

Macbeth Revision Booklet

EDUQAS Literature Component 1



Exam details:

TOTAL TIME: 2 hours

1 hour Macbeth

1 hour Poetry Anthology

A HISTORY OF 'MACBETH'

THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH was most likely written in 1606, early in the reign of James I, who had been James VI of Scotland before he succeeded to the English throne in 1603. James was a patron of the arts, and especially of Shakespeare's acting company - originally named The Chamberlain's Men, and renamed The King's Men at the suggestion of King James himself - and of all the plays Shakespeare wrote under James's reign, *Macbeth* most clearly reflects the playwright's close relationship with the sovereign. In focusing on Macbeth, a figure from distant Scottish history, Shakespeare paid homage to his king's Scottish lineage, and also played along with James's long-lasting interest in witchcraft and the occult. Additionally, the witches' prophecy that Banquo will found a line of kings is a clear nod to James's family's claim to have descended from the historical Banquo.

In a larger sense, the theme of bad versus good kingship, embodied by Macbeth and Duncan, respectively, would have resonated at the royal court, where James was busy developing his English version of the theory of divine right of kings. By 1606 James had already survived three major plots to kill him, including the infamous Gunpowder Plot of 1605, and *MACBETH* was developed in part to bolster the image of James I as a good king in the mould of King Duncan: wise and benign. Throughout his reign as King James VI of Scotland he had attended many trials for witchcraft, and was clearly intrigued by such things, so Shakespeare included the witches specifically to delight James.

Shakespeare borrowed the story of Macbeth from several tales in *Holinshed's Chronicles*, a popular history of the British Isles known to Shakespeare and his contemporaries. In *Chronicles*, a man named Donwald finds several of his family put to death by his king, King Duff, for dealing with witches. After being pressured by his wife, he and four of his servants kill the King in his own house. In *Chronicles*, Macbeth is portrayed as struggling to support the kingdom in the face of King Duncan's ineptitude. He and Banquo meet the three witches, who make exactly the same prophecies as in Shakespeare's version. Macbeth and Banquo then together plot the murder of Duncan, at Lady Macbeth's urging. Macbeth has a long, ten-year reign before eventually being overthrown by Macduff and Malcolm. The parallels between the two versions are clear. Shakespeare changed the story so that Macbeth kills the king in Macbeth's own castle, adding to the darkness of Macbeth's crime as the worst violation of hospitality. Shakespeare made another revealing change. In *Chronicles*, Banquo is an accomplice in Macbeth's murder of King Duncan. He also plays an important part in ensuring that Macbeth, not Malcolm, takes the throne in the coup that follows. In Shakespeare's day, Banquo was thought to be a direct ancestor of the King James I, though Banquo's Stuart descent was disproved in the 19th century. The Banquo portrayed in historical sources is significantly different from the Banquo created by Shakespeare, largely to portray the king's ancestor as a murderer would have been risky for him! Other authors of the time who wrote about Banquo, such as Jean de Schelandre in his *Stuartide*, also changed history by portraying Banquo as a noble man, not a murderer, probably for the same reasons.

Macbeth is not Shakespeare's most complex play, but it is certainly one of his most powerful and emotionally intense. Whereas Shakespeare's other major tragedies, such as *Hamlet* and *Othello*, fastidiously explore the intellectual predicaments faced by their subjects and the fine nuances of their subjects' characters, *Macbeth* tumbles madly from its opening to its conclusion. It is a sharp, jagged sketch of theme and character; as such, it has shocked and fascinated audiences for over four hundred years. *Macbeth* is an anomaly among Shakespeare's tragedies in certain critical ways. It is short: more than a thousand lines shorter than *Othello* and King

Lear, and only slightly more than half as long as Hamlet. This brevity has suggested to many critics that the received version is based on a heavily cut source, perhaps a prompt-book for a particular performance. That brevity has also been connected to other unusual features: the fast pace of the first act, which has seemed to be "stripped for action"; the comparative flatness of the characters other than Macbeth; the oddness of Macbeth himself compared with other Shakespearean tragic heroes.

The only eyewitness account of a performance of Macbeth in Shakespeare's lifetime was recorded by a Simon Forman, who saw a performance at the Globe in 1610 or 1611. The play's brevity and certain aspects of its staging (for instance, the large proportion of night-time scenes and the unusually large number of off-stage sounds) have been taken as suggesting that the text was revised for production indoors, perhaps at the Blackfriars Theatre, which the King's Men acquired in 1608. After Shakespeare's death, and the publication of the First Folio, Macbeth became regularly performed, especially after the restoration of Charles II, and it has remained one of the most universally popular of all Shakespeare's plays. Throughout the 20th Century there were countless productions on stage, plus two major Hollywood films (directed by Orson Welles and Roman Polanski), and various versions and reworkings on television. The brevity and fast pace of the play has made it very accessible, whilst the themes of power, corruption, ambition, cruelty, superstition and the supernatural remain universally attractive to audiences.

And the play has attracted its own superstition, and whilst many today would say that any misfortune surrounding a production is mere coincidence, actors and other theatre people often consider it bad luck to mention Macbeth by name whilst inside a theatre, and sometimes refer to it indirectly, for example as "the Scottish play", or "MacBee". This is because Shakespeare is said to have used the spells of real witches in his text, purportedly angering the witches of the day and causing them to curse the play. It was rumoured that an actor died on its first opening night! Thus, to say the name of the play inside a theatre is believed to doom the production to failure, and perhaps cause physical injury or death to cast members. Indeed, there are stories of accidents, misfortunes and even deaths taking place during runs of Macbeth over the centuries.

One particular incident that lent itself to the superstition was the Astor Place Riot in Manhattan in 1849. The cause of the riots was based on a conflict over two rival performances of Macbeth running simultaneously. One production featuring a British actor was targeted by rioters in a wave of anti-British sentiment, and the militia was sent out to stop the ensuing riot, and shots were fired into the crowd killing 25 and injuring over 120. In the aftermath of the riot New York newspapers attributed the deaths to the curse of the play! Maybe there is something in the superstition.....!?

THE PLOT

The play begins with the brief appearance of a trio of witches and then moves to a military camp, where the Scottish King Duncan hears the news that his generals, Macbeth and Banquo, have defeated two separate invading armies - one from Ireland, led by the rebel Macdonwald, and one from Norway. Following their pitched battle with these enemy forces, Macbeth and Banquo encounter the witches as they cross a moor. The witches prophesy that Macbeth will be made thane (a rank of Scottish nobility) of Cawdor and eventually King of Scotland. They also prophesy that Macbeth's companion, Banquo, will beget a line of Scottish kings, although Banquo will never be king himself.

The witches vanish, and Macbeth and Banquo treat their prophecies sceptically until some of King Duncan's men come to thank the two generals for their victories in battle and to tell Macbeth that he has indeed been named thane of Cawdor. The previous thane betrayed Scotland by fighting for the Norwegians and Duncan has condemned him to death. Macbeth is intrigued by the possibility that the remainder of the witches' prophecy - that he will be crowned king - might be also true, but he is uncertain what to expect. He visits with King Duncan, and they plan to dine together at Inverness, Macbeth's castle. Macbeth writes ahead to his wife, Lady Macbeth, telling her all that has happened.

Lady Macbeth suffers none of her husband's uncertainty. She desires the kingship for him and wants him to murder Duncan in order to obtain it. When Macbeth arrives at Inverness, she overrides all of her husband's objections and persuades him to kill the king that very night. He and Lady Macbeth plan to get Duncan's two chamberlains drunk so they will black out; the next morning they will blame the murder on the chamberlains, who will be defenceless, as they will remember nothing. While Duncan is asleep, Macbeth stabs him, despite his doubts and a number of supernatural portents, including a vision of a bloody dagger. When Duncan's death is discovered the next morning, Macbeth kills the chamberlains - ostensibly out of rage at their crime - and easily assumes the kingship. Duncan's sons Malcolm and Donalbain flee to England and Ireland, respectively, fearing that whoever killed Duncan desires their demise as well.

