

GCSE English Literature: Macbeth Exam Practice

An extract from Act 1 Scene 5, close-reading questions, context and an essay plan.

Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

Learning objective: I can analyse an extract from Macbeth and plan a whole-text essay.

✓ I can analyse language ✓ I can link to context ✓ I can plan an essay

Extract: Act 1 Scene 5 – Lady Macbeth alone, after hearing that Duncan will stay at her castle

The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements. Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
5 And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood;
Stop up th' access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
10 Th' effect and it!

From *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare (out of copyright). Glossary: *compunctious visitings of nature* – natural feelings of guilt; *fell* – cruel, deadly.

1 Read closely (AO1/AO2)

1 What does Lady Macbeth ask the spirits to do? [2 marks]

2 What is the effect of the image of the raven? [2 marks]

3 Why might 'Make thick my blood' be significant? [2 marks]

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2 Context (AO3)

4 How might a Jacobean audience have reacted to a woman calling on spirits? [3 marks]

3 Plan your essay

Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare present Lady Macbeth as a powerful woman? Plan three paragraphs.

Paragraph	Point and evidence (from the extract or elsewhere in the play)
1 – in this extract	
2 – Act 1 Scene 7	
3 – Act 5 Scene 1	

4 Write your introduction

Write the opening paragraph of your essay (thesis + first point).

Answer Key

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Question	Answers
1 Read closely (AO1/AO2)	1. To 'unsex' her – remove her feminine qualities/compassion – and fill her with cruelty, so she can carry out the murder without remorse. 2. Ravens were omens of death; it foreshadows Duncan's murder and creates a dark, ominous mood. 3. She wants to block pity/remorse from flowing through her; it links to the play's blood imagery and guilt later on.
2 Context (AO3)	4. With shock and fear: it suggests witchcraft (James I wrote <i>Daemonologie</i>); it challenges expected female roles and the natural order.
3 Plan your essay	1 – in this extract – Point and evidence (from the extract or elsewhere in the play): calls on spirits; imperatives ('Come', 'Make', 'Stop up') show control and determination 2 – Act 1 Scene 7 – Point and evidence (from the extract or elsewhere in the play): persuades Macbeth by questioning his manhood 3 – Act 5 Scene 1 – Point and evidence (from the extract or elsewhere in the play): sleepwalking; guilt destroys her power – 'Out, damned spot!'
4 Write your introduction	Look for: • A clear argument about Lady Macbeth's power (and its limits) • Embedded quotations with analysis of language (AO2) • Relevant context woven in (AO3) • Accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar (AO4)

Teaching note: the extract is from Shakespeare's Macbeth (out of copyright). The essay question is written in the style of GCSE extract-to-whole questions; it is not taken from a past paper.