

AQA English Literature Paper 1

Macbeth



Revision booklet

Ms. Gee

REMINDER

In the exam, **you will be presented with a short extract** from the play.

There will only be ONE question on Macbeth – you MUST answer it!

The question will ask you to focus on an idea or character/s in the play so you can show your understanding of the whole text. You can then use the printed extract as a starting point for evidence and response (**examiners expect to see word level language analysis**).

SPAG is assessed in your Macbeth answer.

You are advised to spend 15 minutes planning using a mind map, 30 minutes writing your response and then 5 minutes carefully proof-reading it for SPAG accuracy!

(You then spend the next 50 minutes in this exam writing your response to the question on Dickens' novel, 'A Christmas Carol'.)

Macbeth: 'a chain of events'



Character Analysis: Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth is the deuterogamist (the second most important character) in this drama: the wife of Macbeth, she shares his lust for power. Our initial impressions of Lady Macbeth are that she is, as Malcolm describes her at the close of the play, indeed **“fiend-like”** as, when she learns of Duncan’s visit to Dunsinane her thoughts turn immediately to regicide. Without pause, she summons evil **“spirits”** and commands them to **“make thick my blood”** so that **“no compunctious visitings of Nature”** shake her wicked intention to murder the King.

Interestingly, in this soliloquy Lady Macbeth imagines committing the regicide herself as she asks to be wrapped in the blackest smoke of Hell **“so that *my* keen knife sees not the wound it makes.”** Later, she privately admits in an aside: **“Had he not looked like my father as he slept, I had done’t,”** suggesting that Lady Macbeth is not as “fiend-like” as is sometimes argued. Certainly, she is not naturally **“fiend-like”** or she would not have sought assistance from the **“murdering ministers”** she conjures when the audience first meet her, even though she willingly submits to their wicked influence.

It is arguable that Lady Macbeth is subconsciously repelled by the thought of regicide because when she is pressuring her husband to commit the deed she avoids using the word “murder”; instead she employs a variety of euphemisms, including: **“this enterprise”**, Duncan being **“provided for”** or merely **“it”**. However, others argue that Shakespeare’s employment of euphemisms here is quite deliberate and serves subtly to convey Lady Macbeth’s wily, artful manipulation of her husband and which, therefore, strengthens the audience impression of her as being truly **“fiend-like”**.

However, once the regicide is committed and Lady Macbeth becomes Queen, the dynamics of her relationship with Macbeth undergoes a dramatic transformation. Despite having fulfilled her ambition to become Queen, in an aside to the audience Lady Macbeth privately admits: **“Nought’s had, all’s spent, where our desire is got without content.”** Ironically, when her husband then enters her own face becomes a mask, disguising what is in her heart as she admonishes Macbeth for entertaining gloomy thoughts which ought to have been buried alongside the body of the dead King Duncan.

As her ability to influence her husband diminishes – he simply ignores her command to halt his murderous plans for Banquo when she demands: **“You must leave this”** – Lady Macbeth becomes an increasingly isolated figure. After the banquet scene at which Macbeth arouses suspicions by his erratic behaviour, Lady Macbeth tells him: **“You lack the season of all natures – sleep.”** Ironically, the audience’s final impressions of her are in Act 5 scene 1 where she is sleepwalking, burdened by guilt.

The bold figure who instructed evil spirits to **“pall thee in the dunnest smoke of Hell”** is now a pathetic figure, afraid of the dark. Lady Macbeth’s gentlewoman tells the Doctor observing her sleepwalk: **“She has light by her continually – ‘tis her command.”** The evil she so willingly embraced betrays her – as it betrays Macbeth – and produces only anguish in place of the rewards she had envisioned. On the night of Duncan’s murder, their hands bathed in Duncan’s blood, she boldly claimed: **“A little water clears us of this deed.”** Now, however, she seems unable to rid herself of the stench and spots of blood she imagines cover her hands still. The Doctor fears she is suicidal and claims: **“more needs she the Divine than the physician.”**

Character analysis: Macbeth

Macbeth is the protagonist in this tragedy: a tragic hero whose **hamartia** – the fatal flaw in his character - is his ambition, a lust for power shared by his wife. He is aware of the evil his ambition gives rise to but he is unable to overcome the temptation.

Often, Lady Macbeth is wrongly accused of inviting Macbeth to contemplate regicide. In fact, after his encounter with the witches in Act 1 scene 3, Macbeth himself considers regicide when he reflects on their prophecy and admits:

**“If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature?”**

He is here acknowledging that the thing he is contemplating – usurping King Duncan’s crown - is **“against the use of nature.”**

Wracked by doubts, in Act 1 scene 7 as he contemplates the regicide, Macbeth wavers and informs his wife: **“We will proceed no further in *this business*.”** Unlike his wife’s wily, artful avoidance of the word “murder” during this conversation, it is clear that Macbeth uses a euphemism here because the very thought of murder frightens him, let alone the deed. Even when criticised and challenged by Lady Macbeth, he retains the moral sensibility to declare: **“I dare do all may become a man. / Who dares do more is none.”**

Having submitted to his wife’s artful persuasion, Macbeth kills Duncan but is immediately plagued by his conscience. He tells how he **“could not say Amen”** and of a voice that foretold sleeplessness as punishment for such a heinous act.

