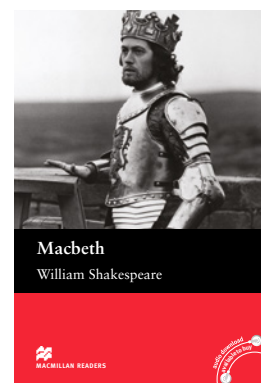




## Macbeth by William Shakespeare

### ABOUT THE PLAY

Set in Scotland in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the play tells the story of Macbeth, a brave general, who is respected and admired by many, including the king of Scotland, King Duncan. One day he meets three old women who tell him that he himself will one day become king. At first he decides to wait for this to happen but is then persuaded by his ambitious wife, Lady Macbeth, to kill King Duncan so he can become king more quickly. However, he feels guilty about this and ends up committing more and more crimes to try and hide what he has done. By the end of the play he has become a hated and feared man with many enemies. *Macbeth* is unusual compared to Shakespeare's other tragedies in that it is much shorter and faster-paced.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564. He wrote approximately 37 plays, 12 of them tragedies. *Macbeth*, written sometime between 1599 and 1606, is his shortest tragedy. The king at the time was James I, who was already James VI of Scotland. He was a patron of Shakespeare's work, and so Shakespeare set the play in Scotland in recognition of his Scottish ancestry. He also based a lot of the play on superstition – one of James I's interests.

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### Act 1, Scene 5

[Macbeth's castle, at Inverness in Scotland. Lady Macbeth has just read a letter from her husband about the three women predicting he will be king.]

**Lady Macbeth:** You are Glamis and Cawdor too. And you shall be What the three sisters promised. But yet I fear  
5 You do not have the will to get what you desire  
You are ambitious, but not bold enough  
To do what must be done. To get the crown,  
You must commit a murder, and you know it.  
10 You must do wrong, but fear to do that wrong.  
Husband, come quickly, so that my bolder spirit  
Will help you put aside all that still keeps you  
From the golden crown that fate says shall be yours.  
[Enter servant]

15 What is your news?

**Servant:** The King comes here tonight.

**Lady Macbeth:** The King! You are made to call your master that. [Quickly correcting herself]  
I mean ... the King is with your master.

20 King Duncan is our guest tonight.

**Servant:** Yes, my lady.

**Lady Macbeth:** This is good news, but there is much to do.  
Go, we must be ready for the King.  
[Exit servant, Lady Macbeth to herself]

25 That black bird, the raven with his cry,  
Both warns and welcomes Duncan to my castle,  
Come to me, you spirits, who are always waiting,  
Ready to put black thoughts in human minds!

Take womanly weakness from me – make me like a man!

30 Fill me from top to toe with hellish cruelty.  
Strengthen my powers, weaken all thoughts of pity.  
Silence my conscience, so that no guilty feelings  
Prevent my foul plan having the end I wish for!  
[She continues] Come, darkest night and grow darker yet  
35 So my sharp knife sees not the wound it makes.  
Cover the eyes of Heaven as I do the dreadful deed!  
[Enter Macbeth]  
Great Glamis! Worthy Cawdor! Greater than both.  
As the three sisters promised! Your letter's taken me

40 From present time to future glory in a moment!

**Macbeth:** My dearest love, Duncan comes here tonight.

**Lady Macbeth:** When does he leave?

**Macbeth:** Tomorrow – that is his plan.

**Lady Macbeth:** Tomorrow? No. Duncan will never see tomorrow.

45 Your face is like a book, my dearest Lord,  
Where man can read strange things.  
Your looks, your actions, all must welcome him.  
Our wicked purpose must be kept well hidden.

50 You can trust me to carry out this business.  
Then all our days and nights to come will be  
Strong with the power that goes with royalty.

**Macbeth:** We need to talk more ...

**Lady Macbeth:** The way ahead is clear.

55 I tell you we have nothing else to fear.  
Leave all the rest to me.

[Exit Macbeth and Lady Macbeth]

### VOCABULARY FOCUS

**Glamis and Cawdor (line 4):** two areas which Macbeth rules over

**will (line 6):** determination

**bold (line 7):** confident and not afraid

**foul (line 33):** evil or unpleasant

**deed (line 36):** something that someone does



## Macbeth by William Shakespeare

### Before reading

- 1 You are going to read an extract from *Macbeth*, which is a Shakespearean tragedy. In pairs, discuss what the main elements of a Shakespearean tragedy are.**
- 2 Read *About the play*. Work in pairs to discuss these questions.**
  - 1 In what ways does *Macbeth* fit the definition of a protagonist in a Shakespearean tragedy?
  - 2 What do you think Macbeth's major character flaw is?
  - 3 What do you think happens at the end of the play?
  - 4 What do you think are some of the key themes of the play, based on what you have read?
- 3 Now think about the two main characters, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. What do you think each character is like? How do you think they will be portrayed in the text? Brainstorm some adjectives that might describe them.**

Macbeth: .....

Lady Macbeth: .....

### While reading

- 1 Read the extract and choose the correct options.**
  - 1 Is Lady Macbeth alone at the beginning?
    - a yes
    - b no
  - 2 Who is she addressing when she first speaks?
    - a herself
    - b Macbeth
  - 3 What news does the servant bring?
    - a that King Duncan is coming
    - b that Macbeth is coming
  - 4 How long is Duncan planning to stay?
    - a until tonight
    - b until tomorrow
  - 5 What does Lady Macbeth ask Macbeth when he comes in?
    - a when Duncan will leave
    - b if Duncan is coming
  - 6 What does Lady Macbeth instruct Macbeth to do?
    - a be welcoming to Duncan
    - b do business with Duncan

### 2 Read the extract again and answer the questions.

- 1 What is Lady Macbeth planning to do in this scene?
- 2 Does Lady Macbeth believe Macbeth will be king? What reservations does she have?
- 3 Who does she think the servant is talking about at first?
- 4 What does she ask the spirits to do? In what way does she want to change?
- 5 Who do you think is planning to get rid of King Duncan: Macbeth or Lady Macbeth?
- 6 What does she mean when she says to Macbeth 'your face is like a book'?

### 3 How does Lady Macbeth see Macbeth? Look at the adjectives below. For each one, circle yes or no and write the line from the extract that supports your answer.

adjective	yes / no	evidence from text
determined	yes / no	
ambitious	yes / no	
daring	yes / no	
fearless	yes / no	
honest	yes / no	

- 4 Which of the adjectives in exercise 3 would you use to describe Lady Macbeth? Are there any other adjectives you would use to describe her?**
- 5 In *Before reading*, you discussed Macbeth's fatal flaw. Having read the extract, do you still think it is the same or something different? Who do you think is responsible for what ultimately happens, Macbeth or his wife?**

### After reading

- 1 Think about how women and men were supposed to behave at that time. What is unusual about Lady Macbeth's and Macbeth's personalities?**
- 2 Look at Macbeth's last line *We need to talk more ...*. Work in pairs or small groups. What do you think he wants to talk about?**
- 3 Create and then role-play a subsequent conversation between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in which he tells her what he wanted to say.**