

MACBETH

Our fears do make us traitors.

SHAKESPEARE'S
GLOBE

In partnership with
BORN TO BE
The Deutsche Bank youth
engagement programme



PLAYING
SHAKESPEARE
WITH DEUTSCHE BANK

MACBETH: LIVE AND UNPLUGGED.

Heartfelt thanks to Deutsche Bank for supporting Playing Shakespeare for a fourteenth year.

Our mission with this project has always been to give students the opportunity to see a Shakespeare play as he intended: live and unplugged.

Studying Shakespeare may be compulsory in school but seeing a Shakespeare play in performance, sadly and strangely, is not.

I can't imagine reading a film script without seeing the film or a buying a music score without hearing it played. Last year, after the *Playing Shakespeare with Deutsche Bank's* production of *Romeo and Juliet*, a student said 'it was better than Shakespeare's play'. He had just seen Shakespeare's play, of course, but he was right. Those words, that seemed so lifeless on the page, had heart and soul when animated by a theatre company in a production.

It is why *Playing Shakespeare with Deutsche Bank* is such an important project and so popular. 18,000 free tickets were snapped up by London and Birmingham state secondary schools. A further 8,000 free or subsidised tickets have been taken up by families, schools and community groups. This year, for the first time, we will be streaming the production so that even more students will be able to see *Macbeth* in performance.

Playing Shakespeare with Deutsche Bank workshops, with teachers and students, have excited discussion and responses to the play through performance. Interactive online resources, created especially for the production, will be used by schools across the globe this year and in years to come.



My thanks to Cressida Brown, director of *Macbeth*, and her production team; to the brilliant cast and crew; to colleagues in Education and Theatre departments, indeed in every department across Shakespeare's Globe, for helping to make this project happen.

Thanks to Lareena Hilton, Nicole Lovett and Amy Harris from Deutsche Bank for their advice and encouragement and to all Deutsche Bank employees who have bought tickets in support of the free ticket scheme for schools.

And thank you for coming.

Best wishes

Patrick Spottiswoode

Director, Globe Education



REAL LIFE ISSUES.

One of the most impactful and longest running cultural education projects in the UK, *Playing Shakespeare with Deutsche Bank*, is now proudly in its fourteenth year.

This year Deutsche Bank celebrates its 150th anniversary. As the bank reflects on achievements and looks to what the future holds, one thing is as true as it was in 1870: Deutsche Bank is driven to create a positive impact, for our clients, our employees, the economy and society. For 150 years, Deutsche Bank has been connecting worlds to help people and businesses get to where they want to be.

Playing Shakespeare with Deutsche Bank is a fantastic example of how we connect worlds. Through our global youth engagement programme *Born to Be*, we endeavour to help young people to prepare for the future and unlock their potential. *Born to Be* aims to raise aspirations, develop life skills, and empower young people to follow career paths of their own choosing.

Despite being written more than 400 years ago, the themes of loyalty, courage and guilt that are raised in *Macbeth* are still as relevant today. The play's director, Cressida Brown, has adapted this production to help young people understand these important topics and to encourage them to discuss mental health as a means of improving wellbeing, self-esteem and communication skills.

I'd like to thank Patrick, Cressida, the Globe's education and creative teams, and all the actors who continue to make *Playing Shakespeare with Deutsche Bank* such a success. In addition, thank you to over 10,500 Deutsche Bank employees, friends and family who have purchased tickets for exclusive performances during the partnership, enabling us to continue to offer even more free tickets to state secondary school students.

If this is your first experience of seeing Shakespeare in performance, I have no doubt that you will want to come back for more.

I hope you enjoy the show.

Tiina Lee

**Chief Executive Officer, UK and Ireland
Deutsche Bank**



THE COMPANY.

MARA ALLEN

Witch 3 / Fleance

At primary school I was shy – you wouldn't catch me on a stage. Then I played a police officer in a pantomime which brought me out of my shell. I found a sense of belonging. I have never forgotten that feeling and loved acting ever since! Moral of the story: step out of your comfort zone – go for it!

AIDAN CHENG

Malcolm

The last time I was in *Macbeth* I was strutting onstage, topless in a ballet skirt and heels. With acting, you never know what world you'll end up in. Growing up, you might feel under pressure to fit in. Don't. You'll be surprised where your weirdness can take you.