Though Macbeth is influenced by both the witches and his wife, Macbeth is not controlled by them. His story is one of moral choice and the consequences of that choice. Once Duncan is murdered, Macbeth withdraws from Lady Macbeth and all subsequent murders in this play are the products of Macbeth’s own paranoia and desperate desire to cling to power **“on this bank and shoal of time”** here on Earth, knowing he has been condemned to an eternity in Hell for killing God’s anointed representative on Earth.

Having murdered Banquo and Macduff’s family, Macbeth’s paranoia gives way to a more fundamental disorder. In Act 5 we watch as he prepares to defend his kingdom – reduced to his castle at Dunsinane – and he swings violently between fits of rage and despair. Evidently, he has lost any emotional connection to his fellow men, declares that he is **“sick at heart”** and has **“lived long enough”**. When informed of his wife’s death, he is completely unmoved and instead reflects on the meaningless of life itself. Macbeth is a tragic hero precisely because he does not accept his evil callously; he suffers for it. In his own words: **“To know my deed, ’twere best not know myself.”**

Character Analysis: Banquo

Banquo might best be described as a minor character in the tragedy of Macbeth. Nevertheless, he has an important function in the play and is considered by many to be an effective dramatic foil for Macbeth. It is through Banquo's interactions with Macbeth and his own motivations that the audience – through contrast – gain insights into Macbeth's nature also.

Alike in many ways, Banquo and Macbeth are equals as the play begins: both are Scottish **"captains"** defending Duncan's realm against the marauding Norwegians led by Sweno. They fight honourably and are heroic warriors, risking their lives in defence of Duncan's kingdom. However, after the battle when they encounter the **"weird sisters"** on the **"blasted heath"**, Banquo's dramatic function is to demonstrate to an audience that the temptations of the witches may be successfully resisted and that Macbeth therefore acts from free will. Banquo expresses unshakeable moral principles and warns his friend that the witches may well be **"instruments of darkness"** who **"tell us truths"** in order to **"win us to our harm"** and to **"betray us in deepest consequence."** Banquo's concern contrasts strikingly with Macbeth's own susceptibility to the witches.

Banquo's resistance to the influence of evil serves to highlight Macbeth's failure to resist and foregrounds his tendency towards evil, stimulated by ambition - the flaw that makes the tragedy possible.

Prompted by paranoid insecurity, when Macbeth decides to murder Banquo he acknowledges Banquo's endearing qualities: his **"royalty of nature"**, his **"wisdom"** and his **"dauntless"** or fearless nature. This resentment of Banquo's natural superiority, together with jealousy of his destiny as a **"father to a line of kings"**, motivates Macbeth to commit further wicked murders in the second half of the play, commencing with Banquo's and the attempted murder of his son and heir, Fleance.

Banquo's fate is determined by his virtue, just as Macbeth's is determined by his villainy.

Character Analysis: The Weird Sisters (Witches)

The weird sisters are an unholy trinity, a trio of malevolent, supernatural characters whose function in the drama is to encourage Macbeth in his evil inclinations.

Though their appearances in the play are brief, they have an important function. Shakespeare establishes the supernatural theme via their association with disorder in Nature: they appear amid thunder and lightning in a grim meeting on a “**blasted heath**” which contributes greatly to the tone of mysterious evil which pervades the play.

Likewise, the supernatural world they represent is terrifying to an audience because it is beyond human control and in the play it is symbolic of the unpredictable force of human desire, such as Macbeth’s ruthless ambition to become King.

At their first appearance, the weird sisters state an ambiguity that Shakespeare weaves through the play: “**Fair is foul, and foul is fair.**” Indeed, the witches’ relationship with Macbeth is so entwined that the first line he speaks in the play is an echo of this riddle. He says: “**So fair and foul a day I have not seen.**”

The deceptive pictures of the future – in their initial prediction of Macbeth becoming King and later in the riddles given by the Apparitions which rise from the cauldron when Macbeth visits the witches for a second time – encourage in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth a false sense of what is desirable and possible. The magic of the witches, then, is their ability to create moral disruption which, in Macbeth’s case, leads to his death and subsequent damnation.

It is important to remember that while the witches may have “**more in them than mortal knowledge**”, they do **not** control Macbeth. They merely put ideas into his mind on which he then decides for himself. He is the master of his own destiny and acts out of free will.

Key Quotes to remember by character:

Lady Macbeth	Macbeth	Banquo	The witches

Language Analysis Practice Extracts

- 1) At this point in the play, a bloody Sergeant is giving King Duncan a report about Macbeth's brave conduct on the battlefield. King Duncan then rewards Macbeth with the title of Thane of Cawdor.

