

illustrated
READERS

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Macbeth

retold by Virginia Evans



Express Publishing



William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare is the world's most famous playwright. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon on 23 April 1564, the third of eight children, and grew up there. On 28 November 1582, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, who was eight years older than him. They had three children: Susanna, born in 1583, and twins, Hamnet and Judith, born in 1585.

Little is known about Shakespeare's life between 1585 and 1592, but at some time during this period he moved from Stratford to London and became involved in the theatre. By 1592 he had already become a well-known actor and playwright. When King James came

to the throne in 1603, he chose Shakespeare's group of actors to be his royal entertainers. They were called 'The King's Men' and performed plays in his honour.

Around this time, Shakespeare wrote his most famous tragedies, including *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. However, Shakespeare also wrote many comedies, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It*. Most of these plays were performed at the Globe Theatre, built in south London for Shakespeare's group in 1599.

Shakespeare eventually moved back to Stratford, where he spent the last few years of his life. He died there on 23 April 1616.

Read the biography of William Shakespeare, then answer the questions:

- 1 When and where was Shakespeare born? When and where did he die?
.....
- 2 How many brothers and sisters did he have? How many children did he have?
.....
- 3 When did he get married? Who did he marry, and what was unusual about her?
.....
- 4 Who and what were The King's Men? Who chose them, and what did they do?
.....
- 5 When and where was the Globe Theatre built? Who was it built for?
.....





Macbeth



Macbeth¹ was probably written in 1605 or 1606, during the period in Shakespeare's career when he wrote his greatest tragedies. Like most classical tragedies, *Macbeth* is about the fall of a powerful man – in this case, a man who becomes king of Scotland by murdering his cousin and taking the throne himself.

The people and events in the play are taken, almost exactly, from the best-known history book at that time. The action is quite simple, and most of Shakespeare's audience already knew the basic story. So why did the play interest them, just as it still interests people today? The answer is that, in Shakespeare's dramatisation, the characters' reactions, thoughts and feelings become more important than what happens to them.

Macbeth begins with a battle scene and ends with another, but the play is really about the battle taking place in Macbeth's mind. This is a battle between good and evil, between his ambitions and the knowledge that what he is doing is wrong.

His guilt makes him half mad, but killing becomes easier all the time; by the end of the play, he seems to have no feelings left at all. Even Lady Macbeth, his ruthless wife, goes mad with secret guilt and finally kills herself.

Magic also plays a very important part in the story, because the witches' prophecies and visions affect Macbeth so strongly. (To us, of course, magic is just imaginary, a piece of "theatre"; but we must remember that Shakespeare's audience believed in witches and ghosts as very real things.)

Macbeth has been translated into almost every language and performed all over the world. Many people believe it is one of the greatest plays ever written.

¹ see Glossary and Notes, p. 38.



1. MACBETH AND BANQUO

Scotland, 1040. The battlefield near Forres. The Scottish King, Duncan, is fighting a rebel army.



Not as great as Macbeth – but greater!

6

Never to be king yourself – but father of kings to come!

7

Wait!

Where did they go?

Not as lucky as Macbeth – but luckier!

At Forres Palace ...

The witches called me Thane of Cawdor – and straight away I am! Am I also the future king? And if I am, must I ... do something ... to make it true?

Macbeth? Macbeth! Come – the King is waiting for us.

8

Macbeth! The King has heard how well you fought – and to reward your bravery, he names you Thane of Cawdor.

9

10

Macbeth, dear cousin! Let us go together to your castle at Inverness.

Welcome, Macbeth! Welcome, Banquo! I owe you both great honours! But first I honour my eldest son – Malcolm, I name **you** as the next king when I die.¹

11

Malcolm to follow Duncan as king?! This stands in the way of my destiny ... unless ... unless ...

12

Your highness, I will travel there at once to prepare a royal welcome for you.

¹ see Glossary and Notes, p. 39.



activities

*Before Reading*

- 1 Look at the pictures, then answer the questions.
 - 1 Who is Macbeth talking to in picture 2?
 - 2 How does Macduff feel in picture 5? What might have happened?
 - 3 Who is talking in picture 6? Who is he talking to?
 - 4 What can you see in picture 7?

*While Reading*

- 2 Read or listen to the episode and make sentences using the prompts.

Macbeth	Macduff	Malcolm
he killed Macduff's wife and children		
he went to join Macbeth's enemies		
he killed Duncan and took the crown of Scotland		

- 1 Macbeth takes revenge against because
- 2 Macduff wants revenge against because
- 3 wants revenge against Macbeth because

- 3 Read the episode again, then answer the questions:

- 1 Why did Macduff go to England?
- 2 What happens to Macduff's wife and children?
- 3 How does Macduff want to get revenge against Macbeth?
- 4 Where does Malcolm lead his army, and where is Macbeth at the time?

*After Reading*

- 4 Read and listen again, then take roles and act out the episode.
- 5 In pairs, discuss the following questions:
 - 1 Why did Macbeth kill: - Duncan? - Banquo? - Macduff's wife and children? How would you describe his behaviour each time: - cautious? - mad? - horrified?
 - 2 Malcolm goes to Birnam Wood, Macbeth goes to Dunsinane Castle; in Episode 6, who referred to these two places together? What do you think will happen next?





Before Reading

- 1 Look at the title. What might Lady Macbeth have “dark thoughts” about?



While Reading

- 2 Read or listen to the episode and match the pairs of words.

1 dark	.....	a diseases
2 huge	.....	b memory
3 terrible	.....	c asleep
4 strange	.....	d thoughts
5 fast	.....	e army

- 3 Read the episode again, then answer the questions:

- 1 Why is Lady Macbeth washing her hands? Do you think she really has blood on her hands?
- 2 What is Macbeth thinking about in picture 4? How does he feel when he remembers what the visions prophesied?
- 3 When Macbeth says “the terrible memory ...” (picture 5), he is asking about his wife – but who else might he be thinking about?
- 4 What does Macbeth mean when he says “Then I don’t need a doctor – just my helmet and sword”?
- 5 Why does Malcolm tell his soldiers to carry a branch of a tree?



After Reading

- 4 Read and listen again, then take roles and act out the episode.

- 5 In pairs, discuss the following questions:

- 1 Look at Episode 3, pictures 2-3; how has Lady Macbeth changed between then and now? How has Macbeth changed?
- 2 What “strange diseases” is the doctor talking about in picture 3? Can people really become ill in this way?
- 3 How do you think Macbeth is feeling in picture 9?
- 4 What do you think will happen in the next episode?



Macbeth

Macbeth is a powerful Scottish *thane* (lord), a brave general and a cousin of King Duncan. But this is not enough for him. When three witches tell Macbeth that he will be king of Scotland, he thinks about making it come true – by killing Duncan. His conscience prevents him, until his wife persuades him to do it. He becomes king, and finds it is easier to get power than keep it. The witches show him visions that make him believe he can't be beaten, even though he makes more and more enemies ... Then the visions come true, in a way he doesn't expect.

Components:

- Reader
- Audio CD



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