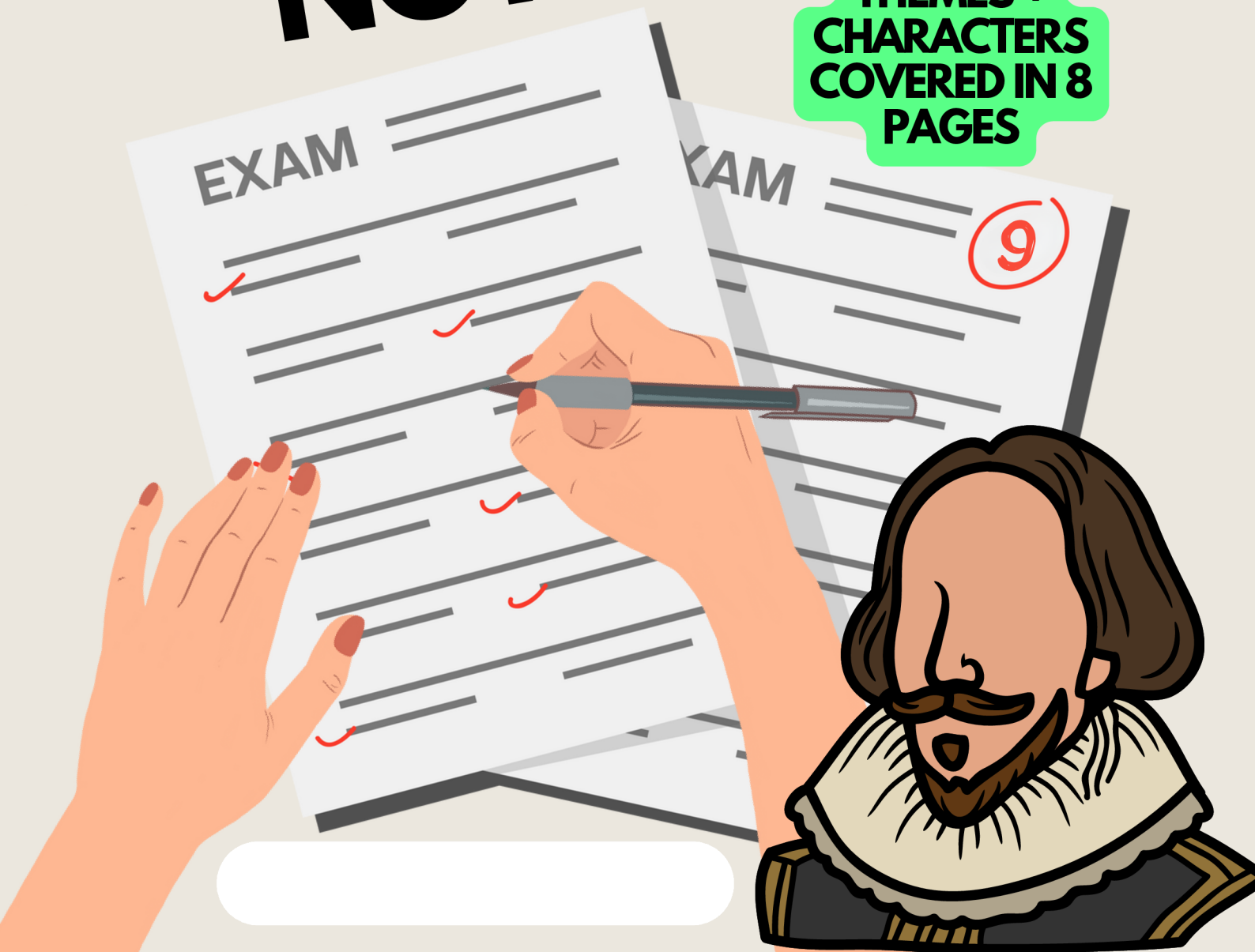


Z

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

MACBETH NOTEBOOK

THEMES +
CHARACTERS
COVERED IN 8
PAGES



CONTENTS

HOW TO ANSWER THE QUESTION	1
OVERVIEW & PLOT SUMMARY	2
THEMES	3
CHARACTERS	5
CONTEXT & WRITER'S METHODS	7
POWER QUOTES BY THEME	8

THEMES

AMBITION

- Ambition = Macbeth's fatal flaw (hamartia) → fuels regicide, tyranny, downfall | Presented as dangerous, unnatural, corrupting | Witches + Lady Macbeth spark it, but his flaw destroys him | Warning against hubris + overreaching desire.
- Lady Macbeth: catalyst → manipulates Macbeth, questions masculinity → "Art not without ambition, but without the illness should attend it" (A1S5).

