THE RENAISSANCE
(1485-1625)
THE PURITAN AGE
(1625-60)
Extra Material
William Shakespeare

The Merchant of Venice (1596-97)

BEFORE READING

‘I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same summer and winter as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?’ (Act III, Scene I)

Through this passionate speech Shylock cries out for the common humanity of his fellows: he is seen as a hated man by Christians, an outcast who longs for social acceptance.

Who is an outcast in your opinion? Are there outcasts in our society both as individuals and communities?

In particular if you consider the Jews and the sufferings endured by them throughout history, do you think you can apply this word to them?

The Merchant of Venice

The court in Venice is in session. The Duke has tried to dissuade Shylock from pressing further with his case, but the Jew insists on following the law to the letter and even sharpens his knife for Antonio’s flesh. At this point Portia, disguised as a young Doctor of Laws, appears on the scene.

PORTIA. I am informed thoroughly of the cause. Which is the merchant here? And which the Jew?
DUKE. Antonio and old Shylock, both stand forth.
PORTIA. Is your name Shylock?
SHYLOCK. Shylock is my name.
PORTIA. Of a strange nature is the suit you follow, yet in such rule that the Venetian law cannot impugn you as you do proceed. You stand within his danger, do you not?
ANTONIO. Ay, so he says.
PORTIA. Do you confess the bond?
ANTONIO. I do.
PORTIA. Then must the Jew be merciful.
SHYLOCK. On what compulsion must I? Tell me that.
PORTIA. The quality of mercy is not strained, it droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath; it is twice blest, it blesseth him that gives and him that takes; ‘Tis mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes he thronèd monarch better than his crown. His sceptre shows the force of temporal power, The attribute to awe and majesty, Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings; ut mercy is above this sceptred sway, It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings, It is an attribute to God himself, And earthly power doth then show likest God’s When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew, Though justice be thy plea, consider this: That in the course of justice none of us Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy, And that same prayer doth teach us all to render The deeds of mercy. I have spoke thus much To mitigate the justice of thy plea, Which if thou follow, this strict court of Venice Must needs give sentence ‘gainst the merchant there.
3 Closely analyse Portia’s speech and underline all the attributes referred to mercy.

3 What is mercy contrasted with?

3 Why does Portia advocate mercy? Choose from the following.

☐ Mercy suits the king.
☐ Only God shows mercy.
☐ In justice alone there is no salvation.
☐ We cannot be merciful.
☐ The justice of the plea has to be mitigated.
☐ Shylock’s plea will bring to a sentence against Antonio.

6 Imagine to flesh out the character of Shylock, the Jew. Consider the following aspects of the character’s life and make notes under each heading.

| Social position | ................................................................................................................................................ |
| Age | ................................................................................................................................................ |
| Clothing | ................................................................................................................................................ |
| Voice | ................................................................................................................................................ |
| Appearance | ................................................................................................................................................ |
| Adjectives to describe personality | ................................................................................................................................................ |

7 What do you know about the living conditions of the Jews in contemporary society? Compare it with the status of the Jews in the Elizabethan period. For your information read the following passage.

In Shakespeare’s England the Jewish religion was banned: officially there were supposed to be no Jews at all in England between 1290, when they were expelled by Edward I, and 1664, when they were readmitted with Charles II. Jews mainly lived in London, and as long as they did not make themselves too oblivious (they had to pretend they were Christians), or create a disturbance, they were in a way tolerated, principally because they were useful as money lenders. Inter-marriage was not permitted, so the race remained pure, and apart.

Creating the character of Shylock, Shakespeare conformed to the traditional stereotype of the Jew - having a red untidy wig and beard, and a long nose-, as he was represented on the Elisabethan stage, and was also influenced by the plays of many Elisabethan dramatists, such as Marlowe and Webster, full of attacks on money lending. In making such attacks, the playwrights were seeking to please the influential noblemen in their audience, who were so often the victims of these usurers; but the dramatists were also reflecting an ancient tradition of Christian belief.

In spite of all this Shakespeare was also interested in the enigmatic and lonely Jew and he endowed the conventional villain with human touches.
A modern Shylock

Arnold Wesker (1932), a contemporary playwright, has created another figure of the Jew in his play Shylock (1976), which sounds as a sort of reply to Shakespeare’s The Merchant of Venice, as concerns the treatment of the Jewish character. The playwright explained, in a talk in 1982, his approach to the character of Shylock:

Suddenly it came to me: my Shylock was a free spirit. That’s what he was about and that’s what I was about and that, I realized, is what a certain kind, a very important and influential kind, of Jewishness is about. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why the Jew has throughout history attracted such hostility and resentments, as free spirits do. Shylock, the foolish, defiant free spirit! He irritates on two levels: he neither conforms to what is expected of him outside the play by a public brought up on Shakespeare’s image of him, nor will he do what he is told within the play. Shakespeare’s Shylock on the other hand is a very well-behaved Jew, he behaves as is expected of him. He is malevolent from the start; possesses an evil imagination, which conceives of a pound of flesh as surety against his loan; is so miserly that he weeps for the loss of his ducats before the loss of his daughter (...) Gentiles feel very comfortable with such a portrait. It conforms to the image of the Jew which most reassures them. The Two Roots of Judaism, in Distinctions, 1985.

The plot of Shylock is the same as in Shakespeare’s play and is set in the Jewish Ghetto of Venice. The first scene takes place in Shylock’s study, strewn with books and manuscripts. Shylock, a ‘loan-banker’ and his old friend Antonio - both in their middle sixties - are leisurely cataloguing. Antonio needs to borrow three thousand ducats to lend to his grandson, and Shylock would prefer to give him the money without a contract but Antonio points out that the laws of Venice do no permit this. As a consequence of this the bond for a pound of flesh is made between the two and the familiar tragedy unfolds when Antonio loses his ships and cannot pay back. Shylock has to face the moral dilemma of respecting the terms of the contract and sacrificing his friend or violating the agreement and creating a precedent for the respect of the laws in Venice. When the question of the bond is brought to the Doge Shylock is accused by Bassanio, Graziano and Lorenzo of usury as a Jew, and he defends himself in a passionate way.
Read the following speech from Act II, Scene V, and compare it with the one you have read before in Shakespeare's play.

SHYLOCK. [furious but low and dangerous, building]: Jew! Jew, Jew, Jew! I hear the name around and everywhere. Your wars go wrong, the Jew must be the cause of it; your economic systems crumble, there the Jew must be; your wives get sick of you - a Jew will be an easy target for your sour frustrations. Failed university, professional blunderings¹, self-loathing² - the Jew, the Jew, the cause the Jew. And when will you cease? When, when, when will your hatreds dry up? There's nothing we can do is right. Admit it! You will have us all ways won't you? For our prophecies, our belief in universal morality, our scholarship, our command of trade, even our ability to survive. If we are silent we must be scheming³, if we talk we are insolent. When we come we are strangers, when we go we are traitors. In tolerating persecution we are despised, but were we to take up arms we'd be the world's marauders⁴, for sure. Nothing will please you. Well, damn you then! [Drawing knife.] I'll have my pound of flesh and not feel obliged to explain my whys and wherefores. Think what you will, you will think that in any case. I'll say it is my bond. The law is the law. You need no other reason, nor shall you get it - from me.

1. blunderings: errori madornali.
2. self-loathing: disprezzo di sé.
3. scheming: complottando.
4. marauders: saccheggiatori.
William Shakespeare

Hamlet (1600-01)

BEFORE READING
What is the nature of a ghost? Can it be trusted? Hamlet is affected by this question and doubts if the ghost is ‘a spirit of health or goblin damned’, but he calls him ‘Hamlet, King, father, royal Dane’ and gets ready to listen to him.
What do you think Hamlet’s state of mind is in front of the Ghost?

Back home from his university study at Wittenberg, Prince Hamlet finds his father dead and his mother married to his uncle. He falls into a distracted state of mourning and of grief over his mother’s quick remarriage, which is also emphasized by his complex and melancholy nature. The meeting with his father’s ghost on the battlements of the castle of Elsinore at night marks the beginning of Hamlet’s dramatic conflict.

GHOST. [...] Now, Hamlet, hear:
‘Tis given out that, sleeping in mine orchard,
A serpent stung me; so the whole ear of Denmark
Is by a forged process of my death
Rankly abus’d; but know, thou’ noble youth,
The serpent that did sting thy’ father’s life
Now wears his crown.

HAMLET. O my prophetic soul!
My uncle!

GHOST. Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitrous gifts,
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce! - won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen.
O Hamlet! what a falling-off was there;
From me, whose love was of that dignity
That it went hand in hand even with the vow
I made to her in marriage; and to decline
Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor
To those of mine! [...],

1. thou: tu (forma arcaica).
2. thy: tuo/a (forma arcaica).
OVER TO YOU

1. What does the ghost reveal to Hamlet about his death and the queen’s new attachment?

2. What are the expressions used by the ghost to define Hamlet’s uncle and mother in comparison with himself? What feelings do they convey?

3. In reply to what the ghost reveals him Hamlet says: ‘O my prophetic soul! / My uncle!’ What does this exclamation mean?

WRITER’S CORNER

4. The entry of a ghost on the stage is a thrilling moment in the theatre: how does it look like? Does it have a physical appearance or not? How does it move (slowly, suddenly, with particular gestures)? Are there accompanying sound effects or lighting? Imagine preparing your own staging for the entry of the Ghost: try to make it dramatically effective.

TEXT 3

BEFORE READING

‘Frailty, thy name is woman’ is a sentence uttered by Hamlet in his first soliloquy when he expresses his disappointment at his mother’s hasty marriage with Claudius. Keep it in mind while reading the following extract and say if it can be applied to Gertrude.

HAMLET.

After the ghost has asked Hamlet to remember and to revenge him, according to the medieval code, the young prince is more and more torn between the necessity to comply with his father’s request and his inability to act, as appears in many of his soliloquies. He pretends to be mad and arranges the performance of a play resembling his father’s murder to observe Claudius’ reactions, which clearly betray his guilt. After the performance he visits his mother.

HAMLET. Look here, upon this picture, and on this,

The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.
See, what a grace was seated on this brow;
Hyperion’s curls; the front of Jove himself;
An eye like Mars, to threaten and command;
A station like the herald Mercury new-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill;
A combination and a form indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal,
to give the world assurance of a man:
This was your husband. Look you now, what follows:
Here is your husband; like a mildew’d ear,
Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?
Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,
And batten on this moor? Ha! have you eyes?
You cannot call it love; for at your age

1. Hyperion: Iperione; nella mitologia greca è un titano, padre di Elio (il sole).
2. Jove: Giove, il mitologico re degli dei.

AMLETO. Guardate questo ritratto, e quest’altro. Sono le immagini fedeli dei due fratelli. Guardate quanta luce di grazia su questo volto! I riccioli d’Iperione, la fronte di Giove; l’occhio d’un Marte alla minaccia e al comando; il portamento di Mercurio l’araldo, appena posa il piede sui colli ai margini del cielo; un complesso e una forma in cui, veramente, sembra che ogni dio abbia impresso il suo suggello per garantire al mondo l’autenticità di un uomo tale. Questo ‘era’ il vostro marito. Ma guardate ora quest’altro, il sopravvenuto. Questo ‘è’ il vostro marito, la spiga guasta che insidia la salute del fratello sano. Avete occhi, voi?
The hey-day in the blood is tame, it’s humble,
And waits upon the judgment: and what judgment
Would step from this to this? [...] 
O shame! where is thy blush? Rebellious hell,
If thou canst mutine in a matron’s bones,
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax,
And melt in her own fire: proclaim no shame
When the compulsive ardour gives the charge,
Since frost itself as actively doth burn
And reason panders will.

QUEEN GERTRUDE. O Hamlet, speak no more:
Thou turn’st mine eyes into my very soul;
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct.

HAMLET. Nay, but to live
In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,
Stew’d in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty, -

QUEEN GERTRUDE. O, speak to me no more;
These words, like daggers, enter in mine ears;
No more, sweet Hamlet!

HAMLET. A murderer and a villain;
A slave that is not twentieth part the tithe
Of your precedent lord; a vice of kings;
A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,
That from a shelf the precious diadem stole,
And put it in his pocket!

QUEEN GERTRUDE. No more!

HAMLET. A king of shreds and patches,-

O allora, come avete potuto abbandonare questo pascolo d’alta montagna per ingrassare in questa palude? Ah! Avete occhi? E potete dire che è amore? All’età vostra già si è placato il furore di luglio; e il sangue, fatto mansueto e savio, ubbidisce al giudizio. Ma quale giudizio vi porta a questo trapasso?

