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“By the Pricking of My Thumbs, Something Wicked This Way Comes.”

Curriculum Unit 87.04.04
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I was fourteen years old and in junior high when I saw my first play by William Shakespeare: *Julius Caesar* captivated me with its powerful language and violent staging. I had been to the theater before, but I had never been so moved by the drama presented. The director had tried an unusual twist, beginning the play with the climatic battle wherein Julius Ceasar’s ghost returns to haunt his murderers. This dream-like opening served as a prologue, setting the scene for the treachery and murder that followed. When the battle was re-enacted chronologically its power was greatly magnified. I was so moved that to this day I can still see in my mind the image of Julius Caesar wounded, covered with blood, ghostly, silent, and haunting.

Since my first introduction to his work, I have seen many Shakespearean productions, including most of the comedies. I love Shakespeare’s comedic plays, but I think his glory lies in being one of the greatest suspense storytellers in the world of literature. It is no small coincidence that at the time I first encountered the works of William Shakespeare I was already a diehard fan of mystery and detective fiction. Shakespeare wrote his plays 300 years before the publication of the first modern detective story, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* by Edgar Allan Poe, yet his dramatic tales have many classic elements of the genre: suspense, murder, deceit, and such psychological motivations as greed, jealousy, and ambition. William Shakespeare created clever, but still very human characters who behave as we all might if pushed to the edge and placed in an extreme situation.

Alongside my image of Caesar’s ghost, I can see Sir Laurence Olivier’s Lear sinking into madness at the betrayal of his daughters, Romeo and Juliet lying side by side in their bridal bed-like tomb, and Hamlet stabbing Polonius as he hid behind the curtain in the royal chamber. The strongest pictures in my mind though are all from *Macbeth*. I first read the Scottish play in high school and later worked on its professional production at the Long Wharf Theatre. I have solid mental images of the three weird sisters on the Scottish heath, the ghost of Banquo sitting in Macbeth’s chair at the banquet, and of Lady Macbeth wringing her blood stained hands while deep asleep. Of all Shakespeare’s tragedies I find *Macbeth* and its tale of murderous ambition to be the most fascinating, mysterious, and haunting. Therefore, it is this play I have chosen to be the core of this curriculum unit and the play that will serve as my students’ first introduction to the Bard of Avon.

I teach English and humanities at the Betsy Ross Arts Magnet School in New Haven, Connecticut to 6th, 7th, and 8th graders in a humanities class setting. The class will meet twice a week for two full marking periods. This unit will be an intensive course of study and the only material covered during the year.

The Arts Magnet is an unusual school in that students regularly attend arts classes in dance, music, theater, and visual arts while also taking academic courses in the same building. There is no stringent screening process and students do not need to audition or be gifted and talented in the arts to attend the Betsy Ross Arts Magnet School. Students of all different types and learning abilities work together in this school. The daily dose of arts education integrated with academic subjects has created a student body that is generally a little more creative, less inhibited, more eager to share, and less resistant to new ideas and approaches than the average adolescent middle school population. Because this curriculum unit is very ambitious, in most cases it is best suited for high school students, but since my students already have an interest in the theater and a tolerance for challenging classroom projects, I think this combination of mystery and *Macbeth* will be a success.

Humanities classes at the Betsy Ross Arts Magnet School serve as the bridge between the arts and academic programs. The core of each and every humanities class is literature. While reading and interpreting novels, short stories, plays, and poems, students and their teachers attempt to relate and connect literature to other humanistic disciplines such as art, history, music, and the performing arts. The humanities program at the Arts Magnet challenges students to look at themselves as unique, yet also typical human beings within the context of man's greatest achievements.

The main teaching objective of this curriculum unit is to introduce middle school students to the world of William Shakespeare so that they can begin to see that Shakespeare's drama is as alive and relevant as it ever was. My main goal as an educator is to encourage students to read, write, analyze, and think. As simple and as obvious as these skills may seem they are too often rarely addressed and lost within a maze of educational hoopla and jargon. My educational philosophies are Piagetian in their approach. I have based my thoughts on learning on the developmental principles of Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget. Children learn in an ordered, individualized system of interaction with the world around them. They must be challenged and helped to find the path that is right for them. As a teacher it is my job to listen to my students and to address their special needs and interests. If children play an active role in the learning process they will be more motivated and productive as learners. It is really as simple as presenting children with resources that are interesting and challenging, such as William Shakespeare's plays, yet at the same time, speak to their personal interests such as a love of mysteries and detective fiction.

