



ORLANDO  
*Shakespeare*  
THEATER  
*In Partnership with UCF*

**William Shakespeare's  
Macbeth**

**Study Guide**

# *Macbeth*

Welcome to *Macbeth*. We hope that this study guide will help you further your understanding and enjoyment of one of Shakespeare's most popular tragedies. The Orlando Shakespeare Theatre has a strong belief in the relationship between the actor and the audience because, without either one, there is no theater. We hope that this study guide will help bring a better understanding of the plot, themes, and characters in this play so that you can more fully enjoy the theatrical experience.

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This guide was written to correspond to the following **Sunshine State Standards**

### **The Arts**

**Skills and Techniques** - The student understands and applies arts techniques, media and processes.

**Creation and Communication** - The student creates and communicates a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas using knowledge of structures and functions of the arts.

**Cultural and Historical Connections** - The student understands the arts in relation to history and culture.

**Aesthetic and Critical Analysis** - The student analyzes, evaluates, and responds to characteristics of works of art.

### **Language Arts**

**Writing** - The student uses the writing process effectively.

**Listening, Viewing, & Speaking** - The student uses listening strategies effectively.

**Language** - The student understands the nature and power of language.

## Meet the Characters

**The Three Witches:** Introduced to us in the opening scene, the Three Witches set Macbeth upon his murderous path. They tell Macbeth that he will be Thane (Lord) of Cawdor and later the King. Later, by use of the Three Apparitions, they foretell his doom.

**Macbeth:** Originally a loyal and honest man, his descent into murder and betrayal is the tale of how ambition can tarnish even the purest of souls. Driven by loyalty to King Duncan, his own "Vaulting ambition," leads to him killing King Duncan to secure his own destiny.

**Lady Macbeth:** Macbeth's wife. Her ambition for Macbeth's future rivals and arguably exceeds that of Macbeth's. She goads Macbeth to kill King Duncan when Macbeth hesitates.

**Banquo:** Loyal friend of Macbeth. He bears witness to the initial prophecies made by the Three Witches. Though eager to learn his own destiny, Banquo serves as a counterpoint to how one deals with fate.

**Fleance:** Son of Banquo and the first in a line of kings prophesied by the Three Witches.

**Duncan, King of Scotland:** The loyal but naïve, trusting King. At the beginning of the play Duncan is betrayed by the original Thane of Cawdor. He grants this title upon Macbeth because he secured the King victory in battle against the Thane of Cawdor.

**Malcolm & Donalbain:** The two sons of King Duncan. Upon their father's death, they flee to avoid a similar fate. Donalbain heads to Ireland, whilst Malcolm heads to England where he hopes to build an army to take back the kingdom from the evil Macbeth.

**Hecate:** A shadowy character of the underworld, she is in command of the Three Witches.

**Macduff:** Thane of Fife and Macbeth's nemesis. He is the first person to suspect Macbeth of Duncan's murder and thus loses his family because of it.

**Siward:** Leader of the English army.

**Young Siward:** The son of Siward, he dies fighting Macbeth.

**Lennox, Ross, Menteith, Angus and Caithness:** Noblemen of Scotland fighting Macbeth.

**Sergeant:** A Warrior in Duncan's army.

**Seyton:** A lieutenant of Macbeth's.

# Plot Summary

## Act I

A storm rages above a Scottish moor, thunder and lightning split the sky. Three haggard old women, the witches, appear out of the storm. In dark, chanting tones, they make plans to meet again upon the heath, after the battle, to confront Macbeth. As quickly as they arrive, they vanish.

King Duncan and his followers have just won a war against the armies of Norway and Irish invaders. At his camp, the King asks a sergeant for news about the day's events. The sergeant tells the king how bravely Macbeth fought in the battle. The King then decrees that, for his bravery in battle, Macbeth shall be given the title of Thane of Cawdor.

