

Knowledge Organiser— Macbeth GCSE



Main Characters

Macbeth	Begins the play as the Thane of Glamis, a warrior loyal to King Duncan.	<i>aspirant rapacious obdurate jaded nihilistic callous merciless ambitious remorseless</i>
Lady Macbeth	At first, cajoles and manipulates Macbeth into taking power; later, loses control.	<i>manipulative Machiavellian nonchalant coercive aberrant self-reproachful pitiless</i>
Banquo	Macbeth's close friend who also receives prophecies—but does not act upon them.	<i>loyal virtuous ethical principled honourable incorruptible high-minded</i>
Duncan	The true King of Scotland, who puts his trust in the wrong men.	<i>trusting unsuspecting unguarded credulous respected sanctified venerated revered</i>
Malcolm	Duncan's son and true heir to the throne. Goes to England to raise an army.	<i>dignified intelligent resourceful capable inventive</i>
Macduff	A loyal warrior of King Duncan's and the Thane of Fife. Suspicious of Macbeth.	<i>vengeful remorseful Macbeth's nemesis consumed guilt-ridden implacable compelled</i>
Witches	Three women who seem to have supernatural knowledge and influence.	<i>prophetic cryptic enigmatic ambiguous double-dealing duplicitous disingenuous</i>

Some Themes

violence	The play begins and ends with violence. Macbeth and Banquo are praised for their violence by Duncan. Manhood and political power seem to be expressed by violence.
ambition	Political ambition is what seems to drive both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Ambition seems to be Macbeth's tragic flaw (<i>hamartia</i>).
evil	Macbeth clearly commits evil. Lady Macbeth is destroyed by her sense of her own evil. The witches seem to represent a form of evil.
regret	Macbeth, at the start, sees the murder of Duncan as regrettable. Lady Macbeth seems less concerned at the start, but becomes an isolated, remorseful character. Macbeth world views seems empty and nihilistic by the end of the play.
the supernatural	The witches: do they make Macbeth commit evil or just prompt something inside him? Do they need to be "magical" for the play to take place? Are the dagger and the ghost supernatural or psychological in origin?
appearance and reality	King Duncan admits that he was taken in by the former Thane of Cawdor. Lady Macbeth uses her skills of deception to murder the king. Macbeth comes to doubt the witches.
the unnatural	Lady Macbeth is unnatural in her discussion of herself. Macbeth's usurpation of the proper king is unnatural. Unnatural events occur surrounding the murder.
gender	Lady Macbeth seems to dislike her femininity. She also accuses Macbeth of lacking manly bravery. The play seems to equate masculinity with violent action.

Plot

Act 1	The play opens with three witches who set the scene and atmosphere for the play. Macbeth and Banquo have just helped win a battle for King Duncan. Returning from the battle, they meet the witches — who provide prophecies for both Banquo and Macbeth. King Duncan is so grateful for Macbeth he decides to stay at their castle when Macbeth returns. Macbeth writes a letter to his wife about the prophecies and being King. Lady Macbeth creates a plan to murder the King so they will become King and Queen. Macbeth does not want to kill Duncan to begin with, but lady Macbeth cleverly manipulates him into doing so.
Act 2	Macbeth is unsure about murdering Duncan — even seeing a ghostly bloody dagger — but finally he goes through with the plan. He is deeply disturbed by his actions, so Lady Macbeth finishes the plan by wiping blood on the guards. Macduff arrives in the morning and finds the slaughtered king; Macbeth kills the guards, helping make them seem guilty. Malcolm and Donalbain, the kings' sons, flee Scotland in order to stay alive.
Act 3	After Duncan's death, Banquo begins to think that Macbeth was the true murderer. In order to keep this a secret, Macbeth pays murderers to kill Banquo and his son, Fleance — but Fleance escapes. Macbeth holds a banquet for all the other lords at his castle. At this banquet, Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo. Macbeth begins to rant and rave, making the guest uneasy. Macbeth notices that Macduff did not attend their feast. He decides to visit the witches again.
Act 4	Macbeth becomes obsessed with power and begins to ask the witches for more prophecies. The witches tell Macbeth that he should be fearful of Macduff, that he cannot be killed by man, and that he should only fear when the Dunsinane wood begin to move. Macbeth sends murderers to kill Macduff's family. In England, Macduff joins Malcolm to defeat Macbeth. Macduff learns of his family's murder and vows revenge upon Macbeth.
Act 5	Lady Macbeth has become insane over her involvement in the murders. Outside Macbeth's castle, an army gathers to attack. Macbeth is not overly worried as he believes the prophecy that no man can kill him, will protect him. Lady Macbeth kills herself. The battle begins—and Macbeth sees the wood advance towards the castle. Macduff confronts Macbeth and learns that Macduff was ripped from his mother's side and not naturally born. Macduff then kills Macbeth in a final battle where he beheads him. Malcolm now becomes the rightful king of Scotland.

