

Macbeth Study Guide

Characters

Macbeth – Is a Scottish general and the Thane of Glamis. He is a brave soldier and a powerful man. He becomes the Thane of Cawdor. He murders Duncan to become king.

Lady Macbeth – A deeply ambitious woman who lusts for power and position. She is more ruthless than her husband. Her behavior is quite ruthless.

Duncan – He is the King of Scotland. He is a virtuous king but a little too trusting. He is killed by Macbeth.

Malcolm – He is the eldest son of Duncan and heir to the throne. When his father is murdered, he flees to England.

Donalbain – He is Duncan's youngest son and Malcolm's younger brother. When his father is murdered he flees to Ireland.

Macduff – He is the Thane of Fife and is one of the first people to suspect Macbeth of betrayal.

Banquo – He is a brave general who is with Macbeth and also has ambition, but does not take any action on it. He is told that future generations of his children will become kings. Fleance is his son.

Fleance – He is Banquo's son.

The Witches – They are three ugly hags who plot mischief against Macbeth by giving him prophecies.

Summary

Act I, Scene 1 – Prior to the battle, the three witches were meeting and talking about how they were going to see Macbeth.

Act I, Scene 2 – A wounded captain emerges from the battle and gives the king a detailed report of how Macbeth and Banquo won the battle. King Duncan is going to reward Macbeth for his performance during the battle and will name him the new Thane of Cawdor. The previous Thane is a traitor and is going to be executed.

Act I, Scene 3 – The witches meet Macbeth and Banquo. They tell Macbeth that he is the new Thane of Cawdor and that he will become King of Scotland. They tell Banquo that future generations of his bloodline will become kings.

Act I, Scene 4 – The original Thane of Cawdor is executed. King Duncan declares that his son Malcolm is the Prince of Cumberland and his successor.

Act I, Scene 5 – Lady Macbeth receives a letter from Macbeth that contains the story of the witches' predictions and his new responsibilities. The letter also mentions that King Duncan will be visiting their castle. When Macbeth returns home, his wife tells him of her plan to kill King Duncan.

Act I, Scene 6 – King Duncan arrives at the castle and is greeted by Lady Macbeth. She welcomes them to the castle and is given a diamond by the King.

Act I, Scene 7 – Macbeth contemplates several reasons why it is a bad idea to kill Duncan. However, Lady Macbeth ridicules his fears and explains her plan on how to kill Duncan. Macbeth concedes to her wishes.

Act II, Scene 1 – Banquo and Macbeth plan to meet in the future to talk about the witches and their prophecies. Later, as Macbeth goes to murder the king, he has a vision, where he sees a dagger pointing him towards his future.

Act II, Scene 2 – Macbeth returns to his wife after the murder of the king, but he has forgotten to leave the daggers at the scene of the crime. He claims he heard the children of Duncan having nightmares, and praying together. Lady Macbeth takes the daggers and places them at the scene, when Macbeth refuses to return to it.

Act II, Scene 3 – There is a short comic scene with a Porter who jokes about alcohol and sex. Macduff, Macbeth and Lennox meet in the morning to await the king. When he doesn't show up, Macduff goes and discovers that he has been murdered. Macbeth kills the guards, pretending that his anger at their supposed crime was his motivation. Malcolm and Donalbain (the king's sons) flee the scene because they believe that they might be targets for murder as well.

Act II, Scene 4 – Malcolm explains how Duncan's children have been blamed for the murder, and that Macbeth is to be crowned king at Scone. However, Macduff declares that he will not go to Macbeth's coronation.

Act III, Scene 1 – Banquo considers the possibility that Macbeth killed Duncan to become king. Macbeth finds out that Banquo is coming to the coronation party and plans to kill him and his son, Fleance. Macbeth tells two murderers to ambush him as he comes to the castle.

Act III, Scene 2 – Lady Macbeth tells her husband to act more cheerfully, as they are about to have guests at their party. Macbeth informs his wife that he is planning to kill Banquo and his son, to prevent that part of the prophecy.

