



Goblin:Macbeth

Enrichment Guide

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Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre is proud to call Manitoba home. Royal MTC is located in Winnipeg on Treaty 1, the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Inninewak, Anishinewak, Dakota Oyate, and Denesuline, and the National Homeland of the Red River Métis. We are thankful for the benefits sharing this land has afforded us, acknowledge the responsibilities of the Treaties, and embrace the opportunity to partner with Indigenous communities in spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

The Role of the Audience

Theatre needs its audience! We are happy to have you here. Every staff person, actor, and crew member backstage plays an important part in your experience, and you also have a role in the experience of cast, crew and the people around you.

Arrive Early: Please make sure you give yourself enough time to find your seat before the performance starts. Latecomers may not be admitted to a performance. We ask groups to arrive at least 20-30 minutes before the show.

Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices: Please **turn off** your cell phone/mp3 player/gaming system/camera/smart watch. Texting, surfing, and gaming during performances is very distracting for the performers and other audience members. Using cameras and recording devices during a performance is **never** allowed.

Talking During the Performance: Even when you whisper, you can be heard by performers and people around you. Unless it is a relaxed performance, disruptive patrons will be removed from the theatre. Please wait until after the performance to share your words with others.

Food/Drinks: Food and outside drinks are not allowed in the theatre. When there is an intermission, snacks and drinks may be available for purchase. There is complimentary water in the lobby.

Dress: There is no dress code at the Royal MTC, but we respectfully ask you not to wear hats in the theatre or block the view of those behind you. Please do not wear strong scents like perfume or body spray. We thank all patrons for their cooperation.

Leaving During the Performance: If you leave the theatre, you will be readmitted at the discretion of Front of House staff. If readmitted, you may be placed in an empty seat at the back of the auditorium instead of your original seat.

Being Asked to Leave: The theatre staff has, and will exercise, the right to ask any member of the audience to leave if that person is being inappropriate or disruptive including (but not limited to): talking, using devices that produce light or sound, and deliberately interfering with an actor or the performance (tripping, throwing items on or near the stage, etc.).

Talkbacks: A short question and answer period with the actors takes place after student matinees, first Tuesday evening shows, and some public matinees. While watching the show, make a mental note of questions to ask the actors about the production or life in the theatre. Our artists deserve to be treated with respect! It's okay to have a negative opinion, but this is your chance to ask questions and understand the performance or process, not to criticize. If you have a concern, see the house manager after the show and they will make sure your feedback gets to the appropriate Royal MTC staff.

Enjoy the show: Laugh, cry, gasp – responding to the performance is part of the nature of theatre! As you get involved in the story, try to balance your reactions with respecting the people around you. The curtain call is part of the performance too – it gives you a chance to thank all the artists for their hard work with applause, and for them to thank you for your attention. We all appreciate when you stay at your seat and join in the applause!

About the Creators

Spontaneous Theatre specializes in creating daring productions that sometimes feature an audience member as the star of the show. They are an ensemble of some of Canada's top improv and theatre talent, led by Canadian Comedy Award winner Rebecca Northan. Collectively, the artists are trained in improvisation and mask by Keith Johnstone at the Loose Moose Theatre in Calgary. "Spontaneous theatre" also describes their theatre genre: combining rigorous narrative structure with the thrill of improvisation. [Find out more about their creations and the creatives at spontaneoustheatre.ca](http://spontaneoustheatre.ca).

William Shakespeare was a prolific playwright whose work covered many subjects and styles, including comedies, tragedies, histories and romances, all with his signature "expansive plots, extraordinary language and humanist themes" (Stratford Festival). Shakespeare wrote 38 (canonically accepted) works in 23 years, some of them the most popular plays of all time. He was admired in his lifetime, and 400 years later he is still the most produced playwright in the world.

Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, a small Warwickshire town, in 1564. He probably attended Grammar School, where he would have studied Latin literature. At 18, he married farmer's daughter Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children. Nothing else is known of his life until 1592.

Shakespeare was working as an actor when his earliest known play (*Henry VI* Part 1) became a hit in London. An outbreak of the plague forced theatres to close temporarily, so Shakespeare wrote poetry, but by 1594, he had returned to acting with the Lord Chamberlain's Men. He quickly became a successful dramatist. He made enough money to buy a mansion back in Stratford in 1597, and in 1599 he became a shareholder in London's newly built Globe Theatre. In 1603, Shakespeare's company was awarded a royal patent by the new King James, becoming known as the King's Men. Eventually the playwright retired to his home, living there and investing in real estate, until his death on April 23, 1616.

See the entire creative team and cast for Royal MTC's production, including their biographies, [on our website](#), where you can also download the Ovation program. [Sparknotes has a comprehensive Shakespeare biography](#) with extra contextual information, and myShakespeare compresses it into a [5-minute animated video](#).

About the Performance

The conceit of this show is that an ordinary theatre erupts into extraordinary circumstances. The Spontaneous Theatre team hope that people are surprised by the events, which includes asking MTC not to distribute a program until after the performance is over. If it works for your experience to come in fresh, please peruse the rest of this guide after the show! Teachers, we understand that you will need to know what's going on, and potentially communicate some things to your students, but we hope that the goblin-related elements in this guide can be discussed after the show rather than before.

