Macbeth

Act I, Scene I

1. What effect is Shakespeare creating by beginning the play with this scene?

*Shakespeare is creating suspense and mystery—appropriate for a tragedy. The first mention of the hero's name comes from the weird sisters which creates mystery and foreshadows his downfall.*

2. What do you suppose is suggested by the line, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair"?

*The line could suggest that things are not as they appear, or that the natural order of things is disturbed and disrupted. It also could mean that what seems good is not.*

3. What poetic devise is used in this scene and to what effect?

*The alliteration of the "F" sound in "fair," and "Foul," and "Fog," and "Filthy" allows the actors playing the Weird Sisters to emphasize their base slovenliness.*

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Act I, Scene II

1. What is the purpose of this early scene?

*Shakespeare offers the audience some important exposition—we learn of the Macdonwald revolt and of the (attempted) Norwegian invasion. The audience also hears Macbeth's name for the second time, this time in context with words like "brave," "valiant," and "worthy." The audience also first hears of Banquo in similar terms.*

2. What image do we have of Macbeth's bravery and ability as a warrior?

*Concentrate on the image of Macbeth "carving out his passage"—hacking and hewing with battleaxe and sword through a battlefield of foot soldiers—and then essentially slicing Macdonwald in half and cutting off his head.*

3. What is his relationship to King Duncan?

*Duncan calls him a cousin, which suggests that they are kinsmen.*

4. Whom had Macbeth and Banquo been fighting?

*They have fought two battles: a rebellion led by Macdonwald (Duncan says the bloody soldier can report the "newest state" "of the revolt," and the Sergeant says that Macdonwald is "worthy to be called a rebel"); and an attempted invasion by Norway, assisted by the Thane of Cawdor.*
5. What does King Duncan tell Ross to do?

Ross is to draft a death warrant for the Thane of Cawdor and then find Macbeth and tell him that he will be the new Thane of Cawdor as a reward for his valor in battle.

**Act I, Scene III**

1. What does the audience learn about the Weird Sisters from their conversation at the beginning of the scene?

   This early conversation shows them to be evil in a petty, mischievous, sense, and that they are also vindictive.

2. When Macbeth says, “So foul and fair a day I have not seen,” to what is he referring? What could be the dramatic irony in this line?

   While Macbeth is referring to the weather (foul) and his decisive victory (fair), the audience knows that although Macbeth has just fought a great battle, there is evil awaiting him in the persons of the Weird Sisters.

3. Describe the physical appearance of the Weird Sisters.

   They look “wither’d and so wild” that Macbeth questions if they are human. They look like they might be women, except that they have beards.

4. What prophecies do the Weird Sisters make regarding Macbeth? How does he react?

   They say that he will become King of Scotland. Later, he will tend to believe this because they also correctly identified him as Thane of Glamis (a title inherited from his father). When Macbeth hears this, he is startled and apparently frightened. Although the second witch hails him as Thane of Cawdor, this is not a prediction. Macbeth was made Thane of Cawdor in the previous scene. The audience knows this, Macbeth does not.

5. What do the Weird Sisters see in the future for Banquo?

   They predict that although he won’t be a king himself, he will be the father of kings.

6. How do Macbeth and Banquo react to the experience after the Weird Sisters vanish?

   Banquo wonders whether the witches were real or a hallucination. Macbeth immediately tries to draw attention away from the prediction that he will be king.
7. What “terms” does Ross indicate accompany the title Thane of Cawdor?

He tells Macbeth that Thane of Cawdor is an “earnest of a greater honor” or a token of a promise of something greater in the future. In the context of the encounter with the witches, Macbeth is probably thinking that Duncan is giving him Cawdor as a token of his promise to name him heir to the throne.

8. As the others talk, what does Macbeth’s aside reveal about his thinking?

The aside reveals Macbeth’s ambivalence—the beginning of his inner conflict. On the one hand, he desires to be king and believes that the truth of Glamis and Cawdor indicate that the witches’ prediction may actually come to pass. On the other hand, he is horrified (hair standing on end, heart pounding) at the thoughts he is entertaining regarding how to become king. Finally, he decides that he need do nothing (“If chance will have me king, why chance may crown me without my stir”).

9. How does Banquo’s comment support the “Fair is foul, foul is fair” theme?

Banquo says that the instruments of darkness (the Weird Sisters) win our confidence with small truths (Thane of Cawdor), only to deceive us in some other very important way.

10. What does Macbeth mean in his aside about two truths being prologue to the act of the imperial theme?

The Weird Sisters’ two pronouncements of his being Thane of Glamis and Thane of Cawdor are true. He is thinking that the last part, about his becoming King, may also come to be.
11. What dramatic conventions does Shakespeare use to establish character and begin to lay out his tragedy?

