
Year 9

English

Shakespeare's

Macbeth

Lesson 2

Macbeth and Lady

Macbeth

Overview of Lesson

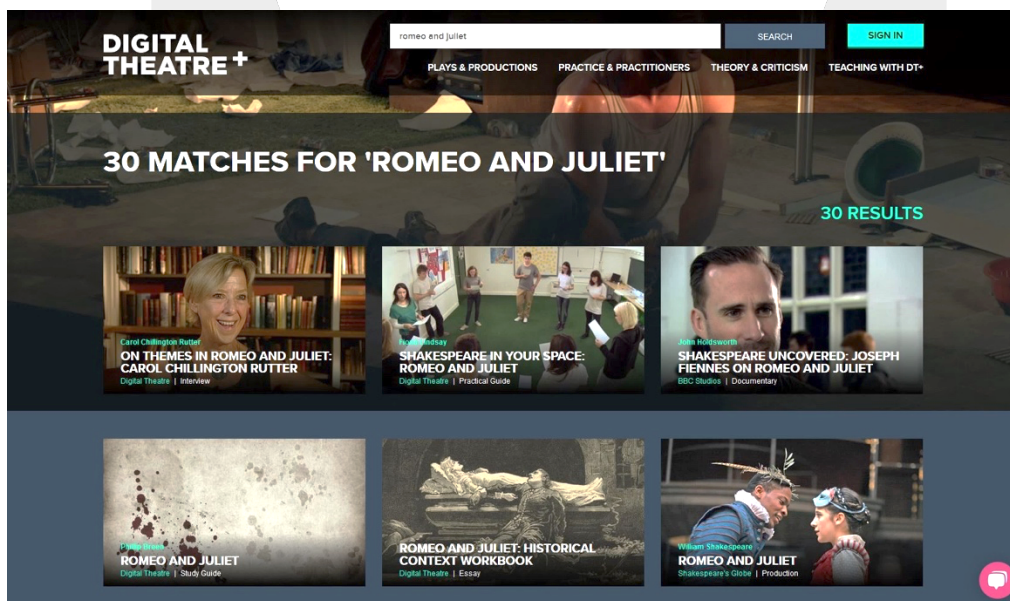
L	Content	Skills
2	<p>Students learn about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The consequences of hearing prophecies ▪ The influence of performance of drama on our understanding of a script ▪ The character of Lady Macbeth 	<p>Students learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analyse and interpret Shakespearean language through collaborative exercises ▪ Identify and analyse key dramatic techniques
	<p>Evidence of Learning: Class discussions; text annotations; small text analysis exercises</p> <p>Assessment: Homework Two (content knowledge quiz)</p>	

Digital Theatre +

Matrix Education has collaborated with Digital Theatre + to bring more to your experience of studying drama, especially Shakespeare.

With this online resource you can watch productions of Shakespearean plays, including *Macbeth*.

There are other resources to help you in your study, such as theatre notes, interviews, film and television adaptations, and manga editions of some of the plays.



This is a great supplement to just reading the script in class. To use Digital Theatre + follow these steps:

1. Log into Canvas
2. Click on the link to Digital Theatre +
3. Select 'Sign In' (top right corner)
4. Choose Matrix Education from the drop-down menu and click 'SIGN IN WITH MY INSTITUTION'
5. Explore and enjoy!

If you have trouble, clear your browser cache and try again.

1. Macbeth in Review

Below is a description of key moments from the play. Your challenge? To place them all in the correct plot sequence!

Events in <i>Macbeth</i>	Order of events (1-5)
Macbeth and Lady Macbeth resolve to murder King Duncan.	
Lady Macbeth goes mad.	
Macbeth is defeated in battle.	
The Witches offer Macbeth and Banquo prophecies.	
Macbeth kills Banquo	



Théodore Chassériau 1855. *Macbeth and Banquo meeting the Witches on the heath*

2. How does prophecy change someone?

Macbeth's imagination really takes off when he stops questioning the Witches' prophecy and begins to consider its possibilities. He sees the potential not only for himself but also for his friend Banquo—remember, the Witches have prophesised that Banquo's children will become kings. In the scene below, two minor characters Angus and Ross have just arrived and delivered the news from King Duncan that Macbeth is now Thane of Cawdor, which means part of the Witches' prophecy has come true!

Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act 1, Scene 3, Lines 115-126

MACBETH

[*Aside*]¹ Glamis, and Thane of Cawdor!
The greatest is behind.² — Thanks for your pains. —
[*To Banquo*] Do you not hope your children shall be kings,
When those that gave the Thane of Cawdor to me
Promised no less to them?

BANQUO

That trusted home³
Might yet enkindle you unto the crown,⁴
Besides the Thane of Cawdor. But 'tis strange:
And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,⁵
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence. —⁶
Cousins, a word, I pray you.⁷

¹ ANGUS and ROSS are still on stage as Macbeth makes an aside.

² *The greatest is behind* the larger part of the prophecy has come to pass.

³ *Home* fully or to the end

⁴ *Enkindle* inflame with desire

⁵ *Instruments of darkness* devils (the Witches)

⁶ *Win us with honest trifles, to betray's / In deepest consequence* tell us the truth about small matters, but lie about matters of great importance.

⁷ *Cousins* kinsmen (directed at ANGUS and ROSS who are still on stage).

Aside	A theatrical convention in which a character, unnoticed by the other characters on stage, speaks frankly and directly to the audience to express a thought or intention.
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Class Discussion

- What possibilities does Macbeth see for his friend Banquo after finding out that King Duncan has appointed him Thane of Cawdor?
- What meaning or meanings do you take away from Banquo's reply?

Critical Thinking

Consider Banquo's words carefully. Discuss the warning he offers Macbeth here.

But 'tis strange:
And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence. —
Cousins, a word, I pray you.

Let's consider Macbeth's thoughts in response to Banquo. Instead of replying directly to Banquo's concerns, Shakespeare has directed that Macbeth speak in an aside to the audience. This is an important directorial choice as it allows the audience to understand more about Macbeth than about the other characters on stage.

Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act 1, Scene 3, Lines 126-143

MACBETH

[*Aside*] Two truths are told, 126
 As happy prologues to the swelling act
 Of the imperial theme. — I thank you, gentlemen. —
 This supernatural soliciting – are⁸
 Cannot be ill, cannot be good: if ill, 130
 Why hath it given me earnest of success,
 Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor:
 If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
 Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair⁹
 And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,¹⁰ 135
 Against the use of nature? Present fears¹¹
 Are less than horrible imaginings:¹²
 My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
 Shakes so my single state of man that function
 Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is,¹³ 140
 But what is not.

...

MACBETH

[*Aside*] If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me,
 Without my stir. 143

⁸ *Soliciting* promising of pleasure

⁹ *Unfix my hair* make my hair stand on end

¹⁰ *Seated* fixed in position

¹¹ *Use* ordinary course or state

¹² *Present fears / Are less than horrible imaginings* real dangers are less frightening than those I can imagine.

¹³ *Surmise* imaginings

Class Collaboration

Together with your teacher and in discussion with your peers, tease out your interpretation of Macbeth's speech. Key questions to consider:

- What are Macbeth's thoughts on the nature of good and evil? Has he really heard and understood Banquo's warning?
- What do you think Macbeth means when he describes the Witches' prophecy as "[it] cannot be ill, cannot be good"?
- What do you think Macbeth is worried about when he says "why do I yield to that suggestion / Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair [?]"
- Upon learning that he has become Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth begins to consider murdering King Duncan: "My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical / Shakes so my single state of man that function / Is smothered in surmise" – what do you think this suggests about Macbeth's character?

Use the space below for additional notes or thoughts in response to the questions above.

Watching actors perform Shakespeare is very important. It allows us to gather understanding from body language, facial expression, costuming, and set design, in addition to the words themselves. Experiencing *Macbeth* as theatre is encountering the play as Shakespeare intended. Consider the following scene from the 2011 Everyman Theatre production, directed by Gemma Bodinetz:

Media Viewing: [DigitalTheatre+ Macbeth Act 1, Scene 3: 7:33-14:37](#)¹⁴

Class Discussion

- How does Macbeth seem to change over the course of this scene?
- What do we learn about his motivations and/or interests?
- The use of asides produces dramatic irony. Why is this important for the audience in the case of Macbeth's long aside which we have just considered?

