

Shakespeare Coursework
Macbeth Essay Structure
by Joanne Cox

Task: By Careful study of the play decide, in committing Duncan's murder how far Macbeth is driven by his own ambition; how far he is dominated by his wife's; and how far he is influenced by the witches.

Introduction

- Introduce the play and the character of Macbeth – you may chose to use the opening phrase that you have been given on the essay framework.

Possible opening sentence:

The play 'Macbeth' gives the audience plenty of opportunities to consider the reasons for the main character's actions. In this essay I will consider...

Main body

How far is he driven by his own ambition?

Points to consider:

- We find out that 'Macbeth' is brave in Act 1 Scene 2 (line 16) and that he is also the king's cousin. Is it possible that he has got fed up with simply being a warrior?
- In Act 1 Scene 3 note Macbeth's willingness to believe the witches. Note the language used. Banquo is more suspicious – 'Things that do sound so fair'
- Macbeth clearly feels that he has to kill Duncan – note the way he speaks and the language he uses. Surely if he believed the witches he would allow fate to take its course. He clearly realises that killing Duncan is an option. Note the use of the soliquy technique – allowing us to see his inner thoughts. Note the use of poetry and always look for the images and language that Shakespeare employs. 'Present fears...My thought, who murder is...'
- In Act 1 Scene 4 Macbeth is able to be kind to the King, which shows his duplicity. Again note the use of language. He admits that he is thinking of murder. Note the reference to astrology and the supernatural. In Act 3 Scene 1 Macbeth shows his coldheartness by setting up the murder of Banquo, he ensures the death of Lady MacDuff.

Possible opening sentence:

It is clear that at the beginning of the play Macbeth is a brave war hero...

This essay plan was found free at www.englishresources.co.uk

How far is he dominated by his wife?

Points to consider:

- From the moment Lady Macbeth receives the letter from Macbeth she begins to plan the murder. Note the language she uses – for example she talks about defeminising herself. She paints Macbeth as a weak man. She resolves to persuade Macbeth to do it and asks for the strength to commit the murder. Again look for images within the speech.
- Lady Macbeth uses various strategies for example praise. She plans the murder. She tells him that he is not a man if he does not perform it. She encourages him.
- In the presence of his wife Macbeth shows himself to be a weak man. She plans the murder for him.

Possible opening sentence:

It is clear to the audience that...

Influenced by the witches?

Points to consider:

- In Act 1 Scene 1 the witches are waiting for Macbeth, this seems to suggest that they have something in mind – they are creatures of supernatural origin. What difference would it make to the play if they were not there?
- The witches show themselves to be evil, for example they cause men's deaths.
- Remember the line 'Fair is foul and foul is fair' – appearances are often deceiving.
- They don't tell Macbeth the whole truth.
- Banquo feels they might not be all they seem.
- In Elizabethan times witches were thought to be dangerous and servants of Satan.
- Macbeth seems almost to be hypnotised by what they tell him.
- Always consider the language used.

Possible opening sentence:

The Supernatural is an important theme in the play of 'Macbeth'...

Conclusion

- Sum up the main points of your argument and reach a conclusion

Possible opening sentence:

In conclusion it is clear that there are many possible reasons why Macbeth may have behaved in the way that he did...

This essay plan was found free at www.englishresources.co.uk