

WHS Book Rationale

Title: Macbeth

Author: William Shakespeare

- **Intended Audience**

English 11 and English 11 Honors

- **Brief summary and educational significance**

Macbeth, upon returning from his successful leadership of King Duncan's army in battle, is told by three witches that he will become king. This sends Macbeth into a downward spiral that includes the murder of Duncan, Banquo, and the family of Macduff, as well as the madness and suicide of Lady Macbeth. This tragedy explores Macbeth's ambition and how that leads to his downfall.

- **Purpose of teaching the work and how it will be used**

- This text is an excellent example of Shakespearian tragedy, and can be used to explore the tragic hero (the flaw, downfall, recognition).
- Paired with Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (taught in the English 11/English 11 Honors courses) this play provides an effective comparison with Miller's contemporary version of American tragedy.
- Close reading of important passages from this text helps students read carefully and understand the structures of 17th Century drama.

- **Potential problems**

Macbeth is a dark play. It includes a number of murders (including Lady Macduff and her children), witchcraft, and suicide.

- **Addressing potential problems**

Macbeth is ultimately about the choices made by the protagonist. Although the play could be about fate (the witches who tell Macbeth he will become king are called "the Weird Sisters"—*weird* being an archaic word for fate), Macbeth is presented in contrast to other characters who choose to remain loyal when he chooses his ambition. His wife's madness and suicide, his own apparent lack of concern for her death, or for the murder of his friends, all illustrate how Macbeth's choice of heeding the Weird Sisters—and his own and Lady Macbeth's ambition—leads to his tragic fall.