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**Gender Roles**
Macbeth Prompts and Activities

**Note:** The following activities and writing prompts are meant to serve as a loose guide for you as you lead the class. You may choose to use many of them, some of them, or parts of them in your class. Many of these prompts include multiple questions. Some questions may be used for discussion prior to the introduction of the writing prompts. As you teach, you will learn what works for you and your specific class.

*Anytime activities:* These activities have been placed where they may be most relevant, but they can be used in more than one act or scene. You will find many of them at the end of this list. Some activities may need to be changed slightly to suit the section of the play you intend to use them in.

The Folger Shakespeare Library has an excellent Macbeth Study Guide. Some of the activities found in the study guide are referenced in the following list. Also, the character tree is a great visual of character relationships and would be a useful handout for students at the start of the class.

**Act 1**

1. **Fair is Foul**

   **Literary Terms Covered:** Doubles Theme, Equivocation, Foreshadowing, Tone  
   **Section of Play:** (1.1.1-13), (1.3.1-92)  
   **Speakers:** Witches, Macbeth, Banquo  

   **Writing Prompt:** How does this double speak affect the tone?  
   This language (equivocation) serves as a type of foreshadowing. Make your predictions: What do you think will happen in the play or specifically to Macbeth? Why do you think the witches speak this way to Macbeth? Think of a time you had something important to say to someone. Did you say exactly what you meant? Why or why not?

2. **Casting Spells**

   **Literary Terms Covered:** Imagery, Mood, Nature Theme  
   **Section of Play:** (1.3.1-39)  
   **Speakers:** Witches  

   **Writing Prompt:** The witches’ spells are full of rich imagery from the natural world. What effect does this focus on nature have on the mood of the play?  
   -or-  
   Write your own spell using rich imagery from nature or whatever suits you best. What images would you call upon? What events would you want to set into motion? (Note: Please be mindful that some students may not want to participate in this activity for personal reasons. If that’s the case, just move on and select a different prompt.)
3. Masking Murder

**Literary Terms Covered:** Character, Ambition Theme, Internal Conflict  
**Section of Play:** (1.7.1-28)  
**Speakers:** Macbeth

**Activity:** (Folger Pre-Performance #8) Macbeth rarely speaks directly of killing Duncan. Instead he uses less brutal language, or euphemisms. As a class, read the speech in 1.7.1-28 underlining all the words that refer to the murder of Duncan (there are at least 12). Then split the class into 2 groups: 1st group: Read speech as written; 2nd group: Every time one of the underlined words is said, whisper “MURDER.”

**Writing Prompt:** Why do you think Macbeth avoids using the words “murder,” “kill,” etc? What does this tell you about Macbeth’s state of mind at this stage of the play?

4. Power of Persuasion

**Literary Terms Covered:** Character Relationships, Conflict, Themes of Ambition, Power, Fate & Manliness  
**Section of Play:** (1.7.34-95)  
**Speakers:** Macbeth, Lady Macbeth

**Activity:** (Folger Pre-Performance #2) Macbeth tells Lady Macbeth, "We will proceed no further in this business" (1.7.34), meaning that he will not kill King Duncan. Yet, by the end of the scene, just some 60 lines later, he is resolved to commit murder. Read the scene aloud and note how Lady Macbeth counters Macbeth’s arguments.

**Writing Prompt:** How does Lady Macbeth convince him to kill Duncan? How do you ask for what you want? Does it differ from Lady Macbeth’s tactics?

**Act 2:**

5. Dagger of the Mind

**Literary Terms Covered:** Staging, Tone, Imagery  
**Section of Play:** (2.1.44-74)  
**Speaker:** Macbeth

**Activity:** Make a dagger out of cardboard/paper. Act out the scene with and without the dagger. How did the tone change by staging it differently? How did your perception of Macbeth change?

**Writing Prompt:** The image of the dagger clearly impacted Macbeth greatly. What is an image (positive or negative) that has stuck with you, and why?

6. Part of Porter

**Literary Terms Covered:** Mood, Suspense, Tension, Character Roles, Staging  
**Section of Play:** (2.3.1-21)  
**Speaker:** Porter
Activity: (Folger Pre-Performance #4) Shakespeare introduces the Porter in 2.3. Read the Porter's part aloud by having each student read to an end mark of punctuation. Add in the sound effects of knocking as they are called for in the Porter's speech. How does it help to clarify the meaning of the Porter's lines?

