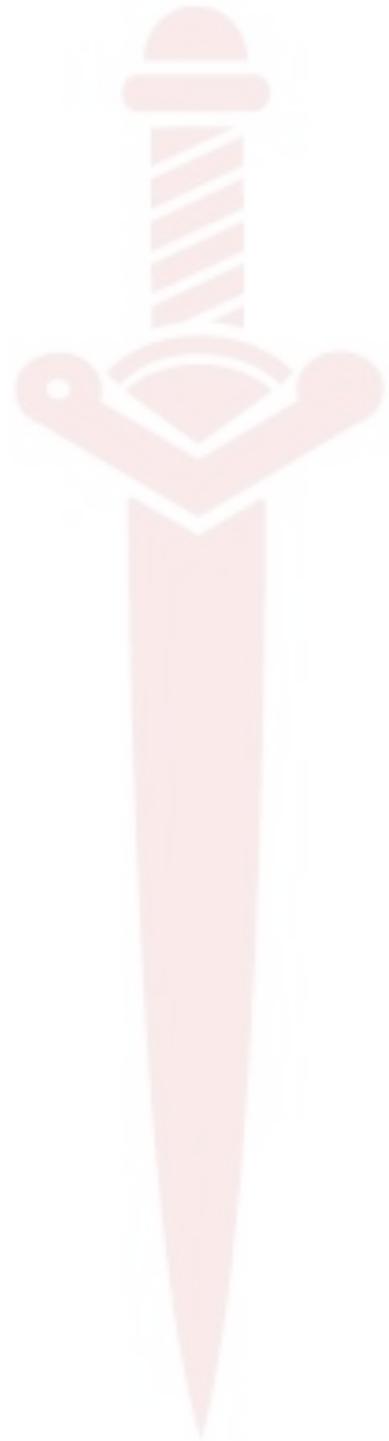


myShakespeare's
Macbeth
Curriculum Guide



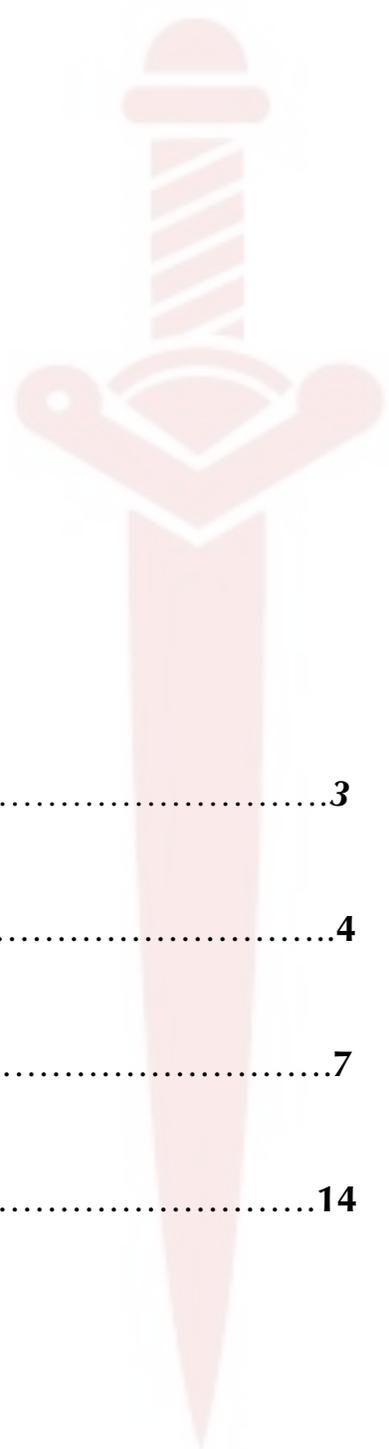


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Tips and Tricks for Teaching *Macbeth*

In the Beginning...

Poll the Class

- What do you know about Shakespeare? When did he live and what was his world like? What are some of the plays you have read or heard of?
- Have you seen any of Shakespeare's plays performed? Have you seen any film versions or adaptations of Shakespeare's plays (i.e. Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*, *10 Things I Hate About You*, etc.)? Have you ever performed anything written by Shakespeare?
- What do you know about Shakespeare's language? Are iambic pentameter, prose, and verse familiar or unfamiliar terms? Do you know any famous quotes from Shakespeare? If so, what do you think they mean?
- What do you know about *Macbeth*? Any famous lines? Plot points? Characters? Where is it set, and when? What are some themes of *Macbeth*?
- What are your anxieties about Shakespeare? Is there anything that has confused you in past attempts to study Shakespeare? Is there anything that you're dreading as you embark on *Macbeth*?

