

Macbeth: Act I Reading and Study Guide

I. Vocabulary: Be able to define the following words and understand them when they appear in the play. Also, be prepared to be quizzed on these words.

hurly-burly: noisy disorder and confusion

thane: a member of an aristocratic class and holds land

whence: from what place

valor: bravery

minion: loyal servant

ought: anything

prophetic: predicting future events as if by supernatural forces

surmise: guess based on incomplete facts

harbinger: sign of future events

adage: a saying that expresses a common observation; proverb

II. Background Info:

Bellona: ancient Roman goddess of war.

Notice the word stem **bell** in her name. *Bell* means war, and appears in words like *belligerent*, *bellicose*, *rebel*, and *ante bellum*.

III. Literary Terms: these will be the terms that we use to discuss this act. Please know them for our discussion and your tests and quizzes.

couplet: a pair of lines that rhyme

aside: a remark made quietly so as to be heard by a select group of people and not by others who are near by. In Shakespeare's play, sometimes a character makes an aside to the audience.

soliloquy: lines spoken by one character on stage. These lines are not meant to be heard by anyone. Soliloquies function to communicate a character's inner thoughts and usually communicate an internal conflict.

antithesis: rhetorical device where the author places an idea next to one to which it is sharply contrasted or directly opposed. Think of this word meaning opposite. The function of antithesis is to give emphasis to an idea by placing it next to a contrasting idea.

IV. Questions: answer the following questions while you read to check your comprehension.

Scene 1:

1. Who will the witches meet?

Scene 2:

2. What does Malcom ask the Captain to tell Duncan?

3. What name does Macbeth deserve?

4. The captain says, “Till he unseamed him from the nave to the chops / And fixed his head upon our battlements.”

a. Who is the person doing the “unseaming”?

b. Who is the person being unseamed?

5. Who is the “most disloyal traitor”?

6. What title do they give to Macbeth?

Scene 3:

7. The witches greet Macbeth by three titles. What are the three:

8. What prophecy do the witches give to Banquo?

9. What does Banquo say the “instruments of darkness” are capable of doing?

10. In Macbeth’s short soliloquy, he argues that the witches’ prophecy cannot be “ill” because why?

11. In this short soliloquy, he argues that it cannot be good. What images does he conjure that makes him feel frightened?

12. To satisfy his fear, Macbeth thinks it might be possible to be King without what?

13. What reason does Banquo give to Ross and Angus for Macbeth's odd behavior?

Scene 4:

14. What does Malcom report Cawdor did at his execution?

15. "There is no art / To find the mind's construction in the face. / He was a gentleman on whom I built / An absolute trust."

a. Who is speaking?

b. Paraphrase these lines:

16. For what does Duncan apologize to Macbeth?

17. What does Duncan announce about Malcom?

18. Duncan says that they should go to "Inverness." What is Inverness?

19. What does Macbeth say about the Prince of Cumberland?

Scene 5:

20. What is Lady Macbeth doing at the beginning of this scene?

21. What is Lady Macbeth afraid stands in the way of Macbeth becoming king?

22. "Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, / And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full / Of direst cruelty."

a. Who is speaking?

b. Paraphrase the above lines.

23. What does Lady Macbeth compare Macbeth's face to?

24. What does Lady Macbeth instruct Macbeth to do?

Scene 6:

25. Lady Macbeth tells Duncan that hosting him and his servants is nothing compared to what?

Scene 7:

26. In Macbeth's soliloquy, what does Macbeth say is a consequence of murder?

27. Macbeth says there are two ways that Duncan trusts him at this moment. What are they?

28. What does Macbeth say is the reason people will cry like crazy over Duncan's murder?

29. What reason does Macbeth give for not wanting to go through with the murder?

30. Lady Macbeth compares Macbeth to the "poor cat" in some story. How is Macbeth like this cat?

31. What act does Lady Macbeth say she would go through with if she had sworn to do it?

32. What does Lady Macbeth say she will do with Duncan's chamberlains?

33. How does Macbeth say they will be able to get away with the murder?