STAGING CHALLENGES

Blood Will Have Blood: Stage Blood and Banquo’s Ghost

Macbeth is, with Titus Andronicus, certainly among Shakespeare’s bloodiest plays. Not only does it have a high body count, but several characters must appear on-stage with blood on their weapons or themselves. In the following activities, your students will explore both the practicalities and the dramatic potential of blood in Macbeth by assessing a scene’s blood-related needs, preparing the kind of stage blood appropriate for the scene, and making decisions about staging Banquo’s ghost based on the text.

Activity 1: Stage Blood

Blood is something that actors and production companies have to negotiate with, deciding how much to use, what kind to use, where to hide blood packets, whether or not it can get on clothing (and if so, how to get it out; if not, how to keep that from happening).

• Materials Needed:
  o Clear plastic cups
  o Plastic spoons
  o Plastic baggies
  o Empty gel capsules (available at most pharmacies)
  o Food coloring (red, blue, yellow)
  o Corn syrup
  o Water
  o Peanut butter
  o Cornstarch
  o Powdered cocoa
  o Liquid soap

• Have your students come to class with old T-shirts they can put on over their clothes. Even if you end up preparing washable blood, this measure is still good to take. You may also want to lay down newspaper or a tarp in your classroom, or, if possible, to do this activity outside.

• Divide your students into at least 5 groups.

• Give each group one of the snippets of text from Handout #9A.

• Have each group determine:
  o What kind of blood they are going to need – thick or thin, drippy or flowing, etc
  o How much blood they will need
  o Where the blood needs to go
  o How to release the blood, if it does not appear at a character’s entrance
  o Which recipe from Handout #9C they need to use to create their blood, based on the conditions of their scene

  ▪ You may wish to give your students Handout #9B, our Blood Recipe Flowchart, to help them make this decision.
• How to manipulate the blood on-stage. Do they need a hidden packet? Can it be palmed?
• Your students will need to experiment in order to find out the appropriate proportions of these ingredients in their recipes. We recommend mixing in clear plastic cups for the trial-and-error process.
• Have each group present their scene snippets to the class.
  o They may want to use the feeding-in method (page 22) so that the students manipulating blood are not also trying to hold paper.
• Discuss:
  o How easy was it to determine the kind of blood they needed to create?
  o How easy was it to achieve the right mixture?
  o What other ways of showing blood on-stage might be possible? Some modern productions use red ribbons or red fabric as a way of stylizing the blood. What effect do your students think that would have on the scene?
  o You may also want to discuss the practicality of getting the blood back off. When Macbeth and Lady Macbeth’s hands are covered in blood at the end of 2.2, how long do they have before their 2.3 entrance to get clean again? (See Production Choices, page 165, for more information on matters of timing). This could become even more complicated if an actor doubles as multiple characters who appear in successive scenes (See Casting and Doubling, page 165). Does this consideration change the kind of blood your students think they should use?

Follow-Up
Consider Lady Macbeth’s sleepwalking scene (5.1), when she washes imaginary blood from her hands. How does this play against all the blood the audience would have seen in the production up until that point? Would using stylized blood, or avoiding the use of blood altogether, change the impact of that scene?

Further Exploration
Working blood into fight scenes is an additional challenge. Sometimes productions. Advanced Studies classes or production companies may wish to consider the challenges of adding blood to one of the fight scenes (Banquo vs Murderers, 3.3; Macduff family murder, 4.2; Macbeth v Young Siward, 5.7; Macbeth v Macduff, 5.8).
• How to conceal the blood during the fight
• How to release the blood
• What clothing the blood might get on
• What weapons the blood might get on
• How to clean up the floor afterwards

