

Macbeth – Characters

Main Characters

Macbeth

Thane of Glamis, later King of Scotland

Macbeth is a beloved Scottish general who bravely defends his king and country in battle. After hearing the three weird sisters' prophecy that he will one day rule Scotland, Macbeth commits heinous murder and other tyrannous acts in order to secure his position as king.

Lady Macbeth

Macbeth's wife and supporter of her husband's quest for power

At the play's beginning, Lady Macbeth is a powerful figure: she's charming, attractive, ambitious, and seems to be completely devoted to her husband. (We might think of the pair as the original power couple.) She's also a teensy bit worried that her man isn't quite "man enough" to do what it takes to be king. According to Lady Macbeth, her husband is "too full o' the milk of human kindness" (1.5.1). If her husband's going to be the powerful figure she wants him to be, Lady Macbeth's got to take things into her own hands.

Duncan

Duncan is the King of Scotland. While spending the night as a guest at Inverness, he's murdered by Macbeth, who has aspirations to rule the country. In the play, Duncan is a benevolent old man. We never see him out on the battlefield, and he is always full of kindly words. He's also generous when bestowing honors on the soldiers and thanes that protect him and his kingdom. Duncan is so sympathetic and likable a character that murdering him seems horrifying.

Malcolm

Malcolm is elder son of King Duncan and newly appointed as Prince of Cumberland, known to be the holding place for the next King of Scotland. When we first meet Malcolm, he seems rather weak – he's standing around praising a brave and bloodied Captain for saving his life and rescuing him from capture. In other words, Malcolm's the kind of guy who seems to need rescuing. Malcolm's reaction to news of his father's death doesn't recommend him to be king yet, either; it only

shows he's still feeling around for the best course of action. He seems to lack the experience to make him confident or capable. Malcolm's words at the end, praising and gifting his allies and damning his enemies, make it seem like he'll follow right in the footsteps of his dad: gracious and, for the most part, harmless. Even if Malcolm isn't going to be a tough warrior anytime soon, he has folks like Macduff to help out, so long as Malcolm can continue to make the speeches and be pure of heart, which we are sure he is.

Banquo

Banquo is a general in the King's army (same as Macbeth) and is often seen in contrast to Macbeth. Banquo is the only one with Macbeth when he hears the first prophecy of the weird sisters; during the same prophecy, Banquo is told that his children will be kings, though he will not be. How Macbeth plays his part in fulfilling the prophecy makes the play – how Banquo does *not* creates a nice contrast to our main character.

It's important to note that King James I of England (a.k.a. King James VI of Scotland), the guy who was monarch when Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*, traced his lineage back to Banquo so it's important that Shakespeare portrays Banquo as a noble figure.

Macduff

Macduff is a loyal Scottish nobleman and the Thane of Fife. After Macbeth murders Macduff's family, Macduff grieves for his loved ones and then resolves to kill Macbeth in man-to-man combat. At the play's end, he triumphantly carries Macbeth's severed head to Malcolm, the future king.

Weird Sisters (the Witches)

The three weird sisters set the action of the play in motion when they confront Macbeth and prophesize that he will be King of Scotland. We never see them apart and they often speak and act in unison so it's worth considering them here as a single unit.

Minor Characters

Donalbain — Duncan's younger son

Lady Macduff — Macduff's wife

Lennox and Ross — Noblemen of Scotland that support Malcolm's fight against Macbeth

Son — Macduff's son

Angus — Nobleman of Scotland and supporter against Macbeth

Menteith and Caithness — Noblemen of Scotland in Malcolm's English Army

Porter — servant at Macbeth's castle

Murderers — Macbeth's hired killers

Fleance — Banquo's son who is seen as a threat by Macbeth

Apparitions — Visions conjured up by the Witches to inform Macbeth of what he should fear for the future

Doctor and Gentlewoman — Servants that witness Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking

Seyton — An Officer in Macbeth's Army

Siward — General in the English army fighting with Malcolm

Young Siward — Siward's son in the English army with Malcolm

Captain — Soldier in Duncan's military that reports on Macbeth's success in the battle against Macdonwald

Hecate — Goddess of the Witches