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## Macbeth study guide act 1 scene 4

Photo By Lisa Fotios on Pexels.com So, a little Shakespeare to brighten up the middle of the week. This is a sample guide I'm currently working on. Another free analysis of the scene from Macbeth. We hope this piece will be helpful to all students studying the play. It should also give you a little taste of the style and depth of the guide. I'm sorry for the mistakes of misusing and making small mistakes. Enjoy. 1.4 King Duncan receives word of Thane of Cawdor's death before greeting Macbeth. Duncan reveals that he named his eldest son Malcolm as Cumberland Prince and his successor. Macbeth reacts to this unwelcome announcement with calculated anger. Another minimalist stage description opens the scene – Duncan's Palace in Forres, followed by the 'flourishing' trumpets and the arrival of the king and numerous lords. Duncan wants to find out if the 'execution was done on Cawdor'. It reveals from his son that a report has been delivered on the execution of the treacherous nobleman. Malcolm is once again generous in his praise, stating that Cawdor 'is very sincere... he confessed his treachery.' Therefore, once again, something is presented to us as an audience that we did not expect – and we are versed in the duality (theme) of Cawdor's character. The man may have rebelled against the crown, but in the end he pleaded guilty and 'begged' the king's pardon, admitting his misdeeds and guilt ('set/Deep Repentance'). Humans, as Duncan soon points out, are complex creatures. Cawdor was initially presented as the most baseline of creatures, a rebel against his king and God's authority. Still, 'Nothing in his life has become like his departure.' He dies with dignity and without a small measure of courage. His death is considered the noblest act of his life. It was as if Cawdor eventually realised he had thrown away 'the most favorite thing he owned' (his life) cheaply. This sentiment will resonate much later when Macbeth ponders whether he has rejected his 'eternal jewel' (his soul) in killing the king. The oldest and hoariest themes seem to be raising their heads again – the choice(s). Cawdor made his choice and had to accept the consequences, which he did inexorably to his credit. Duncan's next line is one of the most moving Shakespeares ever written, one of life's greatest truisms. 'There's no art to find a mind-to-face construction.' Simply put – we cannot say what one thinks simply by looking at them, their thoughts remain essentially unknown. The dramatic irony is that Duncan won't learn from his mistake. Interestingly, this sentence is a biblical allusion to Samuel's book, where it is written: 'For God sees something not as a man: for a man who looks at the outward appearance, but a gentleman who observes the heart.' Duncan goes on to say that Cawdor was a gentleman. 'I've built absolute trust.' Cawdor's smiling birth isolated him from suspicion. Duncan will have the same trust in Macbeth, a mistake that will result in his bloody murder. The dramatic irony is heightened by a few notches when Macbeth himself enters the next minute, to be greeted by the greeting 'O most loyal relative.' Macbeth will prove to be Duncan's killer. The monarch's confidential nature will prove his death. Once again, the filthy bonds between the king and his most recent theme have been emphasized, which will only serve to make eventual betrayal worse. Duncan is a gracious and humble king, at least he's in this scene. It makes you wonder why so many of his nobles seemed intent on removing him from the throne. Historic Duncan was more of a tyrannical monarch, not at all the gentle and aging figure we see here. The king talks about how 'the sin of my inaction even now/was difficult for me.' He can't say thank you, even though he's honest enough to admit it and accept that he owes his kingdom of courage and courage to his cousin. Macbeth is once again showered with praise. 'It's more yours to pay for.' Basically, he says there's nothing he can give Macbeth that would be compensated for the service he offered. He even jokes that he wishes Macbeth was somewhat less worthy, so his feeling praise and thanks would seem reward worthy of the general's service - 'Would you have less deserved.' Macbeth, of course, offers the perfect soundbite, claiming that 'The service and loyalty I owe / That way, it pays for itself.' That, of course, would make him even more of a paragon of a virtuous soldier. He says he owes Duncan his loyalty and service because of his feudal connections ('Ministry' all nobles owe to their ruler) and the fact that the king is God's representative. He argues that anyone who serves a king simply does 'what he should', thereby respecting the divinely ordained order of things. There is an irony (or will be) in Macbeth's next claim. He says the subject's duties are 