



THE SHAKESPEARE THEATRE
OF NEW JERSEY | EDUCATION
PRESENTS

SHAKESPEARE LIVE! 2023
MACBETH

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

**STUDENT-TEACHER
STUDY GUIDE**

COMPILED AND ARRANGED BY
THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF
THE SHAKESPEARE THEATRE OF NEW JERSEY



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COVER: Lady Macbeth and Macbeth in the 2023 Shakespeare LIVE! touring production of MACBETH.

THIS SPREAD: Macbeth battles Macduff as the Weird Sisters look on in the 2023 Shakespeare LIVE! touring production of MACBETH.

Photos: Sarah Haley.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

What we hear most from educators is that there is a great deal of anxiety when it comes to Shakespeare; seeing it, reading it, and especially teaching it. One of the principal goals of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's education programs is to demystify Shakespeare, take him "off the shelf," and re-energize his work for students and teachers alike. Toward these goals, this Study Guide provides educators with tools to both allay their own concerns and to expand the theatre-going experience for their students beyond a visit with The Shakespeare Theatre.

The information included in this guide will help you expand your students' understanding of Shakespeare in performance as well as help you meet many of the New Jersey Core Curriculum State Standards. We encourage you to impart as much of the information included in this Study Guide to your students as is possible. The following are some suggestions from teachers on how you can utilize elements of the guide given limited classroom time.

BEFORE THE SHOW

- Short Synopsis (p. 11) ~5 minutes of class time
- Who's Who (p. 9) ~5 minutes of class time
- About the Playwright (p. 4) ~10 minutes of class time
- Introduction (p. 8) ~10 minutes of class time
- Go over verse and vocabulary activities (pp. 6, 7, and 15) ~20 minutes of class time
- One teacher divided her class into groups and assigned each group research topics based on the divisions found in the study guide. Using a copy of the corresponding study guide page as a launch pad, the students had one week to research the topics. The students then presented their information to the class in three- to five-minute oral reports. Including the questions that evolved from the presentations, the entire project took only one class period. I am told that the reading of Old English and Middle English texts was "quite entertaining and very informative."

DURING THE SHOW

- Assign students aspects of the play to be on the lookout for: a line, costumes, set design, music, etc. Find examples on page 10.

AFTER THE SHOW

- Topics for Discussion (p. 17) ~20 minutes of class time
- Commentary & Criticism (p. 14) ~20 minutes of class time
- Quizzes (pp. 16 and 18)
- Follow-Up Activities (p. 19)

We hope you will incorporate as many portions of this study guide as you are able into your classroom experience. If you have any suggestions for activities or topics not already found in the Study Guide, please contact our education department. We are always interested in hearing new ways to excite young people (and teachers) about Shakespeare and live theatre.

Happy Teaching,



Brian B. Crowe,
Director of Education



The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's
Main Stage

Shakespeare: Helpful Tips For Exploring & Seeing His Works

“Just plunge right in

(to Shakespeare). See a play, read it aloud, rent a video, listen to a tape. It's up to you. When you look at Shakespeare close up, he's not as intimidating as when he's seen from afar.”

Norrie Epstein
The Friendly Shakespeare

Tragedy can have humor, and
great comedy always has
elements of the tragic.

18th-century critics complained that Shakespeare's tragedies weren't consistently serious enough. According to the classic rules, tragedy should be uniformly somber. Shakespeare's use of humor in his tragedies prevents us from becoming washed away in a dense fog of emotion. Rather, it forces us out of the “tragic” long enough to appreciate the level to which the play's passions have taken us.

“Some of the plays have taken on mythic proportions. By myths, I mean we grow up knowing certain things about [Shakespeare's] characters but we don't know how we know them.

There are lots of
SHAKESPEAREAN MICROCHIPS
lodged in our brains.”

Charles Marowitz, director

“It was Olivier's *Henry V*
that made me realize that
Shakespeare is
about real people
and that his language wasn't simply
beautiful poetry.”

Robert Brustein, director

Don't be afraid to
LISTEN,
WATCH
AND REACT;
laugh, cry, and be moved.
Shakespeare wrote for
a live and active audience.
Both audience and actor
must be involved to create
a truly winning performance.

“My advice to anyone seeing Shakespeare:

**Don't worry so
much!**

Just make sure your ears are clean and your eyes are sharp. Listen and look and watch. Look at the distance people stand from each other; look at the relationships being developed.

Stay with it.

Don't negate the move that Shakespeare will make toward your gut, toward your soul— because he will touch you there, if you allow yourself to be touched.”

-David Suchet, actor

“There are some parts of the plays you'll never understand. But excuse me, I thought that's what great art was supposed to be about.

**DON'T
FREAK
OUT
OVER
IT!”**

Peter Sellars,
Director

About the Playwright

William Shakespeare, widely recognized as the greatest English dramatist, was born on April 23, 1564. He was the third of eight children born to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden of Stratford-on-Avon in Warwickshire, England. Shakespeare's father was a prominent local merchant, and Shakespeare's childhood, though little is known about it for certain, appears to have been quite normal. In fact, it seems that the young Shakespeare was allowed considerable leisure time because his writing contains extensive knowledge of hunting and hawking. In 1582 he married Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a farmer. She was eight years his senior, and the match was considered unconventional.

It is believed that Shakespeare left Stratford-on-Avon and went to London around 1588. By 1592 he was a successful actor and playwright. He wrote approximately 38 plays, two epic poems, and over 150 sonnets. His work was immensely popular, appealing to members of all social spheres including Queen Elizabeth I and King James I. While they were well-liked, Shakespeare's plays were not considered exceptional by his educated contemporaries. By 1608, Shakespeare's

involvement with theatre began to dwindle, and he spent more time at his country home in Stratford. He died on April 23, 1616.

Most of Shakespeare's plays found their first major publication in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, when two of his fellow actors put the plays together in the *First Folio*. Other early printings of Shakespeare's plays were called *quartos*, a printer's term referring to the format in which the publication was laid out. These quartos and the *First Folio* texts are the sources of all modern printings of Shakespeare's plays.



A MAN OF MANY WORDS

Shakespeare used over **20,000 different words** in his plays and poems. Of these, 8.5% (1,700 words) had never been seen in print before Shakespeare used them.

To give you a sense of just how extraordinary this is, consider that the King James Bible uses only 8,000 different words. Homer is credited with using approximately 9,000 different words in his works. Milton is estimated at using 10,000 different words in his works.

THE SONNETS

You might have thought that Shakespeare wrote the sonnets earlier in his career, as a type of "stepping stone" to his plays. However, Shakespeare actually penned most of his sonnets during the various outbreaks of the plague in London, when the theatres were closed.

Shakespeare's London

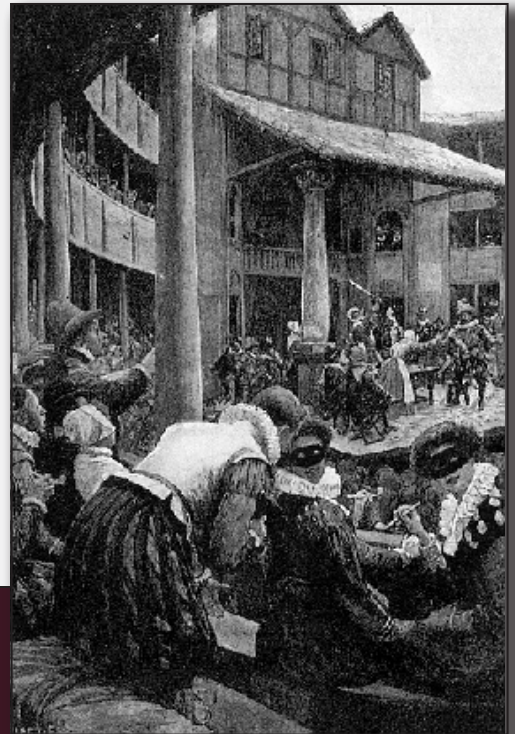
In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, London was a bustling urban center filled with a wide variety of people and cultures. Although most days centered around making a living or going to church, the theatre offered a main source of diversion for Londoners. It was a form of entertainment accessible to people of all classes. The rich and the poor, the aristocrats and the beggars all met at the theatre. Though often appealing the church or the monarchy, theatre at this time did experience a freedom that was unknown in previous generations. Evidence of this can be found in the numerous bawdy and pagan references found in Shakespeare's plays. This relative artistic license and freedom of expression made theatre extremely unpopular among certain members of society, and it was later banned entirely by the Puritans. Not until the reign of Charles II (1660-1685) was the theatre restored to the status it held in Shakespeare's day.

