

1. Characters in Macbeth	
Witches	Referred to as the “weird sisters” by many of the characters. The mischief they cause stems from their supernatural powers, but mainly it is the result of their understanding of the weaknesses of their victims—they play upon Macbeth’s ambition like puppeteers. They speak in rhyme and half truths (equivocation) to confuse Macbeth.
Duncan	King of Scotland at the beginning of the play; respected and benevolent (kind) leader. Trusting and nurturing (caring) towards his nobles. Represents the Divine Right of kings. Too trusting and is therefore betrayed.
Macbeth	Tragic hero; initially celebrated as “brave” and valorous in Act 1, but becomes a violent and tyrannical king. Tempted by ambition and led by hubris following the witches’ prophecy (his hamartia), and influenced by wife.
Banquo	Macbeth’s close friend and ally; also receives prophecies from the witches; cautious – does not immediately believe prophecies. Noble and wise. Dramatic foil to Macbeth; ‘ <i>Banquo</i> ’ was an ancestor of King James I - represents the “right” way to respond to the supernatural
Malcolm	Duncan’s eldest son and next in line to the throne. Joins the English army to defeat Macbeth at the end of the play. Honest and wise. Becomes a strong leader. Final speech in A5 represents restored order.
Lady Macbeth	Wife to Macbeth ; rejects her femininity, believing that the use of violence to achieve power is a masculine trait. Manipulates Macbeth, but gradually loses control over him. Strongly linked to supernatural through the ‘spirits’ she calls on to ‘unsex’ her.
Macduff	Thane of Fife ; honest, sincere and loyal; determined to avenge his family’s slaughter; represents goodness and hope; ends Macbeth’s tyranny and restores natural order at end.
Other characters	Fleance : Banquo’s son who escapes murder; may come to rule Scotland, fulfilling Witches’ prophecy. Lady Macduff : slaughtered cruelly by Macbeth in A4; traditional maternal (motherly) role juxtaposed with Lady Macbeth. Donalbain : younger son to Duncan; flees to Ireland for refuge after father’s murder in A2.

2. Literary techniques or Methods used by Shakespeare	
Symbols/motifs	blood = <i>guilt, violence, bloodline</i> ; light and dark = <i>good and evil</i> ; sleep = <i>innocence and peace</i> ; birds = <i>disruption to natural order</i> ; hands = <i>responsibility & power</i> ; water = <i>purity, redemption, forgiveness</i>
Soliloquy and aside	character speaks thoughts and feelings out loud, to audience; e.g. <i>Macbeth in A1 S3; Lady Macbeth in A1 S5</i> ; makes audience aware of Macbeth’s hubris and Lady Macbeth’s malevolent intentions .
4. Metaphor	Powerful imagery used throughout the play. E.g. ‘the milk of human kindness; stars hide your fires; full of scorpions is my mind; there’s daggers in men’s smiles.
5. Contrast + juxtaposition	Macbeth (violently ambitious) – Banquo (honest and noble) Lady Macbeth (devious and cruel) – Lady Macduff (maternal and loyal); Macbeth at the start and end: A1, s2 ‘brave Macbeth’ – A5, siv ‘the dead butcher
Tragic Structure	

QR Codes
Plot Summary & Key Words
15 key 'References'

