

MACBETH

THE REHEARSAL



ONLINE RESOURCES

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BELL
SHAKESPEARE



Australian Government
Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
Office for the Arts

ABOUT BELL SHAKESPEARE

Bell Shakespeare is Australia's national theatre company specialising in Shakespeare and the classics. The company was founded by John Bell AO in 1990 with the aim of making Shakespeare and live performance accessible to all Australians, regardless of geographic location or socio-economic disadvantage. Bell Shakespeare is proud to deliver Australian theatre's most comprehensive and wide-reaching education program, which operates in approximately 93% of Australian electorates annually and is delivered to more than 80,000 students and teachers face to face each year.

The national program includes in-school performances by The Players, student workshops, Artist in Residence, community and outreach work, engagement with refugee and Indigenous communities, the National Teacher Mentorship, scholarships for regional students, work experience, and a renowned Youth Justice program. Bell Shakespeare uses Shakespeare as a vehicle for self-reflection and transformation: as Ophelia says in *Hamlet*, "We know what we are, but know not what we may be."

MACBETH: THE REHEARSAL

A director has called their two leading actors to a special rehearsal of the 'Scottish Play', and your students are invited to observe. The show opens in two weeks and things are not looking good. It's crunch time to engage with Shakespeare's classic tragedy and transform text into performance. Become a fly on the wall for this fictional rehearsal, with illuminating and entertaining results.

Macbeth: The Rehearsal invites students to play observer and participant in this immersive and interactive show. Watch The Players play and replay with famous scenes and soliloquies from *Macbeth*. Witness the play's trajectory blur with the actors' own journeys, discovering key motivations, themes, language techniques and plot devices. This is a show that celebrates theatre-making, storytelling and the power of the imagination, within an engaging contemporary narrative.

CREATIVE TEAM

TEAM ROMEO



ARI



SOPHIE



AMOS

TEAM JULIET



KEIDEN



HANNAH



LIBBY

CREATIVES AND CREW

SCRIPT

By Joanna Erskine

DIRECTOR

Jules Billington

MOVEMENT DIRECTOR

Nigel Poulton

VOICE CONSULTANT

Jack Starkey-Gill

STAGE MANAGERS

Jessica Twells

Alexis Worthing

BACKGROUND TO THE PLAY

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Macbeth is Shakespeare's shortest tragedy. It was written in the early 17th century, not long after King James was crowned after the death of Queen Elizabeth I. James was a great patron of the theatre. Soon after his coronation he gave Shakespeare's company the title of 'The King's Men' and commanded that they play regularly at court, where this play was almost certainly seen around 1606. The earliest surviving definitive account of the play is from an audience member called Simon Forman who attended a performance at the Globe Theatre in 1611. The play was hugely popular during its time and was a particular favourite of diarist Samuel Pepys who is recorded to have seen six productions of the show in 1667 alone. On April 19 of that year he wrote that *Macbeth* is, 'one of the best plays for the stage that I ever saw'.

King James I had been King James VI of Scotland for 37 years before he succeeded to the English throne. He was a superstitious and paranoid king who greatly feared the art of witchcraft. In 1597 he wrote a political and theological publication on the subject called *Daemonologie* that justified the persecution of witches in a Christian society under the rule of canonical law. The book included a news pamphlet that gave details of the North Berwick Witch trials that took place in Scotland. The witches involved in the trial are believed to have confessed to using witchcraft to raise a tempest to sabotage James I's ship when he and his Queen were sailing from Denmark to Scotland. It is believed that Shakespeare may have been referencing this in *Macbeth* through the witches' lines, "Though his bark cannot be lost, yet it shall be tempest tossed" (Act 1, Scene 3). When *Macbeth* was written, women all over Europe were still being executed as witches, so the power displayed by Shakespeare's witches or Weird Sisters would have been considered, by much of the Jacobean population, as completely plausible. Similarly, most people in the 17th century still believed in ghosts, so Banquo's appearance at the banquet table would have been assumed to be a genuine apparition, not just a sign of Macbeth's deteriorating mental state, as we often reappropriate it today.

The Weird Sisters also form part of a series of references in the play to the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, in which Catholic dissidents planned to assassinate King James, his son, and the entire government in one explosion at the Houses of Parliament. The plot was discovered, and the assailants were brought to trial, during which the king carefully organised the public's outrage, including inventing Guy Fawkes Day (Gunpowder Treason Day as it was then known). A dissidents' act was then passed and linked to witchcraft, and several plays were written around 1606 and 1607 referring to the conspiracy. It is no surprise that after this event James I was not a fan of regicide (the murder of a king) being depicted on stage. As Shakespeare's *Macbeth* so clearly references this event, and carefully offers a warning to those attempting such a treasonous act, historians often use The Gunpowder Plot as a way to date Shakespeare's play.

James was also very insistent on the 'divine right of kings', and the 'great chain of being', which is the belief that the king is appointed by God and that any act against him is not only treachery but the worst kind of mortal sin. It was a common

renaissance belief that the honour and rightful seating of the monarch directly affected nature and the well-being of the state. If the throne was usurped or unlawfully won, it not only placed the nation in great danger but manifested itself in such things as poor harvests and ominous weather. James I was highly preoccupied with this worldview and Shakespeare very much plays on this in *Macbeth*.

One of the ways the Weird Sisters trick Macbeth is by encouraging him to fear being succeeded by the children or heirs of Banquo. In fact, the Weird Sisters' prophecy is a reference to King James' family claim to have descended from the (possibly mythical) Banquo, Thane of Lochaber, a family line that did not come into play for several generations after Malcolm replaced Macbeth. Macbeth would have gained nothing even if he had succeeded in having Fleance killed, and this makes his efforts as ironic as his dismissal of the seemingly impossible prophecies that then came to pass. It is important to note that at this time the law of Tanistry governed the royal succession in Scotland: a king was succeeded not by his eldest son but by the most respected of his kinsmen. This of course justifies Macbeth's relationship to the crown in the play, first coveting it as something he could achieve and then later holding the honoured position.

HISTORIC RECORD

Macbeth, Duncan and Malcolm are real figures from Scottish history. Shakespeare sourced and adapted their stories from the historian Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*, specifically his *Historie Of Scotland*. Saying that, Shakespeare didn't care much for historic accuracy in his plays – history to him was simply material for a good story. However, Shakespeare still had to be careful about how he presented royal family history in relation to the current reigning monarch. James I was from Scotland and believed he was a direct descendant of Banquo. For this reason, Shakespeare ensures that his Banquo has no involvement in the murder of Duncan, although according to history he was a co-conspirator and is labelled as much in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, the most likely source for Shakespeare's work. In reality, Duncan was young and weak, not old and wise, and Macbeth ruled successfully for 17 years before being deposed and slain. The Scottish royal line of succession shows that Macbeth's main claim to the throne was through his wife, Gruoch, who, like Duncan, was descended from Malcolm I. Oddly enough, you can see that Queen Gruoch had a son by her first husband, so perhaps her line that she knows "how tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me" (Act 1, Scene 7) and Macduff's "He has no children" (Act 4, Scene 3) are not such a puzzle after all.

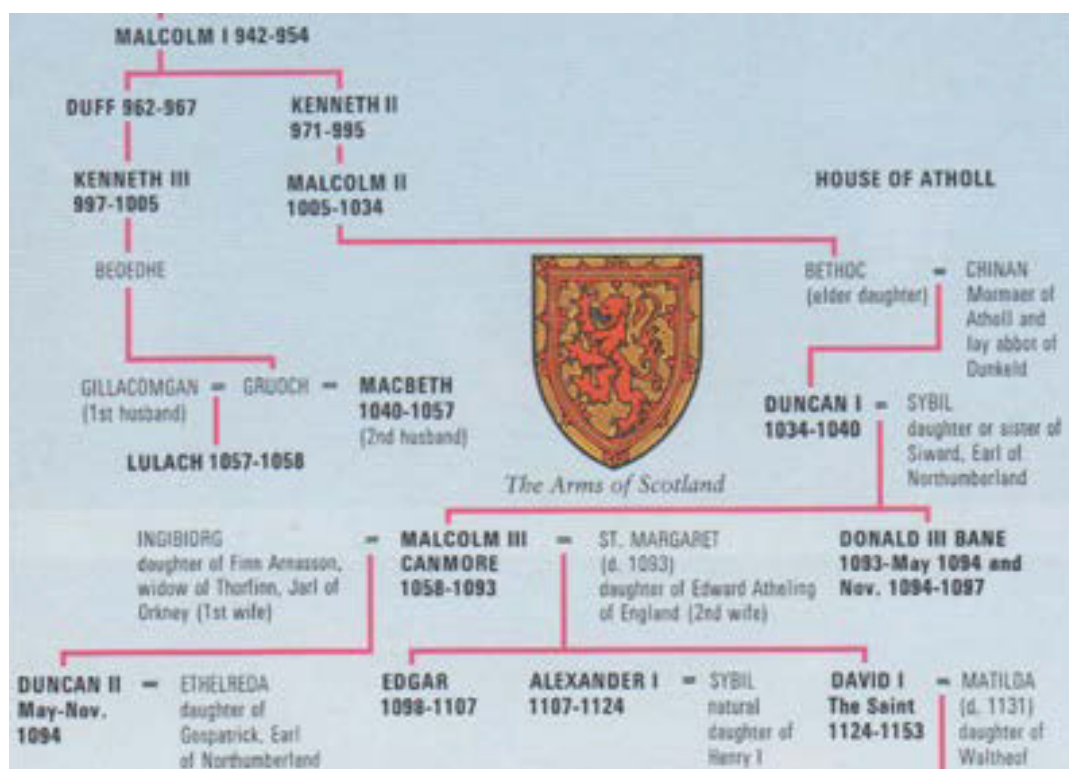


Figure 1: From *The Royal Line of Succession* (Pitkin Guide, 2000)

