

# UNLOCKED

## MACBETH TEACHERS' PACK

**Shakespeare Unlocked** brings Shakespeare's most popular plays to life for young people by showing how actors and directors work to interpret and take ownership of Shakespeare's text.

There are 12 short films for each play: 3 scenes filmed in colour, in the theatre and 8 workshops filmed in black and white, with actors and directors exploring those scenes. There is also a short film about this theatre production.

These films and the teachers' pack build on the approach developed in the RSC's [Stand up for Shakespeare manifesto](#). We know that children and young people can experience Shakespeare in ways that excite, engage and inspire them. We believe that young people get the most out of Shakespeare when they, like actors, experience and explore the plays actively. We want young people to: Do it on their feet, See it live and Start it earlier.



RSC/Elle Kurtz

**The Teachers' Pack** is aimed at the teaching of Key Stage 3 and 4 English. It can also be used for Key Stage 5 and Theatre Studies. It includes:

- An introduction to each of the three scenes
- Suggestions for ideas to consider with your students before and after watching each scene and workshop film.
- Activities to further students' understanding of the play. These require a cleared space to work in.

The [scene text](#) which is needed for several activities is on the BBC Shakespeare Unlocked web pages. [bbc.co.uk/shakespeare](http://bbc.co.uk/shakespeare)

### Curriculum targets

The activities in this pack support students' understanding of:

- Character and motivation
- Themes and ideas
- The author's craft
- Plays in performance
- Speaking and listening

# MACBETH

This production of Macbeth, directed by Michael Boyd, opened on 16 April 2011 in the newly transformed Royal Shakespeare Theatre, in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Shakespeare Unlocked focuses on the following scenes and characters:

Act I Scene 7  
**TO KILL  
THE KING**



Act 2 Scene 2  
**BLOODY  
DAGGERS**



Act 5 Scene 1  
**SLEEPWALKING**



**These three scenes represent key moments in the play:** the decision to kill the king; the moment immediately after his murder; and Lady Macbeth's mental deterioration. The first two offer the greatest insights into the Macbeths as a couple and how they respond to the unfolding events. The three scenes together show Lady Macbeth's dark journey through the play.

# MACBETH

Film title and chapters	Description	Pack page	Film duration
<b>Act 1 Scene 7</b> <b><u>TO KILL THE KING</u></b>	Macbeth debates the murder of King Duncan and decides against it. Lady Macbeth uses a battery of strategies to change his mind.	4	5'48
<b><u>WHETHER TO KILL THE KING?</u></b> Assessing the risks Decision made	Michael Boyd and Jonathan Slinger rehearse Macbeth's soliloquy and unpick key images from the speech about why he must not kill the king.	5	6'56
<b><u>PERSUADING MACBETH</u></b> Making a plan	Lady Macbeth persuades her husband to change his mind. The cast explore different ways of performing the scene.	8	6'23
<b>Act 2 Scene 2</b> <b><u>BLOODY DAGGERS</u></b>	Macbeth has committed the murder and is overcome with guilt and fear. Lady Macbeth tries to reassure him and oversee the unfinished business. A knocking at the door unsettles them both.	10	4'38
<b><u>THE KING IS DEAD</u></b> Lady Macbeth takes control	The actors and director explore the Macbeths' very different responses to Duncan's murder. They try different ways of playing the escalating conflict between the two characters.	11	6'16
<b><u>RHYTHM OF THE LANGUAGE</u></b> Shared lines	The cast discuss iambic pentameter and explore the rhythms of Shakespeare's language. The rhythm of the lines create an atmosphere of urgency and desperation.	13	5'19
<b><u>HEARING NOISES</u></b> Voices Knocking	Macbeth's guilty conscience causes him to hear terrifying sounds. He cannot say 'amen'. The cast explore how Lady Macbeth takes control of the situation.	15	5'37
<b>Act 5 Scene 1</b> <b><u>SLEEPWALKING</u></b>	The doctor and lady-in-waiting witness Lady Macbeth sleepwalking. Mottled lighting and a gloomy set create an oppressive atmosphere. Lady Macbeth appears haunted by remorse.	17	3'58
<b><u>SLEEPWALKING QUEEN</u></b> The truth is revealed The danger of secrets	The director works with the cast to explore how knowledge of Lady Macbeth's dark secret changes the lives of the doctor and lady-in-waiting.	18	5'31
<b><u>CANDLE IN THE DARK</u></b>	The director and actors experiment with the staging of the sleepwalking scene. What happens to the relationships when the whole of the scene is played in a small circle of light?	20	3'45
<b><u>UNLOCKING THE WORDS</u></b> Punctuating thoughts Shifting thoughts Recurring thoughts	RSC Head of Voice and Text, Lyn Darnley, helps Aislin McGuckin highlight what Lady Macbeth is seeing, hearing and smelling to make sense of her seemingly disconnected words.	22	5'19
<b><u>ABOUT THE 2011 RSC PRODUCTION</u></b>	Michael Boyd and Tom Piper talk about their production and how the design was informed by the period in which <i>Macbeth</i> was written: the Protestant Reformation and the Gunpowder Plot. They explore supernatural elements of the play: how the Porter is portrayed as Satan and the witches as Macduff's dead children.	24	4'07

