

Plot (Acts)		Character		Context (Written 1606)
1	This Act opens with the three Weird Sisters. A war is taking place between Scotland and Norway; Scotland is victorious due to the valiant efforts of Macbeth. The traitorous Thane of Cawdor is captured and executed. King Duncan decides to reward Macbeth with the title of Thane of Cawdor. Before he is given the title, the three Weird Sisters confront Macbeth and Banquo. They tell Macbeth that he will become Thane of Cawdor and eventually king. Macbeth soon learns of his new title which fulfils part of the prophesy and sends word to his wife. Duncan plans on staying the night at Macbeth's castle in Inverness. Lady Macbeth receives the news and immediately plots the death of King Duncan so her husband will be king. Lady Macbeth manipulates Macbeth into following her plans; he reluctantly agrees to murder Duncan. By the end of Act 1, Macbeth is determined to follow through with the plan.	Macbeth	<i>The eponymous protagonist is both ambitious and ruthless. He transforms from loyal warrior to paranoid, tyrannical king.</i>	Macbeth. The plot is partly based on fact. Macbeth was a real 11 th Century king who reigned Scotland from 1040-1057. Shakespeare's version of the story originates from the Chronicles of Holinshed (a well known historian). The play was most likely written in 1606 – the year after the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 – and reflects the insecurities of Jacobean politics.
		Lady Macbeth	<i>A strong, ambitious and manipulative woman who defies expectations. Persuasive and ruthless.</i>	
		The Witches / Weird Sisters	<i>Supernatural and manipulative beings who seem to be able to predict the future. Unearthly and omniscient.</i>	
		Banquo	<i>Macbeth's close friend and ally is astute and loyal. Macbeth sees him as a threat. Virtuous and insightful.</i>	
		Duncan	<i>King of Scotland; a strong and respected leader.</i>	
		Macduff	<i>A noble soldier who is loyal to Duncan and is suspicious of Macbeth.</i>	
2	Macbeth has some doubts (and visions) but he talks himself into following through with the murder. Macbeth is so scared that Lady Macbeth must finish the rest of the plan by wiping blood on the drunk guards. The next morning, Macduff and Lennox arrive at Macbeth's and Macduff discovers the dead body of King Duncan. The guards are immediately suspects and Macbeth kills them. Malcolm and Donaldbain, the King's sons, flee the castle because they are afraid that they will be blamed for the murder of their father.	Themes		King James I of England (and VI of Scotland) came to the throne in 1603 following the death of Queen Elizabeth I. The play pays homage to the king's Scottish lineage. The witches' prophecy that Banquo will found a line of kings is a clear nod to James' family's claim to have descended from the historical Banquo. While King of Scotland, James VI became utterly convinced about the reality of witchcraft and its great danger to him leading to trials that begin in 1591.
		Ambition	‘Macbeth’ is a play about ambition run amok. The witches’ prophecies spur both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to action but the witches never make Macbeth or his wife do anything; they act on their own to fulfil their deepest desires and ambitions. Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth want to be great and powerful, and sacrifice their morals to achieve that goal.	
3	Banquo begins to suspect Macbeth for the murder of King Duncan; Macbeth feels that Banquo will reveal that it was he that killed the King. Therefore, Macbeth sends out some men to murder Banquo and his son, Fleance. Banquo is murdered but Fleance escapes. Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Lennox, Ross and other lords attend a banquet. The ghost of Banquo presents itself to Macbeth who begins to rant and rave which makes the other guests uneasy. Lady Macbeth tries to cover up the situation by saying that Macbeth is prone to fits. By the end of the Act we learn that Macduff has not attended the banquet because he has gone to England looking for help because he is suspicious of Macbeth.	Order and Disorder	The play subverts the natural order of the world. Macbeth's actions are based on a supernatural belief in a prophecy. It depicts an anarchic world: Macbeth inverts the order of royal succession; his wife inverts the patriarchal hierarchy; the unnatural world disrupts the natural. The disruption underpins the conflict that is not only external and violent but internal as Macbeth and his wife come to terms with what they've done.	
