

Hamlet: Using Context for Word Meaning

Perhaps the most famous of William Shakespeare's plays is Hamlet, the drama about a Danish prince who seeks to revenge his father's death. Below is a passage from the beginning of the play, where Hamlet meets with his father's ghost. Read it carefully, paying special attention to the underlined words.

Hamlet

Act I, Scene V.

Ghost: I am thy father's spirit;

Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,

And for the day confin'd to fast in fires,

Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature

Are burnt and purg'd away. But that I am forbid

To tell the secrets of my prison-house,

I could a tale unfold, whose lightest word

Would harrow up thy soul; freeze thy young blood;

Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres;

Thy knotted and combined locks to part,

And each particular hair to stand on end,

Like quills upon the fretful porcupine:

But this eternal blazon must not be

To ears of flesh and blood.—List, list, O, list!—

If thou didst ever thy dear father love,——

Hamlet: O Heaven!

Ghost: Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

Name: _____

In the blanks below, write the letter of the word or phrase from the list that most closely matches the word from the passage.

_____ 1. fast

_____ 2. nature

_____ 3. purg'd

_____ 4. forbid

_____ 5. unfold

_____ 6. harrow

_____ 7. knotted

_____ 8. fretful

_____ 9. blazon

_____ 10. list

A. distressed

B. prohibited

C. poetry

D. go without eating

E. destroy or tear

F. declaration

G. removed

H. interwoven or braided

I. listen

J. life

K. castle

L. tell

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Name: **Key**

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D 1. fast

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