SYNOPSIS OF MACBETH

Three witches meet on a heath, and plan an encounter with Macbeth, the Thane of Glamis, a Scottish general. Meanwhile, a captain reports to King Duncan that the Scottish forces have been victorious. He reports that Macbeth has fought valiantly and the Thane of Cawdor, one of the King's men, has been named a traitor. Returning from war, Macbeth and Banquo are confronted by the witches who strangely predict that Macbeth will be promoted to Thane of Cawdor, and will one day become king. They also forecast that Banquo will be father to a line of kings. The witches disappear and the lords Ross and Angus arrive to inform Macbeth that he has been granted the title Thane of Cawdor, just as the witches predicted. Macbeth then contemplates the idea of becoming King.

King Duncan greets Macbeth and Banquo with praise and tells Macbeth that he plans to visit Macbeth's castle. To Macbeth's dismay, Duncan honours his son Malcolm as the Prince of Cumberland, the next in line to the throne. Macbeth writes a letter to his wife, Lady Macbeth, informing her of what has happened, including the witches' prophecies. On reading the letter and receiving news that the King is visiting their castle, she immediately envisages winning the crown for her husband through foul play. Lady Macbeth summons dark spirits to aid her carry out her plan and when her husband arrives she informs him of her idea to murder King Duncan. Macbeth is hesitant but agrees to the plan. Duncan arrives and Macbeth informs his wife that he will not go through with the murder. She challenges his loyalty, love and manhood, eventually convincing him to proceed. They plan to frame the guards for the murder.

After midnight, Macbeth converses awkwardly with Banquo, then alone, hallucinates that a bloody dagger appears before him leading him to Duncan's chamber. Macbeth overcomes his reluctance and doubts, and kills King Duncan, returning to his wife with the bloodied daggers. He is already hearing voices and regretting his actions. Lady Macbeth begrudgingly takes the daggers and plants them on Duncan's sleeping guards, bloodying her own hands. The couple retire to bed and are disturbed by knocking at the castle gates. In the morning, Macduff arrives, has a brief exchange with the porter (doorman) and enters the castle to discover King Duncan is dead. He wakes everyone to alert them of the murder, and Macbeth and Lady Macbeth feign surprise. The King's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, fear they will be blamed for their father's death and flee abroad. Soon after, Ross and Macduff reflect on what has happened and Macduff reports that Macbeth has been named the new King of Scotland.

Even though Macbeth has gained the crown, he is plagued by the thoughts of losing it. He recalls the witches' prophecy about Banquo's children becoming kings. He arranges two murderers to kill Banquo and Banquo's son, Fleance. Macbeth partially informs his wife of this but is beginning to hold back information from her. Banquo is killed but Fleance escapes. At dinner that night, Macbeth is visited by Banquo's ghost and reacts to the vision in front of his guests with terror. He decides to return to the witches to learn more about his fate.

The witches tell Macbeth that he should fear Macduff, that no man of woman born can harm him, and that he will never be defeated until Birnam Wood comes to his castle at Dunsinane. They also show him a line of eight kings descended from Banquo's family. Lennox and another Lord discuss that Macduff has gone to England to convince Malcolm to join arms with him. They inform Macbeth that Macduff has fled to England and Macbeth plots an attack on Macduff's family in revenge. Whilst lamenting that her husband has deserted her, Lady Macduff and her children are attacked and killed by Macbeth's hired villains. In England, Macduff and Malcolm agree to fight together against Macbeth, forming a rebel army. Ross arrives and delivers the devastating news that Macduff's entire family is dead.

Back in Scotland, Lady Macbeth's gentlewoman brings a doctor to observe her distracted sleepwalking. She is mentally unwell, imagines that she cannot cleanse her hands of Duncan's blood and reveals information about the various murders. The Scottish nobles gather. Malcolm orders his men to camouflage themselves with tree branches to disguise their numbers for the attack, giving the appearance of Birnam Wood marching towards Dunsinane. Macbeth is told by a servant that Lady Macbeth has died, yet he is too distracted to even register her death. Despite the numbers turning against him, Macbeth continues to believe he is invincible. The rebel army storms Macbeth's castle. Macduff confronts Macbeth and informs him that he was not naturally 'born of a woman' but by caesarean, fulfilling the witches' final prophecy. Macduff kills Macbeth and presents his severed head to Malcolm, who is proclaimed King Of Scotland.

THE SUPERSTITION

THE SUPERSTITION

For a long time *Macbeth* was considered an unlucky, cursed play (despite being hugely popular), and stories have circulated about terrible accidents, injuries, illnesses and deaths that have occurred to actors and crew members whilst working on it. Many believe it is because Shakespeare included actual rituals and incarnations of witchcraft in the play. For this reason many actors still won't say the word 'Macbeth' inside a theatre, and refer to it instead as 'The Scottish Play.' If you say the name of the play in the theatre there are various acts to counteract the curse. Some actors will insist that you have to go outside and run around the theatre three times, but others think you can get by with just turning around three times on the spot, and spitting. Whether the curse is real or not a number of unfortunate and disastrous events have occurred over the years when this play was being performed. Here are just some of the cursed stories:

- Folklore tells us that the chain of bad luck began with the very first performance of *Macbeth* (circa 1606) when the young male actor cast to play Lady Macbeth suddenly took ill or died and Shakespeare was forced to replace him.
- Apparently in Amsterdam in 1672, an actor playing King Duncan was actually murdered on stage when a prop dagger was replaced with a real one and used during Act 2, Scene 2, the famous stabbing scene.
- During an 1849 production in Manhattan at the Astor Opera House, a deadly riot erupted in the audience over a long-standing rivalry between fans of British actor William Charles Macready and American actor Edwin Forrest. 31 people were killed and over 120 were injured.
- In 1937 Laurence Olivier was preparing for opening night at the Old Vic when he suddenly lost his voice and a heavy weight fell from the wings of the theatre and nearly killed him. Olivier survived, but a few days later the theatre manager Lillian Baylis died of a heart attack. This production was particularly fraught: one of the swords used in the fight scene slipped out of an actor's hand during a performance and flew into the audience, injuring a patron.
- In 1942, during a London production of *Macbeth* starring John Gielgud, three of the actors in the show died, and on the day the show opened, the set designer committed suicide.
- In 1947 actor Harold Norman was playing the title role when one of the battle scenes became a little too realistic and he was actually killed on stage. Apparently he did not believe in the superstition.
- In 1948 British actress Diana Wynyard told a reporter she thought the curse was ridiculous. The following night whilst performing Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene she walked right off the stage and fell into the orchestra pit!
- John Bell was in a production of *Macbeth* in London in 1967, playing Lennox. He remembers that, "the director Peter Hall contracted a severe attack of shingles and the production had to be postponed for six weeks."

- In 2011 the actor playing Macbeth for the Royal Shakespeare Company, Jonathan Slinger, was knocked off his bike on his way to the theatre and broke his arm.
- When Peter Evans directed *Macbeth* in 2012 for Bell Shakespeare, many of the cast members got severe food poisoning. Opening night had to be cancelled and two actors and the Assistant Director ended up in hospital.

See Richard Huggett's book *The Curse of Macbeth* for more fun facts.

MACBETH: GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY

Antic round — mad dance	Lamentations — sad cries, wailing
Avaunt — be gone, get away	Latch — catch
Benediction — blessing	Lion-mettled — courageous
Betimes — swiftly	Mar — spoil
Blanched — gone white	Maws of kites — stomachs of birds of prey
Brindled — Streaked with colour	Minister to — to cure
Chafes — rebels	Mirth — good humour
Charnel houses — tombs where bones were stored	Mortal custom — usual life-span
Doff — remove	Physic — medicine
Dunnet — darkest	Plight — dangerous or unfortunate situation
Fain — gladly	Posset — a hot, milky alcoholic drink
Fantastical — imaginary	Prate — talk
Fell — deadly	Recompense — reward
Feny — slimy	Shaft — arrow
Forsworn — untruthful	Surcease — death, killing
Foul — disgusting, pungent	Surfeited grooms — drunken guards
Friends — usually means family, kindred, not just people you like and hang out with	Thane — a noble lord
Front to front — face to face	Trifles — small, valueless things
Gall — bitter poison	Unbecoming — unattractive
Glamis — a province in Scotland, pronounced ‘Glarms’	Unbend — weaken, relax
Golden round — crown	Unseamed — split open
Harbinger — messenger	Vizards — masks
Homely — friendly	Wassail — drinking and revelling
Incarnadine — make blood red	Wherefore — why, for what reason

Note: These words can be the basis for a game of guess the definition. Students can make a ‘cold’ guess first, then search for where the words are used in the play, making note of the context and whether they were close to the true definition.