Fearful of the witches' prophecy that Banquo's heirs will seize the throne, Macbeth hires a group of murderers to kill Banquo and his son Fleance. They ambush Banquo on his way to a royal feast, but they fail to kill Fleance, who escapes into the night. Macbeth becomes furious: as long as Fleance is alive, he fears that his power remains insecure. At the feast that night, Banquo's ghost visits Macbeth. When he sees the ghost, Macbeth raves fearfully, startling his guests, who include most of the great Scottish nobility. Lady Macbeth tries to neutralise the damage, but Macbeth's kingship incites increasing resistance from his nobles and subjects. Frightened, Macbeth goes to visit the witches in their cavern. There, they show him a sequence of demons and spirits who present him with further prophecies: he must beware of Macduff, a Scottish nobleman who opposed Macbeth's accession to the throne; he is incapable of being harmed by any man born of woman; and he will be safe until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane Castle. Macbeth is relieved and feels secure, because he knows that all men are born of women and that forests cannot move. When he learns that Macduff has fled to England to join Malcolm, Macbeth orders that Macduff's castle be seized and, most cruelly, that Lady Macduff and her children be murdered.

When news of his family's execution reaches Macduff in England, he is stricken with grief and vows revenge. Prince Malcolm, Duncan's son, has succeeded in raising an army in England, and Macduff joins him as he rides to Scotland to challenge Macbeth's forces. The invasion has the support of the Scottish nobles, who are appalled and frightened by Macbeth's tyrannical and murderous behaviour. Lady Macbeth, meanwhile, becomes plagued with fits of sleepwalking in which she bemoans what she believes to be bloodstains on her hands. Before Macbeth's opponents arrive, Macbeth receives news that she has killed herself, causing him to sink into a deep and pessimistic despair. Nevertheless, he awaits the English and fortifies Dunsinane, to which he seems to have withdrawn in order to defend himself, certain that the witches' prophecies guarantee his invincibility. He is struck numb with fear, however, when he learns that the English army is advancing on Dunsinane shielded with boughs cut from Birnam Wood. Birnam Wood is indeed coming to Dunsinane, fulfilling half of the witches' prophecy.

In the battle, Macbeth hews violently, but the English forces gradually overwhelm his army and castle. On the battlefield, Macbeth encounters the vengeful Macduff, who declares that he was not "of woman born" but was instead "untimely ripped" from his mother's womb (what we now call birth by Caesarean section). Though he realises that he is doomed, Macbeth continues to fight until Macduff kills and beheads him. Malcolm, now the King of Scotland, declares his benevolent intentions for the country and invites all to see him crowned at Scone.

Task: complete the plot summary activity below to show you understand the full plot.

<u>Plot detail</u>	<u>Key word to remember it</u>
The play opens as three witches plan a meeting with the Scottish nobleman Macbeth, who at that moment is fighting in a great battle	
When the battle is over, Macbeth and his friend Banquo come across the witches who offer them three predictions: that Macbeth will become Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland, and that Banquo's descendants will become kings.	
Banquo laughs at the prophecies but Macbeth is excited, especially as soon after their meeting with the witches Macbeth is made Thane of Cawdor by King Duncan, in return for his bravery in the battle.	
Macbeth writes to his wife, Lady Macbeth, who is as excited as he is. She thinks he is too kind to become king the easiest way.	
A messenger tells Lady Macbeth that King Duncan is on his way to their castle and she invokes evil spirits to help her slay him.	
Macbeth is talked into killing Duncan by his wife and stabs him to death.	
No-one is quite sure who committed this murder and no-one feels safe, but Macbeth is crowned king.	
Now that Macbeth is king he knows the second prediction from the witches has come true, but he starts to fear the third prediction (that Banquo's descendants will also be kings).	
Macbeth therefore decides to kill Banquo and his son, but the plan goes wrong - Banquo is killed but his son escapes.	
Macbeth then thinks he is going mad because he sees Banquo's ghost and receives more predictions from the witches	
He starts to become ruthless and kills the family of Macduff, an important lord.	
Macbeth still thinks he is safe but one by one the witches' prophecies come true.	
Lady Macbeth cannot stop thinking about Duncan, she sleepwalks. Later, she commits suicide.	
A large army marches on Macbeth's castle and Macbeth is killed by Macduff.	

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Macbeth - Macbeth is a Scottish general and the thane of Glamis who is a brave soldier and a powerful man, but he is not a virtuous one. He is easily tempted into murder to fulfil his ambitions to the throne, and once he commits his first crime and is crowned King of Scotland, he embarks on further atrocities with increasing ease. His response to every problem is violence and murder.

Lady Macbeth - Macbeth's wife, a deeply ambitious woman who lusts for power and position. Early in the play she seems to be the stronger and more ruthless of the two, as she urges her husband to kill Duncan and seize the crown. After the bloodshed begins, however, Lady Macbeth falls victim to guilt and madness to an even greater degree than her husband. Her conscience affects her to such an extent that she eventually commits suicide.

The Three Witches - Three "black and midnight hags" who plot mischief against Macbeth using charms, spells, and prophecies. Their predictions prompt him to murder Duncan, to order the deaths of Banquo and his son, and to blindly believe in his own immortality. The play leaves the witches' true identity unclear - aside from the fact that they are servants of Hecate. They resemble the mythological Fates, who impersonally weave the threads of human destiny. They clearly take a perverse delight in using their knowledge of the future to toy with and destroy human beings.

Banquo - The brave, noble general whose children, according to the witches' prophecy, will inherit the Scottish throne. Like Macbeth, Banquo thinks ambitious thoughts, but he does not translate those thoughts into action. Banquo's character stands as a rebuke to Macbeth, since he represents the path Macbeth chose not to take: a path in which ambition need not lead to betrayal and murder. Appropriately, it is Banquo's ghost - and not Duncan's - that haunts Macbeth, reminding Macbeth that he did not emulate Banquo's reaction to the witches' prophecy.

King Duncan - The good King of Scotland whom Macbeth, in his ambition for the crown, murders. Duncan is the model of a virtuous, benevolent, and farsighted ruler. His death symbolises the destruction of an order in Scotland that can be restored only when Duncan's line, in the person of Malcolm, once more occupies the throne.

Macduff - A Scottish nobleman hostile to Macbeth's kingship from the start. He eventually becomes a leader of the crusade to unseat Macbeth. The crusade's mission is to place the rightful king, Malcolm, on the throne, but Macduff also desires vengeance for Macbeth's murder of Macduff's wife and young son.

Lady Macduff - Macduff's wife. The scene in her castle provides our only glimpse of a domestic realm other than that of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. She and her home serve as contrasts to Lady Macbeth and the hellish world of Inverness.

Malcolm - The son of Duncan, whose restoration to the throne signals Scotland's return to order following Macbeth's reign of terror. Malcolm becomes a serious challenge to Macbeth with Macduff's aid (and the support of England). Prior to this, he appears weak and uncertain of his own power, as when he and Donalbain flee Scotland after their father's murder.

Donalbain - Duncan's son and Malcolm's younger brother.

Hecate - The goddess of witchcraft, who helps the three witches work their mischief on Macbeth.

Fleance - Banquo's son, who survives Macbeth's attempt to murder him. At the end of the play, Fleance's whereabouts are unknown. Presumably, he may come to rule Scotland, fulfilling the witches' prophecy that Banquo's sons will sit on the Scottish throne.

The Murderers - A group of ruffians conscripted by Macbeth to murder Banquo, Fleance (whom they fail to kill), and Macduff's wife and children.

Lennox - A Scottish nobleman.

Ross - A Scottish nobleman.

Porter - The drunken doorman of Macbeth's castle.

