

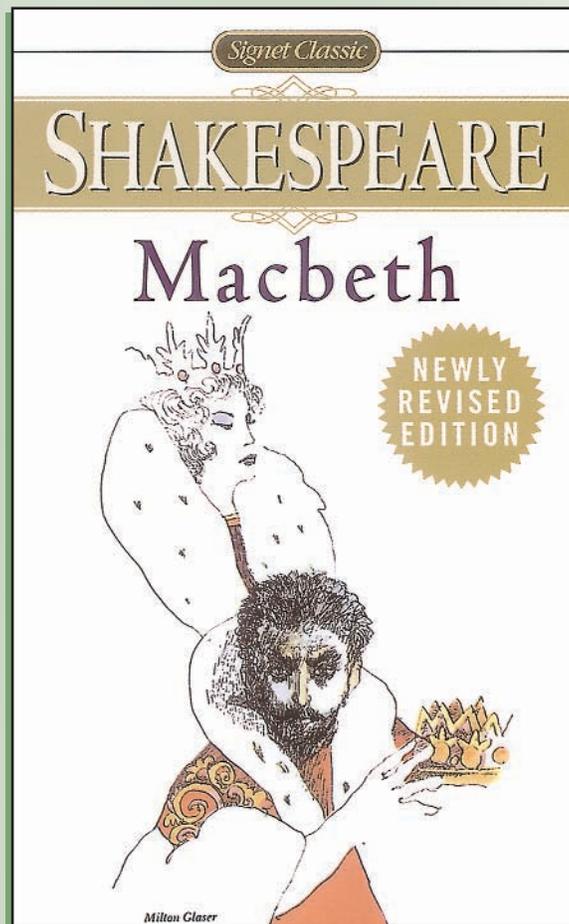


A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE SIGNET CLASSIC EDITION OF

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S

# MACBETH

LINDA NEAL UNDERWOOD



S E R I E S   E D I T O R S :

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## INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare developed many stories into excellent dramatizations for the Elizabethan stage. Shakespeare knew how to entertain and involve an audience with fast-paced plots, creative imagery, and multi-faceted characters. *Macbeth* is an action-packed, psychological thriller that has not lost its impact in nearly four hundred years.

The politically ambitious character of *Macbeth* is as timely today as he was to Shakespeare's audience. Mary McCarthy says in her essay about *Macbeth*, "It is a troubling thought that Macbeth, of all Shakespeare's characters, should seem the most 'modern,' the only one you could transpose into contemporary battle dress or a sport shirt and slacks." (Signet Classic *Macbeth*)

Audiences today quickly become interested in the plot of a blindly ambitious general with a strong-willed wife who must try to cope with the guilt engendered by their murder of an innocent king in order to further their power. The elements of superstition, ghosts, and witchcraft, though more readily a part of everyday life for the Renaissance audience, remain intriguing to modern teenagers. The action-packed plot, elements of the occult, modern characterizations, and themes of import to today's world make *Macbeth* an excellent choice for teaching to high school students.

This study guide offers ideas for presenting *Macbeth* to a high school class. The activities have been divided into sections:

1. a brief literary overview, including a synopsis and commentary on the play;
2. suggestions for teaching the play, including ideas for incorporating it into a thematic unit, activities, discussion questions, essay topics to be used before, during, and after reading the play;
3. ideas to extend students' learning beyond the play, including ways to address its themes, ideas for teaching literary analysis, techniques for using the play as a bridge to other works;
4. bibliographies.

Since *Macbeth* is a play dealing with adult themes and emotions, it is difficult reading for many adolescents. Therefore, this study guide will focus attention on the ability levels of students, and specific activities, discussion questions, and topics will be labeled as to difficulty.

- \* Appropriate for all students.
- + Most appropriate for nonacademic students.
- # Most appropriate for above average students.
- % Most appropriate for academic students.

## OVERVIEW

### ACT I

Three witches meet Macbeth and Banquo on the heath as the men return from battle. They predict that Macbeth will be named Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland and that Banquo will be the father of kings. The witches vanish; Ross enters to greet Macbeth with the title of Cawdor, the traitor whom King Duncan has determined must be executed and whose title and lands will be given to Macbeth. This immediate "earnest of success commencing in a truth" causes Macbeth to consider the extent of his ambition and Banquo to warn that predictions are often harmful as well as beneficial. (iii.)

Announcing that his eldest son, Malcolm, is to be his heir, Duncan states his intention to visit Macbeth's castle, Glamis. (iv.) When Lady Macbeth reads the letter Macbeth has sent ahead, she determines her husband must take advantage of the opportunity Duncan's forthcoming visit offers as a way of fulfilling the prophecy. However, she fears that though Macbeth is "not without ambition," he is "too full o' th' milk of human kindness to catch the nearest way." (v.)

Macbeth is not as determined as his lady about the need for murder. He considers reasons he should defend rather than threaten the life of his king. Lady Macbeth remains adamant and pressures him with attacks on his manhood as well as reminders of their feelings for each other. She convinces Macbeth to proceed by presenting her plan to drug Duncan's guards and leave evidence that will implicate them in the crime. (vii.)

## ACT II

Macbeth sees a "dagger of the mind" leading him towards Duncan's chamber. (1.) Lady Macbeth has drugged the guards, noting that Duncan's resemblance to her father has stayed her from doing the deed herself. After the murder, Macbeth carries the bloody daggers from the chamber causing Lady Macbeth to reprimand him for his great show of emotion. After she returns the daggers and smears the guards with blood, she tells Macbeth, "a little water clears us of this deed." (ii.)

