YEAR 10

REVISION ACTIVITIES

POWER AND CONFLICT POETRY

**Name:**

**Class:**

**Teacher:**

*This booklet has been designed to help you revise the poems in the AQA Power and Conflict cluster from your poetry anthology at home. Work your way through the activities in the booklet. You can fill these out on the computer or print the booklet off and hand write your answers. On various pages there will be directions to other resources you can find online to help you with your studies. If you do not have access to a computer, please do not worry! The most important things you need to know have been set out for you here.*

‘MY LAST DUCHESS’

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| **Session 3: My Last Duchess** |

*This third session will be based around ‘My Last Duchess’ by Robert Browning. Some of the activities will require you to make notes in this booklet or on a different piece of paper. When you begin to annotate the poem, you can do this in your copies of the poetry anthology if you wish. We will go through these poems again in class when you return to address any misconceptions you might have made. If you have any questions, email your teacher who will get back to you as soon as they can. This is a long poem, so take your time.*

*Spend no more than five minutes on this activity. Consider the title of the poem. Predict what big ideas the poem will explore by completing the following activities. Write your answers as annotations around the title:*

1. What does ‘my’ imply about the speaker of the poem?
2. What does the noun ‘Duchess’ imply about the types of people we will meet in this poem?
3. The word ‘last’ is ambiguous. This means its meaning is unclear or it may have more than one meaning. What could those meanings be?

MAKE PREDICTIONS

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| Activity #1 – Pre-reading activities |



**My Last Duchess**



Robert Browning (1812-1889) was heavily influenced as a youngster by his father's extensive collection of books and art. His father was a bank clerk and collected thousands of books, some of which were hundreds of years old and written in languages such as Greek and Hebrew. By the time he was five, it was said that Browning could already read and write well. He was a big fan of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (the poet who wrote ‘Ozymandias’, another poem in the anthology) and asked for all of Shelley's works for his thirteenth birthday.

Browning is best known for his use of the *dramatic monologue*. A dramatic monologue is a type of poem written in the form of speech of individual character. *My Last Duchess* is an example of this and it also reflects Browning's love of history and European culture as the story is based on the life of an Italian Duke from the sixteenth century.

SUMMARISE THE INFORMATION

*Spend no more than five minutes on this activity. ‘My Last Duchess’ is by Robert Browning. Read the contextual information below. When you have finished, write down four things you learn about Browning and the poem from the text in full sentences.*

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| Activity #2 – Read the poem |

*Spend no longer than ten minutes on this activity. Read the poem and answer the questions that follow in full sentences. If you need help understanding the poem, try the Shmoop link. Do your best to answer the questions without extra help first before you look elsewhere for information:* <https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/poetry/my-last-duchess>



**The narrator of ‘My Last Duchess’ was – in fact - a real historical figure – Alonso the Duke of Ferrera. The Duchess he is looking at is the first of three wives who died after two years of marriage under suspicious circumstances. Her name was Lucrezua de’Medici.**

**My Last Duchess**

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will 't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 't was not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say, 'Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat:' such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 't was all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule

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She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. 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. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark'—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
—E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will 't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

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The characters mentioned in this poem are based on real life, historical figures. The narrator is Duke Alfonso II who ruled a place in northern Italy called Ferrara between 1559 and 1597. The Duchess of whom he speaks was his first wife, Lucrezia de' Medici who died in 1561 aged 17, only two years after he married her. In real life, Lucrezia died in suspicious circumstances and might have been poisoned.

The poem is set in 1564, three years after the death of the Duchess. An emissary (messenger or representative) has been sent to see the Duke from the Count of Tyrol. The Count is the father of the Duke's next wife (he married three times in all). The Duke shows the emissary a picture of his late wife and remarks on her character, suggesting that she was unfaithful to him - and hinting that he might have killed her because of it.

During his speech, the Duke makes himself look arrogant, insensitive and selfish. The poem is a dramatic monologue.



HUH?

*If you are still stuck and do not understand, don’t worry! Have a go at answering the questions below which break up the poem. There is also a very good ‘translation’ of the poem which you can find at the following link:* <https://www.litcharts.com/poetry/robert-browning/my-last-duchess> *It has a re-written version of the poem in modern English. Only use this if you are completely stuck. Try and work through the challenge first as you will remember the poem in greater detail this way!*



1. **Look at lines 1 to 10. The Duke has a painting of his last wife, the Duchess, who is now dead. What does he keep this painting hidden behind? Answer in full sentences.**
2. **The Duke says he is the only one who is allowed to reveal the painting to others. What kind of person do you think that makes him and why?**
3. **‘She had a heart – how shall I say? – too soon made glad. She liked whate’er she looked on, and her looks went everywhere.’ What kind of person do you think the Duchess was? How does she act around other men?**
4. **Look at lines 25 to 30. The Duke is listing all the things that make the Duchess equally happy. He starts with ‘my favour at her breast’. He is talking about a brooch he has gifted her. What else makes her equally happy?**
5. **‘My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name’ – By marrying, the Duke has given the Duchess his name. He says it is a ‘nine-hundred-years-old name’ meaning his well-known family goes back generations. Why do you think he sees this as a gift?**
6. **‘I gave commands then all smiles stopped together’ – The Duke does not like the way the Duchess acts around other men. What do you think he has done to her here?**

