

## Context and Act 1 - Knowledge Organiser

### Plot summary

Act I scene i – The three witches gather to in a thunder storm to meet Macbeth

Act I scene ii – Duncan hears reports of the battle in which Macbeth proves himself a hero and also of the treachery of the Thane of Cawdor.

Act I scene iii – Macbeth & Banquo meet the witches and hear the predictions that he will be Thane of Cawdor and the next king. Ross arrives to confirm that Macbeth is the new Thane of Cawdor.

Act I scene iv – Duncan decides to make his son Malcolm the heir to his throne and tells Macbeth that he will visit his castle.

Act I scene v – Lady Macbeth reads a letter from her husband about the events so far and makes up her mind to murder Duncan.

Act I scene vi – Duncan arrives at Macbeth's castle and is welcomed by Lady Macbeth.

Act I scene vii – Macbeth decides he cannot go through with the plot but Lady Macbeth persuades him to change his mind.

### Key Themes:

- Appearance *versus* Reality & Disruption of the natural order
- Loyalty and Trust *versus* Betrayal and Revenge
- Fate *versus* Free Will
- Gender, masculinity and femininity
- The Supernatural

### Key Terms:

supernatural – a force beyond the laws of nature

pagan – non-religious

monarch – king or queen

Thane – Scottish Lord

prophecy – a prediction of the future

paradox/ical – a contradictory statement

patriarchal – society in which women are considered inferior

contemporary – belonging to the present time

ambition – strong desire to achieve something

cowardice – lack of bravery

### Key Literary Terms

iambic Pentameter - controlled meter conveys power and authority.

trochee – one stressed syllable followed by one unstressed syllable

tragic hero – protagonist of a tragedy

dramatic irony – the audience knows more than a character does  
couplet – two lines

hamartia – fatal flaw that leads to the downfall of the tragic hero

soliloquy – character speaks his or her thoughts direct to the audience

semantic field – a set of words related to one theme

### Quotes:

“Fair is foul, and foul is fair  
hover through the fog and filthy air”

“...his brandish'd steel  
which smoked with bloody execution”

“O valiant cousin! Worthy gentleman!”

“that shalt be King hereafter”

“Lesser than Macbeth and greater”

“...Stars, hide your fires;  
Let not light see my black and deep desires:”

“...yet do I fear thy nature”

“...unsex me here,  
and fill me from the crown to the toe top-full  
of direst cruelty!”

“I am his kinsman and his subject...”

“When you durst do it, then you were a man”

### Context:

The plays Shakespeare wrote during the reign of King James( such as Macbeth) were cynical and dark reflecting the insecurities of King James. Macbeth is known as one of Shakespeare's most strong and forceful plays. The play was **written** in 1606, a time in history that was called the Elizabethan era.