

MACBETH

WORKSHEETS

by

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2016/17

Part 1

Commentary, notes, questions, tasks and activities

(for keeping track of the action, comprehension, and interpretation)

Rationale

A play is written in order to be produced, acted and seen. This means that, when we use a play for classroom reading and study, we are actually creating an artificial situation. Once we accept this, then we have a useful, communicative tool for language teaching and learning.

When we read a play, we are, in a sense, asked not just to be readers, but also to become actors, directors, producers, stage designers...as well as the audience! Ideally, drama needs a performance in the theatre to come alive.

Most dramas tend to follow some pattern: at the start there appears to be a state of balance, but soon a state of disturbance upsets this. A protagonist has certain goals, but obstacles stand in the way of reaching these. There may be several crises, one or more subplots, and an eventual resolution. *Macbeth* follows such a pattern.

Drama is often about conflict: conflicts we need to experience, identify, define and interpret. Conflicts bring about changes in the character of protagonists. Which figure changes most in the course of a play? In which way is s/he different at the end from what s/he was at the start? Whom do we empathize with, possibly sympathize with and even identify with? How do we interpret the mind and motives of a character, especially in a monologue or soliloquy?

Approach

The worksheets offered here are wide-ranging, allowing you to choose the ones you need for your particular class.

Reading the play aloud in class may be problematical. After all, it's only when a scene has been studied that readers can give their reading real meaning through stress and intonation, pitch and tone of voice. Silent reading with a task (either in class or at home) can be assigned prior to the reading aloud. How can the scene be read aloud? Students and teacher can discuss and negotiate this. Reading aloud can then be done in class from the front, panel-style, with the readers standing or sitting on desks, so creating an 'on-stage' effect.

Alternatively - and as a speedier process - a small group of teachers could get together with a language assistant and record the play, building in appropriate sound effects. The recording then offers a receptive experience for students, rather than a productive challenge!

A) PRE-READING

1. Author's Note, by Clive Duncan (pp. 3-4)

1. In which ways is *Macbeth* a play typical of its time?
2. For which reasons did Shakespeare write the play?
3. How did the play appeal to Jacobean audiences?
4. Where does the human tragedy lie in *Macbeth*?
5. In which ways has Clive Duncan adapted and streamlined the original play?

2. Characters in the play (p.5)

Draw a first sociogram showing the social inter-relationships between the characters. Use space symbolically to represent hierarchy, family trees and the supernatural or infernal. Add more detail to your sociogram in the course of studying the play.

Speculate about the characters

- What do you think the characters look like?
- What costumes might they wear?
- How might they be positioned on the stage, and how might they move?

3. Role of Banquo (pp. 6-7)

Banquo is both participant in the play and narrator. While narrating he prepares us for what will happen, comments on the action, summarizes what has happened and links scenes.

In Brecht's dramatic theory the actor must be able to keep enough detachment to observe what is happening to that character and the action itself. The actor steps out of role, and comments on the role. In this way the '4th wall' of a traditional proscenium stage is broken: that is, the imaginary boundary between the stage and the auditorium. As a result, we the audience are pulled into the play, but can still take critical distance from the action. For example, we may not show empathy or sympathy for a character, but hold back.

The 'distancing effect' or 'alienation effect' was called the 'Verfremdungseffekt' by Brecht.

4. General questions on any opening scene in a play

- How does the drama begin?
- When and where does the action start?
- How is the setting described or presented?
- Which characters appear on stage? How are they presented?
- What do you think is going to happen next?

B) SCENE BY SCENE

Scene 1 (pp.6-12), in sections

Banquo narrating (pp. 6-7)

1. What is the overall purpose of Banquo's opening monologue?
2. What makes the speech so direct and immediate?
3. In which ways is the story of Macbeth timeless?

Context (pp.7-8) News straight from the battlefield is brought to Duncan, King of Scotland, telling of Macbeth's great victory over rebels supported by islanders. Duncan proclaims Macbeth Thane of Cawdor in place of the defeated rebel leader.

Note how Macbeth is praised for his heroism, strength and bravery before he actually appears. i.e. our positive opinion of him is already formed. Later we realize that the higher Macbeth is praised, the greater his ultimate fall.

Tasks

4. List the qualities you think Macbeth possesses.
5. Discuss: Are we meant to see Macbeth as the saviour of the kingdom from rebellion and invasion?
6. The soldier's story is action-packed and presented in vivid pictures. One person reads slowly while others mime the action described.

Context (pp.8-9) Three witches are speaking during thunder and lightning and while a battle subsides. The atmosphere of the scene is one of mystery, weirdness, horror, superstition and evil.

Tasks

7. Are the witches hideous, plain or glamorous? What do they look like?
8. Do they chant or speak? Do they whisper or scream?
9. Are their voices thin and high or rough and low, harsh and sarcastic, or sweetly nice?
10. How does Macbeth feel when he meets the witches? (confused, frightened, disturbed, shocked?)
11. Act out this scene; prepare sound effects. Divide the witches' lines between the whole class, with echo effects

Context - The Temptation Scene (pp. 10-11) So far the witches and humans have been shown separately. Now they are shown together. The changeability of the weather will soon be reflected by the changeability of fortune.

Tasks

12. 'Welcome!': Which gesture or movement could the witches make here?
13. Have the witches touched on Macbeth's secret longings? Or is he afraid of the evil he senses? Or that his own schemes are to be revealed?
14. How does Macbeth show fear?

