

Topic: the mystery of Shakespeare's personal life and relations with his family

Level: B2

Time: 90 minutes

Aims

- To give practice of comprehensive reading and deducing the meaning of phrases from the context
- To develop students' speaking skills for having a discussion
- To revise and consolidate the usage of verbs 'say', 'tell', 'deny', 'disagree' in reported speech
- To develop students' knowledge about the life of William Shakespeare

Introduction

Students will have the opportunity to find out more about Shakespeare's private life and will role-play the main characters of his family in the discussion stage, **Task 6**.

Preparation

You will need to print enough copies of *Letters to Susanna*, which offers competing accounts of the relationship Shakespeare may have had with his family. For this stage, there are two separate text files with the reading texts A and B. You will need a copy of

Text A for each student in group A, and a copy of **Text B** for each student in group B.

Task 6 – Role play: family heart-to-heart

For this activity you have to cut up a set of three role-play cards **A**, **B** and **C** from the end of this lesson plan. You will need one set of these cards per group of three students.

Suggested homework

Encourage student to do some research in the library or on the internet to find out more information on the ambiguous answers to the questions in Task 3A.

Procedure:

Warmer – Discussing the photos (5 mins)

The aim of this task is to lead students to the topic of the lesson, brainstorm any knowledge they might have about Shakespeare and make them interested to find out more information about him.

- Ask students to look at the pictures in the **Warmer** activity and elicit which famous person these pictures refer to and what they already know about this man.

Suggested answers:

William Shakespeare, a famous English writer, poet and actor from the 16th/17th century. He wrote many comedies, tragedies, histories and sonnets. Among his famous works are: 'Macbeth', 'Hamlet', 'Romeo and Juliet', 'Othello', 'Henry IV', 'Henry VII', 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' and 'Cymbeline', shown in the second picture. Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in England. He was married to Anne Hathaway and they had three children. Anne Hathaway's childhood home is shown in the third picture. The fourth picture shows the recently reconstructed Globe Theatre in London, where Shakespeare worked.

- Pre-teach the meaning of the word 'sonnet' – a type of poem with 14 lines and a regular rhyme.

Task 1 – Pre-reading: speculation about Shakespeare (10 mins)

- Tell students that Shakespeare spent many years away from his family in Stratford. Ask them to discuss any possible reasons for which he might have lived apart from his family.

Suggested answers:

- *He was travelling around Europe and performing his plays on stage in different countries*
- *He had to escape from Stratford to avoid punishment for some criminal offence he committed in his home town*
- *He fell in love with another woman*
- *He wasn't interested in his family.*
- Discuss or elicit the meaning of the words in the box.
- To check students' understanding of these words you can ask the following concept questions:
 - *Does a **playwright** write novels or drama?*
 - *Is it better to be described as a man's **mistress** or his girlfriend? Why?*
 - *Is '**grief**' the same as sadness? When do people experience grief?*
 - *If you're an **absentee**, are you expected to be present in a place or not? Does this word have a positive or negative meaning?*
 - *Do '**desert**' and 'leave' mean the same? What do you actually do to people when you desert them?*
 - *Do people still trust you if you **betray** them?*
- Invite students to suggest how the words might be connected with Shakespeare.

Task 2 – Reading: letters to Susanna

- Divide students into two groups A and B. Give each student in group A a copy of '**Letters to Susanna' Text A**, and each student in group B a copy of '**Letters to Susanna' Text B**.
- Ask them to read their texts once only to find out if their predictions were right.

Answers:

Text A – Shakespeare left for London under the pretext of earning some money for his family. In fact it was only an escape from his paternal responsibilities.

Text B – Shakespeare went to London to earn some money to support his family.

- Get students to read their letters again and complete their texts with the missing words from the box in **Task 1B**.
- Once they've finished, ask them to compare the answers in their groups.

Answers:

Text A

1. *grief* 2. *betray* 3. *desert* 4. *playwright* 5. *absentee* 6. *mistress*

Text B

1. *desert* 2. *playwright* 3. *absentee* 4. *grief* 5. *betray* 6. *mistress*

Task 3 – Reading and speaking: letters to Susanna (15 mins)

- Tell them to read their letters again and find out the answers to the ten questions.

*Answers to **Text A**:*

1. *Susanna's mother, Anne Hathaway, wrote her the letter to tell her how much she understands her sorrow at the rumors about her father. She also wanted to tell her daughter the whole truth about Shakespeare.*
2. *He was devastated by the news of her pregnancy.*
3. *They lived in Stratford.*
4. *William's father, John, was a highly respected citizen in Stratford.*
5. *Shakespeare had three children: Susanna and the twins – Judith and Hamnet.*
6. *He wasn't a dedicated father or husband and moving away to London under the pretext of earning more money for his family was only a good excuse to escape from his home life.*
7. *William Shakespeare became very famous for his drama and poetry writing in London. He also started building a theatre there.*
8. *He wasn't very interested in the life of his family in Stratford and hardly ever visited them. He often sent them money but in his letters he never asked about their life.*
9. *The death of his son Hamnet didn't bring him back to his family.*
10. *The mysterious dark lady of his sonnets was his secret mistress in London.*

