

SHAKESPEARE IN OUR LIVES

Why do we study the plays of William Shakespeare? He lived and died almost 400 years ago. He wrote about kings and queens and other people far from our own time. His use of poetry is strange to our ears, and his vocabulary is full of words we don't understand and can't pronounce. How could Shakespeare possibly be relevant to our lives today?

To answer these questions, you only need to look at the way Shakespeare's work has woven its way into the fabric of our world. He has shaped our language in countless ways. His plays are produced around the world, more than those of any other playwright who ever lived. There are many theatre companies for whom Shakespeare is their central and defining focus. Every year, more movies are made based on his works; the Internet Movie Database (IMDB.com) lists 120 just since 2000. Writers and other artists have long been inspired by his works. *West Side Story* is *Romeo and Juliet* with street gangs in New York City. *O* is *Othello* at a prep school. *She's the Man* is *Twelfth Night* in a locker room. Operas, ballets, symphonies, paintings, and sculptures are based on his plays. All theatre artists strive to measure their skills against Shakespeare's works, both on stage and on film.

The characters Shakespeare created may live in exotic places and have fancy titles attached to their names, but they are deeply human characters who experience love, grief, joy, jealousy, and pain, and who wrestle with questions of ethics, morality, and justice, just as we do today. Some of the words he used may have faded from our language over the years, but a minimum of effort to understand these terms yields a maximum of benefit, for Shakespeare's understanding of the human condition is extraordinary. To quote Hamlet himself, Shakespeare's plays "hold as 'twere the mirror up to Nature to show Virtue her feature, Scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."

The Indiana Repertory Theatre's production of Macbeth is part of Shakespeare for a New Generation, a national theatre initiative sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts in cooperation with Arts Midwest.

(below) Andrew Ahrens and Jennifer Johansen will play Macbeth and Lady Macbeth at the IRT.

"SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES"

Macbeth and Banquo, generals in the service of King Duncan, have succeeded in putting down a rebellion led by the Thane (or Duke) of Cawdor. Returning home from battle, they meet three witches, who hail Macbeth first with his own title (Thane of Glamis), then as Thane of Cawdor and "king hereafter." Banquo is told that he shall be the father of kings, although he himself will never rule. Still puzzling over these prophetic words, the two are greeted by other lords dispatched by Duncan, who confirm that Macbeth has been named Thane of Cawdor; part of the witches' prophecy has already come true. When Macbeth and Banquo meet the rest of the army, Duncan names his son Malcolm heir to the throne and tells Macbeth that he plans to visit Macbeth's castle. Macbeth sends news of the visit and the strange prophecies ahead in a letter to his wife. She seizes upon her husband's dreams of power even more resolutely than he.

With the encouragement of his ambitious wife, Macbeth formulates a brutal plot to kill King Duncan. Macbeth's conscience surfaces even before the deed is done, but the unflinching Lady Macbeth calms his nerves and drives him forward. Lady Macbeth drags Duncan's servants, and Macbeth stabs the King while he sleeps. But Macbeth flees the scene of the crime before the setup is complete, and Lady Macbeth must return to Duncan's bedchamber to place the daggers and smear the servants with blood to seal their apparent guilt. In the morning, when the murder is discovered, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth pretend grief. To

divert suspicion, Macbeth kills the grooms as though angered by their denial of the deed. Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, fearing a similar fate, flee the country, thus casting guilt for the King's death on them. Macbeth is crowned king, but the honor seems incomplete when he remembers the prophecy that Banquo's sons, not his, will reign.

Knowing that Banquo suspects him of Duncan's

murder, Macbeth plots more deaths. Macbeth's hired killers succeed in killing Banquo, but Banquo's son Fleance escapes. As Macbeth praises the absent Banquo to the other lords, the murdered ghost of Banquo appears to Macbeth, seizing him with terror. Macbeth's frightened words lead the nobles to suspect his guilt. To cover for her husband's loose tongue, Lady Macbeth dismisses the guests, claiming that her husband is ill. The nobles learn that Malcolm has been joined by

Macduff, one of the most powerful of the lords, whose defection to Malcolm's side speaks of a coming rebellion against Macbeth's claim to the throne.

