



## LADY MACBETH'S SLEEPWALKING (Act V, scene 1)

### Overview

- The students will be the actors and directors of this scene. They will analyse and search Shakespeare's text for clues and then stage each character's movements and behaviour.

Grade  
Level

Subject  
Area

Curriculum Expectations and Learning  
Outcome

Time  
Needed

Space

Materials

7-12

English,  
Drama

Develop interpretations of Shakespeare's text, using evidence from the text and visual cues to support and explain these interpretations.

Analyse texts, examining how their various aspects contribute to the presentation.

Identify and use various techniques or methods to develop a character.

1-2 class  
Periods

Desks in groups, then open spaces for exploring the text

Attached handouts of activities

## LADY MACBETH'S SLEEPWALKING (Act V, scene 1)

### Activity:

*Lady Macbeth's guilt in the murders of Duncan, his two guards and Banquo starts to undermine her emotional stability, leading her to sleepwalk and imagine there is blood on her hands that she cannot wash away. Her physician and gentlewoman are observing her.*

You are the actors/directors of this scene. Read the entire scene first, then work out how you envision each character would behave and respond physically and emotionally. HINT: The staging clues are in the text! 😊

*A room in Dunsinane Castle*

*Enter a Doctor of Physic (medicine) and a Waiting-Gentlewoman (personal attendant)*

### DOCTOR

I have two nights watched with you, but can perceive no truth in your report. When was it she last walked?

*remained awake  
sleepwalked*

### GENTLEWOMAN

Since his majesty<sup>1</sup> went into the field<sup>2</sup>, I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her night-gown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon't, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep.

*1. Macbeth 2. went to the battlefield  
  
chest/cabinet  
personal stamp in hot wax on a letter*

### DOCTOR

A great perturbation in nature, to receive at once the benefit of sleep, and do the effects of watching. In this slumbry agitation, besides her walking and other actual performances, what at any time have you heard her say?

*disturbance  
appearances and actions of waking  
sleepwalking/disturbed state of mind  
active*

### GENTLEWOMAN

That, sir, which I will not report after her.

**DOCTOR**

You may to me: and 'tis most meet you should.

*suitable*

**GENTLEWOMAN**

Neither to you nor any one, having no witness to confirm my speech.

*She is unwilling to say, as this would be treason.*

*Enter LADY MACBETH, with a taper (candle)*

Lo you, here she comes. This is her very guise  
and, upon my life, fast asleep. Observe her; stand close.

*custom/manner*

*concealed*

**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.

*appear to be*

**LADY MACBETH**

Yet here's a spot.

**DOCTOR**

Hark, she speaks; I will set down what comes from  
her, to satisfy<sup>1</sup> my remembrance<sup>2</sup> the more strongly.

*write*

*1. confirm 2. memory*

**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?

*She imagines the striking of a clock.  
dark*

*Duncan's murder is not known / no one can  
hold us responsible*

**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.

*Macduff*

*your nervousness is spoiling everything*

**DOCTOR**

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

*come, come (a chastisement)*

**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. O, O, O.

*spices*

**DOCTOR**

What a sigh is there! The heart is sorely charged.

*heavily burdened*

**GENTLEWOMAN**

I would not have such a heart in my bosom for the  
dignity of the whole body.

*the sake of life itself / worth*

**DOCTOR**

Well, well, well, –

**GENTLEWOMAN**

Pray God it be, sir.

**DOCTOR**

This disease is beyond my practice; yet I have known  
those which have walked in their sleep who have died  
holily in their beds.

*professional medical skill*

**LADY MACBETH**

Wash your hands, put on your night-gown, look not so  
pale. – I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he  
cannot come out on's grave.

*of his*

**DOCTOR**

Even so?

*is that how it is?*

## LADY MACBETH

To bed, to bed! there's knocking at the gate.  
Come, come, come, come, give me your hand; what's  
done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed.

*Exit*

## DOCTOR

Will she go now to bed?

## GENTLEWOMAN

Directly.

*immediately*

## DOCTOR

Foul whisperings are abroad; unnatural deeds  
Do breed unnatural troubles; infected minds  
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets.  
More needs she the divine than the physician.  
God, God forgive us all. Look after her;  
Remove from her the means of all annoyance,  
And still keep eyes upon her. So, good night:  
My mind she has mated, and amazed my sight.  
I think, but dare not speak.

*terrible rumours are circulating*

*priest*

*injury/self-harm*

*always*

*confused*

## GENTLEWOMAN

Good night, good doctor.

*Exeunt*

### Things to Think About

1. What are the most important lines in this scene?
2. What does Lady Macbeth's fragmented language signify?
3. The hands play an important role in this scene both physically and psychologically. What staging techniques might you use to highlight this in the scene?
4. Compare Lady Macbeth's profound changes from the start of the play to this point.

# WRITE ON!



Write a journal entry from the perspective of the Gentlewoman or the Doctor, describing what you have just witnessed and the change in Lady Macbeth's personality and demeanour.