Macbeth Study Questions

Answer the following questions with at least 3 complete sentences each on separate paper; include a full citation for the line or section of dialogue where you found your answer for each question, unless the question gives the citation and/or is marked with an asterisk (*). Be sure to answer all parts of every question.

MACBETH – Act 1 Questions

1. *What purpose does the first scene serve for the plot, and what purpose does it serve for establishing the play’s atmosphere?
2. Why is Duncan so happy with Macbeth and so unhappy with Macdonwald?
3. How do Macbeth and Banquo react to the witches’ prophecies while the witches are still there? What is their attitude about the prophecies after the witches leave but before Ross and Angus enter?
4. What warning does Banquo give Macbeth?
5. *Paraphrase what Macbeth is saying in his asides in 1.3.143-164.
6. What is the relationship between King Duncan and Macbeth, judging by their conversation?
7. *How does Macbeth’s aside in 1.4.55-60 shed new light on his loyalty to Duncan?
8. *Describe Lady Macbeth as you see her in 1.5, referring to specific actions and lines to support your answer.
9. *Describe the contrast between appearance and reality in 1.6.
10. In 1.7, Macbeth tells his wife flatly, “We will proceed no further in this business.” However, Lady Macbeth changes his mind completely. Describe the arguments by which she persuades him to carry out her plan.

After Act 1 – Describe how Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are similar, and then describe their marriage. Finally, how do you predict they will each act/behave throughout the play? (Your answer must be at least 100 words.)

MACBETH – Act 2 Study Questions

1. What lie does Macbeth tell Banquo? What does this tell us about Macbeth?
2. What does Macbeth see in a hallucination? What do you think this might mean?
3. Why doesn’t Lady Macbeth kill Duncan herself? What does this tell us about her?
4. How do Macbeth and Lady Macbeth differ in their reactions to the murder? Is this how you would expect them to act? Explain.
5. *Why do you think Shakespeare included the scene with the Porter in 2.3? Do you think this part of the scene (2.3.1-45) fits in at this point in the play? Explain.

6. Who are Macbeth’s second and third victims? What reason does he give for killing them?

7. What do Malcolm and Donalbain do that makes them suspects in the murder of their father? Why did they do it? How is all this ironic?

8. *Why do you think Macduff is skipping Macbeth’s coronation?

After Act 2 – What have we learned about Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in Act 2? Did you predict this correctly at the end of Act 1? (Your answer must be at least 100 words.)

MACBETH – Act 3 Study Questions

1. *What hope does Banquo now have (3.1.6-10)? Explain whether or not this surprises you.

2. Why does Macbeth fear Banquo?

3. How does Macbeth persuade the murderers to kill Banquo and Fleance? What reason does he give for not murdering Banquo himself?

4. *Compare and contrast the feelings of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in 3.2. What changes do you perceive in Macbeth?

5. *Summarize what Macbeth says about death in 3.2.22-29. What is your reaction to this?

6. *What is the significance of Fleance’s escape in 3.3?

7. What does Macbeth’s behavior at the banquet suggest about his emotional state?

8. How does Lady Macbeth handle the situation?

9. What does Macbeth plan for the day after the banquet? Why?


After Act 3 – What is your reaction to Macbeth’s behavior in Act 3? What is your reaction to Lady Macbeth’s behavior in Act 3? Explain how this is changing your understanding of them and their marriage. (Your answer must be at least 100 words.)

MACBETH – Act 4 Study Questions

1. *What is Macbeth's attitude toward the witches in 4.1 as compared to Act 1?
2. What does this change in attitude (in ques. #1) show about the change in his character?
3. What are the messages of the three apparitions that the witches conjure for Macbeth, and how does Macbeth react to each apparition that the witches conjure?
4. How is Macbeth changing, as indicated by the passage in which he orders the murder of Macduff’s family?
5. *Explain why you think Shakespeare included Lady Macduff’s discussion with her son about treason and honesty in 4.2.51-64.
7. What advice does Malcolm give Macduff?

**After Act 4 –** What is peculiar and very telling about what Shakespeare has Macbeth and Lady Macbeth do and say (in general) in Act 4? Explain how this may be surprising to you considering your prediction at the end of Act 1. (Your answer must be at least 100 words.)

---

**MACBETH – Act 5 Study Questions**

1. What is Lady Macbeth’s mental state during the sleepwalking scene?
2. What does her line “Out, damn spot” refer to, and what does this line say about her?
3. What does 5.2 reveal about Macbeth as a person and as a ruler? Give examples.
4. How does Macbeth respond to the doctor’s report regarding Lady Macbeth’s ill health in 5.3?
5. What is Macbeth’s response to Lady Macbeth’s death? Explain whether or not this surprises you.
6. *How does Macbeth behave in Act 5 (up until 5.8) as a result of the witches’ prophecies? What errors does he make as a result? What successes does he have as a result?
7. What does Macduff say to make Macbeth do what he said he wouldn’t do in line 5.8.26?
8. *What does Macbeth’s final act (5.8.32-39) say about him, considering his behavior in this act?
9. *Whom is Malcolm referring to when he says “us” in the last line of the play? Why is this significant?

**After Act 5 –** Do you feel bad for Macbeth, or do you think you got what he deserved? Explain. (Your answer must be at least 100 words.)