



# Education Resources Pre-Production

NEXT STAGE Sydney Theatre Company and The Border Project present

## VS MACBETH

(most of it) by William Shakespeare



### PRE-PRODUCTION RESOURCES

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Teacher's Resource Kit compiled by Education manager **Naomi Edwards**, Education Coordinator **Toni Murphy**, Editor **Lucy Goleby**, Contributors **Kerreen Ely Harper**, **Shannon Murphy** and **Elizabeth Surbey**

#### KEY



AIM of exercise or section



Extension Exercises



Download and watch



Drama Exercises



English Exercises

#### VS MACBETH

Sydney Theatre Company Education Resources 2010

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### ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

[www.sydneytheatre.com.au/about](http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/about)

### ABOUT STCED

[www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced/about](http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced/about)

### ABOUT THE RESIDENTS

[www.sydneytheatre.com.au/about/artistic/the-residents](http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/about/artistic/the-residents)

### ABOUT THE BORDER PROJECT



“The Border Project is a contemporary performance ensemble committed to charting the future language of live performance”

([www.myspace.com/theborderproject](http://www.myspace.com/theborderproject))

Adelaide-based The Border Project presented their first work, *Heiner Muller’s Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscape with Argonauts* in 2002, and was nominated for an Adelaide Critic’s Circle Award for innovation.

Quickly establishing themselves as a company with an exciting vision, The Border Project went on to premiere *The War* in 2003, *Please Go Hop!* in 2004, *Highway Rock ‘n’ Roll Disaster* in 2006, and *Trouble on Planet Earth* and *Disappearance* in 2008.

“The Border Project constructs its performances through mashing new and classical texts with film and video, dance and movement, multi-layered live sound, sport, and other materials”

([www.theatre.asn.au/node/11700](http://www.theatre.asn.au/node/11700))

The Border Project is triennially funded by both Arts SA’s Theatre Development Strategy and as an Emerging Key Organisation of the Australia Council’s Theatre Board.



**Watch** [www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkBGJNVQCJA&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkBGJNVQCJA&feature=related)

**Read more** [www.performingartsmarket.com.au/spotlight/company?id=66](http://www.performingartsmarket.com.au/spotlight/company?id=66)

**Become a fan** [www.facebook.com/theborderproject](http://www.facebook.com/theborderproject)

“

In this radical version of *Macbeth* The Residents team up with Adelaide’s The Border Project to tackle the curse head-on.

”

**Vs Macbeth**

[www.sydneytheatre.com.au/2010/next-stage/vs-macbeth](http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/2010/next-stage/vs-macbeth)

## CREATIVE TEAM

**Director** – Sam Haren

**Set Designers** – Sam Haren and Matthew Kneale

**Costume Designer** – Mel Page

**Lighting Designer** – Govin Ruben

**Composer** – David Heinrich

**Video Designer** – Richard Bach

## CAST

Alice Ansara, Cameron Goodall,

David Heinrich, Ursula Mills,

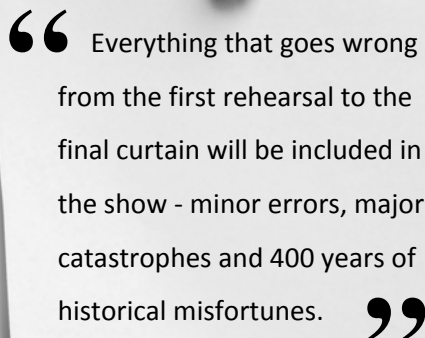
Amber McMahon, Julia Ohannesian,

Zindzi Okenyo, Richard Pyros,

Sophie Ross, Tahki Saul,

Brett Stiller, Alirio Zavarce.