Enjoyment of learning is a very special skill that has to be taught right along with the basic skills. When students read entertaining literature in school it helps to build this important life skill and when learning becomes a pleasure, as it has for my students when they read mysteries, it does not begin or end with the school bells but continues on and flows into all aspects of one's life. The greatest gift a teacher can give a student is the ability to enjoy learning and to discover reading for pleasure and personal fulfillment. This gift will bring joy for a lifetime.

Yet, in an average middle school classroom students are still, for the most part, using only basal readers. Now is the time to wean them from this pap and to introduce them to the world of adult literature. Such reading will not only prepare them for high school, but also will help them broaden and grow as individuals. I think my 8th graders will be as stimulated and moved by Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as I was at the same age by his *Julius Caesar*.

Approaches to Shakespeare

While the proposed end of this unit is to engage the students' interest and to help them discover a love for Shakespearean drama, that is admittedly no easy task. Shakespeare's reputation and his language are

intimidating; the length of the plays and the intricacy of plot seem, at first glance, overwhelming. Thus, I plan to approach Shakespearean study in a gentle and somewhat roundabout manner so that students will enjoy *Macbeth* and not be overwhelmed by Shakespeare's poetic use of language and by manners from a long time past.

Three years ago, while teaching a mini-mystery unit, I learned that almost all of the students in our school enjoy detective fiction. In that course of study, we looked chronologically at the work of Edgar Allan Poe, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and Agatha Christie. It was a great success! Since then I have taught a variation of this mystery unit each year and its popularity keeps on growing. I first expose students to the world of detective fiction while they are in the 6th grade; as 7th and 8th graders they can't seem to get their hands on enough mystery and suspense novels. The school librarian adds to her collection every year due to student demand and at the school book fairs the most popular titles are those found in detective fiction.

This unit grew out of my need to expand on and make a study of detective fiction more challenging, at the same time I realized that a study of mystery could lay the groundwork for approaching *Macbeth* in a more interesting manner, that of mystery. Mystery and detective fiction has much more to share with its readers than just a feeling of pleasure and amusement. There are important lessons about life and human behavior to be found within the pages of a good mystery novel. If used correctly, the pleasures of mystery can pass beyond being escapist for the students, and become a key to involving them in the classic questions of human nature. The reader sees normal people in a seemingly normal environment, but what is behind the facade? Why do the characters behave as they do? What are their motivations? What prompts someone to steal or to murder? While reading detective fiction we can clearly see what humans are capable of doing and in what situations and conditions they are capable of these acts. Mysteries are simply a very entertaining study of human behavior.

This mystery/literature connection can function as a course of study on its own, but it can also bring in a second area of strong interest for students, that of the theater. All three forms: detective fiction, Shakespearean drama, and theater, share a common facet. Each is a study of man and his behavior. Theater, as art, provides yet another means for the interpretation of human behavior. The actor is similar to the detective in that he must psychoanalyze the character he is pretending to be. An actor must always know his motivation and the reasons behind his character's behavior. The literary detective also tries to step inside the shoes of the crook he is attempting to catch. The mystery writer manipulates the "little grey cells" of his detective so that the red herrings can be separated from the clues. A fictional detective always solves the crime with his powers of deduction and knowledge of human behavior. An actor creates his stage performance from his observations of real human behavior. Through the study of Shakespeare's plays, a reader can bring together both of these approaches. In a manner similar to that of the detective he will try to figure out the reasons for certain actions and how these motivations affect the greater whole of the drama. Like the actor he will visualize the scene and place real flesh and blood people within the situations and he will be involved in their intimate, personal dramas. The literature will then become real to the reader and will bring with it unique, yet shared meanings and messages of who we are as a race of men and women.

