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

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### **Overview**

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#### **A Case of Inspiration**

The intended outcome of this unit is for students to read Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in its entirety. In the process, they will use the performance triangle strategy, described in detail throughout this curriculum unit. The purpose of this focused strategy is to frame the reading of the play, as well as the written pieces and discussion that students will produce. These written pieces and discussions will be centered on how the myriad themes and literary devices contribute to the multiple meanings of the play. Additionally, they will be presented with secondary source material to accompany the play's reading. The classroom activities and lessons themselves are an extension of this model.

My passion for reading and discussing Shakespeare was instilled in me as a fourteen-year-old eighth grade student, the year in which I was chosen by my teachers to play the role of William Shakespeare himself at the inaugural St. Joseph School Shakespeare Festival. It was my duty to act as host for the performances, in which students of all grade levels prepared selected scenes from the plays. At the festival, I also played the conspirator Decius in a performance of *Julius Caesar*, and the sheer wonder I experienced while reading and memorizing my lines truly inspired me to become a teacher of literature. In my collegiate and professional career as an educator, I have continually looked for ways to approach Shakespeare pedagogy. I want my students to have the same meaningful experience that I did in studying Shakespeare, and it is in this spirit that I approach this curriculum unit.

In presenting a work of literature to students, teachers often times struggle with what I call the balance between established or traditional ways of teaching the material and their own creative strategies for approaching the work. With Shakespeare's most popular and most often-taught works, there is an exhausting wealth of resources for teachers. It can be quite overwhelming. For example, in teaching *Macbeth*, I researched teaching resources, but soon realized that I was adrift in a seemingly endless ocean of activities. Some were interesting, but most were poor. With this in mind, this unit is meant to offer a method by which to teach Shakespeare, and, specifically, his play *Macbeth*.

In the role of a teacher, I find it fascinating to encounter some of the ideas in approaching Shakespeare that I did not experience as a high school and college student, as well as dismaying to discover what some students

are being subjected to. What, I asked myself, is exactly being taught? Is it how to summarize a five-act play? I also asked myself what should be taught while reading a Shakespeare play. Should teachers simply focus on plot comprehension, which students often struggle with? Or, should teachers focus on extraction and discussion of themes? I believe that the understanding of concepts such as 'soliloquy' and 'iambic pentameter' is just as important as all these other topics, especially for an Advanced Placement course. The reality of it is that each of these concepts is directly connected to the others, and that, in presenting Shakespeare to students, there is an opportunity to provide a multifaceted and well-rounded exploration of the text. It is important to mention, too, that I believe that this unit is fully accessible to any teacher interested in a rigorous and engaging study of Macbeth.

## **Engaging Students in Shakespeare**

The intended student participants for whom this unit is written are twelfth graders in an Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition course. The unit is five weeks long, and fifty-minute class meetings are held four times per week. Teachers who meet with their students five times per week can easily modify the schedule of activities to fit their own needs. Usually, the first barrier encountered in teaching Shakespeare is the students' lack of comprehension. Many good teachers have succeeded in readying students for Shakespeare with appropriate background lessons, or prior knowledge activities, but needless to say, once the text is in hand, many students experience a shock that comes with the contact with Shakespeare's language.

Most senior high school students, mine included, will have already encountered one or more Shakespeare plays throughout their education. I will provide students with tools to access the language as part of this unit, but by no means is the comprehension of the plot the focus. Students will know that my expectation is that they work hard to use those tools to grasp the plot, but that is just the beginning. In this course, most of the reading will be done for homework. I am counting on student preparedness (which has not been an issue in the past), to take them beyond comprehension and into literary analysis and critical thinking. As a teacher of an AP course, I am responsible for teaching specific skills, concepts, and content to prepare students for the AP exam near the end of the school year. These include the analytical skills needed to write about and discuss poetry and prose, as well as the skill of making intra-textual and inter-textual connections. Additionally, AP courses are writing intensive. Students are expected to write in a variety of ways. Most of my students will have taken the AP English Language and Composition course as eleventh-graders. Therefore, they will have a foundation of rhetorical skills, and the AP English Literature course aspires to build upon this foundation.

In order to foster good, meaningful topics for writing and discussion, I have created an original method for helping students study the concept of 'performance' in Macbeth, which is detailed below. Specifically, I envision a strategy that will help students discover the multilayered elements of performance that make up the genius of Shakespeare. I envision a graphic organizer as the central building block that will guide students to identify three facets of performance that are relevant to Macbeth, namely, 1) the character of Macbeth performing various roles within the play; 2) the role of the actor in performing the characters in Macbeth, from text to stage; and 3) the concept of performance brought to the text by the individual reader/audience member in his everyday environment. The central graphic will be a 'Performance Triangle' with each side representing a separate facet of 'performance.' The strategy will not be limited to Macbeth's character, but any relevant character. In this way, students will read and discuss the play through these multiple lenses, which will lead to discussion and writing about the relationships of these lenses and how they contribute to the overall meanings of the play. To accompany the play, I will also provide appropriate secondary sources for students to read and discuss, such as essays from the fields of sociology and the theater.