SERGEANT

For brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name),
Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel,
Which smoked with bloody execution,
Like valor's minion, carved out his passage
Till he faced the slave;
Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,
Till he unseamed him from the nave to th' chops,
And fixed his head upon our battlements.

DUNCAN

O valiant cousin, worthy gentleman!

SERGEANT

As whence the sun 'gins his reflection
Shipwrecking storms and direful thunders [break'],
So from that spring whence comfort seemed to come
Discomfort swells. Mark, King of Scotland, mark;
No sooner justice had, with valor armed,
Compelled these skipping kerns to trust their heels,
But the Norweyan lord, surveying vantage,
With furbished arms and new supplies of men,
Begin a fresh assault.

DUNCAN

Dismayed not this our captains, Macbeth and Banquo?

SERGEANT

Yes, as sparrow eagles, or the hare the lion.
If I say sooth, I must they were
As cannons overcharged with double cracks,
So they doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe.

Q1: Starting with this conversation, explain how far Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a **heroic character**?

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents Macbeth's character here
- How Shakespeare presents his character elsewhere in the play.

Things to read / think / write about:

READ the character analysis of Macbeth

- The sergeant's reference to him as '**brave Macbeth**' and what it suggests about his reputation.
- The sergeant remarks that Macbeth was '**disdaining fortune**' – laughing at the luck that Macdonald had on his side – and easily killed him. Discuss the significance of this in the context of Macbeth's belief in the **fortune and fate** as well as the **natural order**.
- Shakespeare's choice of **metaphor** as the sergeant describes Macbeth's '**brandished steel / Which smoked with bloody execution**' and what it might **foreshadow** about Macbeth's conduct later in the play
- The significance of the deliberately unsettling and gruesome description of Macbeth killing his enemy: '**He 'neer shook hands, nor bade farewell to him, / till he unseamed him from the nave to th' chops / And fixed his head upon our battlements.**' Is Shakespeare introducing our "hero" as a blood-soaked killer who has no self-control or concern for human life?
- The frequent use of the word '**bloody**' in this scene introduces a much used word in the play. It is of note to consider the heavy mention/ appearance of blood in the play even outside the beginning and end scenes which are set on the battlefield, even though there are no other battle-like circumstances. Is this a suggestion that the actions that take place in the royal court are as malicious and violent as on the battlefield and that both arenas are as dangerous as each other?
- If we consider that the king, the instructor of the order of things, advocates gruesome fighting and a 'bloody execution', does this suggest that this is a world where morality is secondary?
- The sergeant foreshadows Macbeth's deception while he praises his dedication to defending Scotland. This is an example of the world of the play as a place where all is not what it seems: '**fair is foul and foul is fair**'.
- Consider how the initial presentation of Macbeth as a war hero who, unlike the traitor Thane of Cawdor is a brave and loyal servant of King Duncan helps Shakespeare present his fall from this state of virtue because of his character's **fatal flaw**.
- Contrast this scene with Macbeth's later soliloquies when considering the act of killing: '**Full of scorpions is my mind**' and '**Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hands?**
- The end of the play sees Macbeth's own head being brought to Malcolm as he is proclaimed King: is it worth considering if there are any other similarities between the beginning and the end of the play and why?
- Is it significant that Duncan is not in the battlefield leading his army? Compare this to Macbeth who despite seizing the crown through wrongful means defends his kingdom from the front at the play's end.

- 2) At this point in the play, Banquo and Macbeth have just met the witches. The witches have just told Macbeth he will one day be the King of Scotland.

<p>BANQUO Good sir, why do you start; and seem to fear Things that do sound so fair? I' the name of truth, Are ye fantastical, or that indeed Which outwardly ye show? My noble partner You greet with present grace and great prediction Of noble having and of royal hope, That he seems rapt withal: to me you speak not. If you can look into the seeds of time, And say which grain will grow and which will not, Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear Your favours nor your hate.</p>	5
<p>First Witch Hail!</p> <p>Second Witch Hail!</p> <p>Third Witch Hail!</p>	10
<p>First Witch Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.</p> <p>Second Witch Not so happy, yet much happier.</p> <p>Third Witch Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none: So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo!</p>	15
<p>First Witch Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!</p> <p>MACBETH Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more: By Sinel's death I know I am thane of Glamis; But how of Cawdor? The thane of Cawdor lives, A prosperous gentleman; and to be king Stands not within the prospect of belief, No more than to be Cawdor. Say from whence You owe this strange intelligence? or why Upon this blasted heath you stop our way With such prophetic greeting? Speak, I charge you.</p> <p><i>(The Witches vanish)</i></p>	20 25

Q1: Starting with this conversation, explain how far Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a character who believes in the **supernatural power of the witches**.

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents Macbeth's reaction to the witches here
- How Shakespeare presents his beliefs in them elsewhere in the play.

