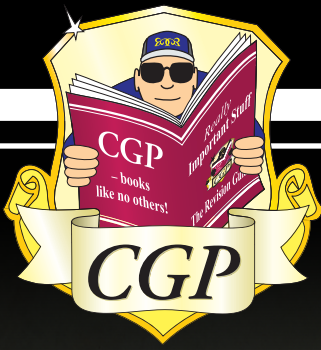


GCSE English



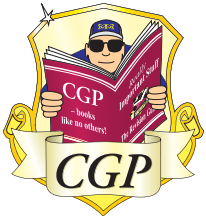
GCSE English
Macbeth

Macbeth



The Text Guide

For all GCSE English courses — including the new exams from 2017



CGP

The only GCSE Text Guides you'll ever need!



*A Christmas Carol • Animal Farm • An Inspector Calls • Anita and Me • A View from the Bridge
Blood Brothers • The Crucible • Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde • Frankenstein • Great Expectations • Jane Eyre
Lord of the Flies • Macbeth • Of Mice and Men • Pride and Prejudice • Romeo and Juliet • To Kill a Mockingbird*

www.cgppbooks.co.uk

GCSE English

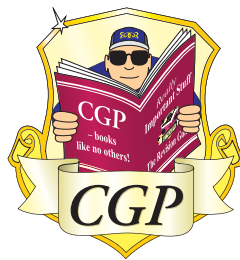
Macbeth

by William Shakespeare

If you like murder, treachery and witches, you'll probably love *Macbeth*.
But writing essays about it? That can be a challenge.

Not to worry. This brilliant Text Guide explains the whole thing — characters, language, structure, themes... the lot. And because it's a CGP book, we get straight to the point, with no needless rambling.

We've also included plenty of practice questions to test you on what you've learned, plus a section of advice on how to plan and write brilliant essays! Guaranteed to be safer and more reliable than witchcraft, or your money back.



The Text Guide

CONTENTS

Introduction

Introduction to 'Macbeth' and Shakespeare	1
Background Information	2
Who's Who in 'Macbeth'	3
'Macbeth' — Plot Summary	4

Section One — Understanding Shakespeare

How Plays Work	6
How to Understand Shakespeare's Language	7

Section Two — Discussion of Acts

Analysis of Act One — The Witches and a Battle.....	9
Analysis of Act One — The Witches' Predictions.....	10
Analysis of Act One — A Prediction Comes True.....	11
Analysis of Act One — The Macbeths Plot to Kill.....	12
Analysis of Act Two — Macbeth Murders Duncan.....	13
Analysis of Act Two — The Body is Discovered.....	14
Analysis of Act Three — Macbeth Plots Banquo's Murder.....	15
Analysis of Act Three — Banquo is Murdered	16
Analysis of Act Three — The Thanes are Unhappy	17
Analysis of Act Four — Macbeth Visits the Witches	18
Analysis of Act Four — Lady Macduff is Murdered.....	19
Analysis of Act Four — Malcolm and Macduff Meet	20
Analysis of Act Five — Lady Macbeth Sleepwalks	21
Analysis of Act Five — Lady Macbeth Dies	22
Analysis of Act Five — Macbeth is Killed	23
<i>Practice Questions</i>	24

Section Three — Characters

Character Profile — Macbeth.....	26
Character Profile — Lady Macbeth	28
Character Profile — Duncan	30
Character Profile — Malcolm and Donalbain	31
Character Profile — Banquo	32
Character Profile — The Macduffs.....	33
Character Profile — The Witches.....	34
Character Profile — Other Characters	35
<i>Practice Questions</i>	36

CONTENTS

Section Four — Context and Themes

Ambition.....	38
Loyalty and Betrayal.....	39
Kingship.....	40
Good and Evil.....	41
The Supernatural.....	42
Reality and Appearances.....	43
Fate and Free Will	44
<i>Practice Questions</i>	45

Section Five — Shakespeare's Techniques

The Structure of 'Macbeth'.....	47
Mood and Atmosphere	50
Poetry in Shakespeare.....	52
Puns and Wordplay.....	54
Imagery and Symbolism.....	55
<i>Practice Questions</i>	58

Section Six — Exam Advice

Exam Preparation.....	60
The Exam Question.....	61
Planning Your Answer	62
Writing Introductions and Conclusions	63
Writing Main Paragraphs.....	64
In the Exam	65
Sample Exam Question	66
Worked Answer	67

Index	69
-------------	----

The Characters from 'Macbeth'
'Macbeth' Cartoon

Published by CGP

Editors:

Claire Boulter
Holly Corfield-Carr
Heather Gregson
Holly Poynton
Caley Simpson

With thanks to Glenn Rogers and Nicola Woodfin for the proofreading.

Acknowledgements:

Cover Illustration: Glamis Castle (w/c on paper) by Girtin, Thomas (1775-1802) (attr. to) Private Collection/ The Bridgeman Art Library.

Page 1: Macbeth and the Witches, 1793-94 (oil on canvas) by Fuseli, Henry (Füssli, Johann Heinrich) (1741-1825) Petworth House, Sussex, UK/ The Egremont Collection/ National Trust Photographic Library/Derrick E. Witty/ The Bridgeman Art Library.

With thanks to iStockphoto.com for permission to use the image on page 1.

Images on pages 3, 4, 5, 9, 11, 15, 17, 18, 19, 21, 27, 28, 30, 31, 33, 39, 41, 44, 52, 55 and 57 taken of the Macbeth Production of the Department of Theatre and Dance, College of Fine Arts, The University of Texas, Austin, USA. Directed by Ken Albers, Costume Design: Candida Nichols, Set Design: David Utley, Lighting Design: Monique Norman, Photographer: Amitava Sarkar.

Images on pages 3, 10, 34, 40, 43 and 54 from the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre production of Macbeth, photographer Ellie Kurtz.

Images on pages 3, 6, 8, 13, 20, 22, 29, 35, 38, 42 and 47 © COLUMBIA / THE KOBAL COLLECTION.

Image on page 7 © CROMWELL / LAMANCHA / GRAMPIAN TV / THE KOBAL COLLECTION.

Image on page 32 © BRITISH LION / THE KOBAL COLLECTION.

Image on page 48 © BRITISH LION / THE KOBAL COLLECTION / BOULTON, DAVIS.

With thanks to Alamy for permission to use the images on pages 2, 5, 12, 14, 23 and 26.

With thanks to Rex Features for permission to use the images on pages 16 and 51.

ISBN: 978 1 84146 116 8

Printed by Elanders Ltd, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Clipart from Corel®

Based on the classic CGP style created by Richard Parsons.

Text, design, layout and original illustrations © Coordination Group Publications Ltd. (CGP) 2011

All rights reserved.

Photocopying more than one chapter of this book is not permitted. Extra copies are available from CGP.

0870 750 1242 • www.cgpbooks.co.uk

Introduction to 'Macbeth' and Shakespeare

'Macbeth' is about the corrupting power of ambition

- *Macbeth* is about an [ambitious nobleman](#) who [murders](#) the Scottish King after some [Witches](#) make a [prediction](#) that he will rule Scotland.
- Macbeth becomes a [cruel king](#) who commits many [crimes](#), before he is eventually [killed](#).
- *Macbeth* is one of Shakespeare's [most-performed](#) plays. Its themes of [ambition](#) and [betrayal](#) are still relevant today, and the basic plot has inspired many [adaptations](#).

Macbeth is about ambition and betrayal

- 1) Shakespeare shows that even [honourable](#) men can be [corrupted](#) by [ambition](#) — Macbeth [betrays](#) his [king](#), his [country](#) and his own [conscience](#) to satisfy his lust for [power](#).
- 2) Macbeth and Lady Macbeth show that power that's taken [unfairly](#) doesn't bring happiness, but leads to [guilt](#), [madness](#) and [death](#).

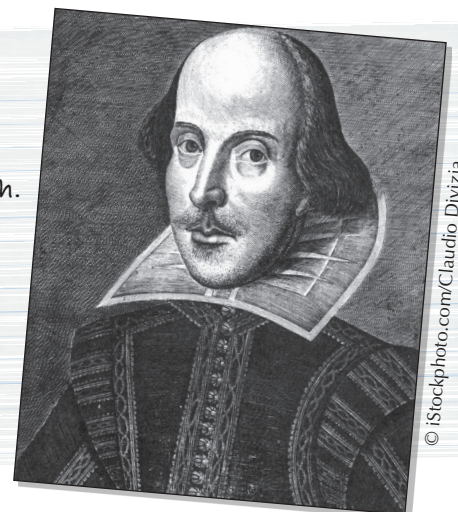


Macbeth meets the Witches.

Shakespeare is the most famous writer in the English language

- William Shakespeare wrote at least [thirty-seven plays](#) and a lot of [poems](#).
- He wrote some of the most [famous](#) plays in the English language, including [comedies](#) (such as *Twelfth Night*), [tragedies](#) (such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*) and [histories](#) (such as *Richard III*).
- *Macbeth* is one of his best-known [tragedies](#).
- It was written in the [1600s](#), but the story is very loosely based on [history](#) — a man called Macbeth was [King](#) of Scotland in the [11th century](#).

1564	Born in Stratford-upon-Avon , Warwickshire.
1582	Married Anne Hathaway .
1583-85	Had three children — Susanna, Hamnet and Judith.
1585-92	Began an acting career in London .
1589-1613	Wrote most of his plays.
1611	First known performance of 'Macbeth' .
1616	Died, aged 52.

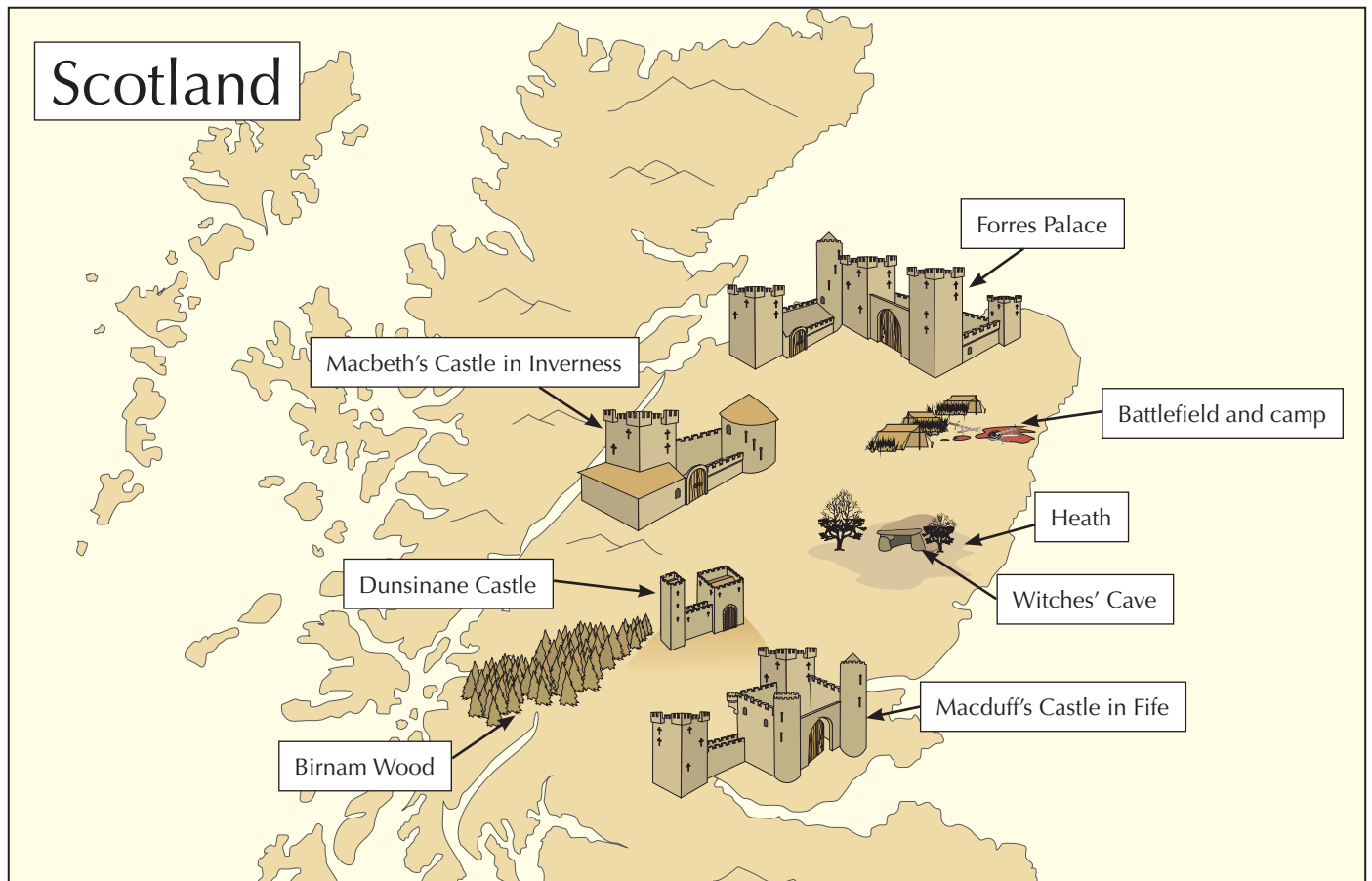


© iStockphoto.com/Claudio Divizia

Background Information

'Macbeth' is set in various parts of Scotland

Here's a [plan](#) of the important places in the play, showing where all the [important action](#) happens.



Theatre was an important form of entertainment



The rebuilt Globe Theatre in London.

- There was no [TV](#), [radio](#) or [internet](#) in Shakespeare's time, so going to the [theatre](#) was really popular.
- The theatre wasn't just for [rich](#) people — Shakespeare's audiences included [servants](#) and [labourers](#). Audiences could get quite [rowdy](#) during performances.
- The [poorer](#) people in the audience stood in [front](#) of the stage — if it rained, they got wet. The [richer](#) people sat in the [covered galleries](#) above.
- Shakespeare's theatre company, the [King's Men](#) (previously called the [Lord Chamberlain's Men](#)), performed in the [Globe Theatre](#) in London. This was [rebuilt](#) in 1997.
- It was [illegal](#) for [women](#) to act, so the women's parts were played by young [boys](#) (even Lady Macbeth...).

Who's Who in 'Macbeth'

© COLUMBIA /
THE KOBAL COLLECTION



Macbeth...

... is an ambitious Scottish nobleman. He murders the King of Scotland and takes his place.

Lady Macbeth...

... is Macbeth's wife. She persuades Macbeth to kill the King. She eventually goes mad and kills herself.



© Amitava Sarkar

Duncan...

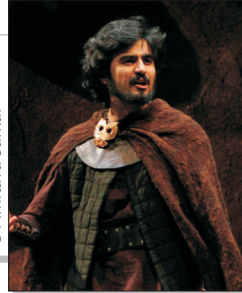
... is the King of Scotland at the start of the play. Macbeth murders him.



© Ellie Kurtz

Malcolm...

... is Duncan's son. He flees after Duncan's murder, and becomes King at the end of the play.



© Amitava Sarkar

Macduff...

... is a noble soldier. He doesn't trust Macbeth and eventually kills him.



© Amitava Sarkar

Lady Macduff...

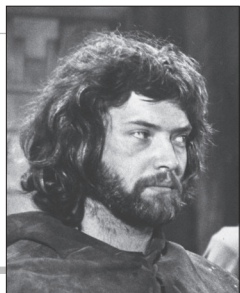
... is Macduff's wife. Macbeth has her and her children murdered.



© Amitava Sarkar

Banquo...

... is a brave soldier and nobleman. He's friends with Macbeth but Macbeth has him killed.



© COLUMBIA /
THE KOBAL COLLECTION

© Ellie Kurtz



Three Witches...

... are evil supernatural beings who can predict the future. Their leader is called Hecate.

'Macbeth' — Plot Summary



'Macbeth'... what happens when?

Macbeth needs to be as familiar to you as your favourite socks. This little recap of the main events will help you on your way, but it's no substitute for reading the play. There's no escaping that I'm afraid...

Act One — The Witches make two prophecies



© Amitava Sarkar

- The three Witches plan to meet Macbeth.
- Macbeth and Banquo meet the Witches, who tell Macbeth he'll be Thane of Cawdor, then King. They tell Banquo his descendants will be kings.
- Duncan makes Macbeth Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth starts to wonder if the Witches' prophecy about him being King will come true too.
- Macbeth tells Lady Macbeth about the prophecy. She plans to persuade him to murder Duncan.

- Duncan comes to stay with the Macbeths. Macbeth is reluctant to kill him, but Lady Macbeth convinces him that they can frame Duncan's servants for the murder. Macbeth agrees to the plan.

Acts Two and Three — Duncan and Banquo bite the dust

- Macbeth murders Duncan and Lady Macbeth plants blood-stained daggers on Duncan's servants.
- Macduff arrives and discovers the King's body. The King's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, leave Scotland because they fear for their lives — this makes them look guilty of Duncan's murder.
- Rosse and an old man discuss the strange and unnatural things that have been happening since Duncan's murder. Macbeth is about to be crowned, but not all the other noblemen support him.
- Macbeth is now King, but he's worried by the Witches' prophecy about Banquo's descendants being kings. He orders some murderers to kill Banquo and his son, Fleance.
- The murderers kill Banquo, but Fleance escapes. Macbeth hosts a feast and sees Banquo's ghost. He decides to visit the Witches again.
- Lennox and a lord suspect Macbeth of murdering Duncan and Banquo. They say that Macduff is getting an army together to attack Macbeth and put Malcolm on the throne.



© Amitava Sarkar

Act Four — The three apparitions

- Macbeth visits the Witches again and they summon [three apparitions](#).
- Each apparition makes a prophecy. The first [warns](#) Macbeth about [Macduff](#), the second tells him that no one [born from a woman](#) can harm him and the third tells him that he can't be beaten until Birnam Wood [moves](#) to Dunsinane Hill.
- When Macbeth demands to know if Banquo's children will ever [rule Scotland](#) the Witches show him Banquo's ghost and a line of kings who seem to be Banquo's [descendants](#).
- Macduff has fled to England. Macbeth sends his murderers to kill Macduff's [wife](#) and [children](#).
- In England, Macduff proves his [loyalty](#) to Malcolm, and Malcolm reveals that the [English King](#) has given him [ten thousand soldiers](#) to fight Macbeth. Macduff learns that Macbeth has [killed](#) his [family](#), and vows to [avenge](#) their deaths.



© Amitava Sarkar

Act Five — Macbeth is overthrown

- Lady Macbeth has gone [mad](#). She [sleepwalks](#) and keeps washing [invisible blood](#) from her hands.
- The [Scottish lords](#) plan to meet the [English army](#) at Birnam Wood and [attack](#) Macbeth.
- Macbeth hears about the approaching English army. He [isn't scared](#) because of the Witches' predictions.
- Malcolm tells the soldiers to [cut down branches](#) from Birnam Wood and hide behind them as they march towards Macbeth's castle.
- Macbeth prepares for battle and finds out that Lady Macbeth has [killed herself](#).
- Macbeth and Macduff meet on the battlefield. Macbeth is [sure](#) that he'll win, until he finds out that Macduff was born by [Caesarean](#), so he isn't [born from a woman](#). They fight and Macbeth is [killed](#).
- [Malcolm](#) is made [King](#) of Scotland.



© Amitava Sarkar

Macbeth? Macdeath more like...

Once you're confident that you know what happens in *Macbeth*, you're ready to start Section One. If you're still not sure about the plot or want a break from revision, have a look at the *Macbeth* cartoon at the back of the book.



© The Art Archive / Alamy

How Plays Work

Lots of people think Shakespeare's the hardest thing you have to study for English — and they're right... but it should be less hard and less weird when you've read this section.

'Macbeth' is meant to be watched — not read

- 1) *Macbeth* is a [play](#). A play tells a story by [showing](#) it to you.
- 2) When you [read](#) the play, it's often pretty hard to [follow](#) what's going on. Try to [imagine](#) what's happening and how the people would [speak](#) and [act](#) — it should all start to make a lot more sense.
- 3) If you can, try to see the play [on stage](#). If not, watch a [film](#) version to get an idea of the [story](#).
- 4) But remember to [read the play](#) as well — films often [cut scenes](#) and [change](#) the language, so it's [dangerous](#) to rely on them too much.

'Macbeth' is a tragedy

Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's [most famous](#) tragedies. Mostly, it's a [typical tragedy](#)...

- 1) It's about [serious topics](#) like [war](#) and [death](#).
- 2) It's [sad](#) — lots of the characters [die](#).
- 3) The play's [main character](#) (*Macbeth*) [dies](#) as a result of his [flaws](#).

But there are also a few [more unusual](#) things...

- 4) There are [supernatural](#) elements — the three [Witches](#) and their [prophecies](#).
- 5) [Lady Macbeth](#) isn't typical of Shakespeare's female characters — she's [evil](#) and [strong-willed](#).
- 6) There are a few [comic moments](#) — the [Porter](#) is a comic character.



© COLUMBIA / THE KOBAL COLLECTION

Pay attention to the stage directions

When you're reading the play, look at the [stage directions](#) — they're little phrases in italics that tell the actors [what](#) to do, [when](#) to come in and when to [leave](#) the stage.

These are the really [common](#) stage directions in [Shakespeare](#):

- Enter** = when someone [comes onto](#) the stage
- Exit** = when one person [leaves](#) the stage
- Exeunt** = when [more](#) than one person [leaves](#)
- Aside** = the character is [talking to themselves](#), not to other characters on the stage




Don't forget that 'Macbeth' was written to be performed...

Plays like *Macbeth* don't have loads of description. When you read it, you'll need to think about how the characters might move and speak on stage. Stage directions can sometimes give you a clue.

How to Understand Shakespeare's Language

Shakespeare's plays can be more confusing than a fox and ferret convention, especially all the strange ye olde language. But there are certain ways of reading it so it makes more sense...

The play is written in poetry and prose

- 1) Some of the play is written in poetry — but the poetry doesn't always rhyme.
- 2) The poetry is the bits where all the lines are roughly the same length, and each line starts with a capital letter. It looks like this: 
- 3) The Witches, Hecate and the apparitions (the supernatural characters) speak in rhyming verse.
- 4) Some bits of the play are in prose — prose is normal sentences without any set rhythm.
- 5) Common characters, like the Porter, usually speak in prose.
Lady Macbeth speaks in prose when she goes mad.

"Still it cried, 'Sleep no more' to all the house,
'Glamis hath murdered sleep', and therefore Cawdor
Shall sleep no more – Macbeth shall sleep no more."
Act 2, Scene 2

*For more on poetry see
Section 5.*

Don't stop reading at the end of each line

- 1) Even though each line starts with a capital letter, it doesn't mean it's a separate sentence.
- 2) Just ignore the capitals and follow the punctuation.
- 3) For example, there's no full stop here so carry on to the next line:

"My hands are of your colour, but I shame
To wear a heart so white"
Act 2, Scene 2



© CROMWELL / LAMNCHA / GRAMPIAN
TV / THE KOBAL COLLECTION

Look out for words in a funny order

- 1) Another reason Shakespeare can be tricky to understand is the long complicated sentences.
- 2) It's hard because the words are in a funny order. If you change the order it makes it easier to understand. For example:

"So foul and fair a day I have not seen."
Act 1, Scene 3



I have not seen so foul and fair a day.

