

AQA English Literature Paper 1

Macbeth



Revision booklet

Name _____

REMINDER

In the exam, **you will be presented with a short extract** from the play.

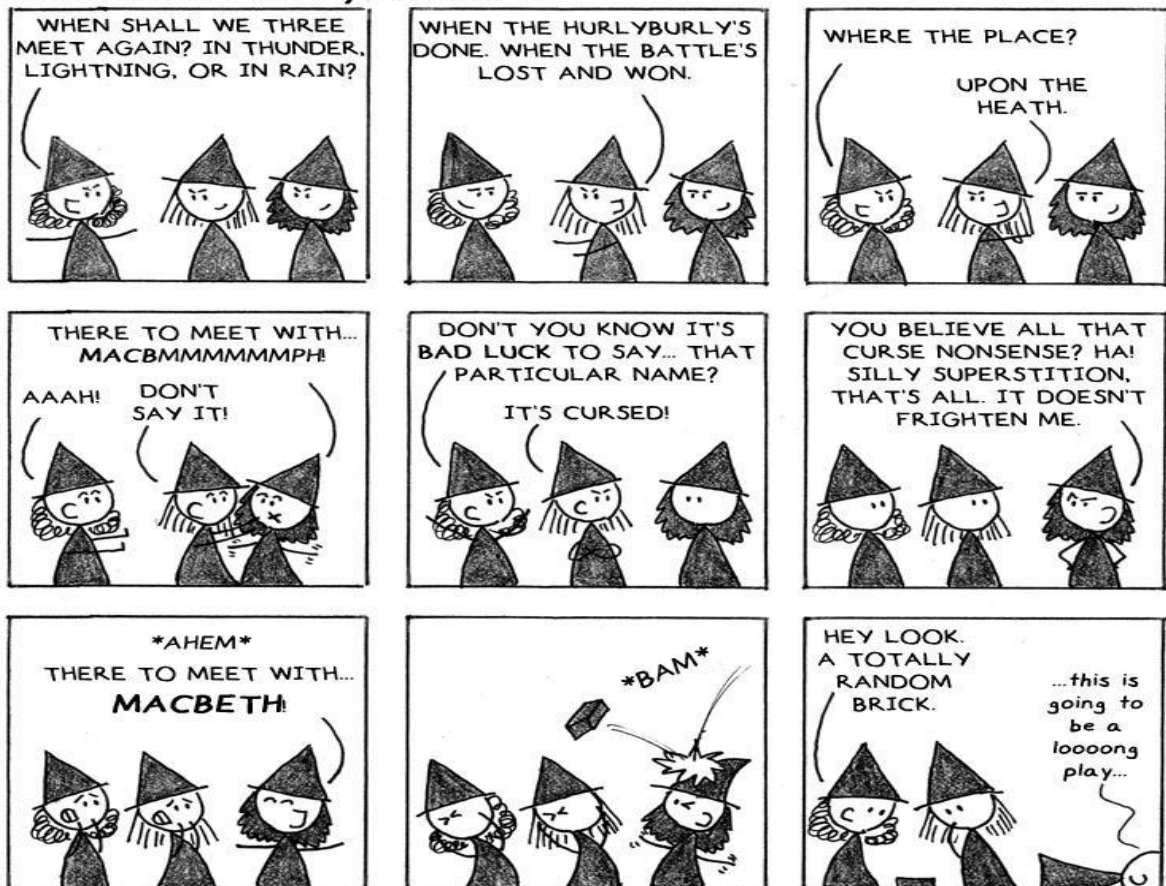
There will only be ONE question on Macbeth – you MUST answer it!

The question will ask you to focus on the extract (examiners expect to see close language analysis) and then relate it to elsewhere in the play, so you can show your understanding of the whole play.

