Edexcel English Literature

STUDENT BOOK

A PEARSON COMPANY

ISBN 978-1-84690-248-2

Edexcel AS English Literature

STUDENT BOOK

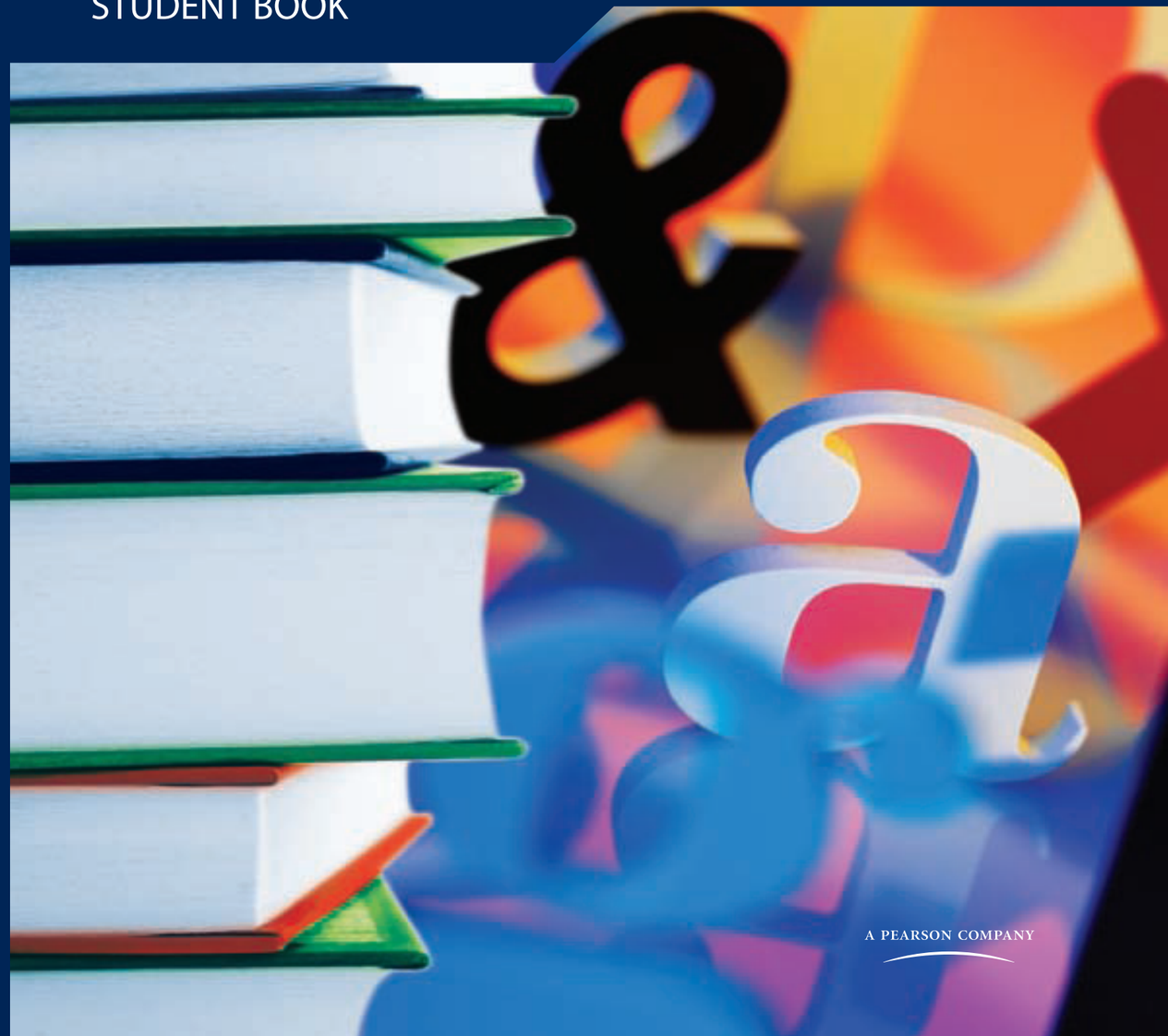
edexcel

edexcel
advancing learning, changing lives

Edexcel English Literature
Part 3: Exploring drama

Sue Dymoke Ian McMechan Mike Royston Jennifer Smith
Consultant: Jen Greatrex

STUDENT BOOK



A PEARSON COMPANY

Edexcel English Literature
Part 3: Exploring Drama

Sue Dymoke Ian McMechan Mike Royston Jennifer Smith

STUDENT BOOK

Consultant: Jen Greatrex

Part 3 Exploring Drama

Contents

A Responding to drama

1 Viewing drama: the audience's perspective

Activity 1

1 Choose one TV or film drama and one stage drama to give your opinion about. Then fill in a copy of the chart below.

Myself as an audience: stage and screen	
Drama on screen	**Drama on stage**
Title of the drama seen:	Title of the drama seen:
Liked/disliked it because: • • •	Liked/disliked it because: • • •
Rating 5: (excellent) to 1 (bad):	Rating 5: (excellent) to 1 (bad):

2 Compare your choices and your opinions with a partner's. Are there any patterns of similarity or difference?

3 Share your responses with the class. Then examine your class profile as an audience for drama. What do you conclude about:

- your preferences for stage or screen
- your preferences for dramatic genres (eg comedy, sitcoms, musicals, mysteries etc)
- your expectations when you view live theatre: are these different from your expectations of drama on film or TV?

Activity 2

1 Read aloud the extract below from the TV series *Blackadder Goes Forth.*

During World War I, Blackadder and Baldrick have crashed their plane over Germany and are being held in prison by Baron von Richthoven. They find it more comfortable than the trenches and do not want to be rescued. However, Lieutenant George and Lord Flashheart, the British flying legend, are determined to free them.

BALDRICK: Is it really true, sir? Is the war really over for us?

The question finds BLACKADDER in the best mood of his life.

BLACKADDER: Yup! For us, the Great War is finito, a war which would be a damn sight simpler if we just stayed in England and shot fifty thousand of our men in a week! No more mud, death, rats, bombs, shrapnel, whiz bangs, barbed wire and bloody awful songs that have the word 'Whoops!' in the title. Damn, they've left the door open.

BALDRICK: Oh, good, we can escape.

BLACKADDER: Are you mad, Baldrick? I'll go and find someone to lock it for us.

There is a knock on the door. BLACKADDER sweeps it open. It is George, also in flying gear.

GEORGE: Shhh! Mum's the word! Not half or what!

BLACKADDER slams the door on him in horror.

BALDRICK: Why did you slam the door on Lieutenant George?

BLACKADDER: I can't believe it. *(He calls out through the door.)* Go away!

GEORGE: It's me – it's me! *(He re-opens the door. GEORGE stands there, grinning.)*

BLACKADDER: What the hell are you doing here?

GEORGE: *(very pleased with himself)* Oh, never mind the 'hows' and 'whys'. And the 'do you mind if I don'ts'.

BLACKADDER: But it would take a superman to get in here.

GEORGE: Well, funny you should say that, because I did, in fact, have some help from a spiffing fellow. He's taken a break from some top-level shagging.

BLACKADDER: Oh, God.

FLASHHEART swings in through the door on a rope.

FLASHHEART: It's me. Hurray!

BALDRICK: Hurray!

FLASHHEART hits BALDRICK.

FLASHHEART: God's potatoes, George! You said noble brother flyers were in the lurch. If I'd known it was only Slack Bladder and the mound of the hound of the Baskervilles, I'd have let them stew in their own juice. And let me tell you, if I ever tried that, I'd probably *drown*!

BALDRICK is up again and laughing. FLASHHEART hits him again.

Still, since I'm here, I might as well doo-o-o it! As the bishop said to the netball team. Come on, chums!

They run away – then look back through the door. BLACKADDER has stayed behind. He sinks to the ground and starts moaning.

Come on.

BLACKADDER: Uhm, look, sorry chaps, but I've splintered my pancreas and I've got this awful cough.

He coughs. The coughs sound suspiciously like: Guards! Guards!

FLASHHEART: Wait a minute! I may be packing the kind of tackle you'd normally expect to find between the hind legs of a Grand National winner, but I'm not totally stupid – and I've got a feeling you'd rather we hadn't come.

BLACKADDER: No, no, no. I'm really grateful but I'd slow you up.

FLASHHEART: I think I'm beginning to understand.

BLACKADDER: Are you?

FLASHHEART: Just because I can give multiple orgasms to the furniture by sitting on it doesn't mean I'm not sick of this damn war. The blood, the noise, the endless poetry.

FLASHHEART gets out a gun and points it at BLACKADDER.

BLACKADDER: Is that what you really think, Flashheart?

FLASHHEART: Of course … it's not what I think! Now get out that door before I

redecorate this room in an exciting new colour called Hint of Brain.

BLACKADDER: Excellent – nice and clear. In that case, let's get back to that lovely war …

FLASHHEART: Woof!

GEORGE: Woof!

BALDRICK: Bark!

But too late! RICHTHOVEN melodramatically appears at the doorway.

RICHTHOVEN: Not so fast, Blackadder!

BLACKADDER: (with massive relief) Damn – foiled again – what bad luck!

RICHTHOVEN: Ah, and Lord Flashheart, this is indeed an honour. Finally the two greatest gentleman flyers in the world meet. Two men of honour who have jousted together in the cloud-strewn glory of the skies are face to face at last. How often have I rehearsed this moment of destiny in my dreams. The valour we two encapsulate, the unspoken nobility of our comradeship, the …

And FLASHHEART shoots him – 'bang'. He's dead now.

FLASHHEART: What a poof! Let's go!

ALL: Hurray!

2 With a partner, explore the comedy of this scene by filling in a copy of the chart below. Justify to one another your entries in column 3.

Blackadder Goes Forth

Comic device	**Example**	**How effective do you find it?**
Physical comedy/slapstick		
Character comedy: caricatures/stereotype figures		
Situation comedy: dramatic irony of Blackadder and Baldrick being safer in prison		
Verbal comedy: puns, jokes, **innuendo**/double entendre		
Satirical comedy: mild mockery of aspects of World War I		

3 Watch an episode from the *Blackadder* series on DVD or an episode from any comedy drama series you enjoy. Then note down and/or discuss:

a how the comedy works, being as specific as you can

b why you think the show has become popular with TV audiences

c whether it would transfer successfully to the stage, saying why or why not.

