2.21 Literature: Macbeth - Themes in Depth: 30-minute Pack

AQA 8702 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Choose two of the six themes you have studied in this pack: ambition, guilt, the supernatural, kingship and order, appearance vs reality, gender. Explore how Shakespeare interweaves your two chosen themes to build the tragedy of Macbeth across the whole play.

(Total for Question 1 is 24 marks)

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2 Write about the importance of the supernatural in Macbeth and how Shakespeare uses it to shape the audience's response to Macbeth's actions.

(Total for Question 2 is 18 marks)

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Mark scheme · 2.21 Literature: Macbeth - Themes in Depth: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

Level 1 Simple, general comments about the chosen themes, treated largely separately, with limited reference. **1-5**

Level 2 Some understanding of both chosen themes, with a few relevant references, but limited discussion of how they connect. **6-10**

Level 3 Clear explanation of both themes, supported by well-chosen quotation, with some clear discussion of how they interact or reinforce one another. **11-15**

Level 4 Detailed, well-structured exploration of how the two chosen themes are interwoven across the play, analysing language and structure with relevant integrated context. **16-20**

Level 5 Sophisticated, critical, sustained exploration of how the two chosen themes work together to shape the tragedy, evaluating their relationship with a convincing personal response, precise analysis of method and skilfully integrated context. **21-24**

Indicative content:

- ambition and the supernatural: the witches' prophecy in Act 1 Scene 3 does not create Macbeth's ambition but gives it a target, and the equivocal apparitions of Act 4 Scene 1 later encourage him to over-extend that ambition into reckless overconfidence
- ambition and guilt: Macbeth's soliloquy admitting only "vaulting ambition" (Act 1 Scene 7) is immediately followed, once the murder is done, by escalating guilt (Act 2 Scene 2), suggesting Shakespeare presents guilt as the direct, inescapable consequence of unchecked ambition
- kingship/order and the supernatural: the witches' disruption of the natural order in Act 1 Scene 1 anticipates the disorder in nature (Act 2 Scene 4) that follows Macbeth's regicide, linking supernatural and political disorder as two expressions of the same idea
- appearance/reality and gender: Lady Macbeth's instruction to "look like th' innocent flower" (Act 1 Scene 5) is itself bound up with her rejection of conventional femininity, since deceptive appearance and 'unsexed' resolve are presented as two sides of the same performance
- guilt and gender: Lady Macbeth's guilt surfaces only once her controlled, 'masculine' resolve collapses in the sleepwalking scene (Act 5 Scene 1), suggesting Shakespeare links the failure of her gender performance to the return of suppressed guilt
- candidates may choose any valid pairing of the six themes; credit should be given for a well-supported, clearly explained connection between the two chosen themes rather than for any specific pairing
- the strongest answers will evaluate which theme is presented as driving the other, for example whether ambition causes guilt or the supernatural enables ambition, rather than simply describing both themes side by side

Question 2

Level 1 Simple, general awareness that supernatural elements appear in the play, with limited reference. **1-4**

Level 2 Some understanding of the witches' or ghost's role, with a few relevant references and straightforward comment. **5-8**

Level 3 Clear explanation of how the supernatural influences events and audience response, supported by well-chosen quotation. **9-12**

Level 4 Detailed, well-structured exploration of the supernatural's dramatic function, analysing language and stagecraft with relevant context. **13-15**

Level 5 Sophisticated, sustained exploration of the supernatural across the play, evaluating its effect on audience judgement of Macbeth, with precise analysis and skilfully integrated context. **16-18**

Indicative content:

- the witches open the play (Act 1 Scene 1) with "Fair is foul, and foul is fair", immediately establishing a disordered, uncanny world that frames everything that follows
- their prophecy gives Macbeth's ambition a starting point, but Shakespeare is careful to show Macbeth choosing to act rather than being forced, so the supernatural does not remove his responsibility
- Banquo's ghost (Act 3 Scene 4) makes Macbeth's guilt visible on stage and to the audience, while other characters see nothing, increasing dramatic tension
- the apparitions in Act 4 Scene 1 (an armed head, a bloody child, a crowned child holding a tree) deliver prophecies that are literally true but practically misleading, showing the supernatural as deceptive rather than simply predictive
- a Jacobean audience, aware of King James I's own writing on witchcraft (Daemonologie, 1597) and recent witch trials, would have found the witches genuinely threatening rather than merely theatrical
- the supernatural encourages the audience to judge Macbeth as both a victim of temptation and an agent who freely chooses evil, since he consults the witches a second time of his own accord (Act 4 Scene 1)
- candidates might discuss how the fading of supernatural intervention in the final act, with no witches appearing at Dunsinane, coincides with Macbeth's growing isolation, suggesting the supernatural's power is ultimately psychological as well as literal

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