

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS - *Macbeth*
Short Answer Format Answer Key

Act One

1. What is the point of the first scene literally and in reference to the whole play?
Literally, the witches are deciding when they shall meet again. This scene sets the mood for the entire play, and introduces several major motifs: the witches (supernatural influences in the play), the idea of fair being foul, and the stormy fate of Scotland. The main character, Macbeth, is also introduced by name.
2. What does Duncan call Macbeth when he hears Macbeth has defeated Macdonwald?
He calls him "valiant Cousin! Worthy gentleman!" This is ironic, being said to the man who will be his murderer.
3. Who is sentenced to death?
The Thane of Cawdor is sentenced to death.
4. What do the witches predict in I.iii for Macbeth? For Banquo?
They predict Macbeth will be Thane of Cawdor and eventually the king. They predict that Banquo will be "lesser than Macbeth, and greater, Not so happy, and yet happier" and that his descendants will be kings although he will not be one.
5. What news does Ross bring Macbeth?
Ross tells Macbeth that Macbeth now holds the title of the Thane of Cawdor.
6. Banquo, like Macbeth, is surprised that the witches have predicted Macbeth's new title. He is, however, leery. What does he say about the motives of the "instruments of darkness"?
He says they often tell of good things which may happen without telling the bad consequences.
7. Malcolm describes Cawdor's last moments before execution. What is Duncan's reply?
You can't tell what is in a person's heart by looking at his face.
8. Macbeth says, "Stars, hide your fires, Let not light see my black and deep desires." What are Macbeth's desires?
He now desires to be the king, and he realizes that something will have to be done with the present king (and his sons) before his desires can become reality.
9. After Lady Macbeth reads the letter, what does she tell us is her opinion of Macbeth, and how does she plan to help him?
In short, Lady Macbeth thinks Macbeth could be a good king, but he lacks the hard-heartedness which would allow him to get to the position. She'll talk him into it.

10. What is Lady Macbeth's "prayer" to the spirits after she learns Duncan is coming"?
She wants to be filled with cruelty, given a hard heart and the thick blood necessary to do what has to be done in order to make Macbeth king.
11. What advice does Lady Macbeth give Macbeth when he arrives home?
She tells him he must learn to look innocent even when his heart is full of evil. He has to learn to hide his true feelings.
12. What are Macbeth's arguments to himself against killing Duncan?
Macbeth is Duncan's kinsman and his subject. Duncan is a good king and virtuous man; he has done no particular evil. Duncan is a popular king, and his death would bring sorrow and unrest upon Scotland.
13. What arguments does Lady Macbeth use to convince Macbeth to commit the murder?
She tells him not to be a coward, not to say later that he "could have been" when he could "be" king. She tells him to be a man and go get what he wants. She says if she had made the promise to do this, that she would have killed her own baby to carry forth with her promise.
14. What is Lady Macbeth's plan?
She will drug the king's grooms (guards). Macbeth will then go into the king's room and murder him in his sleep.

Act II

1. What is Macbeth's lie to Banquo about the witches' predictions?
He says he doesn't even think about them.
2. What is the signal Lady Macbeth is to give Macbeth to let him know that she has taken care of the guards (grooms)?
She will ring a bell.
3. What excuse does Lady Macbeth give for not killing Duncan herself?
He looked like her father sleeping there.
4. After Macbeth kills Duncan, he goes to Lady Macbeth and is concerned about not being able to say "Amen." What is her advice to him?
She tells him not to think about it so much, or it will make them crazy. (Notice that she does later, in fact, go mad and commit suicide.)
5. Then, Macbeth is worried about hearing a voice saying, "Macbeth does murder sleep." What does Lady Macbeth then tell him to do?
She tells him to go get some water and wash "this filthy witness" from his hands. In other words, get cleaned up and forget about it.

6. Why won't Macbeth take the daggers back to the scene of the crime?
He can't bear to look at Duncan again.
7. Who was knocking?
Macduff and Lennox were knocking at the gate.
8. What three things does drinking provoke?
It provokes "nose-painting, sleep, and urine."
9. How does Lennox describe the night, and what is Macbeth's response?
Lennox goes through a great description of the terrible night, saying it predicted terrible, confusing times ahead. Macbeth brushes it off by saying it was a "rough night."
10. What did Macduff discover?
Macduff discovered Duncan's body.
11. Macduff says, "Oh, gentle lady, 'Tis not for you to hear what I can speak. The repetition, in a woman's ear, Would murder as it fell." What is ironic about this?
Lady Macbeth was a determining force in the death of Duncan. She is no "lady."
12. What excuse or explanation did Macbeth give for killing the guards (grooms)? What is his real reason?
He did it out of pain and rage, but he actually wanted to be rid of any possible witnesses to the murder.
13. Why do Malcolm and Donalbain leave?
They fear that the king's murderer will be after them, too.
14. Why does Ross not believe Malcolm and Donalbain were responsible for Duncan's murder?
He says it is against nature -- both their personal natures and nature as the ruling force in the universe.

