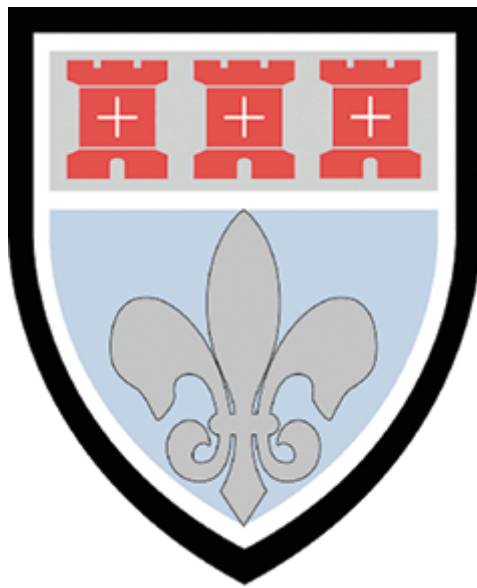


St Mary's English Department



GCSE English Literature Revision Guide Macbeth by William Shakespeare



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Plot Summary

On the edges of a battlefield, three witches meet and plot, waiting for Macbeth who, with Banquo, his comrade-in-arms, soon encounters them. They greet him as Thane of Glamis, then as his title, then as Thane of Cawdor, and finally as the future King. They are scarcely gone when word arrives that the Scottish forces have been victorious and, as a token of his favor, Duncan, King of Scotland, has bestowed the title of Thane of Cawdor on Macbeth. Musing on the witches' prophecy, Macbeth hurries home to his wife, in advance of Duncan's visit.

Lady Macbeth receives the news from her husband and, unlike Macbeth who would rather not pursue the matter too forcefully, plots to kill Duncan. The King is their guest that night and, by getting his attendants drunk, she tells him that they can kill Duncan and pin the murder on his guards. Troubled by his conscience, Macbeth almost backs out at the last minute, but his wife forces him to go through with the plan. Duncan's body is discovered the next morning by Macduff, the Thane of Fife, and when they flee, Duncan's sons Malcolm and Donalbain are blamed for the murder.

Macbeth is crowned King, but rules uneasily, partly because the prophesy of the witches was also heard by Banquo to whom they promised his children would someday rule. Fearful both of Banquo and the truth of the witches' predictions, Macbeth arranges with three murderers to have his friend, along with his son Fleance, killed. The attempt succeeds only partly as Fleance escapes and, during a banquet, the ghost of Banquo returns to haunt Macbeth. In one of the most famous scenes in Shakespeare, Macbeth incriminates himself before the assembled company by his words to the ghost, whom only he can see. The nobles leave the hall, suspicious and wondering at what they've heard. Lady Macbeth consoles her husband, who resolves to continue in his bloody path.

General unrest grows as Macbeth, ruling from a position of fear and distrust, becomes a despot. In desperation, he seeks out the witches again, who summon three apparitions; the first predicts that Macduff will unseat Macbeth, the second says that "none of woman born" poses a threat, and the third predicts that Macbeth will never fail until Birnam Wood comes to his castle at Dunsinane. Reassured, he presses them for more news, and they produce a line of eight kings, all descended from Banquo, who will succeed him. Macbeth sends the murderers to Macduff's castle where they find that he had fled to England, but they kill his wife and child.

Meanwhile, troubled by her conscience, Lady Macbeth sleepwalks, reliving the night of the murder of Duncan. When one of her gentlewomen consults a doctor, her secret is revealed.

In England, Malcolm is raising an army and preparing to win back his father's kingdom. On the march toward Dunsinane - where Macbeth has taken refuge, still believing in the witches prophecies, Malcolm orders his troops to carry boughs from nearby Birnam Wood to disguise their numbers. As he prepares for the assault, Macbeth hears news from his sentries: Birnam Wood seems to be moving, heading for Dunsinane. Taking comfort that "none of woman born" can harm him, however, he arms himself and confronts Macduff. Boasting of the prophesy, Macbeth hears Macduff tell him that he was indeed not "of woman born" but was instead delivered by caesarean section. Realizing all hope is lost, Macbeth takes flight and is hunted down by Macduff as Malcolm and his forces take the castle. Victory is declared, and Malcolm, now rightful King of Scotland, leads his followers on to Scone for his coronation.

