

Macbeth: Introductory guide – Act 2

Rastrick High School 2019-2020

Year 9

Student name:

Introduction

As part of your GCSE studies, you will be learning “Macbeth”- a play by William Shakespeare.

You will be examined on this at the end of Year 11. At Rastrick High School, we first study the play at the end of Year 9. This is to give you clear understanding of:

- The characters of the play.
- The plot of the play.
- The main themes in the play.
- Key quotes from the play.

Each week, you will be given a new section of the play to study.

The first few pages of this booklet will explain some key ideas, characters and terminology. Please read this information before you begin looking at the story.

Using this booklet

The key sections of this booklet are:

1) Characters

2) Context





3) Terminology

4) Plot- this section will be updated weekly with each new act of the plot.

- Throughout the booklet, you will find **blue boxes**. These contain short quizzes for you to complete as you go. The answers to these quizzes are at the back of the booklet.
- At the end of each act, you are expected to complete a short essay. There is also a model essay to help you.
- If you have any questions about the information in this booklet, please e-mail your English teacher.

Now, let's look at the key characters in the play.

1. Characters

	<p>Macbeth</p> <p>The protagonist (main character) of the play. At the beginning of the play, Macbeth is a Thane (Lord) in Scotland. He rules over the area of Glamis. He is later given control of the area of Cawdor as a reward for his bravery from the king. He is well-respected by other Thanes and highly regarded by the king. He leads the Scottish army as a chief general and is considered a great fighter. However, Macbeth is an ambitious man and develops a hunger for power during the play.</p> <p>Adjectives to describe Macbeth: Brave, ambitious, flawed, naïve, guilt-ridden.</p>
	<p>Lady Macbeth</p> <p>Macbeth's wife. Lady Macbeth is presented as a very unusual woman for the time during which the play is set. Whereas most women at the time were expected to do exactly as they were told by their husbands, Lady Macbeth has a lot of control over her husband. She is presented as manipulative and power hungry. She encourages Macbeth to gain power- whatever the cost.</p> <p>Adjectives to describe Lady Macbeth: Manipulative, ruthless, dominating, ambitious.</p>
	<p>King Duncan</p> <p>Duncan is the King of Scotland at the start of the play. He is a popular and well-loved King. He is known for being a good and fair leader. However, he has an unfortunate habit of trusting the wrong person.</p> <p>Adjectives to describe Duncan: moral, just, fair, naïve.</p>
	<p>Banquo</p> <p>Macbeth's best friend. Banquo is also a Scottish nobleman and acts a leader in the Scottish army at the beginning of the play.</p> <p>Adjectives to describe Banquo: loyal, calm, wise, cynical.</p>

**The Witches**

Three witches who appear throughout the play. The Witches like nothing more than causing chaos and destruction. They take pleasure in manipulating men to perform evil deeds.

Adjectives to describe the witches: evil, manipulative, supernatural.

**Malcolm**

Duncan's first born son. During the play he is made Prince of Cumberland. He is expected to be King after his father dies. He proves himself to be a fair and brave man.

Adjectives to describe Malcolm: loyal, just, intelligent.

**Donalbain**

Duncan's younger son and Malcolm's younger brother.

**Macduff**

The Thane of Fife. Macduff is a Scottish nobleman who is extremely loyal to his King. He is a fierce warrior and a strong believer in justice. He does not trust Macbeth.

Adjectives to describe Macduff: Loyal, brave, moral.

**Lennox**




A Scottish nobleman.

**Ross**

A Scottish nobleman.

**Fleance**

Banquo's son. He is normally presented as a young child during the play.

	<p>Seyton</p> <p>Macbeth's chief servant.</p>
	<p>Siward</p> <p>The Earl of Northumberland. An English nobleman. He is a well respected soldier and leads the English army during the play.</p>
	<p>Young Siward</p> <p>Siward's son. A skilled fighter.</p>

Please note: As well as the characters listed here, there are a number of servants and minor characters who appear in individual scenes throughout the play.

Please note: You have been provided with adjectives to describe the main characters only.

2. Context

Before we study a text, it is important we understand the ideas and environment that influenced the writer. This is called **context**. For example, a story written during the First World War may have been influenced by the context of the war.

So, in this section, we are going to look at a number of historical details which influenced **William Shakespeare** when he wrote "**Macbeth**".

The Jacobean era- This is a phrase you will hear a lot when studying Macbeth. Basically, it means the years 1603-1625. This was the period when James I was the King of England. "Macbeth" was written in 1606, very early in the reign of James I.