## SYNOPSIS



“ Everything that goes wrong from the first rehearsal to the final curtain will be included in the show - minor errors, major catastrophes and 400 years of historical misfortunes. ”

Ever seen something go wrong in the Scottish Play? [www.facebook.com/theborderproject](http://www.facebook.com/theborderproject)

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is one of his most famous plays, both because of its dark, compelling, treasonous content, and because theatrical history swirls with superstition and stories of accidents or eerie occurrences whenever the 'Scottish play' is performed. Indeed, that's the first superstition right there: many theatre people believe the word 'Macbeth' should never be spoken in a theatre, as it attracts bad luck which can only be warded off by various rituals, such as running around the theatre three times. At STC, they're calling this production 'VS McB'.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is titled for its protagonist: Macbeth, Thane of Glamis and cousin to Duncan, King of Scotland. As Macbeth returns heroic and triumphant from war with Norway, his grateful King determines to title him Thane of Cawdor. Yet before the news reaches Macbeth, he and his fellow Captain, Banquo, are met by three witches, who greet them thus:

FIRST WITCH: All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!

SECOND WITCH: All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!

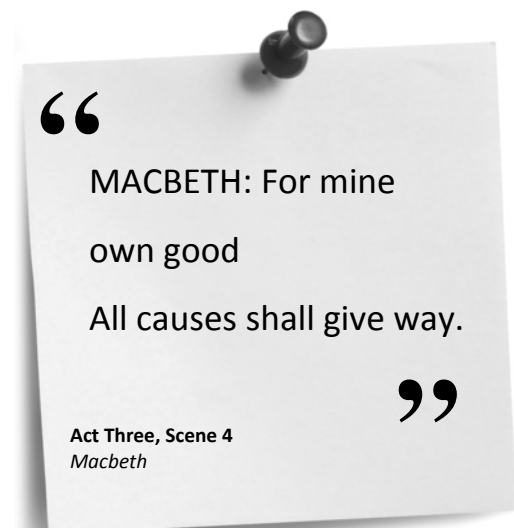
THIRD WITCH: All hail, Macbeth! That shalt be king hereafter!

Act One, Scene Three

*Macbeth*

Initially, Macbeth is taken aback by this odd greeting, yet once the news that he is indeed to be Thane of Cawdor reaches him, the witches' greeting becomes strangely prophetic. And if they were right to hail him as Thane of Cawdor, will Macbeth indeed become king? When Duncan instead pronounces his eldest son, Malcolm, his heir, Macbeth decides to take control of the destiny he believes the witches predicted for him. Encouraged and aided by his increasingly ambitious wife, Macbeth embarks upon a path of desire, greed, betrayal and murder upon murder.

It has been said that, "Of all Shakespeare's plays, *Macbeth* is the one most obsessively concerned with evil" (Hunter, 1994, 'Introduction to *Macbeth*', Penguin Books), as Macbeth's evil is not balanced with another character's good. Perhaps it is the lack of redemption in *Macbeth* that started the clouds of superstition that continue to plague productions of the play. Perhaps, like the witches connive for Macbeth, the superstitions surrounding the play become a self-fulfilling prophecy when any group of performers immerse themselves in a world of suspicion, violence and treachery. This is where *Vs Macbeth* begins, as The Border Project and The Residents incorporate the superstitions, accidents and theatrical curse of the Scottish play into the world of their production.





**AIM: To establish the story and the correct sequence of events.**



**TELLING THE STORY IN 8 TABLEAUX – AN EXERCISE FROM THE ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY**

<http://www.rsc.org.uk/macbeth/teachers/story.html>

**Divide** into eight groups.

**Allocate** each group a section of the text, as delineated below.

**Each** group must create one (or more) tableau to tell their part of their story.

**Give** every tableau a title (caption).

**Show** the tableaux to the rest of the group.

**GROUP 1:** Returning triumphant from battle (Scotland v. Norway - Scotland won), two generals in the King's army, Macbeth and Banquo, meet three weird sisters (the WITCHES) who predict that Macbeth (already Thane of Glamis) will be Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland.

**GROUP 2:** Soon afterwards, King Duncan of Scotland rewards Macbeth by giving him the title, Thane of Cawdor, so now Macbeth is both Thane of Glamis and thane of Cawdor and the first of the witches' prophecies has come true.

**GROUP 3:** Spurred on by the prophecy and by his ambitious wife, Lady Macbeth, Macbeth murders King Duncan whilst the king is visiting him at his castle in Dunsinane. Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, run away in terror. Macbeth is crowned king.

**GROUP 4:** Macbeth revisits the witches and is told

1. to beware Macduff,
2. that he can be harmed of no man born of woman,
3. that he is safe until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane.