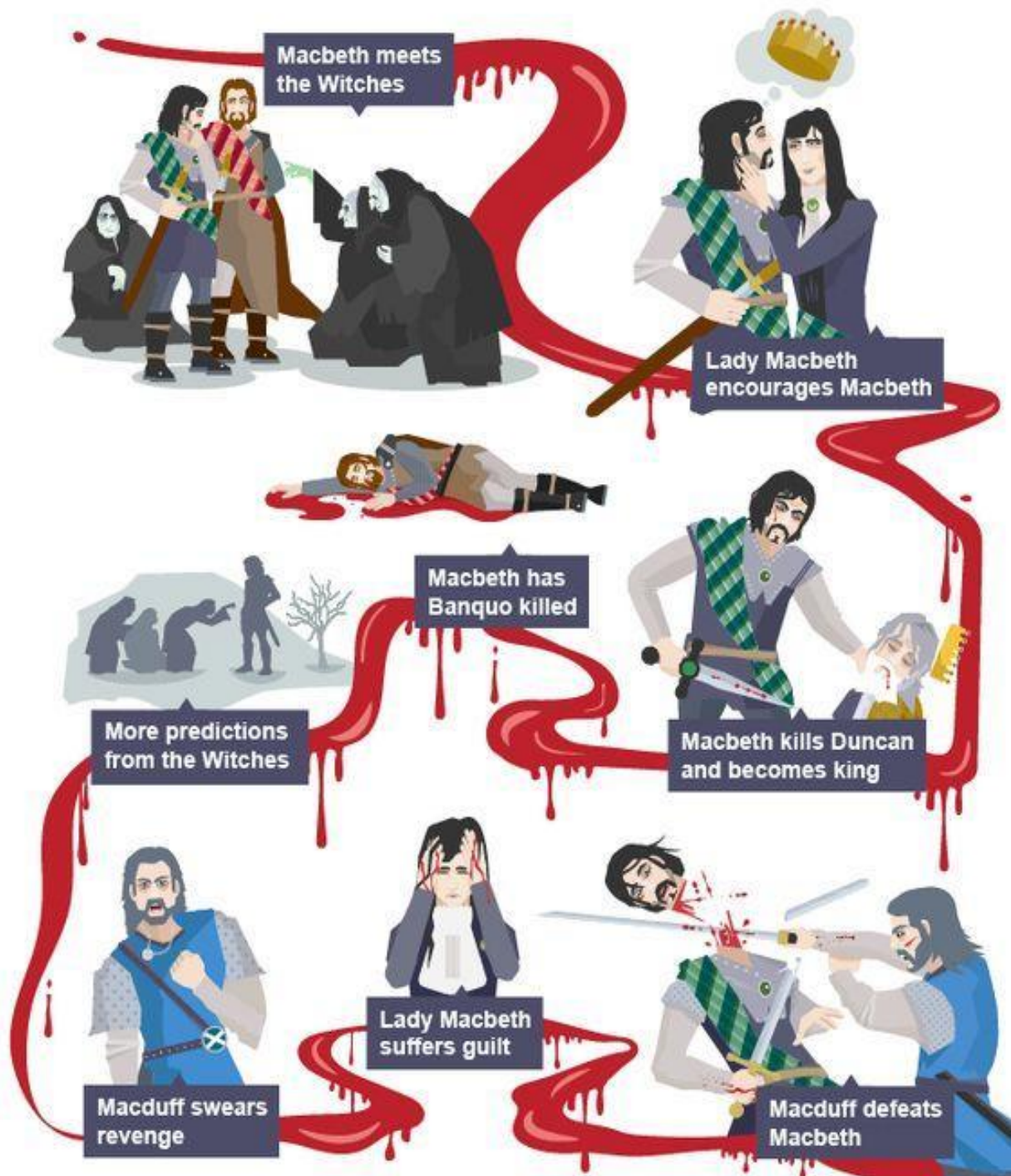
You are advised to spend 45 minutes writing your response to Macbeth and then 5 minutes carefully proof-reading it for SPAG accuracy!

SPAG is marked for your Macbeth answer – so spend 5 minutes checking and correcting any mistakes you might have made when writing against the clock!

MACBETH: Act 1, Scene 1



Macbeth: 'a chain of events'



Understanding the plot: Act 1

What happens in the play?

- Three Witches plan to meet Macbeth on the heath after the fighting has finished, but before the sun has set.
- Duncan, the King of Scotland, has been impressed with Macbeth's fighting and makes him Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth is considered a war hero.
- Macbeth and Banquo meet the witches. They tell Macbeth he will be Thane of Cawdor, then King. They tell Banquo his sons will be kings. Macbeth then meets Ross who tells him he is Thane of Cawdor.
- King Duncan thanks Macbeth for his hard work. Macbeth considers murdering Duncan to make the prophecy true.
- Lady Macbeth reads a letter from Macbeth about the Witches. She plots King Duncan's murder and then later convinces Macbeth.
- King Duncan arrives to stay with the Macbeths and Lady Macbeth and Macbeth act politely towards him.
- Macbeth decides not to kill the king and feels guilty. He is convinced by Lady Macbeth to kill the King and he finally agrees to it.

Key Quotations

Who says it?	Quotation	What does it show?

Understanding the plot: Act 2

What happens in the play?

- Banquo and his son are walking together at night. Banquo feels worried and then speaks to Macbeth about the Witches. Macbeth is then alone and hallucinates that he sees a dagger. He leaves to kill Duncan.
- Macbeth has murdered Duncan and his overcome with guilt. Lady Macbeth takes the daggers he has returned with and smears blood on the guards to make them look guilty.
- Begins with the Porter who gives some comic relief as he is drunk. There is then uproar when they all find out about Duncan's death. His sons decide to flee Scotland.
- Macbeth becomes King.

Key Quotations

Who says it?	Quotation	What does it show?

Understanding the plot: Act 3

What happens in the play?

- Banquo worries that Macbeth has murdered Duncan. Macbeth plans Banquo's murder.
- Macbeth and Lady Macbeth feel insecure about their position as King and Queen. Macbeth hides his plan to murder Banquo from Lady Macbeth.
- Banquo is murdered, his son escapes.
- Macbeth holds a feast at the castle. He begins to see Banquo's ghost and shows he is mentally unstable at this point.
- Hecate (head Witch) is annoyed at the witches for seeing Macbeth without her. She plans an evil spell to destroy Macbeth.
- Lennox is suspicious of Macbeth. A lord tells him that Malcom and Macduff are in England getting an army together.

Key Quotations

Who says it?	Quotation	What does it show?

Understanding the plot: Act 4

What happens in the play?

- Macbeth visits the Witches. ~They summon 3 apparitions and they each make a different prophecy. Macbeth is told to be careful of Macduff, so Macbeth decides to have him killed.
- Murders break in and murder Lady Macduff and her children.
- Macduff goes to England to persuade Malcom to go back to Scotland. Ross arrives to tell him his family has been murdered.

Key Quotations

Who says it?	Quotation	What does it show?

Understanding the plot: Act 5

What happens in the play?

- Lady Macbeth is sleepwalking. She appears to be losing her mind as a doctor is watching her.
- The Scottish Thanes are talking about the arrival of the English army. They plan to meet near Birnam Wood.
- Macbeth hears of the army, but is not afraid. He is told that Lady Macbeth cannot be made better.
- The English army organises itself for battle.
- Macbeth is waiting for the English army. Lady Macbeth kills herself.
- Macduff and Malcom attack.
- Macduff looks for Macbeth, determined to kill him.
- Macbeth finds out Macduff was not woman born. Macduff kills Macbeth.
- Macduff enters with Macbeth's head. Malcom is made King.

