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MACBETH

SYNOPSIS

This production of *Macbeth* takes an untraditional approach to Shakespeare's play. In this version, the action is set in the early 20th century in an unspecified country. As you watch, consider how this setting offers opportunities for new interpretations, and what it says about the continued relevance of Shakespeare's plays.

As the play begins, three witches gather in a stormy field, planning to meet Macbeth, as he returns from an important battle. Macbeth is a Thane—one of the lords that serve the king of Scotland, Duncan. At the military camp of King Duncan, a soldier describes the defeat of another Scottish lord—the traitorous Thane of Cawdor—by Macbeth. Duncan announces that, as a reward for his valor, Macbeth will receive Cawdor's title and property in addition to the territory he already rules, Glamis.

While traveling to the king's camp, Macbeth and another lord, Banquo, encounter the witches. They hail Macbeth as Thane of Glamis and Cawdor, and tell him he "shalt be King hereafter." They also prophesy that Banquo will be the father of kings.

The witches disappear, and Banquo and Macbeth are greeted by two other noblemen, who announce that Duncan has appointed Macbeth the new Thane of Cawdor. Later, Duncan thanks Banquo and Macbeth for their loyalty and announces his intention to make his son Malcolm his heir. Macbeth hints at the evil actions he may take to secure the throne for himself.

Macbeth's wife receives a letter from her husband that describes the prophecy of the witches. She fears that he will not have the courage to do what's required to seize the throne. When Macbeth arrives, Lady Macbeth urges him to put on a pleasant face for Duncan, who will soon arrive at their castle.

The king arrives and is welcomed by Lady Macbeth. Alone, Macbeth wonders whether he can commit murder to gain his ambitions. He is joined by Lady Macbeth, who chastises him. She tells him her plan: she will get the king's attendants drunk, Macbeth will murder Duncan, and they will blame the act on the attendants. As Lady Macbeth takes wine into the king's chamber, Macbeth sees a bloody dagger that leads him into the room to commit the murder.

When Duncan's murder is discovered, Lady Macbeth faints, and Macbeth kills the attendants. Duncan's sons Malcolm and Donalbain suspect foul play and flee the country.

In Malcolm's absence, Macbeth takes the throne, and Banquo wonders whether the new king was involved in Duncan's death. Fearing these suspicions—as well as the witches' prediction that Banquo will be the father of kings—Macbeth sends a trio of assassins to kill his loyal friend. The assassins succeed, but Banquo's son Fleance escapes. Later, Macbeth hosts a banquet, where he sees Banquo's bloody ghost. Meanwhile, one of the noblemen, Macduff, rejects Macbeth's authority and flees to England.

Macbeth seeks out the witches to learn more about his fate. They conjure spirits who offer three prophecies: "Beware Macduff"; "None of woman born shall harm Macbeth"; "Macbeth will not be

defeated until the great Birnam Forest comes to Dunsinane Hill" (two landmarks in the countryside). Macbeth interprets these signs as meaning that he cannot lose. Finally, the witches reveal a parade of apparitions representing a long line of Banquo's descendants as kings of Scotland.

Hearing of Macduff's flight to England, Macbeth sends troops to murder his family. Macduff meets Malcolm in England, and urges the young prince to come home and reclaim his throne. Macduff also learns of the slaughter of his family and vows revenge.

Back in Scotland, Lady Macbeth is seen sleepwalking as she re-enacts Duncan's murder night after night. Malcolm raises an army and invades Scotland. He's joined by many of the Scottish lords, who assemble to attack Macbeth at his castle at Dunsinane. The invading generals order the soldiers to camouflage themselves with boughs from the trees of Birnam Wood, fulfilling one of the witches' prophecies. Lady Macbeth commits suicide, and Macbeth seeks out and attacks Macduff, only to learn that he was born via Caesarian section (and thus is "not of woman born"). Macduff slays Macbeth and beheads him, and Malcolm takes the throne of Scotland.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Macbeth: A nobleman who murders Duncan, the King, in order to seize his throne. Once he becomes king, he quickly becomes a tyrant and is killed. The play charts the progression of evil as it overtakes his character.

Lady Macbeth: At the beginning of the play, she is the ambitious, cold-hearted one, urging Macbeth to follow his ambitions through murder. Eventually, though, she succumbs to feelings of guilt and regret.