In this scene, Shakespeare uses:

- **Character reaction:** twice in this scene Shakespeare has Banquo point out Macbeth's reactions: when the witches first address them ("Good sir, why do you start and seem to fear...?") and after Ross and Angus have told Macbeth he is Thane of Cawdor ("Look, how our partner's rapt"). These comments are to make certain that the audience does not miss Macbeth's strong—and questionable—reaction to the news.

- **Aside:** For those who want to blame Lady Macbeth for everything, notice that in this scene we already see Macbeth entertaining horrifying thoughts ("Why do I yield to that suggestion that doth unfix my hair and make my seated heart incline at my ribs...") We also see the beginning of the inner conflict: Macbeth's desire versus his integrity (the fact that the thought of murdering Duncan horrifies him so, and his decision that "If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me, without my stir").

- **Character action:** Notice how Macbeth twice seems to try to draw attention away from his better prophecy ("that shall be king hereafter") to focus on Banquo's considerably lesser prophecy ("thou shalt get kings"). This fact, combined with his admission to entertaining horrifying thoughts, starts to establish a troubled mind (guilt).

- **Foil character:** by having Banquo request a prediction from the Weird Sisters and allowing the audience to witness his reaction, or apparent lack thereof, Banquo starts to become a foil to contrast and emphasize Macbeth's reactions.

**Act I, Scene IV**

1. Why was the former Thane of Cawdor executed?

   *He betrayed his King and country by assisting the Swedish king's attempted invasion.*

2. What effect does Shakespeare create by having Macbeth and Banquo enter just as they are discussing the execution of the former Thane of Cawdor?

   *Their well-timed entrance creates dramatic and visual irony. Macbeth—having already probably contemplated murdering Duncan—enters just as Duncan is lamenting the inability to read a man's inner thoughts and see disloyalty before it is too late.*
3. What announcement does the King make to everyone present and what is Macbeth's reaction?

_Duncan announces that his son Malcolm is Prince of Cumberland—heir to the Scottish throne. Macbeth feels cheated. He thought (given the witches' prediction, the promise of "something greater" when he was given Cawdor, and Duncan's "promise" to make him "full of growing") that he would be named heir to the throne. Now he must somehow "o'erleap" being the legitimately named heir—or give up his ambition to be king._

4. In his last speech in this scene, what does Macbeth reveal?

_Macbeth is again entertaining some evil thought ("my black and deep desires")—presumably murdering Duncan. Yet he again decides against it ("let that be, which the eye fears, when it is done, to see")._

**Act I, Scene V**

1. What is the purpose of the letter?

_Macbeth does not tell his wife anything the audience does not already know so Shakespeare does not use the letter for exposition. But Lady Macbeth's reaction to the letter offers considerable insight into her character and Macbeth's, as well as their relationship._

2. What do we learn about Macbeth from Lady Macbeth's reaction to the letter?

_Lady Macbeth confirms what we already know: Macbeth is a man with both aspirations and integrity. He "would (desires to) be great," is "not without ambition," but is not willing to do anything wrong to achieve his ambition._

3. What do we learn about Lady Macbeth from her reaction to the letter?

_While Macbeth's initial reaction to the witches' prophecy was fear (as Banquo pointed out in Act I, Scene III), Lady Macbeth seems energized. Both Lady Macbeth and Macbeth think immediately of murdering Duncan, but as Macbeth twice decides against such an act, Lady Macbeth commits herself to this plan of action. In this sense, Lady Macbeth is a "stronger" person than Macbeth in that he wavers between whether or not to commit the assassination. But we must not forget that the deed that Macbeth is "afraid" to do is an illegal, immoral act. Our first image of Macbeth was carving through the soldiers on the battlefield and splitting the rebel Macdonwald in half. If Lady Macbeth is "strong," then, she is more strongly, more consistently evil. Lady Macbeth is also shrewd enough to know her husband's "weakness," and apparently how to help him "overcome" it._
4. Does Lady Macbeth fear Macbeth will not be king if he does not murder Duncan?

No, Lady Macbeth acknowledges that he is Glamis and Cawdor, and she says, “and shalt be that which thou art promised” (king). What she fears is that he is too good a man to “catch the nearest way.”

5. How does the news about King Duncan’s expected arrival affect her? What is she planning?

She can not believe the opportunity and is already planning the King’s murder.

6. Why does Lady Macbeth pray to be unsexed?

She wishes to turn off her “feminine” conscience and be the brutal, strong male, capable of murder.

7. What does Shakespeare establish in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth’s first exchange when Macbeth arrives home?

Shakespeare establishes how well Macbeth knows his wife. They speak of the murder (“this night’s great business”) in vague, ambiguous terms. Lady Macbeth could simply be talking about preparing Duncan’s meal and his lodging, but Shakespeare has Lady Macbeth comment on Macbeth’s facial expressions to let the audience know that he understands exactly what she is talking about.

