# English – Stage 5 – character and context

## Macbeth

In this activity you will look at how Shakespeare describes the character of Macbeth. You will then consider how the language used to describe him reveals meaning about the way an Elizabethan audience would see Macbeth as a character.

**Core resource/text:**

‘Macbeth’ by William Shakespeare: [shakespeare.mit.edu/macbeth/full.html](http://shakespeare.mit.edu/macbeth/full.html) © public domain

**Background information**

You should have a sound understanding of the play and an understanding of the context in which Shakespeare was writing.

### Learning intention:

Today you will:

* Explore the language used to describe a character
* Reflect on what this description reveals about context.

### Success Criteria

So you can:

* Demonstrate your understanding of the character of Macbeth.
* Demonstrate your understanding of how an Elizabethan audience would feel about him.

### Syllabus outcome

The following teaching and learning strategy will assist in covering elements of the following outcomes:

* **EN5-7D:** understands and evaluates the diverse ways texts can represent personal and public worlds.
* **EN5-3B:** selects and uses language forms, features and structures of texts appropriate to a range of purposes, audiences and contexts, describing and explaining their effects on meaning.

Syllabus outcomes are from [English K-10syllabus](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/english-year-10/english-k-10) © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales, 2012

#### Outcome content

* **S5O3EP2** analyse and explain how text structures, language features and visual features of texts and the context in which texts are experienced may influence audience response.
* **S5O7DA1:** evaluate the way personal perspective and language choices affect meaning and can be shaped by social, cultural and historical influences.

(The coding for this content point comes from the English Textual Concepts and Learning Processes resources for Stage 5 English – Stage 5 [englishtextualconcepts.nsw.edu.au/portfolio](http://englishtextualconcepts.nsw.edu.au/portfolio)).

### Learning sequence

#### Task 1: The character of Macbeth

Read and analyse:

1. Read the descriptions of Macbeth in the resource table below and note what each reveals about his character.
2. Can you label the speakers?

#### Task 2: Context of the play

Reflect and write:

1. Consider what you understand about the context in which this play was written and for whom it was written. Remember that James 1 was a Scottish King.
2. Write a response to the following question. How would an Elizabethan audience feel about Macbeth as a person, husband, fighter, leader and friend? In your response, use some of the quotes from the table to support your answer.

#### Where to next?

Consider how the tide turns in Act V. Here Macduff insults Macbeth when he refuses to fight.

Read, reflect and write:

* How might an Elizabethan audience have reacted to this speech by MacDuff?
* What would the audience have thought about ‘brave’ Macbeth?
* Consider your own response to Macbeth and the change in his character over the course of the play.

Macduff:

Then yield thee, coward,

And live to be the show and gaze o' the time:

We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are,

Painted on a pole, and underwrit,

'Here may you see the tyrant.'

You could collect some other quotes from Act V to support your argument.

### Resource

Table: Macbeth character quotes worksheet

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Scene | Description or quote | How do these quotes reveal his character? |
| II | * …valiant cousin!
* …worthy gentleman!
* …brave Macbeth
* …like valour’s minion
* …noble Macbeth
 |  |
| III | * My noble partner…
* …most worthy Thane
* Worthy Macbeth…
 |  |
| IV | * …worthiest cousin…
* My worthy Cawdor…
* …he is full so valiant…
* It is a peerless kinsman.
 |  |
| V | * full o’the milk of human kindness.
* Art not without ambition but without /The illness should attend it
* thou wouldst be great
* wouldst play holily.
* wouldst not play false,/And yet wouldst wrongly win
* thou dost fear to do
* Your face, my thane, is as a book where men /may read strange matters.
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