

Grade level: 11th-12th Grade

Subject: Language Arts

Rationale:

Students will examine the use of theme in the Manga Classics adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Students will be asked to focus on specific illustrations in the book and consider how the artist brings to light some of the major motifs of the play including (but not limited to) the tragic hero, the supernatural, animal imagery, and fate vs. destiny.

Instructional Duration: 4-6 hours

Objectives:

Students will:

- ✓ Read the Manga Classics graphic novel *Macbeth* and consider it as a visual adaptation of a classic piece of literature.
- ✓ Use images from the novel to answer specific essential questions.
- ✓ Understand the concepts of foreshadowing, fate, and the tragic hero as they pertain to a graphic novel adaptation of a classic play

Front-loaded information / understanding:

Theme - Students should be able to define and identify one or more themes from the original text. This lesson will translate that concept for the graphic novel medium.

Imagery - Students should be able to define and identify imagery in the original text. This lesson will translate that concept for the graphic novel medium.

Symbolism – Students should be able to define and identify one or more symbol from the original text. This lesson will translate that concept for the graphic novel medium.

Foreshadowing – Students should be able to define and identify moments in the text where the artwork, actions of the characters, or dialogue foreshadow possible future events. This lesson will look specifically at the imagery and how it helps create a sense of foreboding or anticipation within the text.

Fate vs. Destiny – Students should understand how the concepts of fate and destiny are often at odds. Throughout the course of the play, students will constantly consider the question of destiny versus free will and how it is being addressed by this text.

The Tragic Hero – Students should understand the concept of the tragic hero as it pertains to classic literature and, in particular, Shakespearean text. Consider the nature of this

concept and the individual components that leads to a character's fall from a position of status, health, or power.

Manga – Many students have not been exposed to this type of reading. Prior to assigning any reading in the Manga Classic Text, instructors should cover the “How to read manga” section at the beginning of the book with their students to ensure understanding.

Instructional Strategies:

NOTE: The lessons contained below assume that students are reading the Manga Classic adaptation after having already been exposed to some or all of the original text. If you are using the graphic novel adaptation as an alternative to reading the original novel, the lessons can still be utilized with modifications.

Students should have read the original play *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare. Have them share with the class what they know about the text itself. Specific attention should be paid to how students visualize some of the more crucial moments of the play including, but not limited to, character appearance and actions, conflict, thematic elements, dialogue, and tragedy.

Activity #1 – Answering Essential Questions (Pre-Reading)

Students should be asked to recall their experiences reading Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Instruct them to think about what parts of the novel stood out to them and why. Students should then be broken into groups of 3-4 and asked to consider how they themselves would adapt the text to a visual medium. In doing so, they will answer the following essential questions:

- ✓ *What is one major motif of the play? How does it manifest in the text?*
- ✓ *Which acts and scenes are the most memorable and impactful based on how the plot moves forward as a result? Choose three to consider and explain why you chose them.*
- ✓ *How would you stage the scenes that you chose from above if you were the director? How would you draw them if you were an artist tasked with adapting the play?*
- ✓ *How would the story of Macbeth be different, had he not met the three Witches at the onset of the play?*
- ✓ *What moves does Shakespeare make in the play early on that foreshadow the events that come later?*

For the second essential question in the list above, ask students to provide three sketches (one for each scene selected). These sketches do not need to be elaborate but should stage the scene in some way (position of characters, background, and objects). Sketches should include some sort of caption that contains specific guiding information that explains how the images shape understanding of the text (2-3 sentences).

Activity #2 – The Tragic Hero

Explore the concept of the “tragic hero” with the students. Explain the characteristics that a tragic hero will often have:

- Pride/Hubris – a hero’s arrogance and overconfident attitude
- Tragic flaw – the characteristic that accelerates the downfall
- The reversal of fortune – the moment where things turn bad for the hero
- The great realization – the all-too-late moment when the hero sees his/her mistakes
- The fall from grace – the suffering and loss that the hero endures
- Sympathy from others/the audience – pity from the other players in the work and/or the audience

Have students reach into the text and apply these characteristics to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, as they are clearly the “tragic heroes” of the work. Ask them to consider how they specifically meet each of the bulleted criteria above and to what degree of fidelity to that definition they exhibit.

