Daily Bard

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Macbeth: study questions and answers

More than fifty questions on Macbeth, act by act, each with a full answer. Comprehension questions check what happens, analysis questions show how to write about it, and five essay questions come with outline plans you can adapt.



How to use these questions

Read the act first, then cover the answers and try each question from memory. The comprehension questions check that you know what happens and in which scene. The analysis questions ask how and why, and their answers are short models of the kind of paragraph an essay needs: a point, a quotation, a method and its effect. The whole-text questions and the essay outlines at the end pull the play together. Every quotation here is exact to the Folger text, so you can learn the wording with confidence. For context, themes and critics, use the **Macbeth study guide**, and keep the **Macbeth quotation sheet** beside you for the lines worth memorising.

Act 1

Comprehension

1 **What do we learn about Macbeth before he appears on stage?**

In Scene 2 a wounded Captain reports that Macbeth cut his way to the rebel Macdonwald and "unseamed him from the nave to th' chops", then helped Banquo beat off a fresh Norwegian attack. Ross adds that Norway was aided by the traitorous Thane of Cawdor. Duncan orders Cawdor's execution and gives his title to Macbeth. We hear of a loyal and ferocious soldier before we meet him.

2 **What do the Witches predict for Macbeth and for Banquo?**

In Scene 3 they hail Macbeth by three titles: Thane of Glamis (which he already is), Thane of Cawdor, and one "that shalt be king hereafter". Banquo asks for his own future and gets riddles: he will be "Lesser than Macbeth and greater", "Not so happy, yet much happier", and he will "get kings" (father them) without being one himself. The Witches vanish when Macbeth demands more.

3 **How does the first prophecy come true, and how do the two men react?**

Moments after the Witches vanish, Ross and Angus arrive from the King, and Ross greets Macbeth as Thane of Cawdor. Banquo's reaction is alarm: "What, can the devil speak true?" He warns that evil powers win trust with small truths. Macbeth's reaction is private excitement. In asides he calls the two truths "happy prologues" to the crown and finds that his mind has already turned to murder.

4 **What does Duncan announce in Scene 4, and why does it matter to Macbeth?**

After thanking Macbeth and Banquo, Duncan names his elder son Malcolm as his heir, with the title Prince of Cumberland, and says he will visit Macbeth's castle at Inverness. Macbeth sees at once that Malcolm now stands between him and the throne: it is "a step / On which I must fall down or else o'erleap". He leaves asking the stars to hide his "black and deep desires".

5 **What reasons does Macbeth give against the murder in Scene 7, and what plan does Lady Macbeth propose?**

Alone, Macbeth lists his objections. Violence returns on the person who uses it. Duncan is there "in double trust": Macbeth is his kinsman and subject, and also his host. Duncan has been so good a king that his death will cause universal pity. Lady Macbeth's plan is to get Duncan's two chamberlains drunk "with wine and wassail", kill the unguarded King and let them "bear the guilt". Macbeth adds that they will use the grooms' own daggers.

Analysis

6 **How does Shakespeare establish the Witches in the opening scene?**

The play begins with them, not with the humans, so that everything afterwards happens under their shadow. The scene is very short and tells us almost nothing except a name: they will meet "with Macbeth". Their verse sets them apart. They chant in short rhymed lines that begin on a stress, quite unlike the blank verse of the court, and it sounds like a spell. Their closing line, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair", is a chiasmus (a pattern repeated in reverse order), and it announces a world in which moral words can swap places. When Macbeth's first line calls the day "So foul and fair", he echoes creatures he has not yet met, which links him to them before any prophecy is spoken.

