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To: Professional Language Arts Teachers

From: Dr. James Scott, Prestwick House Inc.

Subject: Advanced Placement Teaching Unit

Thank-you for your interest in Prestwick House materials. The sample pages from the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Teaching Unit are enclosed.

The goal of our Advanced Placement Teaching Units is to offer you title-specific, ready-to-use materials that are especially designed to help your students develop the specific knowledge and skills they will need to succeed on the AP English Literature and Composition examination.

Scene-by-scene study-guides include questions that help students examine the text beyond a mere understanding of meaning, but an appreciation of how the text works to create that meaning. End-of-unit tests contain sets of multiple choice questions based on key passages, and both forms of free-response items (passage-based and free choice). All test items are specific to the title, but assess the student’s knowledge of such issues as the development of character and theme, how the part contributes to the whole, how the author uses language and rhetoric to convey his meanings, etc.

In short, each unit is designed to help your students achieve a close critical reading of the title and rigorous AP-exam practice without requiring countless hours of preparation on your part. As our ad says, “Now you can teach AP Literature and have a life too.”

The writer of the Macbeth unit, from which this sample was taken, retired from teaching with over 25 years’ experience. He taught his school’s AP “Lit and Comp” course for over ten years.

All of our forthcoming AP Units are being written by either current or retired Advanced Placement teachers, teachers who know firsthand how challenging and intense Advanced Placement instruction must be.

We hope you like what you see in the enclosed sample. If you do, tell all of your colleagues. If you don’t, tell us.

In either event, thank-you for your continued interest in Prestwick House products. We look forward to being of service to you in the future.

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Macbeth

Objectives

By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:

1. analyze the characters of Macbeth, Banquo, and Lady Macbeth and their relationships to each other.
2. trace the development of Macbeth's character from his first mention in the play until his last, noting how and why he changes.
3. trace the mental and emotional make-up of Lady Macbeth from her death.
4. discuss the techniques Shakespeare uses to convey character to an audience.
5. discuss the dramatic development of the play in terms of exposition.
6. analyze the importance of literary elements like dramatic irony and development of the play.
7. discuss the frequent references to children in the play as characters, symbols, and elements of a metaphor.
8. analyze Shakespeare's use of language (verse, prose, rhythm, rhyme) and its importance in setting mood and establishing character.
9. identify and analyze the use of comic relief.
10. define by example the terms tragedy, and tragic hero.
11. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
12. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
13. offer a close reading of Macbeth and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the play.



Editor's Note:

All Advanced Placement Teaching Units have objectives designed to give your students a close study of the literature and preparation for the A.P. exam.



II. Features of Shakespeare's Use of Language

1. blank verse

Shakespeare's essential pattern in his plays is BLANK VERSE (unrhymed iambic pentameter).

Therefore, whenever a reader notices a change in this pattern (a change in rhythm from iambic to trochaic; a shift in meter from pentameter to tetrameter; a shift from poetry to prose) there is a reason for the change.

With the change, Shakespeare is creating a mood, establishing character ... something.

Be aware of shifts in language like this. For example:

1. the witches speak in rhymed couplets of irregular iambic tetrameter;
2. the Porter (Act II, scene iii) speaks in prose;
3. Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene (Act V, scene i) is in prose.

2. use of figurative language (especially SIMILE and METAPHOR)

Shakespeare's characters often speak in similes and metaphors – to expand ideas and amplify **IMAGERY**.

Be certain not to miss the “like” or “as” or the text will indeed seem incomprehensible.

For example, in Act I, scene ii, the bloody sergeant describes the battle against Macdonwald:

Doubtful it stood;
As two spent swimmers, that do cling together
And choke their art. The merciless Macdonwald--
Worthy to be a rebel, for to that
The multiplying villainies of nature
Do swarm upon him--from the western isles
Of kerns and gallowglasses is supplied;
And fortune, on his damned quarrel smiling,
Show'd **like a rebel's whore**: but all's too weak:
For brave Macbeth--well he deserves that name--
Disdaining fortune, with his brandish'd steel,
Which smoked with bloody execution,
Like valour's minion carved out his passage
Till he faced the slave;
Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,
Till he unseam'd him from the nave to the chaps,
And fix'd his head upon our battlements.