Characters

Three goblins, Kragva, Moog, and Wug, play characters from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*:

Macbeth – Scottish captain and the Thane of Glamis. A brave and successful soldier but not a virtuous one. In love with his wife.

Lady Macbeth – his wife, an ambitious woman whose conscience eventually resurfaces. In love with her husband.

Witches – servants of the goddess Hecate, their true identities are not clear. They resemble the three Fates and can predict the future – and seem to enjoy the chaos that causes.

Banquo – a brave and noble Scottish captain and friend of Macbeth.

Fleance – Banquo's teenaged son.

King Duncan – King of Scotland who is generous and well-liked. He has two sons, Malcolm and Donalbain. (In this production, Donalbain is a dog.)

Macduff – Thane of Fife, a Scottish nobleman who never trusted Macbeth. He is married with children.

Ross – A noble, cousin to Macbeth.

Other nobles, servants, messengers, soldiers, and ghosts.

The creators invite you **not** to investigate the identities of the performers. The goblins are The Goblins. Allow the play and the text to wash over you in new ways. If you really must know who's who, please wait until after the performance to search out this information.

Content Overview

This section may contain spoilers.

Strong language, violence, innuendo; water-based haze, flashing lights. For specifics, please [visit our recommendations page](#).

Synopsis

Synopsis of *Macbeth* adapted from Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. Of course, the goblins put their own spin on this retelling – in the spirit of keeping their work a surprise, we haven't included those details. If you need to know about any offstage violence or other staging to prepare yourself, please contact kbrodamilian@royalmtc.ca

Act I

On a bleak Scottish moorland, Macbeth and Banquo, two of King Duncan's generals, discover three “weird sisters” (witches). The witches prophesy that Macbeth will be promoted twice: to Thane of Cawdor (a rank of the aristocracy bestowed by grateful kings) and King of Scotland. Banquo's descendants will be kings, but Banquo isn't promised any kingdom himself. The generals want to hear more, but the women disappear.

Soon afterwards, King Duncan names Macbeth Thane of Cawdor as a reward for his success in the recent battles, which seems to support the prophecy. The King then decides to visit the Macbeth castle that evening. Lady Macbeth receives news from her husband about the prophecy and his new title. She vows to help him become king by whatever means are necessary, giving a famous speech where she calls on spirits to take away her femininity (her “natural” compassion

and nurturing) and instead fill her with cruelty, block guilt and regret, and help her to support murder.

Act II

Macbeth returns to his castle, followed almost immediately by King Duncan. The Macbeths plot together to kill Duncan and wait until everyone is asleep. Lady Macbeth gives the guards drugged wine so Macbeth can enter and kill the King. He regrets this almost immediately, but his wife reassures him. She leaves the bloody daggers by the dead king just before Macduff, a nobleman, arrives. When Macduff discovers the murder, Macbeth kills the drunken guards, as though he blames them for failing. Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain run away, afraid for their own lives; but they are accused of the murder.

Act III

Macbeth becomes King of Scotland but cannot settle; he feels insecure and unsafe. He remembers the prophecy that Banquo's descendants will inherit the throne, so arranges for Banquo and his son Fleance to be killed. In the darkness, Banquo is murdered, but his son escapes. At his state banquet that night, Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo and loses his grip on reality, which worries the courtiers. Lady Macbeth dismisses the court and unsuccessfully tries to calm her husband.

Act IV

Macbeth looks for the witches for reassurance. They say that he will be safe until a Birnam Wood, a local forest, marches into battle against him. He also need not fear anyone born of woman. However, they still prophesy that the Scottish succession will come from Banquo's son. Meanwhile, another nobleman, Macduff had gone to look for Malcolm (one of Duncan's sons who fled) in England. Malcolm is young and unsure of himself, but Macduff persuades him to lead an army against Macbeth. Back in Scotland, Macbeth embarks on a reign of terror, slaughtering many, including Macduff's wife and children.

Act V

Malcolm's army uses branches Birnam Wood camouflage for their assault on Macbeth's stronghold – just as the witches predicted, the forest is marching against him. Meanwhile, an overwrought and conscience-ridden Lady Macbeth walks in her sleep and tells her secrets. She dies by suicide. As the final battle begins, Macbeth hears of Lady Macbeth's death and mourns.

In the midst of a losing battle, Macduff challenges Macbeth. Macbeth learns Macduff is the child of a caesarean birth – he was surgically removed from his mother, not “born” in the traditional sense. Macbeth realises he is doomed, and submits to his enemy. Macduff triumphs and brings the head of the traitor Macbeth to Malcolm. Malcolm declares peace and goes to Scone to be crowned king.

Related Resource Links: A [Sparknotes video summary](#) tells the plot of Macbeth as well as analyses some key moments (9:20). For a more in-depth plot exploration, see these [three videos narrating the plot of Macbeth](#) along with key moments acted out is available from Bell Shakespeare (about 15-20 minutes each).