"O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!"
Act 3, Scene 2



O, my mind is full of scorpions, dear wife!

How to Understand Shakespeare's Language

Macbeth is full of cobwebby, dusty old words — and weird ways of writing things using apostrophes. Don't let them put you off — it *is* English really. I promise.

You have to guess what the missing letters are

- 1) Shakespeare often runs two words together and misses letters out to make them fit into a line.
- 2) There's often an apostrophe instead of the missing letter. So "is't" means "is it".

Act 4, Scene 1

What is't you do?

- 3) If you come across random apostrophes when you're reading, you'll have to work out what the missing letters are.



© COLUMBIA / THE KOBAL COLLECTION

Mind your thees, thous and thys

- 1) They had different words for 'you' in those days.
- 2) People used to say 'thou' to be familiar or friendly, and 'you' to be more formal. Look out for these words:

Thou	=	You
Thee	=	You
Thy	=	Your
Thine	=	Your

And finally, some more old, confusing words

- 1) Verbs often look a bit different from modern English...

thou art	=	you are	thou wilt	=	you will
thou hast	=	you have	thou canst	=	you can

- 2) If this seems difficult, here's a trick — take the 't' off the end of the verb:
- 3) And here are a few more words to watch out for:

hast	- t =	has
wilt	- t =	wil(l)

hie	=	go quickly	wherefore	=	why
hither	=	to here	thence	=	from <u>there</u>
whence	=	from <u>where</u>	ere	=	before
hence	=	from <u>here</u>	whither	=	where



Spend time getting to grips with the language...

So, Shakespeare missed letters from his words, and he put his words in a funny order. As annoying as that may be, you need to get used to it. The better you understand the play, the better you'll do in your exam.

Analysis of Act One — The Witches and a Battle

This section goes over the story of *Macbeth*. Read it all and you'll know what happens in every scene. Don't go thinking you don't need to read the play as well, though. I'll find out if you don't.

Scene 1 — The Witches plan to meet Macbeth

The wild weather hints that unnatural events are occurring.

- 1) The play starts with **thunder** and **lightning**, which sets a **dark** and **violent mood**.
- 2) The three Witches are the first characters on stage — this shows how **important** the theme of the **supernatural** is to the play. The Witches are **mysterious** — we don't know what their **purpose** is.
- 3) The Witches speak in **rhyming couplets**, e.g. "When the hurly-burly's done, / When the battle's lost and won." Only the **supernatural characters** in the play consistently use rhyme — it sets them **apart** from the other characters and makes their speech sound **unnatural**, as if they're casting an **evil spell**.
- 4) The Witches plan to meet Macbeth, but don't explain their **intentions**. Their final rhyming couplet, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair, / Hover through the fog and filthy air" hints that they're **evil**.

Theme — Reality and Appearances

The Witches introduce the idea that **nothing is as it seems**: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair". This theme is **central** to the play.

A paradox is a statement that contradicts itself.

Writer's Techniques — Language

The Witches speak in **paradoxes** — "When the battle's lost and won". At first they don't make any **sense**, but their predictions become clearer as the play goes on.

Scene 2 — King Duncan hears reports of the battle

- 1) The **Scottish army**, led by Macbeth and Banquo, are **fighting** rebel armies from Norway and Ireland.
- 2) Shakespeare **contrasts** the **eerie** opening scene with the **brutality** and "bloody execution" of the battlefield. This sets a **violent mood** for the rest of the play.
- 3) The Captain and Duncan describe Macbeth as "brave" and "valiant". At this point he's a **hero** who's **loyal** to his king and country.

Character — Macbeth

At the start of the play Macbeth is **celebrated** for his **bloodthirsty** nature — he cut the traitor Macdonald "from the nave to the chops". It's **ironic** that this **violence** eventually leads to his downfall.

Theme — Reality and Appearances

The Witches have just told the audience that "**Fair is foul**" — this suggests that the "Worthy" Macbeth might not be as **good** as the other characters believe. The audience hasn't met Macbeth yet, so their **view** of him is based on what the **other characters** say.

Macbeth cuts off the traitor's head — this foreshadows (hints at something that happens later) his own death at the end.



© Amitava Sarkar



"Fair is foul, and foul is fair"

Macbeth starts as it means to go on — creepy witches that can see into the future, and bloody violence. The audience is also warned not to trust appearances, something which will crop up a lot...

Analysis of Act One — The Witches' Predictions

The Witches are back — and there's all sorts of hubble-bubble afoot.

Scene 3 — The Witches make three predictions



- 1) The Witches are accompanied by **thunder** again — this recurring motif hints at **chaos**, **danger** and the **overturning** of the **natural order**.

A motif is a recurring symbol — see pages 55 and 56.

Writer's Techniques — Metaphor

The Witches talk about sending a **storm** out on a sailor's ship so that he **can't sleep**. The sailor is a **metaphor** for what will happen to Macbeth, who's made sleepless by **guilt**, and the ship is a **metaphor** for Scotland, which is almost **destroyed** during Macbeth's **violent** reign.

- 2) Macbeth's first line in this scene, "So foul and fair a day I have not seen", immediately **links** him to the Witches and their "Foul is fair" prophecy.

Banquo and Macbeth react differently to the predictions

- 1) The Witches predict that Macbeth will be made **Thane of Cawdor**, then **King**, and that Banquo's descendants will also become **kings**. Banquo and Macbeth **react differently** to the news:

- Banquo is **suspicious** and questions his own **sanity** — he asks, "have we eaten on the insane root".
- He **warns** that the Witches "Win us with honest trifles — to betray's". He accepts that the Witches are telling the **truth**, but he's also aware that they're **manipulating** Macbeth and himself.
- Banquo's less easily **deceived** than Macbeth. He calls the Witches "instruments of darkness" because he sees they're **evil**, whereas Macbeth is less **certain** — he says they "Cannot be ill, cannot be good".
- The encounter with the Witches leaves Macbeth "rapt withal". He's **spellbound** by the predictions, but he's also **scared** by the powerful **ambition** that the Witches have **awakened** in him.



© Ellie Kurtz

- 2) The Witches tell Banquo he will be "Lesser than Macbeth, and greater". This is a reference to Banquo's sons being kings, but it could also mean that Banquo is **greater** because he isn't driven by **greed** and **ambition**.
- 3) Macbeth can't stop thinking about the prophecies — this shows his **lust for power**. He immediately thinks about killing Duncan, but he's also **reluctant**. At this point Macbeth isn't an **evil** character — he's **wrestling** with his conscience and torn between his **ambition** and his **loyalty**.

Character — The Witches

The Witches tell Banquo he will be "Not so happy, yet much happier". This hints that although Macbeth will get what he wants (he'll be King), it won't make him happy. The Witches use **paradoxes** and **riddles** to **confuse** Macbeth and Banquo and lead them **astray**.

- 4) When Macbeth finds out he's been made Thane of Cawdor, it shows that the first prediction has come **true**. This convinces him that the prediction about him becoming **King** will come true too, which strengthens his **ambition**.



"Lesser than Macbeth, and greater"

The scene is now set. The Witches have told Macbeth that he'll be King, but Duncan and Malcolm stand in his way. Banquo's kids look like a threat to him too. So it looks like murder might be the answer...

Analysis of Act One — A Prediction Comes True

The next three scenes are all at Macbeth's castle — Macbeth and Lady Macbeth make their plan...

Scene 4 — Macbeth is made Thane of Cawdor

Turning point in the action
The Witches' first prediction comes true.

- 1) Duncan gives Macbeth the title of Thane of Cawdor as a **reward** for his **loyalty**.
- 2) Duncan uses an **extended metaphor** of plants, e.g. "plant thee" and "make thee full of growing", to show that he sees it as his duty to **nurture** people who are **loyal** to him. Duncan sees Macbeth as a **potential successor**, suggesting that **fate** might make Macbeth King without him doing anything.

Theme — Kingship

Duncan is represented as a **strong and fair leader** — he rewards **loyalty** and wants Scotland to **prosper**. This **contrasts** with Macbeth's violent, tyrannical rule.

Theme — Reality and Appearances

Duncan says he **misjudged** the old Thane of Cawdor because there's no way to "find the mind's construction in the face" — he thinks that people who seem **good** and **loyal** may not be. It's **ironic** — he also **misjudges** Macbeth.

Writer's Techniques — Symbolism

Duncan says, "signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine / On all deservers." He thinks that **fate** will **reward** those who **deserve** it. Light is also linked to **visibility**, which contrasts with Macbeth's desire to **hide** his intentions.

- 3) Macbeth seems **confused** in this scene. Outwardly he's a **brave** and **loyal** warlord, but inwardly his **ambition** is **battling** with his **conscience**. He wants to keep his "black and deep desires" **hidden**, not just from other people but from himself.

Scene 5 — Lady Macbeth decides Duncan must die

- 1) The scene opens with Lady Macbeth alone, **reading a letter** from Macbeth about the Witches' prophecies — this allows the audience to hear her **inner thoughts** and see what she's **really like**.
- 2) She has **no doubts** about killing Duncan and immediately sees that she'll have to **force** Macbeth to do it because he's "too full o'th'milk of human kindness".
- 3) Lady Macbeth's **soliloquy** uses **evil imagery** such as "smoke of hell" and "direst cruelty", which shows the **evil** on her mind.

Writer's Techniques — Symbolism

Lady Macbeth asks the spirits to "unsex me here" — she doesn't want to be a **woman** because she sees women as **weak** and **incapable of murder**. For more on the symbolism of masculinity have a look at p.57.



© Amitava Sarkar

- 4) Her speech links her to the Witches — she uses **imperatives**, which make it sound like she's **casting a spell**. She says, "Come, you spirits" and "Come, thick night", which links her to **evil**, **unnatural** spirits.
- 5) Macbeth enters and their **dialogue** in lines 56-58 is in **half-line breaks**. This makes their speech sound **urgent** and **hurried** — they're both **nervous** and need to act quickly in case they're **interrupted**.



Explain what Lady Macbeth's soliloquy tells us about her...

Lady Macbeth's soliloquy is really important — it shows that she's the driving force behind the decision to murder Duncan. Her language links her to the Witches, and shows that she's not to be trusted.

Analysis of Act One — The Macbeths Plot to Kill

Duncan arrives at Macbeth's castle — he's in for the night of his life...

Scene 6 — Duncan and the lords arrive at Macbeth's castle

- 1) Duncan arrives at Macbeth's castle and is **grateful** for his hospitality and everything Macbeth's done for him.
- 2) Lady Macbeth appears to be the **perfect hostess** — she **flatters** Duncan and thanks him for the "honours deep and broad" he has given them. Shakespeare **contrasts** this scene with the previous one to show how **false** Lady Macbeth is.

Writer's Techniques — Irony

Duncan describes Macbeth's castle as "pleasant" and says that it "sweetly recommends itself". It's **ironic** that Duncan feels happy and welcome at Macbeth's castle — the audience knows what Macbeth's **got planned**.

Writer's Techniques — Irony

Duncan describes Macbeth's love for Lady Macbeth as "sharp as his spur". This is **ironic** — it wasn't love that made Macbeth rush home but his desire to **plot** Duncan's murder with Lady Macbeth. It's also ironic because Lady Macbeth is the **spur** (encouragement) that **drives** Macbeth into action.

Scene 7 — The Macbeths agree to kill Duncan

- 1) Scene 7 opens with Macbeth's **soliloquy** — he's trying to **decide** whether to kill Duncan and gives a list of reasons why he **shouldn't**:

- He knows that **murder** can "return / To plague th'inventor", so if he kills Duncan he's likely to end up being **killed himself**.
- As Duncan's "kinsman" and "host" he has a duty to **protect** him.
- Duncan is a **good king** — he's "clear in his great office", so killing him will lead to "deep **damnation**".
- Macbeth knows his own **ambition** will be his **downfall**.

- 2) Lady Macbeth is **forceful** — she **bullies** and **persuades** Macbeth to go through with the murder by questioning his **masculinity**. She says that by killing Duncan Macbeth will be "so much more the man". This has a **double meaning** — he'll be more of a **man**, and he'll also be **King**.
- 3) She **rejects** her **femininity** by telling Macbeth that she'd kill her own child. She's trying to **prove** how **remorseless** and **evil** she is.

Writer's Techniques — Imagery

Lady Macbeth uses language connected with **alchemy** (the process of turning cheap metal into gold): "A limbeck" and "receipt" are the **apparatus** used and "fume" refers to the gases produced. Alchemists **never succeeded** in turning cheap metal into real gold — Shakespeare is hinting that Macbeth will never become a **good king**.



© AF archive / Alamy

Writer's Techniques — Suspense

Act One ends with **anticipation** — the murder has been **planned** but **hasn't happened**. This builds **suspense** for the audience.



Write about Shakespeare's use of irony...

Duncan is full of praise for the Macbeths and their home, but the audience knows they're up to no good. This takes us back to the Witches' warning: "Fair is foul..." (I told you it was a key quote).

Analysis of Act Two — Macbeth Murders Duncan

Macbeth kills Duncan, and Lady Macbeth covers the servants in blood to frame them for his murder.

Scene 1 — The famous ‘dagger’ bit

- 1) Banquo and his son, Fleance, go for a walk at night. Fleance is a reminder to the audience about the Witches’ prophecy that Banquo’s sons will be kings.
- 2) There aren’t any stars: “Their candles are all out”, so it’s very dark. The darkness symbolises the evil that Macbeth is about to do. The starless sky also echoes Duncan’s speech in Act 1, Scene 4 about stars shining on the deserving — Macbeth is undeserving.
- 3) Macbeth promises that if Banquo supports him, he’ll “honour” him, but Banquo replies that he’ll only help Macbeth if he can keep his “allegiance clear”. This shows that he’s loyal to Duncan.



Character — Banquo

Banquo’s response shows that he’s more moral than Macbeth, but his “cursèd thoughts” and mention of the Witches may hint that he’s thinking about acting on the prophecies.



© COLUMBIA / THE KOBAL COLLECTION

Theme — The Supernatural

See p.42 for more on visions.

In his soliloquy Macbeth talks about “witchcraft”, “Hecate’s offerings” and “a ghost”. This links Macbeth to the Witches and shows how he’s affected by their predictions. He starts seeing visions of a dagger — it’s not clear if it’s leading him to commit murder or warning him against it.

Scene 2 — The deed is done

Turning point in the action
Macbeth commits his first murder.

- 1) Lady Macbeth waits for Macbeth to return from killing Duncan. She’s startled by every noise, and she says that she couldn’t kill Duncan because he reminded her of her father. This suggests that Lady Macbeth isn’t as merciless as she appears.
- 2) The murder takes place offstage — this increases the suspense and makes the audience imagine the killing, which makes it more horrific. It also lets the audience see how Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are affected by their experience in Duncan’s room.
- 3) There’s a lot of foreshadowing (hinting at things that happen later) in this scene:
 - Macbeth doubts “Neptune’s ocean” will clean the blood off his hands — he’s feeling guilty. Lady Macbeth doesn’t seem as bothered by her bloody hands — it’s an ironic foreshadowing of her frenzied hand washing in Act 5.
 - Macbeth says he’s “murdered sleep” — sleep symbolises peace and a clear conscience, so murdering sleep shows that he’s wracked with guilt. This also foreshadows Lady Macbeth’s sleepwalking in Act 5.
 - There are also references to insanity — Lady Macbeth talks about Macbeth going “mad” and being “brain-sickly” — it’s an ironic foreshadowing of her own madness later.
- 4) The stage directions add to the tension — there’s a repetition of a knocking sound, which gives a sense of urgency. This seems to echo Macbeth’s pounding heart, and is a sign of his fear and guilt.

For more on the symbolism of blood and water see p.57.



“Macbeth does murder sleep”

Macbeth may have committed a terrible, grisly murder, but he feels pretty guilty about it. Lady Macbeth doesn’t seem quite so concerned by what they’ve done at this point — but that will change soon enough.

Analysis of Act Two — The Body is Discovered

There's a bit of light relief (don't get used to it) in Scene 3 before Duncan's body is discovered.

Scene 3 — Duncan's body is discovered

- 1) The Porter's comic [monologue](#) relieves the [tension](#), but also [builds suspense](#) before Duncan's body is found.
- 2) Shakespeare uses [dramatic irony](#) to increase the audience's [anticipation](#) — the audience knows that Duncan has been murdered, and although the characters don't know, they can [sense evil](#):

- The Porter describes the Macbeths' castle gate as a "hell-gate" and makes a joke about a man sent to [hell](#) who "committed treason".
- Lennox comments on how "unruly" and [stormy](#) the night was — he tells Macbeth that the wind sounded like "strange screams of death".
- He also says the storm was "prophesying with accents terrible / Of dire combustion and confused events". This reflects the [terrible events](#) that have taken place and [foreshadows](#) the events to come.

Treason means betraying your king or country.

- 3) [Macduff](#) finds Duncan's body — his [reaction](#) shows how [horrified](#) he is, and makes the murder seem even [worse](#).

Writer's Techniques — Language

- 4) Macbeth confesses to [killing](#) Duncan's servants out of [rage](#). When Lady Macbeth hears this she [faints](#). This could be to [distract](#) the other characters from Macbeth's [suspicious behaviour](#), or she may actually be [horrified](#) by Macbeth's [violence](#), which she didn't help plan.

- Before Duncan's body is found, Macbeth speaks in [short sentences](#) — "Twas a rough night", "Not yet" — he seems [distracted](#) and [tense](#). This highlights his [guilt](#) and [nervousness](#).
- When Duncan's body is discovered, Macbeth's language [changes](#) — he describes Duncan's "silver skin laced with his golden blood". His [poetic language](#) seems [false](#).

- 5) Malcolm and Donalbain [run away](#) because they fear for their lives. It makes them look [guilty](#) and allows Macbeth to [take the throne](#).

See p.40 for more about how Macbeth becomes king.

Scene 4 — Macbeth is about to be made king

- 1) This scene is a [bridge](#) between Act 2 and Act 3. Its purpose is to create a sense of [fear and uncertainty](#).
- 2) [Strange events](#) have happened since Duncan's death, which show how the [natural order](#) has been [disrupted](#). A country's well-being is linked to that of its king, so these events are [bad omens](#) for Macbeth's reign.

- It's [dark](#) during the day: "dark night strangles the travelling lamp". This symbolises the [evil](#) that has come over Scotland.
- A [falcon](#) has been savagely [killed](#) by an [owl](#) — the falcon symbolises Duncan, and the owl symbolises Macbeth (see p.56).
- Horses have been [eating](#) each other, which is [unnatural](#).

- 3) The scene ends with Macduff telling Rosse that Macbeth will be [King](#). Macduff isn't going to the coronation — this suggests he's [suspicious](#) of Macbeth and sets him up as Macbeth's [main enemy](#).



© AF archive / Alamy



Explain the role of the Porter...

If you mention the Porter in your exam, write about [why](#) Shakespeare included him in the play. As well as making lots of ironic references to Macbeth's dirty deeds, he provides some comic relief for the audience.

Analysis of Act Three — Macbeth Plots Banquo's Murder

That naughty Macbeth is up to no good again — this time he's got his sights set on Banquo...

Scene 1 — Macbeth plots Banquo's murder

- 1) The scene opens with Banquo's **soliloquy**. His inner thoughts reveal several things:

- He's **suspicious** of Macbeth, who he thinks "play'dst most foully" for the crown.
- He's still thinking about the Witches' prediction that his descendants will be kings. He's **ambitious**, but unlike Macbeth, he's willing to let **fate** take its course.



© Amitava Sarkar

- 2) Macbeth's **soliloquy** shows that his attitude to murder has **changed**. In Act 1 he was **tormented** by killing Duncan and almost **couldn't do it**, but he's **decisive** about killing Banquo — murder has become **easy**.
- 3) Macbeth hires **murderers** to kill Banquo. This shows how much his character has **changed** — in Act 1, Scene 1 he was a **fearless hero**, but now he can't meet his enemy face-to-face. He's become a **coward**.
- 4) Macbeth has become more like Lady Macbeth. He **persuades** the murderers to do what he wants by **questioning** their **masculinity** and telling **lies** to convince them that Banquo is their **enemy**.

Theme — Fate and Free Will

Macbeth thinks he can **change fate** and prevent Banquo's descendants from becoming kings by **killing** Banquo and Fleance.

Scene 2 — The Macbeths are feeling insecure

- 1) Lady Macbeth and Macbeth both feel **insecure** about Macbeth's position as King.
- 2) Shakespeare uses **oxymorons** in this scene, e.g. "doubtful joy" and "restless ecstasy", to show their **mixed emotions**. They've got what they wanted but they also feel **guilty** and **uneasy**.

An oxymoron is where two words contradict each other.

Character — The Macbeths

There's evidence that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have **switched roles** — before she told him to "look like / th' innocent flower" — now he tells her to **flatter** Banquo and says that they must make their "faces vizards to our hearts".

Writer's Techniques — Foreshadowing

Macbeth **envies** Duncan because he isn't troubled by "Malice domestic, foreign levy" (civil war or foreign armies). This **foreshadows** Macduff's **uprising** and the **English attack** at the end of the play.

- 3) This scene shows a **change** in the Macbeths' **relationship**. Macbeth hints that he plans to kill Banquo, but he refuses to confide in Lady Macbeth. This could be because he wants to **protect** Lady Macbeth from more **guilt**, or because he's so **driven** by his own **ambition** that her opinion doesn't matter.
- 4) Macbeth uses a lot of **animal imagery** in this scene, e.g. "full of scorpions is my mind" and "the bat has flown". This sets an **unsettling** tone — these animals **remind** the audience of **evil** and emphasise Macbeth's feelings of **insecurity** and **paranoia**.



Show how Macbeth changes during the play...

Macbeth was a war hero not long ago, but now he's hiring lackeys to murder his ex-best-pal. And although he needed his wife to convince him to murder Duncan, now he's the one telling *her* how to behave...

Analysis of Act Three — Banquo is Murdered

Banquo bites the dust, Fleance escapes and Banquo's ghost makes an unwelcome appearance at the feast.

Scene 3 — Banquo is murdered

- 1) A **third murderer** joins the other murderers as they prepare to kill Banquo. Macbeth has sent another murderer because he's **paranoid** and **doesn't trust** anyone. Some directors emphasise this by making **Macbeth** the **third murderer**.
- 2) The sun is **setting** and **darkness is coming** — this symbolises the **terror** of **Macbeth's reign**. Banquo approaches carrying a **torch** — the **light symbolises** Banquo's **goodness**. When he's **murdered** the light goes out — his goodness has been **destroyed**.
- 3) Fleance **escapes** — the Witches' **prediction** about Banquo's sons becoming kings could still come **true**. This shows that it's impossible to **cheat fate**, which suggests that Macbeth would have become **King** even if he hadn't forced it to happen.



