

MACBETH by William Shakespeare

PLOT		KEY QUOTES	
ACT 1	Macbeth and Banquo meet witches. Cawdor executed. Lady Macbeth reads letter & taunts Macbeth. Duncan arrives.	<p>MACBETH</p> <p>'For brave Macbeth – well he deserves that name – disdaining fortune, with his brandished steel, which smoked with bloody execution.' A1S2</p> <p>'Stars, hide your fires; let not light see my black and deep desires.' A1S4</p> <p>'I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself' A1S7</p> <p>'Oh, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!' A3S2</p> <p>'It will have blood, they say. Blood will have blood.' A3S4</p> <p>'This dead butcher and his fiendlike queen.' A5S8</p> <p>'Yet do I fear thy nature; it is too full o' th' milk of human kindness to catch the nearest way.' A1S5</p> <p>'Unsex me here, and fill me from the crown to the toe top-full of direst cruelty.' A1S5</p> <p>'While it was smiling in my face, have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums and dashed the brains out.' A1S7</p> <p>'These deeds must not be thought after these ways. So it will make us mad.' A2S2</p> <p>'You have displaced the mirth, broke the good meeting, with most admired disorder.' A3S4</p> <p>'Out, damned spot! Out, I say!' A5S1</p>	
ACT 2	Macbeth kills Duncan. Malcolm flees. Macbeth crowned.		
ACT 3	Banquo suspects Macbeth. Murder of Banquo & Fleance escapes. Macbeth haunted by Banquo's ghost at a banquet.		
ACT 4	Witches show Macbeth future kings – sons of Banquo. Macduff's family murdered. Malcolm tests Macduff's loyalty.		
ACT 5	Lady Macbeth sleepwalks & dies. Macduff kills Macbeth. Malcolm restored as King.		
<p>...AND FOUL IS FAIR</p>  <p>FAIR IS FOUL... A1S1</p>		<p>LADY MACBETH</p> <p>'These deeds must not be thought after these ways. So it will make us mad.' A2S2</p> <p>'You have displaced the mirth, broke the good meeting, with most admired disorder.' A3S4</p> <p>'Out, damned spot! Out, I say!' A5S1</p>	
DRAMATIC DEVICES		CONTEXT	
SOLILOQUY	One character speaking to audience. Macbeth uses to make audience complicit.	Written around 1606, early in the reign of James I, who had been James VI of Scotland before he succeeded to the English throne. Kings like James believed in their 'divine right' to rule and that they were anointed by God. To kill a king was a sin and terrible crime. Macbeth is a tragedy and the character of Macbeth is a tragic hero. The people of this time had a real and genuine belief in witchcraft and supernatural beings.	
DRAMATIC IRONY	Audience knows more than characters. Audience knows Duncan will die.		
TRAGIC HERO	A character whose own judgement leads to their downfall. Macbeth's hubris leads to his own death		
RELIGIOUS IMAGERY	Use of biblical images. Lady Macbeth washing hands clean like Pontius Pilate.		
RHYMING COUPLETS	Lines that rhyme and show that a decision has been reached. The bells that signal Duncan's death		
SYMBOLISM	Images used to represent an idea. Sleep/lack of sleep = innocence/guilt.		
PATHETIC FALLACY	Weather conditions reflecting character's emotions. Stormy night for Duncan's murder.		
THEMES & SYMBOLS			
AMBITION & DESIRE	GUILT		
APPEARANCE VS REALITY	HERO Vs VILLAIN		
BLOOD	LIGHT Vs DARK		
FATE/FREE WILL	ORDER Vs CHAOS		
FEAR & VIOLENCE	SLEEP		
GENDER CONVENTIONS	SUPERNATURAL		

Macbeth by William Shakespeare

(performed around 1606, Jacobean Britain)

Jacobean Britain (historical and social context)

The play was written in 1606 when King James I was king this means the era is called Jacobean and the people were Jacobeans. The play is set in 11th Century (1000-1100) so 600 years earlier set in Medieval times.

The supernatural – Many Jacobeans believed in witches and witchcraft. So, the witches in Macbeth were used by Shakespeare to entertain the audience and evoke fear. Shakespeare wanted to make the play more frightening to show his support to King James I as he is linking the witches to treason. This means that Shakespeare is implying that plotting, or killing the King is an act that comes from the supernatural – meaning it is evil.

King James I – The play ‘Macbeth’ was performed to different audiences – to the general public (all classes) and to the royal courts (King James I and aristocracy). Shakespeare wanted to please his King by performing a play which warned people against plotting to kill the King (treason). James I had already had several plots of treason against him stopped as he was not a popular King and Shakespeare needed a play which supported his King and interested him as well as the public.

