

## AQA GCSE LITERATURE MACBETH 100% SHEET



### 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).



### THE PLAY:

- *Macbeth* tells the story of a brave Scottish general (Macbeth) who receives a prophecy from 3 witches that one day he will become King of Scotland.
- After talking to his wife and thinking about the things he will gain, Macbeth murders King Duncan and becomes King. He is forced to commit more and more murders to protect himself.

### CONTEXT

- *Macbeth* was written in 1606, early in the reign of James I. James was the Scottish king too and gave money to Shakespeare's acting company. James I was interested in Witches and Supernatural.
- James I believed in the divine right of kings - that the monarch is chosen by God.

### CHARACTERS

- Macbeth** is a Scottish general and the thane of Glamis. Macbeth is a brave soldier and a powerful man. He is easily tempted into murder to fulfil his ambitions.
- Lady Macbeth** Macbeth's wife. A woman who lusts for power and position. Early in the play she seems to be the stronger and urges her husband to kill Duncan. After the bloodshed begins, however, Lady Macbeth becomes guilty. Her conscience affects her so much that she eventually commits suicide.
- King Duncan** The good King of Scotland who Macbeth kills. His death shows the destruction of order in Scotland.
- Banquo** A nobleman and Macbeth's friend (until Macbeth kills him). Macbeth is haunted by his ghost.
- Macduff** A Scottish nobleman. He eventually kills Macbeth. Macbeth murders Macduff's wife and young son.
- Malcolm** The son of Duncan.
- Hecate** The goddess of witchcraft, who helps the three witches.
- Fleance** Banquo's son, who survives Macbeth's attempt to murder him.
- Lennox and Ross:** Scottish noblemen.
- The Murderers** A group of ruffians ordered by Macbeth to murder Banquo, Fleance (whom they fail to kill), and Macduff's wife and children.
- Lady Macduff** Macduff's wife. Her castle is the opposite of Macbeth's - calm.
- Donalbain** Duncan's son and Malcolm's younger brother.



### THEMES

- The Corrupting Power of Unchecked Ambition**
- The Relationship Between Cruelty and Masculinity**
- The Difference Between Kingship and Tyranny**

### KEY TERMS: LEARN DEFINITIONS & SPELLINGS

- |             |                     |                  |
|-------------|---------------------|------------------|
| ✓ Soliloquy | ✓ Personification   | ✓ Light and dark |
| ✓ Simile    | ✓ Religious Imagery | ✓ Dramatic irony |
| ✓ Metaphor  | ✓ Symbolism         | ✓ Imagery        |

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

- a) **Hallucinations:** remind us of the murders and guilt.
- b) **Violence:** *Macbeth* is a famously violent play. Interestingly, most of the killings take place offstage. 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.

## **SYMBOLS**

- a) **Blood:** Blood is everywhere in *Macbeth*, beginning with the opening battle between the Scots and the Norwegians which is described 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 murder spree takes place whilst other strange, unnatural things are happening: from the thunder and lightning when the witches' appear, to the terrible storms that rage on the night of Duncan's murder. These things reflect corruption and evil.



## **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*)

