

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES ON *MACBETH*

MACBETH DILEMMAS

Preparing to stage a play involves asking questions and pursuing solutions to problems and difficulties. The questions our directors, designers and actors asked themselves about *Macbeth* were similar to those that follow. Have your class try to find their own answers.

1. Text

Make a list of the characters in *Macbeth* who tell the truth when they talk to other characters, and another list of those who lie. What do these two lists tell you about the atmosphere of the play? About its characters? About how these characters could be acted?

2. Costumes

What should King Duncan look like? How old is he? How vigorous? What should he wear? What are his king's robes like? What overall image should be projected? Try a few sketches for a costume for Duncan, basing your details on evidence in the play itself. (Look for clues in what he says about himself and what others say about him.)

3. Music

What sort of music, scored for what kinds of instruments, should be heard in *Macbeth*? Make a list of instruments – or sounds – that might be suitable.

4. Staging

Each of the various locations in *Macbeth* has its own atmosphere. Consider three distinct locations – the castle of the Macbeths, the castle of the Macduffs and the scene in England – and discuss how, by means of lighting, design, sound and staging, these three places can be differentiated. Why is that sense of difference important?

MAPPING THE SCENE

In small groups, students examine the scene of Duncan's murder. Draw a floor plan for Macbeth's castle and map out the movements of all characters involved in this scene. Pay

particular attention to the dialogue between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth: it will provide valuable clues. Devise a legend and make sure all plans are clear. Students share their work with the other groups.

CONVERSATIONS FOR TWO

This improvisational activity will help students think about the themes of the story. With a partner, students brainstorm different scenarios to fit the following situations. They then carry out a conversation. If comfortable, they can share their conversations with the rest of the class. Discuss the different choices made by pairs working with the same scenario.

1. Two friends discuss their visit to a fortune teller at the local fair and discover that they have both been told they will get a date with the same boy or girl.
2. A man discusses with his wife how he will have to betray a co-worker to get a desired promotion.
3. Two friends arrive home together after a party at another friend's house. One discovers her wallet is missing from her purse. She left it unattended in a hallway at the party. Who could have taken it?
4. Two friends are talking about a strange happening. One friend's horoscope had predicted financial success today, and now s/he has won money on the lottery. Was this fate or merely coincidence?
5. Two friends are discussing a recent crime at the school. One friend suspects the other and tries to discover if his/her suspicions are accurate.

EVIL INTENTIONS

Lady Macbeth and King Duncan compliment one another when they first meet at Macbeth's castle in Act I, scene 6. Lady Macbeth's gracious words mask her evil intentions.

In pairs, students read through the conversation between Lady Macbeth and Duncan. *Does Duncan sense the hypocrisy of Lady Macbeth?*

Students read through the lines again, this time making exaggerated facial expressions that

depict the secret thoughts and desires of Lady Macbeth. Students do the same with Duncan's lines. *Is he completely honest in the words he speaks, or does he too have a hidden agenda?*

REVISITING THE STORY

Below, the plot of *Macbeth* has been simplified into five basic actions, one for each act:

Act I: The witches' predictions

Act II: The murder of Duncan

Act III: The murder of Banquo

Act IV: The murder of Lady Macduff

Act V: Crime doesn't pay

1. Students form groups, each of which will create and present a series of five tableaux depicting each of these key images.
2. Students then add seven more key images or actions to the summary.
3. The groups can present their 12-part tableaux sequences, adding background music to bridge the transition from one tableau to the next.
4. Students can title each of the 12 images or action in the sequence with sensational newspaper headlines. They should decide for what kind of newspaper they are writing, and the class can discuss how their headlines would differ if they were writing for *The Globe and Mail*, *The Toronto Sun*, *Now* magazine, *The National Enquirer*, a community newspaper, etc.

INSIDE THE MIND OF A MACBETH

In this exercise, students identify the thoughts inside the main characters' soliloquies.

Divide the class into two groups. Give each group a soliloquy – for example, Lady Macbeth's "The raven himself is hoarse" (Act I, scene 5) and Macbeth's "Is this a dagger which I see before me" (Act II, scene 1). Have them read the speech as a chorus, exploring the range of their voices and different tones and rhythms. Have each student decide on his or her favourite line of the speech.

Pick one to five students in each group to play the main character. This student (or students; if more than one, have them divide the speech into equal parts) will read the whole soliloquy while the others move around him or her in a circle, chanting the favourite lines they have chosen in different rhythms, tones and pitches. Have the chorus establish itself before the central character begins speaking. When the soliloquy is over, the chorus voices should fade out.

As a class, discuss the feeling of being inside the circle. Repeat the exercise with different students as the main characters, and then discuss whether the experience was different for the group. Have a final discussion about the idea of a person's thoughts driving him or her to action or to madness.

MODERN MOVIE TRAILERS

After the class has read the play, discuss genres and modern cinematic treatments it lends itself to (for example, war movie, crime drama or political thriller).

Divide the class into groups of five or six and have each group pick a genre or treatment for their cinematic version of the play. Each group will storyboard a trailer for their movie (or film the trailer if video equipment is available). The trailer should include voiceovers and lines from the play to entice an audience of their peers to see the movie.

Have each group pitch its trailer to the class. The students should act out their trailers or show their videos.

SCULPTURE GALLERY

Divide the class into groups of three. Instruct each group to designate each of its members as either A, B or C. Group member A will be the "artist," while group members B and C are the "clay."

Instruct the "artists" to use the "clay" to create a sculpture that captures the essence of the given line. Artists must be sure to work *gently* with their clay, and remember that the clay can be transformed into both inanimate objects or people, and can be manipulated to create facial expression, suggest bold movement or create

different levels. Artists must also be sure to creatively incorporate the index card into the sculpture so that it may easily be read. After about five minutes, the artists may be invited to freely walk through the sculpture gallery and appreciate each other's wonderful works of art.

Repeat so that group members B and C each have turns to be the artist. The following are examples of quotes that may be used:

If chance will have me King, why, chance may crown me. (Act I, sc. 3, 143)

Make thick my blood, stop up the access and passage to remorse. (Act I, sc. 5, 43-44)

Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under't. (Act I, sc. 5, 65-66)

This even-handed justice commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice to our own lips. (Act I, sc. 7, 10-12)

I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only vaulting ambition. (Act I, sc. 7, 25-27)

But screw your courage to the sticking place, and we'll not fail. (Act I, sc. 7, 61-62)

False face must hide what false heart doth know. (Act I, sc. 7, 83)

Is this a dagger I see before me, the handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee. (Act II, sc. 1, 33-35)

Methought I heard a voice cry "Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep." (Act II, sc. 2, 35-36)

Go get some water, and wash this filthy witness from your hand.

(Act II, sc. 2, 46-47)

Here's a knocking indeed! If a man were porter of hell-gate, he should have old turning the key. (Act II, sc. 3, 1-2)

O horror! Horror! Horror! Tongue nor heart cannot conceive, nor name thee! (Act II, sc. 3, 64-65)

Here lay Duncan, his silver skin lac'd with his golden blood. (Act II, sc. 3, 112-113)