MAIN CHARACTER PROFILES

MACBETH is a beloved Scottish general who bravely defends his king and country in battle, and ready to die for King Duncan in battle. However, the prophecies of the witches have a powerful effect on him, especially when he learns the first has come true, and he becomes the Thane of Cawdor. After hearing the three weird sisters' prophecy that he will one day rule Scotland, Macbeth commits heinous murder and other tyrannous acts in order to secure his position as king. When we follow Macbeth's journey in the play, we're invited to consider what it is, exactly, that makes a seemingly decent man commit an 'evil' act. Let's start from the beginning. When Macbeth hears the witches' prophecy, he is very interested in what they have to say. His thoughts also turn to 'murder' (in order to fulfil the prophecy). But Macbeth is also terrified by his 'horrible imaginings' - his hair stands on end and his heart races, knocking at his ribs. "My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical," says Macbeth, "Shakes so my single state". Macbeth knows that killing Duncan would be a terrible act and he is sickened by his own thoughts. So, what happens to Macbeth? What makes him kill Duncan and then order several other murders without batting an eyelash? Is it fate, or just reckless ambition?

On the one hand, we can see Macbeth as a figure controlled by outside forces. After all, the three witches prophesise that Macbeth will become king, and they also know the exact circumstances of Macbeth's downfall, which suggests that Macbeth has no control over his own fate. What is more, the weird sisters' words clearly prompt Macbeth into action and we often get a sense that Macbeth is acting against his own will, as though he is in a trance: the first time Macbeth encounters the witches he is twice described as being 'rapt'. Even after this encounter Macbeth, at times, seems to move through the play in a dreamlike state, as when he follows a 'dagger of the mind' toward the sleeping king's room just before he commits his first murder. In light of this, it's easy to blame all of Macbeth's actions on the three witches and/or fate. Yet, we can also argue that Macbeth has a mind of his own and acts according to his own free will. In the play, we clearly see Macbeth deliberate about murder, and then make his own choices and put his plans into action. The witches never say anything to Macbeth about murdering Duncan. When Macbeth first hears the sisters' prophecy, his thoughts turn to 'murder' all on their own. In fact, the witches never say anything at all about HOW Macbeth will become king. So, perhaps Macbeth has had inside him a murderous ambition all along and the three witches merely awaken or embody a desire that's been dormant. We could argue, then, that 'fate' has nothing to do with Macbeth's life at all. We can also read Macbeth's character as a study of ambition and its ill effects. Once Macbeth murders Duncan, he becomes willing to do anything necessary in order to secure his position of power. It also becomes easier and easier for Macbeth to commit heinous crimes. Without thinking twice, he orders the murders of Macduff's family, including his children. According to Macbeth, he's got to look out for his own best interests: *"For mine own good all causes shall give way. I am in blood stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o'er"*. (Act III, Scene 4).

By comparing his actions to wading through a bloody river, Macbeth suggests that once a man commits a murderous act for his own gain, it's impossible to stop. Turning back would be 'tedious.' Macbeth's selfishness, acting for his 'own good,' ultimately makes him a hated 'tyrant,' which is quite a long way from being the 'beloved' thane he once was. As the play progresses, Macbeth's justifications for his actions become increasingly thin and by the end, Macbeth seems like a shell of the man he once was - the entire kingdom looks forward to the day he'll be replaced by Malcolm.

As things fall apart for him at the end of the play, he seems almost relieved - with the English army at his gates, he can finally return to life as a warrior, and he displays a kind of reckless bravado as his enemies surround him and drag him down. In part, this stems from his fatal

confidence in the witches' prophecies, but it also seems to derive from the fact that he has returned to the arena where he has been most successful and where his internal turmoil need not affect him - namely, the battlefield. Unlike many of Shakespeare's other tragic heroes, Macbeth never seems to contemplate suicide: "Why should I play the Roman fool," he asks, "and die on mine own sword?" Instead, he goes down fighting, bringing the play full circle: it begins with Macbeth winning on the battlefield and ends with him dying in combat.

LADY MACBETH At the play's beginning, Lady Macbeth is a powerful figure: she is charming, attractive, ambitious, and seems to be completely devoted to her husband. She is also a bit worried that her husband isn't quite "man enough" to do what it takes to be king, "too full o' the milk of human kindness". If her husband is going to be the powerful figure she wants him to be, Lady Macbeth's got to take things into her own hands. Lady Macbeth calls on 'spirits' to aid her while she prepares to help her husband murder the king. What does Lady Macbeth actually mean when she asks the spirits to "unsex" her? Essentially, she is asking to be stripped of everything that makes her a reproductive woman, including menstruation or, the "visitings of nature." She also asks that her breast milk be exchanged for 'gall' or poison. In Lady Macbeth's mind, being a woman interferes with her evil plans. Lady Macbeth construes femininity as compassion and kindness and also suggests that masculinity is synonymous with 'direst cruelty.' Lady Macbeth will use her belief of Macbeth's "kindness" against him when she goads him to murder the king: "When you durst do it, then you were a man". It turns out that Lady Macbeth's attack on Macbeth's masculinity is the final nudge Macbeth needs to murder Duncan. All of this makes Lady Macbeth sound dangerous, pushing Macbeth into murderous action. In fact, Lady Macbeth's whole "unsex me" speech aligns her with witchcraft and the supernatural (calling on spirits and talking about "smoke of hell" and "murdering ministers"). Lady Macbeth sounds like a powerful figure and may evoke some fears about dominant women, but soon after Macbeth proves his 'manhood' by killing Duncan and becoming king, Lady Macbeth disappears into the margins of the story and becomes the kind of weak, enfeebled figure she herself would probably despise. When she learns that the king's dead body has been discovered, she grows faint and must be carried from the room, and later, when Macbeth decides to murder Banquo in order to secure his position of power, he excludes his wife from the decision making altogether. By Act V, Lady Macbeth has been reduced to a figure who sleepwalks, continuously tries to wash the imaginary blood from her hands, and talks in her sleep of murder. She's grown so ill that the doctor says there is nothing he can do to help her. "The disease," he says, "is beyond his practice," and what Lady Macbeth needs is "the divine" (a priest or, God), not a "physician". We can read this as a psychological breakdown. Lady Macbeth is so consumed by guilt for her evil acts that she eventually loses her mind. We can also say that her transformation (from a powerful and masculine figure into an enfeebled woman) is significant insofar as it re-establishes a sense of 'natural' gender order in the play: Lady Macbeth is put in her place as a woman - she is no longer the dominant partner in her marriage and Macbeth makes all the decisions while she sleepwalks through the palace. In the end, Lady Macbeth is all but forgotten. When Macbeth learns of her death, he says he has no "time" to think about her - "She should have died hereafter; There would have been a time for such a word"

MACDUFF is a loyal Scottish nobleman and the Thane of Fife. After Macbeth murders Macduff's family, Macduff grieves for his loved ones and then resolves to kill Macbeth in man-to-man combat. At the play's end, he triumphantly carries Macbeth's severed head to Malcolm, the future king. Macduff is not a man of many words, but he is one of the few characters in the play whose absence or silence speaks as much for him as his words. When Macduff speaks, you listen, because it's a rarity and because it's generally sensible and genuine. We first hear

Macduff as he expresses honest grief at the King's murder, which he discovered. As we get to know Macduff, who is a strong and courageous soldier, we can appreciate how awful and deeply he felt Duncan's murder. It takes a lot to make this kind of man explain his feelings. Macduff is additionally sharp and attentive; while everyone else panics and dithers about Duncan's death, Macduff is the one that asks why Macbeth killed the guards senselessly. He is also the first to see to the ailing Lady Macbeth, who cries for help upon hearing the news about the guards. Everyone else is too wrapped up in Macbeth's passion to do the practical thing and help the Lady. As the play unfolds, Macduff speaks with Ross about the effects of Macbeth's monarchy, and instead of elaborating his suspicions of the King, Macduff makes the quiet and powerful decision to just leave for England. This is not a cowardly act, but rather a brave one intended to aid Malcolm (who needs all the help he can get) in enlisting the English against Macbeth. It is clear from his talk with Malcolm that Macduff loves Scotland and is not willing to see her maligned by an evil king.

