

English 9

*Macbeth*: Study Questions for Act 2

2.1

1. What does Banquo notice about the night? Note his reference to stars as “candles” (2.1.7). Recall that Macbeth earlier called on the stars to “hide their fires” (1.4.57).
2. Why is Banquo unable to sleep?
3. How is Banquo’s response to the Weird Sisters different from Macbeth’s? Although Macbeth and Banquo are partners in war, what about this scene indicates a difference in attitude toward the Sisters and what they have said?
4. Reflect upon the triple meaning of “fatal,” explained in the note to 2.1.48. In what sense does each meaning apply here?
5. How does Macbeth respond to the appearance of the dagger? What is on his mind regarding it? What other hallucinations has Macbeth entertained? Keep track of these events.

2.2

1. Compare and contrast Lady Macbeth’s attitude in this scene with that of Macbeth in the previous scene.
2. What stops Lady Macbeth from carrying out the murder herself?
3. How does Macbeth behave now that he has killed Duncan? How does Lady Macbeth respond?
4. Macbeth notes that he “could not pronounce ‘Amen’” (2.2.42) in response to the guards’ sleeping prayer. Why do you think this is? Have the guards actually spoken, or is this another trick of Macbeth’s fevered imagination?
5. What is the importance of sleep to Macbeth? What does it mean that he thinks he has “murdered sleep” (2.2.55)?
6. For what does Lady Macbeth admonish Macbeth? Watch how this develops later in the sleepwalking scene.
7. Does Macbeth view his crime as forgivable or able to be forgotten? Why or why not?

2.3

1. The Porter says he is the porter of “hell gate” (2.3.2). How is this truer than he knows?
2. Examine Macbeth’s speech 2.3.107-112. Although this speech offers an obvious ruse to deflect the suspicion of others, these words are a presage of 5.5.22-31 and a reminder of

Macbeth's spiritual sensitivity in 1.7.1-28. Explain how these connections work, demonstrating the overall integrity of the play as a work of art.

3. What is the significance of the timing of Lady Macbeth's fainting?
4. Malcolm and Donalbain size up the situation and act accordingly. What action do they take? Why?
5. To what degree have Macbeth and Lady Macbeth adhered to the original plan?

2.4

1. What do Ross and his father think about the natural events of the previous night? What specific details do they note? How could these events correspond to those that occurred in Inverness?
2. What is the current theory regarding who has murdered King Duncan?