

It was noted that only 18 points out of the 100 available in the English SATs are awarded for Shakespearean knowledge.

Various opening tactics for introducing Shakespeare were discussed. For introducing the language, a crossword had been used to explain the following:

- Verbs in the second person (you) end with 'st' (hast thou);
- Verbs in the third person (he, she, it) end with 'th' (he hath);
- English now always uses the polite or formal form of the second person – 'you';
- Shakespearean language includes the use of the intimate form of the second person – 'thee' or 'thou';
- 'thy' and 'thine' are the equivalent forms of 'your'.

For introducing the play itself, the 'prior knowledge' approach had been used whereby the class identifies what the pupils already know about the play (story, plot, characters, film versions, etc.) and this is written on the board to de-mystify the text.

Another approach is to relate the story to things within the pupils' experiences: for Macbeth, the story could be related to a recent murder for inheritance reported in the press. Other topics which could be introduced in the same way are madness, sex, fate and destiny, guilt and susceptibility to suggestions (e.g. fear of asylum seekers).

Other approaches include: using a video; creating a 'fantasy' cast of the play; using the 'Animated Shakespeare' video; reading the modern version as a story in, for example, 'The Enchanted Isles'.

Approaches for studying Macbeth include:

- Showing the 1972 Polanski version of 'Macbeth', which was highly recommended, was very bloody and included lots of sex.¹ Either in parts or as a whole, perhaps after school;
- Comparing a modern film version of a scene with a Shakespearean language version;
- Having shown the complete film version, discuss with the pupils which of the scenes are the key ones and why;
- There has been a recent article on a US schoolgirl doing witchcraft which could be used as a parallel situation;
- Pupils could do a Sun-style review of the approximate year of Macbeth's creation, including key background information such as the gunpowder plot;

¹ It was noted that any over-15 film being shown to pupils who were under age should be have written parental approval.

- Pupils could be given only one scene, such as the opening scene, and create directors notes for it, identifying such things as scenery, use of music, etc.;
- Using extracts from audio tape versions for KS 4.

In designing a Scheme of Work (SoW) for Macbeth, the following Framework objectives were identified. Since Year 9 would probably only do the one play in the year, it is essential to include all of the objectives which can only be addressed by studying a play.

Framework Area	Objective ²
Speaking & Listening	13,14,15,12
Sentence	1,4,6,11
Reading	3,10,12,14,15
Writing	3,13,14,17
Word	7,4,6

It was noted that for the SATs, both reading and writing activities were included within the papers. As an overall structure for the lessons within the SoW, it was felt that an appropriate format would be to have the main activity followed, every lesson, with 10 minutes of writing at the end. The writing could cover a particular aspect of the scene(s) worked on during the lesson. Initially, the teacher could provide extensive modelling for the work, then provide a topic and quotation and then leave the pupils to identify the material to be included. At the end of the SoW, work on sentence connectives could be used to join the paragraphs together to make an essay.

It was felt that this approach allowed tremendous freedom in the choice of main activity but ensured that the pupils had also covered a reasonable amount of writing and formal comprehension during the SoW. Suitable homework might include writing a paragraph of personal reflection on what the scene meant to the pupil.

Over recent weeks I have been working with another teacher to teach Macbeth to a low-ability Year 9 group with significant attention and behavioural problems, as well as poor English skills. This class has been provided with a significant amount of scaffolding.

The first phase of the SoW aims to make them familiar with the key points of the plot. Initially, they were shown excerpts from the Polanski version of 'Macbeth', focusing on the battles. This whetted their appetite for the story.

The class then read the 'Crown of Blood' version of Macbeth (part of the High Impact SEN series) which includes a simplified version of the story illustrated by a large number of cartoons. The teachers read the narrative, with pupils reading out the speeches from the cartoon figures. This took two lessons to complete.

Following this the pupils were given a skeleton flowchart, with key points to be filled in by answering a list of questions they were also given. This was then used for them to create their own flowchart of the action, using copies of the drawings of key scenes and pictures of the characters. The pupils were then told to write the story, as prose, for homework.

To address the key scenes the pupils were provided with copies of the original scenes in Shakespearean language and provided with modern day versions to match against them. The class worked as a whole to identify which speeches matched. Key words were translated with them and they annotated their copy.

The pupils then created their own book of the key scenes putting the modern and Shakespearean versions next to one another.

Finally, the pupils will use the Macbeth activities provided on www.schoolsnet.com to consolidate their understanding.

The plot consolidation activities, I thought, were a very effective method of teaching the story to low-ability pupils. The website activities look to be a good way of engaging their interest. The method of 'reading' the key scenes is an effective way of familiarising the pupils with the content and meaning: more work will be done on this area.

² Key objectives are shown in **bold** font.