Key Quotations

Who says it?	Quotation	What does it show?

Character Analysis: Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth is the deuteragonist (the second character) in this drama: the wife of Macbeth, she shares his lust for power. Our initial impressions of Lady Macbeth are that she is, as Malcolm describes her at the close of the play, indeed **“fiend-like”** as, when she learns of Duncan’s visit to Dunsinane her thoughts turn immediately to regicide (killing of the king). Without pause, she summons evil **“spirits”** and commands them to **“make thick my blood”** so that **“no compunctious visitings of Nature”** shake her wicked intention to murder the King.

Interestingly, in this soliloquy Lady Macbeth imagines committing the regicide herself as she asks to be wrapped in the blackest smoke of Hell **“so that my keen knife sees not the wound it makes.”** Later, she privately admits in an aside: **“Had he not looked like my father as he slept, I had done’t,”** suggesting that Lady Macbeth is not as “fiend-like” as is sometimes argued. Certainly, she is not naturally **“fiend-like”** or she would not have sought assistance from the **“murdering ministers”** she conjures when the audience first meet her, even though she willingly submits to their wicked influence.

It is arguable that Lady Macbeth is subconsciously repelled by the thought of regicide because when she is pressuring her husband to commit the deed she avoids using the word “murder”; instead she employs a variety of euphemisms, including: **“this enterprise”**, Duncan being **“provided for”** or merely **“it”**. However, others argue that Shakespeare’s employment of euphemisms here is quite deliberate and serves subtly to convey Lady Macbeth’s wily, artful manipulation of her husband and which, therefore, strengthens the audience impression of her as being truly **“fiend-like”**.

However, once the regicide is committed and Lady Macbeth becomes Queen, the dynamics of her relationship with Macbeth undergoes a dramatic transformation. Despite having fulfilled her ambition to become Queen, in an aside to the audience Lady Macbeth privately admits: **“Nought’s had, all’s spent, where our desire is got without content.”** Ironically, when her husband then enters her own face becomes a mask, disguising what is in her heart as she admonishes Macbeth for entertaining gloomy thoughts which ought to have been buried alongside the body of the dead King Duncan.

As her ability to influence her husband diminishes – he simply ignores her command to halt his murderous plans for Banquo when she demands: **“You must leave this”** – Lady Macbeth becomes an increasingly isolated figure. After the banquet scene at which Macbeth arouses suspicions by his erratic behaviour, Lady Macbeth tells him: **“You lack the season of all natures – sleep.”** Ironically, the audience’s final impressions of her are in Act 5 scene 1 where she is sleepwalking, burdened by guilt.

The bold figure who instructed evil spirits to **“pall thee in the dunnest smoke of Hell”** is now a pathetic figure, afraid of the dark. Lady Macbeth’s gentlewoman tells the Doctor observing her sleepwalk: **“She has light by her continually – ‘tis her command.”** The evil she so willingly embraced betrays her – as it betrays Macbeth – and produces only anguish in place of the rewards she had envisioned. On the night of Duncan’s murder, their hands bathed in Duncan’s blood, she boldly claimed: **“A little water clears us of this deed.”** Now, however, she seems unable to rid herself of the stench and spots of blood she imagines cover her hands still. The Doctor fears she is suicidal and claims: **“more needs she the Divine than the physician.”**

