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Macbeth

AQA GCSE English Literature



York Notes Rapid Revision

Macbeth

AQA GCSE English Literature

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CONTENTS

PLOT AND STRUCTURE

Act I Scenes 1–4	4
Act I Scenes 5–7	6
Act II	8
Act III Scenes 1–3	10
Act III Scenes 4–6	12
Act IV	14
Act V	16
Form and structure	18
Quick revision	20

SETTING AND CONTEXT

Jacobean society	22
Succession and order	24
Settings	26

CHARACTERS

Macbeth in Acts I and II	28
Macbeth in Acts III–V	30
Lady Macbeth	32
Banquo	34
Macduff and Lady Macduff	36
King Duncan and Malcolm	38
The witches	40
Quick revision	42



THEMES

Ambition	44
Betrayal and revenge	46
The supernatural	48
Fate and free will	50
Appearance and reality	52
Guilt and madness	54
Quick revision	56

LANGUAGE

Imagery and symbolism	58
Dramatic techniques	60

EXAM PRACTICE

Understanding the exam	62
Character questions	64
Planning your character response	66
Grade 5 annotated sample answer	68
Grade 7+ annotated sample answer	70
Theme questions	72
Planning your theme response	74
Grade 5 annotated sample answer	76
Grade 7+ annotated sample answer	78
Practice questions	80

GLOSSARY **82**

ANSWERS **83**

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Act I Scenes 1-4

Three key things about Act I Scenes 1-4

1. The play opens with **three witches** out in a **storm**.
2. We meet **Macbeth**, a **brave warrior**, who appears to be **loyal to King Duncan**.
3. Key **themes** are introduced: the **supernatural**, **ambition**, **violent conflict** and **appearance and reality**.



What happens in Scenes 1-2?

- **Scene 1:** Three witches appear and arrange to meet Macbeth.
- They refer to a **'battle'** and **'hurly-burly'**, suggesting that conflict is raging all around them.
- **Scene 2:** An army captain informs King Duncan that Macbeth and his friend, Banquo, fought courageously in a battle against the king's enemies.
- He also reports that Macbeth fought ruthlessly because he **'unseamed'** their enemy, Macdonald, then fixed his severed head on the battlements.

What happens in Scenes 3-4?

- **Scene 3:** Macbeth and fellow soldier, Banquo meet the witches who hail Macbeth as **'Thane of Cawdor'** and **'king hereafter'** and tell Banquo that his sons will be kings.
- One of the witches' prophecies comes true immediately when King Duncan makes Macbeth Thane of Cawdor as a reward for his loyalty and courage.
- Banquo warns Macbeth about the witches, claiming that the **'instruments of darkness'** sometimes tell truths in order to cause harm.
- **Scene 4:** We learn that the previous Thane of Cawdor, a man who betrayed King Duncan's **'absolute trust'** has been executed.
- King Duncan names Malcolm, his eldest son, as his heir.
- Macbeth concludes he will need to **'o'erleap'** Malcolm in order to become king as the witches predicted.

Five key quotations

1. The theme of appearance and reality: **'Fair is foul, and foul is fair'** (witches) (1.1.12)
2. Macbeth's reputation: **'For brave Macbeth – well he deserves that name'** (Captain) (1.2.16)
3. Macbeth's violent conduct: **'his brandish'd steel,/Which smok'd with bloody execution'** (Captain) (1.2.16–17)
4. Macbeth's evil side: **'Stars, hide your fires,/Let not light see my black and deep desires'** (1.4.50–1)
5. Macbeth's interest in the supernatural: **'Stay, you imperfect speakers. Tell me more'** (1.3.68)

Note it!

Note how Act I Scene 1 grabs our attention: stormy weather, the witches' chanting and their contradictory riddles create a mysterious atmosphere. Their final chant **'Fair is foul, and foul is fair'** resembles Macbeth's first words: **'So foul and fair a day I have not seen'**, linking him with them.

Exam focus

How can I write about Macbeth? AO2

You can focus on Scenes 1 and 2 to show how Shakespeare introduces Macbeth.

At the beginning of Act I, we hear about Macbeth twice before we see him. Firstly, in Scene 1, three witches plan to meet him, which gives us the impression that Macbeth is associated with witchcraft. Then, in Scene 2, the Captain reveals how 'brave Macbeth' fought courageously in battle. Both these reported references to Macbeth raise the audience's curiosity and build up expectations before his appearance.

