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Dramatic Publishing

MACBETH:
A Kid's Cautionary Tale
Concerning Greed, Power, Mayhem
and Other Current Events

Adapted from Shakespeare

by

NANCY LINEHAN CHARLES

(Bilingual translation by

CLARA BLANK)



Dramatic Publishing

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(MACBETH: A Kid's Cautionary Tale Concerning Greed, Power,
Mayhem and Other Current Events)

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Brief Production History

The idea for this play was formed out of necessity: a fundraiser for the fifth-grade trip to Catalina Island. I had always believed that Shakespeare and children were somehow destined for each other, but how? A story theatre version began to form, and all who were interested stormed into this uncharted territory. The director, designers (all parents) and I began to invent solutions and ways of providing access by 10-year-olds and their potential audience to, arguably, the greatest dramatist of all time. No one had the slightest idea if it would actually work.

On February 28, 1998, the play opened at Edison Language Academy in Santa Monica, Calif. It played to capacity houses for three performances, garnering a tidy \$2000 for the school. Six weeks later, the show moved as a co-production to Pacific Resident Theatre in Venice, Calif., an award-winning professional venue. It played for five Sundays, earning another \$2500 for this small public school.

— NLC

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A bilingual translation of the play can be found on pages 53–62 of this book.

MACBETH: A Kid's Cautionary Tale Concerning Greed, Power, Mayhem and Other Current Events was first presented at the Edison Language Academy in Santa Monica, Calif., on February 28, 1998 under the title *MACBETH... According to the Fifth Grade*, with the following cast:

SHAKESPEARE CHARACTERS:

Macbeth Kevin Dugan
Lady Macbeth Tabitha Ross
King Duncan Ruben Calderon
Banquo Edwin Lovos
Macduff Will Rothhaar
Messenger / Servant Marcello Santos
Witches Adriana Alvarez, Gizel Barragan, Sara
Allain-Botsford, Suzanne Cambou, Lysandra
Carter-Aaron, Jordan Freedman, Martha Gonzales,
Kati Lira, Natalie Moran
Soldiers . . Daniel Calderon, Sergio Cruz, Bryan Marquina,
Jared Morgan, Miguel Rosas, Darren Smith, Luis Valdez,
Adrian Uberto-Flores, Michael Wilson

STORYTELLERS:

Rochelle Rochelle Bailis
Jessie Jessie Clemens
Marie Marie Eggebrotten
Sahoua Sahoua Gboizo
Kaytlin Kaytlin Hall
Anna Anna Nabel

(Storytellers' names can change to the names of the actors performing the roles.)

The play subsequently opened as a co-production with Pacific Resident Theatre, at the Pacific Resident Theatre in Venice, Calif., on April 18, 1998. The cast was as above with the following differences:

SHAKESPEARE CHARACTERS:

Witches Gizel Barragan, Suzanne Cambou, Lysandra
Carter-Aaron, Jordan Freedman, Kati Lira, Natalie Moran
Soldiers . . Daniel Calderon, Sergio Cruz, Bryan Marquina,
Jared Morgan, Darren Smith, Michael Wilson

Directed by Michael Rothhaar
Produced by Candi Lira
Costumes by April Clemens
Lighting by Deena Lynn Mullen
Special Properties by Annette Dittmar, Jim Dittmar,
Kent Clemens, Gail Freedman
Vocal Coach Sarah Zinsser
Graphic Design Ric Lira
Production Photographer John Hummel
Video Production Rick King
Technical Supervisors Raphael Blank, Ismael Herrera
Spanish Translation Clara Blank

For Pacific Resident Theatre:

Artistic Director Marilyn Fox
Managing Director Bruce Whitney
Publicist Judith Borne
Technical Director Chris McCabe

Special thanks to Michael Rothhaar, Candi and Ric Lira, April and Kent Clemens, Lark Nakazaki-Mann, John Hummel, Raymond Hummel, Steve Martinez, Maria Rodriguez, Orson Bean, Alley Mills, Marilyn Fox, Bruce Whitney, and Joey Crawford.

