

Hamlet's soliloquy

Topic

Hamlet

Learning outcomes

- Learn more about Hamlet and his soliloquy
- Practise speaking through pair and group discussion
- Practise giving advice

Age group and level

Adult B1+

Time

80 minutes + extension. (This could be done over more than one lesson)

Materials

Appendix 1 cut ups – 1 per group

Worksheet 1 – 1 per group

Worksheet 2 – 1 per pair

Worksheet 3 – 1 per learner (if extension needed)

Presentation – This can replace worksheet 2 and the cut ups

Introduction

This lesson looks at a very well-known Shakespeare text, Hamlet's soliloquy, which begins 'To be or not to be'. Its main objectives are for learners to enjoy working with a

Shakespearean text (which can be very motivating) and improve their confidence with language which is at first glance beyond them. It does this by identifying common and relevant themes, and inviting learners to comment on what is going on in the mind of the character, Hamlet.

Procedure

<p>1. Lead-in (10 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To introduce the lesson, ask students if they are familiar with any quotations from Shakespeare. You will probably hear ‘to be or not to be’, at the very least. Write this on the board. You can also display slide 1. Then ask learners to discuss the following questions. Monitor closely for any potentially sensitive discussions. Ask for feedback from the open group but again be sensitive to what learners say. These questions are also on slide 2. Tell learners: Think about the last few days: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —What successes have you had? Can you name three? Share them. —Now think about the things that were not successful for you, the things that made you angry, frustrated, sad. Can you name three? Share them.
<p>2. Pre-reading (10 minutes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read the following introduction to the text. If your class is familiar with the play, elicit some of Hamlet’s problems from them first. This text is on slide 3. “Hamlet has some serious problems. His father has been murdered. His mother has married the man who murdered his father. The girl he was going to marry has drowned. His father’s ghost visits him every night. He must take revenge, but he cannot act – something stops him. As he thinks about the situation, he asks himself many questions. The first: “To be, or not to be: that is the question.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask learners: What do you think he means? What is ‘not to be’? <p>Answer: (In simple terms – no one has really agreed on a definite answer)</p> <p>Hamlet is asking ‘shall I continue living or shall I kill myself?’</p>
<p>3. Reading (10 minutes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put learners into small groups and give each group a set of the cut ups from Appendix 1. Or you could display slide 4. Explain these are more of Hamlet’s thoughts in modern language.

	<p>Note: Be aware that suicide could be a sensitive topic for some students. So, if a student is being particularly quiet don't force them to be more vocal during this activity.</p> <p>Give Worksheet 1 to each group Ask learners to match the cut ups (or text on the slide) with the sections of the worksheet. Emphasise the objective of the exercise and avoid discussing vocabulary problems at this stage.</p> <p>Answers: a-1; b-2; c-4; d-3; e-5</p>
<p>4. Vocabulary (10- 15 minutes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put learners into pairs and give out worksheet 2. Or display slide 5. Elicit ideas from the whole class for modern interpretations of 'the oppressor's wrong' <p>Answer: Examples of 'the oppressor's wrong' in modern life would be police brutality and corporate greed. It can be applied to many situations where power is abused, or individuals are mistreated by those in authority.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask learners to match the modern meanings in the table with Hamlet's descriptions. <p>Answers: 1 – B; 2 – A; 3 – C; 4 – E; , 5 – F; 6 – D</p>
<p>5. Pair discussion (10 minutes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners remain in pairs Ask learners to share any experiences they can relate to Hamlet's descriptions, such as unrequited love. Ask a few learners to share what they learnt from their partner. Make sure they don't share anything that would embarrass their partner.
<p>6. Group discussion (15 minutes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask learners to look at Worksheet 1 again. Explain or elicit from the whole group that Hamlet is hesitant and doesn't know what to do Ask pairs to tell their partner about a time they didn't know what to do; a time when they had to do something but couldn't? They should explain to their partner why they stopped themselves. Put two pairs together to make a group. They share what they've learnt from their partner and give each other tips.

- Ask a few groups to share one anecdote a partner told them.
- Ask the groups to discuss the following questions: Why does Hamlet hesitate so much? Why can't he act?
- Monitor and be ready to clarify doubts as to the meaning of "hesitate".

Tip: All answers are subjective here, but you could prompt students for the question about why Hamlet hesitates, e.g. is he afraid, tired, confused? Remember the main ideas here are that he is debating whether to tolerate his problems or fight against them, considering the fear of death or what comes after it.

Useful vocabulary:

Quietus – death,

Take arms – fight,

Bodkin – knife

7. Writing (10 minutes)

- Learners work in pairs to write advice they could give to Hamlet
- You could direct them toward these three questions. These are on **slide 6**.
 1. Is it better to 'to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?'
 2. Is it better to 'quietus make
With a bare bodkin?' than to 'bear the whips and scorns of time'?
 3. Is it right to feel 'The dread of something after death'?

Tip: Encourage them to use structures such as 'You should' and 'If I were you' but don't over-emphasise this, as it is not the focus of the task. There are some useful sentence starters on **slide 7**. This is a chance for learners to practice giving advice and opinions but in a controlled form. You could display their work with the original text.

- Get feedback from some of the pairs and try to get a consensus for the best advice
- Finally, ask 'Do you think Hamlet gets over this crisis? What does he do next?'

8. Extension (15 minutes)
OPTIONAL

- If your learners are familiar with Hamlet you could ask them to complete Worksheet 3 in pairs.

Alternative using slides

Display **slide 8** and ask learners to make notes about the characters.

Display **slide 9** and elicit a few answers before asking learners to complete the sentences in pairs.

Answers:

1. **Hamlet** kills several other people but not **Claudius**, the man who killed his father.
2. In turn, **Claudius** tries to kill him several times but he is not successful
3. **Claudius** tries to kill **Hamlet** one last time by arranging a sword duel between him and **Laertes**.
4. There is a trap for **Hamlet**: the tip of **Laertes'** sword is poisoned.
5. **Claudius** also poisons the victory cup in case **Hamlet** wins.
6. The poisoned drink is offered to **Hamlet** but he turns it down, and instead **Gertrude** drinks it.

Contributed by

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Appendix 1 – cut ups ✂

A But what is there after death? This is a difficult question and maybe there are more problems afterwards! So we prefer to tolerate the problems we have now.

B Who wants to fight against so many problems? We could find peace by killing ourselves.

C This is one great way of avoiding these problems – then we can sleep.

D Is it better to tolerate problems and difficulties, or to fight them?

E But there is another problem: if we die, we sleep, and if we sleep, we might dream. But what kind of dreams would we have?

Appendix 2 – Hamlet's soliloquy

To be or not to be--that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And, by opposing, end them. To die, to sleep--
No more--and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to--'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep--
To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause. There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life.
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of th' unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country from whose bourn

No traveler returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action.