

Plot summary:

1 The play opens as three witches plan a meeting with the brave Scottish nobleman Macbeth, who at that moment is fighting in a great battle. When the battle is over, Macbeth and his friend Banquo come across the witches who offer them three predictions: that Macbeth will become Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland, and that Banquo's descendants will become kings.

Banquo laughs at the prophecies but Macbeth is excited, especially as soon after their meeting with the witches Macbeth is made Thane of Cawdor by King Duncan, in return for his bravery in the battle.

2. He writes to his wife, Lady Macbeth, who is as excited as he is. A messenger tells Lady Macbeth that King Duncan is on his way to their castle and she invokes evil spirits to help her do what must be done next. Macbeth is persuaded to kill Duncan by his wife and stabs him to death. No-one is quite sure who committed this murder; no-one feels safe. Macbeth is crowned king.

3. Macbeth is king - the second prediction from the witches has come true, but he starts to fear the third prediction (that Banquo's descendants will also be kings). Macbeth decides to have Banquo and his son killed, but the plan goes wrong. Banquo is killed but his son Fleance escapes. Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost at the feast and it seems that he is losing his mind as he hallucinates for the second time in the play. He seeks out the witches for more predictions. Their promises make him think that he is invincible.

4 He becomes more ruthless and orders the murder of the family of Macduff, a lord who seems to be challenging him. In England, forces begin to gather together to fight Macbeth.

5. Macbeth still thinks he is safe but one by one the witches' prophecies come true. Lady Macbeth is obsessed with guilt over the death of Duncan, becomes deranged and kills herself. A large army marches on Macbeth's castle. Macbeth is killed by Macduff, and his head is placed on the battlements of the castle.

'Macbeth' knowledge organiser

Exam Requirements:

English Literature: Paper 1

1hr 45

Shakespeare ('Macbeth') & pre-19th century novel ('A Christmas Carol')

English Literature: Paper 2

2hr 15

Modern texts ('An Inspector Calls') & poetry (Power & Conflict) & unseen)



English Literature Grade Descriptors:

Grade 8

- sustain a convincing, informed personal response to explicit and implicit meanings of texts
- sustain a perceptive critical analysis of the ways in which writers use language, form and structure
- use judicious and well-integrated textual references to develop personal responses
- show perceptive understanding of how contexts shape texts and responses to texts
- make illuminating comparisons between texts

Grade 5

- develop a generally coherent and engaged response to explicit and implicit meanings of texts
- develop a clear understanding of the ways in which writers use language, form and structure
- use apt textual references to support responses
- use understanding of contexts to inform responses to texts
- make credible comparisons between texts

Grade 2

- make straightforward comments about explicit meanings of texts
- describe straightforward aspects of language, form or structure
- make general references to obvious details of texts
- show awareness that texts are related to contexts
- make basic links between texts

Skills: The 7 Steps

Point: what has been used and why?
"Evidence"

- 1) this suggests / on the surface / this conveys...
- 2) the word "___"
- 3) has connotations of...
- 4) metaphorically / at a deeper level...
- 5) symbolically / this becomes a symbol for...
- 6) Shakespeare is showing...
- 7) the audience is made to think / feel / understand

Key Quotations

"Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hands?" **Macbeth** (Act 2)

"Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under 't."

Lady Macbeth (Act 1)

"Stars, hide your fires/Let not light see my black and deep desires" **Macbeth** (Act 1)

"vaulting ambition" **Macbeth** (Act 1)

"There's daggers in men's smiles." – **Donaldbain** (Act 2)

"Something wicked this way comes" **The witches** (Act 4)

"Weed" **Lennox** (Act 5)

"Butcher" **Malcolm** (Act 5)

"O Hell-Kite – all? What all my pretty chickens, and their dam, at one fell swoop?" **Macduff** (Acts 4)

Themes:

Ambition

Evil

Order/disorder

Appearance & reality

Guilt

Loyalty/disloyalty

Kingship

The Supernatural

Manhood/courage

Fate vs Free will

Revenge

Key images (motifs)

Some ideas occur many times and have more significance:

Blood

Darkness and night

Sleep

Daggers

Animals, birds and insects

Heaven & Hell



Characters:

Macbeth: thane of Glamis. Easily tempted into murdering the king by the prophecies and with the encouragement of his wife; once crowned, he becomes guilt ridden and also a tyrant.

Lady Macbeth: Macbeth's wife, she calls down the evil spirits and coaxes her husband to kill the king. Her conscience affects her and she eventually commits suicide.

The Three Witches: plot mischief using spells, and prophecies. Their predictions prompt Macbeth to murder Duncan, to order the deaths of Banquo and his son, and to blindly believe in his own immortality.

Banquo: a brave, noble general, Macbeth's friend. Banquo also thinks ambitious thoughts, but he resists the witches' temptation. It is his ghost which haunts Macbeth.

King Duncan: The good King of Scotland, murdered by Macbeth. Malcolm is his son.

Macduff: leader of the crusade to overthrow Macbeth. Macduff also desires vengeance for Macbeth's murder of his wife and family.

Context:

'**Macbeth**' was first performed in 1606, and it is clear that Shakespeare had the newly crowned **James 1st** in mind whilst writing. The play appeals to many of the king's interests, including his fascination with the supernatural and witchcraft. There had been an attempt on his life in 1605 (the Gunpowder Plot). Banquo, one of the play's heroes, is an ancestor of James 1st. The death of a childless Queen Elizabeth had led to instability in the later years of her reign, and this would have heightened fears about the chaos and instability that can arise when a king's position is challenged.

The Great Chain of Being: people believed that the king's authority was derived from God, with God at the top, then angels, mankind, animals, birds, fish and so on. In the human order, the king was supreme; males were above females. To kill a king was to go against the will of God, and was seen as punishable with eternal damnation. It was felt to be an act against nature.