Daily Bard

LESSON PLANS

Macbeth: three lesson plans

Three lessons on decision, deed and consequence: the argument before Duncan's murder, the minutes after it, and the price paid in Act 5. Each has minute-by-minute timings, named passages and a clear outcome.



LEVEL
Ages 14-18 (GCSE, A-level, AP Lit, IB); adaptable for first-year seminars

SEQUENCE
3 lessons of 60 minutes

FOCUS
Guilt and the Macbeths' reversal: Act 1 Scene 7, Act 2 Scene 2, Act 5 Scenes 1 and 5

YOU WILL NEED
Copies of the play, the printed worksheet, highlighters, mini whiteboards or paper

Overview

This sequence follows the murder of Duncan from decision to consequence. Students study the argument Macbeth has with himself and then loses to his wife (Act 1, Scene 7), the moments after the killing (Act 2, Scene 2), and the two speeches in which each of them pays for it (Act 5, Scenes 1 and 5). By the end they can explain, with evidence, how the two characters change places. The class should already know the outline of the plot; the act summaries in the Macbeth study guide are enough preparation.

- Students will be able to analyse how Shakespeare's choices of word, image and form present guilt.
- Students will be able to explain how ideas about kingship, sin and damnation give the murder its weight.
- Students will be able to trace an image (blood, water, sleep) across the play and explain how its meaning changes.
- Students will be able to compare Macbeth and Lady Macbeth at two points and evaluate a view of their relationship.

Assessment focus. The lessons practise the three things every literature course rewards: a clear argument supported by apt quotation (AO1), analysis of language, form and structure (AO2), and context used to illuminate meaning (AO3). Evaluation questions in each lesson prepare older students to handle competing interpretations. The assessment map sets out how these skills are weighted in different courses.

Lesson 1: "If it were done" - the decision in Act 1, Scene 7

Key question: Macbeth argues himself out of murder. How is he argued back in?

- Summarise Macbeth's reasons against killing Duncan.
- Analyse the methods Lady Macbeth uses to persuade him.

TIME	ACTIVITY	WHY
0-8 min	**Starter.** Display *"I dare do all that may become a man. / Who dares do more is none."* Ask: what does "become" mean here? What is Macbeth's definition of a man?	Sets up the word the scene fights over.
8-18 min	**Teaching input.** Read the soliloquy from *"If it were done when 'tis done"* to *"Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself"*. Define soliloquy and euphemism. Ask why the opening lines keep calling the murder "it".	Gives terms and shows a mind avoiding a word.
18-35 min	**Main task.** Pairs complete a two-column table. Left: Macbeth's reasons against, each with a quotation (consequences, *"double trust"*, Duncan's virtues, pity). Right: Lady Macbeth's replies, from *"Was the hope drunk"* to *"And we'll not fail."*	Makes the structure of the argument visible.
35-47 min	**Discussion.** Does Lady Macbeth answer any of his reasons? What does she attack instead? Why is the image of the nursing child so shocking? At which line has he given in?	Students see that persuasion works on identity, not logic.
47-55 min	**Writing.** One paragraph: "Lady Macbeth persuades her husband not by ... but by ..., as shown when ...".	Turns discussion into analysis.
55-60 min	**Plenary.** Whiteboards: who is more responsible for the murder, as a percentage split, with one quotation as proof.	Quick check, and a hook for Lesson 2.

Differentiation

- **Support:** a glossed copy of the soliloquy with Macbeth's four reasons already labelled; students find the quotations.
- **Core:** complete both columns and write the paragraph with two embedded quotations.
- **Stretch:** the soliloquy breaks off in the middle of a line when Lady Macbeth enters. What might Shakespeare be suggesting by leaving the thought unfinished?

Assessment and homework

The paragraph shows whether students can name a method of persuasion and prove it. Homework: learn the three lines beginning *"I have no spur"* and write three sentences on what the riding image predicts about the rest of the play.

Lesson 2: "This my hand" - the minutes after the murder

Key question: How does Shakespeare show two different responses to the same act in Act 2, Scene 2?

