

## An Active Introduction to Macbeth



Shakespeare's plays and characters can be brought vividly to life for children using a variety of interactive, energetic and engaging storytelling techniques. The following active introduction provides a great first encounter with Shakespeare and offers the opportunity for large groups of children to play several different roles. This style of introduction is a technique that is regularly used by drama practitioners, including the RSC, and is often described as a 'whoosh'.

### How it works

As the teacher you are the storyteller and the whole class should sit in a circle for this activity. You will need to use 'whoosh' or chose a particular action word or perhaps a particular sound like a whistle or a drum to use as a command. The command signifies a change in the action and controls the pace of the storytelling. It is used to return the children quickly to their places in the circle after acting in each 'scene'. Everyone will have the opportunity to join in with the telling of the story, by becoming a character or an object in the tale.

# Macbeth

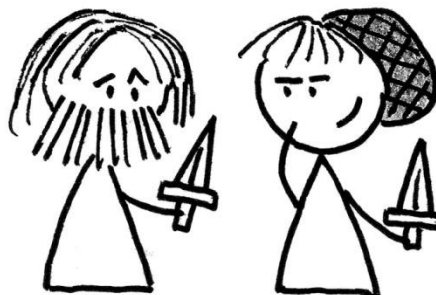
Start telling the story and as soon as a character or an object is mentioned, indicate the first child to step into the circle. Encourage the child to strike a pose or make a shape. If two or more characters are introduced then they can step in at the same time to act their part of the story. When you call out the action word or blow the whistle/beat the drum the children should sit down. Continue telling the story with the next child/children from the circle.

As more characters or objects are introduced, move around the circle so that all the children are given a chance to take part. Explain to the children that it does not matter if the character they have been chosen to be is male or female. Using this technique means that different pupils get to play the same character at various times and everyone gets a chance at acting several roles, regardless of gender.

Continue telling the story, introducing more characters or actions, making sure all children are given a chance to take part. Props can also be introduced although this is not essential. The story continues to be told to the end.

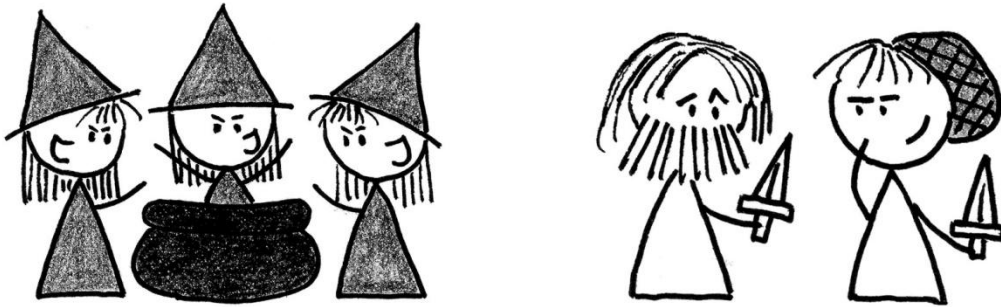
The text below gives possible suggestions for interjections; however you may choose to adapt the text for your class. You may prefer to use quotations from Shakespeare or encourage children to use their own words. For ease of storytelling new characters in each 'scene' are highlighted in bold text.

In essence this storytelling needs to be pacy and energetic. Above all, the story needs to be visual and fast moving so that it is fun, meaningful and driven.





# Macbeth



## The Tragedy of Macbeth

Once upon a time there were two Scottish generals, **Macbeth** and **Banquo**. One day they meet **three witches**.

'All hail Macbeth,' says the First Witch. 'Thane of Glamis.'  
[pronounced 'Glams']

'All hail Macbeth,' says the Second Witch, 'Thane of Cawdor.'

'All hail Macbeth,' says the Third Witch. 'Thou shalt be king hereafter.'

Just then another general, called **Ross**, arrives on his horse.

(sound of horses' hooves)

'The King bade me call you Thane of Cawdor,' says Ross to Macbeth.

'Glamis and Thane of Cawdor,' says Macbeth to himself. 'The best is still to come.'

'Come friends!' he says to Banquo and Ross, and they ride home to Macbeth's castle on their horses.

- action word or sound -

# Macbeth

Lady Macbeth thinks they should kill King Duncan.

Lady Macbeth says. 'When he is asleep, what cannot you and I perform upon the unguarded Duncan?'

'I am settled,' says Macbeth.

- action word or sound -

Everyone goes to bed. **Macbeth** sneaks into Duncan's room. He stabs the **guards** and then stabs **Duncan** and goes back to his room.

The next morning **Macduff** goes to Duncan's room and discovers Duncan is dead.

'O horror, horror, horror!' says Macduff.

Everyone wakes up. (everyone repeats 'O horror, horror, horror!')

And Macbeth is crowned king.

- action word or sound -

'To be thus is nothing but to be safely thus,' says **Macbeth**.

So he hires **three murderers** and he tells them to kill **Banquo** and his son, **Fleance**.

Banquo and Fleance go out for a ride (sound of horses' hooves)

The first murderer says, 'Hark, I hear horses.'

The second murderer says, 'Tis he.'

The third murderer says, 'Stand to it.'

The murderers kill Banquo but Fleance gets away.

# Macbeth

Just before he dies, Banquo says, 'Fly good Fleance, fly, fly, fly!'

- action word or sound -

That night **Macbeth** has a banquet.

*(arrange the whole group in two lines)*

**Banquo's ghost** appears at the banquet but only Macbeth can see him.

*(put Banquo into ghost mask and red wig)*

'Never shake thy gory locks at me!' says Macbeth.

- action word or sound -

**Macbeth** goes back to see the **three witches**.

The witches perform some magic, 'Double, double, toil and trouble, fire burn and cauldron bubble'. And they summon up **three ghosts**.

The first ghost says, 'Beware Macduff.'

The second ghost says, 'None of woman born shall harm Macbeth.'

And the third ghost says: 'Macbeth shall never vanquished be, until Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill shall come against him.'

And the witches and the ghosts all disappear.

- action word or sound -

**Lady Macbeth** goes mad with grief and guilt for killing Duncan.

*(walk round the circle)*



# Macbeth

'Out damned spot,' says Lady Macbeth. 'All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. To bed, to bed, to bed.' She goes back to bed and then she dies.

- action word or sound -

**Malcolm** and **Macduff** march their **army** from England to Scotland and arrive at Birnam Wood outside Macbeth's castle.

Malcolm says, 'Let every soldier hew him down a bough.'

They storm the castle and Macduff kills **Macbeth** and cuts off his head.

'Hail King of Scotland,' says Macduff to Malcolm.

'Hail King of Scotland,' says everyone else.

And so the story of Macbeth ends!



With thanks to Andrew Cowie