We truly discover the strength of Macduff's character when he meets with Ross and receives the terrible news of his family's murder. When Macduff hears of his loved ones' deaths, he is not afraid to express emotion and to grieve openly for his loss, despite Malcolm's insistence that he needs to be a 'man' and get revenge. This is because Macduff is the only person in the play who insists that being a 'man' means being able to 'feel' things. Everybody else in Macbeth seems to insist that masculinity is synonymous with violence and even cruelty. Not so, according to Macduff. Real men are able to express emotion.

DUNCAN is the King of Scotland. While spending the night as a guest at Inverness, he is murdered by Macbeth, who has aspirations to rule the country. In the play, Duncan is a benevolent old man. We never see him out on the battlefield, and he is always full of kindly words. He is also generous when bestowing honours on the soldiers and Thanes that protect him and his kingdom. Duncan is so sympathetic and likable a character that murdering him seems horrifying. His good nature, pronounced by Macbeth in his private thoughts, reminds us of what a terrible thing it is to murder him. Even Lady Macbeth, who says she would murder her own nursing babe, can't kill him because he resembles her father while sleeping. That Macbeth can murder this man exemplifies just how atrocious the act is. It's also a clear indication that Macbeth is far removed from human kindness and morality. King Duncan's character is also interesting insofar as it speaks to the play's representation of masculinity and power. In a time where manhood was synonymous with violence and cruelty, King Duncan is decidedly soft: heavily idealised, this ideally protective father is nonetheless largely ineffectual: even when he is alive, he is unable to hold his kingdom together, reliant on a series of bloody men to suppress an increasingly successful series of rebellions... For Duncan's androgyny is the object of enormous ambivalence: idealised for his nurturing paternity, he is nonetheless killed for his softness, his childish trust, his inability to read men's minds in their faces, his reliance on the fighting of sons who can rebel against him.

MALCOLM is elder son of King Duncan and newly appointed as Prince of Cumberland, heir to the throne. When we first meet Malcolm, he seems rather weak - he is standing around praising a brave and bloodied Captain for saving his life and rescuing him from capture. In other words, Malcolm is someone who seems to need rescuing. Malcolm's reaction to news of his father's death doesn't recommend him to be king yet, either; it only shows he is still feeling around for the best course of action. He seems to lack the experience to make him confident or capable. Only when he meets Macduff, who complements him in courage and experience, do we begin to see the seeds of power in Malcolm. In order to test Macduff's honour, Malcolm makes himself out to be a lecherous tyrant who is more interested in selfish gain than he is in the good of the kingdom. Everything makes sense again when Malcolm admits he is chaste and was just testing

Macduff to make sure he was true to the cause of Scotland. Malcolm's words at the end, praising and gifting his allies and damning his enemies, make it seem like he'll follow in the footsteps of Duncan: gracious and, for the most part, harmless.

BANQUO is a general in the King's army, the same as Macbeth, and is often seen in contrast to Macbeth. Banquo is the only one with Macbeth when he hears the first prophecy of the weird sisters; during the same prophecy, Banquo is told that his children will be kings of Scotland, though he will not be. How Macbeth plays his part of the prophecy to be fulfilled makes the play - and how Banquo does not, creates a contrast to Macbeth. From the very first time we meet Banquo, he sets himself apart from Macbeth, especially notable because both characters are introduced into the play at the same time: their meeting with the witches. While Macbeth is eager to jump all over the weird sisters' words, Banquo displays a caution and wisdom contrary to Macbeth's excitement. He notes that evil tends to beget evil. Though, we might want to keep in mind that in Banquo's last private speech, when he knows Macbeth has done wrong, he still thinks of what good might be coming to him as a result of the prophecy.

THE THREE WITCHES (often referred to as the weird sisters) set the action of the play in motion when they confront Macbeth and prophesise that he will be King of Scotland. We never see them apart and they often speak and act in unison so it's worth considering them here as a single unit. Lots of ambiguity and drama surrounds these figures. When we encounter them in the play's opening scene, we're not sure where they've come from, who/what they are, or what they have in mind when they say they plan to meet Macbeth. What we do know is that they've gathered amidst thunder and lightening and move about the fog and 'filthy' air, which seems just as murky and mysterious as they are. Even Banquo and Macbeth are unsure about the sisters' identity when they meet them on the heath. Appropriately, the witches deliver the infamous lines that set the tone for the play: "Fair is foul and foul is fair". In other words, nothing, including their identity, is certain in this play.

The witches spend most of their time gathered around a bubbling cauldron, chanting, casting spells, conjuring visions of the future, and goading Macbeth by making accurate predictions of the future before they vanish into thin air.

The sisters are called 'witches' only once in the play, as opposed to being referred to as 'weird' a total of six times. The term 'weird' comes from the old English term 'wyrd' meaning 'fate' so it seems that they are in some way associated with the three fates of classical mythology, which are supposed to control man's destiny, and one of the major questions in the play revolves around the issue of whether or not Macbeth's actions are governed by his own free will or by some outside force. It is possible that the weird sisters control Macbeth's actions and cause him to commit murder. On the other hand, it could be that they merely set things in motion and release Macbeth's latent murderous ambition.

THEMES

A theme is an idea that runs through a text. A text may have one theme or many. Understanding the themes makes the text more than 'just' a text - it becomes something more significant, because we're encouraged to think more deeply about the text, to work out what lies beneath its surface. There are several themes in *MACBETH*, these are:

The Corrupting Power of Unchecked Ambition

The main theme of *Macbeth* - the destruction wrought when ambition goes unchecked by moral constraints - finds its most powerful expression in the play's two main characters. Macbeth is a courageous Scottish general who is not naturally inclined to commit evil deeds, yet he deeply desires power and advancement. He kills Duncan against his better judgment and afterward stewes in guilt and paranoia. Toward the end of the play he descends into a kind of frantic, boastful madness. Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, pursues her goals with greater determination, yet she is less capable of withstanding the repercussions of her immoral acts. One of Shakespeare's most forcefully drawn female characters, she spurs her husband mercilessly to kill Duncan and urges him to be strong in the murder's aftermath, but she is eventually driven to distraction by the effect of Macbeth's repeated bloodshed on her conscience. In each case, ambition - helped, of course, by the malign prophecies of the witches - is what drives the couple to ever more terrible atrocities. The problem, the play suggests, is that once one decides to use violence to further one's quest for power, it is difficult to stop. There are always potential threats to the throne - Banquo, Fleance, Macduff - and it is always tempting to use violent means to dispose of them.

The Relationship Between Cruelty and Masculinity

Characters in *Macbeth* frequently dwell on issues of gender. Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband by questioning his manhood, wishes that she herself could be "unsexed," and does not contradict Macbeth when he says that a woman like her should give birth only to boys. In the same manner that Lady Macbeth goads her husband on to murder, Macbeth provokes the murderers he hires to kill Banquo by questioning their manhood. Such acts show that both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth equate masculinity with naked aggression, and whenever they converse about manhood, violence soon follows. Their understanding of manhood allows the political order depicted in the play to descend into chaos.

At the same time, however, the audience cannot help noticing that women are also sources of violence and evil. The witches' prophecies spark Macbeth's ambitions and then encourage his violent behaviour; Lady Macbeth provides the brains and the will behind her husband's plotting; and the only divine being to appear is Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft. Arguably, Macbeth traces the root of chaos and evil to women, which has led some critics to argue that this is Shakespeare's most misogynistic play. While the male characters are just as violent and prone to evil as the women, the aggression of the female characters is more striking because it goes against prevailing expectations of how women ought to behave. Lady Macbeth's behaviour certainly shows that women can be as ambitious and cruel as men. Whether because of the constraints of her society or because she is not fearless enough to kill, Lady Macbeth relies on deception and manipulation rather than violence to achieve her ends.

Ultimately, the play does put forth a revised and less destructive definition of manhood. In the scene where Macduff learns of the murders of his wife and child, Malcolm consoles him by encouraging him to take the news in "manly" fashion, by seeking revenge upon Macbeth. Macduff shows the young heir apparent that he has a mistaken understanding of masculinity. To Malcolm's suggestion, "Dispute it like a man," Macduff replies, "I shall do so. But I must also feel it as a man". At the end of the play, Siward receives news of his son's death rather

complacently. Malcolm responds: "He's worth more sorrow [than you have expressed] / And that I'll spend for him". Malcolm's comment shows that he has learned the lesson Macduff gave him on the sentient nature of true masculinity. It also suggests that, with Malcolm's coronation, order will be restored to the Kingdom of Scotland.

