

# Macbeth and the Death of Lady Macbeth

by William Shakespeare *from Macbeth*

*This passage 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.*

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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.

**Questions**

1. What is the main theme of Macbeth's speech?
2. Shakespeare uses several metaphors in this speech. Identify one and explain it.
3. What is one example of alliteration in the passage?
4. Explain the contradiction, "full of sound and fury/ Signifying nothing."

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**Vocabulary List**

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. hereafter
2. petty
3. struts
4. frets
5. signifying

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**Context Clues**

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) "She should have died **hereafter**"

- a. quietly or easily    b. with medical care    c. later; in the future    d. someplace else; nearby

2) "Creeps in this **petty** pace from day to day"

- a. minor; trivial    b. joyful; happy    c. touchy; anxious    d. quickly; furiously

3) "a poor player /That **struts** and frets his hour upon the stage"

- a. plays music    b. dies or collapses    c. toils; works hard    d. walks proudly; parades

4) "a poor player /That struts and **frets** his hour upon the stage"

- a. counts; watches    b. uses a stringed instrument    c. shows distress or emotion    d. speaks

5) "full of sound and fury/**Signifying** nothing"

- a. forgetting    b. meaning; indicating    c. remembering; recollecting    d. excusing; justifying