Natural order - Jacobeans believed that god chose who should be king through the blood line of the royal family – this is divine right. James I greatly believed in divine right and so did most Jacobeans, however in the play ‘Macbeth’, we see Macbeth plays god and destroys this divine right by changing the blood line from Duncan’s family to his own. The consequences of this action are tragic as Macbeth changes from being a hero to a hated king who is also a killer of young children.

Women – In Jacobean times, women were seen as belonging to men, being weak and needing protection (same as medieval times when the play is set). This means that Lady Macbeth’s character at the start of the play goes against the stereotype and so is not a traditional female as she controls Macbeth’s thoughts, feelings and actions by persuading him to kill King Duncan - an act which goes against all that he believes in. She is, however, traditionally conveyed as weak at the end of the play as we see how she cannot cope with the guilt of murders so she kills herself.

The Plot...

- Three witches are casting spells – introduces the supernatural.
- 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 so he decides to award them land and titles of ‘Thane’ (Lord).

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- Macbeth and Banquo encounter the witches: They predict (prophesise) that Macbeth will be made thane of Cawdor and eventually King of Scotland and Banquo's heirs (sons), will be King but not Banquo himself.
- King Duncan's men find Banquo and Macbeth and thank tell Macbeth that he has indeed been named thane of Cawdor – they start to believe the prophesises.
- Note: Previous thanes betrayed Scotland by fighting for the Norwegians and Duncan has condemned him to death.
- Macbeth writes ahead to his wife, Lady Macbeth, telling her all that has happened and that King Duncan is going to stay at their castle. Lady Macbeth ignores her husband's uncertainty about being king as she wants it to happen quickly: She asks the gods to make her strong enough to persuade her husband to kill.
- Macbeth arrives at Inverness (their castle) and she overrides all of her husband's objections and persuades him to kill the king that very night. Macbeth 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 defenseless, as they will remember nothing. While Duncan is asleep, Macbeth stabs him, despite his doubts which is conveyed through 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 as 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 (Macbeth's coronation – crowning of the new king), but they fail to kill Fleance, who escapes into the night.
- At the royal feast (banquet), the assassins inform Macbeth that Fleance is alive, he fears that he will lose the throne. He returns to his noble guests and finds Banquo's ghost sitting in his place – symbolising his fear of losing his title as king. Macbeth acts in a strange manner, shouting angrily at an empty chair and Lady Macbeth becomes strong and covers up for her husband saying he is unwell.
- Frightened, Macbeth goes to visit the witches in their cavern and they tell him that 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 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 family (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 is obsessed with what she believes to be bloodstains on her hands – King Duncan's blood she first had when she took the daggers and planted them on the guards.
- 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

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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 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 realizes that he is doomed, Macbeth continues to fight until Macduff kills and beheads him. Malcolm, now the King of Scotland, declares he now wants everyone to live in peace.

The Characters

Macbeth is a complex character who changes throughout the course of the play. He is clearly a brave warrior and leader at the start of the drama but he falls victim to the Witches' predictions. It is unclear whether they plant ideas in his mind or whether they simply highlight thoughts that he has already had. In a series of soliloquies he repeatedly questions himself about his motives for killing the King but is eventually persuaded to continue by his forceful wife.

Having committed murder he finds himself caught in a spiral of evil from which he can see no escape. His actions become less heroic and more cowardly as he continues to murder and terrorise others in order to hold on to his power. Towards the end of the play, when he realises that he is doomed, he briefly returns to his old heroic self.

Lady Macbeth is even more ambitious and ruthless than her husband. As soon as an opportunity to gain power presents itself, she has a plan in mind. She uses her influence to persuade Macbeth that they are taking the right course of action and even takes part in the crime herself.

For a while she is able to suppress her actions but eventually she becomes unable to deal with the guilt of what she has done. She becomes unable to sleep, and mentally unstable, eventually dying in tragic circumstances.

Banquo is another general in King Duncan's army and Macbeth's best friend. While both men have ambitious thoughts, Banquo is more cautious and does not resort to murder to get what he wants.

Banquo is aware that the Witches' predictions may be tricking Macbeth into evil actions and is the first to suspect Macbeth of murder. He dies while protecting his son, Fleance, and comes back as a ghost to haunt Macbeth.

Macduff, the Thane of Fife, is Macbeth's deadly enemy. He discovers Duncan's body and becomes Malcolm's chief supporter, following him to England to support him in raising an army against Macbeth. When he learns of the murders of his wife and family, Macduff feels guilty about leaving them and driven by a need for revenge.