Students will come to an understanding of the recurring theme of self and performance in this play through close reading and rigorous engagement with the text, with a focus on how these readings are supportive of, and informed by, our central three-dimensional strategy. Classroom activities and exercises such as staged readings, annotation, and activating prior knowledge and experience will focus on the multiple voices and personas of characters. I also envision a final project for the unit in which students will write an essay about a particular character using the performance triangle strategy.

The unit aims to create relevancy for students as they become aware of the figurative language and literary devices that people use to 'perform' in their everyday lives. In teaching *Macbeth*, I was pleasantly surprised at how strongly students identified with the characters in the play. Upon reflecting, however, I realized that teachers should not be surprised at how eighteen-year-old students would be fascinated with the motivations, decisions, and emotions expressed by these characters. One particular quote that really spoke to many of my students was "Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under't." They all knew friends, classmates, and family members who did just the same. They argued about who was responsible for Macbeth's downfall—was it Lady Macbeth's manipulation and ambition, Macbeth's vacillating inner conflict, or the weird sisters themselves, whose prophecies portend realities? To develop a plausible argument about this question, students must be challenged to closely study the dialogue and speech that so brilliantly lends itself to interpretation of the inward and outward performances, or presentations of self, of the characters in the play.

Although the goal of the unit is to help students prepare for the AP exam at the end of the year, it is important for them to understand that there are many other reasons to study Shakespearean performance. The value of studying Shakespeare will last beyond the looming hurdle of the exam. A well-planned curriculum unit in Shakespeare is valuable because it provides the kind of rigorous experience needed to adequately prepare high school students for success at the postsecondary level.

Not only is the study of Shakespeare valuable in the academic world, however. Shakespeare teaches us a great deal about the human condition, and asks the universal question: "to be, or not to be?" In addition, the English language is not easy to imagine in its present state without Shakespeare, who contributed countless idioms and expressions to our everyday lexicon. This fact is a way to get young people interested in Shakespeare, but it is also, in a way, culturally valuable to recognize and appreciate. As Marjorie Garber writes in her book *Shakespeare and Modern Culture*, "Shakespeare has scripted many of the ideas that we think of as 'naturally' our own and even as 'naturally' true: ideas about human character, about individuality, about selfhood, about government, about men and women, youth and age, about the qualities that make a strong leader." <sup>1</sup> She also points out that many fields of study and work outside of literature and the theatre have also been strongly influenced by Shakespeare, including psychology, law, politics, business, and medicine. In this way, the study of Shakespeare is a pursuit of limitless relevancy to our lives and our world.

## Learning Objectives

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The major goal of this unit is that, by the end, students will be able to identify, discuss, and coherently write about the major themes in *Macbeth*. Moreover, students will be able to identify and explain literary devices such as diction, imagery, and metaphor in Shakespeare. This skill will be necessary in coming to an understanding of the threefold performance feature that exists in and beyond Shakespeare. In a sense, these devices will be explored as tools by which Shakespeare creates character, while at the same time making the

reader aware of the significance of the relationship among speech, character, and selfhood beyond the text. These skills will also be valuable in the study of all works of literature, including those studied in this course and in my students' future college educations. A pragmatic side to this learning objective is that Shakespeare's work may appear on the AP exam, as it has in the past. One specific example is the 2009 AP exam, which asked students to write an essay about the extended metaphor in a soliloquy from a history play.

The objectives of the unit are closely tied to the skills and content knowledge outlined in two main sets of standards, which themselves are closely related. These two sets of standards are the Advanced Placement Competency Goals and the College Readiness Standards. In reading the Competency Goals, one can see that they all add up to a fundamental objective: students must demonstrate that they can identify and explain the language of literature in order to analyze it, and then form their own arguments and opinions about it to be coherently expressed, orally and in writing. What's more, students must express an understanding of the historical, social, and cultural value of the literature that they are studying. There will be several writing assignments throughout the unit, demonstrating the kind of writing-intensive course outlined by the Competency Goals. This is particularly significant because two-thirds of the time on the AP exam is allotted for writing three essays on poetry and prose.

