

MachHomer

written and performed by

Rick Miller

a WYRD production

in association with Robert Friedman Presents

Study Guide

**THE NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE ENGLISH THEATRE
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About This Guide

This guide offers information and activities which could be used before or after viewing *MacHomer*. The activities are suitable for students in grades 7-12. Many of the activities are integrated and link up to various aspects of the Language Arts/English, Drama/Dance, Art, Music, History, Geography, and Information Studies curriculum. The information and activities have been divided into sections so that you can pick and choose what you wish to use or focus on.

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1) General Information on *MacHomer*

MacHomer is an adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Canadian Rick Miller performs the roles from the original play as the characters from the television program *The Simpsons*. During the show, Miller mimics the voices of over 50 characters from *The Simpsons*. Some of the characters include: Mr. Burns as the King of Scotland, Smithers as Malcolm, Barney as Macduff, Moe, Capt. McCallister and Principal Skinner as the witches, Krusty the Clown as the Porter, Homer Simpson as Macbeth, Thane of Glamis and Cawdor, with Marge as his Lady, Ned Flanders as Banquo, Troy McClure as Ross, Bart Simpson as Fleance, Grampa Abe Simpson as an Old Man and Murderer No. 1, Apu as Murderer No. 2, Ottoman as a Doctor and Murderer No. 3, and Lisa Simpson as a Gentlewoman.

Here are some of Rick Miller's comments on the show:

The Simpsons "holds up a satirical mirror to modern-day society" (Steven Berketo, <http://www.torontostage.com/reviews/machomer.html>)

"I don't hold anything sacred, either with Shakespeare or with *The Simpsons*," .."There are a lot of stupid theatrical devices -- game shows, dream sequences -- specifically designed to bring in as many recognizable side characters as possible. The last thing I wanted to have was rabid *Simpsons* fans telling me every night I missed using this obscure character or that one." (Kevin Connolly, *Eye Weekly*, 10/14/99, http://www.eyenet.net/eye/issue/issue_10.14.99/arts/machomer.html)

On creating *MacHomer*: "It was a joke, a cast party joke, that I never performed because I thought it was too stupid at the time,"... "Sometimes the silliest ideas are the ones that stick with you,"... "It's high art meets pop culture and let's see what happens,"... "I think *The Simpsons* are so well-written and they have a tragic dimension to them,"... "They are not just irreverent. They have this quality we care about. They have what I like to call tragic nobility." (Steven Hyden, *The Post-Crescent*, 05/15/03, http://www.wisinfo.com/postcrescent/news/archive/et_10288071.shtml)

"*MacHomer* is about one dysfunctional family doing another," ... "It's a multimedia, fast-paced, condensed version of *Macbeth*, brutally edited and *Simpsonized*, but with the look and feel of a one-man version of the play, and only a small percentage of what I say coming from *The Simpsons*." "The spirit of the evening is very silly. It's pure parody, yet an attempt to really tell the story of *Macbeth*. The result is a collision between these two intentions. It makes for an interesting hour, to say the least." (Michael Rydzynski, *Irvine World News*, 05/15/03, <http://www.irvineworldnews.com/Bstories/may15/machomer.html>)

2)

a) General Information on *Macbeth*

- *Macbeth* was written by William Shakespeare (1564-1616) around 1610;
- Like *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Othello*, *Macbeth* is a tragedy. Aristotle described tragedy as a story involving the fall of a character of importance (i.e. a King) as a result of his/her flawed qualities. Consequently, the audience is to feel fear and pity and ultimately a catharsis or a cleansing of these emotions;
- *Macbeth* is often referred to as “the Scottish Play” because some actors and actresses believe that it is bad luck to say the name of the play, *Macbeth*;
- *Macbeth* is based on the historical figure Macbeth, who took over the throne after killing Duncan the King of the Scots;
- Shakespeare wrote “the Scottish Play” at the request of his patron King James I.

b) A Description of the Plot in *Macbeth*

Act I

The play begins with Macbeth and Banquo on their way home from battle. They have been fighting in Duncan’s army against the rebellious Macdonwald. Macbeth and Banquo are then confronted by three witches. The witches inform Macbeth that he will become Thane of Cawdor and then King of Scotland and that Banquo’s sons will also be Kings. Later, as the witches predicted, Macbeth does become Thane of Cawdor. When this occurs, Macbeth is encouraged to think more about their predictions. He decides that he will do what he can to become King. However, Duncan instead names his son successor to the throne. When Lady Macbeth finds out about all of this she suggests that Macbeth murder the King while he is visiting Macbeth’s castle in Inverness so that Macbeth can take the throne. Macbeth is not certain of what he should do. In the end a plan is devised by Macbeth and his wife to kill Duncan in the night and blame his own guards for the murder.

