

Macbeth

Performance Length	Number of Parts	Genre
20 to 25 Minutes	22	Tragedy

Synopsis



Once upon a time, in the kingdom of Scotland, Macbeth and his ambitious wife plot to take the throne by assassinating the king, Duncan. Once Macbeth is crowned king, their remorse and guilt cause them both to hallucinate. Their strange behavior raises suspicions among the Scottish Lords who raise an army, kill Macbeth, and place King Duncan's son, Malcolm, on the throne.

Characters



Reading Levels of Difficulty:

Easy (E)

Moderate (M)

Challenging (C)

Macbeth (C)

Banquo and Banquo's Ghost (M)

Lady Macbeth (C)

King Duncan (M)

Malcolm (E)

Donalbain (E)

Macduff (M)

Lennox (M)

Ross (M)

Angus (E)

Scottish Lords (2) (E)

The Three Witches (C)

Apparition (E)

Murderer 1 (E)

Murderer 2 (E)

Captain (M)

Fleance (E)

Attendant (E)

Narrator (M)

Pronunciation Guide

Banquo (bank'-kwo)

Malcolm (mal'-come)

Fleance (flay'-ahnce)

Donalbain (don-al'-bin)

Staging & Costumes (Reading-Only Performance)

In a reading-only performance, costumes are an option that some classes like to choose, and are most effective when kept simple. Costumes are similar to other play suggestions: girls can wear long dresses, and boys can wear a man's white or light-colored shirt, not tucked in, and secured at the waist by a belt. A crown will have to be made. The ghost of Banquo might use a mask, or a flashlight to illuminate its face. The witches can be created effectively with simple black clothes and pointy witch hats. Macbeth should be portrayed as an honest, but ambitious man, whose wife's even greater ambition pushes him to committing these dreadful acts. Their exaggerated behavior (i.e., Macbeth seeing Duncan's ghost, the imaginary blood on Lady Macbeth's hands), is caused by guilty consciences.

Teaching Tips

- **Introducing the Play:**
Discuss what a tragedy is. What makes a tragedy? List the attributes of tragedy. Introduce the idea of the curse of "The Scottish Play" that supposedly haunts performances of Macbeth.
- **Pre-Reading Language Activity:**
What other stories do we know where there are witches? What are those witches like? List the stories and the actions of the witches. After reading the play, compare Macbeth's witches to the others.
- **Discussion Topic:**
Who is the villain in this play? Macbeth? Lady Macbeth? The witches? Or could it be ambition taken to the extreme by several of the characters?

Extension Activities

- Research the curse of "The Scottish Play". What is it? When did it begin? Present your ideas in a report.
- Choose a scene from the play and present it using puppets that you have made out of paper bags.

Macbeth

Dramatis Personae



Macbeth – _____	Banquo and _____
Lady Macbeth – _____	Banquo's Ghost – _____
King Duncan – _____	Macduff – _____
Malcolm, _____	Donalbain, _____
Duncan's son – _____	Duncan's son – _____
Ross – _____	Lennox – _____
Scottish Lords (2) – _____	Angus – _____
Apparition – _____	Witch 1 – _____
Fleance, _____	Witch 2 – _____
Banquo's son – _____	Witch 3 – _____
Captain – _____	Murderer 1 – _____
Attendant – _____	Murderer 2 – _____
	Narrator – _____

As Scotland is threatened by an army from Norway, supported by Scottish traitors, strange things begin to happen. As Duncan, King of Scotland, prepares to honor his general, Macbeth, for his bravery in battle, three witches also plan to greet Macbeth with an eerie prophecy.

- Witch 1: When shall we three meet again
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?
- Witch 2: When the hurly-burly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.
- Witch 3: That will be ere the set of sun.
- Witch 2: Upon the heath.
- Witch 3: There to meet with Macbeth.
- Witches: Fair is foul, and foul is fair:
Hover through the fog and filthy air.

The witches
should appear eerie
and mysterious. Use
your voices to
show this.





Meanwhile, in the king's camp near the battlefield, news of Macbeth's bravery and skills arrives yet again.

Duncan: What bloody man is that?

Malcolm: A sergeant who fought for my freedom, father. Hail, brave friend.
Tell the king of your news.

