

MACBETH
Narrative Improv

Classroom setup: Ideally, you'll want to move the desks out of the way (if you can), and arrange the students' chairs in circle or semi-circle.

Before you begin:

- Choose 2 STRONG readers. They will be the narrators. Hand out copies of the narrative to each of these volunteers and have them read through it together. Alternatively, the teacher can be the narrator.
- Choose 2-3 sound students to be in charge of the sound effects. Hand them a copy of the narrative and a **list of sound effects** and tell them to prepare ways to produce the sounds, using objects in the room, their own voices, or sounds they can download from computers or their phones. They are also free to create other special effects appropriate to the narrative, such as opening and closing window blinds, turning lights off and on, etc. You might also have them find a couple of musical examples to set the mood? *Alternatively – the whole group can make the sound effects just using their voices and bodies during the improv.*
- Ask for 2-3 casting/directing crew volunteers. They will be in charge of handing out roles and getting students on and off the “stage” when needed. Give the casting/directing people a copy of the narrative and a list of roles. Have them assign the roles as quickly as possible. *Alternatively – the teacher could assign the roles in advance, perhaps splitting the larger roles of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth between two students. *Note: do not cast by gender (in true Shakespeare fashion).*

Cast of Characters

(In order of appearance, with hyperlinks and descriptions from Shakespeare-Navigators.com)

Three [Witches](#), (AKA, the Weird Sisters)

[Duncan](#), King of Scotland

A bleeding [Sergeant](#)

[Malcolm](#), eldest son of King Duncan.

[Donalbain](#), younger son of King Duncan.

[Lennox](#), a Scottish nobleman who turns against Macbeth's tyranny.

[Ross](#), a Scottish nobleman who turns against Macbeth's tyranny.

[Angus](#), a Scottish nobleman who turns against Macbeth's tyranny.

[Banquo](#), a Scottish general, and Macbeth's best friend.

[Lady Macbeth](#), Macbeth's wife.

[Messenger](#) in the Household of Macbeth.

TWO GUARDS* - **These characters are only spoken about in the play – they never actually appear on stage; but it's helpful (and fun) to include them in the Narrative Improv so the students can see the actions that are being described.*

[Macduff](#), a Scottish nobleman, Thane of Glamis (pronounced “GLAHMZ”)

[Fleance](#), son of Banquo.

[Porter](#), the gatekeeper at Macbeth's castle.

[Old Man](#), who can remember events from seventy years back.

[Servant](#) in the household of Macbeth.

Three [Murderers](#)

[Hecate](#), goddess of Witches.

[Another Lord](#), friend of Lennox.

[Lady Macduff](#), wife of Macduff, and victim of Macbeth's murderous anger.

[Son](#) of Macduff, and victim of Macbeth's murderous anger.

[Messenger](#)

[Doctor](#), who observes Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking.

[Gentlewoman](#), an attendant of Lady Macbeth

[Seyton](#), the only follower of Macbeth who stays with him to the very end.

[Siward](#), a renowned English general.

[Young Siward](#), Son of Siward.

NARRATIVE IMPROV KEY:

ALL CAPS	character names (give new characters a moment to get on stage before continuing)
dot dot dot ...	a reminder to pause from the narration so actors can improvise dialogue and actions
“quotations”	say “quote” before reading the line, then the actors will repeat it.
<i>italics</i>	<i>stage directions / actions</i> - read these out loud so the actors know what to do
<i>Bold italics</i>	Sound effects
*** <i>WHOOSH</i> ***	Spoken by the Narrator to indicate the end of a scene – everyone goes back to their seats

(Backstory)

Once in the faraway land of Scotland, there lived a great warrior named MACBETH. MACBETH was Thane of Glamis. (A thane was a position in the royal hierarchy of Scotland, who ruled over an area of land, similar to an Earl in England.) MACBETH smiled and treated everyone kindly—except on the battlefield. There, alongside his best friend, BANQUO, he was courageous and brutal, hacking away at whole armies. Together, MACBETH and BANQUO were unbeatable war heroes.

(ALL ON STAGE – slow-motion battle scene. Only Macbeth and Banquo are left standing)

The play begins with the ***sounds of thunder and lightning***, as 3 WITCHES huddle together, planning their next meeting...

They decide to meet after the battle is over...

which one predicts will be before the end of the day...

and there they will meet with MACBETH...

They leave, chanting the following spell as they exit:

“Fair is foul, and foul is fair
Hover through the fog and filthy air.”

*** ***WHOOSH******

Back at the army camp, KING DUNCAN, his sons MALCOLM and DONALBAIN, and one of his noblemen, LENNOX, are met by a BLOODY SOLDIER, clearly weak from his many injuries. MALCOLM tells the soldier to report everything he saw on the battlefield to the King...

