

MACBETH

READING COMPREHENSION

ACT 4

YEAR 5 AND 6

In the depths of the night Macbeth lay awake, thinking back to the battle in which he had been such a hero. It seemed a lifetime ago, and he had been different then, a different man. The evening before the fight, he and his warriors had swapped stories of the enemy that they were about to face, talking of the strange gods that the Norwegians believed in and how they would seem to go crazy when they picked up their weapons. One story above all had come back to haunt him; an old soldier, whose lonely teeth whistled as he spoke, had told them all about the Viking Hell: it was, he said, a big, feather bed on which you could always lie down, but never sleep.

He was in hell, then.

Each night he lay down already exhausted from his duties as King, desperate for sleep to come. It never did. Instead, thoughts filled his head, each darker than the one before, flooding his mind with images of his own death and destruction, and how he might lose all that he had fought so hard to gain. Hour after hour he would lie there, staring into the night, seeing strange shapes: ghosts, bodies, witches. At last, dawn would come and he would drag on his rich robes, more tired than when he had lain down.

He could stand it no longer.

They knew he was coming, desperate for answers. How could they not? It was their own spell that was bringing him to them. As they took turns to throw ingredients into the pot, each one of the three smiled to herself, whilst chanting the words of power.

“Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.
Fillet of a fenny snake
In the cauldron, boil and bake
Eye of newt and toe of frog
Wool of bat and tongue of dog
Adder’s fork and blind worm’s sting
Lizard’s leg and howlet’s wing
For a charm of powerful trouble
Like a hell broth boil and bubble
Double, double toil and trouble”

The charm was done, the magic cast. And, as a fish follows bait, the subject of their spell was on his way.

The eldest of the witches held her hands to the air.

“By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes!”

He was here. Macbeth’s face was flushed with blood.

“I conjure you, by that which you profess – answer me!”

And answers came. Warnings....

“Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth! Beware Macduff.”

Just as he’d suspected. Good. He would deal with Macduff.
Then there was some comfort...

"None of woman born shall harm Macbeth"

Who lives who is not born of woman? He need fear nobody! Even better news followed.

“Macbeth shall never vanquished be until
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
Shall come against him”

That could never happen! How could a forest move? He was safe! Safe! Oh, how the witches’ words soothed his troubled mind. Yet there was one question more that he wanted, needed, to know the answer to.

“Tell me -if your art can tell so much -
Shall Banquo's issue ever reign in this kingdom?”

The answer came back immediately.

“Seek to know no more.”

But Macbeth would not be denied.

“I will be satisfied: deny me this,
And an eternal curse fall on you!”

It’s often said that you should be careful what you wish for. The Witches were silent, unmoving.

Then, with one swift, flowing movement, the oldest witch reached out into the air itself, as if grasping the handle of some huge, invisible door which she then proceeded to fling wide. There stood a vision: a man - tall, proud, clothed in the finery of a king, and bearing the royal crown which, at that moment, still rested on Macbeth’s own head. Now, Macbeth could see, behind this king, stood others - seven more, not the same, but with the same eyes, the same brow. And at the back of the line wearing, not a crown, but a look of triumph, the father of them all, the ghost of Banquo himself.

There were footsteps behind him, and Macbeth turned to see one of his nobleman, Lennox, approach. By the time he had turned back, the witches were gone, taking with them all the apparitions that he had seen.

“Saw you the weird sisters?”

“No, my lord” replied Lennox.

“Came they not by you?”

“No, indeed, my lord.”

Macbeth did not look well, thought Lennox. The quiet, whispered talk in corners of the castle was all of the strange behaviour of their King: his outbursts at the banquet, the haunted look in his eyes, as if he saw things that no-one could - or should - see. Lennox knew that messengers bringing bad tidings seldom prospered and so was now gradually edging backwards from Macbeth, hovering in the doorway to give his message, ready to leave as soon as he had spoken.

“’Tis two or three, my lord, that bring you word
Macduff is fled to England.”

Noting the look of fury on Macbeth’s face, Lennox bowed quickly and, taking Macduff’s example, fled the room.

Lady Macduff was so tired. So many children, and so much to do: babies to be changed, young ones to be dressed, mouths to be fed, games to be played. And at night, worries to be soothed and nightmares to be calmed. And where was their father? Always away, never here to lend a hand. She loved him, but this latest absence in particular was not just trying her patience – it scared her. Her cousin Ross had tried to defend Macduff’s actions, even hinting that there might be some hidden wisdom in it, but she was having none of it.

“Wisdom! to leave his wife, to leave his babes,
His mansion and his titles in a place
From whence himself does fly? He loves us not”

And now Ross was leaving too and she was alone again with the children, with no-one to help her, no-one to defend her.

She was wrong, though. She wasn’t alone.

She just hadn’t heard the quiet footsteps that had ascended the stone steps to the children’s rooms.

And she hadn’t looked into the shadows in the corners, where three hooded figures were standing; figures that we have met before, but that Lady Macduff had never seen. In a moment, though, they would be the last faces that she and her children ever glimpsed. For the few brief seconds before that, her thoughts were of bedtime,

of how she must tuck them up, make them safe and sound. And then the three murderers stepped into the dying light.

“Where is your husband?”

She turned to face them, quickly placing herself between the men and her children.

“I hope, in no place so unsanctified
Where such as thou mayst find him.”

“He’s a traitor.”

At this, her eldest son, ran full pelt at the man who had so insulted his father.

“Thou liest, thou shag-hair’d villain!”

There was no mercy. The screams were soon over and Lady Macduff and all her children lay quiet on the floor. None would ever open their eyes again.