Play Around with the Text: A Sneaky Shakespeare Exercise

- Distribute the first 13 lines of dialogue in *Macbeth* to students. Work through the text as a class to unlock any unfamiliar phrases.
- Divide the class into thirds, into a "Team First Witch," "Team Second Witch," and "Team Third Witch." Have students select from a pile of index cards listing "secret styles," such as horror, western, detective, opera, soap opera, sit-com, musical, farce, and so on.
- Have the class exchange dialogue in this style, either as a group or student-by-student down the line. Encourage students to go big—this is Shakespeare!
- At the end of the exercise, re-group and have students guess Shakespeare's intended setting and style for the scene. Perform the scene in this style.

Pre-Detecting: Interpreting Key Lines out of Context

- Distribute a worksheet of 5-8 key lines from Act 1 of *Macbeth*.
- Read each line aloud. Who do you imagine is speaking the line—a man or woman, someone old or young, powerful or weak, good or evil? Human or supernatural? To whom (or what) is he or she speaking? Have students write their ideas under each quote.

Throughout the Play...

Weird Word Log

- Select ten archaic or unusual words from your students' first reading assignment and have students guess meanings, first by the word alone, then by interpreting it in context.
- Have students create a Weird Word Log to keep track of unusual words as they continue to work through the play. For each word, students may wish to write a definition or synonym and write and illustrate a sentence of their own that employs the word.

Character Bookmarks

- Distribute index cards to students, along with copies of the Dramatis Personae.
- Discuss the cast list with your students, with an eye towards relationships and social status.
- Then have students depict the characters on their bookmarks based on what they've inferred from the Dramatis Personae.
- On the back, students can list character traits as they learn them, and continue to use these cards as a reference throughout the play.
- Remind your students that they can view the character blurbs for each scene, which might help them deduce what's important for each character as they move through the play.

In-Class Activities and Ideas

The following are brief overviews of general exercises that may enhance your students' experience. They can be adapted for use at any point in the play, depending on your curricular needs.

Staging Macbeth

As your students work through the play, ask them to generate ideas for staging the particular sections of the text you're reading. Some reliably interesting moments include

- [The Witches' opening scene](#) (1.1)
- [Banquo and Macbeth's encounter with the Witches](#) (1.3)
- [Lady Macbeth's Letter Scene](#) (1.5)
- [The appearance of the ghost of Banquo](#) (3.4)
- [Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene](#) (5.1)
- [Macbeth's "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" soliloquy](#) (5.5)
- [Final duel of Macbeth and Macduff](#) (5.7)

Once you've generated some ideas, show your students the corresponding scene from myShakespeare (at the links above). Use the following questions as a guide:

- Do certain staging ideas suggest different emphases? Different points of view? Different moods or atmospheres?
- What is conveyed by the staging ideas you have generated and by the film representation you have seen?
- Do you feel that some scenes can be dramatized more effectively through one medium or the other?

NOTE: This exercise can be easily expanded into a filmmaking or performance exercise using the same section of text (see Culminating Essays and Projects). You may also consider dramatizing moments that occur off-stage, such as Duncan's murder, Lady Macbeth's death scene, or events that occur after the end of the play.

How Do Actors Convey Meaning and Tone?

The following activity is adapted from Reading Shakespeare with Young Adults by Mary Ellen Dakin.

Distribute copies of a famous speech from the play to students. Some suggestions include

- [Lady Macbeth's letter scene](#) (1.5)
- [Lennox's description of the "unruly" night](#) (2.3.54-62)
- [Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking speech](#) (5.1)
- [Macbeth's "Tomorrow and tomorrow" soliloquy](#) (5.5)

First, have the students highlight words and phrases that appeal to any of the five senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch. Then, have them underline and label examples of personification. Finally, ask your students to read the passage aloud. Once your students have completed these steps, discuss the following questions:

- How does the passage sound? Do you hear a rhythm? Are the words soft and musical, or harsh and discordant?
- What is the mood of this speech? how do the imagery and personification contribute to the mood?

