

# MACBETH

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

**STUDY  
GUIDE**

STUDY GUIDE BY **ALLISON BACKUS**

ADAPTED AND ORIGINALLY DIRECTED BY  
**LEE SUNDAY EVANS**

DIRECTED BY **ROSA JOSHI**  
ORIGINAL MUSIC BY **HEATHER CHRISTIAN**

**OCTOBER 19-NOVEMBER 6**



MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE

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ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



PRESENTS

# MACBETH

BY  
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

ADAPTED AND ORIGINALLY DIRECTED BY  
LEE SUNDAY EVANS

ORIGINAL MUSIC BY  
HEATHER CHRISTIAN

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DIRECTED BY  
ROSA JOSHI+

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Alice Gosti ..... Movement Director  
Tom Coiner ..... Fight Choreographer  
Joel Mercier ..... Music Director  
Maggie McCloskey ..... Artistic Assistant

OCTOBER 19-NOVEMBER 6, 2022

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# LEARNING STANDARDS

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F.T.R.07, F.T.R.08, A.T.R.08, A.T.R.09  
English Language Arts – *Reading Literature*  
RL.7

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WHII.T3.03, USI.T7.04, USI.T5.08

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# SYNOPSIS

# MACBETH

**THREE WITCHES**, who call themselves the “Weyward Sisters” – sometimes called the “Weird Sisters” – gather together in a storm, awaiting Macbeth, who will shortly return from battle. Macbeth enters with his friend and fellow soldier, Banquo. The first witch appropriately greets Macbeth by his title, as the Thane of Glamis. The second witch greets Macbeth as the Thane of Cawdor, and the third witch hails Macbeth, stating that he will soon be king. The three witches then hail Banquo, stating that while he himself will never rule, his decedents will be kings. Before Macbeth and Banquo can question the witches further, they vanish.

Ross, another nobleman enters, greeting Macbeth and congratulating him on his battlefield victory against the rebel army who sought to usurp the king. He calls Macbeth “Thane of Cawdor” before explaining that the previous Thane of Cawdor was a traitor, that he has been stripped of his title and will shortly be put to death. In thanks for his loyalty and military excellence, the king, Ross explains, has made Macbeth Thane of Cawdor in addition to his title of Thane of Glamis. Both Macbeth and Banquo express their shock, for the first part of the witches’ prophesy has turned true. Macbeth is pleased at his good fortune, but his thoughts quickly turn ambitious, and he considers regicide for the first time. Macbeth and Banquo then greet Duncan, the king, and his eldest son, Malcolm. Duncan bemoans the late Thane of Cawdor’s betrayal and heartily thanks Macbeth for his service.



At Macbeth’s castle, his wife, Lady Macbeth, reads a letter from her husband where he recalls the witches prophesies and the gift of his new title. Lady Macbeth, who believes her husband

to be too weak-willed, swears to goad her husband to the foul act of murder. She begs to be stripped of her traditional womanhood; to become a human weapon of cold ambition and “direst cruelty.” Macbeth enters, informing his wife that the king will stay for one night in their castle. Lady Macbeth tells him he must murder the King that evening. Unable to shake the moral implications of killing his king, he tells Lady Macbeth that their plans of murder will “go no further.” Lady Macbeth calls her husband a coward and reassures him that they cannot fail. Macbeth relents.

That night, Lady Macbeth drugs the king’s guards, so that her husband can slip into the king’s chambers unnoticed. Covered in blood, Macbeth enters, informing his wife that the king has been killed by his hands. Lady Macbeth chastises her husband for not leaving the daggers behind. She places the daggers by the still sleeping guards, smearing them with blood so that they appear guilty of the king’s death. The next morning, Duncan’s body is discovered by the nobleman, Macduff. The king’s sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, fearing for their own lives, flee to England. Macbeth becomes king.

Macbeth’s paranoia and guilt steadily rise, and he becomes wary of Banquo, who again brings up the Weyward Sisters. Fearing his crown, and hoping to prevent Banquo’s sons from becoming kings, Macbeth hires men to murder Banquo and his son, Fleance. While away from the palace, Banquo is murdered by Macbeth’s

hired men, but Fleance manages to escape. The murderers inform Macbeth that his friend is dead, but his happiness is short lived. At a dinner with Ross and others, Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo at his table. Macbeth rages, appearing mad to his guests.

Macbeth once again comes across the three witches and demands answers from them. Calling forth a number of apparitions, the witches tell him three things: first, that he must “Beware Macduff,” second, that no man “of women born” will be able to harm him, and third, that he will be king until the forest, “Birnam Wood,” travels to his home in Dunsinane. Feeling certain that no man could kill him, and knowing it is impossible for a forest to move, Macbeth is contented.

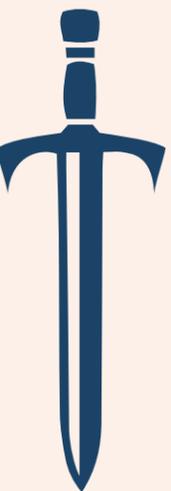
At Macduff’s castle, his wife, Lady Macduff, and their children long for Macduff who has fled to England and left them behind. Murderers sent by Macbeth enter in search of Macduff. In his absence, Macduff’s family is slaughtered. Macduff, who has joined forces with Malcolm in England, is informed of his family’s brutal demise. He swears revenge.

Back in Dunsinane, a doctor and a gentlewoman witness Lady Macbeth sleep walking, obsessively trying to wash her hands. Madness and grief seem to have overcome her. Outside the city, forces led by Macduff and Malcolm prepare to attack Macbeth’s castle. A servant informs Macbeth of this, and Macbeth readies for battle telling himself he will “not be afraid of death and ruin”



until “Birnam Forest come to Dunsinane.” At the edge of Birnam Wood, Malcom and Macduff tell their soldiers to cut branches from the trees and hold them in front of them as they advance in order to hide the size of their army.

The Doctor informs Macbeth that Lady Macbeth has died, and a messenger tells him that it appears the forest of Dunsinane is advancing on the castle. Although aggrieved and terrified, Macbeth is intent on keeping his crown, and he leads his men into battle. Macbeth and Macduff meet on the battlefield. Macbeth mocks Macduff, and, still believing himself safe from being killed, brags that “none of woman born” can kill him. Macduff tells Macbeth that he was “untimely ripped” from his mother’s womb and was delivered by incision (C-section) rather than being delivered naturally. Despite this shocking revelation, Macbeth continues to fight, swearing he will never yield. He is slain by Macduff’s hand. Malcolm is crowned king, and the three witches gather one last time, saying they will hang Macbeth’s body on a pole for all to see, with a sign that reads, “Here may you see the tyrant.”



# FROM THE DIRECTOR:

## AN INTERVIEW WITH ROSA JOSHI



Rosa Joshi is a director, producer, and educator based in Seattle, Washington. Joshi is the co-founder of *upstart crow collective*, a theatre company that produces classical works with diverse, female, and non-binary casts in order to re-conceptualize classical theatre for contemporary audiences.

### WHAT DREW YOU TO MACBETH?

When I work on a classic, I'm always thinking about what the play has to say to us as contemporary American people. So my lens is always about how the play resonates for us today. I've always been drawn to Shakespeare's plays about power, and the questions they raise about the nature of moral leadership. *Macbeth* goes one further and explores the nature of morality in all of us. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are not without conscience: they have to actively corrupt their humanity in order to fulfill their desire for power. That is a choice they make - and that power of choice - to do good, or not - lies in all of us. That was my way into the play as a story that is relevant to anyone who might walk into the theatre.

There's so much else: the character of Lady Macbeth, and her relationship to Macbeth, is fascinating - there is a bond between these people that is terrifying and also electric - there's deception, betrayal, intrigue... and sword fights! And then the element of supernatural in the play takes us into a primal world of witches, prophecies, ghosts, and visions which takes us beyond a political to a metaphysical realm - making that come alive on stage is always an exciting challenge!

### WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST INTRODUCTION TO SHAKESPEARE?

Like a lot of people, it was in middle school in an English class. I was fortunate to have an exceptional teacher who helped us understand the plays and see ourselves in the work by performing the scenes. The first play I read was *The Tempest*, another play filled with magic and the supernatural. I later got hooked

when I watched a performance of a Shakespeare play and realized, "Oh, wait, I can understand this.... This just sounds like people talking to each other." I think that's a big bias that we carry from the way we are often introduced to the works - that this is 'old fashioned, archaic language,' that it's difficult to understand, etc. That can set us up from an early age to think we can't understand it. And I reject that; I think the language is absolutely accessible, if we make it so as theatre artists.

**...IF CLASSICAL WORK IS GOING TO GROW AND THRIVE, THEN IT NEEDS TO BELONG TO EVERYONE—OTHERWISE THAT WORK WILL DIE.**

### WHY CHOOSE AN ALL-FEMALE, LARGELY BIPOC CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM?

I have a theatre company, *upstart crow collective*, which focuses on producing classical works with casts of women and non-binary people. So this particular version of *Macbeth* was a natural draw to me. As someone who was not always felt like I 'belonged' in theatre, I think a

lot about access - who gets to tell the stories, both on and off stage. I think if classical work is going to grow and thrive, then it needs to belong to everyone - otherwise that work will die.

