

## Worksheet 2 – Soliloquies and Meditations

### Review

**Answer these questions about the previous video lecture to check how much you remember.**

1. The Tragedy of Hamlet deals with ideas and philosophies concerning which historical movement:  
a) modernism  
b) renaissance  
c) reformation  
d) hedonism
2. Hamlet was written shortly after the death of Hamnet, Shakespeare's only son but this story was originally taken from which historical text?  
a) Holinshed Chronicles  
b) Daemonologie  
c) The Leviathan  
d) Saxo Grammaticus
3. What elements of the Renaissance Revenge Tragedy do we see in the play Hamlet?  
a) A dynamic hero who swiftly revenges.  
b) A chorus.  
c) The action takes place in one day.  
d) The supernatural

### Recall

**Answer these questions after watching the video lecture to check how much you remember.**

4. How many soliloquies does Hamlet perform in the entire play?  
a) 5  
b) 3  
c) 7  
d) 14
5. Why were numbers important to those in the Renaissance period?  
a) Because they were Buddhists  
b) Because there are always seven main characters in Shakespeare's plays.  
c) Because they were searching for meaning and felt that the certainty of numbers might assist them to structure thought and meaning.  
d) Because they believed in the certainty of architecture.
6. Who is given soliloquies in the play Hamlet?  
a) Only Hamlet  
b) Hamlet and Ophelia  
c) Hamlet and Horatio  
d) All the main characters get one.

*Extension: Look at all the soliloquies in the play and flag up when they are and who gets them. Does this tell you anything about the inequalities in this play? What do you notice about the characters who are given this intimacy and those who are not?*



## Analysis

7. Read through the following meditation 'The Seven Ages of Man' that Jacques performs in Shakespeare's earlier play 'As You Like It' first performed in 1599. For each stage summarise what each stage of manhood shows about mankind. Notes the actions and the thoughts of the man in each stage. As you read and study Hamlet's seven soliloquies, consider how Hamlet's journey of self-discovery marry or contrast with these stages.

### Speech: "All the world's a stage"

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

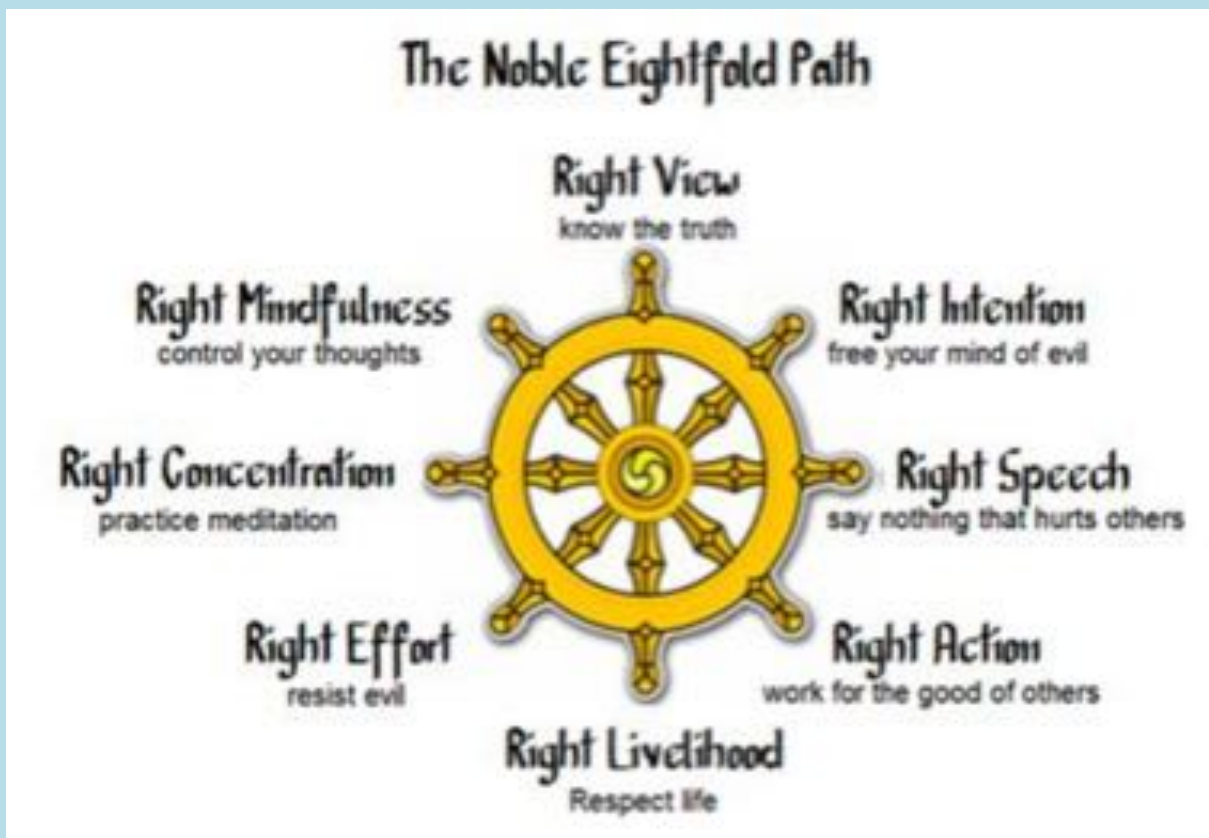
*(from As You Like It, spoken by Jacques)*

