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Shakespeare's Characters: A Visual Analysis

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Introduction

Why teach Shakespeare? Each year and in each class students bemoan the idea of having to read Shakespeare. Their perception of the plays and sonnets is that they are written in an ancient language no longer spoken, much less understood. So what is the point? My answer is a standard one: that the stories and drama of life do not change even though the language may seem different, and the lessons we learn from them are just as important now as they were then. I also aspire to reinforce the fact that the plots, characters, language, and even complete speeches are often alluded to in many other great works. If the students have never been exposed to *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, how can they understand an allusion to the famous balcony scene?

Capital High School in Santa Fe, New Mexico consists of a majority of Hispanic and Mexican immigrant students. We have many English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at the school but the majority of the students are in regular education. The number of Advanced Placement courses offered grows yearly. At least one Shakespearean drama is required in each class level of English at Capital High School as part of our standard curriculum. Some faculty members are as apprehensive of Shakespeare as the students; unfortunately, that comes across in their teaching. I sympathize because I know what it is like to be forced to teach a text that I don't particularly like. The students recognize that loathing and they respond with a reluctance to learn. I, on the other hand, truly appreciate sharing the literary complexity and genius of Shakespeare. Each time I prepare to teach a Shakespearean drama, it is like learning it from a whole new perspective. Reading the plays with each new class brings a whole new perspective to the plays as well, because as the students become familiar with the language, they add their own opinions and analysis, which is beneficial to all.

The courses I teach are junior and senior literature. The variety of literature in these classes is endless. I try to teach something new each year to keep my curriculum current and exciting. In addition to my regular education courses, I also teach Advanced Placement (AP) English Literature and Composition and AP Language and Composition. These courses are offered to junior and senior level students. The curricula for these courses follow the standard curricula at CHS with the addition of preparation for the Advanced Placement Exams taken in May. Students can receive college credit for classes if they score above a three on the one-five scale. In addition, many colleges base admission on the scores of the AP exams. Shakespearean analysis is an essential

skill for the AP students; they must be able to analyze how the author creates meaning through the use of literary strategies.

The visual aspect of this project is of great value. When students are asked to compose a written character analysis, they tend to confine themselves to a formulaic paragraph format: they find three examples and stay fixed there. I want them to explore the entire character and to find everything they possibly can. If the students are looking for all the major aspects of the character to create a complete portrait, they will undoubtedly create a complete analysis. As a bonus, the presentation of these portraits will also help the remainder of the students to develop their understanding of characters they did not analyze themselves.

Objectives

The main objective of this unit is to analyze characters in plays written by William Shakespeare. To this end, the students will need to recognize and analyze methods of characterization through identifying physical attributes, symbols, motivation, important lines, internal and external perspective, the figurative language used to develop the character and the major psychological shift in the character. We will apply close reading analysis skills. The final assessment will be a formal essay analyzing three characters from *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. The students will be able to form an analysis explaining how Shakespeare's characterization relates to the meaning of the work as a whole.

The Unit

The students will read three plays by Shakespeare: *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*. The students will choose from the major characters in each of the plays to create six visual analyses by the end of the unit: two characters from each play: at least two females and two males. The other two characters may be any of the main characters from the plays. The plays will be assigned for reading outside of class while some close readings will be done in class. I believe in starting with the end in mind when it comes to curriculum units. The students will be given the essay topic before they begin the portraits. Shakespeare's plays, whether tragedy or comedy, introduce characters that are complex, calculating and, on any account, three-dimensional. These characters drive the action and the plot of the play, hence a grasp of characterization is necessary to understand what happens. The following prompt will be given to the students: "Write an essay in which you analyze three characters from each of the plays we have read. Be sure to emphasize the most important of these attributes of character: physical, symbolic, motivational, language, perspective, and psychological shift. Interpret these attributes to explain how they relate to the meaning of the work as a whole." This essay is not a compare and contrast but rather an analysis of how Shakespeare creates characters and equips them with the necessities for driving the action of the play.

The visual portraits of specific characters from each of the plays will be an analysis of the characters with emphasis on physical attributes, symbols relating to the character, motivation, important lines, internal and external perspective, and figurative language used to develop the character. A major part of the analysis is the identification of the psychological shift the character undergoes (if indeed the character changes);

however, depicting that change in a visual portrait is a difficult task. I will offer the students bonus points on the project if they can show that change. Otherwise, the psychological shift does not need to be included in the portrait but we will discuss the changes in class and the students may use that analysis in their essays. The elements of the analysis will be represented on the body with placement of the symbolic and textual attributes in the appropriate places on the figure itself.