Key terms
innuendo
satirical (satire)

2 Performing drama: the actor's and director's perspectives

Activity 3

1 Read aloud the opening of Alan Bennett's play, *Habeas Corpus*, below. The main characters are listed as:

Habeas Corpus (1973)

ARTHUR WICKSTEED: a general practitioner

MURIEL WICKSTEED: his wife

DENNIS WICKSTEED: their son

CONSTANCE WICKSTEED: the doctor's sister

MRS SWABB: a cleaning lady.

There are no notes for the actors and only one stage direction.

ACT ONE

WICKSTEED: Look at him. Just look at that look on his face. Do you know what that means? He wants me to tell him he's not going to die. You're not going to die. He is going to die. Not now, of course, but some time … ten, fifteen years, who knows? I don't. We don't want to lose you, do we? And off he goes. Sentence suspended. Another ten years. Another ten years showing the slides. ('That's Malcolm, Pauline and Baby Jason.') Another ten years for little runs in the car. ('That's us at the Safari Park.') 'So what did the doctor say, dear?' 'Nothing, oh, nothing. It was all imagination.' But it's not all imagination. Sometimes I'm afraid, it actually happens.

MRS WICKSTEED'S VOICE: Arthur! Arthur!

MRS SWABB: It's all in the mind. Me, I've never had a day's illness in my life. No. I tell a lie. I once had my tonsils out. I went in on the Monday; I had it done on the Tuesday; I was putting wallpaper up on the Wednesday. My name is Mrs Swabb (hoover, hoover, hoover) someone who comes in; and in all that passes, I represent ye working classes. Hoover, hoover, hoover. Hoover, hoover, hoover. Now then, let's have a little more light on the proceedings and meet our contestants, the wonderful, wonderful Wicksteed family. Eyes down first for tonight's hero, Dr Arthur Wicksteed, a general practitioner in Brighton's plush, silk stocking district of Hove. Is that right, Doctor?

WICKSTEED: Hove, that's right, yes.

MRS SWABB: And you are fifty-three years of age.

WICKSTEED: Dear God, am I?

MRS SWABB: I'm afraid that's what I've got down here.

WICKSTEED: Fifty-three!

MRS SWABB: Any hobbies?

WICKSTEED: No. No. Our friends, the ladies, of course, but nothing much else.

MRS SWABB: Do you mind telling us what your ambition is?

WICKSTEED: Ambition? No, never had any. Partly the trouble, you see. When you've gone through life stopping at every lamp-post, no time.

MRS SWABB: Next we have …

MRS WICKSTEED: I can manage thank you. Elocution was always my strong point. Speak clearly, speak firmly, speak now. Name: Wicksteed, Muriel Jane. Age? Well, if you said fifty you'd be in the target area. Wife to the said Arthur Wicksteed and golly, don't I know it. Still potty about him though, the dirty dog. Oh, shut up, Muriel.

MRS SWABB: And now … this is Dennis, only son of Arthur and Muriel Wicksteed. And what do you do, Dennis?

DENNIS: Nothing very much. I think I've got lockjaw.

MRS SWABB: Really? Whereabouts?

DENNIS: All over.

MRS SWABB: Are you interested in girls at all?

DENNIS: If they're clean.

MRS SWABB: That goes without saying. You don't want a dirty girl, do you?

DENNIS: In a way, I do, yes.

MRS WICKSTEED: Dennis!

MRS SWABB: And now we have the doctor's sister, Miss Constance Wicksteed. Connie is a thirty-three-year-old spinster …

CONNIE: I am not a spinster. I am unmarried.

MRS SWABB: And to go with her mud-coloured cardigan Connie has chosen a fetching number in form-fitting cretonne. Have you any boyfriends, dear?

CONNIE: No.

MRS SWABB: Connie, you big story! What about Canon Throbbing, our thrusting young vicar? Why! That sounds like his Biretta now.

THROBBING *crosses on his power-assisted bicycle.*

Now, Connie, would you like to tell the audience what your ambition is? Go on, just whisper.

CONNIE: I'd like a big bust.

MRS SWABB: And what would you do with it when you'd got it?

CONNIE: Flaunt it.

MRS WICKSTEED: Connie!

2 In a group, plan a performance of this opening. Share the task between you. You need to decide about:

a The staging – Should there be a bare stage, a setting defi ned by scenery, moves and interaction between characters, costumes and props?

b The genre (the kind of play) – Should it be light comedy, a **thriller**, a **farce**, a **murder mystery**?

c The production style – Should it be realistic (as in soaps), comedy routine (as in *Blackadder*), documentary (as in *The Office*, for example), a skit (or parody)?

3 Then EITHER give your own performance, rehearsing it to the point where you need the book only as a prompt, OR write rehearsal notes from the director about aspects of this scene that would be important in performance.

4 Evaluate the performances OR compare your rehearsal notes. Can you agree on and justify an acting style that suits this drama best?

Independent research

Find a selection of contemporary plays from libraries, bookshops and the internet. Read them yourself, then bring some into class to read extracts as you proceed with your course. Try these publishers' lists: Faber & Faber, Nick Hearn Books, Longman, Eyre/Methuen, Samuel French. Playwrights might include: Caryl Churchill, David Hare, Alan Bennett, Timberlake Wertenbaker, Tom Stoppard.

Key terms

thriller
farce
murder mystery

B Analysing key elements of drama

1 Introduction

This section introduces you to the basic elements of stage drama. Whatever **drama text you** study, these will be central to it.

As you work through this section, continue thinking of drama as a *live* medium written for the stage rather than for the page.

The activities below are designed to support you during your study of your play.

2 How dramatists set the scene

Activity 14

1 Read aloud the opening of the play below (*Teechers*). It was written by John Godber for the Hull Truck Theatre Company in 1988. There are three characters, Salty (male), Gail and Hobby (female).

A comprehensive school hall.

A wooden stage. There are two double desks upstage. Upstage right is an old locker with a school broom leaning against it. Downstage centre is a chair; left and right two single desks and chairs angled downstage, and three bags. A satchel, plastic bags and sports bags are near the chairs and desks. They belong to SALTY, GAIL *and* HOBBY *respectively.*

Some music plays and SALTY, GAIL *and* HOBBY *enter, recline on the chairs and desks and look at the audience for a moment before speaking.*

SALTY: No more school for us, so you can knackers!

GAIL: Salty, you nutter.

SALTY: What?

GAIL: Swearing.

HOBBY: Shurrup.

SALTY: So what?

HOBBY: You daft gett.

SALTY: It's true.

GAIL: Just get on with it.

SALTY: Nobody can do us.

HOBBY: We've not left yet.

SALTY: *(shouts loudly)* Knackers!

GAIL: Oh God, he's cracked.

HOBBY: Shurrup.

SALTY: I've always wanted to be on this stage. I've always wanted to come up here and say 'knackers'. bet you all have. Whenever I see Mrs Hudson come up on this stage to talk about litter or being a good samaritan or corn dollies or sit down first year stand up second year I think about that word. Cos really Mrs Hudson would like to come up here and say, 'knackers school'. She would.

GAIL: Are we doing this play or what?

SALTY: It's like when she gets you in her office, all neat and smelling of perfume, and she says, 'You don't come to school to fool around, Ian, to waste your time. We treat you like young adults and we expect you to behave accordingly. I don't think that writing on a wall is a mature thing to do.'

GAIL: Let's start, Salty.

HOBBY: I never thought I'd be doing this. I hated drama, only took it for a doss about.

SALTY: Right, don't forget to keep in character, and, Hobby, always face the front.

HOBBY: I will do.

SALTY: A lot of the stuff in the play was told to us by our drama teacher, Mr Harrison –

GAIL: And even though you might not believe it, everything what happens in this play is based on truth.

HOBBY: But the names and the faces have been changed.

SALTY: To protect the innocent.

GAIL: We're going to take you to Whitewall High School. It's a comprehensive school somewhere in England … And they're expecting a new teacher to arrive.

HOBBY: There's fifteen hundred kids at Whitewall and it's a Special Priority Area which means that it's got its fair share of problems …

SALTY: All we want you to do is use your imagination because there's only three of us, and we all have to play different characters …

HOBBY: And narrators …

SALTY: And narrators.

HOBBY: So you'll have to concentrate …

SALTY: Oh, yeh, you'll have to concentrate …

GAIL: Title …

SALTY: Oh, shit, yeh … And it's called *Teechers*.

A sudden burst of music. They become teachers, with briefcases and files, walking about a number of corridors.

Key terms
plot
exposition

2 Discuss with a partner:

a whether this is an effective opening to a play in the theatre. Why or why not?

b how well it meets the needs of an audience. What are these needs?

3 Copy and complete the chart below. It will record your own ideas about how a dramatist writing for the theatre can set the scene.

Setting the scene for a play in the theatre: my suggestions on how to …			
Establish the setting, mood and atmosphere	Introduce characters	Get the **plot** under way	Let the audience know what kind of play this is, eg whodunit, farce, serious social drama.

4 Read the opening scene or two of the play you are studying.
Use the chart you created above to make three or four diff erent points about how the dramatist stages the **exposition** and how well you think it works.

Activity 15

1 Read the following extract. It is the Prologue to Shakespeare's *Henry V*. The play dramatises the war between England and France in the fifteenth century. The action moves between the two countries and reaches a climax at the Battle of Agincourt.

Enter CHORUS.

