

Macbeth

Pre-reading and Research

King James, who ruled England and for whom Shakespeare wrote Macbeth, visited Denmark, a country familiar with witch-hunts. What he saw sparked an interest in the study of witchcraft,^[43] which he considered a branch of theology.^[44] King James attended the North Berwick witch trials, the first major persecution of witches in Scotland under the Witchcraft Act 1563. Several people were convicted of using witchcraft to send storms against James's ship, most notably Agnes Sampson.

<https://www.biography.com/news/real-witches-in-history>

<http://time.com/4219953/true-history-the-witch/>

Comprehension Questions

Act I, scene i

- 1. What mood does Shakespeare create? How does he create the impression that the witches are not human?**
2. Explain the possible significance of the last line, "Fair is foul and foul is fair."

Act I, scene ii

- 3. What does the Captain report about the battle to King Duncan? Why is this important to establishing Macbeth as a hero?**
4. In a paragraph with 3-4 short quotations, explain how this scene makes war (and Macbeth) look horrific.
- 5. Although Macbeth does not appear in this scene, the audience learns a great deal about him from the captain and from Ross. What impressions does the audience get? Why is this impression an important aspect in the building of a tragic character?**

Act I, scene iii

- 6. How do the witches greet Macbeth after the battle? Describe Macbeth and Banquo's reaction to meeting them. Does their reaction change at all over the course of their interaction? What vice or weakness of Macbeth might the witches be exploiting?**

7. By the end of the scene, Macbeth decides not to kill King Duncan (lines 158-159). What does his speech reveal about his character? If he's a hero, why is this aspect of his character important to establish early in the play?

Act I, scene iv

8. Duncan appears to be a kind and generous King; however, he can be seen as having at least one major shortcoming. What is it? Provide evidence to support your point.

9. What imagery does King Duncan use when he is praising Macbeth and Banquo? What does this tell us about Duncan?

Act I, scene v

10. The opening sentence in Macbeth's letter makes it very clear how he feels about the Weird Sisters (witches). What is his opinion of them? Why?

11. Lady Macbeth provides the audience with more information about her husband's character. What does she say and what does it contradict? Explain who we should trust.

12. One of the major themes in Macbeth is the conflict between appearance and reality. The Weird Sisters introduce this theme when they state in scene i, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair". In review of the previous scenes; if possible, list five examples of the deceptive nature of appearances. (*Focus on this scene in particular*)

Act I, scene vi

13. The opening dialogue between King Duncan and Banquo depends on dramatic irony for its full effect. Explain.

14. Describe Lady Macbeth's welcoming of King Duncan. What effect does she create? What kinds of imagery does her speech use?

Act I, scene vii

15. In the opening soliloquy, Macbeth offers numerous reasons why it would be wrong to kill King Duncan. Paraphrase this speech into your own words and decide whether his feelings support his wife's or the soldier's claims about him.

16. Lady Macbeth uses powerful language in her attempt to deal with Macbeth's wavering. Does she ever rhyme like the witches did? Explain three arguments Lady Macbeth uses to persuade her husband to go through with the plan.

17. What does this scene reflect sexist attitudes and what quality does it associate with Lady Macbeth?

18. How do the last few lines of this scene echo the last words used in I.i?

Macbeth Act II Comprehension Questions

Scene i

19. What evidence is there that Banquo is suspicious of Macbeth?

Scene ii

20. What evidence is there that Lady Macbeth is not as strong as she would like be?

21. Try to explain why Shakespeare chooses to have Duncan's murder happen off stage.

22. Identify and explain the meaning of two images Shakespeare uses to emphasize the depth of Macbeth's guilt.

Scene iii

23. How does Lennox describe the night?

24. How does Macbeth justify killing Duncan's guards? Why did he really kill them? Was it heroic or courageous? Explain.

25. Lady Macbeth takes centre stage twice in this scene. How does she do so and what is the purpose of each example?

26. Explain the reasons for the choices made by Malcom and Donalbain at the end of this scene.

Scene iv

27. Macduff refuses to go to Scone to see Macbeth crowned. What reasons do you think he has for his decision? What are your first impressions of Macduff (use this scene and previous the previous one)?