James I- James I was the first Scottish King to rule England. He became King after his cousin, Elizabeth I (the last Tudor monarch), died. James I's last name was Stuart and his descendants would rule England until 1714.

However, he initially wasn't a very popular King with certain people in England. One reason behind this was because he was Scottish and the English and

Scottish had traditionally been enemies. Another reason was because he was a strict Protestant and disliked Catholics. A group of Catholics even tried blowing him up in 1605- this became known as the Gun Powder Plot. It is important to remember that the vast majority of people during the Jacobean era were Christians. Religion was a very important part of life and

James I was used to having absolute power in Scotland, whereas in England the King had to have the support of Parliament in order to make laws. Some people think that Shakespeare wrote "Macbeth" in order to show James I what the English expected of a good King.

The Supernatural- During James I's reign, there was a great deal of interest in the supernatural. In particular, people became interested in witches. The Jacobeans believed that witches existed and that they were servants of the Devil. Witches were often put on trial and burned to death. Unfortunately, we now know that these were just ordinary women who were normally innocent of any crime. James I was so obsessed with witches that he wrote a book on the subject, "*Daemonologie*".

Theatre- During this period in history, theatre was a very popular form of entertainment. Shakespeare was the most popular playwright of his day. He was so popular in fact that his theatre company (the group of actors he worked with most often) was sponsored by King James, they became known as The King's Men. Many people think that Shakespeare wrote "Macbeth" because he knew the King would like it and he wanted to impress his new boss.

Scotland- There was a lot of interest in Scotland in the Jacobean period as the new King of England was Scottish. The play "Macbeth" was actually based on a book of Scottish history called "Holinshed's Chronicles" which mentioned a real life Scottish King called Macbeth who ruled in the 11th Century. Shakespeare's play is set at the same time but he made up most of the details.

3. Themes

A theme is a main idea or message within a piece of writing or other creative work. For example, if you think back to studying A Christmas Carol in year 7, one of the main themes in this novel was charity.

The main themes you need to be aware in “Macbeth” are:

Ambition- Throughout the play, Shakespeare shows how Macbeth’s ambition causes problems for himself and others.

Chaos and Order- The witches are characters that cause chaos and this leads to death and violence. On the other hand, a good King is shown to create a sense of order and peace.

Duty- This is an idea closely linked to order. Shakespeare shows how failing in your duty to the King and your country can have disastrous consequences.

Greed- Some people think this play’s main message is about the impact of being greedy for power.

Honour- Throughout the play, Shakespeare shows how the characters who have a strict sense of honour are rewarded.

Leadership- Shakespeare contrasts the leadership style of several characters throughout “Macbeth”. One of the main questions he asks in the play is: what makes an effective King?

Madness- Several characters show signs of madness in the play. This is linked to the chaos caused by the witches’ influence.

The Supernatural- As shown by the disruption caused by the witches.

Trust- Many of the problems in the play are caused by characters betraying the trust of others or appearing to be trustworthy but actually lying.

Violence- Macbeth is one of Shakespeare’s most violent plays. There are two full battles in the play and several murders.

3. Terminology

In this section, I will explain some key words and phrases which you need to understand before studying the play. If there are any other words you are unsure of, please check a dictionary online or ask your English teacher.

Dramatic terms

Act- A large section of a play. There are 5 acts in a play. The 3rd act of a play acts as a turning point in the action of the play. Each act is made up of several scenes.

Scene- A section of an act based in one location with no break in time. There are several scenes within one act of a play.

Dialogue- Spoken words exchanged by two or more characters.

Soliloquy- A speech where one character expresses their thoughts and feelings to the audience, alone on stage.

Aside- A break in dialogue where a character speaks to the audience. The other characters on stage cannot hear them.

Lines- The unit of measurement of a character's dialogue.

Verse- A line written in poetry. Most of the lines in Shakespeare's plays are written in verse. They have a regular rhythm.

Prose- Any form of language that is not poetry. When a character speaks in prose during a Shakespearean play, it means that they are either working class or their state of mind has changed.

Dramatic irony- When the audience knows or realises something which the characters do not.

Tragic genre

Tragedy- A play about unpleasant events with an unhappy ending. "Macbeth" is a tragedy.

Tragic hero- The main character of a tragedy.

Hamartia- A flaw in the tragic hero's personality. This leads to their downfall and tragic ending at the end of the play. Macbeth's hamartia is his ambition.

Catharsis- The moment when a tragic hero's experiences leads to a release feelings of pity.

Anagnorisis- The moment when the tragic hero realises what problems their actions have caused.

Peripeteia- A turning point during the play.

English specific terms

Pathetic Fallacy- The use of weather and setting to show the feelings of humans within a text.

