



CLASS X
ENGLISH LITERATURE READER
CHAPTER 2 - MACBETH
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

SOLUTIONS

A. Based on your reading of the text, complete the following statements:

- (i) The first witch hailed Macbeth as Thane of Glamis.
- (ii) The second witch said to Banquo that he would not be so happy, yet much happier than Macbeth.
- (iii) When Ross addressed Macbeth as Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth was surprised because it was a very quick and sudden fulfilment of the witch's prophesy.
- (iv) If he killed the king, Macbeth knew that he would risk damnation after his death but knew also that in this life he would reap as he sowed.
- (v) When Lady Macbeth taunted him as a coward, too feeble to take what he wanted, Macbeth was so stung that he resolved to doubt no further but to follow his wife's persuasion and murder the king.
- (vi) After the king's murder, Malcolm and Donalbain ran away because they feared that the murderer of their father would next search out for them.
- (vii) During the supper, Macbeth said that the table was full. But this astonished the lords because the seat in the midst was vacant.
- (viii) Lady Macbeth became afraid of darkness and she commanded that there should always be a candle burning by the bedside.

B. Answer the following questions in a sentence each:

- (i) **Whose help did Macdonwald seek when he rebelled against King Duncan?**
Ans: When Macdonwald rebelled against King Duncan, he sought the help of the king of Norway along with his soldiers.
- (ii) **How did the third witch address Macbeth?**
Ans: The third witch addressed Macbeth as the would-be king of Scotland.
- (iii) **Why did Lady Macbeth not stab King Duncan herself?**
Ans: Lady Macbeth did not stab King Duncan herself because the sight of the king with his white hair on the pillow reminded her of her own father.



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(iv) **‘Then Macbeth caught sight of his own hands.....’**

What did Macbeth see of his own hands?

Ans: Macbeth saw that his own hands were all clammy with King Duncan’s blood.

(v) **After the discovery of the king’s murder, why did Macbeth kill the two grooms guarding the king?**

Ans: After the discovery of the king’s murder, Macbeth killed the two grooms guarding the king because he was overcome with grief and anger at the sight of them with their blood-stained clothes and daggers.

(vi) **‘All pledged this toast, but as Macbeth took the cup from his lips and would have sat down again, there.....’**

What did Macbeth see?

Ans: Macbeth saw Banquo behind him streaked with blood, looking pale and staring at him with open sightless eyes.

(vii) **Malcolm escaped to England. What treatment did he find in the hands of the English king?**

Ans: Malcolm, who by right was Scotland’s king after his father’s death, was kindly received by the English king.

(viii) **In his second meeting with the Weird Sisters, what did the first figure say to Macbeth?**

Ans: In his second meeting with the Weird Sisters, the first figure had warned him to beware of Macduff, the Thane of Fife.

(ix) **When Macduff reached England, Malcolm at first treated him unkindly. Why?**

Ans: When Macduff reached England, Malcolm at first treated him unkindly in order to check his faithfulness and to make sure that he was not a spy sent by Macbeth.

(x) **What tactics did Malcolm adopt to hide the exact number of his soldiers as they reached Birnam Wood?**

Ans: As they reached Birnam Wood, Malcolm commanded every soldier to cut off a leafy branch from a tree and carry it with him so that they hid the exact number of his soldiers from Macbeth’s scouts.

C. Answer the following questions briefly:

(i) **Why did the king of Norway crave for a truce immediately?**

Ans: In the battle, the king of Norway saw how hardily the brave general of Duncan i.e. Macbeth fought and how gallantly he slew Macdonwald. The king was so shaken seeing Macbeth’s valour that he craved for a truce immediately and agreed to pay a huge ransom if he might be allowed to bury his dead soldiers and return home.



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(ii) What fate did the Thane of Cawdor meet for plotting against King Duncan?

Ans: The Thane of Cawdor was condemned to death for plotting against the king. It was also commanded that his lands, goods and title be taken away and bestowed upon Macbeth as a reward for his valour.

(iii) What were the prophecies made to Macbeth by the Weird Sisters?

Ans: The prophecies made to Macbeth by the Weird Sisters were that he was the Thane of Glamis, the Thane of Cawdor and that he would be the King of Scotland thereafter.

