



These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

Third Witch

By Jackie French

ISBN 9781460754306 RRP 16.99

Book Summary:

A searing story of passion, betrayal, battles and love, this is Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' stripped of superstition, and its power and beauty refined into fewer words where good balances the evil and there is a happy ending - for some.

Following on from OPHELIA, QUEEN OF DENMARK and I AM JULIET, this is the third title in the series for young people that focuses on the reinterpretation of Shakespeare's classic and enduring plays.

'I didn't mean to do it'. Annie is not a witch, but when her mistress Lady Macbeth calls for a potion to 'stiffen Macbeth's sinews', Annie is caught up in plots that lead to murder, kingship and betrayal. Annie must also not only choose between Rab the Blacksmith and Murdoch, Thane of Greymouth, but discover where her loyalty lies.

Key Learning Outcomes

Year 8 Stage 4

Language: ACELA1540, ACELA1547

Literature: ACELT1626, ACELT1627, ACELT1629

Literacy: ACELY1732, ACELY1733

Year 9 Stage 5

Language ACELA1552, ACELA1553, ACELA1561

Literature: ACELT1633, ACELT1634, ACELT1636

Literacy ACELY1742, ACELY1743, ACELY1744

Recommended: 10+

Third Witch Teacher's Notes by Jackie French

About the Book

The 'Shakespeare's Women' Series

About the Author

Inspiration for *Third Witch*

Themes of Macbeth and *Third Witch*

- The 'tragic flaw'
- Evil
- Ambition
- Loyalty

Characters in *Third Witch*

And They Lived Happily Ever After

Language in Macbeth

Textual Analysis

Superstition

A Woman's Place

The Prophecies

Names

The Historical Basis of the Play and the Book

Similar Works by Jackie French

Australian Curriculum Relevance

Further Reading

Bibliography

About the Book

Third Witch is a retelling of the Shakespearean play *Macbeth*, told from the point of view of Annie, a village girl and maid to Lady Macbeth. When her mistress orders Annie to fetch a herbal potion to make Macbeth more assertive in seeking a reward from the king for his leadership in battle, Annie seeks help from the village herbalist, Agnes, who sheltered Annie and her mother after Annie's father was killed in one of the king's many unsuccessful wars.

Agnes is no witch, nor is there any witchcraft in this book. Instead Agnes knows people, as well as herbs. Agnes, Annie and Annie's mother will trick Macbeth by appearing in the mist as three mysterious women who prophesy that he will be successful, thus giving him the courage to ask for what he deserves for his skill and effort.

But Annie becomes caught up in the drama. She assures Macbeth and Banquo of far more than Agnes's vague promises. Annie's impulsive words enable her mistress to convince Macbeth that these prophetic utterances are true — and that he must murder the king to save Scotland from his ineptitude.

Plotting and murder make Macbeth king — but can he keep the throne without the support of the Scottish lords? As guilt slowly erodes the sanity of the new king and queen, and drives them to new murderous schemes to keep the throne secure, Annie is torn between loyalty to the mistress who has given her so much and her own sense of guilt at initiating the calamitous chain of events.

Lady Macbeth dies admitting her guilt and asking that the world remembers her not as a woman who tried to do good but as a lesson to those who let ambition carry them too far. Annie is rescued from the final battle by Rab, the village blacksmith. It

seems that good has triumphed ...

Years later, however, Annie's impulsive words lead to a visit from the king's witch finder. He, too, has heard the tale of the witches who spoke to Macbeth. Rather than escaping, and leaving Annie to be implicated, Agnes allows herself to be burnt at the stake. Annie must watch, knowing that this tragedy, like that of the Macbeths, came from a few impulsive words by a girl in the fog.

A story of passion, betrayal, battles and love, this is Shakespeare's *Macbeth* stripped of superstition, with its power and beauty refined to show that good can be a match for evil.

And for some, there can be a happy ending.

The 'Shakespeare's Women' Series

Third Witch is the latest book in a series by Jackie French that began with *I am Juliet* (2014), followed by *Ophelia: Queen of Denmark* (2015) and continued with *The Diary of William Shakespeare, Gentleman* (2016). The series is based on well-known Shakespearean plays and written from the perspective of a female character with the exception of *Diary of William Shakespeare, Gentleman*. In doing this, Jackie has repositioned the role of women and extended the imaginative landscape of Shakespeare's plays, as well as making the plays accessible to students who find reading them boring or difficult.

Shakespeare's plays were never written to be read or studied, but to be performed, and were changed according to their audience. Jackie French states that in rewriting the plays for modern teenagers, she is acting in keeping with Shakespeare's own tradition.