CHORUS:

	O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend	Muse: poetic inspiration
	The brightest heaven of invention,	invention: imagination
	A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,	
	And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!	
5	Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,	Harry: King Henry V
	Assume the port of Mars; and at his heels,	Mars: Roman god of war
	Leash'd in like hounds, should famine, sword, and fire,	
	Crouch for employment. But pardon, gentles all,	gentles: men and women in the audience
	The flat unraisèd spirits that hath dar'd	unraisèd spirits: humble actors
10	On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth	scaffold: stage
	So great an object. Can this cockpit hold	cockpit: theatre
	The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram	
	Within this wooden O the very casques	wooden O: Globe Theatre
	That did affright the air at Agincourt?	
15	O, pardon! Since a crooked figure may	
	Attest in little space a million;	
	And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,	ciphers: small figures accompt: account
	On your imaginary forces work.	
	Suppose within the girdle of these walls	
20	Are now confin'd two mighty monarchies,	
	Whose high upreared and abutting fronts	
	The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder.	
	Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts:	imperfections: bad acting
	Into a thousand parts divide one man,	
25	And make imaginary puissance;	puissance: prancing horses
	Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them	
	Printing their proud hooves i' th' receiving earth;	
	For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,	deck: dress, costume
	Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times,	
30	Turning th' accomplishment of many years	
	Into an hour-glass; for the which supply,	
	Admit me Chorus to this history;	
	Who prologue-like, your humble patience pray	
	Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play.	

Henry V was first performed in 1599. Shakespeare's Globe Theatre had a bare stage and an open roof. No scenery was used, although props were. Performances took place in daylight. All the actors were male.

2 Look carefully at what the Chorus says to the audience. With a partner, talk about what part Shakespeare asks them to play in the performance and the reasons why he may have chosen to begin the play in this way.

3 Is the idea that members of the audience are part of the performance one you have considered before? Why is this not true of television and film drama? Share your ideas with the class.

Activity 16

1 Compare the opening of *Henry V* with the extract from *Teechers* (pages 131–132) and your play. Fill in a copy of the chart below as you make your responses.

Comparing openings			
Key considerations	***Henry V***	***Teechers***	**My play**
Setting How it is created?			
Characters What do we find out about them?			
Plot development How far does the action progress?			
Dialogue/ monologue What does this achieve?			
Language How does this signal the play's period and social context?			
Genre What kind of play is this going to be? How can we tell?			
Role of the audience What relationship is created between audience and play?			

Key term
monologue

2 Use the headings on the chart to write an account of the way your play opens. This will prove valuable in getting to grips with the text and in becoming familiar with the terms and concepts used in studying drama.

3 How dramatists develop the characters

The activities below help you to understand characterisation in stage drama. Characterisation means the way a dramatist creates and presents characters, not what their personalities are like.

Activity 17

1 Read aloud the extract below from Willy Russell's play, *Educating Rita*, first performed in 1980.

A room on the first floor of a Victorian-built university in the north of England. There is a large bay window with a desk placed in front of it and another desk covered with various papers and books. The walls are lined with books and on one wall hangs a good print of a nude religious scene.

FRANK *who is in his early fifties, is standing holding an empty mug. He goes to the bookcases and starts taking books from the shelves, hurriedly replacing them before moving on to another section.*

FRANK: *(looking along the shelves)* Where the hell ...? Eliot? *(He pulls out some books and looks into the bookshelf)*. 'E' *(He thinks for a moment)*. 'E', 'e', 'e' … *(Suddenly he remembers.) Dickens. (Jubilantly he moves to the Dickens section and pulls out a pile of books to reveal a bottle of whisky. He takes the bottle from the shelf and goes to the small table by the door and pours himself a large slug into the mug in his hand.)*

The telephone rings and startles him slightly. He manages a gulp at the whisky before he picks up the receiver and, although his speech is not slurred, we should recognise the voice of a man who shifts a lot of booze.

FRANK: Yes? … Of course I'm still here … Because I've got this Open University woman coming, haven't I? … Tch … Of course I told you … But darling, you shouldn't have prepared dinner should you? Because I said, I distinctly remember saying that I would be late … Yes. Yes, I probably shall go to the pub afterwards, I shall need to go to the pub afterwards, I shall need to wash away the memory of some silly woman's attempts to get into the mind of Henry James or whoever it is we're supposed to study on this course … Oh God, why did I take this on? … Yes … Yes I suppose I did take it on to pay for the drink … Oh, for God's sake, what is it? … Yes, well – erm – leave it in the oven … Look if you're trying to induce some feeling of guilt in me over the prospect of a burned dinner, you should have prepared something other than lamb and ratatouille … Because, darling, I like my lamb done to the point of abuse and even I know that ratatouille cannot be burned … Darling, you could incinerate ratatouille and still it wouldn't burn … What do you mean am I determined to go to the pub? I don't need determination to get me into a pub …

There is a knock at the door.

Look, I'll have to go … There's someone at the door … Yes, yes, I promise … Just a couple of pints … Four …

There is another knock at the door.

FRANK: *(calling in the direction of the door)* Come in! *(He continues on the telephone.)* Yes … All right … yes … Bye, bye … *(He replaces the receiver.)* Yes, that's it, you just pop off and put your head in the oven. *(shouting)* Come in! Come in!

The door swings open revealing RITA.

RITA: *(from the doorway)* I'm comin' in, aren't I? It's that stupid bleedin' handle on the door. You wanna get it fixed!

She comes into the room.

FRANK: *(staring, slightly confused)* Erm – yes, I suppose I always mean to …

RITA: *(going to the chair by the desk and dumping her bag)* Well, that's no good always meanin' to, is it? Y'should get on with it; one of these days you'll be shoutin' 'Come in' an' it'll go on forever because the poor sod on the other side won't be able to get in. An' you won't be able to get out.

FRANK *stares at* RITA *who stands by the desk.*

2 With a partner, talk about how the dramatist characterises Frank. Use the chart below to focus your discussion. Fill in a copy of it as you make your decisions.

3 Share your findings with the class.

Willy Russell's characterisation of Frank: how is it achieved?		
Dramatic technique	**Example**	**How this helps establish Frank's character**
Dramatist's notes to the director/actors		
Stage directions		
Monologue		
Dialogue on the telephone		
Dialogue with Rita		
Actions on stage		
Choice of language		

4 Look carefully at what you have noted down about Frank's choice of language or diction. Make suggestions about:

- **a** why he calls his wife 'darling' when he really wants her to 'put your head in the oven'
- **b** what his language shows about his attitude to teaching
- **c** his vocabulary in 'I like my lamb done to the point of abuse' and 'you could incinerate ratatouille'
- **d** his joke about determination and going to the pub.

5 Compare Rita's diction with Frank's. How much can you tell about her from her five lines of dialogue?

6 Continue this dialogue for the next 20 lines or so. Rita, who has never been inside a university before, but is not overawed, inspects Frank's room. Frank searches his papers for Rita's details; he is not sure she really is the Open University student he has been expecting. See how closely you can reproduce the two characters' speech styles or idiolects. If you use stage directions, keep them brief.

Activity 18

1 Read aloud the extract below from Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, written about 1594.

Doctor Faustus is about a university teacher who sells himself to the devil, called Lucifer in the play. The bargain is that Lucifer, a fallen angel with supernatural powers, will give Faustus 24 years of boundless 'pleasure and delight' on earth in return for his soul. Faustus is also promised knowledge of heaven, hell and the secrets of the universe.

In this extract, Mephostophilis, the servant Lucifer has assigned to Faustus, comes from hell to seal the bargain with 'a deed of gift'. This is to be signed in blood.

Enter MEPHOSTOPHILIS.

FAUSTUS: Now tell me: what saieth Lucifer thy lord?

MEPHOSTOPHILIS: That I shall wait on Faustus whilst he lives,
So he will buy my service with his soul.

FAUSTUS: Already Faustus hath hazarded that for thee.

MEPHOSTOPHILIS: But now thou must bequeath it solemnly
And write a deed of gift with thine own blood,
For that security craves Lucifer.
If thou deny it, I must back to hell.

FAUSTUS: Stay, Mephostophilis, and tell me what good
Will my soul do thy lord?

MEPHOSTOPHILIS: Enlarge his kingdom.

FAUSTUS: Is that the reason why he tempts us thus?

MEPHOSTOPHILIS: *Solamen miseris socios habuisse doloris*.

Solamen miseris socios habuisse doloris: the unhappy find comfort in others' misfortunes

FAUSTUS: Why, have you any pain that torture others?

MEPHOSTOPHILIS: As great as have the human souls of men.
But tell me, Faustus, shall I have thy soul?
And I will be thy slave and wait on thee
And give thee more than thou hast wit to ask.

FAUSTUS: Ay, Mephostophilis, I'll give it him.

MEPHOSTOPHILIS: Then, Faustus, stab thy arm courageously,
And bind thy soul, that at some certain day
Great Lucifer may claim it as his own;
And then be thou as great as Lucifer.

FAUSTUS: Lo, Mephostophilis, for love of thee
Faustus hath cut his arm, and with his proper blood
Assures his soul to be great Lucifer's,
Chief lord and regent of perpetual night.
View here this blood that trickles from mine arm,
And let it be propitious for my wish.

proper: own

MEPHOSTOPHILIS: But, Faustus,
Write it in manner of a deed of gift.

FAUSTUS: Ay, so I do. But, Mephostophilis,
My blood congeals, and I can write no more.

MEPHOSTOPHILIS: I'll fetch thee fire to dissolve it straight. (*Exit*)

FAUSTUS: What might the staying of my blood portend?
Is it unwilling I should write this bill?
Why streams it not, that I may write afresh?
'Faustus gives to thee his soul': O, there it stay'd.
Why shouldst thou not? is not thy soul thine own?
Then write again: 'Faustus gives to thee his soul'.

portend: signify

Enter MEPHOSTOPHILIS *with the chafer of fire.*

chafer: cauldron

Take it further

Read the first and last scenes of *Dr Faustus*. Use the knowledge of the play you already have to speculate about what happens in the course of it.

	MEPHOSTOPHILIS:		See, Faustus, here is fire; set it on.
	FAUSTUS:		So, now the blood begins to clear again Now will I make an end immediately.
45	MEPHOSTOPHILIS:	*[Aside]*	What will not I do to obtain his soul!

