

Macbeth – Short answer type questions

What are the setting and stage directions in Act 1, Scene 1 of *Macbeth* and how do they support the actors in creating an ominous mood for the play?

The setting for the first scene in *Macbeth* is an unspecified outdoor location, "open ground," which in Scotland likely means moors or fields. The stage directions call for thunder and lightning, which in itself is designed to tap into basic human fears and create an unsettling feeling; the open space combined with a storm creates additional vulnerability. The characters in the scene are witches, meeting to talk about a battle. Neither of these elements, witches or war, carry positive connotations in most literary traditions. The final line of the scene calls for the witches to "hover through the fog and filthy air." Closing the scene in this way provides an image of reduced visibility, things hidden, and a sense of being unclean.

What makes Macbeth's and Banquo's deeds in battle so noteworthy and honorable in Act 1, Scene 2?

Macbeth and Banquo continue to fight the battle, even when the odds are inconceivably stacked against them. Macdonwald's forces outnumber the king's, but Macbeth takes the time and trouble to locate Macdonwald and ultimately kills him. When the Norwegian king sends reinforcements and fresh supplies, the captain who later tells the story to Duncan thinks the Scots are surely defeated, but Macbeth and Banquo double their efforts. Ross backs up the story, saying the Norwegian forces had raised their banners at Fife; he calls it a "dismal conflict." Nonetheless, Macbeth forces the victory and demands Norway compensate Scotland for the battle before he will allow the Norwegians to bury their men.

Why does Duncan immediately decide to make Macbeth Thane of Cawdor in Act 1, Scene 2 of *Macbeth*?

Macbeth defeated the treacherous Thane of Cawdor in battle, which makes Cawdor's title and lands available. Still, Duncan could have easily assigned the title and lands to someone else. In fact, it becomes clear in Scenes 3 and 4 that Macbeth does not expect to automatically receive Cawdor's title. Duncan makes his decision based on Macbeth's valiant efforts on the battlefield and apparent loyalty to his king. This is one of Shakespeare's most significant examples of situational irony in the play. Although neither Duncan nor Macbeth would question Macbeth's loyalty at this moment, Duncan is about to replace one traitor (Cawdor) with someone who will develop into a much more dangerous traitor—Macbeth.

What evidence of the witches' malicious nature appears in their conversation with one another in Act 1, Scene 3 of *Macbeth*?

The First Witch describes a recent encounter with a sailor's wife who refused to share some chestnuts she was eating and tried to chase the witch away. The witches then conspire to subject the woman's husband to sleepless nights and days; they also place a curse on his ship, which is on a return voyage from Aleppo. The First Witch shows the others the severed thumb of a ship's navigator lost on a voyage, which presumably will figure into their curse on the sailor.

What is the full meaning of the witches' prophecy about Banquo in *Macbeth*, Act 1, Scene 3?

The witches call Banquo "lesser than Macbeth, and greater." This line means that Banquo will not achieve the same rank as Macbeth but will achieve a greater legacy than his friend. However, the second line of the prophecy is the most telling for both men's futures. The witches call Banquo "not so happy, yet much happier." Banquo does meet an unhappy end, murdered while horseback riding, but his life has been reasonably happy. Unlike Macbeth, he has little anxiety about things he has done, and in death he is respected by his fellow noblemen. Macbeth's successes give him hope for his own children, but he is not obsessive about it. By contrast, Macbeth is racked with guilt after he kills Duncan, commits additional murders out of anxiety and ambition, and sees his marriage weaken before his wife descends into madness and kills herself. In addition, Macbeth becomes despised by his countrymen and will be known as a villain throughout history. In contrast, Banquo's quick death while out riding with his son is unhappy but far better than Macbeth's fate.

Describe Macbeth's immediate thoughts about becoming king after he is awarded Cawdor's title in Act 1, Scene 3.