We all need to see ourselves in these stories and know that we can tell these stories from our own perspectives. As long as we are led to believe that these plays are not about us, or there is no place for us in telling these stories, then we will effectively be shut out from the work. So I want to invite everyone in - especially people who have not thought Shakespeare was for them.

**I WANT TO INVITE EVERYONE IN - ESPECIALLY PEOPLE WHO HAVE NOT THOUGHT SHAKESPEARE WAS FOR THEM.**

It's when we bring the work to us, when we grapple with the gnarly aspects of the plays, that we are able to both stay true to the essence of the work and also transform it into something that speaks more wholly to us. So making space for women and non-binary people in a play that is usually inhabited by male bodies is both radical and necessary for the life of an art form that I love. It invites people in who have been marginalized and lets them see that there is a space for them, their bodies in the story. And then that's not just about bodies on stage - that's the obvious way that we recognize 'inclusiveness' because it's the most visible. But I think making space for the people who are creating the world of the play is equally vital - it has been thrilling to work with a team of women designers who are also BIPOC and immigrants. When we respect the craft but also don't hold ourselves to 'the way it should be done', we can really make something exciting. There's something about us taking Shakespeare and reclaiming it for a new generation of audiences and artists that inspires me.

### WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE LINE FROM THE SHOW?

Well, this is not really a favorite, necessarily, but "Macbeth hath murdered sleep" is one that I remember well because this was actually the first full length Shakespeare that I did when I was in grad school. And I remember as I was obsessing over the play late into the night, that line kept looping in my head endlessly!

### WHY BUILD AN ENTIRE PRODUCTION AROUND THE WITCHES?

The witches are the center of this story in so many ways. The story could still happen without them; the murders could take place, the ambition, the desire for power could still be there, the political intrigue - all of it - but the witches introduce the supernatural, and that takes us into a completely different world. What are the forces that exist outside of us, if any? Do they make the whole story happen? Do they control the actions of the characters, or do they awaken what is lying nascent in them, fueling the fires of ambition within them? What sparked for me in this adaptation was the idea that the witches tell this story to us, that the story comes through their eyes and from their perspective. There is a sense perhaps that they have told this story before, and will tell it again - because it is a story that must be told. It is a warning to us about the darkness in us all, perhaps.

The story told from the witches' perspective also allows for a transformative style of storytelling - there's an immediate awareness that these are also performers who are telling this story to us, inhabiting all the different characters. Characters switch so swiftly that you have to embrace a theatricality that is really rather thrilling. And part of the joy of watching this production, I think, will be witnessing three amazing actors transform themselves into multiple characters, telling this epic story through the power of their craft.



YELLOW WITCH MACBETH COSTUME SKETCH BY YAO CHEN, COSTUME DESIGNER FOR MRT'S 2022 PRODUCTION OF MACBETH.

# BEWITCHED!

## AN INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR MILICENT WRIGHT



Milicent Wright is an actor of both classical and new work. She has recently performed in productions at Merrimack Repertory Theatre and Indiana Repertory Theater.

### HOW DO YOU APPROACH ACTING SHAKESPEARE?

I have to make sure I know what I am saying first and foremost. That takes me a while, and it can also change with the input of the director, the text coach and through rehearsals. Once I figure out what I am saying, I begin to work on how I, within my characters, can get my desires, emotions, opinions, across to a 21<sup>st</sup> Century audience while I am speaking Shakespeare's words. So, my voice is an essential tool, and I often employ small gestures to help with meaning, which directors often assist with, too.

Remember, language changes all the time. Words drop out of usage and new words and phrases are added to the Oxford English Dictionary every year. I also must conquer my own fears and insecurities that come with doing Shakespeare. I have told numerous summer drama camp students the same thing - they know more than they think they know! Together we can open the many dictionaries available to us and dive in.

Lastly, I love implementing the rhetorical tools and using the sounds in the language. Use your antitheses, and alliterations.

### WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE PART ABOUT ACTING SHAKESPEARE?

First, I will say it is collaborative. All theatre is collaborative, yes, but I have found Shakespeare to be more so due to all the layering and dissection needed to draw in the audience. I enjoy the discussions with the directors and the text coaches, and I enjoy making discoveries that come with being directed in Shakespeare's plays. I find the challenge of Shakespeare stimulating, even when I'm struggling. I also love hearing

**I FIND THE CHALLENGE OF SHAKESPEARE STIMULATING, EVEN WHEN I'M STRUGGLING.**

audience members react to what my character is saying during the show, and hearing later, 'I knew what you were saying,' 'I followed all your different characters!' Then all the work has paid off.

But my favorite things about Shakespeare is the various concepts which companies have devised to make the works alluring and relevant to us. Plus, in all honesty, seeing young people do Shakespeare is what drew me in. Shakespeare and Company's Fall Festival of Shakespeare in the Massachusetts Berkshires is not to be missed!, 10 to 12 high schools coming together to do 90-minute cuts of the plays. I was blown away my first time watching the festival. I went home to Indiana a converted motivator of Shakespeare with youth.

### WHY DO YOU THINK SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS ARE STILL SO IMPORTANT?

This is a mixed question for me, being both a person of color and a cisgender female. Part of me wants to say it's time to move on from this work; it's ancient, it's hard to understand, and we have moved past these views on gender, race, class, and war. But then I hear a line or a scene from one of Shakespeare's plays, and I am struck with how these centuries-old plays *are* still relevant, poignant, and hard hitting – as Hamlet says, "...to hold

**SHAKESPEARE'S WORDS ARE POETIC AND STIRRING, AND OFTEN SPEAK TRUTHS.**

**WE STILL LOVE AS DEEPLY, CRAVE POWER MADLY, AND GRIEVE; WE LUST AND MISTRUST.**

as 'twere the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."

We are, in my opinion, given a chance to look at how much humanity is still the same. Shakespeare's words are poetic and stirring, and often speak truths. We still love as deeply, crave power madly, and grieve; we lust and mistrust. My favorite Shakespeare quote that everyone hears from me too often is from *Julius Caesar*: "How many ages hence shall this our lofty scene be acted over, In states unborn and accents yet unknown." Think about a play written in 1599, as scholars have deduced, that speaks to civil and governmental unrest and wars to come in places yet discovered. And what are we dealing with now here in the US? In Rwanda 1990-94, China 1945-49, and the list goes on.

Not to end on a sad note, here is something I used to say to the high schoolers: Someone can say that someone is cute, *or* they can say, "Oh, she doth teach the torches to burn bright" or "Sing again bright angel!" So much from *Romeo and Juliet* that would make any girl swoon at the knees!

### WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE LINE THAT YOU SPEAK IN THE SHOW?

An actor is supposed to say all my lines are their favorite! I am sure by the time we open, I will have a few favorites that I speak from the Scottish play. I like the famous "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow" monologue; those aren't my lines, but they're never far from my memory.

### WHAT'S ANOTHER TRADITIONALLY MALE SHAKESPEARE ROLE YOU WOULD LIKE TO PLAY? WHY?

Well, I don't know. I didn't long to play Duncan

or Banquo, it just happened. I haven't gone through the canon looking for male roles to play. Much has to do with my age and race; what I can believably play. I wanted to play Margaret in *Richard III*, and I got my first chance at that role this summer with Indianapolis Shakespeare. I now want to play the Duchess of York in *Richard III*, and Volumnia in *Coriolanus*. However, as you have probably guessed, a chance to try on Brutus from *Julius Caesar* would be exciting, and a small dream come true. It is very innovative and creative to me the way Rosa Joshi approaches casting and producing her visions. Part of me really wants to be in the audience to see this production!

### HOW DO YOU NAVIGATE THE CHALLENGES THAT COME WITH PLAYING SO MANY CHARACTERS IN ONE PLAY?

I have previously done about five solo shows, where I have played from three to fifteen-plus characters, often three characters in one scene. This summer, in *Ricky 3: A Hip Hop Richard III*, I played five characters, so I am not new to doing multiple character work like this.

However, this time around is really going to be challenging, because several characters are similar in background, status, age and "profession," so to speak. My brain is already spinning with ideas. I am in the script trying to decide who is the youngest, who is the most badass, who is the most kind and gentle, etc. I'm thinking about how to put this into my body. This may sound a bit bizarre, but in my mind, I have a picture of what I look like as the characters, and I embody that image by knowing I am the king, that I carry many responsibilities, have fought in battles, that I am respected. Distinctions like this help inform how I stand, walk, sit, sound, and address others.

The rehearsal period is also helpful – learning what the director wants, and what the other actors need from me. And if I am lucky, we might have a few props and costume pieces to help! Remember playing with a shawl as a child? Transforming into three different character's by wearing it different ways?

**ACTIVITY: TABLEAUX**  
**ACTIVITY: WHO HAS THE POWER?**

SEE PAGES 26-27 FOR DETAILS & INSTRUCTIONS



# IS MACBETH A TRAGIC HERO?

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote extensively on the purpose and the importance of live theatre. Aristotle believed that in order for a dramatic tragedy to be successful, it needed to

evoke both pity and fear from the audience. He also believed that certain characters in these tragedies contained certain specific characteristics. Aristotle defined these characters as “tragic heroes.”

