

MACBETH | FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Shakespeare's language can seem scary, but give it a try! *Go at your own pace, and have fun!*



SHAKESPEARE IN PRISON

DETROIT PUBLIC THEATRE'S
SIGNATURE COMMUNITY PROGRAM

Here's the story... Once upon a time, Macbeth and his BFF Banquo are coming back from a great victory in some random Scottish civil war. Then, in the middle of the road, **ka-ZAM!!**, out of nowhere come these witches. Spooky! The witches have some news for Macbeth: he'll get a big promotion to Thane of Cawdor (like a duke, only more...Scottish). As if that weren't enough, they also say he'll become the king of Scotland.

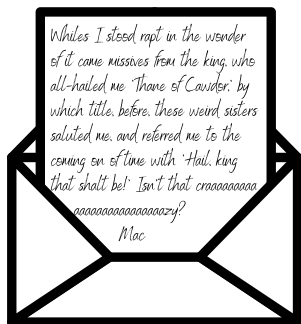
Macbeth and Banquo are confused—there's already a Thane of Cawdor, and the king is this friendly dude named Duncan, and he's not going anywhere soon. (And anyway, Duncan has kids and stuff, so Macbeth isn't even in line for the throne.) While these guys are in the middle of being confused, the witches turn to Banquo, and say they have news for *him*, too: he won't be king, but his children and grandchildren will be. Then, **POOF!!**, the witches vanish. Double spooky!

Before Macbeth and Banquo can process the predictions, a messenger arrives and tells them that the Thane of Cawdor was found out as a traitor. He's been executed, and the new Thane of Cawdor is... Macbeth! Triple spooky!

Macbeth writes all of this in a letter to his wife, who goes by Lady Macbeth. Her first thought is: Aha! Clearly, we need to kill the king. Macbeth more or less agrees (more on that in a future activity pack!), so they kill King Duncan and frame his servants. Duncan's sons flee the country, and Macbeth claims the throne. Ta-DA! He's king. Mission accomplished.

Sort of... Macbeth begins to obsess about the second part of what the witches said, the part about Banquo's children and grandchildren becoming kings. Neither Macbeth nor Lady Macbeth can sleep through the night. Macbeth starts making plans without telling his wife, which he never used to do.

And he worries a lot about Banquo's son, Fleance. Fleance is a problem...



The Shakespeare

Enter LADY MACBETH and a SERVANT.

LADY MACBETH

Is Banquo gone from court?

SERVANT

Ay, madam, but returns again tonight.

LADY MACBETH

Say to the king I would attend his leisure For a few words.

SERVANT

Madam, I will.

Exit SERVANT.

LADY MACBETH

Naught's had, all's spent. Where our desire is got without content. 'Tis safer to be that which we destroy Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy.

Enter MACBETH.

How now, my lord! Why do you keep alone. Of sorriest fancies your companions making. Using those thoughts which should indeed have died With them they think on? Things without all remedy Should be without regard. What's done is done.

MACBETH

We have scorched the snake, not killed it. She'll close and be herself whilst our poor malice Remains in danger of her former tooth. But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer. Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep In the affliction of these terrible dreams That shake us nightly. Better be with the dead, Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace. Than on the torture of the mind to lie In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave. After life's fitful fever he sleeps well. Treason has done his worst; nor steel nor poison. Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing Can touch him further.

LADY MACBETH

Come on, gentle my lord, Sleek o'er your rugged looks. Be bright and jovial Among your guests tonight.

MACBETH

So shall I, love. And so, I pray, be you. Let your remembrance Apply to Banquo; present him eminence. Both with eye and tongue: unsafe the while that we Must lave our honors in these flattering streams. And make our faces vazards to our hearts, Disguising what they are.

LADY MACBETH

You must leave this.

MACBETH

O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife! Thou know'st that Banquo, and his Fleance, lives.

LADY MACBETH

But in them nature's copy's not eterne.

MACBETH

There's comfort yet; they are assailable. Then be thou jocund. Ere the bat hath flown His cloistered flight, ere to the black Hecate's summons The shard-borne beetle with his drowsy hums Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done A deed of dreadful note

LADY MACBETH

What's to be done?

MACBETH

Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck, Till thou applaud the deed. Come, seeling night, Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day And with thy bloody and invisible hand Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond Which keeps me pale. Light thickens, and the crow Makes wing to th'rooky wood. Good things of day begin to droop and drowse; Whiles night's black agents to their preys do rouse. Thou marvel'st at my words; but hold thee still. Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill. Do, prithee, go with me.

Hecate is the queen of the witches. Spooky!

Exeunt.

The Translation

LADY MACBETH and a SERVANT enter.

LADY MACBETH

Has Banquo left the court?

SERVANT

Yes, madam, but he'll be back tonight.

LADY MACBETH

Go tell the king I want to talk to him for a few minutes.

SERVANT

No problem, madam.

The SERVANT exits.

LADY MACBETH

If you get what you want and you're still not happy, you've spent everything and gained nothing. It's better to be the person who gets killed than to be the killer and be tormented with anxiety.

MACBETH enters.

What's going on, my lord? Why are you keeping to yourself, with only your sad thoughts to keep you company? Those thoughts should have died when you killed the men you're thinking about. If you can't fix it, you shouldn't give it a second thought. What's done is done.