Clear topic sentence to introduce paragraph

Analytical comment showing effect

Quotation used to illustrate point

Explanation and development of main point

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about Macbeth. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Shakespeare also reveals other aspects of Macbeth's character in the early scenes of Act I. One of these aspects is his evil side which is evident when

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Act I Scenes 5-7

Three key things about Act I Scenes 5-7

1. The **action moves** to Macbeth's castle at **Inverness**.
2. We meet **Lady Macbeth**: a **strong, ambitious** woman who has a **close relationship** with her husband.
3. The key **themes** of **ambition** and **good and evil** are developed.

What happens in Scenes 5-6?

- **Scene 5:** Lady Macbeth reads a letter from Macbeth about the witches' prophecies.
- She asks dark spirits to **'unsex'** her and fill her with **'direst cruelty'** so she can persuade Macbeth to murder King Duncan.
- When Macbeth arrives, the couple discuss the murder plan and Lady Macbeth takes charge of the arrangements.
- **Scene 6:** King Duncan, Banquo and other royal attendants arrive and comment on the **'pleasant'** setting of Macbeth's castle and the **'delicate'** air surrounding it.
- Lady Macbeth welcomes King Duncan, playing the role of the perfect hostess.



What happens in Scene 7?

- Macbeth wrestles with his conscience because he knows that as King Duncan's host he should protect him from danger, not **'bear the knife'** against him.
- He acknowledges that **'Vaulting ambition'** is his only reason for murdering the king.
- After much deliberation, Macbeth tells Lady Macbeth that he will not proceed with the murder.
- Lady Macbeth questions her husband's courage and manliness in order to persuade him to kill King Duncan. She convinces him to go ahead with the murder.
- The couple decide to smear the two grooms guarding King Duncan with blood when they are asleep so that they will be blamed for the murder.

Five key quotations

1. The relationship between Macbeth and his wife: **'my dearest partner of greatness'** (Macbeth) (1.5.10)
2. Lady Macbeth's links to evil: **'fill me from the crown to the toe topfull/Of direst cruelty'** (1.5.41-2)
3. Lady Macbeth's view of Macbeth: **'too full o'th'milk of human kindness'** (1.5.16)
4. The theme of good and evil: **'his virtues/Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongu'd against/The deep damnation of his taking-off'** (Macbeth) (1.7.18-20)
5. The theme of ambition: **'Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be/What thou art promis'd'** (Lady Macbeth) (1.7.14-15)

Note it!

Lady Macbeth never uses the word 'murder' when she discusses killing King Duncan with Macbeth. Instead she says Duncan must be **'provided for'** and speaks of the **'night's great business'**. Her words are deliberately **euphemistic** and could refer to making the necessary preparations for Duncan's visit.

Exam focus

How can I write about good and evil? AO1 AO3

You can show how Shakespeare portrays the good and evil traits of his characters.

In Act I Scene 7, **Shakespeare uses his characters to introduce the theme of good and evil.** When Macbeth contemplates murdering the virtuous King Duncan, he fears that Duncan's *goodness* will be magnified by his death since memories of his virtues will plead **'like angels'** against the crime. This **simile connects Duncan with heaven** and reminds us that, **in Jacobean times, some people, including King James I, believed that the king was appointed by God.**

Clear topic sentence to introduce paragraph

Relevant embedded quotation

Analytical comment with effect

Link to historical context

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about good and evil. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Shakespeare further explores the concept of evil in the second half of Act I when Lady Macbeth

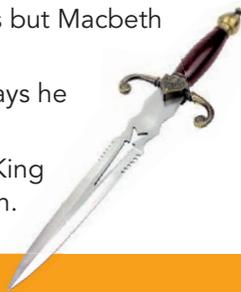
PLOT AND STRUCTURE Act II

Three key things about Act II

1. Act II begins **inside Macbeth's castle**, in the **middle of the night**.
2. Macbeth's **conscience** is troubled **before** and **after** King Duncan's murder.
3. Key **motifs** are explored: **blood, water** and **sleep**.

What happens in Scene 1?

- Banquo gives Macbeth a diamond for Lady Macbeth from King Duncan.
- Banquo tells Macbeth that he dreamt about the witches but Macbeth claims he does not think of them.
- Macbeth seems to test Banquo's support but Banquo says he will keep his **'allegiance clear'**.
- Macbeth thinks he sees a dagger leading him towards King Duncan's chamber. A bell rings as he goes to kill Duncan.



What happens in Scene 2?

- Lady Macbeth waits nervously for Macbeth.
- Macbeth appears carrying two bloody daggers. He is distressed and claims that he heard a voice saying **'Sleep no more'**.
- Lady Macbeth takes control, returns the daggers and smears the grooms with blood. She claims **'A little water'** will wash away the deed.
- They hear knocking and hurry to bed.

What happens in Scenes 3-4?