Editor's Note:

The study of literary techniques and figurative language becomes purposeful and concrete.



There are three similes in this brief, 17-line passage:

- Macbeth and Banquo are not swimming. Neither is drowning. The sergeant is explaining that the two sides of the battle were both exhausted yet each impeding the other's victory ... **as two spent swimmers.**

If students start imagining Macbeth and Banquo swimming, fully armed, in the middle of a battle, they will be confused indeed.

- There's also no whore on the battlefield. But fortune (the mythical figure, blindfolded and spinning her wheel) is smiling – **like** a woman who gets paid to convince men she loves them – on the rebel's, Macdonwald's, cause.
- This is a pretty clear one. Macbeth fights his way to Macdonwald **like** the special favorite or “pet” of valour (bravery, fortitude, etc.).

Notice the *nature* or *quality* of the simile/metaphor. Often this will be a clue to how one character feels about another, or how we are to feel about the character.

For example, in the passage above, notice how Fortune smiles on the rebel's cause *like a whore*, but Macbeth fights *like a favored one of valour*:

Also, consider the example below from Act II, scene iii:

Here lay Duncan,
His silver skin laced with his golden blood;
And his gash'd stabs look'd like a breach in nature
For ruin's wasteful entrance:

Here Macbeth is describing the appearance of Duncan's body. The skin is not literally silver, nor the blood gold, but Shakespeare is giving us information about how much Macbeth valued Duncan and thus regrets killing him – and how conflicted (noble yet evilly ambitious) Macbeth is. We are to feel ambivalent toward Macbeth: appalled at his deed, yet wanting to admire the person.

Likewise, notice who speaks the similes and metaphors ...

1. Throughout the play Lady Macbeth uses very few similes, and these are comparatively straightforward:
“Your face ... is as a book ...” (I,v)
“Look like the innocent flower
But be the serpent under't.” (I,v)
“The sleeping and the dead are but as pictures ...” (II,ii)

III. Dramatic Conventions and Author's Techniques

dramatic devices

- A **SOLILOQUY** is a monologue. The character is alone onstage. It is a **DEVICE** the playwright uses to give the audience insight into the character's thoughts and emotions.

Shakespeare uses soliloquies to allow the reader to witness the conflict between Macbeth's honorable nature and his ambition combined with his desire to please his wife.

- The **ASIDE** is another **DEVICE** used by the playwright to give the audience insight into the character. Here the character is speaking either to himself or directly to the audience. There are other characters onstage who by convention do not hear the aside.
- A **FOIL** is a character who highlights or emphasizes certain traits of the main character by contrasting them (see Practice Free Response Question 6).

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare uses both Banquo and Lady Macbeth as foils for Macbeth.

Banquo's staunch integrity and Lady Macbeth's unmitigated ambition heighten the inner conflict between Macbeth's own wavering integrity and ambition.

- An **ALLUSION** is an indirect reference to another event, person or work with which the writer assumes the reader is familiar.

Shakespeare uses **ALLUSIONS** as techniques for establishing character, building theme, setting mood.

In *Macbeth*, there are allusions to Greek and Roman mythology, Roman history, and the Bible.

- Use of **THE SUPERNATURAL** is another **DEVICE**
- **MADNESS**, either real or pretended, was another popular **DEVICE** in Elizabethan drama
- One also cannot discuss Elizabethan tragedy without a discussion of the **TRAGIC HERO**
- Finally, there can be no drama at all without **CONFLICT**, ... In *Macbeth*, the primary conflict is **INTERNAL** between Macbeth's strong sense of Right and his strong desire both to be king and to please his wife.