# MACBETH

## Act I Scene 7: TO KILL THE KING

### THE STORY SO FAR....

By this point in the play the groundwork has been laid for the murder of King Duncan. Macbeth has told his wife of the witches' prophecies and Lady Macbeth has begun her campaign. In the previous scene she models her own advice when she graciously receives Duncan into her home, while plotting his murder.



### WHAT HAPPENS?

At the start of this scene, Macbeth reflects on the prospect of the murder. Duncan is a virtuous and well-loved king who has rewarded Macbeth well. To kill a king who is a guest is the worst imaginable crime, punishable by eternal damnation. When, in soliloquy, he has considered the consequences of this terrible deed, he tells his wife he has decided against the murder. She immediately sets about changing his mind.

Though brief, this scene marks a vital turning point in the action. Macbeth moves from a determination against the crime to a decision to commit the crime. The opening soliloquy tells us much about Macbeth, about his reflective mind, his powerful imagination and his moral anchorage. This scene tells us more about the Macbeths' relationship than any other in the play.

### IDEAS TO USE WITH THIS SCENE:

#### Before watching the scene

- **Crises and turning points**  
What words would students use to describe the Macbeths' relationship at the start of the scene?  
Ask students to look for moments of personal crisis for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth during this scene.

#### After watching the scene

- **Crises and turning points**  
Now what words would students use to describe the Macbeths' relationship?  
Ask them to discuss:  
What is the turning point of the scene?  
What is the importance of the reference to the child?  
What does it tell us about both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth?

# MACBETH

IDEAS TO USE WITH:

## WHETHER TO KILL THE KING

Michael Boyd and Jonathan Slinger rehearse Macbeth's soliloquy, and unpick key images from the speech about why he must not kill the king.

### Before watching the workshop

- **Macbeth's soliloquy**

In small groups ask students to brainstorm a list of words which describe the relationship between Macbeth and Duncan up to this point in the play.

As students watch and/or read Macbeth's soliloquy, ask them to make two lists about his thoughts on murdering Duncan:

1) Macbeth's hopes

2) Macbeth's fears

- Ask students to write definitions of the words 'murder' and 'assassination'. Discuss how they are different.
- Analyse the first seven lines of Macbeth's speech, from 'If it were done...' down to 'We'd jump the life to come'. What exactly is Macbeth saying here?

### After watching the workshop

- **To kill a king**

In small groups ask students to discuss the crime of killing a king. Ask students to reflect on how the director describes the crime of killing a king during Shakespeare's time. Do we have the same views today?

- **Assassination and murder**

Why does Jonathan Slinger think Macbeth uses the word 'assassination' rather than 'murder'?

*"Assassination – it's an odd word to choose but he chooses it very carefully."*



# MACBETH

ACTIVITY (30 MINUTES):

## IMAGING MACBETH'S SOLILOQUY

**In the workshop we see the director and actor tackling the complex complex imagery in this speech and become confident using it. This exercise invites students to physicalise and to understand with the rich pictures in Macbeth's mind for themselves**

