

MACBETH  
READING COMPREHENSION  
ACT 3  
YEAR 5 AND 6

Banquo gazed out of the castle windows, his eyes caught by two crows strutting side by side along the battlements, for all the world like two friends lost in conversation. My friend. My best friend. My best friend the king! Look at you now, with the crown upon your head. What did you do to get it, best friend?

Banquo kept turning the words of the witches over and over in his mind.

‘All hail, Macbeth and Banquo.’

He was used to being second. Everyone always noticed Macbeth first. But the witches hadn’t stopped there...

‘Banquo and Macbeth, all hail’

How sweet it was to hear that little change. And they had said more: though he was not to be king himself, his children, and his children’s children, they would be kings. Everything the witches had predicted so far had come true, so why not this? Yet, thought Banquo, Macbeth had heard that prophesy too and now here came his ‘best friend’ with an invitation.

“To-night we hold a solemn supper sir,  
And I’ll request your presence.”

“Let your highness command upon me” replied Banquo. He could see Macbeth’s eyes take in the boots that he was wearing, the heavy cloak across his shoulders.

“Ride you this afternoon?”

“Ay my Lord.”

“Is’t far you ride?”

When Banquo looked into his friend’s eyes, something he saw there made him careful in his answers.

“As far as will fill up the time  
’Twillt this and supper.”

The next question made the hairs on Banquo’s neck rise...

“Goes Fleance with you?”

What will you do to keep the crown, best friend? And to whom will you do it? What are you planning? Ride, Banquo! Take Fleance with you and ride as far and as fast as you can. And don’t turn back.

Who were the hard, hooded men who- Banquo having departed - now stood before Macbeth? Men with grudges, men without conscience, sure of little but that the world had done them wrong. They listened as Macbeth poured poisonous lies into their

ears. Every blow and buffet they had suffered? That had come from Banquo. The heavy hand that had beggared their family? Banquo's. Who made their lives a torment? Banquo. So, who needed to die? Macbeth watched them leave.

"It is concluded. Banquo, thy soul's flight, if it find heaven, must find it out tonight."

Lady Macbeth waited for her husband. Was he yet her husband? She still loved him, but he seemed changed – there was no quiet to him anymore. At night she would wake to the sound of his pacing feet; or she would turn and glimpse the moon reflected in his open, staring eyes. How strange, she thought: they'd got what they wanted: they sat upon thrones, they wore crowns and rich robes, and the power was all theirs. But they had had to give up one thing in return. Happiness.

His eyes now, she could see as he crossed the threshold of her chambers, were red and ringed with dark shadows, his face haunted by his thoughts.

"How now, my lord! Those thoughts should indeed have died with them they think on. Things without all remedy should be without regard. What's done is done."

She tried to comfort him, distract him, remind him of their supper that evening, the friends who would be there, who would want to see them both smiling. Macbeth hardly seemed to hear. The crown that had been handed to him might be snatched from his grasp at any moment. Malcolm might snatch it, Fleance might take it. The terrible thing that he had done might be for nothing. So, he would need to do more terrible things. Tonight. It seemed to be getting easier...

"Ere the bat hath flown his cloistered flight, there shall be done a deed of dreadful note."

Lady Macbeth gasped

"What's to be done?"

"Be innocent of the knowledge dearest chuck, till thou applaud the deed."

As they left to dress and to prepare themselves to receive their guests, the sun was setting and the crows that had been perched on the battlements of the castle flapped their black wings towards the distant, darkening forest.

Silhouetted against those dying streaks of sun, Banquo and Fleance's horses galloped homewards through the parkland that lay around Macbeth's home. Ahead of them, the dark stones of the castle seemed to suck all remaining light out of the air and the path that led up to the gates appeared, on the instant, to turn invisible. Banquo called for a light, and a guard standing watch at the edge of Macbeth's estate handed him a lantern.

He put his arm around his son, encouraged him to tread carefully and follow the lantern's beam, to watch the ground ahead for rabbit holes – terrible for twisting a knee or an ankle.

There was little warning. Three knives flashed in the lamplight. All found a target in Banquo, though not before he had managed to shout out a warning.

“O, treachery! Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly!  
Thou mayst revenge.”

Stabs and slashes came raining down. One catching the lantern, knocked it to the ground and plunged the horrid scene into darkness. There was silence. Three pairs of hands felt the ground and found only one body.

“There’s but one down; the son is fled.”

“We have lost best half of our affair.”

