

STUDENT GUIDE

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MACBETH



quick facts

KNOCK, KNOCK... So it's not structured EXACTLY as we know it, with a clear back and forth set up and punchline, but the Knock Knock Joke was created in Macbeth. That's right! Think of the character of the Porter like a stand-up comedian and each "Knock knock" is the beginning of a new joke. And Shakespeare knew his audience. The portion about the equivocator is thought to be a direct reference to Henry Garnet, a Jesuit priest who used "equivocation" (or unclear answers) as his defense during his trial for complicity in the Gunpowder Plot. What's that you ask? Keep reading this guide to find out more!

HOLINSHED'S CHRONICLES

This history of the British Isles, first published in 1577, is the main source Will used for *Macbeth*. The story of Macbeth is wholly there but with some significant differences: Macbeth was a real king who led Scotland for 17 years and was benevolent and liked. Duncan, on the other hand, was weak and disliked according to history. These aren't the only character descriptions Shakespeare changed: the Weird Sisters still give prophesies to Macbeth and Banquo, but they are described as beautiful and nymph-like in *Chronicles* as opposed to strange in *Macbeth*. Along with this, Banquo in *Chronicles*, is a co-conspirator in the murder plot alongside Macbeth instead of merely suspicious of the act. Scholars believe that much of this historical story is based more in Scottish legend than actual fact. Shakespeare also takes from "The Historie of Scotlande" the story of 10th century king Duffe who was murdered at the urging of his wife by Donwalde [sic]. Duffe's death was believed to have been attempted by witchcraft causing Scotland to enter a time of rough weather and darkness.

VERSE BUUUUUURN

Lady Macbeth is the only major tragic character whose last line on stage is not in verse. Verse is the classic "ba-bum ba-bum" pattern of Shakespeare's poetry and is usually used by characters of higher status like Lady M. Her final scene is all in prose or "common" talk. That's the literary equivalent of dying without dignity.

It is thought that the Weird Sisters are a dark, twisted take on the three Fates of Greek Mythology: three very old women who spun the thread of human destinies. Clotho spun the "thread" of human fate, Lachesis dispensed it, and Atropos cut the thread, or determined the moment of death. The three names translate to Spinner, Allotter, and Inflexible, respectively. **TWISTED FATE**

KING JAMES I, WITCH HUNTER

King James was into witches and the dark forces. Scholars think it started with the horrific execution of his mom, Mary, Queen of Scots; young James was convinced dark forces were involved in her death. Then, while King of Scotland, James was caught and almost died in a terrible storm at sea on his voyage to pick up his bride, Princess Anne of Denmark. He was certain witches caused the storm and led the witch hunt and trials known as the North Berwick Witch Trials. Over 70 people were implicated over the course of two years. King James was so concerned with witches and dark forces taking hold of the kingdom, that he published *Daemonologie* in 1597 citing extensive research on witches, witchcraft and other dark forces including vampire-like creatures. Shakespeare used this book as a direct reference for the incantations used by the Weird Sisters and also nods to witches being the cause of the near-death moment at sea in Act 1 Scene 3: "Though his bark cannot be lost,/ Yet it shall be tempest-toss'd."

Though Shakespeare took big artistic liberties, *Macbeth* is based in Scottish history: King Macbeth was a real person, as was Banquo. It was believed that King James was a descendant of Banquo. It was no secret that King James VI of SCOTLAND became King James I of ENGLAND. So all that talk in the play about Banquo, you know "that shalt get kings, though thou be none," in Act 1 and the line of eight appearing behind a vision of Banquo in Act 4 are thought to be nods to the easily influenced audience that James, though Scottish born, was the rightful heir to the English crown.