The porter attends the knocking at the gate, creating a comic relief scene of his imaginings. Macduff discovers the body, and Macbeth kills the guards, explaining the act as his overwrought response to their unjust offense. Duncan's sons realize their danger and decide that Malcolm will go to England and Donalbain will go to Ireland. (iii.) Their flight makes them suspect, and Macbeth is crowned King of Scotland. (iv.)

## ACT III

Macbeth plans to overturn the witches' prophecy that Banquo's sons will become kings by sending two murders to kill both Banquo and his son, Fleance. (i.) Macbeth no longer needs Lady Macbeth's involvement and bids her be "innocent of the knowledge" of his decisions. (ii.) A third murderer, obviously not known by the other two, joins them, and although Banquo is slain, Fleance escapes. (iii.)

At the banquet, Macbeth is terrified by the bloody ghost of Banquo. Since no one else sees the apparition, Lady Macbeth attempts to excuse his behavior and eventually has to end the banquet. Macbeth determines to visit the witches again. (iv.)

Suspicion of Macbeth is mounting, and Macduff joins Malcolm in England. (vi.)

## ACT IV

The witches show Macbeth three apparitions which warn him to beware Macduff, promise him that "none of woman born shall harm Macbeth," and assure him he will remain safe until Birnam Wood moves. He feels comforted by these prophecies without seeing their double meaning but is shaken by a vision of Banquo and his eight descendants. (I.)

Malcolm tests Macduff's loyalty to Scotland, and they plan strategy with English forces to oust Macbeth. (iii.) Meanwhile, Macbeth has Lady Macduff and all her children slain. (ii.)

## ACT V

Lady Macbeth, while sleepwalking, reveals her knowledge of the deaths of Duncan, Lady Macduff, and Banquo. Her continual washing of her hands cannot ease her dread or make her feel cleansed. The doctor and attendant realize they cannot help her. (i.)

Macbeth is too involved with battle preparations against Malcolm and English and Scottish troops to spend much time considering his wife's dreams. (iii.) When he hears of Lady Macbeth's death, he contemplates that life is "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." He reassures himself with the predictions only to see the woods advance when Malcolm's soldiers camouflage themselves with boughs from Birnam Wood. (v.)

Macbeth sees the ambiguity of the predictions but goes bravely into battle. He kills young Siward who dies fearlessly (vii.) and then faces Macduff who tells him that he was not "of woman born" but was "untimely ripped" from his mother's womb. Finally realizing the true implications of the predictions, Macbeth refuses to yield to Macduff and face capture and ridicule. He confronts Macduff and bravely fights to the death. Macduff displays the "usurper's cursed head" and acclaim Malcolm the new King of Scotland. (viii.)

## COMMENTARY

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### Origin of the Play

William Shakespeare's talents were in the creative dramatization of a story full of imagery and imagination rather than in the origination of the story itself. For his inspiration, he often consulted Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*.

According to the *Chronicles*, the "real" Macbeth became King of Scotland in 1040 after having defeated a historical Duncan who was a weak, youthful ruler with little experience. Shakespeare presents an older King Duncan who is due the respect of his thanes; consequently, his murder is more heinous in the dramatic interpretation.

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In the *Macbeth* of Holinshed's Chronicles, the wife of Macbeth is hardly mentioned. Shakespeare develops the impressive character of an ambitious lady Macbeth from a different story found in the Chronicles.

The historical Macbeth reigned for 17 years and survived the battles which returned Malcolm to the throne; whereas, Shakespeare presents a series of events which speed to the conclusion of a Macbeth defeated and beheaded.

### King James

Shakespeare enjoyed much support for Queen Elizabeth who encouraged the artistic efforts of her subjects during the creative Renaissance years. After her death, James VI of Scotland became James I, King of England, in 1603.

Because James was considered the eighth descendent of the Banquo-Fleance line, Shakespeare "polished" the historical representation to present Banquo's character in a more honorable light. The Banquo of Holinshed's Chronicles is actually involved in the conspiracy to murder King Duncan.

James produced the book, *Daemonologie* (1597), which provided ways to recognize witches as well as to defeat their spells. He was particularly concerned with the threat of witchcraft after several women were tried in connection with their self-acclaimed attempt to sink his ship during his wedding journey. These women claimed to have sailed "in a sieve" which Shakespeare uses in Act I, scene 3. (All three of the women concerned were burned-as were between 4,500 and 8,000 other supposed witches during that century.)

## BEFORE READING

### MACBETH AS PART OF A THEMATIC UNIT\*

Because of the complexity of plot, theme, and characterization in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, as well as the use of Elizabethan language, many students have difficulty reading and understanding the play. To help students understand the adult motivation of Shakespeare's characters, *Macbeth* can be taught as part of a thematic unit. If the themes of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* are explored in less complex literature, particularly modern literature with young adult characters, students will be able to relate Shakespeare's exploration of human nature to their own lives. For example, the play may be studied in a unit dealing with themes such as "the corruption of power," "blind ambition," "things are not what they seem," or "superstition and its effects on human behavior." A unit dealing with one of these can be studied in social studies or history as well as literature.

While students are reading and discussing the themes in less complex literature, the literary techniques used by Shakespeare can be introduced. For example, foreshadowing is a common technique used by authors of fiction. Students can be taught to recognize similes, metaphors, alliteration, symbol, and irony as they are used in young adult and /or less complex adult literature.

Books to use in thematic units are suggested in the bibliography at the end of this study guide.

## BEFORE READING THE PLAY

Shakespeare's plays were written to be performed and enjoyed by his audience, in fact most were not published until seven years after his death. By the time *Macbeth* first appeared on stage, most of Shakespeare's audience was familiar with the story. To give modern day students the same advantage, it is important to acquaint them with the plot, themes, characters, and literary devices employed by Shakespeare.

