MACBETH

Curriculum Guide
Consistent with the Shakespeare Theatre Company’s central mission to be the leading force in producing and preserving the highest quality classic theatre, the Education Department challenges learners of all ages to explore the ideas, emotions and principles contained in classic texts and to discover the connection between classic theatre and our modern perceptions. We hope that this Curriculum Guide will prove useful to you while preparing to attend Macbeth.

This curriculum guide provides information and activities to help students form a personal connection to the play before attending the production. It contains material about the playwright, their world and their works. Also included are approaches to explore the play in the classroom before and after the performance.

We encourage you to photocopy these articles and activities and use them as supplemental material to the text.

Enjoy the show!

The First Folio Curriculum Guide for the 2016-2017 Season was developed by the Shakespeare Theatre Company Education Department:

Director of Education Samantha K. Wyer
Associate Director of Education Dat Ngo
Audience Enrichment Manager Hannah Hessel Ratner
Community Engagement Manager Jared Shortmeier
School Programs Manager Vanessa Hope
Training Programs Manager Brent Stansell
Resident Teaching Artist Dan Crane
Education Coordinator Thais Menendez
Education Fellow Jess Phillips

For more information on how you can participate in other Shakespeare Theatre Company programs, please call the Education Hotline at 202.547.5688 or visit ShakespeareTheatre.org

Table of Contents

Synopsis 3
Characters in Macbeth 4
Shakespeare’s Language 6
Elizabethan England 12
Shakespeare’s Genres 13
About the Director 14
The Double Meanings of Macbeth 16
The “Scottish Play” 18
Costume Design 19
Theatre Superstitions 21
Discussion Questions 23
Resource List 24
Theatre Etiquette 25

Founding Sponsors
Miles Gilburne and Nina Zolt

Presenting Sponsors
Beech Street Foundation
Suzanne and Glenn Youngkin

Leadership Support
D.C. Commission on the Arts & Humanities, an agency supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts
Paul M. Angell Family Foundation
Michael and Maureen McMurphy and the Patrick Michael McMurphy Memorial Foundation
Ms. Toni Ritzenberg
Solon E. Summerfield Foundation
Venable Foundation
Shakespeare for a New Generation, a national program of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest

Additional Support
ExxonMobil
Marshall B. Coyne Foundation
Lorraine S. Dreyfuss Theatre Education Fund
Debbie Driesman and Frank F. Islam
Mark & Carol Hyman Fund
The Jacob and Charlotte Lehrman Foundation
The George Preston Marshall Foundation
The MAXIMUS Foundation
The Morningstar Foundation
Nora Roberts Foundation
After warding off the invading Norwegian army and subduing a civil war, victorious Scottish generals Macbeth and Banquo are confronted by three Witches. The Witches prophesy that Macbeth will be named Thane of Cawdor and ultimately king, and that Banquo will beget a line of Scottish kings. They vanish, and Queen Duncan’s men arrive to announce that Macbeth has indeed been named Thane of Cawdor, just as was prophesied.

Upon hearing the news of her husband’s supernatural encounter and his ensuing good fortune, Lady Macbeth decides Macbeth must murder the queen in order to fulfill the remainder of the prophesy. She convinces her husband to kill Duncan after she dines at their house that evening and helps him frame the queen’s chamberlains. When the queen’s death is discovered the following morning, Macbeth kills the chamberlains, and Duncan’s sons Malcolm and Donalbain flee the country, allowing Macbeth to be crowned.

Fearing the final portion of the Witches’ prophesy—that Banquo’s offspring will seize the throne—Macbeth hires two murderers to kill Banquo and his son Fleance. They succeed in murdering Banquo, but Fleance escapes. That evening, Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo and reacts violently, scaring the noble guests at his banquet.

Word has spread that Malcolm, Duncan’s son and rightful heir, is in England with Macduff gathering an army. Macbeth tracks down the Witches and begs them for more information. They tell him “none of woman born shall harm Macbeth,” and that he will never fall “until Birnam Wood move to Dunsinane Hill,” but warn him to beware of Macduff. Macbeth grows enraged and orders his men to seize Macduff’s castle and kill his wife and children.

When Macduff receives the news that his family has been murdered, he vows to get revenge, and rides with Malcolm and his army to Scotland, spurring yet another civil war. Meanwhile, Lady Macbeth has gone mad: she sleepwalks, reenacts Duncan’s murder, and repeatedly attempts to wash the blood from her hands. Just as Malcolm and the English encroach upon the castle, Macbeth learns that most of his lords have deserted him and that Lady Macbeth has committed suicide. He then realizes yet another of the Witches’ prophesies has been fulfilled, as the invading army has shielded themselves with boughs cut from Birnam Wood: thus, Birnam Wood is indeed moving to Dunsinane.

Macbeth attempts to retaliate, but the English forces overwhelm him. He encounters Macduff, who announces that he was not “of woman born,” but actually was “untimely ripped” from his mother’s womb. Although he knows he is doomed, Macbeth fights back until Macduff kills and beheads him. Malcolm is then hailed as the new King of Scotland.

Director Liesl Tommy, Jesse J. Perez as Macbeth and Nikkole Salter as Lady Macbeth in the Shakespeare Theatre Company’s 2017 production of Macbeth, directed by Liesl Tommy. Photo by Tony Powell.
Characters in *Macbeth*

Macbeth
Jessie J. Perez

Lady Macbeth
Nikkole Salter

Duncan
Petronia Paley

Malcom
Corey Allen

Banquo
McKinley Belcher III

Macduff
Marcus Naylor

Lady Macduff
Nilanjana Bose

Witch
David Bishins

Witch
Naomi Jacobson

Witch
Tim Getman

Porter/Doctor
Myra Lucretia Taylor

Girl
Trinity Sky Deabreu

Lennox
Horace Rogers

Angus
JaBen Early

Ross
Sophia Ramos

Ensemble
Christopher Michael Richardson

Ensemble
Brett Johnson

Ensemble
Stephen Elrod

Ensemble
Kelsey Rainwater

Ensemble
Brayden Simpson

Ensemble
Scotland Newton

Ensemble
Anu Yadav

Ensemble
Nicole M. King
Character Interaction in *Macbeth*

The cast of the Shakespeare Theatre Company’s 2017 production of *Macbeth* with Director Liesl Tommy. Photo by Kent Kondo.
William Shakespeare was writing scripts for specific actors in his own acting company when he created his plays. He purposely wrote lines in two different ways to communicate information about the characters to his actors. Additionally, he wanted characters to sound different from one another and to adapt their language to new situations, the way people do in real life. The two ways he writes are called **prose** and **verse**.

