

Advanced Placement in  
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

**Teaching Unit**

**Macbeth**

by William Shakespeare

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ISBN 978-1-60389-344-2

Item No. 203006

# Macbeth

## Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. analyze the characters of Macbeth, Banquo, and Lady Macbeth and their relationships to each other.
2. trace the development of Macbeth's character from his first mention in the play until his last, noting how and why he changes.
3. trace the mental and emotional make-up of Lady Macbeth from the first time she appears until her death.
4. discuss the techniques Shakespeare uses to convey character and character relationships to his audience.
5. discuss the dramatic development of the play in terms of exposition, conflict, climax, resolution.
6. analyze the importance of literary elements like dramatic irony and foreshadowing on the development of the play.
7. discuss the frequent references to children in the play as characters, symbols, and elements of a metaphor.
8. analyze Shakespeare's use of language (verse, prose, rhythm, rhyme) and its importance in setting mood and establishing character.
9. identify and analyze the use of comic relief.
10. define by example the terms *tragedy*, and *tragic hero*.
11. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
12. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
13. offer a close reading of *Macbeth* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the play.

# Macbeth

## Lecture

### Shakespeare and His Times

When William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616) was born in Stratford-on-Avon, England, Queen Elizabeth I was the ruling monarch. It was a time of national strength and wealth, and the prevailing attitude was that life was exciting. It was an age of exploration, not only of the world but also of man's nature and the English language. Shakespeare's time was also considered the English Renaissance of 1500 – 1650. Some ideas that characterized this period that are important to this play are:

- Humans had potential for development.
- The idea of medieval Christianity, that this world is a preparation for eternal life, was questioned. Instead, people began to see everyday life as meaningful and an opportunity for noble activity.
- This was a time for heroes. The ideal Elizabethan man was a talented courtier, adventurer, fencer, poet, and conversationalist. He was a witty and eloquent gentleman who examined his own nature and the causes of his actions.
- Marriages were arranged, usually for wealth.
- Women had a lower social status than men.
- People were concerned over the order of things. They felt there was “a great chain of being.” This concept originated with Plato and expressed the idea that there is a proper order within all things, and among all things, based on complexity, from the tiniest grains of sand to heaven and God. When everything was in its proper position, there was harmony. When the order was broken, everything was upset and everyone suffered.
- People felt that their rulers were God's agents. To kill a King was a heinous crime; the heavens would show ominous signs when such evil was present.

# Macbeth

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. What do the witches represent? In answering this, be sure to mention their prophecies and the ways in which the prophecies come to be fulfilled.
2. Do a detailed character analysis for each of the following characters. Indicate both their actions and their motives. Also, point out their state of mind and what significant actions of their own, or others, affected them.
  - Macbeth
  - Lady Macbeth
  - Macduff
  - Banquo
  - Malcolm
3. Prove or disprove the following statement by referring to incidents in the play: “Macbeth is not a monster; rather, he is a man, perhaps more inclined toward evil than most men, but still a man who is tempted, succumbs to temptation, and pays the price for his weakness.”
4. The phrase, “Fair is foul, and foul is fair” is first used by the witches in Act I, Scene I. Then Macbeth uses it in Act I, Scene III. That line, or variations of it, appears numerous other times in the play. Trace the appearance of the “fair is foul” motif and what it comes to mean as a theme of the play.
5. Another motif is the idea that the killing of Duncan by Macbeth was an “unnatural” act. State why the Elizabethans would have considered regicide an unnatural act and point out how this idea is reinforced by comments and incidents from the play.
6. Babies and children are mentioned in this play so frequently that we must conclude there was a reason for it. Identify as many of those incidents as you can, state the context, and attempt to draw some generalizations.
7. To what extent is Macbeth a good example of Aristotle’s tragic hero? Try to see both sides of the question.
8. How does Shakespeare allow the audience to witness the disintegration of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth? How does their disintegration parallel the disintegration of the state of Scotland? Why would Shakespeare establish this parallel?

# Macbeth

## Act I, Scene I

1. What effect is Shakespeare creating by beginning the play with this scene?

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2. What do you suppose is suggested by the line, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair"?

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3. What poetic device is used in this scene and to what effect?

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**Act II, Scene I**

1. What is significant about the weather?

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2. What do you suppose is keeping Banquo from sleeping?

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3. What is significant about Macbeth's saying, "I think not of them," after Banquo had admitted to dreaming about the Weird Sisters?

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4. What does Macbeth mean when he says to Banquo, "If you shall cleave to my consent, when 'tis, / It shall make honour for you"?

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5. What is significant about Banquo's reply?

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6. In his soliloquy after Banquo leaves, what does Macbeth tell us he sees? What could account for this apparition?

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7. Why does Shakespeare have Macbeth hallucinate?

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**Act III, Scene I**

1. In his soliloquy, what suspicion and hope does Banquo reveal?

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2. Macbeth seems to be very interested in Banquo's travel plans. Why do you suppose he is so interested?

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3. The speech beginning "To be thus is nothing..." is another one often quoted. What is the meaning of that sentence?

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4. What is there in Banquo's character that makes Macbeth uneasy?

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**Act IV, Scene I**

1. Compare the witches' speech pattern with Macbeth's.

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2. What effect is Shakespeare creating by altering the speech patterns like this?

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3. Describe the three apparitions and the significance of each?

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4. What, after this, does Macbeth resolve?

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5. Pleased with the information, what one further thing does Macbeth desire to know and what is the answer he gets?

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**Act V, Scene I**

1. Explain how this entire scene is ironic.

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2. What is ironic about Lady Macbeth's constant "handwashing"?

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3. What does the Doctor's "Foul whisperings are abroad" speech echo?

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