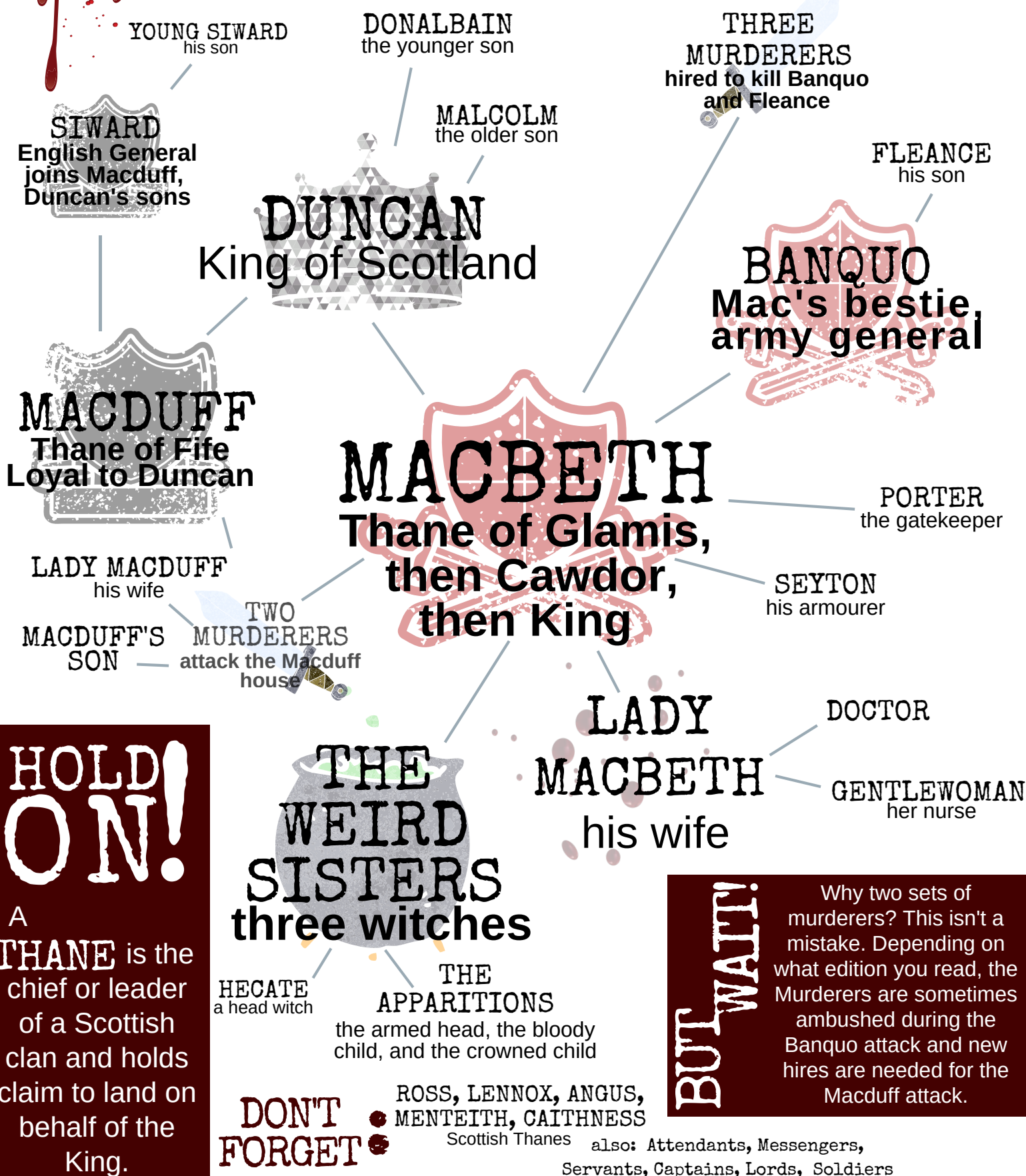
ALL HAIL THE SCOTTISH KING

SHORT AND SWEET

Macbeth is the shortest tragedy in the canon, a quick production can run about 2 hours time; roughly half the length of a full *Hamlet*. Scholars think this is either because King James possibly had a short attention span and Will was catering to his audience or that the first published copy of the script possibly came from a prompt book used for an indoor performance. Indoor performances traditionally were cut down to accommodate the more intimate audience setting. Along with being the shortest tragedy, it also has the most music and sound cues within the text.

dramatis personae

(Psssst! That's Latin for "masks of the drama" or cast of characters as we know it.)