Act by Act Activities

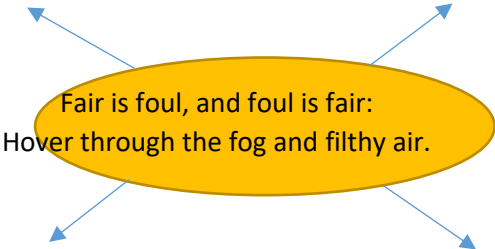
LIT AO1, AO2, AO3

Act One Scene One

The three witches meet in a storm and decide when they will meet up again.

AO1: What does the weather suggest to the audience about these characters?

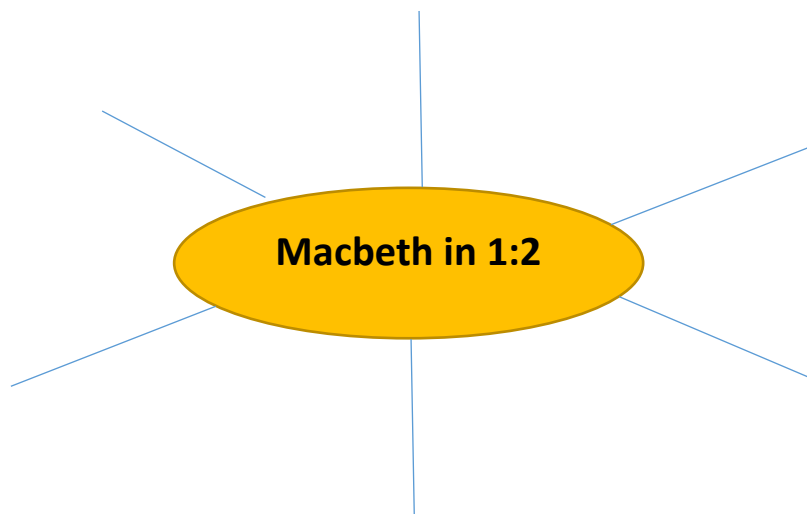
AO2: Why are the lines below important? What do they establish about this play?



(from *BBC Bitesize*): In Shakespeare's time people believed in witches. They were people who had made a pact with the Devil in exchange for supernatural powers. If your cow was ill, it was easy to decide it had been cursed. If there was plague in your village, it was because of a witch. If the beans didn't grow, it was because of a witch. Witches might have a familiar – a pet, or a toad, or a bird – which was supposed to be a demon advisor. People accused of being witches tended to be old,

Till he faced the slave;
Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him, 15
Till he unseam'd him from the nave to the chaps,
And fix'd his head upon our battlements.

AO1 & AO2: What do we learn about Macbeth in this extract?



LIT AO1

Act One Scene Three

The three witches talk about what they've been doing since they last met – it involves 'killing' and 'revenge'. Macbeth and Banquo appear, and the witches hail Macbeth as 'thane of Glamis...thane of Cawdor...that shall be king hereafter'. They also hail Banquo as 'Lesser than Macbeth, but greater...Not so happy, yet much happier...Thou shall get kings, though thou be none.' The witches then disappear, leaving Macbeth and Banquo to ponder their words. Ross and Angus arrive and tell Macbeth he is now thane of Cawdor. Macbeth privately ponders the possibility that he might be king, concluding it is best to let the future unravel by itself.

(from www.elizabethanenglandlife.com): Men assumed a dominant position in [Jacobean] society. It was the man of the house who worked and fetched for food to keep his family alive. Apart from being the sole bread earner of the family, the eldest male member was the head of the house. Everyone had to obey him and do as was being told... Jacobean women continued to live a life that was sub-ordinate to men. They were supposed to obey what was told to them. The main responsibility of married women was to take care of the household matters and raise children.