Some Context

- first performed 1606; Jacobean period
- belief in the Great Chain of Being and the Divine Right of Kings and...
- the threat of chaos if these are ignored
- religion and the fear of divine punishment
- belief in witchcraft and King James I's *Demonologie*
- the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 and the fear of regicide and political turmoil



Some Tragic Theory

- **hamartia**: error of judgement, tragic flaw
- **hubris**: excessive pride or self-confidence
- **anagnorisis**: moment of realisation of wrong-doing
- **catharsis**: purging of emotions of the audience
- **tragic hero**: the main protagonist in the tragic action (not necessarily "heroic" in usual terms)
- **fate**: a cause of downfall which is outside of the control of the tragic hero
- **pathos**: feelings of pity and sympathy
- **peripeteia**: the reversal of fortune experienced by the tragic hero
- **megalopsychia**: the greatness of soul of the tragic hero, the qualities which *could* have made him great and honourable

Some Useful Terms

- **soliloquy**: character speaks their own, usually exploring deepest thoughts
- **aside**: character says something on stage which others cannot hear
- **dramatic irony**: when the audience understands more than characters on stage
- **foreshadowing**: when a text hints forward to later events/ideas

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Plot Questions

Act 1	<input type="radio"/> What is Macbeth Thane of at the start of the battle? <input type="radio"/> What is Macbeth Thane of by the end of the battle? <input type="radio"/> Name King Duncan's two sons. <input checked="" type="radio"/> Who is the Prince of Cumberland? <input checked="" type="radio"/> In whom did Duncan put "absolute trust"?
Act 2	<input type="radio"/> Who kills Duncan's grooms? <input type="radio"/> Who flees to Ireland and England after the murder? <input checked="" type="radio"/> Who says of Macbeth's castle, "this place is too cold for hell"? <input checked="" type="radio"/> Who describes Duncan's death as "most sacrilegious murder"?
Act 3	<input type="radio"/> When Banquo is murdered, who manages to escape? <input type="radio"/> Who shakes "gory locks"? <input checked="" type="radio"/> Who worries that Macbeth "play'd st most foully" for the throne of Scotland? <input checked="" type="radio"/> At the end of the banquet, whose significant absence does Macbeth spot?
Act 4	<input type="radio"/> Who does Macbeth visit to get more information? <input type="radio"/> Whom is Macduff with when he finds out that his wife and children have been murdered? <input checked="" type="radio"/> Who tells Macduff to "Dispute it like a man"? <input checked="" type="radio"/> Who is being talked about by Malcom: "He hath a heavenly gift of prophecy / And sundry blessings hang about his throne"?
Act 5	<input type="radio"/> Who cannot remove the stain of blood? <input type="radio"/> What disturbing and impossible sight does Macbeth see climbing up the hill to his castle? <input checked="" type="radio"/> Who calls Macbeth a "coward" before he dies? <input checked="" type="radio"/> Who ends the play by thanking "the grace of Grace"?

Character Questions

Who says each phrase and in which Act of the play?

"That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold"	said by	in Act
"I must also feel it like a man"	said by	in Act
"pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell"	said by	in Act
"full of scorpions is my mind"	said by	in Act
"Consider it not so deeply"	said by	in Act
"Let not light see my dark and deep desires"	said by	in Act
"They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly"	said by	in Act
"There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face."	said by	in Act

Imagery Questions

imagery	links to themes of...	your best quotation
blood	guilt, violence, crime, evil	
sleep		
hands		
darkness		
natural / unnatural		
birds & animals		
heaven & hell		
clothing / disguise		

Ideas Questions

<input type="radio"/> Which word best describes Lady Macbeth? <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> abstract aberrant </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> abeyant anterior </div>
<input type="radio"/> Which word best describes Macbeth's mood by Act 5? <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> disenchanted enchanted </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> disinterred dissipated </div>
<input type="radio"/> Which word best describes Macbeth's style as a ruler? <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> inclusive democratic </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> despotic consensual </div>
<input type="radio"/> Which word best describes Lady Macbeth in Act 1 & 2? <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> copious congenial </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> contented coercive </div>
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Which feels jaded by power? <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> Duncan Macbeth </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> Banquo Macduff </div>
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Who seeks retribution ? <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> Duncan Macbeth </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> Banquo Macduff </div>
<input checked="" type="radio"/> What is Macbeth's hamartia ? <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> Lady Macbeth King Duncan </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> Scotland ambition </div>
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Which word best describes Lady Macbeth in Act 5? <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> remorseful recalcitrant </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> reticent regal </div>