Mystery as Background

Since this curriculum is a fine intermeshing of the processes of mystery and theater as they relate to the enjoyment of Shakespearean literature, what better way to begin this project than by introducing students to a new mystery writer with a strong theatrical background who spent most of her life as an actress, playwright, and director in the English theater? Students will first meet William Shakespeare as his work is discussed and staged in the novel *Killer Dolphin* by Ngaio Marsh.

Ngaio Marsh was born in Christchurch, New Zealand in 1899 and christened Edith Ngaio (pronounced nyo) Marsh. Her middle name is the Maori word for a local flowering tree. She was descended from an ancient English family and her maternal grandfather was one of the first colonizers of New Zealand. Early on Marsh wanted to be a painter, but she chose instead to be a playwright. Allan Wilkie, the actor-manager of the English Shakespeare Company found her early plays to be too romantic and unproduceable, but he offered her a job as an actress. Marsh spent the rest of her life in and out of the theater as an actress, director, producer, and playwright.

In 1932 she wrote her first novel in which she introduced her beloved detective Sir Roderick Alleyn. It was in her second book, *Enter a Murderer*, that Marsh first showed her talents for using the theatrical world as a setting for murder. She was to use this theme again and again quite successfully in her novels.

The theater is a very natural and obvious setting for a mystery, but this is not apparent at first glance. Immediately one is struck with the fact that the theater is too large, too colorful, and too alive to be reproduced on the printed page. Many authors such as Agatha Christie and Simon Brett have also used the theater as a setting for murder, but Ngaio Marsh stands out from the rest, perhaps because of her background.

The theatrical world is filled with interesting characters and Marsh captures them clearly. Actors and theater technicians have a language all their own that Marsh does an excellent job of recreating in crisp, humorous, tongue-in-cheek dialogue. The members of a theater company tend to be in a world all to themselves and this isolation fits into a mystery plot nicely. Finally, the theater is based on illusion. Nothing is as it seems. The elegant drawing room seen by the audience is really just painted canvas and wood when seen from another angle. Marsh understood this and uses the artificiality of theater to both entertain the reader and support the interplay of appearances and reality essential to the mystery novel.

I have chosen *Killer Dolphin* to be the first work of literature studied not only because it lays out the rudiments of mystery, but also because it connects to the theater, for our understanding of Shakespeare in toto requires that we understand the milieu of the theatrical world in which his plays are produced. Marsh paints an accurate amusing portrait of backstage life that will serve well as introduction to theater and detective fiction. The novel also centers around a small theater company staging an original drama based on the life of William Shakespeare. This connecting thread draws in the most important element of the curriculum unit in a relevant, yet entertaining manner.

In *Killer Dolphin* we first meet the charming young director, Peregrine Jay, who lusts after an abandoned theater, the Dolphin. Through a bizarre mishap Peregrine falls through the floor of the Dolphin and is almost drowned. He is rescued by the mysterious Mr. Conducis, who just so happens to own the theater, and in a fairy tale manner allows Peregrine to restore and manage the Dolphin. Mr. Conducis has also in his possession a glove believed to have once belonged to Hamnet Shakespeare, William's only son who died at the age of eleven. This glove inspires Penegrine to write the play that will officially re-open the Dolphin. The *Glove* is produced and is a major hit with the audience coming to see not only this biographical tale of Shakespeare and his "dark lady" of the sonnets, but to see Hamnet's glove on display in the theater. Unfortunately a few months into the run, the night before the glove is to leave the theater and to be sold by Mr. Conducis, a violent murder takes place. Superintendent Roderick Alleyn, C.I.D. is called in on the case. Through interviews and by using deductive reasoning Alleyn finds the murderer, solves the case, and the Dolphin's company can get back to the business of producing plays.

Ms. Marsh has written a charming and accurate detective novel set within the theatrical world. *Killer Dolphin*

will be an interesting novel for my students to study as they already have some knowledge of the theater and other mysteries with which to compare and contrast it. Through class discussion I plan to explore Ngaio Marsh's depiction of backstage life and to see how it relates to the knowledge of professional theater my students already possess. While reading *Killer Dolphin* a class activity could include a field trip for a backstage tour of one of the local theaters, the Yale Repertory or the Long Wharf Theatre. It might be possible to find a theater professional who could comment on the production of Shakespeare's plays today, especially *Macbeth*. A good resource for this type of speaker is the Yale School of Drama.