IV. Dynamic and Static Characters

- **MACBETH** is a strong example of a **DYNAMIC CHARACTER**. At the beginning of the play he is a courageous general, a man of honor with a strong sense of duty and responsibility. These traits are what cause him to anguish over whether or not to kill his king and cousin. In the middle of the play, he is guilt-ridden and paranoid. By the end of the play he is a brooding tyrant who laments the meaninglessness of his life.
- **LADY MACBETH**, on the other hand is a **STATIC CHARACTER**. From the beginning of the play she is set – Duncan must be killed. To doubt or to speak of guilt is foolish. Ironically, it is her inability to change that ultimately leads to her insanity and suicide.



Editor's Note:

All Units include notes to give students deeper and broader understandings of the social, historical, and philosophical context of the literature.



V. The Weird Sisters and the Tragic Hero

Notice that the Weird Sisters are referred to as “witches” only : sitting in the audience seeing the play will hear the word “wite

Rather, in the text Banquo and Macbeth call them the “Weird : they call themselves.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “weird” wyrd meaning fate or destiny. Later uses of the word refer to the three Fates of classical mythology. These will be discussed later.

Still later uses refer to one who *pretends* or is *supposed* to have the power to foresee and control future events. Still later the uses include persons who *have* the power to control the destinies of others.

So exactly how much control does Shakespeare intend his Weird Sisters to wield over Macbeth’s destiny? Keep in mind that the Elizabethan tragic hero’s downfall was the result of his own choices and actions. Therefore, if the Weird Sisters *cause* the action of the play and *control* Macbeth’s destiny, where’s the tragedy in that?

What, then, *is* their role?

We won’t spend any time on their identity as witches. After all, Shakespeare used that term only in his stage directions – a sort of short hand for his actors as it were. As far as his audience was concerned (and remember that he was not writing for *readers*) they are the Weird Sisters.

VI. Historical References

- According to *Holinshed's Chronicles*, **MACBETH** ruled Scotland for 17 years, the first 10 of which were peaceful and prosperous for Scotland. As a king, Macbeth united the three semi-sovereign provinces of Alba, Caithness, and Orkney. He enacted laws protecting the rights of widows and orphans, and introduced stone construction to a people who often destroyed their enemies by burning down their houses while they slept.

The final seven years of Macbeth's reign were riddled by doubt and suspicion as Duncan's exiled sons had grown to adulthood and were plotting to invade Scotland and oust Macbeth. Holinshed, however, says that Macbeth's paranoia sprang from his sense of guilt at having killed Duncan.

However, Holinshed also records that Macbeth's killing of Duncan was not in cold blood while the king slept. Rather, Macbeth raised an army and revolted against a king whom many considered incompetent (note that even Shakespeare's play begins with both an internal rebellion against Duncan and a foreign invasion). Duncan was killed on the battlefield.

Historical fact, however, will not serve Shakespeare's dramatic purposes.

- Shakespeare's **DUNCAN** is Duncan I who became king in 1034. Prior to this, Scotland had been a loosely confederated collection of tribes and clans. With the Viking raids in the 9th century, the "Scots" began to band together for mutual protection. The vague office of "king" passed frequently and violently between rival clans until Duncan I. Except for the 17 years of Macbeth's reign, all subsequent rulers of Scotland were descended from Duncan – including James I (James VI of Scotland) who was England's ruler when Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*.

Duncan was not the old man Shakespeare presents. He was approximately 36 at the time of his death in 1040, and his oldest son, Malcolm was only 9.

A quiet, gentle man, Duncan was an incompetent ruler, and his six-year reign was riddled with rebellions and threats of rebellion.

- **LADY MACBETH** was the granddaughter of Kenneth IV, a Scottish king of a rival family to Duncan's. Kenneth IV died in a battle against Malcolm II, Duncan's grandfather.

Thus, Lady Macbeth would have grown up believing she had a blood feud with Duncan. This would explain Lady Macbeth's unswerving desire to see Duncan killed and her own husband king.