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,  
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms;  
And then the whining school-boy, with his satchel  
And shining morning face, creeping like snail  
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,  
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad  
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,  
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,  
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,  
Seeking the bubble reputation  
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,  
In fair round belly with good capon lin'd,  
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,  
Full of wise saws and modern instances;  
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts  
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,  
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;  
His youthful hose, well sav'd, a world too wide  
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,  
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes  
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history,  
Is second childishness and mere oblivion;  
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

Extension:

Dr McRae also mentions the Buddhist Eightfold Path to enlightenment and although he is, by no means, suggesting that Shakespeare either knew about or was a Buddhist, there are parallels with the Renaissance interest in numbers to make sense of the world and given some structure to a period of uncertainty.

Look at the Buddhist Eightfold path wheel below and note down any parallels that you see between these stages and both the Seven Ages of Man and Hamlet's seven soliloquies.



Ref: Contemplative studies: John M DeCastro PhD

<http://contemplative-studies.org/wp/index.php/2018/01/28/the-noble-eightfold-path-right-view-2/>

Shakespeare was not a Buddhist and wouldn't have been aware of these steps but these stages and their echoes in Shakespeare's work demonstrate the searching for meaning that was universal.

### Evaluation

8. Listen again to Dr John McRae discuss how the soliloquies, far from being a character talking to himself, are an honest communication directly with the audience and the role that the audience plays as an interlocutor. (1.48 – 3.10)  
This would have been particularly prominent and noticeable at Shakespeare's theatre The Globe where the groundlings are standing and are level with the stage. The lack of artificial lighting also enables the actors to see the audience as well as the audience can see them.

Carry out some research on the Globe as a theatre space and find at least 5 differences between theatre at the time that Shakespeare was writing and how we experience it today. You could start here:

<https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discover/blogs-and-features/2020/04/30/original-practices-at-shakespeares-globe/>

Then take one of Hamlet's soliloquies and imagine that you are in the audience and that these words are being directly spoken to you, face to face with direct eye contact.

Write a journal entry where you explore your feelings at having this experience. How does this intimacy feel and how does it make you feel about the character?

Use your research on the historical background and write two separate entries, one from Shakespeare's time period and one from modern times in order to contrast performance norms and how they change how we feel?

Write down at least five words or phrases that you feel would have the most impact being spoken in this intimate way.

Then analyse what these words or phrases make you think of and why they would have particular power?

How would these words be performed? Consider stresses given to particular words and syllables and the tone and pitch of the voice? If this differs, how does this affect the meaning? What actions do you feel would be most suitable for the actor during performance to accompany these words? Note down the reasoning behind your directorial decisions.

## Glossary

- **Buddhist** – Buddhism is an Indian religion or philosophical tradition based on a series of original teachings attributed to Gautama Buddha. It originated in ancient India as a Sramana tradition sometime between the 6th and 4th centuries BCE, spreading through much of Asia.
- **Nirvana** – a transcendent state in which there is neither suffering, desire, nor sense of self, and the subject is released from the effects of karma and the cycle of death and rebirth. It represents the final goal of Buddhism.
- **geometry** – Geometry is one of the oldest branches of mathematics. It is concerned with properties of space that are related with distance, shape, size, and relative position of figures.
- **privy** – sharing in the knowledge of (something secret or private).
- **prism** - If you see something through a **prism of** something such as time or memory, your idea of it is affected by that thing.
- **soliloquy** – the act of speaking one's thoughts aloud when by oneself, especially by a character in a play.
- *e.g. Edmund starts and ends the play with a soliloquy.*
- **meditation**– a written or spoken argument expressing considered thoughts on a subject.
- *e.g. This is not a meditation on manhood, just my own immediate ideas.*
- *In drama, this can also mean a soliloquy where there is at least one other, passive person on stage.*
- **interlocutor** – a person who takes part in a dialogue or conversation.
- **Credo** - a statement of the beliefs or aims which guide someone's actions.

