

## Macbeth Core knowledge

### Plot

- The play opens with three witches who plan to meet with Scottish soldier, Macbeth.
- A captain from the battle between Norway and Scotland in which some Scottish soldiers rebelled, tells King Duncan of Macbeth and Banquo's bravery. As a reward, Duncan decides to give Macbeth the title of Thane of Cawdor, as the man who currently holds that title is a traitor.
- Macbeth and Banquo meet with the witches. Macbeth is told he will be Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland. Banquo is told his children will be kings.
- Two generals arrive and tell Macbeth he has been named Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth is now intrigued by the possibility of becoming King. He visits the king and Duncan names his son, Malcolm as his heir and Macbeth begins to think about murder. Macbeth writes to his wife to tell her what happened.
- Lady Macbeth expresses her violent ambition. When Macbeth arrives home, they plan to kill Duncan and frame his guards.
- Duncan arrives at the castle and Macbeth has doubts. Lady Macbeth persuades him by questioning his masculinity. Macbeth kills Duncan after seeing a bloody dagger. He feels guilty but Lady Macbeth does not and plants the daggers on the guards who Macbeth has also killed.
- Macduff, a Scottish nobleman, finds Duncan's body. Duncan's sons flee and Macbeth is named king.
- As King, Macbeth feels threatened by Banquo and hires murderers to kill him and his son, Fleance. They kill Banquo but Fleance escapes.
- Macbeth hosts a banquet and sees a vision of Banquo's ghost.
- Afraid, he goes to visit the witches. They show him three apparitions which tell him to beware Macduff, he cannot be harmed by anyone born of woman and he will be safe until Birnam Wood moves to Dunsinane Castle.
- Macbeth orders the death of Macduff's family. Macduff is in England to persuade Malcolm to take the throne.
- Macduff learns of his family's deaths and vows revenge. He and Malcolm along with an English army ride to Scotland.
- Meanwhile, Lady Macbeth has been driven mad by her guilt and sleepwalks trying to wash the blood from her hands.
- Macbeth receives news of Lady Macbeth's death.
- Macbeth then learns that the English army is approaching shielded with boughs cut from Birnam Wood.
- Macbeth fights until he encounters Macduff. Macduff declares he was ripped from his mother's womb. Macbeth continues to fight but is killed and beheaded by Macduff.
- Malcolm is declared king.

### Key Scenes

Act 1 Scene 1, 2, 3 4, 5, 7

Act 2 Scene 1, 2

Act 3 Scene 1, 4

Act 4 Scene 3

Act 5 Scene 1, 5, 7, 8

Other scenes to be summarised to secure plot knowledge

Whole play to be watched (RSC)

### Characterisation and Quotations

- Macbeth – valiant (brave), lauded (admired), tempted (wanting to do something) duplicitous (two-sided), murderous (wanting to kill) (betraying someone), usurper (someone who takes power by force) penitent (guilty) tyrannical (acting like a cruel leader who shows no mercy)
- 'Brandished steel which smoked with bloody execution', 'Bellona's bridegroom' 'Stay you imperfect speakers tell me more!' 'Let not light see by black and deep desires' 'I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent but vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself and falls on th'other' 'Is this the dagger I see before me, the handle toward my hand?' 'Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?' 'Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown' 'Blood will have blood' 'His title hangs loose about him like a giant's robe upon a dwarfish thief' 'Bring me my armour'
- Lady Macbeth – ambitious (a strong wish to achieve something), atypical (not typical), Machiavellian (plotting and doing whatever it takes to get what you want, especially in politics), emasculating (making someone not feel masculine) remorseful (feeling sorry for what you have done), frenetic (fast and uncontrolled), passive (not active)

- 'Come, you spirits, unsex me here' 'fill me from the crown to the toe top full of direst cruelty' 'When you durst do it then you were a man.' 'Give me the daggers' 'My hands are of your colour, but I shame to wear a heart so white.' 'Out, damned spot! Out, I say!' 'Will these hands ne'er be clean?'
- Witches – malevolent (evil) deceitful (misleading others)
- 'fair is foul and foul is fair' 'these juggling fiends be no more believed'
- Banquo – honourable (doing the right thing), loyal (showing strong support for someone)
- 'My allegiance clear' 'I fear he played most foully for it'
- Macduff – audacious (daring), patriotic (love for one's country)
- 'Within my sword's length set him' 'Bleed, bleed poor country! Great tyranny!'

### Methods

- **Dramatic irony** – when some of the characters don't know something that the audience does. This is used to give validity to the witches' prophecies and also to show Lady Macbeth's deception.
- **Aside** – asides are when characters speak aloud with others on stage. This is often used to show the duplicity of Macbeth.
- **Motif** – a reoccurring image. The most prominent motif in Macbeth is the motif of blood which is first used to show masculine violence but eventually guilt.
- **Metaphor** – when something is compare to something else by saying it is that thing. Metaphors are used by Shakespeare frequently to convey complex ideas such as Macbeth's 'vaulting ambition.'
- **Cyclical structure** – when a text begins and ends in a similar way. This used to demonstrate Macbeth returning to his identity as a soldier but also his downfall as he begun killing a traitor and is now the traitor being killed.
- **Prose** – Normal speech, usually spoken by lower class characters. Used in Act 5 Scene 1 for Lady Macbeth.

### Intentions

- To highlight the political instability of the Jacobean period and to solidify King James' reign
- To explore and challenge gender expectations in Jacobean England
- To highlight the consequences of unchecked ambition
- To support the belief in the Divine Right of King

### Concepts

- **Tragic hero:** The main character who begins a hero but has a fatal flaw, which causes their downfall/death. Macbeth is the tragic hero.
- **Antithesis:** The total opposite
- **Tragic fall:** The downfall of a tragic hero. This is Macbeth's death at the hands of Macduff.
- **Hamartia:** A fatal flaw. Macbeth's fatal flaw is his ambition.
- **Jacobean:** When King James I was on the throne. This is a period of instability which heavily inspired the events of Macbeth.
- **Patriarchy:** When men have more power and freedoms in society and women don't. Jacobean society and the world of Macbeth is patriarchal.