Macbeth
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THE BASICS

VERSE

Shakespeare wrote most of the verse in his plays in iambic pentameter, a style consisting of ten syllables per line – five metrical feet, each consisting of one unstressed and one stressed syllable. The process of marking the stresses in a line is called scansion. By writing plays in iambic pentameter, Shakespeare was, in a way, directing the actors of his company. By scanning the lines themselves, your students can discover those directions and the opportunities for choice embedded within the text. Scansion is a valuable tool for both scholars and actors, because determining where the stresses go can reveal much not only about how the line might be delivered and about character, but also about what words in the line are most important. Scansion can also aid your students with the pronunciation of unfamiliar words.

PROSE

Your students may initially fear verse far more than prose; after all, prose is the form that dominates their reading elsewhere, in novels, textbooks, magazines, and online. In Shakespeare, however, prose may actually be more difficult for your students to work with, since prose is more likely to be heavy with colloquialism, and its rhythms are more likely to be idiosyncratic to a particular character’s way of speaking. When working through a prose section of a play, therefore, your students will need to look for different indications of rhythm than they do in verse:

- Identifying Prose from Verse: Depending on how your text is laid out, your students may have trouble distinguishing verse from prose at first glance – and may end up trying to scan their prose lines for iambic meter. The shortcut is this: in most texts, the first word of each verse line is capitalized, while prose lines, written as normal sentences, do not capitalize the first word after a line break.
- Sentence Length: Have your students go through the block of prose and find all of the sentence breaks. Are the sentences short and concise? Or does the character run on, linking many clauses together? How much variation is there in the length of the sentences?
- Unfinished Thoughts: Have your students identify the subject of each independent clause, then determine where that thought reaches completion -- or if it does.
- Questions: Does the speaker ask questions? Does anyone answer them?
- Interruptions: Does the speaker interrupt himself, or does someone else interrupt him?
- Shifts in Focus: When does the speaker change the subject? Does it come as part of an interruption?

Working with Verse and Prose

- During the Iambic Bodies activity, encourage your students to try their favorite lines (from Lesson One homework) out loud.
- After working through the Iambic Bodies activity, select a few lines from the First 100 Lines (see next page) to mark up as a group.
  - First, discuss breaking a line into feet. This will reveal the first round of choices: namely, if any elisions need to occur. A normal line must end its tenth syllable with a stress; a normal line including a feminine ending must end with its eleventh syllable unstressed.
THIRD WITCH

Anon.

ALL

Fair is | foul, and | foul is | fair:
Hover | through the | fog and | filthy | air.

Exeunt

1.2

Alarum within. Enter KING DUNCAN, MALCOLM, DONALBAIN, LENNOX, with Attendants, meeting a bleeding Captain

DUNCAN

What blood|y man | is that? || He can | report,
As seem|eth by | his plight, | of the | revolt
The new|est state.

MALCOLM

This is | the sergeant
Who like | a good | and hard|y sold|ier fought
'Gainst my | captiv|ity. || Hail, | brave friend;
Say to | the king | the know|ledge of | the broil
As thou | didst leave | it.

CAPTAIN

Doubtful | it stood;
As two | spent swim|ers, that | do cling | together
And choke | their art. || The merc|iless | Macdonwald--
Worthy | to be | a reb|el, for | to that

The Witches' meter is irregular even in its irregularity. The final line of this scene is catalectic trochaic pentameter.

Duncan establishes iambic pentameter as the dominant mode for this scene – though not without irregularities. Note the caesura in this line.

Duncan and Malcolm share this line, but it still falls either one beat or one foot short. If the missing beat is a final stress, that would seem to indicate a pause at the end of Malcolm's first line. If the missing beat is a full foot between Duncan's and Malcolm's lines, with "sergeant" as a feminine ending, that would indicate a pause between the lines. Have your students try both ways; which version do they like better?

This line is also a beat short. Does the caesura mark the place for a one-beat pause? Do additional stresses make up for the omission? What are possible other acting reasons for three stresses in a row? Might they involve what's going on with the Captain?