After the discussion, screen the corresponding myShakespeare scene (at the links above) for your students, asking them to keep in mind their earlier conclusions about the speech. Once they've viewed the scene, your students should discuss the following questions:

- How does the actor use his or her voice as a performance tool? What kinds of choices in the sounds of their voices are the actors making, and how do those choices affect the meaning of the text?
- What else does the actor do to add meaning and emotion to these words? How does he or she use gestures, facial expressions, body language, and movement to enrich the words?
- How do the camera shots and angles contribute to the drama of the scene?

You Be the Host

With this exercise, your students will have the chance to step into Ralph's shoes. First have your students view a few examples of our character interviews for scenes they've already ready.

Then, have them choose a scene that might make for an interesting interview. You might have them choose a scene that does not feature a myShakespeare interview, or to interview a character who doesn't get as much interview time in the hot seat. Some options include

- Lady Macduff
- Malcolm and Donalbain
- Siward and Young Siward

First, students should draft a set of questions to ask the character. They should consider

- How the character might be feeling in this scene?
- What does the character want at this point in the play?
- What might the character be hiding, and how can Ralph get them to reveal it?
- What thematic kinds of questions could Ralph ask to help a viewer better understand the play?

Once your students have drafted scripts, the options are endless. They can stage a live interview for the class, film it studio-style, or even create podcast radio interviews.

Musically Speaking

myShakespeare's *Macbeth* has song summaries throughout the play. These can provide inspiration as you have your students write and perform their own musical interpretations of the play. This activity can be as simple and quick as jotting down a few lyrics, or something more involved and long-term, like filming a music video. No matter which iteration you choose, in song, students can

- summarize acts or scenes of the play
 - write a love song for one of the play's romantic pairings
 - write a ballad by the Lady Macbeth from beyond the grave
 - write a battle song for Macduff
-

Act-by-Act Resources

Act I

Discussion Questions and Writing Prompts

For each act, many of the discussion questions and writing prompts are the subject of our character interviews, so we recommend showing students the interviews as preparation. The questions begin as brief, basic discussion questions for in-class conversation or short writing assignments, and build to more complex questions for deeper discussions or longer essays. Each prompt is designed to be adaptable for your classroom needs.

A Few Basic Questions...

- Whom can a King trust?
- Who will succeed Duncan?
- How can things be "foul and fair" at the same time?
- What was Macbeth thinking when he heard the Weird Sisters' prophecy? Can the Weird Sisters be trusted? What are they?
- Was Macbeth thinking of becoming King before he met the witches?
- If Macbeth is to be King, how will it happen?
- Does Macbeth need to act, or will the prophecy come true on its own? -Is Duncan worried about Macbeth's ambitions?
- Why do you think Lady Macbeth asks to be "unsexed"?
- Is Lady Macbeth a step ahead of her husband?
- Is killing the King going to be the "be all and end all" in Macbeth's plan—or will it simply open up new difficulties?

Digging Deeper...

Fresh From Battle

Review *Macbeth* 1.1 and [Macbeth and Banquo's in-studio conversation](#) about the recent battle in 1.3. Then whip out your prop swords (empty wrapping paper tubes), put on your Scottish accents, and practice unseaming your classmates from nave to chops. After some swordplay, discuss the prevalence of violence in Macbeth's world. How many men has Macbeth killed in his life? How much guilt do you think he feels about the enemies he has slain? Discuss how a world at war can be evoked on a theater stage, or in a film like *This is Macbeth*.

The Witches

Review the witches' scenes in Act 1. Close-read Macbeth's and Banquo's reactions to the witches to learn about how supernatural beings fit into Macbeth's world. Have your students think about the following:

- Are sightings like this common?
- Are the witches treated with fear? With reverence? With disrespect?
- What is their purpose in this play?
- Do you think the witches stand to gain anything from giving Macbeth and Banquo these prophecies?

Witch Chat

The Weird Sisters are sitting around their bubbling cauldron of Shakespearean Stew, about to have a family dinner. Write and perform a 2-page script of their conversation as they prepare for Macbeth and Banquo's arrival. Think critically about what might motivate the witches, given what you know from the text:

- Are the witches bound to report something they've foreseen?
- Are they manipulating Macbeth?
- Are they angry because of some slight?