### You will need:

- Table of images (see page 7)
- A cleared classroom or hall

### Structure of the activity:

1. Ask students to work in groups of three or four. Give all but one of these groups one or more of the images from the table on page 7. Give them either fear images or hope images but not a combination of these. Ask them to create a still image for each 'hope' or 'fear' which then comes to life in slow motion, says the words and then freezes again.
2. Meanwhile, use the remaining group to play the Macbeths. While the other groups are preparing their images, ask the Macbeths to review the action of the play to this point.
3. When all the groups are ready, arrange the images on two sides, Macbeth's hopes facing Macbeth's fears, so that they form a corridor. All the groups should be in their opening images. If they have more than one image to show ask them to choose the image that appears first in the speech.
4. Ask the Macbeths to stand at the end of the corridor that is closest to the first image.
5. Cue the images to perform in slow motion, speaking their lines, and freezing when they are finished (or moving to their next place if they are showing more than one image). The Macbeths visit each performing image in turn, travelling first down the left side of the corridor for the hopes and then down the right for the fears.
6. When the Macbeths arrive at the end, ask them to share their thoughts and feelings.
7. Discuss with the group as a whole the structure of the speech and its special features. What does it tell us about Macbeth as a character?

*"If I knew that  
everything would  
be alright here on  
Earth after I killed  
him, I'd risk  
Eternal Damnation,  
Purgatory, Hell."*



# MACBETH

## TABLE OF IMAGES

Macbeth's Hopes	Macbeth's Fears
If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well/It were done quickly.	
If the assassination/Could trammel up the consequence, and catch/With his surcease, success;	
that but this blow/Might be the be-all and the end-all-here,/But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,/We'd jump the life to come.	
	But in these cases/We still have judgment here;
	that we but teach/Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return/To plague th'inventor:
	this even-handed justice/Commends th'ingredients of our poisoned chalice/To our own lips.
	He's here in double trust:/First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,/Strong both against the deed;
	then, as his host,/Who should against his murderer shut the door,/Not bear the knife myself.
	Besides, this Duncan/Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been/So clear in his great office, that his virtues/Will plead like angels trumpet-tongued against/The deep damnation of his taking-off;
	And pity, like a naked newborn babe,/Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin horsed/Upon the sightless couriers of the air,/Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye/That tears shall drown the wind.
	I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only/Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself/And falls on th'other.

# MACBETH

IDEAS TO USE WITH:

## PERSUADING MACBETH

Lady Macbeth persuades her husband to change his mind.  
The cast explore different ways of performing the scene.

### Before watching the workshop

- **Does Macbeth want to kill the king?**  
In pairs, ask students to discuss, on a scale of 1 to 10, how willing they think Macbeth is to kill Duncan before the start of this scene.
- **Persuasion**  
In pairs, ask students to share a situation in which they've wanted to persuade someone to do something against their wishes. What strategies did they use to get what they wanted?

### After watching the workshop

- **The Macbeths' relationship**  
In pairs, ask students to choose words that they would use to describe the Macbeths' relationship in this production.
- **Past productions**  
In small groups, ask students to read reviews and look at images of other productions. (You can find images and video clips of RSC past productions of Macbeth at: [rsc.org.uk/explore/macbeth](http://rsc.org.uk/explore/macbeth)) Ask students what different kinds of relationships between the Macbeths have there been in other productions.

*"Lady Macbeth mounts this extraordinary attack on him and everything about him, but mainly his manhood."*





# MACBETH

ACTIVITY (20-30 MINUTES):

## EXPERIMENTING WITH INTERPRETIVE CHOICES

**In the workshop the actors experiment with different strategies or tactics to achieve their ambitions. In this activity students also try out different tactics in order to appreciate one important way in which theatre creates meaning from the text.**

### Structure of the activity.

1. Ask students in pairs to read aloud the scene from lines 28 to 91 (from the end of Macbeth's soliloquy to the end of the scene)
2. Explain to students playing Lady Macbeth that they are going to try three different tactics while saying the three speeches that appear in this scene: a) to interrogate Macbeth; b) to humiliate him; and c) to encourage him. Students should apply one of these tactics to each speech. They can choose which tactic goes with which speech but they must choose a different tactic each time.
3. Ask the students playing Macbeth to respond to the tactics as they think they would if they were Macbeth at that moment, in just the way the actors do in the filmed workshop.
4. Then ask students to think of other tactics which might be used: for example, to persuade Macbeth, reason with him, comfort him, batter him, shock him, torment him. Which of Lady Macbeth's speeches could they apply these to?
5. Ask students to play the scene again with the revised tactics. As before, the students playing Macbeth should respond as they would if they were in Macbeth's shoes.
6. Ask some students to share their choices with the rest of the class. How did the versions differ?
7. Ask students to reflect on their work. Can they appreciate how different actors will make different choices and how these differences will play a major role in making the production unique?

