

The background is a deep red with a rough, cracked, and textured appearance, resembling dried blood or a dark, bloody surface. In the upper right quadrant, a silver dagger with a black, twisted handle and a cross-guard is positioned vertically. To the left of the dagger, there is a dark, shadowy footprint or smudge on the red surface. The word "MACBETH" is written in large, white, serif capital letters across the center of the image, with the dagger's blade acting as the letter 'B'.

# MACBETH

**LEARNING GUIDE**



# TOC

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## *Pre-Performance*

# INTRODUCING THE OPERA

## Consider This...

These famous lines from Shakespeare's famous play made it into the opera. Circle the lines from Macbeth that you've heard before.

*Double, double toil and trouble.*

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

*Full of sound and fury.*

## And This...

Have you ever let your desire for power (maybe not political, but social or interpersonal?) negatively influence your decisions?

## The Setting + Historical Context



### Scotland, 11th Century

This was a turbulent time in Scotland, at that time known as Alba, in which various groups were constantly fighting for power. Succession of kings at that time did not stay within families but went to the conquerors. Macbeth was a real king, though not a murderer like the fictional character, who ruled for seventeen years. The opera is based on the famous Shakespeare play and follows the original text very closely.

## Pre-Performance SYNOPSIS

**Note:** The listening pieces have been integrated into the synopsis to allow students to listen to the pieces in context of what is happening in the opera.

Make sure you have the “Who’s Who in Macbeth” handout (on pg. 7) handy so you can explore it while you read the synopsis!

### The Story in Short

A power-hungry wife pushes her husband to kill the king and overtake the throne of Scotland which throws them into a spiral of shame, lunacy and more murder.

## ACT I

Returning from a military victory, Macbeth and Banquo are greeted by witches who hail (greet) Macbeth not only by his rightful title but also as the future king. They hail Banquo as the father of kings.

Macbeth broods (worries) over the prophecy, but decides not to lift his hand against the king. Banquo reflects that the prophecies could be a trap leading to destruction.



### Due vaticini

Macbeth and Banquo discuss their encounter with the witches in this duet.

This number is a **duet** (song written for two voices) performed by a **baritone** (middle male voice) and a **bass** (lowest male voice)

Lady Macbeth reads a letter from Macbeth relating these events and delights in the news that King Duncan intends to spend the night at their castle that night. When Macbeth arrives, she convinces him to murder the king.

Late at night, with the king and his entourage asleep, Macbeth has a hallucination of a dagger in the air. After he murders the king, he is horrified at his actions. Lady Macbeth, disgusted by her husband’s guilt, takes the dagger and completes the crime, smearing blood on the sleeping guards to frame them for the crime.

## Pre-Performance SYNOPSIS

Banquo and Macduff, a Scottish nobleman, arrive and the murder scene is discovered. The news provokes cries for revenge from everyone, including Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

### Schiudi, inferno

The people of Birnam Wood are in shock over their king's murder and ask God to "Let the wrath of Heaven mark the brow of the guilty".

This number is sung by the **chorus** (a large group of opera singers)



### ACT II

Macbeth confesses to his wife that he is brooding over the witches' prophecy that Banquo's descendants will be king. He resolves to have him killed. Lady Macbeth relishes (enjoys) the thought that their claim to the throne will soon be unchallenged, even if the cost is more blood. Assassins kill Banquo, but his son, Fleance, escapes.



### Biechi arcani

A "thinking" ensemble where we learn each character's inner thoughts.

This is an **ensemble** (music written for a group of singers).

A banquet is in progress, and Lady Macbeth invites the guests to drink. One of the assassins reports to Macbeth that Banquo has been killed, but Fleance has escaped. Macbeth muses to his guests that Banquo is absent. He is about to take Banquo's seat when Banquo's ghost appears to him. The guests, who cannot see the ghost, are shocked by the sight of their king's madness. Macduff suspects Macbeth's hand in Banquo's murder and decides to flee Scotland.

### ACT III

The witches are sitting around a cauldron when Macbeth comes to them, demanding to know his fate. They summon spirits that tell him first to beware of Macduff and next that he cannot be killed by anyone born of woman. Lastly, they tell him he cannot be killed until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane.