There are numerous ways to acquaint students with *Macbeth*:

### THE PLOT

1. Tell the story to the class.\* if you are a good storyteller you can use your technique to bring Macbeth to life.
2. View a movie or video-tape of *Macbeth*. \* Many movie and video-tape versions are available. Orson Welles played Macbeth in 1948; The Corporation for Public Broadcasting produced *Macbeth* as part of Shakespeare series in 1983; Roman Polanski filmed a graphic ("R" rated) version. After the students have been introduced to plot outline of the play, they can become the audience as modern actors portray the characters of *Macbeth* on the screen. It will be helpful to students

if the film or video tape is topped at strategic points, perhaps at the end of each act, and the plot line is outlined on chart paper for reference during the reading of the play.

3. Since Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is frequently produced, perhaps because of its universal appeal and short length (it is the shortest of the Shakespeare's plays), it may be possible to see a live production of the play.\* However, prior to taking students to a performance of *Macbeth*, the story should be introduced to them.
4. If you are not as storyteller and do not have access to media or live version of the play, use the synopsis of the play as a "bare bones" outline of the plot and related the story to the students.\* For example, you might introduce the play as follows, "Macbeth is the story of a man, Macbeth, whose ambition runs wild. To become King he first kills the current king, Duncan. Then he kills the king's guards in an attempt to pin the murder on them. He then plots to murder a nobleman, Banquo, and his son, Fleance, because three witches have predicted that Banquo's off-spring will become king. After Banquo is slain, Macbeth thinks he sees Banquo's ghost at a banquet. Later he has the wife and children of a general, Macduff, slain after the three witches warn him to beware Macduff. Before the play ends, Macbeth kills Siward, a supporter of Macduff, in battle. Finally, in the last act, Macbeth battles Macduff who slays him and displays Macbeth's "cursed head" for all to see. This is the story of how one murder begets another and how one man's ambitions plague a nation." It is the rare teenager who is not attracted to the gory details of the plot of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.
5. Investigate the story of Macbeth as related by Holinshed in his Chronicles.% The story of the historic Macbeth can be outlined on chart paper for comparisons with the plot of Shakespeare's play. Make predictions about why Shakespeare changed the story. Then, discuss the role of King James in the theatrical life of Shakespeare.
6. If students are unaware of the organization and dramatic techniques of Shakespearean drama, introduce them before students read the play.\* Discuss: five acts divided into scenes, rising action, climax at the beginning of the third act, falling action, soliloquy asides, blank verse, stage direction....

## THEME

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1. After introducing the plot of *Macbeth*, discuss the themes of the play .\* The four themes of most interest to students are: things are not what they seem, blind ambition, power corrupts, and superstition affects human behavior. Explore the themes with questions. For example, "Though Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is about 11th century Scotland, its themes of ambition run wild and the corruption of power can be seen in modern history. Can you think of examples?" List examples on the chalkboard and discuss.  
  
Or, "One of the themes of *Macbeth* is 'things are not what they seem.' Can you relate an incident from your life when you thought something (or someone) was one way, but it (he/she) turned out to be another?"
  2. Search through newspapers and magazines to find examples of the themes in today's world;\* (b) search through history textbooks to find examples of the themes in recent history;+ (c) examine TV Guide for television shows that relate to the themes;+ (d) discuss current movies related to the themes;+ (e) discuss song lyrics related to the themes.+
  3. Read modern novels dealing with the themes.\* For example, "the corruption of power" is dealt with in such novels as Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War*## and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*##. Discuss how power corrupted the antagonists of these novels. Or, read a modern novel on the theme "things are not what they seem," for example, *Killing Mr. Griffin*+## by Lois Duncan, and discuss how the character of Mark seems outwardly normal, but when carefully observed his psychotic behavior is evident. Or, read a novel which explores how superstition effects human behavior. Good choices are Elizabeth George Speare's *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*+##, which also deals with witchcraft, or Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* ##. Discuss each of these novels in relationship to the theme. Assign different novels to individual students, perhaps with small groups of students assigned to the same novel.\* Groups or individuals examine the theme in the novel and present a creative portrayal of the theme to the class. For example, students reading *The Chocolate War* might show dramatically how Archie was corrupted by power.
  4. Read a nonfiction account of political ambition such as John Dean's *Blind Ambitions: The White House Years* or a fictional account such as Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*. Compare the modern, overly ambitious politicians in Dean's and Warren's books with Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.
  5. After discussing themes of *Macbeth* related directly to students' lives, examine the themes of classic tragedy%: the tragic flaw of ambition, the role of fate, the inevitable nature of tragedy, the isolation of the tragic hero.
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## CHARACTERS

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Shakespeare's audience was familiar with the history of Macbeth; modern students are not. Therefore, it is important to introduce students to the names and relationships of the characters prior to reading the play. List the characters on the chalkboard or chart paper and discuss the role each character will play.\*

Macbeth	Scottish general ambitious enough to commit regicide to become king
Lady Macbeth	His wife; ambitious; later remorseful
Banquo	General, murdered by hired killers
Fleance	Banquo's son
Duncan	King of Scotland
Malcolm	Eldest son of Duncan, Prince of Cumberland
Donalbain	Youngest son of Duncan
Macduff	General, dedicated to the good of Scotland
Ross	Cousin to Macduff
Lennox	Nobleman, loyal to Duncan
Seyton	Lieutenant to Macbeth
Siward	English Earl, supporter of Malcolm
Young Siward	Bravely faces Macbeth though he is killed in battle
Three Witches	Predict Macbeth's ambitions will soon come true; later predict his downfall

## LITERARY DEVICES

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Shakespeare used literary devices he knew his Renaissance audience would appreciate. To help modern students do the same, locate and discuss the following:

1. **Allusions**—Shakespeare used both mythological and Biblical allusions. For example, the sergeant compares a bloody scene of death on the battlefield to Golgotha which is the place of Christ's death in the New Testament (I,ii).

