

MACBETH

Study Guide

Music by Giuseppe Verdi
Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave

MICHIGAN OPERA THEATRE
Department of Education and Community Programs

TABLE OF CONTENTS

An Introduction to Michigan Opera Theatre	3
The Department of Education and Community Programs	4
<i>Macbeth</i> Characters & Synopsis	5
The Composer & Librettist	7
Shakespeare and <i>Macbeth</i>: A Dynamic Encounter	9
The Curse of <i>Macbeth</i>/Adaptations	11
Discussion Question	13
In the Classroom	14
Contact & Sources	17

An Introduction to MICHIGAN OPERA THEATRE

Michigan Opera Theatre (MOT), the State of Michigan's premier opera company, which, through its commitment to producing and presenting the very best professional productions of opera, dance, musical theater, and arts education programming, serves as a statewide cultural resource.

The vision of Founder and Artistic Director Dr. David DiChiera, and led by President and Chief Executive Officer Wayne S. Brown, MOT offers an essential, vibrant contribution to the quality of life for Detroit-area residents and to communities throughout the region. This dynamic cultural resource exemplifies artistic excellence. Since its founding in 1971, MOT has offered southeast Michigan the finest arts and cultural performances, concerts, education, and entertainment. By presenting culturally significant productions relative to the diverse populace of the region, such as *Porgy and Bess*, *Anoush*, *King Roger*, *Dead Man Walking*, and the world premiere production of *Margaret Garner*, MOT has brought the magic of live theatre to thousands of people.

In 1963, Dr. DiChiera introduced a new civic enterprise in Detroit, the popular Overture to Opera series, a program of staged opera scenes and one-act operas he narrated and toured to hundreds of schools and community centers throughout the state. The success of the series over a period of years laid the groundwork for the creation of Michigan Opera Theatre in 1971.

In April of 1996, on the Company's twenty-fifth anniversary, the ribbon was cut for the grand opening of the Detroit Opera House. Michigan Opera Theatre joined the ranks of major opera companies worldwide with the multi-million renovation of a 1922 movie palace. Michigan Opera Theatre is one of only a few opera companies in the United States to own its own opera house. The product of Dr. DiChiera's dream, the Detroit Opera House, is comparable to the world's greatest houses in visual and acoustical beauty.



Michigan Opera Theatre's Mission

Michigan Opera Theatre is the premier multi-disciplined producer and presenter for opera, musical theatre, and dance in the Great Lakes Region. Based in the city of Detroit, the organization engages artists of national and international stature for stellar main stage and outreach performances, and provides compelling cultural enrichment programs for the diverse audiences and communities that it serves, making it one of Detroit's pillars of arts and culture.



Michigan Opera Theatre's **DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMS**

Founded by Karen V. DiChiera, the Department of Education and Community Programs has served the entire state with quality entertainment and education for over 30 years. The Department of Education and Community Programs has brought its varied musical programs to every age group in Michigan, allowing artists to visit clubs, offices, schools, and community stages, and performing shows that range from lively children's operas to musical revues to full length operas produced by the local community.

Macbeth: CHARACTERS & SYNOPSIS

Courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera & Opera News

CHARACTER		VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
Macbeth (referred to as Macbetto in Italian)	A Scottish noble and respected general in King Duncan's army	Baritone	An ambitious man, he quickly shows himself capable of deceit and murder to gain the throne once he hears the witches' prophecy.
Lady Macbeth	Macbeth's wife	Soprano	Lady Macbeth's ambitions possibly exceed her husband's; her cunning and ruthlessness help propel Macbeth's rise to power.
Banquo (Banco)	Another nobleman, general in the King's army, and good friend of Macbeth's	Bass	An honorable man whose children (as prophesied by the witches) threaten Macbeth's grip on power
Fleance	Banquo's son and heir	Silent	A young child endangered by the witches' prophesy
Macduff	A nobleman of Scotland	Tenor	Macduff is highly suspicious of Macbeth and ultimately leads the uprising against him.
Duncan	King of Scotland	Silent	An aging ruler, Duncan is murdered by the Macbeths.
Malcolm	Duncan's son and heir	Tenor	Malcolm flees after his father's murder, returning to claim the throne at the end of the opera.
The Witches	Supernatural beings with the ability to see the future	Chorus	Verdi considered the witches central characters. Their prophecies set the opera's plot in motion.

