*The following activities are designed around academic reading. This means you will be given an article to read and answer questions on. These articles have been selected because they will aid your understanding of Shakespeare’s play and the big ideas he explores. There are no answers at the back of the booklet for this section so do your best. If you need any assistance, email your teacher and if you have no access to email, do what you can and then move on to the next activity.*

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| **Activity 5: Pre-Reading Activities** |



*This section of the booklet will focus on extracts from ‘Conjuring Darkness in Macbeth’, an article that can be found on the British Library website. Before you read the extracts, complete the following pre-reading activities to help you understand what the article. Answer in full sentences. If you would like to access the full article, you can find it here:* <https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/conjuring-darkness-in-macbeth>

**Pre-Reading questions**

1. **The British Library have filed this article under the following categories. Make notes around each category which explain how they link to ‘Macbeth’.**

**TRAGEDIES LANGUAGE**

1. **The summary for the article reads as:**

**Much of Macbeth is set at night, yet its first performances took place in the open air, during daylight hours. John Mullan explores how Shakespeare uses speech and action to conjure the play's sense of growing darkness.**

**What does the word ‘conjure’ mean? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**What does the word ‘action’ mean in this context? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**This picture shows a chandelier above the stage of a 17th century playhouse. Using the picture and the summary above, predict what ideas you think the article is going to explore:**

**I think this article** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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| **Activity 6: Guided Reading** |

*Read the article. Highlight two sentences in each paragraph which you deem to be the most important. Down the left-hand side, add a title for each paragraph. On the right-hand side, summarise what each paragraph is saying in two or three bullet points. This follows the guided reading strategy we have used in class. One has been done for you so you can see what your work should look like.*

**Paragraph Titles**

**Bullet Point Paragraph Summary**

**Conjuring Darkness in Macbeth – Part 1**

It is strange to think that [Macbeth](https://www.bl.uk/works/macbeth) was almost certainly written for, and first performed at, the open-air Globe Theatre, where plays were staged in daylight. ‘Light thickens, and the crow / Makes wing to th’ rooky wood’ (3.2.50–51), says Macbeth – but the actor first speaking these words did so in the bright light of day. The palpable gathering of darkness that the speaker describes and welcomes had to be imagined by Shakespeare’s audience. We know for certain that Macbeth was performed in daylight at the Globe, for the astrologer Simon Forman records seeing it performed there in 1610. It had first been staged in 1606. Even if it were later performed at the indoor theatre at Blackfriars, where plays were illuminated by candlelight and where darkness was obtainable, this theatre was not available to Shakespeare’s company until 1608–09. It seems clear, then, that Shakespeare conceived it as a play where darkness had to be theatrically conjured rather than literally provided.

In modern times, productions of the play have given directors opportunities for many a special theatrical effect that has depended on alternations of darkness and concentrated light. Yet the original play, by having to create these alternations in the imagination, powerfully merges literal and metaphorical darkness. Shakespeare did have some special effects to hand: Macbeth begins with ‘thunder and lightning’ and, in the performances at the Globe, this lightning might have been represented by flashes from fireworks, as was done with other plays of the period. But, for the most part, in the bright daylight of a Thameside afternoon, the darkness that seems to envelop the play had to be created by words and gestures.

Key scenes of the play are set at night, and even in many of the daytime scenes characters are aware of the fading of the light. The Witches who open the play agree that they will meet Macbeth ‘ere the set of sun’ (1.1.5); Duncan arrives at Macbeth’s castle at evening (Act 1, Scene 6); the First Murderer, instructed by Macbeth to kill Banquo and Fleance, notes how ‘The west yet glimmers with some streaks of day’ (3.3.5). We often feel darkness coming, especially because both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth seem to invoke and invite it. They need darkness to do their worst.

On a stage crowded with Duncan and his thanes, Macbeth speaks in one of his asides that allow us to hear his unspoken thoughts. ‘Stars, hide your fires, / Let not light see my black and deep desires’ (1.4.50–51). This is the first reference to darkness in the play. He has just found out that he has become Thane of Cawdor, as prophesied by the Witches, and that Duncan is to visit his castle. The underside of the roof covering much of the stage of the Globe was decorated with painted stars, so Macbeth’s invocation is like a spell to darken the very space in which he stands. In the next scene, Lady Macbeth, excited by the tidings that the king is to come ‘tonight’ to her castle, brings on a kind of conjuration of darkness. ‘Come, thick night, / And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell’ (1.5.50–51). She has not heard her husband’s words as we have done, yet she seems to echo them with her wish that ‘heaven’ not ‘peep through the blanket of the dark / To cry, ‘Hold, hold!’’ (1.5.53–54)

Imagining darkness in daylight

-Performances were staged out in the open.

