Review and Anticipate  In Act IV, Macbeth learns from the witches that he must “Beware Macduff!” but that he need not fear any man “of woman born.” He also learns that he will never be vanquished until the forest itself march against him. However, he sees a vision indicating that Banquo will indeed father a long line of kings. Armed with his new knowledge, Macbeth orders the murder of Macduff’s wife and son. Macduff himself is in England to join forces with Malcolm and is overcome when he hears the news. Nevertheless, he and Malcolm will lead an army against Macbeth.

Act V will determine the outcome as Macbeth, grown reckless in evil, battles against Malcolm and his men.

About the Selection
This act shows with great poignancy the final effects of Macbeth’s actions on himself, his wife, and the kingdom of Scotland. As the act begins, Macbeth has fortified himself behind the stone walls of Dunsinane, armed with the prophecy of the apparitions. Lady Macbeth has suffered a mental and emotional breakdown. As the army of angry Scots who are determined to overthrow Macbeth approaches, Lady Macbeth kills herself. What’s left of Macbeth’s former glory will not allow him to die without a fight.

The final speech by Macbeth is meant to lift the mood of the audience. However, this play’s main message is a dark one: Even the noblest and most heroic humans can fall into the depths of depravity and ruin.

Vocabulary Builder
The Latin Word Root -turb-
• Call students’ attention to the word perturbation and its definition. Tell students that the Latin word root -turb- means “to disturb.”
• Write on the board the following words that include this root: disturbing, disturbance, turbulence, turbulent, turbid, imperturbable.
• Explain that this root is related to the Latin words turba, which means turmoil, turbare, which means to confuse, and turbinum, which is a whirling object. It is this last Latin word from which we get turbine and turbo.
• Have students look up the meaning of these words in a dictionary.

Critical Viewing
Who will slay Macbeth with a sword like this one?
[Predict]
1. field battlefield.
2. closet chest.

Vocabulary Builder
perturbation (per′ tar bā′ shən) n. disturbance
3. effects of watching deeds of one awake.
4. meet suitable.
5. guise custom.
6. close hidden.

Why has the gentlewoman summoned the doctor?

Reading Check
Answer: The gentlewoman has summoned the doctor because she has seen Lady Macbeth sleepwalking and she wants another witness.
Humanities
Lady Macbeth Sleepwalking, by Henry Fuseli

Fuseli was considered one of the early Romantics. Like other Romantics, he had an interest in dreams, nightmares, and waking visions. In fact, the first painting to make him famous was titled The Nightmare. His interest in the deeply psychological made him a natural for illustrating Macbeth. Fuseli loved Shakespeare, and illustrated many of his works. Fuseli’s pictorial fantasies later influenced the work of William Blake.

This painting captures the nightmarish quality of Lady Macbeth’s sleepwalking scene. Painted in 1784, this oil paint on canvas work now hangs in the Louvre in Paris.

Use these questions for discussion:

1. How well does this painting capture the feel of the sleepwalking scene? How does your own mental image of the scene compare with the one in the painting?
   **Possible responses:** Students may say that the painting captures the agitation suffered by Lady Macbeth. Students may say that this painting differs from their own mental image, because Lady Macbeth seems stronger and more vibrant than the character they pictured.

2. In what ways do the colors used in the painting capture the mood of the sleepwalking scene?
   **Answer:** The yellow color of Lady Macbeth’s gown and her vivid red hair make her the focal point of the painting. The shadowy dark colors used in the background emphasize that this is a nightmarish scene.

Critical Viewing

Possible responses: Details of the scene which students might identify could include the presence of the female servant (gentlewoman); the presence of the doctor, who appears to be prepared to take notes; Lady Macbeth holding a candle (taper), her eyes are open, and she looks as if she is suffering “slumb’ry agitation.”

Shakespeare’s Universal Appeal

All the world is truly Shakespeare’s stage. His plays have been performed continually since they first appeared. Though the plays seem to be about specific places and times, they are actually about universal themes that speak across time and borders. Ambition, honor, love, death, deceit, humor, guilt, pain, joy—Shakespeare’s themes—are simply the human condition distilled into powerful theater.