ELLY CONDRON

Lady Macbeth

At nine I sang 'Who will buy my sweet red roses?' on stage with my brother trying to make me laugh from his seat. It didn't put me off – I threw a rose at him. I've been performing ever since and my brother comes to every show. It's important to keep your loved ones close – they'll support you as you follow your dream.

MOLLY LOGAN

Witch 2 / Porter

My first acting experience was aged three as Toto the dog in *The Wizard of Oz*. I was incredibly shy as a child so it took a few rehearsals to coax me to project my 'woof woof'. Needless to say I caught the acting bug and went on to train at RADA some years later.

JESSICA MURRAIN

Witch 1 / Lady Macduff

I loved acting growing up because I invented magical worlds in my head! Now I get to play alongside others for a living! As a kid, you'd find me dancing in my Nan's garden, secretly climbing her garage roof, pretending to be a cowboy and riding my horse into the wind. Now I'm playing a Witch and Lady Macduff in this beautiful and epic theatre.

SAMUEL OATLEY

Banquo

I wanted a career in sports. Had a couple of injuries in my teens – end of. I wasn't academic. Felt lost. Then I lost a bet and had to sing in a school show. I was pretty good. 20 years later – I've been the first female doctor's alien nemesis, a gangster, a boxer, a soldier, a duke and a load more.

EKOW QUARTEY

Macbeth

I've played a dog, a mermaid, a wrestler, a school kid, a tiger, a headteacher, a politician, an office worker, a postman, a soldier and now a king. So when your parents and teachers tell you 'you can be anything' they're pretty much telling you to become an actor!

DICKON TYRRELL

Duncan

My first acting experience was playing a Roman soldier in Year 6. I had to say 'Hail, Caesar.' I was so nervous I said 'Caesar, hail.' I delivered a weather forecast. I have been in 23 Shakespeare productions and have performed all over the world. This is the first time I have played a king – hope I get a crown.

JACK WILKINSON

Macduff

My first acting experience was a comedy donkey in a nativity. I was a naughty kid at school and because I never stop talking they pushed me towards acting – I loved it. I was told I'd never make a career as an actor. If you love it, go for it.

AMANDA WRIGHT

Ross

I was a very shy child but I loved telling stories and making up dance routines. When I was five my mum enrolled me in drama lessons. Something clicked when I was performing: I felt free. When I was playing a role, I didn't feel nervous. Exploring my creativity helped me to find my voice.

BECKY BARRY

British Sign Language Interpreter

I grew up in Cornwall, with a supportive family who drove me to Devon weekly for youth theatre. At 19 I met the Cornish Deaf Community. Their effervescence and generosity hooked me, and I began learning BSL. I've been incredibly lucky to combine working as a performer and an interpreter.

HILARY BELSEY

Musical Director / Trombone

When I was seven, I got the chance to try out a trombone and a trumpet in school. The trombone sounded so much like a fart and it was so much fun to play that I started having lessons. I now play in theatres, orchestras, shows, jazz bands, funk bands... it is an amazing job.

GILES BLOCK

Globe Associate – Text

I acted in *Macbeth* when I was at school, at university, on tour in Wales and I directed it in Japan. Now my job is to help the actors be as real and clear as possible. It's one of the best plays ever written. The question is why does Macbeth kill Duncan?

RACHEL BOWN-WILLIAMS & RUTH COOPER-BROWN OF RC-ANNIE LTD

Fight Directors

Rachel and Ruth are peaceful, fluffy bunnies so how did they become Virtuosos of Violence? Rachel started Karate at a very early age, and discovered Stage Combat at Drama School. Ruth was a performer and found it on the job. They met in 2005 with a view to creating a Dramatic Violence Company to take over the world ... mwahaha, *cough, cough* only joking!

CRESSIDA BROWN

Director

None of my family are into theatre except me. Weirdly, though, I have done a lot of plays that haven't actually been staged in actual theatres. A derelict swimming pool, a tower block on Beaumont Estate, Scottish castle ruins, and old newspaper offices. Being a director allows me to be an architect, an archivist, a detective, and a time traveller all at the same time.

TESS DIGNAN

Head Of Voice

I became a Voice Coach when I realised it is possible to listen to voices with your skin and your heart as well as with your ears. Voice at the Globe is magical, because the theatre is a giant circular musical instrument, and we are inside it. Your voice is a part of the magic of this story.

LUCY HAYES

Assistant Director

When I was seven I convinced my teacher to do *The Nutcracker* for our class Christmas show. I decided I wanted to be an actor. Now I realise this was the first sign I wanted to be a director: I've always been driven by the need to tell stories. Shakespeare writes some of the best stories, so I'm excited to work on *Macbeth*!

