

Macbeth

Macbeth is a well-known, old play written by a man called William Shakespeare which was performed for the first time in 1606. Many of Shakespeare's plays are pleasant and funny, but Macbeth is a dark and terrible story. The story takes place in wild Scotland around the same time the Vikings existed. Imagine you are in a theatre. The lights go down and the stage curtain rises. Everything begins with three mysterious witches...

'When shall we three meet again; in thunder, lightning or in rain?'

Thunder booms and lightning flashes brightly in the darkness. In a secret and lonely place the cackling witches gather. They are seeking Macbeth.

'We will wait until his battles are finished,' they quickly decide. 'We will approach him as he travels home.'

Macbeth and his loyal friend, Banquo, are both tough leaders in King Duncan's army. They have been bravely fighting in two long wars against invading armies from Ireland and Norway, and they have finally won! Weary and battle-scarred, but happy with winning, they are slowly heading home.

A mysterious and dark storm swirls strangely around them, soaking and nearly blinding them. As they continue to trudge through the heavy rain, three shapes begin to appear in front of them. Finally the shapes become clear... The three witches have arrived.

'Macbeth will become Lord of Cawdor!' one of the ugly witches calls out shrilly.

'Macbeth will become King!' cries another voice through the rain.

Macbeth and Banquo look at each other, puzzled. Who on earth are these witches? How could they possibly know the future? Will their words actually come true? Macbeth is so shocked by their claims that he cannot speak. Banquo, however, is bolder and steps forward bravely.

'What about me you weird witches?' demands Banquo. 'If you really can look into the future, tell me what lies ahead for me! I am not afraid.'

'Your future is not so happy but is also much happier!' announce the witches puzzlingly. 'You shall never be King, but your family will rule Scotland!'

Macbeth and Banquo are still very confused. They are desperate to ask more questions but the witches quickly leave without telling them anything else, and Macbeth's cries for answers are lost in the wind. The two friends are unsure if they should believe what they have heard, but as they begin to march home again, they meet some messengers who have come from King Duncan. The messengers bring a special announcement; the King has replaced the old Lord of Cawdor with Macbeth! Macbeth is completely shocked - the wild and weird witches are right!

Macbeth is curious to know if all the witches' predictions will come true. Will he actually be crowned as King? He scribbles and sends a short letter to his wife to tell her all that has happened.

'Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand?'

A little while later, Macbeth and Banquo return triumphantly to Macbeth's home, with King Duncan as their guest. Lady Macbeth has read the letter and is filled with evil desires, which she secretly explains to Macbeth.

'Kill the King tonight!' she whispers. 'Don't be fearful. No one will discover the truth if we are careful, and you will be crowned as King!'

At first Macbeth is unsure and resists the idea, but his wife keeps pushing and pushing him to do it and eventually, he agrees to murder the King. Macbeth and his wife come up with an evil and clever plot, and even though he sees a worrying vision of a bloody dagger, Macbeth decides to put the plan into action. Lady Macbeth gets the King's servants drunk, and once they are asleep Macbeth creeps silently into the King's bedroom and kills him with the servants' knives. When the body is discovered, Macbeth announces to everyone that the King's servants did it and kills them. The dead King has two sons called Malcolm and Donalbain who fear for their lives and quickly flee. Donalbain hides in Ireland and Malcolm escapes to England. With no one left to claim the throne, Macbeth is crowned as the new King of Scotland. The witches are right a second time!

Rather than enjoying being King, however, Macbeth is more worried than ever. If the witches were right about him, could they be right about Banquo's children ruling over Scotland? Will Banquo and his son Fleance challenge or even kill Macbeth? Full of fear, Macbeth hires some tough men to murder the pair of them. Ambushed on the way to a feast, Banquo is killed but Fleance escapes. When he finds out his plan has gone wrong, Macbeth is even more scared and later that night at the feast he is faced with the grisly sight of Banquo's ghost! People begin to think Macbeth has gone mad.

'Double, double toil and trouble; fire burn and cauldron bubble.'

Macbeth is now desperately looking for help and advice. Will he lose his crown and his life? Searching for answers, he hurries to find the three witches. He finally discovers them in a huge cave, chanting and throwing strange things into a mysterious, bubbling pot.

