

*Macbeth*

## Act I

### Vocabulary:

Write the letter of the definition on the right in the blank next the the word it defines.

- |                   |                                 |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| ___ 1. plight     | a. relating to the body         |
| ___ 2. vantage    | b. pay out, spread around       |
| ___ 3. curb       | c. matchless, unequaled         |
| ___ 4. disburse   | d. predicament, situation       |
| ___ 5. inhabitant | e. deposit, pledge, downpayment |
| ___ 6. corporal   | f. triviality                   |
| ___ 7. earnest    | g. reward, compensation         |
| ___ 8. trifle     | h. superior position            |
| ___ 9. recompense | i. restrain, repress            |
| ___ 10. peerless  | j. resident, dweller            |

### Scrambled Quotation:

The following words are a quotation from Act I. See if you can unscramble the quotation. Next to the quotation, write the name of the person speaking and the act and scene in which it is found.

in no face art There's the construction to find the mind's.

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### **General Questions:**

1. Who turns the tide of the battle for King Duncan?
2. Who delivers some prophecies to Macbeth and Banquo, and what are the prophecies?
3. To whom is Macbeth referring in scene iv, when he says “The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step/ On which I must fall down or else o’erleap”? What does his statement mean?
4. At the end of Act I, what have Macbeth and his Lady planned? Explain their plans.

### **Analysis:**

5. The opening scene in *Macbeth* is possibly the strangest opening in all of Shakespeare’s plays. What tone does it set for play? How does the first scene affect your expectations for the play?

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6. In scene iv, Duncan says of the former Thane of Cawdor, “There’s no art/ To find the mind’s construction in the face./ He was a gentleman on whom I built/ An absolute trust.” Immediately after this statement, Macbeth enters. What is ironic about Macbeth appearing after Duncan says this?
7. This play makes much of contrasting what is natural with what is unnatural. Banquo calls attention to this in the case of the three Weird Sisters:

*Banquo* What are these,  
So withered, and so wild in their attire,  
That look not like th’ inhabitants o’ th’ earth  
And yet are on ’t?—Live you? Or are you aught  
That man may question? You seem to understand me  
By each at once her choppy finger laying  
Upon her skinny lips. You should be women,  
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret  
That you are so.  
(scene iii, lines 40–49)

The witches are not quite human, not quite spirit; they are female, but not really women—they are distinctly unnatural. Find another instance of someone acting unnaturally in Act I and describe it. Does the unnaturalness appear good or bad?

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### **Character Study:**

8. Pick one or two of the following characters from the play and describe their qualities, using examples from Act I. What kind of people are they? What are their strengths and weaknesses?

Macbeth

Lady Macbeth

Duncan

Banquo

9. An *aside* is when a sentence or two is spoken in an undertone by one character to the audience or to another character. It is understood that the other characters on stage do not hear the aside. Asides help the audience know a character better by allowing that character to privately express feelings, opinions, and reactions. In all of Act I, who is the only character to speak in asides or to instigate aside exchanges between two characters? Act I, scene iii, has more asides than the rest of the play combined. Considering that asides are, in essence, secrets or whispers kept from the rest of the characters, and considering who is speaking the asides, what does this imply about that character?

### **Foreshadowing:**

10. *Foreshadowing* is a literary device by which the author hints at events to come later in the play. At the end of scene i, the three witches chant together “Fair is foul, and foul is fair.” As you look at Act I, what are the witches foreshadowing? What do you think this foreshadows for the rest of the play?

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11. The pacing of *Macbeth* is rapid-fire—there are many drastic scene changes, and events move very quickly. How do you think this rapid change of circumstances affects Macbeth’s ability to sort through events and come to decisions? Consider Proverbs 19:2.
  
12. A *soliloquy* is a speech a character makes when alone on stage, generally to provide background information or express what she is thinking. In Lady Macbeth’s soliloquy at the start of scene v, from what “weaknesses” does she say Macbeth suffers? To what “illness” do you think Lady Macbeth refers when she says Macbeth is “not without ambition, but without/ The illness should attend it”?
  
13. When does Macbeth first consider murdering the king? What does this tell us about Macbeth?
  
14. *Contrast* is a stylistic device in which different things are held up in opposition to each other. For example, a rural setting may be contrasted with, or held up as an opposing image to, an urban setting. An author may also create stylistic contrast by using long and short sentences or short-worded, staccato passages next to longer, more fluid passages.

Explain the contrast in scene vi between Duncan’s and Banquo’s description of the castle and the plans being laid within the castle, or the contrast between Duncan’s statements to Lady Macbeth and her plans for him.

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**Dig Deeper:**

15. Read 1 Samuel 26. What is Abishai's reaction to David's opportunity in the camp? Does David see it the same way as Abishai? How do their reactions compare to Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's ideas about Duncan visiting their castle?
  
16. To how many people does Macbeth confide his thoughts, desires, and plans? From how many people does he seek advice? Do you think this affects his plans at the end of Act I? Read Proverbs 11:14, 12:15, 19:20, 20:18. How might these verses have affected Macbeth's actions? How can you use these verses in your life?
  
17. Toward the end of scene vii, Lady Macbeth accuses Macbeth of unmanliness. Compare Lady Macbeth's definition of manliness with the definition found in Proverbs 3 and 4.
  
18. In his soliloquy at the beginning of scene vii, Macbeth reviews his reasons against murdering Duncan. Summarize this soliloquy. What does this reveal about Macbeth?

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19. Read Galatians 5:7–8 and Colossians 2:6–8. How do these verses relate to what Macbeth is doing in this Act? Why do you think it is so easy for people to discard what they know is right? How can you avoid this?

### **Extra Activities:**

- In Act I, scene iii, Banquo warns Macbeth, “Oftentimes, to win us to our harm,/ The instruments of darkness tell us truths,/ Win us with honest trifles, to betray ’s/ In deepest consequence.” Write a one-page essay discussing the meaning of these statements and how they explain and warn against temptation.
- Research King James I of England and write a one- or two-page paper summarizing James’ life. Examine whether Shakespeare wrote actions or events into Act I of Macbeth to particularly appeal to the king or to reflect events in his life.
- Paint a watercolor or draw a colored pencil rendition of Macbeth’s castle at Inverness, drawing inspiration from the descriptions of Duncan and Banquo from Act I, scene vi.
- Have one person act out a portion or all of the dialogue between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in Act I, scene vii. Note how voice, tone, and pacing must change to depict the character and communicate him or her to the audience. If possible, have several students do this exercise. Other scenes may be chosen.
- Have two students act out the above dialogue or another, each taking the part of a character. Then have the students act out the same scene but exchange characters.