

Assessment Question

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.

Skills Coverage

LIT: AO1
L1, L2, L3, L4, L5, L6, L7, L8, L9, L10

LIT: AO2
E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6, E7, E8, E9, E10, E11, E12*

LIT: AO3
L11, L12, L13, L14*

LIT: AO4
L15, L16, L17, L18, L19, L20*



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 the 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 ‘dunest 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 femininity in order to be able to be strong in a man’s world.

4 MARKS FOR SPAG

- Sentence types: simple/compound/complex
- Punctuation ! ? , “ ” () ; -
- Ambitious vocabulary at every opportunity
- Capital Letters – Understanding – Punctuation – Spelling

Curriculum Intent: Why are we studying this?

1. Knowledge of universal themes & ideas in Shakespeare’s work.
2. Increase our own self awareness
3. Recognise our own difficulties through literature
4. Recognise that personal strength can overcome difficulties
5. Be successful at writing about Macbeth as part of the English Literature Paper 1 exam
6. Confidence & resilience in exams

Key concepts for this module:

1. Role of women
2. Guilt
3. Ambition
4. Appearance vs Reality
5. Good and Evil
6. Loyalty
7. Supernatural
8. Power
9. Tragic Hero
10. Fate and Freewill

More detail on the back...

Critical Theory		
Simone de Beauvoir	<p>Key ideas: Gender is different from one’s biological sex and is a social construction. Society expects each gender to behave in a distinct way. Women are oppressed as they are only valued for their looks and their societal function as wives and mothers. This is a restrictive gender role. Women are ‘the second sex’ as they perceived as less powerful and important to men. Society is therefore patriarchal (male-dominated).</p>	<p>Feminist literary critics may argue... Lady Macbeth is the victim of a patriarchal society. She dies because of the restrictive gender norms of Elizabethan England as she is unable to make autonomous choices about her life. Lady Macbeth subverts the dominant ideologies associated with femininity in Elizabethan England as she defies her gender stereotypes by dominating her husband and convincing him to commit regicide. She rebels from the confines of her gender role.</p>
John Locke	<p>Key ideas: Locke argued strongly against the idea that people were born sinful or that some people are innately evil. Instead, he suggested human beings are born with an ‘empty mind’ or <i>tabula rasa</i> which is then shaped by our experiences. He believed that the way children are brought up has a powerful impact on the adults they become.</p>	<p>The philosopher John Locke theorised that nurture has a more significant influence on human behaviour than inherent nature. Therefore, it could be argued... It is only because of Macbeth’s encounter with the witches that the seed of regicide is sown. In other words, his thoughts and subsequent immoral behaviours are shaped by this experience. Macbeth is not innately evil, and nor is his wife, who must invoke evil spirits to take possession of her body, shaping her into a murderer she knows she is not naturally. It is her belief in the diabolical power of evil which then influences her to act in immoral ways – and this belief in evil has been shaped by her Christian upbringing. It is the nurtured religious concept of sin which causes Lady Macbeth’s descent into madness.</p>

Tier 2 Ambitious Vocabulary*

- ambition despotic duplicitous equivocate
exploit heinous malevolent mercurial regicide
sceptical surreal treachery usurp valour

How to write about it...

Shakespeare introduces the character as...
 The author's intention is...
 Shakespeare's use of emotive vocabulary...
 A sense of..... is created by Shakespeare because.....
 The audience may interpret this as....
 The character embodies/represents/symbolises....*
 Shakespeare is

Key terminology	
Allusion	Referring to something without mentioning it directly.
Antagonist	A character who opposes the protagonist
Dramatic irony	The audience know something that a character does not.
Foreshadow	To give an indication of future events.
Hallucination	Seeing something that is not physically there.
Hamartia	A fatal flaw leading to the downfall of the tragic hero.
Hubris	Excessive pride and ego.
Juxtaposition	Placing two contrasting things close to each other.
*Machiavellian	Someone who is cunning (especially in politics).
Pathetic fallacy	Using the weather to create a mood.
*Prose	Natural speech, usually spoken by servants.
Protagonist	The main character.
Regicide	The act of killing a king.
*Soliloquy	A character speaking to themselves, but aloud.
Supernatural	Things not of this world: witches, spells, curses.
Treason	The act of betraying a King
Tyrant	A villainous ruler.
Valiant	Brave, heroic and confident.



Write about the writer with academic verbs.

Shakespeare...
 shows
 conveys
 portrays*
 implies
 communicates
 insinuates
 creates
 highlights
 displays
 alludes*
 hints
 expresses*



Themes	
Ambition:	The witches' prophecies spur both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to action but they act on their own to fulfil their deepest desires and ambitions. Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth want to be great and powerful. They sacrifice their morals to achieve that goal.
Order and disorder:	The play subverts the natural order of the world. Macbeth inverts the order of royal succession; his wife inverts the patriarchal hierarchy; the unnatural world disrupts the natural. The disruption underpins the conflict that is not only external and violent but internal as Macbeth and his wife come to terms with what they've done. *
Masculinity and femininity:	The play questions and examines manhood itself. Does a true man take what he wants no matter what it is? Or does a real man have the strength to restrain his desires? Lady Macbeth subverts the expectation of what it is to be a woman; she rejects her femininity.
Kingship and tyranny:	The king must be loyal to Scotland above his own interests. Duncan is always referred to as a 'king' while Macbeth soon becomes known as the 'tyrant'. Macbeth brings chaos to Scotland—symbolized in bad weather and bizarre supernatural events—and impulsively murders those he sees as a threat. As the embodiment of tyranny, he must be overcome by Malcolm so that Scotland can have a true king once more.
Appearance and reality:	Appearances are deceptive in the play and some characters trust appearances too much. Duncan trusts the wrong men with disastrous consequences, Macbeth trusts the witches and Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband's trust. The fine line between appearance and reality represents the line between good and evil. *

