

# Activities

## Some *Macbeth* Dilemmas

When the Stratford Shakespeare Festival is preparing to stage a work like *Macbeth* there is a long period of asking questions and pursuing possible solutions to the problems and difficulties. The questions we asked ourselves – directors, designers, actors – about *Macbeth* were similar to the ones which follow. Have your class try working toward your own answers.

## Text

1. Make a list of the characters in *Macbeth* who tell the truth when they talk to other characters, and make a list of those who lie. What do these two lists tell you about the atmosphere of the play? About its characters? About the way that these characters could be acted?

## Costumes

2. What should King Duncan look like? How old is he? How vigorous? What should he wear? What are his king's robes like? What overall image should be projected? Try a few sketches for a costume for King Duncan, basing your details on the evidence that the play itself provides. Look for clues in what he says about himself, and what others say about him.

## Music

3. What sort of music, scored for what kinds of instruments, should be heard in *Macbeth*? Make a list of instruments – or sounds – that could possibly be suitable.

## Staging

4. The atmosphere for the various locations in *Macbeth* is very important in a production. Consider three separate and distinct locations – the castle of the Macbeths, the castle of the Macduffs, and the scene in England – and discuss how, by means of lighting, design, sound and staging, these three places can be differentiated and suggested. Why is that sense of difference important to the play?

## Mapping the Scene

In small groups, students examine the scene of Duncan's murder. Draw a floor plan for Macbeth's castle and map out the movements of all characters involved in this scene. Pay particular attention to the dialogue between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth; it will provide valuable clues. Devise a legend and make sure all plans are clear. Students share their work with the other groups.

## Conversations for Two

This improvisational activity will help you to begin thinking about the themes of the story. With a partner, students brainstorm different scenarios that would fit the following situations. They then carry out a conversation. If comfortable, students can share their conversations with the rest of the class. Discuss the different choices made by pairs working with the same scenario.

1. Two friends discuss their visit to a fortune teller at the local fair and discover that they have both been told they will get a date with the same boy/girl.
2. A man discusses with his wife how he will have to betray a co-worker to get a desired promotion.
3. Two friends arrive home together after a party at another friend's house. One discovers her wallet is missing from her purse. She left it unattended in a hallway at the party? Who could have taken it?
4. Two friends are talking about a strange happening. One friend's horoscope had predicted financial success today and now s/he has won money on the lottery. Was this fate or merely coincidence?
5. Two friends are discussing a recent crime at the school. One friend suspects the other and tries to discover if his/her suspicions are accurate.

## Evil Intentions

Lady Macbeth and Duncan flatter and compliment one another when they first meet at Macbeth's castle in 1.6. Lady Macbeth's gracious words mask her evil intentions.

In pairs, students read through the conversation between Lady Macbeth and Duncan. *Does Duncan sense the hypocrisy of Lady Macbeth?*

Students read through the lines again, this time, they make exaggerated facial expressions that depict the secret thoughts and desires of Lady Macbeth, which are hidden behind the words. Students do the same with Duncan's lines. *Is he completely honest with the words he speaks or does he have a hidden agenda?*

## Revisiting the Story

Below, the plot of Macbeth has been simplified into five basic actions, one to accompany each act.

- Act 1: The witches' predictions
- Act 2: The murder of Duncan
- Act 3: The murder of Banquo
- Act 4: The murder of Lady Macduff
- Act 5: Crime doesn't pay

1. In groups, using the same outline, students create and present a series of five tableaux depicting each of these key images that summarize the story of *Macbeth*.
2. Students then add seven more key images or actions to the summary.
3. Students can present their twelve part tableaux sequence adding background music to bridge the transition from one tableau to the next in the sequence.
4. Students can title each of the twelve images or action in the sequence with sensational newspaper headlines. Students should decide for what kind of newspaper they are writing. The class can discuss how different headlines would be if the students were writing for The Globe and Mail, The Toronto Sun, NOW Magazine, The National Enquirer, a community newspaper, etc.

## Inside the Mind of a Macbeth

In this exercise, students identify the thoughts inside the main characters' soliloquies.

Divide the class into two groups. Give each group a soliloquy – Lady Macbeth's "The raven himself is hoarse" (1. 5.) and Macbeth's "Is this a dagger which I see before me" (2. 1.), for example. Have them read the speech as a chorus, exploring the range of their voices and different tones and rhythms. Have each student decide on his or her favourite line of the speech.

Pick one to five students in each group to play the main character. This student (or students; if more than one, have them divide the speech into equal parts) will read the whole soliloquy while the others move around him or her in a circle, chanting the favourite lines they have chosen in different rhythms, tones and pitches. Have the chorus establish itself before the central character begins speaking. When the soliloquy is over, the chorus voices should fade out.

As a class, discuss the feeling of being inside the circle. Repeat the exercise with different students as the main characters, and then discuss whether the experience was different for the group. Have a final discussion about the idea of a person's thoughts driving him or her to action or to madness.

## Modern Movie Trailers

After the class has read the play, discuss genres and modern cinematic treatments it lends itself to (examples include Wild West; crime family; modern political thriller).

Divide the class into groups of five or six and have each group pick a genre or treatment for their cinematic version of the play. Each group will storyboard a trailer for their movie (or film the trailer if video equipment is available). The trailer should include voiceovers and lines from the play to entice an audience of their peers to see the movie.

Have each group pitch its trailer to the class. The students should act out the trailer or show their video.

## **Sculpture Gallery**

Divide the class into groups of 3. Instruct each group to designate each group member as either A, B or C. Group member A will be the "artist" and group members B and C are the 'clay'.

Instruct the artists to use the clay to create a sculpture that captures the essence of the given line. Artists must be sure to work *gently* with their clay, and remember that the clay can be transformed into both inanimate objects or people, and can be manipulated to create facial expression, suggest bold movement, or to create different levels. Artists must also be sure to creatively incorporate the index card into the sculpture so that it may easily be read. After about 5 minutes, the artists may finish and be invited to freely walk through the sculpture gallery and appreciate each others' wonderful works of art.

Repeat so that group members B and C each have turns to be the artist. The following are examples of quotes that may be used to create beautiful sculptures!

**If chance will have me King, why, chance  
may crown me** (1.3, 143)

**Make thick my blood, stop up the access  
and passage to remorse** (1.5, 43-44)

**... look like the innocent flower, but be the  
serpent under't.** (1.5, 65-66)

**This even-handed justice commends the  
ingredients of our poison'd chalice to our  
own lips.** (1.7, 10-12)

**I have no spur to prick the sides of my  
intent, but only vaulting ambition**  
(1.7, 25-27)

**But screw your courage to the sticking  
place, and we'll not fail.** (1.7, 61-62)

**False face must hide what false heart doth  
know.** (1.7, 83)

**Is this a dagger I see before me, the handle  
toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.**  
(2.1, 33-35)

**Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no  
more! Macbeth does murder sleep'**  
(2.2, 35-36)

**Go get some water, and wash this filthy  
witness from your hand.** (2.2, 46-47)

**Here's a knocking indeed! If a man were  
porter of hell-gate, he should have old  
turning the key.** (2.3, 1-2)

**O horror! Horror! Horror! Tongue nor heart  
cannot conceive, nor name thee!**  
(2.3, 64-65)

**Here lay Duncan, his silver skin lac'd with  
his golden blood** (2.3, 112-113)