---

**STUDENT REFLECTION**

Ask your students to think about how they change their language in different situations:

- Do you speak differently and choose different words when you talk to your friends versus when talking to your parents or teachers? Would you speak differently at a job interview versus a family gathering?
- How does our language change in these situations? Why does our language change in these situations?

*Just like we change our language depending on our situation, so do the characters in Shakespeare’s plays.*

---

**PROSE**

The ordinary form of written or spoken language, without metrical structure. Prose can be very descriptive, but it follows the rules of grammar. Essays, news articles and novels are examples of written prose.

If a character’s lines are written in **PROSE** we assume the following information:

- The character is most likely from the lower class and not very wealthy
- The character is most likely uneducated

For example, The Porter who guards the gate to Macbeth’s castle is one of the few characters in Macbeth who speaks in prose. His role is primarily for comic relief and he’s still drunk from the night’s festivities. His lines are written in prose to reflect his social status.

**How can I tell if it’s prose?** You can tell when lines are written in prose because they look like a regular paragraph. Here’s an example:

*The Porter: (Act II, Scene 3)*

Here’s a knocking indeed! If a man were porter of hell-gate, he should have old turning the key. Knock, knock, knock! Who’s there, I' the name of Beelzebub? Here’s a farmer, that hanged himself on the expectation of plenty: come in time; have napkins enow about you; here you'll sweat for’t.

---

**VERSE**

Another word for poetry. It’s writing that has a rhythmic structure. We refer to the rhythm as meter.

*Meter:* a recognizable rhythm in a line of verse consisting of a pattern of regularly recurring unstressed and stressed syllables.

*Iambic Pentameter:* the name of the rhythm Shakespeare uses.

If a character’s lines are written in **VERSE** we assume the following information:

- The character is most likely from the upper class and/or nobility and very wealthy
- The character is most likely formally educated
- The character may be experiencing a strong emotion like love or jealousy and needs to use poetry

For example, in *Macbeth* all of the upper class characters’ lines are written in verse.

**How can I tell if it’s verse?** You can tell when lines are written in verse because every line begins with a capital letter and the lines are all different lengths on the page. This is because each line is written with a metrical structure. Here’s an example:

*Lady Macbeth: (Act I, Scene 5)*

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be What thou art promised. Yet I do 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 that should attend it.
Shakespeare's Language

When and Why do Shakespeare's characters switch from verse to prose?

| Public = Verse | Noble characters in public situations must present their most formal self and speak in verse as a means to do so. Prince Hal in *Henry IV, Part 1* speaks prose when he's hanging out with his fellow soldiers at the pub, but uses verse at court and when speaking to his father, the King. |
| Private = Prose | Upper-class characters use verse in public settings, but may use prose in private settings when they are talking to family or close friends. |
| Love = Verse | Shakespeare always uses verse when characters fall in love, regardless of their status. For example, in *As You Like It*, Silvius and Phoebe are both shepherds who live in the forest of Arden. However, even though they are lower class, both of these characters are in love and they express it through verse. |
| Respect = Verse | Upper-class characters use verse as a form of respect. To use prose with a King or Duke or parent would be disrespectful. For example, Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, has very eloquent verse for his soliloquies. But because he is angry at his mother Gertrude and his uncle Claudius, the new king, Hamlet often speaks to them in prose. |
| Disguise = Prose | Upper-class characters use prose as part of their disguises, when pretending to be someone else. They are usually disguised as a lower-class character. King Henry V disguises himself as a common foot soldier the night before the battle of Agincourt to find out the true thoughts and feelings of his men. In disguise he speaks in prose, the language of the common men. |
| Madness = Prose | If a character descends into madness, then they have literally “lost their wits” and no longer have the capacity to speak in verse. Both Lady Macbeth and Ophelia speak in verse until they go mad. Once madness sets in, all their lines are in prose. |

Classroom Activity

Have students identify the scenes in *Macbeth* that are written in prose. There are only a few characters in *Macbeth* that speak in prose: The Porter, Lady Macduff & her son & The Doctor and the Gentlewoman.

Key scenes: Act II, scene 3, Act IV, scene 2 & Act V, scene 1

### SUMMARY VS. PARAPHRASE

Paraphrasing is an important tool that actors use to understand what their lines mean and how their character feels. Using this passage, explore the difference between summarizing and paraphrasing:

**Summarizing**—Concisely stating what a passage says. A summary is usually stated in third person.

**Paraphrasing**—Restating each line in your own words. Paraphrasing should be done in first person.

**Summary**

*Macbeth* is feeling jumpy and guilty right after murdering King Duncan. He is disturbed by the blood on his hands and wonders if they will ever feel clean again.

**Paraphrase**

*Macbeth*: (Act II, scene 2)

How is’t with me when every noise appalls me?
What hands are these? Ha, they pluck out mine eyes.
Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.
**Iambic Pentameter**

Iambic pentameter is the main rhythmic structure of Shakespeare’s verse, meaning the majority of Shakespeare’s verse is written in this rhythm. One line of iambic pentameter has 10 syllables, which we divide up into five units of meter called feet. Each foot of the verse contains two syllables. Illustrate this on the board:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A foot = 2 syllables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pentameter = a line with 10 syllables which we divide into 5 feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But soft! / What light / through yon / der win / dow breaks?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Iambic refers to the rhythm of the line. When the first syllable is unstressed and the second syllable is stressed, as in the word Hello, it is called an iamb. *Iambic* means push, persistency or determination. The prefix *penta* means five, as in pentagon, a five sided shape. Therefore, *iambic pentameter is one line of poetry consisting of five forward-moving feet.*

**Iambic = unstressed stressed rhythm**

Identifying the rhythm of a line is called *scansion*. Actors *scan* their lines so we know how Shakespeare wanted us to say them. We mark unstressed syllables with this symbol ͝ and stressed syllables with a slash /

```
~ / ~ / ~ / ~ / ~ / ~
```

But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?

When learning iambic pentameter, many students make the mistake of unstressing & stressing every other word instead of every other syllable. To address this, you need to get the students saying all of the lines out loud, with energy and feeling the rhythm. You can explore having them say their names out loud and figure out what syllable is stressed. You can also explore saying the lines giving every syllable the same stress so they discover how slow & robotic it feels or have them say it with the opposite rhythm to see how unnatural it feels. Have students say this rhythm out loud several times. They should clap lightly on *da* and clap harder on *DUM*.

**Clap the rhythm of iambic pentameter.** Without specific words, the rhythm of iambic pentameter is: 
*da DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM*

The rhythm of iambic pentameter is similar to the human heartbeat, a horse gallop, or the beat underneath a piece of music. Iambic pentameter drives and supports Shakespeare’s verse, moving the language along in a forward flow that imitates natural speech patterns.

