

MACBETH

READING COMPREHENSION

ACT 5

YEAR 5 AND 6

The doctor shivered. The fire was burning low and night had long since sucked the last of the day's warmth from the castle's stones. How much longer must they wait? His legs ached and he longed for his bed. Surely he could attend his patient in the morning? But the maid had been most insistent - rudely so - that he must stay and watch. Well, he'd had enough. He stood, stretched and made as if to leave. Suddenly, she seized his arm.

"Lo you, here she comes! And, upon my life, fast asleep.
Observe her; stand close."

She dragged him to the side of the corridor where they could both better watch the haunted figure slowly pacing towards them. They held their breath as the mistress of the castle passed by, seemingly unaware of their presence. "Her eyes are open!" whispered the doctor.

"Ay, but their sense is shut."

Earlier, the maid had described how she had seen Lady Macbeth for some time now, rise each night from her bed and perform a series of mysterious actions - all whilst asleep. He hadn't believed her then, but now he had no choice. "What is it she does now?" he asked. "Look, how she rubs her hands!"

"It is an accustomed action with her" replied the maid, "to seem thus washing her hands: I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour."

They watched as their mistress bent over her hands, peering at them, searching desperately, then stopping when she seemed to find what she was looking for.

"Yet here's a spot. Out, damned spot! out, I say!"

Her voice was full of such torment, cracked and sad as an abandoned child, that both doctor and maid found their own hands rise instinctively to their hearts in sympathy. They watched as the piteous figure scrubbed frantically at the stain she seemed to see. What could that spot be? What they heard next made the very marrow of their bones freeze.

"One: two: why, then, 'tis time to do't. - Hell is murky!
Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?"

And at that word, 'blood', she set to scrubbing again... The doctor turned to the maid, whispering urgently "Go to, go to; you have known what you should not."

"She has spoke what she should not!" came the maid's sharp rejoinder.
There was more...

"Banquo's buried! He cannot come out on's grave!"

The doctor looked at his patient in horror. Flames danced in her staring eyes. Though reason told him this was just a reflection, he could not help but wonder if she was already burning in hell. There was no medicine for this, he knew. He could cure the body... but the soul? What remedy could he offer to one who, though still living, was already in eternal torment?

Think back for a moment; do you remember Macbeth at the beginning of this story, before he was king? How he stood fearless in the face of the enemy, his fellow warriors - friends all - standing shoulder to shoulder with him, fighting alongside their great hero? How King Duncan and his lords, indeed, the whole Scottish nation, seemed to look at him with love, awe and gratitude. And why not? Had he not saved them?

Macbeth's face had shone then. At the moment of victory his smile was like the sun.

Well, the sun had set a long while ago. Darkness had come to stay.

An attack was coming, Macbeth knew, and he busied himself fortifying the great castle of Dunsinane in preparation. Far away, too far away to hear for now, there was the sound of marching feet, getting closer day by day. Malcolm and Macduff had raised an army in England, and they were on their way to join with the Scottish forces at Birnam Wood.

Now, where have we heard that place named before? Can you remember? That's right, the witches spoke of it. Surely that need not worry Macbeth, though? They had told him, "Macbeth shall never vanquished be, until Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill

Shall come against him."

Impossible, surely? Still, quite a coincidence...

What should, perhaps, have worried him more is that, just as all those feet were marching towards him, others were tiptoeing away. Whether they had only just realised that their master was a murderer, or whether their consciences were now getting the better of them or even just that rats will desert a sinking ship, more than a few of Macbeth's army had sneaked off and left him.

And now, as the days passed, the sound of marching was getting closer - moment by moment Macbeth's servants were bringing him reports of huge numbers of warriors, armed to the teeth, all heading towards Dunsinane. A hundred, then a thousand - and now some shaking boy had come running to the king, his face pale as milk, his voice trembling with fear... "There is ten thousand..." the boy stopped and gulped.

Macbeth roared at him "Geese, villain?"

"Soldiers, sir."

"What soldiers, whey-face?"

"The English force, so please you."

Macbeth smiled grimly. So, it was time to put on his armour and face his enemies. He picked up his sword. It had been a while. He felt the sharpness of its blade, keen as a razor, and swung it from side to side, remembering the way he had cut down the Norwegians like corn in a field. Let Malcom try! Let Macduff come! He would never be defeated: Birnam Wood could not come to Dunsinane, and Macbeth need fear no man born of woman. He was invincible!

Some miles distant, in the wood of Birnam, the Scottish and English forces crouched, hiding. Malcolm could just see the turrets of Dunsinane castle in the distance. Between here and there, there was a lot of open country, he thought to himself. Macbeth was bound to see them coming and be ready to attack. Here, they were concealed, but, as soon as they stepped out of the wood, they'd be seen. What to do?

The thought popped into his head so suddenly he laughed. Macduff looked at him questioningly. By way of reply, he got to his feet and gave the order.

