



# MACBETH

**Knowledge Organiser**

## Social and Historical Context

King James I	Supernatural	Role of Women	Gunpowder Plot
<p>When Elizabeth I died without any children in 1603, her cousin King James VI of Scotland became king of England. He was given the title King James I. It was the first time that England, Scotland and Ireland were ruled under a single monarch.</p> <p>James I was highly intelligent and developed a love of learning. He enjoyed poetry and reading, and wrote two books.</p> <p>He also had an interest in plays. James I became the patron of the King's Men - the playing company that Shakespeare belonged to for most of his career.</p> <p>Elizabethans believed that God set out an order for everything in the universe. This was known as the Great Chain of Being. On Earth, God created a social order for everybody and chose where you belonged. In other words, the king or queen was in charge because God put them there and they were only answerable to God (the Divine Right of Kings). This meant that disobeying the monarch was a sin.</p>	<p>One of the most active centres of witch-hunting was Scotland, where up to 4,000 people were burnt. This was due to royal witch-hunter James VI and I. The violent death of his mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, made him fascinated with magic. "His Highness told me her death was visible in Scotland before it did really happen."</p> <p>Two years after, in 1589 he was to marry Anne of Denmark, but she almost lost her life in a violent tempest. James decided to sail across to Denmark and collect her. But on their return, the royal fleet was battered by more storms and one of the ships was lost. James placed the blame on witches, claiming that they must have cast evil spells upon his fleet.</p> <p>King James I wrote a book called <i>Daemonologie</i> in which he supported and encouraged the trials of witches. He believed the witches were controlled by the devil and he described witchcraft as "high treason against God".</p>	<p>Men assumed a dominant position in the society; making it patriarchal. The eldest male was head of the house and they worked and fetched for food to keep his family alive. Everyone had to obey him and do as was being told.</p> <p>Marriages were normally decided by elders or parents. Jacobean men had property rights meaning any property was either passed down from father to son or from brother to brother. The position of men in society was also reflected in the Jacobean plays. Most of the characters were played by men, even women! Only boys were given a full education. Young girls were mostly brought up to prepare them for later life. The main responsibility of married women was to take care of the household matters and raise children. Before marriage, a girl was under the control of her father, after marriage her husband and after the death of her husband, her son. Women were made to depend on their male relatives throughout their lives.</p>	<p>Catholics in England had expected James to be more tolerant of them. In fact, he had proved to be the opposite and had ordered all Catholic priests to leave England.</p> <p>This so angered some Catholics that they decided to kill James and put his daughter Elizabeth on the throne ensuring that she was a Catholic.</p> <p>This led to a plot to kill not only the king of England, James, but also everyone sitting in the Houses of Parliament at the same time as James was there when he opened Parliament on November 5th, 1605. The Gunpowder Plot had failed, and the conspirators had been arrested. One of them, Father Garnet, used equivocation during the trial: the use of ambiguous language to conceal the truth or to avoid committing oneself. The English authorities were intensely distrustful of equivocation. They saw it as lying and as an attack on language and meaning itself. The country was split as to whether it should be allowed or not.</p>

