

RSC

ROYAL
SHAKESPEARE
COMPANY

TEACHER PACK

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

ABOUT THIS PACK

This pack supports the RSC's 2018 production of *Macbeth*, directed by Polly Findlay.

The activities provided in this pack are specifically designed to support KS3-4 students attending the performance and studying *Macbeth* in school.

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These symbols are used throughout the pack:



READ

Notes from the production, background info or extracts



ACTIVITY

A practical or open space activity



WRITE

A classroom writing or discussion activity



LINKS

Useful web addresses and research tasks

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

The 2018 production of *Macbeth*, directed by Polly Findlay and starring Christopher Ecclestone and Niamh Cussack, is set in a modern version of Scotland and the set, designed by Fly Davies, has been made to look like a waiting room. On either side of the stage you will see chairs, laid out as they would be in a waiting room with a water cooler and modern light fittings, and above the stage is a digital clock and viewing gallery. The clock is large and foregrounds the importance of time in the play, counting down to the moment of Macbeth's inevitable death, while the walls of the waiting room are used throughout the play to keep a tally of the death toll in the play. None of these deaths are seen on stage, but happen out of sight.

Take a look at the below image of the set. What other features can you see that suggest Macbeth's fate is sealed from the start?



The company of Macbeth. Photo by Richard Davenport ©RSC

EXPLORING THE STORY



SYNOPSIS

A full synopsis of the play is available at:
<https://www.rsc.org.uk/macbeth/the-plot>

NOTES FROM THE REHEARSAL ROOM

During the rehearsal process, Polly Findlay, spent time going through the text and creating 'units' with the company and breaking down the play into smaller blocks in which a new piece of information was introduced. They gave each of these 'units' titles that felt like they were appropriate for all the characters. The units were often shorter than Shakespeare's scenes and helps the company, when they are rehearsing, to think about the importance of each moment.



ACTIVITY 1: THE STORY IN TWENTY MINUTES

The following activity will introduce students to the play and ensure that the whole group is familiar with the story. It is also an opportunity to introduce some of the key questions that will be explored in more depth in later activities.

- Divide students into small groups.
- Using the 'Story in 20 Minutes' resource in this pack, assign each group two or three scenes each, making sure all twenty scenes have been distributed.
- Ask each group to create tableaux or freeze frames for their scenes.
 - Encourage them to narrate their scenes, explaining what happens in each scene before we see it and using the lines they have been given from the play to bring some of the freeze frames to life.
 - Ask students to think about what titles they would give their scenes if they were naming them, like Polly and the company did when titling the different units they identified in the play.
- Ask the whole class to form a circle and invite each group into the middle to share their scene or scenes, in the order they happen in the play.
- Reflect with students on why Macbeth murders a king he respected, his best friend and then Macduff, a respected Lord in Scotland, and all his family. What do they think drove him to do these things?



ACTIVITY 2: DISCOVERING THE CHARACTERS

As students work through the following exercise on the characters in the play, encourage them to think about which characters are closest to Macbeth and influence him the most and which characters affect him, whether it's their words, deeds or even deaths that have the most impact.

NOTES FROM THE REHEARSAL ROOM

While looking at each unit, the acting company would discuss the meaning behind their character's words and actions, looking specifically at the relationships different characters have and how they feel about the characters around them. For example, the company looked at the back story of Lady Macbeth and Macbeth and whether or not the couple had had a family, as Lady Macbeth talks about having a child but they have no surviving children. Looking at these relationships and dynamics is important in helping the company to understand how the characters might react to each other. The importance of children to Lady Macbeth and Macbeth, for example, makes it really significant that the witches appear to Macbeth as young people.

- Divide students into groups of three, providing them with the Character Facts for one of the characters, available in the resource section of this pack. Explain that these character facts introduce us to the character at the start of the play.
- Ask each group to create a statue or freeze frame of their character, with one or two people acting as the character and the other(s) moving them and directing them to create the best and most effective image. How many things can they show about the character?
- Invite each group to share their freeze frames or statues, allowing the rest of the group to look and to question their choices. How much can they work out about the character from what they are seeing in front of them?
- Invite the group who have created Macbeth to move into position in the middle of the room and then ask the groups who have created statues of other characters to position themselves around Macbeth, imagining how close or far away from him they are at the start of the play. The directors can stand back and help the students in their group who are part of the statue to make their decision.
- Reflect with students on why they have made their choices. According to their 'diagram' who is the closest to Macbeth? Do they think this person has the most influence over him? Look at the characters closest to him. What would need to happen for him to hurt that person? Would he care if they died?
 - Allow students time to create a drawn version of their diagram, with Macbeth in the centre and the characters in his life around him.
 - Extend this by asking them to draw a second diagram of how important they each are in causing Macbeth's downfall and eventual death, with the most important being closest to him and the least furthest away. How different are the two versions of the diagram? Which of the characters has moved the most – i.e. was not close to him but is really important in causing his death or has nothing to do with his death but was very close to him?