Captain: Brave Macbeth, disdaining Fortune, has slain the traitor, Macdonald, who had joined with Norway. But then the Norwegian lord began a fresh attack.

Duncan: Were Macbeth and Banquo dismayed?

Captain: No, they redoubled their strokes on the foe.

Ross: God save the king! Norway, and the traitorous thane of Cawdor are beaten.
Victory has fallen to us!

Duncan: We will grant Macbeth the thane of Cawdor's title as a reward for his bravery.
What Cawdor hath lost, Macbeth hath won.

While riding home from their victory in battle, Macbeth and his friend Banquo met the three witches standing on the heath.

Witches: A drum, a drum! Macbeth doth come!

Macbeth: So foul and fair a day I have not seen.

Banquo: What are these? So withered, and so wild in their attire. Are they witches?

Macbeth: Speak, if you can. What are you?

Witch 1: All hail, Macbeth, Thane of Glamis!

Witch 2: All hail, Macbeth, Thane of Cawdor!

Witch 3: All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter!

Banquo: Good sir, why do you start and seem to fear things that do sound so fair?
What of me, witches? Speak, then to me.

Witches: Hail!

Witch 1: Lesser than Macbeth, and greater!

Witch 2: Not so happy, yet much happier!





Witch 3: All hail, Banquo, the father of kings!!

Macbeth: Stay and tell me more! What do you mean? I am already the Thane of Glamis, but another man is Thane of Cawdor. Say from whence you owe this strange intelligence. Speak, I charge you.

Suddenly, the witches vanished.

Banquo: Whither are they vanished?

Macbeth: Into the air, melted as breath into wind. *(Pauses.)* Your children shall be kings.

Banquo: You shall be king.

Macbeth: And thane of Cawdor too, went it not so?

Into this unusual scene rode Ross and Angus with a message from King Duncan.

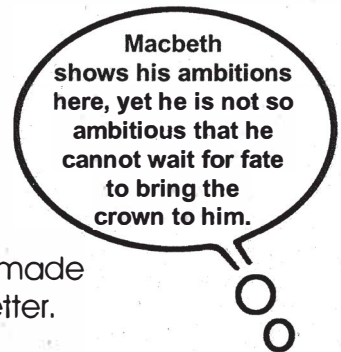
Ross: Hail, Macbeth. The king hath happily received the news of thy success.

Angus: We are sent to give thee thanks, from our royal master.

Ross: And call thee Thane of Cawdor!

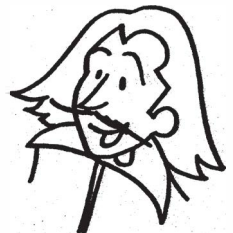
Banquo: *(Aside, to himself and the audience.)* What? Did the witches speak true?

Macbeth: Thanks for your pains.
(Aside, to himself and the audience.)
Two truths are told, as happy prologues to the swelling act.
The witches' words cannot be ill; cannot be good.
If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me.



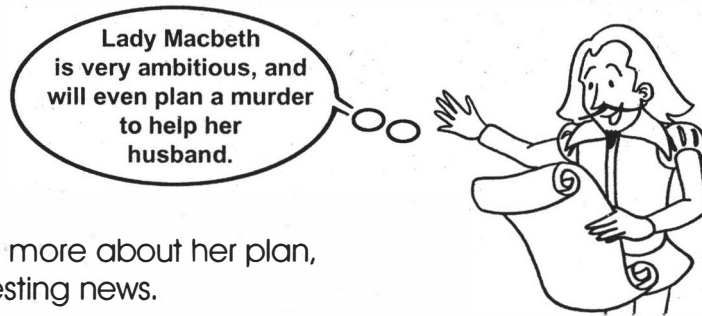
Macbeth's amazement that what the witches had said had come true made him begin to think about becoming king. He told his wife about it in a letter.

Lady Macbeth: *(Holding a letter and reading from it.)*
The witches said, "Hail, thou shalt be king hereafter!"
This I have thought good to deliver thee,
my dearest partner of greatness. Lay it to thy heart.





Glamis thou art, and Cawdor. So, the three witches promised this to you. Then, my husband, you will become king too. I have a plan.