Again, this shared line is a beat short. Where should the one-beat pause fall? Does the necessary trochee of "doubtful" affect the placement of the pause?

Several of the Captain's lines contain feminine endings. What might inform his need to rush through from one line to the next?
William Shakespeare, like most boys of his social status in the early modern period, likely attended a grammar school in Stratford-upon-Avon. From the age of about seven on through his teenage years, Shakespeare would have spent much of his time at school studying and conversing in Latin (and possibly Greek) translating the works of great classical authors such as Ovid, Virgil, Plautus, Cicero, and Seneca. From these authors, Shakespeare would have learned not just grammar, but also the art of rhetoric: the composition of words to achieve a desired result. Shakespeare’s plays demonstrate that he had a keen and imaginative grasp of the hundreds of rhetorical devices used by the ancients, devices which helped him craft his words for emotional appeal, comic effect, and persuasive power.

Recognizing when characters use rhetoric is more important than identifying the terms each figure goes by (though we will introduce some later in this guide that are particularly relevant to the study of [???Insert Play Here]). Once actors and students can identify the basic shapes that rhetorical figures take, they can proceed to determining the playing choices those shapes provide. This section will provide you and your students with the tools to identify those shapes.

To help your students learn the basics of rhetoric, we’ve broken the most common devices down into five categories: Repetition, Omission, Addition, Direction, and Substitution. You can find further explanations of these types in our Teacher’s Guide to Rhetoric, which explicates the devices by name. Whether or not you choose to teach the specific terms to your students, it will be helpful for you to know them. Once you know the devices intimately, their patterns will begin to pop off of the page. Familiarity with the specific devices will enable you to recognize them in use and to show them to your students as examples of each type. For the personal insights of the ASC staff as to the value and excitement of rhetorical exploration, please visit the ASC Education blog: http://americanshakespearecentereduction.blogspot.com/search/label/rhetoric

Repetition
Repetition gives speech a cadence, a rhythm to follow. Our brains, which are tuned to appreciate harmony, naturally pick up on these patterns, assisting us in synthesizing ideas. Shakespeare frequently uses devices of repetition within the structure of iambic pentameter, which already has a distinct rhythm; layering the rhetorical device on top of the scansion augments the brain’s ability to hear patterns. You may also find devices of repetition in prose lines, and you may want to ask your students to consider how, or if, they hear the device differently in prose than they do in verse.

Of sounds:
An author can use repetition of this kind to create an aural mood. An excess of the letter “S” makes a sibilant sound, evoking the image of a snake, and perhaps of a character who is sneaky, surreptitious, or sly. An excess of “O”’s produces a mournful, lugubrious noise, wounded and woeful. Ask your students to consider the tonal quality of the repeated sound. What might that indicate about the character or the situation?

Of words or phrases:
CAPTAIN

As whence the sun 'gins his reflection

Shipwrecking storms and direful thunders break,

So from that spring whence comfort seem'd to come

Discomfort swells. Mark, [king of Scotland], mark:

No sooner justice had with valour arm'd

Compell'd these skipping kerns to trust their heels,

But the Norwegian lord [surveying vantage],

[With furnish'd arms and new supplies of men]

Began a fresh assault.

DUNCAN

Dismay'd not this

Our captains, [Macbeth and Banquo]?

CAPTAIN

Yes;

As sparrows eagles, or the hare the lion.

If I say sooth, I must report they were

As cannons overcharged with double cracks, so they

Doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe:

Except they meant to bathe in reeking wounds,

Or memorise another Golgotha,

I cannot tell.

But I am faint, my gashes cry for help.

