

Act I, scene ii

1. What is the purpose of this early scene?
2. What image do we have of Macbeth's bravery and ability as a warrior?
3. What is his relationship to King Duncan?
4. Whom had Macbeth and Banquo been fighting?
5. What does King Duncan tell Ross to do?

Act I, scene iii

1. What does the audience learn about the Weird Sisters from their conversation at the beginning of the scene?
2. When Macbeth says, "So foul and fair a day I have not seen," to what is he referring? What could be the dramatic irony in this line?
3. Describe the physical appearance of the Weird Sisters.
4. What prophecies do the Weird Sisters make regarding Macbeth? How does he react?
5. What do the Weird Sisters see in the future for Banquo?
6. How do Macbeth and Banquo react to the experience after the Weird Sisters vanish?

Act I, scene v

1. What is the purpose of the letter?
2. What do we learn about Macbeth from Lady Macbeth's reaction to the letter?
3. What do we learn about Lady Macbeth from her reaction to the letter?
4. Does Lady Macbeth fear Macbeth will not be king if he does not murder Duncan?
5. How does the news about King Duncan's expected arrival affect her? What is she planning?
6. Why does Lady Macbeth pray to be unsexed?
7. What does Shakespeare establish in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's first exchange when Macbeth arrives home?
8. In what way does Lady Macbeth's advice to Macbeth relate to the "fair is foul" theme?

Act I, scene vi

1. What is the purpose of this brief scene?

2. How does this scene contribute to the “fair is foul” theme?

Act I, scene vii

1. What arguments does Macbeth raise for not doing it?
2. What does he finally conclude?
3. What consequences does Macbeth fear if he commits the murder?
4. What does Lady Macbeth say in an attempt to goad her husband into the murder?
5. Macbeth's response to her about what a man may dare is frequently quoted. What is his meaning?
6. What is the point of Lady Macbeth's baby imagery? Note the many times images of babies and mothers are presented in this play.
7. What exposition does Shakespeare give the audience in this scene?

Act II, scene i

1. What is significant about the weather?
2. What do you suppose is keeping Banquo from sleeping?
3. What is significant about Macbeth's saying, "I think not of them," after Banquo had admitted to dreaming about the Weird Sisters?
4. What does Macbeth mean when he says to Banquo, "If you shall cleave to my consent, when 'tis, / It shall make honour for you"?
5. What is significant about Banquo's reply?
6. In his soliloquy after Banquo leaves, what does Macbeth tell us he sees? What could account for this apparition?
7. Why does Shakespeare have Macbeth hallucinate?

Act II, scene ii

1. Compare Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's reactions immediately after the crime.
2. Why does Lady Macbeth not commit the murder when she is in the room?
3. Macbeth, apparently troubled by the murder he has just committed, tells Lady Macbeth what he saw and heard. She tells him, "These deeds must not be thought of this way." Why?
4. Macbeth's response is frequently quoted. What is the sense of this response?
5. How does Lady Macbeth get Duncan's blood on her hands?
6. What does Macbeth's refusal to return to Duncan's chamber echo?

Act II, scene iii

1. The Porter's scene, or the "knocking at the gate," is a much debated scene by scholars, but many agree it is the typical comic relief scene seen in Shakespeare's plays. What do you suppose the dramatic purpose of a comic relief scene is? Why is the Porter's soliloquy in prose rather than poetry? What lines contain the bawdy humor so often found in these scenes?
2. How is the theme of "a crime against nature" reinforced in this scene?
3. What does Shakespeare accomplish with Macduff's allusion to "a new Gorgon"?
4. How does Macbeth react to the discovery of Duncan's body?
5. How does Lady Macbeth react?

Act II, scene iv

1. What is the purpose of this scene?

2. What additional natural, or “unnatural,” events further the “crime against nature” theme?

Act III, scene i

1. In his soliloquy, what suspicion and hope does Banquo reveal?
2. Macbeth seems to be very interested in Banquo's travel plans. Why do you suppose he is so interested?
3. The speech beginning "To be thus is nothing..." is another one often quoted. What is the meaning of that sentence?
4. What is there in Banquo's character that makes Macbeth uneasy?
5. What is there in the situation with Banquo that particularly upsets Macbeth?
6. What exposition does Shakespeare offer in Macbeth's conversation with the murderers?
7. How does Macbeth convince the murderers to kill Banquo and Fleance?
8. What does Macbeth tell them to do?