## SO, WHAT MAKES A TRAGIC HERO?

### 1. VIRTIOUS

in order for a character to be a tragic hero, they must begin the drama as morally conscious individual. Often—but not always—noble born, these characters are virtuous but still susceptible to human error.

### 2. HAMARTIA

or, the tragic flaw. The tragic hero must make an error in judgement that ultimately leads to their downfall

### 3. PERIPETEIA

or, the consequences. This error in judgement must lead to a reversal of fate or fortune.

### 4. ANAGNORISIS

or, the moment of realization. This is when the tragic hero realizes that their error in judgement led to their downfall.

### 5. CATHARSIS

Perhaps most important, the audience must feel both pity and fear for the tragic hero when watching their downfall.

## DISCUSS

1. Is Macbeth a tragic hero? Why or why not?
2. Do you think Macbeth is virtuous at the beginning of the play? What is said about him?
3. What would be his tragic flaw?
4. Does Macbeth have a moment of realization?
5. Do you pity him? Do you fear him? Do you fear *for* him?
6. Do you think Shakespeare intended for us to see Macbeth as a sympathetic character?
7. Can you think of other examples or tragic heroes? (Oedipus, Jay Gatsby, Severus Snape, Javert, John Proctor, Hamlet, Ned Stark, Loki, Willy Loman, Anakin Skywalker, Captain Ahab, Othello, Viktor Frankenstein, Romeo Montague, Walter White, Hester Prynne, Harvey Dent, Scarlett O’Hara, Sweeney Todd, Creon, Sirius Black, etc.)

## ESSAY PROMPT

Write a thesis arguing **why or why not Macbeth should be considered a tragic hero**. Use **at least three** of Aristotle’s tragic hero characteristics to support your answer, and **at least three** quotes from Macbeth.

# MACDUFFS: SUBVERSIONS OF EARLY MODERN PATRIARCHY

**FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS**, scholars and critics have explored the complicated role gender plays in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. Many have noted the reversal of gender norms in the marriage of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth: Lady Macbeth is portrayed as a more traditionally masculine character, and her desire to be “unsexed” along with her iconic lines depicting imagined infanticide, distance her from early modern notions of womanhood. Macbeth, by contrast, often exhibits more stereotypically feminine traits, something he is criticized for by his wife, who deems him too “filled with the milk of human-kindness.” Other scholarly examinations have explored the referenced androgyny of the morally ambiguous Weyward Sisters. Thus, a common argument is that *Macbeth* promotes the notion that women, particularly those who stray from their ascribed gender binaries, are more susceptible to evil and corruption than men. There is evidence to support such a argument, but the characterizations of both Macduff and Lady Macduff, suggest a more complex reading of gender binaries within the play.

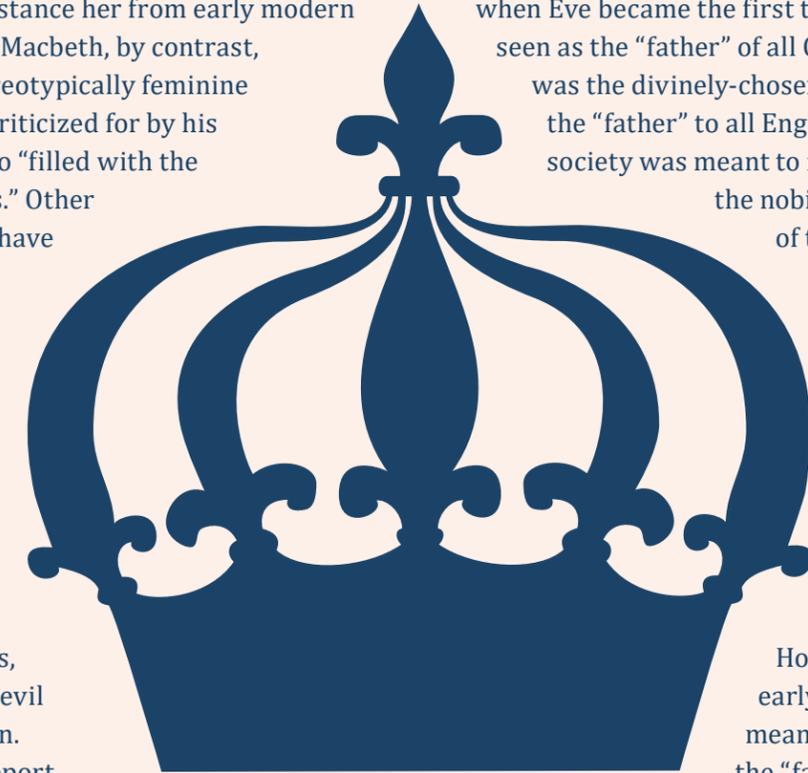
In order to properly examine the Macduffs and their gender subversions, an examination of the early-modern patriarchal structure is crucial. Today, the term *patriarchy* is generally used to describe a society in which male citizens hold either most, or all of the political power. Throughout the English Renaissance, however, *patriarchy* described a specific social structure

on which all English citizens were meant to rely. As the contemporary definition suggests, early modern patriarchy was based on the general idea that women were inherently inferior to men. Patriarchy—literally “rule of the fathers” organized society by figurative and literal father-child relationships. At the top of the social structure was God, who had deemed women inferior when Eve became the first to fall into sin. God was seen as the “father” of all Christians. Below God was the divinely-chosen monarch who served as the “father” to all English citizens. The rest of society was meant to follow the same pattern: the nobility were the “fathers” of the lower classes they employed, and husbands and literal fathers were the “fathers” of their wives and children.

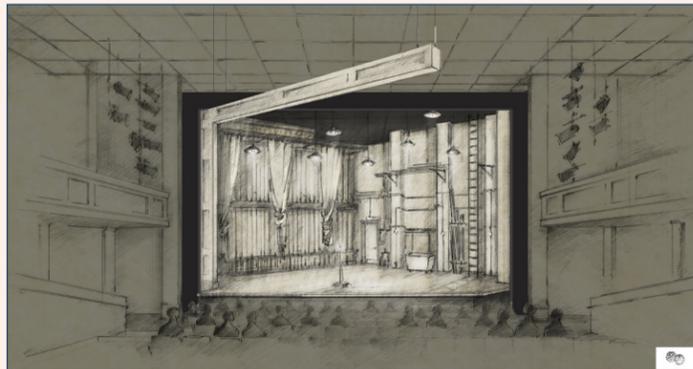
To many modern minds, this social structure seems a naturally exploitive imbalance of power.

However, the system of early modern patriarchy was meant to benefit everyone; the “fathers” of society were granted the subjugation of

others, but in turn, they had a responsibility to guide, protect, nurture, and finance those below them. This concept is illustrated in Sir Robert Filmer’s *Patriarcha*, in which he states that while “the father of a family governs by no other law than by his own will,” he is nevertheless “bound by the law of nature to do his best for the preservation of his family.” Many early modern scholars have theorized that between 1560 and 1660 a panic regarding gender binaries emerged as it became increasingly clear that the patriarchal system was not infallible. Men were not always able to control their



# MACDUFFS: SUBVERSIONS OF EARLY MODERN PATRIARCHY



SKETCH 1: MACBETH, BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, EDITED SCRIPT BY LEE SUNDAY EVANS, DIRECTED BY ROSA JOSHI, MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE, LOWELL, MA, OCTOBER 2022 | DESIGNER: LUCIANA STECCONI

wives, fathers and husbands often failed in their duties, and the patriarchal system was rather less mutually beneficial than previously thought. Notions of this ideological crisis are keenly explored in Shakespeare's depiction of Lady Macduff and her husband

At a superficial glance, Lady Macduff seems to embody traditional notions of femininity in ways Lady Macbeth and the Weyward Sisters do not. She seems content in her role as a wife and mother, lacks blind ambition, and possess deep maternal love for her children. However, Lady Macduff is ultimately portrayed as one of the most thoughtful and rational characters within the play, a direct contradiction of the patriarchal belief that women were the more emotional, and less rational sex. When learning of the approaching intruders, Lady Macduff refuses the "womanly defense" of saying she has done no wrong, for rationally, she understands this does not matter to the murders she is about to encounter.

Furthermore, Lady Macduff subverts her submissive feminine role by challenging her husband's decision to flee to England without her and her children. She goes so far as to call her husband a "traitor" who lacks the "natural touch" of patriarchal duty. She says her

husband's actions are unwisely done: "Wisdom! to leave his wife, to leave his babes, his mansion and his titles in a place from whence himself does fly?... little is the wisdom, where the flight so runs against all reason." Ross, who informs Lady Macduff of her husband's flight, chastises her for challenging her husband's decisions, telling her to "school" herself. Macduff, he says, is "noble, wise, judicious, and best knows the fits o' the season." He is everything a man and patriarch should be, and as his wife, it is not her place to question him.

Lady Macduff does indeed subvert the patriarchal gender binary, rejecting passivity, and submission for rightful anger towards her husband. However, it is Macduff that breaks the patriarchal mold first by abandoning his family, wife, and home out of fear. He fails his patriarchal duties of protection and family leadership, and in doing so, he reveals the anxieties around the crumbling patriarchal structure of the early modern era.

