

Macbeth – William Shakespeare (c1606) – Knowledge Organiser

Key extracts – literary features and effects	
Act 1, Scene 3 – Macbeth and Banquo listen to the witches' predictions.	Shakespeare uses this early scene to set up the whole premise of the play. The witches use rhyming couplets to help create the effect of a spell or a chant. On hearing the prophecy, Macbeth delivers an aside to the audience which allows them to see the impact it has had. Shakespeare also uses vivid metaphors to illustrate the impact further – 'horrid image doth affix my hair'.
Act 2, Scene 2 – Macbeth murders Duncan.	Shakespeare uses this key scene to show the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. He is shocked by what he has done, but she is calm and in control. She uses imperatives 'Give me the daggers!' which show her authority. Shakespeare also uses stichomythia at the start of the scene to increase the tension as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth talk very quickly about what happened.
Act 3, Scene 4 – Banquo's ghost appears to Macbeth	Macbeth is the only character to see Banquo's ghost and Shakespeare adds to the horror of the scene with the use of dramatic irony as we know more than the characters. This scene also reinforces Lady Macbeth's authority as she uses rhetorical questions and exclamations to insult her husband.
Act 4, Scene 1 – Macbeth returns to the witches	Shakespeare shows that Macbeth is losing his control as the witches use imperatives and order Macbeth, who is the King, around. The witches also show their supernatural qualities by using lots of alliteration 'Fillet of a fenny snake' and assonance 'baboon's blood' which adds to the chaos of the scene.
Act 5, Scene 1 – Lady Macbeth sleepwalking	Shakespeare shows that Lady Macbeth also feels guilt about her actions in her final scene. The use of repetition 'out, out' and the imagery of death 'grave', 'buried', 'blood' show that she is haunted and distressed by her part in the plots.

Themes and how they link to characters and plot	
Ambition: Ambition is represented in the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Both of them are ruined by their ambition as it causes them to become cruel and tyrannical which drives them both into madness and mental distress.	Violence and conflict: The whole play revolves around violence and conflict. Everything is started or resolved by a violent act. Macbeth begins to use violence to assert his authority and this is met by more violence and people seeking revenge.
Deceit: All of the characters deceive each other to get ahead and we, as an audience, are the only ones aware of this. This creates a sense of distrust throughout the play and ensures that none of the characters trust each other.	Guilt: Despite their ambition and their need for power, Lady Macbeth and Macbeth are haunted by their guilt. Although this guilt does not stop them from being tyrannical, it does play a big part in their downfall as their consciences are always reminding them that their actions are evil and wrong.
Masculinity: The play is set in a society in which strength and violence is seen as masculine and weakness is seen as feminine. Lady Macbeth uses Macbeth's lack of courage to insult him and question his masculinity.	Fate: By using the prophecy as a catalyst for Macbeth's actions, the play makes the audience question the idea of fate. The question of whether Macbeth was following a future which was planned for him or if he chose to act in the way he did is one which is not answered by the end of the play.

