

GCSE ENGLISH  
LITERATURE  
SUPPORT PACK

Shakespeare's  
Macbeth

## SUPPORT PACK INCLUDES:

Plot summary

Key characters

Contexts

Golden quotes and Model Essays

Essay advice

Practice Questions

# Macbeth: 'a chain of events'



# Plot Summary

## Act 1

- King Duncan plans to reward brave Macbeth with the title Thane of Cawdor for having defeated rebel forces in battle.
- Three witches prophesise that Macbeth will be Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland.
- Macbeth is officially informed that he has become Thane of Cawdor. He is amazed the witches' prophecy has come true and reveals his hopes for the crown of Scotland.
- Macbeth's wife, Lady Macbeth, shares his ambition and calls on evil spirits to give her the strength to undertake the murder of Duncan.
- Duncan arrives at Macbeth's castle, where he is welcomed.
- When Macbeth arrives home, his wife insists on planning the murder.

## Act 2

- Worried about the murder he is about to commit, Macbeth sees a vision of a dagger.
- He murders Duncan, although afterwards Lady Macbeth criticises him for being distressed. She helps to cover up the murder and they then go to bed to pretend innocence.
- Macduff, another Thane, finds Duncan murdered and the alarm is sounded.
- Macbeth slays Duncan's guards to cover his crime, but says he did it in fury because they murdered Duncan.
- Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, slip away in fear of their lives.
- Macbeth succeeds to the throne but Macduff will not attend Macbeth's coronation.

### **Act 3**

- Banquo suspects Macbeth of treachery and Macbeth orders his murder and the murder of Banquo's son, Fleance. Although Banquo is killed, Fleance escapes.
- Banquo's ghost appears at Macbeth's banquet and terrorises Macbeth, whose behaviour indicates his guilt to fellow guests.
- Macbeth, now acting independently of his wife, plans to see the witches again.
- The witches prepare to meet him.
- Macduff flees to the English court, leaving his wife and children behind at his castle.

### **Act 4**

- Macbeth visits the witches and discovers that he should fear Macduff, but that no man born of a woman can harm him. He also learns that he will never be beaten until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane.
- After leaving the witches, Macbeth orders the murder of Macduff's wife and children.
- In England, Malcolm test the loyalty of Macduff, who has recently arrived there from Scotland.
- Macduff learns of the slaughter of his entire family by murders on Macbeth's orders.
- When Malcolm informs Macduff that England will provide an army under Siward to defeat Macbeth, Macduff vows personally to kill Macbeth.

### **Act 5**

- The English army marches on Macbeth disguised with branches taken from Birnan Wood. Macbeth fortifies his castle at Dunsinane and prepares for a long siege.
- Macbeth learns his wife has died – apparently by suicide – but he is unconcerned, as his life appears to lack any meaning.
- He is enraged when a messenger tells him that Birnan Wood is coming to Dunsinane.
- He abandons his siege plan and goes out to fight; although his army is losing, nobody seems able to kill Macbeth himself. He meets Macduff, who was born by Caesarean (so not of woman), and Macduff kills Macbeth in single combat.
- Macduff hails Malcolm as King of Scotland and Malcolm invites all to attend his coronation at Scone.

## Key characters - Summary

**Macbeth:** A warrior and Thane of Glamis. Macbeth defeats the armies of the rebellion against King Duncan and is rewarded with the title of Thane of Cawdor. Three Witches promise he will also become king. His fatal flaw is his “vaulting ambition” and he is convinced by his wife to murder Duncan and take the crown. Overcome with guilt and fear from his act of treason, Macbeth becomes more cruel and tyrannical until his eventual defeat, after which he is considered a mass murderer.

**Lady Macbeth:** Lady Macbeth is dominant, cunning and determined. She defies the gender expectations of the time to take a more controlling role in her marriage. It is she who convinces Macbeth to go through with the plot to murder Duncan. She is quick thinking and calm under pressure during the murder, but becomes increasingly isolated and haunted by guilt as the play progresses.

**King Duncan:** The king of Scotland at the beginning of the play. Duncan is well liked by his people and is respected as a just and noble ruler. He is generous and bestows honours and gifts on his warriors. He rewards Macbeth with the title of Thane of Cawdor, after learning the existing thane had betrayed him. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth murder Duncan in his sleep.

**Banquo:** Banquo is honourable and loyal. He resists the temptation presented by the witches and is later murdered by Macbeth. If Macbeth gives in to evil forces and

suggestions, then Banquo is his opposite. Both are warriors and thanes; both see and hear the witches, but at every point Banquo stands up for honour and integrity.

**Macduff:** Macduff is an honourable thane who, ultimately, brings justice to Macbeth. He is the man of destiny “not born of woman.” Macduff’s peers hold him in high esteem. His behaviour can be impulsive and irrational at times, most likely because he is a passionate man.

**The Witches:** Three sisters who embody demonic intelligence. They provide information but do not directly invite human beings to commit crimes. They use compelling and attractive predictions of the future to tempt Macbeth.

**Malcolm:** The son of Duncan, Prince of Cumberland, and rightful heir to the throne. He fears being falsely accused of Duncan’s murder and flees to England.

# Key characters - Detail

## ***Character Analysis: Lady Macbeth***

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Character analysis: Macbeth**

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

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

**“If good, why do I yield to that suggestion**

**Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair**

**And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,**

**Against the use of nature?”**

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

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

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

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

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

### ***Character Analysis: Banquo***

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

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

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

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

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

### ***Character Analysis: The Weird Sisters (Witches)***

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

Though their appearances in the play are brief, they have an important function. Shakespeare establishes the supernatural theme via their association with disorder in Nature: they appear amid thunder and lightning in a grim meeting on a "**blasted**

**heath**” which contributes greatly to the tone of mysterious evil which pervades the play.

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

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

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

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

# Context - summary

## Historical: James I

- James VI of Scotland became James I of England in 1603
- This coincides with the writing of Macbeth and Shakespeare clearly had James in mind whilst writing it
- James survived an assassination attempt
  - The play appeals to many of the kings interests by:
  - Including his fascination with the supernatural
  - Making his ancestor, Banquo, a hero in the play.

## Historical: Succession

- Queen Elizabeth, who preceded James I, had no children so no natural successors.
- This created instability in the country.
- The concept of a degree of order, or having a line of succession in place, was very important to the people of the time

## Historical: Scotland in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century

- A dangerous place where warring families battled for land and trade.
- Each side was led by a **thane**, whose castle became an important power base.
- The government was primitive and consisted of the king and his council – mainly warlords and church leaders. Political murders and revenge killings were common.
- The real Macbeth was born around 1005 and was the grandson of Malcolm II – so he had a strong claim to the throne.
- Macbeth usurped (replaced by force) King Duncan in about 1040

## Social: a patriarchal society

- Ruled by men
- The male head of the household would hold all family wealth and land and girls would be expected to grow up to become wives and mothers. They would not be expected to concern themselves with politics.
- Women had no rights or authority in law. They could not own property or money but could influence their husbands.

## **Cultural: Witchcraft**

- Up until the 1700's most people in England believed in witches and witchcraft.
- From the mid-1500s religious leaders tried to stamp out these beliefs to make sure that people were following the right religious practices.
- This led to a period of witch hunting where people were tried and often executed for being witches.
- It was believed that witches gained their powers directly from the Devil.
- James I had a keen interest in witchcraft and wrote a book on it in 1597 – "Daemonologie". He personally questioned one of the accused people in the North Berwick witch trials.
- In 1604, under James I, witchcraft was made a crime punishable by execution in England.

# Golden Quotes

	Thesis	Quote 1	Quote 2	Quote 3
Macbeth	Shakespeare uses Macbeth as a vehicle to explore the destructive effects of ambition, showing how his violent prowess and ruthless ambition give way to paranoia and moral torment, revealing the human cost of unchecked power.	<p>“Unseamed him from the knave to th’ chaps.”</p> <p>“as sparrows eagles or the hare the lion”</p>	“Full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife.”	<p>“Turn hellhound, turn!”</p> <p>“dead butcher”</p>
Lady Macbeth	Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth as a vehicle to explore the corrupting influence of ambition and the tension between appearance and reality, showing her initial ruthlessness and manipulation give way to guilt and psychological unravelling.	<p>“Come, you spirits... Unsex me here! And fill me from the crown to the toe full of direst cruelty...Take my milk for gall.”</p>	“Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under’t.”	“Out damned spot!...All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. O, O, O.”
Ambition	Shakespeare uses ambition as a vehicle to reveal its destructive power, showing how Macbeth’s secret desires and overreaching drive lead to moral corruption, psychological torment, and the futility of life.	“Stars, hide your fires. Let not light see my black and deep desires.”	“Vaulting ambition which o’erleaps itself.”	“Out, out, brief candle! Life’s but a walking shadow.”
Kingship	Shakespeare uses kingship as a vehicle to explore legitimacy and the moral responsibilities of rulers, showing how Macbeth’s unnatural ascent creates insecurity, imbalance, and the stark contrast between rightful and ill-gotten power.	“His silver skin, laced with golden blood.”	“Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown”	“Like a giant’s robe upon a dwarfish thief.”
Supernatural	Shakespeare uses the supernatural as a vehicle to destabilise moral and natural order, showing how witches, visions, and ghosts manipulate perception, fuel ambition, and externalise guilt, shaping human behaviour and fate.	“Fair is foul and foul is fair... hover through the fog and filthy air.”	“Is this a dagger which I see before me?”	“Ne’er shake thy gory locks at me!”

Violence	Shakespeare uses violence as a vehicle to explore the moral and psychological consequences of ambition, showing how Macbeth's brutal actions escalate, corrupt him, and ultimately provoke societal and personal condemnation.	"Unseamed him from the knave to th' chaps."	"I am in blood stepped in so far."	"This dead butcher and his fiend-like queen."
Guilt	Shakespeare uses guilt as a vehicle to reveal the psychological consequences of immoral ambition, showing how Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are haunted by their deeds, unable to escape the moral and emotional stain of murder.	"Stars, hide your fires. Let not light see my black and deep desires."	"Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean?"  "A little water clears us of this deed."	"Out damned spot!...All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. O, O, O."

# Macbeth – Golden Quotes and Model Essays

At the beginning of the play, Shakespeare uses Macbeth as a vehicle to explore how heroic violence and bravery can mask an underlying capacity for brutality.

The audience is invited to admire the effectiveness of a blade that seems almost like craft:

the praise arrives through reported testimony, building a public myth that flatters and protects him. Yet this very myth hides a paradox. When violence is celebrated as virtue, it becomes easy to carry that habit of cutting from a battlefield into a bedchamber.

“unseamed” borrows calm, tidy sewing imagery to describe a lethal action, turning flesh into fabric and making the killing sound both neat and inevitable. It also calls to mind a task requiring little effort, speaking to the practised ease with which Macbeth goes about his killing.

Potentially, this could foreshadow the violence which Macbeth would later impose during his ill-fated rule.

sweep “from the knave to th’ chaps” suggests a single, controlled motion - precise, professional, and outwardly admirable, whilst emphasising the gore-soaked brutality of the act.

predator-prey pairings compress a food chain into an easy claim of natural superiority: if Macbeth is an eagle or lion, victory is assumed

The opening animal hierarchy foreshadows the later disorder; a man trained to dominate will be tempted to dominate the crown itself. Seen this way, the transition from heroic “unseamer” to illicit murderer is not a sudden break but a dangerous continuation.

The gruesome nature of the punishment for insurrectionists recalls the public execution of the gunpowder plotters and a contemporary audience, indoctrinated to celebrate such violence, would be further encouraged to admire the character of Macbeth at this point in the play.

The skill that wins honour becomes the mechanism for regicide once ambition rises and restraint thins - an outrage that, to a Jacobean audience under James I, violated the political order enshrined by the Divine Right of Kings.

“Unseamed him from the knave to th’ chaps.”  
“as sparrows eagles or the hare the lion”

**What** As the play develops, Shakespeare uses Macbeth as a vehicle to show how ambition transforms into psychological torment, leaving him consumed by fear, paranoia, and moral decay.

**How** The metaphor relocates venom from battlefield to brain, replacing clean cuts with swarm and sting.

**Why** Shakespeare uncovers how ambition, once enthroned, converts hubris into paranoia; it is not the crown’s glitter but the fear of losing it that devours him.

plural imports not a single issue but a colony; while the possessive “my mind” both asserts ownership and confesses occupation - Macbeth claims and is claimed by what corrodes him.

The phrase “dear wife” reaches for intimacy as remedy, yet it subtly emasculates the hero’s autonomy; he leans on a domestic partnership that has already taught him to equivocate with conscience, masking murder as necessity and prophecy as proof.


links the opening surgical violence to the mid-play psychic trauma: where once he arranged bodies with proud precision, now he arranges murders with anxious speed, including the grim infanticide of Macduff’s children as defensive horror.

Macbeth no longer rules, he reacts. Read in its Jacobean setting, such corrosive fear would resonate in a court deeply protective of James I’s authority and the sanctity of kingship.

outward surgical violence (“unseamed”) becomes inward infestation (“scorpions”), and the lion’s clarity switches to chamber chaos.

