

Much Ado about Nothing Lesson Plan

Aims

- To make Shakespeare accessible, relevant and enjoyable for EFL students.
- To create cross-curricular links e.g. geography (organising a trip to Stratford-Upon-Avon) and history (research into life in Elizabethan England).

Level:

Upper-Intermediate to Advanced

Introduction

This lesson plan follows on from the article 'Shakespeare for Teens' and it is best exploited as a series of two or three lessons. In these lessons students will learn about Shakespeare the man, Shakespeare the poet and Shakespeare the dramatist. They will discover one of his most famous comedies, 'Much Ado about Nothing', and will have the opportunity to re-enact one of the scenes.

Materials

- Internet computer and access for all students
- Copies of Much Ado About Nothing (also available on-line)
- Copies of Worksheets 1,2 and 3 for each student
- Copies of Extracts 1,2 and 3 for each student
- Filming equipment (optional)
- A4 paper and sellotape (for covering computer screens)

Procedure

Tip: Before opening the text and looking at the language it's important for the students to understand the larger picture. Introduce the plot, themes, and main characters first.

The Plot and Themes

The main themes of the play are deception, falling in love, and male and female honour.

- Brainstorm real-life situations where the learners have experienced these
- themes first or second-hand.
- Copy **Worksheet A**, cut up and distribute a set of plot descriptors for groups of 4/5.
- In their groups they should try and put them into a logical order.
- Write up on the board the names of the main characters.
- Elicit from the students the relationship between each of the characters from what they have learnt with the plot descriptors.
- Get each group to present their order of plot descriptors and to explain why they think the different events happen in the order they have chosen.
- When they have all presented the different possible orders you can reveal the correct sequence.

British Council | BBC

Tip: The objective here is not necessarily to have the correct order but to have discovered major events in the play and to consider different possible plot sequences.

Worksheet A – ANSWERS

- 1) Claudio falls in love with Hero.
- 2) Beatrice and Benedick secretly fall in love with each other.
- 3) Don John pretends to make love to Hero.
- 4) Claudio believes Hero has cheated on him.
- 5) Hero is jilted at the altar by Claudio.
- 6) Hero's father pretends that Hero is dead to save her reputation.
- 7) Claudio grieves for Hero.
- 8) Claudio agrees to marry Hero's mystery cousin.
- 9) Hero reveals her true identity.
- 10) Benedick and Beatrice get married.
- 11) Claudio and Hero get married.
- 12) Don John is arrested for being deceptive.

Monologues / Dialogues / Conversations

- Using the previously discussed plot events as a starting block you can now look at the major events in more detail and get to know the characters better. Below are three of the events; a twist in the development of Benedick and Beatrice's complicated relationship, Don John's deception about Hero's fidelity and finally Claudio's discovery that Leonato's niece, the girl he is to marry, is in fact Hero. In this activity the students can read a short monologue or a conversation. Arrange the class into three workshop areas. Everyone should have a copy of the extract their group is working on.
- Explain that they are going to look at some extracts from the play but that they are not expected to understand every word.
- Split the class into 3 groups.
- One person from each group should read out the short description of the scene that accompanies each extract.
- The group should together try and understand what is happening in their extract.
- Each group has the key words for their extract along with dictionaries. They should find out what their key words mean to get a more detailed understanding of their extract.
- They can then start to read the text. For the group looking at **Extract 1** they can take it in turns to read it out loud. Their task is to read the whole text with no emotion, then with a little emotion finally leading to the last person in the group who reads it with as much emotion as possible.

Tip: By giving the students a task when reading (a crescendo of emotion) they can have fun with the text. Encourage the weaker students to read early on if they are embarrassed about playing with the text.

- For the group with **Extract 2** their task is to say the text but they must only whisper. Not only does this force the group to listen and concentrate, it also creates an atmosphere of deceit.
- The groups with **Extract 3** need to concentrate on stage directions. They have to stand and position themselves as if they were on stage and work out who's talking to who.

British Council | BBC

Tip: You can have 2 or 3 groups working on the same extract to give students more speaking time. If you have a small space to work with then keep the class in 3 groups and let the students rotate roles within each group.

Modern v Original

It's important that the students see, read and get a general feel for Shakespeare's original language. However, it can be a useful and fun exercise to compare with a modern version.

- Using the same extracts from the previous activity get the students to rewrite the extract (or part of it) with their own modern English.
- They should do this in pairs with a time limit. Once each pair has written their new version they can compare with the other members of their group.

Tip: By asking the students to write their own versions you are checking their understanding of the original text. By doing this activity in pairs they can help each other. By comparing their modern versions with other pairs they have a clear objective and have further opportunity to discuss the meaning of the extract with their peers

- You can then provide them with another modern version taken from the on-line No Fear Shakespeare from the SparkNotes webpage (see link below). Here you have the original text on the left-hand side of the page and the modern equivalent on the right.

