

Macbeth

PLOT		CHARACTERS		KEY VOCABULARY
Act 1	<p>Macbeth and Banquo are two Scottish noblemen who encounter three witches on a heath. The witches give both men predictions and then vanish. One of the predictions given to Macbeth comes true almost immediately. Macbeth writes a letter to his wife. She is excited by the news and summons evil spirits to give her the courage to commit murder. Macbeth arrives to announce that King Duncan is coming to spend the night at their castle.</p>	Macbeth A "brave" and loyal warrior whose vaulting ambition leads him to commit regicide	Lady Macbeth Macbeth's wife. Coerces Macbeth into committing regicide. Loses control and commits suicide at end of play.	<p>Regicide - The action of killing a king Treason - A crime linked to betraying your own country particularly by attempting to take a monarch's life or their throne Paradox - A contradictory statement Chaos - Complete and utter disorder Tragic hero - A great and noble character who is destined to fall from grace due to their own actions. Fatal flaw - A fault in one's character that has severe consequences. Foreshadow - Clues or an indication of future events. Ominous - To give the impression something terrible is going to happen. Prophecy - A prediction about the future. Ambition - A strong desire to want or achieve something. Contrast - A difference. Suspicious - A sense of distrust. Cunning - Scheming or sly. Unusual - To be different or not as expected. Influence - To have an effect on someone or something. Conflicted - To feel confused, unsure and be inconsistent. Consequence - A result of actions - usually negative. Guilty - To feel responsible for doing something - usually something wrong. Heinous - Wicked and evil. Regicide - The action of killing a king. Dramatic irony - When the audience knows something related to the plot that at least one other character is unaware of. Treachery - To betray someone's trust. Tyranny - An oppressive and cruel rule. Reversal - A change in position or direction to the opposite position or direction. Paranoia - Feeling fear, anxiety or distrust without evidence to support these feelings. Natural order - It was believed at the time that the 'goodness' of a king directly affected the condition of the natural world. The 'natural order' referred to the idea that kings were chosen by God. They had a 'divine right' to be king. A king chosen by God would be good and moral, and therefore the natural world would be as it should be. Macbeth has not been chosen by God to be king. He does not have a 'divine right' to be king. By killing Duncan and becoming king, Macbeth has disrupted the 'natural order'. Because of this, when Macbeth becomes king the natural world is plunged into chaos and disorder: for example, storms appear, and animals behave unnaturally. In order for the natural world to return to its rightful state, Macbeth must be removed from the throne. Resolute - To be determined and steady. Kingship - The state/act of being king. Anagnorisis - The moment that the tragic hero has a sense of self-realisation of what he/she has done to themselves.</p>
		Banquo Scottish nobleman; close friend of Macbeth. Betrayed and killed. Ghost haunts Macbeth at a feast.		
Act 2	<p>Having agreed to kill King Duncan, Macbeth sees a dagger and wonders if it is a "dagger of the mind", because he is having second thoughts. However, he resolves to kill King Duncan, who is found dead at dawn by Macduff. The king's sons flee, fearing for their lives. In their absence, Macbeth is chosen to be king.</p>	Fleance Banquo's son.	King Duncan A fair and generous ruler who is butchered by Macbeth.	
		Macduff A Scottish nobleman, loyal to Duncan. Kills Macbeth to restore order to Scotland.		
Act 3	<p>Banquo suspects that Macbeth was involved in Duncan's murder. Macbeth fears Banquo and so plans to have Banquo and his son, Fleance, murdered away from the castle. Banquo is killed but Fleance escapes. The ghost of Banquo appears at a feast to haunt Macbeth. The guests become suspicious of Macbeth because of his violent reactions to a ghost that only he can see.</p>	Malcolm Duncan's eldest son, the Prince of Cumberland.	The witches / "weird women" Presented by Shakespeare as supernatural beings who can foretell the future.	
		HISTORICAL CONTEXTS		
Act 4	<p>Macbeth, filled with insecurity, returns to the witches and is given three more predictions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beware Macduff, beware the Thane of Fife None of woman born can harm Macbeth Macbeth shall never be beaten until Birnam Woods moves towards his castle <p>Macbeth learns that Macduff has fled Scotland. He orders the execution of Macduff's wife and children.</p>	<p>The play 'Macbeth' is loosely based on events which occurred in 11th century Scotland. King James was a Scottish king who believed himself to be a direct descendant of Banquo. King James VI of Scotland inherited the throne of England when Queen Elizabeth I died.</p>		
		<p>In 1604, English Catholics attempted to assassinate King James in the famous Gunpowder Plot. The play is a piece of political propaganda, warning English audiences that regicide leads to eternal damnation. This is because King James believed in the Divine Right of Kings: the belief that God had chosen him to rule on Earth.</p>		
Act 5	<p>Lady Macbeth appears on stage sleepwalking. Her mental health has deteriorated terribly. She is burdened by feelings of guilt, which she sees as blood on her hands that she is unable wash away. Duncan's son Malcolm, backed by the English army and Macduff, approach Macbeth's castle. They chop down branches from the trees at Birnam Wood to disguise how big their army is. Birnam Wood appears to move. Macbeth says he fears no man as all men are born by women. Macduff announces he was not born naturally but was "ripp'd" prematurely from his mother's womb. Macduff kills Macbeth and Malcolm becomes the next King of Scotland</p>	<p>The Great Chain of Being: the belief in a social hierarchy, planned by God, as follows: God – Angels – Demons – Humans – Beasts – Plants – Rocks. When Macbeth kills Duncan, this leads to a disruption in the natural order that is referred to in the play: storms; earthquakes; chimneys blown down; a solar eclipse.</p>		

Shakespeare: 'Macbeth'