Introduction

Areas for research:
1. Shakespeare (the man)
2. Shakespeare’s theatre
3. Shakespeare’s society
   - Gods
   - King (representative of God – rules by divine right)
   - Society
   - Women in Shakespeare’s society – it is necessary to understand their position in order to sensibly read MfM. Explore the idea of ‘silence as virtue’ very evident in the character of Isabella.
4. Biblical background – difference between new and old testament morality?
   Contrast the old testament ideas of revenge, an eye for an eye, and the new testament notions of forgiveness.
   - Exodus 21: 23-25
   - Leviticus 24: 17-20
   - Deuteronomy 19:21
   - Matthew 5: 38-39
   - Matthew 7: 1-2
   - The Sermon on the Mount:
     ‘Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you’
   (Matt.7:1-2)
5. Reading plays

I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.

(Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*)

Reinforce the idea of the play as *performance* text, mediated by the director.
NB – Shakespeare’s works are open – lacking in specific stage directions, so available for multiple readings.

6. Sources of Measure for Measure

Explore the idea that Shakespeare took his ideas for stories from various sources.

Claude Rouillet Philanira (1556)
Giraldi Hecatommithi (collection of tales) translated by Gabriel Chappuys into French in 1584
George Whetstone Promos and Cassandra pub. 1578 – principal source
Thomas Lupton Siuquila (1581)
7. Measure for Measure: What kind of play is it?  
(problem play / tragicomedy / satire / allegory / morality)

**Tragedy?** A serious play representing the disastrous downfall of a central character, usually concluding with the protagonist’s death. Usually depends on our awareness of hero’s good qualities. Comedy – a play written chiefly to amuse audience by appealing to a sense of superiority over characters. Usually explores common human failings rather than tragedy’s disastrous crimes. Usually ends happily.

**Tragicomedy?** Lacking death for tragedy, but close enough to death? Uses comic devices of disguise, mistaken identity, complex intrigue and surprise ending. The good should not suffer or cause suffering. Tragicomedy = great persons but not actions, dangers but not death, modest amusement etc. (Guarini)

**Problem play** as concerned with a:  
- moral problem which is central to it, presented in such a a manner that we are unsure of our moral bearings, so that uncertain and divided responses to it in the minds of the audience are possible or even probable.

R. W Chambers

**Satire**: a mode of writing that exposes the failings of individuals, institutions, or societies to ridicule and scorn. Its tone may vary from tolerant amusement, to bitter indignation.

**Allegory**: a story or visual image with a second distinct meaning partially hidden behind its literal or visible meaning. Allegory involves a continuous parallel between two or more levels of meaning in a story, so that its persons and events correspond to their equivalents in a system of ideas or a chain of events external to the tale.

**Morality**: a kind of religious drama popular in Europe in the 15th and early 16th centuries. They are dramatised allegories, in which personified virtues, vices, diseases, and temptations struggle for the soul of Man as he travels from birth to death. They instil a simple message of Christian salvation, but often include comic scenes.

8. Themes in Measure for Measure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Law</strong></td>
<td>justice &amp; mercy / privilege – Christian forgiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duke as absent, higher authority – becomes omnipresent through disguise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desire</strong></td>
<td>– transgression &amp; surveillance / nature. Explicit discussion of sexuality, fornication, seduction, prostitution and unbridled sexual passion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>desire subverting social order – as anarchy – near tragic conflict between anarchy and order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creation &amp; death</strong></td>
<td>Juliet as image of female sexuality, fecundity to be punished by death of Claudio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speaking with the body or the voice</strong></td>
<td>Bodies as exchange – tit for tat – Ragozine’s head for Claudio’s, Mariana’s body for Isabella’s, Isabella’s for Claudio’s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>