

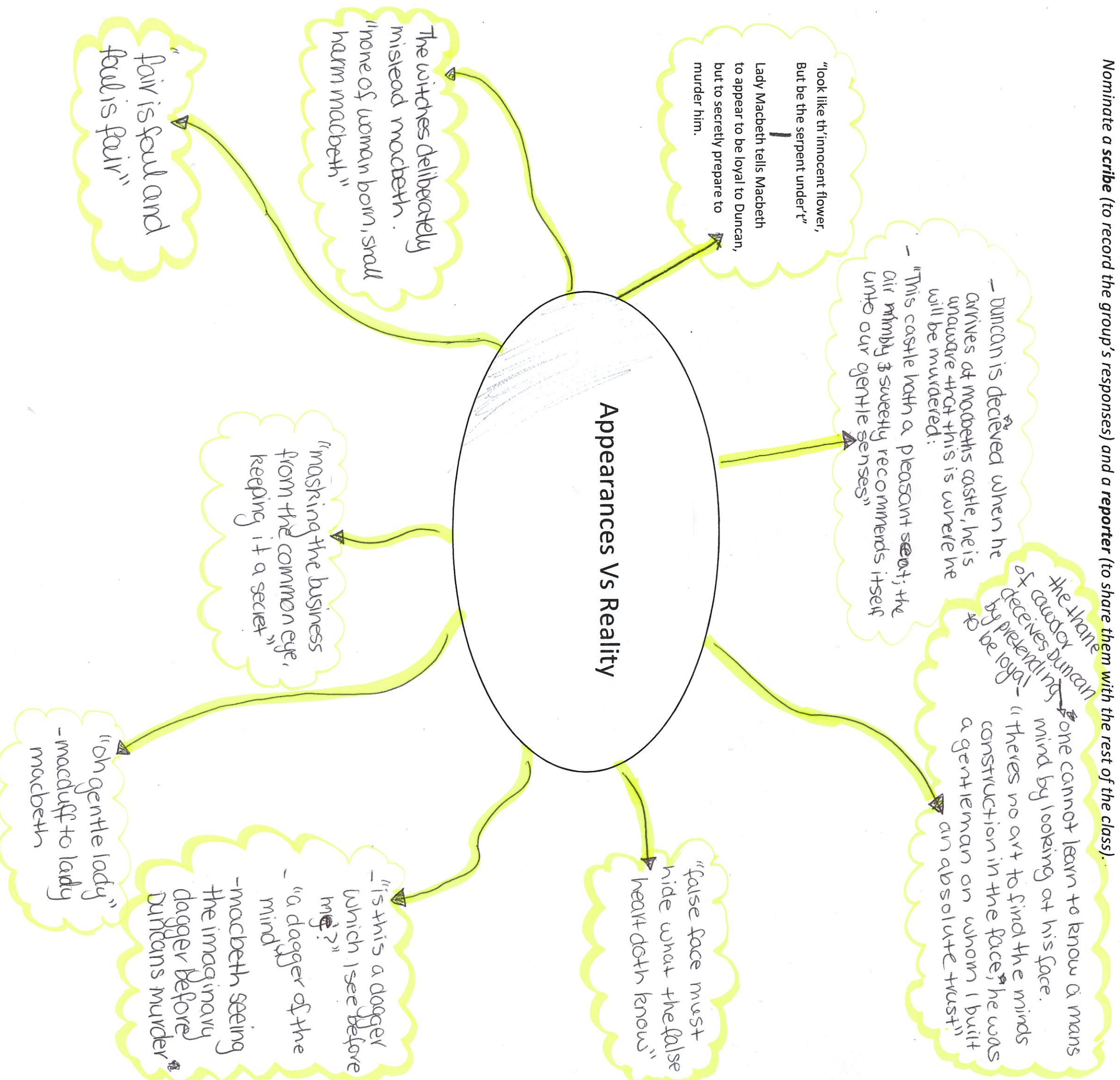
# William Shakespeare's Tragedy of Macbeth

## Key Themes

A central theme in the play is the way in which appearances can be deceptive. Evil can lurk behind 'fair' looks and therefore appearances cannot be trusted. In the play, the term "equivocation" is used; it can be defined as "the use of words in one sense while meaning the opposite in order to deliberately mislead or confuse". The witches deliberately try to mislead Macbeth into believing that he is invincible, while Lady Macbeth advises her husband to disguise his real motives so that those around them will not know the evil in their hearts.

