

Hamlet is Not OK

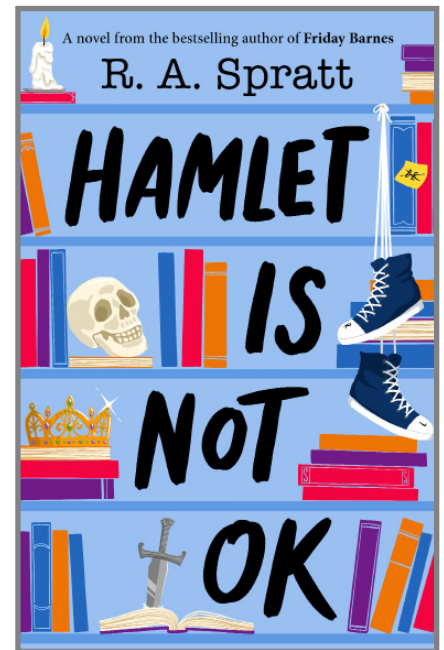
AUTHOR

R.A. SPRATT

SCIS: 5452082

ISBN: 9780143779278

RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower to Mid Secondary



SYNOPSIS

Selby hates homework.

She would rather watch TV—anything to escape the tedium of school, her parents' bookshop and small-town busybodies.

So Selby didn't plan to read Hamlet. She certainly never planned to meet him.

This novel transports Selby, and the reader, into the cold and crime-ridden play itself. Here she meets Hamlet: heavy with grief, the young prince is overthinking and over everything.

Selby can relate. But unlike Hamlet, Selby isn't afraid of making decisions. In her world, Selby is used to feeling overlooked. But in the bloody, backstabbing world of Shakespeare, Selby's good conscience and quiet courage might just save some lives . . . hopefully before Hamlet stabs one of her classmates.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

R.A. Spratt was born in the UK and lived in Dursley, Gloucestershire—a town immortalised by Harry Potter's deeply unpleasant relatives—until she was two years old. Then, like many ambitious English people cursed with regional accents so strong no other British person can take them seriously, her family moved to Australia. The tedium of growing up in the western suburbs of Sydney was fertiliser to the growth of R.A.'s imagination. The only thing for a kid to do was get on a bicycle and go to the library, so R.A. Spratt did just that. Once there, she read everything, devouring the books of Arthur Ransome, Enid Blyton, Roald Dahl, Robin Klein and Judy Blume, and audiotapes of Shakespeare productions and Sherlock Holmes dramatisations.

And so, her young mind was formed, and set on the path of becoming the extraordinary author she is today. Now based in Bowral NSW, she's the bestselling writer of dozens of absurd and witty books including Friday Barnes, The Adventures of Nanny Piggins, The Peski Kids and the Shockingly and Astonishingly Good Stories collections. Her podcast, Bedtime Stories with R.A. Spratt, has had over 2 million downloads and connects R.A. with story-lovers across the globe.

For more information, visit raspratt.com.

THEMES

- Grief, despair and mental health
- Ethics and morality
- Revenge
- Corruption
- Appearance vs reality
- Friendship

STUDY NOTES

WRITING STYLE

- Author R.A. Spratt has been a television writer and a comedy writer. What are some of the writing techniques employed in *Hamlet is Not OK* that might also work in TV writing? What does the strategic use of dialogue, for example, give the novel's pace and plotting?
- Both R.A. Spratt and William Shakespeare use humour in their writing. Humour serves many purposes. It can be used to lighten the mood, relieve dramatic tension and develop characters. It can also be used to challenge the audience's perception, getting them to think about an idea in a different way. Some examples of humour techniques are listed below. Discuss the following literary techniques used throughout *Hamlet is Not OK* and how they enrich the story. See how many examples of each technique you can find:
 - Irony: A literary device in which the literal meaning is the opposite of that intended, especially when the locution understates the effect intended, employed in ridicule or merely playfully (Macquarie Dictionary). A simple way of putting it is that irony usually signals a difference between the appearance of things and their reality.
 - Hyperbole: Exaggeration used to evoke strong feelings or create an impression which is not meant to be taken literally. Often involves a surprise or unexpected event or consequence.
 - Parody: The opportunity to imitate the style of an individual, place, object or institution with a nonsensical approach.