Context and Related Resources

About *Macbeth*

Sparknotes calls *The Tragedy of Macbeth* “one of [Shakespeare’s] darkest and most psychologically intense plays” – it has the highest named body count of any Shakespeare play except *Titus Andronicus*, and a strong supernatural aspect. *Macbeth*’s themes include cruelty, tyranny, ambition, power, and fate versus free will. It is believed to have been written around 1606. In 1603, there was a new monarch on England’s throne: James I (also James VI of Scotland). Anything Scottish was in vogue, and Shakespeare looked at a history of Scotland by Raphael Holinshed for the basis of his next play. James was also widely considered to be paranoid, obsessively concerned that he would be assassinated; he was the closest relative to the recently deceased queen Elizabeth I, but she hadn’t formally named him her heir – and had executed his mother in the past – so he was insecure in his kingship of England. As a result, he was very harsh with anyone suspected of treason.

This script also plays into James’ interest in the supernatural. He was very involved in a series of witch trials in 1590, having women executed for witchcraft – supposedly members of a coven that was trying to attack him. The king published a book called *Daemonologie* in 1597 which covered witchcraft, necromancy, demons, vampires, werewolves and more, which also informed the *Macbeth* script. By spotlighting this content, Shakespeare was telling the king that he was on the same side, which is a smart thing to do when you’re writing a play for the man who is a patron of your theatre company.

The interests of the king naturally became popular among the people, so *Macbeth* appealed in general. However, it also wrestles with huge questions. The Folger Shakespeare says it asks:

“Why do people do evil knowing that it is evil? Does Macbeth represent someone who murders because fate tempts him? because his wife pushes him into it? because he is overly ambitious? Having killed Duncan, why does Macbeth fall apart, unable to sleep, seeing ghosts, putting spies in everyone’s home, killing his friends and innocent women and children? Why does the success of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth—prophesied by the witches, promising the couple power and riches and ‘peace to all their nights and days to come’—turn so quickly to ashes, destroying the Macbeths’ relationship, their world, and, finally, both of them?”

As the Utah Shakespeare Festival notes, “the reasons why [*Macbeth*] was written aren’t nearly as important as the words themselves.” Themes of corruption, good over evil, greed, and gender are just as important and relevant today as they were hundreds of years ago.

Related Resource Links: Bell Shakespeare provides more [historical background on the play in this article](#) as well as a [video exploring the play’s themes](#). MyShakespeare offers a [video on witchcraft in Shakespeare’s time](#) (3 minutes) and CrashCourse Shakespeare has videos featuring author John Green exploring the themes: a [video on Free Will, Witches, and Murders](#) and a [video on Gender, Guilt, and Faith](#) (12 minutes).

There was indeed a Scottish king called Macbeth; [read about the real Macbeth on History Today](#), separate fact from fiction with an [article by the British Library](#), check [dates and sources with the Royal Shakespeare Company](#) or get a quick overview with a [video from MyShakespeare](#) (4:44). For a more academic examination, see this [essay on the modern perspective from Folger Shakespeare](#) and [Roberta Kwan’s discussion of Shakespeare’s relevance](#).

The Curse of Macbeth

According to superstition, if you say the name “Macbeth” in a theatre outside of when it is called for in the script, there could be disaster. This is why you’ll often hear characters referred to as “Mr M” or “Lady M,” and the title of the play said as “The Scottish Play” or “Mackers.” The legend goes that Shakespeare used real incantations and spells in his script, so the play was cursed by a coven of witches.

MACBETH: Act 1, Scene 1



Apparently, this curse appeared with the very first performance, in 1606: the actor playing Lady Macbeth suddenly died, causing Shakespeare to have to play the part, and real daggers were used instead of prop ones, actually killing the actor playing the king. There was a riot caused by rival actors in 1849; Laurence Olivier was almost crushed by falling stage weights in 1937; four people on John Gielgud’s production died in 1942; Lady M fell off the stage in the sleepwalking scene in 1948 – disasters abound! A Stratford Festival production in the 1980s even started with an exorcism, just to be safe.

Another explanation of the “curse” is more pragmatic: it can reflect the theatre being in financial trouble. If a theatre suddenly changed its season to include *Macbeth* it was probably a sign that more money was needed and they were going to do this popular show to fill the audience. But even a theatre that seemed to be doing all right had to be careful – with all the locations and battles, *Macbeth* could be an expensive show, and if a theatre *didn’t* get the audience they were hoping for, the high production costs could bankrupt it.

Luckily, even if you do say the name outside of rehearsal, there is a way to fix it through traditional cleansing rituals. These vary, but almost always involve leaving the room or the building and turning three times. Then the person might spit over their shoulder, swear, or recite a different Shakespeare line. Generally the person has to be invited back in or have their knock on the door answered to complete the ritual.

Silly? Maybe. But a lot of theatre people take this seriously. We ask that you respect this tradition when you come to MTC. We don’t need to tempt fate – especially with these wild goblins around!

