

**RSC**

ROYAL  
SHAKESPEARE  
COMPANY

LIVE LESSON:  
MACBETH 2020

Lesson Plans and  
Activities

MACBETH

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

## ABOUT THIS PACK

This pack supports the RSC's 2020 Live Lesson on *Macbeth* on 28 April. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 Live Lesson will broadcast footage created for the 2018 Live Lesson, exploring the character of Lady Macbeth and led by Assistant Director Peter Bradley and RSC Young People's Performance Developer Robin Belfield.

The activities in this pack provide material for preparatory work that can be set and completed at home, along with background information on the 2018 production and the moments from the play we will explore in the Live Lesson, as well as some ideas for follow up work.

There will also be the opportunity for students' questions to be answered in a Q&A after the Live Lesson. To take part in this please tweet any questions for our actors during the lesson, including Niamh Cussack who plays Lady Macbeth, using #RSCMacbeth. These questions will be answered via the @RSC\_Education account throughout the afternoon.

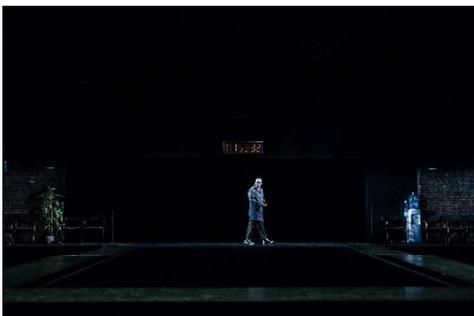
## ABOUT THE PLAY

*Macbeth* focuses on the rise of a Scottish lord and his wife, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, who seek out power after three witches prophesy that Macbeth will become king – stopping at nothing to achieve it. Their path to power and their efforts to keep it have a heavy impact on both characters, arguably driving them both into 'madness'.

How the actor and director have approached the play in rehearsals will be explored in the Live Lesson using the same techniques and exercises they used while they were rehearsing. Below are a few things that you may want to share with students about the production:

- The production is set in a modern world of warfare but with swords rather than guns. The set has been designed to look like a waiting room, with chairs lined on either side of the stage. The character of the Porter is constantly present on these chairs and watches events unfold from the side lines.

You can take a look at the set and characters in the images below from the production. What other details do you notice? How has the world of the play been reflected? What impression do you get of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth?



Michael Hodgson as the Porter, Niamh Cussack as Lady Macbeth and Christopher Eccleston as Macbeth. Photos by Richard Davenport ©RSC

- The idea of the supernatural, witches and what these things mean for modern audiences was something Director Polly Findlay was very keen to explore in the play. Drawing on horror films like 'The Ring' and 'The Shining', young children have been cast as the witches who appear to Macbeth and Banquo.

The RSC Live Lesson will take place on 28 April at 11am – 12pm. The lesson activities below will help you to prepare for the event with your students.

## SYNOPSIS

You can find a synopsis of the play at [www.rsc.org.uk/macbeth/the-plot](http://www.rsc.org.uk/macbeth/the-plot)

# LESSON 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO MACBETH

The following activities will introduce the story of the play and begin to explore the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, taking a look at the ways in which they influence each other and respond to the witches' prophecies.



## ACTIVITY 1: STARTING

Ask students to think about how they react to certain words or phrases and what pictures these create in their mind, drawing quick 60 second pictures of the following:

- Witches
- Brave soldiers
- Ambition
- The death of a king

If possible, encourage them to reflect on their choices and compare them, if they are able to, with other people's interpretations. Do we see these things differently and what do they look like for them?



## ACTIVITY 2: EXPLORING

Take a look at the 'scenes' from the Story in 20 minutes resource. These scenes offer an overview of the plot of Macbeth as a whole.

Allocate scenes to students, giving them a single scene to focus on. Ask students to explore how they might present their scene to others, either as a short film, storyboard or annotated model. If you are working as an individual and cannot divide these scenes between a wider group, then you may want to do this for the whole play, or to focus on the first 3 'scenes' in the resource.

- Allow students to create their presentations and encourage them to find different and interesting ways of including all the information they have been given. Could they have several narrators? Can they find a way of subtitling the scene?
- Invite each of the groups to share their scenes, watching each other's presentations in order.
- Reflect with students, after seeing this version of the play, on what they think the central themes in the play are. Whose story is this? What happens to them? What do they think the cause of that change is? Are there several reasons that they change?

Ask students to finish by suggesting what they think the themes in the play are. Can they finish the sentence – 'This is a play about –'



## ACTIVITY 3: DEVELOPING

Ask students to look at a copy of Lady Macbeth's speech from Act 1 Scene 5. This is her second speech, but explain that in the Live Lesson we will look at this speech alongside her first speech, when she receives her letter from Macbeth.

