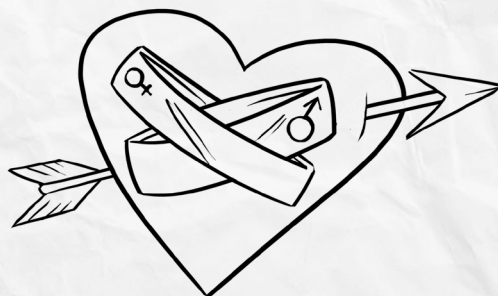
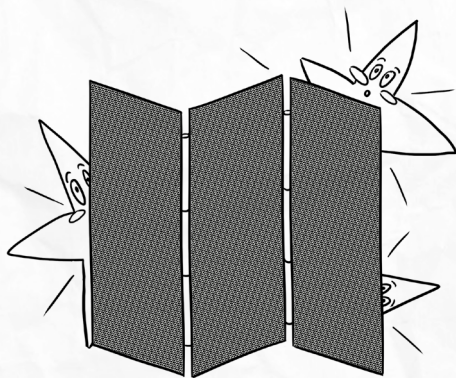


GCSE Macbeth *William Shakespeare*



ThinkIT

Structure

Think about the opening of the play: *'Thunder and lightning. Enter three witches'*. What is the impact of this? Do you think an audience of Shakespeare's contemporaries would react in the same way to you? Why/why not?

Consider how Shakespeare structures his scenes to highlight the duality in the play. For example, in Act 1, when the scenes switch between the witches and the scenes with Duncan. *'Two truths are told, / As happy Prologues to the swelling Act/ Of the imperial theme'*.

Sounds

'Make all our trumpets speak, give them all breath,/ Those clamorous harbingers of blood, and death'. Consider how Shakespeare uses sounds in the play. What sounds accompany different characters' entrances and exits? Drums, oboes, thunder etc. What are the effects of these.

Greatness

Do you feel that there is a tension in how Shakespeare presents *greatness* in the play? Is greatness about power or goodness?

Consider the witches' prophesy, and how they compare Macbeth and Banquo:

'Lesser than Macbeth, and greater' - 'Not so happy, and yet much happier'

Think about the idea that power may actually corrupt goodness. Remind yourself of Act 4 Scene 3, when Malcolm is discussing becoming King: 'A good and virtuous nature may recoil/ In an imperial charge'

Think about the language used to describe Duncan as a good King: *'this Duncan/ Hath borne his faculties 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'*

Can you relate this to a tension in Macbeth's own character? He wants simultaneously to have the power of being King, but also to be loved the way Duncan is loved. *'He hath honour'd me of late, and I have bought/ Golden opinions from all sorts of people'*.

Nature

Consider the importance of Nature in the play; in particular focus on the importance of following the Natural order of things.

What impression does Shakespeare make of those characters who try to control nature? *'The Prince of Cumberland: that is a step,/ On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap, / For in my way it lies. Stars hide your fires, / Let not light see my black and deep desires' / And my seated heart knock at my ribs, / Against the use of nature'*

'Here lay Duncan, silver skin, lac'd with his golden blood, / And his gash'd stabs, look'd like a breach of nature/ For Ruin's wasteful entrance'.

Remember that a contemporary audience would be familiar with the notion of the Divine Right of Kings. How do you think this relates to the presentation of Nature in the play?

Consider the interplay between the natural order of things and fate. How are the two presented? Look, for example, at Macbeth's struggle to decide if he should act on the witches' prophesy or not: *'If chance will have me King, / Why Chance may crown me, / Without my stir'*

How does Shakespeare utilise natural imagery and language for effect in the play?

Consider, for example, Lady Macbeth's line after Macbeth has killed Duncan: *'I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry'*.

What about the old man's speech in Act 2 Scene 4? *'A falcon towering in her pride of place, / Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at, and kill'd'*.

How does Shakespeare utilise motifs within the play?

Consider as a starting point, how Shakespeare uses clothing as a recurring motif. How do you respond to the following quotations?

'Why do you dress me in borrowed robes?' / But for certain/ He cannot buckle his distemper'd cause/ Within the belt of rule' / Now does he feel his title/ Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe/ Upon a dwarfish thief'

Can you find other instances where Shakespeare utilises references to clothing for dramatic effect? Think about the presence of trios in the play.

- the witches - Glamis, Cawdor and King - the witches' apparitions

What other motifs can you identify in the play?

Courage

Think about how different characters talk about courage and valour, in particular the association of courage with *masculinity*.

For example, remind yourself of some of Lady Macbeth's language: *'When you durst do it, then you were a man:/ And to be more than what you were, you would/ Be so much more the man' / But screw your courage to the sticking-place/ And we'll not fail' / Quite unmann'd in folly' / You do unbend your noble strength, to think so brain-sickly of things.'*

Contrast this with Act 4 Scene 3, where Macduff has just found out about the slaughter of his family, and Malcolm is attempting to spur him to action. *'Dispute it like a man' / Be this the whetstone of your sword, let grief/ Convert to anger: blunt not the heart, enrage it' / This tune goes manly'*.