- Analyse the imagery of blood and water.
- Explain the effect of contrasts in vocabulary and line length.
- Evaluate which character is in control.

TIME	ACTIVITY	WHY
0-8 min	**Starter.** Pairs read aloud, as fast as they can, the exchange *"Did not you speak?" "When?" "Now." "As I descended?"* Ask: what do the tiny shared lines do to the pace and mood?	Students feel the panic in the form before analysing it.
8-18 min	**Teaching input.** Ask why Shakespeare keeps the murder offstage. Read *"Macbeth does murder sleep"* and the lines that follow. Define hyperbole. Explain that the murder of a king was seen as a sin against God as well as a crime.	Context taught only as far as the passage needs it.
18-35 min	**Main task.** Students complete questions 1 to 6 of the worksheet below, individually and then checking in pairs.	Structured close reading from comprehension to analysis.
35-47 min	**Discussion.** Take question 7 as a class. Then: what does the knocking add? Who is in control of this scene, and who understands better what has been done?	Separates practical control from moral understanding.
47-55 min	**Writing.** Question 8 as a short evaluative paragraph.	Practises weighing a view.
55-60 min	**Plenary.** Exit ticket: predict how Shakespeare might make the line *"A little water clears us of this deed"* return later in the play.	Prepares the irony of Lesson 3.

Differentiation

- **Support:** a glossed passage (infirm: weak; multitudinous: vast, countless; incarnadine: turn red); sentence stems for question 8.
- **Core:** all eight questions, with quotations embedded in answers.
- **Stretch:** link Macbeth's ocean to his earlier fear, in Act 1, Scene 7, that pity will *"blow the horrid deed in every eye"*. How does Shakespeare keep enlarging the scale of the crime?

Assessment and homework

Collect the evaluative paragraphs and mark against the worksheet's success criteria. Homework: read the essay on "Out, damned spot" and list three phrases from the sleepwalking scene that echo this one.

Lesson 3: "What's done cannot be undone" – the cost in Act 5

Key question: How do the Macbeths' final speeches answer their earlier selves?

- Identify echoes of earlier scenes in the sleepwalking scene.
- Compare the form and language of Act 5, Scene 1 and Act 5, Scene 5.

TIME	ACTIVITY	WHY
0-8 min	**Starter.** Project today's page from Daily Bard (or any short passage). Students have two minutes to put it into plain English before you turn the leaf to compare. Then share last lesson's predictions.	A routine for unseen practice, and retrieval of earlier learning.
8-18 min	**Teaching input.** Read Act 5, Scene 1 from *"Out, damned spot"* to *"To bed, to bed, to bed."* Ask what has happened to Lady Macbeth's verse. Note the Doctor and Gentlewoman as an audience on stage.	Shows collapse of control through form.
18-35 min	**Main task.** Echo hunt in pairs. Match each fragment to the earlier moment it recalls: *"a soldier and afeard?"*; *"so much blood"*; *"The Thane of Fife had a wife."*; *"Banquo's buried"*; *"There's knocking at the gate."* Then set *"What's done cannot be undone."* beside her Act 3 line *"What's done is done."*	Students discover that her mind replays the play out of order.
35-47 min	**Discussion.** Read Act 5, Scene 5 from *"She should have died hereafter."* to *"Signifying nothing."* Is Macbeth grieving? What has happened to his ability to feel? Does the play agree that life means nothing?	Distinguishes the character's view from the play's.
47-55 min	**Writing.** A comparative paragraph: "In Act 2 Lady Macbeth ..., whereas by Act 5 ...; Macbeth, by contrast, ...". Success criteria: one quotation from each act, one comment on form, one comment on change.	Applies the whole sequence.
55-60 min	**Plenary.** Vote, then justify: which of the two is punished more severely?	Forces a final judgement.

Differentiation

- **Support:** the echo hunt as a card sort with act and scene references supplied.
- **Core:** complete the echo hunt unaided and write the comparative paragraph.
- **Stretch:** Malcolm ends the play by calling the pair *"this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen"*. Write a paragraph arguing that the play has shown us more than that.

