

To be or not to be

Topic

The 'To be or not to be...' speech from Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*

Learning outcomes

- Develop ability to read Shakespeare's language
- Develop literary vocabulary, giving opportunities to use new words in spoken and written form
- Respond to a well-known play and speech

Age group and level

Adult B2

Time

80 minutes. This can be done over 2 or more lessons as part of a project.

Materials

- Student worksheet – 1 for each student
- Presentation- This can replace the student worksheet
- Speech jigsaw activity -Divided into 3 parts equally across the class
- Access to the Internet or materials for making a poster

Introduction

This lesson is about Hamlet's 'To be or not to be' speech. It provides students with the opportunity to become familiar with the situations and events in the play, and then look at parts of the speech in detail. Students discuss Hamlet's feelings and situation and then write about them for homework in the form of a blog posting or entry on a social media site.

This lesson looks at a complex section of speech, with a lot of possibly unfamiliar vocabulary and ideas. The activities of the lesson will help students to become more familiar with this well-known and culturally

significant extract. Reassure students that many native speakers would find this speech challenging, but that they will have a glossary to help.

Procedure

<p>1. Warmer – A happy life (5 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This task asks students to consider what makes a happy life. (They will later discover that Hamlet is in many ways fortunate, yet views much of his life negatively.) • Display slide 2 and ask learners to work in pairs to discuss the six suggestions... Set a 2 minute time limit. Talk about the most important things for you, if students need an example. • Feedback with the whole class. • Extension: students who finish quickly could discuss if there are any other aspects which are also important.
<p>2. Introducing Hamlet (10 minutes)</p>	<p>This task introduces learners to Hamlet and events in the play, providing a context for the speech.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display Slide 3. Elicit possible connections between the pictures. <p>Note: Some students may have heard of the play and/or the character. Elicit or explain that he is one of Shakespeare’s most famous characters. Possibly elicit the line ‘To be or not to be’, part of a speech in which he considers ending his life.</p> <p>Answer: Shakespeare (left) wrote a play set in Denmark (centre) about a man called Hamlet (right).</p>
<p>3. Adjectives (10 minutes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display slide 4. Ask students to work in pairs to select adjectives from the eight possible. <p>Take feedback with the whole class. You could refer back to the warmer and discuss the positive aspects of Hamlet’s life which, due to his personality, he doesn’t always value.</p> <p>Suggested answers: youthful, morbid, prosperous (clue: clothes), depressed (clue: skull)</p>

4. Features of Hamlet (10 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display Slide 5. Ask students to work in pairs, using the illustration to decide what might feature in the play. • Take feedback. <p>Answers: All feature, except ‘many jokes’ and ‘a happy ending’.</p>										
5. Information gap (15 minutes)	<p>This task allows students to become more familiar with events in the play, providing further context for the speech.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divide the class into three groups, 1, 2, and 3. Give each member of each group the relevant part of the jigsaw reading. • Ask students to read their paragraph individually and choose the three short sentences linked to it. • Check answers as a whole group. <p>Answers: 1: c 2: a 3: b</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display slide 6. Each group tries to find 3 answers together • Ask students to now form new groups containing someone from groups 1 and 2 and 3. • They share their answers, so they have the answers to all of the gaps. • Elicit the answers and share slide 7. <p>Answers:</p> <table data-bbox="399 1388 1356 1635"> <tr> <td>1. Prince</td> <td>6. Ophelia</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2. Horatio</td> <td>7. Rosencrantz / Guildenstern</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3. Hamlet’s father, Old Hamlet,</td> <td>8. Norway</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4. Hamlet’s mother, Gertrude,</td> <td>9. Castle</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5. his uncle, Claudius,</td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p>Note: Suggested end of lesson 1</p>	1. Prince	6. Ophelia	2. Horatio	7. Rosencrantz / Guildenstern	3. Hamlet’s father, Old Hamlet,	8. Norway	4. Hamlet’s mother, Gertrude,	9. Castle	5. his uncle, Claudius,	
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10. Shakespeare’s language (10 minutes) OPTIONAL	<p>Note: This task is optional. If you feel that students have already spent long enough on Task 3, you may prefer to skip this task, or set it as homework for motivated students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners stay in their groups. Give out worksheet 1. Learners match all the sentences, working together. 										

- Feedback to whole class.

Answers:

Extract 1. a-ii b-iii c-i

Extract 2. d-vi e-iv f-v

Extract 3. g-ix h-viii i-vii

**11. Summarising
Hamlet's
problems (10-
15 minutes)**

This task allows students to use the new vocabulary in spoken form and review the themes and ideas of the play.

Tip: You could at this point play a recording of an actor performing the speech.

Explain that Hamlet is alone on stage talking honestly about his feelings. He is a student interested in philosophy, and also has a pessimistic view about life. At this time in the play, he is thinking aloud about the possibility of ending his life.

Suggested video: <https://youtu.be/q6CLdCI9TB0?si=o3ELq0KOzMLqjLa> (3.53 min)

- Elicit from learners that Hamlet is a pessimist, so he focuses on the negatives and not the positives of his life.
- Ask students in pairs to make a list of Hamlet's perceived problems.. Remind students to look back at the 'Hamlet's life' paragraphs and include information about Family, Friends and Social Status.
- Set a time limit and monitor pairs, encouraging them to view all situations with Hamlet's pessimistic outlook!
- Take class feedback. If time allows, you could discuss what Hamlet might do next.

Note: Be aware that for some students, the idea of suicide may be a sensitive subject for discussion.

Suggested answers (accept any relevant answers): His father has been killed, his mother has married his uncle who he believes killed his father; Norway may start a war with Denmark;

- As an alternative ask learners to identify some positives he could focus on.

Suggested answers (accept any relevant answers): He's a prince; he lives in a castle; he has a good friend; he's at university; his mother is still alive

Writing (15 minutes)	<p>You could ask students to complete this task as homework or do it in class, and write either by hand or on computers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a class Padlet (https://padlet.com/). Title it 'Hamlet's diary.' <p>Tip: If you don't have access to technology learners could create a poster</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell learners that Hamlet keeps a secret diary. They have to imagine they are Hamlet. • Ask learners to work, individually or in pairs, to create diary entries for Hamlet. • Remind students to try to use Hamlet's language where possible and you refer to the information they have about him for ideas. Display slide 8 to show useful names and vocabulary they could use. • Monitor and support as needed.
Extension (25 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the completed Padlet or poster. • Ask learners to present their posts
Using Padlet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Padlet is an online notice board. This video gives a tutorial about setting up a free account and making a Padlet: https://youtu.be/x9IQVofS43I?si=-R0gcvm0D-4RzHGb • Share the Padlet link with your learners and give them a brief explanation of how to add a post. This video gives useful tips: https://youtu.be/tGFc6AQycSs?si=QUhgHcdW52QqSRKY • As you can add direct text, files, images, audio and record a video Padlet aids accessibility in the classroom.

Edited by Suzanne Mordue