8. In what way does Lady Macbeth’s advice to Macbeth relate to the “fair is foul” theme?

Lady Macbeth tells Macbeth he should seem to welcome Duncan while preparing to murder him.

**Act I, Scene VI**

1. What is the purpose of this brief scene?

We receive no new information in this scene, there is very little (if any) character revelation, and the plot is not advanced at all. The sole purpose of this scene is for Shakespeare to build dramatic irony: Duncan is pleased with how welcoming and comfortable the castle appears while the audience knows that Duncan’s murder has already been planned within the castle’s walls.

2. How does this scene contribute to the “fair is foul” theme?

The castle appears “fair” to Duncan yet is “foul” within. Lady Macbeth, who has placed herself in charge of the murder plot, appears gracious to her royal guest.
1. What arguments does Macbeth raise for not doing it?

Macbeth recognizes that murdering Duncan would not be the end of his troubles, but the beginning. The act would be especially horrid because Macbeth is not only his subject but also a relative. Worse yet, he, as Duncan’s host, should be protecting him from others, not committing harm. Duncan has been a good King and does not deserve to be murdered.

2. What does he finally conclude?

Weighing the reasons he should not do it, he realizes that his growing ambition is really the only thing that pushes him toward the evil.

3. What consequences does Macbeth fear if he commits the murder?

Macbeth fears both physical and spiritual consequences. First he knows that by killing Duncan, he’d “jump the life to come,” or damn his immortal soul. Secondly he knows that his murdering Duncan to become king will set a precedent and someone may one day kill him to become king.

4. What does Lady Macbeth say in an attempt to goad her husband into the murder?

She attacks him on two fronts: his love for her and his manliness.

5. Macbeth’s response to her about what a man may dare is frequently quoted. What is his meaning?

Remember our first image of Macbeth carving his way through the footsoldiers, slicing Macdonwald in half, and cutting off his head. Macbeth is no coward. The cold-blooded murder of a trusting friend, kinsman, and guest is not a “manly” act, but the act of a beast.

6. What is the point of Lady Macbeth’s baby imagery? Note the many times images of babies and mothers are presented in this play.

By using the image of a baby at a mother’s breast, Shakespeare arouses a picture of warmth, love, and family; Lady Macbeth then shatters this image by saying that she would knock the infant’s brains out before she would go back on an oath the way Macbeth has just done.

7. What exposition does Shakespeare give the audience in this scene?

Lady Macbeth explains to her husband—and the audience—how they are going to commit the murder and on whom they are going to cast suspicion.
Act II, Scene I

1. What is significant about the weather?

Banquo says there are no stars out. It must be cloudy. This was foreshadowed when Macbeth said (Act I, Scene IV), “Stars hide your fires, let not light see my black and deep desires.”

2. What do you suppose is keeping Banquo from sleeping?

More than likely he is troubled by the possibility that Macbeth is planning some evil deed. This is supported by Banquo’s recognition that the Weird Sisters might be trying to entice Macbeth to his damnation, and by his response to Macbeth later in this scene.

3. What is significant about Macbeth’s saying, “I think not of them,” after Banquo had admitted to dreaming about the Weird Sisters?

He is lying, again apparently trying to draw Banquo’s attention away from the predictions. As in dramatic irony, it is important to note how Shakespeare gives the audience enough information to see the whole picture—not just one character’s view.

4. What does Macbeth mean when he says to Banquo, “If you shall cleave to my consent, when ’tis, / It shall make honour for you”?

Since Macbeth is not heir to the throne, he will not automatically succeed Duncan. There will have to be a time when the throne is empty with no apparent heir. The nobles will then have to name a new king from the royal family. Macbeth is saying that he will repay Banquo if Banquo will speak in support of his claim to the throne when the time comes.

5. What is significant about Banquo’s reply?

He tells Macbeth that he will not do anything disloyal to his present king in order to become a favorite of the new king. This is significant for a number of reasons: it indicates that Banquo suspects that Macbeth might be considering doing something wrong. Secondly, as Macbeth’s foil, Banquo shows again that he has not been affected by the Weird Sisters’ predictions. His sense of integrity is intact, and he cannot be tempted to abandon his values for political advancement.

6. In his soliloquy after Banquo leaves, what does Macbeth tell us he sees? What could account for this apparition?

He sees a dagger before him. Macbeth suggests that it is a hallucination, a “false creation” from a “heat- oppressed brain.”
7. Why does Shakespeare have Macbeth hallucinate?

The tragic hero must be a sympathetic character. Therefore Shakespeare is being very careful to establish for the audience that the murder of Duncan is not an easy act for Macbeth, that he is riddled with doubt prior to the act, and will be guilt-ridden afterward.