THE SUPERNATURAL

NOTES FROM THE REHEARSAL ROOM

Christopher Ecclestone, who plays Macbeth, reflected on how Macbeth changes through the play and the journey he takes. The company talked about the difference in the way he meets the witches at the start of the play, then feels more confident in actively looking for them in Act 4 and finally summons the devil himself later in the play. This relationship with the supernatural grows as he grows in confidence and the company talked about how that could be reflected on stage. Designer Fly Davies created the set to appear like a waiting room and the Porter, also the devil, is on stage throughout the play. The company experimented with how Macbeth might interact with the devil as he draws closer to death and particularly in the moment where he calls on him, asking for him by name three times.



ACTIVITY 3: THE WITCHES' PROPHECIES

- Invite students to form a circle and provide each of them with a copy of the Act 1 Scene 3 extract.
- Invite them to read the scene through once, changing reader at every punctuation mark. Sometimes this means students will only read one or two words but it allows everyone to read.
- Explain to them that Duncan and the Thane of Cawdor are alive and well and Macbeth is not the king or Thane of Cawdor.
- Discuss with students what the witches might look like. Could they be elderly women, young children, figments of Macbeth's imagination or aspects of the environment on the heath? Explain to them that, in the 2018 production, they are portrayed as children but they only appear as children because that is the thing that most haunts Macbeth. Does this mean Banquo sees something else?
- Divide students into five groups and allocate each group a section of the scene.
- Ask them to decide on an interpretation of the witches that they will use in their section and allow them time to create a short performance of the segment, thinking about how both Macbeth and Banquo are reacting and interacting with the witches as part of their performance.
- Encourage each group to then perform the scene, in order, until they have seen the entire scene played out.
- Explain to students that a messenger, Ross, arrives with another Lord and brings Macbeth news that the Thane of Cawdor has been killed and Macbeth is going to be made Thane of Cawdor.
- Ask the last group to perform their final part of the scene again, this time imagining that Macbeth and Banquo learn this news. How does it affect them? How might they respond? How would it change the way Macbeth and Banquo speak and feel about the prophecies?
- Reflect with students on the state that they think Macbeth and Banquo are in at the end of this scene. What might be going through Macbeth's head? What might be going through Banquo's head?

REGIME CHANGE

NOTES FROM THE REHEARSAL ROOM

The company had a number of recommended films and programmes that they looked at during the rehearsal process including supernatural horror like 'The Ring' and series such as 'House of Cards'. Polly was keen to look at the aftermath of Duncan's death in terms of what happens when a leader dies and the power vacuum that emerges. Macbeth's reign comes out of a period of political turmoil where Duncan's sons flee and the company looked at how Dictators establish themselves as figureheads in the midst of that, thinking about Macbeth as a commander who needs to establish a new era following Duncan's death.



ACTIVITY 4: WHAT KIND OF KING?

There are several clues in the text that hint at the kind of King Macbeth is. The way people like Ross, Lennox and Macduff react to him taking over also suggests that his approach is very different:

- Macduff does not attend his coronation or the banquet he throws and leaves his family to go to England and try to defeat him with Malcolm.

- Ross goes to the banquet and questions Macbeth's behaviour there, he also goes to warn Lady Macduff and eventually joins Macduff in England.
- Lennox seems sceptical of Macbeth at first but he gets information about Macduff from another Lord, or a serving boy in the 2018 production, and then reports to Macbeth that Macduff has fled to England. In the 2018 production Lennox also leads the murderers who kill Lady Macduff.

Ask students what they think of these three different reactions. Why do they think Lennox informs on his friend and tells Macbeth what he knows? Can they think of any films or book they have seen or read in which people are forced to betray friends or peers? It's usually fear that forces them to act that way, but what could Lennox be afraid of? What could Ross be afraid of that motivates him to support Macbeth until Lady Macduff comes under threat?