The Witches: These supernatural figures offer deceptive predictions that serve to ignite Macbeth's evil intentions.

Banquo: Another nobleman, Banquo also receives a favorable prediction from the witches, but he refuses to take action to see that destiny fulfilled.

Fleance: Banquo's young son who flees when Banquo is murdered. Because he lives, Macbeth fears that Banquo's line will fulfill the witches' prediction by becoming kings.

King Duncan: Trusting and naïve, Duncan never suspects that Macbeth and his wife are plotting his death. He misreads both of them, just as he had misinterpreted the treacherous Thane of Cawdor.

Malcolm: Duncan's son and heir, Malcolm is everything a king should be: virtuous, pious, chaste, modest, and loyal.

Macduff: An honorable lord, Macduff opposes Macbeth and supports Malcolm as the new king, but only after determining that the prince is worthy.

KEY THEMES

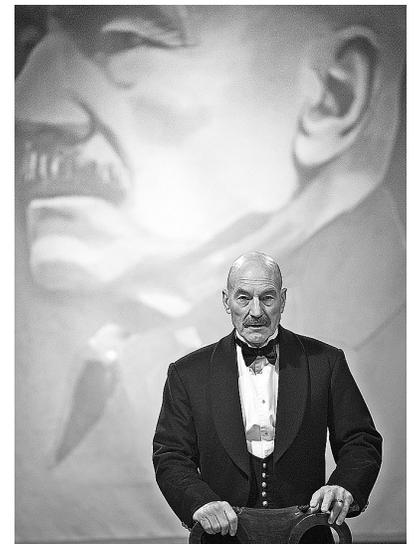
Fate versus free will: Does Macbeth have any control over his fate? Do the witches represent a destiny that can't be avoided, or do they simply provide an opportunity for Macbeth to reveal his character and create his own fate?

The nature of evil: Is evil a supernatural force that infects people? Or is it part of human nature? What happens to Macbeth once he commits himself to evil actions? What happens to the world around him?

Appearance versus reality: How can one tell good from evil? Friends from enemies? Why does Duncan think that Macbeth and his wife are trustworthy when they are plotting his overthrow?

The effect of guilt on the human mind: Can people take actions they know are wrong and remain unaffected? How are Macbeth and Lady Macbeth changed by their actions? Do they suffer psychologically even when they are not caught?

The nature of kingship: What determines who is a rightful king? Can someone like Macbeth simply seize power? Or does a leader need to win the loyalty of the subjects? Must a king be virtuous, like Malcolm? Or simply powerful, like Macbeth?



KEY IMAGERY

- Blood ("It will have blood; they say, blood will have blood")
- Darkness and night ("And yet dark night strangles the traveling lamp")
- Hell ("Not in the legions/ Of horrid hell can come a devil more damn'd/ In evils to top Macbeth")
- Sorcery and supernatural forces (the witches, the apparitions, Banquo's ghost)
- Opposites that are indistinguishable ("Fair is foul and foul is fair")

WORDS OF THE BARD

Common Terms

English has changed a lot since Shakespeare wrote. Here's a guide to some of the terms Shakespeare used. Have you heard any of these words before? Have some of them changed meaning in the last 400 years?

ague: fever
aroint: go away
beldam: witch, hag, old woman
beshrew: to curse
bestride: to stand over
blasted: barren, blighted
bootless: useless
borne in hand: deceived
caitiff: wretched person
certes: certainly
chary: careful
clept: called, named
con: to learn
conceit: idea
confounds: completely ruins
cousin, coz: any kinsman (not just a cousin)
coxcomb: fool
cozen: to cheat or trick
credit: to believe
cry you mercy: beg your pardon
doom: judgment
doth: does
doubt: fear
dumb: mute or silent
ere: before
fair: beautiful
false: dishonest
fell: cruel
foul: ugly
free: generous
gentle: of the noble classes
goodly: handsome
gossip: close friend or godparent
green: sickly
grooms: servants
habit: clothing
hail: welcome, hello (a greeting)
happily: perhaps, by chance, possibly
hardy: brave, courageous
humour: mood
husbandry: farming, agriculture
kine: cattle
kite: raven or crow
marry: indeed (when used as an exclamation)
maugre: despite, in spite of
mean: lowly
mortal: deadly
parlous: dangerous
sans: without
sirrah: a young boy
still: always
stomach: hunger
tetchy: irritable
toys: trifles
wanton: unrestrained
weeds: clothes, outfit
wherefore: why
withal: by it