[...] O vergogna, dov’è il tuo rossore? Ribelle inferno, se tu puoi accendere un tal braciere nelle midolla d’una matrona, sia cera alla fiamma viva della giovinezza la virtù e si fonda al suo stesso fuoco; e se proclami che non c’è vergogna, quando viene all’assalto, d’impeto, il desiderio; ché se alla foia serve da mezzana la ragione, vedremo il ghiaccio in fiamme.

REGINA. Oh basta, Amleto! Tu costringi i miei occhi a guardare nel fondo dell’anima mia. E vedo laggiù macchie nere e così aderenti che vi lasceranno un segno indelebile.

AMLETO. E, intanto, vivere arroso data un letto di corruzione tra tanfate di sudaticcio e fetori di lardo rancido; e con parolette sdolcinate fare all’amore sopra a un mucchio di letame.

REGINA. Oh basta! Basta! Le tue parole m’entrano per le orecchie come pugnali. Oh basta, Amleto caro.

AMLETO. Un assassino, un Vigliacco, un cialtrone che non vale la ventesima parte d’un millimetro del vostro re di prima; una parodia di re, un tagliaborse del potere e del regno che da un cassetto scassinato ha tratto di furto il ricco diadema della regalità, e se l’è cacciato in tasca.

REGINA. Basta! Basta!

AMLETO. Un re di stracci e toppe.

Traduzione di C.V.Lodovici

OVER TO YOU

1. Answer the following questions.
   1. Where is Hamlet?
   2. What is his intention in talking to his mother?
   3. What two objects does Hamlet compare? What differences does he point out in his comparison?

2. When reproaching his mother, what does Hamlet criticise her for? (Choose.)
   - her complicity in the murder of his father
   - her marriage to an inferior husband
   - her marriage to her former husband’s brother
   - other (specify) ...

3. What is his mother’s reaction?

4. Identify the images used to juxtapose the two brothers, King Hamlet and Claudius. Fill in the following chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>King Hamlet</th>
<th>Claudius</th>
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</table>
‘What feelings are conveyed through this imagery?

Hamlet’s imagery is associated with beauty, nature and sex. Find expressions related to these areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beauty</th>
<th>Nature</th>
<th>Sex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

What feelings does the Queen show in her words? Tick as appropriate.

- [ ] disbelief
- [ ] remorse
- [ ] shame
- [ ] anger
- [ ] sorrow

As concerns the language and style answer true or false.

1. There are references to mythology.  
2. The style is colloquial.  
3. There are references to corruption/decay.  
4. The text is in prose.  
5. There is juxaposition of opposites.

1. Consider in Shakespeare’s time, audiences expected actors, especially in histories and tragedies, to speak in verse. The poetic style of verse was felt to be particularly suitable for kings, tragic themes and moments of high emotional intensity, while prose was used especially in comedies and by people of low origin (like the gravediggers in Hamlet’s Act V), or when a character loses his control and so he shifts from verse to prose. More than ninety per cent in Hamlet is in blank verse. It is written in iambic pentameter. A ten-syllable line has five stresses: five stressed (/) syllables alternate with five unstressed (X) syllables, with the pattern of unstressed/stressed, as in the example of line 1: Look here, upon this picture, and on this X /

Why does Hamlet treat his mother with such violence? Discuss the following points.

1. He has an Oedipus complex: he is jealous of Claudius.
2. He thinks she is an accomplice in murder, as well as an adulterer.
3. He wants to make her understand her sin, and become his ally.
4. He is really mad as his mother’s behavior has driven him crazy.
5. He is a misogynist (as he shows in his relationship with Ophelia).

Other: ...

1. This is a Freudian interpretation of the character of Hamlet, obsessed by his mother’s sexuality.
2. A man who hates women: in this case Hamlet rejects Ophelia’s love and blames his mother’s behavior he considers adulterous.
Hamlet

As the final effect of a tragedy, according to Aristotle, is catharsis, that is the process of removing evil. Hamlet follows the pattern of order-disorder-order, which implies that the situation of disorder (King Hamlet’s murder, Gertrude’s remarriage, a world dominated by evil, ‘an unweeded garden’) has to flow, at the end, into one of ‘restored order’. Hamlet dies, as all the other characters, except for Horatio and Fortinbras, the prince of Norway, who arrives to claim the throne of Denmark and arranges Hamlet’s funeral service, paying homage to his royalty.

HAMLET. [...] I am dead, Horatio. Wretched queen, adieu!

You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
That are but mutes or audience to this act,
Had I but time, - as this fell sergeant, death,
Is strict in his arrest, - O! I could tell you -
But let it be. Horatio, I am dead;
Thou liv’st - report me and my cause aright
To the unsatisfied.

HORATIO. Never believe it;
I am more an antique Roman than a Dane:
Here’s yet some liquor left.

HAMLET. As thou’rt a man,
Give me the cup: let go; by heaven I’ll have’t.
O God! Horatio, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story.


---

OVER TO YOU

1. Answer the following questions.
   1. Who does Hamlet say goodbye to?
   2. Which lines are addressed to the public?
   3. What do you think Horatio intends to do?
   4. What task does Hamlet leave him?

2. Hamlet’s speech is marked by the contrast between life and death. Find the expressions used to describe them and say what they convey.

3. The two requests Hamlet makes to Horatio are: ‘report me’ (l. 7) and ‘to tell my story’ (l. 19). Why do you think he insists on them?

4. Hamlet calls ‘incest’ the marriage between Gertrude and Claudius, but actually it was a marriage between a brother-in-law and a sister-in-law. In Elizabethan England such marriage was forbidden by the Church, and offenders were publicly humiliated. So the audience watching Hamlet at the Globe probably felt moral repulsion at the Queen’s hasty marriage, also because widows were expected to observe a long period of mourning, and shared Hamlet’s disgust. Would it be the same in our society?
According to Stanislavskij, each dramatic character has a ‘super-objective’, that is what s/he wants overall during the course of the play, what drives him/her forward. Consider Hamlet, explore his motives and draw a self-portrait using the first person. Fill in the following.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I want (what I want to achieve)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think (what I think about the other characters and the situation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel (fears, hopes, love, hate, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is what I’m like (my nature)</td>
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</tbody>
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1. Konstantin Sergeevic Stanislavskij (1863-1928), attore, regista e teorico teatrale russo, creò un metodo di recitazione basato sull’approfondimento psicologico del personaggio e sulla ricerca di affinità tra personaggio e attore.
The Renaissance and the Puritan Age / Extra Material

William Shakespeare

Macbeth (1606)

**BEFORE READING**

1. ‘Fair is foul, and foul is fair’ is the sentence the three witches repeat. It is a riddle which presents two conflicting values:
   - fair = goodness, light
   - foul = wickedness, darkness

   Why do the witches express this reversal of values? What could it mean? What happens when the supernatural world of the witches and the world of men come together?

---

**Macbeth**

[...] **ANQUO.** What are these,
   So wither’d and so wild in their attire,
   That look not like th’inhabitants o’the earth,
   And yet are on’t? Live you? or are you aught
   That man may question? You seem to understand me
By each at once her choppy finger laying
Upon her skinny lips: you should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so.

**MACBETH.** Speak, if you can: what are you?

**FIRST WITCH.** All hail, Macbeth! had to thee, Thane of Glamis!

**SECOND WITCH.** All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!

**THIRD WITCH.** All hail, Macbeth! that shalt be king hereafter.

**BANQUO.** Good sir, why do you start, and seem to fear Things that do sound so fair? I’ the name of truth Are ye fantastical, or that indeed Which outwardly ye show? My noble partner
You greet with present grace and great prediction
Of noble having and of royal hope,
That he seems rapt withal: to me you speak not.
If you can look into the seeds of time,
And say which grain will grow and which will not,
Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear
Your favours nor your hate.

**FIRST WITCH.** Hail!

**SECOND WITCH.** Hail!

**THIRD WITCH.** Hail!

**FIRST WITCH.** Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.

**SECOND WITCH.** Not so happy, yet much happier.

**THIRD WITCH.** Thou shalt get kinks, though hou be none:
   So, all hail, Macbeth and Banquo!

**FIRST WITCH.** Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!

---

**BANQUO.** Che sono quelle figure tutte grinzose, 
e così selvagge nel vestire, che non hanno 
 l’aspetto degli abitatori della terra, e pur vi 
 stanno sopra? Vivete, o siete qualche cosa a cui 
 si possa rivolgere una domanda? Sembra che mi 
 intendiate, dal fatto che ciascuna di voi, proprio 
 nel medesimo tempo, posa il suo dito rugoso 
 sulle smunte labbra: voi dovete esser donne, 
 ma tuttavia la vostra barba mi impedisce di 
 persuadermi che lo siete davvero.

**MACBETH.** Parlate, se potete: che cosa siete?

**PRIMA STREGA.** Salve, Macbeth! Salute a te, signore di Glamis!

**SECONDA STREGA.** Salve, Macbeth! Salute a te, signore di Cawdor!

**TERZA STREGA.** Salve, Macbeth, che un giorno sarai re!

**BANQUO.** Mio buon signore, perché trasalite e 
 sembra che abbiate paura di cose che suonano 
 così belle? In nome del vero siete creature della 
 fantasia, o siete in realtà ciò che esteriormente 
 sembrate? Voi salutate il mio nobile compagno 
 con un titolo di onore ch’egli già possiede, e con 
 si alta predizione di nobile acquisto e di regale 
 speranza ch’egli ne sembra rapito fuor di sé: a 
 me non parlate. Se voi potete penetrare con lo 
 sguardo dentro i semi del tempo e dire quale 
 granello germoglierà e quale no, allora parlate 
 a me, che non sollecito né temo i vostri favori e 
 l’odio vostro.

**PRIMA STREGA.** Salve!

**SECONDA STREGA.** Salve!

**TERZA STREGA.** Salve!

**PRIMA STREGA.** Inferiore a Macbeth, e più grande.

**SECONDA STREGA.** Non così felice, ma pur molto 
 più felice.

**TERZA STREGA.** Tu genererai dei re, senza esser 
 tale tu stesso: così, salute, Macbeth e Banquo!

**PRIMA STREGA.** Banquo e Macbeth, salute!

---

**Traduzione di C. Chiarini**
Answer true or false.
1. Banquo wonders about the creatures he meets.  
2. The witches are beautiful.  
3. They greet Macbeth and Banquo in an enigmatic way.  
4. Macbeth is not interested in what the witches say.  
5. Banquo invites the witches to predict his future.

Answer the following questions.
1. The witches address Macbeth with three titles: what are they?  
2. What predictions do they imply?  
3. What predictions are made for Banquo?

Find and underline details of the witches’ physical appearance.

The witches’ language is marked by repetition, magic formulas, ambiguity and contrasting concepts. Find examples of them in the text and fill in the following chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repetitions</th>
<th>Magic formulas</th>
<th>Ambiguity</th>
<th>Contrasting concepts</th>
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Macbeth and Banquo respond differently to the witches and their prophecies. Say which of the two is:
1. more fearful  
2. surprised at such a sight  
3. curious to know  
4. more courageous

In the Elizabethan period witchcraft was believed and practiced. King James I of England (1603) was himself an expert in witchcraft. When he was King of Scotland he even published a book on the subject, *Daemonologie*, in 1597, and participated in a number of trials against alleged witches. The Witchcraft Statute approved in 1604 was more severe than the previous Act (1563) and introduced the death penalty for all confirmed witches (by burning or hanging). This resulted in a mass persecution of witches, who were mainly old, poor and unprotected women. They were blamed for every terrible event which occurred, such as diseases, a bad harvest, the death of animals, fires, and they became the target of social violence and fanaticism.

Have you studied or read about any cases of witch-hunting?

Writer’s Corner

Imagine you are performing the scene in a theatre. In groups of three work on the sound effects and scenery of the text. Repeat the witches’ words, giving intonation and rhythm, introducing extra features to the dialogue (posture, movements, gestures) and decide if the witches are old or young, male or female. Add other sound effects like thunder, rain, battle noises, cats, toads, other animals, etc.
Macbeth is haunted by the many crimes he has committed and is besieged in the castle of Dunsinane in Scotland, by his enemies, who want to restore Duncan’s elder son to the throne. Lady Macbeth became mad and died. Macbeth begins to realize his end is near, as you can read below in his most famous soliloquy.

SEYTON. The queen, my lord, is dead.
MACBETH. She should have died hereafter, There would have been a time for such a word. To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, Creeps in this petty pace from day to day, To the last syllable of recorded time; And all our yesterdays have lighted fools The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, And then is heard no more; it is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing.

OVER TO YOU

1. Answer the following questions.
   1. Who do you think Seyton is?
   2. What information does he give Macbeth?
   3. What is Macbeth’s response to this?