BETH HIGHAM-EDWARDS

Percussion

I played the recorder for longer than most of my friends at school but eventually became more interested in percussion and drums. I could play in bigger groups and orchestras and I love working with a composer who writes original music for the play. It's fun mixing with other artists and live theatre shows feel different every time!

GEORGIA LOWE

Designer

As a designer, things are never dull. I work on ideas and models in my studio or root around in costume stores, visiting builders to see the set-build in action, working within rehearsals or doing costume fittings with the actors. The highlight of my career so far was getting to set the stage on fire at the National Theatre!

GLYNN MACDONALD

Globe Associate – Movement

I trained in the Alexander Technique in 1972. Since then I have worked all over the world. In 1997 I came to the Globe. I shared the Sam Wanamaker Award with Giles Block in 2011. I also worked on the Jette Parker Young Artists Programme at the Royal Opera House and am a Faculty Member for 'Arts and Passion-Driven Learning' at Harvard University.

SHELLEY MAXWELL

Choreographer

I have been dancing since my legs could move, in Jamaica we say 'from Yu eye deh a yu knee'. I'm no longer performing on stage but instead working behind it, creating movement on shows such as *Antony and Cleopatra* at the National Theatre and *Equus* on West End.

JON MCLEOD

Composer

I've been a musician in bands, a sound artist, a composer and sound designer for film, a music director for theatre and a bedroom UK garage producer. *Macbeth* was the first Shakespeare I studied at school and I'm delighted to be composing for it for the second time in my career.

BARNABY PHILPOTT

Bass Trombone

I first watched a play at the Globe when I was nine, so whenever I perform music here it feels very special. When not at the Globe or in the West-End, I get to play gigs with artists like Bastille, Muse, Lorde and with my own band.

LAURA RUSHTON

Costume Supervisor

I love seeing costume designs come off the page and brought to life by actors to help tell a story. I studied a combined course in costume design and making and have been doing this job for 16 years. Every job is so different it stays fun and fresh – just don't make me go on stage!



Mara Allen

Witch 3 / Fleance

Aidan Cheng

Malcolm

Elly Condron

Lady Macbeth

Molly Logan

Witch 2 / Porter

Jessica Murrain

Witch 1 / Lady Macduff

Samuel Oatley

Banquo

Ekow Quartey

Macbeth

Dickon Tyrrell

Duncan

Jack Wilkinson

Macduff

Amanda Wright

Ross

Hilary Belsey

Musical Director / Trombone

Beth Higham- Edwards

Percussion

Barnaby Philpott

Bass Trombone

Lucy Hayes

Assistant Director

Josh York

Assistant Stage Manager

Becky Barry

British Sign Language Interpreter

Shelley Maxwell

Choreographer

Jon McLeod

Composer

Laura Rushton

Costume Supervisor

Daniel Gammon

Company Stage Manager

Harry Booth, Tony Forrester

Deputy Heads of Stage

Emma Seychell

Deputy Head of Wardrobe

Lottie Bull, Hayley Thompson

Deputy Heads of Wigs, Hair
and Make-Up

Rosalind Doré

Deputy Stage Manager

Georgia Lowe

Designer

Cressida Brown

Director

Rachel Bown-Williams & Ruth

Cooper-Brown of RC-Annie Ltd

Fight Directors

Glynn MacDonald

Globe Associate – Movement

Giles Block

Globe Associate – Text

Tess Dignan

Head of Voice

Megan Cassidy

Head of Wardrobe

Pam Humpage

Head of Wigs, Hair and Make-Up

Dec Costello

Production Manager

Amy Bygraves, Claire Esnault,

Penny Spedding

Prop makers

Rosheen McNamee

Props Deputy

Katy Brooks

Props Manager

Emma Hughes

Props Supervisor

Tasha Shepherd

Scenic Artist

Jack Cray, Charlotte Hurford

Venue Technicians

Thomas Sylvester

Wardrobe Apprentice

Heather Bull, Jessica Hughes

Wardrobe Assistants

Sophie Jones

Wigs, Hair & Makeup Assistant

Premm Design

Design

Cesare de Giglio

Programme and Production

Photography

Ellie Kurtz

Production Photography

**With thanks to Jean St Clair, Sign
Language Consultant and Regent's
Park Open Air Theatre**



Aidan Cheng



Molly Logan



Mara Allen



Dickon Tyrrell



Jessica Murrain, Ekow Quartey, Mara Allen, Samuel Oatley



Amanda Wright



Elly Condron



Jessica Murrain



Samuel Oatley, Ekow Quartey



Jack Wilkinson





MACBETH PLOT.

