



## **RHYTHM AND RHYME THAT SET THE TONE: THE WITCHES' ENTRANCE (Act I, scene 1)**

### **Overview**

Students will explore the opening scene of the play, which uses a trochaic tetrameter rhythm to create a strong dramatic effect.

Grade Level	Subject Area	Curriculum Expectations and Learning Outcome			Time Needed	Space	Materials
7-12	English, Drama	Analyse the text, focusing on how it conveys info, ideas and themes, and influences the listener's / viewer's response.	Analyse the text and explain how its various elements communicate meaning and enhance effectiveness.	Use a variety of conventions to develop character and shape the action in ensemble drama presentations	1-2 class Periods	Desks in groups, then open spaces for exploring the text	Attached handouts of activities

## ACTIVITY

In the opening scene, Shakespeare doesn't employ his usual iambic pentameter, the rhythm of which is *de DUM de DUM de DUM de DUM de DUM* – as in Macbeth's opening line later on: "So foul and fair a day I have not seen." Instead, the witches use a trochaic tetrameter, in which the rhythm is *DUM de DUM de DUM de DUM*, as in "When shall we three meet again?" This short, rhythmic line is chant-like, evoking a strong dramatic effect for the beginning of the play that sets the tone for what is to come.

In groups of three, experiment with various ways to stage this. You may want to walk slowly around the room at first, to feel the rhythm of the beat. Feel free to incorporate sound effects to enhance the mood.

**Note:** The witches are also referred to as the "weird sisters," a name that comes from the Anglo-Saxon concept of *wyrd*, or fate, often associated with three goddesses. How might you portray these three characters, other than with stereotypical images of witches?



## ACT I, SCENE 1: A DESOLATE PLACE

*Thunder and lightning. Enter three Witches*

### FIRST WITCH

When shall we three meet again  
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

### SECOND WITCH

When the hurlyburly's done,  
When the battle's lost and won.

*fighting, commotion*

### THIRD WITCH

That will be ere the set of sun.

*before*

### FIRST WITCH

Where the place?

### SECOND WITCH

Upon the heath.

*wilderness*

### THIRD WITCH

There to meet with Macbeth.

### FIRST WITCH

I come<sup>1</sup>, Graymalkin<sup>2</sup>!

*1. The witch is answering the cry of her "familiar spirit," usually believed to take the form of an animal. 2. a grey cat*

### SECOND WITCH

Paddock calls.

*toad*

### THIRD WITCH

Anon.

*I'm coming straight away*

### ALL

Fair is foul, and foul is fair:

Hover through the fog and filthy air.

*Exeunt*



## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Why do you think Shakespeare uses a different rhythm at the start of the play?
2. What effect does the mention of the witches' familiars have on the audience?
3. If these three characters represent fate, to what extent do you think Macbeth has the freedom to shape his own his destiny?