Tip: Wait until they have all shared their own texts with their groups before distributing the on-line version. This is to avoid students merely checking their own text against the 'correct version'. It's important they get a chance to present their own texts.

Famous expressions

According to the BBC Shakespeare invented around 1700 words and expressions. Here are a few of them that we commonly use today:

- 'to break the ice'
- 'there's method in his madness'
- 'to eat me out of house and home'
- 'my own flesh and blood'...

Put these expressions up on the board and ask if anyone has heard of them. Explain how the first one is relevant to the EFL classroom and the 'Getting to Know You' activities they are probably used to. This next activity encourages students to consider the relevance of both Shakespearian themes in modern life as well as the language itself.

- Give the students **Worksheet B**.
- They have to find out where the quotes are taken from, who says them and most importantly what they mean. They can use a search engine in the No Fear Shakespeare website or Google.

Tip: If they use the No Fear Shakespeare website search tool they should stick a piece of A4 paper over the right-hand side of each computer screen to cover up the modern version.

Worksheet B – Answers

Famous Quotes

Quote 1

"I wish my horse had the speed of your tongue . . ."

Act 1 scene 1

Benedick to Beatrice

I wish my horse moved as fast as your mouth.

Quote 2

"He that hath a beard is more than a youth, and he that hath no beard is less than a man."

Act 2 scene 1

Beatrice to Leonato

If he has a beard he's more than a boy; if he doesn't have a beard he's less than a man.

Quote 3

"...there was a star danced, and under that was I born."

Act 2 scene 1

Beatrice to Leonato

A star danced in the sky and that's the moment I was born.

BBC | British Council Lesson plan. Much Ado about Nothing. Page 4 of 9

Much Ado about Nothing – Lesson plan - © BBC | British Council 2008

Quote 4

"Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,

Men were deceivers ever,

One foot in sea and one on shore,

To one thing constant never."

Act 2 scene 3

Balthasar (singing to Don Pedro)

Don't cry anymore, ladies, don't cry anymore

Men have always been deceivers

One foot on a ship and one on the shore,

Never devoted to anything.

- Discuss what situations you might say something similar in modern life. The following are example situations:

Quote 1

When two people are having an argument. They are insulting each other and one says that the other should stop talking and being so insulting.

Quote 2

A woman talking about men being immature.

Quote 3

Someone talking about when they were born. Today someone might talk about their horoscope and what star sign they were born under.

Quote 4

Someone talking about how men and how they can't commit to a relationship.

Discussion

This leads directly on from the quotes in the previous activity. Students are shown how the drama of a Shakespeare play can be translated into modern life.

- Write the following provocative sentences on the board;
 - To win an argument you have to insult the other person.
 - Women are more mature than men.
 - Our horoscope determines our personality.
 - Men are more unfaithful than women.
- Split the class into two – one half 'for' the statement and the other half 'against'. Arrange the class so that the two groups are facing each other.
- Before they start arguing their case they should go through the first statement as a group and decide why they agree or disagree with the statement. They should decide who is going to start the debate and who will finish it and everyone in between will have to say at least one sentence to help their team win the debate.
- When they have argued their case with the other team they move onto sentence 2. This time the team who were 'for' the previous statement can now be 'against'.

Tip: If you have enough space you can seat everyone in two semi-circles that are facing each other. If they can all see each other it makes for better communication. I suggest two semi-circles rather than one circle just to make the opinion divide more visual.

60 second Shakespeare

A few years ago the BBC initiated a school project called 60 second Shakespeare. Classes had to produce a 60-second summary of a Shakespeare play or a scene from a play, film it and send it to the BBC. The short films are accessible on the BBC website for your students to view. There is one by

Hasland School on Much Ado about Nothing. These Year 9 students have updated the love story between Hero and Claudio and set their modern day version in a school.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/shakespeare/60secondshakespeare/watch/hasland_muchado.shtml
!

Compile a list of scenes with the class and a synopsis of each. You can split the class into groups with each group looking at a scene each. They should write one or two sentences to describe their scene. Use the original text for this and remind them that they aren't trying to understand every word.

- Collate all the scene descriptors and feedback back as a whole class.
- Decide together on which 5-10 scenes are the most dramatic and would be the most interesting to watch.
- Then in three groups they can devise a 60-second drama which summarizes the chosen scenes making sure their drama tells a story.

Tip: For higher levels they can try to write all or some of their drama in Shakespearian language.

- Film the three groups performing their sketches.

British Council | BBC

- The submissions of short films to the BBC are now closed but you can still show your short films to another class. You could also get each group to act their scene in a different room with someone else filming it and then come together as a class to watch all three short films.