'fairfoul'

The witches predict good fortune for Banquo and Macbeth

'dagger'

King Duncan's visit to the Macbeths takes a turn for the worse

'gorylocks'

Banquo's ghost puts Macbeth right off his banquet

'unsex'

Lady Macbeth vows to ensure Macbeth becomes king

'scorpions'

Newly crowned Macbeth has Banquo murdered but his son, Fleance, escapes.

'apparitions'

The witches get even more cryptic with woods, wombs and warnings

'chickens'

Macduff's wife and children are slaughtered on Macbeth's command

'grace'

Macduff slays Macbeth and Malcolm rules in Scotland

'damnedspot'

Lady Macbeth unravels and breathes her last

'tyranny'

Macduff and Malcolm plot to remove Macbeth from power

'charmedlife'

A bad day in battle for Macbeth with walking woods and birthing stories

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR.

Lucy Cuthbertson, Head of Learning at Shakespeare's Globe, discusses *Macbeth* with director, Cressida Brown.

Lucy: What most interests you about directing a *Playing Shakespeare with Deutsche Bank* production at Shakespeare's Globe?

Cressida: This is the fourteenth year of *Playing Shakespeare with Deutsche Bank* and I am super excited to be directing it. I think that *Macbeth* is the best play, Shakespeare's Globe is the best space and young people are the best audience. The only way that I am altering this production for a younger audience is to strive to make it better. It's got to be clearer, it's got to be more exciting, it's got to be bolder.

What do you think young audiences today can learn from *Macbeth* and how relevant is this story in 2020?

I think in the current climate it's really important for young people to speak out about issues that they feel strongly about. I hope that my production of *Macbeth* will help young people think about the consequences of remaining silent. In the play, everyone knows that Macbeth has murdered Duncan but some people stay quiet because they want to keep their power. I think that the enabling of a tyrant is just as bad as being a tyrant yourself.

So I understand this theme of tyranny is something you particularly want to explore. Does the structure of the play lend itself to that?

The structure of *Macbeth* lends itself to the theme of tyranny because it is about leaders and what they do with power. I am going to end the production with the witches saying 'When shall we three meet again?' As most people know, this is the first line of the play but I want to leave the audience with the idea that tyranny is something that continues, it is not tied to a leader and you never know what regime you are going to be replacing with another.

And you're also exploring the links between nationalism and fear. Tell us something about that.

I think Macbeth is one of the most fearful of heroes and he has every right to be because it's a Machiavellian, dog-eat-dog world. Macbeth might be bloody, and he might be a tyrant but what motivates him is fear for himself as well as ambition. The design of our production is centred around flags because the play has a lot to do with nationhood or nationalism. At the end, England takes over Scotland as Malcolm proclaims it a different nation in just one sentence. I'm interested in these decisions of nationhood being dependent on the whim of your leader.

You've mentioned flags as a key production element. How else are you hoping to communicate your ideas through the design?

Design is really important to this production because the space is so immersive, the audience are right next to the actors and feel part of the action. The world that we are creating is a kind of *Hunger Games*, dystopian, post-apocalyptic world. It's also an ancient world so might be after the climate crisis has come to a head – it feels very ancient even though it is in the future. As the audience walk in to the Globe, there will be burnt flags which hover around the space so people feel like they are in the middle of this desolate war-torn country.

So to the characters ... how will you be approaching the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth?

I truly believe that Lady Macbeth and Macbeth are deeply in love and almost an adult Romeo and Juliet. It might surprise people that we are making Lady Macbeth pregnant and therefore much more vulnerable than she might be in other interpretations. One way of looking at this relationship is that they do all of these hideous deeds initially for love for each other and also for their unborn children. I think it's important when we label people as 'evil', that their actions may be 'evil' but we understand what motivates them and learn ourselves from their mistakes.

How are the witches going to be portrayed in your adaptation of *Macbeth* and why have you chosen this interpretation?

In our production, the witches are vulnerable products of society, the collateral damage of war. They are scavengers on a battlefield, hungry, without a home, desperate and desolate. That's not to say that they've not become crazy, or are capable of cursing people but we want to understand their motives as real people – I think that's far more interesting. It might be that Macbeth doesn't meet the witches again after his first encounter but as the play goes on they become part of his imagination and he is tormented by them. Their language becomes much more extreme with 'bubble, bubble, toil and trouble' and they become almost parodies of themselves.

