

## Five key things about Macbeth in Acts I and II

1. Macbeth is **associated** with the **forces of darkness** through the **witches**.
2. He is **initially** shown as **brave** and **loyal** to King Duncan.
3. His loyalty is **juxtaposed** with his overarching **ambition**.
4. He seems **reluctant** to **kill the king** but is **persuaded** by **his wife** to do so.
5. His **guilty conscience** is suggested by the **dagger** he sees prior to killing Duncan.



## What do we learn about Macbeth in Acts I and II?

- Macbeth is a Scottish lord who lives at Dunsinane with his wife, Lady Macbeth.
- The Captain reveals that Macbeth is a brave warrior who helped to defeat a rebellion against King Duncan.
- Macbeth is fascinated by the witches' predictions, which act as a driving force for his ambition.
- Lady Macbeth fears that Macbeth is **'too full o'th'milk of human kindness'** to kill Duncan.
- We learn that Lady Macbeth has a strong influence over Macbeth.
- Macbeth is prepared to commit murder in order to become king.

## How does Macbeth's character develop?

- After his meeting with the witches, Macbeth is determined to become king. (Act I Scene 3)
- He believes that he needs to remove all the obstacles in his path to the throne, e.g. he decides to **'o'erleap'** Malcolm, Duncan's successor. (Act I Scene 4)
- After listening to his conscience, he decides not to murder King Duncan but Lady Macbeth persuades him to go ahead. (Act I Scene 7)
- He is distressed after the murder and feels he will never sleep peacefully again but he composes himself and pretends to be outraged when the body is discovered. (Act II Scenes 2 and 3)
- He changes from King Duncan's supporter to his murderer. (Act II Scene 2)

## Five key quotations

1. Macbeth's bravery: **'O valiant cousin, worthy gentleman'** (Duncan, I.2.24)
2. Fear of his murderous thoughts: **'why do I yield to that suggestion,/Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair'** (I.3.133-4)
3. Wrestling with his conscience: **'should against his murderer shut the door,/Not bear the knife myself'** (I.7.15-16)
4. The **theme** of ambition: **'no spur/To prick the sides of my intent, but only/Vaulting ambition'** (I.7.25-7)
5. On Duncan's murder: **'I'll go no more./I am afraid to think what I have done'** (II.2.53-4)

### Note it!

At the beginning of the play, Macbeth is described using positive **adjectives** such as **'valiant'** and **'worthy'**. However, his bravery in battle is also linked to verbs of violence such as **'carv'd'** and **'unseam'd'**. These suggest that Macbeth has a ruthless and brutal streak.

## Exam focus

### How can I write about Macbeth at the beginning of the play? AO1 AO2

You can use Acts I and II to focus on how Macbeth fears his own murderous thoughts.

Shakespeare shows us Macbeth wrestling with his conscience in Act I Scene 3 when the 'suggestion' of murdering Duncan first enters his mind. Macbeth refers to this idea as a 'horrid image'. The adjective 'horrid' implies that he finds the thought shocking. When he asks 'why do I yield', the word 'yield' implies that he is giving in to murderous thoughts. In his inner battle between good and evil, the voice that asks 'why' represents his conscience.

Clear topic sentence introduces paragraph

Uses appropriate terminology for analysis

Analysis of quotation

Ends with personal interpretation

## Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about Macbeth's reaction to Duncan's murder. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Macbeth's conscience is also apparent when he refuses to return to the scene of.....

**Five** key things about the theme of ambition

1. **Ambition** is central to the play as it is the **fatal flaw** that leads to Macbeth's downfall and death.
2. The **witches** and **Lady Macbeth** are able to **influence Macbeth** because of his **ambition**.
3. **Ambition** makes **Macbeth tyrannous** and **murderous**.
4. **Ambition** is also explored through **Lady Macbeth**.
5. **Banquo** has **ambitions** but he **takes no action** to fulfil them.

**How** does Shakespeare present Macbeth's ambition?

- When King Duncan names Malcolm as his successor, Macbeth sees Malcolm as an obstacle in his path.
- Macbeth admits that ambition is his only reason for killing Duncan.
- Macbeth's ambition is more powerful than his conscience.
- His ambition is not satisfied once he is king as he wants to make sure that his position is secure.
- He tries to destroy those who threaten his power.



**How** do other characters help develop the theme?

- Lady Macbeth is ambitious for her husband and fears he lacks the cruelty necessary to succeed. Shakespeare shows how she persuades Macbeth to murder King Duncan.
- When Macbeth has doubts about killing King Duncan, Lady Macbeth convinces him to go ahead with the murder plan by questioning his masculinity.
- After the witches tell Macbeth he will be king, Banquo asks them to speak to him and thinks carefully about their prediction that his descendants will become kings.
- Unlike Macbeth, Banquo is suspicious of the witches and, although he has ambitions, he does not act on them.

**Five key quotations**

1. Lady Macbeth on Macbeth: **'Thou wouldst be great,/Art not without ambition, but without/The illness should attend it'** (1.5.17–19)
2. Macbeth on Malcolm being named heir: **'that is a step/On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap'** (1.4.48–9)
3. Macbeth considering murdering King Duncan: **'no spur/To prick the sides of my intent, but only/Vaulting ambition'** (1.7.25–7)
4. Macbeth feeling threatened by Banquo: **'To be thus is nothing,/But to be safely thus'** (III.1.49–50)
5. Banquo asking the witches to predict his future: **'If you can look into the seeds of time/And say which grain will grow and which will not,/Speak then to me'** (I.3.56–8)

**Note it!**

Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a tragic hero. In classical tragedies, the **protagonist** suffers and dies because of a fatal flaw in his character. Macbeth's ambition causes him to kill the King, setting off a chain of events that leads to his downfall.

**Exam focus**

**How can I write about Macbeth's ambition?** AO1 AO2

You can write about how Macbeth reacts to Malcolm being named Duncan's heir.

Shakespeare reveals Macbeth's ambition in Act I Scene 4 when he describes Malcolm as 'a step/On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap'. The words 'step' and 'o'erleap' imply that he wants to climb ahead of Malcolm in the order of succession. His determination is indicated by his use of the strong modal verb 'must'. Macbeth claims that Malcolm is 'in [his] way' which suggests that he views him as an obstacle.

Clear opening using relevant quotation

Analytical comment showing effect

Zooms in on word

Development of previous points

**Now you try!**

Finish this paragraph about ambition. Use one of the quotations from the list. Shakespeare also reveals Macbeth's ambition when he claims his only reason for murdering King Duncan is .....