Macbeth
Act III Comprehension Questions

Act III, scene i

28. Paraphrase Banquo's opening soliloquy. What does this speech reveal about his character?
29. Identify all of the reasons that Macbeth offers as to why Banquo must be killed.
30. Compare Macbeth's role and demeanor in planning Banquo's murder to the same elements of King Duncan's murder. How is Macbeth changing?

Act III, scene ii

31. Are the Macbeths content with having attained the crown? What evidence exists for your answer and why would Shakespeare suggest that even a kingdom isn't enough for traitors.

32. How does the Macbeth's relationship appear to have changed?

Act III, scene iii

33. Why is Fleance's escape from the murderers fateful?

Act III, scene iv

34. In what way(s) does this scene mark the beginning of Macbeth's downfall?

Act III, scene v

35. Why does Hecate call Macbeth a "wayward son" and according to Hecate, what will be the method used by the witches to cause Macbeth's downfall?

Act III, scene vi

36. Take a closer look at the dialogue between Lennox and another Lord. What evidence is there in the speeches that would suggest a sarcastic tone?
37. What information does the Lord reveal concerning Macduff and Macbeth?

Macbeth
Act IV Comprehension Questions

Act IV, scene i

38. Explain the irony (for Shakespeare's Christian audience) of the witches' statement that "Something wicked this way comes".

39a. Summarize the 3 apparitions. What effect does each one have on Macbeth? How do any of these effects confirm the message of Hecate's speech in III.v?

39b. King James wrote this in his book, *Basilikon Doron*: "Take no heed to any of your dreams, for all prophecies, visions, and prophetic dreams are accomplished and ceased in Christ: And therefore take no heed to fret either in dreams, or any other things; for that error proceedeth of ignorance, and is unworthy of a Christian, who should be assured..." Explain how this quotation relates to Macbeth's behavior and how that behavior on stage confirms King James' belief about visions.

Act IV, scene ii

40a. In what significant ways does the murder of Macduff's family differ from Macbeth's previous crimes?

40b. Since Macbeth is worried about treason against him, a traitor, how do these murders serve to caution King James I?

Act IV, scene iii

41. Is Malcolm testing Macduff's loyalty by lying or by telling the horrible truth about himself?

42. What is Malcolm's advice to Macduff upon receiving the news of his family's murder? Does Malcolm show any sympathy? Is he interested in peace? Comment on his character.

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Act V Comprehension Questions

Act V, scene i

43. Why is the Gentlewoman reluctant to repeat what she has heard the sleep-walking Lady Macbeth say?

44. What is ironic about Lady Macbeth's state of mind?

Act V, scene ii

45. How does the news discussed in this scene serve to further explain the reasons behind Macbeth's downfall?

Act V, scene iii

46. What is the tone of Macbeth's first lines in this scene? At what point and in what way does this tone shift?

47. What request does Macbeth make to the doctor regarding Lady Macbeth? How does he use medical imagery to suggest a parallel between her condition and his own?

Act V, scene iv

48. Why is it significant that Malcolm orders the English troops to cut down trees to use for disguise?

Act V, scene v

49. What is Macbeth's reaction to his wife's suicide? How does Shakespeare employ a theatrical metaphor to convey Macbeth's view of life following this event?

50. What news quickly changes Macbeth's emotions? What mood does this scene end with?

Act V, scene vi

None

Act V, scene vii

None

Act V, scene viii

51. How does Macbeth's attitude change when he learns of Macduff's "unnatural" birth? What is the significance of this cause and effect?

52. In what ways does Malcolm's speech exhibit "kingly" qualities?

53. What future event is mentioned at the end of Malcolm's speech? How does the promise of this event resolve the various conflicts and problems of the play?