One of the mythological allusions is Macduff's comparing the dead Duncan to a Gorgon of Greek mythology which could turn a person to stone because of the terror evoked (II,iii).

2. **Figurative Language**—Shakespeare's mastery of language is exemplified through his use of imagery such as similes, metaphors, personification, alliteration, and symbols. To help students understand these, discuss the word pictures Shakespeare paints. Because Shakespeare's pictures are so vivid, students might be able to illustrate them with drawings or collages.

### Similes:

(Flower imagery)  
 Look like the innocent flower,  
 But be the serpent under it. (I,v)

(Disguise)  
 Your face, my Thane, is as a book where men  
 May read strange matters. (I,v)

### Metaphors:

(Planting imagery)  
 I have begun to plant thee, and will labor  
 To make thee full of growing. (I,iv)

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(Clothing imagery)  
 Why do you dress me  
 In borrowed robes? (I,iii)

**Personification:**

If chance will have me King, why, chance may crown me,  
 Without my stir (I,iii)

Was the hope drunk  
 Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since? (I,vii)

**Alliteration:**

But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in  
 To saucy doubts and fears. (III, iv)

**Symbol:**

Before reading the play, related symbols to the plot, characters, and themes of *Macbeth*. For example, the presence of birds is one aspect of nature which symbolizes the theme of superstitions/omens. When Duncan and Banquo note that Macbeth's castle enjoys the good omen of nesting martlets, the audience already realizes the danger Duncan will be facing if he spends the night at Inverness (I,v). Therefore, the "fair" omen is to become "foul." Discuss how this symbol is employed by Shakespeare to advance the theme and plot of *Macbeth*.

Others you might choose to locate and discuss are: water/washing ("A little water clears us of this deed," II,ii), blood ("Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand? II,ii), weather ("Hover through the fog and filthy air," I,i) clothing ("borrowed robes" worn by the Thane of Cawdor, (I,iii), sleep ("Not so sick, my lord, as she is troubled with thick-coming fancies that keep her from her rest," V,iii).

3. **Foreshadowing\***—*Macbeth* provides an excellent opportunity for teaching or reinforcing the literary device of foreshadowing. The witches set the tone in Act I, scene 1 with a storm and predictions that Macbeth's life will become so confused he will find it difficult to differentiate between right and wrong (fair and foul), and their later predictions foreshadow a downfall the audience is aware of long before Macbeth is willing to accept their implications. Students can learn how foreshadowing is used through probing questions. For example: (a) The play opens with thunder and lightning as three witches enter. What does this tell about the mood of the play? Is this play going to be a tragedy or a comedy? (b) What do the witches mean when they say, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (I,i)? What does this tell you about what is likely to go on during the play? (c) If you were going to stage this scene, what would your set look like?
4. **Dramatic Irony**—Shakespeare's audience enjoyed being informed of events before the characters were aware of the implications. The example given above of Macbeth's lack of awareness of his new title, Thane of Cawdor, is a good illustration. Another is Duncan commenting on the pleasantness of Macbeth's castle while the audience knows the Macbeths have just planned his murder to take place there that very night (I,vi).

The most powerful examples of dramatic irony include Macbeth's acceptance of the apparitions' seeming assurances that no man "of woman born shall harm Macbeth" and that he is safe until Birnam Woods move. Macbeth continues to feel confident of his safety even though the audience, through dramatic irony, has seen the equivocations of the witches long before Macbeth realizes them.

Students find irony a difficult concept to understand. To help them understand how Shakespeare employs this device, have them say one simple sentence to express different feelings. For example: "What a beautiful day?" The students can say this as if it is a beautiful day or as if the day is rainy and cold. Or, they can say it as if they have been asked to the prom by the football hero or as if the prom queen has just rejected an invitation for a date. This shows students how the meaning of a simple sentence changes depending on its context. Shakespeare uses this device to show irony.

Search for irony in television programs, magazines, novels, or the conversation of others. List the irony found in these sources. Discuss with the class.

Now, search *Macbeth* for examples of dramatic irony. Read the scene where Lady Macbeth plans Duncan's murder (I,v) and the next scene during which Macbeth and Lady Macbeth welcome Duncan to their castle (I,vi). How do Lady Macbeth's comments show irony? What does she really mean?

All our service  
In every point twice done, and then done double (I,vi)

## WHILE READING

### LANGUAGE

When teenagers first see a Shakespearean play performed or read one for the first time, they frequently are troubled by the language. Understanding how and why Shakespeare used language overcomes this stumbling block to comprehension.

1. **Blank Verse#%**—Except for a few scenes, *Macbeth* is written in blank verse, which resembles more than any other verse form the natural rhythm of spoken English. Read parts of the play aloud to illustrate how the language flows, how punctuation is used, and how rhythm is employed. Choose a line from iambic pentameter and read it with the flow of the rhythm, the accents of the stressed syllables, and the lack of end rhyme.

I am afraid to think what I have done (II,ii)  
Play with the rhythm by reciting lines chorally or individually.

2. **Varying the Verse#%**—Students may understand the play better when they recognize how Shakespeare varies the verse to express meaning. For example, the language of the witches is in a choppy form of verse (IV,i), and the tension of the language used by Lady Macbeth during her famous sleepwalking scene (V,i) provides an interesting contrast to the more natural flow of rhythm in blank verse used in the greater part of the play.

Out, damned spot! Out, I say! One:  
two: why, then 'tis time to do't. Hell is murky.  
Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier, and afeared? What need  
we fear who knows it, when none can call our  
pow'r to accompt? (V,i)

Compare the language variety in the play to background music used to portray emotion in films and television. Play several pieces of music and identify the feelings they portray. Now read several sections of *Macbeth* orally and listen to how the change of verse expresses feeling.

