

SATs for 2002

Act 2, Scenes 1 and 2

Summary

Banquo (who was with Macbeth when he met the witches) and his son Fleance talk about what a dark night it is. In spite of this, Banquo says he cannot sleep.

Macbeth enters, and announces himself as a "friend". They talk about the king, who has been very generous to Macbeth. Banquo tells Macbeth he dreamt of the witches. Macbeth denies this (liar!), but says he would want to talk about it later to Banquo.

Banquo and Fleance leave, and Macbeth is alone. He imagines he sees a dagger in front of him. This dagger apparently shows him the way to the King's chamber. He also mentions the witches. As a bell rings he leaves in order to kill King Duncan.

A little later Lady Macbeth appears. She has succeeded in getting the King's guards drunk: she herself is bold. Nevertheless, she was unable to kill Duncan, when she went to his chamber. He reminded her of her own father as he was asleep. Macbeth joins her and says that he has done the deed. He is distraught because he knows he has done wrong, and the guards prayed as he killed Duncan. Lady Macbeth warns her husband not to think about it, because he may go mad.

Lady Macbeth suggests he is weak and brainsick, and tells him to go and wash his hands, which are full of blood. Since Macbeth is now incapable of thinking and acting, she will go back to the chamber to smear the guards' faces with blood, so it will look as if they killed Duncan.

Lady Macbeth does this. She says she is ashamed because she did not kill Duncan. There is a knocking at the door.

You may be asked to discuss the characters in these scenes, and the way information is presented to us.

For example:

- The irony at the beginning: Macbeth describes himself as a friend, though he will later kill Banquo.
- The irony that the King is really generous and trusting towards Macbeth.
- The effects of the noises mentioned.
- The use of "black" language in Macbeth's soliloquy – witches, animals, etc.
- The relationship between Macbeth and his wife, as we see it.
- The way blood is mentioned – innocence and guilt.