

Macbeth

Schools' synopsis by Rebecca Lenkiewicz

'Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep!'

Macbeth is Shakespeare's only thriller. At times it is a bloodbath. A story of power, ambition and ultimately loss.

Macbeth and Banquo are both generals in King Duncan's army. They've fought a huge battle and cross a wasteland together. From nowhere three witches appear 'so wither'd and wild in their attire' that they can hardly be described as women. They tell the men their separate fates: Macbeth will become the Thane of Cawdor and then king. Banquo's sons will be kings. After their unlikely prophecies they vanish.

A messenger approaches the generals and tells Macbeth that he has been appointed the Thane of Cawdor. With this, Macbeth now wonders if he might also become king.

His wife Lady Macbeth is very driven and incredibly tough. When he writes to her of his promotion she is both surprised and excited. And fearful...that he will balk at killing the present King Duncan. She appeals to the spirits to make her resolute:

'Unsex me here, And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full of direst cruelty!'

The king's party comes that day to stay at their castle. They must kill Duncan tonight. Macbeth wavers but then agrees.

Lady Macbeth drugs the servants who guard the sleeping Duncan. Macbeth then kills the old king. And returns to his wife with the bloodied daggers. Lady Macbeth orders him to return the knives. He cannot. Finally she grabs them herself and plants them back at the crime scene, smearing the drugged guards in the king's blood. In the morning the king's general Macduff arrives. He finds Duncan's butchered body: 'Horror horror horror!' he cries.

Macbeth rushes to the crime scene. In a feigned fit of rage, he slaughters the servants. Duncan's sons Malcolm and Donalbain flee, Malcolm to England and his brother to Ireland.

Macbeth is now king and Lady Macbeth his queen. But Macbeth is restless, full of doubt. He is terrified that Banquo's son Fleance will supplant him. 'O full of scorpions is my mind dear wife!'

Macbeth hires two assassins to kill both Banquo and his son Fleance. They murder Banquo but Fleance escapes into the night. At a feast that same night Macbeth is told of the murder. He looks around to an empty seat and sees Banquo, bloodied, staring at him. Macbeth points at the apparition, screams. The guests imagine that the new King Macbeth is mad. His wife tries to calm him but he sees the ghost again and again. Lady

Macbeth clears the room. But Macbeth no longer listens to her. He is plagued by guilt and fear. He can no longer sleep.

Macbeth seeks out the witches. What is next for him? They tell him to beware Macduff but that:

'None of woman born shall harm Macbeth' and that until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane Hill, he will be safe.

Macbeth orders an attack on Macduff's castle. His men murder Lady Macduff and all of her children.

Malcolm enlists Macduff in his army against Macbeth. Macduff is hungry for revenge. Macbeth can no longer tolerate his wife. The castle is lonely and awash with secrets.

Lady Macbeth sleepwalks every night. She imagines that her hands are always covered in blood. She washes them repeatedly. But she cannot rid herself of the stench and vision of the blood. A doctor watches Lady Macbeth and hears her confession as she sleepwalks. She whispers:

'Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him.'

Macbeth arms himself against the oncoming army. He is confident. Every man is born of woman. And whoever saw a forest walk? He is superhuman. He hears noises and asks his servant Seyton what it is:

'It is the cry of women, my good lord.'

Seyton investigates.

'The Queen my Lord is dead.'

She has killed herself. Macbeth is alone and like a trapped animal.

The invading army revert to camouflage. They cut down Birnam Wood and advance with the branches shielding them. Macbeth is told that the forest is moving towards him.

Impossible! The castle is stormed. Macduff finds Macbeth and shouts to him:

'Turn, hell-hound, turn!'

Macbeth replies:

'Of all men else I have avoided thee.'

They fight, both of them brilliant soldiers. But Macbeth still imagines he is god like. He taunts Macduff:

'I bear a charmed life, which must not yield/To one of woman born'

Macduff shouts back:

'Despair thy charm; / And let the angel whom thou still hast served

Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's womb

Untimely ripp'd.'

Macduff strikes at Macbeth... a fatal blow that kills the tyrant. He cuts off his head and brings it to Malcolm and his army, victorious. Tyranny is defeated. Scotland will be free once more.