**'To be or not to be…'**

Lesson plan

**Topic:** The 'To be or not to be…' speech from Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*

**Level:** B2

**Time:** 80 minutes

> This lesson looks at a complex section of speech, with a lot of possibly unfamiliar vocabulary and ideas. The activities of the lesson will help students to become more familiar with this well-known and culturally significant extract. Reassure students that many native speakers would find this speech challenging, but that they will have a glossary to help.
>
> In addition, the **final page of this lesson plan** contains a full modern-day translation of the 'To be or not to be' extract used in the lesson. You may wish to make copies of this for your students as well, as the student worksheets do not have a full translation of the whole speech.

**Aims**

- To develop students' ability to read Shakespeare's language
- To develop students' vocabulary, giving opportunities to use new words in spoken and written    form
- To introduce students to a well-known play and speech

**Introduction**

This lesson is about Hamlet's 'To be or not to be' speech. It provides students with the opportunity to become familiar with the situations and events in the play, and then look at parts of the speech in detail. Students discuss Hamlet's feelings and situation and then write about them for homework in the form of a blog posting or entry on a social media site.

> **Preparation**
>
> You will need
>
> - one copy of the **Student Worksheets** for each student
>
> - one copy of **Extra information for Task 2**, cut along the dotted lines into 3
>
> Be ready to project the **PowerPoint for Task 1**.
>
> You may also wish to make copies of the modern-day translation of Hamlet's speech from the final page of this lesson plan, if you think it would be beneficial for your students, although the tasks do not require this.

**Procedure**

**Warmer – A happy life (5 mins)**

This task asks students to consider what makes a happy life. (They will later discover that Hamlet is in many ways fortunate, yet views much of his life negatively.)

- Ask learners to work in pairs to discuss the six suggestions in the Student worksheets. Set a time limit. Talk about the most important things for you, if students need an example.
- Feedback with the whole class.
- Extension: students who finish quickly could discuss if there are any other aspects which are also important.

### Task 1 – Introducing Hamlet (10 minutes)

This task introduces learners to Hamlet and events in the play, providing a context for the speech.

- **a.**     Show **Slide 2** of the **PowerPoint presentation** and elicit possible connections between the pictures. Some students may have heard of the play and/or the character. Elicit or explain that he is one of Shakespeare's most famous characters. Possibly elicit the line 'To be or not to be', part of a speech in which he considers ending his life.

*Answer: Shakespeare (left) wrote a play set in Denmark (centre) about a man called Hamlet (right).*

- **b**.     Ask students to work in pairs to select and circle adjectives from the eight possible.

Take feedback with the whole class. You could refer back to the warmer and discuss the positive aspects of Hamlet's life which, due to his personality, he doesn't always value.

*Suggested answers:* youthful, morbid, prosperous (clue: clothes), depressed (clue: skull)

- **c.**     Show **Slide 3** of the **PowerPoint presentation.** Ask students to work in pairs, using the illustration to decide what might feature in the play**.**
- Take feedback. All feature, except 'many jokes' and 'a happy ending'.

### Task 2 – Jigsaw activity: Introducing Hamlet's life (15 minutes)

This task allows students to become more familiar with events in the play, providing further context for the speech**.**

- **a.**     Divide the class into three groups, 1, 2, and 3. Give each member of each group the relevant part of the handout **Information for Task 2**. Ask students to read their paragraph individually and find and complete the three short sentences linked to it. Check their answers within the group.
- **b.**     Ask students to now form new groups containing someone from groups 1 and 2 and 3. Students can then pool information and complete all the sentences.

    Feedback to whole class.

*Answers*

1. *Prince*
2. *Horatio*
3. *Hamlet's father, Old Hamlet,*
4. *Hamlet's mother, Gertrude,*
5. *his uncle, Claudius,*

6. *Ophelia*
7. *Rosencrantz / Guildenstern*
8. *Norway*
9. *Castle*

> • Tip – You could at this point play a recording of an actor performing the speech. Explain that Hamlet is alone on stage talking honestly about his feelings. He is a student interested in philosophy, and also has a pessimistic view about life. At this time in the play, he is thinking aloud about the possibility of ending his life.

