Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Seven Essays of Classic *Macbeth* Literary Criticism

Like all of Shakespeare's plays, *Macbeth* has intrigued generations of literary critics. This lesson will examine some of the most popular critical approaches to the play. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is one of his darkest and oddest plays. While none of Shakespeare's great tragedies can be called cheery, *Macbeth* is distinguished even from those other plays by an underlying bleakness and by its interest in dark, supernatural forces. Like all of Shakespeare's great plays, *Macbeth* has fascinated literary critics for centuries. These critics have tried to make sense of the play's messy plot, supernatural elements, shocking violence, and unforgettable characters like Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

So what exactly is **literary criticism**? Simply put, literary criticism is a reader trying to make sense of a work of literature through analysis, interpretation, and appreciation. Literary criticism usually appears in writing, in the form of critical essays or books, but whenever a group of readers discusses their reaction to a play or book, they, too, are doing literary criticism.

It's best to think of literary criticism not as a key to unlocking the mysteries of a play, but instead as an ongoing conversation among readers who all add to the understanding of the play, by adding their own analysis and opinions. In this lesson, we'll look at three of the most influential critics of *Macbeth* and what they added to the conversation about the play.

**Assignment:** **WRITING THE CRITICAL RESPONSE**

--adapted from Simon & Schuster Handbook for Writers, 4th edition, Writing: Invention Forma and Style by Podis & Podis, The Purposeful Writer by Donna Gorrell

A critique is an analysis of and a commentary on another piece of writing. It generally focuses on technique as well as on content. A critical response essay (or interpretive essay or review) has two missions: to summarize a source’s main idea and to respond to the source’s main ideas with reactions based on your synthesis.

For this assignment, you will choose one of the critical essays for which you want to write a critical response.

**Summarizing**

The first step to writing is to read actively and thoughtfully, seeking answers to the following questions as you go:

• What are the main points, ideas, or arguments of the essay?

• How is the essay organized?

• What evidence/support does the author give for his or her interpretation?

• What is the primary purpose of the essay?

**Analyzing (interpretation and evaluation)**

Before you begin writing your critique, to read it again with several critical questions in mind:

a. Background: What is the nature of the essay? Who wrote it and what are her/his qualifications for writing it?

b. Purpose: Why was the essay written? What is its purpose? What are the objectives of the essay? What kind of material is presented to achieve those objectives? What is the significance of the essay? How does it relate to other materials on the same subject?

c. Thesis: What is the writer's position? Is it stated directly and clearly? What are the writer's key assumptions? Are they explicit or implicit? Do you detect biases? Are the assumptions and biases obvious, or are they hidden behind a stance of neutrality and objectivity? (An assumption is a belief about something. It is often not stated by a writer. Assumptions underlie all human behavior. For example, when you go to your classroom, you assume your teacher will show up. You should critically examine all assumptions, even those in sync with your own.)

d. Evidence: What does the writer provide to support her/his position? What are the writer's specific arguments? Is the evidence believable? Authoritative? Sufficient? Logical or emotional? Are you convinced?

e. Refutation: Does the writer present her/his thesis as the only reasonable position? Has the writer overlooked any possible opposition?

f. Appeal: What is the appeal of the essay? What are some of its most striking or illuminating qualities? What, if any, are its striking deficiencies? What is the writer's style or tone? Authoritative? Speculative? Reasonable? Suggestive? What kind of language does the writer use?

**Organization**

Regardless of length and breadth, all critical responses include the following basic elements:

• Introduction:

• Body:

o Summary

o Transition

o Analysis: Evaluate the evidence: sufficient (enough evidence, examples), representative(large enough pool/sample), relevant (accurate correlations), accurate, claims fairly qualified

o Transition

o Response: base reaction on your prior knowledge and understanding of both the play and the literary criticism

• Conclusion:

Within the body, you may choose from three basic patterns of organization:

* write all the summary paragraphs first, followed by the analysis portion;
* alternate between summary and analysis paragraphs so that each paragraph of summary is followed by a critique of the summarized information;
* combine a summary and critique of each idea within each paragraph of the body.