Once he becomes Thane of Cawdor, the thought of murder does cross his mind. He calls this thought a "horrid image that doth unfix my hair / And make my seated heart knock at my ribs." He also says the idea of murder is "against the use of nature." He knows that taking action against Duncan would upset the natural order, and he resists the idea of it. He also reflects that he might become king purely by chance without doing anything. He knows he could take action to make his purported destiny come true, but he hesitates to do so. Loyalty and honor still influence his character at this point.

In Act 1, Scene 4, describe the contrast between Macbeth's first and last speeches.

Macbeth's first speech in the scene is a false declaration of his loyalty and love for Duncan. He says he expects no reward for his service to the king—that doing his duty is payment enough. At the end of the scene, he speaks to himself about the hurdles between himself and the crown, realizing that the prince (Malcolm) is his only obstacle if Duncan is out of the way. He hopes the others will not see these dark thoughts of betrayal. He also is trying to separate his desires from the traitorous actions he plans; he knows he will have to commit murder but would prefer not to acknowledge it to himself. This disconnect is alluded to in the closing lines: "The eye wink at the hand, yet let that be / Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see." Macbeth wishes to close his own eyes to the terrible deed he remains determined to do.

Based on Act 1, Scene 5 of *Macbeth*, describe what Lady Macbeth and the witches have in common.

Both Lady Macbeth and the witches reject typical standards for womanhood. The witches exert power and live outside the bonds of marriage and family, which would have been the expectation of society at the time. They also reject feminine appearance; for instance, Banquo observes whiskers on their chins when he first meets them. It is likely that Lady Macbeth has a feminine appearance, as nothing masculine is mentioned about her looks. She is married but childless—in contrast to feudal society's expectation for her to produce an heir. Lastly, she calls upon the spirits in much the same way the witches do, to assist her in carrying out plans to kill Duncan.

Why does Lady Macbeth believe her sex is a hindrance to her plans in Act 1, Scene 5 of *Macbeth*?

Lady Macbeth makes clear her belief that to be kind is to be weak, as she worries her husband is too kind to kill Duncan. She equates kindness with milk and thinks that Macbeth is "too full o' th' milk of human kindness." To her, both milk and kindness are substances women produce; she demands the spirits take her milk away and replace it with bitterness so she can do what she believes she must. Her comments to Macbeth in this scene and later make it equally clear that she believes strength and ruthlessness are masculine traits and that those are the ones she and her husband must harness to carry out their plot.

Explain why Lady Macbeth greeting the king is so important that the event gets its own scene in Act 1, Scene 6 of *Macbeth*.

Hospitality, custom, and respect for rank are all cornerstones of the feudal system that provides the backdrop of *Macbeth*. In this society, noblemen are expected to provide food, drink, and merriment to guests; in fact, these are customs that carry over today. When someone hosts visitors in the modern world, the basic expectation of good hosts is that they feed and provide safe shelter to their guests. Emphasizing this expectation of the social contract by isolating it in a single scene sets up the betrayal that follows as even more despicable. The Macbeths don't just murder a king—they murder a king while he is a guest under their own roof, breaking the most basic promise of hospitality along with their oath of fealty to the monarch. Shakespeare uses dramatic irony here, as Duncan does not know what the audience does—that Lady Macbeth has already plotted his murder, even as she professes gratitude for the honors Duncan has given them.

What evidence in Act 1, Scene 7 shows that Macbeth will not go through with Duncan's murder without his wife's goading?

Until Lady Macbeth steps in, Macbeth is lukewarm on the idea of killing Duncan. Even with Duncan in his castle, Macbeth has doubts and hesitates. He argues that Duncan has shown him favor and demands they stop the plan at once. Only when Lady Macbeth questions his manhood and his loyalty to her does he begin to waver again. As a last defense, he brings up the possibility that they might not be able to pull off the murder, but she shoots down this argument as well, saying if he has courage—that is, acts like a man—they will not fail. Even though he is ready to kill Duncan by the end of the scene, it is clear his readiness is primarily the result of his wife's intervention.

What evidence in Macbeth's monologue in Act 2, Scene 1 or elsewhere shows the dagger is a supernatural vision?

