

**Macbeth: Scene in focus**

This activity uses images collected by the royal family to explore *Macbeth*, Act 5, scene 1.

**Extract: *Macbeth*, Act 5, sc. 1**

*Enter Lady Macbeth with a taper*

**DOCTOR**

How came she by that light?

**GENTLEWOMAN**

Why, it stood by her: she has light by her continually; 'tis her command.

**DOCTOR**

You see, her eyes are open.

**GENTLEWOMAN**

Ay, but their sense is shut.

**DOCTOR**

What is it she does now? Look, how she rubs her hands.

**GENTLEWOMAN**

It is an accustomed action with her, to seem thus washing her hands: I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour.

**LADY MACBETH**

Yet here's a spot.

**DOCTOR**

Hark! she speaks: I will set down what comes from her, to satisfy my remembrance the more strongly.

**LADY MACBETH**

Out, damned spot! out, I say!--One: two: why, then, 'tis time to do't.--Hell is murky!--Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account?--Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him.

**DOCTOR**

Do you mark that?

**LADY MACBETH**

The thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now?-- What, will these hands ne'er be clean?--No more o'that, my lord, no more o' that: you mar all with this starting.

**DOCTOR**

Go to, go to; you have known what you should not.

**GENTLEWOMAN**

She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of that: heaven knows what she has known.

**LADY MACBETH**

Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!

## PART 1: Visualising the scene

Read the extract above. Discuss/ write down:

1. How many performers are involved?
2. Where does the scene take place? Inside or outside? Is it a safe place? What time of day/ night?
3. If you were staging this scene, how would you indicate this setting to the audience?
4. If you were staging this scene, which props would you use?
5. What kind of costumes would you use?

## PART 2: Lady Macbeth in art

Look at these images of actors playing Lady Macbeth.

1. Miss Edmiston



2. Sarah Bartley



3. Ellen Kean



#### 4. Mrs Yates



#### What do the images tell us about how the play was performed?

Discuss in groups:

- How does the costume show that she is a woman of high status?
- Does the costume change the shape of the actor's body? What effect does this have?
- What can we see of the actors' gestures and facial expressions?
- Decide which of these pictures looks the most powerful, the most vulnerable, and the most frightening.

Do any of these pictures fit with the Lady Macbeth we imagined for the extract above?

How are they similar/ different?

What kind of change does Lady Macbeth go through in the play?



Look at these representations of the 'sleepwalking' scene.

1. Cromwell House tableaux



2. Ellen Kean in the Rubens Room



3. Sarah Siddons #1



4. Sarah Siddons #2



**Discuss in groups:**

Do these images meet the criteria discussed in **Part 1**?

How can we tell that Lady Macbeth is sleepwalking/ out of place?

Can we tell that she is a woman of high status?

How do the images show that this is a night-time scene?

How do the images create atmosphere?

**[BONUS] Compare: Ellen Kean.**

These images belong to the same production. What information do these images give us? Is the context of the performance surprising?



**Extension: search online for images of Lady Macbeth from modern performances. How have representations of this character changed since the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries?**