The White Devil is an example of a revenge tragedy, a dramatic genre which became very popular in the Jacobean period (1603-1625).

Research task

Research the plots of three or four other revenge tragedies. You could look at:

- *The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd (c.1590)
- *The Revenger’s Tragedy* by Thomas Middleton (1606)
- *Women Beware Women* by Thomas Middleton (c.1623)
- *The Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster (c.1613)
- *The Changeling* by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley (1622)
- *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare (c.1600)
- *Titus Andronicus* by William Shakespeare (c.1590).

Use your research to work out key features of the revenge tragedy genre. You should consider:

- setting
- plot
- character.

Pre-reading activity

Look at the *dramatis personae* for *The White Devil*.

a) What impression do they give you of the social context of the play’s action?

b) How can you see aspects of the revenge tragedy genre reflected in the *dramatis personae*?

c) What predictions can you make about the plot of the play from the character list?

Start reading

Read Scene 1, where Webster establishes the atmosphere of the play and the character of Lodovico. Consider the questions below.

1) How does Webster create an atmosphere of moral corruption in this scene?

2) What is the justification that Lodovico gives us for his desire for revenge?

3) How does Gasparo present the law (the accepted social structure for punishing wrongdoers)?

4) Locate images of:

   - violence
   - a contrast between appearance and reality
   - fate and fortune.

Essay question

How far does the opening of *The White Devil* adhere to the conventions of the revenge tragedy genre?