DUNCAN

So well thy words become thee as thy wounds;

They smack of honour both. Go get him surgeons.
PERSPECTIVES

Rightful Kingship

Many of Shakespeare’s plays attack the question of what makes a good king. In Macbeth, the audience experiences several different views on the topic, from old and respected Duncan to murderous Macbeth to untried but idealistic Malcolm. In 4.3, Malcolm engages Macduff in an extended trial, first accusing Macbeth of being guilty of “every sin that has a name,” and then claiming those same faults as his own, in order to test Macduff’s loyalty both to his claim and to Scotland. This conversation pits the ideal of kingship’s virtues against the extremity of its worst abuses.

Consider that Macbeth was likely written with the idea of appealing to the new King James, who claimed descent from Banquo. James came to the English throne in a somewhat roundabout way. Elizabeth I, the last monarch of the Tudor dynasty, had no issue of her own to pass the crown to, and during the last decade of her life, her councilors maintained a secret correspondence with James, already King of Scotland, to ensure his smooth succession to the English throne. James was the great-grandson of James IV of Scotland and Margaret Tudor, Henry VIII’s sister, and thus the great-great-grandson of Henry VII, the first monarch of the Tudor dynasty – who had, himself, only a tenuous claim to the English crown, cemented more through conquest in battle and through marriage than through blood rights.

These interdisciplinary activities, connecting Macbeth to history and government, will encourage your students to engage with the same questions Shakespeare considered so often in his plays: What makes a good king, and what gives a monarch the right to rule?

Activity:

- Examine the different views of kingship from Macbeth. (Several examples are provided on Handout #6A, but your students may be able to think of more). Discuss the implications that, due to Scotland’s complex political structure during the era of the play, Duncan’s eldest son was not automatically the heir apparent, but had to be chosen by his father and invested as Prince of Cumberland.
  - How important is it to establish a legitimate heir? Is there a difference between the importance to the Scots and to Shakespeare’s audience?

- Consider ideas on kingship from other Shakespeare plays (Handout #6B).
  - Which of these characters would your students consider good kings?
  - Which might they deem unfit to rule?
  - Do any of them sound similar to characters in Macbeth?

- As a class, come up with a list of traits that describe a good king, using examples from Macbeth and other plays. Use direct quotes from the text wherever possible.
  - Is legitimacy truly a better guide for choosing a monarch than ability?
  - Who should be trusted to rule Scotland?
  - Does might make right, or are other virtues more important?

- Based on these ideal traits, who do your students think should be King (or Queen) of Scotland? Do your students believe that Malcolm will live up to his promises? Or would they rather see an experienced leader like Macduff or another lord on the throne? Is anyone willing to stand up for Macbeth and try to justify his kingship?

- Ask your students to respond in a journal entry or an essay about their ideas on what makes a great ruler.

FOLLOW-UP

In our democracy, we don’t have to worry about things like a succession dispute or a monarch dying childless, but we still have to consider what makes a man or woman fit for the highest office in our nation.
STAGING CHALLENGES

Playing Darkness

Macbeth is one of Shakespeare’s darkest plays, not merely in tone or just because of the bloody events that happen in it, but literally dark, with many scenes taking place at night or in a strange, disordered daytime without sunshine. As such, a major concept which runs through the play is the idea of what can or cannot, or perhaps should or should not, be seen. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth take refuge in darkness and summon the night, whereas characters with nothing to hide either fear the dark or else bear lights with them, looking forward to daytime. Consider the following examples of characters within the play commenting on darkness:

Macbeth, 1.4
… Stars, hide your fires,
Let not light see my black and deep desires,
The eye wink at the hand – yet let that be
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.

Lady Macbeth, 1.5
… 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’.

Banquo, 2.1
… There’s husbandry in Heaven,
Their candles are all out. Take thee that, too.
A heavy summons lies like lead upon me,
And yet I would not sleep.

Ross, 2.4
Thou seest the heavens, as troubled with man’s act,
Threatens his bloody stage: by th’ clock ‘tis day,
And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp.
Is’t night’s predominance, or the day’s shame,
That darkness does the face of earth entomb,
When living light should kiss it?

Macbeth, 3.2
… Come, seeling Night,
Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful Day.
…Good things of Day begin to droop and drowse,
While Night’s black agents to their preys do rouse.

