**De Aston**

**English Department**

****

**Year 12: Introduction to Tragedy**

**Academic Excellence Booklet**

**Activity 1 – Tragic protagonists in literature and popular culture**

a. Make a list of characters in literature and popular culture – television, film, computer games, etc. – who could be seen as tragic protaganists.

For example: Sirius Black and Severus Snape in Harry Potter; Anakin Skywalker in Star Wars; Harvey Dent in The Dark Knight; Walter White in Breaking Bad.

Using what you have learnt about tragedy, make brief notes on why each of these characters could be considered as a tragic protagonist.

b. The critic Raphael Falco has said that tragic protagonists possess a ‘charismatic authority’. Is this true of the tragic protagonists you have identified? Explain your answer.

c. Why do you think audiences are drawn to tragic protagonists?

d. Can you think of any real people – politicians, sportspeople, musicians, celebrities – whose lives embody aspects of tragedy? Make brief notes on each person you think of.

**Activity 2 – Tragedy in performance**

If possible, go to a stage production of one of your set plays. Alternatively, watch a different recording (on Youtube) of a stage production or a film adaptation than the one you have seen in class. Drawing on what you have learnt about aspects of tragedy, answer the following questions:

a. In this version, how are the tragic protagonist and other key characters portrayed?

b. In what ways do staging, lighting, and sound contribute to the effect of the tragedy?

c. Focus on two or three key points within the action of the tragedy (for example, hamartia, peripeteia, anagnorisis) and consider how these have been presented in this version.

**Activity 3 - Grasping the concepts: Introducing Tragedy by Sean McEvoy**

Read pages 12-21 of ‘Tragedy: A Student Handbook’, by Sean McEvoy.

a. In your own words, explain what is meant by tragedy, summing up the ideas on pages 12-13.

b. The rest of the chapter covers terms that you will have covered in your lessons, but makes reference to a wide variety of literature to exemplify each concept. It would be useful for you to be able to refer to these texts to show evidence of wider reading. To test your understanding, explain in your own words:

i. How does Oedipus exemplify the concept of hamartia?

ii. How does Creon commit hubris and experience anagnorisis?

iii. How does the play ‘King Lear’ defy the traditional conventions of tragedy?

iv. How did the idea of the tragic protagonist change in the Romantic period (e.g. Hedda Gabler)?

v. What is meant by the term ‘tragic flaw’? How is it exemplified by Hamlet?

vi. How does the ‘ordinariness’ of the protagonist in modern tragedy enable them to stand for a wider class of people (e.g. The Shadow of a Gunman)?

**Activity 4 – Engaging with AC Bradley’s views on Shakespearean Tragedy**

Though AC Bradley has sometimes been criticised for writing of Shakespeare's characters as though they were real people, his book, Shakespearean Tragedy (1904), is probably the most influential single work of Shakespearean criticism ever published. All his published work was originally delivered in the form of lectures. Bradley's pedagogical manner and his self-confidence made him a real guide for many students to the meaning of Shakespeare.

Read the extracts from AC Bradley’s Lecture I. Highlight the key features Bradley identifies in Shakespearean tragedies, then summaries his points in your own words.

**Activity 5 – Witnesses of tragedy**

Choose a ‘bystander’ character from one of the texts you are studying, e.g. Lodovico in *Othello* or Charley in *Death of a Salesman.* Write a monologue from the point of view of this character, to be spoken after the action is concluded. What would your chosen character say about what has happened?

**Activity 6 – Sean McEvoy on modern approaches to tragedy**

Read the extract from “Tragedy: The basics”. Highlight 8 quotes that you think could potentially be useful to quote in your exams. Choose 3 of these to learn by heart.

**Wider reading**

You need not read these texts from cover to cover; use the contents page to determine which sections may be relevant or of interest and read selectively. You could also look at the reference pages of these texts for suggestions for further reading:

* O’ Toole, F (2002) Shakespeare is Hard, But So is Life: A Radical Guide to Shakespearean Tragedy - An accessible and often witty guide. O’Toole argues that we should not try to identify Aristotelian features in Shakespeare’s plays, but instead explore them within the social and political contexts in which they were written.
* McEvoy, S with Coult, T and Sandford, C (2009) *Tragedy: A student Handbook* (English and Media Centre) – Wide-ranging, readable and hugely informative: an excellent starting point for your further reading.
* Poole, A (2005) *Tragedy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford) – an accessible overview of the genre of tragedy.
* Wallace, J (2007) *The Cambridge Introduction to* *Tragedy* (Cambridge) – A wide-ranging exploration of tragedy that looks at tragedy in the novel, in the visual arts and on film as well as at tragic drama.

****

For more resources, including literacy support, visit www.deastonenglish.com