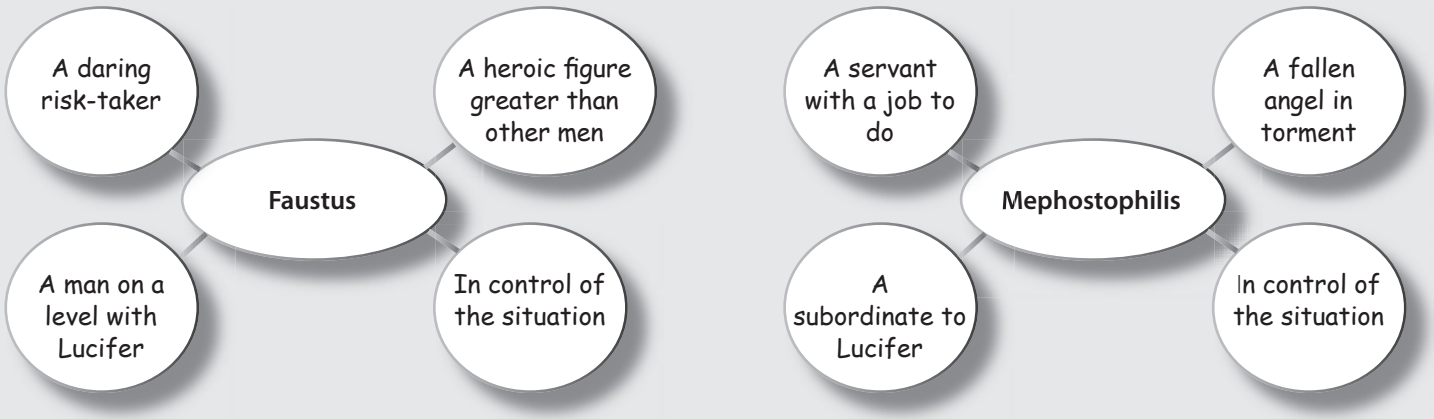
2 With a partner, talk about understanding the dialogue. How well could you follow it? Where there were difficulties, what caused them?

3 With your partner, talk about the dramatic appeal of the dialogue. Do you think it would work well on stage? Why, or why not?

Activity 19

1 In a group, look carefully at the diagram below.

What the dialogue shows about how each character sees himself



2 Find quotations in the dialogue to illustrate each point in the diagram. Then discuss how each character sees the other. What is the effect of showing two characters who perceive the situation here in totally different ways?

3 Share your findings with the class. Then, looking closely at the passage, discuss:

a the frequent use of the words 'soul' and 'blood' in the dialogue. What do you think Marlowe's purpose is in creating this **verbal patterning**?

b how Marlowe's choice of blank verse for this dialogue (a lot of the play is in prose) helps the characterisation. Think about the seriousness and formality of the situation and about the way the line structure and the rhythm emphasise key words and phrases

c thes hort **soliloquy** Faustus speaks in lines 35–40. What do you think Marlowe's purpose is in taking us inside Faustus's mind here? Does it affect your attitude towards him?

Key terms
verbal patterning
soliloquy

Activity 20

1 Choose a passage of dialogue from your play which you think illustrates the characters and the dramatist's techniques of characterising them particularly well. It is best to choose a passage with only two speakers.

2 Write two or three paragaphs on the following topic, using close textual reference and drawing on all the work you have done in this sub-section.

> How does this passage illustrate the characters of the speakers? Comment in detail on the dramatist's techniques of characterisation.

4 How dramatists use language and verse form

Many **pre-1900** plays were written partly or mainly in blank verse.

The activities below provide you with a toolkit for reading the language and verse of plays from the past.

Activity 21

1 Read the opening lines of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Antonio, a wealthy businessman, is telling two friends that he feels unaccountably depressed.

ANTONIO: In sooth, I know not why I am so sad,
It wearies me, you say it wearies you;
But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
What stuff 'tis made of, whereof 'tis born,
I am to learn:
And such a want-wit sadness makes of me,
That I have much ado to know myself.

2 This speech was written to be spoken, not read silently. Now read it aloud to a partner.

Rules for reading blank verse

1 Read it aloud or aloud inside your head.

2 Don't pause at the end of every line. Do pause for about one second when you reach a semi-colon, colon, full stop or other strong punctuation mark, wherever it comes.

3 Get used to following the basic rhythm of a blank verse line. This is called an iambic pentameter and usually has five stresses or strong beats:

di Dum / di Dum /di Dum /di Dum /di Dum /di Dum.

The Merchant of Venice (RSC, 1981)

Activity 22

1 Read aloud to a partner the following blank verse speech from *The Merchant of Venice*. It is spoken to Antonio by one of his friends, Bassanio. Bassanio is attracted to a rich heiress, Portia.

BASSANIO: In Belmont is a lady richly left,
And she is fair, and (fairer than that word),
Of wondrous virtues. Sometimes from her eyes
I did receive fair speechless messages:
Her name is Portia, nothing undervalu'd
To Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia,
Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth,
For the four winds blow in from every coast
Renowned suitors, and her sunny locks
Hang on her temples like a golden fleece,
Which makes her seat of Belmont Colcho's strond,
And many Jasons come in quest of her.

2 On a copy of the extract, put a vertical stroke | just after each strong pause.

Of wondrous virtues. | Sometimes from her eyes
I did receive fair speechless messages: |
Her name is Portia …

3 Read the speech aloud again. Where there is no strong pause or 'end-stop' at the end of a line, read straight on. Base your reading on the di Dum, di Dum, di Dum, di Dum, di Dum rhythm.

Rules for reading blank verse

4 'Feeling' the iambic pentametre beat of blank verse as you read helps you understand the gist of what is being said.

5 Because blank verse is a form of poetry, the full meaning is often quite compressed. So be content to get the general gist at first, then fill in the details later. Don't give up.

4 With your partner, look at the second half of Bassanio's speech (from line 8). It is full of comparisons – similes and metaphors. You have got the idea that Bassanio thinks Portia is beautiful and rich. Use the information below, from a footnote in the text, to work out the details of what he is saying about her.

The Roman hero, Brutus, had a wife named Portia. She was celebrated for her virtue and her devotion to her husband.

In Greek mythology, Jason and the Argonauts searched for the Golden Fleece. They found it at Colchos.

Talk about why you think Bassanio uses these two comparisons to describe Portia in Belmont. Does he seem to want her for her money, her beauty, her suitablity as a wife – or for all of these?

Rules for reading blank verse

6 Use footnotes to fill in the gaps in your understanding. Even the most knowledgeable readers find footnotes useful.

7 When you have filled in the gaps, read the speech again. You will be struck by how much of the meaning depends on imagery (i.e. simile and metaphor) and how much more sense it makes now. Imagery, along with the blank verse form, is the most distinctive feature of the language of older plays.

8 Ask questions about what the imagery is telling you, now you have understood it. You will almost always be able to come up with your own answers. For example:

- Why do you think Bassanio describes Portia's hair as 'sunny'?
- What impression does he give of her by saying her hair is 'like a golden fleece'?
- Why do you think he says her hair 'hangs on her temples'? (He might have said 'shoulders').

Activity 23

1 Read the extract below from later on in *The Merchant of Venice*.

Antonio has provided Bassanio with money to travel to Belmont to win Portia. This money was borrowed in the form of a 'bond' from Shylock, a Jewish money-lender. The bond stated that, if Antonio could not repay him by a set date, Shylock could claim a pound of his flesh as a forfeit.

Antonio's merchant ships are all lost at sea. He cannot repay Shylock and is imprisoned pending trial. Deaf to pleas to show mercy, here Shylock meets Antonio on his way from prison to the court. (There is long-standing hatred in Venice between Christians and Jews.)

Enter SHYLOCK, ANTONIO *in chains and the* GAOLER.

SHYLOCK: Gaoler, look to him – tell me not of mercy, –
This is the fool that lent out money gratis. — gratis: without charging interest
Gaoler, look to him.

ANTONIO: Hear me yet, good Shylock.

SHYLOCK: I'll have my bond, speak not against my bond,
I have sworn an oath, that I will have my bond:
Thou call'dst me dog before thou hadst a cause,
But since I am a dog, beware my fangs, –
The duke shall grant me justice. — duke: head of the judiciary

ANTONIO: I pray thee hear me speak.

SHYLOCK: I'll have my bond. I will not hear thee speak,
I'll have my bond, and therefore speak no more.
I'll not be made a soft and dull-ey'd fool,
To shake the head, relent, and sigh, and yield
To Christian intercessors: follow not, – — intercessors: pleaders
I'll have no speaking, I will have my bond.

2 With a partner, read through this dialogue as if you were a theatre director preparing notes for the actors on how to speak the verse. On a copy of the extract, underline the words and phrases you want them to emphasise. Make brief notes on the tone of voice you want them to use and on any patterns of speech you want to stand out in performance, (eg Shylock's repetition of 'I'll have my bond' and his pounding emphasis on 'I'.)

3 Now read the dialogue aloud following your own instructions.

Rules for reading blank verse

9 Read it as if you are an actor or a director, for the stage rather than on the page.

10 Look for patterns in the verse, for example repetitions, contrasts, balanced phrases, pauses, climaxes.

11 Verse patterns will often be built up through the sound of words. These sounds are an important part of the meaning. Identify them and think about their effect in performance. For example:

- How many of Shylock's words in this extract *sound* harsh and fierce, as if he is spitting them out?
- How many of these words are given extra emphasis by coming immediately before a heavy stop and/or at the end of a line?
- How would you describe the rhythms of Shylock's speeches here? (A good definition of rhythm is 'a pattern of sounds').

12 Try to identify the pace or speed of the lines in a blank verse speech. Is the pace fast (if so, why)? Is the pace slow and drawn out (if so, why)? Is the pace uneven and irregular (if so, why)? The answers you come up with will reflect the characters' mood and feelings as they speak.

This sub-section has given you basic guidance on how to read blank verse and make it comprehensible. Apply what you have learned to your coursework plays, but bear in mind that:

- the meaning of many words and expressions has changed over time – there is no substitute for looking them up in footnotes
- meaning depends strongly on context – as you become familiar with the whole verbal, social and cultural context of your plays, understanding will come more quickly and naturally.

5 How dramatists advance the plot

Most plays have an episode where events reach a critical turning point or **crisis**. This means that from there on the action is set on a new or changed course which leads directly, and often swiftly, to the play's **dénouement** (closing sequence).

