The play is a tragedy: not simply a ‘sad’ story, but a specific category of drama that features a ‘good’ man experiencing a disaster due to personal failing (their tragic flaw) and/or fate. Written a year after the Gunpowder Plot [an attempt to kill King James I], the downfall of traitors and the restoration of the ‘rightful’ heir (Malcolm) would have appealed to the King – a politically wise move on Shakespeare’s part. King James [who the play was performed to] was supposedly related to Banquo, as alluded to in the Witches’ prophecy: ‘you shall get kings’.

Divine right of the King: the belief that the right of the King to rule was given to him by God, making any attack on the King not just an act of treason but a grave sin. Belief in witchcraft was widespread in the time of the play; there were laws against witchcraft [which King James strengthened]. Witches were thought to have a range of powers, yet in Macbeth they do not perform any actual ‘magic’ – they are threatening and sinister, but not necessarily supernatural.

Ambition and power: Macbeth and his wife have an obsessive desire for power and are prepared to do anything to gain it. However, Shakespeare does not allow them even a moment of enjoyment once they achieve their goal; instead they are consumed with paranoia and guilt. Once the initial crime has been committed, Macbeth’s actions become more bloody and cruel as he desperately attempts to hold on to power; his role is characterized by fear and violence. In the final moments of the play it is clear that his men have no loyalty to him: ‘those in command, move only in command, nothing in love’.

Loyalty and leadership: The play considers frequently what makes a good leader; as well as showing us an example of someone who was a strong leader (‘brave Macbeth’) becoming a tyrant, Malcolm and Macduff’s conversation in Act 4 reflect on the moral responsibilities of a king. Treachery is a constant in this play and is present from the very first scene – the battle Macbeth performs so well is in a rebellion by another traitor.

Masculinity and femininity: The partnership of Macbeth and his wife did not meet the gender expectations of the time period. Lady Macbeth appears to surpass her husband in ambition and violent cruelty, explicitly asking to be ‘unsexed’ so she can perform whatever dark actions her ambition requires. Lady Macbeth provokes Macbeth to action through insulting his manhood, and Macbeth then uses this technique when encouraging the murderers to kill Banquo; these taunts contrast with the ideas expressed by Malcolm and Macduff about what it means to be a man.

Guilt and justice: One of the things that makes Macbeth and Lady Macbeth such interesting characters is that they do not pretend that what they are doing is right; Macbeth is very clear when he reflects on the immorality of killing Duncan (his king, cousin and guest) simply for his ‘vaulting ambition’. Lady Macbeth assures him that ‘a little waster [will] wash away the blood of so many other可’.

Blood is referenced many times throughout the play, especially in relation to guilt: Lady M assuming that ‘a little water’ can wash it away, but by her final scene she is being driven mad by a ‘damn spot’ that she cannot wash by a ‘damn spot’ that she cannot wash by a ‘damn spot’ that she cannot wash by a ‘damn spot’ that she cannot wash by a ‘damn spot’ that she cannot wash by a ‘damn spot’ that she cannot wash.

Vocabulary & Concepts

Lady M: Come you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here and fill me from crown to toe topful of dross cruel.

Lady M: Come you to my woman’s breasts and take my milk for gall.

Lady M: Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under’t.

Macbeth: He’s here in double trust [about Duncan].

Macbeth: I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only vaulting ambition.

Lady M: When you durst do it, then you were a man.

Lady M: I would, while it was smiling in my face, have plucked my ripple from his boneless gums and dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you have done to this.

Macbeth: False face must hide what false heart doth know.

Macbeth: Methought I heard a voice cry, ‘Sleep no more: Macbeth does murder sleep.’

Macbeth: Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?

Lady Macbeth: My hands are of your colour, but I shame to wear a heart so white.

Lady Macbeth: A little water clears us of this deed.

Macduff: Oh horror, horror, horror, tongue nor heart cannot conceive.

Macduff: Most sacrilegious murder hath broke open The Lords’ anointed temple.

Donald Bain: There’s daggers in men’s smiles.

Banquo: Thou hast it now... and I fear thou played’st most foully for’t.

Macduff: To be thus is nothing, but to be safely thus.

Macbeth: Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown... For Banquo’s issue have I filled my mind.

Lady M: Things without remedy should be without regard; what’s done is done.

Macbeth: O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!

Macbeth: Thou cannot say I did it; never shake thy gory locks at me!

Macbeth: Blood will have blood.

Macbeth: I am in blood stopped so far that should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o’er.

Macbeth: This deed I’ll do before this purpose cool.

Macbeth: Ross: Alas poor country, almost afraid to know itself. Cannot be called our mother, but our grave.

Macbeth: I must also feel it as a man.

Lady M: Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?

Lady M: What will these hands ne’er be clean?... what’s done cannot be undone.

Doctor: Unnatural deeds do breed unnatural troubles.

Angus: Now do his feel his title hang loose upon his head, let him that would should open The Lords’ anointed temple.

Macbeth: Life is but a walking shadow... it is as tell a tale by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing.

Macbeth: I go to be awry of the sun and wish the state of the world were now undone.
**Macbeth Knowledge Organiser**

**Essential question:** How do we avert the dangers of unchecked ambition?

## Writing the Essay

Remember the marking hierarchy:

1. **The topic**
   - Everything you write must be a genuine exploration of the essay topic
2. **The text**
   - You must use the text as evidence for your arguments, using more than just the obvious quotes and details. Make subtle connections across the entire text
3. **Written expression**
   - You must write fluently, with precise vocabulary choices and with a cogent structure to your essay

### Essay Planning Method

1. Take the topic and brainstorm associations and implications of key words, linked to the central tensions, dilemmas and themes of the texts.
2. Then, take the prompt statement and add the question stem ‘Is it true that...’ to it. Develop your thesis and supporting arguments around this.

### Essay Structure

#### Introduction: The ‘inverted pyramid’ method

1. **Discuss:** How does the topic reflect one of the central dilemmas of the text? (Topic, Text details, Context)
2. **Define:** Signpost your main and supporting arguments.
3. **Refine:** What will your overall stance and thesis be? How does this reflect the writer’s underlying concerns?

#### Main Body:

1. **Main argument...**
   - What is the first main idea you wish to explore?
2. **Furthermore...**
   - Develop your main argument further, exploring different aspects of the text
3. **However...**
   - Here you begin to offer a subtler reading of the topic, by unpicking the implications / assumptions of the prompt statement
   
   **NOTE:** You must not contradict what you have previously argued – instead, you are now steering the essay into a more nuanced discussion of its subtext

4. **(Optional) In this way / Consequently / Yet...**
   - This is where you develop your deeper insight and interpretation & explore the subtext to the topic

#### Conclusion: Flip the pyramid.

**Essentially / Ultimately...**

1. **Generalisation** – What is the final thesis you want to offer into the topic?
2. **Overview** of the most telling detail of the text which echoes this.
3. **Definitive statement** on this topic, and your final insight into the writer’s underlying motives and purposes.

### Active Verbs

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### Discourse Markers

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<th>Consequences, causes and effects</th>
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