

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead: The Movie

Directions: Use these notes and questions as a guide when viewing the movie.

About twenty-five years after writing the play, Stoppard wrote and directed a movie version. He purposefully made changes in words and actions: deletions, alterations, and additions. Whereas the stage version relies mainly on words and their manipulation, the movie relies more on visual images.

Points to Ponder...

- 1.) What obvious changes are in the script?
- 2.) Notice these motifs and decide on their meanings:
 - a. The wind blowing –
 - b. Sheets of paper (blowing, folded) –
 - c. Stairs –
 - d. Echoes-
 - e. A dog howling –
- 3.) The bare stage becomes a realistic, detailed set. They are in a real castle and on a real boat. What effect does this realism have on a play?

Can an absurd play be performed in a literal way?

- 4.) One visual joke that is added shows one of our heroes creating and eating a Dagwood-style hamburger, straight from the 20th century. What other jokes (mainly visual) do you find?
- 5.) How predominant is Hamlet in the movie?

Compared to the play, what portion of the movie consists of scenes from *Hamlet*?

How does this affect the movie?

- 6.) How is Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's disappearance scene changed?

Does this change the play?

Does it make the Player guilty of their deaths?

- 7.) Instead of the simple, on-the-spot mime shows, the movie has a dumb show with skulls, a drowning, and the sound of swords: a mime with masks, an oriental dumbshow and a puppet show; all scenes from *Hamlet*. At the end, the mime is replaced by shots of the described actions actually happening. What is the effect of these changes?

What might the use of masks and puppets suggest?

- 8.) How difficult is it to tell Rosencrantz and Guildenstern apart in the movie? Why?
- 9.) What is the most effective change Stoppard made? The least?

- 10.) Which version do you prefer? Why?