

Imagery

USE WITH ONE OF PAGES
2 TO 11

Imagery is the use of emotionally charged words and phrases which conjure up vivid mental pictures in the imagination. King Lear, waking from his madness and seeing his daughter Cordelia, expresses his suffering in powerful imagery:

You do me wrong to take me out o'th'grave.
 Thou art a soul in bliss, but I am bound
 Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
 Do scald like molten lead.

Such images play a key part in every Shakespeare play. They are a kind of verbal scene painting which appeals to the emotions. They deepen and intensify imaginative and dramatic impact, giving insight into characters' feelings and thoughts:

O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!

In each play, clusters of repeated images build up a sense of the themes of the play. Examples are the images of false appearance in *Macbeth*: ('Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under it'); of light and darkness in *Romeo and Juliet*; the imagery of torture, fracture and suffering in *King Lear*.

In every play Shakespeare uses imagery from nature: sun, moon and stars; the seasons; the sea; animals and birds and so on. The bear baiting he saw near the Globe Theatre gave him a key image for *Macbeth*, surrounded by his enemies, and facing death:

They have tied me to a stake, I cannot fly,
 But bear-like I must fight the course

Metaphor and simile: All Shakespeare's imagery uses metaphor or simile.

A simile compares one thing to another using 'like' or 'as':

Death lies on her like an untimely frost.

A metaphor is also a comparison. It does not use 'like' or 'as' but suggests that two dissimilar things are actually the same:

There's daggers in men's smiles



- 1 Pick out some of the imagery on the accompanying worksheet, or in the play you are currently studying. Identify which are similes and which are metaphors. Use one or more images to design a poster advertising a production of the play.
- 2 In the Zeffirelli film of *Hamlet*, as Hamlet speaks the 'To be, or not to be' soliloquy, the camera slowly pans around a burial vault, illustrating the imagery of the speech with appropriate pictures (skulls and bones, etc.). In Polanski's film of *Macbeth*, a bear-baiting post is used at several points in the play to emphasise the bear-baiting image.

Prepare a camera 'shooting script' for the lines on the accompanying worksheet to suggest how you would illustrate the imagery in a film.

Imagery: the king as the sun

USE WITH PAGE 1

King Richard II compares himself to the sun whose light exposes all criminals.

terrestrial ball
the earth

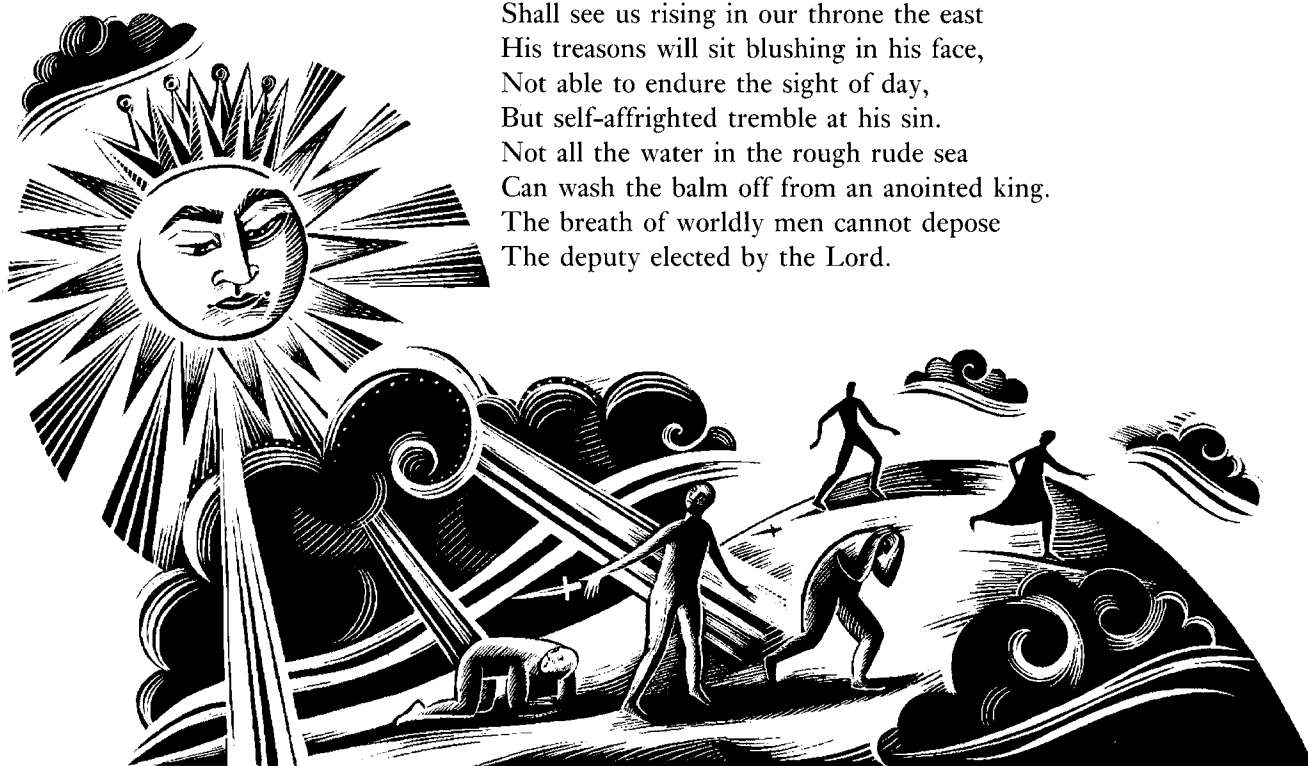
Bullingbrook
King Richard's cousin,
who challenges him

