

Topic: Persuasive language in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

Level: C1/C2

Time: 90 minutes

Aims

- To build on students' knowledge of character adjectives
- To develop students' awareness of persuasive techniques (such as flattery, reassurance, put-down, etc.) and to provide an opportunity to practise using them
- To raise awareness of the differences between vocabulary in Shakespeare's time and today

Introduction

This lesson will introduce students to one of Shakespeare's best known plays: *Macbeth*. It will focus in particular on the character of Lady Macbeth and how she uses rhetoric (persuasive language) to encourage her husband to do what she wants him to do in Act 1, Scene 7. This will lead into a communicative activity in which students learn how to use some of these persuasive techniques in order to get what they want in everyday English.

Preparation

You will need one sheet of the ***Macbeth* plot summary cards** (cut up and shuffled) per pair of students for the warmer task. These can be found in the file

***Macbeth* plot summary cards for warmer and role cards for task 5.**

You will need one copy of **Act 1 Scene 7** per pair of students. Practise Lady Macbeth's lines beforehand so that you can be as expressive as possible.

You will also need one sheet of **Role cards for Task 5** (cut up) per six students. These can be found in the file ***Macbeth* plot summary cards for warmer and role cards for task 5.**

Procedure

Warmer – Discussing and sequencing events in *Macbeth* (10 minutes)

- Begin by finding out what students already know about the play *Macbeth*. Ask them if they have ever read the play/seen it performed. Encourage students to tell you anything they know about Shakespeare and the play, and write up their ideas on the board.
- Organise students into groups and give each group a set of cut-up and shuffled ***Macbeth* plot summary cards**. Students have to reorder the sentences to make them tell the story of what happens in *Macbeth*.
- Read the summary around the class. Ask students questions to check their understanding of the play's main events as you do so, e.g. *Why does Lady Macbeth want her husband to kill King Duncan?* (Because she wants her husband to be crowned king.) *Why do you think that Macbeth starts to see things which aren't there?* (He feels guilty about what he has done.)
- Ask students to place the cards face down on their desk. Challenge them to tell you what they remember about the play. Ask questions to help them, e.g. *What are the names of the main characters? Who tells Macbeth he will be king one day?*

Answers:

1.d 2.i 3.e 4.a 5.h 6.b 7.g 8.f 9.c

Note

You can find short video summaries of Macbeth online. Some of these are entertaining and get the main point across clearly. Make sure that you check the content is appropriate for classroom use before you show them to your students.

Task 1 – Vocabulary: adjectives of personality (5 minutes)

Ask students to tell you whether they think Lady Macbeth played an important part in the play. Ask students to work in pairs to choose five character adjectives which they feel best describe Lady Macbeth. In class feedback, discuss the meanings of the adjectives but do not tell students whether they are 'right' or 'wrong', as they will have the chance to revisit this task later on in the lesson.

Task 2 – Shakespearean English (10 minutes)

Tell students that they are not to worry if they find the language in this lesson difficult: Shakespearean English is very different from the English we speak today, and even native speakers find it challenging. Write the words 'thou art' on the board and ask students if they can guess what this means (it is *you are*). Explain to students that Shakespearean English had two forms for you: a polite form (*you*) and a familiar form (*thou*).

Read the sentences in Shakespearean English aloud to your class. Challenge students to see who can be the first to match them with their translations into modern English. Check answers around the class.

Answers:

1.c 2.a 3.d 4.e 5.b

Task 3 – Reading *Macbeth* Act 1, Scene 7 (10 minutes)

Tell students that they are going to read Act 1, Scene 7 from *Macbeth*. This is a very important scene in the play, as this is where Lady Macbeth persuades her husband to murder King Duncan. Tell students to focus on Lady Macbeth as they read and decide whether or not they agree with the adjectives they chose in **Task 1 – Vocabulary: adjectives of personality**.

Read the scene aloud. Play the part of Lady Macbeth yourself, and nominate a confident student to play the part of Macbeth. Offer as much support with the language as possible.

After you have read the scene aloud, discuss the adjectives your students have chosen. Be aware that there are no real right and wrong answers. For example, it may seem that Lady Macbeth is not at all caring on one hand: but on the other hand, she clearly cares a lot about her husband. Similarly, although Lady Macbeth's speech uses a lot of violent imagery, she herself is not actually violent (she does not actually do any of the killing).

Suggested answers:

Ruthless, manipulative, ambitious, strong, intelligent

Note

If you don't feel confident about reading this extract aloud to your students, you can find various interpretations of this famous scene online.

Task 4 – Identifying Lady Macbeth's persuasive techniques (10 minutes)

Read the persuasive techniques aloud to your class. Check students' understanding of what they mean by asking concept questions, e.g.

