

**Topic:** Shakespeare

**Level:** B2 / C1

**Time:** 70 minutes

### Aims

- To develop students' ability to read for information
- To build students' knowledge of lexis related to tragedy
- To develop students' awareness of the features of Shakespearean tragedy

### 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.

### Preparation

You will need:

Tragedy ingredient grids: 1 grid per 4 students.

Tragedy plot summaries: 1 sheet (cut into two halves) per pair of students.

### Procedure

#### Warmer – 'Tragedy' headlines: the meaning of tragic (5 mins)

- 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. Use questions to elicit a response, e.g. *What happened to the boat? What might have caused this? Who will be blamed?*
- Distribute the worksheets and focus students' attentions on the headlines. Ask students to discuss the possible stories behind them. Nominate students to report back on one of their stories.
- 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.')
- Focus students' attention on the question on the worksheet: *What is the meaning of the word 'tragedy'?* Point out that many of the plays Shakespeare wrote were called tragedies and elicit some names from your class, e.g. *Othello, Hamlet, Macbeth*, etc.

**Task 1 – Features of a tragedy (5 mins)**

Explain that Shakespearean tragedy has very specific ingredients: this lesson will focus on these ingredients.

- Focus students' attention on the illustration. 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. Ask students to predict what is going to happen (Othello is going to kill his wife).
- Ask students to predict the features of a tragedy by ticking the items on the list.
- Allow students to check their answers with a partner before conducting whole class feedback.

*Suggested answers: a, c, e, f*

**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.

**Task 2 – Reading: recipe for a Shakespearean tragedy (10 mins)**

- Tell students that they are going to find out more about the features of a tragedy.
- Focus students' attention on the question.
- Next, read the text aloud to your students.
- Give students a minute to answer the question. Conduct whole class feedback.

*Answers: 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.*

**Task 3 – Check your understanding (10 mins)**

- Focus students' attention on the sentences.
- Ask students to read the text again and decide if the sentences are true or false.
- Check answers around the class. Encourage students to correct the false answers.

*Answers: a. false b. false c. true d. true e. false f. false*

**Task 4 – Defining words (10 mins)**

- Students match the words in bold in the text with the definitions.
- Check answers orally, focusing on the pronunciation of new vocabulary.

*Answers: a. hubris b. anguish c. of noble birth d. self-awareness e. reversal of fortune f. fatal character flaw*

**Task 5 – Ready, steady – tragedy! (15 mins)**

- 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?
- Tell students that they are going to make their very own tragedy. Briefly describe the format of the TV show *Ready Steady Cook*, in which contestants have to make delicious meals in a short time with limited ingredients. Your students' task will be to create an Elizabethan tragedy with limited time and ingredients.
- Organise your class into groups of three or four. Give each group an ingredients grid and tell them to quickly choose four ingredients. The groups have five minutes to create an Elizabethan tragedy using their ingredients. Circulate as your students complete this task, reminding them of the features of Elizabethan tragedy where necessary.

*Suggested answers: 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.*

**Ready Steady Cook!**

*Ready Steady Cook* was a popular television game show in which two celebrity chefs competed against each other to see who could cook the most delicious meal with a limited number of ingredients. The chefs were provided with basic ingredients (such as milk, flour, eggs, etc.) and were also supplied with a bag of ingredients from members of the public. The ingredients provided by the public often included items to challenge the chefs, such as unusual types of fish and exotic fruit and vegetables.

**Task 6 – Talking about tragedies (15 mins)**

- Tell students that they are going to learn about two Shakespearean tragedies. Explain that Thomas Kyd and John Webster were both playwrights who lived and wrote in Shakespeare's time.
- Organise students into groups who have been given the same tragedy to read.
- Students read the tragedy, complete the table and answer the questions about their tragedy. Circulate, helping out with new lexis where necessary.
- Allow students the opportunity to practise retelling their tragedy to a partner.
- Organise students into pairs where they are working with a student with a different tragedy.
- Students recount their tragedy and ask and answer questions about this tragedy.
- 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:

### 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>

### *The Duchess of Malfi*

- Possibly the Duchess is the tragic hero here, but it is unclear 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>

**The Spanish Tragedy**

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