FOR BETTER OR FOR VERSE

Shakespeare used different kinds of verse depending on the mood, action, or character. Here's a sampling of the verse types you'll encounter in *Macbeth*:

Blank Verse

Most of *Macbeth*—and many of Shakespeare's plays—are written in blank verse. Blank verse is unrhymed iambic pentameter. Each line contains five "feet," or units made up of two syllables. The first syllable is unstressed; the second is stressed. This kind of foot is called an "iamb." Read aloud, iambic pentameter has this rhythm:

buh-BAH buh-BAH buh-BAH buh-BAH buh-BAH

In Shakespeare's plays, blank verse sounds a lot like normal speech, only slightly more formal, rhythmic, and musical.

These lines of *Macbeth* are written in perfect iambic pentameter:

Away, and mock the time with fairest show:
False face must hide what the false heart doth know.
(Act 1, scene 7)

To understand the effect of iambic pentameter, try reading a few lines aloud. Pause whenever it seems like you should depending on the punctua-

tion or the meaning of the words. What you'll find is that the meaning of the words and the steady rhythm play off each other, so that the meter pulls you forward while the meaning slows you down. As you're reading, look for moments in the verse where this tension seems to stand out, and consider how this use of poetic meter helps to support what is happening in the play.

Trochaic Tetrameter

The witches in *Macbeth* speak in trochaic tetrameter. Instead of iambs (unstressed-stressed), the syllables or feet in this poetic form are trochees (stressed-unstressed). Tetrameter refers to the fact that there are four feet per line. A line of trochaic tetrameter has this rhythm:

BAH-buh BAH-buh BAH-buh BAH-buh

This meter gives the witches' chants their hypnotic rhythm:

When shall we three meet again?
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?
(Act 1, scene 1)

Did you notice something missing? The last unstressed syllable isn't there, so you're forced to pause at the end of the line. Because of that missing syllable, it's hard to read these lines and make them sound like a normal conversation.

WHAT'S IN A SOLILOQUY?

Is it possible to translate Shakespeare into modern English? Below, you'll find one of *Macbeth*'s most famous soliloquies, along with a version written as we might express the same ideas today.

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly: if the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success; that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases
We still have judgment here; that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips. He's here in double trust;
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off;
And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on the other.

If the crime I'm about to do would be over once I did it,
Then I'd do it immediately; if the murder of Duncan
Would catch up in a net all the possible consequences,
And once it's done, I'd have success; if my blow against Duncan
Might be the only thing that happens of this action,
The only thing in this life that happens as a result,
We'd risk what happens in the afterlife. But in cases like this,
We're still punished here. Through our actions, we teach
Others how to commit crimes like murder, and once taught,
The one who first did the murder receives the same treatment. Because of this kind of justice
We end up poisoning ourselves
With our own actions. Duncan has two reasons to trust me;
First, I'm related to him and I'm his royal subject,
Both these are reasons not to murder him; also, since I'm his host
I should be the one who keeps murderers away from him,
And not murder him myself. Besides, Duncan
Has been so modest and humble as king,
And has been so blameless, his good deeds and character
Will act like angels that announce and condemn
The horrible action of his murder;
And pity will act like an innocent newborn infant
Soaring above, or like heaven's army, riding
Upon the winds,
Will spread news of this horrible deed, as if blowing the image into everyone's eyes,
So they'll cry and drown the wind with their tears. I have nothing
To push me to do this, except
Ambition, which like an overeager rider who tries to jump into the saddle, but overshoots
and falls on the other side of the horse.

RESHAPING THE CHRONICLES: MACBETH AND SCOTTISH HISTORY

Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies, but it could also be considered a history play. Shakespeare based his play on actual historical events recounted in Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*. First published in 1577, the *Chronicles* include the story of an 11th-century Scottish king named Macbeth.

