**Recurring Images**

Throughout the play, a number of images recur with connections to **darkness**, **sleep** and **blood**. These images often have distinctive **connotations** (i.e. wider meanings) and they influence the way in which we respond to the events that unfold on stage. For example, when Macbeth returns from Duncan’s bedchamber with blood on his hands, we immediately understand that he has murdered Duncan. However, it doesn’t stop there: as the scene progresses, the image of blood takes on a **deeper meaning** because it becomes a symbol of the guilt that he feels. Later, when Lady Macbeth believes that she sees a ‘spot’ of blood on her hands, it serves as a powerful reminder of Duncan’s brutal murder and – as was the case with Macbeth – a sign of her guilt.

**Darkness**

Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth welcome the darkness, and the most terrible actions in the play take place at night. The witches themselves are also associated with darkness (and gloomy daylight). In this sense, **darkness** in the play is important because it is connected to **deceit**, **evil deeds** and **witchcraft**. In contrast, truth and justice are associated with the light. For example, Lady Macbeth continually keeps a candle beside her towards the end of the play and the scenes set in England all take place in daylight.

1. Banquo connects the witches to darkness – ‘**The instruments of darkness**’ – A1-S3
2. Macbeth pleads for darkness – ‘**Stars, hide your fires**’ – A1-S4
3. Lady Macbeth evokes the darkness – ‘**Come, thick night**’ – A1-S5
4. Duncan arrives at Inverness at night – ‘**The king comes here tonight**’ – A1-S5
5. Duncan is murdered at night – ‘**Nature seems dead**’ – A2-S1
6. The night of Duncan’s murder is unnaturally stormy – ‘**The night has been unruly**’ – A2-S3
7. Darkness falls after Duncan is murdered – ‘**dark strangles the travelling lamp**’ – A2-S4
8. Banquo is murdered as night is falling – ‘**A light, a light**’ – A3-S3
9. Witches are associated with night – ‘**midnight hags**’ – A4-S1

**Sleep**

After murdering Duncan, Macbeth fears that he will never be able to **sleep** again. This is important because a lack of sleep (or disturbed sleep) is connected with intense feelings of **guilt**; it is a form of **punishment**. Eventually, even Lady Macbeth seems unable to sleep soundly because she is haunted by visions of the murders that have been committed.

1. Macbeth fears that he will never sleep again – ‘**Macbeth does murder sleep**’ – A2-S2
2. Sleep is associated with good health – ‘**Chief nourisher in life’s feast**’ – A2-S2
3. Macbeth’s instability is linked to his lack of sleep – ‘**You lack the season of all natures, sleep**’ – A3-S4
4. Lady Macbeth sleepwalks – ‘**Look how she rubs her hands**’ – A5-S1

**Blood**

It would have been dramatic to see **blood** on stage. However, the presence of it – both real and imagined – is also important because it serves a reminder of **death**. Although Lady Macbeth tries to reassure Macbeth that ‘a little water’ will wash it away, he understands that not even ‘Neptune’s ocean’ would be able to cleanse them. Blood, therefore, is also associated with **guilt**.

* Macbeth’s dagger drips with blood – ‘**gouts of blood**’ – A2-S2
* Macbeth believes he will never be able to clean Duncan’s blood from his hands – ‘**Neptune’s ocean**’ – A2-S2
* Macbeth becomes increasingly murderous – ‘**blood will have blood**’ – A3-S4
* Macduff bemoans the state of Scotland – ‘**Bleed, bleed, poor country**’ – A4-S3
* Lady Macbeth sees blood on her hands – ‘**damned spot**’ – A5-S1
* Lady Macbeth recalls the blood from Duncan’s murder – ‘**so much blood in him**’ – A5-S1