Mask, Clown, and Bouffon

The Spontaneous Theatre team incorporate several theatre styles into their works. Mask work is a theatrical practice that is centuries old, crossing over between nations and eras. Masks may be worn literally or symbolically. This method is used to enhance character and convey heightened emotions, as they allow actors to explore in a more physical way.

Keith Johnstone, who trained the Spontaneous Theatre artists who bring *Goblin:Macbeth* to the stage, is a pioneer in mask work. Johnstone wrote that “the mask is a tool that leads the performer to a state of vulnerability and heightened awareness, allowing the body to express what the face cannot,” and used his techniques to spark unplanned, truthful characters that come from physicality rather than an intellectual response. The Goblins are not just wearing masks, they are “in mask” – tuned in to what the mask/character is experiencing with the audience.

Similarly, you may hear performers referring to being “in clown.” Jan Henderson, a specialist in creativity, describes “any time that we are curious, playful, or creative, we are in clown mode. When we are in a state of wonder or awe, surprise or amazement, we are in clown... Whenever we have strong emotions, we are in clown.” As the Goblins explore and delight in the words of Shakespeare, questioning the world we’re in, they are showing us the principles of clown. Bouffon takes this state of play somewhere even more extreme and can be thought of as a darker, intelligent “cousin of the clown.” Bouffon incorporates the grotesque – shapes that are surreal and deformed – and brings elements of satire, mockery, and wildness to create a sense of awareness. Are the goblins simply telling a story, or are they also commenting on it, helping us connect to the themes in our current time and place?

Related Resource Link: Go behind the scenes with the company that created the goblin masks in a [video from Composite Effects](#) (2 minutes). For more makeup of this type, find the TV show “Face Off” on several streaming services.

Lore of Goblins

Matt King is the author of the first peer-reviewed, book-length history of goblins. This section contains information from [a Reddit thread of his research](#).

King states that the way that people have encountered and depicted goblins across history, as well as the attitudes held towards them, is on a spectrum.

“Trying to find a single unifying thread to connect all of them is inevitably a fool’s errand. In searching for the most applicable through line, however, the characterization of the goblin as an object of atypical appearance and behavior is perhaps the most fitting (even if it is admittedly broad).

“Goblins often ... lived in darkness on the peripheries of human settlement and were capable of supernatural acts ranging from merry pranks to evil deeds. The goblin’s reputation for unnatural appearance and behaviors has resulted in the term being used to broadly characterize the irregular, and the difficulty that stems from slotting such irregularities into one’s understanding of the world means that goblins have thrived on the

margins: somewhere between human and inhuman, existing in dark spaces on the peripheries of the known world, and eerily resembling natural phenomena. To be a goblin is to be outside the realm of normal... It is only in the twenty-first century that these abnormalities have been widely reframed as positive attributes”

The earliest known use of the word "goblin" comes from Normandy in the 12th century, but the term then migrated into Britain. As the British Empire expanded, so did use of this word. In the world of folklore, goblins were a broad category of creature, used interchangeably with fairies. 19th century theatre and literature was crucial in differentiating goblins from other creatures. In the Victorian era, as fairy tales and their derivations became more popular, “these tropes were supercharged,” with fairies being associated with the feminine, good, and light while goblins became masculine, evil, and dark.

Shakespeare himself included goblins in his writing, with some writers crediting him for the idea of the “hobgoblin” as merry and mischievous with Puck from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Shakespeare would have borrowed from folklore in this case, but King says “this ‘folkloresque’ interpretation of this creature in turn influenced later folklore. This is a hazy dialectic at best, but a fascinating one!”

The “explosion” of fantasy media at the turn of the last century has heavily influenced our mental interpretations of goblins. You also see a huge upturn in use of the term beginning in the 2020s, with several potential reasons. King says “we should not underestimate how popular [Dungeons and Dragons] has become, especially since 2020” when games played in small groups and at home gained popularity during Covid-era lockdowns. At this point, the trope of the brutish, conniving creature of the traditional fantasy goblin began to get stale. Also thriving during lockdown was “cottagecore,” a curated aesthetic of romanticized, historical, rural life. Soon, whether as a natural offshoot or “other side of the coin” response, came the more feral “goblincore,” based on appreciation of nature that is not typically thought of as beautiful, like frogs, moss, mushrooms, and mud. “Goblin mode” was chosen as the 2022 Oxford word of the year, decided by public vote. The Oxford Languages president said that the term “resonates with all of us who are feeling a little overwhelmed at this point...it’s a relief to acknowledge that we’re not always the idealised, curated selves that we’re encouraged to present on our Instagram and TikTok feeds.” As King puts it, “Goblins remain atypical and ugly—but so is everyone.”

Related Resource Links: For more about goblins, try this [18-minute video](#) or dive into the [myth and folklore wiki](#).

Read more about [goblincore in general from Medium](#) or the [goblincore fashion trend from The Guardian](#), or explore “goblin mode” in this [interview with Merrill Kaplan](#).

Glossary and Mentions

Accurse: to curse, to threaten with destruction, evil, misery, or divine punishment.

Acheron: (Greek mythology) a river in Hades. The souls of the dead were carried across it by Charon.