Once Macbeth dismisses Banquo, he seems unsure of anything he sees; he believes that either his eyes are not working correctly or that his vision is suddenly more acute than all his other senses. The dagger that appears before him looks as real as the one he draws out of its sheathe. Yet this "dagger of the mind" appears to be a supernatural vision for the following reasons: The dagger leads him in the direction of Duncan's chamber. The dagger first appears clean, then changes form to appear bloody. Both Lady Macbeth and the witches have invoked spirits to spur this plan forward.

What evidence indicates Lady Macbeth feels more guilt than she lets on in Act 2, Scene 2 of *Macbeth*?

Lady Macbeth admits she had a clear opportunity to kill Duncan herself after getting his guards drunk. She was able to look upon him as he slept, and she says she would have done the deed if not for the fact that the sleeping Duncan resembled her own father. At no other point in the planning of this murder does she seem willing to do the killing herself, instead pushing her husband to do the act. For all her talk of wanting to abandon her womanly traits for ruthless ambition, she gets her own hands dirty (literally) only when it becomes absolutely necessary. Even when she is forced to return the daggers to Duncan's chambers to frame the guards, she first tries to goad Macbeth into going back by using the same approach that has proven reliable thus far—attacking his masculinity.

What does the curse "sleep no more" mean for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth going forward from Act 2, Scene 2?

When Macbeth tells his wife about the voices he hears after killing Duncan, she dismisses it as a figment of his imagination. However, the voices speak the truth. Macbeth will face increasing fears of being found out, and his ambition will drive him to attempt to eliminate Banquo's line in order to preserve a legacy for himself. Later, he will face the contempt of his peers and his imminent overthrow. Lady Macbeth's suppressed guilt will drive her mad, and she will be unable to sleep in peace, as she sleepwalks through the night and relives her crimes. Neither spouse will be able to sleep easily; nightmares will haunt them.

After drugging Duncan's guards in Act 2, Scene 2, how do Macbeth and his wife plan to frame the guards for Duncan's murder?

They plan to place the bloody daggers that Macbeth uses in the murder on the guards' beds, knowing that the sleeping guards will not discover the tainted blades until it is too late. However, Macbeth is more disturbed by this assassination than by any killing he has done on a battlefield, and, in a panic, he forgets to leave the knives behind. He claims to be too anxious to return to the scene of the crime. Guilt is starting to plague him, as he says he can't even think about what he has done, much less look at the slaughtered king. Lady Macbeth dismisses her husband's cowardice and plants the evidence herself, smearing the drugged guards' faces and hands with Duncan's blood to further implicate them.

After Macbeth kills the guards in Act 2, Scene 3, why does Macduff seem to suspect him of killing Duncan?

Macbeth's speech about his love and devotion for his king is a bit overstated, which Macduff probably recognizes. Even Lady Macbeth realizes her husband has gone too far, so she fakes a fainting spell to make him stop talking. Nothing Macbeth says can erase the fact that he has killed the only two people who might shed light on the culprits responsible for killing Duncan, and Macduff knows this. That the murder took place in Macbeth's castle is suspicious in itself. The location of the crime gives Macbeth means and opportunity. Furthermore, Macbeth has motive. If Macbeth has figured out the line of succession, then surely Macduff has as well, so he knows what Macbeth stands to gain if Duncan is dead and his sons flee.

In Act 2, Scene 4 of *Macbeth*, what odd events do Ross and the old man talk about after Duncan's murder and what might be the meaning of the events?

Ross and the old man discuss three odd happenings. The first is the darkness of recent days—clocks show it's daytime, yet it's dark as night. They wonder if the nights have become stronger or the days weaker. The second odd occurrence is a falcon killed by a mousing owl, a lesser bird of prey. The third is Duncan's horses running wild from their stables and eating one another (horses are not carnivores). All of these events reflect how the natural order of things has been profoundly disturbed since Duncan was murdered, which further reflects how the natural order of succession to the throne has been upset by the crowning of Macbeth.

After Macbeth is crowned, Banquo suspects Macbeth of foul play, so why doesn't he tell anyone?

