



## Character Explorer:

# Macbeth from

# *The Tragedy of Macbeth*

### Who is Macbeth?

Macbeth is a Scottish Thane, a type of local leader who's been given land and power by the King. Along with a friend and fellow Thane named Banquo, Macbeth is a general in the army of King Duncan, and fights valiantly to defeat a rebellion, earning praise from Duncan and the entire court.

Macbeth is married to Lady Macbeth. Although they have no children together, Lady Macbeth seems to have had a child at some point.

The play tells the story of Macbeth's descent from battlefield hero to someone who murders almost indiscriminately. While inspired in part by events that happened in Scotland about a thousand years ago, the play has seen productions set in many different time periods all over the world.

### What happens with Macbeth

After a battle, Macbeth and Banquo encounter three unusual creatures, often described as witches. They hail Macbeth as Thane of Cawdor, and as future King. After these creatures vanish, messengers arrive with news that King Duncan has named Macbeth Thane of Cawdor. King Duncan then invites everyone to Macbeth's castle to celebrate their victory. Macbeth's spouse, Lady Macbeth, persuades Macbeth to murder Duncan in the royal bedchamber that night. After Duncan's heirs flee in fear, Macbeth is named King of Scotland. However, Macbeth doesn't feel secure, fearing that Banquo might be suspicious about Duncan's murder. So Macbeth hires murderers to kill Banquo. At a royal banquet, Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost among the guests and shouts at it to go away. Lady Macbeth tries in vain to reassure the alarmed guests, then asks them all to leave.

Macbeth goes to visit the 'witches' to try to find out about the future. They invite apparitions, who tell Macbeth three things: to beware Macduff, that none 'of woman born' can harm Macbeth, and that Macbeth will not be defeated until the forest known as 'Birnam Wood' reaches Macbeth's castle, Dunsinane. Macbeth leaves with a renewed sense of confidence but decides to send murderers to Macduff's castle to kill everyone: Macduff's wife and children, as well as all the servants.

Macbeth prepares to fight an invading army, led by Macduff, as well as Duncan's heir, Malcolm. A doctor reports that Lady Macbeth is suffering from a mental health crisis. Macbeth then hears bad news in quick succession: that Lady Macbeth has died and that it appears the forest is moving up the hill towards the castle. (Macbeth doesn't know that this is because the soldiers are carrying tree branches as they march, to conceal the size of the army.) Macbeth faces Macduff on the battlefield and is confident until hearing that *Macduff was from his mother's womb untimely ripped*. This means Macduff was delivered surgically, rather than technically 'born'. After winning the fight, Macduff presents Macbeth's head to Malcolm, who is crowned the new King of Scotland.

## Some words used to describe Macbeth

The ways a character is talked about by others can illuminate aspects of their personality. These words are listed roughly in the order that they appear in the play.

brave	valiant	valour's minion	worthy	good
noble	worthiest	most worthy	peerless	great
gentle	alone	infirm of purpose	rugged	highness
majesty	royal	shame itself	not well	unmanned
tyrant	accursed	something wicked	treacherous	bloody
luxurious	avaricious	fiend of Scotland	false	sudden
malicious	deceitful	smacking of every sin that has a name	hell-kite	usurper
abhorred tyrant	hell-hound	bloodier villain than terms can give thee out	coward	dead butcher



## Some things Macbeth says throughout the play

Lines that a character speaks can reveal details about their personality and relationships with other characters. The lines below are listed in the order that they appear in the play.

- 1 I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent.
- 2 I dare do all that may become a man.
- 3 I had most need of blessing and amen  
Stuck in my throat.
- 4 I am afraid to think what I have done.
- 5 Be innocent of knowledge, dearest chuck,  
Till thou applaud the deed.
- 6 It will have blood, they say, blood will have blood.
- 7 Throw physic to the dogs; I'll none of it.
- 8 I have almost forgot the taste of fears.
- 9 Blow, wind, come wrack,  
At least we'll die with harness on our back.
- 10 Before my body, I throw my warlike shield.

## Challenging assumptions about Macbeth

At the beginning of the play, Macbeth is deeply admired, described as *valiant, noble, worthy, and good*. By the end of the play, however, Macbeth has chosen to murder a King, a friend, and an unspecified number of women and children. People have debated for centuries who's to blame. Some suggest it's all Lady Macbeth's fault. Some claim that Macbeth is a victim of the witches. Others maintain that Macbeth has the power to resist these influences and make better choices. What do you think? Why might a person of conscience and kindness make such violent choices? How do you imagine Macbeth feels about it all in the end?

## Your interpretation Macbeth

Now it's your turn! Read through the information about Macbeth on the previous pages. Then choose activities from the list below to explore your own interpretation of this complex character.

### MOVE

**How would your Macbeth move?** How would you express the thoughts with your body? How could you use your voice and/or body to create this character? Based on what you now know of Macbeth, create your own movement-based interpretation of the text.

**Create a sculpture or statue** using your body to express what Macbeth's lines mean to you. Create a gesture or sculpture for each line. You could also speak the line as you hold each pose. Try it many different ways and notice how each version feels to you.

### LISTEN

**What would your Macbeth soundtrack be?** What types of instruments, ambient sounds, or music would accompany your Macbeth? Create a playlist, or perhaps a soundscape: if you like, you could include recordings of the descriptive words and/or Macbeth's lines.

### WRITE

**Create a poem, story, or monologue** inspired by the list of words that describe Macbeth. Then, create another piece using the lines Macbeth speaks. How are the two different?

### MAKE

**Create a costume design.** What would your Macbeth wear? Where do they live? What's the climate like? How do they spend their time? How do they move? What do they want others to think about them? What do they enjoy wearing?

**Gather objects** that your Macbeth might use or care about. (Just remember to ask before borrowing anything!) Use these props in your other explorations, or create a still life of the objects by drawing or photographing them.

**Create an art project** inspired by the words used to describe Macbeth and by the lines Macbeth speaks.

## Reflect

- What discoveries did you make as you explored the text?
- Why did you make the creative choices that you made?
- What did you learn about Macbeth? About the play? About yourself?