		Masculinity, femininity and identity	Throughout the play, characters discuss or debate the idea of manhood: Lady Macbeth challenges Macbeth when he decides not to kill Duncan, Lady Macduff questions Macduff's decision to go to England etc. Through these challenges, ‘Macbeth’ questions and examines manhood itself. Does a true man take what he wants no matter what it is? Or does a real man have the strength to restrain his desires? Lady Macbeth subverts the expectation of what it is to be a woman; she rejects her womanhood and bargains with darkness.	
4	Macbeth confronts the three Weird Sisters and they show him more visions. The visions lead Macbeth to believe that he cannot be killed by any man which gives him a false sense of security. He then plans to send murderers to the castle of Macduff (who is in England) in order to kill his family. Meanwhile, Macduff is in England begging Malcolm to return to Scotland to seize the throne from Macbeth who has become a tyrant. Malcolm tests Macduff's loyalty to Scotland and himself; once satisfied with Macduff's responses he agrees to wage war against Macbeth. Malcolm's uncle, Siward, will also aid the attack.	Kingship and tyranny	In the play, Duncan is always referred to as a ‘king’ while Macbeth soon becomes known as the ‘tyrant’. In Act 4, scene 3 Malcolm pretends that he would make an even worse king than Macbeth. He tells Macduff of his reproachable qualities—among them a thirst for personal power and a violent temperament. Malcolm says, ‘The king-becoming graces / [are] justice, verity, temp'rance, stableness, / Bounty, perseverance, mercy, [and] lowliness’ (4.3.92–93). The model king, then, offers the kingdom an embodiment of order and justice, but also comfort and affection. Under him, subjects are rewarded according to their merits, as when Duncan makes Macbeth Thane of Cawdor after Macbeth's victory over the invaders. Most importantly, the king must be loyal to Scotland above his own interests. Macbeth, by contrast, brings only chaos to Scotland—symbolized in the bad weather and bizarre supernatural events—and offers no real justice, only a habit of capriciously murdering those he sees as a threat. As the embodiment of tyranny, he must be overcome by Malcolm so that Scotland can have a true king once more.	
		Appearance and reality	Appearances are deceptive in the play and some characters trust appearances too much. Duncan trusts the wrong men with disastrous consequences, Macbeth trusts the witches and Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband's trust. This fine line between appearance and reality represents the line between good and evil.	
5	Lady Macbeth has gone mad with guilt over the murders. The once strong and ruthless woman becomes an hysterical somnambulist and doctors are unable to help her. Some of the Scottish lords discuss Macbeth's state of mind and come to the conclusion that they will help Malcolm and Macduff fight against Macbeth. Of course Macbeth isn't really concerned because he believes the prophecy ensures that he cannot be killed by any man born of woman. Macbeth is soon confronted by Macduff at Dunsinane; Macbeth learns that Macduff was ripped from his mother and not born naturally. Macbeth and Macduff fight and the natural order is restored by the end of the play.			Only a century before <i>Macbeth</i> was written, England had suffered under the massive disorder of the Wars of the Roses . Civil disorder was now seen as the ultimate disaster and also an ungodly state.
				The Great Chain of Being was a strict religious hierarchical structure of all matter and life which was believed to have been decreed by God. This idea dominated Elizabethan beliefs. The chain starts from God and progresses downward to angels, demons (fallen/renegeade angels), stars, moon, kings, princes, nobles, commoners, wild animals, domesticated animals, trees, other plants, precious stones, precious metals, and other minerals.
				The Divine Right of Kings says that a monarch is not subject to earthly authority and that they have the right to rule directly from the will of God. It implies that only God can judge an unjust king and that any attempt to depose, dethrone or restrict his powers runs contrary to the will of God and may constitute a sacrilegious act. The action of killing a king is called regicide.
				Shakespearean Tragedy. 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) yet the character has something the audience can identify with.