KEY CHARACTERS

KEY CHARACTERS

There are many more characters in Shakespeare's original play than we have room for in this production. In fact, there are more than thirty speaking roles.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Duncan, King of Scotland
 Malcolm, son of Duncan
 Donalbain, son of Duncan
 Fleance, son to Banquo
 Siward, General of the English Forces
 Young Siward, his son
 Seyton, officer attending Macbeth
 Son to Macduff
 An English Doctor
 A Scottish Doctor
 A Porter
 An Old Man
 Three Murderers
 Lady Macbeth
 Lady Macduff
 A Gentlewoman attending Lady Macbeth
 Hecate, Queen of Witchcraft
 Three witches
 Three apparitions
 Lords, officers, soldiers, attendants

**THANES (NOBLEMEN)
OF SCOTLAND**

Macbeth
 Banquo
 Macduff
 Lennox
 Ross
 Menteith
 Angus
 Caithness

ANALYSIS

MACBETH

Stars, hide your fires / Let not light see my black and deep desires.

Act 1, Scene 4

Macbeth is a character that undergoes a dramatic transformation as the result of ambition and the pursuit of power. By Act 5 the audience are left in bewilderment, questioning whether they are observing the same man that was described in Act 1 as “brave”, “honourable” and “too full of the milk of human kindness” (Act 1, Scene 5). Even as early as the 1700’s, critics were writing about Macbeth’s extraordinary change in character. William Richardson stated in 1743 that Macbeth begins the play as ‘valiant, dutiful to his sovereign, mild, gentle and ambitious without guilt’, and ends his journey as ‘false, disloyal, barbarous and vindictive’. Macbeth spends the first half of the play in moral contemplation, recoiling at the very thought of wrongdoing. In the second half of the play he is driven by violent matter-of-factness, as soon as a bloody thought comes into his head he acts on it, “Be it thought and done” (Act 4, Scene 1). Unlike another of Shakespeare’s villains, Richard III, who seeks power for power itself, Macbeth initially desires power only to gain regard and respect from his colleagues. In a comparison of the two characters, Thomas Whately says that unlike Richard III, Macbeth’s instincts are naturally ‘social, humane and family orientated’.

Macbeth starts the play as the Thane of Glamis, a lord of the Scottish Court, and the first report of him comes from the wounded captain, “For brave Macbeth – well he deserves that name.” (Act 1, Scene 2) Macbeth first appears in Act 1, Scene 3 accompanied by his friend and companion, Banquo, who clearly holds him in high regard. When Macbeth receives the witches prophecies he does “start and seem to fear” (Act 1, Scene 3) them but his instinct is to dismiss things that are dark and threatening. It is important to note that Macbeth’s drive to usurp the crown begins with the witches’ prophecies and therefore it is not clear whether he would have taken the same path if he hadn’t encountered the witches on the blasted heath.

Many believe Lady Macbeth’s insights into Macbeth’s character to be more trustworthy than that of other characters in the play, as she knows him intimately. She states that he is “too full of the milk of human kindness” to act maliciously, and that he could stare “the ornament of life” (Act 1, Scene 7) or the crown, in the face and still not seize it. However, we do see evidence that Macbeth is ambitious. On hearing of Malcolm’s ascension to be next in line for the throne, Macbeth lets the audience know of his “black and deep desires” (Act 1, Scene 4), and in his letter to Lady Macbeth we learn that he is not only “rapt in the wonder of it” (Act 1, Scene 5) but also “burned in desire.” (Act 1, Scene 5) We observe ambition in Macbeth, but his thoughts don’t transfer into actual plans. The idea of murdering King Duncan comes from Lady Macbeth and when faced with the actuality of it, Macbeth realises that he has “no spur to prick the sides of (his) intent” (Act 1, Scene 7), and that “vaulting ambition” is not a good enough motive for murder.

We witness his weaknesses: pride, ego and an immense love for his wife. Lady Macbeth challenges his love and his manhood, informs him that this act will make him “so much more the man” (Act 1, Scene 7) and even stirs up memories of their loss of a child. With this Macbeth is convinced to murder Duncan, though it is not clear which tactic of Lady Macbeth’s had the biggest impact on his decision.

Macbeth immediately regrets killing King Duncan. Even prior to the act he hallucinates, “Is this a dagger I see before me” (Act 2, Scene 1) and struggles to control his thoughts. After the murder he instantly acknowledges that he will never sleep again. He dramatises the “sorry sight” (Act 2, Scene 2) of the blood on his hands as something “great Neptune’s oceans” cannot wash away, begins to hear voices and acts erratically, killing Duncan’s two guards without consulting his wife. Once crowned, Macbeth’s paranoia grows, “full of scorpions is my mind “ (Act 3, Scene 2), and he becomes increasingly estranged from his wife, “be innocent of the knowledge dearest chuck” (Act 3, Scene 2). Behaviour that once seemed inconceivable to Macbeth, “I am afraid to think on what I’ve done” (Act 2, Scene 2), becomes commonplace. He murders his friend Banquo and his fellow soldier Macduff’s wife and children. Macbeth can now suppress contemplation but his subconscious guilt starts to surface. It emerges in the vision of Banquo’s ghost, which sends Macbeth into a public display of guilt, madness, irrationality and a fear of losing his manhood: “Why so, being gone, I am a man again.” (Act 3, Scene 4)

Macbeth’s increasing anxiety and disconnection from reality is highlighted by his return visit to the witches. He receives further prophecies, convinces himself that he is invincible and his strength and confidence now lies in the witches’ riddle-like predictions. In his final demise, Macbeth shows little humanity, yet at the same time all the humanity one can imagine. He cannot muster remorse for his actions or his wife’s death, yet poetically muses on the pointlessness of his existence:

Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage and is
heard no more: It is a tale told by an idiot,
Full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

Act 5, Scene 5

Macbeth can be thought of as an anti-hero, or as a tragic hero who falls at the hand of personal moral weaknesses. His fatal flaw is usually considered his ambition. Unlike Romeo, Othello or Brutus, Macbeth does not contemplate suicide when his situation is grim, in fact he rails against it: “Why should I play the Roman fool and die on mine own sword?” (Act 5, Scene 10). At the end of the play Macbeth has lost everything except his sword and his military skills, and neither can protect him.

LADY MACBETH

What's done is done.

Act 3, Scene 2

Lady Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's best-known and most complex female characters. She is strong, intelligent and clearly has a loving and trustworthy relationship with her husband, who intimately calls her his "dearest partner of greatness" (Act 1, Scene 5). In the opening act Macbeth not only shares all his dealings with her, but also allows her to take charge of their social progression: "leave all the rest to me" (Act 1, Scene 5). Lady Macbeth indicates that her and her husband have previously lost a child, "I have given suck and know how tender tis to love the babe that milks me" (Act 1, Scene 7), which brings up questions about past traumas in their relationship. She plots the murder of King Duncan with her husband and pushes him to continue with the deed despite his immense doubt and reluctance.

In this patriarchal society of medieval Scotland, Lady Macbeth can only progress by attaching herself to the rise of her husband: there is no place for her to have ambitions of her own. Actress Judi Dench stated in an interview that she believes Lady Macbeth to be driven by an intense love for her husband, but we can never be sure of Shakespeare's true intentions. After receiving Macbeth's news of the witches' prophecies and Duncan's arrival, Lady Macbeth is quick to action. She immediately aligns herself with dark "spirits" and begs them to: "Unsex me here" (Act 1, Scene 4), wishing to shed all qualities traditionally thought of as feminine. John Bell notes, like many literary critics, that Lady Macbeth lacks imagination. She can see no other repercussions of their bloody deed than the advancement that she desires. She sees only the practical, believes that "a little water" (Act 2, Scene 2) will wash the deed clean from their hands, and even suggests to Macbeth that he will be fine if he simply does not "think" on what he has done. The only sign of Lady Macbeth wavering from their goal, prior to the murder, is when she informs the audience that she would have killed King Duncan herself, but that he reminded her too much of her own father.

Despite Lady Macbeth's initial bravado, she does not manage to maintain her strength and composure. While Macbeth parlays his guilt into a string of brutal murders, Lady Macbeth's guilt drives her into depression and madness. She is devastated by her husband's cold distance from her and doesn't feel content in her new position: "Nought's had, all's spent / Where our desire is got without content." (Act 3, Scene 2) When we last see her she is sleepwalking through the castle, wiping imagined blood from her hands: "Out, damned spot! Out, I say!" (Act 5, Scene 1) This moment is the climax of her madness and her subsequent death is not seen on stage, but is reported to Macbeth by Seyton. Its absence from the text leaves the details of her death to the imagination of the audience.

THE WEIRD SISTERS

Fair is foul, and foul is fair.