7 **How does Shakespeare present Lady Macbeth in her first scene?**

She is presented as a woman of formidable will who knows her husband exactly. Reading his letter, she decides at once that he will be king, and identifies the obstacle as his conscience: he is "too full o' th' milk of human kindness". Milk, a mother's food, makes kindness sound natural and nourishing, yet she treats it as a weakness. Her soliloquy then calls on spirits to "unsex me here" and to "Stop up th' access and passage to remorse". The imperatives (commands) show her energy, but they also reveal that she expects remorse to come and must block it in advance. Her cruelty is something she asks for, not something she has, which prepares for her collapse in Act 5.

8 **How does Lady Macbeth change her husband's mind in Scene 7?**

Macbeth opens firmly: "We will proceed no further in this business". She does not answer his moral reasons. She changes the subject to his courage and his love. A run of scornful questions, "Was the hope drunk / Wherein you dressed yourself?", accuses him of cowardice, and she redefines manhood as the willingness to kill: "When you durst do it, then you were a man". Then comes the shocking image of the nursing baby whose brains she would have "dashed" out sooner than break such a promise. Finally she supplies a practical plan, which turns a horror into a task. His last objection is only "If we should fail": he has stopped asking whether it is right and asks whether it will work.

Act 2

Comprehension

9 **What passes between Banquo and Macbeth at the start of Act 2?**

It is after midnight. Banquo, with his son Fleance, cannot sleep and prays to be kept from "cursed thoughts". He gives Macbeth a diamond that Duncan has sent for Lady Macbeth and mentions that he has dreamt of the Weird Sisters. Macbeth lies: "I think not of them". He then hints that supporting him will bring Banquo honour. Banquo agrees only if he can keep his "allegiance clear".

10 **What does Macbeth see before the murder, and what signal sends him to Duncan's room?**

Left alone in Scene 1, he sees a dagger in the air, its handle towards his hand, pointing the way to Duncan's chamber. He cannot grasp it, and as he watches, drops of blood appear on the blade. He decides it is produced by "the bloody business" in his mind. The signal is a bell, which Lady Macbeth was to strike when his drink was ready: "The bell invites me".

11 **What does each of the Macbeths do on the night of the murder?**

Lady Macbeth drugs the grooms' drinks and lays their daggers ready. She does not kill Duncan herself because he "resembled / My father as he slept". Macbeth commits the murder offstage and returns shaken, still carrying the daggers. He refuses to go back, so she returns them and smears the grooms with blood. A knocking begins at the gate, and she hurries him away to wash and put on his nightgown.

12 **Who discovers the murder, and what does Macbeth do in the confusion?**

Macduff, who has come with Lennox to wake the King, finds the body in Scene 3 and raises the alarm. Macbeth goes to the chamber with Lennox and kills the two grooms. He then claims that he did it in a fury of loyal grief. When Macduff asks "Wherefore did you so?", Macbeth gives an elaborate speech of justification, and Lady Macbeth faints, or seems to, and is helped out.

13 **What do Duncan's sons do, and what follows from it?**

Malcolm and Donalbain suspect the mourners around them: "There's daggers in men's smiles". They leave at once and separately, Malcolm for England and Donalbain for Ireland. In Scene 4 Macduff reports that their flight has put suspicion of the murder on them, that Macbeth has been named king and has gone to Scone to be crowned. Macduff himself will not attend. He goes home to Fife.

Analysis

14 **How does Shakespeare present Macbeth's state of mind in the dagger soliloquy?**

As a mind that no longer trusts itself. The speech begins with a question, "Is this a dagger which I see before me", and keeps testing the vision against touch: "I have thee not, and yet I see thee still". He offers a rational explanation, that it is "A dagger of the mind" from a "heat-oppressed brain", but the dagger does not go away. Shakespeare leaves open whether it is supernatural or imagined. What is not open is the direction: "Thou marshal'st me the way that I was going". The vision leads him only where he already meant to go. He then pictures murder as a figure moving "like a ghost", as if the act belonged to someone else.

