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Best of luck in your exams,

Edward Mooney – MA Cantab, PGCE.

Qualified and experienced teacher, tutor and examiner.



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Introduction

(Please note: this is the extended version of this revision guide. A more concise, even more last-minute version is also available from [GCSEEnglish.uk](https://www.gcseenglish.uk).)

This last-minute revision guide is designed to help you prepare for the *Macbeth* question in your AQA GCSE English Literature Paper 1 exam (8702/1).

Macbeth is assessed in Section A of the exam, and you will have 52.5 minutes to complete your answer. If you have 25% extra time, your total time for this section will be 65 minutes and 37.5 seconds (rounded to 66 minutes for practical purposes).

The exam question will present you with an extract from the play followed by a question asking you to explore a theme or character. You must analyse both the extract and the play as a whole. This guide aims to remove any mystery about the exam and help you focus on the most effective ways to prepare.

Since this is a last-minute revision guide, it does not contain every possible piece of information about *Macbeth* or the exam. However, it covers the key elements needed for success, helping you focus on what truly matters in the final days before your exam.

How Many Marks Are Available?

Your *Macbeth* essay is worth 30 marks for content and analysis. Additionally, 4 marks are awarded for AO4 (technical accuracy), which assesses spelling, punctuation, and grammar. This means your response is worth a total of 34 marks. To maximise your score, make sure to write clearly and accurately, using a formal academic style and correct punctuation.

The Four Key Revision Tasks

If you are feeling overwhelmed, focus on these four essential revision tasks:

1. **Read the text** – Even if you have studied *Macbeth* in class, take time to re-read key scenes. Understanding the plot, characters, and themes will allow you to engage confidently with any question.



2. **Memorise key quotations** – You need to reference the play accurately in your response. Aim to memorise at least 10 key quotations, ensuring they cover characters, themes, and dramatic moments. Shorter quotes are easier to remember and can be used flexibly in different essays.
3. **Read model answers** – Studying high-quality example essays, such as those available from [GCSEEnglish.uk](https://www.gcseenglish.uk), will help you understand how to structure your response, use evidence effectively, make links to relevant context and develop your analysis.
4. **Complete timed essay practice** – The best way to prepare for the exam is to practise writing full answers under timed conditions. Use a stopwatch and stick to the allotted time to simulate exam conditions. Practising within time limits will improve your confidence, speed, and ability to structure your ideas clearly.

***Note:** you should hand write your practise essays on lined A4 paper unless you know that you (or your school) will be typing your exams. If this is the case, practise typing in a blank document with spelling and grammar checking tools turned off.*

About the Author

This revision guide was written by Edward Mooney, an experienced teacher, tutor and examiner. He has also written a series of high-quality Grade 9 model answers for the GCSE English exams, which are available for purchase on Amazon and [GCSEEnglish.uk](https://www.gcseenglish.uk).

Final Thoughts

This guide is here to simplify your revision and boost your confidence. While it may not cover every detail, it provides the essential knowledge and skills you need to approach the exam with clarity and focus.

Stay calm, use your revision time wisely, and remember: preparation is the key to success.

Best of luck in your exam!



Revision Checklist

<input type="checkbox"/>	Re-read the text in full.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Read a modern English version of the text.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Watch a good film/theatre adaptation.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Read and remember the plot summary.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Read and remember the character summaries.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Read and remember information about the text's main themes.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Read and remember information about the text's form, structure and language.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Read and remember information about the text's historical context.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Read and remember information about the dramatisation of the text.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Read and memorise key vocabulary.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Read and memorise key quotes.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Read model answers.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Write timed essays using past questions.	



Plot summary

William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is a tragedy that explores themes of ambition, fate, guilt, and the supernatural. The story follows the rise and fall of Macbeth, a Scottish nobleman whose unchecked ambition leads to his ultimate downfall.

The play begins with three Witches meeting on a heath in Scotland, setting an ominous tone. They prophesy that Macbeth, the Thane of Glamis, will become the Thane of Cawdor and eventually the King of Scots. When Macbeth and his friend Banquo encounter the Witches, they are intrigued by the predictions. Soon after, messengers arrive, confirming that King Duncan has granted Macbeth the title of Thane of Cawdor, a reward for his valour in battle, having apparently single-handedly saved the kingdom from rebellion and invasion. This fulfilment of the first prophecy ignites Macbeth's ambition and plants the idea that he could become king.

Encouraged by his wife, Lady Macbeth, Macbeth decides to take fate into his own hands. Lady Macbeth is a powerful influence, manipulating her husband and questioning his masculinity to persuade him to kill King Duncan. When Duncan arrives at Macbeth's castle for a feast, Macbeth hesitates but is ultimately driven by his wife's insistence. That night, Macbeth murders Duncan in his sleep and frames the King's grooms (attendants/guards) for the crime. The next morning, the murder is discovered, and in a panic, Macbeth kills the grooms to prevent any questioning. Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, flee, fearing for their lives, which makes them appear guilty. With the throne now vacant, Macbeth is crowned King of Scots.

However, Macbeth is not content. He remembers that the Witches also prophesied that Banquo's descendants, not Macbeth's, would inherit the throne. Fearing that his position is not safe, and wishing to secure the throne for his descendants (yet to be born), Macbeth orders the murder of Banquo and his son, Fleance. While Banquo is killed, Fleance escapes, keeping the prophecy alive. At a banquet, Macbeth is haunted by Banquo's ghost, causing him to act irrationally in front of his guests. This fuels suspicion about his role in Duncan's murder.

Macbeth visits the Witches again, seeking more answers. They warn him to beware of Macduff, tell him that no man born of a woman can harm him, and assure him that he will not be defeated until Birnam Wood moves to Dunsinane Hill. Believing himself nearly invincible, Macbeth grows more ruthless. He orders



the slaughter of Macduff's family, but Macduff himself has fled to England, where he joins forces with Malcolm to overthrow Macbeth.

Meanwhile, Lady Macbeth, overcome with guilt, begins sleepwalking and obsessively trying to wash imaginary blood from her hands. Her descent into madness leads to her eventual suicide. As Malcolm's forces advance, they use branches from Birnam Wood as camouflage, making it appear as if the forest is moving, thus fulfilling the Witches' prophecy.