Themes: Suspicion. Paranoia. Madness

'Or have we eaten on the insane root, / That takes the reason prisoner'

To what extent could this line from Banquo be seen as a metaphor for the effects of the Witches' prophesies? What techniques does Shakespeare employ to show how Macbeth descends from suspicion, to paranoia, to madness?

'Where we are, there's daggers in men's smiles/ The near in blood, the nearer bloody' / But now I am cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd, bound in/ By saucy doubts and fear'.

Macbeth hallucinates that he sees a dagger covered in blood: *'I see thee still:/ And on thy blade, and dudgeon, gouts of blood, / Which was not so before.'*

Lady Macbeth dreams that she has blood on her hands: *'Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand'*. What do you think this distinction means?

Psychology: Think about the doctor's assessment of Lady Macbeth in the sleepwalking scene. *'Unnatural deeds/ Do breed unnatural troubles'*.

Religion

'But wherefore could not I pronounce Amen? / I had most need of blessing, and Amen stuck in my throat' How does Shakespeare utilise religious connotations in the play? For what effect?

Lady Macbeth: *'Look like th'innocent flower, / But be the serpent under't'* Could you interpret Lady Macbeth as a modern day Eve from the Garden of Eden? Could you expand this idea to include the home of the Macbeths? Think about how Banquo describes the castle when he arrives: *'that the Heaven's breath/ Smells wooingly here' / 'the air is delicate'*. Baptism and the washing away of sins: Consider the following two lines from Lady Macbeth. What do they tell you about absolving sin? *'A little water clears us of his deed. / How easy is it then?' / 'What, will these hands ne'er be clean?'*

Think about the Divine Right of Kings, and how Shakespeare uses religious language to describe Duncan. *'Most sacrilegious murder, hath broke ope/ The Lord's anointed Temple, and stole thence/ The life o'th'bulling'*

Loyalty

Remind yourself of the bloody captain's speech in Act 1 Scene 2. What does this speech tell you about loyalty?

Consider the structure of the speech – beginning with the rebel Macdonwald first, before moving to Macbeth – and also the language that Shakespeare employs. How does Shakespeare set these characters against each other?

Consider the importance of loyalty to the social structures in the play. How does Shakespeare use patriotism to explore the importance of loyalty and heighten the drama of the play? Consider, for example, the following quotations from Macduff and Malcolm. *'Bleed, bleed poor country' – 'I think our country sinks beneath the yoke, / It weeps, it bleeds, and each new day a gash/ Is added to her wounds'*.

Marriage

How does Shakespeare present marital dynamics in the play?

'My dearest partner in greatness': Do you feel like Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are equal partners? Why/why not? Compare the marriage of the Macbeths with that of the Macduffs. What impression does Lady Macduff give you of her marriage?

Lineage

*...Then prophet-like,
They hail'd him father to a line of Kings:
Upon my head they plac'd a fruitless crown,
And put a barren sceptre in my gripe.
Thence to be wrench'd with an unlineal hand
No son of mine succeeding.*

What importance does Shakespeare place on having an heir?

Do you think part of why Macbeth is insecure is because he has no line to continue after his death?

Consider the language Macbeth uses when he tells Malcolm and Donalbain about Duncan's death: *'The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood/ Is stopp'd, the very source of it is stopp'd'*. How are ideas about the importance of lineage related to the fact that the sons are blamed for their fathers' deaths? Malcolm and Donalbain are blamed for Duncan's death, and Fleance is blamed for Banquo's death.

Presentations of Women and Femininity

To what extent do you think women are presented as being a corrupting power to men? What language does Shakespeare use to 'defeminise' the female characters who are presented as 'villainous'?

Banquo [about the Witches]: *'You should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so'*

Lady Macbeth: *'Unsex me here, / And fill me from the crown to the top, top-full / Of direst cruelty' / Come to my woman's breast / And take my milk for gall'*

How do you react to these presentations of women? How do you think an audience of Shakespeare's contemporaries would have reacted? Remember that, in Shakespeare's time, a woman's primary societal role was to bear children. Compare how Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff are presented. Could you interpret Lady Macduff as being too moral? 'Every one that does so, is a traitor, and must be hang'd'

Women and the supernatural: Consider that the witches are able to control the weather. How do you think a contemporary audience would have reacted to this? **Hecate:** in Greek mythology Hecate was associated with many things including – crossroads, the moon, witchcraft, ghosts and necromancy.

Legacy: Consider the following lines spoken by Macbeth. What do they reveal about attitudes towards legacy? *'Out, out, brief candle, / Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player, / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, / And then there is no more. It is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing'*

Could you also relate this quotation to ideas about lineage and religion?