

Study Guide

TEACHER RESOURCE GUIDE



**WILL POWER
SCHOOLS**

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SHAKESPEARE CENTER LA PRESENTS

William Shakespeare's

MACBETH

A VIRTUAL LIVE-ACTION GRAPHIC NOVEL

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SHAKESPEARE CENTER LA PRESENTS

William Shakespeare's

MACBETH

A VIRTUAL LIVE-ACTION GRAPHIC NOVEL

Cast & Characters

Keith David - Macbeth

Geoffrey Owens - Banquo, Duncan, and the Doctor

Simone Moore- Lady Macbeth

Emmie Nagata - First Witch, MacDuff, Narrator and Apparition Chorus

Fiona Cheung -Second Witch, Fleance, Lady Macduff, and The Gentlewoman

Sheldon Donenberg - Murderer, Sergeant, Narrator

Evelyn Spahr -Third Witch, Macduff's Child, Seyton, Apparition Chorus, Narrator

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Purpose OF THIS STUDY GUIDE



Compare drama & contemporary issues

Compare and debate the connection between drama/theatre work and contemporary issues that may impact audiences. Adv.Th.Re9b.

Respond to the art

Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a drama/theatre work to develop criteria for artistic choices. Prof.HT:Re7

Incorporate multiple perspectives on art

Incorporate multiple perspectives and diverse community ideas in a drama/theatre work. Specifically, tableaux. 7.TH;Cn10

Understand how this graphic novel was created

Understand how a graphic novel was created from Elizabethan text to connect to the issues of today.

Document stages of the creative process

Document early stages of the creative process visually and/orally in traditional or contemporary media. 8.VA:CR1.1

Understand how artwork is or has been preserved, presented and experienced

Compare and contrast how technologies have changed the way artwork is preserved, and presented, and experienced. 7.VA:Pr4

Participate & collaborate in discussions

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1

Practice

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING BASICS



Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) reflects the critical role of positive relationships and emotional connections in the learning process and helps students develop a range of skills they need for school and life. SEL skills include the ability to:

- Set and achieve positive goals
- Feel and show empathy for others
- Establish and maintain positive relationships
- Make responsible decisions
- Understand and manage emotions

Selected Vocabulary

CONSISTENT WITH CA STATE STANDARDS

Familiarize yourself with the terms and vocabulary prior to viewing Macbeth.

Anti-Hero

A central character in a story, movie, or drama who lacks conventional heroic attributes.

Blind Ambition

"Sometimes, our highest goal becomes our big enemy when we move towards our goal blindly without focusing on the path we follow." -Durgesh Satpathy

betterhelp.com defines ambition as follows. If ambition is desire, drive, and focus, then blind ambition is blind desire, drive, and focus. But what does that mean? As individuals strive to succeed, there are many times when their desire to achieve may override their sense of right and wrong. For example, someone with blind ambition may turn a blind eye to deceit or they might stop taking care of themselves to reach a goal. That's why those who work toward a goal with blind ambition can be their own worst enemy.

<https://www.betterhelp.com/advice/ambition/what-is-the-difference-between-blind-ambition-and-ambition/>

Fate

The development of events beyond a person's control, regarded as determined by a supernatural power.

Foreshadowing

Is a warning or indication of (a future event).

Graphic Novel

A longer work or collection of works presented in 'comics' style. ... Like comics, graphic novels feature panel-style text and graphics and can be created on any subject (fiction or nonfiction) and for any age.

Image Theatre (Tableaux or frozen picture)

Is a performance technique in which one person, acting as a sculptor, moulds one or more people acting as statues, using only touch and resisting the use of words or mirror-image modeling. The images presented in this form of theatre are a series of still-images or tableaux that are dynamised (brought to life) via a variety of ways. You will use dialogue to bring the images to life.

Plot

The organization of all the elements of a play into a meaningful pattern is the PLOT. The plot is the order of events as the author has constructed the play. It is different from the STORY, which demands linear action.

Tragedy

An event causing great suffering, destruction, and distress, such as a serious accident, crime, or natural catastrophe.



