



MEASURE FOR MEASURE

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
EDUCATION RESEARCH PACK

The research and information in this pack are inspired by Roxana Silbert's 2011 production of *Measure for Measure*. They can be used either as supporting activities for students seeing the production or as stand-alone practical approaches to the play. They have been designed with KS5 students in mind, but can be adapted for other age groups.

ABOUT OUR EDUCATION WORK

We want children and young people to enjoy the challenge of Shakespeare and achieve more as a result of connecting with his work. Central to our education work is our manifesto for Shakespeare in schools; Stand up for Shakespeare. We know that children and young people can experience Shakespeare in ways that excite, engage and inspire them. We believe that young people get the most out of Shakespeare when they:

- Do Shakespeare on their feet – exploring the plays actively as actors do
- See it Live – participate as members of a live audience
- Start it Earlier – work on the plays from a younger age

We also believe in the power of ensemble; a way of working together in both the rehearsal room and across the company enabling everyone's ideas and voices to be heard. Artistic Director, Michael Boyd encapsulates this vision for ensemble in his rehearsal room where actors are encouraged to try out different interpretations of scenes before deciding together on what will be presented to an audience in the final performance.

CONTENTS

Christianity and Power	Page 2
Sadomasochism	Page 3
1604: The Political Climate	Page 4
Leadership and Power	Page 5
The Life of a Poor Clare	Page 7

These symbols are used throughout the pack:



READ

Contextual notes from the rehearsal room



Watch Video

More teaching activities that support your active approaches to Shakespeare can be found in the RSC Shakespeare Toolkit for Teachers, available to buy at [RSC Shop](#). The RSC also runs a range of courses for teachers and students; for more information about this visit: www.rsc.org.uk/education

WHY DO WE USE RESEARCH IN THE REHEARSAL ROOM?

Research into the world of the play is an essential part of every rehearsal process at the RSC. Roxana Silbert and the actors wanted to know as much as they could about the political and social climate at the time when Shakespeare wrote the play. They also researched ideas that the play tackles which were relevant to the contemporary audiences for the production. Research of this kind informs the interpretive choices that the director and actors make.



CHRISTIANITY AND POWER

In *Measure for Measure*, both Isabella and Angelo profess their faith, their obedience to God and to their superiors and their adherence to the laws which govern sexual behaviour in their world. But they are both human. They both make choices which compromise what they say they believe in. They are both caught between the laws of their faith and human desires. When exploring what the characters say and do in the play, a very live question in the rehearsal room has been, 'what drives this person'? The company researched the wider social and historical context of the church at the time in which the play was written to deepen their understanding of this essential question.

Adam Lenson, Assistant Director, was asked to research any historical connections between the religious beliefs in the play and wants and desires of the characters. Here are some of the controversial things he found out:

St Paul noted that at various times in Church history, suffering was not just accepted but sought out. Actions included self-flagellation, flogging, wearing of chains, walking with stones in shoes. This suffering was intended to bring the individual closer to Christ, whose life and teachings were dedicated to lifting humans out of suffering. Suffering became part of devout behaviour in some Christians.

Historians have noted that as the church developed, the institutional structure became organised as a hierarchy. By the time of Thomas Aquinas, obedience to God was associated with obedience to the Church. Aquinas proclaimed that obedience and submission to the Church was necessary for salvation. Therefore, there was strict obedience to the hierarchy in order to prove devotion to God. Obedience was an act of faith for many Christians.

Once a man was ordained as a cardinal or a bishop, he wielded ultimate power and authority over the community he served. Thomas Reese said this of the power structure of the Church:

'Don't think

If you think, don't speak

If you think and speak, don't write, don't sign your name.'

Absolute obedience, deliberately suppressing thought, the expression of ideas and all forms of discourse. Hence, the power arrangements within the Church could be said to be symmetrical with those embedded in sexual abuse.

SADOMASOCHISM

 'Th'impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies... ere I'd yield
My body up to shame.' [ISABELLA, Act 2 Scene 1]

The company read about sado-masochism to inform their work on *Measure for Measure*, here is what they found out:

Sadomasochism (often referred to as S&M) refers to the receiving of pleasure, often of a sexual nature from acts involving the giving or receiving of pain or humiliation. The term originates from two separate practices. Sadism refers to the activity of enjoyment gained from giving pain while Masochism is used to describe enjoyment gained from receiving pain. The two have a joint terminology because they often occur together in relationships, characterised by both aggressive and submissive periods in relationships with others.

