

William Shakespeare's

Name: _____

(This guide may be collected to be used as a quiz—fair warning) ☺

Macbeth: Act I



**Be able to define
(and read for the ideas of):**

Fate	Loyalty
Free Will	Honor
Ambition	Destiny
Guilt	Fear
Power	Deception

Consider:

- The corruption of power
 - Blind ambition
- Appearance vs. Reality
- Superstition and its effects on human behavior
- Gender roles (what is considered “manly”? what is considered “womanly”?)

Aristotle's Tragic Hero:

- ✓ Man of noble stature
- ✓ Good—but not perfect (hamartia)
- ✓ Downfall (peripety) is his own fault
- ✓ Vulnerable—often an excess of virtue
- ✓ Learns from his tragic flaw/hamartia
- ✓ Arouses solemnity—not depression

Define the following literary terms:

1. Tragedy
2. Tragic Hero
3. Tragic flaw / hamartia
4. Allusion
5. Paradox

6. Aside
7. Soliloquy
8. Motif
9. Elision

About William Shakespeare

Shakespeare lived during a remarkable period of English history, a time of relative political stability that followed and preceded eras of extensive upheaval. Elizabeth I became the Queen of England in 1558, six years before Shakespeare's birth. During her 45-year reign, London became a cultural and commercial center where learning and literature thrived. Queen Elizabeth also recognized the importance of the arts to the life and legacy of her nation. She was fond of the theater, and many of England's greatest playwrights were active during her reign, including William Shakespeare. With her permission, professional theaters were built in England for the first time. The Shakespearean sonnet, Spenserian stanza, and dramatic blank verse also came into practice during the period.

Upon the death of Elizabeth, King James I rose to power in England (he ruled from 1603-1625). A writer himself, he displayed a great love of learning, particularly theater. At the king's invitation, Shakespeare's theater company, Lord Chamberlain's Men, became known as the King's Men, and they produced new works under his patronage. King James also commissioned the translation of the Bible from Latin into English so that it might be more readily available to those who had not studied the language of the educated class. Completed in 1611 by a team of scholars and monks, the King James Version of the Bible has become the bestselling and arguably the most-influential book in the world.

Why is this important in understanding Shakespeare's *Macbeth*? King James I of England was a descendant of Banquo.... Read on! ☺

Background Information: *Macbeth*

- Macbeth was a real Scottish king from 1040 to 1057, but Shakespeare changed his story significantly (the real Macbeth had a legitimate claim to the throne).
- Some see this play as a tribute to James I in that the noble Banquo of Shakespeare's play was the King's ancestor and the founder of his family line. Even the inclusion of witches complimented the King, who prided himself on his expert knowledge of witches and who wrote a book about them called *Demonology* in 1597.
- Though some educated people did not believe in witches, most among Shakespeare's audiences took them seriously, making this play even more frightening for them. The three witches are also called the "Weird Sisters," the word "weird" referring not to their appearance but to the original meaning of the word, "having the power to control fate."
- Fear and persecution of women accused of being witches (who were considered agents of the devil) were widespread. King James, in his book, favored "witch-pricking" as a method of determining guilt. A witch-finder would come to town and encourage people to accuse neighbors, particularly women, of witchcraft. Pins were then stuck in their bodies; if the accused did not bleed, she was considered guilty of being a witch and hanged. The witch-finder received 20 shillings for each conviction.
- There are many superstitions regarding *Macbeth*. While many today would simply chalk up any misfortune surrounding a production to coincidence, actors and other theatre people often consider it bad luck to mention *Macbeth* by name while inside a theatre, and usually refer to it superstitiously as *The Scottish Play*, "MacBee," or when referencing the character rather than the play, "Mr. and Mrs. M," or "The Scottish King." This is because Shakespeare is said to have used the spells of real witches in his text, purportedly angering the witches and causing them to curse the play. A large mythology has built up surrounding this superstition, with countless stories of accidents, misfortunes and even deaths, all mysteriously taking place during runs of *Macbeth* (or by actors who had uttered the name).

