

Topic: Shakespearean problems

Level: A2

Time: 60 minutes

Aims

- To develop students' ability to give advice in English
- To give students practice in working out the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary by context
- To introduce students to some well-known Shakespearean plots and characters

Introduction

This lesson provides students with the opportunity to learn about some of Shakespeare's best known characters and story lines in contemporary language which is tailored to suit their level. It will also raise students' awareness of different ways of giving advice in English and provide practice at reading.

Preparation

This lesson requires the teacher to tell the students an anecdote at the beginning of the lesson (see **Warmer – Advising your teacher**). Spend ten minutes before the lesson practising telling the anecdote in front of the mirror and polishing your delivery.

Photocopy and cut out the **Shakespearean problem page rolecards for Task 5**, the role play at the end of the lesson. You will need one character card for each student; make sure there are equal amounts of each character.

Procedure

Warmer – Advising your teacher (10 mins)

Greet your class looking as miserable as possible. Tell your students that you can hardly concentrate on teaching them as something is making you feel really worried. Wait for your students to ask you what the problem is. When everyone is listening carefully, sit down and tell them this story:

My problem is a strange one, I know, but it's very serious too! A few months ago, I really needed some money. There's this really rich old man in town – you don't know him. I don't like this man at all – not many people do – but I thought I could borrow some money from him. He said yes, and gave me the money. However, this rich old man doesn't like my best friend – don't ask me why. The rich old man made me promise that if I couldn't pay him back he would cut half a kilo of flesh from my best friend's body (mime this so students understand). Well, I thought the old man was a bit mad, so I said "fine" and took his money. Well, my problem is I can't pay the money back and I am really worried about my friend. The old man is crazy for sure! But a deal is a deal... isn't it?

Ask your students to work in groups and discuss what they have heard. Monitor the groups, clarifying where necessary. After a minute, ask your students to give you advice. Write their advice on the board, but do not correct language at this stage.

Suggested answers: You should find a second job quickly. Why don't you tell this police? This crazy man is a criminal. You and your friend should run away.

Task 1 – Reading about the problems of people in Shakespeare's plays (10 mins)

- Admit to your students that the problem you told them about was not actually your problem. Explain that the problem belongs to a character from a Shakespeare play (*The Merchant of Venice*).
- Tell students that they are going to read more Shakespearean problems and focus students' attention on the two texts. Read the problems aloud to your students, while they follow the text on the student worksheet.
- Students read the texts again and answer the questions. If necessary, pre teach the word *ghost* (*the spirit of a dead person who has come back to earth*) before your students start work on this task. Check answers around the class.

Answers

- | | | |
|------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. <i>Hamlet</i> | 3. <i>Hamlet</i> | 5. <i>Hamlet and Juliet</i> |
| 2. <i>Juliet</i> | 4. <i>Juliet</i> | |

Task 2 – Vocabulary in context (10 mins)

Students should match the words in the text in bold to the meanings. Work through the first example as a class. Allow students to check their answers with a partner before conducting whole class feedback.

Answers

- | | | |
|--------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. <i>lock</i> | 4. <i>awful</i> | 7. <i>depressed</i> |
| 2. <i>murdered</i> | 5. <i>has very bad taste</i> | 8. <i>can't stand</i> |
| 3. <i>handsome</i> | 6. <i>guy</i> | |

Task 3 – Matching advice with problems (5 mins)

Tell students that several readers have written in with advice for the characters. Ask students to read the advice and match the advice to the problem. Check answers orally.

Answers

- | | | |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1. <i>Hamlet</i> | 3. <i>Hamlet</i> | 5. <i>Juliet</i> |
| 2. <i>Juliet</i> | 4. <i>Juliet</i> | 6. <i>Hamlet</i> |

Task 4 – Giving advice (10 mins)

- Students underline all the different ways of giving advice they can find in the readers' advice section.

Answers

You shouldn't, if I were you I'd, you should, have you tried..., you ought to...

- b. Students choose the correct word to complete the sentence.

Answers

- | | | |
|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1. <i>should</i> | 3. <i>I'd</i> | 5. <i>ought</i> |
| 2. <i>shouldn't</i> | 4. <i>Tell</i> | |

- c. Monitor as students practise saying the sentences, modelling natural sounding pronunciation where necessary. Bring class together again and drill sentences chorally and individually. Finally, revisit the advice your students gave you at the beginning of the lesson. Ask them to make changes and corrections where necessary.

Tip Box: Pronunciation

Take the time to model natural sounding pronunciation of the new language with your students. Draw attention to the pronunciation of you should /ju:ʃəd/ and you shouldn't ju:ʃədən/

Students can sometimes struggle with the complexity of *If I were you I'd...* You can use a technique known as "backchaining" to help them with this, where you build up the structure one word at a time.

Begin by drilling *I'd*: /aɪd/

Now drill *you I'd*: /ju:aɪd/

Next drill: *were you I'd*: /wəju:aɪd/

Finally, drill the whole structure: əvəɪwəju:aɪd/

Task 5 - Role play: Sharing problems and giving advice (15 mins)

Note - gender of roles in Task 5

The rolecards in Task 5 include three male roles (Shylock; King Lear; priest) and two female roles (Lady Macbeth; Desdemona). As students may be more comfortable about adopting the role of a person with their own gender, try to form single-sex groups insofar as possible, and allocate the rolecards accordingly. It will probably be necessary either:

- for some students to adopt a role not of their own gender (e.g. a male student becoming Lady Macbeth), or
- to discard some of the roles so that all students can adopt a role of their own gender.

- Organise students into 5 evenly sized groups (see note in box above). Ask students if they can think of any further advice to offer Hamlet and Juliet. Encourage them to use advice language when they answer, e.g. *should*, *ought to*, *If I were you I'd* etc.
- Tell your students that they are going to meet some new characters from Shakespeare and take part in a role play. Distribute character cards (**Shakespearean problem page rolecards for Task 5**), to each student, giving the same rolecard to each member of the group. Tell students that they are going to become the character on their card and ask the rest of the class for advice. Give them five minutes to read about their character and discuss as a group what they are going to say when they present their problem. Monitor, offering help and support where necessary.

- Next, ask groups to exchange cards. Explain that they are going to read about their classmates' characters and decide what advice they are going to give them. Circulate around the group, encouraging them to practise using the new language they have learned.
- To conduct the role play, ask the students to regroup, so that each new group contains one of each character whose role you are using in the activity (e.g. one Shylock, one King Lear, one Lady Macbeth, one priest and one Desdemona, if you are using all five).
- Get the students to take turns to explain their predicament to the others in the group, who must then offer their advice.

Note on characters and roles in Task 5

The characters and their problems are taken from the following Shakespeare plays:

Shylock – *The Merchant of Venice*

King Lear – *King Lear*

Lady Macbeth – *Macbeth*

The priest – *Romeo and Juliet*

Desdemona – *Othello*

Homework

Direct students online to a website which provides synopses of Shakespeare's plays in their own first language. Ask students to find a character who has a problem and write a letter in English asking for help about their problem. Students can then bring their letter into class and exchange it with another student, who should read it and write a letter of advice. Possible plays to direct students to include: *The Taming of the Shrew*, *King Lear*, *Othello* and *The Tempest*. Students must focus on a character they have not already worked on in this lesson.