Banquo has his suspicions, but he has no real evidence of Macbeth's wrongdoing. The witches' prophecy that Macbeth will be king—followed so closely by Duncan's murder—seems too much of a coincidence to Banquo. However, without solid proof, making an accusation of regicide—the murder of a king—might be seen as treason. In addition, Banquo is much more interested in how the truth of the witches' prophecy affects him and his offspring than what it has done for Macbeth. His hopes for posterity concern him to a far greater extent than the fact that Macbeth now sits on the throne.

When he hires the murderers in Act 3, Scene 1, how does Macbeth convince them to go after Banquo?

Macbeth tells the murderers that Banquo was responsible for some of their past misfortunes, for which they (probably rightly) blamed Macbeth. By setting up Banquo as their enemy, Macbeth makes the murderers eager to have a chance to avenge themselves for these past wrongs. He tells them that, as king, he cannot get rid of Banquo himself because of the friends that he and Banquo have in common. Therefore, he needs their help to get rid of him. By now, Macbeth's sense of honor and loyalty is totally gone. Even while

ordering the murder of his friend, his sympathy is not for the man who is about to die; rather, he is concerned about his ability to mourn Banquo convincingly.

In Act 3, Scene 2, after Macbeth has been crowned king, what evidence shows that the Macbeths' marriage may be in trouble?

Both actions and thoughts reveal the discontent the Macbeths are feeling. Lady Macbeth reflects on how unhappy the two of them are now that they have become monarchs. Lady Macbeth does not know why her husband is so preoccupied and thinks he still feels guilty over Duncan's murder. He has not told her his latest worries about Banquo. Macbeth has hatched and executed a plot against Banquo without her advice. Neither of them is eating or sleeping well. Macbeth, after having Duncan killed, even thinks that Duncan is the luckiest of the three of them because he is now at peace, while Macbeth and his wife are tortured daily by their thoughts.

What worries Macbeth about the prophecy pertaining to Banquo in Act 3, Scene 2?

Macbeth fears Banquo or his children will overthrow or murder him just as he murdered Duncan in order to take the crown. He feels he can't relax or have peace while this threat looms over him. Although he does not yet have any children, he wants any that he might have in the future to have the opportunity to carry on his legacy. Therefore he acts to try to stop the prophesy about Banquo from coming true, just as he acted to make his own prophecy happen. While he was successful in making his own prophecy a reality, he fails when he tries to contradict Banquo's prophecy.

When the murderers kill Banquo and Fleance escapes in *Macbeth* Act 3, Scene 3, why does one of them say "we have lost [the] best half of our affair"?

This line emphasizes that Fleance was the real target of their murder attempt because he is the one who will carry on Banquo's legacy; Fleance will either become king someday or have children who will become king. Macbeth has emphasized to them that Fleance's death is as important to him as the death of Banquo. Killing Banquo is not enough. The witches have predicted that he will not become king anyway. His death, of course, prevents him having any more sons, but to stop the royal legacy prophesied by the witches it is crucial that Fleance must die.

Describe how Lady Macbeth fulfills a traditionally feminine role at the banquet in *Macbeth* Act 3, Scene 4.

Lady Macbeth plays hostess to the assembled noblemen at the feast. Her role here is to be charming and help her guests have a good time. She also shows full loyalty to her husband in public, even as he appears to having a mental breakdown before everyone's eyes. She chides his behavior in private, but never within earshot of the other lords. However, she does not seem entirely comfortable with this role, as her excuses sound weak and forced when she attempts to cover for Macbeth. She becomes flustered trying to talk Macbeth out of his panic and get him to behave calmly.

What is the significance of Banquo's ghost appearing at the banquet in *Macbeth* Act 3, Scene 4?

Like the dagger in Act 2, Banquo's ghost may be real or a hallucination. Macbeth does not express or feel any guilt about having Banquo murdered, which could indicate Banquo's ghost is the real thing. Obviously, the ghost is a manifestation of Macbeth's guilt, and it also emphasizes the fact that Macbeth cannot escape from the things he has done. His deeds will haunt him, literally. The ghost appears at the banquet specifically, though, because Banquo promised he would be there before he went out riding that afternoon. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth were both determined Banquo should promise to attend the feast, and so he does.