**GROUP 5:** Macduff runs away and in his absence, Macbeth has Macduff's wife and all their children murdered.

**GROUP 6:** Lady Macbeth goes mad and dies.

**GROUP 7:** Malcolm (King Duncan's son who ran away earlier in the story), brings an army to attack Macbeth in his castle at Dunsinane, using branches cut from Birnam Wood as camouflage.

**GROUP 8:** Macduff, who wasn't "born of woman" but was "ripped from his mother's stomach" (a Caesarean birth), kills Macbeth and Malcolm is proclaimed King of Scotland.

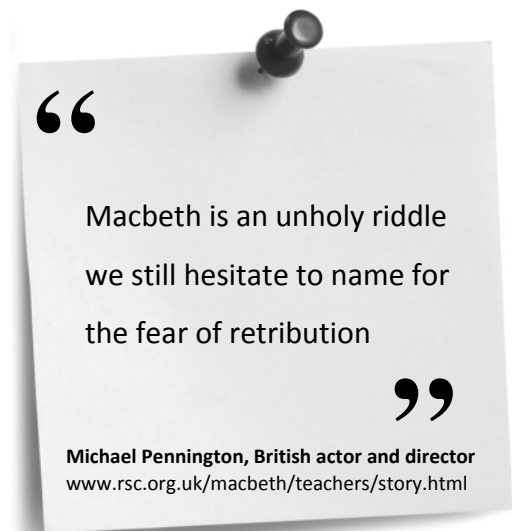
**Discuss:**

1. What worked?
2. How could the tableaux be improved?

**Find** five lines of text to use in your tableaux.

**Perform** the tableaux again, using the text.

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## THEMES

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Greed, ambition, love, murder, envy, superstition, fate, magic, the supernatural, dramatic irony, contemporary adaptation, 'play within the play' narrative.

## HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

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William Shakespeare was a prolific playwright in England in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is widely supposed that *Macbeth* was first performed before King James I and his guest King Christian IV of Denmark in 1606, and that Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* with the likes and dislikes of King James in mind. In the introduction to Penguin Classic's publication of *Macbeth*, G. K. Hunter writes, "The play seems designed to catch at several of James' obsessive interests... James had written learnedly on witches and was known to have a powerful interesting this subject" (Hunter, 'Introduction to *Macbeth*', 1994).

The BBC's h2g2 researchers reveal Shakespeare's primary inspiration for *Macbeth* was Ralph Holinshead's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, first published in 1574. It is widely established that *Macbeth* was written for entertainment, and not as a history play – luckily, because Holinshead's 'history' appears to contain a large amount of embellishment.

The similarities between Holinshead's *Chronicles* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth* are evident. Re-read the section of text quoted above from Act One, Scene Three, and then this excerpt from Holinshead's 'Mackbeth' chapter, where three witches appear to Macbeth and Banquo, who are returning from battle:

...the first of them spake and said; All haile Makbeth, thane of Glamis... The Second of them said; Haile Makbeth thane of Cawder. But the third said; All haile Makbeth and he'ereafter shalt be king of Scotland. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A4455434>

There are many theories surrounding the origins of the supposed curse on *Macbeth*.

Some people believe that the real witches of Shakespeare's time were offended by his theatrical representation of their rituals and placed a curse on the play. Others think the curse came later, as struggling theatre companies would perform *Macbeth* in lieu of a play with a larger cast, so *Macbeth* was associated with the last production of a company. (**Superstition and Macbeth** [http://shakespeareantheatre.suite101.com/article.cfm/superstition\\_and\\_macbeth](http://shakespeareantheatre.suite101.com/article.cfm/superstition_and_macbeth)) It is also rumoured that Shakespeare himself had to go on as Lady Macbeth during the play's first performance because Hal Berridge, the boy playing the role died backstage. Or perhaps because so many of the scenes take place in the dark, there tend to be a lot of accidents backstage.

(**Superstition** [www.rsc.org.uk/macbeth/teachers/superstition.html](http://www.rsc.org.uk/macbeth/teachers/superstition.html))

### VS MACBETH

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*Macbeth*, like many of Shakespeare's plays, continues to be performed regularly over 400 years after it was written. In an interview with Alan Attwood for *The Big Issue* Artistic Director of Bell Shakespeare Company said that Shakespeare's play remain timeless because, "he asks the questions but never gives the answers. The questions are always relevant... There is something about them that keeps resonating" (16 Feb – 1 Mar, #348).