What to Look For

WHILE YOU WATCH



As you watch the Macbeth: Live-Action Graphic Novel stop and write down what you see and what you notice. Here are some suggestions to consider:

1. Stop the recording to write notes when you hear the characters speak of **foreshadowing**. Decide how foreshadowing affects the actions of the characters.
2. What role does **fate** play in the lives of the characters?
3. Discuss which of the characters are led by **positive ambition** and which are led by **blind ambition**. What are the consequences of their ambition?
4. How does Lady Macbeth's hopes and dreams affect the **plot**? Can she forgive herself?
5. Explain the different opportunities for **female-identifying** people to affect positive change. Consider the political setting in Shakespeare's time versus now to give your answer.
6. Differentiate the **actions** characters need to change in order for Macbeth to be a respected and loved ruler of the kingdom from those actions that keep him ruling for a long time.
7. One of the **themes** of Macbeth is that wrongdoing leads to misfortune. Or actions have consequences. Referring to the dialogue in the video, discuss the wrongdoing of Lady Macbeth and Macbeth and what it leads to.
8. Decide which characters you have empathy for and why. Using examples within the video, discuss or chart the dialogue that supports why you came to that conclusion. Are any of them **anti-heros**?
9. Defend why you think the actions of people in **power** have changed or stayed the same since Shakespeare's time.
10. Share examples of how a person can help an individual **achieve** their goals without harming others?

What Are the Characteristics of a Graphic Novel?

GRAPHIC NOVELS VS. TEXT-BASED NOVELS

Graphic novels share all the key characteristics of traditional novels. These include:

- A clear beginning, middle, and end
- A central narrative or A-story (= Macbeth and Lady Macbeth) supplemented by optional B-stories (= Banquo)
- Character development and personal journeys
- Thematic messaging
- Precise, carefully considered dialogue and narration

The distinction between graphic novels and text-based novels is that graphic novels permit their images to do the vast majority of the storytelling, with dialogue bubbles and narration boxes to help elaborate the story. It has the same impact as actors creating theatrical tableaux with the body that express emotion to tell a story.

<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-create-a-graphic-novel#what-are-the-characteristics-of-a-graphic-novel>

Graphic Novel Creation

VISUALIZATION & ILLUSTRATION



Exercises

Select a story or play from the past with themes that are relevant to you or your community.

1. **Use your writing skills to create a VISUAL STUDY GUIDE** that will preserve the story for future generations. How do the characters differ in personality and their desire? It must show how the setting and how characters will be drawn. Draw character sketches of a character using clues from the dialogue.
2. **Create a STORYBOARD of the story.** This will show the plot of the story. It can be drawn or written or be a combination of both. Start with three frames that depict the beginning, middle and end. Fill in the story with specific graphics that best tell the story to the audience. If you want the character to say more, then the picture needs to be bigger!



Performing & Speaking the Text

WITH IMAGES (STILL PICTURES) & SOUND

Exercise 1

Purpose: To discover a story or play from the past with themes that are relevant to you or your community.

Exercise: Read a story from the past with themes that need to be addressed. Create your own story about an issue that is important to you in a current setting. It must be a story that needs to be solved.

Exercise 2

Purpose: To understand how your body moves to create a language that others understand.

Exercise: Standing in an area of the classroom where it is safe for you to move. Create images of attitudes. For example, create an image of a person that is ambitious, then move into a second image of a person who is guilty, and so on. Then charming, condescending, and giddy. In each pose, pay attention to how the air feels on your body and face. Where is your balance? Is the tension in your body and face? What part of your body is most relaxed? Are your neck muscles working to hold your head up? Where is the majority of your weight? On your toes, the middle of the foot or the heel? Make note of how your body moves that is different from what you usually create. Which image is clearer than what you typically make?



Exercise 3

Purpose: Vocal warmups help a speaker use the voice in the proper manner without injuring the vocal cords. When your spine is aligned your voice is allowed to work properly.

Exercise: Begin by standing up straight. Arms dangling down your sides. Hands dangling from the arm socket. Stack each vertebrae on top of each other. Lift the skull onto the spine. Relax your jaw, eye sockets, forehead and chin keeping your throat open. Place your hands on your stomach. Breath in filling the lounges and the stomach. You will see your hands move. This is the proper way to take in oxygen that fuels the body and our voices. Speak the vowels a, e, i, o, u as you breath out your stomach and lungs collapse to move sound out of the body. Keep the throat open. Imagine keeping your throat as open as possible. Then breathe in and start again. You'll notice phlegm from the lungs may be released. This is a good thing. Repeat 6 times.