AO2, AO3 – How much does Lady Macbeth follow the traditional model of a Jacobean woman? Annotate the following extracts, thinking about how Shakespeare is using language to present her to the audience:

Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief!

look like the innocent flower,
But be the serpent under't.

Act One Scene Six

Act One Scene Seven

The scene opens with a SOLILOQUY (a speech that only the audience hears, revealing a character's inner thoughts and feelings) from Macbeth, in which he is wrestling with his conscience: should he kill Duncan or not? Lady Macbeth enters, and Macbeth tells her he will not go through with it. Lady Macbeth questions her husband, and once again convinces him to murder the king.

*****SPOILER ALERT – Macbeth murders A LOT of people besides Duncan, before he is murdered at the end of the play*****

AO1: Why does Shakespeare allow us to hear Macbeth's thoughts and feelings at this point in the play? Annotate the extract below, focusing on what is going through Macbeth's mind:

Macbeth:

But in these cases

We still have judgment here; that we but teach Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice	5
To our own lips. He's here in double trust; First, as I am his kinsman and his subject, Strong both against the deed; then, as his host, Who should against his murderer shut the door, Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan	10
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been So clear in his great office, that his virtues Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against The deep damnation of his taking-off; And pity, like a naked new-born babe,	15
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed	

Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only 20
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on the other.

Act Two Scene One

Banquo tells his son, Fleance, that he cannot sleep even though he feels tired. Banquo and Macbeth talk; Macbeth lies to Banquo and says he 'think[s] not of' the witches and their prophecy. Macbeth performs his second soliloquy, claiming to see 'a dagger' floating in the air before him and leading him to perform the murder of Duncan.

AO2 – At the start of this scene, the atmosphere is much changed. How is this apparent in the extract below?

BANQUO

Hold, take my sword. There's husbandry in heaven;
Their candles are all out. Take thee that too.
A heavy summons lies like lead upon me,
And yet I would not sleep: merciful powers,
Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature
Gives way to in repose!

Enter MACBETH, and a Servant with a torch

Give me my sword.
Who's there?

AO1, AO2: Macbeth delivers his second soliloquy, in which he is preparing himself to kill Duncan. How does Shakespeare use language to show the changes in Macbeth's character? Pick 2 quotes and create a mindmap of what they show:

Act Two Scene Three

The porter (one of the servants at Macbeth's castle) is complaining about the banging at the gates, comparing himself to a doorman at the gates of hell. Macduff enters and asks to see the king. Macbeth tells him he's still asleep. Whilst Macduff goes to see Duncan, Lennox tells Macbeth about a terrible storm the previous night. Macduff returns, telling them the king is dead. Macbeth and

Lennox go to see the king, and Duncan's sons (Donalbain and Malcolm) appear. Macbeth comes back and tells them he has killed the servants, which Macduff questions. Lady Macbeth arrives, and promptly faints. Macduff, Banquo, Macbeth and the other lords agree to assemble in the hall shortly. Malcolm and Donalbain, fearing for their own lives, flee to England and Ireland respectively.

AO2 – A lot happens in this scene, which starts off humorously and ends with significant plot developments.

1) Why do you think Shakespeare decided to include a comic scene at this point in the play?

2) Why do you think we are introduced to Macduff at this point in the play?

AO3 – In Jacobean England, people still largely believed in the **divine right of kings** – the belief that God put the king on the throne, and therefore only God could remove him. An attack on the king was an attack on God Himself, which is a belief that the Stuart kings such as James I promoted in order to validate their claim to the throne.

How would Shakespeare's audience have reacted to the murder of King Duncan? Why? (REGICIDE = murder of a king – use this word in your response).

LIT AO1 AO2

Act Two Scene Four

Ross discusses the ominous events of the past few days with an old man. Macduff arrives and provides exposition: Donalbain and Malcolm are suspected murderers as they have run away; Macbeth is going to be declared king.

Pathetic fallacy = when the weather reflects the mood or coming events in a text.

AO1, AO2 – Shakespeare uses pathetic fallacy a lot in this play, and the start of Act Two Scene Four is no exception. What do the following lines allude to?

by the clock, 'tis day,
And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp:
Is't night's predominance, or the day's shame,
That darkness does the face of earth entomb,
When living light should kiss it?