Understanding Lady Macbeth

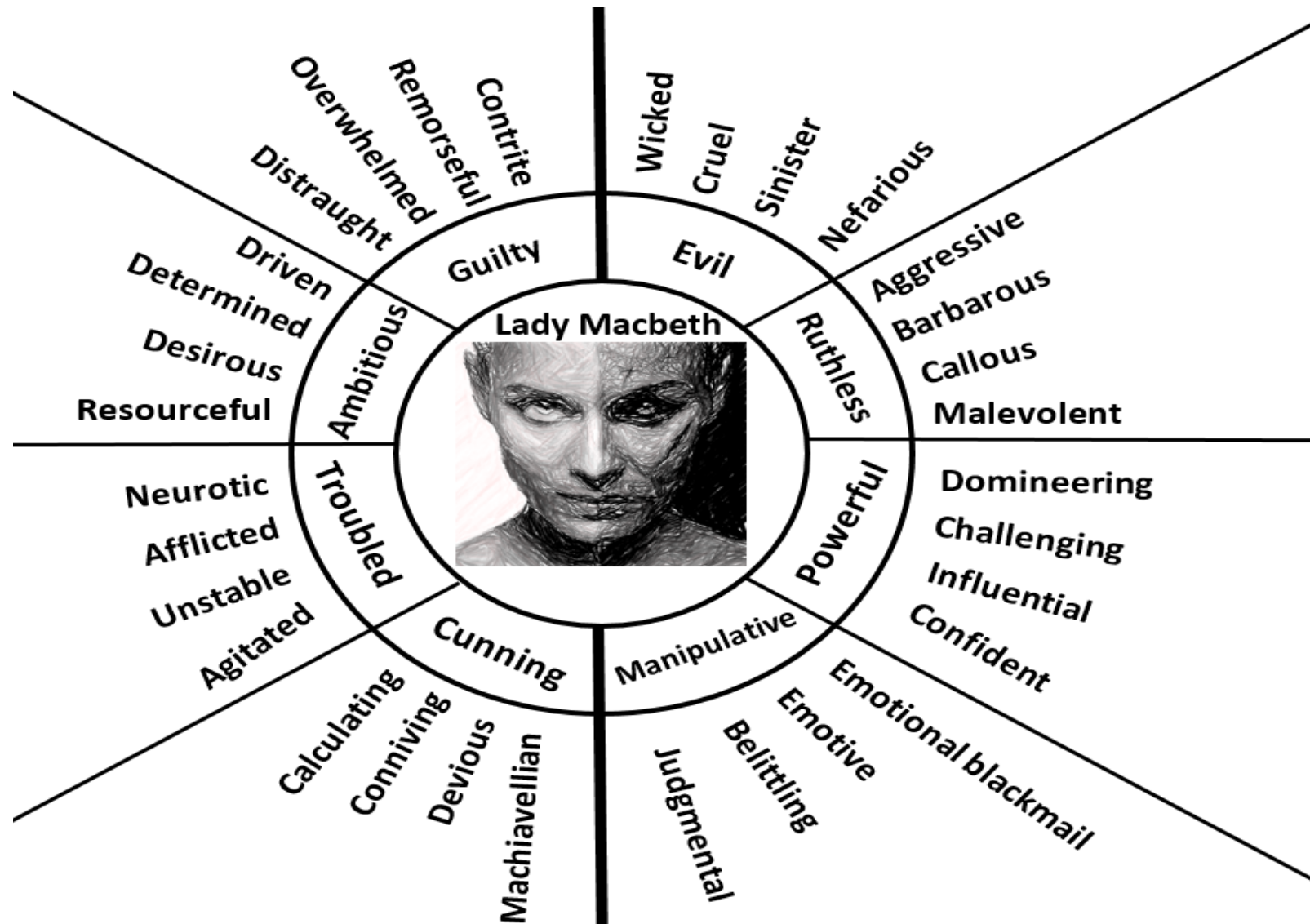
Lady Macbeth is even more ambitious and ruthless than her husband. As soon as an opportunity to gain power presents itself, she has a plan in mind. She uses her influence to persuade Macbeth that they are taking the right course of action and even takes part in the crime herself.

For a while she is able to suppress her actions but eventually she becomes unable to deal with the guilt of what she has done. She becomes unable to sleep, and mentally unstable, eventually dying in tragic circumstances.

The Contextual Background

In both Shakespeare's time and in the time when the play takes place, women had a much lower status than would be the case today. Wives were little more than the property of their husbands and had no legal rights. Their main purpose was to have children and support their menfolk. Lady Macbeth appears to be a much more feisty character with ambitions and desires of her own; these are characteristics that could imply a lack of femininity. It is worth remembering that in the original performances of the play the part of Lady Macbeth would have been played by a man and this would have helped to emphasise the character's masculine qualities.

For each word to describe Lady Macbeth, select a quotation and why you have said she is presented this way.



Character analysis: Macbeth

Macbeth is the protagonist (main character) in this tragedy: a tragic hero whose hamartia – the fatal flaw in his character - is his ambition, a lust for power shared by his wife. He is aware of the evil his ambition gives rise to but he is unable to overcome the temptation.

Often, Lady Macbeth is wrongly accused of inviting Macbeth to contemplate regicide. In fact, after his encounter with the witches in Act 1 scene 3, Macbeth himself considers regicide when he reflects on their prophecy and admits:

**"If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature?"**

He is here acknowledging that the thing he is contemplating – usurping King Duncan's crown - is **"against the use of nature."**

Wracked by doubts, in Act 1 scene 7 as he contemplates the regicide, Macbeth wavers and informs his wife: **"We will proceed no further in this business."** Unlike his wife's wily, artful avoidance of the word "murder" during this conversation, it is clear that Macbeth uses a euphemism here because the very thought of murder frightens him, let alone the deed. Even when criticised and challenged by Lady Macbeth, he retains the moral sensibility to declare: **"I dare do all may become a man. / Who dares do more is none."**

Having submitted to his wife's artful persuasion, Macbeth kills Duncan but is immediately plagued by his conscience. He tells how he **"could not say Amen"** and of a voice that foretold sleeplessness as punishment for such a heinous act.

Though Macbeth is influenced by both the witches and his wife, Macbeth is not controlled by them. His story is one of moral choice and the consequences of that choice. Once Duncan is murdered, Macbeth withdraws from Lady Macbeth and all subsequent murders in this play are the products of Macbeth's own paranoia and desperate desire to cling to power **"on this bank and shoal of time"** here on Earth, knowing he has been condemned to an eternity in Hell for killing God's anointed representative on Earth.

Having murdered Banquo and Macduff's family, Macbeth's paranoia gives way to a more fundamental disorder. In Act 5 we watch as he prepares to defend his kingdom – reduced to his castle at Dunsinane – and he swings violently between fits of rage and despair. Evidently, he has lost any emotional connection to his fellow men, declares that he is **"sick at heart"** and has **"lived long enough"**. When informed of his wife's death, he is completely unmoved and instead reflects on the meaninglessness of life itself. Macbeth is a tragic hero precisely because he does not accept his evil callously; he suffers for it. In his own words: **"To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself."**

