

MACBETH



Plot

1. While returning from battle, Macbeth meets three Witches who predict that he will become King of Scotland.
2. Macbeth tells his wife of the Witches' predictions and she encourages him to murder the current king, Duncan, who is staying with them as a guest.
3. After Macduff discovers the murder, Duncan's sons flee the country, leaving the way clear for Macbeth to become king.
4. Banquo, Macbeth's best friend, becomes suspicious of what his friend has done so Macbeth has him murdered too.
5. Macbeth pays a second visit to the Witches and receives more predictions.
6. In England, Malcolm and Macduff, plan to invade Scotland to win back the throne. An enraged Macbeth has Macduff's wife and children killed; Macduff swears revenge.
7. Lady Macbeth suffers from guilt for what she has done and eventually commits suicide.
8. Malcolm's invasion is successful and Macduff kills Macbeth. Malcolm becomes the new King of Scotland and the country counts the cost of Macbeth's short but bloody reign.

Characters

- **Macbeth:** A brave warrior and leader at the start of the drama but he falls victim to the Witches' predictions.
- **Lady Macbeth:** Lady Macbeth is even more ambitious than her husband. She persuades Macbeth to kill Duncan but she later becomes unable to deal with the guilt of what she has done.
- **Banquo:** Another general in King Duncan's army and Macbeth's best friend. While both men have ambitious thoughts, Banquo is more cautious.
- **Macduff:** The Thane of Fife, is Macbeth's deadly enemy. According to the Witches' prediction, Macduff is the only one who can stop Macbeth. The two men meet face-to-face on the battlefield and Macduff kills Macbeth.
- **The witches:** Their predictions lead to Macbeth killing King Duncan. They plant ideas in Macbeth's mind and let his ambition do the rest.
- **King Duncan:** The good King of Scotland whom Macbeth murders. Duncan is the model of a virtuous, compassionate, and farsighted ruler.
- **Malcolm:** The son of Duncan, whose restoration to the throne signals Scotland's return to order following Macbeth's reign of terror.



Themes

- Ambition, power and greed
- Loyalty and kingship
- Guilt
- Death, violence and conflict
- Light and dark
- Blood and water
- Masculinity/Manliness
- The supernatural



Context

Unrest: The early 17th century was a time of unrest, suspicion and superstition. A new king had just come to power and the future of the country seemed quite uncertain.

Monarchs: A king in Shakespeare's time was thought to rule by 'divine right'. This meant that God had chosen that person directly. The killing of a king (regicide) was considered to be the worst crime that anyone could commit.

Gunpowder Plot: The new King James I was paranoid about assassination attempts. This was unsurprising, since the infamous Gunpowder Plot to blow up the King had taken place just months before Macbeth was first performed.

Supernatural: King James believed in the supernatural. He wrote a book called *Daemonologie* in which he encouraged the trials of witches. Many in his audience would have believed in these things. This is one of the reasons that Shakespeare included the characters of the witches.

Women: Women had a much lower status than would be the case today. Wives were little more than the property of their husbands and had no legal rights.



Macbeth: A brave warrior and leader at the start of the drama but he falls victim to the Witches' predictions.



Lady Macbeth: Lady Macbeth is even more ambitious than her husband. She persuades Macbeth to kill Duncan but she later becomes unable to deal with the guilt of what she has done.



Points (words to describe Macbeth)

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| • Ambitious | Courageous |
| • Honourable | Admired |
| • Malleable | Manipulated |
| • Calculating | Violent |
| • Naive | Feared |

Points (words to describe Lady Macbeth)

- | | |
|----------------|--------------|
| • Manipulative | Calculating |
| • Ambitious | Deceitful |
| • Supernatural | Evil |
| • Controlling | Unscrupulous |
| • Fragile | Possessed |

Top 10 quotations

1. "brave" "Signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine on all deservers" 1.2
2. "I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent" 1.3
3. "stars hide your fires! Let not light see my black and deep desires" 1.4
4. "we will proceed no further in this business" 1.7
5. "False face must hide what the false heart doth know" 1.7
6. "Is this a dagger I see before me, Come, let me clutch thee" 2.1
7. "Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep!" 2.2
8. "To be thus is nothing but to be safely thus. Our fears in Banquo stick deep" 3.1
9. "devil," "hellhound" "abhorred tyrant" "rarer monster" and "follower of Satan" 5.6 (Macduff and others)
10. "Yet I will try the last: before my body I throw my warlike shield" 5.8

Top 10 quotations

1. "my partner of greatness" (Macbeth 1.5)
2. "I fear thy nature; It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness" (1.5)
3. "Come, you spirits... unsex me here/And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full/Of direst cruelty." (1.5)
4. "Look like th' innocent flower, but be the serpent under 't." (1.5)
5. "I would, while it was smiling in my face, have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums and dashed the brains out" (1.7)
6. "a liitle water clears us of this deed" (2.2)
7. "My hands are of your colour, but I shame to wear a heart so white." (2.2)
8. "Be honest of the knowledge dearest chuck" (Macbeth 3.2)
9. "Yet here's a spot...Out, damned spot! out, I say!" (5.1)
10. "What, will these hands ne'er be clean?" (5.1)

Macduff: The Thane of Fife, is Macbeth's deadly enemy. According to the Witches' prediction, Macduff is the only one who can stop Macbeth. The two men meet face-to-face on the battlefield and Macduff kills Macbeth.