© Everett Collection / Rex Features



Scene 4 — Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost

- 1) The Macbeths hold a **feast**. Macbeth's in a **good mood** because he thinks that Banquo and Fleance are being dealt with. He's happy to "play the humble host" — the word "play" suggests his hospitality is **fake**.
- 2) One of the murderers tells Macbeth that he's killed Banquo but Fleance has **escaped**. Macbeth replies that he's "cabined, cribbed, confined". The **alliteration** emphasises how **trapped** he feels. With Fleance still alive Macbeth knows that his future as King is **uncertain**.
- 3) **Banquo's ghost** appears after Macbeth receives the news about Banquo's death and Fleance's escape — it's a symptom of his **guilt** and **anxiety**. The ghost is an important **dramatic device**:

Theme — The Supernatural

In the previous scene Macbeth envied Duncan because he was **at peace**, but the ghost of Banquo suggests to Macbeth that even in death he won't be able to **rest**.

- **Only Macbeth** can **see** the ghost, so the audience is unsure whether it's **real** or a trick of Macbeth's **guilty conscience**. The ghost appears when Macbeth says Banquo's **name** — this suggests that it is a **guilt-inspired hallucination**. It echoes the **ghostly dagger** that Macbeth saw before Duncan's murder.
- The ghost sits on Macbeth's **throne** — this is a visual and dramatic **reminder** to the audience of the Witches' prophecy that Banquo's **descendants** will be kings.

Character — Macbeth

Macbeth says he's killed so many people that "Returning were as tedious as go o'er". He's **despairing** here — he doesn't want to keep **killing**, but he thinks it's the only way to **secure the throne**.

- 4) Macbeth's behaviour is so **strange** that Lady Macbeth has to pretend that he's **unwell**. She takes **control** again, and echoes Act 1, Scene 7 when she asks him, "Are you a man?" She thinks his **fear** isn't **manly**.
- 5) Macbeth says, "It will have blood they say — blood will have blood." His repetition of the word "blood" shows his **fear** — he's starting to see the **inevitability** of his **downfall**.



"I am in blood / Stepped in so far"

Macbeth committed murder to gain the throne, and he's having to murder again to keep it. But all this violence isn't good for a man. Macbeth really starts to unravel, especially after he sees Banquo's ghost.

Analysis of Act Three — The Thanes are Unhappy

Hecate makes a cameo appearance and the lords are getting antsy...

Scene 5 — The Witches meet with Hecate



© Amitava Sarkar

- 1) The Goddess of Witches, Hecate, is **annoyed** that the three Witches have been **meddling** in Macbeth's business without **involving her**.

Writer's Techniques — Mood and Atmosphere

This is a **dark scene** which creates an atmosphere of **fear** and **evil**.

Theme — Fate and Free Will

Hecate says that Macbeth "shall spurn fate" — he thinks that he can **change** the course of **destiny** and **stop** Banquo's descendants from being King.

- 2) The Witches plan to summon apparitions to trick Macbeth into being **overconfident**: "security / Is mortals' chiefest enemy." By making him **bold** they're making sure he'll continue his reign of terror — plunging **natural order** into **chaos**.

Scene 6 — Lennox plans an uprising

- 1) This is another **bridge scene**, between Act 3 and Act 4. The minor characters tell the audience everything that's **happened** — Macduff has raised an army against Macbeth, while Malcolm is at the English court.
- 2) Lennox **suspects** that Macbeth's **responsible** for Duncan and Banquo's murders. He's careful not to speak his mind about Macbeth because he knows Macduff "lives in disgrace" for not being **loyal** to the King. However, Lennox's **true feelings** are revealed by his **speech**:

- The tone of his monologue is **sarcastic**, e.g. he says Duncan's murder "did grieve Macbeth!" — he means the exact **opposite**.
- He uses **rhetorical questions**: "To kill their gracious father?" — he **doesn't believe** that Malcolm and Donalbain murdered Duncan.
- His speech is full of **exclamations** such as "But, peace!" and "Damnèd fact!" This shows how **angry** he is, but also hints that he's afraid to show his anger — his **short, broken sentences** suggest he's trying to **hold back** his emotions.

Historical Context

In Shakespeare's time, people thought that the King was appointed by **God**, so when the Lord calls King Edward "holy", this shows he's the **rightful King** of England. The Lord says that Malcolm will have **help** from "Him above" — they believe he's the rightful King of Scotland, so God will help him **overcome** Macbeth.

Writer's Techniques

Shakespeare wrote this scene from the **perspective** of the **minor characters** to develop the feeling of **unrest** in Scotland.

- 3) Lennox ends the scene by sending a message to the English court to free them from the "hand accursed" — this **builds the tension** because it becomes a question of how far Macbeth will go before he's **stopped**. The audience sees that Macbeth's death is **inevitable**, and the only way to **restore peace** to Scotland.



"Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights"

The lords are pretty annoyed that Scotland has gone to the dogs — there's not enough food, everyone's paranoid that Macbeth will be after them next, and they've had enough of bodies turning up after feasts.

Analysis of Act Four — Macbeth Visits the Witches

The Witches are back by popular demand — have your beard trimmers at the ready...

Scene 1 — The Witches make more predictions...



© Amitava Sarkar

- 1) The scene opens with the Witches casting a spell — “Double, double toil and trouble”. This reminds the audience of their **evil intentions**, and the word “double” hints at **double meanings**.
- 2) The **gruesome** list of body parts that the Witches throw into the cauldron sets a dark, **frightening** tone.
- 3) They announce Macbeth’s **arrival** by saying, “Something wicked this way comes” — this shows how much he’s **changed** from the **brave** hero of Act One.
- 4) The Witches **pretend** to obey him: “Speak. / Demand. / We’ll answer.” They **trick** him into asking for the apparitions by saying that he can talk to their “masters” — the Witches know Macbeth’s biggest **weakness** is his **ambition**, so they play on his **lust for power**.

Writer’s Techniques

Macbeth says, “though the yeasty waves / Confound and swallow navigation up”, which extends the **metaphor** that **Macbeth** is a **sailor** and **Scotland** is a **ship** (see p.10).

...and summon apparitions to predict the future

Turning point in the action
Macbeth starts to believe that he’s invincible.

- 1) Macbeth’s language is **confident** at the start of the scene. He uses **commands** such as “Tell me” and “Call ‘em” to control the Witches and **threatens** them with “an eternal curse” — he’s not **afraid** of them.
- 2) The Witches summon **three apparitions** to predict his **future** — they symbolise the **threats** to Macbeth:

An **armoured head** warns Macbeth about Macduff.

- The armoured head could **foreshadow** Macbeth’s **decapitation**.
- It could also symbolise **treachery** and the violence of **battle**.

A **bloody child** tells Macbeth that no one born from a woman can harm him.

- This could represent **Macduff**, born by **Caesarean section**.

A **child wearing a crown and carrying a branch** tells Macbeth that he can’t be beaten until Birnam Wood moves to Dunsinane Hill.

- This could represent **Malcolm** — the **rightful heir**.
- The branch could represent Birnam Wood, but also the hope that Scotland might **grow** and **flourish** under Malcolm’s rule.

The stage directions say that each apparition “Descends” — this suggests that they’re going back to hell.

- 3) Macbeth takes the Witches’ predictions at **face value**, even though he knows that people who **trust** the Witches are “damned”. He’s **desperate** for them to give him **good news** to make him **feel secure**.



“none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth”

After listening to the apparitions, Macbeth thinks he’s untouchable. But the Witches’ spooky messages always have more than one interpretation. I suppose Macbeth only hears what he wants to hear...

Analysis of Act Four — Lady Macduff is Murdered

Macbeth's on a killing spree — next on the list is Lady Macduff and son...

...Macbeth's full of confidence

- 1) The apparitions give Macbeth [confidence](#). He thinks that he'll [never](#) be defeated because it's [impossible](#) for Birnam Wood to move and that he's [invincible](#) because [every man](#) is born from a woman.
- 2) He wants to know if the Witches' prophecy about Banquo is [true](#), so they show him another vision — a line of Banquo's descendants. Macbeth is [angry](#): "Thy crown does sear mine eyeballs."

Theme — Reality and Appearances

Although the Witches haven't [lied](#), they've [deliberately misled](#) Macbeth. It's another example of their [deception](#).

Historical Context

Some of Banquo's descendants carry [orbs](#) and [sceptres](#) to show that they will be rulers of [England](#) as well as [Scotland](#). *Macbeth* was written during the reign of King James, who ruled over Scotland and England.

- 3) Macbeth wants to kill Macduff's family — this shows how [evil](#) and [paranoid](#) he's become. He's willing to kill anyone associated with his enemy even if they don't pose a [threat](#).
- 4) He doesn't [discuss](#) the murders with Lady Macbeth any more — he's driven solely by his own [ambition](#) and trusts [no one](#).

Scene 2 — Macbeth has Lady Macduff and her son murdered

- 1) Lady Macduff is [angry](#) and [scared](#) because her husband has run off and left her to protect their castle and children.
- 2) Her [fear](#) shows how [afraid](#) people are under Macbeth's rule. Her comment, "to do harm / Is often laudable", shows how the morals of Scotland have been [turned upside down](#) by Macbeth's [tyranny](#).
- 3) Lady Macduff talks with her son — their [witty dialogue](#) shows their [maternal bond](#). The [caring](#) character of Lady Macduff [contrasts](#) with Lady Macbeth, who would have "dashed the brains out" of her own child.
- 4) The murderer enters and stabs Lady Macduff's son — it's made even more [brutal](#) by the murderer calling him "egg" and "fry", which highlights how [young](#) he is and shows that Macbeth is willing to kill [defenceless](#) children. It also shows that he's too [cowardly](#) to commit the murders himself.
- 5) The murder of Lady Macduff's son happens [on stage](#) — this symbolises the fact that Macbeth no longer cares if people see his [terrible crimes](#).

Writer's Techniques — Language

Shakespeare starts this scene [mid-dialogue](#). This highlights the [confusion](#) that Lady Macduff feels about her husband leaving.

Writer's Techniques — Symbolism

Lady Macduff compares herself to a [wren](#), a [tiny](#), [powerless](#) bird, protecting her nest from an [owl](#) (Macbeth). This reminds the audience of the [imagery](#) of the owl killing the falcon in Act 2, Scene 4 and shows that Macbeth is now killing defenceless 'prey'.



© Amitava Sarkar



"to do harm / Is often laudable, to do good... dangerous folly"

Lady Macduff's words show how bad things are in Scotland under Macbeth: people who commit murder are rewarded, while good people are the ones who suffer. Life's just not fair, eh?

Analysis of Act Four — Malcolm and Macduff Meet

There's a lot of talking in this scene — it might seem a bit dull, but it's important stuff.

Scene 3 — Malcolm tests Macduff's loyalty...

- 1) Macduff goes to [England](#) to convince Malcolm to raise an army against Macbeth. Malcolm [doesn't trust](#) Macduff — this shows the [fear](#) and [suspicion](#) Macbeth's created.

Theme — Loyalty

Macduff shows his [loyalty](#) to Scotland by going to England to [support](#) Malcolm even though his family is in [danger](#).

Theme — Kingship

- Malcolm has learnt from Duncan's [mistakes](#) — he doesn't [blindly trust](#) the thanes. This [caution](#) suggests that he'll be a [better king](#) than Duncan.
- Malcolm tells Macduff that he's [honest](#), [grateful](#) and [god-fearing](#) — [good qualities for a king](#). Malcolm's [loyalty](#) to his country contrasts with Macbeth's [tyranny](#) and [betrayal](#).

- 2) Malcolm thinks that because Macduff's family [hasn't been harmed](#) he must support Macbeth. This creates [dramatic irony](#) — the audience knows that Macduff's family has been [murdered](#).
- 3) Malcolm tests Macduff's loyalty by [pretending](#) to be more [evil](#) than Macbeth. Macduff passes Malcolm's test by proving that he's [loyal](#) to Scotland and won't support another [tyrant](#).

- 4) Shakespeare [contrasts](#) the [kind](#), [unselfish](#) kingship of Edward with the [cruel](#), [selfish](#) tyranny of Macbeth.

Theme — Supernatural

Edward has “a heavenly gift of prophecy” and can [cure](#) the sick with his [touch](#). Since rightful kings were thought to have been [appointed by God](#), people thought that Edward had [divine gifts](#) — the opposite of the Witches' [evil](#), [supernatural powers](#).

Like Macbeth, Malcolm tries to disguise his true nature — but he does it to protect Scotland, rather than for his own gain.

...and Macduff discovers that his family has been murdered

- 1) Rosse arrives and tells Macduff that his family have been [killed](#) — his [reluctance](#) to break the news creates [drama](#).
- 2) Macduff's [grief](#) is [clear](#) from the way he speaks: “All my pretty ones? / Did you say all? O hell-kite! All? / What, all my pretty chickens” His [short sentences](#), [rhetorical questions](#) and [repetition](#) of the word “all” shows that he can't [believe](#) what Rosse has told him.
- 3) The murder of Macduff's family is [important](#) to the [plot](#) — it [motivates](#) Macduff to get [revenge](#) on Macbeth and end his cruel reign.



© COLUMBIA / THE KOBAL COLLECTION

Writer's Techniques — Symbolism

See p.57 for more on masculinity.

Like the Macbeths, Malcolm thinks [masculinity](#) means being [aggressive](#) — he tells Macduff to “Dispute it like a man”. Macduff [contrasts](#) this by saying he should “feel it as a man” — he believes that men are also [sensitive](#). In this way, Macduff teaches Malcolm how to be a [good man](#) and [king](#).



“Thy royal father / Was a most sainted king”

Macbeth was written during the reign of King James I, who was a big fan of plays. Shakespeare has lots to say about what makes a good king — it's all divine rights this, compassionate monarch that — what a suck-up.

Analysis of Act Five — Lady Macbeth Sleepwalks

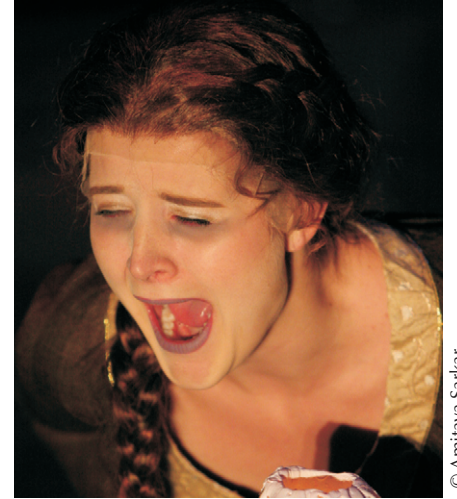
Lady Macbeth has gone a bit cuckoo and gives the game away. Meanwhile, the nobles prepare for war.

Scene 1 — Lady Macbeth sleepwalks



1) It's the first time the audience sees Lady Macbeth since things have started to go wrong — her character has completely changed. She's been driven mad by guilt and fear:

- She carries a candle and “has light by her continually” — she's afraid of the dark. It's ironic because in Act 1, Scene 5 she welcomes the darkness: “Come, thick night”. *See pages 55-57 for Night now reminds her of the evil she's done. [more on imagery.](#)*
- She tries to wash imaginary blood off her hands: “Out, damned spot!” Hand-washing symbolises her guilt, and contrasts with her attitude in Act 2, Scene 2 when she tells Macbeth “A little water clears us of this deed.”



© Amitava Sarkar

2) The way her language changes also reveals her guilty conscience:

- Her speech changes from smooth and fluent blank verse to disjointed prose — this shows her troubled state of mind. *Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking to reveal her inner thoughts.*
- Her speech is uncertain: “The Thane of Fife had a wife — where is she now?” Her use of questions shows her mental confusion and contrasts with her domineering language in Act 1, Scene 7.

3) The Doctor says “unnatural deeds / Do breed unnatural troubles” — Lady Macbeth has upset the natural balance by doing evil things. It reminds the audience of the unnatural things reported in Act 2, Scene 4.

Scene 2 — The thanes prepare for battle

Writer's Techniques — Imagery

- 1) The Scottish lords are preparing to attack Macbeth. This scene builds tension in anticipation of the battle.
- 2) They plan to meet the English army near Birnam Wood — it's a reminder of the Witches' prophecy, and hints that Macbeth might be defeated.

Angus describes Macbeth's “murders sticking on his hands” — this reminds the audience of Lady Macbeth trying to wash the blood from her hands.

3) Shakespeare uses imagery to extend metaphors which have been running throughout the play:

- Health — the lords use imagery to describe Scotland as unwell. Caithness talks about “the sickly weal” (wound) and refers to Malcolm as the “med'cine” that will heal the country.
- Nature — Lennox describes Malcolm as the “sovereign flower”. He also wants to “drown the weeds” (get rid of Macbeth). He compares Macbeth to a weed because he's preventing anything else from growing and he's destroying the land. *For more on imagery have a look at pages 55-57.*
- Clothing — Angus describes Macbeth as a “dwarfish thief” wearing a “giant's robe” — the responsibility of being King is too great for Macbeth.



Write about how Lady Macbeth's character changes...

Lady Macbeth was completely self-assured in Act 1, but by Act 5 she's gone crazy with guilt. Her madness, presented through her sleepwalking, shows the audience that evil deeds always have consequences...

Analysis of Act Five — Lady Macbeth Dies

These scenes alternate between Macbeth's castle and the armies on the battlefield — it's all getting pretty tense...

Scenes 3 and 4 — Everyone prepares for battle

- 1) Like the rest of the scenes in Act 5, Scenes 3 and 4 are very **short**. Short scenes increase the **pace** and add to the **drama**.
- 2) Macbeth's **soliloquy** suggests he's beginning to **despair** even though he thinks he's **invincible** — "I have lived long enough". He admits that everything he's done is **worthless**.

Writer's Techniques

Macbeth's servant is called "Seyton", which sounds like **Satan** — this adds to the **hellish** image of Macbeth's castle.



- 3) However, when he talks to other characters he's **over-confident**, giving orders like "Give me my armour", and calling his servant "lily-livered". This **contrast** reflects his **unstable** state of mind.
- 4) Macbeth shows signs of going **mad** — he tells Seyton to help him put his armour on and then almost straight away he says "Pull't off". He's **confused** and **unbalanced**. His mental state **matches** Lady Macbeth's — the Doctor says she's "troubled with thick coming fancies".
- 5) Meanwhile, Malcolm tells his soldiers to cut down branches from Birnam Wood to **disguise their numbers** — the audience sees that the Witches have **tricked** Macbeth, and that his defeat seems inevitable.
- 6) The English army **calmly** discuss their battle plan — they're in **control**. This **contrasts** with Macbeth's **frenzied** behaviour in Scene 3.

Scene 5 — Lady Macbeth dies

Lady Macbeth dies offstage — it's an anticlimax and shows how unimportant she's become.

- 1) Macbeth **alternates** between **arrogance** and **despair** in these scenes — this shows how **confused** he is.
- 2) At the start of the scene he's **boasting** and full of **bravado**. He says that he's "supped full with horrors", so nothing can **frighten** him. His attitude **changes** when he's told that his wife is dead:

- He realises that all his terrible acts had **no purpose**, "Signifying nothing".
- He describes life as a "**shadow**" and a "**candle**" — it's **fleeting** and **unreal**.
- He compares life to a "poor player" (actor) — he sees life as **meaningless**.
- His language, e.g. "petty", "fools" and "idiot", reflects his **bitterness**.

Writer's Techniques — Language

Macbeth's **language** is sad and reflective, e.g. he says "Life's but a walking shadow". This shows that he's **not** a monster — he still has a **human** side that **regrets** what he's done.

- 3) When Macbeth finds out that Birnam Wood is moving towards his castle, he realises that the Witches have **tricked** him: "the fiend / That lies like truth". This shows that he was **too trusting** of the Witches — it's **ironic** considering his **betrayal** of Duncan, who trusted Macbeth.
- 4) Macbeth decides to **attack** the approaching army — it's a **brave** decision and a reminder of the **fearless warrior** that Macbeth was in Act 1.

Turning point in the action
Macbeth starts to realise the Witches have tricked him.



"Life's but a walking shadow"

Macbeth becomes all philosophical when he realises he's been misled by the Witches. He's committed all these terrible crimes, lost his wife — and what for? Bad guys never get happy endings, folks...

Analysis of Act Five — Macbeth is Killed

So here it is, the final page of analysis. Get through this and reward yourself with the questions over the page.

Scenes 6 and 7 — The attack

- 1) Malcolm's army **march** towards Macbeth's castle and Macbeth's surrounded. Macbeth meets Young Siward and kills him — his death gives Macbeth **confidence**.
- 2) Macbeth is still **clinging** to the idea that he's **invincible** and chooses to **trust** the Witches' prophecies, even though the prediction about Birnam Wood has come **true**.



© AF archive / Alamy

Writer's Techniques — Stagecraft

There are a lot of **entrances** and **exits** in Scene 7, which add to the **confusion** of the battle. They also add **tension** — Macduff is searching for Macbeth and **enters** the scene just after Macbeth **exits**.

Scene 8 — Macduff and Macbeth fight

- 1) Macbeth and Macduff **meet** but Macbeth doesn't want to fight. He feels **guilty** about killing Macduff's family — "my soul is too much charged / With blood of thine already." He's still got some **humanity** left.
- 2) Macbeth still thinks he can't be harmed by any one "of woman born", but Macduff reveals that he was born by **Caesarean section**. Macbeth accepts that he's been **misled** by the Witches and says, "be these juggling fiends no more believed".
- 3) Macbeth is **trapped** but he **refuses** to back down, even though he knows he's **doomed**. This is a return to the **brave warrior** of Act 1, and shows that he's in his **element** fighting **man to man** rather than having people **murdered**.



Theme — Fate and Free Will

All the Witches' prophecies have come **true**. The prophecies are partly **self-fulfilling**, because Macbeth has brought about his own **downfall** through his actions.

The audience feels relief when Macbeth dies — this shows how evil he's become.

Scene 9 — Malcolm becomes king

- 1) Macbeth is dead and Malcolm has **won**. Malcolm is **concerned** about the missing members of his army — his **caring** nature **contrasts** with Macbeth's **cruelty** and **ruthlessness**.
- 2) Siward discovers that his son's been killed, but he's **not upset**. He thinks that it's an **honour** that his son died **protecting** Scotland. This shows how **desperately** they wanted to **overthrow** Macbeth.
- 3) Macduff enters with Macbeth's head. The play begins and ends with a **battle** and a **traitor** being **beheaded** — this gives the play a **circular structure** (see p.47).

Theme — Kingship

At the end of the play the **natural order** is restored. Malcolm is the **rightful** King and will be guided by God — he says, "by the grace of Grace, / We will perform in measure, time and place."