(iv) What prophecies did they (the three witches) make to Banquo?

Ans: After the three witches hailed Banquo, the first witch said that he would be lesser than Macbeth but greater, the second witch said that he would not be so happy as Macbeth yet much happier and the third witch said that he would not be a king but he would give birth to kings.

(v) What piece of news prompted Macbeth to aspire for the throne of Scotland?

Ans: After meeting the Weird Sisters, Macbeth and Banquo saw two of the king's noblemen riding towards them. One of them was Ross who rode up to Macbeth and told him that the king made him the Thane of Cawdor as a reward for his valour. That news fulfilled the second prophecy of the witches and it prompted Macbeth to aspire for the throne of Scotland which was the third prophecy.

(vi) 'When Lady Macbeth received the letter her thoughts caught fire.....' What characteristic of Lady Macbeth made her think so?

Ans: Lady Macbeth was as ambitious as her husband but she lacked his natural kindness which made him shrink from seeking the crown by foul means. She was so determined to make her husband the king of Scotland that she kindled him to the extent that he would stop at nothing, not even the murder of the king while a guest in his own castle. This ambitious trait of Lady Macbeth made her think so.

(vii) What arguments made Macbeth hesitant to murder the king while he was a guest in his castle?

Ans: Lady Macbeth was persistent that King Duncan be murdered while he was a guest in Macbeth's castle. Macbeth brooded endlessly upon it but was hesitant to do so for various reasons. He felt that he would risk damnation after his death if he murdered the king. Also, it was his responsibility to protect the king who was his guest and kinsman. Moreover, Duncan was a meek and honest ruler, so his death would cause universal pity for him and horror against his murderer. Therefore, even if he coveted the crown, it would bring him nothing but only misery and disaster and so he hesitated.

(viii) Why did Macbeth finally decide to murder the king?

Ans: Initially, Macbeth was reluctant to murder the king but he was stung very badly when his wife scorned and taunted him as a coward for being too feeble to take what he wanted. Moreover, she showed that she had already exactly planned the murder. Thus, overcoming his doubts, he finally decided to murder the king.



(ix) Why did Banquo begin to hate Macbeth?

Ans: Banquo was with Macbeth when the prophecies made by the weird sister turned out to be true one by one. He also saw Macbeth's reaction then. Therefore, he would be the first logical character to become suspicious of Macbeth when King Duncan was murdered. In no long time, Banquo began to hate Macbeth for he knew that Macbeth was indeed the murderer of the old king.

(x) How did Macbeth feel when he learnt that Fleance had escaped?

Ans: When Macbeth learnt that Fleance had escaped, he despaired and was afraid of the witches' old prophecy which forecast that Banquo's sons would become the king of Scotland came back to him with force greater than ever.

(xi) Why did Macbeth decide to meet the Weird Sisters a second time?

Ans: Macbeth ordered for the killing of Banquo and Fleance but Fleance escaped which made Macbeth despair and the fear of the witches' prophecy that Banquo's sons would become the kings of Scotland came to him with force greater than ever. He was the king of Scotland but he was lonely and desperate and was afraid that his gruesome acts of murder would be revealed. Under these circumstances, he decided to meet the Weird Sisters so as to know what lay ahead of him.

(xii) When Macbeth met the Weird Sisters for the second time, what did the third figure tell him?

Ans: When Macbeth met the Weird Sisters for the second time, the third figure told him to be as brave as a lion and also to be proud. It also told Macbeth not to worry about those individuals who conspired against him because he would not be defeated until Birnam Wood marched to Dunsinane Hill to fight against him.

(xiii) What did Macbeth do when he heard that Macduff had fled to England?

Ans: When Macbeth heard that Macduff had fled to England and escaped him, his anger was beyond control. He sent his soldiers to take hold of Macduff's castle forcibly and kill every living soul in it, including his wife and his children.

(xiv) Why did Macbeth feel that no one could conquer him?

Ans: In his second meeting with the witches, Macbeth was told by the second figure that he could not be killed by a man born of a woman. The third figure also told him that he would be vanquished only when Birnam Wood moved to Dunsinane Hill. He took the predictions literally and thought that he could not be killed at all. These predictions made Macbeth feel that no one could conquer him.

(xv) How did Birnam Wood move to Dunsinane?