### You will need:

- [Copies of Act 1 Scene 7](#) from lines 28 to 91
- A cleared space where students can easily stand and move in pairs

*"I'm inspired by her...  
wow, you really are  
resolved."*



# MACBETH

## Act 2 Scene 2: **BLOODY DAGGERS**

### THE STORY SO FAR....

Lady Macbeth is alone at the start of the scene. She waits while Macbeth, elsewhere in the castle, commits the crime. She has done everything in preparation for the deed but, in her first sign of conscience, could not kill Duncan because he resembled her father. And then Macbeth enters.



### WHAT HAPPENS?

Macbeth's indecision is finally over. His famous 'dagger' soliloquy immediately precedes this scene. As with "If it were done" in Act 1 Scene 7, in "Is this a dagger..." Macbeth reviews his options and determines to sell his soul for the kingship. Like "If it were done" the 'dagger' soliloquy is focused on the wickedness of the crime and the damnation that will surely follow. Yet even Macbeth's powerful imagination cannot anticipate the agony of conscience and fear of purgatory he will feel after the murder.

This remarkable scene, written at the height of Shakespeare's powers, must be one of the best examples in literature of form supporting content. The rhythms and structure of the verse, the sounds of the words, the pauses Shakespeare has inserted all transmit a hair-raising atmosphere of horror.

### IDEAS TO USE WITH THIS SCENE:

#### Before watching the scene

- **What's just happened?**  
In pairs, ask students to recap on what happens just before this scene.
- **Atmosphere**  
In pairs, ask students to list five words to describe the atmosphere of the scene.
- **The scene in performance**  
In small groups, ask students to discuss what features of the scene they will particularly look out for in performance.

#### After watching the scene

- **Staging and design**  
In small groups ask students to consider whether there was anything about the staging of the scene that surprised them. E.g. the positioning and movement of the actors on the set or their exits and entrances.
- In these groups ask them to discuss what effect the costumes, lighting, make-up and props have on the scene. In particular, how would they describe the lighting? What colours were the costumes? Why might the director and designer choose these colours?
- **Memorable moments**  
In small groups ask students what moments from the performance they will remember. Why?

# MACBETH

IDEAS TO USE WITH:

## THE KING IS DEAD

The actors and director explore the Macbeths' very different responses to Duncan's murder. They try different ways of playing the escalating conflict between the two characters.

### Before watching the footage

- **Setting up the scene**

In small groups, ask students to discuss what important information is given in the opening three speeches of the scene.

Ask students to consider the geography of the scene. Where are the Macbeths at this point? Where is Duncan? What other information does the text give us about location and surroundings? Students might find it helpful to make a simple drawing.

- **Who's in charge**

In pairs, ask students to discuss who's in charge in this scene. How do they know? Why does one character have more power at this point in the play?

### After watching the footage

- **Lady Macbeth**

In small groups, discuss observations about the tactics Lady Macbeth uses to calm her husband's fears.

Consider what Lady Macbeth is feeling. How does the audience know from her performance?

- **Purgatory**

Ask students to discuss what exactly might Macbeth be afraid of.

Ask them to research what purgatory meant to people in the sixteenth century.

*"He's done the deed  
but the fallout is now  
becoming evident.  
He's crumbling which  
cannot happen."*



# MACBETH

ACTIVITY (40-50 MINUTES):

## PLAYING CONFLICTING 'DESIRES'

The director describes this scene as a 'clash between her confidence and his unravelling'. From this difference in response to Duncan's murder come the conflicting 'desires' or ambitions of the two characters which ultimately lead to them drifting apart. This exercise asks students to try out the desires the actors use in the workshop as well as some different ones. Which desires would students use in playing the Macbeths in their own productions?

### You will need:

- [Copies of Act 2 Scene 2](#)
- Coloured pens
- A space where students can work together in pairs, sitting, standing and moving

### Structure of the activity.

1. In pairs ask students to read the scene aloud, one playing Macbeth and one Lady Macbeth.
2. Ask each pair to use coloured pens to annotate Lady Macbeth's changing tactics in the scene as they are described in the workshop. Where does Lady Macbeth try to calm Macbeth by comforting him? Where does she lose patience and begin to blame him?
3. Now ask each pair to choose two contrasting 'wants' or desires from Macbeth. In the workshop the actor explains that his Macbeth is trying to get her to join him in his panic.
4. Next, read the scene aloud with Lady Macbeth playing 'to comfort' followed by 'to blame' and Macbeth playing 'to force her into his panic'.
5. Now ask students to try a different set of tactics. Perhaps for part of the scene Lady Macbeth reasons with her husband and in another part she tries to laugh him out of his fears. Encourage students to try out extreme possibilities as actors might do during rehearsals.
6. Ask pairs to go through the scene twice, trying out two contrasting sets of desires and share their work.

