EXAM STASH

GCSE ENGLISH – CHARACTER REVISION

LADY MACBETH – ACT 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE • CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT



AMBITION | GENDER | APPEARANCE & REALITY | THE SUPERNATURAL

Lady Macbeth turns the promise of kingship into a plan for murder. Her commanding language tries to suppress conscience and make Macbeth associate violence with being a man.

THE JOURNEY: ACT 1

1.5 Reads Macbeth's letter and fears his kindness will obstruct ambition.



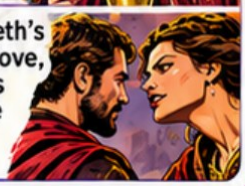
1.5 Calls on spirits for cruelty; instructs Macbeth to hide their intentions.



1.6 Performs the welcoming hostess while the audience knows the danger.



1.7 Attacks Macbeth's courage and love, then explains how to frame the guards.



6 KEY QUOTATIONS

1 ***'too full o' th' milk of human kindness'***
Speaker/Scene: Lady Macbeth, 1.5
Method: Nurturing metaphor
Analysis: She treats compassion as a weakness. The image of milk links kindness to nourishment, preparing her disturbing attempt to exchange care for cruelty.

2 ***'unsex me here'***
Speaker/Scene: Lady Macbeth, 1.5
Method: Imperative and invocation
Analysis: She asks spirits to remove qualities she associates with womanhood. This exposes her own gender assumptions, not proof that Shakespeare endorses them.

3 ***'take my milk for gall'***
Speaker/Scene: Lady Macbeth, 1.5
Method: Antithesis and bodily imagery
Analysis: Milk suggests nurture; bitter gall suggests cruelty. She imagines remaking herself so compassion cannot interrupt the crime.

4 ***'Look like th' innocent flower'***
Speaker/Scene: Lady Macbeth, 1.5
Method: Simile and imperative
Analysis: Her next image, the concealed serpent, turns hospitality into a performance. The audience knows the planned danger that Duncan cannot see.

5 ***'When you durst do it, then you were a man'***
Speaker/Scene: Lady Macbeth, 1.7
Method: Conditional statement and manipulation
Analysis: She makes masculinity depend on murder. Macbeth's earlier moral limits become, in her argument, a shameful failure of courage.

6 ***'screw your courage to the sticking place'***
Speaker/Scene: Lady Macbeth, 1.7
Method: Imperative and mechanical metaphor
Analysis: Courage becomes something to tighten and hold. Her practical plan replaces Macbeth's moral objections with confidence about getting away with it.

KEY CONNECTIONS

- **Macbeth:** his hesitation gives her an opening, but he still chooses to agree.
- **Duncan:** her outward welcome contrasts with the betrayal planned inside his host's household.
- **Themes:** ambition, gender, appearance and reality, conscience and the supernatural.

INTERPRETATION: LADY MACBETH IN ACT 1

- **Basic:** she pressures Macbeth to kill Duncan.
- **Further:** her private invocation contrasts with her public hospitality.
- **Advanced:** her repeated calls for cruelty may suggest that ruthlessness is something she must construct rather than a quality she effortlessly possesses.

CONTEXT (RELEVANT)

A host should protect a guest, while a subject owes loyalty to the king. Her plan violates both obligations. The serpent can recall biblical temptation; explain its effect rather than treating it as a fixed character label.



PAIRED-QUOTATION LINK

"milk of human kindness" ↔ ***"take my milk for gall"*** (1.5): nourishment is rejected in favour of imagined cruelty.



RECALL TASKS

1 Why does Shakespeare show her speaking privately before she welcomes Duncan?

2 How does her definition of manhood differ from Macbeth's in 1.7?

WRITING TASK

How does Shakespeare present Lady Macbeth's power over Macbeth in Act 1? Discuss language and dramatic contrast.