### William Shakespeare

<p><b>Who was Shakespeare?</b> English Playwright (23<sup>rd</sup> April 1564 - 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1616). At 18 he married Anne Hathaway - who was 26. After his son's death, the records of his private life become...private and little is reliably known.</p> <p>Shakespeare's written work is varied! He wrote poetry, comedy and plays. The plays were written according to popular preferences - in the early 1590's historical drama was fashionable (Richard III and Henry VI (pts 1-3)) Then classical comedies in the mid 1590's ( eg. <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>) Later in the decade he turned to tragedy (<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> and <i>Julius Caesar</i>). The new century brought 'problem plays' (<i>Othello</i> and <i>Hamlet</i>...)</p> <p>This is the era in which <i>Macbeth</i> was written - a tragedy with added elements of intrigue and interest.</p> <p><i>Macbeth</i> is the shortest tragedy that Shakespeare wrote. It is fast moving and compressed.</p> <p>Shakespeare became very popular with the king and went to London to write - initially he wrote for various play houses and acting companies but then had his own company of players, called the King's Men (previously known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men)</p>	<b>Features of Form</b>	
	Tragedy	A tragic play is concerned with the downfall of one, usually very important or high status character. Tragic events are ones that deal with suffering, loss and death. It usually deals with one main plot, in a single location or place.
	Stage Directions	Instructions to an actor or a director on how to perform.
	Dialogue	Speech between two or more people.
	Soliloquy	When a character, alone on stage, speaks their thoughts to the audience.
	Aside	A remark in a play that is intended to be heard only by the audience, not by other characters.
	Dramatic Irony	When the audience has more knowledge of what is happening than a character.
	Rhyme	Corresponding sounds between words, especially at the end lines of poetry. ( <i>The Witches</i> )
	Hamartia	A fatal flaw leading to the downfall of a tragic hero or heroine.
	Hubris	Excessive pride or self-confidence.
	Anagnorisis	A moment in a play when a character has a sudden realisation or discovery.

## The Plot

ACT 1	<p>Scenes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The witches meet on the heath</li><li>2. Macbeth and Banquo have fought and won a battle against the Norwegians. They are praised for their bravery by the Captain.</li><li>3. The witches meet Macbeth and Banquo and they make three predictions. They predict that Macbeth will become Thane of Cawdor and eventually king. Banquo is told that he will not become king but that his children will be. Shortly after, Macbeth is told he is the new Thane of Cawdor!</li><li>4. Duncan meets with Macbeth and announces that his son Malcolm will be king when he dies. Macbeth plans for Duncan to stay at his castle.</li><li>5. Lady Macbeth receives a letter from Macbeth filling her in. Lady Macbeth convinces Macbeth to kill King Duncan.</li><li>6. Duncan arrives at Macbeth's castle</li><li>7. Macbeth's soliloquy. Macbeth tells Lady Macbeth he will not murder Duncan. However, she convinces him to go ahead with the murder.</li></ol>
ACT 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Banquo and Macbeth talk briefly about the witches. Macbeth sees a dagger in front of him on his way to go and kill King Duncan.</li><li>2. Macbeth murders King Duncan. Macbeth's guilt is apparent as he appears covered in blood. Lady Macbeth feels no guilt and places the daggers back with the chamberlains.</li><li>3. Duncan's dead body is discovered by Macduff. Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, run away: one to England and one to Ireland. They are afraid for their lives but only end up looking guilty.</li><li>4. Macbeth and his wife become king and queen of Scotland.</li></ol>
ACT 3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Macbeth questions Banquo, he is suspicious of him. As a result, he plans his murder but chooses not to tell Lady Macbeth.</li><li>2. Lady Macbeth and Macbeth talk but Macbeth does not give up his plans.</li><li>3. Banquo is murdered by the hired murderers but his son, Fleance, manages to escape.</li><li>4. At the coronation banquet, Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo at the table. Lady Macbeth persuades everyone that Macbeth is ill and they must leave and is furious at Macbeth.</li><li>5. Hecate is angry that the witches meddled with Macbeth without her permission.</li><li>6. Lennox shares his suspicions about Macbeth.</li></ol>
ACT 4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The witches share three more prophecies: He is told that: he must fear Macduff; that he will not be harmed by anyone born of a woman and that he will never be defeated until Birnam wood moves to 'High Dunsinane Hill.' They also share a vision of Banquo.</li><li>2. Macbeth has Macduff's wife and children murdered.</li><li>3. In England, Malcolm puts Macduff to the test to test his loyalty and check they are on the same side, wanting the same things.</li></ol>
ACT 5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Lady Macbeth sleepwalks and is slowly going mad, she is eaten up with guilt and loneliness as she and her husband drift further and further apart.</li><li>2. The rebels discuss the impending battle.</li><li>3. Macbeth declares he has nothing to fear from the battle. He appears confident. The doctor reports on Lady Macbeth's condition, Macbeth orders him to cure her.</li><li>4. The combined English and Scottish forces march to Dunsinane castle, disguising themselves with branches from the trees of Birnam wood.</li><li>5. Lady Macbeth is dead. Macbeth realises that he is not going to win but decides to at least die fighting.</li><li>6. Malcolm prepares for battle</li><li>7. Macbeth kills young Siward</li><li>8. Macduff and Macbeth fight and Macbeth is killed and his head displayed on a spike, as he was a traitor. Macduff is able to kill him as he reveals he was born by caesarean section.</li><li>9. Malcolm is crowned the new king of Scotland.</li></ol>