2. Describe Macbeth’s frame of mind in this soliloquy. Choose from the following adjectives.
   - [ ] tired
   - [ ] disillusioned
   - [ ] indifferent
   - [ ] resigned
   - [ ] gloomy
   - [ ] proud
   - [ ] desperate
The words uttered by Macbeth at the news of his wife’s death (II. 2-3) are related to his state of mind. Try to interpret them.

Macbeth’s speech is highly poetic and full of images. Find them and list them below.

| Mankind is described as | ............................................................... |
| Man is described as      | ............................................................... |
| Life is                 | ............................................................... |
| Macbeth’s life is described as | ............................................................... |

Which tense is mainly used by Macbeth? Why?

Although Macbeth has committed many crimes, can he be considered a tragic hero? Look at the following features typical of other great Shakesperian heroes and say whether any of them can refer to Macbeth.

- [ ] He is of noble origin.
- [ ] He is brave and loyal but he has a weakness.
- [ ] He experiences an internal struggle between good and evil.
- [ ] After obtaining success and power he loses everything.
- [ ] He struggles till the end but finally dies.

In his tragedies Shakespeare often explores the way in which a man’s own character contributes to his downfall (known in theatrical terms as ‘hubris’), showing how all tragic heroes have a fatal flaw which induces them to make a crucial mistake resulting in their doom. While at the beginning of the play Macbeth appears as a heroic warrior who has fought and won a battle for his country, by the end of the play he is totally deprived of humanity.

What is Macbeth’s fatal flaw? What are the steps which take him from happiness to downfall? Which other tragic Shakespearian heroes do you know who have been affected by the same fatal flaw (difetto)? Discuss in class.
William Shakespeare

Much Ado About Nothing (1598)

The plot
The play begins just after the battle between Don Pedro and his villainous brother Don John. Don Pedro is triumphant and goes to stay with Leonato, the Duke of Messina, with his good friend Claudio and a group of soldiers. Claudio soon falls in love with the Duke's daughter, Hero, and as the feeling is reciprocal a wedding is organised.

At the same time some friends try to bring another couple together: Beatrice, Hero's cousin, with a soldier, Benedick, but they seem to take an instant dislike to each other.

Meanwhile Don John, who hates Claudio, plans to ruin his wedding. He cunningly convinces Claudio that Hero has been unfaithful. Claudio is devastated and rejects Hero during the wedding ceremony in front of her father. Soon after, however, Leonato discovers that Claudio had been tricked and Hero is actually innocent. Claudio is told that Hero has died from grief and that they have both been the victims of a terrible plot.

To compensate Hero’s ‘death’ Claudio is asked to marry Leonato’s ‘niece’ and the wedding takes place. The ‘niece’ wears a mask during the ceremony and does not reveal herself until the end. She is, of course, Hero and they are both delighted to be reunited.

The play ends with a double wedding as the plan to bring Beatrice and Benedick together is also successful, despite their stubborn characters.

Finally, Don John is exposed as the villain he really is and is captured.

Shakespeare’s sources
Ludovico Ariosto’s Orlando furioso (1516), Matteo Bandello’s Novelle (1554-73) and Edmund Spenser’s The Faerie Queene (1596) all seem to have provided different elements for Shakespeare's play Much Ado About Nothing. However, the introduction of the second couple, Benedick and Beatrice, which provides a parallel love-story seems to be an added invention of Shakespeare, providing more intrigue, irony and humour to the play.

The themes
The theme of appearances and deception is dominant throughout the play. Nothing is ever quite what it seems. This comes out clearly with the frequent use of disguises and the negative consequences they have. Also, Beatrice and Benedick’s mask of cold realism in the beginning is destined to crumble when their true feelings are encouraged to rise to the surface, again through the use of disguises and deception. Connected with the theme of appearances is also the frequent mentioning of fashion and how its ephemeral state can be linked to those who follow it. At the beginning of the play Beatrice says of Benedick: ‘He wears his faith but as the/fashion of his hat, it ever changes with the next block.’

So, appearance and deception/seeming and being are dominant themes and ones which affect every character of the play except Friar Francis. He is never taken in by how things ‘seem’ to be but trusts his knowledge and experience. For this reason he never doubts Hero’s innocence and is determined to discover the truth behind the accusations.

The language
The plays is written largely in prose but with passages in blank verse and iambic pentameter, as Shakespeare was becoming more flexible and rhythmically varied with his language. In typical Elizabethan style, Shakespeare contrasts playful and
metaphorical pieces with others that are formal and poetic (especially with the characters of Claudio and Hero). Then there are the more natural and realistic speeches of Benedick and Beatrice. This variety of styles would have been very popular with Elizabethan audiences. Shakespeare’s use of language, however, is skilfully tied up with the theme of appearances, seeming and being. The different styles of language are often used to represent some form of distortion in the plot and can be seen as another theme in itself – that of the different functions of language.

**TEXT 1**

**BEFORE READING**

Do people change when they fall in love? Read the following extract when Benedick is reflecting on the changes in his love-struck friend, Claudio.

**BENEDICK.** He was wont to speak plain and to the purpose, like an honest man and a soldier, and now is he turned orthographer; his words are a very fantastical banquet, just so many strange dishes. May I be so converted, and see with these eyes? I cannot tell. I think not: I will not be sworn but love may transform me to an oyster; but I’ll take my oath on it, till he have made an oyster of me he shall never make me such a fool. One woman is fair, yet I am well; another is wise, yet I am well; another virtuous, yet I am well; but till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in my grace.

**1.** How, according to Benedick, has Claudio’s behaviour changed? Choose 1 or 2.

- 1. He has begun to talk in an elaborate way.
- 2. His speech has become plain and simple.

**2.** Read lines 6-8 again. What effect does Benedick say love has on people?

**3.** He describes himself as ‘fair’, ‘wise’ and ‘virtuous’ but why is he so confident about never finding a woman to love?
Much Ado About Nothing

This is the final scene of the play, the denouement. Claudio has agreed to marry Leonato’s ‘niece’ to compensate his daughter’s ruined reputation and ‘death’. He is now standing at the altar facing Leonato’s masked ‘niece’ who is about to reveal herself as Hero. Beatrice, also wearing a mask, has accompanied her.

HERO. [unmasking] And when I lived I was your other wife; and when you lov’d, you were my other husband.

CLAUDIO. Another Hero!

HERO. Nothing certainer. One Hero died defiled, but I do live, and surely as I live, I am a maid.

DON PEDRO. The former Hero, Hero that is dead!

LEONATO. She died, my lord, but whiles her slander lived.

FRIAR. All this amazement can I qualify: when after that the holy rites are ended, I’ll tell you largely of fair Hero’s death: meantime, let wonder seem familiar, and to the chapel let us presently.

BENEDICK. Soft and fair, Friar. Which is Beatrice?

BEATRICE. [Unmasking.] I answer to that name. What is your will?

BENEDICK. Do not you love me?

BEATRICE. Why, no; no more than reason.

BENEDICK. Why, then, your uncle and the prince and Claudio have been deceived; for they swore you did.

BEATRICE. Do not you love me?

BENEDICK. Troth, no; no more than reason.

BEATRICE. Why, then, my cousin, Margaret, and Ursula, are much deceived, for they did swear you did.

BENEDICK. They swore that you were almost sick for me.

BEATRICE. They swore that you were well-nigh dead for me.

BENEDICK. ‘Tis no such matter. Then, you do not love me?

BEATRICE. No, truly, but in friendly recompense.

LEONATO. Come, cousin, I am sure you love the gentleman.

CLAUDIO. And I’ll be sworn upon’t that he loves her, for here’s a paper written in his hand, a halting sonnet of his own pure brain, fashioned to Beatrice.

HERO. And here’s another, writ in my cousin’s hand, stolen from her pocket, containing her affection unto Benedick.

BENEDICK. A miracle! Here’s our own hands against our hearts. Come, I will have thee, but by this light, I take thee for pity.

BEATRICE. I would not deny you; but, by this good day, I yield upon great persuasion, and partly to save your life, for I was told you were in consumption.

BENEDICK. Peace, I will stop your mouth. [Kisses her.]

DON PEDRO. How dost thou, Benedick the married man?
BENEDICK. I'll tell thee what, prince: a college of witcrackers cannot flout me out of my humour. Dost thou think I care for a satire or an epigram? No; if a man will be beaten with brains, a' shall wear nothing handsome about him. In brief, since I do purpose to marry, I will think nothing to any purpose that the world can say against it; and therefore never flout at me for what I have said against it, for man is a giddy thing, and this is my conclusion. For thy part, Claudio, I did think to have beaten thee; but in that thou art like to be my kinsman, live unbruised, and love my cousin. CLAUDIO. I had well hoped thou would'st have denied Beatrice, that I might have cudgelled thee out of thy single life to make thee a double-dealer, which, out of question, thou wilt be, if my cousin do not look exceeding narrowly to thee. BENEDICK. Come, come, we are friends, let's have a dance ere we are married, that we may lighten our hearts and our wives' heels.
OVER TO YOU

1. Choose the answer a or b.

   1. The final scene of the play focuses mainly on the relationship between:
      - [ ] Claudio and Hero
      - [ ] Benedick and Beatrice
   2. Beatrice and Benedick:
      - [ ] find it difficult to admit their love for each other
      - [ ] openly declare their love for each other

2. Answer true or false.

   1. Beatrice and Benedick were tricked into writing about their love.  
      [ ] True  [ ] False
   2. Don Pedro is surprised by Benedick’s decision.  
      [ ] True  [ ] False
   3. In the end one couple is married.  
      [ ] True  [ ] False
   4. The whole scene ends in a dance.  
      [ ] True  [ ] False

3. Complete the following sentences.

   1. Claudio was deceived because he thought (two reasons) ..............................................................
   2. Hero had Beatrice’s love poem because she ......................................................................................
   3. Benedick says he will marry Beatrice because ....................................................................................
   4. Beatrice says she will marry Benedick because ...................................................................................

4. Find the exact words which express the following and write the name of the character who says them;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exact words</th>
<th>Said by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Hero was only dead while the scandal surrounding her was alive.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. We have written things that seem to contradict our feelings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Not even the most intelligent people could make me change my happy mood.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I think you will be an unfaithful partner unless you are closely watched.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

5. In this extract Benedick and Beatrice decide to marry. How would you describe their behaviour in this moment? Choose from the following.

   - [ ] They seem romantic.
   - [ ] They seem indifferent.
   - [ ] They seem shocked.

6. Compare Benedick’s words in lines XX-XX with lines X-X in the Before reading extract. In what way has he changed?

7. In lines XX-XX Benedick justifies the changes in himself by saying:
   1. ‘If a man will be beaten with brains, a’ shall wear nothing handsome about him.’
   2. ‘For man is a giddy thing, and this is my conclusion.’

   What do you think he means by these two statements? Discuss in pairs. Do you agree with him?

8. This extract and the extract you read from Romeo and Juliet are both declarations of love. Which extract do you personally prefer and why?

9. Do you think the title of the play is appropriate/inappropriate? Justify your choice.
William Shakespeare

Much Ado About Nothing (1598)

Before Reading

In mine eye she is the sweetest lady that ever I looked on. (Act I, Scene 1)

These are Claudio’s words as soon as he sees Hero and falls in love with her. Why, then, is he so ingenious to fall into Don John’s trap? Give your own reason/s.

Much Ado About Nothing

Constantly playing with words and verbal humour are the main features of Much Ado About Nothing: Beatrice and Benedick always joke and verbally fight one with the other about man-woman relationships and love; the rough men of the Watch (Dogberry and Verges) talk about their duty – to patrol and control the area in the Prince’s name in lively and comic prose. In this comedy the ‘word’ is meant to amuse and enchant, but also to deceive and it is especially with this aim that the word is used by the wicked to counterfeit reality and trick the innocent. In fact, this is what occurs when Don John arouses Claudio’s suspicions about Hero’s faithfulness.

CLAUDIO. If there be any impediment, I pray you discover it.
JOHN. You may think I love you not; let that appear hereafter, and aim better at me by that I now will manifest. For my brother, I think he holds you well, and in dearness of heart hath help to effect your ensuing marriage - surely suit ill spent, and labour ill bestowed!
PEDRO. Why, what’s the matter?
JOHN. I came hither to tell you; and, circumstances shortened, for she has been too long a talking of, the lady is disloyal.
CLAUDIO. Who, Hero?
JOHN. Even she - Leonato’s Hero, your Hero, every man’s Hero.
CLAUDIO. Disloyal?
JOHN. The word is too good to paint out her wickedness. I could say she were worse; think you of a worse title, and I will fix her to it. Wonder not till further warrant. Go but with me tonight, you shall see her chamber-window entered, even the night before her wedding-day. If you love her then, tomorrow wed her; but it would better fit your honour to change your mind.