The Globe Theatre, the resident playhouse for Shakespeare's company of actors, was an active social center easily accessible to Londoners. Actors and performers were also regularly brought to court or to private homes to entertain. Despite their social popularity, actors maintained a relatively low status, sometimes no better than a common beggar or rogue. Most performers were forced to earn a living doing trade work. The aristocracy's desire for entertainment however, did spur the development of numerous new theatre pieces. Often a nobleman would become a patron to an artist or company of actors, providing for their financial needs and

sheltering them to some degree from official sanctions. In return, the company would adopt the name of the patron. Shakespeare's acting company was originally named "Lord Chamberlain's Men" after their patron, Henry Carey, Lord Chamberlain. Later, under the patronage of King James I, they were known as "The King's Men," an unprecedented honor at the time.

Despite the flourishing of the arts at this time, London was sometimes a desolate place. Outbreaks of the Black Plague (the bubonic plague) frequently erupted, killing thousands of citizens. Theatres, shops, and the government were all shut down during these times in hopes of preventing the spread of the disease.

Elizabethans were unaware that the disease was being spread by the flea and rat populations, which well outnumbered the human population of London at that time.



HEARING A PLAY

The Elizabethans were an audience of listeners. They would say, "I'm going to hear a play," not "I'm going to see a play." The Elizabethan audience would pick up on words and their various meanings that we wouldn't.

Marjorie Garber

Speaking in rhyme is not natural to us, but it was to the Elizabethans, so we have to understand what language meant to them, and what language does not mean to us today. If I were an Elizabethan and I wanted to impress you as a lover, I wouldn't send you flowers. I would come and woo you at your feet and recite to you a sonnet I had written just for you— no matter how bad it was. Elizabethan England was a world where people sang, talked and breathed language.

Shakespeare's Verse

Shakespeare's plays are written predominantly in "blank verse," a poetic form preferred by English dramatists in the 16th and early 17th centuries. It is a very flexible medium, which like the human speech pattern, is capable of a wide range of tones and inflections. The lines, which are usually unrhymed, are divided into five "feet," each of which is a two-syllable unit known as an "iamb." Each iamb is made up of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. Blank verse is technically defined as unrhymed iambic pentameter.

Here is a selection of blank verse from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with the stressed syllables in **bold** type:

Theseus: To **you**, your **father should be as a god**;
 One **that compos'd** your **beauties, yea**, and **one**
 To **whom** you **are but as a form in wax**
 By **him imprinted, and** within his **pow'r**
 To **leave the figure, or disfigure it.**
Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

Hermia: So **is Lysander.**

Theseus: **In himself he is;**
 But **in this kind, wanting your father's voice,**
 The **other must be held the worthier.**

In this short selection you can see a variety of speech tones indicated by the verse. The regularity of the rhythmic pattern and the use of full lines to complete his thoughts give Theseus a sense of calm and authority. Hermia's brief response, which breaks the iambic pattern, is only a fraction of a line, suggesting that she is impassioned and saying only a portion of what she is thinking. Theseus however, completes her line and restores the iambic pattern, indicating his authority and the fact that he is, at this point in the play, literally overbearing her will.

Notice that while the blank verse pattern is generally iambic, even in this short passage there are instances where the pattern of stress is broken. The play would quickly become monotonous if the characters spoke in nothing but perfect iambic pentameter—fortunately for audiences, Shakespeare's rhythms often become jagged and jarring to reflect the tension and conflict among his characters. Trying to determine where the rhythm of a line is regular or irregular provides important clues for the actor trying to understand what the character is thinking or feeling. As in real life, choosing to change the stress-bearing syllable may radically alter the meaning of what is being said.

Other clues are provided by word order and punctuation. There were few established rules for either in Shakespeare's time, so he was free to experiment with unusual syntax. As in our daily speech, the sentence structure (as indicated by both word order and punctuation) helps the reader or listener understand both the literal meaning of the sentence and the emphasis. A comma may indicate a new portion of the same idea, while a dash breaks into the sentence to insert a new idea, and a period suggests the completion of one idea and the start of another. Editors of Shakespeare over the years have quarreled bitterly about what punctuation the Bard "meant" to use or "should" have used. As an actor or reader of Shakespeare, it is up to you to decide if a comma, dash, or period makes the meaning of the line most clear.

THE HEART OF THE POETRY

The alternating unstressed-stressed pattern of blank verse has often been compared to the rhythm of the human heartbeat. When a character in Shakespeare is agitated, confused or upset, the rhythm of their verse often alters, much in the same way a heartbeat alters under similar conditions.

BOY, OH BOY

In Shakespeare's England, it was against the law for women to perform on the public stage. For this reason, the female roles in plays were always performed by males, usually teenage boys who were of slighter build than the other actors, had higher voices, and no facial hair. In *Macbeth*, however, the unique appearance of the witches ("you should be women, yet your beards forbid me to interpret that you are so") probably indicates that they, at least, were played by adult actors in the company.

Are You SURE This Is English?

Contrary to popular belief, Shakespeare and his contemporaries did not write in Old English, or even Middle English. **PLAYWRIGHTS OF THE 16TH AND EARLY 17TH CENTURIES WROTE IN MODERN ENGLISH.** Shakespeare spoke (and wrote in) the same language which we speak today. It is possible to be thrown a bit by grammatical “carry-overs” from earlier English [“thee” and “thou” instead of “you”] and the poetic liberties that Shakespeare took, but there is no doubt that the words and syntax used in his plays can be understood today without any “translation.” To help clarify this point, here are some examples of Old, Middle, and Modern English.

Old English (500 - 1150 CE)

When Julius Caesar invaded Britain in BCE 55-4, the Celtic (pronounced KEL-tic) tribes lived in the British Isles. Their language survives today in the forms of Gaelic (Scotland and Ireland), Welsh (Wales) and Manx (Isle of Man). Early English developed primarily from these sources as well as influences from invading Germanic tribes. This meltingpot of a language is now commonly known as Old English. It also includes influences from the Latin spoken by Catholic missionaries from Rome and the Scandinavian dialects of Viking raiders and settlers.

What does Old English sound like?



selection from *Beowulf*
author unknown, ca 800 CE

Oft Scyld Scēfing sceaðena prèstum,
monegum mægðum meodo-setla oftēah,
egsode eorlas. Syððan ærert wearð
fēasceaft funden, hē þæs frofre gebād,
wèox under wolcnum, weorð-myndum þàh,
oð-þæt him aeghwylc ymb-sittendra
ofer hron-råde hýran scolde,
gomban gyldan. þæt wæs god cyning!

IN MODERN ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

*Often Scyld the Scefing from squadroned foes,
from many a tribe, the mead-bench tore,
awing the earls. Since first he lay
friendless, a founding, fate repaid him:
for he waxed under welkin, in wealth he throve,
till before him the folk, both far and near,
who lived by the whale-path, heard his mandate,
gave him gift: a good king he!*

WHAT DID SHAKESPEARE SOUND LIKE?
While we may associate Shakespeare with the “refined” British accent of an Sir Ian McKellen or Dame Judi Dench, linguistic scholars suggest that the closest approximation to the London accent of Shakespeare’s day is the accent heard nowadays in the Appalachian region of the United States or in the regions outside England. David and Ben Crystal explore Shakespeare’s original pronunciation in this video.



