

The story of Macbeth

Read the text.

Once upon a time, there was a Scottish nobleman and a brave general in King Duncan's army named Macbeth. One day, Macbeth and his friend, general Banquo, were returning from a victorious battle when three evil creatures appeared on a desolate piece of open land. They told Macbeth that he would rise to nobility and become king of Scotland. For Banquo, they prophesied that his sons would become Scottish kings. Then, they disappeared. The two men continued the journey to the military camp while talking about their strange meeting with the three witches – Macbeth was in raptures while Banquo was skeptical.



When Macbeth and Banquo arrived at the camp, a messenger from the King informed Macbeth that the King had made him *Thane of Cawdor* (an important title of nobility in Scotland), in return for his bravery in the battle, and wanted to honour him with a visit to his castle in Inverness. This news fulfilled the first prophecy of the witches and tempted Macbeth to consider what it would take to become king.

Macbeth told his wife about the three witches, their prediction and its partial accomplishment, and the King's wish to visit their castle. Lady Macbeth who, like her husband, was a very ambitious woman, convinced her husband to murder the King while he was a guest at their castle. So later that night, Macbeth killed King Duncan while he was sleeping, but became deeply shocked by what he had done. Lady Macbeth did her best to calm her husband and took control of the situation.

The morning came and with it the discovery of the murder. Disorder reigned supreme in the castle and throughout Scotland, and nature was in revolt. This was because regicide was considered the worst act against the divine order. The entire suspicion fell upon Macbeth. King Duncan's two sons, who should have succeeded him, ran away in fear of their life. So Macbeth occupied the vacant throne. He was crowned King of Scotland. The second prophecy of the witches had been accomplished.



Macbeth and his wife were filled with happiness and organised a banquet in their castle. But Macbeth's first concern as King was to kill Banquo and his son because he remembered the witches' predictions for Banquo's sons. But, the King's plan was only half successful as Banquo was killed while his son managed to escape.

On the night of his murder, Banquo's ghost appeared to Macbeth at a royal banquet. Macbeth thought he was going mad and went to visit the three witches for more guidance. They offered him more prophecies: the first prophecy was that he would never be harmed by any man born to a woman; the second prophesied that he would be safe until Birnam Wood (a nearby forest) came to his castle at Dunsinane; and the third and final prediction said he had to fear Macduff, a Scottish nobleman who did not like the new King. So Macbeth embarked on a reign of terror and many people, including Macduff's family, were killed. Macduff escaped to England where he joined Malcolm (Duncan's son) and some Scottish rebels. They decided to raise an army and attack Macbeth with the support of the Scottish noblemen who disapproved of the way Macbeth was ruling the country.

The price of these murders was too high for Lady Macbeth who, haunted by her sins, became mentally ill and eventually committed suicide. As Macbeth's horror and suffering were mounting, he reacted without emotion to the departure of his wife. Now he was fully aware of his guilty and miserable condition – he was lonely, his soul was dark and empty and his life meaningless. However he was unable to stop his self-destructive behaviour.



At that very moment, a servant told Macbeth that Birnam Wood was moving towards Dunsinane Castle. Actually, it was Macduff and Malcolm's army! Each soldier was hiding behind branches as they moved towards the castle in an attempt to conceal their numbers. The battle began. Macbeth ran into the battle confident that he was invincible. He killed many soldiers and then faced Macduff who told him that he was not born to his mother in the normal way – she had had a Caesarean. Macbeth, who did not want to be humiliated and was aware that he could not escape his own tragic destiny, decided to fight to the end. He threw himself upon Macduff who, after a severe struggle, killed him. Malcolm, the rightful heir, took the throne and peace and order was finally restored to Scotland.

Choose the correct option.

- 1) At the beginning of the story, Macbeth was
 - A a Scottish nobleman, a respected general and a loyal subject of King Duncan.
 - B a Scottish nobleman, a loyal subject of King Duncan, but a bad general.
 - C a Scottish nobleman, a respected general but a disloyal subject of King Duncan.
- 2) The three witches said that Macbeth
 - A would rise to nobility, become king and that his sons would become Scottish kings.
 - B would rise to nobility, but would not become king.
 - C would rise to nobility, become king of Scotland but that only Banquo's sons would become kings.
- 3) The witches' first prophecy was accomplished because
 - A King Duncan nominated Macbeth as heir to the Scottish throne.
 - B King Duncan made Macbeth the *Thane of Cawdor*.
 - C King Duncan nominated his son, Malcolm, as heir to the Scottish throne.
- 4) Lady Macbeth
 - A was as ambitious as Macbeth.
 - B wasn't at all ambitious.
 - C wasn't as ambitious as Macbeth.
- 5) The moment immediately after the murder of King Duncan
 - A Lady Macbeth was calm, practical and helped Macbeth.
 - B Macbeth helped his wife who felt terrible and was very frightened.
 - C Macbeth and Lady Macbeth were calm and resourceful.
- 6) The murder of the King was accompanied by chaos because
 - A Duncan's two sons, who should have succeeded him, ran away.
 - B regicide was considered the most terrible act against the divine order.
 - C the second prophecy of the witches was accomplished.
- 7) Macbeth's first concern as a King was to kill Banquo and his son because
 - A the witches said that Banquo's sons would become Scottish kings.
 - B Banquo did not like Macbeth.
 - C Macbeth thought that Banquo wanted his son to become king.
- 8) Macbeth returned to the witches who
 - A did not tell him anything.
 - B told him that he was invulnerable.
 - C offered him more prophecies.
- 9) Macduff escaped to England where he
 - A had the support of a group of English nobles.
 - B raised an army against Macbeth.
 - C met Malcolm who did not disapprove of the way Macbeth was ruling Scotland.

- 10) Lady Macbeth committed suicide because she
 A could no longer handle the situation and because of her sense of guilt for what she had done.
 B felt neglected by Macbeth who was too busy ruling the country.
 C was not allowed to give advice to Macbeth.
- 11) Macbeth insisted on fighting Macduff because he
 A felt he was invincible.
 B thought Macduff was too frightened to fight against him.
 C did not want to feel embarrassed and ashamed, and could not escape his own tragic destiny.

Word scramble: put the letters in the correct order. Each word is related to the play “Macbeth”.

1. NIKG CANDUN =
2. ANQUOB =
3. DUMAFCF =
4. DAYL BECAMTH =
5. LCAMOLM =
6. ANEHT =

Curiosity about my name

Will = volontà
 Speare = lancia
 to shake = agitare, vibrare
 to speare = trafiggere