CLAUDIO. May this be so?

PEDRO. I will not think it.

JOHN. If you dare not trust that you see, confess not that you know. If you will follow me, I will show you enough; and when you have seen more and heard more, proceed accordingly.

CLAUDIO. If I see anything tonight why I should not marry her, tomorrow in the congregation, where I should wed, there will I shame her.

BEFORE READING

1. Answer true or false.

   1. The doctor has a good knowledge of astronomy.  
   2. Don Pedro arranged the marriage between Hero and Claudio.  
   3. Claudio is not surprised at the news.  
   4. John openly declares Hero’s unfaithfulness.  
   5. John invites Claudio to go and check the truth with his own eyes.  
   6. Claudio is ready to get married anyhow.

   T F T F T T

2. Match parts in A with parts in B in order to complete the sentences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Claudio wants to know</td>
<td>a. because someone enters her chamber window.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. John asserts that</td>
<td>b. he will shame her at the wedding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Hero is even worse than</td>
<td>c. if there is any impediment to his wedding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>said</td>
<td>d. it was wrong to arrange the wedding with Hero.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Claudio promises that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>if he sees she is unfair</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3. How would you describe Pedro’s and Claudio’s reaction to what John tells them? Choose from the following.

   - impatient
   - indifferent
   - surprised
   - curious
   - firm
   - angry
   - doubtful

4. In order to convince Claudio John uses strong words. Underline them and say what feelings they convey.

5. What do you think the following sentence uttered by John means? ‘Even she – Leonato’s Hero, your Hero, every man’s Hero.’ What is the effect of the repetition of the name Hero?
Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,
Men were deceivers ever,
One foot in sea and one on shore,
To one thing constant never:
Then sigh not so, but let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny,
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into Hey nonny nonny.

Sing no more ditties, sing no moe,
Of dumps so dull and heavy;
The fraud of men was ever so,
Since summer first was leavy:
Then sigh not so, but let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny,
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into Hey nonny nonny.
William Shakespeare

*Julius Caesar* (1598)

*Julius Caesar* was the first of Shakespeare’s three plays dealing with the history of Rome, the others being Coriolanus and Antony and Cleopatra. After its foundation Rome was ruled by oppressive kings until the Romans rebelled and a republic was formed made up of the Senate (who dealt with civil justice) and the tribune, who represented the people. Julius Caesar became a consul in 59 BC and distinguished himself with his leadership ability and ambition, extending Rome’s power extensively outside Italy. His greatest rival was Pompey whom he defeated along with his sons, thus gaining absolute military power.

It was after this victory that Caesar returned to Rome in triumph and it is here that Shakespeare’s story begins.

Many critics feel that the work should actually be entitled Marcus Brutus as he is the main character, Caesar being assassinated at the beginning of Act III. The whole play, in fact, revolves around Brutus’s internal conflict which stems from his love and devotion to Caesar but his fear that he will become absolute dictator and his love for the Roman Republic. Caesar, however, is the instigator of all the action and remains the underlying force in the hearts and minds of the characters throughout the play, so justifying its title.

**The plot**

Pompey and his family have now been defeated. Caesar now has supreme power and as a result a conflict has emerged in Rome between those who conspire against Caesar and the fear of a growing dictatorship (Brutus, Cassius and others) and those who support him (Antony and Octavius).

While most of the conspirators are motivated by envy and ambition Brutus, Caesar’s close friend, has only the interests of Rome at heart and is finally tricked into becoming one of the conspirators by Cassius who led him to believe (through false letters) that the people of Rome no longer supported Caesar.

Caesar is warned of approaching danger, ‘Beware the Ides of March’, (15th March), yet feels invincible and goes to the Senate that day. It is then that he is assassinated, each conspirator stabbing him with Brutus giving him the final blow.

The conspirators, using the much-loved Brutus as spokesman, then face the crowd, declaring they acted in the interests of Rome and its people. Brutus gives a convincing speech but, in allowing Caesar’s supporter, Mark Antony, to speak after him, proves himself to be a naïve politician. Antony, slowly and eloquently swings public opinion in his favour, until finally, after showing them Caesar’s dead body, he incites them to drive the conspirators out of Rome. The last to survive battle is Brutus who finally commits suicide. Antony, however, pays him a final tribute by stating that he was: ‘the noblest Roman of them all’.

**Shakespeare’s source**

The main source of Shakespeare’s play is the work by Plutarch, *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* in its Elizabethan translation by Sir Thomas North. This was a very popular and much read piece of work in Shakespeare’s time and Shakespeare could have depended on the fact that much of his audience would have known the story.
Themes
One of the main themes of the play is the struggle for political power and how it can transform those involved. Through the characters Brutus, Antony, Cassius and Caesar Shakespeare draws four different political profiles. The honest, honourable yet naive character of Brutus; the cunning, opportunistic yet heroic figure of Antony; the corrupt, cynical and ruthless Cassius – the perfect antagonist for Brutus; and Caesar himself, a complex figure, undoubtedly charismatic and an efficient leader yet physically weak and blind to the dangers stemming from those closest to him, the result of his megalomania and a fixed belief in his own invincibility.

The problem of a successor was something which would have also touched the hearts of Shakespeare’s audiences at the time and one which Shakespeare was well aware of. Queen Elizabeth was coming to the end of her reign and still there was no legitimate heir to the throne. The peaceful transition which was to follow under James I was not something the Elizabethan audience could have predicted. Therefore the power struggle and an uncertainty for the future we can find in the play were things Shakespeare’s audience could have identified with.

The malleability of the masses is another theme throughout the play as we can see in the two speeches below how quickly they can change their allegiance.

BEFORE READING
1. We are going to look at two very important speeches in the play. Caesar has just been assassinated. Read and listen to this short speech by Brutus in which he explains to the people of Rome why he took part in Caesar’s murder. Then answer the following.

   1. What reasons does Brutus give for taking part in Caesar’s assassination?
   2. What does he appeal to in his listeners to persuade them that his actions were justified? Choose.
      - their fear
      - their morality
      - their patriotism
   3. Does he convince the people of Rome?

BRUTUS. [...]
Romans, countrymen, and lovers! hear me for my cause, and be silent, that you may hear: [...] 5 If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of Caesar’s, to him I say, that Brutus’ love to Caesar was no less than his. If then that friend demand why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer: Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more. Had you rather Caesar were living and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all free men? [...] 10 Who is here so base, that would be a bondman? If any, speak; for him I have offended. Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman? If any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so vile, that will not love his country? If any, speak; for him have I offended. I pause for a reply. ALL. None, Brutus, none.

BRUTO. [...]
Romani, compatrioti, e amici! uditemi per la mia causa; e fate silenzio per poter udire: [...] Se vi è alcuno qui in questa assemblea, alcun caro amico di Cesare, a lui io dico che l’amore di Bruto per Cesare non era minore al suo. Se poi quell’amico domandi perché Bruto si sollevò contro Cesare, questa è la mia risposta: non che io amavo Cesare meno, ma che amavo Roma di più. Preferireste che Cesare fosse vivo, e morire tutti da schiavi, o che Cesare sia morto per vivere tutti da uomini liberi? [...] Chi v’è qui che abbia voluto che Cesare fosse morto e che l’abbia offeso? Se vi è, che parli; perché v’è chi mi ha offeso. Chi v’è che non ama il suo paese? Se vi è, che parli; perché v’è che mi ha offeso. Aspetto una risposta.

TUTTI Nessuno, Bruto, nessuno.

Traduzione di A. Ricci
Brutus agrees to let Mark Antony speak to the crowd after him.

ANTONY. If you have tears, prepare to shed them now. You all do know this mantle: I remember The first time ever Caesar put it on; ‘Twas on a summer’s evening, in his tent,

That day he overcame the Nervii. Look! in this place ran Cassius’ dagger through: Through this the well-beloved Brutus stabb’d, And, as he pluck’d his cursed steel away,

Mark how the blood of Caesar follow’d it, As rushing out of doors, to be resolv’d If Brutus so unkindly knock’d, or no; For Brutus, as you know, was Caesar’s angel: Judge, O you gods! how dearly Caesar lov’d him!

This was the most unkindest cut of all; For when the noble Caesar saw him stab, Ingratitude, more strong than traitors’ arms, Quite vanquish’d him: then burst his mighty heart; And, in his mantle muffling up his face,

Even, at the base of Pompey’s statua Which all the while ran blood great Caesar fell. O! what a fall was there, my countrymen; Then I, and you, and all of us fell down, Whilst bloody treason flourish’d over us.

O! now you weep, and I perceive you feel The dint of pity; these are gracious drops. Kind souls, what weep you when you behold Our Caesar’s vesture wounded? Look you here, Here is himself, marr’d, as you see with traitors.

FIRST CITIZEN. O piteous spectacle! SECOND CITIZEN. O noble Caesar! THIRD CITIZEN. O woeful day! FOURTH CITIZEN: O traitors! villains! FIRST CITIZEN. O most bloody sight!

SECOND CITIZEN. We will be revenged.

OVER TO YOU

1. Answer the following questions.
   1. What does Antony show the crowd?
   2. What does he focus on in particular?
   3. What did Brutus, Cassius and Casca do?
   4. What does Antony show the crowd at the end of his speech?
   5. At the end of Brutus’s speech the crowd supported him. Who does the crowd support now, at the end of Antony’s speech?
   6. What does the crowd want to do?

2. Antony begins his speech to the crowd with the words: ‘If you have tears, prepare to shed them now.’ Does the crowd shed any tears during his speech?

3. Antony’s speech is very different from Brutus’s speech. What does Antony appeal to in the crowd? Choose.
   □ their reason □ their religion □ their emotions

4. With regard to Caesar what response is Antony trying to get from the crowd in the first ten lines of his speech? Choose.
   □ pity □ anger □ contempt

5. Underline the words Antony uses to describe Brutus and his relationship with Caesar.

6. What is a synonym for the ‘cursed steel’ (l. 9) Brutus used?

7. Why is Brutus’s cut ‘the most unkindest cut of all’(l. 15)?

8. According to Antony how has Caesar’s fall (death) affected Rome and its people?

9. Why do you think Antony finally showed the crowd Caesar’s dead body?

10. Which was the most successful speech, Brutus’s or Antony’s? Give reasons for your answer?

11. Compare both speeches. In which speech can you find the following features?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Brutus</th>
<th>Antony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. speaks in prose</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. speaks in verse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. develops a logical argument</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. rouses the crowd’s emotions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. mourns his friend’s death</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. identifies himself with the crowd</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

12. In the commentary we read how one of the themes of the play is the malleability of the crowd, or the masses. In small groups can you think of any famous speeches in history that have had such a strong effect on the people?
How well can you prepare a speech?

Divide the class into four groups, each group must prepare a convincing speech on one of the following topics and then read it to the rest of the class, (you will need to find information and statistics to back up your argument). At the end vote which is the most convincing speech.

1. In favour of single sex education (all girls’ schools, all boys’ schools).
2. In favour of a global increase in the use of nuclear energy.
3. In favour of making euthanasia an individual’s free choice.
4. In favour of adoption for singles.

Answer true or false.

1. *Julius Caesar* is the only play by Shakespeare about the history of Rome.
2. The main character in the play is Marcus Brutus.
3. Elizabethans were very interested in Roman history.
4. In Rome Caesar has obtained complete power.
5. Brutus hates Caesar.
6. It is Brutus who stabs Caesar last.
7. Brutus is a very cunning politician.
William Shakespeare

Twelfth Night (1600-01)

The plot

‘This is Illyria’, says a character at the beginning of the play, although the setting is not a real geographical location. The main plot of the comedy concerns the adventures of Viola and her twin brother, Sebastian, who are separated during a shipwreck. Before they are finally reunited, lots of events and misunderstandings occur, caused by their close resemblance. Viola, disguised as a young man (Cesario), is employed by Duke Orsino who sends ‘him’ to court Countess Olivia, on his behalf. Olivia is in mourning for her brother’s death and does not care for Orsino but falls in love with Cesario/Viola who, in turn, has fallen in love with Orsino.

The sub-plot centres on Malvolio, Olivia’s puritanical steward, who strongly disapproves of any form of enjoyment in the house. Sir Toby and Maria, who are respectively Olivia’s uncle and maid and who like having fun, play a trick on him together with other friends. They make Malvolio find a letter, written by Maria as if from Olivia, from which it appears that his Lady is in love with him and willing to marry him. The letter requests he appear smiling, with ‘yellow stockings’ and ‘cross-garters’ to please Olivia. Malvolio believes the letter to be genuine and is ready to comply with these requests.