About the Author

Jackie French has written over 200 books in 36 languages and has received over 60 awards nationally and internationally for her work. Her books are regularly shortlisted in children's choice awards, appearing among light, funny works, despite their depth of theme. She is perhaps best known for her iconic works *Diary of a Wombat* and *Hitler's Daughter* and their sequels, and the Matilda and Miss Lily sagas for older readers.

Jackie French was the 2014–2015 Australian Children's Laureate, creating the Laureate project 'The Share-a-Story Calendar', and lobbying to change the law and educational practice so that every child — including those with reading difficulties — has the right to learn to read and the right to have access to the books they need. A passionate believer in the power of story, Jackie believes that, 'Stories tell us who we are. They teach us empathy so we know ourselves and others. They give us the power to understand the past so we can imagine and create the future.'

In 2015 Jackie French was awarded Senior Australian of the Year. She is a keen advocate of help for children with learning difficulties. Jackie donates a large portion of her time and income to her work for literacy and for the conservation of our small blue planet for the children of the future. She also writes columns for the *Australian Women's Weekly*, the *Canberra Times* and its associated papers, *Gardening Australia*, *Earth Garden* and *WellBeing* magazine, as well as a monthly blog, 'Cooks, Books and Wombats'.

You can read more about Jackie French and her work on her personal website, www.jackiefrench.com, and find her at:

www.facebook.com/authorjackiefrench

Twitter @jackie_french_ Instagram @jackie_french_

Inspiration for *Third Witch*

In the Author's Notes to *Third Witch*, Jackie French describes taking part in a semi-professional production of *Macbeth* as a teenager. The atmosphere was unforgettable: 'the rolling words; the dry ice creating a mist across the stage; the clash of genuine broadswords that gave off sparks'. The first pages of her novel recreate this atmosphere and draw readers into the unforgiving landscape and brutal wars.

Yet despite her love of the play and its language, Jackie was also aware that the play had been written as deliberate propaganda for King James I, an unbalanced monarch who hated women in power, women like his predecessor, the much loved Elizabeth I, and his disgraced executed mother, Mary Stuart.

James I believed in witches and blamed his own and his country's misfortunes on them. King James also wrote a book on how to identify witches and destroy them, as well as creating the post of 'witch finder' to identify witches and burn them.

'The witches in *Macbeth* were part of the mad illusion of King James I, an absolute monarch who forced his insanity across his kingdom.' Extract from Author's Notes (p. 204)

Jackie French wrote *Third Witch* to strip the play of its misogyny and superstition; to add good to balance the evil; and, possibly, to create a version of the play that Shakespeare himself might have preferred if he did not have to serve a mad and woman-hating patron. Shakespeare was one of the first English playwrights to create strong female characters, but once James I took the throne, it would have been potentially lethal to keep on doing so.

The Lady Macbeth in the play is not just the embodiment of evil ambition and disloyalty (the latter regarded as one of the worst sins of the time) but also so mentally fragile that she cannot bear the consequences of her actions. Although no part of

Shakespeare's plot has been changed, *Third Witch* gives Lady Macbeth not just her own name — never given in the play — but a background and motivation.

Themes of Macbeth and *Third Witch*

Macbeth is a tragedy. In Shakespeare's time, 'tragedy' had a specific meaning: a play where a good person is corrupted and thus brought down. In the case of the play *Macbeth*, the dutiful soldier is corrupted by the evil witches and his wife's ambition. This failure leads to the death of both Macbeth and his wife.

- The 'tragic flaw'

Shakespearean tragedy was based on classical Greek tragedy. A tragic play was supposed to contain:

- a hero with a fatal flaw, or hamartia — a concept from ancient Greek drama, where a heroic character's single flaw will corrupt them;
- the struggle between forces of good and evil;
- internal conflict, as the protagonist struggles with the character flaw that will inevitably destroy them;
- external conflict, as those who desire good battle with the protagonist;
- the supernatural — in ancient Greek tragedies this was played out by the involvement of the gods; and
- a final catharsis — the cleansing of evil to restore order.

Discuss:

1. How is each element presented in the play? Which of these elements are not present in *Third Witch*? Why?
2. For both ancient Greek authors and Shakespeare, only a man might be a tragic hero. Do you think Lady Macbeth fits the role of a tragic hero even though she

is a woman?

- **Evil**

King James, and much of Shakespeare's audience of the time, would have accepted that the witches acted purely from a desire to do evil.

Discuss:

1. Does evil exist? Or is evil done from mistaken beliefs, or because a person has been hurt mentally or socially and so lashes out to hurt the world?

- **Ambition**

A central theme of both the play and the book is ambition. When the play opens, Lady Macbeth is ambitious for her husband's promotion and bitter that he has not already been acknowledged and given his due.

