

Macbeth Study Guide Questions: Act 1

Name: _____

Date: _____ Period: _____

1.1

1. Note the setting and characters that make up this scene.

What connections can you make? How are they significant?

2. Scan the witches' lines and determine the foot and meter of each:

WITCH 1:

When shall we three meet again _____

In thunder, lightning, or in rain? _____

WITCH 2:

When the hurlyburly's done, _____

When the battle's lost and won. _____

WITCH 3:

That will be ere the set of sun. _____

WITCH 1:

Where the place?

WITCH 2: *Upon the heath.* _____

WITCH 3:

There to meet with Macbeth. _____

WITCH 1:

I come, Graymalkin! _____

WITCH 2:

Paddock calls.

WITCH 3: *Anon.* _____

ALL:

Fair is foul, and foul is fair: _____

Hover through the fog and filthy air. _____

What conclusions can you draw? Compare the rhythms above to the convention of using primarily iambic pentameter throughout his plays. Consider the characters themselves and the Elizabethan worldview.

3. Do you notice any other literary device used throughout these lines? What? Where? **So what?**

Any favorite passage/s in this scene? (Document line numbers!)

1.2

1. Summarize the central action of this scene.
2. What does the captain tell Duncan and the others? HOW does he tell it? Examine the way he speaks. What does his way of talking say about his character?
3. What news do Ross and Angus bring Duncan and the others?
4. What is Duncan's pronouncement as a result?

Any favorite passage/s in this scene? (Document line numbers!)

1.3

1. How does the witches' language differ from the others? Significance?
2. What are they doing?
3. What example of challenging illusion does Shakespeare have for an Elizabethan audience in this scene? (lines and explanation)
4. What do the witches tell/call Macbeth?
What is his reaction (according to Banquo)?
5. What do they tell Banquo?
6. What does Macbeth's line to Banquo (86) say about his focus and his character? Where is this line echoed throughout the scene?
7. What news do Ross and Angus bring to Macbeth?
8. What concerns does Banquo have about the witches?
9. Discuss Macbeth's aside to the audience (128-42, 44-46). What does he question? What does he imply? What does he decide?
10. What does Macbeth tell Banquo they should do?

Any favorite passage/s in this scene? (Document line numbers!)

1.4

1. What comment does Duncan make regarding the treachery of the former Thane of Cawdor?
2. Who enters immediately following those lines? _____ Hmm. . . any literary significance here?
3. How does Duncan greet Macbeth? What does he promise him?
4. What official pronouncement does Duncan make?
5. How does Macbeth react (look to the aside for his true feelings)?
6. Discuss the dramatic irony in this scene.

Any favorite passage/s in this scene? (Document line numbers!)

1.5

1. What does Lady Macbeth read in the letter from her husband? What does he call her?
2. What does she fear about her husband?
3. When she hears that Macbeth and the King are on their way to Inverness (their estate), for what does she pray? Why/for what purpose? What does her speech (38-54) reveal about her character?

4. When Lady Macbeth delivers lines 59-60, how does Macbeth physically react? How do we know?
5. What practical advice does she then give him?
6. What is the only comment he makes after? What inferences can you make?

Any favorite passage/s in this scene? (Document line numbers!)

1.6

1. What mood does Shakespeare establish at the beginning of this scene? How?
2. What does Duncan say about Macbeth and their trip to Inverness?
3. Discuss the effects of dramatic irony in this scene.

Any favorite passage/s in this scene? (Document line numbers!)

1.7

1. On what is Macbeth ruminating?
In lines 7-10, what is his primary concern?
2. What are his three arguments against the deed?
3. Explain the implied metaphor Macbeth uses (25-28) and what it says about his character.
4. What reason does he give Lady Macbeth for proceeding “no further in this business” (31)?
5. Her reaction? What psychological approaches does she take to convince him to change his mind?
6. Discuss Lady Macbeth’s Mother-of-the-Year Award acceptance speech (54-58). What are its effects?
7. What’s the plan, and who is the author of it?
8. Macbeth’s reaction?
9. Discuss the relational dynamic between this married couple; support your conclusions with textual evidence!

Any favorite passage/s in this scene? (Document line numbers!)

