**KING DUNCAN** - Duncan, the King of Scotland, is Macbeth's first victim en route to obtaining the crown for himself. To usurp a valiant and benevolent monarch was wicked beyond comprehension. Thus, for reasons both dramatic and political, Shakespeare had to make notable changes to the historical Duncan.

Characters in

Macbeth

Shakespeare's Duncan epitomizes the perfect ruler. Shakespeare's changes to Duncan's character are also in keeping with other changes he made to his sources, all seemingly intended to cater to his king and patron, James I.

**BANQUO**

**MACDUFF** - Macduff, the thane of Fife, arrives at Macbeth's castle the morning after Duncan has been murdered. Macduff pronounces the king dead, and is suspicious of Macbeth almost immediately. Macduff quickly sides with Malcolm, Duncan's son and rightful heir to the throne. As punishment for his betrayal, Macbeth hatches a plan to kill Macduff and his whole family. Macbeth's assassins do murder Lady Macduff and his son, but Macduff, who is in England at the time, lives to take his revenge on Macbeth at the end of the play, when he slays in him battle and carries his head to the new king, Malcolm.

**THREE WITCHES** - The Three Witches, also known as the Weird Sisters or Wayward Sisters, are characters in William Shakespeare's play Macbeth (c. 1603–1607). They hold a striking resemblance to the three Fates of classical mythology, and are, perhaps, intended as a twisted version of the white-robed incarnations of destiny. The witches eventually lead Macbeth to his demise. Their origin lies in Holinshed's Chronicles (1587), a history of England, Scotland and Ireland. Other possible sources, aside from Shakespeare's imagination, include British folklore, such contemporary treatises on witchcraft as King James VI of Scotland's Daemonologie, the Norns of Norse mythology, and ancient classical myths of the Fates: the Greek Moirai and the Roman Parcae. Productions of Macbeth began incorporating portions of Thomas Middleton's contemporaneous play The Witch circa 1618, two years after Shakespeare's death.

Shakespeare's witches are prophets who hail Macbeth, the general, early in the play, and predict his ascent to kingship. Upon killing the king and gaining the throne of Scotland, Macbeth hears them ambiguously predict his eventual downfall. The witches, and their "filthy" trappings and supernatural activities, set an ominous tone for the play.

**LADY MACBETH** - The wife of the play's tragic hero, Macbeth (a Scottish nobleman), Lady Macbeth goads her husband into committing regicide, after which she becomes queen of Scotland. Later, however, she suffers pangs of guilt for her part in the crime, which drives her to sleepwalk. She dies off-stage in the last act, an apparent suicide.

According to some genealogists, Lady Macbeth and King Duncan's wife were siblings or cousins, where Duncan's wife had a stronger claim to the throne than Lady Macbeth. It was this that incited her jealousy and hatred of Duncan.

The character's origins lie in the accounts of Kings Duff and Duncan in Holinshed's Chronicles (1587), a history of Britain familiar to Shakespeare. Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth appears to be a composite of two separate and distinct personages in Holinshed's work: Donwald's nagging, murderous wife in the account of King Duff and Macbeth's ambitious wife Gruoch of Scotland in the account of King Duncan.

Lady Macbeth is a powerful presence in the play, most notably in the first two acts. Following the murder of King Duncan, however, her role in the plot diminishes. She becomes an uninvolved spectator to Macbeth's plotting and a nervous hostess at a banquet dominated by her husband's hallucinations. Her sleepwalking scene in the fifth act is a turning point in the play, and her line "Out, damned spot!" has become a phrase familiar to many speakers of the English language. The report of her death late in the fifth act provides the inspiration for Macbeth's "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" speech.

Analysts see in the character of Lady Macbeth the conflict between femininity and masculinity as they are impressed in cultural norms. Lady Macbeth suppresses her instincts toward compassion, motherhood, and fragility — associated with femininity — in favour of ambition, ruthlessness, and the singleminded pursuit of power. This conflict colours the entire drama and sheds light on gender-based preconceptions from Shakespearean England to the present.