In addition, specific ideas or elements may find favor in different places or situations. For example, the Japanese are particularly fond of Shakespeare’s wise fools, and the plays in which tyrants are killed have been popular among those who feel downtrodden.

Because Shakespeare is also about a good story, directors often give his work new looks and new settings, to share their own vision or to reach new audiences. In recent years, movies have been made of Hamlet, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, Romeo and Juliet, and Henry V.
After students have read the sleep-walking scene, ask them why it is ironic that Lady Macbeth is so concerned about washing her hands. **Answer**: She was so matter-of-fact about Macbeth's washing his hands after the murder.

**Ask** students to think of a speech of Macbeth's about sleep and one about hand washing in Act II, Scene ii that are echoed in this scene. **Answer**: Act II, Scene ii, lines 34–41, “Macbeth does murder sleep,” and lines 57–61, “Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood/Clean from my hand?”

Point out that Lady Macbeth switches back and forth from past to present, as she “washes” her hands and then relives the night of Duncan’s murder and ensuing events. (Explain that the Thane of Fife, line 43, is Macduff, so Lady Macbeth knows of his wife’s murder.)

Discuss in class what mental state has brought on this sleepwalking. **Possible response**: Students may feel that it is guilt, fear, or both. They may observe that she is not as tough and ruthless as she thought she was. Her conscience is torturing her.

**Literary Analysis**

**Shakespearean Tragedy**

Does the sleepwalking scene suggest that Lady Macbeth is a tragic heroine? **Explain**.

**Answer**: She has known those which have walked in their sleep who have died holily in their beds. He cannot come out on ‘s grave.

What does Lady Macbeth do and say as she sleepwalks?

**Macbeth, Act V, Scene i** 383
Reading Strategy
Inferring Beliefs of the Period
- Remind students that the play is set in Scotland in the 11th century, but that it was written and performed in the 17th century.
- Ask students the Reading Strategy question: What can you infer about medicine during this time from the doctor’s words in lines 72–80?
Answer: Students should note that the doctor recognizes that Lady Macbeth’s illness stems not from physical suffering, but from emotional suffering. Realizing the depth of her emotional suffering, he admits that while he is unable to help her, perhaps God could. Students should remark that the doctor’s willingness to call on divine aid represents a blending of religion and medicine that was characteristic of the time.

Literary Analysis
Shakespearean Tragedy
- Have students read the speech in lines 12–16 to themselves.
- Ask them to think about madness, or insanity, and Macbeth’s murderous acts.
- Then, ask students the Literary Analysis question: Do you agree with those whom Caithness quotes in line 13? Is Macbeth “mad”? Why or why not?
Possible responses: Students who agree that Macbeth is mad should support their answers by pointing out that the theme of evil runs throughout the play, and that Macbeth has become evil and cannot redeem himself. His lack of restraint or human caring at this point might indicate madness. Those who say he is not mad might state that he is simply a man who has allowed his selfish ambition to rule his judgment, and is suffering for the actions that resulted from his wrong decisions. They might say that it is a weakness of character, not madness, which drives his actions.

Scene ii. The country near Dunsinane.

[Drum and colors. Enter MENTEITH, CAITHNESS, ANGUS, LENNOX, SOLDIERS.]

MENTEITH. The English pow’r \(^1\) is near, led on by Malcolm, His uncle Siward and the good Macduff. Revenges burn in them; for their dear causes Would to the bleeding and the grim alarm Excite the mortified man.\(^2\)

CAITHNESS. Who knows if Donalbain be with his brother?

LENNOX. For certain, sir, he is not. I have a file\(^3\) Of all the gentry: there is Siward’s son, And many unrough\(^4\) youths that even now Protest\(^5\) their first of manhood.

MENTEITH. What does the tyrant?

CAITHNESS. Great Dunsinane he strongly fortifies. Some say he’s mad; others, that lesser hate him, Do call it valiant fury: but, for certain.

ANGUS. Now does he feel His secret murders sticking on his hands; Now minutely revolts upbraid his faith-breach.\(^7\) Those he commands move only in command, Nothing in love. Now does he feel his title

Wealth of words: Menteith (MEN-tee-th) in Shakespearean spelling

Enrichment
Malcolm’s Reign
As the play closes, Duncan’s son Malcolm takes the throne of Scotland. In reality, Malcolm did become king in 1057, seventeen years after Duncan’s death. He reigned as Malcolm III Canmore for thirty-five years.

