

## INTRODUCING SHAKESPEARE BY CHRIS LIMA

**Age:** Young adults / Adults

**Level:** Upper intermediate to Advanced

**Time:** Approx. 90 minutes

**Materials:** one copy of the worksheet per student; computer, projector and internet access.

**Aims:** In this lesson, students will:

- Share their current views on Shakespeare and his work
- Critically discuss Shakespeare's relevance in the 21st century
- Explore particular aspects of his use of language
- Engage with other writers' views on Shakespeare's language
- Practise summarizing ideas and expressing their own opinion in writing
- Do independent study and note-taking

**Summary:** This lesson is meant as a gentle introduction to Shakespeare, focusing particularly on unpacking students' perceptions of the 'difficulty' of dealing with Shakespeare's language and understanding the plays. It also invites learners to share any previous knowledge they have of Shakespeare's work and think critically about his relevance for contemporary readers and audiences. The lesson also serves as an introduction to the kind of work students are expected to do in the following lessons in this series.



**TEACHING TIP:** There is no need to conduct whole class feedback after the pair/group work, but depending on the number of students and the time available you may wish to do so. This activity will give you an idea of how familiar your students are with Shakespeare's work and also how comfortable they already are at this stage with expressing their opinions. It will also give you a fairly good idea of their speaking accuracy and fluency in English.

### ACTIVITY 2 – LISTENING

**Video link:** [www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vM\\_8E7vut4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vM_8E7vut4)

**Aims:** to listen for gist; to practise taking notes in lectures; to engage with lecturers'/speakers' stance and ideas

**Approximate time:** 20 mins

#### PROCEDURE:

1. Set the scene for the listening, connecting it to the last question in the previous activity. (Do you think Shakespeare's plays are still relevant in the 21st century?)
2. Play the video twice. Tell students that you will first play it in sections, pausing after the speaker has discussed each of the plays in the table to give them time to take notes. Then play it again without pausing and tell students to note down any relevant points they may have missed on the first listening.
3. Ask students to discuss their notes in pairs, comparing and contrasting information and discussing the accuracy of their own notes.
4. Discuss the answers with the whole group. Accept any answer/interpretation that is close to the ideas below.



#### Possible answers:

**What lessons can we learn from the four plays below?**

**Henry V:** How we can use language to motivate people and work together to achieve an objective.

**Othello:** Trust people who speak from the heart, not those who are confident speakers but lack honesty.

**The Tempest:** Whatever new things we want to explore, we have to keep our minds open – imagination and understanding must expand with our ambition.

**Hamlet:** When you are in a difficult situation, be inventive – don't let the pressure of the moment get in the way of imaginative thinking.

**The most important lesson:** Imagination is crucial for everything in life, especially in crucial moments. Shakespeare can help us see how imagination is important.



**TEACHING TIP:** Although the lessons in this series were designed with EAP learners at foundation programmes and undergraduate level in mind, they can also be used by advanced language learners and in English language teacher training and CPD programmes to prepare staff to teach Shakespeare in the future.

### ACTIVITY 1 – SPEAKING

**Aims:** ice-breaker; to give students the opportunity to share their previous experiences of Shakespeare; to raise awareness of the issues discussed in the lesson

**Approximate time:** 5 mins

#### PROCEDURE:

1. Give students the worksheet or project the questions on the screen.
2. Ask students to discuss the questions in pairs or small groups. Point out that there are no right or wrong answers for these questions and that they should express their views freely.

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'Don't grow out of your imagination. The world is complicated. The pace of change is just scary. Imagination multiplies our options.'

**TEACHING TIP:** During the whole class stage when you go over the possible answers, prompt your students to have a critical view on the speaker's stance: Do they agree with his positions and ideas? Is this a valid/interesting way to look at the plays? Do they see any problems with the speaker's views?

### THINK CRITICALLY

Each lesson in this series has one or two Think critically boxes to give students some food for thought. Teachers don't need to 'do' anything with the content in the box. However, since this is the first lesson, teachers should point out that critical thinking is one of the most important skills to develop in EAP and in academic life. Students need to critically engage with what they read and listen to and be prepared to question concepts, attitudes and statements.

### ACTIVITY 3 – LANGUAGE WORK

**Aims:** to make students realize that with a bit of attention to the language it is possible to understand most of Shakespeare's work as long as we understand the conventions and the basic changes which have occurred in the language

**Approximate time:** 20 mins

#### PROCEDURE:

1. Students work individually and match the words. When they finish, they can compare their answers with their classmates.
2. Whole class feedback based on the answer key below.
  - 1i 2d 3e 4g 5j 6h 7b 8f 9a 10c
3. Repeat steps 1 and 2 above for the gap fill exercise. Point out that all the sentences here come from plays that students will discuss in the coming lessons.
4. Go over answers with the whole group, eliciting and discussing the kind of changes that we can observe in the language, the differences and similarities between Shakespeare's English and contemporary English.