After the historical Macbeth died, his stepson, Lulach, tried to continue the dynasty but failed. Presumably Macbeth's stepson was Lady Macbeth's son by a previous marriage – which would explain how Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth has apparently been a mother (“I have given suck and know/How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me...” I, vii) while Macbeth himself apparently has no children.

- The **BANQUO** legend had long been established as accepted “truth” by the time Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*. The king of England was James I, who was also King James VI of Scotland, a descendent of the Stuart dynasty. James was the eighth Stuart monarch (ninth if you count Mary Stuart, but Shakespeare had his reasons for not counting her).

According to legend, the Stuarts of Scotland traced their ancestry back to Duncan I on the female side and to Banquo on the male.

Banquo's being the “founder” of the Stuart Dynasty, and James's being the eighth Stuart monarch sheds light on the parade of kings the Weird Sisters show Macbeth (Act IV, scene i). Shakespeare's king – James I – is the eighth king. He is carrying the mirror to show a long line of future Stuarts (Shakespeare would have no idea how long the dynasty would continue). Some of these kings are carrying “two-fold balls”, indicating England and Scotland; and “treble scepters” indicating England, Scotland, and Ireland (or possibly even predicting a successful American empire). *Macbeth* was probably written in 1606 – the same year that James I founded the London Company and the Plymouth Company, charging them to find gold, find a route to the South Seas, and find the Lost Colony of Roanoke.

- **DUNSINANE** seems to appear out of nowhere. In the beginning of the play, Duncan lives at Forres and Macbeth at Inverness. Act III all takes place in and around Forres. In fact, the first mention of Dunsinane isn't until Act IV, scene i when the third apparition reports, “Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until/
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill/ Shall come against him” that we hear of Dunsinane.

Dunsinane is the stone hilltop fortress Macbeth built during his seventeen-year reign, apparently one of the first such fortresses constructed of stone. While the historical Macbeth was indeed defeated at a Battle of Dunsinane (Dunsinnan), he remained king and was not finally defeated and killed until three years later at the battle of Lumphanan.

Free-Response (Essay) Items

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 1:

The passage below, from the beginning of Act I, scene v, is the audience's first introduction to Lady Macbeth. Read the passage carefully and then write a well-organized essay in which you compare Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's characters and explain how the contrast established here foreshadows later action in the play.

LADY MACBETH:

They met me in the day of success; and I have learned by the perfectest report, they have more in them than mortal knowledge. When I burned in desire to question them further, they made themselves air, into which they vanished. Whiles I stood rapt in the wonder of it, came missives from the king, who all-hailed me, Thane of Cawdor; by which title, before, these weird sisters saluted me, and referred me to the coming on of time, with Hail, king that shalt be! This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee. Lay it to thy heart, and farewell.

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
What thou art promised:—yet do I fear thy nature;
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness,
To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great;
Art not without ambition; but without
The illness should attend it: what thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win: thou'dst have, great Glamis,
That which cries, Thus thou must do, if thou have it;
And that which rather thou dost fear to do
Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear;
And chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round,
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crown'd withal.



Editor's Note:

End-of-unit tests contain both types of Free-Response Items: passage based and whole text.



Discussion Topics/Questions

1. What do the witches represent? In answering this, be sure to mention their prophecies and the ways in which the prophecies come to be fulfilled.
2. Do a detailed character analysis for each of the following characters. Indicate both their actions and their motives. Also, point out their state of mind and what significant actions of their own, or others, affected them.

Macbeth
Lady Macbeth
Macduff
Banquo
Malcolm



Editor's Note:

All units contain suggestions for additional writing, discussion, and research.