Fair and Foul

In studio, Ralph and Macbeth discuss the "good and ill" news Macbeth has heard from the witches. Review what Macbeth says in the studio interview and in *Macbeth* I, iii. Then imagine this scenario: Stealing away from Banquo in the forest, Macbeth takes out his swineskin notebook to sort through his feelings about the prophecy. Write Macbeth's Fair and Foul List of Pros and Cons for Killing Duncan based on Macbeth's musings in *Macbeth* I,iii, and on what you know about Macbeth's world. Given the pros and cons, what action would you advise?

Malcolm in the Way

Macbeth calls Malcolm "a step on which I must fall down, or else o'er leap, for in my way it lies" (1.4.48-50). With this quotation in mind, discuss the power system in Scotland. Have students create either a 2-D or a 3-D representation of the tiers of Macbeth's world after considering the following questions:

- Where is the King? Where are the Thanes? Where are the witches?
- Where are enemies— can you position them in such a way as to illustrate the threat they pose?
- If Malcolm is a "step" between Macbeth and the throne, where does Macbeth stand?
- Are there shortcuts to the top?

Be creative, using found materials, drawings, suspended items, text-art, and/or other means to make the hierarchy tangible.

Unsex Me Here

Review Lady Macbeth's "Unsex me here" speech in *Macbeth* 1.5. This is our introduction to Lady Macbeth: what do we learn about her? What is significant about the way we are introduced to her? After discussing these questions, give your students a creative writing assignment: It's a week before Macbeth's letter arrives—Macbeth is away at war, and Lady Macbeth is home alone. Write a one-page diary entry. Is Lady M frustrated that, as a woman, she can't fight in the war? Is she bored? Is she depressed? Is she weary of being a woman?

Character Study: Macbeth and Lady Macbeth

Note: This activity is adapted from "Summarizing with Biopoems" by Research for Better Teaching, Inc.

Who are these people, anyway? Act I introduces us to this famous couple, and we learn what they have in common, as well as how they differ. Create "bio-poems" for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to help clarify our understandings of these characters. As a class, use dictionaries and thesauruses to generate vocabulary for Lady Macbeth and Macbeth (i.e., manipulative, impressionable, ambitious, cynical, etc). Craft a "bio-poem" for each character using the template below:

- Line 1: Your character's name
- Line 2: Four traits that describe your character
- Line 3: Relative (parent, husband, child, etc) of _____
- Line 4: Lover of ____, ____, and ____ (3 things or people)
- Line 5: Who feels ____, ____, and ____ (3 emotions)
- Line 6: Who needs ____, ____, and ____ (3 items)
- Line 7: Who fears ____, ____, and ____ (3 items)
- Line 8: Who gives ____, ____, and ____ (3 items)
- Line 9: Who would like to see ____, ____, and ____ (3 items)
- Line 10: Resident of _____
- Line 11: Your character's name

Act II

Discussion Questions and Writing Prompts

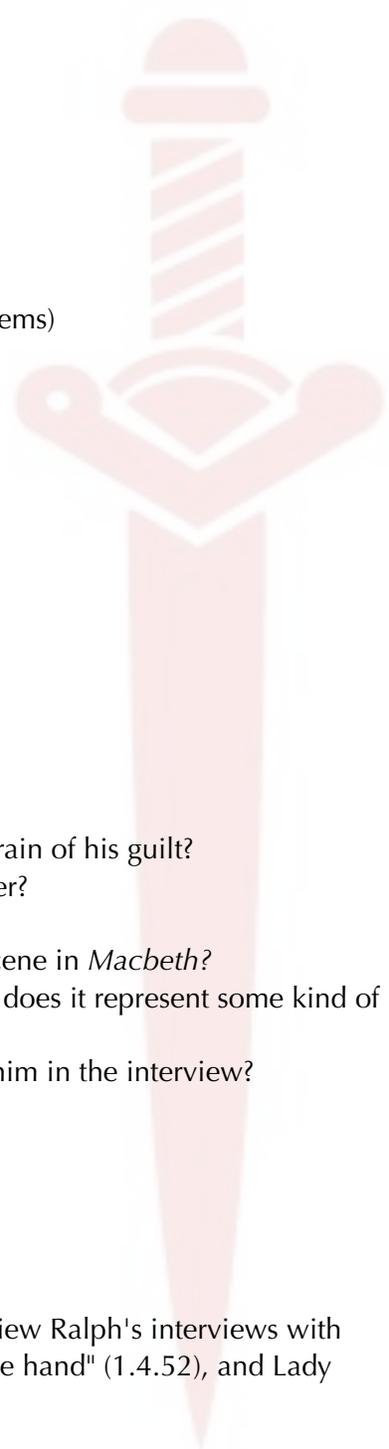
A Few Basic Questions...