- *If I put you down do I make you feel better or worse about yourself? (Worse)*
- *If I reassure you, do I make you feel more or less confident? (More confident)*

Ask students to work in pairs to decide which persuasive technique (a–d) they think Lady Macbeth is using in each extract (1–4). Encourage discussion, as various answers are possible. Students might need a little help to understand the meaning of Extract 1. (Lady Macbeth says that she would kill her own child rather than not go ahead with something she had promised to do.) Conduct class feedback.

Suggested answers:

1.d 2.c 3.a;c 4.b

Task 5 – Role play (20 minutes)

Distribute role play cards. Give students five minutes to work in pairs and practise the role plays. Emphasise that students are to include the persuasive techniques they observed in Macbeth and ask students to take turns at being the person who is doing the persuading.

Nominate a few pairs to perform their role play to the rest of the class. The students who are watching must try to identify the persuasive techniques used. At the end of the role play conduct feedback. Whose persuasive language was most successful? Why?

Task 6 – Pitching a modern day film version of *Macbeth* (10 minutes)

Discuss the questions as a class. Generate as much debate as possible and write any new language on the board.

Suggested answers

I think similar events could take place, because people are always going to be ambitious and hungry for power. It might be different nowadays because kings don't always have so much power: it might be a politician or a businesswoman who was killed. In Shakespeare's play Lady Macbeth did a lot of talking, but didn't act. In a modern-day film, females might be more actively violent.

Organise students into groups of four and ask them to work together to pitch a film. Ask groups to report back on their ideas. Conduct a class vote for the most interesting idea. If you have the necessary resources, you could ask students to produce a trailer for the film they have pitched.

MACBETH

How now! What news?

LADY MACBETH

He has almost supp'd: why have you left the chamber?

MACBETH

Hath he ask'd for me?

LADY MACBETH

Know you not he has?

MACBETH

We will proceed no further in this business:
He hath honour'd me of late; and I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon.

LADY MACBETH

Was the hope drunk
Wherein you dress'd yourself? Hath it slept since?
And wakes it now, to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valor
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem;
Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would,"
Like the poor cat i' the adage?

MACBETH

Pr'ythee, peace!
I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none.

LADY MACBETH

What beast was't, then,
That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man;
And, to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place

Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
Does unmake you. I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this.

MACBETH

If we should fail?

LADY MACBETH

We fail!
But screw your courage to the sticking-place,
And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep,--
Whereto the rather shall his day's hard journey
Soundly invite him, his two chamberlains
Will I with wine and wassail so convince
That memory, the warder of the brain,
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
A limbec only: when in swinish sleep
Their drenched natures lie as in a death,
What cannot you and I perform upon
The unguarded Duncan? What not put upon
His spongy officers; who shall bear the guilt
Of our great quell?

MACBETH

Bring forth men-children only;
For thy undaunted mettle should compose
Nothing but males. Will it not be receiv'd,
When we have mark'd with blood those sleepy two
Of his own chamber, and us'd their very daggers,
That they have don't?

LADY MACBETH

Who dares receive it other,
As we shall make our griefs and clamor roar
Upon his death?

MACBETH

I am settled, and bend up
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.
Away, and mock the time with fairest show:
False face must hide what the false heart doth know.

Warmer – Discussing and sequencing events in *Macbeth*



A scene from William Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*

Have you ever watched this play or seen a filmed version? What do you know about it?

*Your teacher will give you a jumbled-up version of the plot of *Macbeth*.*

Work with a partner to see if you can arrange the events in the correct order.

Task 1 – Vocabulary: adjectives of personality

*You will now know that Lady Macbeth plays an important part in shaping the plot of *Macbeth*. Choose five words from the box which, in your opinion, best describe the character of Lady Macbeth.*

ruthless	submissive	manipulative	ambitious	violent	feminine	sensitive	caring
strong	intelligent	confident					

Task 2 – Shakespearean English

Shakespearean English is quite different from the English we speak today.

Can you match Lady Macbeth's lines (1–5) with their translation into modern English (a–e)?

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. <i>He has almost supped</i> | a. Are you too scared to go and get what you really want? |
| 2. <i>Art thou afeared to be the same in thine own act and valour as thou art in desire?</i> | b. When Duncan is asleep I'll get his two servants so drunk that they won't remember a thing the next day. |
| 3. <i>When you durst do it then you were a man</i> | c. He has almost finished dinner. |
| 4. <i>But screw your courage to the sticking place and we'll not fail.</i> | d. You were manly when you were brave enough to do it. |
| 5. <i>When Duncan is asleep his two chamberlains will I with wine and wassail so convince that memory, the warder of the brain will be a fume.</i> | e. Set your mind on what you want to do and we'll not fail. |

Task 3 – Reading *Macbeth* Act 1, Scene 7

You are going to read Act 1, Scene 7 from *Macbeth*. As you read, think about the adjectives you chose to describe Lady Macbeth in **Task 1 – Vocabulary: adjectives of personality**. Do you still agree with your choices?