Writer's Techniques — Symbolism

Siward only cares that his son died **bravely** "like a man". Malcolm says that "He's worth more sorrow" — this shows that he's realised that being a man means more than just being **violent** and **aggressive**.



Explain how the ending links to the beginning...

The play ends how it began — with victory on the battlefield and a traitor's head being cut off. The circular structure ties everything up nicely. Clever, eh? Point this out, and the examiner will think you're clever too.

Practice Questions

These questions will help you make sure you know exactly what happens when in Macbeth and what it all means. Your answers to the Quick Questions shouldn't be much longer than a sentence, but the answers to the In-depth Questions should be about a paragraph. Make sure you refuel with tea and biscuits before having a go at the Exam-style Questions on the next page.

Quick Questions

- 1) In Act One, what do the three Witches predict Macbeth will become?
- 2) What do the Witches predict will happen to Banquo's descendants?
- 3) What supernatural thing does Macbeth see in Act 2, Scene 1?
- 4) Why do Malcolm and Donalbain run away after Duncan's murdered?
- 5) Whose son escapes from the murderers in Act Three?
- 6) Pick one of the apparitions and describe briefly what it looks like and what it predicts.
- 7) Where has Malcolm run away to when Macduff finds him in Act Four?
- 8) What does Lady Macbeth try to wash off her hands in Act Five?
- 9) Who kills Macbeth?

In-depth Questions

- 1) In Act 1, Scene 3 Banquo says of the Witches' predictions:
 "The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
 Win us with honest trifles – to betray's" (124-125)
 Do you think Banquo is right? Use evidence from the play to support your answer.
- 2) "Macbeth never shows any remorse for what he has done."
 Do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.
- 3) Do you think that Macbeth would have become King even if he hadn't killed anyone?
 Explain your answer.

Practice Questions

It's time for some hardcore questions to really test your noggin. Even if you don't have time to have a stab at all of them, try to write a plan for each question — it's all good practice.

Exam-style Questions

- 1) Read the following extract. How does Shakespeare develop the plot and key themes in this extract and elsewhere in the play?

Macbeth: (Aside) Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme. — I thank you, gentlemen. —
This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.
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? Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings.
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man that function
Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is,
But what is not.

Banquo: Look how our partner's rapt.

Macbeth: If chance will have me King, why, chance may crown me,
Without my stir.

Banquo: New honours come upon him
Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mould,
But with the aid of use.

(Act 1, Scene 3, 127-146)

- 2) How does the character of Macbeth change throughout the play?
- 3) Discuss the way Shakespeare presents the Witches in *Macbeth*.

Character Profile — Macbeth

Macbeth's the main character. Not surprising, really, given what the play's called. You'll have to write about him in any essay to do with this play — so you have to know what he's like.

Macbeth is ambitious but easily led astray

- 1) Macbeth is a **strong warrior** who fights **bravely** in battle.
- 2) He's **ambitious** — he wants to become **King** of Scotland and will do anything to make this happen, even commit **murder**.
- 3) However, he's got a **conscience** and often **doubts** whether he's doing the right thing. He spends a lot of time feeling **guilty**.
- 4) He's easily **influenced** by others, which means he can be **weak**.



Language

The way Macbeth **speaks** reflects his **state of mind**. He asks lots of **questions** when he's feeling **uncertain** or **guilty**: "Whence is that knocking? / How is't with me, when every noise appals me?". At the **start** and **end** of the play, his **language** is more **certain** and **confident**: "Stars, hide your fires", "I will not yield".

Macbeth is...

- ambitious**: "I have no spur / To prick the sides of my intent, but only / Vaulting ambition"
- brave**: "brave Macbeth — well he deserves that name"
- guilty**: "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?"

He's a brave hero...

- 1) At the start of the play, Macbeth is described as a "valiant" **warrior**. Rosse compares him to "Bellona's bridegroom" — he's saying that Macbeth is like **Mars**, the **god of war**.
- 2) Macbeth's **brave** actions impress the King, who names him **Thane of Cawdor**. This title shows that the King recognises Macbeth's "personal venture" (how bravely he fought) and **loyalty**.

Writer's Techniques — Structure

By the end of the play, Macbeth's come **full circle** — he's **returned** to being the **brave soldier** he was in Act 1. This **contrasts** with the **middle** of the play, where he seems **weak** and **uncertain**.

- 3) Macbeth seems most **comfortable** on the battlefield. When he's fighting, he doesn't have to **worry** about his **guilty conscience** and the **morality** of his actions.
- 4) Macbeth dies in battle too — he **fight**s "bear-like" to the end, even though he knows he's **doomed**. He's determined to "try the last" and says that he "will not yield".

...and a brutal murderer

- 1) Macbeth's brave but he's also a **cold** and **calculating killer**. He murders Duncan because he wants to be King. He also has Macduff's family and Banquo **killed** because he's worried about losing his **position**.
- 2) Macbeth is **influenced** by the people around him. He lets Lady Macbeth persuade him to kill Duncan because he wants to become King — his **ambition** is stronger than his **morality**.
- 3) At the end of the play, Macduff calls Macbeth a "hell-hound" and Young Siward calls him "abhorred tyrant" — Macbeth's **violent ambition** has ruined all his **noble** characteristics.

Theme — Fate and Free Will

When Macbeth says, "**I am settled and bend up / Each corporal agent to this terrible feat**", it sounds like he's making a **deliberate decision** to kill Duncan. Later, he says that he didn't have **control** over his **actions** because he's just a "poor player" who's controlled by **fate** (or he could be trying to make himself feel **less guilty** about his crimes).

Character Profile — Macbeth

He struggles with his conscience

- 1) Macbeth has a strong sense of **right** and **wrong**. He worries about the **consequences** of his actions because there's "judgement" on earth and "deep damnation" after death. This makes his **actions** more **shocking**.
- 2) He's **reluctant** to kill Duncan, who has "honoured" him, and says, "We will proceed no further in this business". He sounds **confident**, as if he's made up his **mind** — Macbeth **recognises** that Duncan **trusts** him as "his kinsman" and that as Duncan's "host" he has a duty to **protect** him.
- 3) Once he's killed Duncan, Macbeth swings between **killing** anyone who **threatens** his position as King and moments of **despair** when he struggles with **terrible guilt**.
- 4) His **guilty conscience** makes him **imagine** things:
 - Immediately after killing Duncan he hears a **voice** saying, "Macbeth does **murder** sleep".
 - After arranging for Banquo to be murdered, he sees **Banquo's ghost** at the feast and almost gives himself away. Lady Macbeth thinks he's **hallucinating**.
- 5) By the end of the play, Macbeth seems **world-weary** and **cynical** — he no longer seems to feel **guilty**, because he thinks that a person's **actions** don't matter and that life means "nothing".

Theme — Kingship

Macbeth knows that Duncan is a **good** king — "clear in his great office", and that killing him would **damage** Scotland. Macbeth places his own **desires** above his **love of Scotland** — this hints that he'll be a **bad** king.

He's easily influenced

- 1) Lady Macbeth greatly **influences** Macbeth — he wouldn't **kill** Duncan if it wasn't for her. Macbeth **acts** because he doesn't want to be seen as **unmanly** or a "**coward**".
- 2) Lady Macbeth's influence over Macbeth **declines** after Duncan's murder — once he's murdered Duncan, the other murders seem to come more **easily** to Macbeth, so he acts **alone**.
- 3) He's also **influenced** by the **supernatural**:

- The first time he meets the **Witches**, he **trusts** them straightaway, saying "Two **truths** are told". However, Banquo is **suspicious** of them and thinks they want to "win us to our **harm**".
- He sees a **dagger** that **leads** him to Duncan's room.
- As the **Witches' prophecies** start to **come true**, Macbeth's **belief** in them increases. He begins to **rely** more heavily on what they say, and **panics** when their prophecies are **fulfilled** unexpectedly.

Writer's Techniques — Symbolism

Lady Macbeth **persuades** Macbeth to kill Duncan by suggesting that he'll be "**more the man**". Throughout the play, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth link **masculinity** with **strength** and **courage**.



© Amitava Sarkar



Write about Macbeth's good qualities as well as his bad ones...

Poor Macbeth — he wants to be good but he just can't stop murdering people. It's a shame because he starts off as such a hero. It all goes downhill when his wife and his ambition get the better of him...

Character Profile — Lady Macbeth

It's difficult to say who would win in a fight between Lady Macbeth and a grizzly bear — but there's no doubt that she'd put up a good fight if she had to. She's tough as nails, this one...

Lady Macbeth's cruel and ruthless

- 1) Lady Macbeth is Macbeth's **wife** — she's an **important** character because she **influences** Macbeth, especially at the start of the play. She's **ambitious** and doesn't mind committing terrible **crimes** to get **what she wants**.
- 2) Lady Macbeth **changes** over the course of the play. At the beginning, she's **dominant** and **confident** — she **persuades** Macbeth that killing Duncan is the **best** thing to do.

Lady Macbeth is...

cruel: "And fill me from the crown to the toe topfull / Of direst cruelty"

cunning: "look like th'innocent flower, / But be the serpent under 't"

disturbed: "she is troubled with thick coming fancies"



© Amitava Sarkar

- 3) Once Macbeth has committed murder, Lady Macbeth is slowly driven **mad** by **guilt**. Macbeth **distances** himself from her and she **kills herself** because she can't **live** with what they've **done**.

She is very ambitious

- 1) Lady Macbeth is just as **ambitious** as Macbeth — when she gets his letter, she **immediately** assumes that they need to kill Duncan. She's more **ruthless** than her husband.
- 2) She thinks that no **ordinary woman** would plan this murder. That's why she **appeals** to the spirit world to "**unsex**" her and fill her with "**direst cruelty**".

Theme — Good and Evil

Lady Macbeth says that Macbeth is "**too full o'th'milk of human kindness**" — she thinks that his **goodness** makes him a "**coward**" and **stops** him from achieving his **ambitions**.

Writer's Techniques — Symbolism

Lady Macbeth links **masculinity** to **strength** and **violence**, but Shakespeare shows that **women** can be just as **ruthless** and **cold-hearted** as men.

- 3) Lady Macbeth knows her husband's **weak spots** — she uses his **ambition** and **fear** of being seen as a coward to **manipulate** him into killing Duncan.

She's clever and quick-witted

- 1) Lady Macbeth is the one who comes up with the **cunning plot** to drug Duncan's servants and **frame** them for the murder. This shows that she's **clever** as well as **cruel** and **heartless**.

Theme — Reality and Appearances

If Lady Macbeth only **pretends** to faint, she's taking **advantage** of the way women were viewed at the time. She's using the **stereotype** of a weak woman overcome by shock to hide the **reality** of her cruel, cold-hearted nature.

- 2) When Duncan's murder is discovered, Lady Macbeth **faints**. This could be a **pretence**, which cleverly **draws attention** away from the **unconvincing** speech that Macbeth's making. Lady Macbeth also **covers up** Macbeth's **strange** behaviour when he thinks that he sees Banquo's ghost. She's the one in **control** of the **situation**.

Character Profile — Lady Macbeth

Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth to explore gender and power

- 1) Women were traditionally seen as **kinder** and **weaker** than men, but Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth to show that this isn't always **true**. She says she would **kill her own baby** if she'd sworn to do it. Shakespeare **contrasts** her with Lady Macduff, who's a **caring mother** (see p.33).
- 2) Lady Macbeth does have a **softer side**. She says that she **couldn't kill** Duncan herself because he **reminded** her of her **father**. This shows that she's not as **cold-hearted** as she appears.

Writer's Techniques — Symbolism

Lady Macbeth thinks women are made **weak** by their **maternal instincts** — she tells the spirits to “Come to my woman's breasts / And take my milk for gall”. She wants to lose her **femininity**.

Lady Macbeth's power lies in manipulating people. This shows that non-violent 'female' traits are just as powerful as violent 'male' ones.

Theme — Ambition

*Macbeth is set in a violent, **male-dominated** society, so Lady Macbeth can only achieve her ambitions **through Macbeth**.*

She goes mad with guilt and kills herself

Language

The way Lady Macbeth speaks **reflects** her **state of mind** — at the beginning, she speaks **confidently** in **verse**. By the end, her speech is made up of **mad ramblings** and **repetitions** — “Come, come, come, come, give me your hand.” It shows that she's **lost** all **self-control**.

- 1) At first, it's Macbeth who **struggles** with his **guilty conscience**. By the end of the play, Lady Macbeth is driven **mad** by **guilt**.
- 2) She starts **sleepwalking**. The doctor calls this a “great perturbation in nature” because her mind is so **disturbed** that it's **affected** her ability to sleep **soundly**.
- 3) In her sleep, she keeps **washing her hands** in the hope that she can **wash away** her feelings of guilt just as easily as the **blood** after Duncan's murder: “Out, damned spot!”
- 4) **Guilt** and **isolation** affect Lady Macbeth so much that she **kills** herself — she **can't** live with what she's done.

Writer's Techniques — Symbolism

Sleepwalking was thought to be **unnatural** in Shakespeare's time — sleep is the “**Balm of hurt minds**”, so the fact that Lady Macbeth can't sleep **peacefully** emphasises her **madness**.

The Macbeths' marriage is intense

- 1) Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's relationship **changes**. At the beginning, their marriage seems **loving** and **passionate** — Macbeth calls Lady Macbeth “my dearest partner of greatness”.
- 2) As the play develops, it becomes clear that Lady Macbeth **dominates** Macbeth — she **manipulates** him into killing Duncan and **covers up** his **strange behaviour** when he sees Banquo's ghost.
- 3) As Macbeth reveals less about his plans to his wife, Lady Macbeth becomes increasingly **anxious** and **alone**. Even though she's **domineering** at the beginning, she can't **cope** without her husband.



© COLUMBIA / THE KOBAL COLLECTION



“look like th'innocent flower, / But be the serpent under ‘t”

Lady Macbeth is as ambitious as her husband, and she's the brains behind Duncan's murder. But her tough-girl attitude soon gives way to terrible guilt. By the end of the play she's an emotional wreck.

Character Profile — Duncan

Duncan's a nice guy, which is a shame because he's killed off by the end of Act 1. He influences a lot of the rest of the play though, so he's worth getting to know. It's a shame that nice guys always die first...

Duncan's kind, but too trusting

- 1) Duncan's the King at the start of the play. He's a **kind** and **generous** man who rewards loyalty — he hands out **honours** to Macbeth and Malcolm.
- 2) **Nobody** has a **bad word** to say about Duncan — even Macbeth says that “his virtues / Will plead like angels”.
- 3) Duncan's **flaw** is that he's **too trusting**. He trusts Macbeth and doesn't **suspect** he's **plotting** to kill him, and he describes the **treacherous** Thane of Cawdor as “a gentleman on whom I built / An **absolute trust**”. However, Duncan can be **firm** when needed — he **executes** the Thane of Cawdor when he **betrays** him.

Duncan is...

kind: “let me enfold thee / And hold thee to my heart”

trusting: “There's no art / To find the mind's construction in the face”

a good king: “So clear in his great office”

He's an example of a good king

- 1) Shakespeare presents Duncan as a **model king** — he's **kind**, **honest** and **fair**.
- 2) Macbeth says that one of the reasons that he shouldn't kill Duncan is because he's a **good leader** with many “virtues”. Macduff also calls him “**a most sainted king**”, reminding the audience that kings were thought to be **chosen by God**.

Writer's Techniques — Symbolism

Duncan uses a lot of **plant imagery** — he says he will “**plant**” Macbeth and make sure he is “full of **growing**”. This shows how he **nurtures** his subjects.

Theme — Kingship

In Act 4, Scene 3, Malcolm talks about what a **good king** should be like (see p.40). He says a **ruler** should have “stableness”, “mercy” and “justice” — **qualities** that Duncan has.

- 3) Duncan is **kind**, **generous** and **trusting**, and puts **Scotland's needs** ahead of his own. This contrasts with Macbeth, who is a bad king — he's a **tyrant** who's **feared** and **hated**. Macbeth puts his own **selfish desires** ahead of his country.

Duncan isn't like the other men



© Amitava Sarkar

- 1) Duncan isn't a **soldier** like Macbeth or Macduff — he's **gentle** and **less aggressive**. He doesn't fight himself, but sensibly sends his **best soldiers** to fight for him.
- 2) He's **not afraid** to be **emotional** — he shows “drops of sorrow” because he's so happy and talks about his “gentle senses” — this could be seen as **unmanly**.

Writer's Techniques — Symbolism

Duncan doesn't have the **qualities** that other characters associate with **manliness**, but Shakespeare shows that he's **kind**, **fair** and **generous**. This leads the audience to question whether a **good leader** really needs to be a **violent warrior**.



“his virtues / Will plead like angels”

Shakespeare leaves the audience in no doubt that Duncan is loved by all his subjects. He's kind and trusting — but it's these qualities that lead him to trust Macbeth, and put Scotland in the hands of a tyrant.

Character Profile — Malcolm and Donalbain

Malcolm and Donalbain are Duncan's sons. Malcolm is the eldest, and Duncan makes him his heir. This means that he should be the next King of Scotland, not Macbeth.

Malcolm and Donalbain learn from their father's mistakes

- 1) Malcolm is **fair** and **honest**, like his father. However, **unlike Duncan**, Malcolm and Donalbain are **aware** that they're in **danger** from those **closest** to them: "There's **daggers** in men's smiles, the **near'r** in **blood**, / The nearer **bloody**". They have the **common sense** to flee Scotland after Duncan is murdered.
- 2) Malcolm learns that he should only **trust** people who have **proved** their loyalty — when Macduff visits him, Malcolm **tests** his loyalty by **pretending** to be a tyrant. He knows that even people who **seem** good can be **evil** — "all things foul would wear the brows of grace".
- 3) In the end, Malcolm and Macduff make a **good partnership** because Macduff's **experience** gives Malcolm the **confidence** to take **action**.

Malcolm is...

wise: "wisdom plucks me / From over-credulous haste"

honest: "delight / No less in truth than life"

Malcolm and Donalbain aren't impulsive

- 1) Malcolm and Donalbain don't **react** to their father's murder **immediately**. Malcolm says that their **sorrow** is too "strong" to act on it **straight away**. It shows that he's **sensible** and unwilling to **act** without waiting for the **right time**.
- 2) They're **annoyed** that Macbeth is making **grand speeches** which should be made by Duncan's sons — Malcolm asks Donalbain, "Why do we hold our tongues".

Theme — Reality and Appearance

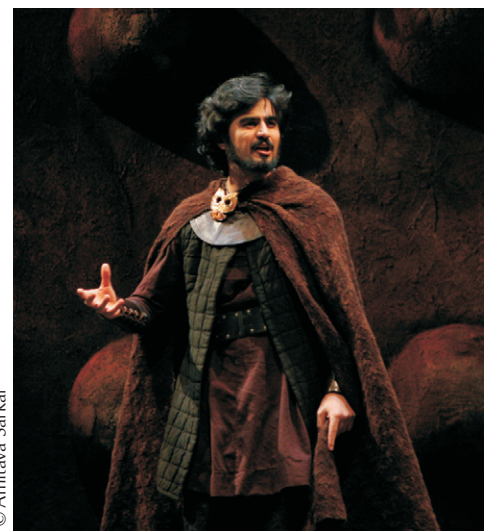
Malcolm is more **suspicious** of **false appearances** than Duncan was — he says, "To show an unfelt sorrow is an office / Which the false man does easy." He's **wary** of people who seem **fake**, like Macbeth.

Malcolm develops into a good leader

- 1) Malcolm becomes a **confident** leader. He earns the **trust** of the Scottish thanes, who say they will "give obedience where 'tis truly owed". They will follow Malcolm because he's the **rightful King**.
- 2) Malcolm eventually returns to Scotland with an **army**. He proves that he's **clever** by **disguising the soldiers** with branches, and **leads** his army to **victory**, which shows that he's a **strong leader**.
- 3) He **rewards** everyone who fought with him — like Duncan, he's **generous** to those who are loyal to him.

Theme — Kingship

Malcolm has many of the **qualities** that made Duncan a **good King**, but he's **less naive** than his father. This suggests that he'll eventually make a better King.



© Amitava Sarkar



Explain how Malcolm demonstrates good kingship...

Shakespeare has nothing bad to say about Malcolm: he's cautious, he's generous, he's a good leader, he looks great in a kilt... He's the opposite of Macbeth, and will be an even better king than Duncan.

Character Profile — Banquo

Banquo has a strange name but at least it doesn't begin with the letter 'M', like pretty much every other character. That's why I find the play so confusing — and why Banquo's secretly my favourite character.

Banquo is more honourable than Macbeth

- 1) Banquo is a **thane**, like Macbeth. He's there when the Witches first make their **prophecies**.
- 2) Banquo is praised for his **courage** in battle — just like Macbeth. However, while Macbeth is guided by his own **selfish desires**, Banquo has “a **wisdom** that doth guide his **valour**”. This suggests that Banquo **thinks** before he acts and does what is **right**.
- 3) Like Macbeth, Banquo is **ambitious** and hopes the Witches' prophecies come **true**. He doesn't **act** on their predictions, so he represents the path Macbeth could have chosen. Banquo isn't **corrupted** by his ambition like Macbeth is, so he remains **honourable**.
- 4) Macbeth promises to “**honour**” Banquo for his loyalty, but Banquo chooses to keep his “**allegiance clear**” — his **conscience** is more important to him than **power** and **glory**.

Banquo is...

brave: “that dauntless temper of his mind”

noble: “Noble Banquo, / That hast no less deserved”

wise: “The instruments of darkness tell us truths, / Win us with honest trifles – to betray's”

Banquo doesn't trust the Witches

- 1) Banquo behaves **rationally** when he meets the Witches — he **questions** whether they are real, and doesn't **trust** them. In contrast, Macbeth wants them to tell him more, and is “**rapt withal**”.



© BRITISH LION / THE KOBAL COLLECTION

- 2) Banquo tells the Witches that he “neither beg nor fear / Your favours”, but he's still **intrigued** to hear what they have to say. He admits to having “**dreamt** last night of the three weird sisters”, which suggests he's still thinking about the **predictions**.

Theme — Reality and Appearance

Banquo's aware that the Witches could be “**fantastical**” and is **perceptive** enough to realise that they are “instruments of darkness” that could “win us to our harm”. He's more **cautious** about believing what he **sees** than Macbeth is.

He doesn't act to protect himself

- 1) Banquo **suspects** that Macbeth murdered Duncan — “I fear, / Thou play'dst most foully”. However, he doesn't **act** on his suspicions and instead reminds himself that he will be the “father / Of many kings” — this shows that **ambitious** thoughts can distract even the most **honourable** characters.
- 2) Macbeth sees Banquo as a **threat** — he says that there's no one except Banquo “Whose being I do fear”. When Macbeth's **hired killers** surround him, Banquo's exclamation of “O, treachery!” shows that he didn't **suspect** that Macbeth would **betray** him.