Macbeth Study Guide Questions: Act 2

2.1

5. What is the setting for this Act? Significance?
6. Explain Banquo's words in lines 15-17.
7. What does Banquo say in line 20?
8. What does Macbeth suggest in line 25?
9. How does Banquo respond? What does this response suggest about his character?
10. Read Macbeth's second soliloquy carefully. What illusion does he experience? Why? How is blood used in this speech? What is the purpose of the bell?

Any favorite passage/s in this scene? (Document line numbers!)

2.2

1. How are an owl and wine important in Lady Macbeth's opening lines?
2. In line 10, what is her reason for not killing Duncan?
3. What is Macbeth fretting about? On what inability is he focused?
4. What advice does Lady Macbeth's give him? What does her response say about her mindset?
5. How does Macbeth define sleep in line 35?

6. How will water help them in line 45?
7. What mistake does Macbeth make? How is he to remedy it? What is Lady Macbeth's attitude about the situation?
8. Why does Macbeth not want to go back into the room? What does this reveal about him?
9. What evidence exists to show that they are jumpy and then panic stricken in this scene?

Any favorite passage/s in this scene? (Document line numbers!)

2.3

1. Where does the Porter imagine he is? How is this idea ironic?

What three people does he imagine knocking at these gates? Why are they there?

2. What does the above reveal about Elizabethan beliefs?
3. What contrasts do we get between the Porter and Macduff & Lennox?
4. Between the Porter's monologue and his conversation with Macduff, why do you think this scene exists? What effects does it have on the audience, especially considering at what point in the play it occurs?
5. How does Lennox describe the night? Give at least three specific details!

What literary device is employed here?

How does his description reflect Elizabethan beliefs/worldview?

6. Who discovers Duncan's body?
7. What Elizabethan (now Jacobean—King James) beliefs about the monarchy does Macduff's speech reveal (his passage beginning with "Confusion")?
8. What two adjectives would you use to describe the scene as a whole? Why?
9. Identify at least three other places in this scene where we experience irony? Briefly explain each choice.
10. Whom does Lennox say "seemed" to murder Duncan? What evidence does he provide?
11. What does Macbeth do?
What rationale does he give for his actions?
12. What does Lady Macbeth do? Why?
13. Why do Malcolm and Donalbain leave? Where does each go? For what purpose?

Any favorite passage/s in this scene? (include line numbers!)

2.4

1. What does the old man say about the atmosphere?

What unusual acts have occurred, according to him and Ross (list three things)?

Significance?

2. What news does Macduff report? What does he say about the guards?
What does he say about Malcolm and Donalbain?
3. What is Ross's very next line?
How is it significant to the entire play?
4. Where is Macbeth? Why there?
5. Where is Macduff headed?
Where is he NOT going? Why not??
6. The Old Man's last lines speak to which motif? How?

Any favorite passage/s in this scene? (include line numbers!)

Macbeth Study Guide Questions: Act 3

3.1

1. What are Banquo's specific suspicions and fears?
2. What does Macbeth call Banquo?
3. What series of questions does Macbeth ask Banquo? Significance?

4. What do Macbeth's lines, "To be thus is nothing, but to be safely thus—"mean? What's he talking about?
5. Summarize Macbeth's soliloquy after the servant exits. What are his primary concerns?
6. What has Macbeth told the murderers about Banquo?
7. How does Macbeth further incite them to do his bidding?
8. Does his language/rhetorical approach sound familiar? How so?

Any favorite passage/s in this scene? (include line numbers!)

3.2

1. Paraphrase Lady Macbeth's words in lines 6-10. How are they significant?
2. What does Macbeth respond when Lady Macbeth asks him what's wrong?
3. What does he mean when he says, "Better be with the dead,/ Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,/Than on the torture of the mind to lie in restless ecstasy"?
4. What comments does he make about Duncan's "sleep"?
5. What is Macbeth's new plan? What does he tell his wife about it? Significance??

Any favorite passage/s in this scene? (include line numbers!)

3.3

1. What does Banquo tell Fleance to do when the murderers attack?
2. What happens to both Banquo and Fleance in this scene?

Connect these events back to the witches' prophecies from Act 1 (significance).

3. How does Shakespeare direct the pace of this scene from the grave? (How does the writing of the lines direct the actors to speak them?)

Any favorite passage/s in this scene? (include line numbers!)

3.4

1. Who is attending the banquet?
Who is missing?
Who shows up uninvited (before line 10)?
2. How does Macbeth react to the bad news he receives?
3. Who enters and sits at Macbeth's place at the table?
How does Macbeth react? What are his first words to this person?