Physical attributes, such as the heart of the character, should be drawn with attention to how the character represents their own heart. Desdemona's heart, from *Othello*, might be drawn in a locked box with Othello's name on it representing her fidelity to him. Iago's tongue might be drawn as forked since it is with his words that he poisons Othello's thoughts. Roderigo may be shown to be lacking a spine because he seems to have no will of his own when he follows Iago's orders like a puppet. Someone with an overblown ego like Petruchio, from *The Taming of the Shrew*, might be drawn with an exaggeratedly large head.

Symbols are the objects and colors representing abstract aspects or themes of the character. Lady Macbeth and Othello might be outlined in green representing envy or jealousy. Iago's disembodied heart might be colored black and shown as shriveled or very small in comparison to his body size. The handkerchief that Othello gives to Desdemona is the major symbol in the play *Othello*. This article provides the seeming "ocular proof" that Othello believes reveals Desdemona's infidelity. Students should include this symbol in the portraits of either Othello or Desdemona; perhaps as falling from Desdemona's hand or stuffed in Othello's heart or mind.

The motivation of a character can be demonstrated through symbols and words. Students can place symbols and text within the portrait to denote motivation. Iago's envy of Cassio, and thus one motive for his diabolical deeds, might be displayed as drawing his rank insignia and coloring it green. Macbeth's motive for killing Duncan would be the receiving of the crown; therefore a green crown denoting envy might be placed on his head. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Petruchio explains that his motivation is to "come to wive it wealthily in Padua;" (1.2.74). These lines could be written on Petruchio's portrait in his brain or maybe where his heart should be. The lines then serve to represent motive but also as part of the important line requirement in the project.

Important lines should be placed on or around the body where appropriate, as in the commonly classroom activity "The Body Biography"¹. Characters can often be defined by their words, and attributing the words to a place on the body is an indicator of higher level thinking. Lady Macbeth's famous line "Out, damned spot!" (5.1.38) might actually be written in red on her hands. Othello's line, "one that loved not wisely, but too well;" (5.2.340) could be written within his heart.

The perspective through which a character is seen is crucial to the development of character. Other characters in the play may see the individual as a completely different person from the way in which the character sees himself/herself. The distinctness between internal and external perspective can be of great significance to the development of the play. For example, Iago and others too use the word "honest" to describe him numerous times throughout *Othello*. The problem is that Iago is anything but honest. His depiction might entail two drawings; one in which he is smiling and appearing "honest" and another with a face revealing his diabolical nature (perhaps horns?). *The Taming of the Shrew* also offers valuable insight into perspective for this unit. The themes include perception of the self, how others perceive the individual, and how change—either forced or internally driven—occurs in the character. The students may choose to create two drawings of these characters to show double perspective, or they may draw a sort of mask that can be lifted to show the internal beneath the external perspective.

Shakespeare's use of figurative language and poetic devices, such as rhyme and meter, reveals important information about his characters. Othello, for instance, often speaks in eloquent verse even though he does not think of himself as well-spoken and others consider him barbaric. Petruccio's language is exaggeratedly poetic at times, while at other times forthright and rude, a range of speech that reveals his flamboyance.

The question of change in a character is important for many reasons. If a psychological shift occurs in a character, it is usually a major breakthrough and a turning point in the plot structure of the play. The depiction of this change or shift in the portrait will be difficult. For this reason I have decided that this part of the portrait will not be required but a bonus option. I do want the students to locate and analyze change as it occurs in the plays, so they will need to discuss it in their defense paragraph (as discussed below). The point when Othello realizes that he has been a victim of Iago's malicious plot, for instance, is of major consequence because he has already killed Desdemona, and he can't fix that. His remorse is great. The students may choose to draw the character as he looks at the particular moment the shift occurs, though again, this challenge is not a mandatory part of the visual assignment.

Upon completion, the portrait will be presented to the class and teacher and the attributes of character it represents will be explained. A paragraph or two in defense of the portrait will be required. This paper will include textual support of the choices that were used in the portrait. It can be a guide in the final character analysis essay. If the student has done the background work in making this portrait, then all of the elements necessary for the essay will be done. All the student need do at this point is organize and write the essay.