Ans: Malcolm marched with a large army towards Scotland to claim his rightful kingdom. When they reached Birnam Wood, he commanded every soldier to cut a leafy branch from the trees in the forest so that Macbeth's scouts were not able to spy the number of his men. From afar, it looked as if Birnam Wood was moving towards Dunsinane.



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(xvi) ‘Your charm is useless,’ retorted Macduff.....’ Why did Macduff say so to Macbeth?

Ans: When Macbeth went to meet the witches for a second time, he was told by the second figure that no man born of a woman could harm him. That is why he had the foolish belief that he lived a charmed life. But, Macduff had an unnatural birth as he was taken out of his mother’s womb before his time and so he was not born like other man. Therefore, he could harm Macbeth. That is why he retorted to Macbeth by saying that his (Macbeth’s) charm was useless.

D. Answer the following questions in about 80 words each:

(i) **Bring out the significance of Macbeth and Banquo’s first meeting with the witches.**

Ans: The first meeting of Macbeth and Banquo with the witches at the barren heath after a victorious war in *Macbeth* is very important to the plot and develops many aspects of the play. It introduces the audience to the supernatural element. It also establishes a theme of disorder through the presence of the witches, the stormy weather and the bleak landscape. The mood of evilness, deception – ‘fair is foul and foul fair’ and bleakness is sustained throughout. Their prophecies also give Macbeth a false sense of hope and the impetus to act. They provide for Macbeth’s primary call to action. The presence of the witches communicates treason and impending gloom and establishes a sense of moral confusion.

When Macbeth and Banquo met the three witches, they greeted Macbeth with three salutations in past, present and future. He was hailed as the Thane of Glamis which he already was, the Thane of Cawdor, which he is but not yet known to him and thirdly as the future king. Banquo was unafraid and unaffected by their prophecies to him but Macbeth was deeply affected and lost into horrible imaginings. It was only after Macbeth received the news of becoming the Thane of Cawdor that the idea of assassinating Duncan came to his mind. Though the witches did not deliberately tell Macbeth to kill Duncan, they used a subtle form of temptation through the prophecies which effectively guided him on his path to his own destruction. Although Macbeth took the action that led to his downfall, he would not have done that if the witches had not told him that he would be king.

Thus, the witches were just as responsible for Macbeth’s downfall as Macbeth himself because they put ideas in his head. Probably, none of Macbeth’s actions would have taken place, had Macbeth and Banquo not meet the witches or the witches gave their prophecies which are largely responsible for the plot and therefore, this meeting was significant.

(ii) **Write the circumstances that led Macbeth to kill King Duncan.**

Ans: There are various reasons as to why Macbeth decided to kill King Duncan. It all went back to the scene where the witches told him the prophecies and hailed him as the future king. Unlike Banquo, Macbeth’s thoughts were ambitious and full of treason. After the battles he was greatly honoured for being a valiant warrior and even made the Thane of Cawdor. The turning into reality of the prophecy of the witches filled his thoughts with horrible imaginings so much so that from that time onwards



he began to think more closely of how things might be brought to pass. However, the making of Malcolm the heir to the throne put a bar to his hope of becoming the king as prophesized by the witches and drove him to take desperate measures.

In short, he murdered the king because of the prophecies of the witches, because of his over-ambitions and also because of his wife who used her slyness and cunning to manipulate him by claiming that he was not a man if he could not kill the king and become king himself. When his manhood and courage were challenged and when the bright prospect of the coveted prize of becoming the king was dangled before his eyes he immediately yielded to the temptation and killed Duncan.

(iii) ‘Macbeth by this time was in a high fever of doubt.....’ Why was Macbeth in such a state of doubt?

Ans: Macbeth was by nature an ambitious man but his natural kindness made him shrink from seeking the crown by foul means. But Lady Macbeth was so determined to make her husband king of Scotland that she would so kindle him that he stopped at nothing, not even the murder of the king while a guest in his own castle. When the time of killing the king came, he was in a high fever of doubt for he could see into the meaning of this foul deed which his wife was thrusting upon him. So, he thought ceaselessly about it. King Duncan was his king, guest and kinsman and it was his duty to protect him; not bear the knife himself. Duncan was also a meek and honest king, so Duncan’s death could cause universal pity for him and horror against his murderer. Macbeth knew that the crown which he coveted could prove a barren honour and bring him nothing but misery and disaster. On the one hand, he knew that the act of killing Duncan would bring him damnation in the world to come but on the other hand he also knew that he would reap as he sowed. Thus, considering the pros and cons of killing Duncan put Macbeth in such a state of doubt.

