

# MACBETH

## READING COMPREHENSION

### ACT 2

### YEAR 5 AND 6

It was the very deepest point of night and the castle was almost still; servants and masters alike lay sound asleep, stomachs full from the feast. A heavy blanket of darkness covered everything: no star shone, and the moon was several hours gone. One dim light, though, shone outside Banquo's bedchamber.

Who was this steadfast guard - the loyal watchman who held this lantern? He looked very young for a soldier. It was Banquo's son, Fleance, standing watch in front of his father's door, protecting his sleep.

Sleep, though, would not come to Banquo – strange thoughts visited him again and again. At last, he gave up and came to sit beside his child.

Father and son stared up into the dark sky together when, suddenly, Banquo snatched up his sword.

“Who's there?”

A voice came from the darkness.

“A friend”

Macbeth stepped into the light of Fleance's lantern and Banquo wondered to himself: why was his friend awake? Could the same thoughts that troubled his own mind have also visited Macbeth? Whilst pondering this question he remembered - he had a gift to pass on, from Duncan himself! So much had the King enjoyed that evening that, in gratitude, he had decided to give Lady Macbeth a diamond!

It seemed to Banquo that Macbeth stared most unhappily at the jewel that sparkled in the lamplight and that he was somehow reluctant to pocket it. Gently, Banquo took his friend by the arm, and drew him to one side, just out of Fleance's hearing.

“I dreamt last night of the three weird sisters:  
To you they have show'd some truth.”

Macbeth shook his head – he spent no time thinking of such things, he replied. But Banquo noticed that, as he did so, Macbeth would not meet his eye. They agreed to talk later, and wished each other a good night's sleep. Banquo and Fleance retreated to their quarters, and Macbeth made as if to leave. However, as soon as their door was closed he signalled to a servant who was lurking in the shadows.

“Go bid thy mistress, when my drink is ready,  
She strike upon the bell. Get thee to bed.”

Alone, Macbeth stared into the blackness, unmoving, desperate for the thoughts that now came thick and fast to leave him. He could just go back to bed, he thought:

sleep, be good, be the Thane of Cawdor, be content. But other images came crowding quickly: crowns, thrones, power, riches. And what stood in his way? A killing. Something he'd done a hundred times before in battle with a sword, or dagger in his hand. A jolt of shock and fear ran through him. His thought – it was in front of him! A dagger was floating – actually floating in the air before him. Was it real? He reached out to grab it, but it moved away, leading him towards Duncan's bedchamber! He followed; and now it seemed as if there was no way back. He was going to do it. The watchtower rang the hour and, to Macbeth's ears, it was the tolling of Duncan's funeral bell.

"I go, and it is done; the bell invites me.  
Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell  
That summons thee to heaven or to hell."

What's that scream? Calm down, it's just the call of an owl, Lady Macbeth told herself. There's a crying in the distance! What's wrong with you? It's only the screech of crickets in the night. But how can they sound so loud? Was she going mad? Now it was too silent. Why? Had Macbeth failed to kill Duncan? Restlessly she paced up and down outside the King's rooms, thinking through her plan. All should be well: she had drugged the guards' wine and yes, one sound at least was reassuring, the snores of these innocent fools, who, in a few short minutes, would bear the blame of Duncan's murder. Now where was Macbeth? At last!

"My husband!"

"I have done the deed." he replied. There was no doubt of that. His hands were covered, no, more than covered, dripping with the blood of Duncan. Macbeth's face was frozen in horror. Then, holding his bloody hands out to her, he went on, "Hark! This is a sorry sight." He stared and stood, frozen to the spot. Seconds stretched till they seemed like hours, with each second an invitation to someone to discover them both red-handed.

"Go get some water" she hissed at him, "and wash this filthy witness from your hand." Still he did not move. Worse! Lady Macbeth now saw...

"Why did you bring these daggers from the place?  
They must lie there: go carry them; and smear  
The sleepy grooms with blood."

But Macbeth would not move, would not touch the daggers, would not return to the bloody corpse of his king. "I'll go no more." he said, "I am afraid to think what I have done." Fury and fear showing in her face, Lady Macbeth snatched up the daggers and ran from the courtyard.

There was a moment of stillness and quiet after she had gone and Macbeth stared upwards at the fading darkness. No quiet for him though, his heart was still pounding, knocking against his ribs. That knocking seemed to grow louder and louder until Macbeth realised, with a start, that it was the sound of the castle gates. At last, he began to move. Visitors had come calling.

