Knowledge organiser *Macbeth* GCSE English Literature

Key themes

Ambition	Macbeth cannot resist the power of his ambition (his fatal flaw). Lady Macbeth's ambition is also limitless. Both characters disobey God to fulfil their ambitions.
Appearance and reality	The play is one where people's outward appearances cannot be trusted. For example, Lady Macbeth's reaction to hearing the news that Duncan was dead.
Guilt	Guilt plagues both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth underestimates the level of guilt she will feel and pays for this with her life.
Power	Some of the most powerful characters are female, the Witches and Lady Macbeth. Both manipulate Macbeth.
Chaos and disorder	The events that follow Duncan's murder are marked by chaos and disorder, for example, the mental state of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, the weather and the state of Scotland itself. Order is finally restored when Malcolm becomes the rightful King at the end of the play.

Setting – Scotland

Shakespeare presents Scotland after the murder as a godless, hell-like country, to match its new king. Failed crops, awful cries fill the air, and the country lives in darkness. Macbeth's declining mental state mirrors the state of the kingdom. Shakespeare suggests that challenging the natural order and living without God is the worst fate a man can have.

Quotations

Decide which quotations you want to use to prove your points.

Remember that using short, integrated quotations is more effective than writing out large chunks of text.

Key quotations

'Look like the innocent flower but be the serpent under it.'	'Fair is foul, foul is fair.'	'Pour my spirits in thine ear'
'I have no spur to prick the side of my intent, only vaulting ambition.'	'Would all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood from my hands?'	'Macbeth does murder sleep'
'Black and midnight hags?'	'My children too?' 'And I must be from thence! My wife killed too?'	'All the perfumes of Arabia'
'She should have died hereafter; There would have been time for such a word.'	'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow'	'Turn hell-hound, turn'

Some useful phrases

Shakespeare presents / hints / suggests / creates …

Through the character of … Shakespeare explores/questions …

Shakespeare challenges the belief that …

Shakespeare asks the audience to question/consider …

Shakespeare reinforces this idea earlier/later in the play when …

Key ideas

Religion	Jacobean England was very religious. Heaven and Hell play heavily on Macbeth's mind and implies he is concerned about the destination of his immortal soul.
Violence	The play is filled with violence and conflict. The conflicts between good and evil, and between supernatural and the natural go across Scotland.
Supernatural	The inclusion of the witches is contextually significant as James I, the king at the time, believed in witchcraft and was wary of witches – like the audiences watching.
Gender	Shakespeare explores masculinity through the character of Macbeth. However, Macbeth's fear of being emasculated also allows Shakespeare to use his character to explore femininity. A complex idea.
Regicide	Shakespeare condemns regicide (the killing of a king). By presenting regicide as controlled by the witches, Shakespeare is implying that it is related to the devil and has severe religious consequences.