(iv) Explain the reason of Macbeth’s behavior at the supper at which Banquo was to be the chief guest.

Ans: After he became the king of Scotland, Macbeth held a celebratory banquet for his nobles at his castle with Banquo as the chief guest. Everything started quite normally. The guests were greeted and they all sat down for the meal. But one man was absent and it was Banquo and the reason for his absence being that Macbeth had him murdered. Where Banquo should be sitting, Macbeth saw the ghost of Banquo instead. He also saw the ghost a second time at the time of the toast. The sight of Banquo’s ghost upset Macbeth so much so that he caused chaos when he started to behave very oddly. Lady Macbeth tried her best to cover up for her husband but in the end had to ask the nobles to leave as she was afraid what her husband might reveal in his fit.

The appearance of the ghost allows us to peep into Macbeth’s mind. Although on the surface Macbeth is happy to kill to attain what he wants but deep down he is troubled by his guilt. The imagining of the ghost at the banquet is significant because Macbeth’s inner conflict is made public for the first time. He became increasingly paranoid and the falling apart of Macbeth really starts here.



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(v) **Explain the reason of Lady Macbeth's strange behavior in her sleep after the death of the king.**

Ans: After the death of the king, Lady Macbeth has a psychological illusion that the blood of King Duncan is stuck to her hands. Lady Macbeth seems to have completely gone mad but it happens only when she is asleep. The doctor and gentlewoman attending on her saw her walking with a candle in her hand; her eyes were open but their sense fast shut. Sometimes, in her sleep she would get up, write something in a paper, read and seal it or pretend to wash her hands repeatedly. She also talks about 'spot' and 'blood' or chides her husband. Her sleep walking shows that she is deeply troubled.

The sleepwalking of Lady Macbeth creates a great deal of irony and shows that the murder of Duncan has serious consequences. Her sleep is disturbed by guilt though she originally chides Macbeth for thinking that he has murdered sleep. She mocks and insults him for his guilt and remorse but ironically it is she who cannot bear the guilt. As she is the closest observer, confidant and a partner of Macbeth in his monstrous crimes, her inner guilt and constant anxiety result in insanity. Clearly she is feeling guilty over the murders. Thus, it clearly explains the strange behaviour of Lady Macbeth in her sleep.

(vi) (a) **Give a character sketch of Macbeth.**

Ans: In William Shakespeare's tragic play *Macbeth*, Macbeth is the protagonist. He is the tragic hero, a virtuous character with a tragic flaw that eventually leads to his downfall. Macbeth's tragic flaw is his over-ambition.

Macbeth is introduced in the play as a warrior-hero whose valour on the battlefield earns him great honour from the king. Despite his fearless character in the battle, Macbeth is concerned by the prophecies of the Witches. He falls prey to the prophecies and this leads to his downfall. He becomes very ambitious when the prophecies began to turn true. When Duncan announces that he intends to pass his kingdom to his son Malcolm, Macbeth appears frustrated as it puts a bar to his hope but he undergoes terrible pangs of conscience at the time of murdering Duncan. We see Macbeth at his most humane and sympathetic self when his manliness is mocked and demeaned by his wife. In order to prove to his wife that he is not a coward, he ultimately kills the king and becomes the king himself. This he does with his wife's help and encouragement.

After becoming king of Scotland, he is plagued by insecurities and becomes tyrannical and goes on a murderous rampage. He suffers from guilt, anxiety and fear, unable to rest or trust his nobles. His reign of terror ended with his death in the hands of his former ally, Macduff.

(b) **Give a character sketch of Lady Macbeth.**

Ans: Lady Macbeth is one of the most powerful, ruthless and ambitious female characters in literature. Unlike her husband, she lacks all humanity. Her burning desire is to become a queen and so she plans and plots so that the throne of Scotland belongs to her husband. Her ambitious nature is her defining quality and she influences, masterminds and helps her husband in killing Duncan. Also, Lady Macbeth persistently taunts her husband for his lack of courage even though we know



of his bloody deeds on the battlefield. But in public, she acts as the gentle and consummate hostess, enticing her victim, the king, into her castle.

