

## Very good Macbeth videos on YouTube

Summary of the whole play [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qfnUq2\\_0FOY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qfnUq2_0FOY)

Miss 'Geordie Stacey' explains how to get a levels 7,8 9 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4-1uZEqx0o>

100% essay on Macbeth and the Supernatural <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIC-fgWNguw>

Mr Salles Examiner report on how to get top grades  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Y5rsezLc1Y>

The Divine Right of Kings <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxoxyh5oxcM>

### Six 'Macbeth' essays by Wreake Valley students

- *No matter what level you are aiming for, you are likely to learn something useful in each of these six example essays.*

The coloured hi-lights show where each student has done well in terms of including **quotations** (part of AO1), **terminology** (part of AO2) and **context** (AO3).

### Level 4 essay

In Act 1, 7 Shakespeare shows how Lady Macbeth is ambitious and is determined to do the murder when Macbeth thinks about failing. One thing that shows this is **"when you durst do it then you were a man"**. This shows that she is trying to say he's not a man like he used to be, that he's not strong enough to do the deed and doesn't deserve to be called a **"man"**.

Shakespeare also presents Lady Macbeth in this scene to be ambitious and violent when she says **"while it was smiling in my face, have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums and dash'd the brains out."** This shows that she would rather kill her baby than not go through with the plan. **In this extract Lady Macbeth seems determined and ambitious and not like women should have been in the 1606 when the play was written.**

The first key moment where we see what Lady Macbeth will be like in the rest of the play is in Act 1, scene 5 when she gets the letter from Macbeth. The letter is very important because it shows how passionate she is to become queen and her husband king, so then she comes up with a plan. Shortly after that in Act 1, scene 7 (the extract) Lady Macbeth convinces Macbeth to kill King Duncan that night. Lady Macbeth explains her plan here and Macbeth changes his mind again. **In the seventeenth century it wouldn't be normal for a**

woman to act like this, it would be about the man to make the plans and convince a woman how easy it would be to do it.

The key message in this scene where Macbeth gets persuaded is when he says the four simple words "If we should fail?" to which Lady Macbeth replies "We fail?" Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth here to show her desire for power and strongly say that it's impossible to fail.

In Act 1.5 when Lady Macbeth thought Macbeth wasn't going to kill King Duncan because he was too kind, full of "the milk of human kindness", she said "unsex me here". This shows she wishes she was a man so she could kill King Duncan because she feels like she could kill him mentally just not physically.

In Act 5. 1 Lady Macbeth starts to sleep walk because she can't deal with the fact that her husband killed King Duncan and that it's all her fault and she says "My bloody hands". This shows she's saying it's her fault and she holds the guilt. This leads to her committing suicide in Act 5.5.

## Level 5 essay

Lady Macbeth is shown as forceful and bullies Macbeth here in act 1.7 when questioning him about his masculinity. This follows from when Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth to be ambitious when Macbeth writes her a letter and she reads it as a soliloquy in act 1.5. After this letter she stated to Macbeth "Look like the innocent flower but be the serpent under't" which implies that she wants Macbeth to carry out her plan of committing the regicide towards King Duncan. We can see here that Lady Macbeth is telling Macbeth what to do which goes against the fact that in the seventeenth century it was a patriarchal society where men were shown as dominant towards females. However, in front of the audience Lady Macbeth clearly disagrees with this as she states "Unsex me here" which proves the point that Lady Macbeth wants to become a man so she can commit the regicide herself instead of 'useless' husband.

In the extract, when Lady Macbeth said "To be more than what you were, you would be so much more of a man" suggests that Lady Macbeth is manipulating her husband because of his new decision based on his underlying loyalty to King Duncan. Back in the seventeenth century, if this was to happen they would be going against the 'Divine Right of Kings' which is when God chooses the next king because society was highly religious then. Macbeth replies "If we should fail?" she replies with an exclamative sentence "We fail!" which shows Lady Macbeth is full of ambition and the use of repetition in "fail" shows that there is some sort of angry annoyance while the plural pronoun "We" shows that they're in it together.

Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth to be mentally unstable in act 1 scene 7 and then again in act 5. The quotation from the extract "and dash'd the brains out" emphasises that she is unstable because she is would have killed her own child. Later on in the play in act 5, scene 1 Lady Macbeth sleepwalks and sees blood on her hands saying "All the perfumes of Arabia

can't sweeten this little hand" which shows that all the guilt has built up inside her throughout the play and has made her hallucinate blood on her hands. Also Lady Macbeth juxtaposes with Lady Macduff because Lady Macbeth is proven to say that she would kill her own baby whereas Lady Macduff says to her child "poor bird" because their father had left them.

Going back to how Shakespeare showed Lady Macbeth to be more dominant in Act 1, scene 7, she has far more to say than Macbeth because of her scheming mind and how she wants to make it very clear about her plan for regicide. She says "when in swinish sleep" where the sibilant sounds add to the sinister mind of Lady Macbeth. We could compare Lady Macbeth to the three "weird sisters" because they are both full of supernatural desires and back in 1606 (when the play was written) witches were shown as supernatural and people were afraid of their powers and links to the devil. So, Lady Macbeth could be seen as supernatural because of the crazy and ambitious mind of hers, the opposite of what women were supposed to be, first hinted at with "Fair is foul and foul is fair."

## Level 6 essay

In this scene Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as a very manipulative woman when she says the declarative sentence "Be so much more the man" as she knows that Macbeth takes his manliness very seriously. This also shows how she is manipulative as she is saying this to mock him and to convince him once again to kill King Duncan. By using straightforward monosyllabic words in "Be so much more the man" shows how direct she is when she is tempting him. This manipulation could also relate to the Witches as it is shown that just like Lady Macbeth the Witches are also able to control Macbeth with their words.

In this scene Shakespeare also presents Lady Macbeth as immensely determined and very ambitious when she tells Macbeth that she would have "Dash'd the brains out" of her child if she was in his position and did not commit regicide. Here, the violent verb "Dash'd" (which also has an onomatopoeic feel to it) shows how she was so determined to kill King Duncan that she would even commit the violent and cruel thing that is infanticide.

Shakespeare also presents Lady Macbeth as a cold hearted traitor when she plans the regicide shown when she suggests to Macbeth "What can you and I perform upon the unguarded Duncan?" and "his spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt Of our great quell". The interrogative sentence shows how Lady Macbeth is already planning how the guards will be so soaked with alcohol, like sponges, and they will be incriminated in the regicide. In terms of context, this also shows how she did not believe in the Divine Right of kings or how she was very willing to break it in order to achieve her aims.

During the middle of the play in the banquet scene Lady Macbeth is shown to have dominance over Macbeth when she says the **interrogative sentence** "are you a man?" This **belittling rhetorical question** shows that she is once again mocking him but this time, due to the forceful presence of Banquo's ghost in Macbeth's mind it does not work and he again hallucinates. As a results of this scene their relationship deteriorates as Macbeth turns to the witches for advice and follows his path to mass killings and his own death. Lady Macbeth's power in the banquet scene turns out to be **ironic** as, towards the end of the play, she is presented to be in the same, unwell, state of mind that Macbeth suffered. This is shown when she sleepwalks and says the **exclamative sentence** "Out damned spot, out I say!" this quote shows how she is hallucinating blood on her hands. This scene featuring blood, could also link back to act 1 scene 7 when Macbeth is hallucinating a dagger that drips blood; this can show how both Lady Macbeth and Macbeth are both very unwell and reminds the audience of Macbeth's statement when he was well and worried that "Blood will have blood" implying that once the murderous journey started it would only get worse.

Lady Macbeth is also a **direct juxtaposition** to the character of Lady Macduff which is shown when Lady Macduff talks to her children. She asks one of her children "how will you do without a father?" but the child replies "how will you do without a husband?" and this shows that the two have a good relationship. **In contrast**, it is implied that Lady Macbeth had a child but it died and she would "have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums," which is far from maternal and would have added towards the **audience's** dislike of Lady Macbeth

Overall, in the play I feel that Shakespeare presented Lady Macbeth as a woman who had wanted more power which **juxtaposes** with **the time that it was originally performed in, this** is shown clearly by her **exclamative** "Unsex me here!".

