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The Language of Power in Shakespeare

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Introduction and Rationale

Shakespeare never goes stale. And there are good reasons for that. Through the years, I have taught *Macbeth, Julius Caesar, Romeo and Juliet, King Lear*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Hamlet* to high school students at various academic levels. When I handled these plays as a young teacher, I was more a learner than a teacher; but as my experience with the texts expanded, so did my understanding and appreciation of the author's work. With each teaching event, and after numerous experiences as a member of audiences, two features of Shakespeare's drama have emerged as focuses for this unit: various conceptions of human power, and how Shakespeare used the mechanics of the English language to elaborate those concepts.

Students will almost all have read *Romeo and Juliet*, as a large number of ninth grade teachers present it. *Macbeth* is already a perennial favorite of teachers and students in twelfth grade, and *As You Like It* will be an addition to the curriculum. I make the latter a choice for students to read independently in its entirety, because, after all, several longer works, usually novels, are required of them. The ambitious will choose to read it, but more will not; so I assign the retold versions of *As You Like It* and *Romeo and Juliet* from the Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare* to all of the students—since, even if they have read the latter play in ninth grade, there is a three-year gap, and the Lambs' tales are literary gems in their own right.

The linguistic awareness I want students to develop in this unit centers on how Shakespeare's manipulation of language serves to construct characters, conflicts, and themes. The students are challenged to analyze Shakespeare's choices at the levels of word and phrase, and at a more abstract, figurative level, specifically in relation to how those word and phrase choices reveal power or powerlessness. In this regard, students have to focus on sound devices, such as alliteration and onomatopoetic phrasing, a range of metaphoric usage—chiefly metaphor, imagery, and symbolism. Technically, students do simple analysis of metrical features, such as iambic meter, rhythm and rhyme. One goal of the unit is to help students draw clear connections between the meaning one elicits from a text and how Shakespeare created that meaning stylistically.

The participants in this teaching unit are twelfth grade vocational high school students. In my school setting, an urban high school of approximately 900 students, the focus is on career preparation; but students must also complete studies in the standard curriculum of a comprehensive high school. They must study English, Social Studies, Mathematics, and three years of Science. Spanish is the only second language offered, and

there are no fine arts electives.

Objectives

This unit is designed to meet established English Language Arts standards in the State of Delaware for twelfth grade students. The first standard calls for the construction, examination and extension of the meaning of literary texts. The study of Shakespeare has applications which not only meet the standard in a world literature sequence, but also allows consideration of the multi-dimensional roles power plays in human life, and is therefore consistent with state standards calling for student understanding of universal human motives and concerns. In this unit, students identify and analyze literary elements and techniques, specifically characterization, conflict, and themes, as they relate to issues of power. Further, students analyze diction in the selections. They also identify how figures of language (particularly metaphor, imagery, and symbolism), work to suggest dilemmas of power. Students identify imagery for its significance relative to concepts of power. And finally, as a special focus, students will look at sound devices, such as alliteration and onomatopoeia, in words, phrases and passages. They will be sensitized to rhythm and metrical issues as such devices affect meaning.

Strategies

Lessons begin with what is called an anticipatory set, or warm-up, to establish a purpose for learning. A good start, after providing students an outline of the unit content, is to have them establish personal learning goals at the outset of the unit. For work in this unit, 2 weeks of class time, in 90 minute block periods daily, provides enough reading and processing time. Students read and discuss the plays; view and discuss media clips from various sources; work in collaborative teams; participate in some direct literary instruction and analysis; and produce written, performance, and student-devised group activities as culmination products.

Consistent with backward design, the unit starts with a statement of the "big ideas" or enduring understandings at which we are attempting to arrive, namely that power is a concept that exhibits many facets in life and in literature, and which lies at the heart of many human endeavors. Another is that writers, in this case Shakespeare, use language in extraordinary ways to develop themes in literature. Depending on the content for that day, students, with guidance, ask essential questions to guide them in that day's activity. Lessons, and the unit itself, end with a summary of how activities have answered questions, and how they have contributed to the understanding articulated at the outset.

The controlling idea in this unit is that issues of power are thematically important in our lives, and that Shakespeare reveals and elaborates these issues in the characters, the plots, and the language of his plays. Power in the abstract suggests many things to people—everything from political might to personal potency. I have developed activities that require of students that they think carefully about the idea of power in several manifestations: first, power as most typically understood by a teen—that associated with physical strength, magnitude or size, wealth, dominance, or aggression in the natural (and supernatural) worlds. Second, students refine the concept by thinking about groups of people in the broad terms of political power, such as

that detectable in governmental authority—police activity, warfare, economics, and organizational pecking orders anywhere. Third, students must derive and articulate conceptualizations of power at the personal level—from the relationships and struggles experienced in their families, from roles they play and interactions they experience among and between their friends, and from the distinct nature of power governing the dynamic between lovers, in particular. Using the full text of *Macbeth*, and selections from *As You Like It* and *Romeo and Juliet*, this twelfth grade unit focuses on these three concepts.

