



Year 10 English Literature Knowledge Organiser



Macbeth

1. Content The play was written by William Shakespeare and was first performed around 1606

Shakespeare's Time- Shakespeare wrote at the time of two monarchs: Queen Elizabeth I and James I. The plays he wrote during Elizabeth's reign are of a happier tone than those in King James' reign- reflecting the mood of the time. For example, the gunpowder plot took place the year before the play was written

James I- 1606 was early in the reign of James I, who was an admirer of Shakespeare's works, and a patron of his acting company. It is doubtless, therefore, that Shakespeare has the king in mind when writing the play about Macbeth, a figure from Scottish ancestry. Furthermore, King James' family claimed to have descended from a historical figure named Banquo.

The Divine Right of Kings- Divine Right asserts that monarchs were appointed by God above, and any act against the monarch was an act against God. This was a widely held view at the time. James I often quotes Divine Right to cement his place on the throne.

The Role of Women- Despite the strength of Elizabeth's reign, society at the time was patriarchal- women were considered inferior to men. Women belonged with their fathers and their husbands. They were not permitted to own land or enter most professions. They were expected to bear children and be the 'doting' wife- a contrasting role to that which Lady Macbeth has.

Witches and the Supernatural- At the time of Shakespeare, the belief in witches and the supernatural was extremely strong, and many so-called "witches" were burned at the stake.

Healthcare and Medicine- These were not as advanced as they are today- there were numerous ailments and diseases that were not yet understood. Furthermore, there were many wars in which scores of men were killed- therefore death was much more frequent at the time the play was set.

2. Main Characters- Consider what Shakespeare intended by the characterisation of the below.

Macbeth- The lead protagonist of the play. He is introduced as a Scottish general who is thought to be a brave and strong soldier. However, he is easily persuaded to commit the murder of the king, whom he loves. He becomes a tyrannical and destructive king, who responds to all threats (including his own insecurities) through violence and murder.

Lady Macbeth- Macbeth's wife, an extremely ambitious woman who lusts for power. At the beginning of the play, she seems stronger than Macbeth, urging and aiding him to kill Duncan. Later in the play she becomes racked with guilt and madness, proving she's unable to come to terms with what she's done. Her conscience effects her to such a degree that she eventually commits suicide.

Duncan- Duncan is a kind and loved King of Scotland who Macbeth murders in order to fulfil his ambition and the witches prophecy. Duncan is a virtuous king, who is both compassionate and rational- he forms a stark contrast with Macbeth as a king. When Duncan dies, order in Scotland is shattered. It is only restored when his son, Malcolm eventually takes the throne.

Macduff- A Scottish nobleman who is dubious and hostile towards Macbeth's reign from the beginning. His wife and son are murdered on Macbeth's orders. Macduff leads the battle against Macbeth's tyrannical reign. Eventually becoming the man who kills Macbeth because he is 'not born of woman' and therefore fulfils the witches' prophecy.

The Three Witches- The witches represent trickery, manipulation and the supernatural. They use charms, spells and prophecies to prompt Macbeth into murdering Duncan. There is some ambivalence over how much of their power comes from supernatural abilities, as opposed to knowing the weakness of their victim. In any case, they take pleasure in toying with human lives and emotions.

Banquo- he is a brave and noble gentleman who is friend and fellow soldier to Macbeth. Banquo is also given prophecies by the witches, but unlike Macbeth, he chooses not to act on them. After being murdered, Banquo's ghost returns to haunt Macbeth, causing him a great deal of fright, and reminding him of the path he chose not to take. In accordance to the witches' prophecies, Banquo's descendants later take their place on the throne.

5. Themes- A theme is an idea that runs throughout the text

Unchecked Ambition- The tale of Macbeth ruthlessly expresses the dangers of ambition when it is not held by moral constraints. Ambition turns Macbeth from a brave and loyal Scottish general into a murderous tyrant. Lady Macbeth is another example of this theme, as she is unable to deal with the acts that she and Macbeth have committed to fuel their ambition, and so commits suicide.

Fate vs Free Will- Throughout the play, the audience is frequently forced to question the notion of fate vs free will. Does the story pan out the way it does because it was pre-ordained, or because of the actions Macbeth chose to take? Macbeth fervently attempts to fight the negative aspects of his fate, and yet it is his these very actions (his free will) that cause the predetermined downfall (fate)

Gender, Masculinity and Femininity- Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband by questioning his masculinity, as he originally declines to murder Duncan for the throne. She states that she wishes she could be 'unsexed' so as to give her bravery to commit the deed. Masculinity is frequently associated with raw aggression and violence, whilst femininity is associated with weakness and kindness.

Inversion of the Natural Order- Wherever the natural order is disturbed in Macbeth (the three supernatural witches, the murder of the king) disorder and chaos follow. There is only peace when the natural order is restored (Malcolm is seated on the throne). In line with the beliefs of King James, through Macbeth, Shakespeare expresses that the inversion of the natural order is dangerous and destructive