Act II

Prior to his murdering Duncan, Macbeth has a hallucination of a bloody dagger. Later he thinks he heard voices while he was committing the murder. He then becomes afraid of what will happen next. In all this confusion Macbeth forgets to return the murder weapon to the guards. As a result, Lady Macbeth must return the dagger herself. In doing this she gets blood on her hands. They then both go to bed. Later, two of the King’s Lords, Lennox and Macduff, come to see the King. The murder is discovered and Macbeth and Lady Macbeth quickly blame the guards. When Duncan’s sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, are notified of the news, they flee to England and Ireland because they are fearful for their own lives or that they may be blamed for the murder. As a result of their leaving, Macbeth is made King.

Act III

Fearful that the witches' other prophecy (that Banquo's son will become King) might come true, Macbeth plans to have Banquo and his son Fleance murdered. Macbeth initially hires two murderers to kill Banquo and his son. However, three people participate in the murder of Banquo (it has been suggested that Macbeth is the third murderer). Although the three murderers are successful in killing Banquo, they do not manage to kill Fleance and he escapes. Macbeth learns of this news while hosting a banquet. When he returns to his seat at the table he sees the ghost of Banquo. Macbeth is struck with fear and plans to meet with the witches to find out what will happen in the future.

Act IV

When Macbeth meets with the witches he is told three things: firstly that he is to beware Macduff, secondly that no man born of a woman will harm him and thirdly that he will be the King until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane. Banquo's ghost then appears with eight of his future royal descendants. Macbeth finds out then that Macduff has also gone to England where Malcolm is and therefore, Macbeth orders that Macduff's wife and children be killed. Although Malcolm does not initially trust Macduff, when Macduff finds out that his family has been murdered, he and Malcolm agree to join together to overthrow Macbeth.

Act V

By this point in the play Lady Macbeth is suffering from guilt and she sleepwalks and talks in her sleep about Duncan's murder. Macbeth waits for Macduff and Malcolm to invade his castle while still believing the witches' three predictions. Macbeth is then told that Lady Macbeth is dead. Macbeth has little time to deal with her death because he is also informed that Malcolm and Macduff are approaching. As the battle begins, Macbeth is challenged by young Siward but Macbeth kills him. Macbeth is then confronted by Macduff who tells him that he was ripped from his mother's womb and therefore, not born of a woman. As the witches predictions come true and Macbeth continues to fight, Macduff soon kills Macbeth by chopping off his head. Malcolm is then crowned the King of Scotland.

3) Activities which Focus on Teaching Plot

Activity A - A Quick Study of *Macbeth* / “*Macbeth* in a Week”

Although many students are likely be familiar with *The Simpsons*, it is less likely that they are familiar with *Macbeth*. This activity quickly familiarizes the students with the play by breaking it into workable pieces.

Divide the play into even sections, and the class into small groups. Each group will be responsible for reading and then dramatizing its section of the play. Encourage students to use dramatic devices such as props, costumes, music etc. in their presentations. Students will present their sections to the class in chronological order. The teacher will evaluate the accuracy, detail and creativity of each student’s presentation. After the students have seen all the presentations, students can evaluate their work by reflecting on i) whether or not they understand the plot and ii) how they feel their presentation contributed to other students’ understanding of the plot.

You may choose to provide students with the **Activity A Handout** included herein as a way of guiding them through the planning of their presentation. The questions are designed to help students organize their work and think about how their section will fit in with those of the other students. It may also be an evaluation tool used to assess the students’ comprehension of what they have read. (**Please note** that for the group assigned the final section of the play questions 2 and 3, which involve what occurs next in the play, will need to be either adjusted (eg. by asking the students what would happen next if the play were to continue), or deemed not applicable.)

Activity B - Create a Comic Strip Based on the Plot

Just like Rick Miller, students will use cartoons to tell the story of *Macbeth*. Students may choose to use *The Simpsons* or any other cartoon. Students will read the play and then create a cartoon strip based on one of the five Acts from the play. Students must strive for detail, accuracy and creativity. Words and pictures must be used to retell the Act’s plot. In other words, students will be evaluated on how well their pictures, dialogue or captions and written explanations in each frame retell the plot. Students must include at least 12 frames. To reflect on their work, students may present their comic strip to a partner. They may share what they think is the best aspect of their comic strip and what they think is the best aspect of their partner’s work.