The confusion and subversion of gender, motherhood, and masculinity within *Macbeth* all seem rooted in the very soil of Shakespeare's depicted Scotland. Ross' cry of "Alas, poor country!" is followed by his declaration that the land no longer "knows itself." Scotland, Ross says, "cannot be call'd our mother, but our grave." Like the women within the play, Scotland has surpassed the gender binary she has been ascribed. Like the women and men who flounder in a country at war with itself, the land, its future, and its past have become too complex and subversive to be contained. Strangled by the imposing beliefs and structures of patriarchy, Shakespeare's imagined Scotland seems to tear itself apart in an attempt at reconfiguration. The darkness and chaos that reign in *Macbeth* are not necessarily the result of the gender complexity and subversion exhibited by the characters. Rather, the darkness that engulfs the play is the result of a system rotted out, a social system with an inability to contain those who were once its subjects.

# MACBETH AND RACE

Unlike Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Titus Andronicus*, *Macbeth* traditionally contains no characters of color. Unlike *The Tempest*, *Macbeth* contains no references to slavery, colonialism,

or racialized subjugation. All the same, *Macbeth* has frequently been viewed, performed, and discussed through a racialized lens, *WHY?*

## LANGUAGE: THE DICHOTOMY OF LIGHT AND DARK

It was common in African and Asian nations colonized by the British to teach Shakespeare as means of showcasing supposed cultural and literary superiority. More than any other Shakespeare play, *Macbeth* contrasts good and evil through metaphors of light and dark, and black and white. Malcom describes Macbeth as both "dark" and "devilish," and Macbeth describes the witches as "black and midnight hags." Again and again, both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth call on night and darkness to hide their "black and deep desires" and later, to hide their murderous crimes.

Because of Shakespeare's choice of language, *Macbeth* was one of the texts most often taught to African and Indian students by their English colonizers and oppressors. By perpetuating a literal and simplistic reading of Shakespeare's figurative language, English Imperialists sought to impart to colonized children that their darker skin made them inferior, and more susceptible to wickedness. As late as 1986, in Apartheid South Africa, an edition of *Macbeth* was assigned to Black students with an introductory note on hierarchy, the virtues of obedience, and the importance of submission to "superior powers."

## LANGUAGE: THE PERMANENCE OF BLOOD

Again and again, the language in *Macbeth* depicts blood as a staining substance that cannot be washed away. Following the murder of Duncan, Macbeth laments that the sight of his bloody hands "pluck out" his "eyes," before bemoaning that even "great Neptune's oceans" could not "wash this blood clean from my hand."

Lady Macbeth echoes this sentiment later in the play while she sleep walks, desperately scrubbing at her hands. Her famous line of "out, damned spot. out I say!" illustrates the imagined permanence of spilled blood that haunts her psyche. This concept of blood permanence is not purely a clever literary device, for similar notions of blood as a staining essence can be found throughout history both in support of, and against slavery and segregations.

In early America, proponents of slavery and segregation used the "one drop rule." This "rule" stated that any person



AN EARLY DRAFT OF A POLITICAL CARTOON BY AN UNKNOWN ARTIST DEPICTS LADY MACBETH AS "COLUMBIA," OR THE UNITED STATES. AS SHE ATTEMPTS TO WAS HER HANDS OF A STAIN TITLED "SLAVERY" ABRAHAM LINCOLN LOOKS ON BESIDE HORACE GREELY, FOUNDER AND EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TRIBUNE WHO WAS WELL KNOWN FOR HIS ARTICLE "THE PRAYER OF TWENTY MILLION," WHICH CALLED ON THE PRESIDENT TO ENACT EMANCIPATION.

with a "drop" of Black blood in their veins, anyone with a single Black ancestor was deemed a "negro" and was thus not allowed the privileges that came with being white in America. This white supremacist ideology perpetuated the notion that the blood of Black individuals was a tainting substance that could not be washed away, regardless of how "white" a person might appear.

However, many opponents of slavery and segregation

# MACBETH AND RACE

# TEXTS AND CONTEXTS

"THEY ARE COMING"

utilized passages from *Macbeth* in their arguments. Bloody stains that could not be washed away were not the result of miscegenation, rather they were the brutal and violent legacy of slavery and racial injustice. Congressmen John C. Clarke of New York argued in favor of abolition before the House 1828, quoting Lady Macbeth's famous lines and depicting slavery's prominence in America as a stain that history could not easily wash away.

Reverend Gilbert Haven echoed this same sentiment later in 1854, when he condemned the Northern states for

their failure to properly protest slavery in the south:

**We were indifferent to the perils and defeats of freedom. We eagerly snatched and swallowed the few beggarly slops of office and enactments which our shrewd Southern masters tossed us....Look on your hands! Blood! Cry, "Out damned spot! out, I say!" It flees not; it blears our eyes; it stains our souls; it smells to heaven. Not all the perfumes in Arabia can sweeten this Northern hand.**

## THEMES

Beyond the figurative language utilized by Shakespeare in *Macbeth*, the broad themes of the play include **ambition, guilt, betrayal, lineage, retribution, and violence**, all themes that are easily tied to conversations surrounding slavery, colonization, freedom, and racial identity.

## DISCUSS

Despite its complicated history as a colonist-taught text, today, *Macbeth* is one of the most frequently performed and adapted Shakespeare plays in formerly colonized nations, Africa in particular. **Why do you think this is?**

## ESSAY PROMPT

Choose a theme from *Macbeth* (Ambition, Betrayal, Guilt, Lineage, Retribution, Violence). **What does the text suggest about this theme? How does the theme develop throughout the play?** Use at least three examples from the text to support your answer.

For centuries, Shakespeare's work has inspired poets, novelists, and artists from around the world. With its rich language and symbolism and complex characters, *Macbeth* is among the plays most frequently adapted and explored. Numerous Black poets have used the motifs and in *Macbeth* as inspiration for their own writing.

Below is an excerpt from the poem, "They Are Coming," written in 1890 by the poet Josephine Delphine Henderson Heard. In her poem, Heard uses metaphor to reimagine Banquo's ghost. **Explore the context of race relations in America around the time the poem was written, and use this knowledge to guide a close reading.**

### THEY ARE COMING

BY JOSEPHINE D. HENDERSON HEARD (1861-1924)

They are coming, coming slowly —  
They are coming, surely, surely —  
In each avenue you hear the steady tread.  
From the depths of foul oppression,  
Comes a swarthy-hued procession,  
And victory perches on their banners' head.

They are coming, coming slowly —  
They are coming; yes, the lowly,  
No longer writhing in their servile bands.  
From the rice fields and plantation  
Comes a factor of the nation,  
And threatening, like Banquo's ghost, it stands.

They are coming, coming proudly  
They are crying, crying loudly:  
O, for justice from the rulers of the land!  
And that justice will be given,  
For the mighty God of heaven  
Holds the balances of power in his hand...

Yes, they come, their stopping's steady,  
And their power is felt already —  
God has heard the lowly cry of the oppressed:  
And beneath his mighty frown,  
Every wrong shall crumble down,  
When the right shall triumph and the world be blest!

After the American Civil War, the Era of Reconstruction brought great progress regarding racial equality in the United States. Reconstruction ended in 1877, and with it came a strong reaction against the progress that had been made. The 1880s were plagued with lynchings of Black Americans, as well as a rise in southern segregation. The

United States Supreme Court overturned the Civil Rights Act, allowing rampant discrimination. The year Heard's poem was published, the Mississippi Plan disenfranchised Black voters across numerous southern states by issuing mandatory literacy tests.

## CLOSE READING QUESTIONS

- Who is the narrator of the poem? Who is the "you" in the poem?
- What is the tone of the poem? What is the mood?
- When Macbeth sees Macduff and Malcolm's armies approaching his castle, he says: "The cry is still, 'They come.'" – Despite the fear of the other lords, Macbeth remains confident that fate is on his side, at least until he sees Birnam Wood approaching.  
**A. With this in mind, what is the effect of the repetition, "They are coming" in Heard's poem? What is the effect of the first lines of the last stanza?**
- What is the rhyme scheme of this poem? What is the meter?
- What does Banquo's ghost represent in this poem?  
**A. If Banquo's ghost represents \_\_\_\_\_, what does Macbeth**

- represent to the narrator?**
- Consider the context of the Reconstruction's progress being substantially reversed. How can this be connected to themes in *Macbeth*?
- Consider the lines, "From the depths of foul oppression/Comes a swarthy-hued procession." The words *oppression* and *procession* suggest a tie to Macbeth's "Is this a dagger..." soliloquy where he says, "art thou but a dagger of the mind, a false creation, Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?"  
**A. What does this connection suggest? Think about what happens in this *Macbeth* soliloquy; how does Macbeth begin the speech, and how does he end it?**

# KING JAMES, THE KING'S MEN, & THE SCOTTISH PLAY

IN 1603 QUEEN ELIZABETH I DIED, bringing her 45-year reign to a close. Having never married or produced heirs, the English crown went to her closest living relative and godson, King James VI of Scotland. As was the custom, the new English monarch chose a playing company to be his official theater troupe to play at court. King James chose Shakespeare's company, officially turning Lord Chamberlain's Men into the King's Men. This honor was both a blessing and curse for the already established playwright. Being the king's chosen players was the highest honor that could be bestowed upon a theatre troupe, but it also came with high expectations and a pressure to produce new work at a rapid rate. The King's Men would be expected to perform at court upwards of 10 times a year, often showcasing new work. In the 1590s, Shakespeare had often written 3-5 new plays a year, but after the death of Queen Elizabeth, in the first few years of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Shakespeare's productivity drastically decreased; he produced about one play a year. Shakespeare scholar, James Shapiro, believes this slump was the result of Shakespeare "finding his footing" as a Jacobean playwright; learning how to flatter and please the new monarch while also speaking to the political moment.