Discuss:

1. Do you think that if Macbeth had been given due recognition earlier, Lady Macbeth would have been satisfied and the tragedy averted?

- **Loyalty**

Loyalty is a major theme of both the play and the book. In Shakespearean England, social life was made up of a hierarchy of loyalties, from God to king, then archbishop, lords, squire, a patron, then master of a trade, father, husband and many others.

Each person in England owed specific loyalty to many people, and their place in society was determined by those to whom they pledged loyalty and by those from whom they could expect it. A 'mercy' was when someone you owed loyalty to made you free of it, e.g. a landlord might not take the rent owed or a knight might not ask the tenants of his estate to join his army in battle.

Shakespeare's audience would have regarded Macbeth's disloyalty to his king (who was also a guest in his house, thus compounding the betrayal) as a greater sin than murder. But people then, as now, also accepted that love might be stronger than social duty.

Discuss:

1. Who does Lady Macbeth owe the social duty of loyalty to? Who does she love?
 2. Who does Annie owe the social duty of loyalty to? Who does she love? How does this conflict with her social duty?
 3. Who does Rab owe the social duty of loyalty to? Rab obeys a very strong sense of duty, but how does it conflict with how Macbeth and others might see his duty?
 4. Who does Agnes owe the social duty of loyalty to? Who is she actually loyal to?
- [Characters in Third Witch](#)

Annie

Annie is a peasant, but has been given almost unheard-of preferment by Lady Macbeth, making her first a lady's maid, then one of her attendants, and then arranging a dowry and marriage with a thane for her.

Discuss:

1. If the Macbeths had succeeded in taking the throne, would Annie have been happy as Mistress of Greymouth?
2. Annie believes she is wiser than Agnes because she knows more of the life of the rulers of Scotland. Discuss the ways in which Annie knows more than Agnes but where Agnes is wiser than Annie.

Lady Macbeth

These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

In *Third Witch*, Lady Macbeth is the daughter of a Norse warrior, far younger than her husband, and her only child has died. In the play, there is no reference to her background or age, and only one reference to a child, who is never mentioned again in the play.

Discuss:

1. Why is there so little background given to Lady Macbeth in the play?

In the play, Lady Macbeth acts purely from thwarted ambition. In the book, she believes she is revenging the slights on her husband, and also saving Scotland from a king who cannot even lead his army and who has unsuccessfully invaded England ten times, causing extreme loss of life and poverty throughout Scotland. She believes that killing one man will save thousands. Annie, too, tries to use this as her justification once she suspects what the Macbeths have done.

Discuss:

1. There is a classic philosophical problem: a train's brakes have failed. You can press a button to move it onto another track, but if you do this, a child playing on the tracks will be killed. If you do nothing, a hundred passengers in the train will die. Do you do nothing and let a hundred die? Or do you do something and kill a child?

Macbeth

Macbeth in both the play and the book is an able warrior and an inspired and brave leader in battle, yet he has not been rewarded by the king.

Discuss:

1. Why do you think this is the case?
2. Could Macbeth have been a successful king if Duncan had not invaded, backed

by an English army?

Rab

Rab leads the village, both by his affluence as a master smith and his own natural leadership, yet he has no formal leadership role in the society of his time.

Discuss:

1. What leadership role might a man like Rab have today?
2. Rab rescues Annie from the battle and, as she is desperate to leave, this is a happy ending. But what if Annie had been genuinely in love with Lord Murdoch? What if, when Rab arrived, Macbeth had had enough men to win against Duncan? Rab's abduction of Annie might lead to the loss of both the love and the position she had worked for.
3. Are Rab's actions in rescuing Annie justified? Do you think he would have carried her away if she didn't want to go, believing he knew what was best for her? Does Rab respect Annie, as well as love her and want to protect her? If you think he does respect her and her decisions, give examples from the text.

Agnes

Agnes is wise, able to survive even though she is old and with no man to support her, and yet she is also an outsider, both because of her knowledge and by her own choice.

At both the beginning of the book and the end, Agnes is shown as truly wise: able to manipulate Macbeth for good, not evil, until Annie's excitement spoils her plan; choosing not to simply vanish into the night, an old woman in a black cloak, but to be executed by being burnt to death so the witch finder does not look more closely at Annie and her children.

Discuss:

These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

1. How much of Agnes's role as an outsider is her own choice, and how much is a result of the villagers' fear of her knowledge?
2. Where would Agnes have learned her knowledge of herbs and humanity? If Annie had not gone to the castle, do you think Agnes would have passed on her knowledge to her? Could Agnes have taken in the starving widow and child out of self-interest so she was able to train a younger woman who might look after her as she grew feeble?
3. What does Agnes expect from Annie throughout the book? What does Agnes give her freely, with no thought of exchange?