Philosopher Michel Foucault elaborated a definition of power as a force that is not exercised exclusively by an authority on subservient people or entities, but as a complex relationship that develops among people in society. In his description of its operation among people, it is not merely a force exercised by the state, but is operating at the every level of human activity down to the personal. Put simply, Foucault's power describes the strictures that organizations, groups, and individuals in society accept so that prevailing established beliefs in society are preserved and protected.[1] This subtlety is probably too much to expect twelfth-graders to detect easily, but students who engage in a consideration of power as outlined here can be ready to think more broadly about how the forces of power affect their lives.

As the unit begins, students are asked to recount, by way of memoir, journal entry, or personal narrative, a life experience that highlights an event that they construe to have been influenced by relationships of power. I will model this activity by sharing a personal childhood memoir of bullying which is highly illustrative of the nature of brute force as a form of physical power. Student accounts of their reactions to the World Trade Center disaster, encounters with fallout from the war in Iraq, schoolyard conflicts, neighborhood violence, interactions with police or gangs, and events at school, work, and within their families that involve authority or perceived power struggles are suggestions that can spark memories.

The next step for students, working as a group, is classifying these personal encounters among three modes of power. Using chart paper, the class as a whole group will define power in three ways—first, in the sense of the raw physical world; next, in the sense of force as evident in political entities; and finally, at the level of inter-personal relationships. These agreed-upon definitions become the operative concepts that drive later choices they will make when confronted with the language of the plays.

Macbeth

Conceptions of Power

Macbeth is handled in detail, on a daily basis, scene-by-scene and act-by-act, over the course of the first week, so the analytic and conceptual work students do with this play becomes a model for the analytic procedure they will use in grappling with the selections from the remaining two plays. Consequently, at-home reading assignments in *Macbeth* are given through this week—roughly an act a night. As students work through the plot in class, there is direct instruction and group work intended to review understandings of the literary concepts of theme, conflict, and characterization. This is likewise true of the linguistic features mentioned: metaphor, imagery, symbolism, alliteration, onomatopoeia, and metrical and rhythmic considerations.

Students consider social or physical power first. (Since there is a strong element of the supernatural in this play, the spirit world is included in this category.) For a model analysis, students are given an organizer (Attachment A), which is designed to focus them on three literary elements as they think about the question: What kind of physical power is evident in Act I, sc.ii, in which the captain reports Macbeth and Banquo's performances on the battlefield to Duncan? With ease, students can identify the brutal actions of soldier

Macbeth,

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 Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel, Which smoked with bloody execution,
Like valor's minion carved out his passage Till he faced the slave; Which nev'r
shook hands, nor bade farewell to him, Till he unseamed him from the nave to th'
chops, And fixed his head upon our battlements.[2]
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The ferocity of Macbeth's battlefield performance, as reported by the Captain in the first act, is another example of the manifestation of physical strength instantly recognizable to a teen. Who can mistake the vivid imagery of raw physical strength in these and the ensuing lines that finish the Captain's report? As students use the organizer for this first time, they work alone in reading the text. Applying what the class has decided constitutes raw physical or natural power, they separately make statements about what these descriptions tell us about Macbeth as a character, what conflicts might develop for a man who performs fearlessly like this, and what this whole play may be suggesting at this point about human existence. Without stretching expectations, kids will almost certainly conclude, as A.C. Bradley does in his essay,[3] that Macbeth's violent bent is machine-like and unrelenting. With some prompting, students might be encouraged to think about what this kind of human being is like in ordinary personal relationships, in romantic relationships, and in terms of personality traits. Bradley talks about the sympathy we almost helplessly have for Macbeth, in spite of the tragic, misbegotten path he chooses. Students can be prompted to consider his character as a "war hero" in terms of his strength and devotion to his lord and master, Duncan. If they can see that, then perhaps they can appreciate Macbeth as the quintessential tragic hero.