Love as madness

The action of Twelfth Night revolves around the results of falling in love and its different variations such as Duke Orsino’s ‘courtly love’, Olivia’s attraction for Cesario/Viola, and the parody of love, shown by Malvolio in Text 1. Love is seen, in the Elizabethan view, as a type of melancholy and thus an illness: Orsino and Olivia are ‘afflicted’ by their love which gives them pain and causes them to behave irrationally. Another theme of the play is disguise and double identity, as in Latin drama (Plautus). Viola disguises herself as a young courtier and plays her role with skill. Viola has also a twin brother, Sebastian, which provokes situations of trickery and misunderstanding.

1. As occurs for some of Shakespeare’s characters, the name Malvolio provides a clue to what the character is like. It hints at ‘evil wishing’ (from the Latin male volens).
BEFORE READING

How much are love and disguise related? Can love be true or the result of trickery?

Read the following monologue uttered by Viola after the first meeting with Olivia. Focus on the initial situation of the play and guess what the future developments will be.

[...]

Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness,
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.
How easy is it for the proper false
In women’s waxen hearts to set their forms!

Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we,
For such as we are made of, such we be.
How will this fadge? My master loves her dearly,
And I, poor monster, fond as much on him,
And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me:

What will become of this? As I am man,
My state is desperate for my master’s love:
As I am woman (now alas the day!)
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe?

O time, thou must entangle this, not I,
It is too hard a knot for me t’untie.

Twelfth Night

TEXT 1

Olivia’s garden.
Enter Olivia and Maria.

OLIVIA. I have sent after him: he says he’ll come;
How shall I feast him? what bestow of him?

For youth is bought more oft than begg’d or borrow’d.
I speak too loud.
Where is Malvolio? he is sad and civil,
And suits well for a servant with my fortunes:

Where is Malvolio?

MARIA. He’s coming, madam; but in very strange manner.
He is, sure, possessed, madam.

OLIVIA. Why, what’s the matter? does he rave?

MARIA. No, madam, he does nothing but smile: your ladyship were best to have some guard about you, if he come; for, sure, the man is tainted in his wits.
OLIVIA. Va’ e fallo venir qui. [Maria esce.] Sono pazza quanto lui, se pazzia triste e pazzia allegra sono la medesima cosa. [Rientra Maria con Malvolio.] Ebbene, Malvolio?
MALVOILIO. Cara signora, oh, oh! OLIVIA. Sorridi! Ti ho mandato a chiamare per un affare grave.
MALVOILIO. Grave, signora? Se esser grave. Mi causano un certo intoppo nel sangue, queste giarrettiere incrociate; ma che farti? Purché ciò vada a genio ad una certa persona, posso dire esattamente come il sonetto: ‘Piaccere ad una è piacere a tutte!’
OLIVIA. Ebbene, come va amico? Cos’hai?
MALVOILIO. Non c’è nero nella mia anima anche se vi è del giallo sulle mie gambe. È arrivata tra le sue mani, ed i comandi saranno eseguiti. Credo che siamo in grado di riconoscere la bella scrittura romana.
OLIVIA. Te ne vuoi andare a letto, Malvolio?
MALVOILIO. A letto? Sì, amor mio, e ti verrò a trovare.
OLIVIA. Che Dio ti assista; perché sorridi a quel modo e ti baci così sovente la mano?
MARIA. Come vi sentite, Malvolio?
MALVOILIO. Rispondere a voi Sì, vi risponderò, poiché gli usignoli talvolta rispondono alle gazze. MARIA. Perché apparite davanti alla mia signora con questa ridicola impertinenza? MALVOILIO. ‘Non lasciarti spaventare dalla grandezza’. Era scritto ben chiaro.
OLIVIA. Wilt thou go to bed, Malvolio?
MALVOILIO. To bed! ay, sweet-heart, and I’ll come to thee.
OLIVIA. God comfort thee! Why dost thou smile so and kiss thy hand so oft?
MARIA. How do you, Malvolio?
MALVOILIO. At your request! yes; nightingales answer daws. MARIA. Why appear you with this ridiculous boldness before my lady? MALVOILIO. ‘Be not afraid of greatness’: ‘twas well writ.
OLIVIA. What meanest thou by that, Malvolio?
MALVOILIO. ‘Some are born great,’ OLIVIA. Ha!
MALVOILIO. ‘Some achieve greatness,’ OLIVIA. What say’st thou?
MALVOILIO. ‘And some have greatness thrust upon them.’ OLIVIA. Heaven restore thee!
MALVOILIO. ‘Remember who commended thy yellow’ stockings,’ OLIVIA. Thy yellow stockings!
MALVOILIO. ‘And wished to see thee cross-gartered.’ OLIVIA. Cross-gartered!
MALVOILIO. ‘Go to, thou art made, if thou desirest to be so;’ OLIVIA. Am I made?
MALVOILIO. ‘If not, let me see thee a servant still.’ OLIVIA. Why, this is very midsummer madness.

Traduzione di A. Zanco
1. Answer the following questions.
   1. Where is the scene set?
   2. Who are the characters and what is their relationship?
   3. What is the main topic of their dialogue?

2. Write a short summary of the scene matching phrases in A with phrases in B.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Olivia sends for Malvolio as</th>
<th>a. he believes Olivia wrote it.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Malvolio is strangely dressed and does strange things:</td>
<td>b. Malvolio misunderstands her words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Olivia inquires about him and his health but</td>
<td>c. he wears yellow stockings and cross-garters; he always smiles and often kisses his hand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Malvolio quotes from the letter as</td>
<td>d. he is sad and civil and he suits the situation of mourning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Olivia knows nothing about the letter so</td>
<td>e. Malvolio is completely out of his mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Olivia finally concludes that</td>
<td>f. she is perplexed and disoriented.</td>
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</table>

3. Answer true or false.
   1. Olivia has called Cesario/Viola and wonders about how to behave when ‘he’ arrives.  
      T       F
   2. When Malvolio arrives he looks sad and depressed.  
      T       F
   3. Maria reproaches Malvolio for his ‘offensive’ behaviour to her lady.  
      T       F
   4. Malvolio is doubtful about Olivia’s interest for him.  
      T       F

4. Hearing Malvolio ‘is possessed’ Olivia says: ‘i am as mad as he, / if sad and merry
   madness equal be’ (ll. 16-17). How do you interpret this sentence?

5. Why does Malvolio quote the sonnet: ‘Please one, and please all’ (l. 26)?

6. Humour is the key element in this scene: identify what makes people laugh and say what kind of humour it is: behavioral, situational or verbal. Mark the following statements with B, S or V.

   1. Malvolio’s attitude and clothes are incongruous with his personality. ............ B
   2. Malvolio misunderstands Olivia’s words. ............ B
   3. The audience knows more than the characters on the stage. ............ B
   4. Olivia prompts Malvolio and echoes his words. ............ B
   5. Malvolio is tricked by Sir Toby and Maria. ............ B

   1. Remember that:
      - Behavioural humour is when characters behave in an incongruous or absurd way;
      - Situational humour is when situations are incredible or highly unlikely to occur in reality;
      - Verbal humour is when there are witty interchanges between characters.

7. *Twelfth Night* is the name given to the night preceding the Christian feast of Epiphany which occurs on January 6th. It has been suggested that the Christian ‘Twelfth Night’ replaced an earlier pagan ritual associated with changes in the natural order. It was the time of the year when coldness was about to be replaced by warmth, darkness by light, and so the revels associated with the festival involved the reversal of roles and a spirit of joy. This is in fact, what marks the play *Twelfth Night*: disguise, trickery and humour together with madness, as the Elizabethans conceived it. A state of the mind, due to the prevalence of one of the four humours (that is melancholic, sanguine, choleric and phlegmatic), and a danger to the community (people who were thought to be insane had to be locked up). Relate the concept of madness in *Twelfth Night* to the one/s in *Hamlet* and make a comparison between different ideas and perceptions of it.

8. Do you consider love as a sort of madness? Say if you agree or disagree on this statement.
William Shakespeare

Twelfth Night (1600-01)

** BEFORE READING **

As Twelfth Night is a comedy how do you think it will end? Read the final part of the play and check your predictions.

Twelfth Night

The main plot ends happily: Sebastian, Viola’s twin brother, turns up and marries Olivia while Orsino marries Viola. But the sub-plot ends on a bitter note: Malvolio is put away in a dark room and treated cruelly as a madman. Eventually he manages to write a note to Olivia who sends for him.

Enter [Fabian with] Malvolio

DUKE. Is this the madman?

OLIVIA. Ay, my lord, this same.

How now, Malvolio?

MALVOLIO. Madam, you have done me wrong, Notorius wrong.

OLIVIA. Have I, Malvolio? No.

MALVOLIO. Lady, you have. Pray you, peruse that letter. You must not now deny it is your hand: Write from it, if you can, in hand or phrase, Or say ‘tis not your seal, not your invention: You can say none of this. Well, grant it then, And tell me, in the modesty of honour, Why you have given me such clear lights of favour, Bade me come smiling and crossgarter’d to you, To put on yellow stockings, and to frown Upon Sir Toby, and the lighter people; And acting this in an obedient hope, Why have you suffer’d me to be imprison’d, Kept in a dark house, visited by the priest, and made the most notorious geck and gull That e’er invention play’d on? Tell me, why?
OLIVIA. Alas, Malvolio, this is not my writing, Though I confess much like the character: But, out of question, ’tis Maria’s hand. And now I do bethink me, it was she First told me thou wast mad; then cam’st in smiling, And in such forms which here were presuppos’d Upon thee in the letter. Prithee, be content; This practice hath most shrewdly pass’d upon thee. But when we know the grounds and authors of it, Thou shall be both plaintiff and the judge Of thine own cause. [...] MALVOLIO. I’ll be reveng’d on the whole pack of you. [Exit]
OLIVIA. He hath been most notoriously abus’d. DUKE. Pursue him, and entreat him to a peace: He hath not told us of the captain yet. [Exit Fabian] When that is known, and golden time convents, A solemn combination shall be made Of our dear souls. Meantime, sweet sister, We will not part from hence. Cesario, come; For so you shall be while you are a man; But when in other habits you are seen, Orsino’s mistress, and his fancy’s queen.

OVER TO YOU

1. **Answer true or false.**
   1. Olivia recognizes she had done some wrong to Malvolio.
   2. Malvolio shows the letter and insists that in it there is her writing and her seal.
   3. He complains that he has suffered a lot (being imprisoned and kept in a dark house).
   4. Olivia does not care about Malvolio’s requests for justice.
   5. The Duke intervenes to restore peace.

2. **Bearing in mind what you have read in the above summary and what you have understood in the extract, associate adjectives with the characters of Olivia, Malvolio and Duke Orsino and give reasons for it.**

   - passionate
   - presumptuous
   - concerned
   - sensible
   - understanding
   - revengeful
   - clever
   - angry
   - impartial
   - simple-minded

   - **passionate**: Olivia is passionate about her own feelings and desires, particularly for Orsino.
   - **presumptuous**: Malvolio is presumptuous in his belief that Olivia is infatuated with him.
   - **concerned**: Duke Orsino is concerned about the wellbeing of his household and the potential for peace.

3. **At this point of the play do you sympathize or not with Malvolio? Say your reason/s.**

4. **The main themes of the play are (tick those appropriate):**

   - ambition and courage
   - love and madness
   - disguise and double identity
   - marriage and relationships
The comedy we find in Shakespeare can be defined as follows: 'a play in which the principal characters ordinarily begin in a state of opposition to one another or to their world - often both. By the end of the play, their opposition is replaced by harmony.' (Scholes and Klaus) Besides, the main purpose of the comedy is to amuse people and its main traits are: humour, comic or intricate plot and flat characters. Keeping in mind the main features of a comic play consider Twelfth Night and answer true or false. Correct the false statements.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The plot of the comedy is linear and simple.</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The main plot revolves around a young man disguised as a girl.</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Humour in the extract is based on a witty dialogue.</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. There is a sub-plot in the play.</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Malvolio changes from a Puritan butler to foolish lover.</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Malvolio’s story is full of humour.</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Both plot and sub-plot end happily.</td>
<td>T</td>
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</table>

Disguise, misunderstanding and double identity have been the typical features of a comedy since the Roman times (Latin Plautus). What effects do they create? What is the audience’s response?
William Shakespeare

Othello (1603)

The plot

Othello, the Moor of Venice, is a powerful and skilful general who has won the heart of Desdemona, the daughter of a Venetian senator. After their marriage, their happiness is undermined and eventually destroyed by Iago, an envious lower officer, who arouses Othello's jealousy by telling him that his wife is unfaithful to him with his lieutenant Cassio. Othello believes Iago's evil words and smothers Desdemona with a pillow. When he finds out that Iago's accusations were false, he kills himself. Apart from the first act, set in Venice, the story takes place in Cyprus, and is compressed into 36 hours building up to a climax of tension. There are only a few main characters in this play and no sub-plot. For these reasons the play is one of Shakespeare's most closely-knit and traditional in structure, following Aristotle's rules for drama.  

