

Context and writer's intentions

Divine Right —The belief that the King was chosen by God. Thus, to commit regicide meant disobeying the will of God. A Jacobean audience believed people who committed regicide would be punished by God. The mental decline of both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, having been plagued with guilt, is Shakespeare's way of showing that regicide does not go without punishment.

Natural Order / The Great Chain of Being — A religious hierarchy where everything on earth was awarded a 'rank' / status. God was at the top, followed by angels, humans, animals and plants etc. A Jacobean audience believed that if this hierarchy was interfered with (i.e. a human tried to 'jump up' the ranks to the status of angels or God) then the natural order would be thrown into chaos. Shakespeare shows this on the night of the regicide when there is a violent storm. Macbeth's attempt to climb the 'Chain of Being' disturbs the natural world.

Religion—A Jacobean audience were extremely religious, believing life to be sacred and God to be the creator of everything. Thus, when Macbeth claims life is 'a tale told by an idiot...signifying nothing' a Jacobean audience would have been greatly shocked. This nihilistic language (rejecting all religious and moral principles in the belief that life is meaningless) solidifies Macbeth's 'tyrant' and 'hellhound' status towards the end of the play.

Patriarchal Society / Gender Identity—The play is set in a Patriarchal society; a society where women were expected to be subservient to men. A woman was expected to obey her father / husband and was presumed to be physically and mentally weaker than a man. However, Shakespeare subverts these traditional gender roles in the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth; a relationship where we observe a strong female character command, instruct and manipulate her husband. Many women who subverted expected gender roles or conventions at the time were accused of being witches.

Witchcraft—King James I was obsessed with magic and witchcraft and ordered several witch-hunts during his reign as King, even producing a treatise on witchcraft called *Daemonologie* ('the Science of Demons'). In 1542, fifty years before Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*, King Henry VIII passed the first English Witchcraft Act, which officially made the practice of witchcraft punishable by death.

The inclusion of the three Witches in Shakespeare's '*Macbeth*' would have greatly interested King James. Shakespeare's portrayal of the Witches shows them to cast spells and use familiars. The Witches' conspiracy against the state (monarchy) was something that would have instilled great fear amongst the audience. Moreover, the 'spot' on Lady Macbeth's hand is also a reference to what was known as 'the devil's mark' (something that would condemn any suspected Witch to death).

The Gunpowder Plot— King James I was the intended victim of Guy Fawkes' Gunpowder plot. This made him nervous of future regicide attempts. Shakespeare's '*Macbeth*' would have been popular with King James because it shows that those who commit regicide are greatly punished / mentally tortured. The message of Shakespeare's play acts as a deterrent to anyone thinking of committing regicide.

TASK 1

Watch the video from BBC Bitesize – create Cornell notes on the plot

Starting with this extract explain how Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a violent character.

Write about:

-how Shakespeare presents Macbeth in the extract

-how Shakespeare presents Macbeth and other characters

In the play as a whole as violent

CAPTAIN

Doubtful it stood,
As two spent swimmers that do cling together
And choke their art. The merciless Macdonald –
Worthy to be a rebel, for to that
5 The multiplying villainies of nature
Do swarm upon him – from the Western Isles
Of kerns and galloglasses is supplied,
And Fortune on his damnèd quarrel smiling,
Showed like a rebel's whore. But all's too weak,
10 For brave Macbeth – well he deserves that name –
Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel,
Which smoked with bloody execution,
Like Valour's minion carved out his passage
Till he faced the slave,
15 Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,
Till he unseamed him from the nave to th'chaps
And fixed his head upon our battlements.

TASK 2

Read the information on context and writer's intention. Write a 50-word summary. Then find quotations from the play as a whole to support each section and mind map them.

The simile references
The commemorative medal
James had cast following the
Failed Gunpowder Plot of
5th Nov 1605.

“ Look like the innocent flower but be
the serpent under't”

The reference to
the serpent links to
evil and the Devil
and the Garden of
Eden

TASK 3

Below is a model paragraph in answer to the question on the text to the left.

3. How does the writer Shakespeare present Macbeth as a violent character.

Throughout the play, Shakespeare uses Macbeth's thoughts and actions, combined with how other people view him, in order to convey Macbeth as a violent character. Firstly, the captain describes Macbeth as “brave” and “merciless”. These adjectives have violent connotations, as they illustrate how powerful Macbeth is as a soldier. As a result, the audience is able to see the nature of Macbeth as a soldier and as a result see that he is violent.

1. Highlight/underline the student's work with three colours to show where the student is using P.E.A.
2. Circle the language device terminology.

TASK 4

1. Write a paragraph of similar quality to that above.
2. Highlight/underline/annotate your own work with three colours to show where you are using P.E.A.
3. Circle the language device terminology