When she meets with the witches in Act 3, Scene 5, what does Hecate say that reveals her true plan regarding Macbeth?

Hecate says she will create a magical illusion that will cause Macbeth to "spurn fate, scorn death, and bear/His hopes 'bove wisdom, grace and fear." Her plan is to use Macbeth's own weaknesses, his ambition, and his arrogance, against him to cause him to abandon his good sense. By showing him only a portion of his destiny, she will, paradoxically, move him to exert his own will in an attempt to make that destiny come to pass. His exertions will move him toward his destiny—even though his true fate is something completely different from the one he had envisioned.

Explain what Lennox tells another lord he thinks Macbeth would do to Malcolm, Donalbain, and Fleance if he captured them in Act 3, Scene 6.

Lennox says if Macbeth had "Duncan's sons under his key/(As, an 't please heaven, he shall not) they should/find/What 'twere to kill a father; so should Fleance." In his hope Macbeth will not capture the sons Lennox reveals his belief that they are innocent. At the same

time he believes Macbeth would definitely pin the murders on the sons and punish them for it. He also implies that Macbeth would almost certainly issue a death sentence, but it would likely be a torturous death, as might befit a man actually guilty of killing his father. This image of Macbeth issuing gruesome punishment enhances his new image as a tyrant.

As the witches prepare to meet Macbeth again in Act 4, Scene 1, what is the significance of the long list of ingredients going into the witches' cauldron?

The witches concoct their potion, which will give rise to Macbeth's visions, from rancid and poisonous substances and parts of generally reviled animals, for example venom from a toad, eye of newt, bat wool, snake tongues, and hemlock. They add a little racism and murder to their stew with body parts from Jews, Turks, and Tartars, and top it off with the finger of a baby strangled at birth by its prostitute mother. This listing underlines just how sinister the witches are as it leads to speculation about how they got their hands on some of these items. It also underlines how nothing that comes out of this cauldron for Macbeth could possibly be good for him, although he does not know this until it is too late to change his course.

In Act 4, Scene 1, why is Macbeth's decision to attack Macduff's family after he meets with the witches a paradoxical choice?

Macbeth has come to the witches for instruction about his destiny, which he gains through the appearance of three apparitions. His way of embracing what he learns about his destiny is to say "From this moment/The very firstlings of my heart shall be/The firstlings of my hand." He now believes that any decision he makes must be acted on immediately before he changes his mind. In other words his response to learning about his destiny is to begin exercising his free will in the most aggressive ways possible, starting with ordering the assault on Macduff's castle and the slaughter of his family and servants.

What purpose does it serve in the narrative to introduce Lady Macduff and her son in *Macbeth* Act 4, Scene 2, only to kill them off immediately?

Lady Macduff and her son engage in witty banter with one another even though the topic—Macduff's absence and possible death—is somewhat dark. The two of them make an impression as a clever family with affection for one another. Macduff's son, in particular, offers some profound insights about how the world is pitched in favor of "the liars and swearers" because they outnumber the honest men. In saying this, the boy seems to predict his own death moments later. Also, by allowing these characters some development, their killing becomes even more senseless and shows Macbeth as even more of a monster.

Contrast Lady Macduff with Lady Macbeth based on *Macbeth* Act 1, Scene 5 and Act 4, Scene 2.

Lady Macduff is clearly angry and irritated with her husband for leaving her unprotected, but even as she asks her son what he will do without a father, her tone lacks the bitterness of Lady Macbeth. Lady Macduff does not question her husband's manhood, though she does question his love for his family. Her interaction with her son appears mildly playful and she calls him "poor monkey," which seems affectionate. In contrast, Lady Macbeth has outwardly rejected the prospect of having children if motherhood might make her soft. When confronted with her killers Lady Macduff puts up the *womanly* defense that she has done no harm. Though this is true she knows that people who do no harm die all the time. Lady Macbeth could not honestly say she has done no harm and would be unlikely to put forth a defense that could be described as womanly.

