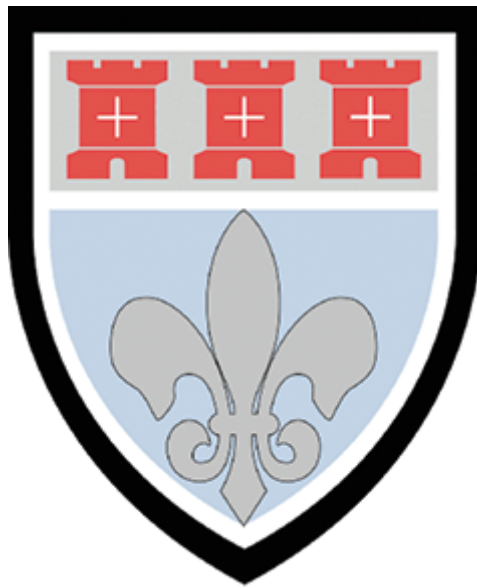


St Mary's English Department



GCSE English Literature Revision Guide Macbeth by William Shakespeare



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Plot Summary

On the edges of a battlefield, three witches meet and plot, waiting for Macbeth who, with Banquo, his comrade-in-arms, soon encounters them. They greet him as Thane of Glamis, then as his title, then as Thane of Cawdor, and finally as the future King. They are scarcely gone when word arrives that the Scottish forces have been victorious and, as a token of his favor, Duncan, King of Scotland, has bestowed the title of Thane of Cawdor on Macbeth. Musing on the witches' prophecy, Macbeth hurries home to his wife, in advance of Duncan's visit.

Lady Macbeth receives the news from her husband and, unlike Macbeth who would rather not pursue the matter too forcefully, plots to kill Duncan. The King is their guest that night and, by getting his attendants drunk, she tells him that they can kill Duncan and pin the murder on his guards. Troubled by his conscience, Macbeth almost backs out at the last minute, but his wife forces him to go through with the plan. Duncan's body is discovered the next morning by Macduff, the Thane of Fife, and when they flee, Duncan's sons Malcolm and Donalbain are blamed for the murder.

Macbeth is crowned King, but rules uneasily, partly because the prophesy of the witches was also heard by Banquo to whom they promised his children would someday rule. Fearful both of Banquo and the truth of the witches' predictions, Macbeth arranges with three murderers to have his friend, along with his son Fleance, killed. The attempt succeeds only partly as Fleance escapes and, during a banquet, the ghost of Banquo returns to haunt Macbeth. In one of the most famous scenes in Shakespeare, Macbeth incriminates himself before the assembled company by his words to the ghost, whom only he can see. The nobles leave the hall, suspicious and wondering at what they've heard. Lady Macbeth consoles her husband, who resolves to continue in his bloody path.

General unrest grows as Macbeth, ruling from a position of fear and distrust, becomes a despot. In desperation, he seeks out the witches again, who summon three apparitions; the first predicts that Macduff will unseat Macbeth, the second says that "none of woman born" poses a threat, and the third predicts that Macbeth will never fail until Birnam Wood comes to his castle at Dunsinane. Reassured, he presses them for more news, and they produce a line of eight kings, all descended from Banquo, who will succeed him. Macbeth sends the murderers to Macduff's castle where they find that he had fled to England, but they kill his wife and child.

Meanwhile, troubled by her conscience, Lady Macbeth sleepwalks, reliving the night of the murder of Duncan. When one of her gentlewomen consults a doctor, her secret is revealed.

In England, Malcolm is raising an army and preparing to win back his father's kingdom. On the march toward Dunsinane - where Macbeth has taken refuge, still believing in the witches' prophecies, Malcolm orders his troops to carry boughs from nearby Birnam Wood to disguise their numbers. As he prepares for the assault, Macbeth hears news from his sentries: Birnam Wood seems to be moving, heading for Dunsinane. Taking comfort that "none of woman born" can harm him, however, he arms himself and confronts Macduff. Boasting of the prophesy, Macbeth hears Macduff tell him that he was indeed not "of woman born" but was instead delivered by caesarean section. Realizing all hope is lost, Macbeth takes flight and is hunted down by Macduff as Malcolm and his forces take the castle. Victory is declared, and Malcolm, now rightful King of Scotland, leads his followers on to Scone for his coronation.

