**Macbeth – Knowledge Organiser – William Shakespeare**

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| **Plot Summary:**  Act I scene i – The three witches gather in a thunderstorm to meet Macbeth  Act I scene ii – Duncan hears reports of the battle in which Macbeth proves himself a hero and also of the treachery of the Thane of Cawdor.  Act I scene iii – Macbeth & Banquo meet the witches and hear the predictions that he will be Thane of Cawdor and the next king. Ross arrives to confirm that Macbeth is the new Thane of Cawdor.  Act I scene iv – Duncan decides to make his son Malcolm the heir to his throne and tells Macbeth that he will visit his castle.  Act I scene v – Lady Macbeth reads a letter from her husband about the events so far and makes up her mind to murder Duncan.  Act I scene vi – Duncan arrives at Macbeth’s castle and is welcomed by Lady Macbeth.  Act I scene vii – Macbeth decides he cannot go through with the plot but Lady Macbeth persuades him to change his mind.  Act II scene i – Banquo feels uneasy about what might happen in the night. Macbeth makes his way to Duncan’s room to kill him and sees a ghostly dagger floating in the air before him.  Act II scene ii – Macbeth forgets to leave the bloody daggers in Duncan’s room after the murder and Lady Macbeth is forced to take charge and put them back.  Act II scene iii – The next morning Duncan’s body is discovered by Macduff; Macbeth conveniently kills the servants in pretend rage; Duncan’s sons, Malcolm & Donalbain, flee the castle.  Act II scene iv – Macduff reports that suspicion for the murder has fallen on the king’s sons; Macbeth has travelled to Scone to be crowned. | | | Act III scene i – Macbeth is now king, but Banquo is suspicious about how the witches’ predictions have come true. Macbeth arranges to have him murdered.  Act III scene ii – Lady Macbeth tries to get her husband to talk to her about his plans but he refuses.  Act III scene iii – Banquo is murdered but his son, Fleance, escapes.  Act III scene iv – At a feast that night, Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo. Lady Macbeth tries to calm him down but when this fails cancels the feasts and sends the courtiers away.  Act III scene v – The witches discuss events so far; Hecate, the ruler of the witches, predicts his downfall.  Act III scene vi – suspicion of Macbeth is growing; Macduff has left for England to rouse support against him.  Act IV scene i – The witches tell Macbeth he cannot be harmed by anyone ‘born of a woman’ and that he will be safe until Birnam Wood moves to the castle at Dunsinane. Macbeth decides to murder Macduff’s family.  Act IV scene ii – Macbeth’s murderers kill Lady Macduff and her children.  Act IV scene iii – Macduff discovers his family’s murder and, with Malcolm, leads an army to attack Macbeth.  Act V scene i – Lady Macbeth is sleepwalking and trying to wash an imaginary blood spot from her hands.  Act V scene ii – Malcolm’s army is at Birnam Wood and hear reports that Macbeth’s supporters are deserting him.  Act V scene iii – Macbeth is besieged but puts his trust in the witches’ prophesy.  Act V scene iv – Malcolm orders his army to cut down branches from Birnam Wood to disguise the number of soldiers.  Act V scene v – Macbeth is told of his wife’s death and about the news that Birnam Wood seems to be approaching. He resolves to die fighting.  Act V scene vi - ix – Macbeth is killed by Macduff (who reveals he was delivered by caesarean and so not properly ‘born’). Malcolm becomes the new king of Scotland and order is restored. | |
| **Motifs** | | | | |
| **Nature** | 'Against the use of nature' (1.3); 'Tis unnatural,/ Even like the deed that's done’ (3.4); 'And his gash'd stabs looked like a breach in nature‘ (3.1); 'Boundless intemperance/ In nature is a tyranny’ (4.3) | | | |
| **Light and dark** | 'Stars, hid your fires; Let not light see my black and deep desires‘ (1.4); 'that darkness does the face of earth entomb,/When living light should kiss it?‘ (4.2); ‘Come, seeling night,/ Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day‘ (3.2) | | | |