- Organise students into pairs and provide each pair with one of the quotes from the resource materials.
- Ask them to read their quote slip and to think about what the short description tells them about Macbeth as a king and person, and what he is like.
- Invite each pair to perform their description, with one of them reading it out loud and the other providing accompanying action. The action could give the emotion of the description or they could be gestures that symbolise particular words that they think stand out.
- Allow each pair time to practice delivering their short description and action.
- Encourage each pair to then perform their description and action, asking the rest of the group to think about their overall impression of Macbeth as they listen and watch. How would they describe him as a ruler in one sentence? Encourage them to take into account all the lines from the text that they hear and see.
- Ask students to share their one line descriptions of Macbeth as a ruler. What kind of king is he?
- Invite students to reflect together on what it might be like to be someone in his castle or fortress. How do they think Macbeth's followers feel? Ask them to reflect on the three Lords you mentioned at the beginning: Macduff, Ross and Lennox. These characters all knew Macbeth before and served King Duncan. Why do they think Macduff flees to England without his family?

AMBITION AND FATE

NOTES FROM THE REHEARSAL ROOM

Christopher Ecclestone, who plays Macbeth, reflected on how Macbeth changes through the play and the journey he takes. The company talked about the difference in the way Macbeth meets the witches at the start of the play, then feels more confident in actively looking for them in Act 4 and finally summons the devil himself later in the play. This relationship with the supernatural grows as he grows in confidence and the company talked about how that could be reflected on stage. Designer Fly Davies created the set to appear like a waiting room and the Porter, also the devil, is on stage throughout the play. The company experimented with how Macbeth might interact with with devil as he draws closer to death and particularly in the moment where he calls on him, asking for him by name three times.



ACTIVITY 5: WHAT DRIVES MACBETH?

In Act 2 Macbeth takes action and murders Duncan, with the help of his wife Lady Macbeth. The following activity will help students to explore Macbeth's behaviour in the moments before he commits the murder and allow you to explore his state of mind more.

- Provide all students with a copy of the extract in the resource materials, with Macbeth's Act 2 Scene 1.
- Ask them to look at the speech for no more than 30 seconds and then turn it over, seeing which words jump out at them.
- Invite each student to share one of the words they noticed the most. As they listen, are there any similarities in their choices? What kind of speech do they think this is?
- Organise students into pairs and invite them to read the speech out loud, taking it in turns to read. Explain that the person listening the first time should listen incredibly carefully and should ask the question 'what?' if they hear anything they don't understand. They can interrupt the speaker at any time doing this and the speaker should repeat what they have just said – doing their best to make it as clear as possible. When they swap, on the second time, the listener can interrupt with comments in modern English. These could be questions for Macbeth, understanding agreements or challenges but they must respond to what the speaker is saying.
- Reflect with students on what the exercise reveals about Macbeth in this moment. What is he seeing? What is going through his mind? Did the words they picked out at the start reflect what they discovered in the exercise?
- Using students' reflections, ask them to think about why he murders Duncan when he is clearly very conflicted. What do they think motivates him?
- Ask students to volunteer reasons why Macbeth might be motivated to kill King Duncan, using their understanding of the play so far. His vision of the dagger can be included in the list, as a starting point. Encourage students to think about characters who influence him, experiences and his own character.
- How important is Macbeth's own personality in driving his need to become king. He even blames his own 'ambition'. Where do we see this in action?

WAYS TO EXTEND THIS WORK

- Ask a student to volunteer to be Macbeth and invite them to stand in the middle of a circle.
- Provide students with the different reasons for and against murdering Duncan, including reasons why he respects the king, or is afraid to murder him and give in to his ambitions, or create this list together.
- Encourage students in the circle to step in, towards Macbeth, and whisper their argument as they draw closer.
- Ask them to make sure no one new moves in until the last person has returned to the circle.
- Reflect with Macbeth on which arguments felt the most persuasive or which side felt like it would win.