Understanding Macbeth

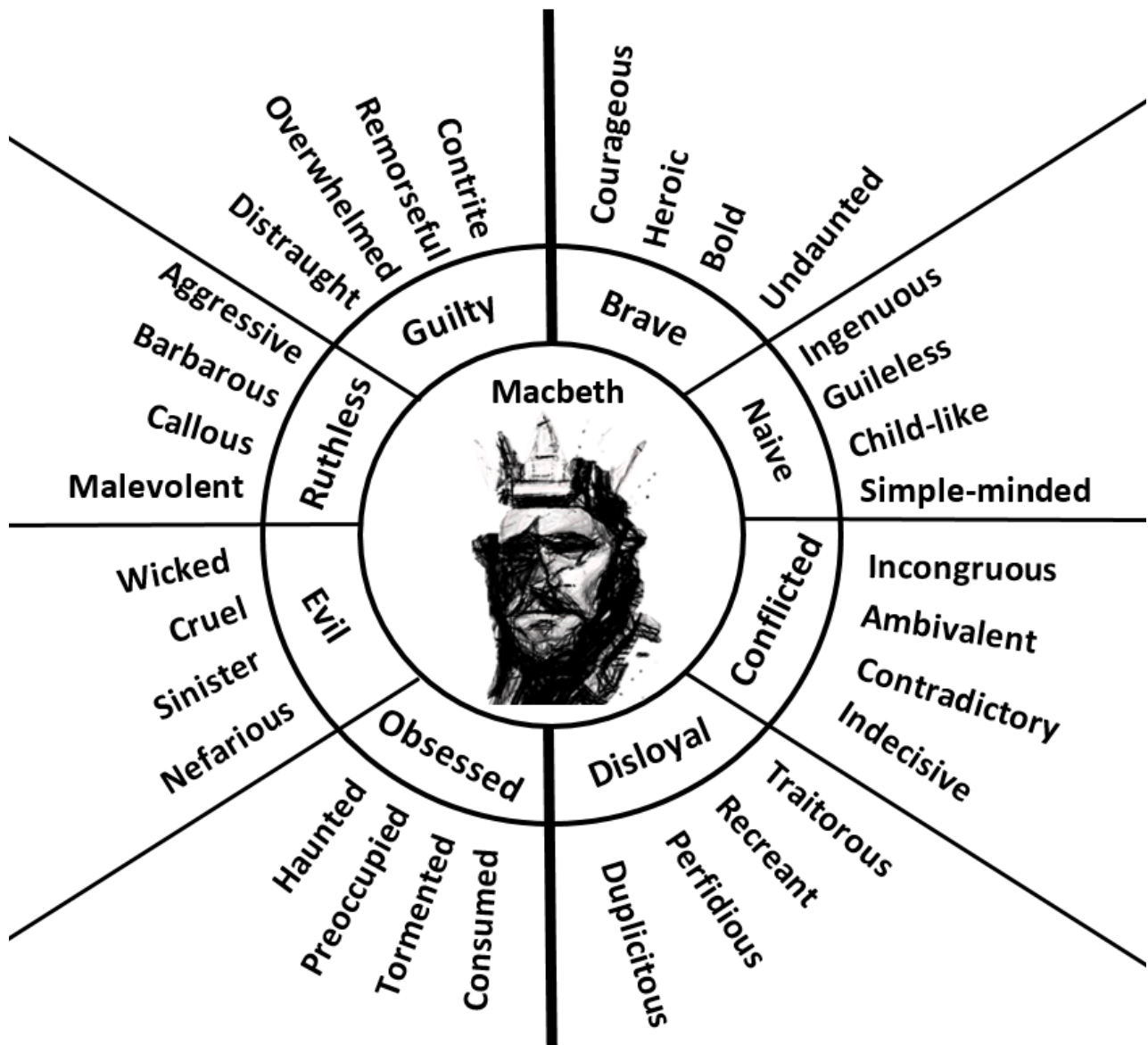
Macbeth is a complex character who changes throughout the course of the play. He is clearly a brave warrior and leader at the start of the drama but he falls victim to the Witches' predictions. It is unclear whether they plant ideas in his mind or whether they simply highlight thoughts that he has already had. In a series of **soliloquies** he repeatedly questions himself about his motives for killing the King but is eventually persuaded to continue by his forceful wife.

Having committed murder, he finds himself caught in a spiral of evil from which he can see no escape. His actions become less heroic and more cowardly as he continues to murder and terrorise others in order to hold on to his power. Towards the end of the play, when he realises that he is doomed, he briefly returns to his old heroic self.

The Contextual Background

A king in Shakespeare's time was thought to rule by 'divine right'. This meant that God had chosen that person directly to rule over others. The killing of a king (known as regicide) was therefore considered to be just about the worst crime that anyone could commit. That is why Macbeth's decision to murder Duncan seemed so horrific to an audience of the time and why the murderer has such a guilty conscience.

For each word to describe Macbeth, select a quotation and why you have said he is presented this way.



Character Analysis: Banquo

Banquo might best be described as a minor character in the tragedy of Macbeth. Nevertheless, he has an important function in the play and is considered by many to be an effective dramatic foil for Macbeth. It is through Banquo's interactions with Macbeth and his own motivations that the audience – through contrast – gain insights into Macbeth's nature also.

Alike in many ways, Banquo and Macbeth are equals as the play begins: both are Scottish **"captains"** defending Duncan's realm against the marauding Norwegians led by Sweno. They fight honourably and are heroic warriors, risking their lives in defence of Duncan's kingdom. However, after the battle when they encounter the **"weird sisters"** on the **"blasted heath"**, Banquo's dramatic function is to demonstrate to an audience that the temptations of the witches may be successfully resisted and that Macbeth therefore acts from free will. Banquo expresses unshakeable moral principles and warns his friend that the witches may well be **"instruments of darkness"** who **"tell us truths"** in order to **"win us to our harm"** and to **"betray us in deepest consequence."** Banquo's concern contrasts strikingly with Macbeth's own susceptibility to the witches.