In the final battle, Macbeth fights Macduff, who reveals that he was born via a caesarean section, meaning he was not "of woman born" (5.8.13) in the traditional sense. Realising his fate is sealed, Macbeth fights bravely but is ultimately killed. Malcolm is declared King of Scots, restoring order to the kingdom.

Thus, *Macbeth* is a cautionary tale of unrestrained ambition and its devastating consequences.



Character summaries

Macbeth

Macbeth is a Scottish nobleman and a valiant warrior who is initially loyal to King Duncan. However, after hearing the Witches' prophecy that he will become king, his ambition consumes him. Encouraged by Lady Macbeth, he murders Duncan and seizes the throne. As king, he becomes increasingly paranoid and ruthless, ordering more killings to secure his power. His tyranny isolates him, and he is ultimately defeated by Macduff. Despite his descent into madness and brutality, he retains some courage, fighting to the end. His tragic downfall illustrates the dangers of excessive ambition and moral corruption.

Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth is Macbeth's ambitious and manipulative wife. She plays a key role in persuading him to kill King Duncan, questioning his masculinity and determination. Initially strong-willed and ruthless, she later succumbs to overwhelming guilt, which manifests in sleepwalking and hallucinations of bloodstains on her hands. Her descent into madness contrasts with her earlier dominance over Macbeth. Eventually, unable to bear the guilt, she takes her own life. Lady Macbeth's transformation from a powerful instigator to a broken woman highlights the psychological consequences of crime and unrestrained ambition.

Banquo

Banquo is a noble and brave Scottish general, as well as Macbeth's friend. Like Macbeth, he hears the Witches' prophecy, but unlike Macbeth, he does not act on it. The Witches predict that his descendants will inherit the throne, which makes Macbeth view him as a threat. Banquo remains honourable but is ultimately murdered on Macbeth's orders. However, his son, Fleance, escapes, ensuring the prophecy's fulfilment. Banquo's ghost later haunts Macbeth, symbolising his guilt and fear. Banquo serves as a foil to Macbeth, representing a path of integrity rather than ruthless ambition.

Macduff



Macduff is a loyal Scottish nobleman who becomes Macbeth's primary adversary. He suspects Macbeth's involvement in Duncan's murder and ultimately joins forces with Malcolm to overthrow him. Macbeth orders the brutal murder of Macduff's wife and children, fuelling Macduff's desire for revenge. In the final battle, Macduff reveals that he was born via caesarean section, fulfilling the Witches' prophecy that no man "of woman born" (4.1.79) would harm Macbeth. He kills Macbeth, restoring justice to Scotland. Macduff embodies loyalty, righteousness, and the personal cost of resisting tyranny.

King Duncan

Duncan is King of Scots at the start of the play. He is a just and benevolent ruler who rewards loyalty and valour, naming Macbeth the Thane of Cawdor as a reward for saving the kingdom from rebellion and invasion. However, Duncan's trusting nature makes him vulnerable, as he fails to see Macbeth's ambition. His murder at Macbeth's hands marks the turning point of the play, plunging Scotland into chaos. Duncan's goodness contrasts sharply with Macbeth's tyranny, and his death serves as a symbol of lost order and rightful rule.

Malcolm

Malcolm is Duncan's eldest son and rightful heir to the throne. After his father's murder, he flees to England, fearing for his safety. Initially cautious, he grows into a wise and strategic leader. He tests Macduff's loyalty before agreeing to fight Macbeth. With the support of the English army, he overthrows Macbeth and restores order to Scotland. His final speech as king signifies a return to justice and stability. Malcolm represents legitimate leadership and contrasts with Macbeth's illegitimate rule.

The Witches

The Witches are mysterious supernatural beings who set the play's events in motion. They prophesy Macbeth's rise to power and Banquo's future lineage, fuelling Macbeth's ambition. Speaking in riddles and paradoxes, they manipulate Macbeth with misleading truths. Their role in the play raises questions about fate and free will: do The Witches simply predict events or actively influence them?



Their eerie presence and cryptic language contribute to the play's dark and ominous atmosphere.



Themes

Ambition

Ambition is the *hamartia*, fatal flaw, that leads to Macbeth's bloody downfall. Initially a noble warrior, Macbeth's unchecked ambition, fuelled by the Witches and Lady Macbeth, leads him to commit regicide. His Machiavellian desire for power turns him into a tyrant who is willing to kill anyone, including children, who threatens his throne. Lady Macbeth also embodies ambition; eager to be queen, she pushes her husband to act but later succumbs to guilt. Shakespeare presents ambition as a double-edged sword, capable of leading to both greatness and destruction when not tempered by morality.

Good and Evil

The play explores the battle between good and evil, with Macbeth's descent into tyranny symbolising the corrupting power of unrestrained ambition. King Duncan and Banquo represent goodness, while Macbeth, influenced by the Witches, becomes increasingly evil. Lady Macbeth initially embraces evil, calling upon dark spirits to fill her with "direst cruelty," (1.5.42) but she later regrets her actions. The contrast between Macbeth and Macduff highlights the struggle between tyranny and justice. Shakespeare suggests that evil is seductive but ultimately self-destructive, as Macbeth's crimes isolate him and lead to his demise. The play reinforces the idea that virtue ultimately triumphs over corruption.

The Supernatural

Supernatural elements shape Macbeth's fate, with the Witches' prophecies planting the seed of ambition in him. Their cryptic messages manipulate him, creating a false sense of security. Lady Macbeth also invokes dark forces to rid her of weakness, showing her willingness to embrace the supernatural for power. Macbeth's visions, including the floating dagger and Banquo's ghost, reflect his deteriorating state of mind. The Witches act as agents of chaos, raising questions about fate and free will: do The Witches simply predict events or actively influence them? Shakespeare uses the supernatural to blur reality, creating an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, and a world full of dark omens, that drives the characters' actions. Significantly, neither Macbeth nor Lady Macbeth seem to have any



relationship with Christian supernatural entities – God, angels, the Holy Spirit – suggesting that their embrace of illegitimate supernatural belief leads them to their destruction.

