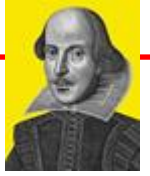


AQA GCSE LITERATURE MACBETH 100% SHEET



1. AUTHOR:

- William Shakespeare
- born in Stratford in 1564.
- the most famous writer of all time, he had two daughters and a son (who died aged 11).

2. THE PLAY:

- Shakespeare's shortest and bloodiest tragedy, *Macbeth* tells the story of a brave Scottish general (Macbeth) who receives a prophecy from a trio of sinister witches that one day he will become King of Scotland.
- Consumed with ambitious thoughts and spurred to action by his wife, Macbeth murders King Duncan and seizes the throne for himself. He soon becomes a tyrannical ruler, as he is forced to commit more and more murders to protect himself.

3. CONTEXT

- *Macbeth* was written in 1606, early in the reign of James I. James was the Scottish king too and a patron of Shakespeare's acting company, by using the character of Macbeth, a figure from Scottish history, Shakespeare was respecting his king's Scottish lineage. Additionally, the witches' prophecy that Banquo will found a line of kings is a clear nod to James's family's claim to have descended from the historical Banquo.
- The theme of bad versus good kingship, (Macbeth and Duncan) would have been popular at the royal court, where James 1 was busy developing the theory of divine right.

4. CHARACTERS

- a) **Macbeth** is a Scottish general and the thane of Glamis who is led to wicked thoughts by the prophecies of the three witches. Macbeth is a brave soldier and a powerful man. He is easily tempted into murder to fulfil his ambitions to the throne, and once he commits his first crime and is crowned King of Scotland, he embarks on further



atrocities with increasing ease.

- b) **Lady Macbeth** Macbeth's wife, a deeply ambitious woman who lusts for power and position. Early in the play she seems to be the stronger and more ruthless of the two, as she urges her husband to kill Duncan and seize the crown. After the bloodshed begins, however, Lady Macbeth falls victim to guilt and madness to an even greater degree than her husband. Her conscience affects her to such an extent that she eventually commits suicide.



- c) **King Duncan** The good King of Scotland whom Macbeth, in his ambition for the crown, murders. Duncan is the model of a virtuous, benevolent, and farsighted ruler. His death symbolizes the destruction of order in Scotland.



- d) **Banquo** A nobleman and Macbeth's friend (until Macbeth kills him).



Macbeth is haunted by his ghost.

- e) **Macduff** A Scottish nobleman. He eventually becomes a leader of the crusade to unseat Macbeth. Macbeth murders Macduff's wife and young son.



- f) **Malcolm** The son of Duncan, whose restoration to the throne signals Scotland's return to order following Macbeth's reign of terror.

- g) **Hecate** The goddess of witchcraft, who helps the three witches work their mischief on Macbeth.

- h) **Fleance** Banquo's son, who survives Macbeth's attempt to murder him.

- i) **Lennox and Ross:** Scottish noblemen.

- j) **The Murderers** A group of ruffians conscripted by Macbeth to murder Banquo, Fleance (whom they fail to kill), and Macduff's wife and children.

- k) **Lady Macduff** Macduff's wife. The scene in her castle provides our only glimpse of a domestic realm other than that of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. She and her home serve as contrasts to Lady Macbeth and the hellish world of Inverness.

- l) **Donalbain** Duncan's son and Malcolm's younger brother.

5. THEMES

- a) The Corrupting Power of Unchecked Ambition
- b) The Relationship Between Cruelty and Masculinity
- c) The Difference Between Kingship and Tyranny



6. MOTIFS are recurring structures, contrasts, and literary devices that can help to text's themes.

- a) **Hallucinations:** Visions and hallucinations recur throughout the play and serve as reminders of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's joint culpability for the growing body count.
- b) **Violence:** *Macbeth* is a famously violent play. Interestingly, most of the killings take place offstage, but throughout the play the characters provide the audience with gory descriptions of the carnage, from the opening scene where the captain describes Macbeth and Banquo wading in blood on the battlefield, to the endless references to the bloodstained hands of Macbeth and his wife. The action begins and ends with bloody battles.
- c) **Prophecy:** Prophecy sets *Macbeth's* plot in motion—namely, the witches' prophecy that Macbeth will become first thane of Cawdor and then king. The weird sisters make a number of other prophecies: they tell us that Banquo's heirs will be kings, that Macbeth should beware Macduff, that Macbeth is safe till Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane, and that no man born of woman can harm Macbeth.



7. SYMBOLS

- a) **Blood:** Blood is everywhere in *Macbeth*, beginning with the opening battle between the Scots and the Norwegians which is described in harrowing terms by the wounded captain in Act 1, scene 2. Blood comes to symbolize their guilt, and they begin to feel that their crimes have stained them in a way that cannot be washed clean.
- b) **The Weather:** Macbeth's grotesque murder spree is accompanied by a number of unnatural occurrences in the natural realm. From the thunder and lightning that accompany the witches' appearances to the terrible storms that rage on the night of Duncan's murder, these violations of the natural order reflect corruption in the moral and political orders.

Key quotes

"Fair is foul, and foul is fair." (*Witches Act I, Scene I*)

"If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me." (*Macbeth Act I, Scene III*)

"Yet do I fear thy nature; It is too full o' the milk of human kindness." (*Lady Macbeth Act I, Scene V*)

"Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under't." (*Lady Macbeth Act I, Scene V*)

"Is this a dagger which I see before me, The handle toward my hand?" (*Macbeth Act II, Scene I*)

