

AQA English Literature Paper 1: Shakespeare (Macbeth)

A revision guide to get you ultra-ready for your **AQA English Literature Paper 1 Section A** exam question!



AQA English Literature Paper 1: Shakespeare

In your first question you will be provided with a short extract from Macbeth (it could be from anywhere in the play).

Your question will ask you to discuss a particular theme or character shown in the extract **and the rest of the play**.



This means for your revision you need to:

- 1) *Know the plot of the play very well*
- 2) *Know the characters very well*
- 3) *Know key quotes for all the main characters and themes*
- 4) *Be able to analyse quotes for language and to consider the structure of the play*
- 5) *Understand the context of the play – including when it was written and when it was set.*

Here's an example AQA exam question for Section A:

Section A:

Shakespeare

Answer one question from this section on your chosen text

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:

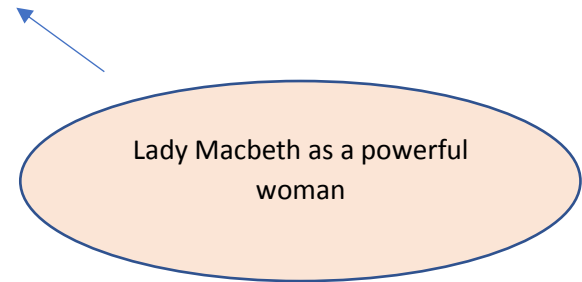
- how Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth in this speech
- how Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth in the play as a whole.

[30 marks]

AO4 [4 marks]

Revision Activity 1: Making Notes on the Question

Lady Macbeth speaks to evil spirits and asks them to 'unsex me here'. She wants to be able to carry out the murder without feeling anything about it. This shows she is capable of great evil and is therefore very powerful.



Challenge: Create a detailed mind map of all the ways Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as a powerful woman in the play.

Extra Challenge: Add quotes to each of your ideas to support your interpretations.

Mega Challenge: Evaluate how Lady Macbeth's power changes throughout the play. Write an analysis of this in your exercise book.

Revision Activity 2: Analysing The Mark Scheme

Assessment Objectives (AOs)

AO1	Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response• use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.
AO2	Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.
AO3	Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.
AO4	Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

Look at the AOs above.

Challenge: Highlight all the important words in the AOs. Write down five things you will need to include in your Macbeth answer to make sure you get a good mark.

Extra Challenge: In your own words, write down exactly what skills and knowledge the examiners are looking for in your Macbeth answer.

Mega Challenge: How would you plan your essay to ensure you meet ALL these AOs?

Revision Activity 3: PETAZL paragraphs

Look back at the exam question included at the start of the booklet.

Shakespeare shows Lady Macbeth as a powerful woman in this extract by illustrating her control over her language. When she says: "The raven himself is hoarse / That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan / Under my battlements" Lady Macbeth uses metaphors to emphasise how determined she is to kill Duncan and take power for herself. The raven, a symbol of death in Jacobean England, is shown here to be personified and has a 'hoarse' voice because it has been announcing Duncan's death so much. Moreover, the use of 'battlements' to describe Lady Macbeth's home is military imagery to show to the audience that Lady Macbeth is intending to create conflict and ultimately kill the king so that she can take power. Her use of language here shows she is determined to carry out her plan and shows how much power she has over what she says to the audience.

P = Point

E = Evidence (Quote)

T = Technique

A = Analysis

Z = Zoom

L = Link

Using this example PETAZL paragraph:

Challenge: Write out ONE PETAZL paragraph about the extract.

Extra Challenge: Write out TWO PETAZL paragraphs – one about the extract and one about the rest of the play.

Mega Challenge: Begin writing out your full answer to this question.

Key Themes

Ambition

Key point	Relevant quote	Explanation of quote
Macbeth wants to be king so badly that he talks of murder early on in the play.	"My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical"	The witches did not mention the idea of murder – this is something Macbeth put into his own head. This shows that deep down he is desperate to become king and will do anything to achieve it.

Finished? Complete tables for the following themes:

Fate/Free Will

Violence

Nature and the unnatural/supernatural

Manhood

Gender

Time

Key Quotes

The Witches

"Fair is foul, and foul is fair." (*Act I, Scene I*)

"When the battle's lost and won." (*Act I, Scene I*)

"When shall we three meet again in thunder, lightning, or in rain? When the hurlyburly 's done, When the battle 's lost and won." (*Act I, Scene I*)

"By the pricking of my thumbs, Something wicked this way comes." (*Act IV, Scene I*)

"Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn, and cauldron bubble." (*Act IV, Scene I*)

Macbeth

"If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me." (*Act I, Scene III*)

"I dare do all that may become a man; Who dares do more is none." (*Act I, Scene VII*)

"I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself, and falls on the other." (*Act I, Scene VII*)

"Is this a dagger which I see before me, The handle toward my hand?" (*Act II, Scene I*)

"Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather the multitudinous seas incarnadine, making the green one red" (*Act II, Scene II*)

Macbeth:

[*Looking on his hands*] This is a sorry sight.

Lady Macbeth:

A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight.

