

## Example answers to past *Macbeth* questions

Reading good answers is an excellent way to develop a stronger sense of what a good essay is like and how to write one. Each time you read one, think about *how* and *where* it achieves marks. The examiners' comments after each answer will help to point out the answer's strengths and possible areas for improvement.

All of the examples given are extremely good and would earn grades of 7, 8 or 9 (often 9). Don't be put off by them: whatever your target grade, you can use these examples to support your revision. If an essay uses a word or concept you don't understand, take this as a learning opportunity and look it up. It has never been easier to find definitions and explanations, thanks to the internet. Similarly, if an essay makes a reference to the text that you don't understand, look that part of the play up and think about it afresh. (You might find it helpful to open an online copy of the play, and use Search or CONTROL F to find sections quickly.)

As well as developing your own essay-writing style, use these answers to help you to revise. Take note of good points, references and analysis given about characters and themes, which can become part of your own revision notes and understanding.

You can use the highlighting below to select essays on **characters and themes** you wish to concentrate on. You might then like to consider themes of *Macbeth* that have *not* appeared in past exams (such as kingship and tyranny, guilt and regret, dishonesty and deceit or false appearances, courage, fate and evil) and ensure you have secure notes on these. Remember that revising each theme or character will support your wider revision of the text as a whole, as you note ways in which particular examples can be used to explore various possible themes.

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An <b>excellent</b> (L5; approx. Grade 8-9) answer to the 2017 question on <b>ambition.</b>	24-25

Read the following extract from Act 5 Scene 3 of *Macbeth* and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play, Macbeth hears that the English army is approaching and asks the Doctor for a report about Lady Macbeth.

	<b>MACBETH</b>	Seyton! – I am sick at heart, When I behold – Seyton, I say! – this push Will cheer me ever or disseat me now. I have lived long enough. My way of life
5		Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf, And that which should accompany old age, As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends, I must not look to have; but in their stead, Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath
10		Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not. Seyton!
		<i>Enter SEYTON</i>
	<b>SEYTON</b>	What's your gracious pleasure?
	<b>MACBETH</b>	What news more?
15	<b>SEYTON</b>	All is confirmed, my lord, which was reported.
	<b>MACBETH</b>	I'll fight till from my bones my flesh be hacked. Give me my armour.
	<b>SEYTON</b>	'Tis not needed yet.
	<b>MACBETH</b>	I'll put it on;
20		Send out more horses; skirr the country round. Hang those that talk of fear. Give me mine armour. How does your patient, doctor?
	<b>DOCTOR</b>	Not so sick, my lord, As she is troubled with thick-coming fancies
25		That keep her from her rest.
	<b>MACBETH</b>	Cure her of that. Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased, Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow, Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
30		And with some sweet oblivious antidote Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff Which weighs upon the heart?

Starting with this conversation, explore how far Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a male character who changes during the play.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents Macbeth in this conversation
- how far Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a male character who changes in the play as a whole.

[30 marks]  
AO4 [4 marks]

#### Response 4

William Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' tells the tale of a man, one a hero, facing his hamartia once he interferes with the Great Chain of Being, a construction of his own downfall.

During Act 1 of the play we are first introduced to our protagonist as he fights ruthlessly in battle – 'unseamed him from the nave to the chaps' depicts the manner in which he fights. The metaphor uses the verb 'unseamed' to illustrate just how skilled Macbeth is at fighting – it feels like the word was used very deliberately in this way – in one skilled move a person's flesh is stripped from them. We know that this skill is honoured as he is then described a 'brave Macbeth'. During the time Shakespeare was writing, the Jacobean era, fighting in war was honourable for a man – in fact it was expected. By having Macbeth fit into the stereotypes and expectations of the time, a contemporary audience would have been more likely to find his upcoming downfall even more tragic and take it to heart. As a modern audience we are able to admire his skill and so it feels a shame that it is wasted on the character he is to become.

Later in the play, Macbeth is already showing signs of change. Despite having taken lives previously and clearly being ruthless, the idea of murder plagues him – specifically when it comes to the murder of King Duncan. ‘Stars hide your fires, let not light see my black and deep desires’ is an example of this. Shakespeare’s main message in this play, in my opinion, is that the chaos created by a disruption of the Great Chain of Being; the natural order that England and Scotland was believed to follow. Macbeth committing treason breaks this chain and he knows this. In this metaphor he asks that the pure and natural ‘light’ does not witness his awful deeds as he knows they are wrong. This juxtaposes the fact he calls his actions ‘black’ – the opposite of the good ‘light’. The line bodes as a warning to an audience. The change depicted is in the fact he is still brave enough to do these violent things but winning a battle is not enough – his hamartia takes over and he wants more.

In the extract, we learn of how Macbeth has an entirely new perspective at the end of the play. Yet again, in an almost circular structure, he prepares for war... only this time he knows deep down that his sins have caught up to him. He states, ‘I have lived long enough’ which illustrates that he is no longer in desperation to gain what is not his and has finally allowed his actions to catch up to him. Not long after this scene, he states ‘out, out brief candle’ – the noun ‘candle’ being a representation of his reign, short and now over. This is also similar to the phrase burning the candle at both ends, which illustrates the idea that he has no remaining options. He was once a respected, noble warrior but is now just a fallen King. Shakespeare may have chosen to depict this change in such a tragic way in order to warn his audience that may happen to a country when, in a very patriarchal society, this natural order is disturbed. A man who tries to forcefully take what is not his will face the consequence. It is good to be brave and fit the expectations but never should you surpass that and step out of line.

We still see a small amount of the old Macbeth’s character when he says, ‘I’ll fight till from my bones my flesh be hacked’ – he still carries the same courage he once did but we know it is already too late for him. This violent imagery mirrors that of how Macbeth ‘unseamed’ a man, only this time it is less delicately done and instead the verb ‘hacked’ is used. This is almost symbolic of his reign as King, it was a violent series of events for him to get there and now the character knows he will meet a violent end in return. The main way that this shows his character’s change is the role reversal. He used to be the one doing the ‘bloody execution but now he knows deep down he is to become the next victim while a modern audience may not take this message from Shakespeare the same way as a contemporary audience would, it is still deeply impactful. For those who believe in fate it may influence them to think carefully about the price paid for actions taken. For those who don’t, it is still a tale to take note from – you can’t always get what you want – bad actions do not bring a person any good.

This student takes a linear approach to the task by considering the extract later in their response, thereby demonstrating their understanding of where the extract fits into the overall plot. Their focus is very much on the idea of change and how this is presented by Shakespeare, and draws effectively on a range of well-selected moments from the play to illustrate their increasingly-developed focus. References are apt and well-considered throughout, and there is a clear sense of this student having a very sound understanding of the text, in particular through their discussion of themes and ideas which enables them to achieve Level 5 for AO3. Overall this is a good example of a very thoughtful approach to the question with highly effective illustrations from the text throughout. In order to move into Level 6, perhaps more of an exploration of particular moments or techniques might be beneficial to this candidate. **25 marks (Approx. Grade 8-9) AO4 = 4 marks**

## Response 5

Throughout Shakespeare’s Macbeth, the eponymous protagonist is driven by ambition which turns to paranoia. At the start of the play “brave Macbeth” is presented as a war hero by the Captain to King Duncan, a statement juxtaposed with the previous scene’s dialogue where the witches organise “to meet with Macbeth”. Witches were a large part of the late 17th century culture and to a contemporary audience, this foreshadows the events of Act 1 Scene 2.

Ultimately, after Macbeth meets the witches, his ambition is catalysed, he describes it as “vaulting ambition, which o’erleaps itself”. This is the beginning of Macbeth’s denouement and from here he undergoes several more character changes. Firstly, he doubts himself and whether he should do “it” –

the neutral pronoun's usage to ascribe the level of horror and moral guilt Macbeth feels about the regicide. It is only the influence of his wife, who believes Macbeth is "too full 'o' the milk of human kindness" that Macbeth agrees to do "it". In this sense, during the first act alone, Macbeth changes from a hero to the villain, and is changed by his wife and the weird sisters.

The second and third acts see Macbeth's ambition, kindled by his wife, turn to paranoia. After killing Duncan, Macbeth proclaims that "all great Neptune's oceans" won't wash the blood from his hands. The Roman religious imagery is used here as a facet of Renaissance plays to show just how guilty and paranoid Macbeth feels and becomes. From here, the tyrant starts a brutal killing spree: he manipulates murderers into killing his friend Banquo and "his issue" to protect his "fruitless crown". Macbeth describes it as thus because of the witches' prophecy "thou shalt get kings" to Banquo. And then, fearing Macduff's betrayal and joining of Malcolm's army in England, he orders the Thane of Fife's family to be killed but not before they are told Macduff is a "traitor".

By this point in the play, Macbeth's paranoia has led him to become a murderous tyrant who is "in blood stepped so far". Shakespeare is regularly using the motif of blood around Macbeth to show how he has changed into this tyrant and villain. Even the witches describe him as "something wicked" suggesting even the forces of darkness are somewhat put off by his evil.