Act II, Scene II

1. Compare Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's reactions immediately after the crime.

   Macbeth is immediately filled with grief and regret. He knows his nights will be troubled. The sight of Duncan's blood on his hands bothers him. He feels he is damned. Lady Macbeth refuses to acknowledge guilt. She is cold and down-to-business.

2. Why does Lady Macbeth not commit the murder when she is in the room?

   Because the sleeping Duncan resembled her father, she could not kill him.

3. Macbeth, apparently troubled by the murder he has just committed, tells Lady Macbeth what he saw and heard. She tells him, “These deeds must not be thought of this way.” Why?

   She believes thinking about it will drive him mad. This idea may be foreshadowing and also fairly ironic, as she is the one who has mental problems later.

4. Macbeth's response is frequently quoted. What is the sense of this response?

   In killing Duncan while he slept, Macbeth committed a crime against “nature's second course,” i.e., sleep. For having committed this unnatural act, Macbeth expects he shall sleep no more. This is also ironic, since Lady Macbeth's sleep is unnatural later.

5. How does Lady Macbeth get Duncan's blood on her hands?

   Macbeth refuses to reenter the room and replace the daggers on the drugged grooms. Lady Macbeth takes the daggers and says that she will do it, for the grooms must seem to be the murderers.

6. What does Macbeth's refusal to return to Duncan's chamber echo?

   In Act I, Scene IV, Macbeth has determined to “let that be, which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.”
Act II, Scene III

1. The Porter's scene, or the "knocking at the gate," is a much debated scene by scholars, but many agree it is the typical comic relief scene seen in Shakespeare's plays. What do you suppose the dramatic purpose of a comic relief scene is? Why is the Porter's soliloquy in prose rather than poetry? What lines contain the bawdy humor so often found in these scenes?

   After the building tension of the murder and its aftermath, it gives the audience a humorous breather before the tension begins to build again. In all of Shakespeare's plays, the common people speak in prose; poetry is reserved for nobility and those in the upper classes of society. The porter comments on alcohol and its relationship to sex.

2. How is the theme of "a crime against nature" reinforced in this scene?

   Lennox tells of the strange night they had in which many unnatural things occurred.

3. What does Shakespeare accomplish with Macduff's allusion to "a new Gorgon"?

   The Gorgons were sisters in classical Mythology, two of whom were immortal. They were monsters with wings and snake-like hair. Any mortal who looked at them was turned instantly to stone. Medusa, the one mortal Gorgon, was slain by Perseus. With this allusion, Macduff is essentially saying that the sight of Duncan's body is so horrible as to turn a man into stone—leave him astonished and dumbfounded.

4. How does Macbeth react to the discovery of Duncan's body?

   Macbeth admits immediate regret and says that he knows the best part of his life is over: "Had I but died an hour before this chance, I had lived a blessed time; for, from this instant, there is nothing serious in mortality." This is ironic because Macbeth killed Duncan ostensibly to bring about the best portion of his life. However, Macbeth did predict that he would feel this way if he did kill Duncan.

5. How does Lady Macbeth react?

   Her first reaction is that the death of Duncan brings scandal to her house. (Remember that this is a feigned reaction since she is involved in the murder.) Then she faints. We do not know whether this is an honest reaction, but it is probably a feint to cover her earlier blunder.

6. Who is the one who points out the inappropriateness of Lady Macbeth's initial response?

   Banquo, who asserts that the murder of Duncan would be "too cruel anywhere." The issue is not where it happened.
7. What is the predominant image in this scene, and what effect does it create?

The dominant image is clearly the image of Duncan’s “silver skin laced with his golden blood.” This emphasizes Duncan’s royalty and superior nature.

8. What double meaning might Shakespeare have intended for Macbeth’s line, “He does: he did appoint so,” in response to Lennox’s asking, “Goes the King hence today?”

Macbeth’s response could be a simple affirmation that, yes, the King intends to leave today. Or, the change from present to past tense could indicate Macbeth’s difficulty in hiding his guilt: he does leave today; he intended to leave today.

Act II, Scene IV

1. What is the purpose of this scene?

- Exposition and passing of time – events are narrated for the audience that Shakespeare does not choose to dramatize (Duncan’s burial, Macbeth’s coronation, Malcolm and Donalbain’s flight).

- A “recap scene” – emphasizes the odd things that happened the night of Duncan’s murder; reiterates that the grooms are considered the murderers, and adds that it is assumed Malcolm and Donalbain put them up to it.

- Macduff’s dislike/distrust of Macbeth is established by his refusal to go to Scone to attend Macbeth’s coronation. As this coronation would certainly include the nobles’ swearing allegiance to their new king, Macduff’s refusal to attend is essentially an act of treason.