'Help me!' he begs and waits for their answer. One by one, three strange creatures rise from the pot, and each one delivers a different message to Macbeth.

'Beware Macduff, the Lord of Fife!' moans the first creature loudly. Macbeth is worried and tries to ask a question, but is silenced by the witches.

'You can't be hurt by any man who has been born from a woman!' cries the second creature as it appears from the hot liquid. Macbeth is understandably pleased. Surely this means he will never be hurt or killed! Whom should he fear now?

'You are safe, until the forest moves to your castle!' laughs the third creature wildly, and Macbeth is happier still. Everybody knows that trees do not move!

But then the witches produce a vision of many Kings and Banquo's grinning ghost. These are the rulers of Scotland who will come from Banquo's family! Macbeth becomes bitter and angry, shouting at the witches as they vanish. His rage grows quickly and he orders that Macduff's home

be attacked and everyone found there killed.

Macduff understands how evil and dangerous Macbeth has become and without knowing what Macbeth has planned, he runs away to England to find an army. He plans to make Scotland safe again by killing Macbeth. Soon he finds Malcolm, who is living as a guest of the English King and has gathered an army. While the two of them are talking, however, a messenger arrives and brings terrible news – Macduff's family have been horribly murdered by Macbeth's soldiers.

'Macbeth deserves to die for all the evil things he has done!' cries Malcolm angrily. 'Let your grief lead you to kill him!'

'We will fight Macbeth together!' agrees Macduff, tears of sadness in his eyes. The pair set out for revenge, marching swiftly with thousands of men to Scotland, to fight Macbeth.

'Behold, where stands the usurper's cursed head?'

Macbeth is still in Scotland, waiting to defend himself in a strong castle. Lady Macbeth is full of worries that their crimes will be discovered, and soon her thoughts drive her mad. She is seen sleepwalking, muttering fearfully to herself and scrubbing at her hands, convinced they are covered in blood which she cannot wash off. Full of pain and guilt, she dies, and when Macbeth hears what has happened he begins to wonder if there is any point in being alive. But he is still brave, certain that the witches' messages mean he will not be killed.

Then, in the distance, a sight is seen which terrifies the murderous King. Malcolm and Macduff are leading their huge army towards Macbeth's fortress. To disguise how many soldiers are with them, the two leaders have made every man carry a leafy tree branch. The forest is marching to Macbeth's castle!

Macbeth is shocked and his confidence begins to fail him. But he holds on to one final hope – no man can harm him! The witches said so and they have been right about everything else...

'The only sword which brings me any fear is the sword carried by a motherless man!' Macbeth screams desperately.

The two armies smash together in a huge and horrible battle. Macbeth easily beats every soldier he faces. Macduff searches eagerly for him, wanting revenge, and in the middle of the battle the two enemies finally meet.

'Don't even bother to try and fight me! You might as well stab the air! I can't be wounded by any man who has been born!' laughs Macbeth confidently.

'Ha! Then now is the time for fear to fill you! I was not born the normal way!' shouts Macduff over the crashing and clashing of weapons and armour.

His last hope gone, Macbeth knows now that he will die. With a desperate cry, he charges wildly at Macduff. Their swords and shields smash together loudly. Their epic fight goes on and on until eventually, Macduff defeats Macbeth and chops off his head. The witches are proved right for the final time!

Macbeth

Put these events in the order that they happen in the story.

- A. Macbeth is killed.
- B. Macbeth and Banquo see the witches.
- C. Macbeth's wife goes mad.
- D. Macbeth kills the king.
- E. Macbeth sees the witches.

The witches only say one thing to Banquo, but it scares Macbeth.

1. Why would Macbeth be worried about Banquo's children becoming kings?

2. Why would Fleance's escape make Macbeth even more scared?

Why does Macbeth go to the witches for a second time?

In the whole play the witches say that six things will happen or be true in the future.

1. What is the sixth thing they say?

2. What happens which shows the sixth thing they say is true?

Macbeth is a play full of interesting characters.

1. Who do you think is the best or nicest character in the play? Why?

2. Who do you think is the worst or meanest character in the play? Why?

Two of these sentences about the story are true and two are false. Put 'True' or 'False' next to the right sentences.