Macbeth and his friend Banquo are on their way to the King's court in Florres, when they are confronted by the Three Witches and shrink in fear at the sight of the old women. The witches hail Macbeth as the Thane of Glamis (his original title) and as the Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth is stunned by this second title because he has not yet heard about the King's decree. Furthering his confusion and imagination, the Witches also declare that Macbeth will one day be King of Scotland. Banquo then asks the Witches to tell him of his future, and the Witches reply that he will never be king but that his *sons* shall sit on the throne. Macbeth implores the Witches to explain what they meant by calling him the Thane of Cawdor, but they vanish without an answer.

After the Witches leave, Macbeth and Banquo discuss the strange encounter, but are interrupted by Ross and Angus, two nobleman of Scotland. Ross tells Macbeth that the King has made him Thane of Cawdor. Astonished that one part of the Witches' prophecy has come true, Macbeth asks Banquo if he hopes his children will become kings. Banquo warns his friend that devils often tell half-truths to "win us to our harm." As the group departs for Florres, Macbeth whispers to Banquo that, at a later time, he would like to discuss their mysterious day.

Once they arrive at the King's palace, Duncan greets Macbeth and Banquo with praise and thanks for their heroism in battle. Duncan also announces that he has named his son Malcolm heir to the throne. Macbeth openly declares his joy, but notes to himself that Malcolm now stands between him and the crown. Plans are made for Duncan to dine at Macbeth's castle that evening, and Macbeth goes ahead of the royal party and writes a letter to his wife to inform her of the day's events and the King's impending arrival.

The scene shifts to Inverness at Macbeth's castle where Lady Macbeth is reading the letter from Macbeth announcing his promotion to the thaneship of Cawdor and the details of his meeting with the witches. She resolves to put her natural femininity aside and convince her husband that the two of them should do whatever is necessary to seize the crown.

Macbeth enters, and he and his wife discuss the King's forthcoming visit. Macbeth tells his wife that Duncan plans to leave the next day, but Lady Macbeth declares that the King will never see tomorrow. She tells her husband to have patience and leave the plan to her.

Lady Macbeth then goes outside to greet the King. Duncan thanks her for her hospitality. He professes his love for Macbeth.

While everyone is preparing for dinner Macbeth ponders whether or not he should kill the King. He states that the act would be easy if he was sure that there would be no consequences and also declares his willingness to risk eternal damnation. However, he knows that he is Duncan's host and kinsmen; moreover, Duncan is universally admired and loved for being a virtuous king. Macbeth finally states that there is no real reason to kill the King except for his own ambition, which he realizes is an unreliable guide.

Just then Lady Macbeth enters and Macbeth tells to her that he no longer wishes to kill King Duncan. Lady Macbeth calls him a coward and says that they cannot fail if they are bold and act with confidence. She reveals her plan: while Duncan sleeps, she will drug his guards so Macbeth can kill the King in the middle of the night. They will then smear the blood of Duncan on the sleeping guards, framing them for the murder. Astonished by the brilliance of her plan, he agrees to perform the bloody act.

## **Act II**

Later that evening, well after midnight, Macbeth is wandering through the dark, torch lit castle, when he hears a bell toll. This is Lady Macbeth's signal that the King's guards are asleep. Macbeth strides off towards the King's chamber to commit the murder. At that moment Lady Macbeth enters and remarks on her boldness. Macbeth emerges badly shaken, his hands covered in blood, and tells her that the deed is done. Lady Macbeth tries to steady her husband but becomes angry when she notices that he has forgotten to plant the daggers on the guards so as to frame them for the murder. She quickly takes the daggers into the room herself. As she leaves, Macbeth is frightened by a mysterious knocking. When Lady Macbeth reenters, the knocking comes again, and then a third time. She ushers her husband away into their bedchamber to clean up.

A porter then stumbles through the hallway to answer the door and lets Macduff and Lennox enter. Macduff asks the porter if Macbeth is awake as Macbeth enters. Macduff tell Macbeth that the King asked them to come and wake the King this early and Macbeth leads them to the King. As Macduff enters the King's chamber, Lennox tells Macbeth how strange the weather was this night. In shock and panic, Macduff emerges from the King's chamber shouting that the King has been murdered.

