

Language and imagery in *Macbeth*

1

Act 3 Scene 2

(*Reminder* – Lady Macbeth and Macbeth discuss Macbeth’s behaviour and keep secrets from each other.)

- ◆ “After life’s fitful fever he sleeps well”. Who is being described here?
- ◆ “ ... sleep in the affliction of these terrible dreams that shake us nightly”. How are the Macbeths reacting to their terrible deed?

EXT: how does the idea of sleep link to the scene which took place after Macbeth killed Duncan? (Act 2 Scene 2). If you can, find a quotation.

- ◆ Macbeth’s mind is “full of scorpions” – what does this mean?

2

Act 3 Scene 4 (the banquet scene)

Use colours to highlight the following quotes, to put them into categories.

- blood
- sleep
- manliness
- unnaturalness

“gory locks”	“horrible shadow”	“Blood hath been shed”	“unreal mockery”
“Stones have been known to move and trees to speak”	“Are you a proper man?”	“What man dare, I dare”	“it will have blood, they say. Blood will have blood”
“secret’st man of blood”	“thy bones are marrowless”	“to the weird sisters”	“you lack the season of all natures, sleep”
“Thy blood is cold”	“come, we’ll to sleep”	“What, quite unmanned in folly?”	
“Why so, being gone, I am a man again”	“I am in blood stepped so far”	“But now they rise again”	

EXT: for each quote, can you say what it means, who says it, and how it links to earlier in the play?

3

Macbeth and the Murderer

Macbeth uses EUPHEMISMS to discuss the murder of Banquo. A euphemism is where you use a 'nicer' term to describe something ... e.g. "Spend a penny" is a euphemism for going to the toilet.

Explain what Macbeth REALLY means when he says:

- ◆ "dispatched"
- ◆ "safe"

In contrast, the murderer is very brutal and to the point. Find THREE quotes from the murderer in ACT 3 SCENE 4 which shows the murderer's brutal language.

EXT: Why does Macbeth use euphemisms? What does it show about how he feels about Banquo's murder?

Who else does Macbeth use euphemisms to talk about? (clue – look at the first section of this worksheet!)

4

Weird Creatures ...

You may already have noticed the references to animals in the play, especially to nocturnal animals and poisonous animals linked to Macbeth's evil deeds.

- ◆ What does Macbeth compare to dogs?
- ◆ What poisonous creatures are mentioned in Act 3 Scene 2 by Macbeth?
- ◆ Who is the 'worm' that 'Hath nature that in time will venom breed, no teeth for the present'?
- ◆ What exotic beasts does Macbeth dare Banquo's ghost to appear as?

5

Macbeth and the witches

Before he kills Duncan, Macbeth says "The bell invites me./Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell/ that summons thee to heaven or to hell".

Before he has Banquo killed, Macbeth says "Banquo, thy soul's light/If it find heaven, must find it out tonight".

While Banquo is being killed, Macbeth says to Lady Macbeth: "Good things of day begin to droop and drowse/Whiles night's black agents to their preys do rouse./Thou marvell'st at my words; but hold thee still./Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill".

- ◆ What do you notice about these lines?
- ◆ What might this signal to the audience?

At the start, the witches say "double, double, toil and trouble/fire burn and cauldron bubble".

- ◆ The witches often speak like this. Why do you think Shakespeare decided to use this way of speaking for Macbeth? What does it show about his character?