Middle English (1150 - 1450 CE)

The conquest of England by the Norman army in 1066 brought great changes to English life and the English language. The Old French spoken by the Normans became for many years the language of the Royal Court and of English literature. Over time, the spoken English still used by the lower classes borrowed about 10,000 words from French, as well as certain grammatical structures. By the time English reappeared as a written, literary language in the 14th century, it only distantly resembled Old English. This German-French hybrid language is known as Middle English.

What does Middle English sound like?



selection from *The Canterbury Tales*
by Geoffrey Chaucer, ca 1390 CE

But natheless / while I haue tyme and space
Er that I ferther / in this tale pace
Me thynketh it acordant to resoun
To telle yow / al the condiciun
Of eeche of hem / so as it seemed to me
And whiche they weere / and of what degree
And eek in what array / that they were inne
And at a knyght thanne wol I first bigynne.

IN MODERN ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

*But nonetheless, while I have time and space
Before I continue in this story
I think it appropriate to speak of,
To tell you, the condition
Of each of them, as it seemed to me.
And who was who, and of what degree,
And in what fashion each was dressed.
And with a knight then I will begin.*

Modern English (1450 - present day)

With the invention of the printing press in the 15th century, the English language began to develop and mutate at an unprecedented rate. Books, previously a precious and expensive commodity, were now widely available to anyone with basic literacy. Works in Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, and Portuguese were being translated by the hundreds, and the translators found it necessary to borrow and invent thousands of new words. English trade and exploration fueled even more cultural and linguistic exchange. The early Modern English of Shakespeare and his contemporaries has been referred to as “English in its adolescence”; daring, experimental, innovative, and irreverent.

selection from *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, ca 1595 CE

Well, you have made a simple choice; you know not how to choose a man: Romeo! No, not he; though his face be better than any man’s, yet his leg excels all men’s; and for a hand, and a foot, and a body, though they be not to be talked on, yet they are past compare...

Macbeth: An Introduction

Like all of Shakespeare's tragedies, *Macbeth* is a character-driven play. Unlike the others however, *Macbeth* contains no sub-plots, little comic relief, and no extravagant detail. This places a constant, searing focus upon the title character and his motivations. The play, narrating Macbeth's swift rise and fall from power in Scotland, can be simultaneously viewed as a fictionalized history play, a tale of a man trapped by fate, and a cautionary tale of the consequences of unchecked ambition.

As with *King Lear*, Shakespeare looked to early medieval European history for his plot when penning *Macbeth*. He chose the career of a Scottish king recounted in Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, a storehouse of plots to which Shakespeare and his contemporaries often turned. The historical Macbeth was a contemporary of Edward the Confessor, king of England from 1042 to 1066 CE.

One can interpret *Macbeth* as a play that depicts the demise of a man who chooses "evil as his good." The witches promise Macbeth that he will be king, yet he, driven by his wife, believes that his *only* path to the crown is through the murder of King Duncan. With Duncan dead, Macbeth is crowned king and the prophecy is fulfilled. Once enthroned, however, Macbeth continues on a path of murder fueled by his paranoia and determination to hold on to the throne.

Macbeth murders Banquo in an attempt to prevent the prophecy that Banquo will be the "root and father of many kings" from coming true. He incorrectly interprets the prophesy to mean that Banquo's young son Fleance will be the immediate instrument of his downfall. Fearful of traitors within the Scottish nobility, Macbeth also places spies in the homes of the thanes. When he hears that Macduff has fled to England to gain forces to overthrow him, Macbeth has Macduff's castle destroyed and his family slaughtered.

A warrior by training, Macbeth seems well suited for the bloody path on which he has embarked. Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, believes that the murder of Duncan is a singular sacrifice, which will usher them into a life of royal ease and splendor. Macbeth understands that this first murder is only the beginning of a long road on which "blood will have blood."

Despite his violent deeds, Shakespeare does not paint Macbeth as a simple villain. When we are introduced to the protagonist, he

is a valiant and honorable general returning from a war in which he has nobly defended his country and his king from both foreign invasion and domestic treachery. After the visitation from the three witches he resolves that "If chance will have (him) King... chance may crown (him) without (his) stir" despite his "black and deep desires." It is Lady Macbeth that insists that they must murder Duncan to gain the crown. Macbeth struggles with this option, but finally decides that his fate is a bloody path to the crown and once he embarks, Macbeth does not turn back. Even at Macbeth's darkest, however, Shakespeare gives us a glimpse of the man he once was. When a messenger announces that his wife is dead, he ponders the futility of his life with insight and eloquence in the famous "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" speech.

Regardless of the various possible interpretations of *Macbeth*, the themes of ambition, corruption, destiny, sex and power presented in the play are quite tangible even today. Modern audiences can relate to the feelings of lust, power and ambition that drive Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Though we may not match the extreme lengths to which they go, the desires that drive them are, on a basic level, all too human. This may be one of the many reasons why *Macbeth* has remained one of Shakespeare's most popular tragedies for nearly four centuries.

NIGHTTIME IN SHAKESPEARE'S DAY

The Elizabethans believed that night was the time of spirits and demons. Though many contemporary thinkers would scoff at such a notion, one must consider what nighttime was like for the Elizabethans. In pre-modern times, the night lacked the artificial glow that chases away complete darkness today. Only the moon, stars and scattered lanterns and candles illuminated the Elizabethan night.

In the dim flicker of these limited light sources, it is easy to imagine supernatural encounters. A dead tree jostled in a breeze can be transformed into a hideous monster, a darting bird can become a fleeing spirit. Because these sights were never seen in the bright daytime, Elizabethans believed that ghosts held dominion over the night, and the first signs of the dawn (such as the crowing rooster) chased evil spirits away.

DUDE, THAT'S WYRD!

The "weird sisters" in Shakespeare's play can represent many things. Some believe that they represent the classical Fates. In fact, the Old English word "wyrd" (pronounced "weird") meant "fate" or "destiny." The Elizabethan audience had little connection to the classical image of the Fates. They did, however, hold a strong belief in witches and the power that witches possessed. Shakespeare may have used a familiar word to indicate that his witches are somehow instruments or enablers of Fate.

It is also likely that Shakespeare's play is substantially responsible for the contemporary meaning of weird: eerie or strange. *Macbeth* is its first recorded appearance with that spelling and meaning.

A SIMPLE PLAY?

Macbeth is distinguished by its simplicity... Its plot is quite plain. It has very little intermixture of humor. It has little pathos except of the sternest kind. The style...has not much variety.

A.C. Bradley
Shakespearean Tragedy

Macbeth: A Short Synopsis

At the opening of the play, King Duncan's forces are attempting to defend Scotland from Norwegian invaders and trying to suppress a treasonous attack from one of their own, the Thane of Cawdor. Duncan receives word that Scotland has won the battle in large part due to the skill and command of Macbeth. Duncan orders the execution of the existing Thane of Cawdor, and sends men to present Macbeth with the title. Meanwhile, returning from the battlefield, Macbeth and Banquo encounter three witches who greet Macbeth as Thane of Glamis (his present title), Thane of Cawdor, and "King that shall be." When challenged, they add that Banquo, though he will not be a king, will be the father of future kings, and then they vanish. Neither of the men are sure what to make of their encounter until they are greeted by the King's messenger, who tells Macbeth that he has been given the title of Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth's hopes are raised that the witches might be truthful in their prediction that he will be King. When they arrive at the King's camp however, Duncan names his eldest son, Malcolm, heir to the Scottish throne, and Macbeth sees this as an obstacle in his way to the crown.

