

	Key Ideas	Language/Word analysis	Form and Structure	Context	Shakespeare's intentions
Character of Macbeth	<p>Violent: As the play progresses, Macbeth's violent nature seems to grow and his motives for violence also change. Macbeth 'unseamed him from the nave to the chaps' – portraying a sophisticated violence. However, the motif of blood later displays how unskilful he is with murder later on in the play. While before the blood from his weapon 'smoked', later on it haunts him as he questions 'Will all great Neptune's oceans wash this blood clean from my hand?'. This rhetorical question demonstrates how the confidence earlier associated with his violent nature has disappeared. Now that he has committed regicide and used violence sinfully, he will never be able to free himself from Christian guilt.</p> <p>Ambition, tragedy, hamartia: Ambition within the character of Macbeth is revealed very early on in the play, and it evolves into a much darker and twisted motive to cross moral boundaries. Initially, his reaction to the witches' prophecies is 'If chance will have me king, why chance may crown me without my stir', which implies how at first he is happy to let the powers of fate take its course and not interfere for his own gains. This is juxtaposed with his Aside to the audience in the following scene 'Stars hide your fires, Let not light see my black and deep desires', where the proximity of these two feelings in the text demonstrates how quickly Macbeth can change his mind, leading the audience to believe it was his intention all along.</p> <p>His savagery and delight in killing at the beginning, can be ascribed to the mourning he is going through that he has just lost his baby. Lady Macbeth reminds us of how recent this is with the fact that she is still lactating 'take my milk for gall' – we can infer how important the baby must have been, this could be the root of their hamartia, the weakness that sends them towards ambition to replace the love that they have just lost.</p> <p>Even so, it can be argued that it is not ambition that is his hamartia as depicted when he says in an aside 'I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself', showing that his ambition is not enough. Instead, it is the way he exercises his freewill such as by writing to his wife, knowing that she will push him further.</p> <p>Macbeth's fate, Christianity: Macbeth becomes convinced that life is completely pointless and his actions have no meaning: 'Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player... It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.' The 'tale' could be referring to God's ultimate plan for humans, and Macbeth therefore calls God an 'idiot', which in the eyes of Jacobean society would make Macbeth completely deserving of death. He also went against Christianity through the regicide he committed – one of the worst crimes. This furthers the message to the audience that Macbeth will be damned eternally for the exercising of his freewill.</p> <p>Relationship with Lady Macbeth: Macbeth has a powerful deep love for his wife and is trying to protect her wife from the mental turmoil of dealing with murder: 'Be innocent of the knowledge dearest chuck' (3,2). Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene shows a really powerful love, since he is caring for his wife on the morning of the battle, placing his concern for her emotional and mental wellbeing above his own power. It can be seen that Shakespeare in fact portrays their relationship in positive light, as opposed to the relationship of Macduff and his wife.</p> <p>Relationship with Banquo: Macbeth killing Banquo leads to his madness, not the killing of Duncan (the killing of Banquo has a bigger impact). The third murderer implies how psychologically difficult it is for Macbeth to kill Banquo, and so he correlates this to the requirement of 3 murderers – demonstrated the deep friendship he had with Banquo.</p>	<p>'unseamed him from the nave to the chaps' → sewing imagery, precision, delicacy 'As two spent swimmers that do cling together/And choke their art' → powerful verbs → simile 'Stars hide your fires let not light see my black and deep desires' → celestial imagery → biblical imagery with references to 'fires' and 'black' that belong to the lexical field of Hell → rhyming couplet mimics the tone of the witches 'Will all great Neptune's oceans wash this blood clean from my hand?' → Hyperbole, guilt → rhetorical question</p>	<p>Shakespeare flips the idea of Greek tragedy form (which is often of a character who does everything he can to avoid his tragic fate), since Macbeth exercises his freewill and rushes towards his fate. However, as a tragic hero, Macbeth still needs to be pitied at the end of the play, so Shakespeare introduces the idea of nihilism in Macbeth's 'Out, out brief candle' speech, and places this after the death of Macbeth's with, a successful use of structure which evokes pity and sympathy for Macbeth since the audience can see his great love for his wife, and how now that she is dead his life is meaningless.</p>	<p>* The Great Chain of Being was a key idea in Jacobean Era, depicting that rising above one's social position was seen as damaging and corrosive, leading ultimately to evil deeds.</p> <p>* Jacobean belief in the Divine Right of Kings means that the King was God's own representative of Earth, and therefore going against him would mean going against this natural order.</p>	<p>Shakespeare makes Macbeth's use of freewill his hamartia and therefore the root of the tragedy that leads to his death and eternal damnation. This is because he attempts to appeal to King James. He would want to send the same moral message to his people and nobles in order to discourage them from using their freewill to change their social standing, persuading them instead to adhere to the hierarchy of the Great Chain of Being unequivocally.</p>