Characters Act I:

- **The witches:** they can tell the future, and they love to cause trouble.
- **Duncan:** The king of Scotland
- **Malcolm:** One of the king's sons
- **Macdonwald:** A Scottish rebel fighting against the king in a civil war
- **Lennox and Ross:** noblemen of Scotland, fighting for the king
- **The King of Norway:** an outsider fighting against King Duncan
- **The Thane of Cawdor:** A Scotsman who supported the rebels in their fight against the king in a civil war (a traitor)
- **Macbeth:** a brave general fighting for the king (holds the title "thane of Glamis"); a relative of the king
- **Banquo:** a brave general fighting for the king
- **Angus:** a nobleman of Scotland
- **Lady Macbeth:** Macbeth's wife who resides at their castle in Inverness

*"Double, double, toil and trouble;
fire burn and cauldron bubble" (I.vi)*

Study Questions: Act I (pp. 7-45)

Scene 1:

1. In this brief scene we meet the three witches. What do we learn from the few things that they say (about them, about the setting, etc.)?
2. Define paradox and identify the paradox in this scene:

Scene 2:

1. King Duncan's Scottish army is fighting Macdonwald of Ireland and the army of Norway. In the beginning of Act I, scene ii, what does King Duncan want to know?
2. Who is the Scottish traitor?
3. Who kills Macdonwald? Describe how this is accomplished.

4. Once the traitor is defeated, who is the next enemy to face?
5. Macbeth is a Scottish general--what is the name of the other Scottish general, the one who fights by Macbeth's side?
6. Who is Ross and what news does he bring to King Duncan?
7. What will happen to the Scottish traitor and who will get his title?
8. Based on the report of others, how would you describe Macbeth up to this point?

Scene 3:

1. The First Witch is planning to sail "in a sieve" (line 10)—why? What character trait is emphasized here? (Note: This is where the motif of sleeplessness is introduced.)
2. How does Macbeth's first line immediately align him with the witches?
3. How does Banquo describe the witches' appearance?
4. What three titles do the witches use to address Macbeth? Which titles are really his?
5. Contrast Banquo's behavior toward the witches to Macbeth's:
Macbeth's behavior: _____ Banquo's behavior: _____
6. What prediction do the witches make for Banquo upon his request? Use a direct quote in the space below:

7. What news do Ross and Angus bring to Macbeth?
8. Discuss the following words from Banquo to Macbeth: “And Oftentimes, to win us to our harm,/ The instruments of darkness tell us truths,/ Win us with honest trifles, to betray’s/ In deepest consequence” (I.ii.143-146).
9. What does Macbeth begin to think about, and how does it make him feel?
10. What does Macbeth mean when he says, “If chance will have me King, why,/ chance may crown me,/ Without my stir” (I.ii.165-7)?

Scene 4:

1. What does King Duncan mean when he says (about the traitorous thane of Cawdor), “There’s no art/ To find the mind’s construction in the face” (I, iv, 13-14)? What might this **foreshadow**? (HINT: Do note who walks in immediately after Duncan speaks—and be able to relate the idea of **dramatic irony**....)
2. How does the king speak to Macbeth and Banquo when they arrive at his castle?
3. What announcement does King Duncan make regarding his son Malcolm and what is Macbeth’s reaction?

Scene 5:

1. In scene v the audience meets Lady Macbeth, who is reading a letter from her husband. Before analyzing her as a character, consider Macbeth’s letter to his wife—what is its tone? What does it reveal about their relationship?
2. What is the difference between an aside and a soliloquy? Define each.
Aside:

Soliloquy:

3. In Lady Macbeth's first soliloquy, how does she describe her husband? Does his character please her? Why or why not? Define situational irony and discuss why her reaction is **ironic**:
4. Lady Macbeth calls on the spirits of evil to "unsex her." What does she mean? What does she want—and why?
5. What advice does Lady Macbeth give to her husband at the end of the scene?
6. Lady Macbeth becomes a dynamic character in the play, meaning that her character alters—describe her initial character, using specific detail.

Scene 6:

1. How would you describe King Duncan based on his behavior in this scene and the previous scenes?

Scene 7:

1. According to Macbeth, what are the many reasons why he should not kill King Duncan, and what is the only reason why he should? (see the next page.....)

<u>Reasons not to kill the king</u>	<u>Reason to kill the king</u>
--------------------------------------------	--------------------------------

2. What tactics does Lady Macbeth use to try to convince her husband to stick to the plan?
3. What does Macbeth decide to do? What does he say about his wife's personality? Is it a compliment?