- **Scene 3:** The porter opens the door to two noblemen: Macduff and Lennox.
- Macduff discovers Duncan's body.
- Macbeth claims the grooms killed Duncan and that he then killed them in anger.
- The king's sons, Malcolm and Donaldbain, flee for their lives.
- **Scene 4:** Ross, another nobleman, and an old man discuss disturbances in nature.
- Macbeth prepares for his coronation but Macduff decides not to attend.

Five key quotations

1. Macbeth's vision: **'art thou but/A dagger of the mind, a false creation,/ Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?'** (II.1.37–9)
2. The motif of sleep: **'Methought I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more:/ Macbeth does murder sleep"'** (Macbeth) (II.2.38–9)
3. The motifs of blood and water: **'Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood/Clean from my hand?'** (Macbeth) (II.2.63–4)
4. Lady Macbeth taking control: **'Infirm of purpose!/Give me the daggers'** (II.2.55–6)
5. The motif of disturbance in the natural world: **'On Tuesday last,/A falcon tow'ring in her pride of place/Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and kill'd'** (Old Man) (II.4.11–13)

Note it!

The Porter, who is unwell after drinking too much the previous night, provides a comic interlude between King Duncan's murder and the discovery of his body. The humour is offset when he describes the castle's entrance as a **'hell-gate'**, which reminds us of the horrors within and links Macbeth to the Devil.

Exam focus

How can I write about motifs? AO2

You can write about how Shakespeare uses key motifs in Act II.

Shakespeare includes several key motifs in Act II. One of these is sleep. In Act II Scene 2 Macbeth thinks he hears a voice saying **'Macbeth does murder sleep'**. This suggests that his **guilty conscience might not allow him to rest**. His use of **the verb 'murder'** reminds us of his recent crime and implies that he killed his own capacity to sleep when he murdered King Duncan.

Clear introduction to the paragraph

Relevant quotation selected

Analytical comment with effect

Zooms in on key word

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about another motif from Act II. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Another important motif in Act II is blood. In Act II Scene 2 Macbeth says

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Act III Scenes 1-3

Three key things about Act III Scenes 1-3

1. Act III opens in Macbeth's castle as Banquo is getting ready to go riding.
2. We learn more about Banquo: he takes **no action** against Macbeth or to make the **witches' predictions** for his **descendants** come true.
3. The **motifs** of **darkness** and the **night** are explored.

What happens in Scene 1?

- Banquo is suspicious because Macbeth has everything that the witches promised.
- He thinks about the witches' momentous predictions for his family but then quickly dismisses these thoughts.
- Macbeth invites Banquo to attend his banquet and discovers that Banquo is going riding with his son, Fleance.
- Threatened by the witches' prediction that Banquo's offspring will be kings, Macbeth longs to make his own position more secure.
- Two murderers enter and Macbeth persuades them to kill Banquo and Fleance.



What happens in Scenes 2-3?

- **Scene 2:** Lady Macbeth is concerned because Macbeth has been spending too much time alone thinking.
- Macbeth tells his wife that he is worried about Banquo and Fleance but he does not tell her that he has arranged their murders.
- He implies that he is planning a crime and asks her to remain ignorant of his plans, but to admire his actions afterwards.
- **Scene 3:** Outside the castle, the two original murderers are joined by a third.
- When Banquo and Fleance appear on horseback, the men spring out and try to murder them.
- Banquo is killed but his son, Fleance, escapes.

Five key quotations

1. Banquo's suspicions about Macbeth: **'I fear/Thou played'st most foully for't'** (III.1.2–3)
2. Macbeth's concerns about Banquo: **'For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind;/For them, the gracious Duncan have I murder'd'** (III.1.66–7)
3. Macbeth's troubled mind: **'O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!'** (III.2.37)
4. The Macbeths' relationship: **'Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck'** (Macbeth to Lady Macbeth) (III.2.45)
5. The motif of darkness: **'Come, seeling night,/Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day'** (Macbeth) (III.2.46–7)

Note it!

Macbeth's appeal to **'seeling night'** in Act III Scene 2, associates him with darkness as he plans Banquo's murder. Darkness is connected to evil throughout the play. His words also link him to the evil of the witches who are **'midnight hags'**.

Exam focus

How can I write about Macbeth's relationships? AO1 AO2

You can use the first three scenes of Act III to focus on how these relationships change.

In Act III Scene 2, **Shakespeare reveals a change in the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth** when Macbeth does not tell her about his plan to murder Banquo and Fleance. Although he hints that he is planning a crime, he tells her to be **innocent of the knowledge**. He also calls her **'chuck'**, which is **an affectionate term but lacks the sense of power and equality** of his earlier endearment **'partner of greatness'**.