Lady Macbeth	<p>Manipulative and secretive: When Macbeth tells Lady Macbeth that they will no longer kill King Duncan, she tries to change his mind by manipulating him. At first, she attacks his courage. She asks him if he plans to live his life in fear: 'live a coward in thine own esteem' (1,7). She then tells him that he has broken a promise to her. She says she would rather murder her own child than go back on her word to him.</p> <p>Lady Macbeth seems to be very good at hiding her true thoughts. She proves this when she greets King Duncan in Act 1, Scene 6. He refers to her as 'honoured hostess' many times. This repeatedly emphasises that she is supposed to protect him in her home. Shakespeare is using dramatic irony here: the audience know that she plans to kill him, but she meets him with kind words and welcome.</p> <p>Violence, masculine, powerful: She says, 'Come to my woman's breasts / And take my milk for gall'. This is possibly the clearest demand to have her femininity removed. She no longer wants to be able to nurture children with her breastmilk. She wants her breastmilk to be filled with bitter poison instead – this is a clear indication that she does not want to nurture anyone; she wants to cause pain and death.</p> <p>Justified violence, masculinity, and power: Her use of aggression and violence, especially when she smears the blood of Duncan onto the guards, can be ascribed to the mourning she is going through as she has recently lost her baby. Lady Macbeth reminds us of how recent this is with the fact that she is still lactating 'take my milk for gall' 'I have given suck and know how tender tis to love the babe that milks me' – we can infer that it has been difficult to conceive and how important the baby must have been, this could be the root of their hamartia, the weakness that sends them towards ambition to replace the love that they have just lost of their child.</p> <p>As a woman in Jacobean times, Lady Macbeth's only route to power would be through her husband, or alternatively to act in a masculine way. In his letter, Macbeth writes 'not lose the dues of rejoicing by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee' which causes Lady Macbeth to 'rejoice' as she has this opportunity to grasp power. It is perhaps due to the fact the Macbeth then takes this opportunity from her when he says 'We will proceed no further in this business' (not long after he promises her 'We will speak further'), that causes her to turn to violence and manipulation.</p>	<p>'smiling in [her] face' 'plucked' 'boneless' 'brains' → contrast of poignant visual image with aggressive platives 'Bellona's bridegroom' → Roman goddess of war, power over Macbeth 'nature, it is too full o'th'milk of human kindness' → metaphor → maternal connotations</p>	<p>When Lady Macbeth sleepwalks, Shakespeare breaks his pattern of iambic pentameter and writes in prose. → control breaking down and mental instability</p>	<p>* Ambitious or aggressive women ran the risk of being seen as witches since they were acting outside of what should be their submissive nature.</p>	<p>Shakespeare's creation of the strong and powerful character of Lady Macbeth may have been a reflection of having Elizabeth I on the throne just before James I.</p>
Supernatural and Witches	<p>Witches' appearances: Banquo struggles to identify whether they are women or not: 'you should be women / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so' (1,3). Their unconventional (not normal), even ugly appearance is perhaps to remind the audience of how unattractive witchcraft was. Women who practised it started to look inhuman. This shows Shakespeare conforming to the ideas of Jacobean England, where the supernatural was feared and seen as unnatural. Those who practised it were viewed as evil – the witches' ugly appearance may echo this apparent inner-evil. However, the fact that their appearance is linked to that of men links to the belief that women can hold no power whatsoever, which could be a subtle attack on the patriarchal Jacobean society, perhaps Shakespeare is opposing this idea that it is only men that can harness power.</p> <p>Witches' powers: One of the witches takes revenge on a sailor, but we are told that the witch does not have the power to take the sailor's life: 'Though his bark cannot be lost, yet it shall be tempest-tossed'. Shakespeare's use of structure is key here, he deliberately shows the audience the limits of the witches' power. This means that when Macbeth arrives and is captivated by them, we can see that his infatuation tells us more about him than it does about the witches.</p> <p>Also, the scene with Hecate undermines the witches as she is referred to as 'the mistress of your charms'.</p>	<p>'Instruments of darkness' → noun 'instruments' suggests that the witches are simply tools with the sole purpose of corrupting them – they hold no power of their own.</p>	<p>The witches speak in rhymes and trochaic tetrameter, which makes their words read like nursery rhymes.</p>	<p>* Witches were seen as a symbol of evil and thus their appearance in plays foreshadow the natural order being disrupted and chaos ensuing.</p> <p>* King James was very interested in the supernatural and dedicated his life to irradiating them – he wrote a book on it called 'Daemonologie'.</p>	<p>Exploring the supernatural appeals to King James's who had strong views towards the supernatural - a successful attempt by Shakespeare to obtain better recognition for his play. However, Shakespeare's use of trochaic tetrameter for the witches speech may be a subtle attempt at mocking King James's absurd beliefs in witches and the supernatural.</p>

