# Hamilton

## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA, JEREMY MCCARTER

Lin-Manuel Miranda was born in New York to a clinical psychologist and a Democratic strategist. After graduating from the competitive Hunter College High School, Miranda went to Wesleyan University, where he began workshopping his first musical, *In the Heights*. When *In The Heights* debuted on Broadway in 2008 (with Miranda in the title role), it was acclaimed for its unique blend of hip-hop and musical theater traditions. After the runaway success of *In the Heights*, Miranda worked on the musical version of *Bring It On* and contributed Spanish-language versions of Stephen Sondheim's lyrics for the Broadway Revival of *West Side Story*. In 2015, Miranda then starred as the titular character in his musical *Hamilton*, winning two Tony awards (for Best Musical and Best Score) and earning a nomination for Best Actor. More recently, Lin composed music for the Disney movie *Moana* and directed the Oscar-nominated film *Tick, Tick, Boom!* Miranda is also a two-time nominee for the Pulitzer Prize in Drama, winning in 2016 for *Hamilton*.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*Hamilton* tells the story of the American Revolutionary War and of the difficult, exciting years following. Over the course of the musical, the muddled band of rebellious colonists ("a ragtag volunteer army in need of a shower") defeats the powerful British empire—a victory the musical attributes to French aid, quick thinking by Hamilton and his friends, and George Washington's sage leadership. But if the war saw men from across the new United States come together, the first decade of the country's history tore them apart. In particular, Alexander Hamilton, always in favor of a strong central government and a national bank, found himself at odds with Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, two slaveholding Virginian politicians who imagined an agrarian country built on a plantation economy. Though the musical sticks largely to the facts, it recasts the all-white Founding Fathers as Black and brown men. As Thomas Kail put it, "this is a story about America then, told by America now."

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Director Thomas Kail names four musicals as the "grandparents" of *Hamilton*: *Sweeney Todd*, *Gypsy*, *Evita*, and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. But perhaps more importantly, Miranda frequently emphasizes his determination to fill Hamilton with musical samples and lyrical references to the work—both hip-hop and musical theatre—that had informed it. He quotes directly from songs from a wide range of genres, from "Shook Ones, Part II" by Mobb Deep to "You've Got To Be Carefully Taught," from the Rodgers & Hammerstein musical *South Pacific*. He also borrows rhyme schemes from rappers like Big Pun and thematic content from hip-hop artist the Notorious B.I.G. and composer-lyricist Jason Robert Brown. By pulling from these various sources, theatre critic Jeremy McCarter argues, Miranda is giving out "invitations [...] to people from diverse backgrounds that the show is meant for them."

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Hamilton
- **When Written:** 2008–2015
- **Where Written:** New York City
- **When Published:** 2016
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Musical, Biography, History
- **Setting:** New York City at the turn of the 19th century
- **Climax:** After years of tension and political scheming, Aaron Burr challenges Alexander Hamilton to a fatal duel in New Jersey.
- **Antagonist:** Aaron Burr

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Wait For It.** Eliza and Hamilton aren't the only love for the ages: Lin-Manuel Miranda famously met his wife Vanessa when they went to the same high school together (just two years apart), though they would not start their life as a couple for more than a decade after they graduated. Touchingly, each had a column in their school's newspaper, which was called the *What's What?* Their columns were often on the same page. And of course, Lin, always the wordsmith, punnily titled his column "Miranda Writes."

**Mixtape to Musical.** Before it was a musical, Miranda envisioned *Hamilton* as a concept album called *The Hamilton Mixtape*. Eventually, director Thomas Kail got Miranda to work in a musical format—and producer Jeffrey Seller pushed for the name change. But *The Hamilton Mixtape*, featuring Miranda and a slew of acclaimed pop artists, was eventually released in 2016.

## PLOT SUMMARY

The first song in Lin-Manuel Miranda's musical *Hamilton* follows Alexander Hamilton from his birth in the Caribbean through the loss of his mother, and then to his eventual arrival in New York. The song is narrated largely by Aaron Burr, Hamilton's frenemy and the story's primary antagonist ("Alexander Hamilton").

Hamilton meets Burr ("Aaron Burr, Sir"), and the two men's worldviews clash: Hamilton is verbose and openly ambitious, whereas Burr believes everyone should "talk less / smile more." Fortunately, Hamilton also gets to know Lafayette, Laurens, and Mulligan, three equally rowdy young revolutionaries ("My Shot"); they share Hamilton's feeling that "I'm just like my country / I'm young, scrappy, and hungry / and I'm not throwing away my shot." While the men drink to their new friendship ("The Story of Tonight"), across town, Angelica, Peggy, and Eliza Schuyler have snuck away from their country house to spend a reckless day in the city ("The Schuyler Sisters").

The revolution heats up: in waltz time, Hamilton publicly mocks British loyalists ("Farmer Refuted"), while British King George sings a Beatles-esque break-up song to his American subjects ("You'll Be Back"). Things aren't looking good for the American side, but Washington rallies the troops, hiring Hamilton as his closest aide ("Right Hand Man").

The war grows tenser, but Hamilton and Burr find time to party with the Schuyler sisters ("A Winter's Ball"). At the party, Hamilton meets sweet Eliza and her older sister, quick-thinking Angelica. Eliza is captivated, and in a whirlwind R&B number, Hamilton and Eliza court and get married ("Helpless"). But then the scene rewinds—and audiences realize that Angelica, also in love with Hamilton, has decided to step back to make her sister happy ("Satisfied").

While Hamilton rises through the ranks, Burr resents his own failure to launch—but promises himself his time will come ("Wait For It"). Hamilton isn't content, either: he is desperate to be made a general, but Washington, overwhelmed by the British ships surrounding New York City, sees him as an administrator ("Stay Alive"). When Washington promotes inept Charles Lee over Hamilton, a duel ensues ("The Ten Duel Commandments"). Washington is embarrassed that Hamilton resorts to violence, so he temporarily fires the younger man ("Meet Me Inside"). Hamilton is crushed, but there is one perk: he gets to go home to Eliza, who begs to be "part of" her husband's narrative and reveals that she is pregnant with their first son Philip ("That Would Be Enough").

The next three songs bring Hamilton into the heat of battle. In a rapid-fire rap, Frenchman Lafayette returns with guns and ships from the French ("Guns and Ships"); energized by this good news, Washington finally makes Hamilton a general ("History Has Its Eyes On You"); and at last, the Americans emerge victorious, singing that "the world turned upside down" ("Yorktown").

After the war ends, King George gleefully predicts the new nation's ruin ("What Comes Next"). Hamilton and Burr both have children, and each man worries about the fate of the new nation and about his ability to parent ("Dear Theodosia"). Hamilton also suffers a crushing blow when he learns that Laurens, his best friend and a passionate anti-slavery advocate, has been killed ("Tomorrow There'll Be More of Us").

The first act ends with Hamilton and Burr back in New York. Hamilton attends the Constitutional Convention and writes the vast bulk of the crucial Federalist Papers (51 in total), persuading various states to ratify the new Constitution. Washington makes Hamilton Secretary of the Treasury, and Eliza continues to ask for a bigger spot in her husband's life ("Non-Stop").

Act Two begins when Thomas Jefferson returns from France to be Secretary of State. James Madison, his best friend, believes that Hamilton is trying to ruin the country ("What'd I Miss"). Hamilton wants to create a national bank and centralize debt, whereas Jefferson pictures a more agrarian economy, and the two face off in a rap battle mediated by Washington ("Cabinet Battle #1).

While Hamilton toils to create the national bank—and continues to flirt with Angelica—Eliza begs him to join him upstate with their young son Philip ("Take a Break"). But Hamilton stays in the city, where he inadvertently begins an affair with a young woman named Maria Reynolds. Unfortunately for Hamilton, Maria's husband finds out about the tryst and uses it to blackmail the Treasury Secretary ("Say No to This").

Over a closed-door dinner, Hamilton and Jefferson strike a deal, and Hamilton gets his bank. Burr is livid to have been left out of things ("The Room Where It Happens"). Burr finds Jefferson and Madison, and the three men complain about Hamilton's cozy relationship with the president ("Washington on Your Side"). But fortunately for them (and unfortunately for Hamilton), Washington has decided to retire, ensuring that "the nation learns to move on." Though he is crushed, Hamilton ghost-writes Washington's Farewell Address ("One Last Time").

John Adams becomes president, and King George laughs at the puny new leader ("I Know Him"). Hamilton and Adams spar, ruining each other's reputations and clearing the way for Jefferson's reign ("The Adams Administration"). To eliminate Hamilton once and for all, Jefferson and Burr try to expose him for embezzlement—and to clear his name, Hamilton explains that he is actually having an affair ("We Know").

Panicked that Burr will dishonor his name, Hamilton reflects on his traumatic past and tries to write his "way out" of the scandal ("Hurricane"). But his writing backfires, making him the subject of mockery and alienating him from Angelica ("The Reynolds

Pamphlet"). Heartbroken, Eliza decides to take herself out of Hamilton's narrative, burning his **letters** and erasing herself from history ("Burn").

Philip, determined to defend his father's honor, gets himself killed in a duel ("Blow Us All Away"/ "Stay Alive"). Hamilton and Eliza are crushed, and for the first time, Hamilton has no words to describe his grief; instead, Angelica must narrate their mourning and reconciliation for them ("It's Quiet Uptown").

By now it's 1800, and Burr and Jefferson are running against each for the presidency; Hamilton endorses Jefferson, fearing Burr's lack of principles ("The Election of 1800"). Burr is enraged, challenging Hamilton to a duel ("Your Obedient Servant"). The two face off, and in a climactic moment of silence, Hamilton decides to throw away his "shot." Burr shoots and kills Hamilton ("The World Was Wide Enough").

In the finale, the various characters reflect on Hamilton's legacy—and give the floor to Eliza, who sings about her desire to preserve her husband's memory forever ("Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story").

## CHARACTERS

**Alexander Hamilton** – Alexander Hamilton, the first-ever Secretary of the United States Treasury, is the musical's protagonist; all other characters are defined in relation to them. Hamilton is Eliza's husband and an object of romantic desire for both Angelica and Maria Reynolds; he is mentored by George Washington, and a mentor to his best friend Laurens and his young son Philip. The actors who play Hamilton's best friends (Mulligan and Lafayette) in the first act become his political opponents (Madison and Jefferson) by the second. But Hamilton's most important relationship is with Aaron Burr, his lifelong frenemy and his antithesis in every way. If Burr grew up as a member of the American elite, Hamilton prides himself on being an immigrant, reshaping his new homeland even as he acclimates to it. And if Burr is patient to a fault, Hamilton is intensely ambitious, boasting that "I'm just like my country / I'm young, scrappy and hungry / and I'm not throwing away my **shot**." Over the course of the show, Hamilton's inexhaustible drive enables him to make giant contributions to the new United States: he serves as a general in the Revolutionary War, helps ratify the Constitution by writing 51 of the Federalist Papers, and founds America's national bank. But his obsession with getting ahead—and with protecting his own honor and legacy—also leads him to make powerful enemies. By the end of the show, Burr's distaste for Hamilton is so intense that Burr challenges his rival to a duel, shooting and killing him. But in the finale, Eliza reveals that for 50 years after her husband's death, she worked as an advocate and educator, defining Hamilton's place in history for centuries to come.

**Aaron Burr** – Aaron Burr is Hamilton's nemesis and ideological opposite. He is also, in a structural move that immediately raises the stakes, the musical's narrator, introducing audiences to Hamilton through his own vengeful eyes. Whereas Hamilton sees his own mortality as motivation to work harder, Burr's knowledge of death causes him to bide his time and be patient: "I am the one thing in life I can control" ("Wait For It"). And while Hamilton is vocal about his strong opinions, Burr prefers to play both sides, singing that his motto is "talk less / smile more" ("Aaron Burr, Sir"). Though the two men are never close, during the Revolutionary War, they are able to work together, bonded by their shared status as orphans (though Burr grew up in wealth), and by their love of their newborn children ("Dear Theodosia"). After the war, Hamilton climbs the political ranks while Burr falls by the wayside, causing Burr to fume that he wants—above all else—to be in the "room where it happens." Seeking revenge, Burr tries to tarnish Hamilton's honor, threatening to expose his affair with Maria Reynolds ("We Know"). When Hamilton endorses Thomas Jefferson over Burr for the presidency, it is the final straw, and Burr challenges his lifelong enemy to a duel ("Your Obedient Servant"). Burr shoots and kills Hamilton, but he is aware that by doing so, he makes himself "the villain in [the audience's] history"; though Hamilton may have lost his life, Burr has lost his legacy ("The World Was Wide Enough").

**Eliza** – Eliza, the middle child of the wealthy Schuyler family, is Hamilton's loyal, generous, adoring wife. After a whirlwind courtship ("Helpless"), however, Eliza often finds herself sidelined in her husband's life; while he is off at war or immersed in a political battle, she sits at home, begging him to "let me be a part of the narrative / in the stories they will write someday" ("That Would Be Enough"). Though Hamilton rarely consults her for political advice, he comes to trust and depend on her goodness—he reflects that she is the "best of wives and best of women," a line in the show pulled straight from the archives. When Hamilton betrays Eliza, publicizing news of his years-long affair with another woman, Eliza responds by burning all the **letters** he sent her: "I'm erasing myself from the narrative / let future historians wonder / how Eliza reacted" ("Burn"). When the couple's son Philip is killed in a duel, however, Eliza finds "forgiveness" for her husband, demonstrating the need for grace and patience in the face of tragedy ("It's Quiet Uptown"). After Hamilton's death, Eliza spends the remaining 50 years of her life fighting for the causes most important to him, even founding an orphanage in his memory. Her desire to protect her husband's legacy is dramatized in the show's finale, which ends with a focus on Eliza as the story's true hero ("Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story").

**Angelica** – Angelica, the eldest and "wittiest" daughter of wealthy New Yorker Philip Schuyler, is considered by the creators of Hamilton to be the "smartest" character in the musical. Though her father tries to separate her from the

political hubbub of the day, Angelica knows that "history is happening in Manhattan"—and she is desperate to be a part of it ("The Schuyler Sisters"). Angelica quickly falls in love with Hamilton, but she selflessly does not pursue him, instead setting him up with her sister Eliza ("Satisfied"); her rapid-fire singing in that piece reflects her incredibly quick thinking as a character. After Hamilton and Eliza get married, Angelica becomes a confidante for them both. Her brilliance and ambition are best captured in the **letters** she exchanges with Hamilton, where she presses him to adopt certain political positions and flirts with him via debates over comma placement. When Hamilton cheats on Eliza, publicly humiliating her and ruining his own reputation, Angelica stands by her sister: "I love my sister more than anything in this life / I will choose her happiness over mine, every time" ("The Reynolds Pamphlet"). By the end of the musical, Angelica's loyalty to Eliza makes her a narrator of sorts, helping her sister cope first with betrayal and then grief over her murdered son.