The BLOODY SOLDIER tells the king how the rebel forces of Norway and Ireland were helped by a traitor to Scotland,— (also known as the Thane of Cawdor)...

The SOLDIER goes on to describe how against all odds, MACBETH defeated the leader of the rebel forces, saying,

“he unseam'd him from the nave to the chops, And fix'd his head upon our battlements”

Too weak to continue, the King orders the soldier to be taken for medical treatment...

The King and his entourage are then joined by ROSS, another Scottish nobleman, who reports that Scotland has won the war, thanks to MACBETH, and the King of Norway is now asking for a treaty...

Everyone CHEERS!

KING DUNCAN orders the traitor's execution... and tells Ross to give his title, (Thane of Cawdor), to the brave and loyal MACBETH...

*** **WHOOSH*****

MACBETH didn't know any of this Cawdor business. He was already the Thane of another province called Glamis, and gaining a second title was the last thing on his mind as he and BANQUO trudged home from the battlefield, slapping each other on the back.

Suddenly, they hear a strange, high-pitched laughter, and see three hunched-over, weird-looking WITCHES. The WITCHES bow to MACBETH and BANQUO, telling them three things:

- #1: MACBETH is now the Thane of Cawdor.
- #2: MACBETH will someday be king.
- #3: BANQUO will never be king, but his sons shall be kings...

Then, with wild laughter and a *roll of thunder*, the WITCHES vanish into thin air.

MACBETH and BANQUO are stunned at first, but then they have a good laugh over the WITCHES' supposed prophecies, wondering if maybe they imagined the whole thing ...

Suddenly, they hear the *galloping of horses*. Their friends, ROSS and ANGUS arrive to announce that MACBETH has just been given the title of Thane of Cawdor! ...

MACBETH and BANQUO are amazed! One of the WITCHES' prophecies has come true!

This gets MACBETH thinking about the second prophecy: becoming King of all Scotland...

He feels guilty even thinking about it. After all, KING DUNCAN is a close relative of his. MACBETH isn't sure whether the WITCHES' prophecies are good news or bad. If it's good news, why does he feel so afraid? ...

BANQUO can see that his dear buddy is out of sorts, and the two agree to talk more about their weird encounter again when they have a chance to be alone. ...

*** *WHOOSH****

MACBETH, BANQUO, ROSS, AND ANGUS *gallop their horses* to Dunsinane, the castle where KING DUNCAN lives. There is much *blowing of horns* and *applause* as they all kneel before DUNCAN, and the King congratulates MACBETH and BANQUO for their bravery on the battlefield...

KING DUNCAN's sons, MALCOLM and DONALBAIN, look on nervously. MACBETH smiles as he shakes hands with them, but he also feels jealous, reminding himself that not only the king, but Malcolm, the Prince of Cumberland, stands between him and the throne. He would have to get rid of them all, saying to himself,

“Stars hide your fires.
Let not light see my black and deep desires”

Duncan announces that he and his court will accompany MACBETH home to his castle at Inverness for an overnight visit...

*** *WHOOSH****

In the meantime, MACBETH's wife, LADY MACBETH, is reading a letter from her husband, telling about the WITCHES' prophecies, and how Duncan named him Thane of Cawdor, (in addition to his present title). LADY MACBETH is overjoyed about her husband's success, and especially about the thought of him becoming king. She is ready to kill Duncan so that she and her husband could become Queen and King of Scotland. But she worries that MACBETH is just too nice a guy to go through with it, saying,

“ I fear thy nature;
It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way.”

A SERVANT enters, announcing that KING DUNCAN is on his way to visit Inverness. Hearing that the King will soon be in her castle, LADY MACBETH pumps herself up to kill him. She calls on the spirits of darkness to give her the strength to be ruthless and carry out her merciless plan, saying,

“Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty!”

Her incantation is interrupted by shouts of joy, the stomping of feet and the blowing of horns announcing MACBETH's arrival home at Inverness Castle.

LADY MACBETH squeals with delight to see her husband, now the Thane of Glamis AND Cawdor. She tells him to leave everything—that is, all the plans for killing Duncan—up to her...

*** **WHOOSH*****

More *shouting of joy, stomping of feet, and blowing of horns* to announce the arrival of KING DUNCAN, DONALBAIN, and MALCOLM, along with ROSS, ANGUS, LENNOX, BANQUO, and lots of other lords and SERVANTS to Inverness.

(*EVERYONE except Macbeth UP ON STAGE*)

They all cry out, “Hail KING DUNCAN!”
LADY MACBETH is all smiles as she greets her guests...
but MACBETH isn’t there!

*** **WHOOSH*****

MACBETH is alone in his room, worrying. He’s thinking about all the reasons **not** to kill Duncan...

LADY MACBETH enters, interrupting his thoughts. He tells her that the plan is off. How can he kill Duncan, who is a good king and has treated him so well? ...