15. How does Banquo feel when the witches only focus on Macbeth's future fortune?
16. Describe Macbeth's reaction to the witches' prophecies. What do you imagine he is thinking?
17. How can a stage-director solve the practical problem of how the witches actually vanish? Offer practical suggestions.
18. Suppose you were directing a performance of this scene. Which of the lines do you think the actors should speak loudly, and which softly? Which quickly, which slowly? Explain your decisions.
19. Rewrite the witches' predictions for Banquo as a modern horoscope.
20. Plot the timescale of the opening three parts.
21. Did Macbeth have any thoughts of becoming King before he met the witches? (If so, he lays himself open to their influence.)
22. When Macbeth addresses Banquo, is it to test Banquo's feelings towards the witches' prophecy, or out of his good fortune to share his happiness?

Context (p.11) 'These strange predictions...': This is a soliloquy, or solo speech, which gives us, the audience, the chance to see into Macbeth's mind. In a soliloquy a character expresses his/her thoughts unheard by, or in the absence of, other characters. We, the audience, become aware of the character's deepest and most private feelings.

What do we learn here about Macbeth's character?

Macbeth is prepared to deceive people as to his true purpose. (The theme of the difference between outer appearance and inner reality emerges in the play.)

Tasks

23. We have now seen Macbeth as a character. Is he as you expected?
24. How do Macbeth and Banquo look at each other during this scene? Give directions to the actors.

Context (pp.11-12) In Shakespeare's day those about to be executed took pains in their last speech to leave a positive impression. Contrast the Thane of Cawdor's end now with Macbeth's later, which is inglorious and undignified.

Macbeth's entry during Duncan's speech turns it to dramatic irony. Dramatic irony occurs when the audience know something that the characters in the plot do not. As Duncan speaks of trust, the man who is thinking of seizing the crown actually enters.

25. How should Macbeth enter here? As a war hero? Hesitantly? Proudly? Secretly?.....?

In ancient Scotland, the King's eldest son did not automatically succeed to the throne: the King could choose his heir from among any of his close relations or kinsmen. Bearing this in mind...

26. How do you think Macbeth feels about Duncan's announcement? (Macbeth is Duncan's first cousin.)

The overthrow of Scotland's enemies by Macbeth ironically leads Duncan to declare Malcolm his heir.

'I'll give/ My wife the joyful news': it is important for Macbeth to get to his castle before the King arrives so as to be able to tell his wife some of the ideas burning in his mind.

27. 'The joyful news....': is there a touch of irony here? Duncan does not know what will be the nature of Lady Macbeth's 'joy'. So, how sincere is Macbeth here?

Tasks

28. What mood do you think Macbeth is in? How might he say the soliloquy at the end of this scene? (The sudden apparent frustration of Macbeth's hopes rouses his evil desires.)
29. Which qualities does Duncan show? (generosity, gratitude, a trusting nature, innocence, blindness, or.....?)
30. Read aloud Macbeth's words earlier to Duncan; contrast them with his secretive words in his soliloquy.

Scene 2 (pp.13-25)

31. How does Banquo as narrator prepare us for the character of Lady Macbeth?

Context This is Lady Macbeth's first appearance. How do you visualize her? (age, costume, physical appearance). She reads the letter from Macbeth, which tells of the meeting with the witches, of the truth they foretold and of his hopes for the future.

Tasks (p. 14)

32. Write the opening sentences of Macbeth's letter about his meeting with the witches.
33. What do we learn about Lady Macbeth's opinion of her husband?
34. Note Lady Macbeth's analysis of her husband's character. In her analysis, what does she lay bare in her own character?
35. Which words would you use to describe her reaction to his letter? (disappointed, pleased, excited, bored, determined, interested, uncontrolled, or....?).
36. With the Servant's announcement, what do you think should be the expression on Lady Macbeth's face?
37. What shows us that Lady Macbeth is a ruthless, fully committed woman?
38. Does she really feel Macbeth is too mild and even too weak to seize the throne?
39. Do her words echo the spirit of the witches? Speak the lines as a spell, calling on evil spirits for help. Are her words whispered, hissed, or....? Does she kneel, stand or make any movement or gesture?
40. Why could Lady Macbeth be described as 'witch-like'?
41. How does Macbeth enter? Is his entry sudden, dignified, breathless, affectionate, or?
42. Describe the relationship between husband and wife in this scene. Do you think they are well matched?
43. Why does Macbeth get his wife to meet Duncan? (Because she has stronger nerves? Because she can be a charming hostess?)

Context (p. 15) In an aside or soliloquy, Macbeth expresses his second thoughts and doubts about the plan to murder Duncan. In it he struggles with his conscience.

Tasks

44. What do the conditionals and contrasts tell us about Macbeth's state of mind?
45. Experiment with ways of speaking this soliloquy.
46. Which reasons does Macbeth offer to justify his apparent decision not to kill Duncan?
47. Which arguments does Lady Macbeth use to try to change his mind?
48. Lady Macbeth says Macbeth has to prove his manhood by acting decisively. What has prompted her, do you think, to make this outspoken declaration?
49. What do you think will happen next?

Context (pp. 17-18)

50. In which ways does this night scene arouse tension?

It is past midnight, so dark and moonless that Banquo does not recognize Macbeth. 'This diamond...': Traditionally, a diamond was thought to be a lucky charm against witchcraft, or possession by demons and terror by night.