Shakespearean dramas provide a unique view of societal functions such as gender, race, and politics as well as the universal themes of love, loyalty, honor, and betrayal. An analysis of these functions and themes as invested in the characters of the dramas must begin with a study of the context and historical setting of the drama. To understand the inner workings of Shakespearean characters, one must understand some aspects of the time period in which the plays were written. Shakespeare wrote his plays between the years 1588-1613. The early part of this era is known as the Elizabethan Age. The later part is known as Jacobean. Children of particular classes were educated in the classics, and some in higher classes went on to study in colleges and universities. Travels to Europe were taken as a vacation by the wealthy, or to work, but most did not travel. The "Grand Tour" was very rare this early. Ambassadors, scholars, and artist wanderers were the likeliest to go abroad. In fact, the majority in the Globe Theater's audience had probably never traveled abroad. Therefore, the re-creation on the stage of other cities and countries with characters from distant lands must have been quite amazing for the groundlings - those who paid a penny to stand in front of the stage as opposed to having a seat - as would the scenes of court and the routines of kings and queens. For the remainder of the audience, those who had paid more than a penny, these tales echoed a certain more familiar reality that was deeply entertaining and riveting. Plays were also staged at court for the benefit of Queen Elizabeth I. Later plays written by Shakespeare were seen by King James I in much the same manner.

We also need to be aware of setting for the analysis of characters. Again, travels abroad were not commonplace for all, so the dramatization of events occurring in Italy would have been a sort of "vacation" for the audience. In a setting that was foreign to his audience, Shakespeare could get away with tales that were fantastical, surreal, decadent, and outlandish. Many of the comedies consist of noble young people running around causing mischief without a care in the world. Several of the tragedies reveal the inner mechanics of a castle and its inhabitants - also running around and causing mischief, but usually ending in murder and much bloodshed. The audience is again transported to another world. The three plays we will read for this unit provide these "vacations" for their audiences. *Othello* reveals the inner workings of a military installation, *Macbeth* takes the audience to a faraway castle where a murderous/treasonous plot is hatched, and *The*

Taming of the Shrew places the audience in decadent Italy where youngsters run about causing mischief.

Othello lends itself to this analysis, as its central character is of an exotic race and the setting of the play is for the most part in Cyprus, a military stronghold of Venice. Othello ultimately goes mad and murders his wife. Othello's loss of control is attributed to his unfounded belief that his wife is unfaithful. The supposed act of betrayal functions as a form of humiliation for Othello who, as a General and a man of power, is habituated to using violence to secure his power. Othello is a Moor, an outsider, an exotic man who is very different from the race of the general audience of this time. The fact that Othello is a converted Christian and of a different race than the others is, at times, used against him, as others feel he is practiced in the arts of magic and witchcraft. The antagonist of the play, Iago, is a Venetian, and Cassio – the man believed to be having the affair with Othello's wife – is a Florentine. Iago feels Othello has cheated him out of his position as lieutenant, and his vow of revenge provides the major conflict of the play. Race plays an important role in his vengeful scheme, as he calls attention to the possibility that Othello's barbarism might at any moment resurface. Othello falls victim to this villainous plot, and his return to barbarism in the act of murdering Desdemona is foreshadowed when he says, "when I love thee not,/ Chaos is come again." (3.3.91-92) A portrait analysis of Othello should contain references to his moral shifts in the play: from a man who displays strong discipline and self-control to being helplessly out of control. In reference to external perspective, or how other characters in the play see him, the portrait of Othello would contain symbols of the occult, magic, or witchcraft. However, not all of the characters see him as evil. In fact, the references to Othello being black, evil, or barbaric are few.

Although *Othello* contains few female characters, their strong characteristics are worthy of deep analysis. The character of Desdemona, Othello's wife, performs two functions in the play. Symbolically, she represents pure love, compassion for all, and honesty. As a character, Desdemona is the balance factor for her polar opposite, Iago, who represents hate, self-centeredness, and dishonesty. Emilia, Iago's wife, performs the role of unwitting participant in his evil plot. The relationship between Iago and Emilia does not seem a loving one. She tries to do his bidding in order to gain his attention and affection; and even then she thinks twice, but it is too late. There is no indication that Iago shows his wife any true affection. Iago's low opinion of women (2.1.108-111) and Emilia's revelation that she would "venture purgatory" and "make her husband a cuckold to make him a monarch" (4.3.78-79) shows that she resembles her husband in her pragmatism, if in nothing else make the two of them a rather fine pair. Emilia changes significantly when she realizes that she has unwittingly played a part in the murder of Desdemona in Act 5, scene 2. Her portrait might reveal her misplaced loyalty to Iago through the writing of his name in her heart or a smiling, handsome picture of him in her head. The portrait of Desdemona would not represent a moral/psychological shift as would Othello's, because she does change significantly. Desdemona's portrait should also contain Othello's distorted view of her faithfulness as well as her true virtue.