Metaphor- A word or phrase which is non-literal/symbolic of something else.

Imagery- Visually descriptive language.

Motif- An idea or symbol which continually appears in a text.

Symbol- an object which is used to represent an idea.

Characterisation- The way a character is presented.

Foreshadowing - A warning or hint that something is going to happen in the future.

Meter- The rhythm in a line of poetry. Most of "Macbeth" is written in iambic pentameter (which means there are 10 beats per line). The exception is the witches who speak in trochaic tetrameter (which means there 8 syllables per line).

Juxtaposition- Placing two things next to each other in order to highlight the contrasts and differences between them.

Inciting incident- The moment in a story when the character is placed into the main drama or narrative.

Plot

We will provide you with the notes for each act in the play.

You should have completed your work on Act 1.

This booklet contains work around Act 2 and Act 3.

Don't forget to complete your key questions and quizzes for each scene along with the final essay question for each act.

Act 2 scene 1

Methods

Pathetic fallacy

The empty night sky represents the inner darkness required for Macbeth to commit regicide. The lack of stars links back to Act 1 Scene 4 when Macbeth begged for stars to *'hide your fires'*. The darkness of the sky provides Macbeth with the perfect *'blanket'* of darkness to commit the most horrific act.

Contrast in character

The discussion of the Witches/prophecy now brings a heavy contrast between Macbeth and Banquo. Banquo remains morally good and loyal to Macbeth. Whereas, Macbeth lies and appears to begin plotting to further achieve the prophecy.

Soliloquy

Macbeth's speech is a soliloquy. Soliloquies are famously used in drama when the audience needs to hear the inner most thoughts of a character.

Symbolism

Dagger - violence

Bell – fate/free-will/temptation/supernatural control

Metre, punctuation and line length

Macbeth's speech includes three questions, 8 mid-ending lines, a mix of balanced/imbalanced metre and uneven lines. Such a frantic structure to the speech reflects the frantic and chaotic nature of Macbeth's mind at this point in the play. The speech is without measure and order just like his plan to kill King Duncan.

Summary

This scene begins with Banquo and his son, Fleance, keeping watch outside Macbeth's castle gazing at the night sky. Fleance notices that *'the moon is down'* whilst Banquo feels concern that *'their candles are all out'* – a reference to a moonless, starless sky. Banquo remarks that he is struggling to sleep due to *'cursed thoughts'* prompted by his meeting with the witches at the start of the play. Already on edge, Banquo draws his sword at a sound before realising it is friend Macbeth (on his way to kill Duncan). Banquo informs Macbeth that he *'dreamt last night of the three Weyward sisters'* before confirming that, to Macbeth, their prophecy *'showed some truth'* as he is now Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth claims that *'I think not of them'* yet asks Banquo to meet him soon to discuss *'some words upon that business'* – likely to be the Witches' prophecy.

Banquo, Fleance and all servants exit the stage leaving Macbeth alone to consider once more the regicide plot. Suddenly, Macbeth visualises a floating dagger that he can't grasp hold of and questions *'Is this a dagger which I see before me'*. Macbeth continues to doubt the daggers existence as he claims it to be a *'dagger of the mind'* due to his *'heat-oppressed brain'*. Despite his doubts, much like with the Witches, Macbeth believes the dagger is real and informs the audience it looks like *'such an instrument I was to use'* on Duncan. On the floating blade, Macbeth can see *'gouts of blood'* and realises the vision of the dagger is simply the uneasy *'bloody business'* that he is about to commit controlling his mind. Macbeth's reservations for killing Duncan rise once more as he references the classical tale of Lyacon: a murderer who was turned into a wolf by Zeus in punishment. Macbeth soon realises that he is delaying the act and *'Whiles I threat, he lives'* - meaning Duncan is not yet dead. Lady Macbeth summons with a bell offstage (*A bell rings*), interrupting Macbeth's doubts as he claims *'the bell invites me'*. Macbeth hopes Duncan *'hear it not'* as he believes the bell to be that of a *'knell'* (a funeral bell) signposting doom for both Duncan and perhaps Macbeth himself.



Context

Discussion of supernatural

Banquo and Macbeth's discussion of the Witches would be deemed by a Jacobean audience a dangerous conversation. To discuss the Witches' prophecy signposts belief in their existence – an act tantamount to treason.

Choice

Choice of action is a key universal idea that still resonates with audiences today. In this scene, we see Banquo making the noble choice to ignore the witches and their prophecy choosing to remain loyal to the crown and all things rationale. Alternatively, we see Macbeth's choice to believe the prophecy even though he lies that he thinks *'not of them'*. His desire to speak about them further confirms his choice to believe their words and intends to act in order to gain the crown.

