

# **Macbeth Study Guide**

## **Themes, Motifs, and Concerns**

- Fear and Security (Sleeplessness)
- Innocence, Sin, and Suffering
- Darkness and Light
- Trust and Vulnerability
- Justice and Tyranny
- Choice and Destiny (Independence)
- Courage and Sacrifice
- Arrogance and Hubris
- Knowledge and Understanding (Enlightenment)
- Revenge and Rebellion
- Manipulation and Control
- Power and Powerlessness
- Loyalty and Disloyalty
- Masculinity and Femininity
- Peace and Conflict
- Isolation and Connection
- Family and Individuality (Love)
- Responsibility and Ambition
- Desire, Strength, and Weakness
- Lineage and Legacies
- Morality and Contradiction (Identity)
- Desperation and Irrationality
- Natural vs. Supernatural
- Order vs. Disorder
- Death and What Comes Next

## **Settings and Symbols**

- Armed Head
- Banquo's Ghost
- Barren Scepter
- Birds
- Bloody Child
- Crowned/Tree Child
- Floating Dagger
- Weather

## **Characters, Peoples, and Places**

- Angus
- Banquo
- The Doctor
- Donalbain
- Duncan (King)
- Fleance
- Hecate
- Lady Macbeth
- Lady Macduff
- Lennox
- Macbeth (Thane of Glamis)
- Macdonwald
- Macduff (Thane of Fife)
- Macduff's Son
- Malcolm
- Murderers
- The Porter
- Ross
- Sinel
- Siward
- Sweno
- Thane of Cawdor
- The Weird Sisters
- Young Siward
- Scots
- Norwegians (Norwegians)
- Rebels
- Birnam Wood
- Dunsinane
- Fife
- Forres
- Inverness (Macbeth's First Castle)

## **Miscellany**

Understand:

- The “mechanical” aspects of the play’s plot; what determines how each domino falls, and what are the play’s major turning points?
- The extent to which characters’ desires and fears influence their motives, some of which grow more complex over time
- How and why many characters change dramatically over the course of five acts, as well as each one’s strengths, weaknesses, and “core qualities”
- The meaning of each prophecy, as well as how Macbeth responds to each he hears or sees, and Shakespeare’s other foreshadowing devices
- Susan Snyder’s fantastic essay, as well as “Shakespeare’s Macbeth”
- The nuances of Shakespearian English (iambic pentameter, verbs before subjects, etc.)
- The influences on Shakespeare’s work (James, Holinshed, etc.)
- The ways the play connects with the rest of our works
- Everything from the lectures in class that isn’t specifically mentioned here!