In addition to stimulating study and debate on today's professional theater, reading *Killer Dolphin* will serve as an introduction to a further study of the life and times of William Shakespeare. While reading the novel, students will also study biographical materials on the Bard by reading excerpts from *An Introduction to Shakespeare* by Marchette Chute. Chapter 6 is particularly excellent as it discusses in detail how Shakespeare and the members of the Chamberlain's company produced a play. *Shakespeare and His Theatre* by John Russell Brown tells the tale of the Globe theatre in a manner appropriate for young readers. An excellent overview of Shakespeare's life and his career in the theater is presented simply and pictorially in *Shakespeare* by Martin Fido and Roland Mushat Frye's *Shakespeare's Life and Times*. Students will enjoy the manner in which Shakespeare's biography is presented in these coffee table style art books.

It is clear that this course of study is weaving together a number of different threads, that of detective fiction, the theater, Shakespearean dramas, biography, and history. This is the point of a humanities curriculum: to enable the student to see how one aspect of life touches on the other. For example, how theater requires knowledge of human nature and how literary study as well as history and biography can provide that knowledge. Humanities is the formalized study of all the collective elements that make man special and unique.

Shakespeare and Macbeth

Once we have read *Killer Dolphin* and examined William Shakespeare's life so that students have a firm grasp on him as a man and playwright, we will begin to look at his play *Macbeth*. *Macbeth* will be studied in many forms and from many different angles. To prepare for reading the complete play, students will first read several adaptations, including two story versions, *Macbeth* as found in *Tales From Shakespeare* by Charles and Mary Lamb and the narrative tale found in Leon Garfield's *Shakespeare Stories*. The Lamb version is entertaining, yet dated in an 18th century manner. The basic story is not as difficult to grasp as in the original; even though students may find its language dated, it is good preparation for the original. Garfield's version has been modernized and tells the story very well, thus sweeping students up in the drama. Although some purists would argue against exposing students to anything but Shakespeare's original, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* itself is an eloquent retelling of an ancient king's life found in the popular history of that time, *Hollinshed's Chronicles*. I chose this sequence of versions because I want my students to enjoy Shakespeare's original when they do read it: by being familiar with the basic plot, they can concentrate on Shakespeare's poetic language.

After reading the stories, the students will read aloud and dramatize a version of *Macbeth* adapted for middle school students by Albert Cullum in *Shake Hands with Shakespeare*. Mr. Cullum has retained Shakespeare's poetry while making the drama more accessible to young students. At this time I want the students to view a production of *Macbeth*. I want them to see a professional interpretation of the play. If there is no local production, we will view the videotape of Nicol Williamson's BBC production. It is really important for the students to dramatize and view *Macbeth* because Shakespeare intended his plays for performance. During his lifetime they were not published since he was more concerned with their dramatic life than their literary one.

Classroom activity is not limited to performance; however, as a means to performance we will discuss much in advance. As a group we will explore the important and relevant questions that each novel and the play *Macbeth* raises. I want to look at the themes of power, greed, and ambition found in *Macbeth*. Why is the murder of Duncan committed? What is really gained by this killing? What role does the supernatural play in *Macbeth*? Where do we see guilt and remorse shown? Could the chain of events have been broken? If so, how and where? What motivated Macbeth to commit the crime of murder? What motivated Lady Macbeth? Which character was worse in his reasoning? What basic human behaviors are clearly seen in this play? How do they fit the behaviors seen in *Killer Dolphin* and other detective novels? How is *Macbeth* like a mystery novel? The questions could go on and on and in the classroom I hope they do.

This curriculum unit will end as it began, with another dramatic mystery novel by Ngaio Marsh, *Light Thickens*. *Light Thickens* was her last novel and it brings us back full circle to the Dolphin Theatre and Peregrine Jay twenty years after we first met him. Jay and his company are now staging *Macbeth*. He is married to Emily and the father of three sons. The Dolphin has been a successful venture and Jay is now an established leader in the London theater scene. Fortunately, there have been no tragedies since the murder of the night watchman in *Killer Dolphin*. But from the start of rehearsals odd things begin to happen as the company is working on the Scottish play. Several of the actors are superstitious and try to blame the events on the bad luck a staging of *Macbeth* is supposed to bring. The students will explore at this time some of the theater folklore associated with the play. *Great Theatrical Disasters* is an excellent, humorous source for theater tales.

