



act one, scenes 4 and 5

overview

1.4: Duncan greets Macbeth and rewards him with the title of Thane of Cawdor; but the king also announces his son Malcolm as heir – Macbeth is bothered by this.

1.5: Lady Macbeth reads a letter from Macbeth telling news of Duncan's arrival and resolves to do whatever it takes to get her husband the crown. When they meet, though, Macbeth seems unsure...

Act One, Scene 4

1. Duncan describes the traitor – the old Thane of Cawdor - as being 'a gentleman on whom I built / An absolute trust.' Why do you think Shakespeare has Macbeth entering at that point?
2. Find quotations that show how Duncan feels towards Macbeth. How does Macbeth respond to these words of praise?
3. Duncan announces that his eldest son, Malcolm, will become Prince of Cumberland and heir to the throne. **Describe** and **explain** Macbeth's reactions to this. You might also comment on the use of the *aside* in this section – ask your teacher what an *aside* is for.

Act One, Scene 5

1. How is Macbeth's letter set out differently to the dialogue of the previous scenes? Why does Shakespeare do this?
2. Why do you think Shakespeare repeats details in Macbeth's letter that the audience already knows? Think about different types of people in the audience and what is important in terms of the plot so far.
3. Read Lady Macbeth's first speech and answer these questions fully, with supporting quotations:
 - a) What does she want after reading her husband's letter?
 - b) What does she fear might come in the way of these ambitions?
4. Read her second speech after the attendant exits, up to the point when Macbeth enters ('The raven himself is hoarse...*hold, hold.*')
 - a) Circle and write down all the words you associate with evil and violence. What might be the effect on the audience of hearing these words? What do you think of Lady Macbeth at this point?
 - b) What does Lady Macbeth mean when she says of Duncan, 'never / Shall sun that morrow see'? Why do you think Macbeth avoids answering back in detail?