

# Reading Guide: AP Language and Composition

## MacBeth Act II Reading Guide

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

### Act II Scene i

1. Explain the symbolism of midnight.
2. How does the audience know that the sky is overcast, hence dark, in lines 4-5?
3. Identify and explicate the figure of speech in line 5.
4. *Leitmotif* of sleeplessness: Explain why Banquo cannot sleep. Explain why MacBeth cannot sleep.
5. What does the archaic *a-bed* mean in contemporary English?
6. After reading line 20, look back to question three. Why would the audience now suppose that Banquo could not sleep?
7. Defend whether MacBeth is being deceitful or truthful in line 21.
8. What is stated twice and who initiates the dialogue in I.iii.153-154 and II.i.22? Why would he engage this other character?
9. How does the audience know that Banquo trusts MacBeth from line 26-29?
10. From MacBeth’s soliloquy:
  - a. The bell in line 32 is a “summons.” What does it do?
  - b. What is the significance of the hilt towards MacBeth in lines 33-34?
  - c. How would it be different if the blade was pointing toward MacBeth instead of the hilt?
  - d. How can the floating, fantastical dagger in lines 35-39 be understood as a metaphor of the mind?
  - e. Contrast the meaning of a suspended dagger of the mind and a drawn dagger in the hand (lines 40-41).
  - f. Compare how the suspended dagger commands MacBeth to act with how he already planned to act (line 42).
  - g. Can MacBeth trust his vision in lines 44-45 or his other his other four senses (he can’t trust both). If his vision symbolizes a fantasy, then what do his other senses symbolize (fantasy vs. \_\_\_)? What can MacBeth not differentiate between? This creates another *leitmotif*; see question 21.
  - h. The fantastical blade runs with blood in lines 46-47. What does this foreshadow?
  - i. *Leitmotif* of sleeplessness (lines 50-51): Why might MacBeth have difficulty sleeping?
  - j. Explain the literal and metaphorical meanings of, “Thou sure and firm-set earth, / Hear not my steps” II.i.56-57
  - k. Paraphrase “While I threat, he lives; / Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.” II.i.60-61
  - l. “Ask not for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.” A ringing bell is a part of the poetic tradition where a tolling bell symbolizes death. Ironically, MacBeth says that he doesn’t know whether Heaven or Hell is tolling for King Duncan. How could the bell be tolling for MacBeth and is the audience unclear of MacBeth’s eternal destination? What type of irony is this?
  - m. Does MacBeth choose to commit regicide?
  - n. *Leitmotif* of Uncertain Appearances: The witches being this *leitmotif* with “Fair is foul and foul is fair.” How does the dagger continue this motif?

### Act II Scene ii

11. What does Lady MacBeth do to the King’s guards (line 6)?
12. Why doesn’t Lady MacBeth kill King Duncan (lines 12-13)?
13. What does MacBeth confess to Lady MacBeth?
14. Why would Shakespeare have the regicide in Act II of the play (during the rising action), as compared to later in the play?
15. Why can’t MacBeth speak “amen”? What does this mean?
16. Why is it ironic that MacBeth wants a blessing in line 31?
17. *Leitmotif* of Sleeplessness:
  - a. What is the figure of speech in lines 34-35?
  - b. Identify the five metaphors to describe sleep in lines 34-39.
  - c. What is the dual meaning of “MacBeth does murder sleep”?
  - d. What do lines 49-52 intend?
18. Contrast the characterization of MacBeth (II.ii.40-42) and Lady MacBeth (II.ii.43-49).
19. What martial vice does MacBeth express in line 50?
20. The *leitmotif* of confusion between reality and fantasy is further developed by Lady MacBeth in lines 52-54. What distinction does she fail to make?
21. Explain the pun of the homophones “gilt” and “guilt”.
22. Explain MacBeth’s characterization at the end of this scene.
23. Contrast Lady MacBeth’s characterization to Macbeth’s at the end of this scene.
24. Correctly quote and cite the line number that shows MacBeth acknowledges his moral culpability.
25. There is the beginning of another *leitmotif* in lines 66-67 when Lady MacBeth claims it is easy to cleanse \_\_\_ of \_\_\_. What are the literal and metaphorical meanings of clean versus dirty hands?

26. Correctly quote and cite the line number showing MacBeth's regret.
27. Can someone regret an intentional act?

### Act II Scene iii

28. Why are the Porter's lines in prose?
29. What is the verbal irony in MacBeth's reply in line 39?
30. What is the verbal irony in MacDuff being timely when calling upon King Duncan in line 40?
31. Explain the paradox of "joyful trouble" in line 42.
32. What bad weather and conditions does Lennox mention? What do unnatural portents indicate to a Renaissance audience (see line 47).
33. Identify and explain the figure of speech in line 60.
34. Contrast the symbolism of the bell for MacBeth (II.i.60) and MacDuff (II.iii.68-74).
35. Explain the biblical allusion and metaphor of "body as a temple" in terms of lines 63-64.
36. Identify the modern use of these archaic contractions: *O', Th', Is't*
37. Identify the Greek allusion in line 66.
38. Irony:
  - a. Identify the dramatic irony of MacDuff's statement to Lady MacBeth in lines 78-80.
  - b. Explain the verbal irony of Lady MacBeth in line 82.
  - c. How does Banquo relieve blameworthiness?
  - d. Explain the literal and metaphorical truth of line 85. How is this ironic?
39. Identify the figure of speech, vehicle, and tenor in line 87.
40. Contrast MacDuff (line 94) and MacBeth (lines 91-93;106-108) when announcing King Duncan's death.
41. How does MacBeth deviate from the plan in lines 100-101?
42. What type of rhyme is employed in lines 103-106?
43. What does the use of silver imply about Duncan's character? What does golden blood imply about his lineage?
44. Suspects:
  - a. According to Lennox, who is believed to have murdered King Duncan?
  - b. Is Banquo convinced that the conspiracy is over (lines 124-126)?
  - c. Who does MacBeth seem to agree with (line 126)? What is the paradox?
  - d. Where and why does Malcolm flee?
  - e. Where and why does Donalbain flee?
45. *Chiasmus* is a rhetorical figure in which elements are presented in the order ABBA. An example is: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." We can see the *chiasmus* in the last example (with "country" and "you").  
  
"Where we are / There's daggers in men's smiles; the near in blood, / The nearer bloody" (II.iii.133-135).
  - a. Identify the type of rhyme employed.
  - b. Identify the figure of speech used.
  - c. Explain *chiasmus* in terms of this passage.