**AIM: To explore Macbeth in the technology age through non-linear text and virtual worlds.**

### VIRTUAL WORLDS



Foul Whisperings, Strange Matters brings Shakespeare's *Macbeth* into the virtual world of Second Life (over 18+ years only). The Macbeth SIM (simulator) is divided into four key spaces: the arrival grove, Macbeth's head, the "what if?" copse and teaching studios. Visitors are invited to engage with the non-linear story world of Macbeth, to remake, co-create and mash-up Shakespeare.



Second Life



<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Macbeth/44/54/54>



Wiki page available for teachers and student access to online resources (no age restrictions)

<http://virtualmacbeth.wikispaces.com/>

### MACHINIMAS



Virtual Macbeth in Second Life flythrough machinima

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QNxe2gePEQ>



'Halo Macbeth goes to the Future' machinima using game search engine

<http://fliiby.com/file/329934/prwkusj6jg.html>

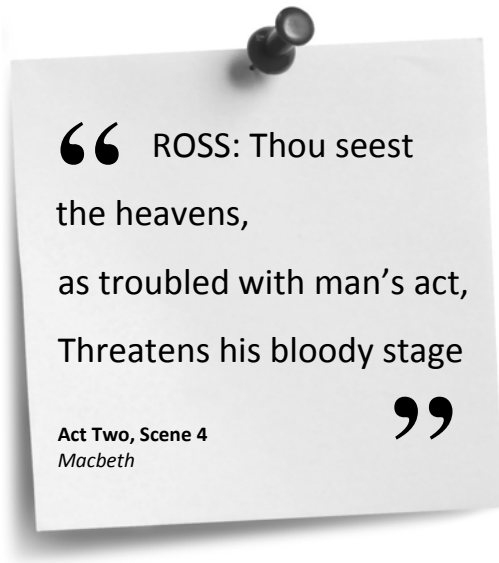




**AIM: To explore *Vs Macbeth's* 'play within the play' structure as device for satire, parody and dramatic irony.**

### PLAY WITHIN A PLAY

Vs. *Macbeth* has an open 'play within a play' approach: we are watching the play *Macbeth*, while being told stories of the superstitions involved in productions of *Macbeth*. Yet even in the original text, Shakespeare hid sly reminders to the audience that they were in a theatre, watching a play. In doing so, he was creating a similar environment to that which *The Residents* and *The Border Project* aspire: an awareness of the external reality of the production for the actors, alongside emotional engagement in the created world of the characters.



### Film



*Tropic Thunder*, 2008, Dreamworks USA.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qE3qpo4YD1U>



### Literary Texts

*Hamlet*, William Shakespeare.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, William Shakespeare.

*The Taming of the Shrew*, William Shakespeare.

*Arabian Nights* introduces the concept of a story within a story. The King of Persia sentences all of his wives to death, until he marries the Vizier's daughter, who tells him the first half of a story every night, so that he will postpone her execution to hear the end... and the beginning of another next story, for 1,001 nights.

### Animation



Homer from *The Simpsons* plays *Macbeth* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYO4VB49L-A>



Flocabulary's *Macbeth* video rap <http://www.youtube.com/w?v=E4cMHnWIR9k>

### VS MACBETH



**AIM:** To introduce *Vs Macbeth's* premise of 'something goes wrong' and 'playful anarchy' method of approach.



### **SOMETHING GOES WRONG**

**Devise** a scene with 3 characters where something must go **WRONG**.

**Decide** if it will be comic or dramatic/tragic scene.

**Present** your scene to the group.

**Repeat** the scene and do the opposite version from your initial choice.

For example, if you did a comic version, now do the dramatic/tragic version.

### **Discuss:**

1. Which version did you prefer? Why?
2. Which version was easier to devise? Why?
3. What are the dramatic elements that make a story or scene tragic or comic?



**Write** a short story, poem or reflection in response to the quote below.

**Make** an addition to the end of this quote.

For example, 'Accidents will happen if you walk around with your eyes closed'.

