

Macbeth quotes, in plain words

Every big quote from the book. Who says it, where, and what it means. Start with the twenty marked with a dot.

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Learn these twenty first

Short. Easy to remember. Between them they cover every theme and every main character.

- **Fair is foul, and foul is fair**

Witches · [Act 1, Scene 1](#) · [the supernatural](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

Good things are bad. Bad things are good. That is the rule of the play.

- **So foul and fair a day I have not seen**

Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 3](#) · [the supernatural](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

Macbeth's first words copy the witches. He has not met them yet.

- **Stars, hide your fires; Let not light see my black and deep desires**

Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 4](#) · [ambition](#) · [guilt](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

Macbeth asks the stars to go dark. He does not want anyone to see what he wants.

- **Yet do I fear thy nature; It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness**

Lady Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 5](#) · [gender and manhood](#) · [ambition](#)

Lady Macbeth thinks her husband is too kind. She wants to make him hard.

- **Come, you spirits That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here**

Lady Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 5](#) · [gender and manhood](#) · [the supernatural](#) · [violence](#)

She asks the spirits to take away the woman in her. Then she can be cruel.

- **Look like th' innocent flower, But be the serpent under 't**

Lady Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 5](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

Look like a nice flower. Be the snake under it. That is her plan.

- **I have no spur To prick the sides of my intent, but only Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself And falls on th' other**

Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 7](#) · [ambition](#)

Macbeth has no good reason to kill. Only wanting more. Wanting more jumps too far and falls.

- **When you durst do it, then you were a man**

Lady Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 7](#) · [gender and manhood](#) · [violence](#)

She says a real man would do it. He believes her.

- **Is this a dagger which I see before me, The handle toward my hand?**

Macbeth · [Act 2, Scene 1](#) · [the supernatural](#) · [guilt](#) · [violence](#)

Macbeth sees a knife in the air. Real or not, it points him to the king's room.

- **Macbeth does murder sleep**

Macbeth · [Act 2, Scene 2](#) · [guilt](#)

A voice says he has killed sleep itself. He will not sleep well again.

- **Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood Clean from my hand?**

Macbeth · [Act 2, Scene 2](#) · [guilt](#) · [violence](#)

Can the whole sea wash the blood off his hands? No.

- **A little water clears us of this deed**

Lady Macbeth · [Act 2, Scene 2](#) · [guilt](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

She says a bit of water will clean them. In Act 5, nothing can.

- **To be thus is nothing, But to be safely thus**

Macbeth · [Act 3, Scene 1](#) · [ambition](#) · [kingship](#)

Being king is nothing if you are not safe. So Macbeth must kill again.

- **O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!**

Macbeth · [Act 3, Scene 2](#) · [guilt](#)

His mind is full of stings. He stops telling his wife his plans.

- **Thou canst not say I did it. Never shake Thy gory locks at me**

Macbeth · [Act 3, Scene 4](#) · [guilt](#) · [the supernatural](#)

Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost at dinner. No one else can. They see a king going mad.

- **I am in blood Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, Returning were as tedious as go o'er**

Macbeth · [Act 3, Scene 4](#) · [violence](#) · [guilt](#)

He is so deep in blood that going back is as hard as going on. So he goes on.

- **By the pricking of my thumbs, Something wicked this way comes**

Witches · [Act 4, Scene 1](#) · [the supernatural](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

The witches call Macbeth 'something wicked'. He is one of them now.

- **none of woman born Shall harm Macbeth**

Apparition · [Act 4, Scene 1](#) · [fate and free will](#) · [the supernatural](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

No one born from a woman can hurt Macbeth. He feels safe. He should not.

- **Out, damned spot, out, I say!**

Lady Macbeth · [Act 5, Scene 1](#) · [guilt](#)

Lady Macbeth walks in her sleep. She washes her hands. The blood is not there. She still sees it.

- **Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow Creeps in this petty pace from day to day**

Macbeth · [Act 5, Scene 5](#) · [fate and free will](#)

Day follows day. None of them mean anything.

- **Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player That struts and frets his hour upon the stage And then is heard no more**

Macbeth · [Act 5, Scene 5](#) · [fate and free will](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

Life is a short candle. A bad actor on a stage. Then gone.

- **this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen**

Malcolm · [Act 5, Scene 8](#) · [kingship](#) · [violence](#)

Malcolm's last word on them. A butcher and his devil queen.

Every quote, in order

All 73, in the order they happen.