Sadomasochism is not only physical but also has a strong emotional component; causing or receiving emotional abuse. This can lead to intentional aggression or submission in some personalities and in some relationships whether sexual or not. Gilles Deleuze in *Coldness and Cruelty* argues that the tendency to masochism is based on intensified desire brought on or enhanced by the acting out of frustration at the delay of gratification. The masochist derives pleasure from the contract: the process by which he can control another individual: The sadist, in contrast, derives pleasure from the law: the unavoidable power that places one person below another.

There are a number of reasons commonly given for why a sadomasochist finds the practice of S&M enjoyable, and the answer is largely dependent on the individual. For some, taking on a role of compliance or helplessness offers a form of therapeutic escape from the stresses of life, from responsibility, or from guilt. For others, being under the power of a strong, controlling presence may evoke the feelings of safety and protection associated with childhood. They likewise may derive satisfaction from earning the approval of that figure. On the other hand, a sadist may enjoy the feeling of power and authority that comes from playing the dominant role, or receive pleasure vicariously through the suffering of the masochist. The company noted sado-masochistic potential in the relationships between some of the characters in the play, notably the central one between Lord Angelo and Isabella.

The design of Silbert's production draws on the sado-masochist tradition. In this interview, the director explains why:



www.rsc.org.uk/whats-on/measure-for-measure/video-interview.aspx#1



Abhorsen [Youssef Kerkour] and Pompey [Joseph Kloska] Act 4 Scene 3
Photograph by Hugo Glendinning
© RSC 2011



Mistress Overdone [Annette McLaughlin] bemoans the change in policy under the new Deputy Duke, to ensemble from left to right: Sam Marks and Youssef Kerkour, Act 1 Scene 2. Photograph by Hugo Glendinning © RSC 2011

1604: THE POLITICAL CLIMATE



Measure for Measure is an experiment in form, a mix of comedy and tragedy. Escolme¹ sees this as a deliberate challenge by Shakespeare to his contemporary audience. Because the play blurs the conventions of tragedy and comedy, the audience could not rely on their formulaic understandings of what to expect. Hence, the audience had to concentrate more and engage fully in the play.

In the play, Shakespeare explores the nature of leadership and power. Shakespeare himself was a leader of his own theatre company. In 1599, he had bought shares in his own company, The Lord Chamberlain's Men, and the company had moved into The Globe Theatre. By 1603 the company had become one of the two leading companies in the city of London, and when King James ascended the throne, he became the patron of Shakespeare's company. The company was re-named The King's Men in honour of their patron, and held exclusive rights to perform Shakespeare's plays. As a senior member of the company, with a stake in its future, Shakespeare had greater artistic freedom than he had had earlier in his career. He was playwright, director, actor, producer, and by 1604 he had the scope and power to experiment.

Nevertheless, Shakespeare would have been acutely aware of the social and political climate in which he was writing. The company asked themselves, why Shakespeare might have written the play? In 1604, there was a law that prohibited playwrights from writing plays about the King and *Measure for Measure* explores power, law and order, and the specific relationship between the state and the people. It is a play about a ruler who seeks to test those around him, and explores key questions:

- Who has the right to judge?
- Who amongst us is without sin, particularly the sins of the flesh?

The ruler of Vienna, Duke Vincentio delegates his power to a rule bound, morally strict and punitive deputy, Lord Angelo. Resonance with the contemporary political landscape in which Shakespeare wrote the play is very easy to find. In 1604, King James was keen to establish his Divine Right as the new king of England. The king-like Duke spies on his people and scrutinises his 'kingdom', but arguably he does this seeking deeper understanding of what will make him a better ruler. The status relationships between the characters are complex and can be understood in different ways. Shakespeare offers us multiple perspectives on the question of leadership.