51. Why, then, is it ironic that Duncan should give a diamond to Lady Macbeth?

Tasks

52. Why do you think Banquo has been having bad dreams?
53. Is there any sign that Banquo is suspicious of Macbeth?
54. What makes Macbeth see a vision of a dagger?
55. How could the vision be shown on stage? (As a laser image, or?)
56. Should Macbeth show horror, fear or confidence?
57. Is the vision a warning, a hallucination, or an incitement to murder?
58. Which sound effects or music could you use during this soliloquy?
59. In which tone of voice do you think an actor should say the last two lines?
60. How does Macbeth exit? (trance-like, secretly, purposefully, tentatively, or....?)
61. How aware is Macbeth of the seriousness of his treachery against his innocent guest?

Context (pp. 18-20)

Lady Macbeth has drunk wine to give her courage and increase her confidence.

Tasks

62. Who is the dominant partner in this scene?
63. How does Macbeth enter? Should he rush out wildly with daggers uplifted, or creep out stealthily, or walk as in a trance? And how does he speak?
64. 'He laughed in his sleep': Is Macbeth talking to Lady Macbeth or only to himself here?
65. Why could he not say 'Amen'? Is he conscience-stricken, or....?
66. Why do you think Shakespeare chose not to present Duncan's murder on stage?
67. How is tension created in this scene?
68. What signs are there to suggest Lady Macbeth is not as totally ruthless and inhuman as she would like to be?
69. What has Macbeth forgotten to do?
70. What tells us that Macbeth is suddenly aware of the enormity of his crime?

71. To what extent is Macbeth close to being hysterical?
72. What is the dramatic effect of the knocking at the end of this scene?

Context (p.20) The Porter is still drunk from the evening party. The comedy here is amusing, but also grotesque and sinister. Possible reasons why Shakespeare included this scene are:

- We the audience can relieve our horror at the murder in laughter, and so the scene offers welcome relief.
- By contrast, the tragedy seems more tragic and the comedy more comic.
- Practically, it gives Macbeth and Lady Macbeth time to change into nightgowns.
- It allows contemporary jokes and sexual humor, especially for the ‘groundlings’ standing in the pit of the original Globe Theatre.

Tasks

73. The discovery of the murder has been delayed by the Porter’s going on talking. What is the effect of the delay?
74. In which ways is the disorder in the kingdom following the murder of Duncan reflected in the natural world?
75. ‘O gentle lady’: ‘Gentle’ is the one adjective we would perhaps not use of Lady Macbeth! So, which adjectives would you use to describe her.
76. Does Lady Macbeth really half faint or does she only pretend to?
77. Why do you think Macbeth has killed the sleeping guards?
78. How does he justify his apparently impulsive action?
79. What tells us that Malcolm is suspicious of the circumstances of his father’s death?
80. How wise is it of him to run away? (In a way he plays into Macbeth’s hands as he draws suspicion on himself.)

Mini-project

Newspaper reporters are going to interview people who were at the castle at the time of Duncan’s murder. Think of specific questions. Carry out a number of interviews with those who were present, and write up a short article for the newspaper.

Scene 3 (pp.25-34)

Tasks (pp.25-26)

81. Which lines show that Banquo suspects Macbeth of murdering Duncan?
82. In his speech, is Banquo talking in confidence to us, or speaking his thoughts aloud, or addressing an empty throne, or simply telling us the story at this point?
83. Why does Banquo not expose Macbeth’s crime and wickedness?
84. In which tone of voice do you think Macbeth asks Banquo about his plans for the afternoon?

85. Why does Macbeth stress the importance of Banquo's presence at the banquet? (Perhaps to remove suspicion from himself when the murder of Banquo becomes known?)
86. Which reason does Macbeth give in his soliloquy for wishing Banquo dead?
87. How does Macbeth try to justify the killing of Banquo to the Lord?

Tasks (p.27)

88. Which details show that Lady Macbeth sees her husband as isolated and anxious?
89. Does Macbeth detach himself from being reliant on his wife?
90. Which thoughts torment Macbeth?
91. What change has taken place in the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth? Is there a growing split between them? If so, why?
92. Why has Macbeth not told Lady Macbeth of his plan to have Banquo murdered?
93. Apart from the love Banquo has for his son, why is he so keen that his son should escape?

Context - The Banquet Scene (pp.28-31)

A banquet is traditionally a highly ritualistic feast, symbolizing order and harmony. To what extent is that the case in this scene?

This scene should be the hour of triumph for the Macbeths, but is it really?

Tasks

94. Should Macbeth himself stand or sit as he speaks?
95. What is ironic about the timing of the Ghost's entry?
96. Should the stage director bring on a ghost or not? What are the advantages and disadvantages of an invisible ghost?
97. How does the ghost reflect Macbeth's guilt?
98. Which words betray the crime against Banquo?
99. When Macbeth talks with the 'lord' (the murderer of Banquo), does he whisper nervously, speak angrily, or does he pretend to those present that it is a normal conversation?
100. How does Lady Macbeth try to explain her husband's behaviour?
101. How does she show her support for and loyalty to her husband?
102. How, in practical stage terms, would the audience hear the private conversation between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, but the banquet guests would not?
103. What makes Macbeth regain his calmness and composure?
104. How is the formality of the ceremony broken at the end?
105. Why does Macbeth actually want to seek out the witches?
106. Banquo explains that Macbeth is at a turning point. Which emotions does Macbeth experience at this point in the story?
107. Do you feel disgust or pity for Macbeth at the end of this scene?
108. Chart, in the form of a graph, the gradual collapse of Macbeth's mental state during this scene.