Malcolm had been protected during exile by Edward the Confessor and was later able to return the favor to England. After England was defeated in the Battle of Hastings in 1066 by William of Normandy, the grandchildren of Edmund Ironside, half-brother to Edward the Confessor, fled in exile to Scotland to be protected by Malcolm. The names of the grandchildren were Edgar and Margaret. Malcolm and Margaret eventually married.

After the brief reign of Malcolm’s brother, Donalbain, three of Malcolm and Margaret’s sons ruled in succession. It was from the last of these sons, David I, that all future kings of Scotland, including the Stuarts, descended. Queen Elizabeth II is the twenty-eighth generation of this line.

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Scene iii. Dunsinane. In the castle.

[Enter MACBETH, DOCTOR, and ATTENDANTS.]

MACBETH. Bring me no more reports; let them fly all! till Birnam Wood remove to Dunsinane.

I cannot taint with fear. What's the boy Malcolm? Was he not born of woman? The spirits that know
All mortal consequences have pronounced me thus: "Fear not, Macbeth; no man that's born of woman Shall e'er have power upon thee." Then fly, false thanes, And mingle with the English epics. The mind I sway by and the heart I bear
Shall never sag with doubt nor shake with fear.

[Enter SERVANT.]

The devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon. Where got'st thou that goose look?

SERVANT. There is ten thousand—

MACBETH. Geese, villain?

SERVANT. Soldiers, sir.

MACBETH. Go prick thy face and over-red thy fear. Thou lily-livered boy. What soldiers, patch? Death of thy soul! Those linen cheeks of thine Are counselors to fear. What soldiers, whey-face?

SERVANT. The English force, so please you.

MACBETH. Take thy face hence. Seyton!—I am sick at heart.

[Exit, marching.]
When I behold—Seyton, I say!—This push\(^9\) 
will cheer me ever, or disseat\(^{10}\) me now. 
I have lived long enough. My way of life 
is fall’n into the sear,\(^{11}\) the yellow leaf, 
And that which should accompany old age. 
As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends, 
I must not look to have; but, in their stead, 
Curses not loud but deep, mouth-honor, breath, 
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not. 
Seyton!

[Enter Seyton.]

SEYTON. What’s your gracious pleasure?

MACBETH. What news more?

SEYTON. All is confirmed, my lord, which was reported.

MACBETH. I’ll fight, till from my bones my flesh be hacked. 
Give me my armor.

SEYTON. ’Tis not needed yet.

MACBETH. I’ll put it on.

Send out more\(^{12}\) horses, skirt\(^{13}\) the country round. 
Hang those that talk of fear. Give me mine armor. 
How does your patient, doctor?

DOCTOR. Not so sick, my lord, 
As she is troubled with thick-coming fancies 
That keep her from her rest.

MACBETH. Cure her of that. 
Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased, 
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow, 
Raze out\(^{14}\) the written troubles of the brain. 
And with some sweet oblivious antidote 
Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff 
Which weighs upon the heart?
**Literary Analysis**

**Shakespearean Tragedy**

How does Malcolm’s order in Scene iv, lines 4–7 increase the sense of tension surrounding the play’s outcome and Macbeth’s fate?

1. **safe** that people will be safe in their own homes.
2. **shadow** conceal.
3. **discovery** those who see us.
4. **setting down before ‘t** laying siege to it.
5. **more and less** people of high and low rank.

**Possible response:** Students will probably say that Macbeth is very emotional, weighed down by his wife’s illness and the approaching battle. This mood is shown in his outbursts and in his increasing impatience.

**Critical Thinking**

- **Point out** that Macbeth is talking to more than one person at a time. In performance, he would likely be turning, or at least facing, in different directions as he talks to Seyton, then the doctor, then turns back to donning his armor.
- **Ask** students to describe Macbeth’s mental state as he speaks lines 47–56.

**Possible response:** Students will probably say that Macbeth is very emotional, weighed down by his wife’s illness and the approaching battle.