### TASK:

In small groups, brainstorm your given theme. Create a mindmap in which you record key incidents in the plot and the actions of the characters that develop the theme, as well as key quotes. You should also consider Shakespeare's messages for the audience. Nominate a **scribe** (to record the group's responses) and a **reporter** (to share them with the rest of the class).



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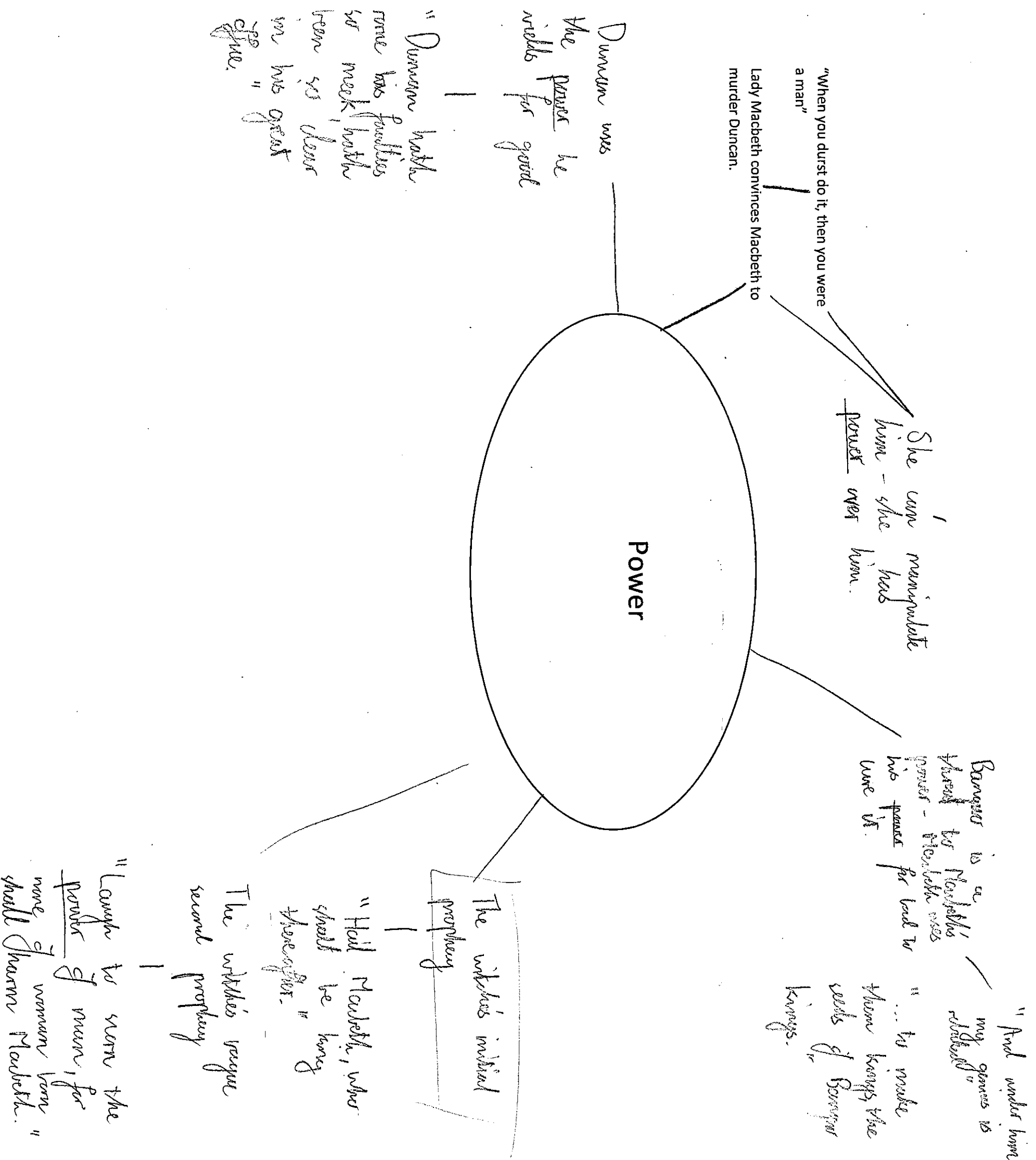
## Key Themes

The play is partially a study of power. Macbeth achieves power, but he does not understand it and wields it unskillfully. He also lacks the delight in the manipulation of power. He handles the gaining of it poorly and the execution of it too. Macbeth's failure to understand the real situation he is in, his casual and ineffective acts of violence, his lack of planning, all stem from his inability to comprehend the nature of power which inevitably fell upon him as a result of his act of regicide.