-Audiences had to imagine darkness on stage.

**Conjuring Darkness in Macbeth – Part 2**

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth separately call on darkness not just to assist their plans but to hide their deeds from ‘Heaven’ or their own consciences. ‘Let ... The eye wink at the hand’ (1.4.51–52), says Macbeth, as if the dark might hide his own action from himself. Later he echoes his wife’s when he talks to her of his planned murder of his friend Banquo, but in such way that she might remain ‘innocent of the knowledge’ of what he is about to do (3.2.45). ‘Come, seeling night, / Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,’ he continues. Seeling is a metaphor taken from hawking, where a hawk has its eyelids sewed shut in order to be trained. Macbeth looks forward to the darkness that will facilitate his murderous plans. But it is more than this. Day is ‘pitiful’, and in his ruthless actions Macbeth must escape pity. In his imagining, darkness is a psychological space, where scruple can be shed, compunction lost.

Audiences will be most aware of the gathering of darkness when Duncan comes to stay at Macbeth’s castle. What Lady Macbeth chillingly calls ‘This night’s great business’ (1.5.68) must happen in the dark. Servants carrying torches enter at Act 1, Scene 7 to signify that night has fallen. And it gets yet darker. At the opening of Act 2, Banquo’s son Fleance carries a torch when he enters with his father. It is after twelve and ‘The moon is down’ (2.1.2): it is pitch dark. With a brilliant touch, Shakespeare lets us hear how different characters make their own sense of the blackness. ‘There’s husbandry in heaven, / Their candles are all out’ (2.1.4–5), says Banquo, fancifully – and unconsciously reminds us of the obscuring of Heaven and starlight for which Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have wished.

Now, in this deep darkness, characters cannot see each other even by the light of torches. ‘Who’s there?’ asks Banquo as Macbeth enters with a torch-bearing servant (2.1.10). It is the same nervous exclamation as begins Shakespeare’s [Hamlet](http://www.bl.uk/works/hamlet), and as in the first scene of that play, which begins in darkness on the battlements of Elsinore, the audience at the Globe would have been able to see very clearly how the characters on stage were unable to see clearly. A little later, after Banquo has retired, Lady Macbeth enters and catches herself starting at the shriek of an owl, just before her husband comes to meet her. ‘Who’s there? What ho?’ (2.2.8) asks Macbeth, and at first she hardly seems to recognise him: ‘My husband!’ (2.2.13). Their dialogue creates a darkness in which sounds and apprehensions are amplified: ‘Didst thou not hear a noise?’ (2.2.14), ‘Did not you speak?’ (2.2.16). The terrible deed has been done and the darkness that made it possible concentrates their fears.

The discovery of Duncan’s murder is followed by an odd little scene, which must take place several days later, in which Ross and an Old Man discuss unnatural events that seem to have accompanied the killing. Shakespeare takes from his source story in Holinshed’s Chronicles the report that after Donwald murdered King Duff ‘For the space of six monenths together ... there appeered no sunne by day, nor moone by night in anie part of the realme’. In the wake of Duncan’s killing, darkness appears to have seeped from the night into the day. ‘By th’ clock ’tis day, / And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp’ (2.4.6–7), observes Ross. Without any help from artificial lighting effects, we gain an impression of ‘night’s predominance’ (2.4.8), as he calls it.

**Paragraph Titles**

**Bullet Point Paragraph Summary**

**Bullet Point Paragraph Summary**

**Paragraph Titles**

**Conjuring Darkness in Macbeth – Part 3**

When we return to Macbeth he has been crowned king but fears Banquo and ‘his royalty of nature’ (3.1.49). He must again call darkness to his aid. Banquo tells him that he is riding out and will probably be ‘a borrower of the night / For a dark hour or twain’ (3.1.26–27) before he returns for Macbeth’s feast. Night will, of course, facilitate the arrangement of his murder, and when Macbeth instructs the two Murderers on their mission, he echoes Banquo’s own phrasing. Fleance, he tells the hired killers, must ‘embrace the fate / Of that dark hour’ (3.1.136–37). As so often in this play, darkness is simultaneously metaphorical and literal. The ‘dark hour’ is the time of killing – but also the lightless time when a trap can be sprung. When the Murderers attack Banquo, it is darkness that allows them to surprise him – but also that allows Fleance to escape. ‘Who did strike out the light?’ asks the Third Murderer (3.3.19). Darkness is not the friend to Macbeth that he believes. Fate is not his to command.