Minor characters

Minor characters include Annie's mother, Lady Margaret, Lady Susan, Lord Murdoch and the doctor.

Discuss:

1. How do you think this book would have differed if it had been told from their points of view?

Activity:

1. Write a page retelling the story from the point of view of one of the other characters.

And They Lived Happily Ever After

Third Witch has an almost-happy ending. We know the end for Agnes, Annie, Annie's mother, Rab and the Macbeths.

Activity:

1. Choose a minor character from the book and write what happened to them after the battle or by the end of the book.

These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

Language in *Macbeth*

In Shakespeare's time, his plays were performed in many places, from Court to the Globe Theatre to tavern courtyards in regional centres, especially when plague frequently shut the London theatres in summer.

While specially built theatres like the Globe might offer scenery, props or special effects, mostly it was the words of the play that had to create the scene. As the Prologue says in *Henry V*: 'A kingdom for a stage, princes to act, and monarchs to behold the swelling scene.'

A novel like *Third Witch* can add sentences or even paragraphs of description about the surroundings, which Shakespeare could only put into the speeches of his players, making them sound long and cumbersome to today's readers and theatre-goers.

Activity:

1. Find three examples in the play where the characters must describe where they are to the audience, then compare them to the scenes in *Third Witch*, where the author creates the scene through description rather than the characters' words.

Aristocratic Language

The well-educated in Shakespeare's day were expected to use a more formal and creative speech than we do today, using metaphor, simile and onomatopoeia in everyday speech. Elizabeth I was an expert in rhetorical devices.

In *Macbeth*, the higher born a character is, the more poetic their speech. Commoners spoke more simply. As *Third Witch* is told from the point of view of a commoner, it can be told simply. But Shakespeare's audience, even if they were not

capable of poetic speech, would have appreciated it, while modern audiences, used to the short, informal dialogue of TV and films, find it obscure and difficult.

Activities:

1. Compare the speech of one of the aristocrats with that of the porter from the Third Witch.
2. Compare the speeches of the characters in the play with the same speeches in *Third Witch*. How have they been simplified? Why? Do you believe this adds or detracts from the beauty or strength of the speech?
3. The following are literary techniques used in Shakespeare's time and today. Find an example of each in both the play and the book:

Onomatopoeia	When the sound of the word mimics the meaning, e.g. the buzzing of busy bees
Metaphor	A form of imagery where something is described as being something else, e.g. 'The whole world is a stage'
Simile	A comparison using 'like' or 'as', e.g. 'Fat as a rat after autumn grain'
Personification	Giving an object or non-living thing the qualities of a person, e.g. 'Time creeps in its pretty pace from day to day'

These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

Alliteration	The repetition of the first letter, usually a consonant, in two or more consecutive words, e.g. 'Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers'
Assonance	The repetition of the vowel sound in two consecutive words, e.g. "Tirra lirra" by the river / Sang Sir Lancelot'
Symbolism	Using an object or word to represent an abstract idea, e.g. 'Time is but a creeping thief that robs us of our childhood'

Discuss:

1. How do the following phrases establish the mood, place, characters and culture of the book using the techniques above? Can you create a phrase that gives a similar impression?

p. 2 — Thunder muttered beyond the hills, as if it had heard her words. The mist blazed blue-white then blinked back to grey.

p. 8 — They were only words, but I'd felt the air about us quiver.

p. 11 — The fog sifted down like flour on the hills, hiding the sheep, though I could still hear their bleats.

p. 19 — Fog sat on the heath like a vast cat on a giant's hearth. Shadows had swallowed

the earth, the sky and us. Thunder growled all around. Even the ground vibrated.

p. 21 — 'Can't be doing with quince,' said Agnes, shoving the food sack behind a rock. 'Gives me wind.'

p. 55 — She creaked off and the black night swallowed her. She was right. Within three heartbeats I could not see her at all.

p. 101 — I had hoped that the king would recover his spirits at Glamis, where he had been boy, man and thane. But he started at every shadow as the torches flickered in the corridors, and shuddered each time winter's wind moaned and rubbed against the castle, as if it were a dragon ghost sent to snare us.

p. 169 — Midsummer's Eve sat upon the land, the days so fat and fair they squeezed out night till it was only a few hours of shadow before dawn. You could almost hear the grass grow. Larks soared singing above the palace, and lambs wriggled their white tails on the hills.

Textual Analysis

Discuss:

1. What is the significance of the following quotes from the book?

p. 2 — 'The royal idiot's lost ten battles in ten summers, and half his army in each one. That man's like a kitten that scratches a tom cat then wonders how it came to lose an ear.'

p. 4 — 'A charm won't work,' I said firmly. 'Not on a thane.'

