**Macbeth Leaving Cert Questions and Possible Points**

**2003**

**“We feel very little pity for the central characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare’s play.” To what extent would you agree with the above view? Support your answer by reference to the play.**

Possible points:

We feel little pity when –

* Lady Macbeth reveals her evil nature
* Macbeth seeks security through the murder of Banquo
* Macbeth has Lady Macduff and her children murdered

Yet we do feel sympathy/pity when

* Macbeth wrestles with his conscience
* when Macbeth suffers the consequences of his deeds
* when he recognises the equivocations of the witches
* when Lady Macbeth descends into madness - when their marriage crumbles and they are no longer partners in greatness
* when Macbeth confronts life’s essential emptiness

**“In Macbeth, Shakespeare presents us with a powerful vision of evil.” Write your response to the above statement. Textual support may include reference to a particular performance of the play you have seen.**

Possible points:

* visual impact of the appearance and role of the witches
* apparitions, ghosts, nightmares, and so on
* revealed through the thoughts, words and actions of characters
* the graphic violence of the play
* specific recreations in film or on the stage
* language, imagery
* staging, costume, props, lighting, music, and so on
* despite the overthrow of Macbeth the apparent absence of redemption in the world

**2004**

**“Shakespeare’s Macbeth invites us to look into the world of a man driven on by ruthless ambition and tortured by regret.” Write a response to this view of the play, Macbeth, supporting the points you make by reference to the text.**

Possible points:

Ambition:

* his eager response to the witches
* the killing of Duncan and Banquo
* his obsession with ‘vaulting ambition’
* he embarks on a tyrannical rule, determined to hold on to power
* Lady Macbeth, however, questions his capacity to be ruthless
* his soliloquies repeatedly qualify the ruthlessness of his character

Regret:

* Macbeth wrestles with his conscience
* he is plagued by visions of his evil deeds and their consequences
* following the murder of Duncan he is incoherent and tormented
* he is haunted by the realisation that he has achieved a ‘fruitless crown’ and a ‘barren sceptre’
* his mind is ‘full of scorpions’
* for him life becomes progressively more empty and worthless

**“The play, Macbeth, has many scenes of compelling drama.” Choose one scene that you found compelling and say why you found it to be so. Support your answer by reference to the play.**

While candidates may interpret ‘one scene’ liberally, they should focus mainly on one particular part of the play, or on a group of related scenes such as the meetings with the witches, or the murder of Duncan and its immediate aftermath.

Possible points: Compelling drama because of…

* the setting and atmosphere
* the tension and conflict created in it
* its occurrence at a key moment in the drama
* the mood created by the actions and thoughts of the characters
* the dramatic impact of Shakespeare’s language/imagery
* the staging, costume, lighting
* the scene’s potential for special effects

**2007**

**“The relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth undergoes significant change during the course of the play.” Discuss this statement supporting your answer with the aid of suitable reference to the text.**

Possible points:

* the plan to kill Duncan introduces tension into their loving/sharing relationship
* the murder alters the dynamic between them
* he acts alone, highlighting the ‘death’ of the partnership
* their relationship disintegrates following the banquet scene
* they become increasingly isolated from each other
* the witches replace Lady Macbeth’s influence on his life
* his response to her death illustrates the significant gulf between them
* despite the apparent change/s, their love endures

**“Essentially the play Macbeth is about power, its use and abuse.” Discuss this view of the play, supporting your answer with the aid of suitable reference to the text.**

“Power” may be understood to refer to political, moral, ‘divine’, emotional, physical power, etc. In response, candidates may employ focused narrative to illustrate the points they make

Possible points:

Use of power

* Macbeth’s powerful presence on the battlefield
* Duncan’s use of political power is ineffectual
* Lady Macbeth uses her influence to support her husband
* divine power “healing” the sick and curing “the Evil”
* Malcolm identifies the ideal of moral/political power
* the obsession with power dominates the story

Abuse of power

* the power of evil
* the excessive use of physical violence throughout
* the witches’ prophetic power deceives their victims
* Lady Macbeth’s emotional blackmail
* the tyranny of Macbeth’s reign

**2009**

**“Macbeth’s murder of Duncan has horrible consequences both for Macbeth himself and for Scotland.” Write a response to this statement. You should refer to the play in your answer.**

Possible consequences:

Macbeth

* psychological – guilt, remorse, trauma, confusion
* violent – paranoid killings of Banquo, Macduff’s family
* moral – “supped full with horrors”, reliance on the witches
* social – isolation, alienation from Lady Macbeth
* spiritual – soliloquies, awareness of failure, despair, futility

Scotland

* social – banquet disorder, fear and suffering, “widows howl, new orphans cry” –
* natural – darkness, “night has been unruly”
* political – tyranny, “Alas! Poor country”
* future – “the time is free”, new order

**“Macbeth has all the ingredients of compelling drama.” Write a response to this statement, commenting on one or more of the ingredients which, in your opinion, make Macbeth a compelling drama**

Possible points:

* powerful presence of Macbeth himself
* intense physical and psychological conflict
* gripping/melodramatic scenes of the supernatural
* evocative setting and atmosphere
* dramatic impact of language/imagery
* absorbing/unconvincing nature of themes

**2013**

**“The variety of significant insights that we gain into Macbeth’s mind proves critical in shaping our understanding of his complex character.”**

