

'Macbeth' Plot Overview Reading Comprehension



'Macbeth' by William Shakespeare is a dark tragedy that delves into the themes of ambition, power, guilt and fate. It explores the consequences of unchecked ambition through the character of Macbeth, a Scottish general (known as 'thane' in the play). Driven by prophecy and influenced by his wife, Macbeth's ascent to power is marked by bloodshed, betrayal and his ultimate downfall. Read on to discover this tale of power and peril. Then, answer the comprehension questions that follow.

The play begins with Macbeth and Banquo, two Scottish thanes, encountering three witches who deliver cryptic prophecies foretelling Macbeth's rise to power and hinting at a figure 'not of woman born' (a reference to the caesarean birth that ultimately seals Macbeth's fate). They inform Macbeth that he will become Thane of Cawdor as well as Glamis (the title he already holds) and eventually, King of Scotland. Soon after, Macbeth is indeed made Thane of Cawdor by King Duncan, reinforcing his belief in the witches' prophecies. Driven by ambition and encouraged by his wife, Lady Macbeth, he murders Duncan to seize the throne.

Macbeth's rise to power, however, is plagued with guilt and paranoia. He becomes increasingly ruthless, arranging the murder of Banquo, his former friend, to prevent Banquo's descendants from inheriting the throne, as foretold by the witches. Haunted by visions of Banquo's ghost, Macbeth's sanity begins to unravel and he becomes a tyrannical ruler.

Desperate to secure his power, Macbeth consults the witches again. They warn him to beware of Macduff, a nobleman loyal to the rightful king. In response, Macbeth orders the slaughter of Macduff's family. Meanwhile, Lady Macbeth, overwhelmed with guilt, descends into madness and eventually dies. Macduff, allied with Duncan's son Malcolm, leads an army against Macbeth.

In the final battle, Macbeth confronts Macduff, who reveals that he was 'not of woman born' but delivered by caesarean, fulfilling the witches' prophecy. Realising his fate, Macbeth is defeated and killed. Malcolm is restored as king, bringing peace back to Scotland.