Act 1, Scene 1

The Weird Sisters, or witches, open the play, and their contrasting energy and language patterns plant a sense of mystique and intrigue. Although they refer to each other as “Sister” and collectively call themselves the “Weird Sisters” (Act 1, Scene 3), they are conventionally known as ‘the Witches.’ The Sisters are enormously powerful in their manipulation of Macbeth, yet they do not actually cast a spell on him, they only deliver predictions and conjure apparitions. The Sisters often speak in a different rhythm to other characters in the play. Instead of pentameter, they use tetrameter (four strong beats to a line) when chanting or casting spells, and trochaic rather than iambic (emphasis on the first syllable, rather than the second). Shakespeare often used this form for magical or supernatural characters throughout his work. There is much contention over whether the Sisters are to blame for Macbeth’s demise, however it is Macbeth who acts upon their prophecies.

BANQUO

Merciful powers, Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature gives way to in repose!

Act 2, Scene 1

Banquo is a Scottish general and close friend to Macbeth. They witness the Weird Sisters’ initial prophecies together. At the beginning of the play, Banquo and Macbeth display a strong comradeship, and Banquo warns him not to pay too much attention to the Sisters’ prophecies, calling them “instruments of darkness” (Act 1, Scene 3). Despite both receiving prophecies, Macbeth acts on the Weird Sisters’ predictions whereas Banquo does not, despite his seeming interest. He does however think of them and shares this with Macbeth the night of the murder: “I dreamed last night of the three Weird Sisters; to you they have showed some truth.” (Act 2, Scene 1) According to the Sisters’ prophecy, Banquo’s children will inherit the Scottish throne. Banquo becomes suspicious of Macbeth after Duncan’s death, and Macbeth plots his murder. After Macbeth has him killed, Banquo’s ghost haunts Macbeth at the royal banquet table.

KING DUNCAN

He was a gentleman on whom I built an absolute trust.

Act 1, Scene 4

King Duncan is the epitome of a noble and virtuous leader, and Macbeth says that his soul is so holy that if he were to be killed “his virtues will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against the deep damnation of his taking-off.” (Act 1, Scene 7) Duncan is however, naive and unaware of the true character of his

followers and seems to take people at face value. He has two sons, Malcolm, his anointed successor, and Donalbain. Duncan is murdered in his sleep by Macbeth whilst a guest at Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's castle. Being unlawfully usurped, his death reflects the destruction of order in Scotland (see 'Divine Right Of Kings').

MACDUFF

Bleed, bleed, poor country.

Act 4, Scene 3

Macbeth's nemesis, Macduff, the Thane of Fife, is another nobleman in the play. He loves his country dearly, and is a loyal soldier and general. Macduff is suspicious of Macbeth's rise to the throne from the beginning. He is not present at Macbeth's castle on the night of the murder, only arriving the following morning. By going to his home in Fife instead of to Scone for Macbeth's coronation, he sends a signal that he does not support Macbeth's kingship, and is considered a traitor. After receiving the witches' prophecy to "beware Macduff", Macbeth orders the brutal murder of Macduff's wife and children. Macduff feels this devastating loss deeply: "I must also feel it as a man" (Act 4, Scene 3). Macduff makes note in his rage and despair that Macbeth has no children, further clarifying their differences.

Macduff joins Malcolm in leading a rebel army to unseat Macbeth and to place Malcolm on the throne. At the end of the play, Macduff revenges and kills Macbeth in battle, decapitating Macbeth and presenting his severed head to Malcolm.

MALCOLM

What I am truly is thine and my poor country's to command.

Act 4, Scene 3

Malcolm is the elder son of King Duncan. In Act 1 he is anointed Prince of Cumberland, successor to the throne, by his father. After Duncan is murdered, Malcolm escapes to England, fearing he may be killed next. Later, Malcolm employs shrewd rhetoric to test Macduff's loyalty to the throne. Pleased with the outcome, he joins with Macduff and the English forces to form a rebel army against Macbeth. Malcolm marches on Scotland to take the crown. After Macduff kills Macbeth at the end of the play, Malcolm assumes the throne, promising to reconcile with both friends and enemies.

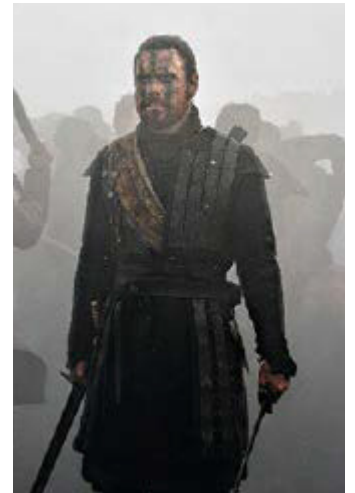
FLEANCE

Fleance is Banquo's young son. He escapes the murderers that Macbeth has sent to kill him. He has no further role in the play after this, yet the audience is left to assume that he or his children may come to rule Scotland one day, as in the Weird Sisters' prophecy.

REHEARSING MACBETH

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In Justin Kurzel's 2015 film version of *Macbeth*, Michael Fassbender played the title role. When interviewed during rehearsals he said it was important for him to "find a personal connection" with the story and Shakespeare's words. After filming a crucial moment in the story, Fassbender said he thought to himself, "There's one thousand ways to play that scene, it's almost frustrating, but uplifting at the same time, I suppose that's why this play is still around". As an actor he felt it was important to let Shakespeare's words guide his performance. He told a reporter that in preparation he read the play over and over, saying "the text will dictate a lot to you as an actor, all you need to do is follow the rhythm".



'Justin Kurzel's 2015 film

When giving a workshop on playing the role of Macbeth, Sir Ian McKellen says that instead of simply following the verse like music, you should "look after the sense of the text and then the sounds will look after themselves". He also believes that an "actor has to have total awareness of all of the complexities of Shakespeare. Take the 'Tomorrow speech' for instance, you must allow your imagination to be fed by all of the dense imagery", and this will make your performance all the more clearer and richer.



Ian McKellen in the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *Macbeth* 1976.

Dame Judi Dench famously played Lady Macbeth in Trevor Nunn's production of the play in 1976. Speaking about rehearsing the role, she stressed the importance of relating to your character. Dench says she decided early on that Lady Macbeth isn't a "bad person. She just has a great passion for her husband." Dench also talks about mapping the journey of the character. She feels an important part of playing this role is finding the transition between the banquet scene and her sleepwalking. She says, "Lady Macbeth's pain is paramount, she has nothing else left to live for and that's why she dies."



Judi Dench in the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *Macbeth* 1976.



John Bell and Anna Volska as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in Bell Shakespeare's 1994 production directed by David Fenton.

John Bell has had a long relationship with this play as student, actor and director. He says "I studied the play in high school and loved it to the point of learning it off by heart and making my own production of it." With regards to directing *Macbeth* he says, "you face a lot of challenges. How do you convincingly embody and convey a sense of evil, and how do you maintain the tension and the horror without tipping into bathos and melodrama? With the playing of the Macbeths, you need courage and a wide-ranging imagination. You need great emotional commitment."



Kate Mulvany and Dan Spielman in Bell Shakespeare's 2012 production directed by Peter Evans © Rush

Peter Evans directed a production of *Macbeth* in 2012 starring Kate Mulvany and Dan Spielman as the infamous couple. In an interview Mulvany said that in preparation for playing the role she "started by looking at history and articles" and then she just immersed herself in Shakespeare's words and felt it important to let her "imagination run free". She says as an actor "you need something important to latch on to, to connect to." She focused on the loss of the Macbeth's child, and the grief that must exist between them. Mulvany said that it is important that the rehearsal space is fresh and exciting and that all those collaborating bring an energy to the room.

THEMES IN MACBETH

LOYALTY AND TRUST

King Duncan is a trusting monarch, who takes his subjects on face value. He believes Macbeth to be entirely loyal to him, rewards his service in promotion and honours him greatly by visiting his castle. However, it is Macbeth who murders him. On Macbeth's return from battle Duncan greets him with honoured thanks, "The sin of my ingratitude even now was heavy on me" and Macbeth responds with an unwavering allegiance, "The service and the loyalty I owe" (Act 1, Scene 4). Banquo equally trusts his friend Macbeth, and addresses him as "my noble partner" (Act 1, Scene 3), yet Macbeth also murders Banquo. Unlike Duncan, Banquo lives to observe a change in Macbeth's demeanour. He has full knowledge of the witches' predictions, and as he watches them come true he begins to question his faith in Macbeth's honesty: "King, Cawdor, Glamis, all, as the weird women promised, and I fear thou played'st most foully for't" (Act 3, Scene 1). The night before Duncan's murder, Banquo asks Macbeth an honest question in private, openly sharing his dreams of the Weird Sisters, and the audience witness Macbeth's first betrayal of their trust as he responds, "I think not of them". (Act 2, Scene 1) Their friendship never recovers.

