
MACBETH

Revision Day Slides

ACT I SCENE I

- Note the significance of the number three: three witches, three traitorous thanes, three appearances of the witches etc.
 - The number three and events grouped in three is very important. It is a cabalistic and potent number: Holy Trinity, three men crucified on Calvary etc.
 - Macbeth at one stage says 'Had I three ears, I'd hear thee'.
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Setting

PATHETIC
FALLACY:
NATURE
REFLECTS THE
CHARACTERS'
EMOTIONS



LANGUAGE

- 'When the battle's lost and won'. These words will later be echoed by Duncan.
 - 'Fair is foul, and foul is fair': These words will later be echoed by Macbeth.
 - The witches plan to meet with Macbeth. Doctrine of voluntary assent said that evil spirits from hell are sent to get you if your soul is weak.
 - The witches speak in tetrameter (from the Greek, meaning four). Rhythm sets the witches apart.
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ACT I SCENE 2

- The entrance of the 'bloody man' is our introduction to the blood imagery that runs through the entire play.
 - The image of Macbeth cutting the traitor Macdonwald in half with his broadsword sets the idea in our mind that he is a terrifying killer.
 - The reference to 'another Golgotha' is interesting. Golgogtha: Place of the Skull - was where the Romans crucified the Jews and left their bones on the hillside) is a powerful image of death and carnage, as well as an image of destroying Christ.
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DUAL IMAGE OF MACBETH

- Violent killer and terrifying on the field of battle
 - Noble (like an eagle and a lion) within the sphere of battle
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- Second traitor - Cawdor - is mentioned.
 - Bellona was the Roman goddess of war and married to the god of war, Mars.
 - Macbeth is linked to a pagan god rather than the god of Christianity.
 - Duncan is not leading his troops any more; he is too old. Therefore, would Macbeth make a more likely king? Does he deserve to replace him and could he be forgiven for thinking he might?
 - Duncan ends the scene by echoing the witches' words: 'What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won'. The evil that they represent lurks in the mouths of the other characters, even though they don't know it.
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ACT I SCENE 3



- It was calm and peaceful at the camp in Forres, now there is thunder again.
 - Story of the sailor's wife is a context specific reference: later in the play Macbeth is made to do something he does not want to by a woman - his wife - and has no sleep as a result.
 - Note that the witches cannot directly harm people. Their powers are limited.
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- Note the use of the number three in their chant.
 - Macbeth's opening line echoes the penultimate line in the witches' speech in Scene I.
 - Banquo notes how unnatural the witches look.
 - Macbeth jumps at the witches' words because he has most likely been thinking that he should indeed be king. That ambition is why the witches chose him.
 - Macbeth is overwhelmed by the prophecy.
 - Macbeth calls the witches 'imperfect speakers'. He does not yet realise how equivocal their speeches are, however. He merely thinks they have not given him enough information.
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- 'Why do you dress me in borrowed robes?' This is the first example of the clothing imagery.
 - This is a shortcut to signify appearance versus reality. You can dress someone as a king but that does not make him a king.
 - This is a major theme of Shakespeare's work and especially of this play.
 - Banquo is far more perceptive than Macbeth and sees how the witches use Macbeth's desire to turn his head.
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MACBETH

LOST IN
THOUGHT -
SOLILOQUY
SHOWS HIS
INNER DESIRES
AND
CONFLICTS



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- Macbeth imagines himself killing Duncan. The witches' words have set the seeds.
 - However, Macbeth hopes that perhaps he may be crowned without having to do anything about it.
 - In the second of the clothing images, Banquo says that new honours hang on Macbeth like new clothes which have not yet moulded to their wearer's shape.
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ACT I SCENE 4