Tasks (pp.32-34)

109. What sort of atmosphere is created by the rhythm and rhyme of the witches' spells?
110. 'We know what you want': How is this possible? (Are perhaps the witches a projection of Macbeth's subconscious mind?)
111. Which apparitions are there in this scene?
112. Which prophecies do the witches make?
113. Summarize what Banquo tells us at the end of this scene.

Scene 4 (pp.34-41)

Context (pp.34-37) Malcolm has understandable reasons for his doubts and fears. Compare how Trotsky, Stalin's friend and ally in the Russian Revolution of 1917, fled Russia for Mexico to escape Stalin's tyranny. However, he was assassinated by one of Stalin's agents. Tyrants never forgive or forget.

Tasks

114. In which ways does Malcolm mistrust Macduff?
115. How does he test Macduff's sincerity?
116. Why does Macduff suspect Malcolm's integrity?
Compare how political power and sexual energy are somehow related. Can you think of any examples of this in contemporary politicians?
117. How does Macduff find reasons to excuse Malcolm's wild lust and greed?
118. How convincing are Macduff's arguments, do you think?
119. Which qualities of kingship can you list?
120. So, what is Malcolm really like, as a man and possible future king?
121. Do you think Malcolm has acted fairly in testing Macduff?
122. Why doesn't the Lord immediately tell Macduff of his terrible news?
123. According to Banquo, how do the situation and atmosphere change in Macbeth's castle?

Context - The Sleepwalking Scene (pp.37-38)

Psychologists claim that anything repressed in waking life tends to recur in dreams, often in a symbolic form.

Tasks

124. Is Lady Macbeth really sleepwalking in this scene?
125. How does she reveal her guilts and anxieties?
126. What is the significance of the constant washing of her hands?
127. Do you feel any sympathy for her in this scene? Why (not)?
128. Why does Macbeth put his hand over Lady Macbeth's mouth?
What is Macbeth's state of mind in this scene? Do we feel any pity for him or only terror? In what sense is he a tragic hero?

129. What does the name 'Birnam' remind us of? (Retell the witches' prophecy)

Context - The Final Battle (pp.38-41) In the original play, Malcolm, Macduff with the lord would have entered from the right, that is, the side opposite hell, the side associated with Macbeth. We learn that Macduff was born by Cesarean section, hence 'cut from his mother's womb'.

Tasks

130. How convincing is Macbeth's bravado?

How did Lady Macbeth die, do you think? Was it perhaps suicide, or....?

131. Is Macbeth heartbroken, indifferent, insensitive, angry, or....? So, how could his words be spoken? (Sadly, casually, regretfully, angrily, fearfully, or?)

132. Does Macbeth show himself to be an atheist, a nihilist or a?

133. How does Macbeth face the overwhelming odds against him?

134. Why do you think Macbeth refuses at first to fight Macduff? Out of fear or remorse, or...?

135. What will Macduff do if Macbeth surrenders?

136. Does Macbeth's decision to fight to the death, rather than surrender and accept humiliation, give him any nobility or dignity, ie., do you find Macbeth's death 'heroic', or is he simply a helpless, desperate animal?

137. How are the prophecies of the witches fulfilled in the end?

138. What will the future bring for Scotland? Will Malcolm's victory restore peace, order, and justice to Scotland?

At the very end Macbeth's charmed life ('Your charm is worthless') has run out. The play gained a reputation among actors as being unlucky, and so even today it tends to be called 'the Scottish play', rather than 'Macbeth'.

Part 2

Overview and Background to *Macbeth*

(Please feel free to choose ideas and strategies that suit your own particular class.)

“Vielleicht ist *Macbeth* das grösste Werk Shakespeares, das wahrste ist es ohne Zweifel.”
(Grillparzer)

“*Macbeth* halte ich für Shakespeares bestes Theaterstück, es ist darin der meiste Verstand in bezug auf die Bühne.” (Goethe)

Approach

Macbeth is first and foremost a play. Although it is often referred to as a ‘text’ *Macbeth* is not a book, but a script intended to be acted on a stage. So, how it will be performed in a theatre is vital when we look at the script. For this reason many of the tasks in the worksheets above focus on visualizing, hearing and enacting the script.

A. Advertising headlines and synopsis

‘Thrilling’, ‘Fast-moving’, ‘Horri-fying’, ‘Bloody’, ‘Violent’, ‘Exciting’

The defeat of a rebel army, thunder, lightning, three witches on a heath. The course of nature is perverted and Macbeth, victorious general, beloved cousin of the King, reaches for the crown. But nothing is what it appears to be: ‘fair is foul and foul is fair’. At the pinnacle of ambition, this hero of Scotland twists and decays into a violent and finally unfeeling monster. Murder follows murder, blood follows blood, until Macbeth stands alone, to face his own mortality at the hands of a man not ‘of woman born’. (from a Preview by Cambridge Arts Theatre)

B. Mini Summary

Macbeth and Banquo, victorious generals serving Duncan, King of Scotland, meet three witches who prophesy that Macbeth will become King. Lady Macbeth helps persuade her husband to murder Duncan while he is a guest at their castle, and Malcolm, son and heir to Duncan, flees to England.

