

# We Players' Macbeth: the Power of Place

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When the curtain rises in the theatre, the audience is introduced to a setting very possibly quite different from their own. Yet, you are likely sitting in a comfy seat, in the dark, watching the plot unfold from a distance. How would it feel to be truly transported into another world?

**The scene:** Fort Point, San Francisco. **The drama:** *Macbeth*, by William Shakespeare. **The players:** [We Players](#), and the stunning setting of Fort Point.

Since its inception in 2000, We Players has specialized in bringing live performance to untraditional locations, from Angel Island to Alcatraz. They first staged *Macbeth* at Fort Point in 2008: it was so powerful that they resurrected the production last year, only to have an unceremoniously early closing due to the 2013 government shutdown (as part of the Presidio and a historic site, Fort Point is run by the National Park Service). Luckily for us, they remounted it this summer.

While the show's cast is skilled, Fort Point is clearly the dominant player. Built in the 1850's on the same site as a Spanish fortress, this national historic site looms over the audience and provides all of the sets needed to stage this Shakespearean masterpiece.

Whether you know the play well or are new to it, trust me: you've never experienced *Macbeth* like this. The castles of Scotland are brought alive amidst the cold and the howling wind. Seldom has an audience truly been transported inside a performance as effectively and powerfully. Radically different from watching it inside of a cozy theatre.

Place is powerful. As they say in the real estate biz, the 3 most important factors are location, location, location. Yet, most live performance occurs in a sterile environment.

Our relationship to place is often juxtaposed with comfort. A home, for example, requires it. And yet, we seem to desire other circumstances as well: nature could be appreciated on a large screen in the luxury of your living room, yet many people are compelled to hike through the woods, enclose themselves in a small fabric collapsible structure for days, and risk poison oak.

Yet, how many of us venture into Richmond's Iron Triangle or other high-crime areas, rather than watch a movie about it? Our surroundings not only teach us what the world is like: they condition us to believe that others experience the world similarly... or that we are either privileged or oppressed because of our current circumstances compared to what others experience.

Whenever we leave what is known, we risk discomfort. Yet, any sort of growth occurs when we step outside of our comfort zone. The stage may be cold and unwelcoming (a la Fort Point), or it could simply be unfamiliar. A physical location, perhaps, materially represents the exploration of our potential – be that of our light or the shadow. Who would you be if you lived in the Tenderloin? Brentwood? Arkansas?

And, on a more accessible level, daring to venture outside of our safe zones lets us move beyond mere compassion for others, into the cultivation of true empathy. It also provides perspective on our own lives. Taking time to reflect on what sets of our lives provide security... which ones are desirable but may feel unattainable (be it a luxurious mansion or a trip to a distant country)... and those we desire to avoid... may provide insight into our belief systems, and how we can stretch ourselves into better understanding the world around us. Even if that means being cold for a few hours.

On that note, *Macbeth* audience members are strongly encouraged to fully heed the given instructions to wear long johns, ski hats, and more layers than seem prudent. After all, as we venture forth outside of our comfort zones, we can still be prepared.