

Edexcel English Literature GCSE

Brief Overview: Macbeth

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Brief Overview

Act 1

Act 1, Scene 1 - Opens with the three witches meeting, and they arrange to meet Macbeth. This is the first mention of Macbeth in the play. The scene establishes the witches as having power over the events of the play and the characters.

Act 1, Scene 2 - The Captain gives a report on the battle to Duncan, during which he praises Macbeth. We learn that Macbeth is to be given the Thane of Cawdor's title.

Act 1, Scene 3 - The witches meet again on a heath, Macbeth and Banquo arrive and meet the witches, who give them both prophecies. Banquo is sceptical, but Macbeth wants to learn more. Macbeth is told that he is now Thane of Cawdor by Ross and Angus.

Act 1, Scene 4 - When Macbeth and Banquo return to the palace they meet with King Duncan who thanks them for their heroism in the battle. He announces that he will make his son, Malcolm, the next heir to the throne.

Act 1, Scene 5 - Lady Macbeth reads a letter from Macbeth explaining the witches prophecies, and she doubts that he is strong enough but is determined to help him. When Macbeth arrives home they plan to kill Duncan.

Act 1, Scene 6 - Banquo and Duncan arrive at Macbeth's castle, and describe it similarly to Eden. Lady Macbeth greets them.

Act 1, Scene 7 - Macbeth doesn't want to kill Duncan but Lady Macbeth persuades him to by insulting him and his masculinity.

Act 2

Act 2, Scene 1 - Banquo discusses the night and it's unnatural darkness. He has dreamt about the Witches' prophecies and has been tempted by them but has resisted, when Macbeth tries to bribe him he resists again. Macbeth hallucinates and sees a dagger, leading him to kill Duncan. Offstage, Duncan is murdered.



Act 2, Scene 2 - Lady Macbeth remarks at her ability in planning the murder and drugging the guards. Macbeth returns from killing Duncan, feeling guilty and covered in blood.

Act 2, Scene 3 - The porter, drunk, likens himself to a porter of hell. He describes sins that mirror Macbeth's actions. Macduff discovers that Duncan is dead, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth fake their shock at this. Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, arrive and are told their father has been killed, most likely by his guards. They flee to England and Ireland in fear.

Act 2, Scene 4 - Ross and an old man discuss the recent events and reflect on the reversal of the natural order. Macbeth is made king by the other lords.

Act 3

Act 3, Scene 1 - Banquo reveals he has suspicions about Duncan's death but doesn't say anything, and is invited to a feast by Macbeth. After Banquo leaves, Macbeth thinks about the witches prophecy and realises that Banquo stands in his way of fulfilling them. He then meets with two murderers and plots Banquo's murder.

Act 3, Scene 2 - Lady Macbeth reveals her concerns about the stability of their reign, and Macbeth discusses his issue of Banquo with her but does not tell her of his plan.

Act 3, Scene 3 - Banquo is murdered but his son, Fleance, escapes.

Act 3, Scene 4 - Macbeth hosts a banquet and is told that Banquo has been killed, but Fleance escaped. Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost at the banquet and Lady Macbeth has to take control. The night ends in chaos.

Act 3, Scene 5 - Witches meet with Hecate, who predicts their next meeting with Macbeth, but tells them that this time he will come of his own accord. She then scolds them for helping Macbeth gain power, telling them to trick him into false security and send him to his doom.

Act 3, Scene 6 - Lennox and the other lords discuss recent events. Malcolm and Macduff have left for England to raise an army. People are beginning to suspect Macbeth.



Act 4

Act 4, Scene 1 - Macbeth meets the witches again and receives three apparitions about his future: to beware of Macduff, that no one of *“woman born”* can harm him, and that he will never be defeated until *“Birnam Wood [come] to high Dunsinane hill”*.

Act 4, Scene 2 - Lady Macduff describes Macduff as a traitor, saying he has betrayed her by going to England. Macbeth has Lady Macduff and their son killed.

Act 4, Scene 3 - Malcolm tests Macduff loyalty and decides to trust him. Ross arrives and tells them they need to go back to Scotland. He later tells Macduff that Macbeth has killed his wife and child, Malcolm tells Macduff to take revenge.

Act 5

Act 5, Scene 1 - Lady Macbeth is sleepwalking and obsessively washing her hands (re-enacting the murder and trying to wash the blood off her hands). The doctor comes to visit her but says that she is possessed and he cannot heal her.

Act 5, Scene 2 - The army is marching towards Dunsinane. Macbeth is going mad.

Act 5, Scene 3 - Macbeth shows hubris and is cruel to Seyton. The doctor tells him about Lady Macbeth.

Act 5, Scene 4 - Malcolm tells the army to carry boughs in front of them to disguise their numbers.

Act 5, Scene 5 - In the middle of battle Macbeth finds out that Lady Macbeth has died. He no longer feels fear. He is told that the woods are moving and there is going to be a siege.

Act 5, Scene 6 - The army, including Malcolm, Siward, and Macduff, has reached the castle. They reveal themselves from under the branches and blow trumpets.

Act 5, Scene 7 - Macbeth kills young Siward. Macduff wants to avenge his family so he looks for Macbeth. The castle is being defeated, Macbeth's forces are betraying him.



Act 5, Scene 8 - Macduff faces Macbeth, but Macbeth thinks he can't be killed. Macduff then reveals that he was born by caesarean section rather than a natural birth. Macbeth dies. Malcolm is crowned King of Scotland and vows to restore order.