The Difference Between Kingship and Tyranny

In the play, Duncan is always referred to as a "king," while Macbeth soon becomes known as the "tyrant." The difference between the two types of rulers seems to be expressed in a conversation that occurs in Act 4, scene 3, when Macduff meets Malcolm in England. In order to test Macduff's loyalty to Scotland, Malcolm pretends that he would make an even worse king than Macbeth. He tells Macduff of his reproachable qualities - among them a thirst for personal power and a violent temperament, both of which seem to characterise Macbeth perfectly. On the other hand, Malcolm says, "The king-becoming graces / [are] justice, verity, temp'rance, stableness, / Bounty, perseverance, mercy, [and] lowliness". The model king, then, offers the kingdom an embodiment of order and justice, but also comfort and affection. Under him, subjects are rewarded according to their merits, as when Duncan makes Macbeth thane of Cawdor after Macbeth's victory over the invaders. Most important, the king must be loyal to Scotland above his own interests. Macbeth, by contrast, brings only chaos to Scotland - symbolised in the bad weather and bizarre supernatural events - and offers no real justice, only a habit of capriciously murdering those he sees as a threat. As the embodiment of tyranny, he must be overcome by Malcolm so that Scotland can have a true king once more.

The Supernatural

Another major theme is the supernatural - the idea that there are mysterious forces controlling what is happening in our lives. The very first characters we meet are the three witches, and their prophecies are what drives the story forward. In Shakespeare's time belief in witchcraft was very strong and many so-called witches were burnt at the stake. It is not surprising that his audience would have taken these ideas seriously and felt that Macbeth was somehow possessed. There are lots of references to this - he is unable to say 'Amen', he has visions, he is disturbed and even thinks no-one can kill him. The final battle scene also contains many elements of the supernatural. Macbeth believes he is invincible because many of the witches' prophecies appear impossible to fulfil - and yet just as the witches predicted Birnam Wood does indeed move to Dunsinane, and Macbeth is killed by Macduff because he is not 'of woman born'.

Reality and Appearance

The contrast between what is real and the appearance of something is also used by Shakespeare. The classic dagger scene, when Macbeth is not sure if he can trust his eyes, is only one of many references to this theme. For instance, he sees Banquo's ghost at the banquet and Lady Macbeth imagines blood on her hands.

The contrast between reality and appearance is also shown with all the references to thoughts, dreams and actions. Banquo talks about the 'cursed thoughts' he has had and his dreams of the witches. Macbeth talks of the world of thought and dreams and sometimes is stuck there. For instance, Lady Macbeth is critical of Macbeth's 'foolish thoughts' and talks of him being 'lost' because of this.

Sleep is another theme associated with reality, because characters view it as vital to life, but like death or being in another world. Macbeth is told he has murdered sleep and will 'sleep no more' whilst Lady Macbeth thinks of sleep as death, calling it the sternest 'goodnight'.

MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS

MOTIFS are recurring structures, contrasts, and literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes:

Hallucinations

Visions and hallucinations recur throughout the play and serve as reminders of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's joint culpability for the growing body count. When he is about to kill Duncan, Macbeth sees a dagger floating in the air. Covered with blood and pointed toward the king's chamber, the dagger represents the bloody course on which Macbeth is about to embark. Later, he sees Banquo's ghost sitting in a chair at a feast, pricking his conscience by mutely reminding him that he murdered his former friend. The seemingly hardheaded Lady Macbeth also eventually gives way to visions, as she sleepwalks and believes that her hands are stained with blood that cannot be washed away by any amount of water. In each case, it is ambiguous whether the vision is real or purely hallucinatory; but, in both cases, the Macbeths read them uniformly as supernatural signs of their guilt.

Violence

Macbeth is a famously violent play. Interestingly, most of the killings take place offstage, but throughout the play the characters provide the audience with gory descriptions of the carnage, from the opening scene where the captain describes Macbeth and Banquo wading in blood on the battlefield, to the endless references to the bloodstained hands of Macbeth and his wife. The action is bookended by a pair of bloody battles: in the first, Macbeth defeats the invaders; in the second, he is slain and beheaded by Macduff. In between is a series of murders: Duncan, Duncan's chamberlains, Banquo, Lady Macduff, and Macduff's son all come to bloody ends. By the end of the action, blood seems to be everywhere.

Prophecy

Prophecy sets Macbeth's plot in motion - namely, the witches' prophecy that Macbeth will become first thane of Cawdor and then king. The weird sisters make a number of other prophecies: they tell us that Banquo's heirs will be kings, that Macbeth should beware Macduff, that Macbeth is safe till Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane, and that no man born of woman can harm Macbeth. Save for the prophecy about Banquo's heirs, all of these predictions are fulfilled within the course of the play. Still, it is left deliberately ambiguous whether some of them are self-fulfilling - for example, whether Macbeth wills himself to be king or is fated to be king. Additionally, as the Birnam Wood and "born of woman" prophecies make clear, the prophecies must be interpreted as riddles, since they do not always mean what they seem to mean.

SYMBOLS are objects, characters, figures, and colours used to represent abstract ideas or concepts:

Blood

Blood is everywhere in Macbeth, beginning with the opening battle between the Scots and the Norwegian invaders, which is described in harrowing terms by the wounded captain in Act 1, scene 2. Once Macbeth and Lady Macbeth embark upon their murderous journey, blood comes to symbolise their guilt, and they begin to feel that their crimes have stained them in a way that cannot be washed clean. "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?"

Macbeth cries after he has killed Duncan, even as his wife scolds him and says that a little water will do the job. Later, though, she comes to share his horrified sense of being stained: "Out, damned spot; out, I say . . . who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?" she asks as she wanders through the halls of their castle near the close of the play. Blood symbolises the guilt that sits like a permanent stain on the consciences of both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, one that hounds them to their graves.

Half-Truths.

The drunken Porter responds to the knocking at the castle's gates just after Macbeth has murdered King Duncan. As he does so, he imagines there's a Catholic "equivocator" at the door "who committed treason enough for God's sake". On the one hand, an "equivocator" is a person who speaks ambiguously or doesn't tell the whole truth, which shows up over and over in Macbeth. The witches tell partial truths when they make predictions; Macbeth frequently bends the truth as he deliberates about whether or not it's OK to murder the king; he equivocates when he justifies (to his henchmen) that murdering Banquo is acceptable; and even Banquo has some ambiguous thoughts about the prophecy that he'll father kings.

On the other hand, the word "equivocator" is most likely an allusion to the treatise written by the Jesuit Henry Garnet, who encouraged Catholics to speak ambiguously or, "equivocate" when they were being questioned by Protestant inquisitors (so they wouldn't be persecuted for their religious beliefs). Henry Garnet was tried and executed for his role in the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, when a group of Catholics planned to blow up the King and Parliament (they stored kegs of gunpowder in a nearby building). The plot failed, but it was an extremely upsetting experience for everyone involved - and it's likely that a lot of the original audience members would have associated the scene of Macbeth returning from the room where he's murdered the sleeping king with this terrorist plot.

The Weather

As in other Shakespearean tragedies, Macbeth's grotesque murder spree is accompanied by a number of unnatural occurrences in the natural realm. From the thunder and lightning that accompany the witches' appearances to the terrible storms that rage on the night of Duncan's murder, these violations of the natural order reflect corruption in the moral and political orders.

Key Extracts and Questions

Tip: practise analysing how the characters in the extracts are presented as this will help you prepare for section (a) of the exam.

ACT I 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 hurly-burly'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

1. What is the "hurly-burly" the witches refer to?
2. Who are the witches meeting?
3. Why is this significant?
4. Why do the witches call on "Graymalkin" and "Paddock"?
5. What is significant about the line "Fair is foul and foul is fair"?