Theme — Supernatural

Macbeth is **haunted** by **Banquo's ghost**, which shows how **guilty** Macbeth feels about killing his **honourable friend**.



Make comparisons between Macbeth and Banquo...

Macbeth and Banquo aren't total opposites — both are warriors and both are ambitious. But unlike Macbeth, Banquo distrusts the Witches. He wants his descendants to be kings, but he won't kill to make it happen.

Character Profile — The Macduffs

The Macduffs make a good contrast with the Macbeths, and not just because their names look similar and both sound quite Scottish. Macduff's got more honour than Macbeth, but far fewer lines in the play...

Macduff is honest and sincere...

- 1) Macduff is a [nobleman](#). He's honest and has integrity, so he acts as a contrast to Macbeth. He discovers Duncan's murder and is [horrified](#) by it.
- 2) Macduff doesn't go to Macbeth's [coronation](#). This suggests that he is [suspicious](#) of Macbeth.

Writer's Techniques — Irony

Macduff is [angry](#) that, under Macbeth's rule, "New widows howl, new orphans cry". This is [ironic](#), as his [wife](#) and [children](#) have just been [murdered](#).

Macduff is...

noble: "this noble passion, / Child of integrity"

a soldier: "I have no words: / My voice is in my sword"

emotional: "I must also feel it as a man"

- 3) Macduff has a strong sense of [loyalty](#) and [love](#) for his country. He doesn't like the way Macbeth [rules](#), so he goes to England to persuade Malcolm to help — he exclaims "O Scotland, Scotland!" which reflects his [emotional turmoil](#) about the state of his country.
- 4) Macduff is [brave](#) — he fights and [kills](#) Macbeth, freeing Scotland from "the [tyrant](#)".

...but he puts his country before his family

- 1) Macduff makes a [mistake](#) by going to England, leaving his wife and children [unprotected](#). His decision shows his strong sense of [justice](#), but also his lack of "[wisdom](#)".
- 2) When he [finds out](#) that Macbeth has had them murdered, he is overcome with [grief](#). His reaction shows his [disbelief](#): "All my pretty ones? / Did you say all?"

In contrast with the other men who see [emotions](#) as a sign of [weakness](#), Macduff says that he will "feel" his grief "as a man". This shows that he sees the ability to show [emotion](#) as an important part of his [masculinity](#).



© Amitava Sarkar

- 3) Macduff kills Macbeth both to put the [rightful heir](#) on the throne and to [avenge](#) his family. He thinks that his wife and children will "[haunt](#)" him until he kills Macbeth.

Lady Macduff can't understand her husband's actions

Theme — Good and Evil

Lady Macduff's [goodness](#) and [caring](#) behaviour towards her son [contrast](#) with Lady Macbeth's [unnatural](#), [evil](#) [desires](#) — she says she'd kill her baby to get what she wants.

- 1) When Macduff goes to England, [Lady Macduff](#) says that he lacks "the natural touch" — she thinks his behaviour shows a [lack](#) of fatherly [love](#).
- 2) Lady Macduff shows [courage](#) as she comforts her son, calling him "Poor bird". Her [love](#) and [affection](#) for him are clear. They speak in [prose](#), which makes the scene feel [natural](#) and [homely](#) — this makes the murders even more [shocking](#) and [horrible](#).



"All my pretty ones? / Did you say all?"

The scene where Macduff learns about his family's death is one of the saddest bits of the play — the page in my copy of *Macbeth* is all tear-stained. It's a shame that just one mistake costs Macduff his whole family...

Character Profile — The Witches

Some of the Witches' lines might sound a bit familiar, like "Double, double toil and trouble". They sound like something out of a weird creepy nursery rhyme and they lurk around the play like a bad smell...

The Witches have supernatural powers

- 1) The **Three Witches** are also known as the **Weird Sisters**. They look like ugly women with beards, which suggests straight away that they're **unnatural** and **evil**.
- 2) The Witches can **see the future** — all their predictions come **true** eventually. They seem to act out of **malice** — they don't **gain** anything from their actions, they just like causing **trouble**.

The word "weird" comes from the Old English word "wyrd", which means "fate". This suggests that the Witches are instruments of fate.

The Witches are...

evil: "instruments of darkness"

ambiguous: "This supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill, cannot be good."

strange: "So withered and so wild"



© Ellie Kurtz

- 3) They speak in **short** lines that **rhyme**. This sets them **apart** from the other characters. Lines like "Eye of newt, and toe of frog, / Wool of bat, and tongue of dog" make them sound **gruesome** and **evil**.
- 4) Banquo isn't sure whether the Witches are **real** or **imaginary** — "Are ye fantastical, or that indeed / Which outwardly ye show?" He's **suspicious** that their **appearance** is **misleading**.

Theme — Reality and Appearance

The Witches' line "**Fair is foul, and foul is fair**" shows that **nothing** is as it **seems** in the play.

They're evil, but they don't tell Macbeth to murder Duncan

- 1) The Witches are usually accompanied by "**Thunder and lightning**". This makes the atmosphere **dark** and **frightening**.
- 2) They make **prophecies** but they never explain **how** they'll happen. In this way, they take **advantage** of Macbeth's **weakness** (his "**Vaulting ambition**") and use it to **control** his actions.
- 3) The Witches **don't** tell Macbeth to murder Duncan — but they do **predict** he'll be king, which **pushes** him to kill Duncan.
- 4) The Witches **confuse** Macbeth using **paradoxes** — for example, telling him that Banquo will be "**Lesser** than Macbeth, and **greater**". By not being **clear** about what the future holds, they keep **control** of Macbeth.
- 5) **Hecate** is the goddess of witchcraft. She's **angry** at Macbeth's behaviour, so she uses the apparitions to **punish** him. They **trick** him by making predictions that give him a **false sense of security**, such as "none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth". These predictions indirectly lead to his **death**.

Theme — Fate and Free Will

Shakespeare doesn't make it **clear** whether the Witches are **messengers of fate** (so their prophecies are **inevitable**) or whether Macbeth could **change** his future (see p.44).

This is a self-fulfilling prophecy — Macbeth makes it come true.



Mention fate when writing about the Witches...

The Witches' predictions influence Macbeth's actions. It's up for debate whether the Witches control fate (by planting the idea of murder in Macbeth's head) or whether they just tell him what's going to happen anyway.

Character Profile — Other Characters

Now you know who everyone important is. The other characters in the play are minor. But you'd better know who they are, just so you don't get confused.

There are some other noblemen...

- 1) Lennox, Rosse, Menteith, Angus and Caithness are all **thanes** — Scottish **noblemen**. None of them are very significant characters. They're basically there to **move the story along** and show how **power shifts** during the play.
- 2) They **comment** on the **big events** of the play — e.g. in Act 3, Scene 6, Lennox **sarcastically** says that Macbeth "**nobly**" and "**wisely**" killed Duncan's guards. This shows that the thanes **suspect** that Macbeth killed Duncan, and suggests that he's starting to **lose power**.
- 3) The thanes say that they will "give **obedience** where 'tis truly owed" — in other words, they'll be **loyal** to whoever **deserves** it. They gradually start to **question** whether Macbeth is the **rightful King**, and start to **resent** his tyranny. By the end of the play they side with **Malcolm** and help him **defeat** Macbeth.



© COLUMBIA / THE KOBAL COLLECTION

Rosse represents the noblemen who **comment** on the action but are **reluctant** to put themselves in **danger**. He warns Lady Macduff that "**cruel are the times**" but makes an **excuse** to **leave** before the murderers arrive. This leaves Lady Macduff, who he calls his "dearest coz", **unprotected**.

...and a few other minor characters

- 1) The **Porter** appears in Act 2. He's a **comic character** — he talks about his **drunken** behaviour the night before, saying that drinking makes three things happen, "nose-painting, sleep, and urine". He provides a bit of **light relief** in between the **darker**, more **tragic** parts of the plot.
- 2) Three **Murderers** appear in Act 3 — they're **hired killers** that Macbeth persuades to **kill Banquo** and his son, Fleance. They kill Banquo but let Fleance escape. The Murderers show how **ruthless** Macbeth has become, and possibly that he's **unwilling** to commit more murders himself. They also kill **Lady Macduff** and her **children** on Macbeth's orders — this shows how **desperate** and **cruel** he is.

Cultural Context

In Shakespeare's time, most plays had a **clown-like** character to **amuse** the crowd. Usually the clown would be in **one or two scenes** and would make some **rude** jokes or **silly** comments.

Macbeth sends a third murderer to help the first two kill Banquo — this shows that he no longer trusts anyone. Some people think the third murderer is Macbeth himself.

Theme — Loyalty and Betrayal

Seward shows how important **honour** and **bravery** are to him by saying he's glad that his son died an **honourable death** and showed **loyalty** to Malcolm.

- 3) **Siward** is an English Lord. He's a **great fighter** and helps Malcolm defeat Macbeth in **Act 5**. He's got a son, **Young Siward**, who is killed in battle by Macbeth.
- 4) There are a few other minor characters such as the **Doctor** and the **Gentlewoman** who are with Lady Macbeth when she goes mad. They only have small parts but they help to move the plot along and develop the **themes** of the play.



Mentioning minor characters will impress the examiner...

You might not think these minor characters are crucial to the action of the play, but Shakespeare had some good reasons for putting them in. Explaining these reasons could win you some marks come exam day...

Practice Questions

These questions will help you make sure you know exactly who all the characters are and what they're like. There are a few characters with similar-sounding names in the play, so learn who's who and what each character does. It's also useful to learn who's alive and who's dead at the end of the play, so you don't make any embarrassing comments about a character who dies in Act 1.

Quick Questions

- 1) What title does Duncan give Macbeth in Act 1?
- 2) Give two reasons why Macbeth is reluctant to murder Duncan.
- 3) Which three words best describe Lady Macbeth:
a) caring b) cruel c) ambitious d) sweet e) mad?
- 4) Why does Lady Macbeth say that she couldn't murder Duncan?
- 5) Who are Malcolm and Donalbain?
- 6) Whose idea is it to disguise the army as a forest?
- 7) What does Banquo suspect Macbeth did in order to become King?
- 8) Why does Macduff leave his family to go to England?
- 9) Find three quotes from the play that describe the Three Witches.

In-depth Questions

- 1) Do you think Macbeth is a brave soldier, a cold-hearted killer or both? Find evidence from the play to back up your answer.
- 2) Explain how Shakespeare shows that Lady Macbeth has a guilty conscience. How does this affect your feelings about her?
- 3) Compare Banquo and Macbeth's reactions to the Witches in Act 1, Scene 3. What do you think this reveals about their characters?
- 4) How does Macduff's character contrast with Macbeth's? Give some examples from the play.
- 5) Do you think that it's the Witches' fault that Macbeth kills Duncan? Explain your answer.

Practice Questions

“Fair is foul, and foul is fair”. These practice questions are foul and unfair, but they’re better than getting into the exam and not having the faintest idea who Macbeth is. Try these questions out and if you’re a bit hazy on the details of any of the characters, flick back through the section and remind yourself who’s who.

Exam-style Questions

- 1) Read the following extract. How does Shakespeare present Lady Macbeth’s thoughts and feelings in this extract and elsewhere in the play?

Lady Macbeth:

Come, you spirits

That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here
 And fill me from the crown to the toe topfull
 Of direst cruelty; make thick my blood,
 Stop up th’access and passage to remorse
 That no compunctious visitings of nature
 Shake my fell purpose nor keep peace between
 Th’effect and it. Come to my woman’s breasts
 And take my milk for gall, you murd’ring ministers,
 Wherever in your sightless substances
 You wait on nature’s mischief.

(Act 1, Scene 5, 38-48)

- 2) Explore how the characters of Macbeth and Macduff are used to present conflict in the play.
- 3) Show how Shakespeare develops the character of Lady Macbeth in the play.
- 4) Explore how Shakespeare portrays the characters of Malcolm and Banquo.

Ambition

When I was little, my mum used to say that “‘I want’ doesn’t get”. If Macbeth had heard this, he’d probably respond, “‘I want’ does get, especially if you kill everyone standing in your way”. Bad man.

Ambition is the main theme in ‘Macbeth’

- 1) Ambition **motivates** Macbeth to commit terrible deeds. It **changes** him from a “valiant” soldier to a “dead butcher”.
- 2) The play shows that ambition is **dangerous** because it can quickly **spiral** out of control. Macbeth **considers** the **morality** of killing Duncan for a long time but doesn’t **hesitate** about killing Banquo.
- 3) Once Macbeth **starts** killing, he has to kill **more** people to get what he wants and to try and make his position **secure**. It shows that **ambition** can make people **ruthless** and **selfish**.
- 4) Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are eventually destroyed by their ambition, so the play can be read as a **warning** against ambition that isn’t **balanced** by **reason** or **morals**.



© COLUMBIA / THE KOBAL COLLECTION

Ambition is Macbeth’s biggest weakness

- 1) Ambition is Macbeth’s ‘**fatal flaw**’. He’s a brave hero at the start — Duncan calls him “noble” and Lady Macbeth says he “wouldst not play false” to get what he wants.

Character — Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth sees that there’s a difference between **being ambitious** and **acting on ambition**. She says that Macbeth is “not without ambition, but without / The illness should attend it”. She thinks that Macbeth isn’t **ruthless** enough to take **action** to get what he wants.

- 2) Macbeth’s **reluctance** to kill Duncan shows that he’s **moral**, but his actions emphasise how **strong** his ambition is — his ambition makes him act **against** his morals.
- 3) It also makes him act against his better judgement. He knows that ambition often “o’erleaps itself / And falls” — it can lead a person to **aim too high** so that they **fail** and lose **everything**. This **foreshadows** Macbeth’s own **tragic downfall**. By the end of the play, Macbeth’s lost everything and he dies an “abhorred tyrant”.

Context — Tragedy

In Shakespeare’s tragedies, the **hero** is usually a **noble** person with one **main** character flaw which leads to their **downfall**. This is their ‘**fatal flaw**’.

Ambition can be good or bad

- 1) Not all characters are **corrupted** by their **ambition**, as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are. Ambition **can** be a **positive** thing if it’s **motivated** by a desire to help **others** rather than **yourself**.
- 2) Malcolm and Macduff are **ambitious** for their **country**. They want to take Macbeth’s **power** away from him, not for their own **selfish desires**, but for the **good** of **Scotland**.
- 3) Banquo is **ambitious** for his sons once he’s heard the Witches’ **prophecy**. He wants them to be kings, but he **doesn’t act** on the predictions in the **violent** way that Macbeth does.



“I have no spur... but only / Vaulting ambition”

Macbeth knows that he’s very ambitious, and it’s this that fuels his decision to kill Duncan. Lady Macbeth thinks he’s not quite ambitious enough though, so she gives him a gentle push in the right direction.

Loyalty and Betrayal

In general, humans aren't known for their loyalty — golden retrievers, on the other hand, are always loyal. If only Macbeth had been a Macspaniel or a Macpoodle, the story might have ended differently...

Characters show loyalty through their actions

- 1) There's a **difference** between characters who **say** that they are **loyal** (like Macbeth, who talks about the "loyalty" he owes to Duncan even when he's plotting to kill him) and characters whose **actions** show their loyalty (like Macduff). The characters in *Macbeth* show loyalty to different **things**:

Country

Macduff is **loyal** to Scotland. He chooses to go to England to ask Malcolm to **defend** his country instead of protecting his family. He'd rather **leave** Scotland than see it be ruled by a **bad king**.

King

The thanes are **loyal** to Duncan because he's been a "great" king. Macbeth gives Duncan "**service and loyalty**" by fighting for him in Act 1.

Beliefs

Banquo is **loyal** to his own sense of **honour** — he says that he will keep his "**allegiance clear**". He **won't** let ambition or the Witches' prophecies affect him.

- 2) When characters **betray** their loyalty, it's usually to pursue their own **selfish desires**.

Loyalty is rewarded, betrayal is punished...

- 1) Duncan has the old Thane of Cawdor **executed** for **betraying** him and rewards Macbeth's **loyalty** by giving him the **title**. The play has a **circular structure** — it ends with Macbeth being **killed** for **betraying** Scotland and Malcolm rewarding the **thanes' loyalty**.
- 2) Macbeth **betrays** his own sense of **right** and **wrong**. This eventually leads to his loss of **self-worth** and his **death**.
- 3) **Betrayal** is often linked to **power**. **Power** (in the form of titles) can be **given** or **taken away** depending on a person's **loyalty**.

Loyalty and betrayal often go **hand in hand**, e.g. Macduff's **loyalty** to Scotland leads him to **betray** his family.

© Amitava Sarkar



The Macbeths pretend to be loyal

- 1) Macbeth is **initially** loyal to Duncan as "his kinsman and his subject" — this makes it even more **shocking** when he puts his own **desires** ahead of his loyalty to the King.
- 2) Lady Macbeth **fakes** an **appearance** of loyalty. She tells Duncan that she and Macbeth are "Your servants ever", even though they're plotting his murder. It shows how **easily** she can pretend to be **loyal**.
- 3) Shakespeare **juxtaposes** Lady Macbeth's **plotting** to kill Duncan with her **welcoming** him into their castle. This **develops** her character and makes her **murderous intentions** more **dramatic**.

Theme — Reality and Appearances

Lady Macbeth's **two-faced nature** helps her to betray Duncan — he trusts her as a "Fair and noble hostess" and doesn't see her lust for power.



Explain how different characters show their loyalty...

At the start of the play, Macbeth is celebrated for his bravery and loyalty — and he's rewarded for it. His loyalty at the beginning makes his betrayal seem even worse — it means he has further to fall...

Kingship

When Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*, kings and queens were properly in charge of running their country — so it was really serious if they were bad people or were bad at the job (*cough* Macbeth).

A king didn't have to be the old king's son

- 1) In the play, Macbeth suddenly becomes King, even though he's not the heir to the throne. Duncan chooses his eldest son as his heir, but he makes Macbeth next in line after Malcolm and Donalbain.
- 2) Macbeth wins the throne by killing the King and framing Malcolm and Donalbain. Gradually, other characters realise Macbeth is not a true king.

Historical Context

In Scotland at the time, the successor didn't have to be the King's eldest son, even though it often was.

Malcolm describes good rulers and bad rulers

- 1) Duncan is an example of an ideal king — he's described as "gracious" and inspires loyalty in his subjects, who see him as a "most sainted king" and therefore the rightful ruler of Scotland.
- 2) In contrast, Macbeth is described as a "tyrant" because he rules selfishly, using violence. He's rarely referred to as "king" which shows that the other characters don't accept him as the true King.
- 3) In Act 4, Scene 3 Malcolm describes good and bad kings:

Writer's Techniques

Under Duncan's rightful reign, the country is ordered and peaceful. Macbeth's unlawful reign is reflected in the overturned natural order, e.g. day turns to night and horses eat each other.

A bad king is...

bloody,
Luxurious, avaricious, false, deceitful,
Sudden, malicious, smacking of every sin
That has a name.

Malcolm's describing Macbeth's reign here — he's "avaricious" because he's motivated by selfish greed. His lies make him "false" and "deceitful", and he's "bloody" because he uses violence to keep control over his people.

A good king has...

king-becoming graces,
As justice, verity, temperance, stableness,
Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness,
Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude

Malcolm could be describing Duncan in this speech — Duncan shows "temperance" in his calm, peaceful manner, "lowliness" (being humble) in his gratefulness for loyalty, "justice" when dealing with those who betray him and "Bounty" in his generosity.

A good king should be holy

- 1) Malcolm also says that a good ruler is holy — at the time, people believed the King was appointed by God.
- 2) The King of England, Edward, has a "healing benediction" and uses "holy prayers" to cure sick people. He's surrounded by "blessings" that "speak him full of grace".
- 3) In contrast, Macbeth is "Devilish" — he commits murder and talks to evil witches. He's not the chosen King.



© Ellie Kurtz



Compare different styles of kingship shown in the play...

The play shows the two extremes of being a ruler — Duncan is a great king but Macbeth couldn't be any worse. Malcolm seems to have Duncan's good qualities, plus a dash of well-founded mistrust...

Good and Evil

Like so many other stories, the plot of *Macbeth* boils down to a classic case of good versus evil. Obviously you're meant to identify with the 'good' side, unless you're also a murderous crazy person.

Macbeth is a good man who does evil acts

- 1) At the beginning of the play, Macbeth shows that he's a "noble" person — he has the **potential** for **greatness**. Duncan **recognises** this and makes him Thane of Cawdor.
- 2) Once he's **tempted** to give in to his **ambition**, Macbeth's **goodness** is overcome by his **evil desires**. It shows that even **good** people can be led astray by **ambition** and **power**.
- 3) Macbeth becomes increasingly **evil** as he becomes **hardened** to the many **crimes** he commits.
- 4) The struggle for the **crown** of Scotland becomes a **battle** between **good** and **evil**. Macbeth is the evil "tyrant" who must be killed before he **destroys** Scotland.



© Amitava Sarkar

Shakespeare uses images of darkness to represent evil and images of light to symbolise goodness (see p.56).

Evil is linked to gender

- 1) Lady Macbeth links **cruelty** and **aggression** with **masculinity**. She wants the spirits to "unsex" her and fill her with "direst cruelty" — she thinks her femininity **holds her back** from taking **violent action**.
- 2) **Masculine** ideas of **evil** focus on **violence** and **bloodshed**. Though she wants to be more like a man, Lady Macbeth relies on **manipulation** rather than **action**. She sees Macbeth's weakness and uses **emotional** blackmail to persuade him to commit **evil**.
- 3) The Witches' gender is **ambiguous**. Banquo says that they "should be women" but they have beards. Like Lady Macbeth, they rely on **manipulation** rather than physical **force**.

Theme — The Supernatural

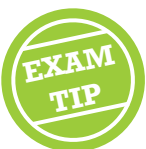
The **supernatural elements** of the play are presented as **evil** and **powerful**. The Witches are **linked** to the **devil** — Banquo calls them "devil" and Macbeth calls them "fiends", which associates them with **evil deeds**.

Battles represent the conflict between good and evil

- 1) Shakespeare uses **battles** to symbolise **good** and **evil**.
- 2) In the opening scene, there's a battle between Scotland and Norway — the **enemy army** is led by a **traitor**, "merciless Macdonald", whose "villanies of nature" show that he's **evil**.
- 3) The play ends with a **battle**, this time against Macbeth. Malcolm's men have "dear causes" and fight to "dew the sovereign flower" — in other words, to restore the **rightful** King. Macbeth is an "abhorred tyrant" who represents **evil**.

Writer's Techniques — Imagery

Shakespeare emphasises the **conflict** between **good** and **evil** through **religious imagery** — Macbeth is described as "cursèd" and has a name "More hateful" than the **devil**. In contrast, Young Siward is "**God's soldier**" because he died fighting to defeat an **evil** "tyrant".



Compare the balance of good and evil in different characters...