Macbeth visits the witches again and begs to know his fate. They show him a series of apparitions: the first warns him to beware Macduff; the second promises that "none of woman born shall harm Macbeth"; the third promises Macbeth safety "till Birnam Wood do come to Dunsinane." These prophecies seem to suggest that it would be impossible to conquer Macbeth; and yet the witches conclude with a vision of Banquo's descendants as kings. In hopes of securing his safety, Macbeth issues orders to have Macduff's wife and children murdered. When news of this horrible deed reaches Macduff in exile, Malcolm and the English forces join

with Macduff to rid Scotland of the tyrannical Macbeth.

While Macbeth prepares to repel the invaders, Lady Macbeth, now wracked with guilt, walks and talks in her sleep, reliving hideous memories of her crimes. To conceal their numbers and their movements, Malcolm orders each soldier to cut and carry a bough from Birnam Wood. The wood then literally moves towards Dunsinane, thus fulfilling the witches' prophecy. Lady

Macbeth commits suicide, and Macbeth, robbed of his strongest ally and deserted by his followers, rushes into battle. He comes face to face with Macduff. Still confident that he cannot be defeated by one "of woman born," Macbeth challenges Macduff, only to learn that Macduff was "from his mother's womb untimely ripped," meaning that he was born by

Caesarean section, not by natural childbirth. Thus the last of the prophecies comes true, as Macduff kills Macbeth in single combat, and Malcolm is crowned king.

TO LEARN MORE

Visit these websites:

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<http://www.wsmacbeth.com/index.php>
http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=215

View these films:

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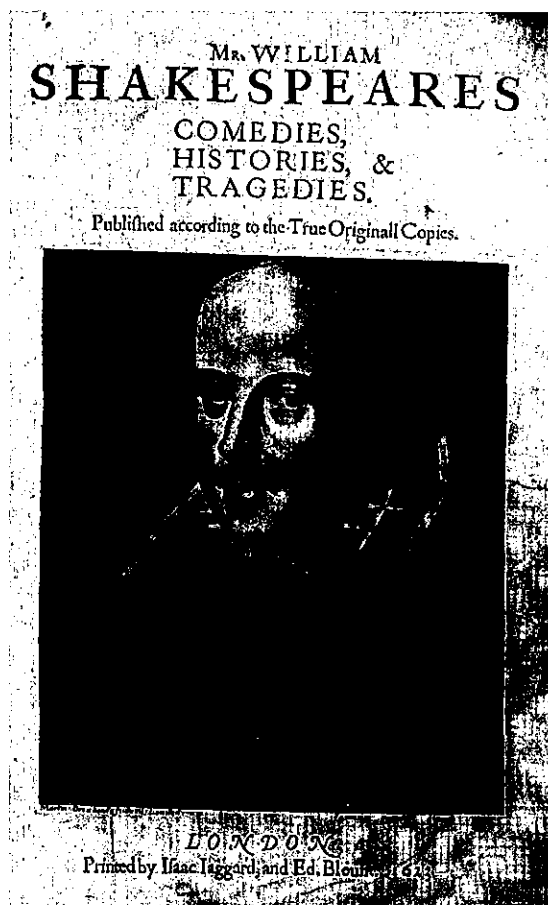


SHAKESPEARE, HIS 1

Although William Shakespeare is generally considered the greatest dramatist in the English language, few facts are known about his life. Only a handful of legal documents verify his existence. Tradition has it that he was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, a small market town, on April 23, 1564. His father was a glove maker who became High Bailiff of Stratford, a position similar to our mayor.

As the son of a leading citizen and public official, Shakespeare would have gone to school as soon as he learned to read and write. The Stratford grammar school was excellent compared to similar schools in bigger towns. School was in session year round, and students attended for nine hours a day. The curriculum was limited, consisting almost entirely of Latin: grammar, reading, writing, and recitation. By the time Shakespeare was a youth, many traveling theatre companies of significance had visited Stratford, so it is fair to guess that Shakespeare had seen some of them and admired their art.

