

Intertextuality and the context of reception: *Measure for Measure* – Act 2 scene 2 by William Shakespeare

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Lesson plan

Resources

- ❖ **Resource A** – Bible verse cards
- ❖ Copies of the text
- ❖ **Resource B** – film clip
- ❖ **Resource C** – text with Bible verses.

Learning objectives

- ❖ To consider Christian perspectives on the themes of justice and mercy
- ❖ To analyse the scene closely and the arguments between Angelo and Isabella.

Starter activity – mind mapping justice and mercy

- ❖ Teacher writes 'justice' and 'mercy' on the board, and students mind map around them – synonyms, word associations, examples, etc.
 - In the Christian world of *Measure for Measure*, what were the prevailing ideas about justice and mercy?
 - Distribute Bible verse cards [**Resource A**] to students and consider what is being said about a biblical view of justice or mercy
 - Feed back and add to mind maps.

Intro – recapping the story

- ❖ Quickly recap the plot of the play up to Act 2 Scene 2: Claudio is arrested by Lord Angelo (the temporary leader in the Duke's absence) for impregnating Juliet before they were married, and is sentenced to death. Claudio's sister, the pious Isabella, goes to Lord Angelo to please for mercy for Claudio.
 - What might the Elizabethan audience think of Lord Angelo's stance?
 - Is he right to pursue justice for Angelo's crime, or should he listen to Isabella and show mercy to him?

Main activity 1 – understanding the scene: justice Vs mercy

- ❖ Read Act 2 Scene 2.
 - Working in pairs, students try to sum up the arguments proposed for:
 - Justice (Angelo)
 - Mercy (Isabella) (e.g. by picking out / highlighting key words and points).
 - Feed back to establish understanding.

Main activity 2 – analysing the arguments

- ❖ What persuasive techniques does each character use as part of their argument?
 - In pairs, with each student allocated to either Angelo or Isabella, students find techniques and examples for their character (e.g. repetition - 'Condemn...condemn'd'; rhetorical questions - 'Condemn the fault and not the actor of it?'; exclamations - 'O just but severe law!'; etc.)
 - Feed back ideas
 - Debate: Which argument appears more convincing and why? (Angelo is defending his position, and is more insistent, repetitive, and authoritative, whilst Isabella appeals to him in an emotional way using a number of strategies, including asking him to consider his own guilt).

Main activity 3 – applying a biblical interpretation

- ❖ Watch the film clip [**Resource B**] and follow along with the text with Bible verses [**Resource C**].
 - Discuss and make notes: Why is it significant that Isabella makes many more biblical allusions than Angelo?

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- It is just her characterisation (as a prospective nun) or is Shakespeare making a point about justice and mercy through her words?
- Does her use of biblical quotation make her argument stronger? (feedback with specific examples)
- How does an understanding of the biblical allusions change the dynamics of the scene?
 - Does anyone want to change their view on who has the stronger argument?

Plenary

- ❖ Look again at:
 - Isabella's words at the end of the scene: 'Go to your bosom; / Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know / That's like my brother's fault.'
 - The Bible passage Matthew 7:3-5
- What is being suggested about Angelo's own relationships, behaviour and desires?
- Why will this become more significant during the play? (Make predictions or links, depending on whether or not the class already knows the whole plot.)

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Resources

Resource A – Bible verse cards

Leviticus 19:15

Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly.

Luke 6:36

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Psalms 106:3

Blessed are they who maintain justice, who constantly do what is right.

Isaiah 10:1-2

Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless.

Isaiah 30:18

Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!

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Micah 6:8

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Zechariah 7:9

This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and
compassion to one another.'

Psalms 86:5

You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you.

Psalms 103:8

The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

Micah 7:18

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the
remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry for ever but delight to show
mercy.

Romans 2:1

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at
whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who
pass judgment do the same things.

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Resource B – <http://www.crossref-it.info/articles/476/Measure-for-Measure-~-Act-2,-scene-2>

Resource C - *Measure for Measure* Act 2 scene 2 by William Shakespeare

ANGELO

Well; the matter?

ISABELLA

I have a brother is condemn'd to die:
I do beseech you, let it be his fault,
And not my brother. ...

ANGELO

Condemn the fault and not the actor of it?
Why, every fault's condemn'd ere it be done:
Mine were the very cipher of a function,
To fine the faults whose fine stands in record,
And let go by the actor.

ISABELLA

O just but severe law! ...
Must he needs die?

ANGELO

Maiden, no remedy.

ISABELLA

Yes; I do think that you might pardon him,
And neither heaven nor man grieve at the mercy. ...

ANGELO

He's sentenced; 'tis too late. ...
Your brother is a forfeit of the law,
And you but waste your words.

ISABELLA

Alas, alas!
Why, all the souls that were were forfeit once;
And He that might the vantage best have took
Found out the remedy.

Mark 10:45 ⁴⁵**For even the Son of man came ... to give his life a ransom for many.**

How would you be,
If He, which is the top of judgment, should
But judge you as you are?

1 Corinthians 4:5 ..the Lord ... will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts... .

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O, think on that;
And mercy then will breathe within your lips,
Like man new made.

Luke 6:36 ³⁶**Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.**

ANGELO

... It is the law, not I condemn your brother:
Were he my kinsman, brother, or my son,
It should be thus with him: he must die tomorrow.

ISABELLA

To-morrow! O, that's sudden! Spare him, spare him!
He's not prepared for death. ... Good, good my lord, bethink you;
Who is it that hath died for this offence?
There's many have committed it. ... Yet show some pity.

ANGELO

I show it most of all when I show justice; ...
Your brother dies to-morrow; be content.

ISABELLA

So you must be the first that gives this sentence,
And he, that suffer's. ... Man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority,

Psalms 103:15-16 ¹⁵**As for man, his days are as grass** ¹⁶**For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.**

Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven ...
We cannot weigh our brother with ourself: ...

Romans 2:1 ¹**Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.**

ANGELO

Why do you put these sayings upon me?

ISABELLA

Because authority, though it err like others,
Hath yet a kind of medicine in itself,
That skins the vice o' the top. Go to your bosom;
Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know
That's like my brother's fault: if it confess
A natural guiltiness such as is his,
Let it not sound a thought upon your tongue
Against my brother's life.

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ANGELO

[Aside] She speaks, and 'tis
Such sense, that my sense breeds with it.

Romans 2: 21-2 ²¹Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?

Fare you well.

.....

Matthew 7:3-5 ³And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? ⁴Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, 'Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye'; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? ⁵Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.