Banquo	<p>Foil of Macbeth: Banquo's initial response to the witches' prophecies when he turns and asks Macbeth 'Why do you start?' indicates how he has chosen not to read into the matter on account of the untrustworthy source, the witches – who often tell half-truths. He also responds very rationally to the fulfilment of the witches' prophecies and worries about the consequences of it. He suspects that the witches 'win us to our harm...to betray's in deepest consequence' implying that despite the fact that a prophecy has in fact been fulfilled, he still does not feel the need to act on it, instead he allows fate to take its course and doesn't try to meddle with the process.</p> <p>Shakespeare endlessly praises Banquo: Line of descent will 'stretch out to the crack of doom' 'royalty of nature', 'He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour to act safely'.</p> <p>Ambitious: Banquo never sharing his suspicions that Macbeth killed Duncan with the other nobles: 'I fear Thou played'st most foully for 't' (3,1). This could suggest that Banquo needs Macbeth to become king in order to buy time for the witch's prophecy to come true about Fleance, and then Fleance will become king after Macbeth. Shakespeare has to keep this negative side of Banquo very low key, since the reigning king – King James – is thought to be descendent of Banquo. Banquo's true colours also emerge when he commands at the witches 'if you can look into the seeds of time and say which grain will grow and which will not, speak then to me' which indicates at Banquo's impatient curiosity in the matter.</p>	Banquo is thought to have been the ancestor of King James	Shakespeare shows Banquo as shrewd and cautious, which is a compliment to the King, King James, since he is thought to be descendent of Banquo. Perhaps he is sending the message to King James to be more like him, to not let the supernatural influence his ruling.
Duncan, appearances deception, kingship, porter	<p>Porter: In summary, the porter is a servant of the Macbeth household whose job it is to answer the gate to callers – he has been up late and joined the celebrations with king Duncan and the other guests and so he is tired but also hungover having drunk too much. When he hears the knocking that of Macduff who has come to wake the king, he imagines that the knocking is that at the gates of hell and he is the porter for hell's gate. He imagines himself admitting three different sinners into hell: the first is a farmer who tried to make money by hoarding his grain in the hope that price would rise but when the price drops, he realises that he is financially ruined and hangs himself; the second is an equivocator (there is a link here with the witches and their equivocations) and he's committed treason but tries to get himself out of it by telling half-truths; the third is an English tailor who has been condemned for stealing by making clothes with less material than he charged. All three of these sinners are condemned to death and the porter imagines welcoming them to hell. These would have been current events for the audience at the time Macbeth was first performed, therefore the scene would certainly have gotten a lot of laughs, especially with the sexual innuendo of the porter.</p> <p>Kingship: Shakespeare uses the 'crown' and 'throne' as metonyms for kingship in the play, and the way that the different characters use these words signifies both their royal status and fate. For example Macbeth and Lady Macbeth call it the 'crown' – something that is removable, therefore hinting at the fact that his rule will be cut short very easily. On the other hand, Malcolm's side call it the 'throne' something fixed you can ascend to, demonstrating the divine right of kings, how they are destined to inherit the title.</p> <p>Shakespeare recognises that ambition is an undercurrent in the relationship between the monarchy and nobility, but when ambition is unchecked by morality, the consequences are terrible for the country and for the ambitious person. Contextually, Shakespeare establishes a conflict as nobility is portrayed as the potential risk to the crown, but also as the force that can restore order. Shakespeare is pleading to the nobility not to start any kind of revolution or insurrection, as shown by the fact that Macbeth was actually first performed in court and not at the theatre.</p> <p>A key discussion of kingship takes place between Malcolm and Macduff in Act IV Scene 3. In testing Macduff, Malcolm lists all the characteristics of a tyrant. These are voluptuousness, avarice and a lack of kingly graces. By pretending that these are his personal faults, Malcolm points out that these are the marks of a tyrant – and by implication Macbeth's.</p> <p>We are aware that Malcolm knows what is expected from a king and can be confident that when he rules Scotland, healing will take place through his kingship. Crucially, he does not possess his father's gullibility; he is aware that Macbeth tried to entice him back to Scotland. He is also politically shrewd in testing that Macduff was not sent by Macbeth to lure him to his death.