Do you agree with this addition: 'Accidents will happen, it is how you respond to them that matters'?

**Discuss** with reference to your experience of when something has gone wrong and how you responded at the time.

**Explore** how you might have responded differently to achieve a different/better outcome.



# Tragedy and the Common Man

By **ARTHUR MILLER**

In this age few tragedies are written. It has often been held that the lack is due to a paucity of heroes among us, or else that modern man has had the blood drawn out of his organs of belief by the skepticism of science, and the heroic attack on life cannot feed on an attitude of reserve and circumspection. For one reason or another, we are often held to be below tragedy-or tragedy above us. The inevitable conclusion is, of course, that the tragic mode is archaic, fit only for the very highly placed, the kings or the kingly, and where this admission is not made in so many words it is most often implied.

I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were. On the face of it this ought to be obvious in the light of modern psychiatry, which bases its analysis upon classic formulations, such as Oedipus and Orestes complexes, for instances, which were enacted by royal beings, but which apply to everyone in similar emotional situations.

More simply, when the question of tragedy in art is not at issue, we never hesitate to attribute to the well-placed and the exalted the very same mental processes as the lowly. And finally, if the exaltation of tragic action were truly a property of the high-bred character alone, it is inconceivable that the mass of mankind should cherish tragedy above all other forms, let alone be capable of understanding it.

As a general rule, to which there may be exceptions unknown to me, I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing-his sense of personal dignity. From Orestes to Hamlet, Medea to Macbeth, the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to gain his "rightful" position in his society.

Sometimes he is one who has been displaced from it, sometimes one who seeks to attain it for the first time, but the fateful wound from which the inevitable events spiral is the wound of indignity and its dominant force is indignation. Tragedy, then, is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly.

In the sense of having been initiated by the hero himself, the tale always reveals what has been called his "tragic flaw," a failing that is not peculiar to grand or elevated characters. Nor is it necessarily a weakness. The flaw, or crack in the characters, is really nothing-and need be nothing, but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status. Only the passive, only those who accept their lot without active retaliation, are "flawless." Most of us are in that category.

But there are among us today, as there always have been, those who act against the scheme of things that degrades them, and in the process of action everything we have accepted out of fear of insensitivity or ignorance is shaken before us and examined, and from this total onslaught by an individual against the seemingly stable cosmos surrounding us-from this total examination of the "unchangeable" environment-comes

the terror and the fear that is classically associated with tragedy. More important, from this total questioning of what has previously been unquestioned, we learn. And such a process is not beyond the common man. In revolutions around the world, these past thirty years, he has demonstrated again and again this inner dynamic of all tragedy.

Insistence upon the rank of the tragic hero, or the so-called nobility of his character, is really but a clinging to the outward forms of tragedy. If rank or nobility of character was indispensable, then it would follow that the problems of those with rank were the particular problems of tragedy. But surely the right of one monarch to capture the domain from another no longer raises our passions, nor are our concepts of justice what they were to the mind of an Elizabethan king.

The quality in such plays that does shake us, however, derives from the underlying fear of being displaced, the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who we are in this world. Among us today this fear is strong, and perhaps stronger, than it ever was. In fact, it is the common man who knows this fear best.

Now, if it is true that tragedy is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly, his destruction in the attempt posits a wrong or an evil in his environment. And this is precisely the morality of tragedy and its lesson. The discovery of the moral law, which is what the enlightenment of tragedy consists of, is not the discovery of some abstract or metaphysical quantity.

The tragic right is a condition of life, a condition in which the human personality is able to flower and realize itself. The wrong is the condition which suppresses man, perverts the flowing out of his love and creative instinct. Tragedy enlightens-and it must, in that it points the heroic finger at the enemy of man's freedom. The thrust for freedom is the quality in tragedy which exalts. The revolutionary questioning of the stable environment is what terrifies. In no way is the common man debarred from such thoughts or such actions.

Seen in this light, our lack of tragedy may be partially accounted for by the turn which modern literature has taken toward the purely psychiatric view of life, or the purely sociological. If all our miseries, our indignities, are born and bred within our minds, then all action, let alone the heroic action, is obviously impossible.

