Macbeth: Past Exam Questions

**By Year:**

**2009**

“Macbeth’s murder of Duncan has horrible consequences both for Macbeth himself and for Scotland.”

Write a response to this statement. You should refer to the play in your answer.

“*Macbeth* has all the ingredients of compelling drama.”

Write a response to this statement, commenting on one or more of the ingredients which, in your opinion, make *Macbeth* a compelling drama.

**2007**

“The relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth undergoes significant change during the course of the play.”

Discuss this statement supporting your answer with the aid of suitable reference to the text.

“Essentially the play *Macbeth* is about power, its use and abuse.”

Discuss this view of the play, supporting your answer with the aid of suitable reference to the text.

**2004**

“Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* invites us to look into the world of a man driven on by ruthless ambition and tortured by regret.”

Write a response to this view of the play, *Macbeth*, supporting the points you make by reference to the text.

“The play, *Macbeth*, has many scenes of compelling drama.”

Choose one scene that you found compelling and say why you found it to be so.

Support your answer by reference to the play.

**By Category:**

**Character Profile**

“The relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth undergoes significant change during the course of the play.”

Discuss this statement supporting your answer with the aid of suitable reference to the text.

**Technical**

“*Macbeth* has all the ingredients of compelling drama.”

Write a response to this statement, commenting on one or more of the ingredients which, in your opinion, make *Macbeth* a compelling drama.

“The play, *Macbeth*, has many scenes of compelling drama.”

Choose one scene that you found compelling and say why you found it to be so.

Support your answer by reference to the play.

**Plot-based**

“Macbeth’s murder of Duncan has horrible consequences both for Macbeth himself and for Scotland.”

Write a response to this statement. You should refer to the play in your answer.

“Essentially the play *Macbeth* is about power, its use and abuse.”

Discuss this view of the play, supporting your answer with the aid of suitable reference to the text.

“Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* invites us to look into the world of a man driven on by ruthless ambition and tortured by regret.”

Write a response to this view of the play, *Macbeth*, supporting the points you make by reference to the text.

**How to answer them!**

“Macbeth’s murder of Duncan has horrible consequences both for Macbeth himself and for Scotland.”

Write a response to this statement. You should refer to the play in your answer.

Points to make:

* Why and how Macbeth comes to the decision to murder Duncan
* Effects of Macbeth’s actions on himself: goes from being a heroic soldier to a paranoid murderer; relationship with wife disintegrates; increasingly relies on prophecies of morally dubious witches for his advice; abandoned by his followers, who he must fight with mercenaries; his ultimate death
* Concept of divine kingship
* Examples of good kingship (Duncan / Edward / Malcolm)
* Effects of Macbeth’s reign on Scotland: natural world turns against him (quote 8, Act 2; quote 7, Act 3); loyal followers killed by their leader;

“*Macbeth* has all the ingredients of compelling drama.”

Write a response to this statement, commenting on one or more of the ingredients which, in your opinion, make *Macbeth* a compelling drama.

Similar: “The play, *Macbeth*, has many scenes of compelling drama.”

Choose one scene that you found compelling and say why you found it to be so.

Support your answer by reference to the play.

Points to make:

* Define the ‘ingredients of compelling drama’: strong plot, excellent characterisation, well-formed narrative arc, tension / suspense, relatable themes
* Take each of these aspects and demonstrate how *Macbeth* fulfils the requirements
* For the second option, take a particularly strong scene (final battle scene) and show how it brings all the aspects listed together

“The relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth undergoes significant change during the course of the play.”

Discuss this statement supporting your answer with the aid of suitable reference to the text.

Points to make:

* Define their relationship at opening of play (partners / letter / co-conspirators)
* Discuss Lady’s Macbeth’s initial dominance and Macbeth’s reluctance
* Murder of Banquo – LM left out of decision; Macbeth takes dominant role
* Banquet scene – LM still covers for M despite being marginalised – last we see of her until her madness / sleepwalking
* Their separation and isolation and the affect it has on both of them – LM madness / suicide; M increasing paranoia, obstinacy and violence

“Essentially the play *Macbeth* is about power, its use and abuse.”

Discuss this view of the play, supporting your answer with the aid of suitable reference to the text.

Points to make:

* Define / explain how power is acquired and obtained
* Discuss how Duncan uses his power; compare with Edward
* Contrast with how Macbeth (1) obtains power and (2) uses it
* Discuss the results of point above

“Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* invites us to look into the world of a man driven on by ruthless ambition and tortured by regret.”

Write a response to this view of the play, *Macbeth*, supporting the points you make by reference to the text.

Points to make:

* This can be tackled as a ‘tragic hero’ essay
* Define the concept of Shakespearean tragic hero
* Analyse how Macbeth fits the mould
* Demonstrate his moments of ambition and regret with ample quotations!