2. What additional natural, or “unnatural,” events further the “crime against nature” theme?

Although it is daytime, it is as dark as night; a small owl kills a falcon; Duncan’s horses turn wild and devour one another. According to Medieval tradition, the falcon was always associated with the King and was the most prized bird in the sport of falconry. By law, only the king could own a falcon. The owl, by comparison, being a nocturnal animal, was associated with witchcraft, secrecy, and death. Also, the owl in this passage is a mere mousing owl, not a great bird of prey. The significance is to show how Macbeth’s (represented by the owl) murder of Duncan (represented by the falcon) has turned the order of the universe upside-down.
Act III, Scene I

1. In his soliloquy, what suspicion and hope does Banquo reveal?

   *He suspects Macbeth “play’dst most foully” for his position. At the same time, remembering the Weird Sisters’ predictions about himself, he hopes to become the founder of a line of Kings.*

2. Macbeth seems to be very interested in Banquo’s travel plans. Why do you suppose he is so interested?

   *Macbeth, too, remembers the Weird Sisters’ prophecy regarding Banquo. If he sees Banquo as a threat, staging an ambush on the road would be a logical course of action for him. This is shown to be true in Macbeth’s soliloquy and his conversation with the murderers later in this scene.*

3. The speech beginning “To be thus is nothing...” is another one often quoted. What is the meaning of that sentence?

   *To be a King is worthless if one lives in fear. To be safe, Macbeth feels he has to be rid of Banquo.*

4. What is there in Banquo’s character that makes Macbeth uneasy?

   *Banquo is not only very brave, but also very wise. This combination can make him very dangerous. He also has a “kingly nature,” a reminder of the prophecy about Banquo’s descendants.*

5. What is there in the situation with Banquo that particularly upsets Macbeth?

   *He has killed Duncan to become King, but the Weird Sisters said the throne would pass on to Banquo’s heirs. Essentially, Macbeth is jealous.*

6. What exposition does Shakespeare offer in Macbeth’s conversation with the murderers?

   *The audience learns that conditions in Scotland under Macbeth are not good. Macbeth’s subjects are “bow’d ... to the grave” (worked to death) and their families and descendents are “beggar’d for ever” (turned into beggars with no hope of ever rising in status or fortune).*

7. How does Macbeth convince the murderers to kill Banquo and Fleance?

   *He tells them that it was Banquo who was the cause of all their problems.*

8. What does Macbeth tell them to do?

   *The plan is for them to hide on the road, ambush, and kill both Banquo and Fleance.*
Act III, Scene II

1. What is the meaning of Lady Macbeth’s opening speech in this scene?

_It does not profit them to achieve their objective if they live in a constant state of uneasiness and worry. It’s better to be dead like Duncan (“that which we destroy”) than live as they have been living since the murder (“than by destruction live in doubtful joy”)._

2. In this scene, what is Macbeth’s state of mind?

_He is depressed, spends much of his time alone. Judging from Lady Macbeth’s comment, he seems to have great remorse for his crime. Again she advises him to put his guilty thoughts out of mind._

3. On the other hand, how does Macbeth show that his resolve and ambition have become stronger?

_Prior to the killing of Duncan, Macbeth was pushed and encouraged by Lady Macbeth. It is possible that Macbeth would not have killed Duncan without his wife’s forceful ambition. Macbeth, now, however, has arranged to have Banquo and Fleance killed, with no encouragement from his wife, and he withholds this news from Lady Macbeth._

4. What is significant about Macbeth’s instructions to Lady Macbeth about how to treat Banquo at the state dinner that night?

_He does not even intend for Banquo to attend the feast as Banquo should be dead by then. This emphasizes how strongly Macbeth has taken control and stopped even confiding in his wife._

Act III, Scene III

1. What happens at the ambush?

_Banquo is killed, but Fleance escapes._

2. Given the previous scene in which Banquo’s death is planned, and the next scene in which the audience could learn with Macbeth that Fleance has escaped, why would Shakespeare choose to dramatize this seemingly insignificant event?

_Fleance’s escape does establish the security of the Weird Sisters’ predictions—Macbeth could not thwart fate and destroy Banquo’s line. Also given King James’ Is descendancy from Banquo, this scene would probably please the King. Finally, the murder of Banquo affords Shakespeare with the opportunity to dramatize violence which would have been very popular with his paying audience._
Act III, Scene IV

1. One characteristic of Shakespeare's style is his play on words. How is this demonstrated in Macbeth's response to the murderer's saying it's Banquo's blood on his face?

   "Tis better thee without than he within..." It's better for you (thee) to have his blood outside of you (on your face) than for "he" to have it inside of him (and thus still be alive).

