



THE TRAGIC HERO MACBETH

Tragedy is a distinctive type of drama that has existed for over two thousand years. Its origins go all the way back to the open-air theatres of ancient Greece.

The suffering of the hero elicits strong emotions from the **audience**, leading to an eventual sense of relief and purification at the end of the play.

The Tragic Hero

A 'classical' tragic hero has a high status and a good reputation at the start of the play, and they have the potential to become even greater. However, despite this, they possess a 'fatal flaw' and commit an act that is ultimately responsible for their downfall and eventual death. As the play progresses, **a tragic hero both suffers and causes other to suffer**. Before a tragic hero dies, they usually experience a moment of insight that provides an opportunity for reflection and this helps them to gain a new perspective on the consequences of their actions.

Questions to Consider

- How is Macbeth described in **A1-S2** and how does Duncan choose to reward him?
- What do the 'asides' reveal in **A1-S3**?
- How is Macbeth's 'fatal flaw' presented in **A1-S4**?
- What 'fear' does Lady Macbeth express about Macbeth in **A1-S5**?
- How does Macbeth 'suffer' in **A3**?
- Who does Macbeth inflict 'suffering' on in **A4** and what are his motives for doing it?
- What moments of insight does Lady Macbeth gain in **A5-S1**?
- What moments of insight does Macbeth gain in **A5-S3** and **A5-S5**?
- How is Macbeth's kingship presented in **A3, A4** and **A5** and how is he a very different king to Duncan?

Key Points

- Macbeth has a high status and good reputation at the **beginning** of the play
- He is a **respected** and highly skilled warrior in a world largely defined by ruthlessness and acts of physical violence
- Macbeth's '**fatal flaw**' emerges soon after the witches prophesise that he will become king
- He later commits the act that is ultimately responsible for his **downfall** in the form of murdering of Duncan
- Macbeth is struck by his increasingly **isolation** towards the end of the play
- He seems to finally **understand** that he will not possess 'honour, love, obedience' and 'troops of friends' in his old age
- Macbeth is eventually killed by Macduff on the battlefield and **denounced** as a 'dead butcher'