

## Macbeth: An Intimate Look at Lust and Justice

The activities in this guide address several aspects of *Macbeth*:

- the composer’s use of music to depict human relationships
- the themes of politics and government in Verdi’s reworking of Shakespeare
- the opera as a work of art, involving a wide range of creative decisions by the composer, the librettist, and the artists of the Metropolitan Opera

The guide seeks not only to acquaint students with *Macbeth*, but also to encourage them to think more broadly about opera—and the performing arts in general—as a means of personal and philosophical expression. Little prior knowledge is required for the activities. If you’d like to present *Macbeth* in a more formal, traditional way, please take advantage of the introductory activity in the companion publication, *Opera: the Basics*.

### The Story

ACT I. Scotland. Macbeth and Banquo, leaders of the Scottish army, meet a group of witches who prophesy the future. They address Macbeth as Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland and tell Banquo that he will be the father of kings. The two men try to learn more, but the witches vanish. Messengers arrive with news that Duncan, the current King of Scotland, has made Macbeth Thane of Cawdor. The first part of the witches’ prediction has come true.

In Macbeth’s castle, Lady Macbeth reads a letter from her husband telling her of the events that have just transpired. She resolves to follow her ambitions (“Vieni! t’affretta!”). A servant announces that Duncan will soon arrive at the castle, and when Macbeth enters, she tells him that they must kill the king. Duncan arrives, and Lady Macbeth invites him to spend the night. Macbeth has a vision of a dagger, then leaves to commit the murder. On his return, he tells his wife how the

### THE GUIDE INCLUDES FOUR TYPES OF ACTIVITIES

- Two full-length activities, designed to support your ongoing curriculum.
- Five “Coming Attractions”—opportunities to focus briefly on bits of music from *Macbeth* to cultivate familiarity with the work.
- Activities for students to enjoy during the Metropolitan Opera HD transmission, calling attention to special aspects of this production. Reproducible activity sheets can be found on the last two pages of this guide.
- A post-transmission activity, integrating the *Live in HD* experience into students’ wider views of the performing arts.



Željko Lučić, top, and Maria Guleghina, above, played the Macbeths at the premiere of the Met’s new production.



John Relyea as Banquo



Condemning the murder of Duncan



Dimitri Pittas as Macduff

act has frightened him (“Fatal mia donna”). She replies that he needs more courage. They both leave as Banquo enters with Macduff, a nobleman, who discovers the murder. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth pretend to be horrified and join the others in condemning the crime.

ACT II. Macbeth has become king. Duncan’s son, Malcolm, is suspected of having killed his father and has fled to England. Worried about the prophecy that Banquo’s children will rule, Macbeth and his wife now plan to kill him and his son, Fleance, as well. As Macbeth leaves to prepare the double murder, Lady Macbeth hopes that it will finally make the throne secure (“La luce langue”).

Outside the castle, assassins wait for Banquo, who appears with his son, warning him of strange forebodings (“Come dal ciel precipita”). Banquo is killed, but Fleance escapes.

Lady Macbeth welcomes the court to the banquet hall and sings a drinking song (“Si colmi il calice”), while Macbeth hears news that Banquo is dead and his son has escaped. About to take Banquo’s seat, Macbeth has a terrifying vision of the dead man. His wife is unable to calm her husband. The courtiers wonder about the king’s strange behavior. Macduff vows to leave the country, which is now ruled by criminals.

ACT III. The witches gather again, and Macbeth enters their cave, demanding more prophecies. Apparitions warn him to beware of Macduff and assure him that “no man of woman born” can harm him, and that he will be invincible until Birnam Wood marches on his castle. In another vision, he sees a procession of future kings, followed by Banquo. Horrified, Macbeth collapses. The witches disappear, leaving him on the heath, where his wife finds him. They resolve to kill Macduff and his family as well as Banquo’s son.

ACT IV. On the English border, Macduff has joined the Scottish refugees (Chorus: “Patria oppressa”). His wife and children have been killed (“Ah, la paterna mano”). Malcolm appears with British troops and leads them to invade Scotland.



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**FUN FACT**

Giuseppe Verdi once said of his opera, "Be guided by this: There are three roles in this opera and three roles only: Lady Macbeth, Macbeth, and the witches."

Lady Macbeth is sleepwalking, haunted by the horrors of what she and her husband have done ("Una macchia").

In another room in the castle, Macbeth awaits the arrival of his enemies. He realizes that he will never live to a peaceful old age ("Pietà, rispetto, amore"). Messengers bring news that Lady Macbeth has died, and that Birnam Wood appears to be moving. English soldiers appear, camouflaged with its branches. Macduff confronts Macbeth and tells him that he was not born naturally but had a Caesarean birth. He kills Macbeth and proclaims Malcolm king of Scotland.