And if society alone is responsible for the cramping of our lives, then the protagonist must needs be so pure and faultless as to force us to deny his validity as a character. From neither of these views can tragedy derive, simply because neither represents a balanced concept of life. Above all else, tragedy requires the finest appreciation by the writer of cause and effect.

No tragedy can therefore come about when its author fears to question absolutely everything, when he regards any institution, habit or custom as being either everlasting, immutable or inevitable. In the tragic view the need of man to wholly realize himself is the only fixed star, and whatever it is that hedges his nature and lowers it is ripe for attack and examination. Which is not to say that tragedy must preach revolution.

The Greeks could probe the very heavenly origin of their ways and return to confirm the rightness of laws. And Job could face God in anger, demanding his right and end in submission. But for a moment everything is in suspension, nothing is accepted, and in this sketching and tearing apart of the cosmos, in the very action of so doing, the character gains "size," the tragic stature which is spuriously attached to the royal or the high born in our minds. The commonest of men may take on that stature to the extent of his willingness to throw all he has into the contest, the battle to secure his rightful place in the world.

There is a misconception of tragedy with which I have been struck in review after review, and in many conversations with writers and readers alike. It is the idea that tragedy is of necessity allied to pessimism. Even the dictionary says nothing more about the word than that it means a story with a sad or unhappy ending. This impression is so firmly fixed that I almost hesitate to claim that in truth tragedy implies more optimism in its author than does comedy, and that its final result ought to be the reinforcement of the onlooker's brightest opinions of the human animal.

For, if it is true to say that in essence the tragic hero is intent upon claiming his whole due as a personality, and if this struggle must be total and without reservation, then it automatically demonstrates the indestructible will of man to achieve his humanity.

The possibility of victory must be there in tragedy. Where pathos rules, where pathos is finally derived, a character has fought a battle he could not possibly have won. The pathetic is achieved when the protagonist is, by virtue of his witlessness, his insensitivity, or the very air he gives off, incapable of grappling with a much superior force.

Pathos truly is the mode for the pessimist. But tragedy requires a nicer balance between what is possible and what is impossible. And it is curious, although edifying, that the plays we revere, century after century, are the tragedies. In them, and in them alone, lies the belief-optimistic, if you will, in the perfectibility of man.

It is time, I think, that we who are without kings, took up this bright thread of our history and followed it to the only place it can possibly lead in our time-the heart and spirit of the average man.

**New York Times, February 27, 1949**

Scholars are in widespread agreement that Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* in 1606, with the preferences of then King, James I, firmly in mind. James I was also King James VI of Scotland, hence the setting, He was also nervous about securing his claim to the throne, and ensuring his heirs would succeed him as King. James was also fascinated by the supernatural, and had written a book on witches, *Daemonologie*, published in 1597. Finally, King James was known to have a short attention span, and *Macbeth* is one of Shakespeare's shorter plays. Read more about the potential origins of the curse on *Macbeth* in the pre-production

RESOURCES. Hunter, 'Introduction to *Macbeth*, Penguin, 1994

and *Witches and King James* <http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/ideas/daemonologie.html>

“

LADY: Art thou afeard  
To be the same in thine  
own act and valour  
As thou art in desire?

”

Act One, Scene Seven  
*Macbeth*



**AIM:** To explore and appreciate the tensions and status exchanges throughout *Macbeth*.



### KING FOR A DAY

**Players** gather outside the court, inside which sits (enthroned) the King/Queen.

**Taking** turns, the players must enter the space and make a suitable 'offer' to the King/Queen befitting their station and status.

The **King/Queen** decides to accept or refuse each offer.

This is part of each **player's** challenge.

### Discuss

1. What was the reasoning behind certain offers?
2. What was the reasoning behind the King/Queen's acceptance or rejection?
3. Was it calculated, or whimsy?
4. Were the acting skills of each player a consideration?



**STATUS TRANSITION** (similar exercises may be found in the *Theatresports Impro Guide* by Lyn Pierson)

**Two** players begin a scene at opposite ends of the master / servant spectrum.

**After** two minutes improvising, they must have justifiably reversed their position.



**Chose** a scene between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

**Determine** high status and low status to begin the scene,

**Justify** a change in status by the end of the scene, through alternative interpretations of the text.



### **BLOOD POTATO**

**Players** are all blindfolded in a secure and safe area.

*Perhaps some players stay outside the action to support safety of players.*

**Leader** moves silently amongst the figures before the action and touches one person to be the murderer.

The murderer remains blindfolded.