The widening semantic field - venom, swarm, infestation - makes Scotland’s sickness feel like the mind’s contagion writ large

“Full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife.”



**What** By the end of the play, Shakespeare uses Macbeth as a vehicle to demonstrate how unchecked ambition leads to tyranny and, ultimately, self-destruction

the noble predator of Act 1 is transformed into a satanic insult

**How** The sound work - the repeated “turn” pivots Macbeth physically and ethically.

resolves the earlier paradox: the same violent efficacy that made him admirable now howls under the light of moral scrutiny

The transformation from “eagle” and “lion” to “hellhound” completes the descent the audience has been tracking


“Turn hellhound, turn!”

“dead butcher”

The peripeteia of the scene - a reversal from hunter to hunted - produces catharsis, because order is restored and the miasma begins to clear.

in a culture that guarded the Divine Right of Kings under James I, the tyrant’s fall reads as a moral and political restoration: rightful rule is re-affirmed, and the sacred hierarchy re-stabilised.

The end answers with justice but also with caution; tyranny is not an exotic accident but a domestic possibility when power outweighs ethics. The cyclical nature of the plot leaves the lingering fear that history could repeat itself. If the hero must once again draw swords to restore order to the realm, what distances Macduff from Macbeth? In asking the question, Shakespeare explores the inherent dangers of a culture of violence.



### **How does Shakespeare present Macbeth? (Grade 5 model)**

Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a brave and respected soldier who gradually becomes a cruel and violent ruler. Through Macbeth's rise and fall, Shakespeare explores how ambition and temptation can take over a person's mind, especially when they stop listening to their conscience. The play also reflects the beliefs of Shakespeare's time, when King James I ruled and people believed strongly in the Divine Right of Kings—which meant killing a king was seen as both a crime and a sin against God. Macbeth's journey shows what can happen when someone allows desire for power to outweigh what is morally right.

Shakespeare uses Macbeth as a vehicle to show how his early courage can hide a more dangerous and brutal side. At the start, Macbeth is praised for killing an enemy so fiercely that he "unseamed him from the knave to th' chaps," which makes him seem like a heroic warrior. The word "unseamed" makes the act sound neat and controlled, almost like Macbeth is performing a skilled action rather than a violent one. This shows that Macbeth is confident and comfortable with extreme violence. He is also compared to powerful animals, such as an eagle or a lion, which suggests he naturally dominates weaker opponents. Because these descriptions come from other characters, the audience is encouraged to admire Macbeth. However, Shakespeare also hints that this level of violence could be dangerous if Macbeth ever turns it towards the wrong target. This is especially important in a society that believed a king was chosen by God. Macbeth's willingness to use violence so easily in battle foreshadows the later moment when he uses that same brutality to murder King Duncan. Shakespeare shows that Macbeth's strengths as a soldier can quickly become flaws when ambition starts to control him.

Shakespeare uses Macbeth as a vehicle to show how ambition turns into fear, guilt, and mental suffering. After he becomes king, Macbeth says, "Full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife," which clearly shows how troubled he has become. The image of "scorpions" suggests that his thoughts are painful, sharp, and constantly attacking him. This shows that Macbeth cannot escape the guilt and fear caused by his choices. His attempt to speak gently by saying "dear wife" shows he wants comfort, but it also makes him seem weaker and more unstable than he was earlier in the play. Macbeth used to be confident and calm, but now he is frightened and full of paranoia. Part of this comes from the fact that he trusted the witches' prophecies, which Shakespeare's audience would have found unsettling because King James I believed witches were genuinely dangerous. Macbeth starts to believe he must kill again to stay safe, which is why he sends murderers after Banquo and even after Macduff's innocent family. This shows how far he has fallen: ambition has not brought him happiness or security, but has instead filled him with fear and pushed him towards more cruelty.

Shakespeare uses Macbeth as a vehicle to show how ambition finally turns him into a hated tyrant who must be defeated. Near the end, Macduff calls Macbeth a "hellhound," which shows how completely Macbeth has lost his honour and humanity. Earlier in the play he was compared to noble animals like lions, but now he is compared to something evil and vicious. The command "Turn" shows Macduff's determination to stop Macbeth's rule and bring justice back to Scotland. This moment shows that Macbeth has become the enemy of the country he once protected. The final fight restores order and would have reassured Shakespeare's audience that even though Macbeth broke the Divine Right of Kings, justice will always defeat a tyrant in the end. It also supports the beliefs of King James I, who wanted people to understand the importance of loyalty to the crown. Macbeth's death brings the chaos of the play to an end and proves that ambition, when not controlled by morality, leads to destruction for both a person and their country.

Overall, Macbeth shows how a person can fall from honour to disaster when they give in to ambition and ignore what they know is right. Shakespeare encourages the audience to think about how dangerous it can be when someone uses power without responsibility or conscience. The play leaves us wondering how easily a hero can become a villain—and what might stop someone from following the same path as Macbeth.

### How does Shakespeare present Macbeth? (Grade 7-9 model)

Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a celebrated soldier whose courage and skill gradually sour into tyranny, using him to test how ambition, prophecy, and moral choice can unmake a human being—written in the Jacobean court of James I, where the Divine Right of Kings made any assault on a monarch a profound sacrilege. The play moves from public glory to private collapse, asking us to consider how the very qualities that win wars may become dangerous when cut free from conscience and community, and how hubris and equivocation can lead a mind toward nihilism even as the theatre offers catharsis when order is restored.

At the beginning of the play, Shakespeare uses Macbeth as a vehicle to explore how heroic violence and bravery can mask an underlying capacity for brutality. Early on, reports of Macbeth on the battlefield praise him for “Unseamed him from the knave to th’ chaps” and compare him to dominant predators - “as sparrows eagles or the hare the lion.” The audience is invited to admire the effectiveness of a blade that seems almost like craft: the word “unseamed” borrows calm, tidy sewing imagery to describe a lethal action, turning flesh into fabric and making the killing sound both neat and inevitable. It also calls to mind a task requiring little effort, speaking to the practised ease with which Macbeth goes about his killing. The anatomical sweep “from the knave to th’ chaps” suggests a single, controlled motion - precise, professional, and outwardly admirable, whilst emphasising the gore-soaked brutality of the act. The hard consonants in “knave” and “chaps” give the line a percussive beat that echoes the blows of combat. The gruesome nature of the punishment for insurrectionists recalls the public execution of the gunpowder plotters and a contemporary audience, indoctrinated to celebrate such violence, would be further encouraged to admire the character of Macbeth at this point in the play. Potentially, this could foreshadow the violence which Macbeth would later impost during his ill-fated rule. Likewise, the compact predator–prey pairings compress a food chain into an easy claim of natural superiority: if Macbeth is an eagle or lion, victory is assumed. Furthermore, the implied comparison to noble, heraldic creatures further anchors Shakespeare’s construction of Macbeth’s righteousness here. These choices work as stagecraft: the praise arrives through reported testimony, building a public myth that flatters and protects him. Yet this very myth hides a paradox. When violence is celebrated as virtue, it becomes easy to carry that habit of cutting from a battlefield into a bedchamber. The skill that wins honour becomes the mechanism for regicide once ambition rises and restraint thins - an outrage that, to a Jacobean audience under James I, violated the political order enshrined by the Divine Right of Kings. In other words, Shakespeare plants Macbeth’s hamartia early: a mix of compulsive proficiency and swelling hubris. The opening animal hierarchy foreshadows the later disorder; a man trained to dominate will be tempted to dominate the crown itself. Seen this way, the transition from heroic “unseamer” to illicit murderer is not a sudden break but a dangerous continuation.

As the play develops, Shakespeare uses Macbeth as a vehicle to show how ambition transforms into psychological torment, leaving him consumed by fear, paranoia, and moral decay. Having seized the throne, he confesses, “Full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife.” The metaphor relocates venom from battlefield to brain, replacing clean cuts with swarm and sting. “Scorpions” as plural imports not a single issue but a colony; while the possessive “my mind” both asserts ownership and confesses occupation - Macbeth claims and is claimed by what corrodes him. The phrase “dear wife” reaches for intimacy as remedy, yet it subtly emasculates the hero’s autonomy; he leans on a domestic partnership that has already taught him to equivocate with conscience, masking murder as necessity and prophecy as proof. This image marks a clear peripeteia: outward surgical violence (“unseamed”) becomes inward infestation (“scorpions”), and the lion’s clarity switches to chamber chaos. Crucially, the metaphor is a manifestation of the knowledge he has sought: the Weird Sisters’ prophecy and later apparition promise certainty but are structurally deceptive, riddling him into action while withholding truth. He turns to further bloodshed not purely as political calculus but as compulsion to silence the stings; the tyrant’s decisions look less like strategy than symptom. The widening semantic field - venom, swarm, infestation - makes Scotland’s sickness feel like the mind’s contagion writ large; the miasma is ethical and atmospheric at once. Even without additional quotation, the play’s trajectory links the opening surgical violence to the mid-play psychic trauma: where once he arranged bodies with proud precision, now he arranges murders with anxious speed, including the grim infanticide of Macduff’s children as defensive horror. This matters because Shakespeare uncovers how ambition, once enthroned, converts hubris into paranoia; it is not the crown’s glitter but the fear of losing it that devours him. The result is tyranny born from inward

collapse - Macbeth no longer rules, he reacts. Read in its Jacobean setting, such corrosive fear would resonate in a court deeply protective of James I's authority and the sanctity of kingship.

By the end of the play, Shakespeare uses Macbeth as a vehicle to demonstrate how unchecked ambition leads to tyranny and, ultimately, self-destruction. At the end, society speaks back through Macduff's trumpet-like imperative: "Turn, hellhound, turn!" With that single epithet, the noble predator of Act 1 is transformed into a satanic insult; the public title "king" is morally overwritten by a spiritual judgment. The sound work - the repeated "turn" pivots Macbeth physically and ethically. The transformation from "eagle" and "lion" to "hellhound" completes the descent the audience has been tracking; our anagnorisis arrives even if Macbeth's own recognition is partial or belated. The epithet is a crisp manifestation of all his choices - prophecy trusted, apparition misread, conscience silenced. It also resolves the earlier paradox: the same violent efficacy that made him admirable now howls under the light of moral scrutiny. The peripeteia of the scene - a reversal from hunter to hunted - produces catharsis, because order is restored and the miasma begins to clear. Crucially, in a culture that guarded the Divine Right of Kings under James I, the tyrant's fall reads as a moral and political restoration: rightful rule is re-affirmed, and the sacred hierarchy re-stabilised. Yet Shakespeare threads a final unease: if a culture glorifies blades and calls their bearers heroes, how quickly can those skills cross the invisible line into monstrous tyranny? The end answers with justice but also with caution; tyranny is not an exotic accident but a domestic possibility when power outweighs ethics. The cyclical nature of the plot leaves the lingering fear that history could repeat itself. If the hero must once again draw swords to restore order to the realm, what distances Macduff from Macbeth? In asking the question, Shakespeare explores the inherent dangers of a culture of violence.

Macbeth, then, is a test of how admired prowess, once severed from moral restraint, curdles into paranoia and tyranny. The tragedy pushes us to examine the cost of praising violent effectiveness without checking its ethical horizon, and to notice how public myth can become private permission. If language can crown and then condemn, if public myth can turn private poison, what safeguards - personal, communal, or spiritual - can prevent the next admired warrior from becoming the next hellhound?

## Lady Macbeth – Golden Quotes and Model Essays

**What** At the beginning of the play, Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth as a vehicle to explore how the desire for power drives her to reject femininity and humanity.

**How** she speaks in a rhythm that sounds like an incantation, blurring the boundaries between human and supernatural, implicitly linking her own corruptive influence over Macbeth to that of the witches

imperatives “Come... Unsex... Fill” give her language a forceful, summoning quality, as if she expects the world to obey her.


“Come, you spirits... Unsex me here! And fill me from the crown to the toe full of direst cruelty... Take my milk for gall.”

“take my milk for gall” is especially disturbing. Milk symbolises nurture, maternity, innocence; “gall” is bitterness and poison. In asking for this exchange, Lady Macbeth imagines her own body as a site of corruption, replacing life-giving qualities with a miasma of cruelty.

summoning “spirits” would have alarmed an audience in James I’s reign, especially given his obsession with witchcraft in *Daemonologie*. Lady Macbeth’s ambition is therefore framed not only as morally dangerous but as spiritually transgressive - she is attempting to step outside the Great Chain of Being and rewrite the nature allotted to her.

request to be “unsexed” rejects the Jacobean association between femininity, softness, and compassion, revealing a paradox: she believes she must strip away her womanhood in order to gain power, even though women in Shakespeare’s world traditionally lacked political agency.

Shakespeare uses this to establish her hamartia: an overreaching desire that refuses natural limits.



English  
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**What** As the play develops, Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth as a vehicle to reveal the deceptive nature of ambition.

she becomes the architect of deception

**How** Lady Macbeth encourages Macbeth to fake innocence, but she herself will later lose the ability to perform calmness once guilt infiltrates her mind.

