INTRODUCTION

Reading Shakespeare is no less than a challenge. Teaching Shakespeare is no less than daunting. However, teachers do it every day and most are quite successful at it. Because Shakespeare can be difficult, I wanted to approach it from a different perspective. I teach 8th grade Literacy and most of my students will have plenty of Shakespeare analysis once they enter high school. I certainly don’t feel that I need to tackle this job in 8th grade. However, I do feel my students will be more prepared for high school if I give them a foundation of Shakespeare that they can relate to and understand. Preparing them to understand Shakespeare more easily in high school is the main goal of this unit. The phrase “Shakespeare readiness” comes to mind.

I would like to address Shakespeare less from the traditional study and more from a contemporary study. By this I mean using varied forms of Shakespeare’s plays that have been adapted for young adult audiences. I have found that even the most reluctant readers will read graphic novels. I think this would be a perfect way to introduce Shakespeare to middle school students. By approaching Shakespeare from a more contemporary standpoint, I think students will be more eager to try and understand this classic and worthwhile author.

A Shakespeare purist will scoff at the idea of SparkNotes or graphic novels, but put them together and a blasphemy has happened. I appreciate that. In no way am I intending to use the SparkNotes as a way of disgracing the work of Shakespeare or saying that this is the only way to read it. I understand the work that companies like SparkNotes have put into translations, and I also understand that it is just a tool, not a complete study. Having said all of the above, I must reiterate that this curriculum unit is designed for middle school students. The intention of this unit is to provide an introduction to the storyline of a few of Shakespeare’s plays in order to prepare the students for a more intense analytical study in high school.

OBJECTIVES

The following objectives are covered in this unit. The numbers correspond to the Houston Independent School District. Through the explanation you will see a description of the objectives that will undoubtedly relate to objectives for your district and state.

ELA.8.3B - Evaluate and specify how the language of literature, including literary elements (rhyme, rhythm, onomatopoeia) affects the listener.

ELA.8.5A - Choose, adapt, and critique spoken language such as word choice, diction, and usage to the audience, purpose, and occasion.

ELA.8.5C - Present dramatic interpretations of experiences, stories, poems, or plays using appropriate communication skills.

ELA.8.5D - Generate criteria to evaluate his/her own oral presentations (book/film reviews, dramatic interpretations, panel/group presentations) and the presentations of others.
ELA.8.9B - Draw on experiences to bring meanings to words in context such as interpreting figurative language (metaphors, similes, and idioms) and multiple-meaning words by sorting, classifying, identifying related words, and selecting appropriate meanings.

ELA.8.12C - Compare communication in different forms such as contrasting a dramatic performance with a print version of the same story or comparing story variants.

ELA.8.12D - Understand and identify literary terms (title, author, illustrator, playwright, theater, stage, act, dialogue, and scene) across a variety of literary forms (texts).

ELA.8.12F - Identify, describe, and analyze important characters, including their traits, points of view, causes of feelings and motivations, relationships, conflicts and their solutions, and the changes they undergo.

ELA.8.12G - Recognize and analyze plot (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution), setting, (time and place), and problem resolution in a text passage and in longer selections.

ELA.8.12J - Recognize and interpret literary devices (flashback, foreshadowing, symbolism, alliteration, onomatopoeia, personification, hyperbole, metaphors, and similes).

ELA.8.22A - Describe how illustrators' choice of style, elements, and media help to represent or extend the text's meanings.

ELA.8.23A - Interpret and evaluate the various ways visual image makers such as illustrators, documentary filmmakers, and political cartoonists represent meanings.

RATIONAL
One might ask why a teacher would intentionally introduce the timeless work of Shakespeare in such a contemporary way. My answer is that the work is timeless and important. However, many students are turned off by the unfamiliar language. Of course, it is the language that makes Shakespeare’s work the art that it is. However, the language can be a stumbling block for younger readers and as a result many students feel discouraged by this style. My idea of introducing Shakespeare by using graphic novels is a way to begin the conversation about his work. By laying the groundwork of the basic storyline, the teacher can help students begin to build the foundation of what true Shakespeare is.

It is said that Shakespeare’s plays are intended to be viewed rather than read. Truly in the 1600s, viewing the play was the only media for which Shakespeare presented his work. In keeping with this thought, a graphic novel depicting images of the action seems like a logical pairing. Getting the sense of the action through drawings can help students internalize the overall story and, therefore, be prepared for the next step which would be the analysis of the language itself.

