

Macbeth – Study Questions

Act One

1. Why is it so important that Macbeth should be first be presented to us as a brave and honoured soldier?
2. The Elizabethan audience actually believed in witches; a modern audience does not. What difference could this make in the reactions of the two groups to the prophecies of witches.
3. What is the difference between Macbeth's and Banquo's reactions to the witches? How will this affect the whole play?
4. Can the weird sisters "make" anything happen, or do they merely foresee the future? How do you know?
5. What does Lady Macbeth read in the letter from her husband?
6. What does Lady Macbeth fear about her husband?
7. In scenes 5 to 7, how much evidence can we find that Macbeth is more frightened by the plan to kill Duncan than Lady Macbeth is? Is there evidence that there has been previous discussion of the plan? If so, refer to the line or lines.
8. Rewrite Macbeth's soliloquy in your own words while retaining the original meaning (Act I, Scene vii, lines 1-28: "If it were done when 'tis done,").
9. How does Lady Macbeth manage to stiffen Macbeth's courage and determination? What arguments does she use to force Macbeth to kill Duncan?

Act II

1. In the brief dialogue between Banquo and Macbeth in the beginning of the Act, what do we learn about their regard for each other?
2. Analyze the "dagger" speech. In how many ways does Macbeth see the dagger? Is he becoming stronger or weaker in will ad determination than he revealed himself in Act One?
3. In what ways is the feeling of horror revealed and made impressive at the beginning of Scene Two.
4. What dramatic effect is produced by the knocking and by the actions of the Porter?
5. Why did Macbeth kill the Grooms? Was it a wise move? Explain. What reason did he give the others? How is Macbeth thinking at this point?
6. Why do Duncan's sons flee rather than remain to inherit the throne?

Act III

1. For what reasons does Macbeth want Banquo murdered? What reasons does he give the murderers? What does the conversation with the murderers reveal about Macbeth?
2. Do Scenes 1 and 2 taken together indicate that Macbeth has either fallen or risen in a moral sense? Explain.
3. Scene 4 is considered by many to be a turning point in the play. (You might agree or disagree) Explain why this might be considered the climax.

4. What dramatic purpose is served by the appearance of Banquo's ghost? How does Lady Macbeth act react in this horrible scene? Compare her behaviour with that of Macbeth.
5. In this act what hints or nuances are given of the gathering forces of opposition to Macbeth?
6. What does Lennox's and the other lord's conversation in Scene 6?

Act IV

1. Name all the devices Shakespeare uses in creating a feeling of horror and impending doom at the beginning of this act. Point these out in the play.
2. What are the three new prophecies the witches make to Macbeth? Which seems the most immediately dangerous? What effects do the witches' enhancements have upon Macbeth's morals?
3. For what did Macbeth deliberately search out the witches? Why does the answer horrify him?
4. What further moral degeneration does Macbeth show at the end of Scene 2?
5. Why might Ross' appearance at Macduff's castle represent a weakening of Macbeth's position? Do you think the Messenger who warns Lady Macduff might have been sent by Lady Macbeth? Give reasons for or against.
6. How does the murder of Macduff's family differ from that of Banquo?
7. In Scene 3, why does Malcolm misrepresent his own character to Macduff? How does Macduff's reaction as well as his horrible personal news set him up as a nemesis?

Act V

1. In Scene 1, what words by Lady Macbeth show that she has been brooding over the past crimes? Untangle the confused mixture of words to show which crime she dwells on most frequently. What is the reason for this?
2. What lines foreshadow (are harbingers) Lady Macbeth's death?
3. How does Macbeth react to his wife's death?
4. How is each of the witches' prophecies revealed? (Scenes 4, 5 and 8)
5. Trace the final mental state of Macbeth through significant speeches. Where does he show false braver which masks the underlying fear? Where does he reveal dependence upon the witches' prophecies? Where does he reveal the sense of betrayal by the witches? Where does he reveal his horrified realization of his mis-spent life?
6. In what ways does Macbeth show his better qualities in Scene 8? (i.e., bravery and humaneness)
7. What dramatic purpose might there be to having 8 short scenes in the last act?

After The Play

1. What do you feel towards Macbeth? Pity? Compassion? A sense of identification? Do you feel he might have been less responsible for his acts because the witches' prophecies tempted him?
2. How would you imagine each character looked? Draw, describe or cast the play with well known actors.
3. Find four examples of bird imagery, two of personification (hint: V,iii, 50; and IV, iii, 40), and three of dramatic irony.