



# RECURRING IMAGES MACBETH

A number of images recur throughout the play 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.

## Darkness

- 'The instruments of darkness' – A1-S3
- 'Stars, hide your fires' – A1-S4
- 'Come, thick night' – A1-S5
- 'The night has been unruly' – A2-S3
- 'night strangles the travelling lamp' – A2-S4
- 'midnight hags' – A4-S1

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.

## Sleep

- 'Macbeth does murder sleep' – A2-S2
- 'Chief nourisher in life's feast' – A2-S2
- 'the season of all natures, sleep' – A3-S4
- 'Look how she rubs her hands' – A5-S1

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 an enduring 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.

## Blood

- 'gouts of blood' – A2-S2
- 'Neptune's ocean' – A2-S2
- 'blood will have blood' – A3-S4
- 'Bleed, bleed, poor country' – A4-S3
- 'damned spot' – A5-S1
- 'so much blood in him' – A5-S1

It would have been particularly dramatic for an audience to see blood on stage. However, **the presence of blood – both real and imagined – is also important because it serves as a reminder of death**. Although Lady Macbeth tries to reassure Macbeth that 'a little water' will wash it clean from his hands, he knows that not even 'Neptune's ocean' could cleanse them. Blood, therefore, is powerfully associated with guilt.