

REMOTE TRANSITION TASKS

Get A-Level Ready!

SKILL 1: READ FOR MEANING

This Extract is taken from Act IV, Scene 15 of Shakespeare's tragic play Antony and Cleopatra (1607).

Here, Cleopatra – with her political enemies closing in around her – receives the dying body of her lover Antony. She then decides to take her own life.

Read the extract through carefully and then answer the questions below. You don't need quotations for this initial activity. I have numbered the sections from the text wherein the answers can be sourced.

Cleopatra.

How now! is he dead?

Diomedes. His death's upon him, but not dead.

Look out o' the other side your monument;

His guard have brought him thither.

[Enter, below, MARK ANTONY, borne by the Guard]

Cleopatra. O sun,

Burn the great sphere thou movest in!

darkling stand

The varying shore o' the world. O Antony,

Antony, Antony! Help, Charmian, help, Iras, help;

Help, friends below; let's draw him hither.

Antony. Peace!

Not Caesar's valour hath o'erthrown Antony,

But Antony's hath triumph'd on itself.

1

Cleopatra. So it should be, that none but Antony

Should conquer Antony; but woe 'tis so!

2

Antony. I am dying, Egypt, dying; only

I here importune death awhile, until

Of many thousand kisses the poor last

I lay up thy lips.

3

Cleopatra. I dare not, dear,—

Dear my lord, pardon,—I dare not,

Lest I be taken: not the imperious show

Of the full-fortuned Caesar ever shall

Be brooch'd with me; if knife, drugs,

serpents, have

Edge, sting, or operation, I am safe:

Your wife Octavia, with her modest eyes

And still conclusion, shall acquire no honour

Demuring upon me. But come, come, Antony,—

4

5

Help me, my women,—we must draw thee up:
Assist, good friends.

Antony. O, quick, or I am gone.

Cleopatra. Here's sport indeed! How heavy weighs my lord!
Our strength is all gone into heaviness,
That makes the weight: had I great Juno's power,
The strong-wing'd Mercury should fetch thee up,
And set thee by Jove's side. Yet come a little,—
Wishes were ever fools,—O, come, come, come;
[They heave MARK ANTONY aloft to CLEOPATRA]
And welcome, welcome! die where thou hast lived:
Quicken with kissing: had my lips that power,
Thus would I wear them out.

All. A heavy sight!

Antony. I am dying, Egypt, dying:
Give me some wine, and let me speak a little.

Cleopatra. No, let me speak; and let me rail so high,
That the false housewife Fortune break her wheel,
Provoked by my offence.

Antony. One word, sweet queen:
Of Caesar seek your honour, with your safety. O!

Cleopatra. They do not go together.

Antony. Gentle, hear me:
None about Caesar trust but Proculeius.

Cleopatra. My resolution and my hands I'll trust;
None about Caesar.

Antony. The miserable change now at my end
Lament nor sorrow at; but please your thoughts
In feeding them with those my former fortunes
Wherein I lived, the greatest prince o' the world,
The noblest; and do now not basely die,
Not cowardly put off my helmet to
My countryman,—a Roman by a Roman
Valiantly vanquish'd. Now my spirit is going;
I can no more.

Cleopatra. Noblest of men, woo't die?
Hast thou no care of me? shall I abide
In this dull world, which in thy absence is
No better than a sty? O, see, my women,
[MARK ANTONY dies]
The crown o' the earth doth melt. My lord!
O, wither'd is the garland of the war,
The soldier's pole is fall'n: young boys and girls
Are level now with men; the odds is gone,

6

7

8

And there is nothing left remarkable
Beneath the visiting moon.

[Faints]

Charmian. O, quietness, lady!

Iras. She is dead too, our sovereign.

Charmian. O madam, madam, madam!

Iras. Royal Egypt, Empress!

Charmian. Peace, peace, Iras!

Cleopatra. No more, but e'en a woman, and commanded
By such poor passion as the maid that milks
And does the meanest chares. It were for me
To throw my sceptre at the injurious gods;
To tell them that this world did equal theirs
Till they had stol'n our jewel. All's but naught;
Patience is scottish, and impatience does
Become a dog that's mad: then is it sin
To rush into the secret house of death,
Ere death dare come to us? How do you, women?
What, what! good cheer! Why, how now, Charmian!
My noble girls! Ah, women, women, look,
Our lamp is spent, it's out! Good sirs, take heart:
We'll bury him; and then, what's brave,
what's noble,
Let's do it after the high Roman fashion,
And make death proud to take us. Come, away:
This case of that huge spirit now is cold:
Ah, women, women! come; we have no friend
But resolution, and the briefest end.

9

[Exeunt; those above bearing off MARK ANTONY's body]

1. Who does Antony blame for his death?

2. How does Cleopatra feel about his death?

3. How does Antony view Cleopatra?

4. Why will Cleopatra not go to meet Antony as he dies?

5. Cleopatra desires safety from what circumstance? What does she not desire to happen?

6. How does Cleopatra behave in front of her dying lover and before her servants?

7. How does Antony wish for his life to be remembered?

8. How does Cleopatra see the world with Antony gone?

9. What is Cleopatra's attitude to her own death?

10. As a director, what dramaturgical issue would you have to consider during this scene?

SKILL 3: DISCUSS CONTEXT

Research and note down four conventions of tragic plays	How are they manifested in the extract from Cleopatra?

SKILL 4: COMPARE TEXTS

This poem was written by Robert Browning in 1864 following the death of his beloved wife. The title roughly translates as 'looking forward'. In the poem he ruminates on his view of death.

Prospice

Fear death?—to feel the fog in my throat,
The mist in my face,
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote
I am nearing the place,
The power of the night, the press of the storm,
The post of the foe;
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,

Yet the strong man must go:
For the journey is done and the summit attained,
And the barriers fall,
Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,
The reward of it all.
I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,
The best and the last!
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes and forbore,
And bade me creep past.
No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers
The heroes of old,
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
Of pain, darkness and cold.
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minute's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest!

Compare Browning's attitude to death in his poem with either Antony or Cleopatra's attitude to death in the extract from Shakespeare's play.

You're only writing one paragraph, so be concise and selective – what is your most perceptive comparison? Make sure you use evidence to support your views.

READING LOG

KEEP A LOG OF THE BOOKS YOU HAVE BEEN READING THIS SUMMER...

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