to France to keep tabs on his son Laertes, Polonius is interrupted by his frightened daughter Ophelia**

**-She tells Polonius that Hamlet barged into her room, stared at her, then left looking very distressed.**

**-Polonius believes that Hamlet is in love with Ophelia and is acting strange because of a broken heart.**

**-He plans to tell the King and Queen he has found the reason for Hamlet’s strange behavior lately.**

*(At this point, the audience figures out that some time has passed since the ghost scene, and Hamlet still has not killed Claudius. Instead, he has been acting crazy in public.)*

Scene 2

**The King calls on Hamlet’s childhood friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to find out what is bothering Hamlet**

**-The Queen says it must be the quick marriage that is causing Hamlet’s behavior**

**-After receiving word that King Norway has prevented Fortinbras’ attack, Polonius tells the king what happened between Ophelia and Hamlet**

**-Polonius plans to spy on Hamlet to see it Ophelia is really the cause of Hamlet’s behavior**

**-During the planning phase, Hamlet shows up reading a book, and Polonius confronts him**

**-Hamlet acts insane, never giving a straight answer**

**-Polonius concludes that the break-up with Ophelia is the cause**

**-Rosencrantz and Guildenstern confront**

**Hamlet, but they receive the same treatment**

**-Hamlet figures out they are spies and warns them to stay away, but they don’t understand him**

**-Hamlet also tells them he is not really crazy, just pretending, but they don’t understand that either**

**Polonius introduces the players, an acting troupe hired by R and G to entertain Hamlet**

**-Hamlet knows the players, and asks them to perform a scene about the fall of Troy when a queen witnesses the death of the king, her husband**

**-After time with the players, Hamlet reveals to the audience that he has been putting off killing his Uncle, but he has a reason**

**-What if the ghost is an evil spirit? He plans to prove the ghost’s story with a play that re-enacts the death of King Hamlet and watch King Claudius’ reaction.**

**Act III, scene 1**

**The king and Polonius hide behind a curtain to watch Hamlet and Ophelia talk**

**Hamlet, thinking he is alone, delivers the “to be or not to be” speech, then spots Ophelia**

**They talk, but Hamlet realizes they are being watched, and it is not “love” that Hamlet expresses, but anger, so the King now knows that something else is bothering Hamlet**

**scene 2:**

**Play within a play:**

**Hamlet’s play, “The Mousetrap,” is about a queen who swears loyalty to her husband, then marries her husband’s murderer**

**The King rises during the murder scene (Poison in the ear) and Hamlet knows Claudius is guilty**

**Rosencrantz and Guildenstern tell Hamlet that he needs to talk to his mother in her room**

**scene 3**

**On his way to his mother’s, Hamlet spies the king and is about to kill him when he realizes the King is praying and will go to heaven if he’s killed**

**Hamlet says he’ll wait until Claudius is sinning, then he can send him to Hell, but it turns out Claudius was not praying, only trying to pray with no success, so Hamlet could have had his revenge**

**Scene 4:**

**In the Queen’s room, Polonius hides behind a curtain to spy on Hamlet and the Queen’s conversation**

**Hamlet arrives angry, and the Queen is scared, so Polonius calls for help from behind the curtain**

**Hamlet, thinking it’s the King, stabs the curtain with his sword only to find out he has just killed Polonius.**

**Hamlet tells his mother that she should not sleep with Claudius, and tells her about the murder, which appears not to know about**

**The ghost returns to tell Hamlet to leave his mother alone and kill Claudius**

**Hamlet hides the body of Polonius**

**Act 4, scene 1:**

**Claudius arrives and learns of the murder of Polonius.**

**Scene 2:**

**R and G find Hamlet and bring him to the king**

**Scene 3:**

**The king has decided to send Hamlet (guarded by R and G) to England for the murder of Polonius.**

**The king tells the audience that Hamlet is to be secretly executed; even R and G won’t know about it because the letter they carry is sealed.**

**Scene 4:**

**Fortinbras arrives with his army to attack Poland, Hamlet asks a captain the reason for the war. Hamlet vows to take vengeance on Claudius, and be more like Fortinbras.**

**scene 5:**

**Ophelia learns of the death of her father and goes mad, wandering the castle and singing songs about relationships that don’t work out**

**Laertes, hearing about the death of his father, returns from France and invades the castle with a rabble army.**

**He believes the king is the killer.**

**The king convinces Laertes to hear him out first, just as Ophelia wanders in and starts to sing about flowers, fathers, and boyfriends.**

**Laertes questions the king’s secret burial of Polonius, and the King vows to tell him everything**

**Scene 6:**

**Horatio receives a letter from Hamlet explaining that he has escaped the ship to England with pirates, and he is on his way home.**

**Scene 7:**

**Just as the king is about to tell Laertes that Hamlet was the killer, and the king had him executed secretly in England, a message arrives from Hamlet requesting a meeting with the king.**

**The king, surprised that Hamlet is alive, plots with Laertes to murder Hamlet in a “friendly” dual between Hamlet and Laertes**

**The queen enters and informs them that Ophelia has drowned in the stream while decorating a tree with flowers.**

**Act 5, scene 1:**

**Hamlet and Horatio walk through a graveyard, and spot a gravedigger singing while throwing skulls out of a grave**

**In Hamlet’s conversation with the gravedigger, the audience finds out that Hamlet was born 30 years ago, the day King Hamlet killed King Fortinbras, the day the gravedigger started digging graves as a boy.**

**-Hamlet holds the skull of an old acquaintance, Yorick, the king’s Jester, who has been dead for 23 years.**

**-His reunion is interrupted by Ophelia’s funeral, where Hamlet confronts Laertes for his overblown display of grief.**

**Scene 2:**

**-Hamlet explains to Horatio how he switched the King’s letter on R and G.**

**-Osric, a friend of the King’s, interrupts and presents Hamlet the terms of a “friendly” sword fight with Laertes: 12 passes, Hamlet can lose by 3 and still win.**

**-Hamlet suspects a trap, but agrees because he has put off the Claudius killing for too long.**

**-During the duel, Hamlet wins the first two points, but refuses the wine (poisoned by Claudius with a poisoned pearl) Instead, the queen drinks.**

**-Laertes cuts Hamlet in between rounds, and in the fight, they switch swords and Hamlet cuts Laertes.**

**-Everyone suddenly notices the Queen is dying, and she tells Hamlet she was poisoned by the wine, the she dies.**

**-Laertes tells Hamlet that the poison was the King’s doing, and the sword tip was also poisoned.**

**-Hamlet stabs the kings and forces him to drink the wine. The King dies.**

**-Laertes asks Hamlet to forgive him, then dies.**

**-Hamlet tells Horatio to tell the world what happened, but Horatio tries to drink the wine. Hamlet stops him.**

**-Hamlet declares Fortinbras the heir to Denmark’s throne, then dies.**

**-Fortinbras arrives with his army, but finds the royal family dead. He agrees to hear the story from Horatio, claims the throne, and gives Hamlet a soldier’s funeral.**