15 **How does Shakespeare contrast the Macbeths' reactions straight after the murder?**

Macbeth thinks in images and she thinks in tasks. He is fixed on what he could not do, say "Amen", and on a voice crying "Sleep no more". His language reaches for the cosmic: all "great Neptune's ocean" will not clean his hand. Her replies are short and practical: "Consider it not so deeply", "Go get some water". Where he sees a sea turned red, she sees a stain: "A little water clears us of this deed". Yet her own warning, "so, it will make us mad", shows that she understands the danger. The scene plants the lines that return in her sleepwalking, when she can no longer wash the blood away.

16 **Why does Shakespeare put the Porter's comic scene directly after the murder?**

The Porter does three things. First, he holds the tension: the knocking that terrified Macbeth goes on while a drunk man takes his time, and the audience waits for the body to be found. Second, his joke is true. He pretends to be "porter of hell gate", and the castle has just become a kind of hell. Third, he introduces a key word. His "equivocator", who "could not equivocate to heaven", is generally read as a topical reference to the trials after the Gunpowder Plot, and equivocation (misleading by words that are technically true) is the method of the Witches' later prophecies. He speaks prose, the language of low comedy, which makes the return to verse and horror at Macduff's cry more violent.

Act 3

Comprehension

17 **What does Banquo suspect at the start of Act 3, and what does he hope?**

In a short soliloquy he notes that Macbeth now has everything the Witches promised and fears "Thou played'st most foully for 't". He tells nobody. His next thought is of himself: if the prophecies have come true for Macbeth, the promise that he will be "the root and father / Of many kings" may come true as well. He then accepts the new King's invitation to the feast.

18 **Why does Macbeth want Banquo and Fleance dead, and how does he arrange it?**

He fears Banquo's character, his "royalty of nature", and he cannot bear the prophecy that Banquo's descendants will reign, which makes his own a "fruitless crown". He has already met two desperate men and convinced them that Banquo caused their misfortunes. In Scene 1 he goads them by questioning their manhood, then orders the killing for that night, away from the palace, with Fleance included.

19 **What happens in the ambush in Scene 3?**

A third murderer, sent by Macbeth, joins the two. At dusk Banquo and Fleance approach the palace on foot with a torch. The murderers attack, the light is struck out, and Banquo is killed, crying to his son to escape and take revenge: "Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly!" Fleance gets away in the dark. As one murderer says, they have "lost best half" of the job.

20 **What happens at the banquet in Scene 4?**

A murderer reports at the door that Banquo is dead and Fleance has escaped. When Macbeth turns to the table, Banquo's ghost is sitting in his place. Nobody else can see it. Macbeth speaks to it in terror, and Lady Macbeth tells the lords that her husband has had such fits "from his youth". The ghost leaves and returns, and when Macbeth breaks down again she dismisses the guests in haste.

21 **What does Macbeth decide after the banquet, and what do we learn about Macduff by the end of the act?**

Macbeth resolves to visit the Weird Sisters the next day, to learn "By the worst means the worst", and to put his own interest before everything. He has heard that Macduff refuses his summons, and admits that he keeps a paid spy in every lord's house. In Scene 6 we hear that Macduff has gone to the English court, where Malcolm is living, to ask for an army.

Analysis

22 **How does Macbeth persuade the murderers, and why is his method significant?**

He uses his wife's method on them. When the First Murderer says "We are men, my liege", Macbeth answers with a contemptuous list of dogs, from "hounds and greyhounds" to "curs", all called dogs but ranked by quality. If they are not in "th' worst rank of manhood", they will prove it by killing. This is the argument of Act 1, Scene 7 turned outward: manhood measured by readiness to murder. The scene also shows how kingship has changed him. He could kill Banquo openly, he says, but needs to keep certain friends, so he works through hired men and lies. The soldier who once fought "with his brandished steel" in the open now kills by proxy and in the dark.

