

# Synopsis and Sample of Macbeth's Children

## A Confrontation with William Shakespeare's Macbeth

by

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**NOTE:** This script was developed with the help of thirteen young actors in the Cambridge (MA) Performance Project during the spring of 2001: Sky Rote, Sophie Blum, Amanda Catterfield, Sofia Erlien-Cerullo, William Ford, Jenni Grout, Rebecca Hecht, Marcel Moran, Henry Patterson, Felicity Slater, Elizabeth Sapiro-Mitten, Connie Tancredi-Brice, and Owen Thomas. Many thanks go to them, to the parents and friends who supported the project, and to the city of Cambridge for its support of the arts.

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### **Dramatis Personae**

Duncan, King of Scotland  
Malcolm, Son of Duncan  
Donalbain, Daughter of Duncan  
Banquo, Thane of Scotland  
Fleance, Banquo's son

Macbeth, Thane of Glamis, later of Cawdor, later King of Scotland  
Lady Macbeth, his wife

Macduff, Thane of Fife  
Lady Macduff, his wife  
Atholl, his son

First Witch  
Second Witch  
Third Witch

### **A Note on Casting:**

1. Many of the actors will double (this is indicated in the text).
2. The original casting did not follow gender; for example, female actors played Duncan, Donalbain, Macduff, and Atholl. This presented no problem in the production.

### **Production Notes:**

1. Weapons: In the original production, ten of the weapons were 1½" painted dowels about 5' long, which served as spears and swords, and were held in a box with drilled holes when not being used. There were

four daggers made out of thin dowels and a simple cross-piece as a handguard.

2. WITCHES

The witches had simple painted dowels for their wands. Whenever possible, have the witches onstage; they should only rarely exit.

3. Crowns: Gold crowns were used for Duncan and Lady Macbeth. (Duncan's crown was later passed on to Macbeth) There were also eight gold crowns that Banquo's lays down in the apparition scene.

4. Costumes: We wanted to have the actors, except for Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff, dress in some kind of military garb. The witches can dress in as wild an attire as they prefer.

5. Music: We used a live drummer, but recorded music and sound could be used as well.

6. Banner at end of Prologue: If it is too costly, it does not have to be used.

7. Choreography: Movements should be simple and clean, with an emphasis on both adjectives.

8. Epilogue: The epilogue can be done in one of two ways, depending upon the actors and the director. This script uses Epilogue #2; in performance, we used Epilogue #1.

a. *Epilogue #1*: This will require that each of the actors write a brief letter to one of the characters in the play, a character to whom they want to say something or make an observation. For instance, the witches may address all the "humans" and say that they did nothing wrong but simply traded on the character flaws already in people. Lady Macduff may want to address Lady Macbeth about the nature of motherhood. And so on. The letters should come out of the actors' insights and desires to make their own statement about some aspect or idea in the play that touched or moved them. The letters can be memorized or read from sheets of paper the actors carry on them. They should be brief. When they are finished, the company, as one, speaks to the audience: "What does it cost to be young in this world? / Calculate the price as your story's unfurled."

b. *Epilogue #2*: The ending included with this script.

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**Act I, Scene 1: Prologue**

Lights out -- drumming begins, military style. THE WEIRD SISTERS appear and take up their places on the stage as if they were orchestrating the ensuing action. The company, dressed as soldiers with some kind of weapon (perhaps something simple like a 5' length of 1½" dowel), enters the theatre and marches to the stage in rhythm to the drum where they perform THE FIELD OF BATTLE, a choreographed scene

of warfare and devastation. The WITCHES wander through the warfare, occasionally "correcting" or re-directing but basically watchers.

The following phrases should be used at some point in the choreography as a call-and-response.