- Why doesn't Lady Macbeth kill Duncan herself?
- Is Macbeth going to be able to handle the psychological strain of his guilt?
- Is Lady Macbeth concerned about Macbeth after the murder?
- Is the Porter a worthless drunk?
- Why do you think Shakespeare included this sole comic scene in *Macbeth*?
- Was killing the servants part of Macbeth's original plan, or does it represent some kind of change in Macbeth?
- Why doesn't Macbeth accept the royal robes Ralph offers him in the interview?

Digging Deeper...

Deception and Self-Deception

Consider the themes of deception and self-deception in *Macbeth*. Review Ralph's interviews with Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, Macbeth's desire that the "eye wink at the hand" (1.4.52), and Lady



Macbeth's urging of Macbeth to "look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under 't." Then write a 1-2 page essay on the theme of deception and self-deception as interrelated ideas.

- Does lying to someone else require you to lie to yourself in some way?
- Do moral humans have to turn a blind eye on some part of themselves in order to kill or commit other crimes?
- How do your opinions on these topics affect how you feel about the Macbeths and their actions?

Is This a Dagger?

Review Macbeth's "Is this a dagger" soliloquy. This speech is famous for the imagery it evokes, and the ambivalence of this imagery, so after reviewing, discuss the following: Macbeth really seeing a dagger, just as he has seen witches? Is he hallucinating? Should the audience see what he is seeing, or should we have to imagine it?

Storyboard a Speech

You are the director of a short-film illustrating Macbeth's famous soliloquy. Create a "storyboard" to plan your shots. Draw 15-20 images that illustrate particular moods, words, or phrases from a section of text that interests you. For example, you might draw a close-up of Macbeth's eyes ("mine eyes" 2.1.44), then a wide-shot of a group of fools laughing ("the fools o' the other senses" (2.1.44), followed by an image of Macbeth's face in which the eyes are "worth all the rest" (2.1.45)—i.e., an image in which Macbeth's face has been stripped of ears, mouth, and nose, and only eyes remain. Feel free to explore alternate meanings or unusual representations of the text.

A Commoner's Tale

Both the porter's speech in 2.3, and Ross's discussion with the old man in 2.4, give us some insight into how commoners might have seen Macbeth, Malcolm, and political life in Scotland. Duncan's dead, Malcolm's off in England... what's a concerned citizen like you to do? Write an editorial for the Daily Scotsman, of course! As a well-educated peasant living near Macbeth's castle, compose a 1-page Letter to the Editor of Scotland's leading tapestry periodical. How have the recent changes-of-command affected your life? Are you pleased or displeased that Duncan's out and Macbeth's in? What are your concerns?

Act III

Discussion Questions and Writing Prompts

A Few Basic Questions...

- Why can't Macbeth be satisfied with his newly won title?
- Did Lady Macbeth ever have a child?
- Has Macbeth changed since killing Duncan?
- Is Macbeth worried about the state of his soul?
- What motivates Macbeth? Ambition? Fear? Both?

- Why has Lady Macbeth begun to have misgivings?
- Does Macbeth believe that murdering Banquo will be beneficial?
- Is Macbeth really "just getting started"? Is it possible for him to stop the murders and retain his Kingship?
- Would Macbeth have been a good King if he came by the crown honestly?

Digging Deeper...

Queen, But Not a Mother

Macbeth is threatened by Banquo because of the prophecy that Banquo will father Kings. Ask your students: Is Lady Macbeth an undesirable partner because she hasn't produced heirs? Then consider the childlessness of the Macbeths and Lady Macbeth's "unsexing" of herself. Could Macbeth have become King if Lady Macbeth hadn't unsexed herself? Is Macbeth's ascension predicated on the fact that he is fated to have no heirs? Write a 1-2 page essay exploring Lady Macbeth's role as a wife to a King.

The Banquet Scene

Review the [Banquet Scene](#) (3.4). Here is another scene where staging is everything: where does everyone sit, and why? What does Banquo's ghost look like? What does Macbeth do when the ghost appears? The text leaves these questions open for a director's interpretation, but they dramatically affect how we understand the action. After discussing the scene, divide the class into groups of 5 or 6. Have the students stage five or more "tableaux" illustrating the banquet scene. Students can play Macbeth, the murderers, Banquo's ghost, other guests, or can use their bodies to represent the table or other inanimate objects. Trace the arc of the entire scene with the tableaux. When is ghost apparent and not apparent to Macbeth? How can you make more physically dynamic choices to express characters' emotions?