Topic sentence makes overall point

Relevant quotation selected

Zooms in on key word

Links to previous scene

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about changes in Macbeth's relationship with Banquo at the beginning of Act III. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Macbeth's concerns about Banquo also change early in Act III. This is evident when

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Act III Scenes 4-6

Three key things about Act III Scenes 4-6

1. **Scene 4** begins in the **banqueting hall of Macbeth's castle** as his **guests arrive** for a feast.
2. We learn more about **Macduff, the Thane of Fife**: he **refused to attend** the banquet and he is planning to go to **England** and gather support for an **army to depose Macbeth**.
3. The **themes** of the **supernatural** and **revenge** are developed.

What happens in Scene 4?

- Macbeth and Lady Macbeth host a banquet as king and queen.
- One of the murderers appears and tells Macbeth that Banquo is dead but that Fleance has escaped.
- Banquo's ghost appears to Macbeth at the feast and sits in Macbeth's chair. None of the other guests can see the ghost. Lady Macbeth makes excuses for her husband, telling them that he often has these fits.
- The ghost disappears and Macbeth regains his composure but then it appears again. Macbeth becomes even more agitated and Lady Macbeth has to ask their guests to leave.
- Macbeth believes that the ghost was seeking vengeance. He also feels threatened by Macduff's absence and decides to consult the witches again.



What happens in Scenes 5-6?

- **Scene 5**: Hecate, queen of the witches, is angry with the other three witches for not informing her about their dealings with Macbeth.
- She helps the witches to prepare a strong spell to deceive Macbeth.
- **Scene 6**: Lennox discusses recent events with a Lord. Lennox speaks with **irony**, suggesting that he no longer trusts Macbeth.
- The Lord reveals that King Duncan's son, Malcolm, has been welcomed in England by Edward, the English king, and that Macduff plans to join them.

Five key quotations

1. The theme of the supernatural: **'Thou canst not say I did it; never shake/Thy gory locks at me!'** (Macbeth to Banquo's ghost) (III.4.50–1)
2. The theme of revenge: **'blood will have blood'** (Macbeth) (III.4.122)
3. Lady Macbeth's view of the ghost: **'This is the very painting of your fear'** (III.4.61)
4. The **motif** of blood: **'I am in blood/ Stepp'd in so far that should I wade no more,/Returning were as tedious as go'er'** (Macbeth) (III.4.136–8)
5. Lennox's use of irony: **'Did he not straight/In pious rage the two delinquents tear ...?'** (III.6.11–12)

Note it!

The banquet scene marks a turning point for the Macbeths. At the start of the banquet they are at the height of their power but this is the last time that we see Lady Macbeth's self-control, and Macbeth is unable to keep calm at this important state occasion.

Exam focus

How can I write about the theme of the supernatural? AO1 AO2

You can use Act III Scene 4 to write about how Shakespeare presents Banquo's ghost.

Here, Shakespeare raises questions about whether Banquo's ghost is supernatural or not, Lady Macbeth and the other guests can't see the ghost, and Lady Macbeth refers to it as a 'painting' of Macbeth's fear. This implies that, in her opinion, the ghost is a work of his fevered imagination just like the dagger he saw prior to King Duncan's murder.

Clear topic sentence to introduce paragraph

Development of previous point

Relevant embedded quotation

Link to a previous scene

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about Macbeth's reaction to Banquo's ghost. Use one of the quotations from the list.

However, Macbeth believes that the ghost is real and he is terrified of it. This is evident when he tells it

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Act IV

Three key things about Act IV

1. Act IV begins with the **three witches** standing around their **cauldron**.
2. We are introduced to Macduff's wife, **Lady Macduff**, a **caring mother** who thinks her husband should not have abandoned his family.
3. **Imagery** is used to represent the state of Scotland: **suffering, sickness** and **enslavement**.

What happens in Scene 1?

- The three witches brew up a revolting potion.
- Macbeth arrives and commands them to answer him. They summon up apparitions who speak in riddles.
- An apparition of an armoured head warns Macbeth to **'beware Macduff'** and a bloody child tells him that **'none of woman born/ Shall harm Macbeth'**.
- A child wearing a crown and carrying a branch says that Macbeth is safe until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane. Then a line of eight kings appears, followed by Banquo's ghost; this distresses Macbeth.
- The witches vanish and Lennox tells Macbeth that Macduff is in England. Macbeth decides to have Macduff's wife and children murdered.

What happens in Scenes 2-3?