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| Activity #3 – Clarifying tricky vocabulary |



*Spend no longer than twenty minutes on this activity. Some of the words from the poem are quite complex. Write the definitions for each word and explain what they mean in the poem’s context. Look at the example below to help you. Once you have finished adding your definitions, check the answers in the back of the booklet immediately to avoid any errors and misconceptions. There will be a chance for you to visually represent each word at the end of this activity as well. Not every complicated word is in this grid. I have only chosen the main ones for you.*

CLARIFY TRICKY VOCABULARY

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| **Word** | **Add the definition** | **Read the word in context** | **What does the line mean?** |
| **countenance** | A face | ‘Strangers like you that pictured **countenance**, the depth and passion of its earnest glance.’ | Strangers like you have looked at the painting and studied the emotion in the Duchess’ face.  |
| **mantle** |  | ‘Her **mantle** laps over my lady’s wrist too much.’ |  |
| **flush** |  | ‘Paint must never hope to reproduce the faint half-**flush** that dies along her throat.’ |  |
| **officious** |  | ‘The bough of cherries some **officious** fool broke in the orchard for her.’ |  |
| **trifling** |  | ‘Who’d stoop to blame this sort of **trifling**?’ |  |
| **munificence** |  | ‘I repeat, the Count your master’s known **munificence** is ample warrant.’ |  |
| ***Extension:*** *Create an icon (visual representation) of each word in the space below to help your understanding of the language used in the poem.* |

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| Activity #4 – Annotate the poem |

*Spend no longer than forty minutes on this activity. You may complete this activity by annotating each part of the poem below OR in your poetry anthology if you have it with you. If you run out of space, feel free to print another copy of the poem off OR write on a different piece of paper. We will go through this again in class so please do not worry about missing anything. I have split the poem up into a certain number of lines. Annotate each section by answering the questions to do with those lines.*

**The poem begins with the Duke showing a messenger around his art collection. The messenger has come to arrange the terms of the Duke’s next marriage to another woman. They come to the painting of the Duke’s ‘last Duchess’. The Duke invites the messenger to sit and look at the painting.**

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will 't please you sit and look at her? I said

1. If the Duchess looks like she was alive, what is the quality of the painting like?
2. Highlight the word ‘wonder’. How does the Duke feel about the painting?
3. Frà Pandolf is a fictional artist but clearly one who is very good. Why do you think the Duke drops his name into conversation?
4. EXTRA CHALLENGE: The Duke invites his visitors to look at the painting. How is the Duchess a victim of the ‘male gaze’ here?

**The Duke says that strangers often ask how such a look came to the Duchess’ face. He explains that only he is allowed to draw the curtain that hides the painting.**

'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus.

1. How is the Duke controlling the Duchess even in death?
2. The Duke says visitors ask him how the Duchess’ look came to be in the painting if they ‘durst’ which means dare. How do you think the Duke comes across the visitors?
3. Highlight the words ‘depth’ and ‘passion’. What are the connotations of these words?

**The Duke goes on to say that it was not only his presence that made the Duchess blush. He also says Fra Pandolf complimented the Duchess by saying that paint could never hope to recreate the ‘half-blush’ that is fading on her throat.**

Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 't was not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say, 'Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat:' such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy.

1. Highlight ‘spot of joy’. This means the Duchess is blushing. What kind of behaviour does this link to?
2. A ‘mantle’ is a cloak or a shawl. If it ‘laps over my lady’s wrist too much’, what is it doing?
3. Highlight the word ‘dies’. How is this an example of foreshadowing?
4. In the last three lines, the Duke is saying any compliment made the Duchess blush. Why do you think this would frustrate him?

**The Duke begins to criticise the Duchess’ behaviour. He says everything made her happy, regardless of what it was. He also hints that she liked everyone she saw and that she was flirtatious with other men.**

For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 't was all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule She rode with round the terrace – all and each

1. What do the dashes in the second line suggest about the way the Duke is delivering this line?
2. What impression do we receive of the Duchess based on the way she looks at other people?
3. Look at the last three lines. There is no punctuation at the end of each line which means the Duke is not pausing. This is called **enjambment**. How does the enjambment reflect the increasing anger of the Duke?

**The Duke says the Duchess valued any gift regardless of what it was. He believes he has elevated her social status by marrying her, because his family is rich and powerful and is angered that she does not appreciate it in the way she should.**

Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. 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. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark'

1. The use of dashes increases. What does this tell us about how the Duke is delivering the lines and how does he feel about the Duchess as he recounts her flirtatious and (and in his view) ungrateful behaviour?
2. Highlight ‘my gift of a nine-hundred-year-old name. How can a name be powerful?
3. Highlight the word ‘stoop’. If you stoop, what do you do? Why would the Duke not want to be seen to be stooping?
4. The Duke says he has no skill in speech. Is he speaking the truth here? Explain your answer.