I understand the banquet scene is a personal favourite of yours. What do you love about it?

I think the banquet scene is one of the best scenes written in the history of theatre. It's so anarchic! Banquo is enjoying himself scaring Macbeth, it's his only power. It starts as a very formal banquet and by the end it's in complete disarray. We want to have a lot of fun with that.





MACBETH

10 KEY QUOTES.



'Look like th'innocent
flower, but be the
serpent under't.'

ACT I, SCENE 5



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

ACT I, SCENE 5

'I have no spur to prick
the sides of my intent, but
only vaulting ambition'

ACT I, SCENE 7

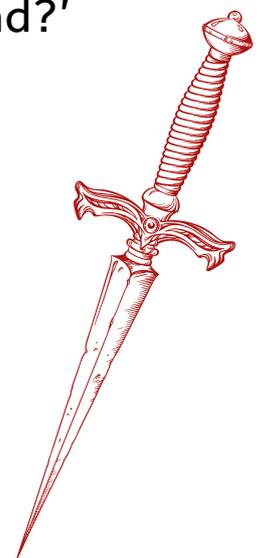


'Will all great Neptune's
ocean wash this blood
clean from my hand?'

ACT II, SCENE 2

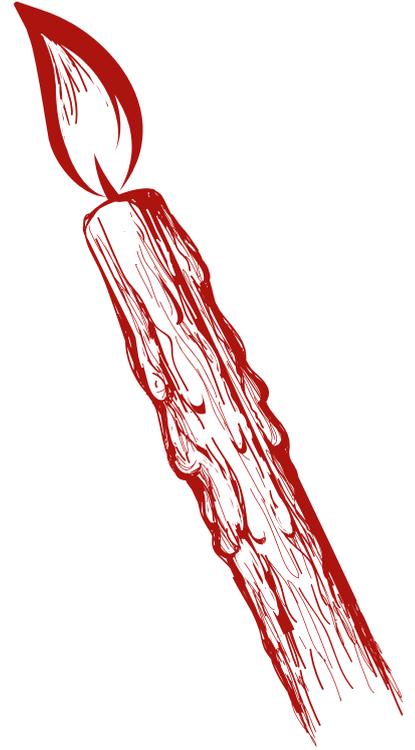
'Here lay Duncan, his silver skin
laced with his golden blood,
and his gashed stabs looked
like a breach in nature for ruin's
wasteful entrance.'

ACT II, SCENE 3



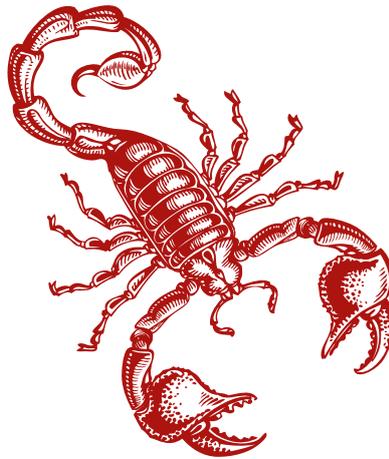
'Out, out, brief candle. Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.'

ACT V, SCENE 5



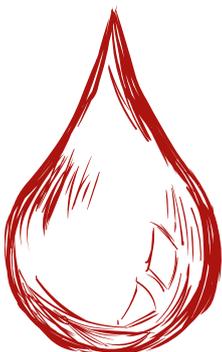
'O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!'

ACT III, SCENE 2



'I think our country sinks beneath the yoke. It weeps, it bleeds, and each new day a gash is added to her wounds.'

ACT IV, SCENE 3

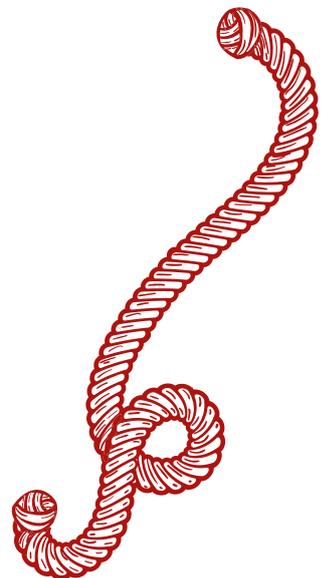


'But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in to saucy doubts and fears.'