Darkness may seem to become Macbeth’s element, but his wife, once the prime mover of their plots, comes to dread it. Watching her sleepwalking, her Gentlewoman tells the Doctor that ‘she has light by her continually, ’tis her command’ (5.1.22). ‘Enter Lady with a Taper’ is the stage instruction in the First Folio, on which text all later editions are based. The taper, the smallest kind of candle, is Lady Macbeth’s safeguard against the powers of darkness. These were once the powers that she invoked, but now they crowd in on her. Once she called ‘Come, thick night, / And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell’ (1.5.50–51); now she feels and fears ‘Hell is murky’ (5.1.36). In her final scene before her death, Shakespeare shows how the horror of her deeds has possessed her, and does so by dramatising the most elemental and childlike of fears: fear of the dark.

**Summarise the article in one paragraph.**

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| **Activity 7: Post-Reading Questions** |

*Answer the following questions on the article above. Remember to answer in full sentences. If there is a question you are not sure about, email your teacher or miss it out and come back to it when you have finished the rest of the activities. If you need extra space, write on a difference piece of paper and attach it to this booklet once you have finished.*

1. **What were some of the special effects theatres employed to create thunder and lightning?**
2. **Why do Macbeth and Lady Macbeth ask for darkness at the beginning of the play?**
3. **Why do you think Macbeth describes day as ‘pitiful’ when he asks for darkness to come?**
4. **How does Shakespeare signify night has fallen before Duncan’s murder takes place?**
5. **The article states that ‘in the wake of Duncan’s killing, darkness appears to have seeped from the night into the day.’ What do you think this means and what is this symbolic of?**
6. **The article says, ‘The taper, the smallest kind of candle, is Lady Macbeth’s safeguard against the powers of darkness.’ Why do you think Lady Macbeth’s light is so small? What could this symbolise?**
7. **Characters come to ‘fear the dark’. What does this remind you of? What do you think Shakespeare is saying here?**

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| **Activity 8: Further Questions** |

*Answer the following questions on the article. These questions require shorter answers and can be answered as notes and brief annotations. If you need extra space, write on a different piece of paper and attach it to this booklet. If you need a copy of the script, you can find one online. Check your answers at the back of the booklet when you have finished.*

*Shakespeare did have some special effects to hand:*Macbeth*begins with ‘thunder and lightning’ and, in the performances at the Globe, this lightning might have been represented by flashes from fireworks, as was done with other plays of the period.*

1. **Why does Shakespeare open the play with thunder and lightning?**
2. **Why do the witches appear in thunder and lightning?**
3. **How does Shakespeare use speech in this scene to let the audience know what kind of weather the witches meet in?**

*We often feel darkness coming, especially because both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth seem to invoke and invite it. They need darkness to do their worst.*

1. **Retrieve a short quotation where Macbeth asks for darkness.**
2. **Retrieve a short quotation where Lady Macbeth asks for darkness.**
3. **What is darkness symbolic of?**

*Audiences will be most aware of the gathering of darkness when Duncan comes to stay at Macbeth’s castle. What Lady Macbeth chillingly calls ‘This night’s great business’ (1.5.68) must happen in the dark.*

1. **What does Duncan initially think of Macbeth’s castle when he first arrives. Retrieve a short quotation.**
2. **What does the Porter joke the castle has become in the scene after Duncan’s murder?**

*A little later, after Banquo has retired, Lady Macbeth enters and catches herself starting at the shriek of an owl, just before her husband comes to meet her. ‘Who’s there? What ho?’ (2.2.8) asks Macbeth, and at first she hardly seems to recognise him: ‘My husband!’ (2.2.13). Their dialogue creates a darkness in which sounds and apprehensions are amplified: ‘Didst thou not hear a noise?’ (2.2.14), ‘Did not you speak?’ (2.2.16). The terrible deed has been done and the darkness that made it possible concentrates their fears.*

1. **What kind of character is Banquo in the play?**
2. **Why are the Macbeths so afraid of noise?**
3. **Lady Macbeth only calls Macbeth by the name of ‘husband’ once in the play. Why do you think this is?**

*Darkness may seem to become Macbeth’s element, but his wife, once the prime mover of their plots, comes to dread it. Watching her sleepwalking, her Gentlewoman tells the Doctor that ‘she has light by her continually, ’tis her command’ (5.1.22). ‘*Enter Lady with a Taper*’ is the stage instruction in the First Folio, on which text all later editions are based. The taper, the smallest kind of candle, is Lady Macbeth’s safeguard against the powers of darkness.*

1. **Retrieve a short quotation which shows Lady Macbeth is scared of darkness.**
2. **What kind of character is Lady Macbeth at the end of the play?**