By the time of the extract though, Macbeth has regained his warrior's confidence. Once again, he becomes the warlord he was previously renowned for. "Give me my armour" and "send out more horses" showing his military attitude. And to his wife's failing mental health "cure her of that". His confidence puts him in denial, a denial that is revealed to him throughout act 5. Firstly the death of his wife leads him to the line "life's but a poor player, strutting and fretting his hour upon the stage" showing his badness then when "Birnam wood comes to Dunsinane" and Macduff is revealed to have been "untimely plucked" from his mother's womb, the faith he had in the witches' prophecies unravels, but he doesn't lose his warrior attitude. He fights Macduff to the death rather than be "paraded through the streets". His denouement leads his legacy to be "that dead butcher and his fiend-like queen".

Ultimately, Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a character that changes over time, from a hero to a tyrant, from ambitious to paranoid but one thing remains constant, and that is the warrior characterisation, revealed again by the end.

The point of these changes is for a contemporary audience to reflect on moral values of the time. Firstly, it is a warning to those who would commit regicide – as nearly happened in the year the play was written with the Gunpowder Plot – but also as a commentary on gender roles. As a play set just after the reign of Britain's first true Queen, there is a return to the misogynistic society of the past. Shakespeare presents the evil witches and Macbeth's wife as being the cause of Macbeth's treason and so it is representative of the values held at the time about women in power. To a modern audience, the changes in Macbeth's character can be interpreted as a warning to be vigilant against the corruption of our own values in becoming something we do not accept, and the affects of paranoia on our outlook on life.

This is a detailed, exploratory approach to the question that develops consistently throughout the response. The student has a firm grasp of the question and focuses throughout on the changes in Macbeth that are shown by Shakespeare. AO3 is a thread that runs throughout, and is demonstrated by an over-arching consideration of Macbeth within the context of both the contemporary setting and wider-reaching messages about human behaviour. The strength of this response therefore is in the approach to the ideas as suggested by the focus of the question, which lifts the response into Level 6 for AO1 task and AO3. AO2 methods would be a focus for development in order to secure the whole of Level 6. **27 marks (Grade 9) AO4 = 4 marks**

## Response 6

In the play 'Macbeth', Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a male character who changes a lot during the play. From a noble thane, hesitant about committing treachery, to a determined rebel, and ultimately to a hopeless man, engulfed in guilt – Macbeth embodies all of these throughout the course of the play.



At the very beginning, the protagonist is introduced to the readers as a noble general – although very violent, he uses his loyalty to the King correctly. While fighting rebels, he is described to have “unseam’d (MacDonwald) from the naves to the chops” which depicts his gruesome nature, already foreshadowing the ever-so-present theme of violence in the play. Then, after the Witches inform the hero of his destiny, Macbeth hesitates. He, both the King’s “kinsman and loyal subject”, wouldn’t dare commit the sin of regicide. Lady Macbeth, however, doesn’t share his morality, convincing Macbeth to go through with ‘The deed.’ “Was the hope drunk, wherein you dressed yourself?” is a rhetorical question that she asks her husband in order to spark his ambition. The use of the adjective “drunk” by Shakespeare shows how foolish it was for Macbeth to contemplate the murder, yet hesitate about it. The protagonist had been “drunk” on the idea of becoming king, but hasn’t sacrificed enough for it to come true. Such a bold accusation and the undermining of his manhood convinced Macbeth to commit the crime, since in the Jacobean era society was patriarchal. It was humiliating for the hero, a man of great power and strength, to be undermined by his own wife. From this moment on, the audience witnesses the first transformation of Macbeth: from a loyal thane to an ambitious rebel, ready to murder the King to fulfill his goal.

In the given extract, which comes much later in the play, there is a clear decline in the ambition of Macbeth. He admits that “honour, love, obedience, troops of friends, I must not look to have”. By listing a wide range of things he cannot afford, the protagonist demonstrates the limit to his achievements – whilst he had become King, he’s had no sacrifice both the lives of his subjects as well as all of the favourable qualities that he possessed. Particularly the use of the noun “honour” displays the irony in Macbeth’s fate: to achieve the most honourable title of them all, the title of “King”, he has lost all of the honour that he had accumulated in his life by being loyal. Shakespeare uses Macbeth’s decline in ambition to prove that it is condemnable to defy the Great Chain of Being, which was a belief in the Jacobean society that the King was chosen by God. Macbeth had failed to obey the Great Chain of Being, committing regicide and claiming the title for himself. While his ambition grew, everything dear to him, everything good that he has done was fading, and this resulted in another change of the male character from one filled with ambition to one who slowly grasped the horror of its consequences.

Lastly, by the end of the play, Macbeth becomes hopeless. Upon hearing of his wife’s death, he proclaims that “life is but a walking shadow”. This metaphor shows that, no matter how hard you try, being a flashback to the protagonist’s elaborate schemes such as killing the King and anyone else who stood in his way, it is all meaningless. The noun “shadow” implies something that can never be caught, slipping away from one’s grasp. After Macbeth realises his hamartia, his fatal flaw, which had been his ambition, he begins to have nihilistic views on everything that he’s known. And even though he fits to the end, the fact that he had accepted his defeat ultimately proves his last change as a character: from an ambitious tyrant to a man who has lost all meaning in life.

This response is a clearly exploratory approach to the question which achieves most of Level 6 due to the focus on ideas and also some extremely pertinent analyses of methods that are woven into the response throughout. This student does not waste words but instead provides a focused, purposeful answer to the question that highlights a deep level of understanding of themes and ideas and also uses the plot as their organisational structure, which is highly relevant given that the supporting extract comes from Act 5 of the play. References to the text are apt and well-selected, although this is the one small area in which the response might have achieved all of **Level 6. 29 marks (Grade 9) AO4 = 4 marks**

## ADD EXTRACT FROM PAST PAPER

Read the following extract from Act 3 Scene 1 of Macbeth and then answer the question that follows. At this point in the play, Macbeth is thinking of his feelings about Banquo.

	<b>MACBETH</b>	To be thus is nothing,
		But to be safely thus. Our fears in Banquo
		Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature
		Reigns that which would be feared. 'Tis much he dares,
5		And to that dauntless temper of his mind,
		He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour
		To act in safety. There is none but he,
		Whose being I do fear; and under him
		My genius is rebuked, as it is said
10		Mark Antony's was by Caesar. He chid the sisters
		When first they put the name of king upon me
		And bade them speak to him. Then prophet-like,
		They hailed him father to a line of kings.
		Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown
15		And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
		Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,
		No son of mine succeeding. If't be so,
		For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind;
		For them, the gracious Duncan have I murdered,
20		Put rancours in the vessel of my peace
		Only for them, and mine eternal jewel
		Given to the common enemy of man,
		To make them kings, the seeds of Banquo kings.
		Rather than so, come Fate into the list,
25		And champion me to th'utterance. Who's there?

Starting with this speech, explore how Shakespeare presents Macbeth's fears.  
Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents Macbeth's fears in this speech
- how Shakespeare presents Macbeth's fears in the play as a whole.

[30 marks]  
AO4 [4 marks]

## Response 9

It is evident from early in the play that Macbeth holds room for fear as when he hears the witches' prophecies, he is intrigued – only he lacks 'the illness that should attend' the actions required to become king. This metaphor used by Lady Macbeth in her soliloquy after she discovers the prophecies highlights how Macbeth does have 'ambition', he just lacks the courage or stereotypical masculine features that would enable him to murder Duncan. Thus suggesting that fear could have been one factor getting the better of Macbeth at the beginning. Although Macbeth overcomes this fear by murdering Duncan, it is made clear that one fear now turns towards fear of Banquo's son's becoming kings, as mentioned in the witches' prophecies. In the extract, Macbeth states how there is 'none but he, but being I do fear'. The explicit use of the adjective 'fear' indicates that Macbeth is a character who presents fear. In fact, he is presented as very insecure because he feels the need to take the prophecies into his own hands, and use his free will to become king. He is uncomfortable in allowing prophecies to come true over time, mirroring a sense of fear that they won't come true. A Jacobean audience would have been mortified to know that Macbeth had disrupted the Divine Right of Kings to fulfill desires prompted by the supernatural. James I wrote that any supernatural was evil, so for an audience to see Macbeth so

dedicated to the 'imperfect speakers' would have been absurd. If anything, a Jacobean audience would expect Macbeth to have fear towards the supernatural or the consequences of his actions.

In the extract, it is made clear that Macbeth murdering Duncan had put 'rancours in one vessel of [his] peace'. The metaphor reflects how the murder of Duncan had disrupted Macbeth's peace, which could be suggesting that Macbeth does have some fear towards the consequences of his actions. Alternatively, it could be presenting a slight sense of guilt through the mentioning of the word vessel. Vessels connote to blood, and blood is used throughout the play as a symbol for guilt. As a religious society, the Jacobeans would certainly expect Macbeth to feel guilt and fear his 'deep damnation' as the consequences of his actions. As the play progresses, Macbeth's fear of losing the title of being king (once he becomes king) gets to intense that he murders the innocent wife and child of Macduff. They are 'savagely slaughtered', mirroring how a mixture of fear, ambition and desire have possessed Macbeth into becoming a wicked tyrant. The simile implies that Macduff's innocent 'wife and babe' had a painful and brutal death. Furthermore, the adverb 'savagely' emphasises the wicked, merciless and evil character Macbeth has turned into. A Jacobean audience may have believed this was a result of Macbeth's engagement with the supernatural, leading him down a dark path. Additionally, they would have been horrified to hear of a man to be as reckless to not only murder a king, but an innocent family too. A woman and child would not have been seen as such a threat, so one may be of the opinion that Macbeth had no reason to act so carelessly. However, this could be a result of his fear in losing control. Macbeth may have got so caught up in the idea of power, status and kingship that he feared a life without it, in which he completely lost sight of all this when he allowed ambition to overcome him.

