Lesson plan

Resources
- Resource A – images of death
- Resource B – Bible verse cards
- Resource C – copy of poem
- Resource D – film clip Death Be Not Proud
- Resource E - close analysis task sheets

Learning objectives
- To consider the Christian attitude to death
- To analyse and understand the poem

Starter activity – attitudes to death
- Look at the various pictures of death [Resource A] and label each one with a phrase which describes the attitude to death suggested eg. death personified as an enemy, belief in afterlife, re-incarnation, etc.
- What are our attitudes to death?
- What attitudes to death have we encountered in English Literature? (i.e. likely to be from a predominantly Judeo-Christian worldview).

Main activity 1 – analysing Bible passages
- What is the Christian attitude to death?
  - Allocate Bible verse cards [Resource B] to pairs. Students summarise the viewpoint contained therein
  - Feedback to create a spider diagram on the board of a biblical view of death.

Main activity 2 – analysing the poem’s meaning/message
- Read the poem Death Be Not Proud [Resource C]
  - What attitude to death is shown by Donne?
  - Students annotate the poem with links to Bible verses and Christian views of death using the Bible verses they have heard and the ideas written on the spider diagram on the board
  - Students draw a quick picture which represents Donne’s view of death
  - Watch the film clip Death Be Not Proud [Resource D] and check/add to notes on Bible connections
  - Explain that Donne was an Anglican minister, and that he wrote this poem whilst sick with smallpox, in the days before vaccination was available
  - Does this change the poem’s significance at all? Consider especially the fourth line and final line
  - Students sum up the poem’s meaning into one sentence and feedback.

Main activity 2 – group close analysis of form, structure, speaker, imagery
- Divide students into four groups and allocate task sheets [Resource E].
  - Feedback from each group to complete annotations on the poem.

Plenary – drama task
- In pairs, students create a role play in which one person is Donne and one is Death personified. They should have an argument in their own words which shows an understanding of the poem and its message.

Possible homework tasks
- Write up close analysis of the poem and its meaning.
Resources

Resource A – Images of death
Intertextuality and the context of reception: 
*Death be not Proud* by John Donne

**Resource B – Bible verses**

1 Corinthians 15:53
For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14
Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

John 11:25-26
Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

Revelation 21:4
He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

1 Corinthians 15:54-55
When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

1 Corinthians 15:51-52
Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.
Death be not Proud
by John Donne

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou are not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou'art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy'or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

Intertextuality and the context of reception:  
*Death be not Proud* by John Donne

Resource E – Close analysis task sheets

**Group one: Form**

1. The form of the poem is a Petrarchan sonnet. The Petrarchan sonnet is normally on the topic of love, and has fourteen lines and a rhyme scheme that goes ABBAABBA and then, most frequently, CDCDCD.
   a. Does the poem follow this pattern exactly?
   b. What does this suggest?
2. Another feature of a Petrarchan sonnet is a shift, or "turn," in the argument or subject matter somewhere in the poem. In Italian, the word is *volta*. Usually, the turn occurs at line 9 to coincide with the introduction of a new rhyme scheme.
   a. Is this the case with Donne’s poem?
   b. What/where are the turning points?
3. The Petrarchan sonnet has a regular meter: iambic pentameter, which means that each line has ten syllables, and every second syllable is accented.
   a. Does Donne’s poem follow this pattern? E.g. look at the first line (the first word, ‘Death’ is accented).
   b. Where does Donne play with rhythm and to what effect?

**Group two: Structure**

1. Try to follow the arguments or logic of the poem, numbering Donne’s ideas. Donne doesn’t develop a single line of argument but throws different ideas at Death.
2. Where does the poem pick up momentum? (pace, anger)
3. Look at the number of syllables in different words eg. look for monosyllables (words with only one syllable).
   a. How does this affect the pace?
Intertextuality and the context of reception: *Death be not Proud* by John Donne

**Group three: Speaker and listener**

1. Who is speaking and to whom?
   a. Whose side is the reader on?
2. An apostrophe is an address to an abstract figure. In what sense is this poem an apostrophe?
3. Donne was an Anglican minister and so he was well practised at public speaking. Find points of the poem at which he is creating rhetorical effects or where he sounds as if he is making a public speech.

**Group four: Imagery and themes**

1. Find examples of the following themes or imagery (word-pictures) in the poem:
   a. Mortality
   b. Hopes
   c. Courage
   d. Sleep
   e. Pain and pleasure