GCSE English Literature for AQA
Macbeth Student Book

Written for the AQA GCSE English Literature specification for first teaching from 2015, this Student Book provides in-depth support for the study of Macbeth as students' Shakespeare set text. Exploring the play in detail and as a whole text, this resource builds skills and confidence in understanding and writing about Macbeth.

• Encourages skills development and progression based on GCSE English Literature assessment objectives and study focus areas, including structure, contexts, characterisation and language.
• Part 1 units explore each act of the play in detail; Part 2 units consider the play as a whole.
• Each Part 1 unit includes a 'Getting it into writing' task to build focused writing skills and confidence.
• Includes an exam preparation section with guidance and practice, including example answers.
• The Cambridge Elevate-enhanced Edition features additional rich digital content, including brand-new videos of performances of key scenes, character and language explorations and much more.

This book has been approved by AQA.

Some of the other titles in this series:
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About the authors
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Series editor Peter Thomas has been involved in English curriculum development for more than 30 years.

Macbeth
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Student Book
Anthony Partington and Richard Spencer
Series editor: Peter Thomas
### GETTING STARTED - THE PLAY AND YOU

**Sympathy or judgement?**

Every day the news reports cases of people doing something wrong or committing serious crimes. In most cases you may not think there is any reason to feel sorry for those people. You will probably feel that they deserve their punishment. But are there any exceptions to this?

1. Work in small groups. Discuss the following questions.
   - Think of examples in the recent news where you may have felt sympathy for someone who has committed a terrible crime. Why did you feel that way?
   - Under what circumstances might you feel sympathy for someone who had done something bad? How would you judge?

### GETTING CLOSER - FOCUS ON DETAILS

**Bringing it all together**

Act 5 is packed with dramatic moments as the play reaches its climax and conclusion. Read the following summary of what happens in Act 5.

- understand the factors that lead to Macbeth’s downfall
- consider how Lady Macbeth’s character has changed
- explore the moral context and messages of the play
- analyse the use of dark and violent imagery and language
- develop written response skills.

#### Act 5: Endings and beginnings

**How does the play end?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scene 1</td>
<td>Lady Macbeth is very ill. Sleepwalking and talking in her sleep, she sees visions of blood on her hands. The Doctor and her Gentlewoman realise, through the things she says, that she is guilty of Duncan’s murder, but they are unable to help with her troubled behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 2</td>
<td>The English army has marched on Scotland. Macbeth has defended his castle at Dunsinane and is prepared for a siege, even though men are deserting him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 3</td>
<td>Macbeth is furious that Malcolm is approaching. He is told that Lady Macbeth cannot be cured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 4</td>
<td>Malcolm hears of many deserters from Macbeth’s army. He orders his army to cut down the boughs of the trees from Birnam Wood and use them as camouflage when marching to Dunsinane.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 5</td>
<td>Macbeth hears a scream and is informed that his wife has committed suicide. His reply is subtle; he has to concentrate on the coming fight. He is shaken by the next message he receives – Birnam Wood is coming to Dunsinane, just as the Witches predicted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 6 and 7</td>
<td>The battle begins and Macbeth fights fearlessly, killing many just as he did in the battle before the play begins. Although Macbeth’s army is losing, nobody seems able to kill Macbeth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 8</td>
<td>Finally, Macbeth meets Macduff face to face in battle. They fight and Macduff reveals that he is not ‘of woman born’ – he was born by caesarean section. On hearing this, Macbeth’s courage deserts him. He is killed by Macduff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 9</td>
<td>Macduff produces the head of Macbeth for Malcolm and hails him as the new king of Scotland. Malcolm invites all to attend his coronation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lady Macbeth sleepwalks

Act 5 begins with one of the most famous scenes of any Shakespeare play. Watched by her Gentlewoman and a Doctor, Lady Macbeth sleepwalks, talking in her sleep about the ‘deeds’ she has committed.

Look at these two statements by Lady Macbeth – one from Act 2 and one from Act 5:

A little water clears us of this deed.
How easy is it then!

Lady Macbeth: Act 2 Scene 2, lines 70–71

What, will these hands ne’er be clean?

Lady Macbeth: Act 5 Scene 1, line 37

In pairs, discuss how Shakespeare uses language to make a connection between these two points in the play.

What does the contrast between these two quotations suggest about the change that has come over Lady Macbeth by the beginning of Act 5?

The Doctor and the Gentlewoman

The sleepwalking scene begins with a Doctor and a Gentlewoman speaking to each other. This is one of the few passages in Macbeth where Shakespeare uses prose rather than verse.

Why do you think Shakespeare uses prose in this scene? Look at the possible reasons in the table below.

