

DIGITAL THEATRE+

LESSON PLAN



MACBETH

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

LESSON PLAN LENGTH: 60 MINUTES

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Feel confident as they begin an early-stage analysis of the complex characters, situations and ideas/themes within the play
- Think critically about the story and discuss potential outcomes
- Immerse themselves in the world of the play by participating in a variety of practical exercises
- Use historical context, textual evidence, and imagination to conjure a visual image of the world and begin a character analysis

For standards alignment, please refer to the end of the lesson plan.

To teach this lesson, you will need the following resources found in your toolkit:

- [Shakespeare In Your Space: Macbeth Practical Guide](#)
- [Shakespeare In Your Space: Macbeth Workshop](#)
- [Macbeth Study Guide](#)
- [Introduction to the Story](#)
- [Evidence Tags](#)
- [Act One – The witches](#)

Plus:

- Post-it notes
- Large sheets of paper
- Pens

EXERCISE 1

SHAKESPEARE CIRCLE

- Push the desks back and have your students form a circle in the centre of the room.
- Going around the circle one by one, ask each person to say any word or phrase that comes to mind when finishing the statement 'Shakespeare is...?' All responses should be encouraged.
- Repeat the previous exercise with the question '*Macbeth* is...?' and encourage the group to reveal the word or phrase they think of when they think about *Macbeth*. They can respond either about the play or the character.
- At the end of this sequence, based on everything they have just heard, have the students write down one word on a post-it note to describe the play. Then have them place these on the wall.



ESTIMATED TIME:
3 MINUTES

The aim of this exercise is to take away any feelings of anxiety or uncertainty about the play early on to encourage fuller participation, and get the students thinking and talking about the text.

You can view this exercise in action in the [Shakespeare In Your Space: Macbeth Workshop](#) (6 min 48 sec – 8 min 3 sec).

EXERCISE 2

SETTING THE SCENE

- Choose one of your students to read the following excerpt aloud – consider having them read it in the style of a voice-over for a movie trailer, really building the suspense and tension. You may also wish to use an appropriate music track to underscore the text, creating atmosphere and encouraging students to engage with the mood and content of the play.
- This excerpt is taken from the [Macbeth Study Guide](#) in the section **Introduction to the Story** ([a printable version is available in your toolkit](#)):

Scotland is under attack by Scottish rebels supported by Ireland and an invading force from Norway.

Two Scottish generals, Macbeth and Banquo, have successfully defeated the attacks, and after the battle, are met by three witches on a desolate moor. They claim to be able to predict the future and tell Macbeth that King Duncan of Scotland is going to reward him by giving him the title of Thane (a rank of Scottish nobility) of Cawdor. After that they predict he will become King of Scotland himself, and that Banquo's sons will also become Kings of Scotland.

The men don't believe these old hags until two messengers from the King arrive and tell Macbeth he is to be named Thane of Cawdor. But when they visit the King, he announces that his son, Malcolm, is next in line to the throne.

So how is Macbeth to become King?

- Lead a class discussion on potential answers to this question. The class may be familiar with what happens in the story – but is there anything else that could have happened? Potential questions could include:
 - Whose ambition drives the plot of Macbeth?
 - When do you think Macbeth first starts thinking of murder as a way of claiming his fate?



ESTIMATED TIME:
5 MINUTES

The aim of this exercise is to set the scene and introduce students to the world of the play, providing them with the framework of the text they will be studying. It also gets them to think critically about key decisions made by the main character.