*Answers to **Text B**:*

1. *Shakespeare decided to write Susanna this letter to tell her the truth about his life.*
2. *He was over the moon about becoming a father and he couldn't wait to marry Anne Hathaway.*
3. *They lived in Henley Street in Stratford.*
4. *William's father, John, was a highly respected citizen in their town. He was also the owner of a craftsman's shop where he was making and selling leather gloves to aristocratic ladies.*
5. *Shakespeare had three children: Susanna and the twins – Judith and Hamnet.*
6. *At that time Shakespeare worked hard at his father's shop but his family didn't have much money. As he had always been interested in acting and writing, William decided to join a travelling group of actors visiting Stratford and left for London to earn more money for his family.*
7. *He worked as an actor and playwright at the King's Men theatre in London. He wrote many plays and poems as well.*
8. *Shakespeare was very busy with his work in London but he tried to visit his family as much as he could. He often sent letters and money to his wife but she never replied to any of his question about their life in Stratford.*
9. *The news of Hamnet's death completely devastated Shakespeare and after that he wasn't able to visit Stratford any more.*
10. *The dark lady of his sonnets was his wife Anne, the only inspiration of his writing.*
 - Once students have finished answering their questions, ask them to compare the answers with another student who has read the same text.
 - Get students into pairs now so that there is a **student A** and **student B** in each one. Ask them now to compare their answers to the questions in Task 3A by telling each other the answers. Tell them to find similarities and differences between the two stories.

Answers:

Similarities between **Text A** and **Text B**: answers to the questions 1, 3, 4, 5 and 7.

Differences between **Text A** and **Text B**: answers to the questions 2, 6, 8, 9 and 10.

Task 4A– Vocabulary: idioms (10 mins)

- Focus students' attention on the idioms (1-7).
- Ask them to discuss in pairs the meaning of these phrases in their **Texts A** and **B**.
- Tell students to match the phrases (1 – 7) with their definitions (a – g).

Answers:

1.e 2.g 3.a 4.f 5.b 6.c 7.d

Task 4B – Vocabulary: idioms (5 mins)

- Ask students to complete the sentences 1-7 with the correct phrase from **Task 4A**. Tell them that they might have to change the form of the verb in some of them.

Answers:

1. *make ends meet* 2. *was over the moon* 3. *foul play* 4. *a golden opportunity*
5. *fell head over heels in love with* 6. *forever and a day* 7. *much ado about nothing*

Task 5 – Grammar: reporting verbs (5 mins)

- Elicit the differences between the verbs:
 - say something to someone; tell someone something*
 - disagree that....; deny that...*
- Focus students' attention on the sentences in **Task 5** which summarize the main discrepancies between Anne's and William's letters. Ask students to work in pairs and complete these sentences with the correct past simple form of the verbs 'say', 'tell', 'disagree' or 'deny'.

Answers:

a) <i>told</i>	b) <i>denied</i>	c) <i>told</i>
d) <i>said</i>	e) <i>disagreed</i>	f) <i>told</i>
g) <i>said</i>	h) <i>told</i>	i) <i>denied</i>

Task 6 – Role play: family heart-to-heart (20 – 30 mins)

- Tell students they're going to prepare a role-play, in which Susanna will meet up with both her parents, Anne and William, to clarify the discrepancies between their letters. Tell them she really wants to reach an agreement in this discussion and to reunite their family.
- Divide students into three groups: **students A**, **students B** and **students C**, and give each student a correct role card from the final page of this lesson plan.

- A. Students A get Susanna's role card.
 - B. Students B are given Anne's role card.
 - C. Students C receive William's role card.
- Ask them to read the task on their cards first and in their groups brainstorm any possible ideas for further questions and answers they might use in the discussion.
 - Once the groups are ready, get students into new groups of three so that there is a **Student A - Susanna**, **Student B - Anne** and **Student C - William** in each.
 - In their new groups students need to act their roles now. Tell them that in reference to their letters Susanna is trying to find out more information about William whereas Anne and William have to answer her questions and provide more details to what they have already written her.
 - Feedback on any errors that occurred during the speaking stage.

Task 6 – Role play: family heart-to-heart

Susanna's role card – Student A

You are Susanna. You have arranged a meeting with both your parents together to discuss their letters further. You're desperate for your family to get back together.

Think about any questions you want to ask them about their letters. Try to find out why your mother and father said different things in their letters, and find out the real truth about your father's life.

Anne's role card – Student B

You are Anne Hathaway. Your daughter Susanna asked you and your husband William to meet together to talk. In your letters to Susanna, you and William said different things about your family. Susanna wants to find to what the truth is. Susanna is very keen to get your family back together, but she is also desperate to find out the truth about her father, William.

Think about any possible questions she might ask you in reference to your letter and the answers you wish to give her. Are there any other secrets you want to reveal to them?

William's role card – Student C

You are William Shakespeare. Your daughter Susanna asked you and your wife Anne to meet up to discuss different versions of the letters she has recently received from you. Susanna is very keen to reunite your family but she is also desperate to find out the truth about her father.

Think about any possible questions she might ask you about your letter and your life and the answers you wish to give her. Are there any other secrets you want to reveal to them?