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| **Lesson Title:** Translating Shakespearean English into Modern English | | **Theme:** Reading | |
| **Practice Activity:** PHL-09-125 | | **Class:** JSS 3 | |
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| **Learning Outcome**  By the end of the lesson, you will be able to translate Shakespearean English into modern English. | | | |

**Overview**

**Shakespeare** was a great writer when Elizabeth I was Queen of England hundreds of years ago. The English we use today is different from the English Shakespeare used. It is called **modern English**. Shakespearean texts used in schools today are difficult to understand because:

* Many words that Shakespeare used are no longer used today.
* Many words were borrowed from foreign languages. For example, 'signior' is an Italian word meaning 'gentleman'.
* Some words are spelled differently now. For example, 'myself' was separated in the days of Shakespeare as 'my self'.
* Some Shakespearean phrases mean a single word. For example, 'in faith' means 'frankly'.
* Short Shakespearean expressions can become longer in modern English. Some long expressions can become shorter. Sometimes the word order changes. For example, 'I know not' becomes 'I do not know’.

To make Shakespearean English easy to read and understand, we can translate it into modern English. Doing this will help candidates reading Shakespearean drama at both the BECE and WASSCE levels. Look at the example below from Shakespeare’s ‘Merchant of Venice’ from Act 1 Scene 1:

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| **Excerpt** | **Translation into Modern English** |
| **In sooth, I know not** why I am so sad;  It **wearies** me; you say it wearies you;  But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,  What stuff ‘tis made of, **whereof it is born**,  **I am to learn**;  And such a **want-wit** sadness makes of me  That I have much ado to know myself. | Truly, I do not know why I am so sad.  It tires me; you say it tires you too.  But how I got this sadness,  What it is like and where it came from,  I have yet to find out.  And sadness has made me so foolish  That I have trouble understanding myself. |

**Practice**

**Activity 1**

Below are some quotes from plays written by Shakespeare. Match the words in bold with the words lettered a-h that share the same meaning.

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| 1. ‘The lady **doth** protest too much.’ 2. ‘I kissed thee **ere** I killed thee.’ 3. ‘O Romeo, Romeo, **wherefore** art thou Romeo?’ 4. ‘From **whence** doth spring the true Promethean fire.’ 5. ‘**Thy** husband is **thy** lord, **thy** life, **thy** keeper.’ 6. ‘He that **hath** a beard is more than a youth, and he that **hath** no beard is less than a man.’ 7. ‘Oh, thou did’st then **ne’er** love so heartily.’ 8. ‘**Hark**! **Hark**! the lark at heaven’s gate sings.’ | 1. why 2. before 3. has 4. does 5. listen 6. never 7. where 8. your |

**Activity 2**

Explain the following excerpt from Shakespeare’s ‘Merchant of Venice’ from Act 4 Scene 2 in your own words. You will have to translate the text into modern English.

I am sorry for thee. Thou art come to answer

A stony adversary, an inhuman wretch

Uncapable of pity, void and empty

From any dram of mercy.

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**Activity 1**

1. d 2. b 3. a 4. g 5. h 6. c 7. f 8. e

**Activity 2**

The Duke tells Antonio that he feels sorry for him because his adversary, the person against him, is a terrible, cruel person who does not have any feelings of pity or mercy for others.