Malcolm, 4.3
… Receive what cheer you may.
The night is long that never finds the day.

While many productions rely on darkening the house and on using complex light boards to convey nighttime scenes to the audience, the King’s Men played in broad daylight in the middle of the afternoon. It was up to the actors, with the use of props like lanterns or torches, to indicate night or darkness, and their actions had to convey to the audience if characters on stage together could not see each other.

This activity will lead your students through the process of discovering how Shakespeare indicates light or darkness, how actors may choose to represent either, and how those choices may affect the interpretation of the play.

Activity:
Set up your classroom according to the Elizabethan Classroom guidelines, found on page #### of this study guide. This will allow your students who are not participating as actors to serve as the audience. Remind your non-acting students that the audience members are still a part of the play – at any moment, an actor may pick them out to play with them.

Divide your students into 4 groups and assign each group one of the following scenes, which all take place in complete or partial darkness. The text for these scenes can be found in Handout: #8A-#8D.

- 2.1.1-43 (Banquo, Fleance, Macbeth, & servant).
- 2.2.1-56 (Lady Macbeth, Macbeth)
- 3.3.5-22 (3 Murderers, Banquo, Fleance)
- 5.1.11-81 (Doctor, Gentlewoman, Lady Macbeth)
(Three Murderers already on stage)

FIRST MURDERER
The west yet glimmers with some streaks of day:  
Now spurs the lated traveller apace  
To gain the timely inn; and near approaches  
The subject of our watch.

THIRD MURDERER
Hark! I hear horses.  
Banquo Within. Give us a light there, ho!

SECOND MURDERER
Then 'tis he: the rest  
That are within the note of expectation  
Already are i’ the court.

FIRST MURDERER
His horses go about.

THIRD MURDERER
Almost a mile: but he does usually,  
So all men do, from hence to the palace gate  
Make it their walk.

Enter BANQUO, and FLEANCE with a torch

SECOND MURDERER
A light, a light!  
(10)

THIRD MURDERER
'Tis he.

FIRST MURDERER
Stand to’t.

BANQUO
It will be rain to-night.

FIRST MURDERER
Let it come down.

BANQUO
O, treachery! Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly!  
Thou mayst revenge. O slave!

STOP Only because, for simplicity’s sake, we’re beginning a few lines into the scene. Where should they be positioned in order to have the advantage over the entering Banquo?

STOP Decide which direction “west” is on your stage.

STOP Does this imply an off-stage sound cue of some kind?

STOP How far away is Banquo likely to be, either from the murderers, from the stables, or from the castle?

STOP How does the 3rd Murderer know this? Exceptionally good eyesight? Or exceptionally good knowledge of the grounds?

STOP How bright is it? How easily are Banquo’s and Fleance’s faces discernable?

STOP The Folio has no stage directions to indicate when the fight happens, how long it is, or how Fleance is able to escape. Your students will need to decide these things for themselves.

STOP Indeed, who did? Go back and try it several ways – an accidental dousing during the fight, an intentional dousing by Banquo or Fleance, to cover Fleance’s escape, or an intentional dousing by one of the murderers, hoping to surprise or to frighten Fleance.
RHETORIC AND FIGURES OF SPEECH

Through the use of rhetorical devices (or figures of speech), Shakespeare provides a map to help an actor figure out how to play a character and to communicate the story of the play to the audience. These devices may provide clues to meaning, may indicate how a character’s mind works, or may audibly point the audience towards important concepts in a character’s speech. Rhetoric is one of many tools an actor can use to discover playable moments in a speech or in dialogue. For example, a character who uses ellipsis, leaving out part of a sentence to force the other characters or audience members to complete it in their minds, might be forging a bond, or he might simply be in a hurry.