- Rank them in order 1 to 4, with the most convincing as number 1.
- Find evidence from the text to support your decisions.
- Add an idea of your own. Try to justify it with evidence from the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Shakespeare is showing an informal conversation; this is gossip rather than the language of the court.</td>
<td>Shakespeare wants to make this scene seem more ‘real’ for the audience. They speak in prose, so that the audience is drawn into what they are saying and sympathises with Lady Macbeth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Doctor and the Gentlewoman are servants and Shakespeare wants to show this.</td>
<td>The Doctor and the Gentlewoman are speaking to each other, and their conversation is informal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Shakespeare wants to demonstrate that the normal rules have broken down and that formality and etiquette has given way to disorder and rumour.</td>
<td>The Doctor and the Gentlewoman are servants and Shakespeare wants to show this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I think the characters speak in prose in this scene because…</td>
<td>The Doctor and the Gentlewoman are servants and Shakespeare wants to show this.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key terms

prose: writing that follows the style of normal speech.
verse: writing that has a particular rhyme, pattern or rhythm.
PUTTING DETAILS TO USE

Macbeth reflects on life

Macbeth retreats to his castle. A sequence of messengers deliver bad news about the approaching English army and Macbeth begins to doubt the Witches’ prophecies.

His outward mood changes from weariness and doubt to threat and bravado, but he is determined to fight on, whatever may happen. Through a series of soliloquies Shakespeare allows us to hear his private thoughts:

I have lived long enough. My way of life Is fall’n into the sere, the yellow leaf, And that which should accompany old age, As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends, I must not look to have; but in their stead, Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.

Macbeth: Act 5 Scene 3, lines 22–23

In this speech, Macbeth lists four things that people hope for in old age. What are they? Write a sentence about each one to explain what it would mean for an older person.

What does Macbeth expect instead of these things? How do these contrast with what other people hope for?

In this context, the word ‘should’ could mean:

• she ought to have died later
• she would have died later anyway.

What do you think Macbeth might mean in each case?
Macbeth as ‘tragic hero’

Many of Shakespeare’s plays are called tragedies. A tragedy is built around the personality and career of a ‘tragic hero’. The key points about a tragic hero can be summarised as follows:

- They are the central figure in the drama.
- It is their personality and decisions that make the events in the story happen.
- They usually have a secret flaw or weakness in their personality that causes a fatal mistake and leads to their downfall.
- They are at the centre of the action and they always die at the end of the play.

a Copy and complete the following table to show how the key elements of the ‘tragic hero’ can be seen in Macbeth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A tragic hero …</th>
<th>How does this apply to Macbeth?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>is a man of power</td>
<td>As Thane of Glamis, Macbeth is a powerful and admired noble at the start of the play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has a flaw or character weakness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has a career that is impressive, frightening and finally sad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>becomes a tyrant and does terrible things</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has allies and enemies that are murdered, exiled or alienated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>becomes isolated and realises their flaw or mistake too late</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dies as a result of their own actions and character flaw</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b In what way does the weakness you have identified in Macbeth’s character lead to his downfall?

In Scene 9, Macbeth realises that the end has come. The prophecies have falsely raised his hopes. Yet he remains defiant:

I will not yield
To kiss the ground before young Malcolm’s feet
And to be baited with the rabble’s curse.
Though Birnam Wood be come to Dunsinane
And thou opposed being of no woman born,
Yet I will try the last. Before my body,
I throw my warlike shield.

Macbeth: Act 5 Scene 9, lines 27–33

How does the language in this – Macbeth’s final speech – affect your view of him?

How do you think Shakespeare intended us to feel about Macbeth by the end of the play? Should we sympathise with him or not? Discuss this in small groups.

Make a list of anything that Macbeth says or does in Act 5 that seems admirable or that makes you sympathise with him. Give your reasons.

Learning checkpoint

Write one or two paragraphs explaining how Shakespeare shows changes in the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in Act 5.

How will I know I’ve done this well?

✔️ You will have shown how Shakespeare uses language to convey information about character.
✔️ You will have integrated at least one quotation to support each point you have made.
✔️ You will have used examples from earlier in the play and made comparisons between aspects of character earlier in the play and in Act 5.
✔️ You will have used key terminology and ensured accurate spelling and clear, well-punctuated sentences.

Endings and beginnings
GETTING IT INTO WRITING

Lady Macbeth’s obituary

An obituary is an account of someone’s life that is published after their death. The purpose of an obituary is to:

- give factual details about a person’s life
- summarise their achievements
- explore their personality, their strengths and weaknesses, in an objective way
- identify significant events and actions in their lives
- evaluate their contribution or the decisions they made in life
- suggest how, and for what, they will best be remembered.

Write an obituary of about 300 words for Lady Macbeth, to be published in the Dunsinane Herald the day after Malcolm’s victory over Macbeth. Use some of the following starters to help you.

