Macbeth: Act I Reading and Study Guide

I. Vocabulary: Be able to define the following words and understand them when they appear in the play. Also, be prepared to be quizzed on these words.

- **hurly-burly**: noisy disorder and confusion
- **thane**: a member of an aristocratic class and holds land
- **whence**: from what place
- **valor**: bravery
- **minion**: loyal servant
- **aught**: anything
- **prophetic**: predicting future events as if by supernatural forces
- **surmise**: guess based on incomplete facts
- **harbinger**: sign of future events
- **adage**: a saying that expresses a common observation; proverb

II. Background Info:

- **Bellona**: ancient Roman goddess of war. Notice the word stem *bell* in her name. *Bell* means war, and appears in words like *belligerent, bellicose, rebel, and ante bellum*.

III. Literary Terms: these will be the terms that we use to discuss this act. Please know them for our discussion and your tests and quizzes.

- **couplet**: a pair of lines that rhyme
- **aside**: a remark made quietly so as to be heard by a select group of people and not by others who are near by. In Shakespeare’s play, sometimes a character makes an aside to the audience.
- **soliloquy**: lines spoken by one character on stage. These lines are not meant to be heard by anyone. Soliloquies function to communicate a character’s inner thoughts and usually communicate an internal conflict.
- **antithesis**: rhetorical device where the author places an idea next to one to which it is sharply contrasted or directly opposed. Think of this word meaning opposite. The function of antithesis is to give emphasis to an idea by placing it next to a contrasting idea.
IV. Questions: answer the following questions while you read to check your comprehension.

Scene 1:

1. Who will the witches meet? Macbeth

Scene 2:

2. What does Malcom ask the Captain to tell Duncan? The status of the battle between Scotland and Norway

3. What name does Macbeth deserve? "Brave Macbeth"

4. The captain says, “Till he unseamed him from the nave to the chops / And fixed his head upon our battlements.”
   
   a. Who is the person doing the “unseaming”? Macbeth

   b. Who is the person being unseamed? Macdonwald

5. Who is the “most disloyal traitor”? The Thane of Cawdor

6. What title do they give to Macbeth? The Thane of Cawdor

Scene 3:

7. The witches greet Macbeth by three titles. They are: Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor, King Hereafter

8. What prophecy do the witches give to Banquo? He will be the father of kings, but not king himself

9. What does Banquo say the “instruments of darkness” are capable of doing? The agents of evil (witches) often tell us part of the truth in order to lead us to our destruction. They earn our trust by telling us the truth about little things, but then they betray us when it will damage us the most.

10. In Macbeth’s short soliloquy, he argues that the witches’ prophecy cannot be “ill” because why? His prophecies are all good (promotions).

11. In this short soliloquy, he argues that it cannot be good. What images does he conjure that makes him feel frightened? He finds himself thinking about murdering King Duncan.

12. To satisfy his fear, Macbeth thinks it might be possible to be King of Scotland without what? Doing anything (like murder)
13. What reason does Banquo give to Ross and Angus for Macbeth’s odd behavior? He is wearing his new title of Thane of Cawdor like new clothes, and needs time to break it in.

**Scene 4:**

14. What does Malcom report Cawdor did at his execution? Died with dignity, like he had practiced for the event.

15. “There is no art / To find the mind’s construction in the face. / He was a gentleman on whom I built / An absolute trust.”
   
a. Who is speaking? **King Duncan**
   
b. Paraphrase these lines: He expresses that you never know what someone is thinking about from their expressions/what they tell you. You may trust someone, like he did the traitorous Thane of Cawdor, but they can deceive you.

16. For what does Duncan apologize to Macbeth? He can't repay him enough.

17. What does Duncan announce about Malcom? He is crowned Prince of Cumberland-heir to the throne.

18. Duncan says that they should go to “Inverness.” What is Inverness? **Macbeth's castle**

19. What does Macbeth say about the Prince of Cumberland? He is a step that will trip him up (never be king) or he needs to overleap (murder/get rid of so he can be king)

**Scene 5:**

20. What is Lady Macbeth doing at the beginning of this scene? Reading a letter of Macbeth updating her about what has happened in previous scenes.

21. What is Lady Macbeth afraid stands in the way of Macbeth becoming king? He is too kind.

22. “Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, / And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full / Of direst cruelty.”
   
a. Who is speaking? **Lady Macbeth**
   
b. Paraphrase the above lines. She wants evil spirits to take away her feminine kindness and fill her with evil.

23. What does Lady Macbeth compare Macbeth’s face to? **An open book (easy to read)**

24. What does Lady Macbeth instruct Macbeth to do? Look like an innocent flower but be the snake underneath it.
Scene 6:

25. Lady Macbeth tells Duncan that hosting him and his servants is nothing compared to what? The honors he has given Macbeth.

Scene 7:

26. In Macbeth’s soliloquy, what does Macbeth say is a consequence of murder? Violence comes back to plague the inventor (karma)

27. Macbeth says there are two ways that Duncan trusts him at this moment. What are they? They are cousins, and Macbeth is Duncan's host.

28. What does Macbeth say is the reason people will cry like crazy over Duncan’s murder? He is a good king and everyone loves him; they will be disappointed that such a good man was killed in such a bad way.

29. What reason does Macbeth give for not wanting to go through with the murder? He feels like he should enjoy his new titles and honors now, while his reputation is still good, instead of ruining it.

30. Lady Macbeth compares Macbeth to the “poor cat” in some story. How is Macbeth like this cat? The cat wants to get fish, but not get his paws wet. Macbeth wants the title, but does not want his hands to be dirty with murder in order to get it.

31. What act does Lady Macbeth say she would go through with if she had sworn to do it? Kill her own child.

32. What does Lady Macbeth say she will do with Duncan’s chamberlains? Get them drunk so they can't keep watch/remember what happened that night.

33. How does Macbeth say they will be able to get away with the murder? If they use the chamberlain’s knives and act surprised when the news is broken that the king has been killed.