“Well, let’s away and say how much is done.”

None thought that Macbeth would be happy with this news.

Macbeth was smiling from ear to ear, stretching that smile till it covered all the dark thoughts and feelings inside. He looked down the long banqueting table, laden with the finest and most expensive food and drink, gazed at the expectant faces of his powerful guests, lords and ladies all, all standing behind their chairs, all looking for his signal that the feasting might begin. He couldn’t seem to bring himself to do it. He was like an actor who hadn’t rehearsed, thrust out onto the stage, blinking in the lights, sweating and panicked. Looking to his right, it seemed his wife had forgotten her lines.... Speak!, Speak! Somebody must speak. The silence was awful. He found his voice at last.

“You know your own degrees; sit down: at first and last the hearty welcome.”

The guests waited. Was that it? Was the new king going to say any more? It was a very short speech, they all thought. Somewhat lacking in jollity. Silence hung in the air. At last, one Lord spoke out, “Thanks to your majesty”, and they all joined in: “Thanks to your majesty!” scraping back their chairs, eagerly sitting. Hesitant at first, soon the wine was flowing, and the hall started to fill with the sounds of chatter. Macbeth began to relax a little. Maybe the party would be a success after all, winning friends and loyalty to his and his queen’s new reign. I mean, everyone had wanted to come. The table was full. Then who was this? Was there another guest standing in the doorway? Why didn’t they enter? Suddenly he realised why the man was hanging back in the shadows, and strode quickly across the hall, hoping that the guests were too busy to notice.

“There’s blood on thy face.” he hissed at the Murderer.

“Tis Banquo’s then.” came the reply.

Macbeth gripped the man’s hand in gratitude. All could be well, now! If all had been does as he had hoped, the crown would be safe and he could rest easy. Then came the news came that he had been dreading; Fleance had escaped. In his mind’s eye, he could see the crown already on Fleance’s head. His hand slid up the man’s body

and grabbed him by the throat, his powerful grip choking the breath from him. Macbeth's voice came out in a low growl.

"Then comes my fit again: I had else been perfect. But now I am cabin'd, cribb'd, confined, bound in to saucy doubts and fears."

The murderer's eyes were bright with his own fear, and Macbeth released him.

"But Banquo's safe?"

"Ay my good lord: safe in a ditch he bides, with twenty trenched gashes on his head."

"Thanks for that."

It would have to do for now. He turned back into the room, suddenly remembering that he was supposed to be the smiling host of a party. Lady Macbeth stared at him meaningfully and he realised that the chatter in the room was dying away.

"My royal lord," she said, "you do not give the cheer!"

"Sweet remembrance!" he replied and raised his cup.

"Now, good digestion wait on appetite,  
And health on both!"

All the guests raised their cups with him and drank deep. Lennox called out to him.

"May't please your highness sit."

Macbeth looked round the table. It was strange. Every seat was filled. He turned to Lennox.

"The table's full."

"Here is a place reserved sir."

Macbeth had seen blood, death, slaughter and sights on the battlefield that would have made others lose their minds with fear. Nothing had ever shaken him, yet now, he felt his knees almost give way beneath him and a silent scream fill his tortured mind. There, sitting at Lennox's side was Banquo, his face and head punctured by the Murderers' gashes! The ghostly figure fixed Macbeth with a malevolent glare, shaking his head from side to side. Macbeth could not contain himself.

"Thou canst not say I did it: never shake thy gory locks at me."

No-one else could see Banquo. To them, it seemed as if Macbeth was shouting at an empty chair. What was happening? Was the king losing his mind? The guests looked at one another in confusion. One of the nobles struggled to his feet.

"Gentlemen, rise: his highness is not well."

Lady Macbeth was on her feet first. Bewildered by her husband's behaviour, she was desperate to save the situation – they must not think him mad, or all was lost.

"Sit, worthy friends: my lord is often thus,  
And hath been from his youth: pray you, keep seat;

The fit is momentary; upon a thought  
He will again be well.”

As the guests took their seats, she whispered urgently – pointing at the chair.

“Why do you make such faces? When all's done,  
You look but on a stool.”

The ghost vanished. Macbeth took a deep breath. If it had been there, it was gone now. He steadied his nerves and, once more, put on that smile, as if it had all been a joke.

“Do not muse at me, my most worthy friends,  
I have a strange infirmity, which is nothing  
To those that know me. Give me some wine.”

His cup full again, he raised it once more.

