

**Worksheet 14 – Accepting Death: Head, Heart and Hand**

**Review**

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

1. What does Hamlet mean when he says he is 'set naked' back in Denmark?
  - a) That he has lost all his luggage
  - b) That he has no clothes
  - c) That he is alone
  - d) That he is still pretending to be mad.
  
2. What has he learned through his encounters with the pirates?
  - a) How to attack other ships
  - b) To handle a sword
  - c) How to wear a disguise
  - d) To be a man of action
  
3. What does the Renaissance idea of a 'sea-change' signify has happened to you?
  - a) That all your past has been washed off you
  - b) That you have become a brave fighter
  - c) That the sea has made you fearless
  - d) That you have cut all connections with your previous friends and family.

**Recall**

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

4. According to Dr McRae, what sort of death does Yorick represent?
  - a) An actual death
  - b) A philosophical death
  - c) An unjust death
  - d) An argumentative death
  
5. What does John McRae state that the phrase 'the readiness is all' signify?
  - a) That Hamlet is proud of how ready he is to fight.
  - b) That Hamlet is bragging about his dealings with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern
  - c) That Hamlet has been corrupted by the pirates.
  - d) That Hamlet has combined past, present and future and is now resigned.
  
6. What do the audience think of Hamlet's claim that he loved Ophelia more than 40,000 brothers?
  - a) That he is trying to out-do Laertes in his grief.
  - b) That he is being melodramatic.
  - c) That he really did love Ophelia that much.
  - d) That he is trying to provoke Laertes into a fight.

**Analysis :**

7. Let's look again at Hamlet's seventh meditation Act 5 scene 2 L197-202. Re-read this section and re-watch the lecture from 3.00 to the end.
  1. Circle the verbs that have been used.
  2. Write a paragraph about the repetition that has been used here. What is Shakespeare trying to emphasize about life and about Hamlet's personal and professional journey?
  3. What other parts of the play does this meditation link with? What progression do you see?
  4. Count the syllables in each word in this section and see what you discover. What do you think is Shakespeare's purpose for choosing this pattern?

*Extension:*

*We have now looked at all of Hamlet's soliloquies and his meditations so it is a good place to reflect on how they work to show the progression of Hamlet's character.*

*Re-read all seven soliloquies and give each a title that shows what the main idea in each is.*

S1: "O that this too too solid flesh would melt" (1.2.129-58)

S2: "O all you host of heaven, O earth – what else?" (1.5.92-112)

S3: "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" (2.2.485-540)

S4: "To be or not to be – that is the question" (3.1.55-89)

S5: "'Tis now the very witching time of night" (3.2.378-89)

S6: "Now might I do it pat" (3.3.73-96)

S7: "How all occasions do inform against me" (4.4.31-65)

*Then write a paragraph about what they show you about Hamlet's journey and development in this play.*

*Then carry out the same activity with his seven meditations.*

M1: "The King doth wake tonight and take his rouse" (1.4.8-38)

M2: "I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth" (2.2.259-276)

M3: "Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you..." (3.2.1-34)

M4: "Nay, do not think I flatter ... In censure of his seeming" (3.2.52-83)

M5: "Why, look you now how unworthy a thing you make of me ... you cannot play upon me" (3.2.355-63)

M6: "Alas poor Yorick" (5.1.174-185)

M7: "Not a whit. We defy augury" (5.2.197-202)

*Do they tell you anything different from the soliloquies?*

*Consider the fundamental difference which is that soliloquies are delivered in solitude and so therefore are entirely honest. Does this make any difference?*

### **Evaluation**

8. John McRae discusses the philosophical discussion that Hamlet conducts about the fact that death is a true leveler of status and this play has been seen as radically political because of this element.

Michael D Bristol (as quoted in Zimmerman 1998) states that 'Against the perspective of death and burial, all claims to hierarchical superiority are nullified, all the 'serious' claims of economic, political and moral systems become the objects of laughter. In the grave-diggers world-view, Doomsday is a horizon that corresponds to the overthrow of social inequality.'

Look back through the text of the play and see where else this idea is discussed.

Do you agree?

There is much discussion about the way that people die and how that affects their experiences in the afterlife.

Look at the way that Old Hamlet describes his experiences in purgatory, the way that Laertes talks about Polonius' 'obscure' method of burial and the 'ceremonies' that have been extended as far as they could be for Ophelia. It would be a good idea to research what was believed at the time about suicide and the usual methods of burial for them. When contrasted with the funeral that Ophelia gets, perhaps you can see the priests' view in a different way.

Is death the true leveler in society or are there still differences in economic, political and moral systems?