Lady MACBETH is furious, and calls her husband a wimp...

But MACBETH still has reservations. What if they fail?
LADY MACBETH tells him,
“Screw your courage to the sticking place and we’ll not fail”

She lays out the following plot to kill Duncan. After the King is asleep, she will drug the men guarding his room...then MACBETH will stab Duncan and plant the murder weapons on the sleeping GUARDS, so they look like the guilty culprits...

Convinced. MACBETH agrees...

*** **WHOOSH*****

That night, just as planned, DUNCAN goes to sleep, and LADY MACBETH gives the two GUARDS outside his room some “wine”. For a moment the GUARDS have a great time laughing, dancing, and stumbling around drunk, but soon the drugs take effect, and they pass out, cold...

According to the plan, MACBETH heads down the hall to kill the king. But on the way, he starts hallucinating. He sees a dagger floating in the air, pointing the way towards Duncan’s chamber. He says,

“Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand?”

He isn’t sure if it is real, or all in his head. Then he hears the *sound of a bell*. This is his cue to go through with the murder.

In the hallway outside of Duncan's room, LADY MACBETH paces back and forth, wondering if her husband has successfully carried out their plan...

Shaken and afraid, MACBETH enters to find his wife, saying,
"I have done the deed."

MACBETH'S hands are all bloody, and he is still holding the daggers. (He forgot to leave them with the passed out GUARDS!) LADY MACBETH tells him to go back and plant the murder weapons on the GUARDS, but MACBETH says he's too scared to go back in there. He is hearing weird sounds and voices that say things like:

"Sleep no more, MACBETH doth murder sleep"

Angrily, LADY MACBETH takes the daggers herself and returns to the scene of the crime to finish what her husband could not... *Lady Macbeth exits.*

While she's gone, MACBETH laments what he has done, wondering if he'll ever be forgiven for his crimes. Just then, LADY MACBETH returns, having planted the murder weapons on the guards and smearing their faces with blood, saying

"My hands are of your color, but I shame to wear a heart so white".

Suddenly, they both hear *a knocking outside* and go to their room to wash "the filthy witness" from their hands and pretend to be asleep.

*** *WHOOSH****

The *knocking on the door continues*, waking a PORTER who guards the front door from a drunken stupor. The PORTER talks to the audience about how the knocking he hears are sinners knocking on the gates of Hell. Finally, he goes to answer the door. He re-enters with LENNOX and MACDUFF, who have arrived to wake up the King.

MACDUFF goes to Duncan's chamber, only to find him brutally stabbed to death. He cries out,

"Horror! Horror! Horror!"

and everyone in the castle wakes up, (MACBETH, LADY M., BANQUO, DONALBAIN, AND MALCOLM). They all cry and wail to hear of the King's death, especially MACBETH and LADY MACBETH, who put on a great show of grief and surprise...LADY MACBETH even faints, and has to be dragged away...

The king's sons, MALCOLM and DONALBAIN, are suspicious that real killer is among their friends... DONALBAIN says to his brother,

"There's daggers in men's smiles."

The two brothers decide to flee Inverness Castle and split up so they won't be the next victims. MALCOLM decides to go to England, and DONALBAIN to Ireland...

*** WHOOSH***

There is a great ceremony that includes, of course, the *blowing of horns, pounding of drums, etc.* as MACBETH and LADY MACBETH are crowned King and Queen of Scotland, just as the WITCHES had predicted.

(place crowns on their heads)

But now that the second of the Weird Sisters' prophecies had come true, MACBETH starts worrying about the third: **(What was that third prophecy again?)**

MACBETH feels threatened, so he hires a TWO MURDERERS to kill BANQUO—his very best friend—and BANQUO's little son, FLEANCE!...

*** WHOOSH***

The MURDERERS sneak into the woods and hide. When BANQUO and FLEANCE come strolling along, the MURDERERS catch BANQUO and kill him. FLEANCE, however, manages to escape!

*** WHOOSH***

MACBETH and LADY MACBETH are ruling Scotland now, living in the lap of luxury at Dunsinane Castle, but something is terribly wrong—MACBETH's mind! He's seeing things that aren't there.

One night MACBETH and LADY MACBETH have a dinner party. ROSS, ANGUS, LENNOX, and many guests attend.

(EVERYONE ON STAGE)

There is music and dancing, eating and drinking. (10 second dance party)

Suddenly, MACBETH starts to freak out. He sees the ghost of his old friend, BANQUO, covered with blood, nodding his head, and pointing his finger at him. MACBETH makes a scene, screaming and pointing at the ghost no one else can see...

LADY MACBETH tries to cover up for him, but the guests can tell something is very wrong... LADY M. finally orders everyone to leave.

