

HANDOUT 1

TRACING A WORD IN MACBETH

During our study of *Macbeth*, you will each be responsible for keeping a “word journal” in which you identify how the meaning of a specific word is shaped by the situation in which it is used and the character who uses it.

Starting at the beginning of the act you were assigned, find the word every time it appears. A concordance or computer program is a great help here, but if these are not available, reading the act and scanning for the word is fine. Each time you find the word, make an entry in your word journal.

Guidelines for Each Entry

1. Write out the passage that contains your word and give act, scene, and line numbers—for example, 2.3.3–5. Record enough of the passage to make its meaning clear; avoid cutting it off in mid-thought. Identify the speaker.
2. Clarify the meaning of the passage by putting it into your own words. This is called paraphrasing. Then briefly explain what is happening in the play at the time the words in this passage are spoken.
3. Draw conclusions about how the word is used. For example, compare the passage to one you recorded earlier by explaining how the meaning of your word is affected by the character who uses it and the situation in which it is used.
4. At the end of your act, use the journal to draw more conclusions: What character uses the word most often? How does the denotation and connotation of the word change from character to character? Is there an unusual use of the word? How does this word affect the act you studied?

Sample Word Journal

This is what an entry might look like for the word *blood* in Act 1.

1. a. Quotation and speaker Duncan: What bloody man is that? He can report, / As seemeth by his plight, of the revolt / The newest state. (1.2.1–3)
- b. Paraphrase and clarification Who is that bloody man? It looks like he has been fighting against the revolt and can give us the latest news of the battle. King Duncan is on or near the battlefield and wants to know how the fight is going.
- c. Conclusions First quote; no comparison yet. Duncan trusts a bloody soldier whose blood gives him the authority to report on the battle.
2. a. Quotation and speaker Captain: For brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name), / Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel, / Which smoked with bloody execution, / Like valor's minion, carved out his passage / Till he faced the slave . . . (1.2.18–22)

- b. Paraphrase and clarification In spite of our troops' bad luck, brave Macbeth carved his way with his executioner's sword through the ranks of rebel soldiers until he faced the traitor who led the revolt. The captain reports to King Duncan that Macbeth fought fiercely to spill the blood of the traitors who rebelled against Duncan and Scotland.
- c. Conclusions In the first passage, the loyal Scottish captain is bloody because of the rebels' uprising. Because of his bravery, fierceness, and loyalty, Macbeth makes the rebels bloody.
3. a. Quotation and speaker Lady M.: Make thick my blood. / Stop up th' access and passage to remorse . . . (1.5.50–51)
- b. Paraphrase and clarification Make my blood thick so I can be cold-hearted and feel no sorrow or guilt about planning this murder. Lady Macbeth wants to convince Macbeth to kill Duncan. In order to do so, she hopes to become more mannish and heartless.
- c. Conclusions Early in the play, soldiers get bloody as they try to overthrow Scotland. Then Scottish soldiers get bloody overthrowing the rebels. Lady Macbeth wants to overthrow King Duncan, so she is going to have to get bloody too. But before she can make Duncan's blood flow, she is going to have to change her blood—slow it down, make it cold. She talks as if she can change her personality by changing her blood.

General Conclusions for Act 1:

1. In Act 1 it is a good thing to be bloody, especially for *men* to be bloody—the king trusts the bloody soldier, and people admire Macbeth because he has a bloody sword and has killed lots of soldiers. Lady Macbeth thinks it might be good for her and her husband to be bloody—she wants to slow down her blood and be like a man and make Duncan's blood flow.

2. Even before we meet him, Macbeth is bloody—he comes onstage with a bloody sword.

KEY WORD FREQUENCY LIST:

MACBETH

Rank	Frequency	Word	Rank	Frequency	Word
1	52	come	38	15	dead
2	51	good	39	15	friend(s)
3	44	time	40	15	heaven
4	42	Macbeth	41	14	air
5	40	king(s)	42	14	bloody
6	39	say	43	14	God
7	35	fear	44	14	name
8	34	lord	45	13	dare
9	33	hand(s)	46	13	Duncan
10	31	great	47	13	father
11	31	see	48	13	noble
12	29	man	49	13	pray
13	29	sir	50	13	sword
14	26	sleep	51	13	think
15	25	thane	52	13	wife
16	24	thought(s)	53	12	fly
17	23	blood	54	12	keep
18	23	look	55	12	leave
19	22	Banquo	56	12	new
20	22	eye(s)	57	12	Scotland
21	22	heart	58	11	bed
22	22	night	59	11	knock
23	21	Cawdor	60	11	peace
24	20	death	61	11	stand
25	20	live(s)	62	11	welcome
26	20	nature	63	11	wood
27	19	love	64	10	Birnam
28	18	day	65	10	face
29	18	hear	66	10	fight
30	18	life	67	10	grace
31	17	show	68	10	honor
32	17	worthy	69	10	hour
33	16	hail	70	10	place
34	16	Macduff	71	10	tonight
35	16	men	72	10	woman
36	16	poor	73	10	words
37	16	strange			