### *Extension:*

*T.S. Eliot discusses the importance of the 'skull beneath the skin' and this leads us onto talking about memento mori which were popular at the time that Shakespeare was writing Hamlet and still hold our fascination today.*

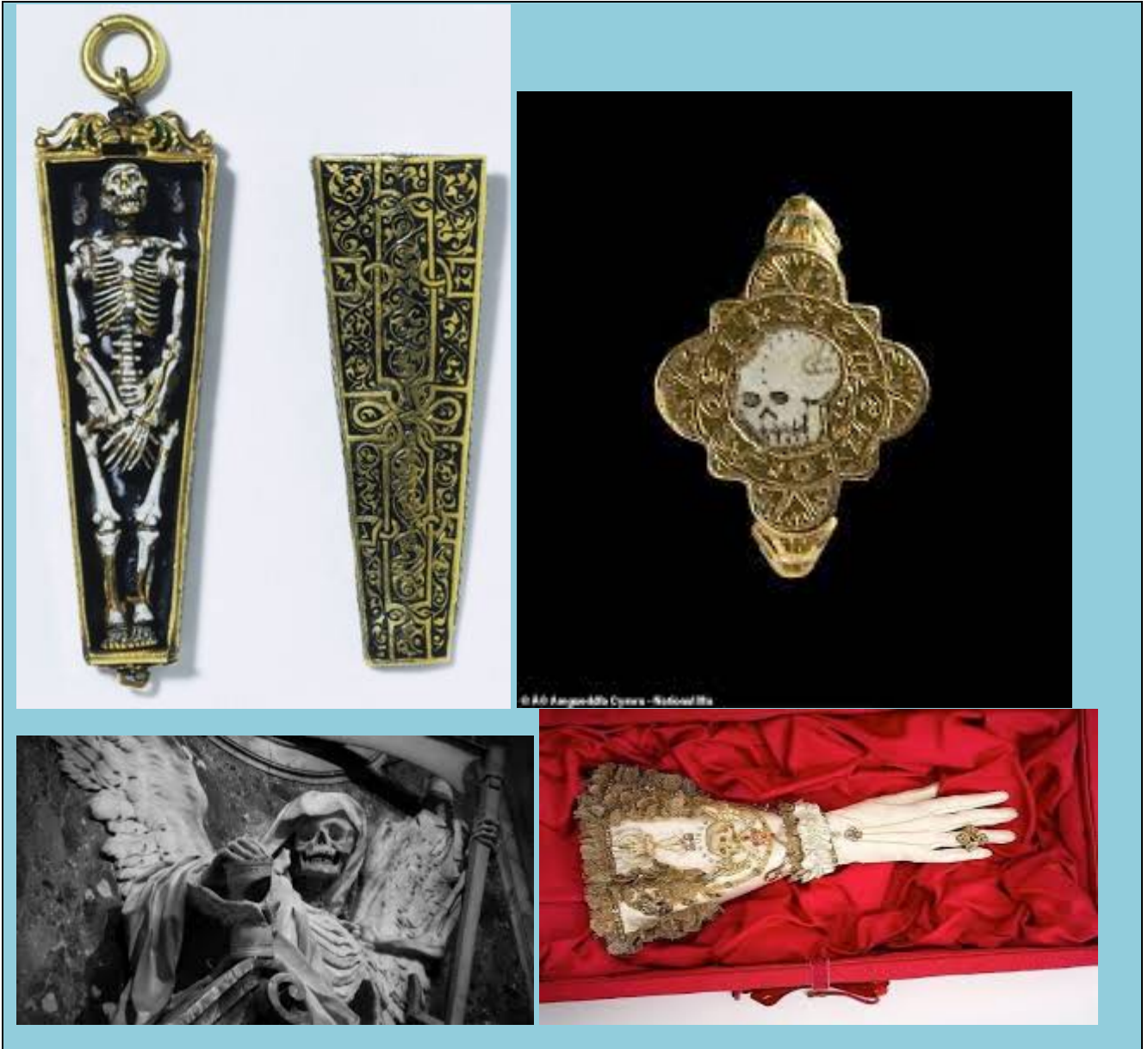
*Look at the picture The Ambassadors by Hans Holbein, (1533) housed in the National Gallery. The distorted image at the front between the men is a human skull which is only clear when looked at from a particular perspective. It is a reminder of the inevitability of death and was used to remind men of the importance and fragility of life.*



Memento Mori were extremely popular and were often incorporated into pictures, sculptures, architecture and clothing.

Some examples of Elizabethan examples are shown below but carry out some further research to see how this fascination with being reminded of one's own mortality has changed and stayed with us over the years.





## Glossary

**Memento Mori** - an object kept as a reminder of the inevitability of death, such as a skull.

**Hierarchical** - of the nature of a hierarchy; arranged in order of rank.

**Nullified** - make legally null and void; invalidate; make of no use or value; cancel out.

**Perspective** - a particular attitude towards or way of regarding something; a point of view.

**Transcended** - be or go beyond the range or limits of (a field of activity or conceptual sphere); surpass (a person or achievement).

**Augury** - a sign of what will happen in the future; an omen.

**Equanimity** - calmness and composure, especially in a difficult situation

**Balanced** - taking everything into account; fairly judged or presented.

**Component** - constituting part of a larger whole; constituent.