At age 18, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, who was eight years his senior; they had three children, Susanna, Hamnet, and Judith. Little is known of Shakespeare's life at this time. It is clear that by the early 1590s, however, Shakespeare was a part of the theatrical scene in London, although we know nothing of the circumstances by which he left Stratford and his family to become an actor and playwright in the city. By 1594 Shakespeare was established at the center of theatrical activity, for he is recorded as a shareholder in the Globe Theatre.



Over the next fifteen years, Shakespeare wrote 37 plays, several narrative poems, and more than 150 sonnets. He became the most popular playwright in London's highly competitive theatrical world. He was granted a coat of arms, thus officially making him a gentleman, and he bought sizeable pieces of real estate in and around Stratford with his earnings. His plays exhibit not only a fine sense of poetry and stagecraft, but also an excellent awareness of the tempestuous political and literary atmosphere in which he lived. Shakespeare used his plays metaphorically to suggest how, in a changing society, order could be made out of chaos.

Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616—his 52nd birthday—and was buried in the church chancel in Stratford. A tribute to his genius occurred in 1623, when two of his fellow actors and a London printer published a collected edition of his plays. This kind of publication was rare in its day, as plays were valued for their commercial appeal on the stage, with little thought of them as literature to be preserved. No doubt some of the texts were reconstructed from memory or from a stage manager's promptbook. In any case the *First Folio*, as this collection has come to be called, is a document of great his-

toric and literary importance, for it preserved for posterity some of the greatest writing in the English language, allowing us to study and perform Shakespeare's plays more than 400 years later and for generations to come.

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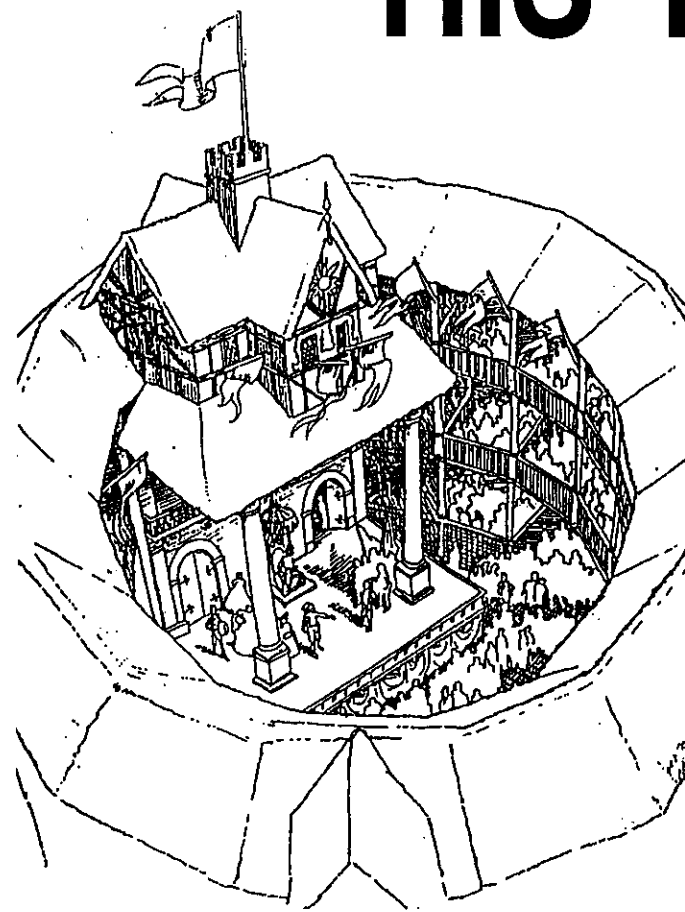
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In Shakespeare's day, playgoing was enormously popular for all classes of people, and new theatres were springing up across London. None was more popular than Shakespeare's home theatre. The Globe functioned in many ways as a metaphor for contemporary concepts of society, civilization, and the universe at large. The name of the theatre itself—the Globe—suggested that the events portrayed on its stage were symbolic of events happening in the world. The building's shape, an octagon, suggested the round shape of the world itself.

