

## MACBETH HOLIDAY HOMEWORK

Please complete the following tasks for your first lesson back in September on *Macbeth*.

### Task 1: research the answers to the following historical questions

When was *Macbeth* written?

Who was on the throne when *Macbeth* was written?

Had this monarch been king before? What was he previously known as?

What era in British history was this known as? (for example, the reign of Queen Victoria is known as the **Victorian** era)

What year did James I become king? Who did he succeed?

### Task 2: what was it like to be a woman in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century when *Macbeth* was written?

Read the advert below.

Vacancy

Wife for early 17th-century man

Should be under 23 years old. Must be able to speak two languages, sew, sing and play two musical instruments. Must like pretty dresses. Must be a good listener and happy to follow orders without question. Must have a large sum of money to put in husband's bank account. Fathers, please apply in writing and with a recent portrait to:

[17thcenturyman@17thcenturyengland.co.uk](mailto:17thcenturyman@17thcenturyengland.co.uk)

Closing date 12/5/1603

**Why might the advertisement have been directed to the woman's father?**

### Task 3: read the information about what it was like to be a woman at the time Shakespeare was writing "Macbeth" and complete the paragraph task below.

**Ideal women**

In Shakespeare's time, women had little choice in many of the important decisions in life. People believed girls should follow the rules set by their fathers, and after marriage a woman became financially dependent by law on her husband. The image of the 'perfect wife' was someone who was charming and obedient. In contrast, Shakespeare's plays like "Macbeth" often present women who are strong, rebellious and independent-minded, and some are even responsible for murder.

### **Deceivers and witches**

Many of Shakespeare's female characters used their skills to influence husbands and fathers for their own reasons, often ending in tragedy. Deceit and charms were also linked to magic and the existence of witches, a widely-held belief theme in Shakespeare's day. Most of those accused of being witches were unmarried women. The scheming Lady Macbeth in "Macbeth" calls on witches for help with her plans and, although she is not single, Lady Macbeth was clearly very different to society's ideal obedient, passive wife.

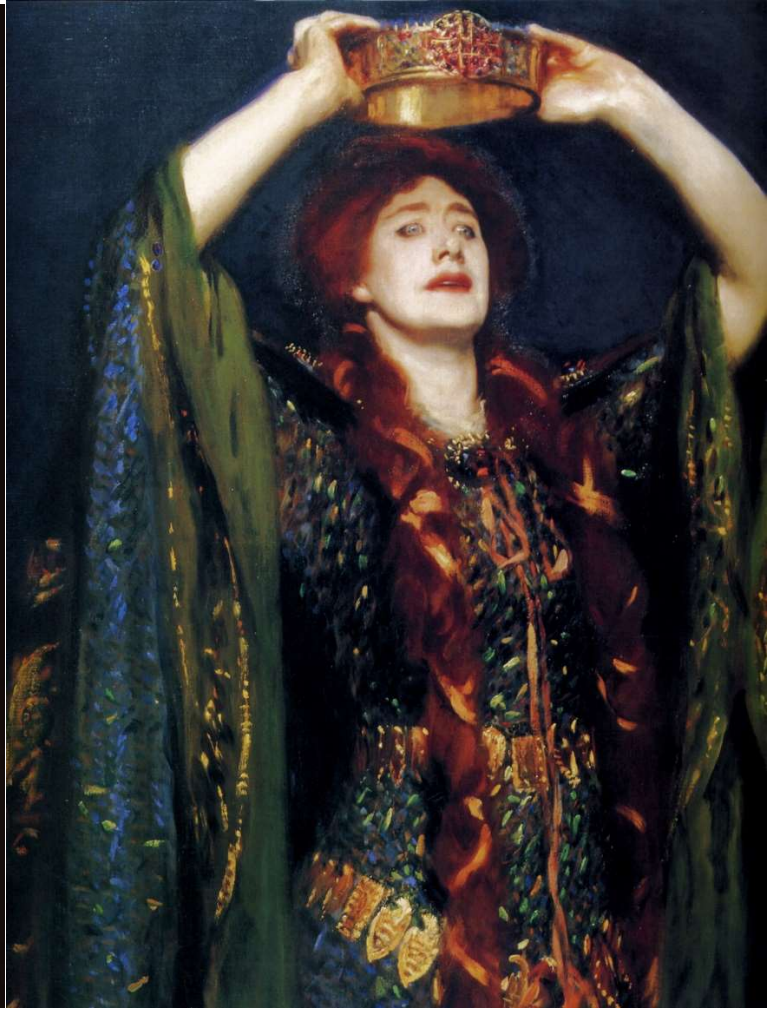
### **Shakespeare led the way**

Overall, women had a hard time in Shakespeare's day. A girl was expected to live by the rules of her father and then her husband. If she tried to do something different in her life she could be judged very harshly by society. Shakespeare's female characters, however, often broke the rules. An audience would have been very shocked by the character of Lady Macbeth who tells her husband what to do. It is not surprising that the first woman to work as a professional actor in England was in a Shakespeare play!

**Now you have read the information above, write a short paragraph about how living at the time Shakespeare was writing the play was different for women to living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**

### **Task 4:**

Look at the images of Lady Macbeth on the next page taken from different productions of "Macbeth". Write a few sentences about what her character appears to be like and why it is different from the expectation of a woman in Shakespeare's day. Consider costume, gestures and facial expressions.