The instructional leadership team along with the administration of my school in Chicago made the decision to look beyond the Illinois Learning Standards, in favor of the ACT College Readiness Standards. In reality, the College Readiness Standards are a better fit for our school. Many schools in Chicago are in danger of being placed on a probationary list if they do not demonstrate what is now referred to as 'AYP,' or adequate yearly progress. Essentially, this means that ACT scores must steadily rise. Our plan has been to align the curriculum with the College Readiness Standards, which outline the specific skill sets and content knowledge that students must master each semester to perform well on the ACT.

## The Presentation of Self

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### Character: Readings in the Language of the Macbeths

Lady Macbeth has just been found dead, evidently of suicide. Macbeth is told about his wife's death at a time of turmoil, as Macduff's army is approaching Inverness, Macbeth's castle. Overall, things are not exactly turning out the way he planned. Although he had wavered in his own thinking about taking the crown from King Duncan, his wife had, with her strong sense of purpose, convinced Macbeth to murder the king. Thereafter, he had his good friend Banquo killed out of selfishness, and has been suffering the guilt and madness that came along with this despicable act. To complicate things, the obscure prophesies of the witches are always in the back of his mind.

It is at this moment when Macbeth delivers a speech that reflects his despair at his own discovery of life's fragility and meaninglessness: "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player/ That struts and frets his hour upon the stage/ And then is heard no more." <sup>2</sup>

In his declaration that "life's a poor player," he suggests two notions. One is that life is a player, and a poor one at that. In other words, our lives consist of merely acting a certain part, whether it is conditioned in us, or a conscious type of acting that is informed by the social or cultural values around us. However, it is "poor"

because, in the vast scheme of the entire world, the acting of a single player cannot have any meaningful or far-reaching significance.

Secondly, among the possible identities it can claim, life is only a poor player. This is to say, it is not a king, queen, dignitary, and certainly not a god. Life is not particularly special, for a poor player is not very high up on the social ladder. In fact, the life of a player is made up of pretending to be other people. The player is not the real thing itself, but only a "walking shadow" of the real thing. In Macbeth's own mind, it is difficult for life to compete with the everlasting phenomena of time and death. He says, "all our yesterdays have lighted fools/ The way to dusty death." <sup>3</sup> The purpose of his actions is now called into question. Of course, he had been inwardly conflicted about his own ambition, but the finality of Lady Macbeth's death has struck the chord of guilt and regret. In the face of the recognition of the insignificance of life and its events and actions, Macbeth plays the part of introspective philosopher- as to what degree of sincerity he may have achieved; it is up to the reader to decide. Therefore, he himself has become a player, an idea intensified even more with the immediately ensuing part he takes on, that of a raging bully who threatens a messenger that comes in with the inconceivable news that Birnam Wood is itself physically approaching the castle.

To complicate things, however, it is quite possible that Macbeth presents himself to his own self in uttering these words. For example, if Macbeth can convince himself of his own metaphor (that life is indeed a poor player), and that the events and actions therein are lacking in meaning and substance, then his own actions are much more palatable. He can then imagine that in the broad scheme of things he is not required to justify his now seemingly inconsequential actions. Time and the world will go on, in other words, despite the results of his own diminutive circle of life. The guilt he may feel for the deaths of Duncan, Banquo, Macduff's family, and now Lady Macbeth, is pointless. So, in verbalizing his awareness that life is a "brief candle" that "signif[ies] nothing," <sup>4</sup> he can extricate himself from the burden of responsibility.

Harold Bloom presents yet another element to this idea of Macbeth's performance to himself. He notes the connection between the "shadow" of his speech and his later statement: "I'gin to be aweary of the sun,/ And wish th'estate o' th' world were now undone." <sup>5</sup> He explains that just as the shadow cannot survive the disappearance of the sun, the player on the stage cannot survive the disappearance of the audience member. This concept provides an excellent opportunity for students to further explore the relationship between performers and audience members as it applies to the 'player' aspect of the performance triangle. First of all, one can not exist without the other. Performer and audience member are mutually dependant on one another. A question to raise in the classroom is, "what is it about a performance that draws an audience member emotionally into a play?" In reality, audience members know that the characters on stage are not 'real' people, and the art director, no matter how skilled, cannot duplicate the setting the way, say, a film can. Still, a good performance can have an effect on a willing audience member; and therein lies the key. An audience member is willing to accept all that is present to him or her, and suspension of disbelief goes a long way in the hands of skilled actors. Therefore, in their staged reading activities in this unit, students should be mindful of this performer- audience member relationship.