Peregrine Jay and his production suffer the worst luck imaginable when their *Macbeth* is actually beheaded. Roderick Alleyn is now Chief Superintendent and once again solves this mystery with his sharp mind and wits.

Light Thickens is a darker novel and a little more grim than *Killer Dolphin*. That may be due to both Jay's middle age and the tragedy that his theater is producing. The novel completes the tale when Peregrine Jay decides that the company cannot go on performing *Macbeth* after this tragic murder takes place, and so he decides to resurrect *The Glove*. The novel closes with Jay's company starting production on this play of his youth.

After reading *Light Thickens*, there may be the same need for levity that Peregrine Jay felt in the novel. In that case, it would be quite appropriate to read James Thurber's delightful short story, *The Macbeth Murder Mystery*. This tale can be found in *The Thurber Carnival*. The story humorously relates the attempts of a foolish woman to unravel the "whodunit" of *Macbeth*. This American woman relates that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth couldn't have been the real murderers. That's too obvious. Shakespeare is pulling a leg, the lady states. She and her gentleman friend finally reach a hilarious conclusion as to who really killed Duncan, Banquo, Lady Macduff, and the little Macduffs. This light Thurber concoction is fun, relevant, and very amusing. It could kick off a discussion or writing assignment about what a mystery really is, the mysterious elements in Shakespeare's plays, and whether or not *Macbeth* could be considered a mystery.

The unit activities will end with a full reading of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Students will be asked to listen to and analyze Shakespeare's poetry. A pleasant activity could involve students listening to a recording of the play and/or making their own taping of selected scenes. Now is the time to emphasize the language of *Macbeth* and to discuss Shakespeare's unique gift in writing such beautiful plays.

As this unit concludes there will be time set aside to comment and reflect on the activities of the past twenty weeks. I will encourage students to voice their opinions, to ask their own questions, and to make their own statements. This student input will direct how this curriculum unit will conclude. Will we stage scenes from the play for an audience? Will we tape record some of *Macbeth's* speeches and monologues? Will we write some

actual scenes for *The Glove* and perform them? Will we write about and study Shakespeare's life? Possibly build a miniature Globe theatre? Or will we simply end as we began the unit with an in-class discussion of the mysteries, the theater, human behavior, William Shakespeare and his plays, Ngaio Marsh and her novels, thus trying to fit all the pieces into a puzzle of our own making. The mystery and suspense of William Shakespeare's drama will now be an important addition to the students' knowledge and interests in literature and life.

Teaching Strategies

There are many, many lessons and specific learning activities that can arise from a progressive year-long study of human behavior as it appears in the form of mystery plots, the art of acting, and finally, in great literature. Yet, it is impossible here to mention more than a few of the teaching activities I plan to share with 8th graders while introducing them to the dramatic literature of William Shakespeare and the genre of detective fiction. But the length of the actual teaching unit and the range of materials makes it possible for each teacher to fashion her own connections and order of teaching. I am not offering so much a cut and dried set of lessons that will fail or succeed, but rather an approach for involving and interesting students in the subject matter. Any number of different lesson plans can work as long as the focus of human behavior is maintained.

I am most concerned with the basic learning skills of reading, writing, thinking, and analyzing. Each of these can be attained through a variety of means within this study of man as we perceive him through literature. I encourage each teacher to draw on her most creative energies in planning lessons and in using these lessons to create the student's interest in learning more about himself through this study.

In the four categories below, I suggest some possible approaches to achieving and maintaining this interest. Three specific sample lesson plans follow.

Reading :

1. Reading mysteries for fun.
2. Looking at the work of other mystery writers who have written about the theater. (Eg. Margery Allingham, Simon Brett, and Agatha Christie)
3. Reading aloud dramatically the suspense plays of Ira Levin or Anthony Shaffer.
4. Reading scenes from other plays by William Shakespeare.
5. Keeping a reading notebook filled with selected Shakespearean quotations.

