

Macbeth

By William Shakespeare

Pre-reading

2. Summary and quiz

This is a quiz where you compete in groups. Which group has the most right answers in 10 minutes? Before you begin, find and read a summary of *Macbeth* on the internet. Other than that, you may use any resource.

- a) Where does the play take place?
- b) How is Macbeth introduced at the beginning of the play?
- c) What do the witches tell Macbeth?
- d) Why does he get the title of “Thane of Cawdor”?
- e) Who is Banquo?
- f) What do the witches tell Banquo?
- g) What does Lady Macbeth do when Macbeth returns to the castle?
- h) How do they kill King Duncan?
- i) What happens after the murder?
- j) Why do Duncan’s two sons flee?
- k) Why does Macbeth have Banquo killed?
- l) What happens to Banquo’s son Fleance?
- m) What do the witches prophesy which reassures Macbeth that he will be successful?
- n) Who is Macduff?
- o) What happens to his family?
- p) What happens to Lady Macbeth in Act 5?
- q) Do the witches’ prophecies come true?

Wider CONTEXTS EVIL

1. Divide the following words into two categories.

What do the words in each category have in common?

just truthful insensitive violent unscrupulous inhuman
valiant generous brutal deceitful loyal patient
courageous brave greedy hypocritical cruel ruthless
sincere gentle affectionate honest humane

While-reading

COMPREHENSION AND ANALYSIS

2. Macbeth's letter, lines 1-15.

a) Read the letter to yourself. Try to imagine what a wife in this situation might do with this news. Look at the statements below. Complete the table, indicating which statements you think may be true, which false, or if you are not certain, tick the column headed ?. Add at least one statement.

Wider CONTEXTS EVIL

A wife in this situation

	T	F	?
would be worried by his ambition and superstitious nature.			
would be proud of his success.			
would be excited about the prospect of being queen herself.			
would be worried in case the “Weird Sisters” were evil spirits.			
would fear that this might change their lives.			

b) In pairs or groups: compare and discuss. If possible, reach an agreement.

3. P. 145, l. 11-26.

d What qualities does Macbeth possess according to Lady Macbeth? Why are these qualities an impediment now?

According to Lady Macbeth’s knowledge of her husband’s character, Macbeth is

	T	F	?
ambitious.			
is willing to commit an evil act to reach his goal.			
is too honourable a man to commit an evil act.			
is too full of the milk of human kindness to commit an evil act.			
will do anything to reach his goal.			
has no moral scruples.			
has too many moral scruples.			

In pairs or groups: compare and discuss. If possible, reach an agreement.

Wider CONTEXTS EVIL

OVERALL QUESTIONS

2. Should Lady Macbeth be portrayed as a fiend, as a caring wife or ...?

Which of the following three statements do you agree with most? Why?

a) “Lady Macbeth is by far the stronger and more vicious member of the partnership. Lady Macbeth has ambition, she wants a crown, and Macbeth is going to get it for her. Calling on the spirits of murder, she is almost a fourth witch. She is in harmony with dark night, birds of ill omen, and things that are damned.”

For more details use the following link: <http://hubpages.com/hub/lady-macbeth>

b) “Lady Macbeth puts her husband before herself, tries to kill her own better nature for his sake, and finds that the cost has been too great.

Love, rather than ambition, is the centre of her world. Macbeth promises her greatness, but it is his greatness that she is more concerned about.”

For more details use the following link: <http://hubpages.com/hub/lady-macbeth>

c) “... in the opening act at least, Lady Macbeth is the most commanding and perhaps the most awe-inspiring figure that Shakespeare drew. Sharing, as we have seen, certain traits with her husband, she is at once clearly distinguished from him by an inflexibility of will, which appears to hold imagination, feeling, and conscience completely at check. To her the prophecy of things that will be becomes instantly the determination that they shall be:

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be

What thou are promised

She knows her husband’s weakness, how he scruples ‘to catch the nearest way’ to the object he desires; and she sets herself without a trace of doubt or conflict to counteract this weakness. To her

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there is no separation between will and deed; and, as the deed falls in part to her, she is sure it will be done:

*The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements.*

On the moment of Macbeth's rejoining her [...] she takes superior position and assumes the direction of affairs, – appears to assume it even more than she really can, that she may spur him on. She animates him by picturing the deed as heroic, 'this night's *great* business,' or 'our *great* quell,' while she ignores its cruelty and faithlessness. [...] Besides [...] in these earlier scenes the traces of feminine weakness and human feeling, which account for her later failure are not absent. [...] The appalling invocation of the spirits of evil to unsex her and fill her from the crown to the toe topful of direst cruelty, tells the same tale of determination to crush the inward protest."

from A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*. Meridan. 1955.

