

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.

In this scene, Macbeth is in his castle as Malcolm and Macduff's army closes in on him. He hears a scream from elsewhere in his castle.

ACT V, SCENE V. Dunsinane. Within the castle.

MACBETH

Wherefore was that cry?

SEYTON

The queen, my lord, is dead.

MACBETH

She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word.
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

LANGUAGE

1. How is Macbeth's reaction to the news of Lady Macbeth's death unusual? What language does Shakespeare use to show this?

Consider: the length of Macbeth's first line, use of repetition, negative nouns/adjectives/verbs

2. What is Macbeth's mood at this point in the play? What language does Shakespeare use to show this?

Consider: "fools", "dusty", "death", "poor", "frets", "idiot", "fury"

3. What metaphors are used to describe life? What do they suggest about Macbeth's state of mind?

Consider comparisons to: a candle, an actor with a brief time on a stage, a tale told by an idiot

THEME (Men, Women, and Power)

1. How has Macbeth's status changed as the play has progressed?
2. How might Lady Macbeth's death have affected Macbeth's feelings of strength and power?
3. What could this suggest about male power in the Jacobean era?

CHARACTER

1. Macbeth's journey began with praise and glory. How would you describe this stage of his journey?
2. How is Macbeth portrayed as a tragic character at this point in the play?
3. Consider Macbeth's last lines in this extract. What might an audience expect will happen to Macbeth next?