Activity 2: Banquo’s Ghost
One of the more spectacular and dramatic moments in Macbeth is the appearance of Banquo’s ghost at Macbeth’s banquet. The audience shares Macbeth’s experience. They see the Ghost with him while no-one else on stage can. This situation is an interesting reversal of the typical theatrical suspension of disbelief.
Typically, the audience is asked to imagine something that is not really there, as in the dagger scene earlier in the play. Here, the audience must try to imagine what it is like for Lady Macbeth and the assembled lords, watching Macbeth react to nothingness – meanwhile, the audience knows perfectly well that Macbeth suffers no hallucination, but is truly haunted by Banquo, whom they can see as clearly as he can. Shakespeare uses these scenes to play with the theatrical convention of suspension of disbelief, pitting the theatre of imagination versus the theatre of illusion.

- Give your students **Handout #10**: the text of 3.4 from *Macbeth*
- Discuss the following:
  - What does Macbeth tell us about how the ghost looks?
  - Consider your above exploration of stage blood.
    - What kind of blood would be best to use for this scene?
    - Where does it need to be on Banquo?
    - How much blood should there be?
    - You may wish to look back both at Banquo’s murder (3.2) and the Murderer’s description of it (3.3) for further clues.
  - What is the best arrangement for the stage?
    - If there is a “*Banquet prepared*”, what does that mean? How big is the table? Where is it? Who prepares it?
    - Where should each character sit? Consider issues of status as well as practical matters of blocking. (See *Elizabethan Classroom*, page 35, for more on blocking and sight lines).
    - Where is the “space reserved” for Macbeth?
  - How does the Ghost appear, disappear, and reappear?
    - Consider the options available to the King’s Men at the Globe: the stage left and stage right doors, the central discovery space, appearing above in the balcony, descending from the heavens, or ascending from the trap. Which of these options is the most practical? The most dramatic?
    - Notice that the Ghost has two entrances marked in the text, but no exits. When does he leave? Or does he? Is there a way to keep him on-stage but somehow out of Macbeth’s sight?
      - Keep in mind that the Globe stage would have had, in addition to the above entrance spaces, two large columns about two-thirds of the way downstage.
      - Should any noise or music accompany Banquo’s entrance or exit?
  - How should the other characters react to Macbeth seeing the ghost? Should they all react in the same way, or differently?
- Stage the scene. Use your **Teacher’s Guide**, page 148, to help your students make choices about performance.
  - If your class time is limited, you may wish to only explore through the Ghost’s first exit, at about line 42.
- Discuss:
  - How difficult is it to sort out Banquo’s timing?
  - How hard is it for the actors portraying Lady Macbeth, Lennox, Ross, and the other lords to avoid looking at Banquo’s ghost?
  - How does Banquo’s appearance fit in with the other supernatural elements in the play?
**Follow-Up**

Compare this scene to Macbeth’s 1.7 monologue when he sees the “dagger of the mind.” Examine the language Macbeth uses in that monologue. How does Shakespeare tell the audience (and production companies) whether or not the dagger is real or imagined? How is that language similar to or different from the language that Macbeth uses about Banquo’s ghost?

- Discuss:
  - Some production companies will choose to stage the dagger, using a prop or a projection. How does this change the audience’s perception of Macbeth’s hallucination? How is it different if we share the experience of seeing the dagger, as opposed to just watching Macbeth imagine it?
  - Some companies will also choose not to have Banquo’s ghost physically present, rather having the actor playing Macbeth acting against the same empty air that the other characters see. How does this change the energy of the scene? Does it have any greater implications for Macbeth’s character? For the supernatural elements of the play?

**Further Exploration**

For Advanced Studies classes, compare the appearance of Banquo’s ghost to the appearance of ghosts in other plays, such as: Hamlet’s father appearing to Horatio and the sentinels, then to Hamlet in various scenes in Hamlet; Caesar haunting Brutus in Julius Caesar and foretelling his death at Philippi; the ghost of Don Andrea serving as a sort of chorus in Thomas Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy. How is Banquo’s appearance similar to or different from these ghosts? Why do your students think that Shakespeare keeps Banquo silent while so many other avenging ghosts speak?
Handout #9A – Scene Snippets for Blood Work

#1: 1.2 – Duncan and Bloody Captain
DUNCAN
What bloody man is that? He can report,
As seemeth by his plight, of the revolt
The newest state.