As Lady Macbeth thought some more about her plan, an attendant entered with interesting news.

Attendant: My lady, the king comes here tonight with your husband.

Lady Macbeth: He brings great news. Come, thick night, and hide my evil plans in the dunnest smoke.

Now that Lady Macbeth knew that King Duncan was coming to visit their castle that very day, she made a plan to kill the king. As Duncan arrived, she told Macbeth about it. Later that night, Macbeth would sneak into Duncan's room, past his sleeping guards, and stab him to death. Then he would creep back to his room.

That night, after a feast in his honor, King Duncan retired to his room.

Lady Macbeth: Now that he has gone to bed, let us talk. Are you ready to kill him?

Macbeth: If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly.

Lady Macbeth: Are you afraid to do what you desire? You will be king!

Macbeth: If we should fail?

Lady Macbeth: We fail! But be brave, and we'll not fail! When Duncan is asleep, I will give his two guards wine to drink, and they will fall into swinish sleep. What cannot you and I perform on the unguarded Duncan?

Macbeth: I am settled to this terrible feat. A false face must hide what the false heart doth know.

Late that night, as Macbeth headed to Duncan's room, he met Banquo with his son, Fleance.

Banquo: How goes the night, boy?





Fleance: The moon is down.

Banquo: Who's there?

Macbeth: A friend.

Banquo: All's well. I dreamt last night of the three witches.
What they said to you has some truth.

Macbeth: I think not of them. You and your son should now go to bed.
Good repose, the while!

Banquo: Thanks sir; the like to you!



As Banquo and Fleance left, Macbeth had a vision of a knife in the air before him.

Macbeth: Is this a dagger I see before me,
the handle toward my hand.
Come, let me clutch thee;
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still, fatal vision,
dagger of the mind.
I go now, and it is done.

Waiting for Macbeth to return, Lady Macbeth imagined she heard an owl scream and the crickets cry. Suddenly, Macbeth returned.

Macbeth is
upset by his actions.
He should be shown to
be very nervous.



Lady Macbeth: Who's there? My husband!

Macbeth: I have done the deed, but methought I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep! Macbeth shall sleep no more!" Look at my
hands! They are bloody!

Lady Macbeth: Wash this filthy witness from your hands. But why did you bring these daggers
from the place? Go back and smear Duncan's sleeping guards with blood.

Macbeth: I'll go no more; I am afraid to think what I have done. Look on it again,
I dare not.

Lady Macbeth: Give me the daggers! I'll do it!





Macbeth: *(Knocking is heard. One of the actors should knock on his or her chair back.)*
Whence is that knocking? How is it with me when every noise appalls me?

As Lady Macbeth returned, Macbeth stared at the blood on her hands.

Lady Macbeth: My hands are bloody now, too, but I am not a coward. A little water clears us of this deed. I hear knocking. Hark, more knocking! Get on your nightgown, and be ready to greet whoever has come to our gate.

As Macbeth and his wife change, a porter opened the front gate to admit Macduff and Lennox, two of King Duncan's men. They are greeted by Macbeth.

Macbeth: Good morrow, both.

Macduff: Is the king stirring?

Macbeth: Not yet.

Macduff: I'll make so bold as to wake him. *(Pause, and cry aloud.)* O horror! Horror!

**Macbeth and
Lennox:** What's the matter?

Macduff: The king is murdered! Murder and treason! Banquo! Malcolm! Donalbain! Awake! Up, up, and see! Ring the bell!

As Macbeth and Lennox ran to see the king, Lady Macbeth and Banquo entered, shaken.

Lady Macbeth: What's this business?

Macduff: O, Banquo, Banquo, our royal master's murdered!

Lady Macbeth: Woe, alas! What, in our house?

Banquo: Too cruel anywhere!

Into this horrifying scene ran the king's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain.





Malcolm and
Donalbain:

What is amiss?

Macduff:

You royal father's murdered!

Malcolm:

O, by whom?

Macduff:

His guards! Their hands and faces were all badged with blood.
So were their daggers.

In a rush, Macbeth and Lennox returned.

Macbeth:

Repent me of my fury, but I did kill them.

Lady Macbeth:

Help me hence, ho!

