

INTRO TO HAMLET

Lesson 3: My Last Duchess

Introduction

In this lesson, students read lines 21–34 of Robert Browning’s “My Last Duchess” (from “She had / A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad” to “My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name / With anybody’s gift”), in which the Duke further describes the Duchess. Students continue to gather evidence of the Duke’s character and the emergence of the Duchess’s character as described by the Duke.

Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write and self-assessed discussion at the end of the lesson:

What is the impact of Browning’s choice of speaker on the development of the Duchess?

For homework, students respond briefly in writing to the following prompt: What does the reader learn about the characters of the Duke and the Duchess in lines 29–34? What is left uncertain about the Duke and Duchess in these lines?

Standards

Assessed Standard(s)	
RL.9-10.3	Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.
RL.9-10.6	Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.
SL.9-10.1.b	Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on <i>grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues</i> , building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. b. Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.

Addressed Standard(s)	
L.9-10.4.a-d	<p>Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on <i>grades 9-10 reading and content</i>, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4.A</u> Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4.B</u> Identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech (e.g., <i>analyze, analysis, analytical; advocate, advocacy</i>).</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4.C</u> Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning, its part of speech, or its etymology.</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4.D</u> Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary).</p>

Assessment

Assessment(s)
<p>Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write and self-assessed discussion at the end of the lesson. Students respond to the following prompt, citing textual evidence to support analysis and inferences drawn from the text.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the impact of Browning's choice of speaker on the development of the Duchess?
High Performance Response(s)
<p>A High Performance Response should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify a discrepancy between how the Duke presents information about the Duchess and what the information actually means (e.g., The Duke claims the Duchess had a "bough of cherries" forced on her by "some officious fool" (line 27). She actually accepted the "bough" and it pleased her, which means the "fool" (line 27) could not have forced it on her. Or, the Duke criticizes the Duchess for her heart: "She had / A heart ... too soon made glad, / Too easily impressed" (lines 21–23). Although the Duke is criticizing the Duchess in these lines, he actually shows that she was a

pleasant person who enjoyed a great variety of things, not just the Duke's "favour" (line 25).).

- Convey the understanding that the Duchess is presented solely by the Duke, who is an unreliable narrator (e.g., The Duke's description of the Duchess reveals that he is not a reliable narrator. He negatively describes harmless things like the Duchess's appreciation for sunsets and gifts. Also, he implies that she was not grateful enough to him for his name, his title. The Duke feels she "ranked" (line 32) the "gift of [the Duke's] nine-hundred-years-old name / With anybody's gift" (lines 33–34). Instead of demonstrating the Duchess's weakness, the Duke shows himself to be demanding and proud, an unreliable narrator.).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)

- favour (n.) – a gift bestowed as a token of goodwill, kind regard, love, etc., as formerly bestowed upon a knight by his lady

Vocabulary to teach (may include direct word work and/or questions)

- bough (n.) – a branch of a tree, especially one of the larger or main branches
- officious (adj.) – objectionably aggressive in offering one's unrequested and unwanted services, help, or advice; meddlesome

Additional vocabulary to support English Language Learners (to provide directly)

- breast (n.) – the chest thought of as the place where emotions are felt
- orchard (n.) – a place where people grow fruit trees
- mule (n.) – an animal that has a horse and a donkey as parents
- terrace (n.) – a flat area created on the side of a hill and used especially for growing crops

Lesson Agenda/Overview

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
Standards & Text: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards: RL.9-10.3, RL. 9-10.6, SL. 9-10.1.b, L. 9-10.4.a-d • Text: "My Last Duchess" by Robert Browning, lines 21–34 (Masterful Reading: entire text) 	

<p>① In order to provide context, the masterful reading includes the entire poem.</p>	
<p>Learning Sequence:</p>	
1. Introduction of Lesson Agenda	1. 10%
2. Homework Accountability	2. 10%
3. Masterful Reading	3. 5%
4. Reading and Discussion	4. 40%
5. Self-Assessed Discussion	5. 20%
6. Quick Write	6. 10%
7. Closing	7. 5%

Materials

- Copies of the 11.1 Speaking and Listening Rubric and Checklist for standard SL. 9-10.1.b for each student
- Student copies of the 11.1 Common Core Learning Standards Tool (refer to 11.1.1 Lesson 1)
- Free Audio Resource: <https://archive.org/> (Google search terms: My Last Duchess, Zachariah Wells)
- Student copies of the Short Response Rubric and Checklist (refer to 11.1.1 Lesson 1)

Learning Sequence

How to Use the Learning Sequence	
Symbol	Type of Text & Interpretation of the Symbol
10%	Percentage indicates the percentage of lesson time each activity should take.
no symbol	Plain text indicates teacher action.
	Bold text indicates questions for the teacher to ask students.
	<i>Italicized text indicates a vocabulary word.</i>
►	Indicates student action(s).
💬	Indicates possible student response(s) to teacher questions.
①	Indicates instructional notes for the teacher.

