

MACBETH PLOT SUMMARY

- You will need to write a 650–800 word essay for coursework on the play Macbeth by Shakespeare.
- Will account for 20% of your final grade
- The final mark is out of 30.
- We recommend buying an edition of Macbeth with translations to aid your studies.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- There are 5 acts.
- There are 27 scenes
- Set in Dunsinane, Scotland 1040–1057

LEADING CHARACTERS:

Duncan	Malcom	Macbeth	Lady Macbeth
			
The King of Scotland. Embodiment of the Elizabethan belief that a king was appointed as God's deputy on Earth as he was deemed a kind King.	Duncan's eldest son. Originally Duncan's heir, the next king of Scotland and is the main suspect after Duncan is murdered.	He is the leader of Duncan's army and known as a mighty and ambitious warrior and the main character. A witches prophecy leads him to murder King Duncan so he can become king. However he lives with guilt and he	Macbeth's wife. Very ambitious and urges Macbeth to kill Duncan for power. She ultimately doesn't listen to his doubts and their relationship crumbles as her downfall takes over

		becomes addicted to murder.	and Macbeth loses control.
Banquo 	Macduff 	Ross	The Witches 
Macbeth's co commander in Duncan's army. Also hears the witches' prophecies but resists the temptation of murdering Duncan .	A Scottish thane who arrives after the murder of Duncan and is the lead opposition to Macbeth.	A Scottish thane. Utilised to commentate what is going on outside of Scotland.	Three witches and called 'the weird sisters'. They are the ultimate motive of the murders.

QUICK SYNOPSIS:

ACT 1

SCENE 1 - A prologue, the witches discuss their evil plan to meet with Macbeth

SCENE 2 - King Duncan is told that the battle is successful and of the bravery displayed by Macbeth and Banquo and labels Macbeth as the 'Thane of Cawdor' but Macbeth doesn't know yet.

SCENE 3 - The witches tell their strange prophecies of who becomes the next king to Macbeth and Banquo. Ross and Angus arrive into the play to tell Macbeth he is the new Thane of Cawdor as the previous one has died.

SCENE 4 - Duncan announces that his son will be the next king and Macbeth begins to worry as this is his chance and the witches' words are in the back of his mind.

SCENE 5 - Lady Macbeth reads a letter explaining what has happened written by Macbeth. She hosts a banquet for king Duncan and other guests.

SCENE 6 - King Duncan and others go to Macbeth's castle and are welcomed by Lady Macbeth.

SCENE 7 - Macbeth leaves the dinner due to his thoughts of murdering the king, but Lady Macbeth doesn't allow this and eagers him to kill Duncan again.

ACT 2

SCENE 1 - Banquo and his son, Fleance are going to bed and they run into Macbeth preparing to kill Duncan.

SCENE 2 - Macbeth has murdered Duncan. Lady Macbeth takes the daggers from her husband who is regretting his choice.

SCENE 3 - King Duncan's death is discovered. The porter is woken up from his drunken sleep by Macduff and Lennox who go to see the king but discover he is dead. Macbeth panics and kills Duncan's attendants. Duncan's sons are concerned for their safety and run away.

SCENE 4 - Ross and an Old Man discuss the events that occurred during Duncan's murder. They learn from Macduff that Duncan's sons have fled and that Macbeth has chosen to be the next king.

ACT 3

SCENE 1 - Banquo is suspicious of Macbeth as he was there during the witches prophecy. Macbeth arranges for him and his son to be murdered by two assassins.

SCENE 2 - Lady Macbeth is now concerned. Macbeth tells her he has everything under control, but doesn't reveal his plans.

SCENE 3 - Banquo is murdered but Fleance (his son) escapes,

SCENE 4 - Macbeth and Lady Macbeth host another banquet for guests. The Ghost of Banquo appears to Macbeth and this startles Lady Macbeth and guests as Macbeth starts acting peculiar.

SCENE 5 - The witches and their Queen prepare for their next meeting with Macbeth.

SCENE 6 - Malcolm is in England, Macduff has joined him and the English king is raising an army to fight Macbeth.

ACT 4

SCENE 1 - The witches meet with Macbeth and promise to answer his questions. However after this meeting Macbeth is concerned and alarmed.

SCENE 2- Lady Macduff questions Ross about Macduff's escape and tries to explain the situation to her young son. She is warned to flee the palace however it is too late and murderers rush into the room and kill them.

SCENE 3 - Macduff has reunited with Malcolm with Edward the Confessor (the King of England.), both Macduff and Malcolm are suspicious of each other and question each other. Plans are created for an invasion of Scotland by the English king. Macduff is made aware of the murder of his wife and child.

ACT 5

SCENE 1 - Lady Macbeth's downfall begins, she sleepwalks and dreams of her and her husband killing Duncan. Lady Macbeth talks about the blood on her hands.

SCENE 2- A part of the invading army marches towards where Macbeth is, Macbeth begins to panic.