Things to read / think / write about:

READ the character analysis of the Witches

- Macbeth's dramatic reaction to the predictions delivered by the "**weird sisters**". It is so striking that Banquo observes Macbeth's facial expression and addresses him directly (see lines 1 – 2).
- Banquo's remark to the witches about Macbeth being "**rapt withal**". Discuss the significance of this in the context of Macbeth's belief in the **supernatural**.
- Shakespeare's choice of **imperative verbs** when Macbeth commands the weird sisters (twice on line 20 and again on line 28).
- The significance of a series of questions addressed directly to the witches and Shakespeare's choice of **diction** in Macbeth's opinion that the witches possess "**strange intelligence**". What does this series of questions convey to an **audience** about Macbeth's belief in, and attitude towards, the **supernatural**?
- Consider the use of **dramatic irony** here, too. The **audience** is aware that Duncan has decreed the title Thane of Cawdor is to pass to Macbeth for his bravery in battle. Is Shakespeare trying to shape the audience's opinion of belief in the **supernatural**?
- Consider Macbeth's aside shortly after the first prediction is realised when Ross brings news that Duncan has bestowed the title Thane of Cawdor on Macbeth. In an **aside**, Macbeth reflects on the encounter and remarks: "**This supernatural soliciting/ Cannot be good, cannot be ill.**" Discuss the significance of Macbeth's uncertainty about the **supernatural** being good or evil here.
- Contrast this with Banquo's very different reaction to the witches and the advice he gives to Macbeth: "**And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence.**"
- Macbeth's ignorance of Banquo's advice and later visit to the witches. Explain what motivates him to visit them and what this conveys to an audience about his belief in their abilities, given his later bold claim that he bears "**a charmed life**" which "**must not yield / To one of woman born.**"
- The futility and **irony** of Macbeth's final comment in the play, to Macduff: "**damned be he who first cries, 'Hold – enough!'**" in the context of having already surrendered his soul to the devil for committing the act of regicide.

Macbeth

- 3) Read the following extract from Act 1 Scene 5 of Macbeth and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play Lady Macbeth is speaking. She has just received the news that King Duncan will be spending the night at her castle.

The raven himself is hoarse That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan Under my battlements. Come, you spirits That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood; Stop up the access and passage to remorse, That no compunctious visitings of nature Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,	5
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers, Wherever in your sightless substances You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night, And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell, That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,	10
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark, To cry 'Hold, hold!'	15

Q1: Starting with this speech, explain how far you think Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as a **powerful woman**.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth in this speech
- how Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth in the play as a whole. [30 marks]
SPAG [4 marks]

Things you might write about:

- The **connotations** of the “*raven*” and her use of the adjective “*fatal*” to describe Duncan’s entrance to Dunsinane castle. What does it convey about her immediate thoughts and reactions to Macbeth’s letter?
- Summoning evil spirits. Explain clearly **what** Lady Macbeth invites the “*murdering ministers*” to do to her body and **why** she requests their assistance.
- The fact she imagines committing the regicide **herself** in this **soliloquy**: she refers to the weapon as “*my keen knife*”. However, she does not later commit the crime herself. What reason does she give for not doing so, in an **aside** to the audience in Act 2 scene 2, lines 15 – 16? Explain what impressions this **private admission** conveys about Lady Macbeth’s character to the audience.
- Think now about **Act 3 scene 2**, where we first see Lady Macbeth as Queen. In an **aside** to the audience at the opening of this scene, explain what feelings she **privately** admits to, now that her **ambition** to be queen has been fulfilled.
- Now think about our **final impressions** of Lady Macbeth, in **Act 5 scene 1**. Write about the significance of having “*light by her continually*” and how this links to her desire to be wrapped in “*the dunnest smoke of Hell*” when first contemplating Duncan’s murder. Explain also the **irony** of her constantly rubbing her hands, given her comment to Macbeth on the night of Duncan’s murder: “*A little water clears us of this deed.*”

KEY WORD VOCABULARY: try to use these words in your response. Check spelling of key terms.

soliloquy audience impression initial admission ambitious

fiendish determined callous ironic significant aside

symbolism imperatives euphemisms light imagery regicide

sin Elizabethan chain of being unnatural metaphor alliteration

gender roles/stereotypes

Things to think and write about:

FIRST – Read the character analysis of Lady Macbeth. Highlight useful points and consider where you might synthesise them into your response.

- Comment on Lady Macbeth's violent emotional reaction to Macbeth's decision. Comment on **Shakespeare's choice of imagery** here, where Macbeth's "**hope**" is **personified** by Lady Macbeth in a scathing criticism of his cowardice (see lines 6 to 9).
- Comment on Macbeth's attempt to assert **his dominance** in this exchange (see lines 17 to 19). Is it successful? What is Macbeth's view of murder here? How is it different from hers?
- Her use of **euphemisms** (on lines 21 and 22) to cleverly avoid having to use the word "murder", given Macbeth's announcement in this exchange that he will **not** commit the deed. How does this show **her dominance** in their relationship?
- Explain how the **dynamics** of their relationship changes once Macbeth usurps Duncan's throne. Consider their disagreement over Macbeth's plans for Banquo in Act 3 scene 2. How does Lady Macbeth try to assert **her dominance** in that conversation (see Act 3 Scene 2, lines 25 to 40)? Is she successful?
- Our **final impressions** of her: a pitiable, tragic and troubled woman, frightened of the "**dunest smoke of Hell**" she so willingly asked to be wrapped in at the beginning of the play.