## Main Characters

Character	Summary	Words to describe	Key Quotations
Macbeth	<p>From his first mention in Act 1 Scene 2, our initial impression is of a brave and capable warrior. However, once we see Macbeth interact with the three witches we realise he has a consuming ambition that will lead to being his fatal flaw in the play.</p> <p>Shakespeare shows the terrible effects that ambition and guilt can have on a man who lacks strength of character.</p> <p>Before he kills Duncan, Macbeth is plagued by worry and almost doesn't commit the act. It takes Lady Macbeth to persuade him. After the murder, however, her powerful personality begins to collapse, leaving Macbeth more and more alone.</p> <p>He fluctuates between moments of intense action, in which he plots a murders; moments of terrible guilt, such as when he sees Banquo's ghost; and pessimism such as after his wife's death. These reflect the tragic tension within Macbeth: he is at once too ambitious to allow his conscience to stop him from murdering his way to the top but he has too much of a conscience to be happy with himself as a murderer.</p> <p>As things fall apart at the end of the play, he appears brave as his enemies surround him. In part, this comes from his confidence in the witches' prophecies, but it also seems to come from the fact that he has returned to doing what he is good at. He goes down fighting, bringing the play full circle: it begins with Macbeth winning on the battlefield and ends with him dying in combat.</p>	<p>courageous, confident, indecisive, submissive, disloyal, tyrannical, deceiver, ambitious, remorseful, tormented, heartless, cunning, egocentric</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'brave Macbeth'</li> <li>• 'Vaulting ambition'</li> <li>• 'We will proceed no further in this business'</li> <li>• 'Is this a dagger which I see before me/The handle toward my hand?'</li> <li>• 'Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep'</li> <li>• 'Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?'</li> <li>• 'The castle of Macduff I will surprise'</li> <li>• 'the heart I bear, shall never sag with doubt nor shake with fear.'</li> <li>• 'I have lived long enough. My way of life is fallen in to the sear, the yellow leaf.'</li> <li>• 'She should have died hereafter'</li> <li>• 'Life's but a walking shadow'</li> <li>• 'tyrant'</li> <li>• 'dead butcher and his fiend-like queen'</li> </ul>
Lady Macbeth	<p>When we first see her, she is already plotting Duncan's murder, and she is stronger, more ruthless, and more ambitious than her husband. She is fully aware of this and knows that she will have to push Macbeth into committing murder. At one point, she wishes that she were not a woman so that she could do it herself. Shakespeare seems to use her, and the witches, to show how women can use female methods of achieving power—that is, manipulation—to further their supposedly male ambitions. Women, the play implies, can be as ambitious and cruel as men, yet their restrictions in society stop them from pursuing these ambitions on their own.</p> <p>Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband and when he hesitates to murder, she repeatedly questions his manhood until he feels that he must commit murder to prove himself. Lady Macbeth's remarkable strength continues through the murder of the king—she steadies her husband's nerves after the crime.</p> <p>Afterward, however, she begins a slide into madness—just as ambition affects her more strongly than Macbeth before the crime, so does guilt affect her more strongly afterward. By the end, she has been reduced to sleepwalking, trying to wash away an invisible bloodstain. Lady Macbeth's sensitivity becomes a weakness, and she is unable to cope. Significantly, she (apparently) kills herself, signalling her total inability to deal with the legacy of their crimes.</p>	<p>Ambitious, commanding, conniving, heartless, malicious, manipulative, ruthless, sinister, guilty, paranoid</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'The raven himself is hoarse'</li> <li>• 'Come you spirits unsex me here'</li> <li>• 'take my milk for gall'</li> <li>• 'Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under't'</li> <li>• 'When you durst do it, then you were a man'</li> <li>• 'My hands are of your colour but I shame to wear a heart so white'</li> <li>• 'he grows worse and worse'</li> <li>• 'out, damned spot!'</li> <li>• 'all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!'</li> <li>• 'dead butcher and his fiend-like queen'</li> </ul>

