MACBETH

Plot

Act 1	Macbeth and Banquo meet witches who give them predictions. Cawdor executed. Lady Macbeth reads letter. She taunts Macbeth and Duncan arrives.
Act 2	Macbeth sees a dagger reflecting his doubts about the murder- but kills Duncan with Lady Macbeth's help. Malcolm flees and Macbeth chosen to be king.
Act 3	Banquo suspects Macbeth – Macbeth murders Banquo but his son Fleance escapes. Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost.
Act 4	Witches second predictions. Macbeth orders the killing of Macduff's family. Macduff and Malcolm agree to invade Scotland.
Act 5	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.
Lines per character	Macbeth 715 Lady Macbeth 259 Malcolm 211 Macduff 180 Ross 135 Banquo 113

Themes

Ambition	Children	Natural world
Kingship	Blood	Gender
Fate and free will	Sleep	Light/dark
Appearance and reality	Visions	Manhood

Assessment Objectives

AO1 12 marks	Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to: • maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response • use textual references, and quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.
AO2 12 marks	Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.
AO3 6 marks	Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.
AO4 4 marks	Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

Character

Macbeth	A loyal warrior who becomes duplicitous 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.

Vocabulary

- Meter
- Blank verse
- Rhymed verse
- Prose
- Iambic pentameter
- Trochaic Tetrameter
- Heroic couplets
- soliloquy
- Dramatic irony
- Concealment
- Gender
- Stichomythia
- Tragedy
- Hamartia
- Prophecy
- Imagery
- Symbols
- Metaphor
- Regicide

Context

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.

This violent period in Scotland's history ended with stronger links with England much like **the union of the crowns** that took place when King James became King of England as well as Scotland.

King James was fascinated by **witchcraft** and it is likely that the witches were included to please him as Shakespare wanted his approval.

King James also believed in **The Divine Right of Kings** meaning that 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.

Both King James' parents were killed in politically motivated moves to secure power and an attempt was made on his life through the gunpowder plot. Shakespeare echoes this interest in **usurpation** in the murders in the play.

There is a **direct reference to King James** in the play in Act 4 Scene 1 when Macbeth sees a vision of kings stemming from Banquo's sons

How far is lady Macbeth portrayed as a strong and manipulative woman in this soliloquy? (Act 1 Scene 5 lines 12-27)

Lady Macbeth is *contemplating* the predictions Macbeth revealed in his letter in the previous scene. She *echoes* the words of the witches *linking* her directly with the *supernatural* world and evil. *Although* she acknowledges he has achieved two of the predictions, she fears his "nature is too full of the milk of human kindness". The *intensifier* "too" *implies* that she believes this is an element of his character that will prevent him killing Duncan. The reference to milk and its goodness is in direct *contrast* to the "bitter gall" she wanted to turn her nurturing milk into. She knows his weakness but also how to manipulate him. She knows "he is not without ambition" but doesn't have the evil "illness" with which he will be able to see through the murder. The *reference* to illness *foreshadows* the inevitable consequence of their actions.

Stretch yourself

- ❑ Whilst analysing the extract, quickly refer out to other parts of the play.
- ❑ Watch <u>different</u> performances of key scenes to provide you with 'ammunition' when discussing form.

Form

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**. The **climax** must end in a tremendous catastrophe involving the death of the main character; the character's death is caused by their own flaw(s) (**hamartia**); the character has something the audience can identify with which outweighs their flaws so we care about them.

Macbeth Sample Exam Question

Macbeth

Read the following extract from Act 1 Scene 5 of *Macbeth* and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play Lady Macbeth is speaking. She has just received the news that King Duncan will be spending the night at her castle.

The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements. Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe topfull
Of direst cruelty; make thick my blood,
Stop up th'access and passage to remorse
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose nor keep peace between
Th'effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief. Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry 'Hold, hold!'

Starting with this speech, explain how far you think Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as a powerful woman.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth in this speech
- how Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth in the play as a whole.

[30 marks]
AO4 [4 marks]

Exemplar response

Lady Macbeth describes Duncan's entrance as 'fatal' straight after hearing he will be coming to her castle, which shows power because she is capable of making instant decisions. Lady Macbeth's language in this extract suggests that she is calling for power from evil spirits to help give her strength to carry out the murder of Duncan. She wants to get rid of her feminine side: 'unsex me here' – which suggests that she sees being a woman as weak, also shown with 'come to my woman's breasts and take my milk For gall'. It is as if she thinks that she will only be able to carry out he act if her female side is replaced with 'gall' (poison). On the one hand Shakespeare might be showing her to be a powerful woman, capable of selling her soul to the 'dunnest smoke of hell' in order to get what she wants. However it could also suggest that she isn't powerful at all and knows that her female weakness has to be destroyed in order to give her the strength to do what needs to be done.
The fact that Lady Macbeth is destroyed by guilt and remorse shows that this second interpretation of this speech is closer to the truth. Straight after the murder she is nervous and jumpy: 'hark/peace', and has to drink the wine meant for the guards to keep herself strong. She gets angry with Macbeth when he is too shocked and frightened to act, and takes the daggers back to Duncan's room herself. However, she also says that she couldn't murder Duncan herself because he reminded her of her father, which might suggest that she isn't as cruel and heartless as she thinks she needs to be. By Act 3 she has already been pushed aside by her husband, who tells her to be 'innocent of the knowledge' of Banquo's murder rather than his 'partner in greatness'. Her power in her relationship has started to disappear. She is finally tormented so much by the murder of Duncan that she goes mad and kills herself. Perhaps Shakespeare is suggesting that Lady Macbeth is powerful in some ways but not others; she is determined and strong when she needs to be, but also feels that she has to completely get rid of her femaleness in order to be able to be strong in a man's world.

Commentary

The opening sentence shows clear understanding of where this passage fits into the play. There is close focus on particular words/ phrases with explanation of possible meanings. Ideas about power are being considered and the student is developing a response to the question as they go, thinking about different interpretations of what Lady Macbeth says and how it fits into an interpretation of her in the play as a whole. There are some appropriate uses of direct reference from other parts of the play, used to support the student's response to the play as a whole. Overall this response shows clear understanding of the demands of the task. The student deals well with both the extract and their knowledge of the whole play in order to demonstrate their response to ideas about Lady Macbeth as a powerful woman.