

GCSE

REVISING Macbeth

STUDENT
PACK

- Covers all the key themes, acts and scenes
- Active revision strategies and approaches
- Practice exam questions for all boards

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Theme: the supernatural



Overview

One of the most fascinating themes in the play is that of the supernatural. The play opens with the introduction of the three witches and their predictions drive the action of the play. However, there are other aspects of the supernatural, from Lady Macbeth's call to the 'spirits' to give her strength to Macbeth's ghostly visions of Banquo.

Key characters

The three witches, the first characters introduced in the play, are the primary supernatural figures. They are joined by Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft, in Act 3 Scene 5 and Act 4 Scene 1. Since in Act 1 Scene 3 the three witches are seen by both Macbeth and Banquo, they are more than just projections of Macbeth's imagination. However, in other sections of the play, there is a blurring between the supernatural and the Macbeths' guilty consciences. For example, Macbeth alone sees Banquo's ghost, which may be evidence of his consciousness of guilt as much as a supernatural appearance. In Act 1, Lady Macbeth speaks to unseen supernatural forces and by Act 5 her guilty feelings are evident in her imagining of blood on her hands.

Events

Key scenes for exploring the supernatural:

Act 1 Scene 1:	The witches agree to meet.
Act 1 Scene 3:	The witches make their predictions to Macbeth and Banquo.
Act 1 Scene 5:	Lady Macbeth calls on the spirits to give her strength.
Act 2 Scene 1:	Macbeth has a 'fatal vision' of a dagger.
Act 2 Scene 4:	The Old Man and Ross discuss the 'unnatural' night.
Act 3 Scene 4:	Banquo's ghost appears at the Macbeths' feast.
Act 3 Scene 5:	Hecate and the witches prepare to meet Macbeth.
Act 4 Scene 1:	The witches provide more prophecies to Macbeth.
Act 5 Scene 1:	Lady Macbeth imagines she sees blood on her hands.

Language

One way that the witches are set apart from the other characters is their use of verse. Instead of the iambic pentameter spoken by most of the other characters, they speak in tetrameters, so their lines are shorter, usually seven or eight beats, or four 'feet' of verse, rather than the 10 beats, with five 'feet' of verse, of iambic pentameter. They usually speak in trochaic verse which stresses the first syllable in each foot of verse, rather than the second as in iambic pentameter. Many of their lines are rhyming couplets, meaning that the last word of two consecutive lines rhyme with each other. The witches are also set apart by how they are described: 'so wither'd and so wild', and 'not like th'inhabitants o'th'earth'. Their otherness is also stressed by what they are called: 'weird sisters', and 'midnight hags'.

Setting

James I, the king when *Macbeth* was written, firmly believed in witches. He thought they foretold the death of his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, and were responsible for his near death at sea. In Scotland, there were witch-hunts during this period, with many accused witches being burnt at the stake. James I wrote a book, *Demonology*, explaining his research into witches and their sorcery. In 1604 he had parliament pass an Act against witchcraft. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* would have been written with this understanding that witches were very real to many in the 16th and 17th centuries. The witches in *Macbeth* appear on rugged Scottish heaths, often accompanied by thunder and lightning, adding to their otherworldly qualities.

Supernatural summary

Read through the discussion of the theme of the supernatural above, highlighting any points which you think are important.

Then, close your revision booklet and, on a separate piece of paper, write at least 10 bullet points about the supernatural in *Macbeth*.

After you have finished, return to the revision booklet and see how many more bullet points you would like to add.



Quick self-check

<input type="checkbox"/>	When is the audience first introduced to a supernatural element?
<input type="checkbox"/>	How does the belief in the supernatural change the Macbeths' behaviour?
<input type="checkbox"/>	How does Shakespeare make the witches different from the other characters?
<input type="checkbox"/>	How does the character of Banquo contribute to the theme of the supernatural?

Challenge:

How might an audience in Shakespeare's time have reacted differently than a present-day audience to the witches and the theme of the supernatural?

Key quotations

Read the quotations below and answer the question underneath each. Answers are at the back of the booklet.

'This supernatural soliciting.' (Act 1 Scene 3)

What literary technique is used here?.....

'Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crown'd withal.' (Act 1 Scene 5)

What is the difference between 'fate' and 'metaphysical aid'?.....

.....

.....

'Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts ...' (Act 1 Scene 5)

Who is speaking and what do they want?

.....

'Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight?' (Act 2 Scene 1)

What is the fatal vision seen here?.....

'Lamentings heard i'th'air, strange screams of death
And prophesying with accents terrible ...' (Act 2 Scene 3)

What words in this connect to the witches?