Throughout *Macbeth*, Shakespeare uses many figures of parallelism and figures of repetition. Repeating words or grammatical structures focuses the mind’s ability to recognize and to remember patterns, thus underscoring important elements of a scene. These devices can also give a scene a particular cadence, and in the case of the Witches’ spells and prophecies, these patterns enhance the magical quality of their speech. Though the Witches use these figures more regularly than anyone else in the play, other characters do employ the same devices. An examination of who uses figures of parallelism and figures of repetition and when that character uses them may reveal new insights into characters and dynamics.

**Isocolon** (i-so-co’-lon): A series of similarly structured elements having similar length.

Example: *First Witch:* All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of Glamis!
*Second Witch:* All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, thane of Cawdor!
*Third Witch:* All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter!

**Tricolon** (tri-co’-lon): Three parallel elements of the same length occurring together in a series.

Example: *Macbeth:* The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood
Is stopp’d; the very source of it is stopp’d.

**Anaphora** (an-aph’-o-ra): Repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginning of successive clauses, sentences, or lines.

Example: *Second Witch:* When the hurlyburly’s done,
*Second Witch:* When the battle’s lost and won.

**Epizeuxis** (e-pi-zook’-sis): Repetition of words with no others between, for vehemence of emphasis.

Example: *First Witch:* Hail!
*Second Witch:* Hail!
*Third Witch:* Hail!

**Activity:**
- Have your students examine 4.1 of *Macbeth* on **Handout #9A**. Where can they find examples of *isocolon*, *tricolon*, *epizeuxis*, and *anaphora*?
  - What effect do these figures have on how you hear the words? What words or concepts become more important because of the scene’s rhetorical underpinnings?
  - How do the metrical patterns and rhyme schemes of the scene work with the rhetoric to create a mood? What does it indicate that the witches use a different, shorter meter than Macbeth does?
Masculinity

Concepts of masculinity are central to the themes of power and power-brokering in *Macbeth*. Throughout the play, characters ask themselves what is to be a man. The play begins and ends with warfare, wherein men are admired for bravery and bold action, and Lady Macbeth builds on these ideas while goading on her husband. Yet in the midst of such a martial atmosphere, some characters associate masculinity instead with piety, temperance, or familial devotion.

The following activity will help your students explore the various concepts of masculinity and manhood in *Macbeth*. As you prepare your students to analyze their scenes and speeches, ask them to keep the Basics of text analysis in mind.

**ACTIVITY**

- Set up your classroom according to the Elizabethan Classroom guidelines, found on page ### of this study guide. This will allow your students who are not participating as actors to serve as the audience. Remind your non-acting students that the audience members are still a part of the play – at any moment, an actor may pick them out to play with them.
- Divide your students into 8 groups.
- Assign each group one of the following speeches or scenes (provided on Handout #10):
  - Lady Macbeth’s 1.5 “unsex me” speech;
  - Macbeth and Lady Macbeth’s conversation at the end of 1.7;
  - Macbeth’s conversation with the murderers from 3.1;
  - Macbeth reacting to the ghost in 3.4, pt 1;
  - Macbeth reacting to the ghost in 3.4, pt 2;
  - the Lord’s speech about Malcolm and King Edward from 3.6;
  - Macduff and Macbeth’s conversation at the end of 4.3;
  - Ross, Malcolm, and Siward discussing Young Siward’s death, 5.8
  - Ask them to examine whose masculinity is reinforced or challenged in the passage. What concepts do the characters invoke to support or to question someone’s manhood?
  - Have each group come up with a list of words from the text of their passage which they believe demonstrate the speech or scene’s idea of masculinity.
- As a class, discuss the lists. What virtues do the different characters ascribe to masculinity? Whose ideas and methods are proved more successful by the play’s end? Is there an ideal balance between martial violence and gentler virtues?
- Ask your class how they feel about the alternate views on masculinity. Which ideas are they comfortable with? Which do they find less appropriate?
- Have each group decide, based on these, how they want to present their passage.
  - Encourage them to think about power and status in relationship to masculinity. Is the most masculine character necessarily the one with the most power?
- Have each group stage their passage.
- Discuss how each scene presents masculinity.