The witches: Their predictions lead to Macbeth killing King Duncan. They plant ideas in Macbeth's mind and let his ambition do the rest.



Points (words to describe Macduff)

- | | |
|--------------|-----------------------|
| • Brave | Courageous |
| • Honourable | Admired |
| • Loyal | Selfless |
| • Righteous | Powerful |
| • Feared | Antithesis of Macbeth |

Points (words to describe the witches)

- | | |
|----------------|-------------|
| • Manipulative | Calculating |
| • Controlling | Deceitful |
| • Supernatural | Evil |
| • Wicked | Prophetic |
| • Tormenters | Despicable |

Top 10 quotations

1. "oh horror, horror, horror" 2.3 (finding Duncan's body)
2. "O gentle lady, 'Tis not for you to hear what I can speak" (to L. Macbeth)
3. "The untimely emptying of the happy throne" 4.3 (Macbeth murdering Duncan)
4. "bleed, bleed, poor country" 4.3 (when he thinks Malcolm will be a bad king)
5. "I must feel it as a man" 4.3 (finding out about his wife and children)
6. "tyranny show thy face" 5.7 (calling out for Macbeth)
7. "from his mother's whom untimely ripped" 5.8
8. "turn, hellhound, turn!" "rarer monster" (to Macbeth)
9. "I have ne words, my voice is in my sword" 5.8 (to Macbeth)
10. "Hail, King! Hail, King of Scotland!" 5.8 (to Malcolm)

Top 10 quotations

1. "when shall we three meet again? In thunder, lightning or in rain?" 1.1
2. "there to meet with Macbeth" 1.1
3. "fair is foul and foul is fair" 1.1
4. "Hail Macbeth...thou shall be king hereafter" 1.3
5. "Lesser than Macbeth and greater" 1.3 (to Banquo)
6. "imperfect speakers" 1.3 (Macbeth)
7. Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn, and cauldron bubble 4.1
8. "By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes" 4.1 (about Macbeth)
9. "you secret, black, and midnight hags" 4.1 (Macbeth)
10. "Beware Macduff" 4.1

Ambition, Power and Greed

- Macbeth's ambition is contrasted to Banquo's loyalty
- Lady Macbeth is ambitious to be Queen
- Macbeth kills King Duncan because of his ambition
- Macbeth orders the deaths of Banquo, and Macduff's family
- Lady Macbeth, no longer powerful, dies off stage
- With the death of Macbeth, rightful power is restored at the end of the play



Loyalty and Kingship

- Macbeth named Thane of Cowdor for being loyal to King Duncan.
- Macbeth says he cannot kill Duncan out of loyalty
- Macbeth betrays King Duncan and murders him
- Malcolm tests Macduff's loyalty to him
- Macduff kills Macbeth out of loyalty to Malcolm
- Malcolm, the rightful heir, is King at the end of the play



Guilt

- Lady Macbeth persuades Macbeth to kill King Duncan as the guard will "bear the guilt" of the murder
- After murdering Duncan, Macbeth becomes consumed with guilt
- Lady Macbeth says not to worry about the death
- Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost – highlighting his guilt
- Lady Macbeth sleepwalks seeing blood on her hands
- Consumed with guilt, Lady Macbeth commits suicide



Death, Violence and Conflict

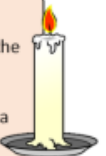
- Violence in battle is celebrated at start of the play
- Macbeth and Lady Macbeth argue about killing King Duncan
- Macbeth suffers internal conflict of conscience
- Macbeth murders King Duncan
- Macbeth orders the death of Banquo
- Conflicted, Lady Macbeth dies
- Macduff kills Macbeth and his death is celebrated



Themes

Light and Dark

- Macbeth asks the "stars to hide their fires"
- Following Duncan's death the sun doesn't rise as the world is in chaos "night strangles light"
- Before Banquo's murder, his torch goes out
- At the end of the play, Lady Macbeth had to have a light by her side
- Macbeth reacts to Lady Macbeth's death by saying "out brief candle" – showing he felt she brought light



Blood and Water

- Macbeth sees visions of a blood covered dagger
- Macbeth is scared by Duncan's blood – he says it would turn all of the seas red
- L. Macbeth says that they can wash the blood away
- Macbeth celebrates Banquo's blood being on the murderer's face
- The ghost of Banquo is covered in blood
- Lady Macbeth later sees blood on her hands



Masculinity/Manliness

- Macbeth describes his wife as his "partner of greatness"
- L. Macbeth worries Macbeth will not kill Duncan
- L. Macbeth says he's not a man unless he kills Duncan
- L. Macbeth guides Macbeth after Duncan's murder
- Macduff is upset at the death of his wife and children and wants revenge against Macbeth
- At the end, we are reminded of Macbeth's bravery



The Supernatural

- The witches open the play at set the atmosphere
- Macbeth has complete belief in their prophecies
- L. Macbeth asks for the evil spirits help to persuade her husband to murder Duncan
- Macbeth sees visions of a dagger and Banquo's ghost
- After Duncan's death, the world is thrown into chaos
- Macbeth is so consumed, he returns to the witches
- Lady Macbeth's sleep is haunted and she kills herself