Iago's portrait will be a complicated one. When we first encounter him he is moaning about not becoming Othello's lieutenant. He convinces Roderigo to call up to Desdemona's father and to tell him that she "hath made a gross revolt," (1.1.131) by running off with Othello. Iago's words are much more base than Roderigo's, as he is hidden from view screaming out vulgarities about what has occurred. Thus, at the very beginning of the play, Iago shows his true self as a vulgar, manipulative calculator. Iago explains his views about the freedom of the will to Roderigo, how "we have reason to cool our raging motions" (1.3.325-326) and how much fun it will be to "cuckold" the Moor, all the while charging him to make a lot of money to impress Desdemona. Iago's plan is in the works and he will stop at nothing to see it done.

Macbeth is a tragedy where the setting is a remote castle and the audience bears witness to the plan that

takes the life of the king at the hands of his host and hostess. The castle is in Scotland, where feudal relations continued in Shakespeare's time to be a direct threat to the government of England. According Sylvan Barnet, among others, the history is that the play was written to please King James I, the son of Mary Queen of Scots, Mary Stuart. The Stuarts claim to be the heirs of Banquo, a character killed by Macbeth. The Witches tell Macbeth and Banquo in Act 1 scene 3 that Macbeth will be king but that Banquo's children will be kings. They say that Banquo will be "Lesser than Macbeth, and greater." (1.3.65) Macbeth writes a letter to his wife explaining the strange events, whereupon she decides that they should kill the King and take his crown based on the belief that they can rule if they just eliminate Duncan. Unfortunately for them, fate has other plans for them. Macbeth must murder many others, including Banquo, to protect his rule. The inner workings of court provide the backdrop for this play. We see the head of the house, Lady Macbeth, make plans to receive her guests. This is a rather ordinary task in a noble house. What we also see is the plan to kill the king as it is conceived. Events thereafter tell of secrecy, murder, and madness. Macbeth, who truly believes he is meant to be king, kills Duncan, then Banquo, and then is haunted by the ghost of Banquo. The descent into madness for Lady Macbeth is a fascinating study. Lady Macbeth is haunted by the image of blood on her hands representing the murder of the king in her house for which she is responsible. She ultimately goes mad and kills herself. Macbeth by this time seems unaffected by much of the doom and destruction around him. His reaction to the suicide of his wife—"She should have died hereafter;" (5.5.17)— reveals an almost passive acceptance of her death. The speech that follows, "Tomorrow, and tomorrow and tomorrow..." shows Macbeth's belief that humans only live to perform certain functions; and when that role is complete, we die. This notion is reinforced in Macbeth's ultimate realization that he is doomed to die when he learns that he is not invincible as he thought. True to his character, he does not yield; he goes out fighting. The symbolism of the witchcraft and occult images can be the motivation for the characters' actions as well as their ultimate doom. It is interesting to note that King James I wrote a book on the occult called *Daemonologie* of which Shakespeare was aware. Much of the occult imagery in the play can be attributed to the idea that the play was written to please King James I.

Now we get to the comedy. *The Taming of the Shrew* is a whimsical comedy in which the characters are lively and deep. The play is preceded by the English story of Christopher Sly, who is fooled into believing he is the lord of a grand house when in reality he is a simple drunken tinker. The actual lord of the house decides to play a prank on Sly by dressing him in the costume of a man of fortune and convincing him that he has been "infused with so foul a spirit!" (Ind.2.16) that has made him leave his house and believe he is a peasant drunkard for fifteen years. The main play commences when players arrive at the lord's house. The play they perform is the tale of Katherine, the shrew, and her suitor Petruchio who is determined to "cure" her of her shrewishness. The perception of Katherine in Act One is that she is "stark mad or wonderful froward." Her father Baptista will not allow her much-desired younger sister Bianca to marry until he has found a husband for Kate. The young men of Padua devise many plans to woo Bianca but have no idea what to do with Kate until the arrival of Petruchio. Here is a man who knows exactly what he wants: a wealthy wife. He cares not if she is "foul" or "moves [him] not." He claims he "come[s] to wive it wealthily in Padua;/ If wealthily, then happily in Padua." (1.2.74-75) It seems that Kate would rather punch Petruchio for his presumptuousness than marry him. Nevertheless, she appears at the church and is driven to tears when he does not appear on time. Meanwhile, the character of Bianca is revealed as she deftly sorts out the suitors who are pretending to be her tutors or continuing to play themselves. By the time she joins the Widow in refusing to come when her husband sends for her in the fifth act, it seems that Bianca may actually be the shrew. The critic Harold Bloom suggests, in *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, that Petruchio is ultimately the one who is tamed. He torments Kate after their wedding in an attempt to "tame" her. It is through her wits that she figures out how to convince him that he has won - she tells him what he wants to hear. She then explains the roles of the