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RESOURCES

THE STORY IN 20 MINUTES

- 1. There is a fierce battle between Scotland and Norway. Three witches plot to meet Macbeth on his way home after battle.**

Witches: *When shall we three meet again?
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?*

- 2. King Duncan of Scotland, his children Malcolm and Donalbain, Macduff, loyal advisor to the king, Macbeth's personal servant, Seyton and all Scotland praise Macbeth for his bravery in winning the battle.**

worthy gentleman

brave Macbeth

worthy thane

great Glamis

- 3. Returning from the battle, Macbeth and his friend, Banquo, meet the three witches on the heath. They make a prophecy.**

First witch: *All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!*

Second witch: *All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!*

Third witch: *All hail, Macbeth, that shall be king hereafter!*

- 4. Banquo asks the witches to predict his own future.**

First witch: *Lesser than Macbeth, and greater*

Second witch: *Not so happy, yet much happier*

Third witch: *Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none.*

5. **A messenger arrives from the King and tells Macbeth that he has been made Thane of Cawdor: Macbeth and Banquo are amazed.**

Macbeth: *If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me,
Without my stir.*

6. **Macbeth sends a letter to his wife, Lady Macbeth, telling her what the witches have said. She reads it, and she is afraid that her husband is too weak to fulfil his destiny, but a messenger brings the news that King Duncan is coming to stay to celebrate and honour Macbeth. She decides they must kill the king and she calls on the spirits for strength**

Lady Macbeth: *Come you spirits;
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty.*

7. **Macbeth and Lady Macbeth welcome King Duncan, Macduff and other lords as their guests. Macbeth takes his wife on one side and tells her he has decided not to go through with the murder. But she will not listen.**

Lady Macbeth: *Art thou afeard?
Screw your courage to the sticking place,
And we'll not fail.*

8. **Lady Macbeth gets the king's bodyguards drunk, they fall into a stupor and King Duncan sleeps unguarded. As Macbeth approaches the King's chamber, he sees a vision.**

Macbeth: *Is this a dagger which I see before me?*

9. **Macbeth kills the king. Lady Macbeth smears the sleeping guards with blood. But Macbeth hears voices.**

Macbeth: *Methought I heard a voice cry "Sleep no more!
Macbeth doth murder sleep"*

10. **The murder is discovered by Macduff. The dead king's children, Malcolm and Donalbain, realise it is dangerous to stay in Scotland.**

Malcolm and Donalbain: *Where we are, there's daggers in men's smiles*

Malcom escapes to England, Donalbain to Ireland.

- 11. Macbeth is crowned King of Scotland. He decides he must kill his friend Banquo and Banquo's young son Fleance to stop the witches' prophecy coming true, so he arranges for them to be murdered while they are out riding.**

Banquo: *O, treachery! Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly fly!*

Banquo is killed , but Fleance escapes.

- 12. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth hold a feast to celebrate Macbeth's coronation, but Banquo's ghost appears to Macbeth. No one else can see the ghost. Macbeth is terrified.**

Macbeth: *Hence, horrible shadow!*

Everyone wonders why Macbeth is acting so strangely.

- 13. Macbeth goes to meet the witches again.**

Witches: *Double, double, toil and trouble
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.*

The witches conjure up apparitions to appear, each with a message for Macbeth.

First apparition: *Beware Macduff!*

Second apparition: *None of woman born shall harm Macbeth.*

Third apparition: *Macbeth shall never vanquished be until
Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill
Shall come against him.*

- 14. Macduff goes to England to persuade King Duncan's son Malcolm to fight Macbeth and save Scotland. Meanwhile, Macbeth decides to kill Macduff's wife and children**

Macbeth: *Give to th' edge o' th' sword
His wife, his babes, and all...that trace him in his line.*

15. In England, Ross arrives and tells Macduff that his family has been murdered by Macbeth.

Macduff: *All my pretty ones?
Did you say all? O hell-kite! All?*

They decide to march against Macbeth.

16. Meanwhile Lady Macbeth has started to walk and talk in her sleep. She imagines blood on her hands, and frantically tries to rub them clean.

Lady Macbeth: *Out, damned spot! Out, I say! ... Hell is murky*

As she says this, her doctor and gentlewoman look on.

17. Malcolm, Macduff and their invading army gather near Birnam Wood, not far from Dunsinane Castle. As he prepares to fight them, Macbeth tells his personal servant Seyton:

Macbeth: *I will not be afraid of death and bane
Till Birnam Forest come to Dunsinane.*

18. Seyton brings Macbeth the news that Lady Macbeth is dead. Meanwhile, Malcolm orders every soldier to cut down a branch and carry it in front of himself towards Dunsinane. Macbeth sees them and realises that the witches' predictions are coming true.

Macbeth: *And now a wood
Comes toward Dunsinane*

19. Macbeth decides to fight to the last, even though most of his men have deserted him. Lord Macduff finds Macbeth, and raises his sword. He tells Macbeth that he was born by caesarean section.