23 **How has the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth changed by Scene 2?**

The partnership of Act 1 has become two solitudes. She has to send a servant to ask for a few words with her own husband, and her first question is "why do you keep alone". Alone for four lines, she admits the crown has brought no joy: "Naught's had, all's spent". She hides this from him, and he hides his plan from her: "Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck". The endearment is tender, but the line shuts her out of a murder she would once have planned. The roles have reversed. It is now Macbeth who calls on darkness, "Come, seeling night", in a deliberate echo of her invocation in Act 1, and she who is left wondering: "Thou marvel'st at my words".

24 **Is Banquo's ghost real? How does Shakespeare use it?**

The question is open, and the scene is built to keep it so. The stage direction brings the ghost on, so the audience sees what Macbeth sees, which supports a real haunting. Yet no other character sees it, and Lady Macbeth links it to an earlier vision: "This is the air-drawn dagger which you said / Led you to Duncan". On that reading it is guilt made visible. Either way its dramatic work is the same. It sits in the King's own seat, turning the prophecy about Banquo's line into a picture, and it destroys the ceremony by which Macbeth hoped to look like a legitimate king. The feast that began "You know your own degrees" ends in disorder: "Stand not upon the order of your going".



Half of knowing a play is knowing its lines exactly. **Daily Bard** gives you one Shakespeare passage a day, checked against the Folger text, with a plain-English reading on the back of the leaf.

Act 4

Comprehension

25 **What are the three apparitions, and what does each tell Macbeth?**

In Scene 1 the Witches raise three figures from the cauldron. An Armed Head warns him: "Beware Macduff". A Bloody Child tells him to be bold, because "none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth". A Child Crowned, with a tree in his hand, promises that he will never be defeated until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane Hill. Macbeth takes the second and third as guarantees of safety.

26 **What else does Macbeth insist on knowing, and what is he shown?**

He demands to know whether Banquo's descendants will ever reign. The Witches warn him to "Seek to know no more", then show a procession of eight kings, the last holding a mirror that reflects many more, with Banquo's ghost following, smiling and pointing at them as his. This is the one answer Macbeth did not want. He curses the Witches and everyone who trusts them.

27 **What does Macbeth decide when he hears that Macduff has fled?**

Lennox tells him that Macduff has gone to England. Macbeth resolves never again to delay between thought and act: "The very firstlings of my heart shall be / The firstlings of my hand". Since he cannot reach Macduff, he will seize his castle in Fife and kill "His wife, his babes" and all his kin. There is no soliloquy of doubt this time and no consultation with his wife.

28 **What happens at Macduff's castle in Scene 2?**

Lady Macduff complains to Ross that her husband's flight has left his family unprotected, and then talks with her quick-witted young son. A messenger warns her to escape, but too late. Murderers enter, call Macduff a traitor, and stab the boy when he defends his father. Lady Macduff runs out pursued, crying murder. In the next scene Ross reports that wife, children and servants were all killed.

29 **How and why does Malcolm test Macduff in Scene 3?**

Malcolm fears that Macduff may be Macbeth's agent, sent to lure him home, especially as Macduff left his family behind. He therefore pretends to be worse than Macbeth: boundlessly lustful, greedy, and lacking every "king-becoming" virtue. Macduff excuses the first two faults but finally despairs: such a man is not fit to govern, or even to live. That honest outburst proves his loyalty to Scotland, and Malcolm takes back every word.

Analysis

30 **How do the apparitions deceive Macbeth?**

They deceive by equivocation: each statement is true, and each is worded so that he will mishear it. "none of woman born" sounds like "no one", and Macbeth takes it that way, yet it leaves out a man delivered by surgery. The moving wood sounds impossible, and he says so: "That will never be". Shakespeare lets the audience see more than Macbeth does, because the apparitions' shapes contradict their words. The Bloody Child can be read as Macduff at his birth, and the crowned child with a tree as Malcolm with his bough from Birnam. Macbeth listens and does not look. Hecate has already named the trap: "security / Is mortals' chiefest enemy", where security means overconfidence. The prophecies do not make him safe. They make him careless.