antipodes
opposite side of the
earth

anointed
marked with holy oil
(‘balm’) to show rightful
kingship

deputy
rightful king

Discomfortable cousin, knowest thou not
 That when the searching eye of heaven is hid
 Behind the globe and lights the lower world
 Then thieves and robbers range abroad unseen
 In murders and in outrage boldly here.
 But when from under this terrestrial ball
 He fires the proud tops of the eastern pines
 And darts his light through every guilty hole
 Then murders, treasons and detested sins,
 The cloak of night being plucked from off their backs,
 Stand bare and naked, trembling at themselves?
 So when this thief, this traitor, Bullingbrook,
 Who all this while hath revelled in the night
 Whilst we were wandering with the antipodes
 Shall see us rising in our throne the east
 His treasons will sit blushing in his face,
 Not able to endure the sight of day,
 But self-affrighted tremble at his sin.
 Not all the water in the rough rude sea
 Can wash the balm off from an anointed king.
 The breath of worldly men cannot depose
 The deputy elected by the Lord.



- 1 Explore ways of speaking and acting out the lines to make the imagery as clear as possible to an audience.
- 2 After the extended imagery of the king as the sun, in the final four lines Richard uses two different images. Suggest which you find most imaginatively powerful, then make up four further lines containing an image of your own.
- 3 See also Activities 1 and 2 on page 1.

Imagery: the horrors of civil war

USE WITH PAGE 1

Julius Caesar has been assassinated. Over Caesar's dead body, Mark Antony prophesies horrific civil war.

cumber
trouble or load down

fell
cruel, savage

Ate (pronounced Artec)
the fanatical goddess of
revenge and mischief

carrion
nearly dead, food for
wild beasts

O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth,
 That I am meek and gentle with these butchers!
 Thou art the ruins of the noblest man
 That ever livèd in the tide of times.
 Woe to the hand that shed this costly blood!
 Over thy wounds now do I prophesy –
 Which like dumb mouths do ope their ruby lips
 To beg the voice and utterance of my tongue –
 A curse shall light upon the limbs of men:
 Domestic fury and fierce civil strife
 Shall cumber all the parts of Italy;
 Blood and destruction shall be so in use
 And dreadful objects so familiar
 That mothers shall but smile when they behold
 Their infants quartered with the hands of war,
 All pity choked with custom of fell deeds;
 And Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge,
 With Ate by his side come hot from hell,
 Shall in these confines with a monarch's voice
 Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war,
 That this foul deed shall smell above the earth
 With carrion men groaning for burial.



- 1 Almost every line contains an image ('bleeding piece of earth', 'butchers', 'ruins', etc.). Identify as many images as you can, then make a list of them in the order that you find most imaginatively powerful. Compare your list with those of other students.