UNIT BACKGROUND: THE APPROACH
I plan to introduce three of Shakespeare’s plays using SparkNotes No Fear Shakespeare Graphic Novels. These plays are Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, and Macbeth. These are not only very popular plays studied in high school, but they are also the ones that have been published in graphic novel form through SparkNotes as of the time of this curriculum publication. In addition, these plays also have very famous soliloquies and monologues that are worth studying in their true format.

My overall idea is to introduce the plays through the graphic novel format. This will give the students the basic foundation of the storyline. Once that basic understanding is established, then students can be introduced to some of the formal language of Shakespeare. For instance, we may read Hamlet in the graphic novel format and then reread some of the well known soliloquies and
study them, i.e. “To be or not to be.” In addition, students will be asked to memorize these pieces in order to establish an intimacy with the language.

**THE PLAYS**

There are many choices of plays to use with graphic novels. Looking outside of the *SparkNotes No Fear Shakespeare Graphic Novels*, you will find a wide variety of other publishers who have created graphic novels and interpretations of many of Shakespeare’s plays. Some graphic novels maintain the original language of Shakespeare and simply incorporate the visual illustration. Doing a little research I found plays such as *Henry V, The Tempest, Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, Twelfth Night,* and *Julius Caesar* all in graphic novel form, some with original text, others with modified text, and all with a variety of types of illustrations. For this curriculum unit I will focus on the *SparkNotes No Fear Shakespeare Graphic Novels* series in order to maintain consistency. Modify and adjust to the needs of your classroom.

Time constraints of the typical classroom would probably not provide the ability for all students to read all three of the plays described in this unit. To acknowledge this constraint, it will be necessary to divide the class into groups according to play. If the school can provide copies of the graphic novels, that would be ideal. However, it will most likely fall upon the students to acquire a copy of the novel for themselves. The actual reading of each novel does not take long. If you have ever read a graphic novel yourself, you have probably found that it is a quick read because each page is full of more pictures than words. Because of this advantage the actual reading period should be relatively short. A few days should be sufficient. Since small groups of students will be reading the same story, an arrangement resembling book clubs would be appropriate. Develop a reading schedule for the students to follow and allow class time for small group discussions. The small group discussions will help with interpretation of the plot. Some points to emphasize in discussion would be story line, character, climax, illustrator interpretation and theme.

A study of the actual illustrations and the relation to the story is probably appropriate. The illustrations of these graphic novels really bring the story to life. Students can discuss the illustrations including the look of the characters, the clothing, and the background images. As mentioned earlier in this unit, Shakespeare was truly meant to be viewed more than read. A graphic novel provides this visual image that a regular reading of Shakespeare does not provide. It is important to point out to students that the images in this play are just as important as the words and story line.

**Romeo and Juliet**

“The privileged children of two rival families, Romeo and Juliet fall in love so intensely that they tear their parents’ world apart” (*No Fear Shakespeare Graphic Novel, Romeo and Juliet*, back cover). The previous statement gives a succinct summary of what this play is about. Although this is one of the most famous plays, and students are likely to know something about the play, a study of the plot and concept are still appropriate. It is reasonable to start with this play because the students are no doubt familiar with this play even if it’s just that they know it’s about two young lovers forbidden to be together. What young person can’t relate to the idea of falling in love with someone whom you are forbidden to be with for one reason or another? There are many versions of this play out there that are meant to relate to the young adult audience. The movie *Romeo and Juliet* released in 1996 starring Leonardo DeCaprio and Claire Danes was a contemporary movie targeted at the teenage audience by putting the characters in modern times while still keeping the original Shakespearean dialogue. What you saw was new but what you heard was old. The book *Romiette and Julio* by Sharon Draper was also a take on the classic play meant to draw young audiences by including star-crossed lovers who are forbidden to be together due to rival gangs and difference races. This Shakespearean play has been adapted in so many
forms that it is unlikely the students would not at least have heard of it. By introducing it through graphic novel form and then studying some of the more intense or dramatic parts, students can begin to understand this play and be able to see its effect on so many other stories they might have read or will read in the future.

**Impromptu Acting**

For this part of the curriculum it is important to make sure students can relate to this story in their own way; this will help make this very “ancient” piece of literature relatable to students of today. Before reading the play prepare several scenarios relating to the book that you would like to see students act out. For instance, tell two students to act out a scene, impromptu style, where they have just found out that they are forbidden by their parents to date even though they have recently gotten to know each other at the prom and have passionately developed feelings for one another. Another scenario: a girl finds out that her boyfriend has gotten into a fight with her cousin and has injured him severely and she struggles with forgiveness of her boyfriend. A third scenario: your family has set up an arranged marriage for you but you are not in love with your future mate, but have a boyfriend that your parents don’t know about; or even simpler, your parents want you to date a person they have picked out but you haven’t told them you are currently in a relationship. The point of these scenarios is to find a common ground between scenes in the play and relatable experiences of young people.