3. Prove or disprove the following statement by referring to incidents: Macbeth is not a monster; rather, he is a man, perhaps more inclined toward evil than a man who is tempted, succumbs to temptation, and pays the price.
a man who is tempted, succumbs to temptation, and pays the price
4. The phrase, “Fair is foul, and foul is fair” is first used by the witches in Act I, scene i. Then Macbeth uses it in Act I, Scene iii. That line, or variations of it, appears numerous other times in the play. Trace the appearance of the “fair is foul” motif and what it comes to mean as a theme of the play.
5. Another motif is the idea that the killing of Duncan by Macbeth was an “unnatural” act. State why the Elizabethans would have considered regicide an unnatural act and point out how this idea is reinforced by comments and incidents from the play.
6. Babies and children are mentioned in this play so frequently that we must conclude there was a reason for it. Identify as many of those incidents as you can, state the context, and attempt to draw some generalizations.
7. To what extent is Macbeth a good example of Aristotle’s tragic hero? Try to see both sides of the question.
8. How does Shakespeare allow the audience to witness the disintegration of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth? How does their disintegration parallel the disintegration of the state of Scotland? Why would Shakespeare establish this parallel?

Multiple Choice Questions

PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 1 – 10:

1. Read the following passage carefully before you choose your answers:

MACBETH:

To be thus is nothing;

But to be safely thus.—Our fears in Banquo

Stick deep; and in his royalty of nature

Reigns that which would be fear'd: 'tis much he dares;

And, to that dauntless temper of his mind, 5

He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour

To act in safety. There is none but he

Whose being I do fear: and, under him,

My Genius is rebuked; as, it is said,

Mark Antony's was by Caesar. He chid the sisters 10

When first they put the name of king upon me,

And bade them speak to him: then prophet-like

They hail'd him father to a line of kings:

Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,

And put a barren sceptre in my gripe, 15

Thence to be wrench'd with an unlineal hand,

No son of mine succeeding. If 't be so,

For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind;

For them the gracious Duncan have I murder'd;

Put rancours in the vessel of my peace 20

Only for them; and mine eternal jewel


Given to the common enemy of man,

To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings!

Rather than so, come fate into the list.


And champion me to the utterance! 25

1. In the context of the passage, the word “filed” (line 18) most likely means
- (A) sharpened.
 - (B) sorted.
 - (C) submitted.
 - (D) troubled.
 - (E) controlled.



Editor's Note:

*End-of-unit tests also contain
A.P. style multiple-choice
questions.*



2. The word “list” (line 24) is a reference to
 - (A) Medieval jousting tournaments.
 - (B) the book of judgement.
 - (C) a census of Scottish subjects.
 - (D) the act of counting suspects.
 - (E) the record of the Scottish royal family.

3. The pronoun “them” (lines 19, 21, 23) refers to
 - (A) Banquo’s descendents.
 - (B) Banquo and Fleance.
 - (C) Macbeth’s children.
 - (D) the Weird Sisters.
 - (E) Malcolm and Donalbain.

4. “There is none but he whose being I do fear” (lines 7 – 8) is an example of
 - (A) pathetic fallacy.
 - (B) dramatic irony.
 - (C) tragic flaw.
 - (D) hyperbole.
 - (E) understatement.

5. The mention of Mark Antony and Caesar (line 10) is an example of an
 - (A) understatement.
 - (B) illusion.
 - (C) allusion.
 - (D) epitaph.
 - (E) enigma.

6. Which of the following is true of the first line of the soliloquy?
 - (A) It is a heroic couplet.
 - (B) It is a dependent clause.
 - (C) It introduces an extended metaphor.
 - (D) It is rhythmically shorter for emphasis.
 - (E) It is syntactically altered for emphasis.

MULTIPLE CHOICE ANSWERS With Explanations

1. In the context of the passage, the word “filed” (line 18) most likely means
- (A) sharpened.
 - (B) sorted.
 - (C) submitted.
 - (D) troubled.**
 - (E) controlled.

“Troubled” is the only possibility that fits contextually into the passage. To recognize the use as an abbreviated form of “defiled.”