Regicide

This scene is the last time we see Macbeth pre-regicide. It is a scene filled with horror and elements of the supernatural to remind the audience just how unnatural and damning the killing of one's King truly is.

Key Questions- Act 2 Scene 1

1. How has Macbeth and Banquo's relationship changed at this point in the play?
2. Although he says little in this scene, Fleance will become an importance character if you consider the Witches' prophecy. Why is this? Consider Banquo's prophecy in your answer.
3. Some directors of the play choose to include an actual dagger floating on stage, some do not and Macbeth speaks to the air in front of him. How will each choice impact the audience and their impression of Macbeth in this scene?
4. This scene focuses heavily on darkness and the supernatural. Why is this fitting considering Macbeth is about to kill his King?
5. Lady Macbeth rings a bell offstage which confirms the guards are asleep and the plan can go ahead. How does this off-stage act confirm your opinion of Lady Macbeth as a character?

Comprehension Quiz 1– Act 2 Scene 1

1. Why is Banquo struggling to sleep?
2. Banquo is aware of Macbeth's plot to kill King Duncan. True or False?
3. What lie does Macbeth tell Banquo in this scene?
4. What is significant about the object that Macbeth sees before him?
5. What two reasons does Macbeth give for seeing the floating dagger?



Act 2 scene 2

Methods

Metre and dialogue

Many of the lines in 'Macbeth' follow the rules of Iambic Pentameter – 10 syllables & a unstressed/stressed sound pattern. In this scene, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's dialogue is fragmented meaning they often speak monosyllabic lines one after each other building the metre together. This highlights just how on edge both characters are immediately jumping on the other's words out of fear.

Off-stage action

The killing of Duncan is never witnessed but is believed to take place between Scenes 1/2 of Act 2. It is believed that Shakespeare was influenced by Greek theatre here in which violent acts are kept offstage, seeming more terrible by the power of suggestion. Consider also the audience's need to remain somewhat connected to their tragic hero: Macbeth. To see him physically murder Duncan on stage, it is believed, would deny the audience of ever being able to sympathise with Macbeth at the end of the play.

Motifs (a recurring symbol)

Blood: Guilt/Violence

Water: Purification/Goodness

Third person voice

An unsettling part of this scene come from Macbeth referring to himself in the 3rd person. Shakespeare may have done this to imply the instant damage on Macbeth's mental stability. It could also be argued that Macbeth's instant detachment from himself highlights the severing of '*Brave Macbeth*' from Act 1 to the treasonous murderer he has become. Such separation may also imply Macbeth's disbelief at his own actions and is only able to confront them by referring to himself as a separate individual.

Summary

Lady Macbeth enters and waits for Macbeth to return from Duncan's chamber having killed him. She remarks on how confident and '*bold*' she feels having drugged the drinks of the King's guards. Lady Macbeth panics as she hears a noise offstage and instantly fears Macbeth has awoken the guards and the murder '*'tis not done*'. She appears confused as to how Macbeth could have made any mistake as she '*laid their daggers ready*'. In her panic, she confesses that she herself would have killed Duncan '*Had he not resembled/my father as he slept*' – implying that Lady Macbeth does hold some emotional conscience.

Macbeth enters '*(holding two daggers in his blood-stained hands)*'. He appears badly shaken but confirms '*I have done the deed*' meaning Duncan is slain. Lady Macbeth claims to have heard '*the owl scream, and the crickets cry*', highlighting to the audience the impact of Duncan's death even on the natural world. Both characters continue to present their paranoia as they believe they hear noises around the castle.

Macbeth recalls the events of the murder. He remembers how the two guards cried '*God Bless us*' and '*Amen*' before Macbeth killed them both with '*these hangman's hands*'. Macbeth panics that, on hearing their prayers, he '*could not say Amen*' despite the fact that he believes to be '*most in need of blessing*'. Lady Macbeth panics at seeing her husband so disturbed by the act and demands he not think of it or '*it will make us mad*' with guilt.

Macbeth continues his frantic ramblings and begins to speak about himself claiming he heard '*a voice cry Sleep no more!/Macbeth does murder sleep!*'. In an attempt to calm him, Lady Macbeth speaks softly to Macbeth and tells him to '*get some water*' to '*wash this filthy witness from your hand*'.

Her calm approach does not last long as she realises that Macbeth has brought the murderous daggers with him instead of leaving them planted on the guards as part of Lady Macbeth's plan. Macbeth refuses to return to Duncan's chamber as he is '*afraid to think what I have done*'. Angered by his cowardice, Lady Macbeth demands '*give me the daggers*' as it is only children who fear death.