Macbeth, now King, has Banquo murdered, whose Ghost subsequently appears to him at a banquet. When the witches warn Macbeth to beware of Macduff, a nobleman who has gone to England, he has Macduff’s wife and children murdered. Macduff and Malcolm raise an army against Macbeth. Lady Macbeth dies, possibly through suicide. Macbeth is killed by Macduff and Malcolm is crowned King of Scotland.

C. The action of *Macbeth*

Put these events in the correct order:

- A Banquo is killed
- B Duncan's guards are killed
- C Macduff leaves Scotland for England
- D Macbeth is crowned King
- E Banquo's son escapes
- F Duncan is murdered
- G Macduff's wife and children are murdered
- H Malcolm and Macduff invade Scotland with an army
- I Duncan's son escapes to England
- J Macbeth is killed
- K Lady Macbeth dies

Macbeth can be very exciting in performance. Which two incidents would you choose as particularly dramatic?

D. Which Genre?

- A crime-does-not-pay story?
- A horror story of the anatomy of evil?
- A historical thriller?
- A fast-moving action-packed murder story?
- A psychological study of a murderer's mind?
- A play of political and social realism?
- A play of illusions and the supernatural?
- A play of themes and ideas: appearance vs. reality?
- A drama of a man in conflict with fate?
- A tragedy of a hero with a fatal flaw (error in his character)?
-?

E. Scottish Background

On a map of Scotland and Northern England mark the following locations:-

Western Isles, Cumberland, Inverness, Cawdor, Glamis, Fife, Scone, near Perth (where traditionally kings of Scotland are crowned)

Birnan (or Birnam) is some 12 miles NW of Perth, near Dunkeld.

Dunsinane (Macbeth's hill-fort) is some 7 miles SE of Perth in the Sidlaw Hills.

Task

- 1) Draw a plan of Macbeth's castle at Inverness, locating where different episodes take place.
- 2) Which images of Scotland are presented in the play?

(wild heathland, strong castles, thick woods, dramatic hills; strange and haunting place-names; the hard-drinking Scot, cf. the Porter; nobility, courage and patriotism of the Scottish character; etc.)

3) Why these images? To evoke the Scottish background of the new King, James I of England and Scotland, in 1603, perhaps?

James I, formerly James VI of Scotland alone, succeeded Elizabeth I. He was fascinated by the supernatural world, especially witchcraft, apparitions and ghosts. (It has been estimated that some 8000 so-called ‘witches’ were burned in Scotland in the second half of the 16thc) The historical Banquo was an early ancestor of James and the play explores the theme of kingship and loyalty – vitally important to James, who had survived an assassination attempt early in life. Topical to the play was the Gunpowder Plot (1605) and the subsequent trials of its conspirators, including Guy Fawkes. (The ‘Gunpowder Plot’ to blow up Parliament is celebrated each year on November 5 in Britain!). The play *Macbeth* may have been performed before King James in 1606.

The historical Macbeth had a double claim to the Scottish throne: both his mother and his wife were members of royal houses. To succeed to the throne Macbeth killed his cousin Duncan in battle, and was in turn killed by Duncan’s son Malcolm.

Macbeth was a strong king, ruling 17 years (1040-1057). He appears to have been a good king, who was generous to the church and brought prosperity to Scotland.

F. Drama Terms

Task

Choose the correct definition from the list (A -) for each drama term (1 -). There is one extra definition that you should not use. Write your answers in the spaces provided next to the definition. The first one (0) is given and serves as an example.

- | | | |
|----|----------------|---|
| 0 | Climax | A |
| 1 | Conflict | |
| 2 | Denouement | |
| 3 | Dramatic irony | |
| 4 | Exposition | |
| 5 | Aside | |
| 6 | Falling action | |
| 7 | Foreshadowing | |
| 8 | Motif | |
| 9 | Monologue | |
| 10 | Soliloquy | |
| 11 | Rising action | |
| 12 | Turning point | |

A Highest point of tension of play

B A character does not perceive what his fate holds in store, but the audience know better

- C Point when an important change takes place (crisis)
- D A longer speech spoken by a single character (either alone or not on the stage)
- E Action following the climax
- F Introduction, setting the action off, with the main characters, element of suspense
- G A longer speech where a single person, alone on stage, expresses their inner thoughts and feelings
- H Last part after the climax, in which the conflict is resolved (the resolution)
- I A character's short speech to the audience, often with a cupped hand and in a low voice, so that it is not heard by the other characters
- J Verbal and dramatic hints suggesting what is to come later
- K A single element (phrase, image, symbol, incident) that recurs
- L An appendix (usually a concluding address) to a play
- M Struggle between opposing forces or characters
- N Action after the exposition, leading to the climax

G. Structure of the Play

One of Shakespeare's shortest plays, many scenes are very brief, leading to a sense of frenetic movement. The main focus of the play is Macbeth himself, and there is no real sub-plot. The play operates as a series of contrasts and parallels in a rise-fall, symmetrical pyramidal structure, with key turning points. Growing tensions characterize the action.