- A. The story takes place in Ireland. _____
- B. William Shakespeare wrote the play. _____
- C. Macduff was not born the normal way. _____
- D. Macbeth kills Macduff. _____

In this story the writer shows that every time a person decides to do something, other things happen because of what they do. What do you think is the biggest decision made by a character in the story? Why is the decision so important? Remember to think about what the decision leads to.

Whose body is found before Macbeth blames the servants?

The text you have just read does not just tell a story. Find and explain one way that the writer has used a different type of writing.

When she is speaking to Macbeth about killing King Duncan, Macbeth's wife 'whispers' to him. What does the word 'whispers' tell you about the plan and how she is feeling?

Using the right tense is very important as a writer. Different tenses change how readers understand a text.

- 1. What tense has the writer used when telling the actual story of Macbeth?

2. How does using this tense help to make a reader feel like they are in a theatre watching the play?

Tick one word from the list which you think best describes Macbeth. Find and copy a sentence from the text and explain why you chose your word.

- A. cruel
- B. clever
- C. foolish
- D. weak-minded
- E. strong-minded

‘Behold, where stands the usurper’s cursed head’.

Read the last section of the story again. Who do you think the ‘cursed head’ belonged to?

Macbeth

Put these events in the order that they happen in the story.

- | | |
|--|---|
| A. Macbeth is killed. | 5 |
| B. Macbeth and Banquo see the witches. | 1 |
| C. Macbeth's wife goes mad. | 4 |
| D. Macbeth kills the king. | 2 |
| E. Macbeth sees the witches. | 3 |

The witches only say one thing to Banquo, but it scares Macbeth.

1. Why would Macbeth be worried about Banquo's children becoming kings? **The other things the witches said have come true. If Banquo's children are going to become kings, they will have to get rid of Macbeth and his children.**
2. Why would Fleance's escape make Macbeth even more scared? **Fleance escaping means that there is still a chance that what the witches said will come true. There is still someone from Banquo's family who could become king, and who might kill Macbeth to do it.**

Why does Macbeth go to the witches for a second time? **He needs their help and is worried.**

In the whole play the witches say that six things will happen or be true in the future.

1. What is the sixth thing they say? **That Macbeth is safe until trees move towards his castle.**
2. What happens which shows the sixth thing they say is true? **Macduff and Malcolm's army arrives at Macbeth's castle carrying tree branches.**

Macbeth is a play full of interesting characters.

1. Who do you think is the best or nicest character in the play? Why? **Various answers; must be justified.**
2. Who do you think is the worst or meanest character in the play? Why? **Various answers; must be justified.**

Two of these sentences about the story are true and two are false. Put 'True' or 'False' next to the right sentences.

- A. The story takes place in Ireland. **False**
- B. William Shakespeare wrote the play. **True**
- C. Macduff was not born the normal way. **True**
- D. Macbeth kills Macduff. **False**

In this story the writer shows that every time a person decides to do something, other things happen because of what they do. What do you think is the biggest decision made by a character in the story? Why is the decision so important? Remember to think about what the decision leads to. **Various answers; must be justified.**

Whose body is found before Macbeth blames the servants? **King Duncan's body**

The text you have just read does not just tell a story. Find and explain one way that the writer has used a different type of writing. **The writer has written a factual/non-fiction introduction before starting the fictional narrative. The writer has included quotations from the play.**

When she is speaking to Macbeth about killing King Duncan, Macbeth's wife 'whispers' to him. What does the word 'whispers' tell you about the plan and how she is feeling?

She wants the plan to remain a secret and is nervous/concerned about being overheard and discovered. She knows how terrible it would be for their treachery to be discovered.

Using the right tense is very important as a writer. Different tenses change how readers understand a text.

1. What tense has the writer used when telling the actual story of Macbeth? **Present tense**

2. How does using this tense help to make a reader feel like they are in a theatre watching the play? The story is presented as happening live before the reader in real time, just as the action and dialogue of a play takes place in front of an audience live.

Tick one word from the list which you think best describes Macbeth. Find and copy a sentence from the text and explain why you chose your word.

- A. cruel
- B. clever
- C. foolish
- D. weak-minded
- E. strong-minded

Any selection is valid as long as it is justified by the copied sentence and explanation.

'Behold, where stands the usurper's cursed head'.

Read the last section of the story again. Who do you think the 'cursed head' belonged to?

Macbeth