- **Scene 2:** Lady Macduff and her son are at Macduff's castle. Ross tells Lady Macduff that her husband is in England.
- A messenger warns Lady Macduff she is in danger.
- Macbeth's hired murderers arrive and Lady Macduff and her children are killed.
- **Scene 3:** In England, Malcolm tests Macduff's loyalty by suggesting he, Malcolm, would be a worse king than Macbeth. He realises that Macduff is sincere when he laments the state of Scotland.
- A doctor speaks about King Edward of England's gifts of healing and prophecy.
- Ross informs Macduff that his family have been murdered. The distressed Macduff wants revenge.
- Malcolm, Macduff and the English army prepare to attack Macbeth's castle.



Five key quotations

1. Macbeth's evil: **'By the pricking of my thumbs,/Something wicked this way comes'** (Second Witch) (IV.1.44–5)
2. Ross's view of the state of Scotland: **'know not what we fear,/But float upon a wild and violent sea'** (IV.2.20–1)
3. Malcolm's view of Scotland's suffering: **'I think our country sinks beneath the yoke;/It weeps, it bleeds'** (IV.3.39–40)
4. Macduff's distress: **'All my pretty ones?/Did you say all?'** (IV.3.218–19)
5. Malcolm preparing to attack: **'Macbeth/Is ripe for shaking'** (IV.3.240–1)

Note it!

Malcolm tests Macduff's loyalty because he wonders why Macbeth has not taken any action against Macduff. This is an example of **dramatic irony** because, unlike Malcolm, the audience knows that Macduff's family has already been killed. Their brutal murders also show us how low Macbeth has sunk.

Exam focus

How can I write about the state of Scotland? AO1 AO2

You can use Act IV to write about the imagery Shakespeare uses to describe Scotland:

In Act IV Scene 3 **Shakespeare uses negative imagery to represent the state of Scotland under Macbeth.**

For example, Malcolm claims that Scotland **sinks beneath the yoke**. The **verb 'sinks'** indicates that Scotland is being oppressed and the **noun 'yoke'** suggests enslavement because a yoke is the wooden bar which was used to attach oxen to a plough.

Clear topic sentence to introduce paragraph

Quotation used to illustrate point

Uses appropriate terminology

Zooms in on key word

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about how Shakespeare uses negative imagery for the state of Scotland. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Shakespeare also uses the image of a stormy sea to depict the state of Scotland under Macbeth's leadership. This is evident when

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Act V

Three key things about Act V

1. Act V sees the downfall and death of **Lady Macbeth** and **Macbeth**.
2. Malcolm, as **rightful king**, is restored to the throne.
3. The **themes** of **guilt**, **madness** and **revenge** are developed and concluded.

What happens in Scenes 1-2?

- **Scene 1:** A doctor and gentlewoman discuss Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking.
- While walking in her sleep, Lady Macbeth talks of murder and tries to wash imaginary blood from her hands.
- The doctor concludes that she needs divine help rather than medical attention.
- **Scene 2:** The rebel Scottish army prepares to attack Macbeth's castle.

What happens in Scenes 3-5?

- **Scene 3:** Macbeth hears that ten thousand soldiers are approaching but he remains confident due to the witches' predictions.
- The doctor tells Macbeth about his wife's illness.
- **Scene 4:** Malcolm's army cut down branches from Birnam Wood to use as camouflage.
- **Scene 5:** Macbeth hears his wife is dead and reflects on the meaninglessness of life.
- A messenger tells him that Birnam Wood is moving and Macbeth orders an attack.



What happens in Scenes 6-9?

- **Scene 6:** Malcolm's army throw down their branches and prepare to attack.
- **Scene 7:** Macbeth fights and kills young Siward.
- **Scene 8:** Macduff confronts Macbeth and reveals that he was born by caesarean section.
- Macduff fights and kills Macbeth and then cuts off his head.
- **Scene 9:** Malcolm is hailed as the new king of Scotland.

Five key quotations

1. Lady Macbeth's guilt: **'who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?'** (V.1.34–6)
2. Macbeth's despair: **'My way of life/Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf'** (V.3.22–3)
3. Macbeth's response to his wife's death: **'Out, out, brief candle,/Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player/That struts and frets his hour upon the stage'** (V.5.22–4)
4. Macbeth's determination to fight: **'Why should I play the Roman fool and die/On mine own sword?'** (V.8.1–2)
5. The theme of revenge: **'I have no words;/My voice is in my sword'** (Macduff) (V.8.6–7)

Note it!

Note how this act is structured to build tension. The focus shifts quickly from Lady Macbeth to the English army to Macbeth. Most of the scenes are short and there are plenty of exits, entrances and hand-to-hand combat.

Exam focus

How can I use Act V to write about Macbeth? AO1 AO2

You can use Act V to discuss how Shakespeare portrays Macbeth's feelings about life.

