

Student Projects

*The suggestions below will help you extend your learning about Shakespeare and the history behind **Macbeth**. The categories give choices for researching, writing, speaking, and visual activities. You are also encouraged to design your own project.*

The Historian's Study

1. Suppose that you are asked to be a consultant for a production of *Macbeth*. The director wants the costumes to be as historically accurate as possible. Prepare some guidelines for authentic *Macbeth* costuming.
2. Present a live broadcast of an event that might have made news during Shakespeare's time. Resources such as *Chronicle of the World* or Grun's *The Timetables of History* are helpful.
3. Compare Shakespeare's portrayal of the witches with descriptions in *Compendium Maleficarum* or Reginald Scot's *The Discovery of Witchcraft*. Note where Shakespeare followed the common belief and where he heightened the powers of his witches.
4. Prepare a report or display about the tactics used to attack and defend castles.
5. Explore whether Lady Macbeth can truly be called the "fourth witch" in Shakespeare's play. Consider whether she uses any language that was commonly used by witches and the resemblance between her sleepwalking scene and the witches' public repentance. *Witches and Jesuits: Shakespeare's Macbeth* by Garry Wills (Oxford University Press, 1995) is an excellent source.
6. Find out more about one of the topical references in *Macbeth*, such as
 - the Gowrie Conspiracy
 - the murder of Lord Darnley
 - the Ruthven conspiracy
 - the Gunpowder Plot
7. Shakespeare referred to the King's Touch to please King James. Write an explanation of the King's Touch that could be used to interpret lines 162–165 in act 4 scene 3.
8. Act 5 scene 3 has several references to medical diagnosis and treatment during Shakespeare's time. Prepare a report or display about Renaissance medicine.
9. Create a timeline showing what was happening around the world at the time Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*.
10. Explore ideas about witchcraft in the early 1600s. Sources you might use include Reginald Scot's *The Discovery of Witchcraft*, King James' *Demonologie*, and Fr. Gerard's autobiography.

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11. Explore how fears about a Catholic uprising against England's Protestant rulers influenced popular reaction to the Gunpowder Plot. You might compare these fears to American fears of Communist insurrection in the 1950s.
12. Compare the way the entrance to Macbeth's castle is described in act 2 scene 1 to the way medieval morality plays depict the gates of Hell. Glynne Wickham's article on "Hell-Castle and its Door-Keeper" in *Shakespeare Survey* 19, 1966, is a helpful source.
13. King James' ideals of the good king are found in his *Basilicon Doron* and speeches made to Parliament on the divine right of kings. Speculate about how the monarch's ideals might have influenced the way Shakespeare portrays the character of Duncan.
14. Create a display or multimedia production on the stage history of *Macbeth*. You might include famous actors and directors associated with the play. You could also concentrate on one production, such as Orson Welles' all-black version in 1936.

The Artist's Studio

1. Create a model of Macbeth's castle. Historically, his castle would have been a *rath*, or set of fortified wooden buildings. You might model a rath, your idea of how Macbeth's castle would have been presented at the Globe, or a castle that might be used in a modern production.
2. Create a musical or artistic composition that shows the tension between order and disorder in *Macbeth*.
3. Provide music to accompany a production of *Macbeth*. You might compose music for a particular scene of the play or select several existing pieces and identify when they would be played.
4. Make a diagram or model of a set that could be used in a production of *Macbeth*.
5. Create a visual organizer that shows the structure of the play. One structure that you might use is Order/Complication/Resolution.
6. Draw one of Macbeth's hallucinations.
7. Create a portrait of one of the characters in *Macbeth*. Indicate which passages in the play influenced your portrayal of the character.
8. Draw or paint Shakespeare's shield of arms.
9. Make a model that shows how a particular special effect might have been created at the Globe Theatre. You might explore how trapdoors, painted screens, and lever-operated cloud thrones were used. Hodges' *The Third Globe* (Wayne State University Press, 1979) is an excellent source.
10. Find several different portraits of Shakespeare. (Two of the most famous, by Chandoes and Droeschout, are reproduced in Campbell and Quinn's *The Readers' Encyclopedia of Shakespeare*. Display the portrait(s) you feel are most representative of what Shakespeare was really like. Include an explanation of why you chose the portrait(s) you did.

