The main idea

Duncan embodies generous authority but repeatedly misreads loyalty. His vulnerability makes Macbeth's betrayal both political and intimate.

Character development

Rewards loyal service

Trusts appearances

Enters Macbeth's home

Becomes the murdered king

Trust betrayed twice

"There's no art" — Duncan, 1.4; reading a face

"O worthiest cousin!" — Duncan to Macbeth, 1.4

His admission that appearances conceal character is followed by affectionate praise of the next traitor. Dramatic irony makes his confidence disturbing.

Hospitality reversed

"This castle hath a pleasant seat" — Duncan, 1.6

"His silver skin laced with his golden blood" — Macbeth describing Duncan, 2.3

The welcoming setting conceals the plan to kill him. Macbeth's ornate report idealises the body even as the murderer performs public grief; interpretation must account for that speaker's deception.

Develop the interpretation

Duncan's generosity does not make his judgement flawless. Distinguish the image of legitimate kingship from a claim that every decision he makes is wise.

Recall question

Why does Shakespeare let Duncan recognise deception before he trusts Macbeth?