Think about how Shakespeare presents good and evil through the characters — some of them are really bad (like the Witches), some are really good (like Duncan) and some (like Macbeth) go from good to bad to worse.

The Supernatural

Thrice the stripy zebra danced. Thrice and once the llama pranced. Make the tea and feed the birds. Then sit thee down and read these charmèd words. Ahh, magic...

The Witches are a supernatural force

- 1) The Witches are an **evil** supernatural force — their “strange intelligence” and ability to **predict** the **future** gives them **power** over humans. However, when they’re planning to **harm** the sea captain, they say that his ship “**cannot** be lost”, which hints that their power is **limited**.
- 2) They’re not in **many** scenes but they **drive** the **action** of the play. It’s **unlikely** that Macbeth would have committed so many **terrible** crimes if he hadn’t been **influenced** by the Witches.

Social Context

At the time Shakespeare was writing, many people thought that **witches** were **real**, so the **Weird Sisters** would have seemed **believable** and frightening to an **audience** in the 1600s.

Writer’s Techniques

The **supernatural elements** add to the **atmosphere** — they make the play **darker** and more **frightening**. Shakespeare only **hints** at what’s real and what’s not, which adds to the **drama**.

- 3) The Witches are associated with **chaos** — they try to impose an **unnatural order** on what’s **good** and **natural**. Macbeth says they “untie the winds” and make “castles topple”. The Witches are motivated by “destruction” rather than goodness — they represent the **struggle** between the **natural** and **unnatural order**.
- 4) Shakespeare presents them as **completely evil**. They are **cruel**, **inhuman** and don’t show any **remorse** — in fact, they **celebrate** evil.

Visions are supernatural signs of guilt

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have **visions** which **remind** the audience of their terrible guilt:

Act 2, Scene 1

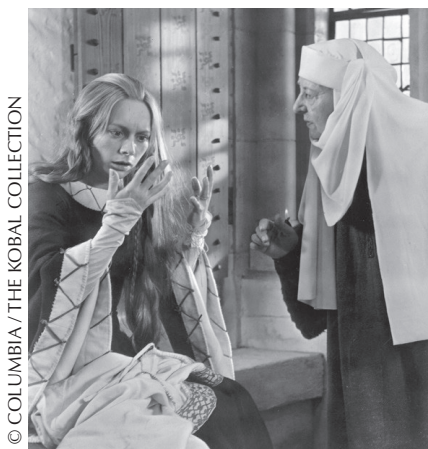
Macbeth sees a **vision** of a dagger just as he’s about to kill Duncan. It’s not clear whether it’s **leading** him to Duncan or **warning** him against murder. It represents the “**bloody business**” he’s about to do.

Act 3, Scene 4

Macbeth sees Banquo’s **ghost**, which gives him a “strange infirmity”. Nobody else can **see** the ghost, which suggests that it’s a sign of Macbeth’s guilty **conscience**.

Act 5, Scene 1

Lady Macbeth is driven **mad** as she imagines that her hands will “ne’er be clean” of Duncan’s blood — her **guilt** is so great that she kills herself.



© COLUMBIA / THE KOBAL COLLECTION

- 1) The visions are **ambiguous** — they could be real or imaginary.
- 2) The visions **fill** the characters who see them with **fear**. Macbeth is “blanched with fear” by Banquo’s ghost and his language is **agitated** and **nervous**: “Prithee, see there! Behold, look, lo!” His fear has made him lose **control** of his speech. Macbeth calls his own **reaction** a “strange infirmity” — it links to other **signs** of **madness** later in the play.
- 3) Lady Macbeth’s language when she sleepwalks is desperate, “O, o, o!”, and shows that she’s **disturbed** by the **vision** of blood on her hands. The Doctor says that her heart is “sorely charged” — he sees that the vision is the **result** of her **guilty conscience**.



“Were such things here as we do speak about?”

All these visions and apparitions are dead important to the progress of the play. Some drive Macbeth’s actions, while others show the audience how guilt has ruined a character’s peace of mind.

Reality and Appearances

There's a big difference between seeming lovely and being lovely. Shakespeare's constantly going on about the difference between appearances and reality in *Macbeth*, so it's worth getting to grips with.

Appearances can be deceptive

- 1) In *Macbeth*, characters often **hide** their thoughts and **pretend** to be something that they're **not**.
- 2) Lady Macbeth **encourages** Macbeth to **appear** to be good so nobody suspects that he plans to kill Duncan:

look like th'innocent flower,
But be the serpent under't
Act 1, Scene 5

The serpent links Lady Macbeth to Satan who tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.



© Ellie Kurtz

- 3) Macbeth knows that he needs a "**False face**" to hide his murderous acts. However, when Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost, his face is "the very painting" of his fear and **betrays** his feelings.
- 4) At first, Lady Macbeth has **no trouble** disguising her evil behaviour. She **pretends** to faint with **shock** when Duncan's death is discovered. However, her guilt becomes **too great** to **hide** and she starts sleepwalking.

People can be deceptive, but the play shows that their true natures come out in the end.

Meanings of words are unclear

- 1) The Witches' chant "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" suggests that things that **appear** good are actually **evil**.
- 2) They use language to **trick** Macbeth and **convince** him of a **false reality** — they tell him that "none of woman born" will harm him, which gives him the **false confidence** to fight to protect his reign.
- 3) Other characters speak using **paradoxes**, e.g. Macbeth says, "Nothing is / But what is not". These paradoxes create **uncertainty** — they show that **nobody** can tell what's **real**.

Some characters trust too much in appearances

- 1) In a world full of **deception** and **lies**, characters suffer when they **trust** in appearances **too much**.
- 2) Duncan trusts Macbeth and **dies** for it, even though he made the **same mistake** by trusting the **disloyal** Thane of Cawdor. When this happens, Duncan says, "There's no art / To find the mind's construction in the face" — he thinks that there's **no way** of telling what someone's **really** like.
- 3) Macbeth knows that **reality** and **appearances** don't always **match up**, but he completely **trusts** the Witches' prophecies. This leads to his **downfall**.
- 4) In contrast, Malcolm is immediately **sceptical** that Duncan was **murdered** by his servants and **suspects** one of the thanes: "To show an unfelt sorrow is an office / Which the false man does easy". His **awareness** of what "false" men can do causes him to **flee** and probably **saves his life**.

Apparitions and visions **seem** real to the **characters** who see them, but they're a sign that the character can't tell **reality** from **appearance**.



"False face must hide what the false heart doth know."

It's difficult for the characters in *Macbeth* to tell appearance and reality apart sometimes, because so many characters aren't what they seem. Those who trust too easily, like Duncan, pay the price...

Fate and Free Will

It would be great to see into the future — you'd never be caught without an umbrella and you'd know what exam questions to expect. It would remove the element of surprise though, and that's half the fun...

Fate is the opposite of free will

- 1) **Fate** is the idea that **everything** has already been **decided**, so people can't change what happens to them.
- 2) **Free will** means that humans **choose** their own course of **action**, so their **future** is made up of the **results** of their **choices**.
- 3) If it's **fate** that everything that happens was **destined**, then it's not Macbeth's **fault** that he murders Duncan. If **free will** exists, then Macbeth's own choices lead to his **downfall**.
- 4) The play **raises** a lot of **questions**, but Shakespeare doesn't make it **clear** whether it's Macbeth's **fate** to kill Duncan.



© Amitava Sarkar

You could say that Macbeth is doomed from the start...

- 1) At times, Macbeth seems to believe in fate. After he hears the Witches' **prophecy**, he seems **happy** to let **fate** take its course — he believes that “chance may crown me, / Without my stir” so he'll become King without doing anything to **make** it happen.

Characters — The Witches

It's not **clear** whether the Witches are **messengers** of Macbeth's **fate** or whether their prediction **inspires** Macbeth to make **bad choices**.

Character — Macbeth

You could say that Macbeth is **doomed** because of his '**fatal flaw**' (see p.38). If he wasn't so **ambitious**, he'd **ignore** the Witches and Lady Macbeth.

- 2) Lady Macbeth thinks that Macbeth is **fated** to be King — “fate and metaphysical aid doth seem / To have thee crowned withal”. Despite believing in fate, she decides Macbeth must **act** to make it **happen**.
- 3) By the end of the play, Macbeth says that **life** is “a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage”. He feels that people are no more than **actors** playing a **part** who aren't in **control** of their lives.

...or that he acts out of his own free will

- 1) At first, Macbeth makes a **deliberate choice** not to kill Duncan after he's **considered** the options: “We will proceed no further”. He carefully **weighs up** the **pros** and **cons**, which suggests that he's **in control**.
- 2) Later, Macbeth **acts** on the Witches' **prophecies** despite Banquo's earlier warning that they're “**instruments of darkness**”. Macbeth could do as Banquo does and **accept** the prophecies without **acting**.
- 3) Some of the prophecies are **self-fulfilling** — Macbeth only **acts** because he hears his **future**, so he causes it to happen. This suggests that he has **free will**.

Character — Macbeth

The captain says that Macbeth was “**Disdaining fortune**” when he fought Macdonald — it shows that Macbeth killed Macdonald **against** the **odds**. It hints that Macbeth could have **changed** his **actions** if he'd **wanted** to.



Back up your arguments with quotes and examples...

You could argue that Macbeth's actions were determined by fate, or you could argue that he should have used his free will to do the right thing. Either way, use quotes from the play to back up your argument.

Practice Questions

The themes are like the jammy layer in a sponge cake — they help to stick everything together and stop the play from falling apart in a soggy mess. Jam comes in lots of different flavours, just like themes — strawberry, apricot, raspberry... free will, ambition, good and evil. Try these questions out to see whether you've really got to grips with the themes in Macbeth, and if you know all the answers, reward yourself with some cake.

Quick Questions

- 1) What is Macbeth's biggest weakness?
- 2) How does Macduff show his loyalty to Scotland?
- 3) Describe a part of the play when a character betrays something or someone.
- 4) Name three characteristics that Duncan has that make him a good king.
- 5) Give three qualities that make a bad ruler in the play.
- 6) Why does Lady Macbeth want the spirits to "unsex" her?
- 7) How does Macbeth react to seeing Banquo's ghost?
- 8) Give an example of a time when Lady Macbeth disguises her evil thoughts or actions.
- 9) Briefly explain the difference between fate and free will.

In-depth Questions

- 1) Who do you think is the most loyal character in the play and why?
- 2) Compare the way that Duncan and Macbeth rule Scotland and explain which of them you think is the more successful ruler.
- 3) Who do you think is more evil — Macbeth or Lady Macbeth? Why?
- 4) How does Shakespeare use the Witches to show that appearances can be deceptive?
- 5) How important is the role of fate in the plot of *Macbeth*?

The Structure of 'Macbeth'

Structure is one of the most important parts of a play. Structure is the skill of writing a play so all the bits fit together, in the right order, in a way that works on stage. Shakespeare's structure was the cat's bananas.

A play's structure is the way it's put together

- 1) One of the most important parts of stagecraft is the **structure** of the play. The structure is the **overall design** of the play — how the **plot** is revealed, what **events** happen when, which scenes focus on **thoughts** and **feelings**, and which scenes build towards a **dramatic climax**.
- 2) Shakespeare didn't put the scenes in a **random order** — he had **reasons** to structure them a **certain way**:

To Emphasise Important Themes

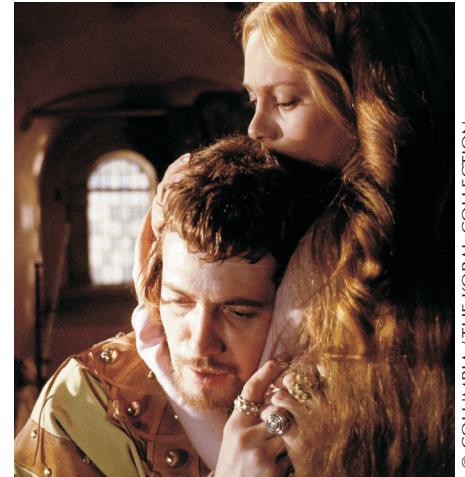
He introduces the **Witches** right at the **beginning** in Act 1, Scene 1. That way the audience knows that there are **supernatural** forces at work.

To Set the Mood

The **first scene** of each act sets the **mood** for the rest of the act. E.g. in Act 2, Scene 1, Macbeth goes to **murder** Duncan. This sets the **dark atmosphere** for the whole of Act 2.

Tragedies have a set structure

- 1) *Macbeth* is a typical **tragedy**. The first part **builds** up to the **turning point** (Duncan's murder), and the second part deals with the **consequences** of this, which lead to the main character's **downfall**.
- 2) The structure helps Shakespeare **develop** the **characters** — Macbeth starts off as an **honourable**, **moral** character, but he's corrupted by **ambition** (his **fatal flaw**). In contrast, Lady Macbeth starts out **cruel** and **remorseless**, but she eventually goes **mad** from **guilt**.
- 3) *Macbeth* also has a **circular structure** — it **starts** and **ends** with a **battle** to defeat a "**merciless tyrant**". This shows that the events have come **full circle** and **order** is restored at the end of the play.



© COLUMBIA / THE KOBAL COLLECTION

Shakespeare varies the length of the scenes

- 1) Shakespeare uses **short** scenes to **speed up** the **action** and make the play more **exciting**.
 - For example, Act 5 is made up of **nine short scenes** — and a lot happens in this act. Lady Macbeth goes **mad**, the **English army** arrives, Lady Macbeth **kills herself**, Macbeth sees **Birnam Wood** on the move, Macbeth **kills** Young Siward, Macduff **kills** Macbeth and Malcolm becomes **King**. Phew.
- 2) **Long** scenes let Shakespeare **explore** his characters' **emotions** and reveal their **true characters**.
 - In Act 4, Scene 3, Malcolm **tests** Macduff by claiming to be **unfit** to be King. Macduff's **reaction** shows that he is **loyal** to Malcolm and **passionate** about his country. Later in that scene, Macduff learns that his wife and children are **dead** — his **grief** shows that he cares about his **family** too.



Mention the play's structure and the effects it has...

Shakespeare didn't want people getting bored — or finding the scary and tragic bits funny. He had to use every trick he knew to make the audience react as he wanted them to. Know these tricks for the exam.

The Structure of 'Macbeth'

Shakespeare knew all the tricks to keep the audience from yawning. His favourite tactic — let the audience know that juicy scenes are coming up, without giving away what's going to happen. Easy when you know how.

Shakespeare prepares you for what's going to happen

Hinting at what's going to happen later on in a play is a good way of keeping the audience on the **edge** of their **seats**. Shakespeare does it a lot in *Macbeth*, especially near the **start**.

- 1) In **Act 1, Scene 1** the Witches let the audience know that they're **evil** ("Fair is foul") and that they're going to meet Macbeth. This creates **dramatic tension** because it makes the audience wonder **who** Macbeth is and **what** the Witches are planning for him.
- 2) In **Act 1, Scene 3** the Witches tell Macbeth he'll be **King**, which **plants the idea** in both Macbeth's and the audience's minds and creates **anticipation**.
- 3) In **Act 1, Scene 4** Macbeth hears that **Malcolm** is heir to the throne, not him — this suggests that for the Witches' prophecy to come **true**, Macbeth will have to **do something**. The audience starts to wonder what Macbeth's **capable** of, and how **strong** his **ambition** is.



© BRITISH LION / THE KOBAL COLLECTION / BOULTON, DAVIS

Theme — Supernatural

The supernatural elements in the play (the **Witches**, the **apparitions**, Macbeth's vision of a **dagger** and Banquo's **ghost**) create **tension**. They make things seem **uncertain** and **evil**.

- 4) The apparitions' **prophecies** in **Act 4, Scene 1** hint at things to come. The audience suspects the prophecies will come **true**, but doesn't know **how**, which builds **suspense**.

Suspense — what will happen next?

Shakespeare leaves the **audience** in little doubt it's going to be a **tragedy** — but he still **keeps** a few **questions open** about what's going to happen.

Act 1, Scene 7 Macbeth battles with his conscience before killing Duncan.



Will he go through with it?
We don't find out until Act 2.

Act 3, Scene 1 Banquo suspects that Macbeth killed Duncan. Macbeth plots to kill Banquo.



Will Banquo accuse Macbeth? Will Macbeth kill Banquo before he gets the chance?
We don't find out until later in Act 3.

Act 4, Scene 3 Macduff learns that his family have been murdered and vows to take revenge on Macbeth.



Will Macduff kill Macbeth?
We don't find out until Act 5.

Act 5 The scenes alternate between Macbeth preparing for battle and the English army advancing.



Who will win? What will happen to Macbeth?
We don't find out until the end of the play.

The Structure of 'Macbeth'

Macbeth is made up of key scenes and minor scenes. It's not full-on murder and witches all the way through — but every bit is there for a reason and scenes can have lots of different purposes.

The first part is structured around Macbeth's rise to power

Key Scenes

In Acts 1 and 2 the **key scenes** are focused on Macbeth becoming **King**. The plot gradually **builds up** until the **murder of Duncan** is discovered and Macbeth is **crowned**.

Act 1

Scene 3

Macbeth meets the Witches, who tell him he'll be King.

Scene 7

Lady Macbeth persuades Macbeth to kill Duncan.

Act 2

Scene 1

Macbeth goes to kill Duncan.

Scene 3

Macduff finds Duncan's body.

Act 1, Scene 1

The Witches are introduced.

Act 1, Scene 2

Duncan talks about the battle.

Act 1, Scene 4

Macbeth starts to think about killing Duncan.

Act 1, Scenes 5&6

Lady Macbeth learns of the Witches' prophecy. Duncan arrives at Macbeth's castle.

Act 2, Scene 2

Lady Macbeth covers up the murder.

Act 2, Scene 4

An old man talks about weird events. Macbeth is crowned.

Minor Scenes

The **minor scenes** build up the **tension** and **delay** the actual murder.

In the second part, things fall apart for Macbeth

Key Scenes

In Acts 3, 4 and 5, the other characters learn how **evil** Macbeth is, and start to **plot against him**. This builds up to the climactic **rebellion** in the final act.

Act 3

Scene 4

Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost.

Act 4

Scene 1

Macbeth visits the Witches, and is shown three apparitions that predict his future.

Act 5

Scene 1

Lady Macbeth sleepwalks.

Scene 8

Macduff kills Macbeth.

Act 3, Scenes 1-3

Macbeth realises that Banquo's a threat, so he has him killed.

Act 3, Scene 5

Hecate plans to ruin Macbeth.

Act 3, Scene 6

Lennox is told of a plot to overthrow Macbeth.

Act 4, Scenes 2-3

Macbeth has Macduff's wife and son killed. Malcolm tests Macduff, and Macduff learns of the murders.

Act 5, Scenes 2-4&6

The English army advances, disguised as Birnam Wood.

Act 5, Scenes 5&7

Lady Macbeth kills herself and Macbeth kills young Siward.

Act 5, Scene 9

Malcolm becomes King.

Minor Scenes

The **minor scenes** help develop the plot. The short scenes **speed up** the action.



Make sure you can explain the purpose of key scenes...

If you're writing about structure, focus on key scenes — the ones where tragedy and murder are at their peak. Discuss minor scenes too, but don't make them the main subject (unless the question asks you to).

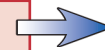
Mood and Atmosphere

Horror, revenge and suspense — *Macbeth* certainly ain't your average slushy romance. Shakespeare keeps the mood pretty dark almost all the way through the play — there's not much in the way of light relief.

Shakespeare creates atmosphere in different ways

Shakespeare uses different methods to create different atmospheres, which are an important part of the play. Some of the techniques he uses are:

- Setting
- Use of the supernatural
- Humour
- Different senses
- Language



In particular, imagery helps to create different moods — see pages 55-57.

Different settings create different moods

Shakespeare chose the settings of his scenes very carefully — they add to the atmosphere of the play.



The Witches always appear in a spooky setting, usually in deserted places. This gives a sense of isolation and secrecy, and highlights the fact that they are separated from the rest of the characters. They are often accompanied by “thunder and lightning”, which makes them seem menacing. Each apparition is introduced with more “thunder”, so they appear threatening.

A lot of the scenes take place in and around Macbeth's castles in Scotland. This reminds the audience that the Macbeths are noble. However, the way they act contrasts sharply with this — their actions are not noble at all.

Most of Act 5 takes place as Malcolm's army advances, which highlights the violence that occurs throughout the play.

Language sets the scene and creates atmosphere

Sometimes what the characters say helps to set the scene. Using dialogue to describe the setting and atmosphere was important in Shakespeare's time because sets and props were limited.

- 1) In Act 1, Scene 1, the Witches appear in “fog and filthy air”. This creates a gloomy atmosphere, and also makes them seem ambiguous as they can't be seen properly.
- 2) In Act 1, Scene 6, Shakespeare uses dramatic irony — Duncan describes Macbeth's castle as “pleasant”, not knowing that he's going to be murdered there.
 *Dramatic irony is when the audience knows something a character doesn't.*
- 3) Act 2, Scene 1 takes place on a dark night — Banquo says the “candles are all out” (there are no stars). This is an appropriate setting for murder.
- 4) Language can create an atmosphere of its own — one that isn't linked to the setting, but more to do with what's going on in the characters' minds. In Act 4, Scene 1, the Witches talk about “poisoned entrails”, and “Finger of birth-strangled babe”. This unpleasant, gruesome language reflects their evil intentions.
- 5) Shakespeare uses violent language to reveal Lady Macbeth's true nature. Her description of how she would kill her own child creates an evil atmosphere.


“I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
And dashed the brains out”
Act 1, Scene 7
- 6) He also uses short lines of dialogue, questions and exclamations to create feelings of panic and confusion.

Mood and Atmosphere

Shakespeare uses the senses to set the scene

By making the characters [describe](#) what they can [see](#) or [hear](#), Shakespeare makes the scenes more [vivid](#) — it helps the audience [imagine](#) what’s happening, especially as there wouldn’t have been many [props](#).

- 1) When Macduff has just discovered Duncan’s body, he says it will “[destroy your sight / With a new Gorgon](#)”. This emphasises the [horror](#) of the discovery — he feels he’s gone [blind](#) from seeing something so terrible.
- 2) Earlier in the play, Duncan’s arrival is introduced by a “[Flourish](#)” (or fanfare). This contrasts with the “[hideous trumpet](#)” and “[alarum bell](#)” that announce his death, and shows how the atmosphere has [changed](#).
- 3) On the night of Duncan’s [murder](#), Lennox hears “[strange screams of death](#)”, which create a [dark, frightening atmosphere](#).
- 4) The army approaches to the sound of a “[Drum](#)”. The sounds of [battle](#) highlight the [violence](#) that happens throughout the play.