Macbeth is most commonly considered a work about driving ambition and a lust for power. However, it is also a study of the fragility of the frameworks that support power structures, most notably trust and loyalty. Why does Macbeth trust a word of the Weird Sisters' prophecies? He does initially "start and seem to fear" these "imperfect speakers", (Act 1, Scene 3) but when the first prophecy comes true, Macbeth can't help but dream for more: "The greatest is behind" (Act 1, Scene 3). His loyal friend Banquo gives him honest counsel, warning Macbeth of how dark spirits can blur the boundaries between truth and illusion, and deceive by presenting small truths:

And often times, to win us to our harm
The instruments of darkness tell us truths
Win us with honest trifles to betray 's in
deepest consequence.

Act 1, Scene 3

Macbeth trusts his wife, and she encourages him to murder King Duncan. Macbeth agrees to the bloody deed but begins to lose trust in his own judgement. He manages to talk himself out of the act in a lengthy soliloquy, in which he highlights trust as something he holds in the highest regard:

He's here in double trust;
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself.

Act 1, Scene 7

Macbeth considers his 'deep and dark desires' (Act 1, Scene 3) but that is simply a private distrust in his head, to act on his desires is a very different thing. Upon arriving at Lady Macbeth's home, King Duncan trusts his hostess. Her flattery, however loyal on the surface, hides a sinister purpose:

All in our service,
 In every point twice done and then done double,
 Were poor and single business to contend
 Against those honours deep and broad wherewith
 Your majesty loads our house. For those of old,
 And the late dignities heaped up to them,
 We rest your hermits.

Act 1, Scene 6

Lady Macbeth is being polite in her comment, "rest your hermits". This means "pray for you constantly", but this reference could be referring to her intention to put Duncan closer to God, in other words, to kill him.

Having betrayed trust in this way, Macbeth becomes obsessed with the possibility that others might be intending to betray him. Even before the Weird Sisters warn him to "beware Macduff", he suspects he cannot rely on Macduff's support: "How sayst thou that Macduff denies his person / At our great bidding?" (Act 3, Scene 4) He mistrusts the lords who appear to serve him, even to the point of having spies in his Thanes' households: "There's not a one of them but in his house / I keep a servant fee'd." (Act 3, Scene 4) Macbeth doesn't even trust his wife, and begins to keep most of his dealings secret from her: "Be innocent of the knowledge dearest chuck". (Act 3, Scene 2) He begins to place his trust solely in the Weird Sisters. His investment in their darker world grows more and more as the play progresses and by Act 5 his entire reign and rule rests on the shoulders of their flimsy word play. Even this trust crumbles as their final prophecy, "No man of woman born can harm" Macbeth, proves to be another fallacy when Macduff announces, "I was from my mother's womb untimely ripped". (Act 5, Scene 8)

THE SUPERNATURAL

It is not only witches who appear in this play, but ghosts, conjured apparitions, ill omens and a goddess of magic derived from mythology, probably inserted into the play by Thomas Middleton. In Shakespeare's time, audiences delighted in being frightened. However, the crucial point about the supernatural figures in *Macbeth* is that they never enchant or directly compel anyone. Their power lies solely in revealing the truth to their listeners. This makes them a much more interesting narrative element than mere spell-casters would be. In a sense, Shakespeare disempowers the witches by reducing their prophecies to simple truth-telling and word play, yet at the same time empowers them by proving the immense impact that the power of suggestion can have on human nature.

BETRAYAL AND DECEPTION, APPEARANCE AND REALITY

The two most obvious betrayals are Macbeth's betrayal of King Duncan and of his comrade Banquo. However, the concept of betrayal runs much deeper: betrayal of office, betrayal of friendship, betrayal of trust, betrayal of rank, betrayal of truth and betrayal of justice. Lady Macbeth betrays her womanhood by calling on the spirits to "unsex" her as she seeks masculine strength in order to fulfill the Weird Sisters' prophecy.

In *Macbeth*, characters believe that what they can see is fair or good, but in most instances this is not the case. They are deceived by appearances and the central characters are well aware of the power that holds. King Duncan has no sense of danger or foreboding when he arrives at Macbeth's castle, the setting where he will soon be murdered. On the contrary, he finds it very agreeable:

This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.

Act 1, Scene 6

Macbeth perceives the prophecies made by the "armed head" and the "bloody child", on his second meeting with the witches, to be good omens. He later discovers that these prophecies are deceptive wordplays that foretell his own downfall. The tactic of Malcolm is to use the trees of the forest as cover, and so for Macbeth Birnam Wood does "come to Dunsinane." Macduff was, in fact, born of a caesarian section and therefore is "not of woman born."

Lady Macbeth believes her husband to be a bad actor, too transparent in his responses – "Your face, my thane, is as a book where men may read strange matters." (Act 1, Scene 5) She constantly urges her husband to conceal his true intentions: "Look like the innocent flower but be the serpent under't." (Act 1, Scene 5) He must "look up clear" and not "alter favour". (Act 1, Scene 5) On being resolved to the murder, Macbeth echoes this sentiment "False face must hide what the false heart doth know." (Act 1, Scene 7) Despite their performances, others suspect their intentions. On the morning Duncan's body is found his son Donalbain tells his brother "There's daggers in men's smiles". (Act 2, Scene 3) Eventually Lady Macbeth can no longer conceal the truth. The secrets she has held in come bursting forth in her sleepwalking confessions, 'Yet who would have thought the old man to have so much blood in him'. (Act 5, Scene 1)

Pictures are used by Lady Macbeth to describe insubstantial fears. Duncan's body is "a painted devil" (Act 2, Scene 2), being unable to move or hurt her, although of course her participation in the murder does wound her deeply. Macbeth deeply fears the vision of Banquo's ghost at the banquet, but Lady Macbeth must play

the role of actor and keep up appearances with her guests, saying “He is often thus”. (Act 3, Scene 4) She works to devalue and dismiss this actualisation of her husband’s guilt as merely “the very painting of your fear.” (Act 3, Scene 4) The idea that appearances are no reliable guide to reality is one that Shakespeare returns to over and over in many of his plays, including *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Measure for Measure*, but also comedies like *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

SLEEP

Sleep and the lack of sleep spurs on the angst, confusion and destruction in this play. When King Duncan comes to stay at Macbeth’s home, he is killed in his sleep. During the murder Macbeth imagines hearing a voice cry, “Sleep no more”. (Act 2, Scene 2) Some interpret this as a clue that Macbeth develops permanent insomnia, and in fact never sleeps again. Soon after the murder, in another part of the castle, Macbeth’s Porter rants about his sleep being disturbed by a loud knocking at the gate: “Here’s a knocking indeed!” (Act 2, Scene 3)

When Lady Macbeth loses her grip on the world, this too manifests in disturbed sleep. When she sleepwalks she reveals truths to the Doctor and Gentlewoman, and the audience. Her conclusion, “What’s done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed” (Act 5, Scene 1) suggests both an echo of her former self at the scene of Duncan’s murder, and a longing for peace that is now denied her. Ironically, she now cannot achieve the very remedy she suggested to her disturbed husband a few scenes earlier, “You lack the season of all natures, sleep.” (Act 3, Scene 4)

AMBITION

Lady Macbeth reads Macbeth’s letter with delight: “Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be / What thou art promised.” (Act 1, Scene 5) On the basis of his letter she indicates to the audience that she wants Macbeth to be ambitious and follow the Weird Sisters’ prophecy. Yet Lady Macbeth also reveals that she doubts Macbeth has the drive to fulfill the prophecy:

Yet do I fear thy nature,
It is too full of the milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it.

Act 1, Scene 5

Lady Macbeth cajoles her husband, playing on the ambition she knows he has when he arrives back at their castle after a long absence: “Great Glamis! Worthy Cawdor! Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter!” (Act 1, Scene 5) She admits her own ambition to him, stating that his “letters have transported” her “beyond

this ignorant present” and she feels now “the future in the instant”. (Act 1, Scene 5) Forward motion sits at the very heart of ambition, and Lady Macbeth seems to be in a perpetual state of trying to “jump the life to come”. (Act 1, Scene 7)

Macbeth’s soliloquy when he considers murdering Duncan, reveals that Macbeth recognises his own ambitious nature, but also realises it to have limitations:

I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o’erleaps itself
And falls on th’other.

Act 1, Scene 7

Lady Macbeth enters at the end of Macbeth’s soliloquy and the depth of her ambition is revealed in her strong and unwavering counter argument. She challenges Macbeth’s love for her, his manhood, and particularly his commitment, pointing out the extreme lengths she would go to for him:

I have given suck and know how tender tis to
love the babe that milks me, I would while it was
smiling in my face, have plucked my nipple from
his boneless gums and dashed the brains out
had I so sworn as you have done to this.

Act 1, Scene 7

In response, Macbeth swiftly buries the moral arguments he has been toying with:

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.

Act 1, Scene 7

Even Banquo is not immune to ambition. When he sees that Macbeth has become king he wonders whether this suggests he should take the witches’ prophecies: “May they not be my oracles as well / And set me up in hope?” (Act 3, Scene 1) However, unlike Macbeth and his wife, Banquo does nothing to try to hasten what he has been promised. King James disliked anyone who attempted to forget their place in his strictly ranked court and nation, so ambition became a flaw when it caused someone to attempt to rise beyond their allotted position in society. Shakespeare was sure to show King James he adhered to this notion by outlining the fatal path that results from unlawful and amoral usurpation.