AO1, AO2, AO3 – Write a paragraph about how the weather has been important in the play so far. You should refer to other parts of the play as well as this scene.

Old Man: 'Tis unnatural,
Even like the deed that's done. On Tuesday last,
A falcon, towering in her pride of place,
Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and kill'd.

What is Shakespeare using an owl as a symbol for? Annotate the quotes above with your ideas. Try to consider alternative interpretations as well.

Act Five Scene One

In Dunsinane Castle, a doctor and gentlewoman discuss the changes in Lady Macbeth, who has been sleepwalking. She enters, sleepwalking, speaking to herself about the blood that she cannot remove from her hands.

AO1, AO2 – This is the first time we have seen Lady Macbeth onstage since Act Three Scene Four. How has she changed? Focus your ideas around the extract below, annotating it and drawing comparisons with her role in the rest of the play. Consider how some of her words can be seen as metaphorical as well as literal:

Out, damned spot! out, I say!--One: two: why,
then, 'tis time to do't.--Hell is murky!--Fie, my
lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard? What need we
fear who knows it, when none can call our power to
account?--Yet who would have thought the old man
to have had so much blood in him.

AO1, AO2 - This is Lady Macbeth's last scene – her death is reported to us later in the play. Why do you think Shakespeare chose to include this scene in the play?

AO1, AO2: One of the most famous speeches in 'Macbeth' is delivered by Macbeth after he hears of his wife's death. What does Macbeth mean? What is he saying about life, and the decisions he has made?

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

LIT AO1 AO2

Act Five Scene Six-Eleven

Malcolm, Siward and Macduff advance on Macbeth's castle with tree boughs as their shields. They leave the stage.

Macbeth repeats the witches' prophecy that he cannot be killed by someone 'of woman born.' Young Siward approaches and fights Macbeth, and is killed. Macbeth leaves.

Macduff, enters, searching for the 'tyrant' Macbeth. He leaves.

Siward and Malcolm enter, heading for Macbeth's castle. They leave the stage.

Macbeth enters, declaring he will not kill himself. Macduff enters and they fight. Macbeth declares he cannot be killed 'by one of woman born'. Macduff replies that he was 'from his mother's womb untimely ripped.' Macbeth says he will not

fight him. Macduff tells him to yield and they will put him on show. Macbeth says he doesn't want to live to see Malcolm become king. They leave the stage fighting.

Malcolm, Siward and Ross enter. Ross tells Siward his son is dead; Siward is glad to hear he died as a hero. Macduff returns to the stage with Macbeth's head. He declares Malcolm king. He declares Macduff, Siward and Ross the first earls of Scotland, and recalls his brother to Scotland.

AO1 – Why does Macbeth's death appear offstage? Why is he beheaded? Is it important that he dies fighting? Why?

AO2 – After Macbeth's death, the play ends quite abruptly, with a short speech from Malcolm vowing to address the wrongs done to Scotland by 'this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen'. Why do you think the play ends here?

AO1 – Macbeth is called many things in the play – which words best describe him in your mind?

- | | | | | | |
|--------|-------------|---------|-----------|----------|---------|
| Brave | Valiant | Worthy | Gentleman | Noble | Partner |
| | Worthiest | | | | |
| Cousin | Peerless | Kinsman | Great | Coward | Man |
| | Good lord | | | | |
| Royal | Highness | Wayward | Spiteful | Wrathful | Wicked |
| | Treacherous | | | | |

Traitor

Butcher

Devilish

Sinful

Fiend

Villain

Usurper

Characters



Character activities:

1. Rank the characters in order of importance at the beginning and the end of the play.
2. Think of 5 adjectives to describe each character.
3. Draw a diagram to illustrate the relationships between the characters.
4. List the characters in order in which they appear in the scene? Do you notice anything interesting about this? We see Macbeth long after we first hear about him, for instance.

5. Choose one character and draw a diagram to show how they change through the play.
6. Do any characters act as “foils” in order to provide a contrast with others?