*"What she feels and what she can show don't tally."*



# MACBETH

IDEAS TO USE WITH:

## RHYTHM OF THE LANGUAGE

The cast discuss iambic pentameter and explore the rhythms of Shakespeare's language. The rhythm of the lines creates an atmosphere of urgency and desperation.

### Before watching the workshop

- **Shakespeare's language and iambic pentameter**

As a whole class, ask students what they already know about Shakespeare's use of language. For example, did he write in prose or poetry or both? What forms of poetry or verse did he use most often?

Give students an example of a perfect line of iambic pentameter from a Shakespeare play. Mark the stressed and unstressed syllables.

### After watching the workshop

- **Shakespeare's language and iambic pentameter**

As a whole class, ask students what the actors said about iambic pentameter. In particular, what was compared to the rhythm of iambic pentameter?

Ask students to tap out the rhythm of iambic pentameter on their own chests: de dum, de dum, de dum, de dum, de dum.

In pairs, ask students to find an example of a perfect line of iambic pentameter from this scene. Ask them to mark the stressed and unstressed syllables. Ask one or two pairs to read out their chosen line. What is the effect on us, as an audience, of lines that sound like this?

Ask students if they understand what a shared line is. If necessary, give them examples from the scene. Ask for two volunteers to say aloud one example of shared lines. How do the shared lines sound different to the perfect lines of iambic pentameter? What is the effect of the shared lines in this scene?

*"The truth is that we very often speak in iambic pentameter just naturally. I'd really like to have a cup of tea."*



# MACBETH

ACTIVITY (30-45 MINUTES):

## EXPERIMENTING WITH VERSE RHYTHMS & SHARED LINES

**In their work on the verse structure in this scene, the actors and director reveal how Shakespeare establishes the atmosphere of the scene in its rhythms, shared lines and pauses. In this activity students have practical opportunities to discover the effects of Shakespeare's verse.**

### You will need:

- [Copies of Act 2 Scene 2](#)
- A cleared classroom or hall

### Structure of the activity:

1. Ask students to look at lines 15 ("I have done the deed") to 26 ("A foolish thought to say a sorry sight"). Clap through this section together, clapping on all the stressed syllables only. Ask students where the verse rhythm is regular and where is it uneven. What is the effect of a jerky or very short line?
2. Ask students, on their own or in pairs, to compose two perfect lines of iambic pentameter on any subject they like. The actor playing Macbeth chose: "I'd really like to have a cup of tea." Then ask them to add a third line which breaks that rhythm in some way.
3. Ask some students to share their lines. What is the effect of a broken rhythm after the perfect lines of iambic pentameter? Why might Shakespeare often break his own rhythm?
4. Now ask students, in pairs, to highlight all the shared lines in the scene.
5. In their pairs, ask students to read aloud lines 15 to 26. The first time, students should pause for various lengths of time between speakers. The second time, there should be only a one second pause between speakers – no more or less.
6. Ask one pair of students to demonstrate these two different versions. Ask students which approach is more effective.

*"The sharing of the lines allows us to hear how urgent the need to communicate is, because of panic, rising panic."*



# MACBETH

IDEAS TO USE WITH:

## HEARING NOISES

Macbeth's guilty conscience causes him to hear terrifying sounds. He cannot say 'amen'. The cast explore how Lady Macbeth takes control of the situation.

### Before watching the workshop

- **Pauses**

Explain to students that a very short line which is not shared would indicate a pause. Where in the scene has Shakespeare indicated pauses?

Ask students why they think Shakespeare has put pauses in those places? Remind them to think from the characters' points of view. Why might they pause in those places?

### After watching the workshop

- **Hearing noises**

As a whole class discuss:

- What noises does Macbeth imagine he hears in this scene?
- Does Lady Macbeth imagine any sounds?
- What noises are real and heard by both characters?
- What meaning does Macbeth make of the noises he hears, real and imaginary?
- What does he think will happen as a result of what he hears?