**The Story Through Graphic Novel**

Any graphic novel of Romeo and Juliet, or for that matter any of the Shakespeare plays, will be fine. “Seeing” the characters helps you familiarize yourself with them and their actions. This unit focuses on the *No Fear Shakespeare Graphic Novel* series because it represents good visual artwork and the language has been translated to modern day. This helps with the initial understanding of the play. Later the students will get a chance to explore the original language, but the initial introduction will come in the form of translated, modern day English.

**Characters**

As students are discussing the plays, an emphasis should be placed on character analysis. The students should delve into the intricacies of the characters and how they are related to one another and the storyline itself. Below are some highlights of character analysis that may help when you need to guide students into meaningful discussion.

Romeo belongs to the Montague family, and when we first meet him he is in love with Rosaline. However he is very distraught and depressed because she is not returning his affections. Very soon he sees Juliet and all of his emotions for Rosaline are gone as he is instantly in love with Juliet. Romeo’s ability to switch his love so quickly tells us that he is a hopeless romantic, and also somewhat immature. As the play progresses we see Romeo become more mature in love and more invested in his relationship with Juliet. Romeo exhibits extreme behavior throughout the play. From his insistence on seeing Juliet even though they are risking their family pride, to losing his temper and killing Tybalt, to committing suicide upon learning of Juliet’s death, everything Romeo does is seeded in passion and quick judgment. This tells us that Romeo is very headstrong and allows his passions to guide his actions.

Juliet belongs to the Capulet family, and when we first meet her we are reminded of how very young she is at only fourteen. Even though she is so young, her father is already arranging for her to marry Paris, a kinsman of the Prince. We notice that Juliet is very naïve being so young and having very little experience outside the castle walls. However, once she sees Romeo, she too falls instantly in love. From this point forward all of her thoughts are consumed by him. We see that she quickly matures to a young lady having to make very difficult decisions about her future. Although her even temperament is a perfect contrast to Romeo’s passion-driven antics, we do see
extensive emotion come from her when she realizes that she may not see Romeo again because of his banishment from Verona. When she feels defeated and that all love is lost she returns to her submissive ways and allows her father to dictate her future. But this doesn’t last long. She is insistent on seeing Friar Lawrence to confess her sins, and that is where the plot twists – she resolves to try and deceive her family into thinking she is dead so she will later be reunited with Romeo. It is a very risky plan set in place by Friar Lawrence, and we realize how much passion Juliet has for Romeo, being that she would be willing to take the sleeping potion and ultimately leave her family for good. It is unexpected that Juliet would go to such extreme lengths, but it shows us the maturity she has gained over the course of the play and her willingness to risk her family in order to begin a life with Romeo.

Friar Lawrence plays a very integral role in this play. First and foremost he married Romeo and Juliet even though they are very young and come from rival families. It is perhaps his hope to end the feud between the families that guides his actions. Every other character in the play is either on the Capulet side or the Montague side; Friar Lawrence is the only one that is friendly with both. In addition it is his ultimate plan to reunite Romeo and Juliet in quite an unconventional way. We see that Friar Lawrence has an uncanny knowledge of potions which seems out of place for a man of the cloth. In addition he convinces Juliet to take the potion and sets up an elaborate plan that requires very careful timing in order to be successful. As we find out, the timing is off and the whole plan goes awry. We are left perplexed as to how a holy man could ultimately cause the death of three people without actually having a hand in their killing.

Other pivotal characters include Mercutio, Nurse, Tybalt, Benvolio, Capulet, and Montague. Discussion can center these characters as well, indicating their role in the play and their development within the plot.

Monologues and Soliloquies

The monologues and soliloquies included in this section are meant to give students a sample of the writing of classic Shakespeare. Since this unit focuses on graphic novels written in modern English, it is important to expose students to the actual writing that makes Shakespeare so interesting and memorable. For this play and the others in the unit, a few significant parts have been extracted in hopes that these will be used as memorization pieces. Students will be asked to choose one of the pieces from the play and memorize it in its entirety. This recitation should happen as a task that all students participate in. The idea is to give students an opportunity to really get a feel for the language associated with Shakespeare. A few significant sections from various points in the play have been chosen, but any soliloquy, monologue, or sonnet will be fine.