3. **Rhymed Couplet#%**—Point out that the end rhyme of the rhymed couplet was used to indicate the end of a scene to an audience in a theater without curtains. For example:

Away, and mock the time with fairest show:  
False face must hide what the false heart doth know. (I,vii)

Look through the play to find other examples.

4. **Diction#%**—Consider Shakespeare's diction which is so masterfully displayed in *Macbeth*. Choose passages that best exemplify Shakespeare's use of sound, rhythm, and meaning and discuss how the passage reveals the character's feelings. For example, Lady Macbeth says:

Out, damned spot! Out, I say! One:  
two: why, then 'tis time to do't. Hell is murky. (V,i)  
The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is  
she now? What, will these hands ne'er be clean? No  
more o' that, my lord, no more o' that! You mar  
all with this starting.(V,i)

5. **Vocabulary#%**—Frequently students find the Elizabethan and literary vocabulary an impediment to understanding the play. Therefore, keep a list of terms essential to understanding the play including those literary terms cited that are unfamiliar to students (e.g.: dramatic irony, tragic flaw). List in a journal or notebook vocabulary important to comprehension of the play (e.g.: equivocator, thane).

## DRAMATIC INTERPRETATIONS

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Since Shakespeare wrote for the stage, the more you can make his stagecraft part of your teaching, the better your students will understand the play.

1. Shakespearean Theater—Study the Shakespearean theater. Students will better understand the play if they have some knowledge of Shakespeare's theater. The fact that the plays were performed in daylight, without curtains, in the round needs to be considered when visualizing how scenes would have looked and been linked to each other. The fact that male actors played all the roles might have influenced the actors' portrayal of Lady Macbeth and the witches. Ask students to picture the opening scene given what they know about the plot, themes, character, language, literary devices, and Shakespeare's theater. What props might Shakespeare have used? What costumes might have been worn by the witches? Since there were no microphones, how would the actors have spoken their lines?

2. Classroom Drama—Presenting the play in class need not be complicated. Try some informal classroom drama.

Choral Reading\*—Prior to reading a scene, assign several students to each part. Practice reading the scene with each character represented by a chorus of students. Present the scene chorally with every member of the class involved.

Readers' Theater#—Assign a scene to a small group of students; each group should have one student per character and be assigned a different scene; rehearse the scenes: read each scene in order with the entire class participating.

Story Theater%—Students are assigned to groups to rehearse scenes; two students are assigned each part. One reads the part, while the other acts it out. As the students decide how to present the oral interpretation of their lines for a particular scene, they will better understand the motivation and attitudes of the various characters.

3. Differing Dramatic Interpretations#%—Interpret and present a single scene with a small group of students. An excellent scene to explain the variations which the reader/actor provides with intonation/interpretation is Lady Macbeth's response to Macbeth when he is afraid their murder plot might fail (I,vii). She might respond with, "We fail!" as a derisive scoff (= We will NOT fail), as a question (= How could we possibly fail with my perfect plan?), or with yet another appeal to the love they share by stressing the WE (= My darling, how could WE possibly fail when we are in this TOGETHER?).
4. Oral Interpretation\*—Students who are hesitant to attempt informal classroom drama will often respond to the teacher's oral interpretation. Become one of the witches and select two more "weird sisters" from students in the class and "perform" Act I, scene 3. Or, divide the class in half with each half reading one of the other two witch parts chorally.
5. Recordings—Listen to a recording of *Macbeth*. \*There are many presentations of *Macbeth* on record and cassette. Students who have difficulty with the language of Shakespeare benefit from the interpretation of mood that professional actors give the lines. Students can become bored when listening to long recordings. Therefore, it is important to break the listening at key places for discussion of character,\* and theme.#%

After listening to a scene, students can present their own variations using informal classroom drama techniques suggested above. #%

6. Visual Interpretations—Sketch the action.\* Many students who have difficulty with verbal interpretations derive a clearer understanding of developing action by sketching the action in a picture which summarizes an act. Overhead transparencies, as well as other visual media—such as posters, collages, original drawings—depicting the major events of an act (with symbols for king, general, castle, etc.) can prove valuable to students who are visual learners.

## WRITING AND DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

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1. Journal Writing—Keep a journal or log.\* Students can gain significant benefit from keeping a journal or reading log. The journal/log can serve several functions:
    - (a) a chronological sequence of events of the play, +
    - (b) a diary of one of the major characters [recording in diary form what the character is doing and feeling],\*
    - (c) a character development journal [noting traits, changes, interaction with other characters, interaction with the themes of the play, the character's use of language], #%
    - (d) writing about one or more of the themes of the play [how they are interpreted by Shakespeare, how they relate to the modern world], #%
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- (e) writing about one of symbols in the play [selecting one symbol, blood for example, and listing each quote in which it appears and discussing how the symbol furthers the development of plot, character, and theme], %
  - (f) a vocabulary journal [listing and defining words of literary and dramatic importance], +# and/or
  - (g) a response journal [writing about the student's personal interaction with the play].\*
2. Responding to Theme—List recurring themes #% (things are not what they seem, the corruption of power, blind ambition, superstition and its effects on human behavior) that develop as you read. Add notations of act and scene to serve as a guide for later reflection and writing. %
  3. Imagery and Theme—Shakespeare's use of imagery develops many themes, list these as they appear in the play. % For example, the use of clothing begins with "borrowed robes" (I,ii) and continues with clothing representing a disguise of "false face" (I,vii) being repeated many times. Other examples include: flowers/planting, omens and unnatural events (superstitions), darkness, water/cleansing, blood, weather, and sleep/death.
  4. Relationship of Characters—Now that students are familiar with the plot, examining characters in terms of their loyalties is interesting and useful. Have the students list the characters and diagram their relationships on chart paper, using a format similar to the one presented below.\* If this is done in small groups, students can compare their diagrams and discuss differing interpretations. They might also compare their diagrams to the one in this study guide.