HOW SHAKESPEARE PRESENTS AMBITION

- Negative trait → "vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself" (A1S7) → dangerous, uncontrolled.
- Unnatural desire → regicide = disruption of Divine Right & Great Chain of Being.
- Cost of ambition = guilt, paranoia, loss of morality, death.
- Contrast: ambition for selfish power (Macbeth, Lady Macbeth) vs ambition for honour/country (Malcolm, Banquo, Macduff).

ESSAY STRUCTURE EXAMPLE

- Thesis: Ambition, though influenced by witches + Lady M, is Macbeth's true downfall. Shakespeare warns Jacobean society that ambition without morality corrupts natural + divine order.

Para 1 – Macbeth's ambition awakened

- Quote: "I have no spur... but only vaulting ambition" (A1S7).
- Method: metaphor of ambition as uncontrollable force.
- Context: regicide = ultimate sin against Divine Right.

Para 2 – Ambition vs conscience

- Quote: "That summons thee to heaven or to hell."
- Method: religious imagery → shows awareness of consequences but chooses to ignore.
- Elsewhere: Lady Macbeth attacks his masculinity to push ambition.

Para 3 – Ambition leads to tyranny + downfall

- Quote: "O, full of scorpions is my mind."
- Method: violent imagery → shows mental state.
- Elsewhere: murders family → ambition leads to self-destruction.

Conclusion – Ambition = the true cause of Macbeth's downfall. Shakespeare presents it as a political warning.

METHODS

- Tragedy conventions (tragic hero/fall) | Characterisation (Macbeth's decline, Lady M's manipulation) | Religious imagery (heaven/hell, damnation) | Foreboding ("o'erleaps")

CONTEXT

- Divine Right: regicide = sin against God's Chain of Being | ambition disrupts order | Jacobean fears of tyranny | Christian morality | ambition = sin + damnation

THE SUPERNATURAL

- Setting/atmosphere → eerie, superstitious, medieval Scotland | ominous tone from opening scene
- Plot driver → witches' prophecies spark Macbeth's ambition, vision push him deeper into tyranny
- Audience appeal → Jacobean fears of witchcraft; links to King James' obsession (Daemonologie)
- Dramatic device → opens/closes with supernatural | adds tension, spectacle, fear.

KEY SUPERNATURAL ELEMENTS

- Witches: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" | evil, manipulative, speak in riddles/rhyming | drive plot, represent chaotic order.
- Unnatural events: daylight darkness, night, animals behaving (horses eat each other).
- Apparitions: Banquo's head (beware), child (none shall harm him) → crown (succession), Wood (murder).
- Vision/hallucination: dagger (Macbeth's guilt), ghost (Macbeth's conscience), Lady Macbeth's screams (A5). Symbolise psychological breakdown.

CHARACTERS

- Macbeth → sceptical, then overconfident, loses ability to distinguish truth/illusion → downfall.
- Lady Macbeth → manipulative, false security, auditory hallucinations ("Sleep no more") → sleepwalking → suicide.
- Banquo → suspects deception, consumed by guilt → sleepwalking → suicide.

QUOTES

- Act 1: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (witches blur moral order).
- Act 2: "A little of the mind" (ambition tempts, supernatural)

- Act 3: "shake thy gory locks" (Banquo's ghost = guilt).
- Act 4: "Something wicked this way comes" (Macbeth corrupted, aligned with witches).
- Act 5: "Out, damned spot!" (Lady M's guilt + madness).

TEXT

- Witchcraft fears → witches seen as real, dangerous, devilish.
- Natural order → supernatural = disruption of God's design (Great Chain of Being).
- Moral warning → turning to dark forces → sin + destruction.
- Flattering James I → Banquo shown as noble (ancestor of Stuarts); witches align with king's interest in demonology.

APPEARANCE V REALITY

- Macbeth as it seems: characters deceive with appearances, visions, and illusions. Shows how appearances lead to downfall.

KEY IDEAS

- Deception → disguise → Lady Macbeth: "Look like th'innocent flower, but be the serpent under't" (A1S5) | Macbeth's "dagger" (A2) and Banquo's ghost (A3) → reveal reality, reveal guilt.
- Illusions → Macbeth's "dagger" (A2) and Banquo's ghost (A3) → reveal reality, reveal guilt.
- Trust + betrayal → Duncan trusts Macbeth's "fair and noble hostess" (A1S6) but is murdered in her castle.
- Language + paradox → "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (A1S1) sets tone of moral confusion + deception.

IMPACT ON CHARACTERS

- Macbeth → deceived by witches' riddles, loses ability to distinguish truth/illusion → downfall.
- Lady Macbeth → manipulates appearances to gain power; later consumed by guilt → "Out, damned spot!" (A5).
- Banquo → suspects deception ("instruments of darkness tell us truths") but fails to act → murdered.
- Duncan → naive trust blinds him to betrayal → murdered by Macbeth.
- The Witches → masters of illusion, speak in riddles, embody theme of blurred reality.

WHY SHAKESPEARE USES IT

- Setting/atmosphere → creates uncertainty, mistrust, foreboding tone.
- Plot driver → betrayal (Duncan, Banquo) + downfall (Macbeth misled by prophecies).
- Audience appeal → reflects Jacobean concerns with treason (Gunpowder Plot 1605).
- Dramatic device → visions + paradoxes blur truth, create spectacle + tension.

CONTEXT

- Jacobean fears of betrayal/treason → appearance vs loyalty highly political.
- Moral lesson → false appearances inevitably exposed; truth brings justice.

MACBETH



CHARACTER TRAITS

- Fearless warrior → praised as "brave Macbeth" | loyal to Duncan at first → then corrupted by ambition + witches' prophecies → ruthless tyrant.
- Key traits: Ambitious → Ruthless → Paranoid → Nihilistic ("life is but a walking shadow").
- Flaw (hamartia): Vaulting ambition → leads to downfall + death.
- Contrasts: Heroic soldier at start → guilty, paranoid murderer → despairing, nihilistic ruler.

LANGUAGE & METHODS

- Iambic pentameter → noble, elevated at start | breaks down into fragmented prose/chaotic rhythms → mirrors moral decline.
- Rhyming couplets/prose → mirrors witches' speech → shows corruption.
- Soliloquies → reveal inner conflict, guilt, paranoia, nihilism (e.g. dagger scene, "Tomorrow, and tomorrow").
- Imagery: Blood = guilt | Darkness = evil | Animals = loss of reason, dehumanisation.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT (ACTS 1-5)

- Act 1, Sc.7: First soliloquy → debates killing Duncan, recognises loyalty + morality, but admits "only vaulting ambition" drives him.
- Act 2, Sc.1: Dagger soliloquy → hallucination blurs reality/supernatural, symbolises ambition dragging him to murder.
- Act 3, Sc.4: Banquo's ghost → guilt + paranoia exposed in public, foreshadows breakdown.
- Act 5, Sc.5: Final soliloquy ("Out, brief candle") → nihilism, life = meaningless → tragic recognition

CONTEXT & INTERPRETATION

- Violence: Initially noble (defending Scotland), but regicide = moral downfall.
- Divine Right of Kings: Killing Duncan = ultimate sin; makes Macbeth's reign illegitimate.
- Jacobean expectation of loyalty → treason + regicide = ultimate sin; Plot; Macbeth as tyrant.
- Religion & supernatural: Witches believed witches were real → Macbeth seen as corrupted by evil forces → also responsible for his choices.

KEY QUOTES + ANALYSIS

- "Vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself" (1.7.25) → metaphor of horse-racing → ambition = uncontrollable self-destruction.
- "Is this dagger which I see before me?" (2.1.36) → hallucination → loss of reality.
- "Macbeth shall sleep" (A2S) → auditory hallucination, symbolises loss of peace.
- "Never shake thy gory locks" (A3S4) → Banquo's ghost, public guilt in public.

LADY MACBETH

- Wife of Macbeth → drives plot by urging Duncan's murder → loses control & descends into guilt | Strong, ambitious, manipulative later vulnerable, disturbed, suicidal.

AMBITION & POWER

- "Unsex me here" → rejects femininity, calls on spirits → links her to witches + supernatural corruption.
- More ambitious than Macbeth → immediately plots Duncan's murder after prophecy.
- Manipulates Macbeth → questions his masculinity: "When you durst do it, then you were a man." Uses ambition + fear to control him.
- Ambition destroys her → overconfidence (hubris) → guilt, madness.

GENDER & PSYCHOLOGY

- Subverts gender roles → no nurturing → not controlled by emotions | Regicide in marriage (dagger scene).
- "Look like th'innocent flower, but be the serpent under't" → tells Macbeth to hide his ambition → "the man" → strength.
- "Look like th'innocent flower, but be the serpent under't" → tells Macbeth to hide his ambition → "the man" → strength.
- "Look like th'innocent flower, but be the serpent under't" → tells Macbeth to hide his ambition → "the man" → strength.

