

A Dozen *Macbeth* Essays *

1. Trace the characterization of Macbeth from the beginning the play (military victory) to the end (defeat, death, degradation). Examine the progression of his internal conflicts and external actions as he develops from each stage to the next. To what extent can he be considered a tragic hero; is his villainy too great to even apply this term? Consider, too, the reader's/audience's degree of sympathy for Macbeth, showing how it, too, changes in response to his moral deterioration.
2. Evaluate Lady Macbeth's character, weighing her strengths and weaknesses. Consider her motivation, courage, and punishment. Examine the sleepwalking scene as the realization of a side of Lady Macbeth's personality briefly hinted at earlier, and evaluate her earlier actions and speeches with a view to her total character. Cite specific passages demonstrating how Shakespeare leads his audience to respond to Lady Macbeth's character.
3. Using direct references to the play, examine the strength of the love Macbeth and Lady Macbeth demonstrate toward each other. Consider this love as a significant factor contributing to their mutual demise. Could Shakespeare possibly be suggesting that love—a good thing—could lead to evil and self-destruction? Use examples both within and outside the play, as well as your citations, to support your thesis.
4. Examine the contrasts revealed in *Macbeth* through characterization and symbolism. Show how these contrasts create a recurring motif that threads throughout the entire play beginning with the witches' opening scene: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair." What thematic ideas does Shakespeare suggest through these contrasts?
5. Examine Shakespeare the Psychologist. Study *Macbeth* for examples of Shakespeare's psychological awareness of humanity as revealed through his characters and their actions. Consider this psychological insight as an aspect of Shakespeare's enduring universality. What insights into human nature does this psychologist provide us?
6. Study thoroughly the element of the supernatural in *Macbeth*. Trace its occurrence as you evaluate both its theatrical effect and its moral impact in terms of free will and the choice between good and evil. Notwithstanding these supernatural elements, how does the theme of *Macbeth* have enduring value as a moral statement?
7. The three generals of Duncan's army present interesting checks and balances. Macbeth is an excellent soldier acclaimed by king and peers; Banquo is loyal to his king and cautious when the witches appear to him. Macduff is loyal to Scotland and his king. Analyze their friendships and loyalties and how they act as dramatic foil one to another.

8. The characters of the first Thane of Cawdor, King Duncan, Banquo, Lady Macbeth, and Macbeth all contained flaws which, to a greater or lesser degree, were the cause of their downfall. Referring to specifics in the play, describe the flaws of each and explain why you think each character was or was not deserving of his fate.

9. Commentators have pointed out that three forces are at work to destroy Macbeth: flaws in his own character, the force of evil or the Devil as represented by the Three Weird Sisters, and Lady Macbeth. Select the force which you think was most responsible for his downfall and show how that force was predominant. You may wish to note that the other forces existed, but you should concentrate on proving that the one you select was the major one.

10. To equivocate means “to use ambiguous expressions, especially to mislead.” Discuss equivocation as a theme in *Macbeth*, citing specifics.

11. In literature, characters are frequently used as foils; that is, the characteristics of one point up by contrast the characteristics of another. Consider how Banquo acts as a foil to Macbeth. Or how Macduff acts as a foil to Macbeth. Or how Lady Macduff acts as a foil to Lady Macbeth. Or Lady Macbeth to Macbeth. Or Duncan to Macbeth. Or...? Get it?

12. Write a composition on the following topic: “*Macbeth*: A Lesson for Modern Man.”