

PLOT		CHARACTERS		KEY VOCAB.	KEY QUOTATIONS
Act 1	Macbeth and Banquo are two Scottish noblemen who encounter three witches on a heath. The witches give both men predictions and then vanish. One of the predictions given to Macbeth comes true almost immediately. Macbeth writes a letter to his wife. She is excited by the news and summons evil spirits to give her the courage to commit murder. Macbeth arrives to announce that King Duncan is coming to spend the night at their castle.	Macbeth	A “brave” and loyal warrior whose vaulting ambition leads him to commit regicide	aside	“Fair is foul and foul is fair”
		Lady Macbeth	Macbeth’s wife. Coerces Macbeth into committing regicide. Loses control and commits suicide at end of play.	dramatic irony	
		Banquo	Scottish nobleman; close friend of Macbeth. Betrayed and killed. Ghost haunts Macbeth at a feast.	tragedy	“Stars, hide your fires. Let not light see my black and deep desires.”
Act 2	Having agreed to kill King Duncan, Macbeth sees a dagger and wonders if it is a “dagger of the mind”, because he is having second thoughts. However, he resolves to kill King Duncan, who is found dead at dawn by Macduff. The king’s sons flee, fearing for their lives. In their absence, Macbeth is chosen to be king.	Fleance	Banquo’s son.	protagonist	“Come, you spirits That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here and fill me from the crown to the toe top full of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood.”
		King Duncan	A fair and generous ruler who is butchered by Macbeth.	deuteragonist	
		Macduff	A Scottish nobleman, loyal to Duncan. Kills Macbeth to restore order to Scotland.	hamartia	
Act 3	Banquo suspects that Macbeth was involved in Duncan’s murder. Macbeth fears Banquo and so plans to have Banquo and his son, Fleance, murdered away from the castle. Banquo is killed but Fleance escapes. The ghost of Banquo appears at a feast to haunt Macbeth. The guests become suspicious of Macbeth because of his violent reactions to a ghost that only he can see.	Malcolm	Duncan’s eldest son, the Prince of Cumberland.	prophecy	“Look like the innocent flower but be the serpent under’t.”
		The witches / “weird women”	Presented by Shakespeare as supernatural beings who can foretell the future.	guilt	
		HISTORICAL CONTEXTS		metaphor	
Act 4	Macbeth, filled with insecurity, returns to the witches and is given three more predictions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beware Macduff, beware the Thane of Fife None of woman born can harm Macbeth Macbeth shall never be beaten until Birnam Woods moves towards his castle Macbeth learns that Macduff has fled Scotland. He orders the execution of Macduff’s wife and children.			imagery	“A little water clears us of this deed. How easy is it then.”
				symbolism	
				supernatural	
Act 5	Lady Macbeth appears on stage sleepwalking. Her mental health has deteriorated terribly. She is burdened by feelings of guilt, which she sees as blood on her hands that she is unable wash away. Duncan’s son Malcolm, backed by the English army and Macduff, approach Macbeth’s castle. They chop down branches from the trees at Birnam Wood to disguise how big their army is. Birnam Wood appears to move. Macbeth says he fears no man as all men are born by women. Macduff announces he was not born naturally but was “ripp’d” prematurely from his mother’s womb. Macduff kills Macbeth and Malcolm becomes the next King of Scotland			blank verse	“Thou hast it now: King, Cawdor, Glamis, all as the weird women promised. And I fear thou plays’t most foully for it.”
				rhymed verse	
				DRAMATIC DEVICES	
		The play ‘Macbeth’ is loosely based on events which occurred in 11 th century Scotland. King James was a Scottish king who believed himself to be a direct descendant of Banquo. King James VI of Scotland inherited the throne of England when Queen Elizabeth I died.		aside	“Nought’s had, all’s spent, where our desire is got without content.”
		In 1604, English Catholics attempted to assassinate King James in the famous Gunpowder Plot . The play is a piece of political propaganda, warning English audiences that regicide leads to eternal damnation. This is because King James believed in the Divine Right of Kings : the belief that God had chosen him to rule on Earth.		dramatic irony	
		The Great Chain of Being : the belief in a social hierarchy, planned by God, as follows: God – Angels – Demons – Humans – Beasts – Plants – Rocks. When Macbeth kills Duncan, this leads to a disruption in the natural order that is referred to in the play: storms; earthquakes; chimneys blown down; a solar eclipse.		soliloquy	“Our fears in Banquo stick deep” and “Every moment he’s alive stabs me to the heart.”
				rhyming couplets	

Shakespeare : ‘Macbeth’