**Literary Analysis**

**Shakespearean Tragedy**

How does Malcolm’s order in Scene iv, lines 4–7 increase the sense of tension surrounding the play’s outcome and Macbeth’s fate?

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2. **shadow** conceal.
3. **discovery** those who see us.
4. **setting down before ‘t** laying siege to it.
5. **more and less** people of high and low rank.

**Possible response:** The soldiers carrying boughs would look like moving trees. Macbeth, seeing them, would begin to fear that he was misled by the prophecy.
Students may predict that the Connect to the Literature Remind students that Shakespeare often departed from historical fact to eighteen the drama of his plays. Then, ask the Connect to the Literature question.

**Answer:** Students may predict that Macbeth will die in battle, killed by Malcolm or by Macduff, as the witches warned.

**Background Sieges**

Macbeth’s attitude in scene v, lines 1–7 was not bravado—he had reason to believe Dunsinane might withstand attack. Battles were as hard on attackers as on the attacked. It was easier to fight from the castle than to approach unprotected. Poor hygiene, inadequate supplies, and exposure to the elements often seriously diminished the ranks of the besiegers. Also, normally hostile groups that joined together for battle, such as the English and Scottish, sometimes fell to fighting among themselves.

**Literature in Context**

**The Real Macbeth**

Macbeth’s claim to the crown was probably stronger than Duncan’s. Macbeth was the grandson of Scottish king Kenneth II, and Lady Macbeth (Gruoch) was the granddaughter of Kenneth III.

Duncan’s grandfather, Malcolm II, became king after he killed Kenneth III. He wanted to make sure that Duncan became king, so he tried to kill rival claimants. However, Macbeth survived.

Duncan may be the only Scottish king of the era who became king without killing for it, but he soon found himself fighting—the battles at the beginning of Macbeth reflect the tenor of Duncan’s reign.

Many other references in the play are loosely connected to real people, places, and events. Macbeth vanquished a rebel army near Birnam Wood. Siward, Earl of Northumbria, unsuccessfully attempted to dethrone Macbeth in favor of Malcolm in 1046. Macbeth was eventually killed in battle against Malcolm, who was aided by the English.

**Connect to the Literature** Remind students that Shakespeare often departed from historical fact to eighteen the drama of his plays. Then, ask the Connect to the Literature question.

**Quotable Shakespeare**

Only the Bible has been the source of more titles, quotes, and allusions than Shakespeare. Shakespeare has given us such familiar lines as “Neither a borrower nor lender be,” “To thine own self be true,” “Dead as a doornail,” “The dogs of war,” and “All that glitters is not gold.” From Macbeth, we get “The milk of human kindness,” “One fell swoop,” “A charmed life,” and “The crack of doom.”

Titles have been lifted from the text throughout the play, such as Steinbeck’s The Moon is Down (II, i), but the famous speech in Act V, scene v, lines 17–28 has been the richest source of titles, from Robert Frost’s poem “Out, Out—” to William Faulkner’s novel The Sound and the Fury. In fact, almost every line of this speech has been used at least once for the title of some work: Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow, This Petty Pace, All Our Yesterdays, The Way to Dusty Death, Brief Candle, Walking Shadow, A Poor Player.
Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir
As life were in ‘t. I have supped full with horrors.
Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
Cannot once start me.

[Enter Seyton.]

15 Wherefore was that cry?

Seyton. The queen, my lord, is dead.

Macbeth. She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word. 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.

[Enter a Messenger.]

Thou com’st to use thy tongue; thy story quickly!

Messenger. Gracious my lord,
I should report that which I say I saw.
But know not how to do’t.

Macbeth. Well, say, sir.

Messenger. As I did stand my watch upon the hill,
I looked toward Birnam, and anon, methought,
The wood began to move.

Macbeth. Liar and slave!

Messenger. Let me endure your wrath, if ‘t be not so.
Within this three mile may you see it coming;
I say a moving grove.