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The Writer's Workshop

1. List several current slang expressions. Then see if you can find expressions that have similar meanings in Shakespeare. You could also make a dictionary of Shakespearean expressions.
2. Trace an image throughout the play. Look for repeated references to a particular topic, such as disorder, alarm bells, sickness, light, dark, blood, deceit, treachery, healing the country, or disarranged garments. Then explain what these references contribute to the meaning of the play.
3. Shakespeare wrote in iambic pentameter. Experiment with other forms of syllabic verse. You might write a *haiku*, with five syllables in line 1, seven syllables in line 2, and five syllables in line 3. You could also create a *tanka*, which is a haiku plus two more lines of seven syllables each. Other syllabic verse forms include *sept* (1, 2, 3, 4, 3, 2, 1 syllables), *septet* (3, 5, 7, 9, 7, 5, 3 syllables), and *lanternes* (1, 2, 3, 4, 1 syllables). You might also invent your own form of syllabic verse.
4. Write a prequel to the play that explains how Macbeth developed his ambition to be king.
5. Listen to music based on the story of Macbeth, such as the symphonic poem by Richard Strauss or Verdi's opera. Then write a review about how the mood and themes of the musical work compare to those of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.
6. Read James Thurber's short story "The Macbeth Murder Mystery" from his *My World and Welcome to It*. Then write your own creative response to the story. You might write a response to the American lady who complains about *Macbeth*. You might also write your own original short story about the play or people's reactions to it.
7. Write an essay exploring why Lady Macbeth has such influence over her husband.
8. Shakespeare's audience would expect Macbeth to be damned because of his involvement in rebellion and conjuring the dead. Compare Shakespeare's *Macbeth* with another work about someone who made a pact with the devil, such as Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," Benét's "The Devil and Daniel Webster," or a drama about Dr. Faust.
9. Read one of the classic accounts of Medea—plays by Euripides or Seneca or Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Then compare Medea to Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth.
10. Write an introduction to *Macbeth* that prepares other students to read and understand the play.
11. Macbeth describes how he kills the grooms in act 2 scene 2. Rewrite this description so that the murder scene is acted out rather than talked about. Then give your opinion about why Shakespeare chose to describe rather than show these murders.
12. Read any one of Richard Armour's *Twisted Tales from Shakespeare* except "Macbeth." Then write your own "twisted" version of the Scottish play.
13. Write a diary entry that Lady Macbeth might have written shortly before her sleepwalking scene.

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14. Read Thomas De Quincey's essay "The Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*," available in editions of his works and numerous critical anthologies. Then write an essay on your reaction to one aspect of the play, using De Quincey's comments as your model.
15. Write a dialogue about a modern-day problem using language that Shakespeare might have used. Try to include some of Shakespeare's favorite rhetorical devices, such as puns, insults, and elaborate comparisons.

The Speaker's Platform

1. Shakespeare expresses many ideas about political order in a speech by Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida* (1.3.78–134). Prepare an oral interpretation of the speech. After you perform the speech, lead a discussion about how its ideas apply to *Macbeth*.
2. Create and conduct a game show such as *Jeopardy!* based on the play. You might include such categories as Famous Shakespearean Quotations (FSQ's), characters, and plot developments.
3. Prepare an infomercial to encourage other students to read *Macbeth*. You might videotape your performance for next year's classes.
4. Suppose that you are directing a new production of *Macbeth*. Prepare some remarks for the first rehearsal explaining your idea of the play and the atmosphere you want to create.
5. Create an eyewitness news report based on a scene from the play.
6. Organize a talk show with Lady Macbeth as a guest. You might want to include her husband and a marriage counselor.
7. With a classmate, conduct a Siskel-and-Ebert-style review of *Macbeth*.
8. Choose a prop that you think would be important to a modern production of *Macbeth*. Explain why you chose this prop, and demonstrate how it might be used.
9. Explain how a scene from *Macbeth* might be presented on a modern stage. Use visuals or models to illustrate your concept.
10. Conduct a trial of one of the characters in the play. Determine the charges, choose classmates to play the roles of prosecutor, witnesses, and judge, and perform the trial for your class.
11. Introduce the witches into another scene of the play. Keep Shakespeare's original text, but add the witches' comments about what's going on. For example, you might add the witches' observations about what's going on at the banquet scene to act 3 scene 4. You could then invite your classmates to read your adapted version aloud.
12. Pantomime Macbeth's encounter with Banquo's ghost or Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene. Be ready to describe how you developed the facial expressions and body language you used for your role.
13. Choose a scene from the play that is open to several interpretations. For example, does Macbeth really see Banquo's ghost? Then direct a performance of the scene according to your interpretation. If possible, present your scene with another director's interpretation of the same scene.

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14. Present a performance of music used in Shakespeare's plays. Harbage's *Shakespeare's Songs* is a good source; local colleges and universities may also have helpful resources.
15. Plan the staging of act 1 scene 3. Issues to consider include
 - whether the witches are simply figments of Macbeth's imagination
 - the extent of any supernatural powers the witches might have
 - special effects to use
16. Suppose that you are going to act the part of a character in *Macbeth*. Choose one scene or act from the play and create stage directions for your character. Include instructions for tone of voice and physical movement.
17. Present a review of a performance of *Macbeth*, whether on video or onstage. You might work with a partner to present a program similar to Siskel and Ebert's. Topics to consider include
 - believability of character portrayal and motivation
 - pacing—did parts of the performance drag or move too quickly to be understood?
 - themes (such as evil, loyalty, and the nature of a good king)
 - qualities that make this performance a good (or bad) production, such as staging, lighting, and costuming