4. Scene by Scene Summary- Take note of some of the key quotations for each scene. The play is Structured in 5 Acts

Act 1	-Scene 1: The witches meet on a heath. They plot to trick Macbeth at a later time. -Scene 2: King Duncan is told of Macbeth's bravery and he awards him Thane of Cawdor -Scene 3: The witches confront Macbeth and Banquo and deliver their prophecies -Scene 4: At the king's palace Duncan names Malcolm his successor. -Scene 5: Lady Macbeth receives Macbeth's letter and hatches a plan to murder Duncan -Scene 6: Duncan arrives at Macbeth's castle, professing his love for him. -Scene 7: Macbeth doubts about the assassination. Lady Macbeth then convinces him to do it.	'Fair is foul and foul is fair, hover through the fog and filthy air' 'No more than Thane of Cawdor shall deceive...and with that formal title greet Macbeth' 'All hail Macbeth, Thane of Glamis...Thane of Cawdor...King hereafter!' 'The prince of Cumberland that is a step on which I must fall down or O'erleap' 'You spirits that tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here...fill me from crown to the toe-top full of direst cruelty.' 'Conduct me to mine host: we love him highly and shall continue our graces towards him.' 'If it were done, when t'is done, t'were well it were done quickly'
	-Scene 1: Banquo and Fleance arrive. When they depart to bed, Macbeth sees a vision of a dagger leading him towards Duncan's chamber. -Scene 2: Macbeth emerges from Duncan's chamber, shaken, he has the daggers with him and so Lady Macbeth has to take them back and leave them by the sleeping guards, so that Macbeth and herself are absolved of the murder. -Scene 3: Macduff arrives and finds Duncan dead. Macbeth explains he killed the chamberlains in rage. Duncan's sons flee. -Scene 4: Macduff tells Ross, a thane, that Macbeth has been named king.	'Is this a dagger that I see before me?' 'Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?' 'Sleep no more, Macbeth does murder sleep' 'O horror, horror, horror! Tongue nor heart cannot conceive or name thee.' 'The sovereignty will fall upon Macbeth.'
	-Scene 1: Macbeth, fearing the witches' prophecies about Banquo's descendants sitting on the throne, arranges to have Banquo and Fleance killed. -Scene 2-3: Macbeth tells Lady Macbeth of his plan to kill Banquo. Elsewhere, the murderers kill Banquo, but Fleance escapes. -Scene 4: Macbeth holds a banquet. He sees Banquo's ghost and becomes hysterical. Lady Macbeth takes over the situation. -Scene 5-6: The witches are scolded by Hecate for their meddling. Elsewhere Lennox tells of Macduff gathering an army to fight Macbeth.	'It is concluded, Banquo thy souls flight. If it find heaven must find it out to-night.' 'O, treachery! Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly!' 'I pray you, speak not: he grows worse and worse.' 'May soon return to this our suffering country, under a hand accursed.'
	-Scene 1: Macbeth visits the witches again and they tell of three new prophecies regarding his fate. They then vanish. -Scene 2-3: Macduff's wife and children are murdered by Macbeth's assassins. Macduff and Malcolm unite in order to fight Macbeth.	'Beware Macduff...none of woman born/ shall harm Macbeth...Great Birnam Wood to High Dunsinane hill shall come against him.' 'Macbeth is ripe for shaking, and the powers above put on their instruments.'
	This act uses cross cutting to move between Macbeth and the rebel army, to create a sense of tension in the run up to Macbeth's death -Scene 1: A doctor watches Lady Macbeth sleep walk as she talks of the murders of Duncan and Banquo, and imagines stubborn blood on her hands. -Scene 2: Lords discuss how the rebel army will gather at Birnam Wood -Scene 3-4: Inside, Macbeth boasts that none of woman born can harm him. Macduff and the rebel army gather at Birnam Wood. -Scene 5: A scream is heard at Macbeth's castle. It is announced that Lady Macbeth is dead. Macbeth reacts numbly. A messenger reveals that the trees of Birnam Wood are advancing. -Scene 6-7: The battle begins. Macbeth fights without fear, as he believes no man born of woman can harm him. The castle is breached. -Scene 8: Macbeth and Macduff finally meet. Macduff reveals that he was born by caesarean section (not 'by woman born.'). He kills Macbeth. Malcolm is proclaimed king.	'Out, damned spot; out, I say...' 'Make us our march towards Birnam' 'I will not be afraid of death and bane, till Birnam Wood come to Dunsinane.' 'Life is 'a tale/ told by an idiot, full of a sound and fury/ signifying nothing.' 'But swords I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn, brandished by man that's of a woman born.' 'Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's womb untimely ripped. Hail, king of Scotland.'

3. Dramatic Devices in Macbeth

Dramatic Irony	'tis a peerless kinsman'- Duncan trusts Macbeth but the audience knows Macbeth is plotting his murder.
Soliloquy	'This supernatural soliciting cannot be ill, cannot be good.' Macbeth's soliloquies reveal his inner torment.
Aside	'The prince of Cumberland, that is a step that I must fall down' Macbeth reveals his ambition through an aside.
Rhyming Couplets	'Away and mock the time, with the fairest show, false face must hide what false heart doth know.'

6. Features of tragedy in Macbeth

Tragic Hero- A main character who is cursed by fate and possesses a tragic fate	Hamartia- A term from Greek tragedy for a fatal flaw	Catharsis- The release of the audience's emotions through empathy with the characters.	Internal Conflict- The struggle the hero engages in with their fatal flaw.
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English Knowledge Organiser

Macbeth



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Homework		
Week 1	Key Spellings for Macbeth	Spellings will be tested in lesson. Knowledge Organiser revision will be tested through multiple choice quizzes.
Week 2	GCSE PODs on the plot events for Act 1 and Act 2	
Week 3	Extended Writing: Write a response to the following question: How does Shakespeare present female characters in Act 1 and 2 of Macbeth?	
Week 4	Key Spellings for Macbeth	
Week 5	GCSE PODs on Characters: Macbeth, Themes: Ambition, Themes: Guilt	
Week 6	Extended Writing: Write a response to the following question: How does Macbeth change during the play from Act 1 to Act 5?	
Week 7	Key Spellings for Macbeth	
Week 8	Knowledge Organiser Revision Task	