Activity 1: Introduction of Lesson Agenda

10%

Begin by reviewing the agenda and the assessed standards for this lesson: RL. 9-10.3, RL. 9-10.6, and SL. 9-10.1.b. In this lesson, students focus on how Browning develops the characters of the Duke and the Duchess through the viewpoint of the Duke in lines 21–34.

- ▶ Students look at the agenda.

Inform students that later in the lesson they self-assess their participation in a small group discussion of the text. Distribute a copy of the 11.1 Speaking and Listening Rubric and Checklist for SL. 9-10.1.b to each student. Instruct students to read the rubric and ask questions to ensure comprehension.

- ▶ Students read the rubric and ask questions as necessary.

Instruct students to take out their copies of the 11.1 Common Core Learning Standards Tool. Inform students that in this lesson, they begin to work with two new standards: RL. 9-10.6 and L. 9-10.4.a-d. Instruct students to individually read these standards on their tools and assess their familiarity with and mastery of them.

- ▶ Students read and assess their familiarity with standards RL. 9-10.6 and L. 9-10.4.a-d.

Instruct students to focus on standard RL. 9-10.6 and talk in pairs about what they think the standard means. Lead a brief discussion about the standard.

💬 Student responses may include:

- Students identify the point of view in complex texts.
- Students determine the difference between what is said and what is really meant.

To support students' work with RL. 9-10.6, introduce the concept of an unreliable narrator, which will be important in the study of "My Last Duchess." Lead a discussion of narrator reliability in the text read so far, encouraging students to think about the relationship between what the Duke says and what he means.

Instruct students to focus on standard L. 9-10.4.a-d and talk in pairs about what they think the standard means. Lead a brief discussion on the similarities between L. 9-10.4.a-d and RL. 9-10.4.

💬 Student responses may include:

- Both standards talk about determining the meaning of words as they are used in a text.

- Standard L. 9-10.4.a-d focuses on the strategies for determining word meaning, including using context, word patterns, and reference tools like dictionaries, glossaries, and thesauruses.
- RL. 9-10.4 talks about how to find the meaning of the word but also asks for its impact on the text overall.

Activity 2: Homework Accountability

10%

Instruct students to take out their responses to the previous lesson's homework assignment. (Reread lines 9–10 of “My Last Duchess” and respond in writing to the following prompt: What does the reader learn about the portrait? How does this information develop the Duke's character?) Instruct students to Turn-and-Talk in pairs about their responses to the homework prompt.

💬 Student responses may include:

- No one is allowed to “put[] by” (line 9), or move, the curtains hiding the painting except for the Duke. This shows that he guards his possessions carefully and, since he is telling his listener, we can assume he takes pride in that fact.
- The fact that the painting is kept behind a curtain that only the Duke can draw suggests the possibility that the Duke has a jealous and controlling character.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Activity 3: Masterful Reading

5%

Have students listen to a masterful reading of “My Last Duchess” in its entirety. Ask students to focus on how Browning develops the character of the Duchess.

- ▶ Students follow along, reading silently.

① **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider posting or projecting the following guiding question to support students in their reading throughout this lesson:

What is the difference between the Duchess's actions and how the Duke talks about her actions?

Activity 4: Reading and Discussion

40%

Instruct students to form groups. Post or project each set of questions below for students to discuss. Instruct students to continue to annotate the text as they read and discuss.

Instruct students to select one member of the group to read aloud lines 21–25 (from “She had / A heart – how shall I say?” to “her looks went everywhere. / Sir, ’twas all one!”), and ask the other members of the group to annotate the text as that person reads. Instruct students to answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

- ① To promote fluency, consider modifying the reading technique to whisper or group reads (in which students read in low voices by themselves or in small groups).

Reread lines 21–23: “She had / A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad, / Too easily impressed.” What is the effect of the repetition in these lines?