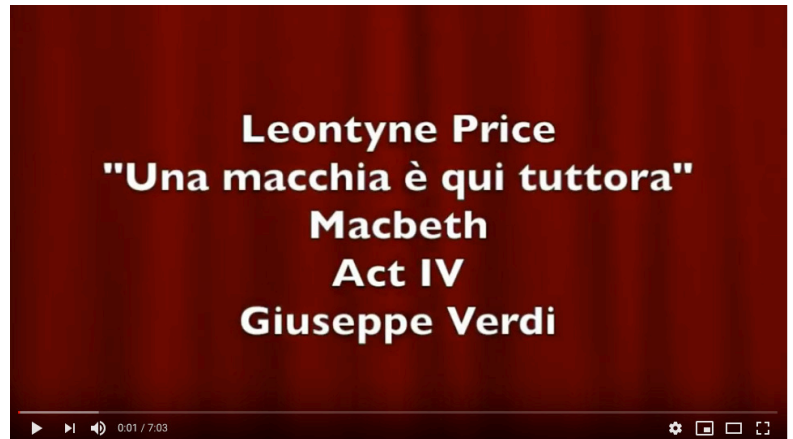
## Pre-Performance SYNOPSIS

When he asks if Banquo's children will be kings, he is shown a vision of eight kings with Banquo indicating that they are his issue. Macbeth faints, and the witches vanish. Lady Macbeth enters and convinces him to kill Fleance. He agrees and tells her he will also have Macduff and his family put to death. They swear bloodshed on anyone who opposes them.

### Una macchia e qui tuttora

Lady Macbeth sings the famous words, "Out, out damned spot" as she walks in her sleep trying to wash the blood from her hands.

This number is a **soprano aria** (solo song written for the highest female voice).



Faced with a stream of desertions, Macbeth takes comfort from the witches' prophecies. He is weary of life. He receives news that his wife has died, which confirms his feelings about the futility of existence. When soldiers announce that Birnam Wood is moving towards his castle, he realizes that the witches have deceived him, but is determined to die fighting.

The scene changes to a plain where the battle rages. On the battlefield, Macbeth confronts Macduff. When Macbeth boasts that none born of woman can kill him, Macduff replies he was born unnaturally, by Caesarean section. He kills the tyrant and hails Prince Malcolm as king as the people join in thanksgiving.

## ACT IV

Macbeth has fallen and everyone rejoices, thanking Heaven and saluting the new King Malcolm.





*Pre-Performance*

# WHO'S WHO IN MACBETH

Directions: As you read the Synopsis, draw and label lines between characters to illustrate the relationships between them. For example, you might draw an arrow from Banquo to Macbeth and draw a picture of a ghost to show that Banquo's ghost appears to Macbeth.

*Banquo*



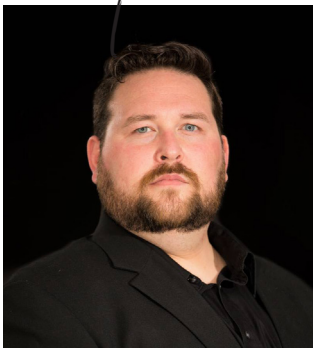
*Lady Macbeth*



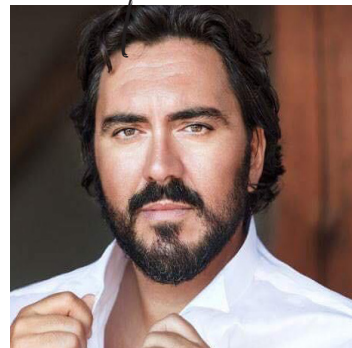
*Macbeth*



*Malcolm*



*Macduff*



## ABOUT THE OPERA

Relay or review the following information:

Opera is a drama (play), that is sung!  
Opera uses many different art forms to tell stories.

### What to listen for/look for in *Macbeth*

How could each of these art forms help to tell the story in an opera?

Music    Lyrics    Dialogue    Costumes    Sets

Look out for each of the above elements in the performance.