Alarum: Alarm; a signal to warn, or call to arms.

Apparition: a ghostly figure.

Beguile: to hoodwink or deceive, usually by being pleasant – Lady M says her husband should trick the king and court by being welcoming and smiling to hide his true intentions.

Cauldron: a very large pot that is used for boiling.

Charnel house: a building or chamber to put corpses or bones.

Estate: all the money, property, and debts owned by a person, especially at death.

Equivocator: someone who gives an unclear answer, usually to deceive.

Glamis: a village in Eastern Scotland that Macbeth ruled over. Macbeth is told by the Witches that he will hold three titles: Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor, and King. A **thane** is a landowning nobleman in a feudal system, in this case within the system of King Duncan.

Harbinger: a person or thing that announces something's approach. Macbeth is saying he'll be the messenger of Duncan's arrival.

Heath: open land, where grass and other small plants grow, but where there are few trees or bushes.

Hecate: (Greek mythology) Greek goddess associated especially with the underworld, night, and witchcraft.

Hell-kite: Macduff calls Macbeth this, a cruel bird of prey, after he kills Macduff's family ("all my pretty chickens").

Hie: to move fast.

Hurlyburly: uproar or commotion; the witches are referring to a violent conflict or battle.

"I" Statements: An "I-statement" is a way of expressing your feelings and experiences that comes from your own experience. By using this, the person saying it takes responsibility and avoids blame. It does not focus on your perspective of what the other person has done or failed to do.

Inverness: a city in the Scottish Highlands.

Missives: an official, formal, or long letter.

Parley: to speak with an opposing side or enemy to try to make a deal.

Scone: A village in central Scotland that was the traditional place for Scottish kings to be crowned.

Sheathe: to enclose with a protective covering.

Sirrah: a way to address a man that shows no respect, as usually you say it to a child.

Slumbury: sleepy or drowsy.

Thane: a feudal lord or baron.

Tolkien: J. R. R. Tolkien was an English writer and student of language. He wrote the high fantasy works *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* which feature goblins.

Treasonous: involving betrayal, especially planning to overthrow the government.

Unsex: remove the qualities typical of one's sex. In this case, Lady M asks spirits to take away her femininity (her "natural" compassion and nurturing) and instead fill her with cruelty, block guilt and regret, and help her to support murder. This relates to why many scholars study the understanding of gender in Macbeth.

Valour's minion: a sergeant describes Macbeth this way in Act 1 Scene 1. He means that Macbeth is the companion of bravery; Macbeth has shown courage in the first battle. Back in ancient Greek times, tragedies followed rules by the philosopher Aristotle. In this formula, a tragic hero must be brave and worthy before being overwhelmed with ambition. Shakespeare is setting up Macbeth for this same formula, having his bravery

described as so high it is almost mythical at the beginning of the play.

Wassail: to make a toast. Lady M says "will I, with wine and wassail, so convince that memory... shall be a fume" meaning that she will use give the servants wine and call for so many toasts that they will drink enough to make their memory foggy, and not remember who kills King Duncan.

Weird Sisters: the three witches are referred to in this way, but it's not calling them strange; in Anglo-Saxon myth, 'wyrd' meant 'fate' or 'destiny'. The weird sisters are fortune tellers.

"Yes, and...": a collaborative technique of acceptance, used in improvisation (acting without a script). It acknowledges what someone is saying and builds on it, whether or not you agree with their idea.

Explore More: Recommended Library Reading List

Explore More Goblin Content

Goblin Mode: How to Get Cozy, Embrace Imperfection and Thrive in the Muck by McKayla Coyle
Embrace your inner goblin with this illustrated guide to the goblin lifestyle. Cherish your imperfections and idiosyncrasies the goblin way as you take inspiration from frogs, fungi, moss, rocks, and dirt to live better.

645 COYLE 2023

Nine Goblins: A Tale of Low Fantasy and High Mischief by T. Kingfisher

Join a troop of goblins trapped behind enemy lines in this humorous and fast-paced adventure. After an unfortunate encounter with an angry wizard, goblin sergeant Nessilka must lead her fellow goblins safely back home. Between them and their goal lies a forest thick with elves, trolls, monsters, and even that most terrifying creature - a human being.

FICTION SCI KINGFISHER

Explore More Shakespeare Themes

Shakespeare: The Man Who Pays the Rent by Judi Dench

Take in Judi Dench's love letter to all things Shakespeare recounts all the Shakespeare roles she has played during her seven-decade career, sharing the behind-the-scenes stories behind each. A rollicking and intimate tour through Shakespeare's plays and the stories of those who bring them to life.

792.028092 DENCH 2024

Fools and Mortals by Bernard Cornwell

Follow the trials and tribulations of Richard Shakespeare, actor and brother of the Bard, as he struggles to make his way in the company dominated by his estranged older brother, William. The booming popularity of theatre propels the sibling's rivalry in this gripping historical thriller.