One of the most recognizable monologues in this play comes from Act 2, Scene 2 when Romeo is at the base of Juliet’s balcony and begins speaking his heart:

```
But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief,
That thou her maid art far more fair than she:
Be not her maid, since she is envious;
Her vestal livery is but sick and green
And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.
It is my lady, O, it is my love!
O, that she knew she were!
She speaks yet she says nothing; what of that?
Her eye discourses; I will answer it.
I am too bold, 'tis not to me she speaks:
```
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,  
Having some business, do entreat her eyes  
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.  
What if her eyes were there, they in her head?  
The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,  
As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven  
Would through the airy region stream so bright  
That birds would sing and think it were not night.  
See, how she leans her cheek upon her hand!  
O, that I were a glove upon that hand,  
That I might touch that cheek! (2.2.2-25)

This monologue is perfect for oral recitation as it is very recognizable and a key scene in the play. Juliet is speaking from her balcony, not knowing Romeo is listening.

O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?  
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;  
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,  
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.  
'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;  
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.  
What's Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot,  
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part  
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!  
What's in a name? that which we call a rose  
By any other name would smell as sweet;  
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,  
Retain that dear perfection which he owes  
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,  
And for that name which is no part of thee  
Take all myself. (2.2.33-49)

Spoken by Juliet’s Nurse, this monologue is said in hopes that Juliet will be comforted by her advice:

Faith, here it is.

Romeo is banish'd; and all the world to nothing,  
That he dares ne'er come back to challenge you;  
Or, if he do, it needs must be by stealth.  
Then, since the case so stands as now it doth,  
I think it best you married with the county.  
O, he's a lovely gentleman!  
Romeo's a dishclout to him: an eagle, madam,  
Hath not so green, so quick, so fair an eye  
As Paris hath. Beshrew my very heart,  
I think you are happy in this second match,  
For it excels your first: or if it did not,  
Your first is dead; or 'twere as good he were,  
As living here and you no use of him. (3.5.213-226)
Hamlet

“With his father murdered and the murderer crowned king, Prince Hamlet struggles to deliver justice on his own terms even as the rest of the world writes him off as a madman” (No Fear Shakespeare Graphic Novel, Hamlet, back cover). Hamlet is a tragedy that is easily relatable on many levels. On one level the idea of your mother re-marrying shortly after the death of your father is an emotion that many people can understand. We as humans certainly can sympathize with Hamlet’s anger and therefore we see his actions as justified. It is not Hamlet who is the villain but rather his uncle. At least that is what Shakespeare would probably want us to believe. The idea of revenge or reclaiming justice is also a theme prevalent in Hamlet. The idea of making right an act that was wrong is something many people, no doubt, can understand. Overall, family drama is something no one can say they haven’t experienced. In one way or another, we can all relate to family drama, mistakes, and hard decisions. This is why Hamlet is such a popular play and one that is referenced throughout many other media and literary forms.

Impromptu Acting

There are several scenarios in this play that would make for good dramatic interpretations. One activity for introducing Hamlet, along with the other plays in this unit, is to have the students act out a scene or scenario in the play before reading the actual play. For example, you have recently found out your mother has remarried a short time after your father’s death. In addition, the man she has recently married just happens to be your uncle, the brother of your deceased father. That scenario alone would make for a good dramatic interpretation.

Another scenario: you find out your father was murdered by a man named Hamlet. Shortly after you also find out your sister has drowned apparently out of grief because Hamlet would not return her love. What is your reaction?

A third scenario: you are Laertes and have agreed to a duel with Hamlet. You are having a discussion with King Claudius and Osric about poisoning the sword you will use in order to kill Hamlet with a cut from it. Have the discussion with King Claudius and Osric without alerting Hamlet.

The Story Through Graphic Novel

The story opens with the ghost of the dead king of Denmark making an appearance to the tower watchmen and Horatio. The ghost speaks of the ill fate that has occurred. Prince Hamlet is disgusted by his mother’s recent marriage to her once brother-in-law, Hamlet’s uncle. Horatio comes to tell Hamlet of the King’s ghost appearance. Hamlet knows that his father would not make an appearance unless there was important information to be revealed. The ghost does reveal that he was murdered by Claudius, his brother, in order to attain the crown of king. Once this information is revealed, Hamlet sets on a journey of revenge. The entire play centers around Hamlet’s desire to make public what Claudius has done and make his mother see that she should not be with him. Although Hamlet is in line for the crown, his motivation is not to take the crown for himself. He wants to avenge the murder of his father. He begins a series of actions that ultimately lead people to believe that he is crazy. The uncle has caught on to Hamlet’s antics and banishes him to England. In an attempt to warn his mother and because of a case of mistaken identity, Hamlet kills Polonius thinking it was his uncle. Unknown to Hamlet, Claudius has ordered the King of England to sentence Hamlet to death. Claudius has arranged a duel between Laertes, Polonius’ son, and Hamlet. He believes he has everything planned out so that no matter what happens, Hamlet will be sure to die. Claudius’ plan goes awry when Gertrude drinks from the poison cup and Laertes cuts himself with his poisoned sword. In the end, Hamlet, Laertes, Claudius, and Gertrude all perish because of the poison. Fortinbras arrives just after the massacre.
and once he is told the story, he insists that Hamlet’s body be treated like a fallen soldier, with respect.

