

Plot Summary

1	Act 1	Three witches plot to meet Macbeth. King Duncan awards Macbeth's bravery in battle. Macbeth and fellow soldier Banquo encounter the Witches and are given prophecies. Duncan names his eldest son Malcolm as successor. Lady Macbeth receives a letter from Macbeth and plans Duncan's murder. Duncan arrives at Macbeth's castle but Macbeth has doubts about killing the king.
2	Act 2	Macbeth has a vision of a dagger leading him to Duncan's chamber and follows it. After, he is shaken and has forgotten to place the daggers with the drugged chamberlains. Macduff finds Duncan dead. Duncan's sons flee. Macbeth is named king.
3	Act 3	Macbeth, fearing the Witches' prophecy about Banquo, arranges to have him and his son Fleance killed. The murderers kill Banquo but Fleance escapes. Later on at his banquet, Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo and becomes hysterical. The witches are scolded by Hecate for their meddling. Macduff (who fled to England) is gathering an army to fight Macbeth.
4	Act 4	Macbeth visits the Witches again and is given new prophecies regarding his fate. Macbeth has Macduff's wife and children murdered. Macduff and Malcolm unite.
5	Act 5	Lady Macbeth has begun sleepwalking and talks of the murders in her sleep. Macbeth boasts none of woman born can harm him. Macduff and Malcolm gather at Birnam Wood. Lady Macbeth commits suicide and a messenger tells Macbeth the trees of Birnam Wood are advancing towards the castle. The battle begins. Macbeth fights without fear. Macduff is able to defeat Macbeth because he was born by caesarean, not by 'woman born.' Malcolm is proclaimed King.

Characters

1	Macbeth	The protagonist. Introduced as a brave and strong soldier but is easily persuaded to murder a king he loves. He becomes a tyrannical and destructive king.	4	The Witches	The Witches: They use prophecies to prompt Macbeth into murdering Duncan. They take pleasure in toying with human lives and emotions.
2	Lady Macbeth	Macbeth's wife. Ambitious and persuades Macbeth to murder Duncan. Eventually she becomes wracked with guilt and commits suicide.	5	Macduff	Macduff: Scottish nobleman who is dubious of Macbeth's reign from the beginning. Macbeth leads the battle against Macbeth's regime, eventually becoming the man to kill him (in line with the Witches' prophecy).
3	King Duncan	Virtuous king of Scotland murdered by Macbeth. With his death order is shattered and only restored when his son Malcolm becomes king at the end of the play.	6	Banquo	Banquo: Brave and noble soldier and friend to Macbeth. Banquo is also given prophecies but unlike Macbeth, chooses not to act on them. After being murdered his ghost haunts Macbeth.

Themes

1	Ambition	The tale of Macbeth exposes the dangers of ambition when it is not held by moral constraints. Ambition turns Macbeth into a murderous tyrant.
2	Fate versus Free Will	The audience is forced to question whether the story develops as it does because of fate or the actions Macbeth chooses to take.
3	Masculinity and Femininity	Masculinity is associated with raw aggression and femininity with weakness and kindness. Lady Macbeth manipulates Macbeth by questioning his masculinity.
4	The Natural Order	When the natural order is disturbed, disorder and chaos follow. There is only peace when the natural order is restored (Malcolm on the throne).

Key Vocabulary

1	Tragic Hero	A main character cursed by fate and possessed of a fatal flaw.
2	Hamartia	The fatal flaw of the tragic hero. Macbeth's is ambition.
3	Dramatic Irony	Some things are revealed to the audience before the characters, increasing tension.
4	Catharsis	The release of the audience's emotions through empathy with the characters.
5	Peripeteia	Sudden reversal of fortune or change in circumstances.
6	Fate	Events in a person's life predetermined by a cosmic or supernatural power.
7	Fortune	Chance or luck affecting human affairs.
8	Anagnorisis	When a critical discovery is made by a character, e.g. Macduff was not 'born of woman.'

Context

1	James I	King James' family claim to have descended from a historical figure named Banquo. He also wrote a dissertation on witchcraft called Demonology.
2	Divine Right	Monarchs were appointed by God and any attempt to question them was to question God himself.
3	The Supernatural	In the early 17 th century belief in witches was strong and many suspected of practising so-called witchcraft were burnt at the stake.
4	Beliefs about Gender Roles	Society was patriarchal and women were considered inferior to men. Women belonged to their fathers and then their husbands. They were expected to bear children and be gentle and womanly.