

This resource is intended to support teachers in leading students' analysis of a key scene. This could be used for discussion as a class, in pairs or groups, or as a homework task.

**ACT 1, SCENE V. Inverness. Macbeth's castle.**

**LADY MACBETH has just read a letter from her husband, which tells her the prophecies he just heard from the witches on the Heath.**

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be	1
What thou art promised: yet do I fear thy nature;	
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness	
To catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great;	
Art not without ambition, but without	5
The illness should attend it: what thou wouldst highly,	
That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,	
And yet wouldst wrongly win: thou'ldst have, great Glamis,	
That which cries 'Thus thou must do, if thou have it;	
And that which rather thou dost fear to do	10
Than wishest should be undone.' Hie thee hither,	
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear;	
And chastise with the valour of my tongue	
All that impedes thee from the golden round,	
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem	15
To have thee crown'd withal.	

**LANGUAGE**

1. Why do you think there are so many caesurae in this speech? What does it tell you about Lady Macbeth's state of mind?
2. Find as many positive words as you can in this speech and circle them. Find as many negative words as you can and highlight them. What do you notice? What does this reveal about Lady Macbeth and her husband?

**THEMES (Men, Women and Power)**

1. How does Lady Macbeth present her husband in this speech?
2. Who comes across as most powerful?
3. How might this have been perceived by an audience in the Jacobean era? Does that differ to how she might be perceived now?

## **CHARACTER**

### **Macbeth**

1. What does Lady Macbeth mean here by 'nature'? What connotations does 'milk' have? What, therefore, is Shakespeare suggesting she feels about her husband?
2. How does this description of Macbeth compare with what we have already learnt about him? How does that make you feel about both characters?
3. Look at Macbeth's soliloquy in Act 1, Scene 7 'If it were done when 'tis done'.... What link can be made between Lady Macbeth's criticism here and Macbeth's own fears about killing Duncan?

### **Lady Macbeth**

1. What does Lady Macbeth mean by 'illness' here? Why might Shakespeare have chosen this word?
2. What is the impact of linking 'ambition' with 'illness'?
3. How does this make you feel about Lady Macbeth?

## **ACT 1, SCENE V. Inverness. Macbeth's castle.**

**LADY MACBETH has just heard that King Duncan is arriving at her castle tonight**

The raven himself is hoarse  
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan  
Under my battlements. Come, you spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,  
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full  
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;  
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,  
That no compunctious visitings of nature  
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between  
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,  
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,  
Wherever in your sightless substances  
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,  
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,  
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,  
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,  
To cry 'Hold, hold!'

### **Language**

1. 'Unsex me here'. Shakespeare uses the negative prefix 'un' more in Macbeth than in any other of his plays. It is a prefix of negation, but can also be a prefix of removal, deprivation or reversal. What is the significance of Shakespeare using the term 'unsex' here? Why not have Lady Macbeth say, 'make me a man'?  
Where else can you find examples of the words that begin with the prefix 'un' in the play? Can you make any links between the way they are used in each instance?
2. How many references to liquids can you find across this scene? What does each liquid represent? How is this imagery effective?

### **Theme- Natural and Supernatural**

1. 'Come, you spirits'  
Why do you think Lady Macbeth invokes/ calls on the spirits?
2. What is the significance of this, particularly for a Jacobean audience?

### **Character**

1. Do you find Lady Macbeth powerful in this speech?
2. Think about the lack of opportunities for women in the Jacobean era. Why might Lady Macbeth go to these lengths to make sure she has the strength to persuade her husband to pursue The Crown.