

# INTRO TO HAMLET

## Lesson 4: My Last Duchess

### Introduction

In this lesson, students read and analyze lines 31–43 of “My Last Duchess” by Robert Browning (from “She thanked men,—good! but thanked / Somehow—I know not how” to “E’en then would be some stooping; and I choose / Never to stoop”), in which the Duke states that he never “stooped” to blame the Duchess for her actions. Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson: How does Browning further develop the character of the Duke in lines 34–43? Students then discuss the significance and relevance of the evidence they cited in their responses in relation to W.9-10.2.b and W.9-10.5, the new standards introduced in this lesson.

### 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.
W.9-10.2.b	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.  b. Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.
Addressed Standard(s)	
W.9-10.5	Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grades 9-10 <a href="#">here</a> .)
L.9-10.4.a, b	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

	<p>strategies.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> <li>Identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech (e.g., <i>conceive</i>, <i>conception</i>, <i>conceivable</i>).</li> </ol>
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## Assessment

Assessment(s)
<p>Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write 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"> <li>How does Browning further develop the character of the Duke in lines 34–43?</li> </ul>
High Performance Response(s)
<p>A High Performance Response should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze how Browning further develops the character of the Duke in lines 34–43 (e.g., Browning further develops the Duke's character by providing clues about how the Duke may have treated the Duchess while she was alive. The Duke repeats that he did not “stoop to blame” (line 34) the Duchess for her behavior, but he continues to speak about the Duchess in a way that suggests he wants to control her. The Duke claims that he never told the Duchess how she “disgusts” (line 38) him or how she misses or “exceed[s] the mark” (lines 38–39), but the text suggests that the Duke may be deceptive or manipulative. For example, the Duke says he does not have “skill / In speech” (lines 35–36) to explain to the Duchess how he wants her to behave, but based on his words throughout the poem, it is obvious that he is an eloquent speaker capable of explaining his desires.).</li> </ul>

## Vocabulary

Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>trifling (n.) – idle or frivolous conduct, talk, etc.</li> <li>forsooth (adv.) – in truth; in fact; indeed</li> </ul>
Vocabulary to teach (may include direct word work and/or questions)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>stoop (v.) – to do something that is not honest, fair, etc.; to bend down or over</li> <li>will (n.) – a person's choice or desire in a particular situation</li> </ul>

- lessened (v.) – taught; instructed; given a lesson; admonished; reproved

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

- disgusts (v.) – causes (someone) to have a strong feeling of dislike for something especially because it has a very unpleasant appearance, taste, smell, etc.
- exceed (v.) – to go beyond the limit of (something)
- mark (n.) – a specified point or level; something that is aimed at or shot at
- wits (n.) – the ability to think or reason
- e'en (contraction) – even

## Lesson Agenda/Overview

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
<b>Standards &amp; Text:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standards: RL.9-10.3, W. 9-10.2.b, W. 9-10.5, L. 9-10.4.a, b</li> <li>• Text: “My Last Duchess” by Robert Browning, lines 31–43</li> </ul>	
<b>Learning Sequence:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction of Lesson Agenda</li> <li>2. Homework Accountability</li> <li>3. Masterful Reading</li> <li>4. Reading and Discussion</li> <li>5. Quick Write</li> <li>6. Significant and Relevant Evidence Discussion</li> <li>7. Closing</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 10%</li> <li>2. 10%</li> <li>3. 5%</li> <li>4. 50%</li> <li>5. 10%</li> <li>6. 10%</li> <li>7. 5%</li> </ol>

## Materials

- 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 Quick Write responses from Lesson 2 (refer to 11.1.1 Lesson 2)
- 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.
	<b>Bold text indicates text dependent questions.</b>
	<i>Italicized text indicates a vocabulary word.</i>
▶	Indicates student action(s).
💬	Indicates possible student response(s) to teacher questions.
❗	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 and W. 9-10.2.b. In this lesson, students work in groups to analyze how Browning further develops the character of the Duke. After drafting a short written response about how Browning develops the character of the Duke, students discuss the relevance and significance of the evidence used in their responses.

- ▶ Students look at the agenda.

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: W. 9-10.2.b and W. 9-10.5. 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 W. 9-10.2.b and W. 9-10.5.

Instruct students to talk in pairs about what they think standard W. 9-10.2.b means. Lead a brief discussion about this standard. Remind students to pay attention to the overarching standard W. 9-10.2 as well as the substandard W. 9-10.2.b.

💬 Student responses may include:

- Students write texts that inform or clearly explain ideas.
- Students organize their ideas in their writing.
- Students analyze a topic in their writing.
- In their writing, students use strong details, definitions, or quotes from the text to support their ideas and analysis.
- Students make choices about what evidence most clearly and accurately supports ideas and analysis in their writing.

Instruct students to talk in pairs about what they think standard W. 9-10.5 means. Lead a brief discussion about this standard.

💬 Student responses may include:

- Students revise writing to meet the needs of a specific purpose or audience.
- Students revise and edit their writing to make it better.
- Students plan before beginning to write.

