

HARD WORDS FOR CHILDREN

Shakespeare, Translation and *The Merchant of Venice*

Ways into Venice

Leila Rasheed

In this 60 minute writing workshop we explored, through creative practice, ways of engaging children and teenagers in *The Merchant of Venice*. The aim was to demonstrate that children can very well understand the key emotions and conflicts in this play, since they have experienced these emotions and conflicts themselves. They can empathise with the characters and engage with their situations. By exploring their own childhood memories, participants could also build empathy with the children they work with. This should help them develop teaching activities that make the play more accessible to children from all backgrounds.

Resources used

- Printed copies of key speeches and dialogues from *The Merchant of Venice*, one per participant.

Notes

The workshop is adaptable to any group size, and the duration is also flexible (although doing it in less than an hour would be difficult). It would be possible to remove Step 4, or give participants more time to complete it, depending on the tutor's aims for the group. There is also flexibility around whether participants work in groups or individually, and whether they respond to each step verbally or by writing notes. The techniques used (such as free writing) are in general use in creative writing workshops.

After each step there is an opportunity for participants to feedback to the group.

Process

Step 1: Participants choose a speech or dialogue from the play and identify the key feelings and conflicts expressed in it.

Step 2: Participants bring to mind an occasion when they as children felt the same feelings or experienced the same conflicts that they identified in the text. They then free write for approximately five minutes about this memory.

Step 3: Participants make notes about situations when contemporary children or teenagers (for example, ones they work with) may feel the same emotion or experience the same conflict that they identified in Step 2.

Step 4: This step is the 'creative writing' part of the workshop. Participants EITHER write a scene in prose, using notes made in Step 2 or Step 3, OR, translate one of the speeches or dialogues into words that could be spoken by contemporary children.

Step 5: In groups, participants discuss how the activities practiced in this workshop could transfer to teaching the play to young people. What is accessible about the play? What isn't? How can we create activities that give children and teenagers effective ways in to the play?

Leila Rasheed is a children's author published primarily in the UK and USA. She teaches Writing for Children and Young People on the University of Warwick's MA in Writing, and leads Megaphone, a Arts Council-funded development scheme for BAME writers of children's and YA fiction. Further information is at www.leilarasheed.com and www.megaphonewrite.com .