



Arts Engagement  
and Education

## OPHELIA

“O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!”

*From Hamlet*

by William Shakespeare: <https://www.shakespeare.org.uk>

Gender: Female/Feminine Presenting

Style: Classical Dramatic

Age Range: 14-16 years old

**Link to Buy Script:** [www.target.com](http://www.target.com)

### **Play Synopsis**

Prince Hamlet is depressed. Having been summoned home to Denmark from school in Germany to attend his father's funeral, he is shocked to find his mother Gertrude already remarried. The Queen has wed Hamlet's Uncle Claudius, the dead king's brother.

To Hamlet, the marriage is "foul incest." Worse still, Claudius has had himself crowned King despite the fact that Hamlet was his father's heir to the throne. Hamlet suspects foul play. When his father's ghost visits the castle, Hamlet's suspicions are confirmed. The Ghost complains that he is unable to rest in peace because he was murdered. Claudius, says the Ghost, poured poison in King Hamlet's ear while the old king napped.

Unable to confess and find salvation, King Hamlet is now consigned, for a time, to spend his days in Purgatory and walk the earth by night. He entreats Hamlet to avenge his death, but to spare Gertrude, to let Heaven decide her fate.

### **Before this Moment**

The King and Queen enter with Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Polonius, Ophelia, and members of the court. Claudius questions Rosencrantz and Guildenstern about Hamlet's madness, asking if they have found a reason for Hamlet's behavior. Rosencrantz answers that the Prince has admitted to being distracted but will not say from what. Guildenstern says that Hamlet has been crafty in disguising his motivations. The two report that Hamlet is very excited about the play to be presented, and Claudius asks them to encourage him in this regard. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern leave. Claudius orders Gertrude to leave so that he and Polonius can spy on Hamlet, who has an imminent meeting with Ophelia.

Ophelia enters, and the Queen, in a moment of maternal affection, tells Ophelia that she hopes that Hamlet and Ophelia will patch up their broken romance so that Hamlet can get on with his life. Gertrude exits. Polonius greets Ophelia and instructs her to pretend to read a book so that her being alone will not seem unusual to Hamlet. Ophelia complies and waits with a book while the two men hide. Hamlet enters, speaking his "To be or not to be" soliloquy. He ponders the nature of being and nothingness, and then notices Ophelia reading. Hamlet, assuming that she is reading prayers, asks her to pray for him. She tells him she wishes to return to him gifts he has given her. He responds that he has given her no gifts. She insists that he did give her gifts, and she claims that he gave the gifts to her with words that made

them seem symbols of great love. Again, he denies having given her the gifts at all and further denies having ever loved her.

He questions her honesty and, in response to her bewilderment, tells her that all men are untrustworthy knaves and that she would be better off in a nunnery. To Ophelia's further consternation, Hamlet then abruptly demands that she disclose the current whereabouts of her father. She lies and says that he is at home. Enraged, Hamlet curses her, predicting a disaster for her dowry. He tells her again to go to a nunnery. As Ophelia frets over his apparently fled sanity, he says that he knows that women are two faced and cannot be trusted; they all deserve to be cast aside. Then he leaves.

**Monologue (Act III, Scene 1)**

O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!  
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword;  
The expectancy and rose of the fair state,  
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,  
The observed of all observers, quite, quite down!  
And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,  
That suck'd the honey of his music vows,  
Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,  
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh;  
That unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth  
Blasted with ecstasy: O, woe is me,  
To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!

**Helpful Links: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7EH0FxJVCs>**

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWncmObHHgg>**