Ultimately, she fails the test of her own hardened ruthlessness. Having scolded her husband one last time during the banquet, the pace of events becomes too much even for her. Following King Duncan's murder, she becomes mentally deranged. She is not able to handle the anxiety, guilt and stress and begins to sleep-walk. She fails to transform into a completely ruthless, nefarious person and suffers the consequences of her bloody actions. In the end, she becomes a mere shadow of her former commanding self, over-whelmed with anxiety and ends up committing suicide.

(vii) Why did Macbeth describe his life as 'vain and useless' comparing it with 'a little candle soon burnt out'?

Ans: Macbeth began his life as a brave Scottish general who was both honourable and admirable. But in the course of his life, he had become over-ambitious and even murdered his own king and kinsman Duncan. He also degraded himself by killing his friend Banquo and Macduff's wife and children. All these showed that he had become tyrannical and paranoid.

After killing Duncan, he had to kill a number of people to keep the act a secret and also to protect himself. He became a king to whom few were loyal. Also he did not trust any of his nobles. Even his wife had ceased to be his companion or ally for she was utterly worn out with the ceaseless horror and anxiety. Thus, despite being a king, Macbeth lived a barren and futile life. Towards the end of the play, he came to know that Lady Macbeth was dead and Malcolm's armies were marching against him. But he was so hardened then that he didn't even feel sorrow for his wife. At this stage, Macbeth succumbed to pessimism and despair and saw the meaninglessness of his life. He realized his worthless life and compared it to a little burning candle which shone brightly for a short time but only to be soon burnt out. His life as a king was full of events that were all vain and useless like a tale told by an idiot. At last, he realized the futility of his life for in spite of being a king he was not happy or secured and his wife had to die a tragic death.

(viii) Describe the role of the witches in the story of Macbeth.

Ans: The witches in Macbeth represent the influence of supernatural forces on human affairs. They are depicted as malicious and evil in the play and their activities are simultaneously tied up with the themes of destiny and corruption. They further the theme of 'fair is foul and foul is fair' throughout the play. Also, they serve as instruments of fate by delivering their prophecies to Macbeth who is then motivated to pursue his ambition.

In this moral play, we are shown how weak-willed people can be easily influenced. Macbeth is greatly influenced by the witches. Though, the witches are not directly responsible for Macbeth's actions, they definitely bring out what is evil in Macbeth by using a subtle form of temptation when they inform him that he is destined to be the king. By placing this thought in his mind, they effectively guide him on the path of his destruction. Other actions of Macbeth are more or less related to what the witches dictated. They also made him believe that he was invincible. Thinking he lived a charmed life, he fought with Malcolm and Macduff only to get killed. Thus, he fell an easy victim to their trap of deception and treachery.

The weird sisters or the three witches are the root of the problem that is the subject of the play and thus play a significant role in the story of Macbeth.



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(ix) Do you think the story has a lesson to teach? Elaborate on it.

Ans: **Macbeth** is a tragic play written by the great playwright, William Shakespeare. This play is set in medieval Scotland and dramatizes concepts like ambition, power, greed, deception and treachery. The story revolves around Macbeth, the brave general of the king and his subsequent downfall.

Macbeth is a tale of ambition and so, Shakespeare uses the titular character's motives to convey the dangers of being too ambitious. We can relate it to modern society as it is human nature to succumb to temptation and so Shakespeare gives warning of the outcomes of over-ambition. What **Macbeth** primarily teaches is that ambition is man's worst enemy more so if it is not lawful. It is so potent as an enemy because it worked from within. Macbeth would have remained great, noble and widely admired if the witches did not provoke him on the heath and if his wife did not stand by his ambition. His wife should not have backed her husband's unlawful desire. However, a companionship marked with guilt and fear does not last long and soon after Duncan's death, the bond between them loosened.

It also teaches that crime never pays. While Macbeth goes down to defeat and death in the end, Lady Macbeth suffers from somnambulism leading to suicidal death. Their ambition to have something which does not belong to them led to their doom.



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