Context



Witchcraft

The persecution of Catholics



The chivalric code

Religious beliefs in the 1600s



Masculinity and femininity in the 1600s

The Gunpowder Plot



Contextual Activities

1. Research each contextual issue on the previous page.
2. Summarise each issue in 5 bullet points, explaining how each issue links to the play.
3. Practice making connections between your language analysis and the contextual issues on the previous page.
4. Practice using the following sentence stems to ensure you are including contextual links in your essay:
 - In Jacobean society.....
 - To a Jacobean audience.....
 - A Jacobean audience would have reacted with _____ to this line because.....
5. Make links between context and the following quotations:

1. "I must report they were as cannons overcharged with double cracks"	
2. "Come to my woman's breasts and take my milk for gall"	
3. "I could not say Amen"	
4. "Finger of birth-strangled babe, ditch delivered by a drab"	
5. "More needs she the divine than they physician".	
6. "I begin to doubt the equivocation of the fiend that lies like truth"	

Glossary

Macbeth GCSE English Literature - Key Vocabulary

Term	Definition	Example from Macbeth
alliteration	The repetition of the same sounds at the beginning of adjacent and closely connected words	
ambiguity	Being open to more than one interpretation	
anaphora	The repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses	
antithesis	The opposite	
aside	A line intended to be heard by the audience but not the other characters	
assonance	The repetition of vowel sounds	
blank verse	Verse without rhyme, usually in iambic pentameter	
chiasmus	A device in which words are repeated in reverse order	
chivalry	The knightly system and its moral and social code	
comic relief	Humorous content in a play intended to offset more serious events	
conventions	Usual and expected features of a genre	
dramatic irony	When something is clear to the audience but unknown to the characters	
equivocation	Ambiguous language used to conceal something or avoid committing oneself	
eponymous	Named after a particular person	
euphemism	A mild or indirect expression used instead of a more direct or blunt statement, especially when the topic is unpleasant or embarrassing	
hendiadys	Expression of a single idea by 2 words connected with and	
heroism	Great bravery	
hubris	Excessive pride and self confidence	
iambic pentameter	A line of verse with 10 syllables, made up of 5 pairs - one unstressed syllable and one stressed.	
imagery	Visually descriptive language	