It had been a fine evening, the Porter reflected. After all the lords and ladies had had their fill of the King's banquet, and the table in the great hall had been cleared, there was more than enough for the servants to have a feast of their own. And quite a few toasts were drunk to the King, quite a few to Macbeth, some to Banquo and a handful to victory! After that, everything was a bit hazy. Perhaps there'd been some dancing. He'd definitely told some jokes. But, he wasn't feeling quite so wonderful now. In fact, his head was pounding. Somebody seemed to be knocking on the outside of his skull. Over and over and over again, louder and louder, on and on it went. It sounded so real! Ah, he thought, maybe it is.

He struggled to his feet and went to unlock the castle. As the key turned, the door flew open, knocking him to the ground and two men, Macduff and Lennox, strode in. Macduff loomed over the Porter.

"Was it so late, friend, ere you went to bed,  
That you do lie so late? Is thy master stirring?"

At that moment, Macbeth appeared and Macduff smiled broadly.

"Our knocking has awaked him; here he comes."

Macduff! Macbeth swallowed. That great warrior and most loyal of the king's subjects, with Lennox by his side! There could hardly be two less welcome guests at this moment. They seemed pleased to see him, though. Behaving as if nothing had happened. As if the King were not lying dead in the next room. Suddenly, to Macbeth, it seemed like the hardest thing in the world to behave like that. The King, said Macduff, had asked him to call early and there was nothing for Macbeth to do but show him to Duncan's door.

Macbeth braced himself, knowing what was about to come, knowing he must not seem to know.... And then.

"O horror, horror, horror!"

Macduff flung the door of the king's bedroom wide, and Lennox and Macbeth ran in. At Macduff's command, alarm bells started to ring all over the castle. Murder, mayhem, blood and death had come to call and turned the world upside down. Doors slammed open, shouts and cries echoed through the corridors and a crescendo of feet drummed across the stones as everyone gathered in the courtyard, shock and grief forcing the same question onto everyone's lips: who could have done such a thing? The grooms had been found, the daggers in their hands, the blood smeared across their clothes and faces. Surely it must be them, but why? They, though could answer no questions, their tongues were still, their hearts too, had stopped. Macbeth had seen to that.

"O, yet I do repent me of my fury,  
That I did kill them."

"Why did you so?" replied MacDuff.

All eyes turned on Macbeth, waiting for an explanation. His mind went blank. The seconds ticked by and into this silence started to pour suspicion.

“Help me hence, ho!”

All thoughts were forgotten as Lady Macbeth crumpled to the ground, seemingly in a dead faint. Was it Banquo’s imagination, he wondered, or was there the smallest hint of a smile on her face as he and Lennox carried her from the courtyard?

It was enough distraction to allow Macbeth to gather himself and to take charge.

“Let’s briefly put on manly readiness,  
And meet i’ the hall together.”

As everyone left, Duncan’s two sons hung back. Malcolm turned to Donalbain.

“What will you do? Let’s not consort with them:  
To show an unfelt sorrow is an office  
Which the false man does easy. I’ll to England.”

His brother replied,

“To Ireland, I; where we are,  
There’s daggers in men’s smiles.”

As Malcolm and Donalbain galloped away from the castle, Rumour galloped after them, overtook them, went to every town and city and told a story. Duncan had been murdered by his very own sons! They’d forced his own servants to do it and now had run away to hide from the vengeance of the new king, Macbeth. It sounded true, this story – why would Malcolm and Donalbain run if they weren’t guilty? Lots of people believed it....

But not everyone.

## Part 1: Page 1-2

### 1. A. What time of day is it when the story starts?

Middle of the night  Early evening

Middle of the day  Late afternoon

### B. Write down a direct quote to support your answer

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### 2. Where is there still a light on?

Macbeth's bedroom  The kitchen

Outside Banquo's bedroom  The cellar

### 3. *'Father and son stared up at the dark sky together..'*

Write the names of the father and son

Father: \_\_\_\_\_

Son: \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. *'It seemed to Banquo that Macbeth stared most unhappily at the jewel that sparkled in the lamplight and that he was somehow reluctant to pocket it..'*

Why do you think Macbeth was staring unhappily at the jewel?

