

Shakespearean Insults (One or two 60 minute lessons)

In this lesson, students will use insults traded by the Montagues and Capulets at the beginning of 'Romeo and Juliet' as a starting point to explore Shakespearean language. They will translate the insults into modern English, and write their own new Shakespearean insults to script their own version of the play's opening scene.

Who is it for?

This learning resource is for students studying Literacy at Key Stage 2 (years 5 & 6).

Learning outcomes

Learners will:

- Plan their writing selecting the appropriate form and use similar writing models for their own work
- Draft and rewrite by structuring their text and making appropriate vocabulary and grammar choices
- Assess the effectiveness of their own and others' writing

You will need

- Access to the production of 'Romeo and Juliet' in the On Demand player.
- Copies of the attached table of Shakespearean vocabulary

Activities

1.

Watch the scene in which the Montagues and Capulets start a fight (from 0:58 to 3:30), including the "do you bite your thumb at me?" exchange.

2.

Ask the class which insult starts the fight, and why. Note that there is no bad language used - the power of the insult comes from being clever and inventive.

3.

Explain that many common phrases we use now were created by Shakespeare - "a sorry sight", "dead as a doornail", "it's all Greek to me", "eaten out of house and home", "faint-hearted"... there are countless other examples. Make the point that a well-crafted phrase can make such an impact it lasts forever.

4.

Share some of the selected Shakespearean insults from Appendix 1, and ask the class to think about what they mean, and translate them into modern English. You may choose to hand out copies of the list and have the class work through them in pairs, and then feed back. Focus on how the insults use creative and vivid



language to summon a strong image.

5.

Now the class can begin writing their own Shakespearean insults. Share copies of Appendix 2, the list of Shakespearean insults, with the class. By taking one word from each column, and putting "thou" at the front, they can make a Shakesperean insult of their own. e.g "Thou tottering onion-eyed mumble-mews!"

6.

Ask the class to re-write the opening scene of 'Romeo and Juliet': there should be two families who trade insults before starting a fight, with one insult leading to another. They can write them in Shakespearean language, or in modern English, or a mixture of the two. The insults the characters use should be powerful because they are clear and powerful images: NOT because they contain bad or inapprorpriate language. Encourage them to have their characters play insults off each other, as in 'Romeo and Juliet', where one insult leads on to the other, and the characters listen to each other's insults and react. You may need to show them or remind them how a script should be laid out before they start.



Appendix 1

I desire that we be better strangers.

You have such a February face, so full of frost, of storm and cloudiness.

Thou lily-livered boy.

His wit's as thick as a Tewkesbury mustard.

I am sick when I do look on thee.

I'll beat thee, but I would infect my hands.

More of your conversation would infect my brain.

The tartness of his face sours ripe grapes.

Thou sodden-witted lord! Thou hast no more brain than I have in mine elbows.

You are as a candle, the better burnt out.

Would thou wouldst burst!

Your brain is as dry as the remainder biscuit after voyage.

A most notable coward, an infinite and endless liar, an hourly promise breaker, the owner of no one good quality.



Appendix 2

Artless Bat-fowling Apple-john

Bawdy Beef-witted Baggage

Beslubbering Beetle-headed Barnacle

Bootless Clapper-clawed Bladder

Churlish Clay-brained Canker-blossom

Craven Crook-pated Clack-dish

Dankish Dismal-dreaming Clotpole

Dissembling Dreadbolted Coxcomb

Droning Elf-skinned Flap-dragon

Errant Flap-mouthed Giglet

Fawning Fly-bitten Gudgeon

Frothy Fool-born Hedge-pig

Gorbellied Guts-griping Hugger-mugger

Impertinent Half-faced Lewdster

Infectious Idle-headed Lout

Jarring Knotty-pated Maggot-pie

Loggerheaded Milk-livered Malt-worm

Lumpish Onion-eyed Miscreant

Memmering Plume-plucked Moldwarp

Mewling Rough-hewn Mumble-mews

Paunchy Sheep-biting Pigeon-egg

Reeky Swag-bellied Pignut

Spongy Tardy-gaited Ratsbane

Tottering Toad-spotted Strumpet

Unmuzzled Unchin-snouted Vassal

Villainous Weather-bitten Wagtail