ACT I.....

Macbeth and Banquo, leaders of the Scottish army, meet a group of witches who prophesy the future. They address Macbeth as Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland, then tell Banquo that he will be the father of kings. The two men try to learn more, but the witches vanish. Messengers arrive with news that Duncan, the current king of Scotland, has made Macbeth Thane of Cawdor. The first part of the witches' prediction has come true.

In Macbeth's castle, Lady Macbeth reads a letter from her husband telling her of the events that have just transpired. She resolves to follow her ambitions. A servant announces that Duncan will soon arrive at the castle, and when Macbeth enters, his Lady tells him that they must kill the king. Duncan arrives. Macbeth has a vision of a dagger, then leaves to commit the murder. On his return, he tells his wife how the act has frightened him, and she replies that he needs more courage. They both leave as Banquo enters with Macduff, a nobleman, who discovers the murder. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, feigning horror, join the others in condemning the murder.

ACT II.....

Macbeth has become king. Duncan's son, Malcolm, is suspected of having killed his father and has fled to England. Worried about the prophecy that Banquo's children will rule, Macbeth and his wife now plan to kill him and his son, Fleance, as well. As Macbeth leaves to prepare the double murder, Lady Macbeth hopes that it will finally make the throne secure.

Outside the castle, assassins wait for Banquo, who appears with his son, warning the boy of strange forebodings. Banquo is killed, but Fleance escapes.

Lady Macbeth welcomes the court to the banquet hall and sings a drinking song, while Macbeth receives news that Banquo is dead but his son has escaped. About to take Banquo's seat at the table, Macbeth has a terrifying vision of the dead man accusing him. His wife is unable to calm her unsettled husband, and the courtiers wonder about the king's strange behavior. Macduff vows to leave the country, which is now ruled by criminals.

ACT III.....

The witches gather again, and Macbeth visits them, demanding more prophecies. Apparitions warn him to beware of Macduff, but assure him that "no man of woman born" can harm him, and that he will be invincible until Birnam Wood marches on his castle. In another vision, he sees a procession of future kings, followed by Banquo. Horrified, Macbeth collapses. The witches disappear, and his wife finds him. They resolve to kill Macduff and his family.

ACT IV.....

On the English border, Macduff has joined the Scottish refugees. His wife and children have been killed. Malcolm appears with British troops and leads them to invade Scotland.

Lady Macbeth is sleepwalking, haunted by the horrors of what she and her husband have done.

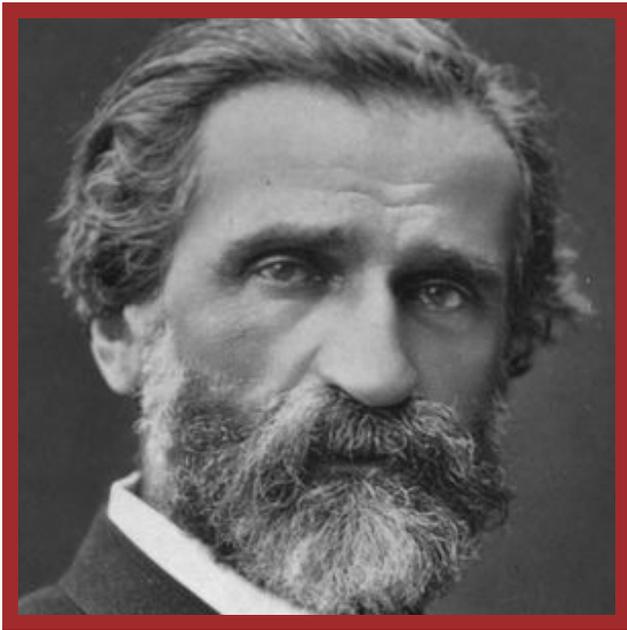
In another room in the castle, Macbeth awaits the arrival of his enemies. He realizes that he will never live to a peaceful old age. Messengers bring news that Lady Macbeth has died, and that Birnam Wood appears to be moving. English soldiers appear, camouflaged with its branches. Confronting Macbeth, Macduff reveals that he was not born naturally, but had a Caesarean birth. He kills Macbeth and proclaims Malcolm king of Scotland.