PROMINENT IMAGERY IN MACBETH

BLOOD

Blood and the word 'bloody' is mentioned frequently throughout *Macbeth* – 41 uses, to be exact. The play opens with a violent battle described by a wounded, 'bleeding' captain. At the appearance of the captain, King Duncan says "What bloody man is that?" The loss of blood and survival is synonymous with heroism in battle, to the point where Duncan says: "Thy words become thee as thy wounds / They smack of honour both." (Act 1, Scene 2) In fact blood is one of the main images in Macbeth's imagination and is somewhat of an obsession for him: "It will have blood, they say: blood will have blood." (Act 3, Scene 4) He even imagines himself wading through a river made of blood: "I am in blood / Stepped in so far that should I wade no more / Returning were as tedious as go o'er." (Act 3, Scene 4) When Lady Macbeth plots to kill Duncan, she calls upon dark spirits to "make thick my blood". (Act 1, Scene 5) Blood was thought to be thickened by poison, hence Lady Macbeth wants to poison her own soul so that she is able to kill Duncan without remorse.

Once Macbeth and Lady Macbeth embark upon their murderous journey, blood comes to symbolise their guilt, and they begin to feel that their crimes have stained them in a way that cannot be washed clean. Macbeth asks "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?" after he has killed Duncan, even as his wife scolds him and says that "a little water" will clear them of the deed. (Act 2, Scene 2) Later, Lady Macbeth comes to share Macbeth's horrified sense of being stained: "Out, damned spot; out, I say... who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?" she asks as she sleepwalks near the close of the play (Act 5, Scene 1). Blood symbolises the guilt that sits like a permanent stain on the consciences of both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, one that hounds them to their graves.

CLOTHING

There are several references throughout *Macbeth* to a character's readiness or suitability for their social position based on clothing and associated imagery. Macbeth himself often alludes to a discomfort he feels due to being prematurely adorned in a role he either did not expect, does not feel he deserves or one he has unlawfully usurped. In Act 1 when he hears he has been promoted to the Thane of Cawdor, he states: "The Thane of Cawdor lives; why do you dress me / In borrow'd robes?" (Act 1, Scene 3) Banquo also analyses Macbeth's uneasiness in adjusting to this new role through the use of clothing imagery when he states: "New honours come upon him, / Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mould / But with the aid of use." (Act 1, Scene 3)

When Macbeth's manhood is then challenged by Lady Macbeth he defends the importance of this position and Duncan's trust by stating: "He hath honour'd me of late; and I have bought / Golden opinions from all sorts of people, / Which

would be worn now in their newest gloss, / Not cast aside so soon.” (Act 1, Scene 7) Macbeth is patient, and wishes to ‘wear’ this new position in all its new glory, not reject the gifts that Duncan has bestowed upon him. Macbeth’s apprehension and negative relationship with his robes or roles work to foreshadow his impending failure.

As the Scottish forces march to join the English army before Macbeth’s castle, various Scotsmen comment on Macbeth’s inadequacies and thus desperate situation. Angus says,

“Those he commands move only in command, / Nothing in love: now does he feel his title / Hang loose about him, like a giant’s robe / Upon a dwarfish thief.” (Act 5, Scene 2)

BIRDS AND DISRUPTIONS IN NATURE

Shakespeare constantly utilises natural imagery in its darkest form in *Macbeth*, and presents the idea that nature has been turned upside down. It was a common belief in the Jacobean era that the sovereign was intrinsically linked to the balance of the natural state. If a ruler lacked in ability, honour or moral fibre, the natural elements around him and his state would be affected, causing the natural order of things to invert or disintegrate. After King Duncan’s murder it is reported that his horses turn wild and eat each other, and a hunting falcon is killed by a bird that should be its prey:

A falcon, towering in her pride of place,
Was by a mousing owl hawk’d at and kill’d.

Act 2, Scene 4

Bird imagery is particularly prominent in this play. Shakespeare draws on well-known symbols of prey to emphasise the rise of the darker side of the natural world. When Lady Macbeth hears that Duncan will be visiting her castle she states: “The raven himself is hoarse / That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan / Under my battlements.” (Act 1, Scene 5) The raven is a bird of ill omen, and Lady Macbeth means that the raven is hoarse from saying again and again that King Duncan must die. When King Duncan does arrive at Macbeth’s castle, he remarks how sweet the air is. Banquo agrees, adding:

This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,
By his loved mansionry, that the heaven’s breath
Smells woingly here: no jutting, frieze,
Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
Hath made his pendant bed and procreant cradle.

Act 1, Scene 6

A “martlet” is a kind of swallow that is “temple-haunting” because it likes to build its nests high on the walls of tall buildings. Banquo and the King’s bright expectations of their visit not only reveal their moral stability but also work in contrast to Lady Macbeth’s darker image or the raven and therefore foreshadow the unsuspecting visitor’s fate. Just before Duncan’s murder is discovered Lennox reports that “the obscure bird / Clamour’d the livelong night.” (Act 2, Scene 3)

Macbeth then plots and kills his friend Banquo. When Banquo’s ghost appears later that night at the feast Macbeth says “If charnel-houses and our graves must send / Those that we bury back, our monuments / Shall be the maws of kites” (Act 3, Scene 4). “Monuments,” like “charnel-houses” and “graves,” are the places where the dead belong. “Kites” are hawks, and their “maws” are their eating apparatuses, such as beaks, gullets and stomachs. If the dead are out of the ground, their bodies are at the mercy of birds of prey, and the bodies’ only graves will be the stomachs of these birds.

Macbeth is then responsible for the murder of Macduff’s family. When Ross tells Macduff of the slaughter, Macduff cries out in grief: “All my pretty ones? / Did you say all? O hell-kite! All? / What, all my pretty chickens and their dam / At one fell swoop?” (Act 4, Scene 3). The “hell-kite” is Macbeth, who has killed all the “pretty chickens” in one murderous dive (“fell swoop”). This extended metaphor denotes that Macbeth’s actions have become those of the darker birds of prey.

FROM THE WRITER, JOANNA ERSKINE

FROM THE WRITER

The play focuses on actors rehearsing Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. What can students learn from actor's rehearsal techniques? Is this a good way into understanding the play?

I've often thought that watching an actor work with Shakespeare's text would be so helpful for students. First, they need to decode and understand every word they say. They spend a long time breaking down the text, looking up any words they don't understand, analysing the rhythms, understanding their character's journey in the play, what their given circumstances are and noting where their shifts are. Then they need to understand their character within the context of the story and their relationships with every other character on stage. All this (and more) is done even before an actor gets into the rehearsal room. Once all the actors are together, then it gets really exciting. I wanted to show students how specific techniques are used to change the meaning and intentions of scenes, even though the actors are saying the same words. A comedic scene can turn tragic, desperation can turn to anger – actors are experts at their craft and it's incredible to see how many different ways a scene can be played. This also gives students the permission to interpret scenes in multiple ways in their own studies.

Making the text active like this is so useful to students who often get stuck analyzing it on the page. You need to let the words live – play around with them – and then come back to the text, with a deeper sense of who these characters are, what drives them, what excites them.

You have chosen to focus your play mainly on the central couple, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Why so, and what do you find fascinating about their relationship?

It's interesting that many people think of the Macbeths as an 'evil power couple', but when you look deeper they are far more interesting than that. Power corrupts them and they do terrible things, certainly, but it's important to look back to where they started and how they got there. They are a loving couple, with deep admiration for each other. They want the best for each other. They have suffered the loss of a child which has caused them great grief. They really do feel like equals in their relationship. Over the events of the play we see their relationship crack and crumble, to the point where they can no longer even communicate. I think that bringing them to the forefront of our focus allows us to view them as flawed human beings, rather than stereotypical villains.

MACBETH SCREEN ADAPTATIONS

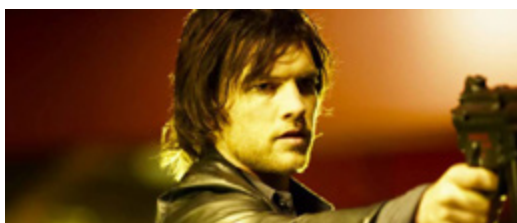
SCREEN ADAPTATIONS



Macbeth 2015 Director:
Justin Kurzel
StudioCanal



Shakespeare Retold (2007)
Director: Mark Brozel BBC
Productions



Macbeth 2006 Director:
Geoffrey Wright Arclight
Films



Macbeth (1979)
Director: Trevor Nunn
Royal Shakespeare Company



Macbeth (1971) Director:
Roman Polanski Columbia
Pictures



Throne Of Blood (1957)
Director: Akira Kurosawa
Toho Films



Macbeth (1948) Director:
Orson Welles Republic
Pictures

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

RESOURCES

WE RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING VERSION OF *MACBETH* FOR SCHOOL STUDENTS:

Rex Gibson / Linzy Brady / David James / Vicki Wienand (Eds), Cambridge School Shakespeare Macbeth (2014, Cambridge University Press)

The RSC version is also excellent and simple to follow, and the Arden is more thorough yet more challenging as the support material is very dense.

