

Act 2: murder



This sample project links to the listen live/download audio clip

Level 1

Level 2

Level 3

Essentials

Listen out for and make a list of references that relate to:

- Colours and the effects of colour

Continue your lists from earlier projects: groups of three, weather conditions and time of day, sleep and sleeplessness (insomnia), clothing, birds and animals, appearance and reality, characters in the play who are hiding something, children.

Discuss or write about the character of Lady Macbeth at the end of Act 2 Scene 2, considering how Shakespeare has developed her character in these early scenes. Remember that in Act 1 she said that she would kill Duncan, but we have just heard that it was Macbeth who committed the murder.

Level 1



In modern English write Lady Macbeth's account of the murder. Be sure to include:

- The plan – who was to perform which task
- Any changes or mistakes that were made

Level 2

Level 3



'Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?' How effective is the image of washing away blood and sin, and why does Shakespeare use it? What does it show us? Consider:

- Macbeth's reaction
- Lady Macbeth's reaction
- Their guilt



Divide into small groups or pairs to devise and perform a *silent* scene set in Duncan's bedchamber when Lady Macbeth returns the daggers and smears the chamberlains with blood. Allocate the role of Lady Macbeth and have other students direct the scene (rotate the roles with larger groups). Focus on:

- Her reaction to the body of Duncan
- Her movement and facial expression



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Level 3



Macbeth cannot say 'Amen' after he has killed Duncan. What is Shakespeare saying about evil and its effect on the human soul? Evaluate Macbeth at this point in the play.

- How is he different from the character we first heard about in Act 1 Scene 2?
- What has brought about the change?
- Can he ever be noble again?



Read the account of Duncan's death in the excerpt from Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (worksheet attached). What details has Shakespeare changed from the historical account concerning:

- Banquo's role in the murder?
- Where Duncan died?
- Lady Macbeth's role?

Why does Shakespeare use such dramatic licence to alter the facts? What does he gain by it?



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The same night after, at supper, Banquo iested with him and said: Now Mackbeth thou has obtained those things which the two former sisters prophesied, there remaineth onelie for thee to purchase that which the third said should come to passe. Whereupon Mackbeth revolving the thing in his mind, began even then to devise how he might atteine to the kingdome; but yet he thought with himselfe that he must tarie a time, which should advance him thereto (by the divine providence) as it had come to passe in his former preferment. But shortlie after it chanced that king Duncane having two sonnes by his wife which was the daughter of Siward earle of Northumberland, he made the elder of them called Malcolme prince of Cumberland, as it were thereby to appoint him his successor in the kingdome, immediatlie after his deceasse. Mackbeth sore troubled herewith, for that he saw by this his hope sore hindered (where, by the old lawes of the realme, the ordnance was, that if he that should succeed were not of able age to take the charge upon himself, he that was next of blood unto him should be admitted) he began to take counsell how he might usurpe the kingdome by force, having a just quarrel so to doo (as he tooke the matter) for that Duncane did what in him lay to defraud him of all manner and title and claime, which he might in time to come, pretend unto the crowne.

The words of the three sisters also (of whom before ye have heard) greatlie encouraged him hereunto, but speciallie his wife lay sore upon him to attempt the thing, as she that was verie ambitious, burning in unquenchable desire to beare the name of queene. At length therefore, communicating his purposed intent with his trustie friends, amongst whome Banquo was the chiefest, upon confidence of their promised aid, he slue the king at Enuerns, or (as some say) at Botgosuane, in the sixt yeare of his reigne. Then having a companie about him of such as he had made privie to his enterprise, he caused himselfe to be proclaimed king, and forthwith went unto Scone, where (by common consent) he received the investure of the kingdome according to the accustomed manner.