2. What wordplay is there in the murderer's reply that Banquo is "safe" now?

   Macbeth asks if "Banquo's safe," meaning is he safely taken care of—dead. The murderer replies that he is "safe in a ditch...with twenty gashes on his head." The use of the word "safe" in these instances is doubly ironic.

3. The dagger Macbeth saw in Act II, Scene I was a hallucination. Banquo's ghost in this scene is not. How do we know?

   When Macbeth sees the dagger, he says (for the audience's benefit), "Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand?" Shakespeare must have Macbeth announce what he sees because the audience does not see it—it is a hallucination. However, there is no such announcement when Banquo's ghost enters—even as an aside—so the audience must also see it. Thus it is really there.

4. What does Lady Macbeth say to Macbeth?

   She needs him to calm down and stop imagining things. She claims nothing is in his seat and that the way Macbeth is acting makes him seem like a weak, old woman.

5. What is the significance of the conversation Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have immediately after the guests leave?

   Macbeth is acknowledging that once one sheds blood, one cannot stop. There is always someone who poses a threat to the murderer's security. Also, such a crime as murder cannot be kept a secret: stones will move and trees will speak to reveal the murderer. Birds (magpies, crows, and rooks) have been used as omens to reveal guilty persons who have shed others' blood.

6. For what reason does Macbeth mention Macduff's name?

   Macduff didn't come to the banquet to which he had been invited. Remember that Macduff also did not attend Macbeth's coronation.

7. What does Macbeth say he will do next?

   The next day he will go to the Weird Sisters to find out the worst that is going to happen.
8. What is Macbeth's frame of mind?

He is resigned to violence—he has shed so much blood, that it is now just as easy to continue on the bloody path as to turn back. He is having strange thoughts that he must act on before he can put them out of mind.

**Act III, Scene V**

1. Who is Hecate, and why is she angry?

Hecate is the goddess of witchcraft, and she is angry because the other witches did not consult with her before dealing with Macbeth. She is also angry because their dealings with Macbeth will not profit them at all in the end.

2. What is her plan for Macbeth?

She plans on telling him things that will make him feel secure, so that he can be more easily deceived.

**Act III, Scene VI**

1. How can we interpret Lennox's speech?

When Lennox speculates what Macbeth would do to Malcolm and Donalbain if he had them in Scotland, he interjects, “an't please heaven, he shall not” (and heaven grant that he won't [ever get his hands on them]). Likewise, when—at the end of the speech—he directly calls Macbeth a “tyrant,” when explaining that Macduff did not attend the banquet; the audience knows that he is being ironic/sarcastic. He does not dare to openly criticize Macbeth, but he is not fooled by the appearance of Malcolm's, Donalbain's, and Fleance's guilt.

2. What further exposition does Shakespeare offer through the Lord?

The Lord explains that under Macbeth's reign, the Scots “pine for” meat on their tables, sleep at night, and peace and security. Further, the nobility does not feel free to serve their king, nor are they repaid for the services they do perform. Contrast this with how quickly Duncan repaid Macbeth for his services at the beginning of the play.
Act IV, Scene I

1. Compare the witches' speech pattern with Macbeth's.

   *Macbeth* speaks in *blank verse*—unrhymed iambic pentameter. For the most part the witches speak in rhymed couplets of irregular trochaic tetrameter.

2. What effect is Shakespeare creating by altering the speech patterns like this?

   Shakespeare is establishing that the witches are other-worldly, that they are not to be trusted. The sing-song rhythm and rhyme of their speech makes them seem almost childlike or silly which emphasizes that they are going to seduce Macbeth into a false sense of security.

3. Describe the three apparitions and the significance of each?

   The first apparition is a head wearing a helmet, warning Macbeth to beware Macduff. The helmet indicates that Macduff poses a military threat to Macbeth. The fact that it is just a head and not a full warrior might foreshadow Macduff's beheading Macbeth. A bloody child appears, telling Macbeth to be bold, for "none of woman born" will harm him. This is significant in two ways: first, Shakespeare's audience would know that babies born naturally would not be bloody. In order for there to be blood, someone (either the baby or the mother) would have to be cut. Hence, the bloody child could not have been born naturally. Second, the apparition says, "none of woman born shall harm Macbeth." Many readers—and apparently Macbeth himself—understand the apparition to say "none of woman born can harm Macbeth." But the prediction is not an assurance, it is a statement of destiny. He will not be harmed by one born of woman—not that he can not be harmed... The third apparition is a child, wearing a crown, with a tree in his hand. It tells Macbeth that he will not be vanquished until Birnam wood comes to Dunsinane Hill. The fact that the child is carrying a tree clearly foreshadows how a forest could possibly move. The child wearing a crown is probably either Malcolm (Duncan's son and rightful heir) or Fleance (as the witches predicted). Also note that the apparition does not say Macbeth will not be vanquished unless the forest moved, the prophesy is that he won't be vanquished until the forest moves. Shakespeare's choice of words and mood (subjunctive as opposed to indicative) again supports a reading of destiny that Macbeth misunderstands as an assurance of security.