During the conversation between Macduff and Malcolm in Act 4, Scene 3 of *Macbeth*, why does Malcolm go through the description of all his vices if they are false?

Before agreeing to return to Scotland, Malcolm uses this long explanation of his vices—notably sexual perversion and greed—to accomplish two things. He is demonstrating what a king should not be and using this to get a feel for how dire the situation has become in Scotland. Macduff's dismissal of this supposed debauchery as better than Macbeth's vices illustrates how bad Macbeth really is. More than that, Malcolm uses this deception to test Macduff's own worthiness, saying Macbeth has in the past attempted to sway him by appealing to these base natures. Macduff doesn't take the bait by offering Malcolm money or women; he simply says these flaws aren't so bad. In this way, Malcolm is able to see Macduff's devotion to Scotland is truly sincere as well.

Explain the purpose of praising Edward the Confessor when Malcolm meets with Macduff in Act 4, Scene 3 of *Macbeth*.

Edward the Confessor is painted in saintlike terms during the brief interlude with the English doctor. The English king heals the sick and casts out evil from those who seek his help, performing miracles for the masses. This bit of content illustrates the role model Malcolm has had during his exile and shows, by comparison, how dreadful Macbeth is as a king. It also seems devised to create goodwill in the original audience, James I's English court. The play praises a beloved king of England for his Christian faith and

works, which alone would appeal to a highly religious monarch such as James, as it flatters history and draws a strong parallel between one saintly monarch and another.

Describe Macduff's feelings in Act 4, Scene 3 of *Macbeth*, when he learns his family has been murdered.

Macduff appears to go through stages of grief when he learns what has happened to his family. He asks Ross repeatedly who is dead and how they died, as if he does not believe it has happened. He quickly comes around to blaming himself for what has happened to them. They were murdered in order to cause him pain, and he believes they might not have died if he had not left them alone. He seems a bit annoyed with Malcolm for jumping right to revenge without allowing him proper time to grieve, but then he progresses to the next stage of his grief, agreeing that his family must be avenged.

Why was killing Macduff's family a mistake on Macbeth's part based on Act 4, Scene 3?

The first of the three apparitions the witches show Macbeth warns him to beware of Macduff. The second apparition tells him that no one "of woman born" can harm him. In this scene, Macbeth believes Macduff is not a danger, but he resolves to kill him anyway. Instead of heeding the apparition's warning, Macbeth attacks Macduff's family and creates a personal vendetta between the two of them. Once Macduff has absorbed the shock of the news, he doesn't just intend to save his country from a tyrant—he is determined to avenge the deaths of his family. The attack on Macduff's castle has only added fuel to his fire.

In Act 5, Scene 1 of *Macbeth*, what actions does Lady Macbeth engage in while sleepwalking and what is the significance of these actions?

Lady Macbeth sleepwalks through the castle, eyes wide open but unseeing, and engages in actions that seem to indicate her guilt. These actions include the following: Writing and reading unexplained letters, as if confessing on paper. Continuous handwashing movements. Insisting on having a candle by her at all times because of her fear of the dark. These acts are observed by her lady-in-waiting, who calls in a doctor to try and help her. The doctor, though, says that her condition is not one he can treat. His suspicions are aroused by what he has seen, however. The lady-in-waiting must have very strong suspicions about Lady Macbeth as well, but she is bound to keep the queen's confidences, and it looks doubtful the doctor will report his suspicions.

Identify and explain a line from Lady Macbeth's episode of madness in Act 5, Scene 1 of *Macbeth*, in which she speaks about her feelings of guilt.

Lady Macbeth utters several incriminating statements while sleepwalking. These speeches indicate she is feeling guilty and include the following statements: "Hell is murky." Lady Macbeth is living in her own private hell now that she has lost her mind. "Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?" Lady Macbeth did not expect to see so much blood when she returned to the scene of the murder to plant the bloody daggers on the guards. "The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is / she now?" Lady Macbeth likely knew Lady Macduff, and her mention of this other wife indicates her sympathy for the murdered lady. "What, will these hands ne'er be clean?" or "all / the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little / hand." Lady Macbeth envisions her hands covered with blood she can't wash away because she can't wash away the guilt of what she has done.