What do these words reveal about Macbeth?
4. After Ross tells the others that it's time to go because the King is ill, what does Lady Macbeth say to them?

Why? What is she attempting to do?
5. How does she speak to Macbeth? How does she try to snap him back into reality?

As a director, which lines would you have her say to him directly (out of the hearing of others), and which lines would you have her say for the general table to hear? Why?

6. What appears to be happening to Macbeth?
7. What does Macbeth say about *blood*?
8. Paraphrase Macbeth's speech beginning with, "I hear it by the way. . . ." (120-130). What does he reveal about his actions and his attitude?

I hear it by the way; but I will send:

There's not a one of them but in his house

I keep a servant fee'd. I will to-morrow,

And betimes I will, to the weird sisters:

More shall they speak; for now I am bent to know,

By the worst means, the worst. For mine own good,

7 All causes shall give way: I am in blood

Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more,

9 Returning were as tedious as go o'er:

Strange things I have in head, that will to hand;

Which must be acted ere they may be scann'd.

9. Draw a picture of the image in lines 7-9 above. How does his language change in the last half of this speech? How is this change significant?

Any favorite passage/s in this scene? (include line numbers!)

3.5

1. Why is Hecate angry at the other witches?
2. How does she describe Macbeth?
3. What is her specific plan for him?

How does she expect him to react?

Any favorite passage/s in this scene? (include line numbers!)

3.6

1. What is Lennox's tone in his summary of events at the beginning of the scene?
What does his tone reveal about his understanding of them?
2. According to Lennox, why does MacDuff live "in disgrace" (23)? (give two reasons)
3. Where has Macduff gone?
Why? Be specific!

Who knows of these events and is preparing for war?

4. Whom do Lennox and the other Lord hope will return and save Scotland?

Any favorite passage/s in this scene? (include line numbers!)

Macbeth Study Guide Questions: Act 4

4.1

1. Identify three of the grossest things the witches drop into the cauldron.
2. Identify three of the most horrifying things they add to the “hell-broth” (19).
3. How are these items significant, considering that the spell is for Macbeth? (Make connections!)
4. How does Macbeth speak to the witches now? In what manner/what is his tone?

What does he call them?

What verb does he use in his third line directed at them (50)?

How is it significant?

5. What do the images Macbeth uses (50-60) reflect? How are they significant?
6. Whom does Macbeth demand to see? Why?

7. What do the witches toss into the brew to conjure them?

Significance? (Connect them to Macbeth!)

8. Complete the following chart with details from the text:

Apparitions	Appearance	Prophecy	Macbeth's Reaction
1st			
2nd			
3rd			
4th			

9. How is the last image a tribute to King James?

10. What news does Lennox give Macbeth?

11. What two major decisions does Macbeth make as a result?

12. How are they significant? What do they say about Macbeth's character at this point?

Any favorite passage/s in this scene? (include line numbers!)

4.2

1. What are Lady Macduff's feelings toward her husband right now? Why?
2. What does she say he lacks/"wants" (9)? Why? To what does she compare his actions?
3. What does Ross say to her about Macduff?
4. What does Lady Macduff tell her son about his father? Why?
5. How would you describe the son? What adjectives would you use to describe his character? Consider his biblical allusion (reference) to Jesus' words to the crowds in his Sermon on the Mount:

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? (Matthew 6: 25-27)

6. What does the Messenger tell Lady Macduff?
7. What happens?

Any favorite passage/s in this scene? (include line numbers!)

4.3

1. What news does Macduff bring Malcolm (3-8)?
2. What is Malcolm's response? (And can you blame him?)
3. To what motif do Malcolm's lines speak?
"Angels are bright still though the brightest fell; / Though all things foul would wear the brows of grace, / Yet grace must still look so" (22-24).

What do they say about his concerns?

4. How does Malcolm compare himself to Macbeth?
5. What is Macduff's response?
6. Then what does Malcolm tell Macduff (114-136)?
7. The last two lines of his speech (136-7) contain embedded acting directions to Macduff—what are they?
8. What news does the doctor bring?

How is this news significant? (Connect back to Macbeth!)

9. How does Ross respond to Macduff's question, "How does my wife?" (177)? Why does he respond that way? What is he trying to do?
10. What does Ross want Macduff to do ((186-88)?
11. What does Malcolm tell Ross is going to happen (189-192)?
12. What does Ross finally tell Macduff (204-207)?