Hundreds of miles and four days of riding away, at the Palace of King of England, was the absent father, the missing husband. Whilst the dreadful news got ever closer, Macduff and Malcolm planned in detail how they would take back Scotland and protect its people. When, at last, the planning was done, they were delighted to see their friend and kin, Ross arrive – his face full of news.

Macduff embraced him, eager to hear what he had to say.

“My ever-gentle cousin, welcome hither.”

“Sir, amen.”

And then, silence. Macduff was surprised. It had been some time since they had seen each other, surely Ross had more to say? He would ask again.

“Stands Scotland where it did?”

“Alas, poor country!” returned Ross, though he added nothing more.

“How does my wife?”

“Why, well.”

“And all my children?”

“Well too.”

This was infuriating, why did he not give answers?

“Be not a miser of your speech: how goes’t?”

Ross stared at the floor, unable to meet Macduff’s eyes. He took a deep breath.

“Your castle is surprised; your wife and babes
Savagely slaughter’d.”

As if struck by an axe, Macduff fell to his knees. His family wiped out! Though he himself still lived, what life would it now be when those he held most precious were gone? Too much to bear he thought, to even go on living. Then, it came to him.

There was a reason to stay alive. Vengeance. He rose to his feet, wiped his hands across his face, and looked upwards.

“Gentle heavens,
Cut short all intermission; front to front
Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself;
Within my sword's length set him; if he 'scape,
Heaven forgive him too!”

Malcolm looked at his friend approvingly.

“Come, go we to the king; our power is ready;
Macbeth is ripe for shaking”

MACBETH
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PART 1: PAGES 1-2

1. Who lay awake in the 'depths of the night'?

Banquo

Macbeth

Lady Macbeth

Macduff

2. What was he thinking about?

3. What is 'Viking Hell'

A battle, so bloody, that you could never feel clean again.

A big, feather bed on which you could always lie down, but never sleep.

A loud, deafening noise that meant you could never hear again.

4. Why do you think Macbeth was thinking about this 'Viking Hell'?

5. When Macbeth was lying, unable to sleep would things could he see?
Give three examples from the text:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

6. Who did Macbeth go to see to try and get answers?

7. Complete the missing words below

Double, double, toil and _____

Fire _____ and cauldron _____

8. The eldest of the witches held her hands to the air

“By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes!”

A. Who is coming their way?

B. Why do you think the witch uses the word ‘wicked’?

PART 2- PAGES 3-5

9. Who do the witches warn Macbeth to beware of?

10. Give two reasons the witches give which make Macbeth believe he is safe.

Use evidence from the text to justify your answers

1. _____

2. _____

11. What 'vision' do the witches show Macbeth

Fleance as king

Macbeth dead

Macduff as King

Lady Macbeth dead

12. Who comes to tell Macbeth that Macduff has fled to England

1. _____

2. _____

13. Read the paragraph, “Lady Macduff was so tired...”

Write down three reasons, using evidence from the text, why she was so tired

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

14. What do the murderers tell Lady Macduff her husband is?

15. Who was killed?

Lady Macduff

The Macduff Children

Macduff

Lady Macduff and her children

16. Where was Macduff when he heard that his wife and children were killed?

17. What did Ross tell Macduff had happened. Use a direct quote from the text

18. What is a synonym for 'slaughtered'?

19. Why do you think Ross found it so difficult to tell Macduff the news that his family had died?

20. What reason did Macduff think of to stay alive. Write down one word from the text

answers
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ACT 4
YEAR 5 AND 6

PART 1: PAGES 1-2

1. Who lay awake in the 'depths of the night'?

Macbeth

2. What was he thinking about?

Back to the battle when he'd been such a hero

3. What is 'Viking Hell'?

A big, feather bed on which you could always lie down, but never sleep.

4. Why do you think Macbeth was thinking about this 'Viking Hell'?

Because he can't sleep, "Each night he lay down already exhausted from his duties as King, desperate for sleep to come. It never did."

5. When Macbeth was lying, unable to sleep would things could he see?

Give three examples from the text:

Any of:

Strange shapes, Ghosts, Bodies, Witches

6. Who did Macbeth go to see to try and get answers?

The witches/weird sisters

7. Complete the missing words below

Double, double, toil and **trouble**

Fire **burn** and cauldron **bubble**

8. The eldest of the witches held her hands to the air

"By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes!"

1. Who is coming their way?

Macbeth

2. Why do you think the witch uses the word 'wicked'?

Because of all the terrible things Macbeth has done, for example killing King Duncan and Banquo.

PART 2- PAGES 3-5

2. Who do the witches warn Macbeth to beware of?

Macduff

3. Give two reasons the witches give which make Macbeth believe he is safe.

Use evidence from the text to justify your answers

1. "None of woman born shall harm Macbeth"
2. "Macbeth shall never vanquished be until
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
Shall come against him"

4. What 'vision' do the witches show Macbeth
Fleance as king

5. Who comes to tell Macbeth that Macduff has fled to England
Lennox

6. Read the paragraph, "Lady Macduff was so tired..."
Write down three reasons, using evidence from the text, why she was so tired

Babies to be changed, Young ones to be dressed

Mouths to be fed, Games to be be played

Worries to be soothed, Nightmares to be calmed

7. What do the murderers tell Lady Macduff her husband is?

A traitor

8. Who was killed?

Lady Macduff and her children

16. Where was Macduff when he heard that his wife and children were killed?

The palace of King of England

17. What did Ross tell Macduff had happened. Use a direct quote from the text

"Your castle is surprised; your wife and babes
Savagely slaughter'd"

18. What is a synonym for 'slaughtered'

Butchered/killed/murdered- or any similar

19. Why do you think Ross found it so difficult to tell Macduff the news that his family had died?

Because he knew how devastated/sad/distraught that would make Macduff

20. What reason did Macduff think of to stay alive. Write down one word from the text

Vengeance