Activity C - Write a News Story Using the 5 Ws and H (Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?)

Students will write a news story based on one of the major events from the play (i.e. the murder of Duncan, Malcolm and Macduff’s return to Scotland, Banquo’s murder, the Macduff family murders etc.). The students’ articles can be compiled into a *Macbeth* newspaper and each student given a copy. Students may be allowed time to read the newspaper and to independently reflect on the quality of their contribution to the newspaper. By reading the newspaper articles the students may gain a better understanding of parts of the play that were not clear to them.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Activity A Handout

A Quick Study of *Macbeth* / "Macbeth in a Week"

Once you have been assigned a section, read it and then use this handout to take notes. These notes will help you plan your presentation. Be sure to be as detailed and accurate as possible on this sheet as you will be handing it in for evaluation.

Answer the following questions:

1) Make a list of the events that occurred in the section you read. In other words, create a summary of your section.

2) Consider what aspects of your scene will carry through into other scenes (i.e. continuing characters, important props, ongoing activity etc.).

3) Make a list of questions that you would like answered in the next sections.

4) A List of Important Scenes and Quotations from *Macbeth*

- **Act I, Scene i**

ALL (the witches): *"Fair is foul, and foul is fair,"*

This quotation introduces the play and focuses on the theme of deception.

- **Act I, Scene vii**

Macbeth (to Lady Macbeth): *"False face must hide what the false heart doth know."*

This quotation again highlights the theme of deception. It also sets the mood for the murder that will occur soon.

- **Act II, Scene i**

Macbeth: *"Is this a dagger which I see before me ?"*

This quotation precedes a famous monologue of Macbeth's. It is spoken shortly before the pivotal murder of Duncan which sets the play in motion.

- **Act III, Scene iv**

Macbeth: *"Strange things I have in head that will to hand,
Which must be acted ere they may be scanned."*

Macbeth says this after seeing the ghost of Banquo. Macbeth is emotional and he is forced to think about his actions in the play.

- **Act IV, Scene i**

The witches: *"Double, double, toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble...."*

The second witch: *"By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes."*

These well known quotations are spoken by the witches shortly before Macbeth appears. Macbeth is looking for the Witches because he wants to know what the future holds.

- **Act V, Scene v**

Macbeth: *"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."*

Macbeth says this after hearing the news that his wife has died and as he is going into battle with Macduff and Malcolm.

5) A List and Brief Description of Characters in *Macbeth*

(in order of rank and/or importance)

Duncan - King of Scotland who is murdered by Macbeth.

Malcolm - Duncan's son who eventually joins Macduff to overthrow Macbeth and become King.

Donalbain - Duncan's son and Malcolm's younger brother.

Macbeth - lead character, initially part of Duncan's army. Later, becomes the Thane of Glamis, of Cawdor, and King of Scotland. To achieve his title as King he murders Duncan and to protect the title hires murderers to kill Banquo and his son Fleance. In the end of the play Macbeth is killed by Macduff.

Banquo - a general in Duncan's army, and initially a friend of Macbeth's. However, Macbeth hires murderers to have Banquo and his son Fleance killed so that they cannot take over the throne. Unlike Fleance, Banquo dies in the play but later appears as a ghost who haunts Macbeth.

Macduff - unites with Malcolm to overthrow Macbeth. Macduff wants to defeat Macbeth because Macbeth has killed Macduff's family.

Fleance - Banquo's son who escapes death after Macbeth hires murderers to have him killed. Macbeth does not want Fleance to take over the throne.

Siward - Earl of Northumberland, general of the English forces.

Young Siward - Siward's son who is killed at the end of the play by Macbeth. Young Siward is killed during the battle where Malcolm and Macduff are overthrowing Macbeth.

Lennox, Ross, Menteith, Angus, and Caithness - some of the noblemen of Scotland.

Seyton – an officer attending on Macbeth.

Lady Macbeth - wife of Macbeth who persuades her husband to kill Duncan. Later, she experiences so much guilt that she dies.

Lady Macduff - Macduff's wife who is later killed by Macbeth.

Hecate – an evil goddess who interacts with the Witches.

Three Witches (First, Second, and Third) – witches who offer predictions to Macbeth about what the future holds.

As in any Shakespeare play there are many **minor roles** including: Apparitions Lords, Doctors, Gentlemen, Gentlewomen, Officers, Soldiers, Porters, Murderers (First, Second and Third), Attendants, Servants, Messengers and A Boy.

