Macbeth

Plot

Act 1	On the way back from battle Macbeth and Banquo meet 3 witches who give predictions that Macbeth will be Thane of Cawdor and king. King Duncan executes the current Thane of Cawdor and gives his title to Macbeth. He makes his son, Malcolm, heir. Macbeth writes a letter to his wife about the news. She plans to kill Duncan so Macbeth can become king. Duncan arrives at their castle. Lady Macbeth taunts her husband for being a coward.
Act 2	Macbeth has a hallucination of a dagger reflecting his guilty conscience - but kills Duncan and, with Lady Macbeth's help, the bloody daggers are planted on the drugged guards. Malcolm and his brother flee and Macbeth is made king.
Act 3	Banquo suspects Macbeth has murdered Duncan. Macbeth hires assassins to murder Banquo but his son Fleance escapes. Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost at his banquet – a sign of his guilty conscience.
Act 4	Macbeth visits the Witches and they give him more predictions. Macbeth orders the killing of Macduff's family. Macduff and Malcolm agree to invade Scotland.
Act 5	Lady Macbeth's mental state deteriorates and, eventually, she commits suicide. Malcolm's army invades through Burnham wood and eventually Macbeth killed by Macduff. Malcolm is proclaimed king.

Lines per character

Macbeth 715	Lady Macbeth 259	Malcolm 211
Macduff 180	Ross 135	Banquo 113

Themes

Ambition	Children	Natural world
Kingship	Blood	Gender
Fate and free will	Sleep	Light/dark
Appearance and reality	Visions	Manhood

Assessment Objectives

AO1 Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response
- use textual references, and quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

AO2 Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

AO4 Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation

Characters

Macbeth	A loyal warrior who becomes evil, murderous and deceptive as he becomes obsessed with the witches' prophecies of power
Lady Macbeth	Macbeth's wife who fuels his ambition in the beginning but loses her control and kills herself in despair by the end.
Banquo	Macbeth's best friend who also receives prophecies from the witches. He is murdered by Macbeth
Fleance	Banquo's son who escapes and eventually fathers a line of kings.
Duncan King of Scotland	A fair and respected leader at the start of the play. Murdered by Macbeth.
Macduff	A brave warrior who is loyal to Duncan and is consistently suspicious of Macbeth. Kills Macbeth at the end.
Malcolm	Duncan's son and next in line to the throne. Becomes the rightful king at the end.
The Three Witches	(Weird Sisters) – Supernatural forces of nature who seem to know the future. They equivocate with Macbeth.

Vocabulary

- Meter
- Blank Verse
- Rhymed Verse
- Prose
- Iambic Pentameter
- Rhyme/Rhythm
- Heroic Couplets
- Soliloquy
- Dramatic Irony
- Concealment
- Gender
- Imagery
- Tragedy
- Hamartia
- Prophecy
- Imagery
- Symbols
- Metaphor
- Regicide

Form

Shakespeare uses soliloquy to allow the characters to communicate their true thoughts to the audience.

Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's Tragedies and follows specific conventions. The climax must end in a tremendous catastrophe involving the death of the main character; the character's death is caused by their own flaw(s) (hamartia). The character has something the audience can identify with which outweighs their flaws so we care about them.

Sample Extract Question

Look at how Macbeth and Lady Macbeth speak and behave in Act 1 scene 7 from 'Pr'ythee peace!' to 'nothing but males'. How do you think an audience might respond to this part of the play? Refer closely to details from the extract to support your answer. [15]

Sample Extract Response

In this extract, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are contemplating murdering Duncan. Macbeth says 'I dare do all that may become a man' which means that if he goes through with their scheme then he would no longer be a man. However, Lady Macbeth emasculates Macbeth by snarling, 'When you durst do it, then you were a man,'. This tells the audience that if Lady Macbeth doesn't get her way she manipulates Macbeth by belittling him despite everything he has done for her. She also backs up her statement by commenting that he would 'be more than what you were' which reinforces the idea of Lady Macbeth manipulating Macbeth to get her way. Later on in the extract she tries to persuade Macbeth by exaggerating how she would kill her own baby for him, 'plucked my nipple from his boneless gums and dashed the brains out.' The verb 'dashed' helps emphasise how brutal it would be if she killed her own child. On the other hand Macbeth is still nervous about their plan and asks 'if we should fail' but she instantly responds with 'screw your courage to the sticking place/And we'll not fail.' This metaphor emphasises how Lady Macbeth thinks if he doesn't care about his courage then they would succeed with their plan. The audience gets the impression that Lady Macbeth is the leading role in the relationship because of how she has taken control and is trying to manipulate Macbeth into going through with their plan.

Commentary

AO1 The response focuses on the task and conveys ideas with general coherence and uses a mostly appropriate register. It has a straightforward approach to the task and shows an understanding of key aspects of the text. The response is supported with apt direct reference, including quotations.

AO2 The response comments on and begins to analyse use of language with some relevant subject terminology.

Macbeth: Sample Exam Question

'Macbeth is a play about violence'. Write about how Shakespeare presents violence at different points in Macbeth [25] *5 of this question's marks are allocated for accuracy in spelling, punctuation and the use of vocabulary and sentence structures.

Exemplar response

Violence is a theme carried throughout 'Macbeth' due to the large amounts of death and war in the play.

For example, the play begins with a detailed description of how the three witches cursed a person for being rude to them. She has his 'finger' – a quite disgusting detail - which she adds to the eerie broth they are creating. This is shocking as they have no problems with inflicting suffering upon anyone they wish to, it is rather violent.

Next, we hear of the war Macbeth and Banquo fought in. Though it is described positively it is quite violent as you hear they fought as 'doubly recharged cannons' to violently kill the opposing army. Also, the death of the previous Thane of Cawdor is lightly dismissed, 'Go pronounce his present death and with his former title greet Macbeth'. The death of another man is overshadowed by Macbeth's success, which is quite shocking to me as they are taking lives so carelessly without guilt or hesitation.

Throughout the play there is some violent and vulgar imagery created by Shakespeare. For example, when Lady Macbeth describes how she would have 'dashed the brains out' of her own innocent child for Macbeth, the verb 'dashed' being violent and harsh to shock the audience.

This can also be seen when Banquo was killed. Macbeth's guilt forces him to see Banquo's ghost and exclaims 'Do not shake thy gory locks at me'. The adjective 'gory' is quite disgusting and reminds us of the violent way he has just been killed under the orders of his best friend.

Another scene that comes to mind when thinking of violence is the murder of Macduff's entire estate. After a tender scene between his wife and his son the castle is attacked. The assassins show no mercy by stabbing the young boy, to which he says 'he has killed me mother'. This is quite a heart-breaking line which makes you question the morals of those people who 'savagely slaughtered' Macduff's family, the ominous alliteration in that phrase emphasising the ruthless nature of the attack.

When Macduff kills Macbeth at the end of the play there is the violent and gruesome act of putting his head, violently cut off Macbeth's body, on to a stick and displaying it proudly at Malcolm's coronation. Although this was normal to do at those times, it is still a very disturbing act to see for modern audiences.

Commentary

AO1 – The answer is sustained and on task, and ideas are conveyed with considerable coherence. An appropriate register is used and overall the approach to the task is thoughtful. A secure understanding of key aspects of the text is shown and considerable engagement, and the response is justified by well chosen reference to the text including quotations.

AO2 – The response discussed and increasingly analyses Shakespeare's use of language, form and structure. There are thoughtful references to the meanings and effects of stylistic features used by Shakespeare. Use of subject terminology is apt.

AO4 – Technical accuracy is of a high standard.

Band 4

15+5 = 20/25