

## Ready, Steady – Tragedy!

### Topic

Shakespeare's tragedies

### Learning outcomes

- Practice reading for specific information
- Build knowledge of lexis related to tragedy
- Develop awareness of the features of Shakespearean tragedy

### Age group and level

Aged 13-17 and Adult C1

### Time

60 - 80 minutes. This could be done over 2 lessons

### Materials

- Lesson plan
- Presentation – This can replace Worksheet 1, the image, Appendix 2 and Appendix 3
- Worksheet 1 – Lead in
- Tragedy ingredients: 1 per 4 students (Appendix 2)
- Worksheet 2 - Tragedy plot summaries (1 plot per group)
- Talking about tragedies (Appendix 3)
- Image of Othello (1 large copy or 1 per group of learners)

### Introduction

This lesson encourages an exploration of how the meaning of the word 'tragedy' has evolved since Shakespeare's time. It provides students with an introduction to the features of Shakespearean tragedy, as awareness of these features will enhance students' appreciation of Shakespeare's own tragic plays.

**Procedure**

<b>1. Warmer: (5 minutes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write the following headline on the board: BOAT TRAGEDY KILLS TEN and ask students to speculate about what they think the story behind the headline might be.</li> <li>Use questions to elicit a response, e.g. What happened to the boat? What might have caused this? Who will be blamed?</li> <li>Display <b>slide 2</b> or write the following headlines on the board:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>JORDAN'S TRAGIC LOVE SPLIT LEAVES STAR HEARTBROKEN</li> <li>SCHOOL CLOSURE 'TRAGEDY' FOR LOCAL KIDS SAYS HEAD</li> <li>GWYN'S RED CARPET LOOK 'FASHION TRAGEDY'</li> </ol> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask students to discuss the possible stories behind them.</li> <li>Nominate students to report back on one of the stories</li> <li>Elicit which word all of the newspaper headlines have in common (tragic/tragedy). Ask students to provide a definition of the word 'tragedy'. (They will probably say something like: 'It's when something sad and terrible happens.')</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Oxford dictionary definition:</b> a very sad event or situation, especially one that involves death</p>
<b>2. Task 1 – Features of a tragedy (5 minutes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain that Shakespearean tragedy has very specific ingredients: this lesson will focus on these ingredients.</li> <li>Display <b>slide 3</b> or show learners the Othello image. Tell students that this picture is from a scene in Shakespeare's tragedy Othello*, and that the illustration shows Othello in the tragedy's climax.</li> <li>Ask students to predict what is going to happen (Othello is going to kill his wife).</li> <li>Ask students to look at the list (on <b>slide 3</b> and worksheet 1) and select the features of a tragedy</li> <li>Allow students to check their answers with a partner before conducting whole class feedback.</li> </ul> <p><b>Suggested answers:</b> a, c, e, f</p> <p><b>*Note:</b> See <b>Appendix 1</b> for a synopsis of Othello</p>

<p><b>3. Task 2 – Reading: recipe for a Shakespearean tragedy (10 minutes)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell students that they are going to find out more about the features of a tragedy.</li> <li>• Give out worksheet 1 and focus learners' attention on questions a, b and c.</li> <li>• Next, read the text aloud to your students.</li> <li>• Give students a minute to answer the question. Conduct whole class feedback.</li> </ul> <p><b>Answers:</b> a. a recipe; b. Begin by choosing, for best results choose, add a, stir in well, sprinkle in, beat, mix in, nice, sweet dessert; c. It is written for a general audience but would probably be of interest to playwrights or students of literature.</p>
<p><b>4. Task 3 – Check your understanding (10 minutes)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Display <b>slide 4</b> or write the following questions on the board:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Elizabethan tragic heroes are often from poor families.</li> <li>b) The best tragic heroes are totally wicked.</li> <li>c) Many tragic heroes get into trouble because of their pride.</li> <li>d) Tragic heroes need to experience a change in luck.</li> <li>e) For a hero to be truly tragic he needs to see what he has done wrong.</li> <li>f) The audience should feel totally depressed at the end of a tragedy.</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Learners work in pairs and decide if the sentences are true or false.</li> <li>• After a few minutes elicit answers from the whole group. Encourage students to correct the false answers.</li> </ul> <p><b>Answers:</b> a. false b. false c. true d. true e. false f. false</p>
<p><b>5. Task 4 – Defining words (10 minutes)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Display <b>slide 5</b> or dictate the following:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a. pride</li> <li>• b. terrible pain and suffering</li> <li>• c. coming from the top level of society (e.g. prince, duchess, etc.)</li> <li>• d. knowledge about yourself and who you are on the inside.</li> <li>• e. a change in luck</li> <li>• f. something bad about your personality which will result in your downfall.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Students match the words in bold in the text with these definitions.</li> <li>• Check answers orally, focusing on the pronunciation of new vocabulary. E.g.: hubris /'hju:brɪs/; anguish /'æŋɡwɪʃ/; flaw /flɔ: /</li> </ul>

