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Launch issue

Prejudice in Shakespeare's work and time

Teacher's lesson plan

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Prejudice in Shakespeare's work and times

Lesson plan

In this guide we provide a plan to teach this lesson. Material for the students with the assignments can be found in the student worksheets.

Topic: Shakespeare and prejudice:

The Merchant of Venice; Othello; The Taming of the Shrew, Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet

Level: B1+

Time: 60 minutes

Aims / learning objectives

- To introduce students to the Elizabethan age
- To help students to understand a little about Shakespearian society and how it might have differed from modern-day society
- To introduce students to 5 of Shakespeare's best-known plays, all of which have been quite controversial as being sexist or racist
- To teach students about prejudice in general terms as well as relating it to Shakespearian plays
- To provoke discussion about prejudice in general terms as well as relating it to Shakespearian plays

Organisation / teaching methods

- One class of about 25 students
- Activities are done in the class as a whole, in pairs and in groups of five
- Materials: smart board (with internet and sound), white board (+ markers), worksheet
- Student materials: pen and paper, pc or tablet

Teaching materials provided

- Source : <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teaching-teens/uk-culture/shakespeare>
- Teacher's lesson plan with answer key
- Worksheet
- Powerpoint presentation

Teaching materials necessary in class

- Smart board
- White board with markers and eraser

Useful clips

- Link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfgeLdXA87I> (Elizabethan era)
- Link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRrvQ1vZxcg> (Romeo & Juliet)
- Link <https://youtu.be/EmjWIMMtjDc> (Hamlet)
- Link <https://youtu.be/upmMKz1PuMU> (Othello)
- Link <https://youtu.be/fAjOMs8u4Bo> (The Merchant of Venice)
- Link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVBFj_v9lz8 (The taming of the shrew)
- Link <https://youtu.be/h--HR7PWfpO> (The Scottish play- ^{Black Adder})

Queen Elizabeth I

In order for students to understand the time frame in which Shakespeare wrote his plays, the following information can be useful. There is a Youtube clip which explains this in a fun and easy way (see link above), but you may also choose to dress up as Queen Elizabeth I and explain the students about her in a more “dramatic” way.

Queen Elizabeth I was born in 1533 in Greenwich, England. She was the daughter of Henry the VIII and Anne Boleyn. She lived in difficult times and did not have the easiest life growing up. Her mother, Anne Boleyn would be executed for adultery when Elizabeth was only two years old. Her fathers last wife did make sure Elizabeth was highly educated and could speak several languages fluently. There were many changes in power after Elizabeths father died and religion was a much discussed topic as well. In 1553, Mary, Elizabeths half sister came to power. Mary insisted on making England Catholic again and even locked Elizabeth up in the Tower of London because she was Protestant. But Elizabeth was a strong and intelligent woman and her time would come. Mary died in 1558 and Elizabeth became queen. She restored Protestantism and formed the Church of England. She did maintain some Catholic elements and so both sides were pleased. Besides the church she also changed politics and law by bringing in experienced and trustworthy advisors. Elizabeth did many great things, but

Introduction

Students start by looking at the idea of stereotypes, concentrating on stereotypes about the English. They then start to look at possible stereotypes of their own cultures/nationalities, which leads into some work on the notion of prejudice (including vocabulary).

The lesson then goes on to look at attitudes towards women and different race in Shakespeare’s time, to give students a little background before looking at five well-known Shakespeare plays: *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Othello*, *Romeo & Juliet* and *Hamlet* – all of which have been accused of being sexist or racist. Students consider whether they think the plots might be sexist or racist, and then look at some alternative interpretations.

Task 1 – Warmer – Stereotypes (10 minutes)

The warmer is intended to start students thinking about prejudice and the way that people often make assumptions about those who are different from themselves.

- Ask students to work in pairs or small groups, look at the picture and discuss how typical they think it really is of an Englishman. In fact, it is pretty unusual these days to find someone who dresses this way, even in the City of London, where the bowler hat was traditionally worn by men working in the financial markets.
- Then ask them to discuss how true they think the list of stereotypes are. Obviously this is a matter of opinion, but as an English person, I’d say that none of them was really true except maybe the first one!
- This discussion should start to bring up the idea of stereotypes often being offensive.

Task 2 – Prejudice in Shakespeare’s time (5–10 minutes)

- (a) Students watch the videoclip <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfgeLdXA87I> or the teachers dressed as Queen Elizabeth I explains the students about Queen Elizabeth to get acquainted with the Elizabethan era.
- (b) Ask students to work in groups of four to discuss the question. Depending on their background knowledge, this discussion may be very short or quite extended.
- (c) Then ask them to read the short text and compare it with their ideas. They should then discuss what they read and say if anything surprised them.

Task 3 – Prejudices in Shakespeare’s plays? (20 minutes)

- Put students into groups of four or five and **ask each student to read a different problem**.
- They use the Internet to find out on which play their problem is based and they summarize the play in one or two sentences.
- Then ask them to tell the others in their group about the problem and to discuss whether they think the plays show racism, sexism or any other kind of prejudice.
Note that this could be Shakespeare’s prejudice or it could be the prejudice of characters in the play (not necessarily Shakespeare’s own).

< If desirable, a clip can be shown about each of the plays to show the story lines, see useful clips >

Task 4 – Class discussion (10 minutes)

- Ask students to look at the statements and try and decide which statement they agree with most. It might help to give them an example. For instance, because Shakespeare’s imagery often uses ‘black’ as a synonym for ‘evil’, phrases such as ‘black hearted’ are sometimes changed when the plays are produced. Is this a good idea, or is it ridiculous to change Shakespeare’s language because our modern ideas are different?
- Put students in pairs and let them discuss the statements. Explain that it doesn’t matter if they agree with the statement or not, they simply need to think of examples or arguments to support it. These do not have to be about Shakespeare, but could be about any book or play or television programme from the past which has scenes which would no longer be acceptable in today’s society.
- Put the pairs into four and let them argue the two points.

Ending - Show Black Adder’s run in with Shakespeare

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nm-Y1ch4b5c>