**George Washington** – Both historically and in the musical, George Washington is the oldest, wisest figure in Hamilton's group of young revolutionaries. As the Commander-in-Chief of the American army—and later as the country's first president—Washington is keenly aware that his every move will be recorded and remembered for generations to come ("History Has Its Eyes on You"). He often acts as a moderating force for Hamilton, tempering the upstart's dreams of martyrdom by reminding him that "dying is easy, young man / living is harder" ("Right Hand Man"). Additionally, more than perhaps any other character in the play, Washington feels the need for compromise and consensus: he mediates debates between Hamilton and Jefferson, and he insists on stepping down as president so that the country can learn to function without him. On the one hand, then, he exemplifies several of the play's most important thematic messages, showing the gap between lived experience and history and the importance of patience and collaboration. But Washington, a lifelong slaveholder, is also a deeply compromised figure, a fact the musical never outright references.

**Laurens** – In Act 1, John Laurens is Hamilton's best friend. As in history, the musical shows Laurens to be a committed anti-slavery advocate: he spends most of the war in North Carolina, helping to build the nation's first Black battalion. Like Hamilton, Laurens craves the thrill and danger of battle, and he winds up getting killed in a skirmish after the war has officially ended. Hamilton is devasted by his death ("Tomorrow There'll Be More of Us"). In Act 2, the same actor returns as Hamilton's young son Philip.

**Philip** – Played by the same actor as Laurens, Philip is Hamilton's young son. who takes after his father in more ways than one: he is a skilled rapper and a brilliant wit, but he is also obsessed with old-school ideas of honor and too quick to anger. Ultimately, Philip dies after being **shot** in a duel defending his father ("Blow Us All Away"). Philip's death is in some ways the central tragedy of the show, as Hamilton and his wife Eliza never recover from the loss ("It's Quiet Uptown").

**Lafayette** – In the first act, the French Marquis de Lafayette is one of Hamilton's closest friends. Building on his historical role as the primary emissary from France, the musical depicts Lafayette as an immigrant, an essential ally, and a rapid-fire (bi-lingual) rapper and thinker. When Lafayette returns with essential ammunitions for the Americans, he and Hamilton reflect on the centrality of immigrants to the American war effort: "immigrants, we get the job done" ("Guns and Ships"). In the second act, the same actor plays Thomas Jefferson.

**Jefferson** – Played by the same actor as Lafayette, Jefferson is the drafter of the Declaration of Independence and the country's third president. Jefferson, who preached freedom but held hundreds of slaves, is one of Hamilton's primary antagonists; he despises Hamilton's plan for a national bank, he is frequently xenophobic, and he is constantly trying to ruin Hamilton's reputation ("We Know"). Ultimately, however, Hamilton respects Jefferson more than he respects Aaron Burr, largely because Jefferson has strong beliefs and principles—more than once, Hamilton and Jefferson cooperate, a testament to the necessity of both disagreement and collaboration in democracy ("The Room Where It Happens").

**Mulligan** – Hercules Mulligan is a central part of Hamilton's first act friend-group. Historically, Mulligan was an Irish tailor and a prominent spy in the American Revolution; in the musical, he is displayed as the brash joker of the group, bragging about his sexual prowess ("My **Shot**"). In Act Two, the same actor plays James Madison, the man responsible for the Constitution and the fourth president of the United States.

**Madison** – Portrayed by the same actor as Mulligan, Madison is depicted as being wonky and uncharismatic, though he is able to get incredible amounts of work done via his collaboration with the more charismatic Thomas Jefferson ("What'd I Miss?"). As a slaveholding Virginian, Madison is deeply opposed to Hamilton's more industry-centric financial plan. Both Mulligan/Madison and Lafayette/Jefferson illustrate the same dramatic trick: the characters who are Hamilton's friends in the first act become his enemies in the second, isolating the titular character onstage just as he was isolated in reality.

**King George** – King George III, who ruled over the British Empire during and after the time of the American Revolution, is rendered in *Hamilton* as a spoiled, petulant brat. Throughout the musical, King George makes several brief cameo appearances, in which he treats the American colonies as a difficult lover. At first, as the war begins, he insists that "oceans rise, empires fall / we have seen each other through it all" ("You'll Be Back"); later, after the Americans have won, he taunts them that they will never be able to form a real government ("What Comes Next?"). King George is largely a

comic character, and his music, cheekily inspired by the "British [Musical] Invasion" of the 1960s, sounds poppy and retro.

**Peggy** – In the first act, Peggy appears as the youngest sister of Angelica and Eliza Schuyler. Peggy is less rebellious than her sisters, and she does not appear in Act 2 (in real life, Peggy married young and died soon after). In the second act, the same actor reappears playing a seductive young woman named Maria Reynolds.

**Maria Reynolds** –In the second act, Maria Reynolds is a seductive young woman with an abusive husband. Maria seeks out Hamilton both for financial support and for a secretive affair ("Say No to This"); when the affair comes out, it tarnishes Hamilton's reputation almost beyond repair. Yet Maria, who ends up falling in love with Hamilton almost despite herself, is depicted as a sympathetic figure.

**Charles Lee** – General Charles Lee was George Washington's second-in-command. He was put in charge at the Battle of Monmouth (in New Jersey), but he dishonored himself by urging his troops to flee the scene instead of fighting ("Stay Alive"). Lee was an object of much scorn and jealousy for Hamilton, who was envious of his prominent military position; in fact, the relationship between the two men grew so tense that John Laurens fought a duel with Lee on his best friend Hamilton's behalf ("Ten Duel Commandments").

**Samuel Seabury** – Samuel Seabury was a well-known Loyalist in New York City; both historically and in the show, he was one of Hamilton's leading rivals in the early years of the war. In the musical, he is depicted as being out of touch and ridiculously mannered. While Seabury sings the praises of the British to the tune of Bach-inspired harpsichord, Hamilton raps over him, using his own words against him ("Farmer Refuted").

## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

### COLLABORATION, DISAGREEMENT, AND DEMOCRACY

Midway through Lin-Manuel Miranda's smash-hit musical *Hamilton*, the titular character lays out his lifelong goal: Alexander Hamilton is all in "for a strong central democracy." As Hamilton tries to create new institutions across state lines and ideological divides, he embraces collaboration as a necessary part of political life in the early United States. Though the American Revolution seems inevitable in retrospect, *Hamilton* asks audiences to look closer, to notice that each military tactic, each new law, each financial decision, was the result of deliberation and compromise.

Sometimes, the show depicts the joys of collaboration: all of the politicians in the show help each other out behind the scenes. Hamilton forms a plan to establish a national bank, but he cannot turn that plan into a reality without Thomas Jefferson's backing; when George Washington needs a Farewell Address that will perfectly capture his hopes for the country, he knows only Hamilton can do the job. But other times, collaboration is less about support and more about disagreement, forgiveness, or the capacity to change. "I have never agreed with Jefferson once," Hamilton sings, "we have fought on like 75 different fronts"—yet in the next breath, Hamilton endorses Jefferson for president, explaining that he admires Jefferson's principles even if he does not share them. After Hamilton cheats on his wife Eliza, she chooses to "forgive" Hamilton so they can get through the tragic loss of their son together. "We struggled and we fought and we killed," Hamilton explains, "for the notion of a nation we now get to build." On both a large-scale and an interpersonal one, then, the musical demonstrates the need for a multiplicity of voices: only collaboration builds a country—or a marriage—that is truly democratic, able to grow and change even in the face of hardship.

### STORIES VS. HISTORY

As important generals and politicians during the years of the American Revolution, the main characters in Lin-Manuel Miranda's musical *Hamilton* are aware that their actions will be judged by the annals of history—indeed, George Washington sings an entire song called "History Has Its Eyes on You." But even though the most dramatic battles and duels have been written about to no end, the musical still makes clear the gap between lived experience and the way it is recorded, examining how personal stories become the history that people read about in textbooks. Eliza begs her husband to "let me be a part of the narrative, of the stories they will write someday," suggesting the persuasion and calculation that goes into creating even seemingly straightforward historical "narrative." And in his climactic duel with Hamilton, Aaron Burr instructs the audience that "they won't teach you this in your classes / but look it up, Hamilton was wearing his glasses / why, if not to take deadly aim?" In other words, Burr is trying to justify himself by highlighting different facts, changing the simplified lens history "classes" traditionally use.

In particular, the question of perspective is essential to the show. Burr, despite being the show's narrator, spends the whole musical gradually realizing that he will be made the "villain in your history." Even more directly, the final line of the show is about how stories get warped depending on who tells them: "who lives, who dies, who tells your story," the characters sing in unison. In a way, then, *Hamilton* contradicts itself—it

presents a thrilling history of America's founding even as it reminds audiences that such a narrative is only one of many.

## AMBITION AND MORTALITY

In Lin-Manuel Miranda's musical *Hamilton*, death and ambition are intimately intertwined. Midway through the song "My **Shot**," in which Alexander Hamilton raps about his big dreams and boundless ambition, he is struck by a darker thought: "I imagine death so much it feels more like a memory." And early on in the show, Hamilton sees war and the opportunity to die as a martyr for the new United States as a sure way to cement his legacy. Only George Washington, chastising him that "dying is easy, young man / living is harder," can make him change his mind. Later, in the song "Non-Stop," Hamilton's arch-nemesis Aaron Burr asks him, "why do you write like you're running out of time?" Even the symbol of a gunshot, which recurs throughout the show, illustrates this thematic link between ambition and a fear of death: a shot represents both Hamilton's drive ("I am not throwing away my shot") and the thing that ultimately kills him, as he is shot to death in a duel with Burr.

Tellingly, in the book that Miranda cowrote about *Hamilton*, he explains exactly why his protagonist's work ethic stems from his sense of mortality—and reveals that he shares the same trait. "The ticking clock is loud in both our ears," Miranda writes, "and it sets us to work." Ultimately, then, *Hamilton* shows that a knowledge of life's limits, while scary, can also motivate people to create powerful governments or amazing works of art. And when these institutions or art pieces are built to last, they can outlive their creators—allowing their creators to become, in a sense, immortal. [JEK1]

## IMMIGRATION AND DIVERSITY OF INFLUENCE

One line in *Hamilton* always gets an especially lengthy round of applause: "immigrants," the French Marquis de Lafayette sings to his Caribbean-born friend Alexander Hamilton, "we get the job done." *Hamilton* constantly emphasizes that immigration is essential to the United States' success. The musical's composer, Lin-Manuel Miranda, was the child of an immigrant from Puerto Rico, and he immediately identified with Hamilton as a striver, someone hoping to reinvent himself in a foreign land ("in New York you can be a new man," goes one of the show's catchiest refrains). Though Hamilton faces prejudice because he is not American-born—John Adams calls him a "Creole Bastard," in a parallel to much of the xenophobic rhetoric in today's politics—the musical dreams of an America where immigrant contributions are fully recognized instead of feared or downplayed.

Immigration is a crucial plot point in *Hamilton*. But diversity and globalism are not just the content of the show—they are also crucial to its form. Miranda likes to point out that "just as we continue to forget that immigrants are the backbone of this country, we forget that musical theater is a mongrel art form": it is built on jazz, on rock, on classical operettas, and now (thanks to Miranda) on hip-hop. To honor these varied influences, Miranda has packed the Hamilton score with references and allusions: the musical quotes rappers like The Notorious B.I.G. and Big Pun in one moment and the lyrics to a classic Rodgers & Hammerstein musical in the next. In content and form, then, Hamilton emphasizes both the need for an accessible immigration system and the artistic imperative of diversity.

## HONOR

Honor is one of the most important values for all of the characters in *Hamilton*. From the very first moments of the show, Alexander Hamilton is obsessed with his reputation. "All I have is my honor," he tells his wife Eliza in their courtship; later, he and nemesis Aaron Burr share a rare moment of commiseration that when it came time to name a nearby street, nobody chose either one of them as the namesake. But while *Hamilton* sometimes depicts the quest for honor as noble or motivating, the piece also demonstrates the dangerous consequences of focusing so narrowly on one's reputation—"you and your words, obsessed with your legacy," a betrayed, grieving Eliza screams of her husband. At one point, Hamilton instigates a physical fight because someone insults his beloved mentor George Washington ("my name's been through a lot," Washington chastises, "I can take it"). And after Burr finds out about Hamilton's illicit affair, the latter man publishes a pamphlet about the sordid ordeal in the hopes of preserving his political prospects, deeply wounding Eliza in the process: "in clearing your name, you have ruined our lives." And worst of all, both Hamilton and his young son Philip get themselves killed in elaborate gunfights known as duels, where they go to deadly lengths to protect their sense of pride. Honor in *Hamilton* is thus a double-edged sword—his obsession with reputation and legacy propels Hamilton to greatness, and at the same time, his need to make a name for himself is the very thing that kills him.

# SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

## GUNSHOTS

In *Hamilton*, a **gunshot** symbolizes intense ambition—and the link between such ambition and a fear of death. Early on in the first act, a young Alexander Hamilton introduces his life goal: "hey yo / I'm just like my country / I'm young scrappy and hungry / and I'm not throwing

away my shot!" In other words, a shot is a chance—as an immigrant with no connection in the burgeoning United States, Hamilton is desperate to make his mark whenever the opportunity arises. Composer Lin-Manuel Miranda, who identifies deeply with his protagonist's ambition, explains that this sense of hunger comes from a knowledge of life's limitations: "the ticking clock is loud in both our ears," Miranda acknowledges, "and it sets us to work." Or as Hamilton himself puts it, "I imagine death so much it feels more like a memory."

Indeed, if a "shot" can be an opportunity, a literal shot is a cause of death, both on the battlefield (as in "Guns and Ships") and off of it. *Hamilton* is set at the turn of the 19th century, when duels were part of political life. Both Hamilton and his beloved son Philip are prone to dueling, and both are killed by gunshots. Most touchingly, when Hamilton faces off with his nemesis Aaron Burr, he chooses to "point his pistol in the air" rather than shooting, meaning he literally throws away his shot rather than kill someone else. Ultimately, then, the symbol of the shot shows Hamilton's ambitions—but it also shows that, at least by the end of the musical, he values others' lives and hopes just as much as his own.

## LETTERS

**Letters**, the primary form of communication for Hamilton and his cohorts, symbolize the power words have to shape reality—and to transform the way history is remembered. Writer-composer Lin-Manuel Miranda chose to frame many of the most pivotal moments in his musical around letters. Hamilton first courts his wife Eliza via letter-writing ("you built me palaces out of paragraphs," she later reflects); he and Aaron Burr speak to their newborn children in "Dear Theodosia," a song written in letter format. And because letters capture private thoughts and relationships, preserving them for future archives and historians, the characters are tremendously concerned with how their letters are written and interpreted. When Hamilton's sister-in-law Angelica notices a surprising comma in one of Hamilton's letters, she can't help but obsess: "it changed the meaning, did you intend it / one stroke and you've consumed my waking days." And when Hamilton's affair comes to light, a heartbroken Eliza takes her revenge by burning his letters ("Burn"): "I'm erasing myself from the narrative," she vows, "I'm burning the memories, burning the letters that might have redeemed you." In "Burn," Eliza makes clear that letters can spark love or tarnish it, build reputations or destroy them—and when those letters are kept and archived, they impact the historical "narrative" forever.

## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Grand Central Publishing edition of *Hamilton* published in 2016.

### Act 1: Alexander Hamilton Quotes

BURR: There would have been nothing left to do for someone less astute,
He woulda been dead or destitute,
Without a cent of restitution,
Started workin'—clerkin' for his late mother's landlord,
Tradin' sugar cane and rum and all the things he can't afford
Scammin' for every book he can get his hands on
Plannin' for the future see him now as he stands on
The bow of a ship heading for a new land.
In New York you can be a new man.

**Related Characters:** Aaron Burr (speaker), Alexander Hamilton

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 17

**Explanation and Analysis**

As the musical's very first number, "Alexander Hamilton" has a lot of ground to cover: with an assist from the rest of the company, Aaron Burr explains how Hamilton used his intelligence and determination to rise up out of poverty. In some ways, then, this song is a prime example of content echoing form: the rapid, "astute" rhymes mimic Hamilton's own cleverness and quick-thinking. And as Burr lists off his future nemesis's accomplishments, the audience gets a sense of Hamilton's great strengths—his ambition, his ease with language (even as a teenager he's reading "every book he can get his hands on"), and his skill with money.

But there are two other important threads in this section. First, Hamilton's emigration from the Caribbean to the fledgling United States reflects classic American narratives (from "The Great Gatsby" to "West Side Story"), in which the very fact of a "new land" allows someone to become a "new man." In other words, Hamilton is not just switching places; he is becoming a completely different version of himself, gaining new opportunities for wealth and in some ways embodying the American Dream. And second, Burr's acknowledgment that Hamilton might have been "dead" had he not been so inventive sets up one of the musical's major themes. Hamilton is driven not just because of who he is as a person, but because, given his traumatic upbringing, he is keenly aware of the possibility of death, always just around the corner.

## Act 1: Aaron Burr, Sir Quotes

BURR: Talk less.

HAMILTON: What?

BURR: Smile more.

HAMILTON: Ha.

BURR: Don't let them know what you're against or what you're for.

HAMILTON: You can't be serious.

BURR: You wanna get ahead?

HAMILTON: Yes.

BURR: Fools who run their mouths oft wind up dead.

**Related Characters:** Aaron Burr, Alexander Hamilton (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 24

### Explanation and Analysis

Hamilton is eager as can be when he first meets Aaron Burr, expressing his desire to go to war and peppering Burr with questions about how he graduated from college so quickly. Right away, then, Burr's chilly advice demonstrates the stark contrast between the two men: while Hamilton is relentlessly talkative, Burr just "smiles," remaining a cipher to those around him. And while Hamilton wears his heart on his sleeve, Burr is resolved to never "let them know what you're against or what you're for." Hamilton is honest to a fault, willing to alienate almost everyone around him, and Burr is guided by a desire to manipulate others, using people to "get ahead" at any cost. This divergence comes in part from the two men's different backgrounds: while Hamilton feels the need to prove himself immediately, Burr can rest on his family's venerable reputation and his hefty inheritance. The two men's approaches are at odds, but their stakes are also very different.

The other thing to catch here is Lin-Manuel Miranda's use of foreshadowing ("fools who run their mouths," Burr warns, "oft wind up dead"). Burr has already announced in the opening number that, by the musical's end, he will shoot Hamilton to death—and that's hardly a spoiler, given that it's a matter of historical record. But by making the audience constantly aware that Hamilton is approaching his own doom, Miranda is forcing the audience to obsess over death in much the same way that Hamilton does. (There's also an interesting structural question here: how do you dramatize history in a way that can still surprise?)

## Act 1: My Shot Quotes

HAMILTON: I am not throwing away my shot!
I am not throwing away my shot!
Hey yo, I'm just like my country,
I'm young, scrappy and hungry,
And I'm not throwing away my shot!

**Related Characters:** Alexander Hamilton (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 26

### Explanation and Analysis

Giddy to have found new friends in Lafayette, Laurens, and Mulligan, Hamilton introduces himself with "My Shot," in which he sings about his ambition and his desire to make a mark via the Revolution. By comparing himself—an immigrant born without status or wealth—to his country, Hamilton envisions America as a nation of immigrants, "scrappy" and "hungry" rather than elitist and prejudiced. There is truth in Hamilton's optimism, though the musical will also make clear (in characters like Thomas Jefferson) that the United States was rife with bigotry and division from its very first chapter.

Hamilton's focus on the word "shot" is especially essential. In this context, a "shot" is an opportunity; "I am not throwing away my shot," repeated over and over again, becomes a chant-like promise of Hamilton's own determination. And "My Shot" is what is known as an "I want" song: a number early on in a musical that defines the protagonist's central aspiration, which in this case is Hamilton's desire to rise alongside his country. But despite his declaration, Hamilton will (literally) "throw away" his shot by the end of the show, when it comes time to duel with Burr. The shifting symbolism of gunshots thus helps audiences follow the shifting trajectory of Hamilton's life.

HAMILTON: I imagine death so much it feels more like a memory
When's it gonna get me?
In my sleep? Seven feet ahead of me?
If I see it comin' do I run or do I let it be?
Is it like a beat without a melody?
See, I never thought I'd live past twenty
Where I come from some get half as many.
Ask anybody why we livin' fast and we
Laugh, reach for a flask,
We have to make this moment last, that's plenty.

**Related Characters:** Alexander Hamilton (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 28

**Explanation and Analysis**

In the midst of this up-tempo ode to ambition, the music slows down and Hamilton lets audiences into a darker corner of his psyche. If he is eager—to finish college, to join the war, to take his "shot" and make a name for himself—it is only because he is acutely aware that time is limited. Having lost his mother and many of his other nearest relatives at a young age, death is as real to Hamilton as life; the end of existence feels "more like a memory" than a far-off possibility. And this sense of his own mortality propels Hamilton not just to ambition but to a sort of exuberance, where every "moment" is a cause for both hard work and celebration.

This refrain also links Hamilton to his creator Lin-Manuel Miranda, the writer-composer of *Hamilton* who also originated the titular role. Not for the last time, this moment shows Hamilton conceiving of his own life in musical terms; he compares death to a "beat without a melody," and indeed, his eventual death song will have no music underneath it. More explicitly, Miranda has acknowledged this line as one of the most autobiographical things he has ever written. "The ticking cloud is loud in both our ears," Miranda explains of himself and his lead character, "and it sets us to work."

## Act 1: The Story of Tonight Quotes

LAURENS: Raise a glass to the four of us.

HAMILTON, LAURENS, MULLIGAN, LAFAYETTE: Tomorrow there'll be more of us.

HAMILTON, LAURENS: Telling the story of tonight.

MULLIGAN, LAFAYETTE: Let's have another round tonight.

**Related Characters:** Alexander Hamilton, Lafayette, Mulligan, Laurens (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 35

**Explanation and Analysis**

Now officially a part of the gang, Hamilton and his new friends—abolitionist Laurens, Frenchman Lafayette, and Irish tailor Mulligan—drink to their future. In this lilting number, the quartet is able to see that this everyday experience of drinking is also an essential moment in history: for generations to come, they predict correctly, Americans will gratefully "tell the story of tonight." At the same time, the song hints at the gap between the messiness of life and the grandeur of history; what might seem a purely heroic moment is equally a moment of getting "another round," four young men getting just a little bit drunker.

There is also an incredible amount of meaning packed into the performance of this song. The repetition—the song is structured as a round—reflects the sense that these men are at the forefront of a swiftly-growing movement ("tomorrow there'll be more of us"). And the fact that Lafayette performs these words with a heavy French accent reminds audiences that three out of the four singers—Hamilton, Lafayette, and Mulligan—are immigrants. If "the story of tonight" is a story of the nation's founding, then *Hamilton* makes it completely clear that immigrants were an essential part of it.

And finally, in a show so concerned with the collaboration and compromise that goes into making democracy work, it is telling that "The Story of Tonight" is a song first and foremost about friendship. Hamilton is able to accomplish so much not just because he is brilliant but because he has good allies; unlike Burr, he wins friends not in spite of his opinions but because of them.

## Act 1: The Schuyler Sisters Quotes

ANGELICA: I've been reading *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine.
So men say that I'm intense or I'm insane.
You want a revolution? I wanna revelation
So listen to my declaration:

ELIZA, ANGELICA, PEGGY: "We hold these truths to be self-evident
That all men are created equal."

ANGELICA: And when I meet Thomas Jefferson [...]
I'm 'a compel him to include women in the sequel!

WOMEN: Work!

**Related Characters:** Angelica, Eliza, Peggy (speaker), Jefferson

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 44

### Explanation and Analysis

Angelica, Eliza, and Peggy, the three daughters of the wealthy New York politician Philip Schuyler, have snuck out of their house upstate to ogle all the young revolutionaries in the city. By framing the three sisters as a kind of trio girl group (think *Destiny's Child* or *The Supremes*), Miranda adds a certain contemporary, playful edge to this New York anthem. But Angelica has not come just to flirt. She is determined to assert herself as an intellectual player in her own right, quoting Thomas Jefferson's "Declaration of Independence" and citing Thomas Paine, one of the most radical thinkers of the Revolution (who was also an advocate for women's rights).

Aided by her sisters, Angelica insists that the founders "include women" in their vision of America. In doing so, she opens up a question about who gets to be included in history: who gets to swan around in the public square, who gets to write declarations, and whose sentiments are recorded and remembered? And just as Hamilton argues for an America that makes room for the contributions of immigrants and those without wealth, Angelica now pushes to widen the gender boundaries of what it means to be a "revolutionary."

## Act 1: You'll Be Back Quotes

KING GEORGE: You say
The price of my love's not a price that you're willing to pay.
You cry
In your tea which you hurl in the sea when you see me go by.
Why so sad?
Remember we made an arrangement when you went away.
Now you're making me mad.
Remember, despite our estrangement, I'm your man.

**Related Characters:** King George (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 57

### Explanation and Analysis

In this comedic number, King George—depicted in the musical as an overgrown brat—woos the angry colonists as he would a petulant lover. In both lyrics and style, the song packs in an impressive number of history jokes. King George's reference to the colonists crying as they hurl their tea is a reference to the famous Boston Tea Party, in which angry Americans tossed large amounts of tea into the Massachusetts Bay to protest taxation. And Alex Lacamoire, the show's conductor and orchestrator, suggested that Miranda should score the song to Beatles-esque music, linking the 1960s musical "British Invasion" to this more literal one.

But there are also some subtler thematic messages beneath the playful humor of this song. First, George's use of the courtship metaphor reflects the—highly gendered, largely misogynistic—rituals of the time; marriages and empires alike were built on "arrangements," on a sense of honor and duty. Second, George's frustration reflects the difference between a monarchy and a democracy. As the final voice of government for the whole British empire, George never has to compromise or give in; he can just get "mad" whenever he wants to. As Hamilton and Burr will soon learn, this same petulance does not fly in a democracy.

## Act 1: Right Hand Man Quotes

WASHINGTON: It's alright, you wanna fight, you've got a hunger.
I was just like you when I was younger.
Head full of fantasies of dyin' like a martyr?

HAMILTON: Yes.

WASHINGTON: Dyin' is easy, young man.
Living is harder.

**Related Characters:** George Washington, Alexander Hamilton (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 64

**Explanation and Analysis**

As the war heats up, Hamilton is desperate to enter the fray, earning the reputation of a reckless, valiant soldier—but General George Washington, sensing the young man's potential, has other plans. Instead of allowing Hamilton to die "like a martyr," Washington emphasizes that staying alive is the "harder," braver thing to do. For the first time in the musical, Hamilton's worldview is challenged: instead of linking ambition to mortality, Washington suggests that ambition is "living" long enough to make real change, instead of merely making a name for oneself.

Implicit in this moment—and explicit in the song as a whole, which in its very title nods to the relational nature of political and military success—is that "dying" is a solo act while "living" is a collective one. If Hamilton "fantasizes" about giving up his life in a solitary moment of heroism, the work of being a secretary (taking notes, attending meetings, forging compromises) is all about collaboration. As the oldest character in the musical, and America's first great mediator, Washington is keenly aware that committing to debate and disagreement is much more difficult than a single moment of martyrdom.

And finally, this contrast—which will return, slightly reformulated, after the war is won—makes clear that honor is not necessarily a meaningful metric. Hamilton might be brave, or reckless, but his real value lies in his brain and his literary ability. Historically and in the musical, Washington stands out for his lack of self-interest, for his ability to cede power and reputation for the good of the country. How much Hamilton is able to absorb that lesson then becomes one of the musical's central questions.

## Act 1: Helpless Quotes

HAMILTON: I've been livin' without a family since I was a child.
My father left, my mother died, I grew up buckwild.
But I'll never forget my mother's face, that was real
And long as I'm alive, Eliza, swear to God, you'll never feel so…

WOMEN: Helpless

ELIZA: I do I do I do I dooo!

**Related Characters:** Alexander Hamilton, Eliza (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 77

**Explanation and Analysis**

"Helpless," which tracks Hamilton and Eliza's relationship from their first meeting through their whirlwind courtship and marriage, is mostly Eliza's song. But for a brief moment, Hamilton interrupts with his own perspective, a form Miranda says he copied from songs like "Crazy in Love" (Eliza as Beyoncé, Hamilton as Jay-Z). In Hamilton's mind, the word "helpless" means something very different: instead of being a dreamy, romantic word, as it is to Eliza, Hamilton associates helplessness with trauma and the loss of his mother. The same phrase changes its meaning depending on the context—and so the song reminds the audience that stories are always different depending on the narrator.

This sense of shifting meaning also exists in the line "I do I do I do I dooo." In one sense, this is a very literal line, reflecting the moment of Hamilton and Eliza's wedding. But in another sense, Eliza's "I do" is her admitting that her new husband makes her feel "helpless"—even as he swears to protect her. Hamilton's sense of honor thus collides with her head-over-heels commitment, proving that it is just as difficult to get on the same page in a marriage as it is in a democratic government.

## Act 1: Satisfied Quotes

ANGELICA: To the groom!
To the bride!
From your sister.
Who is always by your side.
To your union.
And the hope you provide.
May you always
Be satisfied.
And I know
She'll be happy as his bride.
And I know
He will never be satisfied.
I will never be satisfied.

**Related Characters:** Angelica (speaker), Eliza, Alexander Hamilton

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 85

**Explanation and Analysis**

Onstage, "Satisfied" rewinds through the action of "Helpless," showing the audience (quite literally) the same story from a different vantage point. But just as audiences comprehend that Angelica, too, loves Hamilton, time speeds up again, and Angelica is toasting the happy couple to their "union." As happens often throughout the show, Angelica's toast draws a parallel between intimate relationships and the political world just outside the wedding venue; "union" and the "hope" that it provides are words that apply equally to Hamilton's marriage and to the strengthening Revolution.

