

Reading Guide: AP Language and Composition

MacBeth Act I Reading Guide

Do not simply look for surface meaning or “fill in the blank” responses for the below questions. Respond thoughtfully to each.

Act I Scene i

1. What is the significance of MacBeth being named but not present at this point of the drama?
2. What event is happening this day?
3. What does a witch symbolize?
4. What does MacBeth meeting with three witches foreshadow?

Act I Scene ii

5. Line 2 ends with “revolt”; Line 6 ends with “broil”; Line 9 ends with “Macdonwald”; and Line 10 ends with “rebel”. What tone is set?
6. Fortune is who’s whore?
7. What has MacBeth accomplished according to I.ii. 16-23?
8. What heroic qualities has MacBeth displayed?
9. Per lines 25-33, what misfortune befalls King Duncan’s army just as Macdonald is defeated?
10. Who pulled the King of Norway into the rebellion?
11. Line 54, “Bellona’s bridegroom”, what is the type of rhyme; what is the allusion; and who is the subject?
12. Who defeated the King of Norway?
13. According to lines 63-65, what is MacBeth’s new title?
 - a. What does this promotion mean in terms of the relative social positions of Duncan, Cawdor, and MacBeth?
14. Lines 4 and 67, the witches foretell of a battle won and lost: What three events could this pertain to?
15. *Paradox*: a seeming contradiction, which, upon closer examination, prove to be true.
 - a. “Fair is foul and foul is fair.” I.i.10
 - b. “So from that spring whence comfort seek to come / Discomfort swells.” I.ii.27-28
How are (a) and (b) paradoxes?

Act I Scene iii

16. What animals symbolize witches and what is witches familiar?
17. The witches’ curse of sleeplessness is the first instance of a *leitmotif*. How many weeks does the sailor suffer sleeplessness? How many years, to the nearest tenth, is that?
18. “Bark” is a metaphor for a ship.
 - a. How could it be *metonymy*?
 - b. “A bark in a tempest” is a metaphor for a soul in turmoil. Explain the tenor and the vehicle.
19. Why can’t the witches kill the Captain?
20. Find the definitions of *coscinomancy* and *necromancy* and explain how this is relevant to I.iii.8 and I.iii.28.
21. The witches are *weird* sisters. *Weird* derives from Old English and means fate or destiny. How is this a Greek allusion and what does it imply concerning their prognostications?
22. More *paradoxes* are detailed in I.iii.65-68. Explain.
23. Contrast Banquo (I.iii.83-85) and MacBeth’s (I.iii.117-119), logical or emotional reaction to the witches. Do not summarize the lines; explain the significance or implications concerning characterization that the text offers.
24. Reword the following archaic words to their modern forms: *hath*, *O'er*, *afeared*, *didst*
25. James I, King of England, in *Daemonologie*, asserts that witches are “agents of the devil.” How does Banquo echo that belief in line 107?
26. What is the vehicle and tenor of the metaphor in lines 108-109?
27. Witches are not benevolent and their motives are never questionable. Paraphrase Banquo in lines 122-126.
28. *Paradox*: “Cannot be ill, cannot be good” I.iii.131. Explain the paradox.
29. *MacBeth* I.iii.132-142: What are the two ways that MacBeth imagines that could allow him to become king? Also, explain the characterization that takes place, and why these lines are an aside.

Act I Scene iv

30. In lines I.iv.11-14, what is the dramatic irony of King Duncan's remark about the late Thane of Cawdor?
31. How might MacBeth interpret King Duncan's statement, "More is thy due than more than all can pay" I.iv.21 in terms of the weird sisters' prophecy?
32. What is the vassal's virtue that MacBeth expresses in I.iv.2?
33. What is the relationship and whom does King Duncan declare as his heir apparent?

By law, this was illegal for two reasons: First, a law of succession prohibits a minor from succeeding to the throne. Secondly, the Law of Tanistry, in effect from A.D. 843 to A.D. 1058, (coinciding with the end of MacBeth's reign) said that a son cannot succeed his father directly. Tanistry required that the first ranking adult of the nearest branch of the family be elected to succeed the king. Then succession would revert to the original branch of the family. This created a system of shared power while retaining stability through the primary family branch's retention of power.

34. Contrast King Duncan's celestial imagery in line 41 to MacBeth's usage of celestial imagery in lines 50-53. Contrast the virtue or vice that the imagery represents.
35. Where do the principle characters commit to spend the night?

Act I Scene v

36. Define the setting.
37. MacBeth's letter to his wife is direct characterization. What has the audience learned about MacBeth?
38. What does Lady MacBeth fear of MacBeth's nature in line I.v.17-23?
39. What does Lady MacBeth suppose must accompany ambition?
40. To what end does Lady MacBeth seek counsel with MacBeth?
41. Paraphrase Lady Macbeth's reaction to King Duncan's arrival in lines 29-31.
42. Identify the figure of speech, tenor, and vehicle in "The raven himself is hoarse" (line 36). Identify the symbolic nature of a raven.
43. Identify the figure of speech, tenor, and vehicle in "That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan / Under my battlements" (lines 37-38).
44. Paraphrase lines 38-52.
45. How does Lady MacBeth exemplify "Fair is foul and foul is fair?" I.i.10
46. What is the verbal irony in lines 57-59.
47. What does Lady MacBeth mean when she talks about MacBeth's face in line 60? What is the figure of speech, tenor, and vehicle?
48. What conspiracy does she imply and who shall be the principle agent of cause?
49. What does Lady MacBeth believe the outcome of the conspiracy will be?

Act I Scene vi

50. Identify the setting.
51. How is Banquo identifying Inverness with the martlet dramatic iron? Note: Contrast a martlet to a raven with the context of Christian folklore.
52. Explain the dramatic irony in lines 20-25. Why does King Duncan believe MacBeth hurried home? Based on his letter, what other reason could the audience suspect?
53. What adjectives describe King Duncan's character?

Act I Scene vii

54. In MacBeth's soliloquy, what are his reasons to not assassinate King Duncan? There are four reasons.
55. What is MacBeth's only reason for his potential course of actions?
56. Paraphrase or recreate Lady MacBeth's pathos in lines 35-44.
57. Paraphrase MacBeth lines 45-47.
58. Paraphrase Lady MacBeth's pathos in lines 48-52.
59. Paraphrase Lady MacBeth's ethos in lines 44-59.
60. Macbeth's question (line 59) has two implications. What are they?
61. What is Lady MacBeth's assassination plan?
62. What does MacBeth's question in line 75 imply? Note: This is a deep question into the workings of the plot. Might it seem reasonable that some tacit decision has been made?
63. Compare I.v.61-64 with I.vii.81-82.