**The Duke imagines a situation where he confronts the Duchess about her behaviour to say it disgusts him. He ends up saying that confronting her would be beneath him. He goes on to say that the Duchess still smiled at him whenever she walked past but she also gave everyone else the same smile. Growing tired of this, the Duke ‘gave commands’ and ‘all smiles stopped’, presumably because he had her killed. Now she lives on only in the painting.**

Or there exceed the mark'—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
—E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive.

1. Highlight a line which suggest the Duchess has been unfaithful to the Duke and explain why you have chosen it.
2. The Duke repeats the idea of ‘stooping’. Highlight these references and explain why the Duke is against the idea of ‘stooping.’ Consider his status and what he would believe about himself in your answer.
3. Look at the last three lines beginning with ‘this grew’. How does Browning structure his sentences to make the Duke sound emotionless?

**The Duke ends his discussion of the Duchess without confirming what really happened to her, although there is a sense of a veiled threat. The Duke’s new wife must behave for him or face the consequences. He directs his guest downstairs. As they go, he pauses to point out another work of art: a statue of the God Neptune taming a seahorse which another famous artist, Claus of Innsbruck, cast in bronze specifically for him, making it very rare.**

As if alive. Will 't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

1. Highlight ‘Will’t please you rise?’. Notice how the Duke controls his guest’s every movement. What does this suggest about him?
2. How has the tone changed in these last few lines now we know of the Duchess’ fate?
3. The Duke points out a statue of Neptune ‘taming a sea-horse’. What are the connotations of the word ‘taming’ and how can you link it to the relationship between the Duke and the Duchess?
4. Why does the Duke mention *another* famous artist?

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| Activity #5 – Tier 2 Vocabulary |

*Spend no longer than ten minutes on this section. Complete the following activity on vocabulary that will come in useful when writing about ‘My Last Duchess’ in an essay.*

**The poem is centred around a hubristic Duke and his rising jealousy which stems from the way his Duchess acts around other men.**

**Use the term correctly in a sentence:**

**Write a new definition in your own words:**

**hubris**

*excessive pride or self-confidence*

**Write a question where the word is the answer:**

**Think of other words that mean the same thing (synonyms) and make a list below:**

**Drawn an icon/symbol to illustrate the key word:**

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| Activity #6 – YouTube Analysis |

*This activity is optional but if you are aiming for a grade 6 or above, you should complete it if you have access to the internet. Follow this link:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xdAHGOoQn4> *It will take you to a video by ‘Mr. Salles Teaches English’ on YouTube. The ideas he discusses are complex but will help you consider the ideas needed for grades 7-9. Make notes in the grid below on each section of the video. Completing this activity will take you over your 90 minute slot BUT to achieve those higher grades, you MUST push yourself! You do not have to watch the entire video.*



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| **Comments about the Duke** | **Comments about the Duchess** |
| **Comments about power** | **Other notes** |

*Summarise your notes from the video into four key points:*

**1.**

**2.**

**3.**

**4.**

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| Activity #7 – Themes  |

*Spend no longer than ten minutes on this section.*

**Themes:**

Consider the ‘big ideas’ explored in Robert Browning’s ‘My Last Duchess’. Tick the ones you think apply to the poem and briefly explain your choices below.

**Individual Experience**

**Identity**

**Negative Emotions - Pride**

**Negative Emotions - Fear**

**Negative Emotions - Guilt**

**Negative Emotions - Anger**

**Power of Humans**

**Power of Nature**

**Effects of Conflict**

**Reality of Conflict**

**Loss and Absence**

**Memory**

Briefly explain your choices in full sentences:

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| Answers |

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| Vocabulary |

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*Mark your answers to the vocabulary activity. Your definition does not need to be worded exactly as it is here but you should be able to tell whether you have the correct answer or not.*

CLARIFY TRICKY VOCABULARY

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| **Word** | **Add the definition** | **Read the word in context** | **What does the line mean?** |
| **mantle** | A shawl or cloak | ‘Her **mantle** laps over my lady’s wrist too much.’ | Her shawl is covering her wrist too much. |
| **flush** | Blushing | ‘Paint must never hope to reproduce the faint half-**flush** that dies along her throat.’ | Paint can never reproduce exactly how the Duchess blushes. |
| **officious** | Offering unwanted help | ‘The bough of cherries some **officious** fool broke in the orchard for her.’ | Someone offering help which was unwanted broke a branch of cherries in the orchard for the Duchess. |
| **trifling** | Insignificant or unimportant | ‘Who’d stoop to blame this sort of **trifling**?’ | Who would lower themselves to deal with something so insignificant. |
| **munificence** | Very generous | ‘I repeat, the Count your master’s known **munificence** is ample warrant.’ | Your master is very generous. |

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| Themes  |

*These are the FOUR main themes that ‘My Last Duchess’ relates to. If you ticked something else, ensure you correct it in your booklet and amend your written answer too.*



**Individual Experience**

**Identity**

**Negative Emotions - Pride**

**Negative Emotions - Fear**

**Negative Emotions - Guilt**

**Negative Emotions - Anger**

**Power of Humans**

**Power of Nature**

**Effects of Conflict**



**Reality of Conflict**



**Loss and Absence**



**Memory**