A major goal of this unit is to have students proficient enough to identify metaphors such as this, and then discuss and write about the multiple layers of meaning that are embedded in the language that a character speaks. Earlier in the play, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth argue about the prospect of murdering Duncan. The dialogue in this entire scene is another example of the central concept this curriculum unit will focus on; that Shakespeare's characters, like us, tend to play a part, presenting themselves in a role in order to convince others of the sincerity of that role. In this scene (Act I, scene 7), the turmoil within Macbeth's mind is apparent. As the scene opens, Macbeth delivers a soliloquy in which he debates whether to murder Duncan. After

examining the risk, coupled with the fact that Duncan, who is a guest in his home, is a virtuous king, he seems to have decided not to let his ambition drive him to disreputable deeds. He begins, "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well/ It were done quickly." The possibility of the murder is still present in his mind at this point, but he counters himself during his interior deliberation a few lines later: "as his host,/ [I] should against his murderer shut the door,/ Not bear the knife myself." <sup>6</sup>

Before he completes his soliloquy- for Shakespeare makes this clear with a dash to end the speech- Lady Macbeth interrupts. There is a notable shift in tone from his soliloquy to his instant declaration to his wife that they "will proceed no further in this business." This shift and then the maintaining of this tone is violently broken in on by Lady Macbeth and the gruesome imagery she uses to persuade her husband that their original plan to depose the king should be followed through. She also insults him and calls his manhood into question: "When you durst do it, then you were a man;/ And to be more than what you were, you would/ Be so much more the man." Here, Lady Macbeth delivers a remarkable performance herself. She presents herself as a forceful, uncompromising individual rooted in determination. She chooses not to show her own inward thoughts of frailty as a woman. Yet, she does outwardly express these thoughts to the audience in her speech: "Come, you spirits [ . . . ] unsex me here,/ And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full/ Of direst cruelty." <sup>7</sup> She implores the spirits to change the fundamental femininity about her; she desires to become something else. In essence, she desires to assume a different role with the intention of presenting that self to the outside world, just as an actor will call on the muse to help better create a character upon the stage.

### **Self: Sociological Readings**

The strategies in this unit aim to focus students' attention on the diction, imagery, and metaphor in examples of dialogue and speech in *Macbeth* so that they can explore the performance-of-self aspect that Shakespeare makes us aware of, and connect it to themselves. Most of Shakespeare's characters are reflections of, and reflective of, people we know in our real lives. They also remind us of ourselves- for who has not, as Macbeth does, carried on an internal debate when a tough decision lies before us? Who has not presented themselves, as Lady Macbeth does, as more confident, and less vulnerable, than they really were at the time? As we live our daily lives, we tend to play multiple roles, whether consciously or not. The fact that people present themselves as they want others to perceive them is a common element of human behavior. Individuals perform, so to speak, to the outside world in a sometimes very calculating way.

This concept is the main argument of Irving Goffman in his sociological work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. He argues that individuals have an internalized sense of whom or what they are, and how they must represent this sense to outside observers. However, this internalized sense of self is continuously shifting, so that the presentation of the self may be drastically different in separate circumstances. The part that individuals play for others is much like an actor what an actor does in taking on a role for an audience. Just as the actor's challenge is to convince the audience to take him seriously as the character he is portraying, individuals endeavor to convince their observers of a particular persona. In doing so, people must attempt to maintain that persona- which itself is a performance. Goffman sums up this idea by saying that individuals, whilst performing, hope that outside observers "believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be." <sup>8</sup>

Goffman goes on to argue that not only do individuals perform for others, they perform for themselves. He discusses two key extremes that the individual may experience. On one hand, a performer can be completely convinced by his own performance. This scenario is not unlike the circumstances in which Macbeth finds

himself in as he internally debates whether to let his ambition dictate murderous action. If the performance is successful in persuading the individual of this selfhood, then it may be possible to justify any action or behavior.

On the other hand, Goffman continues, the individual, in performing for himself, may not be convinced at all. He notes that this is "understandable, since no one is in quite as good an observational position to see through the act as the person who puts it on." <sup>9</sup> This may seem obvious, but it truly is an extraordinary insight. Through the character of Macbeth, Shakespeare heightens our awareness of the relationship between outward and inward performance. Lady Macbeth herself offers us distinct voices, and, consequently, distinct performances. It is this relationship between the self and the ways in which we distinguish outward and inward presentations that focuses the reading of Macbeth in this unit. Students will begin by examining their own selves, and questioning preconceived notions of what makes up their own selves in relation to how they perform in their everyday lives.