Characters

As students are discussing the plays, an emphasis should be placed on character analysis. The students should delve into the intricacies of the characters and how they are related to one another and the storyline itself. Below are some highlights of character analysis that may help when you need to guide students in meaningful discussion.

Hamlet is a very complex character that is revealed only in segments to the reader throughout the play. He seems to constantly surprise us with his actions and thoughts. Although the ghost of his father has revealed that he was murdered by his brother, Hamlet does not take immediate action to confront his uncle. Instead he sets up an elaborate play in which a reenactment of the murder, in Hamlet’s eyes, is acted out in hopes that Claudius will have a reaction to show his guilt. On the other hand, when Hamlet is in the room with his mother he does not check to see that it is Claudius behind the curtain but rather stabs the figure before being certain of who it is. Even his love for Ophelia is at one time masked and he denies any love at all, even to the extent of insulting her, only later to reveal that he does in fact care for her. It is this diabolical action that makes Hamlet such an interesting character to study and discuss.

Claudius is Hamlet’s uncle who has taken over as king since the death of King Hamlet. He is driven by power. Each move he makes is calculated as an effort for him to remain King of Denmark even though he knows it is not truly his crown to take. He plots and schemes against Hamlet in order to maintain control of the castle and ultimately control of the country. He shows no remorse for marrying his once sister-in-law merely weeks after his brother’s death. He is aware that Hamlet is crazy and probably knows that Hamlet suspects him of wrongdoing. Throughout the story Claudius shows very little emotion for anyone around him. This tells us that he truly is driven by power and does not have passion or emotion for his family or close confidants.

Gertrude is Hamlet’s mother who has very suddenly married Claudius after the death of her husband, King Hamlet. We are introduced to her first through the thoughts of Hamlet. He is utterly disgusted at her actions and feels it is a disgrace to his father for her to marry so soon after his death. As we begin to see Gertrude more and more we are inundated with questions about her. We are never really sure how deep her love goes for King Hamlet or Claudius. We also see that although she listens to Hamlet, she does not necessarily take his word to heart. We are not clear who she sides with in many cases because her loyalties seem to be very faint. She is portrayed somewhat as a weak character, but we have to wonder if she isn’t perhaps pulling the puppet strings behind the scenes.

Other characters such as Polonius, Laertes, Ophelia, and Horatio offer plentiful discussion as to how they are woven into the plot. These characters each have a formidable part in the play and would provide for interesting analysis of their character traits.

Monologues and Soliloquies

In this section monologues and soliloquies will be provided that show the rich language of Shakespeare’s plays. The purpose of providing these pieces is to have the scenes available so students may choose one to memorize. It is important that students take the time to memorize these lines and present them to the class. This activity will make Shakespeare a part of the students’ lives and give an opportunity for students to experience the spoken word of these very famous plays.
The most famous of soliloquies is spoken by Hamlet in Act 3.

To be, or not to be - that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them. To die- to sleep-
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die - to sleep.
To sleep - perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub!
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause. There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life.
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despis'd love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of th' unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? Who would these fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death-
The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns - puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action.- Soft you now!
The fair Ophelia!- Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins rememb'red. (3.1.58 – 92)

This monologue from Claudius occurs near the end of the play.

O, this is the poison of deep grief; it springs
All from her father's death. O Gertrude, Gertrude,
When sorrows come, they come not single spies.
But in battalions! First, her father slain;
Next, your son gone, and he most violent author
Of his own just remove; the people muddied,
Thick and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers
For good Polonius' death, and we have done but greenly
In hugger-mugger to inter him; poor Ophelia
Divided from herself and her fair judgment,
Without the which we are pictures or mere beasts;
Last, and as much containing as all these,
Her brother is in secret come from France;
Feeds on his wonder, keeps, himself in clouds,
And wants not buzzers to infect his ear
With pestilent speeches of his father's death,
Wherein necessity, of matter beggar'd,
Will nothing stick our person to arraign
In ear and ear. O my dear Gertrude, this,
Like to a murd'ring piece, in many places
Give me superfluous death. (4.5.49-70)

Macbeth

*Macbeth* is truly one of the bloodiest plays Shakespeare wrote. The story revolves around Macbeth and his willingness to go to extreme lengths to become king. He is urged by his wife, Lady Macbeth, to take any action necessary to ensure his rightful place in the kingdom. Macbeth becomes a tyrannical ruler and commits more and more murders to maintain his power.