With *Macbeth* as the central reading, there are many opportunities for students to relate their own specified considerations of the nature of power to all three levels. Second under consideration at the outset of the play is application of their understanding of personal or interpersonal power. One specific selection for a model analysis in Act I, sc.vii, is the exchange between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as Duncan finishes his meal. In a preceding soliloquy, Macbeth voices his hesitation in murdering Duncan for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is hesitation over the unpredictable consequences. Stephen Greenblatt suggests that Macbeth sees that he has no worthy objective when he says, "I have no spur/ To prick the sides of my intent, but only/ Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself/ And falls on th'other—"[4] If one reads Macbeth's motive as ambition, argues Greenblatt, then it is difficult to explain his actual commission of the crime when he has so clearly laid out the reasons against the act.[5] In any case, the focus for students here is the ensuing dialogue—especially Lady Macbeth's brilliant rhetoric resulting in Macbeth's resolve to go ahead with his grab for power, in spite of his own better judgment.

To analyze this shift, students are again provided the literary element organizer (Attachment B), modified slightly, to answer the question: What "personal power" does Lady Macbeth wield in her exhortation that is strong enough to convince her husband to risk uncertain outcomes, and essentially to bend his own will? As kids review the actual language, they work in groups of three to decide how the class understanding of personal power that they have developed exhibits itself in the characters; how it creates or resolves conflict between those characters, or more broadly in the play; and how it contributes to an emerging theme, or a central truth about humanity. When students have discussed and recorded their thoughts and observations, new triads of students are formed, by rotating one student out at a clip so that there is some sharing of ideas with classmates in these new groups.

Using a third organizer (Attachment C), students are directed to shift their focus to their previously formulated understanding of power as expressed in the social, or political sphere. The entire fourth scene of the first act is

scrutinized in this activity. In this scene, Macbeth comes before the king to receive deserved congratulations for his role in the battle. The focus, though, is the attitude and bearing of the king in his dialogue, as well as the behavior of those around him, including Macbeth. The strategy for students to do work on this aspect of power is called a "gallery walk." Students work in slightly larger groups—the number of students in the room divided by 6 determines the number of group members. Kids are asked to engage this activity by posing to themselves the question: What political or social power is expressed in the words and actions of Duncan? They work solo in again identifying words, phrases, and actions which comport with their understanding of political or social power. Students will see that Malcolm, Banquo and Macbeth—save his alarming reflective aside when he learns of Malcolm's succession—all show the king their best sides in terms of fealty and respect. Again, kids follow the now established routine of considering the words in terms of how they paint Duncan as a benevolent character with secured regal power, as all of the other characters, including his own son, defer ingratiatingly to his utterances. Second, they are asked to consider how this type of power can engender conflicts; and last, how the action in this scene might suggest larger thematic ideas about human beings and their relationships with leaders. Students post their written reflections on these three elements around the room (the gallery), and all are given three post-its on which to write questions, comments, or personal elaborations of what their classmates have written. Each must stick a post-it on some other paper. When all have finished, papers are dismounted and returned to their owners. This way, students can benefit from the thoughts of their classmates.

Literary Devices

The final phase of the routine which is being established in these first days of the unit concerns students' looking at devices and features of language which animate Shakespeare's poetry. Although not with metrics, twelfth grade students are acquainted with the concepts of metaphor, imagery, symbolism, alliteration, and onomatopoeia as dynamic devices in poetry. Using the passages from *Macbeth* already analyzed, students take another turn, in the early days of the unit, to inspect them for how various devices suggest power in any of the three aspects students are now used to thinking about.

I have developed another paper organizer for this purpose (Attachment D). Using this device, students work independently to react to the three selected passages. To model this activity, I use Lady Macbeth's invocation of spirits in Act I, sc.v, to empower her to work her will. This soliloquy is rife with language that frightens the audience, like an oboe solo with bass drums beating. As a model for student analysis the lines,

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 …Come you spirits That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, And fill me from the crown to the toe, top-full Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood, Stop up th' access and passage to remorse, That no compunctious visitings of nature Shall my fell purpose, nor keep peace between Th' effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts, And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers, Wherever in your sightless substances You wait on nature's mischief! Come thick night, And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell, That my keen knife see not the wound it makes, Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark, To cry "Hold, hold!"…[6]
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are explicated in terms of the iambic measures, the assonance, and the imagery suggested in the words, all to the effect of one's reach for power—both personal and/or preternatural. To this end, the dark images of damnation suggested by the phrases *direst cruelty, come thick night, dunnest smoke of hell,* and *blanket of the dark* are isolated in the speech, as are the deathly phrases, *mortal thoughts, direst cruelty, murd'ring ministers*, and *keen knife,* and finally the grotesque and jarring phrases of physical distortion, *unsex me here,*

from the crown to the toe top-full of …cruelty, make thick my blood, come to my woman's breasts and take my milk for gall, and *my keen knife, the wound it makes.*