- Cawdor died with nobility. He admitted his guilt and accepted that he should die.
 - Malcolm says that Cawdor died more nobly than he lived.
 - Contrast this with the way Macbeth goes to his death in Act 5.
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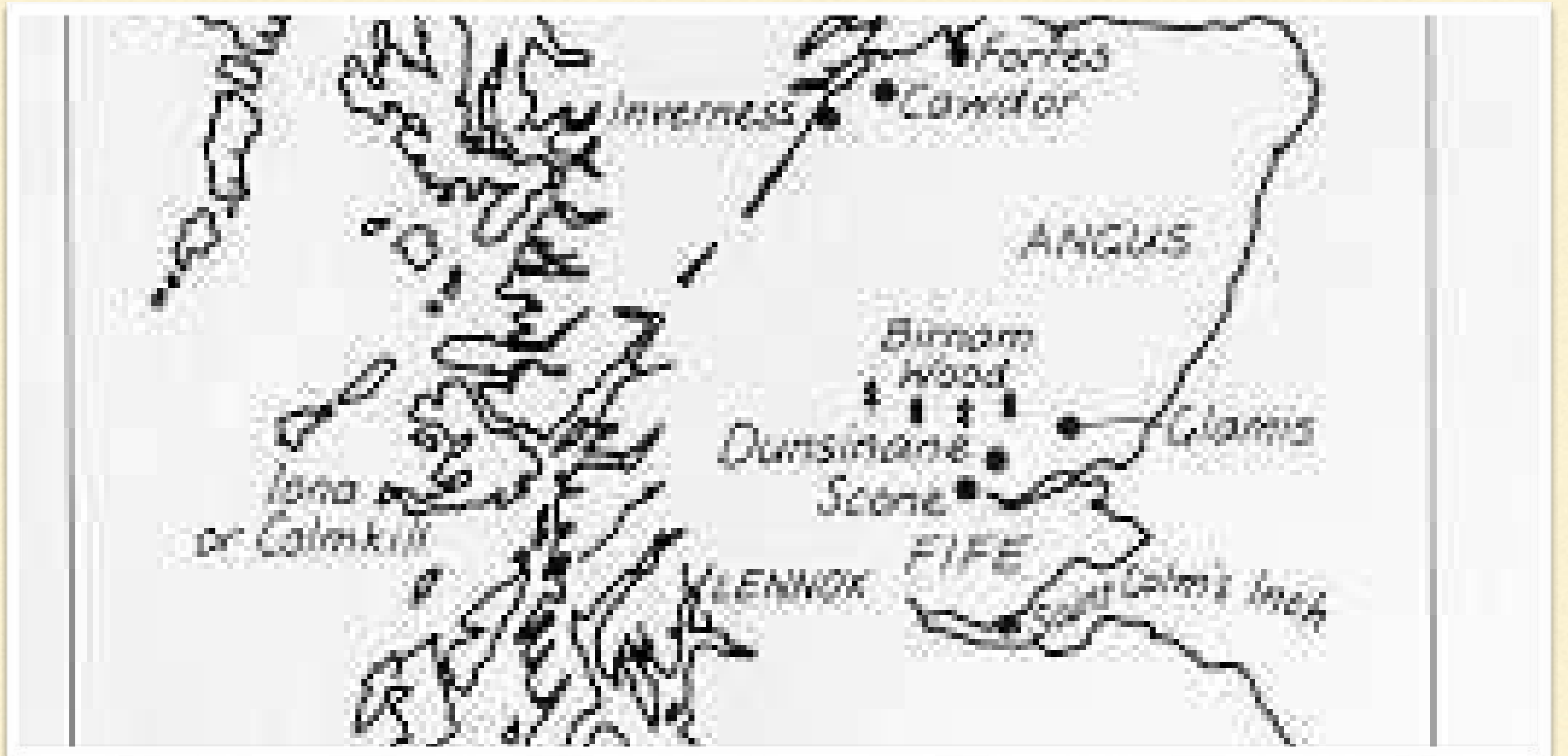
MACBETH AND DUNCAN - DRAMATIC
IRONY

'HE WAS A
GENTLEMAN ON
WHOM I BUILT
AN ABSOLUTE
TRUST'

ENTER
MACBETH...



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- Macbeth tells Duncan the dues he owes him, knowing full well his intention is to kill the king.
 - Duncan is no judge of character. He cries with delight at the respect Macbeth shows him.
 - However, in the midst of all of this emotional gratitude, Duncan appoints Malcolm his heir.
 - Macbeth's reward is to have Duncan visit him (something which would have been very costly as the king went about with a large company of men).
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SHAKESPEARE: GREAT WRITER BUT DREADFUL GEOGRAPHER

Glamis Castle is not in Inverness but in Perthshire.



'Stars, hide your fires;
Let not light see my black and deep desires'

—Macbeth, on learning that Malcolm is the king's heir

ACT I SCENE 5

- Lady Macbeth shows her ambition immediately. Macbeth will be king.
 - Interesting that she thinks he is 'too full o' the milk of human kindness' to carry out the deed.
 - She has no idea of what Macbeth is really capable and thus decides to take the task upon herself.
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- Note the raven flying over the battlements. This contrasts with the eagle mentioned earlier.
 - 'my battlements' - Lady Macbeth has taken charge. She does not trust Macbeth and is determined to do the deed herself.
 - She calls on evil spirits to remove her femininity. She wants male gall to replace her female milk.
 - This is the first indication of child abuse imagery. Children represent the future. When Macbeth realises he cannot have what he wants, he sets about destroying the future.
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'Come, thick night
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes
Nor Heaven peep through the blanket of the dark
To cry, Hold, hold!'

