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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2009 Volume III: Shakespeare and Human Character

"Life's But a Poor Player:" Macbeth and Performing Ourselves

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by Aleco Julius

Shakespeare's great tragedy *Macbeth* is a very appealing work for young people to study. It involves ambition, deceit, violence, and elements of the supernatural, while posing questions and problems that young people will be eager to discuss and connect to. This curriculum unit presents a framework for which to study this remarkable play, called the Performance Triangle. This threefold paradigm is a graphic representation of what Shakespeare makes us aware of in his work: the complex concept of performance. First, there is the everyday performance of the self that each reader/audience member engages in. Secondly, there is the performance of the actor, who must take on a role while interpreting the text. Lastly, there are the performances of the characters within the play, who present their own multiple selves to the other characters.

Through close reading strategies such as staged readings, annotation, and guided discussion, students will use this performance triangle to come to an understanding of how Shakespeare comments on the multifaceted concept of performance— in the play and in our own lives. The unit also includes intensive writing, culminating in an essay that draws upon the entire unit's study of *Macbeth*.

(Developed for AP Literature and Composition, grade 12; recommended for AP Literature and Composition, grade 12, and World Literature and British Literature, grade 11)

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