Many were relieved when James ascended the English Throne. A protestant like Elizabeth, James didn't revert the nation back to Catholicism. He was also married with several children and heirs, allowing an end to the worries of succession that had clouded Elizabeth's reign. James was a lover of both literature and the arts, and he had penned a number of publications himself before taking the English throne. However, King James proved to be perhaps less politically savvy than his predecessor; he was often exorbitant with money, and he continuously failed in his top priority of uniting England and Scotland, leaving him to rule both countries simultaneously, but separately.

English Catholics were also deeply disappointed



FIGURE 1: A 1605 PORTRAIT OF KING JAMES I, BY JOHN DE CRITZ.

to see England remain a Protestant nation under James, and in 1605, an assassination attempt on the new king failed. Known as the Gunpowder Plot, a number of English Catholics led by Robert Catesby planned to blow up Parliament while the King spoke inside. Before it could be executed, however, the plan was revealed in

an anonymous letter, and the conspirators were put to death shortly thereafter. If it had succeeded, the plot would have killed not only King James, but the House of Lords, and the religious leaders of the country, too. While the plot was ultimately foiled, its exposure shook the nation to its core.

The year 1606 was a painful time of death and uncertainty in England. The Gun Powder conspirators were hunted down, tortured and put to death over the course of the year, and the bubonic plague ripped through England, causing playhouses and other establishments to close their doors. Furthermore, James' official proposal of uniting Scotland and England was met with strong opposition.

A union between the countries would mean a merging and reconfiguration of both parliamentary governments, and there was strong national prejudice on both sides.

The King's Men grappled with all these issues as they strove to produce new, popular and timely plays. Early in 1606, the company wrote a play about the Gun Powder Plot titled *The Tragedy of Gowrie*. This play, however, proved to be too topical, and James' government officials ordered it never be performed. With *The Tragedy of Gowrie* scrapped, the King's Men needed a new play. Under pressure to please both Globe audiences and King James, Shakespeare turned towards history.

Shakespeare based his new Scottish tragedy on Raphael Holinshed's 1587 historic tome, *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, a book he had used as inspiration before when writing plays like *King Lear*, *Henry IV Part 1* and *2*, *Henry V*, and *Richard III*. Holinshed's *Chronicles* contained accounts of both Duncan and Macbeth's reigns in 11<sup>th</sup> Century Scotland. It was here that Shakespeare found the basis for a new tragedy that spoke both to the political moment and flattered the new king.

Like Holinshed's version of events, Macbeth

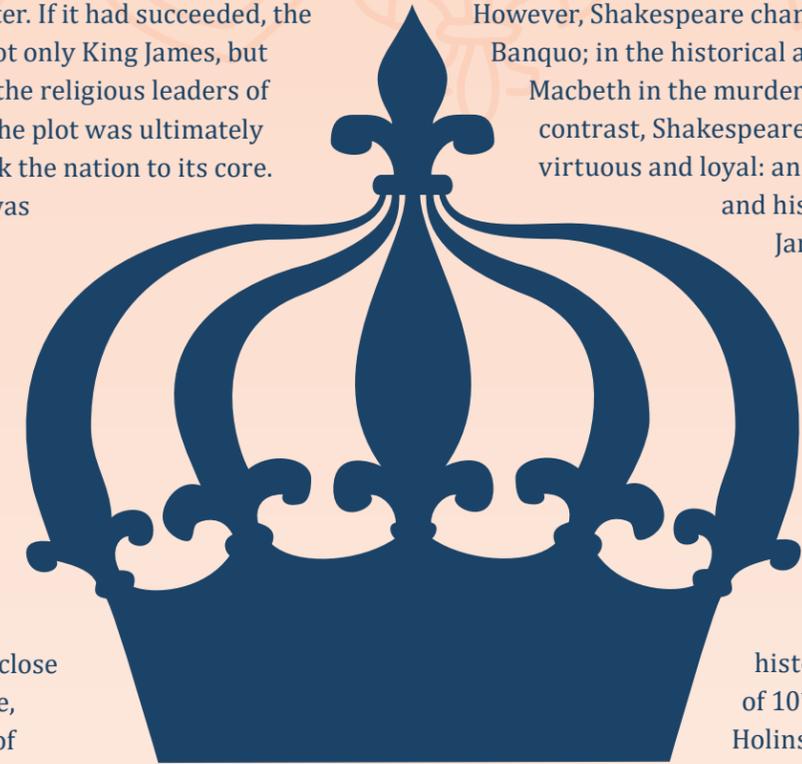
murders Duncan after encountering three witches. However, Shakespeare changed the character of Banquo; in the historical account, Banquo aids Macbeth in the murder of King Duncan. By contrast, Shakespeare's Banquo is painted as virtuous and loyal: an adversary to Macbeth and his bloody plans. King

James claimed to be a direct descendant of Banquo, and Shakespeare likely thought it unwise to offend the new king by portraying his ancestor as a murderer and usurper.

Shakespeare seems to have pulled from other Scottish histories, too. In an account of 10<sup>th</sup> Century Scotland, Holinshed explored the murder of King Duffe by the traitor Donwalde, who, aided by his wife,

gets the king's attendants drunk in order to murder the sleeping monarch. Holinshed's introduction to the people of Scotland might also have been influential. He describes Scottish women as being warriors like their husbands, brave and vicious on and off the battlefield with no qualms about killing the "first living creature that they found." Such a depiction could certainly be the reason Shakespeare decided to flesh out the character of Lady Macbeth, making her as ruthless and ambitious as her husband.

Today, *Macbeth* is one of Shakespeare's most loved and frequently performed plays. Despite the hardships of plague, violence, and political fear that permeated England in 1606, Shakespeare had a tremendously productive year. After years of diminished output, Shakespeare found new footing, writing three of his greatest tragedies that year: *King Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, in addition to the hugely popular *Macbeth*. Each of these plays dealt with the then-relevant issues of union, violence, and power. These plays continue to resonate as tragedies that reveal the complexities of politics, power, and human nature.



# JAMES I AND WITCHCRAFT

IN 1590, Princess Anne of Denmark left her home in Copenhagen to sail to Scotland where she was to become Queen and consort of King James VI of Scotland. The journey was plagued with storms and rough winds, and the ship had to dock in Norway where James later met his wife. After staying a number of months at court, the couple sailed for Scotland. Again, the ship faced tempest after tempest.

The Danish Navy admiral, Peder Munk accused statesmen and financier Christoffer Valkendorff of neglecting to properly prepare the ship for rough conditions. Wanting to deflect this accusation, Valkendorff visited the alleged witch Ane Koldings in prison. Under prolonged torture, Koldings admitted to bewitching the ship and causing the storms. She



FIGURE 2: AN ILLUSTRATION OF SUSPECTED WITCHES KNEELING BEFORE KING JAMES I. FROM HIS BOOK, DAEMONOLOGIE

named five other women as her accomplices, and all were put to death.

After hearing about this trial, James launched his own witch hunt back in Scotland. In the southeast town



of Tranent, the servant Geillis Duncan was said to suddenly exhibit strange new powers in healing. Her employer, David Seaton tortured her until she made a confession. She named a number of women and men as her accomplices, including the elderly midwife and healer, Agnes Sampson. Sampson was one of many accused brought before King James. After days of no sleep and torture, she

finally relented, admitting to numerous accounts of witchcraft and the use of black magic against the king. Duncan, and over 60 other women and men, were put to death during the two years of the North Berwick Witch Trials.

In 1597, James penned *Daemonologie*, a book in which he sought to prove the existence of witches, and provide readers with preferred methods of interrogation and torture. James also illustrated why witches were more likely to be women than men: “The reason is easy,” he wrote, for the female sex “is frailer” than the male sex and is more easily “entrapped” in the “snares of the Devil.” His point, he said was “well-proved” given that in the Bible, Eve had



been deceived by the serpent and was the first to fall into sin. Women did make up the majority of those accused, about 84%. These women ranged in age from teenagers to the elderly, and came from various economic backgrounds. However, the women who found themselves accused were often outcasts – they were disabled or widowed, or acted in ways that didn’t adhere to early modern ideas of femininity. Other women were simply accused because they had done something to displease a neighbor or friend. At a time when women were not permitted to stand as witnesses in court, women accused of witchcraft had little to no means of defending themselves against torture and execution. The year James wrote *Daemonologie*, Scotland was gripped by a year-long witch hunt that resulted in 400 accusations. Over half of those accused were put to death.