It's short. And spooky. And it gave us two of the most iconic witch phrases of all time: "Double, double toil and trouble..." and "...by the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes" (the latter is even the title of the Ray Bradbury book about a wicked carnival). *Macbeth* might even be cursed?! *Macbeth* has it all. It was a big time crowd favorite in its day and is still a favorite amongst any Bard lover. Interestingly, *Macbeth* was not seen in published form until the First Folio (or the first complete works) was released in 1623. Perhaps writers were scared to rewrite the incantations? Whatever the reason, scholars believe this is a big factor as to why *Macbeth* is the shortest tragedy. People bought "remembered" versions of popular plays as cheap Quarto publications, not all that accurate but the story was there. But there are no records of a Quarto for *Macbeth* ever being published and it is also likely the *Macbeth* we know today is likely an abridged version of the now possibly lost original

Things start out spooky as we open on three witches predicting their meeting with Macbeth. Next, we're on the battlefield where we learn of Macbeth and Banquo's victories in the name of King Duncan. We see the witches again who predict Macbeth will be first named Thane of Cawdor and then King while they tell Banquo he will not be a king but will be the father of a line of kings. Ross enters to tell Macbeth the Thane of Cawdor has been put to death for being a traitor and Duncan has declared Macbeth as the new Thane of Cawdor. The first prophesy has come true. Duncan enters to declare his son Malcolm as heir to the crown and invites himself to Macbeth's home, Inverness, to celebrate the victories on the field. Macbeth writes home to his wife to relay the news of Duncan and the witches. She wants to be queen. When Macbeth gets home, she convinces him to murder Duncan that night while he sleeps as their guest. Duncan arrives.

Duncan is asleep, and after much personal turmoil, Macbeth kills him. Distraught, he forgets to leave the daggers at the scene to successfully frame the sleeping guards; Lady Macbeth takes charge to finish the crime. Lennox and Macduff arrive early in the morning to call upon Duncan and we meet a cheeky Porter. Macduff discovers the body of Duncan. Macbeth kills the two chamberlains found with the bloody daggers before they have a chance to plead their innocence; he claims he murdered them in a fit of emotion over the death of Duncan. Duncan's sons Malcolm and Donalbain, fearing for their lives, flee to England and Ireland, respectively. With the heirs to the throne gone, Macbeth assumes the throne. Banquo reflects on the witches words and begins to be suspicious.

The paranoia in Macbeth sets in. Macbeth invites Banquo to a royal banquet. After accepting, Banquo informs Macbeth that he and his son, Fleance, intend to leave the castle that night. Fearing that Banquo has become suspicious, Macbeth hires murderers to kill Banquo and Fleance. They succeed with Banquo but Fleance escapes. Macbeth learns this news at the banquet and he begins seeing images of a bloody Banquo sitting at the table sending him into strange fits. Lady Macbeth tries to explain away his odd disposition, but eventually the party guests all leave. Distraught, Macbeth seeks to learn more from the Weird Sisters.

Macbeth goes to the Weird Sisters for more information about the prophesies. He is met with three apparitions who give him three pieces of information: beware Macduff, no one born of woman can harm Macbeth, and he'll be safe until Great Birnam Wood come to Dunsinane Hill. Macbeth thinks he's in the clear because every human is born from a woman and trees don't move. Finally, he is shown a vision of a line of Banquo's descendants as kings. After the Weird Sisters leave, Macbeth hears news that Macduff has fled to England. He orders the Macduff family to be murdered...all of them. Meanwhile in England, Macduff swears allegiance to Malcolm, the eldest son of the deceased King Duncan. Then he learns of the death of his family.

Lady Macbeth lets out her true feelings about the happenings around the castle in a disturbing sleepwalking state observed by a doctor and her gentlewoman; we never see her again and hear report later of her death. Macduff heads to Scotland for revenge alongside Malcolm and Siward. Distraught with news of his wife's death, Macbeth awaits battle. He sees a prophesy coming true: the trees are moving. Soldiers had cut down branches to use as camouflage in the woods. When confronted by Macduff, he learns a second prophesey: Macduff was not "of woman born" because he was "untimely ripped" (his mom had a c-section). Macbeth is killed by Macduff and Malcolm is declared King of Scotland and invites everyone to see him crowned at Scone (pronounced SKOON), the capital of the Kingdom of Scotland.



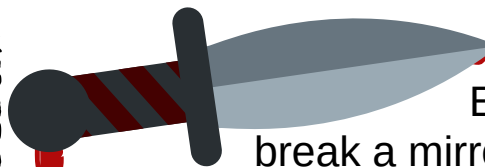
**Southwest
Shakespeare
Company
Challenge:**

Our adaptation is full of interesting choices and storytelling. Above is the summary of the play as originally written. How many differences do you notice in our production? Email your answers to:

Discover@swshakespeare.org

"Hot potato, orchestra stalls. Puck will make amends. Ah!"