But if you compare Shakespeare's version to the one in his main source, you'll see many changes. Here are just a few:

- In the *Chronicles*, Duncan was not an old, sage, revered king, but a young and feeble ruler.
- The historical Macbeth had a right to be angry when Duncan chose his son as his heir. In Scotland of his day, the throne didn't automatically pass to a king's son. In fact, the real Macbeth had a fair claim to the throne.
- The historical Banquo was one of Macbeth's accomplices in the murder of Duncan, along with several other lords. Shakespeare takes his story of the wife who helps murder a king from a different episode of the *Chronicles*.
- Macbeth was a good and successful king for 10 years before he was overthrown.

Some of the most memorable scenes from *Macbeth* were not from the *Chronicles* at all. Here are some of Shakespeare's inventions:

- The image of the "air-drawn dagger" (Act II, scene 1)
- The Porter's long speech after the murder of Duncan (Act II, scene 3)
- The depiction of Macbeth as unable to sleep (Act III, scene 2)
- The banquet in which Banquo's ghost appears (Act III, scene 4)
- Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene (Act V, scene 1)
- Lady Macbeth's suicide (Act V, scene 4)

To Discuss: Why do you think Shakespeare made these changes? What's the effect of his new scenes and incidents?

To Learn More: Visit the Shakespeare Navigator's website to view the original story of *Macbeth* in Holinshed's *Chronicles*. <http://www.shakespeare-navigators.com/macbeth/Holinshed/index.html>

THE "SCOTTISH PLAY"

Why did Shakespeare decide to write a play about a Scottish king? Consider these facts:

- Most scholars believe that *Macbeth* was written around 1606.
- James I became King of England in 1603. When he inherited the throne, he was already King of Scotland.
- Banquo was generally believed to be an ancestor of James I.

In writing *Macbeth*, Shakespeare was paying a compliment to his new king. When Macbeth is offered a glimpse of Banquo's sons, what he's seeing is the line of royal succession that will lead the current rule of England—and a subtle suggestion that James I was predestined to sit on the throne. In fact, scholars have suggested that when *Macbeth* was performed for the king, the "glass" (mirror) held by the last of the apparitions in Act IV, scene 1, was actually held up so that James could behold himself as the present-day descendent of Banquo.

There are other indications of James' influence in the play. King James was the author of the *Basilikon Doron*, a treatise on the nature of kingship addressed to his son Henry. In it, James defends the Divine Right of Kings—the idea that rulers are given the right to reign by God. This idea, as well as others that James describes to his son, are echoed in Macbeth's discussion of kingship. Consider these excerpts from the *Basilikon Doron*, presented in modern-day English:

"Conscience . . . it is nothing else but the light of knowledge that God has planted in man; which chops him with a feeling that he has done wrong whenever he commits any sin . . ."

"For a good king (after a happy and famous reign) dies in peace, lamented by his subjects, and admired by his neighbors. . . And although some of them (which falls out very rarely) may be cut off by the treason of some unnatural subjects, yet lies their fame after them, and some notable plague fails never to overtake the committers in this life, besides their infamy to all posterities hereafter. . ."

"...a tyrant's miserable and infamous life, arms in end his own subjects [against him] . . . and although that rebellion be ever unlawful on their part, yet is the world so wearied of him, that his fall is little lamented by the rest of his subjects, and but smiled at by his neighbors. . ."

To Think About: How are these views reflected in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*?

WITCHCRAFT IN SHAKESPEARE'S TIME

In Holinshed's *Chronicles*, the witches appear as "three women in strange and wild apparel." They're described as "goddesses of destiny," "nymphs," or "fairies." Their title of the "Weird Sisters," seems to tie them to the Wyrd, the goddess of fate in Anglo-Saxon literature. In fact, they're never called "witches" in the *Chronicles*.

Shakespeare transforms these fairy goddesses into the hag-like crones of witchcraft lore. He could assume his audience would be familiar with this lore. There were 247 witch trials during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. According to a German visitor to England in 1592, "Many witches are found there who frequently do much mischief by means of hail and tempests."

King James I himself was a firm believer in witches, and even wrote a book, entitled *Daemonologie*, in which he discussed a wide range of supernatural and demonic creatures. He also recounted the trial of a group of witches in his pamphlet, *The Newes from Scotland*. In it, he gives his account of his interrogation of one of the accused witches, Agnes Sampson, and describes how she traveled over the sea in a "cive" (possibly a sieve) and joined with other witches to dance and sing "in one voice."