- Ask students to read the speech out loud to themselves at least twice. Hearing it will help to give a sense of the speech, so it's useful to read it aloud even if you are on your own.
- Reflect briefly on what has just happened to Lady Macbeth. What information has she just received? What is her reaction? Can they tell how she feels about it? If students already know Lady Macbeth's speech, where she receives the letter from Macbeth, ask them to think about how her reaction is changing and developing. How is this speech different?
- Allow students the opportunity to read the speech again, listening carefully for any words that make them think of death or the supernatural. Invite them to tap the table or stomp a foot when they say any words that remind them of these things.
- Think about the movement that the speech required. How many times were they clapping or stomping? What does that reveal to them about Lady Macbeth? What do they think she is thinking about at this point?
- Explain that this scene as a whole is the first time we meet Lady Macbeth's character. Why do they think Shakespeare gives us this introduction to her?

Ask students to look at one or two specific lines from the speech, creating a freeze frame or still image that shows what is happening in their lines(s).

This may be something that can be photographed and shared, or that students will need to describe.

- Reflect with students on whether this was a difficult challenge. How easy was it to create images from Lady Macbeth's language? Is there anything that connects the images she uses? Why do they think she uses these kinds of images and how do they connect with the words they discovered as a group?



## ACTIVITY 4: REFLECTING

- Discuss students what kind of character they think Lady Macbeth is. How will she react when Macbeth arrives home, do they think? What will be her main objective? How might she achieve that objective.
- Ask students to work in pairs to come up with three words that they think describe Lady Macbeth and share these together if possible.

Remind students to have these impressions in mind when they hear from Niamh during the Live Lesson.

During the Live Lesson, you may want to have copies of both Act 1 Scene 5 speeches from the Resource Materials to hand, as the lesson will explore these with Niamh and Peter.

Students can send in questions during the Live Lesson before 12pm, so may also want to think about the questions they would like to ask about these speeches and Lady Macbeth, as well as any other questions they may have about the play and performing at the RSC.

## FOLLOW UP:

## MACBETH AND LADY MACBETH

In the Resource Materials you will find an edited copy of Act 1 Scene 7. During the Live Lesson we will talk more about how you can explore this moment together and look more closely at how Macbeth and Lady Macbeth influence each other when Macbeth returns home.

# RESOURCE MATERIALS

## FOR PREPARATION

### ACT 1 SCENE 5 Extract (2018 Production edit)

LADY MACBETH

The raven himself is hoarse  
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan  
Under my battlements. Come, you spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,  
And fill me from the crown to the toe, top-full  
Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood,  
Stop up th'access and passage to remorse,  
That no compunctious visitings of nature  
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between  
Th'effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts  
And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,  
Wherever, in your sightless substances,  
You wait on nature's mischief. 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'.

## THE STORY IN 20 MINUTES

1. There is a fierce battle between Scotland and Norway. Three witches plot to meet Macbeth on his way home after battle.

Witches: *When shall we three meet again?  
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?*

2. King Duncan of Scotland, his children Malcolm and Donalbain, Macduff, loyal advisor to the king, Macbeth's personal servant, Seyton and all Scotland praise Macbeth for his bravery in winning the battle.

*worthy gentleman*

*brave Macbeth*

*worthy thane*

*great Glamis*

3. Returning from the battle, Macbeth and his friend, Banquo, meet the three witches on the heath. They make a prophecy.

First witch: *All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!*

Second witch: *All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!*

Third witch: *All hail, Macbeth, that shall be king hereafter!*

4. Banquo asks the witches to predict his own future.

First witch: *Lesser than Macbeth, and greater*

Second witch: *Not so happy, yet much happier*

Third witch: *Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none.*

5. A messenger arrives from the King and tells Macbeth that he has been made Thane of Cawdor: Macbeth and Banquo are amazed.

Macbeth: *If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me,  
Without my stir.*

6. Macbeth sends a letter to his wife, Lady Macbeth, telling her what the witches have said. She reads it, and she is afraid that her husband is too weak to fulfil his destiny, but a messenger brings the news that King Duncan is coming to stay to celebrate and honour Macbeth. She decides they must kill the king and she calls on the spirits for strength

Lady Macbeth: *Come you spirits;  
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full  
Of direst cruelty.*

7. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth welcome King Duncan, Macduff and other lords as their guests. Macbeth takes his wife on one side and tells her he has decided not to go through with the murder. But she will not listen.

Lady Macbeth: *Art thou afeard?  
Screw your courage to the sticking place,  
And we'll not fail.*

8. Lady Macbeth gets the king's bodyguards drunk, they fall into a stupor and King Duncan sleeps unguarded. As Macbeth approaches the King's chamber, he sees a vision.

Macbeth: *Is this a dagger which I see before me?*

9. Macbeth kills the king. Lady Macbeth smears the sleeping guards with blood. But Macbeth hears voices.

Macbeth: *Methought I heard a voice cry "Sleep no more!  
Macbeth doth murder sleep"*

10. The murder is discovered by Macduff. The dead king's children, Malcolm and Donalbain, realise it is dangerous to stay in Scotland.

Malcolm and Donalbain: *Where we are, there's daggers in men's smiles*

Malcolm escapes to England, Donalbain to Ireland.