MACBETH:
A Kid's Cautionary Tale
Concerning Greed, Power, Mayhem
and Other Current Events

A Play in One Act
For a minimum of 15 actors

CHARACTERS

MACBETH
LADY MACBETH
KING DUNCAN
BANQUO
MACDUFF
MESSENGER / SERVANT
WITCHES
STORYTELLERS
SOLDIERS

PLACE: Where you find us.

TIME: Now.

Approximate running time: 40 minutes

Notes from the Adaptor

I have a son named Charlie, now an adult. When Charlie was three, he caught me unawares one Saturday morning, leaping onto my bed at some ungodly hour to ask if we were going to a movie tomorrow. Hoping to throw him off the scent and catch a few more winks, I picked up on his last word and, without opening my eyes, began Macbeth's final soliloquy:

Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time.
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death.
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.

Silence. Then a small voice. "What's that?" he asked. I looked. His eyes were wide. "It's from a play called *Macbeth*...by William Shakespeare." "Do it again," he commanded.

I did. Within the week, he had it memorized. At the end of two, we were performing it for his friends—swords drawn (inexplicably) and charging a penny a show (easy credit terms for those without means). I had a bachelor's in

English and a master's in theatre, but that was my first real awakening to the power of Shakespeare's language. Our audiences were enthralled. Box office was good.

Thus began almost a quarter century of working on possible ways of bringing Shakespeare to very young children. I began telling the Shakespeare plots to my own children, with the Bard's language peppered in. They would memorize sections and perhaps months or years later ask what "hurlyburly" meant or what is a "fenny snake"? Charlie tells me when he got to *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar* in high school, he felt no intimidation at all regarding the language of Shakespeare.

I believe *Macbeth* to be an ideal children's tale—in a Grimm sort of way—incorporating as it does, witches, ghosts, soldiers, kings, and the battle between good and evil. Kids get that, perhaps more clearly than their somewhat worldly and jaded elders. I have told the tale to preschoolers who immediately went to gather branches from Birnam Wood and be off to Dunsinane to take on the evil Macbeth.

Children *get* Shakespeare. We should be giving it to them from the crib on up as a staple along with Mother Goose and Sesame Street. To deprive them of this is to take away perhaps our greatest English-language asset.

Director's Production Notes

Overview

These notes, based on the original production, are included here, not to codify the original staging, but to provide an example of how the show *may* be staged—under less than ideal circumstances—and thereby encourage the producer to move ahead with creativity, ingenuity and courage, utilizing all resources to their best advantage.

The original production was conceived for and presented with great success in that well-known, but little-loved theatrical venue, the cafeteria-auditorium. In our case, it was quaintly called The Cafetorium. Every grade-school teacher and student knows this type of room with its assets and liabilities. Its chief assets are a vast stage and ample seating capacity. Its chief liabilities are bad acoustics, limited or nonexistent lighting capabilities, poor sightlines and the ubiquitous grey/beige curtains surrounding the stage. Recognize it? Of course you do. Don't despair. Here's how it can work.

The conceit of the show is as if a band of kid actors, having rehearsed their version of *Macbeth*, merrily overrun the theatre and discover that an audience has shown up. They seize the moment and swing into action. The show should have an improvised, “use what's at hand,” “something from nothing” look and feel. It should not be over-produced. I suppose one could aim for Old Vic opulence, but, given that it is kids playing for kids, that route might diminish its exuberance, immediacy and charm.

Setting

The original production utilized the entire theatre/auditorium which had an existing elevated proscenium stage at one

end. It bore the usual all-purpose grey curtains which functioned as backdrop and wing masking. We used stepladders and benches to serve as perches for the storytellers—enabling them to comment on the action, take focus when needed, then throw it back to the story proper. The stage was otherwise bare save for the props needed for each scene (witches’ cauldron, Duncan’s bed, etc.) which were placed and struck by the characters and storytellers, allowing a smooth segue from scene to scene.