</p> <p>Shakespeare depicts Duncan as an agent of benevolence, thus establishing him as Macbeth's binary opposite, and interestingly, very few people speak about Duncan after he is dead- with the exception of the Macbeths: no-one speaks of him as a human being, a loving father, a man as well as a king, who should be an object of pity as well as reverence or terror. Here, Shakespeare uses how Duncan evinces great respect but little fellow feeling, great horror but little pity as Duncan is memorialised and sanctified as a gracious king by hardly mourned for as a man, illustrating how both Duncan and Macbeth are reduced as ineffective kings.</p> <p>The divine rights of kings and the fact that the king is appointed by God is shown through the fact that Shakespeare equates the English King's figure with Christ, as depicted by the King's miraculous power of healing conjointly with his 'heaven gift of prophecy'. The identification of the king with a semantic field of divinity as 'heaven', 'sanctity' and 'soul' and the emphasis on the ability to heal by touch recalls the figure of Christ, elevating the great sin that regicide is.</p> <p>Duncan and deception: Duncan fails as a king, and this is partly due to his inability to judge human character, shown through his misjudgement of both Macbeth and the traitor at the beginning of the play. His ignorance in this area, means that his recently appointed thane of Cawdor, Macbeth, murders him – it is almost too easy. Shakespeare does not hide this fact and makes this flaw very clear to the audience through Duncan's line 'There is no art to find the mind's construction in the face', in order to send the message to the reigning King, King James, who would have been a part of the audience, the flaws he must avoid in order to be a good King. This is especially significant since many doubted the King's abilities after the famous Queen Elizabeth. In comparison Banquo is shrewd, which can be seen in the scene with the witches, through which Shakespeare is depicting what King James should be like, and since he is a supposed descendent of Banquo, Shakespeare is also flattering the King.</p> <p>On the other hand Shakespeare may be demonstrating the bigger themes of appearance vs deception, how no one, not even the King can determine between the traitors and the honest. Shakespeare references to this broader theme, through Malcolm, who says 'Stars are still bright although the brightest fell'. This could be a reference to Satan, who was the 'bright[est]' angel but was able to fool God himself, elevating how not only God nor the King (appointed by God) can distinguish the traitors, therefore Duncan's inability is not a reflection of poor character but of the nature of deception.</p>	Aristotle said that tragedy arouses pity and fear in such a way as to culminate in a cleansing of those passions, the famous catharsis.	Porter: Shakespeare may have included this almost unfitting scene to provide as comic relief after the intensity of Duncan's murder. However, the purpose of this scene can be interpreted in other ways also, for example, Shakespeare could be normalising Macbeth's crimes by putting his crime alongside stealing, greed, and lying. In comparison, Macbeth's actions don't seem big in scale, but cowardly and low, murdering an old man as he slept in his bed. Alternatively, Shakespeare could be suggesting that the simple vices of the porter such as alcohol and women – which Macbeth clearly does not possess – are far better in comparison to Macbeth's vices of greed and ambition. A third way to interpret this scene, is as a method of foreshadowing to Macbeth's ultimate death since there is a clear link between the crimes of the three men and those of Macbeth, and since they all end up dead, the same can be assumed for Macbeth.
Macduff, revenge, manhood	<p>Macduff and revenge: It can be argued that the entire of the play revolves around the idea of loss, and especially the feelings and actions of grieving parents, for example Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, Siward, and also Macduff. Significantly, the audience can see their grief and how they deal with it, perhaps it is Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's lack of closure or relief after the death of their child that leads them to act out and let their ambition drive them. In comparison both Siward and Macduff receive comfort after the death of their child: Siward through the fact that his son did not die a coward 'here comes newer comfort', and Macduff through his murder of Macbeth. Therefore, through the character of Macduff especially, Shakespeare demonstrates the idea of the requirement of revenge to bring about comfort after loss – Malcolm says to Macduff after he hears of the murder of his family 'let grief convert to anger'. Through this way, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's actions may be justified, and it may even be argued that Macduff is the 'villain' since he leaves his entire family unprotected, perhaps subconsciously wishing for a motive to be able to kill Macbeth.</p> <p>Manhood: The idea that manhood needs to be balanced with feeling can also be seen through Macduff, who after the remark made by Malcolm 'Dispute it like a man' responds 'I shall do so; But I must also feel it as a man'. In this way, Macduff is seen as almost a father figure to Malcolm, who later applies this lesson that Macduff teach him, when he responds to Young Siward's death with 'He's worth more sorrow and that I'll spend for him'. Through this, Shakespeare is hinting at the kind of king he is advising King James to become, and the fact that the play was first performed in court emphasises this idea.</p>		