



Activity One

The Macbeths: Medieval Power Couple?



The marriage of the Macbeths hardly seems to be a typical one, by the standards of Shakespeare's time.

Research the typical marriage of nobility in the time Shakespeare wrote this play and compare it to the one presented in *Macbeth*.

How much does Lady Macbeth differ from the typical noble wife?

How might the play have gone differently if Macbeth had reacted the way a typical nobleman would have to Lady Macbeth's obvious ambition and the manner in which she expressed it to him?



Pick one of the following and rewrite the scene, imagining that Macbeth responded by angrily refusing Lady Macbeth's commands:

1. Act I, Scene 5, starting: "O, never/Shall sun that morrow see!"
2. Act I, Scene 7, starting: "We fail?/But screw your courage to the sticking-place,"
3. Act II, Scene 2, starting: "Why did you bring these daggers from the place?"

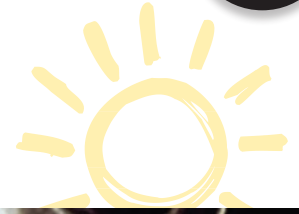
Assuming that the main events of the play remained the same, how would the plot have changed to accommodate Macbeth's stronger character? Outline the remainder of the altered play, beginning after your rewritten scene.

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Activity Two

Why was Macbeth a Bad King?



The method by which Macbeth became King was not unique in the medieval world. Yet he was reviled in the play once suspicion began to fall on him. Duncan, on the other hand, was loved by all as a good and wise king.

Find an example of a king from English history who ascended to the throne after (actually or merely being suspected of) murdering his predecessor and was considered a good king. What did this king have that Macbeth lacked? Does the play provide any clues as to what a good king needs?

Outline a PR campaign that might have been used to convince Scottish nobles that Macbeth was a good and virtuous man who mourned the death of Duncan and sought to find the murderers and bring them to justice.



Activity Three

The Weird Sisters



These three witches are modeled after characters in mythology. This modeling includes their powers.

Research these three in either Greek or Norse Mythology, and outline their history and chief characteristics.

In *Macbeth*, the Weird Sisters are subject to the goddess Hecate. They also are intent on mischief in everything that they do.

If the Weird Sisters behaved as the Norns or the Moirai do, would *Macbeth* have gone differently as a play?

Suggest some plot changes that might result if, either:

1. The Weird Sisters were completely impartial;
2. The Weird Sisters were actively trying to help Macbeth to achieve his destiny to become a good king.

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Activity Four

Out, damned spot! Out, I say



Throughout the play, blood plays an important part, especially for Macbeth and his wife. What does it mean to them?

Analyse each instance in the play where blood is mentioned.

Write what you think the character actually means when they talk about blood, in each instance that blood is mentioned.

Describe what you think the motif of blood adds to the presentation of Macbeth.

Write out a well-thought-out essay describing your thoughts.



Activity Five

Macbeth's Hallucinations

Were the vision that Macbeth had more than merely manifestations of his conscience? Shakespeare's characters, often as a symptom of a decline into madness, hallucinate.

In *Macbeth*, however, he introduces a strong theme of the supernatural into the play. Twice, the Weird Sisters interact with Macbeth. On the second occasion, he is presented with actual visions that we are intended to accept as being real.

Assume that, contrary to Shakespearean expectations, the Weird Sisters are causing Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to experience the visions that they have.

Write an essay arguing one of the two points of view. Either:

1. The hallucinations make the downfall of Macbeth more certain by instilling guilt and madness into the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.
2. The hallucinations fail of their purpose because the actions of neither character would have been significantly different had they been absent.



Support your position by demonstrating, for each hallucination, what would have happened had that hallucination not occurred.

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Activity Six

Macbeth a Play for James I?

In the first scene of Act IV, Macbeth is shown many predictions, including a line of kings coming from Banquo; the last (eighth) of which holds a "glass" (mirror).

The first audience for this play was the court of King James I. It has been suggested that the mirror would have been angled to reflect the face of King James I back at him as James (formerly James IV of Scotland) traced his lineage back to the person depicted as Banquo.

Research the origins of the story that Shakespeare based this play on. Write an essay detailing the ways Shakespeare tailored his play to flatter his patron.