INTERTEXTUALITY

- Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was published in 1601 and continues to be one of the most influential pieces of literature in the world. After reading *Hamlet is Not OK*, do you feel like you have more of an understanding of Shakespeare's famous play?
 - What is it about R.A. Spratt's novel that may help a reader grasp the plot and themes of *Hamlet*?
- The author, R.A. Spratt, often includes pop culture references in her writing, those referred to in *Hamlet is Not OK* include the book *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* and the TV show *Colombo*. How do these references impact our experience of reading the novel?

PLOTTING

- In *Hamlet is Not OK*, Selby and Dan attempt to give Hamlet a happier, or at least less deadly, ending. In intervening with the play's plot, simple changes have complicated knock-on effects. For example, the character Ophelia is displaced from the play and the climatic final scene takes an entirely different turn. What are other examples of the domino effect in life, or in other books you've read?
- *Hamlet* is often described as a 'revenge tragedy.' However, unlike the protagonists in Shakespeare's other revenge plays (*Othello* and *Titus Andronicus* for example) in *Hamlet* we see the prince contemplate the certainty of his revenge, and question his motivations the whole way through. Does this add something to the story? How does R.A. Spratt treat the character's famous indecision? What are some modern examples of a revenge story in literature or film/TV?

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

- We see Selby's motivations change throughout the novel, and Chapter 13 marks a turning point for the course of the plot. Here Selby progresses from a passive spectator of *Hamlet* to a motivated heroine. This is called character

development. What inspired her change? Can you think of times from your own life, or examples from other stories, where someone progresses from one position to another? What does this add to the story, and our enjoyment of it as readers?

- Selby can sometimes feel like she doesn't fit in: her parents love books and reading while she finds it difficult; her siblings are academic while she prefers the storytelling of TV; her small town is claustrophobic. This is a trope in literature call the 'outsider protagonist' or more colloquially a 'fish out of water' story. What are some other examples of outsider protagonists in books? Why do you think this is a common characterisation technique in stories?
- The character of Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, has been assessed and discussed for centuries. What do you make of Selby's view of him as a man beset with grief and despair, rather than a madman? What evidence is there of grief, compared to mental disorder? What do you think attracted R.A. Spratt to this story, and this character, in particular?

THEMES

- Commonly cited themes of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* include revenge, honour, corruption, death, deceit, friendship and grief. Did these come across while reading *Hamlet is Not OK*? Why do you think these themes continue to inspire readers? What are some examples of modern books, films or TV that explore these perennial themes?
 - How did the author mirror the themes of *Hamlet* in the story of Selby and Dan?
 - How does grief affect Dan in comparison to Hamlet?
 - How does guilt shape Selby's relationship with her mother, compared to Hamlet's relationship with his father?
- Selby calls Hamlet out for his reproachful attitude towards women. Do you think Hamlet loved Ophelia, and his mother Gertrude? Why do you think he treats them so appallingly? When Hamlet rails against Ophelia and Gertrude, how much of it is the character Hamlet, and how much of it is William Shakespeare revealing what he personally thinks?

LANGUAGE

- Many phrases coined by Shakespeare are still in use today some 400 years later. A list of phrases that were first expressed in *Hamlet* is below. What do you think they mean, and why do you think they are still in use today?
 - Conscience doth make cowards of us all
 - The cat will mew and dog will have his day
 - I must be cruel only to be kind
 - In my mind's eye
 - Murder most foul
 - O, woe is me
 - Sweets to the sweet
 - The lady doth protest too much
 - There's method in my madness
 - What a piece of work is man
 - Witching time of night
- The below famous quotes are spoken by Polonius (Ophelia's father).
 - Neither a borrower nor a lender be
 - To thine own self be true
 - Brevity is the soul of wit

These quotes sound wise, but Polonius is a foolish character. How does this effect our perception of the words? Why does Shakespeare give these wise platitudes to a fool to say?

- Do you feel differently about a story when listening to the words being read aloud? Shakespeare's plays were intended to be acted, with the drama and pageantry of the stage. How does the act of reading Shakespeare compare to watching a live performance of it, or listening to a reading?
 - What are some of your favourite audiobooks, radio plays or podcasts?