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.

DUNCAN

O valiant cousin! worthy gentleman!

SERGEANT

As whence the sun 'gins his reflection
Shipwrecking storms and direful thunders break,
So from that spring whence comfort seem'd to come
Discomfort swells. Mark, king of Scotland, mark:
No sooner justice had with valour arm'd
Compell'd these skipping kerns to trust their heels,
But the Norweyan lord surveying vantage,
With furbish'd arms and new supplies of men
Began a fresh assault.

DUNCAN

Dismay'd not this
Our captains, Macbeth and Banquo?

SERGEANT

Yes;
As sparrows eagles, or the hare the lion.
If I say sooth, I must report they were

1. Who gives the report of the battle?
2. How is this man described?
3. How is the battle described at the beginning of the sergeant's speech?
4. How is Macbeth described? What does this suggest about him?
5. Find a simile that describes how Macbeth fought on the battlefield.
6. What did Macbeth do to Macdonwald?
7. What does this show about Macbeth?
8. How does Duncan respond to this description of the battle?
9. What animals are Macbeth and Banquo compared to?
10. What does this suggest about them?
11. What does Duncan say to the sergeant when he has finished speaking?

As cannons overcharged with double cracks, so they
Doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe:
Except they meant to bathe in reeking wounds,
Or memorise another Golgotha,
I cannot tell.
But I am faint, my gashes cry for help.

DUNCAN

So well thy words become thee as thy wounds;
They smack of honour both. Go get him surgeons

ACT 1 SCENE 5. Inverness. Macbeth's castle.

Enter LADY MACBETH, reading a letter

LADY MACBETH

'They met me in the day of success: and I have
learned by the perfectest report, they have more in
them than mortal knowledge. When I burned in desire
to question them further, they made themselves air,
into which they vanished. Whiles I stood rapt in
the wonder of it, came missives from the king, who
all-hailed me 'Thane of Cawdor;' by which title,
before, these weird sisters saluted me, and referred
me to the coming on of time, with 'Hail, king that
shalt be!' This have I thought good to deliver
thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou
mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being
ignorant of what greatness is promised thee. Lay it
to thy heart, and farewell.'

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

Enter a Messenger

What is your tidings?

Messenger

The king comes here to-night.

LADY MACBETH

Thou'rt mad to say it:

Is not thy master with him? who, were't so,
Would have inform'd for preparation.

Messenger

So please you, it is true: our thane is coming:
One of my fellows had the speed of him,
Who, almost dead for breath, had scarcely more
Than would make up his message.

1. What has Macbeth put in his letter to Lady Macbeth? Summarise briefly.
2. How does Lady Macbeth react?
3. How does she describe Macbeth?
4. What does "but without the illness should attend it" mean?
5. What qualities does Lady Macbeth recognise that Macbeth has?
6. What does Lady Macbeth say she would like to do?
7. What news does the messenger bring?
8. How does Lady Macbeth react?

ACT 1 SCENE 5

LADY MACBETH

Give him tending;
He brings great news.

Exit Messenger

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.

1. How does Lady Macbeth describe the arrival of King Duncan to her home?
2. What is significant about this?
3. What does Lady Macbeth ask the spirits to do?
4. Why does Lady Macbeth ask for this?
5. What does "Come, thick night, and pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell" mean?
6. How does Lady Macbeth greet Macbeth?
7. What does Lady Macbeth mean "I feel now the future in the instant"?

ACT 1 SCENE 7

MACBETH

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly: if the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success; that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases
We still have judgment here; that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips. He's here in double trust;
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off;
And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on the other.

1. What is Macbeth talking about here? "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly"
2. What reasons does Macbeth give for not killing Duncan?
3. What does Macbeth say about the way Duncan has treated him?
4. How does Macbeth describe King Duncan?
5. How does Macbeth describe how the murder of Duncan would be seen?
6. What does this suggest about King Duncan?
7. What is Macbeth's only reason to commit the murder?

ACT 1 SCENE 7

MACBETH

Prithee, peace:

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

LADY MACBETH

What beast was't, then,
That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man;
And, to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
Does unmake you. I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this.

MACBETH

If we should fail?

LADY MACBETH

We fail!

But screw your courage to the sticking-place,
And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep--
Whereto the rather shall his day's hard journey
Soundly invite him--his two chamberlains
Will I with wine and wassail so convince
That memory, the warder of the brain,
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
A limbeck only: when in swinish sleep
Their drenched natures lie as in a death,
What cannot you and I perform upon
The unguarded Duncan? what not put upon
His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt
Of our great quell?

1. How does Lady Macbeth speak to Macbeth?
2. What does Lady Macbeth say she would do if she had made a promise like Macbeth has done?
3. How do you think an audience might respond to this?
4. What is Macbeth concerned about?
5. How does Lady Macbeth respond to Macbeth's doubts?
6. What does Lady Macbeth say she will do?
7. Who will be blamed for the murder?

ACT 2 SCENE 1

MACBETH

Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight? or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
I see thee yet, in form as palpable
As this which now I draw.
Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going;
And such an instrument I was to use.
Mine eyes are made the fools o' the other senses,
Or else worth all the rest; I see thee still,
And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood,
Which was not so before. There's no such thing:
It is the bloody business which informs
Thus to mine eyes. Now o'er the one halfworld
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtain'd sleep; witchcraft celebrates
Pale Hecate's offerings, and wither'd murder,
Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace.
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
Moves like a ghost. Thou sure and firm-set earth,
Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
Thy very stones prate of my whereabouts,
And take the present horror from the time,
Which now suits with it. Whiles I threat, he lives:
Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.

A bell rings

I go, and it is done; the bell invites me.
Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell
That summons thee to heaven or to hell.

Read the extract opposite. Then answer the following question.

Look at how the character speaks and behaves here. How do you think an audience might respond to this part of the play? Refer closely to details from the extract to support your answer. [15]

ACT 2 SCENE 2

MACBETH

But wherefore could not I pronounce 'Amen'?
I had most need of blessing, and 'Amen'
Stuck in my throat.

LADY MACBETH

These deeds must not be thought
After these ways; so, it will make us mad.

MACBETH

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

LADY MACBETH

What do you mean?

MACBETH

Still it cried 'Sleep no more!' to all the house:
'Glamis hath murder'd sleep, and therefore Cawdor
Shall sleep no more; Macbeth shall sleep no more.'

1. What has happened just before this scene?
2. What is Macbeth upset about?
3. Why is this significant?
4. How does Lady Macbeth react to Macbeth?
5. What does this show about Lady Macbeth?
6. Pick out three metaphors Macbeth uses to describe sleep.
7. How does Lady Macbeth react?
8. What does this suggest about her?
9. What do we learn about Macbeth from this scene?

ACT 2 SCENE 3

LENNOX

Goes the king hence to-day?

MACBETH

He does: he did appoint so.

LENNOX

The night has been unruly: where we lay,
Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,
Lamentings heard i' the air; strange screams of death,
And prophesying with accents terrible
Of dire combustion and confused events
New hatch'd to the woeful time: the obscure bird
Clamour'd the livelong night: some say, the earth
Was feverous and did shake.

MACBETH

'Twas a rough night.

LENNOX

My young remembrance cannot parallel
A fellow to it.

Re-enter MACDUFF

MACDUFF

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

1. What does Lennox tell Macbeth?
2. Why is this important?
3. What does Lennox say to show how stormy the night was?
4. What does Macduff say to show his horror at the murder of King Duncan?
5. How does the audience know Macduff is shocked by what he has seen?

ACT 3 SCENE 4

LADY MACBETH

My royal lord,
You do not give the cheer: the feast is sold
That is not often vouch'd, while 'tis a-making,
'Tis given with welcome: to feed were best at home;
From thence the sauce to meat is ceremony;
Meeting were bare without it.

MACBETH

Sweet remembrancer!
Now, good digestion wait on appetite,
And health on both!

LENNOX

May't please your highness sit.

