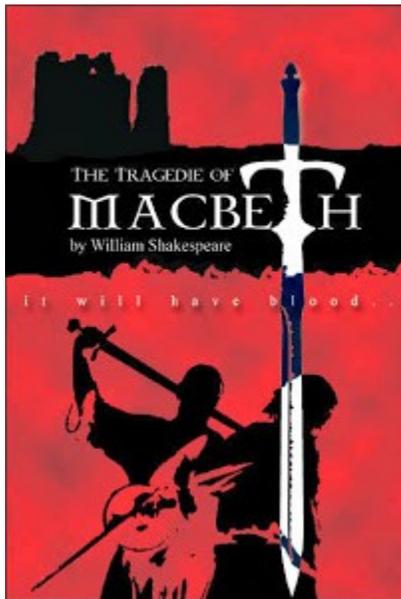


# Macbeth

Great help for ISC class XI , XII students in English(i.e. Macbeth). Notes in easy and simple language..



## Macbeth – An Overview

Macbeth is a story woven around a man's ambition and the repercussions of it. A brave and respected general, Macbeth wins a war against Norwegian and Irish allied forces that was led by the traitorous Macdonwald. When Macbeth returns to Scotland with his friend general Banquo, they meet three witches who prophesy that Macbeth will be the king and Banquo's descendants will be kings. Macbeth starts to think over the prophecies and is disturbed in to a great extent. The prophecies could be his own feelings rather than witches' prophecies as we

too have seen instances where generals becoming kings or trying to become kings in the recent history.

With the pressure of the prophecies becoming too much to bear alone, he writes to Lady Macbeth about them while going to see the King of Scotland, King Duncan. Lady Macbeth, a vicious childless woman, put venom into the prophecies and plans to kill the ageing king and make Macbeth the King. Macbeth, being a kinder person, hesitates to kill the king after the latter pays a visit to the former's castle but Lady Macbeth induces him not to lose the opportunity. With much uncertainty and hesitation, Macbeth kills King Duncan and his chamber guards and put the responsibility of the murder on the guards.

Macduff, the King's loyal Thane of Fife suspects Macbeth but doesn't show it. Duncan's sons Malcolm and Donalbin flee to England and Ireland for fear of death as whoever killed the king could murder his sons as well. But Macbeth takes this as an opportunity to become the king as there is no heir to the throne. He also puts the blame of killing the king on his own sons.

Though Macbeth becomes the king as he aspires, he is still suspicious of Banquo, the general, as the prophecies mentioned that his sons will be kings. So, he invites Banquo and his son Fleance to a dinner and in the meantime hires two murderers to kill the father and the son. Banquo gets killed but his son flees the scene. Even though Banquo was killed his ghost haunts Macbeth's castle and Macbeth is greatly disturbed.

Macduff also flees to England. Macbeth orders Macduff's castle be seized and sends murderers to slaughter Macduff's wife and children. Lady Macduff and her young son are murdered cold-bloodedly.

Meanwhile Lady Macbeth, who was the mastermind of the plot to kill the king becomes mad and sleepwalks at night. She feels the gravity of the crimes she was involved in and kills herself.

Kings sons and Macduff get together and raise armies and invade Macbeth's castle and defeats Macbeth's army and kill him.

(Malcom, the son of murdered king Duncan becomes the king. Although Malcolm, and not Fleance, is placed on the throne, the witches' prophecy concerning Banquo ("Thou shalt get kings") was known to the audience of Shakespeare's time to be true: James VI of Scotland (later also James I of England) was supposedly a descendant of Banquo.

In the backstage world of theatre, some believe that the play is cursed, and will not mention its title aloud, referring to it instead as "the Scottish play".

## **Actwise Summary Of Macbeth**

### **Act I:**

This Act opens with the three Weird Sisters setting up the entire theme of the play: Fair is foul and foul is fair. A war is taking place against Scotland (the setting of this play) and Norway. Scotland is victorious due to the valiant efforts of Macbeth. The traitorous Thane of Cawdor is captured and executed. King Duncan decides to reward Macbeth with the title of Thane of Cawdor to show his gratitude.

The scene shifts to the battleground where the three Weird Sisters confront Macbeth and Banquo, telling Macbeth that he will become Thane of Cawdor and eventually king. Macbeth soon learns of his new title, fulfilling the first part of the prophesy, and sends word to his wife. King Duncan plans on staying the night at Macbeth's home.

Lady Macbeth receives the news and immediately plots the death of King Duncan so her husband will be king. Lady Macbeth manipulates Macbeth into following her plans, and he reluctantly agrees to murder Duncan. By the end of Act I, Macbeth is determined to follow through with the plan.

## **Act II:**

Macbeth again has some doubts (and visions), but he soon talks himself into following through with the murder. Macbeth freaks out so Lady Macbeth finishes the rest of the plan by wiping blood on the drunk guards.