This exercise is mostly teacher-directed, partly because it is an instructional review, and partly because scaffolding the process by way of direct contact is more likely to lend confidence to students when they do it on their own. I ask students to highlight the first list of phrases in one color, and the other two lists in different colors on a handout containing the speech (Attachment D). As I elicit from them observations about similarities within each list, it is unlikely that they will miss ideas close to damnation in the first, since the idea of hell is pretty visual, right down to the smoke in a traditional image of fire, brimstone and smoking coals. They are likely to connect as clearly with the ideas of murder and death in the second, given the image of the sharp knife, the word mortal used literally to mean lethal, the word murder, and the modifier direst, meaning the most serious kind of cruelty, i.e. murder. And finally, they should note blood and physicality in the third. When that discussion ends, students are directed to flip their papers over and to engage in a search for each of the literary devices. This list contains descriptions of how each device works, and failing substantial responses, I give them answers and explanations as needed. A student at work on analysis at this level could be expected to identify the metaphor which compares Lady Macbeth's invocation of the "spirits" to conventional prayer; the difference being that, rather than asking for a beatific afterlife, she petitions the devil for the force of a dark, smoky hell. When prompted to react to images as words intended to stimulate one or more of the five senses, students will recognize the taste of gall (once it is defined for them) as a bitter olfactory suggestion consistent with the meaning of her intention. Similarly, the sensual or tactile sensations suggested in the phrase "make thick my blood," and "Come to my woman's breasts,/ and take my milk for gall…" work at such elemental levels (that is, blood and mother's milk) that students can readily explain how this imagery builds Lady Macbeth's character, creates conflict, and contributes to several themes in the developing plot. One of those themes, of course, has to do with what students are being directly set up to consider—how power works at the levels of the individual, social, and natural worlds.

A new concept for twelfth graders at this point is detecting meter in a line of poetry. I want students to turn their attention to the rhythmic effects in lines and passages as they read these plays, with the ultimate goal of connecting the actual sounds in the lines to the tone and meaning therein. So, using the same speech, I ask students to look at the lines, "And fill me from the crown to the toe, top-full/ Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood/…" Using these lines, I direct students to underline *fill*, *crown,, -full, dire, cruel-, thick,* and *blood.* After ensuring that they hear the emphasis on these words and syllables, I explain that this pattern, when it is repeated line after line, is called iambic pentameter. More important than knowing the nomenclature is the suggestion that the words and syllables which get this emphasis are intentionally stressed by the writer to draw the audience's attention to the meaning behind the word, or to create an independent sound that complements the prevailing mood or the suggested meaning. For example, the word "thick" is onomatopoetic. As the word is voiced, the throat closes up in a choke or a swallow, just as the *sense* of the line suggests that the darkness "swallow[s]" the speaker's actions. Once this is presented, students offer their own explanations of what these particular lines suggest about what Lady Macbeth is thinking or feeling. In small groups, students are then provided a copy of Macbeth's "If it were done when 'tis done…" soliloquy, and asked to follow the procedure they were just led through. My role at this point is to monitor and guide students in their attempts to perform the close readings, and to identify a reasonable number of examples. These first exemplars are all concentrated in the first act because the sooner students acquaint themselves with the process of analysis, the more facility they have moving forward into the next two plays, and in this phase of learning they have to be familiar with the surrounding text to be able to do that.

The analytic framework for considering power, as it pertains to character, conflict and theme, and the

linguistic work, are brought together at the end of the act in a class discussion format that is described below in the first classroom activity. Briefly, this activity unfolds when I appoint a student to lead the discussion and to maintain the orderly sharing of thoughts in the group. The rules of engagement are explained. All of the students sit in a discussion circle. The class definitions of power developed at the outset of the unit are reviewed, and I ask whether or not students see power in each of these conceptions playing itself out in the action of this act. The student leader calls on each individual, who must answer the question using his analysis of character, conflict, or theme; or must answer by choosing a minimum of two language devices and explaining how he sees it working. For example, a reasonable expectation in this activity would be a student's responding to the question by saying something like, "Lady Macbeth seems to be a character with a real bad streak, if she's asking evil spirits to help her. This kind of character is reaching into the world of superstition to ask for special personal power to do evil, maybe because she feels she can't do it with normal personal power. Our personal power definition says that it's the kind of power people use their brains or their emotions to get things done with, or to influence other people. Lady Macbeth is asking for a special supernatural boost to her ordinary ability to use power." Classmates then have a very limited time, on a volunteer basis, to ask the speaker for a clarification, or to offer a brief elaboration. I purposely exclude myself from this process, to avoid the temptation for students to turn to me for "the right answer." The analytic model is now established for kids. They have the power definitions, an understanding of how to look to words and phrases in the text at the figurative and literary levels, and a way to express and share the conclusions they come to regarding power and how it might be read in *Macbeth*, and in the ensuing plays.