	<p><b>Answers:</b> a. hubris b. anguish c. of noble birth d. self-awareness e. reversal of fortune f. fatal character flaw</p> <p>Proposed end of lesson 1</p>
<p><b>6. Task 5 – Ready, steady – tragedy! (20 minutes)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask students to think back to the very beginning of the lesson. Did the newspaper headline stories they saw contain any of the features of Shakespearean tragedy?</li> </ul> <p><b>Suggested answers:</b> No, the headlines didn't really contain any of the ingredients of a Shakespearean tragedy because they merely focused on things which were sad and unfortunate. Also, none of the people involved in these situations were of noble birth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell students that they are going to make their very own tragedy. Their task will be to create an Elizabethan tragedy with limited time and 'ingredients'.</li> <li>• Organise your class into groups of three or four.</li> <li>• Display <b>slide 6</b> or put the table on the board (<b>Appendix 2</b>) and ask learners to copy it into their notebooks. You could also give each group a copy of the Appendix.</li> <li>• The groups have 10 minutes to create an Elizabethan tragedy using their ingredients. Monitor and remind learners of the features of Elizabethan tragedy where necessary.</li> </ul>
<p><b>7. Task 6 – Talking about tragedies (20 minutes)</b> EXTENSION</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell students that they are going to learn about two Shakespearean tragedies. Give out Worksheet 2. Explain that Thomas Kyd and John Webster were both playwrights who lived and wrote in Shakespeare's time.</li> <li>• Students read the tragedy, complete the table and answer the questions about their tragedy. Monitor, helping out with new lexis where necessary.</li> <li>• Allow students the opportunity to practise retelling their tragedy to a partner.</li> <li>• Organise students into pairs where they are working with a student with a different tragedy.</li> </ul> <p>Students recount their tragedy to their new partner from memory. Encourage partners to ask questions.</p>

Conduct class feedback and be prepared to 'feed' students the information needed to complete the tables. Discuss what features of tragedy each play contains.

Answers are on **Appendix 4** and **slides 8 and 9**.

Edited by Suzanne Mordue

### Appendix 1 - Othello

Othello Othello is a general in the Venetian army. He falls in love with and marries a woman called Desdemona. Iago is an ensign, who hates Othello for not promoting him. He decides to get revenge on Othello by telling him that his wife is cheating on him with another man. He does this very cunningly, and over the course of the tragedy slowly drives Othello mad with jealousy.

### Appendix 2 - Tragedy ingredients

a prison	a castle	a lake	a church
a young prince	a king	a queen	a princess
pride	ambition	love	indecisiveness
a handkerchief	a letter	a knife	a sword
a ghost	a battle	a bed	a pillow
a graveyard	a chemist	a boat	a soldier

### Appendix 3 –Talking about tragedies

Complete the table:

Name of character				
Good, bad or neither?				
Role in story				
Most dramatic moment?				

Now answer the questions:

- Is there a tragic hero?
- Does anyone die?
- Which 'ingredients of a tragedy' can you identify?
- Does anything positive happen at the end of the tragedy?

## Appendix 4

**The Duchess of Malfi**

Name of character	<i>The Duchess of Malfi</i>	<i>Duke Ferdinand</i>	<i>Antonio</i>	<i>Bosola</i>
Good, bad or neither?	<i>Good: she shows great courage in dealing with her cruel brother</i>	<i>Evil and cruel</i>	<i>Good and honest, but quite passive and weak when compared to the strong Duchess</i>	<i>Evil (although at the end of the play he does show that he is sorry for all he has done)</i>
Role in story	<i>Her decision to marry Antonio results in the destruction of her entire family (including herself)</i>	<i>His growing anger over the Duchess's actions move the story forward</i>	<i>He is the man the Duchess loves and the reason behind the play's action</i>	<i>He is the Duke's tool: the Duke uses him to spy on (and eventually kill) the Duchess</i>
Most dramatic moment?	<i>Her decision to marry Antonio and the moment when she reveals her love for Antonio to Bosola</i>	<i>Arriving at his sister's house and demanding she kill herself</i>	<i>Being sent to Milan</i>	<i>Killing the Duchess</i>

- Possibly the Duchess is the tragic hero here, but it isn't clear from the summary what her flaw is.
- Yes, the main characters all die.
- Noble birth, suffering and anguish, reversal of fortune (the Duke finding out about the baby)
- Yes, there is hope for the future (Antonio's son).

**Spanish tragedy**

Name of character	<i>Don Andrea</i>	<i>Prince Balthazar</i>	<i>Bel-Imperia</i>	<i>Horatio's father</i>
Good, bad or neither?	<i>Neither: he is simply portrayed as a man who needs to get revenge</i>	<i>Not totally bad: he does evil things (such as killing Horatio), but his love for Bel-Imperia seems real</i>	<i>Neither: she is a strong woman who is not frightened to make her own decisions</i>	<i>He is initially good, but his son's death pushes him into violence and madness</i>
Role in story	<i>Don Andrea's call for revenge is the first in this play about revenge: he starts the play's action</i>	<i>Don Andrea wants revenge on Prince Balthazar, who kills Horatio. This leads to Horatio's father's revenge.</i>	<i>Balthazar's love for her causes him to murder Horatio</i>	<i>His son's murder causes him to plan the play's violent finale</i>
Most dramatic moment?	<i>At the end of the play he has to judge the other characters</i>	<i>Killing Horatio in a jealous rage</i>	<i>Appearing in her own wedding 'entertainment'</i>	<i>Revealing that the violent events in the play were real</i>

- a. Horatio's father seems to be a tragic hero. His desire for revenge is his fatal flaw.
- b. Yes, all of the main characters die.
- c. Noble birth, suffering and anguish, tragic hero, fatal flaw
- d. No