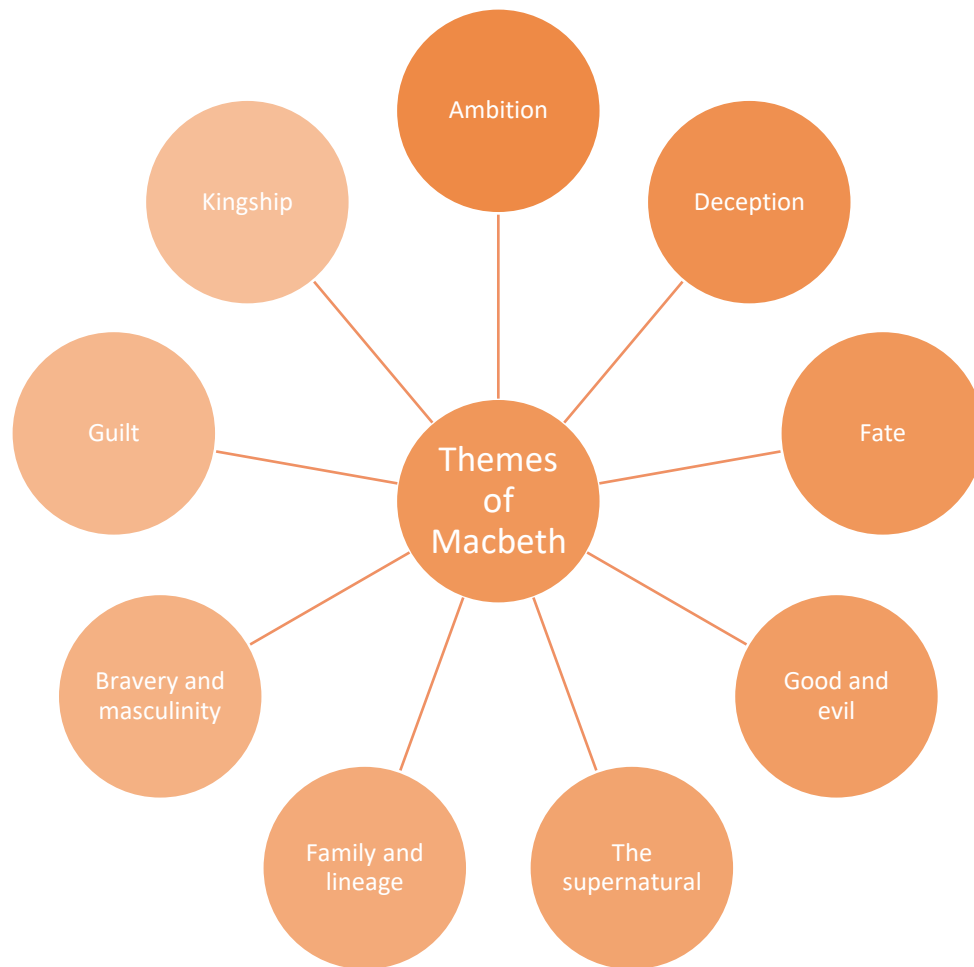
Jacobean	Relating to the rule of James I of England, from 1603 to 1625	
nihilism	The belief that life is meaningless	
paternal lineage/patrilineal	A series of male ancestors	
pathetic fallacy	Attribution of human feelings to the natural world	
patriarchy	A system of society in which men are more powerful	
prose	Language with no rhyme, rhythm or metrical structure which has the natural structure of speech	
soliloquy	The act of a character speaking one's thoughts alone when they are by themselves	
stichomythia	Dialogue between two characters using single, short and fast paced lines	
tragedy	A play dealing with unhappy events, usually involving the downfall and eventual death of a main, powerful character	
Trochaic tetrameter	A meter made up of 4 trochees – a trochee is a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable	
tyranny	Cruel and oppressive government	

Recurrent images

Below are some images which occur frequently in the play. Find at least 3 quotations for each of them and explain why Shakespeare has used these patterns of imagery.

Image	Quotation	Significance
Hands		
Sleep		
Blood		
Weapons		
Dress and costume		
Animals		

Themes



Theme activities

1. For each theme, list your top 5 quotations from the play which relate to it.
2. For each theme, write a paragraph explain its significance, using example from the play.
3. Think about Shakespeare's wider purpose – what is he trying to tell us about each of these big ideas?

Key quotations

Can you fill in the gaps from these key quotations from the play?

Key quotations from Act 1

7. " _____ through the fog and filthy air"
8. "Till he _____ him from the naves to the chaps"
9. "I must report they were as _____ overcharged with double cracks"
10. " _____ shall neither night nor day hang upon his penthouse lid"
11. "Why do you dress me in _____ robes"
12. "There's no art to find the mind's construction in the _____"
13. "Stars hide your _____, let not light see my black and deep desires"
14. "I do fear thy nature is too full of the _____ of human kindness to catch the nearest way"
15. Come to my woman's breasts and take my milk for _____"
16. "Your _____ my Thane is as a book"
17. "If it twere done when 'tis done then 'twere well it were done _____"
18. "We will proceed no further in this _____"
19. "But screw your _____ to the sticking place and we'll not fail"
20. "False _____ must hide what the false heart doth know"

Key quotations from Act 2

1. There's husbandry in heaven, their _____ are all out.
2. This _____ he greets your wife withal.
3. I dreamt last night of the three _____ _____. To you they have showed some truth.
4. Is this a _____ which I see before me
5. It is the _____ business which informs thus to mine eyes.
6. Thou sure and firm-set earth _____ not my steps.
7. Had he not resembled my _____ as he slept, I had done't.
8. I could not say _____
9. Macbeth does murder _____
10. Will all great _____ ocean was this blood clean from my hand?
11. A little _____ clears us of this deed.
12. O _____ lady, tis not for you to hear what I can speak.
13. Here lay Duncan, his silver skin laced with his _____ blood.
14. There's _____ in men's smiles.

