

Macbeth Questions

Act 1, Scene 1

1. What effect is Shakespeare creating by beginning the play with this scene?
2. How are the supernatural and evil powers of the Witches suggested?
3. What is suggested by the line “fair is foul and foul is fair” (1.1.11)?



Act 1, Scene 2

1. What qualities of Duncan’s character and Malcolm’s character are brought out here?
2. What two purposes—both dramatic and practical—are served by the bleeding Sergeant and Ross?
3. What image is given of Macbeth’s bravery and ability as a warrior?
4. Whom had Macbeth and Banquo been fighting? How is Macbeth rewarded for this bravery? By who?

Act 1, Scene 3

1. When Macbeth says, “So foul and fair a day I have not seen” (1.3.39), to what is he referring? What dramatic irony is found here?
2. Why would the salutations used by the Witches win Macbeth’s confidence?
3. What differences is there in the reaction of Macbeth and Banquo to the prophecies?
4. How does this scene add to the sinister role in the play?
5. As other talk, what does Macbeth’s aside reveal about his thinking?



Act 1, Scene 4

1. What effect does Shakespeare create by having Macbeth and Banquo enter just as they are discussing the execution of the former Thane of Cawdor?
2. Of what importance are Duncan’s naming of Malcolm as his successor, and Duncan’s visit to Inverness?

Act 1, Scene 5

1. What does Lady Macbeth’s reaction to the letter show how she thinks about her husband?
2. What purpose is served by Lady Macbeth’s invocation to the powers of evil and to darkness?
3. In what way does Lady Macbeth’s advice to Macbeth relate to the “fair is foul” theme? What is she planning?



Act 1, Scene 6

1. How is this scene juxtaposed with scene 5? How does the peaceful setting add to the feeling of pathos the audience feels for Duncan?
2. What qualities does Lady Macbeth illustrate in this scene?

Act 1, Scene 7

1. What three reasons does Macbeth give for not wanting to kill Duncan? What does he conclude?
2. What taunts does Lady Macbeth use to “spur” her husband to commit the crime?
3. Macbeth’s response to her about what a man may dare is frequently quoted. What is his meaning?
4. In what respects is Lady Macbeth both admirable and despicable in this scene? Why may she be compared to the biblical Eve?

Act 2, Scene 1

1. How is pathetic fallacy evident in the beginning of the scene?
2. What is significant about Macbeth saying “I think not of them” (2.1.25) after Banquo had admitted to dreaming about the weird sisters?
3. What differences are evident between the integrity of Macbeth and Banquo?
4. In his soliloquy after Banquo leaves, what does Macbeth tell the audience he sees? What could account for this apparition?
5. Why does Shakespeare have Macbeth hallucinate during his soliloquy?

Act 2, Scene 2

1. Why doesn’t Shakespeare include the actual murder of Duncan in the script?
2. Compare Macbeth’s and Lady Macbeth’s reaction immediately after the crime.
3. Macbeth, apparently troubled by the murder he has just committed tells Lady Macbeth what he saw and heard. She tells him, “These deeds must not be thought of this way” (2.2.45-46). Why?
4. How does Lady Macbeth get Duncan’s blood on her hands?

Act 2, Scene 3

1. What is the dramatic and practical purpose of the Porter scene?
2. How is the theme “a crime against nature” reinforced in this scene?
3. How does Lady Macbeth react to the discovery of Duncan’s body?
4. How does the line “Duncan’s silver skin laced with his golden blood” (2.3.128) add to the characterization of Duncan?



Act 2, Scene 4

1. What is the purpose of this scene?
2. What additional natural, or “unnatural”, events further the “crime against nature” theme?

Act 3, Scene 1

1. In his soliloquy, what suspicion and hope does Banquo reveal?
2. By referring to Macbeth’s soliloquy found in lines 52-76, summarize his reasons for wanting Banquo murdered.
3. How do the plans for the second great crime (i.e. killing Banquo) differ from those made for the first one?

Act 3, Scene 2

1. What is the meaning of Lady Macbeth's opening speech in this scene?
2. What indication is there in this scene of Macbeth's increasing ruthlessness and his tormented conscience?

Act 3, Scene 3

1. Give reasons why Banquo's killing and Fleance's escape is the climax of the play?
2. To what extent did Banquo deserve the death that befell him?
3. Which is the greater crime—the killing of Duncan or Banquo? Why?



Act 3, Scene 4

1. What wordplay is there in the murderer's reply that Banquo is "safe" (3.4.29) now?
2. How does Lady Macbeth try to calm her husband and the guests at the banquet?
3. What is the significance of the conversation that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have immediately after the guests leave?
4. Does Macbeth mention Macduff's name?
5. What does Macbeth say he will do next?

Act 3, Scene 5

1. Who is Hecate, and why is she angry?
2. What is her plan for Macbeth, according to lines 25-33?

Act 3, Scene 6

1. What is the purpose of introducing a Lord at this point, and what do his comments reveal about the state of the kingdom?

Act 4, Scene 1

1. Compare the witches' speech pattern with Macbeth's. What effect is Shakespeare creating by altering speech patterns like this?
2. Describe the three apparitions and the predictions given by each? Why is significant that Macbeth believes these predictions?
3. What evidence is there of the degeneration of Macbeth's character in this scene?

Act 4, Scene 2

1. What is the purpose of the exchange between Lady Macduff and her son?
2. Why may the third great crime (i.e. killing Macduff's family) be considered the worst? What does it prove about Macbeth?
3. Why does Shakespeare show the son's murder onstage?



Act 4, Scene 3

1. What additional evidence is included that shows that Macbeth is a tyrant?

2. Give evidence of Malcolm's wisdom and high moral standards? Why would this make him a good king?
3. What witty ploy does Malcolm use to test Macduff's honesty?

Act 5, Scene 1

1. How does Shakespeare create sympathy for Lady Macbeth?
2. What does Lady Macbeth's action of washing of her hands symbolize, and why does it seem ironic?
3. What does the doctor mean when he says, "More needs she the divine than the physician"? (5.1.69).

Act 5, Scene 2

1. Where do the invading forces assemble, and why is this significant?
2. What does this scene show about the loyalty of Macbeth's soldiers?

Act 5, Scene 3

1. What is Macbeth's lament in his "my way of life/Is fallen into the sear" (5.3.26) speech?
2. What is ironic about Macbeth asking the doctor to find a cure for the disease affecting his country? (refer to lines 55-64)

Act 5, Scene 4

1. What tactical strategy does Malcolm take to disguise his army?

Act 5, Scene 5-6

1. Compare Macbeth's reception of the news of his wife's death and the way Macduff reacted to Ross' announcement concerning the death of Lady Macduff and her children. Who is affected more deeply?
2. What metaphor does Macbeth use to describe people's experience in life? (refers to lines 26-30)

Act 5, Scene 7

1. What effect is Shakespeare creating with this sequence of short scenes which follow one another so closely?
2. How do the following create suspense: the death of young Siward and the speech of Macduff?

Act 5, Scene 8

1. How does Macbeth's comment that "I bear a charmed life, which must not yield/ To one of woman born" (5.8.15-16) show his confidence?
2. What terrifying realization does Macbeth make when confronted by Macduff?

Act 5, Scene 9

1. What do you think is the purpose of this scene with regards to the theme of the "natural order" in the play?
2. What three things does Malcolm say he is going to establish now that Macbeth has been killed?