Task

1. Draw the rise and fall as a pyramid structure and label the diagram. Mark also the page references from the text.

Rising action: *Exposition/ Background* (Macbeth's victories), *Complication* (temptation), *Inciting incidents* (Lady Macbeth's ambition for Macbeth), *Dilemma* (his hesitations), *Climax/ Peripeteia/ 'Point-of-no-return'* (Duncan's murder)
Apex (Macbeth's apparent success, culminating in Banquo's murder)

Falling action: *Decline* (Macbeth deep in blood), *Descent* (murder of Macduff's family), *Unravelling/ Denouement* (death of Lady Macbeth), *Resolution* (Macbeth's death and degradation), *Balance restored* (Malcolm as king)

Alternatively, the overall structure can be seen in 3 phases:
 Temptation, Crimes, Retribution.

Task

2. Draw a time-chart showing the passage of time through the whole play.

H. Tragedy

The ancient Greek idea of tragedy concerned the fall of a great man, such as a king, from a position of superiority to one of humility as a result of his ambitious pride, or *hubris*. To the

Greeks, such arrogance in human behaviour was punishable by terrible vengeance. The tragic hero was to be pitied in his fall, but not forgiven. The outcome was often grim and dark. Christian drama, by contrast, offers a ray of hope. So, in *Macbeth*, Malcolm is crowned king with the virtues that suit a king.

I. Conflicts

Drama is about conflict of some sort, sometimes below the surface of the action.

In the case of *Macbeth*:

- the struggle between forces of good and forces of evil
- the confrontation between supernatural powers and natural powers
- the maintaining or destroying of social and natural bonds
- immorality, deception, treachery vs. morality and natural trust, among other conflicts.

J. Themes and Images

Themes are important ideas that run through the play.

Find references in the text for each of these contrasting themes:-

- Natural vs. unnatural
- Disease vs. health
- Man vs. beast
- Appearance vs. reality

Other themes: fortune, fate and free will; ambition, evil, guilt and conscience; manhood/womanhood; kingship and natural order; chaos and inverted order; time, especially the future; violence and tyranny.

Task

1. Draw a mind-map that shows how the various themes are related.

Recurrent images: pictures suggested by words to do with blood, water and darkness.

They become an obsession with Macbeth and his wife.

Tasks

2. Underline these recurrent images in different colours each time they appear.
3. How does a pattern of these images develop?
4. Which scenes in the play could be played in (a) almost total darkness, (b) penumbra, with chiaroscuro and shadow effects, (c) broad daylight?

Task

5. The murder of Duncan affects people and nature. Match object with change:

Object

night
earth
chimneys
events
human
horses
falcon

Change

blown down
confused
feverous
shaken
unruly
rough
turned wild
eat each other
hawked at and killed

K. Characters and their Characteristics

1. **Complete** the sociogram already started. Add details, draw in lines of contact, use symbols (eg. hearts, marriage rings, lightning bolts, cross-swords, crucifixes, etc.)

2. **Try and match up** the adjectives/descriptions with these persons:-

Macbeth
Lady Macbeth
Banquo
Duncan
Malcolm
Macduff
The witches

Adjectives:

Shrewd, evil, revengeful, ambitious, strong-minded, loyal, honourable, self-possessed, deranged, dignified, noble, hesitant, ruthless, overcome with guilt, generous, terrifying, suspicious, well-respected

One adjective may fit more than one character, so explain why you have chosen that one. Also bear in mind that a character may well change in the course of a play.

3. Discussing characters:

Macbeth

Do you think he would have murdered Duncan without the prophecies of the witches? Or without the insistent motivation of his wife?

Is he ever afraid? If so, find examples.

Consider his relationship with his wife before the murder, immediately after it, during the banquet scene, and later in the play.

Is he perhaps 'bewitched' even before the play begins because he is under the influence of his wife?

He experiences a number of hallucinations in the play. What does each tell us about the state of his mind at the time?

At which point in the play does he decide to act without his wife's advice?
How admirable or despicable a figure is he?

Lady Macbeth

What suggests that she is a capable planner and organizer?

Which womanly/ feminine characteristics does she show in a. her behaviour, b. what she says, and c. what she does or has done?

Where does she show growing tiredness and weakness?

Are there any signs that she might be heading for a mental breakdown?

To what extent should she be held responsible for her husband's fate?

How guilty is she of the crime that sparks off the whole tragedy?

Speculate how she might have died.

4. Personalizing

How ambitious are you? What would you like to achieve?

Would you be prepared to be cruel and ruthless to reach your goal?

(eg. to become class speaker, editor of the school magazine, etc.)

L. Creative Activities

1. In a brief period of sanity before her death, Lady Macbeth writes to her husband, reviewing their life together. What does she write? Does she express regret or even remorse?
2. Draw a practical and flexible stage-set where the action of each scene can flow easily into the next. Where could Banquo be positioned at each scene change?
 - a. What kind of stage would be most useful for this production of *Macbeth*?
 - b. (a 3-walled proscenium stage, facing the audience; an arena stage with the audience sitting in a circle all around it; a thrust stage, with the audience sitting on three sides)
3. Build a cardboard or wooden model for a production of the play. Ensure it is functional and allows easy and swift scene-changes.
4. Design a poster, programme cover, or a whole programme for a production of the play.
5. Write a series of tabloid newspaper headlines for key turning-points in the action.
6. Listen to the jazz song *Dunsinane Blues*, by Cleo Laine and John Dankworth. Then, in groups, prepare a jazz rap of the text. Go on to create your own text about the tragedy of Macbeth, paying close attention to syntax and rhythm.
7. Analyze a number of art pictures that have been inspired by Shakespeare's play. Compare and contrast them. Which scene does each picture depict? Which lines in the text would you add as a sub-title to the picture?
8. Heinrich Fussli: *The Weird Sisters* (1785), *Macbeth, Banquo and the Witches* (c. 1793), *Lady Macbeth Seizing the Daggers* (1812)
9. John Martin: *Macbeth, Banquo and the Three Witches* (1820)
10. D.G. Rossetti: *Study for the Death of Lady Macbeth* (1875)
11. T. Chasseriau: *The Ghost of Banquo*
12. J.A. Koch: *Macbeth und die Hexen* (in Landesmuseum, Innsbruck)