Macbeth. If thou speakest false,
Upon the next tree shalt thou hang alive,
Till famine cling thee. If thy speech be sooth,
I care not if thou dost for me as much.
I pull in resolution, and begin
To doubt th’ equivocation of the fiend
That lies like trueth: ‘Fear not, till Birnam Wood
Do come to Dunsianna!’ And now a wood
Comes toward Dunsianna. Arm, arm, and out!
If this which he avouches does appear,

Literary Analysis
Shakespearean Tragedy
In lines 17–28, how does Macbeth compare life to what two things does this expression of life’s futility. Is Macbeth’s story really “a tale/Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury /Signifying nothing”? Why or why not?

Possible responses: Students who agree may note that Macbeth said in Scene iii that he lacked most things worth having, and now he has lost his wife. His life has come to nothing. Those who disagree may say that Macbeth’s life gains meaning by serving as a warning to others.

Point out that lines 24–26 reflect a common Shakespearean metaphor that “all the world’s a stage.”

Explain that lines 26–27 show Shakespeare’s familiarity with the Bible, and his assumption that his audience knows it too. It refers to Psalm 90, which states that “we spend our years as a tale that is told.” The psalm speaks of how, because life is brief, we must “apply our hearts to wisdom” to avoid evil and judgment that might make it shorter—sentiments that suit this speech.

Differentiated Instruction
Solutions for All Learners

Support for Special Needs Students
Have students read the adapted version of Scenes v–vi of Macbeth in the Adapted Reader’s Notebook. This version provides basic-level instruction in an interactive format with questions and write-on lines. Completing the adapted version will prepare students to read the selection in the Student Edition.

Support for Less Proficient Readers
Have students read Scenes v–vi of Macbeth in the Reader’s Notebook. This version provides basic-level instruction in an interactive format with questions and write-on lines. After students finish the selection in Reader’s Notebook, have them complete the questions and activities in the Student Edition.

Support for English Learners
Have students read the adapted version of Scenes v–vi of Macbeth in the English Learner’s Notebook. This version provides basic-level instruction in an interactive format with questions and write-on lines. Completing the adapted version will prepare students to read the selection in the Student Edition.

Reading Check
Answer: Macbeth compares life to an actor and a senseless story.
Scene vi. Dunsinane. Before the castle.

[Drum and colors. Enter MALCOLM, SIWARD, MACDUFF, and their army, with boughs.]

MALCOLM. Now near enough. Your leavy leaves throw down,
And show like those you are. You, worthy uncle,
Shall, with my cousin, your right noble son,
Lead our first battle. Worthy Macduff and we
Shall take upon us what else remains to do,
According to our order.

SIWARD. Fare you well.
Do we find the tyrant’s power tonight,
Let us be beaten, if we cannot fight.

MACDUFF. Make all our trumpets speak; give them all breath.
Those clamorous harbingers of blood and death.

[Exit. Alarums continued.]
Scene vii. Another part of the field.

[Enter MACBETH.]

MACBETH. They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly, But bearlike I must fight the course.1 What’s he That was not born of woman? Such a one Am I to fear, or none. 

[Enter YOUNG SIWARD.]

YOUNG SIWARD. What is thy name?

MACBETH. Thou’lt be afraid to hear it.

YOUNG SIWARD. No; though thou call’st thyself a hotter name Than any is in hell.

MACBETH. My name’s Macbeth.

YOUNG SIWARD. The devil himself could not pronounce a title More hateful to mine ear.

MACBETH. No, nor more fearful.

YOUNG SIWARD. Thou wast born of woman. But swords I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn, Brandished by man that’s of a woman born. [Exit.]

[Alarums. Enter MACDUFF.]

MACDUFF. That way the noise is. Tyrant, show thy face! If thou be’st slain and with no stroke of mine, My wife and children’s ghosts will haunt me still. I cannot strike at wretched kerns, whose arms Are hired to bear their staves.2 Either thou, Macbeth, Or else my sword, with an unbattered edge, I sheathe again undeseed.3 There thou shouldst be; By this great clatter, one of greatest note Seems bruited.4 Let me find him. Fortune! And more I beg not. [Exit. Alarums.]

[Enter MALCOLM and SIWARD.]

SIWARD. This way, my lord. The castle’s gently rend’red:5 The tyrant’s people on both sides do fight; The noble thanes do bravely wage the war; The day almost itself professes yours, And little is to do.