[...]

CAPTAIN
But I am faint.
My gashes cry for help.

DUNCAN
So well thy words become thee as thy wounds;
They smack of honor both. Go get him surgeons.

#2: 2.2 – Macbeth and Lady Macbeth
LADY MACBETH
Who was it that thus cried? Why, worthy thane,
You do unbend your noble strength, to think
So brainsickly of things. Go get some water,
And wash this filthy witness from your hand.
Why did you bring these daggers from the place?
They must lie there: go carry them; and smear
The sleepy grooms with blood.

MACBETH
I'll go no more:
I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on't again I dare not.

LADY MACBETH
Infirm of purpose:
Give me the daggers

#3: 2.2 – Macbeth and Lady Macbeth
Enter LADY MACBETH

LADY MACBETH
My hands are of your colour; but I shame
To wear a heart so white.
I hear a knocking at the south entry:
Retire we to our chamber;
A little water clears us of this deed:

#4: 3.4 – Macbeth and Murderer
MACBETH
See, they encounter thee with their hearts’ thanks.
Both sides are even: here I'll sit i’ the midst:
Be large in mirth; anon we'll drink a measure
The table round. There's blood on thy face.

MURDERER
'Tis Banquo's then.

MACBETH
'Tis better thee without than he within.
Is he dispatch’d?

MURDERER
My lord, his throat is cut; that I did for him.

MACBETH
Thou art the best o' the cut-throats: yet he's good
That did the like for Fleance: if thou didst it,
Thou art the nonpareil. [...] But Banquo’s safe?

#5: 4.3 – Macbeth and Banquo’s Spirit
MACBETH
Thou art too like the spirit of Banquo: down.
Thy crown does sear mine eye-balls. And thy hair,
Thou other gold-bound brow, is like the first.
A third is like the former. Filthy hags,
Why do you show me this? ------- A fourth? Start,
eyes!
What, will the line stretch out to the crack of
doom?
Another yet? A seventh? I'll see no more:
And yet the eighth appears, who bears a glass
Which shows me many more; and some I see
That two-fold balls and treble scepters carry:
Horrible sight: Now, I see, 'tis true;
For the blood-bolter'd Banquo smiles upon me,
And points at them for his. What, is this so?
Handout #9C -- Stage Blood Recipes

**Recipe #1**
corn syrup
warm water
cornstarch
red food coloring
powdered cocoa
green or yellow food coloring
---Mix cornstarch/cocoa with water. Stir in corn syrup. Add food coloring.

**Recipe #2**
corn syrup
liquid soap
red food color
blue food color

**Recipe #3**
corn syrup
peanut butter
lots of red food color
little blue food color
Handout #10 - Banquo’s Ghost

Macbeth, 3.4

Banquet prepared. Enter MACBETH, LADY MACBETH, ROSS, LENNOX, Lords, and Attendants

[...]

LADY MACBETH
My royal lord,
You do not give the cheer: the feast is sold
That is not often vouch'd, while 'tis a-making,
'Tis given with welcome: to feed were best at home;
From thence the sauce to meat is ceremony; Meeting were bare without it.

Enter the GHOST OF BANQUO, and sits in Macbeth's place.

MACBETH
Sweet remembrance:
Now, good digestion wait on appetite,
And health on both.

LENNOX
May't please your highness sit.

MACBETH
Here had we now our country's honour roof'd,
Were the graced person of our Banquo present;
Who may I rather challenge for unkindness
Than pity for mischance.

ROSS
His absence, sir,
Lays blame upon his promise. Please't your highness
To grace us with your royal company?

MACBETH
The table's full.