ACT III, SCENE 4

'I bear a charmed life'

ACT V, SCENE 10





Violent power struggle does not begin or end with the Macbeths. The play is couched in violence.

King Duncan's reign has, after all, not been a peaceful one. In the gruesome description of 'brave' Macbeth's heroics in battle, we are introduced to a violent world. A world in which loyalty and allegiance are up for grabs and any treacherous acts are decisively and emphatically punished in an effort to create order and maintain power. Macbeth is to reap a reward from such a punishment; the previous Thane of Cawdor is swiftly dispatched after straying from the fold, a 'most disloyal traitor'.

'MOST DISLOYAL TRAITOR'

Over the course of the play, many characters are left to question their allegiances and ponder their own deepest, darkest desires. Yet, fascinatingly, even in the midst of this savage world, we're also aware of a moral compass within each of the characters. Some try to suppress it, whilst others desperately cling to it.

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth talk of loyalty but are, we might think, astonishingly prepared to seize the moment by stabbing an old man to death in his bed. Lady Macbeth's decisiveness in Act I, scene 5 is almost awe inspiring whilst Macbeth's descent into 'hell-hound' is fairly swift. We are left wondering how often they might have talked through potential plots and schemes before the witches' prophecy.

Nevertheless, these two go-getters grapple with their own humanity and it trips them up repeatedly. Lady Macbeth foresees this challenge after reading her husband's letter: Macbeth is 'too is full o' the milk of human kindness' and she calls on the supernatural world to help her suppress her own inherent goodness: 'fill me from the crown to the toe, top full of direst cruelty' Even as the plan to kill the King is in motion, Lady Macbeth checks herself, moved by Duncan resembling [her] 'father as he slept'. In Act I, scene 7, Macbeth too longs for a kind of conscience holiday where one can reap the benefits of a course of action without the agony of actually doing it. In this couple, Shakespeare has not given us a pair of psychopathic despots but a man and a woman struggling to keep their humanity at bay.

It's not just the Macbeths experiencing inner turmoil. Banquo's response to the witches is intriguing. He seems to scoff at his friend's awe-struck reaction: 'Good Sir, why do you start and seem to fear / Things that do sound so fair?' He then demands the weird sisters' attention himself, claiming to 'neither beg nor fear / Your favours nor your hate'. Is this detached skepticism authentic? Or is he, like Macbeth, susceptible to the stirrings of powerful ambition? We know that he dwells on what the witches have said to him.

After Duncan's death, Banquo worries about what Macbeth might have done, before pondering his own potential rise. The witches' words have set Banquo 'up in hope' and it's ambiguous whether he would be prepared to take action and force Fate's hand. Of course, the assassins ensure that we never find out. Was Macbeth right to fear him?

Malcolm, urged by Macduff to lead his country, is fearful of the dangerous tyrant within himself and almost manages to walk away from greatness, fearing that 'Macbeth will seem as pure as snow and the poor state / Esteem him as a lamb, being compared / With my confineless harms.' Ironically, it is Macduff's very human suffering after his wife and children are 'savagely slaughter'd' that draws Malcolm heartily into the fray. Now, Malcolm says, 'the tune goes manly'. We have to hope at the end of the play that he proves to be a better leader than he fears he might be.

This is a world where the moral bar has been lowered; a world which 'sinks beneath the yoke'. In the Macbeths, we see just how terribly the human soul can be corrupted. However, this struggle is played out within other characters too. Perhaps we're left wondering: in such a dog-eat-dog world, how would we fare?

**TOM DAVEY, LEARNING CONSULTANT,
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT, SHAKESPEARE'S GLOBE.**

MACBETH 2020:

Our website for teachers and students.

CHARACTERS

Our characters section equips teachers with helpful tools for the classroom and provides a useful touchpoint for students' revision. Each profile page contains a character description, photos, key quotes and plot points. Throughout the rehearsal and production weeks these pages will build to contain backstage blogs on the characters that are full of insights from the cast and creatives. These pages are an ideal springboard for classroom discussions and a great way for students to connect to characters through the eyes of the actors playing them.

STAFFROOM

In this section of the site, created exclusively for teachers, we round up everything needed to plan lessons around *Macbeth*. Teaching resources are categorised by Key Stage and divided into section by topic for easy access. The section also contains links to our weekly blogs with practical tasks linked to different careers within the theatre.