“I drink to the general joy o' the whole table,  
And to our dear friend Banquo, whom we miss;  
Would he were here!”

And suddenly, there he was again! Macbeth lunged across the table as if to strangle the phantom.

“Avaunt! and quit my sight! let the earth hide thee!  
Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold;  
Thou hast no speculation in those eyes  
Which thou dost glare with!”

There was no persuading the guests this time, Lady Macbeth saw, and they started to leave, wishing that “better health attend his majesty”. It was a disaster, but there was nothing to be done.  
When they were gone, Macbeth turned to his wife.

“Strange things I have in my head”

She placed her hand on his brow and stroked it gently.

“You lack the season of all natures, sleep.”

“Come, we'll to sleep.”

Tongues, which had been wagging already, wagged harder. Duncan dead? Servants slaughtered? Banquo stabbed and left dead in a ditch? Who could do all these things? Well, who had gained most from these deaths? The new king - though some had stopped calling him that. Macduff, gone to England to raise an army, was determined to bring down Macbeth, the tyrant.

**Part 1: Page 1-2**

**1. Where is Banquo at the beginning of this Act?**

Macbeth's castle	<input type="checkbox"/>	Riding with his son	<input type="checkbox"/>
The battlefield	<input type="checkbox"/>	At home	<input type="checkbox"/>

**2. *'My friend. My best friend. My best friend the king! Look at you now, with the crown upon your head. What did you do to get it, best friend?'***

**How is Banquo feeling? Tick one box**

Angry	<input type="checkbox"/>	Suspicious	<input type="checkbox"/>
Happy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cold	<input type="checkbox"/>

**3. *'When Banquo looked into his friend's eyes, something he saw there made him careful in his answers'.***

Why do you think Banquo suddenly felt he needed to be careful about what he told Macbeth?

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**4. A. What question did Macbeth ask Banquo that 'made the hairs on Banquo's neck rise?' Use a direct quote from the text**

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**B. Why was Banquo so scared by this question?**

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5. Read the paragraph beginning... *'Who were the hard, hooded men who-Banquo having departed - now stood before Macbeth?*

How did Macbeth persuade them that they should kill Banquo?

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6. Read the paragraph that begins...

*'Lady Macbeth waited for her husband....'*

A. Using direct examples from the text what three things had Macbeth and Lady Macbeth got that they had wanted?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

B. What had Macbeth and Lady Macbeth given up in return (Quote ONE word from the text)

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7. What time of day was it when Banquo and Fleance came riding ack towards Macbeth's castle. Tick one box

Sunset	<input type="checkbox"/>	Midnight	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dawn	<input type="checkbox"/>	Afternoon	<input type="checkbox"/>

**PART 2: Page 3-4**

**8. Read the paragraph,  
'There was little warning...'**

**A. What flashed in the lamplight?**

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**B. Who was killed?**

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**C. Who managed to escape?**

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**9. Read the following again:**

***"There's but one down; the son is fled."***

***"We have lost best half of our affair."***

***"Well, let's away and say how much is done."***

***None thought that Macbeth would be happy with this news.***

**Why wouldn't Macbeth be happy with 'this news'?**

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10. *‘Macbeth was smiling from ear to ear, stretching that smile till it covered all the dark thoughts and feelings inside’.*

Was Macbeth really happy? Justify your answer with reference to the text

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11. “There’s blood on thy face.” he hissed at the Murderer.

“Tis Banquo’s then.” came the reply.

Macbeth gripped the man’s hand in gratitude.

A. Which are synonyms for ‘gratitude’. Tick TWO boxes

appreciation  thanks

sadness  anger

12. Read the paragraph beginning ‘Macbeth had seen blood, death, slaughter....

A. Who did Macbeth see sitting next to Lennox?

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B. What did Macbeth say? Use a direct quote from the text.

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C. Was Banquo really there?

YES  NO

D. Justify your answer using evidence from the text

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### PART 3

13. Was the banquet a success?

YES

NO

Justify your answer with reference to the text.

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14. Put these event in order

Macbeth orders Banquo and Fleance to be killed

Banquo is suspicious of Macbeth

Banquo dies but Fleance escapes

The guests leave

People no longer believe Macbeth is a good man

Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost at the dinner table

15. Is Macbeth safe as king?

YES

NO

Justify your answer with reference to the text.

