

Macbeth Reading Guide

Act I

Scene i

1. Characterize the mood in this scene.
2. What do the witches prophesize?
3. List two examples of foreshadowing in this scene.

Scene ii

1. Who attacks Macbeth and Banquo?
2. How do Macbeth and Banquo react?
3. How does Macbeth fare against the Norwegians and the traitorous Thane of Cawdor?
4. Why does the King of Norway pay \$10,000 to the Scottish army?
5. How does the Thane of Cawdor pay for his treason?

Scene iii

1. Characterize the witches.
2. Why are they torturing the woman's husband?
3. How are they torturing the woman's husband?
4. Why is Macbeth's "so foul and fair a day" important?
5. What does Banquo say about the witches' appearance?
6. What three titles do the witches use to greet Macbeth?
7. Why are these titles significant?
8. What do the witches predict for Banquo?
9. How does Macbeth react to these predictions?
10. What news do Ross and Angus bring?
11. How does Macbeth feel when he learns that the witches' prophesy has come true?
12. Why do Macbeth and Banquo speak in asides in front of Ross and Angus?
13. What does Banquo mean when he says that the spirits sometimes tell part of a truth in order to deceive?
14. What new characteristic do we see in Macbeth during this scene?

Scene iv

1. What do we hear about the execution of the Thane of Cawdor?
2. Why is the king's comment about Macbeth full of dramatic irony?
3. How does Duncan plan to reward Macbeth?
4. What announcement does Duncan make? How does Macbeth react?
5. Why does Duncan invite himself to Macbeth's home?
6. What does Macbeth admit in his aside?

Scene v

1. What does Macbeth's letter say?
2. How does Lady Macbeth react?
3. How will she help her husband?
4. What is your assessment of Lady Macbeth's character?

Scene vi

5. Describe Duncan's arrival at Inverness.
6. Why is Lady Macbeth so polite?

Scene vii

1. What does Macbeth say in his first soliloquy?
2. Characterize Lady Macbeth.
3. How is Macbeth affected by his wife?

Act II

Scene i

1. Why is Banquo bothered by the Weird Sisters?
2. What prompts Macbeth's second soliloquy?
3. How is the mood different from when Duncan arrived?
4. Banquo almost draws his sword against an intruder. How is this dramatic irony?

Scene ii

1. Describe Lady Macbeth's attitude as she waits.
2. Why does the sound of Macbeth's voice startle her?
3. How does Macbeth describe what happened?
4. What can't Macbeth say "Amen"?
5. What does the voice in Macbeth's head say?
6. How does Macbeth describe sleep? How does this relate to the witches?
7. How does Lady Macbeth call him back to himself?
8. Why can't Macbeth listen to her?
9. How does Lady Macbeth react?
10. How is Macbeth doing? How does Lady Macbeth respond?
11. To what does the hand washing image allude?
12. How does Macbeth show signs of regret at the end of this scene?

Scene iii

1. Why does Shakespeare begin this scene with comedy?
2. What has been happening during the evening at Inverness?
3. Why do Macduff and Lennox come for the king?
4. Why is it important that Macbeth takes them to Duncan?
5. Why is it important that someone else finds Duncan's body?
6. How does Lady Macbeth react?
7. Why has Macbeth killed the suspected murderers?
8. Why are Malcolm and Donalbain silent through all of this? What is their course of action? Is this wise?

Scene iv

1. What is the purpose of this scene?
2. How does the old man describe the odd events of the past days?
3. Ross asks an important question. What is it?
4. Macduff offers an explanation. What is it?
5. How has Macbeth become king?

Act III

Scene i

1. How does Macbeth motivate the murderers?

2. Why does Macbeth say they need to kill Banquo?
3. Who else must die? Why?
4. How has your impression of Macbeth changed since Act I?

Scene ii

1. Lady Macbeth encourages Macbeth to forget what he has done. Is she following her own advice?
2. What aftereffects of murder is Macbeth struggling with?
3. What does Macbeth ask Lady Macbeth to do?
4. Why doesn't Macbeth tell his wife of his plans for Banquo?

Scene iii

1. What action occurs in this scene?
2. Who escapes? Why is this troublesome?
3. What does Banquo call for his son to do?