SCENE 3 - When Macbeth is told of the armies searching for him, he attempts to comfort himself by reading the witches' prophecies. He talks to the doctor about Lady Macbeth's condition, then sets off to battle.

SCENE 4 - Malcolm's soldiers camouflage with leaves and branches from Birnam wood to conceal their attack on Macbeth.

SCENE 5 - The peak of the battle, although Macbeth isn't part of it yet. Macbeth is told his wife has died. A messenger tells Macbeth armies are approaching him from the woods.

SCENE 6 – The battle commences as the army attacks Macbeth's castle.

SCENE 7 – Macbeth encounters Young Siward (supporter of Malcom) and kills him.

Macduff comes in search of Macbeth and they fight and Macbeth is eventually murdered. Malcom is now reigning as King.

CONTEXT:

- Unlike Of Mice and Men, context will not impact your essay nearly as much.
- Aim for a piece of context embedded in each paragraph.

WHEN IS IT SET?:

- Macbeth is set in 11th century medieval Scotland.
- From around 1040 – 1057
- However, it was WRITTEN by William Shakespeare in 1606 in the Jacobean era. So when referring to Shakespeare's intentions, refer to this era.

WHERE IS IT SET?:

- Macbeth is set in medieval Scotland
- Some of the main settings are :
 - Inverness = Macbeth's castle before becoming King
 - Dunisnane = Macbeth's castle after becoming King
 - The Heath = Where Macbeth meets with the three witches
 - Birnam Wood = The witches tell Macbeth he will never lose a battle until Birnam Wood moves to his castle. Malcolm does this at the end.
 - King's palace in England = Where Malcom and Macduff meet to discuss the action against Macbeth and their return to Scotland.

THE KING'S INFLUENCE:

- The whole play was likely written by Shakespeare to appease King James I, who was deeply interested in witchcraft and claimed to be part of Banquo's ancestry (who is a hero in the play).
- It was first performed in 1606 in front of King James I at Hampton Court Palace.
- In honour of King James' coronation, Shakespeare changed the name of his actors from 'The Chamberlains Men' to 'The Kings Men'.
- It was important for the King to like Shakespeare as he had ruling over what companies could work. Luckily he gave Shakespeare full influence to play in any building.
- His own father was killed by **gunpowder** - and The Porter alludes to the events of The Gunpowder Plot of 1605 :
 - The Porter rants about an "equivocator" - deliberately saying unclear words to get out of something, who could commit treason "for God's sake", mocking Father Henry Garnet who was accused of using this technique when questioned about treason and the Gunpowder plot
 - The assassination of King Duncan mirrors the plotters' intent to blow up King James I and Parliament, shows regicide as an ultimate disruption of the natural and moral order.
 - Lady Macbeth advises her husband to "look like th' innocent flower, but be the serpent under't", mirroring the gunpowder plot medal for King James featuring a snake hiding among lilies and roses.

THE GREAT CHAIN OF BEING:

- A lot of people at this time believed in the Great Chain of Being - the idea that every living thing on Earth was assigned a place by God.
- God was top of the chain and there was a strict descending order.

THE DIVINE RIGHT OF KINGS:

- The idea that the King was appointed by God and to go against the King was to go against God.
- King Duncan was the embodiment of this
- King James I also believed in this strongly

THE WITCHES:

- In 1589 James married Anne of Denmark, however when they finally went to meet each other many storms got in the way and it was belief that their marriage was cursed
- In Denmark the idea of witches is that they were agents of the Devil and even witch hunting took place where 'witches' were burnt.
- James even took place in witch trials
- In 1597 James wrote a book called *Daemonologie* - a book about magic and witchcraft and also makes it abundantly clear that most witches are women.

JACOBAN WOMEN:

Lady Macbeth being an unconventional wife:

- The typical marriage in the Jacobean era was particularly sexist and did not allow women to be superior to the man. In *Macbeth* this is the opposite primarily at the beginning of the play.
- During the Jacobean era, it was unusual for the man in the relationship to show endearment towards their partner.
- Shakespeare deliberately presents Lady Macbeth as working deceitfully against her protagonist husband, rather than working alongside him, in the daring task of murdering King Duncan, demonstrating her playing the role of an unconventional wife.
- In Act 3 Macbeth and Lady Macbeth become more distant, Shakespeare

now presents Lady Macbeth as the weaker and more traditional Jacobean wife in the relationship, contrasting how the relationship was at the beginning of the play.

Duncan image: 210 x 240 210 x 240

Malcolm 231 x 231 231 x 231

Macbeth 400 x 400 400 x 400

Lady Macbeth 553 x 678 553 x 678

Banquo 200 x 200 200 x 200

Macduff 231 x 370 231 x 370

The witches 231 x 370 231 x 370

Some scene summaries and character summaries helped written from Oxford School Shakespeare: Oxford School Shakespeare: Macbeth.