Prestwick House

Activity Pack

MACBETH

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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:_____

Pre-Reading

Advertising

Objective: Creating a playbill

Activity

Shakespeare existed long before the present age of mass communication. Playwrights in Shakespeare's era had to rely on word-of-mouth and simple playbills, or flyers, to advertise their productions. Limited printing technology meant that playbills were mostly text and had only one simple drawing—if any. The playbill usually included the name of the production, the playwright, the time and location of the performance, the names of the actors and characters, and a brief description of the play.

Each group should design a modern playbill for *Macbeth*. The playbill should be no larger than one page, but it should contain enough information to convince someone to see *Macbeth*.

Use any available resources to make the playbills. They can be completely hand drawn, computer generated, or any combination of the two. Remember, the text on the playbill should be eye-catching but readable. Any drawings should be relevant to the play, but dramatic enough to spark someone's interest.

Complete one flyer per group.

Name: _____   Date:_____

Act I

Characterization

Objective: Recognizing character traits

Activity

Reading a play like *Macbeth* is exciting, but unfortunately, one element is missing: physical descriptions of the characters. Drama is designed to be watched—not read. Viewers see for themselves the physical details of characters in a play, so the printed form need not contain descriptions common to standard literature.

When reading drama, one must pay close attention in order to mentally complete the character details. Much of the detail is secondary; we read what one character says or thinks about another character. We also gain character information by observing the actions of characters.

Complete the Character Chart to reveal your assessment of the characters in the first Act. When you are finished with the chart, review the characters that you designated as "major characters." Select the two most similar characters and write one paragraph comparing them. Next, select the two least similar characters and write another paragraph, this time contrasting them.

You may not yet have the information to fill in some of the blocks in the chart. When this occurs, write "NI" in the appropriate space.

Name: _____   Date:_____

Act II

Simile

Objective: Recognizing a simile

Activity

Shakespeare's drama is full of simile; however, we might not easily recognize the objects that he uses for comparison due to the evolution of language since the late 16th century. In Act III, scene four, Macbeth describes himself as "broad and general as the casing air." Today, we would probably use the equivalent simile, "free as the wind."

In Acts I and II, identify six instances of simile. List them on the **Simile Chart** that follows and then interpret them. For each interpretation, try to include a modern simile that carries the same message as the original.

The first example has been completed for you.

Name: _____   Date:_____

Act II

<u>Letter Writing</u>

Objective: Writing to characters in the play

Activity

The violence in *Macbeth* is indeed brutal, but it's even worse because it is premeditated. Macbeth commits his atrocities knowing exactly what will happen to the victims. In the very beginning of Act II, we see Macbeth in his last few moments as an innocent man.

To complete this exercise, assume that you now have access to a message service that can reach Macbeth before he murders Duncan. Write a letter that will convince Macbeth to abandon his murderous scheme. In your letter, include anything that you know about Macbeth's life (spirituality, fears, etc.) that might make him change his mind.

After you write to Macbeth, write a letter to Duncan in case Macbeth cannot be swayed. Warn him of the plan and explain why Macbeth would do such a thing. Advise him on how to stay safe. Your letter must be believable because Duncan trusts Macbeth; it might be a good idea to keep it vague (don't identify the murderer—just the plan).

Examples:

Wait, Macbeth!

You already have the respect of everyone around you! Do not risk it all! You're a war hero and you own two provinces. You have no enemies in Scotland—why do you want to change that?

Your Highness, the King of Scotland;

Be warned, for one man desires to kill you as you sleep this evening. He is one of your own trusted men; keep two vigilant guards with you at all times!

Reproducible Student Worksheet

Name: _____   Date:_____

Act IV

Communicating

Objectives: Writing a speech
                Speaking effectively

Activity

Macbeth is plagued with problems, but he is still the King of Scotland. By the end of Act IV, several prominent public figures are dead, and others are fleeing to England to build an army. Civil unrest is increasing, and rumors of a possible coup d'état take Macbeth to new levels of anxiety. Macbeth decides to address the people of Scotland in order to put them at ease.

Each group will act as Macbeth's staff, including chief advisors and speechwriters. Consult the text and each other to come up with the topics that Macbeth will need to address when he speaks to the people. Have one person list these topics. Using the list, each group should prepare a short speech for Macbeth (no more than three minutes).

While compiling the speech, remember to address all the major problems of Scotland according to the play. Also, try to ensure that the speech reflects Macbeth's personality (even if he's evil). In other words, Macbeth might not be entirely truthful about some of the events that he addresses.

When the speeches are complete, each group should have a volunteer stand up and read the speech to the class.

Name: _____   Date:_____

Acts I – V

<u>Symbol</u>

Objective: Interpreting symbols in the play

Activity

Blood is one example of a symbol in *Macbeth*. The word *blood* or *bloody* is mentioned over forty times in the play. Prior to murdering Duncan, Macbeth imagines a bloody knife. After the murder, Macbeth's hands are bloody. Lady Macbeth is obsessed with the blood on her hands that never seems to disappear, and the bloody ghost of Banquo appears during Macbeth's dinner. Blood symbolizes murder or untimely death and the guilt that it causes.

Blood is only one of many symbols in *Macbeth*, however. The chart that follows supplies you with some of the other major symbols in the play. Review the play if necessary. Explain the meaning of each symbol and support your explanation with at least two references from the text. Note the act and scene in which you find your support.

When you finish the chart, identify two more symbols in *Macbeth* and explain them. Pay close attention to colors, numbers, and natural phenomena.

The first symbol has been completed for you.

Name: _____   Date:_____

Acts I – V

Plot

Objective: Relating conflicts and characters in *Macbeth* to contemporary conflicts

Activity

Shakespeare's drama is often described as universal, meaning it appeals to all audiences and cultures anywhere in history. Shakespeare achieves this universal appeal by using age-old themes to which anyone can relate, regardless of time or geography. *Romeo and Juliet,* for example, portrays lovers whose families are enemies—a story that could take place as easily in present-day America as it could in Renaissance Europe. Many of his plays have been recast in modern times—*Macbeth, Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, The Tempest, King Lear*, etc., have different titles, but the plots of the movies are Shakespeare's.

Consider the storyline of *Macbeth* and think of where or how it could occur in the present day. Be sure to take into account the many unpredictable organizations that exist in the world: governments (including monarchies like Macbeth's), corporations, organized crime families, etc.

Once you have identified a situation that parallels *Macbeth*, fill in the supplied chart, THE MODERN *MACBETH*, with the equivalent events and characters. You need to write only short comments to identify what you wish to say. Several examples have been completed for you.

Name: _____   Date:_____

Acts I – V

<u>Acting</u>

Objective: Understanding drama through performance

Activity

Plays such as *Macbeth* are written for the stage. Reading a play without watching it omits elements that only a physical performance could include.

Each group should select a single scene from *Macbeth* to act out for the class. The groups should first discuss the chosen scenes and settle on the details that the scene will require (voice, stage positions, mood, volume, etc.).

Members of each group will assign themselves roles. The members of the group should divide the scene to accommodate everyone; for example, two people will act the first half of the scene, and the others will act the second half.

Groups may also choose soliloquies, but no one in the group should do the same soliloquy. In addition, the group should still discuss the dramatic details of the chosen material.