*“Every time I come up with something, she tries to explain it in a rational, pragmatic way.”*



# MACBETH

ACTIVITY (45 MINUTES):

## SOUNDS IN THE BLOODY DAGGERS SCENE

**In the workshop the actors discuss what the Macbeths see and hear during the scene. These sights and sounds fill the pauses and add sound-tracking, helping to create the scene's suspenseful atmosphere. This sound-tracking activity will give students insight into the impact of Duncan's murder on the Macbeths as they attempt, in their different ways, to cope with their feelings.**

### You will need:

- [Copies of Act 2 Scene 2](#)
- Coloured pens
- A cleared classroom or hall

### Structure of the activity:

1. Referring to their responses to the activities on page 15, ask the whole class to create a list of the sounds that Macbeth hears or thinks he hears during Act 2 Scene 2.
2. Do the same for Lady Macbeth.
3. Write up this list on a whiteboard or blackboard, or photocopy the list so that everyone has a copy.
4. Now ask students to work in pairs and annotate their copy of the script, deciding where exactly in the text Macbeth and/or Lady Macbeth hears something and record at that spot what sound(s) they hear, whether real or imagined.
5. Now ask students, still in their pairs, to read the scene aloud, one playing Macbeth, one playing Lady Macbeth both reacting to the sounds they might hear.
6. Choose one pair to share their findings. Ask them what sounds they have chosen and where they occur in the scene. Ask all other students to record these sounds on their scripts in a different colour pen from the one used for their own version.
7. Ask your volunteer pair to read the scene aloud on their feet while the rest of the group creates the sounds the pair have chosen for their scene – for example, the whispering, knocking, a scream, and so on. The actors should be aware of the layout of their scene and move about it as the characters would, particularly in response to the sounds.
8. Ask students to consider the effect created by the sounds – both real and imagined. What effect do these sounds have on the scene? What contribution do they make to the atmosphere? What do we learn about the Macbeths from this exercise?

*"In my head, I am  
absolutely paranoid  
that it is either  
Duncan's spirit, or it's  
God or the Devil."*





# MACBETH

## Act 5 Scene 1: **SLEEPWALKING**

### THE STORY SO FAR...

Up until this point, the focus of the play has been on Macbeth's decline. To make Macbeth king and become queen herself Lady Macbeth has buried all vestiges of conscience. After the murders of Duncan and Banquo, she has managed Macbeth's rising panic and erratic behaviour and held their enterprise together. For more than a full act, Lady Macbeth has not been on-stage – not since her quick-witted salvage of the royal banquet. When the guests are gone, ironically she advises her husband: "You lack the season of all natures, sleep".



### WHAT HAPPENS?

In this famous scene, we witness the prelude to the last act of Lady Macbeth's journey. Here we see her sleepwalking, no longer able to hold down the cover on her turbulent conscience. Shakespeare brilliantly shows her to us through the eyes of two quite ordinary people, the doctor and the lady-in-waiting. Their shocked commentary on the Queen's behaviour is a mirror for our own responses, possibly including pity, fear and horror.

### IDEAS TO USE WITH THIS SCENE:

#### Before watching the scene

- **Directing choices**  
Ask students to discuss in pairs what choices they would make about the scene if they were directing it, in particular:
  - Where the scene is set
  - What Lady Macbeth is wearing
  - The relationship between the lady-in-waiting and the doctor
  - Whether or not Lady Macbeth sees them
  - Stage lighting

#### After watching the scene

- **Lady Macbeth**  
In pairs, ask students to discuss how Lady Macbeth is different from the way she has been in earlier scenes. What is the actor doing physically and vocally that helps to achieve this change?
- **Staging**  
As a whole class, ask students what they noticed about the stage the scene is performed on. What is the effect of having an audience on three sides? As a whole class ask students where Lady Macbeth went when she said "To bed, to bed...". Where was she going? Who was the figure sitting above the door she exited through? Who opened the door?

# MACBETH

IDEAS TO USE WITH:

## SLEEPWALKING QUEEN

The director works with the cast to explore how knowledge of Lady Macbeth's dark secret changes the lives of the doctor and lady-in-waiting.

### Before watching the workshop

- **The doctor and the lady-in-waiting.**

Ask students to discuss what information is in the text about them.

Ask, if they were the director, what questions they would put to the actors playing these characters.