### **Player: Actors' Readings**

Between the concepts of Macbeth's performances within his play and the self-performances of individuals in the real world, lies another paradigm of performance; that of the player, or actor. In this unit, students will come to a deep understanding of the overarching phenomenon of performance by studying the ways in which actors play parts in Shakespeare. In high school classrooms, much effort is directed toward supporting students with visuals such as video clips or illustrations. Audio clips of plays also give students an insight into ways in which actors and directors interpret the text.

Actors have been performing Shakespeare for hundreds of years now, and the countless approaches to Shakespeare's characters have been chronicled. In the case of the characters in Macbeth, a great opportunity arises in which to interpret a character with multifarious voices and presentations of self. In his book *The Player's Passion*, Joseph R. Roach recounts the ways in which actors throughout history have attempted to embody the psychology of their characters. As the field of modern psychology developed in the late nineteenth century, it gave actors more fuel for their approaches to acting. <sup>10</sup> In light of this, Macbeth lends itself exceptionally well to the study of performing character. Shakespeare affords us plenty of opportunity to interpret the characters' words and behavior in order to come to understandings about these characters' psyches.

In discussing Macbeth, Marjorie Garber insists that "interpretation and its risks and dangers are at the heart of the play [. . .] equivocation in Shakespeare's time was associated with the Jesuit practice of 'mental reservation'- saying one thing while holding in reserve another, more private thought or belief." <sup>11</sup> This idea of mental reservation is epitomized by Lady Macbeth's plea to her husband that he 'look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under't." This fact is made all the more interesting considering the fascinating history of productions of Macbeth. Garber explains the disaster-prone and volatile history of the play's productions, leading many actors and directors to deem it cursed, even to this day. The connection between text and stage is bridged by the actor, and students will discover this in exercising staged readings. Still, the interpretation and analysis of Macbeth need not be staged for an audience. Silent readers may also 'hear' the inflection, tone, and delivery of the characters in their own minds. It is the challenge of the actor to transmit this performance from the mental to the physical, making it manifest for audiences along with the communication of body language, which is a subject in and of itself.

Another helpful resource that we will reference is John Wilders' *Shakespeare in Production: Macbeth*. This

edition presents the full text of the play, but also provides a wealth of notes on producing, directing, and acting the play. As a reader progresses through the play, there are insights into how various productions of Macbeth have interpreted specific scenes, or speeches. Notes on the variations of intonation or tonality in the deliverance of certain lines are useful in demonstrating to students how actors think about performing. Set pieces and props are also described, especially in relation to how renowned productions of the play were staged. When one juxtaposes the text and these production notes, the player-performance aspect of Shakespeare comes more fully to life.

## Teaching Strategies

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### The Performance Triangle

In the 'Presentation of Self' section of this unit, I discussed the three major aspects of performance inherent in the study of Macbeth: character, self, and player. Each of these focal points will be represented in what I call the performance triangle. The performance triangle is a paradigm upon which each of the strategies in the unit builds. It is the framework for reading, discussing, and writing about Macbeth, which are the chief objectives of the unit. This concept can also be seen as a building block that will guide students to identify, interpret, and analyze three aspects of performance. Specifically, these three aspects are: 1) the character of Macbeth performing various roles within the play; 2) the role of the actor in performing the characters in Macbeth, from text to stage; and 3) the concept of performance used by the individual reader/audience member in his everyday environment.

The performance triangle will be introduced to students at the start of the unit, so that each of the strategies described in this section can be guided by this paradigm. Furthermore, each of the specific activities in the unit is an extension of this concept of performance, whether it be of self, player, character, or the relationship among these. A poster of this graphic will be produced and placed on the classroom wall, so that it will be constantly available as we study the play.

### Activation of Prior Knowledge and Experience

Before handling the actual text, it is important to lead students into a particular work of literature when beginning a new unit. A time-honored method of creating relevancy for students is to activate student prior knowledge about a subject or field of study. It creates relevancy by allowing students to make personal connections, and, in literature, this is especially helpful. In reading Macbeth, students will be able to continuously draw connections between the themes and motifs in the play and their own lives. In addition, activating prior knowledge increases interest. When students are interested in a particular unit topic from the start, they are motivated to learn; this is important because student motivation is key in their successful mastery of the skills promoted and the content embedded in the unit.

Activities such as anticipation surveys and visual literacy exercises will set the tone for the first lessons of the unit. An example of an anticipation survey is an exercise in which students respond to statements relating to the themes of the literary work. In this case, it will be the concepts of selfhood, performance, and moral or ethical ambiguity. Students will respond in writing and then share their responses orally in small groups. These are meant to challenge students to think deeply about their own selves, which would be the focus of this unit. Also, an excellent visual literacy exercise that I use is to show students paintings inspired by



Macbeth, and to have discussions about details in the artwork, helping students develop predictions about the play.