The Royal Couple

Note: This activity is from the Folger Shakespeare Library

In order to better understand the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, review key scenes of dialogue with you students. Then distribute the dialogue between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth from the following scenes:

- [Act 1, Scene 5](#)
- [Act 1, Scene 7](#)
- [Act 2, Scene 2](#)
- [Act 3, Scene 2](#)
- [Act 3, Scene 4](#)

Have students pair off, discuss, and paraphrase a scene. Then, have the pairs prepare the scene as a dance. It may be helpful to have a couple songs from different styles queued up (i.e., square dance, Latin dances, swing, ballroom, etc). Tell the students not to worry about adhering to the music; it's only an option. Have each pair perform the dance, without text or with only minimal paraphrased lines. Then, after everyone has performed, have the pairs perform the scene using the original language. Did the movement help uncover anything new about the relationship? Was subtext revealed? How did dancing the tango affect your performance?

Act IV

Discussion Questions and Writing Prompts

A Few Basic Questions...

- Why do the witches speak in riddles?
- Why do the murders of Lady Macduff and her son affect Lady Macbeth, when she seemed emotionally unaffected by those of Duncan and Banquo?
- Does Macbeth believe he has been divinely selected to be King?
- Is Macbeth's seeming unconcern about Macduff and Malcolm's plot arrogance, or bluster?
- How do you suppose Malcolm managed to raise an army of 10,000 soldiers?
- Has it all become too much for Macbeth?

Digging Deeper...

The Witches' Equivocations

Review the prophecies and additional equivocating statements of the Witches in 4.1 with your students. Are their prophecies similar or different in scope or detail from their pronouncements earlier in the play? Then create the outline for a skit set in your school in which the lead character runs into three Weird characters. Perhaps this student has ambitions to be Class President, Prom King or Queen, the lead actor in the spring play—be creative as you think specifically about the social world of your school. Using the structure of *Macbeth* as a model, write and perform a 10-15 minute skit that begins with the protagonist receiving his or her three prophecies. Later, the protagonist will hear three more prophecies, as Macbeth does in 4.1. Without worrying about the end of *Macbeth*, conclude your own skit as you wish for your story.

Being King

In his interview with Ralph, Macbeth says, "to be King is nothing; to be King safely is everything." Considering the case of King Duncan—who was killed by one of the few people he thought he could trust—it seems like a King can rarely count on safety. Ask your students: Why does the position still hold so much appeal? Then research the monarchical system of 11th-century Scotland. What privileges did a King hold? What was his living situation? What responsibilities did a King have? How was the King viewed in the religious system? Write a 1-2 page paper describing your findings. Has Shakespeare's Macbeth taken advantage of any of the benefits offered to him as King? As a follow-up essay for your more historically minded students, you can have them research the monarchical system of Shakespeare's England. What kind of lifestyle did King James I lead? What responsibilities did he have? How safe from assassination were royals in Shakespeare's time?

Lady Macduff

Review Act 4, Scene 2, the scene between Lady Macduff and her son. Ralph relates the events of this act to Lady Macbeth and Macbeth in studio. When Ralph mentions that Macduff has fled for England leaving

Lady Macduff and her son unprotected, Lady Macbeth calls Macduff a "coward." Similarly, upon learning of her husband's flight, Lady Macduff calls Macduff a "traitor" and tells her son that Macduff is dead. After reviewing, divide your students into small groups and discuss the scene. Lady Macduff is the only other mortal woman in *Macbeth* besides Lady Macbeth. How are these two women alike? How are they different? Do you feel that they behave realistically? Then you can have students rehearse and perform the scene in class, paying particular attention to Lady Macduff's emotional state. How much is anger motivating her words? How much is she motivated by fear? Compare and discuss each group's interpretation.

Act V

Discussion Questions and Writing Prompts

A Few Basic Questions...

- Who has undergone a bigger change over the course of the play, Lady Macbeth or Macbeth?
- Is Macbeth as confident as he appears about his ability to defeat the rebels, or is he in denial?
- Will Malcolm's reign mean an end to violence?
- Should Malcolm be nervous about being king?
- What's next for Macduff?

