EXAM STASH

GCSE ENGLISH – CHARACTER REVISION

MACBETH – ACT 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE • CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE



AMBITION | FATE | LOYALTY | DECEPTION

Macbeth begins as Duncan's celebrated defender. Before the act ends, he chooses to help murder him. Shakespeare makes us hear the moral arguments he understands and then overrides.

THE JOURNEY: ACT 1

1.2 Others praise his courage before we meet him.



1.3 Prophecy awakens thoughts of kingship; becoming Cawdor makes the witches seem credible.



1.4 Malcolm is named heir. Macbeth conceals desires that conflict with loyalty.



1.7 He rejects the murder, debates with Lady Macbeth, then commits to their plan.



PUBLIC vs PRIVATE

- **Public:** a loyal, celebrated warrior who serves Duncan and Scotland.
- **Private:** an ambitious man whose asides and soliloquy reveal desire, doubt and moral awareness.



KEY CONNECTIONS

- **Lady Macbeth:** 'When you durst do it, then you were a man' (1.7). She links murder to masculinity; Macbeth initially argues that a man has moral limits.
- **Banquo:** also hears prophecies but warns of the 'instruments of darkness' (1.3). This alternative response complicates blaming fate alone.
- **Duncan:** trusts Macbeth. The audience's access to Macbeth's private thoughts creates dramatic irony and makes the welcome at his castle unsettling.

6 KEY QUOTATIONS

1	*'brave Macbeth'*	**Speaker/Scene:** Captain, 1.2 **Method:** Public praise and delayed entrance	**Analysis:** We meet his reputation before the man. Violence is initially admired because it protects the king. His later betrayal reverses this loyal public image.
2	*'If chance will have me king'*	**Speaker/Scene:** Macbeth, 1.3 **Method:** Conditional language and personification	**Analysis:** He imagines kingship arriving without action. Yet he has already pictured murder: apparent passivity coexists with dangerous desire.
3	*'Stars, hide your fires'*	**Speaker/Scene:** Macbeth, 1.4 **Method:** Imperative; light and darkness	**Analysis:** He asks the heavens to conceal his ambition. An aside lets the audience hear what Duncan cannot: the split between loyalty performed and desire hidden.
4	*'He's here in double trust'*	**Speaker/Scene:** Macbeth, 1.7 **Method:** Soliloquy and moral reasoning	**Analysis:** As Duncan's kinsman, subject and host, Macbeth should protect him. He recognises murder as betrayal; his awareness makes responsibility harder to evade.
5	*'vaulting ambition'*	**Speaker/Scene:** Macbeth, 1.7 **Method:** Riding metaphor	**Analysis:** Ambition resembles a rider who leaps too far and falls. Macbeth diagnoses his own dangerous motive: no rightful cause justifies killing Duncan.
6	*'False face must hide what the false heart doth know'*	**Speaker/Scene:** Macbeth, 1.7 **Method:** Repeated 'false'; rhyming closing couplet	**Analysis:** He now chooses deception. The emphatic close turns hesitation into shared resolve, preparing the audience for the crime in Act 2.

INTERPRETATION: MACBETH IN ACT 1

- **Basic:** Macbeth wants power but knows killing Duncan is wrong.
- **Further:** his asides and soliloquy make the conflict between public service and private ambition visible.
- **Advanced:** prophecy and marital pressure influence him, but neither makes murder inevitable; he debates alternatives and knowingly chooses.

CONTEXT (RELEVANT)

A regicide threatens political and moral order. Macbeth's duties as subject, relative and host make this planned betrayal especially serious. Connect context to his words rather than adding a detached history paragrapth.



PAIRED-QUOTATION LINK

'brave Macbeth' **(1.2) ↔** ***'False face'*** **(1.7):** pubiicly celebrated loyalty becomes deliberate concealment. Track this contrast through later acts.



RECALL TASKS

1. Why does Shakespeare let us hear praise of Macbeth before showing his private thoughts?
2. Which quotation best proves that Macbeth understands his duty to Duncan? Explain one word or method.

WRITING TASK

How does Shakespeare present Macbeth's conflict between loyalty and ambition in Act 1? Use one early and one later moment.