## Task 5: Read the information on witchcraft and answer the question below

When Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* there were many ideas about witchcraft - but where did those ideas come from? During the reign of **James I** (1603-1625), a period we call the **Jacobean era** of English history, they were fascinated with witches and black magic. It was in this time that many women were accused of witchcraft which led to dozens of trials, arrests, and even executions.

James I came into power already a strong believer in witchcraft. In fact, as King James VI of Scotland (his title before he inherited the English throne), he wrote a book on witchcraft called *Daemonologie*, in which he argued that witchcraft was alive and well in England and that it must be stopped. Upon becoming King of England, he immediately set out to work with Parliament in passing new laws to increase punishments for witchcraft and other sorts of dark magic.

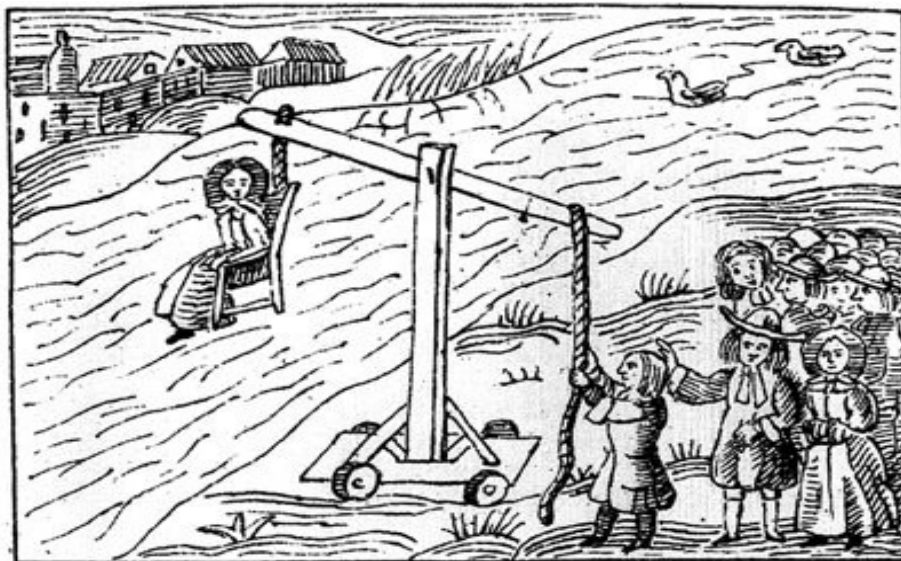
Many people thought it was possible to spot a witch- King James' book identified things to look out for. Old women living alone often with a pet such as a cat were seen as suspect. There was also the belief that witches kept 'familiars', such as toads or birds as pets. They could also be identified by marks on their skin. Commonly held beliefs included the idea that witches fed their pets on blood, captured children to boil and eat, and that they could fly. Witches were believed to be working with the devil and communicating with the dead.

### The Witchcraft Acts

1542- it becomes a serious crime to use witchcraft for any unlawful purpose

1563- it becomes a serious crime to call on evil spirits and to use magic

1604- it becomes a serious crime to communicate with, entertain, employ, feed or reward any evil or wicked spirit. Witchcraft is now punishable by death.



Dunking stool (above) and hanging (below): common punishments for witches



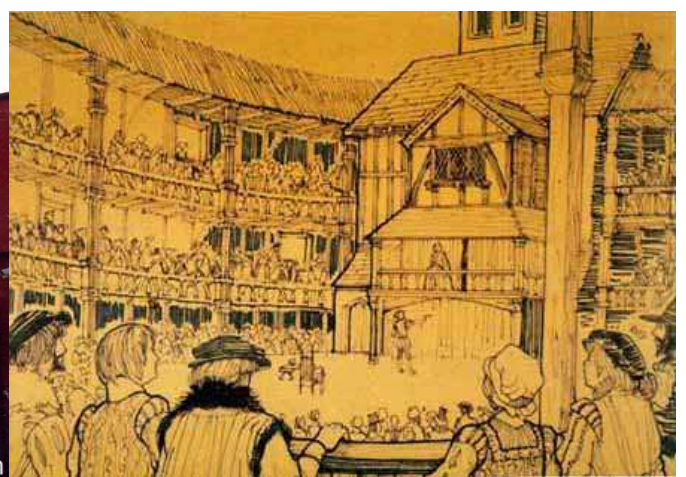


The play *Macbeth* starts with three witches (weird sisters) planning to meet the main character Macbeth.

**Having read what people believed about witches, what kind of atmosphere do you think Shakespeare wanted to create for his audience by beginning the play with them?**

**Task 6: read the information about “The Globe Theatre” and complete the set design task.**

In Shakespeare’s day both rich and poor people enjoyed going to the theatre. Theatres such as The Globe held up to 2,500 people. The wealthy sat in the galleries while the rest stood in the yard. At St. Aidan’s there are about 2000 students, to give you some idea of the scale.



Shakespeare attracted and maintained his audiences by using a number of methods. Often he would use notable opening scenes, with characters such as....



A hunchback



A ghost



Three witches

**Design a stage set for the opening of *Macbeth*.**

It must include three witches and be set in a desolate place like a moor or wasteland. It could be a drawing, collage, or a model! Use the images below to help you.