LENNOX
Here is a place reserved, sir.
Behold, look, lo, how say you?
Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, speak too.
If charnel-houses and our graves must send
Those that we bury back, our monuments
Shall be the maws of kites.

LADY MACBETH
What, quite unmann’d in folly?

MACBETH
If I stand here, I saw him.

LADY MACBETH
Fie, for shame.

MACBETH
Blood hath been shed ere now, ’t the olden time,
Ere human statute purged the gentle weal;
Ay, and since too, murders have been perform’d
Too terrible for the ear: the times have been,
That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
And there an end; but now they rise again,
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,
And push us from our stools: this is more strange
Than such a murder is.

LADY MACBETH
My worthy lord,
Your noble friends do lack you.

MACBETH
I do forget.
Do not muse at me, my most worthy friends,
I have a strange infirmity, which is nothing
To those that know me. Come, love and health to
all;
Then I’ll sit down. Give me some wine; fill full.

Enter GHOST

I drink to the general joy o' the whole table,
And to our dear friend Banquo, whom we miss;
Would he were here: to all, and him, we thirst,
And all to all.

LORDS
Our duties, and the pledge.

MACBETH
Avaunt, and quit my sight, let the earth hide thee:
Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold;
Thou hast no speculation in those eyes
Which thou dost glare with.

LADY MACBETH
Think of this, good peers,
But as a thing of custom: 'tis no other;
Only it spoils the pleasure of the time.

MACBETH
What man dare, I dare:
Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
The arm'd rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan tiger;
Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves
Shall never tremble. Or be alive again,
And dare me to the desert with thy sword;
If trembling I inhabit then, protest me
The baby of a girl. Hence, horrible shadow,
Unreal mockery, hence. Why, so: being gone,
I am a man again. Pray you, sit still.

LADY MACBETH
You have displaced the mirth, broke the good
meeting,
With most admired disorder.
Banquet prepared. Enter MACBETH, LADY MACBETH, ROSS, LENNOX, Lords, and Attendants

[...]

LADY MACBETH
My royal lord,
You do not give the cheer: the feast is sold
That is not often vouch'd, while 'tis a-making,
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MACBETH
The table's full.

LENNOX
Here is a place reserved, sir.

MACBETH
Where?
LENNOX
Here, my good lord.
What is't that moves your highness?

MACBETH
Which of you have done this?

LORDS
What, my good lord?

MACBETH
Thou canst not say I did it: never shake
Thy gory locks at me.

ROSS
Gentlemen, rise: his highness is not well.

LADY MACBETH
Sit, worthy friends: my lord is often thus,
And hath been from his youth: pray you, keep seat;
The fit is momentary; upon a thought
He will again be well: if much you note him,
You shall offend him and extend his passion:
Feed, and regard him not. Are you a man?

MACBETH
Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that
Which might appall the devil.

LADY MACBETH
O proper stuff:
This is the very painting of your fear:
This is the air-drawn dagger which, you said,
Led you to Duncan. O, these flaws and starts,
Impostors to true fear, would well become
A woman's story at a winter's fire,
Authorized by her grandam. Shame itself,
Why do you make such faces? When all's done,
You look but on a stool.

MACBETH
Prithee, see there,
Behold, look, lo, how say you?
Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, speak too.
If charnel-houses and our graves must send
Those that we bury back, our monuments
Shall be the maws of kites.

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Ay, and since too, murders have been perform'd
Too terrible for the ear: the times have been,
That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
And there an end; but now they rise again, 50
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,
And push us from our stools: this is more strange
Than such a murder is.

LADY MACBETH
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MACBETH
I do forget.
Do not muse at me, my most worthy friends, 55
I have a strange infirmity, which is nothing
To those that know me. Come, love and health to all,
Then I'll sit down. Give me some wine; fill full.

Enter GHOST
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And to our dear friend Banquo, whom we miss; 60
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