### **RELATIONSHIP OF CHARACTERS**

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#### **Macbeth's supporters:**

Macbeth—Scottish general; ambitious enough to commit regicide to become king

Lady Macbeth—His wife; ambitious; convinces Macbeth to perform the murder; later remorseful

Seyton—Lieutenant to Macbeth

#### **Neutral:**

Three witches—Predict Macbeth's ambitions will soon come true; later predict his downfall

#### **Duncan's supporters:**

Duncan—King of Scotland; his murder by Macbeth is the first in a series of many murders

Malcolm—Eldest son of Duncan; heir to the throne of Scotland; flees to England after Duncan's murder; becomes king at end of the play

Donalbain—Youngest son of Duncan; flees to Ireland after Duncan's murder

Lennox—Nobleman, loyal to Duncan

Siward—English Earl; supporter of Malcolm

Young Siward—Bravely faced Macbeth though he is killed in battle

Banquo—General; witches predict his offspring will become kings; murdered by Macbeth's hired killers

Fleance—Banquo's son; escapes murder by Macbeth's hired killers

Macduff—General; discovers Duncan's body; becomes suspicious of Macbeth and joins forces with Malcolm; slays Macbeth and proclaims Malcolm

Ross—Cousin to Macduff

5. Quote Analysis—Analyze quotes.% The quotes chosen should reflect the development of plot, character, and theme.

For high school students quote analysis should be a game in which students fill in:

1. Speaker
  2. To whom the character is speaking
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3. Situation (and its significance to plot development)
4. Interpretation (include any literary devices, etc.)

For example:

If you can look into the seeds of time,  
And say which grain will grow and which will not,  
Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear  
Your favors nor your hate. (I,iii)

### **ANALYSIS**

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1. Banquo
2. To the witches
3. The witches have given Macbeth the good news that he will be king
4. Banquo expresses a curiosity to hear his own future (the metaphor of the "seeds of time") but, unlike Macbeth, shows neither fear nor great desire to receive special concessions from these women.

## AFTER READING

### **DRAMATIC INTERPRETATIONS**

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1. Develop one or more scenes into a classroom drama, building on some of the informal techniques used earlier. # % Analyze the language used by your characters; determine how you will say your lines to best portray the emotion of the scene. Discuss how the character's lines develop the plot, theme, and character. Be sure to examine the imagery used in the lines. How will you present them to further plot, theme, and character? Examine the stage directions. Remembering that Shakespeare's plays were presented outside, in the round, decide where you will stand, what will be presented on the stage, how you will move. If several groups of students present the same scene, video tape them for comparison.
2. View a film or stage version of *Macbeth*. \* Compare the version seen to the one read and/or presented by the class. \* What are the differences? \* Why did the director make changes? \* Were the changes faithful to Shakespeare's intent? # % Were the plot, characters, and themes well developed in the production? # % How would you have changed it? \*
3. Choose a scene and plan detailed explanations of the set and/or blocking of the actors. # % A great variety of sets have been used from a real boiling cauldron with witches disappearing into trapdoors or flying away on wire harnesses to a "clear" set with one metal gate to symbolize all the structures necessary. Although this assignment is not for everyone, many students relish the challenge of stage manager/director for such scenes as the banquet with a selectively appearing ghost or dagger that cannot be clutched.
4. Draw a character such as Macbeth or Lady Macbeth, depicting the "true" characteristics through facial expression and body language. \* Sketch the witches including all the details provided by Shakespeare. \* Even students who do not draw can present the above in the form of a collage of cut-outs from a magazine. \*
5. Using the text of *Macbeth* as the only source, debate the extent of the power of the witches upon Macbeth (I,iii). %
6. Create and perform an Elizabethan commercial done in the language of Shakespeare. For example, develop a commercial for a detergent that removes even the most stubborn blood stains, complete with a testimonial from Lady Macbeth.

### **WRITING ACTIVITIES**

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1. Use your journal writing to develop an essay about how a character has changed, \* an examination of how a theme has developed, # % a study of how symbol furthered the theme. % Discuss your essay with other students who worked on the same character, theme, or symbol. \* Present the results of your analysis to the class. \*
  2. Write an essay about a theme you have selected. # % Discuss the relevance of the theme to today's world. # Discuss how
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Shakespeare developed the theme and how it relates to the tragedy of *Macbeth*. % incorporate direct quotes from the play to reinforce the theme chosen.%

3. Find (and later develop) examples of imagery within themes of nature—such as flowers (planting), darkness, blood; or with human nature such as superstitions; or a physical element such as disguise/clothing.%
4. Discuss the relationship between various characters.\* Shakespeare develops the husband and wife relationship early with Macbeth's letter to a wife he will soon see and with terms of endearment as well as shared ambitions (I,v).

The three generals of Duncan's army also present interesting checks and balances. Macbeth is an excellent soldier acclaimed by king and peers; Banquo is loyal to his king and cautious when the witches appear to him. Macduff is loyal to Scotland and his king. An analysis of their friendships and loyalties and how they act as dramatic foil one to another is good exercise in character development.

