English IV Honors

Motifs in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*

**Directions:** As you read *Macbeth*, keep track of Shakespeare’s symbolic use of various motifs. On the form attached to this assignment on Google Classroom, document **at least** five examples of each motif that you find throughout the play. Write out the line or lines and cite in MLA format: Act.scene.line(s), II.iv.21-23.

These motifs recur throughout the play:

* **Equivocation** has a dual meaning in the play and is manifest in both the language of the play and the behavior of the characters. Look for passages that reflect equivocation and paradox.
* There is a conflict between **fate and free will** in the play. Do we control our own destiny or does fate intervene? Look for passages that reflect this conflict.
* **Children/childlessness** is a recurring motif in the play. Look for quotes/passages that illustrate this motif of fertility and infertility. Include references to descendants of the characters (future generations).
* Shakespeare frequently juxtaposes symbols of dark and light in the play. Look for quotes/passages that stress **light and/or darkness**. Look also for related images of hiding, masking, and clothing.
* **Images of plowing, sowing, and reaping** occur frequently in the play. Track these.
* Find examples of **dramatic, verbal, and situational irony** in the play and explain their meaning in the context of the play.
* **Blood** is a major symbol in the play, often as a symbol of guilt, although its meaning at times shifts. Look for quotes that demonstrate the symbolism of blood, especially those that show a shift or change in meaning.
* References to **sleep and sleeplessness** abound in this play. Track those and explain the symbolic meaning within the context of the play.
* Macbeth’s killing of Duncan disrupts **nature and the natural order**. Look for quotes that illustrate this disruption. Track references to nature, as well as to what is “natural” and “unnatural”.
* Things are not always what they seem in Scotland. Look for quotes that demonstrate **appearance versus reality**.
* Track images of **birds** and what they may symbolically suggest.