Macbeth is left alone and hears knocking. He looks down at his blood-stained hands and questions whether '*all great Neptune's ocean*' will '*wash this blood/Clean from my hand*'. He believes his hands would turn the entire ocean from green to red thus highlighting the scale of what he has done.

Lady Macbeth returns with blood-stained hands like her husband but remarks that she would '*shame to wear a heart so white*' implying she is embarrassed of her husband's reaction. Knocking continues to which Lady Macbeth demands they both wash and get dressed. Macbeth is left alone and remarks '*Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst!*' confirming his instant regret.

Context

Gender

Subversion of gender appears again in this scene in which Lady Macbeth assumes the more dominant, masculine role whereas Macbeth is a picture of frailty and weakness. Interestingly, despite her excuses, Lady Macbeth appears to accept that Macbeth must be the one to kill Duncan. This could be viewed as her admission that, being a woman, she cannot claim the crown herself due to her lesser social status.

Guilt

In Act 1, Macbeth showed an awareness of the guilt he would feel should he kill his king. In this scene, we see the direct evidence of guilt in full force. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's hands are literally stained with Duncan's blood yet this soon becomes a recurring image that cannot be unseen. Lady Macbeth warns that to think too much of the murder will cause madness foreshadowing both characters' mental spiral in the latter half of the play. It was vital for Shakespeare to present immediate consequences for the pair to warn the Jacobean audience away from treasonous thoughts towards their new king (James 1).

Religion

The murder of Duncan (God's mortal representation on Earth) denies Macbeth the comfort of his religion. We see instantly that he could not say the word 'amen' symbolising how regicide will destroy any link between the individual and God. Macbeth now appears to be fated for hell.

Mythology

Neptune was the god of freshwater and the sea in Roman religion. He is the counterpart of the Greek god Poseidon

Key Questions- Act 2 Scene 2

1. How does this scene develop the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth?
2. Lady Macbeth may not kill Duncan directly but she takes the daggers and returns them to the chamber. How might this affect her later in the play?
3. Macbeth has succumbed to all pressure and murdered his king. How do you feel about him now as a character? Is he completely responsible for Duncan's death?

Comprehension Quiz 2 – Act 2 Scene 2

1. What reason does Lady Macbeth give for not murdering Duncan herself?
2. Who have Macbeth and Lady Macbeth planned to blame for the murder? How will they cause this?
3. What does Macbeth bring back with him from Duncan's chamber?
4. What interrupts Macbeth and Lady Macbeth and forces them to exit the stage?

Act 2 Scene 3

Methods

Comic relief

It is no coincidence that the comedy character of the Porter appears just after Duncan's murder. Shakespeare includes this moment of comic relief to calm the audience, briefly, from the tense and treasonous scenes so far.

Symbolism

Macbeth's Castle- Hell

Personification

In his description of the night, Lennox personifies the earth by suggesting it has become ill with a fever. This description implies both the severity of Macbeth's actions and the vast impact his treasonous act will have on Scotland.

Dramatic irony

The exciting part of this scene stems from the power given to the audience. Other than Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, they are the only ones who know the identity of Duncan's killer. With this power, the audience is able to watch M and LM closely and see through their 'innocent' appearance.

Entrances/Exits

Scene 3 is frantic in many ways yet Shakespeare's use of characters entering and exiting stage certainly intensifies this. It is crucial to consider who is on stage at which moment and how they are behaving. As more and more characters arrive on stage, the pressure builds around Macbeth as seen by the all-knowing audience.

Metaphors

Family - Duncan is referred to as the 'spring' of his family implying he is the source/origin.

Kingship- precious metals such as 'silver' and 'gold' implying the royal nature of Kings runs through their very being.

Summary

A porter stumbles on stage to answer the knocking, grumbling comically about the noise and mocking whoever is on the other side of the door. He compares himself to a porter at the gates of hell and asks, '*Who's there, i' th' name of Beelzebub?*' The Porter makes several jokes as to who could be behind '*Hell Gate*' interestingly joking about an '*equivocator*': someone who intentionally deceives the person they are talking to. The Porter opens the gate to Macduff (Thane of Fife) and Lennox (Scottish noble) who have arrived to journey on with Duncan.

Macbeth enters and escorts Macduff and Lennox to the King's chamber. Macbeth appears calm and unmoved by their presence. As Macduff enters the chamber to 'wake' the King, Lennox speaks to Macbeth about the night just gone having been '*unruly*'. He claims to have heard '*chimneys...blown down*', '*strange screams of death*' and '*confused events*'. He informs Macbeth that '*some say, the earth/Was feverous and did shake*'. To all of this, Macbeth replies simply with '*Twas a rough night*'.

