



The Operatic Moods of *Lady Macbeth* | The Metropolitan Opera Using This Resource

Musical Menace and Murder

Introduce the activity by explaining to students that opera offers the opportunity to depict characters' feelings and relationships through music. The video excerpt included in this exercise contains a pivotal moment in drama, as Lady Macbeth goads her husband into committing yet another act of violence. Let students know that as they watch the opera excerpt and listen to the music, they will be working to identify the feelings they hear in the two characters' voices.

Draw a two-column chart on the chalkboard. At the top of one side, write "Lady Macbeth." At the top of the other, write "Macbeth." You will use the chart later in the lesson to keep track of students' comments. Next, distribute the Student Handout included in this lesson, taken from an excerpt of the Met's full-length Educator Guide [link] for Verdi's opera. Have students read the English translation of the text so that they understand what they will be watching in the video excerpt. The scene includes the text marked Track 4 and Track 5 on the handout.

Before playing the excerpt, instruct students that they should use the space provided on the handout to note their observations on the characters' emotions and attitudes. Now, play the video for this exercise for students, letting them know that the text will appear on the screen. (Ensure that you have selected the option for closed captions in the video player. Students may notice that the subtitles differ slightly from the more literal translation in the handout.) This excerpt corresponds to the full scene; you may wish to pause the video at (03:11), at the close of the duet between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

As students listen to the excerpt, have them jot down the first word that comes to mind describing any feeling they hear. They should feel free to have their observations correspond to specific moments in the text, circling and starring words as necessary. You may want to play the selection twice—first for students to get a general sense of the music, and a second time to give them a chance to make notes. Afterwards, ask them to share their observations with the class and list the feelings they've noted on the chalkboard. A listening guide is provided below for your reference.

"Perchè mi sfuggi" ("Why are you avoiding me?")

As Act II opens, we witness the rapid shifting of attitudes in both Macbeth and his wife. Lady Macbeth begins the duet "Perchè mi sfuggi." Notice her tone here, and again, seconds later, as she insists *"Il fatto è irreparabile!"* ("The deed is done"). In contemporary language, she might be saying, "Honey, just get over it!" But Macbeth is worried. We hear it in his voice, mulling over the predicament: *"Dunque i suoi figli regneran? Duncano per costor sarà spento?"* ("So will [Banquo's] sons rule? Did Duncan die for them?")

The next few lines play out an intricate psychological drama. Hear how Lady Macbeth nudges her husband along. She nourishes the thought of killing Banquo, softly encouraging Macbeth. But as soon as he declares "Tonight!" Lady Macbeth turns the screw: *"Immoto sarai tu nel tuo disegno?"* ("Will you be firm in your intention?") Students can decide whether she's successful or not in both the words and the music of Macbeth's reply, *"Banco! L'eternità t'apre il suo regno"* ("Banquo, eternity opens its gates to you"). Has Macbeth changed? What do students make of his attitude now?

“*La luce langue*” (“The light is fading”)

One of the opera’s best-known arias follows directly after the above duet. In “*La luce langue*” (“The light is fading”), we hear Lady Macbeth’s inner thoughts. With her husband away, does her confidence wane? Does she sound pensive? Concerned? Scheming? Have students listen carefully at three key moments in the aria:

- “*Nuovo delitto!*” (“Another murder!”)
- “*È necessario!*” (“It is necessary!”)
- “*O voluttà del soglio*” (“O coveted throne”)

Lady Macbeth is by turns thoughtful, decisive, self-justifying, warming to the idea, and, ultimately, thrilled. Your students can hear all this unfold, even more through her music than the words.

Finally, using the notes they took while watching and listening to the opera scene, prompt students to draw conclusions on who they think has more power over the other—Macbeth or Lady Macbeth? Do they think one of them bears more responsibility than the other? And finally, what is the role of Verdi’s music in displaying these characters’ true natures?

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