As Macbeth and Lennox exit into the bed chamber to inspect the scene for themselves, Lady Macbeth and Duncan's son Malcolm arrive on the scene and are given the tragic news. Macbeth emerges from the room saying that in his rage he has killed the King's guards. Malcolm feels that he is not safe, because he assumes that whoever wanted the King dead will probably want to kill him too, and declares that he will flee to the south of England.

Meanwhile Macbeth and Banquo rally the lords to meet and discuss the murder. At the meeting Macbeth is made King of Scotland by the other lords. The lords also suspect that it might have been Malcolm who had the King killed because he fled the scene so quickly.

### **Act III**

At the palace at Forres, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth meet Banquo and invite him to a feast they will be hosting that night. Banquo accepts the invitation and tells them he will be taking a ride in the forest that afternoon. Macbeth then dismisses the court and meets privately with two murderers. Macbeth hires these two men to kill Banquo and his son Fleance while they are out riding.

At dusk the two murderers, now joined by a third, linger in the forest outside of the palace. Banquo and his son Fleance approach and dismount their horses, and as they light a torch, the murderers set upon them. They successfully kill Banquo, but Fleance escapes into the growing darkness. The men leave with Banquo's body to go and find Macbeth and tell him what has happened.

Back at the castle a feast has been prepared and Macbeth and his wife mingle with the guests. One of the murderers appears in a doorway and Macbeth learns from him that Banquo has been slain but Fleance has escaped. This news angers Macbeth, if only Fleance had died, he muses, his place on the throne would have been secure. Returning to the party, Macbeth finds Banquo's ghost sitting in his chair. This apparition frightens Macbeth so much that he begins to yell at the spirit and order him away. All of his guests are confused at their King's strange behavior, and Lady Macbeth quickly steps in and explains to everyone that her husband often has visions such as these and asks her guests to leave as the ghost vanishes.

Macbeth utters to his wife that "blood will have blood" and that he has heard from a servant-spy that Macduff intends to keep away from court, an action that verges on treason. Macbeth also tells his wife that he will visit the three Witches the next day in hopes of learning more about the future and about who may be plotting against him. Macbeth resolves to do whatever is necessary to keep his crown.

That night, somewhere in Scotland, Lennox discusses with another lord the strange and bloody events that have happened to the kingdom. Banquo's murder has been blamed on the escaped Fleance. Nevertheless, both men suspect Macbeth, whom they label a tyrant in the murders of Duncan and Banquo. The lord then tells Lennox that Macduff has traveled to England, where he will join Malcolm and ask the King of England for aid. He also says that these actions by Macduff have prompted Macbeth to prepare for war.

### **Act IV**

In a dark cavern a large cauldron boils and hisses as the Three Witches appear onstage. As they predicted, Macbeth enters and asks them to reveal the truth of their prophecies to him. The Witches give him three predictions: first, to beware Macduff, second, that "none of woman born shall harm Macbeth," third, that he will be safe until Birnam Wood moves to Dunsinane Hill. After providing Macbeth with their visions the Witches disappear. Lennox enters and tells Macbeth that Macduff has fled to England. Macbeth resolves to send soldiers to capture Macduff's castle and kill Macduff's wife and children.

Outside of King Edward's palace in England, Malcolm is talking to Macduff, when Ross enters and tells Macduff that Macbeth has murdered his wife and children. Macduff is overcome with grief, but Malcolm tells him to turn his grief into anger.

Malcolm then declares that he will return to Scotland with ten thousand soldiers lent to him by King Edward and Macduff assures him that he will have his revenge on Macbeth.

## **Act V**

Back at Macbeth's castle in Dunsinane, a doctor and a gentlewoman are discussing Lady Macbeth's strange habit of sleepwalking, when suddenly Lady Macbeth enters in a trance. She is mourning the deaths of Lady Macduff and Banquo and seems to see blood on her hands and claims that nothing will wash it off. Lady Macbeth leaves, and the doctor and gentlewoman marvel at her descent into madness.