In the remaining four acts of this play, students will choose one of two selections per act that I consider to be provocative conceptually and related to one or more levels of power as described in its three aspects. The work proceeds as modeled. At the conclusion of *Macbeth,* students return as a group to the discussion format, and engage the question of how they see the original power concepts playing out in the total plot. The only difference in the process, once the play is complete, is that the original definitions of power in each of the three aspects can change. This is done by again using the gallery walk strategy, where students post revisions to the original definitions. The *Macbeth* sequence ends, with the revised definitions serving as the starting point for the analysis of the next play, *As You Like It*.

As You Like It

Students may elect in this unit to read the Charles and Mary Lamb version of *As You Like It*, so that the essential plot and the characters are familiar when they grapple with the language. (There is simply not enough curricular space to deal with the entire text in class.) This play affords many opportunities for students to recognize how the revised conceptions of power reveal themselves in characters, conflict and theme, as well as how the language at the figurative and rhythmic levels works. For example, the banished Duke Senior's panegyric on his life in Arden is a terrific model for considering deposed, or relieved power, and perhaps for what power truly represents. The forest, a fantastic Eden, can be studied as a place free of the typical constraints of conventional human power structures, but also as a place where the constraints of hierarchical society are reintroduced with the restoration of Duke Senior, the consummation of the agreement Rosalind has exacted, and the execution of the marriages, as finale to the action. With these lines as a focus, students can use their analytic protocol to engage the text:

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 Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile, Hath not old custom made this life more
sweet Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods More free from peril than the
envious court? Here we feel not the penalty of Adam; The season's difference, as
the icy fang And churlish chiding of the winter's wind, Which, when it bites and
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blows upon my body Even till I shrink with cold, I smile and say "This is no flattery; these are counselors That feelingly persuade me what I am." Sweet are the uses of adversity, Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous, Wears yet a precious jewel in his head; And this our life, exempt from public haunt, Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, Sermons in stones, and good in everything.[7]
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What I expect from students in an analysis of this work includes considerations of character that would plumb student thought about what is revealed in the words—primarily about Duke Senior himself; but also what, by inference, it might reveal about his nemesis-brother. This titled power figure, ousted from his position of authority, apparently accommodates himself to Arden felicitously, but still exhibits a degree of *noblesse oblige,* inherent to his social position. So, I might expect students to discuss how this accommodation effects itself based on the societal rules and conventions attributed to a person of his rank.

The words and phrases likely to be selected by students in the first citation are: *co-mates, brothers, life more sweet, painted pomp, free from peril, not the penalty of Adam, no flattery, sweet...adversity*, *a toad with ajewel in his head*, *tongues in trees*, and *good in everything*. It is predictable that students will characterize Duke Senior as a man whose new life he sees as free from the turmoil he would be experiencing were he in his rightful position. The logical inference about his politically powerful brother would be that life for him is just the opposite. More exactly, if Senior's and his compatriots' lives are so "sweet," is Frederick's sour or bitter? Frederick's words in the first act of the play might suggest so. His banishment of Rosalind, even against the wishes of Celia, is the act of a man ever mindful of protecting his position of power. When quizzed by Rosalind about his reasons for banishment, he says, "Let it suffice thee that I trust thee not." In other words, just because she is his brother's daughter, he must be suspicious of her as a potential threat to his power. Further, when he says, "Her very silence and her patience,/ Speak to the people, and they pity her," he is clearly speaking of her as a political power, painting Rosalind as a favorite of the people, and thereby a threat. This is the very embodiment of the "perilous court" to which Senior refers.

When using the linguistic lens to focus on phrases like "And this our life, exempt from public haunt,/ Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks," student analysts are likely to focus on the emphases given words like tongues, trees, haunt, books, and brooks in the iambic scheme; and they may even suggest (focused on one of the three power aspects), that power is symbolized by tongues, or *verbiage*, and by books, representing religion or law, erudition and education, and of course literature itself. And to the contrary, release from power's constraints is symbolized by trees and brooks—the natural world. Students will opine that the alliteration here in the repetition of the "b" and "t" consonants creates the simple emphasis on these ideas, the contrast between them, or something in the actual sounds that suggest, onomatopoetically, comparisons between the pairs of ideas. The analytical sky is the limit! What's important is not whether or not students are *correctly* reading the text as the teacher would prefer, but that they are using the tools they have been given. It is an act of faith, supported by experience, that, when all is said and done, no student who has carefully followed this approach concludes that there is nothing to say about power.