The Globe was located on the south bank of the River Thames in a disreputable part of London. Built in 1599, the wood-and-plaster building held more than 2,000 spectators, and popular plays often sold out. The public entered through a narrow door located at the base of a small tower. Inside, the building was open to the sky, and performances took place in the afternoon sun.

The audience surrounding the stage was arranged to reflect society at large. Standing on the ground around the stage itself, in the area known as the Pit, were the penny groundlings—those of the lowest classes who paid the least for admittance. Three surrounding

A World of Images

Macbeth offers some of the most skillful writing and magnificent poetry in dramatic history. The play is a work of extraordinary compression. There are no subplots to intrude on the thrust of the tragic action, which is relieved only by a single comic moment in the Porter's drunken ramblings following the murder of Duncan. The compact dramatic construction of the play is further heightened by the playwright's careful use of verse. The bulk of the play is written in iambic pentameter (five-stress rhythm), as exemplified by Macbeth's first line:

So foul and fair a day I have not seen.

Shakespeare establishes an eerily hypnotic tone by writing the witches' scenes in trochaic tetrameter (four-stress rhythm), such as this line that echoes the image in Macbeth's line above:

Fair is foul and foul is fair.

Shakespeare weaves a tapestry of interlocked images in *Macbeth*. Here are a few that recur throughout the play, gaining resonance through their profusion:

Blood

Few lines pass in this play without words that evoke blood; it is used repeatedly to suggest the essence of life, a precious liquid, the spilling of which means treachery.

Wine & Drink

Lady Macbeth, Duncan's servants, the Porter—all suffer from alcohol abuse; Macbeth toasts Banquo and his ghost appears. Alcohol is seen as a destructive force that alters man's senses.

Night & Darkness

Many images collide in the play that suggest the horrors of the night. Almost the entire play takes place at night, when shadows loom and strange sounds echo hauntingly across the landscape. Darkness (in the form of blindness) is invoked to cover up sin. Macbeth's is a world upon which the sun seldom shines.

Disease & Medicine

Images suggesting disease reflect both sin and Macbeth himself, who becomes the disease from which Scotland suffers.

Sleeplessness

"Macbeth does murder sleep." As Macbeth begins his sequence of murders, he becomes the victim of horrible nightmares that eventually afflict Lady Macbeth too, ultimately driving her to suicide. Sleep is depicted as a balm that heals the innocent and deserts the guilty, leaving Macbeth in a waking nightmare of fear.

Clothing

"Why do you dress me in borrowed robes?" Macbeth's new honors sit ill upon him, like badly fitting garments; this idea is picked up through recurring images of dress.

Children

Duncan, Banquo, and Macduff are parents. Only Macbeth is childless, and therefore obsessed with his own ambition: with no heirs to carry on his name, he must triumph himself at all costs.

Lying & "Equivocation"

To cover up his crime, Macbeth must lie. Equivocation—using words with a double meaning to mislead—is a common practice in this play. Opposites become interchangeable: murder becomes both "foul and fair," and nothing is at it seems. Macbeth, by his own actions, has robbed life, and language, of meaning: "A tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

THEATRE, & MACBETH

levels of balconies rose above them, with correspondingly rising admission prices; Elizabethan society, from top to bottom, was clearly divided and arranged for all to see. Thus an audience member at the Globe could not help but feel his or her place in the world order.

The stage itself jutted out into the center of the yard. On each side of the stage, two tall columns, known as the Pillars of Hercules, were carved and brightly painted. Underneath the roof, the "heavens" were painted sky blue and decorated with starry signs of the Zodiac. Tucked under that ceiling was a small balcony where the theatre's musicians played "the Music of the Spheres." At the rear of the stage, on each side, were doors to the backstage area, known as the tiring house, through which the players made their entrances and exits. Between the doors, a brightly painted curtain hid a small alcove, the "discovery" area; above was an often-used balcony.

