



Yale-New Haven
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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2016 Volume I: Shakespeare and the Scenes of Instruction

Macbeth: Gender and Gender Authority

Guide for Curriculum Unit 16.01.05
by Marialuisa Sapienza

This unit studies how manliness or lack of manliness affects Macbeth. Shakespeare presents a very strong Lady Macbeth who is in control of a fearful and hesitant Macbeth. The supernatural power of the weird sisters lures Macbeth to believe he should be king, and he seems to succumb to the power of women that is evoked by their feminine presence. The differences between man and woman loom throughout the text. The sexual and gender differences, the masculine and the feminine, constantly cross the boundaries and prove ambiguous. The unit analyzes and discusses Macbeth's gender identity, and the authority it may have on Macbeth's ethics. The students also read excerpts from "The History of Sexuality" by Michele Foucault, excerpts from "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" by Judith Butler, excerpts from "Sexual Transformation" by Gayle Rubin, and excerpts from "Female Masculinity" by Judith Halberstam. One goal of the unit is to make students understand, reflect about, discuss, and argue how Shakespeare sees gender, its influence on decision-making, and the reactions it might provoke. The other goal is to help students question their own stereotypes about gender and facile generalizations and/or prejudices. The unit adheres to the new Common Core Standards.

(Developed for AP English Literature and Composition, English 10-11, grades 10-12; recommended for AP English Literature and Composition, English 10-11, grades 10-12)

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