M. Drama Activities

1. Devise a scene where a fortune-teller talks informally to Macbeth about the prophecies.
2. 'Hotseat' Macbeth after the murder of Macduff's family, asking him about his motivation, how he feels, and what his hopes for the future are.
3. 'Freeze' a key scene at a dramatic moment and make a digital photo of it. Comment on the photo, looking at the relationships between the figures, their body language and facial expression. Suggest improvements where necessary.

N. Playing the Witches

Which sound effects accompany them (eg. cracking thunder, pattering rain, howling wind, hooting owl, hissing wild cat, etc.)

Are they differentiated individually, or do they all look alike?

Do they like each other (in female solidarity) or are they 'cattish' towards each other?

How do they enter, move and disappear?

How can they be presented and staged? (costumes, lighting, atmosphere)

1. In the opening scene as creeping away from among the corpses of the battlefield?
2. As figments of Macbeth's mind? Macbeth, in bed with his wife, dreams of them confronting him after the battle?
3. As an externalization of Macbeth's dark inner demons, his deep subconscious, his grim imagination?
4. As aggressive men? As young seductresses?
5. As disgusting old hags?
6. As stylish entertainers?
7. As commercial fortune-tellers?
8. As naked young women, as temptresses?
9. As spiderwomen (on a giant cobweb over the stage)?
10. As

O. General questions for discussion

1. To what extent are Macbeth's actions directed by his own free will and in how far are they influenced by fate (as revealed to him by the witches)?
2. Does the excitement of the play depend more on Shakespeare surprising us by the turn of events or letting us know in advance what is going to happen?
3. *Macbeth* has always been one of the most popular of Shakespeare's plays. Which reasons can you suggest for this popularity?
4. Can the play be regarded as a political drama or a medieval morality play? Or is the play a tragedy? A Renaissance morality? A Christian play?

5. In which different ways is the difference between appearance and reality presented in the play?
6. There seems to be *supernatural* evil in the witches, with their horrific visions. But to what extent does the *real* evil lie in the human characters?
7. In which ways does Macbeth as hunter become the hunted?
8. In the last part of the play Macbeth is only referred to as the ‘tyrant’, and not by his actual name. In how far does this reflect the loss of his personal, individual identity?
9. Shakespeare’s England treated women as inferior to men. In 16th century patriarchal society women had few rights and were expected to be obedient first to their father and then to their husband. In which ways does Lady Macbeth challenge such conventional and submissive female stereotyping?
10. Some of Freud’s ideas are personality focused: on unconscious and irrational desires, repressed memories or wishes, sexuality, fantasy, anxiety and conflict. How might they apply to Lady Macbeth? Could she be a figure of repression, an overpowering mother figure, or even a ‘castrator’ of Macbeth?

P. Analyzing a speech from the original play by Shakespeare

(Act V, Scene 5, ll. 17 – 28)

Seyton	The Queen, my lord, is dead.
Macbeth	She should have died hereafter; There would have been a time for such a word. 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.

Tasks

1. **Underline all references to ‘light’ and ‘dark’ in the extract.** Now put them in two columns:

Light	Dark
.....
.....

What do you notice?

2. Write down all references in the text to:

the past	the present	the future
.....
.....

3. Match these meanings to words in the text. Find the words.

- a after this, later
- b moves quickly, step by step
- c unskilled actor
- d covered with dust (powder on earth)
- e very slow speed
- f light (of life)
- g only
- h unreal spirit
- i meaning, adding up to
- j short-lived, not lasting long
- k desperate angry noise
- l offered torchlight
- m performs over-proudly
- n performs anxiously
- o story or anecdote
- p an individual's history, his life (or the history of the world, ie. the Day of Judgement)

4. Try answering these questions:-

- i Does the text say something about Macbeth's final relationship with his wife? If so, what, and how?
- ii Does he feel any grief (deep sadness) at her death? Why (not)?
- iii How is Macbeth? Cold, emotionless, heartbroken, indifferent, insensitive, regretful, or...?
- iv How is time personified in this speech?
- v What could the candle symbolize? Why this?
- vi Which gesture might Macbeth make when he refers to the candle?
- vii 'Poor player' may not mean 'bad actor', but rather someone who is to be pitied? Pitied for what? (because his appearance on the stage of life is so short...?)
- viii How suitable is the stage as a metaphor for life? Why (not)?
- viii How do the three lines starting 'Tomorrow, ...' reinforce the notion of time dragging and of Macbeth's state of mind?
- ix What is the dramatic effect of the incomplete last line?