*** WHOOSH***

MACBETH'S mind is getting more messed up all the time. He hasn't slept a wink since killing Duncan, and he's consumed with thoughts of murder. He worries about little FLEANCE out there somewhere alive, waiting to take over the throne. He decides to visit the Weird Sisters once more to learn his future.

*** WHOOSH***

At the WITCHES' hovel, there is a great howling of wind and wolves. Night birds screech as the WITCHES creep around a cauldron, chanting,

“Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble”

The WITCHES throw a bunch of nasty things into the pot, like a toad, eye of newt, wool of bat, tongue of dog, lizard's leg, a person's liver, the finger of a birth-strangled babe, and other delicious ingredients. Suddenly, one of the WITCHES predicts MACBETH's arrival, saying

“By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes”

There is a great sound of thunder as MACBETH arrives, and the WITCHES bring forth 3 APPARITIONS, (or visions)..

The FIRST APPARITION tells MACBETH:

“Beware MACDUFF, the Thane of Fife!”

The SECOND GHOSTLY APPARITION tells him:

“None of woman born shall harm MACBETH!”

And finally, the THIRD APPARITION appears and says,

“MACBETH shall never vanquished be until Great Birnam Wood to High Dunsinane Hill shall come against him.”

The news from the WITCHES is a relief to MACBETH, because he knows that the forest couldn't uproot to move against him. And now he needn't fear anyone who was of woman born!

The WITCHES vanish with screams of laughter, as LENNOX arrives with news:

MACDUFF has fled to England. This, coupled with the warning he'd just gotten from the Weird Sisters about MACDUFF, makes MACBETH so angry, he vows to kill MACDUFF's wife, his children, and everyone living in his household.

True to his vow, MACBETH sends MURDERERS to MACDUFF's castle, where LADY MACDUFF and her CHILDREN laugh and play...

(Enter MURDERERS. Slow-mo murder scene)

Meanwhile, MACDUFF is in England trying to convince MALCOLM (remember KING DUNCAN's son?) to raise an army against the tyrannous MACBETH...

MALCOLM agrees to invade Scotland just as ROSS rides up with the miserable news that MACDUFF's family had been slaughtered. MACDUFF falls to the ground crying...

MALCOLM tells him to

“Dispute it like a man” meaning don't cry, take revenge and you'll feel better. MACDUFF replies:

“I shall do so,
But I must also feel it as a man.”

MACDUFF then rises to his feet, swearing to take revenge on MACBETH! MALCOLM and ROSS raise their swords and agree to join him.

Back at Dunsinane, LADY MACBETH is sick with guilt, walking and talking in her sleep. Her GENTLEWOMAN and her DOCTOR hide in her room one night to observe her. She walks in with her eyes wide open, (but she is actually sleepwalking), and begins washing imagined blood from her hands and crying,

“Out! Damned spot! Out I say!”

She talks about the murders of Duncan, BANQUO, and the MACDUFF family...

The DOCTOR and GENTLEWOMAN realize that even though she may be crazy, they have definitely heard things they did not and should not know...

Meanwhile, MALCOLM'S ARMY marches toward Dunsinane Castle, using branches of trees from Birnam Wood to camouflage themselves.

Inside the castle, MACBETH has lost all sense of fear, even though he knows the odds should be against him. After all, the WITCHES had assured him no one of woman born could harm him.

A scream is heard off stage, as a SERVANT enters to report that LADY MACBETH is dead...

Responding to the news of his wife's death, MACBETH voices his hopelessness and despair in one of Shakespeare's most famous speeches, saying,

“Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.”

A SERVANT enters again to report that Birnam Wood seems to be moving toward the castle! MACBETH is alarmed, remembering that the APPARITION saying he would not be defeated until Great Birnam Wood moved.

The ARMY, led by MALCOLM, advances on the castle, discarding the branches they'd hidden behind. YOUNG SIWARD, the son of an English general is the first to break in and challenge MACBETH. They fight, and MACBETH kills him, boasting,

“Thou wast born of woman!”

Then MACDUFF breaks in to challenge MACBETH, but MACBETH does not want to fight him. He says,

“my soul is too much charged With blood of thine already”

But MACDUFF won't take no for an answer. He wants to avenge his family's murder. MACBETH warns him, saying,

“I bear a charmed life, which must not yield
To one of woman born.”

But MACDUFF surprises him with his answer, saying,

“Macduff was from his mother's womb untimely ripp'd”

(which means he was delivered by medieval C-section)!

MACBETH and MACDUFF clashed their swords against each other, and MACDUFF is victorious!

He displays MACBETH's severed head to MALCOM and the troupes waiting outside the castle as he cries out,

“Hail MALCOLM, king of Scotland!”

All the people shouted back,

“Hail MALCOLM, king of Scotland!”

Applause

Everyone takes a bow

THE END