Act 1 31 quotes

Act 2 7 quotes

Act 3 11 quotes

Act 4 7 quotes

Act 5 17 quotes

Act 1

● Fair is foul, and foul is fair

Witches · [Act 1, Scene 1](#) · [the supernatural](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

Good things are bad. Bad things are good. That is the rule of the play.

When the battle's lost and won

Witches · [Act 1, Scene 1](#) · [the supernatural](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

A fight can be won and lost at the same time. That is Macbeth's whole story.

brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name)

Captain · [Act 1, Scene 2](#) · [violence](#) · [kingship](#)

At the start, Macbeth is a hero. He wins the battle for the king.

unseamed him from the nave to th' chops

Captain · [Act 1, Scene 2](#) · [violence](#)

He cuts a man open from belly to jaw. He is good at killing. That is the problem.

O valiant cousin, worthy gentleman!

Duncan · [Act 1, Scene 2](#) · [kingship](#)

The king loves Macbeth. He trusts him. That is why he dies.

What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won

Duncan · [Act 1, Scene 2](#) · [kingship](#) · [fate and free will](#)

A traitor loses his title. Macbeth gets it. He gets a traitor's name before he does anything wrong.

● So foul and fair a day I have not seen

Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 3](#) · [the supernatural](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

Macbeth's first words copy the witches. He has not met them yet.

Lesser than Macbeth and greater

Witches · [Act 1, Scene 3](#) · [fate and free will](#) · [the supernatural](#)

The witches tell Banquo he is lower than Macbeth, but higher too. His sons will be kings.

Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none

Witches · [Act 1, Scene 3](#) · [fate and free will](#) · [kingship](#)

Banquo will never be king. But his children will. Macbeth cannot forget this.

If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me Without my stir

Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 3](#) · [ambition](#) · [fate and free will](#)

Macbeth says he will wait and let luck make him king. He cannot wait.

Present fears Are less than horrible imaginings

Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 3](#) · [ambition](#) · [guilt](#)

Real danger scares him less than the things he imagines. His mind is his enemy.

The instruments of darkness tell us truths, Win us with honest trifles, to betray 's In deepest consequence

Banquo · [Act 1, Scene 3](#) · [the supernatural](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

Banquo sees the trick. The witches tell small true things so you believe one big lie.

There's no art To find the mind's construction in the face

Duncan · [Act 1, Scene 4](#) · [appearance and reality](#) · [kingship](#)

You cannot read a face, says the king. Then Macbeth walks in. The king cannot read his face.

● Stars, hide your fires; Let not light see my black and deep desires

Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 4](#) · [ambition](#) · [guilt](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

Macbeth asks the stars to go dark. He does not want anyone to see what he wants.

The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step On which I must fall down or else o'erleap

Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 4](#) · [ambition](#) · [kingship](#)

The king picks his son to be next. Now that son is in Macbeth's way.

● **Yet do I fear thy nature; It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness**

Lady Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 5](#) · [gender and manhood](#) · [ambition](#)

Lady Macbeth thinks her husband is too kind. She wants to make him hard.

Thou wouldst be great, Art not without ambition, but without The illness should attend it

Lady Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 5](#) · [ambition](#)

He wants to be great. But he is not cruel enough. She thinks cruel is good.

● **Come, you spirits That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here**

Lady Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 5](#) · [gender and manhood](#) · [the supernatural](#) · [violence](#)

She asks the spirits to take away the woman in her. Then she can be cruel.

Come, thick night, And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell

Lady Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 5](#) · [the supernatural](#) · [guilt](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

She asks the night to hide the murder. Her husband asked the stars the same thing.

● **Look like th' innocent flower, But be the serpent under 't**

Lady Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 5](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

Look like a nice flower. Be the snake under it. That is her plan.

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well It were done quickly

Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 7](#) · [ambition](#) · [guilt](#)

Macbeth wishes the murder could be over as soon as it is done. He knows it will not be.

His virtues Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against The deep damnation of his taking-off

Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 7](#) · [kingship](#) · [guilt](#)

The king is such a good man that heaven will cry out when he dies. Macbeth knows it.

● **I have no spur To prick the sides of my intent, but only Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself And falls on th' other**

Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 7](#) · [ambition](#)

Macbeth has no good reason to kill. Only wanting more. Wanting more jumps too far and falls.

We will proceed no further in this business

Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 7](#) · [ambition](#) · [gender and manhood](#)

Macbeth says no. He will not do it. His wife changes his mind in forty lines.

Was the hope drunk Wherein you dressed yourself?

Lady Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 7](#) · [gender and manhood](#) · [ambition](#)

She asks if his courage was only drunk talk. She is making fun of him.

- **When you durst do it, then you were a man**

Lady Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 7](#) · [gender and manhood](#) · [violence](#)

She says a real man would do it. He believes her.