- "Look like th'innocent flower, but be the serpent under't" → tells Macbeth to hide his ambition → "the man" → strength.

LANGUAGE & METHODS

- Iambic pentameter early → high status | Later, disjointed prose → loss of control.
- "Unsex me here" → ambition + guilt.
- "Look like th'innocent flower, but be the serpent under't" → deception.
- "Too full o' th' milk of human kindness" → criticises Macbeth's weakness.
- "Out, damned spot!" → guilt & madness.
- "My dearest partner of greatness" → equal marriage at start → later collapse.

KEY QUOTES

- "Unsex me here" → ambition + rejection of femininity.
- "Look like th'innocent flower, but be the serpent under't" → deception.
- "Too full o' th' milk of human kindness" → criticises Macbeth's weakness.
- "Out, damned spot!" → guilt & madness.
- "My dearest partner of greatness" → equal marriage at start → later collapse.

BANQUO

- Scottish general → Macbeth's friend → Father of Fleance → Represents loyalty, honesty, Christian values → Macbeth's foil (contrast).

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Loyal, Honest | Brave, Noble
- Represents loyalty, honesty, Christian values.
- "In the great hand of God I stand" → moral guide → his integrity contrasts Macbeth's ambition.
- Symbol of guilt → appears as ghost, only Banquo sees (guilt + paranoia).
- Fleance → James I → believed to be from Banquo's line, Shakespeare portrays him as noble.

LANGUAGE & STYLE

- Plain & direct → integrity | Iambic pentameter → noble | Religious imagery → "In the great hand of God I stand" | Soliloquies show suspicion of Macbeth.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

- Act 1, Sc 3: Questions witches' prophecies, urges Macbeth to "reason".
- Act 2, Sc 1: Declares loyalty to Duncan & faith in God.
- Act 3, Sc 1: Suspects Macbeth "Thou play'dst most foully for't".
- Act 3, Sc 3: Betrayed & murdered → ghost haunts Macbeth.

RELATIONSHIP WITH MACBETH

- Starts as allies → suspicion grows → fails to act → murdered → ghost = symbol of guilt + paranoia.

JACOBAN CONTEXT

- Embodies values Jacobean admired: loyalty, faith, honour.
- Contrasts Macbeth → usurper & tyrant.
- Flattering James I → Banquo = ancestor of Stuart line.

KEY THEMES

- Ambition (resists acting) → Loyalty vs Betrayal → Supernatural (cautious vs gullible Macbeth) → Appearance vs Reality (deception + ghost truth).

ESSAY FOCUS

- Contrast Banquo vs Macbeth (ambition, loyalty, trust).
- Banquo as foil → what Macbeth should have been.

QUOTES

- "In the great hand of God I stand" (Act 2) → loyalty/faith.

CHARACTERS

AMBITION & POWER

Macbeth: "I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only vaulting ambition" (Act 1, Scene 7)

- A02: Metaphor "vaulting ambition" → uncontrolled, dangerous force → hamartia.
- A03: Ambition opposing Divine Right of Kings = deeply threatening to Jacobean.
- Essay Use: Shows Macbeth's downfall is self-inflicted → ambition overcomes morality.

Lady Macbeth: "When you durst do it, then you were a man" (Act 1, Scene 7)

- A02: Declarative attack on masculinity → manipulates Macbeth's pride.
- A03: Jacobean belief: manliness = strength/honour; here twisted to justify regicide.
- Essay Use: Gender role reversal; Lady Macbeth dominates → fuels Macbeth's violence.

Macbeth: "Life [...] is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" (Act 5, Scene 5)

- A02: Nihilistic metaphor → life as meaningless performance.
- A03: Blasphemous rejection of God's plan = shocking to Jacobean Christians.
- Essay Use: Tragic waste + pathos; audience pities Macbeth despite crimes.

LOYALTY & BETRAYAL

- **Banquo:** "Lesser than Macbeth and greater" (Act 1, Scene 3)
- A02: Paradox → Banquo's loyalty rewarded spiritually (line continues with "not so happy, yet much happier")
- A03: Links to James I, believed to be descended from Banquo → flattering lineage.
- Essay use: Contrasts Macbeth's betrayal with Banquo's integrity, emphasising theme of loyalty.