**SCANSION**

Actors scan the verse for a few different reasons. First, we want to see if it’s a regular line of iambic pentameter. (Sometimes, Shakespeare writes in different rhythms.) Second, we want to make sure we are pronouncing the words correctly. Third, we want to determine which words Shakespeare wants emphasize. To *scan* a piece of text mark the unstressed syllables with a ~ symbol and the stressed syllables with a / symbol. Here are examples of regular iambic pentameter from *Macbeth* that you can do together as a class.

| I am afraid to think what I have done. -Macbeth Act 2, scene 3 |
| To know my deed ‘twere best not know myself. Wake Duncan with thy knocking I would thou couldst. -Macbeth Act 2, scene3 |
| O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife! -Macbeth Act 3, scene 2 |
Shakespeare's Language

MACBETH. (Act I, scene 7)
If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly: if the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success; that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'ld jump the life to come. But in these cases
We still have judgment here; that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips. He's here in double trust;
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking off. I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on the other.

MACBETH. (Act II, scene 1)
Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight? or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
I see thee yet, in form as palpable
As this which now I draw.
Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going;
And such an instrument I was to use.
My eyes are made the fools o' the other senses,
Or else worth all the rest; I see thee still,
And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood,
Which was not so before. There's no such thing:
It is the bloody business which informs
Thus to mine eyes. Thou sure and firm
set earth,
Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
Thy very stones prate of my whereabout,
And take the present horror from the time,
Which now suits with it. Whiles I threat, he lives:
Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives. I
go, and it is done; the bell invites me.
Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell
That summons thee to heaven or

LADY MACBETH. (Act I, scene 7)
Was the hope drunk
Wherein you dress'd 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' the adage?
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 pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this.
Modern day plays have a director. A director’s job is to oversee the whole production and make sure all the elements of the production, including the acting, costumes, set, sound and lighting, work together cohesively to tell the story. Part of this job includes directing the blocking on stage. **Blocking** is all of the actor’s movement on stage.

Modern day plays often have **stage directions** as well. Stage directions are blocking instructions or design instructions written by the playwright.

The job of a director did not exist in Shakespeare’s lifetime and there are almost no stage directions explicitly written in Shakespeare’s plays. Instead, Shakespeare directed the actors movement through the dialogue he wrote. This device is called **internal stage directions** because the blocking is embedded in the dialogue. For example, when characters say things like, “Let me go!” or “On my knees I beg,” the actors on stage know they have to hold onto someone or be on their knees for the line to make sense.

### Classroom Activity

1) Give each student and line with an internal stage direction from the list below.
2) Give everyone a chance to rehearse saying the line and doing the blocking.
3) Have students perform for the class.
   
   *(note: some lines may require a scene partner)*

#### Internal Stage Direction Lines from *Macbeth*

The Weird Sisters, hand in hand, posters of the sea and land, thus do go about, about

All hail, Macbeth, that shall be king hereafter!

Good sir, why do you start and seem to fear things that do sound so fair?

Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear

Your face, my lord, is as a book where men may read strange matters

Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.

Why did you bring these daggers from the place? They must lie there. Give me the daggers.

Awake, awake! Ring the alarum bell.—Murder and treason!

O treachery! Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly!

Give me some wine. Fill full. I drink to th’ general joy o’th’ whole table

Avaunt, and quit my sight!

He has killed me mother. Run away I pray you.

Here is the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.

Before my body I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff.

### Scene Study Activity

1. Work in small groups to read a scene from *Macbeth*.
   
   Recommended scenes: Act I scene 3, Act II scene 2, Act III scene 4, Act IV scene 1, Act V scene 8
2. Underline all the clues for physical action.
3. Stage the scene with as much physical action as possible.
4. Rehearse and perform in class.
William Shakespeare

No man’s life has been the subject of more speculation than William Shakespeare’s. For all his fame and celebration, Shakespeare’s personal history remains a mystery. There are two primary sources for information on the Bard—his works and various legal and church documents that have survived from Elizabethan times. Unfortunately, there are many gaps in this information and much room for conjecture.

We know a man named William Shakespeare was baptized at Stratford-upon-Avon on April 26, 1564, and was buried at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford on April 25, 1616. Tradition holds that he was born three days earlier, and that he died on his birthday—April 23, 1616. Young William was born of John Shakespeare, a glover and leather merchant, and Mary Arden, a landed heiress. William, according to the church register, was the third of eight children in the Shakespeare household, three of whom died in childhood. We assume that Shakespeare went to grammar school, since his father was first a member of the Stratford Council and later high bailiff (the equivalent of town mayor). A grammar school education would have meant that Shakespeare was exposed to the rudiments of Latin rhetoric, logic and literature.

In 1575, John Shakespeare suddenly disappears from Stratford’s political records. Some believe that his removal from office necessitated his son’s quitting school and taking a position as a butcher’s apprentice. Church records tell us that on November 27, 1582 a marriage license was granted to 18-year-old William and 26-year-old Anne Hathaway. A daughter, Susanna, was born to the couple six months later. We know that twins, Hamnet and Judith, were born soon after and that the twins were baptized. We also know that Hamnet died in childhood at the age of 11, on August 11, 1596. We don’t know how the young Shakespeare came to travel to London or how he first came to the stage. One theory holds that young Will was arrested as a poacher (one who hunts illegally on someone else’s property) and escaped to London to avoid prosecution in Stratford. Another holds that he left home to work in the city as a school teacher. Neither is corroborated by contemporary testimony or public record. Whatever the truth may be, it is clear that in the years between 1582 and 1592, William Shakespeare did become involved in the London theatre scene as a principal actor and playwright with one of several repertory companies.

By 1594, Shakespeare was listed as a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, one of the most popular acting companies in London. He was a member of this company for the rest of his career, which lasted until approximately 1611. When James I came to the throne in 1603, he issued a royal license to Shakespeare and his fellow players, inviting them to call themselves the King’s Men. In 1608, the King’s Men leased the Blackfriars Theatre in London. This theatre, which had artificial lighting and was probably heated, served as their winter playhouse. The famous Globe Theatre was their summer performance space.

In 1616 Shakespeare’s daughter Judith married Thomas Quiney, the son of a neighbor in Stratford. Her father revised his will six weeks later; within a month he had died. The revised version of William Shakespeare’s will bequeathed his house and all the goods therein to his daughter Susanna and her husband, Dr. John Hall, leaving Judith and Thomas only a small sum of money; his wife, who survived him, received the couple’s second best bed.

