

Macbeth: Scene by Scene Study Questions

ACT I scene i

1. Describe the mood and atmosphere in the first scene. Why does Shakespeare attempt to make the audience uneasy?
2. What main character is mentioned? What future event?
3. You are the director. How would you cast the witches? What would they wear? How would they look? How would they speak?

ACT I scene ii

1. List the several qualities described to us that reveal Macbeth as a hero.
2. Why are King Duncan and Malcolm not in battle?
3. What kind of king does Duncan seem to be? How is he treated by those around him?
4. How do Macbeth and Banquo appear in this scene? Since this is a play about Macbeth, why has he not yet appeared?
5. Who are the primary traitors to Duncan? What does Macbeth do to such persons? What can be **foreshadowed** of Macbeth's **later character**?
6. What title is given to Macbeth as a reward at the end of the scene? Why does he receive this title?

ACT I scene iii

1. List several phrases that reveal the witches' evil nature, their vengefulness, their supernatural powers. What limits are there upon the witches' powers?
2. Name the three prophecies given to both Macbeth and Banquo. Describe the reaction each has to these prophecies.
3. After Ross informs Macbeth of his new appointment, what lines reveal Macbeth's ambition? What decision does Macbeth make regarding his political future?
4. What is Banquo's warning to Macbeth concerning the witches?
5. Describe the two clothing images found in this scene. What is their function?
6. Identify and explain a speech by Macbeth that sounds false.
7. Trace Macbeth's inner conflict as revealed by his asides.

ACT I scene iv

1. Why juxtapose Duncan's comment on the recently executed Cawdor with the arrival of Macbeth and Banquo?
2. Why is Macbeth so upset about Malcolm being proclaimed *Prince of Cumberland*? Why does Duncan choose this occasion for the announcement?

3. Read over the speeches given by Macbeth and Banquo. Which seems the most sincere? Why?

ACT I scene v

1. Describe Lady Macbeth's character as revealed in her opening speeches. How does she view her role in the enterprise at hand?
2. What images are revealed in her soliloquy? What moods do they create in the reader?
3. According to Lady Macbeth, what is Macbeth's "problem"?
4. What does Lady Macbeth foreshadow in her speech?
5. What is Macbeth's reaction to his wife's proposal for the murder of King Duncan that very night?

ACT I scene vi

1. How does King Duncan's opening speech intensify the apprehension of the reader?
2. How does Lady Macbeth give a dazzling example of what she earlier told Macbeth he should do?

ACT I scene vii

1. Read over Macbeth's soliloquy. What reasons does Macbeth offer for not murdering King Duncan? What images suggest Macbeth's sense of guilt? Fear? Identify **one** reason Macbeth gives for the murder.
2. Follow Lady Macbeth's methods of argument through the scene. Describe her tactics and devices. Why is Macbeth convinced by Lady Macbeth's arguments?
3. How does Macbeth seem to "echo" his wife from earlier on when he utters his final speech? What does this "echo" tell the reader about Macbeth's character?

Act II scene i

1. Identify the phrases that suggest the darkness of the night.
2. What is bothering Banquo in his opening speech?
3. Re-read Macbeth's first three-line speech. What lesson does Macbeth seem to have learned?
4. Why is Banquo so careful in his reply to Macbeth's, "It shall make honour for you"?
5. In this scene Macbeth delivers a great speech. Identify his expressions of fear and determination. What images are suggestive of the murder and horror of the deed? What feelings might be created in the audience during this soliloquy? Detail the similarities to Lady Macbeth's earlier speech.

Act II scene ii

1. What details create unbearable tension at the opening of the scene?

2. What indications are there in Lady Macbeth's opening comments that she is not in fact as strong as she would like to be?
3. What line shows that Macbeth is fearful? Conscience stricken?
4. What is Lady Macbeth's reaction to her husband's weakness?
5. What effect is achieved with the pounding at the gate?
6. Account for the dramatic power of Macbeth's closing lines.

Act II scene iii

1. What dramatic purposes are served by the Porter's speech? (consider both comic and serious)
2. What is the key word repeating itself, in one form or another, through the speeches delivered by the Porter? How does this word relate to a major theme of the play? What is the fate of all those who are discussed by the Porter?
3. Identify and explain an example of *pathetic fallacy*.
4. Identify the speeches from both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth that demonstrate that they are not fully under control.
5. Is Lady Macbeth's fainting spell real or false? Why or why not?
6. Why do King Duncan's sons decide to flee? How does this decision help Macbeth? Why two separate countries?
7. What theme is commented upon in the closing speeches in this scene?
8. Identify the uses of irony throughout this scene. Which passage is most intense?

Act II scene iv

1. Why do we need the account from the Old Man?
2. Identify the examples of *pathetic fallacy*.
3. What purpose does Macduff serve in this scene?
4. What phrases suggest Macduff is suspicious of Macbeth?
5. Identify and explain the clothing imagery.
6. To what extent has Macbeth's plan worked?

Act III scene i

1. If Banquo is as sure as he seems of Macbeth's guilt, why does he not rise up as a leader against Macbeth?
2. What valuable information does the reader gain from Banquo?
3. Why does Macbeth fear Banquo?

4. In this scene, Macbeth goes to considerable effort to explain to the murderers why they should kill Banquo. What does this tell us about Macbeth's state of mind? What kind of imagery is used in this section that should catch one's eye? Why?
5. Reflect upon Macbeth's speeches to the murderers and suggest how he has changed?

