

Macbeth Comprehension Questions

ACT ONE

Scene One

1. What **mood/atmosphere** is established at the beginning of the play? How?
2. Who do the witches plan to meet after the battle?
3. What is the **dramatic purpose** of this scene? Explain.

Scene Two

1. What qualities of (a) Duncan's character, and (b) Malcolm's character are brought out in their first appearance in the play? Provide textual support for your answer.
2. What news is brought to King Duncan by the captain and Ross? What is his reaction to the news about the Thane of Cawdor?
3. How does scene two introduce the absent Macbeth? Provide textual proof.

Scene Three

1. What prophecies are given by the witches to Macbeth and Banquo?
2. How could Banquo be "lesser than Macbeth and much greater" and "not so happy, yet much happier"? Explain. What **term** could be used to describe these phrases?
3. What examples are there of **dramatic irony** in this scene? Explain.
4. What qualities of Macbeth's character are brought out in his first soliloquy?

Scene Four

1. How does the Thane of Cawdor die? How had King Duncan always felt about Cawdor? What does this say about Duncan's **character**?
2. Of what **significance** are the following:
 - (a) Duncan's naming Malcolm his successor?
 - (b) Duncan's decision to visit Inverness?
3. Identify and explain two examples of **dramatic irony** in this scene.

Scene Five

1. How was Lady Macbeth advised of the witches' prophecies?
2. What **purpose** is served by Lady Macbeth's invocation of the powers of evil and darkness?
3. How is Lady Macbeth **characterized** in this scene? Explain providing examples.

Scene Six

1. How is a peaceful atmosphere created at the beginning of this scene? How does this add **pathos**?
2. What is **ironic** about the conversation between Lady Macbeth and Duncan?
3. What **qualities** does Lady Macbeth exhibit in this scene? Provide examples.

Scene Seven

1. Summarize Macbeth's long soliloquy at the beginning of the scene. How does it (a) create sympathy for him; (b) destroy sympathy for him?
2. What taunts are used by Lady Macbeth to spur Macbeth on to commit the crime?
3. What plan has Lady Macbeth formulated for Duncan's demise?
4. What is Lady Macbeth's **function** in this scene? Explain.
5. How is Lady Macbeth both admirable and despicable in this scene?

Macbeth Comprehension Questions

ACT TWO

Scene One

1. What evidence is there in the text that;
 - (a) Banquo has been tempted by the prophecy made to him?
 - (b) Banquo is trying to resist this temptation?
2. How does the dagger soliloquy **create atmosphere, advance the plot, and reveal character**?

Scene Two

1. How does Lady Macbeth save the situation in this scene? Explain.
2. Show that Macbeth's imagination and conscience are both active in this scene.
3. Provide examples of a **pun, metaphor, and onomatopoeia**. Explain how Shakespeare uses each of these to create atmosphere.
4. What is the **dramatic purpose** of this scene?

Scene Three

1. What purposes are served by the episode involving the porter?
2. Why did Macbeth murder the grooms? In what ways was this wise? In what ways was it foolish?
3. Provide reasons for thinking Lady Macbeth's faint was (a) genuine, (b) feigned. What effect would each have on your opinion of her?
4. What **roles** do Banquo and Macduff play in this scene? Explain providing examples.

Scene Four

1. How successful has Macbeth been in the achievement of his ambition? Support your response with examples.
2. What details are used to reveal the unnatural aspects of the murder?
3. What purpose is served by the Old Man?
4. What information is provided about the following characters?
 - (a) Macduff
 - (b) Duncan
 - (c) Malcolm
 - (d) Donalbain
 - (e) Ross

Act Two Response

Who was more responsible for the murder of King Duncan, Macbeth or Lady Macbeth? Argue your position using examples and quotations from the play. Use proper paragraph format.

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ACT THREE

Scene One

1. How does Macbeth react to success? Explain, citing specific examples from the play.
2. What evidence is there in this scene that Banquo suspects Macbeth of the murder of Duncan? Be specific.
3. Refer to Macbeth's soliloquy (approx. III.i.48-72) and summarize his reasons for wanting Banquo murdered.
4. How are Macbeth's plans for the second murder different from those made for the first one? What does this indicate about Macbeth's character? Explain.
5. Why are the murderers prepared to carry out Macbeth's wishes?