*Be -- all that you can be.  
We are looking for an army of one.  
The few, the proud -- semper fi!  
Sound off -- 1 -2 / Sound off -- 3 - 4 / 1 - 2 -  
3 - 4 / 1 - 2 - Hup! - 3 - 4  
National security  
Pacification  
Low-level intensity  
Collateral damage*

Also at some point in the choreography, there should be a dumb show of the final scene of the play, where MACDUFF asks/encourages FLEANCE to cut off MACBETH's head, and FLEANCE's acceptance of the deed. It need not stand out, but it should be a visible image.

At the end of FIELD OF BATTLE, the company simply stands and faces the audience, looking at them directly, one by one. Then FLEANCE steps forward.

FLEANCE

Who would have thought the old man -- and the old woman, and the father and mother aching to shield their children, and the children themselves, both ripe and unripe, all reaped by the harvest of swords -- who would have thought they had so much blood in them. I never would have thought it.

(to the WITCHES)

You may begin.

FIRST WITCH

So here we are, we three again  
In thunder, lightning, and in rain.

SECOND WITCH:

Listen, sisters, to the drums --  
Something wicked this way comes.

THIRD WITCH

These dogs of war, cold and ironical,  
Are the players in our piercing chronicle.

ALL

Fair turns foul, foul never turns fair:  
Madness hovers in this choking air.

The company, as one, bangs down their weapons, then takes up a posture of attack/defense, as if in battle.

FIRST WITCH  
Our story begins in a world rich in death.

SECOND WITCH  
Caused by one man --

THIRD WITCH  
Macbeth.

FIRST WITCH  
Macbeth.

ALL (INCLUDING COMPANY)  
Macbeth.

Company bangs their weapons again, then changes to a new posture.  
MACBETH, LADY MACBETH, and DUNCAN step forward out of the company.

FIRST WITCH  
The play starts in Scotland --

SECOND WITCH  
It's a time of civil war --

DUNCAN  
Macbeth kills the traitors for King Duncan --

THIRD WITCH  
But he wants just a little bit more --

FIRST WITCH  
Greedy for the crown --

SECOND WITCH  
Pricked on by his wife --

DUNCAN  
They kicked King Duncan up to the afterlife.

Company bangs their weapons again, then new posture. LADY MACBETH,  
BANQUO, and FLEANCE step forward.

FIRST WITCH  
But to keep the crown firmly nailed to his head -  
-

LADY MACBETH  
Macbeth piled more dead ones on the dead --

Company bangs their weapons, then simply stands at attention.

FLEANCE  
Banquo, his best friend, was the first defiled --

MALCOLM and DONALBAIN step forward.

BANQUO

Leaving his son Fleance a fatherless child.

SECOND WITCH

Malcolm and Donalbain, Duncan's heirs to the crown,

MALCOLM

Run away to England --

DONALBAIN

And Ireland --

MALCOLM  
(thumb up)

Son up --

DONALBAIN  
(thumb down)

Son down.

MACDUFF, LADY MACDUFF, and ATHOLL step forward.

FIRST WITCH

Macduff who knew the sins of Macbeth --

MACDUFF

Paid for his knowing with his own family's death.

THIRD WITCH

Lady Macbeth, her heart stuffed with remorse,

LADY MACDUFF

Killed herself -- she'd backed the wrong horse.

SECOND WITCH

Here's how it ends so you won't have to wait.

ATHOLL

Macduff kills Macbeth and --

Everyone makes a slicing motion across their necks with their hands.

ALL

Decapitate. End of story.

WITCHES

(indicating the audience)

But not for you --

(indicating the company)

-- or them.

FLEANCE

What about Fleance, Banquo's left-behind boy?

SECOND WITCH

Murderous dreams have murdered his joy.

MALCOLM

Or Malcolm --

DONALBAIN

Or Donalbain --

THIRD WITCH

Burning with hate --

MALCOLM AND DONALBAIN

When do we get to retaliate?

SECOND WITCH

Young Atholl Macduff --

ATHOLL

How sharp was my pain / When the murderer stabbed  
me --

COMPANY

-- again and again and again and again?

ALL WITCHES

None of these questions Mr. Shakespeare consults.