Shakespeare drew from these accounts of witchcraft writing *Macbeth*, but he also appears to have taken details from Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, which was a skeptical analysis of these cases.

According to some of the common beliefs from Shakespeare's day:

- Witches typically had familiars, which were demonic servants that took the form of animals. Typical familiars included cats, dogs, frogs, and apes.
- Witches could fly through the air.
- Witches could control the winds.
- Witches concocted charms and potions out of herbs and demonic ingredients.
- Witches cast spells that sickened animals and withered crops.

To Explore: What lines in *Macbeth* refer to these common beliefs about witchcraft?

To Think About: Why do you think Shakespeare chose to characterize the "fairies" of the *Chronicles* as witches?

To Learn More: Do you want to read James I's account of a witch trial in *The Newes from Scotland*? The entire text can be found at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/pag/kjd/kjd11.htm>



SCHOOL ACTIVITIES: BEFORE WATCHING *MACBETH*

For students who have not read the play:

Sneak Preview

Distribute a synopsis of the play for the students to read before viewing the play.

Classroom Exercise: Macbeth Meets the Witches

Select seven students, and have them read Act I, scene III, of *Macbeth* aloud. (This is the scene that starts when the first witch says, "Where hast thou been, sister?")

After the reading, ask the class to discuss what happened in the scene, and how it establishes your expectations about what will happen later in the play.

Here are a few questions you can ask to prompt discussion:

- What happens in this scene? Can you summarize the action and conversations in a few sentences?
- What are the key themes and images in this scene? Did you notice any particular images used by the witches or *Macbeth*? What sort of mood does this scene establish?
- What is the purpose of the conversation of the witches that opens the scene?
- What predictions do the witches make when they meet Macbeth and Banquo? How do the two lords respond? What can we tell about Macbeth and Banquo based on how they respond to the witches?
- What happens when Angus and Rosse enter? Why is the news they bring important to the play?
- What do you think will happen in the play based upon what happens in this scene?

Writing Prompt

Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's most famous tragedies. What do you know about tragedy? What other examples of tragic plays, novels, or movies have you previously encountered? What do you think are the key elements of a tragedy? Based on what you know about tragedy, what sorts of things do you expect to see in this play?

To Discuss

Some of the most famous scenes in *Macbeth* portray what happens when people respond to temptation and deal with guilt about their actions. Why do people feel guilt? What does it feel like? How can guilt affect the way people behave?

To Think About

What other Shakespeare plays have you read or seen? What were your impressions of those plays? Based on those experiences, what do you expect to see in this production? What ideas do you think will be discussed in the play?

For students who have already read the play:

Student Exercise: Shakespeare's Art—The Soliloquy

Translate one of Macbeth's soliloquies or Lady Macbeth's soliloquy into modern English. Is anything lost in the translation? Compare your translation with those created by other students.

Discussion Topic: The Supernatural in *Macbeth*

In Shakespeare's day, most people believed in witches, ghosts, spirits, and other supernatural occurrences. Theatrical companies used a wide range of "special effects" to help bring the supernatural to the stage, including trap doors, fireworks, and ropes for flying characters.

- Consider the various supernatural elements that appear in this play: the witches, the apparitions, the ghost of Banquo, the "air-drawn dagger." Do

you think all of these elements are "real"? Should they all be depicted on stage? Which elements do you think need to appear, and which do you think work better if they're just figments of Macbeth's imagination?

- Imagine you're going to direct a production of *Macbeth*. How would you represent these various supernatural elements to reflect your interpretation of the play?

Group Activity: Directing a Scene

Break the class into groups and assign each group a scene from *Macbeth*. Each group will choose parts and read the scene aloud. After reading the scene, the students will discuss how they would stage the scene, including decisions about where characters would be positioned, gestures they would use, and how lines are to be delivered. If time permits, the students can act out their staging for the other groups in the class.

Ask students to pay close attention to the assigned scene when viewing the *GREAT PERFORMANCES* presentation of *Macbeth*, and think about the decisions made by the director in this filmed version.