“Let every soldier hew him down a bough
And bear't before him: thereby shall we shadow
The numbers of our host and make discovery
Err in report of us.”

Then Macduff was laughing too. It was brilliant. If they couldn't leave the wood without being seen, they'd just take the wood with them!

What was that sound? Macbeth wondered, as he stood within the castle walls, straining to hear. A drum? Far off thunder? There were no reports from his lookouts of Malcolm's army closing in... but it was getting louder, there was no question. Just then though, another, far sharper sound rang out - unmistakably the sound of women crying. A few moments later, his servant, Seyton, appeared at the door.

“Wherefore was that cry?”

“The queen, my lord, is dead.”

Time seemed to stop. A terrible numbness came over him. Dead? Gone? What was the point in anything now? Why even be king without his queen? Why carry on living? He was dimly aware that that drumming sound was back, getting louder by the moment, and he was just beginning to realise that it was the sound of marching feet when, suddenly, that milk-faced boy was also back, his face even paler.

“As I did stand my watch upon the hill,
I look'd toward Birnam, and anon, methought,
The wood began to move.”

Macbeth leapt to his feet. What? Could it be true?

“The devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon!”

His thoughts turned immediately to the witches. If he survived this battle, he would hunt them down and put them to the sword for the terrible trick they had played upon him!

With the castle right in front of them, Malcolm turned to address the soldiers now gathered.

“Now near enough: your leafy screens throw down.
And show like those you are.”

The branches were hurled aside to reveal a huge horde of English and Scottish soldiers, axes, swords and spears all raised in readiness for battle. A mighty roar rose up from the throats of all assembled as they ran headlong towards the tyrant’s castle.

Malcolm’s trick had worked perfectly. Macbeth’s army was caught off guard; some were slaughtered, but more surrendered. Macbeth himself, though, was like an unstoppable death machine, killing all in front of him.

But there was one man who did not fear him. Having himself lost so much - his wife, his children - he did not even fear death. Steadily, skilfully, Macduff fought his way across the battlefield. He killed many, though without hatred - only because it must be done, and because those men stood between him and the one he did hate.

And there he was, pulling his sword out of the body of one of the English soldiers, wiping its blade on his sleeve. Macduff took a deep breath.

“Turn hell hound, turn!”

Macbeth didn’t move at first. Nor did he speak for several long seconds. His voice, when it did come, was low, weary.

“Of all men else I have avoided thee:
But get thee back; my soul is too much charged
With blood of thine already.”

Macduff could, with one stroke of his sword, have taken his head off there and then. But he wanted Macbeth to face him, to see the hatred and vengeance in his eyes. He grabbed his enemy’s shoulder and span him around.

“I have no words, my voice is in my sword!”

And with that his blade came crashing down towards Macbeth’s head. Macbeth stepped out of the way almost lazily, smiling. Macduff lunged again, with Macbeth parrying at the last possible moment. Blow after blow was met in the same way. Macbeth seemed hardly to be trying, yet Macduff was unable to touch him.

At last, Macduff, panting with his efforts, stopped. So did Macbeth, smiling again.

“Thou losest labour:
I bear a charmed life, which must not yield,
To one of woman born.”

Now it was Macduff’s turn to smile. Now he understood the secret of Macbeth’s power. And that power was about to vanish. Macbeth was in for a surprise...

“Despair thy charm;

And let the angel whom thou still hast served
Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's womb
Untimely ripp'd."

New strength flooded through Macduff, and his sword moved with dizzying speed. Macbeth fought with fury and determination - but to no avail. With one last, swift stroke, Macduff had his revenge. All around, soldiers from Malcolm's army were cheering. At first, in a daze, he thought they must have been watching him fight. But then, he saw, Macbeth's army - those that were left - were kneeling in surrender. The battle had been won.

As Malcolm walked towards him, Macduff bent over the body of Macbeth. Grabbing it by the blood-stained hair, he held out the tyrant's severed head towards Banquo's son.

"Hail, King of Scotland."

PAGE 1

1. *'The doctor shivered. The fire was burning low and night had long since sucked the last of the day's warmth from the castle's stones'.*

The doctor is cold. Tick one box

TRUE

FALSE

Use evidence from the text to justify your answer

2. Who did the maid want the doctor to see?

3. *"Her eyes are open!" whispered the doctor.*

"Ay, but their sense is shut."

What does the maid mean by 'but their sense is shut.'

4. Re-read the paragraph that begins
'Earlier, the maid had described...'

A. What does the maid say Lady Macbeth seems to be doing every night when she is sleepwalking?

B. Using the text and your knowledge of the story why do you think Lady Macbeth is doing this?

**5. *“One: two: why, then, 'tis time to do't. - Hell is murky!
Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?”***

Who is the ‘old man’ that Lady Macbeth is talking about here?