The metaphor of the “innocent flower” suggests harmless beauty, while the “serpent” evokes temptation, the Fall of Man, and the biblical symbol of evil. This allusion to Eden positions Lady Macbeth as a corrupted guide - one who tempts Macbeth to fall from grace, just as the serpent tempted Eve.


“Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under’t.”

sets up a structural irony: the woman who teaches deception becomes the woman who cannot conceal her own unravelling. Through Lady Macbeth, Shakespeare argues that ambition often begins with the illusion of control - yet the cost of sustaining deception ultimately corrodes the self.

contrast between “flower” and “serpent” creates a sharp duality, mirroring the theme of equivocation that runs through the play.

The sibilance in “serpent” hisses with danger, suggesting the venom beneath the polite courtly mask Macbeth must wear.

the phrase “look like” emphasises performance, disguise, and the creation of false appearances



English  
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**What** By the end of the play, Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth as a vehicle to demonstrate how overwhelming guilt and trauma can destroy the mind.

Her decline is made more tragic because she once believed she could control morality through willpower alone

**How** repeated “Out” creates a fractured sound pattern, almost like a sob or a gasp, revealing a mind broken by its own secrets.

**Why**


The “spot” symbolises the invisible stain of Duncan’s blood - a manifestation of guilt that only she can see.

“Out damned spot!... All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. O, O, O!”

Shakespeare uses her downfall to show that guilt resists suppression - it manifests, returns, and corrodes. Her death, though offstage, completes her tragic arc: ambition gave her power for a moment, but guilt ultimately destroys her identity, humanity, and sanity.

word “damned” shows she now recognises the moral weight of her actions; she feels spiritually condemned, recalling the earlier conscious choice to call upon ‘evil spirits’ and having her self-inflicted damnation come full circle.

hyperbolic image of “all the perfumes of Arabia” not being enough highlights the permanence of her guilt: no luxury, no beauty, no earthly richness can cleanse her.



English  
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### **How does Shakespeare present Lady Macbeth? (Grade 5 model)**

Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as a character who changes dramatically throughout the play. At first she seems confident and determined, but her ambition leads her to make dangerous choices that eventually cause her to break down completely. Through Lady Macbeth, Shakespeare shows how the desire for power can change a person's behaviour, relationships, and even their mind. Her journey reflects the beliefs of Shakespeare's time, especially the idea that harming a king was a terrible sin because of the Divine Right of Kings.

At the beginning of the play, Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth as a vehicle to explore how the desire for power drives her to reject femininity and humanity. When she cries, "Come, you spirits... unsex me here!" she is asking to be filled with "direst cruelty," which shows how far she is willing to go to gain power. The word "unsex" means she wants to remove the parts of herself that society linked with kindness, care, or softness. She even says, "Take my milk for gall," which shows she wants her natural goodness to be replaced with bitterness. Milk represents motherhood and gentleness, while "gall" means poison, so this change is shocking. Shakespeare uses this language to show that Lady Macbeth is trying to make herself less human in order to push Macbeth into killing Duncan. For a Jacobean audience, her behaviour would seem frightening and unnatural. Her ambition is so strong that she calls on dark spirits for help, which links her to witchcraft - something King James I believed was very real and very dangerous.

As the play develops, Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth as a vehicle to reveal the deceptive nature of ambition. When she advises Macbeth to "Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under't," she is teaching him how to hide his true intentions. The "flower" represents harmlessness and innocence, while the "serpent" suggests danger and evil. This contrast shows that Lady Macbeth thinks success comes from pretending to be something you are not. The serpent also reminds the audience of the Bible, where the serpent tempts humans into wrongdoing, which suggests that Lady Macbeth is encouraging Macbeth to make a terrible choice. Shakespeare uses this moment to show how ambition leads to lies, acting, and manipulation. Lady Macbeth becomes the driving force behind Duncan's murder, planning the details and telling Macbeth how to behave. Even though she seems strong here, the pressure of keeping secrets and hiding the truth will later contribute to her collapse.

By the end of the play, Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth as a vehicle to demonstrate how overwhelming guilt and trauma can destroy the mind. In the sleepwalking scene, she desperately says, "Out, damned spot!" as she tries to wash imaginary blood from her hands. The "spot" represents Duncan's blood and her guilt for the murder. Even though she once told Macbeth that "a little water clears us of this deed," she now realises the stain cannot be removed. When she says, "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand," she means that no amount of perfume could cover the smell of guilt she imagines. Shakespeare uses these images to show how deeply the murder has affected her. Her repeated cries and confused speech show that she is losing her grip on reality. She can no longer hide her emotions, and the confidence she showed earlier has completely disappeared. Shakespeare presents her downfall as tragic but also as the natural result of trying to go against morality and the natural order.

Overall, Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as a character who is destroyed by her own ambition. She begins the play full of power and confidence, believing she can control events and shape her own future. However, her ambition leads her into deception, violence, and eventually overwhelming guilt. Shakespeare uses her journey to warn the audience about the dangers of wanting too much power and ignoring the consequences of your actions. Her story makes us think about how quickly strength can turn into weakness—and how a single decision can change a person forever.

### How does Shakespeare present Lady Macbeth? (Grade 7-9 model)

Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as one of his most complex and transformative characters, using her to explore power, ambition, deception, guilt, and the psychological cost of challenging natural and social order. Across the play, she becomes a dramatic vehicle through which Shakespeare questions what happens when a person rejects the limits placed on them - moral, emotional, or even gendered. By charting Lady Macbeth's journey from fierce ambition to psychological collapse, Shakespeare suggests that attempting to control destiny, power, and the human conscience ultimately leads to self-destruction.

At the beginning of the play, Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth as a vehicle to explore how the desire for power drives her to reject femininity and humanity. When she commands, "Come, you spirits... Unsex me here! And fill me... full of direst cruelty," she speaks in a rhythm that sounds like an incantation, blurring the boundaries between human and supernatural, implicitly linking her own corruptive influence over Macbeth to that of the witches. The imperatives "Come... Unsex... Fill" give her language a forceful, summoning quality, as if she expects the world to obey her. Her request to be "unsexed" rejects the Jacobean association between femininity, softness, and compassion, revealing a paradox: she believes she must strip away her womanhood in order to gain power, even though women in Shakespeare's world traditionally lacked political agency. The phrase "take my milk for gall" is especially disturbing. Milk symbolises nurture, maternity, innocence; "gall" is bitterness and poison. In asking for this exchange, Lady Macbeth imagines her own body as a site of corruption, replacing life-giving qualities with a miasma of cruelty. Shakespeare intensifies this by linking her desires to the supernatural: summoning "spirits" would have alarmed an audience in James I's reign, especially given his obsession with witchcraft in *Daemonologie*. Lady Macbeth's ambition is therefore framed not only as morally dangerous but as spiritually transgressive - she is attempting to step outside the Great Chain of Being and rewrite the nature allotted to her. Shakespeare uses this to establish her hamartia: an overreaching desire that refuses natural limits.

As the play develops, Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth as a vehicle to reveal the deceptive nature of ambition. Advising Macbeth to "Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under't," she becomes the architect of deception. The metaphor of the "innocent flower" suggests harmless beauty, while the "serpent" evokes temptation, the Fall of Man, and the biblical symbol of evil. This allusion to Eden positions Lady Macbeth as a corrupted guide - one who tempts Macbeth to fall from grace, just as the serpent tempted Eve. The contrast between "flower" and "serpent" creates a sharp duality, mirroring the theme of equivocation that runs through the play. Shakespeare crafts her language to be softly manipulative: the phrase "look like" emphasises performance, disguise, and the creation of false appearances. Her advice relies on stagecraft as well; she understands theatre within the play - how to act, how to hide, how to control what others see. Her ambition is not merely violent, but strategic, psychological, theatrical. The sibilance in "serpent" hisses with danger, suggesting the venom beneath the polite courtly mask Macbeth must wear. However, there is a deeper tragedy in this deception. Lady Macbeth encourages Macbeth to fake innocence, but she herself will later lose the ability to perform calmness once guilt infiltrates her mind. Shakespeare thus sets up a structural irony: the woman who teaches deception becomes the woman who cannot conceal her own unravelling. Through Lady Macbeth, Shakespeare argues that ambition often begins with the illusion of control - yet the cost of sustaining deception ultimately corrodes the self.

By the end of the play, Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth as a vehicle to demonstrate how overwhelming guilt and trauma can destroy the mind. In the sleepwalking scene, she cries, "Out, damned spot! ... All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand," marking a dramatic peripeteia from her earlier confidence. The repeated "Out" creates a fractured sound pattern, almost like a sob or a gasp, revealing a mind broken by its own secrets. The "spot" symbolises the invisible stain of Duncan's blood - a manifestation of guilt that only she can see. The word "damned" shows she now recognises the moral weight of her actions; she feels spiritually condemned, recalling the earlier conscious choice to call upon 'evil spirits' and having her self-inflicted damnation come full circle. The hyperbolic image of "all the perfumes of Arabia" not being enough highlights the permanence of her guilt: no luxury, no beauty, no earthly richness can cleanse her. This contrasts sharply with her earlier dismissal of Macbeth's fear - "a little water clears us of this deed." Shakespeare creates a devastating irony: the woman who once mocked guilt is now consumed by it. The rhythm of her speech

fragments into broken outbursts ("O, O, O"), capturing the collapse of her linguistic control and her psychological coherence. She no longer commands spirits; she is haunted by them. Her decline is made more tragic because she once believed she could control morality through willpower alone. Shakespeare uses her downfall to show that guilt resists suppression - it manifests, returns, and corrodes. Her death, though offstage, completes her tragic arc: ambition gave her power for a moment, but guilt ultimately destroys her identity, humanity, and sanity.

In conclusion, Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth to explore how ambition can overturn natural order, corrupt identity, and, ultimately, destroy the self. Her journey - from summoning spirits to rejecting her own femininity, to encouraging deception, to collapsing under unbearable guilt - reveals the psychological and moral cost of pursuing power at any price. Lady Macbeth becomes a tragic reminder that the human conscience cannot be silenced, and that the desire to rewrite one's nature is both intoxicating and fatal. Shakespeare leaves us with a final question: in a world driven by ambition, how long can anyone ignore the voice of conscience before it demands to be heard?

# Kingship – Golden Quotes and Model Essays

**What** At the beginning of the play, Shakespeare uses Duncan as a vehicle to idealise true kingship, presenting him as a precious and sacred figure.

**How** This imagery is dramatically cunning: Macbeth attempts to equivocate, to mask regicide in reverent rhetoric, yet the language inadvertently affirms Duncan's archetypal kingship.

**Why** the language elevates him beyond ordinary humanity.

“silver” and “golden”—metals associated with value, purity, and royalty—consecrates the corpse; the king's blood is no longer simply red and mortal but imagined as a gilded essence.

“laced” carries a delicate, decorative connotation, turning the image into a kind of courtly embroidery—a euphemism that sanctifies the act of representation even as it hints at the paradoxical horror beneath.

“Skin” invokes vulnerability while “golden blood” asserts sacred value; the friction between frailty and sanctity intensifies the sense that killing a king is a violation of both flesh and order.

For a Jacobean audience shaped by James I's politics, the image signals the gravity of regicide: the king is God's anointed, and his destruction tears at the Great Chain of Being.

the metallic imagery does double work—exalting Duncan's legitimacy while laying the ethical groundwork for the play's larger argument: rightful kingship is precious, life-giving, and morally radiant, and its loss unleashes a destructive miasma.

**“His silver skin, laced with golden blood.”**

English SHARPE HILL ACADEMY TRUST

**What** As the play develops, Shakespeare uses Macbeth as a vehicle to expose the insecurity, emptiness and anxiety of illegitimate kingship.

**How** “fruitless” summons a field of sterility—no heir, no legacy, no rootedness—undercutting the crown's promise of permanence.

**Why** this confession surfaces in private speech, revealing hamartia reshaped by fear—Macbeth's hubris wins him the throne, but the lack of legitimacy renders that victory poisonous.

The dual meaning of fruitless also calls to mind the futility of Macbeth's regicide, further suggesting the doom which Macbeth has brought upon his head.

passive “they placed” also matters: Macbeth presents himself as an object of external forces - prophecy, the Weird Sisters, circumstance - rather than as a rightful, chosen ruler; it is as if the crown has been compulsively imposed upon him, not earned

the anxiety about succession would have resonated in a post-Elizabethan world newly stabilised under James I: the health of kingship is measured by continuity, justice, and the consent of the moral order, not by bloodshed.

The juxtaposition of the metonym “crown” (kingship) and “fruitless” exposes its hollowness:

Shakespeare shows that a stolen crown cannot soothe the conscience; instead, illegitimate rule breeds equivocation, further violence, and nightmarish isolation.

The blunt, fricative f in “fruitless” catches on the tongue, momentarily choking the phrase, mirroring Macbeth's paranoia about Banquo's line.

**“Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown”**

English SHARPE HILL ACADEMY TRUST

**What** By the end of the play, Shakespeare uses Macbeth as a vehicle to reveal how kingship without virtue becomes grotesque and unfit.

