

WHY TEACH THIS?

This **engaging** lesson blends a number of **strategies** I've been exploring this year, which focus on developing thinking skills through **enjoyable, experiential** learning. To meet the demands of the reformed GCSEs our lessons must **prepare learners** to think for themselves and build their confidence in critical response to **challenging** material.

The new National Curriculum and reformed GCSEs offer real opportunity for teachers to reflect on their core classroom approaches and make sure that what we're offering students in their day-to-day school experience is valuable to them – in preparation for exams, but also in building skills they can carry forward into the world of work. I want students to be critically engaged citizens – my approach to teaching literature reflects this. We start with real-world concepts that engage students on a personal level, explore how these and other perspectives are voiced in the text, and move towards students articulating their own critical responses. Peer learning is a core part of the process and there is an emphasis on quality student discussion, identifying differing perspectives and articulating argument.

This lesson aims to build students' confidence in handling Shakespearian language and responding to it, while developing their sophistication in discussing complex arguments about feminism and avoiding reductionist reactions. Through engaging stimulus texts, students are encouraged to strengthen their own personal views and are offered the tools to support their arguments with relevant reference points that they can connect with.

STARTER ACTIVITY

Present students with the following statement and questions as they enter the room (you could add images too – tailored to the interests of your students. I have found celebrity couples such as Beyonce & JayZ/Rihanna & Chris Brown work well with mine. This will work from an interactive whiteboard, projector board or on slips of paper on desks).

Behind every great man there is privilege, encouragement, favouritism and supremacy. Behind every great woman there is sexism, oppression, discouragement and objectification.

- *What does this statement mean?* (clarify understanding for all)
- *What point does it make?* (elicit student interpretation)
- *Who do you think wrote it? When?* (expose assumptions)
- *Who or what is it critical of?* (high-order thinking: extend discussion beyond individuals to social values)

Allow students to discuss in groups using speaking frames to support quality discussion. I use a timer for both discussion and feedback to maintain the lesson's pace – it is easy to get lost in this discussion! Speaking frames are used to encourage use of Standard English and guide students to articulate their thoughts, preparing them to write responses later:

"I think that the main point raised in the statement is that _____." / "What this statement suggests about gender roles is _____." / "The writer suggests that women _____"

A BIT OF ADO

IT'S EASY FOR TODAY'S TEENS TO REJECT SHAKESPEARE AS IRRELEVANT – BUT THIS CLEVER APPROACH BY LOUISE HOOPER MIGHT JUST CHANGE THEIR MINDS...

Depending on the class you could give some students the original statement: "Behind every great man is a great woman", or present both in the initial display rather than waiting for this reference to be identified by students.

Take whole class feedback drawing out the assumptions students have made and clarifying for all the idea of gender discrimination in its different forms. Keep the focus on valuing all perspectives rather than finding a 'right answer' or favouring a particular view.

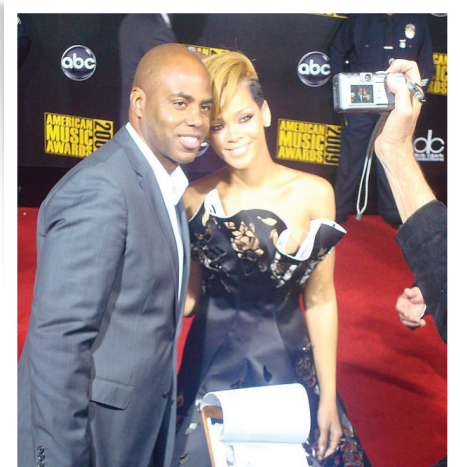
Now display the following statements for students to consider:

Feminism is relevant today. Shakespeare is relevant today.

Use a quick show of hands to see how the class feel at this point – do they agree with either? Both?

Challenge assumptions: Reveal the author of the Gender Equality statement: Anthony Anaxagou, a modern poet and writer. Pose the questions: *Does your reaction change because it is written by a man? What about the fact he is a 21st Century poet?*

(It is not essential for students to be familiar with his work as the key point for discussion here is that he is male and writing about gender discrimination in a 21st



Century context. Looking at how he presents social criticism through poetry could make interesting extension work/further lessons).

Connect to Text:

On their feet: Provide students with a selection of quotes from *Much Ado*. In pairs, students read their quote out loud 'punctuation-to-punctuation mark'. They then create actions for each word of the quote (keep quotes short). This helps students to overcome their fear of the language, while internalising the lines and allowing time for a deeper appreciation of what the language choices infer. Perform the quotes with actions to whole class, listening for differing perspectives on gender.

MAIN ACTIVITIES

Here are a few things you could try with your students:

Peer learning

In groups, students rank quotations from the text in order of which they can most confidently discuss in relation to the theme of gender. Using mini Post-It notes (or annotations in different colours) students annotate key points and questions about what they are confused by/don't understand. Groups then circulate trying to extend the points raised by other groups and answer their questions where possible. These

can be developed into group presentations or class question and answer sessions.

Role play the message

Divide quotations into categories (attitudes to masculinity; marriage etc). Give small groups an allocated category and a random location such as 'a haunted house'; 'a beach' (pick from a hat, or differentiate scenarios for different groups – you can add details to increase or decrease the level of challenge, such as ages of characters, locations and timeframes). Students devise a short role play in the given context

that demonstrates the perspective on gender roles. After performing, they talk the class through how they depicted their given category, comparing it to the presentation of the original quote.

Make connections

Give students two sets of paper hexagons (I usually use six but adapt this number to your learners), one set stating facts about the play and the other statements of gender stereotypes (use different colours). Challenge students to connect all of the hexagons using references to the text.

INFORMATION
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ABOUT OUR EXPERT



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STRETCH THEM
FURTHER

DEPENDING ON THE CLASS AND THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH DISCUSSION-BASED LEARNING YOU MAY WISH TO BREAK THIS INTO TWO LESSONS, SPENDING LONGER ON THE STARTER AND DISCUSSION SECTIONS AND EXTENDING THE 'CONNECT TO TEXT' TASK INTO THE MAIN ACTIVITY. THE LANGUAGE ANALYSIS WOULD THEN BECOME THE FOCUS OF THE FOLLOWING LESSON. ALTERNATIVELY, YOU CAN BEGIN THE FOLLOWING LESSON WITH A DEEPER CONSIDERATION OF THE MODERN TEXT INTRODUCED IN THE SUMMARY AND CONDUCT CLOSE ANALYSIS COMPARISON TO MUCH ADO.

HOME LEARNING

Choose one of the following and argue against the statement:

1. Feminism is not relevant today.
2. Shakespeare is not relevant today.
3. Neither Shakespeare nor feminism is relevant today. (This could be submitted in essay form, as a poem/performance script, or as a video response.)

SUMMARY

Watch Sadia Ahmed's Slambassador spoken word piece 'Emotional Euthanasia' (tinyurl.com/sadiaahmed), or use a print copy of the poem explaining its context and author, and/or read Anthony Anaxagou's Real Men. Students should reflect on the similarities and differences of the messages in the modern texts and Much ADO. Ask students if their opinions about the relevance of Shakespeare and feminism have changed, and if so how and why.