4. What, after this, does Macbeth resolve?

   Macduff "can not" harm him since, obviously, a woman gave birth to him, but Macbeth decides to kill him anyway.
5. Pleased with the information, what one further thing does Macbeth desire to know and what is the answer he gets?

He wants to know whether Banquo's heirs will ever be Kings of Scotland. Eight Kings appear. Banquo points at the others as if claiming them as his heirs. The eighth King has a mirror that reflects a line of Kings. Macbeth notes that some of the kings are carrying three scepters and two orbs. The two orbs would indicate that Banquo's descendent are kings of two countries (Scotland and England). The three scepters indicate that they are kings of three countries (Scotland, England, and Ireland or possibly even Scotland, England, and America).

6. What is the significance of this scene?

The parade of kings does not advance the plot, nor does it develop character. Likewise, it offers no new information. But James I (England's king when Shakespeare wrote Macbeth) was the eighth Stuart king of Scotland (James VI of Scotland and James I of England). The Stuart dynasty claimed descent from both Duncan I and Banquo. Therefore, this pageant is Shakespeare's attempt to flatter his king. The eighth king in the parade would represent James, and the mirror would indicate the continuation of the dynasty far into the unpredictable future. Shakespeare wrote Macbeth in 1606, the same year James founded the London Company and the Plymouth Company, charging them to find gold, find a route to the South Seas, and find the Lost Colony of Roanoke. By having some of the kings carry three scepters, Shakespeare could be broadening his attempt at flattery by predicting James's success in the New World.

7. What news does Lennox give to Macbeth?

Macduff has fled to England.

8. What is Macbeth's response?

From now on, he will not procrastinate. If a thought comes into mind, he will act on it immediately. He believes that it was his procrastination that allowed Macduff to escape.

9. What is his resolve at the end of this scene? How is this different from his previous actions?

Macbeth will murder all of Macduff's family. There is no reason for this slaughter, other than frustration, anger, and an evil nature. Previously, at least, Duncan's murder had been motivated by ambition, and Banquo's by paranoia and envy. Macbeth's character is becoming increasingly evil.
Act IV, Scene II

1. What does Shakespeare achieve with the conversation between Ross and Lady Macduff?

Unlike Lady Macbeth in Acts I and II, Lady Macduff knows nothing of her husband’s affairs. She seems not to know where he has gone or for what reason. Shakespeare also emphasizes for the audience how bad the situation is in Scotland under Macbeth’s reign. There is nothing but fear, doubt, insecurity—and not even the certainty of whom or what to fear.

2. What is the purpose of the exchange between Lady Macduff and her son?

This witty exchange does not offer any exposition, does not advance the plot, and develops only briefly a character who is going to die in this same scene. It is a scene of comic relief, just as the “knocking at the gate” scene (Act II, Scene III) broke the tension of the murder of Duncan, this scene lulls the audience into a sense of humorous calm immediately before the brutal slaughter of Lady Macduff and the child. (NOTE: this same technique is still used quite often—especially in action, suspense, and horror films.)

3. What effect is created by the Messenger’s entering to warn Lady Macduff?

The suspense and anticipation of some impending horror, begun at the start of the scene with Ross, is intensified.

4. Why does Shakespeare show the son’s murder onstage?

The “son” has been a recurrent issue in the play since the witches’ prediction to Banquo. Macbeth has no son in the play, and this disturbs him deeply. Duncan named his son heir to the throne instead of Macbeth. Macbeth succeeded in killing Banquo but not Banquo’s son. Thus, this onstage death of Macduff’s son is something of a climax to this thread. Macbeth has succeeded in destroying someone else’s lineage. Ironically it is this brutal act that will motivate and justify his own death. Also, the image of Macduff’s dying, bleeding son might echo the bloody child in apparition two (not to mention Shakespeare’s audience’s penchant for violence).

Act IV, Scene III

1. What additional evidence does Shakespeare give his audience that Macbeth is a tyrant?

Macduff tells Malcolm that every day “new widows howl, new orphans cry,” indicating that men—presumably “traitorous” nobles—are dying or being killed every day in Scotland.
2. What suspicion of Macduff does Malcolm voice?