‘The equivocation of the fiend’

Macbeth finally becomes aware that the Witches have misled him:

I pull in resolution and begin
To doubt th’equivocation of the fiend
That lies like truth.

Macbeth: Act 5 Scene 5, lines 41-42

And be these juggling fiends no more believed
That palter with us in a double sense

Macbeth: Act 5 Scene 8, lines 19-20

Work in small groups. Discuss the following questions.

a What is Macbeth saying about what the Witches told him?

b Think about the Witches’ prophecies, and about what happens in Scenes 5 and 8 of Act 5. In what way have the Witches lied ‘like truth’?

c Why might the Witches have intended to mislead Macbeth?

When articles and obituaries are published online, there is often an opportunity for people to leave comments underneath expressing their views. Add a couple of imaginary alternative views responding to your obituary.

Drawing together the ideas that you have explored while studying Act 5, write an extended answer of no more than 300 words to one of the questions below. Practise writing your response in no more than 45 minutes.

1 In Act 5, how does Shakespeare show the development of Lady Macbeth’s character?

2 How does Act 5 contribute to the play’s presentation of Macbeth as a tragic hero?

Learning checkpoint

How will I know I’ve done this well?

✓ The best answers will explore what Shakespeare does to show development in a character. They will look at specific scenes and comment on how details of character are conveyed through language, and the effect these have on the audience. They will use brief, well-chosen and integrated quotations to support the points being made.

✓ Good answers will show a clear understanding of what Shakespeare does to show different aspects of character to the audience using a range of examples and quotations from a number of scenes in the play.

✓ Weaker answers will only comment on the character’s words and actions in the play without using many examples or quotations, or explaining how Shakespeare might use them to affect the audience.

Before you start writing, consider the following:

a What does Shakespeare’s play actually tell us about Lady Macbeth?

b What information do we not know about her?

c What gaps will you have to fill in when writing your obituary?
3. Write a paragraph explaining how far you think the Witches are responsible for Macbeth’s actions. Consider the following:
   a. Are the Witches’ prophecies genuine, or just vague statements?
   b. Do the Witches really have any supernatural powers?
   c. Why does Macbeth interpret the ‘prophecies’ in the way he does?
   d. What choices does Macbeth have at various points in the play?

4. Are the Witches to blame for Macbeth’s actions? Watch a debate on Cambridge Elevate.

5. Do you think Lady Macbeth’s behaviour in Act 5 Scene 1 would come as a surprise to audiences? In what ways has Shakespeare prepared us for this development in her character? Find evidence from various scenes in the play to support your answer.

6. Thinking more about Lady Macbeth

   1. How far do you feel Macbeth is to blame for the terrible things that happen in the play? List reasons why he is to blame and why he is not. Weigh up the evidence, then write a response of no more than 300 words to answer the question.

   2. Look at the following grid, which contains a range of facts and opinions about the character of Lady Macbeth. Decide which of these are facts and which are opinions. Organise them into a two-column table.

   a. Lady Macbeth seems to show no pity towards humans or children.
   b. Lady Macbeth behaves in an evil way.
   c. Lady Macbeth claims she would rather kill her own child than break a promise.
   d. Lady Macbeth is too kind to kill Duncan.
   e. Lady Macbeth pretends not to know Duncan is dead when his body is found in Act 2 Scene 3.
   f. Lady Macbeth calls on evil spirits to assist her in Act 1 Scene 5.
   g. Lady Macbeth pretends to faint in order to distract attention from Macbeth in Act 2 Scene 3.
   h. Lady Macbeth drank alcohol before she drugged Duncan’s bodyguards.
   i. Lady Macbeth is stronger and more determined than Macbeth in Act 2.

   3. Is Lady Macbeth a purely evil character, or is she worthy of some sympathy? Hold a class debate. Weigh the evidence carefully before reaching a conclusion.

   4. Lady Macbeth in performance

      Read these two different actors’ thoughts on performing the role of Lady Macbeth:

      I think first and foremost she’s a wife, she’s a homemaker, she’s a very, very intelligent woman.
      I think that the audience have an affection for this woman to be able to see how far she and her husband fall. I think she’s a very strong woman who’s the backbone, the crutch of Macbeth. In their marriage she’s been the backbone of him.

      -- Alison McKenzie

      She had no illusions about the evil she was embracing, but the thrill of it drew her back.

      -- Judi Dench

   1. Do you agree with these interpretations? Discuss this in pairs. Find evidence in the text to support your opinions.

   2. Lady Macbeth is a challenging character to interpret and perform on stage. Directors and actors take very different views. Imagine you are directing a production of Macbeth. Prepare some brief notes for the actor playing Lady Macbeth. Include:
      a. an outline of how you see the character
      b. how you’d like them to play the part
      c. ideas for costume, movement and gesture
      d. suggestions on how to deliver certain key lines.
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