There was very little scenery. Most of the company's expense went into costumes. Audiences loved noise and spectacle, so the plays had lots of action and violence. Thunder was created by rolling a cannonball across the wooden floor above the stage. Ghosts and other spirits could be raised from below the stage through trap doors or lowered from the "heavens" by a small crane.

At the center of the Globe was the actor. Men played all the parts, since it was against the law for women to act on the stage; young teenage boys played the female roles. The groundlings crowded close to the stage, and the actor-audience relationship was an intimate one.

Shakespeare wrote for an audience who was largely illiterate; most people obtained their news, religious instruction, and entertainment by ear. Without modern stage and lighting effects, location, time, and atmosphere, as well as emotions and ideas, had to be communicated through dialogue.

Shakespeare's plays were very popular, appealing to a wide spectrum of society. Yet his use of language clearly shows that he expected his audience to understand and appreciate puns, paradoxes, and nuances of meaning, complex metaphors, and innovative vocabulary. It may be a bit more challenging in our highly visual age to tune in our ears, but theatregoers of all ages still thrill to Shakespeare's eloquent exploration of the human condition.

TO LEARN MORE

Visit this website:

<http://www.shakespearesglobe.org>

Check out these books:

William Shakespeare & the Globe
written & illustrated by Alik

Eyewitness: Shakespeare by Peter Chrisp
The Usborne World of Shakespeare
by Anna Claybourne and Rebecca Treays

Reduced Shakespeare:
the complete Guide for the Attention-Impaired
by Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor

In 1603, Queen Elizabeth of England died leaving no heir. Her nearest surviving relative was a distant cousin, James VI, King of Scotland, whose mother, Mary Queen of Scots, had been beheaded by Elizabeth for her rival claim to the English throne. James believed that much of his family's heritage of suffering was due to a conspiracy of witches. In 1595, James published a book on the occult called *Daemonologie*; during his reign more than fifty women accused of witchcraft were burned at the stake.

Scholars agree that Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* especially for King James, who was a direct descendant of the honorable Banquo in the play. But when the play premiered at court in 1606, King James was apparently less than pleased to see a story based on the assassination of Scottish kings, and the realistic portrayal of the witches may have terrified a man obsessed with witchcraft. Evidence suggests that the king banned performances of the play for five years. It was produced only

once again in Shakespeare's lifetime, in 1611 at the Globe Theatre, which burned to the ground shortly thereafter, launching, perhaps, the superstitious belief that a curse surrounds the play and its productions.

As a source for *Macbeth*, Shakespeare drew, as he often did, from Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577), which presented a relatively factual picture of eleventh-century Scotland: a barbaric time when the nation was just emerging from a group of warring tribes. Today, usurpation—seizing a position of power by force—is considered a horrible crime against society; but in 1034, when Duncan became King of Scotland, there was no estab-

lished hierarchy that assured the throne to the firstborn child. Bloodshed had been used for centuries to obtain power. Macbeth, as a cousin to King Duncan and a powerful general, had as much right to the throne as anyone.

By Shakespeare's time, however, right of succession was established as passing from father to eldest son. The succession of James I from Queen Elizabeth challenged this accepted belief, and the unrest created when Elizabeth died without declaring an heir is perhaps similar to the chaos created by Macbeth's murder of Duncan. In this manner, Shakespeare was dramatizing a real concern of his society through the metaphor of history.

Shakespeare was perhaps a bit too realistic in one other aspect of the play: the witches' incantations are thought to derive from an actual medieval witches' spell. Consequently, hundreds of horror stories

abound about mishaps during rehearsals and performances of the play. *Macbeth*, which is referred to in theatrical circles as "the Scottish play," is treated with caution and respect.