ALL CHILDREN

He's more interested in presenting his anguished  
adults.

Here, everyone except the CHILDREN strikes a melodramatic pose as an "anguished adult" as they say the following lines: hand to forehead, fist against heart, etc., even making a sound: moan, groan, etc. The company can also look at the CHILDREN with a glance or from underneath to see if their melodrama is affecting them at all. The lines should be said individually.

Iago made me do it!  
Those Montagues stink!  
Those Capulets smell!  
It's not easy being Caesar Augustus, you know!  
Why? Because the King says so, that's why!  
To be or not to be -- I just can't make up my  
mind!  
The fault is not in the stars - it's in those  
Twinkies I ate!  
It's all my parents' fault!

Others can be added.

The CHILDREN look at them in disgust; then they turn to the audience and speak with great loathing.

CHILDREN  
(emphasizing each initial)  
Bull. Shit.

The "adults" break their poses in embarrassment.

FLEANCE  
These adults said they'd protect us from pain --

ATHOLL  
"We know what's best" was their constant refrain  
--

MALCOLM  
But they took what was sacred and made it profane  
--

DONALBAIN  
They put our bones out to rot in the rain.

The drumming begins again, low, and the company, except for the WITCHES, marches in place but slowly moves upstage as well. The WITCHES step forward.

DUNCAN  
This world of Macbeth --

BANQUO  
-- is like our world today --

LADY MACBETH  
Where children are beaten --

LADY MACDUFF  
-- used up --

ATHOLL  
-- thrown away --

MALCOLM  
No power or money --

DONALBAIN  
Means they have no defense --

MACBETH  
And so the world murders --

MACDUFF  
-- their innocence --

Drumming stops.

FIRST WITCH

What does it cost to be young in this world?

FLEANCE steps forward and takes a moment to look at the audience directly.

FLEANCE

What does it cost to be young in this world?

SECOND WITCH

Calculate the price --

THIRD WITCH

As our story's unfurled.

The drumming begins again, and there is now a much more choreographed piece of warfare as the WITCHES unfurl a banner which reads "Macbeth's Children." When it's unfurled, the WITCHES call a halt to the "war," and the play begins.

NOTE: The banner can stretch across the stage horizontally or run vertically on both sides of the stage, "Macbeth's" on one side and "Children" on the other.

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### **Act I, Scene 2: England**

The WITCHES announce the scene. This works best if FIRST WITCH says the words while the other two do some sort of funny mime to underscore the words.

FIRST WITCH

The exiles from Scotland at the Palace of Edward the Confessor, England. Facts in evidence -- please keep score: Macbeth has killed Duncan, Banquo, and Macduff's wife and son. We now begin the play proper; you may sit back and watch.

This scene takes place just after Macbeth: 4.3, where MACDUFF has learned about the death of his family. MACDUFF is sitting alone.

FLEANCE enters running, wiping his hands vigorously on a handkerchief, as if trying to clean off something dirty. There is also a streak of red on his face or cheek. When he shows the handkerchief, it is dappled with red, as if with blood. MALCOLM and DONALBAIN enter, following.

MALCOLM

Macduff?

MACDUFF

Yes.

MALCOLM

How goes your grief today?

MACDUFF

I am the cat's mouse: I am played with and still living.

MALCOLM

Our hearts go to you -- yes, Fleance?

FLEANCE

(trying to get his hands clean)

Yes, yes -- honored Macduff.

DONALBAIN

What is the matter?

FLEANCE

I have cut my hand.

DONALBAIN

How?

FLEANCE

(embarrassed)

On my knife.

DONALBAIN

(mocking)

Practicing great gladiator games, hey?

MACDUFF

(to MALCOLM and DONALBAIN)

Our warrior.

MALCOLM goes to FLEANCE and gently wraps his hand in the handkerchief.

MALCOLM

At least he was doing something. What is it that we will do?

DONALBAIN

We each have hard cause against Macbeth.