Activity 24

1 Read the extract below from *The Revenger's Tragedy*, written by either Thomas Middleton or Cyril Tourneur (scholars have not yet made up their minds). It was first performed in 1607.

Vindice (Vin-deechée: the Italian name means 'revenger') wants to murder the Duke. Now an old man, the Duke raped and poisoned Vindice's fiancée, Gloriana, nine years before. Vindice carries around her skull to focus his mind on revenge. He has disguised himself as Piato, a pimp who supplies young girls to the Duke for sexual pleasure.

In this scene, Vindice has attached Gloriana's skull to a broomstick and dressed her up as a country girl. The Duke believes he is coming to have sex with her in a private place outside the palace. The extract begins with Vindice showing his brother, Hippolito, how he has planned the Duke's murder.

Look you, brother,
I have not fashioned this only for show
And useless property; no, it shall bear a part
Even in its own revenge. This very skull,
Whose mistress the Duke poisoned, with this drug,
The mortal curse of the earth, shall be revenged
In the like strain, and kiss his lips to death.

drug: arsenic
mortal: deadly

HIPPOLITO: Brother, I do applaud thy constant vengeance.

VINDICE puts poison on the lips of the skull.

VINDICE: So, 'tis laid on. Now come, and welcome, Duke.

VINDICE puts a mask on the skull.

Hide thy face now, for shame, thou hadst need have a mask now;
'Tis vain when beauty flows, but when it fleets
This would become graves better than streets.

fleets: withers
become: suit

HIPPOLITO: You have my voice in that. Hark, the Duke's come.

VINDICE: Peace, let's observe what company he brings,
And how he does absent 'em, for you know
He'll wish all private. Brother, fall you back
A little with the bony lady.

absent: send away

HIPPOLITO: That I will.

VINDICE: So, so –
Now nine years' vengeance crowds into a minute!

They step aside as the DUKE *enters, with some* GENTLEMEN.

DUKE: You shall have leave to leave us, with this charge,
Upon your lives: if we be missed by th' Duchess,
Or any of the nobles, to give out
We're privately rid forth.

charge: command

VINDICE: *aside* O happiness!

DUKE: With some few honourable gentlemen, you may say;
You may name those that are away from court.

GENTLEMEN: Your will and pleasure shall be done, my lord.
[*Exit* GENTLEMEN.]

VINDICE: *[aside]* 'Privately rid forth';
He strives to make sure work of it!
[*to the DUKE*] Your good grace.

DUKE: Piato, well done. Hast brought her? What lady is't?

VINDICE: Faith, my lord, a country lady, a little bashful at first, as most of them are; but after the first kiss, my lord, the worst is past with them. Your grace knows now what you have to do. She has somewhat a grave look with her, but –

DUKE: I love that best; conduct her. — conduct: bring

VINDICE: [*aside*] Have at all!
Back with the torch; brother, raise the perfumes. — raise: waft about

DUKE: How sweet can a Duke breathe? Age has no fault.
Pleasure should meet in a perfumèd mist.

The DUKE *approaches the skull.*

Lady, sweetly encountered; I came from court,
I must be bold with you.

[*The* DUKE *kisses the skull.*] O, what's this? O!

VINDICE: Royal villain, white devil!

DUKE: O!

VINDICE: Brother –
Place the torch here, that his affrighted eyeballs
May start into those hollows. Duke, dost know — hollows: eye-sockets
Yon dreadful vizard? View it well; 'tis the skull — vizard: mask
Of Gloriana, whom thou poisonedst last.

DUKE: O, it has poisoned me. What are you two?

VINDICE: Villains, all three! The very ragged bone
Has been sufficiently revenged,

DUKE: O, Hippolito! Call treason.

HIPPOLITO: Yes, my good lord; treason, treason, treason [*stamping on him*]

DUKE: Then I'm betrayed … Is it thou, villain?
Nay, then –

VINDICE: 'Tis I, 'tis Vindice, 'tis I.

2 In a small group, act out this scene, books in hands. Appoint one person to direct it. They should plan the moves carefully and pay particular attention to where characters speak 'aside'.

3 As a class, discuss what you learned from your performances about the dramatist's:

a **stagecraft**

b characterisation of Vindice and the Duke

c use of language in a play that is 400 years old.

What do you think would be the effect of this scene on a modern audience in the professional theatre?

4 With a partner, examine the aspects of diction and verse form listed below.

a The five uses of the word 'revenge' or 'vengeance'. This establishes a verbal pattern in the passage. What do you think is the dramatist's purpose?

b Images of poisoning and kissing, bones and body parts, and beauty and masks/disguises. These establish a pattern of imagery in the passage. What do you think is the dramatist's purpose?

c The blank verse. Compare it with the blank verse in *Doctor Faustus* (pages 137 and 138). How are its rhythms much closer to natural live speech than Marlowe's? What do you think is the dramatist's purpose?

Activity 25

1 Choose a passage from your play where events reach a crisis which advances the plot. Analyse its dramatic and linguistic effects by focusing on:

a stagecraft: how does the staging direct the audience's response to character?

b diction and imagery: how do these underline key themes?

c **verse form** (or prose style): how does this work to express character and create bp_k_rga tension?

Activity 26

1 Read aloud the extract below from Shakespeare's *Othello*, first performed in 1604.

Othello, an army general in Venice, has begun to suspect that his wife, Desdemona has been 'disloyal' to him with Michael Cassio. His ensign, Iago, has deliberately planted this suspicion in Othello's mind while outwardly playing the part of his devoted friend.

In this extract, Iago continues to poison Othello's mind.

OTHELLO: Give me a living reason that she's disloyal. — living: convincing

IAGO: I do not like the office, — office: task
But sith I am enter'd into this cause so far, — sith: since
Prick'd to't by foolish honesty and love, — prick'd: prompted
I will go on: I lay with Cassio lately,
And being troubled with a raging tooth,
I could not sleep.
There are a kind of men so loose of soul
That in their sleeps will mutter their affairs,
One of this kind is Cassio:
In sleep I heard him say 'Sweet Desdemona,
Let us be wary, let us hide our loves'.
And then, sir, would he gripe and wring my hand,
Cry out, 'Sweet creature!' and then kiss me hard,
As if he pluck'd up kisses by the roots,
That grew upon my lips, then laid his leg
Over my thigh, and sigh'd, and kiss'd, and then
Cried 'Cursed fate, that gave thee to the Moor!' — the Moor: Othello

OTHELLO: O monstrous, monstrous!

IAGO: Nay, this was but his dream.

OTHELLO: But this denoted a foregone conclusion. — foregone conclusion: previous liaison

IAGO: 'Tis a shrewd doubt, though it be but a dream,
And this may help to thicken other proofs — thicken: stengthen
That do demonstrate thinly.

OTHELLO: I'll tear her all in pieces.

IAGO: Nay, but be wise, yet we see nothing done,
She may be honest yet; tell me but this,
Have you not sometimes seen a handkerchief,
Spotted with strawberries, in your wife's hand.

OTHELLO: I gave her such a one, 'twas my first gift.

IAGO: I know not that, but such a handkerchief –
I am sure it was your wife's – did I today
See Cassio wipe his beard with.

OTHELLO: If't be that –

IAGO: If it be that, or any that was hers,
It speaks against her, with the other proofs,

OTHELLO: O that the slave had forty thousand lives!
One is too poor, too weak for my revenge:
Now do I see 'tis true; look here, Iago,
All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven –
'Tis gone.
Arise, black vengeance, from thy hollow cell,
Yield up, O love, thy crown, and hearted throne,
To tyrannous hate; swell, bosom, with thy fraught,
For 'tis of aspics' tongues! [*He kneels*.] — aspics: snakes

IAGO: Pray be content.

OTHELLO: O blood, Iago, blood!

IAGO: Patience, I say, your mind perhaps may change.

OTHELLO: Never, Iago. My bloody thoughts, with violent pace
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
Till that a capable and wide revenge
Swallow them up. Now by yond marble heaven,
In the due reverence of a sacred vow,
I here engage my words. — engage: pledge

IAGO: Do not rise yet. IAGO [*kneels*.]
Witness, you ever-burning lights above,
You elements that clip us round about,
Witness that here Iago doth give up
The excellency of his wit, hand, heart,
To wrong'd Othello's service: let him command,
And to obey shall be in me remorse,
What bloody work so ever. [*They rise*.]

OTHELLO: I greet thy love;
Not with vain thanks, but with acceptance bounteous,
And will upon the instant put thee to't: — put thee to't: set you a task
Within these three days, let me hear thee say
That Cassio's not alive.

IAGO: My friend is dead: — dead: as good as dead already
'Tis done as you request; but let her live.

OTHELLO: Damn her, lewd minx: O damn her!
Come go with me apart, I will withdraw
To furnish me with some swift means of death,
For the fair devil: now art thou my lieutenant.

IAGO: I am your own for ever. [*Exeunt*.]

2 With a partner, discuss how Iago makes Othello believe that Desdemona is having an affair and that he, Iago, has Othello's best interests at heart. Focus on the way Iago presents:

a his account of Cassio talking in his sleep

b his story about the handkerchief

c himself as an embodiment of 'honesty and love'.

Look carefully at Iago's language. How does the dramatist make you aware of both its text (to Othello: 'I'm telling you this in all honesty for your own good') and its sub-text (to the audience: 'I'm leading him by the nose to his destruction')? Share your ideas with the class.

3 Then look carefully at Othello's lines in this passage. Fill in a copy of the chart on the following page to show how his language reveals his character.

Take it further

Watch a performance of *Othello* on DVD. Write your personal response to his tragedy. Do you feel any sympathy for him?

Examples of Othello's language	Comment on his language choice	What this shows about him
'I'll tear her all in pieces'		
'All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven –/'Tis gone'		
'Arise, black vengeance'		
'some swift means of death/For the fair devil'		

4 Why do you think Othello 'kneels' half-way through this passage and Iago kneels shortly after? What will be the effect on the audience of this **stage emblem**?