Exercise 4

Purpose: Collaboration builds clarity in a storyline.

Exercise: In groups, find lines of text that talk about blind ambition, foreshadowing or fate. Or use the scene samples provided below. Create three images using the entire body, facial expression and all your energy to create three still pictures that tell the story to the audience. Create one image that depicts the beginning, a second image for the middle and a third image for the final idea. Examples below:

Scene III

image 1: The instruments of chaos tell us truths,
image 2: Win us with honest trifles, to betray us
Image 3: In deepest consequence. - Banquo

Scene III

image 1: My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
image 2: Shakes so my single state of man
That function is smothered in surmise
image 3: And nothing is, but what is not.” - Macbeth

Scene XI

image 1: I am in blood Stepped in so far,
image 2: that should I wade no more,
image 3: Returning were as tedious as go o’er. - Macbeth

Scene XV

image 1: Foul whisperings are abroad.
image 2: Unnatural deeds do breed unnatural troubles.
image 3: Infected minds To their deaf pillows
will discharge their secrets. -Doctor

Once you have three clear images. Pick the person(s) who will speak the text while the images are made. Transfer the images you create with your body to a visual board and storyboard. Add the text as thought bubbles.





CHARACTERS

Since the graphic novel was adapted from Shakespeare's script some characters were cut or combined with other characters.

Duncan King of Scotland

Macbeth Renowned warrior and Thane of Glamis

Lady Macbeth Macbeth's wife and "partner in greatness"

Seyton Macbeth's attendant

Banquo Another renowned warrior and Macbeth's close friend

Fleance Banquo's son

Macduff Renowned warrior and Thane, holder of lands

Lady Macduff and their son

Three sisters ("Witches")

Doctor

Gentlewoman

Note: In Macbeth, Kings are appointed or elected.

Thane is a title similar to Duke or Earl.





STORY SUMMARY & SPECIFIC LINES ON FATE AND BLIND AMBITION

This summary reflects the edits and adaptations made by the creators of *Macbeth: Live-Action Graphic Novel*. Steps to adapting a play are described in the in-classroom experience with SCLA Teaching Artists.

Part One

The play begins on the heath, a marshy field in a post-apocalyptic landscape. Three weird sisters, or witches, meet in the middle of thunder and lightning. They are planning a time to meet Macbeth.

Part Two

Scotland is coming to the end of a civil war. Macbeth and his friend Banquo have fought on the side of the king, Duncan. They have been battling disloyal Dukes, who are called Thanes. Macbeth is the Thane of Glamis. The disloyal Thanes, Cawdor and Macdonwald, have joined forces against Duncan.

We learn that Macbeth and Banquo have defeated the traitors, and that Macbeth is destined to become Thane of Cawdor

Part Three

The “sisters” meet in a clap of thunder. They tell each other where they have been. One asked a sailor’s wife to share her snack. The sailor’s wife refused to share and called the sister a “witch”. * The three sisters craft a spell to force her husband’s ship through bad weather.

Macbeth and Banquo arrive. They are not sure who or what the sisters are at first. The sisters greet him by three titles: Thane of Glamis (which he currently is), Thane of Cawdor (which will be his), and King. The three tell Banquo that he will never be king, but his descendants will. Then the sisters vanish.

Macbeth and Banquo meet with the king, who has heard of their victory. Furthermore, Cawdor is a traitor and sentenced to die. The title Thane of Cawdor goes to Macbeth.

Macbeth is excited that the predictions might be true. Banquo doesn’t quite trust them. Macbeth figures that it can’t be bad if it’s true. If it is really his fate to be king he shouldn’t have to do anything. Macbeth leaves to get his castle ready to host King Duncan.

*Director's Note: This is the only time that we hear them called “witches”.)



Part Four

Lady Macbeth reads a letter from her husband Macbeth who is returning from the battlefield. It tells her about meeting the weird sisters and how their prophecy is starting to come true. Lady Macbeth doesn't think that he is ruthless enough to go after what he wants. She calls on spirits to take away her woman-ness and fill her with cruelty so that she can help her husband become king. When Macbeth arrives, she tells him that Duncan will never leave and that Macbeth should leave the arrangements to her.