31 **Why is the murder of Macduff's family a turning point in our view of Macbeth?**

Because it has no purpose and no cost to him. Duncan stood between Macbeth and the crown, and Banquo threatened his line. Lady Macduff and her children threaten nothing, and he has just been told to fear no man "of woman born". He orders it anyway, in a few flat lines. Shakespeare then makes us watch. Duncan died offstage and Banquo died in the dark, but here we meet the victims first, in a domestic scene full of affectionate teasing, and a child is stabbed in front of us. Lady Macduff's bitter remark that in this world "to do harm / Is often laudable" shows what Scotland has become. In the next scene he is "This tyrant, whose sole name blisters our tongues".

32 **How does Macduff's response to the news challenge the Macbeths' idea of manhood?**

When Ross tells him, Macduff can hardly take it in. He repeats the same question in broken phrases: "All my pretty ones? / Did you say "all"?" The image of a "hell-kite" swooping on "pretty chickens and their dam" is homely and pitiful, far from the grand rhetoric of the court. Malcolm urges him to "Dispute it like a man", meaning fight back. Macduff's reply is the moral centre of the play: "I shall do so, / But I must also feel it as a man". For Lady Macbeth, to be a man was to feel nothing. For Macduff, feeling is part of manhood, and grief comes before revenge. He also blames himself, "Sinful Macduff", taking the responsibility that Macbeth never does.

Act 5

Comprehension

33 **What do the Doctor and the Gentlewoman witness in Scene 1?**

Lady Macbeth walks in her sleep, carrying a candle, since she now insists on having "light by her continually". She rubs her hands as if washing them and speaks in fragments that betray the murders of Duncan, Banquo and Macduff's wife: "The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now?" The Doctor concludes that this is beyond medicine and orders that she be watched.

34 **How does Birnam Wood come to Dunsinane?**

In Scene 4 Malcolm's army, joined by the Scottish thanes who have deserted Macbeth, reaches Birnam Wood. Malcolm orders every soldier to "hew him down a bough / And bear 't before him", so that the enemy cannot count their numbers. In Scene 5 a frightened messenger tells Macbeth that the wood seems to be moving towards the castle. The prophecy is fulfilled by an ordinary military trick.

35 **How does Lady Macbeth die, and how does Macbeth respond?**

She dies offstage in Scene 5. Macbeth hears "the cry of women", and Seyton reports: "The Queen, my lord, is dead." No cause is given then. At the very end Malcolm says it is thought that she killed herself, "by self and violent hands", which is a report and not a certainty. Macbeth answers with the speech beginning "She should have died hereafter", in which life itself seems to him meaningless.

36 How does Macbeth die?

Trusting the prophecy, he kills young Siward in Scene 7. In Scene 8 Macduff finds him. Macbeth boasts of his "charmed life", and Macduff replies that he was "from his mother's womb / Untimely ripped", meaning delivered by being cut out. Macbeth at first refuses to fight, then refuses to surrender and be mocked, and fights on. Macduff kills him and returns carrying his head.

37 How does the play end?

Macduff hails Malcolm as King of Scotland, and the thanes repeat the cry. Old Siward learns that his son died bravely, with his wounds in front. Malcolm makes his thanes earls, the first in Scotland, promises to call home the exiles and to deal with the agents of "this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen", and invites everyone to his coronation at Scone.

Analysis

38 How does Shakespeare present Lady Macbeth in the sleepwalking scene?

As a mind taken apart. Until now she has spoken controlled blank verse. Here she speaks prose, in short sentences with no connecting logic, and the form itself shows the loss of command. Almost every phrase replays an earlier moment: "A little water clears us of this deed" has become "What, will these hands ne'er be clean?" The hyperbole (deliberate exaggeration) of "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand" matches her husband's ocean in Act 2, and the adjective "little" gives back the womanhood she asked the spirits to remove. Shakespeare also frames her with two watchers, so we see her as a patient, pitied and feared. The **essay on "Out, damned spot"** reads the scene line by line.