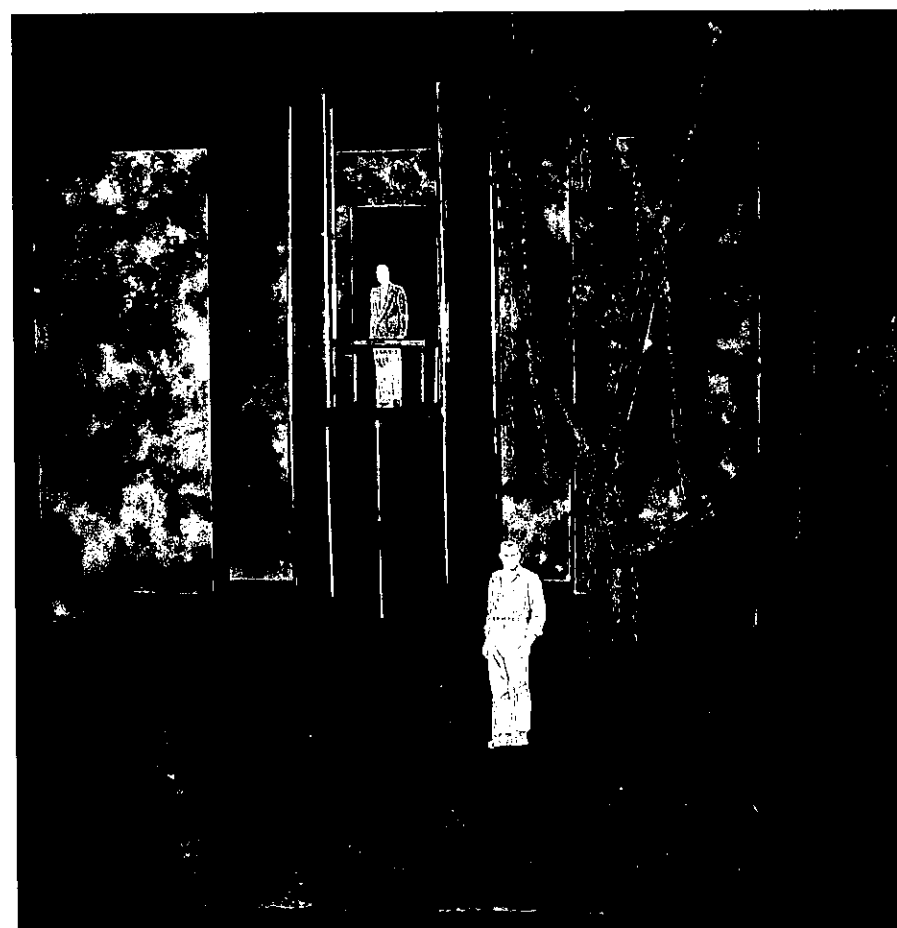
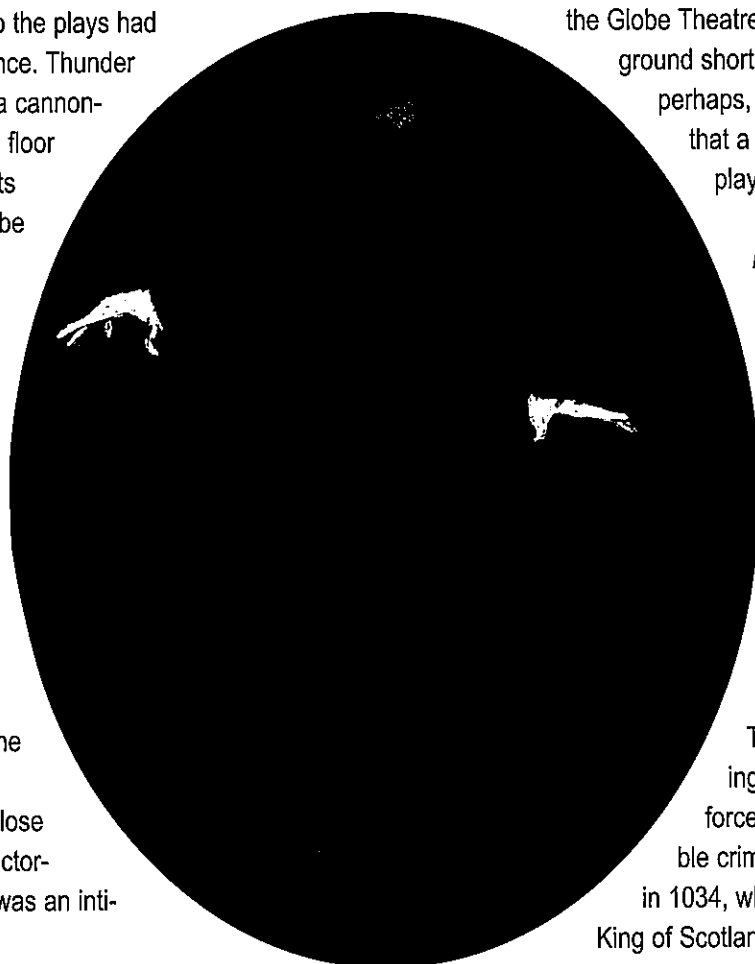
Artists, audiences, and critics over the last century have found *Macbeth* to be a particularly modern play, one which, centuries after it was written, resonates with contemporary attitudes toward power, status, and greed. While all of Shakespeare's plays were originally presented in what was then contemporary dress, modern dress seems particularly to suit this play; recently a Broadway production with Patrick Stewart, a new Metropolitan Opera production of Verdi's adaptation, and an Australian film version have all followed this trend. Janet Allen, director of the IRT production, says, "This is a story that could as easily happen today as it could at any time in the past. With the upsurge in weapons access, terrorism, militia armies, and rogue nations, our modern era is every bit as violent as any time in the past.