At the heart of the play is a real dilemma, based on the religious tension which Shakespeare's audience were living between: The Protestant values of the Reformation and the older Catholic values that still prevailed. Sins are measured against each other in the play, weighing which has the greatest consequence according to the beliefs of the characters. For example, the play asks whether chastity is more important than life? In 1604 Puritanism was on the rise. The Puritans wanted to close the theatres, along with the brothels and public houses which surrounded them on the Southbank. The tearing down of the brothels in Act 1 Scene 2 is an explicit reference to this. The theatre goers who saw the play in 1604 would have seen direct parallels with the world in which they were living. It is likely, for example, that some of them would have recognised Angelo as a strict Puritan, although he is not named as such in the fiction of the play. Puritans believed that faith was a matter of obedience, not emotion. They believed that happiness came from order and a pure relationship with God, and that the pursuit of pleasure, excess and material possession should be avoided. Equally, the 'old' Catholic faith expressed by Isabella in the play would have still been live in the hearts and minds of the audience in 1604. And, it is likely that Shakespeare's audience would have enjoyed Pompey's lust for life precisely because of the naughtiness of that character in the context of rising Puritanism. The comedy for Shakespeare's audience lay in the parallels between the fictional world of the play and the real events and ideas of his time.

Additional supporting resources

- For a history of Stratford productions of the play, visit:
www.rsc.org.uk/whats-on/measure-for-measure/performance-history.aspx
- For more information about staging practices in Shakespeare's time go to:
www.rsc.org.uk/education/resources/social-historical-context/

¹Bridget Escolme is a Renaissance scholar from Queen Mary

LEADERSHIP AND POWER



Eve Poole² asked the company to consider some key questions about the Duke and his actions in the play. Shakespeare uses the character's disguise and manipulations to create most of the dramatic tension in the play. The suspense created enables the audience to feel a sense of 'Is he pushing it too far?' and to be drawn into his investigations of humanity as co-investigators. We are directly faced with the same problem which faces the Duke in the play: What is it to judge? Who can judge what is good or bad? Where is the tipping point between justice and mercy? If you measure, expect to be measured.

Poole reminded the company that there is a major shift in power in the opening scene of the play: The Duke deputises his power to Lord Angelo. Angelo takes on the position, but he has limited political power and he is not used to power so his personality is tested; and corruption is the outcome. The Duke meanwhile switches from a position of absolute power, but seeks to gain political power; he looks for the knowledge and networks with which he can more adeptly use his position once he re-claims his Dukedom. He switches position to the role of Friar, which is a different kind of power position; through this position he has access to new information and networks, but he still has a 'kind of authority' which allows him to manipulate others. The Duke does not just act as a spy: he shifts into a position which affords him a different kind of power. Whilst in the position of Catholic Friar he breaks the 'Seal of Confession' which would have been acutely apparent and hilarious to the Protestants in the audience in Shakespeare's time, as a comment on the hypocrisy of the Catholics.



The Duke [Raymond Coulthard]. Act 1 Scene 1 Photograph by Hugo Glendinning © RSC 2011

The company then went on to discuss Isabella, whose position is 'nun'. Or is it? In fact she is a novice, and not yet a full member of the Poor Clares. So her position is interesting. A nun has some authority, and her role still has some political power: she is party to information. What is clear in the text is that Isabella has 'personal power'. Lucio (Her brother), Angelo and the Duke all speak of her ability to move men.

Poole cited the recent events reported in the press around the case of Dominique Strauss-Kahn, then Head of the International Monetary Fund, accused by hotel maid Nafissatou Diallo of attempted rape.³ Both Diallo and Strauss-Kahn have been subject to enormous media and public scrutiny, partly because Strauss-Kahn was a very powerful man. Poole asked the company to note this case in relation to the shifting power dynamics between Angelo and Isabella in Act 2 Scene 4, and noted the moment at line 168, when Angelo asks Isabella, 'Who will believe thee Isabel?'. The subtext of what Angelo says could

² Eva Poole is Leadership Associate at Ashridge Business School

³ The case has now been in the press for several months. Prosecutors acting for Diallo have since dropped the case.

be: 'you may have some information which gives you political power, but I have a more important position than you, and my role gives me more networks, so I can trump your political power as well.'

Poole then asked the company to focus on The Duke, and asked the question, 'Is he Machiavellian?' which many academics have asserted. Poole noted that it is common contemporary business practice to do what the Duke does in the play: Get in a consultant who is a 'hardliner' to sort things out, and then neutralise that person by discrediting them. The Duke sets up Angelo to take a hard line, only to publicly discredit him, ensuring that his power is neutralised. But the Duke does not leave. It seems he is deliberately testing the situation.