Assessment and homework

The comparative paragraph is the assessed outcome for the sequence. Homework: plan, in bullet points, an answer to "How does Shakespeare present guilt in Macbeth?" using the essay planner. As a low-stakes continuing habit, students with an iPhone or iPad can read the day's passage in the Daily Bard app and bring one unfamiliar word to the next lesson.

Student worksheet: blood and water

Macbeth has killed Duncan and come back carrying the daggers. He refuses to return to the chamber.

> LADY MACBETH Infirm of purpose!
> Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead
> Are but as pictures. 'Tis the eye of childhood
> That fears a painted devil.
> ...
> MACBETH Whence is that knocking?
> How is 't with me when every noise appalls me?
> What hands are here! Ha, they pluck out mine eyes.
> Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
> Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
> Making the green one red.
> LADY MACBETH My hands are of your color, but I shame
> To wear a heart so white.
> ...
> A little water clears us of this deed.
> How easy is it, then!
>
> MACBETH · ACT 2, SCENE 2

1. What does Lady Macbeth take from her husband, and what is she about to do?
2. What does she mean by saying that only *"the eye of childhood"* *"fears a painted devil"*?
3. What does Macbeth's reaction to the knocking tell us about his state of mind?
4. Explain the image of *"great Neptune's ocean"*. What technique is Shakespeare using, and what does it suggest about Macbeth's guilt?
5. Compare the words *"multitudinous"* and *"incarnadine"* with the phrase *"Making the green one red"*. What is the effect of the change in vocabulary?
6. In Lady Macbeth's reply, what do the colours red and white stand for?
7. Set *"A little water clears us of this deed"* beside Macbeth's ocean. What does the contrast show about the two characters at this moment?
8. "In this scene Lady Macbeth is the stronger of the two." How far do you agree? Consider what happens to each of them later.

Writing task

Write one paragraph answering question 8. Success criteria:

- a clear opening judgement;
- at least two short quotations, embedded in your sentences;
- analysis of one specific word or image;
- one comment on why killing a king mattered so much to the first audience;
- a sentence that looks ahead to Act 5.

Teacher notes and indicative answers

1. The daggers. She will return them to the chamber and smear the grooms with Duncan's blood so that they appear guilty.
2. A dead body is like a picture and cannot hurt anyone; only a child is frightened by an image. She treats fear as immaturity and so as unmanly.
3. He is jumpy and estranged from himself: *"How is 't with me"* shows he no longer recognises his own reactions.
4. Hyperbole. Even the sea god's whole ocean could not clean one hand, so the guilt is limitless and permanent.
5. Two long Latinate words make the line swell like the sea; the plain monosyllables then state the result with flat, childlike clarity. The idea is said twice, once grandly and once simply, so that no one can miss it.
6. Red is the blood of guilt, which she shares; white is cowardice. She accepts the guilt and rejects the fear.
7. She thinks guilt is a physical stain and a practical problem; he knows it is moral and cannot be removed. She controls the moment, but he understands it.
8. Reward any argued position. Stronger in action and nerve, certainly. But her confidence depends on not imagining the deed, and in Act 5 the water she trusted fails her.

Model paragraph

Lady Macbeth dominates this scene in action, but Shakespeare suggests her strength is a failure of imagination. Her brisk claim that *"A little water clears us of this deed"* reduces regicide to a stain, and the short, practical sentence shows a mind fixed on the next task. Macbeth sees further. His hyperbole, that his hand would *"The multitudinous seas incarnadine"*, makes the guilt as vast as the ocean, and for an audience who thought a king sacred that scale is exact. The irony arrives in Act 5, when she rubs at a hand that no water can clean. Her control here is real, yet temporary.

Extending the sequence

For a fourth lesson, return to the Witches and ask how far the prophecies cause the murder, using the themes section of the **study guide**. The **Macbeth quotation sheet** works well for weekly retrieval quizzes, and the **close reading toolkit** gives students a repeatable method for unseen passages. The essay on **"Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow"** supports the Lesson 3 discussion, and the **Hamlet lesson plans** offer a contrasting hero who hesitates before the deed. A printable copy of these plans is available as a **PDF**.



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