'to your throne and country, children and servants'. Obviously, he doesn't know that Duncan will formally elevate his son Malcolm to the position of Prince of Cumberland, the appointed crown prince. This is an interesting little historical aside – unlike the later Middle Ages, it was not automatically assumed that the king's eldest son would take the throne on his father's death. The concept of primogeniture would come to life as centuries have moved on, but here in Scotland (as in England) there should be a general enclimation of candidates' abilities. Does Macbeth mean what he just said. We, the audience, know it's short. taking the throne by force, he still ended the previous scene by stating, 'chance can crown me'. I think it's reasonable to assume, given what he went through in the battle, he's genuinely overjoyed to have saved Duncan and means what he says. Although many have argued otherwise. What is important is that, whatever you believe, you offer an informed and personal response, supporting your opinion with respect to the text. Duncan is certainly impressed by Macbeth's eloquence, as strengthening as she is by the idea of the Divine Right of Kings. It's hard not to see Shakespeare's play for the graces of its new monarch, James I. Duncan unleashes a multitude of horticultural metaphors in response to Macbeth's pledge of loyalty (semantic field - another literary technique Shakespeare loved) - 'I started planting you and I will work / To make you full of growth.' These metaphors of nurturing and growing are once again allusions to the Bible—where God is constantly described as an effort to help His people grow and thrive in the Old Testament. It's clear how Duncan sees himself and how Shakespeare wants to introduce him. It is also clear that the old man is presented to us as a good and noble figure. Forget his royal status for a moment and simply consider that he is a kind old man. The crime Macbeth is about to commit is even worse considering Duncan's seeming sanctity. Banquo must not be surpassed by graciousness, stating: 'There if I grow/The harvest is yours.' Shakespeare couldn't be clearer about how the king's subjects view him and how Duncan sees his position. Any deviation from the king's will is firmly placed in the arena of sacrilege. Still, the bomb is coming for Macbeth. You would know that an established succession system required agreement from the nobles of Scotland, but Duncan in this scene turns this system on its head. Is this a crack in the senior king's perfect façade? Does he show his guile here? After all, he drew shouts of loyalty and loyalty from his two greatest generals. Macbeth even went so far as to promise his continued service to Duncan's son. The King seems to invoke the full power of the royal family when he says, 'We will establish our estate on / Our eldest Malcolm.' This is a dynasty building. Some commentators have seen this as Duncan sneaks into the news that his son will succeed him almost behind everyone's back. He chose the perfect time to do so, if the insidiousness was his intention. The kingdom has just been saved, chaos and the continuation of the civic has been averted. There would never be a better time to introduce what constitutes a significant constitutional change. Duncan is smart enough to show the assembled nobles that this honor 'must/does not have to invest him unaccompanied He states that all those other nobles gathered, who deserve recognition, will be similarly honored. Signs of his affection 'will shine on all they deserve'. Duncan asks that Macbeth hurry to Inverness (where his castle resides) to prepare for the royal visit, which will 'further bind us to you'. Arriving to visit the Macbeths, he intends to show them a special affection and further put himself in their debt. Macbeth's response to this request is very interesting. He claims to regard any action not in the service of his king as 'working' He seems happy to assume the role of 'messenger', which was an expression to designate a messenger riding in front of the king to make his offer. However, the herald also carries a more sinister connotation—something that hints at a future event. His next soliloquy, which we see in a few lines, shows that he has resurrected his idea of taking the throne by force, which is murder. Shakespeare is toying with the expectations of his audience here. They would be immediately vigilant, even before Macbeth poured out the ambitions and desires of his heart. Duncan's show of thanks - 'My Worthy Cawdor', is another massive dollop of dramatic irony. Think of him by the title of the man who wanted him dead, not knowing Macbeth was thinking exactly that. This may be the last time the audience will give Macbeth the benefit of the doubt, believing he deserves to be considered worthy and noble. Macbeth's soliloquy – now no doubt about it – had a murder on his mind Macbeth apparently