Key terms
crisis
dénouement
stagecraft
verse form
stage emblem

6 How dramatists construct an ending

The dénouement of a play shows the outcome of the plot and the situation in which the main characters end up. In comedy, the dénouement centres on events that signal personal happiness and social harmony: reunion, forgiveness, reconciliation, celebration, marriage. In tragedy, the dénouement dramatises the consequences of the main character's actions in the course of the play. It is sometimes termed the **catastrophe** because these consequences invariably prove fatal. Tragedies typically end with suffering and death – separation, murder, suicide, revenge – and the society in which the hero lived is left in a state of fracture or total ruin.

Both exemplar plays in this section are tragedies. The activities below help you to explore this dramatic genre, particularly common from 1580 to 1620, by focusing on its most striking aspect: the tragic **resolution**.

Activity 28

1 Read aloud the extract below from Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, first performed in 1954.

The play is set in a puritan community in Salem, New England in 1692. Accused of witchcraft and devil worship, a group of girls try to pass the blame to adults in the village. A court is set up by Judge Danforth to try them. John Proctor is among the accused. He has, wrongly, been found guilty, but Danforth rules that if he makes a public confession he will be spared hanging.

At the end of the play, Proctor has a difficult choice. He can lie and have his life, or he can continue to speak the truth and die. He has a wife, Elizabeth, and three young children. He has already 'confessed' verbally. Now Danforth demands 'good and legal proof' in writing.

DANFORTH: Mr Proctor, I must have good and legal proof that you –

PROCTOR: You are the high court, your word is good enough! Tell them I confessed myself; say Proctor broke his knees and wept like a woman; say what you will, but my name cannot –

DANFORTH: [*with suspicion*]: It is the same, is it not? If I report it or if you sign it?

PROCTOR: No, it is not the same! What others say and what I sign to is not the same!

DANFORTH: Why? Do you mean to deny this confession when you are free?

PROCTOR: I mean to deny nothing!

DANFORTH: Then explain to me, Mr Proctor, why you will not let –

PROCTOR: [*with a cry of his soul*] Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!

DANFORTH: [*pointing at the confession in Proctor's hand*] Is that document a lie? If it is a lie, I will not accept it! What say you? I will not deal in lies, Mister! [PROCTOR *is motionless*]. You will give me your honest confession in my hand, or I cannot keep you from the rope. [PROCTOR *does not reply*]. Which way do you go, Mister?

His breast heaving, his eyes staring, PROCTOR *tears the paper and crumples it, and he is weeping in fury, but erect.*

DANFORTH: Marshal!

REVEREND HALE: Man, you will hang! You cannot!

PROCTOR: [*his eyes full of tears*] I can. And there's your first marvel, that I can. You have made your magic now, for now I do think I see some shred of goodness in John Proctor. Not enough to weave a banner with, but white enough to keep it from such dogs.

ELIZABETH*, in a burst of terror, rushes to him and weeps against his hand.*

Give them no tears! Tears pleasure them! Show honour now, show a stony heart and sink them with it. [*He has lifted her, and kisses her now with great passion*].

DANFORTH: Hang them high over the town! Who weeps for these, weeps for corruption. [*He sweeps out past them*.]

MARSHAL HERRICK: Come, man …

HERRICK *escorts them out.* ELIZABETH *stands staring at the empty doorway*.

REVEREND HALE: Woman, plead with him! Woman! It is pride, it is vanity.

She avoids his eyes and moves to the window. He drops to his knees.

Be his helper! – What profit him to bleed? Shall the dust praise him? Shall the worms declare his truth? Go to him, take his shame away!

ELIZABETH: [*grips the bars of the window, and with a cry*] He have his goodness now. God forbid I take it from him!

The final drumroll crashes, then heightens violently. HALE *weeps in frantic prayer, and the new sun is pouring in upon her face, and the drums rattle like bones in the morning air.*

2 With a partner, talk about how the dramatist presents John Proctor, the play's tragic hero in this passage, which ends the play. Focus on:

a why he is so concerned about his 'name'

b how the dramatist arouses our sympathy and admiration for him (look at the characterisation of Danforth and Elizabeth as well as Proctor)

c how the stage directions guide the actor playing him.

Share your ideas with the class.

3 Look carefully at the language of the passage. Compare Proctor's idiolect with Danforth's. Fill in a copy of the chart below to help you reach your conclusions.

Danforth's idiolect		**Proctor's idiolect**	
Language feature	**Example**	**Language feature**	**Example**
Repeated questions (interrogatives) in first half		Repeated exclamations and **declarative** statements in first half	
Imperative sentences in second half		Sentences structured around 'Because', 'name' and 'I'	
Inflexible legal language throughout		Mixture of colloquial speech and figurative language	
Stern, aggressive tone throughout		Varied tone: anguished at first, then quietly assured, then defiant/triumphant	

4 The key moment in this passage is enacted, not spoken. What is it, and why is it key?

5 Use the work you have done above to write a commentary on the dramatist's presentation of the tragic hero in this passage.

Activity 29

Re-read the ending of your play and the comments introducing this sub-section (page 146). Use the comments as a starting point to examine in detail how your dramatist constructs the resolution to the play whether it is a tragedy **or** a comedy**.**

Activity 30

1 Read the extract from near the end of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, first performed in 1608.

Mark Antony, a consul of Rome, has died, bringing to an end his love affair with Queen Cleopatra of Egypt, which has plunged two empires into turmoil. The Roman army under Octavius Caesar has invaded Egypt. Cleopatra knows that, if she lives, she will be overthrown and taken captive. In this passage, she arranges her own death. Her servants are Charmian and Iras. The setting is Cleopatra's palace.

Enter CHARMIAN

CLEOPATRA: Now Charmian.
Show me, my women, like a Queen. Go fetch
My best attires. I am again for Cydnus,
To meet Mark Antony. Sirrah Iras, go.
Now, noble Charmian, we'll dispatch indeed,
And when thou hast done this chare, I'll give thee leave
To play till doomsday. Bring our crown and all.

Cydnus: where Anthony and Cleopatra first met
sirrah: servant of either sex
dispatch: die
chare: task

Exit IRAS. *A noise within.*

Wherefore's this noise?

Enter a GUARDSMAN.

GUARDSMAN: Here is a rural fellow
That will not be denied your highness' presence.
He brings you figs.

CLEOPATRA: Let him come in. [*Exit* GUARDSMAN.]
What poor an instrument
May do a noble deed! He brings me liberty.
My resolution's placed, and I have nothing
Of woman in me. Now from head to foot
I am marble-constant; now the fleeting moon
No planet is of mine.

Enter CLOWN.

Hast thou the pretty worm of Nilus there, — worm: snake, asp Nilus: River Nile
That kills and pains not?

CLOWN: Truly I have him; but I would not be the party that
should desire you to touch him, for his biting is
immortal; those that do die of it seldom or never recover.

CLEOPATRA: Remember'st thou any that have died on't?

CLOWN: Very many, men and women too. I heard of one of them
no longer than yesterday, a very honest woman, but
something given to lie, as women should not do, but
in the way of honesty, how she died of the biting of it,
what pain she felt. Truly, she makes a very good report
o'th'worm. But he that will believe all that they say shall
never be saved by half they that do. But this is most
fallible, the worm's an odd worm.

CLEOPATRA: Get thee hence, farewell …

CLOWN: I wish you all joy of the worm.

CLEOPATRA: Farewell. [*Exit* CLOWN.]

Enter CHARMIAN *and* IRAS *with a robe and a crown.*

CLEOPATRA: Give me my robe, put on my crown, I have
Immortal longings in me. Now no more
The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip.
Yare, yare, good Iras; quick. Methinks I hear — yare: make haste
Antony call; I see him rouse himself
To praise my noble act, I hear him mock
The luck of Caesar, which the gods give men
To excuse their after wrath. Husband, I come.
Now to that name my courage prove my title.
I am fire and air; my other elements
I give to baser life. So, have you done?
Come, then, and take the last warmth of my lips.
Farewell kind Charmian; Iras, long farewell.

She kisses them. IRAS *falls and dies.*

Have I the aspic in my lips? Dost fall? — aspic: snake's venom
If thou and nature can so gently part,
The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch,
Which hurts, and is desired. Dost thou lie still?
If thus thou vanishest, thou tell'st the world
It is not worth leave-taking.

CHARMIAN: Dissolve, thick cloud and rain, that I may say
The gods themselves do weep.

CLEOPATRA: This proves me base.
If she first meet the curlèd Antony, — curlèd: curly-haired
He'll make demand of her, and spend that kiss
Which is my heaven to have. Come thou mortal wretch — mortal: deadly

She applies the asp to her breast.

With thy sharp teeth this knot instrinsicate — instrinsicate: inmost
Of life at once untie. Poor venemous fool,
Be angry and dispatch. O couldst thou speak,
That I may hear thee call great Caesar 'Ass,
Unpolicied!' — unpolicied: disempowered

CHARMIAN: O eastern star!

CLEOPATRA: Peace, peace!
Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep?

CHARMIAN: O break! O break!

CLEOPATRA: As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle –
O Antony! Nay, I will take thee too.

Applies another asp to her arm.

What should I stay. [*She dies*].

CHARMIAN: In this vile world? So fare thee well.
Now boast thee death, in thy possession lies
A lass unparalled. Downy windows, close;
And golden Phoebus never be beheld — Phoebus: the sun
Of eyes so royal! Your crown's awry,
I'll mend it, and then play –

2 Fill in a copy of the chart below. Work with a partner or in a group.

Examples of Cleopatra's use of language in this passage			
Sounds poetic	**Sounds down-to-earth**	**Sounds like an actress**	**Sounds sad**

3 Share your responses with the class. Then talk about:

a anything that surprises you about how the play's tragic heroine faces death

b why you think Shakespeare chose to include three minor characters (two serving women and a clown) at this point in the play

c whether this death scene strikes you as 'tragic'.

Key terms
catastrophe
resolution
imperative
declarative

Take it further

Read accounts by actors in *Players of Shakespeare* of performing in *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. What impressions of the plays do they give?

Activity 31

1 Read the following comments about this scene by Frances de la Tour, an actress who played Cleopatra for the Royal Shakespeare Company.