CONTEXT AND THEME

The Context and Theme section houses a collection of different perspectives on *Macbeth* spanning Elizabethan theatre practices to contemporary critical interpretations. The resources have been created by the research and production teams here at the Globe. This library of resources also contains videos relating to the theatre space and creative practices. It's a great space for teachers looking to add variety to lesson plans and for students looking to read around the subject prior to their exams.



LANGUAGE

This section of the site provides a range of activities to unlock the language, plot and structure in *Macbeth*. Our script machines and extract analysis pages offer interactive ways to tackle language analysis and integrate relevant contextual information into essays. It also houses synopsis, quote pages and videos of key speeches recorded by actors and students, offering visual routes into unlocking the ways Shakespeare's poetry brings meaning to his audiences.

Our *Macbeth* website also includes a profile of Deutsche Bank – the project's sponsor since its inception.



BACKSTAGE

Our backstage section is a must for Drama and Theatre Studies teachers and students, as well as for anyone interested in understanding more about working in a professional theatre. It offers insights and behind the scenes peeks into the rehearsal room. It allows students to consider putting on the play from a range of different perspectives including production, marketing, choreography and more. Visit this section to learn about our 2020 production's interpretation of the play and hear from director Cressida Brown about what it is like to work in theatre.

THE WEIRD SISTERS, HAND IN HAND...

Hovering through the foggy air of *Macbeth*, the three witches are a terrifying chorus to the action of the play.

Magic and devilry were on people's minds in 1606, the year *Macbeth* was first performed. England's new Scottish king James was known to his subjects as a committed opponent of witchcraft and a scholar of black magic. And less than two years after James's succession, and perhaps six months before Shakespeare started writing *Macbeth*, the country was profoundly shaken by the exposure of the Gunpowder Plot, the failed attempt by a group of English Catholic dissidents to assassinate the king and all the members of parliament in a huge explosion. Preachers were quick to detect demonic encouragement behind the plot.

The dread of supernatural horror hangs over *Macbeth*, and Shakespeare was very aware that his play would be taken as a comment on the Scottish king's escape from devilish treason (it's even been suggested that the smell of the sulphurous gunpowder used at the Globe to simulate lightning flashes would have reminded the audience of their monarch's near miss).

But if the witches are the central focus for this atmosphere of terror, Shakespeare never lets his characters refer to the prophetic threesome as 'witches', although they're termed as such in the speech prefixes and stage directions. For Macbeth and Banquo, the two characters who encounter them, they are 'weird women' or 'weird sisters', that unfamiliar umlaut indicating how early modern people said this ancient word (with two distinct syllables). In fact, in the First Folio, the earliest surviving text of *Macbeth*, the word is variously spelled 'wayward', 'weyward' and 'weyard', all of which would have been pronounced the same way in 1606: 'WAY-rrd'.

Shakespeare took this unusual word from his main source for *Macbeth*, Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, in which the historical 'Makbeth' and 'Banquho' encounter 'the weird sisters', as Holinshed describes them, 'goddesses of destiny, or else some nymphs or fairies, endowed with knowledge of prophecy'. In the play, the witches' primary role is the provision of ambiguous fortunes which stir the ambitious Macbeth to action despite the fact that the details of his promised fate are decidedly sketchy (when will he be 'king hereafter'? By what means? For how long?).

'GODDESSES OF DESTINY, OR ELSE SOME NYMPHS OR FAIRIES, ENDOWED WITH KNOWLEDGE OF PROPHECY'

So one interpretation of the weird women is less as traditional witches and more as potent prophets. In 11th century England and Scotland, a person's fortune was determined by the workings of *wyrd*, a mysterious force that was both unavoidable and inexplicable. By the Renaissance, the word (now spelled 'weird') had lost its folkloric association but retained the broad meaning of 'destiny'. Also in play in early modern England was the classical notion of feminised 'Fates', goddesses like the *Morai* of ancient Greece who dictated the scope of a person's life.

Early modern audiences would have heard another meaning in 'weird', too, as the First Folio spellings suggest. To them, the word sounded the same as 'wayward', an insulting term meaning 'disobedient' or 'perverse'. 'Wayward' was frequently applied to women who were perceived to be outspoken or quarrelsome (cardinal sins according to the misogynistic theories of Shakespeare's England). Women who asserted their wisdom and knowledge might well find themselves castigated as 'wayward', and if they were vulnerable and unlucky that 'waywardness' might be interpreted more darkly as sorcery or witchcraft.

