

Shakespeare's Macbeth Reading Comprehension

Below is a speech from Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth*. The title character Macbeth is a Scottish general who receives a prophecy that he would one day be King of Scotland. He becomes ambitious and eager to make the prophecy come true. He is encouraged by his wife, Lady Macbeth. He kills the reigning king and becomes king, but the resulting wars lead to more murders and death. The power that Macbeth and his wife desire eventually leads to their destruction.

In this speech Macbeth is reacting to the news that his wife has died.



Answer the questions below.

Macbeth

by William Shakespeare

Act V, Scene 5

She should have died hereafter;

There would have been a time for such a word.

— To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,

To the last syllable of recorded time;

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

And then is heard no more. It is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury

Signifying nothing.

1. What is the main theme of Macbeth's speech?

2. Shakespeare uses several metaphors in this speech. Identify one and explain it.

3. Explain the contradiction, "full of sound and fury/ Signifying nothing."

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Student's choice; student's answers should reference:

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1. What is the main theme of Macbeth's speech?

That life has no meaning.

2. Shakespeare uses several metaphors in this speech. Identify one and explain it.

Possible metaphors: Life is a walking shadow; life

is a brief candle; a person is an actor on a stage,

life is a worthless story.

3. Explain the contradiction, "full of sound and fury/ Signifying nothing."

Sound and fury seem to mean much passion and

commotion, but all the passion and commotion is

without substance and therefore useless.