Here are some scenes you may wish to assign:

Act I, scene III

Seven characters

In this scene, Macbeth and Banquo meet the witches, then learn the latest news from Angus and Rosse.

Act II, scene II

Two characters

Macbeth and his wife carry out the murder of Duncan.

Act II, scene III, starting at Macbeth's entrance at line 43

Eight characters

Duncan's murder is discovered, and the members of the court respond.

Act III, scene IV

Six characters

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth host a banquet, which the ghost of Banquo attends.

Act V, scene I

Three characters

Lady Macbeth suffers from a fit of sleepwalking.

Writing Prompts:

- Who's to Blame? How do you assign blame in Macbeth's crimes? Is Macbeth himself responsible for his actions? How do you assess the roles of the witches and Lady Macbeth in relationship to Macbeth's guilt or innocence?
- Man and Wife: How would you describe the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth? Who do you have more sympathy for? How do these characters change over the course of the play?

To Think About: The Medium is the Meaning

Every production of a Shakespeare play is unique. Directors make many choices about how to interpret the characters and stage the action, as well as other details such as costumes, makeup, music, and lighting.

When a stage production is turned into a film, even more decisions have to be made: when to use close-ups, what camera angles to employ, and what parts of the play will work on-screen.

To prepare for your viewing of *Macbeth*, think about how film is different than theater. How would you describe the relationship of the audience to the action in each medium? What role does the camera lens play in a film? What does the medium of film allow a director to do that can't be done on stage?

Then think about the play *Macbeth* itself. Do you think there are scenes that would work better in a filmed version? Which scenes do you think would not work as well in film? What scenes would you cut or change if you were filming a version of *Macbeth*?

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SCHOOL ACTIVITIES: AFTER WATCHING *MACBETH*

To Discuss: First Impressions

What did you think of the production? Did you like it? How did it compare to what you expected to see? Did anything surprise you?

To Discuss: Taking Macbeth Out of Scotland

Macbeth is based on events that occurred in 11th-century Scotland. But in the theater, directors are free to re-interpret the play by setting the action in other countries and other eras. In fact, one of the signs of Shakespeare's enduring artistic value is the fact that his plays continue to have relevance and meaning for today's world.

How would you characterize the time and place chosen for this production? Ask yourself these questions:

- In what time period does this production appear to be set? What clues do you have that signal the time period? How did the costumes, sets, and props contribute to your understanding of the time period?
- Does this production appear to be set in a specific country?
- Does it remind you of other events, time periods, or locations in history? Why do you think the director chose this setting?

When answering these questions, consider the effect of these specific details within the production:

- The costumes of the witches
- The military-style uniforms worn by the various generals and soldiers
- The use of newsreel film
- The depiction of the execution of the Thane of Cawdor
- The large portrait of Macbeth that appears after he becomes king
- The montage of executions
- The depiction of Banquo's murder

To Discuss: Setting the Scene

- Consider and discuss details of the set. Think about these questions:
 - How would you characterize the various sets of the play? What do the rooms and other settings look like?
 - Which scenes are set indoors? Which are outdoors? What impact do these indoor and outdoor scenes have on the mood of the play?
 - Which rooms, props, or set pieces take on symbolic meaning as the play progresses? Consider the appearance of these different setting elements: the ballroom, the kitchen, the hospital gurney, the elevator, the sink.
 - Assess the setting of the witches' scenes. In the original play, Macbeth meets the witches first in a field and then in a cave. Where does he meet them in this film? Are these settings unexpected? How do these changes in setting affect your interpretation of the meaning of the witches?
- Think color: Consider how the following colors are used throughout the production: red, gray, white, black, green. What mood do these colors help to establish?

To Consider: Film as a Medium

How does the director use the medium of film to enhance the telling of this story? Consider how these elements—which are the unique attributes of film—are used in this production:

- Close-ups and cross-cuts between different scenes
- The freedom to use a variety of realistic and non-realistic settings
- The ability to follow a character as he or she moves through a space
- The ability to limit the audiences' view to the perspective of one character

Classroom Activity: A Matter of Character

When taking Shakespeare from the page to the stage, directors must make many choices, and work with actors to bring characters to life. To uncover some of the decisions about character in this production of *Macbeth*, work with students to fill out the details in the Character Table. Come up with

short descriptions that apply to each of these aspects of the characters as they appear in this production.

