

Macbeth Theme Analysis - Helpful Hints and Examples

Literary Devices: When writing about character, you need to write about one character only in that paragraph. The same goes for plot event – select a single “event” to focus on.

When you are writing about literature, you always do so from the perspective that your reader knows the play, but she just does not have it in front of her to verify your analysis or look for additional explanation. This is why you include your own quotes. You should not be summarizing the play itself.

Thesis Statements: The clearer, more specific, and more persuasive your thesis is, the easier it is to prove. Most of you need to do some serious thesis revision.

Reminder: Italicize the play’s title: *Macbeth*. Do not italicize the character’s name: Macbeth.

Shaping Your Essay:

Make sure each quotation has a clear, effective lead-in that adequately and accurately provides a context for the quote.

When choosing quotes, make sure that first they are clear examples of your literary device, and second, that they clearly relate to and connect with your interpretation of the theme.

In your commentary, you have two tasks, which should be completed in the following order: 1. explain the quotes – what does it mean (this is not about telling me what happened), and 2. explain its connection with the theme, as defined by your thesis. Each chunk must have this clear thesis-based connection.

Examples:

Thesis: William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* proves that blind ambition does not always lead to success. This is confirmed through Macbeth’s ironic actions and thoughts shown imagery, as well as in recent history.

Body Thesis: Macbeth’s gory deeds seem to verify his untiring ambition to become King of Scotland, but his regrets ironically show otherwise, revealing how impossible it is to guarantee success when one is solely motivated by ambition.

Q: When Macbeth first learns of the witches’ prediction of himself becoming king, Macbeth reluctantly declares that, “If chance will have me King, why,/ chance may crown me,/ Without my stir” (I.iii.25).

CM: Macbeth is initially unconcerned about the importance of this position. If fate leads him to the throne, he will accept the responsibility. Greed rapidly engulfs Macbeth, and leads to his decision of murdering the present King of Scotland.

Thesis: In William Shakespeare’s play *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, imagery and characterization of Lady Macbeth are used to reveal how people let their fears and anger control their actions, and let desires for power and control run their lives.

Body Thesis: Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth to demonstrate how easy it is to become corrupt through lust for power and how it can control one’s life.

Q: On the night of Duncan’s murder, Lady Macbeth decides to “put this night’s great to all our nights and days to come. Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom” (I.v.79-81).

CM: Lady Macbeth was going to make all of the plans for Macbeth to kill the king because she wanted absolute power. Her consuming obsession for more power leads her to distrust her husband’s ability to follow through with their corrupt plot to overthrow Duncan; she worries about their plan because her desires hinge upon the outcome of the Macbeth’s actions.