

# ENGLISH LITERATURE- MACBETH

A CONTEXT		
1	King James I	<i>Macbeth</i> was likely 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's family's claim to have descended from the historical Banquo.
2	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.
3	Patriarchy	Patriarchal societies are those in which men dominate and inheritance passes through male heirs.
4	Women	Women were expected to obey everything that their husbands said. They were expected to be faithful and respectful at all times. They would have been regarded as a possession, first owned by the father, then given to and owned by the husband. Women were supposed to be religious and hate violence of any kind. They 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.
5	Gender	Macbeth and 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.
6	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 <i>Macbeth</i> .
7	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 'Deamonologie' and appealed to parliament to pass the following act in 1563 which was still a part of English law until 1951.

B KEY CHARACTERS		
1	Macbeth	<i>Thane of Glamis</i>
2	Lady Macbeth	<i>Macbeth's wife</i>
3	Banquo	<i>Macbeth's best friend</i>
4	Fleance	<i>Banquo's son</i>
5	Duncan	<i>King of Scotland</i>
6	Malcolm	<i>Duncan's eldest son</i>
7	Donalbain	<i>Duncan's younger son</i>
8	Macduff	<i>Thane of Fife</i>
9	Lady Macduff	<i>Macduff's wife</i>
10	Ross, Lennox, Angus	<i>These are all Thanes who work for Duncan</i>
11	Siward (and young Siward)	<i>Siward is a general of the English forces. Young Siward is his son and is a soldier.</i>
12	The witches	<i>Supernatural beings who predict events in the play</i>
13	Hecate	<i>Goddess of Witchcraft</i>

## C KEY QUOTATIONS

### ACT 1

1	The Witches	'Fair is foul, and foul is fair' (Sc. 1)
2	Captain	'brave Macbeth—well he deserves that name' (Sc. 2)
3	Lady Macbeth	Yet do I fear thy nature; It is too full o' the milk of human kindness.' (Sc.5) 'Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under't.' (Sc.5): 'un-sex me here, And fill me from the crown to the toe top full of direst cruelty' (Sc. 5) 'I have given suck and know how tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me' (Sc. 7)
4	Macbeth	'have no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself' (Sc. 7) 'I dare do all that may become a man; who dares do more is none.' (Sc.7)

### ACT 2

5	Macbeth	'Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand?' (Sc. 1) 'Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?' (Sc.2)
6	Lady Macbeth	'My hands are of your colour, but I shame to wear a heart so white.'(Sc. 2)

### ACT 3

7	Macbeth	'upon my head they placed a fruitless crown, and put a barren sceptre in my gripe' (Sc. 2) 'We have scorch'd the snake, not kill'd it.' (Sc. 2) 'O full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!' (Sc.2)
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### ACT 4

8	The Witches	'beware Macduff' (Sc. 1) 'none of woman born shall harm Macbeth' (Sc. 1) 'Great Birnam wood...shall come against him' (Sc. 1)
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### ACT 5

9	Lady Macbeth	'Out, damned spot!' (Sc. 1)
10	Macbeth	Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow' (Sc. 5) 'a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.' (Sc. 5)
11	Macduff	'Macduff was from his mother's womb untimely ripp'd.' (Sc. 8)
12	Malcolm	'Of this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen' (Sc. 8)

## D KEY WORDS

1	Patriarchy	A male dominated society
2	Matriarchy	A female dominated society
3	Regicide	The murder of a monarch
4	Jacobean	The era of James I's reign
5	Divine right	The belief that Kings were chosen for the throne by God
6	Ambition	The desire to succeed
7	Prophecy	Prediction
8	Infanticide	The murder of a child
9	Supernatural/apparition	Being or event beyond natural understanding - a ghost
10	Tragedy	A disaster or a play with an unhappy ending
11	Usurper	Person who takes a position of power illegally
12	Thane	A man who held land granted by the King
13	Nonpareil	Having no match or equal - unrivalled
14	Somnambulate	Sleepwalking
15	Succession	The action or process of inheriting a title
16	Treason	The crime of betraying your country
17	Monarchy	A form of government with a monarch at the head