'How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags!' (Act 4 Scene 1)

What words in this relate to an image of witchcraft?

Revision activity 1

Animal imagery

Animal imagery is important to the theme of witchcraft because witches were thought to have particular control over animals, known as their 'familiars', such as 'Graymalkin' the cat and 'Paddock' the toad, mentioned in the first scene. However, animals are also used to show how nature is disturbed by supernatural happenings.

Look at the animal imagery below. Underline the bird, insect or other animal mentioned then write a bullet list of what you associate with that creature. For example, do you associate them with day or night? Air or ground? Silence or noise? Danger or safety? If it helps you to visualise the image, make a small sketch to accompany your notes. Answers are at the back of the booklet.

'The raven himself is hoarse' (Act 1 Scene 5).

'... the wolf / Whose howl's his watch' (Act 2 Scene 1).

'It was the owl that shriek'd' (Act 2 Scene 2).

'We have scorch'd the snake, not kill'd it' (Act 3 Scene 2).

'... Hecate's summons / The shard-born beetle with his drowsy hums.' (Act 3 Scene 2)

'eye of newt, and toe of frog / Wool of bat, and tongue of dog' (Act 4 Scene 1).

Revision activity 2

Banquo's version of the meeting with the witches

Macbeth and Banquo both meet the witches and then Macbeth writes a letter to his wife describing the meeting. Imagine that Banquo has written to his son, Fleance, describing his reaction to the witches. Remember to include:

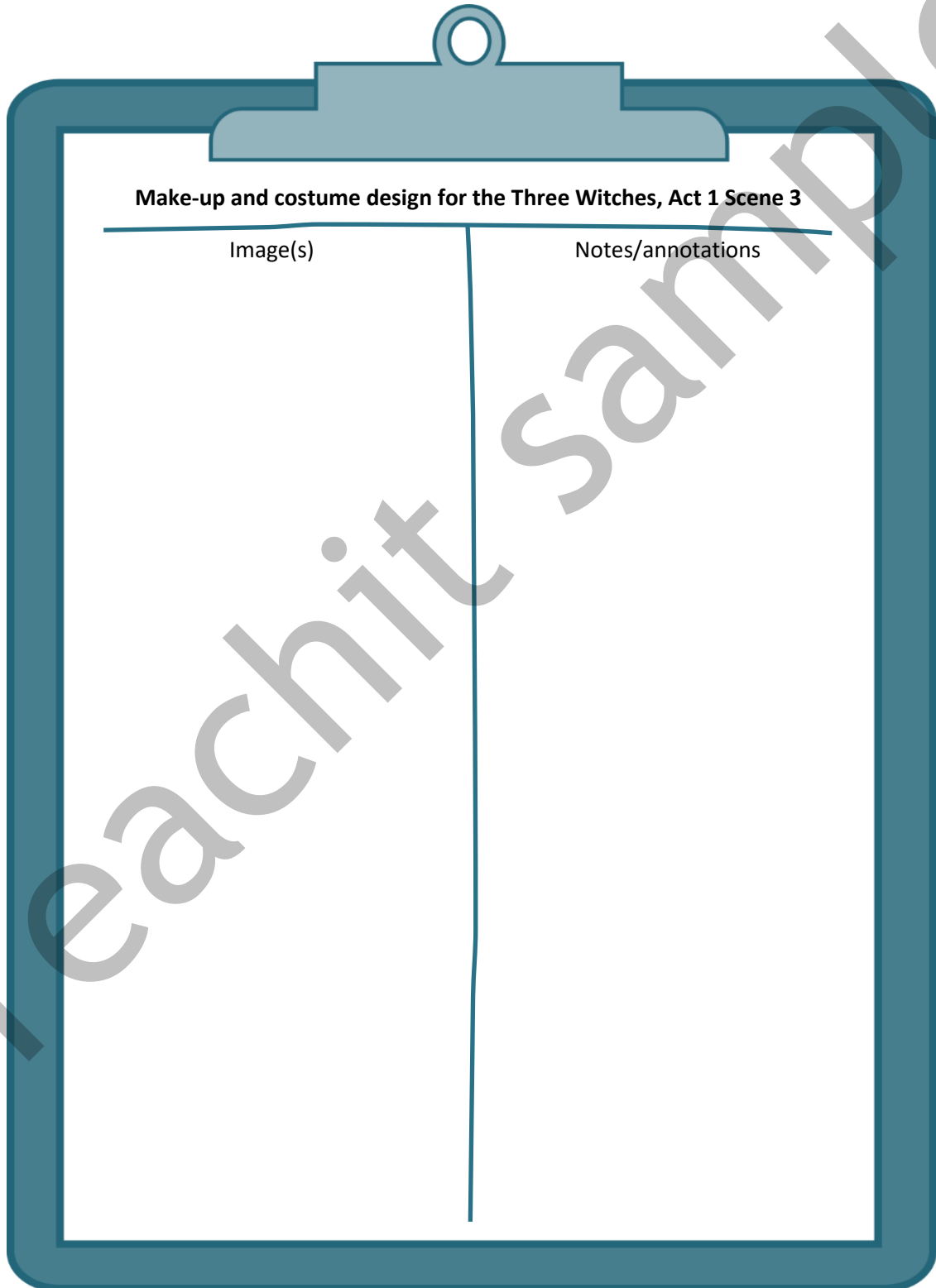
- the predictions the witches made to him and Macbeth
- Macbeth's reaction to the predictions
- Banquo's feelings about what was said to him.