'It will if we do it right. The right words, at the right time.'

p. 10 — 'Brave men are fighting, Rab, and you make light of it? War is no joke.'

'No, it is no joke.' His face was serious now. 'But that is what the king and thanes make of it, all those fine gentlemen of yours from the castle, riding above the blood and screams in their armour on their great horses.'

p. 27 — And now words came to me too. 'Thou shalt get kings though thou be none. So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo!'

'Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!' Agnes called hurriedly. She grabbed my hand and tugged me off the path into the fog.

p. 47 — I looked at him curiously, trying not to stare; this man who had spent his army fruitlessly each year for a whole decade, trying to gain a foothold on England's soil, but who never wielded a sword himself.

p. 66 — The whole castle would be eating leftovers for a week. The peacock had looked so fine when it was carried into the feast, its feathers stuck back into the roasted meat, but today it was tough and greasy. For a moment I longed for Agnes's cottage. She and Mam would be eating mutton broth, bright with herbs and hot from the pan, not carried across the castle courtyard from the kitchens.

p. 78 — Agnes raised a shaggy eyebrow. 'So King Duncan deserved to be murdered?'

'Of course not.'

She stared at me. 'Why not? What's the death of one king and a pair of grooms compared to thousands in his armies?'

'I ... I don't know.'

My heart still bled at the thought of the poor grooms, sacrificed for ambition, their families not just grieving but having to bear the whispers of those who wondered if the grooms had been guilty.

'I'll tell you then.' Of course she would. 'The land has to have rules. And one of them is you don't chop off a guest's head. No one could travel safe if people went around chopping off their guests' heads. And you don't break promises neither.'

p. 87 — 'I do not think the most courteous courtier would call me kind. But I will be a good queen. I will swear to that.'

p. 116 — Macbeth had killed the king, and killed two innocent servants to hide his crime. And his wife had urged him on. But they had not dreamed such a plot until I spoke it.

His guilt was killing him.

His guilt was mine too.

p. 182 — 'When they speak of me,' she whispered, 'do not defend my name. Say not "She did it because Duncan was a feeble king", nor "She would have a realm of peace". Let my name live for good, as I did not; a lesson in how ambition can nibble away virtue, till all that is left is death and trickery.'

'My lady, you were so much more than that.'

She smiled. 'I know. But this is what I wish. One good deed to leave this earthly world. Grant me that wish, at least.'

p. 199 — I am not a witch, nor could ever be; nor have I ever met one. There was no magic, ever, just play-acting and ambition. If Agnes had been a witch, she could have spirited herself away, not stood there screaming as her face melted and flared.

Only then, in that last second, did she meet my eyes. She'd saved me, her glance told me. Because if she had vanished, not by magic but under a dark cloak on a dark night, as soon as the witch finder arrived, there'd have been whispers to the

witch finder about Mam and me.

p. 200 — I didn't mean to do it. I'm sorry.

2. Compare these words in the book with the same scene in the play:

p. 6 — 'Well,' demanded Agnes, 'when shall we three meet again, in thunder,
lightning, or in rain?'

Mam shivered as a gust of rain lashed her face. 'When the hurly-burly's done.'

Her voice turned bitter. 'When the battle's lost and won.'

p. 22 — But this wasn't evil, I told myself. Just play-acting to convince Macbeth to
claim the reward that should be his.

'Killing swine,' hissed Mam.

I had never guessed she could sound so sinister. She glanced at me as if to say,
I do this for you.

Agnes glared at me, waiting for my line.

'Sister, where art thou?' I asked, trying to make my voice as harsh as a crow's.

p. 23 — The thunder snickered, as if it knew a joke we couldn't share. No, that wasn't
thunder. Those were hooves!

'A drum, a drum!' I said urgently. 'Macbeth has come.'

p. 28 — I moved closer, soft-footed through the heather. I could just make out
Macbeth's face staring at Banquo.

'Your children shall be kings,' he said quietly.

'You shall be king,' Banquo replied.

They believed us!

'And Thane of Cawdor too. Went it not so?' Macbeth sounded breathless.

'To the selfsame tune and words.'

p. 45 — I ran back along the corridor to ask her, then stopped as I heard voices in her chamber. Not voices, I realised. Just one: her own.

'The raven himself is hoarse,' she whispered, 'that croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan under my battlements.'

She must have moved towards the window for her words faded. I strained to hear, but then her voice rose.

'Come, you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, and fill me from the crown to the toe top-full of direst cruelty!'

I should not hear this. No one should. And yet I could not move.

p. 59 — I kept my ear against the door. I could not help it. What were they talking about?

"Macbeth does murder sleep," my lord whispered, so soft that I wouldn't have heard it from my bed. 'The innocent sleep, sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care.'

'What do you mean?' My lady's voice was sharp.

p. 139 — '*Scale of dragon, tooth of wolf,*' sang young Robert, in a whisper that echoed through the cave.

A true actor, I thought, admiring despite my fear and horror.

p. 158 — 'Blood,' she whispered, 'blood across the land. Blood calls to blood, whispered from shattered veins. Blood calls vengeance to the blood that shed it ...' She looked down at her hands, small and white in the blue starlight. 'Will these hands never be clean?' She wiped them against her night shift. 'There! A spot! And there another!'

She gazed at her hands again, then began to rub them frenziedly against the stones. She would rub them raw!

I ran to her. 'Ma'am, come. I'll wash your hands.'

She looked, but did not see me. But at least the desperate movement ceased.

p. 183 — His voice was so soft I could hardly hear it above the clash of armour, the thuds of boulders from the battering rams. '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.' He opened his eyes and gazed upon his wife. He had loved her once, I thought. Loved her deeply. Did he grieve for her now, or for his hopes? 'Out, out, brief candle!' he muttered, still staring at the figure on the bed.

'My lord,' I said, then stopped. I had no words.

He did. Even in battle, gentlefolk had their words.

Superstition

Shakespeare's play is based on the audience's belief that certain superstitions were real, beginning with the witches. Phrases like 'by the pricking of my thumbs' and 'the raven himself is hoarse that croaks around my battlements' were also firmly based in reality.

Activities:

1. List three superstitions in one act of the play and explain their meaning.
2. Examine how *Third Witch* removes the superstitions of the play and gives alternative interpretations that do not depend on a belief in the supernatural.

A Woman's Place

Shakespearean England was socially stratified and it was difficult to move from one rank to another. Shakespeare himself was the subject of both gossip and scandal as he moved from the position of tradesman to player to gentleman (see *The Diary of William Shakespeare, Gentleman*).

A woman was supposed to be subordinate to her father, brothers, husband and the head of the family, who would be a man. While Queen Elizabeth I was popular and deeply intelligent, even she had to downplay her abilities, as seen in her speech to her troops before the invasion of the Spanish Armada: 'Although I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, I have the heart and stomach of a king.'

Discuss:

1. How did the female roles Shakespeare wrote while under the patronage of Elizabeth I differ from those he wrote for the misogynist James I?
2. Does Lady Macbeth appear to be frustrated at having to have her ambitions carried out by her husband? If she had been free to take on other roles, do you think she would have turned to murderous plots in the night?
3. Shakespeare portrays Macbeth as corrupted by women — the witches and his wife. At what point in the play and the book does Macbeth begin to murder and do wrong on his own initiative?

The Prophecies

Prophecies in the play lead to Macbeth's wrongdoing. But as *Third Witch* points out, most are innocuous.

Discuss:

1. Which of the prophecies in both the book and the play inspire Macbeth to murder? Why?

Agnes in *Third Witch* advises what is now known as a 'cold reading' — a method used by fortune tellers to give vague promises that may be interpreted as specifics by their listeners (who hear them through their pre-existing filters and hear what they want to hear) or to draw out information that they can then represent to their listeners.

Activities:

1. Investigate the concept of a 'cold reading'. With a partner you do not know well, attempt to give a 'cold reading', telling the other person things about themselves that they will believe, and future promises that are vague enough for them to think may come true.

Classic cold-reading lines include 'Few people understand who you really are', 'Others impose on your good nature', 'I see something difficult coming very soon for you', 'It will be hard, but you will overcome it', 'News from far off is going to give you great pleasure' and so on.

2. What events might someone who had been given a cold reading assume match the fortune told to them? 'News from afar', for example, might refer to a movie made overseas that you enjoy, just as it might be a long-distance telephone call.

Names

Few in Shakespeare's time had surnames. Aristocrats were known by their title, and

These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

titles could be given or taken away.

Discuss:

1. Annie in the book does not have a surname — 'Grasseyes' is a description of her made up by Rab. Rab, too, is 'the smith' and does not have a surname. But Lady Macbeth's own name is never used — she is referred to simply by the title of her husband. What does this say about the power the three wield in their society?
2. Annie, Rab and Lady Macbeth must act secretly. Compare why they must do so in the culture of the time. How much does this need for secrecy affect the tragedy in both play and book?

The Historical Basis of the Play and the Book

The historical Macbeth was elected by Scotland's chiefs and bishops. He ruled long and well, and his wife was renowned for her wisdom and kindness.

Activity:

1. Research the true history of Macbeth and the sources that Shakespeare used to write the false history. For example, why does the character of Banquo appear in the play? Why do the witches play such a significant role? There is no historical basis for either Banquo or the witches in the true history of Macbeth.
2. Compare the choice of main characters in the play with those in the book.
3. Neither the play or *Third Witch* is based in the time of the actual historical King Macbeth. Why did both authors choose another era?
4. What aspects of the background in both play and book are those of Shakespeare's time, not 600 years earlier?

5. What aspects in both play and book are English, not Scottish?

Similar Works by Jackie French

Jackie French has written about the true history of the real Macbeth in *Macbeth and Son*.

The Diary of William Shakespeare, Gentleman is the factually based, fictional diary of Shakespeare for the years after he retired from the theatre. It presents an accurate social background and textual context for both his plays and the books Jackie French based on his plays.

Discuss:

1. Compare the character of Macbeth in *Macbeth and Son* with the one in *Third Witch*.
2. Why did the author choose to have the Shakespearean plays retold from the point of view of a female character?
3. Jackie French has stated that a good work of historical fiction 'weaves between the facts of history' and does not conflict with them. Does *Third Witch* succeed in giving another interpretation of Shakespeare's play, or does it contradict parts of it?

Australian Curriculum Relevance

Outcomes addressed by the novel and associated activities included in these notes:

These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

Year 8 Stage 4

Language

ACELA1540

Understand how conventions of speech adopted by communities influence the identities of people in those communities.

ACELA1547

Recognise that vocabulary choices contribute to the specificity, abstraction and style of texts.

Literature

ACELT1626

Explore the ways that ideas and viewpoints in literary texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts may reflect or challenge the values of individuals and groups.

ACELT1627

Share, reflect on, clarify and evaluate opinions and arguments about aspects of literary texts.

ACELT1629

Recognise, explain and analyse the ways literary texts draw on readers' knowledge of other texts and enable new understanding and appreciation of aesthetic qualities.

Literacy

ACELY1732

Analyse and evaluate the ways that text structures and language features vary according to the purpose of the text and the ways that referenced sources add authority to a text.

ACELY1733

Apply increasing knowledge of vocabulary, text structures and language features to understand the content of texts.

Year 9 Stage 5

Language

ACELA1552

Investigate how evaluation can be expressed directly and indirectly using devices, for example allusion, evocative vocabulary and metaphor.

ACELA1553

Understand that authors innovate with text structures and language for specific purposes and effects.

ACELA1561

Identify how vocabulary choices contribute to specificity, abstraction and stylistic effectiveness.

Literature

ACELT1633

Interpret and compare how representations of people and culture in literary texts are drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts.

ACELT1634

Reflect on, discuss and explore notions of literary value and how and why such notions vary according to context.

ACELT1636

Analyse texts from familiar and unfamiliar contexts, and discuss and evaluate their content and the appeal of an individual author's style.

Literacy

ACELY1742

Interpret, analyse and evaluate how different perspectives of issue, event, situation, individuals or groups are constructed to serve specific purposes in texts.

ACELY1743

Apply an expanding vocabulary to read increasingly complex texts with fluency and comprehension.

ACELY1744

Use comprehension strategies to interpret and analyse texts, comparing and evaluating representations of an event, issue, situation or character in different texts.

Further Reading

Read the school synopsis on the Royal Shakespeare Company website:

<https://cdn2.rsc.org.uk/sitefinity/education-pdfs/school-synopses/edu-macbeth-schoolsynopsis.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

Watch the first video of the 2011 Michael Boyd RSC production of *Macbeth*:

<https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare/macbeth/past-productions/michael-production/stage-footage>

boyd-2011-

The complete digital text is available here:

<http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/macbethscenes.html>

The BBC has outlined the historical context of *Macbeth*, the time it was written in and how this influenced Shakespeare's play:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/higher/english/macbeth/background/revision/1/>

Bibliography

Texts

Oxford School Shakespeare: Macbeth (2009 edition)

Shakespeare the Playwright: A Companion to the Complete Tragedies, Histories, Comedies and Romances
by Victor L. Cahn

Macbeth: A Lust for Power by L.C. Knight

Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth by A.C. Bradley

Website Links

Macbeth plot overview, scene breakdown and play analysis:

<http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/macbeth/summary.html>

These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

Macbeth scene summaries and contextual information:

<http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/macbeth/macbethps.html>

Techniques and references in *Macbeth*:

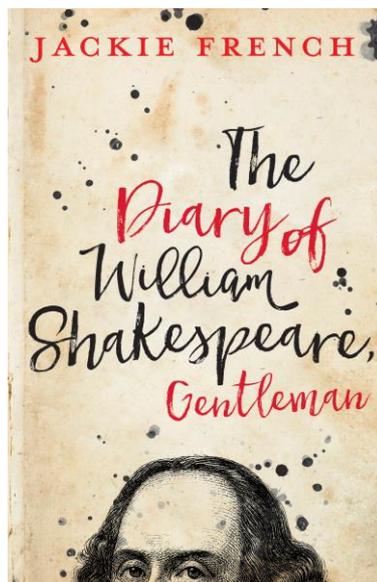
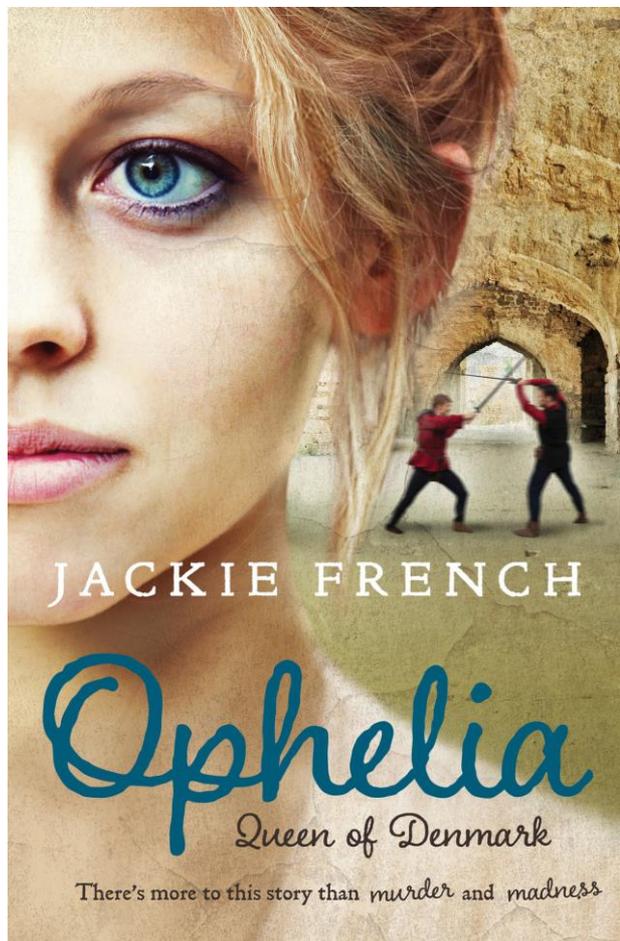
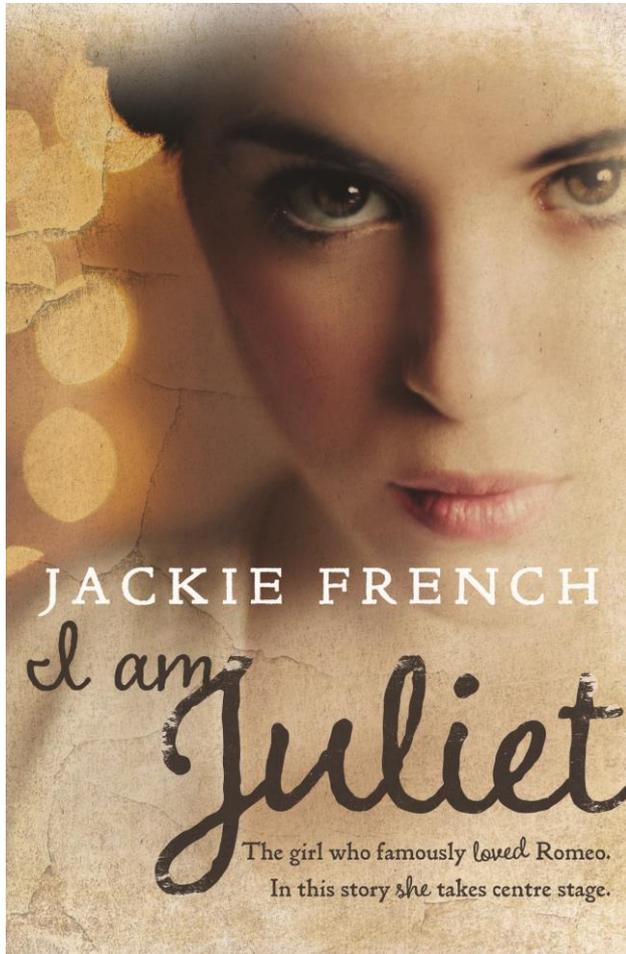
<http://www.shakespearestudyguide.com/Macbeth.html>

US teacher's guide to *Macbeth*:

<http://www.penguin.com/static/pdf/teachersguides/macbeth.pdf>

Macbeth study guide:

<http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/macbeth/macbethresources.html>



These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.