

Der gute Mensch von Sezuan

Brief synopsis of the book 'Fundbüro' by Siegfried Lenz

This is one of Brecht's major plays, and it poses the question of whether it is possible to be a morally good person in an immoral, corrupt world. The play shows the influence of oriental theatre on Brecht, and is set in the southwestern Chinese province of Szechwan.

The main character is Shen Te and her alter ego Shui Ta (both the same character). When three gods leave their celestial home and come to Earth in search of a good person, they conclude they have found one in the prostitute Shen Te. Her hospitality towards them and her general kindness makes them believe their mission has been successful. However Shen Te is too generous towards others and risks losing her newly acquired business. To help herself she reinvents herself in the shape of Shui Ta, her "cousin". He is in many respects the opposite of her as a hard-hearted business man.

The play was finished in 1943, and although over half a century old, is still of contemporary relevance due to its political and moral themes. As a mid-20th century play written by a hugely influential playwright (both in Germany and internationally) and still performed today this text fits into the second part of Theme 2 in the WJEC specification. Activities are furthermore designed to cover A04, where students are expected to: "Show knowledge and understanding of, and respond critically and analytically to, different aspects of the culture and society of countries/communities where the language is spoken"

When page references are used they apply to the Methuen's edition, 20th Century Texts.

Please note that the information contained in the second column "Suggested uses" in the grid below is in many cases applicable to more than one of the activities.

On theme – Resources were made and adapted to help students come to a greater appreciation of the main themes of this work, and to enable them to understand how short reviews are written. As such all three of the tasks should be treated holistically. Students will have opportunities across the tasks to build up their vocabulary and develop their ideas which it is hoped will culminate in the final task, where students will write their own review.

Der gute Mensch von Sezuan

	Description of activity and suggested uses	Skills covered
Activity 1	<p>In the text of this review there are a number of gaps, which can be filled by dragging and dropping words from the word list below it. Students could do this on an individual basis and a score is given at the end.</p> <p>As an extension activity students could translate the review into English. Alternatively/ Additionally students could search for other short reviews online.</p>	<p>This exercise involves reading skills, and is based on a customer review of the book in German.</p> <p>Skills involved in the extension activities include translation and research skills. Throughout students have opportunities to develop their vocabulary, which they can use in Activity three.</p>
Activity 2	<p>As above students could tackle this on their own or in small groups. They have to translate a “mixed” review (i.e. the review contains both positive and negative comments) from German into English. Afterwards they could compare their translation with translations by other class members and/or the pop up solution (in English). This could lead to a productive class discussion on translation technique.</p>	<p>This exercise involves reading and translation skills. Students have further opportunities to develop their vocabulary, for use in Activity three.</p>
Activity 3	<p>For this Activity students have to read two (positive) reviews of the play, with a view to writing their own. These reviews are designed to complement the previous reviews in activities one and two.</p> <p>Before writing their own review, students should be carefully prepared by teachers. Initially that would probably involve reading and thoroughly understanding the two model reviews. Thereafter students could discuss the relative strengths and weaknesses of the reviews. They could also discuss language (phrases/ words) that they might use in their own reviews. At the teacher's discretion, students could then write their own, which they could subsequently present to the class.</p>	<p>This activity involves reading and writing skills. Depending on how the teacher approaches this, collaborative skills and reviewing skills could also be developed.</p>