FICTION CORNWELL

Explore More Reinterpretations of Shakespeare's Classics

Hag-Seed: William Shakespeare's The Tempest Retold by Margaret Atwood

Experience this fresh imagining of *The Tempest* in this story of revenge and regret. Felix, an artistic director haunted by the memories of his lost daughter Miranda, attempts to snare those who betrayed him long ago using a theatre course at a prison he is leading where the inmates are staging a production of, of course, *The Tempest*.

FICTION ATWOOD

Vinegar Girl: William Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew Retold by Anne Tyler

Delight in this effervescent remix of the bard's classic comedy. Kate Battista is stuck managing the house on behalf of her brilliant scientist father and ungrateful younger sister, Bunny. Dr. Battista is on the verge of a major breakthrough, but only if he can prevent his young lab assistant, Pyotr, from being deported before they can complete their work. The two men turn their Kate as the solution to their problems in this sweet Shakespearian romcom.

FICTION TYLER

The Gap of Time: William Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale Retold by Jeanette Winterson

Be swept away in this epic story of tragedy, regret, and revenge. Owing to a tragic misunderstanding fueled by jealousy, the newborn child of Leo, a tyrannical financier, and MiMi, a famous singer, is mistakenly given away at a hospital as an unwanted baby. Many years later the child, Perdita, traces her origins and returns to the place of her birth.

FICTION WINTERSON



There are 1.4 million books, movies, audiobooks, eBooks and more at the Winnipeg Public Library, and all you need to borrow them is your library card. There are 20 locations throughout the city and there's an online catalogue for requesting items for pick-up at your library of convenience. An e-Library has thousands of eBooks, eAudiobooks and more! All free with your card.

Visit us at Winnipeg.ca/library

Discussion and writing prompts

Pre-Show

What do you know about the story of *Macbeth* already? Have you seen a production of it?
How do you feel about the works of Shakespeare? Have you read or seen any performed before?
Have you ever performed or played in a mask? How did that make you feel or affect you?
Do you think our future is determined by destiny or by our choices?

Post-Show

Did seeing this production make you want to learn any more about the world of Shakespeare?
What?
If you were told by a magical source that you would come into great power, would you wait to see if it would come true on its own or try to make it happen? How far would you go?
Did the Goblins' storytelling affect how you understood *Macbeth*? How?
Rebecca Northan, the director, has said "we cannot bear tragedy without the release of laughter."
How do you feel about the mix of this tragic play in a comedic "container"?
At the end of the show, a goblin asks what the point of doing theatre was. They then realize the audience's hearts beat in unison, and it is "powerful magic." What do you think is this magic? What would you say is the point of doing theatre?

Classroom Activities

Your future in your own hands Watch the [TED Talk by social psychologist Mesmin Destin](#) about how everyday interactions and words can influence identity and the future. How did words influence the journey of the Macbeths?

To extend, provide students with a copy of Act II, sc. 1 or project it at the front of the class. Ask them to look at the speech for 30 seconds and write down the words that jump out at them. Have students share these words in small groups or as a class. Discuss further how these words might have pushed Macbeth a certain way.

Inside the Mind of a Macbeth – adapted from the Stratford Festival

Divide the class into two or three groups, and assign each group a soliloquy – for example, Lady Macbeth I.5 "the raven himself is hoarse," Macbeth II.1 "is this a dagger which I see before me" and/or Macbeth III.2 "We have scorched the snake not killed it" (removing Lady M's interjections.) Have each group read their speech as a chorus, exploring the range of their voices and different tones and rhythms. Have each student decide on their favourite line of the speech.

Pick one or a few students in each group to play the main character. This student (or students; if more than one, have them divide the speech into equal parts) will read the whole soliloquy while the others move around them in a circle, chanting the favourite lines they have chosen in different rhythms, tones and pitches. Have the chorus establish itself before the central character begins speaking. When the soliloquy is over, the chorus voices should fade out.

As a class, discuss the feeling of being inside the circle. Repeat the exercise with different students as the main characters, and then discuss whether the experience was different for the group. Have a final discussion about the idea of a person's thoughts driving them to action or to madness.

Sculpture Gallery – adapted from the Stratford Festival

Put some quotes from the play onto index cards or slips of paper (examples below.) Divide the class into groups of three. One group member will be the “artist,” while the others are the “clay.” Instruct the “artists” to use the “clay” to create a sculpture that captures the essence of the given line. (Clay can be gently transformed into both inanimate objects or people, and can be manipulated to create facial expression, suggest bold movement or create different levels.) After about five minutes, the artists may be invited to freely walk through the sculpture gallery and appreciate the other art. Repeat so that all group members have turns to be the artist. Here are some example quotes:

If chance will have me King, why, chance may crown me. (Act I, sc. 3, 143)

Make thick my blood, stop up the access and passage to remorse. (Act I, sc. 5, 43-44)

Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under't. (Act I, sc. 5, 65-66)

This even-handed justice commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice to our own lips. (Act I, sc. 7, 10-12)

I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only vaulting ambition. (Act I, sc. 7, 25-27) But screw your courage to the sticking place, and we'll not fail. (Act I, sc. 7, 61-62)

False face must hide what false heart doth know. (Act I, sc. 7, 83)