### Opera vocabulary to know for *Macbeth*

**Aria** - opera song for one singer that has melody and usually gives insight on the character's feelings

**Baritone** - the middle male voice

**Bass** - the lowest male voice

**Chorus** - a large group of singers who typically portray townspeople, servants, military, etc.

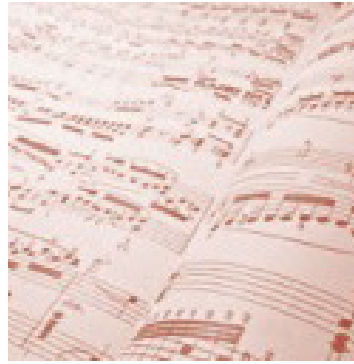
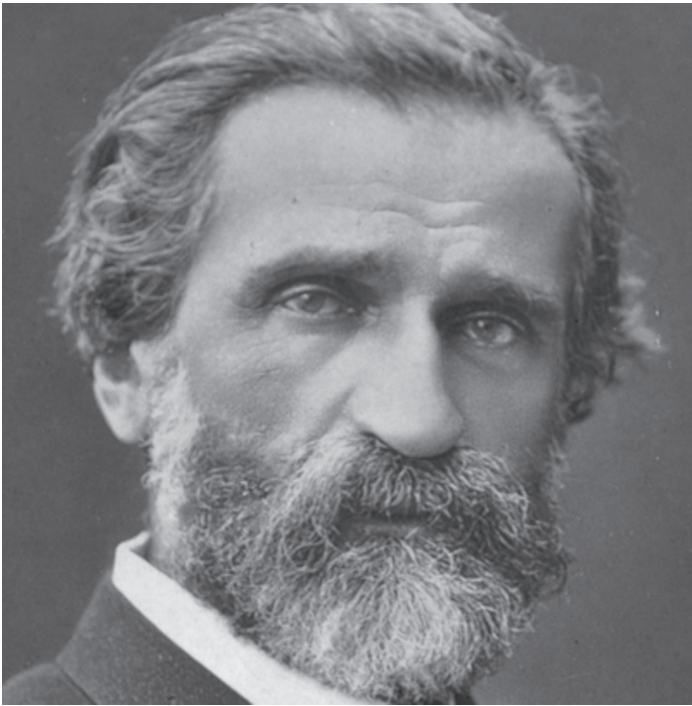
**Duet** - a song written for two voices

**Ensemble** - a group of singers (smaller than a chorus)

**Soprano** - the highest female voice

**Tenor** - the highest male voice

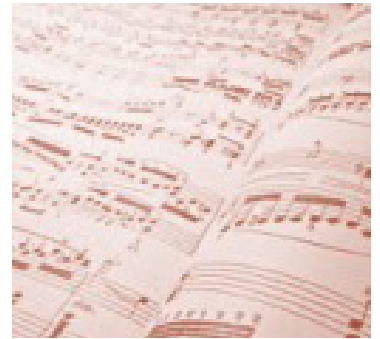
Don't forget to check out the composer, Verdi, on the next page!



# 28

operas written

*Macbeth* wasn't Verdi's only opera based on Shakespeare... *Otello* and *Falstaff* were his final two operas



## Giuseppi Verdi (1813-1901)

# Maestro of Macbeth

The great Italian composer Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi was born in the town of La Roncole on October 10, 1813. When he was still a child, Verdi's parents moved to Busseto, where the future composer's education was greatly facilitated by visits to the large library belonging to the local Jesuit school. He also began his first lessons in musical composition.

Displaying big talent from a very early age, Verdi was assistant organist at the small local church by the time he was 10. Not long after, he became an assistant conductor of the Busseto orchestra and an organist at the town church. At age 19, Verdi tried to enter the Milan Conservatory but was rejected – "Lacking in musical talent" said the admissions people! Despite the bad news, he continued to study privately while attending operatic performances and concerts among high

society. This helped convince young Giuseppe that writing for theater was the path for him.

His first opera, *Oberto*, opened at La Scala –one of the world's most renowned opera houses- in 1839 and was a success. His next opera, the comedy *Un Giorno di Regno* (King for a Day), was a complete failure and, on top of that, he lost his wife and two young children to illness within the same year. Verdi nearly gave up until he was convinced to persevere. His next opera, *Nabucco*, (1842) was another success and secured Verdi's reputation as a major figure in the music world – one of the Architects of the artform.

Verdi retired to Sant'Agata, and wrote his great Requiem Mass (an oratorio). He died on January 27, 1901 – he was nearly twice Mozart's age.



# CLASSROOM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

The following standards-linked exercises have been designed as a classroom supplement for teachers of upper grades classrooms and/or homeschool groups.

## *Pre-Performance*

### ACTIVATE WITH ARTS: ACT IT OUT!

Teachers are encouraged to use this activity in place of reading the synopsis and filling out the “Who’s Who” worksheet. Activate with the Arts activities enhance student engagement and learning through arts-based skills, giving teachers more “bang for their buck” for their instruction time.

#### **Macbeth in Three Minutes**

Student volunteers silently act out an abbreviated plot.