### **Annotation**

This strategy is key for students to master in this unit, especially because Shakespeare's language is very dense and laden with multiple ideas and rhetorical devices. By 'annotation' I mean marking insights and reactions on the actual page with a pen or pencil. Although students are not allowed to write in the texts they receive from my particular school, sections of the book can be easily photocopied and disseminated to students. Annotation of Shakespeare's language will facilitate a much closer reading by students than that which they are normally accustomed to. It is a skill that will benefit students by giving them a way to both identify the literary devices learned throughout the course, and to jot down personal reactions, all of which is very useful in the study of poetry and poetical language. Interestingly, AP exams in the past have presented speeches from Shakespeare plays in the poetry essay section, accentuating the deeply poetic aspects of his language.

Through annotation, students will focus on identifying the tone and diction of the characters, leading to the concept of performance, but also such devices as imagery, metaphor, and symbolism. After annotating the text, students can begin to form opinions and arguments about the sincerity of each character's presentation of themselves to others. Using the above example of Lady Macbeth's dialogue with Macbeth, students will learn to discuss what the ghastly imagery she employs says about how she wants to present herself to her husband. Additionally, students will be able to mark the meter and rhythm of Shakespeare's language, after the concepts of 'iambic pentameter' and blank verse have been introduced to them earlier in the course.

### **Staged Readings**

As we begin the play as a whole class, it is important that students feel as though they have firm footing as they enter the study of a work that is new to them. In order to foster this confidence, we will engage in class read-alouds. These are exercises in which we straightforwardly read the text as a class, usually for no more than ten minutes. As we read, I model the sort of close reading that is encouraged. I will pause intermittently while reading, asking the class for reactions to the text or inferences they might make. In this way, the teacher 'reads aloud' as one might 'think aloud.' After the initial teacher modeling exercise, students are prepared to perform read-alouds on their own in small groups. As students become more comfortable with active reading and thinking critically about the text, they will be ready for the staged reading strategy.

A staged reading is a more considered version of a read-aloud. Students are divided into small groups of three or four students. Then, they are assigned a specific passage from the play to prepare for a mini-performance. They are not required to memorize any lines or use costumes or props, because they will have had only fifteen to twenty minutes to prepare their scenes and to think about the way they will present them. This strategy is closely tied to the 'player' aspect of the performance triangle paradigm. I will use the example above, in which Lady Macbeth convinces her husband to assassinate Duncan, as a good model for a staged reading exercise. Students will have to synthesize many skills and tools they are learning in order to interpret the scene between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

### **Guided Discussion**

There are three main avenues of discussion that students will experience in this unit. Specifically, these are: in-class oral discussion (both in small groups and as a whole class), the gallery walk, and an online discussion

group.

Teaching students how to engage in discussion is vital, because oral expression is important to develop as a skill, especially for these students. Many of my students lack the confidence, for one thing, to express their own opinions about challenging material. Also, many students have not had much practice in listening and responding in a discussion about literature in a small or large group setting. For discussion to be meaningful in this unit, I will encourage all students to voice their opinions and reactions. Written responses to bell ringer prompts that relate to the text are a good strategy to start students' thought processes in the direction of critical analysis.

The basic premise of the small-to-large-group discussion strategy starts with small groups of three or four students. They are allotted time, usually fifteen minutes, to discuss and take notes on a specific prompt regarding a passage of the play. Then, the whole class comes together and shares in a large group discussion. Note taking during small group discussion is useful because it gives students a starting point, or something to say. Making even just one point or stating a personal reaction is encouraged, because it may trigger ideas in another student, and, in this fashion, every voice contributes to the discussion.

For the gallery walk strategy, which will take place twice during the unit, students engage in a 'silent discussion.' Several posters are placed on the walls of the room, each with a quote from the text or a specific thematic element of the text. Students walk around the room contemplating the posters, as they would in an art gallery, and write a short response on the poster. Students are encouraged to respond to every poster, as well as respond to the opinions that other students are putting in writing. Gallery walks are helpful in giving every student a chance to contribute to the discussion, particularly a student that is still in a developing stage of his or her skill in vocally expressing themselves. This strategy leads to high levels of student engagement, because it promotes thinking about high interest aspects of Macbeth. Students will draw upon both the oral discussion and gallery walks when forming their original theses for their essays at the end of the unit, and the gallery walk contributes in bolstering the quality of their writing.