The Composer:

GIUSEPPE VERDI (1813 – 1901)

Courtesy of John Zaretti, President of the Verdi Opera Theatre of Michigan

Giuseppe Verdi, one of the greatest composers in the history of opera, was born on October 10, 1813, in the village of Le Roncole, near Busseto, in the province of Parma, where his parents ran a tavern. After showing early talent for music and making rapid progress as church organist and with youthful compositions, Verdi continued his studies in Milan. While studying in Milan, Verdi heard many operas at La Scala Theater, and composed piano pieces, overtures, and other works that captured the attention of influential people, eventually gaining him an engagement to compose an opera for Teatro



alla Scala. The opera, *Oberto Conte di San Bonifacio* (1839), was a success, and Verdi received a commission for two more operas. In the interim, Verdi also returned often to Busseto, where he fell in love with and married Margherita Barezzi. But tragedy struck the young family as their two children died in infancy, soon followed by the death of Margherita as well. This happened during the same period that Verdi was asked to write his second work, a comic opera (*Un Giorno di Regno*, 1840) which failed at La Scala. Verdi, utterly depressed, was determined never to compose again, though he did finally, setting his third opera, *Nabucco*, to music in 1842. It was an immense success, and the chorus "Va pensiero" became a rallying-cry taken up by Italian patriots for the country's liberation from Austrian occupying forces.

There followed a period, coinciding with the outbreak of the Italian Risorgimento (Resurgence) movement for the country's unification, when Verdi's music achieved international stature for mastery of its theatrical effect and the stirring melodic qualities. He wrote fifteen operas in the following ten years. Several of those works, such as *I Lombardi* (1843), *Ernani* (1844), *Giovanna d'Arco* (1845), *Attila* (1846), *I Masnadieri* (1847), *Il Corsaro* (1848), and *La Battaglia di Legnano* (1849) were based on patriotic themes that became identified with the Italian nationalist movement. Their performance created frequent conflicts with Austrian authorities, even more so when Verdi's name became a symbol of the Italian spirit also scrawled on walls and posters by the insurgents as Viva V.E.R.D.I., an acronym for "Viva Vittorio Emanuele Re d'Italia" (Long live Vittorio Emanuele King of Italy). With the much loved *Rigoletto* (1851), *Il Trovatore* (1853) and *La Traviata* (1853), Verdi reached a new level of musical development which placed him in a class of his own, bringing him worldwide fame as one of the great masters of opera. Quite wealthy at this stage, Verdi devoted more time to a large farm that he had bought earlier outside Busseto, where he lived with his second wife, Giuseppina Strepponi, the popular soprano who sang the leading role in his first great success, *Nabucco*. He also began to employ his great wealth in charitable gifts and the endowment of charitable organizations. Verdi was now considered a national treasure and, having supported Italy's fight for liberation, he later agreed to serve as deputy in the Italian parliament after Italy's unification in 1861, and was later appointed

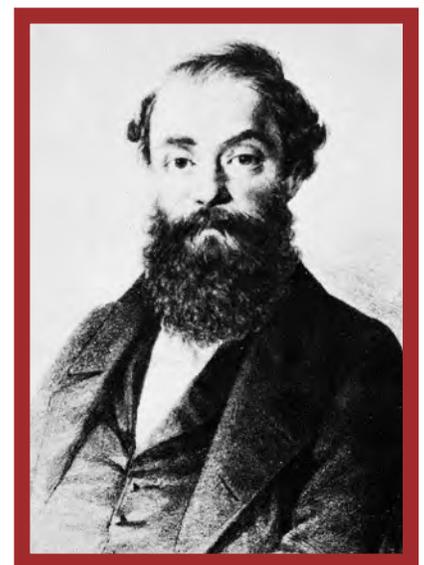
Senator (1875) by King Victor Emanuel II, even though because of an aversion to politics he did not avail himself of his seat.