## Activity 2: Homework Accountability

**10%**

Instruct students to take out their responses to the previous lesson's homework assignment. (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 form pairs to discuss their responses to the homework assignment.

💬 Student responses may include:

- The reader learns more about the Duchess than about the Duke. The Duke's description shows that the Duchess was friendly and courteous to all men: "all and each / Would draw from her alike the approving speech" (lines 29–30). The reader also learns that she was easily pleased and impressed: "she liked whate'er / She looked on" (lines 23–24). The reader also learns that the Duke may think the Duchess was unfaithful. He says, "her looks went everywhere" (line 24).
- Although the lines appear to describe the Duchess, the reader learns more about the Duke than about the Duchess. The reader learns about the Duke's pride: he is unable to bear the idea that "my favour at her breast" (line 25) and "a nine-hundred-years-old name" (line 33) are not ranked above all other gifts. The reader also sees hints of his jealous nature in the line "her looks went everywhere" (line 24), where he suggests that she may have been unfaithful to him. These traits begin to suggest that the Duke may be an unreliable narrator as his pride and jealousy affect his description of the Duchess. The Duke also controls the story—he alone speaks and the Duchess cannot, so we are only offered one point of view.

Check to ensure all students have completed the second part of the previous lesson's homework assignment: selecting an AIR text.

### Activity 3: Masterful Reading

5%

Have students listen to a masterful reading of “My Last Duchess,” lines 31–43 (from “She thanked men,—good! but thanked / Somehow” to “E’en then would be some stooping; and I choose / Never to stoop”). Instruct students to focus on how Browning develops the Duke’s character.

- ① Students listened to a masterful reading of the entire poem at the beginning of 11.1.1 Lessons 1–3. If students need another masterful reading of the entire poem, consider varying the delivery by using an audio source.

- ▶ 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 does the reader learn about the Duke’s relationship with the Duchess in lines 34–43?**

- ① Consider leading a brief whole-class discussion to ensure comprehension.

### Activity 4: Reading and Discussion

50%

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 student groups to read lines 31–35 (from “She thanked men,—good! but thanked / Somehow” to “Who’d stoop to blame / This sort of trifling?”) and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

Provide students with the following definition: *trifling* means “idle or frivolous conduct, talk, etc.”

- ① Students may be familiar with this word. Consider asking students to volunteer the definition before providing it to the class.

- ▶ Students write the definition of *trifling* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

**Consider the definition of *trifling*. To what “trifling” (line 35) is the Duke referring?**

- 💬 The Duke is referring to the Duchess’s interactions with other men and to the fact that she thanked them all equally for their favors, as though the Duke’s gifts of his “nine-hundred-years-old name” (line 33) and status were no more important than others’ gifts.

**How does the Duke describe his response to the Duchess's "trifling" (line 35)?**

- ☞ The Duke says that he does not "stoop to blame" (line 34) the Duchess for her actions. In other words, he does not lower himself to tell her how he disapproves of her actions.

**What does it mean to *stoop*? What does the word mean in this context?**

- ☞ To *stoop* means to lower oneself. To *stoop* would mean the Duke would have to go down to the Duchess's level to blame her.
- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing the following definitions: *stoop* means "to do something that is not honest, fair, etc.; to bend down or over."
  - ▶ Students write both definitions of *stoop* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- ① Encourage students to discuss how both the literal and figurative meanings of the word *stoop* apply.

**What does the word *stoop* suggest about how the Duke views the Duchess?**

- ☞ This word choice suggests the Duke views himself as higher than, or superior to, the Duchess in this situation.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

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Instruct student groups to read lines 35–43 (from "Even had you skill / In speech—(which I have not)" to "E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose / Never to stoop") and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

Provide students with the following definition: *forsooth* means "in truth; in fact; indeed."

- ① Students may be familiar with this word. Consider asking students to volunteer the definition before providing it to the class.
  - ▶ Students write the definition of *forsooth* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the following definitions: *disgusts* means "causes (someone) to have a strong feeling of dislike for something especially because it has a very unpleasant appearance, taste, smell, etc.," *exceed* means "to go beyond the limit of (something)," *mark* means "a specified point or level; something that is aimed at or shot at," *wits* means "the ability to think or reason," and *e'en* means "even."
  - ▶ Students write the definitions of *disgusts*, *exceed*, *mark*, *wits*, and *e'en* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

**What does the Duke say about his own speaking ability?**

- 🗨 The Duke says he does not have “skill / In speech” (lines 35–36), or that he is not an eloquent speaker.

**What does the language of the poem suggest about the Duke’s speaking ability? What specific details and examples illustrate his speaking ability?**

- 🗨 Student responses may include:
  - The language of the poem suggests the Duke is an eloquent speaker. For example, he uses artistic language such as “never read / Strangers like you that pictured countenance” (lines 6–7) and “My favour at her breast, / The dropping of the daylight in the West” (lines 25–26).
  - The language of the poem suggests the Duke has skill in speech. For example, he uses beautiful language such as: “they would ask me, if they durst, / How such a glance came there” (lines 11–12) and “Paint / Must never hope to reproduce the faint / Half-flush that dies along her throat” (lines 17–19).

