

MACBETH

CHARACTERS

Macbeth: Scottish nobleman and valiant warrior. Ambitious and easily manipulated by the witches and his wife into killing King Duncan. Becomes a cruel, tyrannical king. *'stars hide your fires, let not light see my black and deep desires'*

Lady Macbeth: Macbeth's wife. Deeply ambitious; craves power and status. *'unsex me here, and fill me from the crown to the toe top-full of direst cruelty'*

The Witches: Supernatural being that speak in riddles and prophesy Macbeth's future. *'All hail Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter'*

Duncan: King of Scotland at the start of the play. A just and noble ruler, but too trusting. *'his virtues will plead like angels'*

Banquo: Macbeth's friend and witness to the witches' prophecies. Mistrusts the witches and comes to suspect Macbeth. Killed on Macbeth's orders *'Thou hast it now: king, Cawdor, Glamis, all... and I fear thou playd'st most foully for it.'*

Macduff: A Scottish nobleman who opposes Macbeth. Seeks revenge after the killing of his family on Macbeth's orders. *'Turn, hell-hound, turn!'*

Malcolm: Duncan's son. The rightful heir to the throne. *'What I truly am is thine, and my poor country's to command'*

THEMES

Ambition	Guilt
The Supernatural	Power
Order vs Chaos	Kingship

CONTEXT

- Written in the early 1600s during the reign of King James I (the Jacobean era)
- James I wrote a book on witchcraft and led witch hunts – the witches in the play reflect society's fear of witches
- King James had been targeted in the Gunpowder Plot – the play can be seen as a warning against killing the rightful King
- There was strong belief in the Divine Right of Kings: that kings were appointed by God. The murder of Duncan therefore goes against God's wishes and disrupts the world's natural order
- The Jacobean era had clearly defined gender roles – Lady Macbeth challenges these

QUOTES FOR ANY ESSAY

Macbeth: *'vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself'*

Macbeth: *'Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown'*

The Witches: *'Fair is foul and foul is fair'*