Staging

The show was staged environmentally, that is, using the entire room and all the entrances. Needless to say, all critical action was played on the stage or apron, in the interest of sightlines and focus. But the house entrances and aisles were used frequently for large group entrances—Duncan’s retinue, the approach of Birnam Wood to Dunsinane, any “ride arounds,” (Macbeth and Banquo approaching the witches, the murderers pursuing Banquo, Macbeth riding to his castle)—as a free-wheeling chance for the witches to terrorize the audience, and finally, to allow the storytellers to move through the house, encouraging the audience to participate as per the script.

All of the props were set and struck within the action. For example, the witches and storytellers set Duncan’s sheet prior to his murder, as they proceed with the dialogue. The soldiers struck it with him behind it after his death.

Given that the show is by kids for kids, the violence was treated in a stylized fashion. The script eliminates some of the grislier details of the original play—the murder of MacDuff’s family, the issue of Caesarean section, etc. For those violent acts remaining, no “real blood” effects were used. The script provides for the witches to be shadowing Macbeth throughout

his tragic course. Therefore, when the violence occurs, the witches are always present in some fashion. At the moment when Duncan is murdered, two witches may flank the bed, unseen by Macbeth. As Macbeth stabs him, the witches may fling red silk scarves over Duncan, creating a stylized illusion of blood and masking the mechanics of a stage stabbing. Macbeth may wrap the daggers in red silk as he “withdraws them” from Duncan—allowing the silk to flow over his hands and arms, again creating the illusion of bloody daggers. When Banquo is murdered (offstage), we may hear him scream and see the witches fling red silk back through the curtained doorway. The point is made dramatically, without the usual gore.

Generally, the storytellers and witches are free to move amidst the action—invisible to actual *Macbeth* characters.

A few words about the sword fight between Macbeth and Macduff: the first and most important is SAFETY! These kids are kids, not stunt men. Keep it safe, and keep it simple. Use a memorizable series of basic cuts and defenses. Drill it over and over and always go from the top. Don’t pick up at random. Once it is learned, try not to change it. Changes can be confusing and dangerous. Rehearse the fights at half speed—confidence and repetition will naturally speed them up. Don’t worry about exact period combat styles...the audience isn’t being picky, they love the razzle-dazzle. But be SAFE!

Costumes

The costumes reflected the “found...something from something else” look. The kids were required to provide dark leggings or sweatpants, dark shoes, a dark turtleneck (all returnable), and one dark sweat shirt—to be cut, distressed and painted. From a basic outfit a designer can resourcefully build individual costumes using collected scraps for soldiers’ tar-

tans, old belts, flea-market hats for the storytellers, painted designs on the sweatshirts for individual jerkins, helmets and crowns cut from old plastic milk jugs—painted and detailed with hot glue—old robes for the King and Macbeth, etc.

Props

The props can be developed in much the same way as the costumes. Cardboard shields, with a bang-up paint job; lengths of dowel for spears, tipped with cardboard heads; wooden daggers, beautifully painted; wooden swords for Macbeth and Macduff (these are best if made of one solid piece of wood as they take a beating in the climactic duel); a witches' cauldron left over from Halloween, with nicely oversized items for the witches to toss in the pot—big pink “tongue of dog,” big green “toe of frog”—all can be found or faked easily; and wooden stick horses with painted heads. For the cauldron, a Pyrex bowl full of hot water into which a storyteller drops a chunk of dry ice, provides a swell smoke effect.

Casting

We used a cast of thirty-one—six Shakespeare characters, six storytellers, nine witches and 10 soldiers. It can be done with far fewer, but you do need the six Shakespeare characters and a minimum of three witches. The soldiers and storytellers can be reduced easily. Or expanded. We went on the principle that anyone wanting to be in the show was in it. Their audition was used only for placement in specific roles.

Macbeth Fight Choreography

The choreography uses just the basic cuts—head, chest, back, thigh, flank and thrust, as well as their basic defenses.