Part Five

Macbeth agonizes over killing Duncan and reviews the reasons why he shouldn't. If it could be done without future consequences- no problem The problem is that there should be consequences for something like that. Plus, there are more reasons not to kill the king than there are to kill him. Besides, Duncan hasn't done anything to deserve death. Heaven itself will spread the word of his murder.

After Macbeth considers all of this, he decides that they will NOT kill Duncan. Lady Macbeth challenges his manhood, his loyalty to his word. She tells him that he is most manly when he dared to kill. She would rather smash her baby's brains out than to break her word. Lady M. convinces him that their plan is foolproof. She will get Duncan's guards drunk and frame them for the murder. Macbeth leaves determined to keep a smile on his face to hide the murder in his heart.

The background of the page is a dark, stylized illustration. On the left, a figure in a dark robe (Macbeth) is shown from the chest up, reaching out. On the right, a bearded man in a red tunic (Banquo) is shown from the chest up, looking towards the left. The overall color palette is dark with red and purple tones.

Part Six

Banquo brings up the weird sisters and how their prophecy seems to be coming true. Macbeth claims not to be thinking about it. Macbeth says that he wants to talk to Banquo later. Banquo agrees as long as it stays within his honor.

Macbeth sees a vision of a dagger in front of him.
It gets bloodier as he moves towards killing Duncan

Part Seven

Lady Macbeth enters. She drugged the guard's wine so they can't wake up. She says that she would have killed Duncan herself but he looked like her father and she didn't have the heart. Macbeth enters with the daggers and Duncan's blood on his hands. He is terrified. After he killed Duncan he heard a voice say "Sleep no more."

Lady M. tells him to snap out of it and stay focused. She tells him to wash his hands while she plants the bloody daggers on Duncan's guards. They are spurred to action by a knock on the door.

Part Eight

Macbeth opens the gate for Macduff, who was called to wake the king. Macbeth leads him to the door of the king's room.

Macduff calls Macbeth to see that Duncan is dead. Macduff is horrified and wakes everyone, including Banquo.

Lady Macbeth pretends to not know what's going on.

Macbeth kills the guards before they can tell their side of the story.

Part Nine

Banquo suspects that Macbeth got the crown through foul means. He also wonders if that means that his sons, meaning his descendants, will be king.

Macbeth invites Banquo to dinner celebrating Macbeth's coronation. In fact, they insist that he be there.

Banquo leaves to go riding with his son, Fleance.

Macbeth is alone. He reveals he is afraid of Banquo. First, because he is a noble person by nature and he makes Macbeth feel lesser just by being around. Banquo also might figure out what Macbeth has done and act against the new king. If the witches were right, all that Macbeth has been through after killing Duncan will be for the benefit of Banquo's family.

Macbeth is greeted by an assassin. Macbeth has told the assassin that Banquo is responsible for the hardship in his life. The murderer is so tired of life that he would do anything to fix it or be done with it. Macbeth sends them out to kill Banquo and his son Fleance.

Then, Lady Macbeth tries to ease her husband's mind by telling him to let go of the past. Macbeth is worried that Banquo will rise against him. He finds it ironic that the thing that was supposed to bring him peace, killing Duncan, has resulted in mental torment for him. At the same time, Duncan, now that the murder is over, gets eternal rest. Lady M. tells him to put on a happy face for tonight. He tells her to do the same.

Macbeth does not tell her about his plan to kill Banquo. He calls on the forces of night to help him.



Part Ten

The murderer kills Banquo but Fleance gets away.

Part Eleven

The Macbeths throw a dinner party. Just as the party is starting the murderer enters to say that Banquo is dead. Macbeth is happy until he hears that Fleance has escaped. Lady M. brings Macbeth back to the table. As he turns around he sees Banquo's ghost. Macbeth freaks out and accuses the assembled lords of playing a trick on him. Macbeth yells at the ghost so much that lady Macbeth finally makes all of the lords leave.

Once they are gone, Macbeth turns his suspicions to Macduff. He vows to find the sisters the next day and get them to tell him the whole story. Macbeth believes that the fear he is feeling comes from his lack of practice at murder.