husband and wife in exactly the terms and circumstances that fit the time and setting of the play. Petruchio believes he has succeeded in his task of "taming" her and we are to suppose that the two live happily ever after. The characters in this play are as colorful and whimsical as the characters in *Macbeth* are dark and heavy. The portraits the students will create should be great.

Strategies

This unit will take approximately six weeks, giving two weeks for each play. I will begin by assigning the reading pace: a closely followed calendar of deadlines for the readings. The writing that will go along with the reading will be in the form of what I call a Dialectical Journal. The students should have their focus from the outset because they already have the final essay question. Because our focus is on character, the students will keep a running journal in which they record important lines revealing the attributes of character on one side of the page and analyze the lines on the other side. The number of entries for each play is determined by the play's length. This journal will be worth many points, as it will serve to aide them in their essay writing. Also, it is a good way of gauging whether they are keeping up with the reading.

The reading will be done outside class time as homework assignments. I will give one to two days to read each act, depending on the length of the act. A series of quizzes will be given on the due dates of each reading section. As the students enter the room, they will see a question on the board which they will have five minutes to answer (yes, I will keep time). The questions will focus on something that they should have read for that day, and they will be allowed to use their books. Because of the time limit, they do not have time to frantically read the passages and "fake it", but the book will be there to help if they need a reminder. These quizzes will not be simple "find it in the text" questions but higher-level thinking questions. I have included some examples of these questions in an appendix.

Classroom Activities

The assignment page will be given to the students before the reading of the plays commences. I will go over the assignment, answering any questions. I will also show some examples: things I have drawn or work from previous years when I did a similar project with other subject matter. After the first time doing this unit, I will have many student examples to show. I would caution against showing too many examples because the students' creativity in their own portraits may be stunted as a result. Then we will take a character with which we are all familiar - a character from a fairy tale or a superhero maybe - and do a quick portrait as a whole class. I will be sure to include all the points the students will need to bring out in their own portraits.

Another facet of this unit will be the writing of Dialectical Journals². Dialectical Journals provide an easy and interesting method to help students write succinctly while developing their own voice. "Dialectical" suggests the art of discourse - and that is the skill they will be developing - talking "to" and about the text. The students will prepare these journals after each act of each play. They will choose a character to discuss in these journals and, preferably, that will also be the character they choose to analyze for the project. However, they may change their chosen character at any time throughout the reading of the play. The students will be

familiar with this style of journal writing because I use it throughout the class in many different forms, so the actual explanation of how to write the journal does not have to take place during this unit. I will go over the changes in format that are necessary to adapt the journal to the plays. I will also spend some time modeling one entry, using the first act of *Macbeth*, but I will choose a lesser character like the witches. In this exercise, I will ask students to provide the summary of the plot of the first act, scene one. Then I will ask the students why Shakespeare chose to open the play with the witches. At this point, the students will have read Act One and should understand what the witches have told Macbeth. So, how does this technique of characterization enhance the meaning of the play? How would the action of the first act be different if there were no witches? Because characters drive the action of the play and cause the conflict, we must assume that the witches are there to externalize the irrationality and inhumanity of Macbeth's temptation. Then the students will choose one of the journal strategies and write a paragraph following the directions given³.

Once the Dialectical Journals have been explained, passages relating to characterization will be selected for close reading and analysis. We will begin the class with a quick read of the passages and then turn to discussion. I use the Socratic Seminar method for discussion. Mainly, that leaves the discussion and analysis to the students with little prodding by the teacher. This method, when taught to the students and used correctly, is very effective in actively engaging the students in analysis and interpretation of the work. The idea is that the teacher, as guide instead of teacher, does not allow for a series of yes/no questions; nor does the process allow for lecture. This idea does allow the students to pass around their thoughts and struggle with the language in the passage being studied. There are many useful websites defining and outlining this process. I like to use poker chips for the first few seminars as "speaking tokens". Some students like to dominate the discussion while others choose not to participate. I give three tokens to each student and allow them only that many times to interject. Of course, I do not hold fast to the rule and some students beg, borrow, and steal others' tokens when they have something they need to say. In the end I find that keeping score works well. I sit with a seating chart in front of me and put check marks on the student's name each time he/she speaks. Those who have not spoken yet towards the end of the seminar are encouraged to do so. The grade for this is part of their participation grade and can mean the decision of bumping up a borderline grade or the offer of extra credit if needed.