Tip: On the BBC website there are Teachers' notes on how to successfully produce a 60-second Shakespeare drama.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/shakespeare/60secondshakespeare/teachers_index.shtml

Shakespeare the Man and his Words

- Put the class into 2s or 3s and give them access to a computer. You may need to do this on a rotation system if you don't have enough computers. Each team will devise their own Shakespeare quiz. It should be about his language and his life.
- Give them Worksheet C to complete. This should give them an idea of the type of questions they can include in their quizzes. You can also provide an example biographical quiz. <http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/quiz/bioquiz.htm>
- They could choose 5 new words and 5 words they already know from any source i.e. their text books, and include a 'find the old English equivalent from a website' section in their quiz.
- They all need to provide an answer key on the back of their quiz to facilitate scoring at the end.
- Each quiz is copied and a pile of all the quizzes are placed by each computer. Then each team has to complete quiz number 1 before their peers. All teams start the next quiz at the same time. Each time a pair completes a quiz correctly before the others they get a bonus point.

Tip: If you don't have enough computers for the whole class to do the quizzes at the same time then the challenge is to complete all the quizzes in the quickest time rather than do each individual quiz faster than the other teams.

Worksheet C Answers

Match the Shakespeare text to the modern translation.

1)	When I do name him, let it be thy part to praise him more than ever man did merit:	d)	When I mention his name you need to say what a great person he is.
2)	Then go we near her, that her ear lose nothing of the false sweet bait that we lay for it.	c)	Then let's get closer so that she can overhear what we're saying and take the bait
3)	She cannot love, nor take no shape nor project of affection, she is so self endeared.	b)	She's so in love with herself she doesn't even know what love is.
4)	I pray thee, cease thy counsel, which falls into mine ears as profitless as water in a sieve:	e)	Please stop giving me advice. I'm not listening to you.
5)	I say, thou hast belied mine innocent child; Thy slander hath gone through and through her heart, And she lies buried with her ancestors:	a)	You have ruined my innocent daughter. Your slander has broken her heart and killed her.

Stratford-Upon-Avon

Shakespeare's birth town in Warwickshire is one of the most visited towns in England with around 3 million visitors each year. It's a beautiful medieval town with a canal running through it; swans on the river, rowing boats, Shakespeare's birthplace, Anne Hathaway's Cottage and the famous RSC Swan Theatre. Stratford-Upon-Avon is also on the edge of the Cotswolds, which is the surrounding English countryside, where tourists can enjoy cream teas in tea rooms and Sunday roasts in Traditional English pubs.

This next stage of the lesson is a group task. Each group is allocated a different type of tourist that is going to spend three days in and around Stratford-Upon-Avon. Tourist types can include a group of young backpackers, a family with two young children, an elderly couple, newly weds on their honeymoon...

- Here is a link to a provocative article published in 2006 by Germaine Greer about Stratford-Upon-Avon being a tourist trap.
<http://arts.guardian.co.uk/shakespeareyear/story/0,,1855077,00.html>
- The students should read this article and react to it by organising a fantastic trip to Stratford which will bring the town back to life and be a trip to remember for their tourists.
- The following links should help them and provide all the information they need to prepare a successful trip.
 - <http://www.stratford-upon-avon.co.uk/>
 - <http://www.accommodation-stratford.co.uk/contentok.php?id=34>

BandBs

- <http://www.penshurst.net/>
- <http://www.meridianguesthouse.co.uk/rooms.php>
- <http://www.twelfthnight.co.uk/>

Hotels

- http://bookings.legacy-hotels.co.uk/hotel-details&hotel_id=139
- <http://www.stratfordthistle.co.uk/>
- <http://www.courtlandhotel.co.uk/>
- http://www.macdonaldhotels.co.uk/alvestonmanor/index.htm?macd_source_link=http://www.macdonaldhotels.co.uk/hotels/location_hotels.htm&ac=afu&affut=79736

On these sites they will need to decipher theatre schedules to find out what is on. They will need to find out how much the hotel or BandB will cost and how the tourists will need to pay for their room. They must provide as much information as possible down to the name of the room they will be staying in and times of performances, opening times for monuments. The end result should be a timed schedule for each day of the three-day tour.

Follow-up

Having looked at Stratford-Upon-Avon today it is fascinating to compare it to the Stratford-Upon-Avon of Shakespeare's day. In the late 16th Century England was rife with the bubonic plague. Theatres were often closed to stop the spread of the killer disease and people were dying everywhere, including Shakespeare's 11-year-old son, Hamnet. Students could research into what life was like when Shakespeare was alive and write a short description of Shakespeare's real life.

Tip: You can set them in the right direction by telling them that he was the third child of 8 and he got married when he was 18. Both of these facts were commonplace. Women had several children as many would die in early childhood and people got married much younger in those days compared to now.

Internet links

- Games – knowledge about Shakespeare plays:
<http://www.randomhouse.com/bantamdell/shakespeare//playhouse.html#>
- Modern translations or original text available on-line:
<http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/muchado/>
- BBC 60-second Shakespeare:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/shakespeare/60secondshakespeare/index.shtml>