Lit. Term Focus: Blank Verse

Blank Verse is unrhymed iambic pentameter; it means lines of verse that have ten syllables and have an iamb rhythm pattern. For example, when Macbeth says,

“Away,/ and mock /the time/ with fair /est show;
False face/ must hide/ what the /false heart/ doth know” (I.vii.94-5)

=====

Student Section:

1. Write the most significant quote in the space below (including Act.scene.line)—and state how/why it is the most significant quote in this Act.
2. Write down one question you find worthy of discussion from this Act.
3. Select one of the ideas listed on the cover of this study guide to discuss in a brief paragraph of 3-5 sentences).

Act I: There are five acts in the play; at the end of each act, the student guide will cite the most significant quotes, which will surely resurface on quizzes—be ready! This means you need to understand them AND be able to relate them to literary devices; a few, for example, contain a type of irony...

1. When Macbeth kills Macdonwald, “he unseamed him from the nave to the chops / And fixed his head upon our battlements” (i.ii.24-5). King Duncan says, “What he hath lost noble Macbeth hath won” (i.ii.77). (Connect this quote to the motif of blood.)
2. Macbeth’s first line aligns him with the witches, **“So foul and fair a day I have not seen”** (i.iii.40).
3. The third witch tells Banquo, “Thou shalt get kings, thou thou be none” (i.iii.74-5). Unlike Macbeth, Banquo immediately mistrusts the witches and tells Macbeth, “Oftentimes, to win us to our harm, / The instruments of darkness tell us truths, / Win us with honest trifles, to betray’s / In deepest consequence” (i.iii.143-6).
4. Macbeth wants to become king without murdering Duncan; he hopes it will happen by fate. “If chance will have me King, why chance may crown me / Without my stir” (i.iii.165-7).
5. Macbeth to Banquo—let’s talk about this honestly (later on). “Think upon what hath chanced, and at more time, / The interim having weighted it, let us speak / Our free hearts to each other” (i.iii.179-82).
6. Malcolm says that the former Thane of Cawdor, the traitor, “confessed his treasons” and “implored...pardon” from the king; Malcolm says he died with dignity: “Nothing in his life / Became him like the leaving it” (i.iv.8-9).
7. King Duncan tells his son Malcolm that people can fool you, as the former Thane of Cawdor did, emphasizing the idea that things/people are not always as they seem. **“There’s no art / To find the mind’s construction in the face. / He was a gentleman on whom I built / An absolute trust”** (i.iv.13-16).
8. Macbeth, in an aside, says that he must act; Duncan has just named Malcolm next in line for the throne. “The Prince of Cumberland—that is a step / On which I must fall down or else o’erleap, / For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires; / Let not light see my black and deep desires” (i.iv.55-59). (Macbeth likes the idea/image of leaping—see #12, below) ☺
9. Lady Macbeth, to herself, worries that Macbeth is too kind to take “the nearest way” to the throne. Milk is also mentioned in line 46 of this scene, as well as i.vii.55. “Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be / What thou art promised. **Yet do I fear thy nature. / It is too full o’ th’ milk of human kindness** / To catch the nearest way” (i.v.15-18).
10. Lady Macbeth: **“Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, / And fill me from the crown to the toe top—full / Of direst cruelty”** (i.v.46-49). She tells her husband to **“look like th’ innocent flower, / But be the serpent under’t”** (i.v. 75-77) and to “Leave all the rest to me” (i.v.85).
11. King Duncan trusts the Macbeths completely; he tells Lady Macbeth, “Fair and noble hostess, / We are your guest tonight” (i.vi.28-9). (Hint: What type of irony is this?)
12. Macbeth has reasons not to kill Duncan; he is his subject, his kin, and his host, yet Macbeth says, I have no spur / To prick the sides of my intent, but only / Vaulting ambition, which o’erleaps itself, / And falls on th’other” (i.vii.26-29).
13. Lady Macbeth has no doubt; she says, **“When you durst do it, then you were a man”** (i.vii.49). She tells him, We fail? / But **screw your courage to the sticking place / And we’ll not fail”** (i.vii.69-71).
14. Macbeth tells his wife, “Bring forth men-children only; / For thy undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males” (i.vii.83-85).
15. Unlike his wife, Macbeth still has doubts; he knows they are doing wrong—the first act ends with his quote: **“I am settled, and bend up / Each corporal agent to this terrible feat. /**

Away, and mock the time with fairest show; / False face must hide what the false heart doth know” (I.vii.92-95).