MACBETH: 360

Explore Bell Shakespeare's new video resource, [Macbeth: 360](#). An in-depth exploration of the plot, themes and language of *Macbeth*, presented and filmed in the round. Guided by actor and director Jules Billington, a team of Bell Shakespeare actors present key scenes and soliloquies in a series of engaging videos designed for classroom viewing.

SHAKESPEARE HUB

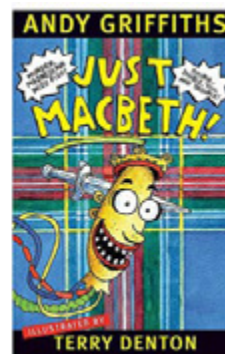
Bell Shakespeare's [Shakespeare Hub](#) has a wealth of information about Shakespeare and his plays. You'll find a number of video resources focused on *Macbeth*.

SHAKESPEARE UNBOUND

Explore our series with ABC Splash, [Shakespeare Unbound](#), which showcases key scenes from *Macbeth* and interviews with cast members, including Kate Mulvany.

A FUN, YET VERY CLEVER, REIMAGINING:

Bell Shakespeare commissioned popular Australian children's author Andy Griffiths to write the hilarious *Just Macbeth!* The script has now been published and provides a very silly, yet very clever journey through the play via Griffiths' well-known characters of Andy, Danny and Lisa.



WATCHABLE THINGS

Upstart Crow, Series 1, Episode 5 – *What Bloody Man is That?* (BBC)

A comic, fictional series about the life of William Shakespeare, written by Ben Elton, starring David Mitchell. This episode satirises Macbeth, as the play's events infiltrate Shakespeare's own life. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07fd593>

Slings and Arrows is a Canadian TV series about a company staging Shakespeare. Season 2 is about *Macbeth*, and has some great, useable clips.

There are many film versions of *Macbeth* available, including those directed by Polanski, Bogdanov, Nunn/Casson, the BBC's Shakespeare Retold adaptation set in a restaurant kitchen, a 2003 Indian version set in Mumbai – *Maqbool*, and the most recent 2015 film version starring Michael Fassbender and Marion Cotillard.

REHEARSAL ROOM AND ACTOR INTERVIEWS/WORKSHOPS:

Ian McKellen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGbZCgHQ9m8>

Kate Mulvany: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ooylBrpzquU>

Michael Fassbender: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SF8HObQgZ00>

BOOKS WITH GOOD EXERCISES FOR TEACHERS TO USE TO INTRODUCE SHAKESPEARE

Bayley, P., *An A-B-C Of Shakespeare* (1985, Longman Group)

Gibson, Rex, *Stepping Into Shakespeare* (2000, Cambridge University Press)

Gibson, Rex, *Discovering Shakespeare's Language* (1998, Cambridge University Press)

Winston, Joe and Miles Tandy, *Beginning Shakespeare 4–11* (2012, Routledge). This is aimed at teachers of younger children, but the principles still apply for secondary students.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Chubbuck, I, *The Power Of The Actor* (2005, Currency Press)

Crystal, David & Ben Crystal, *Shakespeare's Words: A Glossary & Language Companion*, (2002, Penguin Books)

Dunton-Downer, Leslie & Alan Riding, *Essential Shakespeare Handbook* (2013, Dorling Kindersley)

Fantasia, Louis, *Instant Shakespeare* (2002, Ivan R. Dee)

Jackson, Russell, *Players of Shakespeare 2* (1988, Cambridge University Press)

Wells, Stanley, *Is It True What They Say About Shakespeare?* (2007, Long Barn Books)

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Hazlit, William, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1845

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P. Yachnin, J. Slights, *Shakespeare and Character: Theory, History, Performance and Theatrical Persons*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008

Nick Moschovakis, *Macbeth: New Critical Essays*, London: Routledge, 2008

Wells, Stanley, *Shakespeare Survey, Volume 34*, Cambridge University Press, 1982

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY ONE: SOUND AND FURY

DRAMA AND ANALYSIS

The opening scene in *Macbeth* is highly atmospheric. Act 1 Scene 1 is set in a deserted, open space. As with all plays from this period, there would have been no set or special effects, Shakespeare set the scene with words alone.

ACT 1, SCENE 1

- FIRST WITCH:** When shall we three meet again, In
thunder, lightning, or in rain?
- SECOND WITCH:** When the hurlyburly's done, When
the battle's lost and won.
- THIRD WITCH:** That will be ere the set of sun.
- FIRST WITCH:** Where the place?
- SECOND WITCH:** Upon the heath.
- THIRD WITCH:** There to meet with Macbeth.
- FIRST WITCH:** I come, Graymalkin!
- SECOND WITCH:** Paddock calls.
- THIRD WITCH:** Anon.
- ALL:** Fair is foul, and foul is fair: Hover
through the fog and filthy air.

1. Read Act 1, Scene 1 above, then answer the following questions:
 - What mood does this scene set for the audience?
 - Why do you think Shakespeare chooses this as the entry point to the play?
 - Why is it important to set the mood at the beginning of a story or play?
 - What type of language and what techniques does Shakespeare use to create the mood?
2. As a class, stage the scene in your classroom paying particular attention to mood. How can you use sound effects, rhythm, percussion and voice to present the scene? Note: You can do this without even leaving your desks.
3. Once you have all your sound elements, play with layering them for different effects. How does the scene sound with one sound, two, three, or multiple sounds together?
4. Read the scene aloud over the soundscape, or work in groups to create your own unique way to present the scene.

ACTIVITY TWO: THE LANGUAGE OF FEAR

DRAMA AND ANALYSIS

Read the extract from Act 2 Scene 2 below.

1. What is happening in this scene? Explain the circumstances, mood, time of day, and what is concerning the two characters in this scene?
2. Look at the way Macbeth and Lady Macbeth complete each other's lines. How has Shakespeare laid this out on the page?
3. In iambic pentameter there are ten syllables per line. Count out the syllables in each line. What has happened to the rhythm? Why do you think Shakespeare might have done this?
4. Write in any actions or stage directions for the actors playing this scene.
5. Act out the scene in pairs. Try it as many different ways as you can think of, and discuss what is most effective: fast/slow, whispered/loud voices, close together/far apart. Which versions worked the best? Who had the most power in each version – Macbeth or Lady Macbeth?

ACT 2, SCENE 2

LADY MAC My husband?

MACBETH I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a noise?

LADY MAC I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry. Did not you speak?

MACBETH When?

LADY MAC Now.

MACBETH As I descended?

LADY MAC Ay.

MACBETH
Hark! Who lies i' the second chamber?

LADY MAC Donalbain.

MACBETH This is a sorry sight.

LADY MAC A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight.

MACBETH There's one did laugh in's sleep, and one cried 'Murder!' That they did wake each other: I stood and heard them: But they did say their prayers, and address'd them Again to sleep.

LADY MAC There are two lodged together.

MACBETH One cried 'God bless us!' and 'Amen' the other; As they had seen me with these hangman's hands. Listening their fear, I could not say 'Amen,' When they did say 'God bless us!'

LADY MAC Consider it not so deeply.

MACBETH But wherefore could not I pronounce 'Amen'? I had most need of blessing, and 'Amen' Stuck in my throat.

LADY MAC These deeds must not be thought After these ways; so, it will make us mad.

ACTIVITY THREE: DOUBLE, DOUBLE

LANGUAGE AND CREATIVE WRITING

A recurring motif in the language and images of *Macbeth* is the idea of the double (as in many of Shakespeare's plays). Shakespeare uses many phrases and images to explore this idea. Remember, doubles can be pairs, reflections or opposites. They can even be puns (when a word has a double meaning), or *hendiadys* (when two words with the same meaning are used in quick succession).

1. Macbeth tells Lady Macbeth, referring to King Duncan:

He's here in double trust

Act 1, Scene 7

Where and when does this happen in the story? What does Macbeth mean by this? What are the two forms of trust he is referring to?

2. Find other phrases or images that Shakespeare uses in the play that reference the idea of the double. List a quote for each, and explain the two meanings intended.

**ACTIVITY FOUR:
"I WOULD NOT
HAVE SUCH A
HEART"**

CREATIVE WRITING

In Act 5, Scene 1, Lady Macbeth's Gentlewoman tells the Doctor:

I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her night-gown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon't, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep.

1. Read Act 5, Scene 1 in full.
2. What happens in this scene? What is the mood and tone of this scene?
3. In what way is Lady Macbeth different to earlier in the play?
4. Despite her dark deeds, does this scene change your opinion of Lady Macbeth at all? If so, why? And if not, why not?
5. If you were a director, how might you stage this scene? How would you use set, costume, mood, sound, etc. to create the atmosphere for this scene?
6. What do you think Lady Macbeth is writing? Provide three ideas as to what she might be writing, and who she is writing to. Use evidence from the play to support your ideas.
7. Choose one of your ideas, and write Lady Macbeth's letter. Look closely at her lines in Act 5, Scene 1 to see what things are tormenting her, and include them in your letter.
8. Share the letters as a class – what ideas did your classmates have?

