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Act 4 scene 1 macbeth study guide

Macbeth meets the witches, who are busy making potions and spells. He tells them he wants to know more about his future. They tell him three important things: He needs to keep an eye on Macduff. He will not harm anyone born of woman. He will not be conquered until Birnam Wood marches to Dunsinane. Macbeth thinks this is all good news - when can forests march? And Macduff is sure to be the born woman, right? Still, he thinks it's a good idea to kill Macduff anyway, just in case. Everything seems to work well for Macbeth until the witches share with him one final vision: a long line of kings who all resemble Banquo. As soon as the witches leave, Lennox comes to Macbeth to tell them that Macduff has gone to England. Because Macduff himself is out of range, Macbeth chooses to go after his family. The witches circle a cauldron, mixing in a variety of grotesque ingredients, while chanting double, double toil and problems; / Fire burn, and boiler bubble (10-11). Hecate appears, they all sing together, and Hecate leaves. Macbeth then comes in and demands answers to his pressing questions about the future. The witches complete their magic spell and conjure up a series of apparitions. The first is an armed head that warns Macbeth to watch out for the Thane of Fife (Macduff). The second appearance is a bloody child, who tells him that none of the woman born / Will harm Macbeth (96-97). This news strengthens Macbeth's spirits. The third appearance is a crowned child with a tree in hand, who says that Macbeth will never be overcome until / Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill / Will come against him (107-09). This cheers Macbeth even more, because he knows that nothing can move a forest. Macbeth proceeds to his final question: will Banquo's children ever rule Scotland? The cauldron sinks and a strange sound is heard. The witches now show Macbeth a procession of kings, the eighth of whom holds a mirror in his hand, followed by Banquo. As Banquo points out this line of kings, Macbeth realizes that they are indeed his family line. After the witches dance and disappear, Lennox comes in with the news that Macduff has fled to England. Macbeth decides that from now on he will act immediately on his ambitions: the first step will be to seize Fife and kill Macduff's wife and children. Act 4, Scene 2 At Fife, Ross visits Lady Macduff, who fears for her own safety now that her husband has fled. He reassures her by telling her that her husband was only doing what was right and necessary. After he leaves, Lady Macduff talks to her son about his missing father. The little boy shows wisdom far beyond his years. A messenger interrupts them with warning to flee the house immediately. But before Lady Macduff can escape, murderers attack the house and kill everyone, including Lady Macduff and her son. Law 4, 4, 3 Macduff arrives at the English court and meets Malcolm. Recalling his father's misplaced confidence in Macbeth, Malcolm decides to test Macduff: he confesses that he is a greedy, lascivious and sinful man who makes Macbeth look like an angel in comparison. Macduff despairs and says that he will leave Scotland forever if this is the case, as no man seems to be fit to govern it. Upon hearing this, Malcolm is convinced of Macduff's goodness and reveals that he was only testing him; he has none of these mistakes to which he has just confessed. In fact, he claims, the first lie he ever told was this false confession to Macduff. He then announces that Siward has assembled an army of ten thousand people and is ready to march on Scotland. A messenger appears and tells the men that the King of England is approaching, attended by a crowd of sick and desperate people who want the king to heal them. The king, according to Malcolm, has a gift for healing people simply by laying his hands on them. Ross is from Scotland and reports that the country is in a mess. When Macduff asks how his wife and children are doing, Ross first replies that they are well at peace (180). When pressed further, he tells the story of their deaths. Macduff is bewildered speechless and Malcolm urges him to heal his grief by demanding revenge on Macbeth. Macduff is overcome with guilt and grief for the murders that took place while he was absent. Once again, Malcolm urges him to use his grief well and take revenge. All three men leave to prepare for battle. Analysis of the act opens, the witches carry on the theme of doubling and equivocation that threads into play. As they throw ingredients in their cauldron, they chant double, double, toil and trouble— a reminder that their speech is full of double meanings, paradox and ambiguity (IV i 10). The apparitions that the witches conjure up give ambiguous messages to Macbeth, and they seem very conscious to know that he will only understand half of their words. Although Macbeth himself has previously acknowledged that stones are known to move and speak trees (III iv 122), the apparitions give Macbeth a false sense of security. He takes the words of the apparitions at face value, forgetting to explore how their predictions could potentially come true. The theme of doubling is amplified when the witches call the show of kings. Every king who appears seems too much like the spirit of Banquo, frightens Macbeth with their likeness (IV i 128). For Macbeth, it is as if the spirits of Banquo have returned to him several times in the procession of kings. Macbeth also notes that some carry double balls and treble scepters – as if even the signs of their power have doubled. On a historical note, it is widely thought that the eighth king holds a mirror to attach pander to I. This last king – the eighth generation descendant of Banquo – is none other than a figure of James I himself. So he wears a mirror to send so much signal to the real James I, who sits at the forefront of the audience. A similar moment of indulgent occurs when Malcolm notes that the King of England has a special power to heal people affected by evil (147). In several subtle ways, Shakespeare complimented King James I – a