Revision activity 3

The witches

Imagine you are a costume and make-up designer who has been asked to create a design for the witches influenced by how they are described by Shakespeare. Use the box below to show your make-up and costume design annotated by quotations from the play to explain your choices.



Make-up and costume design for the Three Witches, Act 1 Scene 3

Image(s)	Notes/annotations

Revision activity 4

Writing an incantation

Most of the witches' verses have a stressed syllable, followed by an unstressed syllable, for a total of eight syllables or beats, such as:

Dou'ble, dou'ble, toil' and trou'ble

Write four lines of rhyming couplets of your own incantation warning Macbeth of the dangers of his violent actions, following this same form. Mark the stressed beats and underline the rhyming words.

Teachit sample

Challenge:

How is the verse spoken by characters like Macbeth different from that of the witches? Try to write four lines in that style as if you were Macbeth responding to the witches' warning.



Practice exam questions

Read this extract from Act 1 Scene 7 then answer the question which is relevant to your exam board.

MACBETH, *aside*

Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme.—I thank you, gentlemen.
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.
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.
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.

BANQUO

Look how our partner's rapt.

MACBETH

If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me
Without my stir.

BANQUO

New honours come upon him
Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mould
But with the aid of use.

MACBETH, *aside*

Come what come may,
Time and the hour runs through the roughest day.

OCR

Choose **ONE** question.

EITHER

1. Explore how the witches' predictions change Macbeth's life and relationships. Refer to this extract from Act 1 Scene 3 and elsewhere in the play.

[40]

OR

2. In what ways does a belief in the supernatural influence the behaviour of characters in the play? Explore at least two moments from the play to support your ideas.

[40]

Edexcel

- a) Explore how Shakespeare presents Macbeth's relationship to the supernatural in this extract. Refer closely to the extract in your answer.

[20]

- b) In this extract, Macbeth reacts to the witches and their supernatural predictions.

Explore the importance of the supernatural elsewhere in the play.

In your answer you must consider:

- other examples of supernatural events in the play
- how a belief in the supernatural affects the behaviour of characters in the play.

You must refer to the context of the play in your answer.

[20]

AQA

Macbeth

This speech comes after Banquo and Macbeth have received the first predictions from the witches.

Starting with this moment in the play, explore how Shakespeare depicts the supernatural.

Write about:

- Macbeth's feelings towards the witches' predictions in this extract
- how Shakespeare explores the supernatural in the play as a whole.

[30 marks]

AO4 [4 marks]

WJEC Eduqas

Answer **both** part (a) **and** part (b).

You are advised to spend about 20 minutes on part (a) and about 40 minutes on part (b).

Read the extract. Then answer the following question.

a) Look at Macbeth’s choice of language and his thoughts and feelings after meeting the witches. What does this speech reveal to an audience about Macbeth’s character? Refer closely to details from the extract to support your answer.

[15]

b) *‘The supernatural can be seen disrupting social order and relationships.’ Show how the theme of the supernatural is important to the play as a whole

[25]

*5 of this question’s marks are allocated for accuracy in spelling, punctuation and the use of vocabulary and sentence structures.

Some prompts to help you:

Extract	Whole text
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does Macbeth’s attitude change when he is speaking his private thoughts in his asides? • What words or phrases suggest that Macbeth has been shaken by the first of the witches’ predictions coming true? • Are any words or sounds repeated in the speech and to what effect? • What are the ‘horrible imaginings’? • In your opinion, is this a negative or positive portrayal of Macbeth’s encounter with the supernatural? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does Macbeth’s reaction to the witches’ predictions differ from Banquo’s? • What imagery and other language is used in the play to reinforce the theme of the supernatural? • What is Macbeth’s reaction to his second visit to the witches? • How might attitudes towards witches at the time Shakespeare was writing the play have affected his presentation of the supernatural?

