

DISCUSSION GUIDE

LADY MACBETH'S
DAUGHTER

by Lisa Klein

About the book: When fiery Scottish general Macbeth returns home from battle, he is aghast to find that his wife has given birth to a daughter—and one who appears to be malformed, at that. Denying that he could parent such a child, he demands that the babe be left in the woods for wolves, despite Lady Macbeth's tearful protests. The child, named Albia, is saved from that fate and is raised by three sisters, who pledge to keep the girl's heritage a secret. But what will happen when Albia learns of her true parentage? And how will she react when she discovers the treachery of her father, who has conspired with Lady Macbeth to kill King Duncan and attain the throne of Scotland for himself? Will Albia ever meet her mother—or want to—knowing that Lady Macbeth did not save her?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Lisa Klein taught Shakespeare at the Ohio State University before she began writing books for young readers. She is the author of the acclaimed *Ophelia* and *Two Girls of Gettysburg*. She lives in Columbus, Ohio, with her family.

AUTHOR INTERVIEW:

What intrigued you about telling Albia's story? How did you begin?

I wanted to retell Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as a young adult novel from the perspective of a minor character. The problem was, there are no young people in *Macbeth* (except for Macduff's son). I couldn't use Lady Macbeth alone, because she was too central, and she was older than my projected readers. So I decided to invent a character, a daughter who was loved by Lady Macbeth but rejected by Macbeth, in order to help explain the tragic action and motivations of Shakespeare's two main characters. At first I felt like I was going out on a limb—in *Ophelia*, I used a character

who was already there. But as I started working Albia's story between the lines of Shakespeare's, and weaving her life with that of the Wyrd sisters and Lady Macbeth, a lot of things fell into place for me. For example, Macbeth's lack of a male heir in a play where King Duncan, Banquo, and Macduff all have sons can be seen as a factor in his ruthless ambition for power. I began by thinking through every aspect of *Macbeth* with my character in place and then turning to history for facts about the real Macbeth and his wife and their times. Then I wove all those elements together into a story that would take my new character from her birth to age sixteen, and end where Shakespeare's play ends.

What is the best writing advice you ever heard?

It was in the context of writing poetry that someone advised me, "Make every word count." But it works for fiction writing too. Choose the best and the fewest words to make your point. But here's *my* advice: Don't let anything tie you up at first. Free-write it all out, then revise and revise again. It's like spreading out a thousand Lego pieces on the floor, building the rocket or the action figure, then putting away all the pieces you didn't need. You've got something neat that you made, *and* your room is clean afterward.

What can your fans look forward to next?

I'm working on a story that spans Queen Elizabeth's England and the New World, an *Ohhello*-like tale of love across racial boundaries. I'm also thinking about a more lighthearted novel based on Shakespeare's comedies.

DISCUSSION GUIDE:

1. How did the three Wyrð sisters come to raise the infant, Albia? What is each sister's reaction to the baby? Why is this child so important?
2. Do you see Lady Macbeth (Grelach) as a victim of her circumstances or a creator of chaos? What power would noblewomen like Lady Macbeth have had in this time period? How does Grelach wield hers?
3. Describe Albia's childhood, being raised by Geillis and Helwain. How might Albia's life have been different if she had been raised by Lady Macbeth? Do you think she would have been happier in the Macbeth household, or not? Why?
4. Geillis tells Albia of four spiritual worlds that guide the lives of the Scottish people: the Now-world, the Under-world, the Other-world, and the As-Yet-world. Describe the mythology behind each of these four worlds. How do myths develop in a culture? What clues do they give us about a culture's people?
5. What gift does Albia possess that even Helwain does not? Why does this bother Helwain? How does Albia feel about her abilities? How does she learn to manage them?
6. How do Helwain's predictions at Stravenock Henge influence Macbeth? Do you think Helwain bears any responsibility for Macbeth's actions? Why?
7. How does Albia's life change during her first summer in the shieling? Whom does she meet? Is it natural for friends to eclipse family at some point in life? Why do you think this is so?
8. Why is Albia sent to live in Dunbeag? Describe her foster family. What does she learn from Banquo, Breda, and Fleance? Compare and contrast her new life to her childhood days with Helwain and Geillis.

9. Albia says, "To know my father is to know myself." Do you think this is true? What does she think when she learns who her true parents are? How would you feel to learn that you are the daughter of a king, who is also a murderer?
10. After Duncan's murder, what further plot does Macbeth mastermind? Is he mad, or has his treachery led to madness?
11. How do Albia, Colum, and Caora become involved in the plot to overthrow Macbeth, now king of Scotland? What discoveries do they make along the journey?
12. Albia says of Lady Macbeth, "My mother is the queen. I feel no speck of pride in this, for the woman came by that title by foul deeds. Still less can she be called a mother, for she did not even protect me from my cruel father. I deny her." Would you feel similarly, or would curiosity have you seek out your birth mother? Could you forgive Lady Macbeth? How are justice and revenge woven together in Albia's life? Which is more important?
13. How have Fleance and Albia changed each other? Who has the better claim to revenge? In the end, do you think Albia should accept Fleance's proposal or not? Why? Do you think his love is true, or is it motivated by ambition?
14. Whom do you blame for the evil acts of the novel—is it Helwain, for planting the seeds of discontent in Macbeth's mind; Lady Macbeth, for nurturing his ambitions; or simply Macbeth, for succumbing to his desire for power and glory? Was it fate or free will? Which do you most believe in?

PROJECTS:

Reading:

As you read fill out the following character chart based on the novel. Use it for discussion and to anchor your reading.

Name of character:	Relationship to Albia:	Most important facts:	Fate:
Geillis			
Helwain			
Rhuven			
Grelach (Lady Macbeth)			
Macbeth			
Luoch			
Colum			
Caora			
Banquo			
Breda			
Fleance			
Fiona Macduff & her children			

Language Arts:

Create a Venn diagram to compare and contrast this novel to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Use it for discussion.

Art:

Create a piece of art that represents the mind of a character. It can be in any media you prefer but explain your piece (and your choice of color, form, figure, and media) in an artist's statement that you enclose with the piece.

Drama:

You are designing a stage production of *Lady Macbeth's Daughter*. Using "Celtic Britain" or "Prehistoric Scotland" as keywords research the archaeology of tenth-century Scotland. Then sketch the settings for some key scenes in the novel (such as the Shieling, Stravenock Henge, the fort at Dun Sinane.) Or sketch costumes for the main characters.

Literature:

After reading both *Macbeth* and *Lady Macbeth's Daughter*, write a review and critique of Klein's novel, using the voice of William Shakespeare.

This guide was created by **Tracie Vaughn Zimmer**, a reading specialist and author of *The Floating Cirrus*, visit her website to find hundreds of guides to literature.

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