MACDUFF

And that means only one thing, agreed upon, I hope: his swift and surgical and *painful* death. Edward will supply the men -- all we need to do is supply the will. And so, the question: when will we four return to take back what was taken from us?

FLEANCE

I have had enough blood around me.

MACDUFF

What are you saying?

DONALBAIN

What is the warrior saying?

FLEANCE

Just that -- blood enough. He always treated me well.

MACDUFF

(to FLEANCE)

Your father was unjointed for that devil's table -- and your every breath does not speak "revenge"? What kind of son are you?

FLEANCE

My heart needs patience.

MACDUFF

(dismissive)

Patience.

MALCOLM

Macduff --

MACDUFF

What?!

MALCOLM

Be patient --

MACDUFF

(ignoring MALCOLM, to FLEANCE)

You crave patience even though a towering falcon -- your father! their father! -- was by that mousing owl Macbeth hawk'd at and kill'd? The world cracks, and you say "Patience."

MALCOLM

We are doing the best we can with what we do not have. A little more talk will not harm the time.

DONALBAIN

You were always one for the talk.

MALCOLM

You forget, brother, that I go back not only as avenger but also as king --

DONALBAIN

(to MACDUFF, mockingly)

And I get to be the good king's servant --

MALCOLM

-- and I do not want to be a traitor-hearted king like the king we now have. A little understanding of "why," otherwise we lose sight of "when" and "how."

(to FLEANCE)

Tell them about the encounter with the witches -- you were there.

(to MACDUFF and DONALBAIN)

Have you heard this?

MACDUFF

No.

MALCOLM

(to DONALBAIN)

You?

DONALBAIN

No.

FLEANCE

I do not want to remember this!

MALCOLM

You should -- to better understand your understanding.

(to MACDUFF)

This is supposedly where began Macbeth's fall from grace.

(to FLEANCE)

We have both lost fathers -- speak this for yours.

FLEANCE

I wish my father could hold me now in his arms and with his voice.

MALCOLM

I have the same ache.

MACDUFF

My God!

MALCOLM

Pour his voice from the chalice of your throat. I will be here.

FLEANCE

We were coming from the battle -- I was attending

my father, as I always do.

MACDUFF

A young boy's place in battle.

FLEANCE

And then we saw them.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Act I, Scene 3: The Witches' Brew**

Lights and setting change: the heath. Thunder. Enter the WITCHES. BANQUO and MACBETH prepare to enter; FLEANCE prepares to join them.

FIRST WITCH

Thrice the brinded cat hath mew'd.

SECOND WITCH

Thrice and once the hedge-pig whined.

THIRD WITCH

Harpier cries 'Tis time, 'tis time.

ALL

'Tis time, 'tis time.

The drumming begins.

THIRD WITCH

A drum, a drum!  
Macbeth doth come.

ALL

The weird sisters, hand in hand,  
Posters of the sea and land,  
Thus do go about, about:  
Thrice to thine and thrice to mine  
And thrice again, to make up nine.  
Peace! the charm's wound up.

Enter MACBETH and BANQUO, with FLEANCE.

MACBETH

So foul and fair a day I have not seen. Young  
Fleance, keep up with us! I would not want to  
lose you.

BANQUO

He held himself well today.

MACBETH

He did, he did -- I wish I had a son of mine to  
follow my feet.

BANQUO

There is always time and hope --

FLEANCE

Father, look!

BANQUO

What are these

So wither'd and so wild in their attire,  
That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,  
And yet are on't?

MACBETH

Speak, if you can: what are you?

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, thou shalt be king hereafter!

FLEANCE

(pointing to MACBETH)

Father, look!

BANQUO

Good sir, why do you start; and seem to fear  
Things that do sound so fair?

MACBETH

Like the day itself, fair with good news but  
fouled with exhaustion.

MALCOLM

(interrupting the action, to FLEANCE)

What did you think then?

FLEANCE

Think? I could barely breathe! These witches --  
ugly, loud --

MALCOLM

Think, Fleance --

MACDUFF

This is a waste of time.

