

# 'To be or not to be'

## LEAD IN

**1** Look at this picture and answer the following questions.

1. What colour(s) dominate the painting?
2. What feelings does the painting make you think of?
3. Which of the following titles would you give to the painting?
  - a. Feeling Blue
  - b. Melancholic Shades
  - c. Silent Tears in Blue
  - d. Blue Despair



**036**

The following extract is Hamlet's most famous soliloquy from Act III, Scene 1. The despondent Hamlet reflects on the sorrows and torments of life and contemplates suicide.

To be, or not to be, that is the question –  
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
 The slings and arrows<sup>1</sup> of outrageous fortune,  
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
 5 And by opposing<sup>2</sup> end them. To die, to sleep –  
 No more; and by a sleep to say we end  
 The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks  
 That flesh is heir to<sup>3</sup> – 'tis a consummation  
 Devoutly to be wished<sup>4</sup>. To die, to sleep –  
 10 To sleep, perchance<sup>5</sup> to dream. Ay, there's the rub<sup>6</sup>,  
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,  
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil<sup>7</sup>,  
 Must give us pause. There's the respect  
 That makes calamity of so long life,  
 15 For who would bear the whips and scorns<sup>8</sup> of time,  
 The oppressor's wrong<sup>9</sup>, the proud man's contumely<sup>10</sup>,  
 The pangs of disprized love, the law's delay,  
 The insolence of office<sup>11</sup> and the spurns  
 That patient merit of th' unworthy takes<sup>12</sup>,  
 20 When he himself might his quietus make<sup>13</sup>  
 With a bare bodkin<sup>14</sup>? Who would fardels bear,  
 To grunt and sweat under a weary life,  
 But that<sup>15</sup> the dread of something after death,  
 The undiscovered country from whose bourn<sup>16</sup>  
 25 No traveller returns, puzzles the will<sup>17</sup>,  
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
 Than fly to others that we know not of?  
 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,  
 And thus the native hue of resolution<sup>18</sup>  
 30 Is sicklied o'er<sup>19</sup> with the pale cast<sup>20</sup> of thought,  
 And enterprises of great pith<sup>21</sup> and moment  
 With this regard their currents turn awry<sup>22</sup>  
 And lose the name of action. Soft you now<sup>23</sup>,  
 The fair Ophelia. – Nymph, in thy orisons<sup>24</sup>  
 35 Be all my sins remember'd.

- < Hamlet wonders whether to commit suicide or not.
- < Hamlet reflects on whether it is better to accept suffering or put an end to it.
- < Hamlet desires the sleep of death.
- < What stops people from committing suicide is the fear of the afterlife.
- < Hamlet considers what comes after life.
- < Hamlet realises that thinking prevents us from acting.

- 1 **slings and arrows**: colpi e dardi
- 2 **by opposing**: combattendo
- 3 **That flesh is heir to**: Di cui la carne è erede
- 4 **'tis... wished**: questa è una fine da desiderare con devozione
- 5 **perchance**: forse
- 6 **rub**: intoppo
- 7 **When... coil**: Ci siamo tolti di dosso i tumulti della vita
- 8 **whips and scorns**: le sferzate e le ingiurie
- 9 **oppressor's wrong**: torti dell'oppressore
- 10 **contumely**: gli insulti umilianti
- 11 **office**: potere
- 12 **the spurns...takes**: il disprezzo che il merito paziente riceve da chi è indegno
- 13 **his quietus make**: prendersi il permesso di andarsene
- 14 **bare bodkin**: nudo pugnale
- 15 **But that**: Se non fosse che
- 16 **from whose bourn**: dalla cui frontiera
- 17 **will**: volontà
- 18 **hue of resolution**: la tinta naturale della decisione
- 19 **sicklied o'er**: ricoperta in maniera malsana
- 20 **pale cast**: pallido incarnato
- 21 **of great pith**: di grande portata
- 22 **turn awry**: mutano il loro corso
- 23 **Soft you now!**: Silenzio ora!
- 24 **orisons**: preghiere

