‘To be or not to be…’
Student Worksheet

Warmer – A happy life

Which THREE of these are most important to make you happy? Discuss them with your partner and see if you agree.

a. having good friends
b. being in a loving relationship
c. doing a satisfying, well-paid job
d. having a loving family around you
e. being able to travel wherever you want
f. studying and learning about things that interest you

Task 1 – Introducing Hamlet

Discuss these questions.

a. What do you think is the connection between these pictures?

b. Based on the picture of Hamlet (above right), which of the adjectives in the box below do you think might describe him?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>prosperous</th>
<th>elderly</th>
<th>unimportant</th>
<th>youthful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>morbid</td>
<td>depressed</td>
<td>deprived</td>
<td>cheerful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
c. Looking at this advert for a performance of *Hamlet*, which of the following do you think might feature in the play?

- the appearance of a ghost
- many jokes
- a mysterious death
- depression
- a happy ending
- suicide
- unhappy love
- execution
- murder

**Task 2 – Jigsaw activity: Introducing Hamlet's life**

**a.** *Your teacher will put you into three groups and give each group some information about Hamlet. Read your information and use it to complete three of the sentences below.*

1. Hamlet is the ____________ of Denmark.
2. Hamlet’s best friend is _______________.
3. ___________ has been killed.
4. ________________ has just married Hamlet’s uncle.
5. Hamlet thinks ___________ is a murderer.
6. Hamlet was in love with ________________.
7. _______________ and ______________ are at university with Hamlet.
8. ______________ may invade Denmark soon.
9. Hamlet lives in a _______________.

**b.** *Find two new partners (one from each of the other groups). Work together to complete the other six sentences.*
Task 3 – Looking at parts of Hamlet’s speech

Read your part of the speech (Extract 1, 2 or 3) with your group. Use the glossary to help.

Extract 1

To be, or not to be – that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles  
And by opposing, end them. To die, to sleep  
No more – and by a sleep to say we end  
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to.

Extract 2

For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,  
Who would fardels bear,  
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,  
But that the dread of something after death,  
The undiscovered country, from whose bourn  
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have than fly to others, that we know not of?

be: live  
nobler in the mind: more admirable  
The slings… fortune: the injuries life gives us for no reason  
take arms against: fight  
opposing: fighting  
shocks: bad surprises  
flesh is heir to: the body must suffer  
whips and scorns: injuries  
fardels bear: suffer big problems  
grunt: make a noise like a pig; weary: tiring  
dread: fear  
bourn: border  
puzzles the will: confuses us  
bear those ills: suffer those troubles  
fly to: choose
Extract 3

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,  

conscience: our thinking mind

And thus the native hue of resolution  

our natural way of deciding

Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  

sicklied o'er with: damaged by

the pale cast of thought: the weakness of thinking too much

And enterprise of great pitch and moment  

important projects

With this regard their currents turn awry  

their currents turn awry have no direction

And lose the name of action  

we don’t act, and finish them

Then, with your group, decide on the best summary of your part of the speech (a, b or c).

a. Hamlet describes life as being hard work. We only put up with it because we are afraid of death, which we know nothing about.

b. Hamlet decides that worrying and thinking too much stops us from being brave and taking the actions that we naturally want to take. We lose focus and our important plans are not completed.

c. Hamlet is trying to decide if it is better to suffer the problems of a hard life, or to end the suffering by taking your own life. Death is like a sleep which ends all our human troubles.

Task 4 – Looking more closely at Shakespeare’s language

Draw a line to match Shakespeare’s words (left) with the modern translation of those words (right).

From Extract 1

a. To be or not to be – that is the question  

i. Sleep ends the emotional problems and back events that all humans suffer

b. Take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing, end them  

ii. I can’t decide whether to live or die

c. A sleep to say we end the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to  

iii. Fight against those problems, and put an end to them
From Extract 2

d. Who would bear the whips and scorns of time

e. The undiscovered country, from whose bourne no traveller returns

f. Rather bear those ills we have, than fly to others we know not of

iv. Death is an unknown place. No one returns from there, to tell us what it’s like

v. We live with our problems, not risking something we don’t know

vi. Which person wants to suffer all the injuries life gives us during our lifetime

From Extract 3

g. Thus conscience does make cowards of us all

h. The native hue of resolution is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought

i. Enterprise of great pitch and moment
   Their currents turn awry

vii. Big plans can go wrong easily as we stop taking action

viii. Our own minds stop us being brave

ix. Our natural way of making quick decisions is destroyed, by thinking too much
Task 5 – Summarising Hamlet’s problems

Hamlet considers life to be full of problems and suffering. Talk to your group and make a list of his problems.

Examples

- He’s far away from his university life.
- He’s missing his love, Ophelia.

Task 6 – Writing: Hamlet on social media

Imagine that Hamlet is a keen user of blogs and social media. Write Hamlet’s posting for this day. Include his thoughts about his family, his friends, his social situation, and life in general.

Below are some words that could appear in the posting.

Example:

I feel so depressed today. I hate my uncle and I feel my mother has been so disloyal. How could she marry that man Claudius, when my father was so wonderful?