All players begin to move continuously around the secured space.

As they unintentionally brush against other players, they are obligated to reveal their status by whispering 'potato' to each other.

The murderer, however, will reveal their intentions by whispering, 'blood potato'.

Once a player has had the murderer whisper to them, they must pause for a count of five, then scream and die.

The dead remove their blindfold and silently move to the watching outskirts.

**Remember**, the watchers need to remain as quiet as possible, only adding to the suspense and fear of the moving players awaiting their demise.



**Attribute** the defining quality of some of the key characters in *Macbeth* to different players.

Macbeth = murderer.

If Lady Macbeth encounters the murderer, she can encourage them to kill another player.

Three players could represent the witches, and can cast spells on all players, such as creating new murderers, or freezing a player in place for 5 seconds.



## I WANT THE CHAIR

**Players** line up one after the other.

The first player sits out front on a chair.

**Taking** turns, each player attempts to remove the first player from the chair.

**Players** should use skills of persuasion to encourage the first player to give up the chair.

Any reasonable, original or unusual request should result in the chair being yielded.

**Note:** nobody may not use force or touch the first player (chair incumbent) at any time.

The exercise is in offers and yields.

“

MACBETH: Do you not  
hope your children shall be kings  
When those that gave the Thane  
of Cawdor to me  
Promised no less to them?

Act One, Scene Three  
*Macbeth*

”

## SUPERSTITIONS

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Sydney Theatre Company Production Education Resources 2010

[www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced](http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced)

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The superstitions surrounding ‘The Scottish Play’ have a long, well-recorded history. Read more about the potential origins of the curse on *Macbeth* in the pre-production resources, and search online for a plethora of stories about accidents and injuries from people involved in productions of *Macbeth*. Is the curse a self-fulfilling prophecy? Are people more alert to *Macbeth* mishap because of the superstition?

“

MACBETH: I will be satisfied! Deny me this  
And an eternal curse  
fall on you!

”

Act Four, Scene One  
*Macbeth*



**AIM:** To delve into the superstitions that inspired *Vs Macbeth*.



### READ MORE

Richard Huggett, 1981, *The curse of Macbeth and other theatrical superstitions: an investigation*, Clippenham, Picton.

Margaret Lucy, 1906, *Shakespeare and the supernatural, a brief study of folklore, superstition and witchcraft in Macbeth, A Midsummer Night's Dream, and The Tempest*, Shakespeare Press.

Cumberland Clark, 1931, *Shakespeare and the supernatural*, Williams and Norgate.



### IT'S TRUE!

**Brainstorm** a list of superstitions you've heard, whether you believe in them or not.

For example: don't walk under a ladder, don't open an umbrella indoors, throw salt over your left shoulder if you spill it, 7 years bad luck if you break a mirror, etc.

**Highlight** the superstitions in your list that you don't believe but follow anyway, like wishing on a star or holding a button when you hear a siren.

**Investigate** the origins of the superstitions you come up with.

**Create** your own superstitions. For example, don't eat eggs before noon, if you step on chewing gum, you'll have five years worth of bad hair days.

**Make up** a good historical argument for why this superstition has come about.

**Remember**, superstitions have no power if people don't believe in them.

### VS MACBETH

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[www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced](http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced)

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## BEING AN ACTOR IN MACBETH

**Write** a monologue or a short story from the point of view of an actor playing a role in a production of *Macbeth*.



**Describe** something that went terribly wrong in the rehearsal room or on opening night.

**Conjure** up something possibly catastrophic, supernatural or just downright eerie.



## HUMOROUS MISTAKES

The Border Project and The Residents are using the idea of a crash test dummy factory for the setting of *Vs Macbeth*. This is to give us the sense that we are observing a laboratory that is set up to test accidents. The director's aim is to keep what is traditionally a tragedy playful and alive by incorporating humour.



**Add** humour to the scene below (or one of your own choosing) by inserting stage directions or suggestions to the actors to purposely create accidents or mistakes.

[Act 3, Scene 3]

[Enter three Murderers.]