> The death-scene itself begins with the audience anticipating something solemn: 'Now from head to foot/I am marble constant', she says, and this is where we expect the aria, the big speech that is going to make her a legend, an icon. And just as the handkerchiefs are coming out in preparation, Shakespeare wrong-foots us all again, and on comes the clown to take over the scene with his smutty jokes … Even after this, and after the solemn dressing-up for death, we aren't allowed to settle into an anticipated moment of solemnity, for Iras's death sends Cleopatra off into a fit of jealous anxiety: 'If she first meet the curlèd Antony/He'll make demand of her, and spend that kiss/Which is my heaven to have'. Our laughter (and it's inevitable) at this moment is even more extraordinary than our earlier laughter at the clown; and then, just ten lines later, we are again invited to laugh – and *at* her rather than with her – as she desperately grabs the asp to catch up with Iras: 'Come, thou mortal wretch/With thy sharp teeth this knot intrinsicate/Of life at once untie'. This is brilliant writing. Of course, Shakespeare could have conducted the audience through a vale of tears to a predictable conclusion; but the manipulation is much cleverer than that with the audience, wrong-footed, being swung between emotional extremes all the way to the end.

With a partner, discuss whether you agree with her. Read aloud particular passages in the text to help you make up your mind.

2 Look at Cleopatra's speech beginning 'Give me my robe' down to 'my other elements/I give to baser life'. Write out the speech as one prose paragraph, keeping Shakespeare's sentences and punctuation. Read this aloud to a partner. Discuss what has been lost. Focus on:

- **a** pauses and emphases
- **b** the pace and rhythms of the lines
- **c** patterns of language.

Activity 32

1 Choose a key speech from the dénouement of **y**our play that is written in blank verse. Write a commentary on what the dramatist achieves that would have been achieved less effectively in prose.

2 Read the dénouement of your play. Use the work you have done in this sub-section to:

- **a** analyse the way they reach a resolution
- **b** comment on how the hero, or heroine, is presented at the end of the play compared with how they were presented at the beginning
- **c** describe the contribution to their effectiveness made by the dramatist's stagecraft and use a blank verse, or prose.

Activity 37

1 Read through the table below at least twice.

Contextual influences on drama		
'Context' refers to the factors that influence:	**These contextual factors can be grouped into headings:**	**These headings relate specically to:**
The dramatist's choice of plot, characters and theme	Literary	• the dramatist's use of their reading
	Social and political	• events and attitudes of the time
	Theatrical	• the tastes of the audience • the theatres where drama was performed
The dramatist's choice of genre, style and language	Literary	• the conventions of drama of the time • the conventions of drama from the past
	Theatrical	• the tastes of the audience • the theatres where drama was performed
The dramatist's way of thinking about life	Literary	• the dramatist's use of their reading
	Social and political	• events and attitudes of the time
	Cultural	• **philosophical** ideas of the time
		• **theological** views and beliefs of the time
The staging of the play	Literary	• the conventions of drama of the time
	Theatrical	• the tastes of the audience • the theatres where drama was performed

Note A dramatist's own life and experience, the personal context, is clearly an important influencing their writing. It is not included in this table because the precise ways in which life influences literature can be speculated about but never ascertained and because relatively little is known for sure about the lives of most dramatists writing between 1300 and 1650, including Shakespeare's.

2 As a class, talk about:

a the headings in the central column (make sure you can differentiate between them)

b the notes in the left- and right-hand columns (make sure you can see how they link to the headings in the central column).

This table provides you with a structure for planning and writing about the context of your main and further plays. Refer to it regularly as you build up your explorative study.

C Comparing plays in their contexts

1 Relating your plays to their context: an example

This section explains how to develop a knowledge of context so that you can apply it to your play. It shows you that contextual factors influence both the way a play is written and the audience's response to it.

The exemplar play used in this section is Shakespeare's Macbeth. Watch a performance of the play on DVD before working on the activities below.

Macbeth (RCS, 2007)

Activity 38

1 Consider the literary contextual factors that influenced *Macbeth*. Use the information below.

Shakespeare's sources

The plot of *Macbeth* is derived from other literature. This was Shakespeare's common practice, as it was with almost all Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists: they had a

The main source for Macbeth is *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* compiled by Raphael Holinshed in 1587 (when Shakespeare was 23). Its historical narrative describes

a group of witches in the town of Forres. Donwald, captain of the castle of Forres and loyal to the King, broke into the witches' house and found them casting spells against King Duff . The witches were executed and the King cured.

The previously loyal Donwald mounted a rebellion against King Duff and murdered him. Donwald was, in turn, put to death.

King Duncan ascended the Scottish throne. His generals, Macbeth and Banquo defeated an invasion attempt by King Canute of England. Then Macbeth murdered Duncan and took the throne himself, beginning a reign of terror in Scotland that lasted nearly 20 years. Earlier, three witches had prophesied that Macbeth would never be slain by 'one of woman born'. Macduff , loyal to Duncan's son, Malcolm, led an insurrection against Macbeth and killed him in his castle at Dunsinane. Apparently, Macduff had been born by Caesarian section.

2 As a class, discuss how Shakespeare makes use of Holinshed's *Chronicle*. Focus on:

- **a** how he adapts events
- **b** how he deliberately changes and merges together some parts of the **chronology**
- **c** why he may have chosen to dramatise the story of Macbeth rather than King Duff and Donwald (Lady Macbeth is a minor figure in Holinshed's *Chronicle*.)

Key terms

philosphical (context)
theological (context)
chronology

Activity 39

1 Consider some of the social and political contextual factors that influenced *Macbeth*. Use the information below.

King James I

James I of England (James VI of Scotland), a direct descendent of Banquo, succeeded Queen Elizabeth I in 1603. The Act of Union joined the two kingdoms. Elizabeth had not produced a male heir and James's right to the English throne was disputed.

Macbeth was written in 1605 or 1606. James I was a keen **patron** of drama. He gave a royal charter to Shakespeare's theatre company, which took the title of The King's Men in 1603. They performed regularly at court.

James I wrote several treatises on kingship, notably the *Basilicon Doran*, published in 1599. This contains a long section contrasting a good king with a usurping **tyrant**. James I believed firmly that kings were appointed by God and that regicide, the killing of a king, was blasphemy against the natural order of God's world.

James I also had a particular interest in witchcraft. He wrote repeatedly about it, most extensively in his treatise on *Demonology*, published in 1597. Many elements of **demonology** are common to James's writings on the subject and Shakespeare's play: the supernatural powers of witches, their capacity to become invisible and to change shape, their allegiance to the devil, the ingredients of their magic brews.

The Gunpowder Plot failed, but very nearly succeeded, in November 1605. Catholic loyalists tried to blow up King James and his parliament. The Plot was followed by a series of arrests and executions.

Key terms
patron
tyrant
demonology

2 As a class, discuss:

- **a** which events and ideas in *Macbeth* James I would have recognised
- **b** which political themes would strike a chord with James I's views about, and experiences of, kingship up to 1606
- **c** whether you agree with those scholars who argue that *Macbeth* was written as a compliment to James I.

Activity 40

1 Consider some of the theatrical contextual factors that influenced *Macbeth*. Use the information below.

Macbeth was acted at the Globe Playhouse, the theatre where The King's Men normally performed. The Globe had a platform stage with a trapdoor, frequently used as a 'hellmouth' (through which demonic characters made entrances and exits). There was no stage lighting and no fixed scenery. Performances took place in the open during the afternoon. In Shakespeare's time, there was a convention for fluid movement between one scene and the next. The actors utilised a large store of 'props', which were used and re-used for two or three different productions a week.

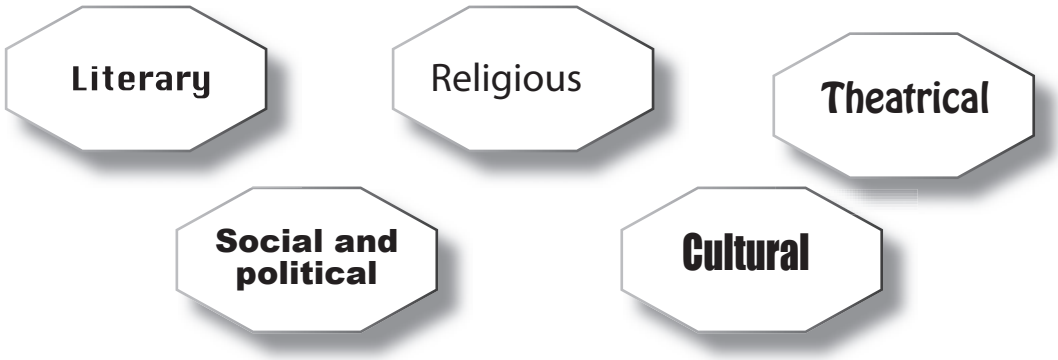
The audiences at the Globe crossed social barriers. They ranged from ordinary workmen and women to highly educated professional people and minor nobility. Between them they had a particular taste for horror, violence and bloodshed; the supernatural, particularly ghosts and witches; battles; colourful spectacle; broad comedy and obscenity; British history (many members of the audience were illiterate and could not read about this); political themes; and debate about philosophical and religious matters.

2 As a class, discuss:

- **a** any two scenes from the play: how do you visualise them being performed at the Globe?
- **b** how well you think *Macbeth* is suited to its contemporary audience
- **c** how the performance of *Macbeth* you watched was, or was not, comparable in production style to a performance at the Globe in the early 1600s.

2 Building material on context into your response

The contextual influences you highlight will depend on your particular play. Choose relevant contextual factors from below.