Part Twelve

The witches prepare to meet Macbeth. When Macbeth arrives, they show him visions. The 1st tells him to beware of Macduff. The 2nd tells him that "no man born of woman will harm Macbeth." The 3rd tells him that he will never be defeated until Burnham forest moves to Dunsinane Hill. When Macbeth asks if Banquo's descendants will be kings, they show him a line of 8. Macbeth decides to kill Macduff's family.



Part Thirteen

Lady Macduff and her son are murdered along with the rest of the household. Macduff arrives back home too late, and vows to take his revenge on Macbeth.

Part Fourteen

A doctor watches as Lady Macbeth sleepwalks. In a crazed frenzy, she admits to killing the king. She has visions of blood on her hands. The doctor believes that she needs a priest more than a doctor.

Part Fifteen

Macbeth and the Seyton are preparing for war, as Macduff approaches with his army. Macbeth hears a scream from far away. He tells Seyton to go see what it is. He has gone crazy with power and is obsessed with the witches' prophecies.

Seyton returns to reveal that Lady Macbeth is dead.

Macbeth wishes there was more time to mourn her loss. He reflects on life's futility and pointlessness alone in his war room. Then he realizes that Macduff's army is close by, and has taken the shape of trees as they have cut down Birnam Wood and hidden their numbers. He ragefully put his armor on and the war begins.

Part Sixteen

Macbeth and Macduff face each other. Macbeth is confident because of the witches prophecy stating that no one born of woman should ever harm him. Macduff hears this and reveals that he wasn't born, he was untimely ripped from his mother's womb. They fight and Macbeth is decapitated. Victorious Macduff displays Macbeth's severed head for all to see.

The Names of the Age

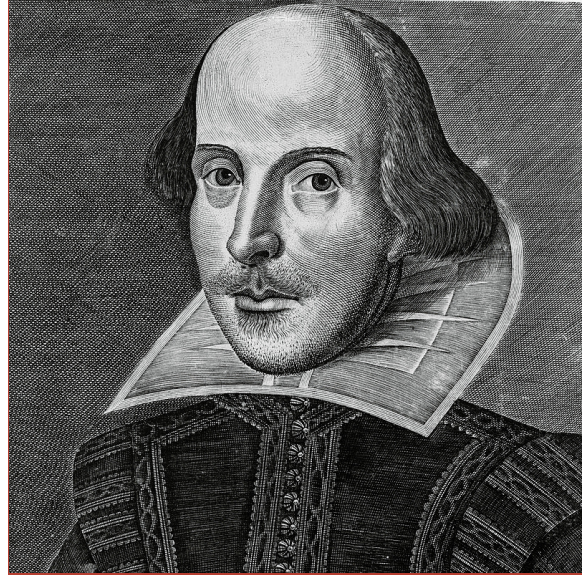
William Shakespeare was born in 1564 and died in 1616.

During Shakespeare's lifetime there were two rulers of England.

Queen Elizabeth I was born in 1533 and ruled England from 1558-1603. 1558-1603 is called the Elizabethan Era. Her last name was Tutor so she is considered a Tutor monarch.

King James I was born in 1566 and ruled England from 1603-1625. 1603-1625 is called the Jacobean Era. James' last name was Stuart. He is the first Stuart monarch.

Top: The Droeshout portrait of William Shakespeare. Public Domain
MIDDLE: Elizabeth I, 1533-1603 (the 'Armada Portrait') © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London
BOTTOM: King James 1 © Christie's Images Ltd



Daily Life

When reading Shakespeare, it helps to think about what life was like in the Elizabethan and Jacobean world. It is tempting to think of Shakespeare's time in idyllic terms. We would like to think that everyday life was like a landscape painting-quiet and happy where everyone gets along and there is no cursing or violence. The reality was very different.

The English during Shakespeare's time were in the middle of great cultural change. People were moving from rural areas to the city. The middle class was growing in affluence and power.

Before this time, class distinctions were more strict. Wealthy people would always be wealthy and peasants would always be servants. Now, small businessmen could make money like never before. It was possible to have money but not royal title. Or a wealthy person could buy a coat of arms on the sly and call themselves noble.