39 What does the "Tomorrow" speech show about Macbeth?

It shows what the murders have cost him: the capacity to feel that anything matters. His first response to his wife's death is that she "should have died hereafter", a line that can mean either that she would have died some day anyway or that there ought to have been a better time to mourn. Then the rhythm drags: "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow / Creeps in this petty pace", where repetition makes time a dull procession. The metaphors shrink life to a "brief candle", a "walking shadow", a "poor player", and finally a tale "Signifying nothing". This is the speaker's despair, not the play's verdict. Macbeth has destroyed the bonds that give a life meaning, and reports the result. See the **essay on the speech**.

40 Does Macbeth recover any of our sympathy in the final act?

There is a case on each side. Against him: he bullies a frightened servant, has no word of grief that is clearly for his wife, and kills young Siward with a sneer. For him: he sees his own ruin without self-deception. He knows that what should come with age, "honor, love, obedience, troops of friends", he "must not look to have". He tries to avoid Macduff because "My soul is too much charged / With blood of thine already", the nearest he comes to remorse. And when every prophecy has failed he still fights: "Yet I will try the last". Shakespeare returns him to the soldier of Act 1, with courage but no cause. The strongest answer is that we feel the waste of what he was, without wishing him to win.

Whole-text questions

41 How does Macbeth change in the course of the play?

He moves from a man who feels too much to a man who feels almost nothing. At the start the mere thought of murder makes his hair stand up and his heart "knock at my ribs". He argues with himself before killing Duncan and is tormented afterwards. Banquo's murder is planned coolly and done by others. The slaughter of Macduff's family is ordered in a moment. By Act 5 he can say "I have almost forgot the taste of fears". The change is not from good to evil, since his ambition is there from his first scene. It is a deadening of conscience through use, and Shakespeare makes Macbeth observe it himself, which is why he stays tragic and not merely monstrous. The character analysis of Macbeth follows this in detail.

42 How are Macbeth and Lady Macbeth structured as opposites?

They start at opposite ends and cross. In Act 1 she is resolute and he is full of scruple. On the night of the murder he raves about blood and sleep while she manages the evidence. From Act 3 the lines cross: he plans alone, hardens and stops consulting her, while she is left with knowledge she cannot share. By Act 5 he has "supped full with horrors" and she is reliving them in her sleep, speaking his old fears about blood that will not wash off. The design makes an argument about guilt. Her method was to suppress it and his was to outrun it with new crimes, and neither works. For more on her half of the pattern, see the character analysis of Lady Macbeth.

43 Is Macbeth controlled by fate, or does he choose?

The play gives evidence for both and leans towards choice. For fate: every prophecy comes true, including those Macbeth fights against, and Banquo's line does inherit. For choice: the Witches say that he will be king, never that he must kill. He himself sees the alternative, "If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me / Without my stir", and then rejects it. Banquo hears the same kind of promise and does nothing. Most tellingly, Macbeth believes in fate only when it suits him: he trusts the promise of the crown and tries to cancel the promise to Banquo by killing Fleance. A balanced answer is that the prophecies fix the end but not the means, and the means are the tragedy. The page of quotes about fate gives the key lines.

44 How does the reign of James I help to explain the play?

Macbeth was written around 1606 for the King's Men, whose patron was the new King, a Scot. Several features fit his interests. James believed kings were God's deputies, and the play treats Duncan's murder as sacrilege: "Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope / The Lord's anointed temple". He had written on witchcraft, and the play opens with witches. He traced his descent from Banquo, whom Shakespeare makes innocent, and the show of kings in Act 4 stretches Banquo's line into the future. The praise of the English king who heals by touch is a compliment to sacred monarchy. Context should support a point about the text, though, and the play is not simple flattery: its good kings are either murdered or untested, and its portrait of how a loyal subject becomes a traitor is disturbingly sympathetic.