Macduff bursts back onto stage, horrified by the vision of his dead king and his '*tongue, nor heart,/cannot conceive nor name thee!*' Macduff informs Macbeth and Lennox that '*most sacrilegious murder (murder) hath broke ope*' and '*stole the life o' th' building*': King Duncan. He warns Macbeth and Lennox that, should they look upon their murdered king, it will '*destroy your sight/With a new Gorgon*'.

As Macbeth and Lennox enter Duncan's chamber off-stage, Macduff calls for all to wake in the castle including Banquo and Duncan's two sons: Malcom and Donalbain. Lady Macbeth enters, pretending to be shocked at Macduff's behaviour. Macduff refuses to tell Lady Macbeth what he has seen as he believes her to be a '*gentle lady*' and that to tell a woman such a horrible thing would '*murder*' her as it entered her ear.

Banquo enters and is informed of the King's murder. Macbeth, Lennox and fellow noble Ross re-enter the stage. Macbeth delivers a seemingly sombre speech that should he had '*died by an hour before*' seeing Duncan's body, he would have classed his life a '*blessed time*'. He appears completely distraught at Duncan's death.

Malcom and Donalbain enter. Macbeth informs them that '*the spring, the head, the fountain of your blood/Is stopped*'. Malcom immediately wants to know who killed his father and is informed by Lennox that they believe it to have been the work of his two guards whose '*hands and faces were all badged with blood*'. Interrupting, Macbeth begins his cover-up act and informs all on stage that, only moments ago, in his '*fury*', killed the two guards. Macduff seems shocked and confused at the two new deaths. Macbeth declares that his rage and emotion at his King's murder was enough to prove his '*violent love*'. Macbeth goes on to compliment Duncan's '*silver skin laced with his golden blood*' and cried that his wounds '*looked like a breach in nature*'. He declares that any man who truly served his King would have behaved in the same way.

Noticing her husband frantic behaviour worsening, Lady Macbeth faints causing an end to Macbeth's speech and a distraction to the other characters. In a separate conversation, Malcom and Donalbain discuss their next move. They are fearful that whoever killed their father will likely look to kill them next. As the other characters agree to meet later to discuss future action, Malcom worries that '*there's daggers in men's smiles*' and such men can no longer be trust. He decides to flee to England whilst Donalbain will journey to Ireland.

Context

Hell and damnation

The Porter's speech makes many references to hell and the devil. It is often believed that, from the moment Duncan is murdered, Macbeth's castle becomes a 'hell on earth' setting for all who enter it. As Macbeth has killed God's mortal representative, his home is now only fit for those who serve the devil ('Beelzebub').

Order and nature

By killing Duncan, Macbeth has broken the Great Chain of Being: a system developed by rulers in the Middle Ages to ensure order in society. A King is placed higher on the chain that man thus Macbeth stealing Duncan's crown for himself breaks the chain and the natural order of life. This 'break in the chain' is instantly reflected in Lennox's. Strange events, horror sounds and animals behaving unusually all work to reflect the heinous impact of Macbeth's decision.

Mythology

'*Destroy your sight/With a new gorgon*'. This refers to classical mythology where one of three monster sisters could turn people to stone with just her eyes.

Expectations of women

Macduff's refusal to inform Lady Macbeth of the brutal scene he witnessed in Duncan's chamber is a fine reflection of man's view of women in both the Jacobean era and 11th Century Scotland. It was believed that women were to be protected and removed from violent, distressing situations as they were not mentally able to recover from such.

Appearance vs. Reality

Malcom's realisation that there's '*daggers in men's smiles*' highlights fears around the safety of James 1 and who he could trust in his court.

Key Questions- Act 2 Scene 3

1. How does Macbeth behave in this scene? Do you consider it to be convincing? If not, why not?
2. Lady Macbeth faints in this scene to stop her husband in his frantic ramblings. Explain how Lady Macbeth uses the stereotype of a weak female to secretly control the men in this scene.
3. Duncan's son Malcom is the rightful heir to his father's throne yet he flees to England. How might the Jacobean audience feel about that decision? Explain.
4. Given your knowledge of the characters so far, which character do you think will first suspect Macbeth as the murderer?

Comprehension Quiz 3: Act 2 Scene 3

1. Which two characters enter Macbeth's castle at the start of this scene? Why are they there?
2. Which character discovers Duncan's body?
3. What are the names of Duncan's two sons?
4. What reason does Macbeth give for killing the two guards?

