**Macbeth**

**Tragedy and the Tragic Hero**

Over 2,300 years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote his definition of a *tragedy*. According to Aristotle: “Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.” In other words, to be a true tragedy, a story must make the audience pity the characters and make them feel the same consequences the character (usually the protagonist) experiences.

Similarly, Aristotle defined the concept of a tragic hero. A *tragic hero* is a protagonist with a fatal (also called tragic) flaw that eventually leads to his/her downfall.

The Aristotelian tragic hero is introduced as happy, powerful, and privileged, and ends up dying or suffering immensely because of his own actions or mistakes. **The tragic hero must have four characteristics:**

- **goodness** (a moral and ethical person)
- **superiority** (such as someone with supreme or noble authority or control)
- **a tragic flaw** —called *hamartia*—which will eventually lead him to his own demise
- **the eventual realization that his decisions or actions have caused his downfall** (faces death or suffering with honor).

Usually, the realization of tragic flaw results in an *epiphany*, or a sudden realization by the character, audience, or both, and a *catharsis*, or a release of emotions, which makes the audience feel more at peace with their own lives.

**Directions:** Many scholars debate whether Macbeth is a true tragic hero. Analyze the character of *Macbeth* and the play as a whole by answering the questions below.

1. In your opinion, does Macbeth have a tragic flaw? If so, what is it?

2. When Macbeth is first introduced, is he happy? Why or why not? Give 2 examples from the text to support your response.
3. How might Macbeth be considered a superior or privileged person? Give 2 examples from the text to support your response.

4. In your opinion, is Macbeth a moral and/or ethical person? Give 2 reasons to support your response.

5. At what point does Macbeth realize he is facing his own demise? What is his reaction? How is/isn't this consistent with the characteristics of the tragic hero?

6. Do you feel Macbeth is the ideal tragic hero? Why or why not? Explain how he fits or does not fit the definition of a tragic hero. What “rules” Macbeth—external forces or his own inner motivation? Explain.

7. According to the definition, is Macbeth a tragedy? Why or why not? Support your response with evidence from the play. Do you feel pity for the characters, especially Macbeth? Did you experience a catharsis, or emotional release, because you did not suffer the same fate as Macbeth? Why or why not?