

Writing about the BIG IDEAS in 'Macbeth': Gender

This resource has been designed to help you consider the BIG IDEAS explored by Shakespeare in 'Macbeth'. For Assessment Objective 1, you are required to:

Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to: • maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response • use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations

Exploring the BIG IDEAS will help you meet the requirements of this assessment objective. Complete the activities below in as much detail as possible to help you begin to consider how to discuss them in an exam answer.

ACTIVITY 1: Explain where the theme (Big Idea) of gender appears in the play as annotations around the image. Link your answers to events and characters as well as Shakespeare's authorial intent. If you can, include examples from across the play.

Gender



ACTIVITY 2: Consider how Shakespeare connects gender to other 'Big Ideas'/themes explored in the play. Explain in as much detail as possible. One has been done for you.

Gender and ambition are linked through Lady Macbeth. She is a character who does not let the fact she is a woman stand in the way of getting what she wants. In fact, her ambitions lead her to call upon spirits to rid her of her femininity. While she is not changing her gender, she identifies that certain qualities typically associated with her gender may be a weakness and so she believes she must purge herself of them to achieve her ambitions.

Ambition

Masculinity

Power

Innocence

Gender

ACTIVITY 3: Complete the sentence stems that help you answer the following question: **How is gender explored throughout the play?** Try and turn each sentence stem into a full paragraph by exploring your own interpretations of gender. What do certain events, characters and motifs suggest to you? What does Shakespeare want his audiences to understand? Include quotations if you need to, but remember, you do not need to analyse language for AO1.

At the beginning of the play, Macbeth embodies the stereotypical view of a man; he lives up to societal expectations through his acts of bloodshed and violence in honour of the king. Perhaps Shakespeare is keen to connect masculinity and violence because...

Lady Macbeth, however, is held back by her gender; the opportunities afforded to her are few, reflecting Shakespeare's society's expectations of the Jacobean woman. Gender, however, is seen by Lady Macbeth as an obstacle to overcome. To do this, she calls upon spirits to 'unsex' her and rid her of her femininity, as a way of...

As the play progresses, Lady Macbeth uses Macbeth's gender against him, attacking his masculinity when he refuses to go through with Duncan's murder. Macbeth's failure to summon the physical and emotional strength needed to complete the act of regicide suggests gender is...

Shakespeare, however, does challenge these gender associations, particularly in Act Four, Scene Three, when Macduff hears news of his family's murder. Malcolm expects Macduff to react with anger and violence, two qualities typically connected to a stereotypical view of masculinity, yet Macduff says he must first 'feel [his loss] as a man.' This suggests...