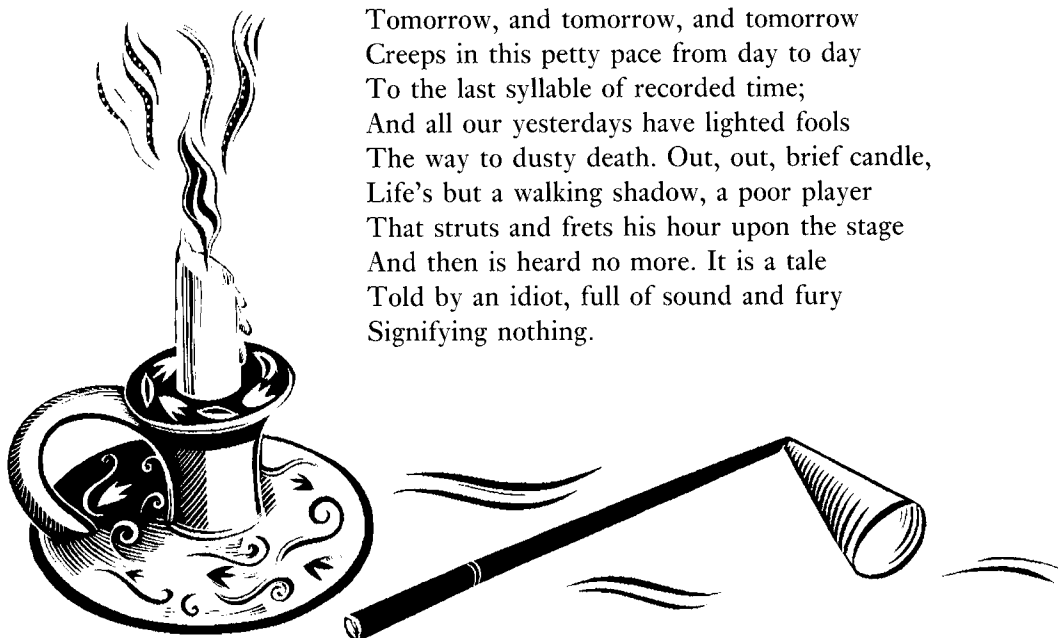


- 2 'The dogs of war' has often been used as a newspaper headline in times of conflict. Make up a newspaper page in which each item or picture has a headline or caption taken from the imagery of these lines.
- 3 Experiment with different ways of speaking Antony's lines. For example, whisper them, speak them calmly and rationally, as a solemn ritual, etc. Find a style that you feel is appropriate to a stage delivery.
- 4 See also Activities 1 and 2 on page 1.

Imagery: the futility of life

USE WITH PAGE 1

Macbeth, besieged by his enemies, has just been told of the death of his wife.



Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
 To the last syllable of recorded time;
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle,
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
 And then is heard no more. It is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
 Signifying nothing.



- 1 Explore different ways of speaking the lines (sadly, angrily, fearfully, wonderingly, etc.).
- 2 Share out the lines and devise a choral-speaking presentation with accompanying actions.
- 3 Select short phrases (for example, 'brief candle'). Imagine they are book titles. Write the first sentence for each book.
- 4 See also Activities 1 and 2 on page 1.

Imagery: acting and theatre

USE WITH PAGE 1

In *The Tempest*, Prospero compares the brevity of human life and achievement with the impermanence of theatre and acting. Just as actors vanish into thin air, so too will everyone and everything.

baseless fabric

flimsy structure

all which it inherit

all who live there now
and later

rack

clouds painted on
scenery

Our revels now are ended; these our actors,
 As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
 Are melted into air, into thin air;
 And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
 The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
 The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
 Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
 And like this insubstantial pageant faded
 Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
 As dreams are made on; and our little life
 Is rounded with a sleep.



'The great globe itself'.

The image suggests both Shakespeare's Globe theatre and the world itself.

- 1 Prospero's lines have become famous as a metaphor for the impermanence of human life. Work out how they might be spoken on stage. Suggest his tone of voice, which words he might emphasise, where he might pause.
- 2 Devise a choral-speaking presentation of the lines in which several voices speak together. Use repetitions, echoes, together with movement and other dramatic action to accompany the voices.
- 3 See also Activities 1 and 2 on page 1.

