

Hamlet Themes

Writer: William Shakespeare | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Themes

Revenge: Revenge is a central theme in *Hamlet*, driving much of the plot. Several characters seek revenge: the ghost of King Hamlet urges his son to avenge his murder; Laertes seeks to avenge Polonius's and Ophelia's deaths; and Fortinbras desires revenge for his father's death and military losses. Shakespeare might be suggesting the futility of revenge, especially with the play's final carnage, where vengeance leads only to destruction and death for most of its key figures.

Action vs. Inaction: *Hamlet* is a revenge play, but Shakespeare masterfully changes the genre by portraying Hamlet as indecisive. Hamlet is unable to act on his desire for vengeance. Hamlet wrestles with the moral and emotional weight of killing Claudius. He questions the value of action versus inaction. His indecision extends to contemplating suicide, torn between living with his failure to act or abandoning his duty. This indecision makes Hamlet one of the most human characters Shakespeare ever created. Meanwhile, decisive characters like Fortinbras succeed. This contrasts Hamlet's inaction.

Madness: Madness is a key theme in "*Hamlet*." Madness affects Hamlet, Ophelia, and possibly Claudius (if egomania is considered madness). The theme is closely linked to truth versus deception, as the question of whether Hamlet's madness is genuine or an act remains unresolved throughout the play. This ambiguity fuels the tension and uncertainty surrounding his actions and the other characters' responses.

Mortality: In "*Hamlet*," mortality is a central theme. Shakespeare discusses this theme through key moments like Hamlet's contemplation of suicide, Ophelia's death, and the gravediggers' scene with Yorick's skull. Shakespeare examines mortality as an inevitable part of life's cycle. He presents it from both religious and secular viewpoints, ultimately exploring death's inescapable presence and its impact on human existence.