Writing Prompt: How do you see the Porter's role in the play? Does he provide comic relief? Is he a messenger of sorts? Does his character serve some other function? In some productions, the Porter's part is omitted from the play. What effect do you think leaving the Porter out has on the play?

7. Inquiry into Storytelling: Mapping it Out *

Literary Terms Covered: Plot Points
Section of Play: End of Act 2

Activity: As a class, pick a few familiar stories (movies, fairy tales, folk stories, etc.) Map out the plot points. Now map out Macbeth so far. What do you think will happen next? Does anything in the text lead you to your predictions?

Act 3:

8. False Friends

Literary Terms Covered: Character Relationships, Themes of Deception & Fate
Section of Play: (3.1.1-41), earlier (2.1.24-35)
Speakers: Macbeth and Banquo

Activity: (Folger Pre-Performance 9) Read Macbeth 3.1.1-41 as a class. Discuss what is happening at this point in the play. (Macbeth is questioning Banquo about his movements in the full knowledge that he, himself has ordered Banquo and his son to be killed.) Underline every word or phrase where Macbeth is being insincere or lying (e.g. "Fail not our feast", etc.), then split class into 2 groups. Group 1 reads lines 1-41 slowly. Group 2 allocates each of the underlined sections to different speakers. As these lines are read by Group 1, have students shout out “That is false,” and have speakers say what they think is really on Macbeth's mind.

Writing Prompt: Discuss the relationship between Macbeth and Banquo. Is it based on genuine respect and friendship at the beginning of the play? How is it affected by the prophecies of the witches? Does Banquo ever doubt Macbeth's loyalty to his country, king, and fellow soldiers? What other factors contribute to their increasing distrust of one another? Find evidence in the text to support your answers.

9. Mask Makers

Literary Terms Covered: Deception Theme, Metaphor, Masks
Section of Play: (3.1.140), (3.2.35), earlier (1.4.13-16), (1.4.55-60), (5.70-80), (1.7.95)
Speakers: Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Duncan

Writing Prompt: In this scene, Macbeth is discussing hiding his true self. This same idea is expressed several times in the play as wearing “masks.” Describe a time when you weren't
yourself. What was the result? Is there ever a situation where it’s good to be a little deceptive or hide your true self/intentions?

**Activity:** Make a mask, but instead of hiding yourself, make it illustrate who you are or who you want to be. Present you mask to the class and explain how it describes you and what you want to show the world.

**Supplies Needed:** Cardboard, colored paper, popsicle sticks, markers, glue, tape, etc.

10. **Dear Diary * **

**Literary Terms Covered:** Character Types  
**Section of Play:** End of Act 3

**Writing Prompt:** Pick 1 or 2 characters and describe their character type. Write a brief journal entry as your selected character(s). Try to incorporate at least one important line from the play. Describe how you illustrated what kind of character they are (E.g., reaction to self, to others, by how they speak).

**Act 4:**

11. **No Man of Woman Born**

**Literary Term Covered:** Foreshadowing  
**Section of Play:** (4.1.90-101)  
**Speaker:** Second Apparition, Macbeth

**Writing Prompt:** This passage is a perfect example of the double speak and inversion used by the witches throughout the play. The prophecy gives Macbeth a false sense of security because he does not know that Macduff was delivered by c-section. What is the significance of Macduff’s birth? Do you agree that being delivered by c-section makes him “not of woman born”? How does the meaning of this prophecy change if it reads “no man born of woman”?

12. **Mad About Macduff**

**Literary Terms Covered:** Values, Character Roles and Relationships  
**Section Of Play:** (4.2)  
**Speaker:** Lady Macduff

**Activity:** Lady Macduff is clearly upset that Macduff has left her (presumably) to conspire against Macbeth. As a class, write a list of qualities for being a good husband/father. Now write a list of good soldier/kinsman qualities. Do these values match? If not, can you see this discrepancy anywhere in modern times?

**Writing Prompt:** Do you ever feel torn between two roles?
13. I Just Can't Wait to be... King?

Literary Terms Covered: Character Traits, Kingship Theme, Values
Section of Play: (4.3.55-155)
Speaker: Malcolm

Writing Prompt: Why does Malcolm think he doesn’t have kingly qualities? Is there any other reason he wouldn’t want to be king? What inspires him to change his mind? Do you think the characters in this scene think Macbeth has kingly qualities? What do you think it takes to be a good leader? Would you want to be king?