**What inference can be made about the Duke based on what he says about his speaking ability?**

- 🗨 Student responses may include:
  - The Duke says he is not a good speaker to draw attention to the fact that he is actually a good speaker.
  - The Duke presents himself as a simple man with little skill for human interactions but, he may, in fact, be manipulative.

**To whom does the Duke refer as “such an one” in line 37?**

- 🗨 “Such an one” refers to the Duchess.

**What is the meaning of the word *will* on line 36?**

- 🗨 *Will* in this context means wishes or desires.

① **Differentiation Consideration:** To support comprehension, consider posing the following question:

**To whose will is the Duke referring? How do you know?**

- 🗨 The Duke is referring to his own will. After the Duke uses the term “your will” (line 36) he proceeds to share specific details about what “stooping” (line 42) based on the Duchess’s behavior would look like.



**What is the Duke's will? How does this contribute to the Duke's development as a character?**

- The Duke's will is to tell the Duchess what disgusts him about her and what she does that disappoints him. This further develops the idea that the Duke wants to control the Duchess.

Inform students that "if she let / Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set / Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse" (lines 39–41) means "if she let herself be lectured in this way and did not argue or make excuses."

**What is the meaning of *lessoned* as Browning uses it in line 40?**

- *Lessoned* contains the word *lesson*. The Duke is describing his will to correct the Duchess, so he wants to teach her a lesson. In this case, *lessoned* means corrected or taught.

- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle to define the word *lessoned*, consider posing the following questions:

**What common word is in the word *lessoned* (line 40)? How does this common word help define the word *lessoned*?**

- The common word "lesson" is in the word *lessoned*, so the word *lessoned* must have something to do with learning or teaching a lesson.

**What words or phrases from the poem help define the word *lessoned* (line 40)?**

- The Duke says that if the Duchess would "let / Herself be lessoned" (lines 39–40), so the word *lessoned* must mean taught.

- ① Consider drawing students' attention to their application of standard L. 9-10.4.a, b through the process of using context and word parts to make meaning of a word.

**Paraphrase lines 35–43 (from "Even had you skill / In speech" to "and I choose / Never to stoop").**

- Even if a man was an eloquent speaker who could tell a woman what about how her actions disgust him, and if the woman listened and made no excuses, it would still it would be beneath the man to speak to the woman about her actions. And I (the Duke) never chooses to do things that are beneath me.

**How do specific words or phrases in the Duke's statement, "I choose / Never to stoop" (lines 42–43) impact the meaning or tone of the text?**

- Student responses may include:
  - "Never" (line 43) is a strong word that shows how committed the Duke is not to stoop to blame the Duchess.

- Through the use of the word “stoop” (line 43), the Duke emphasizes that he believes he is higher than, or superior to, the Duchess.
- The Duke’s use of “I choose” (line 42) shows that he is in control of the situation; he is the one making decisions.

### How does the repetition of *stoop* contribute to the Duke’s development as a character?

- The Duke’s repetition of *stoop* signifies that he believes he would have to lower himself to address the Duchess and her actions. By repeating the word *stoop*, the Duke reinforces that he views himself as higher or better than the Duchess.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

## Activity 5: Quick Write

**10%**

Instruct students to reread their response to the Lesson 2 Quick Write and then respond briefly in writing to the following prompt:

### How does Browning further develop the character of the Duke in lines 34–43?

Remind students to focus on finding the most significant and relevant details and to support their analysis with new evidence from lines 34–43. 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 writing.

- ▶ 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 6: Significant and Relevant Evidence Discussion

**10%**

Instruct students to share their Quick Write responses in small groups and discuss which evidence most effectively demonstrates the development of the Duke’s character.

- ▶ Students discuss their Quick Write responses in small groups.

Ask each group to share out the evidence they identified as the most significant and relevant, based on how effectively the evidence demonstrated the development of the Duke's character.

► Student groups share out their evidence.

🗣 Student responses may include:

- After the Duke has demonstrated many examples of beautiful and poetic language, he says he does not have “skill / In speech” (lines 35–36), which is not true. Therefore, the Duke is either modest or pretending to be modest.
- The Duke asks rhetorically who would “stoop to blame” (line 34) a woman like the Duchess. He repeats that he never stooped to blaming or criticizing the Duchess. The Duke's use of the word “stoop” shows that he believes he is above the Duchess and to tell her how he feels would be to lower himself to her level.

## Activity 7: Closing

5%

Introduce standard RL. 9-10.1 and model what applying a focus standard looks like. For example, RL. 9-10.1 asks students to “Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.” Students who read “My Last Duchess” might say, “In lines 21–22, the Duke describes the Duchess by saying, ‘She had / A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad.’ This line contributes to Browning's development of the Duke as a character who harshly judges the Duchess for being easily pleased by the people and objects around her.”

► Students follow along.