1. Students should be placed in small groups of 6.
2. Students read the provided synopsis and distill it into an 8 sentence or less “speed-synopsis.”
3. Each group’s narrator reads their script while the rest of the group silently acts it out for the rest of the class.
4. Remind student actors to think about the following as they act out the scene:
  - their body position in relation to the other actors
  - their facial expressions

## *Post-Performance*

### REFLECTING ON THE OPERA EXPERIENCE

The following questions may be used for classroom discussion or written reflection after the performance.

1. What is one thing you learned about opera or this time period in history that you didn’t know before?
2. Did anything surprise you about this opera?
3. Can you think of any modern day parallels to Macbeth? Does the story remind you of any other stories in your experience, current events, or modern fiction?
4. “Absolute power corrupts absolutely.” What do you think this quote means? Do you agree or disagree?



## GET THERE

Visiting Center City doesn't have to be a tough trip.

Blumenthal Performing Arts Center  
130 N. Tryon St  
Charlotte, NC 28202

**Ride.** Hop on the Lynx Lightrail. Check out the options [here](#).

**Drive.** Directions from door to door [here](#).

**Park.** Participating garages are just \$5. Find details [here](#).

## THE BELK THEATER

**MAKE ANY SEAT IN THE HOUSE THE BEST ONE**

Attending an opera in the Belk Theater is an experience not to be forgotten. The performance you are attending is the final dress rehearsal in which the cast performs one last full run through of the opera before opening night. Just like a regular performance, there will be an intermission(s) between acts.

Upon entering the theater, notice the production crew's station in the orchestra level seating (the lowest level of seating). The crew is set up with computers and headsets to allow them to communicate with people backstage to ensure that the performance runs smoothly. During this final rehearsal they will be making sure all cues and technical features of the performance are in place. Also notice the supertitles

(English translations of the lyrics being sung) that are projected onto a screen above the stage.

Please remember that this is a working performance and the performers on stage are very aware of their audience, especially a distracting audience. The polite audience member should always refrain from talking and stay seated during a performance. Nothing shows more respect and appreciation for the performers on stage than giving them your full attention.

### Shout Out

Give a shout out to the cast after a beautiful aria or at the end of the evening – literally! Shout "Bravi!" for a job well done to the whole cast, "Brava!" to the diva who aced it, or "Bravo!" to the guy who left it all on the stage.

# Opera Carolina

## INVESTED IN OUR COMMUNITY AND ITS LIFE



### Then, now, & years from now

Let's take a journey back to 1948: the Charlotte Music Club is formed by a handful of arts enthusiasts who realize that Charlotte's artistic landscape –but more importantly, cultural community– would be enhanced by opera performances. Fast forward to today: Opera Carolina is a 71 year-old company that's still blossoming, hitting new highs with each season of glorious music, drama, and all that encompasses the operatic art form. Your resident Opera continues to bring high-quality standards of the operatic repertoire to stages near you, but is also continually striving to perform lesser-known gems.

What does our future hold? A rich commitment to our community –which we take seriously– to continue enriching the lives of citizens from all walks of life; a continual quest to produce excellent opera from all eras on our stage; and, most importantly, to connect our community.

### The people

In the early days of Opera Carolina, volunteers designed the sets, built costumes, sang in the chorus, filled leading roles and, of course, sold tickets and held fundraisers to support the company.

Now a fully professional company that not only produces Opera performances on a big scale but also travels programs into local schools and community venues, we never forget the legacy of the original volunteers who made this company the what it is today. Opera Carolina is rooted

in the Carolinas; 90% of our company live and work right here in our region, complementing the international artists who join the resident company to perform on our mainstage. We guess you can say we've got Carolina on our mind.

### The House

If the paragraphs before didn't sell you on our commitment to our community, maybe information on the Opera Center will. Opera Carolina now resides in the historic Biberstein house, in the Elizabeth neighborhood. The last remaining historic home in the Uptown radius, Opera Carolina's digs are as much a part of the community as is the company.

Built in 1906, the Biberstein House was designed and lived in by R. C. Biberstein, one of the noted mill architects of the Southeast. Mr. Biberstein is credited with building many of the mills in the Charlotte region, including the Highland Park #3 mill. Mr. Biberstein eventually moved his business into this house, his talents and self-designed home playing a role in the New South Industrial movement. Today, the home is registered as a Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmark.

The house has since been adapted into offices and is now the proud home of Opera Carolina. The Opera Center hosts the company's administrative offices but also serves as space for auditions, recitals, and more. **Our doors are always open.**