Poole then addressed one of the key things which the Duke says in the play: 'Power changes purpose'. One of the big questions about the play is what the Duke's purpose is: Is it to clean up Vienna? Is it to test Angelo? The company speculated that people act in reaction to the power/status relationships in the play moment by moment, and the power relationships in *Measure for Measure* are constantly shifting.

Poole described a common characteristic of 'Leaders'. Leaders require followers, and followers behave as followers seeking reward rather than punishment: For example, they laugh at non-jokes and speak about events more positively than the reality warrants. Leaders, however, recognise this 'following' behaviour, and then cover any of their vulnerabilities by not allowing anyone too close. Poole conjectured that this is what we see in the Duke: His motivations are complex and hard to work out because he typifies a leader who does not let anyone else into what he is thinking.

The company then turned their attention to contemporary business practice where it is very common to give someone with youth/or a powerful personality a big challenge. But Angelo, given this challenge also acts in a way that is recognisable and typifies the responses of someone in his circumstances. He is frustrated because although he has the position of power he does not have the political power which would make being the Duke's Deputy comfortable. He gets stressed when his personal interest in Isabella compromises his position of power. Initially, Poole argued, he experiences a fight or flight

reflex response, but he progressively makes the decision to fight for his personal desire despite the risk for his position of power. In doing so, he gathers his resources and gains strength. His body reacts chemically, on overdrive, and things start to make sense to him which would have been previously unthinkable. This chemical reaction is arousing. Poole asked the company to think of this as a typical response from any human being who is experiencing conflict between their position of power and the power of their personality: Angelo is caught between who he is and who others expect him to be. Poole believes that people who experience this tension often start re-writing the rules that the world lives by, in order to avoid the personal pain that the tension causes them.



THE LIFE OF A POOR CLARE



Isabella is a Poor Clare. As research for the play, the company visited a contemporary Poor Clare monastery. Here is what they discovered about the values and lives of the Poor Clares:

Values of the Poor Clares

A Poor Clare is a woman whose only, all absorbing, purpose in life is to belong to God. In the framework of her community she takes vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, and a fourth vow of Enclosure, which means she does not leave the monastery precincts without reasonable cause. 'Our vows do not shut us off from the cares and joys, hopes and sorrows of the world; rather we share them at a deeper level, for our prayers are asked on every subject under the sun. Prayer, after all, is our business and people sensibly are not slow to make use of it. Often they need prayers even more than they know. God has given us this work to do.' The heart of the vocation is the desire to leave everything and, following St Francis and St Clare to set out 'with swift pace, light step, unswerving feet' into the desert to seek the face of God, in silence and solitude, through prayer, meditation and contemplation. However, living within the cloister, they still have a heart for the world. Community life is very important to the Poor Clares, and they are expected to provide support for their sisters. The lifestyle of the cloister is a balance of prayer, work and tradition. The Poor Clare watchword is 'Never let the thought of God leave your mind.'



Isabella [Jodie McNee]. Photograph by Hugo Glendinning © RSC 2011

Research such as this is very useful to the creative team: It offers a frame of reference from which choices for the production can be made. Jodie McNee (who played Isabella) found the research visit to the Poor Clares invaluable, as study for her part. But the whole creative team have drawn on this research in creating the production.

Typical Poor Clare Day

Time	Activity
12.00 midnight	Rise for night litany, matins, readings, meditation
1.15 am	Retire
5.30am	Rise
6.30am	Morning offering
7.30am	Mass
8.30am	Breakfast then work (cooking, cleaning, sewing, gardening, sacristy, infirmary)
12.00 midday	Sext (Vegetarian dinner)
1.15pm	Spiritual reading then free time for study, letter writing, crafts, gardening, hobbies.
4.00pm	Recreation
5.00pm	Blessed sacrament
5.45pm	Vespers evening prayer
6.30pm	Collation (evening meal)
7.30pm	Rosary and Compline (prayer) Retire

Towards the end of rehearsals, Roxana Silbert talked to us about falling in love with *Measure for Measure* and what it has been like to direct the play at the RSC, to view film clips visit:



www.rsc.org.uk/whats-on/measure-for-measure/video-interview.aspx#2

Additional supporting resources



■ For supporting practical exercises around the research pack visit the Activities pack:
www.rsc.org.uk/downloads/rsc_measure_2011_teachers_activites_pack.pdf



■ For further creative interviews on this production visit the Interview pack:
www.rsc.org.uk/downloads/rsc_measure_2011_teachers_interview_pack.pdf