## Main Characters continued

Character	Summary	Words to describe	Key Quotations
Banquo	Banquo is Macbeth's best friend, but also his second victim. Banquo is seen on stage for the first time at the same time as Macbeth and is seen to be as deserving of praise as Macbeth. However, Banquo is overshadowed by Macbeth. Banquo does have ambition as he asks for a prophecy from the Witches, and is told his children will rule Scotland. However, Banquo is more cautious of the Witches' and the consequences of acting upon their promises. Similar to Macbeth though, Banquo does not understand the cost of the Witches' prophecy will be his life. In Act 3, murderers kill Banquo at Macbeth's command, and try to kill his son, Fleance, who escapes. After his death, Banquo appears in the form of a ghost at Macbeth's coronation banquet.	Brave, loyal, diplomatic, virtuous, friendly, astute, shrewd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'they were as cannons overcharged with double cracks'</li> <li>'Lesser than Macbeth, and greater'</li> <li>'The instruments of darkness tell us truths, Win us with honest trifles, to betray 's. In deepest consequence'</li> <li>'I dreamt last night of the three weird sisters'</li> <li>'I fear thou play'dst most foully for't'</li> </ul>
The Witches (weird sisters)	The witches are instrumental to the whole plot and are, in many ways, present throughout the whole play. They appear to be able to manipulate due to their supernatural powers, but mainly due to understanding people's weaknesses. Shakespeare has them speak in rhyming couplets, which separates them from the other characters. The witches' beards, potions, and rhyme make them seem ridiculous. This could be to please King James I. However, they are clearly the most dangerous characters in the play, being both tremendously powerful and utterly wicked. Shakespeare makes the witches hard to understand as they embody an unreasoning, instinctive evil.	Trouble-making, prophetic, evil, creepy, spooky, eerie, manipulative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'Fair is foul, and foul is fair'</li> <li>'That look not like th' inhabitants o' th' earth'</li> <li>'All hail Macbeth, that shalt be King hereafter!'</li> <li>'Finger of birth-strangled babe'</li> <li>'Something wicked this way comes'</li> <li>'beware Macduff'</li> </ul>
Macduff	Macduff is a loyal and brave noble. He is shocked at the king's death, and does not trust Macbeth's claim that Duncan was killed by his servants, and refuses to go to Macbeth's coronation. Macduff flees to England to gain support against Macbeth. He proves his loyalty to his country and what is good as he passes Malcolm's test. In the mean time, Macbeth realises that Macduff will not be loyal to him, causing him anger and desire to protect his power. Macbeth arranges for the murder of Macduff's wife and children. Macduff responds to this news with dignity and emotion but is motivated by their deaths, and avenging them. His desire to place Malcolm on the throne reflects his desire to have the true king ruling, but also shows his desire for vengeance for his wife and children's murder.	Emotional, courageous, strong-willed, righteous, justice-oriented, focused, deliberate, heroic, responsive, intuitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'O horror, horror, horror!'</li> <li>'Your royal father's murdered.'</li> <li>'I am not treacherous'</li> <li>'Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself'</li> <li>'tyrant' (Macbeth)</li> </ul>
Malcolm	Malcolm embodies the values of a good king. This is seen particularly in Act 4, when he tests the allegiance of Macduff. By pretending to be an awful person, he tests Macduff's views on kingship. This feature of his character — playing a part in order to strengthen the chance of good — is in contrast to Macbeth, who plays a part in order to advance his own evil. In the end, Malcolm is presented as the king. His use of the phrase "by the grace of Grace" shows how important he thinks it is to do good and this implies to the audience he rules by divine right, as opposed to Macbeth, who seized the throne. Malcolm represents order.	Righteous, moral, virtuous, noble, honourable, stable, maturing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'I'll to England.'</li> <li>'This tyrant, whose sole name blisters our tongues'</li> <li>'Esteem him as a lamb, being compared with my confineless harms' (testing loyalty)</li> <li>'Macbeth is ripe for shaking'</li> <li>'this 'dead butcher and his fiend-like queen'</li> </ul>