By the time he ascended the English throne, James was interested not only in real witches, but also in those he deemed fakers and frauds. In 1606, he took a special interest in the case of the teenager, Anne Gunter. Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* the same year the prolific Gunter case caused a stir. Knowing the king had a keen interest in this particular case, and in witchcraft in general, Shakespeare likely thought a tale of witches and possible black magic would be both timely and popular.

The daughter of English gentleman Brian Gunter, Anne was said to exhibit numerous symptoms associated with



black magic: she would convulse and foam at the mouth, vomit up pins, and randomly assault family and strangers. Her clothing would fall from her body, seemingly of its own accord, and she was able to reveal to strangers the exact amount of money they had on their person. Anne stated her unnatural habits were the result of curses placed on her by three female witches – all women of lower stations who had, at one time, quarreled with the Gunter family. The well-documented, widely followed case came to a close when Anne admitted that her fits and tricks had been forced on her by her father who had fed her various concoctions to make her vomit. Anna received a pardon, as did the three women she accused.

Anne’s case was perhaps more of a novelty in her native England than in Scotland. Had the same case been sent to trial in Scotland, it’s likely it would have had a more tragic outcome. While England was not immune to witch-panic, the country saw less than half the amount of persecutions and executions than the less populated Scotland. The panic induced witch-hunts that occurred in Scotland between 1500 and 1700 are today considered the most deadly in the world. In March of 2022, the Scottish government issued a pardon and apology to the victims of the Scottish Witch Hunts.



# TIMELINE

**1530** **THE REFORMATION** – King Henry VIII cuts ties with the Catholic Church in Rome, and names himself head of the Church of England. This causes lasting tension between English Catholics and English Protestants.

**1547** After Henry VIII's death, his youngest child and only son, Edward VI, takes the throne at the age of nine. Raised Protestant, Edward and his council strive to uphold Henry's religious reforms.

**1550** The English Renaissance begins, giving way to a new abundance of literature, art, and philosophy.

**1553** Queen Mary I, Henry VIII's first child, becomes Queen of England after the death of her half-brother, Edward. She attempts to revert the Reformation and return England to the Catholic Church. She puts hundreds of English Protestants to death for heresy.

**1559** After her half-sister's death, Queen Elizabeth I is crowned Queen of England. Despite her Protestant faith, she proves a more tolerant ruler than the previous monarch. Nevertheless, her reign is riddled by religious tensions and uncertainty.

**1563** James VI, later James I, is born to Mary Queen of Scots. In Scotland, witchcraft is deemed a capital offense.

**1564** William Shakespeare is born in Stratford-upon-Avon.

**1567** At only one year old, King James VI becomes King of Scotland.

**1582** 18-year-old Shakespeare marries the 26 year old Ann Hathaway.

**1583** Shakespeare's first daughter, Susanna is born.

**1585** Twins Hamnet and Judith are born to William and Ann Shakespeare.

**1590** Shakespeare pens his first play, likely *Henry VI Part 1*. He leaves Stratford to pursue a career as an actor and playwright in London. In Scotland, the North Berwick Witch Trials begin.

**1592** An outbreak of Bubonic Plague causes all the theaters in London to close down for almost an entire year. With no money to be made in the theatre, Shakespeare turns to poetry. He writes and publishes the poem, *Venus and Adonis*.

**1594** Theaters reopen in London. Shakespeare's troupe, Lord Chamberlain's Men, are popular among both common folk and the nobility. They perform often for the Queen.

**1595** Shakespeare writes *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

**1596** Shakespeare's only son, Hamnet, dies at the age of 11.

**1597** King James of Scotland, and the future king of England, writes *Daemonologie*, a philosophical book on witchcraft and black magic. From March to October, The Great Scottish Witch Hunt of 1597 begins, 400 individuals are accused, and more than half are put to death.

**1599** Shakespeare writes *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *As You Like It*, and *Henry V*. The Globe Theater opens in London.

**1603** Queen Elizabeth I dies, and King James I ascends the throne. Plague strikes England again, causing London theaters to shut their doors.

**1605** In the Gunpowder Plot – wanting to reinstate a Catholic monarch - English Catholics attempt to assassinate King James by blowing up Parliament. Before it can be executed, the plot is discovered, and the traitors are put to death.

**1606** Shakespeare writes *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Another outbreak of plague occurs. Anne Gunter accuses three women of witchcraft, the high profile case intrigues King James, who suspects Anne's accusations to be false.

**1609** Shakespeare's sonnets, which he wrote during the 1590s, are published for the first time.

**1611** Shakespeare writes his last solo play, *The Tempest*.

**1616** Shakespeare dies in Stratford at the age of 52.

**1623** The First Folio is published.

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# WEIRD OR WEYWARD?

**TODAY**, most editions of *Macbeth* refer to the three witches as “The Weird Sisters.” The modern English word “weird” comes from the old English “wryde,” which describes the ability to control, change, and manipulate the fate of individual human lives. However, the First Folio edition of *Macbeth* refers to the three witches, not as the Weird Sisters, but as the Weyward or Weyard Sisters. Unlike the word *weird*, *weyward* does not necessarily depict the witches as prophetic beings. Instead, the term

*weyward* describes the three witches as perverse, vagrant, and willful; outcasts from society shrouded in no small amount of mystery.

This production of *Macbeth* chooses *weyward* over *weird*. Encourage students to consider the implications of this word change as they read and discuss *Macbeth*, and as they watch and consider the MRT production. In small groups or as a class, discuss the following questions throughout the unit.

## DISCUSS

- Does changing the Weird Sisters to the Weyward Sisters change the play? How so?
- Describing the sisters as *weird* implies that they control Macbeth’s fate. Is this still the case if the sisters are no longer *weird*, but *weyward*?
- What is the role of fate and freewill in *Macbeth*? Does Macbeth become king because it is pre-destined, or does he become king because he *chooses* to act on what the witches tell him?
- In this production, all the characters are played by only three actors –the actors who play the witches in the first scene. What does this achieve? Does this make all the characters *weyward*, or just some?
- Why might *weyward* have been chosen over *weird* in this production? What might this imply about gender in *Macbeth*? About race? About power?
- If you were directing *Macbeth*, would you choose *weird* or *weyward*? Why?

## ACTIVITY: VOTE

Give each student a slip of paper, a marble, or another small object that can be used as a “voting chip.” Place two containers at the front of the class, one labelled WEIRD, and the other labelled WEYWARD. Ask students to consider Discussion Question #6. One by one, students should place their voting chip in the container labelled with the word they would choose if they were directing *Macbeth*.

Do this activity twice. The first time, after everyone has read the first scene with the witches. Do it the second time on the last day of the unit. Compare the difference in opinions, ask students to share their reasoning, and encourage debate!

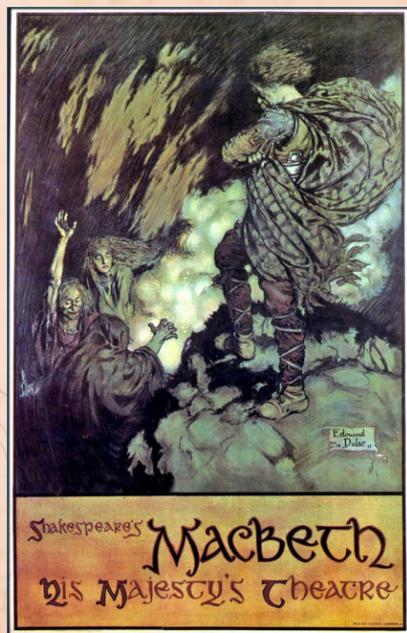
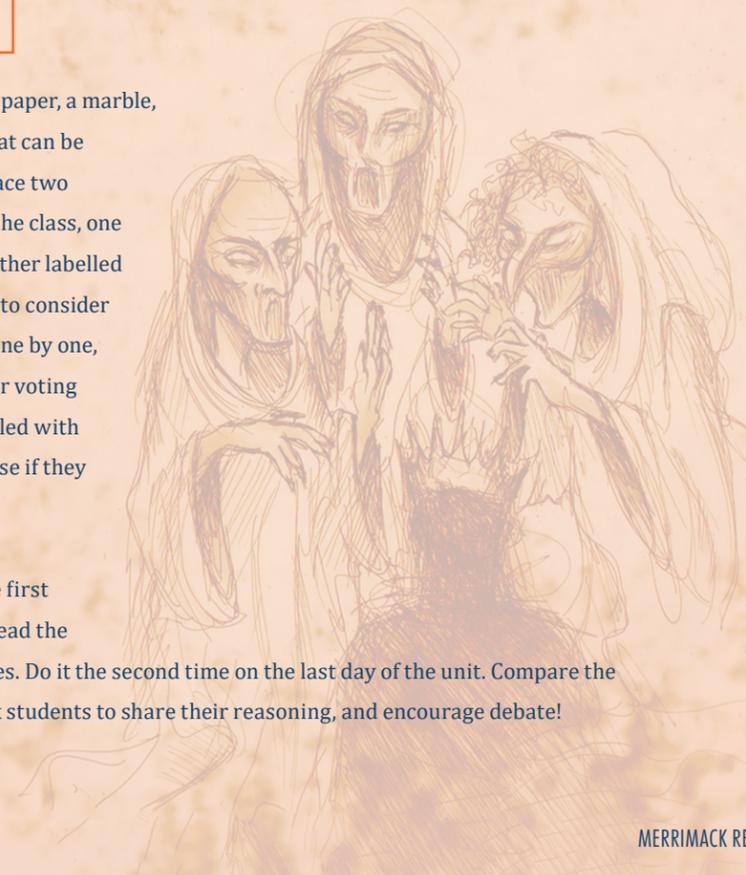


FIGURE 3: A POSTER ADVERTISING A 1911 LONDON PRODUCTION OF *MACBETH*. DESIGNED BY EDMUND DULAC.