_In effect, he asks how he can be sure that Macduff didn’t come to England. “To offer up a weak, poor, innocent lamb [himself] To appease an angry god [Macbeth].” In other words, Macduff might be Macbeth’s agent to lure Malcolm back to Scotland and his death._

3. How do Malcolm’s comments about Macbeth again bring to mind the “fair is foul” theme?

_It is impossible to tell by a man’s appearance whether he is good or evil. Macbeth was once thought honest—and was loved even by Macduff. Macduff now looks honest, but might not be. But Malcolm admits there are still probably honest men in Scotland even though one thought to be among the most honest turned out to be deceitful: “Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell.”_

4. What literary device is Shakespeare employing when Malcolm says, “Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell”?

_Allusion. Medieval and Renaissance theologians interpreted certain passages in the Old Testament books of Ezekiel and Isaiah to tell the story of Lucifer, one of the most beautiful angels of heaven (whose name meant “bearer of light”) who challenged God’s authority. He and 144,000 of his followers were expelled from Heaven and became Satan and his demons._

5. What is it that makes Malcolm suspicious of Macduff’s motives?

_Macduff left his wife and children behind._

6. How does Malcolm test Macduff’s honesty?

_He lies about his character, telling Macduff that he is lecherous and greedy, possessing none of the traits of a good ruler._

7. How does Macduff nearly fail the test?

_He seems too eager to bring Malcolm back to Scotland. Macduff excuses away every sin of which Malcolm accuses himself._

8. What finally convinces Malcolm?

_Macduff finally despairs and announces that he will remain exiled from Scotland if their only choice of rulers is Macbeth or the vile person Malcolm is pretending to be._

9. What purpose does the brief dialogue about Edward the Confessor’s alleged ability to heal serve?

_THIS dialogue serves no dramatic purpose. Shakespeare is merely flattering his king._
10. After receiving word of his family's slaughter, what does Macduff resolve?

_He vows to kill Macbeth himself._

**Act V, Scene I**

1. Explain how this entire scene is ironic.

_Lady Macbeth warned Macbeth not to dwell on his feelings of guilt “so it will make us mad” (Act II, Scene II). It is finally her repression of her guilt that has made her mad._

2. What is ironic about Lady Macbeth's constant “handwashing”?

_In Act II, Scene II, after she took the bloody daggers back to Duncan's room and had blood on her hands as well, she told Macbeth, “A little water clears us of this deed: how easy is it then.” Now she has a subconscious sense that she will never have her hands clean._

3. What does the Doctor's “Foul whisperings are abroad” speech echo?

_Act III, Scene IV in which Macbeth says that the secret of the murderer will eventually find some way to be revealed._

**Act V, Scenes II – VII**

1. What effect is Shakespeare creating with this sequence of short scenes which follow one another so closely?

_Time is moving quickly. The pace of the action is picking up, speeding toward Macbeth's death._

2. Whose side are Lennox, Angus, Menteith, and Caithness on?

_They are allied against Macbeth._

3. What do they say about the men that Macbeth commands?

_They know that the soldiers act only because they are commanded, not out of any love for Macbeth._

4. What is Macbeth's lament in his “my way of life Is fallen into the scon...” speech?

_He knows he will not have honor, love, respect, family, etc., as one would expect to have at his point of life. Instead he has curses and false honor._
5. What is Lady Macbeth's condition, and how does Macbeth believe it could be cured?

Many "thick-coming fancies" plague her and keep her from resting. Macbeth, quite accurately, believes that if her guilty memory could be purged, she would be well again.

6. What tactical strategy does Malcolm take?

His troops camouflage themselves with tree limbs from Birnam wood, so that they may get close to the castle without being observed.

7. In reaction to the news that Lady Macbeth is dead, Macbeth delivers his most famous soliloquy. What does it mean?

Macbeth is contemplating death and life. He says that people have just a short time on Earth to brag or to worry. Then they die, it is over, and life signifies nothing.

8. What does Macbeth recognize and how does it fit in with the "fair is foul" theme?

He recognizes that the prophecies the Weird Sisters made are true. But he took them as assurances when they were merely enigmatically-worded statements of destiny.

9. As bad as things look for Macbeth, why does he still scorn all his opponents?

He naively continues to believe the Weird Sisters and their promise that no man born of a woman shall hurt him.

10. What is the meaning of Siward's statement that Macbeth's men "on both sides do fight"?

Macbeth's soldiers are deserting him and fighting on the other side.

**Act V, Scene VIII**

1. What information does Macduff tell Macbeth that makes him frightened ("Cow'd my better part")?

Macduff was "untimely ripp'd" from his mother's womb. This can only mean he was delivered by a Cesarean section.

2. What is Macbeth's response?

As above, he recognizes that the prophecies the Weird Sisters made are true. But he took them as assurances when they were merely enigmatically-worded statements of destiny.
3. Why does he quickly change his mind about fighting?

He would rather die in battle than go through the humiliation of being taken prisoner and put on public display.

4. On what note does the play end?

Malcolm's speech suggests that law, justice, and stability have returned to the once-troubled country.