

Context:

- Macbeth is loosely based on true events in **feudal Scotland** in the **11th Century** and would have been known to King James. **King James** inherited the throne through his ancestors Banquo and Fleance who appear in the play.
- This violent period in Scotland's history ended with stronger links with England much like **the union of the crowns** that took place when King James became King of England as well as Scotland.
- King James was fascinated by **witchcraft** and it is likely that the witches were included to please him as Shakespeare wanted his approval.
- King James also believed in **The Divine Right of Kings** meaning that any attempt to depose a king went directly against God and would be judged harshly. This is reflected in Macbeth's failure as a king.
- Both King James' parents were killed in politically motivated moves to secure power and an attempt was made on his life through the gunpowder plot. Shakespeare echoes this interest in **usurpation** in the murders in the play.

Themes:

Ambition - seen as a purely negative quality > **Guilt** - the play shows the terrible consequences of murdering a king > **Kingship vs Tyranny** – Duncan and Macbeth embody the qualities of a good king and a tyrant respectively > **Order vs Chaos** - natural order is disrupted then re-established > **Fate** > **Masculinity/femininity**

Characters:

Macbeth, Thane of Glamis
 Lady Macbeth (Macbeth's wife)
 Banquo (Macbeth's best friend)
 Fleance (Banquo's son)
 Duncan, King of Scotland
 Malcolm (Duncan's eldest son)
 Donalbain (Duncan's younger son)
 Macduff, Thane of Fife
 Lady Macduff (Macduff's wife)
 Ross, Lennox, Angus (Scottish nobles)
 The witches – supernatural beings who predict events in the play
 Hecate (ruler of the witches)



Plot

Act 1	Macbeth and Banquo meet witches who give them predictions. Cawdor executed. Lady Macbeth reads letter. She taunts Macbeth and Duncan arrives.
Act 2	Macbeth sees a dagger reflecting his doubts about the murder- but kills Duncan with Lady Macbeth's help. Malcolm flees and Macbeth chosen to be king.
Act 3	Banquo suspects Macbeth – Macbeth murders Banquo but his son Fleance escapes. Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost.
Act 4	Witches second predictions. Macbeth orders the killing of Macduff's family. Macduff and Malcolm agree to invade Scotland.
Act 5	Lady Macbeth's mental state deteriorates eventually committing suicide. Malcolm's army invades through Burnham wood and eventually Macbeth killed by Macduff. Malcolm is proclaimed king.

Key Literary Vocabulary:

Simile- comparing using 'like' or 'as'
Metaphor- saying one thing is another
Personification- make an object human
Pathetic fallacy- weather to create mood
Hyperbole- exaggerated statement
Connotation- associated meaning of word
Characterisation- built up description of character in text
Semantic field- words related in meaning
Imagery- visually descriptive language
Iambic Pentameter- a line of verse with five metrical feet, each consisting of one short (or unstressed) syllable followed by one long (or stressed) syllable
Dramatic Irony – when the audience knows more than the characters
Soliloquy – a character speaks their thoughts to the audience
Monologue – a long speech by a single character
Oxymoron – contradictory terms together

Key Quotations:

The witches: Fair is foul, and foul is fair, Hover through the fog an filthy air. (Act I, Scene i) - Captain: For brave Macbeth—well he deserves that name— Disdaining fortune, with his brandished steel, Which smoked with bloody execution, Like valour's minion carved out his passage (Act I, Scene ii) - Lady Macbeth: Come, you spirits That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here And fill me from the crown to the toe topfull Of direst cruelty (Act I, Scene v) - Macbeth: Is this a dagger which I see before me, The handle toward my hand? (Act II, Scene I) - Lady Macbeth: Out, damned spot! out, I say! (Act V, Scene i) - Macbeth: I bear a charmed life which must not yield To one of woman born. Macduff: Macduff was from his mother's womb untimely ripp'd. (Act V, Scene viii)

Additional Vocabulary

Corruption
 Hubris
 Morality
 Hallucination
 Tyrant
 Betrayal
 Supernatural
 Machiavellian
 Usurp
 Concealment
 Gender
 Tragedy
 Hamartia
 Prophecy
 Symbol
 Regicide

Symbols:

Blood: a symbol of guilt and violence.
 The supernatural: witchcraft, prophesy, hallucinations, ghosts and magic.
 The crown: ambition and power.
 Light and darkness: good and evil.