

NATE Shakespeare revision for GCSE

The rationale behind this teaching and learning support material

1 Shakespeare and literature study

Shakespeare is part of what has come to be called the literary heritage. This sometimes obscures the fact that he was a very successful popular entertainer of a mainly uneducated audience. It is helpful to think of him as a dramatist rather than a writer of poetry for performance.

His skill was in keeping audiences engaged for several hours by providing a variety of action, relationship, mood and spectacle. His plays are better seen as dramascript for public performance than as literature for private pleasure.

Although language and dramatic fashions have changed, the core of Shakespeare's drama is the comedy and tragedy of human behavior, human passion and human struggles in a range of social contexts. That makes them as relevant today as they were then.

2 Shakespeare and GCSE

Studying Shakespeare has to be within the framework of GCSE Literature AOs and the GCSE assessment framework. Knowledge, understanding and response will be directed by examination questions and mark schemes. Fortunately, these work within an understanding of Shakespeare's past and present relevance, his dramatic craftsmanship and his use of language.

3 Assessment for learning

Preparation for GCSE Literature requires familiarity with key literary reading skills. These are presented in these revision lessons as a progression through the core skills of *select and retrieve* to the more developed skill of *explain*, then to the more sophisticated skills of *exploration, interpretation and analysis*.

4 Inclusive learning

The activities are based on the principle that learning is most effective when developed through talk and collaboration rather than instruction. Lessons should be framed to include:

- a) all academic abilities
- b) all human faculties –not just literary and cerebral
- c) individual experience
- d) oracy, groupwork, performance as well as reading and writing
- e) different cultures

Each lesson focuses on a particular aspect of literary study as follows:

- Character and characterisation
- Ideas, feelings and attitudes
- Structure
- Language
- Contexts

Obviously, the extracts chosen from the plays could all be used for any or all of the study focus features. Teachers will already have covered these focus elements and the whole text. The purpose of these revision lessons is to highlight the nature of each study focus and to give scope for developing it as a strength in students' preparation for the exam.

This material has been produced by the NATE Learning and assessment committee, Spring 2017.

*****See NATE manifesto for Teaching Shakespeare for a fuller rationale*****