In the Macbeth household, Lady Macbeth receives a letter from her husband describing the witches' prophetic greetings. When Macbeth returns and announces that King Duncan will be their guest for the evening, Lady Macbeth suggests that they murder the visiting monarch. Though Macbeth is reluctant at first, he eventually agrees to her plan: Lady Macbeth will get the guards drunk and Macbeth will murder the King. That evening, as he awaits his wife's signal, Macbeth encounters a mysterious spectral dagger which points him in the direction of the murder. Once the murder is accomplished, the Macbeths rush off to bed, so as not to raise suspicion. Upon the discovery of the assassination, Macbeth kills Duncan's guards for their supposed guilt, and Duncan's son, Malcolm flees to England. With Duncan and Malcolm both out of the way, Macbeth is crowned King of Scotland.

On the afternoon of Macbeth's coronation, the new king plots the death of his dear friend, Banquo, in hopes of nullifying the witches' prophecy that Banquo's children will be kings. He sends murderers to kill Banquo and his son, Fleance. At the coronation banquet, Macbeth is overcome with fear at the sight of Banquo's ghost. None of his guests can see the spirit, and Lady Macbeth attempts to pass the King's peculiar behavior off as the effects of an illness. After the guests leave, Macbeth vows to seek out the witches to discover more about his future.

In the witches' lair, Macbeth is given contradictory information about his future. He is told to beware Macduff, but that he himself cannot be harmed by anyone born of woman. He is also told that he will never be defeated until the woods of Birnam advance on his castle. As the witches vanish, Macbeth is brought word from one of his soldiers that Macduff has fled to England. At this news, Macbeth orders the death of Macduff's family and servants, and the destruction of his home.

In England, Macduff lobbies Malcolm to take Scotland back from Macbeth. Malcolm, unsure if he can trust Macduff, tests his loyalty. When satisfied that Macduff is not a spy for Macbeth, Malcolm announces that he has already gained the support of the English army, and is preparing to advance on Scotland.

Meanwhile, back in Dunsinane castle, Lady Macbeth is observed sleepwalking and re-enacting the murder of Duncan. Macbeth finds himself more and more alone as those around him defect and ally themselves with Malcolm. As Malcolm's forces arrive at Birnam Wood, the young prince orders them to cut down limbs from the trees. They will then carry the limbs before them as they march on Macbeth's castle. Malcolm hopes this will disguise the size of their army. It will also make the woods appear to march toward Dunsinane castle, just as the witches predicted.

On the eve of the great battle, Macbeth is told that Lady Macbeth has died. Alone, he ponders the meaning of his existence. A messenger brings him word that Birnam Wood has begun to move toward Dunsinane. Determined to beat the fate the witches said awaited him, he goes to battle. On the battlefield, he encounters Macduff. As Macbeth gloats that "none of woman born" can harm him, Macduff tells him that he was not born of woman, but rather had been delivered via caesarian-section. They fight and Macbeth is killed. Malcolm is crowned the new and rightful King of Scotland.



The Weird Sisters in the 2023 touring production of MACBETH. Photo: Sarah Haley.

Aspects of *Macbeth*

WHOSE FAULT IS IT, ANYWAY?:

This is probably the biggest question every reader, actor and director of *Macbeth* must face. There are various possible answers to this question. Most commonly one of four sources is the subject of the finger-pointing; the witches, Fate, Lady Macbeth, and of course Macbeth himself.

THE WITCHES: It is the witches who plant the idea of royalty in Macbeth's head. They also give him a false sense of his future as king when they tell him that no one "born of woman" can harm Macbeth. However, several other questions must be asked when considering the witches as the source of the downfall of Macbeth. Are they malicious? Do they intend to do Macbeth and/or Scotland harm? Do they know more than they say, or are they only given bits of information to pass on to Macbeth? For that matter, are they even magical at all? What if they are merely ugly old women who plant an idea in Macbeth's brain just to see what will happen? Declaring the witches the villains of the play makes Macbeth their victim. Are we meant to pity his plight?

FATE: There are many allusions to fate in *Macbeth*. Are the destinies of Shakespeare's characters pre-determined? Would the results remain the same even without the intervention of the witches or Lady Macbeth? Are the witches the earthly servants of Fate? If you say it's all a matter of Fate, then Macbeth is merely a puppet in this world with no control over his destiny. In this case, is anyone really to blame? Does the outcome even matter?

LADY MACBETH: "Lady M" has long been a popular favorite of finger-pointers. She's the one who not only develops the plan to kill Duncan, but also convinces her noble husband to commit the assassination. She certainly carries some sway over her husband and she uses it with brutal force in the first half of the play. Is Lady Macbeth the only *truly* evil character in the play? Is she merely looking out for her husband's best interest? Is she driven by personal ambition or love of her husband?

MACBETH: Then of course there's the man himself. He decides to tell his wife about the witches' prophesies. He eventually decides to kill Duncan... and Banquo... and the Macduffs. Shouldn't he take some responsibility? If Macbeth is the one you choose, the play is very much the story of a once noble man who becomes evil.

Whichever choice you make when selecting who is to blame, you must consider how it affects your interpretation of the play as a whole. Is *Macbeth* a play about Man's entrapment by Fate? Is it an exploration of the evil that lurks within each of us? Does it present the human race as the puppets of the supernatural world? All of these answers are correct and supportable in the play. The choice is up to you!

WITCHES AND GHOSTS:

The supernatural plays a vital role in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. From the opening moments of the play, we see a world just outside the realms of our own, as three mysterious witches gather on a deserted barren patch of land. The world Shakespeare establishes for *Macbeth* is one in which witches, ghosts and spectral weapons abound. With them comes a sense of unease and uncertainty about the evidence of one's own senses. As he is accosted by supernatural solicitations, Macbeth finds himself in a nearly constant state of uncertainty.

Upon first encountering the weird sisters, Banquo asks:

*What are these,
So withered and so wild in their attire,
That look not like th' inhabitants o' th' earth
And yet are on't? Live you, or are you aught
That man may question?*

Later, as Macbeth prepares to murder King Duncan, he encounters the vision of an ethereal floating dagger. Unable to grasp the spectral blade, he watches as it transforms before his eyes from an untarnished symbol of strength to the blood-drenched weapon of an assassin. Like the weird sisters, the reality of this vision is questioned:

*Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?*

After ordering the murder of Banquo and his young son Fleance, Macbeth is visited by Banquo's ghost. The other guests and Lady Macbeth, all unaware of the murder of Banquo, are unable to see the paranormal visitor. Nonetheless, Macbeth is so shaken by the vision that he upsets the banquet. Lady Macbeth insists that it is nothing more than a projection of his conscience.

*This is the very painting of your fear,
This is the air-drawn dagger which you said
Led you to Duncan.*

Are any of these visions real? One might argue that the witches have some corporal existence in the world, for they are also seen by Banquo. However, Macbeth and Banquo are the *only* people who see them, and the witches are able to vanish into thin air. Certainly a double hallucination would seem far-fetched, but not outside the realm of possibility.

On the subject of the dagger and Banquo's ghost, however, the debate is up for grabs. Is there actually a dagger? Does the ghost exist? Or are both merely projections of Macbeth's own troubled psyche. Productions have been staged in which there is no image of a dagger seen by the audience and no actor playing Banquo's ghost. In these productions, Macbeth creates his own horror. Is this a more correct choice for the play? No one can say.

This of course leads one to the next, and possibly more important question: "If the dagger and the ghost are not projections of Macbeth's mind, where do they come from?" Are they the work of the witches? Is it heaven or hell attempting to guide Macbeth, or punish him, or madden him?