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- Lady Macbeth advises her husband to ensure that his feelings do not show on his face.
 - This is another example of appearance versus reality.
 - She tells him he should look like an innocent flower, but in reality be the serpent underneath it.
 - The serpent image is reminiscent of the snake in the garden of Eden and highlights the Satanic, evil side of what Macbeth is up to.
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'LEAVE ALL THE REST TO ME'



- Lady Macbeth never talks honestly about murdering people but talks about 'providing for' and 'dispatching' them.
 - She does not like to admit what she really does.
 - She claims she will take charge of the whole business but proves unequal to the task.
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ACT I SCENE 6

- Duncan sees the castle as a pleasant place.
 - The contrasting bird images are important. Lady Macbeth noticed the raven, Banquo shows Duncan the martins' nests.
 - Child imagery - the birds make their nests here as it is a safe place.
 - Dramatic irony - Banquo says 'the air is delicate' just at the moment Lady Macbeth enters: she who has been screaming for the darkest smoke of hell to fill the castle.
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ACT I SCENE 7

- 'If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well / It were done quickly'
 - Macbeth wants to do the deed, but does not want to be caught.
 - He worries that if he kills the king and is made king, then others may do to him what he did to Duncan.
 - He also worries that it is wrong to kill Duncan because he is his host, his subject and his kinsman.
 - He praises Duncan. This is one of the great ironies of the play: the person who praises Macbeth the most is the man who will kill him.
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LADY MACBETH MANIPULATES HER HUSBAND

- Spurious arguments. Think about what she says...
 - He does not love her, unless he kills the king.
 - He is a coward, unless he kills the king.
 - He is not a man if he does not kill the king.
 - The fact that the king is their guest makes the murder most convenient. It's handy!
 - He has made a vow and it is morally wrong to break a vow. (But killing the king is morally acceptable?)
 - She would do anything to keep her promises.
 - Lady Macbeth uses horrifying images of child abuse.
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ACT 2

SCENE 1

- Banquo says that the sky is completely starless and black. This is more pathetic fallacy.
 - Banquo cannot sleep because he is thinking of the ways in which he could fulfil the witches' prophecies.
 - Banquo is tempted, but he calls on God and the heavens to save him from these thoughts. He does not call on evil, like the Macbeths.
 - Banquo's temptation is to kill for his son, not himself.
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- Macbeth says he does not think about the witches' words, but contradicts himself by asking Banquo to talk to him about it later.
 - Macbeth asks Banquo to talk to him about the witches' prophecies later.
 - He hints that Banquo would do well to show him allegiance as he may be rewarded for so doing.
 - Banquo draws himself up and makes it clear that his allegiance is to the king. Now he and Macbeth realise that the other is not necessarily on their side.
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IS THIS A DAGGER WHICH I SEE BEFORE ME?

Macbeth is troubled by dark energy and evil

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- The mention of Tarquinius is an interesting one and something we will explore further when we revisit this play in the New Year.
 - The earth is not 'firm set' as Macbeth thinks it is.
 - We learn later that there was an earthquake that night.
 - Duncan's murder is offstage, but the violence is clear in the blood and gore seen on Macbeth's hands.
 - Early murders are not shown because, although they are bloody, they are necessary. We are shown more detail of the later murders because they are unnecessary and their horror should be highlighted.
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- Macbeth can not pray any more. He has sold his soul to the devil and from this moment on sinks further and further into evil.
 - Two images linked: 'Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care'. Clothing and sleep imagery.
 - 'A little water clears us of this deed.' Of course, it does not. We think back to this image when she sleepwalks and repeatedly tries to wash her hands.
 - 'If he do bleed...' Lady Macbeth has clearly never seen a murder.
 - Macbeth's ego shown when he says his bloody hands could turn the sea red.
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ACT 2 SCENE 3