"The IRT production is set in a kind of *Waiting for Godot* wasteland: post-oil boom, post-technology bust, a world that has reverted back to hand-to-hand combat. You might think that it's a post-nuclear world—there are no living things except the skeleton of a tree—and the earth looks like a remnant of an old lava flow: dried, cracked, arid. It could be anywhere. It's a culture where violence is an agency of power, and the sides shift quickly. It's a world of paranoia, a world where it's unwise to trust anybody. Fast movements elicit drawn knives, even among friends. The vast majority of Shakespeare's play takes place at night. It's a play of shadows and of people doing and saying things they might not hazard in light.

"The witches will be on stage throughout the play. They play the murderers and servants. They already know everything that's going to happen. They are, in part, agents of a return of humanity and nature to the world, and are therefore costumed as archetypal women: a schoolgirl, an earth mother, and a wise woman. They could wait forever, and maybe have, for humanity to come to its senses. They are the eternal civilians that nobody notices. The watchers.

"This is a world of violence, greed, and betrayal. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Nobody's safe."

(left) Costume sketch for the Witches by Myron Elliott Jr.
(below) scenic model by Gordon R. Strain.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Before seeing the play:

Review the definitions and the use of the following elements of a Shakespeare play:

- Language - alliteration, rhyme, meter
- Imagery - metaphor, simile, personification
- Comedy and the bawd
- Music

Discuss:

- what makes a tragic figure.
- ways in which a play creates mood and tone.
- the meanings of nature and natural.

Discuss what you envisioned in your head while reading the play. What historical or contemporary settings might be appropriate? How might the characters be dressed? How do the witches fit into the world you see for the play? How do different class members see the play differently? After seeing the IRT production, discuss how this interpretation affected your thoughts about the play. How has your understanding of the play deepened?



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Outreach to underserved students has been made possible in part through grants from The Indianapolis Foundation, a CICF affiliate, & The Elba L. and Gene Porteus Branigin Foundation; and Teachers Credit Union.

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Contributors: Rachel Bennett, Katie Norton

UPCOMING STUDENT MATINEES

ProLiance Energy presents *A Christmas Carol*
October 31; November 13-7, 10-14, 17-21, 24-26
December 2-5, 9-12, 16-18

This Wonderful Life
December 2, 3, 5, 9, 10,12, 16, 17

To Kill a Mockingbird
Monday-Friday, January 21-February 20

Crime and Punishment
February 17-19, 24, 25

The Ladies Man
March 13, 17, 18

Crowns
April 15, 16, 22, 23

Rabbit Hole
May 8, 12, 13

Interpreting William
May 14, 20, 26

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ACTIVITIES

Create your own witch song. Decide on its purpose: is it to bewitch someone's mind or heart, to celebrate some great event or deed, to mourn a loss, or to entertain a particular audience? Then, if you are game, put movement to your song.