The answers to these questions all come down to one's interpretation of Shakespeare's central character. Does he exist in a world in which magical events happen? Or is he so tormented by guilt and dread that his mind projects these images? The question of supernatural intervention versus guilt-inspired madness is one of the great mysteries of *Macbeth*, and one of the elements that allow it to be such a mutable play from production to production. It also is one of the reasons the play has remained so popular for more than 400 years.

"WHY DO YOU DRESS ME IN BORROWED ROBES?":

One way to analyze the play is through Shakespeare's use of imagery. A recurring image is that of clothing and how well it fits (or doesn't fit) the title character. When greeted as the new Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth replies: "Why do you dress me in borrowed robes?" A few moments later, when Macbeth is rapt in ambitious thoughts, Banquo observes that:

*New honors come upon him
Like our strange garments cleave not to their mold
But with the aid of use.*

Macbeth initially refuses to murder Duncan, telling his wife:

*I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon.*

Who's Who in *Macbeth*

Duncan— The rightful King of Scotland and father to Malcolm. Murdered by the Macbeths while a guest in their home.

Malcolm— King Duncan's son and the rightful heir to the throne of Scotland. Flees to England after his father's murder.

Macbeth— Thane of Glamis; later, Thane of Cawdor. After murdering King Duncan, Macbeth becomes King of Scotland.

Lady Macbeth— Macbeth's wife and "partner in greatness". She prods Macbeth into the murder of King Duncan.

Banquo— A Scottish nobleman and friend to Macbeth. He is with Macbeth when they meet the Weird Sisters, and their prophecy places his heirs upon the throne.

Fleance— Banquo's young son.

Macduff— A nobleman of Scotland, loyal to the murdered King, who inspires Prince Malcolm to return and fight for his birthright.

Ross— A Scottish nobleman who remains in Scotland after Macduff departs for England.

Lennox— A Scottish nobleman.

Siward— Uncle to Malcolm; general of the English forces.

The Weird Sisters— The three "witches" who predict the futures of Banquo and Macbeth.

These images continue throughout the play, nearly always presenting the image of Macbeth dressed in ill-fitting garments. As Malcolm's forces approach, Macbeth is described with the following passage:

*...now does he feel his title
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
Upon a dwarfish thief.*

All these images seem to direct the reader to view Macbeth as a small man dressed in clothing that is too large for him. Although some productions have gone so far as to interpret this as a direct costume note from the Bard, more likely Shakespeare intended these images in a less literal manner. He presents Macbeth as a man who has forced himself into a position of power for which he is not suited. Some theorists argue that Shakespeare is trying to show the Scottish king as a man too emotionally "small" for the great task of kingly leadership.

HERO OR ANTI-HERO?:

The story of a bad man who commits a crime is not a tragedy, but rather a straightforward tale of evil. *Macbeth* however, is the story of a good man who *becomes* evil. This is his tragedy. When we are first introduced to Macbeth, he is a valiant hero in a war defending his country and his king. When stopped by the weird sisters who inform him of future honors, Macbeth, though tempted by these prophecies, resolves to leave his path to the throne in the hands of Fate.

Lady Macbeth urges her husband to murder Duncan, so that he may gain the throne immediately. Though he considers her suggestions, he acknowledges that what she is suggesting is wrong; a crime against the laws of man, nature, and divinity. He also states that the bloody acts that she would have him do will eventually return on them.

*But in these cases
We still have judgment here, that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which being taught, return
To plague th' inventor.*

When Lady Macbeth presses him further, Macbeth's resolve is weakened and he agrees to "bend up each corporal agent to this terrible feat." Once he kills Duncan, Macbeth is a changed man. This one act transforms him irrevocably from a valiant hero to a cold-blooded assassin; a stranger to himself. Macbeth however, soon becomes accustomed to his new identity. He has killed to get the throne, and his reign becomes a bloodbath in a futile attempt to retain the crown. It is this complete transformation from hero to antihero, not Macbeth's specific deeds, that is the source of real terror in Shakespeare's play. Shakespeare has combined both criminal and hero in his title character, and in doing so explores the potential for evil within each of us.

At the end of the play, numb to feeling, Macbeth distantly remembers the man he once was:

*I have almost forgot the taste of fears.
The time has been my senses would have cooled
To hear a night shriek...
...I have supped full of horrors:
Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
Cannot once start me.*

It is his capacity for self-scrutiny that makes Macbeth a worthy tragic subject. He never lies to himself about the nature of his deeds, and never attempts to rationalize or justify his actions. Aware that he is doomed, he pursues his damnation headlong to his own destruction:

*Though Birnam Wood be come to Dunsinane,
And thou opposed, being of no woman born,
Yet I will try to the last.*

It is only in these last moments of his life that Macbeth defies the prophecies that have guided his choices throughout the play. In this final futile attempt to regain control of his destiny, Macbeth, now a soldier in a battle for his soul, can once again be viewed as a hero in this great tragedy.

A LITTLE TOO TOPICAL?

Royal assassination was on English minds when Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*. Around the time Shakespeare began writing the play, England was rocked by the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot, a plan orchestrated by a group of extreme Catholics intent on ridding England of its Protestant king and his sympathizers. They planned to blow up the Houses of Parliament on the opening day of the legislative session in November 1605.

Had the group succeeded, it would have been a political catastrophe for England and would have almost certainly led to the collapse of the nation. The explosion would have not only killed the King and his heirs but also practically every government official. In our time, this would be equivalent to the simultaneous deaths of the President, his entire cabinet, and every member of Congress and the Supreme Court.

The plan was thwarted however, when Guy Fawkes, the man appointed to ignite the explosives, was caught on the eve of the parliamentary session waiting beneath the House of Lords with a lantern in his hand and several slow-burning matches in his pocket. After Fawkes' arrest, the other conspirators were eventually captured, charged with treason, convicted and hanged. Guy Fawkes Day is still celebrated in Britain every November 5th as a commemoration of the day in 1605 when his plan was foiled and the English government and royal family were saved. If you have seen the movie *V for Vendetta* or read the graphic novel on which it is based, you will be familiar with some of the many references to Guy Fawkes Day in British popular culture, including the rhyme that begins "Remember, remember, the 5th of November..."

When watching *Macbeth*, audiences in Shakespeare's day would have no doubt keenly understood the national turmoil that ensues from Duncan's murder.

THE BEST OF THE BARD

The following phrases and sayings have their origin in *Macbeth*:

"Fair is foul, and foul is fair"

"the milk of human kindness"

"blood will have blood"

"double, double, toil and trouble"

"By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes"

"one fell swoop"

"what's done is done"

"what's done cannot be undone"

THE CURSE OF "THE SCOTTISH PLAY"

Many actors to this day are very superstitious about saying "Macbeth" or quoting from the play in a theatre. Supposedly, this is a guarantee of bad luck (or even deadly mishap).

One popular legend about the origins of the "curse" holds that Shakespeare based his depiction of the witches on actual black magic rituals that he had spied on; even quoting directly from their incantations. While this seems absurd, it is true that theatre lore is replete with tales of disasters large and small that have occurred during or around performances of *Macbeth*.

-In 1849, a bitter rivalry between the American actor Edwin Forrest and the British actor John Macready boiled over into a riot outside the theatre where Macready was appearing in *Macbeth*. Thirty-one people were killed.

-In 1934, a production at London's Old Vic went through four different lead actors in a week: one caught laryngitis, another the flu, and a third was fired.

-The next production at the Old Vic in 1937, starring Laurence Olivier, had its director nearly die in a taxi accident, its star narrowly dodge a falling sandbag, and its opening night delayed when the set could not be made to fit on the stage. Shortly thereafter the founder of the theatre, Lillian Bayliss, died suddenly.

-Eighteen years later, the Old Vic was holding opening night for yet another *Macbeth* when the portrait of Bayliss in the lobby fell from the wall and shattered.