**How** Explores the impact of Macbeth's poor kingship as power leaks away because it lacks the ethical body to hold it

**Why** The simile hinges on proportion: “giant's robe” evokes the vastness of true kingship - its responsibilities, its moral stature - while “dwarfish thief” reduces Macbeth to smallness and criminality

In tragic structure, this amounts to anagnorisis for the audience: we recognise that kingship is not brute control but moral fitness; without virtue, the crown becomes monstrous costume.

“robe” captures the ceremonial exterior of power; Shakespeare's choice makes kingship a garment that must fit the wearer's inner measure but it is juxtaposed with the accusatory “thief” which names the manner of acquisition - stolen, unjust - to highlight the contempt the speaker has for Macbeth's rule of Scotland.

Shakespeare uses the line as the culmination of Macbeth's ignoble choices, ultimately exposing the consequences of poor leadership - if no one is following you, you are not leading.

revisits the play's recurring motif of “borrowed robes,” completing the earlier arc of disguise and deception

The image is grotesque - fabric draped over a misshapen frame - capturing the nihilism of a reign that cannot sustain meaning or loyalty.

As stagecraft, the judgment arrives publicly, through a thane's voice, signalling that Macbeth's authority has evaporated,

**“Like a giant's robe upon a dwarfish thief.”**

English SHARPE HILL ACADEMY TRUST

### How does Shakespeare present the theme of kingship? (Grade 5)

Shakespeare explores the theme of kingship in *Macbeth* by showing the difference between a good, rightful king and a bad, illegitimate one. Throughout the play, he suggests that true kingship is linked to honesty, fairness and the natural order, while false kingship leads to fear, chaos and guilt. By comparing Duncan and Macbeth, Shakespeare makes it clear that a king must rule with virtue, not just hold a crown.

At the beginning of the play, Shakespeare uses Duncan as a vehicle to idealise true kingship, presenting him as a precious and sacred figure. After Duncan is murdered, his body is described as having "his silver skin laced with golden blood," which makes him seem valuable and almost holy. The words "silver" and "golden" suggest treasure, purity and something worth protecting. This shows how respected and important Duncan is as a rightful king. The description also makes his death seem shocking and unnatural, because killing a king was seen as one of the worst crimes in Shakespeare's time. People believed in the Divine Right of Kings, meaning the king was chosen by God. By using these precious images, Shakespeare shows that Duncan represents the ideal king: kind, generous and trusted by his people. His murder breaks the natural order and sets off the tragedy that follows.

As the play develops, Shakespeare uses Macbeth as a vehicle to expose the insecurity, emptiness and anxiety of illegitimate kingship. When Macbeth says, "Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown," he admits that his kingship brings him no comfort. The word "fruitless" suggests something that cannot grow or succeed, showing that Macbeth knows his rule has no future because he has no heir. Instead of enjoying the crown, he becomes paranoid and fearful. He realises that he has gained power through murder, not through loyalty or fairness, and this makes him constantly anxious. The line also shows that Macbeth does not feel truly in control: he says the crown was "placed" on him, as if he did not earn it. Shakespeare uses this moment to show that a stolen crown cannot bring happiness. Macbeth's kingship is empty because it is built on lies and bloodshed, not on the qualities that make a real king.

By the end of the play, Shakespeare uses Macbeth as a vehicle to reveal how kingship without virtue becomes grotesque and unfit. Angus describes Macbeth's rule as "like a giant's robe upon a dwarfish thief," a powerful image that shows Macbeth is too small - morally and spiritually - for the role he has taken. The "giant's robe" represents true kingship, which requires strength, honesty and responsibility. Macbeth, however, is described as "dwarfish," showing he lacks these qualities. Calling him a "thief" reminds the audience that he stole the throne through murder. The robe does not fit him, just as the role of king does not fit his character. Shakespeare uses this clothing metaphor to show that kingship is not just about wearing a crown - it must match the person's inner qualities. Because Macbeth has none of the virtues a king needs, his rule becomes strange, forced and finally impossible to maintain. This prepares the audience for his downfall and the restoration of rightful leadership.

Overall, Shakespeare presents kingship as a role that depends on moral goodness, not just on power or position. Duncan's rightful kingship brings harmony and respect, while Macbeth's illegitimate kingship brings fear, guilt and disaster. By comparing these two rulers, Shakespeare teaches that true kingship must be earned through virtue and honesty. The play leaves us thinking about what qualities a leader should have - and what happens to a country when the wrong person wears the crown.

### How does Shakespeare present the theme of kingship? (Grade 7-9)

Shakespeare explores kingship in *Macbeth* by setting sacred, rightful authority against counterfeit, anxious rule, and by showing how the moral quality of the ruler shapes the health of the realm. Writing for a Jacobean audience newly under James I, he dramatises the Divine Right of Kings and the Great Chain of Being: a good king sustains natural and social order, while an illegitimate one breeds miasma—fear, tyranny, and spiritual decay. Through precise imagery and stagecraft, the play becomes a parable about how power without virtue collapses into insecurity and grotesque display.

At the beginning of the play, Shakespeare uses Duncan as a vehicle to idealise true kingship, presenting him as a precious and sacred figure. When Duncan's body is described as having "his silver skin, laced with golden blood," the language elevates him beyond ordinary humanity. The choice of "silver" and "golden"—metals associated with value, purity, and royalty—consecrates the corpse; the king's blood is no longer simply red and mortal but imagined as a gilded essence. The word "laced" carries a delicate, decorative connotation, turning the image into a kind of courtly embroidery—a euphemism that sanctifies the act of representation even as it hints at the paradoxical horror beneath. This imagery is dramatically cunning: Macbeth attempts to equivocate, to mask regicide in reverent rhetoric, yet the language inadvertently affirms Duncan's archetypal kingship. "Skin" invokes vulnerability while "golden blood" asserts sacred value; the friction between frailty and sanctity intensifies the sense that killing a king is a violation of both flesh and order. For a Jacobean audience shaped by James I's politics, the image signals the gravity of regicide: the king is God's anointed, and his destruction tears at the Great Chain of Being. Shakespeare's stagecraft compounds this by surrounding Duncan with blessings, gratitude, and a stable court; his presence soothes the realm. Thus, the metallic imagery does double work—exalting Duncan's legitimacy while laying the ethical groundwork for the play's larger argument: rightful kingship is precious, life-giving, and morally radiant, and its loss unleashes a destructive miasma.

As the play develops, Shakespeare uses Macbeth as a vehicle to expose the insecurity, emptiness and anxiety of illegitimate kingship. Macbeth's lament, "Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown," condenses his entire crisis into one stark oxymoron: a symbol of power that cannot produce continuity. The word "fruitless" summons a field of sterility—no heir, no legacy, no rootedness—undercutting the crown's promise of permanence. The dual meaning of fruitless also calls to mind the futility of Macbeth's regicide, further suggesting the doom which Macbeth has brought upon his head. The passive "they placed" also matters: Macbeth presents himself as an object of external forces—prophecy, the Weird Sisters, circumstance—rather than as a rightful, chosen ruler; it is as if the crown has been compulsively imposed upon him, not earned by virtue. The juxtaposition of the metonym "crown" (kingship) and "fruitless" exposes its hollowness: an image of glitter without growth. The blunt, fricative f in "fruitless" catches on the tongue, momentarily choking the phrase, mirroring Macbeth's paranoia about Banquo's line. Dramatically, this confession surfaces in private speech, revealing hamartia reshaped by fear—Macbeth's hubris wins him the throne, but the lack of legitimacy renders that victory poisonous. In context, the anxiety about succession would have resonated in a post-Elizabethan world newly stabilised under James I: the health of kingship is measured by continuity, justice, and the consent of the moral order, not by bloodshed. Shakespeare shows that a stolen crown cannot soothe the conscience; instead, illegitimate rule breeds equivocation, further violence, and nightmarish isolation. Kingship becomes performative costume rather than ethical office, and the realm darkens because the sovereign's spirit is fruitless.

By the end of the play, Shakespeare uses Macbeth as a vehicle to reveal how kingship without virtue becomes grotesque and unfit. Angus's verdict—Macbeth's authority is "like a giant's robe upon a dwarfish thief"—deploys clothing imagery to judge fitness for rule. The simile hinges on proportion: "giant's robe" evokes the vastness of true kingship—its responsibilities, its moral stature—while "dwarfish thief" reduces Macbeth to smallness and criminality. The word "robe" captures the ceremonial exterior of power; Shakespeare's choice makes kingship a garment that must fit the wearer's inner measure but it is juxtaposed with the accusatory "thief" which names the manner of acquisition—stolen, unjust—to highlight the contempt the speaker has for Macbeth's rule of Scotland. The choice of "dwarfish thief" hisses with contempt, shrinking Macbeth further in the audience's ear. This line also revisits the play's recurring motif of "borrowed robes," completing the earlier

arc of disguise and deception. As stagecraft, the judgment arrives publicly, through a thane's voice, signalling that Macbeth's authority has evaporated, exploring the impact of Macbeth's poor kingship as power leaks away because it lacks the ethical body to hold it. The image is grotesque - fabric draped over a misshapen frame - capturing the nihilism of a reign that cannot sustain meaning or loyalty. In tragic structure, this amounts to anagnorisis for the audience: we recognise that kingship is not brute control but moral fitness; without virtue, the crown becomes monstrous costume. The ensuing military reversal delivers peripeteia and catharsis - order is restored because the garment is reclaimed by one it fits. Shakespeare uses the line as the culmination of Macbeth's ignoble choices, ultimately exposing the consequences of poor leadership – if no one is following you, you are not leading.

Shakespeare, then, idealises rightful rule through sacred, precious imagery; he exposes counterfeit kingship through sterility, anxiety, and the language of compulsion; and he condemns vice-ridden sovereignty through grotesque mismatch between office and wearer. Read against the Divine Right of Kings and James I's concerns for stability, the play argues that true kingship is measured not by possession of a crown but by the soul that gives that crown meaning. The final challenge is quietly unsettling: if power can be worn like a robe, what ensures that the robe fits - virtue, consent, or fear - and how quickly might a realm decay when its ruler is dwarfish inside a giant office?

## The Supernatural – Golden Quotes and Model Essays

**What** At the beginning of the play, Shakespeare uses the witches as a vehicle to show how the supernatural disturbs the natural and moral order.

**How** The tight, mirrored phrasing creates a paradox in which moral opposites become interchangeable, suggesting that in this world appearances cannot be trusted.


**Why** The act of hovering through the air aligns them with Jacobean fears (encouraged by King James I's *Daemonologie*) that witches existed beyond God's order.

The witches "hover," an unsettling word that pulls them out of the physical world

**“Fair is foul and foul is fair...hover through the fog and filthy air.”**

“fog and filthy air” suggest both physical obscurity and moral pollution; fog blocks sight, while the word “filthy” gives the atmosphere a sense of contamination. Shakespeare may be implying that the witches do not merely create chaos but reveal an underlying instability already present

This early miasma of confusion becomes the psychological environment Macbeth walks into, priming him to be deceived - because in a world where meanings are blurred, ambition can easily disguise itself as fate



**What** As the play develops, Shakespeare uses Macbeth as a vehicle to explore how the supernatural preys on human weakness, blurring the boundary between reality and illusion

**How** His hamartia – ambition - makes him vulnerable to illusions that confirm what he secretly longs for. In reaching for the dagger, Macbeth chooses not the supernatural but the version of reality that best justifies his movement toward tyranny.

“this” makes the dagger feel close and tangible, even though the audience sees nothing, exposing the fragility of Macbeth’s perception. Shakespeare’s stagecraft heightens this: by letting the audience watch Macbeth reach for an invisible object, he reveals how Macbeth’s imagination is overpowering his judgement


**“Is this a dagger which I see before me?”**

his uncertainty shows how far the witches’ earlier paradox has infected his thinking. He can no longer trust the reality he sees before him.

The word “see” becomes crucial - Macbeth sees a dagger, but not the moral implications of following it. Another reading is that Macbeth’s question is not genuine confusion but a kind of self-authorization: he wants the dagger to be a sign that destiny supports his ambition.

Jacobean feared that evil forces could manipulate the senses, but Shakespeare simultaneously suggests a more psychological truth: Macbeth sees what he wants to see.

imagery suggests Shakespeare’s condemnation of Macbeth’s impending regicide. The noble violence of Macbeth’s earlier executions with his “brandished steel” – a weapon of a warrior who fights fairly in defence of others – has been replaced with the ignobility of a “dagger” – a symbol of murder and deceit.



**What** By the end of the play, Shakespeare uses the supernatural as a vehicle to illustrate how Macbeth’s inescapable guilt comes back to haunt him.

**How** the ghost of Banquo becomes the manifestation of Macbeth’s conscience

**Why** “gory” corrupts what should be a symbol of life – hair - into a reminder of violent death, while the imagined “shake” suggests a silent accusation Macbeth cannot silence.