Dramatic Irony	<p>This term describes instances when the audience knows more about a character's situation than the character does. When we can foresee an outcome sharply contrary to the character's expectations, and thus ascribing a different sense to some character's own statements, we are dealing with <u>dramatic irony</u>. This tends to place us in a powerful position as we observe the action with a superior understanding to those on the stage. In tragedies, this can be called <u>tragic irony</u>.</p>
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¹⁴ Having trouble opening DigitalTheatre+? Clear the cache of your browser and try again. You can navigate to the scene you need through the Key Scene menu.

3. Introducing Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth is one of the most famous characters in Shakespeare's corpus. She's known for her ambition and loyalty to Macbeth and she has engaged and thrilled audiences for centuries. Lady Macbeth is introduced to the audience in Act 1, Scene 5, reading a letter from Macbeth:

Macbeth, Act 1, Scene 5, Lines 1-12

Macbeth's castle at Inverness

Enter LADY MACBETH, reading a letter

LADY MACBETH

[*Reads*] 'They met me in the day of success,¹⁵ and I have learned by the perfectest report,¹⁶ they have more in them than mortal knowledge. When I burned in desire to question them further, they made themselves air, into which they vanished. Whiles I stood rapt in the wonder of it, came missives¹⁷ from the king, who all-hailed me 'Thane of Cawdor;' by which title, before, these weird sisters saluted me, and referred me to the coming on of time,¹⁸ with "Hail, king that shalt be!" This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee. Lay it to thy heart, and farewell.'

5

10

12

¹⁵ *In the day of success* on the day of victory in battle

¹⁶ *Perfectest report* most reliable source of information

¹⁷ *Missives* messengers

¹⁸ *The coming on of time* the future

Class Discussion

In this letter, Macbeth describes Lady Macbeth as “my dearest partner of greatness” and notes that he wrote to her because he didn’t want her to be “ignorant of what greatness is promised thee”.

- Who are the “weird sisters”?
- What greatness is promised Lady Macbeth?
- How would you describe Macbeth’s feelings for Lady Macbeth?

This letter is a prop that could be used in a variety of ways by the actress playing Lady Macbeth to reveal something about her own character to the audience. Consider how this letter might be read differently if:

- Lady Macbeth is afraid for Macbeth away at war;
- She becomes excited part way through the letter about the possibility of becoming queen;
- She is suspicious about prophecies in general.



Vivien Leigh as Lady Macbeth in the 1955 Shakespeare Memorial Theatre production.¹⁹

After reading the letter, Lady Macbeth speaks in her own voice for the first time in the play. This is a very important moment for us as the audience as she is alone on stage and we have the chance to learn about her character. Before we look closely at the text let's consider how the speech might sound when performed with a certain interpretation in mind.

MEDIA VIEWING: Lady Macbeth's speech Act 1, Scene 5 RSC²⁰

Class Discussion

Based on the discussion and performance in this video, what things stand out for you about Lady Macbeth?

¹⁹ Photo by Angus McBean © RSC

²⁰ This is from the Royal Shakespeare Company's 2018 production of *Macbeth* with Niamh Cusack as Lady Macbeth speaking with the Assistant Director Peter Bradley.

Focus Question

Cusack notes that in this speech Lady Macbeth is weighing up Macbeth's "strengths and weaknesses" and she understands that it is his character that might prevent him from achieving his ambitions. These ideas are reflected in the following lines from the speech:

LADY MACBETH

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
What thou art promised;²¹ yet do I fear thy nature;
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way.²²

What is it about Macbeth's character that worries Lady Macbeth? Compose your answer in full sentences and include evidence from the lines above.



²¹ *What thou art promised* according to the prophecy, Macbeth will be king

²² *Catch the nearest way* act without pity

Class Collaboration

Let's consider the rest of the speech carefully. Spend time as a class reading through the speech and making annotations with the help of your teacher. There are a range of questions to consider on the following page as part of this exercise.