**www. Language terminology, quotations, knowledge of whole play**

**EBI: more context**

## Level 7 essay

Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth in the extract as a manipulative, spiteful and selfish character. We can first see this when she uses emotional blackmail to manipulate Macbeth in killing King Duncan. "When you durst do it then you were a man." This not only shows her manipulating her husband into committing regicide – the worst of all crimes in the Jacobean era and punishable by hell – but also seeking his appreciation for it. The quotation hints at Lady Macbeth potentially trading her body for power, something that **we know witches were thought to do with Satan**. The use of the noun "man" shows Lady Macbeth doesn't see Macbeth as masculine but rather a coward and weak-minded. The **theme** of being weak minded and mentally unstable continues throughout the play.

Lady Macbeth is also shown to be evil when she says she would've "dashed the brains out". This is **violent imagery** that shows Lady Macbeth's own personal anguish. She is a woman who is angry and frustrated and once given something to focus on transfers all that built-up rage into it. Lady Macbeth is shown by Shakespeare to be strongly emotional, passionate and ambitious; these act almost as her **hamartias** leading to her eventual suicide in act 5. **Shakespeare's specific portrayal of Lady Macbeth is done to shock the audience, she is a character contradicting to Jacobean gender**

expectations of a woman. It is this sparking of emotion in Shakespeare's audience that builds his successful career as a playwright as he understood the emotions and interests of his seventeenth century audience.

In the extract as a whole, Lady Macbeth is shown to be dominant, assertive and powerful compared to Macbeth. This dominance over her husband only reinforces the idea of rejection of gender expectations. In the extract Macbeth is shown to say only four words "If we should fail" – this seems to represent the overwhelming barrage of abuse and persuasion by Lady Macbeth. This emphasises her power but also hints at her insecurities suggesting she may be projecting her own egotistical view of her personal strength due to overwhelming passion and ambition.

Shakespeare also shows Lady Macbeth as partial towards deception. We see this as she tells Macbeth to pretend to be brave. She is shown to say this, presenting it as common place for herself – almost reinforcing the idea of a false projected strength with the words "screw your courage to the sticking place and we'll not fail."

Throughout the play, Shakespeare uses the noun "milk" which in this extract can be seen by Lady Macbeth to reject her femininity and also as a contrast between being a mother and letting her masculine ambition take over. The audience is shown that Lady Macbeth believes that femininity makes her weak and disadvantages her. This idea is also shown in Act 1,5 when upon reading the letter of the prophecies she declares in her soliloquy that Macbeth is "too full o' the milk of human kindness". At this point in the play Macbeth is far from entirely evil, and Lady Macbeth's knowledge of the prophecies makes this scene a pivotal point in the play and Macbeth's character development. Lady Macbeth is shown by Shakespeare to repeatedly insult her husband by calling him a "coward" and weak. It is these words that drive him towards being a morally absent and short-tempered king. Arguably, from this point in the play he is haunted with a fear of criticism and is willing to kill people to prove that he is still the "brave Macbeth" that he was described as in Act 1 scene 2.

Lady Macbeth is instrumental in the creation of the evil and brutal monster that Macbeth is to become. As the play progresses Lady Macbeth's previously masculine qualities appear to transfer onto Macbeth who becomes more ambitious but as a consequence mentally unstable. This mental instability also plagues Lady Macbeth, eventually leading to her sleepwalking and hallucination in Act 5.1 and reported suicide in Act 5.5.

To celebrate his coronation, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth host a banquet (Act 3.4). In terms of context, these banquets were huge events that helped mark the beginning of a new king's reign; they were instrumental in deciding the success of a ruling monarch. Lady Macbeth understandably has to step in for Macbeth when he is disturbed by the shocking arrival of Banquo's ghost – a vision that only Macbeth can see. Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth in this scene as concerned and worried. However, this turns into anger and frustration "My lord is often thus" the use of the "My Lord" with its determiner "My" and referential title "Lord", shows Lady Macbeth's formal tone – something she does not bother with in private – this shows her insincerity.

