

***Macbeth* Reading Guide**
Senior Literature

ACT I

Background Info

1. Consider the year that *Macbeth* was first performed, the year that James I took the throne, and the content of the play that seems specifically aimed at James I. Why might Shakespeare have so clearly written a play aimed at pleasing the new king?

Act I Scene 1

1. The play opens with the witches conversing on the heath. What atmosphere and tone are created in this opening scene?
2. Shakespeare often writes in **oxymorons - pairs of contradictory words**. We see these in lines 4 and 10. Why does he use contradictions and paradoxes?
3. Consider the word choice Shakespeare uses to create an element of time and place. Give examples from Act I.
4. Just as he does in his sonnets, Shakespeare ends Act I with a rhyming couplet. What is the significance of this rhyming couplet?
5. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare chose to outline the major plot in a Prologue at the beginning of the play. How is the lack of a Prologue in *Macbeth* more or less of a narrative hook?

Act I Scene 2

1. Examine lines 16-23. Our first impression of Macbeth occurs in these lines. What do we learn about his character?
2. Examine lines 63-65. Macbeth gets a new title. What is it?
3. What is the purpose of Scene 2? How does this compare to the re-telling of the epic hero's conquests? What does this difference suggest about a shift in values from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance period?

Act I Scene 3

1. Why might Shakespeare include this introduction to the witches (with regard to the sailor's wife)? What does the audience learn about these women?
2. Examine line 38. Where did we see this line before? What might this mean? What is the significance of this repetitive foil theme?
3. In lines 48-50, the three Witches make three predictions for Macbeth. What are they? Please put these predictions in your own words.
4. In lines 65-67, the three Witches make three predictions for Banquo. What are they? Please put these predictions in your own words.
5. What is Macbeth's initial reaction to these prophecies? What does this suggest about his character?
6. In lines 104-107, Ross brings Macbeth what news? How does Macbeth react to this news?
7. Reread Macbeth's asides in lines 128-142 and the aside after Banquo's comment immediately following the first aside. What do we learn about Macbeth's feelings regarding the predictions?

Act I Scene 4

1. In lines 10-14, why does Duncan feel betrayed?
2. In Macbeth's aside in lines 48-53, what does he cite as his issue with the fact that Duncan has named his son the Prince of Cumberland?
3. How has Macbeth's attitude changed since after he first heard the predictions?

Act I Scene 5

1. Our first impression of Lady Macbeth occurs in lines 10-24. What do we learn about her character? How does she view her husband? Does she seem to put more or less stock in the idea of Fate compared to her husband?
2. In lines 49-69, Lady Macbeth comes up with a plan. What is it? How does she tell Macbeth to act when Duncan arrives?

Act I Scene 6

1. In Scene 6, how is Duncan greeted by Lady Macbeth?
2. Describe the tones of Duncan and Lady Macbeth? With regard to Lady Macbeth in particular, given her plans for the king and the manner in which she speaks to him, what can the audience conclude about her character?

Act I Scene 7

1. We learn from Macbeth's **soliloquy - a speech delivered while the speaker is alone, calculated to inform the audience of what is passing in the character's mind** - in lines 1-28 that he has reservations about Lady Macbeth's plan to kill Duncan. Paraphrase his soliloquy, answering the following questions: What do we learn about Macbeth's state of mind? What is his conflict? How does he describe Duncan's character? What is the effect of Lady Macbeth's arguments?
2. Examine lines 48 - 59. What strategies does Lady Macbeth use to persuade her husband to stick with their plan?
3. Examine lines 61-72. Describe Lady Macbeth's plan to kill Duncan. Describe her plan in detail, including how they plan to get into Duncan's bedroom, and who they plan to implicate in the murder.
4. In line 82, Macbeth says, "I am settled, and bend up / Each corporal agent to this terrible feat. / Away, and mock the time with fairest show. / False face must hide what the false heart doth know" (I.vii.79-82). What does he mean by this?

Reflection Questions

1. Is there any evidence in this act that Macbeth had previously entertained the possibility of becoming king? What does this indicate about the role the witches play in influencing Macbeth's thoughts and actions? What does this suggest about the universal debate of Fate and Free Will?
2. Discuss Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's relationship. What impressions are we given of each character in this Act?
3. What is the act of Tanistry as described on page 291? Why might Shakespeare have chosen to avoid using this custom to defend his protagonist in this English play?

Figurative Language

Identify the figurative language in each of the following sentences. Label the following examples as on of the following:

- a. simile
- b. metaphor
- c. allusion
- d. personification

___ 1. "Except they meant to bathe in reeking wounds, / Or memorize another Golgotha, / I cannot tell..." (I.ii.39-41).

___ 2. "...but I am faint, my gashes cry for help" (I.ii.42).

___ 3. "Till that Bellona's bridegroom, lapped in proof" (I.ii.54).

___ 4. "Look like the innocent flower / But be the serpent under 't" (I.vi.60-61)"

___ 5. "...That my keen knife see not the wound it makes, / Nor [h]eaven peep through the blanket of dark..." (I.vi.47-48).