EXERCISE 3

INTRODUCING ATMOSPHERE: HAPPY COURT/SUSPICIOUS COURT

- Introduce the students to the idea of etiquette and status.
 - ‘How might one behave at court?’
 - ‘How do we communicate status and power through body language and eye contact?’
- Establishing this first will enable students to differentiate between what they are doing in later parts of this task.
- Ask your students to walk neutrally in the space and as they are doing so, ask them to imagine that they are in the world of the **happy court** – there’s not a care in the world, everyone is happy, everyone has a smile on their face and all is well.
- After a few moments, ask them to reflect on how they feel, how they have changed physically and what facial expressions they have used.
- Keep them moving around the room throughout the sequence. Once they are fully committed to the world of the **happy court**, ask them to acknowledge each other as they pass.
- Once you feel that the atmosphere of the room has been affected by the group mood, stop the movement. Then, by tapping students on the shoulder, ask them to talk about what they were feeling and discuss the atmosphere in the room.
- Now ask them to imagine that they are no longer in this world, but in the **suspicious court** – the happy king has died and his successor is a cruel tyrant. In this world, you can’t trust anybody.
- Ask the students to move around the space in this suspicious world. Suggest that at any moment they suspect someone might be out to kill them.
- Ask students how this makes them react to others: what their body was doing, what their face was doing.

You can view this exercise in the [Shakespeare In Your Space: Macbeth Workshop](#) (8 min 3 sec – 12 min 2 sec).



ESTIMATED TIME:
5 MINUTES

The aim of this exercise is to immerse the students in the world of the play, getting them to experience the atmosphere and tension, and opening them up to the impact of different physical actions and emotions. By immersing students physically in this world, they are better able to analyze the text once they begin reading it.

EXERCISE 4

EVIDENCE TAG

- Divide your students into 4 small groups and then give each group an Evidence Tag.
- Now ask the groups to consider the following question: 'If this (their Evidence Tag) exists in the world of our play, then what else could exist?' Encourage them to think about the physical environment, the people - their role in society and the feelings that they have, other objects that could be there and key events that could happen involving this object.
- Allow the groups 2 minutes to brainstorm ideas.
- After that time, invite everyone to come back into a large group and share their findings, stating 'My evidence was... and I saw...' Spend 3-4 minutes sharing evidence.
- After all the groups have shared their evidence, go around the circle and have students contribute ideas, based on what they have just heard, to construct an image of what happened in the space where all of this 'evidence' was found.



ESTIMATED TIME:
10 MINUTES

The aim of this exercise is to unlock the imagination and collectively conjure a world which offers students a framework that supports their exploration of the play. Thinking as detectives and discovering story details can empower your group, enabling them to feel like they are taking ownership of the play.

You can view this exercise in the [Shakespeare In Your Space: Macbeth Workshop](#) (19 min 26 sec – 24 min 16 sec).

EXERCISE 5

INTRODUCING LANGUAGE: THE WITCHES (PART 1)



ESTIMATED TIME:
5 MINUTES

The aim of this exercise is to introduce students to the first characters we meet in the play, getting them to think about who they are and what they represent.

- Break the students up into groups of 3.
- Give each group a large sheet of paper and pens. Have them write down the words: **witches, weird sisters, hags**. Give them 2 minutes to write other things that come to mind in response to these words.
- Once they have finished, ask the groups to share with the class what they have written down. Then stick the sheet on the wall.
- Now repeat the '*Macbeth* is...?' exercise but using the phrase 'The witches are...?'
- After doing the exercises above, get students to write down a single word to describe the witches in *Macbeth* and add it to the wall where the other post-it notes are.

You can view this exercise in the [Shakespeare In Your Space: Macbeth Workshop](#) (24 min 16 sec – 25 min 28 sec).

EXERCISE 6

WITCHCRAFT AND SUPERSTITION

- Go to the [Macbeth Study Guide](#) and read the section on Context – **Witchcraft and Superstition**.
- Discuss the questions posed at the end of the passage.
 - ‘With all this in mind, are Macbeth’s weird sisters still relevant figures to us today?’
 - ‘How would a modern adaptation treat them?’
 - ‘Is it possible to see them as victimised women?’
 - ‘Or can they still hold the power to mystify and terrify their audience in equal measure?’



ESTIMATED TIME:
5 MINUTES

The aim of this exercise is to provide students with the context of why the witches are so important to the story. Students will begin to connect to the characters and discover their relevance as well as their universality and who they would be today.

EXERCISE 7

INTRODUCING LANGUAGE: THE WITCHES (PART 2)



ESTIMATED TIME:
5 MINUTES

The aim of this exercise is to begin an in-depth analysis of the text, starting with a manageable and familiar section of the play.

