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Macbeth

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



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All references come from the Dover Thrift Edition of *Macbeth*, copyright 1993.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Setting and History

Objective: Researching the historical setting of the play

Activity

Beyond the witches and the ghosts, the political events that occur in *Macbeth* are realistic for the time and the place in which the play is set. In medieval Scotland, kings were overthrown on a regular basis and often through violent means.

Use the library, the Internet, or both to research the setting of *Macbeth*. Begin by searching for the early history of Scotland (between the years 850 – 1100). *Macbeth* and Shakespeare websites will be helpful, as will the history of specific places in the setting. Use the information that you find to fill out the chart on the following page.

Some of the topics on the Setting Chart are more applicable to the timeframe than the location of *Macbeth*, such as “Historical Events” or “Inventions.” These apply to the entire world during the target period of your research.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Act II

Newspaper Reporting

Objective: Writing a news story about the play

Activity

News reporters must be keen observers of the events that they cover, especially when the information they distribute has the potential to influence the general public. During war and other large-scale events, for example, people on the home front await reports from the front lines in order to evaluate the situation for themselves. The information must be carefully reviewed and free of personal opinion or exaggeration because it has the potential to cast an entire nation into panic. False or improper information may also cause harm to the public; it can sway political opinions, create enemies with other nations, or cause instability in the government.

You are a modern reporter who has been transported through time to medieval Scotland in order to compile a story on the murder of Duncan. Observe what you can from the characters involved with the event and record the answers to the fundamental questions of a reporter: who, what, when, where, how, and why? Once you've acquired those answers, write an article covering the event. Include a headline, a sub-head, and be sure to keep the article factual and free of your own opinion.

Your first paragraph should be a condensed version of the event. The remainder of the article should contain any other significant information surrounding the murder; remember, in journalism, the *unanswered* questions are just as important as the answered questions. Obviously, as a modern reader, you *know* who the guilty people are, but as someone reporting the facts of the assassination at that time, you need to put this knowledge aside.

Below is an example as to how your article might begin:

DUNCAN ASSASSINATED!
Killer or Killers Unknown

INVERNESS. The calm after the battle was shattered today when Duncan, King of Scotland, was found murdered in the castle of General Macbeth. Also killed were two guards suspected of conducting the assassination. "O horror, horror, horror!" cried the shaken nobleman Macduff upon discovering the murdered Duncan.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Act V

Prophecy and Fate

Objective: Identifying plot consistencies

Activity

One of the themes in *Macbeth* is whether man has freewill or has control over his own destiny. The witches appear to govern the wicked events, but do they really? Once they reveal the prophecy (fate), must they maintain it or do they simply “enjoy the show”?

Macbeth takes the witch-prophecy quite seriously in Act I; so much, in fact, that he feels he has no choice but to pursue it. Once Macbeth changes his life to claim the part of the prophecy that benefits him, he begins to fear the prophecy, however. He knows that it has been accurate, so he worries about the remainder of the prophecy, which states that he will have no heirs.

Frightened, Macbeth unsuccessfully attempts to circumvent the prophecy, but his attempts only hasten it. Fate appears to be predetermined and immovable.

Macbeth caused grave damage while trying to alter his fate; this is the reason why *Macbeth* is often called Shakespeare's bloodiest play. If fate was unalterable, do you think that Macbeth could have reached it without the bloodshed? Write a short paragraph and support your opinion.

The chart on the following page contains a list of Macbeth's victims. Write in a sentence or two how each one dies and the Act and Scene in which it occurs. In the *Alternate Fate* column, explain how the prophecy could still come true if the character does not die. If saving a victim *would* change fate, describe an alternate future for that character.

The first character is done for you.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Acts I – V

Understanding Shakespeare's Language

Objective: Understanding Elizabethan English

Activity

Rewrite the following script in Shakespeare's dialect so that it would make sense to characters in the play. Remember to change items in the dialogue to fit Shakespeare's time period.

(Scene: Small town. Two policemen respond to a car accident. A woman stands on the road yelling for help.)

Woman: Hey, over here! Over here! Hurry!

Officer 1: Ma'am, calm down, calm down. Are you hurt?

Woman: No, no, I'm fine. It's that van over there; it's on fire and there's still a woman and kid inside!

Officer 2: Go over by the car, where it's safe.

(The two officers run to the van)

Officer 1: Lady, can you hear me? Can you get out?

Officer 2: She's knocked out; the seatbelt's holding her inside!

Officer 1: I can reach the kid—I've got the kid; get the woman!

Officer 2: Ma'am, can you hear me? Ma'am?

(Officer 1 holds child and turns)

Officer 1: Take my knife and cut her free! The fire's getting worse!

(Officer 2 grabs knife; Officer 1 takes child to safety)

Woman: *(woozy)* Where am I? *(coughs)*

Officer 1: Hold still ma'am, I've got to cut you free.

(Officer 1 frees the woman and pulls her from the van)

Name: _____

Date: _____

Acts I – V**Resume Writing**

Objective: Interpreting details from the text

Activity

Attached is a sample resume. Notice that the resume includes career objectives, prior work experience, skills, personal interests, and references.

Weary of being King, Macbeth has decided to pursue a new career. Overlooking his criminal record and death, write a resume for Macbeth or Lady Macbeth.

Your first task will be to think up a career for a person of Macbeth's experience to pursue. Identifying that will allow you to write the resume so that it is targeted to a specific job.

A blank resume is attached, but feel free to use a computer if you have one available.

Name: _____

Date: _____

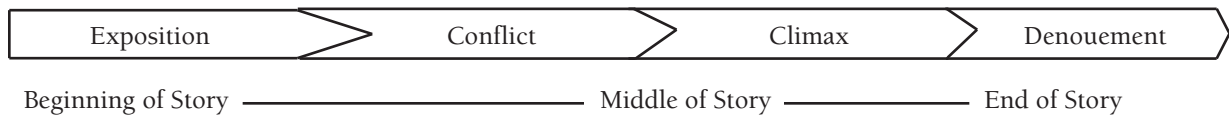
Wrap-Up

Plot

Objective: Creating a graph that depicts the action of the play

Activity

The intensity of some literature and drama follows a pattern: it rises and then falls. If one were to create a timeline and label the stages of this pattern, it might look like this:



In this pattern, the intensity of the story is lowest at the beginning and end and highest during the climax. This pattern may or may not apply to *Macbeth*.

Most businesses today use charts and graphs to visually represent their activity over a given period of time. You can use the same method to represent the activity, or intensity, of *Macbeth*.

Create a graph that portrays the level of activity in *Macbeth* to the time at which it occurs. The bottom should be divided by acts, while the side should be divided by the intensity of the action in the play. The result will be a line graph that illustrates the rise and fall of action throughout the play.

We have provided a list of events to place on your chart. After you place them, connect them to form a line graph. Three events have been placed for you.

When you finish your graph, identify any patterns in the intensity of the play. Compare your graph to those of your classmates and discuss any outstanding similarities or differences.

Put the following events in their proper places on the chart:

- Macbeth crowned
- Banquo murdered
- Hecate scolds witches
- Guards murdered
- Lady Macbeth dies
- Lennox warns Lady Macduff
- Malcolm announces crowning
- Macduff's family murdered
- Porter answers door
- Macduff learns of murdered family
- Macbeth's head brought forth
- Army reaches Dunsinane
- Macbeth fights Macduff
- Ghost of Banquo appears
- Malcolm and Macduff plot
- Witches' first prophecy
- Macbeth sees apparitions