

# Macbeth character essay

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Macbeth Character Essay In Act 1, Macbeth is described by Duncan as “ O valiant cousin! Worthy gentleman! ” By the end of the play, Malcolm calls him a “ dead butcher”. Trace the changes in Macbeths’ character, analysing the reasons behind them. Macbeth’s ruthless seeking journey for power, urged on by his wife, becomes his tragic flaw which leads to his downfall in all ways. The tragic hero is used by Shakespeare to show how the tragedy lies in the greatness that could so easily have been Macbeth’s.

Inevitably, his conversion in character all results in his ambition which causes him to act in such brutal ways. We note how an idealised individual such as Macbeth’s changes into a despised one. We observe Macbeth’s greatness and bravery in combat through the Captain’s account of the battle. Macbeth is described as “ Valour’s minion” who “ carved out his passage till he faced the slave”. One examines the respect enclosed in his companion soldiers who give him the name “ brave Macbeth”.

This is followed by a line of reassurance which is “ well he deserves that name”. Macbeth’s honour and excellence in battle is demonstrated in Duncan’s words “ O valiant cousin! Worthy gentleman! ”. His lack of fear displays his courage and heroism presented in the line “ As cannons over-charged with double-cracks”. Shakespeare uses this to highlight the greatness he once had. We immediately suspect the thought of Duncan’s murder in Macbeth’s mind through the line “ Good sir, why do you start and seem to fear things that sound so fair? . Macbeth’s ambition seems to take control of him as he continuously orders the witches to inform him of the prophecies in the lines “ Stay, you imperfect speakers! Tell me more” and “ Speak, I charge you! ”. One can imagine Macbeth’s subsequent actions in

the line " nothing is but what is not" as through it we realise that the only values that exists for Macbeth are those which he does not yet have, the Kingship. This continues to demonstrate how his ambition takes full control over him.

Macbeth realises that he must act quickly as " The Prince of Cumberland" is " a step on which he must fall down, or else o'erleap", which continues to indicate how his ambition is taking over him and triggers his thought of Duncan's murder which will soon become a reality. Macbeth recognizes the various reasons of why he should not kill Duncan and is tormented about these doubts, however he resolves to his " Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself and falls on the other". However the loyalty shown to King Duncan in previous scenes is forgotten completely and his true colours are really being shown.

We can see how Macbeth deceives Banquo by replying: " i think not of them" when Banquo says he dreamt of the witches. This is linked to the theme of " appearance vs. reality" as we see the " false face" Macbeth has put on. Macbeth's guilty, overwrought brain induces him to see visions before he does the murder. His guilt becomes outwardly visible to his own eyes, which he calls " a dagger of the mind". This is a sign of the great turmoil in his mind where this fearless soldier is now tormented by images of blood and fear of the unknown.

After Duncan's murder Macbeth realizes that because of the deed he has just committed he has lost the possibility of ever receiving blessing. He appears to be conscience stricken as he struggles to say " Amen". He realises perfectly well the extent of his guilt as we see in the lines " Will all great

Neptune's Ocean wash this blood clean from my hand? No" and " The pluck out mine eyes". Macbeth's guilt induces loss of sleep and, since he has lost his peace of mind, his innocence and guilt will torture him. His guilt becomes clearly evident in the line " Wake Duncan with thy knocking!

I would thou couldst" and this shows how he will be scarred and damned for eternity. Macbeth's mind is tormented by the witches' prophecy that Banquo's descendants will be kings of Scotland and convinces murderers that Banquo has always been their enemy while forcing them to kill him. This imposes the reprehensive position with which he has become, even worse than the murderers. Macbeth's guilt and wickedness is also embodied in the ghost of Banquo which appears to torture Macbeth at the banquet he has organised for the succession of the throne.

As soon as Macbeth hypocritically mentions Banquo, he sees his ghost however Macbeth attributes his hallucination of the ghost to being a result of him being a beginner in murder. In later murders Macbeth appears to be quite hardened to the horrors of murder. He does feel guilt but this is not enough to keep him from committing further murders as he says that he is " in blood stepped in so far that should I wade no more returning were as tedious as going o'er". Macbeth derives security from the witches as he typically interprets the apparitions in his favour, rejecting what is unfavourable to him.

We remember Hecate's words: " security is mortals' chiefest enemy". By the end of the play Macbeth becomes completely ruthless and irrational and decides that " The very firstlings of my heart shall be the firstlings of my hand". He therefore resolves to attack Macduff's castle and kill his family.

This accentuates Macbeth's evil even more while showing the degeneration in his character as he murders a defenceless woman and her children. Macbeth no longer has any soul searching as he does not justify himself anymore with soliloquies before doing his deeds.

This causes him to become completely ruthless and unscrupulous, making him an outright villain. Although throughout the book Macbeth seems to be influenced by his wife and the witches, it is Macbeth and his will to become king that performs each and every deed. Macbeth could so easily have been a righteous and respectable person however it is his ambition and will that induces him to become a "hell hound" and a "dead butcher". Although Macbeth has become a changed man his only kingly characteristic was his courage to fight until he, the lonely saddened yet ruthless character, died in battle.