The GHOST OF BANQUO enters, and sits in MACBETH's place

MACBETH

Here had we now our country's honour roof'd,
Were the graced person of our Banquo present;
Who may I rather challenge for unkindness
Than pity for mischance!

ROSS

His absence, sir,
Lays blame upon his promise. Please't your highness
To grace us with your royal company.

MACBETH

The table's full.

LENNOX

Here is a place reserved, sir.

1. Who does Macbeth mention before he sits down?
2. How does he speak about Banquo?
3. Macbeth is asked to sit down twice – how does he reply?
4. What happens in the rest of this scene?
5. Why is this important?
6. What does it show about Macbeth?
7. How is Macbeth changing?

ACT 4 SCENE 2

LADY MACDUFF

Whither should I fly?

I have done no harm. But I remember now
I am in this earthly world; where to do harm
Is often laudable, to do good sometime
Accounted dangerous folly: why then, alas,
Do I put up that womanly defence,
To say I have done no harm?

Enter Murderers

What are these faces?

First Murderer

Where is your husband?

LADY MACDUFF

I hope, in no place so unsanctified
Where such as thou mayst find him.

First Murderer

He's a traitor.

Son

Thou liest, thou shag-hair'd villain!

First Murderer

What, you egg!

Stabbing him

Young fry of treachery!

Son

He has kill'd me, mother:

Run away, I pray you!

Dies

Exit LADY MACDUFF, crying 'Murder!' Exeunt Murderers, following her

1. What does Lady Macduff reveal about Scotland and how people now live?
2. How does Lady Macduff protect her husband?
3. How does Macduff's son stand up for his father?
4. What is shocking about this scene?
5. How would an audience respond to this scene?

ACT 4 SCENE 3

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!

MALCOLM

Macduff, this noble passion,
Child of integrity, hath from my soul
Wiped the black scruples, reconciled my thoughts
To thy good truth and honour. Devilish Macbeth
By many of these trains hath sought to win me
Into his power, and modest wisdom plucks me
From over-credulous haste: but God above
Deal between thee and me! for even now
I put myself to thy direction, and
Unspeaking mine own detraction, here abjure
The taints and blames I laid upon myself,
For strangers to my nature. I am yet
Unknown to woman, never was forsworn,
Scarcely have coveted what was mine own,
At no time broke my faith, would not betray
The devil to his fellow and delight
No less in truth than life: my first false speaking
Was this upon myself: what I am truly,
Is thine and my poor country's to command:
Whither indeed, before thy here-approach,
Old Siward, with ten thousand warlike men,
Already at a point, was setting forth.
Now we'll together; and the chance of goodness
Be like our warranted quarrel! Why are you silent?

1. What has Malcom told Macduff just before this scene?
2. How does Macduff react?
3. What does it show about Macduff?
4. How does Malcolm respond to your concerns?
5. What does this show about Malcolm?

ACT 4 SCENE 3

MALCOLM

Merciful heaven!

What, man! ne'er pull your hat upon your brows;
Give sorrow words: the grief that does not speak
Whispers the o'er-fraught heart and bids it break.

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!

1. What has Ross told Macduff just before this extract?
2. How does Malcolm react?
3. What does Macduff say to show his shock?
4. What does Malcolm say he should do?
5. What does Macduff say Macbeth does not have?
6. What does Macduff say he must do before he can avenge their deaths?
7. What does this show about Macduff in contrast to Macbeth?

ACT 5 SCENE 1

LADY MACBETH
Yet here's a spot.

Doctor
Hark! she speaks: I will set down what comes from her, to satisfy my remembrance the more strongly.

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!

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

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

Doctor
Well, well, well,--

Gentlewoman
Pray God it be, sir.

1. What is Lady Macbeth doing in this scene?
2. What is significant about this?
3. What is Lady Macbeth doing?
4. Find a quote that refers to the murder of King Duncan.
5. Who is the Thane of Fife's wife?
6. What has happened to her?
7. How do the doctor and gentlewoman react to what they have heard?
8. What does this show about what they have heard?
9. Can the doctor help Lady Macbeth? Why?

ACT 5 SCENE 5

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.

Re-enter SEYTON

Wherefore was that cry?

SEYTON

The queen, my lord, is dead.

MACBETH

She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word.
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

Enter a Messenger

Thou comest to use thy tongue; thy story quickly.

Messenger

Gracious my lord,
I should report that which I say I saw,
But know not how to do it.

1. How has Macbeth changed from the beginning of the play?
2. What does Macbeth mean when he says "I have supp'd full with horrors"?
3. How does Macbeth react to the death of Lady Macbeth?
4. How does Macbeth describe his life?
5. What has Macbeth lost in becoming king in the way that he did?
6. Does the audience feel sympathy for Macbeth at this point in the play? Explain.
7. What does the messenger tell Macbeth in this scene?

ACT 5 SCENE 8

MACDUFF

Turn, hell-hound, turn!

MACBETH

Of all men else I have avoided thee:
But get thee back; my soul is too much charged
With blood of thine already.

MACDUFF

I have no words:
My voice is in my sword: thou bloodier villain
Than terms can give thee out!

They fight

MACBETH

Thou lovest labour:
As easy mayst thou the intrenchant air
With thy keen sword impress as make me bleed:
Let fall thy blade on vulnerable crests;
I bear a charmed life, which must not yield,
To one of woman born.

MACDUFF

Despair thy charm;
And let the angel whom thou still hast served
Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's womb
Untimely ripp'd.

MACBETH

Accursed be that tongue that tells me so,
For it hath cow'd my better part of man!
And be these juggling fiends no more believed,
That palter with us in a double sense;
That keep the word of promise to our ear,
And break it to our hope. I'll not fight with thee.

MACDUFF

Then yield thee, coward,
And live to be the show and gaze o' the time:
We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are,
Painted on a pole, and underwrit,
'Here may you see the tyrant.'

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 Thanes, and Soldiers

Read the extract opposite. Then answer the following question.

Look at how the characters speak and behave here. How do you think an audience might respond to this part of the play? Refer closely to details from the extract to support your answer.

[15]

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

1. Who does Malcolm say will be called home?
2. How does he refer to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth?
3. What sort of a king do you think Malcolm will be?
4. Is it fair to describe Macbeth as "this dead butcher"? How has Macbeth changed from the beginning of the play?

Section B Example Questions

- Write about the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth and how it is presented at different points in the play. [25]
**5 of this question's marks are allocated for accuracy in spelling, punctuation and the use of vocabulary and sentence structures.*
- Write about the theme of power and how it is presented at different points in the play [25].
**5 of this question's marks are allocated for accuracy in spelling, punctuation and the use of vocabulary and sentence structures.*
- Write about ambition and how it affects the characters during the play [25].
**5 of this question's marks are allocated for accuracy in spelling, punctuation and the use of vocabulary and sentence structures.*
- Write about the importance of the supernatural in Macbeth [25].
**5 of this question's marks are allocated for accuracy in spelling, punctuation and the use of vocabulary and sentence structures.*
- Write about the ways in which gender roles are used with Macbeth [25].
**5 of this question's marks are allocated for accuracy in spelling, punctuation and the use of vocabulary and sentence structures.*
- Write about Banquo and the ways in which he is presented in the play [25].
**5 of this question's marks are allocated for accuracy in spelling, punctuation and the use of vocabulary and sentence structures.*
- Write about Macbeth and the ways in which he is presented in the play [25].
**5 of this question's marks are allocated for accuracy in spelling, punctuation and the use of vocabulary and sentence structures.*
- Write about Lady Macbeth and the ways in which she is presented in the play [25].
**5 of this question's marks are allocated for accuracy in spelling, punctuation and the use of vocabulary and sentence structures.*
- Write about Macduff and the ways in which he is presented in the play [25].
**5 of this question's marks are allocated for accuracy in spelling, punctuation and the use of vocabulary and sentence structures.*
- Write about kingship and the effect it has on characters in the play [25].
**5 of this question's marks are allocated for accuracy in spelling, punctuation and the use of vocabulary and sentence structures.*
- Write the themes of reality and illusion and how they are presented in the play [25].
**5 of this question's marks are allocated for accuracy in spelling, punctuation and the use of vocabulary and sentence structures.*
- Write about the witches and the way they are presented in the play [25].
**5 of this question's marks are allocated for accuracy in spelling, punctuation and the use of vocabulary and sentence structures.*