Students will have an opportunity to discuss the play or any relevant class work online. It is fairly easy to set up an online listserve. For this course, I will use Yahoo! Groups, which will serve the purpose of the course quite well. Basically, the listserve is a forum that students log on to using their email addresses. I will take each student's email address and register it as part of the online group. No one else besides the students in the class and the teacher has access to the discussion forum. I will periodically pose guiding questions, homework help, and links to helpful websites (including a blog I have developed for my AP course). Students will have the option to speak to the entire group, or to send a message to just one or more particular students. By utilizing each of these avenues of discussion, students will strengthen their prospects of succeeding in meeting the critical thinking and writing objectives of the unit.

### **Intensive Writing**

Writing will be based on close analysis of the text's performance aspects, thematic issues, and social and historical value, as well as the figurative language, tone, diction and imagery- which they will have been learning through annotation exercises, guided discussions, and read-alouds. Students are expected to complete bell ringers at the start of each class session. These bell ringers will be written on the front board as students walk into the classroom. They will have the first five minutes to write a quality paragraph reaction in their journals. The bell ringers are in the form of prompts. One example is, "In your opinion, which character is most responsible for the death of Duncan? Give reasons and examples from the text to support your answer."

The purpose of these written bell ringers is twofold. One, the prompts are closely linked to the material to be studied that day in class. This way, they can be a springboard for discussion, and always a good way to link back to our all-encompassing framework of performance. Secondly, these timed bell ringers are good practice for the AP exam, in which they will be required to write coherently and think critically about a prompt related to a literary passage, all under a strict time limit.

This unit will also include a formal critical essay of three to four pages, due at the end of the five weeks. Throughout the course, students will learn the format of writing high-quality, college-level pieces that demonstrate logical essay organization. The essays will require one draft, to be handed back with teacher notes and corrections. I will stress the idea of how drafting, something my students are not familiar or even comfortable with doing, can improve the quality of expression in writing.. For example, they will learn how to construct a thesis, and use varied sentence structure and relevant textual support to form a strong argument. The topic of the essay will be performance and the presentation of self, and how Shakespeare makes us aware of this phenomenon. Students are strongly encouraged to choose at least three passages including various characters in Macbeth, and demonstrate a close reading of these passages. Graphic organizers and various note-taking strategies will be taught to students during the pre-writing stage. This will teach students to organize their thoughts and create a structurally sound essay. A five-point rubric will be used to assess the final drafts of these essays.

## Exemplary Lessons

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### Activation of Prior Knowledge and Experience

As students are introduced to a new unit, it is helpful to find out what students already know about the topic, and what sort of experience students have had with the topic. This activity provides a great starting point for discussion, especially with high school students. The students for which this unit is designed are seventeen and eighteen years old. They are beginning to come into their own as young adults as they discover and form their own identities. Great literature, which is what we read and study in this course, gives students the opportunity to deeply investigate what it means to be human and to live in our complex world.

Macbeth affords this opportunity in a variety of ways. This activity is one way to engage students in discussion of the themes and issues explored in the play. It is a type of anticipation guide, designed in the form of a survey. A series of questions are posed to students on a handout, and they respond to each in a brief written piece on the handout. This sheet may be given for homework or done in class, which will take about twenty minutes. The questions are designed to guide students toward inward reflection about their own beliefs and stances on moral or ethical issues -which are raised in profusion in Macbeth. After students answer questions individually, they form groups of three to four. Then they share their answers with each other while explicating the reasoning behind each response. I find that, many times, students will disagree with each others' responses. This is a perfect opportunity to teach the art of argument and discussion, in which students must listen carefully and respond with articulacy. Examples of statements on the anticipation guide are "What is the difference between greed and ambition?," and "Do you listen to your conscience?"

These mini-discussions within groups will eventually lead into a whole-class discussion. Another useful aspect of this anticipation guide is that it promotes student enthusiasm for the play, and provides a personal

connection to the literature. These statements and questions will be continually revisited throughout the unit, as students make judgments on how their own responses may have changed, or how certain characters might respond to the statements on the anticipation guide. Additionally, these discussions lend themselves well to the overarching examination of the performance paradigm. For example, Macbeth may have an inner concept of his own conscience, but may present a different, outward concept of conscience to the other characters in the play.

## **Staged Reading**

This lesson is designed to help students move through the reading of the play. It offers an engaging activity in which students must look critically at the text, and then make unique choices in interpretation. Students are first divided into small groups, or in this particular example, partners. Students are then instructed to reread a passage from their copies of Macbeth. I say 'reread' because, for the staged reading activity, it is best to choose a passage students are already somewhat familiar with. It is important that they know how the passage fits into the story, for their staged readings are performances that interpret the characters' dialogue in context.

