



Macbeth KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER



Context – The play was written by William Shakespeare, and was first performed around 1606

Shakespeare's Time – Shakespeare wrote at the time of two monarchs: Queen Elizabeth I and James I. The plays wrote during the period of Elizabeth are generally happy and joyful, reflecting the mood at the time. However, darker plays such *Macbeth* were written in the darker, more uncertain time of James I.



James I – 1606 was early in the reign of James I, who liked Shakespeare's plays. It is thought that Shakespeare would have considered James I when writing *Macbeth* – this may be why it is about Scottish royalty. Also, King James's family claimed to have descended from a historical figure named Banquo.



The Divine Right of Kings – Divine Right was a belief that monarch (kings/queens) were chosen by God above, and that questioning them was to question God. King James I often spoke of divine right to strengthen his place on the throne. A play about the bad things that happen to a 'king-slayer' would have gone down well with King James at the time.



The Role of Women – Women were not thought of as highly as men. Women 'belonged' to their fathers and brothers, and then their husbands when they married. They were not allowed to own land or to do most jobs. Instead they had to bring up children, and be gentle and womanly. The character of Lady Macbeth would have been a shock to the audiences at the time.



Witches and the Supernatural – At the time of Shakespeare, many people believed in witches and magic. This was because science and technology was not as advanced, so people could not explain strange things that happened in the world. Some old ladies were even burnt at the stake!



Healthcare and Medicine – Healthcare and medicine has improved a lot since Shakespeare's day. At the time, death was something that people had to think about every day, as there were less cures to diseases and ailments. Therefore, reactions to death would be a little different to how we would react today.



Main Characters

Macbeth – Macbeth is the leading character in the play. At first, he is a Scottish general, who is a brave and strong soldier. However, he is persuaded to murder of a king that he loves. He becomes a terrible and destructive king, who responds to all threats through violence and murder.

Lady Macbeth – Macbeth's wife, who is an ambitious woman who wants power. At the beginning of the play, she seems stronger than Macbeth, persuading him to kill Duncan. Later in the play, she feels guilt and cannot come to terms with what they have done. She eventually commits suicide.

First Scene: Act I Scene III **Final Scene:** Act V Scene VIII

First Scene: Act I Scene V **Final Scene:** Act V Scene V

Duncan – Duncan is a kind and loved King of Scotland, who is murdered by Macbeth. Duncan is a good King – very different to the king that Macbeth becomes. When Duncan dies, order in Scotland is destroyed. Order only returns again at the very end of the play.

Macduff – An important Scottish man, who doubts Macbeth's story from the start. His wife and son are murdered by Macbeth. Macduff leads the battle against Macbeth, eventually becoming the man who kills Macbeth. He was born by caesarian section, which is important to the ending.

First Scene: Act I Scene II **Final Scene:** Act II Scene I

First Scene: Act II Scene III **Final Scene:** Act V Scene VIII

The Three Witches – The witches are supernatural characters, who use charms, spells and prophecies to make Macbeth murder Duncan. They seem to take pleasure from tricking humans and meddling in the human world. They seem to know the weakness of people, and use deception (tricking people) to make them act in a certain way.

Banquo – Banquo is a brave soldier, who is a friend to Macbeth. Banquo is also given prophecies by the witches, but unlike Macbeth, he chooses not to act on them. After being murdered, Banquo's ghost returns to haunt Macbeth, causing him a great deal of fright. Banquo's descendants (his great-grandchildren etc.) later become royalty in Scotland.

First Scene: Act I Scene I **Final Scene:** Act IV Scene I

First Scene: Act I Scene III **Final Scene:** Act III Scene IV

Themes

Ambition – When the witches give Macbeth the prophecy about him being King, he begins to think about how much he want this to happen. (ambition) Ambition turns Macbeth from a brave and loyal Scottish general into a murderer. When Lady Macbeth hears about the prophecy, she also becomes very ambitious, and persuades Macbeth to commit the murder. The play shows us how destructive it can be to follow ambition without thinking of other people, as things do not end well for either of these characters. As a result of their ambition, lots of things go wrong!



Men and Women – As the play was written a long time ago, it has some outdated ideas about what men and women 'should be.' When Macbeth does not want to kill Duncan at first, his wife questions whether he is a man. She also says that she wants to lose her womanliness in order to go through with the murder plot.



Fate vs Free Will – Fate is the idea that everything is already decided in advance, and there is nothing we can do about it: The way that we act, even though we feel as though we control ourselves, is decided by a higher power. Free will, on the other hand, is the idea that we can change and have control over actions and events. The play leaves the audience wondering whether it is fate or free will that makes things happen in the world.

