

Answer these questions in as much detail as possible in your workbook.

Scenes I and II

1. Identify the two settings for these scenes.
2. How is the witches' chant different from the major poetic style of the drama?

The witches' refrain serves as foreshadowing, as an example of paradox, and as one of the themes of the drama. Quote it.

3. Locate two similes that contribute to descriptions of Macbeth and Banquo.
4. Quote a further reference to a quality of Macbeth.

Scene III

5. Both Macbeth and Banquo speak of "foul" or "fair" aspects. Give examples.
6. Banquo refers to the witches' prophecies. What are those "predictions" given to Macbeth?

Quote the predictions that are given to Banquo.

7. Macbeth is addressed by Ross as "Thane of Cawdor." Why?
8. Report Macbeth's mixed feelings about one of the prophecies of the witches coming true.
9. How does Macbeth's reaction contrast to Banquo's reaction?

Application

1. In a letter to a friend, report a time that you were eager to see whether or not a prediction came true. (Perhaps you had read your horoscope in the daily paper or had your fortune told.) Report your feelings of expectations or nervousness as you awaited the event. Then, report your feelings after the prediction did or did not materialize.
2. Dress up as the witches and perform this scene. Different groups can interpret their appearance differently to see what varying affects are possible.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Macbeth

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

William Shakespeare was born in 1564 in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon, England. Although we have less information about his personal life than we would wish to, we know enough to be sure that he did indeed write the plays that made him known as the greatest of the world's dramatists. The son of John Shakespeare, a businessman and active citizen, Shakespeare presumably went to the town school, where he probably received a good education at the hands of a university-trained master. In 1582 he married Anne Hathaway; they had three children. Aside from these facts, all we know is that he reached London in the late 1580's and soon became well-known as a playwright and poet. In 1594 he helped form a theatre company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which in 1603 became the King's Men, and became a partner in the Globe Theatre, where the company performed. He supposedly acted small parts in his own plays, including the Ghost in *Hamlet*. His success in the theatre allowed him to purchase a family coat of arms, as well as one of the best houses in Stratford. He retired to his home town around 1611 and lived there until his death on April 23, 1616.

MAJOR WORKS

Shakespeare wrote over three dozen plays, as well as sonnets and two long narrative poems. His plays are generally classified as histories, comedies, tragedies, and romances. Principal examples of each type are

- Histories: *Richard II*, *Henry IV* (Parts I and II), *Richard III*. About the struggles for power in fourteenth and fifteenth century England
- Comedies: *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*. About young lovers overcoming obstacles; full of clowning and mistaken identities
- Tragedies: *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*. About the deaths of kings and other high people, whether through error or crime
- Romances: *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*. About the reuniting of separated lovers and families; full of magic and mystery

See Related Reading for works by Shakespeare specifically connected to *Macbeth*.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS

Macbeth, like many other of Shakespeare's plays, explores good and evil in the lives of its characters. In this play a man with many good qualities is corrupted by the lust for power until he becomes a monstrous perversion of the good general and loyal lord he had been. Yet, even at his death, he retains hints of the traits that helped him in his rise and that make his fall so tragic. If *Macbeth* shows us that no one is beyond the reach of evil, *Lady Macbeth* shows that the effects of wrongdoing cannot be escaped, even by those who believe themselves most hardened to them. In the end her madness and his reflections on the meaninglessness of a life twisted by greed and crime convey the truth that evil means never lead to good ends.

In addition to these two great characters, Shakespeare creates numerous other memorable figures. Through the witches he questions how much we control our own lives and how much of what happens to us is due to forces beyond us. *Macduff* and *Banquo* demonstrate that it is possible to resist temptation and suggest that, even though one may suffer for one's refusal to be corrupted, justice will finally be done. In the character of the Porter, Shakespeare's comic skills are used to balance and enhance the tragic effects at their height.

Shakespeare is also the greatest master of blank verse, the unrhymed iambic pentameter that was the accepted form for Elizabethan drama. The language of *Macbeth* is exceptionally vivid, filled with phrases that have become part of our speech "fair is foul and foul is fair"; "what's done cannot be undone"; "out, damned spot." Other writers have dipped into *Macbeth* for titles and subjects from Frost's "Out, Out ..." to Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. The play's great speeches, particularly the soliloquys of *Macbeth* and *Lady Macbeth*, are among the finest in all of Shakespeare. *Macbeth* is particularly notable for its use of repeated imagery. Night, darkness, blood, clothing, and savage or ominous animals all recur frequently, adding to the play's grim atmosphere and helping to drive home its themes.

RELATED READING

- Shakespeare's *Richard III* is another tale of an ambitious ruler who rises to the crown through unscrupulous means, then falls to his doom. *Julius Caesar* treats the subject of ambition in an ancient Roman setting.
- F.E. Halliday's *The Life of Shakespeare* or Marchette Chute's *Shakespeare of London* are readable biographies detailing Shakespeare's life and times, while G.B. Harrison's *Introducing Shakespeare* is an accessible general introduction. E.M.W. Tillyard's *The Elizabethan World Picture* explains the views of society and the universe common in that era.