In the years since Shakespeare’s death, he has risen to the position of patron saint of English literature and drama. In the 1800s especially, his plays were so popular that many refused to believe that an actor from Stratford had written them. To this day some believe that Sir Francis Bacon was the real author of the plays; others choose to believe Edward DeVere, the Earl of Oxford, was the author. Still others would prefer to believe Walter Raleigh or Christopher Marlowe penned the lines attributed to Shakespeare. While most people are content to believe that genius can spring up in any social class or rural setting, the gap between the known facts and the myths that surround Shakespeare’s life leaves ample room for speculation.
Elizabethan England

The age of Shakespeare was a great time in English history. During the reign of Elizabeth I (1558—1603), England emerged as the leading naval and commercial power of the Western world, consolidating this position with the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Elizabeth I firmly established the Church of England (begun by her father Henry VIII after a dispute with the Pope) during this time. London in the 16th century underwent a dramatic transformation. It was quickly becoming a world center for trade and business of all kinds, and so people flocked to the city from the countryside. The population grew 400% between 1500 and 1600, swelling to nearly 200,000 people in the city proper and outlying region by the time William Shakespeare came arrived in London. That meant that the streets were always busy, and suddenly crime and disease became major issues.

England also experienced a tremendous cultural revival during this time. The English Renaissance found expression in architecture, music, literature and drama. A rising merchant middle class was also carving out a productive livelihood, and the economy was booming. With it, language was also booming, as more and more people were learning to read. This caused the trade of book-making to flourish during the period as public education fueled the appetite for great works in print.

All of these new city-dwellers needed things to do in their leisure time. So a massive entertainment industry grew up on the outskirts of London, mostly on the south bank of the Thames river. This area was called Southwark and it included taverns, firing ranges, public bear baiting pits, brothels, and of course theatres. Shakespeare’s theatre company, The Lord Chamberlain’s Men, erected The Globe theatre in Southwark in 1599. Popular entertainment during the 16th century tended to be boisterous and often violent. Many men, women and children attended public executions of criminals regularly, and persons of all social classes and genders attended theatre performances. Shakespeare both drew inspiration from and enhanced the popular culture of the English Renaissance.

During the years 1590-1593, England suffered from an outbreak of terrible proportions; the bubonic plague or “Black Death” claimed so many lives that English society stood on the verge of collapse. Many businesses, including theatres, closed, in part to keep people from spreading the disease and in part due to labor shortages from illness and death. Once the epidemic subsided, the theatres re-opened.

This explosion of commerce and culture lasted throughout Elizabeth’s reign and into that of her successor, James I. James’ rule brought many changes to English life; the two most pivotal were a bankrupt economy and an intense dissatisfaction from a minority religious group—the Puritans. In September 1642, the Puritan Parliament issued an edict that forbade all stage plays and closed the theatres, an act that effectively brought to a close the Elizabethan Renaissance. Theatres rapidly fell into disrepair and neglect until the Restoration in 1660.

In writing his plays and sonnets, William Shakespeare drew ideas from many different sources. His perceptive understanding of human nature and mastery of the English language enabled him to create some of the most enduring works of drama and poetry ever produced. But his work also provides an insightful commentary on 16th-century English values, life, history and thought.
When Shakespeare’s plays were published in The First Folio in 1623, they were categorized under “Comedies,” “Histories” and “Tragedies.” Drawing distinctions between Shakespeare’s plays by categorizing his works has been a focus of scholars for hundreds of years, and the criteria used to differentiate the plays into genres has changed over time.

When Shakespeare was writing, writers conformed to the Greek philosopher Aristotle’s definition of tragedy. A great tragedy had to be a probable tale of the demise of a great man or woman. The plot needed to be a clearly constructed cause and effect chain of actions that were driven by the protagonist’s choices. The character’s downfall should come as a result of a great mistake or frailty in their character, which Aristotle called the tragic flaw. Shakespeare demonstrated his mastery of this form with plays like Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth and Othello.

Comedy, which focused on love, domestic troubles and family affairs, was defined by the end of the story. If the play ended with a marriage it was a comedy. Aristotle speculated that comic characters were usually middle to low class characters, or if noble, they were of low moral character. For example, Shakespearean characters like Falstaff in Henry IV Part 1 & 2 and Sir Toby Belch in Twelfth Night, although well-born, are pompous, self-important and self preserving instead of being truly noble. Comedic protagonists are frequently underdogs, young men or women from humble or disadvantaged backgrounds who prove their real worth—in effect their “natural nobility”—through various tests of character over the course of a story or play.

Shakespeare’s histories chronicle the lives of English Kings. Shakespeare is world renowned for being able to dramatize the lives of royalty in human terms. Some of Shakespeare’s history plays, like Richard II and Richard III, seem more like tragedies because the main characters lose their power and eventually their lives. Other plays, like Henry IV, have comedic subplots. This interweaving of genres is one of Shakespeare’s stylistic signatures.

Several plays, written late in Shakespeare’s career, do not easily fit into any of these categories. The recognition of these plays has led scholars to add an additional genre, the “romances,” to classify these works. The romances have darker elements intermingled with comedy and involve fairy tale or legendary plots, with mystical characters and events. Romances include The Tempest, The Winter’s Tale, Pericles and Cymbeline. These plays do not have a clear comic resolution with a marriage at the end. It’s important to note that romance, in this context, does not mean love story. For example, even though Romeo & Juliet is Shakespeare’s best known love story, it is categorized as a tragedy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Performed</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1590-91</td>
<td>Henry VI, Part II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1590-91</td>
<td>Henry VI, Part III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1591-92</td>
<td>Henry VI, Part I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1592-93</td>
<td>Richard III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1592-93</td>
<td>The Comedy of Errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1593-9</td>
<td>Titus Andronicus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1593-9</td>
<td>The Taming of the Shrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1594-95</td>
<td>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1594-95</td>
<td>Love's Labour's Lost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1594-95</td>
<td>Romeo and Juliet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1595-96</td>
<td>Richard II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1595-96</td>
<td>A Midsummer Night's Dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1596-97</td>
<td>King John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1596-97</td>
<td>The Merchant of Venice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1597-98</td>
<td>Henry IV, Part I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1597-98</td>
<td>Henry IV, Part II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1598-99</td>
<td>Much Ado About Nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1598-99</td>
<td>Henry V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1599-1600</td>
<td>Julius Caesar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1599-1600</td>
<td>As You Like It</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1599-1600</td>
<td>Twelfth Night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600-01</td>
<td>Hamlet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600-01</td>
<td>The Merry Wives of Windsor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1601-02</td>
<td>Troilus and Cressida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1602-03</td>
<td>All's Well That Ends Well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1604-05</td>
<td>Measure for Measure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1604-05</td>
<td>Othello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1605-06</td>
<td>King Lear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1605-06</td>
<td>Macbeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1606-07</td>
<td>Antony and Cleopatra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1607-08</td>
<td>Coriolanus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1607-08</td>
<td>Timon of Athens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1608-09</td>
<td>Pericles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1609-10</td>
<td>Cymbeline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1610-11</td>
<td>The Winter's Tale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1611-12</td>
<td>The Tempest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1612-13</td>
<td>Henry VIII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1612-13</td>
<td>The Two Noble Kinsmen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the descriptions above, what genre is Macbeth?
Before immigrating to Newton, Massachusetts as a teenager, Liesl Tommy grew up in a township outside Cape Town in apartheid-era South Africa. Her experiences across borders have shaped her vision as a director and theatre artist, and she is known for her socially-conscious and justice-oriented stagings of well-known works. After high school, Tommy studied acting in London and discovered her interest in directing while completing a joint MFA through Brown University & Trinity Rep. She has since become the first woman of color to receive a Tony Award nomination for Best Director of a Play. The play in question, *Eclipsed* by Danai Gurira starring Lupita Nyong’o, was the first play on Broadway to have an all-female cast, playwright, and director. It was also nominated for five other Tony Awards.

