

## Women in Shakespeare's plays

### Lesson plan

**Topic:** The role of women in the times and works of Shakespeare

**Level:** C1

**Time:** 90minutes

#### Aims

- To develop students' reading and speaking skills
- To develop students' vocabulary (adjectives of personality)
- To increase students' familiarity with female characters in Shakespeare's plays

#### Introduction

This lesson examines the role of women in Shakespeare's day (16th/17th century), and compares this with the roles and characters of some of the women in his plays.

#### Preparation

There is a **PowerPoint** presentation to accompany this lesson, which is for use in the Warmer and Task 5.

As well as one copy of the worksheets for each student, you will need to make copies of the resource **Shakespeare's interview questions for Task 2**, one for every three students, and enough for each pair to have pair A or pair B sheets of **Task 5 – Two Shakespearean heroines**.

#### Warmer – The role of women in Shakespeare's day (5 minutes)

- If you have access to a projector in your classroom, **show slide 2** of the PowerPoint file.
- Using the worksheet and/or the PowerPoint file, ask the students in pairs to discuss the questions.
- Elicit feedback

#### Task 1 – Describing Shakespeare's women (15 minutes)

- Ask the students in pairs to match the adjectives with the meanings in **(a)**.
- Concept-check by asking students questions such as:
  - *Do you think teenagers tend to be **rebellious** or **obedient**?*
  - *If someone is **scheming**, does this mean they are planning good things or bad things?*
  - *How many of the adjectives have a negative meaning? Which ones?*
  - Etc.
- Students go on to select the correct adjective in the sentences in **(b)**.

- Take feedback.

**Answers to a:** 1 c, 2 d, 3 b, 4 a, 5 g, 6 i, 7 f, 8 h, 9e

**Answers to b:** 1 virtuous, 2 bawdy 3 scheming 4 rebellious

### Task 2 – A job interview with Shakespeare (10 minutes)

This task is a roleplay, in which students take on the roles of budding actors being interviewed by Shakespeare for female roles in his plays.

- Divide the students into two groups, A and B. There should be twice as many students in group B (actors) as in group A (Shakespeares).
- Give each student in group A (Shakespeares) the interview worksheet (**Interview questions for Task 2**).
- Get the Shakespeares to interview all the actors and find a suitable role for them. You could also get the actors to mingle and get additional interviews with other interviewers.

### Task 3 – Reading for gist (10 minutes)

- Elicit from the students what they think life might have been like for women in Shakespeare's times. Ask question such as:
  - *Do you think girls were educated as well as boys?*
  - *What jobs do you think women could do in those days?*
- Ask students to read text at speed and identify the section which relates to the Shakespearean character that they were assigned in Task 2 (the students who took the role of actors).

**Answers:**

*Cordelia – Ideal women*

*Lady Macbeth – Deceivers and witches*

*Viola – Shakespeare led the way*

*Miranda – Educating future wives*

*Nurse – Educating future wives*

### Task 4 – Reading for detail (15 minutes)

- Students read again and answer the multiple choice questions.
- Elicit feedback.

**Answers:** 1b, 2 a, 3 c, 4 a, 5 c, 6 b, 7 a, 8 c

### Task 5 – Two Shakespearean heroines (25 minutes)

- **Project the PowerPoint slide 3**, and elicit from students if the scenes featuring two of Shakespeare's famous heroines are likely to be from tragedies or comedies. (Note: *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy; *Twelfth Night* is a comedy.)
- Divide students into pairs giving each pair either **A** or **B** texts. Explain they will have a gapfill and a *What's wrong here?* text where they will try to identify the two 'wrong' words in each sentence (2 mistakes/sentence x 3 sentences = 6 mistakes in each text).
- Group the pairs (one Student A and one Student B together) for peer feedback.

- Ask students to work in groups to match the words in the box with the stories and think of how the stories end.
- Students read out corrected text and share their ideas on the ending of the stories.

**Answers: Student A****Task 5a**

*tragedy; refuses; father; angry; rebels; secret*

**Task 5b**

[1] In the ~~tragedy~~**comedy** *Twelfth Night* the main character is a ~~man~~**woman**, which was very unusual in Shakespeare's times. [2] Viola, who has been shipwrecked in a foreign land, ~~smells~~**dresses** like a boy so she can get a ~~bat~~**job** as a servant of the Duke. [3] Viola falls in ~~water~~**love** with the Duke (who thinks she is a young man) and the Duke's sister wants to ~~paint~~**marry** Viola, thinking she is a man too!

**Answers: Student B****Task 5a**

[1] In the ~~comedy~~**tragedy** *Romeo and Juliet*, 14-year-old Juliet ~~agrees~~**refuses** to marry the man her parents have chosen for her. [2] Her ~~lover~~**father** is very ~~happy~~**angry**. [3] Her father says if she does not agree, he will not speak to her again, so she ~~obeys~~**disobeys** by running away and marrying her lover in ~~public~~**private**.

**Task 5b**

*comedy; woman; dresses; job; falls in love with; marry*

**Task 6 – Reacting to Juliet and Viola (10 minutes)**

- Ask students to discuss the possible reactions of different audience members to the stories of Juliet and Viola. Encourage them to think about audiences today or audiences in Shakespeare's time.
- Elicit brief feedback.

**Homework suggestion** – Students can imagine they are one of the audience members and write a short review giving their opinion of the character of Viola or Juliet.