Only minimal time will be given for the actual illustration work in class. The students will need to work on their drawings for homework. A presentation of each poster will be given at the end of each play and the other students will need to take notes as the portraits are being presented. The defense paragraphs will be due at the time of the presentations. I will grade those for the same information as the drawings as well as textual evidence in support of the choices made for the selection of detail⁴.

The presentations will be done in front of the class as a benefit to the other students. The audience will take notes on the characters and they will be able to use these notes when writing the final essay. The portraits will be hung on the wall and their order will decide the order of the presentations. While the presentations are being given, I will grade the posters, using a pre-designed rubric⁵. I will give this rubric to the students along with the assignment paper so that they will know what exactly is expected of them.

The timed writing will be done at the end of the unit, during one class period (our classes run for 59 minutes). The students will have the entire class period to write and the essay will be due at the end of the hour. The essay will be scored based on the nine point Advanced Placement rubric⁶. I use this rubric for all essays with slight modifications for content, so the students are aware of the language in the rubric. I have created a rubric for this essay and included it in the appendices. I copy the rubric for each essay and highlight the elements that are found in the essay. I then decide which number to assign as the grade. Because I use a

point scale for my grade book, each number on the rubric represents a percentage based on the amount of points assigned to the essay. This particular essay will be worth 200 points.

Notes

1 The Body Biography is an activity that encourages the students to find quotes by the characters and distinguish them between actions and thoughts. The quotes are placed on a drawing of the body: action quotes on limbs and thought quotes in the head area.

2 See Appendix 4.

3 See Appendix 4.

4 See Appendix 1.

5 See Appendix 2.

6 See Appendix 5.

Resources - Reading lists for teachers and students

Adelman, Janet. 1992. *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in*

Shakespeare's Plays.

New York: Routledge

Bloom, Harold. 1998. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*

New York: Penguin Group.

This book contains essays on every play in the Shakespearean canon. The essays are excellent for students and teachers as a study in literary criticism.

Bradley, A.C. 2004. *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear,*

and Macbeth.

London: Kessinger Publishing.

McCarthy, Mary. June 1962. "General Macbeth," in *Harper's Magazine.*

New York: Harper's Magazine, Co.

Neill, Michael, 1989 "Unproper Beds: Race, Adultery, and the Hideous in Othello,"

In *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40.

New York: Folger Shakespeare Library Press.

Shakespeare, William. 1998. *The Tragedy of Macbeth*.

New York: Penguin Group.

_____. 1998. *The Tragedy of Othello The Moor of Venice*

New York: Penguin Group

_____. 1998. *The Taming of the Shrew*.

New York: Penguin Group.

I recommend the Signet Editions of the plays for the Advanced Placement classes because they contain background information as well as critical essays on each of the plays.

Sprengnether, Madelon Gohlke, 1980 " 'I wooed thee with my sword': Shakespeare's

Tragic Paradigms," in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Green, and Carol Thomas Neely

Illinois: University of Illinois Press.

Appendix 1 - Student Handout

Shakespeare's Characters: A Visual Analysis

The purpose of this activity is to bring your analysis out of the paragraph structure and into a deeper meaning and interpretation of character. The end result will be a character analysis essay. To that end we will create visual analyses of some of the main characters of the texts we will be reading. This project will be done mostly for homework with minimal time in the classroom save for clarification of ideas and strategies. The final essay will be a timed writing done in class.

Shakespeare's plays, whether tragedy or comedy, introduce characters that are complex, calculating and, on any account, three-dimensional. These characters drive the action and the plot of the play, and a grasp of characterization is in any case necessary to the understanding of the play. Write an essay in which you analyze three characters from each of the plays we have read. Be sure to emphasize the most important of these attributes of character: physical, symbolic, motivational, language, perspective, and psychological shift. Interpret these attributes to explain how they relate to the meaning of the work as a whole.

Materials: You will need large pieces of butcher paper or posterboard, markers, the texts of *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*, and your imagination.

Process: Choose two main characters – at least two male and two female - from each play to analyze. (If you are unsure whether the character you choose is a main character, talk to me.) Draw a portrait of the character using colors and symbols to reveal their personalities.

Portrait: You will be graded on the following information.

