

Propaganda and Shakespeare's *Richard III*

Lesson plan

Topics: Propaganda in Shakespeare's time; *Richard III***Level:** B1–B2**Time:** 65–80 minutes**Aims**

- To develop students' reading for information skills
- To give students practice in guessing the meaning of new vocabulary by its context
- To raise students' awareness of how Shakespeare used propaganda in his writing

Introduction

This lesson provides students with information about Shakespeare's history play *Richard III*, and raises awareness of how Shakespeare used propaganda to portray King Richard III as an evil tyrant. Students will complete a jigsaw reading activity where they read a text about propaganda in Shakespeare's times and a review of a book about Richard III.

Preparation and materials

Print one copy of the **student worksheets** for each learner in your class.

Be ready to project the **PowerPoint** file, and familiarise yourself with the contents of this before class.

Procedure**Warmer – Talking about propaganda (10 mins)**

- a. If you have a data projector in your classroom, open the PowerPoint file and **show slide 2**.
 - Ask the students to discuss the questions, and then conduct whole class feedback.

Commentary on the posters

The first is a **North Korean** government propaganda poster of fairly recent design. It shows military personnel standing shoulder to shoulder with fists raised, perhaps looking at an enemy, as if to suggest how strong North Korea's military is. The yellow hammer, brush and sickle is a Communist symbol representing industry, the arts and agriculture.

The second poster is **British**, and was produced during the First World War (1914–18). Its aim was to encourage men to enlist for the First World War. It imagines a scene in the future and portrays the shame of a man who did not enlist as his children ask him what he did for his country. The poster appeals to the pride of men, while portraying the war as a heroic duty which every man should be proud to undertake.

- b. Read the question aloud to your students. Ask them to tell you what they think propaganda is and write their ideas on the board.

Suggested answer:

Propaganda is the spreading of information (which is not always true) to help and support a political cause. There are several recognised propaganda techniques, including exaggeration, telling half-truths and demonising the enemy.

Task 1 – pre-reading quiz (5 mins)

- Tell your students that they are going to read about propaganda in Shakespeare's times, but that first they are going to take part in a short quiz.
- You could show the questions onscreen, using **slide 3** of the PowerPoint file.
- Put the students in small groups, and give them three minutes to choose the answers.
- Conduct feedback, awarding points for correct answers,

Answers to Task 1

1. *c (Shakespeare lived from 1564 until 1616; Elizabeth was queen of England from 1558 until 1603.)*
2. *a*
3. *c*
4. *c*
5. *c*

Task 2 – predicting with pictures (10 mins)

- Explain that the students are going to read two texts, but that first they are going to see some pictures of things and people mentioned in the texts, and predict how these are connected.
- **Show slide 4** of the PowerPoint.
- Focus students' attention on the pictures. Ask them to work in pairs to describe what they see and encourage them to make predictions about what they are going to read. Collect ideas around the class.
- It is not necessary to provide the correct answers, as students should be able to arrive at these independently after doing Tasks 3 and 4.

*Students' own answers***Task 3 – jigsaw reading (10 mins)**

- Divide the class into two halves: ask one half to read Text A and the other Text B. The texts are on the **final two pages** of the student worksheet.
- Allow students to work with a partner to answer the questions on their chosen text. Monitor, offering support where necessary.

Answers:

Text A: a. To entertain and also to teach audiences b. With a song about the Queen's wisdom and goodness c. That Protestantism was good and Catholicism was bad. It also aimed to prepare the country for war against the Catholics in Europe d. Evil e. Queen Elizabeth's ancestors had killed King Richard, and she would have been angry if Shakespeare had portrayed him in a positive way f. King Richard III, Queen Elizabeth, Shakespeare, the play Richard III, the theatre.

Text B: a. The King's Grave b. They wanted to show that there was more than one side to King Richard/to show that he was a complex person c. From sixteenth-century writer Thomas More d. Underneath a car park in Leicester e. Langley thinks that Richard III didn't

kill his nephews; Jones thinks he probably did *f. King Richard III*, his nephews, Shakespeare, the car park, the book *The King's Grave*, the theatre.

Task 4 – discussion (10 mins)

- When students have finished reading, ask them to work with someone who has read the other text and tell them what they have read. Students should work together to discuss the connection between the texts and the pictures, and to find and identify all the different examples of propaganda in the text.

Answers:

Examples of propaganda: plays were a way of reinforcing the Queen's power, a song about the Queen's wisdom and goodness, an acting group which promoted Protestantism, plays which prepared the country for war, Shakespeare's portrayal of Richard III, Thomas More's portrayal of Richard III

Task 5 – vocabulary: guessing meaning from context (10 mins)

Ask students to find and underline the words in the text before matching them to their definitions. Allow students to check their answers with a partner before collecting answers around the class.

Answers

1. subversive 2. malicious 3. portray 4. megalomaniac 5. committing treason 6. promoted 7. put on 8. set the record straight 9. the masses

Task 6 – discussing propaganda techniques (10 mins)

- Organise students into groups and read them the question.
- **Show slide 5.**
- Ask the students who the pictures show (Gandhi, Hitler, Obama) and elicit what the students know about them. Ask them if and how propaganda played a part in their lives, either during or after their careers.
- **Click again** and the task rubric will appear.
- Give students a few minutes to discuss their ideas, offering support where necessary. Have the names of some other historical characters (e.g. Stalin, Mao, Tito, Winston Churchill, etc.) ready in case your students don't have any ideas. If possible ask students to find images or propaganda posters of the historical characters online.
- Conduct class feedback. If you have a white board, display images of the historical characters your students have chosen for everyone to see.

Extension Activity (15 mins)

- Ask students to design their own Elizabethan propaganda poster to advertise Shakespeare's play, *Richard III*.
- Students will then present their poster to the rest of the class and talk about the propaganda techniques which helped them to create it.