Masculinity

Masculinity is repeatedly challenged and redefined throughout the play. Lady Macbeth's cruel mockery emasculates Macbeth, questioning his manhood and suggesting he is a coward for, correctly, seeking to renege on their plan to commit regicide. Macbeth's need to prove that he will "do all that may become a man" (1.7.46) pushes him into committing murder. Lady Macbeth associates masculinity with aggression and power and calls for the spirits to "unsex" (1.5.40) her so that she may act with the masculine ruthlessness she believes is necessary for success. However, Macbeth's increasing cruelty makes him a tyrant rather than a noble leader. Macduff, in contrast, balances strength with emotion, showing that true masculinity includes compassion and love: for wife, for children, for country. When Malcolm tells Macduff to "dispute it like a man," (4.3.222) he replies that he must "feel it as a man," (4.3.224) suggesting that masculinity is not solely about violence but also about honour and justice.

Appearances and Reality

Throughout the play, appearances are deceptive, creating a world where reality is uncertain. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth put on false faces to hide their murderous intentions, embodying the Witches' riddle that "fair is foul, and foul is fair." (1.1.12) The Witches use ambiguous language to mislead Macbeth, making him believe he is invincible. Banquo remains sceptical, understanding that the supernatural can deceive and betray. Even Macbeth's hallucinations blur the line between real and imagined. Shakespeare warns that those who rely too much on appearances risk downfall, as Macbeth's trust in misleading visions leads to his ultimate demise.

Kingship and Tyranny

Shakespeare contrasts the qualities of a rightful king with those of a tyrant. King Duncan represents justice, wisdom, and generosity, while Macbeth's reign is marked by paranoia and bloodshed. Macbeth's rule is based on fear rather than



loyalty, making him a tyrant who ultimately loses his people's support. Malcolm, in contrast, tests Macduff's loyalty by pretending to be a corrupt leader, proving he understands the difference between kingship and tyranny. Shakespeare suggests that a true ruler must govern with morality and justice, whereas a tyrant's ruthless ambition leads only to destruction.

Loyalty

Loyalty is a crucial theme, as characters must choose between allegiance to the rightful king or personal ambition. Macbeth begins as a loyal subject but betrays Duncan, showing that unrestrained ambition can override duty. Banquo remains honourable despite the Witches' prophecy, refusing to act against Macbeth. Macduff, the play's most loyal character, sacrifices everything to restore Scotland's rightful ruler. Lady Macbeth's initial loyalty to her husband crumbles under guilt. Shakespeare presents loyalty as a defining trait of noble characters, while betrayal, as seen in Macbeth's actions, leads to chaos and downfall.

Guilt

Guilt haunts both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, serving as a consequence of their crimes. Macbeth initially hesitates to kill Duncan, aware of the moral weight of his actions. After the murder, he is plagued by hallucinations, hearing voices that declare he will "sleep no more." (2.2.44) Lady Macbeth, who seemed fearless, later succumbs to guilt, obsessively trying to wash imaginary blood from her hands. Her suicide is the ultimate consequence of her remorse. Shakespeare suggests that guilt is inescapable and that even the most ruthless characters cannot silence their conscience forever.



Form

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* takes the form of a classical tragedy as outlined in Aristotle's *Poetics* (c335 BC), adhering to key elements such as a noble protagonist with a fatal flaw, a series of dramatic reversals, and the evocation of catharsis in the audience. The play's tightly structured five-act form, use of verse, and dramatic techniques enhance its tragic impact, making it one of Shakespeare's most compelling tragedies.

At the heart of *Macbeth* is the concept of *hamartia*, a term used by Aristotle to describe a protagonist's fatal flaw that leads to their downfall. Macbeth, a valiant warrior, initially embodies noble qualities, but his excessive ambition blinds him to morality and reason. His downfall begins when he chooses to act on the Witches' prophecy, murdering King Duncan to seize the throne. This moment of tragic misjudgement sets him on a path of destruction. Unlike a mere villain, Macbeth does not lack greatness but rather possesses a tragic flaw that transforms him into a tyrant. His inability to restrain his ambition, combined with his susceptibility to manipulation, seals his fate.

A central element of Aristotelian tragedy is the struggle between a protagonist and an antagonist. Macbeth, as the protagonist, is both the hero and the architect of his own downfall. His antagonist is not a single figure but rather a combination of external and internal forces. The witches act as supernatural antagonists, planting the seed of ambition in his mind, while Macduff, representing justice and morality, becomes his ultimate human adversary. However, Macbeth's greatest antagonist is himself. His conscience battles with his ambition, and as the play progresses, his inner conflict is replaced by paranoia and recklessness. The psychological torment he endures adds depth to his character, making him a compelling tragic figure rather than a one-dimensional villain.

Aristotle also emphasised catharsis, the purging of emotions such as pity and fear that a tragedy evokes in its audience. In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare carefully crafts the protagonist's decline to maximise this effect. The audience initially sympathises with Macbeth, recognising his bravery and potential for greatness. Even after he commits murder, his psychological torment means some may still fill sympathy for him. However, as he becomes increasingly tyrannical, killing Banquo and Macduff's family, any remaining sympathy erodes. By the final act, when Macbeth realises the witches' prophecies have deceived him and faces inevitable death, the



audience experiences catharsis. His downfall restores moral order, reinforcing the idea that excessive ambition leads to self-destruction.

Thus, through its adherence to Aristotelian principles, *Macbeth* exemplifies the form of classical tragedy. It presents a noble protagonist whose *hamartia* leads to his downfall, a struggle against antagonistic forces, and a resolution that provides catharsis for the audience.



Structure

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* follows a well-defined dramatic structure that aligns with Freytag's Pyramid, a five-act model of dramatic progression. The play's structure moves through exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and catastrophe, reinforcing its tragic nature.

