

GCSE English Literature: Macbeth extract to essay

Closed-book practice in the style of AQA 8702, Edexcel 1ET0 and OCR J352. Untiered: all candidates sit the same paper. In the real exam you must rely on memorised quotations; on this practice sheet the extract is printed for you.

England · Wales

Untiered · All boards

Shakespeare · Macbeth

A4 · 2 pages

KEY FACTS ABOUT THE LITERATURE EXAM

GCSE English Literature is untiered and **closed book**: no text is provided in the exam; you must memorise key quotations. All boards assess Shakespeare, a 19th-century novel, a modern text and poetry. AQA 8702 is the most widely chosen board for private candidates.

EXTRACT: ACT 1, SCENE 7 (ADAPTED)

MACBETH: *If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly. If the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success; but in these cases
We still have judgement here, that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague the inventor. This even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice
To our own lips.*

Q1 · Close analysis (10 marks)

Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare present Macbeth's inner conflict about killing King Duncan? Write about how Shakespeare uses language in this extract and in the play as a whole.

Essay planning frame (P1 quotation + effect / P2 wider-play link / Conclusion):

MARK SCHEME · PAGE 2

AO WEIGHTING REMINDER (AQA 8702)

AO1 (respond with understanding, supported by quotation) = ~37.5%; AO2 (analyse language, form, structure, using terminology) = ~42.5%; AO3 (context) = ~15%; AO4 (SPaG) = 5%. Higher marks come from AO2 analysis: always comment on HOW language creates meaning, not just WHAT happens.

Mark scheme levels · Q1 (typical 30-mark AQA question)

Level 4 (22–30, high grades 7–9): a perceptive, detailed response offering a critical, conceptualised reading of how Shakespeare presents inner conflict; judicious use of quotations from the extract AND the wider play; sophisticated analysis of the effects of language, structure and dramatic technique; convincing comments on how context shapes meaning.

Level 3 (15–21, grades 5–6): a clear, explained response with some understanding of how language creates the theme; relevant quotations from extract and wider play; clear terminology in analysis; some relevant context.

Level 2 (8–14, grades 3–4): some supported comments on language; some relevant quotations; some awareness of effect; limited context.

Level 1 (1–7): simple comments; simple quotation; limited terminology.

What to reward in the extract: key points

Macbeth's wavering: conditional syntax 'If it were done, when 'tis done' creates a circular, stalling structure that mirrors his inability to commit. The rhythm of hesitation is built into the sentence itself.

Fear of consequences: 'bloody instructions... return to plague the inventor' shows Macbeth understands the principle of poetic justice; he knows violence begets violence.

'Poisoned chalice': the metaphor captures both literal poison (Duncan will die) and moral corruption (Macbeth himself will be poisoned by guilt and ambition). Oxymoronic 'even-handed justice' implies he already feels complicit.

Dramatic irony: the audience knows Macbeth goes ahead despite this speech; his expressed conscience makes the murder more disturbing.

Wider-play quotations to learn

QUOTE	WHERE	THEME
"Is this a dagger which I see before me"	Act 2 Sc 1	Guilt, hallucination, ambition
"Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?"	Act 2 Sc 2	Guilt, conscience
"I am in blood / Stepped in so far"	Act 3 Sc 4	Deterioration, inevitability
"Stars, hide your fires; / Let not light see my black and deep desires"	Act 1 Sc 4	Concealment, ambition