In Act V Scene 3, Shakespeare uses the image of a 'yellow leaf' to reveal Macbeth's feelings of despondency. Macbeth seems to believe that his best days are over. His use of the word 'sere' suggests that his life is withering rather than flourishing. Shakespeare's autumnal image might also imply that, like a yellow leaf on an autumn tree, Macbeth is likely to fall from his lofty position and then die.

Clear topic sentence to introduce paragraph

Analytical comment showing effect

Development of analysis

Ends with personal interpretation

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph to show how Macbeth's responds to his wife's death. Use one of the quotations from the list.

After Lady Macbeth dies, Macbeth believes that life is

PLOT AND STRUCTURE **Form and structure**

Three key things about form and structure

1. The play is a **tragedy** which deals with the **downfall** of the **protagonist**, **Macbeth**.
2. We see his **rise** in the **first half** of the play and his **fall** in the **second**.
3. The play is in **five separate acts**, but we do not know if Shakespeare wrote it in this way.

What makes this play a tragedy?

- Tragedy is a form of classical drama associated with the Ancient Greeks and Romans.
- In classical tragedies the protagonist's fatal flaw results in his downfall; Macbeth's flaw is his ambition.
- Most of the action takes place at Macbeth's castle, which gives unity of place, and there is no **subplot**, which keeps our attention on the tragic hero, Macbeth.

How does the play's structure portray Macbeth's rise and fall?

- Act I is about Macbeth plotting to overthrow King Duncan and Act II sees him acting against King Duncan by killing him.
- Act III is a turning point where Macbeth is king but Fleance's escape from the murderers and Banquo's ghost distress him.
- From Act IV onwards other characters start to plot to overthrow Macbeth and Act V sees them fighting against him. Finally Macduff kills him.



How does Shakespeare use foreshadowing in the play?

- The first Thane of Cawdor was a traitor; this hints that Macbeth could become a traitor too.
- The witches' prediction that Macbeth will be king but Banquo's sons will be kings suggests that Banquo and Macbeth could come into conflict.
- The witches' predictions in Act IV **foreshadow** Macbeth's downfall in Act V.

Five key quotations

1. Ross's view of the first Thane of Cawdor: **'that most disloyal traitor'** (I.2.52)
2. The witches' prediction for Banquo: **'Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none'** (Third Witch) (I.3.65)
3. The First Apparition's warning: **'beware Macduff, Beware the Thane of Fife'** (IV.1.70–1)
4. Macbeth's downfall foreshadowed: **'I bear a charmed life which must not yield/To one of woman born'** (V.8.12–13)
5. Macduff reveals how he was born: **'Despair thy charm, ... Macduff was from his mother's womb/Untimely ripp'd'** (V.8.13–16)

Note it!

Note that Macbeth and his wife pivot around the two-part structure of the play. Early on, Macbeth is troubled by his conscience while Lady Macbeth takes control of planning King Duncan's murder. By Act V these positions have reversed as her conscience is troubled while Macbeth has almost forgotten how to fear.

Exam focus

How can I write about structure? AO2

You can write about how Shakespeare uses foreshadowing in the play.

Shakespeare uses foreshadowing early in the play to give the audience a hint of what might happen later on. One example of this is seen in Act I Scene 3, where the witches tell Macbeth he will become the Thane of Cawdor. Their prediction clearly foreshadows the moment soon afterwards when Duncan makes Macbeth Thane of Cawdor but it also hints that Macbeth might become a 'most disloyal traitor' just like the first owner of this title.