Banquo's resistance to the influence of evil serves to highlight Macbeth's failure to resist and foregrounds his tendency towards evil, stimulated by ambition - the flaw that makes the tragedy possible.

Prompted by paranoid insecurity, when Macbeth decides to murder Banquo he acknowledges Banquo's endearing qualities: his **"royalty of nature"**, his **"wisdom"** and his **"dauntless"** or fearless nature. This resentment of Banquo's natural superiority, together with jealousy of his destiny as a **"father to a line of kings"**, motivates Macbeth to commit further wicked murders in the second half of the play, commencing with Banquo's and the attempted murder of his son and heir, Fleance.

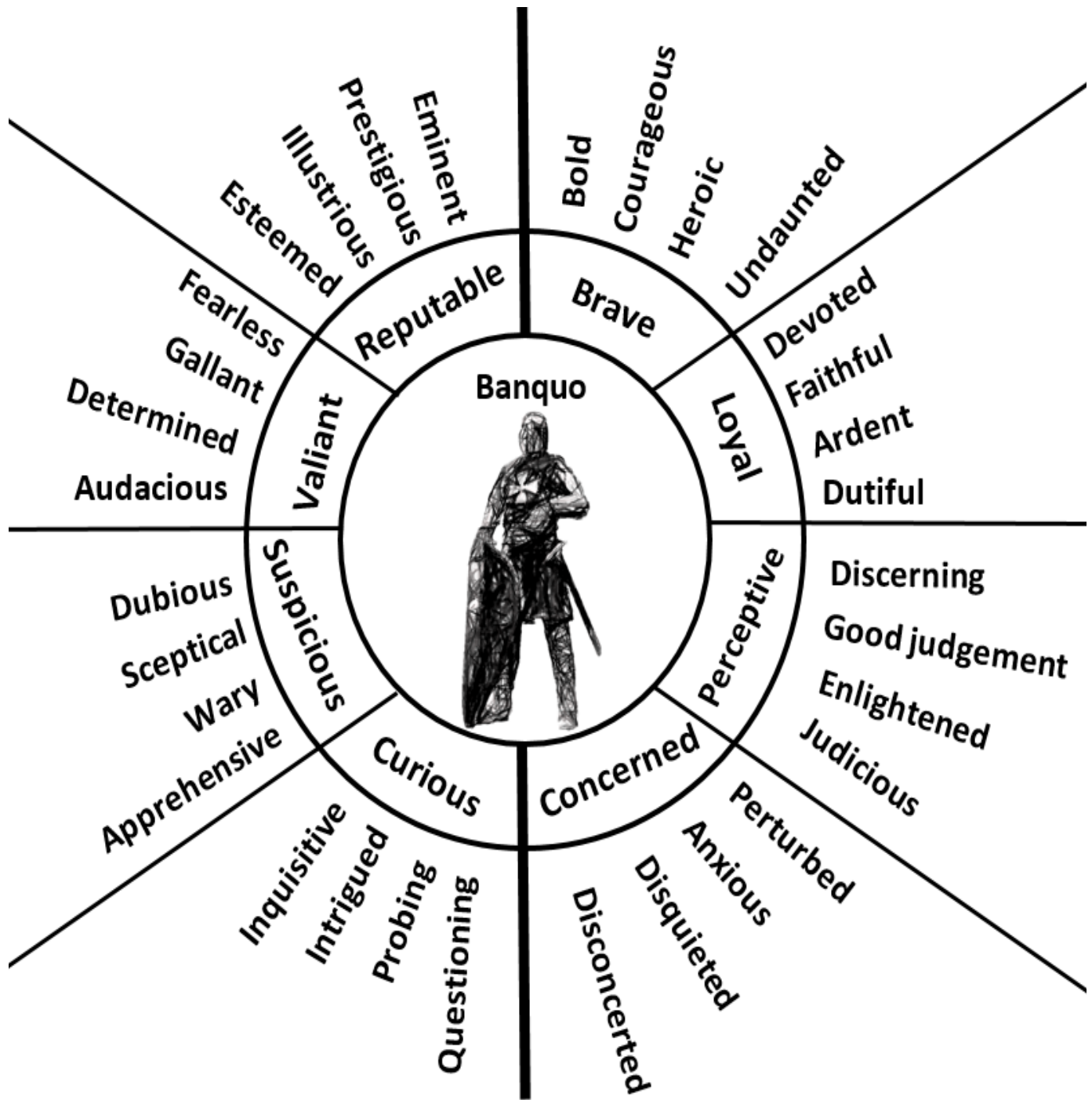
Banquo's fate is determined by his virtue, just as Macbeth's is determined by his villainy.

Understanding Banquo

Banquo is another general in King Duncan's army and Macbeth's best friend. While both men have ambitious thoughts, Banquo is more cautious and does not resort to murder to get what he wants.

Banquo is aware that the Witches' predictions may be tricking Macbeth into evil actions and is the first to suspect Macbeth of murder. He dies while protecting his son, Fleance, and comes back as a ghost to haunt Macbeth.

For each word to describe Banquo, select a quotation and why you have said he is presented this way.



Character Analysis: The Weird Sisters (Witches)

The weird sisters are an unholy trinity, a trio of malevolent, supernatural characters whose function in the drama is to encourage Macbeth in his evil inclinations.

Though their appearances in the play are brief, they have an important function. Shakespeare establishes the supernatural theme via their association with disorder in Nature: they appear amid thunder and lightning in a grim meeting on a “**blasted heath**” which contributes greatly to the tone of mysterious evil which pervades the play.