4) This is from Act 3 scene 1 of the play. At this point in the play, Macbeth is now king of Scotland. His friend Banquo expresses his private fears that Macbeth was involved in the murder of King Duncan.

<p>BANQUO Thou hast it now: king, Cawdor, Glamis, all, As the weird women promised, and, I fear, Thou play'dst most foully for't: yet it was said It should not stand in thy posterity, But that myself should be the root and father Of many kings. If there come truth from them-- As upon thee, Macbeth, their speeches shine-- Why, by the verities on thee made good, May they not be my oracles as well, And set me up in hope? But hush! no more.</p>	<p>5</p> <p>10</p>
<p><i>Enter MACBETH, as king, LADY MACBETH, as queen, LENNOX, ROSS, Lords, Ladies, and Attendants</i></p>	
<p>MACBETH Here's our chief guest.</p>	
<p>LADY MACBETH If he had been forgotten, It had been as a gap in our great feast, And all-thing unbecoming.</p>	
<p>MACBETH To-night we hold a solemn supper sir, And I'll request your presence.</p>	<p>15</p>
<p>BANQUO Let your highness Command upon me; to the which my duties Are with a most indissoluble tie For ever knit.</p>	<p>20</p>

Q1: Starting with this conversation, explain how Shakespeare presents the **relationship between Banquo and Macbeth.**

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents their relationship in this conversation
- how Shakespeare presents the relationship elsewhere in the play.

Things to think and write about:

FIRST – Read the character analysis of Banquo. Highlight any useful points. Think about where and how you might synthesise these points in your response.

- The relationship presented in this extract is one of **mutual - but unspoken - mistrust**. Look closely at **Banquo's aside**, where he reflects on Macbeth's recent gains. Explain what emotion Banquo privately expresses here and what this conveys to the **audience** about the reality of their relationship as friends at this point in the play.
- Macbeth's reference to Banquo as the "**chief guest**" at the "**solemn supper**" to be held later the same evening – an **ironic** comment given Macbeth's **soliloquy** immediately after this conversation when he admits that his "**fears in Banquo stick deep**", followed by a plot to murder him.
- Explain **Banquo's function** in the play. Discuss the qualities that Banquo and Macbeth have in common. (*Look at the first five lines of Macbeth's soliloquy, Act 3 scene 1 lines 50 to 55, where Macbeth explains what those qualities are!*) Explain why Shakespeare presents these two characters as being so similar in many ways.
- Now, explain the major difference between them and in what way Banquo's **virtue** shapes the **audience's** opinion of Macbeth's **vice**. *You might refer to the way the two men react differently to the witches and their predictions in Act 1 scene 3 to illustrate how they are dissimilar in one very significant way.*
- You might discuss the **significance** and the **irony** of Banquo's ghost honouring Macbeth's request, delivered in this extract: "**To-night we hold a solemn supper sir, / And I'll request your presence.**" Plagued by a guilty conscience, the betrayer is tormented by the ghost of his innocent victim. None of the guests yet know Banquo is dead. Ironically, the guests assume that Macbeth is being haunted by the ghost of someone else, perhaps Duncan. Macbeth's seemingly bizarre conversation with "**a stool**" incriminate him in a murder and so Banquo's initial suspicion in this extract, that Macbeth "**play'dst most foully**" for Duncan's crown is a suspicion now entertained by all the guests at this supposedly "**solemn supper.**"

Writer's Ideas (AO3)

These are all possible IDEAS that could appear as exam questions.

Try planning responses towards IMERCI paragraphs for each of the IDEAS that Shakespeare explores in *Macbeth*:

- 1) Shakespeare considers whether **fate** (destiny) or human will (choice) determines a man's future.
- 2) *Macbeth* can be read as a cautionary tale about the kind of destruction **ambition** can cause.
- 3) Shakespeare explores the qualities that distinguish a **good ruler from a tyrant** (what Macbeth clearly becomes by the play's end).
- 4) Shakespeare dramatises the **unnaturalness** of regicide (killing a king).
- 5) "Fair is foul and foul is fair" is the witches' mantra - echoed throughout the play. Shakespeare explores the idea that **appearances, like people, are frequently deceptive**.
- 6) Shakespeare raises the question of whether there's any real difference between **killing a man** in combat and murdering for self-gain.
- 7) The play suggests that unchecked **violence** may lead to a kind of emotional numbness that renders a person inhuman.
- 8) *Macbeth* inverts traditional **gender roles** – Lady Macbeth is the **dominant** partner (at the play's beginning) in her marriage and she frequently browbeats her husband for failing to act like a "man" when he waffles about killing the king.
- 9) The play is also notable for the way it portrays **femininity** as being synonymous with kindness and compassion while it associates **masculinity** with cruelty and violence.