In conclusion, I believe Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a character with a significant amount of fear, as well as ambition. Although both of these traits can be good in some people, it is evidently clear that is not the case with Macbeth. Macbeth fears the wrong things, such as losing control or not becoming king, causing him to do merciless murderings throughout the play. Macbeth should have had fear towards the supernatural instead, perhaps that wouldn't have led him to his tragedy.

The candidate begins their response by introducing the idea of fear from earlier in the play, which enables them to develop a detailed response that focuses very precisely on the key idea of the task. The discussion of the extract refers to relevant details from the play, showing the candidate's ability to use the whole text and select apt references to support their discussion of Macbeth's fears. The comment about fear linked to ambition in the penultimate paragraph shows real appreciation of ideas and overall this is a confident, thorough response to the task that uses the text extremely effectively as support for ideas. Further development of some of the ways Shakespeare presents Macbeth's fears would have secured a mark at the top of Level 5. **23 marks (Approx. Grade 8) AO4 = 4 marks**

## Response 12

Throughout Macbeth, Shakespeare explores Macbeth's fears through his relationship with his wife, his friends, his own mortality, and the destiny supposedly meant for him, all while touching on greater ideas of appropriate kingship, the 'Great Chain of Being' and the supernatural.

In this extract, Shakespeare presents Macbeth's fears through the way he speaks of the witches and his own position. Macbeth worries that his succession was perhaps in vain, and that his reign might be shortlived as he describes the 'fruitless crown' and 'barren sceptre' the witches have supposedly supplied him with. The words 'fruitless' and 'barren' connote a sense of emptiness, and are suggestive of Macbeth's worries that his ruthless road to succession was perhaps in vain, if the power and authority it entails proves to be 'fruitless'. Importantly, this is a soliloquy of Macbeth, a time where he is alone, and can afford to speak true, which emphasises his worries in this scene as he speaks only to himself.

In the play as a whole, Shakespeare presents Macbeth's fears through his recognition of a disruption in natural order. Shakespeare uses Macbeth, as a whole, to explore themes of the 'Great Chain of Being', and ideas discussed in the 'Dream of Scipio' by Cicero, in which the Earth lies at the centre of a number of spheres, which contain different entities, like God, angels, animals, etc. Crucially, these spheres are interlinked, and are shown to be through the ripple effect Macbeth has caused through his transgressions. Macbeth worries about this disruption of order, talking about dead people 'rising again' and even to the point of 'pushing us from our stools'. In the latter quote, Shakespeare uses a metaphor

with double meaning to emphasise Macbeth's worry – he is literally 'pushed' from his stool when he sees Banquo in his seat at the Banquet, and worries that he'll soon be 'pushed' from his 'stool', which is the throne. Shakespeare intertwines ideas of disruption of the macrocosm and Macbeth's actions to demonstrate the magnitude of his actions.

Furthermore, Shakespeare presents Macbeth's fears further in Macbeth's soliloquy at the end of the play. The use of 'tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow' serves as testament to Macbeth's soliloquy, whereby he realises that his whole life is ruined and that he's truly damned. The repetition of 'tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow' and its slow vowel sounds are reflective of his life having also slowed down, now at a 'petty pace', and his now nihilistic attitude towards his life. His use of 'Out, brief candle' echoes Lady Macbeth's 'Out, out damned spot', and places them in parallel as they recognise their actions and damnations.

Shakespeare continues to present Macbeth's fears through his relationship with fate and the witches. Shakespeare has left the role of fate ambiguous throughout Macbeth, as he blurs the lines between destiny and free will. Importantly for Macbeth, however, he regards fate and the witches as his 'insurance' of sorts, ever since he hears the witches' prophecy and that '[he] shall be king', and only realises towards the end of his life that he's been misled through both his own ambition and the witches' prophecy. He uses 'to doubt th' equivocation of the fiend, that lies like truth' to suggest his own recognition and worry about the fact he's been, or has himself, led astray. The use of 'lies like truth' is reflective of the dual and ambiguous note of the witches' prophecy, and further sets Macbeth up as a tragic character as sympathy from the audience is evoked through his now isolated and 'damned' state.

Finally, Macbeth's fears are explored by Shakespeare through his relationship with Banquo. In the extract provided Macbeth mentions Banquo as one 'with a wisdom that doth guide his valour/To act in safety', which sets him up as a point of comparison to Macbeth. Banquo is 'wise', 'rational', and less inclined to act for personal ambition, all traits which Macbeth worries about, as he says 'there is none but he whose being do I fear'. A stress on 'he' is emphatic of the high regard Macbeth holds for Banquo in some respects, as Macbeth worries, and is perhaps even jealous, of Banquo's mental fortitude and restraint.

In overview, Shakespeare explores Macbeth's fears throughout the play in every stage of his life, as he progresses to the throne, and eventually to his demise. Shakespeare weaves together ideas of the disruption of the natural order, fate, and Macbeth's own mortality to emphasise his various emotions in light of the recognition of his transgressions.

This response begins with a clear opening thesis statement that serves as a strong foundation for the essay as well as enabling the candidate to focus precisely on the question. The discussion of the extract in the second paragraph includes some apt references to support ideas and demonstrate the candidate's understanding of Macbeth's fears. By the end of the third paragraph, the discussion of macrocosm shows deep engagement with contextual ideas and this is further developed in the subsequent paragraph which shows how much the candidate understands the ways that Shakespeare is presenting Macbeth's gradual fall. This is a sophisticated, confident and conceptual response to the question that demonstrates a high level of understanding of the play and achieves the maximum marks available for this task. **30 marks (Grade 9)**

**AO4 = 4 marks**



Read the following extract from Act 2 Scene 2 of Macbeth and then answer the question that follows. At this point in the play, Macbeth has murdered Duncan and has returned to Lady Macbeth.

	<b>MACBETH</b>	Methought I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep no more: Macbeth does murder sleep', the innocent sleep, Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care, The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
5		Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course, Chief nourisher in life's feast.
	<b>LADY MACBETH</b>	What do you mean?
	<b>MACBETH</b>	Still it cried, 'Sleep no more' to all the house; 'Glamis hath murdered sleep', and therefore Cawdor
10		Shall sleep no more: Macbeth shall sleep no more.
	<b>LADY MACBETH</b>	Who was it, that thus cried? Why, worthythane, You do unbend your noble strength to think So brain-sickly of things. Go get some water And wash this filthy witness from your hand.
15		Why did you bring these daggers from the place? They must lie there. Go carry them and smear The sleepy grooms with blood.
	<b>MACBETH</b>	I'll go no more. I am afraid to think what I have done;
20		Look on't again, I dare not.
	<b>LADY MACBETH</b>	Infirm of purpose! Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead Are but as pictures; 'tis the eye of childhood That fears a painted devil. If he do bleed,
25		I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal, For it must seem their guilt.

Starting with this conversation, explore how Shakespeare presents the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents their relationship in this extract
- how Shakespeare presents the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in the play as a whole.

[30 marks]  
AO4 [4 marks]

### Response 8

Shakespeare presents the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as equal and passionate at the start of the play but uses imperatives and structure to explore how they manipulate each other throughout the play.

Shakespeare uses repetition of imperative verbs in the extract to present the relationship between Lady Macbeth and Macbeth as controlling. Lady Macbeth commands Macbeth to 'go' and get her water and 'Go' and carry away the daggers. The repetitive use of this imperative verb suggests a level of control in the Macbeth's relationship with Lady Macbeth having a significant amount of power. Macbeth refuses Lady Macbeth's orders, however, he will 'go no more'. This refusal demonstrates a level of domineering in their relationship suggesting conflict as they constantly try to control one another. Lady Macbeth's commanding of her husband would have shocked Shakespearean audiences as women of the Jacobean era were viewed as inferior and 'supposed' to behave submissively. Lady Macbeth's controlling role in the Macbeth's relationship allows her character to subvert gender roles of the time the play is set and present her as having a majority of the power in her marriage.

Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as holding most of the power in her marriage by using manipulative language to control Macbeth in the extract as well as throughout the play. Lady Macbeth asks Macbeth 'why' 'he unbends' his 'noble strength' after murdering Duncan. This method of questioning manipulates Macbeth by undermining his abilities. Asking him 'why' forces Macbeth to question himself while doubting his previous actions. The contrast of 'unbend'ing his 'strength' which

Lady Macbeth declares 'noble' allows her to manipulate his feelings by effectively glavinising him into doing her bidding. The way she can so easily use language to control Macbeth demonstrates Lady Macbeth's manipulative role in their marriage. Lady Macbeth also questions Macbeth's manhood while convincing him to murder King Duncan. She asks if he is a 'man'; this challenging of Macbeth's masculinity forces him to do as his wife commands in order not to appear a 'coward'. This also demonstrates the power Lady Macbeth has in their marriage as well as how much Macbeth values her opinion.