More than that, though, seeing this courtship through Angelica's eyes forces audiences to viscerally reckon with the show's central question: "who lives, who dies, who tells your story?" What seems like celebration—"may you always be satisfied"—is in fact a moment of mourning, as Angelica selflessly chooses her sister's happiness over her own. In other words, the satisfaction that Angelica wishes for Eliza is the very satisfaction that she forever denies to herself. In his notes on the song, Miranda notes that there's a "funny thing about saying a word a lot: it starts to feel the opposite of what it means."

And lastly, by dwelling on that word "satisfied," Angelica links her ambition to Hamilton's own. Neither of them will ever feel content with their lives, and though there is sadness in that, it is also what motivates them to continue to create. Hamilton will never "be satisfied"—but if he were, would the United States ever have gotten a functioning Treasury Department?

## Act 1: Wait for It Quotes

BURR: Death doesn't discriminate
Between the sinners and the saints,
It takes, and it takes, and it takes
And we keep living anyway.
We rise and we fall
And we break,
And we make our mistakes.
And if there's a reason I'm still alive
When ev'ryone who loves me has died
I'm willing to wait for it.
I'm willing to wait for it.

**Related Characters:** Aaron Burr (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 91

**Explanation and Analysis**

As Hamilton rises through the ranks, becoming Washington's personal secretary and marrying into the prominent Schuyler family, Burr remains patient. "Wait For It" thus functions both as an explanation for the audience and as a sort of mantra; just as he has vowed to "talk less / smile more," Burr now repeats to himself that he is "willing to wait for it." But if the song shows where Burr diverges from Hamilton, it also makes clear that the two men have a lot in common. Both are orphans, haunted by the fact that all of their loved ones have died. Both are keenly aware of their own mortality ("death doesn't discriminate," Burr notes here, no matter how good or kind you are). But while Hamilton's fear of death pushes him to work harder and speak more openly, Burr seems to operate out of fear and self-protection. Hamilton dreams of "dyin' like a martyr," while Burr wants to "keep living" even in compromised circumstances; Hamilton embraces today, while Burr just tries to ensure that he is "still alive" tomorrow.

The other crucial thing to pick up on is Burr's sense of loneliness. "Everyone who loves me has died," he admits; why be a "saint" if there is no one in your life to care about? The use of pronouns is particularly interesting here, as Burr switches from "we" to "I." No wonder Burr is hesitant to commit to a single opinion or group—having lost all the people he cares most about, he finds it terrifying to commit to anyone outside of himself.

## Act 1: That Would Be Enough Quotes

ELIZA: I don't pretend to know
The challenges you're facing.
The worlds you keep erasing and creating in your mind.
But I'm not afraid.
I know who I married.
So long as you come home at the end of the day
That would be enough [...]
Oh, let me be a part of the narrative
In the story they will write someday.
Let this moment be the first chapter
Where you decide to stay
And I could be enough
And we could be enough
That would be enough.

**Related Characters:** Eliza (speaker), Alexander Hamilton

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 110

**Explanation and Analysis**

Once Eliza and Hamilton have settled into their married life, Hamilton returns to his almost single-minded focus on his work. In this short, touching piece, Eliza proves her loyalty and depth of understanding: she realizes that Hamilton's work is essential, and more than perhaps anyone else, she knows (having received so many of his letters) the "worlds" Hamilton can create with his words. Indeed, Eliza loves Hamilton in part because she understands that he will forever reshape history—she just wants to be a part of it.

In "That Would Be Enough," then, Eliza expertly bridges the gap between the quotidian and the historical. Hamilton coming "home at the end of the day" is also Hamilton paying attention to her, incorporating her into the "worlds" he writes about. Because Hamilton's life is history, Eliza understands that being a part of that life is also being "a part of the narrative," of the "story" that future historians will craft.

There is potent anxiety in the song, to be sure: "I *could* be enough" implies that Eliza does not currently feel like she is enough. But Eliza's determination to be not just adjacent but central to Hamilton's story in some ways reveals their great compatibility. Both husband and wife understand that history is not inevitable but created, and both husband and wife are hungry to be those creators.

## Act 1: History Has Its Eyes On You Quotes

WASHINGTON: Let me tell you what I wish I'd known
When I was young and dreamed of glory.
You have no control

WASHINGTON, COMPANY: Who lives, who dies, who tells your story.

**Related Characters:** George Washington (speaker), Alexander Hamilton

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 120

**Explanation and Analysis**

After firing Hamilton in a moment of frustration, Washington relents, at last giving the younger man the military command he has so desperately wanted. Before sending Hamilton into the field, though, Washington tells him about his own first command, in which he was responsible for many of his men's deaths. Focusing on "glory"—on honor and reputation—will only lead Hamilton into danger. And though, in the titular refrain, Washington reminds Hamilton that "history has its eyes" on him, he also urges Hamilton to give up "control." In a lesson that Hamilton will never fully learn, Washington explains that one's heroic actions do not determine the reactions of others. By contrast, what matters is relationships, whether or not the people who "live" tell a kind story or a punishing one.

More than anything, though, Washington is fighting back against the idea that history is inevitable. Instead, he emphasizes that what matters is luck and perspective: "who lives" to tell your story, and "who dies" and takes with them all their knowledge and remembrance? This is an important lesson for Hamilton as a character, but it also provides a giant structural clue to the musical. *Hamilton* tells a historical story, but it is not an objective one; instead, it is mediated by creatives (Lin-Manuel Miranda), historians (Ron Chernow), and Hamilton's contemporaries (Jefferson, Madison, Eliza), all of whom lived to tell his story. Implicitly, then, this song poses a fascinating question—would Hamilton be happy with *Hamilton*? And does it matter?

## Act 1: Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down) Quotes

LAFAYETTE: Monsieur Hamilton.

HAMILTON: Monsieur Lafayette.

LAFAYETTE: In command where you belong.

HAMILTON: How you say, no sweat.
We're finally on the field. We've had quite a run.

LAFAYETTE: Immigrants.

HAMILTON, LAFAYETTE: We get the job done.

**Related Characters:** Lafayette, Alexander Hamilton (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 121

**Explanation and Analysis**

The Battle of Yorktown was the defining moment in the Revolution, a drawn-out skirmish in 1781 that at last allowed the Americans to claim victory over the British. Such a win would not have been possible without Hamilton (who acted as George Washington's secretary and "right-hand man") and Lafayette, who was instrumental in getting the French to donate more ammunitions ("Guns and Ships," as the musical says). As they celebrate their contributions,

Hamilton and Lafayette also playfully remind audiences that the Revolution could not have been won without "immigrants."

On the one hand, this moment makes clear that America has always been a nation of immigrants: without foreign-born men like Hamilton, Lafayette, and Hercules Mulligan, the U.S. could never have reached independence. On the other hand, the line "we get the job done" makes clear reference to America's present. Immigrants (both documented and undocumented) are nearly 20% of the U.S. workforce; many of them served as frontline workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. But Hamilton debuted soon after President Donald Trump announced his campaign, in a moment where American xenophobia was particularly visible. This exchange is celebratory, but it also has an important political message: immigration was an essential part of the United States' founding, and it is an essential part of its continued success.

Lastly, it is worth noting the particular syntax Hamilton and Lafayette use with each other. They call each other Monsieur, and Hamilton adopts his friend's French habits to rap "how you say, no sweat." By playing with phrasing in this way, Miranda is showing how central immigrants are to every part of American culture. Hamilton and Lafayette give each other new ways of speaking, just as hip-hop and musical theater and Bach all infuse the *Hamilton* score. Or as Hamilton expert Jeremy McCarter puts it, of course "something as unprecedented and revolutionary as the United States would carry traces of many tangled traditions."

## Act 1: Dear Theodosia Quotes

BURR: My father wasn't around

HAMILTON: I swear that

BURR, HAMILTON: I'll be around for you.

HAMILTON: I'll do whatever it takes.

BURR: I'll make a million mistakes.

BURR, HAMILTON: I'll make the world safe and sound for you…
Will come of age with our young nation
We'll bleed and fight for you, we'll make it right for you.
If we lay a strong enough foundation
We'll pass it on to you, we'll give the world to you, and you'll blow us all away….
Someday, someday

**Related Characters:** Aaron Burr, Alexander Hamilton (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 129

### Explanation and Analysis

Historically, Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton really did have their children around the same time, soon after the United States declared its independence. This song makes the connection between fathers and Founding Fathers explicit: the newborns, young Theodosia and Philip, will "come of age" alongside America. And for the first time, Burr and Hamilton's mutual obsession with legacy seems less about a code of honor and more about a desire to make the world "right" for future generations. Rather than thinking of the Founding Fathers as unique historical forces, "Dear Theodosia," written in letter form, suggests that all parents are involved in the act of history-making.

There are a couple of other useful details. First of all, the phrase "blow it all away" foreshadows the song in Act 2 by that name, in which Philip is killed—once again, death is always just around the corner. And second, this moment shows just how much Hamilton and Burr have in common. But while they can admit their anxieties to the audience ("I'll make a million mistakes"), they can never do so to each other. And so rather than uniting around their shared desire to "lay a strong enough foundation," the two men continue down their deadly path of rivalry.

## Act 1: Non-Stop Quotes

BURR: The Constitution's a mess.

HAMILTON: So it needs amendments.

BURR: It's full of contradictions.

HAMILTON: So is independence.
We have to start somewhere.

BURR: No. No way.

HAMILTON: You're making a mistake.

BURR: Goodnight.

HAMILTON: Hey.
What are you waiting for?
What do you stall for?

BURR: What?

HAMILTON: We won the war.
What was it all for?
Do you support the Constitution?

BURR: Of course.

HAMILTON: Then defend it.

BURR: And what if you're backing the wrong horse?

**Related Characters:** Aaron Burr, Alexander Hamilton (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 142

### Explanation and Analysis

Hamilton and Burr are both practicing law in New York City, but while Hamilton vehemently aligns himself with the Federalists (those who wanted a strong central government), Burr continues to stay neutral. In this little piece of imagined history, the two clash over their fundamentally different views of democracy. Burr is terrified of "backing the wrong horse," while Hamilton is terrified of "stalling." Burr shies away from contradiction, while Hamilton points out that the very idea of "independence" is "messy" and contradictory.

This exchange emphasizes, once again, the two men's very different time frames (Burr hopes to watch and learn, whereas Hamilton feels the need to "start somewhere," even if he steps wrong). But more than that, it introduces the idea of "mess" and mistaken action into the conversation about how to build a government from scratch. Indeed, the American independence movement was rife with "contradictions"—most obviously slavery, which flew in the face of all of the Founders' high-minded rhetoric. But Hamilton's desire to "start" with something, even if that something is faulty, is reflected in his general view that America will constantly keep improving upon itself. Though Burr might not share that viewpoint, it is refracted in both history and the musical itself. The Constitution Hamilton fought for would dream of a "more perfect union," and would make room for future generations to alter this founding document through the process of "amendments." Or as Hamilton puts it: "it's planting seeds in a garden you never get to see."

## Act 2: Cabinet Battle #1 Quotes

HAMILTON: Thomas. That was a real nice declaration.
Welcome to the present. We're running a real nation.
Would you like to join us, or stay mellow,
Doin' whatever the hell it is you do in Monticello?
If we assume the debts, the Union gets a new line of credit, a financial diuretic.
How do you not get it? If we're aggressive and competitive
The Union gets a boost. You'd rather give it a sedative?
A civics lesson from a slaver. Hey neighbor.
Your debts are paid cuz you don't pay for labor.
"We plant seeds in the ground. We create." Yeah, keep ranting.
We know who's really doing the planting.

**Related Characters:** Alexander Hamilton (speaker), Jefferson

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 161

### Explanation and Analysis

In the first cabinet battle, framed as a rap battle between Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, the latter argues against a national bank: why, Jefferson wonders, should wealthy Southerners like himself have to contribute to the overall success of the nation? This reflects Jefferson's historical perspective—along with James Madison, he envisioned the United States as a rural, pastoral nation, built on agriculture and (implicitly) on slavery. In other words, Jefferson saw his Monticello plantation as a template for the entire country. Here, Hamilton calls Jefferson out for his backhanded defense of slavery, reminding the Virginian that he is a "slaver." Jefferson's concept for the country is only idyllic, Hamilton suggests, because it ignores who is "really doing the planting." The actual "labor" of building Jefferson's America, Hamilton points out, would be forced onto enslaved Black men and women.

This is the show's most prolonged critique of slavery (and it's not very prolonged). But it is also one of *Hamilton*'s most

passionate calls for a truly collaborative democracy. Whereas Jefferson employs the royal "we" to skate over the issue of slavery ("we plant seeds in the ground / we create"), Hamilton understands the country more holistically. Over and over, he forces Jefferson to see himself as part of a larger unit: he uses the word "Union" twice, he asks Jefferson to "join us," and he reminds Jefferson that they are "neighbors." Hamilton's desire for solid infrastructure is, this rap battle makes clear, also a desire to build a country that takes care of *all* of its citizens. And while Jefferson, born into a wealthy plantation lifestyle, feels no need to take care of others, Hamilton ("a bastard, orphan" immigrant) knows just how much to value good "neighbors."

## Act 2: The Room Where it Happens Quotes

HAMILTON, JEFFERSON, MADISON, WASHINGTON:
What do you want, Burr?
What do you want, Burr?
If you stand for nothing,
Burr, what do you fall for?

BURR: I
Wanna be in
The room where it happens.
The room where it happens.
I
Wanna be in
The room where it happens.
The room where it happens.

**Related Characters:** Aaron Burr, Alexander Hamilton, George Washington, Jefferson, Madison (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 161

### Explanation and Analysis

Having finally learned how to play political games, Hamilton asks Jefferson and Madison to dinner—and behind closed doors, the three men agree to create a national bank. When Burr learns that Hamilton has successfully "talked less" and "smiled more," he is outraged. But though the Founding Fathers, acting as audience surrogates, push Burr to explain his outrage, this stunning moment reveals that there is *absolutely nothing* behind his desire for power. Burr does not "stand" for any principle besides his own reputation; he will not "fall" for anything besides his own sense of honor. And so while Hamilton, Washington, Jefferson, and Madison all want to make real change, Burr cares more about being remembered than about what he is remembered for.

That selfishness is evident in the brilliant pacing of these lyrics. Burr's "I" stands alone: in a show that moves at lightning speed, the slowness with which Burr refers to himself is striking. And as with other repeated phrases ("satisfied," "helpless," "wait for it"), the words "the room where it happens" become almost meaningless as Burr chants them ad nauseum. But perhaps most tellingly of all is the word "it." Burr doesn't care *what* happens—he just cares about his own proximity. In contrast to Hamilton's fervent beliefs, "The Room Where It Happens" represents an entirely anti-democratic view of legacy.

## Act 2: Cabinet Battle #2 Quotes

JEFFERSON: He knows nothing of loyalty.
Smells like new money, dresses like fake royalty.
Desperate to rise above his station,
Everything he does betrays the ideals of our nation.
And if ya don't know, now ya know, Mr. President.