2. The word “list” (line 24) is a reference to
- (A) Medieval jousting tournaments.**
 - (B) the book of judgement.
 - (C) a census of Scottish subjects.
 - (D) the act of counting suspects.
 - (E) the record of the Scottish royal family.

The Oxford English dictionary offers “the place or scene of combat or contest” as one definition of “list.” There is no textual support (either in the scene or the rest of the play) for any of the other selections.

3. The pronoun “them” (lines 19, 21, 23) refers to
- (A) Banquo’s descendents.**
 - (B) Banquo and Fleance.
 - (C) Macbeth’s children.
 - (D) the Weird Sisters.
 - (E) Malcolm and Donalbain.

“For Banquo’s issue ... for them ... only for them ... to make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings!” Choice A is demanded both grammatically and syntactically .



Editor's Note:

Answer keys contain not just the right answers, but explanations to illustrate how to eliminate incorrect distractors.



Macbeth

ADVANCED PLACEMENT IN ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

STUDY GUIDE TEACHER'S COPY

Act I, scene i

1. What effect is Shakespeare creating by beginning the play with this scene?

Shakespeare is creating suspense and mystery – appropriate for a tragedy. The first mention of the hero's name comes from the weird sisters which creates mystery and foreshadows his downfall.

2. What do you suppose is suggested by the line, “Fair is foul, and foul is fair”?

The line could suggest that things are not as they appear, or that turbed and disrupted. It also could mean that what seems good i

3. What poetic devise is used in this scene and to what effect?

The alliteration of the “F” sound in “fair,” and “Foul,” and “Fog playing the Weird Sisters to emphasize their base slovenliness.



Editor's Note:

In addition to the typical understanding of plot, character, and theme, Study Guide questions ask students to consider how a part fits within the scheme of the whole.

Act I, scene ii

1. What is the purpose of this early scene?

Shakespeare offers the audience some important exposition – we learn of the Macdonwald revolt and of the (attempted) Norwegian invasion. The audience also hears Macbeth's name for the second time, this time in context with words like “brave,” “valiant,” and “worthy.”

The audience also first hears of Banquo in similar terms.

2. What image do we have of Macbeth's bravery and ability as a warrior?

Concentrate on the image of Macbeth “carving out his passage” – hacking and hewing with battleaxe and sword through a battlefield of footsoldiers – and then essentially slicing Macdonwald in half and cutting off his head.

11. What dramatic conventions does Shakespeare use to establish character and begin to lay out his tragedy?

In this scene, Shakespeare uses:

Character reaction: twice in this scene Shakespeare has Banquo point out Macbeth's reactions: when the witches first address them ("Good sir; why do you start and seem to fear ...?") and after Ross and Angus have told Macbeth he is Thane of Cawdor ("Look, how our partner's rapt"). These comments are to make certain that the audience does not miss Macbeth's strong – and questionable – reaction to the news.

Aside: For those who want to blame Lady Macbeth for everything, notice that in this scene we already see Macbeth entertaining horrifying thoughts ("Why do I yield to that suggestion that doth unfix my hair and make my seated heart knock at my ribs ...?") We also see the beginning of the inner conflict: Macbeth's desire versus his integrity (the fact that the thought of murdering Duncan horrifies him so, and his decision that "If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown, me without my stir").

Character action: Notice how Macbeth twice seems to try to draw attention away from his better prophecy ("that shalt be king hereafter") to focus on Banquo's considerably lesser prophecy ("thou shalt get kings"). This fact, combined with his admission to entertaining horrifying thoughts, starts to establish a troubled mind (guilt).

Foil character: by having Banquo request a prediction from the audience to witness his reaction, or apparent lack thereof, Banquo and emphasize Macbeth's reactions.



Editor's Note:

Invite your students to consider the dramatic aspects of the play—not only the language.



Act I, scene iv

1. Why was the former Thane of Cawdor executed?

He betrayed his King and country by assisting the Swedish king

2. What effect does Shakespeare create by having Macbeth and Banquo enter just as they are discussing the execution of the former Thane of Cawdor?