Most recently, Tommy directed a $28 million Broadway-bound production of *Frozen the Musical* at the Hyperion in Disneyland, California. She has also directed plays at Center Stage in Baltimore, Dallas Theatre Center, California Shakespeare Theatre, Sun Dance East Africa, Berkeley Rep, and La Jolla Playhouse. She is an advocate for a more diverse theatre experience in her shows—for example, she featured a mostly-black cast in her 2014 production of *Les Miserables* in Dallas and chose black actors to play Ophelia and Hamlet in the eponymous production at California Shakespeare Theatre. Her current work on *Macbeth* at Shakespeare Theatre Company celebrates this ideal, with a largely diverse cast and actors of color in the two title roles.

Anna Alison Brenner: What originally got you involved in theatre? How did you fall in love with it?

Liesl Tommy: When I was a teenager, my family emigrated here from South Africa. It was a very difficult transition—culturally and politically—to come from Apartheid-era South Africa to a suburb of Boston where people didn’t even really know what Apartheid was.

And then, a teacher, Beverly Logan, asked if I wanted to be in the Black History Month production of *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf*. There were only five people of color in the school…I think she just went up to all of the people of color and asked if they wanted to be in it. And I said yes.

I went on to perform pretty much every one of the ladies in that play by the time I graduated, all during those Black History Month performances. And then I started directing as well.

And that was when I realized it was a passion. Because I found a community immediately—people who thought the way I did, people who read the same weird things that I read, that lived in their imaginations the way that I did. That was how I made my first friends, that’s how I found my first community. So I always say that theatre saved my life.

AAB: How do you shift from directing new works like *Eclipsed* and *Kid Victory* to a classic play like *Macbeth*?

LT: Well, you know, since I work on musicals, and I work on classics, and I work on new plays, I don’t think of them as very different. My process is exactly the same: investigate the text with rigor, find my personal connections to the storytelling and lean in to the events of the play or the musical. That’s it. That’s really all there is.

But when you work on a classic like *Macbeth*—and it’s similar to when I did *Hamlet* [at California Shakespeare Theatre] or *Les Mis* [at Dallas Theatre Center]—the machine of the play is so well constructed, that you can play around with concepts and ideas and the story can withstand it. So even though I think I have a pretty cool concept, what I keep on referring to as the “literal play” is fascinating, regardless of what someone puts on top of it.
AAB: When directing a classic, do you start with a concept and then find a classic that works with your concept, or do you start with the play and then find your concept?

LT: I start with the play. There are specific classics that I have a passion for, that I’ve always wanted to do. I’ve known I was going to direct *Macbeth* from early on; it’s on my bucket list.

When Michael and I talked about doing *Macbeth* specifically at STC, in Washington, I thought, “You know what would be a really exciting way to get inside that play in the 21st century?”

When I work on a play, I think about where I’m doing it and figure out what the pulse of that city is. In this case, it’s D.C., it’s politics—and it’s also structural politics. *They’d* understand this idea I’d have. So I identify the place, and then I figure out how to get the play into the laps of the audience, so it’s not an intellectual thing that they can just sit back and let wash over them—it feels visceral. It feels like it’s a play for them.

And that’s why I don’t know if I would’ve had the same idea if I wasn’t in D.C. This is a production for a D.C. audience.

AAB: That’s pretty Brechtian—really breaking it down for the audience and not letting them just kick back and relax.

LT: One hundred percent.

AAB: You’ve talked a lot about wanting to create theatre that is relevant to what’s happening right now. What about today’s political climate makes this production of *Macbeth* urgent and important?

LT: This particular production matters because we are exploring what happens when a foreign country intervenes in the governing of another country. What does that look like? What is the human cost?

AAB: Did your concept change after the election?

LT: It did and it didn’t. I think that the initial concept is relevant regardless of who’s president—regardless of whether Democrats or Republicans are in power.

But the role of Hecate has been changed because of our current administration. That’s all I’ll say.

AAB: You had a very specific vision in casting this play—how did you approach that process?

LT: I thought about who my favorite actors in the American theatre were, and that’s who I brought on board. It’s not a new play—we don’t have to help the playwright realize the vision so they can polish it up. So I had more freedom in the casting. I wanted people who I think are incredibly talented and creative to be generative artists in the rehearsal room.

Jesse Perez and I have worked together a great deal. And I have just so much admiration for his skills, his artistry, his humanity and his rigor. It’s an extension of how I work. And Nikkole Salter is an actor who I’ve admired for so long. I’ve always known I was going to work with her on something perfect—and to me this is the perfect thing.

There are so many actors in this company that I’ve worked with before. They’re the army that you want when you’re trying to conquer the world. When you work on a classic, that’s what you want. You want an army of hyper-talented, hyper-creative people.

AAB: So you mentioned that *Macbeth* was on the bucket list of plays you want to do—are there any other classics on there? Specifically, any others that you feel connect to the current political climate?

LT: For me, *The Seagull* [by Anton Chekhov], because it’s a play about art. And [Chekhov’s] *Uncle Vanya*, because it’s a play about change. Another one would be *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, because it’s about magic. And—one last one—*The Amen Corner* by James Baldwin, because I think that is about our lives today.

AAB: Do you have any advice that you would give other young, female directors of color trying to make it in theatre?