Pretending to faint, Lady Macbeth drew attention away from her husband for the moment.

Macduff:

Look to the lady! And then let us meet and question this bloody piece of work.

In fear, King Duncan's sons fled Macbeth's castle, and this made some suspicious that they had committed the murder. But Banquo, who knew of the three witches' prophecy, suspected that Macbeth was guilty, especially when Macbeth was soon crowned king by the Scottish lords.

Recognizing his friend's suspicions, Macbeth hired two murderers to kill his friend, Banquo.

Macbeth:

Both of you know Banquo, your enemy?

Murderer 1:

Yes, my lord.

Macbeth:

So is he mine now. I need your help.

Murderer 2:

We shall, my lord, perform what you command us.

In the struggle with the murderers, Banquo was killed, but his son, Fleance, escaped. Rather than make him feel at peace, this news from the murderers, and his murder of King Duncan, made Macbeth feel nervous, and he started to see things.

At a dinner later that day, he saw the ghost of Banquo sitting at the table in his place. No one else could see the ghost. Lady Macbeth had to hurry Macbeth from the room.





Scottish Lords: Welcome, your majesty!

Lennox: May it please your highness to sit?

Macbeth: Where? The table's full.

Lennox: Here is a place reserved, sir.

Macbeth: *(Pointing at the chair where he sees the ghost of Banquo.)*
Who is this? Which of you has done this?

Scottish Lords: What, my good lord?

Macbeth: *(To the ghost of Banquo.)*
Thou canst not say I did it!
Never shake thy gory locks at me!

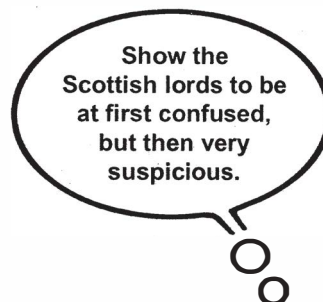
Ross: Gentlemen, rise, his highness is not well!

Lady Macbeth: Why do you make such faces?
You look but on a stool.

Macbeth: *(To the ghost.)*
Avaunt! And quit my sight! Thy blood is cold!
Hence horrible shadow!

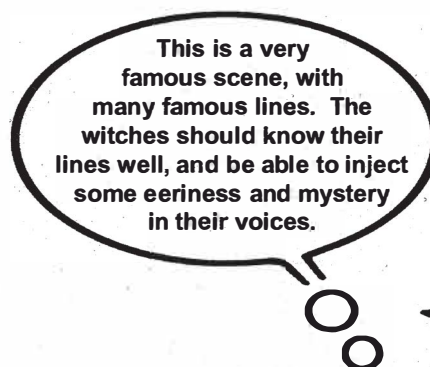
Lady Macbeth: You have displaced the mirth!
Come with me, my lord. A kind good night to all.

Lennox: Good night, and better health attend his majesty.



After Macbeth had gone, the Scottish lords began to suspect that he had killed his friend and king, and they prepared to fight against him. Macbeth, desperate to know what the future held for him, ran to find the three witches. He found them chanting and making a potion around a cauldron.

Witches: Double, double, toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.
Fillet of a fenny snake,
In the cauldron boil and bake;
Eye of newt, and toe of frog,
Wool of bat, and tongue of dog.
For a charm of powerful trouble,
Double, double, toil and trouble,
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.





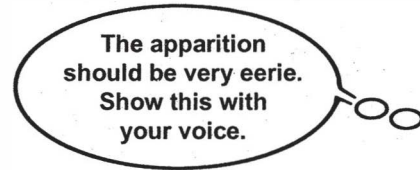
Witch 1: By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes.

Macbeth: Answer me to what I ask you.

Witch 2: Demand.

Witch 3: We'll answer.

Macbeth: What will happen to me?



An apparition rose slowly from the cauldron and answered Macbeth's question.

Apparition: Macbeth shall never vanquished be,
until Birnham Wood to high Dunsinane Hill
shall come against him.

Macbeth: That will never be!

Meanwhile, back at her castle, Lady Macbeth began to feel very guilty for having her king and Banquo killed. She also began to feel nervous that the Scottish lords were arming against her husband. She began wiping her hands again and again, imagining that she had blood on her hands.