CHARACTER	AGE/APPEARANCE	COSTUME	PERSONALITY/ATTITUDE	CHANGES FROM ORIGINAL PLAY
Macbeth				
Lady Macbeth				
Witches				
Duncan				
Banquo				
Macduff				
Lady Macduff				
Rosse				
Porter				

Classroom Activity: Anatomy of a Scene

After viewing the entire play, have the students watch the scene with the "air-drawn dagger." As you watch the scene this second time, consider the choices made by the director and actor to shape this scene. Also think about what choices can be made—and need to be made—because this scene is presented on film rather than on a stage.

Here are some questions to ask as you view:

How has the director chosen to transition into this soliloquy? What is the effect of the camera angle chosen by the director? How does the actor playing Macbeth interact with the imaginary dagger? How do they keep your attention in this scene, despite the fact that it's simply a single person talking directly to the camera? What is the impact of small changes in perspective?

Writing Prompt: Pick a Scene, Any Scene

Choose one scene from the production that really struck you. Analyze the choices made by the director and actors. Did they cut any lines from the script? What are the most important moments of the scene? What can you tell about the choices they've made about the thoughts and emotions of the characters? How have the characters been positioned to reflect those choices, and what gestures add to the ability to communicate those choices?

Writing Prompt: The Critics Corner

Write a review of this production. When you're writing, consider the following questions:

- What did you expect to see in this production? Were there any surprises?
- Pick out an aspect of the design of the production—the costume, the lighting, the makeup—and think about how this element contributes to the overall effect of the play.
- What was your favorite part? What parts did you not like as much?

Writing Prompt: The Horror!

Elizabethan audiences shared notions about evil and the supernatural that were part of their overall world view. When writing for this audience, Shakespeare drew upon these shared assumptions to signal when something evil was afoot, and to shock them with a sense of horror. (Think, for example, of the witches' beards, and the grisly potion they concoct.)

Many of these images and ideas no longer hold meaning for today's viewers. A director in the 21st century must re-interpret elements such as the witches' chants to make them shocking and frightening.

Explore how the director of this production of *Macbeth* re-interpreted the horror of this play for modern audiences. Which scenes in this production did you find shocking or unsettling? How did they help convey horror to you? What other movies, images, or historical events seem to have inspired the director's reinterpretation of these scenes?

Some scenes to consider:

- The report of Macbeth's success by the injured soldier (Act 1, scene 2)
- Macbeth and Banquo's first meeting with the witches (Act I, scene 3)
- The murder of Duncan (Act II, scene 2)
- The banquet scene in which Banquo's ghost appears (Act III, scene 4)
- Macbeth's second meeting with the witches (Act IV, scene 1)
- The murder of Lady Macduff and her children (Act IV, scene 2)

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Shakespeare's Plays Online

Internet Shakespeare Editions

<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/>
Fully annotated texts of Shakespeare's plays and other resources from the University of Victoria.

OpenSourceShakespeare

<http://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/>
Online, searchable texts of Shakespeare's plays and poems.

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare

<http://shakespeare.mit.edu/>
Play and poetry texts made available on the Web by MIT.

Shakespeare's Language

Shakespeare Searched
<http://shakespeare.clusty.com/>
An online concordance that allows you to search a single word or phrase and find out where it appears in all of Shakespeare's canon.

Absolute Shakespeare Glossary

<http://absoluteshakespeare.com/glossary/a.htm>
Alphabetical listings of common terms from the plays.

The Electronic Literature Foundation

<http://www.theplays.org/glossary.html>
A searchable glossary of words and phrases found in Shakespeare's plays.

Elizabethan English as a Literary Medium

<http://www.bartleby.com/213/2011.html>
An interesting essay about the language of Shakespeare's time.

Quick Tips for Teaching Shakespeare's Language

<http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/language/quicktips.html>
Pointers for teachers offered by PBS's *In Search of Shakespeare* website.

Classroom Resources

Teaching *Macbeth* – Resources from Folger Education

<http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=2778>
Classroom activities, podcasts, and videos that introduce innovative methods for teaching *Macbeth*.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: Fear and the "Dagger of the Mind"

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=368
A study guide for the play created by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Classroom Activities from the Ethics Curriculum Project

<http://www6.miami.edu/ethics/ecp/pages/macbeth/Description.htm>
Discussion topics regarding the ethical issues raised in *Macbeth*.