LT: People are going to try and tell you no from the first moment you decide that this is going to be your career. And people are going to try to limit your vision from the first moment—and you’re not even going to realize they’re doing it. But they’re doing it, and you’re not even going to realize you’re internalizing it—but you’re internalizing it. And the thing I would say is to guard against that with everything you have. And trust yourself. Because nobody knows the power of what you know about yourself.
The Double Meanings of *Macbeth*

By Drew Lichtenberg

*Macbeth*, more than perhaps any of Shakespeare’s other plays, seems to have been written fast. It feels like a feverish spurt of imagination, one almost certainly fired by a recent political crisis—the Gunpowder Plot of late 1605, a terrorist conspiracy to blow up the Houses of Parliament that shaped the apocalyptic tenor of much Jacobean drama.

The play is unusually short—the shortest of the tragedies, by far. Written in between *King Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, two of his lengthiest and most panoramic works, Shakespeare seems to have drafted *Macbeth* quickly and rushed it onto the stage. Many of the play's odd details seem designed especially for King James—a paranoid, superstitious monarch who had published a book on demonology, and who was obsessed with his own personal safety.

Despite its specific origins, however, Shakespeare’s “Scottish Play” has also proven to be a surprisingly accessible work. Throughout the twentieth century, critics, politicians, and artists have granted it a peculiarly prognosticatory power to predict future history. The play has been translated into widely diverse circumstances, fitted neatly to reflect concerns of different decades and domains. What is it, then, about *Macbeth*, that makes it so suggestive and yet also so open to new interpretation?

Few other plays display in such concentrated form the full imaginative powers of late Shakespeare: his hypnotic feel for the iambic and trochaic rhythms of the English language, his unconscious-seeming mastery of alliterative warp and weft. Above all, *Macbeth* offers a glimpse of the tragic themes that seemed to obsess Shakespeare—the corrupting currents of power and ambition, the inevitability of time, the toxic intimacy of husbands and wives, blood that will have blood. All of these themes can be said to equivocate, to extend beyond the specific context of the play and Shakespeare’s life and times to shed insight on our own. The play constitutes its own form of “supernatural soliciting,” as Macbeth terms the Weird Sisters’ prophecy. It is endlessly rewarding to repeated study and reinterpretation and nearly impossible to reduce to straightforward meanings.

Because of its shortness, the structure of *Macbeth* is unusually clear. Beginning with the death of Duncan in Act 2, the action charts an obsessive, repetitive pattern: Macbeth embarks upon a series of murders, preceded by scenes in which they are discussed, and followed by scenes in which the murders are announced in public. Each act ends with a scene of lords providing the perspective of the citizenry, in “choral” passages of lamentation and mourning, remarkable for their Boschian images of “a great perturbation in nature”—horses are said to eat each other, falcons hawked by mousing owls. The Thane of Ross seems to crystallize such passages in Act 4, speaking in lines that would have sounded new in Hitler’s Germany, Stalin’s Russia, or in America at many points in our history:

> Cruel are the times, when we are traitors
> And do not know ourselves; when we hold rumor
> From what we fear, yet know not what we fear,
> But float upon a wild and violent sea.

In a typically Shakespearean pattern, each of these murders is more horrifying than the last. Children, the heirs of Macbeth’s enemies, become targets. (It is no accident that the Macbaths are a childless couple.) The choral scenes chart the dissolution of Macbeth’s fragile court, with the lords moving into exile and ultimately action, as Macbeth’s Dunsinane becomes a veritable prison. Not only does Shakespeare dramatize murderous ambition—he also captures within the play what such deeds do to those who commit them. As the Polish critic Jan Kott wrote, *Macbeth* takes us to the threshold of the “Auschwitz Experience”: history transfigured not into dream, but into nightmare. The middle action of the play moves in one direction—toward isolation, toward the death of community and personal relationships.
In a crowning touch, Shakespeare punctuates this sickly progression with banquets, those hallmarks of human community. Duncan’s offstage feast becomes Macbeth’s onstage feast (haunted by Banquo’s ghost), which becomes the witches’ cauldron, a perverted repast of newts and toads, serving up ghastly images of bloodied and crowned children. In Shakespeare eating and drinking—Sir Toby’s cakes and ale or Falstaff’s bottles of sack—often signify the simplest of human pleasures, nourishment and revelry. By the second half of the play, Macbeth has “supped full with horrors.” He envies the dead their peace, free from the “restless ecstasy,” the “torture of the mind” from which he now suffers.

Shakespeare being Shakespeare, however, this middle action is framed within a completely different structure. The play opens at a rapid clip, alternating the short, striking, atmospheric scenes of the Sisters Three upon the barren heath with an equally rapid public action regarding King Duncan’s Scotland in revolt. Exposition hurtles toward the audience so quickly we can barely take it in.

In the second scene, a “Bleeding Captain” speaks, his short lines and jumbled syntax suggesting the man’s fresh wounds, as if he is gasping for air or verging on death itself. The nation is at war, of both civil and foreign kinds—Irish “kerns and galloglasses” flood from the west and Norway’s banners “flout the sky / And fan our people cold.” These forces are led by the traitorous Thane of Cawdor Macdonald. The first image of Macbeth—Duncan calls him a “worthy gentleman”—is of him carving this same Macdonald “from the nave to th’ chops.”

It is worth stopping to consider: in this highly unstable landscape, this tribal world of warrior clans and chieftains, the same action that makes a man a worthy gentleman is what later makes him a murdering monster. In Act 1, the Thane of Cawdor is a traitorous Scotsman named “Mac” who has his head fixed on the battlements. The same is true in Act 5. If the moral trajectory of the middle three acts traces a straight line downward, the value system of Acts 1 and 5 calls our attention to “Th’equivocation of the fiend / Which lies like truth.” Fair is foul, and foul is fair. The battle is both lost and won. This supernatural soliciting cannot be ill, cannot be good.

The play’s embodiment of this queasy back-and-forth is not Macbeth, though he is one of Shakespeare’s greatest and most unusual creations: a savage killer blessed with an inner life of hallucinatory intensity and some of Shakespeare’s most poetic language. Nor is it Lady Macbeth, a formidable creature of the present tense who wills her husband to do the deed and then finds herself trapped in the past, unable to wash it away. Rather, it is those strange figures with whom Shakespeare starts the play. In a work preoccupied with time, with what Thomas de Quincey termed the “awful parenthesis” between thought and deed, the Weird Sisters equivocate between tenses, offering Macbeth the gift of future knowledge and the curse of the ignorant present. They do “a deed without a name,” their prophecies, like Shakespeare’s language itself, concealing meaning as much as they disclose it. How we choose to interpret these figures ultimately bespeaks our own tragic preoccupations as much as what they are. As the 400 years since Shakespeare’s play illustrate, we show no signs of having fully understood this play, one of his most terrifying masterpieces—nor having moved past the need to use it to understand the depths of our own dark purposes.
The “Scottish” Play

In Shakespeare Theatre Company’s current production of Macbeth, Director Liesl Tommy transports Shakespeare’s famous characters from medieval Scotland to a future-present landscape inspired by war-torn regions of Africa.