___ 6. "Your face, my Thane, is as a book where men / May read strange matters" (I.vi.57-58).

___ 7. "The earth hath bubbles...And these [witches] are of them" (I.iii.79-80).

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ACT II

Act II Scene 1

1. Who accompanies Banquo at the opening of this act?
2. What is Macbeth's hallucination before he murders Duncan?
3. Examine lines 31-64. Summarize Macbeth's soliloquy.
4. At what point in this soliloquy does Macbeth cease hallucinating and proceed with his plan?

Act II Scene 2

1. Identify quotes in Scene 2 that further develop Lady Macbeth's character.
2. Explain the different roles Macbeth and Lady Macbeth play in Duncan's death.
3. Lines 13 - 21 consist of a series of short, choppy phrases exchanged between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. What is the effect of this structure?
4. What reason does Lady Macbeth give for not committing the murder herself?
5. Compare Macbeth's reaction to seeing the blood on his hands to the reaction of Lady Macbeth.
6. Whose daggers are used to commit the murder?
7. Why does Lady Macbeth return to the King's bedchamber?
8. How does the mood shift from the beginning of this scene to the end? What was Shakespeare's purpose for this shift?

Act II Scene 3

1. What do you think is the function of the Porter in the play?
2. In lines 55-62, Lennox reflects upon the unruliness of the night. What might this symbolize?
3. In lines 107 - 108, what does Macbeth admit to? Why does he claim to have done this? Why might he have actually done it?
4. How does Lady Macbeth respond to the news of Duncan's murder? What effect does this response have on the audience's impression of her character?
5. At the end of Scene 3, Malcolm and Donalbain make a plan. What is their plan?

Act II Scene 4

1. What is the function of Ross's conversation with the Old Man?
2. What is the parallel between "A falcon...was by a mousing owl...killed" (II.iv.12-13), and Duncan's horses eating one another (II.iv.14-18).
3. When Macduff joins Ross and the Old Man, who does he say killed King Duncan?
4. What is the significance of Macduff not going to the king's funeral?

Figurative Language

Identify the figurative language in each of the following sentences. Label the following examples as on of the following:

- a. simile
- b. metaphor
- c. allusion
- d. personification
- e. hyperbole

___ 1. "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather / The multitudinous seas incarnadine, / Making the green one red" (II.ii.62-64).

___ 2. "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather / The multitudinous seas incarnadine, / Making the green one red" (II.ii.62-64).

___ 3. "The sleeping and the dead / Are but as pictures" (II.ii.53-54).

___ 4. "Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst" (II.ii.74).

___ 5. "Confusion how hath made his masterpiece" (II.iii.53).

___ 6. "Lechery, sir, it provokes..." (II.iii.19).

___ 7. "Approach the chamber, and destroy your sight / With a new Gorgon" (II.iii.58-59).

Progression of Themes, Motifs, and Symbols

Identify quotes related to:

Blood:

Darkness:

Supernatural:

Sleep:

The pitfalls of ambition:

Name_____

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ACT III

Act III Scene 1

1. In lines 1-10, Banquo's **soliloquy** reveals some concerns. What are they?
2. When a character uses the literary device **apostrophe**, **he or she speaks to something or a character who is not present**. To whom is Banquo speaking in lines 1-10?
3. In lines 11-40, there are several examples of **dramatic irony - the irony occurring when the implications of a situation, speech, etc, are understood by the audience but not by the characters in the play**. Please list one here:
4. In Macbeth's soliloquy in lines 48-72, what does he cite as his motive for having Banquo murdered? Why is it important for Macbeth to have Fleance killed also?
5. What reason does Macbeth give the hired assassins for their taking revenge?

Act III Scene 2

1. How do scenes 1 and 2 reveal a moral change in Macbeth?

Act III Scene 3

1. Are the Murderers successful in Scene 3? What might this mean for Macbeth?

Act III Scene 4

1. Which speeches by Macbeth seem to call forth Banquo's ghost? What is ironic about this timing?
2. What does Macbeth's visions of Banquo reveal about his [Macbeth's] moral state?
3. How does Lady Macbeth excuse Macbeth's behavior?
4. Which of the Scottish nobles has refused to attend the feast at Macbeth's palace? Why?

Act III Scene 5

1. Who is Hecate?

Act III Scene 6

1. What do we learn about Malcolm? Where is he and what is he doing?
2. What does the Lord say happens between Macbeth and Macduff? What might this foreshadow?
3. What does Macbeth hope to learn from the Witches?
4. Why has Macduff left for England?

Figurative Language

Identify the figurative language in each of the following sentences. Label the following examples as on of the following:

- a. *simile*
- b. *metaphor*
- c. *allusion*
- d. *personification*

e. *hyperbole*

- ____ 1. "Our time does call upon 's" (III.i.37).
- ____ 2. "In the catalog ye go for men, / As hounds and greyhounds..." (III.i.92-93).
- ____ 3. "We have scotched the snake [their problems] not killed it (III.ii.13).
- ____ 4. "The worm [Fleance] that's fled / Hath nature that in time will venom breed..." (III.iv.29-30).
- ____ 5. "Can such things be, / And overcome us like a summer's cloud..." (III.iv.110-111).

