

# Macbeth

## *Sample Analytical Paper Topics*

These analytical papers are designed to review your knowledge of the drama and apply that knowledge to a critical paper. The topics may request that you examine the conflicts, themes, or question a standard theory about the play.

### **TOPIC #1**

The term tragic hero refers to a central character who has an authoritative status in the drama, but through a flaw in his or her character brings about his or her demise. The flaw may consist of a poor decision that is made and creates a situation the character cannot change or control. The tragic hero recognizes his or her flaw, however there is nothing that can be done to avert tragedy. Macbeth is seen as a tragic hero. Write a paper tracing the sequence of events that contribute to Macbeth's demise and tragic end.

#### ***Outline***

**I.** Thesis Statement: *Macbeth is seen as a tragic hero. He compromises his honor and negates moral responsibility to attain power and position which result in his tragic end.*

#### **II. Definition and characteristics of a tragic hero**

1. Fate
2. Weakness
3. Poor decision making resulting in a catastrophe
4. Realization of flaw but unable to prevent tragedy

#### **III. The Witches**

- A. Plan to meet Macbeth
- B. Statement that fair is foul, and foul is fair

#### **IV. Allegiance to Scotland and Duncan**

- A. Battle with Macdonwald
- B. Battle with the King of Norway
- C. Duncan's Response
  1. Honor bestowed on Macbeth
  2. Duncan's opinion of Macbeth

#### **V. Witches on the battlefield**

- A. The prophecy
- B. Macbeth's Response
- C. Banquo's Response

#### **VI. Macbeth's meeting with Duncan**

- A. Duncan greets Macbeth with respect
- B. Macbeth's reaction to Duncan naming Malcolm as his successor

## **VII. Decisions made before Macbeth is king**

- A. Lady Macbeth's plan
  - 1. Macbeth's response
  - 2. Lady Macbeth's Influence on Macbeth
  - 3. Macbeth's decision
- B. Eve of the Murder
  - 1. Floating Dagger
  - 2. Macbeth's reaction
- C. Duncan's Murder
  - 1. Murder of the guards
  - 2. Response
- D. Discovery of Duncan's body
  - 1. Macbeth's reaction
  - 2. Duncan's sons
  - 3. Macbeth named as king

## **VIII. Decisions made as King**

- A. Banquo
  - 1. Fear of prophecy
  - 2. Hires Murderers
- B. Banquet
  - 1. Reaction to Murderers
  - 2. Ghost
- C. Meeting with the Witches
  - 1. Response to Prophecy
  - 2. Macduff and family
  - 3. Leaving for Dunsinane in England
- D. Battle with Malcolm's forces
  - 1. Dunsinane prophecy
  - 2. Young Siward
  - 3. False sense of security
- E. Reactions to Lady Macbeth's illness and death
- F. Meeting Macduff
  - 1. Guilt
  - 2. Revealing prophecy to Macduff
  - 3. Macbeth's Realization that the Witches told him half-truths

## **IX. Macbeth's tragic end**

- A. Macduff's victory
- B. Malcolm's speech

## TOPIC #2

Lady Macbeth is seen as a controlling factor in Macbeth's life. She is able to control his actions and events. However, she loses control of Macbeth. Write a paper describing what control she has in Macbeth's life and how the loss of that power contributes to her demise.

### Outline

I. Thesis Statement: *Lady Macbeth's desire for power prompts her interest in controlling Macbeth's actions. However, she loses control which contributes to her tragedy.*

### II. Introduction of Lady Macbeth

- A. Reading Macbeth's letter
- B. Witches prophecy fulfilled
- C. Opinion of Macbeth
- D. Desire for Power
  - 1. Strength needed
  - 2. Her plan

### III. Meeting with Macbeth

- A. Affection towards each other
- B. Lady Macbeth's plan

### IV. Power over Macbeth

- A. Macbeth's Decision about Lady Macbeth's plan
  - 1. Lady Macbeth's response to Macbeth
    - a. Attacks his manhood
    - b. Calls him a coward
    - c. His fear
    - d. Her anger
  - 2. Macbeth's decision after they speak
    - a. Agrees to the plan
    - b. Recognizes her strength and vicious nature
- B. Macbeth's vision of the daggers

### V. Loss of Control over Macbeth

- A. Duncan's murder
  - 1. Guards
  - 2. Voices
  - 3. Fearful to return to Duncan's chamber
- B. Banquo
  - 1. Hires Murderers
  - 2. Murder of Banquo

- C. Banquet
  - 1. Reaction to Ghost
    - a. Lady Macbeth is unable to control Macbeth's response
  - 2. Confession from Macbeth
  - 3. Guest leaving upon Lady Macbeth's request
  - 4. Macbeth turns to the Witches for advice

#### **VI. Decision's made without Lady Macbeth's advice**

- A. Banquo's murder
- B. Murder of Macduff's family
- C. Leaving for England
- D. Battle with Malcolm and Macduff

#### **VII. Lady Macbeth's loss of control of her own life**

- A. Inability to kill Duncan herself
- B. Taking the bloody daggers back to Duncan's chamber after the murder
- C. Realization she has no control over Macbeth's decisions
- D. Guilt Feelings

#### **VIII. Resolution**

- A. Tragic end
  - 1. Lady Macbeth's
  - 2. Macbeth's

### **TOPIC #3**

A motif is a word, image, or action in a drama that happens over and over again. There is a recurring motif of blood and violence in the tragedy Macbeth. This motif contributes to the theme of the drama. In a paper trace the use of blood and violence and cite images that contribute to the theme.