#### Answer key:

1. **Protest** – Slight change in meaning from Early Modern English (EME – Shakespeare's English) to Modern English.
2. **O'er** – Contraction to fit the rhythm of the line, usually the iambic pentameter.
3. **Adieu** – The use of French words was quite common in EME, as is now the use of loan words from different languages in any kind of text.
4. **Hath** – The EME form of has/have. The language was then changing and both the EME and the ME form can be found in Shakespeare.
5. **Thou** – As above. However, point out that when characters change from thou to you or vice-versa, there is always a change in attitude and mood between them. This aspect will be dealt with in another lesson in this series.
6. **Prithee** – The only word in the activity that really is an archaism now.
7. **Behold** – A more 'poetic' synonym for look!
8. **Thy** – As number 5 above. You may want to explore these pronouns further and even ask students to find more examples online.



**TEACHING TIP:** These are no mere match-up and fill-in-the-gaps activities. Instead, they should be approached as a language awareness task that will give you and your students the opportunity to discuss the potential sources of problems to understand Shakespeare's language and the meaning of particular lines.

If you have time, ask your students to try to figure out what the speaker is really trying to say in each of these sentences. Prompt your students to 'paraphrase' the speakers in their own language. This is a technique that actors use in the first stages of preparing for their role.

Use this activity to introduce Crystal & Crystal's Shakespeare Glossary. This is an absolutely essential working tool for students and teachers of Shakespeare: [www.shakespeareswords.com](http://www.shakespeareswords.com)

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### ACTIVITY 4 – READING

**Aims:** to help students get used to reading more complex and long academic texts; to introduce students to academic style and register; to critically think and discuss the ideas conveyed by the authors

**Approximate time:** 20 mins

#### PROCEDURE:

1. Introduce the activity and comment on the importance of identifying the main ideas in the reading material, which will then be used in the process of writing academic essays.
2. Allow students silent reading time. Encourage them to highlight key ideas and vocabulary and take their own notes.
3. Ask students to discuss the follow-up questions in pairs or small groups.



**TEACHING TIP:** Circulate while students are discussing but avoid interfering. Also there is no need to have whole class feedback. If you do so, students will expect you to give the right answers for these questions. Instead, let students express themselves and share ideas among their peers – this will boost their confidence and independent thinking. However, you may want to tell them you are open for questions if they wish to ask you anything.

Draw students' attention to the reference list in the reading box – providing full references for texts and quotes is a fundamental premise of academic work.

### ACTIVITY 5 – WRITING

**Aims:** to practise paraphrasing and summarizing; to practise including short quotes and citations in writing; to express opinions using impersonal language

**Approximate time:** 20 mins

#### PROCEDURE:

1. Set the activity according to the instructions. Point out that choosing between given questions is standard academic practice when lecturers assign essays.
2. Allow students silent writing time.
3. Walk around, monitor, and help if necessary.
4. Students can do the writing in the space provided on the worksheet. Alternatively, you may ask them to write on

a separate piece of paper and collect these paragraphs to provide written feedback on the language. Another possibility is to ask students to post an edited version of their writing on the class blog or discussion board if you have one.



**TEACHING TIP:** This is the production phase of the lesson and it is very important that students go through this in the first lesson. Here the teacher can identify and comment on the most frequent difficulties EAP students face: paraphrasing and summarizing; the inclusion of short quotes and citations; expressing opinion using impersonal language. As this is the first lesson, teachers can also identify students who struggle with language and perhaps even struggle to produce a short paragraph in class.

If there is no time to do this in class it can be assigned as homework but then the teacher will have to make choices regarding the suggestion for homework below.

### HOMework & INDEPENDENT LEARNING

**Aims:** to prepare for the next lesson; to foster independent learning; to practice note taking; getting used to Shakespearean sources online

**Approximate independent study time:** 60 mins

#### PROCEDURE:

1. Set the activity according to the rubric. Point out that it is very important to do the homework because the content of the video and the article will be discussed in the following lesson.
2. Point out that note-taking is a crucial aspect of work at university and that they are expected to bring their notes to class for discussion.

#### References

Crystal, D., and Crystal, B., 2004. *Shakespeare's Words: A Glossary and Language Companion*. London: Penguin.  
Gibson, R., 1998. *Teaching Shakespeare: A Handbook for Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## LESSON 1 INTRODUCING SHAKESPEARE

**Aims:** In this lesson, you will:

- Share your current views on Shakespeare and his work
- Critically discuss Shakespeare's relevance in the 21st century
- Explore particular aspects of his use of language
- Engage with other writers' views on Shakespeare's language
- Practise summarizing ideas and expressing your own opinion in writing
- Prepare to do independent study and note-taking

### ACTIVITY 1 – SPEAKING

Discuss the questions below in pairs or small groups:

- Have you ever watched Shakespeare being performed, either in the theatre or in a film?
- Have you ever read the entire text of a play? If so, was it in English or translated?
- In your opinion, why has Shakespeare become such a cultural icon?
- Do you think Shakespeare's plays are still relevant in the 21st century?