Plot summary
Act 1: The play opens with three witches, who meet with Macbeth, the Thane of Glamis, and his best friend, Banquo, who have just fought for King Duncan. The witches tell Macbeth that he will become Thane of Cawdor and then King of Scotland. They tell Banquo that he will not be king, but his descendants will. After this news, Macbeth is told that Duncan is rewarding his efforts at war by making him the Thane of Cawdor. This makes Macbeth believe the prophecy of the witches. We are introduced to King Duncan in his castle and he is stating how his eldest son, Malcolm, will be his successor. Meanwhile, Macbeth has written to his wife, Lady Macbeth, to tell her about the witches. Lady Macbeth, knowing that Duncan is due to visit them, decides to murder Duncan but she is concerned that Macbeth is not brave enough to carry out the plan. The Act ends with Duncan arriving and greeting Macbeth as an old friend.
Act 2: Macbeth, encouraged by Lady Macbeth, plots to kill Duncan. They agree to get the guards drunk, murder Duncan and put the daggers next to them. Macbeth murders Duncan, but he is so shaken up that he forgets about the daggers and Lady Macbeth has to return them. The next morning, Macduff, the Thane of Fife, arrives and discovers the murdered body of Duncan. To cover up his own guilt, Macbeth kills the guards. Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, leave the country. This allows Macbeth to take over and become King.
Act 3: Macbeth begins to think about the other part of the prophecy and worries that Banquo's descendants will take over. When Banquo becomes suspicious of Macbeth and his role in Duncan's death, Macbeth arranges to have Banquo, and his son Fleance, murdered. The murderers kill Banquo, but Fleance escapes the attack. Macbeth later sees the ghost of Banquo at a feast he is holding and his guests, who cannot see the ghost, think he is going mad. Lady Macbeth covers for her husband but is worried about his mental state. Elsewhere, the witches are told off for meddling by Hecate and we hear that Macduff is preparing to fight Macbeth.
Act 4: Macbeth goes back to the witches who reassure him that he will be safe until Birnam Wood moves to Dunsinane Hill and that he cannot be killed by anyone born from a woman. But they do tell him to be beware of Macduff. When they leave, Macbeth learns that Macduff is plotting against him and vows to kill his family. Macduff's wife and children are murdered, and this unites Macduff and Malcolm against Macbeth.
Act 5: Lady Macbeth begins to feel the guilt of their actions and is seen sleepwalking and trying to wash the blood from her hands. Elsewhere, a rebel army is gathering at Birnam Wood. Macbeth is confident that he will not be killed due to the witches' prophecy. During this time, we are also told that Lady Macbeth has died, and Macbeth shows little reaction. A messenger then tells Macbeth that the army are advancing. Macduff and Macbeth meet, and Macduff tells him he was born by a caesarian section and therefore can kill Macbeth. Macduff kills Macbeth and beheads him. Malcolm is proclaimed King.

Characters and what Shakespeare may have wanted them to represent	
Macbeth: Macbeth is introduced to us as a brave and strong soldier, but becomes more cowardly as the play progresses. He is very ambitious and allows himself to be influenced by others. As King, he is paranoid and reacts violently to any threat to his authority. He is haunted by his evil actions but is unable to stop.	Lady Macbeth: As Macbeth's wife, she is the driving force in the relationship and is even more ambitious for power than her husband. She encourages him to kill Duncan and continues to influence her husband. She is eventually overcome by guilt and her mental state causes her to commit suicide.
Duncan: Duncan is a kind and generous king, who rewards Macbeth and sees him as a friend. When he is killed, order disappears from Scotland which highlights his strength as a ruler.	Macduff: Macduff is loyal and prepared to do anything to gain revenge for the death of Duncan and his own wife and children. He eventually kills Macbeth and restores order.
Banquo: Banquo is Macbeth's friend who is a brave and loyal soldier. He also receives a prophecy from the witches but does not act on it. He dies a noble death protecting his son and comes back to haunt Macbeth and remind him of his terrible actions.	The witches: The witches are used to start the story off as they prophesise the events to Macbeth and Banquo. They represent the supernatural and mystery. They also seem to enjoy their power and use it to play with the main characters emotions and thoughts.

Contexts and concepts	
King James: The play was written around 1606 when King James, a king of Scottish descent, was on the throne. Shakespeare's play, which looks what happens when the good and rightful king is usurped, may well have been directed at King James.	Divine right of kings: At the time the play was written, it was believed that rulers were appointed by God and represented God on earth. Therefore, if you went against the King, you were not only committing treason, but also going against God, the ultimate ruler.
Witches and the supernatural: Many people at the time believed in witches and the supernatural and worried about being possessed. This fear led to women suspected of being witches being killed.	Tragedy: Shakespeare's play follows many of the conventions of Greek or Roman tragedies. Macbeth is often seen as a typical 'tragic' hero as his life and actions are governed by fate and he can't escape that fate.
Gender politics: The society of the time, and the society of the play, was dominated by male rule. Women were considered to be inferior to men and were expected to be wives, mothers and daughters rather than people in their own right with careers and power. Lady Macbeth is therefore unusual as she is outspoken and arguably the more dominant partner in her relationship with Macbeth. A Shakespearean audience may have found her character quite shocking.	