6) Activities which Focus on Teaching Character

Activity D – Prepare and Present a One-Person Show

Rick Miller has prepared and performs *MacHomer* all on his own. To get a better understanding of what it takes to create and present a one person show, students will choose a story from the newspaper and prepare a performance depicting that story. Students will then perform their piece in front of the class as various characters from the story. Students will have to choose a news story that involves more than one person and the student will have to play the different characters in the story using variations in tones of voice, costumes, props, mannerisms etc.. The teacher will be provided with a copy of the newspaper article and the student will be evaluated on his/her ability to create a performance which accurately and creatively depicts the story through various characters. As a reflective activity, students could keep a journal of the challenges they face in putting together and performing a one-person show.

Activity E – Create a Life Map of a Primary Character from *Macbeth/MacHomer*

A life map is a visual that depicts the events of a person's life. It is one of many ways of creatively presenting information on a character. It also helps students develop their abilities to interpret text in a symbolic way, not only when they create their own life map but when they read those of other students. As a warm-up, students could create a life map of their own lives. Students will then create a life map based on one of the primary characters from *Macbeth* or *MacHomer*. The life map may include words and pictures. The life map will be evaluated on its detail, accuracy, and creativity. As a reflective activity, students may share their life maps with other students in the class. Students may then guess whose life is depicted in each life map.

(Refer to page 11 – **Satire**, for the **Extension Activity** based on this Activity)

Activity F – Create a Mobile Based on the Characters in *Macbeth/MacHomer*

Students will create a mobile based on the characters in *Macbeth*. Similar to the life map (**Activity E**), this mobile activity allows students to interpret and present information on a character in a creative and symbolic way. Students might use symbolic shapes to represent the characters, draw pictures of the characters, draw important scenes which involve certain characters etc. Students must also include important information about each character such as a physical description, information on the character's life, background, family, values, motivations, problems, friends, enemies etc.. Students will be evaluated on their ability to create a detailed, accurate and creative mobile.

(Refer to page 11 - **Satire**, for the **Extension Activity** based on this Activity)

7) A List and Brief Description of Themes in *Macbeth*

Ambition - This relates to Macbeth's desire to become and, then eventually, remain King. This could also apply to Lady Macbeth given her role in Duncan's murder.

Truth vs. Deception - As the witches say in Act I, scene i, "*Fair is foul, foul is fair*". Throughout the play there are many moments where people are deceptive in their actions (eg. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth blame Duncan's murder on the guards). Macbeth may have also thought he was deceived by the witches' prophecies; for instance, in Act I, scene 3 Macbeth questions the truth in what they have said.

The Psychological Affect of Guilt – Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth experience guilt in the play. For instance, guilt causes Lady Macbeth to both sleepwalk and talk in her sleep. Macbeth feels guilt and then sees Banquo's ghost.

Fate vs. Freewill – Many of the characters actions can be analyzed from a fate vs. freewill perspective (eg. Macbeth's role in Duncan's murder).

8) An Activity which Focuses on Teaching the Themes

Activity G – Create a Multi-Media Thematic Collage

According to Rick Miller, *MacHomer* is a multi-media version of *Macbeth*. For instance, Rick Miller uses photographic slides in his performance. In this activity students will create a multi-media collage using various forms of technology. Not all students will have access to the same technology, therefore, this activity can be modified to suit the context of each class. Students will create a collage based on a theme from the play. They can choose a theme that interests them or from the list in this guide, or decide on one of their own. Students may use photos, computer images, video etc.. As a reflective activity, students may analyze not only themes in the play *Macbeth*, but also discuss how technology affects the presentation of ideas in *MacHomer* and in their collages.

9) Understanding Satire and How it Relates to *MacHomer*

Satire: (from the Greek *satur*, "a satyr" and *satyros*, "mythical burlesque"; also from the Latin *satur*, "sated; well-fitted").

definition: The use of wit, sarcasm, or irony to expose, attack, or ridicule human faults and weaknesses.

Irony: (from the Greek *eiron*, "dissembler").

definition: The clash between the expected and the unexpected in a literary piece.

Rick Miller has said, *The Simpsons* "holds up a satirical mirror to modern-day society." (Steven Berketo, <http://www.torontostage.com/reviews/machomer.html>). Students should be given the opportunity to think about this statement and the time to respond to why this may be true. Students can discuss this as a class or in small groups. It may be helpful to begin the discussion by brainstorming specific examples of satirical moments from the show. Viewing clips of the show would also be useful for those students who have not seen the show. Once students are able to identify the satire in *The Simpsons*, students should consider how this affects the performance of *MacHomer*.