While at this time Verdi was contemplating retirement, he nevertheless accepted three foreign commissions to write new operas: respectively for the Imperial Theatre in St. Petersburg, *La forza del destino* (1862); for the Paris Opera, *Don Carlo* (1867); and for the Cairo Opera, *Aida* (1871), all great successes, as his flowing melodies were enriched by an increased command of the resources of the orchestra. Verdi was stirred again on the death of author and poet Alessandro Manzoni, whom Verdi idolized, and the maestro composed his majestic *Messa da Requiem* (1874) in Manzoni's honor. A few more years went by, as the grand old man of Italian opera, like fine wine, mellowing as he aged, before Verdi was persuaded to write two final masterpieces, *Otello* (1887), and *Falstaff* (1893), based on Shakespeare's works (and on librettist Arrigo Boito's genial adaptations). These operas are considered his crowning achievements. Upon his death on January 27, 1901, in Milan, a period of national mourning was declared, and an immense crowd participated at his funeral, where a chorus of 700 people, conducted by Arturo Toscanini, intoned the "Va pensiero" chorus from *Nabucco* with the crowd joining in the singing. Verdi's and Giuseppina's bodies are entombed in the Casa di Riposo in Milan, built by Verdi to house destitute musicians and still presently in use.

Verdi's works stand among the greatest in the history of Italian and world opera, most noted for their emotional intensity, tuneful melodies, and dramatic characterizations. He transformed Italian opera, with its traditional set pieces, old-fashioned librettos, and emphasis on vocal displays, into a unified musical and dramatic entity. His operas are among those most frequently produced in the world today.

The Librettist: FRANCESCO MARIA PIAVE (1870 – 1876)

Francesco Maria Piave was born in Murano, Venice, the son of a glassmaker. Following a stint in seminary, he found employment for several years as a proofreader in a publishing house, after which time he moved to Rome. It was in Rome that he was said to have written his first libretto, for *Don Marzio*, though the opera was never performed. He returned to Venice in 1838, and was soon employed at the Teatro la Fenice (Venice's principal opera house) as the resident "poet" (i.e. provider of librettos to composers commissioned to write for the theatre). It was here that Piave first met Verdi, and the two formed a long-standing relationship. Piave would go on to write the librettos for ten of Verdi's operas, including *Macbeth*, *Rigoletto*, and *La Traviata*. In 1859, Piave moved to Milan to work as stage director at La Scala. He suffered a stroke in 1867, which rendered him paralyzed, and he died in 1869. Though best known for his work with Verdi, Piave authored 40 librettos and worked with a number of composers throughout his career.



Verdi and Shakespeare: A DYNAMIC ENCOUNTER OF TWO GIANTS OF THE THEATRE

Courtesy of John Zaretti, President of the Verdi Opera Theatre of Michigan

Giuseppe Verdi was a voracious reader and was always looking for dramatic sources and subjects to mold into operatic form. The sources of many of his early operas were some of the great poets, dramatists, and playwrights known at that time, such as Schiller, Hugo, Byron, Voltaire, Dumas fils, and Shakespeare. But above all he adulated Shakespeare's plays, which he read and re-read in translation (Italian and French, as he spoke no English). *Macbeth*, Verdi's tenth opera, composed in 1847, marked his first approach to Shakespeare and a turning point in the maestro's career. Verdi considered Shakespeare "the great searcher of the heart of man" and *Macbeth* "one of the greatest human creations."