Shakespeare's source

The seventh novella of the third decade of the Hecatommithi (1566) by Giovanni Battista Giraldi Cinthio provided the plot for Othello, which Shakespeare used in the original Italian version or the French translation by Gabriel Chappuys (1584). As in other cases, Shakespeare altered the original story, in particular through the triangle - Othello, Iago, Desdemona - and even more, through the close and complex relationship of attraction/repulsion, faithfulness/hatred, light/darkness between Othello and Iago, Shakespeare creates one of his most charming dramatic designs.

1. Aristotle in his Poetics asserts three classical unities for drama: that is the unity of action (a play should have one main action that it follows, with no or few subplots); the unity of place (a play should cover a single physical space and should not attempt to compress geography, nor should the stage represent more than one place); the unity of time (the action in a play should take place over no more than 24 hours).
Othello

The extract you are going to read is from Act V, Scene II, near the end of the tragedy. The scene of Desdemona’s murder opens with a poignant and magnificent speech by Othello. It is night: darkness is needed for the crime, but images of light are interwoven into the dark fabric of the scene. It is the light of a candle, but it is also the light of Desdemona’s life which will be put out. Furthermore, light and darkness are also related to white (Desdemona’s purity) and black (Othello’s complexion as a Moor).

OTHELLO. It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul, Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars! - It is the cause. - Yet I’ll not shed her blood; Nor scar that whither skin of hers than snow, And smooth as monumental alabaster. Yet she must die else she’ll betray more men, Put out the light and then put out the light: If I quench thee, thou flaming minister, I can again thy former light restore, Should I repent me; but once put out thy light, Thou cunning’st pattern of excellent nature, I know not where is that Promethean heat That can thy light relume. When I have pluck’d thy rose I cannot give it vital growth again, It needs must wither: - I’ll smell it on the tree. - [Kissing her.] O balmy breath, that dost almost persuade Justice to break her sword! - One more, one more. - Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee, And love thee after. - One more, and this the last: So sweet was ne’er so fatal. I must weep But they are cruel tears: this sorrow’s heavenly It strikes where it doth love. - She wakes.
OVER TO YOU

1. Answer the following questions.
   1. Where is the scene set?
   2. What is Desdemona doing?
   3. What does Othello do after entering the room?

2. Fill in the passage with the following words.
   shin · kisses · intention · decides · blood · betray · die

   Othello reasons with himself why Desdemona must __________ (1): he wouldn’t like to shed her __________ (2) and scar her perfect, white __________ (3), but he has to do so otherwise she will __________ (4) other men. He __________ (5) her and asks for more; he nearly abandons his __________ (6) to kill her, but in the end __________ (7) she must die.

3. There are three key words in Othello’s monologue:
   1. cause
   2. light
   3. rose

4. Which of the following meanings can you associate with each word?
   Desdemona’s life
   Desdemona’s beauty
   Desdemona’s imagined infidelity
   Desdemona’s love for Othello
   Othello’s jealousy
   Othello’s wish to avenge his honour
   a lit up candle on a bedside table
   the restoration of justice and moral order

5. Two contrasting colours are juxtaposed in Othello’s speech. What colours are they? What words and expressions suggest them? What meanings do you think are symbolised by these colours?

6. What role has Othello chosen for himself in this monologue? Choose from the following and give evidence from the text.
   □ a jealous husband
   □ a raving mad killer
   □ a judge who is expected to punish an offender

7. Othello repeats the word ‘cause’ three times in the opening three lines of his soliloquy. For the Elizabethans, ‘cause’ had several meanings:
   - an action which prompts a reaction (Desdemona’s infidelity)
   - a morally justifiable end one is pursuing, (e.g. ‘all in a good cause’)
   - a legal usage meaning an accusation brought against someone in court (Othello sees himself as an agent of impartial justice).
   Which of the above meanings would apply to Othello considering his situation and state of mind at this point in the play?

8. Iago, the person who sowed the seed of doubt in Othello about Desdemona’s faithfulness resulting in her murder, represents the tradition of the devil of medieval history plays, of Judas and the fallen angels in the Bible and of Vice in the morality plays. Shakespeare, however, makes him great in his wickedness and personification of evil. He is a villain able to manipulate the innocent. Do you know any other great villain in literature?
William Shakespeare

‘Sonnet 27’

This is another of Shakespeare’s sonnets about love, but it is more meditative than ‘Sonnet 18’ and ‘Sonnet 130’. In ‘Sonnet 27’ the poet does not focus on the happiness surrounding love but on the inner turmoil which love can create.

BEFORE READING

❶ Before reading and listening to the poem discuss in pairs the possible negative consequences falling in love can have on a person, e.g. loss of appetite. You may be able to refer to your own experiences!

❷ Now read and listen to the poem and see if you can choose from the options below which negative effect falling in love has had on the poet/narrator.

(Choose.)

☐ he cannot eat
☐ he cannot concentrate
☐ he cannot sleep

‘Sonnet 27’

Weary with toil, I haste me to my bed,
The dear repose for limbs with travel tired;
But then begins a journey in my head
To work my mind, when body’s work is expired;
For then my thoughts, from far where I abide,
Intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee,
And keep my drooping eyelids open wide
Looking on darkness which the blind do see,
Save that my soul’s imaginary sight
10 Presents thy shadow to my sightless view,
Which like a jewel hung in ghastly night
12 Makes black night beauteous, and her old face new.
Lo thus by day my limbs, by night my mind,
For thee, and for my self, no quiet find.

1. Weary: stanco.
2. toil: lavoro.
3. haste: mi affretto.
4. repose: riposo.
5. limbs: arti, il corpo.
6. expired: finito.
7. abide: abito.
8. zealous pilgrimage: pellegrinaggio zelante.
9. drooping eyelids: palpebre stanche.
10. Save: eccetto.
11. shadow: ombra.
12. ghastly night: notte spaventosa.
13. Lo thus: per questi motivi.
14. quiet: riposo.
OVER TO YOU

1. Look at ll. 1-4 and fill in the following information about the poet.
   1. How he feels
   2. Why he feels like this
   3. Where he is in this specific moment
   4. What happens to him there

2. In ll. 7 what keeps the poet’s ‘drooping eyelids open wide’?

3. In ll. 9-12 the poet says that he sees something in the dark, what?

4. Which word used by the poet tells us that he is happy to see this?

5. The concluding couplet describes the poet’s dilemma. What can’t he ever find?

6. The poet is ‘weary’ but he nevertheless ‘hastes’ to his bed. Why, do you think?

7. In ll. 3 the poet states: ‘But then begins a journey in my head’. What does he mean by this and what effect does it have on him?

8. With his words, ‘zealous pilgrimage’ (ll. 6) do you think the poet is happy to make this journey?

9. Find the lines/expressions the poet uses to give the idea of total darkness.

10. Who is the ‘thee’ and ‘thy’ of ll. 6 and 10?

11. Whose ‘shadow’ does the poet see? (ll. 10)

12. Does this ‘shadow’ have a positive or negative effect on the night? Which words tell you this?

13. Which expressions in ll. 9-12 tell us that he doesn’t really see anything?

14. As with all Shakespeare’s sonnets this is also written in iambic pentameter, but how does the rhythm of this sonnet differ from ‘Sonnet 18’ and ‘Sonnet 130’? Is it slower or quicker?

15. Why, do you think? What overall effect was Shakespeare trying to achieve? (Think about the theme of the sonnet.)

16. Shakespeare’s sonnets have no titles but only numbers. Think of a suitable title you could give to this sonnet and compare with the rest of the class.
William Shakespeare

‘Sonnet 116’

One of the most popular Shakespearean sonnets, ‘Sonnet 116’ brings together two of Shakespeare’s favourite themes, love and the passing of time. It is based on the wording of the Christian marriage service from the Book of Common Prayer.

We must also remember that this sonnet belongs to the group of sonnets dedicated to a young man: interesting, then, that it speaks about marriage, but it is the ‘marriage of true minds.’

BEFORE READING

1. As the poem is dedicated to a man, how would you interpret the expression ‘the marriage of true minds’? What type of love-relationship is it speaking about?

2. Now read and listen to the sonnet defining its tone. Choose from the following.
   - self-assured
   - romantic
   - melancholic

‘Sonnet 116’

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.

Oh, no! It is an ever fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand’ring bark,
Whose worth’s unknown although his height be taken.

Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle’s compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

1. Admit impediments: ponga impedimenti.
2. bends: tende a svenire.
3. with the remover to remove: quando l’altro si allontana.
4. fixed mark: punto di riferimento.
5. shaken: scosso.
6. wandering bark: naviglio errante.
7. worth: valore.
8. although ... taken: benché la distanza sia nota.
9. bending sickle’s compass: cadono sotto la sua curva lama.
10. bears it out: lo sopporta.
11. edge of doom: fino alla morte.
OVER TO YOU

1. Find the lines in the poem which state the following about love.
   1. Love is a constant reference point when a person feels lost. ........
   2. Love does not change when the circumstances in life change. ........
   3. Love can put up with the passing of time till the end. ........
   4. Love can survive even the biggest problems. ........
   5. Love is not influenced by the physical changes of growing old. ........

2. Answer the following questions.
   1. What image is developed in lines 5-8?
   2. In the first two lines what does the poet state he would never do?
   3. In line 9 who or what will effect ‘rosy lips and cheeks’?
   4. Which words or lines tell us that the poet is convinced about what he is saying?

3. Thematically the sonnet could be divided into three quatrains with a concluding couplet. Think of a suitable title for each of the quatrains.

4. How would you describe the language of the poem? Choose from the following.
   - complex
   - rich
   - symbolic
   - conversational
   - humorous
   - didactic

5. The structure and rhythm of this poem is less rigid than the other sonnets we have read. What effect does this have on the overall mood? Does it make it more formal or more informal?

6. What is the significance of the metaphor in l. 7 referring to love as ‘the star to every wand’ring bark’?
   In a relationship what could it mean if a person ‘wanders’?

7. ’Love’s not Time’s fool’ (l. 9). What does the poet mean by this?

8. Do you agree with the sonnet’s message of eternal love? Would your answer be different for a platonic relationship?

9. This sonnet was originally interpreted as a praise to ideal and eternal love. More modern interpretations, however, see it in the context of a world which is not perfect. Modern critics say that the sonnet has a more realistic view of a relationship, seeing its many ups and downs and moments of crisis, but stating that it is the test of true love that it can overcome these moments. Which interpretation do you feel best fits the sonnet? Give your reasons by referring to the poem.
The sonnet we are going to read is from *Astrophel and Stella* (1591), a series of poems about the unhappy love of Astrophel (= lover of a star) for Stella (= star). The sonnets express different points of view (the poet’s, Stella’s or other characters’) and love is either seen as something positive or compared to a poison or hell. Stella has been interpreted in different ways by critics: as Queen Elizabeth (in this way the love relationship would be the one between the courtier and his queen) or as the incarnation of wisdom, pursued by the poet-philosopher.

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### ‘Sonnet 71’

Who will in fairest book of Nature know,  
How Virtue may best lodg’d in beauty be,  
Let him but learn of Love to read in thee’,  
Stella, those fair lines, which true goodness show.  
There shall he find all vices’ overthrow,  
Not by rude force, but sweetest sovereignty  
Of reason, from whose light those nights-birds fly;  
That inward sun in thine’ eyes shineth’ so.  
And not content to be Perfection’s heir  
Thy’ self, dost’ strive all minds that way to move,  
Who mark in thee what is in thee most fair.  
So while thy beauty draws the heart to love,  
As fast thy Virtue bends that love to good:  
‘But ah,’ Desire still cries, ‘give me some food.’

---

### BEFORE READING

1. **thee:** you. Questa e le successive sono tutte forme arcaiche.
2. **thine:** your.
3. **shineth:** shines.
4. **thy:** your.
5. **dost:** does.

---

As the sonnet is dedicated to Stella, what do you think the poet will celebrate about her? Make a few predictions and then check them after reading the poem.
OVER TO YOU

1. Who do the pronouns ‘Who/he’ and ‘thee’ refer to?

2. Choose the correct sentences.
   - The sonnet is spoken by a woman.
   - The topic concerns love, perfection, virtue and desire.
   - The speaker admires Stella.