Reading Circle:

- Using the first section of the witches' speech from the play – “**when shall we three meet again**” – have your students read the text aloud in unison.
- Then read it again, one at a time around the circle, line by line.
- Read it a third time, line-by-line, experimenting with different ways of saying each line – hysterically, scarily, strangely, quietly etc.

Reading and Moving:

- Invite the group to walk around the room in no particular direction, speaking the scene out loud by themselves and using all they have learned from the Reading Circle.
- Now get them to give more one-word responses to the witches and place these on the wall.

You can view this exercise in the [Shakespeare In Your Space: Macbeth Workshop](#) (25 min 29 sec – 30 min 5 sec).

EXERCISE 8

CLOSE TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

- Ask students to write on a post-it note 3 words to describe how **Act One, Scene One** makes them feel.
- Ask students 'Do you think Shakespeare wanted you to feel like this?'
- Then, ask them to write on another post-it note, 3 words to describe how they think Shakespeare wanted his audience to feel when they saw this scene.
- Once students have decided how they think Shakespeare wanted them to feel, ask them to re-read the scene and see if they can discover the devices Shakespeare used to try to make them feel this way. Ask students to highlight anything in the text which they believe he has used to evoke these feelings in his audience.
- Ask your students:
 - 'Why do you think he starts the scene with a question?'
 - 'Does he want you to be curious?'
 - 'Why does he choose to have the witches meet in thunder, lightning or rain rather than night, fog or hurricane?'
- Every single line tells you something about the witches and is designed to make you feel a whole range of things about them. Ask students to try writing an emotion after every line in **Act One, Scene One** to explore how Shakespeare's words can manipulate the audience's emotions.

Extension activity:

- Have your students go back to their groups of 3 and give them time to create a version of the scene to present to the others. The only requirements are that it must be thrilling, odd and dramatic.
- Ask students to perform the creations for the group.

The aim of this extension activity is for students to immerse themselves in the text in order to have a better understanding of the play - creating the atmosphere, exploring character and identifying the mood in which the play begins.

You can view this exercise in the [Shakespeare In Your Space: Macbeth Workshop](#) (30 min 5 sec – 33 min 28 sec).



ESTIMATED TIME:
10 MINUTES

The aim of this exercise is to do a deep dive into the text being studied. Students will be using these techniques as they continue their study of the play.

Additional activity or homework:

Watch the first 2 chapters of the interview [On Directing: Gemma Bodinetz](#). Ask students:

- ‘What do you think *Macbeth* is about?’
 - ‘What do you think Shakespeare was trying to write about?’
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NCAS Theatre Proficient

- 1c. Use script analysis to generate ideas about a character that is believable and authentic in a drama/theatre work.
- 3b. Explore physical, vocal and physiological choices to develop a performance that is believable, authentic, and relevant to a drama/theatre work.
- 4b. Shape character choices using given circumstances in a drama/theatre work.
- 7a. Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a drama/theatre work to develop criteria for artistic choices.
- 8c. Justify personal aesthetics, preferences, and beliefs through participation in and observation of a drama/theatre work.
- 9c. Formulate a deeper understanding and appreciation of a drama/ theatre work by considering its specific purpose or intended audience.
- 11.1a. Explore how cultural, global, and historic belief systems affect creative choices in a drama/ theatre work.

NCAS Theatre Accomplished

- 1c. Use personal experiences and knowledge to develop a character that is believable and authentic in a drama/theatre work.
- 4b. Identify essential text information, research from various sources, and the director’s concept that influence character choices in a drama/theatre work.
- 8a. Develop detailed supporting evidence and criteria to reinforce artistic choices, when participating in or observing a drama/theatre work.

NCAS Theatre Advanced

3b. Synthesize ideas from research, script analysis, and context to create a performance that is believable, authentic, and relevant in a drama/theatre work.

8a. Use detailed supporting evidence and appropriate criteria to revise personal work and interpret the work of others when participating in or observing a drama/ theatre work.

9c. Compare and debate the connection between a drama/theatre work and contemporary issues that may impact audiences.

For further resources to help you teach Macbeth, including our **full-length production**, and **Study Guide**, visit **www.digitaltheatreplus.com**

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