Is this a dagger I see before me, the handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee. (Act II, sc. 1, 33-35)

Methought I heard a voice cry “Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep.” (Act II, sc. 2, 35-36)

Go get some water, and wash this filthy witness from your hand. (Act II, sc. 2, 46-47)

Here's a knocking indeed! If a man were porter of hell-gate, he should have old turning the key. (Act II, sc. 3, 1-2)

O horror! Horror! Horror! Tongue nor heart cannot conceive, nor name thee! (Act II, sc. 3, 64-65)

Here lay Duncan, his silver skin lac'd with his golden blood. (Act II, sc. 3, 112-113)

Talk for Two – adapted from the Stratford Festival

This improvisational activity will help students think about the themes of the story. With a partner, students brainstorm different scenarios to fit the following situations. They then carry out a conversation. If comfortable, they can share their conversations with the rest of the class. Discuss the different choices made by pairs working with the same scenario.

1. Two friends discuss their visit to a fortune teller at the local fair and discover that they have both been told they will get a date with the same person.
2. A person and their spouse discuss how one will have to betray a co-worker to get a desired promotion.
3. Two friends arrive home together after a party at another friend's house. One discovers their wallet is missing from her purse from when it was left unattended in a hallway at the party. Who could have taken it?
4. Two friends are talking about a strange happening. One friend's horoscope had predicted financial success today, and now they have won money on the lottery. Was this fate or merely coincidence?
5. Two friends are discussing a recent crime at the school. One friend suspects the other and tries to discover if their suspicions are accurate.

Studying to be “in mask” is often an extensive and intensive process. However, here are some small activities to introduce the concept.

What mask do you wear?

In everyday life, we may wear a mask to protect us from the outside world; different ones for different occasions. From behind a mask, who we really are is hidden. The mask can hide how we really feel. Ask students to describe a situation where one might have to wear a mask. If they are willing, they can share how they have felt when masking.

Have students walk around the room and interact without talking while “wearing a mask.” They should focus on what both their face and body are doing in response. For example:

1. Your cool mask: the one you wear to give the appearance that you are okay and life is wonderful – even if it isn’t.
2. You are feeling a little afraid or unsure about yourself or the surroundings but you don’t want to show it. This is your “alone in a crowd of strangers” mask.

Have students reflect either in discussion or in writing:

What did you notice about the different masks people were putting on?

Did some of them look the same for each situation? If so, what changed?

Did your body shape or movement change for each mask?

Building character through body

Changing one’s centre of gravity, or “where your energy comes from” can make you feel differently as well as portray a different character. This can be especially important in mask work if you don’t have as much control over your expression.

Have the students stand in their own space in the room. Have them imagine sending a ball of energy up into their forehead – or, if it resonates more, having a string attached there. They will move around the room being led by that ball of energy (or as though someone is pulling on the string.) As they walk, have them reflect on how they feel, and what sort of character might be led by their forehead. With that consciousness, become that sort of character.

Pause and share some thoughts.

Repeat the exercise being led by the chin, sternum, stomach, knee, index finger... whatever you like. In the end, have them shake out to redistribute the energy and/or remove their string and toss it away.

Crossing the Circle

In *Goblin:Macbeth*, the goblins have taken over a theatre with no set and few other supporting elements to tell their story, so again their bodies are a big clue to where we are from scene to scene. Have students sit on chairs in a large circle, and number them off 1-4. On your go, the number 1s will stand up and cross the circle to a new chair, using their bodies to give an idea of location or circumstance. Once they are all seated again, repeat with 2s in a new scenario (etcetera). Some examples are:

- Crossing a tightrope
- On the open moor with wind blowing
- Walking on the moon
- Wading through mud
- Going through a forest
- Sneaking across creaky floorboards

Train like a Goblin

Keith Johnstone was a highly influential theatre artist, recognized internationally as an authority in the field of stage performance. His ideas have been applied in management, writing, film-making, teaching, psychology and therapy of various kinds, and he created formats such as Theatresports, Gorilla Theatre, and Maestro Theatre. His principles are used by Spontaneous Theatre. [Find out more from Keith's biographer here](#). The following is based on his work:

Exploring Status

In a show where 3 goblins play an entire Shakespearean cast, one of the things that helps us recognize characters is how they relate to each other – the status that they hold in the space. Have students brainstorm what kinds of actions show high or low status and/or share these lists:

High status is signified by:

- Moving smoothly
- Speaking slowly and using pauses
- Keeping hands away from the face
- Spreading our body out to take up more space
- Showing teeth when smiling
- Keeping the head still while speaking
- Making sustained and direct eye contact
- Using verbal fillers only at the end of sentences to give impression we are pausing to think of something very important to say.

Lower status is signified by:

- Moving in a jerky or nervous manner
- Speaking fast and not using pauses
- Excessive facial expressions/head movements
- Reducing the space our body takes up by holding arms against body, crouching shoulders, pointing toes inwards etc.
- Putting hands near face, covering our mouth, touching hair.
- Not showing teeth when smiling.
- Beginning sentences or breaking up sentences with verbal fillers like “er”, “um” “like”
- Glancing or avoiding eye contact

Experiment with this by playing out a very simple scene – 2 volunteers could go in front of the class, or you could split into smaller groups. It helps to have some sort of audience. Start with as neutral a portrayal as possible. Someone (1) sits on a chair. The other (2) enters.