6. *‘There was more...*

“Banquo’s buried! He cannot come out on’s grave!”

The doctor looked at his patient in horror. Flames danced in her staring eyes. Though reason told him this was just a reflection, he could not help but wonder if she was already burning in hell.

There was no medicine for this, he knew. He could cure the body... but the soul?

A. Why does the doctor look at Lady Macbeth in horror?

B. Why does the doctor think there is not medicine to help Lady Macbeth?

PAGES 2-4

7. Who had raised an army in England. Write down two names.

i _____

ii _____

8. Where were they meeting the Scottish forces?

9. What two reasons did the witches give Macbeth that mean he is not afraid of Malcolm and Macduff?

i _____

ii _____

10. Re read the paragraph 'Time seemed to stop...'

A. What news had Macbeth just found out?

B. How does Macbeth feel? Use evidence from the text to justify your answer?

11. How did the English and Scottish soldiers manage to get to Dunsinane Castle without Macbeth realising?

12. Who 'did not fear' Macbeth?

Explain your answer, using evidence from the text.

13. 'Macbeth didn't move at first. Nor did he speak for several long seconds. His voice, when it did come, was low, weary'.

Tick the synonym for 'weary'

Excited Happy Tired

Why do you think Macbeth's voice was 'weary'?

14. "Hail, King of Scotland."

Who becomes King of Scotland at the end of the play?

MACBETH

READING COMPREHENSION

ACT 5

ANSWERS

PAGE 1

15. *'The doctor shivered. The fire was burning low and night had long since sucked the last of the day's warmth from the castle's stones'.*

The doctor is cold. Tick one box

TRUE

Use evidence from the text to justify your answer

The doctor shivered. People shiver when they are cold. It also says that 'the fire was burning low' and 'night had long since sucked the last of the day's warmth from the castle's stones'.

16. Who did the maid want the doctor to see?

Lady Macbeth

17. *"Her eyes are open!" whispered the doctor.*

"Ay, but their sense is shut."

What does the maid mean by 'but their sense is shut.'

She's asleep.

18. Re-read the paragraph that begins
'Earlier, the maid had described...'

- B. What does the maid say Lady Macbeth seems to be doing every night when she is sleepwalking?

Washing/scrubbing her hands

- B. Using the text and your knowledge of the story why do you think Lady Macbeth is doing this?

She is trying to get rid of the blood on her hands from the people she has helped to murder.

19. ***“One: two: why, then, 'tis time to do't. - Hell is murky!
Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?”***

Who is the ‘old man’ that Lady Macbeth is talking about here?

King Duncan

20. ***‘There was more...***

“Banquo’s buried! He cannot come out on’s grave!”

The doctor looked at his patient in horror. Flames danced in her staring eyes. Though reason told him this was just a reflection, he could not help but wonder if she was already burning in hell.

There was no medicine for this, he knew. He could cure the body... but the soul?

C. Why does the doctor look at Lady Macbeth in horror?

Because she’s just admitted, in front of him and the maid, that she killed Banquo.

D. Why does the doctor think there is not medicine to help Lady Macbeth?

Although he thinks he might be able to make her body better she has done too many bad things to make her mind and person better.

PAGES 2-4

21. Who had raised an army in England. Write down two names.

**i Malcolm
ii Macduff**

22. Where were they meeting the Scottish forces?

Birnam Wood

23. What two reasons did the witches give Macbeth that mean he is not afraid of Malcolm and Macduff?

**i. He wouldn’t be defeated until Birnam Wood came to Dunsinane Hill
ii He needn’t be scared of any man who was born of woman**

24. ***Re read the paragraph ‘Time seemed to stop...’***

C. What news had Macbeth just found out?

Lady Macbeth was dead

D. How does Macbeth feel? Use evidence from the text to justify your answer?

Macbeth feels distraught/upset/devastated etc. Any evidence from below
'Time seemed to stop. A terrible numbness came over him. Dead? Gone?
What was the point in anything now? Why even be king without his queen?
Why carry on living?'

25. How did the English and Scottish soldiers manage to get to Dunsinane Castle without Macbeth realising?

By cutting down branches and disguising/hiding themselves behind them as they approached Dunsinane Castle

26. Who 'did not fear' Macbeth?
Macduff

Explain your answer, using evidence from the text.

Macduff wasn't afraid to die. He had already lost his family.

"Having himself lost so much - his wife, his children - he did not even fear death."

27. *'Macbeth didn't move at first. Nor did he speak for several long seconds. His voice, when it did come, was low, weary'.*

Tick the synonym for 'weary'

Excited

Happy

Tired

Why do you think Macbeth's voice was 'weary'?

He had lost everything he thought he wanted. His wife had died and he was so tired of everything.

28. *"Hail, King of Scotland."*

Who becomes King of Scotland at the end of the play?

Banquo's son