

By the end of studying **Act 5 Scene 5** I need to know:

**Plot:** Lady Macbeth's body is discovered, Macbeth reflects upon the short nature of existence. A messenger enters and announces that Birnam Wood appears to be moving towards Dunsinane. Macbeth decides to fight to the death.

**Ideas:** Macbeth's maniacal desire to fight to the death is actually reflective of his arrogance and confidence- he still believes no man can kill him.

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| <b>Vocabulary</b>           | <p><b>Banners [noun]</b>-a long strip of cloth; these would bear the emblem for the king/ thane upon them.<br/> <b>Siege [noun]</b>-a military operation whereby an army surrounds a castle, cutting off its supplies.<br/> <b>Famine [noun]</b>-extreme lack of food<br/> <b>Slaughterous [adjective]</b>- brutally destructive or murderous<br/> <b>Player [noun]</b>-actor<br/> <b>Wrath [noun]</b>- anger<br/> <b>Avouches [verb]</b>- state/ assert.</p>   |
| <b>Context</b>              | <p><b>Banners-</b> Banners were draped over castle walls to show ownership; these were typically interior, in that they would be visible in the courtyard. Macbeth's instructions to hang the banners on the outward walls are entirely for show- he wishes to show/ procure strength.</p>  |
| <b>Themes</b>               | <p><b>Appearance vs Reality-</b> To Macbeth appearance is more important than the reality; this is also evident throughout this scene.</p> <p><b>Power-</b> There are hints here that Macbeth realises that his power signifies nothing, as life is so short. He will be forgotten and his power will amount to nothing.</p>  |
| <b>Deeper understanding</b> | <p><b>Existential crisis-</b> Lady Macbeth's death causes Macbeth to reflect upon how he has changed. Upon hearing the screams of a woman (assumedly Lady Macbeth's maid discovering her body), Macbeth reflects how he has 'almost forgotten the taste of fears' and that there was a time when a 'night shriek... [would] rouse and stir' his hair so it stood on end. He is reflecting here upon how nothing appears to make him fear anymore- he has lost an aspect that makes everyone human. Perhaps this is because he has committed regicide- there's nothing else he has to fear as he has assigned himself to eternal damnation. He describes how he has 'supp'd full with horrors'- the imagery associated with food, which sustains life, almost implies how he has been sustained by committing these evil deeds. In fact he cannot fear 'direness' because it has become so 'familiar to [his] slaughterous thoughts'. He is reflecting upon how immoral he has become- something which leads him to consider the limited nature of existence: 'out, out brief candle' and how 'tomorrow, and to-morrow and to-morrow creeps in... from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time'. Despite whatever power Macbeth has, he cannot control time. The death of his wife now signifies how pointless everything has been: Macbeth will have no heirs to carry on his legacy, his line will die with him. Therefore, he has fulfilled the concerns he expressed in Act 3 Scene 1- that 'for Banquo's issue has [he] filed [his] mind'-those words particularly apt here as he appears to have listed (above) how his mind has been 'filed' as a result of his actions. He compares life to acting upon a stage, where the 'poor player [actor]... struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more'. The reference to time here signifies how short life is- and Macbeth's concern, especially considering he cannot have children, is that he will now be 'heard no more'- he will be forgotten. Potentially, the reference to stagecraft also reinforces the idea of appearance vs reality- that life is about pretending/ acting rather than being honest. The final statement that life ultimately 'signif[ies] nothing' reinforces this, it may also be worth drawing parallels with what Macbeth has given up. By murdering Duncan, he has given his 'eternal jewel... to the common enemy of man' (Act 3 Scene 1). His soul, which will last forever, now belongs to Satan; his short-lived power does not seem worth it now.</p> <p><b>Appearance-</b> Macbeth opens the scene by demanding that 'banners [are] hung on the outward walls'- banners would be used to display ownership of the castle. Here, the choice of Macbeth to hang banners on outward walls (for the advancing army to see) is all about establishing his power and ownership. This importance of appearance is reinforced at the end of the scene, when he asserts how 'at least we'll die with harness on our backs'- that if he dies, at least he will die fighting. He wishes to be seen and perceived as masculine and powerful.</p> |

**Reading:**

**Malcolm-** Son of Duncan, has gathered an English army to take the throne from Macbeth,

**Macduff-** Thane of Fife, fled Scotland to find Malcolm.

**Siward-** Malcolm's cousin, and English Lord.

**Menteith, Caithness, Angus, Lennox, Ross-** Rebel thanes now supporting Malcolm.

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| <b>Quotes</b>      | <p>'hang the banners from the outward walls'- Macbeth orders his men to display his banners on the outer walls, rather than the inner walls, of the castle.</p> <p>'I had almost forgotten the taste of fears'- Macbeth reflecting upon how he had almost forgotten what fear was.</p> <p>'out, out brief candle'- Macbeth reflecting upon how short life is, the candle imagery suggests the fragility of life.</p> <p>'tomorrow, and to-morrow and to-morrow creeps in... from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time'- Macbeth suggests that 'tomorrow'/ time cannot be stopped. The image of it 'creeping' suggests how covertly time moves, suggesting that Macbeth himself was unaware of this until now.</p> <p>'poor player struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more'- Life is just an act, and once someone dies they are forgotten (or at least Macbeth will be, he has no one to continue his line)</p> <p>'at least we'll die with harness on our backs'-If Macbeth will die, at least he'll die fighting. The collective 'we' here suggests that he expects his soldiers to lay down their lives for him- he is still deluded and does not realise they 'move out of command... not in love'</p> |
| <b>Terminology</b> | <p><b>Imperatives</b></p> <p><b>Dogmatic language</b></p> <p><b>Exclamatory sentences</b></p> <p><b>Metaphorical language</b></p> <p><b>Rhyming couplets</b></p> <p><b>Declarative language</b></p> <p><b>Collective-</b> he uses 'we' at the end, which constructs the idea that his men will fight with him. This is something we learn does not happen in Act 5 Scene 8, as Macbeth's soldiers surrender.</p> <p><b>Repetition</b></p> <p><b>Irony</b></p>   |

**Links across the text:**

**Act 1 Scene 3-** The extent to which Macbeth can feel fear is evident when the thought of killing the king 'unseat[s] his hear and make[s his] seated heart knock at [his] ribs'

**Act 3 Scene 1-** Macbeth's fears, expressed in soliloquy, that everything he has done has been for 'Banquo's issue' comes true here. He may have tried to 'champion fate into the utterance' but has ultimately failed. The short nature of time on Earth, alluded to by Macbeth in Act 5 Scene 5, contrasts with how his 'eternal jewel' has been 'given to the common enemy of man'.

**Act 5 Scene 4-** Malcolm assumes that Macbeth will attempt a siege, as his men are abandoning him for Malcolm's cause. His assumptions here are shown to be correct in this scene (again, Malcolm is an intelligent and effective military leader).

**Act 5 Scene 8-** Macbeth assumes his men will still fight with him; however, we discover in Act 5 Scene 8 that they surrendered quickly and easily.