

# Macbeth

## STUDY GUIDE

### Introduction

In Indy Shakes' 45-minute production of *Macbeth*, six actors will present this tale of tainted information, the murder it inspires, and what comes next. Witness what spurs Macbeth to that first fatal, evil act and how he excuses what follows.

This masterpiece raises important questions about what we let sway our thoughts, as we make critical decisions that will affect the rest of our lives. This is a great first exposure to Shakespeare on stage with lots of action to punctuate the dialogue, and familiar speeches and quotes heard in context. Each performance will be followed by a question-and-answer time with the *Macbeth* Company.

### The Historical Story of Macbeth

Written around 1606, a year after the infamous and unsuccessful 1605 Gunpowder Plot to assassinate King James I of England and blow up the Houses of Parliament, the story is probably drawn from the history book *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1577), although the historical Macbeth ruled for 17 years, not just for a few days.

King James I, who had recently been crowned when Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*, is a descendant from the line of Banquo, who is depicted in the play with honor and nobility.

King James' interest in the supernatural was evident in the book he wrote on the subject, *Daemonologie*. The witches were so popular with audiences that more about them was added to the play in later performances by another theatre company.

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### FUN FACTS

**MAJOR THEMES** It's bad to kill the king.  
Don't believe everything you hear.  
What's done cannot be undone.

Because of the ferocity of the fights, actors have been injured or rumored to have died in productions of *Macbeth*. And with the enactment of spells in the dialogue, many consider this play cursed.

Audience members can "protect" themselves by HISSING when "Macbeth" is spoken.

### THE CURSE

**DOUBLING** In this performance, 24 characters are played by just 6 actors. Even Lady Macbeth and Macbeth will play other roles.

Each character is aided in part by costume, but relies upon the actor's talent to make each character unique.

Thanks to the support of the Indianapolis Parks Foundation and Indy Parks, Indy Shakes is excited to provide programming within Indy Parks to bring free, high-quality Shakespeare productions to several parks across our city.



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### Synopsis (Summary)

The play opens with three witches gathering on the battlefield. They greet Macbeth and Banquo with prophecies both great and frightening. In a letter sent ahead to his wife, Macbeth tells Lady Macbeth about the prediction that he will become King of Scotland. This drives her to plot the fastest way for Macbeth to get the crown. When King Duncan comes to stay overnight at their castle, they take the opportunity to murder him in his sleep.

The dead king is discovered by Macduff. Macbeth fakes a rage and kills the King's grooms. Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, flee for their safety. Macbeth is crowned. Banquo suspects Macbeth, and Macbeth worries about Banquo enough to have him killed. When Banquo's ghost appears at the feast, only Macbeth sees him and loses his composure. The next day Macbeth finds the witches and demands they tell him more. Their reply makes Macbeth think he is undefeatable. When he learns Macduff has joined Malcolm in England, he orders the murder of Macduff's family and servants.

Lady Macbeth sleepwalks and her Gentlewoman and the doctor learn her guilt from her mutterings. Malcolm marches to fight Macbeth with the help of Macduff and the English force. Lost to her guilty thoughts, Lady Macbeth falls or jumps to her death.

When impossible events foretold by the witches begin to occur, Macbeth decides to fight his way out. He has been told that no man or woman born shall harm Macbeth. But when he faces Macduff he learns Macduff was "untimely from his mother ripped" (was delivered through surgery). Macbeth is defeated, choosing death over humiliation.

"In one fell swoop."

"The be all and end all."

"By the pricking of my thumbs,  
something wicked this way  
comes."

"Double, double, toil and trouble.  
Fire burn and cauldron bubble."

"Out, out, damn spot."

"Fair is foul, and foul is fair."

"The milk of human kindness."

"What's done is done."

### WELL - KNOWN PHRASES

### LADY MACBETH

One of Shakespeare's strongest plot-driving female characters is Lady Macbeth. She is often portrayed as ambitious and overbearing, a wife who pushes her husband to commit murder.

In this production, Lady Macbeth conspires with her husband to commit murder for the crown. With her agreement, support, and acceptance of the risks, Macbeth chooses to take the crown by murder and deception. She is his partner in crime; he may not have murdered King Duncan without her.

Bart Simpson, Indy Shakes Company member and Macbeth director, has condensed Shakespeare's play into a 45-minute format and introductory Prologue suitable for school-age children. The text for this production tells the story, preserves the poetry of the soliloquies, and accentuates the role of misleading information in achieving evil ends. Shakespeare-made for children, it also keeps the witches and the sword fights.

### 45 - MINUTE SHAKES

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### Questions to Think About

- 1) Does Macbeth begin the play as an evil man, or is he just ambitious? Is he a good man who becomes bad?
- 2) Are the witches observers of the action in the play, or do they cause the actions of Macbeth and the other characters?
- 3) Would Macbeth have murdered King Duncan if Lady Macbeth hadn't wanted to as well?
- 4) At the end of the play, does Macbeth regret what he has done?
- 5) How do you make decisions?
- 6) How can we make good decisions instead of bad decisions?

Indianapolis Shakespeare Company is a professional, theatre company with a mission to share the joy of live professional theatre in ways that appeal to diverse audiences.

INDY  
SHAKES

### TRAVELING TROUPE

Indianapolis Shakespeare Company presents our Traveling Troupe, the community and education outreach arm of our organization.

Through this professional extension of our Company, we will present a 45-minute version of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* June 2018, at various summer camps, day care settings, senior facilities, churches, and libraries.

## Coriolanus

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