BACKGROUND MADE FROM IMAGE SOURCED ON PINTEREST

# UTILIZING THE OED

**THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY** is the most definitive guide to the English language. It defines and traces the complex history of every word, and features numerous chronological examples of where each word has appeared in the English literary canon. The OED helps students and researchers of all levels merge research and close reading, and encourages students to ponder double-meanings and literary devices beyond a surface level. The OED is especially helpful when examining older English texts like Shakespeare’s plays. Presenting students with the OED early on can teach them the joys of questioning and analyzing Shakespeare’s language, while also preparing them for college-level textual analysis.

The OED is often among the online databases provided by public schools. However, if your school does not offer access to the OED, students and teachers can access it by signing up for a Boston Public Library eCard [HERE](https://bpl.org/ecard) (bpl.org/ecard). A BPL eCard gives individuals access to all the online resources and databases available through the Boston Public Library, including the OED. An eCard is free for all Massachusetts residents and workers ages 13 and older.



## ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY  
**CARDIOGRAM**

ACTIVITY  
**LOUD, LOUDER, LOUDEST**

ACTIVITY  
**LADY MACBETH'S RHETORIC**

SEE PAGES 27-31 FOR ACTIVITY DETAILS & INSTRUCTIONS

# VERSE AND METER

**IN MOST OF HIS PLAYS**, Shakespeare wrote in both prose and verse. In most editions of Shakespeare's plays, lines spoken in prose run in thick blocks of text from one margin to the other. Shakespeare's verse, on the other hand, is presented in narrower columns set to the left of a page.

While Shakespeare did utilize rhyme schemes from time to time, the majority of his dramatic verse is blank verse, or verse that does not rhyme. Shakespeare did, however, rely heavily on rhythm. Shakespeare's most commonly used rhythm

is iambic pentameter, a rhythm that occurs naturally in human speech. An iamb is a set of two syllables, the first unstressed, and the second stressed. *Pentameter*, from the Greek word *penta*, meaning five, means that there are five iambs in each line, and a total of 10 syllables. A stressed syllable has more prominence than an unstressed syllable and is often spoken slower than an unstressed syllable. Some say iambic pentameter sounds like a horse galloping:

**da-DUM-da-DUM-da-DUM-da-DUM-da-DUM**



When breaking down meter the symbol “-” denotes an unstressed syllable and the symbol “/” denotes a stressed syllable. Examine Macbeth's first line in play, which is spoken in perfect iambic pentameter.

**So foul and fair a day I have not seen.**



Shakespeare didn't always limit himself to strictly ten syllables per line, some lines have more syllables, and some have less. While Shakespeare often wrote in iambic pentameter, he also experimented in other forms of meter. In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare

often used trochaic tetrameter. A Trochee is the opposite of an iamb: it consists of two syllables, the first is stressed and the second is unstressed. In trochaic tetrameter, there are four trochees, for a total of eight syllables:

**DUM-da-DUM-da-DUM-da-DUM-da**



The first lines spoken by the witches are in trochaic tetrameter:

**When shall we three meet again,**



**In thunder, lightning, or in rain**



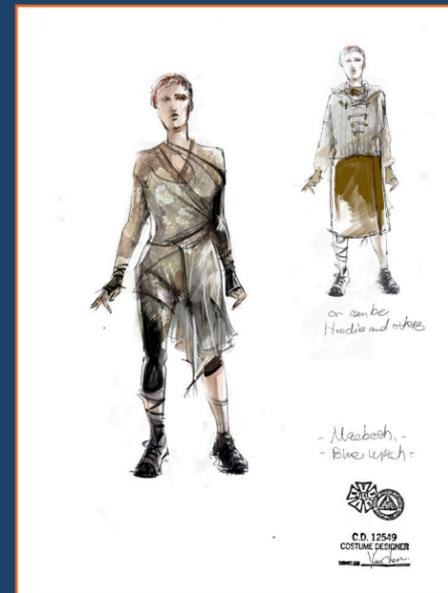
While the first line is irregular, with seven syllables instead of eight, the rhythm creates a vastly different mood from the more natural sounding iambic pentameter. Trochaic tetrameter often

creates a mood of eeriness or unease. It also tends to sound more ritualistic than iambic pentameter.

BG IMAGE: BRITISH LIBRARY—"PROSE AND VERSE IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS" MANUSCRIPT OF SONGS FROM THE TEMPEST, C. 1650-67 | SONGS ARE A STRIKING FEATURE OF THE TEMPEST. THIS MANUSCRIPT SHOWS THE MUSIC FOR ARIEL'S SONG, "WHERE THE BEE SUCKS, THERE SUCK I".

# MACBETH

COSTUME SKETCHES



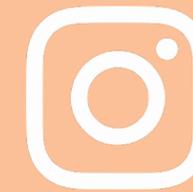
COSTUME SKETCHES BY YAO CHEN, COSTUME DESIGNER FOR MRT'S 2022 PRODUCTION OF MACBETH.

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## TABLEAUX

### WHAT IT IS

Dramatic Tableaux are a classic theatre exercise designed to help students create a poignant stage picture. In a tableau, students are arranged, frozen and silent, in dramatic poses that give a clear illustration of what is happening in the scene. As a theatre exercise tableaux help students understand what makes an interesting and evocative stage picture. However, as an English classroom game, tableaux can help students understand story structure and moments of climax in a given text. Skills to be learned include: creative expression, leadership, collaboration, and narrative and emotional comprehension.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Organize a list of dramatic moments from *Macbeth*. Take volunteers from the class (between 3-7 students). Explain that a tableau is a frozen, silent stage picture that is meant to clearly show what is happening in a given moment in time. To demonstrate the activity, act as “director,” and organize/instruct the student volunteers on how they should pose their bodies’ facial expression. When you are content with the picture, have the students “freeze” and hold it for 10 seconds. Call up another group of volunteers, this time casting one student as the “director” to cast and direct their peers in a new scene. Continue on.

### POSSIBLE TABLEAUX

Macbeth and Banquo come across the three witches.  
 Macbeth enters Duncan’s bed chamber, ready to murder him.  
 Lady Macbeth sleepwalks.  
 Macduff and Macbeth meet on the battle field.  
 Lady Macbeth welcomes her husband home after receiving his letter.  
 Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane.  
 Duncan is found dead.  
 Banquo dies, Fleance flees.

Lady Macbeth persuades her husband to kill the king.  
 Lady Macduff tries to protect her children from the murderers.  
 Duncan praises Macbeth on his battlefield victory.  
 Malcom tells Macduff of his family’s murder.  
 Macbeth meets the witches for the second time.  
 Lady Macbeth chastises her husband for not leaving behind the bloody daggers.  
 Macbeth struggles with guilt after seeing Banquo’s ghost, his wife tries to calm him.

## WHO HAS THE POWER?

### WHAT IT IS

An activity designed to stimulate discussion and reflection on the nature and transition of power in *Macbeth*.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Ask students to share what power means to them, and ask them to describe what a powerful person is like. Ask the students to consider the first act of *Macbeth*. Who is the most powerful person (or people) in the play at the beginning? Present students with note cards that have the names of some of

the characters written on them (i.e. Macbeth, Duncan, Lady Macbeth, Macduff, Malcolm, Banquo, Witches). In groups or individually, ask students to arrange the cards in order from most powerful to least. When finished, ask them to briefly explain their reasoning.

## WHO HAS THE POWER?

### INSTRUCTIONS (CONT.)

Next ask students to consider a point in the middle of the play, say when Macbeth has just been made king. Ask them how the power in the play has shifted. Is Macbeth now the most powerful character? Is his wife? Does having him steal the throne make him a more powerful king than Duncan, or a less powerful king? Have them

rearrange the cards a second time. Finally ask students to consider the end of the play, after Macbeth has been killed. Who has the most power now? Malcolm? Macduff? The Witches? Fleance? After they have organized the cards a final time, ask students to explain their reasoning. . . Encourage debate!