A good early passage to use during the reading of the play is Act I, scene 7, lines 29-83. This is the scene wherein Lady Macbeth first questions why her husband is not at King Duncan's party, and then persuades Macbeth to murder the king. The objective for students is to have each partner assume the role of either Macbeth or Lady Macbeth, then read the lines aloud. They should endeavor to create a strong dramatic affect. This activity involves a three-step process. First, they will read the passage critically, deciding how each character might speak their lines, keeping in mind the motivation and conflicts each character faces. Secondly, they will annotate their passages. I will make copies of each passage so that students can annotate, or take detailed notes on their passages. In their annotation, they may make such marginal notes as "sigh heavily here," or "whisper this line." This way, students will create a script for staged performance out of Shakespeare's text. Body language is another aspect of their performance to keep in mind.

After each partnership has made notes, they will lastly perform the passages aloud at their desks. This is intended to test the students' success in interpreting the dialogue. The students themselves are the assessors of this success. They are pushed to try several readings aloud, discovering the ways in which their thought processes align with the performance triangle aspect of the actor. After all students have had the chance to read their parts aloud, volunteers are chosen to perform their staged readings in front of the class. Following the staged reading, I will lead a whole-class discussion on how the students came to interpret and perform this passage, and what the audience might have learned about the characters from the performance. Time will only allow for a few performances in front of the class, so, after the first one, I will ask for volunteers who may have a different or contrasting reading than the first. This activity will be revisited throughout the reading of the play so that students will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the play and the actor's role, but also so that more students have the opportunity to perform in front of the class.

## **The Critical Essay**

Students are expected to draw upon the entire unit's worth of studying Macbeth in producing a formal essay that will be assessed on the following points: 1) a clear and well-developed thesis; 2) examples and quotes that are relevant and support the thesis; 3) logical organization; 4) punctuation, grammar, and spelling; 5) closing of essay. These points will also have been used to assess previous essays in the course. The essay's format is to be typed, double-spaced, using Times New Roman twelve point font. This format, of course, may be adjusted to fit the requirements of other teachers.

I will explain to students that I am interested in their own unique analyses of the play. In a way, I want them to show me what they have learned about the themes, characters, and stylistic elements of the play as these factors apply to the concept of performance in Macbeth. In the first draft, students must demonstrate their grasp of a workable thesis, and whether their draft has the potential to continue as a full-length essay. I will make comments in the paper's margins, with a general overview at the end of the essay, noting ideas for progress. I also hold a twenty-five minute 'writer's workshop' on the first draft due date during class. During this time, students are encouraged to work with a partner or small group, giving each other feedback. I hand out a peer feedback sheet, and walk around the classroom fielding questions they may have on the comments I made on their papers.

The essay prompt will read: "Choose characters, themes, or literary elements in Shakespeare's Macbeth. Form a thesis about how these aspects of the play contribute to the overall performance aspect of the play, and how they play an important role in the overall meaning of the play. Write a logically-structured essay in which you support your thesis, remembering to use textual quotes. You are also encouraged to use notes from class handouts and discussions." For the final draft, I also will write comments and notes on their paper, but this time the focus will be reading their essay as a college professor whose initial expectations will exceed mine. After the final draft has been returned, students place their essays in a writing portfolio, which is a collection of all their major written pieces over the course of the school year. This will provide students with an excellent source of material to look back on as they enter their postsecondary education.

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<p>I know you all, and will awhile uphold The unyoked humor of your idleness. Yet herein will I imitate the sun, Who doth permit the base contagious clouds To smother up his beauty from the world.....</p> <p>(Continue worksheet with the remainder of this speech)</p>	<p>I understand all of you. For now, I'll put on the rowdy behavior of your good-for- nothing ways. But in this way, I'll be like the sun, who allows the vulgar, corrupting clouds to hide his beauty from the world.</p> <p>(Continue worksheet with the remainder of this speech from the No Fear text)</p>
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## Endnotes

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1. Marjorie Garber, in Shakespeare and Modern Culture, xiii.
2. William Shakespeare, in Macbeth (Signet Classics), 90.
3. William Shakespeare, in Macbeth (Signet Classics), 90.
4. William Shakespeare, in Macbeth (Signet Classics), 90.
5. Harold Bloom, in Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human, 542.
6. William Shakespeare, in Macbeth (Signet Classics), 21.
7. William Shakespeare, in Macbeth (Signet Classics), 17.
8. Iving Goffman, in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, 17.
9. Iving Goffman, in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, 17.
10. Joseph R. Roach, "Second Nature: Mechanism and Organicism from Goethe to Lewes," in The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting, 160-194.
11. Margorie Garber, in Shakespeare and Modern Culture, 86.

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