Act 2 Scene 4

Methods

Bridging scene

After high-intensity, dramatic scenes, Shakespeare's plays often contain bridging scenes. Simply put, these are scenes that contain only minor characters and are often short in length. The purpose of a bridging scene is to allow the audience to digest the previous events in the play.

Through minor characters, Shakespeare reflects the impact of decisions made by major characters on the society around them. In this example, we see the direct impact of Macbeth's violent act on the natural world and those within it.

Stock Character – 'Old Man'

The character of the Old Man is presented as a classical Chorus figure, seeing and reflecting on events that have taken place outside the world of the castle (courtly world). His age, 70 years old, would have seemed terribly old to Shakespeare's audience: the average was 40 for a man. This adds a slightly fantastical element to his experiences and stories.

Foreshadowing

Macbeth's decline: In this scene, we see Ross criticise those who act on selfish ambition as they go against nature and will no doubt be punished. As the audience, we know this actually refers to Macbeth who can begin to predict will likely entire a tragic downfall from this point onwards.

Macduff's rivalry: Macduff's refusal to attend Macbeth's coronation could be deemed the first sign of their future conflict. Many critics believe Macduff already questions Macbeth at this point in the play thus his reluctance to attend the crowning ceremony cements this to the audience.

Off-stage events

Macbeth's coronation – Unnatural so not shown.

Summary

On the same day, Ross, a thane, walks outside Macbeth's castle with an old man. They discuss the strange and ominous happenings of the past few days. The Old Man remarks that in all his seventy years he has seen '*Hours dreadful and things strange*'. However, the previous night, the night of Duncan's murder, he witnessed happenings that '*hath trifled former knowings*'. They begin by discussing the lack of daylight as Ross remarks that '*dark night strangles the travelling lamp*': the sun.

The Old Man goes on to tell Ross how he witnessed a Falcon '*hawked at and killed*' by a mousing owl. On hearing the tale, Ross informs the Old Man how Duncan's horses, beautiful and well-trained, '*turned wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out*'. The Old Man adds '*'tis said they ate each*', which Ross confirms is correct.

Macduff enters. Ross enquires if Duncan's murderers have yet been identified. Macduff believes them to have been '*those that Macbeth hath slain*': the two guards.

Confused, Ross wonders how the two guards would benefit from murdering their king. Macduff informs Ross that he believes they were paid to betray Duncan by Malcom and Donalbain. Macduff remarks how they are '*stol'n away and fled, which puts upon them/Suspicion of the deed*': Duncan's sons are now the prime suspects.

In shock, Ross remarks on the dangerous nature of ambition and how the murder of one's father goes '*Gainst nature*'. Ross realises that the crown will now be given to Macbeth to which Macduff confirms '*He is already named, and gone to Scone*'.

Macduff also confirms that Duncan's body has been '*carried to Colmekill*' where he will lay with '*his predecessors*'. Ross announces that he will travel to Scone to watch Macbeth's coronation. Macduff declares that he is returning to his own territory: Fife.

The men leave and the Old Man blesses them for no more misfortune.

Context

Darkness and Light

Despite their conversation happening midday, Ross and the Old Man remark the lack of light. The darkness here appears to reflect the darkness now shrouding Macbeth's castle and all those who surround it. One could argue further that the lack of light/increase in darkness is symbolic of Macbeth's rejection of God through the murder of the divine King Duncan. Scotland now appears to represent Hell on earth.

Order and Chaos

The murder of Duncan/coronation of Macbeth breaks the Great Chain of Being within the play. As a result, we see through Ross and the Old Man's anecdotes the impact of breaking the chain on a wider scale. We see a large animal, the Falcon, being preyed on by a mousing Owl. Well-trained horses turning wild and feral before eating each other. Just as Macbeth's murder of his King was an unnatural act, so too do we see nature now acting abnormally.

Historical Scottish territories:

Scone – the ancient royal city, where the Stone of Destiny lay, on which the new kings were crowned.

Fife – Macduff's territory in the play.

Colmekill – on the holy isle of Iona, where Scottish Kings were buried.

Key Questions- Act 2 Scene 4

1. Why do you think Shakespeare chose this moment in his play to include a bridging scene?
2. Why is it crucial for the audience to hear the impact Duncan's death has caused on the natural world?
3. Initially, Macduff blames Malcom and Donalbain for the murder of Duncan.
 - How does the false assumption impact the audience?
 - What does this false assumption mean for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth?

Comprehension Quiz 3: Act 2 Scene 4

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. What strange happenings have both Ross and the Old Man witnessed?
3. What three events are mentioned in this scene but never shown to the audience?
4. What reason does Macduff give for believing Malcom and Donalbain are behind the murder of the king?