Macbeth strides confidently into the hall, boasting proudly that he has nothing to fear of the advancing English army since "none of woman born" can hurt him. The doctor tells the king that Lady Macbeth is kept from rest by dark visions and Macbeth orders him to cure her of her delusions.

In the country near Birnam Wood, Malcolm talks with his officers and orders that the soldiers cut down branches from the trees to hold out in front of them in order to disguise their numbers.

Back inside the castle, Macbeth orders that banners be hung and brags that his castle will repel the advancing army. Offstage a woman's cry is heard and Macbeth's servant Seyton enters and tell Macbeth that the queen is dead. Shocked, Macbeth speaks numbly about the passage of time and declares that life is "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." A messenger then bursts in and tells Macbeth that the trees of Birnam Wood are marching toward Dunsinane castle. Astonished and terrified, Macbeth recalls the prophecy given by the Witches saying that he could not die until Birnam Wood moved to Dunsinane. Residingly, he declares that he is tired of the sun and that if he must die, he will die fighting.

Outside the castle the battle commences. On the battlefield Macbeth fights confidently and bravely because no man born of a woman can harm him. After much searching Macduff finds Macbeth on the battlefield. The two men fight and when Macbeth taunts Macduff saying that he is invincible because none of woman born can kill him, Macduff tells Macbeth that he was not of woman born, but rather "from his mother's womb untimely ripped." Macduff was a cesarean delivery. Scared for his life, Macbeth declares that he will not surrender and the two men exit fighting.

Back inside the castle, Malcolm and Siward walk freely because they have successfully captured Dunsinane. Macduff enters with Macbeth's head and proclaims Malcolm the King of Scotland. Cursing Macbeth and his queen, Malcolm calls all of those around him his friends and invites them to Scone where he will be crowned.

**THE END**

## Tools for The Text: Paraphrase

William Shakespeare wrote his plays over 400 years ago. In the past 400 years there have been many changes in the English language that can alter the way we interpret some of Shakespeare's words. Over time, words change from one connotation to another. Sometimes even the definitions of words shift.

A great tool to help connect with Shakespeare's text is Paraphrasing. Paraphrasing is when you take a piece of writing and put it in your own words. It can be very helpful to take Shakespeare's words and put them into modern slang to establish a more personal connection with the writing.

Examine the following lines, where, as the battle is about to begin, Macbeth laments the loss of his wife, and all the terrible things that have transpired:

**She should have died hereafter.  
There would have been a time for such a word.  
Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time.  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle.  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.**

One possible paraphrase might read:

*She should have died later. There would have been time to mourn her. Tomorrow, and tomorrow and tomorrow keep coming slowly every day until the very end of time. Every day before has lit the path toward death. Die, die short life. Life is nothing more than a moving shadow, like a actor that is both happy and nervous in his brief time in the world and then disappears. It is like a poorly told story, a lot of show with no meaning.*



## Tools for The Text: Imagery

Another tool to help with the words of Shakespeare is to use what comes into your mind as fuel for a scene of a character. Just as pictures come into your mind when you read a book, Shakespeare used even more profound words and phrases that create very powerful images.

Let's look at the Macbeth monologue again.

She should have died hereafter.  
There would have been a **time** for such a word.  
**Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow**  
**Creeps in this petty pace** from day to day  
To the **last syllable of recorded time**.  
And all our yesterdays have **lighted fools**  
**The way to dusty death**. Out, out, **brief candle**.  
Life's but a **walking shadow**, a **poor player**  
That **struts and frets** his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, **full of sound and fury**,  
**Signifying nothing**.

Take a look at the words in bold. Step One is to write down the first few images that come into your mind:

time

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow

Creeps in this petty pace

last syllable of recorded time

lighted fools The way to dusty death.

brief candle.

