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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1987 Volume IV: The Writing of History: History as Literature

“By the Pricking of My Thumbs, Something Wicked This Way Comes.” (An exploration of murder and mystery as found in the novels of Ngaio Marsh and the play, “Macbeth,” by William Shakespeare)

Guide for Curriculum Unit 87.04.04
by Kelley O’Rourke

This curriculum unit is a literary study of man and his behavior. The main objective of this unit is to introduce students to the dramatic works of William Shakespeare and to his perceptions of human behaviors as seen in the tragedy, “Macbeth.” Using a humanistic approach, several threads are woven together to create a three-fold approach to learning. In addition to “Macbeth” students will also study the detective fiction of Ngaio Marsh and the performing art of theater. Reading Ngaio Marsh’s novels, “Killer Dolphin” and “Light Thickens,” will make the study of “Macbeth” more entertaining and meaningful as these novels explore the same human actions and motives that Shakespeare does in his drama. The study of theater is yet another way in which to study man’s common patterns of behavior as seen through the eyes of creative artists.

This curriculum unit was created for an 8th grade humanities class, but it is well suited for any high school English or literature course. The study of Shakespeare’s plays should be lively and meaningful for students. This unique blend of mystery and detective fiction with a study of theater should prove to help the Bard of Avon come to life for students today.

(Recommended for Humanities and Theater classes, grades 8-11; English, Literature, and Shakespeare classes, grades 9-11)

Key Words

Drama Literature Macbeth French Novel Mystery Shakespeare and Marsh Les Miserables Marsh, Ngaio Killer Dolphin

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