Writing :

1. Choosing a Shakespearean quotation and applying it to some dilemma in our lives.
2. Writing a paragraph on a chosen scene and how it makes you feel.

4. Writing a dramatic scene based on the prose situation found in a mystery novel.

Writing:

5. Creating the plots and characters for a mystery short story.

Thinking:

1. Choosing a character from a mystery (eg. the villain) and trying to understand his behavior by acting like him in an improvised scene.
2. Writing a stream-of-consciousness monologue as if one was a murderer.
3. Writing an imaginary letter to a friend as if one was a detective. Try to describe and explain your actions in solving a crime.
4. Keeping a journal of one's reactions and thoughts while reading *Macbeth* .
5. Trying to find instances of real people behaving as they do in detective fiction or in Shakespeare's plays. Students could use newspapers, magazines, television, biographies and other non-fictional sources to document their findings.

Analyzing :

1. Keeping a written list of all the motivations and specific actions students find in their readings. A chart or graph could be made for the entire class to use in tabulating the results.
2. Looking at situations of cause and effect as they appear in detective fiction and discussing these problems in small groups. Each group would have to plot and chart the crime they are tracking.
3. Staging mock debates based on the points of view of literary characters such as the Macbeths.
4. Designing and building miniature replicas of the Dolphin theatre based on Ngaio Marsh's descriptions in *Killer Dolphin* .
5. Listing the elements of detective fiction and then discussing the question, "Is *Macbeth* a mystery?". How does the play fit or not fit these criteria?

Sample Lesson Plans

Activity #1: Playwriting

Objective to learn about William Shakespeare's life and times and to experience being a playwright while trying to create Peregrine Jay's play *The Glove* .

While reading *Killer Dolphin* I found the most mysterious element to not be the murder but what Peregrine's play is really like. *The Glove* is central to the novel. The reader is informed about the play's casting, staging, and basic plot but never gets to hear any of its dialogue or to feel its true life. I think that students will be curious about *The Glove* . It is ever present in *Killer Dolphin* and always tempting the reader to find out more about William Shakespeare, the man. Who was the dark lady? What was her relationship with Shakespeare? What was his marriage to Anne Hathaway really like? Why did his family stay behind in Stratford and not join him in London where he lived and worked? What was Shakespeare's relationship with his children? Why did Hamnet die at such an early age? How did Shakespeare's life shape him into the brilliant playwright that he became?

None of these questions will be easy to answer. Some have no clear answers at all. Historians have been puzzled by the holes and gaps in Shakespeare's personal history for generations. Students will enjoy tackling these issues while trying to write their own simple version of *The Glove* .

Preparation Students must be knowledgeable about the existing facts of Shakespeare's life. In class we will read excerpts from *An Introduction to Shakespeare* , the biography written especially for young people by Marchette Chute. Students will be given time in the school library to do research. There will also be a classroom display of related books and materials.

Process After having completed his basic research, each student will be asked to write a brief narrative outline for *The Glove* . These will be shared aloud and discussed in class. The next step is for students to divide themselves into small groups of three or four people. These small groups will then rewrite the story outline until they are pleased with the end result. My students are used to writing alone, as well as in groups. This approach can be very stimulating in that there is a solid sharing and flow of ideas, but it may not work for every class group. Some teachers may choose to keep the writing as a solo activity.

Once the narrative story has been set, we will work on creating a plot outline. Here students will decide which scenes should make it into their play. Due to time constraints, each group might only create one or two complete scenes. These could be strung together with the work done by the other groups to give the sense of a complete play. If there was enough time the students could certainly write as many complete plays as there were groups, but in my classroom this would not be as practical.

Culmination The final scenes will be first read aloud in a semi-staged manner with the rest of the class as audience. The students will then rehearse briefly and present their dramatized scenes. If the interest is there and the students choose to do so, their version of *The Glove* could be staged, polished, simply costumed, and presented for an audience of peers and/or parents. Peregrine Jay would find all this quite amusing.

Activity #2: Classroom Discussion

Objective to give students an opportunity to ask questions about the reading material, but more importantly to give each student a chance to express his own opinion and to enter into a dialogue with his classmates.