Digging Deeper...

A Mind Diseas'd

With your students review the moment Macbeth urges the Doctor to minister to Lady Macbeth's "mind diseas'd," to "pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow" (5.3.40-1). See if putting Lady Macbeth on the couch after [Act 5, Scene 1](#) could help her regain her senses. Script and perform a 2-page exchange between Lady Macbeth and her therapist. You may wish to consider Freud's essay "Some Character-Types Met Within Psycho-analytical Work" (available online) as a resource.

Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow

Copy [Macbeth's "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" speech](#) (5.5) in pencil on unlined paper. Select keywords from each line, preferably words that name ideas or emotions, and erase them. In their place, draw symbols for these words. A symbol is something that stands for something else. Think of creative ways to symbolize the words. Imaging the words in this way can help emphasize emotional content and may alert you to words that hold multiple meanings. Have dictionaries on hand to illuminate unfamiliar words.

The Tragedy of Macbeth

When Ralph remarks on "The Tragedy of Macbeth," Macbeth replies, alarmed, "What do you mean the tragedy of Macbeth?" Why is Macbeth a tragedy? Does it need to end this way? Could the play be resolved differently? How would a different conclusion change the meaning of the play? After discussing these questions with your students, have them free write about the play's end. What events would need to be changed to have made the play resolve happily for Macbeth?

For Lady Macbeth? For Duncan? For Banquo? For others? Trace linked events. Can you spot "chain reactions" in the play, events that caused a series of other events to take place?

Reflection

Reflect on your experience reading *Macbeth* and watching myShakespeare's performances and interviews. Write a 1-2 page reaction paper. You may wish to respond to one or more questions from the following list:

- What moments in *Macbeth* resonated most strongly for you?
- How did watching myShakespeare's *Macbeth* affect your experience of studying *Macbeth*?
- Did the interviews make clear anything that you had missed in reading the text, or provide you with additional insight into characters' thoughts and motivations?
- Were there moments when you wish Ralph had asked characters additional "tough questions"—and if so, what questions, to whom, and at what point? How did the actors' performances match or fail to match what you imagined of the roles when you read the text?
- If you were creating myShakespeare's *Macbeth 2.0*, what would you keep, and what would you change?

Culminating Essays and Projects

Thematic Essay

Below are a few prompts for essays that grapple with some of Macbeth's overarching themes. These prompts are designed to be open-ended and invite student interpretation of the play as a whole.

What is the role of prophecy in *Macbeth*? Are characters merely at the mercy of fate, as pronounced by the three witches? Or do they exhibit free will and have some control over their futures? In particular, consider Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, and Banquo's storylines.

Was Macbeth a bad guy to begin with? Or is he corrupted by the power he seeks and achieves at Duncan's (and Scotland's expense)? Consider how Macbeth changes throughout the play, and how particular events influence his decisions and deeds.

What role does the supernatural play in *Macbeth*? Is there really magic at work—are the witches really witches?—or simply characters looking for ways to explain their behavior? How does the appearance of the supernatural—whether real or imagined—affect the characters in the play?

Performance Projects

By performing *Macbeth*, students can gain new insight into the play's themes and characters. Of course performance projects can go far beyond the standard group project, so we've listed a few different options you might consider as ways to cap off your class's *Macbeth* unit:

- Divide your class into groups and assign each group key scenes from the play to perform for the entire class. But here's the catch: each group must reinterpret the scene for a different setting: Ancient Greece, Victorian England, Communist Russia—whatever you can dream up.
- Have students script new combinations of characters and perform those scenes. What would the Porter say to Lady Macduff? What would happen if the ghost of King Duncan came back and haunted his sons?
- Have students stage key scenes and film them cinema-style. Students can even edit them all together into a movie trailer for *Macbeth*. You can shake things up by assigning them different genres: *Macbeth* as a romantic drama, for example. Or *Macbeth* as an action flick, perhaps?
- If your class isn't a good fit for group projects, you can assign individual students monologues or soliloquies to perform. If the class can handle it, encourage some friendly competition by awarding a prize for the best performance at the end. Points can be awarded for accurate memorization, interesting interpretations, impressive costumes, etc.
- Get the entire school involved by having students perform live for everyone, or by screening filmed versions of their scenes. Faculty judges can review the scenes on the spot to add a live-show atmosphere.