14. What Makes a Modern Man?

Literary Terms Covered: Gender/Manhood Theme, Values, Motivation
Section of Play: (4.3.240-282)
Speaker: Ross, Macduff, Malcolm

Activity: Reread this section of the play, making note of each time anything related to manhood is mentioned. Discuss other scenes where “manliness” is a motivator? As a class, write a list of what it means to be a man in Macbeth. Now write a list of what it means to be a man in modern times.

Writing Prompt: How do the values of manhood differ in modern times? What do you think it takes to be a good man?

15. Mind’s Eye *

Literary Terms Covered: Imagery (motifs of Darkness/Night, Blood/Death, Nature & the Supernatural)
Section of Play: Act 4

Activity: (Folger Pre-Performance #3) Draw a picture or create a collage that illustrates an image in the play that you find both interesting and unsettling. Present it in class, citing the lines from the play that serve as the source for your drawing or collage. What is the significance of this image in the play?

Supplies Needed: Magazines, paper, markers, glue, tape

16. The Trouble with Tragedy

Literary Term Covered: Genre of Tragedy, Character Change, Ambition Theme
Section of Play: (5.1)
Speakers: Doctor, Gentlewoman, Lady Macbeth

Writing Prompt: Describe what is happening to Lady Macbeth in this scene. Why is she so troubled? How has she changed since the beginning of the play? Does her change say anything about the theme of ambition in the play? What would you do for your ambition? How do you differ from Lady Macbeth?
17. Fit to be King?

**Literary Terms Covered:** Metaphor, Kingship Theme  
**Section of Play:** (5.2.19-25)  
**Speaker:** Angus (Scottish Rebel)

**Writing Prompt:** In this scene, Scottish rebels are discussing Macbeth. What is the metaphor they use to describe Macbeth and his role as a king? What idea does this metaphor get across and how is it effective? What do you think it takes to be a good leader?

18. King and Country

**Literary Terms Covered:** Metaphor, Kingship Theme  
**Section of Play:** (5.2.30-34)  
**Speaker:** Caithness (Scottish Rebel)

**Writing Prompt:** In parts of the play (2.4.1-25) we see strange happenings. Now (5.2.30-34) the country is described as sick and in need of medicine. Why does this metaphor work? Do the strange happenings or this current sickness say anything about Macbeth's job as king? What does this say about kingship in general?

19. The Nature of Things

**Literary Term Covered:** Themes of Nature and Doubles  
**Section of Play:** (5.4)  
**Speakers:** Malcolm, Macduff, Siward

**Writing Prompt:** Describe the role of nature in this scene. Does it differ from how we see nature portrayed earlier in the play? Does this tie into the theme of doubles or everything is what is not?

20. Sound and Symbols in Soliloquy *

**Literary Terms Covered:** Soliloquy, Symbolism, Staging/Acting  
**Section of Play:** (5.5.20-31)  
**Speaker:** Macbeth

**Writing Prompt:** One of the most well known soliloquies in all of Shakespeare's plays is the one delivered by Macbeth in Act 5 after learning of Lady Macbeth's death (5.5.20-31). Who is Macbeth talking to (himself, the audience, Seyton)? What is Macbeth saying in this speech? What is Macbeth’s state of mind at this point in the play? What is the symbolism of the candle?

**Activity:** How would you suggest an actor deliver these lines (tone of voice, physical movement, etc.)? Break the class up into groups. Each group will choose an “actor.” The rest of the students will direct the actor. Each group will be given an expression (angry, sad, defeated) that their actor will convey as they perform this part for the class. Which way was most effective?
21. Directing Drama *

Literary Term Covered: Soliloquy, Directing, Acting, Tone
Section of Play: Any
Speaker: Any

Activity: In pairs, choose one person to be the director and one as the actor. Select a (monologue or soliloquy) to act out for the class. The director will assist the actor in deciding how to perform their part. Be mindful of how you use your tone, volume, and gestures to get across how the character is feeling. Practice it several times and perform for the class.