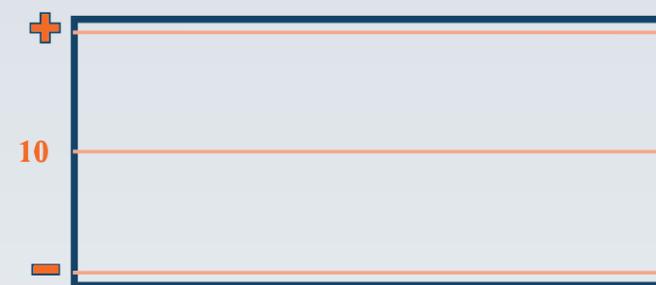
## CARDIOGRAM

### WHAT IT IS

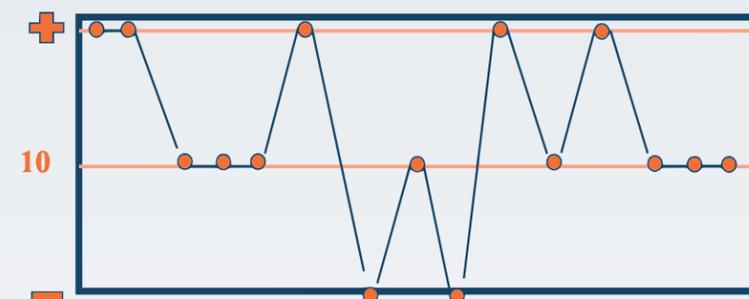
Conceptualized as a teaching resource from the Globe Theatre in London, drawing and plotting cardiograms make for an effective way to visualize and analyze Shakespeare’s use of meter and syllabic differences. This exercise is also a helpful tool for textual analysis: why does Shakespeare choose the traditional 10-syllable iambic pentameter for some lines, but not for others?

### INSTRUCTIONS

Choose a monologue or passage from *Macbeth*. The chosen text should be said by one character, and should be between 10-20 lines. You may choose to cut a monologue in half so long as you “cut” the text at an appropriate place (at a period or colon). Next, consider the graph below:



Now, read the first line of your chosen passage, and count the number of syllables. If there are exactly 10 syllables, draw a first point on the middle line. If there are more than 10, plot the first point on the top line, and if there are fewer than 10 syllables, plot the first point on the bottom line. Continue on, plotting a point for each line. When finished, connect the points together. Below is an example cardiogram for the first 15 lines of Macbeth’s monologue, “Is this a dagger which I see before me...”



**CARDIOGRAM****INSTRUCTIONS (CONT.)**

1. Is this a dagger which I see before me, (11)
2. The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee. (11)
3. I have thee not, and yet I see thee still. (10)
4. Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible (10)
5. To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but (10)
6. A dagger of the mind, a false creation, (11)
7. Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain? (9)
8. I see thee yet, in form as palpable (10)
9. As this which now I draw. (6)
10. Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going, (11)
11. And such an instrument I was to use. (10)
12. Mine eyes are made the fools o' the other senses, (12)
13. Or else worth all the rest. I see thee still, (10)
14. And on thy blade and dudgeon, gouts of blood, (10)
15. Which was not so before. There's no such thing. (10)

Once students have created their cardiograms, ask them to reexamine the text and answer the following questions.

1. Where is the greatest jump from least syllables to most syllables, or vice versa?
2. What could be the purpose of this drastic shift?
3. What do the lines with more than 10 syllables, and less than 10 syllables have in common? What mood do they evoke?
4. What do the lines with exactly 10 syllables have in common? Do they evoke a different mood than the other lines?
5. Imagine these lines are shorter in order to leave an actor time to do a physical action – what might they do to fill the time left by the absent beats?
6. Which syllables are stressed, and which are unstressed? Highlight the stressed syllables.

**LOUD, LOUDER, LOUDEST****WHAT IT IS**

Loud, Louder, Loudest is an easy and popular theatre game that can be played by young children, adolescents and adults. This exercise is great for encouraging students to view *Macbeth* as performative and transformative text.

**INSTRUCTIONS**

Divide students into groups, with three to six students per group. Choose one group to go first, and have the rest of the students sit in the “audience.” Have the first group of students line up in a row facing the audience. Read a line or short passage from *Macbeth*. Starting left and working right, have each student repeat the phrase at a progressively louder volume, from a whisper, to a shout. Once the last and loudest student has gone, have the first (and quietest student) move to the end. Give a new line each round

until every student in the first group has said a line at every volume. Move to the next group.

At the beginning of the game, students tend to only experiment with volume, however, as the game progresses, students always end up experimenting with tone, inflection, and mood, helping them to understand how the same line of text can take on a variety of different meanings.

**LOUD, LOUDER, LOUDEST****POSSIBLE LINES TO USE IN THIS ACTIVITY**

When shall we three meet again  
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?  
Fit to govern? No, not to live. O nation miserable!  
Fair is foul, and foul is fair:  
I will not be afraid of death and ruin  
All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter!  
Speak, if you can: what are you?  
Stars, hide your fires, Let not light see my dark and deep desires.  
But screw your courage to the sticking-place, And we'll not fail.  
Is this a dagger which I see before me,  
O, full of scorpions is my mind,  
It will have blood they say: blood will have blood  
Thou liest, thou shag-hair'd villain.  
Beware Macduff, Beware the Thane of Fife.  
Murder! Murder! Murder!  
Alas, poor country, almost afraid to know itself  
Out, damned spot: out, I say  
Here may you see the tyrant.  
Duncan comes here to-night.  
So foul and fair a day I have not seen.  
What, will these hands ne'er be clean?  
What's done, cannot be undone.  
To bed, to bed, to bed.  
Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more.  
The Queen, my lord, is dead.  
Go, get some water, And wash this filthy witness from your hand.  
Out, out, brief candle, Life's but a walking shadow,  
Your royal father 's murdered.  
Tyrant, show thy face,  
The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now?  
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse the curtained sleep  
Come you spirits, That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here  
I am afraid to think what I have done  
Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more'  
Hail, King of Scotland.  
Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?  
My wife and children's ghosts will haunt me still.  
The raven himself is hoarse.  
O horror, horror, horror. Tongue nor heart cannot conceive nor name thee

**NOTE:** For practical purposes this game is best played outside, in an auditorium, or somewhere where loud voices won't be a disruption to other classrooms

## LADY MACBETH'S RHETORIC

## WHAT IT IS

Merging both close reading and performance, this exercise helps students understand different rhetorical methods, hopefully encouraging them to utilize different methods of rhetoric in their persuasive and argumentative writing. While not necessary, it is helpful if students have a basic knowledge of the rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos.

## INSTRUCTIONS



FIGURE 4: JOHN SINGER SARGENT'S 1889 PAINTING, "ELLEN TERRY AS LADY MACBETH."

In the last step of the activity, students will be asked to perform the passages they have analyzed. In each group, one student will play Macbeth, and the others will play Lady Macbeth, dividing up the lines in her passage among them. Ask students to break their passages up, allowing Macbeth to interrupt his wife at various times. No matter when or how often Macbeth speaks is up to the groups, but he can only say two phrases: "prithce, peace!" and "I dare do all that may become a man." Remind students that this is an argument that Lady Macbeth *wins*. Ask that their performances reflect Macbeth eventually giving in to his wife's desires

After returning to his castle with the king, Macbeth struggles with the idea of killing the king in order to steal the crown. He goes to his wife and tells her that he has decided against the murder, telling her, they will "proceed no further in this business." Lady Macbeth does not take this news well. In the scene that follows, Lady Macbeth convinces her husband to go forward with their bloody plot. How does she go about convincing him? Why is she successful?

Divide students into groups of three to four, and give them each one of Lady Macbeth's passages from this scene. Ask students to do a close reading of the passage they are assigned and ask them to examine and discuss the tactics Lady Macbeth uses to convince her husband he should kill the king. Use the following questions as a guide:

1. What is Lady Macbeth saying in this passage?
2. Are there words you don't know? Identify and define them.  
(Use the OED!)
3. What are the most important words in this passage?  
What words or phrases jump out?
4. What gestures might Lady Macbeth make when saying these important words or phrases?
5. What do you think Lady Macbeth is trying to make her husband feel?
6. How do you think Macbeth feels hearing Lady Macbeth's words?
7. What tactics does Lady Macbeth use to convince her husband to kill the king?
8. What arguments does she make?
9. Does she use Logos (logic), Ethos (credibility), or Pathos (emotion) to persuade him?

## LADY MACBETH'S RHETORIC

## LADY MACBETH

Was the hope drunk  
Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since?  
And wakes it now, to look so green and pale,  
At what it did so freely? From this time  
Such I account thy love. Art thou afraid  
To be the same in thine own act and valour  
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that  
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,  
And live a coward in thine own esteem,  
Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'  
Like the poor cat i' the adage?

## LADY MACBETH

What beast was't, then,  
That made you break this enterprise to me?  
When you durst do it, then you were a man;  
And, to be more than what you were, you would  
Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place  
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:  
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now  
Does unmake you. I have given suck, and know  
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:  
I would, while it was smiling in my face,  
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums,  
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn  
As you have done to this.

## LADY MACBETH

We fail?  
But screw your courage to the sticking-place,  
And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep,  
Whereto the rather shall his day's hard journey  
Soundly invite him, his two chamberlains  
Will I with wine and wassail so convince,  
That memory, the warder of the brain,  
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason  
A limbeck only. When in swinish sleep  
Their drenched natures lie as in a death,  
What cannot you and I perform upon  
The unguarded Duncan? What not put upon  
His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt  
Of our great quell?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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