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**5. What did Banquo tell Macbeth he had dreamt of 'last night'?**

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**6. *Macbeth shook his head – he spent no time thinking of such things, he replied. But Banquo noticed that, as he did so, Macbeth would not meet his eye.***

**Why do you think Macbeth wouldn't look at Banquo?**

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**7. Write down 3 'images' that came into Macbeth's head when he was alone, in the dark.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

**What did Macbeth follow to King Duncan's bedchamber, thinking it was in front of him? Tick one answer**

A cat

A star

A dagger

Banquo

**Part 2: Page 2 -4**

**8. 'Restlessly she paced up and down outside the King's rooms, thinking through her plan'.**

**Underline the adverb that shows Lady Macbeth was nervous**

**9. Read the paragraph beginning....**

**"I have done the deed." he replied. There was no doubt of that....'**

**A. What deed has Macbeth done?**

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**B. Why can't Macbeth move?**

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**C. What is Macbeth carrying?**

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**10. Why is the Porter in such a good mood when he arrives at the castle gates?**

There had been food and drink left for the servants to have their own party

He had won the lottery

King Duncan had made him Thane of Cawdor

He liked dancing

**11. Who arrives after the Porter?**

Macduff and Lennox

Macduff and Macbeth

Banquo and Fleance

**12. Why has Macduff come to the castle early?**

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**13. What does Macduff shout when he realises King Duncan is dead? Use a direct quote from the text.**

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**14. "O, yet I do repent me of my fury,  
That I did kill them."**

**Who is Macbeth admitting to killing here?**



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**15. What does Lady Macbeth do to distract attention away from Macbeth?**

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**16. Is Lady Macbeth successful in distracting everyone?**

YES  NO

**Justify your answer with evidence from the text**

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**17. Why did some people think Malcolm and Donalbain were guilty of killing their dad?**

ANSWERS  
READING COMPREHENSION  
ACT 2  
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Part 1: Page 1-2

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|---------------------|--------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| Middle of the night | <input type="checkbox"/> | Early evening  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Middle of the day   | <input type="checkbox"/> | Late afternoon | <input type="checkbox"/> |

C. Write down a direct quote to support your answer

“It was the very deepest point of night”

2. Where is there still a light on?

|                          |                          |             |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| Macbeth’s bedroom        | <input type="checkbox"/> | The kitchen | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Outside Banquo’s bedroom | <input type="checkbox"/> | The cellar  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

3. ‘Father and son stared up at the dark sky together..’

Write the names of the father and son

Father: Banquo

Son: Fleance

4. ‘It seemed to Banquo that Macbeth stared most unhappily at the jewel that sparkled in the lamplight and that he was somehow reluctant to pocket it..’

Why do you think Macbeth was staring unhappily at the jewel?

Because he felt guilty. He knew he was planning on killing King Duncan and King Duncan was being kind and generous by giving Lady Macbeth a diamond.

**5. What did Banquo tell Macbeth he had dreamt of 'last night'?**

Of the three weird sisters/witches

**6. *'Macbeth shook his head – he spent no time thinking of such things, he replied. But Banquo noticed that, as he did so, Macbeth would not meet his eye.'***

**Why do you think Macbeth wouldn't look at Banquo?**

Because he wasn't telling the truth. He couldn't look his best friend in the eye and be honest.

**7. Write down 3 'images' that came into Macbeth's head when he was alone, in the dark.**

crowns

thrones

riches

**What did Macbeth follow to King Duncan's bedchamber, thinking it was in front of him? Tick one answer**

A cat

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A dagger

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8. *'Restlessly she paced up and down outside the King's rooms, thinking through her plan.'*

**Underline the adverb that shows Lady Macbeth was nervous**

9. Read the paragraph beginning....

"I have done the deed." he replied. There was no doubt of that....'

**D. What deed has Macbeth done?**

Killed King Duncan

**E. Why can't Macbeth move?**

He is in shock. He can't believe that he has actually killed King Duncan

**F. What is Macbeth carrying?**

The daggers

10. Why is the Porter in such a good mood when he arrives at the castle gates?

There had been food and drink left for the servants to have their own party

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12. Why has Macduff come to the castle early?

King Duncan had asked him to come and call for him early

13. What does Macduff shout when he realises King Duncan is dead? Use a direct quote from the text.

“O horror, horror, horror!”

14. *“O, yet I do repent me of my fury,  
That I did kill them.”*

**Who is Macbeth admitting to killing here?**

The grooms/servants

15. **What does Lady Macbeth do to distract attention away from Macbeth?**

Pretended to faint/fell to the ground

16. **Is Lady Macbeth successful in distracting everyone?**

**YES**  **NO**

**Justify your answer with evidence from the text**

“It was enough distraction to allow Macbeth to gather himself and to take charge.”

17. **Why did some people think Malcolm and Donalbain were guilty of killing their dad?**

Because they had run away – if they were innocent why would they have run away?