According to the Witches' prediction, Macduff is the only one who can stop Macbeth. The two men meet face-to-face on the battlefield and Macduff kills Macbeth.

The Witches may be seen as seem as a single character; they are often referred to as "The Weird Sisters". Their predictions drive matters forward though they never actually suggest direct action. Rather, they plant ideas in Macbeth's mind and let his ambition do the rest.

Themes in 'Macbeth'

Ambition and power: Shakespeare set *Macbeth* in the distant past and in a part of Britain that few of his audience would have been familiar with. Scotland is shown as a wild and savage place ruled over by a weak king (Duncan) who relies on his warrior thanes to keep control. However, through the character of Macbeth, Shakespeare goes on to show that having too much ambition and total control of power is just as bad. By the end of the play Malcolm has become King and it seems likely that he will be much fairer and treat his people justly. Shakespeare examines the good and bad aspects of ambition and power. Some of the key aspects are abuse of power and trying to gain power before the natural order of things i.e. before King Duncan dies naturally.

Evil and the Supernatural: In Shakespeare's time, the powers of evil were thought to be absolutely real; to most people Hell was an actual place and the Devil a constant threat to their souls. In particular there was a fascination with witches and witchcraft. Hundreds of innocent people (mostly women) were executed as suspected witches. The interest came from the very top, led by King James I himself who published a book on the subject called *Demonology*. When Shakespeare came to write his play, he knew that his audience would find the theme of evil and the supernatural very interesting indeed. This is seen through language, the Witches' activities such as prophecies and casting spells and the disruption of nature – King Duncan dies before he naturally should have and so do others.

Appearance and reality: In *Macbeth*, things are never quite what they seem. Characters say one thing yet mean something else and use words with hidden meanings (euphemisms) to hide reality e.g. murder is called 'bloody business'. Wicked and violent acts such as murder are covered up or the blame is shifted onto someone else. The Witches mislead Macbeth, or they at least make suggestions which allow him to mislead himself. Ghosts, visions and apparitions occur regularly. All of these things contribute to the many contrasts which exist in the play; almost nothing is as it should be

Motifs:

Sleep: Lack of sleep is a sign that the characters regret what they have done and cannot sleep due to guilt e.g. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Banquo also cannot sleep as he is anxious about the Witches' prophecies which he has not told King Duncan about – this too could also be his guilt.

Hands: Sign of guilt – often vision of them covered in blood e.g. Lady Macbeth.

Night: The constant repetition of the word '**night**' highlights the sense of darkness in the play and at the heart of some of the characters.

Blood: The word '**blood**' appears over 40 times in *Macbeth* – not to mention appearances by related words such as '*bloody*', '*bleeding*' and so on. Shakespeare's constant repetition of the word '*blood*' stresses to his audience or readers the full horror of what is happening.

Time: References to time are an important aspect of *Macbeth* and as time passes in the play, events become more intense and consequences more significant.

Structure and form:

The play's form is a tragedy as it has a central character who has an unhappy ending, in this case a hero's downfall.

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The structure is strictly chronological. This is where events are revealed to the audience/reader in the order in which they have happened. Sometimes events are described rather than shown (eg Macbeth becoming king). Others happen offstage (out of sight of the audience) for example, Duncan's murder.

The events of this play are organised into five acts, each containing a number of scenes. The scene that starts each act sets the mood of the whole act as well as introducing themes e.g. Act 1 begins with the Witches which sets a sinister tone and introduces the Supernatural while act 2 begins with the murder of Duncan and introduces the ambition and power Macbeth.

Rhyme is a structural device used to either (a) highlight important moments in the play such as change, decisions being made, dramatic events etc.

Exits and entrances (stage directions) these are structural techniques used to create drama, tension and suspense. Soliloquies are used to give the audience more information than other characters have and also allow the audience to build up empathy for that character – they hear their deepest thoughts, secrets and feelings.

Key quotes:

'Fair is foul' Act 1 Scene 1

The witches refrain establishes the key them of moral ambiguity. Fair is foul and good is evil,

'Unseamed him from the knave to the chaps' Act 1 Scene 2

This is Macbeth 'unseaming' the rebel Macdonwald. This foreshadows Macbeth's own 'unseaming' by Macduff. It is also a clothing metaphor suggesting Macdonwald is being stripped of his title due to his traitorous actions, like Macbeth is later.

'Why do you dress me in borrowed robes?' Act 1 Scene 3

Macbeth asks this when he is deemed Thane of Cawdor. This suggests his suspicion that there may be trickery at play. It also indicates that this title is not rightly his, it is 'borrowed.'

