

Fate
Power
Violence
The Supernatural
Gender
Power
Identity
Culture
Relationships
Conflict
Context

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

Features of a tragedy in Macbeth:
Tragic Hero: a main character cursed by fate and who has a tragic flaw.
Catharsis: The release of the audiences emotions through empathy with the characters.
Internal Conflict: the struggle the hero engages in with his fatal flaw.

Macbeth (William Shakespeare)

Plot overview

Act 1: Opens with the witches. A war is taking place and Scotland is victorious. The Thane of Cawdor is executed for treason. King Duncan rewards Macbeth's bravery and he is the new Thane of Cawdor. **The witches confront Macbeth** and Banquo telling Macbeth he will become king. Macbeth sends a letter to his wife, who immediately plots the murder of Duncan.

Act 2: **Macbeth has some doubts but talks himself into killing Duncan.** Lady Macbeth must finish the deed by framing the guards as Macbeth is too scared. The next day, Macduff discovers Duncan's body. Malcolm and Donalbain flee the castle.

Act 3: Banquo begins to suspect Macbeth for Duncan's murder. **Macbeth sends murderers to kill Banquo**, but his son Fleance escapes. There is a banquet and Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost. Macduff does not attend as he is suspicious.

Act 4: **Macbeth confronts the witches who show him more visions.** Macbeth believes that he can't be killed by anyone born from a woman. He sends murderers to Macduff's castle to kill his family. Macduff begs Malcolm to help him overthrow Macbeth. They both agree to wage war against Macbeth.

Act 5: Lady Macbeth has gone mad with guilt over the murders. She sleepwalks whilst trying to wash the blood off her hands. She eventually commits suicide. Macbeth is not concerned as he believes he can't be killed. Macbeth confronts Macduff and Macduff reveals he was not born naturally. They both fight and **Macbeth is killed.** Natural order is restored.

- Context**
- **King James I** – Macbeth was written in 1606, early in the reign of James I, who succeeded to the English throne in 1603 after being King of Scotland. The play pays homage to the king's Scottish lineage and hatred of witches. Additionally, the witches' prophecy that Banquo will found a line of kings is a nod to James' family's claim to have descended from the historical Banquo.
 - **The Divine Right of Kings** – the idea that kings got their power from God and not from their subject. James I was a believer in this, and the idea meant that any treasonous activity was a crime against God. Only a century earlier, England had suffered under the massive disorder of the Wars of the Roses, so many supported the idea to avoid civil unrest.
 - **Patriarchy** – patriarchal societies are those in which men dominate, and inheritance passes through male heirs.
 - **Gender** – Macbeth and Lady Macbeth switch between having masculine and feminine characteristics. In the play, gender is often linked to ambition and a willingness to do anything to achieve power.
 - **Women** – Women were expected to follow social expectations with their behaviour towards men. They were meant to obey all men, be faithful and respectful, not be violent and be religious. They would have been regarded as a possession, first owned by the father, then given to and owned by the husband. Women were considered the delicate, 'fairer' sex and they should be quiet and reserved, always respecting the wishes and opinions of the males in their lives. Lady Macbeth subverts these expectations in the play to manipulate Macbeth in getting what she wants.
 - **Adam, Eve and the serpent** – in the bible, Adam and Eve live peacefully in the Garden of Eden until Eve is tempted by the serpent and eats the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge. She convinces Adam to eat as well, and God curses them and banishes them to Earth. The serpent is frequently alluded to in Macbeth.
 - **Witchcraft** – in Shakespeare's time there was no scientific knowledge to explain natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and droughts. One of the ways they accounted for the unexplained was the idea of witches. In Elizabethan England, hundreds of thousands of women were tortured and executed in Europe because they were accused of witchcraft. The King wrote a book on the subject entitled 'Daemonologie' and appealed to parliament to pass the following act in 1563 which was still a part of English law until 1951. At the time Shakespeare was writing, many people thought that witches were real, so the weird sisters would have seemed believable and frightening to an audience in the 1600s.

Key themes	Quotations (M:Macbeth, LM: Lady Macbeth)
Guilt	M: 'Me thought I heard a voice cry 'Macbeth doth murder'd sleep!' (2,2) M: 'Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst!' (2,2) M: 'Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hands?' (2,2)
Betrayal and loyalty	LM: 'Hie thee hither, that I may pour my spirits in thine ear' (1,5) M: 'I go and it is done. The bell invites me. Hear it not, Duncan, for its knell that summons thee to heaven or hell.' (2,2) B: 'My bosom franchised and my allegiance clear.' (2,1) LM: 'My hands are of your colour' (2,3)
The supernatural	M: (sees Banquo's ghost) 'thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold.' (3,4) Witches: 'By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes.' (4,1) Witches: 'Macbeth shall never be vanquished be until Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane Hill shall come against him.' (4,1)
Ambition and power	M: 'only vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself.' (1,7) M: 'whiles I threat, he lives.' (2,1)
Fate and free will	M: 'If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me.' (3,1) M: 'This supernatural soliciting cannot be ill, cannot be good if ill.' (1,3) LM: 'Fate and metaphysical aid doth seem to have thee crowned withal.' (1,5)
Appearance vs reality	Macduff: 'There's daggers in men's smiles.' (2,5) LM: 'look like the innocent flower but be the serpent under't.' (1,6)
Gender stereotypes	LM: 'Unsex me here and fill me from the crown to the toe top-full of the direst cruelty.' (1,5) LM: 'Take my milk for gall.' (1,5)

Characters	
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.
Fleance	Banquo's son who represents innocence and justice.
Duncan	King of Scotland at the beginning of the play - a strong, respected leader.
Malcolm	Duncan's oldest son and next in line to the throne. Joins the English army to defeat Macbeth at the end of the play.
Donalbain	Duncan's youngest son disappears (to Ireland) after Duncan's murder.
Macduff	Macbeth's antagonist: A brave war consistently suspicious of Macbeth

Key Scenes

Act 1, scene 3: Macbeth first meets witches and learns of prophecy.

Act , scene 2: Duncan is murdered by Macbeth and Macduff discovers his body.

Act 3, scene 1: Banquo is now dead and his ghost appears to Macbeth.

Act 4, scene 1: Macbeth visits the witches again and sees more apparitions.

Act 5, scene 8: Macbeth is killed by Macduff.

Key words:
Motif
Irony
Foreshadowing
Metaphor
Equivocation
Antithesis
Iambic Pentameter
Juxtaposition
Monologue
Semantic field
Treason
Apparition
Hallucination
Traitor
Regicide

Dramatic Devices in Macbeth:
 Aside
 Soliloquy
 Dramatic Irony