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ANSWERS  
READING COMPREHENSION  
ACT 3  
YEAR 5 AND 6

Part 1: Page 1-2

16. Where is Banquo at the beginning of this Act?

Macbeth's castle	<input type="checkbox"/>	Riding with his son	<input type="checkbox"/>
The battlefield	<input type="checkbox"/>	At home	<input type="checkbox"/>

17. *'My friend. My best friend. My best friend the king! Look at you now, with the crown upon your head. What did you do to get it, best friend?'*

How is Banquo feeling? Tick one box

Angry	<input type="checkbox"/>	Suspicious	<input type="checkbox"/>
Happy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cold	<input type="checkbox"/>

18. *'When Banquo looked into his friend's eyes, something he saw there made him careful in his answers.'*

Why do you think Banquo suddenly felt he needed to be careful about what he told Macbeth?

Something in Macbeth's eyes made Banquo not trust him. You can often tell by someone's eyes if they're not telling the truth

19. A. What question did Macbeth ask Banquo that 'made the hairs on Banquo's neck rise?' Use a direct quote from the text

"Goes Fleance with you?"

C. Why was Banquo so scared by this question?

Because he knows the witches predicted that his son's would be king and so he suspects that Macbeth may not want Fleance to stay alive.

20. Read the paragraph beginning... ***'Who were the hard, hooded men who-Banquo having departed - now stood before Macbeth?'***

**How did Macbeth persuade them that they should kill Banquo?**

By telling them that everything unfair that had happened in their lives was Banquo's fault.

21. Read the paragraph that begins...

***'Lady Macbeth waited for her husband...'***

**A. Using direct examples from the text what three things had Macbeth and Lady Macbeth got that they had wanted?**

they sat upon thrones

they wore crowns and rich robes

the power was all theirs

**C. What had Macbeth and Lady Macbeth given up in return (Quote ONE word from the text)**

Happiness

22. What time of day was it when Banquo and Fleance came riding ack towards Macbeth's castle. Tick one box

**Sunset**

Midnight

Dawn

Afternoon

**PART 2: Page 3-4**

**23. Read the paragraph,  
'There was little warning...'**

**D. What flashed in the lamplight?**

knives

**E. Who was killed?**

Banquo

**F. Who managed to escape?**

Fleance

**24. Read the following again:**

***"There's but one down; the son is fled."***

***"We have lost best half of our affair."***

***"Well, let's away and say how much is done."***

***None thought that Macbeth would be happy with this news.***

**Why wouldn't Macbeth be happy with 'this news'?**

Because it is Fleance who is the threat to Macbeth being king. The witches said Fleance would become king and so that is who Macbeth most wanted/needed to die

25. *‘Macbeth was smiling from ear to ear, stretching that smile till it covered all the dark thoughts and feelings inside’.*

Was Macbeth really happy? Justify your answer with reference to the text

No, Macbeth isn't happy. He is just pretending to be. It says his smile "covered all the dark thoughts and feelings inside"

26. "There's blood on thy face." he hissed at the Murderer.

"Tis Banquo's then." came the reply.

Macbeth gripped the man's hand in gratitude.

D. Which are synonyms for 'gratitude'. Tick TWO boxes

appreciation  thanks

sadness  anger

27. Read the paragraph beginning 'Macbeth had seen blood, death, slaughter....

B. Who did Macbeth see sitting next to Lennox?

Banquo/Banquo's ghost

E. What did Macbeth say? Use a direct quote from the text.

"Thou canst not say I did it: never shake thy gory locks at me."

F. Was Banquo really there?

YES  NO

D. Justify your answer using evidence from the text

"No-one else could see Banquo. To them, it seemed as if Macbeth was shouting at an empty chair"

### PART 3

28. Was the banquet a success?

YES  NO

Justify your answer with reference to the text.

“There was no persuading the guests this time, Lady Macbeth saw, and they started to leave, wishing that “better health attend his majesty”. It was a disaster, but there was nothing to be done.”

**29. Put these event in order**

Macbeth orders Banquo and Fleance to be killed	2
Banquo is suspicious of Macbeth	1
Banquo dies but Fleance escapes	3
The guests leave	5
People no longer believe Macbeth is a good man	6
Macbeth sees Banquo’s ghost at the dinner table	4

**30. Is Macbeth safe as king?**

YES       NO

**Justify your answer with reference to the text.**

“Tongues, which had been wagging already, wagged harder. Duncan dead? Servants slaughtered? Banquo stabbed and left dead in a ditch? Who could do all these things? Well, who had gained most from these deaths? The new king - though some had stopped calling him that.”