hoped a 'chance' would take him to the throne. Malcolm's altitude is hopeful. The prince's rise is a 'step/On which I must fall, otherwise 'o'erleap'. What is not in doubt now is that he is thinking of the ACT. He committed (at least in his mind) to action, to moving events forward. Malcolm was seen simply in the sense that the obstacle was on its way to the crown. This is dissatisfied and sanguine thinking by any standard. Macbeth in providing the audience with this 'aside' introduces them to the deepest recesses of their mind, revealing the full vast range of their ambitions. So, what reveals: - The 'step' (obstacle) Malcolm presents lies 'in my [his] way'. His ambition (theme) here could not be more evident. He simply sees the young prince as a dynastic inconvenience that needs to be addressed. - 'The stars hide your fires/Let the light not see my black and deep desires.' He's honest with himself and that brings us to two key points of reflection. First, he has the darkest, meanest thoughts. We, the audience, are thinking even worse about this because of how Duncan has been introduced so far. Second, he knows what he's planning is wrong. He'd do the deed. Secret. His metaphorical flourish hammers home that he knows how this work would be considered if it came to light. Especially important is the mention of 'stars' (celestial bodies). He hopes heaven will turn a blind eye to the murder he is planning, because there is no doubt that what he is doing is morally wrong, unjustified and sacrilegious. - He asks you to 'eye a mig in hand. Still, let it be / Which eye is afraid when it's done to be seen.' It's a bit intricate language, but it's not hard to decipher. Macbeth asks the eye to turn away from what the hand does. He doesn't want to watch himself commit murder, even though it's almost like he's imagining the act right here. Yet for all that he wants the outcome to be the death of Duncan at the end of the episode. - Macbeth clearly has a conscience. He knows what's right and wrong, but his ambition is obviously an engine that makes him think about regicide. He knows his thoughts are wrong by any acceptable standards, but thoughts come anyway - and instead of turning to the side in disgust as he did in the previous scene, he seems to accept what he wants to do/must do here. - I know some of you will still be wondering: would you think like this without the sale he got from witches? To that, I say, formulate an opinion of yourself. My own opinion – There was certainly pushing, but there must have been fertile ground already for the idea to take root. Let's consider the speed of Macbeth's mental betrayal. Is it coming unrealistically fast? Well, let's consider Macbeth's situation: 1. He is a close blood relative of the king and the nation's foremost warrior. He must (taking into account the constitutional rules of the day) take into account that he was in with a chance of alasmation of the nobles, in relation to the throne after Duncan's death. Perhaps given the king's age, this was an event that was expected sooner rather than later. 2. Witches have caused a long dormant ambition. He is a proud nobleman after all, he would feel like he deserved to be rewarded after all he has done in Scotland's defence. Having already seen one of the witch's prophecies come true he may have felt as if his ascension was some way divinely ordained. The alternative – although it is fair to point out that three women would find it more likely that the devil's delegates rather than God's messengers. His thoughts on 'stars hiding your fires' also suggest he knows he has no right to usurp the throne. 3. He is clearly annoyed by the announcement that Malcolm will be appointed Prince of Cumberland. It's not hard to imagine him feeling slighted when he hears that information right after the battle is over. Shakespeare is very vague when it comes to time jumps in his plays, but this scene can only be a day or so after the battle at most. Overall, he changes positions very quickly between this scene and the previous scene, but there are compelling reasons why he does. I think it is worth bearing in mind that the defining character flaw he possesses — his ambition — is something he later readily acknowledges, here the driving force. Macbeth comes out, leaving Duncan to make his last eulogies. The audience would now fully appreciate the irony of the king's words. Referring to him as an 'unravalled relative', the audience would sadly shake their heads. Once again Duncan was fooled by his honey words and pleasant visage – it will soon cost him everything. Duncan refers to his cousin who 'went before to welcome us.' He sees Macbeth as a traditional herald, racing forward to prepare accommodation for the monarch. We know a man looks at himself quite differently. Macbeth rides to prepare the ground for murder.

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