

Essay Questions on William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

- 1) Discuss the various roles of the witches in 'Macbeth' with special emphasis on Coleridge's remark that "the witches have the power of tempting those that have been tempters themselves."
- 2) What is, at the end of the play, your attitude to Macbeth? Admiration, sympathy, disgust, or any other attitude? Justify your view by referring to scenes or extracts. (June 1986)
- 3) Analyse the nature of kingship in 'Macbeth' by drawing your information from Shakespeare's presentation of King Duncan, of Malcolm and –by contrast – of Macbeth.
- 4) Macbeth is neither a loathsome nor a heroic character, but a mixture of both. Discuss. (September 1986)
- 5) 'Infirm of purpose': in how far is this impression you receive of Macbeth justified?
- 6) 'This even-handed justice / Commends th'ingredients of our poisoned chalice / To our lips.' Put these lines in their proper context. Explain them and show how they come true for Macbeth. (June 1989)
- 7) Banquo is dramatically as important alive as dead. Discuss.
- 8) Do you agree with the view that Macbeth is fighting a lost battle against forces beyond his control? (September 1991)
- 9) 'She should have died hereafter'. The relation between Macbeth and his wife stands as long as they have a common aim.
- 10) Macbeth is too weak for the part he has chosen to play. (September 1992)
- 11) 'Life is a tale /Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing.' Does Macbeth's nihilistic conclusion (Act V, Scene V) mean that Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' offers a view of a meaningless world, full of horrors and suffering, without any positive moral values?
- 12) Discuss the importance of the Porter Scene (Act II, Scene III). (June 1993)
- 13) Assess the importance of the supernatural in 'Macbeth'.
- 14) Comment on the nature and dramatic function of the Ghost Scene. (June 1994)
- 15) Describe what happens in Lady Macbeth's 'Sleepwalking Scene' at the beginning of Act V. Why is this scene so important?
- 16) Describe the character of Macduff, and show how Shakespeare wins respect and approval for him. (June 1995)
- 17) What would be missing if there were no witch scenes? Discuss the importance of the witches in the whole play.
- 18) Analyse Macbeth's attitude to Lady Macbeth after the murder of Duncan. Is it true that he does not need her any more? What impact does her death have on him? (September 1995)
- 19) Macbeth is a very complex character. Analyse the different roles he plays according to the situations he finds himself in.
- 20) 'Unnatural deeds/ Do breed unnatural troubles.' (Act V, Scene I) Show how the destruction of the natural order becomes one of the main themes of the play. (June 1996)
- 21) Analyse the role of children in 'Macbeth'.
- 22) Shakespeare is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of Nature. Do you agree with Samuel Johnson's assessment? (September 1996)
- 23) 'This even-handed justice / Commends th'ingredients of our poisoned chalice / To our lips.' Discuss the truth of this in relation to Macbeth and his wife.
- 24) Discuss the salient images of health and sickness in the play and point out their relevance to the plot. (June 1997)
- 25) Banquo, Malcolm, Macduff and Lady Macduff. Why does Shakespeare introduce these characters? Are they really necessary?

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- 26) Why does Macbeth fail? Carefully analyse the various reasons for Macbeth's failure. (September 1998)
- 27) Analyse the theme of loyalty to King and country as presented in 'Macbeth'.
- 28) Analyse the relationship between Banquo and Macbeth. (June 1998)
- 29) 'Macbeth is no common ruthless butcher' Comment upon this statement.
- 30) 'Macbeth is a play about crime and punishment'. Comment upon this statement. (September 1998)
- 31) Discuss the influence of the witches' prophecies on Macbeth's decisions to murder Duncan and to have Banquo killed.
- 32) How significant, do you think, is Shakespeare's use of imagery in this play? In your answer analyse two examples more extensively. (June 1999)
- 33) Analyse the theme of equivocation in 'Macbeth'.
- 34) In how far is Macbeth the victim of his own character? What other factors do you see as contributing to his downfall? (September 1999)