ACTIVITY FIVE: UNDAUNTED METTLE

CREATIVE WRITING

If you examine the Background to Shakespeare's *Macbeth* section, you can see that it is Lady Macbeth, whose real name was Gruoch, who actually had the strongest claim to the throne to rival King Duncan's. She had a young son, Lulach, and there were historic precedents for a woman taking the throne on behalf of their underage son. Scotland had no law barring women from succession to the throne. Write a piece of fiction in which there is no Macbeth, and Lady Macbeth challenges Malcolm for the throne herself.

POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY ONE: AFTER THE SHOW

CLASS DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS / DRAMA

Now that you have seen the performance, debrief with your class and discuss how the show deepened your understanding of the play.

1. *Macbeth: The Rehearsal* was a fictional story about the rehearsal of Shakespeare's Scottish play. Why do you think the writer chose to set the play in a rehearsal room?
 1. In *Macbeth: The Rehearsal* one of the characters is rehearsing the role of Macbeth. He has a significant journey. What was it? How did he change from the start of the play to the end? What were the significant shifts for his character?
 2. How does this journey and change mirror Macbeth's journey?
 3. Some of the key scenes were replayed several times. Why do you think this was done? How did it change the meaning of the scene? Did it have any effect on the characters?
1. Choose another short excerpt from a scene in *Macbeth*, and in small groups or pairs, replay it in several different ways. You might like to test out:
 - Physical limitations (ie. One character can move and one cannot, one character chases the other while the other runs away, etc.)
 - Motivations (ie. What does each character want in the scene? Does Macbeth want to back out of the plan, but Lady Macbeth wants to go through with it at all costs?)
 - Settings Try setting your scene in an unexpected location and see what happens, (ie. are Lady Macbeth and Macbeth waiting for a bus? Are they in a horror film? Are they ten years old? Ninety years old? This can be a very funny exercise but can often bring new ideas to the scene when you least expect it!)
2. Each pair or group should choose one version of their scene to share with their class. Afterwards discuss as a class:
 - What was interesting about the way the scene was played?
 - What was unusual/unexpected about the scene?
 - Who had more power in the scene? Why?

ACTIVITY TWO: THE LANGUAGE OF AMBITION (LADY MACBETH)

READING AND WRITING

Macbeth is often referred to as a play full of driving ambition. Macbeth is considered deeply flawed. Is it his ambition that is his character flaw, or is it his weakness at the time of the murder of Duncan, or maybe his gullibility? Lady Macbeth first hears of the Weird Sisters' prophecies in a letter from Macbeth. She then goes on to speak about his character in soliloquy.

1. Read the following extract from Act 1 Scene 5:

ACT 1, SCENE 5

LADY MACBETH

They met me in the day of success: and I have learned by the perfectest report, they have more in them than mortal knowledge. When I burned in desire to question them further, they made themselves air, into which they vanished. Whiles I stood rapt in the wonder of it, came missives from the king, who all hailed me 'Thane of Cawdor;' by which title, before, these weird sisters saluted me, and referred me to the coming on of time, with 'Hail, king that shalt be!' This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee. Lay it to thy heart, and farewell.

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
What thou art promised: yet do I fear thy nature;
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great;
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it: what thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win: thou'ldst have, great Glamis,
That which cries 'Thus thou must do, if thou have it;
And that which rather thou dost fear to do
Than wishest should be undone.' Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear;
And chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round,
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crown'd withal.

Lady Macbeth is enticed by the possibility of Macbeth becoming King. She urges him to fulfil the Weird Sisters' prediction. Her monologue later in Act 1 Scene 5 shows the audience the depth of her desire.

2. Read the extract below:

LADY MACBETH

The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements. 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! Make thick my blood;
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief. Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry 'Hold, hold!'

1. After you have read the two monologues, look up the meanings of any unfamiliar words. Make sure you understand all the phrases, then answer the following:
2. What does Lady Macbeth want?
3. Is her ambition for herself or for her husband? How do you know?
4. What is her opinion of her husband? What does she say about his personality?
5. What ideas does she carry from Macbeth's letter into her following monologue?
6. List the requests she makes of the spirits. What is she asking them to do?
7. Why might she need this kind of supernatural aid?
8. What is she afraid of?
9. How would you describe the imagery she draws on? Use examples from the text.

EXTENSION

These two speeches are also very rewarding dramatic monologues to perform. The important thing is to clear away any assumptions or preconceived ideas you might have, and speak the lines from Lady Macbeth's point of view. Remember, you are just a person who wants something very badly for someone you love. And yet, keep in mind how enormous an action this is you plan to undertake.

ACTIVITY THREE: THE LANGUAGE OF AMBITION (MACBETH)

COMPARISON AND ANALYSIS

Complete Post-Performance Activity Two, focusing on Lady Macbeth. Now read Macbeth's soliloquy below from Act 1 Scene 7:

ACT 1, SCENE 7

MACBETH

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly: if the 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
this 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 the inventor: this
even-handed justice Commends the ingredients
of our poison'd chalice To our own lips. He's here
in double trust; First, as I am his kinsman and his
subject, Strong both against the deed; then, as
his host, Who should against his murderer shut
the door, Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this
Duncan Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath
been So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off; And pity,
like a naked new-born babe, Striding the blast,
or heaven's cherubim, horsed Upon the sightless
couriers of the air, Shall blow the horrid deed in
every eye, That tears shall drown the wind. I have
no spur To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself And falls
on the other.

1. As you did with Lady Macbeth's speeches, ensure that you fully understand the meaning of all words and phrases. Look any words up that you do not understand, then answer the questions below:
2. What type of images does Macbeth use? List some of the comparisons he makes.

1. How do these images differ from the ones Lady Macbeth uses?
4. What arguments does he propose for and against Killing Duncan?
5. What does he fear? Use examples from the text.
6. In which moments does he display ambition and when does he show fear?
7. What does he understand about himself?
8. What is the conclusion that Macbeth comes to at the end of the monologue?

EXTENSION

If you also want to perform Macbeth's speech as a dramatic monologue, remember that he is someone who is working through a series of ideas, coming up with them one at a time. Watching the character make discoveries is always more interesting than watching someone who already has it figured out. Have fun!

ACTIVITY FOUR: "SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES"

CRITICAL THINKING

In the very first scene of the play, Macbeth is a celebrated war hero with a great future ahead of him. He is greeted with a mysterious prophecy from the Weird Sisters, which then determines the course of the play.

We know the events of the play, but what is not clear is who steers the story to its tragic conclusion. Is it the Weird Sisters' fault for planting the idea in Macbeth's mind and igniting his imagination? Is it Lady Macbeth's fault for her ambitious insistence on Macbeth to become King prematurely? Or is Macbeth the only one to blame, as master of his own fate?

CLASSROOM DEBATE

Divide the class into four groups.

1. Group 1 will present their case as to why Macbeth is to blame. Group 2 will present their case as to why Lady Macbeth is to blame.
2. Group 3 will present their case as to why The Weird Sisters are to blame.
3. Group 4 will act as the jury, asking questions of each group, and deciding who has the most convincing case. The jury can also determine whether other groups are allowed to interrupt presentations to 'rebut' statements made.
4. Each group should work to form a strong case using evidence from the text in order to convince the jury of their character's blame.
5. Hold a debate in the classroom, with one member of Group 4 elected Judge to order proceedings. Each group will present their case, be questioned by the jury, then asked to finalise their statement. Encourage all members of the group to speak on the matter.
6. Group 4 will then weigh up all the arguments, summarising them, including the most convincing points. They will then present their findings to the class, and announce their final verdict.

ACTIVITY FIVE: "THIS CASTLE HATH A PLEASANT SEAT"

ANALYSIS / RESEARCH

How important is it that this play is set in ancient Scotland? Some directors choose to set the play in a different place or time, for various reasons. These have included:

- Japan
 - 1950's gangster America
 - Modern Glasgow, Scotland
 - The battlefield of World War I
 - A high-end restaurant
1. Make a list of all the mentions you can find in the text of Scotland, or of things that seem particularly Scottish.
 2. The real Macbeth lived in the eleventh century. Research medieval Scotland and list the key facts you can find. How did people live? What did men and women do? What was life like for children? How would people have dressed? What did they eat? What armour did they use, and how did they fight? What was the landscape like? Build a picture of what feudal Scotland would have been like.
 3. Think of another country, place or time where you could set *Macbeth*, if you were a director. What would that world look like? How would its people behave? Would anything in the story have to be changed? Think about what you are gaining and what you might lose, with your new setting.
 4. Play the designer and determine how you would convey this new setting in a production using:
 - Set
 - Costume
 - Lighting
 - Sound

EXTENSION

Create a production poster for your version of *Macbeth*. How would you convey your new ideas and setting in the poster? Present your poster to your class, and make a case for why this is a viable setting for the play. You could divide into those who decided it needed to be kept in Scotland, and those who want to experiment with putting it elsewhere, and have a debate about the strengths and weaknesses of both choices.