Which bring us back to the weird sisters. Their 'weirdness' was, from Shakespeare's perspective, both '*wyrd*' and 'wayward', powerful and marginal. For Shakespeare's first audience, they were figures who represented England's ancient past and the mysterious magic of prophecy. But the 'withered' and 'wild' sisters were also examples of what was becoming a familiar stereotype in an England newly attuned to the 'risks' of sorcery: poor, disregarded and insulted old women whose wisdom, if acknowledged at all, could be understood only as witchcraft.

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RESEARCH FELLOW AND LECTURER,
SHAKESPEARE'S GLOBE.**

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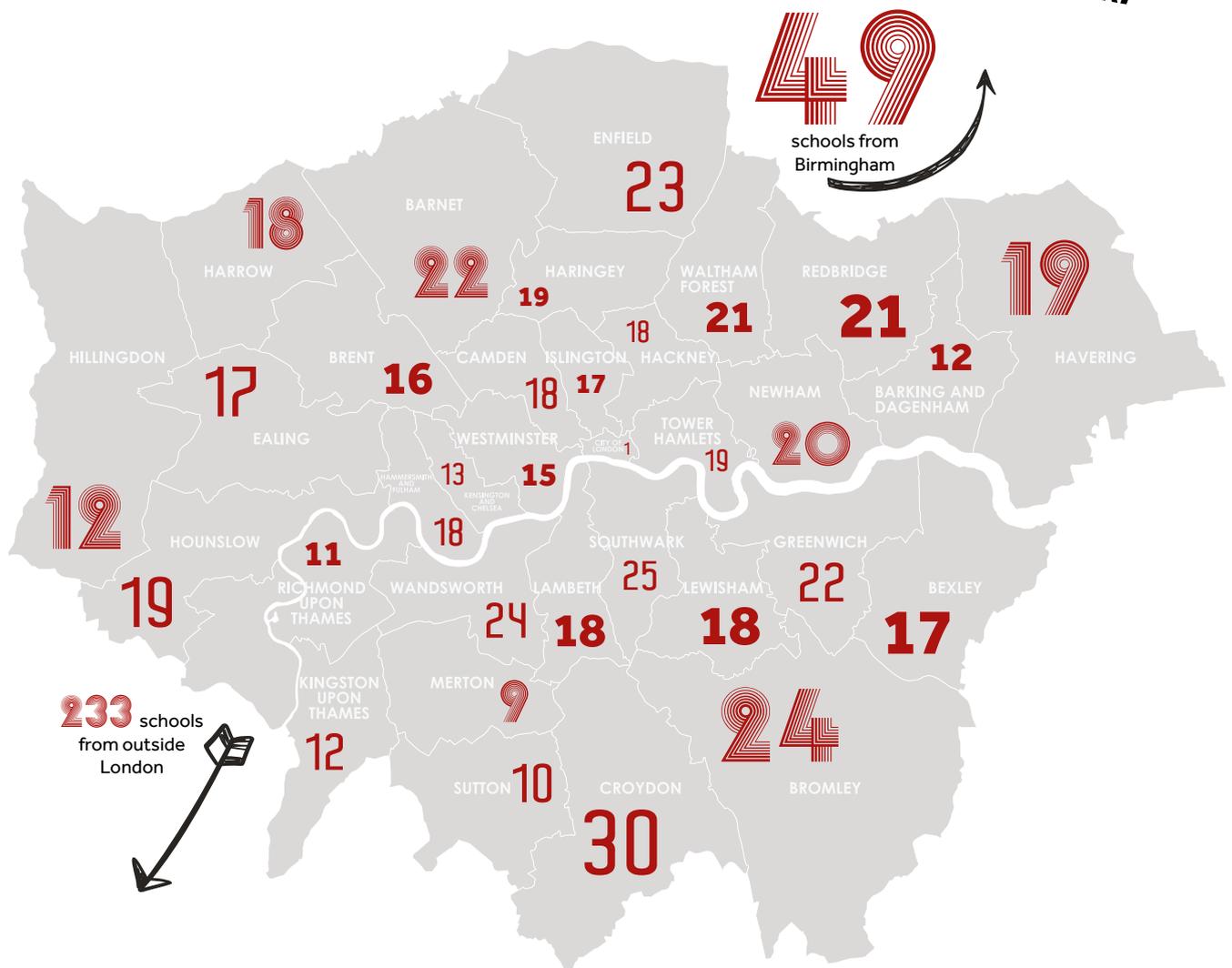
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