45 How does Shakespeare use double meanings and equivocation across the play?

From the first scene, language in Macbeth says two things at once. The Witches speak in paradox (a statement that seems to contradict itself): "When the battle's lost and won", "Lesser than Macbeth and greater". The Macbeths use euphemism (a mild word for a harsh thing), so that murder becomes "this business", and make courtesy a mask: "False face must hide what the false heart doth know". The Porter names the habit when he jokes about an "equivocator". In Act 4 the method is turned on Macbeth, in prophecies that are true in a sense he does not hear. He understands only at the end, cursing fiends who "palter with us in a double sense". The pattern makes a moral point: a man who deceives others ends unable to trust any word, including the ones he was promised.

46 How does Shakespeare develop the idea of sleep?

Sleep stands for innocence and peace of mind, and the play shows it destroyed. Duncan is killed asleep, which makes the crime an attack on sleep itself: Macbeth hears a voice cry "Macbeth does murder sleep", and lists what he has lost in a run of metaphors, among them "Balm of hurt minds". The punishment fits. By Act 3 he speaks of "these terrible dreams / That shake us nightly" and envies the dead King, who "sleeps well". His wife tells him he lacks "the season of all natures, sleep", and in Act 5 her own sleep becomes the place where guilt speaks. When the Scottish lords hope for "sleep to our nights", the motif becomes political: a whole country cannot rest under a murderer.

Essay questions with outline answers

I **“Macbeth is a victim of others, not a villain.” How far do you agree?**

Thesis: Macbeth is tempted and pushed by others, but Shakespeare shows him understanding each crime before he commits it, so he is responsible, and the pressure on him lessens as his guilt grows.

- **Point 1:** The Witches tempt but do not instruct. They promise a crown and never mention murder. The idea is Macbeth’s own, and it arrives within minutes, in Act 1, Scene 3: “My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical”.
- **Point 2:** Lady Macbeth’s pressure is real, and for one scene it is decisive. In Act 1, Scene 7 he has decided against the deed until she attacks his courage. But he gives in knowing every argument against it: Duncan is there “in double trust”.
- **Point 3:** After Duncan, nobody pushes him. He plans Banquo’s death alone and hides it from his wife, and the killing of Macduff’s family follows from his own resolution in Act 4, Scene 1: “be it thought and done”.
- **Counter-argument:** The Witches choose him and deceive him deliberately, and the apparitions are designed to make him reckless. He ends as their dupe, cursing “juggling fiends”. Deceived is not the same as innocent, however.

Conclusion: Others open the door, but Macbeth walks through it with his eyes open, which is exactly what makes him a tragic figure and not a puppet.

II **"Lady Macbeth is the real driving force of the tragedy." How far do you agree?**

Thesis: Lady Macbeth drives the first murder and no other, and the play's design depends on her power fading as her husband's independence grows.

- **Point 1:** In Act 1 she is the stronger will. She resolves on the murder before Macbeth is home, intending to "pour my spirits in thine ear", and in Scene 7 she reverses his decision and supplies the plan.
- **Point 2:** On the night itself she manages what he cannot. In Act 2, Scene 2 she returns the daggers and scorns his horror: "Infirm of purpose!" Without her the plot would have failed.
- **Point 3:** From Act 3 she drives nothing. She does not know of the plan against Banquo, "Be innocent of the knowledge", and is absent from the stage between the banquet and her sleepwalking. The worst crimes are his alone.
- **Counter-argument:** The ambition was already his. Her first speech assumes it, "Art not without ambition", and she claims in Scene 7 that he raised the idea first. She releases something in him. She does not create it.

Conclusion: She is the driving force of Act 1 and the first casualty of what she starts, and that shift is the play's comment on who is finally responsible.