**Related Characters:** Jefferson (speaker), Alexander Hamilton, George Washington

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 161

### Explanation and Analysis

In this second cabinet battle, again moderated by George Washington, Jefferson tries to win U.S. support for the French Revolution by attacking Hamilton personally. Given that Jefferson is played by the same actor who played Lafayette in Act 1, there is a nice symmetry, both historically and dramaturgically, in this pro-France attitude. But more importantly, Jefferson now shows himself to be proudly elitist and xenophobic. He equates Hamilton's "new money" with a lack of "loyalty," suggesting that those without wealth are not to be trusted. And Jefferson argues that in seeking social mobility (both in terms of class and nationality), Hamilton "betrays the ideals of our nation." The use of that word "our" is particularly cruel, as it implies that Hamilton, because he is an immigrant, is not a real part of the country he helped to found.

It's also important to note that Jefferson's final line ("and if ya don't know, now ya know, Mr. President") is a reference to the song "Juicy" by The Notorious B.I.G. On the level of content, the show makes clear that Jefferson was a virulent bigot. But on a formal level, Hamilton pushes back against that bigotry: as producer Jeremy McCarter puts it, these "shout-outs" to hip-hop classics show that "American history can be told and retold, claimed and reclaimed." So just as

Hamilton refutes Jefferson's xenophobia verbally, the musical does the same thing stylistically.

## Act 2: One Last Time Quotes

HAMILTON: Though, in reviewing the incidents of my administration, I am unconscious of intentional error, I am nevertheless too sensible of my defects not to think it probable that I have committed many errors. I shall also carry with me

HAMILTON, WASHINGTON: The hope that my country will view them with indulgence
And that after forty-five years of my life dedicated to its service with an upright zeal, the faults of incompetent abilities will be consigned to oblivion, as I myself must soon be.

**Related Characters:** Alexander Hamilton, George Washington (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 210

### Explanation and Analysis

After two terms as the first President of the United States, Washington decides to step down. In history and in the musical, Washington asks his "right-hand man" Hamilton to draft his Farewell Address; the above text is entirely pulled from Washington's real speech. It is remarkable how many of the themes in Hamilton are also the themes of Washington's speech. The departing president dwells on questions of honor and reputation—the hope that people will think of him with "indulgence"—and he frets over his legacy, wondering which parts of his time in office will survive and which will be "consigned to oblivion" (who will live to tell what story)? Washington even gestures to an awareness of his own mortality, acknowledging that he will "soon" pass on.

Miranda did not write any of this language. But in addition to musicalizing these great historical words, Miranda and his team choose to have Hamilton and Washington read the Farewell Address together. In doing so, the musical makes clear that no important moment is ever the work of a single actor; there is collaboration and multiplicity in even the most seemingly individual acts. And by having Hamilton join Washington in his wisdom, the song pays tribute not only to a Founding Father but to a founding friendship, as essential to the United States' success as any battle or law.

## Act 2: Hurricane Quotes

HAMILTON: I wrote my way out of hell.
I wrote my way to revolution.
I was louder than the crack in the bell.
I wrote Eliza love letters until she fell.
I wrote about the Constitution and defended it well.
And in the face of ignorance and resistance,
I wrote financial systems into existence.
And when my prayers to God were met with indifference,
I picked up a pen, I wrote my own deliverance.

**Related Characters:** Alexander Hamilton (speaker), Eliza

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 232

### Explanation and Analysis

Just as the real-life hurricane marked a low point in Hamilton's youth, "Hurricane" represents the nadir of his adulthood. As he scrambles to deal with the fallout from his affair with Maria Reynolds, Hamilton reflects that his words have always had the power to change the world around him. In particular, Miranda's choice of words gives velocity to Hamilton's writing: it is a physical force, propelling him "out of hell" and causing Eliza to "fall." If, as Hamilton has earlier reflected, he is currently in the "eye of the hurricane," what better thing to do than navigating himself out of it through his words?

But—in a telling proof of the limits of rhetoric—Hamilton misunderstands his own metaphor. Rather than staying in the eye of the hurricane ("waiting for it," as Burr might say), Hamilton moves himself further into chaos and conflict. Or as Miranda puts it: Hamilton "thinks about his whole life and then comes to the *wrong conclusion* about what to do." In addition to demonstrating Hamilton's hubris and obsession with honor, then, the poor decision-making in "Hurricane" hints at the lasting effects of trauma. His whole life, Hamilton has been surrounded by tragedy, and he has developed a sort of fight-or-flight instinct; every time, he has found "deliverance" by moving onwards and upwards, whether literally (to New York) or metaphorically (through the ranks of the Continental Army). But in this moment, Hamilton should instead have learned from his nemesis Burr the value of staying still.

## Act 2: Burn Quotes

ELIZA: You and your words, obsessed with your legacy
Your sentences border on senseless
And you are paranoid in every paragraph
How they perceive you?
You, you, you…
I'm erasing myself from the narrative.
Let future historians wonder
How Eliza reacted when you broke her heart.
You have torn it all apart […]
I'm burning the memories,
Burning the letters that might have redeemed you.

**Related Characters:** Eliza (speaker), Alexander Hamilton

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 238

### Explanation and Analysis

After Hamilton publishes the story of his affair with Maria Reynolds ("The Reynolds Pamphlet"), Eliza appears alone onstage, carrying a stack of letters from her husband and a lit match. In this song, the longest solo number in the entire musical, Eliza returns to the questions of history and legacy that have plagued her since "That Would Be Enough." But this time, Eliza sees history not as a place to play out her love but as the perfect place to take out her anger.

To do this, she acts as a historian of her own life, reinterpreting her courtship with Hamilton through the new lens of the present: now, instead of seeing his letters as proof of his love for her, she criticizes him for his vanity. He is "obsessed with his legacy," "paranoid" to the point of interpreting everything around him in relation to himself ("you, you, you").

On the one hand, then, Eliza takes herself out of the narrative, separating herself from her husband on the historical stage even if she cannot fully separate from him in their everyday life. But her final blow is towards the reputation, the "legacy," he cares so much about. By burning Hamilton's letters, a symbol of his love for her since "Helpless," Eliza puts a part of her husband beyond historical redemption. For a man so concerned with being legible to history—Hamilton's first act in the musical is to literally spell out his name—Eliza's greatest revenge is illegibility.

## Act 2: It's Quiet Uptown Quotes

ANGELICA: They are standing in the garden,
Alexander by Eliza's side.
She takes his hand […]

ELIZA: It's quiet uptown.

*Hamilton shatters.*

COMPANY: Forgiveness. Can you imagine?
Forgiveness. Can you imagine?
If you see him in the streets, walking by her side, talking by her side, have pity.
They are going through the unimaginable.

**Related Characters:** Angelica, Eliza (speaker), Alexander Hamilton

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 254

### Explanation and Analysis

After Hamilton and Eliza lose their teenage son Philip to a duel, the couple "moves uptown," strolling aimlessly in quiet parks as they try to cope with their grief. Fascinatingly, neither parent narrates this song; instead, Angelica steps in, giving words when neither Hamilton nor Eliza can find them. And just as the wordlessness is startling from a man defined by his prolific writing, Angelica's mundane descriptions stand in stark contrast to the sweeping scale of the rest of the show. Hamilton is "standing in the garden," not doing anything; "it's quiet uptown," not bustling with politics and drinking games. Grief, the song suggests, brings life down to size, forcing the grieving to notice each moment as they struggle to get through the day.

There are two other essential things to note in this quotation. First, whereas every other song has worked to bring audiences into the early American world, here, Angelica distances them: this is "unimaginable," a pain that cannot be translated in the space of a few minutes or a piece of choreography. And second, whereas most of Hamilton's achievements have been verbal and combative, here he "shatters" at a simple, physical gesture of "forgiveness." Eliza's willingness to give her husband a second chance—to sing, literally, alongside him—demonstrates that in a marriage, as in a government, tragedy is better faced as a unit.

## Act 2: Election of 1800 Quotes

HAMILTON: I have never agreed with Jefferson once.
We have fought on like seventy-five diff'rent fronts!
But when all is said and all is done.
Jefferson has beliefs. Burr has none.

**Related Characters:** Alexander Hamilton (speaker), Aaron Burr, Lafayette, Jefferson

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 261

**Explanation and Analysis**

Historically, Jefferson ran for president and Burr ran for vice president; however, when the two men tied in the electoral college, Burr began to seek out the presidency for himself. In both real life and "The Election of 1800," Hamilton became the guiding voice for all of the Federalists in Congress—and it was because Hamilton chose to back Jefferson that he ultimately triumphed.

Here, Hamilton doles out his endorsement, but not without acknowledging the fraught past that he and Jefferson have shared. Indeed, the two men have "never agreed"—but at least they have *disagreed*, whereas Burr has always remained on the fence. In endorsing Jefferson, and in explaining his reasoning in this way, Hamilton makes it clear that a successful democracy has nothing to do with perfect agreement or harmony. Instead, political collaboration depends on being able to respect and recognize "beliefs" contrary to yours, as long as they are held in good faith. For it is no accident that this song comes just after "It's Quiet Uptown," when Angelica has sung about the virtues of "forgiveness"—this is the governmental equivalent of Eliza taking Hamilton's hand in the scene before.

## Act 2: The World Was Wide Enough Quotes

BURR: They won't teach you this in your classes,
But look it up, Hamilton was wearing his glasses.
Why? If not to take deadly aim?
It's him or me, the world will never be the same.
I had only one thought before the slaughter:
This man will not make an orphan of my daughter.

**Related Characters:** Aaron Burr (speaker), Alexander Hamilton

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 272

**Explanation and Analysis**

As Burr prepares to take his "shot" in his deadly duel against Hamilton, he pauses to talk to the audience—the only time in the entire show where the audience's futurity is explicitly addressed. As Burr shows viewers his consequential, much-criticized act of murder, he makes the case for a different kind of narrative. By emphasizing that "Hamilton was wearing his glasses," Burr tries to reframe the shooting as self-defense. And by focusing audience attention on his fear of orphaning his daughter, he pulls at the audience's sympathies in much the same way Hamilton has been doing for the entire show, when he mentions his own orphan past in the Caribbean.

What is fascinating here is the desperation behind Burr's attempt to rehabilitate his legacy. "Look it up," he begs, as if hoping that the audience will leave the theater and Google his new facts. That desperation testifies both to the weight of legacy and to the structure of history-as-theater: the actor playing Burr only has a few hours every night to change the way his historical counterpart will be remembered forever.

HAMILTON: If I throw away my shot, is this how you remember me?
What if this bullet is my legacy?
Legacy. What is a legacy?
It's planting seeds in a garden you never get to see.
I wrote some notes at the beginning of a song someone will sing for me.
America, you great unfinished symphony, you sent for me.
You let me make a difference.
A place where even orphan immigrants can leave their fingerprints and rise up.
I'm running out of time, I'm running and my time's up. Wise up.
Eyes up.

**Related Characters:** Alexander Hamilton (speaker), Aaron Burr

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 273

**Explanation and Analysis**

At the critical moment of the duel, the music cuts out, and Hamilton debates whether to fire at Burr or to "throw away" his shot—the very thing he had vowed not to do in "My Shot." The first thing to note, then, is the way that the musical has come full circle. Earlier, Hamilton predicted that death would be like "a beat without a melody," and now, he dies without any music behind him. Whereas "rise up" was a common refrain in Act 1, now that refrain has become "eyes up," as Hamilton decides to shoot into the air instead of firing at Burr. And though Hamilton is now actually "running out of time," he has felt time pressure in nearly every moment of the show ("why do you write like you're running out of time?").

More important, however, is Hamilton's vision of America as a work-in-progress. The United States Constitution promises to create a "more perfect union," one that is always growing and improving. And Hamilton now echoes that message, reflecting that legacy is to some extent out of his control—"planting seeds" that he could not tend or water, much less harvest.

Ultimately, though, Hamilton celebrates that sense of America as a "great unfinished symphony." Because America is not yet completed, Hamilton sings, new people—from other parts of the world, with other perspectives—can "leave their fingerprints" just as he did. And so he exits the stage with a kind of rallying call to the audience, a reminder that the country was designed for its future to "make a difference."

## Act 2: Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story Quotes

ELIZA: I see you every time
And when my time is up?
Will they tell my story?
Oh, I can't wait to see you again.
It's only a matter of—

ELIZA, COMPANY: Time.

COMPANY: Will they tell your story?
Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?
Will they tell your story?
Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?

**Related Characters:** Eliza (speaker), Alexander Hamilton

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 281

**Explanation and Analysis**

In the closing number of the show, all attention turns to Eliza, who explains the various things she does towards the end of her life to carry on her husband's legacy: founding an orphanage, advocating for abolition, and organizing Hamilton's papers. As she sings, she inverts or complicates some of the key refrains in the show. Instead of wanting to be a part of her husband's story, Eliza begins to think of herself as part of her own narrative ("will they tell my story?"). And though she has absorbed some of her husband's sense of time pressure, Eliza also embraces the passage of "time," as death will only reunite her with Hamilton in the afterlife.

Finally, the show ends with the repeated question of "who lives, who dies, who tells your story," first raised by Washington in "History Has Its Eyes on You." In the repetition—and in director Thomas Kail's staging, which places the performers in direct address to the audience—this question becomes directed to viewers. The audience is "who lives," and when they leave the theater, Eliza suggests, they get to decide what stories get told.

# SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## ACT 1: ALEXANDER HAMILTON

Aaron Burr (with an assist from the rest of the company) marvels at how Alexander Hamilton, a "bastard, orphan, son of a whore," grew to be "the ten-dollar founding father."

*By allowing Aaron Burr to tell his lifelong nemesis Hamilton's story, Miranda immediately raises the dramatic stakes—and asks audiences to think about who gets to narrate history. Hamilton is, to this day, the face on 10-dollar American bills.*

Hamilton was born in the Caribbean at the height of the slave trade. His father split when he was 10 years old, and two years later, his mother died. When a hurricane ravaged the island, Hamilton began to plan his escape, getting a job at a trading charter and reading everything in sight. Eventually, with support from the community around him, Hamilton was able to raise enough money to get to New York.

*Hamilton's backstory here is important for three reasons. First, he is an immigrant from the Caribbean. Over and over again, the musical makes the point that immigrants always have been—and always should be—essential to American strength. Second, Hamilton learns early on that reading and writing can prove key to success. And third, Hamilton's ambition comes out of his own sense of fear and helplessness, and particularly out of his mother's traumatizing death.*

Hamilton introduces himself, explaining that "there's a million things I haven't done, but just you wait." Burr sings about how Hamilton's enemies (himself included) "destroyed his rep," while the other major characters reflect on their own relationships to Hamilton: some fought with (or against) him, some loved him, and one even died for him. As the rest of the cast cheers Hamilton on, Burr ends the song admitting that "I'm the damn fool that **shot** him."

*In this introductory moment, Hamilton defines himself by his aspirations. But more importantly, the song ends with a flash-forward of sorts, in which Burr admits to shooting and killing Hamilton. So, fascinatingly, the first time audiences hear the word "shot"—a crucial motif in the show—is in reference to Hamilton's eventual death.*

## ACT 1: AARON BURR, SIR

Hamilton has just arrived in New York, and he is eager to meet Aaron Burr, who graduated from Princeton in only two short years. Burr is put off by Hamilton's eagerness, but he buys him a drink at nearby Fraunces Tavern, advising him to "talk less, smile more / don't let them know what you're against or what you're for." Hamilton does not take well to this advice.