Extension Activity (based on Activities E and F)

By using characters from *The Simpsons* to tell the story of Macbeth, Rick Miller does the unexpected, and as a result satire emerges from *MacHomer*. In order to build the students' understanding of satire, students may compare and contrast the representations of the characters from *Macbeth* and *MacHomer* by examining their life maps or mobiles (see Activities E and F, page 9). A way to set up this activity could be to divide the students into partners. Each person would be responsible for creating both a life map and a mobile. One of these assignments would focus on *Macbeth* and the other on *MacHomer*. The partners would have to decide on the same characters in order to be able to compare and contrast the characters (i.e. If Partner A choose to do a life map of Macbeth, then Partner B would do a life map of MacHomer. Partner A would then do a mobile for the characters in *MacHomer* and Partner B would do one for *Macbeth*). Once all the students have completed their life maps and mobiles, the students can then compare and contrast the life maps or mobiles to gain a better understanding of the characters in both plays, as well as the satire in *MacHomer*.

10) A List of Discussion Topics

- Aristotle described tragedy as a story involving the fall of a character of importance (eg. a King) as a result of his/her flawed qualities. Consequently, the audience is to feel fear and pity and ultimately a catharsis or a cleansing of these emotions. Therefore, is *Macbeth* an example of a tragedy? What about *MacHomer*? How are they similar and how do they differ?
- How much influence does Lady Macbeth have over Macbeth? Do Marge and Homer have a similar or different relationship? How does this comparison affect your interpretation of the play, *MacHomer*?
- Imagine that you are either a defense lawyer or a prosecutor and Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have been charged with murder. What would you say in defense or against these two characters?
- Imagine you are Banquo's ghost. If you could talk to any character, who would you talk to and what would you say?
- Offer a critique of the costumes, props, and set in the performance of *MacHomer*. How did these items meet your expectations? Were you surprised or disappointed by any of the choices in costumes, props or set?
- Have you ever seen a one-person show? What do you think are the positive or negative aspects of choosing to do a one person show? What are the specific positive and negative aspects of *MacHomer* as a person show?
- Are there any changes in roles that you would make if you were Rick Miller? In other words, are there any characters in *The Simpsons* whom you think should have played a different role in the play? If so, what change(s) would you make? If not, why not??
- What other television characters could be used in *Macbeth* or other plays by Shakespeare? How does using television characters in a Shakespeare play change your perspective on Shakespeare?

11) A List of Web Links

Websites on Teaching *Macbeth*

<http://www.folger.edu/education/getarchive.cfm>

This website offers a variety of lesson plans on *Macbeth* (among other Shakespeare plays) which focus on the various themes and key ideas in the play. Some of the lessons use on-line resources while others have handouts that can be printed.

<http://www.westga.edu/~kidreach/macbethlesson.html>

This website clearly describes a 13-day unit for teaching *Macbeth*.

<http://www.berksiu.k12.pa.us/webquest/pmiller/index.htm>

This website is another unit that studies how *Macbeth* would have been staged during Shakespeare's time. It also lists a variety of on-line resources including a link to an online copy of the text.

<http://library.thinkquest.org/2888/>

This website is "an annotated, on-line version of the Shakespearean tragedy" *Macbeth*. It gives descriptions of the characters, themes, glossary of terms, summaries, other resources, an interactive discussion area, a multimedia link of audio and video clips from the play.

<http://www.lesstutor.com/ci2.html>

This website gives background information on Shakespeare, his writing and specifically *Macbeth*. The site also lists many questions based on the play that students could respond to.

<http://www.enotes.com/macbeth/864>

This website offers an introduction to the play, summaries of the scenes, facts, critical discussion topics, quotes accompanied with explanations, images of the play and a bibliography of books that could help with further research.

<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/default.htm>

This website gives information on Shakespeare and an "annotated guide to the scholarly Shakespeare resources on the Internet."

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=368 and

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=215

These websites include lessons on analyzing "how Shakespearean metaphors, imagery, and other dramatic cues reveal Macbeth's response to fear" and "the motives of Macbeth's increasingly desperate and evil actions."

A Website on *The Simpsons*

<http://www.snpp.com/contacts.html>

If you are unfamiliar with *The Simpsons* this website has many links which will familiarize you with the show and its characters.



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