Macbeth

GCSE

Revision Guide

Macbeth

Themes in the play

Ambition –

Motivates/Drives Macbeth to commit/do terrible deeds/things

It changes him from a 'valiant soldier' to a 'dead butcher' who has 'vaulting ambition'

Ambition is dangerous because it quickly spirals out of control e.g Macbeth thinks about killing King Duncan for a long time, where he doesn't hesitate about having Banquo killed.

Once Macbeth starts killing, he kills more in order to get what he wants and to secure his position as King. = ambition makes people selfish and ruthless.

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are both destroyed by their ambition = a warning against ambition that isn't balanced and takes into account morals.

Ambition is Macbeth's 'fatal flaw' (Shakespeare's tragedies usually has a hero with one flaw which leads to their downfall.)

At the start, Macbeth knows that ambition leads people to 'o'erleaps itself and falls' = people aim too high and fall. This happens to Macbeth so foreshadows Macbeth's own tragic downfall.

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Malcolm and Macduff are ambitious for their country = not selfish… they want to take Macbeth's power for the sake of Scotland and not themselves = ambition can be good if it helps others and not an individual.

Banquo is ambitious for his sons once the witches say their prediction. However, he doesn't act violent… unlike Macbeth.

Loyalty and Betrayal –

There's a difference between characters who say they are loyal to the King (Macbeth) and those whose actions demonstrate loyalty to the King (Macduff)

Macduff is loyal to his country, Scotland… that's why he goes to England to get an army in order to protect Scotland.

Loyalty is rewarded and Betrayal is punished. The old Thane of Cawdor is killed for being a traitor & Macbeth is rewarded for his great courage, in the battle, by getting that title, at the start of the play.

Macbeth betrays his own sense of right and wrong which results in his death.

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Betrayal is linked to power = power can be given or taken away depending on your loyalty

Macbeth is loyal at the start = makes it more shocking when Macbeth betrays the King.

Lady Macbeth fakes her loyalty when King Duncan comes to stay = Shakespeare has juxtaposed her plotting against her welcoming nature.

Kingship –

It didn't have to be the eldest son who was heir (next in line0 to the throne.

Macbeth suddenly becomes King even though he wasn't named as heir (it was Malcolm – Duncan's eldest son) Remember, Macbeth has lots of power = he is high up in the line for the throne.

Characters realise as the play goes on that Macbeth isn't a true King because he killed in order to get the throne.

Duncan is an example of an ideal King and vocab relates to a holy figure 'sainted King' = context – where people believed Kings were chosen by God.

In contrast, Macbeth is called 'Hell Kite' which is a bird from Hell = devil associations = contrasts from the Godly figure a King should be.

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In contrast, Macbeth is a 'tyrant' because he is violent. He is hardly ever called King in the play.

Good and Evil –

Macbeth is good and loyal at the start. His goodness is overcome by evilness because of ambition = even good people can be led astray by power.

The struggle for the crown of Scotland = a battle between good and evil.

Gender is linked to evil = Lady Macbeth links cruelty and aggression to masculinity. She asks spirits to 'unsex me here' so she can become evil like a man and have the power to commit the murder of King Duncan.

Men are soldiers = physical violent where The Witches and Lady Macbeth use words to influence people e.g Lady Macbeth manipulates Macbeth to kill.

Shakespeare uses battles represent the struggle between good and evil = play opens with a battle between Scotland and Norway… there's heroes and villains.

The play ends with a battle between Scotland and England in order to get rid of the King.

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Supernatural –

The Witches are an evil, supernatural force. They are more powerful than humans because they can predict the future.

They aren't in many scenes but they drive the action because without them, Macbeth wouldn't have committed the murders he does.

The Witches are trying to make the 'castle topple' = make unnatural order.

Visions are a symbol of guilt –

Macbeth sees a dagger, and Banquo's ghost = a sign of guilty and madness

Lady Macbeth sees blood on her hands that she can't get rid of 'out damn spot' = sign of guilt and madness

Reality and Appearance –

Characters often hide their really thoughts and pretend to be something they're not.

Lady Macbeth encourages Macbeth to appear good but secretly be plotting 'look like th'innocent flower but be the serpent under't' = she is like the devil who tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Macbeth knows he needs a 'false face' to hide his actions – he can only do this until he sees Banquo's ghost.

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The Witches say 'fair is foul and foul is fair' suggesting appearances are unclear and can't be judged/assumed.

King Duncan says 'there's no art' in knowing who is good and who is not.

Don't forget there's a debate if actions are an example of fate (The Witches) or freewill (Choice)

Context in the play

1600s, people believed in the supernatural = The Witches would have seen believable and have frightened the audience.

James 1st on throne and scared of Witches

Gender stereotypes = men more powerful than women. Men had to fight and marry/have a family

Devine Right of King – natural order /chain of beings

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Structure in the play

There is a cyclical structure (circular) because it ends with Macbeth being killed for being a traitor, just like the Thane of Cawdor (whose title Macbeth got) at the start of the play.

The Thanes get rewarded for their loyalty by Malcolm at the end, just like Macbeth got rewarded for his loyalty at the start.

Also, there's a battle to start the play where Scotland is protecting the King, where at the end of the play, there's a battle to overthrow the King.

Act 1, scene 1 – shows the Witches = shows there's a supernatural force at work when events happen.