## PLOT SUMMARY: ACT 1

1	<b>Act I scene i</b> – The three witches gather to meet Macbeth and Banquo
2	<b>Act I scene ii</b> – Duncan hears from the Captain that the Thane of Cawdor has betrayed him, and that Macbeth has proven himself to be a hero.
3	<b>Act I scene iii</b> – Macbeth and Banquo hear the predictions from the witches that Macbeth will be Thane of Cawdor and the next king, and Banquo's children will be kings. Ross arrives and tells Macbeth that he is the new Thane of Cawdor.
4	<b>Act I scene iv</b> – Duncan decides to make his son Malcolm the heir to his throne and tells Macbeth that he will visit his castle.
5	<b>Act I scene v</b> – Lady Macbeth reads a letter from her husband about the events so far, and invokes the spirits to give her the strength to do what needs to be done to murder the King.
6	<b>Act I scene vi</b> – Duncan arrives at Macbeth's castle and is welcomed by Lady Macbeth.
7	<b>Act I scene vii</b> – Macbeth and Lady Macbeth argue over the fate of Duncan. Macbeth has many strong reasons against the murder, but Lady Macbeth convinces him.

## PLOT SUMMARY: ACT 2

1	<b>Act II scene i</b> – Banquo feels uneasy about what might happen in the night. Macbeth makes his way to Duncan's room to kill him and sees a dagger floating in the air before him.
2	<b>Act II scene ii</b> – Macbeth forgets to leave the bloody daggers in Duncan's room after the murder and Lady Macbeth berates him before putting them back.
3	<b>Act II scene iii</b> – Duncan's body is discovered by Macduff the next day. Macbeth pretends to be angry and kills the servants to keep them out of the way. Duncan's sons, Malcolm & Donalbain, flee the castle.
4	<b>Act II scene iv</b> – Macduff reports that suspicion for the murder has fallen on the king's sons; Macbeth has travelled to Scone to be crowned

## PLOT SUMMARY: ACT 3

1	<b>Act III scene i</b> – Macbeth is king and Banquo is suspicious about how the witches' predictions have come true. Macbeth convinces murderers to assassinate Banquo.
2	<b>Act III scene ii</b> – Lady Macbeth tries to get her husband to talk to her about his plans but he refuses.
3	<b>Act III scene iii</b> – Banquo is murdered but his son, Fleance, escapes.
4	<b>Act III scene iv</b> – At a feast that night, Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo and acts strangely in front of his guests. Lady Macbeth tries to convince everyone this is normal behaviour.
5	<b>Act III scene v</b> – The witches discuss events so far; Hecate, the ruler of the witches, predicts the downfall of Macbeth.
6	<b>Act III scene vi</b> – Macduff has left for England to rouse support against Macbeth as suspicion and grows against the new king.

## PLOT SUMMARY: ACT 4

1	<b>Act IV scene i</b> – Macbeth meets the witches who show him a series of apparitions. They tell him to beware Macduff, that 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. They also show him a line of Banquo's heirs. Macbeth decides to murder Macduff's family as a result of the first apparition.
2	<b>Act IV scene ii</b> – Macbeth's murderers kill Lady Macduff and her children.
3	<b>Act IV scene iii</b> – Macduff and Malcolm discuss what it means to be kind. Macduff discovers his family's murder and, with Malcolm, leads an army to attack Macbeth.

## PLOT SUMMARY: ACT 5

1	<b>Act V scene i</b> – A doctor and Lady Macbeth's servant watch Lady Macbeth sleep walking and trying to wash an imaginary blood spot from her hands.
2	<b>Act V scene ii</b> – Malcolm's army is at Birnam Wood and hear reports that Macbeth's supporters are deserting him.
3	<b>Act V scene iii</b> – Macbeth is under siege and places all his hope in the predictions from the witches.
4	<b>Act V scene iv</b> – Malcolm orders his army to cut down branches from Birnam Wood to disguise the number of soldiers.
5	<b>Act V scene v</b> – Macbeth is told of his wife's death and about the news that Birnam Wood seems to be approaching. He resolves to die fighting.
6	<b>Act V scene vi - ix</b> – 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.