Ask them to describe the reactions of these two characters to Lady Macbeth's sleep-walking behaviour.

### After watching the workshop

- **The doctor and the lady-in-waiting:**

In pairs ask students to consider:

- What have the director/actors decided is the relationship between the doctor and lady-in-waiting?
- Is this a choice made for this production or is it something Shakespeare has written in the text?
- What are the dangers for the doctor and lady-in-waiting of over-hearing the Queen?
- What effect do they think the Macbeths' reign has had on ordinary people?

*"It's a dangerous  
time for everybody.  
This secret is  
gunpowder."*



# MACBETH

ACTIVITY (45 MINUTES):

## BACK-STORIES AND SUBTEXT

**In the workshop, the director and actors discuss the personal circumstances of the doctor and lady-in-waiting, and consider what they might be thinking at certain key moments. In the sequence below students are invited to extend what they see of the actors' work by creating more detailed 'back-stories' and 'subtexts' for these two characters.**

### Structure of the activity:

1. Ask students to review what they now know about the doctor and lady-in-waiting.
2. Explain that in this scene both the doctor and the lady-in-waiting are thinking many things which they are not saying because it would be dangerous to say them.
3. Ask students to work in pairs to create and write down the back-stories for the doctor and lady-in-waiting. Ask them to limit their writing to one side of A4 each. Ask for these to be written in the first person and to focus particularly on their life at court and their contact or lack of it with the Queen until this point.
4. Now have them annotate the edited text with the characters' thoughts or subtext. For example, the doctor might be thinking before he says his first line, *"I don't know who this young woman thinks she is, calling me here in the middle of the night."*
5. Have the pairs join another pair. Ask them to choose one of the pair's annotated versions of the scene. One pair will play the doctor and lady-in-waiting while one of the other pair reads Lady Macbeth. The fourth member of the group may call out at any point in the scene, 'Stop, [name of character], think!' Encourage them to do this often. That character must then speak his or her thoughts aloud.
6. Ask students to swap over and look at the second pair's annotated version of the scene.
7. How might this exercise improve the quality of the performance and enrich the meanings of the play?

### You will need:

- [Copies of Act 5 Scene 1](#), double spaced so students can make notes between the lines
- Sheets of A4 plus pens and pencils
- Space for students to work in pairs and small groups

*"Are you accusing our king and queen of something?"*



# MACBETH

IDEAS TO USE WITH:

## CANDLE IN THE DARK

The director and actors experiment with the staging of the sleepwalking scene. What happens to the relationships when the whole of the scene is played in a small circle of light?

### Before watching the workshop

- **Light and dark, seeing and observing.**

As a whole class ask students to consider:

- Light and dark imagery is a feature of *Macbeth*. How does it support the play's themes?
- What examples of light and dark imagery can be found in the first four acts?
- There are repeated references in this scene to seeing and observing. What is the relationship between seeing and the light and dark imagery? How is seeing (and not seeing or blindness) related to the themes of the play?

### After watching the workshop

- **Light and dark, seeing and observing.**

In pairs ask students to discuss:

- What is the effect of playing the scene in a small pool of light? Would they direct it this way?
- What would this practical performance choice tell us about Lady Macbeth and her journey?
- If they were directing would they choose for Lady Macbeth to know the doctor and lady-in-waiting are there or not?

*"It gave me a sense of how small her world may be. Her world is murky, morally. Maybe she only wants this amount of light."*



# MACBETH

ACTIVITY (45 MINUTES):

## EXPLORING PERFORMANCE CHOICES

**This activity helps students to make discoveries about the text through different ways of performing the scene.**

### Structure of the activity:

1. Ask students to work in groups of three and read the scene aloud, with each person playing one character.
2. Now ask students to try the scene in a number of different ways. Ask them to rehearse the scene as if:
  - Lady Macbeth doesn't see the doctor and lady-in-waiting
  - She is well aware that they are there
  - She believes the doctor is her husband
  - The scene is played in a large, open space with plenty of hiding places
  - The scene is played in a small circle of light
  - There are people passing in the corridor and someone might enter at any moment
3. What other options can students think of that they might try out?
4. Ask students to reflect on the importance of this activity and how different choices will make one production very different from another. Explain that Shakespeare's text will usually give some clues as to how a scene, character or whole play might be performed but leaves significant choices for performance down to each theatre company.