**Impromptu Acting**

Some scenarios that are similar to scenes in *Macbeth* and also relatable to young teens today follow. Scenario one: you go to a fortune teller and find out you are destined to become president; what will you do and how far will you go to ensure this prophesy comes true? Scenario two: you tell a lie to one person but shortly afterwards you have to tell another lie to a different person in order to cover up the original lie. Eventually the lies catch up with you and people want revenge for the deception you have created. The previous scenario can be related to the killing and violence that continues to build in Macbeth's life in order to ensure the prophesy comes true. There is also the theme of violence and revenge that can be relatable to some teens, especially those that struggle with gang violence. These teens can easily relate to the idea of holding rank within a group and enacting violence in hopes of maintaining order and a hierarchy.

**The Story Through Graphic Novel**

Macbeth is told by a trio of witches that he will be made a thane of Cawdor and eventually King of Scotland. He is desperate to make this prophesy true and, therefore, begins the process of making sure nothing comes in his way. He invites King Duncan to his castle, Inverness, and stabs him during the night. In order to cover his actions he also kills the two chamberlains. When Duncan's two sons discover the murder, they flee to England. Macbeth is still not confident about his place as king since the witches' prophesy also said his friend Banquo's heirs will seize the throne. He soon orders Banquo to be killed along with his son Fleance. Fleance is able to escape, which infuriates Macbeth because he is insecure about his place as king. He soon visits the three witches to be told his future. They reveal to him that he should beware of Macduff, a Scottish nobleman, he will not be harmed by any man born of woman, and he will be safe until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane. Upon hearing this news Macbeth feels more secure as king because he knows all men are born of women and a forest cannot move. In order to secure against Macduff, he orders that his castle be taken and his wife and children be murdered. Macduff is angered by the actions of Macbeth and vows revenge. He joins Duncan's son Malcolm and his army. They plan to invade Inverness and seize Macbeth. Although Macbeth feels secure in the prophecy of his safety, he soon realizes that he is doomed because the woods are, in fact, coming into Dunsinane by shields made of the wood from the forest, and Macduff was in fact not born of woman as he was birthed by a cesarean section. Macduff soon kills and beheads Macbeth.

**Characters**

Macbeth can be described as an evil character consumed by power and willing to go to any length to secure it. Although this is true to an extent, we cannot count out the influence of his
wife, Lady Macbeth. She has a hand in influencing him to go forward with the killing of Duncan which he was contemplating. This killing, in many ways, set off a series of violent acts by Macbeth all in the desperate hope that he would be king. Throughout the play he shows signs of insanity by switching from unbridled violence to thoughts of remorse. We know Macbeth is a great warrior because we are introduced to him having won on the battlefield and are left with his image of fighting to the death in the castle.

Lady Macbeth is a powerful Shakespearean character. She has an overwhelming desire for power and position. She uses her husband as a puppet and influences him to kill Duncan. She seems to have complete control over her husband and in many ways is portrayed as being stronger than he is in ruthlessness and ambition. Much like her husband, she too shows signs of remorse mixed with violence. She eventually succumbs to madness and is seen sleepwalking through the castle trying to wash away an invisible blood stain, no doubt a hallucination caused by guilt. Eventually, she is overwhelmed with guilt and commits suicide.

The Three Witches are an interesting set of characters for this play. They, in fact, are the reason Macbeth begins his quest for the crown. They have prophesied that he would eventually be king. We are not really told what exactly these three witches or sisters really are. They are there as a supernatural force guiding Macbeth to make decisions he might otherwise not have made. He believes in them so much that he goes to them for advice and future telling. All we really know is that their presence brings out the wickedness in others, namely Macbeth himself.

Other characters to discuss would be Banquo, Macduff, and Malcolm. Each of these men has a special connection to Macbeth and ultimately become his enemy.