In Act 5, Scene 1 of *Macbeth*, why does the Scottish doctor decide Lady Macbeth needs a priest more than a physician after he first sees her?

The doctor won't speak out loud about it, but he can tell she has been through some traumatic experiences and suspects what they are. To his mind, either she witnessed these events and needs spiritual counseling or she took part in them and needs absolution. Either way, these problems are outside his area of expertise. He foreshadows Lady Macbeth's death when he cautions the lady-in-waiting to keep an eye on the queen and to remove any objects with which Lady Macbeth might harm herself. Although Shakespeare does not relate how Lady Macbeth dies, her guilt and subsequent madness certainly play a part in her assumed suicide.

In Act 5, Scene 2, how does the conversation between the thanes reflect on Macbeth's abilities as a leader?

The thanes think he is unable to inspire love or loyalty in his troops and that he probably regrets what he has done. They talk of how the mantle of leadership is too large for a man made small by his murderous actions. Although they are determined to remove Macbeth from the throne and replace him with Malcolm, the rightful king, some of the thanes sound almost sorry for the man. Caithness says that some liken Macbeth's present state of mind to courageous anger, and Menteith believes that if Macbeth appears mad, it is because he so deeply condemns himself for his heinous acts.

When he's alone in Act 5, Scene 3, what does Macbeth say that contradicts the courage he displays to others?

In front of his servants, Macbeth puts on a show of bravado and says he has no fear of the troops that are rising against him. In private, the brusque manner that accompanied his plotting against Banquo and Macduff has seeped away. Lady Macbeth's decline has weighed him down. Though he suffers little from his own guilt, he feels his wife's pain by proxy. He says he has lived a long enough life and that his way of life is dying out anyway. He does not look to the honors of old age and will die with curses and bitterness instead. In private, he seems resigned to defeat.

In Act 5, Scene 3, why isn't Macbeth doing anything to help his wife?

Macbeth is so busy trying to hold onto his title and his throne that he has no time to tend to his wife. She was once his equal partner, perhaps more than equal, but now she is simply another worry for him. He turns her over to the doctor with orders to fix her, but he has no time or inclination to deal with her himself. This may be because he does not like to see her in her diminished state; he is accustomed to the strong woman she has been in the past. Another reason may be because her condition reminds him of his own guilt.

In Act 5, Scene 3 of *Macbeth*, why is the doctor eager to get as far away from Dunsinane as possible?

The doctor knows that Lady Macbeth is beyond his help, as her condition is not a physical illness. The hallucinations that are wearing her down are not something he can treat. What the doctor has seen of her has led him to understand that she and her husband have done terrible things. They may still be dangerous, particularly if they realize what he has learned from observing and listening to Lady Macbeth. He also knows the opposing troops are coming and is not keen to be there in the midst of the coming battle. Once he can take his leave of the castle, he has no intention of ever coming back.

If Macbeth knows the English army has come in Act 5, Scene 4, why is it important for them to conceal their numbers?

Because Macbeth knows the army is on its way to Dunsinane, concealing the number of their troops is the only element of surprise left to the thanes and the English forces. Thus, their camouflage has a practical purpose. In addition, this particular camouflage serves a psychological purpose. While Malcolm does not know of the witches' prophecy about Birnam Wood coming to Dunsinane Hill, he has to realize that the sight of a forest moving—seemingly under its own power—will also intimidate Macbeth more than the sight of soldiers marching. Seeing the advance of this strange group may unnerve Macbeth's soldiers as well, particularly because their hearts are not into serving Macbeth.

In Act 5, Scene 5, when Macbeth is informed of his wife's death, how does his response signify his sadness?

