



## **Macbeth and Issues of Gender**

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by Deborah Samuel

William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is both the author's shortest and bloodiest play. It is therefore a natural choice for high school students. Plays are meant to be performed and not merely read, as is usually the case in the high school classroom. Therefore, it is a happy occurrence that instructors may now use video recordings, audio recordings, and DVDs to bring the performance element into the classroom. But performance on film was not Shakespeare's medium. On stage, the audience gets to look where it wants. The actors get to say their lines without fear of winding up on the cutting floor. When we switch from a play to a film, the director is king, and we now have possibly quite a different experience.

The artistry of cinema and the difficult task of taking a stage play and reinterpreting it for a different medium offer students and teachers a plethora of interesting, and sometimes controversial choices to examine. The intention of this curriculum unit is to examine four screen adaptations of *Macbeth* and to use them to enrich the classroom discussion of *Macbeth*. These adaptations include Orson Welles' *Macbeth* (1948), Akira Kurasawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957), Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971), and *Men of Respect* (1990). Each director has his own approach, visible in camera angles, lighting, sound, casting, omission and inclusion of Shakespeare's lines, and the addition of scenes never written by Shakespeare. We will examine *Macbeth* through the questions it raises about the nature of men and women. How are the witches and Lady Macbeth depicted? Who do they cast? How are they dressed? How do they sound and move? Students will view selected scenes of the women in *Macbeth* to enrich their discussions of Shakespeare's apparent attitudes. What is Shakespeare's original intent, and do the directors aim to be faithful to this, or do they alter the meaning of the play as written to suit a contemporary audience or personal point of view? Extensive background information as well as lesson plans meant to address these issues in the classroom are included.

(Developed for AP English Literature and Composition, grade 12; recommended for English, grade 12)

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