- ☞ The effect of the repetition of “too” (lines 22 and 23) is to emphasize that, in the Duke’s opinion, the Duchess was too easily pleased or satisfied.

What is the effect of “how shall I say?” (line 22) on lines 21–23?

- ☞ The dashes around “how shall I say?” indicate that the Duke is pausing to think about the right words to say.
- ① In the next lesson, students consider a similar instance of a verbal interjection from the Duke (“Even had you skill / In speech—(which I have not) —” (lines 35–36)), which suggests the Duke’s false modesty. Consider revisiting “how shall I say?” as another example of false modesty after completing 11.1.1 Lesson 4, when students have more context to understand the Duke’s character and mannered tone.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Instruct student groups to read lines 25–31 (from “My favour at her breast, / The dropping of the daylight in the West” to “the approving speech, / Or blush, at least”) and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

Provide students with the following definition: *favour* means “a gift bestowed as a token of goodwill, kind regard, love, etc., as formerly bestowed upon a knight by his lady.”

- ① Students may be familiar with this word. Consider asking students to volunteer a definition before providing one to the group.
 - ▶ Students write the definition of *favour* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the following definitions: *breast* means “the chest thought of as the place where emotions are felt,” *orchard* means “a place where people grow fruit trees,” *mule* means “an animal that has a horse and a donkey as parents,” and *terrace* means “a flat area created on the side of a hill and used especially for growing crops.”
 - ▶ Students write the definitions of *breast*, *orchard*, *mule*, and *terrace* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

What does the Duke mean by “the dropping of daylight in the West” (line 26)?

- ☞ The Duke means sunset, because the sun sets “in the West” (line 26).

What does *bough* mean in the line “The bough of cherries some officious fool / Broke in the orchard for her” (lines 27–28)? What words are associated with *bough* that can help to define it?

- ☞ The words *orchard* and *cherries* help define *bough*, because an orchard is a place where people grow fruit trees, and cherries grow on the branches of cherry trees. A *bough* is a branch or, in this case, a branch covered in cherries.
- ① Consider drawing students’ attention to their application of standard L. 9-10.4.a through the process of using context to make meaning of a word.

What happens in lines 27–28?

- ☞ Someone gives the Duchess a gift of a branch of cherries.

What is the connotation of the word *officious*? (line 27)? What words or phrases suggest this connotation?

- ☞ *Officious* is a negative word. The Duke combines it with the word *fool*.
- ① Consider providing students with the following definition: *officious* means “objectionably aggressive in offering one’s unrequested and unwanted services, help, or advice; meddlesome.”
 - ▶ Students write the definition of *officious* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

What does the Duke mean when he claims the Duchess’s “looks went everywhere” (line 24)?

- ☞ Student responses may include:

- The Duchess “look[ed]” (line 24) too often at other men.
- The Duke could mean that the Duchess was interested in many different things, such as his “favour” (line 25), the sunset (line 26), or gifts such as cherries (lines 27–28).

What does the punctuation in “Sir, ’twas all one!” (line 25) suggest about the Duke’s tone and message? What inference can be made about how the Duke feels about what he is saying?

- The exclamation point in “’twas all one!” suggests that the Duke is angry or agitated by the fact that the Duchess responds to other people and things the same way as she does to him.

① **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle, consider posing the following question.

What does the Duke mean by “’twas all one!” in line 25?

- By “’twas all one!” the Duke means that his “favour” (line 25), or love, for her, the “bough” (line 27), and the sunset were the same to the Duchess—she was pleased equally by all of them.

What inferences can be made about the Duchess based on lines 25–29?

- The Duchess enjoyed a great variety of things in life: people, the “bough of cherries” (line 27) someone gives her, the beauty of a sunset (line 26), and her husband’s “favour” (line 25).
- ① Although students are not introduced to standard RL. 9-10.2 formally until Lesson 5, when they consider the development and interaction of central ideas in a text, consider asking students to begin thinking about the central ideas in the poem. Thus far, several central ideas have begun to develop, including jealousy, power and status, voice, etc. Several of these ideas are also developed in other module texts. Students’ work with these and other central ideas supports their work in the Module 11.1 Performance Assessment.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Instruct student groups to read lines 31–34 (“She thanked men,—good! but thanked / Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked / My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name / With anybody’s gift”) and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

What does the Duke mean by the “gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name” (line 33)?