### ACTIVITY 2 – LISTENING

Watch a TED talk by John Bolton walking us through lessons from Shakespeare that still resonate today. What lessons can we learn from the four plays below? Complete the table.

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| HENRY V                   |  |
| OTHELLO                   |  |
| THE TEMPEST               |  |
| HAMLET                    |  |
| THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON |  |

### THINK CRITICALLY

In spite of his popularity, Shakespeare's texts and language are still often considered difficult to understand by both fluent and less fluent English language speakers alike.

Where does that supposed difficulty come from? Is this general perception valid? What is the evidence for that?

## LESSON 1 INTRODUCING SHAKESPEARE

### ACTIVITY 3 – LANGUAGE WORK

Match Shakespeare's words to their modern equivalents.

| SHAKESPEARE'S WORDS |           | CURRENT EQUIVALENTS |                                 | ANSWERS |  |
|---------------------|-----------|---------------------|---------------------------------|---------|--|
| 1.                  | adieu     | a.                  | I insist                        |         |  |
| 2.                  | o'er      | b.                  | please; may I ask you           |         |  |
| 3.                  | hath      | c.                  | eye                             |         |  |
| 4.                  | behold    | d.                  | over                            |         |  |
| 5.                  | thou      | e.                  | has                             |         |  |
| 6.                  | thy       | f.                  | What did you say?               |         |  |
| 7.                  | prithee   | g.                  | Look!                           |         |  |
| 8.                  | say you?  | h.                  | your                            |         |  |
| 9.                  | I protest | i.                  | goodbye                         |         |  |
| 10.                 | eyne      | j.                  | you (informal or disrespectful) |         |  |

Now complete the lines with the appropriate word.

- I \_\_\_\_\_ in the sincerity of love and honest kindness. (Othello II.iii)
- And their executors, the knavish crows, disposer of remains / Fly \_\_\_\_\_ them all, impatient for their hour. (Henry V, IV.ii)
- Portia, \_\_\_\_\_, I have too grieved a heart. (The Merchant of Venice II.vii)
- We doubt not of a fair and lucky war,/ Since God so graciously \_\_\_\_\_ brought to light / This dangerous treason lurking in our way. (Henry V II.ii)
- Heaven truly knows that \_\_\_\_\_ art false as hell.(Othello IV.ii)
- \_\_\_\_\_, no more: let him come when he will; (Othello III.iii)
- \_\_\_\_\_, there stand the caskets, noble Prince. (The Merchant of Venice II.ix)
- That's a lie in \_\_\_\_\_ throat. I charge you in his majesty's name, (Henry V, IV.viii)

### ACTIVITY 4 – READING

Read the extracts in the box below. Underline or highlight the main idea in each paragraph.

#### Texts and contexts in Shakespeare

Shakespeare's characters, stories and themes have been, and still are, a source of meaning and significance for every generation. Their relevance lies in the virtually endless opportunities for reinterpretation and local application of familiar human relationships and passions. The plays are populated with fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, wives, husbands, brothers and sisters. (...) students of all ages can recognise and identify with such relationships. Similarly, they can explore other relationships of lovers, friends and enemies, masters and servants.' (Gibson, 1998, p.2)

'A distinction has to be drawn, first of all between difficulty of language, and difficulty of thought. Simple language can express a complex thought: "to be or not to be, that is the question". Conversely, complex language can express a simple thought'. (Crystal and Crystal, 2004, p.11)

'Shakespeare was clearly fascinated by language. He was acutely conscious of its use, power and limitations; every play displays this awareness. Language is action and Shakespeare's characters reveal themselves through it. (...) the language of the plays is energetic, vivid and sensuous. Its difficulties are enabling difficulties. [Readers] gain a sense of achievement



## LESSON 1 INTRODUCING SHAKESPEARE

### HOMEWORK & INDEPENDENT LEARNING

**Watching:** Watch a trailer produced by the Shakespeare Globe Theatre. Is there anything that surprised you?

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQAb\\_-jseis](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQAb_-jseis)

**Reading:** Read an article from the *Guardian* where the author lists the possible 10 best film adaptations of Shakespeare. Do you agree with this list? [www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/oct/09/10-best-shakespeare-screen-adaptations](http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/oct/09/10-best-shakespeare-screen-adaptations)

**Take notes on both the trailer and the article. Focus on aspects in both that you find interesting, surprising and/or controversial.**

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