

Year 9 MACBETH Knowledge Organiser

1. Characters

Macbeth	A loyal warrior who becomes duplicious as he becomes obsessed with the witches' prophecies of power.
Lady Macbeth	Macbeth's wife who drives his ambition in the beginning but loses her control by the end.
Banquo	Macbeth's close friend and ally who also receives prophecies from the witches
Fleance	Banquo's son
Duncan King of Scotland	Portrayed as a strong and respected leader at the start of the play.
Macduff	A brave warrior who is loyal to Duncan and is consistently suspicious of Macbeth.
Malcolm	Duncan's son and next in line to the throne.
The Three Witches	(Weird Sisters) – Portrayed as forces of nature who seem to know the future (is this true?) They fascinate Macbeth.

4. Themes

Ambition / Greed	Power	Madness
Kingship	Death	Gender
Fate and free will	Supernatural	Light/dark
Appearance and reality	Guilt	Manhood

2. Plot

Act 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Macbeth and Banquo meet witches who give them predictions. The Thane of Cawdor is executed. Lady Macbeth reads letter. She taunts Macbeth and Duncan arrives.
Act 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Macbeth sees a dagger reflecting his doubts about the murder He kills Duncan with Lady Macbeth's help. Malcolm flees and Macbeth chosen to be king.
Act 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Banquo suspects Macbeth Macbeth murders Banquo but his son Fleance escapes. Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost.
Act 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Witches second predictions. Macbeth orders the killing of Macduff's family. Macduff and Malcolm agree to invade Scotland.
Act 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lady Macbeth's mental state deteriorates eventually committing suicide. Malcolm's army invades through Burnham wood and eventually Macbeth killed by Macduff. Malcolm is proclaimed king.

3. Context

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Macbeth is loosely based on true events in feudal Scotland in the 11th Century and would have been known to King James. King James inherited the throne through his ancestors Banquo and Fleance who appear in the play.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although women did have some ability to speak out, they were seen as the lesser sex in the 1600s. They were considered as the property of men (husband, father etc.) making Lady Macbeth's behaviour very shocking.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> King James was fascinated by witchcraft and it is likely that the witches were included to please him. At this time, people were very superstitious and people were being killed for witchcraft.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> King James also believed in The Divine Right of Kings meaning that the King was chosen by God. Any attempt to depose a king went directly against God and would be judged harshly. This is reflected in Macbeth's failure as a king.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the time, there was belief in the Great Chain of Being. This is the belief that everyone has their place in society. God is at the top followed by the angels, the King and insects are at the bottom. People were meant to accept their place and not try to change it like Macbeth does.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both King James' parents were killed in politically motivated moves to secure power and an attempt was made on his life (regicide) through the gunpowder plot. Shakespeare echoes this interest in usurpation in the murders in the play.

5. Form and Structure

Shakespeare uses **soliloquy** to allow the characters to communicate their true thoughts to the audience.

Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's **Tragedies** and follows specific **conventions**.

- A tragic hero (Macbeth) who is noble.
- A flaw – Macbeth's is greed.
- Suffering – Macbeth kills the King, Banquo, Macduff's family and more.
- Downfall – Macbeth must pay the price for his actions and die himself.

In Act 1, Scene 5 Lady Macbeth speaks in prose (rather than iambic pentameter) to show how her mental state has deteriorated.

- The witches are the main characters that speak in rhyme.
- However, other characters slip into occasional rhyme to show how they have been impacted by the witches.
- After Macbeth meets them, he says "**Stars, hide your fires; Let not light see my black and deep desires.**"