Act III, Scene 3 – Three murderers kill Banquo as he heads towards Macbeth's castle, but the torches go out, and Fleance escapes into the darkness.

Act III, Scene 4 – At the party, Banquo's ghost shows up (with blood streaming down his head), but only Macbeth can see him. Macbeth is startled, and begins to yell at the ghost, which makes his dinner guests and wife very nervous. After his wife sends the guests away, Macbeth resolves to go and meet with the witches.

Act III, Scene 5 – In a scene probably not written by Shakespeare, the head witch, Hecate shows up and demands to be involved in the whole affair with Macbeth.

Act III, Scene 6 – Lennox sarcastically comments about how Duncan was murdered by his children, and how Fleance is being blamed for Banquo's murder, indicating that he does not believe either story and that Macbeth is starting to be seen as a usurper.

Act IV, Scene 1 – The three witches give Macbeth three prophecies: He is told to beware of Macduff, that he can only be killed by someone NOT born of woman, and that he would only be defeated if Birnam forest came to Dunsinane castle. He asks if Banquo's children will still become kings, and he sees ghosts of future kings who are descendants of Banquo. He plans to murder Macduff, but when he finds out that Macduff has fled he plans to murder Macduff's family.

Act IV, Scene 2 – Lady Macduff complains that her husband has fled without taking his family and tells her son that they have been disowned by his father. Macduff's son argues with his mother and defends his father's behavior. A messenger enters warning them that they are about to be killed. Almost immediately after he leaves, the murderers enter and kill Macduff's family.

Act IV, Scene 3 – Malcolm suspects that Macduff is an agent of Macbeth. He tests him by telling Macduff that he is going to be a greedy, rapacious king and waits to see Macduff's reaction. When Macduff becomes despondent instead of fawning over him, Malcolm chooses to trust him. Malcolm

reveals that he is noble, and will do his best to be a good king. Ross arrives and tells Macduff that his family has been murdered by Macbeth. As a result, Macduff swears to get revenge and slay Macbeth.

Act V, Scene 1 – A doctor and a gentlewoman enter Lady Macbeth's room. Based on the doctor's assessment and the gentlewoman's report, they determine that Macbeth's wife is crazy. They also become nervous, as Lady Macbeth talks about the murders. They agree to pretend that they never heard anything.

Act V, Scene 2 – A group of Scottish nobles, including Menteith, Caithness, Angus and Lennox meet and....

Act V, Scene 3 – Despite the fact that Macbeth's army is horribly outnumbered, he is confident because he believes that there is no way that Birnham Forest can possibly come towards his castle at Dunsinane, as per the witches' prophecy. In the meantime, the doctor tells Macbeth that his wife's mental condition is incurable.

Act V, Scene 4 – Malcolm, Mentieth and Siward meet near Birnham and make the decision to disguise the number of troops in their army by having the men cut down branches from the forest and hold them up in front of the lines.

Act V, Scene 5 – At the beginning of this scene, Macbeth learns that his wife killed herself. Then he is informed by a messenger that it appears that Birnham wood is moving towards his castle. Accepting his fate, he marches his army out of his castle towards Malcolm's army.

Act V, Scene 6 – Malcolm's army drops the tree branches and attacks Macbeth's army.

Act V, Scene 7 – On the battlefield, Macbeth is confronted by Young Siward, who is then killed by Macbeth. In the meantime, Macduff continues to hunt for Macbeth.

Act V, Scene 8 – Macduff confronts Macbeth, and Macduff reveals that he was 'not born of woman' since he was cut from his mother during the pregnancy. Macduff then kills Macbeth during their fight. Malcolm's forces win the battle. Siward learns that his son was killed during the battle, but is not sad. Rather, he is proud that his son was so brave. Macduff appears carrying Macbeth's severed head. Malcolm is declared king of Scotland, and his first act is to rename all of the thanes who fought with him in the battle; henceforth they are known as Earls.