

Year 10 'Macbeth' Knowledge Organiser



Zoom in
- single
word



Zoom out
- whole
phrase



Historical context

- 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's family's claim to have descended from the historical Banquo.
- The theme of bad versus good kingship, embodied by Macbeth and Duncan, respectively, would have resonated at the royal court, where James was busy developing his English version of the theory of the divine right of kings.
- The play was first performed not long after the Gunpowder Plot. 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.

Key themes

Ambition

Guilt

Kingship vs tyranny

Order vs chaos

Fate

Masculinity/femininity

Key quotations

The witches: Fair is foul, and foul is fair, Hover through the fog an filthy air. (Act I, Scene i)

The witches: When the battle's lost and won. (Act I, Scene i)

The witches: When shall we three meet again in thunder, lightning, or in rain? When the hurlyburly 's done, When the battle 's lost and won. (Act I, Scene i)

Captain: For brave Macbeth—well he deserves that name— Disdaining fortune, with his brandished steel, Which smoked with bloody execution, Like valour's minion carved out his passage (Act I, Scene ii)

Macbeth: So foul and fair a day I have not seen (Act I, Scene III)

Banquo: And oftentimes, to win us to our harm, the instruments of darkness tell us truths (Act I scene iii)

Key Characters

Macbeth	Thane of Glamis
Lady Macbeth	Macbeth's his wife
Banquo	Macbeth's best friend
Fleance	Banquo's son
Duncan	King of Scotland
Malcolm	Duncan's eldest son
Macduff	Thane of Fife
The witches	Supernatural beings who predict events in the play.

Key terminology

Oxymoron -	opposites & contradiction recur throughout the play
Pathetic fallacy	unnatural events are usually echoed by unnatural weather
Blank verse	non rhyming lines written in
iambic pentameter	(iam= a beat du duh; pent = five)
Soliloquy	where a character speaks 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