*In a note on the text, Miranda explains that Burr was able to graduate from college so quickly because his father was the president—but Burr conceals that fact from Hamilton, who has no such connections of his own. This exchange also introduces one of Burr's central mottos: whereas Hamilton is talkative and opinionated, Burr believes in "smil[ing]" and staying quiet so he can play both sides.*

Sure enough, moments later Burr and Hamilton are joined by the three men who will become Hamilton's closest friends: Laurens, Lafayette, and Hercules Mulligan. These three men are rowdy and opinionated, just like Hamilton. So, when Burr refuses to join in their fun, Hamilton pushes back: "if you stand for nothing," he asks, "what'll you fall for?"

*Burr's lack of principles sometimes comes in handy—he later changes political parties just to win an election—but for the most part, it alienates him from the people around him. Yet Burr's refusal to ever agree or disagree, so antithetical to the structure of a representative democracy, also keeps him safe; after all, as the foreshadowing in the first song has made clear, Burr will never "fall" to his untimely death in the way Hamilton does.*

## ACT 1: MY SHOT

While Hamilton gets a degree from King's College, the American colonists are getting angrier and angrier. British taxation is too high, and a revolution is brewing. Hamilton sees the revolution as a chance to make a name for himself: "hey yo, I'm just like my country / I'm young, scrappy, and hungry / and I'm not throwing away my **shot**."

*The chorus of "My Shot" sets up a central parallel between Hamilton—young and ambitious—and the burgeoning United States. But it also focuses the audience on the concept of a "shot" as a symbol for opportunity and ambition.*

Lafayette, who is French, expresses his hope that the American Revolution will inspire the French people to fight for their own independence. Laurens wants to end slavery. Mulligan, a tailor's apprentice, just wants to "socially advance, instead of sewin' some pants."

*Like Hamilton, Lafayette is an immigrant, and like Hamilton, he will prove essential to America's very existence. The boisterous Mulligan also highlights that, unlike Burr (and later Jefferson and Madison), Hamilton's group of friends is anything but elite.*

Then the song quiets down, and Hamilton sings about his own fears of mortality: "I imagine death so much it feels more like a memory." By the end of the song, Hamilton is speaking to a crowd of people, and all the characters sing in counterpoint.

*Hamilton's ambition—his desire to take every "shot" he can get—is intimately linked to this obsession with death. "The ticking clock is loud in both our ears," composer Miranda says of his protagonist, "and it sets us to work." It's also worth noting that the musical hubbub—in which something melodic comes from chaos—reflects the general process of democracy, in which messy collaboration ideally leads to a stronger, more unifying final product.*

## ACT 1: THE STORY OF TONIGHT

Lafayette, Laurens, Mulligan, and Hamilton drink together to commemorate their historic moment: "raise a glass to the four of us / tomorrow there'll be more of us." Hamilton and his friends are also keenly aware that they are in the middle of history: "and when our children tell our story / they'll tell the story of tonight."

*Though many of the relationships in the show are political or romantic, here, friendship is linked to the broader project of democracy. In this lyric, "children" can be taken both literally and metaphorically: this friend group is thinking about their legacy even in their drinking songs.*

## ACT 1: THE SCHUYLER SISTERS

The scene shifts to downtown New York City, where lovely Eliza Schuyler is joined by her older sister (the brilliant Angelica) and her grumpy younger sister (Peggy). In a bouncy musical number, "The Schuyler Sisters" sing about how they are supposed to marry wealthy men, but they are actually more interested in revolutionary politics than in getting rich.

*In addition to being historically accurate, Miranda's choice to present the Schuyler sisters as a trio sets them up as a classic girl group (like modern-day Destiny's Child or The Supremes). Right away, audiences see that both Angelica and Eliza are interested in being part of a historical moment that they feel excluded from because of their gender.*

In particular, Angelica is desperate to make an impact on the war effort: she boasts of reading Thomas Paine's crucial treatise *Common Sense* and complains that Thomas Jefferson left women out of the Declaration of Independence. As the song comes to a close, the three sisters celebrate New York as "the greatest city in the world," reflecting how "lucky they are to be alive right now."

*Thomas Paine, one of the more radical thinkers in the Revolutionary era, was also an advocate for women's rights (unlike Jefferson). But even as the song hints at complex political textures, it also acts as an ode to New York City. Indeed, at the show's opening night party, Miranda created a New York playlist, which included everything from standards like "New York, New York" to Jay-Z's "Empire State of Mind" to "The Schuyler Sisters."*

## ACT 1: FARMER REFUTED

Samuel Seabury, a Loyalist, defends the British to a tune of harpsichords and fifes. But Hamilton responds to Seabury with rap, incorporating his rival's words into new—and eviscerating—responses. For example, Seabury will sing "heed not the rebels who scream Revolution / they have not your interests at heart"; Hamilton will reply, "the Revolution is comin' / the have-nots are gonna win this." At one point, Seabury switches musical keys—and Hamilton warns him, "don't modulate the key then not debate with me!"

*Increasingly, the musical is establishing that style is a clue to content: here, the fussy and out-of-date music corresponds to Seabury's elitist and out-of-date ideas. More than that, though, Hamilton's flexing—his ability to turns "rebels" into "Revolution," "have not" into "have-nots"—shows his incredible intelligence and ambition. Plus, his emphasis on the "have-nots" once again suggests Hamilton's vision for an America built on immigration and class mobility (instead of landed gentry like Seabury and Jefferson).*

## ACT 1: YOU'LL BE BACK

"You'll Be Back" frames the American colonists' push for independence from Britain as a break-up, and King George is taking it personally: "you'll be back / soon you'll see / you'll remember you belong to me."

*Structurally, King George acts largely as comic relief. But this song also highlights, to humorous effect, the gap between history and experience. In history books, the Revolution looks like an impersonal, political act; in King George's mind, it stings just like romantic rejection might.*

## ACT 1: RIGHT HAND MAN

Thirty-two thousand British troops have arrived in New York Harbor, and all the American colonists are counting on General George Washington to save them. Washington makes his grand entrance here, asking, "are these the men with which I am to defend America?"

*This quote, pulled from history, emphasizes the incredible feat Washington was able to pull off. That the general was able to succeed—both in reality and in the show—is a testament to his leadership, to his remarkable ability to rally different kinds of people.*

As Washington figures out how to evade the British attack, Burr offers his help—but Washington declines. Instead, he turns to Hamilton, who initially is reluctant to serve as a secretary. But while Hamilton dreams of martyrdom, Washington pushes back: "dying is easy, young man. Living is harder."

*As Miranda himself has explained, Washington's distrust of Burr demonstrates his wisdom and good sense. His words to Hamilton become a motif throughout the show: though the young upstart dreams of dying in order to secure his place in history, Washington makes a point that the truly ambitious act is living, with the all the compromise and complexity that entails. Gaining honor, Washington implies, is less important than making a difference.*

## ACT 1: A WINTER'S BALL

Burr's resentment of Hamilton's rise and of his success with "the ladies" is growing. Still penniless, Hamilton is hoping to get rich by marrying a Schuyler sister.

*Even for a self-professed egalitarian like Hamilton, wealth and status matter...a lot. And if the men have mostly dealt in political honor thus far, now Burr and Hamilton turn their attention to their romantic/sexual reputations.*

## ACT 1: HELPLESS

At a ball, Eliza tells the audience that she has never been the center of attention. But as soon as Eliza sees Hamilton, she is "helpless," taken by his wit and his famously piercing eyes. Eliza tells Angelica about her crush on Hamilton, and from across the room, Eliza watches as Angelica acts as her wing-woman.

*The idea of "helplessness" will be vital throughout the show. Hamilton, subscribing to the gender norms of the time, often sees himself as the protector of "helpless" women. But also, Eliza's helplessness distinguishes her from her sister Angelica, who—in this moment, and seemingly always—knows exactly how to take action.*

Eliza and Hamilton meet, and there are instant fireworks. The song then jumps forward in time, as the happy couple writes **letters** back and forth. Soon, Hamilton is asking Eliza's father to bless their marriage.

*Hamilton uses language to court Eliza, making letters an important symbol for the power of the written word. Again, the rituals of this time period—based on a strict sense of reputation and honor—are evident in Hamilton's interactions with Eliza's father.*

Hamilton reminds Eliza that he has no money ("all I have's my honor, my tolerance for pain, a couple of college credits and a top-notch brain"). At the same time, Hamilton recalls his father's abandonment, vowing to Eliza that as long as they are together, he'll make sure she never feels as "helpless" or alone as his mother did.

*Now, Hamilton's first trauma—the loss of his mother—rears its head, a deep-seated pain that will continue to plague him throughout the show. Moreover, Hamilton is honest about his lack of wealth, using his ambition and honor as proof of his worthiness instead of more traditional status symbols.*

## ACT 1: SATISFIED

Just as Angelica begins to give a wedding toast, the rest of the company shouts "rewind," and the scene returns to the moment Hamilton enters the party where they met (right before "A Winter's Ball").

*By showing audiences the same scene from a different vantage point (both lyrically and in the staging), the creators of* Hamilton *emphasize that historical narratives can be dramatically different depending on the narrator's viewpoint.*

Angelica now describes the encounter from her perspective: she, too, has fallen in love with Hamilton at first sight. "You strike me," Hamilton says when they meet, "as a woman who has never been satisfied." Hamilton continues to flirt, making it clear that he reciprocates Angelica's feelings.

*Case in point: while Eliza told a straightforward love story, the same moment through Angelica's eyes proves that this is actually a love triangle. The use of the word "satisfied"—which has both sexual and intellectual connotations—also links Angelica's ambitious outlook to Hamilton's.*

Angelica is amazed to have finally met her match. When she asks about Hamilton's family, she realizes he has no money, but she's impressed by his rough-and-ready attitude. But then Angelica turns around and sees Eliza—singing "Helpless"—and she realizes "three fundamental truths." First, as the oldest sister, it is her job to marry rich. Second, Hamilton might just be using her for her money. And finally, though Eliza would never say anything, she would be devastated to lose Hamilton to Angelica.

*There is a lot going on in this section, in part because Angelica thinks (and sings) at warp speed. Part of early Americans' honor was derived from their family trees—so Hamilton, born as a "bastard, orphan" immigrant, might not be acceptable to Angelica's father. But if her decision is in part self-protective, it is also remarkably selfless: always, Angelica will put her sister's well-being above all else.*

The song fast-forwards again, and Angelica is now in the middle of her toast ("may you always be satisfied," she tells the newlyweds). The company repeats the phrase "be satisfied."

*Just as a scene can change its arc depending on a narrator, a word can change its meaning depending on the context. Whereas "satisfied" initially seems to be a celebratory word, by the end of the song, it has taken on tragic connotations.*

## ACT 1: THE STORY OF TONIGHT (REPRISE)

Hamilton and his friends celebrate his new marriage with another round of drinks. Burr shows up halfway through the song, and the guys call him out on his crush on Theodosia, the wife of a British officer. Burr explains that he is waiting to consummate the relationship until it is legal.

*Hamilton's friend group again shows that political change is formed in personal relationships and collaborations. And whereas Hamilton acts on every impulse, Burr is timider, patient almost to a fault.*

## ACT 1: WAIT FOR IT

Burr lusts for Theodosia and reflects on his own family history (his grandfather was famed preacher Jonathan Edwards). Burr has lost everyone in his life, but he comes to the conclusion that "if there's a reason I'm still alive, then I'm willing to wait for it."

*Here, Burr lays out his worldview, which is diametrically opposed to Hamilton's. Though Burr is equally aware of his own mortality, he believes that caution—and an ability to play both sides—is what will keep him alive. In other words, rather than being motivated by the sense that death is near, Burr takes that possibility to mean that he needs to constantly be on the defensive.*

## ACT 1: STAY ALIVE

Meanwhile, an increasingly panicked Washington is trying to figure out how to keep the Americans in battle for another day. Washington wants Hamilton to provoke "outrage" in the press while laying low militarily, allowing the American forces to regroup and come back stronger.

*Though the newspapers are not technically letters, they carry much the same symbolic weight: once again, the musical shows how words (and particularly emotional narratives) have the power to shape history.*

To Hamilton's outrage, Washington promotes a middling man named Charles Lee over him. At the Battle of Monmouth, Lee retreats, costing the Americans a victory. Hamilton and Lee get into a shouting match, and Hamilton wants to duel, but Washington forbids it—so Laurens volunteers to duel with Lee on his friend's behalf.

*If "Wait For It" has shown audiences the complexity and utility of Burr's worldview, this exchange shows how Hamilton's ambition can be a stumbling block, causing the young man to act rashly. His need to protect his honor here puts his friend Laurens's life in danger and angers Washington, the very person he most wants impress.*

## ACT 1: TEN DUEL COMMANDMENTS

To prepare for the duel, Burr, Hamilton, Laurens and the company lay out "The Ten Duel Commandments." First, each party demands "satisfaction"; if one person apologizes, the duel is off. If nobody apologizes, the duel moves ahead, and each man nominates a "second": a friend who can negotiate for him, so as to avoid unnecessary bloodshed.

*This complicated set of rules, based on a real concept known as the* code duello, *reflects just how much men of this time obsessed over their reputations. In addition to giving audience members a sense of the high stakes behind honor culture, the word "satisfaction" gains a new layer of meaning (on top of the ones it had in "Satisfied").*

If the seconds can't reach a peace, then the duelers hire a doctor and get some pistols. The next step is to pick a time and place (usually before dawn and in an isolated area). When it's time for the actual duel, the two parties look each other in the eye, turn back-to-back, walk 10 paces in the opposite directions—and then turn toward each other and fire.

*Just as "satisfied" can have many meanings, here the word "shot"—which was so hopeful in the song "My Shot"—takes on a much deadlier connotation.*

## ACT 1: MEET ME INSIDE

Washington feels that Hamilton doesn't need to defend him. Hamilton bristles, especially when Washington continues to call him "son." Again, Hamilton wants a command, while Washington explains that he is more valuable (to Eliza and the country as a whole) if he stays alive. At last, unable to get through, Washington sends Hamilton home, effectively firing him.

*Hamilton's pride, often a motivating force, now causes him to lose his job; he is so desperate to fight, potentially dying, that he cannot see his long-term value to either his country or his family. Even though he does come to love Washington as a father figure, the orphaned Hamilton also seems to find it presumptuous when Washington calls him "son."*

## ACT 1: THAT WOULD BE ENOUGH

Back at home, Hamilton learns that Eliza is pregnant. Her message is simple but potent in wartime: "just stay alive, that would be enough." She also begs to be given more insight into Hamilton's inner life: "let me be a part of the narrative / in the story they will write someday."