London was a city with thousands of people with poor sanitation crammed into a small space. There was a constant threat of disease and fire. And getting jumped.



Servants & Masters

Servants belonged to households. If you have ever seen the television show *Cribs* on MTV, you have seen something similar to an Elizabethan household. The famous person who owns the house is like the Master, or Lord. The polished floors, manicured gardens and immaculate bed linens are most likely cared for by unseen servants. The guys on *Cribs* who are always hanging out on the couch playing video games are the other members of the household. If you are familiar with *Romeo and Juliet*, compare them to the Montague boys who hang out with Romeo and Mercutio. Sometimes they do things, like get the coffee. Sometimes their job is to hang out.

These members of the household could be relatives sent to study and make social connections under the guidance of the wealthy master. Each household had a uniform, or livery, that could identify a servant as a gainfully employed person. Anyone who was not wealthy and did not have a job could be put in jail or put to work for the town.



Natural Order

The Elizabethans were taught that there was a natural order to the social structure. Kings were on top. Peasants were on the bottom of the social hierarchy. Kings (or Queens) were in that position by the will of God. This, of course, was very handy for keeping those at the bottom “in their place”.

GOD // UNIVERSE // KING / KINGDOM // FATHER / FAMILY

The Process of Sin

Sense >>> Imagination >>> Reason >>> Will.

Temptation enters the mind through the senses (usually the sense of sight). The imagination fantasizes about the temptation.

If Reason is overrun by this fantasizing and embraces temptation, that is the sin. Once Reason has assented to the temptation, will acts upon the decision; but the decision is the crucial stage.

<http://discord.dyndns.org/concepts.shtml>

Entertainment

Theatre was an exciting place during Elizabethan times. Theatres like Shakespeare's Globe were the blockbuster multiplexes of their day. It was a world without television, movies, or video games. They didn't have Borders or Barnes & Noble with books, magazines, or other printed materials relatively cheap. Most people did not read very well anyway. People congregated in pubs (bars), churches, private homes and theatres.

London's theatres were actually across the Thames River from the city. They were built there because the city officials considered them dangerous because of:

- Disease. All of those people crammed together could spread the plague like wildfire.
- Fire. The Globe theatre actually burned down in 1613.
- Bad reputation. It was considered a center of immoral activity. Gamblers, thieves and prostitutes hung out at and around the theatres.

Are there any modern Midwestern cities with similar dynamics?



The Theatre

The public theatre was unique because people from all walks of life were able to attend at once. Noble, wealthy people got really good seats. Middle class people got decent seats. Poor people didn't get seats at all. They stood in the pit. It was similar to the modern day orchestra pit, the empty space in front of the stage. They stood for the entire length of the play, unless they leaned on the stage.

(Today, leaning on the stage is not considered good manners.)

Plays were very popular and people like Shakespeare made a lot of money producing them.

There were no electric lights, so plays were held during the day.

They started around 2:00 in the afternoon. Theatres raised a flag when the play was on so that even people who didn't read would know about it. After the play, many of the audience members stayed for a jig.

Other entertainments included:

- Jigs, shows that happened after the play. Jigs were kind of an after-set that featured singing, dancing, comedy or even magic tricks. Some of the musicians and comedians specialized in physical humor (think "Three Stooges") and dirty jokes. It was common for people to sneak into the theatre as the patrons of the "legitimate" play were leaving, just to get into the jig. This made theatre owners angry.
- Bear baiting, a form of entertainment that tied a bear to a stick while it fought a dog who could run free.
- Cock fighting
- Dog fighting

Politics

Macbeth (the play) begins with a civil war in Scotland. The English people had survived their own bloody civil war in their recent history.

In the 16th century the monarch determined the religion of the entire country. They did not have separation of church and state. When Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII, came to power, England was a Roman Catholic country. Henry VIII broke away from the Roman Catholic Church and founded the Church of England and decided that the monarch (himself) would govern the new church.

Now imagine that there was suddenly a law that you could not follow your own religion. What would you do?

Roman Catholics came into power again when Henry's older daughter, Mary I, came to power after his death. Mary took her revenge on those who swore loyalty to the Church of England. She earned the nickname Bloody Mary for her many executions of Protestants (another name for non-Roman Catholic Christians). Mary made it illegal for anyone to be Protestant.