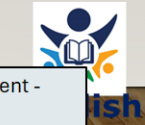
staging intensifies his humiliation: only Macbeth can see the ghost, so his fear becomes public, exposing him as weak and unstable before the nobles he must impress

**“Ne’er shake thy gory locks at me!”**

Some critics interpret the ghost as psychological rather than supernatural - Macbeth generating his own torment. This reading strengthens Shakespeare’s exploration of guilt: Macbeth no longer needs witches to destroy him; his mind has become its own haunting force.

Macbeth’s attempt to command the ghost, just as he commands murderers, reveals his inability to control the consequences of his own actions.

In the context of King James I - who believed that regicide invited divine and demonic judgement - Banquo’s ghost would have appeared as the inevitable return of moral order.



## How does Shakespeare present the theme of the supernatural?

### (Grade 5)

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a man whose character becomes corrupted because of the supernatural. At first the witches create confusion, then Macbeth is tempted by a strange vision, and by the end he is haunted by the guilt that destroys him.

At the beginning of the play, Shakespeare uses the witches to show how the supernatural can disturb the natural and moral order of the world. Their chant, "Fair is foul and foul is fair... hover through the fog and filthy air," immediately creates confusion. The phrase "fair is foul" makes good and bad sound the same, which shows how the witches twist normal ideas of right and wrong. The repeated *f* sounds make their words sound harsh and threatening, while "hover" makes them seem unnatural and frightening. The "fog and filthy air" suggests a world where people cannot see clearly, either physically or morally. Shakespeare includes this to show that Macbeth is entering a world already full of confusion and darkness. The reason Shakespeare might do this is to warn the audience that when the natural order is disturbed - as people in Jacobean England feared with witchcraft - danger and evil can grow.

As the play continues, Shakespeare uses Macbeth to show how the supernatural can take advantage of human weakness. When about to murder Duncan, Macbeth asks, "Is this a dagger which I see before me?" The audience can see that he is beginning to lose trust in his own senses. The word "this" makes the dagger seem close and real, even though the audience knows it isn't there. This shows how Macbeth is becoming confused, and the dagger image represents the murder he is already thinking about. Macbeth wants to believe the dagger is a sign telling him what to do. Shakespeare leaves it unclear whether the dagger is caused by the witches or Macbeth's imagination, which makes his inner conflict more obvious. Shakespeare may do this to show how ambition can twist a person's thinking and make them believe that their darkest desires are justified. It suggests that Macbeth's downfall is caused not only by the supernatural but by his own choices.

By the end of the play, Shakespeare uses the supernatural to show how Macbeth is trapped by his guilt. At the banquet scene, when he shouts, "Ne'er shake thy gory locks at me!" at Banquo's ghost, it becomes clear that the past is coming back to punish him. The word "gory" reminds the audience of the blood Macbeth has spilled, and the idea of Banquo shaking his head suggests that Macbeth is being accused of his crimes. Only Macbeth can see the ghost, which makes him look unstable in front of his guests. This shows that Macbeth can no longer hide what he has done, even from himself. Shakespeare's intention here is to show that guilt always returns, and that those who commit evil cannot escape its consequences. Macbeth's fear proves that his crimes have destroyed his peace of mind and his ability to lead.

Overall, Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a man who is changed and destroyed by the supernatural and by his own ambition. The witches' confusion, the dagger vision, and Banquo's ghost all push him further into darkness. Shakespeare may be reminding the audience that giving in to temptation, especially when it goes against moral or natural laws, will always lead to destruction. The play leaves us thinking about how easily a person can fall when they let ambition overpower their judgement.

### How does Shakespeare present the theme of the supernatural? (Grade 7-9)

Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a tragic figure whose downfall grows out of his entanglement with the supernatural: first through an atmosphere of moral confusion, then through visions that predate and shape his ambition, and finally through the haunting return of guilt that destroys his authority, sanity, and sense of self.

At the beginning of the play, Shakespeare uses the witches as a vehicle to show how the supernatural disturbs the natural and moral order. Their chant, "Fair is foul and foul is fair... hover through the fog and filthy air," immediately collapses the categories Macbeth - and his audience - depend on to interpret the world. The tight, mirrored phrasing creates a paradox in which moral opposites become interchangeable, suggesting that in this world appearances cannot be trusted. The repeated *f* sounds give the line a sinister, breathy quality, as though the words themselves carry corruption. The witches "hover," an unsettling word that pulls them out of the physical world and aligns them with Jacobean fears (encouraged by King James I's *Daemonologie*) that witches existed beyond God's order. The "fog and filthy air" suggest both physical obscurity and moral pollution; fog blocks sight, while the word "filthy" gives the atmosphere a sense of contamination. Shakespeare may be implying that the witches do not merely create chaos but reveal an underlying instability already present in Scotland. This early miasma of confusion becomes the psychological environment Macbeth walks into, priming him to be deceived - because in a world where meanings are blurred, ambition can easily disguise itself as fate.

As the play develops, Shakespeare uses Macbeth as a vehicle to explore how the supernatural preys on human weakness, blurring the boundary between reality and illusion. When Macbeth is about to murder Duncan, and asks, "Is this a dagger which I see before me?" his uncertainty shows how far the witches' earlier paradox has infected his thinking. The word "this" makes the dagger feel close and tangible, even though the audience sees nothing, exposing the fragility of Macbeth's perception. Shakespeare's stagecraft heightens this: by letting the audience watch Macbeth reach for an invisible object, he reveals how Macbeth's imagination is overpowering his judgement. The harsh consonants in "dagger" mimic the violence it represents, preparing the audience for the murder to come. Additionally, the choice of imagery suggests Shakespeare's condemnation of Macbeth's impending regicide. The noble violence of Macbeth's earlier executions with his "brandished steel" - a weapon of a warrior who fights fairly in defence of others - has been replaced with the ignobility of a "dagger" - a symbol of murder and deceit. The word "see" becomes crucial - Macbeth sees a dagger, but not the moral implications of following it. Another reading is that Macbeth's question is not genuine confusion but a kind of self-authorisation: he wants the dagger to be a sign that destiny supports his ambition. The hallucination becomes a manifestation of his desire, shaped as much by his own imagination as by the supernatural influence he believes in. This aligns with Jacobean fears that evil forces could manipulate the senses, but Shakespeare simultaneously suggests a more psychological truth: Macbeth sees what he wants to see. His hamartia - ambition - makes him vulnerable to illusions that confirm what he secretly longs for. In reaching for the dagger, Macbeth chooses not the supernatural but the version of reality that best justifies his movement toward tyranny.

By the end of the play, Shakespeare uses the supernatural as a vehicle to illustrate how Macbeth's inescapable guilt comes back to haunt him. During the banquet scene, his outburst, "Ne'er shake thy gory locks at me!" shows the ghost of Banquo becoming the manifestation of Macbeth's conscience. The word "gory" corrupts what should be a symbol of life - hair - into a reminder of violent death, while the imagined "shake" suggests a silent accusation Macbeth cannot silence. The staging intensifies his humiliation: only Macbeth can see the ghost, so his fear becomes public, exposing him as weak and unstable before the nobles he must impress. The explosive consonants in "gory" and "shake" mirror Macbeth's fractured mental state, breaking the smooth rhythm of royal ceremony. Some critics interpret the ghost as psychological rather than supernatural - Macbeth generating his own torment. This reading strengthens Shakespeare's exploration of guilt: Macbeth no longer needs witches to destroy him; his mind has become its own haunting force. In the context of King James I - who believed that regicide invited divine and demonic judgement - Banquo's ghost would have appeared as the inevitable return of moral order. Macbeth's attempt to command the ghost, just as he commands murderers, reveals his inability to control the consequences of his own actions. He can silence Banquo in life, but not in death.

Shakespeare ultimately presents Macbeth as a man undone not simply by the supernatural but by his own willingness to embrace it whenever it suits his ambition, and to deny it whenever it exposes his guilt. The witches open the door, but Macbeth chooses to walk through it; the dagger appears, but Macbeth chooses to follow it; the ghost returns, and Macbeth cannot escape it. In a world where desire can masquerade as destiny, Shakespeare leaves us with a lasting question: how can we ever be sure that the visions we follow are real - and not simply the shadows of our own darkest hopes?

## Guilt – Golden Quotes and Model Essays

<b>What</b>	At the beginning of the play, Shakespeare uses Macbeth as a vehicle to reveal how guilt can manifest simply from the desire to kill.	Macbeth's conscience recoils at the thought of regicide
<b>How</b>	"hide" signals fear of exposure, as if the natural order itself were a judge.	
<b>Why</b>		

"Stars" are archetypal emblems of guidance and moral constancy; asking them to extinguish their "fires" is paradoxical, a refusal of illumination - the very thing by which humans navigate right and wrong.

"Light" operates as truth and scrutiny, but when juxtaposed with the double worded "black and deep" it gives his desire both moral stain and psychological depth, a sinkhole he knows he should not enter.

By placing guilt at the level of desire, he warns that tyranny begins privately - long before policy or prophecy - and primes a miasma in which the audience senses the moral air thicken as Macbeth tries to push "light" away.

Shakespeare crafts guilt here as an early manifestation of hamartia: ambition already aware of its sin.

**"Stars, hide your fires. Let not light see my black and deep desires."**

English  
SHARE MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST

<b>What</b>	As the play develops, Shakespeare uses Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as vehicles to explore how guilt can affect people in varying ways.	Shakespeare contrasts two moral psychologies to show <i>why</i> guilt corrodes differently. Macbeth's imagination, formerly driven by hubris, edges toward anagnorisis - he senses that the stain is permanent - which seeds paranoia and a slide into tyranny. Lady Macbeth's minimisation temporarily masks guilt, but the strategy is not enduring, as we see later in Act 5.
<b>How</b>	invoking "Neptune," the Roman sea-god, elevates the problem to divine insufficiency.	

"blood" - both literal and symbolic - becomes a manifestation of trauma and the mark of regicide

"A little water" reduces the crisis to a domestic act well within the expected sphere of influence of a Jacobean woman, whilst "clears us" sanitises the act of regicide, downplaying it's significance in a way to mitigate Macbeth's distress

"Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean?"

"A little water clears us of this deed."

It is striking that Macbeth does not mention the Christian God here; it is as if his guilt compels him to search elsewhere for redemption.

Shakespeare's pairing of these reactions foreshadows peripeteia in both arcs - his flooding fear, her delayed collapse - and exposes the horrifying effects of regicide in the Jacobean era.

"deed" as a cool euphemism that rebrands murder as neutral action.

English  
SHARE MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST

<b>What</b>	By the end of the play, Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth's mental collapse as a vehicle to illustrate the dominating, overwhelming effects of guilt.	Shakespeare shifts from sight to scent: where Macbeth feared visible blood, Lady Macbeth cannot escape an imagined smell, perhaps as reflection of Macbeth's practiced comfort with the sight of violence, being a product of is warrior culture, juxtaposed with the more domestic role of Lady Macbeth
<b>How</b>	The stain she once called temporary becomes a compulsive obsession.	
<b>Why</b>		

Spot" tries in vain to reduce the crime to a speck, yet "damned" admits spiritual judgement.

The imperative "Out" reads as a desperate attempt to get rid of her sin.

"Perfumes of Arabia" conjure exotic abundance; "sweeten" shows she seeks not mere cleansing but reversal - corruption turned into goodness - while "little hand" creates tragic irony: the woman who orchestrated power now feels diminished.

Shakespeare's intention is to refute her earlier euphemism ("a little water") with the body's memory: guilt is not surface dirt but a psychic stain that overwhelms the senses.

**"Out damned spot!...All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. O, O, O."**

The queen who once tried to master fear becomes mastered by it, and the audience's catharsis comes from recognising that euphemism and control cannot outpace moral consequence.

Stagecraft makes the guilt public: sleepwalking with a candle, compulsive rubbing, eyes fixed on invisible marks - an apparition of conscience.

English  
SHARE MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST

### **How does Shakespeare present the theme of guilt? (Grade 5)**

Shakespeare presents guilt in *Macbeth* as something that grows stronger the more a character gives in to ambition. At first it appears as a small, private feeling inside Macbeth's mind, then it affects Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in different ways after Duncan's murder, and finally it becomes so powerful that it destroys Lady Macbeth completely.

At the beginning of the play, Shakespeare uses Macbeth to show how guilt can begin even from the desire to kill. When Macbeth says, "Stars, hide your fires. Let not light see my black and deep desires," he already feels ashamed of wanting to become king through murder. The command "hide" shows he wants to cover up his thoughts, as if the natural world could expose him. The "stars" represent goodness and guidance, so asking them to disappear shows that Macbeth understands his ambition is wrong. Calling his desires "black and deep" suggests that he knows they are dark and buried inside him. Even the quiet, tense sounds in the line make it feel secretive. Shakespeare presents guilt here as something that begins privately, long before Macbeth takes action. This helps the audience see that guilt is tied closely to Macbeth's ambition and that he already understands the dangers of following his darker thoughts.