I dare do all that may become a man. Who dares do more is none

Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 7](#) · [gender and manhood](#) · [violence](#)

Macbeth says a real man knows when to stop. He loses this fight.

I have given suck, and know How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me

Lady Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 7](#) · [gender and manhood](#) · [violence](#)

She says she would kill her own baby before she broke a promise. This is how far she will go.

But screw your courage to the sticking place And we'll not fail

Lady Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 7](#) · [ambition](#) · [gender and manhood](#)

Hold your nerve tight, like a bow string. Then we will not fail.

Bring forth men-children only

Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 7](#) · [gender and manhood](#)

He gives in. He says a woman this hard should only have sons.

False face must hide what the false heart doth know

Macbeth · [Act 1, Scene 7](#) · [appearance and reality](#) · [guilt](#)

Show a false face. Hide what you really feel. The murder plan is set.

Act 2

- **Is this a dagger which I see before me, The handle toward my hand?**

Macbeth · [Act 2, Scene 1](#) · [the supernatural](#) · [guilt](#) · [violence](#)

Macbeth sees a knife in the air. Real or not, it points him to the king's room.

- **Macbeth does murder sleep**

Macbeth · [Act 2, Scene 2](#) · [guilt](#)

A voice says he has killed sleep itself. He will not sleep well again.

- **Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood Clean from my hand?**

Macbeth · [Act 2, Scene 2](#) · [guilt](#) · [violence](#)

Can the whole sea wash the blood off his hands? No.

- **A little water clears us of this deed**

Lady Macbeth · [Act 2, Scene 2](#) · [guilt](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

She says a bit of water will clean them. In Act 5, nothing can.

My hands are of your color, but I shame To wear a heart so white

Lady Macbeth · [Act 2, Scene 2](#) · [gender and manhood](#) · [guilt](#)

Her hands are as red as his. But she is not scared. He is.

Confusion now hath made his masterpiece

Macduff · [Act 2, Scene 3](#) · [kingship](#) · [order and disorder](#)

Macduff finds the dead king. Killing a king breaks the whole world.

There's daggers in men's smiles

Donalbain · [Act 2, Scene 3](#) · [appearance and reality](#) · [violence](#)

The king's sons run away. Any smile could hide a knife.

Act 3

Thou hast it now - - king, Cawdor, Glamis, all
As the Weird Women promised, and I fear Thou played'st most foully for 't

Banquo · [Act 3, Scene 1](#) · [kingship](#) · [fate and free will](#) · [guilt](#)

Banquo sees it. Macbeth has everything the witches said. He got it by murder.

● To be thus is nothing, But to be safely thus

Macbeth · [Act 3, Scene 1](#) · [ambition](#) · [kingship](#)

Being king is nothing if you are not safe. So Macbeth must kill again.

Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown
And put a barren scepter in my grip

Macbeth · [Act 3, Scene 1](#) · [kingship](#) · [fate and free will](#)

Macbeth has a crown but no son to give it to. That eats him.

Naught's had, all's spent, Where our desire is got without content

Lady Macbeth · [Act 3, Scene 2](#) · [ambition](#) · [guilt](#)

They got everything they wanted. They are not happy.

We have scorched the snake, not killed it

Macbeth · [Act 3, Scene 2](#) · [violence](#) · [guilt](#)

They hurt the snake. They did not kill it. The danger is still there.

● O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!

Macbeth · [Act 3, Scene 2](#) · [guilt](#)

His mind is full of stings. He stops telling his wife his plans.

Come, seeling night, Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day

Macbeth · [Act 3, Scene 2](#) · [the supernatural](#) · [violence](#)

Now Macbeth asks the night to hide his crime. His wife used to say this. They have swapped.

● Thou canst not say I did it. Never shake Thy gory locks at me

Macbeth · [Act 3, Scene 4](#) · [guilt](#) · [the supernatural](#)

Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost at dinner. No one else can. They see a king going mad.

Stand not upon the order of your going, But go at once

Lady Macbeth · [Act 3, Scene 4](#) · [kingship](#) · [order and disorder](#)

She tells the guests to leave, no matter their rank. Order has broken down.

It will have blood, they say; blood will have blood

Macbeth · [Act 3, Scene 4](#) · [violence](#) · [guilt](#) · [fate and free will](#)

Blood wants more blood. One murder needs another.

- I am in blood Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er

Macbeth · [Act 3, Scene 4](#) · [violence](#) · [guilt](#)

He is so deep in blood that going back is as hard as going on. So he goes on.