FIRST MURDERER

But who did bid thee join with us?

THIRD MURDERER

Macbeth.

SECOND MURDERER

He needs not our mistrust; since he delivers

Our offices and what we have to do

To his direction just.

FIRST MURDERER

Then stay with us.

BANQUO

[Within.] Give us a light there, ho!

FIRST MURDERER

Hark, I hear a noise

SECOND MURDERER

A light, a light!

## VS MACBETH

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Sydney Theatre Company Production Education Resources 2010

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THIRD MURDERER

'Tis he.

FIRST MURDERER

Stand to't.

[Enter Banquo, and Fleance with a torch.]

BANQUO

It will be rain tonight.

FIRST MURDERER

Let it come down.

[Assaults Banquo.]

BANQUO

O, treachery! Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly!

Thou mayst revenge.--O slave!

[Dies. Fleance escapes.]

THIRD MURDERER

Who did strike out the light?

FIRST MURDERER

Was't not the way?

THIRD MURDERER

There's but one down: the son is fled.

SECOND MURDERER

We have lost  
best half of our affair.

FIRST MURDERER

Well, let's away,  
and say how much is done.

[Exeunt.]

*Vs Macbeth* takes us into the playful anarchy of a ‘Crash Simulation Space’. The play itself was crash tested during the rehearsal process with everything that could potentially go wrong, which then found a place in this production. The walls burst into flame, the sides and seams split and crack, and Fleance is no longer a little boy but a crash test dummy – ‘unkillable’.

Live feeds from several cameras around the space keep all, including the audience, monitored via screens at the sides of the stage area. There is so much violence inherent in *Macbeth*, the curse, and the *Vs Macbeth* crash test, that the characters are dressed ready for battle, which is live and hazardous.

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DONALBAIN,  
a Pomeranian Dog.

FLEANCE, A crash test dummy,  
‘son’ to Banquo.

Persons Represented

*Vs Macbeth* by William Shakespeare  
a new version conceived by The Border Project  
Adapted by Cameron Goodall and Sam Haren

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**AIM:** To introduce *Vs Macbeth*'s amplification of the cause and effect structure utilised by Shakespeare in the source text, *Macbeth*.



**Discuss** the dynamics of internal and external cause and effect.

For example,

external = earthquake, flood, volcano . . .

internal = jealousy, cancer, mental illness . . .

internal/external – a person's cancer is caused by asbestos exposure . . .

**Devise** and present a scene where the focus is on cause and effect, with both internal and external forces in play.



### STORY WORLD

**Decide** on the story world or environment in which your scene occurs.

For example, a drought, snowstorm, a hospital.

**Use** the specific conditions of your story world to influence the action.



**View**, discuss, compare and contrast literary and non-literary/non-linear texts adaptations of *Vs Macbeth's* source text, Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.



**Discuss**

1. Why do writers/composers keep returning to *Macbeth* as a source text?
2. What attracted the makers of *Vs Macbeth* to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*?



**Write** or **devise** an adaptation of a classic literary text utilising a non-literary form.

For example, animation, video, film, machinima, mash-up, photo stream, 3D model, text message, song, etc.



**Discuss** and compare your works.



**View** and discuss the effectiveness and popularity of story framing narratives, with specific reference to satire, parody and dramatic irony, as demonstrated by *Vs Macbeth's* 'play within a play' structure that results with actors playing actors playing characters.



For example, *Tropic Thunder*: "I'm a dude playing a dude disguised as another dude", The 2005 film *Transamerica*, in which Felicity Huffman plays a male to female transsexual character journeying across America.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, in which Viola dresses as a boy, falls in love with her master, and has his ladylove fall in love with Viola in turn. The situation is further confused by the presence of Viola's twin brother.



**POST-SHOW DISCUSSION**

1. How were the dynamics of cause and effect were played out in *Vs Macbeth*?
2. How did the choice of story world (ie., crash test centre) affect the action?
3. How were the character relationships affected by the 'play within a play' structure of actors playing actors playing characters?
4. Identify the accidents in the production. How did the external life of the production history impact on the play text?
5. What effect did this have on the audience?
6. How does the production achieve 'aliveness' and a sense that anything could happen, anywhere, at any time?