Macbeth

Act 5, Scene 4

“Life’s but a walking shadow”

In this scene, Macbeth has just been told that his wife has died. How does he show his reaction to his wife’s death?

Task One - Read his speech at least twice. Underline any unusual vocabulary and then try to infer the meaning of these words.

Task Two - How has Macbeth reacted to the news he has been given? Select at least three quotations and justify your answer.

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.

What Next? Homework for the holidays

You should learn this speech by heart and try to perform it in class during the first week back. You will be given some classwork time to practise, but you will then be expected to perform this work. You might want to try:

• Identifying phrases that rely on verbs and give these actions
• Learning a line at a time
• Underlining nouns and then trying to learn the words around them. This also works with prepositions.
• Look, read aloud, cover, say, repeat.

Key Word - Personification

This is where a writer will give an inanimate object human qualities. Where has this been used in the soliloquy? Why do you think Shakespeare has done this? How might it enhance meanings?