But, in these words, in Act V, sc.iv, the same Duke, upon hearing of his brother's change of heart, says,

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 First, in this forest let us do those ends That here were well begun and well begot; And after, every of this happy number That have endured shrewd days and nights with us Shall share the good of our returnèd fortune, According to the measure of their states.[8]
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Students might well note that having *endured shrewd* (difficult) *days*, the Duke's loyal companions have earned a share in the wealth and power associated with his return; but only as befits their *states*! So, a return based on one's status to the old feudal model is imminent. With a nod to the soon-to-be-forsaken forest life, the Duke commands, "Meantime forget this new-fall'n dignity/ And fall into our rustic revelry." In other words, party hearty for now; but only as a last hurrah before restoring your proper way of life. Students should focus on the words and phrases *begun*, *begot, endured, returned fortune*, and *measure of their states* to see if there might be the suggestion that political power perhaps derives from the elemental (begun and begot); that noble power can and must "endure" hardship, or loss of power; and perhaps nobility has a literal right to expect "returned fortune." At the level of language, these same words and phrases make sounds and produce a rhythm suggestive of order. The alliterative effect of the *w*'s, the *s*'s and the *sh*'s suggest softness and quietness—the peace that can only come from order. Even the iambic meter—almost perfect in comparison to much of the speech in the play—implies regularity, and a sort of poetic sweetness. Is this the result of happy marriages and benevolent leadership? These are decisions students can make.

At this point, a person could reasonably wonder whether or not kids can make these kinds of connections unassisted. The answer is no. However, the analysis protocol has been set up, and there are few places remaining where students can move waywardly, once focused on words and phrases, directed to make the connections to power in order to build an understanding of character, conflict, and theme; *and* to look at figures of language and poetic devices to wonder what they too might suggest about power. So, the answer is yes, when the role of the teacher here is to monitor and guide students as they work in their groups with these tools.

In the remaining acts of *As You Like It*, students are given other specific passages to analyze. I have already identified Jaques' "All the world's a stage..." soliloquy in the second act, with the idea of asking students to consider what notion of "personal" power emerges in these lines. Also selected is Rosalind's reading of Orlando's love verse, directing students to consider the power of language, or maybe the powerlessness of language used poorly, at the social level. Other considerations could be analysis of how power manifests itself in sheer physical strength. Charles the wrestler's defeat at Orlando's hands is worthy of careful inspection, and might even have students conclude that there is a source of power that somehow trumps brute force. At the level of language, of course, there are Orlando's romantic verses and Phebe's strange attraction to Silvius' language of violence. These sections of the play are atypically in blank verse, and as in *Macbeth*, students can be directed to look at and listen to the language for cues in imagery, sound devices, and metaphors that suggest how power manifests itself.

Romeo and Juliet

Romeo and Juliet affords an opportunity for students to think about power, especially that which is exhibited in human hierarchies, and most notably as it surrounds wealth (the Montagues and Capulets) and political entities, namely the Veronese government as embodied in the Prince. First, students are instructed to analyze the Prince's words in Act I, sc.i as he issues a warning to the families' patriarchs. There are clear opportunities to identify the language of political power. For example, Escalus' interdiction of the first violence in the play leads him to pronounce:

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 Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace, Profaners of this neighbor-stainèd steel—
Will they not hear? What, ho! You men, you beasts, That quench the fire of your
pernicious rage With purple fountains issuing from your veins! On pain of torture,
from those bloody hands Throw your mistempered weapons to the ground And hear the
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sentence of your movèd prince…

And further on,

If ever you disturb our streets again, Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace. For this time all the rest depart away, You, Capulet, shall go along with me; And Montague, come you this afternoon, To know our farther pleasure in this case, To old Freetown, our common judgment place. Once more, on pain of death, all men depart.[9]