Scene-by-Scene Summary – SPOILER ALERT

Act 1 Scene 1	Three witches meet together. They plot to trick Macbeth at a later time.	<i>Fair is foul and foul is fair, Hover through the fog and filthy air.</i>
Act 1 Scene 2	King Duncan is told of Macbeth's bravery in battle. He tells a messenger to give him the title 'Thane of Cawdor.'	<i>No more that thane of Cawdor shall deceive... ...And with his former title greet Macbeth.</i>
Act 1 Scene 3	The witches speak to Macbeth and Banquo and give their prophecies. The messenger arrives to tell Macbeth that he is the Thane of Cawdor.	<i>All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of Glamis! All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, thane of Cawdor! All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter!</i>
Act 1 Scene 4	At the Kings' Palace, Duncan names Malcolm (his eldest son) as his successor (person to be king after him).	<i>The Prince of Cumberland! that is a step On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,</i>
Act 1 Scene 5	Lady Macbeth reads Macbeth's letter about the prophecies. She plans Duncan's murder, but fears that Macbeth is too kind to go through with it.	<i>You spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, / And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full / Of direst cruelty.</i>
Act 1 Scene 6	Duncan arrives at Macbeth's castle. He tells of his love for Macbeth as a dear friend.	<i>Conduct me to mine host: we love him highly, And shall continue our graces towards him.</i>
Act 1 Scene 7	Macbeth has doubts about the murder. Lady Macbeth tells him of the plot and he then agrees to it.	<i>If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well It were done quickly...</i>
Act 2 Scene 1	Banquo and Fleance arrive. When they go to bed, Macbeth sees a vision of a dagger leading him towards Duncan's chamber.	<i>Is this a dagger which I see before me, The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.</i>
Act 2 Scene 2	Macbeth leaves Duncan's chamber after the murder. He has forgotten to leave the daggers with the chamberlains (so they are blamed). Lady Macbeth must return them.	<i>Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood Clean from my hand? Sleep no more, / Macbeth does murder sleep</i>
Act 2 Scene 3	Macduff arrives and finds Duncan dead. Macbeth explains that he killed the chamberlains in rage. Duncan's sons flee.	<i>O horror, horror, horror! Tongue nor heart Cannot conceive nor name thee!</i>
Act 2 Scene 4	Macduff tells Ross, a thane, that Macbeth has been named King.	<i>The sovereignty will fall upon Macbeth.</i>
Act 3 Scene 1	Macbeth, fearing the witches' prophecies about Banquo's descendants sitting on the throne, arranges to have Banquo and Fleance killed.	<i>It is concluded. Banquo, thy soul's flight, If it find heaven, must find it out to-night.</i>
Act 3 Scenes 2-3	Macbeth tells Lady Macbeth of his plan to kill Banquo. Elsewhere, the murderers kill Banquo, but Fleance escapes.	<i>O, treachery! Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly! Thou mayst revenge. O slave!</i>
Act 3 Scene 4	Macbeth holds a banquet. He sees the ghost of Banquo and is hysterical. The guests are asked to leave.	<i>I pray you, speak not; he grows worse and worse: Question enrages him. At once, good night:</i>
Act 3 Scenes 5-6	Macduff gathers an army to fight Macbeth, who has become a terrible, murdering leader.	<i>May soon return to this our suffering country Under a hand accursed!</i>
Act 4 Scene 1	Macbeth again visits the witches, and is given new prophecies, which really scare him. The witches then vanish, leaving Macbeth wanting more details.	<i>beware Macduff;...none of woman born/ Shall harm Macbeth...Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill Shall come against him.</i>
Act 4 Scenes 2-3	Macduff's wife and children are murdered by Macbeth's assassins. Macduff and Malcom decide to fight Macbeth together.	<i>Macbeth! Is ripe for shaking, and the powers above Put on their instruments.</i>
Act 5 Scene 1	A doctor and maid watch Lady Macbeth sleepwalk. She talks of the murders of Duncan and Banquo, and imagines blood on her hands that she cannot clean.	<i>Out, damned spot; out, I say. . . . Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?</i>
Act 5 Scene 2	Lords discuss how Macduff's army will gather at Birnam Wood.	<i>Make we our march towards Birnam.</i>
Act 5 Scenes 3-4	Inside, Macbeth boasts that none of woman born can harm him. Macduff and co gather at Birnam Wood	<i>I will not be afraid of death and bare, Till Birnam forest come to Dunsinane.</i>
Act 5 Scene 5	A scream is heard at Macbeth's castle. It is announced that Lady Macbeth is dead (suicide). A messenger reveals that the trees of Birnam Wood are coming towards the castle.	<i>Life is "a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing"</i>
Act 5 Scenes 6-7	The battle begins. Macbeth fights without fear, as he believes no man born of woman can harm him. The castle is breached.	<i>But swords I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn, Brandish'd by man that's of a woman born.</i>
Act 5 Scene 8	Macbeth and Macduff finally meet. Macduff reveals that he was born by caesarian section (not 'by woman born.')	<i>Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's womb Untimely ripp'd. Hail, King of Scotland!</i>

Dramatic Devices in Macbeth

Dramatic Devices in Macbeth		Important Vocabulary		
Dramatic Irony	Dramatic irony is when the audience knows something that the characters do not. For example, King Duncan calls Macbeth 'a peerless kinsman.' Duncan trusts Macbeth. However, the audience knows that Macbeth is plotting Duncan's murder.	Shakespeare	Tragedy	Deception
Soliloquy	When a character speaks alone to themselves. E.g. Macbeth's 'supernatural soliciting' soliloquy shows his inner troubles.	Supernatural	Soliloquy	Ambition
Rhyming Couplets	Two lines together that rhyme, e.g. <i>Away and mock the time, with fairest show/ False face must hide what the heart doth know.</i>	Witch	Rhyming Couplets	Prophecy
		Scotland	Dramatic Irony	Fate
		Destructive	Weakness	Free Will