11. Macbeth is crowned King of Scotland. He decides he must kill his friend Banquo and Banquo's young son Fleance to stop the witches' prophecy coming true, so he arranges for them to be murdered while they are out riding.

Banquo: *O, treachery! Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly fly!*

Banquo is killed , but Fleance escapes.

12. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth hold a feast to celebrate Macbeth's coronation, but Banquo's ghost appears to Macbeth. No one else can see the ghost. Macbeth is terrified.

Macbeth: *Hence, horrible shadow!*

Everyone wonders why Macbeth is acting so strangely.

13. Macbeth goes to meet the witches again.

Witches: *Double, double, toil and trouble  
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.*

The witches conjure up apparitions to appear, each with a message for Macbeth.

First apparition: *Beware Macduff!*

Second apparition: *None of woman born shall harm Macbeth.*

Third apparition: *Macbeth shall never vanquished be until  
Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill  
Shall come against him.*

14. Macduff goes to England to persuade King Duncan's son Malcolm to fight Macbeth and save Scotland. Meanwhile, Macbeth decides to kill Macduff's wife and children

Macbeth: *Give to th' edge o' th' sword*

*His wife, his babes, and all...that trace him in his line.*

15. In England, Ross arrives and tells Macduff that his family has been murdered by Macbeth.

Macduff: *All my pretty ones?*

*Did you say all? O hell-kite! All?*

They decide to march against Macbeth.

16. Meanwhile Lady Macbeth has started to walk and talk in her sleep. She imagines blood on her hands, and frantically tries to rub them clean.

Lady Macbeth: *Out, damned spot! Out, I say! ... Hell is murky*

As she says this, her doctor and gentlewoman look on.

17. Malcolm, Macduff and their invading army gather near Birnam Wood, not far from Dunsinane Castle. As he prepares to fight them, Macbeth tells his personal servant Seyton:

Macbeth: *I will not be afraid of death and bane*

*Till Birnam Forest come to Dunsinane.*

18. Seyton brings Macbeth the news that Lady Macbeth is dead. Meanwhile, Malcolm orders every soldier to cut down a branch and carry it in front of himself towards Dunsinane. Macbeth sees them and realises that the witches' predictions are coming true.

Macbeth: *And now a wood*

*Comes toward Dunsinane*

19. Macbeth decides to fight to the last, even though most of his men have deserted him. Lord Macduff finds Macbeth, and raises his sword. He tells Macbeth that he was born by caesarean section.

Macduff: *Turn Hell hound, turn.*

*Macduff was from his mother's womb*

*Untimely ripped.*

20. And so the witches' predictions all come true. Macduff kills Macbeth. Macduff crowns Malcolm the new king of Scotland.

Macduff: *Hail, King of Scotland!*

# FOR THE LESSON

## ACT 1 SCENE 5 Extract (2018 Production edit)

*Lady Macbeth has just received and read Macbeth's letter explaining that the witches correctly predicted he would become Thane of Cawdor. He has also told her their prophecy that he will become king.*

LADY MACBETH                      Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be  
  
  What thou art promised; yet do I fear thy nature,  
  
  It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness  
  
  To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great;  
  
  Art not without ambition, but without  
  
  The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,  
  
  That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,  
  
  And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou'dst have, great Glamis,  
  
  That which cries, 'Thus thou must do' if thou have it;  
  
  And that which rather thou dost fear to do,  
  
  Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee hither,  
  
  That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,  
  
  And chastise with the valour of my tongue  
  
  All that impedes thee from the golden round,  
  
  Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem  
  
  To have thee crowned withal.

# FOR FOLLOW UP

## ACT 1 SCENE 7 Extract (2018 Production edit)

MACBETH            We will proceed no further in this business.

                          He hath honoured me of late, and I have bought  
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,  
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,  
Not cast aside so soon.

LADY MACBETH    Was the hope drunk Wherein you dressed yourself?  
Hath it slept since? And wakes it now, to look so green, and pale,  
At what it did so freely? From this time,  
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard  
To be the same in thine own act and valour  
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that  
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,  
And live a coward in thine own esteem,  
Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'  
Like the poor cat i'th' adage?

MACBETH            Prithee, peace: I dare do all that may become a man,  
Who dares do more is none.

LADY MACBETH    What beast was't, then,  
That made you break this enterprise to me?

When you durst do it, then you were a man;  
And, to be more than what you were, you would  
Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place  
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:  
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now  
Does unmake you. I have given suck, and know  
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me;  
I would, while it was smiling in my face,  
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums,  
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn  
As you have done to this.

MACBETH If we should fail?

LADY MACBETH We fail? But screw your courage to the sticking-place,  
And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep,  
Whereto the rather shall his day's hard journey  
Soundly invite him, his two chamberlains  
Will I with wine and wassail so convince  
That memory, the warder of the brain,  
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason  
A limbeck only; when in swinish sleep  
Their drenched natures lie as in a death,  
What cannot you and I perform upon

Th'unguarded Duncan? What not put upon

His spongy officers who shall bear the guilt

Of our great quell?