- The porter speaks in common prose because he is not a nobleman. Traditionally, in Shakespeare's plays, the lower orders do not speak the same way as their betters.
 - The porter says he is like the porter of the gates of hell. Hell and devilish imagery is appropriate for the Macbeth's castle.
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- Lennox gives us more examples of pathetic fallacy. Chimneys were blown down and strange screams were heard in the air. An owl screeched all night and there was an earthquake.
 - Notice that Macbeth does not take charge at all in this scene.
 - Lady Macbeth makes a mistake by asking 'What, in our house?' Surely the place of the murder is not the issue. Banquo picks up on this immediately. He is becoming more and more suspicious.
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- Macbeth's fulsome praise of Duncan rings false.
 - Macbeth's murder of the groom creates suspicion. It was not part of the original plan, and Lady Macbeth is no longer in control of his actions.
 - Why does Lady Macbeth faint? I believe it is because she is genuinely horrified to see what she has unleashed.
 - Malcolm shows good sense when he says he and his brother should flee. He will go to the court of Edward the First of England to seek help.
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ACT 2 SCENE 4

- This scene shows time passing but also reinforces the pathetic fallacy.
 - Macduff enters and speaks to Ross and the Old Man. He suspects Macbeth and will not go to his investiture in Fife.
 - Clothing image: 'Lest our old robes sit easier than our new'.
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STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY



- Based on Seneca's five act play.
 - Act 1: The temptation
 - Act 2: Persuasion and plotting
 - Act 3: Everything coming to a head
 - Act 4: All falls apart
 - Act 5: Catastrophe in which all is finalised.
 - Unfortunately, Shakespeare did not publish the play. Confusion over the scenes as a result. Banquet scene should have been in the middle.
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ACT 3 SCENE 1

- Macbeth's language has changed. He now refers to himself as the royal 'we'.
 - He questions Banquo about his plans because he plans to kill him.
 - Macbeth praises Banquo but still intends to have him murdered.
 - Macbeth's paranoia is showing: 'fruitless crown', 'no son of mine succeeding'.
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- Macbeth tries to persuade the murderers to kill Banquo, saying he treated them badly. Why do this? Do the murderers need a reason? Probably not. Perhaps Macbeth does, though...
 - Macbeth's first act as king is to arrange to have his friend and his friend's innocent son murdered. The attempt to kill Fleance is an example of the child abuse that is seen repeatedly from now on.
 - Do not confuse children with offspring. Malcolm is not a child; Fleance is.
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ACT 3 SCENE 2



- Lady Macbeth is unhappy.
 - Macbeth is spending most of his time away from her. Their relationship is falling apart.
 - As he matures in evil, so she dwindles.
 - Macbeth is willing to destroy the world to suit his own desires.
 - Interestingly, Macbeth tells his wife to be polite to Banquo at the feast, even though he knows that he will not be there.
 - 'Be innocent of the knowledge...'
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ACT 3 SCENE 3

- Why does a third murderer appear? Remember what we said about the number three...
 - Fleance escapes. The prophecy may well come true. We can only imagine how Macbeth will react to this news.
 - The plan to kill Banquo is a strange decision. It shows Macbeth's slipping from reason.
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BANQUET SCENE

Act 3 Scene 4

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- The banquet scene shows that chaos is replacing order. Lady Macbeth tells her husband that he has ruined the banquet 'with most admir'd disorder'.
 - 'Blood will have blood'. This scene is filled with blood imagery.
 - 'gory locks...'
 - 'I am in blood / Stepp'd in so far...'
 - Macbeth has planted spies in all the thanes' houses. His paranoia is growing.
 - Macbeth says he is 'young in deed' and plans more murders.
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ACT 3 SCENE 5



- Unlikely to have been written by Shakespeare.
 - Most directors cut this scene because it does not fit in.
 - The metre is wrong. The witches no longer speak in trochaic tetrameter (four beats, falling rhythm) but now Hecate speaks in rising tetrameter which is not so depressing and frightening.
 - Probably written by Thomas Middleton who wrote 'The Witch' which contains the same song as the witches' in this scene.
 - Hecate's claim that they will make Macbeth behave the way they want contradicts everything that is important about the idea of Macbeth being the architect of his own downfall.
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ACT 3 SCENE 6

- Lennox and another Lord discuss the situation.
 - This scene serves to show time passing, but the couple also act as a chorus.
 - The Scottish thanes are turning against Macbeth.
 - Macduff has gone to England.
 - Malcolm is safe in the court of Edward I.
 - Both Lennox and The Lord refer to Macbeth as a 'tyrant'.
 - Scotland is in famine and the people live in fear and misery.
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ACT 4 SCENE 1

- The first apparitions give Macbeth hope. He still does not see the witches' treachery. (This scene is dealt with in some detail in one of my sample essays, so I will not discuss it too much here.)
 - He plans to kill Macduff's family.
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ACT 4 SCENE 2

