2.21 Literature: Macbeth - Themes in Depth: 1-hour Pack

AQA 8702 · about 60 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Explore how Shakespeare presents the effects of guilt on Macbeth and Lady Macbeth across the play.

(Total for Question 1 is 18 marks)

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2 Explore how Shakespeare presents ideas about kingship and order across the play.

(Total for Question 2 is 18 marks)

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3 Write about how Shakespeare explores the theme of appearance versus reality across the play.

(Total for Question 3 is 18 marks)

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4 Explore how Shakespeare presents ideas about gender and expectations of men and women across the play.

(Total for Question 4 is 18 marks)

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5 Evaluate the view that Lady Macbeth's fate in Act 5 undermines everything she claims about gender and power earlier in the play. Use your knowledge of the whole play to support your view.

(Total for Question 5 is 12 marks)

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Mark scheme · 2.21 Literature: Macbeth - Themes in Depth: 1-hour Pack

Question 1

Level 1 Simple, general comments about guilt, with limited reference to specific moments. **1-4**

Level 2 Some understanding of guilt affecting Macbeth and/or Lady Macbeth, with a few relevant references and straightforward comment on language. **5-8**

Level 3 Clear explanation of how guilt is shown to affect both characters, supported by well-chosen quotation and some comment on dramatic method (e.g. hallucination, soliloquy). **9-12**

Level 4 Detailed, well-structured exploration of guilt's effects, analysing language, imagery and structure with relevant context. **13-15**

Level 5 Sophisticated, sustained exploration of guilt across the whole play, contrasting its effect on both characters, with precise analysis of method and skilfully integrated context. **16-18**

Indicative content:

- immediately after the murder, Macbeth is tormented by imagined blood and voices ("Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?", "Macbeth does murder sleep"), showing guilt as instant and overwhelming
- Lady Macbeth initially appears far less troubled, dismissing guilt with practical reassurance ("a little water clears us of this deed"), creating a contrast Shakespeare later reverses
- Banquo's ghost, visible only to Macbeth at the feast (Act 3 Scene 4), externalises his guilt on stage, making his private conscience a public spectacle
- by contrast, Lady Macbeth's guilt surfaces only once, in the sleepwalking scene (Act 5 Scene 1), when her unconscious mind betrays what her conscious will had suppressed, "Out, damned spot!"
- her eventual, unstaged suicide (reported in Act 5 Scene 5) suggests guilt is ultimately as destructive for her as violent hallucination is for Macbeth, even though it appears later and differently
- Jacobean audiences, in a strongly Christian culture, would read guilt as evidence of conscience and a sign that divine justice cannot be evaded, however successfully a crime is hidden
- candidates might argue Shakespeare uses the contrast between the two characters' guilt to explore whether guilt is a moral safeguard or simply a psychological weakness

Question 2

Level 1 Simple, general comments about kings or order, with limited reference. **1-4**

Level 2 Some understanding of kingship and disorder, with a few relevant references and straightforward comment. **5-8**

Level 3 Clear explanation of how kingship and order are presented, supported by well-chosen quotation and some comment on Shakespeare's methods. **9-12**

Level 4 Detailed, well-structured exploration of kingship and order, analysing language and structure with relevant context (Divine Right, the Great Chain of Being). **13-15**

Level 5 Sophisticated, sustained exploration of kingship and order across the whole play, with precise analysis of method and skilfully integrated context. **16-18**

Indicative content:

- Duncan is presented as a legitimate, gracious king at the start, praising Macbeth as "valiant cousin, worthy gentleman" and rewarding loyalty, establishing the rightful order Macbeth later destroys
- Macbeth's murder of Duncan is followed immediately by unnatural events reported by Ross and the Old Man (Act 2 Scene 4), darkness at noon and horses "eating each other", showing nature itself reacting to the crime
- as king, Macbeth rules through fear and violence rather than the "king-becoming graces" (justice, mercy, temperance) that Malcolm later lists (Act 4 Scene 3), presenting him as a tyrant rather than a true king
- Scotland under Macbeth is described as wounded and bleeding (Act 4 Scene 3), a metaphor for the state's suffering under illegitimate rule
- Malcolm's testing of Macduff in Act 4 Scene 3, where he pretends to lack the qualities of a good king before revealing the truth, allows Shakespeare to define kingship explicitly, by contrast with Macbeth
- the play restores order when Malcolm, the rightful heir, defeats Macbeth and is crowned, reflecting the Jacobean belief that the God-given order, though disrupted, will ultimately be restored
- candidates might discuss the Divine Right of Kings and the Great Chain of Being as context that would make Macbeth's regicide especially shocking to a Jacobean audience

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Question 3

Level 1 Simple, general comments about disguise or deception, with limited reference. **1-4**

Level 2 Some understanding of characters hiding their true intentions, with a few relevant references and straightforward comment. **5-8**

Level 3 Clear explanation of how appearance and reality are contrasted, supported by well-chosen quotation and some comment on Shakespeare's methods. **9-12**