**MACBETH**  - The character is based on the historical king Macbeth of Scotland, and is derived largely from the account in Holinshed's Chronicles (1587), a history of Britain.

Macbeth is a Scottish noble and a valiant military man. A superb general, he is a physically powerful man, able in a fight to eviscerate a man with an upward stroke.

After a supernatural prophecy, and at the urging of his wife, Lady Macbeth, he commits regicide and becomes King of Scotland. He thereafter lives in anxiety and fear, unable to rest or to trust his nobles. He leads a reign of terror until defeated by his former ally Macduff. The throne is then restored to the rightful heir, the murdered King Duncan's son, Malcolm.

**MALCOM** - Duncan’s eldest son. Almost captured in the battle that rages at the beginning of the play, he is rescued by the captain.

He is named Prince of Cumberland and heir to the throne by Duncan once all the fighting is done. On his father’s death, he flees to England, unwilling to trust the Scottish nobles. This allows Macbeth to frame him as the murderer. In time he becomes the rallying point of opposition to Macbeth, and with the English king’s help assembles a massive army to recover his throne. To test Macduff’s loyalty to Scotland, Malcolm pretends to be a thoroughly vile human being to him; he is reassured that Macduff works for his country and not simply out of hatred when Macduff turns from him. He conceives the idea of camouflaging his army’s advance with the trees of Birnam Forest. On his victory, he re-titles the thanes as earls, an English title rather than a Scottish one.

**DONALDBAIN** - Duncan’s second son. After his father’s murder, he suggests to Malcolm that they quickly leave.

He flees to Ireland, arguing that by going to separate places he and his brother will be safer. He is not returned to join in the battle against Macbeth.

**LENNOX** - the Thane who brings Duncan news of the Norwegian invasion and of Cawdor’s complicity in it.

He is sent to have Cawdor executed and to give his title to Macbeth. He is present the morning after Duncan’s murder, and predicts Macbeth’s accession. Unlike Macduff, he decides to attend the new king’s coronation. Present at Macbeth’s feast, he is the first to note that Macbeth is acting oddly. He attempts to comfort Macduff’s wife, insisting on the flown thane’s wisdom and nobility, but not daring to stay too long with her. Gone to England himself, he at first tells Macduff that his family is well; it is not until he has received assurances from Malcolm that an invasion is imminent that he reveals that they have been murdered. He is present at the final battle, and brings Siward news of his son’s death. A glib-tongued fellow, he has a knack of being on the winning side and at placing himself first.

**MENTEITH**, - one of the four Thanes who desert Macbeth when Malcolm invades, bringing reinforcements to Malcolm’s army.

**ANGUS** - accompanies Ross in bringing Duncan news of the victory over Norway, and later bringing Macbeth the announcement of his accession to the rank of Thane of Cawdor.

**CATHNESS** - one of the four Thanes who desert Macbeth when Malcolm invades, bringing reinforcements to Malcolm’s army.

**FLEANCE** - Banquo’s son and heir, who escapes the murderers sent by Macbeth. Because he escapes, he fulfills the witches’ prophesy to be the father to a line of sons leading to James I’s accession to the throne of England .

**SIWARD** - Earl of Northumberland and Malcom’s uncle. A veteran English soldier who supports Malcom’s bid for the throne.

**SEYTON**  - A noble, who has the traditional role of managing the King’s armor. He remains loyal to Macbeth to the end.

**SERGEANT**  - saved Malcolm from being captured during the battle in Act 1 sc. 1. The Sergeant was present at the battle against Macdonald, where he is wounded; on his way to seek help, he meets Duncan and is able to tell him of Macbeth and Banquo’s success against the rebel.

**PORTER**  - A servant in charge of the castle gate. Drunken, he complains and pretends that he is the porter of Hell’s Gate, and makes up funny stories about various people heading for hell.

**THE MURDERERS** - Two are disaffected peasants who have a grudge against Banquo. Macbeth hires them to kill Banquo and Fleance. They kill Banquo but Fleance makes his escape. They are joined by a third mysterious murderer, sent by Macbeth to make sure the deed is accomplished.