Task 4 – Identifying Lady Macbeth's persuasive techniques

Lady Macbeth has to work very hard to persuade her husband to kill King Duncan. In the scene you have just read, she uses a number of persuasive techniques to make absolutely sure she gets her way. Here are some examples:

- Flattery
- Reassurance
- Putting someone down
- Emphasising determination

For extracts 1–4, decide which of the persuasive techniques a–d she is using.

- I have given suck, and know how tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me. I would, while it was smiling in my face, have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums and dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you have done to this.*
- Was the hope drunk wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since? And wakes it now to look so green and pale on what it did so freely?*
- When you durst do it then you were a man.*
- But screw your courage to the sticking place and we'll not fail.*

Task 5 – Role play

Your teacher will give you a role play card. It will be your job to persuade someone to do something you want them to do. Use the persuasive techniques you have learned about. How successful are they?

Task 6 – Pitching a modern-day film version of *Macbeth*

Do you think similar events to those in the play Macbeth could take place today, in our times? What would be different?

Working in groups, decide on a storyline for a modern-day film version of Macbeth. The story should be similar but the characters, setting, dialogue, etc. should all be adapted for our times. Which actors would play the lead roles? What would the soundtrack be? Where would your film be set?

Take it in turns to 'pitch' your film idea to the rest of the class. Vote for the film which sounds the most interesting.



Macduff and Macbeth

d On the way home from battle a soldier called Macbeth and his friend, Banquo, meet three witches.

i The witches tell Macbeth that one day he will be King of Scotland and that Banquo's children will one day also be kings.

e Macbeth is shaken after the meeting with the witches. The King of Scotland, Duncan, congratulates Macbeth on his bravery and asks if he can come to stay the night at Macbeth's castle.

a Macbeth writes to his wife to tell her that the King will be visiting them that evening. He also tells her of the witches he has met and what they have told him.

h When Macbeth gets home, his wife, Lady Macbeth, is very excited. She really wants Macbeth to become king. She persuades her husband to kill King Duncan when he comes to stay at their castle.

b Macbeth and Lady Macbeth murder King Duncan and make it look as if the King was killed by his two servants. Macbeth kills the servants and becomes king.

g Becoming king does not make Macbeth feel secure. He remembers the witches' prophecy and starts worrying that Banquo's children will become king and knock him off the throne. He hires an assassin to kill his friend Banquo.

f Macbeth kills more and more people to make sure that he stays king. He also starts to see things which aren't there, for example the ghost of his friend Banquo. Meanwhile, Lady Macbeth can't stop thinking about the terrible murder and her part in it.

c Finally, Lady Macbeth kills herself and Macbeth is killed in battle. The new King of Scotland, Malcolm, promises that he will rule Scotland kindly and well.

Situation 1: Student A

You and three of your friends want to go to a music festival in the countryside next weekend. You've bought your tickets and you're really excited! The only problem is that you really need a car (you can't get there by public transport) and you haven't got one. You want your older brother/sister to lend you their car. If they do not lend you their car, you will not be able to go to the music festival. Your friends are counting on you!

Situation 1: Student B

Your brother/sister wants to borrow your car this weekend, but you really don't want to lend it to them. Your brother/sister is really careless and last time you lent your car it came back badly scratched. Also, you are not at all sure about the people your brother and sister is hanging out with at the moment – you think s/he is in with a very bad crowd.

Situation 2: Student A

You have an English test coming up. It's a really important one, because if you don't pass it you won't be able to get into university. Unfortunately, you've been a bit busy lately and you haven't really studied enough. You need to ask your clever best friend if you can sit beside him/her in the exam and copy his/her answers.

Situation 2: Student B

Your friend wants to sit beside you in the English exam – they haven't studied for the exam and want to copy your answers. You have worked really hard for this exam and you don't think it is at all fair of your friend to ask you to do this. You are also worried that you will get into really big trouble if you are caught.

Situation 3: Student A

You have always wanted to go to New York. You have just seen a great deal with an online travel company – the bargain ends at midnight so you don't have much time. You need to persuade your friend to buy tickets and come with you – you know s/he has enough money. You have other friends you could ask, but no one is quite as much fun as this friend.

Situation 3: Student B

Your friend asks you to go to New York with him/her. You're really trying to save money to buy a new house, and if you go on holiday all your savings will be lost. Anyway, New York isn't top on your list of places to visit – you prefer relaxing beach holidays.