**VOCABULARY Lab**

**2** Match the words on the left (1-6) with their translations on the right (a-f). Write a letter in the boxes.

- |               |                          |                        |
|---------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. pang       | <input type="checkbox"/> | a. vigliacco           |
| 2. insolence  | <input type="checkbox"/> | b. indignazione        |
| 3. outrage    | <input type="checkbox"/> | c. sfrontatezza        |
| 4. patience   | <input type="checkbox"/> | d. fitta, dolore acuto |
| 5. resolution | <input type="checkbox"/> | e. pazienza            |
| 6. coward     | <input type="checkbox"/> | f. determinazione      |

**COMPREHENSION**

**3** Complete the summary of the passage with the missing words.

Hamlet is reflecting on the meaning of **1** ..... and death. He is speaking to **2** ....., but the audience can share his thoughts through the soliloquy. The opening lines sum up the problem: to go on living or to commit **3** .....? Hamlet is attracted by the idea of sleeping, which he associates with **4** ..... He wonders why we should accept the hardships of life, when we can put an **5** ..... to them by committing suicide. The main reason for going on living is that we don't **6** ..... what comes after **7** ..... The thought that we don't know this makes us **8** ....., and uncertainty impairs our ability to act.

**ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION**

**4** Who is Hamlet debating with? Choose among the following.

- himself
- the audience
- other characters on stage

**5** How is Hamlet's soliloquy organised? Choose among the following.

- As a series of statements.
- As a series of questions.
- As a series of questions and answers leading to a final conclusion.

**6** Find a metaphor for life, its calamities and the afterlife, as follows.

- Human life (l. 12): .....
- The insults of time (l. 15): .....
- The afterlife (ll. 24-25): .....

**7** Focus on ll. 2-5. Why does he call fortune 'outrageous'? Does this refer to his personal experience?

**8** Focus on ll. 6-10. What does love cause according to Hamlet? Find evidence in the text.

**9** Focus on ll. 11-14. Why does Hamlet associate 'death' with 'sleep'? What do they have in common?

**10** Focus on ll. 15-27. Consider the plot of Hamlet. Who is the only traveller who has come back from the 'undiscovered country'?

**11** In ll. 28-35 Hamlet reflects on human thinking and comes to a strong conclusion.

- What is the effect of human thinking according to him?
- What does the pronoun 'you' refer to in l. 33?

**# KEYTOPICS WELL-BEING**

**Thinking and overthinking.** Hamlet's incredible ability to scrutinise the workings of the human mind is one of his most unique traits. His ability to think is often matched with **his tendency to overthink** (or 'think too much'), which makes him an effective representation of a modern individual trapped in the plethora of thoughts that his powerful brain is able to generate.

**REFLECT & DISCUSS**

**12** Answer the following questions.

- Do you tend to overthink rather than just think things through? How has overthinking affected you?
- How can we prevent the negative effects of overthinking?



↑ A scene from the film *Hamlet* directed by Franco Zeffirelli (1990), starring Mel Gibson as Hamlet and Glenn Close as his mother Gertrude.



## Is Hamlet's mental illness real?

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is one of the first works of Western literature highlighting the complexity and the importance of the theme of mental health and well-being. Saddened by the experience of personal loss, tormented by existential doubts, and haunted by apparitions that provoke in him a constant state of anxiety, Hamlet is clearly the prototype of the tormented soul. But in a play where everyone is pretending to hide the truth, how real actually is Hamlet's mental illness?

### VOCABULARY Lab

**1** Which of the following words contained in Hamlet's soliloquy are connected with these key concepts of well-being? Match them with the relevant concepts.

suffer | sleep | dream(s) | calamity | conscience

1 .....	Well-being discussions often revolve around strategies for managing and alleviating pain, whether it's physical, emotional, or psychological.
2 .....	Quality rest is essential for physical and mental health.
3 .....	The pursuit of aspirations is integral to personal satisfaction and overall well-being.
4 .....	Discussions about well-being may involve strategies for coping with adversity, resilience-building, and finding meaning in the face of challenges.
5 .....	The idea of moral sense and its influence on decision-making is a timeless topic in ethics and philosophy.