Shakespeare's tragedy, written in 1606, is set in Scotland, with witches, ghosts, and prophecies playing a prominent role, and where an overwhelming lust for power has disastrous ramifications. In the play, a nobleman and valued general, Macbeth, is told by three mysterious witches that he will become king of Scotland. But Lady Macbeth, a deeply ambitious woman, doesn't wait for fate to take its course and convinces her husband to murder the reigning King Duncan. Macbeth does the deed and becomes king, but he must kill foes and friends alike to keep his throne and is haunted by the ghosts of his victims. He believes the witches' strange prophecy that he will rule until the unlikely time that the forest of Birnam Wood will come to his castle. Soon, however, Macbeth finds out that Macduff, a Scottish nobleman hostile to Macbeth's kingship from the start, is leading an army toward the castle, together with Malcolm, the son of Duncan, under the cover of tree branches from that very wood.

Though the witches claimed he could not be killed by any man "of woman born," Macbeth realizes they have tricked him when, pursued in battle, he learns that Macduff was not born but "ripped untimely from his mother's womb." They proceed to fight, and Macbeth falls, mortally wounded by Macduff. Lady Macbeth, terror-stricken, dies in the castle. Malcolm is hailed as the new king.

Verdi took immense care in creating *Macbeth* as an opera, determining the shape of the libretto and trying to capture the tormented psychology of the protagonists with his music. With *Macbeth* he ceased thinking of opera as he had inherited it, avoiding the conventional 'sweet words' and set pieces of *bel canto* opera, and sought instead concise language written in a way that would not interrupt the action, having a more powerful impact on the audience. In letters to his librettist, Francesco Maria Piave, Verdi exhorted him with urgent requests for "brevity and sublimity" and to use fewer but significant words, demanding something "with a variety of colors: irony, contempt, wrath" to try to rise to the dramatic challenges of Shakespeare's tragedy, and adding that "if we cannot make something great with it, let us try to make at least something out of the ordinary." The resulting text stays close to the play, although some cuts had to be made to suit operatic needs. Revisions were added many years later, in 1865, this time with text by librettist Andrea Maffei, when *Macbeth* came to be redone for the Paris Opera, and Verdi added new music, including an obligatory ballet for Paris audiences, as well as a witches chorus, a re-elaborated astonishing sleepwalking scene for Lady Macbeth, and a rewritten stirring final chorus of rejoicing. But, as we know it today, the opera also retains all the great moments from the original version.

Verdi was always very exacting about the performance of his works, particularly so about *Macbeth*. The maestro fussed over the casting for the opera, aiming for artists who could sing and act and, in the role of Lady Macbeth, for a voice that had "a diabolical quality... stifled, and dark" to convey the character's innermost feelings. He was equally insistent on the accuracy of costumes and sets, to be attentive to the period of the action. During the many rehearsals before opening night, Verdi attended to every detail, demanding at one point that the duet "Fatal mia donna" be rehearsed "more than 150 times"—as reported by the premiere's leading lady, Marianna Barbieri-Nini in her memoirs—so that it might be closer to speech than to singing. The overall result was indeed something out of the ordinary, producing great enthusiasm at the premiere, with Verdi and the cast having to appear on stage for over twenty curtain calls at the end of the opera. More importantly, for Italian opera as well as for Verdi, this work signaled a new direction, where his music brings the characters to life by the way he colors the orchestra and builds the drama throughout the opera. *Macbeth*, composed when Verdi was thirty-four-years-old, was a harbinger of great things to come in the form of Verdi's other magnificent creations, culminating with his last two operas, *Otello* and *Falstaff*, written in his seventies, based on Shakespeare's works and considered two of the greatest operas ever written. As for *Macbeth*, it only remains for us to judge if Verdi, Piave, and Maffei, succeeded in illustrating and interpreting the spirit of Shakespeare's tragedy. But for those who will witness this MOT production of the opera, we feel confident that the answer might be a resounding yes!