Act III

1. Why does Macbeth want Banquo and Fleance dead?
He knows they suspect him of foul play, and he is furious that he has done all of the work (so-to-speak) of becoming king, and Banquo's descendants will benefit from it.
2. What is Macbeth's plan for killing Banquo and Fleance? Does it work?
He gets two convicted murderers to wait along the road to ambush them. The murderers kill Banquo, but Fleance escapes.

3. Macbeth says, "The worm that's fled Hath nature that in time will venom breed, No teeth for the present." What does that mean?
Fleance will be a problem in the future, since he will have children who will become kings, but for now Macbeth can let him go and deal with other things because Fleance is of no immediate threat to him personally.
4. Who (what) did Macbeth see at the banquet table?
He saw Banquo's ghost.
5. How does Lady Macbeth cover for Macbeth at the banquet? What excuses does she give for his wild talk?
She tells the guests that he often has these fits, that those who know him well have learned to ignore them. When Macbeth really gets out of hand, she sends the guests home.
6. Who else was missing from the banquet table (besides Banquo)?
Macduff is missing.
7. Macbeth says, "I am in blood Stepped in so far that should I wade no more, Returning were as tedious as go o'er." What does he mean?
There is no going back now. Macbeth is committed to this course of action, whatever terrible things he may yet have to do.
8. What does Hecate want the witches to do?
She wants the witches to give Macbeth some visions which will give him false impressions, false hopes for his personal safety and the safety of his rule, so he will continue on his path of destruction.
9. What does Lennox think about Macbeth, Fleance, and Duncan's sons?
He thinks Macbeth is the "good guy," Fleance killed Banquo, and Duncan's sons killed the king.

Act IV

1. Witch 2 says, "By the pricking of my thumb, Something wicked this way comes." Who comes?
Macbeth comes.
2. What is Macbeth's attitude towards the witches this time?
He is demanding, trying to take charge.

3. What four things did the witches show Macbeth? What does each show/say? What is Macbeth's reaction?
They showed him an armed head, a bloody child, a crowned child with a tree in its hand, and, finally, eight kings followed by Banquo's ghost. Respectively, they showed/told Macbeth to beware of Macduff, that he would not be harmed by anyone "born of woman," that he would not be vanquished until Birnam Wood would come to Dunsinane, and that Banquo's descendants would be kings.
4. Macbeth says (about the witches), "Infected be the air whereon they ride, And damned all those that trust them!" What is Macbeth, in effect, saying about himself?
He is damned.
5. Where is Macduff?
He is in England helping Malcolm.
6. Why does Macbeth have Macduff's family and servants killed?
Macduff is not loyal to Macbeth, and Macbeth is angry.
7. Why does Lady Macduff's son say liars and swearers are fools?
He implies that since there are more of them than honest people, they should get together and hang the honest folks. They are foolish to leave themselves in jeopardy when they could overcome the honest people.
8. Malcolm says, "Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell. Though all things foul would wear the brows of grace, Yet grace must still look so." What does that mean?
The devil was, of course, at one time the brightest angel. The point is that things aren't what they seem. One can't judge the book by its cover, so-to-speak.
9. Macduff says, "Oh, Scotland, Scotland!" Why?
Malcolm has just told him what a horrid king he (Malcolm) would be if he were on the throne instead of Macbeth. Given a choice, then, between Malcolm and Macbeth, he gravely fears for his country's future.
10. What news does Ross bring to Macduff?
Ross brings news of Macduff's family's murders.

Act V

1. What do the doctor and gentlewoman see Lady Macbeth doing? What do they decide to do?
She is sleepwalking and talking about the murders. The doctor decides his best move is to not mention that he heard anything, and he tells the woman to keep an eye on Lady Macbeth.
2. What does Macbeth want the doctor to do for his wife?
He wants the doctor to ease her suffering, to give her something to make her oblivious to her weighty troubles.
3. What trick does Malcolm use to hide the number of men in his army?
He has his men cut off tree branches and use them as camouflage.
4. Malcolm says, "And none serve with him but constrained things Whose hearts are absent, too." What does that mean?
Macbeth's armies are there in body only, not in spirit, and there should not be any serious opposition.
5. What is Macbeth's reaction to Lady Macbeth's death?
He takes it very calmly, saying she would have died sooner or later, anyway.
6. What is Macbeth's reaction to the news that Birnam Wood is moving?
"Arm, arm, and out!" He's going to fight to the bitter end and take down the whole universe with him, if necessary.
7. Who first fights Macbeth? What happens?
Young Siward fights Macbeth and is slain.
8. Macbeth says to Macduff, "But get thee back, my soul is too much charged With blood of thine already." To what is he referring?
Macbeth doesn't want to fight Macduff; he has already killed Macduff's family.
9. When does Macbeth know he's in trouble?
He knows this is his end when Macduff tells him he was taken from his mother's womb instead of being "born of woman."
10. How does Macbeth die?
Macduff fights him and beheads him.
11. Who will be King of Scotland?
Malcolm will be king.