Macduff: *Turn Hell hound, turn.
Macduff was from his mother's womb
Untimely ripped.*

20. And so the witches' predictions all come true. Macduff kills Macbeth. Macduff crowns Malcolm the new king of Scotland.

Macduff: *Hail, King of Scotland!*

CHARACTER FACTS

MACBETH

- He is described as a 'brave' soldier and has been fighting for Duncan.
- He shares his news with Lady Macbeth when he meets the witches.
- He describes himself as ambitious.

LADY MACBETH

- She doubts Macbeth will do what needs to be done, and kill King Duncan.
- She is described by her guests as their 'honoured hostess'.
- She believes the only way for Macbeth to become king is to murder Duncan.

BANQUO

- He is a friend and fellow soldier of Macbeth and has fought beside him.
- He seems to believe the witches before Macbeth does, asking them questions.
- He has a son called Fleance.

MALCOLM

- He is the first son of King Duncan.
- King Duncan has only just made him his official heir to the throne – so when Duncan dies Malcolm should become king.
- He flees to England for safety when his father dies.

DONALBAIN*

- She is Duncan's second child.
 - She runs to Ireland when her father dies, at the same time Malcolm does. She does not say anything about her father's death but leaves to keep herself and her brother safe.
- *Having Donalbain as female is a choice for this production

MACDUFF

- He is a thane who lives in Fife with his family.
- Macduff travels to the Macbeth's castle with Duncan after the battle is won and seems loyal to the king.
- When Duncan dies, Macduff is very suspicious of Macbeth and is one of the only characters not to go to his coronation.

ROSS

- He is a thane and is the one who delivers the message to Macbeth that Duncan has given him a new title.
- He is loyal to Duncan but also supportive of Macbeth.

WITCHES

- There are three of them and they are described as 'So withered and wild in their attire, / That look not like th'inhabitants o'th'earth'.
- They cast spells and have planned their first meeting with Macbeth and Banquo.
- They give Macbeth and Banquo three prophecies, telling Macbeth he will be king and Banquo his sons will be kings, but they do not answer Macbeth and Banquo's questions directly.

ACT 1 SCENE 3 (An Extract, edited by RSC Education)

Section One

Thunder. Enter the three Witches

FIRST WITCH

Where hast thou been, sister?

SECOND WITCH

Killing swine.

THIRD WITCH

Sister, where thou?

A drum, A drum:

Macbeth doth come.

ALL

Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine,

And thrice again, to make up nine.

Peace, the charm's wound up.

Section Two

MACBETH

So foul and fair a day I have not seen.

BANQUO

How far is't called to Forres? - What are these,

That look not like th'inhabitants o'th'earth,

And yet are on't?

MACBETH

Speak if you can: what are you?

Section Three

FIRST WITCH

All hail, Macbeth: hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!

SECOND WITCH

All hail, Macbeth: hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!

THIRD WITCH

All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter!

Section Four

BANQUO

Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear
Your favours nor your hate.

FIRST WITCH

Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.

SECOND WITCH

Not so happy, yet much happier.

THIRD WITCH

Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none.

FIRST WITCH

Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!

Section Five

FIRST WITCH

Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!

The Sisters vanish.

MACBETH

Your children shall be kings.

BANQUO

You shall be king.

WHAT KIND OF KING?

Quotes about Macbeth

VALIANT COUSIN

WORTHY GENTLEMAN

BRAVE MACBETH

WORTHY THANE

BUTCHER

HELL-HOUND

DEVIL

FIEND

MONSTER

BLOODY MACBETH

DEVILISH MACBETH

ACT 2 SCENE 1 (An Extract, edited by RSC Education)

**Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
I see thee yet, in form as palpable
As this which now I draw.
Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going,
And such an instrument I was to use.
Mine eyes are made the fools o' th' other senses,
Or else worth all the rest. I see thee still;
And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood,
Which was not so before. There's no such thing,
It is the bloody business which informs
Thus to mine eyes. Now o'er the one half world
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtained sleep; witchcraft celebrates
Pale Hecate's off'rings, and withered murder,**

Alarumed by his sentinel, the wolf,
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
Moves like a ghost. Thou sure and firm-set earth,
Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
Thy very stones prate of my whereabouts,
And take the present horror from the time
Which now suits with it. Whiles I threat, he lives;
Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.

Bell rings.

I go, and it is done: the bell invites me.
Hear it not, Duncan, for it is a knell
That summons thee to Heaven, or to Hell.