- **Physical:** How does your character look? What colors best represent his/her appearance?
- **Symbolic:** What symbols and colors best represent this character? Where will you place these symbols and colors to represent your character?
- **Motivational:** What are your character's motives and how can you represent them in your portrait?
- **Language:** What type of speech does this character use? What are his/her three most important lines or speeches in the play? Where will you write this information on your portrait?
- **Perspective:** How does the character perceive him/herself? How do others perceive this character? How can you show this difference in your portrait?
- ***Bonus* Psychological Shift:** Does your character change significantly during the course of the play? Can you show this shift visually? (This is a bonus because it may not be a change that can be represented visually.)

You will need to carefully use **colors** and **placement of objects and words** on your portrait, as your thoughtfulness in distributing these attributes will affect your grade.

Defense Paragraphs: A paragraph or two in defense of the choices made in the process of creating these portraits is required for each character.

- What textual evidence was used to draw the particular images you chose?
- What textual evidence was used in the selection of colors and placement of objects and words on your character?
- Be sure to include act, scene, and line numbers in these paragraphs.

Due Date: (This will be determined at a later date.)

Points: 200 points per character – total 600 points – Preparation and Participation Grade

200 points - Timed Writing Grade

Appendix 2 - Rubric: Shakespeare's Characters: A Visual Analysis

Student Name: _____ Character: _____

	5 Superior	4 Above Average	3 Average	2 Adequate	1 Fail
Physical	Illustration reveals student's full comprehension of character.	Illustration reveals comprehension.	Character looks almost like description.	Character drawn could be anyone.	Did not attempt. Completely misread text.

Symbolic	Selected symbols fully represent character. All important symbols shown and artist has included details beyond the literal	Selected symbols represent character. All important symbols shown.	Selected symbols represent character. Most important symbols shown.	Selected symbols represent character. May not be complete. Missing major symbols	Did not attempt. Completely misread text.
Motive	Character's motives have been represented fully and artist has included details beyond the literal	Character's motives have been represented fully.	Character's motives have been represented but their analysis is simplistic or too literal.	Character's motives have not been represented fully. May be missing important details.	Did not attempt. Completely misread text.
Language	Language has been represented fully and artist has included details beyond the literal	Language has been represented fully.	Language has been represented but their analysis is simplistic or too literal.	Language has not been represented fully. May be missing important details.	Did not attempt. Completely misread text.
Perspective	Perspectives have been represented fully and artist has included details beyond the literal	Perspectives have been represented fully.	Perspectives have been represented but their analysis is simplistic or too literal.	Perspectives have not been represented. May be missing important details.	Did not attempt. Completely misread text.
Colors	Colors have been used carefully and artist has included details beyond the literal	Colors have been used carefully.	Some colors have been used carefully but their analysis is simplistic or too literal.	Colors used do not accurately represent character or objects. May be missing important information.	Did not attempt. Completely misread text.
Placement of objects and words	Placement is careful and artist has included details beyond the literal	Placement is careful.	Some placement was selected carefully but their analysis is simplistic or too literal.	Placement was not selected carefully. . May be missing important information.	Did not attempt. Completely misread text.
Bonus Psychological Shift	Shift has been shown creatively and with superior analysis and artist has included details beyond the literal	Shift is shown.			

Appendix 3 - Student Handout: Characterization

What is Character?

Consider your favorite characters from *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Write down a few reasons why you chose these characters.

How did Shakespeare develop these characters?

Characterization Defined

Characterization is the method used by a writer to develop a character.

The term characterization refers to the various means by which an author describes and develops the characters in a literary work.

Two types of characters

Round – a round character is one who usually changes or develops.

Flat – a flat character is a stock character; a stereotype like the hero or villain.

Note Details

Characterization is about a selection of details. Note the character traits.

Circumstances don't make the character.

How a character is revealed:

Showing a character's appearance

Displaying the character's actions

Revealing the character's thoughts

Letting the character speak

Getting the reactions of others

PLATA – a useful acronym

P – Perspectives (internal and external)

L – Language used by the character

A – Actions of the character

T – Thoughts of the character

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A – Appearance (physical and environmental)

Verisimilitude

Truth

What a writer strives to do – how does the writer create a realistic character?

What should you write about?

Who is the central character, or who are the central characters?

What means has the author used to demonstrate their qualities?

To what extent are the characters defined by contrast with minor characters?

Do we understand the characters as types or as individuals? By their actions? Their speech? Their thoughts? (It may be useful for you to identify a single instance of action, speech or thought and ask in what ways it represents the character to whom it is attributed.)