1. Exposition (Act 1) – The play begins with the witches meeting on the heath, setting an ominous tone. Their prophecy that Macbeth will become king introduces the central conflict. Meanwhile, Macbeth is portrayed as a noble warrior, rewarded by King Duncan with the title of Thane of Cawdor. Lady Macbeth's introduction establishes her as an ambitious and manipulative force, planting the idea of murder in her husband's mind.
2. Rising Action (Acts 1–2) – Macbeth's inner turmoil is evident as he contemplates Duncan's murder. Lady Macbeth's influence persuades him to act, and the murder is carried out in Act 2. However, rather than bringing him security, the crime leads to paranoia. The killing of the guards, Malcolm and Donalbain's flight, and Macbeth's coronation mark his descent into moral corruption.
3. Climax (Act 3) – The turning point occurs when Macbeth orders the murder of Banquo and his son, Fleance. Although Banquo is killed, Fleance escapes, keeping the witches' prophecy alive. At the banquet, Macbeth's vision of Banquo's ghost reveals his escalating instability. This is the moment where Macbeth fully commits to tyranny, no longer hesitating in his violent actions.
4. Falling Action (Acts 4–5.7) – Macbeth seeks out the witches again, and their new prophecies give him false confidence. He orders the massacre of Macduff's family, sealing his fate as a ruthless tyrant. Meanwhile, Lady Macbeth, overwhelmed by guilt, begins sleepwalking. Malcolm and Macduff gather an army, marching toward Scotland. The prophecies begin to unfold as Birnam Wood appears to move.
5. Catastrophe (Act 5.8) – Macbeth, realising he has been deceived, fights bravely but is ultimately slain by Macduff, who was not "of woman born." (5.8.13) Malcolm is restored to the throne, re-establishing order in Scotland. Macbeth's tragic downfall completes the play's structure.



Use of Verse and Prose in *Macbeth*

Shakespeare's use of different metrical patterns reflects the psychological and social dynamics of the play.

- Iambic Pentameter – Most of *Macbeth* is written in blank verse, using unrhymed iambic pentameter (ten syllables per line, alternating unstressed and stressed beats). This form conveys nobility and control. Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, and Duncan speak in iambic pentameter, reinforcing their status. However, as Macbeth descends into paranoia, his verse becomes more erratic, with shorter lines and interruptions.
- Trochaic Tetrameter – The Witches speak in trochaic tetrameter (four stressed-unstressed beats per line). This unnatural rhythm, coupled with rhyme, gruesome language and strange dancing, creates an unsettling, bizarre effect. Lines such as “Double, double, toil and trouble” (4.1.35) contrast with the noble speech patterns of other characters, emphasising the Witches' supernatural nature.
- Prose – Shakespeare uses prose (natural speech without a regular rhythm or rhyme scheme) for characters of lower status or for moments of madness. The Porter's scene in Act 2 provides comic relief in prose. Later, Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene is also in prose, signalling her mental collapse.



Language

Blood

Blood imagery, symbolising guilt and violence, recurs throughout the play. After murdering Duncan, Macbeth is horrified: “Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?” (2.2.78-79), showing his immediate remorse. Later, Lady Macbeth’s guilt manifests in hallucinations: “Out, damned spot! Out, I say!” (5.1.30). Blood imagery reinforces how violence stains the conscience, suggesting that guilt literally cannot be washed away, highlighting the consequences of excessive ambition.

Night

Night represents concealment and evil. Macbeth calls for darkness to hide his thoughts: “Stars, hide your fires; / Let not light see my black and deep desires” (1.4.50-51). Similarly, Lady Macbeth invokes night for secrecy: “Come, thick night, / And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell” (1.5.49-50). Night imagery emphasises the theme of deception and the influence of the supernatural.

Milk

Milk symbolises innocence and weakness. Lady Macbeth scorns Macbeth’s reluctance, saying he is “too full o’ the milk of human kindness” (1.5.17), equating milk with compassion. She contrasts this with her own willingness to commit violence: “I would, while it was smiling in my face, / Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums, / And dashed the brains out” (1.7.56-58). Milk represents the rejection of nurturing instincts in favour of ambition.

Disguise

Disguise represents deception and betrayal. Lady Macbeth advises Macbeth to “look like the innocent flower, / But be the serpent under’t” (1.5.64-65), highlighting the importance of false appearances for seizing and retaining the throne. Macbeth later questions Banquo’s loyalty, saying: “There’s daggers in men’s smiles,” (2.3.146) suggesting that people can easily hide their true intentions with



deceitful facial expressions. Disguise imagery is also used when Lady Macbeth and Macbeth attempt to hide their actions by putting on their nightclothes after Duncan's murder, and when Malcolm's army hide behind tree branches in order to march on Dunsinane.

Religion

Religious imagery underscores Macbeth's (im)morality and guilt. After Duncan's murder, Macbeth struggles to pray: "Amen / Stuck in my throat" (2.2.32-33), symbolising divine condemnation. Macduff refers to Scotland's suffering under Macbeth as "each new morn / New widows howl, new orphans cry, new sorrows strike heaven" (4.3.4-5), reinforcing the theme of divine justice. Failure to be religious, to follow the example of the saintly King Edward, as discussed by Malcolm and Macduff in Act Four, highlights Macbeth's moral corruption.

Disease

Lady Macbeth frequently uses disease imagery to criticise Macbeth's lack of courage. She worries that he lacks the Machiavellian "illness" (1.5.19) to kill Duncan (1.5) and mocks his hesitation by calling him "green and pale" (1.7.37) and "infirm of purpose." (2.2.55) As guilt consumes them, Macbeth describes his mind as "full of scorpions" (3.2.36), while the doctor acknowledges Lady Macbeth's "mind diseas'd," (5.3.41) which cannot be cured. Under Macbeth's rule, Scotland also suffers, depicted as a sick nation. Later, the thanes are described as the "med'cine of the sickly weal," (5.2.27) coming to heal the kingdom.

Birds

Birds symbolise fate and foreshadow events. Lady Macbeth notes Duncan's doomed arrival: "The raven himself is hoarse / That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan" (1.5.37-38). After Duncan's death, Ross describes unnatural occurrences, reading them as an omen of bad times for Scotland: "A falcon, towering in her pride of place, / Was by a mousing owl hawked at and killed" (2.4.12-13). Later, Macduff's son compares his life without a father to that of a vulnerable bird. Then, Macduff, upon hearing of the gruesome murder of his wife and children mourns



the loss of his “pretty chicks and their dam” at the “fell swoop” of a “hell-kite.” (4.3.219-221) Thus, bird imagery reinforces themes of fate and innocence lost.