Key quotations from Act 3

1. I fear thou play'st most _____ for't
2. Our fears in _____ stick deep.
3. We have scorched the _____ not killed it.
4. After life's fitful fever he _____ well.
5. Make our faces vizards to our _____.
6. Be innocent of the knowledge dearest _____.
7. Is he _____?
8. My lord is often thus and hath been from his _____.
9. It will have _____ they say.
10. You lack the season of all natures, _____.

Key quotations from Act 4.

1. Finger of birth-strangled _____ ditch delivered by a drab.
2. Beware the Thane of _____
3. Be _____, bold and resolute.
4. The _____ of Macduff I will surprise
5. O nation miserable, with an untitled _____ bloody sceptred.
6. Alas poor country, almost afraid to know itself. It cannot be called our mother, but our _____.
7. Your castle is surprised, your wife and _____ savagely slaughtered.
8. Let us make medicine of our great _____.
9. All my pretty _____ and their dam..?
10. Be this the whetsone of your _____.

Key quotations from Act 5

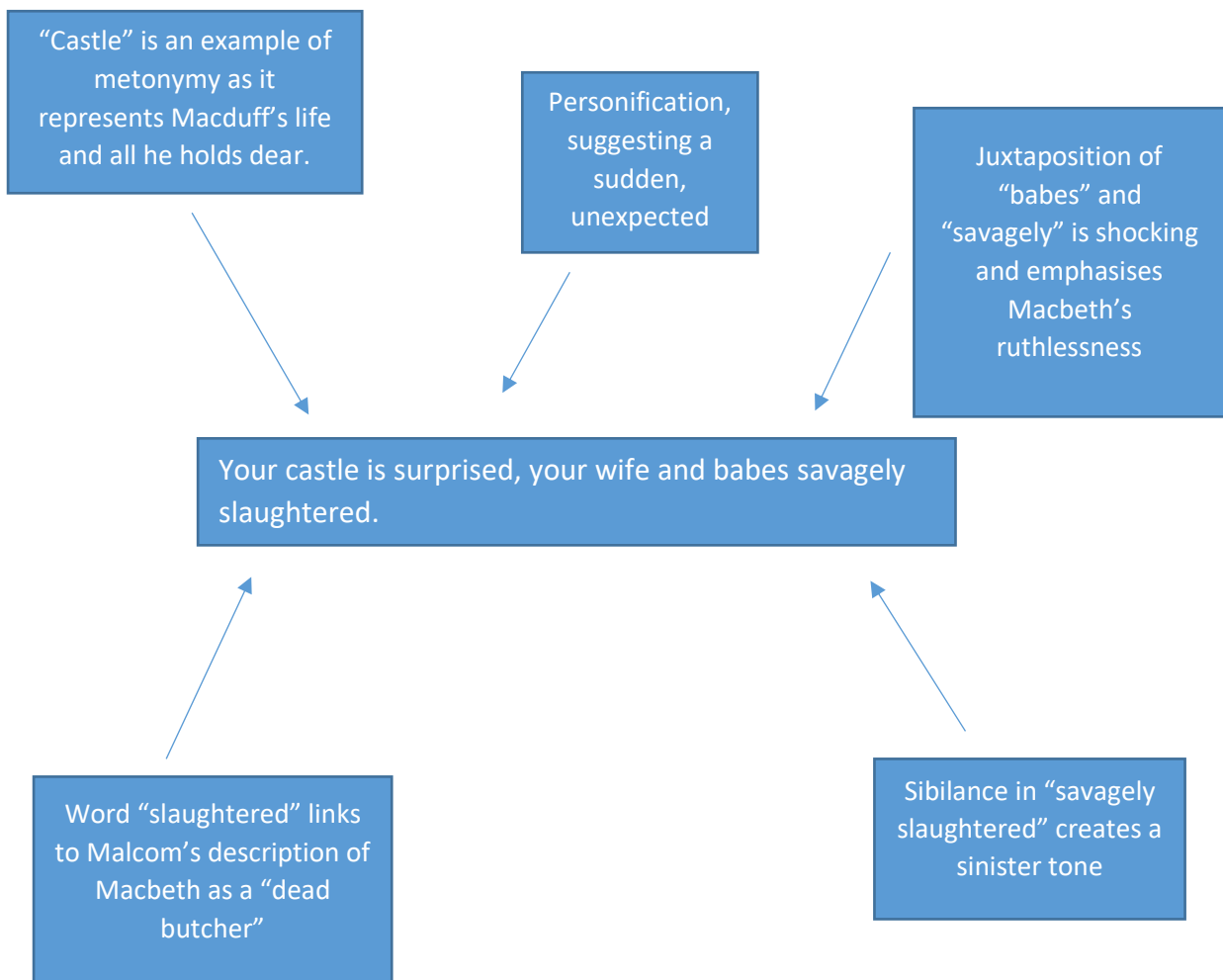
1. All the _____ of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.
2. More needs she the _____ than they physician.
3. Now does he feel his _____ murders sticking upon his hands.
4. Those he commands move only in command, nothing in _____.
5. Let every soldier hew him down a _____.
6. I have almost forgot the taste of _____.
7. And all our _____ have lighted fools the way to dusty death.
8. I begin to doubt the _____ of the fiend that lies like truth.
9. I would not wish them to a fairer _____.
10. This dead _____ and his fiend like queen.