Activity #3 – Animal Imagery

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare uses a lot of animal imagery. In the *Manga Classics* adaptation, artist Julien Choy embraces these metaphors and brings them to life within the novel. Have students find examples of this and identify and explain them. Some examples are:

Page 7 – The illustration of the cat and frog when the witches are meeting at the start of the play.

Page 159 – The scorpions of Macbeth’s mind

Page 187 – Macbeth’s vision of Banquo’s ghost conjures warrior animals

Have students address the following question in regards to their chosen image:

In the image(s) your team analyzed, explain how the artwork impacts your understanding of and attitude towards Shakespeare’s use of animal metaphors and imagery as it exists within the Manga Classics adaptation. How does it enhance your appreciation of these comparisons in some way by seeing it represented visually? If it does not, and your group feels that the images are not effective and the comparisons remain cryptic in some way, explain specifically why and what you might suggest to make it stronger.

Students can share their thoughts to the class as a presentation or a simple discussion.

Activity #4 – Theme Identification

There are a lot of moments where the text explores the nature of tragedy, the concept of the tragic hero, and the supernatural. Select specific points in the novel where the artwork illustrates one of these themes in a particularly compelling manner. For example:

Pages 6-8 – The witches represented as demonic, otherworldly creatures; note the artist’s use of dizzying angles and lightning to create that supernatural tone.

Pages 25 – The prophesy is revealed and Macbeth is set on his tragic path

Pages 40 – Macbeth’s gaze, foreshadowing his future savage choices

Page 65 – Ravens as a dark and ominous symbol of evil to come

Page 72 – Lady Macbeth squeezes her husband’s face with her hands, his expression showing anger and fear.

Page 104 – The growing madness of Macbeth

Page 133 – Malcolm and Donalbain in the shadow of Macbeth’s sinister countenance

Pages 161 – More crows as Macbeth becomes empowered and more engaged in his evil acts

Page 167 – The visuals around the tragic death of Banquo and Fleance’s escape

Page 194 – Hecate manifests and how she is represented visually; there is more evil afoot

Page 202 – “By the pricking of my thumb, something wicked this way comes.”

Page 208-209 – The second prophesy and the riddles it poses

Page 213 – No matter what happens, there will always be another king; note Macbeth’s expressions as he confronts this truth

Page 227-228 – The tragic death of Macduff’s family and how the artist makes this moment so impactful

Page 260-263 – The wild eyed Lady Macbeth’s final fall; compare these images to earlier when she encouraged her husband to kill Duncan

Page 284 – Macbeth’s famous soliloquy; spend time analyzing the artistic choices here as Macbeth begins to realize that he is simply a player to a larger plot written by fate

Page 286-287 – Birnam Wood moves to Dunsinane; Macbeth sees his fate closing in on him

Page 302-307 – Macbeth and Macduff square off; illustrated fury from Macduff and defiance from Macbeth; Macduff acts (and succeeds) without the disadvantage of knowing his own fate

Or any others where you feel the artwork creates a visual representation of the idea of tragedy, the supernatural, or fate within the novel that you find particularly compelling. Have students answer the following question about the image with a short essay:

What elements of the artwork bring a strong understanding of the concept of the tragic hero within the Manga Classics adaptation on the page that play’s dialogue and stage direction alone could not?

Final Assessment:

Fate vs free will is a staple of tragic storytelling, and prophesies in these tales is what often lights the fuse towards a downfall. *Oedipus* was fated to murder his father and marry his mother and, in trying to avoid this fate, he made it come to pass. *Macbeth*, on the other hand, hears a prophesy that sees him become king and it is by his own sinister actions that he makes that happen. Have your students look at the *Manga Classics* adaptation of *Macbeth* and identify elements of the text where Macbeth and the other

characters are victims of or benefit from their own machinations and have them tie these moments back to the prophecies from the three witches. Have them prepare a short essay or group presentation addressing how they feel these events might have unfolded without the characters acting specifically with the knowledge of their own futures. Some questions to consider include:

Would Macbeth have become king had he never met the witches?

How does Banquo's actions in response to the prophecies differ from those of Macbeth?

What is Lady Macbeth's role in the prophecies and how does it impact her throughout the text?

What purpose does Macduff serve in the text and how does he connect to the battle between fate and free will?

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