Dramatisation

Casting Choices

- **The Witches:** Can be grotesque or sinisterly human. Goold's 2010 film portrays them as eerie nurses, while Kurzel's 2015 adaptation makes them ethereal and elemental.
- **Macbeth:** Must balance nobility with paranoia. His reaction to the Witches—*"Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair"* (1.3.133-135)—can be performed with trembling, a shaking voice, or a tense pause.
- **Lady Macbeth:** Initially commanding but later fragile. *"A little water clears us of this deed"* (2.2.70) could be delivered coldly or with hidden hysteria.

Performance Choices

- **Macbeth's reaction to Fleance's escape:** *"Then comes my fit again"* (3.4.21) could be performed with pacing, gripping a chair, or throwing a goblet in frustration.
- **Macbeth's reaction to Lady Macbeth's death:** *"She should have died hereafter"* (5.5.16) may be delivered indifferently or regretfully, as in Fassbender's 2015 portrayal, where he stands motionless in despair.
- **Soliloquies and Asides:** *"Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow"* (5.5.18-27) could be spoken numbly, with vacant eyes or slumped posture, emphasising Macbeth's detachment.

Staging Choices

Lighting

- **Witches' Scenes:** Flickering light or torches for an eerie atmosphere.
- **Duncan's Murder:** Deep red or total darkness symbolising moral descent.
- **Final Scene:** Bright lighting for Malcolm's coronation, restoring order.

Sound



- **Witches' Voices:** Whispered or overlapping for an unsettling effect.
- **Macbeth's Conflict:** Echoing "*Is this a dagger*" (2.1.33) to show his fractured mind.
- **Lady Macbeth's Madness:** Distant dripping water reinforcing guilt.

Visual Effects

- **Banquo's Ghost:** Invisible or a bloodied figure emerging from darkness.
- **Apparitions:** Kurzel's 2015 film shows them as spectral children in mist.

Costume

- **The Witches:** Ranging from ragged robes to eerie modern uniforms.
- **Macbeth & Lady Macbeth:** Regal at first, becoming dishevelled as they unravel.

Scenery and Props

- **Minimalist vs. Elaborate:** Coen's 2011 adaptation used stark black-and-white contrasts.
- **Blood Motif:** Lady Macbeth's handwashing enhanced with visible stains.

Final Scene: Malcolm Proclaimed King

A strong, confident delivery, triumphant music, and bright lighting should symbolise hope and stability returning to Scotland.



Historical context

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was written and first performed around 1606, during the reign of King James VI of Scotland, who ascended the English throne in 1603 as King James I of England. Historians typically refer to him as King James VI and I, and the era is known as Jacobean (from *Jacobus*, meaning James). The play reflects key aspects of Jacobean society, including beliefs about witchcraft, the nature of kingship, and political anxieties. Shakespeare drew upon historical sources and tailored the play to suit his royal patron, making *Macbeth* not just a dramatic tragedy but also a commentary on contemporary concerns.

Shakespeare's Life and Career

By the time Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*, he was an established playwright, with works such as *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *King Lear* already performed. Many of these plays share themes with *Macbeth*, including kingship, ambition, and the supernatural. The play reflects Shakespeare's evolving style; its fast-paced, brutal nature contrasts with the more meditative earlier tragedies like *Hamlet*. Its brevity and intensity suggest it was written with performance in mind, catering to the tastes of Jacobean audiences.

Theatre in Jacobean London

Theatre was central to Jacobean culture, providing entertainment while exploring political and social issues. The Globe Theatre, where many of Shakespeare's plays were performed, attracted large audiences from all social classes. *Macbeth* was likely performed before King James VI and I, possibly at court. Its themes of kingship, treason, and supernatural forces would have resonated with audiences living in a time of political intrigue and religious tensions. Shakespeare's ability to blend history, contemporary concerns, and dramatic spectacle made his plays particularly powerful.

Witch Trials and Witchcraft Beliefs in Early Modern Scotland

Witchcraft was a major preoccupation in early modern Europe, and Scotland was notorious for its severe witch trials. In the late 16th and early 17th centuries,



hundreds of people were accused, tortured, and executed for alleged witchcraft. Most of the accused were women, hence their depiction in the play as women, though around a quarter were men. Scottish trials were particularly intense, partly due to King James VI's personal obsession with the subject. He attended one major trial and believed himself to be a victim of witchcraft. His 1597 book *Daemonologie* outlined his belief that witches were real and posed a serious threat to society.

In *Macbeth*, the Witches embody these fears. They are depicted as evil, deceptive, and agents of chaos, using their ambiguous nature and sinister rhyme scheme to manipulate Macbeth. Their role in setting the tragic events into motion reinforces the belief that witchcraft could alter fate. By including them, Shakespeare catered to King James's interests while amplifying contemporary anxieties about witches as a danger to political stability.

King James VI and I: A Scottish Monarch on the English Throne

When James VI of Scotland inherited the English throne in 1603 after Queen Elizabeth I's death, he became simultaneously King of England and King of Scots, though the kingdoms remained officially separate until 1707. However, tensions remained – many English subjects viewed James as a foreign ruler, and uncertainty surrounded his governance. *Macbeth* can be seen as an attempt to appeal to James by portraying Scottish history in a way that emphasised the dangers of regicide and the necessity of legitimate rule. The play also flatters James by depicting Banquo – whom James claimed as an ancestor – in a noble and virtuous light. The Witches' prophecy that Banquo's descendants would rule subtly reinforces King James VI and I's legitimacy.

The Gunpowder Plot

In 1605, just before *Macbeth* was written, England was rocked by the Gunpowder Plot, a Catholic conspiracy to assassinate King James VI and I by blowing up Parliament. The failed plot heightened fears of treason and divine retribution against those who challenged the monarchy.