The Curse of MACBETH



Everyone loves a good superstition. It's bad luck to break a mirror, walk under a ladder, or cross paths with a black cat. Anyone who works in the theatre knows it's terrible luck to utter the name of Macbeth inside of a theatre unless in rehearsal or performance of the play. Where did this superstition come from and what can you do to cleanse the space after an offense? Thank goodness you have this guide to keep you safe!

ORIGIN STORY THEORIES:

1. Shakespeare used REAL witch incantations in the text for the Weird Sisters and this either:

- a. made real witches angry and they put a curse on the play
- b. a spell is cast when the words are spoken in the text

2. It was a sign of a theatre getting ready to close its doors. If a show flopped, Macbeth would replace it. Being a crowd favorite, the play became viewed as a last hope production to bring in big audiences.

3. Productions led to the financial ruin of a company due to over ambitious staging and poor ticket sales or upset audiences.

COMMONLY USED ALTERNATIVES

- THE SCOTTISH PLAY
- MACKERS
- M AND LADY M
- MACB
- THE BARD'S PLAY

AVOID SAYING "MACBETH"

THE WORD "BARD" MEANS "POET" AND WAS A NICKNAME FOR WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: THE BARD

WHAT TO DO IF YOU SAY IT:

- LEAVE THE THEATRE, WALK AROUND IT THREE TIMES, SPIT OVER LEFT SHOULDER, WAIT TO BE LET BACK IN.

ALTERNATIVE: SPIN THREE TIMES INSTEAD OF GOING AROUND BUILDING

- OR LEAVE THE ROOM, KNOCK THREE TIMES, WAIT TO BE LET BACK IN, QUOTE A LINE FROM A "LUCKY" PLAY LIKE HAMLET OR MERCHANT.

- SPIN AROUND THREE TIMES AS FAST AS POSSIBLE ON THE SPOT, SPIT OVER LEFT SHOULDER, UTTER NONSENSE WORD.

PERSONAL FAVORITE FROM THE TV SHOW BLACK ADDER. THE WORDS GO WITH PAT-A-CAKE AND A NOSE BOOP ON THE "AH!!"

PROOF OF THE CURSE

1. The first production 1606: the boy actor playing Lady Macbeth fell ill and died on opening night; legend has it Will had to go on in his stead. Along with this, real daggers were supposedly used leading to the REAL death of King Duncan onstage.

2. 1849: the Astor Place Riots in New York. Rival acting companies were both presenting Mackers at the same time; there was an intense rivalry between the two men playing the title role which was the catalyst for the riots causing over 20 deaths and 100 injuries.

3. 1937: Laurence Olivier nearly dies when a stage weight mysteriously falls inches away from him during a performance at the Old Vic.

THERE ARE A LOT OF OTHER EXAMPLES.

1942: 3 DEATHS DURING THE RUN STARRING JOHN GIELGUD

RUMOR OF AN ACTRESS FALLING 15 FEET AFTER SLEEPWALKING RIGHT OFF THE STAGE.



History Scavenger Hunt:

How The Gunpowder Plot helped scholars with Shakespeare

THE BACK STORY:

Keeping track of the rightful heir to the crown can be a tricky job. Throughout history, the crown was almost always vulnerable to attack or speculation. Take the story of the crown passing from Elizabeth I to James I, the abridged facts:

Elizabeth was the daughter of King Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, his second wife. He had her beheaded and annulled the marriage.

—
This annulment made many in the Catholic church view Elizabeth as an illegitimate heir to the crown.

—
In his will, King Henry VIII wrote out the Stuart family entirely, deeming any Stuart ineligible to be heir to the crown.

—
Mary, Queen of Scots, or Mary Stuart, became Queen of Scotland at 6 days old. Her grandma, Margaret Tudor was Henry VIII's older sister, making Mary the oldest LEGITIMATE heir to the crown: her grandma made her a direct descendant of King Henry VII, Henry and Margaret's dad.

—
The suspicious murder of her husband and marriage to the supposed culprit caused Mary to have to flee Scotland, seeking asylum in England under the protection of Elizabeth.

Elizabeth, suspicious of Mary's intentions, protected her, but did so by holding her captive and eventually had her executed in 1587 on the grounds of aiding in the death of her husband.

—
With no heir King James VI of Scotland, became King James I of England in 1603 after the death of Elizabeth I. Who is he? The son of Mary Stuart and great grandson of Margaret Tudor, daughter of King Henry VII.