Shakespeare presents Macbeth as reliant on Lady Macbeth and demonstrates how he uses her cunning to advantage himself in the play through the use of language and structure. In the extract, Macbeth is shocked at the fact he has committed regicide and admits to his wife that he is 'afraid to think what' he has 'done'. This confession demonstrates that he trusts Lady Macbeth enough to admit his fear to her as well as the fact that he is reliant on her for reassurance. The use of the adjective 'afraid' suggest Macbeth is appalled at his own actions and possibly scared of himself. Voicing his fearful thoughts to his wife illustrates his role of relying on her in their relationship. This is demonstrated when Macbeth refers to Lady Macbeth as his 'partner of greatness' in his letter to her in Act One. Macbeth uses the noun 'greatness' in his correspondence to make Lady Macbeth feel she is his equal. However, he addresses her often in prose rather than iambic pentameter undermining his apparent belief that they are equal in their relationship. In the Shakespearean period, iambic pentameter was used to address higher classes hence when Duncan names 'noble Banquo, that hast no less deserved' and prose was used when speaking to those of lower social class. When Macbeth uses this structure of speech to address his wife, he directly contradicts the meaning of his words with their structure. The noun 'partner' suggesting equality between them while the use of prose counter this prospect. This use of manipulation over his wife allows Macbeth to encourage Lady Macbeth to plot Duncan's murder which demonstrates his power in their relationship especially while being a man and holding soceital power over Lady Macbeth in the Jacobean era.

Shakespeare uses cold language to demonstrate Macbeth's lack of care for Lady Macbeth. When Macbeth discovers Lady Macbeth is dead he appears indifferent, claiming 'she should have died hereafter'. This cold language suggests Macbeth stopped caring about his wife in his quest for power. He comes across as indifferent believing she would 'have died' anyway. This lack of affection and crassness on Macbeth's part suggest their relationship became dispassionate and loveless in Macbeth's over ambition to rule Scotland tyrannically.

In conclusion, Shakespeare's use of structure and language presented the relationship between the Mabeths' as controlling and domineering with both parties subtly manipulating eachother; ultimately resulting in a loveless marriage and death.

This response develops as it goes, building from identifying methods and showing some awareness of ideas to a developed, thoughtful response to task by the end. In the first few paragraphs the candidate is making supported comments about the relationship using appropriate references and the identification of the effects of language use. There are some generalised comments on 'gender roles' that are not particularly well developed. The candidate presents a much better AO3 point when talking about power relationships between the Macbeths and supports this idea effectively. Use of referencing becomes skilful and apt as the candidate moves into a discussion of later in the play, and towards the end there is clear evidence of a thoughtful, detailed response to the question with the comments on Macbeth's attitude to the death of his wife and what that demonstrates about how his ambition has affected their relationship. In order to secure the whole of Level 5, perhaps the candidate could have developed some of their AO2 comments and linked these to ideas in more detail. **Some Level 5 = 22 marks (Approx. high Grade 7) AO4 = 4 marks**

## Response 10

In William Shakespeare's famous tragedy, Macbeth, the relationship between the eponymous protagonist and his "fiend-like queen" is presented as being ambiguous in its basis. The conventional view of the union posits that Lady Macbeth is a cruel and domineering figure whose emasculating jibes provoke her husband to commit an unimaginable crime against nature and the God of classic theology. According to this interpretation, there is a grave imbalance of power within their relationship created solely by flaws within Lady Macbeth's own character. However, an alternative view might suggest that

the love between the two is a powerful uniting force that allows their relationship to securely transcend contemporary norms. According to this interpretation, the imbalance in their relationship is a manifestation of a natural ebb-and-flow rhythm of power within human interactions.

Lady Macbeth and her husband are often linked in their sinful act to the Biblical figures of Adam and Eve – reinforced by Shakespeare's reference to original sin in the Lady's line "look like the innocent flower but be the serpent under it". However, where Milton's Adam and Eve battle over their culpability for the act warranting their expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Lady Macbeth and her husband "cling" to one another – reference to "two spent swimmers" in the second scene of Act 2 foreshadowing their dependence upon one another. It is only when Macbeth's proclivity for brutality becomes so intense that it overshadows his love for his wife in the final two acts of the play that their relationship deteriorates. Preoccupied by the predictions of the "imperfect speakers" Shakespeare dubs "the weird sister", Macbeth's relationship with his wife feels a cessation in intimate communication. When we return to Lady Macbeth after a long period of her absence from the stage in Act 5, she is in the throes of madness. Her husband has excluded her from his counsel and in doing so severed the intimacy within their relationship. She remains dependent upon a figure that has spurned her input, despite once referring to her as his "dearest chuck" and it is this, more so than remorse, that drives her to suicide. The intensity of her reaction to this dependency upon an absent figure can be interpreted as a clear demonstration of the strength of feeling within their relationship, one literary device Shakespeare uses to emphasise their intimate connection is intertextual reference. When in Act 2, Scene 2 Macbeth refers to the inability of "all great Neptune's oceans" to cleanse his hands of blood, this is directly referenced during the scene in which the extent of Lady Macbeth's psychological degeneration is revealed. She hallucinates a "spot" of blood on her hand that no substance – not even all the Arabic "perfumes" – can cleanse from her "little hand". This use of intertextuality has two key purposes. First, Shakespeare may be attempting to portray Lady Macbeth as subsuming her husband's guilt in a final demonstration of her love. She has taken on the "spot" of guilt with the capability of rendering the "multitudinous seas incarnadine" out of love, and it is this act of love that provokes her suicide – she cannot bear to live with the guilt of the murders she has taken on; those of Banquo, "The Thane of Fife[s] ... wife" and King Duncan. Second, Shakespeare may be attempting to create a dichotomy between their perspectives. Here Macbeth makes use of nature imagery of the vast province of the Roman God Neptune, highlighting his awareness of and powerlessness in the face of the innate rhythms of the natural world, Lady Macbeth makes reference to frivolities – "perfumes". This juxtaposition feeds into the cultural pedigree of misogyny whereby women were seen as possessing little ability to comprehend the complexity of the world around them. Shakespeare could also be attempting to link this dichotomy of world view to their perspectives on kingship. Where Lady Macbeth craves the temporary transient "crown", Macbeth desires a sense of natural permanence in his authority. However, despite these differences of opinion, the intertextual parallels between their two statements is a clear indication of the depth of their connection.

In the extract, the dynamic between the Macbeths is presented as more similar that of a mother and son than that of two equal partners within a relationship. Lady Macbeth chastises her hysterical husband, the semantic field of childhood clear in her reprimands – "tis the eye of childhood / That fears a painted devil." To Lady Macbeth, her husband's achievements within the King's militia are immaterial to her understanding of him as "infirm of purpose". She seizes control of the scene by agreeing to "gild the faces" of the King's guards to frame them for his murder in much the same way as a mother might be expected to rectify her son's mistakes. Shakespeare's choice of the verb "gild" here appears to indicate Lady Macbeth's awareness of and pride of the violent foundations of their future reign. It is the spillage of "blood" that will "gild" their futures within the royal sphere. This scene is but one of many in which Lady Macbeth adopts a tainted maternal role – both in relation to her husband and within the narrative as a whole.

To many scholars and critics, Lady Macbeth is viewed as the 'anti-mother'. She demands for her "milk" ("of human kindness") to be replaced with the bitterness of "gall" in her famous Act 1, Scene 5 soliloquy. As "milk" is so often associated with nurturance, her perversion of her biological ability to nurture could be linked to her assertion that she will imbue her husband with her "spirits". Using the very visceral metaphor of breastfeeding, Lady Macbeth depicts an Oedipal dynamic within her relationship with her husband where in she nurtures his "black and deep desires" with her "gall". Furthermore, in the same soliloquy, Lady Macbeth makes heavy use of maternal imagery, albeit through a subversive lens. She references a "keen knife" and "the sound it makes" in "potential allusions to childbirth by Caesarean

incision of the abdomen. Again, her reference to “the blanket of dark” could be interpreted by feminist critics as an allusion to the protective dark of the womb. When the land is later in “darkness entombed”, Shakespeare may be attempting to present Scotland as being within Lady Macbeth’s metaphorical womb – the womb of “direst cruelty”. However, what Lady Macbeth births is not new life, it is death. Burdened by her apocryphal inability to bear children, she resorts to bearing the presence of regicide within medieval Scotland. She is the anti-mother both to her childlike husband and the country she serves, further enforcing the Oedipal presentation of the Macbeth’ relationship.