Macbeth = MB

Macduff = MD

MB faces right.

MD faces left.

MB "...cries Hold! Enough!"

MB drops shield.

MD drops shield.

MD throws helmet.

MB removes crown, then replaces it.

Both circle and jab...reversing positions... MB now faces left... MD faces right.

MB attacks delivering three quick cuts... head-chest-back...

MD defends.

Break

MD attacks delivering three quick cuts...head-chest-back...

MB defends.

Break

MB attacks...two cuts...thigh-flank.

Break

MD attacks...two cuts...thigh-flank.

Break

MB attacks...seven cuts...chest-back, chest-back, chest-back, head. After the head cut, their swords lock in a face-to-face clinch.

They push apart.

MD attacks...seven cuts...chest-back, chest-back, chest-back, head. After the head cut, their swords lock in a face-to-face clinch.

They push apart.

MB thrusts...MD parries.

MD thrusts...MB parries.

They circle each other...reversing positions... MB faces right... MD faces left.

MB slashes over MD's head... MD ducks.

MB slashes under MD's feet... MD jumps up.

MB attacks with seven cuts...chest-back, chest-back, chest-back, head.

They lock in a face-to-face clinch.

MB pushes MD to ground.

MB slashes on downstage side of MD... MD rolls upstage.

MB slashes on upstage side of MD... MD rolls downstage.

MB steps back...swings sword over head...with bravado...
winding up for the kill.

MD rises...stabs MB...sword on upstage side of MB.

MD places his foot on MB's chest...pulls out sword.

MB gasps...stunned...mortally wounded...falls to the
ground and dies.

MD turns up...sword in the air in victory.

MACBETH:
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(The audience gathers. Suddenly we hear four big bass drum beats from outside, then a trumpet and a great howl, wild and joyous. From all directions come the actors, in bright costumes with musical instruments—tambourines, a flute, bells, drums, violins. These instruments should sound like an orchestra warming up. The actors come in—running, dancing, some galloping, tumbling, dueling, the ones playing soldiers marching in step—into the hall, laughing and singing and generally looking like the motley crew they are. When they are all either on the stage or in the aisles, JESSIE blows a whistle and they all stop and fall silent. KAYTLIN at C turns and sees the audience.)

KAYTLIN *(to fellow actors)*. We're not alone.

JESSIE. It's them. Our audience. They said there'd be people to watch. "If you build it...they will come." Remember?

(The other players ad lib agreement.)

MARIE. But what did we build? We didn't build this room. I think you gotta tell 'em what they came to.

(The actors confer with one another: "Yeah...you tell 'em...not me...you do it." Finally ROCHELLE steps out of a group.)

ROCHELLE. Well, it's not anything you can put your finger on...exactly.

KAYTLIN. ...Except in your imagination!

ANNA. That's right. We've built a story.

MARIE. A story you can jump into and run around in. This story's gonna scare you...

(All actors go BOO! to the audience.)

SAHOUA.and make you say, "HURRAH FOR THE GOOD GUYS!"

(All actors say it. The audience doesn't.)

JESSIE. Look, you guys, we can't do this alone. You have to join in this story, or it won't be as exciting. Trust me. So say it with us: HURRAH FOR THE GOOD GUYS!

(The actors go around the audience, encouraging them. Finally, hopefully, everyone shouts it together.)

ALL. HURRAH FOR THE GOOD GUYS!

(When the audience joins the cheering, the actors applaud them.)

JESSIE. So, anyway, that's it. We've built a story and...

ROCHELLE. Hold it.

ANNA. What?

ROCHELLE. *We've* built the story? Ya better tell 'em who helped us.

MARIE. Oh, yeah. A guy named Shakespeare. William Shakespeare. Great writer. He couldn't be with us today because...well...he's dead. But he left a lot of great stories to remember him by. And we're gonna tell you one today.

SAHOUA. They talked pretty fancy back when Shakespeare wrote his stories. Like for Hello...they said All Hail. Everybody say that: "All Hail."