MACBETH

We have slashed the snake but not killed it. It will heal and be as good as new, and we'll be threatened by its fangs once again. But the universe can fall apart, and heaven and earth crumble, before I'll eat my meals in fear and spend my nights tossing and turning with these nightmares I've been having. I'd rather be dead than endure this endless mental torture and harrowing sleep deprivation. We killed those men and sent them to rest in peace so that we could gain our own peace. Duncan lies in his grave, through with life's troubles, and he's sleeping well. We have already done the worst we can do to him with our treason. After that, nothing can hurt him further—not weapons, poison, rebellion, invasion, or anything else.

LADY MACBETH

Come on, relax, dear. Put on a happy face and look cheerful and agreeable for your guests tonight.

MACBETH

That's exactly what I'll do, my love, and I hope you'll do the same. Give Banquo your special attention. Talk to him and look at him in a way that will make him feel important. We're in a dangerous situation, where we have to flatter him and hide our true feelings.

LADY MACBETH

You have to stop talking like this.

MACBETH

Argh! I feel like my mind is full of scorpions, my dear wife. You know that Banquo and his son Fleance are still alive.

LADY MACBETH

But they can't live forever.

MACBETH

That's comforting. They can be killed, it's true. So be cheerful. Before the bat flies through the castle, and before the dung beetle makes his little humming noise to tell us it's nighttime, a dreadful deed will be done.

LADY MACBETH

What are you going to do?

MACBETH

It's better you don't know about it until after it's done, when you can applaud it. (to the night) Come, night, and blindfold the kindhearted day. Use your bloody and invisible hand to tear up Banquo's lease on life, which keeps me in fear. (to himself) The sky's getting dark, and the crow is returning home to the woods. The gentle creatures of the day are falling asleep, while night's predators are waking up to look for their prey. (to LADY MACBETH) You seem surprised at my words, but don't question me yet. Bad deeds force you to commit more bad deeds. So please, come with me.



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You can respond to these in any way you choose:

Write *Draw* THINK ABOUT IT
Talk about it ACT IT OUT

... up to you!



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Believe it or not, Shakespeare doesn't write about many married couples. And when he does, they are usually dysfunctional or otherwise Very Bad News (I'm looking at you, Richard III and Lady Anne!)

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth definitely do a lot of bad things, but their relationship is close, and they seem to really like each other. At the beginning of the play, they share almost everything with each other, and they work really well as a team. But as the play goes on, their relationship begins to fall apart. Macbeth starts keeping secrets, Lady Macbeth becomes more and more desperate and distracted. And by the end, they are totally disconnected from one another.

This scene falls right in the middle of the play. They're still close, but they are starting to drift apart.

How many clues can you find to the **closeness** of their relationship? Look at the words they use, the way they use those words, and the way they respond to each other. (And look at the verse! Remember waaaaay back to our activity pack about characters who finish each other's lines...)

How many clues can you find to the fact that their relationship is **starting to fall apart**? Again, look at the words they use, the way they use them, and at the verse. (And look at who is "leading" the conversation!)



"What's done is done"

NERD ALERT NERD ALERT NERD ALERT NERD ALERT NERD ALERT NERD ALERT NERD ALERT

Has anyone ever said "What's done is done" to you? Have you ever said it? It's straight from Shakespeare! This play is the first time in history that those words appear (as far as we know).

NERD ALERT NERD ALERT NERD ALERT NERD ALERT NERD ALERT NERD ALERT NERD ALERT

Enough word-nerding. More importantly, Lady Macbeth says this exact phrase *twice* in the play. First in this scene, and then again a couple of scenes later, when Macbeth is *really* falling apart. That's very unusual (remember, word-nerds: this was a brand new phrase). Why is it there?

Think about it from the character's point of view: What do you think she's trying to tell Macbeth with that phrase?

Think about it from the author's point of view: Why would Shakespeare have her repeat that phrase? What is he trying to tell us about how Lady Macbeth deals with things?

Thou marvel'st at my words: but hold thee still. Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill.

After his first couple of plays, Shakespeare mostly stopped the old-school style of rhyming his lines (remember *A Comedy of Errors*?). But when he really wanted to get your attention at the end of a speech or a scene, he would throw in a *couplet* (two rhymed lines) at the end, just like in this scene. Mic drop!

Why are these lines so important? Why would Shakespeare make a big deal of them by making them rhyme? What do they say about Macbeth, or his relationship with Lady Macbeth, or about what's going to happen next? What about the meaning of that last line? Do you agree? When do things that begin with bad deeds "make strong themselves by ill"?

But wait, there's more!



There's another half-line at the end of the scene, after the rhyming couplet. "Do, prithee, go with me." What the heck is that doing there? Shakespeare didn't leave half-lines of verse just lying around randomly in his plays.

Read the rhyming couplet on its own, then read it with the half-line at the end. How does the half-line change the rhythm of the scene?

Does it strengthen the force of the couplet? Weaken it?

Does it make their relationship seem closer? More distant? Or what?

Does it break the rhythm? Draw attention to it?

Does it matter how you say the line?

What do these lines mean to you?



Now that you've examined the text for clues about this couple's relationship, let's make sure we're not forgetting about their individual mindsets. They're definitely both paranoid, but they're dealing with it in different ways. Why do you think that is?



And now, the eternal question... Given all you've found—not only in this activity pack, but in the others you've worked with—how would you stage this scene? What's the dynamic at play between these characters, and how would you—the director—stage that to make it clear to the audience? What direction would you give the actors to help them find their objectives and tactics?

What if this were a movie? A graphic novel? How would you represent it in dance performance or choreography?