The Macbeths’ relationship is unorthodox and could be interpreted as grotesque in its allusions to the ancient tale of Oedipus Rex – further completed by the Macbeth’s reference to “pluck [ing] out mine eyes”. However, their love for one another acts as a powerful unifying force that allows their connection to withstand in the mind of Lady Macbeth even after a cessation of intimate communication between the pair. Shakespeare does not present the relationships between the Macbeths as ideal yet the strength of the bond they have, separated from the power imbalances and Oedipal complexities of their relationship, could easily be seen as loving and aspirational.

This is a highly sophisticated, conceptualised and exploratory response to task. From the start, the candidate demonstrates keen insight into ideas and has a perspective on the play that is extremely perceptive. Ideas and contextual factors are seamlessly integrated into a powerful, articulate argument and it is very clear that this candidate has taken an overview of the play in terms of a contextual framework. There is forensic analysis of judicious moments and language features that are woven into an overall argument that is persuasive, articulate and focused. This response achieves the maximum mark available and is an example of skill level not normally seen at GCSE. **All Level 6 = 30 marks (Grade 9) AO4 = 4 marks**



Read the following extract from Act 5 Scene 1 of Macbeth and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play, the Doctor and the Gentlewoman watch Lady Macbeth sleepwalking.

- LADY MACBETH** Out, damned spot! Out, I say! One, two. Why then 'tis time to do't. Hell is murky. Fie, my lord, fie, a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account? Yet who would have thought the old
- 5 man to have had so much blood in him?
- DOCTOR** Do you mark that?
- LADY MACBETH** The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now? What, will these hands ne'er be clean? No more o'that, my Lord, no more o'that. You mar all with this starting.
- 10 **DOCTOR** Go to, go to; you have known what you should not.
- GENTLEWOMAN** She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of that. Heaven knows what she has known.
- LADY MACBETH** Here's the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. O, O, O.
- 15 **DOCTOR** What a sigh is there! The heart is sorely charged.
- GENTLEWOMAN** I would not have such a heart in my bosom for the dignity of the whole body.
- DOCTOR** Well, well, well –
- GENTLEWOMAN** Pray God it be, sir.
- 20 **DOCTOR** This disease is beyond my practice; yet I have known those which have walked in their sleep who have died holily in their beds.
- LADY MACBETH** Wash your hands, put on your night-gown, look not so pale. I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he cannot
- 25 come out on's grave.
- DOCTOR** Even so?
- LADY MACBETH** To bed, to bed; there's knocking at the gate. Come, come, come, come, give me your hand; what's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed.

'Lady Macbeth is a female character who changes during the play.'

Starting with this moment in the play, explore how far you agree with this view.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth in this extract
- how far Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as a female character who changes in the play as a whole.

[30 marks]  
AO4 [4 marks]

### Response 3

Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as a female character who has ultimately been consumed by guilt after the influence on Macbeth for committing treason including murder and regicide. Shakespeare's use of the repetition "Out, damned spot. Out I say!" highlights the impact of the "blood" that has been spilled. Lady Macbeth's conscience can't deal with these horrific thoughts, implying that there is no way back; Shakespeare emphasises what murder can do to a person and the negative impact it has. However, an alternative interpretation is that perhaps this "spot" that's part of her, is a symbol of her evil and could be linked to her as being a witch herself. The contemporary audience would have believed that witches have this treacherous "damned spot" somewhere on their body, symbolising their possession with demon-like "spirits". By using sinister imagery, Shakespeare portrays Lady Macbeth as a wicked, eerie female character.

Furthermore, Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as a character that has experienced the torture of committing regicide and treason. Shakespeare depicts the character of Lady Macbeth by using more imagery of "blood" all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand". Shakespeare's use of the juxtaposition "perfumes", which connotes a nice fragrance of delight, directly contrasts with "blood" and

her “disease” of sleepwalking mysteriously. Shakespeare creates a sense of serious unease and torture for Lady Macbeth, further emphasising Lady Macbeth’s negative transformation, due to her violence and uncontrolled ambition.

Shakespeare also demonstrates the theme of deception in this extract. Lady Macbeth seems to be convincing herself to do this “look not so pale” Shakespeare’s use of this monosyllabic phrase builds up momentum and rhythm, further emphasised with “wash your hands”. Lady Macbeth is trying to get rid of her thoughts of regicide and murder, however, here, Shakespeare employs dramatic irony as the audience we can see this “blood” as a psychological and spiritual metaphor for her deep regret in her unforgiveable sins, not a physical factor that she can just “wash” off, it will stay in her mind and conscience. By using these monosyllabic sentences, Shakespeare implies the overwhelming thoughts and regrets in Lady Macbeth’s conscience and mind.

At the beginning of the play, Shakespeare portrays Lady Macbeth as a character, who due to her ambition, is willing to become Queen, by upsetting the balance in natural order. Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as being powerful “unsex me here”. By employing this phrase, Shakespeare depicts Lady Macbeth as a character who wants to take on the role of male dominance in a patriarchal society. By doing this, she can have the power and strength men have to commit treacherous acts of murder. The contemporary audience would be quite shocked as the stereotypical view of women in society is that they are vulnerable and can’t harness the power and strength that men contain.

Shakespeare also portrays Lady Macbeth in a powerful state through the use of the phrase “when you durst do it, you were a man”. By attacking Macbeth’s male prowess, Lady Macbeth influences him to commit regicide and further acts of treason. Shakespeare depicts Lady Macbeth as this uncontrollable, powerful source who negatively impacts and influences Macbeth. By aligning Lady Macbeth with the devil, through the use of the semantic field of “spirits”, Shakespeare demonstrates how Lady Macbeth is clearly possessed – however at the end even nature reacts horribly to it, as she doesn’t even contain the power to go to sleep.

Shakespeare’s employment of the phrase “golden round” further emphasis cyclical nature of her situation. She goes from being all-powerful, to expressing guilt at the end of the play. Here, Shakespeare explores the impact of ambition, guilt greed and power on Lady Macbeth, further emphasising the consequences of regicide.

The opening paragraph demonstrates a candidate who has a secure grasp of the task, with a sound treatment of the symbolism of ‘spot’. The subsequent analysis of monosyllabic sentences is tied closely to interpretation of meaning / ideas, demonstrating a clear exploration of methods here. Although rooted in the extract, the candidate uses elements from the passage to demonstrate their knowledge of the play as a whole, and presents a very developed, thoughtful response throughout with the AO2 elements moving this into level 6. The opening thesis provided a strong foundation and perhaps returning to this with an evaluative lens might have secured a mark higher in the level 6 range. **Into Level 6 = 26 marks (Grade 9) AO4 = 4 marks**

Read the following extract from Act 1 Scene 2 of *Macbeth* and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play, the Captain tells Duncan about Macbeth's part in the recent battle.

**CAPTAIN**

Doubtful it stood,  
 As two spent swimmers that do cling together  
 And choke their art. The merciless Macdonald –  
 Worthy to be a rebel, for to that  
 5 The multiplying villainies of nature  
 Do swarm upon him – from the Western Isles  
 Of kerns and galloglasses is supplied,  
 And Fortune on his damnèd quarrel smiling,  
 Showed like a rebel's whore. But all's too weak,  
 10 For brave Macbeth – well he deserves that name –  
 Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel,  
 Which smoked with bloody execution,  
 Like Valour's minion carved out his passage  
 Till he faced the slave,  
 15 Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,  
 Till he unseamed him from the nave to th'chaps  
 And fixed his head upon our battlements.

Starting with this speech, explore how far Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a violent character.  
 Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents Macbeth in this extract
- how far Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a violent character in the play as a whole.

**[30 marks]**  
**AO4 [4 marks]**

**Response 4**

During the play 'Macbeth', Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a violent character in multiple ways for numerous contrasting purposes. Firstly, violent behaviour is valued highly by his subjects and the king, yet also is violent verbally due to his guilt and his ambition. However, it can be said the most significant way his violent attributes are portrayed are through the encouragement of his wife and the witches, the powerful females in the play.

In the extract, Macbeth is shown to be violent in battle, which is emphasised by the fact that another character is praising his so-called bravery. This is shown in the line 'brave Macbeth – well he deserves that name'. This is showing that he is praised for his violent valour and might, and exemplifies what it meant to be a man in the 17th century to a modern audience. Contextually in the Jacobean period, men were stereotypically violent and strong, as it was a symbol of their masculinity. They felt that it was their duty to be dominant, and whilst a modern audience may find this an unusual trait to want, men were just trying to adhere to their stereotype. This is also demonstrated in the line 'with his brandished steel, which smoked with bloody execution', suggesting that he has killed so many, his sword is steaming and smoking with violence. In addition 'steel' is a strong metal, so for Macbeth to have caused it to smoke highlights his violence. The use of the adjective 'bloody' also emphasises his violent behaviour. Thirdly, his violence is seen in the line 'he unseamed him from the nave to th'chaps' indicating that the action was almost effortless. It additionally suggests that Macbeth killed someone ruthlessly, from head to toe, something again that modern society would not praise, reward or appeal to, especially not with a new title 'Thane of Cawdor' later in the act. Shakespeare may have done this to show what was expected of a man in the 17th century and to make the audience feel somewhat sympathy for Macbeth, as he is seen as a victim of society's expectation.