Every Act has a scene 1 that sets the mood of the act e.g Act 2 – Macbeth is going to kill Duncan.

A typical tragedy structure = first part builds up tension to a turning point. The second part = consequences of the actions. Acts 1 and 2 = the rise of Macbeth's power… Acts 3-5 = the fall.

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Short scenes speed up the action and make it more intense or exciting e.g Act 5 has 9 short scenes.

Long scenes explore characters and themes & emotions

Shakespeare hints at later events to hook the audience. He also poses questions so the audience can think which way will events go e.g will he kill the King or not? And who will win at the battle at the end?

Settings in the play

Scotland = real place = sense of reality

England = the place where thoughts can become realistic actions / plans made

Birnam Wood = disguise

Cave = Witches place = hidden and secretive

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Language in the play

Violent language for the murders and battles 'unseamed him from the nave to the chaps'

Pathetic Fallacy = fog and thunder and lightening too set the Witches; scenes

Poetry = Shakespeare mainly uses 'blank verse' (type of poetry that rhymes and has 10 or 11 sounds per line) for important, upper class characters. He uses prose (with no rhyme) for lower class characters.

Lady Macbeth uses prose only when she sleep walks = symbolising she has lost control.

The Witches always rhyme which shows they are different to other characters

Soliloquys (one person talking to share ideas with the audience) are used to share thoughts and feelings. Lady Macbeth does this when talking to the spirit to 'unsex' her. Macbeth does when he sees the dagger and is going to kill Duncan.

The rhythm changes to show panic

Oxymorons when the Witches talk e.g 'fair is foul' and 'battle lost and won'

Irony = Duncan calls Lady Macbeth 'gentle' when she is the one who has planned his murder.

Repetition = 'tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow' = Macbeth is bored of life now

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Personification = 'life is but a walking shadow' = life is pointless

Metaphor = life is brief/short = 'out brief candle'

Imagery & Symbols in the play

Serpent = evil… Lady Macbeth tells Macbeth to do it and Macbeth refers to Banquo as it

Scorpions = corruption 'full of scorpions is my mind'

Light symbolises good 'stars'

Darkness = evil 'black' describe Macbeth's thoughts

Blood = guilt

Water = innocence 'Neptune's ocean' 'a little water clears us of this deed'

Masculinity = strength = 'when you darest do it, then you were a man' & 'unsex me here'

Sleep = disturbed and sleepwalking = guilt

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Mood in the play

Shakespeare uses different methods to create mood and different atmospheres: settings, supernatural, humour, senses, language.

Witches = deserted places = spooky setting = secrecy & pathetic fallacy = thunder and lightening

Castle = the Macbeths are noble people but their behaviour contrasts with this.

Language = dialogue and soliloquys set the scene and mood.

Pathetic Fallacy = fog with the Witches = ambiguous/hazy ideas

Irony = Duncan calls the castle 'pleasant' when he's about to be murdered

Darkness = Duncan's murder about to happen… Banquo says the 'candles are all out'

Gruesome language = Macbeth and his actions e.g the Witches say 'poisoned'

Short lines = panic

Violent language = 'carved out his passage'

Senses helps the audience imagine what's happening:

Macduff finds Duncan's body and says 'destroy your sight'

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The bell = knell = sound of death (remember the murder is not shown)

A drum symbolises the English Army coming

Supernatural visions of the dagger and Banquo's Ghost creates tension.

Tension is created before Duncan's body is found by the humorous drunken man who rambles about 'hell' and 'Beelzebub (the devil) = visitors are entering hell.

The exam

Intro – that briefly answers the question. Use the phrase in the Q.

Main 1 – PEEL that answers the Q. Point, evidence, what it shows, key word, reader feel, link to society

Main 2 – Is there another part that shows what you have just written about in para 1? If not, PEEL that answers the Q. Point, evidence, what it shows, key word, reader feel, link to society.

Main 3 – Is there another part that shows what you have just written about in para 1 or 2? If not, PEEL that answers the Q. Point, evidence, what it shows, key word, reader feel, link to society.

Conclusion – Answer the Q by summing up your main paragraphs and add any other examples you didn't write about.

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Lady Macbeth - 'Look like the innocent flower but be the serpent underneath'

Macbeth – 'be innocent of the knowledge dearest chuck'

Lady Macbeth – 'unsex me here' 'fill me with direst cruelty'

Macbeth – 'a dagger of the mind'

Macbeth - 'knell'

Lady Macbeth – 'The raven himself is hoarse'

Macbeth – 'Neptune's ocean'

Lady Macbeth – 'A little water clears us of this deed.'

Macbeth – 'full of scorpions is my mind'

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Lady Macbeth – 'out damn spot'

Macbeth – 'out brief candle'

Macbeth – 'tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow'

Macduff – 'O Hell-kite'

Lady Macbeth – 'What's done cannot be undone'

Macbeth – 'she should have died hereafter. There would have been a time for such a word.'

Lady Macbeth – 'when you darest do it, then you were a man'

'valiant soldier'

dead butcher'

'vaulting ambition'

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'o'erleaps itself and falls'

'fatal flaw'

'sainted King'

'tyrant'

'castle topple'

'false face'

'there's no art'

'fair is foul and foul is fair'

'unseamed him from the nave to the chaps'

'carved out his passage'

'tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow'

Macbeth

'life is but a walking shadow'

'candles are all out'