

Macbeth – Knowledge Organiser

Plot summary:

Act 1 – This Act opens with the three Weird Sisters setting up the entire theme of the play: Fair is foul and foul is fair. A war is taking place against Scotland (the setting of this play) and Norway. Scotland is victorious due to the valiant efforts of Macbeth. The traitorous Thane of Cawdor is captured and executed. King Duncan decides to reward Macbeth with the title of Thane of Cawdor to show his gratitude.

The scene shifts to the battleground where the three Weird Sisters confront Macbeth and Banquo, telling Macbeth that he will become Thane of Cawdor and eventually king. Macbeth soon learns of his new title fulfilling the first part of the prophesy and sends word to his wife. King Duncan plans on staying the night at Macbeth's home.

Lady Macbeth receives the news and immediately plots the death of King Duncan so her husband will be king. Lady Macbeth manipulates Macbeth into following her plans, and he reluctantly agrees to murder Duncan. By the end of Act I, Macbeth is determined to follow through with the plan.

Act 2 - Macbeth again has some doubts (and visions) but he talks himself into following through with the murder. Macbeth is so scared Lady Macbeth must finish the rest of the plan by wiping blood on the drunk guards.

The next morning, Macduff and Lennox arrive at Macbeth's and Macduff discovers the dead body of King Duncan. The guards are immediately suspects and Macbeth kills them. Malcolm and Donalbain, the King's sons, flee the castle because they are afraid that they will be blamed for the murder of their father. The king is soon buried.

Act 3 - Banquo begins to suspect Macbeth for the murder of King Duncan and Macbeth in turn feels that Banquo will reveal that it was he that killed the King. Therefore, Macbeth sends out some thugs to murder Banquo and his son, Fleance. Banquo is murdered, but Fleance escapes.

Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Lennox, Ross, and other lords attend a banquet. The ghost of Banquo presents itself to Macbeth. Macbeth begins to rant and rave, making the other guests uneasy. Lady Macbeth tries to cover up the situation by saying Macbeth is prone to fits. By the end of this Act, we learn that Macduff has not attended the banquet because he has gone to England, looking for aid because he is suspicious of Macbeth.

Act 4 - Macbeth confronts the three Weird Sisters and they show him more visions. The visions lead Macbeth to believe that he cannot be killed by any man, giving him a false sense of security. He then plans to send murderers to the castle of Macduff (who is in England) in order to kill his family.

Meanwhile, Macduff is in England begging Malcolm to return to Scotland and seize the throne from Macbeth who has become a tyrant. Malcolm tests Macduff's loyalty to Scotland and himself and after being satisfied with Macduff's responses, he agrees to wage war against Macbeth. Malcolm's uncle will also aid in the attack.

Act 5 -Lady Macbeth has finally gone mad with guilt over the murders. The once strong and ruthless woman is now a scared child. Doctors are unable to help her.

Some of the Scottish lords are discussing Macbeth's state of mind and have come to the conclusion that they will help Malcolm and Macduff fight against Macbeth. Of course, Macbeth isn't really concerned because he believes the prophecy ensures that he cannot be killed by any man born of woman. Macbeth soon confronts Macduff and learns that Macduff was ripped from his mother's side and not born naturally. Macbeth and Macduff fight and the natural order is restored by the end of the play.

Key characters	Key themes / Motifs	Historical context	Stylistic features and relevant terms
<p>Macbeth – A loyal warrior who becomes duplicitous as he becomes obsessed with the witches’ prophecies of power.</p> <p>Lady Macbeth – Macbeth’s wife who drives his ambition in the beginning but loses her control by the end.</p> <p>Banquo – Macbeth’s close friend and ally who also receives prophecies from the witches</p> <p>Duncan – King of Scotland at the beginning of the play who is portrayed as a strong and respected leader.</p> <p>Macduff – A brave warrior who is loyal to Duncan and is consistently suspicious of Macbeth.</p> <p>Malcolm – Duncan’s son and next in line to the throne.</p> <p>The Three Witches (Weird Sisters) – Portrayed as forces of nature that seem to know the future (is this true?) and are fascinating to Macbeth.</p>	<p>Ambition</p> <p>Kingship</p> <p>Fate and Free Will</p> <p>Appearance and Reality</p> <p>Nature / The Natural World</p> <p>Light and Darkness</p> <p>Children</p> <p>Blood</p> <p>Sleep</p> <p>Visions</p> <p>Gender</p>	<p>Shakespeare wrote under two monarchs: Queen Elizabeth 1st and King James 1st of England (6th of Scotland). Macbeth was written under the reign of King James 1st.</p>	<p>Meter</p> <p>Blank Verse</p> <p>Rhymed Verse</p> <p>Prose</p> <p>Iambic Pentameter</p> <p>Trochaic Tetrameter</p> <p>Heroic Couplets</p> <p>Soliloquy</p> <p>Dramatic Irony</p> <p>Concealment</p> <p>Gender</p> <p>Stichomythia</p> <p>Tragedy</p> <p>Hamartia</p> <p>Prophecy</p> <p>Imagery</p> <p>Symbols</p> <p>Metaphor</p> <p>Sounds</p> <p>Regicide</p>
		<p>Macbeth is loosely based on true events in feudal Scotland in the 11th Century and would have been known to King James. King James inherited the throne through his ancestors Banquo and Fleance who appear in the play.</p>	
		<p>This violent period in Scotland’s history ended with stronger links with England much like the union of the crowns that took place when King James became King of England as well as Scotland.</p>	
		<p>It is likely that Shakespeare was trying to seek the King’s approval when he wrote the play.</p>	
		<p>King James was fascinated by witchcraft and it is likely that the witches were included to please him.</p>	
		<p>King James also believed in The Divine Right of Kings meaning that any attempt to depose a king went directly against God and would be judged harshly. This is reflected in Macbeth’s failure as a king.</p>	
		<p>Both King James’ parents were killed in politically motivated moves to secure power and an attempt was made on his life through the gunpowder plot. Shakespeare echoes this in the murders in the play.</p>	
		<p>There is a reference to King James in the play in Act 4 Scene 1 when Macbeth sees a vision of kings stemming from Banquo’s sons.</p>	
		<p>Shakespeare uses soliloquy to allow the characters to communicate their true thoughts to the audience.</p>	
		<p>Macbeth is one of Shakespeare’s Tragedies and follows specific conventions. The climax must end in a tremendous catastrophe involving the death of the main character; the character’s death is caused by their own flaw(s) (hamartia); the character has something the audience can identify with which outweighs their flaws so we care about them.</p>	

