

Topic: Persuasive language in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

Level: C1/C2

Time: 90 minutes

Aims

- To build on students' knowledge of character adjectives
- To develop students' awareness of persuasive techniques (such as flattery, reassurance, put-down, etc.) and to provide an opportunity to practise using them
- To raise awareness of the differences between vocabulary in Shakespeare's time and today

Introduction

This lesson will introduce students to one of Shakespeare's best known plays: *Macbeth*. It will focus in particular on the character of Lady Macbeth and how she uses rhetoric (persuasive language) to encourage her husband to do what she wants him to do in Act 1, Scene 7. This will lead into a communicative activity in which students learn how to use some of these persuasive techniques in order to get what they want in everyday English.

Preparation

You will need one sheet of the **Macbeth plot summary cards** (cut up and shuffled) per pair of students for the warmer task. These can be found in the file

Macbeth_plot_summary_cards_for_warmer_and_role_cards_for_task_5.

You will need one copy of **Act 1 Scene 7** per pair of students. Practise Lady Macbeth's lines beforehand so that you can be as expressive as possible.

You will also need one sheet of **Role cards for Task 5** (cut up) per six students. These can be found in the file **Macbeth_plot_summary_cards_for_warmer_and_role_cards_for_task_5.**

Procedure

Warmer – Discussing and sequencing events in *Macbeth* (10 minutes)

- Begin by finding out what students already know about the play *Macbeth*. Ask them if they have ever read the play/seen it performed. Encourage students to tell you anything they know about Shakespeare and the play, and write up their ideas on the board.
- Organise students into groups and give each group a set of cut-up and shuffled **Macbeth plot summary cards**. Students have to reorder the sentences to make them tell the story of what happens in *Macbeth*.
- Read the summary around the class. Ask students questions to check their understanding of the play's main events as you do so, e.g. *Why does Lady Macbeth want her husband to kill King Duncan?* (Because she wants her husband to be crowned king.) *Why do you think that Macbeth starts to see things which aren't there?* (He feels guilty about what he has done.)
- Ask students to place the cards face down on their desk. Challenge them to tell you what they remember about the play. Ask questions to help them, e.g. *What are the names of the main characters? Who tells Macbeth he will be king one day?*

Answers:

1.d 2.i 3.e 4.a 5.h 6.b 7.g 8.f 9.c

Note

You can find short video summaries of Macbeth online. Some of these are entertaining and get the main point across clearly. Make sure that you check the content is appropriate for classroom use before you show them to your students.

Task 1 – Vocabulary: adjectives of personality (5 minutes)

Ask students to tell you whether they think Lady Macbeth played an important part in the play. Ask students to work in pairs to choose five character adjectives which they feel best describe Lady Macbeth. In class feedback, discuss the meanings of the adjectives but do not tell students whether they are 'right' or 'wrong', as they will have the chance to revisit this task later on in the lesson.

Task 2 – Shakespearean English (10 minutes)

Tell students that they are not to worry if they find the language in this lesson difficult: Shakespearean English is very different from the English we speak today, and even native speakers find it challenging. Write the words 'thou art' on the board and ask students if they can guess what this means (it is *you are*). Explain to students that Shakespearean English had two forms for you: a polite form (*you*) and a familiar form (*thou*).

Read the sentences in Shakespearean English aloud to your class. Challenge students to see who can be the first to match them with their translations into modern English. Check answers around the class.

Answers:

1.c 2.a 3.d 4.e 5.b

Task 3 – Reading *Macbeth* Act 1, Scene 7 (10 minutes)

Tell students that they are going to read Act 1, Scene 7 from *Macbeth*. This is a very important scene in the play, as this is where Lady Macbeth persuades her husband to murder King Duncan. Tell students to focus on Lady Macbeth as they read and decide whether or not they agree with the adjectives they chose in **Task 1 – Vocabulary: adjectives of personality**.

Read the scene aloud. Play the part of Lady Macbeth yourself, and nominate a confident student to play the part of Macbeth. Offer as much support with the language as possible.

After you have read the scene aloud, discuss the adjectives your students have chosen. Be aware that there are no real right and wrong answers. For example, it may seem that Lady Macbeth is not at all caring on one hand: but on the other hand, she clearly cares a lot about her husband. Similarly, although Lady Macbeth's speech uses a lot of violent imagery, she herself is not actually violent (she does not actually do any of the killing).

Suggested answers:

Ruthless, manipulative, ambitious, strong, intelligent

Note

If you don't feel confident about reading this extract aloud to your students, you can find various interpretations of this famous scene online.

Task 4 – Identifying Lady Macbeth's persuasive techniques (10 minutes)

Read the persuasive techniques aloud to your class. Check students' understanding of what they mean by asking concept questions, e.g.

- *If I put you down do I make you feel better or worse about yourself? (Worse)*
- *If I reassure you, do I make you feel more or less confident? (More confident)*

Ask students to work in pairs to decide which persuasive technique (a–d) they think Lady Macbeth is using in each extract (1–4). Encourage discussion, as various answers are possible. Students might need a little help to understand the meaning of Extract 1. (Lady Macbeth says that she would kill her own child rather than not go ahead with something she had promised to do.) Conduct class feedback.

Suggested answers:

1.d 2.c 3.a;c 4.b

Task 5 – Role play (20 minutes)

Distribute role play cards. Give students five minutes to work in pairs and practise the role plays. Emphasise that students are to include the persuasive techniques they observed in Macbeth and ask students to take turns at being the person who is doing the persuading.

Nominate a few pairs to perform their role play to the rest of the class. The students who are watching must try to identify the persuasive techniques used. At the end of the role play conduct feedback. Whose persuasive language was most successful? Why?

Task 6 – Pitching a modern day film version of *Macbeth* (10 minutes)

Discuss the questions as a class. Generate as much debate as possible and write any new language on the board.

Suggested answers

I think similar events could take place, because people are always going to be ambitious and hungry for power. It might be different nowadays because kings don't always have so much power: it might be a politician or a businesswoman who was killed. In Shakespeare's play Lady Macbeth did a lot of talking, but didn't act. In a modern-day film, females might be more actively violent.

Organise students into groups of four and ask them to work together to pitch a film. Ask groups to report back on their ideas. Conduct a class vote for the most interesting idea. If you have the necessary resources, you could ask students to produce a trailer for the film they have pitched.