

Edexcel English Literature – Literature Paper 1: Shakespeare and Post-1914, Section A: Shakespeare

Purpose: to study a Shakespearean play; to develop skills to analyse how language, form, structure and context of texts can create meanings and effects; to develop skills to maintain a critical style and informed personal response.

What you need to do:

Answer a two-part question.

- Part A – focuses on an extract of approximately 30 lines
- Part B – focuses on how a theme reflected in the extract is explored elsewhere in the play

How you will be assessed:

AO1	15 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	20 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate
AO3	5 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show an understanding of the relationship between texts and the contexts in which they were written

Context

Shakespeare's Time

- Wrote during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth I (Elizabethan Era) and King James I (Jacobean Era)
- Plays written during the Elizabethan Era tend to be happier, whereas plays written during the Jacobean Era tended to be darker
- *Macbeth* was first performed in 1606

King James I

- Was a patron of Shakespeare's acting company
- Shakespeare had James I in mind when writing the play, particularly the claim that James I was a descendent of a historical figure named Banquo

Divine Right of Kings

- Belief that monarchs are appointed by God, and any attempt to question them was to question God
- To commit regicide (killing the monarch) was one of the worst crimes at the time
- James I used this to establish his rule as he was not a direct descendent of Elizabeth I

The Supernatural

- Belief in the supernatural and witches was particularly strong at the time
- James I had a personal interest in the supernatural and even wrote a book about it
- The audience at the time would have taken the ideas of the witches' prophecies, Macbeth seeming to be possessed, and his hallucinations seriously

The Role of Women

- Society was patriarchal at the time, and even having a female monarch did little to change the existing views
- Women belonged to their fathers, and then their husbands
- They were not allowed to own land or enter most professions
- Lady Macbeth would have been unusual in the 11th –century setting of the play, and to an audience in the 1600s

Themes
Ambition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Macbeth is a warning of what happens with ambition is not restricted by moral constraints Macbeth’s ambition turns him from a loyal general to a murderous tyrant Being overly ambitious is Macbeth’s hamartia (fatal flaw of a tragic hero)
Duty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A moral obligation shown through the characters’ loyalty to the King Duty and loyalty is rewarded through promotion (Macbeth becomes the Thane of Cawdor; Malcolm makes all the loyal Thanes Earls Macbeth swears loyalty to Duncan, while the audience knows he is already planning his murder – this is an example of dramatic irony When Macbeth becomes King, he expects the same level of duty and loyalty from his followers
Destiny <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fate vs free will – do the events happen because it was predetermined to, or because of Macbeth’s actions?
Gender <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband and questions his masculinity She wishes she could be ‘unsexed’ so she could embody the masculine traits needed to kill Duncan Masculinity associated raw aggression; femininity with weakness and kindness
Inversion of the Natural Order <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When the natural order is disturbed (three witches, Duncan’s murder), disorder and chaos occur Peace and order is only restored when Macbeth is killed, and Malcolm is on the throne (according to the Divine Right of Kings)
Secrets and Lies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Macbeth shows his secretiveness through his soliloquies – he hides his true thoughts from Banquo, and plots against the King and his sons He reveals his true thoughts to his wife in the letter he sends her, but eventually begins plotting without consulting her Lady Macbeth encourages Macbeth to lie ‘play false’, when Duncan comes to their castle
Guilt and Madness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Macbeth shows guilt over Duncan’s murder through the symbolic use of blood, his claim that ‘Macbeth shall sleep no more’, and through hallucinating the daggers Macbeth also shows guilt when he sees Banquo’s ghost Lady Macbeth shows madness through her sleepwalking, disjointed speech, and imagining blood on her hands; her suicide is the only way for her to escape her guilt over her actions

Characters	
Macbeth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tragic hero of the playInitially portrayed as ‘brave’ and ‘worthy’ and an excellent soldierPersuaded to kill the king, and takes his place becoming tyrannical and destructive
Lady Macbeth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Extremely ambitious and wants powerInitially appears stronger than Macbeth, urging him to kill DuncanEventually becomes weak due to guilt and madness, and commits suicide
Duncan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Kind and well-loved King of ScotlandHis rule (which is compassionate and rational) is in direct contrast to that of Macbeth’sDuncan’s death ushers in a period of chaos in Scotland
Banquo	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Macbeth’s best friend, who is ‘brave’ and ‘noble’Does not act on the prophecies given to himHis ghost returns to haunt Macbeth
Macduff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Represents honour and morality (contrast to Macbeth)Suspicious of Macbeth’s rule from the beginning; his wife and children are killed by MacbethHe leads an army with Malcolm against Macbeth, eventually killing him as he is ‘not of woman born’
The Witches	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Represent the supernatural, manipulation, and trickeryUse charms and prophecies to convince Macbeth to kill DuncanEnjoy playing with human lives and emotions

Devices and Techniques	
Alliteration	a series of words beginning with the same sound or letter
Atmosphere	The mood or emotion in a play
Dramatic irony	When the audience knows something that a character does not
Foreshadow	Warn about or indicate a future event
Hyperbole	Exaggeration to emphasise an idea or point
Imperative	An order
Juxtaposition	Placing two things side by side
Metaphor	Comparing one thing to something else
Sibilance	Repetition of ‘s’ sounds to create an effect
Soliloquy	A speech given by a character alone on stage to reveal what they are thinking
Synecdoche	Where part of something is used to represent the whole
Hamartia	The fatal flaw or characteristic of the tragic hero
Catharsis	The release of the audience’s emotions through empathy with the characters
Internal conflict	The struggle the hero engages in with their fatal flaw

Tasks to improve and expand your understanding of the play:

1. Write a short summary (one or two sentences) for each scene
2. Pick out a key quotation from each scene and complete a quote explosion for it
3. Track the themes through the play – make a list of quotations that reflect the theme and how the theme is presented by various characters
4. Consider how Shakespeare's audience would have reacted to various scenes and compare it to how a modern audience would react
5. Compare various characters – Macbeth vs Lady Macbeth; Macbeth vs Banquo; Macbeth vs Duncan; Macduff vs Macbeth

What is happening in this quote?

What is the technique used?

What is the most important word? What part of speech is it?
What does it show?

How does this make the reader feel about the character?

Why has Shakespeare chosen to show us this?