3. Themes and Big Ideas In Macbeth

1. Ambition		Ambition motivates Macbeth to commit terrible deeds; ambition is the tragic hero's ‘fatal flaw’; Lady Macbeth persuades Macbeth by appealing to his pride and ambition; Banquo demonstrates that ambition can be balanced with by morals and reason. <i>Shakespeare warns against the dangerous power of unchecked ambition.</i>
2. Gender		Witches defy gender stereotypes. LM represses her own femininity to become more ruthless and uses patriarchy to pressure M into regicide. Macduff defends the right to express tenderness at the loss of his family.
3. Order vs chaos		Witches associated with ‘ disorder ’ and chaos; disorder in nature reflects disorder of Scotland after Duncan’s murder; Great Chain of Being : Macbeth’s actions subvert the ‘natural order’; disorder with Banquo’s ghost. Malcolm’s monologue in Act 5.8 is a glimpse of new ‘restored order.’
4. Appearance and reality		Hallucinations (dagger, blood, Banquo’s ghost) represent fear and guilt of characters; M and LM hide their true intentions from Duncan in Act 1: “look like the innocent flower but be the serpent under’t”; Witches use equivocal language: ‘Fair is foul’ to deceive and confuse.
5. The Supernatural		Witches are a supernatural force and <i>would have been frightening and believable to a Jacobean audience</i> ; the Witches’ prophecies drive the action of the play; ‘strange’ inversions of nature are referenced throughout play; make Macbeth believe he is ‘ invincible ’ in Act 5. <i>King James I was fascinated by the supernatural.</i>
6. Good versus evil		Macbeth transforms from ‘noble’ and respected in A1 to a ‘dead butcher’ in A5 - good can become evil. Evil represented by the Witches; Duncan exemplifies a good and benevolent King; Evil linked to gender : LM loses her femininity to become more cruel and ruthless.
7. Loyalty and betrayal		Macbeth betrays his loyalty to King Duncan to follow selfish desires; Macbeth rewarded for loyalty in Act 1 (Thane of Cawdor) whilst betrayal punished - Cawdor executed; Macduff and Malcolm demonstrate loyalty to Scotland; <i>Gunpowder Plot (1605): Shakespeare uses Macbeth’s downfall to demonstrate that treason and disloyalty to the King will be punished severely.</i>

4. Context of Macbeth

Religion		Christianity was the predominant religion, with conflict between Catholics and Protestants. There was a genuine fear of going to hell in the afterlife for sinning. We watch Macbeth struggle with this fear throughout the text.
The Natural Order		The Natural Order was the idea that people and animals had their place in society and the disruption of this would cause chaos. This links to the Divine Right of Kings and the Great Chain of Being - the idea that God informed the hierarchy of people, class and gender within society.
Gender		Women were expected to display femininity and maternal instinct. Masculinity was linked to legacy, pride and violence. Society believed that genders had their own ‘roles’ and the subversion of this went against nature.
Witchcraft		In the Jacobean era there were fears of the supernatural and beliefs that there could be influence over life, crop, famine... Most of the trialled witches in the UK were women. James 1st was a believer of witchcraft and wrote Daemonologie to validate this. Witch trials took place across England and Scotland and James 1 was involved in some of the trial outcomes.
Gunpowder Plot		The Gunpowder Plot was a failed attempt of treason against King James. Unsettled Catholics planned to destroy the House of Lords. Guy Fawkes was discovered guarding the explosives in the basement of the House of Lords on November 5, 1605.
James I Succession		James 1 became king in 1603 after Queen Elizabeth 1st died. Some people in England were unsettled as he came from Scotland and his mother had tension with Elizabeth 1st. He an unpopular king with the nation due to his religious and political ambiguity. He was a patron for Shakespeare’s company of actors.
Machiavelli		Machiavelli is known for his political philosophy and for saying ‘It is better to be feared than loved, if you cannot be both ‘in regards to leadership. Macbeth is said to echo this ideal when he feels instability within the kingdom - he opts for fear and uses this to gain false loyalty

5. Communicate like an Expert

Valour	Great courage in the face of danger, especially in battle
Tyranny/ tyrant	Cruel and oppressive government or rule
Hubris	Excessive pride or self-confidence.
Tragic hero	A character with heroic or noble traits, but also a fatal flaw that ultimately leads to their downfall.
Divine Right of Kings	The divine right of kings is a belief asserting that kings derived their authority from God
Hamartia	A fatal flaw leading to the downfall of a tragic hero or heroine
Equivocation	open to more than one interpretation; ambiguous.
Benevolent	Well meaning and kindly
Treason	The crime of betraying one's country, especially by attempting to kill or overthrow the sovereign or government
Regicide	The action of killing a king.
Nihilism	The belief that life is pointless and meaningless.
Foil	A character who contrasts the main character, and highlights their flaws.