—
The crown is now "legitimate" again and members of the Catholic church are excited. Why? Mary Stuart was a staunch Catholic. During Henry VIII's reign, he started the English Reformation and tore the church apart, creating The Church of England separate from the Catholic Church. Now, the Catholic church will have solid support once again...

King James VI of Scotland and I of England



Queen Elizabeth I



Mary, Queen of Scots aka Mary Stuart

REMEMBER, REMEMBER THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER...

This British nursery rhyme might remind you of the movie *V for Vendetta*, but it has a real history behind it. November 5, 1605 was the date scheduled for Parliament to reopen after a plague scare and also the day, now known as the Gunpowder Plot, when a group of 13 English Catholics intended to assassinate King James I and anyone else inside the House of Lords by igniting 36 barrels of gunpowder hidden in a tunnel beneath the House. The group was unhappy with the King doing nothing in regard to religious tolerance of the Catholics (The stuff mentioned to the left? There is a LOT more to the Henry vs. Catholic church story. Look it up. Super fascinating.) Long story short, an

anonymous letter tipped off the crown on November 4 and the whole thing was discovered. All of the conspirators were executed in various horrible ways and then Shakespeare made allusions to the whole thing in the form of comedic relief from the Porter. (Remember that Quick Fact about the equivocator? It's a political joke for the times!)

SO WHAT DOES ALL OF THIS HAVE TO DO WITH SHAKESPEARE?

Well, the allusions to the Gunpowder Plot don't stop there. In a 1605 sermon by bishop Lancelot Andrewes commenting on the Plot, he uses the phrase, "...Be they fair or foul, glad or sad..." This phrase is used twice in *Macbeth*, first by the witches "Fair is foul and foul is fair..." and then shortly after by Macbeth, "So fair and foul a day I have not seen..." These allusions along with the nods to James being the rightful heir to the throne "...thou shalt get kings, though thou be none..." (James was believed to be a descendant of Banquo.) have helped scholars pinpoint when *Macbeth* was written: roughly 1606. Why don't scholars know for sure? Well, there are no published copies of *Macbeth* until the First Folio hit the shelves in 1623. The references to the Plot are so clear that historian Garry Willis suggests something even further: *Macbeth* should be put in the category of Gunpowder Plays. What are those? A genre of theatre that was popular immediately following the news of the Gunpowder Plot. These plays all feature the following hallmarks:

- necromancy (sorcery and, more specifically, communicating with the dead to predict the future)
- attempted or successful regicide (killing of a king)
- references to equivocation
- scenes that test loyalty by use of deceptive language
- a character who sees through plots
- words that reflect language used in the Plot and the aftermath (e.g. train, blow, vault)
- Plotters meeting karmic endings

[talking points] MACBETH



So why should you care about a play written over 400 years ago? For the same reason we're still reading the works of Shakespeare 400 years later in the first place: he wrote stories about human nature. Sure, we may not be kings and queens, or Thanes in this instance, but these characters go through some stuff that will continue to be relatable for generations to come:

"Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely..." This quote from 19th century British politician Lord Acton is still used today. This corruption is portrayed in a very bloody manner in Macbeth- an extreme version of how power can corrupt. But what about an average person? Have you ever contemplated something like ripping down the campaign sign of a student body candidate? Started a rumor about a friend with whom you're fighting? Played nice to a more studious classmate in an effort to get a better grade on a project? Taking shortcuts to gain small amounts of power (like better grades or breaking up your former friends) is a very human thing we encounter throughout our lives.

Guilt is a powerful emotion. It can literally destroy a person. In Macbeth, we see Macbeth and Lady Macbeth react to the murder of Duncan in very different ways: Macbeth outwardly degrades. From hallucinations, to erratic mood swings and eventually a murderous rampage, Macbeth deals with guilt by showing very obvious concerning signs and is ultimately killed. Lady M, on the other hand has to keep it together because her husband can't. To combat his erratic behavior and to keep the face of "nothing to see here," the guilt festers internally in Lady M and can only manifest while she's asleep, which leads to the revealing sleepwalking spells and the taking of her own life. Guilt is corrosive. Have you ever kept important information to yourself or done something that would have significant consequences (like getting grounded) if you were caught? Do you act or feel differently when you have a weight like that on your shoulders?