Macbeth: "False face must hide out the false heart doth kneel" (Act 1, Scene 7)

- A02: Repetition of "false" → duplicity, masks inner betrayal
- A03: Echoes idea of original sin, fall of man; unnatural for subject to betray king
- Essay use: Contrast between appearance vs reality essays → Macbeth consciously embracing treachery

SUPERNATURAL

Macbeth: "Stars hide your fires; let not light see my dark and deep desires" (Act 1, Scene 4)

- A02: Light/dark imagery → ambition hidden, aligned with supernatural
- A03: Concealing actions from God = breaking Great Chain of Being
- Essay Use: Foreshadows regicide → ambition tied to unnatural concealment.

Malcolm: "The dead butcher and his fiend-like queen" (Act 5, Scene 9)

- A02: Noun "butcher" = merciless killer; "fiend" = demonic.
- A03: Jacobean fear of supernatural women → Lady Macbeth linked to witches.
- Essay Use: Final judgement restores order by condemning tyranny.

Witches: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (Act 1, Scene 1)

- A02: Oxymoron + chiasm → chaos, disorder, deceit.
- A03: "Fair" = agent of evil → witches as agents of chaos.
- Essay Use: Establishes theme of inversion, where good seems to become evil.

Macbeth: "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (Act 1, Scene 3)

- A02: Paradox → deception + appearance vs reality.
- A03: Jacobean audiences feared disruption of natural order = disruption of God's plan.
- Essay use: Suggests corruption spreads from witches to Macbeth → his "fair" nature becomes "foul."

Macbeth: "A dagger of the mind" (Act 2, Scene 1)

- A02: Metaphor + hallucination → psychological torment for regicide.
- A03: Supernatural temptation.
- Essay Use: Symbol of guilt + madness.

Macbeth: "Come, you spirits, that shake thy gory locks upon me" (Act 3, Scene 4)

- A02: Visions/hallucination = guilt externalised → monosyllabic fear.
- A03: Ghosts seen as proof of damnation.
- Essay Use: Highlights psychological torment from supernatural order.

Macbeth (2nd): "By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes" (Act 4, Scene 1)

- A02: Trochaic tetrameter + couplets = unnatural rhythm.
- A03: Jacobean believed witches could foresee evil.
- Essay Use: Marks Macbeth's transformation → now "wicked" himself.

APPEARANCE V REALITY

Lady Macbeth: "Come, you spirits, unsex me here" (Act 1, Scene 5)

- A02: Imperatives + violent verbs → desires rejection of femininity.
- A03: Challenges Jacobean gender roles → shocks audience.
- Essay Use: Shows ambition requires abandoning natural identity.

Macbeth: "Look on the innocent flowers, that like us, here under the" (Act 1, Scene 5)

- A02: Imagery → duplicity + evil (Eve/Devil).
- A03: Serpent imagery echoes Fall of Man → blasphemous + dangerous.
- Essay Use: Manipulation through appearance → theme of deception central to plot.

CORRUPTION OF NATURE

Witches: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (Act 1, Scene 1) / **Macbeth:** "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (Act 1, Scene 3)

- A02: Paradox → deception + appearance vs reality. Macbeth echoing witches' words shows influence/spell.
- A03: Jacobean audiences feared disruption of natural order = disruption of God's plan.
- Essay use: Suggests corruption spreads from witches to Macbeth → his "fair" nature becomes "foul."

Macbeth: "Macbeth does murder sleep!" (Act 2, Scene 2)

- A02: Personification of "sleep" → innocence, peace, calm destroyed by regicide. Hallucination = guilt.
- A03: Regicide seen as mortal sin → Jacobean audience horrified at eternal damnation.
- Essay use: Symbolises Macbeth's psychological torment + loss of natural peace → links to "Macbeth shall sleep no more."

KINGSHIP

Duncan: "His virtues will plead like angels" (Act 1, Scene 7)

- A02: Simile + religious imagery → Duncan as God's chosen, rightful ruler.
- A03: Divine right of kings → regicide = blasphemy for Jacobean audience.
- Essay use: Contrast between good vs bad kingship.

Malcolm: "The king-becoming graces... justice, verity, temperance, stableness" (Act 4, Scene 3)

- A02: List of virtues → king should be moral, measured, godly.
- A03: Shakespeare aligns good kingship with James I → flattery of monarch.
- Essay use: Key to kingship theme → Malcolm embodies rightful leadership vs Macbeth's tyranny.

“
QUOTES BY
THEME

A bright yellow square with a bold, black, sans-serif letter 'Z' centered inside it.

Z

MR. ZEE'S RESOURCES