## Task 3 – Looking at parts of Hamlet's speech (15 minutes)

This task introduces students to extracts of the speech, and they work in groups to match an extract to a summary.

> • Note – as much of the language in the speech is archaic, definitions are provided in a glossary. Ensure that the students appreciate that, as many of the words and phrases are not in regular use nowadays, students do not need to learn and use them.

• Divide the class into three groups. Ask each group to work on a different extract of the speech. Explain that the glossary gives a modern translation of some of the vocabulary.

• Ask each group to choose the best summary of their extract.

• Check/discuss vocabulary as needed.

• If you think the students will benefit from the activity, you could ask them to regroup in threes, with one person who has read each extract in each group. The students then explain their section of the speech.

• Feedback with the whole class.

*Answers: 1: c   2: a   3: b*

## Task 4 – Looking more closely at Shakespeare's language (10 minutes – optional)

This task is optional. If you feel that students have already spent long enough on Task 3, you may prefer to skip Task 4, or set it as homework for motivated students.

• Ask the students to work in the same groups as in Task 3, and to work on the same Extract (A B or C) to match Shakespeare's words with the modern translation.

• Do the first of each section as an example if needed.

• Feedback with the whole group.

*Answers:*

| *Extract 1.* | *a-ii* | *b-iii* | *c-i* |
| *Extract 2.* | *d-vi* | *e-iv* | *f-v* |
| *Extract 3.* | *g-ix* | *h-viii* | *i-vii* |

## Task 5 – Summarising Hamlet's problems (10 minutes)

This task allows students to use the new vocabulary in spoken form, and review the themes and ideas of the play.

• Ask students in pairs to make a list of Hamlet's problems. Hamlet is a pessimist, so encourage students to make as long a list as possible. Remind students to look back

at the 'Hamlet's life' paragraphs and include information about Family, Friends and Social Status.

- Set a time limit and monitor pairs, encouraging them to view all situations with Hamlet's pessimistic outlook!

- Take class feedback. If time allows, you could discuss what Hamlet might do next. Be aware that for some students, the idea of suicide may be a sensitive subject for discussion.

**Task 6 – Writing: Hamlet on social media (15 minutes)**

You could ask students to complete this task as homework or do it in class, and write either by hand or on computers.

- Remind students that the problems they have found in Task 5 can all be discussed in the blog entry/posting on social media.

You could give further sentence examples based on the problems which came up in Task 5 with your students.

***Hamlet's speech with modern translation***

**Extract 1**

| Shakespeare's original | Modern-day translation |
|---|---|
| To be, or not to be – that is the question: | The question is: is it better to be alive or dead? |
| Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer | Is it nobler to put up with |
| The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune | all the nasty things that luck throws your way, |
| Or to take arms against a sea of troubles | or to fight against all those troubles |
| And by opposing, end them. To die, to sleep | by simply putting an end to them once and for all? Dying, sleeping |
| No more – and by a sleep to say we end | —that's all dying is—a sleep that ends |
| The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks | all the heartache and shocks |
| That flesh is heir to. | that life on earth gives us. |

**Extract 2**

| Shakespeare's original | Modern-day translation |
|---|---|
| For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, | After all, who would put up with all life's humiliations— |
| Who would fardels bear, | Who would choose |
| To grunt and sweat under a weary life, | to grunt and sweat through an exhausting life, |
| But that the dread of something after death, | unless they were afraid of something dreadful after death, |
| The undiscovered country, from whose bourn | the undiscovered country from which |
| No traveller returns, puzzles the will, | no visitor returns, which we wonder about without getting any answers from |
| And makes us rather bear those ills we have | and which makes us stick to the evils we know |
| than fly to others, that we know not of? | rather than rush off to seek the ones we don't? |

**Extract 3**

| Shakespeare's original | Modern-day translation |
| --- | --- |
| Thus conscience does make cowards of us all, | Fear of death makes us all cowards, |
| And thus the native hue of resolution | and our natural boldness |
| Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, | becomes weak with too much thinking. |
| And enterprise of great pitch and moment | Actions that should be carried out at once |
| With this regard their currents turn awry | get misdirected, |
| And lose the name of action | and stop being actions at all. |

Modern-day version from http://nfs.sparknotes.com/hamlet/page_138.html