**Discuss this view, supporting your answer with suitable reference to the play, Macbeth.**

Possible points:

* philosophical/poetic soliloquies reveal a multi-faceted character
* his responses to the witches’ prophecies and apparitions show a ruthless dimension
* vision of the dagger shapes understanding of his moral complexity
* Banquo’s ghost demonstrates Macbeth’s imaginative capacity
* revealing observations of his complex nature by Lady Macbeth and other characters
* attitude to Macduff intensifies our sense of his tragic humanity

**“Shakespeare makes effective use of disturbing imagery in the play, Macbeth.”**

**Discuss this statement, supporting your answer with suitable reference to the text.**

Possible points:

* disturbing images of weather, violence and the supernatural establish the setting/atmosphere
* allusions to darkness and bestial references contribute to characterisation
* clothing and blood symbolism supports plot development
* images of disorder /the unnatural heighten themes
* Macbeth’s moral decay and Scotland’s malaise clearly reflected in disease imagery
* sickness, sleep, transience denote the absurdity/fragility of existence

**2014**

**“Macbeth’s relationships with other characters can be seen primarily as power struggles which prove crucial to the outcome of the play.”**

**Discuss the above statement in relation to at least two of Macbeth’s relationships with other characters. Support your answer with suitable reference to the play, Macbeth.**

Indicative material:

* Macbeth’s volatile relationship with Lady Macbeth is central to their tragic downfall
* the strained dynamic between Duncan and Macbeth propels the political conflict
* Macbeth loses the moral battle with the witches whose influence hastens his demise
* the Macbeth-Banquo power struggle leads to murder and accelerates a reign of terror
* Macduff is both Macbeth’s nemesis and Scotland’s saviour

**“Throughout the play, Macbeth, Shakespeare makes effective use of a variety of dramatic techniques that evoke a wide range of responses from the audience.”**

**Discuss this view with reference to at least two dramatic techniques used by Shakespeare in the play. Support your answer with suitable reference to the text.**

Indicative material:

* supernatural/occult elements have theatrical, psychological and emotional effects
* impact of powerful imagery/symbolism, e.g. blood, darkness, animals, clothing
* changing audience responses evoked through plot structure and characterisation
* range of unsettling/disturbing settings helps frame audience reactions
* other techniques, e.g. soliloquies, contrasts, irony, humour might also evoke responses

**1995**

Discuss the course and nature of the resistance to Macbeth’s rule in the play. Support your answer by relevant quotation or reference to the play.

or

‘Kingship, with all its potential for good or evil, is a major theme of the play ‘Macbeth’.’ Discuss this view, supporting your answer with quotation from or reference to the play.

**1991**

‘The eternal struggle between good and evil – a struggle in which evil comes very close to victory – is the central them of the play ‘Macbeth’.’ Discuss this view and show how the struggle is illustrated in the imagery of the play. Support your answer by reference or quotation.

or

‘While there are redeeming features in the character of Macbeth, Lady Macbeth is portrayed as a ruthless opportunist whose ambition for her husband supersedes all moral considerations.’ Discuss this view, supporting your answer by reference or quotation.

**1987**

‘The Banquo Macbeth has killed is not the innocent soldier who met the witches and scorned their prophecies, nor the man who prayed to be delivered from temptation. He is a man whose principles have been deeply compromised.’ Discuss this view, supporting your answer by quotation or reference.

or

Discuss the way in which the language of the play ‘Macbeth’ contributes to the creation of the atmosphere of evil and violence which pervades the play. Support your answer by relevant quotation or reference.

**1983**

‘The witches in ‘Macbeth’ are malevolent creatures, who originate deeds of blood and have power over the soul.’ Discuss the role of the witches in the play in the light of this statement. Support your answer with appropriate reference or quotation.

or

Discuss the way in which light/darkness, violent imagery and unnatural happenings are used in ‘Macbeth’ to create atmosphere. Support your answer with appropriate quotation or reference.

**1979**

‘Their partnership in guilt, which at the beginning of the play is a strong bond between them, gradually drives Macbeth and his wife apart, until they go down to their separate dooms, isolated and alone.’ Discuss this view, with the aid of suitable quotation or reference.

or

‘Lady Macbeth is no monster. She is a loyal (though misguided) wife, not without tenderness and not without conscience.’ What do you think of this estimation of Lady Macbeth? Support your answer with relevant quotation or reference.

**1975**

‘In ‘Macbeth’ Shakespeare does not present Macbeth as a mere villain, but succeeds in arousing some measure of sympathy for him.’ Discuss the character of Macbeth in the light of this statement, supporting your answer by relevant quotation or reference.

or

‘In ‘Macbeth’ the inner self is conveyed, not through the ideas expressed, nor through the actions performed, but by means of an elaborate pattern of imagery and symbolism.’ Test the truth of this statement by considering any two of the play’s central characters and the images and symbols associated with them. Support your answer by relevant quotation or reference.

**1971**

‘In the play ‘Macbeth’, Shakespeare had heightened our experience of wickedness and disorder by setting them against a background of goodness and order.’ Discuss this view with the aid of appropriate reference or quotation.

or

Discuss the view that Lady Macbeth has more in common with the Witches than with Lady Macduff. Support your answer with suitable reference or quotation.