Macbeth, Act 1, Scene 5, Lines 13-28

LADY MACBETH

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be 13
 What thou art promised;²³ yet do I fear thy nature;
 It is too full o' the milk of human kindness 15
 To catch the nearest way.²⁴ Thou wouldst be great;
 Art not without ambition, but without
 The illness²⁵ should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
 That wouldst thou holily;²⁶ wouldst not play false,
 And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou'dst have, great Glamis, 20
 That which cries 'Thus thou must do' if thou have it;
 And that which rather thou dost fear to do
 Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee hither,²⁷
 That I may pour my spirits in thine ear;
 And chastise²⁸ with the valour of my tongue 25
 All that impedes thee from the golden round,²⁹
 Which fate and metaphysical³⁰ aid doth seem
 To have thee crowned withal.³¹ 28

²³ *What thou art promised* according to the prophecy, Macbeth will be king

²⁴ *Catch the nearest way* act without pity

²⁵ *Illness* evil

²⁶ *Holily* fairly, without evil

²⁷ *Hie* hurry

²⁸ *Chastise* punish and remove

²⁹ *Golden round* crown

³⁰ *Metaphysical* supernatural

³¹ *Withal* as well

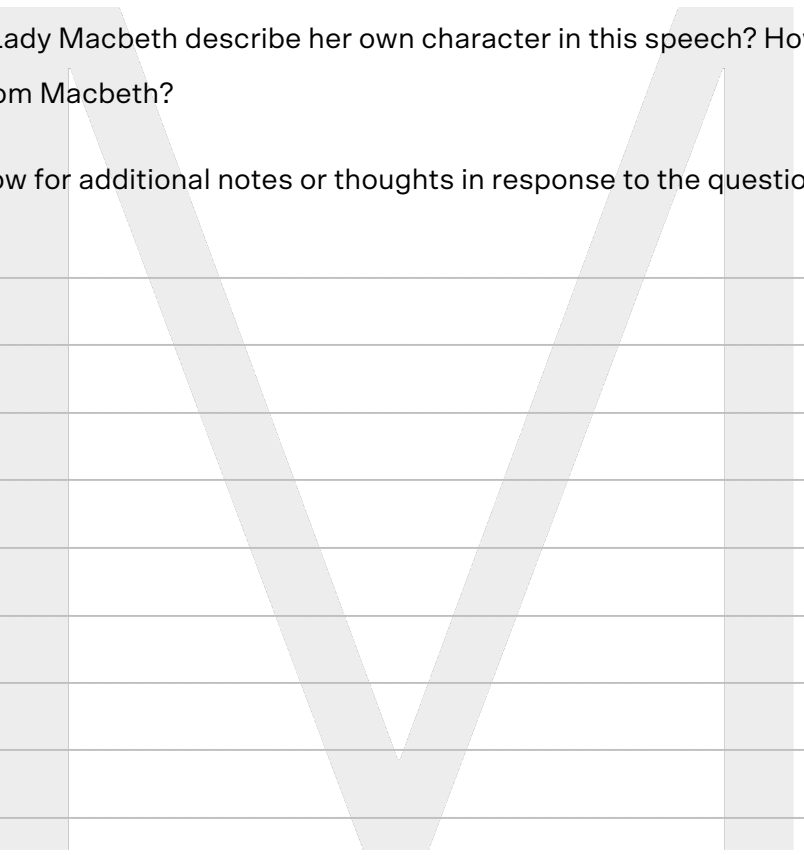
Questions to consider in your close study of Lady Macbeth's speech:

- What qualities does Lady Macbeth see as important companions to ambition?
- What is Lady Macbeth really afraid of? And what steps is she willing to take to ensure those fears don't come to pass?
- Translate the following lines from Lady Macbeth into plain English with the help of your teacher. "What thou wouldst highly, / That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false, / And yet wouldst wrongly win" (hint: Shakespeare has left out the verbs!)
- How does Lady Macbeth describe her own character in this speech? How is she different from Macbeth?

Use the space below for additional notes or thoughts in response to the questions above.

■ How does Lady Macbeth describe her own character in this speech? How is she different from Macbeth?

Use the space below for additional notes or thoughts in response to the questions above.



It seems that Lady Macbeth understands qualities about Macbeth's character that he might not be aware of or, more significantly, that she sees some flaws in his character.

Consider the final lines from the speech closely:

LADY MACBETH

Hie thee hither,³²

That I may pour my spirits in thine ear;

And chastise³³ with the valour of my tongue

All that impedes thee from the golden round,³⁴

Which fate and metaphysical³⁵ aid doth seem

To have thee crowned withal.³⁶

Critical Thinking

Given what Lady Macbeth reveals about herself in this speech, why do you think she wants Macbeth to hurry home?

³² *Hie* hurry

³³ *Chastise* punish and remove

³⁴ *Golden round crown*

³⁵ *Metaphysical*/supernatural

³⁶ *Withal* as well