As the play develops, Shakespeare uses Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to show how guilt can affect different people in very different ways. After Duncan's murder, Macbeth asks, "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean?" which makes his guilt seem enormous - so big that even the sea could not wash it away. "Neptune's ocean" makes his guilt feel as powerful as a god, and "blood" becomes more than a physical stain; it becomes a symbol of the terrible act he has committed. In contrast, Lady Macbeth insists, "A little water clears us of this deed." Her phrase "a little" makes the murder sound small and easy to fix, and calling it a "deed" makes it sound like an ordinary task instead of a crime. Shakespeare places these two ideas together to show why guilt affects them so differently. Macbeth's imagination makes him see the murder as huge and impossible to undo, which later leads him into fear and paranoia. Lady Macbeth tries to stay strong and dismiss the guilt, but her confidence is temporary. By showing both reactions, Shakespeare helps the audience understand guilt not as a simple emotion, but as something that grows or hides depending on the person.

By the end of the play, Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth's mental collapse to show how guilt can become overwhelming and impossible to escape. In the sleepwalking scene she cries, "Out, damned spot! ... All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." The "spot" she imagines is small, but calling it "damned" shows she feels spiritually punished. The command "Out" shows her desperation to remove the guilt she once ignored. Unlike Macbeth, who feared visible blood, Lady Macbeth now struggles with the imagined smell of guilt. Her reference to "all the perfumes of Arabia" shows that even huge amounts of sweetness and luxury cannot cover the guilt she feels. The phrase "little hand" creates a sad contrast, reminding the audience that she once seemed powerful but now feels helpless. Her broken cry of "O, O, O" suggests panic and a mind falling apart. Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth's collapse to show how guilt, once denied, can return even stronger and take over someone's entire identity.

Shakespeare ultimately presents guilt as something that grows quietly but becomes impossible to escape once a person crosses a moral line. Macbeth feels it first in secret thoughts, then after the murder he cannot wash it away, and later Lady Macbeth discovers she cannot hide from it either. Shakespeare leaves the audience thinking about how powerful guilt can be and whether a person can ever truly escape the consequences of their own choices.

### How does Shakespeare present the theme of guilt? (Grade 7-9)

Shakespeare presents guilt in *Macbeth* as a force that begins in thought, thickens through action, and ultimately overwhelms the senses and the self. It shadows ambition from its first “black” flicker, shapes characters in different ways, and returns - like an apparition - to fracture language, sleep, and identity.

At the beginning of the play, Shakespeare uses Macbeth as a vehicle to reveal how guilt can manifest simply from the desire to kill. “Stars, hide your fires. Let not light see my black and deep desires.” Guilt appears even before the deed: Macbeth’s conscience recoils at the thought of regicide. The imperative “hide” signals fear of exposure, as if the natural order itself were a judge. “Stars” are archetypal emblems of guidance and moral constancy; asking them to extinguish their “fires” is paradoxical, a refusal of illumination - the very thing by which humans navigate right and wrong. “Light” operates as truth and scrutiny, but when juxtaposed with the double worded “black and deep” it gives his desire both moral stain and psychological depth, a sinkhole he knows he should not enter. Sound sharpens secrecy: sibilants and clipped plosives compress the line into urgent whisper. Stagecraft may reinforce this with half-lighting against a night sky, making Macbeth carve out a pocket of darkness within a luminous world. Shakespeare crafts guilt here as an early manifestation of hamartia: ambition already aware of its sin. By placing guilt at the level of desire, he warns that tyranny begins privately - long before policy or prophecy - and primes a miasma in which the audience senses the moral air thicken as Macbeth tries to push “light” away.

As the play develops, Shakespeare uses Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as vehicles to explore how guilt can affect people in varying ways. Following Duncan’s murder, the Macbeths contrastingly state: “Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood clean?” / “A little water clears us of this deed.” Macbeth inflates guilt to oceanic scale: invoking “Neptune,” the Roman sea-god, elevates the problem to divine insufficiency. It is striking that Macbeth does not mention the Christian God here; it is as if his guilt compels him to search elsewhere for redemption. The ordinary word “wash” turns tragically inadequate; “blood” - both literal and symbolic - becomes a manifestation of trauma and the mark of regicide. Lady Macbeth counters with compression and control. “A little water” reduces the crisis to a domestic act well within the expected sphere of influence of a Jacobean woman, whilst “clears us” sanitises the act of regicide, downplaying its significance in a way to mitigate Macbeth’s distress. This is anchored through the choice of “deed” as a cool euphemism that rebrands murder as neutral action. Her simple delivery performs authority, and the brisk hand-washing on stage becomes ritual denial. Shakespeare contrasts two moral psychologies to show *why* guilt corrodes differently. Macbeth’s imagination, formerly driven by hubris, edges toward anagnorisis - he senses that the stain is permanent - which seeds paranoia and a slide into tyranny. Lady Macbeth’s minimisation temporarily masks guilt, but the strategy is not enduring, as we see later in Act 5. Shakespeare’s pairing of these reactions foreshadows peripeteia in both arcs - his flooding fear, her delayed collapse - and exposes the horrifying effects of regicide in the Jacobean era.

By the end of the play, Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth’s mental collapse as a vehicle to illustrate the dominating, overwhelming effects of guilt. Obsessively, she chants: “Out, damned spot! ... All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. O, O, O.” The stain she once called temporary becomes a compulsive obsession. “Spot” tries in vain to reduce the crime to a speck, yet “damned” admits spiritual judgement. The imperative “Out” reads as a desperate attempt to get rid of her sin. Shakespeare shifts from sight to scent: where Macbeth feared visible blood, Lady Macbeth cannot escape an imagined smell, perhaps as reflection of Macbeth’s practiced comfort with the sight of violence, being a product of his warrior culture, juxtaposed with the more domestic role of Lady Macbeth. “Perfumes of Arabia” conjure exotic abundance; “sweeten” shows she seeks not mere cleansing but reversal - corruption turned into goodness - while “little hand” creates tragic irony: the woman who orchestrated power now feels diminished. Phonetically, the sharp *d* in “damned” and the repeated “O, O, O” fracture her speech, signalling language broken under trauma. Stagecraft makes the guilt public: sleepwalking with a candle, compulsive rubbing, eyes fixed on invisible marks - an apparition of conscience. Shakespeare’s intention is to refute her earlier euphemism (“a little water”) with the body’s memory: guilt is not surface dirt but a psychic stain that overwhelms the senses. The queen who once tried to master fear becomes mastered by it, and the audience’s catharsis comes from recognising that euphemism and control cannot outpace moral consequence.

Shakespeare ultimately renders guilt as the dark result of ambition: it starts as a warning in thought, swells through the act, and ends by breaking speech, sleep, and self. If light, water, and perfume – truth and action – cannot cleanse the mark, what safeguards can a person or a state build at the moment desire first turns “black and deep,” and is it wiser to silence that wish - or to let conscience speak loudly enough to save us from ourselves?

# Essay advice

You should spend 55 minutes on this section.

You should aim to use the extract **and your knowledge of the wider text** to respond to the question.

## What the examiner wants to see:

'A candidate's response is likely to be a critical, exploratory, well-structured argument. It takes a conceptualised approach to the full task supported by a range of judicious references. There will be a fine-grained and insightful analysis of language and form and structure supported by judicious use of subject terminology. Convincing exploration of one or more ideas/perspectives/contextual factors/interpretations.'

- A focused, detailed, cohesive evaluation of the interrelationship of language, form and structure and their effect on the reader.
- Relevant subject terminology is integrated and precise.
- An assured personal response
- High level of engagement with the text
- Critical style with perceptive understanding and interpretation
- Well-chosen reference integrated into the response
- Excellent understanding of context, and convincing understanding of the relationship between text and context is integrated into the response.

## Subject terminology to use for AO2:

- **Metaphor** – describe one thing as something different, allowing you to make a comparison in your mind's eye.
- **Simile** – a comparison by using the words 'like' or 'as' to help you see it.
- **Imagery** –helps to paint a vivid picture in your mind to help you understand what a character is thinking about or feeling.
- **Oxymoron** – two words which seem to have opposite meanings or contradict each other are placed together to create particular effects.
- **Foreshadowing** – warning, hinting at events to come later in the play
- **Imperative verbs** – commanding or bossy verbs
- **Hyperbole** – exaggeration
- **Contrasts** – ideas that differ from each other
- **Antithesis** – a person or thing that is the direct opposite of someone or something else.
- **Personification** – giving human characteristics to something non-human.

- **Rhetorical question** – asking a question designed to encourage thinking.

Your response should begin with a thesis statement then have 3 detailed paragraphs which cover **what, how** and **why**. It is best to structure your essay by looking at the beginning of the play, the middle and then the end.

<p><b>BANQUO</b>          Good sir, why do you start; and seem to fear          Things that do sound so fair? I' the name of truth,          Are ye fantastical, or that indeed          Which outwardly ye show? My noble partner          You greet with present grace and great prediction          Of noble having and of royal hope,          That he seems rapt withal: to me you speak not.          If you can look into the seeds of time,          And say which grain will grow and which will not,          Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear          Your favours nor your hate.</p> <p><b>First Witch</b>          Hail!</p> <p><b>Second Witch</b>          Hail!</p> <p><b>Third Witch</b>          Hail!</p> <p><b>First Witch</b>          Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.</p> <p><b>Second Witch</b>          Not so happy, yet much happier.</p> <p><b>Third Witch</b>          Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none:          So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo!</p> <p><b>First Witch</b>          Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!</p> <p><b>MACBETH</b>          Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more:          By Sinel's death I know I am thane of Glamis;          But how of Cawdor? The thane of Cawdor lives,          A prosperous gentleman; and to be king          Stands not within the prospect of belief,          No more than to be Cawdor. Say from whence          You owe this strange intelligence? or why          Upon this blasted heath you stop our way          With such prophetic greeting? Speak, I charge you.</p> <p><i>(The Witches vanish)</i></p>	<p>5</p> <p>10</p> <p>15</p> <p>20</p> <p>25</p>
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Q1: Starting with this conversation, explain how far Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a character who believes in the **supernatural power of the witches**.

Write about:

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

[30 marks]  
 SPaG [4 marks]

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

The raven himself is hoarse That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan Under my battlements. Come, you spirits That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood; Stop up the access and passage to remorse, That no compunctious visitings of nature Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts, And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers, Wherever in your sightless substances You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night, And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell, That my keen knife see not the wound it makes, Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark, To cry 'Hold, hold!'	<b>5</b>       <b>10</b>       <b>15</b>
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Q1: Starting with this speech, explain how far you think Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as a **powerful woman**.

Write about:

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

SPAG [4 marks]

At this point in the play, Macbeth has decided he will **not** kill King Duncan. He is just about to share this news with his wife, Lady Macbeth.

<p><b>MACBETH</b>          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.</p>	<b>5</b>
<p><b>LADY MACBETH</b>          Was the hope drunk          Wherein you dress'd 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' the adage?</p>	<b>10</b>
<p><b>MACBETH</b>          Prithee, peace:          I dare do all that may become a man;          Who dares do more is none.</p>	<b>15</b>
<p><b>LADY MACBETH</b>          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.</p>	<b>20</b>

Q1: Starting with this conversation, explain how far you think Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as the **dominant partner** in this relationship.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth in this speech
- how Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth elsewhere in the play. [30 marks]

SPAG [4 marks]

## Act 1

### ACT 1 SCENE I. A desert place.

*Thunder and lightning. Enter three Witches*

**First Witch**

When shall we three meet again  
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

**Second Witch**

When the hurlyburly's done,  
When the battle's lost and won.

**Third Witch**

That will be ere the set of sun.

**First Witch**

Where the place?

**Second Witch**

Upon the heath.

**Third Witch**

There to meet with Macbeth.

**First Witch**

I come, Graymalkin!

**Second Witch**

Paddock calls.

**Third Witch**

Anon.

**ALL**

Fair is foul, and foul is fair:  
Hover through the fog and filthy air.

*Exeunt*

**Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare present the power of the witches in Macbeth?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents the power of the witches here
- How Shakespeare presents their power elsewhere in the play.

[30 marks]  
SPaG [4 marks]

**ACT 1 SCENE 2. A camp near Forres.**

*Alarum within. Enter DUNCAN, MALCOLM, DONALBAIN, LENNOX, with Attendants, meeting a bleeding Sergeant*

**DUNCAN**

What bloody man is that? He can report,  
As seemeth by his plight, of the revolt  
The newest state.

**MALCOLM**

This is the sergeant  
Who like a good and hardy soldier fought  
'Gainst my captivity. Hail, brave friend!  
Say to the king the knowledge of the broil  
As thou didst leave it.

**Sergeant**

Doubtful it stood;  
As two spent swimmers, that do cling together  
And choke their art. The merciless Macdonwald--  
Worthy to be a rebel, for to that  
The multiplying villanies of nature  
Do swarm upon him--from the western isles  
Of kerns and gallowglasses 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 smoked with bloody execution,  
Like valour's minion carved out his passage  
Till he faced the slave;  
Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,  
Till he unseam'd him from the nave to the chaps,  
And fix'd his head upon our battlements.

**Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare present Macbeth as a heroic character?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents Macbeth as heroic here
- How Shakespeare presents him as heroic elsewhere in the play.

