Macbeth Questions

The kind of questions that come up fall into three broad categories:

* Character questions
* Theme questions
* Style questions

**1. Characters**:

The main aspects of **Macbeth’s** character you need to know are:

* External factors that lead to his downfall -LadyMacbeth&Witches.
* Internal factors that lead to his downfall – ambition & self-interest.
* Macbeth’s soliloquies
* The audience‘s reaction to and levels of sympathy for Macbeth.
* His relationship with his wife Lady Macbeth.
* His behaviour as King / tyrant!

You must also be able to discuss the following characters:

* **Lady Macbeth** – as a person in her own right, her relationship with her husband & our reaction to & levels of sympathy for her.
* **Duncan** – as a King & as one of the “good” characters in the play.
* **Banquo** – as a person in his own right and as a “foil” to Macbeth.
* **The Witches** – their role in the play & influence over Macbeth.
* Minor characters – Macduff, Malcolm, Edward (Kings/good guys!)

You can be asked a general question in which you’d discuss several characters. For example: “The play presents a dark and pessimistic view of humanity”.

**2. Themes**:

* **Kingship & power**
* **Good vs. Evil**
* **Justice vs Injustice**
* **Appearance vs. Reality**
* **Supernatural**

**3. Style**:

* **Imagery** – blood, animal & clothing imagery
* **Relevance to a modern audience**
* **Compelling drama**

Here are some specific exam questions but remember that you won’t know the exact question until you open up the exam paper. You are being asked to respond to the statement – discuss to what extent you agree and/or disagree with it. Don’t just bluntly begin by saying “I agree 100% with this statement” – this is predictable and shows an inability to offer a nuanced analysis of the play/statement. You must support all points you make by quotation from and reference to the play.

**CHARACTERS**:

“Ambition and self-interest are the qualities that destroy Macbeth”

“Shakespeare’s Macbeth invites us to look into the world of a man driven on by ruthless ambition and tortured by regret”

“Macbeth’s murder of Duncan has horrible consequences both for Macbeth himself and for Scotland”

“Macbeth’s soliloquies are essential in order to retain audience sympathy for the central character”

“The relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth undergoes significant change during the course of the play”

“The relationship between Macbeth and his wife is ultimately a destructive one”

“Their partnership in guilt, which at the beginning of the play is a strong bond between them, gradually drives Macbeth and his wife apart, until they go down to their seperate dooms, isolated and alone”

“We feel little pity for the central characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare’s play”

“While there are some redeeming features in the character of Macbeth, Lady Macbeth is portrayed as a ruthless opportunist, whose ambition for her husband supercedes all moral considerations”

“Lady Macbeth is responsible for the fall of her husband”

“Lady Macbeth is no monster, she is a loyal though misguided wife, not without tenderness and not without conscience”

“The witches in Macbeth are malevolent creatures, who originate deeds of blood and have power over the soul”

“The witches add little to the play Macbeth”

“Banquo is a good and loyal man, but even he is not above temptation”

“Shakespeare is more interested in dramatic effects than in presenting characters who are psychologically consistent”

“The play presents a dark and pessimistic view of humanity”

“The ‘good’ characters in Macbeth are drab and uninspiring, whilst the flawed characters are absolutely fascinating”

**THEMES**:

“Essentially the play Macbeth is about power, it’s use and abuse”

“Kingship, with all its potential for good and evil, is a major theme in the play Macbeth”

“In the play Macbeth, evil is depicted in a far more interesting way than virtue”

“In Macbeth, Shakespeare presents us with a powerful vision of evil”

“The eternal struggle between good and evil – a struggle in which evil comes close to victory – is the central theme in the play”

“From the opening moments, the play is dominated by the themes of corruption and death”

“The theme of the supernatural adds a malevolent air of mystery to the play Macbeth”

“In the play Macbeth, appearances often mask a disturbing reality”

**STYLE**:

“Macbeth has all the ingredients of compelling drama”

“Centuries after it was written, the play Macbeth remains highly relevant for a modern audience”

“Choose a scene which you consider to be the most dramatic in the play and justify your choice”

“The imagery in Macbeth adds greatly to our experience of the play”