ALL. ALL HAIL!

(After the audience joins the chant, JESSIE turns to another actor.)

JESSIE. Hey, they're great, aren't they? *(To audience.)* There are some words like that, but just listen closely. This guy tells one heck of a story. *(Blows whistle.)* All right, places everybody!

(The actors scatter to various entrances leaving only the STORYTELLERS on stage. JESSIE gets the cauldron and the WITCHES' props from the wings and sets them C. KAYTLIN gets two sets of coconut shells and passes one set to ROCHELLE. MARIE exits to wings for dry ice...all while ANNA speaks.)

ANNA. And Shakespeare's stories were always about something. And he did it without a single computer-generated special effect.

ROCHELLE. The one we're gonna tell you today is about a guy who wanted something that didn't belong to him...

KAYTLIN. ...and what he was willing to do to get it...

(MARIE enters with dry ice.)

MARIE. ...and what happened to him because he was so mean and greedy. *(Drops dry ice in cauldron.)*

ANNA. The guy's name was Macbeth. Everybody say that. Macbeth.

AUDIENCE. MACBETH!

SAHOUA. Good job! So stick with us, and you'll see some surprising things.

(Immediately, we hear WITCHES cackling. They come running and screaming from all entrances, onto the stage. Hundreds of WITCHES. [Note: the WITCHES will be all through the action of the play. They will constantly be looking over MACBETH's shoulder, encouraging him in his misdeeds.] The WITCHES begin dancing around a cauldron. They look dirty and smelly.)

WITCH 1. When shall we three meet again
 In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

WITCH 2. When the hurlyburly's done,
 When the battle's lost and won.

WITCH 3. That will be ere the set of sun.

WITCH 4. Where the place?

WITCH 5. Upon the heath.

WITCH 6. There to meet with Macbeth.

WITCH 1. Fair is foul, and foul is fair.

ALL WITCHES. Hover through the fog and filthy air.

(All WITCHES cackle and race around the stage and through the auditorium. They end up back on the stage, dancing around their cauldron.)

JESSIE *(when WITCHES have returned to the cauldron).*

Hello. Who are these pretty things? I think they're up to no good.

(Four drum beats from off at the back of the theatre... done by BANQUO.)

WITCH 2. A drum, a drum!

Macbeth doth come.

(They all cackle. They hover in groups, whispering.)

WITCH 3. Double, double, toil and trouble,

WITCH 4. Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

(The WITCHES dance around the pot, they cackle and throw things in. Apparently, the things they're naming.)

WITCH 5. Fillet of a fenny snake

In the cauldron boil and bake;

WITCH 6. Eye of newt and toe of frog,

WITCH 1. Wool of bat and tongue of dog.

(The WITCHES freeze in stylized positions.)

KAYTLIN. Sounds like lunch in the cafeteria!

ROCHELLE. Come on, Kaytlin. This is serious.

KAYTLIN. Right. These witches ruined this guy, Macbeth.

No guns, no knives. Nothin' like that. They tricked him.

MARIE. Told him he could take something that wasn't his
and everyone would still like him. And he fell for it.
Hey! There he is now!

(From the back of the auditorium come two drum beats, announcing the entrance of MACBETH and his friend BANQUO. They ride stick horses and look very proud. The STORYTELLERS begin making sounds of cantering horses' hooves by using the coconut shells. Some whinny. MACBETH and BANQUO ride up onto the C platform, as if pausing atop a hill.)

ANNA. Macbeth was a great soldier, a general, in the army
of King Duncan of Scotland. Only they didn't call them
generals then. They called them thanes. Say that, will
ya?

AUDIENCE. Thanes!

*(ANNA repeats "what?" until the audience says
"Thanes" loud and clear.)*

SAHOUA. And Macbeth LOVED being a soldier, only
sometimes a tiny thought came into his head...

(MACBETH turns to the audience and thinks.)