### REFLECT & DISCUSS

**2** Is there any other word/concept contained in Hamlet's soliloquy that is particularly connected with the topic of well-being? Why?

### ORACY Lab

**3** Answer the following questions.

1. What factors contribute to Hamlet's mental and emotional distress in this passage? Support your answer with direct references to the passage on page 150.
2. Hamlet's obsession with death seems to be one of the main causes of his suffering. How does the idea of 'the dread of something after death' contribute to Hamlet's hesitancy to take action, and what does this reveal about his perception of well-being?
3. If you were going through a period of mental distress, would you seek assistance from someone like Hamlet for support or guidance?

### FIRST Reading and Use of English | Part 2

**4** For questions (1-8), read the text below. Use the word given in capitals at the end of some of the lines to form a word that fits in the gap in the same line. There is an example at the beginning (0 = unhappiness).

In the play we see Hamlet move through moments of **0** unhappiness and mania. The play begins with the protagonist in a melancholy state, which is **1** ..... to those around him. King Claudius comments: 'the clouds still hang on him'. However, one of the big questions is: 'Is Hamlet **2** ..... mad, or is he just pretending?'. Polonius seems to suspect this in Act II, Scene 2, when he comments, 'Though this be **3** ..... , yet there is method in it'. This **4** ..... is, indeed, supported by Hamlet himself, who tells Horatio in Act 1 that he is going to pretend to be mad. In Act III, again, we find Hamlet telling his mother: 'I am essentially not in madness. But mad in craft.' This surely is evidence that he is quite sane! Mad or sane, Hamlet clearly suffers from **5** ..... . His grief is wholly **6** ..... , given that his father has recently died (and probably been murdered, but the true impact of this sadness is that those around him (his mother, his stepfather Claudius, his **7** ..... Ophelia and her father Polonius) cannot cope with his sadness. Hamlet is a man whose misery and grief are considered 'unseemly', or **8** .....

- HAPPY
- APPEAR
- TRUE
- MAD / SUGGEST
- SAD
- JUSTIFY
- LOVE
- ACCEPT



## Fighting against stigma

In today's world people might find it hard to admit that they are struggling mentally. This is often due to a form of social stigma (or 'prejudice'), which leads people to feel ashamed of their condition.



### REFLECT & DISCUSS

- 1** Answer the following questions.
  1. Why do you think people often share this common stigma about mental health in general? What are they mostly afraid of?
  2. Do you think Hamlet is the victim of any form of stigma around his 'mental health'? Why?
- 2** Now read the following infographic showing some effective ways to fight mental health stigma. What aspects seem more important to you? Is there any other information you think should be included?

### HOW TO FIGHT MENTAL STIGMA



#### Education key

help people understand what mental disorders are, their prevalence, and that they are treatable.



#### Speak up

challenge negative comments about mental disorders, as this will stop the stigma from spreading.



#### Show compassion

when it comes to mental disorders, listen without judgement, be patient, and offer support.



#### Seek help

confide in a professional if you think you have a mental disorder – this will change the idea that it is untreatable.



#### Support organisations

advocate for Beyond Blue and Lifeline – organisations that work to combat mental health stigma.



### SELF-AWARENESS

### REFLECT ON YOURSELF

- 3** Answer the following questions.
  1. Write down one thing you would be afraid to say about mental health.
  2. Write down one thing you would be afraid to ask about mental health.
  3. What would I need to feel more comfortable in saying things/asking?
  4. What actions would I feel comfortable taking to address the stigma?

### TAKE ACTION BREAK THE STIGMA

- 4** Work in groups to create a public service announcement in the form of a poster or a Tik Tok video to make people aware of mental health stigma, suggesting a way to break it.