-1938 production at The RSC in Stratford saw an old man run over by his own car in the parking lot, the actress playing Lady Macbeth's car crashing through a storefront, and Macduff falling off a horse.

While these spooky stories have a certain mystique, more practical-minded persons might argue that many of the injuries and illnesses associated with the "curse" could have a more prosaic explanation. The leading role is a grueling one in a play that builds with headlong momentum toward a climactic swordfight. Most productions since Shakespeare's time have been dimly lit to create an eerie atmosphere and often employ fog, fire, and other potential hazards. With this in mind, it's a bit easier to understand why *Macbeth* may have more than its share of onstage and backstage accidents.

*Source: "The Friendly Shakespeare" by Norrie Epstein

Sources and History of the Play

Shakespeare's primary source for *Macbeth* was the 1587 second edition of Raphael Holinshed's extensive and massively popular *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*. This collection of oral history and popular legend was one of the best-selling books of Shakespeare's day and a source for many playwrights and poets.

Holinshed's account of 11th-century Scottish history depicts Duncan as a weak king, whose murder by Macbeth was a popular coup carried out with the support of Banquo and many other Scottish chieftains. Shakespeare departed from this account not only because his new king was a descendant of Banquo, but also to create a taut tragedy in which the lines between good and evil are more clearly drawn. The prophecy of three witches features in Holinshed, who solemnly assures his readers that "everything came to pass as they had spoken." Another tale in the Scottish section of Holinshed, that of the murder of King Duff, was used by Shakespeare in creating the character of Lady Macbeth, who urges her husband to murder a guest in their home.

It is assumed because of the subject matter that the play was performed around 1606 at court for King James, who had himself authored a book on witches. The play was certainly performed again at the Globe in 1611, but was not printed until 1623 as part of the First Folio. There are many questions about this text—the fact that *Macbeth* is so much shorter than any other Shakespearean tragedy has caused some to speculate that sections are missing from the Folio text, while other passages, such as the Hecate scene, seem almost certainly to have been added at some point by another writer.

In the 1660s when the public theatres reopened, *Macbeth* was revised by Sir William Davenant as a baroque opera, complete with singing, dancing witches. This version remained popular through the mid-

18th century when David Garrick, and later J.P. Kemble, returned to Shakespeare's text and the psychological journey of its main characters.

Since the middle of the 20th century, *Macbeth* has been perhaps the most widely-read and widely-adapted of Shakespeare's tragedies. One remarkable production was staged in 1936 by Harlem's Negro Theater Project, directed by a then-20-year-old unknown named Orson Welles. The production set the play in 19th-century Haiti, complete with all the trappings of voodoo. Known to this day as "The Voodoo Macbeth," the production was accompanied by unprecedented publicity. On opening night, more than 10,000 people stood in line on Seventh Avenue hoping to get scalped tickets and disrupting traffic for ten blocks.

Another director who made his name in the world of film, Ingmar Bergman, directed a 1948 production whose principal scenic element was a huge tree in whose branches the witches cavorted and from which human corpses and cattle carcasses swung. The eerie, violent world of *Macbeth* seems to cast a particular spell over filmmakers. In 1957, Akira Kurosawa adapted the play in his film *Throne of Blood*, transporting the story to medieval Japan, with the principal characters depicted as Samurai warriors. Roman Polanski's 1971 film retained the medieval Scottish setting, but amped up the violence and sexuality of the play. Other film adaptations have included *Men of Respect* (1991), in which Macbeth is a Mafia hitman, Mike Battaglia (played by John Turturro), and *Scotland, PA* (2001) in which Macbeth is a disgruntled employee at a small-town diner, Duncan's Cafe, pursued by cop Lieutenant McDuff (played by Christopher Walken) after he murders his boss and takes ownership of the restaurant. *Macbeth* continues to be a staple of theatres around the world, and the roles of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth remain among the most prestigious and coveted for actors.



Malcolm is named Prince of Cumberland in the 2023 Shakespeare LIVE! touring production of MACBETH. Photo: Sarah Haley

Commentary & Criticism

“*Macbeth* is a tale told by a genius, full of soundness and fury, and signifying many things.”

James Thurber

“In the world of *Macbeth* there is no margin left for love, or friendship; not even for desire... Lust, too, has been poisoned with the thought of murder.”

Jan Kott

Shakespeare Our Contemporary

“*Macbeth* is a play about the eclipse of evil; when it ends, virtue and justice are restored, the time is free, the ‘weal’ once more made gentle.”

Frank Kermode



Lady Macbeth sleepwalks as the Gentlewoman and the Doctor watch in the 2023 Shakespeare LIVE! touring production of *MACBETH*. Photo: Sarah Haley.



Macduff in the 2023 Shakespeare LIVE! touring production of *MACBETH*. Photo: Sarah Haley.

“It is certainly indicative that there are only two plays in which the word ‘love’ occurs so seldom as in *Macbeth*, and no play in which ‘fear’ occurs so often; indeed, it occurs twice or thrice as often as in most other plays”

Caroline Spurgeon

Shakespeare’s Imagery

“‘Fair is foul, and foul is fair,’ say the witches. In their world, nonhuman and antihuman, everything is equivocal — literally double-voiced... The word ‘double,’ too, is a sign of equivocation, of the fatal split in *Macbeth*, appearing again and again throughout the play, eleven times in all, always in negative connotations.”

Marjorie Garber

Shakespeare After All

“The play is less about legitimacy and usurpation than about the divided self... The drama of *Macbeth* is really a matter between Macbeth and his ambition, Macbeth and the witches and his wife and his hallucinations and his own tortured soul, the drama of prophecies and riddles, and how he understands them, and what he decides to do about them, and how they, in themselves, constitute retribution.”

Stephen Orgel

Introduction to the Pelican edition of Macbeth

Shakespeare's Common Tongue

alack — expression of dismay or shock
anon — soon, right away
ought — nothing
avaunt — go away
ere — before
hath — has
hence — away (from here)
henceforth — from now on
hither — here
lest — or else
naught — nothing
oft — often
perchance — by chance, perhaps, maybe
sirrah — [pronounced SEER-uh] “hey, you” as to someone of lower status
thee — you
thence — away, over there
thine — yours
thither — there
thou — you
thy — your
whence — where
wherefore — why [literally: “where is the ‘for’ or ‘reason?’”]
whither — where

... and the “thys” have it

Often Shakespeare will alternate his usage of “thou” for “you”, or “thy” for “your”, or “thine” for “yours”. Though the words are synonymous, there is a great deal of information that can be obtained by looking closely at these choices.

The different uses of these pronouns have to do with status, relationship, degrees of intimacy, and shifting attitudes. “You” is used in formal situations and conveys respect from the speaker. It is used when addressing royalty and parents. “Thou,” used in more informal settings, also can suggest contempt or aggression from the speaker. The use of “thou” places the speaker above the status of the person to whom s/he is speaking. Children are addressed using “thou,” “thee” or “thy.” In a conversation between two people of equal status, the use of “you” suggests that everything is going along smoothly, whereas “thou” would suggest that there is some kind of upset or unrest in the relationship.

Terms and Phrases Found in *Macbeth*

ACT I

thrice- three times
hurlyburly- battle, chaos
unseamed him from the knave to the chops- cut him open from his navel to his jaw
corporal- of or relating to the body
compunctious- anxiety arising from guilt
dunest- darkest
trammel- confine in a net
surcease- completion; in this case, Duncan's death
shoal- shallow

ACT II

knell- a stroke of a bell for a death or disaster
anointed- made sacred by the application of holy oil

ACT III

indissoluble- cannot be dissolved or undone
sundry- several, diverse, various
gory locks- blood and gore soaked hair
augur- prediction
beldams- hags
Pit of Acheron- a river in Hell in classic mythology

ACT IV

brinded- strictly ‘tawny with bars of another color’ as describing a striped cat

harpier- possibly a harpy, a mythical bird-woman who symbolized vengeance
entrails- intestines
fenny snake- snake which inhabits fens or marshlands
howlet- owl or small owl
farrow- a litter of pigs
gibbet- a wooden frame with two posts from which people are hung to the death
harp'd- struck the right note; guessed
pernicious- very destructive; deadly

ACT V

mated- overcome, bewildered
Seyton- Macbeth's armorer; also a possible pun on “Satan”
skirr- run rapidly over, scour
physic- medicine
bane- violent death, destruction
hew- to cut or fell with blows
ague- a fever with recurrent chills and sweating
cow'd- made to feel fear
painted upon a pole- likeness painted on a pole as an advertisement, as in a sideshow.

