

Plot

Act 1	Macbeth and Banquo meet witches who give them predictions. Macbeth becomes Thane of Cawdor. Lady Macbeth reads the 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 is chosen to be king.
Act 3	Banquo suspects Macbeth, Macbeth hires assassins to murder 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 is killed by Macduff. Malcolm is proclaimed king.

Themes

Ambition	Children	Natural world
Kingship	Blood	Gender
Fate and free will	Sleep	Light/dark
Appearance and reality	Visions	Manhood

Form

Shakespeare uses **soliloquy** to allow the characters to communicate their true thoughts to the audience.

Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's **Tragedies** and follows specific **conventions**. The **climax** must end in a tremendous catastrophe involving the death of the main character; the character's death is caused by their own flaw(s) (**hamartia**); the character has something the audience can identify with which outweighs their flaws, so we care about them.

Vocabulary

Meter	Trochaic tetrameter	Gender	Imagery
Blank verse	Heroic couplets	Stichomythia	Symbols
Rhymed verse	Soliloquy	Tragedy	Metaphor
Prose	Dramatic irony	Hamartia	Regicide
Iambic pentameter	Hallucinations	Prophecy	

Background

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 in the Gunpowder Plot. Shakespeare echoes this interest in **usurpation** in the murders in the play.

There is a **direct reference to King James** in the play in Act 4 Scene 1 when Macbeth sees a vision of kings stemming from Banquo's sons.

Character

Macbeth	A loyal warrior who becomes duplicitous as he becomes obsessed with the witches' prophecies of power.
Lady Macbeth	Macbeth's wife who drives his ambition in the beginning but loses her control by the end.
Banquo	Macbeth's close friend and ally who also receives prophecies from the witches.
Fleance	Banquo's son.
Duncan King of Scotland	Portrayed as a strong and respected leader at the start of the play.
Macduff	A brave warrior who is loyal to Duncan and is consistently suspicious of Macbeth.
Malcolm	Duncan's son and next in line to the throne.
The Three Witches (Weird Sisters)	Portrayed as forces of nature who seem to know the future (is this true?) They fascinate Macbeth.

Tips

- Make sure you understand the events of the play.
- Check your understanding of the main characters and their relationship with each other.
- Integrate key quotes into your response.
- Watch **different** performances of key scenes to enhance your understanding of the characters.

Assessment Objectives

AO1 12 marks	Respond to texts critically and imaginatively; select and evaluate relevant textual detail to illustrate and support interpretations.
AO2 12 marks	Explain how language, structure and form contribute to writers' presentation of ideas, themes and settings.

The relationship between Lady Macbeth and Macbeth does not fit that of the Shakespearean period, as Lady Macbeth is dominant and powerful. The first time we witness the relationship is in Act 1 Scene 5 where Lady Macbeth is reading a letter from her husband. The letter is the first sign of their love, as he sends it ahead of himself showing how he wants to share everything with her and keeps no secrets, which is ironic as after the murder he kills without telling her.

'My dearest partner of greatness' demonstrates the strength of the relationship. 'My' is a possessive pronoun and shows Macbeth's protectiveness of Lady Macbeth, 'dearest' is a superlative which proves he loves her more than anything else. The word 'partner' illustrates the equality and trust in the relationship which is unlike the traditional Jacobean relationship where women were possessions of their husbands. Lastly the adjective 'greatness' conveys how both of the couple are equal in ambition and power.

In Lady Macbeth's speech she proves her complete faith in her husband with the lines 'shall be what thou art promised'. Furthermore the lines 'yet do I fear thy nature it is too full o' the milk of human kindness', highlight Lady Macbeth's knowledge and understanding of Macbeth's character, which shows the closeness and the bond between the pair. Shakespeare uses the word 'milk' to symbolise purity as milk is white - a colour associated with purity and milk feeds young who are pure and innocent. The use of 'hie thee hither that I may pour my spirits in thine ear' demonstrates Lady Macbeth's power and dominance as 'hie' is an imperative.

During Lady Macbeth's prayer to darkness in Act 1 scene 5, she uses the imperative 'come' three times. This conveys her urgency as she needs darkness so she can lead and guide Macbeth. The writer uses 'raven' as the raven is a symbol of death. Its use is foreshadowing the death of Duncan and Lady Macbeth. It also gives the monologue a deathly, dark atmosphere.

The character of Lady Macbeth is illustrated in her comment, 'fill me from the crown to the toe top full of direst cruelty!' This means she wants to be filled of the worst kind of cruelty as 'direst' is a superlative. 'Come to my woman's breasts and take my milk for gall' and 'unsex me' show the sacrifices Lady Macbeth would make for her husband because she's giving up her womanly qualities for him because she loves him so much. The playwright writes 'murdering ministers'. This is an example of alliteration and emotive language. In the speech Lady Macbeth uses '!' four times. This could portray her desperation for help so she can help Macbeth become King or her excitement.

When Macbeth enters the scene, he is greeted by the character of Lady Macbeth as 'Great Glamis Worthy Cawdor! Greater than both by the all-hail hereafter'. The use of 'great' and 'greater' flatter Macbeth. Lady Macbeth is copying the witches' greeting for Macbeth, as a way of preparing to persuade him to kill the King. Macbeth replies to her 'my dearest love, Duncan comes here tonight'. 'My dearest love' is another example of the love between them and 'Duncan comes here tonight' shows the understanding in the relationship as Macbeth understands what his wife is thinking and has come to the same conclusion about killing Duncan.

Lady Macbeth exclaims 'O never shall sun that morrow see!' confident that her husband will be planning Duncan's death too. This shows the level of trust in the relationship as she doesn't try to hide her plot. Then Lady Macbeth offers her husband advice, showing how unlike the typical Jacobean relationship their relationship is, as Jacobean women were meant to be commanded by their husband not the other way around. The advice is 'Look like the innocent flower but be the serpent under 't'. Another phrase that is evidence of the understanding in the relationship is 'he that's coming must be provided for'. This is a euphemism for killing the king and shows how the couple are on the same wavelength and think the same way. By calling the murder 'great business', Lady Macbeth distances it from murder by making it sound positive, 'great' and like work, 'business'. She may have done this as she knows her husband is 'not without ambition - but without the illness should attend it'. Shakespeare again uses alliteration 'solely sovereign sway' to make the speech persuasive. During the conversation Macbeth hardly speaks, this demonstrates how Lady Macbeth is dominant in the relationship.

Commentary

The selection of detail is assured and there is clear evidence that the candidate can discuss thoroughly and increasingly thoughtfully characters/relationships. The candidate has a good grasp of the language of the play and that she/he feels confident in her/his analysis. The work on Lady Macbeth's first speech convincingly demonstrates an ability to deconstruct the way Shakespeare uses language. The candidate shows appreciation of how writers use language to achieve specific effects.