

Violence in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

Lesson Plan

Topic: Plans to commit murder in Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*

Level: B2

Time: 80 minutes

Aims

- To develop students' ability to read Shakespeare's language
- To develop students' vocabulary

Introduction

This lesson encourages a personal response from students, asking them to discuss how ambitious they are personally. They then listen to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth responding to an opportunity of seizing power, and look in detail at the speeches. Students are encouraged to think about the speeches in performance and decide together how they could be staged.

Preparation and materials

You will need a copy of the Student Worksheets for each student.

Check that you can play the audio files in your classroom.

You may also wish to find images from the web showing Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, in a range of stage and screen performances, and show these to the students in **Task 5**.

Procedure**Warmer – Speaking about your ambitions (10 minutes)**

- Ask learners to work in pairs to discuss the three quiz questions in the Student Worksheets.
- Then ask students in their pairs to match each response with an adjective in the box.

Answers:

1a: unconfident; 1b: confident 2a: decisive; 2b: indecisive 3a: remorseful; 3b: remorseless

- Feedback with the whole class.
- Create new pairs and ask students to find out their new partner's responses. Then decide together who is the most ambitious. Encourage students to use the new vocabulary.

Task 1 – Macbeth and Lady Macbeth: listening for gist (15 minutes)

- Explain that Shakespeare in *Macbeth* writes about ambition and its extreme effects.
- Elicit what students may know already about Macbeth, using the illustrations and the short summary paragraph. Check students understand with concept questions e.g.

- *Is Macbeth king?*
 - *Does he want to be?*
 - *Where is Duncan?*
- Play the recordings of the two speeches (or read them yourself).
 - Ask students to choose *Macbeth* or *Lady Macbeth* for **a** and **b**.

Answers: a: *Lady Macbeth* b: *Macbeth*

- Feedback with the whole class. Ask students if they are surprised that it is the female character who seems more determined to carry out the murder. You could discuss gender stereotypes relating to violence, and ask whether they think males are generally seen as more violent and also more single-minded.

Task 2 – Reading Lady Macbeth’s speech (20 minutes)

- Tell students that they are going to look in detail at Shakespeare’s language in the speech. They may find it difficult at first – reassure them that the language is 400 years old and that native speakers would also find it hard at first. Encourage them to use the glossary. Make sure they understand that the words in bold in the speech are explained on the right.
- Ask students how they feel about the character after reading the speech in detail. Are they shocked by what she says?
- Feedback with the whole class.

Answers: 1: True 2: False 3: True 4: True 5: False

Task 3 – Ordering the ideas in Macbeth’s speech (20 minutes)

- Again, tell students that they are going to look in detail at Shakespeare’s language in the speech. Encourage them to use the glossary. Make sure they understand that the words in bold in the speech are explained on the right.
- Ask students to read the speech and put the reasons in order.
- Feedback with the whole class. Again ask students if they were surprised by what he says, or do they think it is natural to be careful and reluctant when considering the murder of a king.

Answers: d a b c

Task 4 – Comparing the husband and wife (5 minutes)

- Ask students to work together to consider each character. Check that they understand that they need to circle one number for each pair of adjectives. Do the first together if necessary.
- Feedback with the whole class. There are no correct answers, but Macbeth would usually be given higher numbers and Lady Macbeth lower numbers.
- Ask pairs to now work with another pair to discuss who is most ambitious, Macbeth or Lady Macbeth.

Task 5 – Discussing how the speeches could be performed on stage (10 minutes)

- Ask students to look closely at the images of Patrick Stewart’s Macbeth and Sarah Bernhardt’s Lady Macbeth, and to discuss why they think these particular costumes and props were chosen for these productions, and what they were trying to communicate about the characters.

Tip: Some students may find this a new type of task and you may have to discuss one character together first, before pairs discuss the other together.

- Feedback as a whole class. This activity is designed to promote discussion among learners rather than to produce 'correct' answers. Accept any valid suggestions.

Possible answers:

Macbeth is dressed in military uniform, but in a style that is ceremonial rather than practical – he looks more ready to be in a parade showing his badges of honour than to be involved in any actual fighting. He's holding a weapon – a dagger – but he's also holding a bottle of expensive-looking wine. The dagger seems more likely to be used to open the bottle than to commit violence. This suggests to the audience that he may look like a military man, but he's more interested in social status.

Lady Macbeth is also dressed in military uniform, which is much more unusual for a woman. She is holding a dagger, and looks ready to use it as she stands in an aggressive posture. This suggests to the audience that she is not like other women, in being strong and ready to commit violence. The actress is also very beautiful. This may create a complicated effect on the audience, as they are both repelled and attracted by this shocking character.

- Ask students to work in groups to discuss the final task.

Tip: You may want to show students images from different productions before the task. The play has been presented in many different settings, to make the characters clear and exciting for the audience. For example, a famous film version from Japanese director Akira Kurosawa (***Throne of Blood 1957***) used masks and symbolic movements from traditional Japanese theatre. An African writer, Welcome Msomi, created a Zulu version of the play (***uMabatha 1970***) using the idea of Voodoo to represent the spirit world. Use a search engine to find images to show and discuss, if possible. Look for images from cultures familiar to your students.

- Who to play each role: be sensitive. Famous actors could be considered, rather than offend students.
- Aspects of the production for students to consider include:
 - location: use your local knowledge to suggest settings that would highlight the characters' personality – an elaborate residence for Macbeth; a wild outdoor setting for Lady Macbeth?
 - what the characters look like: costume, make-up and hair could all be considered. Also colour choice – elicit the different effects created by dressing Lady Macbeth in a trouser suit in red and black, or a soft flowing dress in pale pink.
- Monitor the group discussions. Feedback by asking groups for some of their suggestions. If the discussion engages the students, it could be developed into a longer task in which a group or groups present their ideas to the class.