Students'attention is directed to this edict for analysis at two levels: social power, as represented in raw, elemental gang violence, and political power, as represented by the state figurehead, and its police authority. In the first case, words and phrases of interest include: *beasts,profaners, neighbor-stained steel, pernicious rage, purple fountains issuing from your veins, mistempered weapons,* and *bloody hands.* The parade of visual imagery suggesting blood and gore cannot be overlooked by students, nor can the metaphor of bestial behavior the Prince describes. Mob rule and its attendant power must certainly be identified by student readers. In the second case, and in apposition to these images, are the equally forceful legalistic pronouncements of the Prince in the words and phrases: *rebellious subjects, profaners, sentence of your movèd prince, disturb our streets, lives shall pay, depart away, know our farther pleasure*, and *pain of death*. The officer and judge are heard in these words—words without any metaphoric image, words conveying direct threat and punitive consequence. This is the language of civil law. In terms of cadence, from the very regularity of the iambic meter, with stresses falling on the consequential words *pain, depart,* and *death*, students can easily deduce the no-nonsense tone of voice and resultant mood created by this language. Hopefully, in the discussion sequence, students will consider the unregulated power of the unrestrained passions of the mob against the officious but effective power of the rule of law.

It almost goes without saying that brute force can be considered in this play for its show of individual power, but also as a social phenomenon in the family feud. For example, the youthful violence in the first scene of Act III, when Mercutio and Tybalt escalate their quarrelling into murder, begs for an analysis of power and how it operates at the personal, social, and natural levels. I say at the natural level, because if one considers how Benvolio suggests in the first scene of the play that literal "hot weather" has tempers flaring, then there is room to discuss not only climate, but settings (i.e., the chapel, the graveyard, the garden at night), together with the "celestial" setting suggested in the opening sonnet.

And at the very personal level, there is first the famous dialogue between the lovers in Act 2, sc.ii, where an analysis of the language reveals the force behind sexual drive. Complementarily, the resolution of the conflicts of power ameliorated by the deaths of the two lovers, and the consequent establishment of peace and order in a chastised community in Act V, sc.iii involves dialogue among all of the power players—Montague, Capulet, the Prince, and the church in the person of the Friar. These sequences present many opportunities for students to see how individual word choices and figurative phrases orchestrate power to incite peace or violence. One element introduced at this point into the student discussion of power is how the combination of erotic power, social power, and the power of fate, help to define *Romeo and Juliet* as a tragic drama. Harold Bloom suggests "Mere sexuality will do for comedy, but the shadow of death makes eroticism the companion of tragedy."[10] This provocative idea, along with Bloom's notion that the play could easily have ended as traditional comedy with minor changes, is a good idea to insert into student discussions concerning the conflicts and theme of this play.

Classroom Activities

Day One. Defining Power.

This first class is key in defining the major focuses of the whole unit for students. In order for students to consider power in a realistic, compelling way, it is necessary for them to construct workable definitions for themselves. In this first lesson then, I articulate the broad understanding which students should develop as a result of study, namely that power in its many facets influences all human endeavors, and because this is so, Shakespeare in particular and literature in general reflect this influence, in themes, characterizations, conflicts, and language.

After I tell a true story to students illustrating how a bully's attack on me as a child overwhelmed and then empowered me, I ask them to reflect on incidents in their own lives. Students will be asked to write on this prompt: *Retell an incident in your life that illustrates how any sort of power affected you or someone you know. Explain what kind of power the situation illustrates.* A short discussion of power follows, where I describe the three types of power we will consider. At this point, students who feel that their stories clearly fit one of the categories are encouraged to relate the tale. After one anecdote illustrating each form of power is told, all of the students are directed to situate these rudimentary understandings of power in one of the three categories—physical, political, or personal power—by adding a descriptive phrase with post-it's to the basic definitions on large poster paper. When finished, the class as a whole will decide which operational definitions to proceed with.

Day Six. End of Macbeth.

On this the last day of intensive study of *Macbeth,* students are given a choice of three selections from Act V. The first choice is scene iii, culminating with Macbeth's words, "… My way of life/ Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf…" The second choice is Macbeth's famous reaction to the news of Lady Macbeth's death in the fifth scene: "She should have died hereafter; / There would have been a time for such a word. / Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow/…" The third choice is Malcolm's final restorative speech at the very end of the play.

Students are placed into groups according to their choices. (A fourth group of students may be formed who decline the three choices suggested, and may wish to focus on some other dialogue or speech. If there is such a group, they share their analyses with each other.) After conducting the analysis of language for theme, character and conflict, students are divided randomly into three groups, each of which consider their responses in light of one of the aspects of power as the class has defined them. In these groups, students analyze the language for literary figures and rhythmic patterns at the word and phrase levels. They record their observations using Attachments B and C. Members of these groups are redistributed once again into smaller groups that host a member from each of the three larger "power" groups. Round-robin style, these students share their points of view with the others.

Concluding this session is a whole-class discussion as described above, except that the analysis of Act V is considered in the context of the entire play. The student leader is directed to lead the discussion in these terms.

Day 10. Final Projects.