Characters



Character activities:

1. Rank the characters in order of importance at the beginning and the end of the play.
2. Think of 5 adjectives to describe each character.
3. Draw a diagram to illustrate the relationships between the characters.
4. List the characters in order in which they appear in the scene? Do you notice anything interesting about this? We see Macbeth long after we first hear about him, for instance.
5. Choose one character and draw a diagram to show how they change through the play.
6. Do any characters act as “foils” in order to provide a contrast with others?

Context



Witchcraft

The persecution of Catholics



The chivalric code

Religious beliefs in the 1600s



Masculinity and femininity in the 1600s

The Gunpowder Plot



Contextual Activities

1. Research each contextual issue on the previous page.
2. Summarise each issue in 5 bullet points, explaining how each issue links to the play.
3. Practice making connections between your language analysis and the contextual issues on the previous page.
4. Practice using the following sentence stems to ensure you are including contextual links in your essay:
 - In Jacobean society.....
 - To a Jacobean audience.....
 - A Jacobean audience would have reacted with _____ to this line because.....
5. Make links between context and the following quotations:

1. "I must report they were as cannons overcharged with double cracks"	
2. "Come to my woman's breasts and take my milk for gall"	
3. "I could not say Amen"	
4. "Finger of birth-strangled babe, ditch delivered by a drab"	
5. "More needs she the divine than they physician".	
6. "I begin to doubt the equivocation of the fiend that lies like truth"	

Glossary

Macbeth GCSE English Literature - Key Vocabulary

Term	Definition	Example from Macbeth
alliteration	The repetition of the same sounds at the beginning of adjacent and closely connected words	
ambiguity	Being open to more than one interpretation	
anaphora	The repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses	
antithesis	The opposite	
aside	A line intended to be heard by the audience but not the other characters	
assonance	The repetition of vowel sounds	
blank verse	Verse without rhyme, usually in iambic pentameter	
chiasmus	A device in which words are repeated in reverse order	
chivalry	The knightly system and its moral and social code	
comic relief	Humorous content in a play intended to offset more serious events	
conventions	Usual and expected features of a genre	
dramatic irony	When something is clear to the audience but unknown to the characters	
equivocation	Ambiguous language used to conceal something or avoid committing oneself	
eponymous	Named after a particular person	
euphemism	A mild or indirect expression used instead of a more direct or blunt statement, especially when the topic is unpleasant or embarrassing	
hendiadys	Expression of a single idea by 2 words connected with and	
heroism	Great bravery	
hubris	Excessive pride and self confidence	
iambic pentameter	A line of verse with 10 syllables, made up of 5 pairs - one unstressed syllable and one stressed.	
imagery	Visually descriptive language	