2: *Hello.*

1: *Hello.*

2: *Been waiting long?*

1: *Yes, I have been waiting for 2 hours.*

Repeat the scene several times to observe how body language, eye contact, and how the dialogue is spoken can modify our impression of which person is in power or has “status” over the other person.

Shawn Kinley is an improviser whose work is informed by Johnstone's teachings. Here are some exercises that are “cousins” to that work, from improvisationschool.com

[Stage Directions](#) (Johnstone exercise; pushing a story forward)

[The King Game](#) (status, comedy)

[There's More!](#) (accepting offers)

[What Comes Next and And Now!](#) (inspiring self and partners)

[I'm Not Leaving!](#) (creating tension, resilience)

Curriculum Connections

English Language Arts – The following suggested connections are from the 2026-released Manitoba Framework of Learning. These are from the Grade 10 Curriculum, but similar outcomes from other senior years grades are comparable and similarly applicable. This list is not exhaustive.

FROM STRAND A: Building Literacy

- **General Learning Outcome: Oral Language Communication.** Learners engage in oral language communication as a recursive process of listening, speaking, and interacting to construct meaning, exchange ideas and perspectives, and expand their understanding of themselves, others, and the world.
 - **Listen and Comprehend ELA.10.A1.2** Examine how speakers use language choices, voice, organization, rhetorical strategies, and verbal/non-verbal communication to influence audience understanding and response.
 - **Speak and Interact ELA.10.A1.4** Exchange and develop ideas through dialogue (partners, group); make relevant connections among the contributions and viewpoints of others to build shared thinking; respond thoughtfully and respectfully to deepen understanding and extend collaborative thinking.
- **General Learning Outcome: Language as the Foundation for Reading and Writing** Learners build and apply foundational knowledge and skills, including letter knowledge, sound awareness, word structures, vocabulary knowledge, and language conventions, to engage as active readers, writers, and communicators.
 - **Vocabulary Knowledge ELA.10.A2.6** Apply an expanding vocabulary and knowledge of word relationships, meanings, and nuances to understand texts; select and refine vocabulary to communicate ideas clearly, precisely, and effectively in different contexts.
 - **Language Conventions ELA.10.A2.7** Analyze how language conventions (e.g., syntax, sentence structure, grammar, usage, mechanics) contribute to meaning, clarity, and coherence in texts; apply language conventions purposefully to communicate ideas clearly and effectively.

FROM STRAND B: Comprehend and respond

- **General Learning Outcome: Think Critically about Texts** Learners analyze ideas, information, viewpoints, and perspectives within and across texts to build understanding. Learners use evidence from texts to develop, support, and evaluate interpretations.
 - **Analyze Ideas and Information ELA.10.B3.1** Examine ideas, themes, facts, opinions, and perspectives within and across texts; explain how evidence supports interpretations and deepens understanding of people, experiences, and issues.
- **General Learning Outcome: Consolidate Understanding** Learners reflect on, extend, and integrate new learning to develop deeper understandings. They respond to texts by sharing interpretations, perspectives, and insights that expand, challenge, and/or refine their thinking.

- Reflect on New Learning **ELA.10.B4.1** Explain and connect new ideas and understandings gained from texts; reflect on how new learning extends or expands existing knowledge, experiences, and perspectives.
- Response to Text: Self and Others **ELA.10.B4.2** Examine and share responses to texts by integrating personal, cultural, and textual connections; explain how ideas, aesthetic features, and perspectives contribute to insight, appreciation, and emotional response. **ELA.10.B4.3** Compare and explain personal response with those of others and of broader community contexts; examine how assumptions, experiences, and perspectives can shape interpretations and influence understanding.

Certain activities such as “Future in your hands” fall under Strand C: Compose and Create.

Drama

Making - The learner develops language and practices for making drama/theatre.

DR-M1 - The learner develops competencies for using the tools and techniques of body, mind, and voice in a variety of contexts.

DR-M3 - The learner develops competencies for using a range of dramatic forms and styles.

Creating - The learner generates, develops, and communicates ideas for creating drama/theatre.

CR-2 - The learner experiments with, develops, and uses ideas for creating drama/theatre.

CR-3 - The learner revises, refines, and shares drama/ theatre ideas and creative work.

Connecting - The learner develops understandings about the significance of the dramatic arts by making connections to various times, places, social groups and cultures.

DR-C1 - The learner develops understandings people and practices in the dramatic arts.

DR-C2 - The learner develops understandings about the influence and impact of the dramatic arts.

Responding -The learner uses critical reflection to inform learning and to develop agency and identity

DR-R1 - The learner generates initial reactions to drama/theatre experiences.

DR-R2 - The learner critically observes and describes drama/theatre experiences

DR-R3 - the learner analyzes and interprets drama/theatre experiences.

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