Macbeth reflects these anxieties, warning of the chaos unleashed by regicide. After Macbeth murders King Duncan, Scotland descends into tyranny, mirroring



contemporary fears of political instability. Just as the government used the Gunpowder Plot to justify harsh measures against traitors, *Macbeth* reinforces the idea that those who usurp rightful kings will ultimately face divine punishment.

The Divine Right of Kings

King James VI and I was a strong advocate of the Divine Right of Kings, the belief that monarchs were appointed by God and that rebellion against them was a sin. He wrote extensively on this idea, arguing that kings were God's representatives on Earth.

Shakespeare reinforces this belief in *Macbeth* through the portrayal of King Duncan of Scotland and King Edward of England as just and divinely ordained monarchs. Macbeth's unlawful usurpation of the throne leads to disaster, underscoring the idea that legitimate kingship is sacred. When Macbeth is overthrown, order is restored, aligning with James's vision of monarchy as divinely sanctioned.

Women in Jacobean England

Women in Jacobean society were expected to be obedient, passive, and subordinate to men. Lady Macbeth challenges these expectations – she is ambitious, ruthless, and actively drives her husband towards murder. However, her eventual descent into madness reaffirms traditional gender roles, as she is ultimately unable to handle the consequences of her defiance.

The witches, as powerful female figures, also subvert gender norms. They manipulate Macbeth, showing that women could wield influence over men – a notion that both fascinated and unsettled Jacobean audiences. However, their grotesque portrayal reinforces the idea that women who defy traditional roles are unnatural and dangerous.

Religion in Jacobean England

Religion was a divisive issue in Jacobean England. The country was officially Protestant, but Catholicism remained a source of tension, particularly after the Gunpowder Plot. Religious imagery in *Macbeth* reflects these conflicts.



Macbeth's inability to say *Amen* after Duncan's murder (2.2.32) suggests he has severed his connection with God. Lady Macbeth's references to hell and damnation further highlight their spiritual downfall. The play reinforces Protestant anxieties about divine justice – those who commit sinful acts will ultimately be punished.

The Real King Macbeth

The historical Macbeth was quite different from Shakespeare's villainous portrayal. He ruled Scotland from 1040 to 1057, after killing Duncan in battle rather than through treachery, and governed for seventeen years with apparent stability. He was eventually defeated by Malcolm III, who had English support.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is based on *Holinshed's Chronicles*, a historical work that dramatised Scottish history. *Holinshed* itself was influenced by earlier medieval chronicles that sought to justify the rule of later Scottish kings by portraying their predecessors as illegitimate or tyrannical. Shakespeare exaggerated Macbeth's villainy to align the story with King James VI and I's interests and to reinforce the dangers of usurpation.

Conclusion

Macbeth is deeply rooted in its historical context, reflecting the political anxieties, religious beliefs, and cultural interests of Jacobean England. Shakespeare crafted a play that appealed to King James VI and I while addressing contemporary fears about witchcraft, treason, and divine justice. By drawing on historical sources, contemporary events, and theatrical traditions, *Macbeth* remains one of Shakespeare's most compelling and politically charged tragedies.



Vocabulary list

Ambition – Strong desire for power or success.

Antagonist – A character opposing the protagonist.

Aside – A brief remark, heard by the audience but unheard by other characters.

Catharsis – Emotional release felt by the audience.

Divine Right of Kings – The belief that kings rule by God's will.

Duplicity – Deception or double-dealing.

Emasculate – To weaken or deprive of masculinity.

Equivocation – The use of ambiguous language to mislead.

Foreshadowing – Hints at future events in a story.

Guilt – A deep sense of remorse.

Hamartia – A tragic flaw leading to downfall.

Hubris – Excessive pride leading to downfall.

Machiavellian – Cunning, deceitful, and power-hungry.

Nemesis – Retribution or an inescapable downfall.

Omens – Signs of future events, often supernatural.

Patriarchy – A society dominated by men.

Prophecy – A prediction of the future.

Protagonist – The central character in a narrative.

Regicide – The act of killing a king.

Soliloquy – A speech revealing a character's inner thoughts.

Supernatural – Beyond natural laws, often linked to magic.

Treachery – Betrayal of trust or loyalty.

Tragedy – A serious play ending in disaster.

Tyrant – A cruel and oppressive ruler.

Usurp – Seize power unlawfully.



Quote list

1. Witches – “Fair is foul, and foul is fair.” (1.1.12)

Establishes the theme of deception and inversion of moral order.

2. Macbeth – “If good, why do I yield to that suggestion / Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair?” (1.3.133–135)

Macbeth’s immediate reaction to the witches reveals his deep-seated ambition and fear.

3. Macbeth – “If chance will have me king, why chance may crown me.” (1.3.142)

Macbeth initially considers letting fate decide his future, but ambition soon overrides passivity.

4. Macbeth – “Stars hide your fires, / Let not light see my black and deep desires.” (1.4.50–51)

Macbeth conceals his ambition, linking to themes of darkness and deception.

5. Lady Macbeth – “Yet do I fear thy nature; / It is too full o’th’ milk of human kindness.” (1.5.15–16)

Lady Macbeth doubts Macbeth’s ruthlessness, showing her manipulative and ambitious nature.

6. Lady Macbeth – “Unsex me here.” (1.5.40)

Lady Macbeth rejects femininity to pursue power, challenging Jacobean gender roles.

7. Lady Macbeth – “Look like th’innocent flower, / but be the serpent under’t.” (1.5.64–65)

Encapsulates the theme of deception – appearance versus reality.

8. Macbeth – “I have no spur / to prick the sides of my intent, but only / Vaulting ambition, which o’erleaps itself / And falls on th’other.” (1.7.25–28)

Macbeth acknowledges that his only motive for murder is ambition – his hamartia leads to overconfidence and downfall.

9. Macbeth – “False face must hide / what the false heart doth know.” (1.7.82)

He resolves to deceive others, foreshadowing later betrayals and violence.



10. Macbeth – “Is this a dagger which I see before me?” (2.1.33)

Symbolises Macbeth’s inner turmoil before Duncan’s murder – supernatural or hallucination?

