

**Violence in Shakespeare's *Macbeth***  
Student Worksheet

**Warmer – Speaking about your ambitions**

Read these quiz questions with a partner. Choose **(a)** or **(b)** and compare your answers.

1. You are waiting to go into a job interview for a job that is very important to you. What do you think about as you wait?
  - a. All your faults and the mistakes you might make in the interview
  - b. All your good qualities and why you would be good at this job
  
2. You see a job advertised with a company that you really want to work for. You notice that someone you used to know is a manager with the company. Do you
  - a. contact that person immediately, hoping they will help you get the job?
  - b. spend days trying to decide if it would be a good idea or not to contact the person?
  
3. You did a very important exam. Before the exam you saw a copy of the exam paper on your teacher's desk. You decided to look at it, even though you knew that this was wrong. Knowing the questions in advance helped you to do very well in the exam. How do you feel now?
  - a. Very sad and sorry about this – you should have been honest
  - b. Not sorry – you sometimes have to take advantage of opportunities

Now look at the six adjectives in the box below, used to describe personalities. Match each one with a response from the quiz, e.g. 1.a – unconfident

confident	indecisive	unconfident
remorseful	remorseless	decisive

Find a new partner and compare the answers of each partner. Use the six adjectives in the box in your discussion. Decide which one of your two partners is the most **ambitious**.



**Task 1 – Macbeth and Lady Macbeth: listening for gist**

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare writes about an extreme situation in which **ambition** leads to **murder**. Three witches predict that Macbeth will become king one day. The man who is now king, Duncan, is going to visit Macbeth's castle. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth both think about how Macbeth could become king. They each make a speech about how they are feeling.



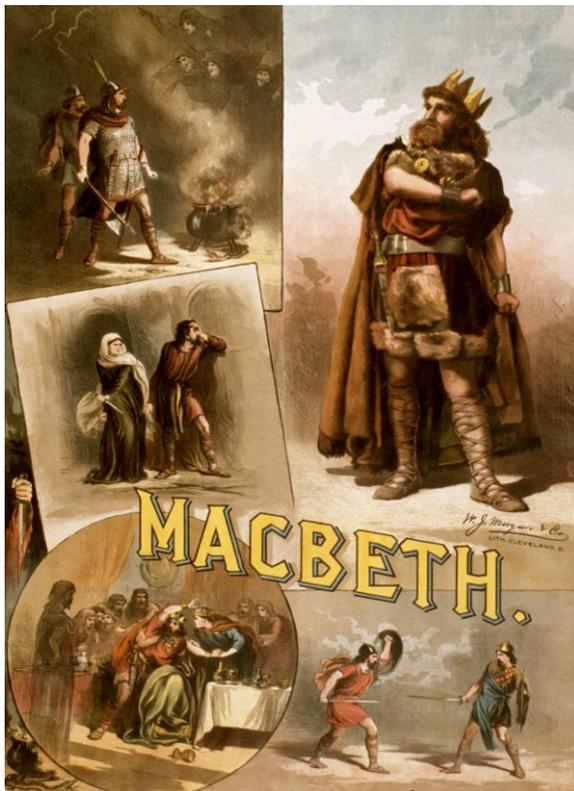
The three witches who predict that Macbeth will become King of Scotland

*Listen to part of each speech and answer the questions.*

- Who asks for the strength to murder Duncan?  
(*Macbeth / Lady Macbeth*)
- Who lists reasons **not** to kill Duncan?  
(*Macbeth / Lady Macbeth*)



Macbeth and Lady Macbeth plotting King Duncan's murder



A poster advertising an 1884 production of *Macbeth*

**Task 2 – Reading Lady Macbeth’s speech**

Lady Macbeth has just heard that Duncan is on his way to her castle, and she is preparing herself to kill him.

*Now read her speech, which you have just heard, using the glossary. Then decide if statements 1–5 are **true or false**.*

1. She asks for help from forces outside the normal world.
2. She wants to act like a woman.
3. She wants to be able to be cruel.
4. She wants nothing to stop her killing Duncan.
5. She wants to see clearly the act of the murder.



Lady Macbeth

Painted by John Singer Sargent (1856–1925)

LADY MACBETH                      Come, you spirits  
that **tend on mortal** thoughts, unsex me here,

look after murderous

and fill me from the crown to the toe, top-full  
of **direst** cruelty! Make thick my blood;

the most horrible

**Stop up the access and passage to remorse,**

Don't allow any remorse  
natural good feelings

That no **compunctious visitings of nature**

Destroy.....cruel  
a bodily fluid which causes cruelty

**Shake** my **fell** purpose.....Come to my woman's  
breasts

And take my milk for **gall**. Come, thick night

cover.....darkest

And **pall** thee in the **dunniest** smoke of hell

sharp and eager

That my **keen** knife sees not the wound it makes

look

Nor heaven **peep** through the blanket of the dark

'Stop, stop'

To cry '**Hold, hold**'

**Task 3 – Ordering the ideas in Macbeth’s speech**

Look at the reasons (a–d) which Macbeth gives for **not** killing Duncan. Then read the speech, and put the reasons in the right order.

- a. He’s a guest in my house.
- b. He’s a good king with an honest and kind personality.
- c. My own ambition is the only reason I have to kill him.
- d. We’re the same nationality, and he’s my superior.



The actor Patrick Stewart as Macbeth

MACBETH                      He’s here in double trust;  
 First, as I am **his kinsman** and his subject,  
 Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,  
 Who should against his murderer shut the door,  
 Not **bear** the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan  
**Hath borne his faculties so meek**, hath been  
 So **clear** in his great office, that his **virtues**  
 Will **plead like angels, trumpet-tongued**, against  
 The **deep damnation** of his **taking-off**;  
**I have no spur**  
**To prick the sides of my intent, but only**  
**Vaulting** ambition, which **o’erleaps itself**  
 And falls on **the other**.

(Act 1 Scene 7)

**Glossary**

- from the same country
- carry
- Has been such a gentle king
- honest.....good qualities
- speak like angels with trumpets
- terrible curse ...murder
- Nothing motivates me
- except
- jumping.....jumps over itself
- the other side

**Task 4 – Comparing the husband and wife**

How would you rate the personalities of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth?

Work with a partner, and circle the numbers (e.g. 1 = very confident; 5 = very unconfident) which you think best reflect their personalities.

**Macbeth**

confident	1	2	3	4	5	unconfident
decisive	1	2	3	4	5	indecisive
remorseless	1	2	3	4	5	remorseful

**Lady Macbeth**

confident	1	2	3	4	5	unconfident
decisive	1	2	3	4	5	indecisive
remorseless	1	2	3	4	5	remorseful

Then compare your marks with another pair. Decide which person is the most **ambitious**.

**Task 5 – Discussing how the speeches could be performed on stage**

In pairs, discuss the costumes that have been chosen for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth for Patrick Stewart and Sarah Bernhardt in the pictures, and also what the actors are holding in their hands.

What effect does this have?

Finally, imagine that your group is going to film these two parts of Macbeth. Decide:

- who in the class could play Macbeth
- who could play Lady Macbeth
- what location to choose
- what you want the actors to look like (props, costumes, etc.).



The French actress Sarah Bernhardt as Lady Macbeth, c.1900