Writer’s Techniques

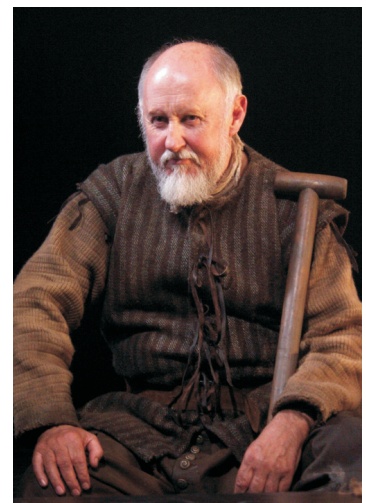
These noises contrast with the moments of [silence](#) — e.g. the [quiet calm](#) when everyone’s [sleeping](#), just before Macbeth [murders](#) Duncan.

Unnatural and supernatural events create tension

- 1) Seemingly [supernatural](#) events, such as the [dagger](#) Macbeth sees and [Banquo’s ghost](#), create a [tense, uneasy](#) atmosphere. It’s [uncomfortable](#) because it’s not clear if these visions [exist](#) or if Macbeth is going [mad](#).
- 2) After Duncan’s [murder](#), there are a number of “[unnatural](#)” events, e.g. horses [eating each other](#) and day turning to “[dark night](#)”. This creates a [troubled](#) atmosphere, because the [natural order](#) has been [disturbed](#).
- 3) Every appearance of the [Witches](#) has a [dark, spooky](#) atmosphere. It’s not just the setting that creates this mood (see p.50) — their “imperfect” [speech](#) and “Filthy” [appearance](#) add to the atmosphere.

The Porter provides light relief — but also increases the tension

- 1) One of the few bits of [comedy](#) in the play comes in Act 2, Scene 3, when a [drunken Porter](#) rambles for a bit. This comic interlude [delays](#) the [discovery](#) of Duncan’s body, which [increases](#) the [tension](#).
- 2) Even here the [atmosphere](#) is [dark](#) — the Porter talks about “[hell](#)” and “[Beelzebub](#)” (the devil). He refers to Macbeth’s castle as “[hell-gate](#)” and calls himself a “[devil-porter](#)”. This suggests that the visitors are [entering hell](#) to be greeted by the [devil](#) (Macbeth).
- 3) Shakespeare also gives the audience a bit of [light relief](#) in Act 4, Scene 2, when Lady Macduff and her son [chat](#) and [joke](#). However, their jokes are [dark](#) and touch on [serious subjects](#): “there are liars and swearers enow to beat the honest men and hang up them.” Since Macbeth ordered their [murder](#) in the previous scene, their banter also [increases](#) the audience’s [suspense](#).



© Rex Features



Give examples of how Shakespeare creates different moods...

There’s all sorts of dark and sinister language throughout the play — especially from the Witches and Lady Macbeth. Learn some key phrases and quote them to show how Shakespeare creates atmosphere.

Poetry in Shakespeare

Shakespeare changes the pace

- 1) **Long** words and sentences **slow things down**.
For example, in this bit Macbeth sounds **thoughtful**:

"All my pretty ones?
Did you say all? O hell-kite! All?"
Act 4, Scene 3

"My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man that function
Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is,
But what is not."
Act 1, Scene 3

- 2) **Short** words and sentences **speed things up**. Here Shakespeare does this to make Macduff sound **upset**.

Shakespeare uses different rhythms to show different emotions

- 1) Shakespeare often changes the rhythm of lines by messing around with the **punctuation** and choice of **words**.
- 2) This bit's got a **steady rhythm**. Duncan's making **small talk** with Banquo.
- 3) Here, the punctuation's very **choppy** and the rhythm's all over the place. Macbeth has just seen Banquo's ghost — the rhythm and **short words** show that he's **scared** and **tense**. His **questions** show his **uncertainty** and **disbelief**.

"This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses."
Act 1, Scene 6

"Why do you show me this? — A fourth? Start, eyes!
What, will the line stretch out to th' crack of doom?"
Act 4, Scene 1

Word order emphasises different words

- 1) Shakespeare changes the word order to make **important** words **stand out** more.
- 2) The **natural** way to say this would be:
"Macduff was untimely ripped from his mother's womb."
- 3) Having "**Untimely ripped**" at the end of the sentence makes it more **dramatic**. The whole sentence builds **tension** by saving the **key information** until the **end**.

"Macduff was from his mother's womb
Untimely ripped."
Act 5, Scene 8

Soliloquies show the characters' thoughts and feelings

- 1) A **soliloquy** is a long speech by **one character** that is not spoken to any other character on stage.
- 2) It's just them **thinking out loud** about their **emotions**, so it's a good way of showing the audience how a character is honestly feeling.

Some Important Soliloquies in *Macbeth*:

- Lady Macbeth's speech to the spirits in Act 1, Scene 5.
- Macbeth's speech about killing Duncan, in Act 1, Scene 7.
- Macbeth seeing the dagger just before he kills Duncan in Act 2, Scene 1.

*There are lots more examples of soliloquies in *Macbeth*, these are just a few to get you started.*



Mention poetic features such as rhyme and rhythm...

Don't just describe what kind of poetry Shakespeare uses — always write about how he uses poetry to create different effects. Try reading some of the text out loud — it'll help you to spot the effects.

Puns and Wordplay

Shakespeare used a lot of puns (using words that look or sound the same but have different meanings). Sometimes the characters make deliberate puns, but at other times they don't seem to do it on purpose.

There are puns everywhere

- 1) Shakespeare loved **puns** — his plays are **full** of them. They were really **popular** at the time he was writing.
- 2) Sometimes they're **funny** (though it's often very **dark humour**), and sometimes it's just **clever wordplay**.

MALCOLM:
Act 2, Scene 3

There's **warrant** in that theft
Which **steals** itself when there's no mercy left.

"Warrant" can mean either
"justification" or "arrest warrant".

"Steal" can mean either
"to sneak" or "to thieve".

- 3) The **double meanings** of both "**warrant**" and "**steal**" reveal why Malcolm and Donalbain's actions could be viewed as **suspicious**. They are running away because they **fear** for their **lives**, but it could be interpreted as running away out of **guilt**.

- 4) Shakespeare uses puns to reveal what characters are **thinking**.

In this example, Lady Macbeth isn't making a deliberate pun — she's using "**crown**" to mean **head**, but it shows her desire to become **Queen** is always on her mind.

LADY MACBETH: And fill me from the **crown** to the toe topfull
Of direst cruelty
Act 1, Scene 5

Shakespeare uses wordplay to create dramatic irony

- 1) **Dramatic irony** is when the **audience** knows something the **characters** on stage don't — for example, Macduff describes Lady Macbeth as "**gentle**" and says that the news of Duncan's murder would "murder" her. This is **dramatic irony** because the audience knows that Lady Macbeth has **planned** Duncan's murder.
- 2) In Act 2, Scene 3, the Porter's **wordplay** creates dramatic irony. He **jokingly** refers to Macbeth's castle as "**hell-gate**" and talks about someone who is sent to **hell** for committing "**treason**" — the audience knows that Macbeth has committed treason by **killing the King**, so the Porter's words are **truer** than he knows.

Some characters contradict themselves

An oxymoron is where two words contradict each other. A paradox is a statement that contradicts itself or cancels itself out.

- 1) Shakespeare uses **paradoxes** and **oxymorons** to heighten the **tension**.



© Ellie Kurtz

- 2) The Witches' **predictions** are **ambiguous**. The things they predict seem **impossible**, and yet they come **true**. Macbeth describes their words as "**lies like truth**" — this is an **oxymoron** because lies are never truthful.
- 3) The Witches often speak in **paradoxes** — "When the battle's **lost** and **won**". This makes them very **ambiguous** — the audience doesn't know what their **motives** are, or whether they can be **trusted**.

Theme — Reality and Appearances

All these puns and paradoxes emphasise that nothing is as it seems, e.g. "Fair is foul, and foul is fair".

Imagery and Symbolism

Macbeth is full of images — they make the language rich and interesting, and help the audience understand the thoughts and feelings of the characters. Of course, they also make the play a bit tricky to study.

There are three kinds of imagery to look out for

Imagery helps you [picture](#) what Shakespeare's describing, and makes it [stick in your mind](#) better.

Similes are when one thing is like something else

"I had else been perfect;
Whole as the marble, founded as the rock"
Act 3, Scene 4

1) Macbeth's saying he was [solid](#) and [grounded](#), [like rock](#). Rock is [firm](#) and [fixed](#), as he was before.

2) Here, Angus compares Macbeth to a "[thief](#)", because he's [stolen](#) power from Duncan. Angus is saying that Macbeth's [responsibilities](#) as King are [too much](#) for him, like [clothes](#) that are [too big](#) for him to fill.

"Now does he feel his title
Hang loose about him, [like a giant's robe](#)
Upon a dwarfish thief."
Act 5, Scene 2

A metaphor is when one thing is said to be something else

"There the [grown serpent](#) lies; the [worm](#) that's fled
Hath nature that in time will [venom](#) breed,
No [teeth](#) for th'present."
Act 3, Scene 4

- Here, Macbeth describes Banquo as a [snake](#) and his son Fleance as a "[worm](#)". He still sees Fleance as a [threat](#), and is [afraid](#) of his "[venom](#)".
- [Snakes](#) and [serpents](#) are used as an [extended metaphor](#) (a repeated metaphor) throughout the play, usually to describe [deception](#) or [betrayal](#). For example, Lady Macbeth tells Macbeth to "look like th'[innocent flower](#) / But be the [serpent](#) under't".



© Amitava Sarkar

Personification means describing a thing as if it were a person

"Life's but a [walking shadow](#), a [poor player](#)
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more."
Act 5, Scene 5

1) Here, Macbeth personifies [life](#), comparing it to a "[walking shadow](#)" and an [actor](#), whose influence is [limited](#) to his time on stage. This shows that Macbeth thinks that life is [brief](#) and [pointless](#).

2) Here, the [earth](#) is personified as a person with a [fever](#) to show that Duncan's death was [unnatural](#).

"the earth
Was [feverous](#) and did [shake](#)"
Act 2, Scene 3



Include some examples of imagery in your essay...

Shakespeare used loads of images for all sorts of reasons, so if your essay is on his use of language, make sure you write shedloads on it. In fact, imagery needs at least a mention in most types of essay...

Imagery and Symbolism

The main point of imagery is to liven up the language, and make the themes more obvious.

Light symbolises good, dark symbolises evil

- 1) Macbeth and Lady Macbeth both use **images** of **darkness** when they talk about **evil deeds**. They also use darkness to represent **blindness** and **ignorance**, and light to represent **sight** and **knowledge**.
- 2) Macbeth **realises** that his intentions are evil — he describes his thoughts as **“black”**.

Theme — Good and Evil

The **witches** are described as **“instruments of darkness”**, which emphasises the fact that they’re **evil**.

Images of Darkness

“Stars, hide your fires,
Let not light see my black and deep desires”
Act 1, Scene 4

“Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunkest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark”
Act 1, Scene 5

- 3) The Macbeths want to **“hide”** their evil thoughts and deeds in **darkness** — the murder of Duncan takes place on a **dark, starless** night when the “candles are all out”. The darkness highlights how **evil** Duncan’s murder is.
- 4) This is further reflected by the **“strange”** and **“unnatural”** events that take place after his death — “by the clock, ‘tis day, / And yet **dark night** strangles the **travelling lamp**”. This image shows that **darkness** and **evil** (Macbeth) have overcome the natural **goodness** and **light** (Duncan).

- 5) **Light** is associated with **goodness** — here, Duncan compares his loyal Lords to **“stars”**:

Images of Light

“signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine”
Act 1, Scene 4

Nature represents the correct order of the world

- 1) The way **nature** behaves shows the **state of events** — Duncan’s murder **disrupts** the natural order. As well as **“night’s predominance”**, horses have “Turned **wild** in nature” and eaten each other.
- 2) Duncan’s murder is **symbolised** by the image: “A **falcon**, towering in her pride of place, / Was by a **mousing owl** hawked at and killed”. It’s **unnatural** for an owl to kill a falcon, so this emphasises the fact that Duncan’s murder has **disrupted** the **natural order** of things.
- 3) **Plant imagery** is used throughout the play — Duncan compares Macbeth and Banquo to plants that he will **harvest**. This image is continued in Act 5, Scene 2, but now Macbeth is compared to the **“weeds”** and Malcolm is the **“sovereign flower”**. This contrast shows how **corrupt** Macbeth has become.

Health and disease represent the state of Scotland

- 1) Shakespeare uses **images** of **disease** and **injury** to highlight what **Scotland** is like under Macbeth’s rule.
- 2) Macbeth asks the **Doctor** to **cure** Scotland: “find her **disease**, / And **purge** it to a **sound** and **pristine health**”. This is **ironic** — he can’t see that **he** is Scotland’s disease, and the country will only recover when he’s **dead**.
- 3) **Macduff** sees Macbeth’s reign as causing **injury** to Scotland.
- 4) Malcolm is later described as the **“med’cine”** that will **cure** Scotland, which reinforces the belief that he is the **rightful King**.

Images of Wounds

“Bleed, bleed, poor country!”
“It weeps, it bleeds; and each new day a gash
is added to her wounds.”
Act 4, Scene 3

Imagery and Symbolism

Images of blood and water symbolise guilt and innocence

- 1) Shakespeare uses images of **blood** to represent **guilt** — from the **blood-stained daggers** that Lady Macbeth plants on Duncan’s guards, to the “**damned spot**” that she **imagines** on her hands.
- 2) The image of **water** is associated with **washing away** the guilt — Lady Macbeth claims that “A little water **clears** us of this deed”, but Macbeth wonders whether “all great Neptune’s **ocean**” would be enough to wash the blood (and guilt) away.
- 3) Lady Macbeth’s **madness** shows that she can’t get rid of her **guilt** — she asks, “will these hands ne’er be **clean**?” **Cleanliness** is linked to **innocence** here.



© Amitava Sarkar

Masculinity represents aggression and courage

- 1) Shakespeare links the idea of **masculinity** to **violence**. Lady Macbeth **bullies** her husband into killing Duncan by **questioning** his masculinity: “When you durst do it, then you were a **man**.” Macbeth uses the same **tactic** to **persuade** the murderers to kill Banquo, saying “in the catalogue ye go for **men**”.
- 2) Lady Macbeth prays to the spirits to “**unsex**” her — she wants **female** qualities like **kindness** and **compassion** to be removed. She rejects her **maternal instincts**, saying “take my **milk** for **gall**”.
- 3) We see **another side** of masculinity when Macduff learns of his family’s **murder**. Malcolm tells him to “**Dispute it like a man**” (i.e. take **revenge**), but Macduff says he must “**feel it as a man**” — he believes men should show **compassion** too. This makes the audience question whether **violence** is what makes a **man**.

Everyday life can be disrupted by guilt

- 1) **Sleep** symbolises a **clear conscience** — so **lack of sleep** suggests **guilt**. For a **guilty mind**, sleep brings “**wicked dreams**”. After murdering Duncan, Macbeth **worries** that he’ll never be able to sleep again.

“Methought I heard a voice cry, ‘Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep’”
Act 2, Scene 2

- 2) Lady Macbeth’s **sleepwalking** in Act 5 is a sign of her guilt — she can no longer sleep **peacefully**.

“Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights,
Free from our feasts and banquets bloody knives”
Act 3, Scene 6

- 3) It is also suggested that Scotland can’t **eat** or **sleep** — being unable to fulfil these **basic needs** shows how badly Macbeth’s rule has affected the country.

- 4) **Clothing** is symbolic too — at first, Macbeth is **reluctant** to wear the “**borrowed robes**” of the Thane of Cawdor. Banquo reinforces this, saying that the “**New honours**” are like “**strange garments**”.



“dark night strangles the travelling lamp”

Rosse complains to a random old man that, although it’s daytime, it’s as dark as night. Things are so bad in Scotland with Macbeth in charge that even the heavens seem to be behaving unnaturally.

Practice Questions

You need to get Shakespeare's techniques sorted out. It's one of the things the examiners expect you to understand. It's all about how Shakespeare made the play good — well-told, atmospheric and gripping... So answer these questions, and keep going through them until you know the answers. Then you can pass the exam, get a job, become a reality TV star, whatever...

Quick Questions

- 1) What effect do short scenes have?
- 2) When does Shakespeare first introduce the supernatural?
- 3) Find a scene where the mood is:
a) spooky b) comic
- 4) Which characters always speak in rhyme?
- 5) "We have scotched the snake, not killed it"
Is this... a) a simile b) a metaphor c) personification?
- 6) Why does Lady Macbeth want the spirits to "unsex" her?

In-depth Questions

- 1) Pick a scene in the play and describe how it helps build tension and suspense.
- 2) Pick a scene in the play and describe how Shakespeare creates a spooky atmosphere.
- 3) Explain how the Witches' speech is different from that of the other characters. What effect does this have?
- 4) Why do you think Shakespeare makes the Porter speak in prose?
- 5) Find a metaphor in the play. Explain what the imagery shows, and how it fits with the atmosphere of the rest of the scene.
- 6) How does Shakespeare use images of light and darkness?
- 7) a) Which of these types of imagery are used to show guilt?
i) light ii) darkness iii) disease iv) medicine v) lack of sleep vi) food
b) Why do you think Shakespeare uses so many images for guilt in *Macbeth*?

Practice Questions

Well, enough of that easy-peasy warm-up stuff. Now it's time to show off your sparkling skills of analysis, insight and general fabulousness with these exam-style questions. Enjoy...

Exam-style Questions

- 1) Read the extract below. Discuss how Shakespeare presents the idea of masculinity in this extract and elsewhere in the play.

Lady Macbeth: When you durst do it, then you were a man.
 And to be more than what you were, you would
 Be so much more the man. Nor time, nor place
 Did then adhere, and yet you would make both.
 They have made themselves and that their fitness now
 Does unmake you. I have given suck and know
 How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
 I would, while it was smiling in my face,
 Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
 And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn
 As you have done to this.

(Act 1, Scene 7, 49-59)

- 2) Explore how Shakespeare uses the structure of *Macbeth* to build tension in the play.
- 3) Examine how Shakespeare uses language to create atmosphere in *Macbeth*.
- 4) Write about the ways Shakespeare presents good and evil in *Macbeth*.

Exam Preparation

Getting to know the text will put you at a massive advantage in the exam. It's not enough just to read it though — you've got to get to grips with the nitty-gritty bits. It's all about gathering evidence...

The exam questions will test four main skills

You will need to show the examiner that you can:

- 1) Write about the text in a **thoughtful way** — **picking out** appropriate **examples** and **quotations** to back up your opinions.
- 2) **Identify** and **explain** features of the text's **form**, **structure** and **language**. Show how the author uses these to create **meanings** and **effects**.
- 3) Relate the text to its **cultural, social and historical background**.
- 4) Write in a **clear, well-structured** way. **5%** of the marks in your English Literature exams are for **spelling**, **punctuation** and **grammar**. Make sure that your writing is as **accurate** as possible.

Preparation is important

- 1) It's **important** to cover **all** the **different sections** of this book in your **revision**. You need to make sure you **understand** the text's **context**, **plot**, **characters**, **themes** and **writer's techniques**.
- 2) In the **exam**, you'll need to **bring together** your **ideas** about these topics to answer the question **quickly**.
- 3) Think about the different **characters** and **themes** in the text, and write down some **key points** and **ideas** about each one. Then, find some **evidence** to support each point — this could be something from **any** of the **sections** in this book. You could set out your evidence in a **table** like this:

Theme: Reality and Appearances	
Appearances are deceptive	Witches say that "Fair is foul" — nothing is as it appears.
Characters	A character's public face may differ from private reality: "look like th'innocent flower, / But be the serpent under't".
Supernatural vs. imagination	Characters can't tell what's real: "Is this a dagger which I see before me", and Banquo's ghost.
Setting	The "fog and filthy air" associated with the Witches obscures reality.
Language	Imagery of darkness linked to deception, e.g. "Come, thick night".

Preparing to succeed — a cunning plot indeed...

Knowing the plot inside out will be unbelievably helpful in the exam. It'll help you to stay calm and make sure you write a brilliant answer that positively glitters with little gems of evidence. The exam's just a chance for you to show off...

The Exam Question

This page deals with how to approach an exam question. The stuff below will help you get started on a scorching exam answer, more scorching than, say, a phoenix cooking fiery fajitas in a flaming furnace.

Read the question carefully and underline key words

- 1) The style of question you'll get depends on which exam board you're taking.
- 2) Read all the instructions carefully. Make sure you know how many questions you need to answer and how much time you should spend answering each one.
- 3) If the question has more than one part, look at the total number of marks for each bit. This should help you to plan your time in the exam.
- 4) Read the question at least twice so you completely understand it. Underline the key words. If you're given an extract, underline important words or phrases in that too.



Henry didn't read the weather report carefully enough when planning his weekend activities.

Here's an exam-style question

Remember to write about form, structure and language.

'How questions' ask you to think about the writer's techniques. E.g. Shakespeare's use of characterisation and symbolism.

Q1 How does Shakespeare present the theme of ambition in the play?
Refer to the following extract in your answer...

Ambition is a key theme — use a range of examples to support your answer.

You must refer to and quote from the extract in your answer.

Some exam boards will ask you to write only about the extract. Others will ask you to write about the extract and the text as a whole. Make sure you read the instructions carefully.

Get to know exam language

Some words come up time and again in exam questions. Have a look at some specimen questions, pick out words that are often used in questions and make sure that you understand what they mean. You could write a few down whilst you're revising. For example:

Question Word	You need to...
Explore / Explain	Show <u>how</u> the writer deals with a <u>theme</u> , <u>character</u> or <u>idea</u> . Make several <u>different</u> points to answer the question.
How does	Think about the <u>techniques</u> or <u>literary features</u> that the author uses to get their point across.
Give examples	Use <u>direct quotes</u> and describe <u>events</u> from the text in your own words.
Refer to	Read the question so that you know if you need to write about just an <u>extract</u> , or an extract and the <u>rest of the text</u> .

The advice squad — the best cops in the NYPD...

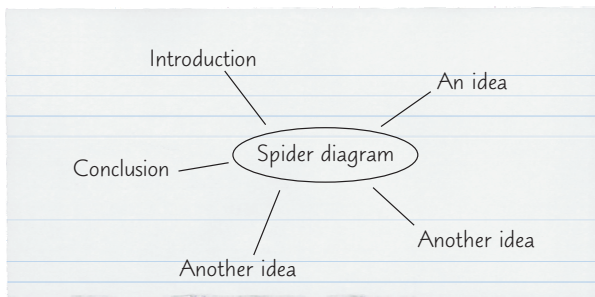
Whatever question you're asked in the exam, your answer should touch on the main characters, themes, structure and language of the text. All the stuff we've covered in the rest of the book in fact. It's so neat, it's almost like we planned it.

Planning Your Answer

I'll say this once — and then I'll probably repeat it several times — it is absolutely, completely, totally and utterly essential that you make a plan before you start writing. Only a fool jumps right in without a plan...