**Monologues and Soliloquies**

The following monologue is spoken by Macbeth. He is hallucinating about a dagger and talking to it as if it can hear all of his thoughts:

- Is this a dagger which I see before me,
- The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.
- I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
- Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
- To feeling as to sight? or art thou but
- A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
- Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
- I see thee yet, in form as palpable
- As this which now I draw.
- Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going;
- And such an instrument I was to use.
- Mine eyes are made the fools o' the other senses,
- Or else worth all the rest; I see thee still,
- And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood,
- Which was not so before. There's no such thing:
- It is the bloody business which informs
- Thus to mine eyes. Now o'er the one halfworld
- Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
- The curtain'd sleep; witchcraft celebrates
- Pale Hecate's offerings, and wither'd murder,
- Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,
- Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace.
- With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
- Moves like a ghost. Thou sure and firm-set earth,
Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
Thy very stones prate of my whereabout,
And take the present horror from the time,
Which now suits with it. Whiles I threat, he lives:
Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.
[A bell rings]
I go, and it is done; the bell invites me.
Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell
That summons thee to heaven or to hell. (2.1.33-64)

In this scene Lady Macbeth is berating her husband because he no longer wants to go through
with the plan to murder Duncan. She is calling him a coward:

Was the hope drunk

Wherein you dress'd yourself? hath it slept since?
And wakes it now, to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valour
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'
Like the poor cat i' the adage?

What beast was't, then,
That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man;
And, to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
Does unmake you. I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this. (1.7.36-59)

CONCLUSION

When studying Shakespeare there are so many avenues to take. This unit chose a simple route
that will help students understand the plotline of Shakespeare without involving deep studies of
the language and the background. The intention of this unit is to build a foundation of
Shakespeare that can be built upon further in high school. The three plays chosen are ones that are
often studied in high school and are also very well interpreted through the No Fear Shakespeare
Graphic Novel series. This unit does not claim to be a full study of Shakespeare in its true and
original form. However, the inclusion of the section for reciting original verse from Shakespeare
does attempt to ease the students into the language that is so familiar when studying Shakespeare.
Overall, when students have completed this unit they will be fully aware of one play and
moderately aware of two other plays, all of which they will likely study in high school. The
unconventional approach this unit chose to take will bring Shakespeare to life for these students
and show them that this text written over three hundred years ago is still relevant for today’s population and will emphasize the true meaning of classic literature.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson 1: Introduction to Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, and Macbeth

Objective: Students will be introduced to the stories of three of Shakespeare’s plays. It is through these introductions that students will choose the play they wish to study further.

Purpose: Students in middle school, or younger, are most likely unfamiliar with most of Shakespeare’s plays. The purpose of this unit is to familiarize them with the storyline and some of the language so that when they enter high school they are more prepared for the in-depth studies that occur. This lesson is intended to give a brief synopsis of three of Shakespeare’s plays in order to familiarize the students with them and allow them an opportunity to choose one to study further. In the later lessons the students will not only read the graphic novel of one of the plays but will also memorize and recite a monologue or soliloquy from the original text.

Materials: Synopses of the plays Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, and Macbeth, a few printed copies of each should be available to pass around the class

Activity: The teacher will introduce Shakespeare to the students and explain that the class will be studying three of his plays. The teacher will continue to explain that a summary of each of the plays will be read aloud and a printed version will be passed around. The teacher will let students know that after all three plays have been introduced students will choose the one they wish to study for this unit.

Assessment: Students will turn in a paper indicating their name and the title of the play they have chosen to study.

Lesson 2: Impromptu Acting

Objective: Students will act out various scenarios taken from scenes of the three Shakespeare plays being studied.

Purpose: In order for students to see that Shakespeare is relevant to their lives, a few adapted scenarios will be given to students for them to act out. This will allow students to see that the scenarios are very common to everyday life and, therefore, Shakespeare made plays that are relatable to modern lives. The idea is to give a scenario that is similar but not exact to the action within any of the three plays.

Materials: Printed scenarios depicting various scenes from the plays to be given to pairs or groups of students.

Activity: The teacher will prepare several scenarios from the plays that are relatable to students. These scenarios will be printed and given to pairs or groups of students corresponding to the play they have chosen and will take a few minutes to prepare a dramatic interpretation. Impromptu acting is meant to be done on the spot with very little preparation. The teacher may choose any scenario and scene he or she chooses. Some suggested ones are provided below.

Romeo and Juliet –

- two students have just found out that they are forbidden by their parents to date even though they have recently gotten to know each other at the prom and have passionately developed feelings for one another
- a girl finds out that her boyfriend has gotten into a fight with her cousin and has injured him severely, and she struggles with forgiveness of her boyfriend
• your family has set up an arranged marriage for you, but you are not in love with your
future mate, but have a boyfriend/girlfriend that your parents don’t know about; or even
cleaner, your parents want you to date a person they have picked out, but you haven’t
told them you are currently in a relationship

Hamlet –

• you have recently found out your mother has remarried after a short period since your
father’s death. In addition, the man she has recently married just happens to be your
uncle, the brother of your deceased father.