Progression of Themes, Motifs, and Symbols

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Supernatural:

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The pitfalls of ambition:

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ACT IV

Act IV Scene 1

1. In line 45, the Second Witch says "Something wicked this way comes." To whom is she referring? What's the significance of the Witches calling this character "wicked"?
2. Hecate and the witches call up four separate apparitions for Macbeth. What are they? What does each of them tell Macbeth?
3. Why does Macbeth decide to murder Macduff's family?
4. How does Macbeth's decision to murder Macduff's family differ from his decisions to murder Duncan and Banquo? What does this indicate about the development of Macbeth's character?

Act IV Scene 2

1. What crime is Macduff accused of by Macbeth?

Act IV Scene 3

1. Why does Malcolm at first suspect Macduff of treachery?
2. In this scene, how does Malcolm describe himself to Macduff? Why does he misrepresent his character to Macduff?
3. What aspects of Malcolm's character suggest he will be a strong leader of the Scottish patriot forces against Macbeth?
4. Shakespeare's handling of the intensely emotional scene when Ross tells Macduff of the murder of his wife and children is particularly masterful. How does Ross's behavior here build up the intensity of the moment?
5. What does Malcolm say to help Macduff control his grief and redirect his emotions?
6. Why does Macduff blame himself for the death of his wife and children?

Figurative Language

Identify the figurative language in each of the following sentences. Label the following examples as on of the following:

- a. *simile*
- b. *metaphor*
- c. *allusion*
- d. *personification*
- e. *hyperbole*

___ 1. "Noise of Turk and Tartar's lips" (IV.i.29).

___ 2. "And now about the caldron sing / Like elves and fairies in a ring" (IV.i.41-42).

___ 3. "Yet my heart throbs to know one thing" (IV.i.101).

___ 4. To Fleance: "What, you egg!" (IV.ii.78).

____ 5. "Bleed, bleed, poor country" (IV.iii.32).

____ 6. "...poor country...It cannot / Be called our mother, but our grave" (IV.iii.164-166).

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ACT V

Act V Scene 1

1. In Scene 1, the famous “sleepwalking scene,” Lady Macbeth relives events that have taken place earlier in the day. In her ravings she skips from one event to another but she always returns to the same one. Of all the events she broods over, which troubles her the most deeply? Why?
2. Why is Lady Macbeth obsessed with the idea of washing her hands?

Act V Scene 2

1. In Scene 2, what is revealed about the Scottish lords’ allegiance?

Act V Scene 3

1. In the beginning of Scene 3, why is Macbeth not worried?
2. What news does the Servant bring Macbeth?
3. Reread lines 22-28, beginning with “I have lived long enough.” What does this soliloquy tell us about Macbeth’s state of mind on the eve of battle? What traditional comforts of old age does he realize will not be his?
4. What does the Doctor say at the end of Scene 3?

Act V Scene 4

1. In lines 4-7, what does Malcolm order the men to do? What will that look like to Macbeth and anyone in the castle?

Act V Scene 5

1. What happens to Lady Macbeth in Scene 5? Why do you think the event occurs off-stage?
2. Summarize Macbeth’s famous speech in lines 17-28.
3. What news does the messenger bring Macbeth in Scene 5? How does Macbeth react to this news? Why do you think Macbeth reacts that way?

Act V Scene 6

1. What is the purpose of this scene? Why do you think it’s included?

Act V Scene 7

1. Explain how Scene 7 functions to build tension.

Act V Scene 8

1. This is the final showdown between Macbeth and Macduff. Why does Macbeth decide to fight?
2. What does Macduff reveal himself that shocks Macbeth (and probably the audience!)?
3. Why do you think Macbeth’s death happens off-stage?
4. Examine Macduff’s last six lines (lines 54-58). What is he holding? What does he say? Wherein lies the humor?

5. Examine Malcolm's last lines. He addresses these to everyone present. What does he announce about himself? What does he announce about those that have fled Macbeth's reign?

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- b. *metaphor*
- c. *allusion*
- d. *personification*
- e. *hyperbole*

___ 1. "All the perfumes of Arabia will not / sweeten this little hand" (Vi.35-36).

___ 2. "All the perfumes of Arabia will not / sweeten this little hand" (Vi.35-36).

___ 3. "Which the poor heart would fain deny" (V.iii.28).

___ 4. "Out out, brief candle [Lady Macbeth]!" (V.v.23).

___ 5. "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage" (V.v.24-25).

___ 6. "[Life] is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing" (V.v.26-28).

___ 7. "Weapons laugh to scorn" (V.vi.13).

___ 8. Why should I play the Roman fool and die / On mine own sword?" (V.vii.1-2).

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