Likewise, the supernatural world they represent is terrifying to an audience because it is beyond human control and in the play it is symbolic of the unpredictable force of human desire, such as Macbeth’s ruthless ambition to become King.

At their first appearance, the weird sisters state an ambiguity that Shakespeare weaves through the play: “**Fair is foul, and foul is fair.**” Indeed, the witches’ relationship with Macbeth is so entwined that the first line he speaks in the play is an echo of this riddle. He says: “**So fair and foul a day I have not seen.**”

The deceptive pictures of the future – in their initial prediction of Macbeth becoming King and later in the riddles given by the Apparitions which rise from the cauldron when Macbeth visits the witches for a second time – encourage in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth a false sense of what is desirable and possible. The magic of the witches, then, is their ability to create moral disruption which, in Macbeth’s case, leads to his death and subsequent damnation.

It is important to remember that while the witches may have “**more in them than mortal knowledge**”, they do not control Macbeth. They merely put ideas into his mind on which he then decides for himself. He is the master of his own destiny and acts out of free will.

Understanding The Witches

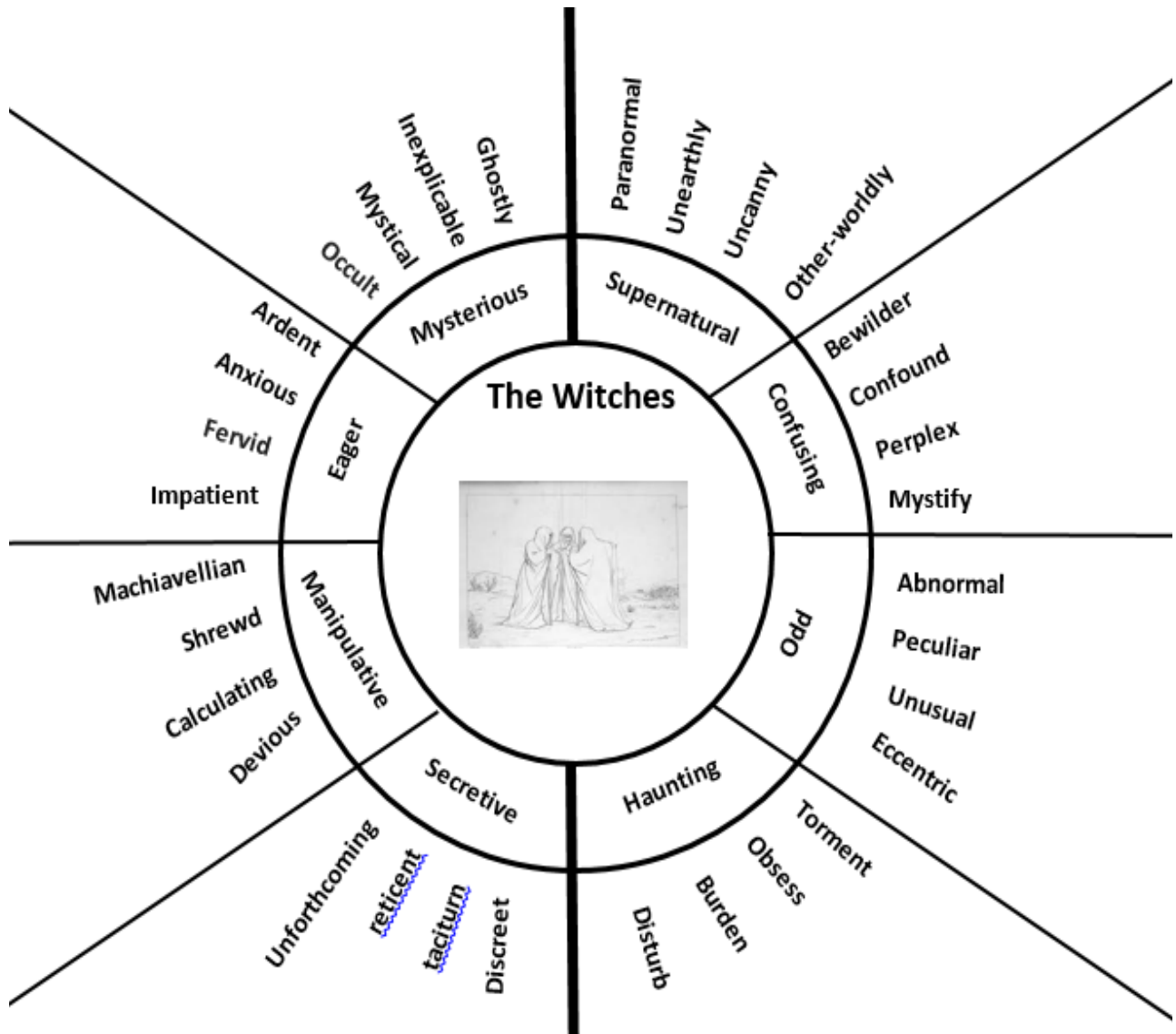
Although there is clearly more than one of them, the Witches may be seen as seem as a single character; they are often referred to as "The Weird Sisters".

Their predictions drive matters forward though they never actually suggest direct action. Rather, they plant ideas in Macbeth's mind and let his ambition do the rest. Many of their predictions are **ambiguous**.

Key Word:

Ambiguous - open to more than one interpretation; not having one obvious meaning.

For each word to describe the witches, select a quotation and why you have said they are presented this way.



Context: Shakespeare's Time

Complete some research on the context of Macbeth. You have got four areas to fill out.