Later in the play, we see Macbeth become violent verbally as well as physically as a product of his guilt. This can be first seen in the response to his wife's death and their evergrowing sour relationship. This is exemplified in the line 'she should have died hereafter'. This merciless insensitive tone indicates how far his mind has disintergrated from the beginning of the play and how guilt leads to violence. This can be contrasted with many things. First with his response and attitudes to his wife at the beginning of the play when it is stated 'dearest partner of greatness'. This implies an equality in the relationship and how this has been destroyed by the guilt of Macbeth's violent actions. In addition, it is juxtaposed with Macduff's response to his wife: 'But I must also feel it as a man.' The use of the verb 'feel' indicates he is more in touch with his emotions and that not everything breeds violence. Shakespeare may have done this to demonstrate how Macbeth has changed due to violence and the audience may respond by being afraid that people can change so quickly as a product of their violent ambitions.

Furthermore, his violent behaviour towards his former loyalists is a result of the encouragement from his wife. This can be seen in the line, 'do I hear thy Lord/who is too full o' th' milk of human kindness'. This shows that she fears his kindness, adhering to the feeling that men should be mentally violent due to stereotype. The use of the noun 'milk' makes the audience picture an image of purity and innocence due to its white colour, suggesting that Macbeth is too weak to achieve his ambitions, of being king, in a violent way. This can be why she turns to the supernatural to 'unsex' her, to allow for her to take his place and support him, as he is 'too' full, putting his kindness in a negative light. This is also seen in the way she emasculates him. This is seen in the line, 'sweep o'er your rugged looks/Be bright and jovial', introducing the theme of appearance and reality, as she encouraged him to be something he's not: positive about the situation. This is also seen in the witches, as he keeps returning to them for knowledge, to quench his dangerous curiosity. This is shown in the phrases 'But one word more' and 'Tell me more'. This suggests he is greedy to feed his violent ambitions and urges making the reader feel unsympathetic towards him. This is unusual for women in the 17th century, as they were expected to be submissive. However, as they couldn't publicly obtain as much power as a man, they rely on Macbeth's violence and status.

In conclusion, whilst the exploration of the quality of bravery and the effect of guilt and ambition upon his violent behaviour are extremely significant, the influence of the secretly strong female characters allows the playwright to explore ideas about women in the Jacobean period.

This is a good example of a response that builds from level 3 (explained response) up to the top of level 5 (detailed and developed) by the end. The candidate demonstrates some understanding of implicit ideas in the first and second paragraphs and starts to use references to support their relevant comments about the task. Ideas become clearly level 4 with the comment on Macbeth being 'a victim of society's expectation'. These comments become increasingly clear and the focus on task sustained, and the comments about Macduff move this into level 5 for a thoughtful response. This is consolidated with the treatment of the word 'milk' and by the end of the answer the candidate has achieved everything in level 5. In order to make further progress, focus on the text as a conscious construct would enable this candidate to move into level 6. **All Level 5 = 25 mark (Approx. Grade 8-9) AO4 = 4 marks**

## Response 5

Shakespeare presents Macbeth in this extract as violent. Yet his violent actions are applauded by others and they are seen to be a sign of Macbeth's bravery. This extract also establishes one of the main themes of the play; masculinity being linked to violence. The extract also foreshadows the ending of the play and Macbeth's downfall.

Shakespeare presents Macbeth as violent through use of language, "he unseamed him from the navel to the thighs". The word "unseamed" has particularly gruesome connotations. It suggests Macbeth is taking apart Macdonald. It has a finality. This emphasises to the audience what Macbeth is doing, he is taking a life. This could be hinting at the gravity of killing, suggesting that violence should not be excessive. Macbeth's violence by the end of the play of course becomes excessive.

The line, "fixed his head upon our battlements" is significant because this is ultimately what happens to Macbeth at the end of the play. The use of the cyclical structure could be reflective of how violence leads to a cycle of destruction. It could also reflect how violence will lead to Macbeth's downfall.



However Shakespeare also presents Macbeth as a brave and noble character whose violent deeds contribute to his bravery. The captain's speech sounds like an epic tale and it vividly brings alive Macbeth's bravery. The quote, "brave Macbeth – well he deserves that name," is significant. It suggests that masculinity is linked to violence and bravery throughout the play. Violence and masculinity are linked. Lady Macbeth calls on spirits to "unsex me" and make her masculine as she believes this will enable her to commit a violent act. Macbeth himself is manipulated into killing Duncan by Lady Macbeth when she insults his manhood. This links masculinity and violence. Shakespeare could be critiquing this idea of toxic masculinity through Macbeth.

The quote "brave Macbeth" is also significant because it shows that Macbeth is most comfortable on one battlefield. When he is using violence on the battlefield he doesn't have to question the morality of his actions. We see this at the end of the play when Macbeth, despite knowing he is doomed, fights bravely against Macduff. He returns briefly to the brave warrior seen at the beginning of the play.

The effect of the line, "brave Macbeth" is significant on the audience because by this point we know the witches are interested in Macbeth. The audience in Shakespeare's time would have seen the witches as deeply evil. Therefore the audience are left wondering why the witches want to associate with such a noble and brave character.

Shakespeare also establishes the motif of blood in this scene which he uses throughout the play to explore Macbeth's violent nature "smoked with bloody execution". Blood here is shown as being representative of Macbeth's skill and victory over his enemies. It represents his righteous violence. However as the play goes on the motif of blood develops to represent Macbeth's guilt. Macbeth later says, "I am in blood stopped so far". This shows how blood becomes representative of Macbeth's violent crimes.

The quote, "their art" seems to suggest that violence is an art. However through the use of simile, "as too spent swimmers that do cling together" suggests that Macbeth's violent nature will ultimately cause his downfall.

Shakespeare also presents Macbeth's violence as linked to fate through personification "Disdaining Fortune". This personification of fortune suggests that Macbeth's violent nature gave him control over fate. He was able to master it. Shakespeare could be making use of irony here as ultimately Macbeth's violent acts and nature seal his fate and downfall.

In conclusion Shakespeare does present Macbeth as a violent character here but crucially his violence is not for his own selfish needs. Shakespeare also establishes the theme of masculinity and violence here. Contextually it is important to remember Shakespeare wrote Macbeth after the Gunpowder Plot. He may have been warning against violence and trying to show ultimately violence leads to destruction and downfall of the perpetrators.

This is a well-structured, holistic and exploratory response to the task and to the play. Focus on task is clear from the start, and the use of references are supporting the developing argument very effectively. The treatment of structural elements moves into level 5 for its thoughtful handling of how the structure is linked to ideas. The comments about 'toxic masculinity' demonstrate real engagement with ideas and this becomes level 6 by the time the candidate is dealing with ideas about Macbeth as a soldier. Overall this is a response at the top of the range of performance for GCSE. **All Level 6 = 30 marks (Grade 9) AO4 = 4 marks**

## Response 8

Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a violent character in the extract and throughout the play through the use of hyperbolic language and graphic detail. He also presents the violence in his mind as he always resorts to violent situations.

In the extract, the captain describes Macbeth's action to the king sparing no detail. He states "with his brandished steel, which smoked with bloody execution" which suggests that his sword was designed for the murder of others. The sensory verb "smoked" further suggests the quickness of the fighting. Macbeth was so quick in his "execution" that the sword appeared to visibly smoke from it. For the audience it can connote the enthusiasm of Macbeth in the fight – and because we haven't yet met him

this is the only description we can gain of him. The description of “brandished steel” conveys the image of the sword and how prepared Macbeth was for this fight. Shakespeare intension is to imply that Macbeth is inherently violent from the beginning, he doesn’t shy away from violence. The effect on the audience would be that they admire his bravery and the captain’s description enhances the idea that Macbeth’s violence is a good thing.

Another way Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a violent character is by the effect of his actions. Captain states “as two spent swimmers that do cling together” which suggests that the enemies were wary of Macbeth’s wrath – they tired out easily and were holding on for dear life – the verb “cling” connotes the desperation. The quote gives the impression that Macbeth is a mighty force to be reckoned with and that he is loyal as he is prepared to fight for his country. He is called “brave Macbeth” that portrays his violent and superior nature. Again, his violence is seen as honourable because he shows loyalty and does not hesitate to kill the enemies. Shakespeare intends to create a glorifying image of Macbeth to make his downfall at the end of the play that much more shocking. His effect on others is always dramatic, like the captain states “two spent swimmers” connoting how Macbeth tires the army out.

However you could argue that Macbeth is only this violent because he is fighting out of loyalty. His bravery and outlandish actions of violence only occur to protect King Duncan. He doesn’t appear to have violent tendencies and is only graphic and harsh to win the fight. The statement “till he unseamed him from the nave to th’chaps” shows not only that he killed somebody violently, but that he did it to ensure that no enemies remained alive. His enthusiasm was to please the king. The part “from the nave to the chaps” is basically Macbeth cutting the people open – to make sure they are really dead. This will reassure him that he has done his job properly. You can link this to traditional Elizabethan beliefs about the Divine Right of kings: that a king was chosen by God to rule the country. This meant that the reign followed a succession and wasn’t to be meddled with. By knowing that King Duncan was appointed by God, Macbeth is showing his loyalty to God, not just the king. This makes him even more admirable and worthy. It makes him less of a violent character and more a person who instils violence for the better of Scotland.