Clear topic sentence introduces paragraph

Develops previous point

Analytical comment

Embedded quotation with interpretation

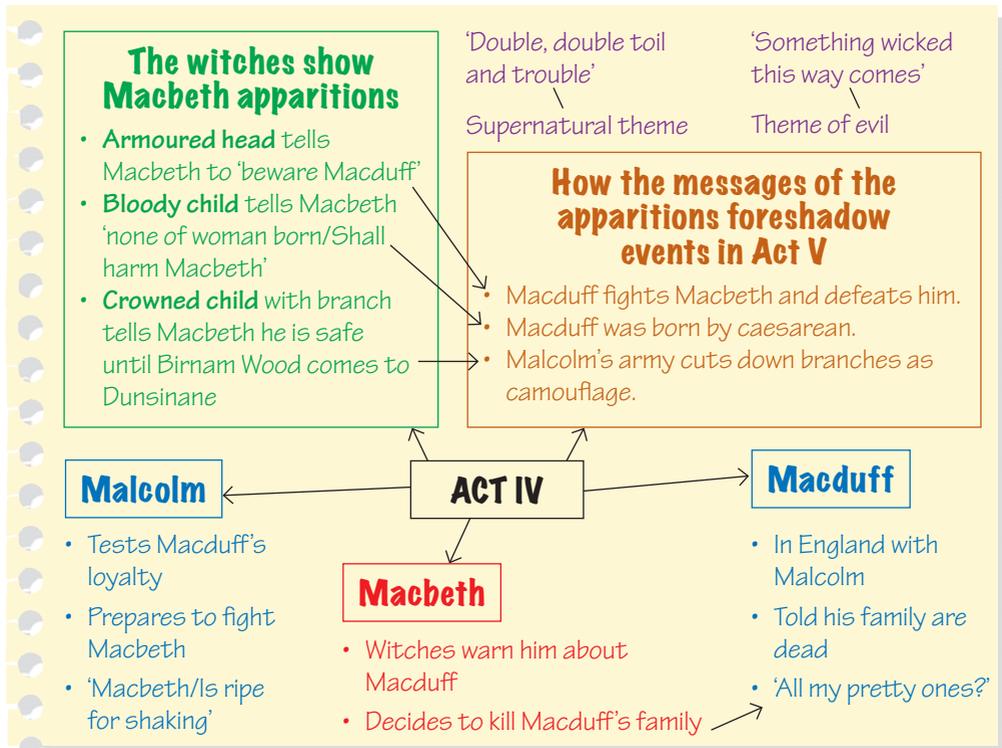
Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about foreshadowing. Use one of the quotations from the list.

When Macbeth hears the apparitions' predictions in Act IV, he feels confident of success but they foreshadow his downfall. This is evident when

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Quick revision

1. Look at this ideas map for Act IV. Is there anything else you could add?



2. Create your own ideas map for one of the other acts.

Quick quiz

Answer these quick questions about plot and structure.

1. What is the weather like in the opening scene when the witches first appear?
2. Who tells Duncan that Macbeth decapitated the rebel Macdonald?
3. How does the first Thane of Cawdor die?
4. What do the witches predict for Banquo's descendants?
5. Who does King Duncan name as his successor?
6. What vision does Macbeth see just before he kills King Duncan?
7. Who discovers King Duncan's body?

8. Which men does Macbeth kill because he claims that they murdered Duncan?
9. Why do Malcolm and Donaldbain leave Macbeth's castle?
10. What is the name of Banquo's son who escapes from the murderers?
11. Where does Banquo's ghost sit at the banquet?
12. Who is the queen of the witches?
13. Why does a messenger visit Lady Macduff and her son shortly before they are murdered?
14. Who tells Macduff that his family have been murdered?
15. Which two characters watch Lady Macbeth sleepwalking?
16. Why does it look like Birnam Wood is moving in Act V?
17. Who does Macbeth fight and kill before he fights Macduff?
18. Who is hailed as king at the end of the play?
19. What is Macbeth's fatal flaw?
20. Which scene in Act III marks the turning point between Macbeth's rise and fall?

Power paragraphs

Write a **paragraph** in response to **each of these questions**. For each, try to use **one quotation** you have learned.

1. In what ways does Shakespeare contrast Macbeth and Banquo in Act I?
2. Why does Shakespeare include the discussion between Ross and the Old Man in Act II Scene 4?

Exam practice

Re-read Act V Scene 8, from line 1 'Why should I play the Roman fool' to line 17 'Accursed be that tongue that tells me so' where Macduff confronts Macbeth.

Why is this moment significant in the play as a whole? Write **two paragraphs** explaining your ideas.

You could comment on:

- the way that Macduff addresses Macbeth and what this reveals
- how confident Macbeth appears to be during this scene.

SETTING AND CONTEXT Jacobean society

Five key things about Jacobean life and society

1. **Jacobean society** refers to **King James I's rule (1603–25)**.
2. Many people in Jacobean society went to **church** and schools reinforced **Christian teaching**.
3. **Women's role** in society was **limited** at this time.
4. **Poor** people **struggled** to survive, while the **rich** lived **lavishly**.
5. There were frequent **political conflicts, uprisings** and **plots** against the **king**.

How did the roles of men and women differ in Jacobean society?

- Education was mainly for boys, while girls stayed at home to learn domestic skills; very few girls were taught to read and write.
- Most married women looked after the children while their husbands went out to work.
- Masculinity was usually associated with strength and courage and femininity with nurturing and caring for children.

How could Christian teachings have influenced Macbeth?

- There are a number of Christian references in the play: Macbeth is associated with Hell and the Devil while King Duncan is '**sainted**'.
- In a Bible story about the Garden of Eden, Eve encourages Adam to eat forbidden fruit. Lady Macbeth persuades Macbeth to murder King Duncan in a similar way.
- Macbeth betrays Duncan for personal gain, just as Judas betrayed Jesus.

How could beliefs about witches have influenced Macbeth?