| **Children** | 'Your children shall be kings‘ (1.3); 'And pity, like a naked new-born babe,‘ (1.7); 'I have given suck, and know / How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me‘ (1.7); 'He has no children. All my pretty ones?‘ (4.3) | | | |
| **Blood** | 'Make thick my blood‘ (1.5); 'And on thy blood and dungeon gouts of blood…/It is the bloody business which informs thus to mine eyes’ (2.1); 'Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?‘ (2.1); 'Here's the smell of blood still.‘ (5.1) | | | |
| **Sleep** | 'Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse / The curtain'd sleep‘ (2.1); 'There's one did laugh in's sleep, and one cried 'Murder!'‘ (2.2); ‘Macbeth does murder sleep‘ (2.2); 'A great perturbation in nature, to receive at once the benefit of sleep and do the effects of watching!‘ (5.1) | | | |
| **Dreams** | 'Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible / To feeling as to sight? (2.1); 'Hence, horrible shadow! Unreal mockery, hence!‘ (3.4); 'Wash your hands; put on your nightgown; look not so pale! I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried.‘ (5.1); 'My wife and children's ghosts will haunt me still‘ (5.7) | | | |
| **Key characters** | **Key themes** | **Historical context** | | **Stylistic features and symbols** |
| **Macbeth:** Thane of Glamis  **Lady Macbeth:** his wife  **Banquo:** Macbeth’s best friend  **Fleance:** Banquo’s son  **Duncan:** King of Scotland  **Malcolm:** Duncan’s eldest son  **Macduff**: Thane of Fife  **Lady Macduff:** his wife  **Donalbain:** Duncan’s younger son  **Ross, Lennox, Angus** Scottish nobles  **The witches**: supernatural beings who predict events in the play.  **Hecate:** ruler of the witches | **Ambition** seen as a purely negative quality.  **Guilt** - the play shows the terrible consequences of murdering a king.  **Kingship vs tyranny** – Duncan and Macbeth embody the qualities of a good king and a tyrant respectively.  **Order vs chaos** Natural order is disrupted then re-established.  **Fate -** is Macbeth’s situation fate or is it of his own making?  **Masculinity/femininity -** who has the power in the Macbeth household and why is this significant? | * *Macbeth* 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. * 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. * 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’ family’s claim to have descended from the historical Banquo. * The theme of bad versus good kingship, embodied by Macbeth and Duncan, would have resonated at the royal court. King James had published *Basilikon Doron* a text that outlined the role of a good monarch. * The play was first performed not long after the **Gunpowder Plot** (1605). Shakespeare shows the murderers of a king tormented by their own guilt and driven to their doom. * 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. * *Macbeth* is a **tragedy** and the character of Macbeth is a **tragic hero** * People believed in witches, women who were slaves to satan and did his ungodly bidding. * King James believed witches had tried to stop his wife reaching Scotland when they were to be married. He was present when women were tortured for confessions. When he became king of England, he re-published his book Daemonologie which advocated witch hunting. He also made the laws and punishments for witchcraft stricter. | | **Symbolism** – eg Blood representing guilt  **The supernatural** – belief in witchcraft was widespread and Shakespeare uses prophecy, hallucinations, ghosts and magic to give the play a menacing, unnatural feel.  **Oxymoron** – opposites & contradiction recur throughout the play  **Pathetic fallacy** – unnatural events are usually echoed by unnatural weather  **Alliteration**  **Blank verse –** non rhyming lines written in  **iambic pentameter** (iamb= a beat *du duh*; pent = five)  **Soliloquy –** where a characters speak their thoughts aloud to the audience  **Monologue** – a long speech by a single character  **Dramatic irony** – when the audience knows more than a character or characters do  **Hubris** - pride |