22. Diss-gusted

Literary Term Covered: Shakespearean Language, Honor Theme
Section of Play: (5.7) – (5.8.1-39)
Speakers: Macbeth, Young Siward, Macduff

Writing Prompt: Young Siward and Macduff sling some heated insults at Macbeth. How would you insult Macbeth using language inspired by the play? No profanity allowed. How would you defend your honor if you were Macbeth?

-Or-

Construct a poem in which you insult Macbeth or someone you personally know that has upset you. You may use this fill-in-the-blank template if you choose:
You are (what describes Macbeth?)
Because you (what did he do?)
You will (what will happen to Macbeth?)
I am (what describes you)
Because I (what will you do?)
I will be (describe your future)

23. Speaking of Soldiers...

Literary Terms Covered: Honor Theme, Values, Message of Play
Section of Play: (5.8.40-88)
Speakers: Siward, Malcolm, Ross, Macduff

Writing Prompt: Why does the play end with so much focus on the story of the soldier (Young Siward) who died fighting Macbeth? How is being a good soldier linked to god, country, and being a good man? What values do you see represented by this scene? Do they match modern values?

24. Make it Modern *

Literary Terms Covered: Parallels, Political Implications, Message of Play
Section of Play: Act 5 or Anytime

Writing Prompt: (Folger Post-Performance 6) What implications does the play have for today's world where tyrants and dictators cause chaos in their countries? Think of ways a director could "politicize" a production (use of crowd scenes, uniforms, national flags, etc.).
Select a scene (or part of a scene) and rewrite it in contemporary English and a modern setting. Consider who your characters will be (profession, personality, speech) and place them in a setting that you think relates somehow to Macbeth’s Scotland.

25. You Talkin’ to Me? *

Literary Term Covered: Quotation Analysis

Writing Prompt/Activity: Pick 3 quotes from the play (You may use the list starting on Folger pg 221) List who said it, to whom, under what circumstances and why it’s important. Now consider which one you find the most powerful or most important to the play (e.g., helps the plot, creates mood, develops character). Write a paragraph defending your position. If you can, incorporate other parts or quotations from the play in your defense. Present your choice to the class.

26. I’ve Got This Covered*

Literary Term Covered: Character Analysis, Persuasive and Business Writing

Writing Prompt/Activity: As a class, prepare a cover letter as if you were Macbeth or another character applying to be king (or have this prepared in advance to use as an example for your students). Think of the qualifications and skills needed for the job of king and how your character has demonstrated that they’d be a good fit for the position. Then have students pick their dream career and write a cover letter for that position.

27. Pleased to Meet Me*

Literary Term Covered: Character Analysis

Writing Prompt/Activity: Pair students and have them choose either king or soldier as the position they are applying for. One student will be the job applicant (interviewee), the other the employer (interviewer). The employer creates a list of job specific skills and experiences needed for the position and prepares questions. The applicant must brainstorm the qualifications needed for the position and market themselves. Since employers interview many people, how will you set yourself apart? What makes you unique?

28. Fair and Foul in Film*

Literary Term Covered: Tone, Acting, Staging, Adaptations

Writing Prompt/Activity: Compare the same scene in two different film versions of Macbeth. How does the acting and visual aspect of seeing the play performed aid in understanding? How does the tone differ in each version and which version was most effective.

-Or-

Compare a scene from one classic version of Macbeth to the modern adaptation, Scotland PA. How does Scotland PA draw parallels to Macbeth? Discuss other modern parallels that can be drawn from the play.
Designated Writing Prompts

1. Analysis Through Memoir

**Fate**: Do you believe events in your life have been guided by fate or chance? Why or why not? Use specific examples from your experience.

2. Compare and Contrast

**Ambition**: Banquo and Macbeth both get exciting prophecies from the witches, but they react in very different ways. How do their reactions reflect their different personalities and ambitions? How do they act toward each other after the prophecies?

3. Argumentative Essay

Choose one of the following:

**Gender roles**: How do values of manhood differ in modern times? What do you think it takes to be a good man? Explain how your views are like or unlike those in the play. Use examples from the text.

**Fate**: Based on the text, what do you think was Shakespeare's attitude toward fate? Did Macbeth have any choice in his actions or was everything predetermined? Use examples from the text.

**Ambition**: What is Shakespeare trying to say about leadership? Who do you think the best leader in the play was? What qualities make that character a successful leader? Use examples from the text.