**AP GRADING RUBRIC—RESPONSE TO LITERARY CRITICISM**

Your Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Due Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Format** **(4 pts. Participation Grade)**

-Typed, double-spaced, 12pt font, Times New Roman, 1” margins

-Names and Date in Upper Left Hand Corner, proper MLA heading

-Paragraphs indented

-All drafts, notes, and inclusions are present

\_\_\_\_\_ **Organization (9 pts.)**

-8/9 Clear, logical, fluid and follows format with artful transitions; focused on thesis

-6/7 Logical; follows format with smooth transitions; focused on thesis

-5 Present, but there may be some confusion

-3/4 Flawed; does not follow format; weak control

-2/1 Deeply flawed; does not follow a logical format

\_\_\_\_\_ **Critical Thinking (9 pts.)**

-8/9 Insightful, meaningful; demonstrates writer’s ability to discuss and clearly analyze with insight, understanding, and control

-6/7 Less thorough, less incisive, or less specific; demonstrates writer’s ability to analyze literary work, but reveal a more limited understanding than 9/8 papers.

-5 Safe, plastic, superficial; reveals simplistic thinking and/or immature writing with thin, commonplace information that addresses prompt.

-3/4 Misinterpretations, underdeveloped or misguided; paraphrase and plot summary at the expense of analysis

-2/1 Serious misreading, unacceptably brief and/or poorly written. Vacuous, inexact, or uses a negative/judgmental tone.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Factual Content (9 pts.)**

-8/9 Skillful use of excellent concrete detail selection; cited correctly

-6/7 Good concrete detail selection; cited correctly

-5 Acceptable use of concrete detail selection; cited correctly

-3/4 Weak/flawed concrete detail selection; does not support topic sentence/question

-2/1 Serious lack of concrete details; details do not support topic/question

\_\_\_\_\_ **Sentence Variety/Diction (9 pts.)**

-8/9 Excellent, critical use of varied sentence structure; powerful, precise word choice

-6/7 Good variety; wording is well-chosen

-5 Limited with simple sentences; average, ordinary word choice or odd word choice; diction may be marred by repetitions, imprecisions, or misuse of words.

-3/4 Sentences are awkward, ambiguous, and/or confusing/little, if any, sentence variety; simple word choice; words used incorrectly; slang; odd phrasing

-2/1 Sentences are seriously flawed/confusing; Little control over mechanics, spelling, capitalization, punctuation; words are used incorrectly; excessive slang and/or misuse.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Mechanics/Style (9 pts.)**

-8/9 Superior paper with stylistic flair that expresses ideas with clarity and skill; excellent grammar, punctuation, spelling

-6/7 Minimal/insignificant mechanical errors that to not detract from meaning

-5 Mechanics and/or legibility is a consistent problem, but essay may lack style or originality

-3/4 Essay is difficult to understand due to grammar, mechanics, and/or legibility; evidence of careful proofreading is minimal

-2/1 Essay is unintelligible due to grammar, mechanics, and/or legibility; no evidence of editing/proofreading

9/8 (A+): Excellent/Powerful/Rich Content 38-45 Points 9=100% 8=100%

7/6 (A): Slightly less insightful than a 9/8 30-37 Points 7=95% 6=90%

5 (B): Well Done/Good/Solid 25-29 Points 5=85%

4/3 (C): Adequate/Average/Not a qualifying paper 21-24 Points 4=75% 3=70%

2/1 (D/F) Demonstrates problems/Rudimentary/Unsatisfactory <21 Points 2=65% 1=50%

FINAL GRADE:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (45 pts.)

**STAPLE ALL NOTES/HANDOUTS/JOURNALS TO THIS GRADING RUBRIC.**