Imagery: society as a beehive

USE WITH PAGE 1

In *King Henry V*, the Archbishop of Canterbury compares human society to a colony of honey bees.

diverse
many

endeavour
human activity

butt
target

Make boot
plunder

executors
executioners

full reference/To one consent
fully agreed on a single purpose

contrariouly
in opposite ways

dial's
sundial's

Therefore doth heaven divide
 The state of man in diverse functions,
 Setting endeavour in continual motion,
 To which is fixèd as an aim or butt
 Obedience. For so work the honey bees,
 Creatures that by a rule in nature teach
 The act of order to a peopled kingdom.
 They have a king, and officers of sorts,
 Where some like magistrates correct at home,
 Others like merchants venture trade abroad,
 Others like soldiers, armèd in their stings,
 Make boot upon the summer's velvet buds,
 Which pillage they with merry march bring home
 To the tent royal of their emperor,
 Who, busied in his majesties, surveys
 The singing masons building roofs of gold,
 The civil citizens kneading up the honey,
 The poor mechanic porters crowding in
 Their heavy burdens at his narrow gate,
 The sad-eyed justice with his surly hum
 Delivering o'er to executors pale
 The lazy yawning drone. I this infer,
 That many things, having full reference
 To one consent, may work contrariouly.
 As many arrows loosèd several ways
 Come to one mark; as many ways meet in one town,
 As many fresh streams meet in one salt sea,
 As many lines close in the dial's centre,
 So may a thousand actions, once afoot
 End in one purpose, and be all well borne
 Without defeat.



- 1 In groups, one person reads the lines aloud, while the other members of the group mime each action mentioned.
- 2 In the final nine lines, another set of images is given. Identify each, and make up several more to illustrate Canterbury's argument.
- 3 Co-operation or dominance? Is the image of a beehive as a model of human society appropriate, or a false, misleading comparison? Take sides and argue for and against the harmonious society of both bees and humans that the lines present.
- 4 See also Activities 1 and 2 on page 1.

Imagery: opening *Twelfth Night*

USE WITH PAGE 1

Twelfth Night begins with Orsino calling for music to feed his hunger for love.

surfeiting
over-filled

That strain again
play that again

validity and pitch
high value

falls into abatement
is lessened

fancy
love

high fantastical
intensely imaginative

hart
male deer

pestilence
plague

fell
savage

ORSINO If music be the food of love, play on;
 Give me excess of it, that surfeiting,
 The appetite may sicken and so die.
 That strain again, it had a dying fall,
 O it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound
 That breathes upon a bank of violets,
 Stealing and giving odour. Enough; no more.
 'Tis not so sweet now as it was before.
 O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou,
 That, notwithstanding thy capacity,
 Receiveth as the sea. Nought enters there,
 Of what validity and pitch soe'er,
 But falls into abatement and low price
 Even in a minute. So full of shapes is fancy,
 That it alone is high fantastical.

CURIO Will you go hunt, my lord?

ORSINO What, Curio?

CURIO The hart.

ORSINO Why so I do, the noblest that I have.
 O when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
 Methought she purged the air of pestilence;
 That instant was I turned into a hart,
 And my desires like fell and cruel hounds
 E'er since pursue me.



- 1 Imagine you are about to stage *Twelfth Night*. You wish to give the audience as vivid an experience as possible of the imagery in these opening lines (music, flower scent, sea, hunting). You can use design, sound lighting, props, etc. Work out in detail how you will stage the lines – then act out your version.
- 2 See also Activities 1 and 2 on page 1.

Imagery: Macbeth and Malcolm

USE WITH PAGE 1

As the thanes (Scottish noblemen) march to besiege Macbeth in Dunsinane castle, they describe Macbeth, the tyrant, and Malcolm, who seeks to overthrow him.

the tyrant
(Macbeth)

distempered cause
corrupt dictatorship

**Now minutely ... faith-
breach**

every minute there's a
rebellion protesting
about his treachery

pestered senses
troubled conscience

start
panic

**the med'cine of the
sickly weal**
the cure of the diseased
kingdom (Malcolm)

purge
cure by cleansing

MENTEITH What does the tyrant?