When was it first performed?	Bonfire Night
The Globe	Beliefs at the time

Context: Witches

In Shakespeare's time people believed in witches. They were people who had made a pact with the Devil in exchange for supernatural powers. If your cow was ill, it was easy to decide it had been cursed. If there was plague in your village, it was because of a witch. If the beans didn't grow, it was because of a witch. Witches might have a familiar – a pet, or a toad, or a bird – which was supposed to be a demon advisor. People accused of being witches tended to be old, poor, single women. It is at this time that the idea of witches riding around on broomsticks (a common household implement in Elizabethan England) becomes popular.

There are lots of ways to test for a witch. A common way was to use a ducking stool, or just to tie them up, and duck the accused under water in a pond or river. If she floated, she was a witch. If she didn't, she was innocent. She probably drowned. Anyone who floated was then burnt at the stake. It was legal to kill witches because of the Witchcraft Act passed in 1563, which set out steps to take against witches who used spirits to kill people.

Recall the facts:

- How does Shakespeare present the Witches? (1)

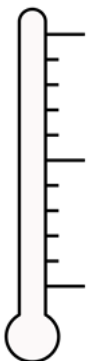
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- How does Banquo describe the Witches? (1)

-
- What do the Witches tell Macbeth in 1.3? (3)

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4. What do they tell Banquo? (1)

-
5. What do the Witches tell Macbeth in Act 4? (3)

How far are the Witches to blame for Macbeth's downfall?



Theme: The Supernatural

In Shakespeare's time, the powers of evil were thought to be absolutely real; to most people Hell was an actual place and the Devil a constant threat to their souls. In particular there was a fascination with witches and witchcraft. Hundreds of innocent people (mostly women) were executed as suspected witches. The interest came from the very top, led by King James I himself who published a book on the subject called *Demonology*. When Shakespeare came to write his play, he knew that his audience would find the theme of evil and the supernatural very interesting indeed.

How would the audience have reacted to the supernatural?

How are the Witches presented?

In *Macbeth*, William Shakespeare uses evil and the supernatural as a background to all the events which take place. Some of the key aspects are:

- wicked thoughts and actions
- the activities of the Witches
- the disruption of nature

Theme: Ambition and Power

Impression	Quotation	How are the Witches presented?	Why has Shakespeare done this?
Shakespeare set <i>Macbeth</i> in the distant past and in a part of Britain that few of his audience would have been familiar with. Scotland is shown as a wild and savage place ruled over by a weak king (Duncan) who relies on his warrior thanes to keep control. However, through the character of Macbeth, Shakespeare goes on to show that having too much ambition and total control of power is just as bad. By the end of the play Malcolm has become King and it seems likely that he will be much fairer and treat his people justly.			

How is ambition and power presented?

In *Macbeth*, William Shakespeare examines the good and bad aspects of ambition and power. Some of the key aspects are:

- The **fatal flaw**
- Leadership
- Greed
-
-
-

What leads to Macbeth's downfall? Ambition or having power?

Underneath, you have two sets of scales. I want you to decide which is more to blame and why: power or ambition. Consider Macbeth's downfall and what led him to behave in certain ways.



Theme: Appearances vs Reality

In *Macbeth*, things are never quite what they seem. Characters say one thing yet mean something else and use euphemisms to hide reality. Wicked and violent acts such as murder are covered up or the blame is shifted onto someone else. The Witches mislead Macbeth, or they at least make suggestions which allow him to 25 mislead himself. Ghosts, visions and apparitions occur regularly. All of these things contribute to the many contrasts which exist in the play; almost nothing is as it should be.

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare examines how appearances can be deceptive and that the reality behind them is often unpleasant. Some of the key aspects are:

- seeing things
- sleep and dreams
- fake hospitality

What quotations reflect these ideas?



Motif: Hands

What is a motif?

Motif: a recurrent image, idea or a symbol which contributes to the development of a theme.

In 'Macbeth', there are twenty six **explicit** references to hands.

The references to hands broadly relate to **three** of the play's themes:

- loyalty / disloyalty
- guilt
- justice

and their distribution, in terms of the play's narrative structure, is worthy of consideration

**'My hands are of
your colour but I
shame to wear a
heart so white'**

**The motif
of hands:
Macbeth**



Annotate: What to these quotations suggest?

Just before they appear to Macbeth the witches dance and sing, "***The weird sisters, hand in hand,
Posters of the sea and land,
Thus do go about, about***" (1.3.32-34).

Duncan, to Lady Macbeth, at Inverness:

***"Give me your hand;
Conduct me to mine host: we love him highly"*** (1.6.34-35)

Macbeth fears his hands will "ne'er be clean"

Motif: Blood
"A little water clears us of this deed" (Lady Macbeth, 2.2)

According to Google, there are approximately 109 references to blood in the play, both explicit and implicit. Implicit references would include such quotations as "Out, damned spot!".

Macbeth is a "tragedy of the imagination"

The very real blood spilled when Macbeth kills Duncan seeps into his imagination (and Lady Macbeth's) leading to his hallucinations of the dagger, Banquo's ghost, and Lady Macbeth's obsessive hand washing.

From the bloody captain to Macbeth's severed head on a pole, it provides a route map through the play.

Symbolises:

- Violence and Macbeth's role as "butcher"
- Guilt and madness
- Treason – the murder of Duncan, spilling his holy blood, the disturbance of the royal blood line
- His own lack of a bloodline – *Macduff*: "He has no children" and his obsession with the bloodline of others. *Harold Bloom*: "Unable to beget children, Macbeth slaughters them."
- His inability to escape his actions. Macbeth grows "more and more outraged that his bloodiest ideas, when accomplished, trail behind them a residuum that threatens him still." (Bloom)

Impression (use of blood)	Quotation	What does it show?