JESSIE. ...that he might like to be more than just a soldier and a thane, that maybe...oh, I don't know...maybe it might be nice to be something like KING!

(MACBETH smiles.)

MARIE. King?

ROCHELLE. King?

ANNA. King?

KAYTLIN. King?

JESSIE. Yeah, King!

ROCHELLE. Only somebody already got to be that...KING
DUNCAN!

(A STORYTELLER blows a trumpet fanfare. From the right front entrance of the auditorium, KING DUNCAN enters on horseback with his retinue: MACDUFF and the MESSENGER (on horseback) and about twelve SOLDIERS marching. MACBETH watches this.)

ROCHELLE. ...so Macbeth would try not to think about it.

KAYTLIN. So one day Macbeth and his best buddy Banquo...

(MACBETH and BANQUO ride around the audience on their stick horses. Other actors make horse sounds.)

MARIE. ...are coming back from a battle... This is where you guys can help us make battle sounds.

JESSIE. Yeah. This side make the dah-dah-dah-dah-dah-dah sound. And this side say CHARGE! OK?

(The actors encourage them, and the audience makes the sounds as MACBETH and BANQUO approach the stage.)

SAHOUA. So Macbeth and Banquo are coming back from this battle. And they come across those witches in a field.

JESSIE. Well, good grief! You don't run across witches every day. So Macbeth and Banquo stop to chat.

(The WITCHES break their freeze and begin to undulate and dance. MACBETH and BANQUO halt a short distance away and watch the dancing WITCHES.)

WITCH 2. Scale of dragon, tooth of wolf...

KAYTLIN. OOOOO. It's those body parts again!

WITCH 3. ...Adder's fork and blindworm's sting,

WITCH 4. Lizard's leg and howlet's wing.

ROCHELLE. And they start to throw gooshy things into their pot. Everybody say "OOOOOOOEEEEEEEEE."

(The audience, fully trained by now, says "OOOOOOOEEEEEEEE. MACBETH and BANQUO ride up to the WITCHES.)

MACBETH. How now, you secret, black and midnight hags.

MARIE (*sarcastically*). He sure knows how to talk to girls!

BANQUO. What are these? So withered and so wild in
their attire,
That look not like the inhabitants of the earth
And yet are on it?

MACBETH. Speak if you can. What are you?

WITCH 5. All Hail, Macbeth.

WITCH 6. All Hail.

WITCH 1. All Hail.

ALL WITCHES. All Hail, Macbeth,
That shalt be King hereafter.

MACBETH. What say you?

ALL WITCHES. All Hail, Macbeth,
That shalt be King hereafter.

*(The WITCHES run around MACBETH and BANQUO
in a circle, screaming all the way. Then they run out. He
shouting after them.)*

MACBETH. Stay, you imperfect speakers. Tell me more.
Say from whence
You owe this strange intelligence or why
Upon this blasted heath you stop our way
With such prophetic greeting. Speak, I charge you.

BANQUO. 'Tis strange.
And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,

The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
Win us with honest trifles, to betray us
In deepest consequence.

MACBETH. But...King.

(MACBETH and BANQUO confer silently.)

ANNA. What are they? Some kind of fortunetellers? They say he's gonna be King! But King Duncan is already King.

JESSIE *(to audience)*. OK, guys, here's the problem...right here. Ya want something ya can't have, and right away somebody ya know, ya probably shouldn't be hangin' out with anyway, tells ya you can have it.

SAHOUA. My question is: Does Macbeth's mother know where he is?

MARIE. No.

(A WITCH runs back, grabs the cauldron, and points out over the house towards Macbeth's castle.)

MARIE. But Macbeth races home pretty fast to tell his wife that the witches say he's gonna be King.

(MACBETH and BANQUO ride down to house level, salute each other, and race away in different directions. The STORYTELLERS make the galloping sounds. BANQUO exits the house at the rear. MACBETH continues around the house, heading back towards the stage. Onto the stage comes LADY MACBETH, looking in a hand mirror and primping.)