11. Macbeth – “I had most need of blessing, and ‘Amen’ / Stuck in my throat.” (2.2.35–36)

Macbeth’s guilt prevents him from seeking divine forgiveness, showing his spiritual downfall.

12. Macbeth – “Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?” (2.2.63–64)

Macbeth realises the permanence of his crime – water cannot cleanse his guilt.

13. Lady Macbeth – “A little water clears us of this deed.” (2.2.70)

Underestimates guilt – contrast to her later breakdown (“Out, damned spot!”).

14. Donalbain – “There’s daggers in men’s smiles.” (2.3.136)

Highlights deception and foreshadows betrayal in Macbeth’s court.

15. Macbeth – “Upon my head they plac’d a fruitless crown.” (3.1.62)

Macbeth’s insecurity grows – he fears Banquo’s descendants will inherit the throne.

16. Macbeth – “O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!” (3.2.36)

Macbeth’s paranoia and descent into violence – he plans Banquo’s murder.

17. Macbeth – “Then comes my fit again.” (3.4.21)

Upon learning Fleance escaped, Macbeth spirals further into fear and instability.

18. Macbeth – “It will have blood, they say: blood will have blood.” (3.4.122)

Acknowledges the inescapable cycle of violence he has initiated.

19. Witch – “By the pricking of my thumbs, / something wicked this way comes.” (4.1.44–45)

Even the witches call Macbeth wicked – he has become the true villain.



20. Apparition (through the Witches) – “Macbeth shall never vanquish’d be until / Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill shall come.” **(4.1.91–93)**

A deceptive prophecy – Macbeth misinterprets it as invulnerability.

21. Macduff – “All my pretty chickens and their dam.” **(4.3.220)**

Macduff expresses devastation upon hearing of his family’s brutal murder, reinforcing Macbeth’s cruelty and tyranny.

22. Lady Macbeth – “Out, damned spot! Out, I say!” **(5.1.31)**

Contrasts with her earlier dismissal of guilt – she is now consumed by it.

23. Lady Macbeth – “Here’s the smell of blood still; / all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.” **(5.1.44–45)**

Unlike her earlier confidence, Lady Macbeth now feels guilt is inescapable.

24. Macbeth – “She should have died hereafter.” **(5.5.16)**

Cold, detached response to Lady Macbeth’s death – he is emotionally numbed.

25. Macbeth – “Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow.” **(5.5.18–27)**

Reflects nihilism and despair – life is meaningless, a “walking shadow.”

26. Macbeth – “Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more. It is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing.” **(5.5.23–27)**

Macbeth reflects on the meaningless nature of life, expressing despair and nihilism after Lady Macbeth’s death.

27. Macduff – “Turn, hell-hound, turn!” **(5.8.3)**

Macduff denounces Macbeth – equating him with hellish evil.

28. Macbeth – “I bear a charmed life.” **(5.8.12)**

False confidence – he still believes himself invincible due to the prophecy.



29. Macduff – “Macduff was from his mother’s womb / untimely ripp’d.” (5.8.15-16)

Reveals how Macbeth has been misled by the witches – his downfall is inevitable.

30. Malcolm – “This dead butcher and his fiend-like queen.” (5.9.35)

Summarises how Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are remembered – reinforces their moral corruption.



Past questions

Below are all of the past questions since the first examination of the renewed AQA GCSE English Literature syllabus (8702/1) in 2017. You will also find three sample questions published by the exam board for training purposes but never used as real exams.

In the interests of brevity, mark schemes, examiner reports and grade boundaries are not included in this revision guide. They are readily available to download from AQA.



2017

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

At this point in the play, Lady Macbeth is speaking. She has just read Macbeth's letter telling her about his meeting with the three witches.

LADY MACBETH

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be
What thou art promis'd; yet do I fear thy nature,
It is too full o'th'milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou'dst have, great Glamis,
That which cries, 'Thus thou must do' if thou have it;
And that which rather thou dost fear to do,
Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear
And chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round,
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crown'd withal.

Starting with this speech, explore how Shakespeare presents ambition in *Macbeth*.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents ambition in this speech
- how Shakespeare presents ambition in the play as a whole.

[30 marks]

AO4 [4 marks]



2018

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

At this point in the play, after receiving The Witches' prophecies, Macbeth and Banquo have just been told that Duncan has made Macbeth Thane of Cawdor.

BANQUO

But 'tis strange,
And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths;
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence. –
Cousins, a word, I pray you.

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 smother'd in surmise, and nothing is,
But what is not.

Starting with this moment in the play, explore how Shakespeare presents the attitudes of Macbeth and Banquo towards the supernatural.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents the attitudes of Macbeth and Banquo towards the supernatural in this extract
- how Shakespeare presents the attitudes of Macbeth and Banquo towards the supernatural in the play as a whole.



[30 marks]

AO4 [4 marks]



2019

Read the following extract from Act 1 Scene 2 of *Macbeth* and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play, the Captain tells Duncan about Macbeth's part in the recent battle.

CAPTAIN

Doubtful it stood,
As two spent swimmers that do cling together
And choke their art. The merciless Macdonald –
Worthy to be a rebel, for to that
The multiplying villainies of nature
Do swarm upon him – from the Western Isles
Of kerns and galloglasses is supplied,
And Fortune on his damned quarrel smiling,
Show'd like a rebel's whore. But all's too weak,
For brave Macbeth – well he deserves that name –
Disdaining Fortune, with his brandish'd steel,
Which smok'd with bloody execution,
Like Valour's minion carv'd out his passage
Till he fac'd the slave,
Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,
Till he unseam'd him from the nave to th'chaps
And fix'd his head upon our battlements.

Starting with this speech, explore how Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a violent character.

Write about:

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

[30 marks]

AO4 [4 marks]



2020

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

At this point in the play, the Doctor and the Gentlewoman watch Lady Macbeth sleepwalking.

LADY MACBETH Out, damned spot! Out, I say! One, two. Why then 'tis time to do't. Hell is murky. Fie, my lord, fie, a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account? Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?

DOCTOR Do you mark that?