Their well-timed entrance creates dramatic and visual irony. Macbeth – having already probably contemplated murdering Duncan – enters just as Duncan is lamenting the inability to read a man's inner thoughts and see disloyalty before it is too late.

3. What announcement does the King make to everyone present and what is Macbeth's reaction?

Duncan announces that his son Malcolm is Prince of Cumberland – heir to the Scottish throne. Macbeth feels cheated. He thought (given the witches' prediction, the promise of "something greater" when he was given Cawdor, and Duncan's "promise" to make him "full of growing") that he would be named heir to the throne. Now he must somehow "o'erleap" being the legitimately named heir – or give up his ambition to be king.

4. In his last speech in this scene, what does Macbeth reveal?

Macbeth is again entertaining some evil thought ("my black and deep desires") – presumably murdering Duncan. Yet he again decides against it ("let that be, which the eye fears, when it is done, to see").

Act I, scene v

1. What is the purpose of the letter?

Macbeth does not tell his wife anything the audience does not already know. But Lady Macbeth's reaction to the letter gives us insight into her character and Macbeth's, as well as their relationship.

2. What do we learn about Macbeth from Lady Macbeth's reaction to the letter?

Lady Macbeth confirms what we already know: Macbeth is a man with both aspirations and integrity. He "would (desires to) be great," is "not without ambition," but is not willing to do anything wrong to achieve his ambition.

3. What do we learn about Lady Macbeth from her reaction to the letter?

While Macbeth's initial reaction to the witches' prophecy was fear (as Banquo pointed out in I, iii), Lady Macbeth seems energized. Both Lady Macbeth and Macbeth think immediately of murdering Duncan, but as Macbeth twice decides against such an act, Lady Macbeth commits herself to this plan of action.

In this sense, Lady Macbeth is a "stronger" person than Macbeth in that he wavers between whether or not to commit the assassination. But we must not forget that the deed that Macbeth is "afraid" to do is an illegal, immoral act. Our first image of Macbeth was carving through the soldiers on the battlefield and splitting the rebel Macdonwald in half.

If Lady Macbeth is "strong," then, she is more strongly, more consistently evil.

Lady Macbeth is also shrewd enough to know her husband's "weakness," and apparently how to help him "overcome" it.



Editor's Note:

Students are asked to consider ALL the possibilities about why the author constructed the literature in a particular way.



Act III, scene ii

1. What is the meaning of Lady Macbeth's opening speech in this scene?

It does not profit them to achieve their objective if they live in a constant state of uneasiness and worry. It's better to be dead like Duncan ("that which we destroy") than live as they have been living since the murder ("than by destruction live in doubtful joy").

2. In this scene, what is Macbeth's state of mind?

He is depressed, spends much of his time alone. Judging from Lady Macbeth's comment, he seems to have great remorse for his crime. Again she advises him to put his guilty thoughts out of mind.

3. On the other hand, how does Macbeth show that his resolve and ambition have become stronger?

Prior to the killing of Duncan, Macbeth was pushed and encouraged by Lady Macbeth. It is possible that Macbeth would not have killed Duncan without his wife's forceful ambition. Macbeth, now, however, has arranged to have Banquo and Fleance killed, with no encouragement from his wife, and he withholds this news from Lady Macbeth.

4. What is significant about Macbeth's instructions to Lady Macbeth about how to treat Banquo at the state dinner that night?

He does not even intend for Banquo to attend the feast as I. This emphasizes how strongly Macbeth has taken control as wife.



Editor's Note:

Students are continually asked to consider author intent and how the literature operates—the parts and the whole.



Act III, scene iii

1. What happens at the ambush?

Banquo is killed, but Fleance escapes.

2. Given the previous scene in which Banquo's death is planned, and the next scene in which the audience could learn with Macbeth that Fleance has escaped, why would Shakespeare choose to dramatize this seemingly insignificant event?

