*Macbeth* – Act 1 Questions – Important Concepts

Act 1, scene 1:

* What weather accompanies the witches? Why is this significant?
* With whom are the witches associated in this scene? What does this say about him?
* Explain the paradox “fair is foul and foul is fair”? Why is this significant coming from the witches?
* What atmosphere does this scene set for the play?

Act 1, scene 2:

* What do the way in which Macbeth is introduced into the play and Duncan’s response to his acts say about Scottish values?
* What is the state of Scotland at the beginning of the novel? Include specific details about who’s attacking whom.
* Is Duncan a good king? Why or why not?

Act 1, scene 3:

* What is Macbeth’s first line in the play? Why is this significant?
* Compare the following responses to the witches’ prophecy from Macbeth and Banquo:

1. Put each quotation into your own words
2. What is this character’s response to the prophecy?
3. Why is this quotation significant to our understanding of this character?

Banquo – 1.3.122-126

But ‘tis strange:

And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,

The instruments of darkness tell us truths,

Win us by honest trifles, to betray’s

In deepest consequence.

Macbeth – 1.3.134-142

If good, why do I yield to that suggestion,

Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,

And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,

Against the use of nature? Present fears

Are less than horrible imaginings;

My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,

Shakes so my single state of man that function

Is smother’d in surmise and nothing is

But what is not.

* What is Macbeth’s decision right after his reaction to hearing he’s Thane of Cawdor?

Act 1, scene 4:

* What is Duncan’s weakness as a king?
* Explain the following quotation in your own words. What is Macbeth’s reaction to the news that Malcolm is named heir? Why is this reaction significant? (How does it compare to his initial reaction to the idea of becoming king in 1.3?)

The Prince of Cumberland! that is a step

On which I must fall down, or else o’er-leap,

For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires!

Let not light see my black and deep desires;

The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be

Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see. (1.4.48-53).

Act 1, scene 5: