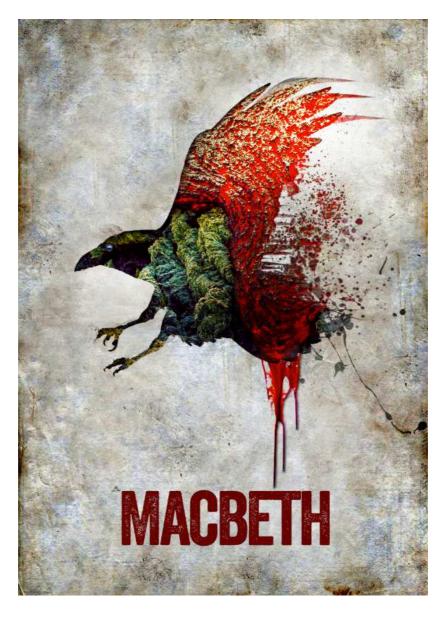


Macbeth of Fire and Ice



Educational Resource Pack

By Jon Gun Thor with Jemima Foxtrot (Arcola Engagement)





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About this educational pack and how to use it

This educational pack has been designed as an aid for teachers and students for use when studying *Macbeth* and especially in response to this production *Macbeth of Fire and Ice*.

Part 1 provides a historical context of *Macbeth*, a simple plot synopsis, and summarises some of the play's main themes. This can be used as a starting point for students and teachers.

Part 2 focuses on three main areas: the Weird Sisters, Lady Macbeth and symbols in the play. It also looks at the connection between *Macbeth* and Norse mythology. This section includes study questions and practical exercises which can be used either before the students see the production or to reflect afterwards.

Part 3 contains some more general study questions and exercises that tackle the play as a whole; again, these materials can be used either before or after the students see the production.

Part 4 is for use after students have seen the production. It asks study questions about several elements of the production and then asks students to write a critical review of it. This is a useful tool for students to learn evaluation skills from a specific production.

Part 5 contains an additional exercise which asks students to respond to photographs presented in an exhibition alongside the production. This section also provides suggestions for further resources and information about the cast and crew.

Headings in **RED** indicate study or discussion questions Headings in **BLUE** indicate practical exercises





Part 1: The Play

Macbeth

Macbeth is believed to have been written between 1603 and 1607 and is most commonly dated as written in 1606. It is considered to be one of Shakespeare's darkest and most powerful tragedies. Originally set in Scotland, *Macbeth* tells a tale of how boundless ambition can have disastrous effects.

Shakespeare's primary source for *Macbeth* was Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland,* first published in 1577. The outlines of Shakespeare's story are derived from Holinshed's account of Kings Duncan and Macbeth. In addition, Shakespeare seems to have taken many particulars from Holinshed's account of King Duffe, who died eighty years before Macbeth did.

Holinshed's *Macbeth* takes place in the 10th century and is influenced by one of the Icelandic Sagas; *Orkneyinga Saga* which was written around 1230 by an unknown Icelandic author. The Orkneyinga Saga is also known as The History of the Earls of Orkney and is a historical narrative of the history of the Orkney Islands from their capture by the Norwegian king in the ninth century onwards until about 1200.

Plot synopsis

The play opens as three Weird Sisters plan a meeting with the Scottish nobleman Macbeth, who at that moment is fighting in a great battle. When the battle is over, Macbeth and his friend Banquo come across the witches who offer them three predictions: that Macbeth will become Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland, and that Banquo's descendants will become kings.

Banquo laughs at the prophecies but Macbeth is excited. Macbeth's excitement is heightened as soon after their meeting with the witches Macbeth is made Thane of Cawdor by King Duncan, in return for his bravery in the battle. He writes to his wife, Lady Macbeth, who shares his excitment, but is even more ambitious. A messenger tells Lady Macbeth that King Duncan is on his way to their castle and she invokes evil spirits to help her slay him. Lady Macbeth persuades Macbeth to kill Duncan which he does by stabbing him to death. Macbeth is crowned king.

Macbeth now begins to fear the third prediction that Banquo's descendants will also be kings will also come true. He therefore decides to have Banquo and his son killed, but the plan goes wrong - Banquo is killed but his son escapes. Macbeth then thinks he is going mad because he sees Banquo's ghost at his banquet. He then receives yet more predictions from the witches which seem so inconcievable that he believes he will never lose his position of power. He starts to become ruthless and kills the family of Macduff who is an important lord. Macbeth still thinks he is safe but one by one the witches' prophecies come true. Lady Macbeth cannot stop thinking about Duncan, becomes deranged and dies. A large army marches on Macbeth's castle and Macbeth is killed by Macduff. Macduff hails Malcolm as King of Scotland and





Malcolm makes the final speech of the play; he thanks everybody and promises that all of his thanes will be rewarded by becoming earls.

Macbeth of Fire and Ice – The Production

Macbeth of Fire and Ice is a modern and dynamic telling of the story of Macbeth influenced by Norse mythology. Icelandic Director Jon Gun Thor draws on his country's culture and history to influence and shape this production. The raw brutality of the Vikings, the powers of the Valkyries, the mystic forest, the Nordic lights, the sounds of volcanic eruptions and hot springs all paint the picture of Macbeth of Fire and Ice.

Major themes and areas for discussion

Major themes in *Macbeth* include:

- Ambition: Macbeth's ruthless search for power, encouraged by Lady Macbeth, is what fuels the action and causes his downfall.
- Evil: the urge to destroy whatever is good; the brooding presence of murderous intent and action.
- Order and disorder: the struggle to maintain or destroy social and natural bonds and the destruction of morality.
- Appearance versus reality: deciet and hypocrisy mean that appearances can not be trusted.
- Violence and tyranny: warfare, destruction and oppresion occur throughout.
 The play also explores the response of Macbeth's subjects the escalating violence and how ambition can transform into tyranny.
- Guilt and conscience: Macbeth and Lady Macbeth both know that murder is wrong but does it nonetheless and suffers agonies of conscience as a result.
- Gender: Lady Macbeth shows ruthless traits that are typically considered masculine, rather than typically feminie traits of loving and caring. There is a constant pressure on the men in the play to fulfil roles of masculinity. There could also be gender confusion about the Weird Sisters.





Part 2: Areas of study

A background of Norse mythology

Norse mythology, or Scandinavian mythology, is the body of mythology of the North Germanic people stemming from Norse paganism and continuing after the christianisation of Scandinavia and into the Scandinavian folklore of the modern period.

The following is an extract from the first and best known poem of the Poetic Edda. The Poetic Edda is a collection of Old Norse poems primarily preserved in the Codex Regius. The author of the Poetic Edda is unknown. This extract can be read as background to *Macbeth* and several similarities can be drawn between the role of the three maidens of the poem and the three Weird Sisters of *Macbeth*.

Völuspá.

I know an ash stands,

named Yggdrasill,

a high tree, washed

with white clay;

from it come the dews

that fall in the valleys,

it stands ever grenn

over Spring of the Past.

From there come the much knowing maidens,

three from the sea

that lies under the tree:

one was named Past,

another present

-they carved in wood-

and Future the thid;





they laid down the law,

they choose lives

from the children of men

people's fates.

Study Questions

- Can you identify what the three maidens in Völuspá have in common with the three Weird Sisters in *Macbeth*?
- Write your own poem which describes your own invented version of the Weird Sisters of *Macbeth* or the three maidens of this poem. Think about what they might look like, how they might speak and the effect their fortune telling abilities might have on the people around them.

Practical Exercises

- Working in threes come up with at least three ideas about how to solve the problem of the stage direction Witches vanish (Act I, Scene III), think about what might be most visually effective for the audience. Choose one of the ideas to develop, rehearse and present to the class.
- In groups of three or more look at Act IV, Scene I and come up with an inventive way of presenting the three apparitions an armed head, a bloody child and a child crowned with a tree in his hand. Be as inventive as you like and think about using moment, sound and any available props. Rehearse and present to the class.

The Weird Sisters and the Norns.

There are many parallels between the Norns of Norse mythology and the Weird Sisters of *Macbeth*.

The Norns

The Norns were three sisters who were the Northern goddesses of fate. According to some mythologists, their purpose in coming to us was to warn the gods of future evil, to bid them make good use of the present, and to teach them wholesome lessons from the past.

These three sisters were personifications of the past, present, and future. These Norns were daily visited by the gods, who loved to ask them questions about their fate.





The Weird Sisters

The Three Witches or Weird Sisters are characters in William Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*. They are never referred to as witches in the play.

The three Weird Sisters first appear in Act I, Scene I where they agree to meet later with Macbeth. In Act I, Scene III, they greet Macbeth with a prophecy that he shall be king, and his companion, Banquo, with a prophecy that he shall generate a line of kings. The prophecies have great impact upon Macbeth. As the audience later learns, he has considered usurping the throne of Scotland. The Weird Sisters next appear in what is generally accepted to be a non-Shakespearean scene, Act III, Scene V, where they are reprimanded by Hecate for dealing with Macbeth without her participation. Hecate orders the trio to congregate at a forbidding place where Macbeth will seek their art. In Act IV, Scene I the Weird Sisters gather as Hecate ordered and produce a series of ominous visions for Macbeth that herald his downfall. The meeting ends with a show of Banquo and his royal descendants. The Weird Sisters then vanish.

Study Questions

- Using the above descriptions of the role of the Norns in Norse mythology and the role of the Weird Sisters in *Macbeth*, write a list of the similarities between them.
- How do Banquo and Macbeth react when they first encounter the weird sisters in Act I, Scene III? Are they surprised, afraid, confused?
- The sisters accurately predict Macbeth's future, but do they actively control his fate? Why or why not?
- Are there connections or similarities between the weird sisters and any other characters in the play? If so, what are they?
- Who do the weird sisters represent today?

Practical Exercises

- In groups of three look at Act I, Scene I and develop and rehearse how you might present the scene for a radio play. Of course, with a radio play, the audience cannot see anything. The witches' tone of voice is therefore essential, it is particularly important for the audience to be able to differentiate between each witch by their voices alone. Don't forget to think about sound effects, the listener must understand the setting is a wild and windy heath, not a cosy living room! Perform to the rest of the class. It may be useful to ask the audience to shut their eyes.
- In groups of three look at Act I, Scene I and develop and rehearse how you might present the scene as a mime, in complete silence. It is important to think about movement in terms of character as well as to convey the meaning and action of the scene.
- You may want to have half the class work on the radio play version of the scene while the other half develops the mime version. The students can then discuss and evaluate the scenes.





Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth is a powerful presence in the play. There is conflict between femininity and masculinity in Lady Macbeth's character, she suppresses her instincts toward compassion, motherhood, and fragility — associated with femininity — in favour of ambition, ruthlessness, and the singleminded pursuit of power traits which are associated with masculinity.

Lady Macbeth's masculine behaviour makes her similar to the Weird Sisters who are also depicted as defeminised, androgynous figures. In Act I, Scene III Banquo says of the witches "You should be women/ And yet your beards forbid me to interpret/That you are so"

Study Questions

- What does Lady Macbeth have in common with the Weird Sisters? Use examples from the text to support your answers.
- Discuss why, in this production, the actor who plays Lady Macbeth also plays one of the Weird Sisters.
- Using examples from the text, can you identify ways in which Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters challenge typical gender roles?

Practical Exercises

- Lady Macbeth takes an active, masculine role while Macbeth becomes passive; no longer the valiant soldier but the doubting accomplice, subject to Lady Macbeth's demands that he go through with the dark plot. In pairs look at Act I, Sc V and each choose a character: either Macbeth or Lady Macbeth. Read the scene through and then, in character, ask each other the following questions
 - Who are you?
 - What are you doing?
 - Where have you just come from?
 - What do you want in this scene?
 - What do you want in the whole play?
 - Use five adjectives to describe how you feel.

If you are struggling to find the answers to these questions, return to the the text.

- Something stops Lady Macbeth from killing Duncan herself: 'Had he not resembled/ My father as he slept, I had done't' (Act II, Scene II). Working alone, use these lines to inspire a short monologue based on one of the following:
 - The childhood of Lady Macbeth: told by herself
 - The childhood of Lady Macbeth: told by her father
 - Lady Macbeth and the sleeping Duncan





Symbols in *Macbeth*

The Raven: In Shakespeare's time, and indeed to some extent today, the raven was associated with death and doom. Shakespeare actually referes to the raven across all his works more than he does to any other bird. In Act I, Scene V Lady Macbeth says "The raven himself is hoarse/That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan"

The Owl: In Shakespeare's time, the cry of a screech owl was thoughto to announce death. In Act II, Scene II, Lady Macbeth refers to the owl as a "fatal bellman/Which gives the stern'st good-night"

Blood:Once Macbeth and Lady Macbeth embark upon their murderous journey, blood comes to symbolize their guilt, and they begin to feel that their crimes have stained them.

The Weather: From the thunder and lightning that accompany the Weird Sisters to the terrible storms that rage on the night of Duncan's murder, weather is symbolic of corruption in the moral and political orders.

Study Questions

It is interesting to note the differnces in various symbols' meanings in Norse mythology and in *Macbeth*. Using the internet, research and write down three things that the following things symbolise, first in *Macbeth*, then in Norse mythology.

Raven, owl, sleep, tree, blood and weather.

- Can you think of any other symbols that feature in Macbeth? Using the internet, research whether these symbols also feature in Norse mythology and, if so, what they represent.
- Can you think of any symbols used today in modern literature, on the television, in films or on the internet? What are these symbols and what do they represent?

Practical Exercises

• In small groups, choose one of the symbols from *Macbeth* – it could be one identified already or one of your own and create two still images with your bodies. One image should be a portrayal of the symbol (for example, blood) and the other should be a portrayal of what that symbol represents (in this instance, guilt). Share with the rest of the class who will then try to identify which symbols are being portrayed.





Part 3: General activities and exercises

Study Questions

Responding to the production

After the production, consider these questions.

- Did you empathise with any of the characters? Who and why?
- Did you sympathise with any of the characters? Who and why?
- Was there a message, a moral, or anything to be learnt from the action of the play and if so, what was it?
- Can you think of five ways this production was successful in conveying the play's message?

Macbeth asks many ethical and moral questions including:

- Are you a murderer if you ask somebody else to kill for you?
- Does power corrupt?
- Can ambition lead to evil?

Try to answer these questions with reference to the play and then try to identify at least three more moral questions that *Macbeth* asks us to consider.

Practical Exercises

- In small groups identify scenes which are set inside and which are set outside, which are in light and which in darkness. The scenes on the heath should be performed very differently from the scenes in the castle. Scenes that takes place in daylight are different than senses in the darkness. A sense of environment is extremely important so try rehearsing Act III, scene V outside or perhaps even try rehearsing Act II, scene II in the dark! Take note of and discuss how a change of environment effects how you speak and move.
- In small groups place a bunch of keys somewhere on the floor and blindfold one actor. The actor must walk towards the keys and pick them up without a sound, if they make any noise at all, they must start again. The aim of this is to try to recreate the way Macbeth may have been feeling when he killed Duncan. When Macbeth stabs Duncan, it is in complete darkness, everyone is fast asleep, if someone wakes up, then Macbeth will be discovered and possibly killed himself. So he must murder Duncan silently. Try to make sure that everybody has a chance to be blindfolded and then discuss how this made you feel. Nervous? Tense? Scared? This should help you understand how Macbeth feels in Act II, Scene II after he has murdered Duncan.
- In groups of 4 6 rehearse and perform a three minute version of the play, think about what the key events of the action are. Afterwards discuss why you chose certain moments and characters to feature in your condensed version as well as why you chose to leave certain characters/moments out.





- In Pairs decide on one character each and choose no more that five lines from the play that describe your character. These lines can be spoken by your character itself or may be spoken a different character referring to your own. Once you have chosen these lines take turns to perform them to your partner. Now try performing these lines to your partner without saying the actual words, just making noises or speaking nonsense instead. Does the expression in your voice allow your partner to understand your character's nature? How can you make them understand it better? Perhaps you could include physical movements to make your character clearer.
- Working alone, choose a speech from Macbeth and then follow Jon Gun Thor's direction to ensure that you invest it with character and feeling. First of all, ensure you know the meaning of the text. If there are words you don't understand, look them up until you understand the meaning of the whole speech. Then find the exclamation marks and question marks: these may not always be actually marked in the text but where you think the character is excited or passionate or angry about something, use an exclamation mark. If the character is asking a question, make sure you make this very clear, really ask the question.

Look at the punctuation, the full stops and the commas. After each full stop there should be a breath/pause for three beats and after each comma there should be a breath/pause for just one beat which often means that the following text should be a continuation of the same thought. Find the parentheses or the brackets in the speech. What is of primary importance and what can be bracketed off? How do you say things of lesser importance?

All of these exercises should help you to add expression into the speech. Once you have identified all of these points, you should have a better understanding of the rhythm and meaning of the speech. Now try to forget these intricacies and perform the speech naturally.

 Many people say that if Shakespeare were alive now, he would be writing for soap operas. In small groups devise a 5 minute, modern day version of Macbeth in the style of a soap opera. Rehearse and share with the class.





Part 4: Macbeth of Fire and Ice

The director's background and approach

Jon Gun Thor is Icelandic and draws upon his cultural background in his approach. He studied directing at Drama Centre London between 2003 and 2006 and during this time was privileged to study under Di Trevis (who was the first female director to work at the National Theatre).

He has written and directed twelve plays and directed many more including musicals, physical theatre, new writing and an opera.

A Note from Jon Gun Thor:

"To direct Shakespeare is very challenging and you have to understand the text before you enter the rehearsal room. How could you direct the actors if you don't know the meaning of the text yourself?

Because English is not my first language, I use both an English Shakespearean script and an Icelandic translation. Often it is better and easier just to read the text in English but it's nice to refer to the text in your native language. In some translations the translator has too much respect for Shakespeare and they make the text seem even older and more difficult than it is, this just makes Shakespeare boring. When I studied Macbeth I used a very good book called NCS; the new Cambridge Shakespeare, edited by A. B. Braunmuller. That book is an excellent translation. There is an explanation on almost every word, and I also look up almost every word. When I know the meaning behind every single word, this starts to be fun. Directing becomes like a puzzle or the Da Vinci code.

I wouldn't start my direction by deciding on how or where I set it up; as a Second World War production of Macbeth, African Macbeth, Macbeth in the space or Macbeth based on Northern Myths - UNTIL, I have done my homework and know the meaning of the play. The text should guide how you approach the production.

But the good and exciting thing with Shakespearean text is that you are always finding more and more out. And you never know it all but work makes you confident."

There are many different ways to approach a powerful Shakespearian text such as Macbeth: due to his cultural background, this Jon Gun Thor has chosen to interpret the play with the assistance of Norse mythology."





Production Elements

The Cast

The cast are the group of actors who perform in the production. This cast is made up of an ensemble of 6 artists, dancers and singers. In this production, it is important that the actors have many inter-disciplinary skills. Every cast member, except the actor playing Macbeth, plays another role in the story.

A Note from Jon Gun Thor:

"When I enter the rehearsal I have to be fully confident, I know what I want to aim at, but I also have to be open minded. I direct my actors by asking questions;

- •Who are you?
- •What are you doing?
- •Where are you coming from?
- •What do you want in this scene?
- •What do you want in the whole play?

By asking them those questions, I am not really directing them, more guiding them to the right answers and often they come up with a better idea than I first thought of. That makes a good ensemble.

Shakespeare himself was a brilliant director and a golden rule is: IT'S ALL IN THE TEXT"

Study Questions

- How did one actor use their voice to enhance a key moment?
- How did one actor use their face to convey their character?
- What effect was created by the actors playing more than one role?

The Movement

In theatre, movement is often used to convey character, atmosphere and emotion as well as helping the audience better understand the action. Hannes Thor is the movement director of *Macbeth of Fire and Ice*. He is a contemporary dancer at the Icelandic Dance Company. In this production, movement is a crucial aspect in reinforcing the mythological and supernatural elements for example the Weird Sisters.

This production endeavours to create the fight scenes truthfully. It uses stage combat and martial arts to try to create a realistic and brutal fight experience for the audience.





Study Questions

- How was movement used to enhance a key moment?
- How did the Weird Sisters move and what effect did this have?
- Were the fight scenes realistic? Why? How did the fight scenes make you feel?
- Choose one actor and think about the way they moved to differentiate between their characters.

Music and Sound

Music is often used in theatre to create the atmosphere of the production and music is integral to in this production of *Macbeth* for this very reason. Harry Napier is the musical director of *Macbeth* of *Fire and Ice*. He is an actor/ Musician and improvises the music during rehearsals. Harry is an actor and therefore knows the meaning of the scene before he starts to compose the music on the cello. He uses a pedal to loop the music and with that pedal he becomes a full orchestra.

Sound effects are used to illustrate the action of play, for example the cry of the screech owl in Act II, Scene II.

Study Questions

- How was live or recorded music used in the production? Think about when, at which points in the action, music was used. Also consider how music affected the atmosphere of the play.
- How was live and recorded sound used and to what extent did this reflect the content of the play?

The set design and use of space

The set design of a production creates the place, the setting, the world of the play. *Macbeth* has many different settings; inside the castle, out in the wood, on the heath and there is potential to create all of these different settings. In this production the set design is simple but, as the production is inspired by Norse mythology, the Norn's web and the tree of life both feature as part of the set.

Study Questions

- How was the set used in the production?
- How was the thrust stage used? Was there any difference to how the action was presented in comparison to a conventional proscenium arch?
- How did the production present the different settings of the play?
- How was the space used during a key moment?





Lighting

Lighting is important in theatre for a number of reasons and can be used in many ways including to create setting and atmosphere. Because of the simple set design, *Macbeth of Fire and Ice* uses light and sound to create different settings within the play. The director does not use blackouts in between scenes but rather keeps the stage lit throughout the play, this decision was inspired by Iceland where, in summer time, it is light for 24 hours a day. Macbeth also suffers from insomnia which also inspired the decision to keep the stage lit throughout.

Study Questions

- How was lighting used in this production?
- How was lighting used during a key moment?
- Was any coloured lighting used? Why? Was it effective?

Costume

Costume is used most commonly in theatre to illustrate character, it is also often used to convey the setting of the play both in time and place.

Study Questions

- How was costume used in the production? What did it tell us?
- To what extent was costume used to symbolise the themes of the play?

Study Question

Writing a critical review of the production

Using your answers to the above study questions, write a critical review of the production *Macbeth of Fire and Ice*.

- Begin with the facts of the production: What? Who? Where? When? Directed by? Written by?
- Then think about your own personal reaction to the production. How did it make you feel? What were you expecting from a production of Macbeth and did it meet those expectations?
- Think about the first key moment of the production. What were your impressions when you first walked into the auditorium? How did you react to the opening scene?





- Pick three moments in the production that you felt were important or which particularly affected you. Describe these moments each with a focus on a different area of the production. For instance, the review of moment one could focus on the actors and how they used their voices or bodies to express meaning whilst the review of moment two could focus on design elements of the production such as lighting or costume.
- Think of any elements of the production that you felt could perhaps be improved and explain why.
- Finally, summarise your overall feeling about the production, did you enjoy it? Why? Was it a successful retelling of a famous Shakespearean story?
- Throughout the review, think about the kind of persuasive language reviewers use. You are trying to convey your opinion of the production to the reader. Try to imitate the writing style that newspaper reviewers use.

Part 5: Additional materials

Landscape and Nature in *Macbeth* and Ragnar's photographs:

This production is accompanied by an exhibition of photographs by award winning photographer Ragnar Th. Sigurdsson, showing captivating images of the land where *Macbeth of Fire and Ice* is set. Ragnar Th. Sigurdsson is a photographer specialising in capturing the beauty of the landscapes of Iceland, Greenland and the Artic. In March 2010, he gained international recognition with his shots of the erupting volcano Eyjafjallajökull.

As in other Shakespearean tragedies, Macbeth's grotesque killing spree is accompanied by a number of unnatural occurrences in the natural realm. From the thunder and lightning that accompany the witches' appearances to the terrible storms that rage on the night of Duncan's murder, these violations of the natural order are symbolic of corruption in the moral and political order.

The photographs below portray incredible and unusual sights in the natural realm.

Study Question

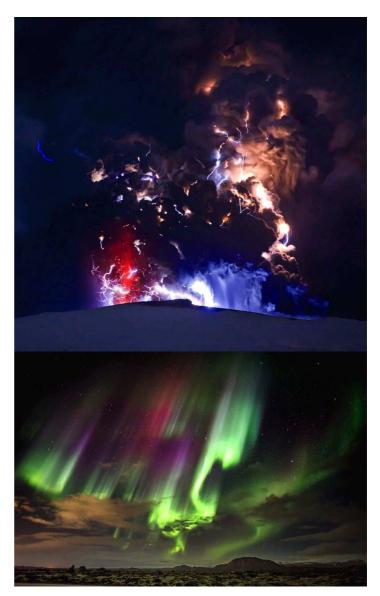
(photos on next page)

Can you find any quotes from *Macbeth* that you think relate to these photographs?















Further Resources

Further Reading

- Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human.* New York: Riverhead Books, 1998.
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- Muir, Kenneth. Shakespeare's Tragic Sequence. Oxford, UK: Routledge, reprint edition 2005.
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- Siegel, Paul. Shakespearean Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise. New York: New York University Press, 1957

Films and Television

- **Game of Thrones** which draws heavily from Nordic and Celtic mythology.
- House of Cards notice how Kevin Spacey looks at the camera, this is how the director of Macbeth of Fire and Ice believes the actors should address the audience.
- Lord of the Flies for a tale of how power corrupts.
- Insomnia because Macbeth can't sleep
- **ShakespeaRE-Told (BBC)** A chef and his wife resort to murder to gain ownership of a Glaswegian restaurant.

Cast and Crew

Jon Gun Thor Directed by Movement Director: Hannes Thor Music by: Harry Napier

Cast: Mark Ebulue Ashley Gayle, Oliver Gomm, Molly

Gromadzki, Joseph Macnab and Harry Napier