Fleance's escape does establish the security of the Weird Sisters' predictions – Macbeth could not thwart fate and destroy Banquo's line.

Also given King James I's descendency from Banquo, this scene would probably please the King.

Finally, the murder of Banquo affords Shakespeare with the opportunity to dramatize violence which would have been very popular with his paying audience.

5. Pleased with the information, what one further thing does Macbeth desire to know and what is the answer he gets?

He wants to know whether Banquo's heirs will ever be Kings of Scotland. Eight Kings appear. Banquo points at the others as if claiming them as his heirs. The eighth King has a mirror that reflects a line of Kings.

Macbeth notes that some of the kings are carrying three scepters and two orbs. The two orbs would indicate that Banquo's descendants are kings of two countries (Scotland and England). The three scepters indicate that they are kings of three countries (Scotland, England, and Ireland or possibly even Scotland, England, and America).

6. What is the significance of this scene?

The parade of kings does not advance the plot, nor does it develop character. Likewise, it offers no new information. But James I (England's king when Shakespeare wrote Macbeth) was the eighth Stuart king of Scotland (James VI of Scotland and James I of England). The Stuart dynasty claimed descent from both Duncan I and Banquo. Therefore, this pageant is Shakespeare's attempt to flatter his king. The eighth king in the parade and the mirror would indicate the continuation of the dynasty into the future. Shakespeare wrote Macbeth in 1606, the same year James I chartered the Virginia Company and the Plymouth Company, charging them to find the Lost Colony of Roanoke. By having some of the kings in the parade represent the New World, Shakespeare could be broadening his attempt at flattery by presenting the New World.



Editor's Note:

The literature is placed in its historical and political context.



7. What news does Lennox give to Macbeth?

Macduff has fled to England.

8. What is Macbeth's response?

From now on, he will not procrastinate. If a thought comes into mind, he will act on it immediately. He believes that it was his procrastination that allowed Macduff to escape.

9. What is his resolve at the end of this scene? How is this different from his previous actions?

Macbeth will murder all of Macduff's family. There is no reason for this slaughter, other than frustration, anger, and an evil nature. Previously, at least, Duncan's murder had been motivated by ambition, and Banquo's by paranoia and envy. Macbeth's character is becoming increasingly evil.

Act IV, scene iii

1. What additional evidence does Shakespeare give his audience that Macbeth is a tyrant?

Macduff tells Malcolm that every day “new widows howl, new orphans cry,” indicating that men – presumably “traitorous” nobles – are dying or being killed every day in Scotland.

2. What suspicion of Macduff does Malcolm voice?

In effect, he asks how he can be sure that Macduff didn't come to England “To offer up a weak, poor, innocent lamb [himself] To appease an angry god [Macbeth].” In other words, Macduff might be Macbeth's agent to lure Malcolm back to Scotland and his death.

3. How do Malcolm's comments about Macbeth again bring to mind the “fair is foul” theme?

It is impossible to tell by a man's appearance whether he is once thought honest – and was loved even by Macduff. Macduff is not. But Malcolm admits there are still probably honest men thought to be among the most honest turned out to be deceitful: “the brightest fell.”

4. What literary device is Shakespeare employing when Malcolm says “the brightest fell”?

Allusion. Medieval and Renaissance theologians interpreted Testament books of Ezekiel and Isaiah to tell the story of Lucifer, an angel of heaven (whose name meant “bearer of light”) who challenged God's authority. He and 144,000 of his followers were expelled from Heaven and became Satan and his demons.



Editor's Note:

Students will identify literary techniques and explore their impact on the piece.



Editor's Note:

Biblical, classical, literary, and historical allusions are explored.



Malcolm suspicious of Macduff's motives?

Macduff's children behind.

Macduff's honesty?

Macduff; telling Macduff that he is lecherous and greedy, possessing none of the virtues of a king.

Macduff fail the test?

He seems too eager to bring Malcolm back to Scotland. Macduff excuses away every sin of which Malcolm accuses himself.