3. Complete the following summary of the sonnet by choosing the correct word from below.
   - sovereignty of reason • eyes • perfection • minds • lover • virtue • beauty • desire • fulfillment • argument • goodness • admirers

   The sonnet develops in the form of an __________________ (1): the initial paradox is that virtue is best lodged with __________________ (2). The first proof of this is that Stella’s fairness shows __________________ (3). The second proof is that Stella possesses __________________ (4); the light of reason shines in her __________________ (5). The third is that Stella’s __________________ (6) is also a model for all her __________________ (7) to improve their __________________ (8). The conclusion is that by loving Stella the __________________ (9) is led to __________________ (10). But there is a contradiction: the lover’s __________________ (11) is eager for __________________ (12).

4. What is the rhyme scheme of the poem?

5. Are there any run-on lines (enjambment)?

6. Are there other sound devices which contribute to the rhythm/musicality of the poem (alliteration, repetition)?

7. As for the metaphors, explain:
   1. what Stella is compared to
   2. what ‘night-birds’ at line 7 are
   3. what ‘that inward sun’ at line 8 is.

8. Underline the abstract nouns in the poem and say why you think the poet uses so many.

9. The English sonnet developed in Britain under the influence of the Italian sonnet, in particular the Petrarchan form. It was Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503?–42), a diplomat and a courtier of Henry VIII, who translated several Petrarchan poems from Italian and partly altered the form inventing the so-called English sonnet. The main theme was ‘courtly love’ - expressed by the poet for an unattainable Lady -, but there were also minor themes such as the beauty and virtues of a Lady, the transience of life and the immortalizing power of poetry.

   In the light of what has been said about the English sonnet, indicate what form ‘Sonnet 71’ has and what its main theme is.

10. The final line of the sonnet gives voice to desire over the union of beauty and virtue. In what way can this be considered a more modern concept?
John Donne

‘The Good-Morrow’ (1633)

‘The Good-Morrow’ is one of the most famous poems by John Donne. It belongs to a collection published in 1633: Songs and Sonnets. The poem’s original fusion of feelings and thought, the colloquial and direct style in which it is written, the images referring to daily life, along with the philosophical and scientific terms the poet uses, make it one of the best examples of metaphysical poetry.

In ‘The Good-Morrow’ the dominating concept is that of love, interpreted here as an intense and overwhelming experience, which turns the lovers away from reality while, at the same time, giving them a different sense of life. The poem is divided into three stanzas, each of them devoted to three periods of time: past, present and future. Stylistically Donne uses his own stanza structure which is not traditional and may have been invented by him.

BEFORE READING

1 The poem starts with a question that captures the reader’s attention.

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I Did, till we loved?

‘The Good-Morrow’

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then, But sucked on country pleasures, childishly? Or snorted we in the seven sleepers’ den?

‘Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be. If ever any beauty I did see, Which I desired, and got, ’twas but a dream of thee.

And now good morrow to our waking souls, Which watch not one another out of fear;

For love all love of other sights controls, And makes one little room an everywhere. Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone, Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown: Let us possess one world; each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears, And true plain hearts do in the faces rest; Where can we find two better hemispheres, Without sharp North, without declining West? Whatever dies was not mixed equally;

If our two loves be one, or thou and I Love so alike that none can slacken, none can die.


E adesso buongiorno alle nostre anime dèste, che non si fissano a vicenda per paura; perché amore esclude amore d’ogni altra vista, e fa di una stanzetta un dappertutto. Se pure i naviganti mondi nuovi han scoperto, e se ad altri le mappe mondi su mondi svelano, a noi un mondo basta; ognuno ha, ed è, un mondo. Nel tuo occhio il mio viso, nel mio il tuo si vede, e nei due visi stanno cuori schietti e sinceri; dove mai troveremmo due migliori emisferi senza gelido nord, né caduco occidente? Ciò che muore, non si era ben mischiato; se siamo un solo amore, o tu e io amiamo così pari che nessuno cede, nessuno può morire.

Traduzione di Valentina Poggi
OVER TO YOU

1. The poem is divided into three stanzas. In which stanza does the poet speak about the following.
   1. the present
   2. the future
   3. the past

2. The poet addresses the woman he loves. What time of day is it? (The title can help you answer this question.)

3. Describe the situation. Where are the two lovers?

4. Choose the correct alternative.
   1. In line 4 there is reference to the ‘seven sleepers’ den’. Here the poet evokes the image of sleepers who, because of their state, miss out on the pleasures in life. Thus he suggests that
      ☐ the lovers were sleeping before
      ☐ experiencing love
      ☐ both had no experience of the world
      ☐ their lives really began when they fell in love
   2. Life before falling in love is depicted as ‘childish’, what was it like? (Choose.)
      ☐ meaningless
      ☐ without real values
      ☐ superficial, since they weren’t interested
      ☐ in anything

5. The second stanza (l. 8) begins with a concrete image. Complete the following.
   1. It is (time of the day) .................................................... .
   2. The two lovers are (place) .................................................... , where they have probably spent the night together.
   3. And they are (doing what) .................................................... .

6. What makes their ‘little room an everywhere’?

7. As a consequence the external world is rejected (ll. 12-13). What symbols does the poet use for the external world?

8. In lines 15-16 the universe is reduced to something even smaller. What is it?
   1. their eyes
   2. their hearts
   3. their houses

9. How is love represented in the concluding lines of the poem?

10. Through a complicated concept the poet defines the connection between lovers and explorers (ll. 12-13). Complete by referring to the text.
    As explorers have reduced the world to simple maps, sharing them with humanity, in the same way the lovers have ............................................. which becomes their universe.

11. In lines 17-19 while looking into his lover’s eyes, the poet wonders:

12. ‘Where can we find two better hemispheres/Without sharp North, without declining West?’
1. This question is full of symbols. Complete the following interpretation.

The north represents the ____________ (1) and the west the end, because in the west the sun ____________ (2). The poet concludes by saying that they are ‘two better hemispheres’. In fact they ____________ (3).

2. What, in your opinion, is the message the poet would like to convey to the reader?
   1. If you love someone, it’s not important whether or not your love is requited.
   2. Love is superior to everything.
   3. Love involves problems and produces fear.

3. Find examples of the following in the text.
   1. Alliteration (first stanza): ____________________________________________________________
   2. Anaphora: _________________________________________________________________________
   3. Chiasm line: _______________________________________________________________________
   4. Metonymy: _________________________________________________________________________
   5. Metaphors: _________________________________________________________________________

4. John Donne is seen as a precursor of modern poetry. Do you find anything innovative in his poetry compared to other poetry from the period? Include Italian poetry in your comparison (Dante, Petrarch, etc.).

5. The poet says the two lovers watch each other ‘out of fear’. He seems to be implying that two people in love always have something to fear. In your opinion what could two lovers fear? Discuss in class.

6. One of the main features of Donne’s poetry is his imagery. Which of the images used here do you find most striking? Do you think that Donne’s way of dealing with love reduces the romantic feeling in his poem? Discuss in class.
John Donne

‘The Flea’

BEFORE READING

Do you think the title ‘The Flea’1 is strange and unusual for a love poem2? What do you expect the poem to be about?

‘The Flea’

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
How little that which thou deniest me is;
It suck’d me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be;
hou know’st that this cannot be said
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead,
Yet this enjoys before it woo,
And pamper’d swells with one blood made of two,
And this, alas, is more than we would do.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where we almost, yea, more than married are.
This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed and marriage temple is;
Though parents grudge, and you, we are met,
And cloister’d in these living walls of jet,
Though use make you apt to kill me
Let not to that, self-murder added be,
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since
Purple thy nail in blood of innocence?
Wherein could this flea guilty be,
Except in that drop which it suck’d from thee?
Yet thou triumph’st, and say’st that thou
Find’st not thyself nor me the weaker now;
‘Tis true, then learn how false fears be;
Just so much honour, when thou yield’st to me,
Will waste, as this flea’s death took life from thee.

---

1. flea: pulce.
2. The flea involved in the love game between a poet and his lover is a traditional motif, present in the Epigrams by the Latin poet Ovid, and in a collection of poems - in French, Spanish, Italian, Latin and Greek - titled La puce de Madame des Roches (1582).

Traduzione di Alessandro Serpieri e Silvia Bigliazzi
OVER TO YOU

1. Who is speaking in the poem? To whom?

2. Where are they?

3. What is the speaker doing?

4. The poem is divided into three stanzas. Identify the content of each stanza.
   - The poet stops his lover from killing the flea, because in this way she would commit three crimes. In fact, the flea contains them both and so it is the symbol of their marriage bed and temple. He says that if she kills the flea, she will be killing not only a part of herself, but also a part of the speaker.
   - The ‘cruel’ woman has killed the flea and he complains about it. She says that by this death nothing has happened to them. If this is so, the poet invites his lover not to fear the loss of her honour if she were to ‘give’ herself to him.
   - First the flea bit him and then it bit her, and their blood mingled in the flea’s body. The poet invites his lover to do the same as the flea, with the union of their bodies.

5. Match the following parts to form correct sentences concerning the text.

   1. The poet draws his mistress’s attention to __________________________.
   2. The poet is envious of the flea because __________________________.
   3. He asks his mistress not to kill the flea because __________________________.
   4. He tries to convince her that she will miss her honour __________________________.

   a. it unites their blood.
   b. only as much as the blood the flea sucked from her.
   c. a flea that has been feeding on her blood.
   d. it can enjoy her without courting.

6. What adjectives would you choose to define the poet?

   - suffering
   - pleading
   - desperate
   - witty
   - melancholic
   - seductive
   - persuasive
   - sad

7. The poet’s mistress is presented as being conventional in her heartless attitude. Quote from the text.

8. Work out the rhyme scheme and say if it is regular.

9. Find examples in the poem of the following.
   1. alliteration
   2. repetitions
   3. enjambment

10. The 17th century idea of sex was the ‘mixing of bloods’. Which images are used in the poem to express it? What do they mean?

11. How do you explain the metaphor ‘This flea is you and I’? (l. 12)

12. Find examples of religious imagery and say what they suggest.

13. How would you define the language and style of the poem? Choose from the following.

   - obscure
   - complex
   - colloquial
   - symbolic
   - plain


15. The parallel between the flea and the lovers is known as a ‘conceit’, which is typical of Donne’s rhetorical style. Do you find it original and interesting? Compare your initial predictions about the poem with your response after reading it. Discuss in class.
John Donne

‘The Dream’

BEFORE READING

Dreams as a psychic activity, beyond our temporal and spatial coordinates, have always fascinated writers and artists, and have been studied and defined in different ways by different scholars, the most famous being Sigmund Freud with his The Interpretation of Dreams (1900). In this work Freud stated that dreams are the psyche’s realization of an unfulfilled desire. What are your ideas on dreams? Do you always remember them? Is there any connection between dream and love? Compare your ideas with the ones expressed in the following poem.

The Dream

Dear love, for nothing less than thee
Would I have broke this happy dream;
It was a theme
For reason, much too strong for fantasy¹.
Therefore thou waked’st me wisely; yet
My dream thou brokest not, but continued’st it.
Thou art so true that thoughts of thee suffice
To make dreams truths, and fables histories;
Enter these arms, for since thou thought’st it best,
Not to dream all my dream, let’s act the rest.
As lightning, or a taper’s light,
Thine eyes, and not thy noise waked me;
Yet I thought thee
- For thou lovest truth - an angel, at first sight;
But when I saw thou saw’st my heart,
And knew’st my thoughts beyond an angel’s art,
When thou knew’st what I dreamt, when thou knew’st when
Excess of joy would wake me, and camest then,
I must confess, it could not choose but be
Profane, to think thee any thing but thee.
Coming and staying show’d thee, thee²,
But rising makes me doubt, that now
Thou art not thou.
That love is weak where fear’s as strong as he;
'Tis not all spirit, pure and brave,
If mixture it of fear, shame, honour have;
Perchance as torches, which must ready be,
Men light and put out, so thou deal’st with me;
Thou camest to kindle, go’st to come; then I
Will dream that hope again, but else would die.

¹. For reason ... for fantasy: il tema del sogno era così vivido che conveniva alla ragione, all’essere sveglio, e non alla fantasia.
². thee, thee: non si tratta dell’identità dell’amata ma di corrispondenza con la figura del sogno.

Traduzione di Alessandro Serpieri e Silvia Bigliazzi
OVER TO YOU

1. Which of the following statements regarding the poem are correct?
   1. The poem is spoken by a man.
      T  F
   2. The poem is spoken by a woman.
      T  F
   3. The poet is woken from a dream by the person he has been dreaming about.
      T  F
   4. The central idea is sexual love.
      T  F
   5. The tone is melancholic.
      T  F

2. In the first stanza why does the poet accept to break his happy dream? And what does he ask his mistress to do?

3. The second and the third stanzas develop the poet’s reasoning. Reorder the following statements.
   - The poet is doubtful about whether his lover is really the one he dreamt about.
   - But then he changes his mind and has profane thoughts.
   - The poet needs to dream about his lover again, otherwise he will die.
   - Love is weak if it is mixed with fear, shame and honour.
   - At first the poet thinks his lover is an angel.