5. Link these quotations, mostly from the Bible, to the text. How does the speech echo some of these words?

- "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust." (Anglican burial service)
- "The light shall be dark in his dwelling, and his candle shall be put out with him." (Job, xviii, 6)
- "For we are but of yesterday, and consider not that our days upon earth are but a shadow." (Job, viii, 9)

- “We bring our years to an end as it were a tale that is told.” (Psalms, 90, 9)

6. Which adjective(s), do you think, describe best the tone of voice in this speech?

(angry, bitter, cold, cynical, desperate, disheartened, disillusioned, distant, impassioned, ironic, low-spirited, negative, pessimistic, philosophical, rasping, reflective, resigned, sad, sarcastic, tragic, ...)

7. Now listen to three different recordings of actors reading this speech. The impact of Shakespeare’s blank, rhythmic, unrhymed verse is intensified by mid-line pauses, run-on lines (*enjambement*), repetitions and alliterations. Compare and contrast the readings. Which of the three do you find most effective and convincing, and why?

8. Private rehearsal: Practise reading aloud the speech in pairs or groups. Think about focus, weight, stress and intonation, tempo, and pause. That is, experiment with your voice, modulating volume, pitch and tone.

9. Public performance: offer your own individual version. (Alternatively, one whole group can start the opening, gradually reducing the number of speakers until the final word is spoken by one person only.)

10. Location and Setting, Movement and Gesture

Where would you have the speech given in the castle? Outside or indoors? What time of day? In darkness or light?

How does Macbeth sit, stand, or pace about? Which gestures does he make and which facial expressions does he show?

11. Now view three different film versions of this scene. Compare and contrast them. Which of the three do you find the most effective and convincing, and why?

12. In how far do you think you understand the character of Macbeth better now?

Do you have any sympathy for Macbeth at the end of this speech? Why (not)?

13. So, what is this speech really about?

Tick one or more of these interpretations, and explain why you have chosen it or them. Give examples from the text to support your view.

- the mental confusion due to a guilty conscience?
- the feeling that the world can offer nothing worth living for?
- the senselessness of human ambition?
- the vanity and illusion of human life?
- the tragic inevitability of death?
- the emptiness and even nihilism of human existence?
- the absence (eg. the shadow) that marks life rather than the presence (eg. the real thing)?
- ?

Q. Follow-ups

- Films: *Macbeth* – directed by Orson Welles (1948), *Joe Macbeth* (1955) – set in gangland Chicago, *Throne of Blood* – set in the world of Samurai, directed by Akira Kurosawa (1957), *Macbeth* – directed by Roman Polanski (1971), *Macbeth* – directed by Trevor Nunn, RSC (1978), among others.
- The most recent version on film is directed by Justin Kurzel (2015), starring Michael Fassbender and Marion Cotillard.

A Traumatized Macbeth

This is a fully cinematic version of the play, made real and grounded for today in a contemporary, but timeless style. A lean, mean powerful piece of cinema.

The brutally violent action sequences largely explain why *Macbeth* is a traumatic product of war, suffering from fits and hallucinations: “Is this a dagger I see before me?” takes on greater meaning than ever before. *Macbeth* suffers from burn-out syndrome, worn out by the psychoses due to the warring. He hardens more and more to become a desperate anti-hero.

Lady *Macbeth*, cold, callous and calculating, is unscrupulous, but carries a certain dignity. Her ‘otherness’ is subtly underlined by having a French actress in the role.

The *Macbeths* are traumatized after the death of their child: in an almost pagan act, two pebbles are placed over the eyes of the dead child. The witches are accompanied by a deaf and dumb child. Ironically, it’s Banquo’s son who finds the dead *Macbeth* on the final battlefield.

This powerfully imaged adaptation of the original play is less about ambition and power (*Malcolm* is shown as a weakling), and much more about relationships: marriage and kinship.

The elemental, almost primeval Scottish landscape, with grim, hostile weather, plays a key role: it is highly atmospheric, and underlines the point that ‘Fair is foul, and foul is fair’. The music is eerie and otherworldly. Pagan ritual and Christian faith collide in this world.

The film is remarkably faithful to the original text, albeit abridged here and there. The intimate closeness to the text gives a confessional element to the exchanges between *Macbeth* and his wife. The language (blank verse) pulsates like a heartbeat.

By the end, in an almost apocalyptic struggle, *Macbeth* is left weary and disillusioned. In short, this is a dramatically stunning *Macbeth*.

(review by Andrew Milne-Skinner)

Task

Analyze the structure and style of the review above.

Now try writing your own review of the film (readily available on DVD (Studiocanal, 2016))

- *Macbetto*, Opera by Verdi (1847). The opera libretto by Piave reduces *Macbeth*’s speech from Act V, Scene 5 to the following:-
“La vita...que importa? E il racconto d’un povero idiota! Vento e suono che nulla dinota.”
Macbeth’s initial reaction to the death of his wife is brief and stunned. Then, in a few bars of arioso, he muses on the futility of life. The dramatic effect is all the more riveting! Listen for yourself.

Other music interpretations of the play as a whole include Richard Strauss's tone poem *Macbeth* (1890). Horns and bass trumpet represent Macbeth as military hero, while lower wind and strings suggest his growing ambition. Lady Macbeth is signalled by flutes and clarinets. By the end of this some 20-minute piece, the music for Lady Macbeth becomes dissonant and fragmented. As Macbeth faces defeat, distant drums and fanfares sound the approach of Malcolm and Macduff.

- *The Macbeth Murder Mystery*, James Thurber

Andrew Milne-Skinner
Inzing, August 2016