#### **Outline**

- I.** Thesis Statement: *The use of blood and violence occurs throughout the tragedy of Macbeth. These images contribute to the understanding of the vicious nature of Macbeth.*

#### **II. The Witches**

- A. On the battlefield during the battle
- B. Statement to make foul things fair and fair things foul
- C. Story of the sailor and his wife
- D. Creating a potion
  - 1. Using blood in the potion
  - 2. Second Apparition appearing to Macbeth

#### **III. Murders Macbeth commits**

- A. Duncan and his guards
  - 1. Inability to say amen
  - 2. Voices speaking to Macbeth

- 3. Inability to smear blood on guards
- 4. Macbeth's description of the murder
- B. Banquo
  - 1. Murder committed on stage
  - 2. Vicious nature of the crime
- C. Macduff's family
  - 1. Murder committed on stage
  - 2. Defenseless victims
- D. Young Siward

#### **IV. Lady Macbeth**

- A. Plot to murder Duncan
- B. Bloody Daggers
  - 1. Returning daggers to Duncan's chamber
  - 2. Smearing guards with Duncan's blood
  - 3. Having the blood on her hands
- C. Guilt feelings
  - 1. Sleep walking
  - 2. Confession of the murders
  - 3. Recalling the events associated with the murders
  - 4. Inability to wash the guilt, the blood from her hands
  - 5. Her tragic end

#### **V. Battles Macbeth is involved in**

- A. Duncan's Army
  - 1. Macdonwald's murder
  - 2. King of Norway
- B. Malcolm's forces
  - 1. Young Siward's death
  - 2. Macbeth's forces
- C. Macduff's Revenge
  - 1. Macbeth's reluctance to battle with Macduff
  - 2. Macbeth's tragic end

### **TOPIC #4**

When a comparison is made between two characters the events that happen, the situations that occur, and the characteristics of each character are shown to be similar. When a contrast is made the differences are acknowledged. Write a paper that compares and contrasts the characters of Macbeth and Macduff.

#### ***Outline***

- I. Thesis Statement: *The characters of Macbeth and Macduff are adversaries in the tragedy, however certain similarities can be cited. The differences and similarities contribute to Macbeth's tragic ending and Macduff's resolution.*

## **II. Similarities between Macduff and Macbeth**

- A. Name
- B. Married
- C. Soldiers in Duncan's Forces
- D. Honor
  - 1. Macbeth's honor at the beginning
  - 2. Macduff's honor
    - a. Loyalty to Scotland
    - b. Loyalty to his family

## **III. Differences in Macduff and Macbeth**

- A. Duncan's Murder
  - 1. Macduff's response
  - 2. Macbeth's response
- B. Coronation
  - 1. Macbeth's acceptance of the Crown
  - 2. Macduff's disagreeing with the selection
    - a. Refuses to attend coronation
    - b. Leaving for England
    - c. Joining Malcolm's fight against Macbeth
- C. Macbeth's Suspicions of Macduff
- D. Witches Warning
  - 1. Second Apparition
  - 2. Macbeth orders Macduff's family to be murdered
- E. Death of Wife
  - 1. Macduff's reaction
    - a. Shock
    - b. Grief
    - c. Wants to know who is responsible
    - d. Vow to seek revenge
  - 2. Macbeth's reaction
    - a. No emotional response
    - b. Does not inquire to the circumstances of her death

## **IV. Motive for Murder**

- A. Macbeth murders out of selfish greed and lust for power
- B. Macduff murders to avenge the murder of his family

## **V. Resolution**

- A. Macduff returns peace to Scotland by killing Macbeth
- B. Revenge is achieved
- C. Restores Malcolm to the throne of Scotland

## TOPIC #5

The Witches are seen as a force working to bring about the demise of Macbeth. They are known as the antagonists in the drama. They foreshadow events that create suspense in the drama and Macbeth makes decisions based on their prophecies. Write a paper describing how the Witches are a controlling factor in Macbeth's destiny.

### Outline

- I. Thesis Statement: *Macbeth makes decisions effecting his future based on what the Witches have told him. He guides his destiny based on their prophecies.*

### II. Statements made by the Witches in the opening scene

- A. "When the hurlyburly's done, When the battle's lost and won."
- B. "Fair is foul, and foul is fair  
Hover through the fog and filthy air."

### III. Exhibition of Witches' Power

- A. Prophecies
  - 1. First battle over
  - 2. Macbeth's title
  - 3. Macbeth to be made King
  - 4. Banquo's sons to be Kings
  - 5. Three Apparitions prophecies
    - a. Beware of Macduff
    - b. No man born of woman will harm Macbeth
    - c. Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill
- B. Story of the Sailor
- C. Hecate's speech
- D. Spell cast when potion is made

### IV. Macbeth's reaction to prophecies

- A. Disbelief
- B. Anxious for power
  - 1. Lady Macbeth's plan
  - 2. Fear of retribution
  - 3. Decision to kill Duncan
  - 4. Vision of bloody dagger
- C. Duncan's Murder
  - 1. Guards murdered
  - 2. Reaction to the murder
  - 3. Public reaction to the murder
- D. Banquo
  - 1. Murder of Banquo
  - 2. Reaction to Banquo's ghost
  - 3. Confession at the banquet

- E. Three Apparitions
  - 1. Decision to leave Scotland for England
  - 2. Murder of Macduff's family
  - 3. Engage a battle with Malcolm
- F. Inability to make rash decisions
  - 1. Murders
  - 2. Battles

**V. Treatment of Lady Macbeth**

- A. Affectionate before murder
- B. Avoidance
- C. Disinterested
- D. Lack of grief when he is told of her death

**VI. Resolution**

- A. Inability to make rational decisions
- B. Guilt feelings consume his mind
- C. Realization of the Witches' prophecies being half-truths
- D. Macbeth's death