

Module 4: Examining Love, Friendship, and Power

Topic 4 Content: Introduction to *Macbeth*

Introduction

Introduction to Macbeth

Overview of Macbeth

Macbeth and Scottish History

Why a Scottish King?

Introduction



Macbeth is one of William Shakespeare's most iconic plays. Allusions to characters and key scenes from *Macbeth* still abound in popular culture today. But what is this play about? Take a moment to familiarize yourself with some of the historical background and context behind this famous drama. Click the tabs to learn more.

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In the opening scene of *Macbeth*, three witches meet Macbeth as he returns from battle accompanied by his friend Banquo. The witches prophesy that Macbeth will be king, although the current King Duncan is a just and righteous king. Tempted to seize the throne for himself, Macbeth must decide between right and wrong. The tragedy of *Macbeth* is about this crisis of morality and all the consequences that ensue.

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Macbeth can be considered a history because it is based on a historical Scottish king named Macbeth. Unlike the Macbeth in the play, the real Macbeth had a right to the throne. Duncan was not an effective king but a feeble and incompetent one. Macbeth was assisted by Banquo along with other lords to murder King Duncan. Afterwards, Macbeth ruled for ten successful years until he, too, was overthrown.

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Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* in 1606 as a tribute to King James I of England, who inherited the throne in 1603. Although the real-life Banquo helped Macbeth assassinate King Duncan, he is an innocent character in Shakespeare's play since he was an ancestor of King James. In Act IV, Scene i of *Macbeth*, Shakespeare has a mirror held up so that King James can see that he was a descendant of Banquo, destined to be king.

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