



Rainford High School English Department – Year 7 Macbeth Knowledge Organiser

Context	Characters	Plot
<p><i>Macbeth</i> was most likely written in 1606, early in the reign of James I, who had been James VI of Scotland before he succeeded to the English throne in 1603.</p> <p>Only a century earlier, England had suffered under the massive disorder of the Wars of the Roses. Civil disorder was now seen as the ultimate disaster, and also as an ungodly state.</p> <p>The play pays homage to the king's Scottish lineage. Additionally, the witches' prophecy that Banquo will found a line of kings is a clear nod to James's family's claim to have descended from the historical Banquo.</p> <p>The theme of bad versus good kingship, embodied by Macbeth and Duncan, respectively, would have resonated at the royal court, where James was busy developing his English version of the theory of the divine right of kings.</p> <p>The play was first performed not long after the Gunpowder Plot. Shakespeare shows the murderers of a king tormented by their own guilt and driven to their doom.</p> <p>It was believed that kings were appointed by 'divine right' and were anointed by God. To kill a king was considered the worst sin and a terrible crime.</p> <p><i>Macbeth</i> is a tragedy and the character of Macbeth is a tragic hero.</p>	<p>Macbeth: (Thane of Glamis and later Thane of Cawdor, King of Scotland) is a Scottish general and the play's lead character. His life is changed when he meets three witches and hears their prophecies.</p> <p>Lady Macbeth: his wife is a deeply ambitious woman who lusts for power and position.</p> <p>Banquo: Macbeth's best friend</p> <p>Fleance: Banquo's son</p> <p>Duncan: King of Scotland</p> <p>Malcolm: Duncan's eldest son</p> <p>Macduff: Thane of Fife</p> <p>Lady Macduff: Macbeth's wife</p> <p>Donalbain: Duncan's younger son</p> <p>Ross, Lennox, Angus: Scottish nobles</p> <p>The witches: supernatural beings who predict events in the play.</p> <p>Hecate: ruler of the witches</p>	<p>ACT I: Three witches gather in a thunderstorm to meet Macbeth and make three prophecies. Duncan hears reports of the battle in which Macbeth is a hero. Duncan names him Thane of Cawdor. Duncan meets Macbeth, gives him his title and says he will stay at his house. Lady Macbeth receives a letter from her husband and plans to murder Duncan. The King arrives at Castle Macbeth and Macbeth changes his mind about murdering him.</p> <p>ACT II: Lady Macbeth convinces her husband to kill Duncan in his bed. They then leave the daggers framing the guards. Duncan's body is found by Macduff and Duncan's sons flee in fear. Macbeth is crowned King.</p> <p>ACT III: Macbeth is King but is suspicious about the witches' predictions in regards to Fleance. He arranges to have him and Banquo murdered but Fleance escapes. Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost at a banquet. Lady Macbeth sends the shocked lords away. The witches predict Macbeth's downfall. Macduff flees to England to gain support against Macbeth.</p> <p>ACT IV: The witches tell Macbeth, he won't fall until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane and no man born of woman can kill him. Macbeth murders Macduff's family. Macduff leads an army to Dunsinane.</p> <p>ACT V: Lady Macbeth is sleepwalking and is trying to wash imaginary blood from her hands. Macbeth's castle is besieged and Lady Macbeth kills herself. Macduff says he was born of a c-section and kills Macbeth.</p>
Key symbols/themes	Key Concepts	Key Terminology
<p>Key Symbols:</p> <p>Blood – a symbol of guilt and violence</p> <p>The supernatural – belief in witchcraft was widespread and Shakespeare uses prophecy, hallucinations, ghosts and magic to give the play a menacing, unnatural feel.</p> <p>Pathetic fallacy – unnatural events are usually echoed by unnatural weather</p> <p>Dagger – represents desire for power and Macbeth's sense of masculinity</p> <p>Sleep - Sleep symbolises innocence and purity of mind, in killing the King 'Macbeth hath murdered sleep.'</p> <p>Key themes:</p> <p>Ambition – It is his ambition which leads to Macbeth's demise, so Shakespeare presents it as a negative quality.</p> <p>Guilt - the play shows the terrible consequences of murdering a king.</p> <p>Kingship vs tyranny – Duncan and Macbeth embody the qualities of a good king and a tyrant respectively.</p> <p>Order vs chaos Natural order is disrupted then re-established.</p> <p>Fate – Is Macbeth destined to fail?</p> <p>Masculinity/femininity – Are these gender roles switched with Lady Macbeth and Macbeth?</p>	<p>A play: A play is a form of literature written by a playwright, usually consisting of dialogue between characters, intended for theatrical performance rather than just reading.</p> <p>Tragedy: branch of drama that treats in a serious and dignified style the sorrowful or terrible events encountered or caused by a heroic individual.</p> <p>Tragic Hero: is a person of noble birth with heroic or potentially heroic qualities. This person is fated by the Gods or by some supernatural force to doom and destruction or at least to great suffering. But the hero struggles against this fate and this cosmic conflict wins our admiration.</p> <p>Hamartia: The fatal character flaw of the tragic hero.</p>	<p>Imagery: Language which creates vivid sensory ideas in the reader's mind, such as a representation of a specific picture or sound, e.g. The image of the moon to reflect mystery and madness</p> <p>Simile: An explicit comparison between two things using 'like' or 'as'</p> <p>Metaphor: An implicit comparison between two things not using 'like' or 'as'</p> <p>Personification: Attributing human-like qualities to objects, ideas or animals</p> <p>Prose: Lines which use a natural, unstructured rhythm, similar to speech, the mechanicals speak like this</p> <p>Blank verse: Most characters speak in blank verse with rhyming couplets for key moments</p> <p>Rhyming couplet: Two successive rhyming lines,</p> <p>Pun: A joke based on the different possible meanings of a word or the fact that there are words which sound alike but have different meanings</p> <p>Soliloquy: When a character, thinking they are alone, speaks their thoughts aloud</p> <p>Act: A part of the play and a tool to separate the performance and settings</p> <p>Scene: A smaller part of the act defined by changing of characters.</p> <p>Stage Directions: Added by the playwright to tell the actors how to move or speak</p> <p>Oxymoron – opposites & contradiction recur throughout the play</p>