Post-reading

LEARNING CHECK

1. Hot seat. Lady Macbeth.

- a) Prepare yourself by using your notes and discussing ideas with a partner to be hot-seated as Lady Macbeth. You will be asked to account for your actions and to explain your innermost feelings.
- b) In pairs, prepare questions to ask Lady Macbeth about her reasons for acting the way she does and about her innermost feelings.
- c) In class, choose a student to be hot-seated as Lady Macbeth and ask him or her your questions. Choose a new Lady Macbeth after 3-4 questions.

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TEXT-RELATED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Written assignment: translate the following text into English.

I samme øjeblik Lady Macbeth læser det brev, hvori hendes mand fortæller om sit møde med heksene på heden og om deres spådom, beslutter hun at rydde alt af vejen, der kan hindre ham i at vinde den kongekrone, som overnaturlige magter lover ham. Alt må vige for denne ambition. Den første og største forhindring findes i hendes eget indre, og det er hun bevidst om. Hun ved også, at hun ikke kan fjerne denne hindring ved egen magt, og derfor påkalder hun mordånder for at afsværges sin natur som kvinde. Dermed klipper hun det bånd, der binder hende til Guds verden, og slutter nærmest en pagt med det onde.

Hun halvvejs lokker, halvvejs tvinger Macbeth til at gøre det samme. De når målet, men kun for at opdage, at skuffelse og frygt og den dybeste afsky venter dem dér, og der er ingen vej tilbage. De har brudt verdensordenen og givet de onde kræfter frit spil.

2. Written assignment: Poem.

write a poem whose lines begin with the first letters of Lady Macbeth's name. Include the word "evil".

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WIDER CONTEXTS

2. Historical, sociological and cultural context:

Shakespeare, his time and his theatre. Match question and answer. You may have to add a preposition.

When in doubt, find information on the internet.

Write the answer in the box with the question.

1 When did Shakespeare live?	1605/1606
2 At Shakespeare's time was England a Catholic or a Protestant country?	Groundlings
3 When was <i>Macbeth</i> written?	A reconstruction of Shakespeare's Globe theatre close to its original site
4 The Elizabethans believed that God created everything in a strict hierarchy that stretched from God down to the lowest things in existence. What was this hierarchy called?	<i>Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth</i>
5 What was "The Globe"?	Protestant
6 What were the members of the audience who stood in the yard around the stage known as?	1558-1603
7 What happened to the Globe in 1613?	Boys
8 What is the Globe today?	Stratford-upon-Avon

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9 Do you know the names of four great tragedies written by Shakespeare?	An open-air circular theatre where Shakespeare's plays were performed from 1599 onwards
10 Which of Shakespeare's tragic heroes kills his wife out of jealousy?	King Lear
11 Which of Shakespeare's plays takes place at Elsinore?	Scotland
12 Which character in a Shakespeare tragedy decides to divide his country between his three daughters according to how much they love him?	<i>Demonology</i>
13 Was Shakespeare married?	An apron stage
14 Where was Shakespeare born and buried?	1564-1616
15 When did James become King of England?	A spark from a cannon fired during a performance of Henry VIII set fire to the thatched roof, and the Globe burned down
16 What was the name of the book James published in 1597 about witches?	The Chain of Being
17 At Shakespeare's time the stage stuck out into the middle of the yard. What is this kind of stage called?	Yes, to Ann Hathaway
18 Where does <i>Macbeth</i> take place?	1603
19 When was Elisabeth I Queen of England?	Othello
20 Who played the women's roles at	<i>Hamlet</i>

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CONTEXTS EVIL

Shakespeare's time?

2. Historical, sociological and cultural context.

Macbeth retold. An Australian 2006 film adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* filmed in Melbourne uses a modern-day Melbourne gangster setting, and the actors deliver the dialogue in Australian accents.

Check the internet for this and other modernized versions of Macbeth. Give examples and discuss whether these versions are sacrilege or a relevant way to introduce Shakespeare to a modern audience.