Key quotations activities

1. Make flashcards with these key quotations and test yourself on them.
2. For each quotation, can you identify who says it?
3. Analyse the language of each quotation.
4. Group the quotations together in terms of character.
5. Group the quotations together in terms of theme.
6. Group the quotations together in terms of imagery.

Language Analysis

The following example demonstrates how to analyse language in detail:



Example question:

In this scene, Macduff has just discovered King Duncan's body.

MACDUFF

Approach the chamber, and destroy your sight
With a new Gorgon. Do not bid me speak.
See, and then speak yourselves.

*Exeunt **MACBETH** and **LENNOX***

Awake, awake!
Ring the alarum bell. Murder and treason!
Banquo and Donalbain! Malcolm! Awake!
Shake off this downy sleep, death's counterfeit,
And look on death itself! Up, up, and see
The great doom's image! Malcolm! Banquo!
As from your graves rise up, and walk like sprites,
To countenance this horror! Ring the bell

*Bell rings. Enter **LADY MACBETH***

LADY MACBETH

What's the business,
That such a hideous trumpet calls to parley
The sleepers of the house? Speak, speak!

MACDUFF

O gentle lady,
'Tis not for you to hear what I can speak:
The repetition, in a woman's ear,
Would murder as it fell.

Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare present attitudes to murder in this scene.

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents murder in this scene.
- How Shakespeare presents murder in the play as a whole.

Example of paragraph

Macduff is horrified when he discovers Duncan's body, and speaks in short, exclamatory fragments which emphasize his sense of shock and horror at the murder. At one point he says to Lady Macbeth "O gentle lady, 'tis not for you to hear what I can speak". This is an important example of dramatic irony as of course, the audience know that Lady Macbeth is partly responsible for the murder of Duncan, and we know from her speech in which she invited malevolent spirits to "unsex" her that she is not at all a conventional "lady" according to Jacobean ideals of femininity. However, later in the play, Lady Macbeth does become incredibly psychologically disturbed by the events which she played such a key role in, which forces the audience to consider whether Macduff was actually correct in his implication that the details of Duncan's murder are too much for her. Lady Macbeth arguably hinted at this herself in Act 2 Scene 1 when she claims that she would have murdered Duncan herself had "had me not resembled (her) father as he slept". This admission of humanity and vulnerability could suggest that Lady Macbeth's psychological unravelling occurs earlier in the play than is conventionally thought.

Can you find:

- Evidence
- Subject terminology
- Audience reaction
- Links to context
- Links to elsewhere in the play

Act by Act Revision

Complete the table below.

Act	What happens?	Key soliloquys	Most important quotation
Act 1			
Act 2			
Act 3			
Act 4			
Act 5			