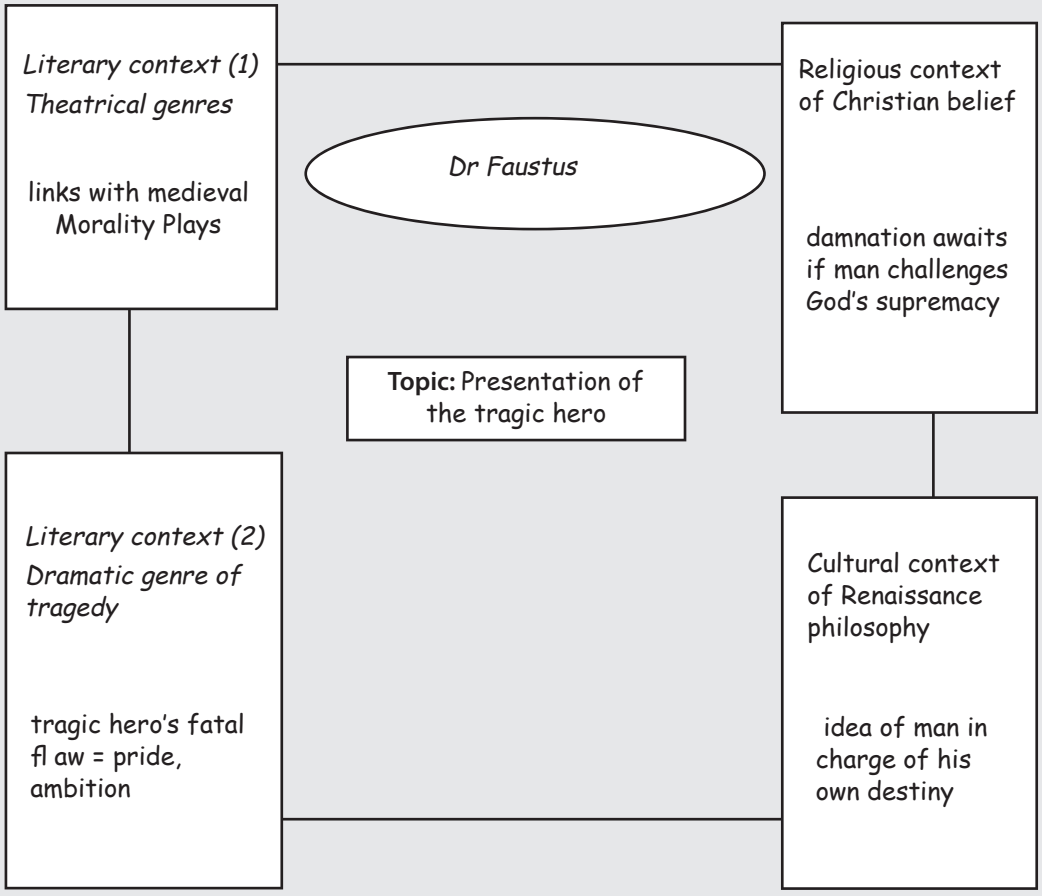


Take it further

Watch a production of *King Lear* on DVD. Use your knowledge of the Jacobean political context to assess how far it reflects the events of its time. Useful contextual comments on this play and many others are made by Emma Smith in *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare.*

Activity 41

1 Study the example below of an outline plan for context.



2 Follow this model to make a provisional outline plan for context on **a topic related to** your own **play.**

3 The history of English drama, 1300–1800

The history of English drama, 1300–1800 – an outline		
Main features of drama	**Main plays and playwrights**	**Contexts**
Medieval and Tudor (1300–1558)		
• Mainly religious, based on stories from the Bible • Mystery Plays performed by ordinary people belonging to **craft guilds** • Mystery Plays performed in cycles of 10 to 20+ episodes or 'pageants' • Tudor **Interludes** performed at country houses and Inns of Court in London	• Mystery Plays: originated in church services when parts were read by priests and congregation • York, Chester, Wakefield and Coventry *Mystery Play Cycles*: anonymous • Morality Plays represented **vices** and **virtues** as **stock characters** – *Everyman, The Castle of Perseverance,* anonymous	• A largely illiterate population • The Black Death • The Hundred Years' War • The Peasants' Revolt (1381) • *The Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer (1387) • Caxton's Printing Press (1470s)
Elizabethan (1558–1603)		
• Drama becoming increasingly popular and commercial • Many public theatres built in London from 1570 onwards: open roofs, platform stages • Professional acting companies formed: male actors only • A variety of genres: histories, comedies, tragedies, satires	• *The Spanish Tragedy*, Thomas Kyd (1558–94) • *Tamburlaine the Great, Dr Faustus,* Christopher Marlowe (1564-93) • William Shakespeare (1564–1616) • *Volpone, The Alchemist,* Ben Jonson (1572–1637)	• Elizabeth I (1558–1603) • Sir Francis Drake circumnavigates the globe (1577–80) • *Chronicles*, Raphael Holinshed (1577) • Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Great Lives* (1579) • *Essays*, Sir Francis Bacon (1597)
Jacobean (1603–25)		
• Indoor theatres established in London (eg Blackfriars): boys' acting companies • Strong Puritan opposition to public theatres • Court **masques** and civic pageants: elaborate scenic effects • Revenge Tragedy and City Comedy increasingly popular	• *The Duchess of Malfi, The White Devil,* John Webster (1580?–1625?) • *The Revenger's' Tragedy,* Middleton/Tourneur • *The Changeling,* Middleton/Rowley • *'Tis Pity She's a Whore,* John Ford (1586–1640)	• James I (1603–25) • Rise of Puritan influence • Pilgrim Fathers sail for America (1620) • English Civil War (1642–1651) • All theatres closed by law (1642)
Restoration (1660–1700)		
• Prohibition of public drama lifted: theatres re-opened • New theatre building in London and the provinces: **proscenium arch** stages • Lavish scenery and lighting effects • Comedy of Manners popular: themes of sexual intrigue and 'town versus country' in witty prose dramas • Women allowed to act by law for the first time	• *The Man of Mode,* George Etheredge (1635–92) • *The Rover*, Aphra Behn (1640–89) • *The Country Wife, The Plain Dealer*, William Wycherley (1640–1716) • *Love for Love, The Way of the World*, William Congreve (1670–1729)	• Restoration of the monarchy • Charles II (1660–85) • Samuel Pepys's *Diary* (1660–9) • *Paradise Lost*, John Milton (1667) • John Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* (1690) • Satirical poems by John Dryden, John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester and others

Main features of drama	Main plays and playwrights	Contexts
Eighteenth century (1700–1800)		
• Sentimental Comedy a popular dramatic genre • Increase in the range of genres: pantomime, ballad opera, heroic tragedy • New theatres built in London and major towns and cities: elaborate architecture matched by elaborate stage scenery and costumes • Professional actor-managers (e.g Garrick at Drury Lane)	• *The Beggar's Opera*, John Gay (1695–1732) • *She Stoops To Conquer,* Oliver Goldsmith (1730–74) • *The Rivals, The School for Scandal,* Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751–1816) • *The Enchanted Isle*, an operatic version of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* performed frequently	• The Age of Enlightenment: belief in rationalism, scientific progress and high culture • Stage Licensing Act (1737) • Dr Johnson's *Dictionary* published in 1755 • The rise of the novel (Defoe, Richardson, Fielding) and the educated middle class • *The Dunciad, The Rape of the Lock*, Alexander Pope (1688–1744) – social and political satires

Key terms

craft guilds
vice
virtue
stock characters
Interlude
masque
proscenium arch

Published by:
Pearson Education Limited
Edinburgh Gate
Harlow
Essex CM20 2JE

First published 2008
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
ISBN 978-1-84690-248-2

Typeset by HL Studios, Long Handborough, Oxford

Printed in Great Britain by Henry Ling Ltd., at the Dorset Press, Dorchester, Dorset

Picture Credits

The publisher would like to thank the following for their kind permission to reproduce their photographs:

(Key: b-bottom; c-centre; l-left; r-right; t-top)

7 Photostage Ltd. 17 Photostage Ltd. 31 Photostage Ltd.

All other images © Pearson Education

Picture Research by: Ann Thomson

We are grateful to the following for permission to reproduce copyright material:

AC Black Publishers for an extract from Educating Rita by Willy Russell published by Methuen Drama 2001. Reprinted with permission; Alan Brodie Representation Ltd for an extract from "Teechers" by John Godber copyright © 1987 John Godber. Reprinted with permission of Alan Brodie Representation Ltd, Fairgate House, 78 New Oxford Street, London WC1A 1HB; Autonomedia for an extract from Caliban and the Witch by Silvia Frederici, published by Autonomedia. Reprinted with kind permission; The BBC for an extract from the transcript a panel discussion of Shakespeare's Henry V at the National Theatre broadcast on Newsnight Review on BBC2 copyright © The BBC; Cambridge University Press for an extract from Players of Shakespeare 4 by Robert Smallwood, published by Cambridge University Press 1998. Reprinted with permission of Cambridge University Press; Faber and Faber Ltd for an extract from Habeas Corpus by Alan Bennett published by Faber and Faber Ltd copyright © Alan Bennett 1973; News International Syndication for the article "The Cheap Laughs" by Rod Liddle published in The Sunday Times August 2007 copyright © NI Syndication Ltd 2007; Nick Hern Books for extracts from Letters to George by Max Stafford-Clark copyright © Max Stafford-Clark 1989; Year of the King by Anthony Shear copyright © 1985; and Theatre Writings by Kenneth Tynan copyright © The Literary Estate of Kenneth Tynan 2007. Reprinted by permission of the publishers, Nick Hern Books: www.nickhernbooks.co.uk; Oxford University Press for an extract from Fields of Light: An Experiment in Critical Reading by Reuben A. Brower (OUP 1951) copyright © Oxford University Press. Reprinted with permission of Oxford University Press; Pan Macmillan for the poem "Hoard" by Kathleen Jamie from The Treehouse published by Picador 2004 copyright © Pan Macmillan; The Penguin Group Limited for an extract from 'Blackadder Goes Forth' in Blackadder: The Whole Damn Dynasty by Richard Curtis and Ben Elton. (Michael Joseph 1998) Copyright © Richard Curtis and Ben Elton 1989. Reprinted with permission of The Penguin Group Limited; Royal Shakespeare Company for the synopsis of the production of Anthony and Cleopatra by Royal Shakespeare Company, 1998. Reproduced with permission; Telegraph Media Group Limited for a review of Twelfth Night by Charles Spencer, published in The Telegraph 8 September 2007 copyright © The Telegraph 2007; and West End Whingers for a blog review of Equus by Peter Shaffer www.westendwhingers.net. Reprinted with permission.

In some instances we have been unable to trace the owners of copyright material and we would appreciate any information that would enable us to do so.