Macbeth:

There's one did laugh in 's sleep, and one cried,
"Murder!"
That they did wake each other. I stood and heard
them;
But they did say their prayers, and address'd them
Again to sleep.

(*Act II, Scene II*)

"There's daggers in men's smiles." (*Act II, Scene III*)

"What's done is done." (*Act III, Scene II*)

"Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." (*Act V, Scene V*)

"I bear a charmed life." (*Act V, Scene VIII*)

Malcolm

About the old Thane of Cawdor: "Nothing in his life became him like the leaving it; he died as one that had been studied in his death to throw away the dearest thing he owed, as 't were a careless trifle." (*Act I, Scene IV*)

Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth:

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 topful
Of direst cruelty!

(Act I, Scene V)

"Yet do I fear thy nature; It is too full o' the milk of human kindness." (*Act I, Scene V*)

"Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under't." (*Act I, Scene V*)

"Screw your courage to the sticking-place." (*Act I, Scene VII*)

Lady Macbeth:

Why did you bring these daggers from the place?
They must lie there. Go carry them, and smear
The sleepy grooms with blood.

Macbeth:

I'll go no more.
I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on't again I dare not.

Lady Macbeth:

Infirm of purpose!
Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead
Are but as pictures; 'tis the eye of childhood
That fears a painted devil.

(Act II, Scene II)

Lady Macbeth:

How now, my lord, why do you keep alone,
Of sorriest fancies your companions making,
Using those thoughts which should indeed have died
With them they think on? Things without all remedy
Should be without regard: what's done, is done.

(Act III, Scene II)

"Out, damned spot! out, I say!" (*Act V, Scene I*).

Understanding context (AO3)

William Shakespeare wrote Macbeth in 1606 and it was performed at a time of political tension. The current monarch was James I, who inherited the throne of England after Queen Elizabeth I died. With Elizabethan having no children, her distant cousin James was the next best claimant to the crown.

Many other members of the aristocracy felt they too had a good claim to the throne, which meant James' place as king was not always certain.

King James was a protestant – one of the reasons he was able to gain the crown – despite his mother being a catholic. Catholics in England had hoped that James might support them because of his family connections, but he did not. This led to a number of conspiracies and plots being developed against him, including the infamous Gunpowder Plot of 1605, just a year before Shakespeare wrote Macbeth.

Generally, many of the plays Shakespeare wrote during the Elizabethan era were very positive such as A Midsummer Night's Dream, but when James came to the throne he brought with him political uncertainty, and this atmosphere is reflected in the more menacing and darker plays Shakespeare wrote like Macbeth and Hamlet.

King James I was Scottish by birth and fascinated by his own family history. The play 'Macbeth' is based on real events from Scottish history and there was actually a King Macbeth in Scotland. In real life, King Macbeth reigned from 1040 to 1057 and had many successes as a king, whilst Duncan was actually a weak man who lacked respect from the people of Scotland.

Shakespeare based many of his plays on 'The Chronicles of Holinshed'. In this book, Banquo is included but he is shown to be a traitor just like Macbeth and assists him in the murder.

King James believed himself to be a descendant of Banquo's (although we now know he wasn't), which may have affected the way Shakespeare showed Banquo on stage.

Moreover, the Jacobean believed in the idea of a 'Great Chain of Being' The idea of this was that God had created a hierarchy that everyone had to live by, which God at the top and the King or Queen one place below Him. Therefore no one should want to become king because it was a position chosen by God and no one else could choose it. To want to become the monarch was therefore viewed as a sin and going against God.

King James very much believed in the concept of 'divine right' to rule. When a king or queen is coronated, the ceremony makes them 'divine', in many ways like the Catholic Church's Pope who is also seen to be divinely chosen and the 'mouthpiece of God' on earth.

During the Elizabethan era, Shakespeare's acting company was called the 'Chamberlain's Men', but during King James' time they changed their name to the 'King's Men'. In many ways, the play 'Macbeth' flatters and pleases King James. Think about what happens to someone like Macbeth who goes against 'divine rule'. Do you remember the line of kings that stretches out 'to the crack of doom'? If James believed himself to be a descendant of Banquo then this implies many of his children would be king as well.

King James was very interested in the concept of an 'ideal king' and wrote about it in a book called 'Basilikon Doron'. In this he discussed how a king should be someone of absolute integrity and someone who does their duty to both their country and God. In the play, Malcolm seems to represent this ideal king, something King James would have been fascinated by.

Furthermore, King James was intrigued by the supernatural, such as witches and ghosts, and wrote a book called 'Daemonologie' about this. That the play is so packed full of the supernatural is again possibly to interest the king. It is believed that King James himself was involved in some witch trials up in North Berwick (near Scotland).

So why did Shakespeare write a Scottish-based play warning about the dangers of being too ambitious and the dangers that await those that try to kill the king to gain power for

themselves? This contextual information might be very useful to mention in your exam essay.

Revision Activity 6: Historical Context

Challenge: Read through the historical context information and highlight all the key parts that will be helpful for your revision.

Extra Challenge: Annotate the information above, making notes on how this helps us to understand the play better. Add in parts of the play that would be helpful to talk about in your exam answer.

Mega Challenge: Go back and add some of this information to your exam-style answer.

