

Shakespeare and Violence

Task 1: Match quotes 1-5 from Shakespeare's plays with their meanings a-f.

1. 'Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.'
(Macbeth, Act 2, Scene 1)
2. 'Away to heaven, respective lenity,
And fire-eyed fury be my conduct now.'
(Romeo and Juliet, Act 3, Scene 1)
3. 'Bloody thou art, bloody will be thy end.
Shame serves thy life and doth thy death attend.'
(Richard III, Act 4, Scene 4)
4. 'See't shalt thou never. Fellows, hold the chair.
Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot.'
(King Lear, Act 3, Scene 7)
5. 'I kissed thee ere I killed thee: no way but this,
Killing myself, to die upon a kiss.'
(Othello, Act 5, Scene 2)
6. 'Vengeance is in my heart, death in my hand,
Blood and revenge are hammering in my head.'
(Titus Andronicus, Act 2, Scene 3)

Glossary

bloody = covered in blood

conduct = behaviour

doth = does

ere = before

lenity = mildness,
gentleness

shalt = will

thee = you

thine = yours

thy = your

- a. The Duke of Cornwall tells the Earl of Gloucester that he will no longer see, and he prepares to take out his eyes.
- b. The villain of the play can only think of getting revenge on another family.
- c. A duchess predicts a violent future and a shameful death for her son, a violent man.
- d. A general imagines a weapon which is pointing towards him. He plans to murder a king.
- e. A general has just murdered his loyal wife and is preparing to kill himself.
- f. The character will no longer be reasonable and rational after the murder of his friend, Mercutio. From now on, he will act with anger and fight.

Task 2: Listen to Beth and Alexander talking about violence in Shakespeare's plays. Decide if the statements are true or false.

1. Alexander is an actor.
2. Beth likes Shakespeare's plays.
3. Alexander explains the plot of 'Macbeth'.
4. Alexander thinks that 'Macbeth' is Shakespeare's most violent play.
5. 'Titus Andronicus' is a very violent play.
6. Beth would like to see 'Macbeth'.

Task 3: Listen to Beth and Alexander's conversation again. Answer the questions.

1. Which character is Alexander going to play?
2. Why does Alexander's character want to murder King Duncan?
3. Match the type of violence with the play as mentioned in the conversation:

'Romeo and Juliet'	assassination
'Titus Andronicus'	death in combat
'Macbeth'	cannibalism
'Richard III'	suicide
4. Give an example of a violent incident from one of the plays mentioned.

Task 4: Read these extracts from the conversation. What do the phrases in bold mean?

Extract 1

Beth: Hi, Alexander. **What've you been up to lately?**

Alexander: I've been really busy with work, actually.

Extract 2

Alexander: Yeah, I'm Macbeth.

Beth: Congratulations!

Alexander: Thanks. It's a part to **get your teeth into**, that's for sure!

Extract 3

Alexander: Really? Didn't you study any Shakespeare at school?

Beth: I only remember 'Romeo and Juliet', but **it was never my thing**.

Extract 4

Beth: So, what's 'Macbeth' about then?

Alexander: Well, **in a nutshell**, Macbeth's about how he and Lady Macbeth use violence to satisfy their ambition.

Extract 5

Beth: The story sounds interesting, but I'm not sure I like the idea of all that **blood and gore**.

Extract 6

Alexander: I think Shakespeare's plays are so interesting though, Beth, because he focuses more on the psychological issues than the violence itself.

Beth: **Let me be the judge of that!**

Task 5: Discuss these questions.

1. Do you ever watch films or read books that contain violence? Why (not)?
2. Why do you think violence on screen or in literature is often popular?
3. Do you think violence on screen or violence in literature is dangerous? Why (not)?
4. At what do you think people should be allowed to see violence on screen or in literature?