[30 marks]  
SPaG [4 marks]

### **ACT 1 SCENE 3**

#### **First Witch**

All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of Glamis!

#### **Second Witch**

All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, thane of Cawdor!

#### **Third Witch**

All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter!

#### **BANQUO**

Good sir, why do you start; and seem to fear  
Things that do sound so fair? I' the name of truth,  
Are ye fantastical, or that indeed  
Which outwardly ye show? My noble partner  
You greet with present grace and great prediction  
Of noble having and of royal hope,  
That he seems rapt withal: to me you speak not.  
If you can look into the seeds of time,  
And say which grain will grow and which will not,  
Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear  
Your favours nor your hate.

#### **First Witch**

Hail!

#### **Second Witch**

Hail!

#### **Third Witch**

Hail!

#### **First Witch**

Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.

#### **Second Witch**

Not so happy, yet much happier.

#### **Third Witch**

Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none:  
So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo!

#### **First Witch**

Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!

**Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare use the character of Banquo in the play?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents Banquo here
- How Shakespeare presents Banquo elsewhere in the play.

[30 marks]  
SPaG [4 marks]

### ACT 1 SCENE 3

#### MACBETH

[Aside] Two truths are told,  
As happy prologues to the swelling act  
Of the imperial theme.--I thank you, gentlemen.

#### *Aside*

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.

#### BANQUO

Look, how our partner's rapt.

#### MACBETH

[Aside] If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me,  
Without my stir.

#### BANQUO

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

**Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare present Macbeth's decision-making in the play?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents Macbeth's decision making here
  - How Shakespeare presents his decision making elsewhere in the play. [30 marks]
- SPaG [4 marks]

## ACT 1 SCENE 4

### DUNCAN

There's no art  
To find the mind's construction in the face:  
He was a gentleman on whom I built  
An absolute trust.

*Enter MACBETH, BANQUO, ROSS, and ANGUS*

O worthiest cousin!  
The sin of my ingratitude even now  
Was heavy on me: thou art so far before  
That swiftest wing of recompense is slow  
To overtake thee. Would thou hadst less deserved,  
That the proportion both of thanks and payment  
Might have been mine! only I have left to say,  
More is thy due than more than all can pay.

### MACBETH

The service and the loyalty I owe,  
In doing it, pays itself. Your highness' part  
Is to receive our duties; and our duties  
Are to your throne and state children and servants,  
Which do but what they should, by doing every thing  
Safe toward your love and honour.

### DUNCAN

Welcome hither:  
I have begun to plant thee, and will labour  
To make thee full of growing. Noble Banquo,  
That hast no less deserved, nor must be known  
No less to have done so, let me enfold thee  
And hold thee to my heart.

**Starting with this extract, how far can the play *Macbeth* be seen as a lesson in kingship?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare may be teaching the lesson in kingship here
- How Shakespeare presents kingship elsewhere in the play.

[30 marks]  
SPaG [4 marks]

## ACT 1 SCENE 5

### 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 top-full  
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;  
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,  
That no compunctious visitings of nature  
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between  
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,  
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,  
Wherever in your sightless substances  
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,  
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,  
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,  
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,  
To cry 'Hold, hold!'

*Enter MACBETH*

Great Glamis! worthy Cawdor!  
Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter!  
Thy letters have transported me beyond  
This ignorant present, and I feel now  
The future in the instant.

**Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare present Lady Macbeth?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth's here
- How Shakespeare presents her elsewhere in the play.

[30 marks]

SPaG [4 marks]

**ACT 1 SCENE 6. Before Macbeth's castle.**

*Hautboys and torches. Enter DUNCAN, MALCOLM, DONALBAIN, BANQUO, LENNOX, MACDUFF, ROSS, ANGUS, and Attendants*

**DUNCAN**

This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air  
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself  
Unto our gentle senses.

**BANQUO**

This guest of summer,  
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,  
By his loved mansionry, that the heaven's breath  
Smells wooingly here: no jutty, frieze,  
Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird  
Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle:  
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed,  
The air is delicate.

*Enter LADY MACBETH*

**DUNCAN**

See, see, our honour'd hostess!  
The love that follows us sometime is our trouble,  
Which still we thank as love. Herein I teach you  
How you shall bid God 'ild us for your pains,  
And thank us for your trouble.

**LADY MACBETH**

All our service  
In every point twice done and then done double  
Were poor and single business to contend  
Against those honours deep and broad wherewith  
Your majesty loads our house: for those of old,  
And the late dignities heap'd up to them,  
We rest your hermits.

**Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare present ideas of duplicity in Macbeth?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents duplicity here
- How Shakespeare presents duplicity elsewhere in the play.

[30 marks]  
SPaG [4 marks]

## **ACT 1 SCENE 7**

### **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 dress'd 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' the adage?

### **MACBETH**

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

**Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare present the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents their relationship here
- How Shakespeare presents their relationship elsewhere in the play.

[30 marks]  
SPaG [4 marks]

## Act 2

### ACT 2 SCENE I. Court of Macbeth's castle.

*Enter BANQUO, and FLEANCE bearing a torch before him*

**BANQUO**

How goes the night, boy?

**FLEANCE**

The moon is down; I have not heard the clock.

**BANQUO**

And she goes down at twelve.

**FLEANCE**

I take't, 'tis later, sir.

**BANQUO**

Hold, take my sword. There's husbandry in heaven;  
Their candles are all out. Take thee that too.  
A heavy summons lies like lead upon me,  
And yet I would not sleep: merciful powers,  
Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature  
Gives way to in repose!

*Enter MACBETH, and a Servant with a torch*

Give me my sword.  
Who's there?

**Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare use images to convey powerful ideas in Macbeth?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare uses images here, and the ideas they convey
- How Shakespeare uses images elsewhere in the play.

[30 marks]

SPaG [4 marks]

## ACT 2 SCENE 2

*Enter LADY MACBETH*

### LADY MACBETH

That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold;  
What hath quench'd them hath given me fire.

Hark! Peace!

It was the owl that shriek'd, the fatal bellman,  
Which gives the stern'st good-night. He is about it:  
The doors are open; and the surfeited grooms  
Do mock their charge with snores: I have drugg'd  
their possets,  
That death and nature do contend about them,  
Whether they live or die.

### MACBETH

[Within] Who's there? what, ho!

### LADY MACBETH

Alack, I am afraid they have awaked,  
And 'tis not done. The attempt and not the deed  
Confounds us. Hark! I laid their daggers ready;  
He could not miss 'em. Had he not resembled  
My father as he slept, I had done't.

**Starting with this extract, how far does Shakespeare present Lady Macbeth as a vulnerable character?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth here
- How Shakespeare presents her elsewhere in the play.

[30 marks]

SPaG [4 marks]

### ACT 2 SCENE 3

**MACDUFF**

O horror, horror, horror! Tongue nor heart  
Cannot conceive nor name thee!

**MACBETH LENNOX**

What's the matter.

**MACDUFF**

Confusion now hath made his masterpiece!  
Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope  
The Lord's anointed temple, and stole thence  
The life o' the building!

**MACBETH**

What is 't you say? the life?

**LENNOX**

Mean you his majesty?

**MACDUFF**

Approach the chamber, and destroy your sight  
With a new Gorgon: do not bid me speak;  
See, and then speak yourselves.

*Exeunt MACBETH and LENNOX*

Awake, awake!  
Ring the alarum-bell. Murder and treason!  
Banquo and Donalbain! Malcolm! awake!  
Shake off this downy sleep, death's counterfeit,  
And look on death itself! up, up, and see  
The great doom's image! Malcolm! Banquo!  
As from your graves rise up, and walk like sprites,  
To countenance this horror! Ring the bell.

*Bell rings*

**Starting with this extract, how are attitudes and reactions towards death shown in *Macbeth*?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents the lords' reaction to the death of Duncan here
- How Shakespeare presents attitudes and reactions to death elsewhere in the play.

[30 marks]

SPaG [4 marks]

## ACT 2 SCENE 4

### Old Man

Threescore and ten I can remember well:  
Within the volume of which time I have seen  
Hours dreadful and things strange; but this sore night  
Hath trifled former knowings.

### ROSS

Ah, good father,  
Thou seest, the heavens, as troubled with man's act,  
Threaten his bloody stage: by the clock, 'tis day,  
And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp:  
Is't night's predominance, or the day's shame,  
That darkness does the face of earth entomb,  
When living light should kiss it?

### Old Man

'Tis unnatural,  
Even like the deed that's done. On Tuesday last,  
A falcon, towering in her pride of place,  
Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and kill'd.

### ROSS

And Duncan's horses--a thing most strange and certain--  
Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,  
Turn'd wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,  
Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would make  
War with mankind.

### Old Man

'Tis said they eat each other.

**Starting with this extract, how far is *Macbeth* about disruption of the natural order?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare disrupts natural order here
- How Shakespeare disrupts natural order elsewhere in the play.

[30 marks]  
SPaG [4 marks]

### Act 3

#### ACT 3 SCENE 1

##### 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 fear'd: 'tis much he dares;  
And, to that dauntless temper of his mind,  
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour  
To act in safety. There is none but he  
Whose being I do fear: and, under him,  
My Genius is rebuked; as, it is said,  
Mark Antony's was by Caesar. He chid the sisters  
When first they put the name of king upon me,  
And bade them speak to him: then prophet-like  
They hail'd him father to a line of kings:  
Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,  
And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,  
Thence to be wrench'd with an unlineal hand,  
No son of mine succeeding. If 't be so,  
For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind;  
For them the gracious Duncan have I murder'd;  
Put rancours in the vessel of my peace  
Only for them; and mine eternal jewel  
Given to the common enemy of man,  
To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings!  
Rather than so, come fate into the list.  
And champion me to the utterance! Who's there!

**Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare present Macbeth's paranoia and its consequences?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents Macbeth's paranoia here
- How Shakespeare presents the effects of his paranoia elsewhere in the play. [30 marks]

SPaG [4 marks]

## ACT 3 SCENE 2

### LADY MACBETH

Nought's had, all's spent,  
Where our desire is got without content:  
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy  
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy.

*Enter MACBETH*

How now, my lord! why do you keep alone,  
Of sorriest fancies your companions making,  
Using those thoughts which should indeed have died  
With them they think on? Things without all remedy  
Should be without regard: what's done is done.

### MACBETH

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

**Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare present the marriage between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents their relationship here
- How Shakespeare presents their relationship elsewhere in the play.

[30 marks]  
SPaG [4 marks]

### ACT 3 SCENE 3

#### Second Murderer

A light, a light!

*Enter BANQUO, and FLEANCE with a torch*

#### Third Murderer

'Tis he.

#### First Murderer

Stand to't.

#### BANQUO

It will be rain to-night.

#### First Murderer

Let it come down.

*They set upon BANQUO*

#### BANQUO

O, treachery! Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly!

Thou mayst revenge. O slave!

*Dies. FLEANCE escapes*

#### Third Murderer

Who did strike out the light?

#### First Murderer

Wast not the way?

#### Third Murderer

There's but one down; the son is fled.

**Starting with this extract, how are murders presented in *Macbeth*?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents murder here
- How Shakespeare presents murders elsewhere in the play.

[30 marks]  
SPaG [4 marks]

## ACT 3 SCENE 4

### ROSS

Gentlemen, rise: his highness is not well.

### LADY MACBETH

Sit, worthy friends: my lord is often thus,  
And hath been from his youth: pray you, keep seat;  
The fit is momentary; upon a thought  
He will again be well: if much you note him,  
You shall offend him and extend his passion:  
Feed, and regard him not. Are you a man?

### MACBETH

Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that  
Which might appal the devil.

### LADY MACBETH

O proper stuff!  
This is the very painting of your fear:  
This is the air-drawn dagger which, you said,  
Led you to Duncan. O, these flaws and starts,  
Impostors to true fear, would well become  
A woman's story at a winter's fire,  
Authorized by her grandam. Shame itself!  
Why do you make such faces? When all's done,  
You look but on a stool.

**Starting with this extract, how far do you agree with the view that 'Lady Macbeth has no independence and no real power.'?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth's power and independence here
  - How Shakespeare presents her independence elsewhere in the play. [30 marks]
- SPaG [4 marks]

**ACT 3 SCENE 5. A Heath.**

*Thunder. Enter the three Witches meeting HECATE*

**First Witch**

Why, how now, Hecate! you look angerly.

**HECATE**

Have I not reason, beldams as you are,  
Saucy and overbold? How did you dare  
To trade and traffic with Macbeth  
In riddles and affairs of death;  
And I, the mistress of your charms,  
The close contriver of all harms,  
Was never call'd to bear my part,  
Or show the glory of our art?  
And, which is worse, all you have done  
Hath been but for a wayward son,  
Spiteful and wrathful, who, as others do,  
Loves for his own ends, not for you.  
But make amends now: get you gone,  
And at the pit of Acheron  
Meet me i' the morning: thither he  
Will come to know his destiny:  
Your vessels and your spells provide,  
Your charms and every thing beside.  
I am for the air; this night I'll spend  
Unto a dismal and a fatal end:  
Great business must be wrought ere noon:  
Upon the corner of the moon  
There hangs a vaporous drop profound;  
I'll catch it ere it come to ground:  
And that distill'd by magic sleights  
Shall raise such artificial sprites  
As by the strength of their illusion  
Shall draw him on to his confusion:  
He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear  
He hopes 'bove wisdom, grace and fear:  
And you all know, security  
Is mortals' chiefest enemy.