DONALBAIN

I agree.

MALCOLM

Did Macbeth seem just surprised or was he full of  
fear?

FLEANCE

He looked -- guilty, as if someone had guessed a  
secret.

BANQUO  
(to the WITCHES)  
My noble partner --

MALCOLM  
A secret --

BANQUO  
-- you greet with present grace and great  
prediction --  
to me you speak not.

MALCOLM  
(to MACDUFF)  
Planted early well before these witches. What  
happened next?

FLEANCE  
My father wanted something from them.

BANQUO  
If you can look into the seeds of time --

FIRST WITCH  
Hail!

SECOND WITCH  
Hail!

THIRD WITCH  
Hail!

FIRST WITCH  
Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.

SECOND WITCH  
Not so happy, yet much happier.

THIRD WITCH  
Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none:  
So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo!

FIRST WITCH  
Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!

The WITCHES vanish. MACBETH and BANQUO pursue, then freeze.

FLEANCE  
It was all very confusing.

MALCOLM  
I can imagine. My father, Duncan, king --  
Macbeth, king --

BANQUO  
(to MACBETH)

You shall be king.

MALCOLM  
(to FLEANCE)

And you, Fleance, king.

MACBETH  
(to BANQUO)

Your children shall be kings.

MACDUFF  
(to MALCOLM)

And you, at that point -- king-in-waiting.  
(pointing to FLEANCE)  
And him -- king?

MALCOLM

Yes.

MACDUFF

Four kings.

DONALBAIN

And a leftover.

MACDUFF

One throne.

MALCOLM  
(to FLEANCE)

It is very confusing.

FLEANCE

I do not want to be king. I cannot bear its edge  
against my heart.

MACDUFF

You are a coward, Fleance -- shut up.

(to MALCOLM)

So, Macbeth had it early in his heart to kill  
your father. The baby verifies that. And only  
one course to the throne -- Macbeth through a sea  
of blood, smile on his lips, his heart a crunch  
of coal without a seam of grace in it. What else  
is there to understand?

MACBETH breaks into the action.

MACBETH

There is more to me than that!

MACDUFF

The hollow man rings!

MACBETH

True, I had lusted to set Duncan's sun on my head

--

But what the witches told me

Frightened me to the hollow of my bones....

Murder -- to hear my thought, yet but  
fantastical,

Echoed back by the clappers of their tongues

Shook so my single state of man

And made my seated heart knock at my ribs....

MACDUFF

So, a touch of conscience --

(referring to FLEANCE)

-- even this suckling --

MALCOLM

(referring to FLEANCE)

You need not insult him --

MACDUFF

-- would feel as much. Much older, you should  
have felt it more. More responsible, you should  
have cut your own throat then and there.

MACBETH

I hoped if chance would have me king, why, chance  
might crown me,

Without my stir.

MACDUFF

Add laziness!

BANQUO

(interrupting)

I tried to tell him

To be more careful of his soul,

That...the instruments of darkness tell us  
truths...

To betray us in deepest consequence.

But he did not hear me -- stood wrapped in his  
own come-bloody thoughts.

MALCOLM

Fleance, you can let the memory go. Enough.

FLEANCE walks to his father. MACBETH and BANQUO turn back to the scene.

FLEANCE

Look, how rapt he is, Father.

BANQUO

Yes, look, how our partner's rapt. Macbeth!

MACBETH

(whispering to himself)

Come what come may --

BANQUO

Worthy Macbeth, we stay upon your leisure.

MACBETH

Let us toward the king.  
Think upon what hath chanced, and...  
Having weigh'd it, let us speak  
Our free hearts each to other.

BANQUO

Very gladly.

MACBETH

Till then, enough. Come, Fleance, come be my  
traveling boy for the tumbled trip to home.

FLEANCE

(asking permission)

Father?

BANQUO

Be to both of us our homeward son and bring us  
three good luck!

BANQUO and MACBETH exit.