• your father has been murdered and your sister drowned out of grief for the same person
who killed your father because she loved him and he wouldn’t return your sister’s love.
What is your reaction?

• you are Laertes and have agreed to a duel with Hamlet. You are having a discussion with
King Claudius and Osric about poisoning the sword you will use in order to kill Hamlet
with a cut from it. Have the discussion with King Claudius and Osric without alerting
Hamlet.

Macbeth-

• You go to a fortune teller and find out you are destined to become president; what will
you do and how far will you go to ensure this prophecy comes true?

• You tell a lie to one person but shortly afterwards you have to tell another lie to a
different person in order to cover up the original lie; eventually the lies catch up with you
and people want revenge for the deception you have created.

Assessment: Each group should be given approximately 15 minutes to prepare something. Then
each group will perform for the class. The assessment will be based on how well the students
worked together and how well they interpreted the scene.

Lesson 3: The Plays and Characters

Objective: The students will read and study one of the Shakespeare plays used in this unit. During
this study students will discuss and understand the characters in the play and the overall storyline.

Purpose: In preparing the students for an in-depth study of Shakespeare in high school, it is
important that they understand the basic plotline and characters from the plays. By studying the
plays in graphic novel form, students will be less intimidated by the story. The graphic novels are
written in modern English and are easy to follow. A discussion of character, setting, and plot will
be done by the students in small groups.

Materials: Each student should have a copy of the graphic novel for Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet or
Macbeth, depending on which novel they will read; spiral notebook and pen.

Activity: Assign students to small groups based on which play they chose. Give students a
schedule of reading that fits with the timeline you have provided for this unit. Each student
should read the assigned section daily and be prepared to discuss within small groups for each
class period. The discussions should cover plot, character, similarities to other stories the students
are familiar with, climax, interpretation of illustrations, and theme. Notes from independent
reading and notes from the discussions should be written in the student’s notebook.

Assessment: The teacher will monitor the group discussions and see that each student is prepared
and participating. Assessment will also come from the notes in the student notebook. The teacher
can create a rubric, if needed, to complete the assessment.
Lesson 4: Monologues and Soliloquies

Objective: Students will memorize and recite a selected monologue or soliloquy from the play they have read and studied.

Purpose: Although reading the play through graphic novel form gives the students the foundation for the plotline it does not give the students an opportunity to experience the language of Shakespeare. By providing selected monologues and soliloquies for students to memorize and recite, students will explore and experience the language that makes Shakespeare’s work a true literary original.

Materials: Selected copies of the original text from the three plays. Any section of the play may be used; however this unit has provided sections that are useful. The selected text provided in this unit includes the following: “But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks” – Romeo and Juliet, Act 2 Scene 2; “O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo” – Romeo and Juliet, Act 2, Scene 2; “Faith, here it is” - Romeo and Juliet, Act 3, Scene 5; “To be, or not to be- that is the question” - Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 1; “O, this is the poison of deep grief; it springs” - Hamlet, Act 4, Scene 5; “Is this a dagger which I see before me” - Macbeth, Act 2, Scene 1; and “Was the hope drunk” - Macbeth, Act 1, Scene 7.

Activity: Students will be given a choice of the monologue or soliloquy they wish to memorize and recite. Give the students a timeline for which they must complete the memorization and give a schedule for when students will recite their piece. Upon arriving at their scheduled recitation, students will recite by memory the piece they have chosen from the selected Shakespeare play.

Assessment: A rubric should be made to show students how they will be assessed on the memorization and recitation. Depending on the length of the piece an “A” would consist of zero to five words incorrect, and so on. The teacher may make the rubric fit the needs of his or her students.
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

<http://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/>.  
This website provides a useful search database for Shakespeare’s plays that includes the complete text including the act, scene and line of the entire play.

A valuable source of explanation for Hamlet. Each scene is explained in easy to understand language.  
Not just for college kids!

A valuable source in explaining Romeo and Juliet. Each scene is explained in easy to understand language.

A valuable source in explanation for Macbeth. Each scene is explained in easy to understand language.

This website gives an easy to locate list of all of Shakespeare’s monologues. You can search each play and you will find monologues for both women and men. It is very helpful and put together very well.

This graphic novel provides an easy to read version of Hamlet. The illustrations are interesting and relevant. Students will find the novel compelling and will easily follow the story because of the modern English.

This graphic novel provides an easy to read version of Macbeth. The illustrations are interesting and relevant. Students will find the novel compelling and will easily follow the story because of the modern English.

This graphic novel provides an easy to read version of Romeo and Juliet. The illustrations are interesting and relevant. Students will find the novel compelling and will easily follow the story because of the modern English.