Scene iv

1. How does Macbeth try to maintain his dual identity?
2. How does Macbeth respond to the news that Fleance escaped?
3. How does the appearance of the ghost affect Macbeth?
4. How does Lady Macbeth explain her husband's actions?
5. To whom do they all drink? How is this ironic?
6. Why does Lady Macbeth unceremoniously dismiss everyone from dinner?
7. Why does Macbeth become so worried when he realizes that Macduff isn't present?
8. How will Macbeth find out about Macduff?
9. What indications do we get that Macbeth is struggling with guilt?

Scene v

1. What is the purpose of this scene?
2. Who is Hecate?
3. Why is she here?

Scene vi

1. How do you think Lennox (and others as well, most likely) put all of this together?
2. Describe Lennox's tone.
3. What is the purpose of the lord's long speech?
4. What is Macbeth's response to Macduff's refusal to see him?
5. How is Macbeth changing?

Act IV

Scene i

1. What are the three witches doing as the scene opens?
2. How do the ingredients of the potion suggest its purpose?
3. How has Macbeth's attitude toward the witches changed?
4. What three apparitions do they invoke?
5. How does each prophesy affect Macbeth?
6. What do we learn about Macduff?
7. What is Macbeth's plan?

Scene ii

1. What is Lady Macduff's reaction to her husband's escape?
2. Do you think Macduff is afraid or wise?
3. Why does Lady Macduff tell her son that his traitorous father is dead?
4. How would you characterize Macduff's son?
5. What provokes Macduff's son at the end?

Scene iii

1. Note the setting.
2. How does Macduff describe events in Scotland?
3. Why does Malcolm suspect Macduff may be an agent from Macbeth?
4. What does Macduff mean when he says, "I have lost my hopes"?
5. Malcolm asks a very important question. What is it?
6. Why doesn't Macduff answer?
7. How does Macduff finally convince Malcolm that he is genuine?
8. Why does Malcolm spend two pages trying to convince Macduff that he would be worse than Macbeth as king?
9. What news does Malcolm give Macduff?
10. Why is Macduff left speechless?
11. What do we learn about King Edward the Confessor?
12. How is Edward a foil for Macbeth?
13. What news does Ross bring?
14. Why does Ross lie about Macduff's family?
15. Why does Ross finally tell Macduff the truth?
16. How does Macduff react?
17. How does Malcolm urge him to react?
18. What does Macduff say?
19. What is about to happen when the scene ends?
20. Do you think Malcolm would make a good king?

Act V

Scene i

1. Note the setting.
2. This scene is small, quiet, and private. What does it show us?
3. What behaviors exhibit her "illness"?
4. Why is the attendant unwilling to tell the doctor what Lady Macbeth says?
5. Why does Lady Macbeth want a light beside her at all times?
6. How would you diagnose Lady Macbeth's illness?
7. What is your reaction to Lady Macbeth? What is the gentlewoman's response?
8. Why is it important that the doctor hears what Lady Macbeth says?
9. How has Lady Macbeth changed?

Scene ii

1. Who has gathered to oppose Macbeth?
2. Is Donalbain with them?
3. What do we learn about Macbeth?
4. Who seems to have the advantage in the impending battle?

Scene iii

1. Describe Macbeth's mood at the opening of the scene.
2. What news does he get of the impending battle?
3. Macbeth describes his regrets. What are they?
4. Do you think Macbeth shares his wife's guilt?
5. What does he ask of the doctor?
6. Why does the doctor want to be away from Dunsinane?

Scene iv

1. How will Birnam Wood come to Dunsinane?
2. Malcolm speculates that Macbeth's army is not ready to fight. How does Macduff respond?

Scene v

1. What is Macbeth's mood at the scene's opening?
2. What causes the scream he hears?
3. How does Macbeth react?
4. How does Macbeth respond to the news of the moving woods?

Scene vi

1. What action occurs here?

Scene vii

2. What does Macbeth mean when he compares himself to a bear tied to a stake?
3. Considering his desperate situation, how is Macbeth so arrogant when confronted by Young Siward?
4. Why does Macduff want to kill Macbeth so badly?
5. How is the battle going?

Scene viii

1. How must the play end?
2. Why does Macbeth refuse to take the Roman way out and kill himself?
3. Macbeth says he has killed too many Macduffs already. Do you think he regrets his actions?
4. How does the final prophecy come true?
5. How do you see Macbeth's refusal to surrender?
6. Why does Ross tell Siward that grieving for his son is senseless?
7. What additional information do we get about Lady Macbeth?
8. How does Macbeth fit the definition of a tragedy?