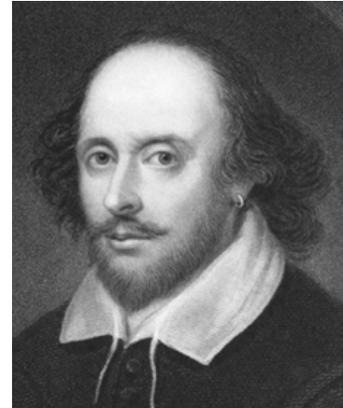
Key Quotes to remember by IDEA:

Fate and freewill	
Ambition	
Power/dominance	
False appearance vs. Reality	
Violence	
Gender	
Nature of Kingship	

Context

Political

Shakespeare wrote Macbeth in 1606. It is important to understand the political context in which it was written, as that is the key to the main theme of the play, which is that **excessive ambition will have terrible consequences**. Shakespeare was writing for the theatre during the reigns of two monarchs, Queen Elizabeth I and King James I. The plays he wrote during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, such as A Midsummer Night's Dream, are often seen to embody the generally happy, confident and optimistic mood of the Elizabethans. **However, those he wrote during James's reign, such as Macbeth and Hamlet, are darker and more cynical, reflecting the insecurities of the Jacobean period. Macbeth was written the year after the Gunpowder Plot of 1605.**



When Queen Elizabeth died in 1603, she had no children, or even nephews or nieces. The throne was offered to James Stuart, James VI of Scotland, who then became James I of Britain. He was a distant cousin of Elizabeth, being descended from Margaret Tudor, the sister of Elizabeth's grandfather, Henry the Eighth. **James was the son of the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots, who had been deposed and imprisoned when he was a baby, and later executed on Elizabeth's orders. Brought up by Protestant regents, James maintained a Protestant regime in Scotland when he came of age, and so was an acceptable choice for England which had become firmly Protestant under Elizabeth. However, his accession was by no means a popular choice with everyone. Since he was not a direct descendant of Elizabeth, there were other relatives who believed they also had a strong claim and James feared that discontented factions might gather around them. At first the Catholics had hoped James might support them, since his mother had been such a staunch Catholic, but when they realised this would not happen conspiracies developed, one of which was the Gunpowder Plot. Guy Fawkes and his men tried to blow up James and his parliament in 1605. The conspirators were betrayed, and horribly tortured on the rack until they confessed. They were then executed in the most brutal fashion as a warning to other would-be traitors. Shakespeare's play Macbeth is to some extent a cautionary tale, warning any other potential regicides (king-killers) of the awful fate that will inevitably overtake them.**

Philosophical

Religious thinkers in the Middle Ages had upheld the idea of 'The Great Chain of Being'. **This was the belief that God had designed an ordered system for both nature and humankind within which every creature and person had an allotted place. It was considered an offence against God for anyone to try to alter their station in life. After death, however, all would be raised in the kingdom of heaven, if they respected God's will. Since royal rank was bestowed by God, it was a sin to aspire to it.** This doctrine – a convenient one for King James – was still widely held in Shakespeare's day.

Although his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, was a beautiful and charming woman, **James I was aware he was ugly and lacking in the charisma which inspired loyalty.** But he was an intelligent and well-educated man, and espoused various beliefs which he felt would keep his position secure. One of these was the so-called 'divine right of kings'. **This was the belief that the power of monarchs was given directly by God, and thus monarchs were answerable only to God.** Any opposition to the King was an attack on God himself, and therefore sacrilege, the most heinous of sins. The anointing

ceremony at the coronation made the King virtually divine. All the Stuart kings strongly supported the belief in their 'divine right' to rule as it was an effective safeguard of their position. They even claimed Christ-like powers of healing. In Macbeth, Shakespeare alludes to King Edward of England successfully healing the sick: 'such sanctity hath heaven given his hand'. Queen Anne was the last British monarch who used 'the Queen's touch' in this way.

Shakespeare's plot is only partly based on fact. Macbeth was a real eleventh century Scottish king, but the historical Macbeth, who had a valid right to the throne, reigned capably in Scotland from 1040 till 1057. He succeeded Duncan, whom he had defeated in battle, but the real Duncan was a weak man, around Macbeth's own age, not the respected elderly figure we meet in the play. In reality, Macbeth was succeeded by his own stepson, not by Duncan's son, Malcolm, who came to the throne later. **The Stuart kings claimed descent from Banquo**, but Banquo is a mythical figure who never really existed. Shakespeare found his version of the story of Macbeth in the Chronicles of Holinshed, a historian of his own time. Holinshed does include a Banquo in his version, but he is also a traitor who assists Macbeth in the murder. **As a tribute to the Stuarts, and James in particular, Shakespeare presents Banquo as a wise, noble and regal figure who arouses jealousy in Macbeth as much for his own good qualities as for the promise the witches make to him of founding a dynasty.**