THE “CURSE” OF *MACBETH*

Within the world of theatre, *Macbeth* carries a unique curse, and saying the word “Macbeth” inside a theatre is strictly taboo (unless you are quoting from the text itself during rehearsal or performance). Invoking the play’s title is believed to bring about bad luck or even disaster. To avoid the curse, actors refer to the play by a variety of euphemisms such as “The Bard’s Play” or “The Scottish Play”, and the title characters as “The Scotsman” and “Lady M.”.

There are a number of different stories surrounding the origin of the curse, but some say that the play’s history of bad luck began with its first performance (circa 1606) when the actor scheduled to portray Lady Macbeth died suddenly and Shakespeare was forced to replace him. Some believe that a coven of witches cursed the play for eternity in revenge for Shakespeare’s inclusion of spoken spells; others believe that the spells themselves awaken black magic, while still others believe that a production that has been staged for more than 400 years is bound to have its fair share of accidents. The legend of *Macbeth*’s curse has been kept alive in the catalog of accidents and misfortunes surrounding various productions over time, including:



A sign on the doors of the Barrymore Theatre during the most recent Broadway run of *Macbeth* (2013)

- ❖ A 17th-century Amsterdam production where the actor playing King Duncan was allegedly killed in front of a live audience when a real dagger was used in place of the stage prop during the stabbing scene.
- ❖ Raucous audience riots, including one in 1721 at Lincoln’s Inn Fields Theatre and another in 1772 at Covent Garden. In 1849, a long-standing rivalry between fans of British actor William Charles Macready and American Edwin Forrest turned violent during a production at New York’s Astor Place Opera House, leaving 22 dead and more than 100 injured.
- ❖ A production at the Old Vic in 1937 when a 25-pound stage weight crashed down from the flies, missing star Laurence Olivier by inches. In addition, the director and the actress playing Lady Macduff were involved in a car accident on the way to the theatre, and the proprietor of the theatre died of a heart attack during the dress rehearsal.
- ❖ Charlton Heston suffered severe burns on his legs because the tights he was wearing had somehow been dipped in kerosene (1953).
- ❖ Despite previously laughing off the supposed curse, actor Jonathan Slinger had to relinquish the title role in a 2011 Royal Shakespeare Company production due to injuries after he was knocked off his bicycle in a collision with a car.

Whether or not the curse is real, many thespians don’t want to take any chances and the play’s title remains unspoken in most theatres. However, this curse does not seem to have transferred over to the opera world, and in producing Verdi’s *Macbeth*, such censorship is not common. Feel free to say the opera’s title while inside the Detroit Opera House; after all, as one MOT staff member reminds us (taking his cue from Harry Potter and He Who Shall Not Be Named), “fear of a name only increases fear of the thing itself.”

ADAPTATIONS OF *MACBETH*

Verdi is far from the only artist to create his own interpretation of Shakespeare's work. From theatre to movies to television, you can find the story of *Macbeth* throughout many mediums and cultures. For instance:

- ❖ *Joe MacBeth* (UK, 1955) is a film noir resetting of the story as a gang war in Chicago.
- ❖ The film *Scotland, PA* is a black comedy retelling of the story, set against the backdrop of a fast food restaurant in 1970s rural Pennsylvania.
- ❖ *Throne of Blood* (or *Kumonosu-jô*, Japan, 1957), co-written and directed by Akira Kurosawa, transposes the story to feudal Japan, with stylistic elements drawn from Noh drama.
- ❖ *Maqbool* (India, 2004) is an adaptation set in the Mumbai underworld.
- ❖ The television series *Slings and Arrows*, which centers on a theatre in Canada, dedicates its' entire second season (2005) to the story of the company mounting *Macbeth*.