'Unsex me here' Act 1 Scene 5

This imperative rejects Jacobean ideas of femininity which impede Lady Macbeth from committing acts of violence which are associated with masculinity. Jacobean femininity, symbolised by milk and breasts elsewhere in the soliloquy, denotes weakness and compassion which Lady Macbeth must rid herself of in order to become powerful. This can link to Queen Elizabeth I who said she had the body of a 'weak woman' but the 'heart of a king' to be credible.

'Look like the innocent flower/ But be the serpent under't' Act 1 Scene 5

Shakespeare uses imagery here (first 'innocent flower' is a simile and then 'serpent' is a metaphor) Lady Macbeth's advice to her husband as she is going over the plan to murder King Duncan so her husband can be king: Hide your true feelings, intentions and actions.

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‘When you durst do it then you were a man’ Act 1 Scene 7

Shakespeare reveals that Lady Macbeth emasculates Macbeth in order to control his actions. To be masculine in the Jacobean period was to take action and be courageous (inaction indelibly associated with femininity) thus to be a ‘man’ Macbeth must act. Ironically, although Lady Macbeth desires great power, her power remains passive – she controls through manipulation.

‘Is this a dagger I see before me, the handle toward me hand? Come, let me clutch thee’

Act 2 Scene 1

The dagger is a visual representation leading Macbeth (literally and metaphorically) to the murder of Duncan and foreshadows bloodier visions to come. The feminine iambic pentameter suggests uncertainty and weakness which diminishes as the soliloquy progresses.

‘I shame/To wear a heart so white’ Act 2 Scene 2

Shakespeare uses the metaphor ‘heart so white’ to convey the image of a frightened looking face – it is white with fear because he is a coward. Act 2.2. Lady Macbeth says this to Macbeth which shows she is ashamed of her husband’s behaviour: After killing Duncan he is frightened by the noises in his castle and he is looking at his hands questioning who they belong to. This implies he cannot believe that he killed his own king – he is in shock.

‘...Macbeth shall sleep no more.’ Act 2 Scene 2

Shakespeare uses the reoccurring word ‘sleep’ which has come to symbolise the guilt that characters feel which prevents sleep. Act 2.2. After Macbeth has killed King Duncan and he returns to his bedroom, he says this to Lady Macbeth – suggests he regrets killing Duncan.

‘Full of scorpions is my mind’ Act 3 Scene 2

This metaphor reveals both Macbeth’s paranoia and his ‘deep and dark desires.’ The metaphorical scorpions have replaced the ‘milk of human kindness’ cementing Macbeth as a villain.

‘But now I am cabined, cribbed, confirmed, bound in to saucy doubts and fears.’

Act 3 Scene 4, Banquet scene.

Macbeth’s reaction to hearing that Banquo is dead, BUT Fleance still lives. These are his true feelings: He is imprisoned in fear of losing the throne to Fleance. Shakespeare uses the repetition of ‘ed’ as well as the exploding ‘k’ sound to show the rapid anger of Macbeth as the assassins failed to kill the threat to his throne. These verbs are all connected to being restraint meaning that Macbeth feels he is in a prison of fear now.

‘There the grown serpent lies; the worm that’s fled’ Act 3 Scene 4

Shakespeare uses the metaphors here of ‘serpent’ and ‘worm’ to reveal how twisted Macbeth’s thinking has become – he sees kind people as being evil. Act 3.4, Macbeth refers to Banquo as a serpent (snake) while Fleance is the worm which will grow into an evil, calculating and dangerous threat like his father (like a snake). Here he addresses the audience and himself despite the assassins being on stage.

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‘Out, damned spot Out, I say!’ Act 5 Scene 1

The repetition of ‘out’ portrays Lady Macbeth as frenetic as she desperately tries to rid herself of this metaphorical ‘spot’. The imperative further demonstrates Lady Macbeth’s loss of power as it is proves futile.

‘Life is a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing’ Act 5 Scene 5

This metaphor suggests that with his wife dead (perhaps the source of his power) and an army marching towards him, Macbeth succumbs to a pessimistic, even nihilistic, outlook. However, the metaphor also implies his crimes are meaningless suggesting Macbeth perhaps does not feel true guilt.

‘Dead butcher and fiend-like queen’ Act 5 Scene 8

Butcher connotes violence and brutality and epitomises Macbeth as a leader – he has brutally ‘butchered’ Scotland in his own quest for power. ‘Fiend-like’ suggests evil and the supernatural connecting Lady Macbeth to the witches