In the rest of the play Macbeth is presented as having the incline to murder out of ambition. Despite his honourable nature in Act 1, the witches’ prophecies of kingship become tempting to Macbeth. However, he doesn’t immediately act on it, instead suggesting reasons for and against his idea. He does show his uncertainty through the regular use of euphemisms. He refers to the murder of Duncan as “th’assasination” to show that his inbuilt morals have trouble coming to terms with the idea of such dishonour. Macbeth knows deep down that what he desires can only come out of pure sin. Yet the witches persuade him to murder. So whilst evaluating his choices the audience recognise that Macbeth doesn’t like or enjoy violence. He knows that it is the only resort for power but dislikes the path that he is travelling down. Shakespeare wants to show that Macbeth has morals but he will start to lose them.

As the play progresses, after Macbeth’s fateful act of regicide, the audience can start to recognise that Macbeth is becoming more quick to violence. The language regularly references to murder and violence. After murdering Duncan, Macbeth states “me thought I heard a voice cry Macbeth doth murder sleep”. The idea that sleep has been murdered suggests that Shakespeare is showing Macbeth’s growing closer to becoming violent. It would’ve shocked a contemporary audience as it suggests that his action is so bad that he managed to murder sleep. This links to the regicide committed as Elizabethans believed that sleep was a reward from God for a hard day of labour. It was for those who were sinless. So the idea that Macbeth has murdered sleep conveys that he has sinned and displeased God. God appointed king Duncan as king and Macbeth murdered him – so he will never sleep. Ironically his actions effect his wife, Lady Macbeth, who suffers from sleep-walking in Act 5 because of her involvement with Macbeth in the murder. Shakespeare intends this to be shocking and a volta (turning point) in the character of Macbeth.

Macbeth becomes worse as we see him lie to his closest friend, Banquo, and to his wife about murdering Banquo. Macbeth becomes increasingly paranoid in nature and worries about the predictions of the witches. They tell him that Banquo that he’ll have “kings hereafter” and that he is “lesser than Macbeth but much greater” suggesting that his children will receive the throne. Although Banquo paid no attention to the prophecies because they’re “instruments of darkness”. Macbeth takes them very seriously and plans to murder Banquo. He doesn’t tell his wife instead endearing her: “Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck” which shows that he is driven so much by violence or the need for

violence he isolates his decisions from his wife. So he murders Banquo to satisfy his increasing paranoia and that leads him down a road of self-destruction and of demise. Shakespeare's intention is to show his connection to becoming more violent after committing his first murder.

Some could argue that Macbeth was never a violent character, that the actions and permission of Lady Macbeth made him violent. Her open masculinity and cold demeanour makes her influential in turning the doubtful and uncertain Macbeth into a murderer. She calls him a coward and chastises him into doing the deed, even after Macbeth tries to assert control by saying "We will proceed no further in this business". The imperative of "will" has no effect on his wife who is his equal at this point and doesn't take orders from him. By her goading him on to the deed, he becomes the violent and paranoid murderer that ends him. Her connection to the spirits: "fill me with the direst cruelty" make her more evil and violent than her husband – so she influences him pressing him with the idea to go through with regicide. So you could argue that he isn't a violent character, but he becomes one through influence.

To conclude, Shakespeare presents Macbeth as violent to an extent as he has morals and honour to begin with but starts to lose himself as power gets to his head.

This response begins in level 5 with an examination of the effect of the line 'smoked with bloody execution' which is very detailed and effective. By the third paragraph the focus on task is becoming thoughtful as the details used to respond to the task are increasingly used to support the ideas the candidate has selected to focus on. The handling of loyalty and violence demonstrate real focus on ideas and move the response clearly into level 5 by the end of this paragraph. As the candidate moves out to the text as a whole their focus becomes exploratory in response to the task and to the text. Focus on ideas about violence root the response clearly in level 6 for AO3, and the analysis of Macbeth's language are linked to an exploration of their effects. Overall, this is a very good example of a response working that achieves all level 6 by the end.  
**All Level 6 = 30 marks (Grade 9) AO4 = 4 marks**

Read the following extract from Act 1 Scene 3 of Macbeth and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play, after receiving The Witches' prophecies, Macbeth and Banquo have just been told that Duncan has made Macbeth Thane of Cawdor.

	<b>BANQUO</b>
	But 'tis strange, And oftentimes, to win us to our harm, The instruments of darkness tell us truths; Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
5	In deepest consequence. – Cousins, a word, I pray you.
	<b>MACBETH [Aside]</b>
	Two truths are told, As happy prologues to the swelling act Of the imperial theme. – I thank you, gentlemen. –
10	This supernatural soliciting Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill, Why hath it given me earnest of success, Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.
15	If good, why do I yield to that suggestion, Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair And make my seated heart knock at my ribs Against the use of nature? Present fears Are less than horrible imaginings.
20	My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical, Shakes so my single state of man that function Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is, But what is not.

Starting with this moment in the play, explore how Shakespeare presents the attitudes of Macbeth and Banquo towards the supernatural.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents the attitudes of Macbeth and Banquo towards the supernatural in this extract
- how Shakespeare presents the attitudes of Macbeth and Banquo towards the supernatural in the play as a whole.

**[30 marks]**  
**AO4 [4 marks]**

## Response 2

In Act 1 Scene 3 of Macbeth, Shakespeare presents Macbeth as being curious and sceptical towards the supernatural's prophecies. He knows they are "instruments of darkness" but and that he should take caution against them, however their "supernatural soliciting" has unlocked his ambition and desires making him want to know more. Banquo on the otherhand is portrayed by Shakespeare as being wary of the supernatural. He sees them as wicked and decieving beings who should not be meddled with.

In the play, Banquo describes the witches as being "instruments of darkness". "Darkness" is contrasted to white which has connotations of purity and nature. this could suggest that "darkness portrays sense of evil and horror in the readers mind. By describing them this way, Banquo may indicate that the witches are tools of evil used by satan to manipulate and decieve people. This is later reinforced when he stays cautious of the supernatural and warns Macbeth that they will try to "win us with honest trifles to betrays in deepest consequences". This could suggest that Banquo knows the supernatural are setting a trap in



which Macbeth will fall into, manipulating him and converting him into a deceiving being which ultimately leads to his tragic downfall.

Later on in the text Macbeth says to himself that “this supernatural soliciting cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill, why hath it given earnest of success”. This could imply that Macbeth’s curiosity has gotten the better of him. He begins to question whether it is a good thing or a bad thing that the witches have prophesied his future. He knows not to trust them as they were widely feared like in 1606 when the play was written, people would go on witchhunts to burn the messengers of satan. However, he cannot help but listen and believe all the good things they say about his future. An alternative reading of this is that Macbeth is sceptical. Even though they have given him good fortune, they cannot be trusted as they are witches who are deceiving beings.

Earlier in the novel, Banquo describes them as being “so withered and wild in their attire that look not like the inhabitants of the earth”. This could suggest that the witches are not of human nature and are abnormal. This could have been orchestrated by Shakespeare to emphasise how mysterious the witches are and to instill fear into the original audience of 1606 who feared the supernatural.

Furthermore, earlier on in the novel, Macbeth begs the witches to “stay you imperfect speaker”. This would indicate that Macbeth’s ambition has taken control of him making him want to know more of how he is to become king and when; suggesting he is eager to rise above his class. This was looked down upon as in the Jacobean era, to want to rise above your class was going against God’s word and the Great Chain of Being as people believed God put you in your place for a reason. Shakespeare may have done this to make the audience acknowledge that Macbeth’s heart is stained.

Overall, Shakespeare presents Macbeth in this scene as a curious character revealing his true colours, and his ambition. Banquo on the other hand is portrayed by Shakespeare as a noble character, wary of the supernatural and cautious of where his friends curiosity might get him.

This response moves into level 5 for the way the candidate has responded to the task overall, and how their focus on ideas enables them to develop some considered comments. There is clear knowledge of the play as a whole and the focus on attitudes towards the supernatural is sustained throughout. In order to move into a more secure level 5, perhaps this candidate might want to focus more on some of the ways in which Shakespeare presents ideas. **Some Level 5 = 22 marks (Approx. high Grade 7) AO4 = 4 marks**

#### Response 4

In the play, Shakespeare presents the supernatural as to something which inverts and subverts morals through the use of manipulation, and an understanding of the weaknesses of their specific interlockers, and overall as a catalyst for what causes the protagonist’s downfall.

In the extract, the audience is immediately made aware of Banquo’s doubts towards the supernatural, making a remark of how ‘tis strange’. The use of this immediate doubt from Banquo signifies to the audience perhaps his perception for hindsight. This is further amplified by the objectification of the witches as those of ‘instruments’, perhaps a foreshadow of later in the play, where it is clear the witches essentially act as ‘puppeteers’ towards the protagonists. This is further accentuated by using the objectification in relation to ‘darkness’, allowing the audience to understand the underlying evil of the supernatural, alternatively this could be a remark on Shakespeare’s attitude towards the supernatural, or what he is trying to convey throughout the play: the supernatural may tempt those, but ultimately humans are free to resist.