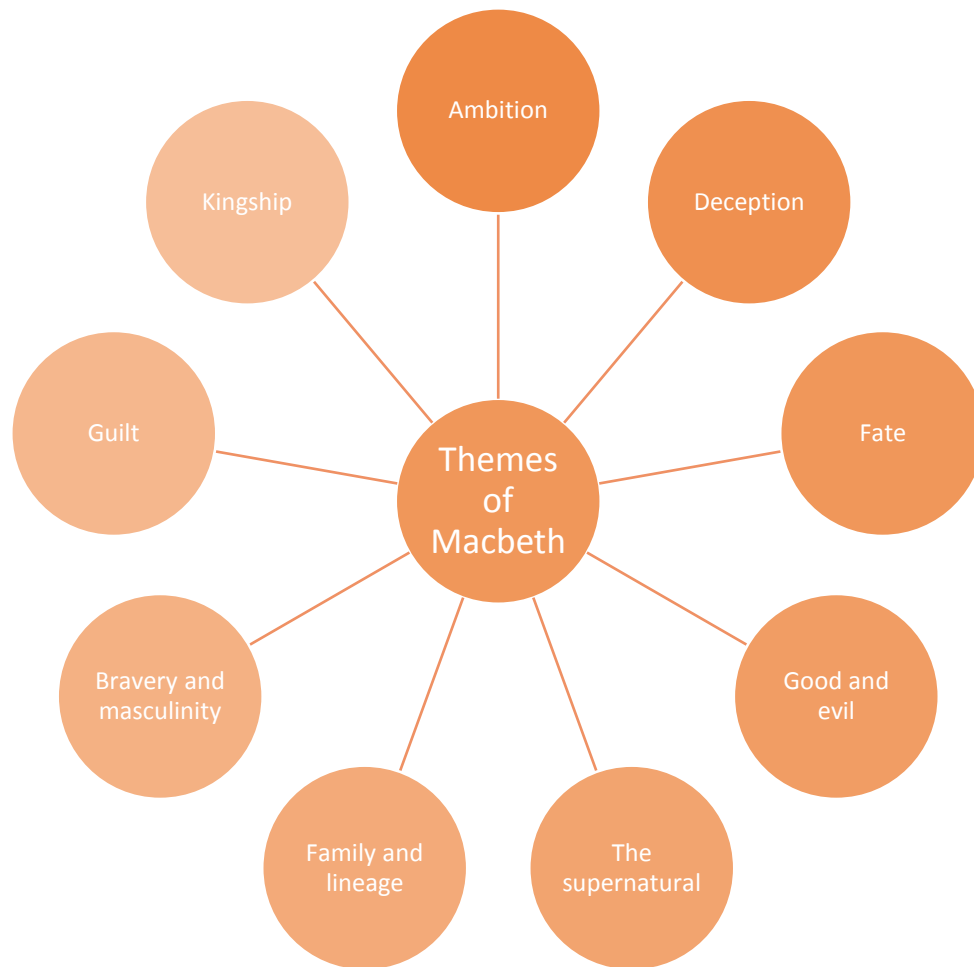
Jacobean	Relating to the rule of James I of England, from 1603 to 1625	
nihilism	The belief that life is meaningless	
paternal lineage/patrilineal	A series of male ancestors	
pathetic fallacy	Attribution of human feelings to the natural world	
patriarchy	A system of society in which men are more powerful	
prose	Language with no rhyme, rhythm or metrical structure which has the natural structure of speech	
soliloquy	The act of a character speaking one's thoughts alone when they are by themselves	
stichomythia	Dialogue between two characters using single, short and fast paced lines	
tragedy	A play dealing with unhappy events, usually involving the downfall and eventual death of a main, powerful character	
Trochaic tetrameter	A meter made up of 4 trochees – a trochee is a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable	
tyranny	Cruel and oppressive government	

Recurrent images

Below are some images which occur frequently in the play. Find at least 3 quotations for each of them and explain why Shakespeare has used these patterns of imagery.

Image	Quotation	Significance
Hands		
Sleep		
Blood		
Weapons		
Dress and costume		
Animals		

Themes



Theme activities

1. For each theme, list your top 5 quotations from the play which relate to it.
2. For each theme, write a paragraph explain its significance, using example from the play.
3. Think about Shakespeare's wider purpose – what is he trying to tell us about each of these big ideas?

Key quotations

Can you fill in the gaps from these key quotations from the play?

Key quotations from Act 1

7. " _____ through the fog and filthy air"
8. "Till he _____ him from the naves to the chaps"
9. "I must report they were as _____ overcharged with double cracks"
10. " _____ shall neither night nor day hang upon his penthouse lid"
11. "Why do you dress me in _____ robes"
12. "There's no art to find the mind's construction in the _____"
13. "Stars hide your _____, let not light see my black and deep desires"
14. "I do fear thy nature is too full of the _____ of human kindness to catch the nearest way"
15. Come to my woman's breasts and take my milk for _____"
16. "Your _____ my Thane is as a book"
17. "If it twere done when 'tis done then 'twere well it were done _____"
18. "We will proceed no further in this _____"
19. "But screw your _____ to the sticking place and we'll not fail"
20. "False _____ must hide what the false heart doth know"

Key quotations from Act 2

1. There's husbandry in heaven, their _____ are all out.
2. This _____ he greets your wife withal.
3. I dreamt last night of the three _____ _____. To you they have showed some truth.
4. Is this a _____ which I see before me
5. It is the _____ business which informs thus to mine eyes.
6. Thou sure and firm-set earth _____ not my steps.
7. Had he not resembled my _____ as he slept, I had done't.
8. I could not say _____
9. Macbeth does murder _____
10. Will all great _____ ocean was this blood clean from my hand?
11. A little _____ clears us of this deed.
12. O _____ lady, tis not for you to hear what I can speak.
13. Here lay Duncan, his silver skin laced with his _____ blood.
14. There's _____ in men's smiles.