The next morning, Macduff and Lennox arrive at Macbeth's, and Macduff discovers the dead body of King Duncan. All are shocked and Macbeth plays his role to perfection. The guards are immediately suspect and Macbeth kills them "in a fit of sorrow and rage." Malcolm and Donalbain, the King's sons, flee the castle because they are afraid that they will be blamed for the murder of their father. The king is soon buried.

### **Act III:**

Banquo begins to suspect Macbeth for the murder of King Duncan and Macbeth in turn feels that Banquo will reveal that it was he that killed the King. Therefore, Macbeth sends out some thugs to murder Banquo and his son, Fleance. Banquo is murdered, but Fleance escapes.

Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Lennox, Ross, and other lords attend a banquet. The ghost of Banquo presents itself to Macbeth. Macbeth begins to rant and rave, making the other guests uneasy. Lady Macbeth tries to cover up the situation by saying Macbeth is prone to fits. By the end of this Act, we learn that Macduff has not attended the banquet because he has gone to England, looking for aid because he is suspicious of Macbeth.

### **Act IV:**

Macbeth confronts the three Weird Sisters and they show him more visions. The visions lead Macbeth to believe that he cannot be killed by any man, giving him a false sense of security. He then plans to send murderers to the castle of Macduff (who is in England ) in order to kill his family.

Meanwhile, Macduff is in England begging Malcolm to return to Scotland and seize the throne from Macbeth who has become a tyrant. Malcolm tests Macduff's loyalty to Scotland and himself, and after being satisfied with Macduff's responses,

he agrees to wage war against Macbeth. Malcolm's uncle will also aid in the attack.

## **Act V:**

Lady Macbeth has finally gone mad with guilt over the murders. The once strong and ruthless woman is now a scared child. Doctors are unable to help her.

Some of the Scottish lords are discussing Macbeth's state of mind and have come to the conclusion that they will help Malcolm and Macduff fight against Macbeth. Of course, Macbeth isn't really concerned because the prophecy, he believes, insures that he cannot be killed by any man born of woman. Macbeth soon confronts Macduff and learns that Macduff was ripped from his mother's side and not born naturally. Thus, Macbeth is killed by Macduff, just as Macbeth had conquered the other Thane of Cawdor. Malcolm then becomes the rightful King of Scotland.

## **Importance Of Opening Scene** **(Macbeth)**

The opening scene in Macbeth provides an ideal background of the play. The audience is gradually made conscious that the events who follow will take place against the

background of evil, which the witches have decided for Macbeth.

The scene takes place on the heath, barren and deserted land. The prevailing darkness is sometimes believed only while thunder and lightening in scene. Such an atmosphere is always indicated with evil. Therefore the audience is given some indication that the evidence of play was also be tragic.

The three witches have enter, there were various prediction regarding the role of the witches in the play. Amongst most commonly discussed theory it is believed that the witches are symbolic representation of the evil in the world. Another theory suggest that the function of the witches is to act as a symbolic representation of the evil in man's mind. They are an extention of desire in man's mind to do wrong and then to blame it on some external agency. the witches are real, presence in the play with a character and role which is destined. To support this belief one must remember that the witches when first seen Banquo on the heath they had prophecised for him also. The witches are ingaged in discussing events past, present and future. They seemed in someone controllers of time. The first witch refers to the past when she speaks of their meeting then concluded in hours - " When shall we three meet again." To this the second witch who is more informed about the present replies - "When the hurly-burly's done, when the battle lost. Refering to the future the third witch confidently said- "That will be ere the

set of sun." From this belief the audience is made aware of chief characters of witches. They preside over time and control the weather causing thunder, lightning and rain. The method of their deception needs to be noticed. They are equivocators to speak of the battle lost or won. This remark also shows that they have knowledge of what is going on in Scotland and they might indeed be responsible for the events.

The witches then go on to say-" There to meet with Macbeth." Immediately the audience is indicated that there is link in between the witches and Macbeth. The elements of curiosity is aroused as well as feeling of pity is also aroused as the audience is certain that the witches are going to interfere in Macbeth's life is judges as a frail weak human being who will find it impossible to fight against the sources that are superior to him. The witches interfere in the life of Macbeth also questions that whether Macbeth can be entirely responsible for his downfall.

The atmosphere of curiosity established in the opening scene intensified by unexpected mewling of cat referred to as 'Graymalkin' and spirit of toad called 'Paddock'. These sounds hidden the atmosphere of evil. The audience in this way is introduced to another features of the witches existence, their familiar angels to which they are associated.

In Shakespeare's time it was popularly believed that the

witches inhabited the body of animals which they could be recognized by absence of their tail. The scene closes with the witches setting the tone of the tragedy of stating their motto. "Fair is foul and foul is fair, hover through the fog and filthy air." This is another example of exavocation. It seems to inform the audience the philosophy which is inversion of the moral values. The witches can go to any extent to harm people and this gave them delight.

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