In terms of Macbeth in this extract, in relation to the supernatural being a catalyst for guilt, we are immediately made aware of his eagerness towards the witches’ prophecies, and arguably the naïve reaction. Within the extract we notice a semantic field of contrasting language between the mention of the advantages that come from the supernatural contrasted with the mention of potential consequences as a result. This can be seen through elaborating on the supernatural, mentioning ‘cannot be ill, cannot be good’. This quote ultimately reflects ‘fair is foul and foul is fair’, a paradox used initially in the novel by the witches, establishing the way they subvert morality, whilst also noting on the key theme throughout the novel of appearance is reality, of which the supernatural play a huge role in. This relation by Macbeth in regards to the prophecies establishes to the reader the inherent traits of the supernatural, how

those willing will immediately begin to revert to their traits, how those willing to be tempted will be consumed, of which explains how the supernatural impregnates Macbeth with the traits of ambition, and guilt of which lead directly to his demise.

This notion is accentuated by how Banquo ultimately rejects the prophecies, arguing how there will be 'deepest consequences', portraying to the audience how the supernatural can only impregnate those who are consumed by the temptation, not those who reject this.

The quick consumption by tempt seen in Macbeth is further portrayed by questioning 'against the use of nature'. This is a literal indication of how he will go against nature later in the play, by murdering Duncan he is committing a crime so great, against the Divine Right of Kings and ultimately God. The fact Shakespeare foreshadows this, with use of Macbeth questioning the idea portrays to the audience how Macbeth is naïve to what he is capable of, he is naïve to the transition he is about to embark on as a result of the manipulating and tempt inflicted on him by the witches.

In the play as a whole, we immediately notice Shakespeare's use of the supernatural, and Banquo's and Macbeth's reaction to these, to evoke a reaction from the audience. The play begins with the witches stating "When shall we three meet again", the structural device of the audience being unaware of what has come prior will quickly interest the audience. Further more, the Jacobean audience was highly superstitious, and had much interest in the concept of witches. It could be argued Shakespeare began his play with the supernatural in attempt to convey his attitudes towards society at the time, his use of supernatural throughout the play acts as a catalyst towards those downfalls, perhaps Shakespeare is trying to warn the audience, or alternatively criticise the notion of those who are 'inherently evil' instead suggesting those who are tempted, but we as a race are free to resist the power of evil, perhaps hinting at the Christocentric society.

When the audience first encounter the meeting between Banquo, Macbeth and the witches, Banquo remarks on their appearance, questioning "You are women, yet your beards forbid me to interpret you so", we know Shakespeare consistently had the roles of the witches played by elderly males. This highlighted to the audience the power of women, but through how to be powerful, their appearance must hint of those in power, arguably the use of this could be to criticise the society at the time, how if we continue to deprive women of education, and fester within inequality, women will have to revert to the supernatural to exert power on others.

Alternatively, this notion could be undermined by the description of the witches as "the weird sisters, hand in hand". The use of the witches being described as to be 'hand in hand' suggests women are reliant on each other, perhaps indicating a misogynistic point of view, as opposed to one for equality of women.

In terms of the supernatural exerting power on others, we can see this explicitly through the protagonist. Macbeth is utterly consumed by the manipulation of the witches, yet his attitude continues to portray a high level of trust. We are aware of the witches sparking the ambition in Macbeth, but what is particularly captivating for the audience is his denial of their wrong-doing. When in panic in the midst of his tyrannous leadership, he reverts to the witches for their apparitions, here exerting one of the crucial examples of appearance vs. reality. The witches state 'none of women born shall harm Macbeth', this immediately lulls Macbeth into a false sense of security, the witches appear to be stating Macbeth is indefeatable, of which is a key attitude he portrays towards the supernatural, as when reverting back for a sense of security, Macbeth states 'Deny me of this and I will curse light on you', effectively this makes apparent to the audience how Macbeth believes he has literally inherited the witch's powers, of which is further portrayed in Lady Macbeth stating "Thick night (could not) peep through the blanket of the dark" after calling on "spirits that tend mortal thoughts". We can see quite the sheer impact the supernatural has on both of the protagonists in terms of the 'appearance' of being secure in their right minds, but in reality, Macbeth's weakness of consuming ambition and the attitude of being indestructable as a result of the supernatural, and Lady Macbeth impregnated with guilt, leading to both of their mutual demise. (MacDuff born of C-Section).

In conclusion, it is clear to the audience the supernatural is used in different impacts to different characters, Macbeth being consumed, and Banquo doubtful and therefore not impacted, that the

supernatural is their to manipulate, but they don't physically make one do an action, and we are free to resist.

This is a powerfully conceptualised response. The candidate opens with their thesis and then uses the essay to explore and exemplify their ideas (in relation to the specifics of the task). This candidate clearly has a forensic knowledge of the play and this enables them to select with precision and focus judiciously on the moments that help to support their concept. Some of the contextual knowledge is particularly impressive, rooted as it is in the text itself rather than being extraneous 'historical' information. This is a response at the very top of what could feasibly be expected from performance at GCSE, and in fact is worth more marks than the mark scheme is able to award. **All Level 6 = 30 marks (Grade 9) AO4 = 4 marks**

Read the following extract from Act 1 Scene 5 of Macbeth and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play, Lady Macbeth is speaking. She has just read Macbeth's letter telling her about his meeting with the three witches.

**LADY MACBETH**

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be  
 What thou art promised; yet do I fear thy nature,  
 It is too full o'th' milk of human kindness  
 To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,  
 5 Art not without ambition, but without  
 The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,  
 That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,  
 And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou'dst have, great Glamis,  
 That which cries, 'Thus thou must do' if thou have it;  
 10 And that which rather thou dost fear to do,  
 Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee hither,  
 That I may pour my spirits in thine ear  
 And chastise with the valour of my tongue  
 All that impedes thee from the golden round,  
 15 Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem  
 To have thee crowned withal.

Starting with this speech, explore how Shakespeare presents ambition in Macbeth.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents ambition in this speech
- how Shakespeare presents ambition in the play as a whole.

**[30 marks]**  
**AO4 [4 marks]**

**Response 2**

Ambition is an important theme in Macbeth and is the driving force of the play because Shakespeare allows ambition to overpower Macbeth's morals when he kills Duncan. Eventhough the witches and Lady Macbeth had been allowed to influence Macbeth, he may not have killed Duncan if his ambition wasn't so strong. This essay will discuss the ways in which Shakespeare presents ambition in the extract and the play as a whole, and how he does this.

Shakespeare shows that ambition changes even the most noble people in this speech. He allows Lady Macbeth to describe Macbeth's nature as being 'too full o'th' milk of human kindness' in her soliloquy (allowing the audience to hear her thoughts). The noun 'milk' has connotations of purity and innocence, implying that macbeth isn't evil enough to act on his ambitions. However, during macbeth's reign after becoming king, he is described as a 'butcher', a powerful adjective that emphasises Macbeth's cruelty and the amount of people he has killed without reason. This change in character from being too kind and innocent to becoming a tyrant supprises the audience and conveys the dangers of having ambitions that leads to bad deeds.

Furthermore, Shakespeare also presents ambition as being able to take over one's morals and reasons. In Lady Macbeth's speech, Shakespeare allows her to say 'Art not without ambition, but without the illness should attend it'. The noun 'illness' creates an impression to the readers of ambition being different from acting on it, and describing it as an 'illness' emphasises the amount of destruction it can cause to the audience. 'Illness' could also suggest that acting on ambition can cause someone to become without morals and kindness. Macbeth also acknowledges his own 'vaulting ambition' after listing all the reasons not to kill Duncan. The metaphor suggests that macbeth's ambition is stronger than his moral conscience and is the only reason left for him to murder Duncan

Macbeth's ambition is also contrasted with Banquo's, who was also present when the witches gave the



prophecies. Macbeth immediately believes the witches, and when he becomes Thane, proving that the first prediction had come true, he begins to believe them more and acts on his ambitions to become king. Banquo, however, is the opposite of Macbeth. Although he does believe the witches, he does not act on his ambitions and even suspects that Macbeth has “play’dst most foully for’t”. This contrast in attitudes towards ambition and the suspenseful two-fold structure of ‘Macbeth’ that sees his rise to power and his downfall further emphasises the destructive nature of ambition, but also conveys to the audience that being able to control your ambitions can prevent a tragedy like Macbeth’s to occur.

In conclusion, Shakespeare presents ambition as being able to change people, take over morals and reasons and can lead to one’s downfall if it isn’t controlled. This allows Shakespeare to also convey to the audience the destruction that someone would experience if they attempted to assassinate King James I of England at the time.

This is a thoughtful, developed response to the task with the candidate taking a considered approach to the idea of ambition right from the start with the introductory paragraph highlighting the sense of the task as a whole. References are integrated into the candidate’s response, demonstrating their ability to use details from the text to illustrate their response, and there is a clear sense of writer behind the text throughout. For this candidate to move towards level 6, perhaps more of an exploratory focus on ideas would help them. **All L5 = 25 marks (Approx. Grade 8-9) AO4 = 4 marks**