Key quotations from Act 3

1. I fear thou play'st most _____ for't
2. Our fears in _____ stick deep.
3. We have scorched the _____ not killed it.
4. After life's fitful fever he _____ well.
5. Make our faces vizards to our _____.
6. Be innocent of the knowledge dearest _____.
7. Is he _____?
8. My lord is often thus and hath been from his _____.
9. It will have _____ they say.
10. You lack the season of all natures, _____.

Key quotations from Act 4.

1. Finger of birth-strangled _____ ditch delivered by a drab.
2. Beware the Thane of _____
3. Be _____, bold and resolute.
4. The _____ of Macduff I will surprise
5. O nation miserable, with an untitled _____ bloody sceptred.
6. Alas poor country, almost afraid to know itself. It cannot be called our mother, but our _____.
7. Your castle is surprised, your wife and _____ savagely slaughtered.
8. Let us make medicine of our great _____.
9. All my pretty _____ and their dam..?
10. Be this the whetsone of your _____.

Key quotations from Act 5

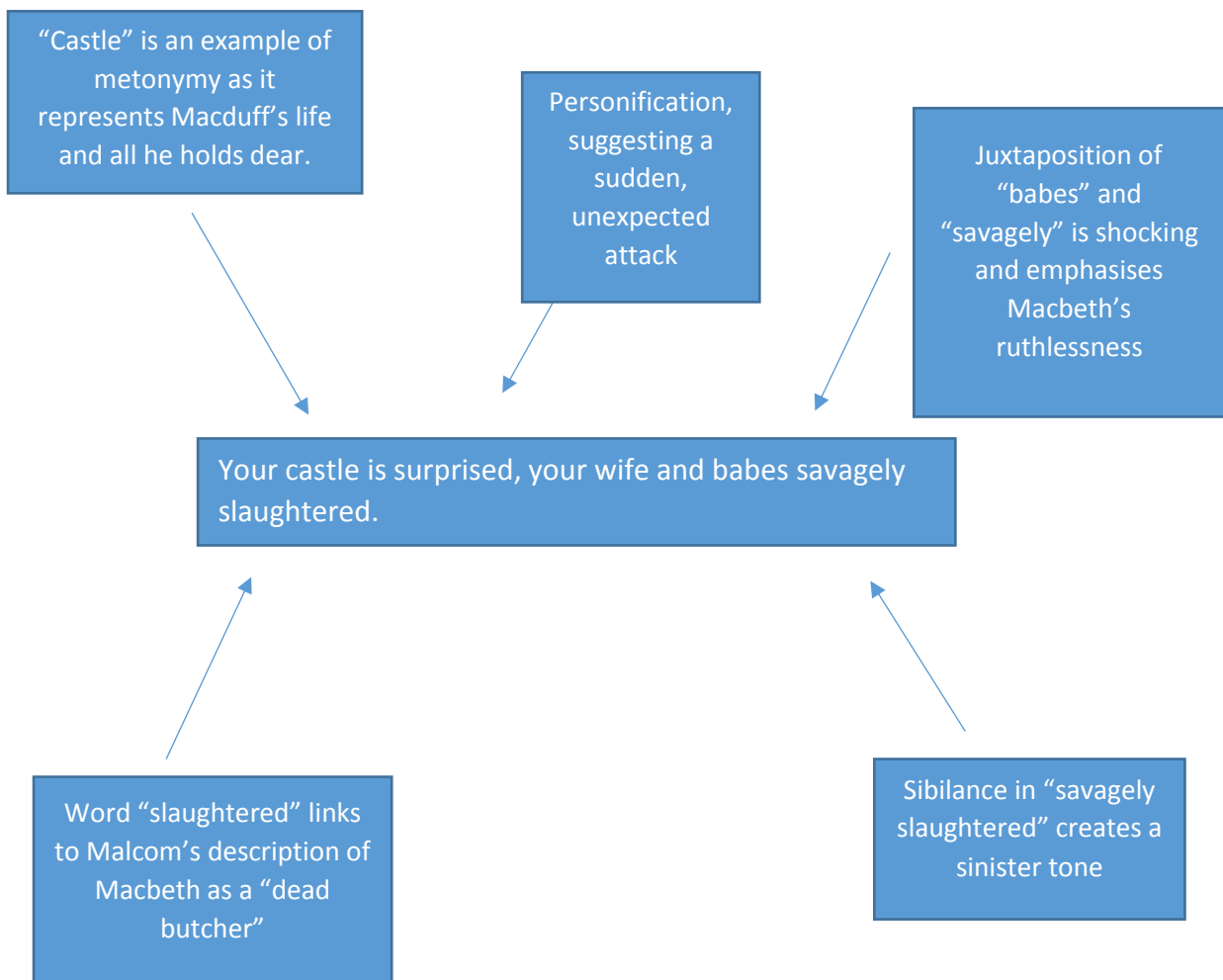
1. All the _____ of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.
2. More needs she the _____ than they physician.
3. Now does he feel his _____ murders sticking upon his hands.
4. Those he commands move only in command, nothing in _____.
5. Let every soldier hew him down a _____.
6. I have almost forgot the taste of _____.
7. And all our _____ have lighted fools the way to dusty death.
8. I begin to doubt the _____ of the fiend that lies like truth.
9. I would not wish them to a fairer _____.
10. This dead _____ and his fiend like queen.