**walking shadow**

**poor player**

**struts and frets**

**full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing.**

The next step is to ask yourself what those images might mean to you. What emotions do they produce? What actions do they make you want to do? You may find that certain words contain more powerful images than others.

Now that you are personally connected to the words, say the monologue out loud and allow the images to fill your mind, and your audience's mind, as you speak.

## Questions for Discussion

**1.) Occult**

Many occult symbols occur in *Macbeth*. Symbols such as blood, witches, ghosts, and storms are littered throughout the text. Why do these symbols appear? Where do they occur in the play? What do they mean? What influences might have compelled Shakespeare to include them? How has this type of imagery influenced the perception of this play in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

**2.) Destiny**

Destiny and fate are major themes throughout *Macbeth*. How do the three “Weird Sisters” compare to the Greek Fates? (note: an archaic definition of “weird” was fate or destiny) To what extent do their predictions dictate events? Are their prophecies binding? Is Macbeth trapped by destiny, a victim of fate, or does he have free will? How do we know?

**3.) Tragedy**

*Macbeth* is one of Shakespeare’s Tragedies. What is tragic about the story? What elements make it a tragedy? Which characters are most tragic? What do you think is the overall, great tragedy within the story?

## Complete Learning Plans

This LEARNING PLAN is designed for Grades 5- 7

**Objectives:** In this exercise, students will examine how the titles of our world today compare to those in Macbeth's world.

**Standards and Benchmarks:** LA.A.1.2, LA.A.1.3, LA.B.2.2, LA.E.2.2, LA.B.1.3, LA.B.2.3, LA.D.1.3

**Materials Needed:** A copy of the play, a notebook/piece of paper, encyclopedia or internet access, and a pencil.

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### Suggested Lesson Plan:

- 1) Ask the students to find all the titles of nobility in *Macbeth* (i.e. Thane, King, Earl).
- 2) Using the text of the play as a reference, have the students write down the title, a definition, and a comparison in modern terms.
- 3) Next, have the students research the title and titles of other countries. They can be modern- United States, France, or older cultures like Ancient Rome, or the Ottoman Empire.
- 5) Using all the information they have gathered, have the students make a hierarchy chain of the titles in *Macbeth* and then another, with comparable titles of another time period or culture.

### Assessment:

Your students will find a greater connection with the action, the text and the characters. They will be encouraged to look up any information they may not know. This activity continues elements of paraphrasing introduced earlier in the study guide.

## Complete Learning Plans

This LEARNING PLAN is designed for Age/Grade 7<sup>th</sup> grade- 12<sup>th</sup> grade

**Objectives:** This exercise is intended to challenge higher level students. In addition to locating specific pieces of action, it will challenge them to connect with the characters on a personal level. This should help them to find meaning for themselves within the scenes. It should inspire them to view the play as a living thing they can connect to personally and introduce them to the fun of exploring the text.

**Standards and Benchmarks:** LA.C.1.3, LA.C.2.3, TH.A.1.3, TH.A.2.3, LA.C.1.4, LA.C.2.4, TH.A.1.4, TH.A.2.4

**Materials Needed:** A copy of the play, a notebook/piece of paper, and a pencil.

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### Suggested Lesson Plan:

- 1) After attending the Festivals production of *Macbeth*, the students should be assigned to pair up and choose a scene from the play and write down the characters and the goal for the play for those characters.
- 2) The students should find the scene in a copy of the text and figure out what each character's goal is for that specific scene. Are the scene goals different from the overall goal? What does the character need to do to achieve their goal? (defined as action) What is standing in the character's way? (defined as obstacle)
- 3) Students should then perform the scene in front of the class. The class will observe and try to identify what the goals, actions, and obstacles are.
- 4) After hearing the class' observations and suggestions, the students will perform the scene again.

### Assessment:

Students should be able to identify the characters and scenes from the play. They will be able to utilize paraphrasing introduced earlier in the study guide. Students will gain an a working grasp of acting terminology and the process that actors, playwrights and directors go through in putting together a play. Students will also gain more confidence in public speaking and thinking on their feet,