Throughout history, directors have staged Shakespeare’s plays in non-traditional settings and design concepts to elevate certain themes and to highlight particularly relevant topics to the audiences of that time. Below are a some famous, thought-provoking productions of “The Scottish Play” worth exploring.

1) Macbeth on the Estate—United Kingdom, 1997
   Penny Woolcock’s movie for BBC imagines Macbeth in modern day on British council estate housing, filled with drug dealers and rival families.

2) umMabatha—South Africa, 1970
   This South African production was conceived during apartheid and its original audiences sat segregated. Setting the action in 19th-century Zulu tribal cultures, umMabatha tapped into ancestral storytelling traditions and depicted the colonial influence on them. It’s since been revived around the world multiple times, most recently playing in London in 2002.

3) Macbeth—United Kingdom, 2007
   Chichester Festival Theatre’s Patrick Stewart-led production placed the action in a brutalist bunker in the 1940s, evoking echoes of Stalin’s rise to power. Stewart’s nihilistic Macbeth was ruthless yet introspective, spurred on by a trio of witches disguised as hospital nurses. An instantly classic reformulation, Rupert Goold’s production was later filmed for a 2010 BBC and Masterpiece Theater special.

4) Maqbool—India, 2003
   Vishal Bhardwaj’s adaptation brought Shakespeare’s tale to the underworld of Mumbai, putting a spin on both the Bard’s tale and organized crime stories.

5) Stage of Blood—India, 1997
   Merging traditions from martial arts, dance and gymnastics in Manipur, this adaptation was performed on a raft floating on a lake in celebration of 50 years of Indian independence. Tapping into the spirituality of the text, the production emphasized both its mysticism and its treatment of cyclical political violence.

6) Kunju Macbeth, or, Blood-Stained Hands—China, 1986
   Huang Zuolin’s adaptation in the Chinese musical style of kunju was part of the inaugural Chinese Shakespeare Festival and used traditional Chinese operatic costumes and staging. Set in ancient China, the production was meant to be interpreted like a genuine Chinese history play, mirroring the horrific deaths of members of the Chinese royal family throughout history.

7) Throne of Blood—Japan, 1957
   Set in feudal Japan, Akira Kurosawa’s Throne of Blood, or Spider Web Castle, fuses together Shakespeare’s plot with Japanese Noh dance theatre traditions.

8) Tlingit Macbeth—United States, 2003
   Spoken in a combination of southeastern Alaskan dialect Tlingit and English, Alaskan theatre company Perseverance Theatre filled Shakespeare’s text with symbols and traditions indigenous to the Tlingit people. Transporting the Bard’s Scottish characters to the ancient tribal societies in northwest America, the production emphasized the tensions between personal ambition and collective identity. D.C.’s own Shakespeare in Washington Festival presented this production in 2007.
Costume Design for *Macbeth*

The Costume Designer supports the action of the play by communicating characters through the garments they wear on stage. The Costume Designer takes into account each character’s culture, social class and personality, then creates a costume that will support the director’s vision of the play. A costume design helps the actors bring their characters to life on stage. After meeting with the director to discuss the concept, the designer draws a rendering for each character in full color with fabric swatches, to be reviewed and approved by the director. At the start of rehearsals, the actors are measured and the costume shop begins building the costumes. As the costumes are built, refitted and refined throughout the rehearsal process, the Costume Designer oversees the process to ensure the costumes are being constructed according to the designs, answer any questions the costumers may have or make last minute changes to the design. Below are renderings by Costume Designer Kathleen Geldard for the Shakespeare Theatre Company’s production of *Macbeth*.

![Costume renderings](image)
Costume Design: Classroom Activity

1) Where you will be setting your production of *Macbeth*?
   * Location and time:

2) What theme from *Macbeth* will your costume design focus on? (Ambition, power, etc.)

3) Color palette: 4 or 5 main colors to use throughout the design

4) Textures: What types of fabrics will you use? (Flannel, Silk, cotton, denim, chiffon, burlap, etc.)

5) Explain your design choices (Provide 5-6 sentences).
   * How does the setting of your production help tell the story of *Macbeth* clearly?
   * What mood does your design create?
   * How do the colors and fabrics you chose support your story telling?

6) Chose a character from *Macbeth* to design a costume for.
   * State 3 qualities about that character.
   * Decide what point in the play the character would be wearing the costume.
   * Sketch and color the costume (templates provided).
   * Present the design and explain the design choices made.
For decades theatre artists have been hesitant to say “Macbeth” in the theatre due to the legend of well-known and dreaded curse that comes with speaking the name. This theatrical superstition states that if “Macbeth” is uttered, disaster will ensue upon the theatre and everyone in it. The curse can lead to supernatural occurrences, injury and even death.

The origins of this superstition can be traced to when Shakespeare was writing *Macbeth*. The current ruler in England was King James I. King James I was obsessed with demonology and witches. He studied the topic and even penned a book about demons. Shakespeare did not want to disappoint the supernatural authority, so not only did Shakespeare plan to include witches in his upcoming production of *Macbeth*, but he conducted thorough research about witchcraft in England to provide accurate depictions. It is said that Shakespeare included actual black-magic spells and incantations from the witches he researched.

Unfortunately, King James I was unsettled by the bloody and supernatural performance and consequently banned it. The King’s banishment is one explanation for the play's unlucky nature. However, others believe the play is unlucky for more sinister reasons. When the witches of England found out Shakespeare used their real incantations in the script they sought revenge. They cursed the production and the play for eternity.

History is littered with reported incidents surrounding the superstition and doomed productions.

- **Original production**: The lead actor passed away a few days before opening. His cause of death is rumored to be either due to a fever or stabbing.

- **1849**: New York City’s Astor Opera House production lead to a riot and resulted in deaths of audience members and passerby’s.

- **1900**: Moscow. The line prompter died in rehearsal and the production was cancelled.

- **1936**: A production of “voodoo MACBETH” was produced with real witch doctors. A critic gave the production terrible reviews and died a few days later.

- **1937**: England. Lawrence Olivier, who was playing Macbeth, was almost killed by a falling sandbag. The director of the theatre also died of a heart attack.

If you hear theatre professionals referring to *Macbeth* as “The Scottish Play” or “The Bard’s Play” it is likely they still believe in the curse. Not only do they refrain from saying the title of the play, but they do not recite lines from the play when in the theatre either. The only exception is if the actors are expressly rehearsing the play or performing it.

If someone slips up, and the dreaded word is spoken, there are counter-curses that can be used. The two most popular counter-curses are below.