4. Underline in the poem the pronouns which define the protagonists. As there is no feminine pronoun to describe the one who wakes the narrator, what makes you think that the unnamed person is a woman?

5. Thou’ (subject) and ‘thee’ (object) are very often repeated. Why? Choose from the following.
   - to increase the musical effect
   - to focus on the centrality of the lover (who is questioned, invited, seduced)
   - to use repetitions as a technical device
   - to make the argument more convincing
   - to make the poem a personal address

6. I. 6 (‘My dream thou brokest not, but continued’st it’) is an example of how Donne plays with opposites. Explain it in your own words.

7. Explain the following simile in your own words: ‘as torches, which must ready be,/Men light and put out, so thou deal’st with me’.

8. What are the lover’s eyes compared to? Does the simile fit into the Petrarchan tradition, where Laura’s eyes are often described as stars?

9. The poem is based on the duality between dream/illusion and reality. Do they mingle?

10. Donne takes his subjects and images from the tradition of court poetry in which, for example, the woman is described as an angel. In ‘The Dream’, however, as in other poems you have read from Songs and Sonnets, Donne also draws a very realistic and sensual portrait of the lover. In what ways do you think this mixture of spiritual and physical features could be regarded as ‘revolutionary’ for Donne’s period?

WRITER’S CORNER

11. After reading, and hopefully enjoying, some of Donne’s fascinating and elaborate poetry, decide which poem by Donne you prefer and write an email to a friend suggesting why she/he should read this poem. Write a detailed account of the poem you have chosen and say why you recommend it.
Edmund Spencer

‘Sonnet 75’

‘Sonnet 75’ belongs to *Amoretti* (little love-offerings), a sequence of 89 sonnets dedicated to Spencer’s future wife, Elisabeth Boyle, and divided into two parts: before and after the Lady’s acceptance. The sequence of the *Amoretti* leads to a happy marriage, which Spenser celebrates in *Epithalamion* (1595). As a sonneteer Spencer adapts Petrarchan models and also uses them to create connections to the scriptural readings of *The Book of Common Prayer*, in an innovative way, through a range of personal tones and emotions.

BEFORE READING

Read the first line of the sonnet. You find this gesture of a lover writing his beloved’s name on the sand:

- extremely romantic
- funny
- pathetic

Explain your choice.

‘Sonnet 75’

One day I wrote her name upon the strand,
But came the waves and washed it away:
Again I wrote it with a second hand,
But came the tide, and made my pains his prey.
Vain man, said she, that doest in vain essay
A mortal thing so to immortalize,
For I myself shall like to this decay,
And eek my name be wiped out likewise.
Not so, (quoth) I let baser* things devise
To die in dust, but you shall live by fame:
My verse your virtues rare shall eternise,
And in the heavens write your glorious name.
Where when as Death shall all the world subdue,
Our love shall live, and later life renew.

1. *The Book of Common Prayer* is the title of a number of prayer books of the Church of England and of other Anglican churches, used throughout the Anglican Communion. The first book, published in 1549, was a product of the English Reformation following the break with Rome.

1. quoth: said (forma arcaica).

2. baser: nella concezione medievale e rinascimentale, l’universo era dominato dal contrasto fra le cose terrene (*baser*) e quelle spirituali (*higher*), come l’amore celeste e la gloria poetica.

Un giorno scissi il suo nome sulla riva, ma vennero le onde e lo lavarono via; di nuovo lo scissi con una nuova grafia, ma venne la marea, e fece delle mie fatiche la sua preda. Uomo vanitoso, disse lei, che invano cerchi una cosa mortale di rendere immortale in tal modo, poiché io stessa sarò soggetta a questo decadimento e anche il mio nome sarà ugualmente cancellato. Non (sarà) così, (dissi io) lascia alle cose più vili la sorte di morire nella polvere, ma tu vivrai grazie alla fama: i miei versi le tue virtù rare renderanno eteree, e nei cieli scriveranno il tuo glorioso nome. Dove, quando la morte tutto il mondo avrà sottomesso, il nostro amore vivrà e in seguito la vita rigenererà.
OVER TO YOU

1. There are two pronouns in the sonnet: ‘i’ and ‘she’. Who do they indicate? What does the use of ‘our’ (l. 14) imply?

2. Put the following sentences in order to rebuild the meaning of the sonnet.
   - The poet replies that his verse will make her and her name immortal.
   - The poet tries to write his lady’s name on the sand but the tide washes it away.
   - The poet concludes that love is eternal and itself gives new life.
   - The lady says it is useless to try to immortalize her, a mortal human being, who like the name on the sand is bound to disappear.

3. Say if the poem develops through:
   - narration
   - description
   - monologue
   - dialogue
   - argument

4. Which of the following themes are present in the sonnet? Quote the lines.
   - a fear of death
   - a love stronger than death
   - the mortality of all creatures
   - the immortality of poetry

5. Identify the rhyme scheme.

6. What other sound devices contributes to the musicality of the sonnet?

7. Beside the musical effect, the repetitions of came (ll. 2 and 4) and vain (ll. 5) reinforce one key concept in the sonnet. Which one?

8. Is this sonnet a Petrarchan or an Elizabethan one?

9. Do you know any other poem, also in other literatures, which develops the theme of human mortality versus the immortality of poetry? If so, make a comparison with this sonnet by Spenser. Discuss in class.
The Puritan Age (1625-60)

John Milton

Paradise Lost (1667)

Paradise Lost

Satan is now seeking his revenge on God. He is in the Garden of Eden disguised as a serpent and is cleverly trying to convince Eve to eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge.

‘O sacred, wise, and wisdom-giving plant,  
Mother of science, now I feel thy power 
Within me clear, not only to discern  
Things in their causes, but to trace the ways 
Of highest agents, deemed however wise. 
Queen of this universe, do not believe 
Those rigid threats of death; ye shall not die: 
How should ye? By the fruit? It gives you life 
To knowledge; by the threatener? Look on me, 
Me who have touched and tasted, yet both live, 
And life more perfect have attained than fate 
Meant me, by venturing higher than my lot. 
Shall that be shut to man, which to the beast 
Is open? Or will God incense his ire 
For such a petty trespass, and not praise 
Rather your dauntless virtue, whom the pain 
Of death denounced, whatever thing death be, 
Deterred not from achieving what might lead 
To happier life, knowledge of good and evil? 
Of good, how just? Of evil, if what is evil 
Be real, why not known, since easier shunned? 
God therefore cannot hurt ye, and be just; 
Not just, not God; not feared then, nor obeyed: 
Your fear itself of death removes the fear. 
Why then was this forbid? Why but to awe, 
Why but to keep ye low and ignorant, 
His worshippers? He knows that in the day 
Ye eat thereof, your eyes that seem so clear, 
Yet are but dim, shall perfectly be then 
Opened and cleared, and ye shall be as gods, 
Knowing both good and evil as they know.’
OVERTOYOU

1 Answer the following questions.
   1. What is the ‘wisdom-giving plant’ (ll. 1-5)?
   2. Who is ‘Queen of this universe’ (ll. 6-8)?
   3. Who gave the ‘rigid threats of death’ according to Satan (l. 7)?
   4. Satan says that he himself has eaten the fruit. In your own words can you say how he benefited from it (ll. 9-12)?
   5. What does Satan say will be God’s reaction if Eve eats the fruit (ll. 14-18)?
   6. According to Satan why doesn’t God want man to eat the fruit (ll. 25-27)?
   7. Eating the fruit will have what results, according to Satan (ll. 28-31)?

2 Compare Satan’s tone in this extract to his tone in the previous one and say how it is different.

3 Complete by underlining the best word.
   In the first passage Satan and the angels found themselves in heaven / hell (1). Their situation seemed idyllic / desperate (2). Consequently Satan needed to convince / frighten (3) the angels into believing that all was not lost. To do this he used skilful hyperbole / mockery (4). His tone is consequently uncertain / dogmatic (5). In the second text Satan is talking to Eve. Again he must try to convince / frighten (6) her into eating the forbidden fruit. This time, however, choice is involved. To be successful with Eve, therefore, Satan must use similar / different (7) tactics. Here we see Satan at his most cunning / ridiculous (8). It is important for him to try to gain Eve’s friendship / trust (9). He is almost authoritative / servile (10) in his approach. The tone of the piece, therefore, is much softer / harsher (11). He uses fewer exclamations but more questions / doubts (12) to make Eve believe she is making her own decision. It is a masterful piece of brainwashing.

4 The poet William Blake, and also literary critics through the ages, have felt that Milton’s representation of Satan was ambiguous in that he seems to be an almost heroic figure. In fact he has been described as one of the first ‘anti-heroes’ in literature. With reference to the two extracts what can you find in Satan’s behaviour which could be described as a) heroic and what makes him b) anti-heroic? Discuss in groups.

5 The biblical story of Adam and Eve meant that for many years women were associated with weakness and were also more easily susceptible to the forces of evil. Can you think of any other examples in literature which seem to reinforce these ideas? Look on the Internet for help.

6 Do these concepts still exist? If so, where? If not, what has contributed to a change in how women are seen in certain cultures?
John Milton

‘On His Blindness’ (1652)

This famous sonnet from the collection Sonnets (1650-60) is very personal, as it describes one of the greatest tragedies of Milton’s life, his loss of sight. His sight began to fail around 1644, and by the year 1655, at the age of only 47, he was completely blind.

**BEFORE READING**

Read and listen to the first two lines of the sonnet and imagine the poet’s feelings and fears of becoming blind.

‘On His Blindness’

When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide,
Lodg’d with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide,
‘Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?’
I fondly ask; but Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, ‘God doth not need
Either man’s work or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o’er land and ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait.’

1. **Ere ... days:** i 35 anni erano considerati la metà della vita, secondo la tradizionale durata della vita di 70 anni presentata nella Bibbia.

2. **talent:** il talento è una moneta, ma qui il riferimento è alla parabola dei talenti (Matteo, 25, 14-30), in cui il servo che seppellisce il talento che il padrone gli ha dato è condannato perché non l’ha fatto fruttare. Milton intende per talento la sua dote di scrittore, che riteneva fosse un dono di Dio.

3. **lest ... chide:** nella parabola dei talenti il padrone ritorna e chiede ai servitori che uso hanno fatto del suo denaro.

Quando io penso a come la mia luce è spenta, non ancora a metà della mia vita, in questo mondo scuro e grande, e a come quel talento che è pecato mortale tener celato sia collocato presso di me, inutilizzato, per quanto la mia anima sia sempre più inclinata a servire con quello il mio Creatore, e a presentare un rendiconto esatto, per paura che lui, tornando, mi sgridi, allora chiedo scioccamente: ‘Ma Dio chiede conto del lavoro fatto, anche a chi come me non ha luce?’, allora la Patienza, per fermare quel mormorio, presta risposte: ‘Dio non ha bisogno né delle opere dell’uomo né delle sue offerte; chi meglio sopporta il Suo giogo gentile, quello Lo serve meglio. La sua condizione è regale; migliaia al Suo comando corrono e si affrettano per mare e per terra senza sosta. Ma Lo servono anche coloro che semplicemente stanno fermi e attendono.’
Answer the following questions.

1. What is the poet thinking about at the beginning of the sonnet?
2. Why is he frustrated?
3. What is he afraid of?
4. What does the poet ask?
5. Who answers his question?
6. What is the given answer?
7. Who serves God?

There is one line in the sonnet which marks the logical division of it into two parts.

1. Identify the line.
2. What different meanings can we find in each part?
3. What different attitude to blindness do they express?

Light and darkness are contrasted in the initial lines of the sonnet. What are the images and what do they convey?

'Talent' is a specific word connected with trade. What other nouns echo the language of commerce? Why are there such terms? Apart from being a unit of currency at the time of Jesus, what does talent symbolize?

Describe the layout of the poem. Identify the rhyme scheme.

Find examples of these poetic devices.

1. alliteration
2. enjambment
3. metaphor
4. personification

Examine the powerful metaphor of the ‘yoke’: what is it and what connotations can we ascribe to it? How does the word ‘yoke’ symbolize the complex relationship between God and man?

How would you define the language used? Choose from the following.

☐ colloquial
☐ elevated
☐ simple
☐ confidential
☐ refined

In the English Renaissance two different types of sonnets were used: the Petrarchan and the Elizabethan. Which of the two did Milton adopt in ‘On His Blindness’? Consider its structure and content.

Despite his total devotion to the Puritan cause, for which Milton abandoned poetry for some twenty years, in this sonnet the poet expresses his doubt that he is wasting his talent for poetry and wonders if also a blind man has to serve God. The answer comes in the true Puritan (and Protestant) spirit. Say why.