**Macbeth Theme Discussion Questions**

**Discuss these questions with your group before jumping into finding text examples of your big idea. These questions should lead you to thinking about the themes (claims) that Shakespeare is making with each of the big ideas. Write your group answers to the big idea questions on a separate sheet of paper. You only need to complete the questions for your assigned big idea. Answers to questions should be 1-2 sentences.**

**Fate Vs Freewill:**

1. What is Macbeth's initial response to the weird sisters' prophesy? Does his attitude change at some point? If so, when does the change occur?
2. Macbeth is repeatedly described as giving the witches his "rapt" attention. Why is that? What does this suggest about Macbeth's choices?
3. Do all of the witches' prophesies come true?
4. What role does Lady Macbeth play in her husband's actions? Is she always involved in Macbeth's decision making?

**Ambition:**

1. What compels Macbeth to murder Duncan? What drives him to continue committing heinous acts after the initial murder?
2. What does Lady Macbeth say about her husband's ambition? What does this reveal about her desires?
3. If Macbeth believed he was fated to have the crown, can he be credited (or blamed) with ambition in trying to gain it?
4. What fuels Malcolm's interest in defending Scotland? Do his actions up to the final battle indicate that he's prepared to be King? Is he ambitious? What is the difference between him and Macbeth, if they’re after the same throne?

**Power:**

1. What kind of a ruler is King Duncan? How would you compare his leadership to Macbeth's?
2. What is the play's attitude toward the murder of King Duncan? Toward the death of Macbeth?
3. In Act iv, Scene iii, Malcolm pretends that he thinks he'll become a tyrant once he's crowned king. Why does he do this? What's Macduff's response? What's the overall purpose of this scene?
4. Does the play ever portray an ideal monarch? If yes, what does that monarch look like? If no, why do you think the play never shows us a good king?

**Appearance vs Reality:**

1. At the beginning of the play, the witches say "Fair is foul, and foul is fair." What in the world does this mean, and how does that topsy-turvy feeling resonate in the play?
2. How do Macbeth and Banquo respond to the witches' prophesy in act one, scene three? Does it seem real to them? Why or why not?
3. What kinds of hallucinations and visions occur in the play? What purpose do they serve?
4. Why is a doctor called in to tend to Lady Macbeth? What's wrong with her?
5. How does the idea of madness connect with the idea of appearance vs reality?

**Gender:**

1. How does Lady Macbeth convince her husband to kill Duncan? Could (according to the logic of this play) a man have used a similar strategy on a woman, or a man on a man? Or does this kind of convincing only work one way?
2. What is meant when Lady Macbeth says Macbeth is too "full o'th'milk of human kindness"? Why "milk"? Is this description gendered?
3. How does the play define "manhood"? What is it that makes one a "man" in Macbeth?
4. How are women characters portrayed in Macbeth? What kinds of roles do they play? Is "womanhood" or "femininity" defined in the way that masculinity is?

**Violence:**

1. Most characters in the play have won their honors on the battlefield. To what degree could you describe politics in *Macbeth* as a kind of battlefield? Is this political violence acceptable?
2. Nature always seems to be rebelling against the unnatural acts going down in Dunsinane, yet violence is a central part of the natural world. Are humans any more than animals here?
3. The play ends with as much violence as the original battle against another traitor to the crown. Is there a suggestion here of cyclical and never-ending violence? Is there any way to argue against Macbeth's claim that blood demands blood?
4. When Malcolm wants to grieve, Macduff tells him instead that violence in the name of Scotland is a better cure. Yet when Macduff finds out his family is murdered, he grieves first before taking revenge. Is violence a justified reaction to a wrong, or is it just an emotion out of control that can be rightfully calmed with thought?

**Supernatural:**

1. How do Banquo and Macbeth react when they first encounter the weird sisters in Act I, Scene iii? Are they surprised, afraid, confused?
2. The witches accurately predict Macbeth's future, but do they control his fate? Why or why not?
3. How would you characterize the witches' speech? What does it suggest about their characters? How does it set them apart from other characters in the play?
4. Are there connections or similarities between the witches and any other characters in the play? If so, what are they, exactly?