A class discussion may seem like too simple and obvious an activity to describe in a lesson plan. My experience has taught me that too often there is no interchange taking place after students have read a piece of literature, or what is even worse the teacher assumes discussion is taking place when in actuality she is simply lecturing. Therefore, I would like to share my simple recipe for assuring student involvement in a class discussion.

Preparation There must be something of value to discuss. Gab sessions can have their own merit in helping people let off steam, but for this activity it is essential that there be a common ground. The students should have read something of merit either in class or at home. Do not let too much time pass between the reading and the discussion.

Process *I like to start with a brief opening statement that I make in an attempt to give an overview of the material about to be discussed. I may also review any previous work that relates to the topic of discussion. I try to never speak initially for more than five minutes or so. Then I ask for students to respond or to bring up any points they feel are important. When students first start this type of discussion they might be quiet. They could be used to speaking only when spoken to or only to answer a question. Once they do become comfortable they guide the discussion along. I find I sit back, listen, comment occasionally, and learn a lot about what they have really learned. I also find that these discussions give me enlightened perspective on the literature we have read. The students are always finding a new twist or outlook on the material.*

Culmination A flexible time limit should be placed on this type of discussion. If the conversation starts to lag it may be time to stop or to change topics. I use the ideas brought up in one discussion to often plan the next. I also listen carefully to what the students say and use their opinions as guidelines on what types of literature to teach. This is how I became aware of the importance of mystery and detective fiction in the classroom.

Activity #3: Monologues and Soliloquies

Objective to expose students to the eloquence of William Shakespeare's writing as found specifically in his dramatic speeches and to encourage students to write their own monologues.

There is no playwright more gifted than William Shakespeare in the poetic and dramatic use of the soliloquy. Through these inner speeches shared with an audience, Shakespeare enlightened us as to the motivations and reasons behind a character's behavior. The most quoted portions of his plays are from these monologues. Some of the most passionate and inspired pieces that Shakespeare wrote can be found in *Macbeth*. In first studying these soliloquies and monologues students will be exposed to Shakespearean language in small, meaningful doses so that they can better understand and appreciate his work.

Preparation Students should have first read the *Macbeth* retellings by Charles and Mary Lamb and Leon Garfield. This will give them a basic understanding of the plot and the context in which these dramatic speeches appear.

Process First, there should be an awareness of the simple difference between a monologue and a soliloquy. A monologue is simply a one person dramatic speech which can be performed on stage alone or with another actor. It can be a speaking out of one's own inner thoughts or a long, one-sided portion of a conversation. Shakespeare took the idea of the soliloquy from the Greeks and refined it to perfection. For a soliloquy an actor is alone on stage and speaking his innermost thoughts aloud. It is the classic way to share motivation with the audience.

Next, the students should be presented with a dramatic speech from *Macbeth*. There are many brilliant

soliloquies from which to choose and eventually a class might want to work with several of them, if not all. I will begin with Lady Macbeth's "milk of human kindness" speech at the beginning of Act 1, Scene 5. Here, she is first performing the simple task of reading her husband's letter from the front. Macbeth is sharing with her his experience with the weird sisters and the news that their prophecy came true. He is now the Thane of Cawdor. It is in this speech that we first meet Lady Macbeth and we see clearly her greed and need for power. Her bitter ambition colors the entire scene and tips the audience off as to what is yet to come.

The students will read and then discuss this soliloquy. We will tackle the vocabulary and then attempt to discover its meaning. There will be an emphasis placed on the psychology of murder and the human motivations called on when one kills another. We will look at how monologues and soliloquies are purely expressions of inner thought and how that can affect a dramatic structure. The students will be asked to sort out Lady Macbeth's motivations and feelings. They will be asked to write a modern monologue from Lady Macbeth's point of view.

Finally, the students will write soliloquies based on their own life experiences. These can be shared and performed within the class.

Culmination The students will be asked to examine other speeches from *Macbeth*, such as Macbeth's soliloquy in Act 2, Scene 1 in which he reflects on his dagger and whether or not he is capable of the crime. Macbeth's motivations will be examined and then compared to those of his wife. I think an interesting discussion could be held on the topic of which one of the Macbeths is the more dangerous and disturbing killer.

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