Elizabeth I reversed that rule when she took the throne after Mary's death. She decreed that everyone be Protestant. Every citizen in England was required to go to church once a month. Those who did not were fined. Elizabeth was not interested in waging a war. She wanted everyone to remain peaceful and follow her rules.

You can imagine that there were people who continued to fight on both sides. Elizabeth did not have the same level of mass execution that Mary did. Many of those who were loyal Catholics plotted against Elizabeth.



Were There People of Color in Shakespeare's England?

Why yes, there were. Race as we know it today was evolving as a concept for the Elizabethans. The main distinguishing factor for Europeans was likely to be religion as much as skin color. Many of the black people that they encountered were Muslim and therefore outsiders.

Black people at that time were called Moors. Moor is a word that means “black”. The English also use the term “blackamoor”. Moor was a term for anyone from Africa. Now people look back on Renaissance England and assume that “Moor” only described people from Morocco in North Africa. In actuality, the English were less precise and used the term for anyone with dark skin whether they were from North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, India or Turkey. If the Moors from Morocco were in America today, they would likely be considered African-American or black Americans.

Moors traded with the English in both English and Mediterranean ports. Average people in London could possibly see or even conduct business with Moors. Queen Elizabeth made treaties with Moorish princes to help defeat their common enemy, Spain, which the Moors ruled for hundreds of years.

King James I is the first English monarch to approve the trade of African slaves to the New World.

<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/multiculturalism-in-shakespeares-plays>

African Americans & Shakespeare

Shakespeare has been popular among Americans since the beginning of the United States. Alexis de Tocqueville, a French observer of early America, noted that “There is hardly a pioneer's hut that does not contain a few odd volumes of Shakespeare.”

Just as Shakespeare is an important part of American history, he is also an important part of African-American theatre history.

The African Company

The first black American theatre company was The African Company. Founded by James Hewlett, The African Company performed in New York City from 1816-22. Hewlett was a professional actor and he recruited fellow actors from many walks of life. They were all free blacks but some were refugees from slavery. This troupe of performers started with reciting to small audiences, but their popularity quickly grew and they drew larger audiences. Members of the audience were racially mixed, with white people sitting in a special section at the back. The African Company's popularity was so great that they were considered a threat to the Shakespearian actor Edmund Keane. The police shut down the African Company's production of Richard III while Keane's production was in town.



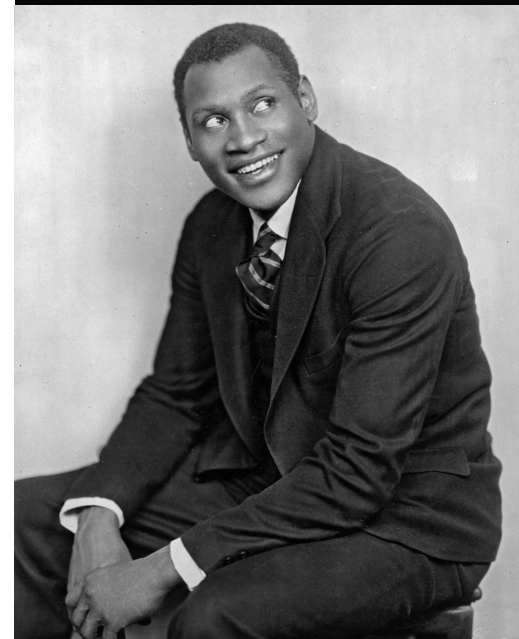
Ira Aldridge

Ira Aldridge (1807-1867) One of the members of The African Company went on to become an international star. Ira Aldridge was one of the most famous Shakespearians of all time. He performed mostly in Europe where he was lauded for his mastery of great Shakespearian roles. His performance of Othello convinced many that the role should be played by an actual black man instead of white actors in black makeup. This was a revolutionary idea at the time. Ira Aldridge was also important because he performed while slavery was still legal in England and the United States. The presence of this intelligent, articulate black man was a powerful argument against those who believed that slavery was justified.

For the next 100 years, most black American Shakespearians were solo artists. There were a few who traveled and recited Shakespeare in performance halls and private homes.

