Macbeth Literary Terms
Act

- A main division of a drama. Shakespeare’s plays consist of five acts that are subdivided into scenes.
Allusion

- A reference to a literary or historical person or event to explain a present situation.
Aside

- A brief remark made by a character and intended to be heard by the audience, but not by the other characters.
Atmosphere

- The tone or mood established by the events, places and situations.
In ancient Greek drama, the singing and dancing group whose words formed commentary or interpretation of action. In Elizabethan drama the role of the chorus was often taken by one actor, who recited a prologue, or by several actors, who offered commentary on a situation.
Comic Relief

- A humorous scene or speech in a serious drama which is meant to provide relief from emotional intensity and, by contrast, to heighten the seriousness of the story.
Foil

- A secondary character who contrasts with a major character and, in so doing, highlights various facets of the main character's personality. The author may use the foil to set up situations in which the protagonist can show his or her character traits. The term refers to the practice of putting polished foil underneath a gemstone to make it shine more brightly.
Foreshadowing

- A hint of what is to come in the story. This is often used to keep the audience in a state of expectancy.
Imagery

- The term used to describe words or phrases that appeal to the five senses. Figurative language may create images, but not all images are figures of speech.
Irony

- A contrast between what is and what appears to be.
Verbal Irony

- A character says one thing and means another.
Dramatic Irony

- The audience knows what the characters do not.
A figure of speech that implies or states a comparison between two unlike things which are similar in some way. Unlike similes, metaphors do not use like or as.
Paradox

- A statement which seems to be contradictory but is at the same time profoundly logical.
A small unit of a play in which there is no shift of locale or time.
Simile

- A figure of speech that states a comparison between two essentially unlike things which are similar in one aspect. Similes are introduced by like or as.
Soliloquy

- A speech given by a character alone on the stage. The purpose of a soliloquy is to let the audience know what the character is thinking and feeling.
Tragedy

- A type of drama of human conflict which ends in defeat and suffering. Often the main character (dignified, noble) has a tragic flaw (weakness of character, wrong judgment) which leads to his or her destruction. Sometimes the conflict is with forces beyond the control of the character...fate, evil in the world.