Lady Macbeth: Yet here's a spot! Out, cursed spot! Out, I say!
Here's the smell of blood still. Oh! Oh! Oh! I cannot wash it away.
What's done cannot be undone.

When Macbeth returned, he saw the Scottish lords' army massing against him. However, just before the battle, an attendant told Macbeth that his wife was dead, and some other troubling news.

(Lady Macbeth cries out, and bows her head.)

Macbeth: Wherefore was that cry?

Attendant: The Queen, my lord, is dead.

Macbeth: Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts
and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told
by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.





Attendant: I should report what else I saw. As I did stand upon the hill, I looked toward Birnham, and anon, methought the wood began to move.

Macbeth: Liar! Arm, arm, and out! Ring the alarm-bell!
Now we go to battle! Blow wind! Come, wrack!

Soon Macbeth saw that what the attendant had said was true. The opposing army had cut branches from the trees of Birnham Wood, and carried the branches before them to hide their numbers.

On the battlefield, Macbeth met an army that included Malcolm, dead King Duncan's son, Macduff, and the other Scottish lords. They wanted revenge for the things that Macbeth had done.

On the battlefield, Macbeth met Macduff, and they had a terrible sword fight.

Macduff: Yield thee, coward.

Macbeth: I will not yield.

Finally, Macduff killed Macbeth, took his crown, and returned to tell Malcolm the news. When the Scottish lords realized that Macbeth was dead, Macduff took the crown, placed it on Malcolm's head, and Malcolm was proclaimed King of Scotland. He gave the title of Earl to his loyal nobles. Peace had come to Scotland again.

Macduff: Hail, King! For so thou art. Hail, King of Scotland!

Malcolm: My thanes and kinsmen, henceforth be earls.
So thanks to all at once, and to each one,
Whom we invite to see us crowned king.

Scottish Lords: Hail, Malcolm, King of Scotland!



Name: _____

Macbeth – A Comprehension Check

1. Where does the story take place?

2. What do the witches predict will happen to Macbeth?

3. When Macbeth hears this how does he react? What does this tell us about his personality?

4. Why does Macbeth return to the witches later in the play? Do they offer him any hope of success?

5. Who is more ambitious, Macbeth or Lady Macbeth? Explain your opinion with proof from the story.

6. Who comes to fight against Macbeth? Why?

7. After Macbeth hears of his wife's death he speaks one of the most famous passages in English literature. What does Macbeth mean when he speaks these words?

(Hint: Think about his wife's death, and the situation in which he finds himself.)

Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

8. Do you find the witches to be scary, mysterious, or unnerving? Explain your opinion.

Shakespeare Comprehension Check



Play Title: _____

Which kind of play is this? (Circle one.)

tragedy

comedy

history

problem play/romance

Explain how you know. _____

Who is the main character in your play? _____

Describe your main character by completing the chart.

Personality Trait	Which actions show this in the play?	What is the result of these actions?

What is the main character's motivation for acting in these ways?

Where and when does your play take place? Tell about the setting, focusing on time and place.

What is the problem in your play? How is it resolved?

Macbeth: (page 68)

1. The story takes place in Scotland.
2. The witches predict that Macbeth will grow in power and will eventually be crowned king.
3. Macbeth does not know if the words of the witches are good or evil, but he is willing to accept the crown if chance hands it to him. This tells us that he is ambitious, but not so ambitious that he will plan to take the throne. He would rather let chance, or fate, play its part.
4. Macbeth returns to the witches to see what the future holds for him, to see how things will unfold. Their first predictions came true, so he wants to hear what new predictions they have for him.
5. Opinions may vary. Macbeth – kills Duncan, defends his new position despite a guilty conscience. Lady Macbeth – plans her husband's ascent to the throne, plots King Duncan's murder, and forces her husband to act.
6. Many Scottish lords and nobles, including dead King Duncan's son Malcolm, and Macduff, a brave Scottish lord. They have come to remove him from power and to restore peace to Scotland.
7. Macbeth is thinking that life is too short, and that no matter what we do, no matter how we act, it all ends without any meaning. He is full of despair over the death of his wife and at the situation in which he finds himself.
8. Opinions may vary.