Formative mini- assessment

Question: How does Shakespeare present the character of Macbeth in Act Two of the play?

Consider:

- How you wrote about Macbeth in Act 1.
- Act 2 changes everything for Macbeth and we see even more layers to his character.
- Act 2 presents Macbeth both pre and post-regicide. Can you see the differences in his character before/after the murder?
- How does he cope in the public sphere? Think about his 'performance' in Act 2 Scene 3.
- Macbeth has now turned his back on God by committing the ultimate sin. Where do you see this impact?

Challenge: What ideas/commentary is Shakespeare channelling through Macbeth in Act 2? How does the character operate and what does he allow Shakespeare to 'say'.

Key vocabulary you may use

- Indecisive
- Manipulated
- Controlled
- Damaged
- Disturbed
- Fearful
- Frantic
- Deceiving

Suggested moments you could explore:

1. Macbeth pre-regicide (dagger scene)
2. The instant impact of the murder on Macbeth.
3. Macbeth's cover up in front of other characters.

In each point, remember to address the following areas:

1. **WHAT** is our impression of Macbeth in this Act? **WHAT** evidence is there in the text to support this?
2. **HOW** does Shakespeare create that impression for us?
3. **WHY** does Shakespeare approach the character this way? Influenced by context? Universal ideas? Intentions for the audience?

Model:

At the start of Act 2, the audience is presented with a far more **corrupt and disturbed** Macbeth. In Scene 1, we see the lasting impact of the prophecy on Macbeth through his conversation with Banquo. Despite Banquo's honesty that he 'dreamt last night' of them, Macbeth appears to lie and declares 'I think not of them'. Here we see the continuation of Macbeth and Banquo's division as characters. Although they started the play as both noble soldiers, their differing reactions to the Witches, and their honesty around their impact, highlights Macbeth's temptation towards evil. This **corrupted mind** is further shown to the audience in Macbeth's speech at the end of Scene 1 as he questions 'is this a dagger I see before me?' Through this interrogative, Shakespeare presents the conflicted and damaged mind of our protagonist. The fact that Macbeth appears to see a floating dagger would deeply trouble the Jacobean audience and confirm their shared belief in the dangers of witchcraft. However, Macbeth's questioning of the dagger's existence acts as a bench-mark of his mental state. He is not yet completely believing of such visions and still holds the ability to question irrational happenings.

Comprehension Quiz- Answers

Comprehension Quiz 1– Act 2 Scene 1

1. Why is Banquo struggling to sleep?
He still thinks about the Witches and their prophecies.
2. Banquo is aware of Macbeth's plot to kill King Duncan. True or False?
False
3. What lie does Macbeth tell Banquo in this scene?
That he does not think about the Witches and their prophecy.
4. What is significant about the object that Macbeth sees before him?
It resembles the dagger that he plans to use to kill Duncan.
5. What two reasons does Macbeth give for seeing the floating dagger?
 - **His mind is overworked/over-heated.**
 - **It is his unease at killing Duncan that has made him imagine the vision of the dagger.**

Comprehension Quiz 2– Act 2 Scene 2

1. What reason does Lady Macbeth give for not murdering Duncan herself?
He looked too much like her father sleeping.
2. Who have Macbeth and Lady Macbeth planned to blame for the murder? How will they cause this?
They plan to blame Duncan's two guards. They will lay the blood-covered daggers next to the guards.
3. What does Macbeth bring back with him from Duncan's chamber?
The bloody daggers
4. What interrupts Macbeth and Lady Macbeth and forces them to exit the stage?
Persistent knocking on the gate of their castle.

Comprehension Quiz 3: Act 2 Scene 3

1. Which two characters enter Macbeth's castle at the start of this scene? Why are they there?
Macduff and Lennox. They have arrived to journey on with the King.
2. Which character discovers Duncan's body?
Macduff
3. What are the names of Duncan's two sons?
Malcom and Donalbain
4. What reason does Macbeth give for killing the two guards?
Out of love for his King

Comprehension Quiz 3: Act 2 Scene 4

5. Where does this scene take place?
Outside Macbeth's castle.
6. What strange happenings have both Ross and the Old Man witnessed?
 - **Lack of daylight**
 - **A falcon killed by a mousing owl**
 - **Duncan's horses turned wild and ate each other.**
7. Which three events are mentioned in this scene but never shown to the audience?
 - **Duncan's murder**
 - **Macbeth's coronation**
 - **Duncan's burial**
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8. What reason does Macduff give for believing Malcom and Donalbain are behind the murder of the king?
They have fled the scene.