

Macbeth

William Shakespeare

Act 1

- 1 We were told that Macbeth – the Thane of Glamis – fought bravely in the battle against King Duncan’s enemies. He killed their leader and put the dead man’s head up on the castle wall. When the King of Norway carried on fighting, Macbeth, with the help of Banquo, defeated him and the rebel Thane of Cawdor. King Duncan said that Macbeth was brave, and planned to make him the next Thane of Cawdor in place of the traitor.
- 2 The three witches hailed Macbeth as Thane of Glamis and Thane of Cawdor and told him he would be King of Scotland. They said that Banquo, though not as great as Macbeth, would be happier, and that his children would be Kings of Scotland.
- 3 Macbeth was disturbed. He went silent at first and seemed to be afraid of the witches’ words about his future. But then he asked for more information. It appeared that he already wanted to be King. Banquo showed that he did not fear the witches, but he wanted to know more about his own future and the future of his family. He did not trust them and thought that they might be trying to cause trouble.
- 4 In his letter, Macbeth said that he knew his wife would want him to be King. Lady Macbeth said that she wanted him to become King, but that she feared that Macbeth lacked her own strength of purpose. She said that Macbeth was not bold enough to commit murder, so she, with her stronger character, would have to push him to do it. She prayed to the wicked spirits to make her more like a man and take away any feelings of guilt. As soon as she saw Macbeth, she hailed him as the future King. She also said that she would plan the murder of King Duncan herself.
- 5 One murder might have led to another murder. Macbeth may not have been safe if he became King in this way. The King was related to him and was a guest in his house. Duncan had been a good king. His good deeds would make his murder even more wicked. King Duncan had honoured Macbeth by making him Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth did not want to risk losing people’s good opinion of him.
- 6 Lady Macbeth told her husband that she could not, and would not, love a coward. She told him that unless he committed the murder, he was not a real man. She also said that if he did not do it, he would have broken his promise to her. Finally, she planned everything herself, so that nothing would go wrong. She told Macbeth that Duncan’s servants would be blamed for the murder, not them.

Act 2

- 1 It was a dark night and Banquo was having unpleasant thoughts and had been unable to sleep. He had dreamt of the three witches and was worried about what they had said, and the fact that some of it had already come true.
- 2 While waiting for the bell to ring, Macbeth thought he saw a dagger, leading him towards Duncan and with fresh blood dripping from it.
- 3 King Duncan had told Macduff to come and see him early. Macbeth told Macduff where the King was, but dared not go into the room with him. Macduff then discovered the King's dead body and raised the alarm.
- 4
 - (a) Macduff was horrified because Duncan's murder was an act against God. He found it hard to share the news with the others.
 - (b) Malcolm and Donalbain were frightened. They thought that they might be murdered too, and perhaps be blamed for the murder. They decided to run away – Malcolm to England and Donalbain to Ireland.
 - (c) Macbeth pretended to be horrified and sad, and killed Duncan's servants.
 - (d) Lady Macbeth also feigned surprise and fainted. She was then helped away by her servants.
- 5 Macbeth said he had killed the servants because he was so angry that they had killed Duncan. His real reason for killing them was probably to stop them from telling the truth when they woke up from their drugged sleep. Macbeth himself might have been blamed if the servants had been allowed to speak.
- 6 Possible answer: Lady Macbeth may have fainted because Macbeth's description of the dead king frightened her. But she may have pretended to faint, to stop Macbeth saying too much.
- 7 Malcolm and Donalbain had run away and some people thought that they had planned the murder of their own father. Macbeth, on the other hand, had shown himself to be a brave leader in the war and was also related to Duncan, so he seemed a natural successor.

Act 3

- 1 Macbeth murdered King Duncan partly because he believed the witches and thought he would be safe. Banquo also remembered what the witches had said to him – that his children would be kings. Knowing that Macbeth had murdered once, Banquo was beginning to fear that Macbeth might harm him and his son, Fleance.
- 2 Although Macbeth believed the witches had told him the truth about his future, he wanted to prove them wrong about Banquo's future. The murder of Banquo and his son would make Macbeth safe, in spite of the witches.
- 3 Possible answer: Macbeth no longer needed help from his wife. He felt strong enough to act on his own. He may have wanted to protect her.
- 4 Because it meant the words of the three witches could still come true – Banquo's heirs could still rule in Scotland.
- 5 Possible answer: We know what the ghost looked like from Macbeth's words. So we can imagine the horrid sight for ourselves and we can share in the guests' fear. However, it might be more exciting and frightening if the audience could see Banquo's ghost for themselves.
- 6 He decided to find the witches and question them again.
- 7 It showed that he did not care what he did or whom he killed. He trusted no one and would do anything, however wicked, to keep his throne.
- 8 Malcolm, now living in England, had asked the King of England to help him fight Macbeth. Macduff had gone there too, to ask the same thing.

Act 4

- 1 Because he wanted to find out exactly what his future would be.
- 2 They were making a magic spell by boiling many horrid things together in a huge pot, or cauldron.
- 3 Because the spirits seemed to be saying that Macbeth would never be defeated in battle and that no one could kill him.
- 4 Macbeth wanted to know if anyone from Banquo's family would ever rule in Scotland.
- 5 Because he was shown a long line of kings who all looked like Banquo. This meant that Macbeth's children would not be kings, but Banquo's would.
- 6 She was angry with her husband because he had left his family unprotected.
- 7 Possible answer: Because he thought that his first duty was to his country. He had to go immediately to seek help from England so that Macbeth could be defeated.
- 8 Malcolm thought that Macbeth had sent Macduff to try to trick him. So Malcolm told Macduff that he would make a worse king than Macbeth. When Macduff was horrified, Malcolm knew that he was honest.
- 9 Macduff prayed that he would meet Macbeth face to face in battle and kill him with his sword.

Act 5

- 1 Possible answer: In earlier scenes, Lady Macbeth's powerful and cruel feelings had been revealed by her powerful and frightening words. The verse showed us how strongly she felt. In this scene, Lady Macbeth's guilt has driven her mad. She cannot speak clearly or reasonably any more. The use of prose helps to show this.
- 2 He still had hope because he still trusted the witches' words. He would not fear defeat until Birnam Wood moved towards his castle at Dunsinane. Of course, Macbeth thought that this could never happen.
- 3 Lady Macbeth killed herself because the guilt she felt had driven her mad.
- 4 At first, he did not believe the news and was angry. Then he realized that the witches had not told the truth. But, in spite of the fact that there was no hope left, he decided to die fighting.
- 5 When Macduff told Macbeth about his unusual birth (in which he was cut early from his mother's side), Macbeth finally realized that the witches were lying and that he could still be killed.
- 6 Possible answer: Macbeth's ambition, his active imagination, his wife's encouragement and his murderous actions had led him to become an evil tyrant. He had to die. But he died bravely and perhaps we can admire him for that.