<p><b>KEY THEMES:</b> Ambition</p>	<p>Ambition is a strong desire to do or achieve something. Ambition is central to the play, being a key fatal flaw in both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's character. Once Macbeth has had a taste of power, he's willing to kill anyone (men, women, and children) who he thinks might undermine his seat on Scotland's throne. Ambition has serious consequences in the play: Macbeth is slain as a tyrant and Lady Macbeth commits suicide. Shakespeare does not give either character the opportunity to enjoy what they have achieved - perhaps suggesting that it is more satisfying to achieve your goals fairly than to achieve them through corruption.</p>
<p>Appearance v reality</p>	<p>Throughout the play, characters say one thing yet mean something else and use euphemisms to hide reality. 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. Characters are also not as they seem. As a man and a brave soldier, Macbeth should be more powerful than his wife, although it does not seem this way at the start. Similarly, Lady Macbeth is not as powerful as she seems as she is unable to murder the king herself and ultimately succumbs to her guilt.</p>
<p>Gender</p>	<p>Shakespeare appears to play with gender roles in a patriarchal society. Lady Macbeth appears to stand out as she first appears more powerful than her husband. It is Lady Macbeth who takes control as Macbeth hesitates on his way to achieve his ambition. Lady Macbeth constantly uses Macbeth's gender as a way to insult him and test him, questioning his manhood whenever he appears weak. As Lady Macbeth propels her husband toward murdering Duncan, she indicates that she must rid herself of female characteristics. This shows the clear link between masculinity and power and the sense that while women can be ambitious, their gender prevents them from acting upon this. However, ultimately, Lady Macbeth is overpowered by her guilt, showing that women can't be that powerful.</p>
<p>Good and Evil</p>	<p>Macbeth begins as a 'good' man, a very good man - loyal, responsible and honourable. During the course of the action he becomes evil, influenced by the witches who are agents of the power of evil. He is led on by their suggestion that he is destined to become king. The saintly Duncan is associated with good, the act of regicide would have been seen as one of the most evil acts possible, going against the divine right of kings. As the forces come together at the end of the play, the play ends in a battle of good v evil, with the good Malcolm coming out on top.</p>
<p>Fate and free will</p>	<p>Some people believe that there is a certain path that has already been set out for us, and nothing we do in life can change this. This is the idea of fate. This is explored throughout the play, examining if this is really the case or if it is more the choices we make that shape our lives. This is particularly shown through the witches as what they predict appears to come true. However, would this be the case without Macbeth's actions? Or does he try to cheat fate?</p>
<p>Revenge</p>	<p>Revenge is one of many themes developed in Macbeth. It is best exemplified by the actions of Macduff, who, when learning of his family's death, decides to exact revenge on Macbeth. The other most prominent example of revenge is when the ghost of Banquo is employed.</p>
<p>Order and chaos</p>	<p>After Macbeth committed regicide on King Duncan, the natural order was disrupted, resulting in a major upheaval in Scotland. By killing the king, Macbeth goes against God. In Shakespeare's time it was thought that if you disrupted the natural order you would be punished by God. Order is restored at the end of the play as Malcolm becomes the rightful king of Scotland.</p>