Level 4 Detailed, well-structured exploration of appearance versus reality, analysing language, imagery and structure with relevant context. **13-15**

Level 5 Sophisticated, sustained exploration of appearance versus reality across the whole play, with precise analysis of method and skilfully integrated context. **16-18**

Indicative content:

- the witches' opening paradox, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (Act 1 Scene 1), announces that appearances will be unreliable throughout the play
- Lady Macbeth instructs Macbeth to "look like th' innocent flower, / But be the serpent under't" (Act 1 Scene 5), making deliberate deception a conscious strategy
- Duncan's comment that "there's no art / To find the mind's construction in the face" (Act 1 Scene 4) is immediately undercut by dramatic irony, since he then extends his trust to Macbeth, his eventual murderer
- Macbeth himself resolves that "false face must hide what the false heart doth know" at the end of Act 1 Scene 7, showing him consciously adopting the same deceptive strategy as his wife
- the witches' prophecies in Act 4 Scene 1, that Macbeth cannot be harmed by "none of woman born" and is safe until Birnam Wood moves, appear to guarantee safety but are technically true and disastrously misleading, extending the theme to a supernatural level
- Macbeth's fatal overconfidence comes from trusting appearances, the apparent impossibility of the prophecies, rather than questioning the reality behind them
- candidates might link this theme to the post-Gunpowder Plot Jacobean anxiety about equivocation, deliberately misleading but technically true speech, which was a live political and religious issue when the play was first performed

Question 4

Level 1 Simple, general comments about male or female characters, with limited reference. **1-4**

Level 2 Some understanding of how gender expectations are shown, with a few relevant references and straightforward comment. **5-8**

Level 3 Clear explanation of how gender is presented and challenged, supported by well-chosen quotation and some comment on Shakespeare's methods. **9-12**

Level 4 Detailed, well-structured exploration of gender across the play, analysing language and structure with relevant context. **13-15**

Level 5 Sophisticated, sustained exploration of gender across the whole play, with precise analysis of method and skilfully integrated context. **16-18**

Indicative content:

- Lady Macbeth's soliloquy asking to be "unsexed" (Act 1 Scene 5) presents femininity as something she believes must be removed in order to commit violence, associating masculinity with ruthlessness from the outset
- in Act 1 Scene 7, she attacks Macbeth's masculinity directly ("When you durst do it, then you were a man") to pressure him into murder, showing how gender expectations are weaponised between the two characters
- Macbeth's reply, "I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more is none", shows him trying to define a limit to masculine action that Lady Macbeth then dismisses
- Macduff's grief on learning of his family's murder (Act 4 Scene 3), and his insistence that he "must also feel it as a man", offers an alternative model of masculinity that includes emotion rather than only violence
- Lady Macbeth's collapse into guilt-ridden sleepwalking (Act 5 Scene 1) undermines her earlier rejection of femininity, suggesting the "unsexing" she asked for was never fully possible
- Jacobean society was strongly patriarchal, so Lady Macbeth's early dominance over Macbeth, and her invocation of supernatural forces to change her sex, would have seemed especially unnatural and disturbing to the original audience
- candidates might argue Shakespeare ultimately reasserts conventional gender roles by having Lady Macbeth's resolve fail while Macduff's more openly emotional grief-turned-resolve succeeds, or might challenge this reading

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Question 5

Level 1 Simple, general agreement or disagreement, with limited reference to Act 5 or earlier scenes.	**1-3**
Level 2 Some understanding of the view, with relevant reference to Lady Macbeth's earlier claims and her Act 5 fate, but limited evaluation.	**4-6**
Level 3 Clear, well-supported evaluation of the view, referring to specific moments in Act 1 and Act 5, with some discussion of Shakespeare's methods.	**7-9**
Level 4 Sophisticated, sustained evaluation, weighing the view judiciously against alternative readings, with precise textual support and skilfully integrated context.	**10-12**

Indicative content:

- Lady Macbeth's early claim to have rejected femininity ("unsex me here", Act 1 Scene 5) and her mockery of Macbeth's hesitation (Act 1 Scene 7) present her as consciously choosing ruthless, 'masculine' control
- her sleepwalking in Act 5 Scene 1, compulsively re-enacting the murder and unable to wash away imagined blood ("Out, damned spot!"), shows her resolve has failed completely, supporting the view that her earlier claims are undermined
- her reported, offstage suicide (Act 5 Scene 5) removes her from the action entirely, in contrast to her earlier dominance over the plot, which could support the idea that the play ultimately punishes her transgression of gender norms
- however, candidates might argue her fate does not simply undermine her earlier claims but shows the psychological cost of suppressing conscience, which is a comment on guilt as much as on gender
- some candidates may argue that Macbeth's own numb, exhausted reaction to her death ("she should have died hereafter") suggests the play is equally sceptical about his more conventional, still-violent masculinity, so gender is destabilised on both sides, not just undermined for Lady Macbeth
- strongest answers will reach a supported personal judgement rather than simply listing evidence for both sides

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