Paul Robeson

The next famous African American to perform Shakespeare was Paul Robeson (1898-1976). Paul Robeson studied law, but his distinctive voice led him to a career as a singer and actor. Like Aldridge, Paul Robeson also created a famous Othello. His 1930 portrayal of Othello in London caused some controversy due to the character's loving relationship with his white wife that turns tragically violent. Robeson stressed Othello's nobility and honor. Also like Aldridge, Robeson performed all over the world to great acclaim. Although he toured the production across Europe, it did not come to America until 1942.



TOP: Ira Aldridge, c. 1867. Photographer unknown. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

BOTTOM: Paul Robeson Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.

Voodoo Macbeth

In 1936 the US government had a jobs program called the Works Project Administration (WPA). One component of this national program was the Federal Theatre Project, which had chapters all over the country. One unit of this group was located in New York's Harlem neighborhood. The director of the Harlem "Negro Unit" was actor director Rose McClendon who convinced co-director John Houseman to help her bring Shakespeare's "Macbeth" to the Harlem community at the Lafayette Theater — with an all-Black cast. They choose for their groundbreaking production a gifted but untested 20-year-old white director by the name of Orson Welles, whose reimagined 19th century Haitian vision for the Scottish play became called "Voodoo Macbeth". The cast included professional and amateur actors and musicians. The production had an all-black cast that reimagined the witches as voodoo priests and used African drums as an integral part of the setting.

TOP: The opening night of Orson Welles' Macbeth at the Lafayette Theatre in Harlem, 14 April 1936 | WPA Federal Theatre Photos
BOTTOM: Macbeth (Maurice Ellis) and Macduff (Charles Collins) from the Broadway run | WPA Federal Theatre Photos



Questions

GET THE CONVERSATION STARTED

Consider as a Student

Who are these characters?
Who do you identify with?
Why?

If this play were written in
2021 Los Angeles, who would
these people be?

Using the 5 senses, what do
you imagine are the
sensibilities of the
Elizabethans?

How does the social context
of the time of this play
parallel with today?

What are your preconceptions
of Shakespeare?

Shakespeare's English and
poetry can seem like a foreign
language, what words are
familiar? What words are
confusing? What words are
new to you?

The process of creating a
play or graphic novel
includes many questions.
As if you were the director
or designer begin by
answering some of the
questions below:

Consider as an Artist

Why choose this play to
perform? Why now?

What themes does your
production focus on?

How do you select your cast?

How do you choose a creative
team?

How do you choose what to cut
from the play?

Consider as a Designer

What do you want the audience
to see, hear, feel?

What can design tell us about
plot, theme, character?

What colors, sounds, time
periods, and textures do you
associate with the themes and
characters in the play?



Resources Bibliography

FIND OUT MORE



Books

Thompson, Ayanna, *Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race, and Contemporary America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011

Thompson, Ayanna and Turchi, Laura, *Teaching Shakespeare with Purpose: A Student-Centred Approach*, Great Britain: The Arden Shakespeare Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2016

Online Resources

Blind Ambition vs. Ambition

<https://www.betterhelp.com/advice/ambition/what-is-the-difference-between-blind-ambition-and-ambition/>

Characteristics of a Graphic Novel

<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-create-a-graphic-novel#what-are-the-characteristics-of-a-graphic-novel>

Film about Voodoo Macbeth

<https://watch.eventive.org/2021sliff/play/615f8c816152f10045ca614d>

Paul Robson

<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/paul-robson-about-the-actor/66/#>

People of Color in England

<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/multiculturalism-in-shakespeares-plays>
<http://www.tideproject.uk/>

Plot vs. Story Telling

<https://www2.southeastern.edu/Academics/Faculty/cfrederic/playanalysis.htm>

Teaching Resources

<https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/learn/teaching-resources/>

https://www.lct.org/media/filer_public/b1/9c/b19cb77d-63c1-4a35-a8cb-8ca7c9ba358d/shakespearesmacbethstudyguide.pdf

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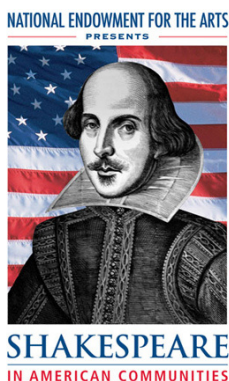
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