In conclusion, throughout the play Lady Macbeth is shown to be manipulative, insecure and ambitious. Her character is a reflection of Jacobean gender expectations used to shock the audience. Lady Macbeth is also a tool for showing character progression and acts as a mortal puppeteer reminiscent of the immortal puppeteers that are the witches. She is instrumental in the denouement of the play, however her eventual death shows us that her character is eventually

overshadowed by Macbeth. Lady Macbeth is left as a distant foul-tasting memory in the eyes of the audience.

**www. Knowledge of plot, characters and context**

**EBI. Bit repetitive in places, more quotations from outside the extract**

### Level 8 essay

Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as a scheming and manipulative woman who loses control of her power as her husband becomes more independent throughout the play. We see her downfall starts to develop as Macbeth becomes more influenced by the supernatural and his desire for the security of his power. Act 1 scene 7 is an important **turning point** in the play as it is where Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's relationship begins to fall apart.

At the beginning of the extract Lady Macbeth lashes out at Macbeth's cowardice saying **"what beast was't, then, that made you break this enterprise to me?"** At this point Lady Macbeth stops referring to Macbeth as the **intimate 'thou'** and instead opts for the **more distant 'you'**. Shakespeare does this to show Lady Macbeth's change from a character who manipulates Macbeth through praise and love to a character who needs to humiliate and torture her husband's mind to drive him through the regrets and guilt. This change really emphasises the extent that Lady Macbeth will go to for her desire of power and control.

Shakespeare builds this cruel and manipulative nature of Lady Macbeth to later emphasise that, amongst all the evil inside her, there is still some remorse in her when she cannot bring herself to stab King Duncan because he **"had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done't"**. This allows us to see that in all evil there is still good and **vice versa**. This **contradiction** in her personality is based around the quotation from Act 1, scene 1 that sets the scene for the whole play **"Fair is foul, foul is fair"** implying to the audience that in all good there is evil and in all evil there is good. Shakespeare has the witches to deliver these **introductory lines** to symbolise their importance and show us how they arguably have full control over the outcome of the play.

Further into the extract, Lady Macbeth emphasises to Macbeth how far she would go to achieve the total control of **monarchical power**. She tells him that she would go as far as to murder her own new-born child in **"plucked my nipple from his boneless gums, and dash'd his brains out."** Shakespeare uses a new-born baby as Lady Macbeth's example to symbolise ridding her life of purity and blessing in order to get power. This would naturally shock any audience as children were, and still are, seen as innocent in their minds and bodies and pure in their hearts – a **complete contrast** of the woman that Lady Macbeth is representing. Shakespeare uses the symbol of children later in the play when we witness Macduff's son murdered on stage to show how far Macbeth is willing to go for the security of his crown. Children and the ability to have them was also seen as a blessing from God telling the audience that, by **theorising the infanticide**, **Lady Macbeth is prepared to go against God, the highest power in the Great Chain of Being**. Lady Macbeth's desperate want for power could also be linked to the **patriarchal society** that was **dominant in both the 12<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century where women lacked power** – rather than submitting to this situation, that most the audience would be in agreement with, she rebels against it to the point where she would do something barely imaginable.

Towards the end of the extract, Lady Macbeth calms down from her infuriated state and begins to use **persuasive techniques** on her husband by saying **"what cannot you and I perform upon the**

unguarded Duncan?" Shakespeare makes Lady Macbeth say this to show that she can manipulate her husband in calmer ways and bribe him to do her bidding if he feels in a secure and confident state of mind. Shakespeare uses a rhetorical question in this previous quotation to show Lady Macbeth's assuring tone towards Macbeth by making him think nothing can go wrong. This quotation also foreshadows the earlier point later in the play when Lady Macbeth says she is unable to kill King Duncan.