CAITHNESS Great Dunsinane he strongly fortifies.
Some say he's mad; others that lesser hate him
Do call it valiant fury, but for certain
He cannot buckle his distempered cause
Within the belt of rule.

ANGUS Now does he feel
His secret murders sticking on his hands.
Now minutely revolts upbraid his faith-breach;
Those he commands, move only in command,
Nothing in love. Now does he feel his title
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
Upon a dwarfish thief.

MENTEITH Who then shall blame
His pestered senses to recoil and start,
When all that is within him does condemn
Itself for being there?

CAITHNESS Well, march we on
To give obedience where 'tis truly owed
Meet we the med'cine of the sickly weal,
And with him pour we in our country's purge,
Each drop of us.

LENNOX Or so much as it needs
To dew the sovereign flower and drown the weeds.
Make we our march towards Birnam.

Exeunt, marching



- 1 In groups, three students speak the lines, pausing at each punctuation mark. In the pauses, others in the group act out the descriptions of Macbeth and Malcolm.
- 2 Find an appropriate way of illustrating, either by acting or through artwork, the imagery used to describe Macbeth (first fifteen lines), and Malcolm (final seven lines).
- 3 See also Activities 1 and 2 on page 1.

Imagery: England as a garden

USE WITH PAGE 1

The gardeners in *King Richard II* use the image of England as a neglected garden. The image suggests that just as a neglected garden becomes full of weeds and pests, so England, when the king neglects his duties, becomes disordered and overrun with quarrels between ambitious, self-seeking courtiers.

noisome
harmful

in the compass of a pale
within the limits of a fence

firm estate
strong environment

knots
patterned flower beds

He that hath suffered
King Richard who allowed

Bullingbrook
King Richard's cousin

GARDENER Go thou, and like an executioner
 Cut off the heads of too-fast-growing sprays
 That look too lofty in our commonwealth.
 All must be even in our government.
 You thus employed, I will go root away
 The noisome weeds which without profit suck
 The soil's fertility from wholesome flowers.

SERVANT Why should we, in the compass of a pale,
 Keep law and form and due proportion,
 Showing as in a model our firm estate,
 When our sea-walled garden, the whole land,
 Is full of weeds, her fairest flowers choked up,
 Her fruit trees all unpruned, her hedges ruined,
 Her knots disordered and her wholesome herbs
 Swarming with caterpillars?

GARDENER Hold thy peace.
 He that hath suffered this disordered spring
 Hath now himself met with the fall of leaf.
 The weeds which his broad spreading leaves did shelter,
 That seemed in eating him to hold him up,
 Are plucked up root and all by Bullingbrook.



- 1 Experiment with different ways of speaking the lines. Think particularly about whether the gardeners would use a country dialect, or some other accent.
- 2 Design costumes for the corrupt courtiers who elsewhere in the play are called 'the caterpillars of the commonwealth'.
- 3 Use the imagery as inspiration for a poem or short report on some aspect of present-day society.
- 4 See also Activities 1 and 2 on page 1.

Imagery: a miscellany

USE WITH PAGE 1

I have supped full with horrors

They'll take suggestion as a cat laps milk

scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day

The moon, like to a silver bow
 New bent in heaven

My intents are savage-wild
 More fierce and more inexorable far
 Than empty tigers or the roaring sea

Humanity must perforce prey on itself
 Like monsters of the deep

Whiter than new snow upon a raven's back

How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
 To have a thankless child

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune

The quality of mercy is not strained
 It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven

O my offence is rank, it smells to heaven

O serpent heart, hid with a flow'ring face!

Why what's the matter,
 That you have such a February face,
 So full of frost, of storm, and cloudiness

Thou art a boil,
 A plague-sore, or embossed carbuncle
 In my corrupted blood

Death lies on her like an untimely frost

She sat like Patience on a monument
 Smiling at grief.



- 1 Make up a staged presentation of some of the images so that it presents a coherent story.
- 2 Illustrate a selection of the images in a method of your choice. For example, 'the dogs of war' has often been used as a newspaper headline in time of conflict. Make up a newspaper page in which each item or picture has a headline or caption taken from the imagery of these lines.
- 3 See also Activities 1 and 2 on page 1.