- Walk out of the theatre, spin three times, spit, and say the foulest word you know and wait for permission to re-enter the theatre.
- Walk out of the theatre, spin three times, spit over your left shoulder and recite a line from a different Shakespeare play.
Theatre Superstitions: Classroom Activity

A Superstition is an irrational belief. While it’s irrational, it is usually a deep-seated belief in the magical effects of a specific action or ritual, especially in the likelihood that good or bad luck will result from performing it.

1. In small groups, have students brainstorm superstitions they have heard of or believe in. Examples: Don’t let a black cat cross your path, Good luck charm, palm or tarot readings, etc.
2. Have groups research a superstition they have heard of, follow, or have seen others recite.
3. Have students present the following information. Students may include images and sound to further enhance their presentation.
   a. Describe the superstition.
   b. How and where did the superstition begin?
   c. Is there a way to reverse the superstition?
   d. Is there any evidence to prove the superstition is real?
   e. Do you believe in the superstition?

Additional Theatre Superstitions

1) Don’t wish a theatre person “good luck.”
   We say, “Break a leg!” There are lots of stories about the origin of “Break a leg!” The version that STC Resident Production Stage Manager Joe Smelser prefers is that “break a leg” actually means to bend at the knee. Wishing that an actor “break a leg” then translates to hoping she induces so much applause that she needs to take a second, lower bow, thereby “breaking a leg.”

2) Don’t turn off the Ghost Light.
   The Ghost Light, a light onstage that is left on even when the theatre is closed, serves a practical and potentially supernatural purpose. Its primary use is to provide enough light so that the first and the last persons in the theatre can move safely around the set pieces, trap doors and lip of the otherwise dark stage. However, according to theatrical myths, the Ghost Light also lights the stage for the ghost performances that happen whenever a theatre is not in use. The hope is that the ghosts can rehearse and act in their plays, and kindly leave our plays uninterrupted.

3) No whistling backstage.
   The original stage hands were off-duty sailors, hired because of their familiarity with rigging. To this day, we still honor our nautical roots in a few ways: we call the stage a “deck,” after the deck of a ship, and we don’t allow any whistling backstage. Before radio transmitters, the sailor-stagehands would use elaborate whistles to communicate during the show. So in the olden days, whistling a tune could accidentally cue a stagehand to drop a sandbag on your head!
Discussion Questions

- “Fair is foul, and foul is fair”. What does this line of the witches mean? And how are those ideas found throughout the play?

- This production begins with an eruption of violence. How does the bloody nature of the opening set up the rest of the story? What role does blood play in *Macbeth*?

- Lady Macbeth’s says “I have given suck, and how/How tender ’tis to love the babe that milks me,” and yet there is no mention of the Macbeth’s having children. What do you think happened to her children? What is the role of motherhood in the play?

- In what way do the Macbeth’s fulfill or defy the perception of their gender roles? Does having a Queen Duncan and female Porter change the way gender roles are perceived in the production?

- What role does ambition play in the outcome of *Macbeth*? How important is ambition in a leader?

- What are the different ways characters’ guilt manifests itself in *Macbeth*? Does that guilt change the way you relate to the characters?

- Why does Macbeth believe the witches? Does he think he has free will? Does he have free will? How would you have responded to the witches temptations, incantations and persuasions?

- How do Macbeth and Macduff’s experiences mirror one another?

- Is there anyone in the play who is evil? Is there anyone in this play who is good? What do you think Shakespeare was saying on the nature of good and evil in the world?

- Why is *Macbeth* a tragedy? How is it similar or different from other dramatic tragedies? Is Macbeth a tragic hero?

- If the witches are functioning on behalf of an outside power what does that power have to gain from the political instability? Who falls victim to the chaos?

- How does the location and setting of this production affect the story?
Resource List

Shakespeare Dictionaries

Books on Teaching Shakespeare

Books on William Shakespeare’s Life and Writing

Websites
- Shakespeare Theatre Company—http://www.shakespearetheatre.org/education
  ON SHAKE SPEARE: Articles and information about Shakespeare’s life and world.
  Teacher Curriculum Guides: Plot synopsis, character maps, lesson plans and discussion questions.
- In Search of Shakespeare: Shakespeare in the Classroom—http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/
  The companion website to Michael Wood’s four-part PBS series *In Search of Shakespeare*, this site includes extensive research about Shakespeare’s life and works, as well as interactive features.
- Folger Shakespeare Library—http://www.folger.edu
  Includes excellent resources for further reading about Shakespeare, as well as fun games and information designed specifically for students and teachers.
- Shmoop Teacher Resources—http://www.shmoop.com
  Learning Guides, Homework Help, Study tools and Test Prep

Standards of Learning

Participation in our student matinee program and the lessons and activities found in this curriculum guide support grade 8-12 Common Core standards in English Language Arts and The National Core Arts Standards for responding and connecting to Theatre Art. Primary content areas addressed include but are not limited to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Core English Language Arts Standards</th>
<th>National Core Arts Theatre Standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Standards for Literature</td>
<td>Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Ideas and Details</td>
<td>Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craft and Structure</td>
<td>Anchor Standard 9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</td>
<td>Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of Reading and Complexity</td>
<td>Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking and Listening Standards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension and Collaboration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Standards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventions of Standard English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary and Acquisition Use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Standards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Types and Purposes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theatre Etiquette

The phrase “theatre etiquette” refers to the special rules of behavior that are called for when attending a theatre performance.

Above all, it is important to remember that the actors on stage can see and hear you at the same time you can see and hear them. Be respectful of the actors and your fellow audience members by being attentive and observing the general guidelines below:

**Before you go:**

- Please help us create the appropriate soundscape by turning off your cell phone and other electronic devices (iPods, games, etc.). It can be very distracting to others, not to mention embarrassing to you, when your cell phone goes off during a performance. The lights from cell phones and other electronic devices are also a big distraction, so please, no text messaging.

- We ask that you spit out your gum before entering the theatre and leave all food and drinks in the lobby or the coat check.

- We don’t want you to miss out on any of the action of the play, so please visit the restroom before the performance begins.

**During the performance:**

- We want you to have honest reactions to what is happening onstage. You may laugh, applaud and enjoy the performance. However, please don’t talk during the performance; it is extremely distracting to other audience members and the actors. Save discussions with friends for intermission and after the performance.

**Thoughts about the importance of being an audience member from Shakespeare Theatre Company Artistic Director Michael Kahn**

“When you go to the theatre, you are engaging with other living, breathing human beings, having an immediate human response. In the theatre you sense that all of this may never happen again in this particular way.

As a member of the audience, you are actually part of how that’s developing—you have a hand in it … You are part of a community where you are asked to be compassionate, perhaps to laugh with or grieve as well as to understand people, lives and cultures different from your own.”