Write a series of letters that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth might have exchanged before Macbeth heard the witch's prophesy.

With every production of *Macbeth* today, one of the biggest challenges is deciding on a concept of the witches. Discuss the role of the witches in the play, the language used to describe them, and the imagery you may want to bring out in your production of Macbeth. Create a collage of your design for the witches (what costumers call their research board). Some suggested supplies to make use of are magazines, pieces of fabric and other textural materials, paint, crayons, etc. This project can also be done on your computer.

The majority of Shakespeare's plays have music of some sort. It was an accustomed theatrical practice of his time, and it still is in our time. Try your hand at sound-tracking the play. What might be your opening music to draw the audience into the world of the play? Which characters might have theme songs? What scenes might you want to enhance with sound or music? What kind of music would you use? Perhaps you can create some original compositions.

Have a debate on who or what has the most impact on the course of action in the play. Does Macbeth act on his own? Do the witches drive the action? Lady Macbeth? A combination of forces? Include society's views of heaven and hell in your debate.

Create a film story board for *Macbeth* or chose one scene and film it. Choose locations and design costumes. You can even add special affects.

What expectations do Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have of each other? How does each character both embody and contradict stereotypical ideas about gender? When and how do we each use both the masculine and the feminine parts of ourselves?

After seeing the play:

How are sleep and sleeplessness important in *Macbeth*? Research insomnia and its effects on the mind and body. From what you learn, does it change your opinion of Macbeth's actions?

How is the supernatural present in *Macbeth*, and why is it important? Discuss the presence of the supernatural today around the world, in society and religion, in the arts (performance, visual, literary), and in pop culture. How have peoples' attitudes toward the supernatural changed through the ages?

How is the world of *Macbeth* different and/or similar to our world now? Expand your discussion by looking at things globally, culturally, and historically.

Compare and contrast the character of Macbeth with other central characters from Shakespeare (such as Hamlet, King Lear, Othello, Iago, or Richard III), from other playwrights (such as Oedipus Rex or Orestes) or from books and films (such as Don Corleone in *The Godfather* or Tony Montana in *Scarface*). How is Macbeth heroic? How is he despicable?

What effect do fear and violence have on the characters in *Macbeth*? How have fear and violence been used throughout history? In what ways are fear and violence weakness and strengths in the world of the play and in today's world? How do you feel about the depiction of fear and violence in works of art?

How would you describe the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth? What do you believe could be the back story of this relationship? What do you believe holds them together? How are the two characters similar and different? Does this relationship change during the play?

Discuss how the following imagery and symbolism are used and portrayed in *Macbeth*:
Order and disorder • Darkness and light
Good and evil • Things seen and unseen

WORD GAME

After reading this study guide and seeing the play, fill in the blanks with the scrambled words that are listed below. Some word may be used more than once.

DIWCEK DAOCWR OLOBD IOLT ODRUCAN
AEGDRG NIKG HRAFERTEE RWIDE CTMEBAH
AFRI OANMW CTOISTHS LIGASM RMNIAB OLFU

1. "_____ is _____ and _____ is _____. Hover through the fog and filthy air."
2. The _____ Sisters is another name for the three witches who come to Macbeth.
3. The witches first greet Macbeth with these three titles: Thane of _____, Thane of _____, and _____.
4. "Is this a _____ which I see before me, the handle toward my hand?"
5. "Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more: _____ does murder sleep.'"
6. "Double, double, _____ and trouble; fire burn and _____ bubble."
7. "Something _____ this way comes."
8. A common nickname for *Macbeth* is the _____ play.
9. "Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much _____ in him."
10. Macbeth is defeated when _____ wood comes to Dunsinane and when Macduff, who was not born of a _____, fights Macbeth.