After King Duncan's murder Lady Macbeth begins to lose power over her husband and relevance in the play. Shakespeare does this to show Macbeth's tyrannical behaviour becoming stronger which means Lady Macbeth no longer needs to assist him. This subsequently leads to Lady Macbeth's change in attitude from a powerful and manipulative woman to a powerless and weak woman who feels the guilt of her actions by despairing "will these hands ne'er be clean?"

**WWW: knowledge of plot, characters and context**

**EBI: more terminology, quotations and a strong conclusion**

## Level 9

In this extract from Act 1, scene 7, Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as very much the dominant figure in her relationship with her husband. This is demonstrated through her constant emasculation of him, especially in the earlier part of the extract. For example, her insistence to him "to be more than what you were, you would be so much more the man" is a clear attempt to demean him. By stating that he would be "so much more a man" the use of the comparative "more" implies that he is not 'manly' at that moment hence Lady Macbeth loses respect for her battle-hero husband, the once "Brave Macbeth" of Act 1, scene 2. It is important to note that this scene occurs before the regicide of King Duncan has occurred. Lady Macbeth's attitude towards Macbeth changes as the play proceeds and as Macbeth metamorphoses from hero to guilt-ridden monarch and then into an insecure and barbarous, bellicose zealot.

Lady Macbeth's dominance over Macbeth in the first Act, and in the banquet scene of Act 3 scene 4 demonstrates a dynamic of her effectively filling the role of the 'the man of the house' (or of Dunsinane) – a very unusual role reversal in the Jacobean era. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century (and in the 11<sup>th</sup> century in which the play was set) women were expected to be submissive to their husbands, hence Shakespeare, by presenting a role reversal such as this, demonstrates that the Macbeth family is not as it seems and is possibly quite dangerous, 'unnatural' and (in a Jacobean period rife with supernatural fear) possibly evil due to the skewed power dynamic.

Additionally, Lady Macbeth is also presented as desiring masculinity in Act 1, scene 5, where the audience see an interesting perspective on masculine ideals from Shakespeare when Lady Macbeth calls upon the spirits to "unsex me here and fill me from the crown to the toe top full of direst cruelty," Shakespeare is demonstrating a perceived connection between masculinity and "cruelty". By presenting a masculine woman he is further amplifying the notability of this connection. Jacobean society would perceive a masculine woman as very unusual and would have a heightened sense of noticing when a woman is not acting 'like a woman' in the expectations of the era. As a result, Shakespeare's exposure of the crueller sides of masculinity through a woman no less, are far more noticeable than through a man. This request for masculinity relatively early in the play, straight



after receiving Macbeth's letter acts as an anchor with which to establish the themes of masculinity early on and as a method of establishing the abnormally masculine character of Lady Macbeth.

One interesting thing to note is that, as Macbeth changes and becomes more emotionally strong, established as a king, dominant and hubristically independent, Lady Macbeth becomes less and less relevant. This is perhaps a method used by Shakespeare to demonstrate the changing power balance. The audience don't see Lady Macbeth at all in Act 4, and the last we physically see her, in Act 5, she is having hallucinations shown by "Out damned spot" and has gone mad with guilt, eventually killing herself. It's interesting here, in my opinion that as the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth becomes more traditional, the events in the play and the state of Scotland and even their relationship itself crumble and worsen. Perhaps, through this, Shakespeare is demonstrating a view that the traditional family values of the seventeenth century are, in fact, a negative thing. Whenever either Macbeth or Lady Macbeth display dominance over one another, something bad always follows. Firstly, it's the regicide of King Duncan, then the murder of Banquo, then the hallucinations at the banquet and then finally Lady Macbeth's insanity and suicide. Perhaps through this, Shakespeare is suggesting that dominance over one another is not a stable way to have a relationship and only leads to negativity.

In conclusion, Shakespeare utilises domineering language and masculine tendencies to present Lady Macbeth as very atypical for his time period and as an anchor to express his views on Jacobean perception of what it means to be masculine and its negative effect on people. The way he structures Lady Macbeth as becoming more irrelevant as the dynamic between her and her husband becomes more traditional also assists in this expression.

**WWW: personal response, knowledge of plot and characters, quotations**

**EBI: more terminology**