Act 4

Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn, and cauldron bubble

Witches · [Act 4, Scene 1](#) · [the supernatural](#)

The witches' spell. It rhymes. No one else in the play talks like this.

- By the pricking of my thumbs, Something wicked this way comes

Witches · [Act 4, Scene 1](#) · [the supernatural](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

The witches call Macbeth 'something wicked'. He is one of them now.

- none of woman born Shall harm Macbeth

Apparition · [Act 4, Scene 1](#) · [fate and free will](#) · [the supernatural](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

No one born from a woman can hurt Macbeth. He feels safe. He should not.

Macbeth shall never vanquished be until Great Birnam Wood to
high Dunsinane Hill Shall come against him

Apparition · [Act 4, Scene 1](#) · [fate and free will](#) · [the supernatural](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

A forest cannot walk, so Macbeth thinks he is safe. The army carries branches.

All my pretty ones? Did you say "all"? O hell - kite! All?

Macduff · [Act 4, Scene 3](#) · [violence](#) · [gender and manhood](#)

Macduff hears his family is dead. He asks again and again. He cannot believe it.

But I must also feel it as a man

Macduff · [Act 4, Scene 3](#) · [gender and manhood](#)

Malcolm says take it like a man. Macduff says a man feels it too.

Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell

Malcolm · [Act 4, Scene 3](#) · [kingship](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

Even the devil was an angel once. Malcolm tests Macduff. He trusts no one.

Act 5

● Out, damned spot, out, I say!

Lady Macbeth · [Act 5, Scene 1](#) · [guilt](#)

Lady Macbeth walks in her sleep. She washes her hands. The blood is not there. She still sees it.

Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand

Lady Macbeth · [Act 5, Scene 1](#) · [guilt](#)

Her hand still smells of blood. No perfume can hide it. A little water did not work.

What's done cannot be undone

Lady Macbeth · [Act 5, Scene 1](#) · [guilt](#) · [fate and free will](#)

She used to say 'what is done is done' to calm him. Now the words are about her.

Those he commands move only in command, Nothing in love

Angus · [Act 5, Scene 2](#) · [kingship](#)

His soldiers obey him. They do not love him. That is the difference between a king and a bully.

Now does he feel his title Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe Upon a dwarfish thief

Angus · [Act 5, Scene 2](#) · [kingship](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

The crown does not fit him. It is like a giant's coat on a small thief.

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased

Macbeth · [Act 5, Scene 3](#) · [guilt](#)

He asks the doctor to fix his wife's mind. The doctor cannot.

I have almost forgot the taste of fears

Macbeth · [Act 5, Scene 5](#) · [violence](#) · [guilt](#)

Nothing scares him any more. He feels nothing.

She should have died hereafter

Macbeth · [Act 5, Scene 5](#) · [fate and free will](#) · [guilt](#)

His wife is dead. He says she would have died some time anyway. That is all he says.

- **Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow Creeps in this petty pace from day to day**

Macbeth · [Act 5, Scene 5](#) · [fate and free will](#)

Day follows day. None of them mean anything.

- **Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player That struts and frets his hour upon the stage And then is heard no more**

Macbeth · [Act 5, Scene 5](#) · [fate and free will](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

Life is a short candle. A bad actor on a stage. Then gone.

It is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing

Macbeth · [Act 5, Scene 5](#) · [fate and free will](#)

Life is a story told by a fool. It means nothing. This is where wanting more ends.

I 'gin to be aweary of the sun

Macbeth · [Act 5, Scene 5](#) · [fate and free will](#) · [guilt](#)

He is tired of the sun. He wants the world to end.

Turn, hellhound, turn!

Macduff · [Act 5, Scene 8](#) · [violence](#)

Macduff calls him a dog from hell. Not a king.

I bear a charmed life, which must not yield To one of woman born

Macbeth · [Act 5, Scene 8](#) · [fate and free will](#) · [the supernatural](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

Macbeth still trusts the witches. The next line breaks him.

Macduff was from his mother's womb Untimely ripped

Macduff · [Act 5, Scene 8](#) · [fate and free will](#) · [the supernatural](#) · [appearance and reality](#)

Macduff was cut out of his mother, not born. So the spell does not protect Macbeth.

Lay on, Macduff, And damned be him that first cries "Hold! Enough!"

Macbeth · [Act 5, Scene 8](#) · [violence](#) · [fate and free will](#)

His last words. He fights even though he knows he will lose.

● this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen

Malcolm · [Act 5, Scene 8](#) · [kingship](#) · [violence](#)

Malcolm's last word on them. A butcher and his devil queen.