Act III scene ii

1. This scene is filled with tension. Identify the phrases that reveal Macbeth's fear and his sense of guilt. There are a number of images referring to the darkness and sleep. Why can't Macbeth sleep? What does the darkness symbolize?
2. Look at Lady Macbeth's speech and compare this to Macbeth's. What is the essential horror of the similarity?
3. What, according to Macbeth, seems to be one of his main problems since he has become king?
4. Lady Macbeth suggested to Macbeth earlier that he must "look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under it." When Macbeth suggests the same thing here, why is Lady Macbeth so upset?
5. In this scene Macbeth says to Lady Macbeth, "Be innocent of the knowledge...deed." What does this reveal about the nature of their relationship? How has it changed since the beginning of the play?
6. Why is Macbeth's final speech the perfect closing for this scene?

Act III scene iii

1. How is suspense and a sense of horror created in this scene?
2. Some critics have suggested that the third murderer is Macbeth himself. What comments suggest that might be so?
3. Why must Fleance die as well as Banquo? What is significant of Fleance's escape?
4. Why might this scene be considered the turning point of the play?

Act III scene iv

1. How are the actions of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in this scene similar to those of Act II scene iii?
2. What is Macbeth's reaction to the murderer's report?
3. Comment on the irony of the ghost's appearance at the banquet.
4. Describe Lady Macbeth's desperate attempts to save the situation.
5. The ghost scene has important dramatic and character significance. What makes the ghost's second appearance even more dramatically powerful? To what extent is Macbeth now suspected by the other Lords? What evidence is there that Macbeth's mind is overwhelmed with guilt? What signs are there that the marital relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth has cracks?

6. Describe how Macbeth has changed from the man we heard about in Act I to the man we meet in Act III.
7. Macbeth determines a course of action at the end of the scene. Describe his plans.

Act III scene vi

1. Compare the mood of this scene with that of Act III scene iv.
2. What is Lennox's opinion of Macbeth? Provide examples.
3. Why do we need information about Malcolm and Macduff at this point in the play?
4. What appears to be the general state of affairs in Scotland? Provide specific examples from the text.

Act IV scene i

1. What are the witches doing at the opening of this scene? What does this tell us about their character?
2. Identify the three apparitions and the warnings each give Macbeth. What is Macbeth's reaction to the apparitions and especially to the line of kings?
3. Review Macbeth's final speech in this scene and suggest why the audience knows he is irrevocably doomed. How has he deteriorated from the great man he once was?

Act IV scene ii

1. What details create tension at the beginning of the scene?
2. What possesses Macduff to leave his family behind unprotected?
3. What feelings are revealed in the conversation between Lady Macduff and her son?
4. Why does Shakespeare send this warning to Lady Macduff to leave?
5. Identify the example of equivocation found in Lady Macduff's speech.
6. At the end of this scene, how do we view Macbeth?

Act IV scene iii

This long scene slows down the action before the excitement and confusion of the last Act. It also develops the character of Malcolm and Macduff, the two men who will save Scotland from the tyranny of Macbeth. This is also the *testing* scene. Malcolm, although young, is no fool. At the same time, Shakespeare tells the audience what characteristics are essential for a good king. **Record the characteristics that Malcolm and Macduff believe are essential for a good ruler.**

1. Why does Malcolm distrust Macduff at first? What test does he devise to prove Macduff's loyalty? How does it work?
2. What is the vice on which Macduff finally breaks? Why?
3. Why, according to his explanation, has Malcolm given Macduff such a harsh test?
4. Why does the audience become tense when Ross appears?

5. Discuss the dramatic power of Ross' revelation to Macduff. Assess Malcolm's remarks and advice to Macduff.

Act V scene i

1. How does the conversation between the Doctor and the Gentlewoman create suspense? Why won't the Gentlewoman report to the Doctor what she has heard?
2. Describe the gestures Lady Macbeth makes during her sleepwalking. Why does she do this?
3. What feelings, if any, are evoked in the reader for Lady Macbeth at this point in the play?
4. Explain the bitter irony of Lady Macbeth's deterioration in this particular form.

Act V scene ii

1. What is the first word in this scene to catch our attention? Why? What is the second word with the same effect?
2. Note the example of clothing imagery.
3. Note the medical imagery.

Act V scene iii

1. Why does Macbeth talk of Malcolm as born of woman? Why does Macbeth not say the same for Macduff?
2. Why is Macbeth so furious with the frightened servant?
3. Describe the tone and emotions suggested by Macbeth's soliloquy. Why does the audience respect Macbeth for this soliloquy?
4. Why are Macbeth's questions to the Doctor poignant?
5. Note Macbeth's use of the imagery of medicine. What is the difference between this point of view and the one by the opposition to Macbeth?

Act V scene iv

1. Why should the audience be informed of the equivocation involved in the third apparition's prediction before Macbeth experiences it?

Act V scene v

1. Describe the reaction Macbeth has upon hearing the news of his wife's death.
2. Identify the two or more ways of interpreting the line, "She should have died hereafter."
3. Why do we pity Macbeth in his speech beginning, "I have almost forgot the taste of fear"?
4. What are the ideas and the mood expressed in the "tomorrow and tomorrow" soliloquy? What is the extended metaphor in this soliloquy?
5. Note Macbeth's reply to the report that Birnam Wood was moving. What does this suggest about his mental state? Do we sympathize?

6. Why does Macbeth go roaring off to fight the enemy? How do we feel about Macbeth when he determines to fight?

Act V scenes vi - viii

1. How do the prophecies of the witches come true for Macbeth?
2. What factors cause us to pity Macbeth? To despise him?
3. Read over Malcolm's final speech of the play. What feelings does it leave the audience with? Do you feel that his description of the Macbeths is appropriate? How does Malcolm's last word provide a fitting conclusion to the play?