*Eliza is a giant part of Hamilton's lived experience, but even in the moment, she can tell that she might not be integral to the more removed story of his life that archives will tell. Just like Lafayette and Mulligan, Eliza points out, she also wants to leave a legacy of her own. But Eliza's desire appears to have more to do with enjoying a happy family life than with building a new nation—a desire that conflicts with her husband's ambition.*

## ACT 1: GUNS AND SHIPS

Now in uniform, Hamilton and his core group of friends launch into the fast-paced "Guns and Ships." Lafayette—who ostensibly just learned English—raps at warp-speed as he convinces Washington to make Hamilton a general.

*As Miranda himself says, Lafayette's creativity with language comes not in spite of his immigrant status but because of it: he is able to think of new phrases and speak with dexterity because he is learning English as the show progresses.*

## ACT 1: HISTORY HAS ITS EYES ON YOU

Washington finally gives Hamilton military command. He urges Hamilton to act with caution because his actions will be written about for ages: "history has its eyes on you." Washington's final word of advice is that "you have no control / who lives, who dies, who tells your story."

*Washington's advice here becomes the single most important motif in the show. On the one hand, he reminds Hamilton that every step he takes now will be refracted through the lens of "history"—and therefore that Hamilton should be careful, acting with patience so as to preserve his honor. At the same time, though, Washington emphasizes the unpredictability of historical narrative: despite his ambition, there are too many actors and warring goals for Hamilton to have "control" over who lives to tell his "story."*

## ACT 1: YORKTOWN (THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN)

Hamilton, now a general, is able to fight at Yorktown. Motivated by the thought of both a new country and a new baby, Hamilton hatches a plan to take the British by surprise: all his soldiers will take the bullets out of their guns so as to sneak up on their enemies more effectively.

*Hamilton's obsessiveness is on full display here, as he orders his men to unload their weapons to cut down on possible accidental noise. That obsessiveness could be a great strength (as it was when it came time to write the Federalist Papers), but it could also make Hamilton a difficult person to work with. In this case, it pays off, as his actions at Yorktown help lead to American victory in the war.*

In the second half of the song, Laurens wonders if the successful Revolution will also mark the end of slavery. Washington grimly replies, "not yet." Hamilton and his friends then celebrate their triumph by singing "the world turned upside down."

*On the one hand, the Revolution is radical, creating a brand-new democratic country. In other ways, it is not radical at all, as it only further entrenches slavery. Indeed, the British would end the practice of slavery decades before the Americans did. And though the musical never outright addresses the fact that Washington owned hundreds of slaves in his lifetime, the fact that the general says "not yet" is meant as a hint at that atrocity. Whether or not* Hamilton *has sufficiently explored the Founding Fathers' ties with slavery is a source of extensive debate.*

## ACT 1: WHAT COMES NEXT

After the war, King George checks in on his former subjects. "Oceans rise, empires fall," George crows gleefully, "it's much harder when it's all your call."

*For King George, a monarch, governance is ultimately a one-man job. But in this song, he (rightly) predicts that democracy—which involves competing interests and opinions—will be much harder.*

## ACT 1: DEAR THEODOSIA

As they sing "Dear Theodosia," Burr and Hamilton connect the births of their respective children at the end of the Revolution to the birth of the new United States ("you will come of age with our young nation"). In both cases, Burr and Hamilton are sure they'll fail. "I thought I was so smart," sings the normally self-assured Burr, now certain that he'll "make a million mistakes".

*In this touching song, Hamilton and Burr unite over their shared concern for the future—a future expressed both in their newborn children and in their "young nation." Just as the two men will have to learn to work with others in order to advance politically, they here have to learn to challenge (and forgive) themselves as unavoidably flawed parents; it is impossible, Burr admits, to avoid making mistakes, whether as a father or a Founding Father.*

## ACT 1: TOMORROW THERE'LL BE MORE OF US

Interrupting her husband's hopeful mood, Eliza receives a **letter** from Laurens's father with the news that Laurens has been killed in a gunfight—a pointless skirmish fought after the end of the war. For the first time in the show, Hamilton has no words. His grief is too profound to do anything but get back to work.

*There was some speculation that Hamilton and Laurens were lovers, and the former's grief in this moment could be read as supporting that theory. But more than that, the letter—a symbol of the power of language—contrasts with Hamilton's wordlessness. Though he can change the world with writing, sometimes, even the future Treasury Secretary finds the words knocked out of him.*

## ACT 1: NON-STOP

When Burr and Hamilton return from the war, both set up law practices in the same neighborhood of New York City. Sometimes they even work together on cases. But while Hamilton is brash and opinionated, Burr is still biding his time—and complaining about Hamilton's rush ("why do you write like you're running out of time?").

*As the contrast between Burr and Hamilton builds, Hamilton's take-no-prisoners ambition becomes even clearer. And Burr, too, begins to notice the connection between Hamilton's fervor and his fear of death; the "ticking clock" Miranda talks about is at work again.*

Hamilton is nominated for the Constitutional Convention, where he talks for six full hours. Motivated by what he sees at the Convention, Hamilton begins writing the Federalist Papers, a series of anonymous essays in favor of the Constitution. Hamilton asks Burr to join him in paper writing, but Burr says no—"I'll keep all my plans close to my chest," he responds, "I'm taking my time / watching the afterbirth of a nation / watching the tension grow."

*Early on in the show, Burr pressed Hamilton to "talk less / smile more." Now, while everyone else passionately argues for a new law or system, Burr continues to "wait for it," trying to strategize about the "tension" instead of diving in with his own beliefs.*

Meanwhile, Angelica announces that she has married a wealthy British man and is moving to London. Eliza begs, again, to let be into her husband's thought processes. And Washington gives Hamilton the opportunity to serve as the country's first Secretary of the Treasury.

*This song moves through a lot of time, but it is important to note how Hamilton's life is changing. Angelica, his closest counterpart in many ways, is now overseas, isolating Hamilton at the very moment he gains most power. And Eliza still feels excluded from the history her husband is so central to—and from his confidences.*

Without any melody or lyricism, Burr states the simple—and astonishing—facts. There were 85 essays in the Federalist papers, written over the course of six months. John Jay wrote 5, James Madison wrote 29, and "Hamilton wrote the other 51."

*The absence of music here is powerful: sometimes, Miranda seems to suggest, the simple facts of history are so telling that no dramatization is necessary. Hamilton's ambition—and his passion for the Constitution and a strong federal government—is unmatched.*

The song builds to a climax, as all of the different refrains from the first act return and intersect. "I am not throwin' away my **shot**!" Hamilton cries, defiantly—and the first act is finished.

*To close out the act, the different strands of music from the first half of the show come together, reflecting the myriad voices (and states) that found harmony in ratifying the U.S. Constitution.*

## ACT 2: WHAT'D I MISS

In 1789, Hamilton is running the Treasury Department, and Jefferson is about to become Secretary of State. But Jefferson has been in France for much of the war, shoring up French aid. This song gives Madison a chance to catch his friend up on his hatred of Hamilton.

*In the musical's Act 2 casting, Lafayette has become Jefferson, and Mulligan has become Madison—so Hamilton's best friends have now become his enemies. In addition to shortening the cast list (always a plus with Broadway budgeting!), this shift shows the isolating effects of Hamilton's ambition; where once he had a group of collaborators, now he has rivals.*

As Jefferson prepares to head to Washington, Madison warns him that Hamilton's plan is overreaching. Jefferson quickly thinks up some remarks for his first Cabinet meeting.

*Unlike Hamilton, Madison and Jefferson are close friends—and so they are able to work more effectively together. As Miranda says, Madison is the "wonk" and Jefferson is the "charisma" in the duo.*

## ACT 2: CABINET BATTLE #1

Hamilton and Jefferson face off about whether or not to create a national bank. Washington moderates the debate. Jefferson chastises Hamilton for moving money around, claiming that "in Virginia, we plant seeds in the ground. We create." Hamilton retorts, "keep ranting / we know who's really doing the planting."

*In this cabinet debate, modeled after a rap battle, Hamilton turns Jefferson's words and ideas against him. Hamilton's reference to "planting" is also the show's way of addressing that Jefferson, despite writing the Declaration of Independence, was a prominent slaveholder. A lyric in "What'd I Miss?" even hints at his affair with Sally Hemings, an enslaved Black woman at his estate in Monticello.*

Hamilton and Jefferson continue to trade barbs. When things get a little too heated ("turn around, bend over / I'll show you where my shoe fits"), Washington shuts the battle down.

*Washington knows that there is value to debate, but only up to a point: go too far, and animosity will get in the way of real governance.*

Hamilton is frustrated that Jefferson and Madison are ganging up on him, but Washington is firm that the only way to create a national bank is to get Congress to vote on it ("winning was easy, young man. Governing's harder"). Hamilton worries that Madison will block his proposal—and worse still, that if his proposal fails, he may be ousted as Secretary of the Treasury.

*Just as Washington urged Hamilton to remember that "dying is easy" but "living is harder," he now pushes the younger man to see that ambition is not the same as success. In other words, Hamilton cannot execute his ideas by himself—he will need other people, other votes, in order to turn his ideas to reality.*

## ACT 2: TAKE A BREAK

Angelica obsesses over a comma in one of Hamilton's **letters**: "it says 'my dearest, Angelica,' / with a comma after dearest." In their correspondence, Hamilton and Angelica trade references to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, with Hamilton quoting Macbeth's lines and Angelica responding with Lady Macbeth's text ("screw your courage to the sticking place").

*The analysis Angelica applies to Hamilton's letters—and the back-and-forth theatrical allusions within them—shows the great joy and danger of language. Hamilton's letters give Angelica enough evidence of his love to obsess over, but they cannot make clear the full truth…just as historical archives let us imagine history without being able to actually access it.*

Meanwhile, Hamilton and Eliza's son, nine-year-old Philip, learns to play piano, teaching himself to write melodies and raps about his father. In a **letter**, Eliza pleads with Hamilton to "take a break" and join her upstate. But Hamilton, busy trying to create the national bank, refuses to leave the city. And though Hamilton admits to "longing for Angelica," not even Angelica's arrival from London can change his mind.

*Eliza seems to have given up on becoming part of her husband's narrative, now just asking him to at least "take a break" from making history and join her at home. Two other things worth noting from this scene: Hamilton's feelings for Angelica remain reciprocated, and Philip's counting to 10 on the piano parallels the rhythm and tune of "The Ten Duel Commandments."*


## ACT 2: SAY NO TO THIS

It's "summer in the city," and Hamilton is exhausted from working so hard. A few weeks in, he meets a woman named Maria Reynolds, who tells him her husband has been abusing her. Hamilton offers her a loan, then quickly realizes that Maria is also trying to seduce him. He is conflicted, but he finds it hard to resist: "my God, she looks so helpless / and her body's saying Hell yes."

*This sexy R&B number, built in part around original cast member Jasmine Cephas-Jones's vocal strengths, once more connects Hamilton's New York City to the city of today. More than that, Hamilton's sense that Maria is "helpless" sends him back to his traumatic memories of his mother, similarly made "helpless" by her husband's abandonment. The only thing that can override Hamilton's sense of honor, it would seem, is this anxiety about his mother. Or perhaps his desire to be honorable to his mother overwhelms his desire to be faithful to Eliza, as he succumbs to his attraction to Maria in the midst of his isolated, pressured existence.*

Soon after the affair starts, Hamilton gets a letter from James Reynolds, Maria's husband. James knows about the affair, and he is blackmailing Hamilton: either Hamilton has to pay up, or James will tell Eliza that he's been cheating on her. Hamilton panics, worrying that he is "ruined," while Maria begs him to forgive her and continue the affair. Seeing how "helpless" Maria looks, Hamilton finds himself powerless to resist. The song ends, and the affair continues.

*As the song goes on, Hamilton's obsession with his reputation becomes a deeply corrupting force: rather than admitting the truth to his wife, Hamilton goes along with the cover-up in a desperate bid to protect his name.*

## ACT 2: THE ROOM WHERE IT HAPPENS

Burr wonders how Hamilton is going to pass his new debt plan, and Hamilton explains that he will act like Burr ("talk less / smile more.") Indeed, Hamilton has set up a cozy dinner with Jefferson and Madison, and Burr is enraged to have been excluded.

*Hamilton seems to have taken Washington's lesson to heart: instead of alienating Jefferson and Madison, Hamilton is able to compromise with them over dinner. Burr, who believes that he has been successfully playing the relationship game the whole time, is especially horrified that Hamilton—normally so abrasive—has figured out how to make peace with his enemies.*

Though Jefferson and Hamilton tell slightly different stories, both agree on the basic details of what went on behind closed doors: Hamilton gets his bank, and Jefferson and Madison get the nation's capital right in their backyard (Washington, D.C.). As trumpets play, Burr obsesses over the fact that "no one else was in the room where it happened."

*Once more, history changes depending on who is telling the story. So for Burr, not being in the "room where it happens" also means never knowing the truth behind history—like the audience, he must grasp at clues rather than getting the full story of what happened behind those doors.*

Hamilton boasts to Burr that he has accomplished his goals. Hamilton presses Burr to think about what he stands for, and the company begins to chant "what do you want, Burr?" Burr answers, "I wanna be in the room where it happens."

*Hamilton's drive comes from a desire to protect people—immigrants, orphans, those who feel "helpless"—who remind him of his own vulnerabilities. But Burr craves power for power's sake; in this electrifying moment, it becomes clear that Burr wants to be in the room solely so that he can say he was there.*

## ACT 2: SCHUYLER DEFEATED

Hamilton learns that his father-in-law, Philip, has lost his race to be a senator from New York. Worse still, he's been beaten by Burr, who changed parties to run against Philip.

*Unlike principled Hamilton, Burr can switch parties easily. But though he might win this election, Burr's lack of trustworthiness does not endear him to anyone in the long run.*

## ACT 2: CABINET BATTLE #2

Jefferson and Hamilton face off about whether the new United States should intervene in the French Revolution. Again, Washington moderates, and this time, he decides who wins.

*One nice dinner, the show makes clear, does not forge a friendship—Jefferson and Hamilton are fighting again just two songs later. The idea of Washington as a judge in the rap battle reflects his real-life role as a moderator of tense political debates.*

Jefferson accuses Hamilton of betraying the French, who had helped the Americans so much in their own revolution. In response, Hamilton scoffs, "we signed a treaty with a king whose head is now in a basket / would you like to take it out and ask it?" Washington sides with Hamilton, arguing that the nation is not yet strong enough to involve itself abroad. Hamilton twists the knife: "if we try to fight in every revolution in the world [...] where do we draw the line?"

*Jefferson's faithfulness to the French is a nice touch, given that the same actor played Lafayette in the first act. In one of the more contemporary call-outs in the piece, Hamilton's opposition to fighting in "every revolution in the world" is a not-so-subtle critique of present day U.S. interventionism.*

Before Hamilton can glory in his victory, however, Jefferson and Madison corner him and remind him that Washington will not be president forever. In the song's final moment, Washington calls out to Hamilton, and Jefferson sneers that "daddy's calling."