Plan your answer before you start

- 1) If you plan, you're less likely to forget something **important**.
- 2) A good plan will help you **organise** your ideas — and write a good, **well-structured** essay.
- 3) Write your plan at the **top of your answer booklet** and draw a **neat line** through it when you've finished.
- 4) **Don't** spend **too long** on your plan. It's only **rough work**, so you don't need to write in full sentences. Here are a few **examples** of different ways you can plan your answer:



Bullet points...	
•	Introduction...
•	An idea...
•	The next idea...
•	Another idea...
•	Yet another idea...
•	Conclusion...

Include bits of evidence in your plan

- 1) **Writing** your essay will be much **easier** if you include **important quotes** and **examples** in your plan.
- 2) You could include them in a **table** like this one:
- 3) **Don't** spend **too long** writing out quotes though. It's just to make sure you **don't forget** anything when you write your answer.

A point...	Quote to back this up...
Another point...	Quote...
A different point...	Example...
A brand new point...	Quote...

Structure your answer

- | | |
|--|---|
| <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">Introduction</div> <div style="text-align: center;">↓</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">Middle Section</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">— paragraphs</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">expanding</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">your</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">argument.</div> <div style="text-align: center;">↓</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">Conclusion</div> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Your introduction should give a brief answer to the question you're writing about. Make it clear how you're going to tackle the topic. 2) The middle section of your essay should explain your answer in detail and give evidence to back it up. Write a paragraph for each point you make. Make sure you comment on your evidence and explain how it helps to prove your point. 3) Remember to write a conclusion — a paragraph at the end which sums up your main points. There's more about introductions and conclusions on the next page. |
|--|---|



Dirk finally felt ready to tackle the topic.

To plan or not to plan, that is the question...

The answer is yes, yes, a thousand times yes. Often students dive right in, worried that planning will take up valuable time. But 5 minutes spent organising a well-structured answer is loads better than pages of waffle. Mmm waffles.

Writing Introductions and Conclusions

Now you've made that plan that I was banging on about on the last page, you'll know what your main points are. This is going to make writing your introduction and conclusion as easy as pie.

Get to the point straight away in your introduction

- 1) First, you need to **work out** what the question is **asking you** to do:

How is the character of Banquo important to the play?

The question is **asking you** to think about the **role** of **Banquo** in the play. Plan your essay by thinking about **how** this character **links** to the play's plot and main **themes**.

- 2) When you've **planned** your essay, you should **begin** by giving a **clear answer** to the **question** in a sentence or two. Use the **rest** of the **introduction** to **develop** this idea. Try to include the **main paragraph ideas** that you have listed in your plan, but **save** the **evidence** for later.
- 3) You could also use the **introduction** to give your **opinion**. Whatever you do, make sure your introduction makes it **clear** how your answer **fits the question**.

Your conclusion must answer the question

- 1) The **most important** thing you have to do at the **end** of your writing is to **summarise** your **answer** to the question.
- 2) It's your **last chance** to persuade the examiner, so make your **main point** again.
- 3) Use your **last sentence** to really **impress** the **examiner** — it will make your essay **stand out**. You could **develop** your own **opinion** of the text or **highlight** which of your **points** you thought was the most **interesting**.



The examiner was struggling to see the answer clearly.

Use the question words in your introduction and conclusion

- 1) Try to use **words** or **phrases** from the **question** in your introduction and conclusion.

How does Shakespeare present madness in the play?

- 2) This will show the examiner that you're **answering the question**.

In 'Macbeth', Shakespeare presents madness as a consequence of guilt. Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth begin to show signs of madness after they murder Duncan.

The first line of the introduction gives a clear answer, which will lead on to the rest of the essay.

- 3) This will also help you keep the question **fresh in your mind** so your answer doesn't **wander off-topic**.

I've come to the conclusion that I really like pie...

To conclude, the introduction eases the examiner in gently, whilst the conclusion is your last chance to impress. But remember — the examiner doesn't want to see any new points lurking in those closing sentences.

Writing Main Paragraphs

So we've covered the beginning and the end, now it's time for the meaty bit. The roast beef in between the prawn cocktail and the treacle tart. This page is about how to structure your paragraphs. It's quite simple...

P.E.E.D. is how to put your argument together

- 1) **P.E.E.D.** stands for: **P**oint, **E**xample, **E**xplain, **D**evelop.
- 2) Begin each paragraph by making a **point**. Then give an **example** from the text (either a quote or a description). Next, **explain** how your example backs up your point.
- 3) Finally, try to **develop** your point by writing about its effect on the reader, how it links to another part of the text or what the writer's intention is in including it.

Remember to start a new paragraph every time you make a new point.

Use short quotes to support your ideas

- 1) Don't just use words from the play to show what **happens** in the **plot**...

When he sees her sleepwalking, Lady Macbeth's doctor says: "Foul whisperings are abroad. Unnatural deeds / Do breed unnatural troubles".

This just gives an example from the text without offering any explanation or analysis.

- 2) Instead, it's much better to use **short** quotes as **evidence** to support a **point** you're making.
- 3) It makes the essay structure **clearer** and **smoother** if most quotes are **embedded** in your sentences.

It's better to use short, embedded quotes as evidence. Then you can go on to explain them.

In Shakespeare's time, sleepwalking was thought to be sinister. Lady Macbeth's doctor implies that she has brought her "unnatural troubles" (her sleepwalking) on herself by committing "unnatural deeds" (evil acts).

Get to know some literary language

- 1) Using **literary terms** in your answer will make your essay stand out — as long as you use them correctly.
- 2) When you're **revising**, think about literary terms that are **relevant** to the text and how you might **include** them in an essay. Take a look at the table below for some examples.

Literary Term	Definition	Example
Personification	A figure of speech that talks about a thing as if it's a person.	"the air / Nimble and sweetly recommends itself"
Simile	Compares one thing to another, often using 'like' and 'as'.	"look like the innocent flower"
Metaphor	Describing something by saying it is something else.	"Life's but a walking shadow"

This page is so exciting — I nearly...

Now now, let's all be grown-ups and avoid the obvious joke. It's a good way of remembering how to structure your paragraphs though. Point, Example, Explain, Develop. Simple. Maybe we could make a rap or something... anyone?

In the Exam

Keeping cool in the exam can be tricky. But if you take in all the stuff on this page, you'll soon have it down to a fine art. Then you can stroll out of that exam hall with the swagger of an essay-writing master.

Don't panic if you make a mistake

- 1) Okay, so say you've timed the exam beautifully. Instead of putting your feet up on the desk for the last 5 minutes, it's a good idea to **read through** your **answers** and **correct any mistakes**...
- 2) If you want to get rid of a mistake, **cross it out**. **Don't scribble** it out as this can look messy. Make any corrections **neatly** and **clearly** instead of writing on top of the words you've already written.

The author uses various literary ~~techniques~~ ^{techniques} to explore this theme.

This is the clearest way to correct a mistake. Don't be tempted to try writing on top of the original word.

- 3) If you've **left out** a **word** or a **phrase** and you've got space to add it in **above** the line it's missing from, write the missing bit above the line with a '^' to show exactly where it should go.

Re-read the sentence carefully to work out where the '^' symbol needs to go.

The writer uses imagery ^{and hyperbole} to draw attention to this point.

- 4) If you've left out whole **sentences** or **paragraphs**, write them in a **separate section** at the **end** of the essay. Put a **star** (*) next to both the **extra writing** and the **place** you want it to go.

Always keep an eye on the time

- 1) It's surprisingly **easy** to **run out of time** in exams. You've got to leave **enough time** to answer **all** the questions you're asked to do. You've also got to leave enough time to **finish** each essay properly — with a **clear ending**.
- 2) Here are some **tips** on how to **avoid** running out of time:

- Work out **how much time** you have for each part of your answer **before** you **start**.
- Take off a few minutes at the beginning to **plan**, and a **few minutes** at the end for your **conclusion**.
- Make sure you have a **watch** to **time yourself** — and keep checking it.
- Be **strict** with yourself — if you spend **too long** on one part of your answer, you may run out of time.
- If you're **running out of time**, keep **calm**, **finish** the **point** you're on and move on to your **conclusion**.



Stephanie never had a problem with keeping cool.

Treat an exam like a spa day — just relax...

Some people actually do lose the plot when they get into the exam. The trick is to keep calm and well... carry on. If you make sure you get your exam technique sorted, you'll be as relaxed as a sloth in a room full of easy chairs.

Sample Exam Question

And now the bit you've all been waiting for — a sample exam question and a lovely little plan. Go and make yourself a cup of tea, then settle down and enjoy.

Here's a sample exam question...

Read this feisty exam question. That's the best way to start...

In the exam, you'll be given the full extract in the exam paper.

Read the question carefully. Underline the important bits.

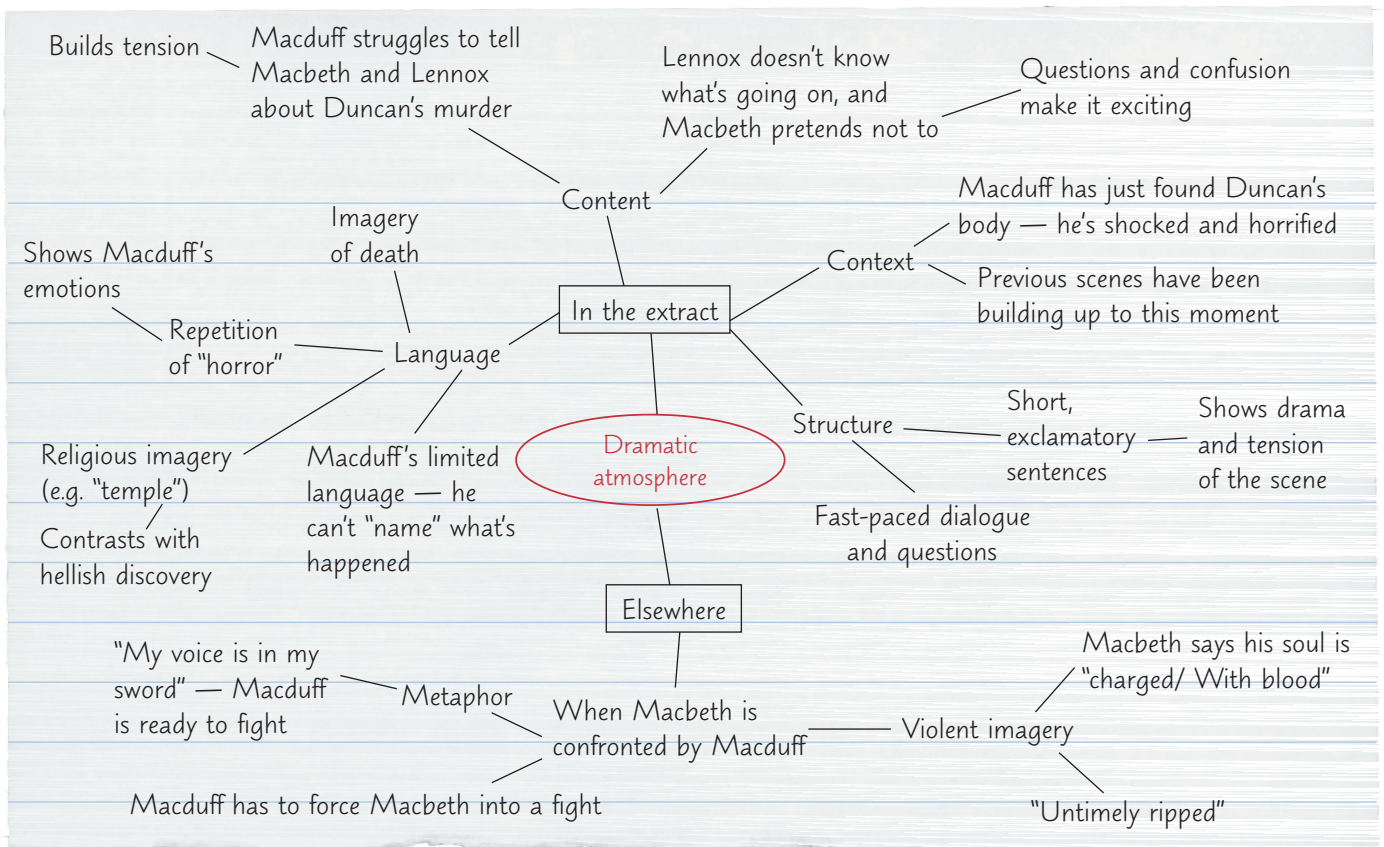
The focus here is on how language makes a scene dramatic — so think about things like imagery and symbolism, as well as the pace of the dialogue.

Q1 In Act Two, Scene Three, read the section that begins, "Oh horror! Horror! Horror!" and ends with the entrance of Lady Macbeth. How does Shakespeare use language to create a dramatic atmosphere in this section, and at another point in the play?

You'll need to discuss the passage given in detail but you also need to refer to a different part of the play.

Back up each point with evidence from the text and analyse why it's important.

Here's how you could plan your answer



What do examiners eat? Why, egg-sam-wiches of course...

The most important thing to remember is DON'T PANIC. Take a deep breath, read the question, read it again, write a plan... take another deep breath... and start writing. Leave a few minutes at the end to check your answer too.

Worked Answer

These pages will show you how to take an OK answer and turn it into a really good one that will impress the examiner.

Use your introduction to get off to a good start

These pages are all about how to word your sentences to impress the examiner, so we haven't included everything from the plan on page 66.

You might start with something like...

Shakespeare uses language throughout the play to create a dramatic and exciting atmosphere. In this extract, Macduff is horrified at finding Duncan's body. His language shows how awful the King's death is, and how it has affected him.

- 1) This intro is **okay**. It describes what's happened and looks at the **atmosphere** of the extract.
- 2) Using the **key words** from the question gives your essay **focus**, and shows the examiner you're on **track** and that you're thinking about the question from the start.
- 3) But there's still room for **improvement** — here's a better introduction...

This tells the examiner that you've thought about the dramatic purpose of the language.

This shows that you're not just describing the language used, but also focusing on its effect.

In this extract, Shakespeare uses language to make the atmosphere dramatic and exciting. Macduff has just discovered Duncan's body; as the audience never sees the body, Shakespeare uses Macduff's reaction to convey how horrific the murder was. Macduff's language shows how shocked and horrified he is, which adds drama to the scene. Lennox and Macbeth both ask questions, which add to the tension and (in Macbeth's case) provide dramatic irony. Shakespeare also uses language to create drama elsewhere in the play. For example, violent imagery and commands build tension during the confrontation between Macbeth and Macduff in Act 5, Scene 8.

Develop each point with detailed comments and quotes

Macduff's repetition of "horror" emphasises how awful his discovery was. He talks of "great doom" and speaks in short sentences. He uses a lot of exclamations, which makes his language dramatic.

- 1) This paragraph makes lots of **points** about the language in the extract. But it doesn't **develop** the points **fully** or give details about **how** the language makes it dramatic and exciting.
- 2) You should develop your points with **detail** and comments:

This makes a relevant point about the extract, and then goes on to comment on the language used.

This develops the point about how Macduff's language shows his state of mind.

Macduff's distress at finding Duncan's body is clear from the language he uses. He speaks in short, exclamatory sentences, which makes him sound panicked and upset. This increases the pace of the dialogue and adds to the excitement of the scene. Shakespeare uses exclamations such as "Murder and treason!" to make the language disjointed, which reflects Macduff's thoughts at this moment. He is so shocked by the discovery that he cannot control his speech. This is further highlighted by his statement that "Confusion now hath made his masterpiece" and by Macbeth and Lennox's questions that he cannot answer. When Macduff says "Do not bid me speak", Shakespeare shows Macduff's absolute "horror" at what he has seen. This is reinforced by the repetition of the word "horror", which adds to the drama of the scene.

Remember to back up your points with quotes from the play.

Referring back to the question keeps your answer focused.

Worked Answer

Write about the rest of the play

In this question, you can't just focus on the extract — you need to discuss the language elsewhere in the play.

Shakespeare also uses language to create a dramatic atmosphere in other parts of the play. For example, in Act 5, Scene 8, he uses language to make the confrontation between Macbeth and Macduff more tense.

- 1) This paragraph still focuses on how language is used to create drama, but discusses another part of the play.
- 2) You can make this paragraph better by giving more detailed examples and backing up points with quotes.

In Act 5, Scene 8, Macduff finally encounters Macbeth. The first words Macduff speaks are "Turn, hell-hound". This command highlights Macduff's rage and determination to kill Macbeth, which creates drama. The words also link Macbeth to hell; this emphasises that it is a battle between good and evil and thus stresses the importance of the outcome. Macbeth is reluctant to fight, telling Macduff that his "soul is too much charged" with blood. Macbeth's unwillingness hints that a peaceful resolution may be possible — this uncertainty builds tension and drama as the audience waits to learn how the play will end.

The question asks about language, so find examples of language features that back up your points.

Don't forget to explain how your points link to the exam question.

- 3) Don't forget to link your answer to the plot of the play as a whole:

During the fight, Macduff reveals that he wasn't "of woman born", but instead was "untimely ripped" from his mother's womb. This is dramatic not only because of the violent imagery Macduff uses, but because it reveals to Macbeth that he has been deceived by the apparitions and he is not invincible.

Mentioning key plot points, such as the apparitions, shows that you understand how dramatic features all link together for maximum effect.

Finish your essay in style

You could say:

In 'Macbeth', Shakespeare uses language very effectively to make scenes dramatic and exciting. He uses violent language and imagery to increase tension during key scenes.

- 1) This conclusion is okay but it doesn't summarise how Shakespeare uses language.
- 2) So to make it really impressive you could say something like...

In 'Macbeth', Shakespeare uses language very effectively to create a dramatic and exciting atmosphere. In the extract, Shakespeare uses Macduff to convey the "horror" of Duncan's murder, using dramatic language and short exclamations to make the scene tense and exciting. Macduff's shock and grief are perhaps more effective than actually showing the murder on stage. Similarly, in Act 5, Scene 8, Shakespeare uses violent language, vivid imagery and fast-paced dialogue to build tension, and to keep the audience gripped.

This shows that you've considered the dramatic effect of the scene and are expressing a personal opinion.

Make your final sentence really stand out — it's your last opportunity to impress the examiner.

Why do alligators write good essays? Their quotes are so snappy...

It seems like there's a lot to remember on these two pages, but there's not really. To summarise — write a scorching intro and a sizzling conclusion, make a good range of points (one per paragraph) and include plenty of examples. Easy.

Index

A

ambition 1, 10, 15, 19, 26, 28, 38
 animals 15, 19
 apparitions 17-19, 34, 48, 50
 appearances 31, 32, 34, 39, 43, 54
 asides 6
 atmosphere 50, 51

B

Banquo 10, 15, 16, 32, 38
 Banquo's ghost 16, 32, 42, 51
 battles 9, 21, 22, 41, 50
 betrayal 1, 39
 Birnam Wood 18, 21-23, 44
 blank verse 21, 52
 blood 21, 29, 42, 57

C

Caesarean section 18, 23
 circular structure 23, 39, 47
 clothing 21, 57
 comedy 35, 51
 confusing words 8

D

dagger 13, 27, 42, 51
 darkness 13, 14, 16, 21, 56
 deception 43
 disease 56
 Donalbain 14, 31
 dramatic irony 14, 20, 50, 54
 Duncan 11-13, 30, 31, 40

E

eating 57
 entrances 6, 23
 evil 10, 15, 17, 34, 40-42, 56
 exam advice 60-68
 exits 6, 23
 extended metaphors 11, 21, 55

F

family 19, 33
 fatal flaw 38, 44, 47
 fate 26, 44
 fear 19, 21
 Fleance 16
 foreshadowing 13, 15, 38
 free will 44

G

gender 29, 41
 Globe Theatre 2
 good 16, 30, 33, 40, 41
 grief 20, 33
 guilt 15, 16, 21, 26, 27, 29, 41, 42, 57

H

health 21, 56
 Hecate 17, 34
 heir 31, 40

I

imagery 15, 19, 30, 41, 55-57
 introductions 62, 63
 irony 12, 14, 20, 50, 54

J

jam 45
 justice 33

K

key scenes 49
 kings 14, 17, 20, 23, 27, 30, 31, 40

L

Lady Macbeth 11, 12, 21, 22, 28, 38
 Lady Macduff 19, 33
 language 50-57
 light 56
 loyalty 11, 17, 20, 31, 33, 39

M

Macbeth 10, 11, 13-18, 23, 26, 27, 29, 38, 40-44
 Macduff 14, 20, 23, 33, 38
 Macpoodle 39
 madness 21, 22, 29, 42, 57
 Malcolm 14, 20, 23, 31, 38
 marriage 29
 masculinity 11, 12, 15, 20, 23, 27, 28, 30, 33, 41, 57
 metaphors 55
 minor characters 17, 35
 minor scenes 49
 mood 9, 47, 50, 51
 morality 38
 murder 13, 15, 16, 19, 20, 26
 murderers 15, 35

Index

N

natural order 29, 33, 34, 40,
42, 56
nature 21, 56
noggin 25

O

omens 14
oxymorons 15, 54

P

pace 53
paradox 9, 34, 43, 54
personification 55
planning 62, 66
plot 49
plot summary 4, 5
poetry 7, 52, 53
Porter 14, 35, 51
power 29, 38, 39
prophecies 10, 11, 18, 23, 27,
32, 34, 39, 43, 44
prose 7, 21, 33, 52
puns 54

R

religion 40, 41
revenge 20
rhyme 7, 9, 34, 52
rhythm 7, 52, 53
Rosse 20, 35

S

Scotland 2
self-fulfilling prophecies 23,
34, 44
senses 51
settings 50
Shakespeare 1
similes 55
Siward 23, 35
sleep 13, 29, 57
sleepwalking 21, 29, 42, 43,
57
soliloquies 11, 12, 15, 22, 53
stagecraft 6, 47
stage directions 6, 13, 18
structure 47-49
supernatural 27, 34, 41, 42, 51
suspense 12, 48, 51
symbolism 55-57

T

Thane of Cawdor 11, 26, 30,
39, 43
thanes 21, 35
tragedy 6, 38, 47, 48
tyrants 19, 20, 26

V

violence 9, 38, 40, 41, 57
visions 13, 42

W

washing hands 13, 21, 29, 57
weather 9, 50
Witches 9, 10, 17, 18, 27, 32,
34, 41-44, 52, 54
word order 7, 53
wordplay 54

Macbeth — we've totally nailed it!

OK, if you're doing *Macbeth* at GCSE, you've come to the right place!

- **Themes, characters, language...**
Yep, got them all covered!
- **Key quotes from the text...**
We're on it — they're all in here!
- **Practice, practice, practice, including exam style...**
More than you can shake a stick at!
- **Brilliant exam tips...**
Of course. All you have to do is listen and learn!
- **Proper chatty language you can understand...**
Well, it's CGP — that's what we do best!

You *could* choose someone else's dreary Text Guide...

...but really — why, *why* would you do that? 😊

Contents may be confusing
if read upside down



ETM43

£5.95
(Retail Price)

www.cgpbooks.co.uk