Act III, scene ii

1. What is the meaning of Lady Macbeth's opening speech in this scene?
2. In this scene, what is Macbeth's state of mind?
3. On the other hand, how does Macbeth show that his resolve and ambition have become stronger?
4. What is significant about Macbeth's instructions to Lady Macbeth about how to treat Banquo at the state dinner that night?

Act III, scene iv

1. One characteristic of Shakespeare's style is his play on words. How is this demonstrated in Macbeth's response to the murderer's saying it's Banquo's blood on his face?
2. What wordplay is there in the murderer's reply that Banquo is "safe" now?
3. The dagger Macbeth saw in Act II, scene i was a hallucination. Banquo's ghost in this scene is not. How do we know?
4. What does Lady Macbeth say to Macbeth?
5. What is the significance of the conversation Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have immediately after the guests leave?
6. For what reason does Macbeth mention Macduff's name?
7. What does Macbeth say he will do next?
8. What is Macbeth's frame of mind?

Act III, scene v

1. Who is Hecate, and why is she angry?

2. What is her plan for Macbeth?

Act III, scene vi

1. How can we interpret Lennox's speech?

2. What further exposition does Shakespeare offer through the Lord?

Act IV, scene i

1. Compare the witches' speech pattern with Macbeth's.
2. What effect is Shakespeare creating by altering the speech patterns like this?
3. Describe the three apparitions and the significance of each?
4. What, after this, does Macbeth resolve?
5. Pleased with the information, what one further thing does Macbeth desire to know and what is the answer he gets?
6. What is the significance of this scene?
7. What news does Lennox give to Macbeth?
8. What is Macbeth's response?
9. What is his resolve at the end of this scene? How is this different from his previous actions?

Act IV, scene ii

1. What does Shakespeare achieve with the conversation between Ross and Lady Macduff?
2. What is the purpose of the exchange between Lady Macduff and her son?
3. What effect is created by the Messenger's entering to warn Lady Macduff?
4. Why does Shakespeare show the son's murder onstage?

Act IV, scene iii

1. What additional evidence does Shakespeare give his audience that Macbeth is a tyrant?
2. What suspicion of Macduff does Malcolm voice?
3. How do Malcolm's comments about Macbeth again bring to mind the "fair is foul" theme?
4. What literary device is Shakespeare employing when Malcolm says, "Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell"?
5. What is it that makes Malcolm suspicious of Macduff's motives?
6. How does Malcolm test Macduff's honesty?

Act V, scene i

1. Explain how this entire scene is ironic.
2. What is ironic about Lady Macbeth's constant "handwashing"?
3. What does the Doctor's "Foul whisperings are abroad" speech echo?

Act V, scenes ii – vii

1. What effect is Shakespeare creating with this sequence of short scenes which follow one another so closely?
2. Whose side are Lennox, Angus, Menteith, and Caithness on?
3. What do they say about the men that Macbeth commands?
4. What is Macbeth's lament in his "my way of life
Is fallen into the sear ..." speech?
5. What is Lady Macbeth's condition, and how does Macbeth believe it could be cured?
6. What tactical strategy does Malcolm take?

7. In reaction to the news that Lady Macbeth is dead, Macbeth delivers his most famous soliloquy. What does it mean?

8. What does Macbeth recognize and how does it fit in with the “fair is foul” theme?

9. As bad as things look for Macbeth, why does he still scorn all his opponents?

10. What is the meaning of Siward’s statement that Macbeth's men “on both sides do fight”?

Act V, scene viii

1. What information does Macduff tell Macbeth that makes him frightened (“Cow’d my better part”)?
2. What is Macbeth’s response?
3. Why does he quickly change his mind about fighting?
4. On what note does the play end?