*Hamilton bristled before when Washington called him "son," likely because of his painful memories of his own father's abandonment. Now, Madison and Jefferson echo this taunt—and remind Hamilton that he only has a single ally (and one who is probably not going to be in politics for much longer).*

## ACT 2: WASHINGTON ON YOUR SIDE

Jefferson, Madison, and Burr—all now part of the Democratic-Republican Party—express their frustration at Hamilton's success. Jefferson sings "I'm in the cabinet I am complicit in / watching him grabbin' at power and kissin' it / if Washington isn't gon listen to disciplined dissidents, this is the difference / this kid is out."

*Hamilton's ambition, spun this way by his enemies, is a vulnerability. But Jefferson is not so different. He cares about his own reputation—he will not let himself be seen as "complicit"—and his verbal dexterity shows that, despite shielding his ambition from the public, he is nearly as quick as Hamilton is.*

## ACT 2: ONE LAST TIME

Washington explains to Hamilton that he is stepping down as president—and that he wants Hamilton to write his final speech. Hamilton panics, especially when he realizes that Jefferson will now likely run for (and win) the office. But Washington is firm that "if I say goodbye, the nation learns to move on / it outlives me when I'm gone."

*Washington is shaping history...not by meddling, but by stepping away. The idea of a country "outliv[ing]" its founder parallels the familial metaphor found in "Dear Theodosia," in which parents prepare their children to outlive them and build on what they've established.*

Washington acknowledges his mistakes ("I am nevertheless too sensible of my defects not to think it possible that I have committed many errors"). While Washington sings his speech, Hamilton sings alongside him, capturing both the drafting process and the delivery of the speech.

*This is one of Hamilton's more selfless acts: though he is losing his closest ally, he still helps Washington find the words to define his history-making presidency. Again, Washington's emphasis on mistakes reflects that forgiveness, patience, and even humility are key ingredients of democracy.*

## ACT 2: I KNOW HIM

King George sings about watching John Adams take over as president. King George is shocked that Washington has relinquished power—he cannot imagine ever doing the same—and even more that Adams ("that's that little guy who spoke to me") is in his place. King George is confident that without Washington at the helm, America will tear itself to pieces.

*In another moment of comic relief, King George muses about the necessity of a moderating figure like Washington. Without such a unifying figure, all the other Founders' competing ambitions and reputations will surely clash; "next to Washington," George reflects, "they all look small."*

## ACT 2: THE ADAMS ADMINISTRATION

Soon President Adams fires Hamilton, calling him a "Creole bastard," and Thomas Jefferson becomes Adams's vice president. In response, Hamilton comes back with a rant, damaging both himself and Adams in the process. Jefferson and Madison celebrate that their path to power is now clear.

*This xenophobic slur (especially coming from Adams, a member of the New England elite) acts as a reminder of the uphill battle immigrants have had to fight in the U.S., both then and now. Again, Hamilton's hot-headedness gets him in trouble, whereas Jefferson and Madison's alliance protects them both.*

## ACT 2: WE KNOW

Jefferson, Burr, and Madison accuse Hamilton of using his role in the Treasury to embezzle money. Hamilton explains that he has not stolen money—but he also overshares, confessing his affair with Maria. Before Burr leaves, he hints to Hamilton that he might use this scandalous information against him.

*The same drive that allows Hamilton to write 51 Federalist Papers now causes him to blurt out the very information that could destroy him. As Miranda has discussed at length, one of the things Hamilton most lacks is "restraint."*

## ACT 2: HURRICANE

Hamilton, alone onstage, reflects on his childhood. He remembers that he has used writing to save himself time and time again, even in traumas like his mother's death. He resolves to publish the story of Maria, while Burr gleefully chants to "wait for it."

*The pamphlet, like Hamilton's letters, opens him up to new possibilities—and to new vulnerabilities. For the first time, Burr's patience is really paying off, as Hamilton is about to destroy himself.*

## ACT 2: THE REYNOLDS PAMPHLET

The thing Hamilton publishes is "The Reynolds Pamphlet." Hamilton reads text from the real pamphlet aloud, explaining his affair with Maria and the blackmail scheme that followed it. While the public freaks out at Hamilton's revelations, Jefferson and his friends cackle that "he's never gon' be president now."

*The more contemporary music here underscores the modern feel of the nation's first-ever sex scandal. Between this and the blow-up with John Adams, Hamilton's reputation is completely tarnished.*

In the middle of the song, Angelica arrives from overseas. Hamilton is grateful to see her, but she makes it clear that she has come for Eliza, not him ("put what we had aside / I'm standing at her side"). King George also arrives to laugh at Hamilton. The song ends when Jefferson and Burr revel in Hamilton's self-destruction: "you ever see somebody ruin their own life? / his poor wife."

*Three important things are happening here. First, the world has completely turned against Hamilton, as evidenced by George's appearance and by the hectic light and sound design in the Broadway production. Second, Angelica's love for her sister once again takes precedence over her feelings for Hamilton. And third, the final line of the song makes clear just how much Hamilton—in trying to take control of history—has damaged his wife's place in it. If the question is "who tells your story," Hamilton has decided to tell Eliza's for her.*

## ACT 2: BURN

Hamilton's "poor wife," Eliza, appears, alone and holding stacks of Hamilton's eloquent **letters**. Having heard about the affair, she recalls Hamilton's early letter-writing days ("you built me palaces out of paragraphs"). Then, in a moment of heartbreak and revenge, she burns the **letters**, singing, "I'm erasing myself from the narrative / let future historians wonder / how Eliza reacted when you broke her heart."

*Over and over again, Eliza has begged to "be a part of the narrative"; over and over again, Hamilton has denied her this basic courtesy. Now, her ultimate revenge is to destroy the letters that Hamilton crafted her. If writing is his superpower, his way to build "palaces" and nations, Eliza will deny him anything that might "redeem" him in archivists' eyes. In doing so, she also reclaims agency over the historical narrative (at least in Miranda's telling).*

## ACT 2: BLOW US ALL AWAY

Philip is at college now, and he has grown to be just as charming and intelligent as his father. But when a young man named George Eacker mocks Hamilton in a speech, Philip is livid, challenging him to a duel in New Jersey ("everything is legal in New Jersey").

*Philip's sense of honor is just as fierce as his father's, and clearly, he is just as good at alienating people. As always, Hamilton finds little ways to align itself with the modern world, as in this New Jersey joke.*

While the music stays cheery, Hamilton helps his son prepare for the duel. Finally, Eacker and Philip face off—but before Philip can count to 10, Eacker shoots, mortally wounding him.

*Lots of symbolism collides here. The 10 counts of the duel mirror the 10 counts of Philip's song on the piano, and sound like the "ticking clock" that Miranda references. And just as a "shot" can be both a chance or a mortally wounding bullet, the song title ("Blow Us All Away") refers both to Philip's promise and to his untimely death.*

## ACT 2: STAY ALIVE (REPRISE)

The music shifts, and the scene moves to a doctor's house, where Eliza and Hamilton sing to their dying son. While Philip struggles to count to 10—a reference both to the duel and to his childhood piano exercises—Eliza reminisces about his tender youth. "Stay alive," the ensemble chants, but the doctor loses hope. Philip collapses, dead.

*"Satisfied" showed that different moments appear different depending on the vantage point; "Stay Alive (Reprise)" brings back a familiar melody with a new, more personally crushing, meaning. So even in this tragic moment, the musical impresses on audiences just how contingent history is on perspective and context.*

## ACT 2: IT'S QUIET UPTOWN

"It's Quiet Uptown," sung by Angelica and the ensemble, follows the Hamiltons as they move uptown and try to adjust to a world without Philip in it. Then Hamilton joins in, narrating mundane routine in a way he never has before: "I spend hours in the garden / I walk alone to the store / and it's quiet uptown / I never liked the quiet before."

*For all of its runtime thus far,* Hamilton *has operated on the scale of national history. Here, the show slows down to capture Hamilton's daily life in all its mundane routine. After all, why does the future matter if the present is so unbearable? How can anyone find the language or the concepts to get through such grief? If ambition is driven by a sense of mortality, what happens when the person who dies is not oneself but one's beloved son?*

Hamilton also apologizes to Eliza, expressing that if he could trade his life for Philip's, he would. The song ends when Eliza takes Hamilton's hand. "Forgiveness," the company sings, and as the lights go down, the ensemble reminds the audience that "they are going through the unimaginable."

*Compromise and patience have been essential values throughout all of the political dealings in the show. Now, in a beautiful moment, "forgiveness" becomes the bedrock of marriage as well: Hamilton and Eliza can only get through the "unimaginable" if they get through it together, faults and all. And by not filling in the gaps of the "unimaginable," the company reminds us of the personal, intimate pain and joy that history fails to capture.*

## ACT 2: ELECTION OF 1800

Sometime later, Hamilton must choose between voting for Jefferson or Burr in the 1800 presidential election. The song begins when Jefferson asks, "can we get back to politics?" Realizing that some people see Jefferson as too "extreme," Madison convinces his friend to seek Hamilton's endorsement. Meanwhile, Burr openly campaigns for himself, a first in American history. "Talk less," he sings with forced enthusiasm, echoing his old refrain, "smile more / don't let 'em know what you're against or what you're for."

*The difference between history and daily life is then mirrored in a tonal shift: after the slow sincerity of "It's Quiet Uptown," Jefferson is funny and abrasive about getting back to "politics." Just like Hamilton, Jefferson's passion and ambition can come across as extremism. But Burr's only passion is for power, as evidenced in his refusal to let people know what he stands for—even as he campaigns.*

Voters like Burr, gravitating toward him because he seems "like you could grab a beer with him!" But people are still on the fence, and Hamilton become the deciding vote. Though he does not like either candidate, he ultimately chooses Jefferson—"when all is said and all is done," Hamilton reasons, "Jefferson has beliefs. Burr has none." Jefferson wins the election and sidelines Burr, who is left seething.

*The so-called "beer test" arose with President George W. Bush, when voters opined that the president, regardless of his stances or achievements, seemed like he would be fun to hang out with. Burr's desire to be a part of history, talking less and smiling more, now leaves him without any honor or allies. Meanwhile, despite their constant sparring, Jefferson and Hamilton are able to put aside their differences and work together to defeat the unprincipled Burr.*

## ACT 2: YOUR OBEDIENT SERVANT

Burr looks back on his life and realizes that every time he has failed, Hamilton is to blame. Singing that he wants to "be in the room where it happens," Burr challenges him to a duel. Hamilton replies with "an itemized list of 30 years of disagreements," ratcheting the tension up even further. When Hamilton refuses to apologize, Burr names a time and place for their duel: "Weehawken. Dawn." The history-making duel is now underway.

*Many moments in the show have highlighted forgiveness: Eliza taking Hamilton's hand, Hamilton's national bank compromise with Jefferson and Madison, Washington's acceptance of his own mistakes. But in "Your Obedient Servant," neither Hamilton nor Burr can compromise—and so they resort to violence instead. The somewhat ridiculous framing of this song—in which each of the men writes letters back and forth, signing them "your obedient servant"—reveals the fallacies of honor culture.*

## ACT 2: BEST OF WIVES AND BEST OF WOMEN

Eliza wakes up late at night to find Hamilton writing. She asks him to come back to bed ("that would be enough"), but he continues to write. Before Eliza leaves, though, Hamilton catches her by the hand: "hey," he sings, "best of wives and best of women."

*Hamilton really did describe Eliza as the "best of wives and best of women." So even though Eliza has stopped trying to cement her own place in history, her husband's place is starting to be defined by her goodness and loyalty.*

## ACT 2: THE WORLD WAS WIDE ENOUGH

As they search for a spot for their duel, Burr and Hamilton cross the water to New Jersey; they are near the spot where Philip was **shot** and killed. Burr points out that Hamilton was wearing his glasses at the duel—"why," he argues, "if not to take deadly aim? / It's him or me, the world will never be the same." Meanwhile, Hamilton slips into a reverie, reflecting that he has spent his entire life thinking about death. He also reflects on the idea of legacy: "it's planting seeds in a garden you never get to see / America, you great unfinished symphony."

*The duel is obviously a conflict between two men, but it is also a conflict between two versions of history. In Hamilton's version, similar to the one we read in history textbooks today, the duel represents a tragedy—a great founder's life cut short, ensuring that he will "never get to see" the brand-new country he helped to create. But Burr tries to shift the audience's lens, emphasizing that Hamilton was wearing his glasses. In Burr's mind, Hamilton is the villain and the murderer; his only job now is to persuade the rest of the people in the theater to see it his way.*

Hamilton thinks, finally, of Eliza, and he looks forward to seeing her in the afterlife. Then he points his gun at the sky, while Burr takes his **shot**, striking Hamilton in the ribs and killing him. To the tune of "Wait for It," Burr reflects that he will forever be punished by history for his role in the duel.

*By directing Hamilton's last thought to Eliza, Miranda cements her as "part of the narrative." Even more heartbreakingly, Hamilton throws away his shot—the very thing he vowed never to do in "My Shot." Perhaps he is following his own advice to Philip, given much earlier in the show: "to take someone's life, that is something you can't shake."*

## ACT 2: WHO LIVES, WHO DIES, WHO TELLS YOUR STORY

The company gathers to commemorate Hamilton one final time. Jefferson and Madison begrudgingly admit that his financial plans were genius (despite all the time they spent trying to undo them). Angelica points out that "every other Founding Father's story gets told / every other Founding Father gets to grow old."

*Jefferson and Madison's posthumous tributes to Hamilton are one final form of democratic forgiveness in action. And more than just rhyming, Angelica's connection of age ("gets to grow old") and legacy ("story gets told") reflects Washington's earlier point: those who survive get to determine how history is remembered. By dying first, Hamilton also loses "control" over his legacy.*

And then Eliza enters: "I put myself back in the narrative," she explains, listing all the things she has done for Hamilton but still regretting that "it's not enough." She fundraises for the Washington monument, publicly denounces slavery, and she starts an orphanage.

*Eliza has always fretted that she will not be "enough" for Hamilton; in some ways, the fact that this anxiety carries through to the finale is one of the saddest elements of the show. Yet even as she worries, Eliza continues Hamilton's legacy exactly as he would have wanted: fighting for abolition, protecting the most vulnerable populations, and honoring George Washington, Hamilton's father figure.*

But through it all, Eliza cannot wait to see Hamilton again in the afterlife—"it's only a matter of time," she explains. One last time, the company sings "who lives, who dies, who tells your story," and the lights go dark.

*Hamilton was always worried that he was "running out of time." Now, Eliza celebrates the passage of "time," as it will reunite her with her husband. As the company repeats this central refrain, it takes on new meaning. Hamilton has "died," but Eliza has "lived" to tell his story—and now, because of her, all of us can hear it.*

## HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

### MLA

Sabel, Francesca. "*Hamilton*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 12 Aug 2022. Web. 12 Aug 2022.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

Sabel, Francesca. "*Hamilton*." LitCharts LLC, August 12, 2022. Retrieved August 12, 2022. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hamilton.

To cite any of the quotes from *Hamilton* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

### MLA

McCarter, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Jeremy. Hamilton. Grand Central Publishing. 2016.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

McCarter, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Jeremy. Hamilton. New York: Grand Central Publishing. 2016.