legendary descendant of Banquo and author of a book on witchcraft (Daemonology [1597]). James I isn't the only character to be doubled in Macbeth. Throughout the game, characters balance and complement each other in a carefully constructed harmony. As a man who also receives a prophecy but refuses to act actively, Banquo serves as a kind of reverse mirror image of Macbeth. Although he has troubled dreams like Macbeth, it's born out of the suppression of ambitions, while Macbeth's stem from fulfilling them. Other major characters, including Malcolm, Macduff and Lady Macbeth, can also be seen as foils or doppelgangers for Macbeth. Particularly interesting is the case of Lady Macbeth, who in some ways swaps roles with Macbeth as the game progresses. While she first advises Macbeth to forget all remorse and guilt, Lady Macbeth becomes increasingly troubled by her own guilt as Macbeth begins to follow her advice. Another form of doubling or ambiguity can be found in the theme of costumes, masks and disguises. While planning Duncan's murder, Lady Macbeth advises Macbeth to look like the innocent flower, / But be the snake under't to tempt time by disguise his motives behind a mask of loyalty (I v 61). After the murder, Lady Macbeth paints the faces of the bodyguards with a mask of blood to get them involved. Similarly, while preparing to kill Banquo, Macbeth comments that men should make [their] faces visors to [their] hearts, / Disguise what they are (III ii 35-36). So when Malcolm tests Macduff's loyalty, he appropriately begins to say that all things wrong would wear the eyebrows of mercy (IV iii 23). Even the most wrong men – perhaps Macbeth and the killers – are capable of disguise themselves. Just as the witch's quivote disguises the true damage in their seductive words, disguises and masks hide the inner world from the outside. Finally, during the scene in which the murders take place, Lady Macduff reflects the bird symbolism that began in Act 1. When Lady Macduff complains to Ross about Macduff's abrupt departure, she says: the poor wretch / The most diminutive of birds, will fight, / Her boy in nest, against the owl (IV ii 9-11). Her metaphor comes to life when she and her son are attacked by Macbeth's men. Macbeth, as previously established, has been identified with the owl; So Lady Macduff, trying to protect her son, becomes the wretch in a realization of her own speech. It is with particular pathos that the audience sees Macduff's precocious son fall prey to the swords of Macbeth's ruthless killers. LitCharts assigns a color and icon to each theme in Macbeth, which you use to track the themes during work. Toggle Nav Act 4, Scene 1 On a dark and stormy night, the three witches hang out in a cave roasting marshmallows and singing spells around a boiling cauldron, throwing all sorts of nasty bits, from lizard bone to the finger of stillborn baby. Hecate comes in, happy with the more serious approach of the witches this time. After Hecate leaves, the Second Met announces that something wicked will come this way. Not surprisingly, Macbeth quickly follows. (So does a Ray Bradbury novel and cinematic adaptation, but not for a few centuries.) Macbeth gives the witches some props for the ability to control the weather and crazy winds that batter churches, cause huge ocean waves to swallow ships, destroy crops, topple castles, and so on. (Hmm... this reminds us of Act I, scene iii, where the witches say they're going to punish a sailor's wife by whipping up a nasty storm for her husband, who is at sea.) Macbeth says he still has some questions about his future and that he wants answers from the weird sisters, pronto. The witches add some more ingredients to the cauldron, and then apparitions appear, each appealing to Macbeth. First, an armed head warns him to watch out for Macduff. The second appearance is a bloody child who says that Macbeth will not be harmed by anyone who was born of the woman. Er, well... That's pretty much everybody, right? Including Macduff. Macbeth thinks he has nothing to fear. He's happy with this good, but figures he might as well have killed Macduff anyway—you know, just to be sure. The third appearance is a child wearing a crown and holding a tree in his hand. The child promises that Macbeth will not be conquered until Birnam Wood marches to Dunsinane. This seems about as unlikely as Macduff not born to a woman. Given all this, Macbeth feels safe that he will not be captured in the coming war. But again, to be on the safe side, he still asks if Banquo's children will ever rule the kingdom. He is warned not to ask any more questions. He demands that he be answered anyway. Macbeth is not happy when he has shown a line of eight kings, the latter holding a mirror that reflects on many more such kings. One of the kings in the mirror happens to be holding two spheres. Time for a History Snack: King James I of England (a.k.a. King James VI of Scotland) its lineage back to Banquo and, at its coronation ceremony in England (1603) James held two orbs (one representing England and one representing Scotland). It's a coincidence, don't you think? The apparitions disappear and the witches tease Macbeth for looking awful when he saw his Destruction. The witches do yet another song and dance routine and they disappear. Enter Lennox to find a surprised Macbeth. Lennox tells Macbeth the news that Macduff has definitely run away to England, presumably to get some help for an uprising. Take your highlighter out, because this next piece is important: Macbeth says that from now on, he's going to act immediately on some thought in his mind: From this moment / The firsts of my heart will be / The firsts of my hand. In other words, stop thinking and thinking about the cons of being bad - he's just going to do whatever the heck he wants to do. Starting with... Macduff's family, especially his children, because Macbeth never wants to see little Macduffs walking around. Join us today and never see them again. By entering your email address, you agree to receive emails from Shmoop and check if you are over 13 years of age. 13.

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