Shakespeare and the Court

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth, Shakespeare's acting company was called the 'Chamberlain's Men', and it is known that they performed for the court. After the accession of James they changed their name to the 'King's Men' as a tribute to him. **The patronage of the King and court was obviously valuable to Shakespeare. In Macbeth, Shakespeare seeks to flatter and please the King in various ways. Macbeth, the character who usurps the place of a lawful King, is shown as losing everything as a result – he becomes hated and demonised by all his subjects, as does his wife, who supports him in his crime. Banquo, whom the Stuarts claimed as their ancestor, is presented in a completely positive light. When the witches show Macbeth the future, he sees a line of kings descended from Banquo that seems to 'stretch out to the crack of doom'. This flatters King James with the promise of a long-standing dynasty**, although in fact James's father, Charles I, would be executed, and the Stuart line was to die out with Queen Anne in 1714.

Shakespeare also included other enthusiasms of the King in the play. James had written a book called Basilikon Doron, which looks at the **theme of kingship**. In the book, James identifies the ideal king as one who does his duty to God and to his country and who is also a man of spotless personal integrity. In the play, Shakespeare, too, explores this topic, with the character of **Malcolm representing the template of the ideal king**. In addition, the idealised portrait of Edward the Confessor, the 'holy king' who has the power literally to heal his people, would come across to a contemporary audience as an indirect tribute to James himself. **James was also very interested in the supernatural, and had written a paper called Daemonologie** on the subject. During his reign as King of Scotland, James is known to have been **directly involved in some witch trials at North Berwick**. Women were regularly burnt as witches, and Shakespeare presents his witches unequivocally as powerful and evil emissaries of the devil. **In his day, the majority of the general public, too, believed in witches and the power of the supernatural, and the witch scenes would have been taken very seriously.**

Further Sample Exam Questions to Practice Planning

Section A: Shakespeare

Answer **one** question from this section on your chosen text.

Macbeth

Read the following extract from Act 1 Scene 3 of *Macbeth* and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play the witches have met and are now ready to meet Macbeth and deliver his predictions.

ALL (3witches chant)

The weird sisters, hand in hand,
Posters of the sea and land,
Thus do go about, about:
Thrice to thine and thrice to mine
And thrice again, to make up nine.
Peace! the charm's wound up.

Enter MACBETH and BANQUO

MACBETH

So foul and fair a day I have not seen.

BANQUO

How far is't call'd to Forres? What are these
So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,
And yet are on't? Live you? or are you aught
That man may question? You seem to understand me,
By each at once her chappy finger laying
Upon her skinny lips: you should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so.

Starting with this extract, explain how you think Shakespeare presents the witches.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents the witches in this extract
- how Shakespeare presents the witches and/or the supernatural in the play as a whole.

[30 marks] AO4 [4 marks]

Macbeth

Read the following extract from Act 2 Scene 3 of *Macbeth* and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play Duncan's sons are considering what they should do to be safe after the death of their father, the king.

Exeunt all but Malcolm and Donalbain.

MALCOLM

What will you do? Let's not consort with them:
To show an unfelt sorrow is an office
Which the false man does easy. I'll to England.

DONALBAIN

To Ireland, I; our separated fortune
Shall keep us both the safer: where we are,
There's daggers in men's smiles: the near in blood,
The nearer bloody.

MALCOLM

This murderous shaft that's shot
Hath not yet lighted, and our safest way
Is to avoid the aim. Therefore, to horse;
And let us not be dainty of leave-taking,
But shift away: there's warrant in that theft
Which steals itself, when there's no mercy left.

Exeunt

0.1

Starting with this extract, explain how far you think Shakespeare presents fear.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents fear in this extract
- how Shakespeare presents fear in the play as a whole.

[30 marks] AO4 [4 marks]

Read the following extract from Act 3 Scene 1 of *Macbeth* and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play Macbeth is arranging to have Banquo killed.

MACBETH

Bring them before us.

Exit Attendant

To be thus is nothing;
But to be safely thus.--Our fears in Banquo
Stick deep; and in his royalty of nature
Reigns that which would be fear'd: 'tis much he dares;
And, to that dauntless temper of his mind,
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour
To act in safety. There is none but he
Whose being I do fear: and, under him,
My Genius is rebuked; as, it is said,
Mark Antony's was by Caesar. He chid the sisters
When first they put the name of king upon me,
And bade them speak to him: then prophet-like
They hail'd him father to a line of kings:
Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,
And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
Thence to be wrench'd with an unlineal hand,
No son of mine succeeding. If 't be so,
For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind;
For them the gracious Duncan have I murder'd;
Put rancours in the vessel of my peace
Only for them; and mine eternal jewel
Given to the common enemy of man,
To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings!
Rather than so, come fate into the list.
And champion me to the utterance! Who's there!

Re-enter Attendant, with two Murderers

Now go to the door, and stay there till we call.