- King James was interested in witchcraft and wrote a book about it called *Daemonologie*, so Shakespeare could have included the witches to please him.
- Witches were commonly believed to have powers to conjure up apparitions and to vanish, as they do in the play.



Three key quotations

1. Lady Macbeth reverses gender roles: **'put/This night's great business into my dispatch'** (Lady Macbeth, planning Duncan's murder) (I.5.66–7)
2. The witches' ability to vanish: **'what seem'd corporal,/Melted, as breath into the wind'** (Macbeth, on the witches) (I.3.79–80)
3. The witches' power to summon spirits: **'raise such artificial sprites'** (Hecate, about apparitions) (III.5.27)

Note it!

In Act I the Captain vividly describes the battle scene as **'another Golgotha'**. As Golgotha was the place where Christians believe Jesus died on the cross, the audience would have associated these words with pain and death.

Exam focus

How do I link context to the play? AO3

You can write about how far Shakespeare's presentation of women matches Jacobean expectations.

While Lady Macduff seems to represent the traditional Jacobean wife, Shakespeare's presentation of Lady Macbeth challenges traditional views about women.

This is evident in Act I Scene 6 when she tells Macbeth to put the plans for King Duncan's murder into her 'dispatch'. This behaviour might have seemed unusual to the Jacobean audience who could have expected her to follow her husband's lead.

Clear topic sentence establishes point

Supports point with evidence from the text

Link to historical context

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about how far Shakespeare's presentation of the witches reflects Jacobean beliefs. Use one of the quotations from the list.

In Jacobean times many people believed that witches could vanish into thin air. This power is seen in the play when

SETTING AND CONTEXT Succession and order

Five key things about succession and order

1. In Shakespeare's time there was **uncertainty** about the **royal succession**.
2. **Elizabeth I** died without children and was **reluctant** to **name** a **successor**.
3. The play **opens** with a **battle**, suggesting a **society in conflict**.
4. **James I** believed in the **divine right of kings** – that the **king's power** came from **God**.
5. Shakespeare uses **images** from the **natural world** to show how the **rightful succession** and the **Great Chain of Being** has been **disrupted**.

Why was the succession an important issue at the time?

- Since Henry VIII broke away from the Roman Catholic Church in the 1530s there had been many rebellions and conflicting claims on the throne.
- Elizabeth I didn't name James I as her successor until she was dying.
- James faced two plots to seize his throne in 1603 and an attempt to blow up Parliament in 1605 (the Gunpowder Plot).

How does Shakespeare use ideas about succession in the play?

- When King Duncan names Malcolm as his successor, Macbeth views Malcolm as an obstacle in his path.
- After the King's death, Macduff calls his murder '**sacrilegious**' and refers to Duncan's body as '**The Lord's anointed temple**' to reinforce the idea of the divine right of kings.
- King Edward of England is portrayed as being close to God as it is claimed he has the gifts of healing and prophecy.
- When Macbeth dies, Malcolm becomes king, restoring the rightful monarchy.



How does Shakespeare portray ideas about order in the play?

- When King Duncan dies, the Great Chain of Being, which Jacobean believed was God's ordering of the universe, breaks down and Scotland suffers as a result.
- At Macbeth's banquet, his guests sit according to their ranks.

Three key quotations

1. The true line of succession: **'The son of Duncan,/From whom this tyrant holds the due of birth'** (Lord, on Malcom) (III.6.24–5)
2. The idea that God supports the king: **'Macbeth/Is ripe for shaking, and the powers above/Put on their instruments'** (Malcolm, about attacking Macbeth) (IV.3.240–2)
3. The rightful heir: **'To dew the sovereign flower and drown the weeds'** (Lennox, about supporting Malcolm) (V.2.30)

Note it!

Macbeth and Malcolm have their coronations at Scone. Kings of Scotland were traditionally crowned at Scone Palace on a throne made of a block of stone. The real King Macbeth was crowned there in the eleventh century.

Exam focus

How can I write about order and succession? AO1 AO3

You can write about how Shakespeare implies that Malcolm is the rightful king.

Shakespeare uses natural imagery to represent Malcolm and Macbeth in Act V Scene 2, when Lennox speaks about the need to **dew the sovereign flower and drown the weeds**. He compares Malcolm, the rightful heir, to a garden flower which they should take care of and Macbeth, who has taken his place, to an unwanted weed, suggesting that Macbeth has planted himself unlawfully on the throne.

Clear topic sentence to introduce paragraph

Supports point with relevant quotation

Explanation of quotation

Analysis and interpretation of quotation

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about the idea that God supports the rightful king. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Malcolm and his followers want to remove Macbeth from power and restore the rightful monarchy. This is evident when Malcolm claims that