Macbeth's horrific actions have made him numb to death. Yet Lady Macbeth's passing moves him. His regret is that she has died now. With the battle about to commence, he has no time to mourn her properly. Had her death come after the battle, he says, "there would have been a time for such a word"—in other words, time for grieving. Because she has guided his actions previously, he may now fear that, without her presence, he will not be able to lead his troops to victory. The remainder of his melancholy speech about life's meaning, or lack thereof, indicates that he thinks her loss was a waste.

In Act 5, Scene 5, how does Macbeth's view of the coming battle change once he learns Birnam Wood is moving?

At the start of the scene, Macbeth still believes implicitly that Birnam Wood can never make its way to Dunsinane Hill and that the castle is therefore safe. His resolve holds firm; the castle's fortifications should withstand the soldiers' assault. He believes starvation and disease will defeat his enemy without the two sides coming face to face. When he hears that—against all odds—the prophecy about a moving wood is coming true, his resolve crumbles. Now in a panic, he seems to welcome the prospect of meeting death with his armor on.

What emotions drive Macduff in Act 5, Scene 7 and what does his comment about Macbeth's troops signify?

The military goal of this battle is to defeat Macbeth, punish him for Duncan's murder, and place Malcolm on the throne. Macduff, however, considers Macbeth's hired soldiers not worth his time. If they are the only opponents he encounters, his sword will remain in its sheathe, and he will fight no one. In this battle, Macduff's agenda is far more personal. His aim is to find and kill Macbeth to avenge the murders of his wife and child. That is the only thing he wants out of this battle, and he worries that someone else may have reached and slain Macbeth before he locates him in the chaos. In that case, he is sure his family's ghosts will haunt him forever.

Explain what Macbeth means in Act 5, Scene 8 when he says he will not die on his own sword.

He makes reference to an ancient custom of soldiers committing suicide by falling on their own swords to preserve their honor and escape the disgrace of surrender. Here, Shakespeare makes a biblical allusion to this form of suicide (the death of Saul—1 Samuel 31: 4–6), as well as to his own play *Julius Caesar* (Act 5, Scene 5). In addition to the literal meaning of the phrase, it may infer individuals making amends by taking responsibility for dishonest or wicked deeds they have committed. Macbeth has no intention of falling on his sword, as he thinks fate may still be working in his favor and that he can thus escape unscathed. His idea of honor is to keep fighting.

When they meet in Act 5, Scene 8, why does Macbeth tell Macduff about the prophecy that he cannot be harmed by "one of woman born"?

Macbeth still clings to this prophesy as his guarantee of survival. He relates it to Macduff in an attempt to intimidate him and convince him to give up the fight. Not only is Macbeth unafraid, he does not wish to harm Macduff, as he already feels burdened with having killed the thane's family. Macduff responds with the truth about his own birth. He was not born in the usual way, but was ripped from his mother's womb. This revelation strips away Macbeth's belief in the prediction and leaves him vulnerable. He wants to get out of the fight, but it is too late.

What does it mean to yield on the battlefield and why won't Macbeth do this while fighting Macduff in Act 5, Scene 8?

By medieval battle custom, a fighter can save his own life by yielding—surrendering—to his opponent. This can be done if an opponent issues a challenge to yield, as Macduff does here, or during a temporary lull in the battle. Because the sign that a fighter is yielding would be the throwing down of weapons, it would certainly be an unwise move in the midst of combat. Macbeth refuses to yield because he does not want to give Macduff the satisfaction of beating him this way, and Macbeth sees no honor in bowing down to Malcolm. He would rather die in the fight than give up.

In Act 5, Scene 8, how does Macbeth end up even worse off than the traitorous rebel, the Thane of Cawdor?

Unlike the Thane of Cawdor, who rebelled against King Duncan, Macbeth refuses to yield to Macduff, to confess his crimes, or to repent for his actions. His unwillingness to pledge loyalty to Malcolm, the rightful king, leads to the desecration of his body after death; his head is put on display for the world to see, and his name is cursed by those who know him. In contrast, Cawdor has an honorable death and burial for resuming allegiance to King Duncan before his execution. Thus, Macbeth, an honorable man and hero at the time of Cawdor's death, has now fallen lower than the traitor whose title he inherited.