III **How does Shakespeare present kingship in Macbeth?**

Thesis: Shakespeare presents kingship as a sacred trust measured by the health of the kingdom, and tests the idea by setting four kings side by side.

- **Point 1:** Duncan is the gracious king whose language is of planting and growth: "I have begun to plant thee" (Act 1, Scene 4). His murder is described as sacrilege. Yet he is also fatally trusting, admitting there is "no art / To find the mind's construction in the face".
- **Point 2:** Macbeth is the tyrant, a king in title only. Under him Scotland is a wounded body, "It weeps, it bleeds" (Act 4, Scene 3), and his subjects obey from fear. Angus sees the title "Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe / Upon a dwarfish thief".
- **Point 3:** Malcolm and the English king supply the ideal. Malcolm lists the "king-becoming graces", beginning with "justice, verity, temp'rance", and Edward heals his subjects by touch, the reverse of a king who makes his country sick.
- **Counter-argument:** The restored order is not wholly reassuring. Malcolm is cautious and skilled at pretending, his list of virtues is spoken during a lie, and the play ends as it began, with a traitor's severed head and rewards for the victors.

Conclusion: The play upholds sacred kingship while showing how much it depends on the character of one man, and how easily the forms of loyalty can be acted.

IV **“Fair is foul, and foul is fair.” Explore how Shakespeare presents the gap between appearance and reality in Macbeth.**

Thesis: Deception begins as a weapon the Macbeths use against others and ends as the condition they live in, when they can trust neither words nor their own senses.

- **Point 1:** The theme is stated before the plot begins, by the Witches and by Duncan, who cannot read the first Cawdor’s face and then trusts the second. The dramatic irony (the audience knowing more than a character) of his praise for the castle’s “pleasant seat” in Act 1, Scene 6 makes the audience feel the gap.
- **Point 2:** The Macbeths make false appearance a policy. She instructs him to “Look like th’ innocent flower, / But be the serpent under ’t”, and by Act 3, Scene 2 he resents having to “make our faces vizards to our hearts”. The mask has become a burden.
- **Point 3:** The deceivers are then deceived. Macbeth cannot tell whether the dagger and the ghost are real, and the apparitions mislead him with truths. Lady Macbeth’s sleepwalking shows the hidden reality forcing its way out against her will.
- **Counter-argument:** Not all disguise is evil. Malcolm lies about himself to test Macduff, and his soldiers hide behind branches. The play separates pretence used to find out the truth from pretence used to conceal a crime.

Conclusion: In Macbeth false seeming cannot be kept outside the self: those who practise it lose their own hold on what is real.

V **Explore the significance of children and inheritance in Macbeth.**

Thesis: Children stand for the future, and the play is the story of a childless man at war with a future he cannot possess.

- **Point 1:** The Macbeths' crime is set against images of infants. Pity is "a naked newborn babe" in Act 1, Scene 7, and Lady Macbeth proves her will by imagining the murder of a nursing child. To gain the crown they must attack what is most defenceless.
- **Point 2:** The crown is worthless to Macbeth without an heir. In Act 3, Scene 1 it is "a fruitless crown" and "a barren scepter", and he has damned himself "To make them kings, the seeds of Banquo kings". Hence the attempt on Fleance.
- **Point 3:** His violence turns on children directly: Macduff's son is killed on stage. Macduff's cry, "He has no children", is ambiguous. It may refer to Macbeth, who cannot be repaid in kind or cannot understand a father's loss, or to Malcolm, who offers comfort too quickly.
- **Counter-argument:** Children are also the agents of his defeat. Two of the apparitions are children, Fleance and Malcolm survive, and the man who kills him was a child "Untimely ripped" from the womb. The future he tried to kill returns armed.

Conclusion: The pattern gives the tragedy its shape: Macbeth wins the present by murder and loses time itself, ending with nothing ahead of him but "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow".

For the lines behind these answers, see the theme pages on **ambition** and **guilt**, and plan your own answers with the **essay planner**.



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