What Did He Say?

This is an opportunity to test your comprehension of Shakespeare's language. Below you will find passages from *Macbeth*. Answer the questions for each passage as specifically as possible.

LADY MACBETH

Your face, my Thane, is as a book, where men
May read strange matters. To beguile the time,
Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue: look like th'innocent flower,
But be the serpent under't. He that's coming
Must be provided for; and you shall put
This night's great business into my dispatch;
Which shall to all our nights and days to come
Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom.

1. To whom is Lady Macbeth speaking?
2. At what point in the play does this speech occur?
3. What does she mean by the metaphor of being the serpent under the flower?
4. Who is coming that "must be provided for"?
5. What is "this night's great business"?
6. What does she mean by the final two lines? Does she believe that their actions will lead to success or failure?

MACBETH

If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly: if th'assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success; that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
But here, upon the bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come. —But in these cases,
We still have judgment here; that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague th'inventor.

1. To whom is Macbeth speaking?
2. What does he hope is "done quickly"?
3. Define "trammel up" and "surcease."
4. In the first half of this speech, do you believe that Macbeth will perform the action he is discussing? Why or why not?
5. What is the "judgment" of which Macbeth speaks?
6. What does he mean by "bloody instructions," and how will they "return to plague th'inventor"?

Who Said That?

Match the spoken line to the character who speaks it. Three characters have two quotes each. Five characters have none of the quotes listed below.

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| A. "Out damned spot. Out I say." | BANQUO |
| B. "If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly." | DONALBAIN |
| C. "The raven himself is hoarse,
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements." | DUNCAN |
| D. "Thou hast it now, King, Cawdor, Glamis, all,
As the Weird Women promis'd; and I fear,
Thou play'dst most foully for 't." | FLEANCE |
| E. "I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on t'other." | LADY MACBETH |
| F. "Let us rather
Hold fast the mortal sword, and like good men
Bestride our downfall birthdom." | LADY MACDUFF |
| G. "Cousins, I hope the days are near at hand,
That chambers will be safe." | LENNOX |
| H. "We'll have thee as our rarer monsters are,
Painted upon a pole, and underwrit,
'Here may you see the tyrant.' " | MACBETH |
| I. "He was a gentleman on whom I built
An absolute trust." | MACDUFF |
| | MALCOLM |
| | MURDERER |
| | ROSS |
| | THE WITCHES |

Topics for Discussion

ABOUT THE PLAY

1. Is Macbeth forced to do what he does by fate and destiny, or is he driven by his own ambition? Does Macbeth have a choice to say “no” to the witches’ prophecies? Do both fate *and* ambition play a factor in his decisions? How? What role does Lady Macbeth play in Macbeth’s decision to speed his destiny? How do your answers affect the overall interpretation of the play?
2. Does Macbeth have any honest remorse or regret for what he has done? If so, what lines in Shakespeare’s play present this side of the protagonist? Does Macbeth ever defy his destiny? When? What does this say about him?
3. Compare the contrasting character progressions of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Do they grow stronger by their actions or weaker? How do the dynamics of their relationship change through the course of the play?
4. Is Macbeth inherently evil or does he become evil as the play progresses? What lines in the play support your answer? What does this say about Shakespeare’s view of the potential for evil and corruption in mankind?
5. The witches announce many predictions, but never say how or when they will come true. Is there any other way that these predictions could have come to pass? For example, does the prediction that Macbeth will become king necessitate his murder of Duncan? In your opinion, are the witches passive observers of events, or do they deliberately manipulate and bring about the actions of Macbeth and others?

ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

1. In this production, eight actors play about two dozen different roles. How do the actors and the director manage to differentiate between these different characters? How did the costumes help you identify specific characters? Be specific.
2. Discuss the use of sound in this production. How does the aural landscape of the play assist in the story-telling? Cite specific moments in the play which were punctuated by the use of sound or music. How would the play be different if the sound were of a different style?
3. The director and designers have set this production in a dark and rotting world; neither future nor past. Why do you think this decision was made? How do the scenic, costume, and sound designs contribute to the production? What materials were used to create the set? How do these relate to the materials used in the costumes?
4. Discuss the witches in this production. How are they costumed? How do they move? How do they sound? Are they passive observers, or active participants in the action of the play? Be specific.



Malcolm (right) with Macduff and Siward plan their attack in the 2023 Shakespeare LIVE! touring production of MACBETH.
Photo: Sarah Haley.

“Test Your Understanding” Quiz

- Shakespeare’s plays are most often written in –
 - rhyming couplets.
 - old English.
 - blank verse.
 - prose.
- When we first meet Macbeth, he already holds which title?
 - King of Scotland
 - Thane of Glamis
 - Governor of Inverness
 - World’s Strongest Man
- The three Weird Sisters promise that Macbeth will be King, what do they promise Banquo?
 - a beautiful family
 - eternal life
 - he will “get kings”
 - all the money in the world
- Who does Duncan proclaim to be his successor by dubbing him “The Prince of Cumberland”?
 - The Thane of Cawdor
 - Macduff
 - Malcolm
 - Donalbain
- When we first meet Lady Macbeth, she is reading a letter. What does the letter describe?
 - a detailed plot to kill the King
 - the dinner preparations for Duncan’s great feast
 - the battle between Macbeth and Macdonwald
 - Macbeth’s encounter with the Weird Sisters
- After reading the letter, a servant delivers information to Lady Macbeth. What is it?
 - The Macduffs have been murdered
 - Duncan is on his way to her castle
 - Duncan is dead
 - Her husband is dead
- Shakespeare never refers to the three beings who speak to Macbeth as “witches”; rather, he calls them the “Weird Sisters”, which some believe is a play on the word “wyrd”. What does “wyrd” mean?
 - bizarre
 - fate
 - deadly
 - ancient
- What does Macbeth see just prior to the murder of Duncan?
 - a talking wolf
 - a floating dagger
 - a weeping Angel
 - a miniature demon
- In what language did Shakespeare write his plays?
 - Old English
 - Middle English
 - Gaelic
 - Early Modern English
- Who flees Scotland after Duncan’s murder, because he’s worried about being accused of the crime or murdered himself?
 - Macduff
 - Malcolm
 - Ross
 - Banquo
- To protect his position as King, Macbeth orders multiple murders. Who’s murder (or attempted murder) is not ordered by Macbeth?
 - Banquo
 - Fleance
 - Lady Macbeth
 - The Macduffs
- What disturbing sight does Macbeth see during the banquet?
 - Banquo’s ghost
 - rotten meat
 - a bloody dagger
 - the catering bill
- What news does Ross deliver to Macduff during Macduff’s visit to England?
 - his family has been murdered by Macbeth
 - his wife is leaving him
 - Macbeth is dead
 - Lady Macbeth has killed herself
- What does Lady Macbeth compulsively attempt to remove during the sleepwalking scene?
 - imaginary blood
 - muddy footprints
 - graffiti
 - old paint
- Macbeth’s self-perceived invincibility comes from the Weird Sisters telling him _____?
 - that he possesses “Tarquins ravishing stride”
 - that his enemy was “an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing”
 - that “fair is foul and foul is fair”
 - that “none of women-born” shall harm him

Follow-up Activities

CRITICS' CORNER:

Write a review of this production of *Macbeth*. Be sure to include specific information and your own reactions to both the acting and the design elements (like set and costumes). Explain what you liked about the production and what you disliked. Support your opinions. Then submit your review to The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's Education Department, or see if it can be published in your school newspaper.