FLEANCE

He joked with me all the way. Gave me coins.  
Praised my arm's strength. Said he wished he had  
a son like me.

MACDUFF

A counterfeit heart.

FLEANCE

I liked him.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### **Act I, Scene 4**

DONALBAIN

You liked him!

(to all)

He liked him! You are an idiot! We are wasting  
time!

MALCOLM

If I am --

(indicating FLEANCE)

-- if we are -- to measure out our lives against his, then I need to know his measure within an inch of my life.

DONALBAIN

Your life isn't worth an inch at the moment.

(to FLEANCE)

Nor yours.

MALCOLM

(to FLEANCE and DONALBAIN)

He treated our father well, too. He saved my father's kingdom -- before corruption tasted anything of him.

Enter DUNCAN, MALCOLM, with Attendants, meeting a bleeding SERGEANT, played by ATHOLL.

DUNCAN

What bloody man is that?

MALCOLM

This is the sergeant  
Who like a good and hardy soldier fought  
'Gainst my captivity. Hail, brave friend!  
Say to king Duncan the knowledge of the broil --

SERGEANT

Doubtful it stood...

A stab of pain -- then the SERGEANT continues.

SERGEANT

Fortune, on the traitor smiling,  
Sho'd like a rebel's whore: but...brave Macbeth--  
-well he deserves that name--  
Disdaining fortune...carved out his passage  
Till he faced the slave  
And with his brandish'd steel  
Unseam'd him from the nave to the chaps,  
And fix'd his head upon our battlements.

DUNCAN

O valiant cousin! worthy gentleman!

MALCOLM comments to MACDUFF, DONALBAIN, and FLEANCE.

MALCOLM

See his manly, savage, graceful bravery. My father's love made him gifts for that.

Enter DUNCAN, MACBETH and BANQUO.

DUNCAN

O worthiest cousin!  
The sin of my ingratitude even now  
Was heavy on me: ...only I have left to say,  
More is thy due than more than all can pay....  
My worthy Cawdor!

FLEANCE

Then why did he do it? I do not want to be a  
king! He had grace, courage -- why, why, why?!  
If he can have that grace and then lose all  
grace, what hope for grace is there for any of  
us? What hope is there for me?

MACDUFF

(slamming his weapon down, to DONALBAIN)  
Oh, this is rare!

DONALBAIN

Most rare and uncooked!

MACDUFF

Your joint and several purposes are blunted by  
"why"! You have enough cause to choke you, and  
yet you will not clear your throats!

(to FLEANCE)

Boy, what must I do to bake you hard?

(to MALCOLM)

And you should know better.

MALCOLM

I know better than you think I know.

DONALBAIN

You think better than you act, which is not hard  
since your act is nothing to think about.

MACDUFF summons the WITCHES and MACBETH and speaks to them.

FLEANCE

What are you doing?

MACDUFF

(directed at MACBETH)

Our devalued Scottish spawn is not the only one  
powered to call our worst forward.

(to them all)

Show them the real truth of this wicked world.  
Begin with me.

In this scene, FIRST WITCH and SECOND WITCH will double as murderers of LADY MACDUFF and ATHOLL, MACDUFF's son. MACBETH will speak the lines of the MESSENGER, then join the murderers. As the scene is set, MACDUFF speaks.

MACDUFF

(to FLEANCE and MALCOLM)

Let these coming wounds wound you back to your purpose.

(to the WITCHES)

You may begin.

The WITCHES circle MACDUFF.

FIRST WITCH

Macduff of Fife had a wife.

SECOND WITCH

Macduff of Fife had a son.

THIRD WITCH

Macduff of Fife left no message.

In the scene, it is clear that FLEANCE allies himself with ATHOLL.

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### **Act I, Scene 5: Macduff's Castle**

The play continues with the killing of LADY MACDUFF and MACDUFF's son, ATHOLL, and then, after FLEANCE agrees to return to Scotland, the play segues into an edited version of the finale of Shakespeare's actual text.