MALCOLM. We have met with foes That strike beside us.6

1. bearlike . . . course Like a bear chained to a stake being attacked by dogs, I must fight until the end.

Literary Analysis
Shakespearean Tragedy

In Scene vii, does Macbeth show signs of bravery or is he just overconfident because of what the witches said? Explain.

Possible responses: Students who say Macbeth is showing bravery should note the fact that Shakespeare has left him some of the admirable traits he had in the beginning in order to evoke pity in the audience. Students who say he is simply overconfident should explain that he is overcompensating for the fact that he already knows the truth: he was misled by the prophecies, and there is really no hope left for him.

• Explain that kerns, mentioned in line 17, were hired Irish foot soldiers. The fact that Macbeth’s troops are hired underscores the fact that Macbeth is alone.

Critical Thinking
Make a Judgment

• Ask students why Macbeth is deliberatelyuveing Young Siward. Why or why not? Possible responses: Students may cite the battles at the beginning of the play as proof of Macbeth’s skill as a fighter and proof that he was brave even before he heard from the witches. They may say that, now, with almost nothing left to lose, he would be a deadly opponent.

• Ask students why Macbeth still seems to be clinging to the last remaining hope of the witches’ promises (lines 11–13). Possible responses: It may be all he has left to hold onto. He may see his victory over Young Siward as a confirmation of it. He may not really believe it, but may just say it out of habit. It may simply be a plot device, to prepare us for a surprise at the end.

Reading Check

What is the outcome of the hand-to-hand combat between Macbeth and Young Siward?

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Differentiated Instruction

Enrichment for Gifted/Talented Students

Have students choose a favorite medium in which to interpret all or part of Scenes iv–viii from Macbeth. They may choose collage, painting, dramatic reading, mime, interpretive dance, puppets, song, theatrical presentation, videotape, or another medium in which to demonstrate the ideas, events, or emotions of these highly charged scenes. Then, have students share their interpretations with the class.

Enrichment for Advanced Readers

While inferring beliefs of the period is an excellent reading strategy, studying a period’s beliefs can often add depth and richness to reading. Have students pick some aspect of life in Shakespeare’s time to research and then show how it appears in Shakespeare’s play. Aspects might include exploding interest in everything from medicine to classical literature, the impact of the Reformation and new Bible translations, relations between England and Scotland, the reign of James I, sports, entertainment, or ideas of honor.

Macbeth, Act V, Scene vii ■ 391
Critical Thinking
Interpret

• Point out that, when Macduff first heard of his family’s death, he called Macbeth a hell-kite (hellish bird of prey), and now in line 3, he calls him a hell-hound (hounds were used for hunting). Both reflect the evil and bloody image created for Macbeth in this play.

• Ask students why they believe Macbeth has been avoiding Macduff.

Possible responses: Some may say that it is because of the warning of the first apparition: “Beware Macduff.” Others may note that Macbeth says it is because he feels he has shed too much Macduff blood already.

• You may want to discuss whether Macbeth’s comments about being “too much charged with blood” shows sorrow or fear.

Possible responses: Some may cite Macbeth’s new awareness of the shortness of life and sorrow over the death of his own wife as reasons he would be sad. Others may say that he worries about Macduff’s vengeful rage.

• Ask students to explain the significance of Macduff’s comments in lines 13–16.

Answer: Macbeth’s last hope is destroyed by this revelation. Because Macduff’s mother died, he was delivered by the equivalent of a caesarean section. Hence, faith in an apparition’s promise has again misled Macbeth.

Literary Analysis

Shakespearean Tragedy

• Ask students what Macbeth is admitting in lines 19–21, and how these lines increase the tragic feeling of this scene.

Possible response: Macbeth is admitting that he should never have trusted the prophecies of the fiends. It heightens the sense of tragedy because Macbeth realizes that his tragic flaw, ambition, has driven him to believe what he wanted to hear, rather than to do what he knew to be right.

• Point out that, when he loses his courage (line 18), we are reminded that he did have good qualities—also part of tragedy.

Sword-play on the Elizabethan Stage

Macbeth ends with a flurry of sword-play. In furious succession, the villainous king stabs Young Siward and then is outdueled by the virtuous Macduff.