Key characters

Macbeth	The eponymous protagonist is both ambitious and ruthless. He transforms from loyal warrior to paranoid, tyrannical king.
Lady Macbeth	A strong, ambitious and manipulative woman who defies expectations. Persuasive and ruthless.
The Witches/The Weird Sisters	Supernatural and manipulative beings who seem to be able to predict the future. Unearthly and omniscient.
Banquo	Macbeth's close friend is astute and loyal. Macbeth sees him as a threat. Virtuous and insightful.
Duncan	King of Scotland; a strong and respected leader.
Macduff	A noble soldier who is loyal to Duncan and is suspicious of Macbeth.
Malcolm	Duncan's son and next in line to the throne. Dignified and clever.

Context (AO3)

Macbeth.	The plot is partly based on fact. Macbeth was a real 11 th Century king who reigned in Scotland from 1040-1057. The play was written in 1606 – after the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 and reflects the insecurities of Jacobean politics.
King James I of England (and VI of Scotland)	Ascended in 1603. The play pays homage to the king's Scottish lineage. James' family's claim to have descended from the historical Banquo. While King of Scotland, James VI became utterly convinced about the danger of witchcraft, leading to trials that began in 1591.
The Great Chain of Being	was a strict religious hierarchical structure of all matter and life which was believed to have been decreed by God. The chain starts from God and progresses downward to angels, demons, stars, moon, kings, princes, nobles, commoners, wild animals, domesticated animals, trees, other plants, precious stones, precious metals, and other minerals.*
The Divine Right of Kings	says that a monarch should rule directly from the will of God. It implies that only God can judge an unjust king and that any attempt to depose, dethrone or restrict his powers runs contrary to the will of God and may constitute a sacrilegious act. The act of killing a king is called regicide.
Shakespearean Tragedy.	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). *

Write about the audience...

The reader:
 ask themselves
 wonders
 questions
 agrees
 sympathises *
 assumes
 remembers
 believes
 BECAUSE...AND...SO...

This makes the audience feel...

shocked
 amused
 disgusted
 outraged *
 confused
 puzzled
 sadness
 melancholy *
 frustration
 fury
 BECAUSE...AND...SO...

Wherever you see

* on an English knowledge organiser it means this is a **stretch & challenge** element.

Revise and Test Your Knowledge

1. "Fair is foul, foul is fair"
2. "Disdaining fortune, with his brandished steel, which smoked with bloody execution"
3. "Too full of the milk of human kindness"
4. "Unsex me here! / And fill me from the crown to the toe-top/Of direst cruelty"
5. "Look like the innocent flower/But be the serpent under't"
6. "Is this a dagger which I see before me?"
7. "O full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife"
8. "Your wife and babes/savagely slaughtered"
9. "Out damned spot!"
10. "A poor player/That struts and frets his hour upon the stage"
11. "This dead butcher and his fiend-like queen."

1. What is the social and historical significance of Macbeth?
2. What is the significance of the Witches?
3. How do Macbeth and Banquo react to the witches?
4. How is Lady Macbeth presented in Act 1, Scene 5?
5. How is the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth presented?
6. How does Macbeth act just before the murders Duncan?
7. Is Macbeth an evil character?
8. What is the impact of the supernatural?
9. How has Lady Macbeth developed at the end of the play?
10. How does Shakespeare present Macbeth at the end of the play?

Wider Reading and Viewing

Youtubers:

Mr Bruff, Miss Cole, Stacey Reay, Mr Salles, Mrs Wheelan, Dr Aiden.

Websites:

[AQA English Revision - Macbeth](#)

[Macbeth - GCSE English Literature Revision - BBC Bitesize](#)

[Free Macbeth AQA GCSE Revision | Seneca \(senecalearning.com\)](#)

[Unit - Oak National Academy \(thenational.academy\)](#)

[Macbeth: Study Guide | SparkNotes](#)

[Revision Booklet - Macbeth](#)

[Revising the Key Context of 'Macbeth' – all the basics for your revision notes! – Miss Huttleston's GCSE English \(wordpress.com\)](#)

[Macbeth | Read online | The Complete Works of Shakespeare](#)

[Macbeth | The British Library \(bl.uk\)](#)

How to learn these:

1. Make flashcards with all the relevant information on them. Some information could be on the back so that you can test yourself on it.
2. Create a revision group either physically or using social media – for example WhatsApp to revise with your peers.
3. Create a 'memory palace' which means you tag a quotation to an object in a room at home. You should then be able to imagine that room and the objects within it to retrieve the quotations, when needed. You could have a different room in your house for each different Literature text.
4. Tag quotations to landmarks you come across on your journey into school. This could be different shops, crossings, bus stops... As you go back and forth to school, try to remember each of the quotations when you come across the tagged landmarks.
5. Re-write the information a number of times. Each time reduce it into less information until you end up with 12 words only: 1 word for each quotation. Then try to remember all of the information from that 1 word you have. Go back to previous notes to check what you got right and what you still need to learn.