- The Duke’s family name is “a nine-hundred-years-old name” (line 33). The Duke considers his last name to be a gift because it is an important and prestigious name. The gift of his last name, in the Duke’s eyes, is a gift that gives the Duchess status and makes her an important person.

From the Duke’s perspective, how does the Duchess value the gift of the Duke’s family name?

- ☞ The Duchess “rank[s]” (line 32) the Duke’s family name with “anybody’s gift” (line 34).

How does this contrast with the Duke’s view of the gift of his name in lines 31–34?

- ☞ The Duke seems to value his name above all other gifts. He says, “I know not how” (line 32) the Duchess ranked his gift with “anybody’s gift” (line 34).
- ① Consider asking students how some of the central ideas they identified earlier in this lesson are developed through the Duke’s view of his name as a gift (e.g., power and status, control, possessiveness, etc.).

Evaluate the Duke’s reliability as a narrator in these lines. Support your response with evidence from the text.

- ☞ The Duke is not a reliable narrator. Anger and jealousy, which are reflected in exclamations such as “Sir, ’twas all one!” (line 25), influence his view of the Duchess. The Duke’s descriptions of the Duchess, like his claim that “her looks went everywhere” (line 24), are not what they at first appear to be.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Activity 5: Self-Assessed Discussion

20%

Instruct students to take out their copies of the 11.1 Speaking and Listening Rubric and Checklist for SL. 9-10.1.b. Direct students to form small groups and engage in a discussion about the following prompt:

What is the impact of Browning’s choice of speaker on the development of the Duchess?

Explain that students will self-assess their participation at the end of the discussion, using the 11.1 Speaking and Listening Rubric and Checklist.

Circulate to informally assess students’ engagement with SL. 9-10.1.b.

Instruct students to use the 11.1 Speaking and Listening Rubric and Checklist to self-assess their participation in the discussion.

- ① Consider collecting and reviewing students’ self-assessments for formative use.

Activity 6: Quick Write

10%

Instruct students to respond briefly in writing to the following prompt:

What is the impact of Browning's choice of speaker on the development of the Duchess?

Ask students to use this lesson's vocabulary wherever possible in their written responses. Remind students to use the Short Response Rubric and Checklist to guide their written responses.

- ▶ Students listen and read the Quick Write prompt.

① Display the prompt for students to see, or provide the prompt in hard copy.

Transition to the independent Quick Write.

- ▶ Students independently answer the prompt using evidence from the text.

☞ See the High Performance Response at the beginning of this lesson.

Activity 7: Closing

5%

Display and distribute the homework assignment. For homework, instruct students to respond briefly in writing to the following prompt:

What does the reader learn about the characters of the Duke and the Duchess in lines 29–34? What is left uncertain about the Duke and Duchess in these lines?

Instruct students to use this lesson's vocabulary wherever possible in their written responses. Also remind students to use the Short Response Checklist and Rubric to guide their written responses.

Homework

Respond briefly in writing to the following prompt:

What does the reader learn about the characters of the Duke and the Duchess in lines 29–34? What is left uncertain about the Duke and Duchess in these lines?

Use this lesson's vocabulary wherever possible in your written response. Use the Short Response Checklist and Rubric to guide your written response.

11.1 Speaking and Listening Rubric

____ / ____ (Total points)

Criteria	4 – Responses at this Level:	3 – Responses at this Level:	2 – Responses at this Level:	1 – Responses at this Level:
<p>Collaboration and Presentation The extent to which the speaker works with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, setting clear goals and deadlines and establishing individual roles as needed.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1.b Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.</p>	<p>Skillfully work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed. (SL.9-10.1.b)</p>	<p>Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed. (SL.9-10.1.b)</p>	<p>Work somewhat effectively with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed. (SL.9-10.1.b)</p>	<p>Work ineffectively with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, or establish individual roles as needed. (SL.9-10.1.b)</p>

- A response that is a personal response and makes little or no reference to the task or text can be scored no higher than a 1.
- A response that is totally copied from the text with no original writing must be given a 0.
- A response that is totally unrelated to the task, illegible, incoherent, blank, or unrecognizable as English must be scored as a 0.

11.1 Speaking and Listening Checklist

Assessed Standards: _____

	Does my response...	✓
Collaboration and Presentation	Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making? (SL.9-10.1.b)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Work with peers to set clear goals and deadlines? (SL.9-10.1.b)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Work with peers to establish individual roles, if necessary? (SL.9-10.1.b)	<input type="checkbox"/>