Students will have been working with *Romeo and Juliet* for two days, and will have finished work with *As You*

Like It. Definitions of power have been revised twice—at the culmination of each play. As the students are proficient now with the analytic tools, this class session is designed to bring the analyses together in a meaningful way expressively.

At students' disposal are filmed versions of each of the plays, the Lambs' versions, the original Shakespearean text of each of the plays, and all of the analytic material they have created in study and discussion. Five possible activities are given to students. They must choose to be involved in two of them. They are:

1. A dramatic reading of a studied passage from any of the plays. If the passage involves more than one character, partners should participate in the reading. The reading must be followed by the participants' oral analysis of the language in the scene and how it contributes to a conception of power in one or more of the three aspects.
2. A showing of a clip from one of the available film versions of the plays, followed by an oral presentation including the same elements as the first activity.
3. An original dramatic scene set in students' contemporary surroundings, i.e. home, the neighborhood, school, etc., which is designed to illustrate power at one or more of the levels they have defined. This performance is followed by a performer-led class discussion that draws out of the audience questions and observations about the nature of power in the action, the words, and the conflicts portrayed.
4. Students write an original poem in iambic verse whose language, figures, images and sounds are designed to suggest power at one of the levels defined. The writer(s) lead a short class discussion in which audience and writer discuss the success of the piece in communicating a message about power.
5. Using the "Shakespearean Insult Sheet"[11] students form teams of no more than four. Each team creates ten insults. For example, "Thou reeky, rug-headed waterfly." In a display of verbal venom, teams hurl insults at each other. The observers decide which team's insults have expressed the strongest "power," in terms of image, metaphor, sound, and rhythm. A brief discussion follows the match, in which the force of language is considered.

Each project is described, after which students make their choices and begin work on rehearsals, writing, finding clips, internet research, etc. My role is to float among groups as a consultant to clarify assignments or to suggest approaches. Students have a week to prepare their presentations.

Assessment

Assessment takes two forms in this unit. A culminating event calls on students to return to the discussion format described above. This time, the discussion returns to the enduring understanding and essential questions. Students have been reminded through the unit that the desired outcome of study has been to understand that power represents itself in many ways and lies at the heart of many human endeavors. The question that ends the unit asks students just how they see power defined; how they have seen it emphasized in the characters, conflicts, themes, and language of these plays; and how they perceive power operating in their own lives.

The second assessment in this unit calls for students to write an evaluative essay on a work of literature. They may well choose one of these three plays; but they may also choose *Beowulf*, *The Pardoner's Tale*, or a long work of fiction—usually *Cry, the Beloved Country, Siddhartha*, *Lord of the Flies*, *Oedipus Rex*, or *The Kite Runner*. Whatever students choose, they will be expected to evaluate the work in terms of the understandings of power developed in their selection. Further, if their choice is a work other than one of the Shakespearean plays, the expectation is that the form of analysis taught and used in this unit will be used to help the student

think through and form evaluative standards against which to judge the work chosen. I use an exercise called "Evolution of a Term" from Gretchen Bernabei's book, *Reviving the Essay*,[12] to help students structure a draft of this essay, and to draw on their personal understandings of how the term *power* has evolved for them through this unit of study.

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Attachment A. Physical/Natural/Supernatural Power

Literary Element	PLAY: Macbeth "I conjure you" Act IV, sc.i "What's the disease he means?" Act IV, sc.iii
Character	
Conflict	
Theme	

Attachment B. Social/Political Power

Literary Element	PLAY: Macbeth "Is execution done on Cawdor?" Act I, sc.iv "So is he mine, and in such bloody distance..." Act III, sc.i
Character	
Conflict	
Theme	

Attachment C. Personal/Interpersonal Power

Literary Element	PLAY: *Macbeth* "We will proceed no further in this business..." Act I, sc.vii "Thou canst not say I did it. Never shake thy gory locks..." Act III, sc.iv
Character	
Conflict	
Theme	

Attachment D. Language Devices

LANGUAGE DEVICES	**MACBETH**
METAPHOR *A suggested comparison of one thing, person, place or idea to another*	
IMAGERY *Stimulation of one or more of the five senses in words and phrasing*	

SYMBOL
An object, place, or person which has a literal as well as a suggested or "deeper" meaning
ALLITERATION
The repetition of a sound in language to suggest or to complement meaning
ONOMATOPOEIA
The use of words which, when said aloud, reproduce a sound associated with the word itself
METER
A pattern of stressed and unstressed word syllables
RHYME
The repetition of the sound of a syllable with another syllable sounding the same or similar

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