

Macbeth

GCSE English · Follows the national curriculum

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

1. Worked example

Track Macbeth's ambition across the play in four moments.

Step 1 · Act 1

'Stars, hide your fires' (1.4): ambition stirs but is hidden; 'Vaulting ambition' (1.7): he knows it is his only motive.

Step 2 · Act 2

The murder; immediate guilt: 'Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?'

Step 3 · Act 3

Ambition turns to paranoia: he has Banquo killed; 'full of scorpions is my mind'.

Step 4 · Act 5

Emptiness: 'Life's but a walking shadow'; ambition has left him with nothing.

Answer: Ambition moves from secret desire to action, to paranoia, to despair.

Check: Beginning, turning point, end: whole-play coverage.

2. Now try one with the steps

Analyse a short quotation: 'Look like th' innocent flower, / But be the serpent under't' (1.5).

Step 1 · Method

Step 2 · Connotations

Step 3 · Effect

Step 4 · Context

Answer:

3. Practice

Show your working. The marks tell you how much is expected.

1. How many witches meet Macbeth and Banquo? Write the number. [1]

2. In which act does Lady Macbeth sleepwalk? Write the number. [1]

3. Who kills Macbeth? [1]
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4. Which title does Macbeth gain in Act 1, witches predicted? [1]
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5. Who is crowned king at the end of the play? [1]
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6. What is the Divine Right of Kings? [2]
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7. Why is Banquo a foil to Macbeth? [2]
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8. Explain the irony of 'A little water clears us of this deed'. [2]
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9. What does 'Fair is foul, and foul is fair' suggest about the world of the play? [2]
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10. Analyse 'Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself / And falls on th' other' (1.7). [3]
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11. How does Shakespeare use the shift from verse to prose in Act 5 Scene 1? [2]
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12. Give one argument that the witches cause Macbeth's downfall and one that they do not. [2]
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13. Write a thesis for: 'How does Shakespeare present guilt in Macbeth?' [2]
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14. Explain one way the 'Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow' soliloquy could make the audience feel some sympathy for Macbeth. [3]

4. Before you hand it in

Retelling the plot scene by scene.

Organise by argument: each paragraph proves part of your thesis with methods.

'The witches made Macbeth kill Duncan.'

Weigh their influence against his own 'black and deep desires'.

Misquoting or inventing quotations.

Learn 15–20 short, exact quotations covering characters and themes.

Generic context: 'In Shakespeare's time people believed in witches.'

Tie it in: 'King James's interest in witchcraft makes the witches' equivocation especially sinister.'