Key quotations activities

1. Make flashcards with these key quotations and test yourself on them.
2. For each quotation, can you identify who says it?
3. Analyse the language of each quotation.
4. Group the quotations together in terms of character.
5. Group the quotations together in terms of theme.
6. Group the quotations together in terms of imagery.

Language Analysis

The following example demonstrates how to analyse language in detail:



Example question:

In this scene, Macduff has just discovered King Duncan's body.

MACDUFF

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

*Exeunt **MACBETH** and **LENNOX***

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

*Bell rings. Enter **LADY MACBETH***

LADY MACBETH

What's the business,
That such a hideous trumpet calls to parley
The sleepers of the house? Speak, speak!

MACDUFF

O gentle lady,
'Tis not for you to hear what I can speak:
The repetition, in a woman's ear,
Would murder as it fell.

Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare present attitudes to murder in this scene.

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents murder in this scene.
- How Shakespeare presents murder in the play as a whole.

Example of paragraph

Macduff is horrified when he discovers Duncan's body, and speaks in short, exclamatory fragments which emphasize his sense of shock and horror at the murder. At one point he says to Lady Macbeth "O gentle lady, 'tis not for you to hear what I can speak". This is an important example of dramatic irony as of course, the audience know that Lady Macbeth is partly responsible for the murder of Duncan, and we know from her speech in which she invited malevolent spirits to "unsex" her that she is not at all a conventional "lady" according to Jacobean ideals of femininity. However, later in the play, Lady Macbeth does become incredibly psychologically disturbed by the events which she played such a key role in, which forces the audience to consider whether Macduff was actually correct in his implication that the details of Duncan's murder are too much for her. Lady Macbeth arguably hinted at this herself in Act 2 Scene 1 when she claims that she would have murdered Duncan herself had "had me not resembled (her) father as he slept". This admission of humanity and vulnerability could suggest that Lady Macbeth's psychological unravelling occurs earlier in the play than is conventionally thought.

Can you find:

- Evidence
- Subject terminology
- Audience reaction
- Links to context
- Links to elsewhere in the play

Act by Act Revision

Complete the table below.

Act	What happens?	Key soliloquys	Most important quotation
Act 1			
Act 2			
Act 3			
Act 4			
Act 5			