Which of the characters are active and which are passive within the pattern of the play?

Does the play show growth or change of character? How much of the play's meaning depends on such growth or change?

Appendix 4 - Student Handout

Dialectical Journals: Practice on Writing about Fiction

Dialectical Journals provide an easy and interesting method to help you write succinctly while you are developing your own voice. "Dialectical" suggests the art of discourse – and that is the skill you will be developing – talking "to" and about the text.

For each of the acts of each of the plays we will read, your assignment is to type a one page, 10 point paper in which you include these three elements:

1. Write a brief summary of the plot.
2. Select a character you noticed in the play and write a short paragraph which explains how Shakespeare uses characterization to enhance meaning.
3. Incorporate text into this paragraph. Respond to the plot and the character you have chosen. You may choose one of several ways. Here is an opportunity for you to be creative. Select from these:
 - a. Converse with specific points in the text that strike you. You can agree, disagree, question or comment, joke or continue a point. Cite the quotation and then respond. You may use first person.
 - b. Write about any personal connections you have with the reading.

- c. Write a letter to Shakespeare and/or a return letter from the author to yourself.
- d. Write an imaginary interview with Shakespeare or the character you have chosen.
- e. Write a prequel or sequel to the play – try to mimic Shakespeare's style.
- f. Rewrite the work into a different genre – turn it into a poem, letter, or prose.
- g. Borrow an incident or theme from the work to write a piece of your own based on a similar incident or theme.
- h. Draft a fictional biography or autobiography of the character you have chosen.

Your perspective is always interesting to me. Write about it in such a way that I can "hear" your voice. This is a Preparation and Participation grade. Turn it in on time and follow the directions.

Appendix 5 - Essay Rubric 1

Prompt: Analyze three characters from each of the plays we have read. Be sure to emphasize the most important of these attributes of character: physical, symbolic, motivational, language, perspective, and psychological shift. Interpret these attributes to explain how they relate to the meaning of the work as a whole.

9=90-95% well-focused and persuasive analysis

8=85-89% uses apt and specific textual support

demonstrates how characterization contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole not without flaws

makes a strong case for the interpretation

discusses the literary work with significant insight and understanding

9's reveal more sophisticated analysis and more effective control of language than do essays scored an 8.

7=80-84% offers reasonable analysis

6=75-79% demonstrates how characterization contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole

discusses the literary work with insight and understanding

analysis is less thorough, less perceptive, and/or less specific in supporting detail than that of the 9-8 essays

7's present better-developed analysis and more consistent command of the elements of effective composition than those scored a 6.

5=70-74% responds to the assigned task with a plausible reading

tends to be superficial or underdeveloped in analysis

often relies upon plot summary that contains some analysis, implicit or explicit

attempts to discuss the prompt and what that contributes to the work as a whole

demonstrates a rather simplistic understanding of the work

reveals unsophisticated thinking and/or immature writing

demonstrates adequate control of language

lacks effective organization

marred by surface errors.

- 4=65-69%** offers a less than thorough understanding of the task or a less than adequate treatment of it
- 3=60-64%** reflects an incomplete or oversimplified understanding of the work
- fails to establish the nature of the prompt
 - may not develop a response to how characterization contributes to the work as a whole
 - relies on plot summary alone
 - assertions may be unsupported or even irrelevant
 - wordy, elliptical, or repetitious
 - lacks control over the elements of college-level composition
 - 3's may contain significant misreadings and demonstrate inept writing.
- 2=55-59%** makes some attempt to respond to the prompt
- 1=50-54%** compounds the weaknesses of the papers in the 4-3 range
- unacceptably brief or are incoherent in presenting their ideas
 - poorly written on several counts and contain distracting errors in grammar and mechanics
 - remarks are presented with little clarity, organization, or supporting evidence
 - particularly inept, vacuous, and/or incoherent essays must be scored a 1
- 0** These essays make no more than a reference to the task, are left blank or are completely off topic.

Appendix 6

Sample Quiz Questions for *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*

The questions selected for the acts need to be high-level thinking questions. They are used to confirm the students have read the assigned act and check for understanding. The questions do not need to be so broad as to cover the entire act. An important aspect from the act is sufficient. The students should be able to answer the question in the time provided - five minutes - if they have read the material.

Othello, Act 1:

Explain Brabantio's feelings about Othello. Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Macbeth, Act 4:

Explain how the comments from the Witches help cause the murders in this act. Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

The Taming of the Shrew, Act 2:

Explain Kate's reaction to Petruchio's announcement that she has agreed to marry him. Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

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