**Starting with this extract, to what extent can the witches be blamed for what happens to Macbeth?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents the witches here
- How Shakespeare presents their effects on Macbeth elsewhere in the play. [30 marks]

SPaG [4 marks]

## Act 4

### ACT 4 SCENE 1

#### MACBETH

I conjure you, by that which you profess,  
Howe'er you come to know it, answer me:  
Though you untie the winds and let them fight  
Against the churches; though the yesty waves  
Confound and swallow navigation up;  
Though bladed corn be lodged and trees blown down;  
Though castles topple on their warders' heads;  
Though palaces and pyramids do slope  
Their heads to their foundations; though the treasure  
Of nature's germens tumble all together,  
Even till destruction sicken; answer me  
To what I ask you.

#### First Witch

Speak.

#### Second Witch

Demand.

#### Third Witch

We'll answer.

#### First Witch

Say, if thou'dst rather hear it from our mouths,  
Or from our masters?

#### MACBETH

Call 'em; let me see 'em.

**Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare present Macbeth's relationship with the witches?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents Macbeth's relationship to the witches here
- How Shakespeare presents his relationship with them elsewhere in the play. [30 marks]

SPaG [4 marks]

## ACT 4 SCENE 2

**Son**

Nay, how will you do for a husband?

**LADY MACDUFF**

Why, I can buy me twenty at any market.

**Son**

Then you'll buy 'em to sell again.

**LADY MACDUFF**

Thou speak'st with all thy wit: and yet, i' faith,  
With wit enough for thee.

**Son**

Was my father a traitor, mother?

**LADY MACDUFF**

Ay, that he was.

**Son**

What is a traitor?

**LADY MACDUFF**

Why, one that swears and lies.

**Son**

And be all traitors that do so?

**LADY MACDUFF**

Every one that does so is a traitor, and must be hanged.

**Son**

And must they all be hanged that swear and lie?

**LADY MACDUFF**

Every one.

**Son**

Who must hang them?

**LADY MACDUFF**

Why, the honest men.

**Son**

Then the liars and swearers are fools,  
for there are liars and swearers enow to beat  
the honest men and hang up them.

**LADY MACDUFF**

Now, God help thee, poor monkey!

**Starting with this extract, what ideas about motherhood does Shakespeare explore in *Macbeth*?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents ideas of motherhood here
- How Shakespeare presents ideas of motherhood elsewhere in the play. [30 marks]

SPaG [4 marks]

### ACT 4 SCENE 3

#### MALCOLM

But I have none: the king-becoming graces,  
As justice, verity, temperance, stableness,  
Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness,  
Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude,  
I have no relish of them, but abound  
In the division of each several crime,  
Acting it many ways. Nay, had I power, I should  
Pour the sweet milk of concord into hell,  
Uproar the universal peace, confound  
All unity on earth.

#### MACDUFF

O Scotland, Scotland!

#### MALCOLM

If such a one be fit to govern, speak:  
I am as I have spoken.

#### MACDUFF

Fit to govern!  
No, not to live. O nation miserable,  
With an untitled tyrant bloody-scepter'd,  
When shalt thou see thy wholesome days again,  
Since that the truest issue of thy throne  
By his own interdiction stands accursed,  
And does blaspheme his breed? Thy royal father  
Was a most sainted king: the queen that bore thee,  
Oftener upon her knees than on her feet,  
Died every day she lived. Fare thee well!  
These evils thou repeat'st upon thyself  
Have banish'd me from Scotland. O my breast,  
Thy hope ends here!

**Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare present Macduff as a heroic character?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents Macduff's heroism here
- How Shakespeare presents his heroism elsewhere in the play.

[30 marks]  
SPaG [4 marks]

### ACT 4 SCENE 3

**MACDUFF**

My children too?

**ROSS**

Wife, children, servants, all  
That could be found.

**MACDUFF**

And I must be from thence!  
My wife kill'd too?

**ROSS**

I have said.

**MALCOLM**

Be comforted:  
Let's make us medicines of our great revenge,  
To cure this deadly grief.

**MACDUFF**

He has no children. All my pretty ones?  
Did you say all? O hell-kite! All?  
What, all my pretty chickens and their dam  
At one fell swoop?

**MALCOLM**

Dispute it like a man.

**MACDUFF**

I shall do so;  
But I must also feel it as a man:  
I cannot but remember such things were,  
That were most precious to me. Did heaven look on,  
And would not take their part? Sinful Macduff,  
They were all struck for thee! naught that I am,  
Not for their own demerits, but for mine,  
Fell slaughter on their souls. Heaven rest them now!

**Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare explore ideas of masculinity in *Macbeth*?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents masculinity here
- How Shakespeare presents masculinity elsewhere in the play.

[30 marks]  
SPaG [4 marks]

## Act 5

### ACT 5 SCENE 1

#### 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. Oh, oh, oh!

**Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare present Lady Macbeth as a sympathetic character?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as sympathetic here
- How Shakespeare presents ways in which she is sympathetic elsewhere in the play.

[30 marks]

SPaG [4 marks]

## ACT 5 SCENE 2

### ANGUS

Now does he feel  
His secret murders sticking on his hands;  
Now minutely revolts upbraid his faith-breach;  
Those he commands move only in command,  
Nothing in love: now does he feel his title  
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe  
Upon a dwarfish thief.

### MENTEITH

Who then shall blame  
His pester'd senses to recoil and start,  
When all that is within him does condemn  
Itself for being there?

### CAITHNESS

Well, march we on,  
To give obedience where 'tis truly owed:  
Meet we the medicine of the sickly weal,  
And with him pour we in our country's purge  
Each drop of us.

### LENNOX

Or so much as it needs,  
To dew the sovereign flower and drown the weeds.  
Make we our march towards Birnam.

**Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare present the consequences of bad kingship in *Macbeth*?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents the consequences here
  - How Shakespeare presents the consequences elsewhere in the play. [30 marks]
- SPaG [4 marks]

**ACT 5 SCENE 3. Dunsinane. A room in the castle.**

*Enter MACBETH, Doctor, and Attendants*

**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 pronounced 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-faced loon!  
Where got'st thou that goose look?

**Servant**

There is ten thousand--

**MACBETH**

Geese, villain!

**Servant**

Soldiers, sir.

**MACBETH**

Go prick thy face, and over-red thy fear,  
Thou lily-liver'd boy. What soldiers, patch?  
Death of thy soul! those linen cheeks of thine  
Are counsellors to fear. What soldiers, whey-face?

**Starting with this extract, how far does Shakespeare present Macbeth as a brave character?**

Write about:

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

[30 marks]  
SPaG [4 marks]

## ACT 5 SCENE 4

### MALCOLM

Cousins, I hope the days are near at hand  
That chambers will be safe.

### MENTEITH

We doubt it nothing.

### SIWARD

What wood is this before us?

### MENTEITH

The wood of Birnam.

### MALCOLM

Let every soldier hew him down a bough  
And bear't before him: thereby shall we shadow  
The numbers of our host and make discovery  
Err in report of us.

### Soldiers

It shall be done.

### SIWARD

We learn no other but the confident tyrant  
Keeps still in Dunsinane, and will endure  
Our setting down before 't.

### MALCOLM

'Tis his main hope:  
For where there is advantage to be given,  
Both more and less have given him the revolt,  
And none serve with him but constrained things  
Whose hearts are absent too.

### MACDUFF

Let our just censures  
Attend the true event, and put we on  
Industrious soldiership.

**Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare present rebels and rebellion in *Macbeth*?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents the rebels here
- How Shakespeare presents the rebels and rebellion elsewhere in the play. [30 marks]  
SPaG [4 marks]

**ACT 5 SCENE 5. Dunsinane. Within the castle.**

*Enter MACBETH, SEYTON, and Soldiers, with drum and colours*

**MACBETH**

Hang out our banners on the outward walls;  
The cry is still 'They come:' our castle's strength  
Will laugh a siege to scorn: here let them lie  
Till famine and the ague eat them up:  
Were they not forced with those that should be ours,  
We might have met them dareful, beard to beard,  
And beat them backward home.

*A cry of women within*

What is that noise?

**SEYTON**

It is the cry of women, my good lord.

*Exit*

**MACBETH**

I have almost forgot the taste of fears;  
The time has been, my senses would have cool'd  
To hear a night-shriek; and my fell of hair  
Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir  
As life were in't: I have supp'd full with horrors;  
Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts  
Cannot once start me.

**Starting with this extract, to what extent does Macbeth undergo change in the play?**

Write about:

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

[30 marks]

SPaG [4 marks]

**ACT 5 SCENE 6. Dunsinane. Before the castle.**

*Drum and colours. Enter MALCOLM, SIWARD, MACDUFF, and their Army, with boughs*

**MALCOLM**

Now near enough: your leafy screens throw down.  
And show like those you are. You, worthy uncle,  
Shall, with my cousin, your right-noble son,  
Lead our first battle: worthy Macduff and we  
Shall take upon 's what else remains to do,  
According to our order.

**SIWARD**

Fare you well.  
Do we but find the tyrant's power to-night,  
Let us be beaten, if we cannot fight.

**MACDUFF**

Make all our trumpets speak; give them all breath,  
Those clamorous harbingers of blood and death.

*Exeunt*

**Starting with this extract, what attitudes towards soldiers and war are presented in *Macbeth*?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents the warriors reaction here
- How Shakespeare presents the attitudes towards soldiers and war elsewhere in the play.

[30 marks]

SPaG [4 marks]

**ACT 5 SCENE 7. Another part of the field.**

*Alarums. Enter MACBETH*

**MACBETH**

They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly,  
But, bear-like, I must fight the course. What's he  
That was not born of woman? Such a one  
Am I to fear, or none.

*Enter YOUNG SIWARD*

**YOUNG SIWARD**

What is thy name?

**MACBETH**

Thou'lt be afraid to hear it.

**YOUNG SIWARD**

No; though thou call'st thyself a hotter name  
Than any is in hell.

**MACBETH**

My name's Macbeth.

**YOUNG SIWARD**

The devil himself could not pronounce a title  
More hateful to mine ear.

**MACBETH**

No, nor more fearful.

**YOUNG SIWARD**

Thou liest, abhorred tyrant; with my sword  
I'll prove the lie thou speak'st.

*They fight and YOUNG SIWARD is slain*

**MACBETH**

Thou wast born of woman  
But swords I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn,  
Brandish'd by man that's of a woman born.

**Starting with this extract how does Shakespeare present the way Macbeth sees himself?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents Macbeth's opinion of himself here
  - How Shakespeare presents his opinion of himself elsewhere in the play. [30 marks]
- SPaG [4 marks]

**ACT 5 SCENE 8**

**MACBETH**

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

*Exeunt, fighting. Alarums*

*Retreat. Flourish. Enter, with drum and colours, MALCOLM, SIWARD, ROSS, the other Thaners, and Soldiers*

**MALCOLM**

I would the friends we miss were safe arrived.

**SIWARD**

Some must go off: and yet, by these I see,  
So great a day as this is cheaply bought.

**MALCOLM**

Macduff is missing, and your noble son.

**ROSS**

Your son, my lord, has paid a soldier's debt:  
He only lived but till he was a man;  
The which no sooner had his prowess confirm'd  
In the unshrinking station where he fought,  
But like a man he died.

**SIWARD**

Then he is dead?

**ROSS**

Ay, and brought off the field: your cause of sorrow  
Must not be measured by his worth, for then  
It hath no end.

**SIWARD**

Had he his hurts before?

**ROSS**

Ay, on the front.

**SIWARD**

Why then, God's soldier be he!

**Starting with this extract how does Shakespeare explore ideas about honour and reputation in Macbeth?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents honour and reputation here
- How Shakespeare presents the importance of honour and reputation elsewhere in the play.

[30 marks]

SPaG [4 marks]

## ACT 5 SCENE 8

### MALCOLM

We shall not spend a large expense of time  
Before we reckon with your several loves,  
And make us even with you. My thanes and kinsmen,  
Henceforth be earls, the first that ever Scotland  
In such an honour named. What's more to do,  
Which would be planted newly with the time,  
As calling home our exiled friends abroad  
That fled the snares of watchful tyranny;  
Producing forth the cruel ministers  
Of this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen,  
Who, as 'tis thought, by self and violent hands  
Took off her life; this, and what needful else  
That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace,  
We will perform in measure, time and place:  
So, thanks to all at once and to each one,  
Whom we invite to see us crown'd at Scone.

*Flourish. Exeunt*

**Starting with this extract, how far does Shakespeare present events in *Macbeth* as inevitable?**

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents the events as inevitable here
- How Shakespeare presents the idea that the events may be inevitable elsewhere in the play.

[30 marks]

SPaG [4 marks]