Macbeth Essay Questions

Choose 1 question and write a 1200 to 1500 word essay.

Hard copies due April 8; electronic copies to Turnitin.com due class time April 8. It is mandatory that you have a hard copy for class on April 8, and that you also submit your essay to Turnitin.com. I will only grade hard copies, but I will not grade the hard copy unless I see it on Turnitin.com first.

Turnitin.com
2nd Block  Class Number 7865087  password: second
3rd Class Number 7864089  password: third

Grading criteria:
A. Knowledge of work demonstrated through precise and relevant references to texts, including quotations and specific examples. Quotations are cited parenthetically by act, scene, line number as in the following example: “Fair is foul and foul is fair” (1.1.10)
B. Addressing the question. Answer the question in a focused, analytical, and convincing manner.
C. Organization. Ideas are organized in a coherent and clear way.
D. Use of the language: MLA format is used; essays are typed and double spaced! With proper heading; language is precise, clear, and correct.

1. How does the play portray evil as a perversion of human nature? Show how Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have to go against their own natures in order to kill Duncan. Trace the effect the betrayal of human nature has on each of them.

2. How does the imagery of disease function in Macbeth? Trace the way in which evil works on Macbeth and on Scotland like a sickness. Find imagery to support the idea that Malcolm and Macduff “heal” the country by overthrowing Macbeth.

3. As Macbeth becomes more evil, how do his feelings change? Start by exploring how his feelings at the beginning of the play are much like anybody else’s. Trace the way in which his feelings about people and his responses to events became twisted and abnormal.

4. How does evil work by deception? Contrast what Macbeth and Lady Macbeth believe they are gaining through murder with what they actually get. Do they deceive themselves, or are they deceived by others? Or both?

5. Supernatural events occur throughout the play. Discuss their dramatic function. Each time Macbeth encounters something supernatural – the witches, the floating dagger, a ghost – he moves more deeply into evil. List the supernatural events and comment on how each marks a step in Macbeth’s downfall.

6. Do the supernatural events really occur, or are they projections of Macbeth’s inner state? Some readers believe that the floating dagger, Banquo’s ghost, and even the witches are products of Macbeth’s imagination. Explore that possibility. Point out in what way, if any, the meaning of the play is changed by accepting or rejecting the reality of the supernatural.

7. Contrast Macbeth’s imaginative nature to Lady Macbeth’s pragmatic nature. Compare their attitudes toward Duncan’s murder, both before and after the deed. Throughout the play, give instances of
his poetic description of feelings and situations and her prosaic, practical way of thinking and expressing herself. Do their natures prepare us for what ultimately happens to each?

8. How are Malcolm and Macduff foil characters to Macbeth? Compare Malcolm, the rightful king, with Macbeth. What motivates each of them? Does Malcolm care about his people? Does Macbeth? Compare the way Macbeth manipulates the two murderers for his own purposes and the way Malcolm temporarily deceives Macduff for the good of their country. How does Shakespeare establish Macduff as a good man? Show how Macduff’s character is revealed through his actions and reactions. Focus on how he handles himself after Duncan’s murder and after hearing that his wife and children have been killed.

9. How does the imagery of light and darkness work through the play? List instances of characters calling upon darkness to hide their evil deeds. Through light-dark imagery, trace the contest of good and evil.

10. Fate and destiny: what is a man’s proper relation to them? Explore what the play is saying about this question by dividing the characters into two groups—those who trust their fate to a higher power, and those who take destiny into their own hands. Which group fares better?

11. Macbeth is one of Shakespeare’s shortest plays. Discuss the economy of the writing. Show how each detail contributes to the advancement of the plot, and how Macbeth seems to plunge to his destruction at a sickening pace.

12. Discuss the use of dramatic tension in Macbeth. Chart what Shakespeare lets us know and what information he withholds from us in order to maintain suspense.

13. Social structure: How is the Scottish society of Macbeth’s time ordered? How is peace maintained? Evaluate how Macbeth affects the social structure and what happens to it after Macbeth takes over.

14. How and to what extent does Macbeth’s rise and fall mirror that of a 20th Century dictator or tyrant? Locate an actual dictator to use for comparison. Look carefully at such aspects as Macbeth’s rise to king, the decisions he makes to secure his kingship, the way he treats those close to him and his subjects, the pressures he faces, mistakes he makes, his psychological breakdown. Be sure to cite your sources for the info about the dictator. Make sure that your essay, however, is equally about Macbeth.

15. To what extent do Macbeth’s soliloquies present Macbeth in a more sympathetic light than if we were to judge him on the basis of his actions alone?