Key Quotations

Act 1 Scene 1 – The witches meet

1. “When shall we three meet again?/In thunder, lightning or in rain?” (1st witch)
2. “When the hurly-burly’s done,/When the battle’s lost and won.” (2nd witch)
3. “Fair is foul and foul is fair,/Hover through the fog and filthy air.” (all)

Act 1 Scene 2- As the captain tells the King about Macbeth’s bravery in battle

1. “brave Macbeth – well he deserves that name” (Captain)
2. “noble Macbeth” (King Duncan)
3. Valour’s minion (Captain)
4. “Disdaining fortune with brandished steel” (Captain)
5. “unseemed him from the nave to th’ chaps” (Captain)

Act 1 Scene 3- After Macbeth hears the witches’ prophecy

6. “This supernatural soliciting cannot be ill, cannot be good.” (Macbeth)
7. “My thought, whose murder is yet but fantastical, shakes so my single state of man that function is smothered in surmise, and nothing is, but what is not” (Macbeth)
8. “If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me without my stir” –Macbeth
9. “Come what come may, Time and the hour runs through the roughest day” –Macbeth
10. “New honours come upon him like our strange garments” - Banquo
11. “worthy Macbeth” – Banquo

Act 1 Scene 5 – Lady Macbeth receives the letter

12. “my dearest partner of greatness”- Lady Macbeth
13. “milk of human kindness”- Lady Macbeth
14. “Hie thee hither, that I may pour my spirits in thine ear”- Lady Macbeth
15. “unsex me here” Lady Macbeth
16. “Fill me from the crown to the toe topfull of direst cruelty” Lady Macbeth
17. “look like th’ innocent flower, but be the serpent under’t” Lady Macbeth
18. “leave all the rest to me” Lady Macbeth

Act 1 Scene 7 – First soliloquy (thinking about killing King Duncan and then being manipulated by his wife)

19. “If it were done when ‘tis done, then ‘twere well it were done quickly” –Macbeth
20. “First, as I am his kinsman and his subject, strong both against his murderer shut the door, Not bear the knife myself” –Macbeth
21. “I have no spur To prick the sides of my intent, but only Vaulting ambition, which o’erleaps itself And fall on the other” –Macbeth
22. “We will proceed no further in this business: He hath honor’d me of late... which will be worn now in their newest gloss, Not cast aside so soon.” –Macbeth
23. “Like the poor cat I’ th’ adage?” Lady Macbeth
24. “I dare do all that may become a man” Macbeth
25. “When you durst do it, then you were a man” Lady Macbeth
26. “I would, while it was smiling in my face, have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums and dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you have done to this” Lady Macbeth
27. “bring forth men-children only” Lady Macbeth
28. “I am settled, and bend up Each corporal agent to this terrible feat” -Macbeth
29. “False face must hide what the false heart doth know” –Macbeth

Act 2 Scene 1 – Second soliloquy (just before he kills King Duncan)

30. "Is this a dagger which I see before me, The handle toward my hand? Come let me clutch thee." – Macbeth
31. "the heat oppressed brain" – Macbeth
32. "Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going" – Macbeth
33. "On thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood" – Macbeth
34. "It is the bloody business which informs thus to mine eyes." – Macbeth
35. "I go and it is done. The bell invites me" – Macbeth

Act 2 Scene 2- After the murder

36. "I laid their daggers ready, he could not miss 'em" Lady Macbeth
37. "I have done the deed" Macbeth
38. "these hangman's hands" Macbeth
39. "Consider it not so deeply" Lady Macbeth
40. "These deeds must not be thought" Lady Macbeth
41. "I'm afraid to think what I have done; look on't again, I dare not" Macbeth
42. "Infirm of purpose!" Lady Macbeth
43. "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?" Macbeth
44. "A little water clears us of this deed" Lady Macbeth
45. "To know my deed, twere best no know myself" Macbeth

Act 2 Scene 3 (When they discover the murder and Macbeth kills the guards)

46. "Th' expedition of my violent love Outran the pauser, reason." Macbeth
47. "His silver skin laced with his golden blood and his gashed stabs looked like a breach on nature" Macbeth describing King Duncan's body

Act 2 Scene 4 (When the men are discussing how the suspicion is on Duncan's sons)

48. "Thrifless ambition that will ravine up thine own life's means" – Ross

Act 3 Scene 1 – Banquo's suspicion and Macbeth's third soliloquy, (after he's killed King Duncan)

49. "Thou hast it now [...] all as the weird women promised and I fear thou playd'st most foully for't" – Banquo
50. "To be thus is nothing, But to be safely thus. Our fears in Banquo Stick deep" – Macbeth
51. "There is none but he whose being I do fear" Macbeth about Banquo
52. "Upon me head they placed a fruitless crown" Macbeth (if his sons can't be king)
53. "For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered" Macbeth (talking about Banquo's sons)

Act 3 Scene 2

54. "We have scorched the snake, not killed it" – Macbeth
55. "O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife" – Macbeth
56. "Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck" – Macbeth to Lady Macbeth when she asks what is to be done

Act 3 Scene 4 – Macbeth's banquet to become king (after he's had Banquo killed)

57. "Thou canst not say I did it; never shake thy gory locks at me!" (Macbeth to the ghost of Banquo)
58. "murders have been perform'd Too terrible for the ear." – Macbeth
59. "you [Lady Macbeth] can behold such sights, And keep the natural ruby of your cheeks When mine is blanch'd with fear" – Macbeth
60. "What, quite unmanned in folly" Lady Macbeth
61. "It will have blood: they say blood will have blood" – Macbeth
62. "There's not one of them but in his [MacDuff's] house I keep a servant fee'd" – Macbeth

63. "Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more, Returning were as tedious as go o'er." – Macbeth

64. "We are yet but young in deed" - Macbeth

Act 4 Scene 1 – Macbeth hears that Macduff has fled to England

65. "The very firstlings of my heart shall be The firstlings of my hand" – Macbeth

66. "give to th' edge o'th'sword his wife, his babes, and all the unfortunate should that trace him in his line" -Macbeth

67. "This deed [surprise Macduff's castle and kill his family] I'll do before this purpose cool. But no more sights!" –Macbeth

Act 4 Scene 3 – Macduff goes to England to convince Malcolm to return and challenge Macbeth

68. "this tyrant, whose sole mane blisters our tongues, was once thought honest"- Malcolm about Macbeth

69. "I shall do so; but I must also feel it as a man" (Macduff, after Malcolm tells him to "dispute it like a man" and get revenge on Macbeth)

Act 5 Scene 1- Lady Macbeth is sleep walking

70. "Out, damned spot! Out, I say!" –Lady Macbeth

71. "Will these hands ne'er be clean?" – Lady Macbeth

Act 5 Scene 2 – Macbeth's lords have started to detract to the other side.

72. "What does the tyrant?" –Menteith

73. "Some say he's mad; others... Do call it valiant fury - Caithness

74. "Those he commands move only in command, Nothing in love" –Angus

75. "Well, march we on, To give obedience where 'tis truly owed"[to King Duncan's sons] – Caithness

Act 5 Scene 5 – After he hears his wife's scream

76. "I have almost forgot the taste of fears" –Macbeth

77. Seyton; "The Queen, my lord, is dead" Macbeth: "She should have died hereafter; There would have been a time for such a word"

78. "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow Creeps in this pretty pace from day to day... And all our yesterdays have lighted fools The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!" - Macbeth

79. "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player That struts and frets his hour upon the stage And then is heard no more. It is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing."- Macbeth

Act 5 Scene 9- Macbeth fighting Macduff

80. "I will not yield to kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet" – The start of Macbeth's final speech

With special thanks to the Manchester Actors Company and their useful resources.