5. Write an analysis of the identity of the third murderer and why he appears in Act III, scene iii.#% Although some believe this may have been just an error in an earlier manuscript, students enjoy a lively debate supporting their choice and explaining the identity according to whom they believe Shakespeare intended that extra person to be: Ross (perhaps as a spy for Macduff), a third assassin hired by Macbeth (revealing his lack of confidence in others), Lady Macbeth (because of her curiosity and Macbeth's independence of her in making the decision), or even Macbeth himself appearing on the scene and stressing the point that he trusts no one, not even a paid servant.
6. Chose a scene and rewrite it using modern slang, being careful to retain Shakespeare's purpose.+#
7. Write an essay responding to Mary McCarthy's comment that "It is a troubling thought that Macbeth, of all Shakespeare's characters, should seem the most 'modern,' the only one you could transpose into contemporary battle dress or a sport shirt and slacks" (Signet Classic *Macbeth*).% You might continue her discussion of the modern Macbeth as a churchgoer "indifferent to religion." Or, you might compare Macbeth with a modern equivalent, perhaps Richard Nixon or Oliver North. Or, you might compare Macbeth to a sports or entertainment figure who has let ambition control his/her life. Or, you might create your own modern fictional short story of a "Macbeth-like" character.%
8. Reflect mastery of the blank verse form by adding several lines to a speech, retaining Shakespeare's style well enough to "fool" the teacher as to its authenticity.%

## EXTENDED LEARNING

One of the advantages of teaching a play like Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is the opportunity to extend the students' learning far beyond the original work. Here are some literary extensions that can be used before, during, or after reading *Macbeth*.

1. Watch one of the excellent film versions of a Shakespearean comedy such as *The Taming of the Shrew*. Students enjoy the contrast between the comedy and tragedy forms employed by Shakespeare.\*
2. Debate Shakespeare's portrayal of women or the "battle of the sexes" in these two works.#%
3. Research one of several topics concerning psychology.#% For example, the attitude of a person who kills for ambition. *Macbeth* is the first play to stress what the murderer is undergoing psychologically, rather than the action of the murder itself. Or, research the effects of guilt and contrast them to Shakespeare's approach to the topic by examining changes in Lady Macbeth resulting in her death, as well as Macbeth's attempts to protect himself and finally accepting the consequences of his deed. What would modern psychology say about Shakespeare's characterizations of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth? Or, research why a blindly ambitious person ignores society's laws and values to fulfill an ambition. Why does this person believe he/she is above all laws? Why does this person appear to lack remorse?
4. Analyze dreams.#% Compare modern research on dream analysis with Lady Macbeth's dreams and sleepwalking.
5. Research witchcraft and its influence during the sixteenth century. Compare *Macbeth* to other literature such as *The Crucible* (Miller).#%
6. Locate superstitions that are often woven into the plot of *Macbeth*,\* for example, those of birds (I,vi) or those of disturbances of nature (II,iv). Research common superstitions throughout the ages.#% Use interview skills to determine the most prevalent superstitions in your community and try to determine their origin.\* Write a paper on how these superstitions affect behavior.#%
7. In a history of the theater or similar reference book, find pictures of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as they have been

portrayed on stage for several centuries of changing attitudes by and towards actors. Discuss this progression.\*

8. Research the life of James I of England and report on his works (Daemonologie or the King James translation of the Bible). Determine the extent of Shakespeare's attempt to please King James with his version of the Macbeth tale.
9. Use the critiques and writings included in the Signet Classic edition of *Macbeth* to consider the variety of commentary generated a Shakespearean work. Research one or more of the topics discussed in the critiques and writings. What other opinions do you find? Use one or more of the critiques or writings as a model for your own written interpretation of an aspect of the play.
10. Research the classic tragedy: The role of fate and fortune, the inevitable nature of tragedy, or the isolation of the tragic hero. Find an example of a modern tragedy. Compare in writing the modern author's treatment to Shakespeare's treatment. Share your essay with the class.
11. Search your literature anthology and library for works that explore similar themes. Develop a bibliography for each theme. Select one theme and read one or more works related to that theme. Discuss with the class.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

There is a great wealth of materials to be found concerning Shakespeare, his Elizabethan times, the theater and audience of his day, and the play of *Macbeth* itself. The bibliography in the Signet Classic text is an excellent guide. The teacher, of course, must be guided by what is available in local and school libraries.

### TEACHING SHAKESPEARE

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Bailey, Paul. *An Approach to Shakespeare through Drama. Use of English.* v 36 n 2, Spring 1985, pp. 47-56.

Davis, Ken. *Rehearsing the Audience: Ways to Develop Student Perceptions of Theatre.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1988

Dow, Marguerite R. *The Shakespearean Play as a Theatrical Event in the Classroom. English quarterly.* v 17 n 4, Winter 1984, pp. 16-22

Evans, Bertrand. *Teaching Shakespeare in the High School.* New York: Macmillan, 1966.

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Mallick, David. *What Could Be on the Left Hand Page? English in Australia.* n 64, June 1983, pp. 59-68.

### OTHER SOURCES ON SHAKESPEARE AND HIS THEATER

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Brown, John Russell. *Shakespeare and His Theatre.* New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, 1982.

Browning, D.C. *Dictionary of Shakespeare Quotations.* New York: E.P. Dutton, 1963.

Chute, Marchette. *An Introduction to Shakespeare.* New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1979.

Ludowyk, E.F.C. *Understanding Shakespeare.* Cambridge: University Press, 1962

Thomson, Peter. *Shakespeare's Theatre.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.

### AIDS FOR THE NONACADEMIC STUDENT

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Barker, Fred G. *Forty Minute Plays from Shakespeare.* New York: Macmillan Company, 1927

Lamb, Charles and Mary. *Tales from Shakespeare.* New York: Thomas Crowell Company, 1942. (Also available in a Signet Classic edition.)

Serrailer, Ian. *Selected Stories from The Enchanted Island: Stories from Shakespeare.* New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1975.

Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth: The Folio Edition.* New York: Workman Publishing, 1982 (Illustrated).

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**MEDIA**

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An excellent series of three filmed lessons with interpretations and commentaries by actor/director Douglas Campbell is available through Encyclopedia Britannica Films. The subjects are (1) Politics of Power (28 minutes), (2) Themes of *Macbeth* (28 minutes), and (3) The Secret'st Man (33 minutes).

**SUGGESTED TITLES**

There are many works of fiction that explore the themes of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The books suggested below represent a variety of reading and interest levels.

**1. THINGS ARE NOT WHAT THEY SEEM**

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- Bograd, Larry. *Travelers*. # Lippincott, 1986.
- Bridgers, Sue Ellen. *Permanent Connections*. # Harper & Row, 1987.
- Brooks, Bruce. *Midnight Hour Encores*. # Harper & Row, 1984.
- Cormier, Robert. *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway*. # Knopf, 1983. Dell, paper.
- Cormier, Robert. *I Am the Cheese*. # Pantheon, 1977. Dell, paper.
- Duncan, Lois. *Killing Mr. Griffin*. # Little, Brown, 1978. Dell, paper.
- Hamilton, Virginia. *M.C. Higgins, the Great*. # Macmillan, 1974. Dell, paper.
- Irwin, Hadley. *Abby, My Love*. \* Macmillan, 1985. NAL, paper
- Kerr, M.E. *Gentlehands*. # Harper & Row, 1978. Bantam, paper.
- Lasky, Kathryn. *Prank*. # Macmillan, 1984. Dell, paper.
- Major, Kevin. *Far from Shore*. # Delacorte, 1981. Dell, paper.
- Paterson, Katherine. *Jacob Have I Loved*. \* Crowell, 1980. Avon, paper.
- Peck, Richard. *Remembering the Good Times*. \* Delacorte, 1985. Dell, paper.
- Voight, Cynthia. *A Solitary Blue*. # Atheneum, 1983.

**2. THE CORRUPTION OF POWER**

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- Cormier, Robert. *The Chocolate War*. # Pantheon, 1986. Dell, paper.
- Cormier, Robert. *Beyond the Chocolate War*. # Pantheon, 1986. Dell, paper.
- Duncan, Lois. *Down a Dark Hall*. + Little, Brown, 1974. Dell, paper.
- Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies*. # Putnam, 1954.
- Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. # Harper & Row, 1932
- L'Engle, Madeleine. *The Young Unicorns*. # Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1968. Dell, paper.
- Rhue, Morton. *The Wave*. # Dutton, 1984. Bantam, paper.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*. # Allen, 1954.

**3. BLIND AMBITION**

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- Dean, John. *Blind Ambition: The White Years*. % Simon and Schuster, 1976.
- Warren, Robert Penn. *All The King's Men*. % Harcourt, Brace and World, 1946.
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#### 4. SUPERSTITION AND ITS EFFECTS ON HUMAN BEHAVIOR

---

Hamilton, Virginia. *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*.# Putnam, 1982. Avon, paper

Miller, Arthur. *The Crucible*.#% Viking, 1954.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Mojo and the Russians*. + Viking, 1977.

Peck, Richard. *Ghosts I Have Been*. + Viking, 1987. Dell, paper.

Speare, Elizabeth George. *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*.+# Houghton Mifflin, 1958. Dell, paper.

Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.#% 1884. Available from a variety of publishers.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE

Currently senior English literature teacher in Buncombe County Schools in North Carolina, LINDA NEAL UNDERWOOD has taught English and Social Studies for twelve years in grades 5-12. She has received training and qualification to serve as Mentor for beginning teachers. She attended Appalachian State University and the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill where she received her B.S. in Education.

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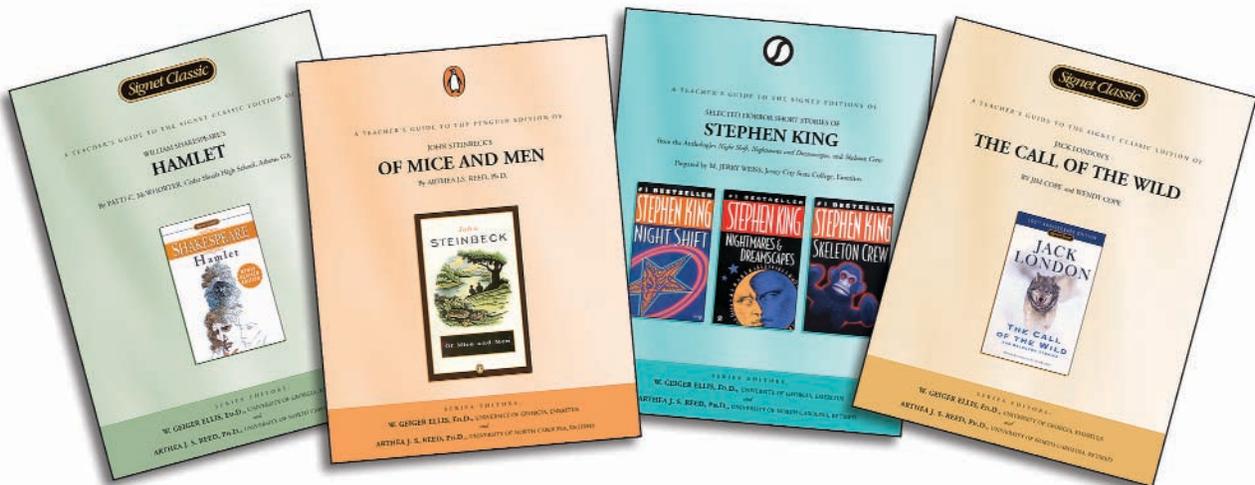
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