Scene Two

1. Does Lady Macbeth appear to be enjoying her new position? Explain.
2. Illustrate how the relationship between Macbeth and his wife has altered by referring to specific examples from the text.
3. What evidence is there of Macbeth's growing ruthlessness and his tormented conscience?
4. What does the darkness and the night symbolize in the scene / play? Explain providing specific examples.

Scene Three

1. Explain how the murder of Banquo could be considered the crisis of the play.
2. Who is the third murderer? What is the purpose of the third murderer? Provide support for your opinion.
3. What is the significance of Fleance's escape? Consider the effects on plot and characters.
4. To what extent did Banquo deserve the death that befell him? Support your response with textual evidence.
5. Outline the similarities and differences between the murder of Banquo and King Duncan. Which do you regard as the greater crime of Macbeth? Why?

Scene Four

1. What is the significance of Banquo's ghost? What arguments can be used to support the idea that Banquo's ghost is the crisis / turning point in the play?
2. What arguments and methods are used by Lady Macbeth to try to restore Macbeth to normality?
3. Explain the significance of the following:
 - (a) Macbeth's thought turn at this time to Macduff.
 - (b) He is determined to seek out the weird sisters.

Scene Five

1. What details in this scene link it with what has happened before in the play and what may happen later in the play?
2. What is revealed about the conditions of Scotland?

Scene Six

1. What information is the audience given about the following characters:
 - (a) Malcolm?
 - (b) Macduff?
 - (c) Edward the Confessor?
 - (d) Siward?
2. Explain how this scene provides an effective conclusion to Act 3. What is its dramatic purpose?

Macbeth Comprehension Questions

ACT FOUR

Scene One

1. Explain why the witches' chant is given in such detail.
2. What do each of the Apparitions represent? State the prediction given by each. Explain the paradox of the Apparitions.
3. Describe "Banquo's revenge". What is the effect on Macbeth?
4. What evidence is there of the degeneration of Macbeth's character in this scene?

Scene Two

1. Characterize Lady Macduff as she appears in this scene. Provide examples to support your opinions.
2. What dramatic purpose is served by Ross and the nameless messenger?
3. Why may the third great crime be considered the worst? What does it prove about Macbeth?
4. Illustrate the following devices that are exemplified in this scene:
(a) suspense (b) dramatic irony (c) pathos (d) humour (e) antithesis

Scene Three

1. What dramatic elements emerge at the beginning of this scene?
2. From this scene, provide evidence of Malcolm's high moral standard.
3. Of what vices does Malcolm accuse himself?
4. What qualities does Malcolm eventually state he possesses?
5. What information does Ross have for Macduff? Of what dramatic importance is the testing of Macduff?
6. What contrasts are implied between Macbeth and Edward the Confessor?
7. Why does Shakespeare choose to make Macduff rather than Malcolm the agent of nemesis? Explain.

Macbeth Comprehension Questions

ACT FIVE

Scene One

1. How does Shakespeare seek to create sympathy for Lady Macbeth?
2. Of what importance are the Doctor and the Gentlewoman? Explain.
3. Compare Lady Macbeth's first appearance in the play with her appearance in this latest scene.
4. Describe the rituals of Lady Macbeth's disorder.
5. What is the Doctor's 'prescription'? What would a modern doctor prescribe? Explain your choice.
6. Analyze the meaning of Lady Macbeth's action of washing her hands. What does it symbolize? How is it ironic?

Scene Two

1. Why is it significant that Macbeth is now referred to as a tyrant?
2. What does the audience learn of Macbeth and his plans?
3. How does this scene suggest the growing isolation of Macbeth and the solidarity of the forces that oppose him? Support your answer.
4. What is the significance of the clothing imagery? Explain.

Scene Three

1. Macbeth receives news in this scene. What is the effect of each of the items of news he receives?
2. How does Macbeth reveal his basic insecurity? Provide specific examples.
3. Prove that Macbeth is placing his trust in the second and third prophecies of the Apparitions.
4. Compare Lady Macbeth's state of mind in this scene with that in V.i.

Scene Four

1. Show that Malcolm is the unconscious agent of destiny. How does Malcolm's command create dramatic irony?
2. What do we learn of Macbeth's plans?
3. Explain the significance of the following:
 - (a) Macbeth's thought turn at this time to Macduff.
 - (b) He is determined to seek out the weird sisters.

Scene Five

1. What details in this scene link it with what has happened before in the play and what may happen later in the play?
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Scene Six

1. What information is the audience given about the following characters:
 - (a) Malcolm? (b) Macduff? (c) Edward the Confessor? (d) Siward?
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