Macbeth Page on ShakespeareHelp.com

<http://www.shakespearehelp.com/macbeth.htm>
A collection of fun resources, including links to video clips from a variety of *Macbeth* productions.

Shakespeare the Man

A Shakespeare Timeline

<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/timeline/summarychart.htm>

An at-a-glance reference for understanding what was happening in Shakespeare's world.

An Outline of Shakespeare's Life

<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/content/view/12/12>
A thorough biography of the Bard, provided by Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

Shakespeare's Life and Times

<http://www.rsc.org.uk/explore/shakespeare/life-times.aspx>
A brief overview of Shakespeare's life by The Royal Shakespeare Company.

IS THAT WHERE THAT'S FROM?

Shakespeare's plays contain some of the most quoted lines in the English language. As you were watching the play, you probably recognized some of the lines. Which are familiar to you? What did you think they meant before you saw the play? Do you understand them differently now that you understand where they're from?

- "When shall we three meet again?"
- "Bubble, bubble, toil and trouble."
- "What's done is done."
- "Yet do I fear thy nature; It is too full o' the milk of human kindness."
- "Out, damned spot! out, I say!"
- "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand."
- "Is this a dagger which I see before me, The handle toward my hand?"
- "I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself, and falls on the other."
- "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow/ Creeps in this petty pace..."
- "It is a tale/ Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/ Signifying nothing."

Are you familiar with these other famous lines from Shakespeare's plays?

"This above all: to thine own self be true"
(*Hamlet*)

"...All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players."
(*As You Like It*)

"Once more, into the breach, dear friends, once more."
(*Henry V*)

"Now is the winter of our discontent."
(*Richard III*)

"Parting is such sweet sorrow"
(*Romeo and Juliet*)

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other names would smell as sweet."
(*Romeo and Juliet*)

"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me

your ears!

I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him."
(*Julius Caesar*)

"...I am a man
more sinned against than sinning."
(*King Lear*)

"...Then must you speak
Of one that lov'd not wisely but too well..."
(*Othello*)

"We are such
Stuff as dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep."
(*The Tempest*)

YOU'RE A POET AND YOU DIDN'T KNOW IT!

Even if you've never read one of Shakespeare's plays, you've spoken some of the Bard's most famous lines. The **long and the short of it** is that unless ***you*** are speaking ***the Queen's English***, it's a **foregone conclusion** that you're constantly quoting Shakespeare.

Whether you're ***in a pickle, wearing your heart on your sleeve***, or simply ***fancy free***, you've spoken the Bard's words. Deny it, and ***in the twinkling of an eye*** you'd be ***a laughing stock***. In fact, trying to avoid Shakespeare's language would send you ***on a wild goose chase*** through the dictionary. ***That way madness lies!***

It's true that spoken English has undergone a ***sea change***, but the fame of the Bard's language lives on ***forever and a day***. So even if you're not ***exceedingly well read***, it's likely that Shakespeare's verse is ***like meat and drink*** to you.

And while ***brevery is the soul of wit***, Shakespeare had a lot to say. With 138 plays, 154 sonnets, and two narrative poems, the range of his work has ***beggared all description***. The man was seldom ***tongue-tied***. He could write ***like the dickens***, it's true, and in his comedies, he kept his audience ***in stitches***.

And what of lovers? After all, ***music is the food of love***, and even if ***love is blind***, Shakespeare has given ***hot-blooded*** wooers dainty phrases to send them down the ***primrose path***. Yep, he could really ***lay it on with a trowel***.

And while all that ***glitters is not gold***, Shakespeare's golden language is hardly ***too much of a good thing***. In fact, it's ***a dish fit for the gods***. Poets today wish they could write so well. Their plays often ***set your teeth on edge*** and ***send you packing!***

So, even though Shakespeare himself is ***as dead as a doornail*** and ***as cold as any stone***, his language lives on. And, after you ***shuffle off this mortal coil***, folks will still be quoting Shakespeare. So don't give this dead poet ***short shrift***. After all, ***all's well that ends well!***