The witches may be seen to exercise the power of influence by the quality of their prophecy and suggestion. Duncan displays the power of goodness. In terms of initiating action, the most decisive single power in the play belongs to Lady Macbeth. Her influence over her husband is total, and she knows what she wants and assumes full responsibility for the conduct of events. However, once gained, power provides no pleasure for her.

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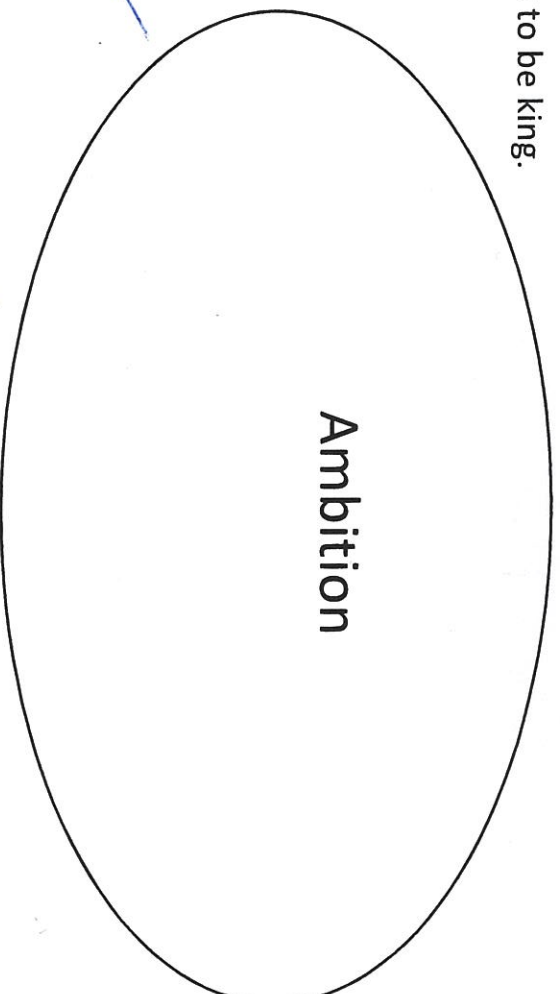
## Key Themes

Macbeth can be seen as a play about an ambitious man who overreaches himself in murdering his king and who brings about his own downfall in the end. Ambition is usually understood in its straightforward sense as an eagerness to gain promotion and power, and to rise in the world. In Elizabethan England, to aspire to be king implied a willingness or desire to break the divine order in society, in particular the order of the succession to the throne, and therefore ambition was considered a sin. The play explores the destruction wrought when ambition goes unchecked by moral constraints. Macbeth is a courageous general who is not naturally inclined to commit evil deeds, yet he deeply desires to be king. He kills Duncan against his better judgment and is afterward wracked with guilt. Lady Macbeth pursues her goals with greater determination, convincing her husband to kill Duncan and urging him to be strong in the murder's aftermath, but she is eventually driven to madness by the effect of the murder on her conscience.

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Lady Macbeth wants Macbeth to be king.



In the beginning,  
Macbeth wanted  
to be king but  
didn't want  
to kill Duncan  
in the process,  
due to his morals.

"I have no spur  
to prick  
sides of my intent,  
but only  
ambition  
which  
o'erleaps itself  
and falls on the other."

— Macbeth's ambition  
is not enough to murder  
the king

"We will proceed no further in  
this business"

Lady Macbeth  
tries to get  
power by getting  
her husband to  
kill Duncan.



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## Key Themes

The relationships of the various characters in *Macbeth* are governed by their actual or pretended loyalty and honour and an examination of the consequences of misplaced trust and betrayal is presented. The play begins with the announcement of the execution of the Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth is given his title, but it is the title of a traitor, and he himself will shortly betray the king. Loyalty is necessary for the health of the kingdom and its existence is all the more necessary when there is distrust, suspicion and corruption. With Macbeth's ascension to the throne the nobles become suspicious and Macduff must convince the cautious Malcolm of his loyalty by the sincerity of his grief. As the English army, led by Malcolm and Macduff, march towards Dunsinane the audience learns that Macbeth's subjects are deserting him.

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