English 11: Finishing Off Macbeth
Answers

Act 3

3.1 How are themes further developed in this scene?

Ambition drives Macbeth to murder Banquo, his best friend.

The metaphor in lines 76–77 (“Rather than so, come fate unto the list, / And champion me to th’utterance”) describes how Macbeth feels he can combat his own fate in the “list,” or arena, in a fight to “th’ utterance” or death. This develops the central idea of agency versus fate—Macbeth believes it is possible to somehow outwit the Witches’ prophecy despite all the evidence to the contrary.

3.2 How do Macbeth and Lady Macbeth’s interactions advance plot?

Lady Macbeth isn’t aware of Macbeth’s plan to murder Banquo. This suggests a new division between the two characters as Macbeth begins to work independently of his wife’s influence.

Lady Macbeth and Macbeth’s interaction in this scene advances the plot by showing how they are coming mentally undone, furthering them towards their tragic ends. They both believe it is better to be dead than to “dwell in doubtful joy” (line 9). Also, their interactions predict that more murder will follow: “Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill” (lines 62), etc.).

3.4 How do interactions between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth develop themes?

Lady Macbeth tries to hide the imbalanced actions of Macbeth to hide his nature.

Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo in the shadows. This relates to the theme of appearance vs. reality. Macbeth is the only one who can see Banquo’s ghost, which develops the idea of appearance versus reality. Lady Macbeth’s assertion that Macbeth is simply having a “fit” because he is scared and tired further develops this central idea. Macbeth’s vision of Banquo’s ghost could be real or it could be a hallucination (that is, both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth could be correct), which further advances the idea that the characters are deceived by and cannot trust their own senses.).

Act 4

4.1 How do the Witches’ interactions with Macbeth advance the plot?

The Witches deceive Macbeth with the first three apparitions, making him feel at ease, as if nothing will happen to him: “none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth” (lines 91–92) and “Macbeth shall never vanquished be until / Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill / Shall come against him” (lines 105–107); however, the Witches then present another series of apparitions that make Macbeth anxious again, because they seem to contradict what he has just been told: “A show of eight kings, the eighth king with a glass in his hand, and Banquo last” (line 126 s.d.).)
Because Macbeth feels confused and threatened by what the apparitions have shown him, he plans to kill Macduff and his family: “The castle of Macduff I will surprise / Seize upon Fife, give to th’ edge o’ th’ sword / His wife, his babes” (lines 171–173).

4.2 How are major themes further developed in this scene?

The theme of appearance vs. reality is developed in this scene, “But cruel are the times when we are traitors and do not know ourselves.” Ross means that Macduff is not a traitor, but may appear to be one.

Shakespeare develops the central idea of disorder when Lady Macduff describes Macduff using the image of the wren, “the most diminutive of birds” (line 12), to depict Macduff’s failure to defend his family. Lady Macduff suggests that Macduff is acting against nature because even the tiny wren will stay to defend his nest.

4.3 How is Macbeth’s character developed by interactions between Malcolm and Macduff?

Macduff says that not even hell could produce “a devil more damned / In evils” (lines 68–69) than Macbeth. Malcolm describes Macbeth with a long list of extremely negative adjectives: “bloody, / Luxurious, avaricious, false, deceitful, / Sudden, malicious, smacking of every sin / That has a name” (lines 70–73). Macduff and Malcolm’s interaction further develops Macbeth’s character as evil by describing him as a “devilish” (line 136) tyrant “whose … name blisters [their] tongues” (line 14).

Analyze the effect on the audience of the revelation of Macduff’s family’s murder (to Macduff)

First, Shakespeare shows the audience the murder of Macduff’s family in Act 4.2, then he has Ross hesitate before telling Macduff his “wife and babes / [have been] savagely slaughtered” (lines 240–241). Shakespeare creates tension through Ross’s hesitation to tell Macduff the news that will “possess [Macduff’s ears] with the heaviest sound / That ever yet they heard” (lines 237–238), because while Macduff demands to that Ross “Keep it not from me. Quickly let me have it” (line 235), the audience knows that Macduff is about to learn horrible news.

Act 5

5.1 Analyze how Shakespeare refines a theme through his development of the character of Lady Macbeth in this scene.

Lady Macbeth has come unhinged because she writes, talks, and pretends to wash her hands “while in a most fast / sleep” (lines 9–10). Her speech is also unmetered as compared to her speech in other scenes, showing her mental breakdown.). Lady Macbeth is losing her mind from guilt which develops the central idea of disorder showing how her “unnatural deeds” (line 75) have given her “unnatural troubles” (line 76). Also, her unmetered speech—“Out, damned spot, out, I say! One. Two.” (line 37)—displays a disorder in her dialogue as compared to the rest of the play.).

5.2-3 How do the character interactions in these scenes further develop the character of Macbeth?

Shakespeare develops Macbeth’s increasing madness and despair by depicting character interactions in which he is both absent and present. In Act 5.2, the dialogue among the thanes
reveals Macbeth’s increasing loss of control: Caithness remarks that “Some say he’s mad; others that lesser hate him / Do call it valiant fury” (Act 5.2, lines 15–16), while Menteith refers to his “pestered senses” (Act 5.2, line 27). In Act 5.3, the interactions between Macbeth himself with other characters confirm these opinions. Despite his confidence in the prophecies of the Witches, Macbeth becomes increasingly unhinged, raging at the “cream-faced” (Act 5.3, line 12) and “lily-livered” (Act 5.3, line 18) Servant. He vows to fight “till from [his] bones [his] flesh be hacked” (Act 5.3, line 38), even though he acknowledges that it is all for nothing since “[his] way of life / Is fall’n into the sere” (Act 5.3, lines 26–27). His interactions with the Doctor further highlight his despair and awareness of his own condition when he asks (supposedly in relation to Lady Macbeth): “Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased?” (Act 5.3, line 50.).

5.4-6 How does Shakespeare’s use of figurative language further develop the character of Macbeth in these scenes?

In Macbeth’s monologue in Act 5.5 lines 20–31, from “She should have died hereafter” to “full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing”, Shakespeare develops three images. With the line “To the last syllable of recorded time” (line 24), Shakespeare uses the image of life as a story. At the same time, Macbeth describes life as a light, a “candle” (line 26) and as an actor, “a poor player” (line 27).)

In all three images in his monologue (Act 5.5 lines 20–31), Macbeth views life as fleeting and meaningless. The “brief candle” (line 26), only lights “fools / The way to dusty death” (lines 25–26), while the actor “struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more” (lines 28–29). Similarly, the story of life is “a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury / Signifying nothing” (lines 29–31).

5.7-8 How does Shakespeare reveal and develop an element of tragedy in Act 5.7 and 5.8

In the final two scenes of Macbeth, Shakespeare develops Macbeth as a tragic hero by emphasizing the reversal of his fortune. Instead of being the “noble Macbeth” of Act 1.2, line 78, he is described as a “hellhound” in Act 5.8, line 4, and his death is celebrated by Siward as “comfort” (Act 5.8, line 64). In addition to this moment of fortune, Macbeth has a moment of recognition as he faces Macduff, in which he realizes his fatal error in trusting the Witches, whom he now recognizes as “juggling fiends … / That palter with us in a double sense, /That keep the word of promise to our ear / And break it to our hope” (Act 5.8, lines 23–26). Macbeth’s terrible fate inspires pity and fear as he is beheaded and his head is brought to Malcolm, completing his reversal of fortune and making him a tragic hero.)