

Themes

What are the main themes?

Morality 	Kingship
Deception 	Power
Gender 	Violence

Author's Intent

Why did Shakespeare write the play?

To solidify King James' position, bringing an end to a political instability, by exposing the ruinous consequences of regicide.	To challenge Jacobean preconceptions of both masculinity and femininity.
To highlight the destructiveness of unrestricted ambition.	To reinforce Jacobean suspicions of the supernatural, by promoting the supremacy of the natural order.

Characters in Macbeth

Who are the main characters in 'Macbeth'?

Macbeth Valliant Corrupt Ambitious Contrite Tyrannical Indecisive	Lady Macbeth Vindictive Manipulative Unscrupulous Emasculating Machiavellian Dismantled	Duncan Honourable Righteous Benevolent Reverent Beguiled Respected	Banquo Perspicacious Deferential Virtuous Sceptical Paternal Immolated	Macduff Reckless Passionate Virtuous Impassioned Emotive Rancorous	Malcolm Pious Moral Cautious Patriotic Dubious Righteous
--	--	---	---	---	---

'Brave Macbeth well he deserves that name' Act 1, Scene 2	'Fair is foul and foul is fair' Act 1, Scene 1	Key Quotes What are some useful quotations to know for Macbeth?	'O' full of scorpions is my mind' Act 3, Scene 2	'This dead butcher and his fiend-like queen' Act 5, Scene 9
'Look the like innocent flower but be the serpent under't' Act 1, Scene 5	'Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from me hands?' Act 2, Scene 2		'What's done cannot be undone' Act 5, Scene 1	'Your castle is surprised; your wife and babes Savagely slaughter'd' Act 4, Scene 3

Plot Summary

What happens in Macbeth?



ACT 1 After fighting for Duncan in battle, Macbeth and Banquo are given prophecies about their futures which cause Macbeth to consider regicide. He is encouraged by his wife who manipulates him, questioning his masculinity as she does so.	ACT 2 Macbeth murders Duncan but is filled with regret. Lady Macbeth chastises him for this and plants the dagger on Duncan's guards, framing them for the King's death. Malcolm and Donaldbain flee Scotland believing they will be the next targets.	ACT 3 Macbeth is king and Banquo begins to suspect him of murder. Macbeth becomes suspicious of him in return due to the Witches' prophecies and arranges Banquo and Fleance's murders. Macbeth begins to hallucinate seeing Banquo's ghost.	ACT 4 Macbeth is obsessed with maintaining his power and asks the witches for more prophecies. They tell him to be fearful of Macduff but reassure him that he is in no danger. Macbeth orders the death of Macduff's family and Macduff begs Malcolm to defeat Macbeth.	ACT 5 Lady Macbeth is driven mad by her guilt. The Scottish lords side with Malcolm and rage war upon Macbeth's castle. Macduff is revealed to have been born from a caesarean and therefore exempt from the witches prophecy meaning he can kill Macbeth. Malcolm is crowned king.
--	--	--	--	---

Techniques

What techniques does Shakespeare use?

Motifs and Symbols Motifs (reoccurring images) such as light and dark, blood and symbols such as the serpent are used to reinforce the play's themes.	Soliloquies Many of the characters give a soliloquy which allows us to hear their deep and personal thoughts – particularly secretive thoughts about regicide.
Dramatic Irony The audience are aware of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's guilt which helps us understand their actions and to see how they continue to deceive others.	Foreshadowing Shakespeare uses the witches cryptic language and prophecies to hint at the turmoil Macbeth will face and his eventual demise.

Context

What was going on in society at the time?

James I wrote a book on witchcraft titled 'Daemonologie'. He also introduced laws which made witchcraft a capital offence.	Jacobean women were expected to be subservient to men and fulfil the role of housewife with no complaint. It was in fact legal for men to punish their wives if they were not doing a sufficient job!
State religion had changed repeatedly between the Catholic and Protestant faith under the Tudor Family's rule. Many saw James I's Protestant views as damning, despite him being fairer to Catholics than Elizabeth I.	On November 5 th 1605 an assassination attempt on James I's life took place. This is now commonly known as the 'Gunpowder Plot'.