"ALERT THE MEDIA!"

Big events are afoot in the course of *Macbeth*: one foreign invasion is defeated, another succeeds, a king is murdered, his son flees the country under suspicion of the deed— not to mention the cannibalistic horses and other spooky signs reported the night Duncan was murdered. Assign the big events of the play to members of the class and create appropriate television, newspaper, or online coverage.

"I LEARN BY THIS LETTER..."

Write a letter or diary entry from the point of view of one of the characters, discussing an event or situation in the play. For example, the (unheard) first half of the letter which Macbeth sends to Lady Macbeth after encountering the witches, a letter from Macduff to his wife on his way to England, a letter from Banquo to Fleance after encountering the witches, or Lady Macbeth's diary entries before and after becoming queen.

THE FIFTEEN-MINUTE MACBETH:

Divide into five groups, and have each group take one act of the play. Your task is to create a three-minute version of your act, using only Shakespeare's words. Choose carefully the lines from your act that carry the most important information and advance the story. When each group is done, you will have a 15-minute version of *Macbeth* which you can perform for one another. Afterwards, discuss both the process of adaptation and how your "abridgement" compared to the slightly longer version by Shakespeare LIVE!

HE SAID/SHE SAID/THEY SAID:

Choose one of the scenes from the play that has both male and female characters and act it out in class three times: once with an all-male cast, once with an all-female cast, and once with the roles assigned according to gender. How does it affect the scene? Discuss this in light of the fact that, in Shakespeare's time, Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff (as well as the witches) would have been played by boys or men.

PLAY/PAUSE/REWIND:

Play/Pause/Rewind. Available versions of *Macbeth* on video include the 1960 Hallmark Hall of Fame film, the 1971 Roman Polanski film, the 1978 RSC production starring Ian McKellen and Judi Dench, Michael Bogdanov's 1998 British television version and Patrick Stewart's 2010 Stage Version. Choose two versions of the same scene, such as Macbeth and Banquo's encounter with the witches, and show each to the students, asking them to observe how the actors in each production speak, interpret and move to the language. Make liberal use of the pause button to stop and ask specific questions, then rewind and let them watch the entire scene through uninterrupted. How are the scenes different? How are they similar?

BOOK A WORKSHOP WITH US:

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey has workshops available in conjunction with all of our touring productions. In a "Speak the Speech" workshop, members of the Shakespeare LIVE! company will lead your students through a series of exercises and activities designed to empower your students by taking the mystery and stigma out of Shakespeare's words. For more information about our other Education Department programs, please give us a call at 973.845.6742.

TEACHERS

Do you have activities or exercises to suggest for this play? We are always looking for new ideas to inspire students (and teachers). Send your suggestions to education@ShakespeareNJ.org, and we will share them with other teachers, or maybe even include them in future study guides.

Sources for this Study Guide

THE ANNOTATED SHAKESPEARE, Introductions, Notes, and Bibliography by A.L Rowe

THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE: MACBETH, edited by Kenneth Muir

ASIMOV'S GUIDE TO SHAKESPEARE by Isaac Asimov

THE COMPLETE IDIOT'S GUIDE TO SHAKESPEARE, by Laurie Rozakis

FREEING SHAKESPEARE'S VOICE by Kristin Linklater

THE FRIENDLY SHAKESPEARE by Norrie Epstein

THE MIRACLE OF LANGUAGE by Richard Lederer

THE NEW CAMBRIDGE SHAKESPEARE: MACBETH, edited by A.R. Braunmuller

THE PELICAN SHAKESPEARE: MACBETH, edited by Stephen Orgel

SHAKESPEARE A TO Z by Charles Boyce

SHAKESPEARE AFTER ALL, by Marjorie Garber

SHAKESPEARE FOR BEGINNERS by Brandon Toropov

SHAKESPEARE FOR DUMMIES by Doyle, Lischner, and Dench

SHAKESPEARE'S IMAGERY by Caroline Spurgeon

SHAKESPEARE IN PERFORMANCE, Consultant Editors Keith Parsons and Pamela Mason

SHAKESPEARE: THE INVENTION OF THE HUMAN by Harold Bloom

SHAKESPEARE OUR CONTEMPORARY by Jan Kott

THEATRE: A WAY OF SEEING, Third Edition by Milly S. Barranger

THE ESSENTIAL SHAKESPEARE HANDBOOK, by Leslie Dunton-Downer and Alan Riding

SHAKESPEARE SET FREE, edited by Peggy O'Brien

SHAKING HANDS WITH SHAKESPEARE, by Alison Wedell Schumacher



Macbeth visits the Weird Sisters and hears from three apparitions in the 2023 Shakespeare LIVE! touring production of MACBETH. Photo: Sarah Haley.

ANSWER KEYS

“Test Your Understanding”
 Quiz Answer Guide
 1. C 2. B 3. C
 4. C 5. D 6. B
 7. B 8. B 9. D
 10. B 11. C 12. A
 13. A 14. A 15. D

“Who Said That?” Answer Key

A. Lady Macbeth
 B. Macbeth
 C. Lady Macbeth
 D. Banquo
 E. Macbeth
 F. Macduff
 G. Malcolm
 H. Macduff
 I. Duncan



Macbeth and Banquo are visited by the Weird Sisters in the 2023 Shakespeare LIVE! touring production of MACBETH. Photo: Sarah Haley.



Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are observed by the Weird Sisters in the 2023 Shakespeare LIVE! touring production of MACBETH. Photo: Sarah Haley.

About The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey

Our Mission

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's mission is two-fold: to bring new, relevant life to the world's classics for a diverse audience; and to use those masterworks to provide transformative experiences on stage and in classrooms. As a teaching theatre, the company is dedicated to using the classics as interdisciplinary teaching tools for artist training and arts education.

A Brief History

Founded in 1963 by Paul Barry and Philip Dorian, The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is one of the oldest and most prestigious classical theatres in the nation, serving approximately 75,000 children and adults annually. The longest-running Shakespeare theatre on the East Coast, the company marks its 60th season in 2022.

Designated a Major Arts Institution by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, the company is a member of the New Jersey Theatre Alliance, the statewide association of professional theatres; and a member of ArtPride New Jersey, the Shakespeare Theatre Association, and the Madison Arts and Culture Alliance.

For six decades, The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey has worked tirelessly to preserve dramatic masterworks, contribute to the vitality of our community, and serve the unique needs of artists, students, and members of the general public. We advocate for the public value of the arts in everything we do and endeavor to relay the message that the classics are relevant and meaningful for everyone. As we continue to celebrate our artistic distinction and the massive impact we have had in the education arena, we are mindful of the responsibilities that come with our longevity and status in the community, and we'll continue to strive for excellence in all of our programming.

Each year we present five to six productions on our Main Stage, the F. M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre, located on the bucolic campus of Drew University in Madison, and each summer we offer an additional production at our Outdoor Stage, the Greek Theatre at St. Elizabeth University in neighboring Florham Park. The company is also a preeminent provider of theatre education programs in New Jersey, offering numerous distinct opportunities that serve students, teachers, emerging artists, and members of the general public; all promote literacy, community, collaboration, creativity, and cultural advancement.



ShakespeareNJ.org

The Thomas H. Kean Theatre Factory: 3 Vreeland Road, Florham Park, NJ 07932

**The F.M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre: 36 Madison Avenue, Madison, NJ 07940
on the campus of Drew University**