Actor Toshirô Mifune in a scene from *Kumonosu-jô*

- ❖ In 2013, actor and writer Alan Cumming presented a one-man version of the play on the Broadway.
- ❖ In 1999, Tiny Ninja Theatre mounted a 40-minute version of *Macbeth* performed by inch-high plastic ninjas and assorted dime store figures on a briefcase-sized stage. It played to a house of 10 seats; later, five standing room spaces were added.
- ❖ The so-called “Voodoo *Macbeth*” was directed by Orson Welles as part of the WPA's Federal Theatre Project in 1936. The story was moved to Haiti, and was performed by an entirely African-American cast. It earned its' nickname from Welles' decision to supplant some of the witches' text with drumming and chants from Vodou ceremonies. Controversial in its time, this production is now regarded as a landmark theatrical event for its success in promoting African-American theatre.
- ❖ *Sleep No More* is a site-specific, interactive work of theatre, currently running off-Broadway, that “evokes the world of *Macbeth*” while audience members move at their own pace through the Manhattan warehouse where the production is housed. This production is lauded as “an immersive production inspired by Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, told through the lens of a Hitchcock thriller.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Part 1: Art in Our Lives

- ❖ What is art? What is music? How do these fit into our lives?
- ❖ What was your first exposure to opera? What do you remember about it?
- ❖ Do you consider yourself an artist? What are the criteria for being an artist?
- ❖ What did you expect to experience with this opera? Were your predictions correct? In what ways were your expectations met or not met?
- ❖ Did you identify with any characters in this opera? Why or why not?

Part 2: About the Production

- ❖ How did you see the technical elements support the story? What did the costumes tell us about the characters, etc.? Did anything in particular stand out?
- ❖ How did the music reinforce the action on stage? What musical changes did you note throughout in terms of changes in setting and atmosphere?

Part 3: Story and Themes

- ❖ *Macbeth* has been adapted across many mediums and cultures. What makes *Macbeth*'s themes so universal? Where and when would you set this story?
- ❖ The witches (also called the “Weird Sisters”) are often blamed for planting the seed of treachery in *Macbeth*'s mind —yet the word “wyrd” goes back to the Anglo-Saxon word for “fate.” How much personal agency do we have against fate? Do the witches represent a destiny that can't be avoided, or do they simply provide an opportunity for *Macbeth* to reveal his character and create his own fate?
- ❖ This story is one that heavily incorporates elements of the supernatural. Explain the role of witches, ghosts, and visions in *Macbeth*.
- ❖ If one of *Macbeth*'s themes is ambition, whose ambition is the driving force of the opera—*Macbeth*'s or *Lady Macbeth*'s?
- ❖ How are traditional gender roles both reversed and enforced in *Macbeth*?
- ❖ Which character in the opera holds the most power? Is it *Lady Macbeth*, with her ability to convince (some may say, manipulate) her husband? The witches, who can influence the actions of others with their prophecies? *Malcolm*, who leads the British troops to invade, and becomes king? The avenging hero *Macduff*? Or is it *Macbeth* himself, who murders *Duncan* and seizes the throne?



A scene from Verdi's *Macbeth*
(Photo courtesy of Florentine Opera Company)

IN THE CLASSROOM

Pre- and Post-Performance Activity: Cross the Room

Have students line up on opposite sides of the room, facing one another. As a statement is read, have students cross to the other side if they agree with what is being said. After the activity, discuss students' reasons for crossing or not crossing.

Statements about live performance:

- ❖ I think that attending a live performance (an opera, play, concert, or sporting event) is more enjoyable than watching the same event on television.
- ❖ I think that attending live performances is an important thing to do.
- ❖ Live performances always hold my interest.
- ❖ When I attend live performances, I usually feel like the story is relevant to my life.
- ❖ I wish I could attend live performances more often than I do.

Statements on themes from Macbeth:

- ❖ Human beings have free will.
- ❖ Destiny is real; some things that happen come down to fate.
- ❖ People in power will always become corrupted.
- ❖ Ambition is a good quality.
- ❖ A person who urges someone to commit a crime shares equal responsibility with the one who commits it.
- ❖ Crimes will always catch up with those who carried them out.
- ❖ A thirst for power will never be quenched.

