Ready, steady – tragedy!
Student worksheets

Warmer – ‘Tragedy’ headlines: the meaning of tragic

Work with a partner. Decide what you think these newspaper stories are about.

JORDAN’S TRAGIC LOVE SPLIT LEAVES STAR HEARTBROKEN
SCHOOL CLOSURE ‘TRAGEDY’ FOR LOCAL KIDS SAYS HEAD
GWYN’S RED CARPET LOOK ‘FASHION TRAGEDY’

What is the meaning of the word ‘tragedy’?

Task 1 – Features of a tragedy

Which of the following would you expect to find in a tragedy?

a. Death
b. Lots of jokes
c. Madness
d. An uncomplicated hero

e. Violence
f. Strong emotions
g. People living happily ever after
Task 2 – Reading: recipe for a Shakespearean tragedy

Read the article and answer the questions.

a. Is it written in the style of …
   - a covering letter?
   - a poem?
   - a recipe?

b. Underline the parts of the text which helped you to choose your answer.

c. Who is this article written for?

Reading: how to make a Shakespearean tragedy

Do you feel that the word ‘tragedy’ has lost its flavour in the modern world? Don’t worry – making a traditional Elizabethan tragedy is not as hard as you might think. Why not impress your friends with this easy dish?

1. Begin by choosing your tragic hero. Please select carefully: for an Elizabethan* tragedy you need a hero of noble birth. Common people may be easy to find, but they are not the stuff of real Elizabethan tragedy. For best results, choose a hero with a strong and attractive character.

2. Add a fatal character flaw. Hubris is a popular choice with many chefs, but feel free to experiment. Stir the flaw in well: you must make sure it will result in your tragic hero’s downfall.

3. Next, make sure that your hero has a reversal of fortune by adding a large catastrophic event.

4. Sprinkle in plenty of suffering and anguish. Beat your hero with it until he can take no more. When your hero is just about ready to die, mix in a moment of self-awareness. Your hero should suddenly recognise his tragic flaw. Time this moment of self-awareness carefully: it should come just a few moments too late.

5. Kill your tragic hero. Make sure that you have a nice sweet dessert for your guests to enjoy so that they feel there is hope for the future.

* The word ‘Elizabethan’ refers to the years Queen Elizabeth I was on the throne (1558–1603).
Task 3 – Check your understanding

Are these sentences true or false?

a. Elizabethan tragic heroes are often from poor families.

b. The best tragic heroes are totally wicked.

c. Many tragic heroes get into trouble because of their pride.

d. Tragic heroes need to experience a change in luck.

e. For a hero to be truly tragic he needs to see what he has done wrong.

f. The audience should feel totally depressed at the end of a tragedy.

Task 4 – Defining words

Match the meaning of the words and phrases in bold to their definitions.

a. pride

b. terrible pain and suffering

c. coming from the top level of society (e.g. prince, duchess, etc.)

d. knowledge about yourself and who you are on the inside

e. a change in luck

f. something bad about your personality which will result in your downfall

Task 5 – Ready, steady – tragedy!

Your teacher will give you some ingredients. Work with your group to create an Elizabethan tragedy. Use the recipe you have read to help you. Tell your class about your tragedy or act it out.
Task 6 – Talking about tragedies

Your teacher will give you a very short summary of an Elizabethan tragedy. Complete the table with information about the four main characters in your tragedy, and then and answer questions a-d.

Fill in the table.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Name of character</th>
<th>Good, bad or neither?</th>
<th>Role in story</th>
<th>Most dramatic moment?</th>
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Now answer the questions:

a. Is there a tragic hero?

b. Does anyone die?

c. Which ‘ingredients of a tragedy’ can you identify?

d. Does anything positive happen at the end of the tragedy?

Ask your partner about his/her tragedy, using the questions above to help you. How is it similar to the tragedy you read? How is it different?