- Lady Macduff is the only other noblewoman we meet in the play.
 - She is the antithesis of Lady Macbeth.
 - The charming domesticity of the scene is important as it shows just how families should be and it also highlights the horror of the Macduffs' murder.
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ACT 4 SCENE 3

- Macduff has underestimated Macbeth and that is why he left his family unprotected.
 - Malcolm is suspicious, as he has a more realistic idea of Macbeth.
 - He believes Macduff may be an agent of Macbeth's 'Why... left you wife and child?'
 - Malcolm shows that he has what it takes to be a king. He does not lack judgement, unlike his late father.
 - We learn the true nature of kingship.
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- Macduff is devastated to learn of his family's slaughter and now has a better reason than ever to kill Macbeth.
 - Contrast Macduff's grief with the way Macbeth reacts to his wife's death later on.
 - Malcolm shows great control, telling Macduff to bottle up his grief and anger and use it when he meets Macbeth.
 - 'Let's make us medicine of our great revenge, / To cure this deadly grief'.
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ACT 5 SCENE 1

- Lady Macbeth is a broken woman.
 - Earlier she called for darkness, now we learn that she always has a light by her side.
 - After the murder she said a little water would cleanse her of the act, but now she cannot wash the spots of blood from her hands.
 - 'Who would have thought the old man to have so much blood in him?'
 - She is horrified by the murder of Lady Macduff.
 - Lady Macbeth is not a cold, calculating murderer. She did not know what she was doing when she unleashed Macbeth's villainous and evil side.
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OUT, DAMNED SPOT...

Lady Macbeth's anguish and guilt are clear

ACT 5 SCENE 2

- Shakespeare was one of the playwrights to overcome the problem of time passing.
 - Lady Macbeth's bringing up the past in the sleepwalking scene helps us to believe that a good deal of time has passed, and now the English and Scottish forces loyal to Malcolm are near Dunsinane.
 - Birnam wood is about seven miles from the castle.
 - There are many 'unrough youths' in the army. ('Unrough' means unshaven. No stubble.) This is important, as we see Macbeth killing one of them. He is repeatedly seen as an enemy of the future.
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- Clothing imagery: Angus says that Macbeth has stolen the crown but is not a big enough man to be a great ruler.
 - 'Now does he feel his title / Hang loose about him, like giant's robe / Upon a dwarfish thief.'
 - Lennox compares Macbeth to a weed. Duncan compared him to a plant worthy of cultivating. All the imagery associated with Macbeth slides inexorably towards negativity.
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ACT 5 SCENE 3

- Macbeth's speech lacks rhythm. The iambic pentameter is broken, signifying his disordered mental state.
 - Macbeth knows he has lost everything and has no future.
 - Macbeth only has one answer to all his problems, and that is to go on fighting.
 - Despite everything, Macbeth is still clinging to the witches' prophecies
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ACT 5 SCENE 4

We see the equivocation of the witches' speeches. Birnam wood will come to Dunsinane.

ACT 5 SCENE 5

- 'Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow...'
 - Macbeth sees no point to life. He barely reacts to news of his wife's death.
 - Now, at last, he begins to doubt the equivocation of the witches' speeches.
 - He is determined to fight on regardless. Compare this to the Thane of Cawdor's end. Do you think Macbeth is noble or not?
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- Macbeth's ego is shown in his desire to destroy the whole world. He cannot be happy, so he wishes the world to end.
 - I do not think Macbeth gains any great honour here. He knows he cannot win, yet he continues to fight on. His only aim is to continue to kill.
 - 'I 'gin to b awearly of the sun / And wish the estate o' the world were now undone'.
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ACT 5 SCENE 6

Malcolm and his forces are about to attack.

ACT 5 SCENE 7

- Macbeth kills young Siward.
 - This is yet another example of Macbeth's desire to destroy the future. Young Siward is just a boy and no match for the battle-hardened, adult man he faces.
 - Siward dies honourably.
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ACT 5 SCENE 8

- Macbeth is about to kill himself, but changes his mind. He scorns the Roman habit of suicide rather than capture, calling it foolish.
 - Macbeth is frightened when he realises that Macbeth was not 'of women born', and throws down his sword.
 - Only the thought of his head being paraded in a humiliated manner, Macbeth fights on. He refuses to yield to Malcolm's rule.
 - The end of the play shows Macbeth in a negative light.
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ACT 5 SCENE 9

- Malcolm is a calm, secure figure.
 - He says he will not act in haste but will perform his duties 'in measure, time and place'.
 - Malcolm will be the sort of king Macbeth could never be.
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