13. How does Macduff initially respond (embedded stage directions in Malcolm's response to Ross's news).

What is Malcolm's advice?

14. What are Macduff's first words then?

What do his initial responses say about his condition?

15. How does Macduff respond to Malcolm's "Be comforted./ Let's make us med'cines of our great revenge / To cure this deadly grief" (214-16)?

Why?

16. What action does Malcolm continue to press? What approach does he take that echoes ones we've heard before in this play?

17. What array of feelings does Macduff experience in this scene? Prove each one with passages from the text.

Example

a. shock and disbelief: after Ross tells him that his entire family has been "Savagely slaughtered" (205), Macduff continues to ask, "My children too?" (211), and then, "My wife killed too?" (213).

b.

c.

Any favorite passage/s from this scene? (Document line numbers!)

Macbeth Study Guide Questions: Act 5

5.1

1. Who and what are the Doctor and Gentlewoman (Lady Macbeth's Lady in Waiting) talking about?
2. How does the Gentlewoman respond when the Doctor asks what she has heard?
3. What does Lady Macbeth insist on having "by her continually" (20-1)? Significance? How is this element meaningful?
4. What is Lady Macbeth doing—what are her actions in this scene?
5. To what three crimes does she allude? List each and the numbers of the lines that prove it.
6. What does the Doctor say Lady Macbeth needs more than a physician?
7. What instructions does the Doctor leave the Gentlewoman?
8. How are Lady Macbeth's words and actions significant? What do they reveal about her character?

How has her character changed from the start of the play?

Any favorite passage/s from this scene? (Document line numbers!)

5.2

1. What news does Menteith give?
2. Where are they to meet Malcolm and the English army?
3. What does Menteith call Macbeth?
4. What general conclusions do the nobles draw about Macbeth and his followers?
5. What are these men doing? Why?

Any favorite passage/s from this scene? (Document line numbers!)

5.3

1. What is Macbeth's response to the actions of his nobles/thanes?

What does his response say about his character? (significance)

2. What news does the servant bring Macbeth?

Why is he afraid?

3. What is Macbeth's frame of mind at this point? How does Shakespeare reveal it through the action of the scene?
4. What can we infer of Macbeth's character from his instructions to the Doctor and reaction to the Doctor's response?
5. Paraphrase the Doctor's last words of the scene.

Any favorite passage/s from this scene? (Document line numbers!)

5.4

1. Where are the soldiers?
2. What instructions does Malcolm give them?
Why?
3. Any literary devices here? Identify them and explain their significance.

Any favorite passage/s from this scene? (Document line numbers!)

5.5

1. What is Macbeth's attitude as he defends his castle (Dunsinane)?

How do you know?

Why is he feeling that way?
2. Why have the women cried out?

3. Analyze Macbeth's reaction to this news below. Annotate the text and scan the lines:

She should have died hereafter:

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.

Ultimately, what does this speech say about Macbeth's outlook on life (tone)?

4. What news does the messenger bring after?
5. What does Macbeth begin to suspect?
6. What two lines best reveal his attitude now? Why?

Any favorite passages from this scene? (Document line numbers!)

5.6

1. Who is leading the first battle?
2. What is Macduff's tone in this scene? What words/literary devices support your conclusion?

5.7

1. What is the allusion to the origins of the shape of Elizabethan playhouses that Macbeth makes (1-2)?

To what does he compare himself? Significance?

2. Whom does Macbeth kill?

What is his attitude after? Prove it—what does he say?

3. How long before the castle is surrendered? Why is that?

Any favorite passages from these two scenes? (Document line numbers!)

5.8

1. Why does Macbeth say to Macduff, “Of all men else I have avoided thee” (4)?
2. What is Macbeth’s attitude as they fight (8-13)? Prove it.
3. Explain the ironic twist in Macduff’s words to Macbeth (13-16)?

What type of irony?

4. What character trait does Macbeth uphold through his last words of the play?
5. What news does Ross give Siward (39-43)? What is Ross’s tone? How do you know?
6. How does Siward react? What does he ask? What seem to be his primary concerns?
7. How does Malcolm react to Siward (50-1)?

What do his lines reveal about his character?

8. What does Malcolm call the Macbeths?
What news do we hear about Lady Macbeth?
9. What might be the significance of Malcolm having the last words in the play?

Any favorite passage/s from this scene? (Document line numbers!)