Londoners of Shakespeare’s time were connoisseurs of the art of fencing and would have been disappointed to see a half-hearted duel. Some Elizabethan actors became so skilful at fencing that they won awards for it. Richard Tarleton, for example, a theater star of the 1580s, was made Master of Fence. As the highest degree offered by fencing schools, this designation was akin to today’s black belt in karate.

Elizabethan audiences, however, wanted blood as well as skill. As a result, Elizabethan actors would wear bladders of animal blood, such as a sheep’s, which would burst open the instant they were “stabbed.” The chances are that Elizabethan theater-goers watched Macbeth die after a dazzling exhibit of sword-play and a copious spilling of blood.
Reading Strategy
Inferring Beliefs of the Period

- Have students review lines 39–53.
- Ask students to answer the Reading Strategy question: What does Siward’s reaction to the death of his son reveal about the values of patriotism and honor at this time? **Answer:** To die fighting for a good cause was one of the highest honors that a young man could attain.

- Remind students that manhood and manliness have been a theme throughout the play. Ask them to consider how the view of manhood here compares with some of the other images of manliness in the play, and how they relate to the period’s beliefs.

  **Possible responses:** Lady Macbeth urges Macbeth to action by saying that a real man just takes what he wants. Macbeth encourages Banquo’s murderers by telling them that to kill to redress hardship is manly. Because both of these characters are “bad guys,” we know that these images do not reflect the period’s beliefs. Then, at the death of his family, there is a discussion of Macduff’s showing sorrow like a man, and then avenging their deaths. Here, the idea of tenderness, love, and honor are associated with being a man. Because Macduff is a “good guy,” this would be more likely to reflect the period’s beliefs.

- Point out that, at the beginning of the play (Act I, scene iv, lines 3–8), the traitorous Cawdor was commended for dying well. Before being executed, he confessed his treasons, begged for the king’s pardon, and repented of his actions. How does this compare with Macbeth’s end? **Answer:** Macbeth would not surrender, refused to serve Malcolm (lines 27–28), and went out cursing. Hence, though his bravado would have been viewed as admirable, reflecting the courage he had from the start, Macbeth’s death would not receive commendation, because it was without honor.

**Reading Check**

**Answer:** Macduff slays Macbeth.
60 **MALCOLM.** We shall not spend a large expense of time
Before we reckon with your several loves, 18
And make us even with you. 19 My thanes and kinsmen,
Henceforth be earls, the first that ever Scotland
In such an honor named. What's more to do,
Which would be planted newly with the time— 20—
As calling home our exiled friends abroad
That fled the snares of watchful tyranny,
Producing forth the cruel ministers
Of this dead butcher and his fiendlike queen,
Who, as 'tis thought, by self and violent hands
Took off her life—this, and what needful else
That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace
We will perform in measure, time, and place: 21
So thanks to all at once and to each one,
Whom we invite to see us crowned at Scone.

[Flourish. Exit all.]

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### Critical Reading

1. **Respond:** Does the ending of the play inspire in you feelings of pity and an almost wondrous sense of fear? Why or why not?

2. (a) **Recall:** What does the doctor see in the sleepwalking scene, and what does he speculate about the causes for what he sees?
   (b) **Analyze:** How have Macbeth and Lady Macbeth reversed roles by the end of the play?

3. (a) **Recall:** What does Macbeth say when he hears of Lady Macbeth's death?
   (b) **Draw Conclusions:** What does his reaction to her death reveal about their relationship and his state of mind?

4. (a) **Recall:** What does Macbeth say about the witches when he learns that Birnam Wood is apparently moving and that Macduff “was from his mother’s womb / Untimely ripped”?
   (b) **Infer:** What growing realization do these statements about the witches seem to reflect?
   (c) **Draw Conclusions:** What is Macbeth’s state of mind in his final battle with Macduff?

5. (a) **Recall:** What occurs in Act V, Scene viii, lines 35–75?
   (b) **Evaluate:** Would the play be complete if it ended with Macbeth’s death but omitted these lines? Why or why not?

6. **Speculate:** Do you think that a tragedy could be written about an ordinary person living today? Why or why not?

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For additional information about William Shakespeare, have students type in the Web Code, then select S from the alphabet, and then select the author's name.