

Plot summary: Macbeth (Shakespeare, 1606) is a tragedy about a brave soldier who meets three witches on his way back from battle. The witches give Macbeth three prophecies and along with his wife, he decides to kill the king in order to make the prophecies come true. This leads to further murders being committed. Throughout the play, both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth descend into madness brought on by guilt at their actions. Lady Macbeth eventually admits to the murders whilst sleepwalking and commits suicide and Macbeth gets defeated by Macduff. Malcolm, Duncan's son, is crowned as the rightful king.

Key extract summary	Key quotes	Key themes
Act 1 Sc 3 – The Witches' first prophecies Macbeth and Banquo meet three witches on the way back from battle. The witches predict that Macbeth will be the Thane of Glamis, the Thane of Cawdor and eventually, King. They tell Banquo that his sons will be kings.		Supernatural Power/control Ambition Relationships
Act 1 Sc 5 – Lady MB's soliloquy Lady Macbeth reads a letter from MB about his encounter with the witches. She makes the decision to ensure the prophecies come true and calls upon spirits to help her become less feminine in her actions. She uses lots of imperatives in this soliloquy to ensure she is in control.	'come you spirits' 'unsex me here' 'come to my woman's breasts and take my milk for gall'	Supernatural Ambition Power/control Relationships
Act 1 Sc 7 – Lady MB persuades MB to kill Duncan When MB arrives home, Lady MB attempts to persuade him that if he wants to be king, he must act; her plan is for them to kill the existing king, Duncan. MB initially resists, but eventually goes along with her plan.	'we will proceed no further in this business' '...you would be so much more the man.' '...plucked my nipple from its boneless gums and dashed the brains out had I so sworn'	Ambition Power/control Relationships Violence
Act 2 Sc 1 – Dagger soliloquy As he's considering how to complete the murder, MB hallucinates a dagger in front of him which leads him to Duncan. Towards the end of the soliloquy, there is lots of natural imagery, linking MB with the witches.	'Is this a dagger I see before me...?' 'on thy blade and dudgeon, gouts of blood' 'thou marshalls't me the way I was going' 'o'er one half world, nature seems dead'	Power/control Violence Madness Ambition Supernatural
Act 2 Sc 2 – Duncan's murder After the murder, both MB and Lady MB feel paranoid. MB has forgotten the second part of the plan, to frame the guards by smearing them with blood. Lady MB goes back to do this.	'Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done 't' 'Macbeth does murder sleep' 'wash this filthy witness from your hand'	Guilt Violence Power/control Madness
Act 3 Sc 2 – MB fears Banquo Macbeth and Lady Macbeth talk and prepare for their feast. He is worried about the witches' predictions for Banquo. We see a shift in power here; Lady MB has very few lines and explicitly tells MB to stop. MB is in control from this point onwards.	'O full of scorpions is my mind dear wife' - MB 'You must leave this' - LMB	Guilt Power/control Madness
Act 3 Sc 4 – Banquo's ghost The Macbeths have a feast to celebrate MB being crowned King. At the feast, MB sees Banquo's ghost at the table, but nobody else does. The murderers tell MB that Banquo is dead but Fleance has escaped.	'the table's full' 'never shake thy gory locks at me' 'the fit is momentary; upon a thought he will again be well'	Madness Supernatural Guilt

Act 4 Sc 1 – The Witches' prophecies Macbeth goes back to visit the witches. They are casting a spell. They give Macbeth three new prophecies: Beware Macduff, none of woman born shall harm MB and that he doesn't need to worry until Great Birnam Wood comes to High Dunsinane Hill. Macbeth feels invincible after these.	'It will have blood; they say, blood will have blood' 'Beware Macduff' 'None of woman born/Shall harm Macbeth.' 'Macbeth shall never vanquished be until Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill Shall come against him.'	Power/control Supernatural
Act 5 Sc 1 – Lady MB sleepwalks Lady Macbeth is not coping well with the guilt of her actions; she is sleepwalking and a doctor has been called to check on her. Whilst she is sleepwalking, she admits her guilt. This is the last time we see her in the play and we later hear that she has died – we can assume that she has committed suicide.	'The Thane of Fife had a wife – where is she now?' 'Out damn spot' 'What will these hands ne'er be clean?'	Guilt Madness Power/control
Act 5 Sc 8 – MB is defeated by Macduff Macbeth enters alone intending to battle Macduff; he is not worried because of the witches' prophecies. Macduff enters and fights Macbeth. Macduff reveals that he wasn't in fact 'of woman born' and kills Macbeth. Malcolm is crowned the rightful king of Scotland.	"Turn, hellhound, turn!" My soul is too much charged With blood of thine already. 'I bear a charmed life' 'Then yield thee, coward'	Violence Power/control Ambition
Context – important notes:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's tragedies, written in 1606 when King James I was on the throne – we call this the Jacobean era. • James I believed in the Divine Right of Kings and the Great Chain of Being – this means that God chooses everyone's place in society. • Women were considered subordinate to men – they could not own a house and were expected to obey their husbands. A woman's role was in the home. • Almost everyone in England at this time was Christian. Most people believed in Hell as a very real place. • Witchcraft was also a very real threat due to lack of scientific knowledge – for example, witches might be blamed if crops fail. Witches were almost exclusively women. • It was legal to kill witches because of the Witchcraft Act passed in 1563. • Medical knowledge was lacking and was based around the concept of the 'four humours': <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ If you were 'sanguine' (dominated by blood) you would be jolly, optimistic and fat. ➤ If you were 'choleric' (yellow bile) you would be short-tempered, red-haired and thin. You might also be ambitious. ➤ If you were 'phlegmatic' (phlegm), you would be slow, pale, and lazy. ➤ If you were 'melancholic' (black bile), you would be thin, yellowish, and tend to spend a lot of time thinking and worrying • Mental illness was considered a result of an imbalance of humours or possession. Treatment would involve exorcisms, trepanning or being locked up in an asylum where the public could pay to look around. 		