0.1

Starting with this extract, explain how far you think Shakespeare presents the idea of Kingship:

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents Kingship in this extract
- how Shakespeare presents Kingship in the rest of the play.

[30 marks] AO4 [4 marks]

Read the following extract from Act 3 Scene 2 of *Macbeth* and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play Macbeth has arranged the killing of Banquo and is reflecting on the killing of Duncan.

MACBETH

We have scotch'd the snake, not kill'd it:
She'll close and be herself, whilst our poor malice
Remains in danger of her former tooth.
But let the frame of things disjoint, both the
worlds suffer,
Ere we will eat our meal in fear and sleep
In the affliction of these terrible dreams
That shake us nightly: better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave;
After life's fitful fever he sleeps well;
Treason has done his worst: nor steel, nor poison,
Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing,
Can touch him further.

LADY MACBETH

Come on;
Gentle my lord, sleek o'er your rugged looks;
Be bright and jovial among your guests to-night.

MACBETH

So shall I, love; and so, I pray, be you:
Let your remembrance apply to Banquo;
Present him eminence, both with eye and tongue:
Unsafe the while, that we
Must lave our honours in these flattering streams,
And make our faces vizards to our hearts,
Disguising what they are.

LADY MACBETH

You must leave this.

0.1

Starting with this extract, explain how you think Shakespeare presents deceitfulness.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents deception in this extract
- how Shakespeare presents deceit in the play as a whole.

[30 marks] AO4 [4 mark]

Macbeth

Read the following extract from Act 4 Scene 3 of *Macbeth* and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play Malcolm and Macduff have not yet heard that Macbeth has killed Macduff's family. They are discussing Macbeth. Malcolm acknowledges that Macduff has good intentions.

MALCOLM

Macduff, this noble passion,
Child of integrity, hath from my soul
Wiped the black scruples, reconciled my thoughts
To thy good truth and honour. Devilish Macbeth
By many of these trains hath sought to win me
Into his power, and modest wisdom plucks me
From over-credulous haste: but God above
Deal between thee and me! for even now
I put myself to thy direction, and
Unspeaking mine own detraction, here abjure
The taints and blames I laid upon myself,
For strangers to my nature. I am yet
Unknown to woman, never was forsworn,
Scarcely have coveted what was mine own,
At no time broke my faith, would not betray
The devil to his fellow and delight
No less in truth than life: my first false speaking
Was this upon myself: what I am truly,
Is thine and my poor country's to command:
Whither indeed, before thy here-approach,
Old Siward, with ten thousand warlike men,
Already at a point, was setting forth.
Now we'll together; and the chance of goodness
Be like our warranted quarrel! Why are you silent?

MACDUFF

Such welcome and unwelcome things at once
'Tis hard to reconcile.

0.1

Starting with this extract, explain how far you think Shakespeare presents good and evil.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents the goodness of Malcolm and Macduff in this extract
- how Shakespeare presents good and evil in the play as a whole.

[30 marks] AO4 [4 marks]

Section A: Shakespeare

Answer **one** question from this section on your chosen text.

Read the following extract from Act 5 Scene 1 of *Macbeth* and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play Lady Macbeth is sleepwalking, being observed by her Doctor..

LADY MACBETH

The thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now?--
What, will these hands ne'er be clean?--No more o'
that, my lord, no more o' that: you mar all with
this starting.

Doctor

Go to, go to; you have known what you should not.

Gentlewoman

She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of
that: heaven knows what she has known.

LADY MACBETH

Here's the smell of the blood still: all the
perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little
hand. Oh, oh, oh!

Doctor

What a sigh is there! The heart is sorely charged.

LADY MACBETH

Wash your hands, put on your nightgown; look not so
pale.--I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he
cannot come out on's grave.

0.1

Starting with this extract, explain how far you think Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as weak.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth in this extract
- how Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth in the play as a whole.

[30 marks] AO4 [4 marks]

Section A: Shakespeare

Answer **one** question from this section on your chosen text.

Macbeth

Read the following extract from the end of *Macbeth* and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play Macbeth is about to be killed by Macduff.

MACDUFF

Despair thy charm;
And let the angel whom thou still hast served
Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's womb
Untimely ripp'd.

MACBETH

Accursed be that tongue that tells me so,
For it hath cow'd my better part of man!
And be these juggling fiends no more believed,
That palter with us in a double sense;
That keep the word of promise to our ear,
And break it to our hope. I'll not fight with thee.

MACDUFF

Then yield thee, coward,
And live to be the show and gaze o' the time:
We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are,
Painted on a pole, and underwrit,
'Here may you see the tyrant.'

MACBETH

I will not yield,
To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet,
And to be baited with the rabble's curse.
Though Birnam wood be come to Dunsinane,
And thou opposed, being of no woman born,
Yet I will try the last. Before my body
I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff,
And damn'd be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!'

0.1

Starting with this extract, explain how bravery is presented

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents Macbeth and Macduff in this extract
- how Shakespeare presents bravery/ brave characters in the play as a whole.

[30 marks] AO4 [4 marks]