LADY MACBETH The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now? What, will these hands ne'er be clean? No more o'that, my Lord, no more o'that. You mar all with this starting.

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

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

LADY MACBETH Here's the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. O, O, O.

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

GENTLEWOMAN I would not have such a heart in my bosom for the dignity of the whole body.

DOCTOR Well, well, well –

GENTLEWOMAN Pray God it be, sir.

DOCTOR This disease is beyond my practice; yet I have known those which have walked in their sleep who have died holily in their beds.

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

DOCTOR Even so?

LADY MACBETH To bed, to bed; there's knocking at the gate. Come, come, come, come, give me your hand; what's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed.

'Lady Macbeth is a female character who changes during the play.'

Starting with this moment in the play, explore how far you agree with this view.



Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth in this extract
- how far Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as a female character who changes in the play as a whole.

[30 marks]

AO4 [4 marks]



2021

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

At this point in the play, Macbeth has murdered Duncan and has returned to Lady Macbeth.

MACBETH

Methought I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep no more:
Macbeth does murder sleep', the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast.

LADY MACBETH

What do you mean?

MACBETH

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.

LADY MACBETH

Who was it, that thus cried? Why, worthy thane,
You do unbend your noble strength to think
So brain-sickly of things. Go get some water
And wash this filthy witness from your hand.
Why did you bring these daggers from the place?
They must lie there. Go carry them and smear
The sleepy grooms with blood.

MACBETH

I'll go no more.
I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on't again, I dare not.

LADY MACBETH

Infirm of purpose!
Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead
Are but as pictures; 'tis the eye of childhood
That fears a painted devil. If he do bleed,
I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal,
For it must seem their guilt.



Starting with this conversation, explore how Shakespeare presents the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents their relationship in this extract
- how Shakespeare presents the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in the play as a whole.

[30 marks]

AO4 [4 marks]



2022

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

At this point in the play, Macbeth is thinking of his feelings about Banquo.

MACBETH

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

Starting with this speech, explore how Shakespeare presents Macbeth's fears.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents Macbeth's fears in this speech
- how Shakespeare presents Macbeth's fears in the play as a whole.

[30 marks]

AO4 [4 marks]



2023

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

At this point in the play, Macbeth hears that the English army is approaching and asks the Doctor for a report about Lady Macbeth.

MACBETH

Seyton! – I am sick at heart,
When I behold – Seyton, I say! – this push
Will cheer me ever or disseat me now.
I have lived long enough. My way of life
Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf,
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have; but in their stead,
Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.
Seyton!

Enter SEYTON

SEYTON

What's your gracious pleasure?

MACBETH

What news more?

SEYTON

All is confirmed, my lord, which was reported.

MACBETH

I'll fight till from my bones my flesh be hacked.
Give me my armour.

SEYTON

'Tis not needed yet.

MACBETH

I'll put it on;
Send out more horses; skirr the country round.
Hang those that talk of fear. Give me mine armour.
How does your patient, doctor?

DOCTOR

Not so sick, my lord,
As she is troubled with thick-coming fancies



That keep her from her rest.

MACBETH

Cure her of that.

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?

Starting with this conversation, explore how far Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a male character who changes during the play.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents Macbeth in this conversation
- how far Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a male character who changes in the play as a whole.

[30 marks]

AO4 [4 marks]



2024

Read the following extract from Act 1 Scene 7 of *Macbeth* and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play, Macbeth has decided that he is no longer prepared to carry out the plan to murder King Duncan.

LADY MACBETH

Was the hope drunk
Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since?
And wakes it now, to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valour
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting I dare not wait upon I would,
Like the poor cat i' th' adage?

MACBETH

Prithee, peace.
I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none.

LADY MACBETH

What beast was't, then,
That made you break this enterprise to me?
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.

MACBETH

If we should fail?

LADY MACBETH



We fail?
But screw your courage to the sticking-place,
And we'll not fail.

Starting with this speech, explore how far Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as a strong female character.

Write about:

- how far Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as a strong female character in this conversation
- how far Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as a strong female character in the play as a whole.

[30 marks]

AO4 [4 marks]



Sample 1

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

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

LADY MACBETH

The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements. Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe 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. Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry 'Hold, hold!'

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

Write about:

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

[30 marks]

AO4 [4 marks]



Sample 2

Read the following question from Act 5 Scene 3 of *Macbeth* and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play Macbeth is under siege from the English army.

MACBETH

Bring me no more reports; let them fly all:
Till Birnam wood remove to Dunsinane,
I cannot taint with fear. What's the boy Malcolm?
Was he not born of woman? The spirits that know
All mortal consequences have pronounc'd me thus:
'Fear not, Macbeth; no man that's born of woman
Shall e'er have power upon thee.' Then fly, false thanes,
And mingle with the English epicures:
The mind I sway by and the heart I bear
Shall never sag with doubt nor shake with fear.

Enter a Servant

The devil damn thee black, thou cream-fac'd loon!
Where got'st thou that goose look?

Starting with this speech, explain how far you think Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a hero.

Write about:

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

[30 marks]

AO4 [4 marks]



Sample 3

Read the following extract from Act 1 Scene 7 of *Macbeth* and then answer the question that follows.

At this moment in the play, Macbeth has left the banquet he and his wife are holding for Duncan, and his wife has come to find him.

LADY MACBETH

He has almost supp'd. Why have you left the chamber?

MACBETH

Hath he ask'd for me?

LADY MACBETH

Know you not, he has?

MACBETH

We will proceed no further in this business.
He hath honour'd me of late, and I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon.

LADY MACBETH

Was the hope drunk
Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since?
And wakes it now to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time,
Such I account thy love. Art thou afraid
To be the same in thine own act and valour,
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting I dare not wait upon I would,
Like the poor cat i'th'adage?

MACBETH

Prithee, peace.
I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none.

Starting with this moment in the play, explore how Shakespeare presents the marriage between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

Write about:



- how Shakespeare presents their relationship at this moment in the play
- how Shakespeare presents their marriage in the play as a whole.

[30 marks]

AO4 [4 marks]



Appendix 1: recommended further resources

Model Answers



Flashcards



CGP Resources



AQA Resources