Notes on this activity:

Remember to encourage your students to talk about WHY they chose their answers. Follow questions with more questions- for example, if students think that operas and live performances are RARELY relevant to their lives, make sure to ask why. And how can we change that? Who is telling the stories right now? How do we position ourselves to make sure our stories, and stories that are important to us, get told? What stories would we like to see represented on stage? Also, if this activity is conducted both pre- and post-performance, make sure to encourage students to note if their answer has changed, and why it changed. Encourage them to talk about elements of the performance that may have contributed to their answer changing.

GRADES 9-10

English Language Arts

1. Write a review of *Macbeth* and send a copy to the Michigan Opera Theatre.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.1.D

Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

2. Create and present an informational presentation about opera that utilizes video and/or audio clips, Power Point slides, photos, etc.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.5

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4

Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

3. Compare and contrast Shakespeare's trio of "Weird Sisters" with Verdi's chorus of witches. What effects do these choices have on the story? Why might Verdi have made this change? For the libretto of Verdi's *Macbeth*, visit:

<http://www.operafolio.com/libretto.asp?n=Macbeth&translation=UK>

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7

Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Breughel's Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

World History and Geography

1. *Macbeth's* composer Giuseppe Verdi was living and writing in Italy during a time known as the Risorgimento ("Resurgence" or "Rising Again"), when the many different states of the Italian peninsula were unified into a single country. Compare a map of the Italian states in the 1800s and a modern map of Italy, then research and discuss what effects unification had on political and social spheres. Finish with a monologue or speech from the POV of a state citizen (e.g. from Sicily or Sardinia) who is either for or against the unification of Italian states, giving reasons why or why not.

WHG.6.3.1b

Analyze the economic, political, and social transformations in Europe by using historical and modern maps to describe how the wars of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods and growing nationalism changed the political geography of Europe.

GRADES 11-12

English Language Arts

1. Write a review of *Macbeth* and send a copy to the Michigan Opera Theatre.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.II-12.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

2. Individually or in small groups, have students brainstorm “Who, what, where, when, why, how” questions they may have relating to Verdi’s *Macbeth*. These could be about the production itself (“What is the process of putting up an opera?”), about the adaptation of the piece (“What differences exist between Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and Verdi’s, and why?”), or about the themes represented in *Macbeth* (“When is history have we seen examples of ambition going unchecked by moral constraints?”). Let students choose one question to guide their research project, and then share final projects with the class.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.II-12.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

3. Compare and contrast Verdi’s *Macbeth* with Shakespeare’s, noting in particular the political statement implicit in Verdi’s addition of the chorus of Scottish exiles, who sing of their longing for their ‘patria’ (homeland).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.II-12.7

Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)

World History and Geography

4. Composer Giuseppe Verdi was living and writing during a time in Italy known as the “Risorgimento”, or Italian Unification (the ideological movement that led to a series of political events that freed the Italian states from foreign domination and united them politically). Have students research this period and create newspapers, essays, speeches, scenes, and/or poetry examining the process and reasoning behind uniting the Italian states, and the effects of the unification on global politics.

WHG.6.3.1a

Analyze the economic, political, and social transformations in Europe by explaining how democratic ideas and revolutionary conflicts influenced European society, noting particularly their influence on religious institutions, education, family life, and the legal and political position of women.

CONTACT

For more info about the
Department of Education and
Community Programs
please contact:

ANDREA SCOBIE

Manager of Education and Community Programs
313.237.3429 | ascobie@motopera.org

Visit us online:

Website: www.michiganopera.org

Facebook: Michigan Opera Theatre

Instagram: @MichiganOpera

Twitter: @DetOperaHouse

SOURCES

HISTORY
history.com

The Metropolitan Opera
metopera.org

No Sweat Shakespeare
nosweatshakespeare.com

Opera News
operanews.com

PBS
pbs.org

Penguin Random House
penguin.com

Playbill
playbill.com

Royal Opera
www.roh.org.uk

The Stage
thestage.co.uk

The Telegraph
telegraph.co.uk

Utah Opera
www.utahopera.org