### You will need:

- [Copies of Act 5 Scene 1](#)
- A cleared classroom or hall

*"I'd like to try the scene in the dark. The night is scary from childhood onwards."*



# MACBETH

IDEAS TO USE WITH:

## UNLOCKING THE WORDS

The RSC's Head of Voice helps the actor playing Lady Macbeth highlight what the character is seeing, hearing and smelling to make sense of her seemingly disconnected words.

### Before watching the workshop

- **Lady Macbeth's troubled mind**

Lady Macbeth is obsessed in this scene. Ask students to suggest what she is obsessed with.

Ask students if they can relate the words and phrases Lady Macbeth uses to past actions in the play. Are there places where she is saying almost the same thing as she said earlier? What are the small but important differences?

### After watching the workshop

- **Playing Lady Macbeth.**

In pairs, ask students to discuss:

- What discoveries does Aislín McGuckin as Lady Macbeth make in the exercises in the film?
- How would these discoveries help her performance?
- If they were playing Lady Macbeth, how would they explain her rapid changes of thought to themselves? Why are there so many changes so quickly?

*"Let's look at the number of times you use this image of blood. Blood runs throughout this passage."*



# MACBETH

ACTIVITY (45 MINUTES):

## EXPLORING LADY MACBETH'S TROUBLED MIND

**Just as in the film, in this activity students will try out different physical approaches to the language to make discoveries for themselves about what Lady Macbeth is thinking and seeing.**

### You will need:

- [Act 5 Scene 1](#) with just Lady Macbeth's lines in the Scenes Text pdf
- A cleared classroom or hall

### Structure of the activity:

1. Ask pupils to work in pairs. One student reads aloud Lady Macbeth's lines and stamps on every reference to blood in the scene. As the Lady Macbeth reads, the partner student is silent but stamps when s/he thinks there's a blood reference. The pair discusses any differences of opinion. Remind students that any reference to blood merits a stamp even if the word itself is not used.
2. Ask students what this kind of repetition tells us about Lady Macbeth at this point. What is the effect on the audience?
3. Now ask students, still working in pairs, to try the clapping exercise: one student reads aloud Lady Macbeth's lines while the other student claps at every punctuation mark. Remind students the punctuation marks give us information about the rhythms of the language and mark the development of ideas and changes of thought, however slight.
4. Develop this approach further. Ask students to swap round so that the partner student now reads aloud Lady Macbeth's lines. The new clapping partner now claps twice for every clear and strong change of thought. An example would be: "Out, damned spot! Out, I say!" DOUBLE CLAP "One: two: why, then 'tis time to do't".
5. As a whole class, ask students to come up with labels for the different places Lady Macbeth's mind travels to. One place might be labelled 'The Present'. Another might be 'After Duncan's Murder'. 'After Banquo's and Lady McDuff's murders' might be a third.
6. Designate places in the room for all the places.
7. Ask for a volunteer Lady Macbeth to read aloud Lady Macbeth's lines only and ask the rest of the group to direct her so she moves to the correct space each time there is a change of focus.
8. Ask students what the implications are for staging the scene of such disjointed thought. If they were directing or acting Lady Macbeth what kind of movement onstage would represent the Queen's turbulence?

*"Become very aware of when you're talking to yourself and when you're talking to Macbeth."*



# MACBETH

IDEAS TO USE WITH:

## ABOUT THE 2011 RSC PRODUCTION

Michael Boyd and Tom Piper talk about the page to stage process for the production, considering how the design and staging was informed by the times when *Macbeth* was written and especially the Protestant Reformation and Gunpowder Plot. They also explore how to portray the witches and the supernatural elements of the play, explaining their choices of the witches being the dead children of Macduff and the Porter as Satan.

### Before watching the clip

- **Directing the play**

Ask students to imagine they've decided to direct *Macbeth*.  
Why would they choose that play?  
What characters, ideas or aspects of the story interest them?

In which historical period would they set their production?  
Where in the world would they choose to set it?

Ask them to explain the thinking behind their choices.

### After watching the clip

- **Explore the following:**

In pairs, ask students to discuss:

- What does the designer, Tom Piper, mean when he talks about 'the world of the play'?
- What historical event was especially influential in the design choices for this production?
- How is the supernatural handled in this production? What might be the thinking behind this decision?

*Tom Piper's set makes reference to the opposition to Catholics and the desecration of the churches after the Gunpowder Plot.*

