

Candidate 5

Macbeth

The evidence for this candidate has achieved the following marks for this Course Assessment component.

10 marks

Question 1

Choose a play in which a major character's actions influence the emotions of others. Briefly explain how the dramatist presents these emotions and actions and discuss how this contributes to your understanding of the play as a whole.

The candidate has chosen Shakespeare's 'Macbeth, an appropriate text for this question, and establishes immediately that it is Macbeth himself whose actions, due to his ambition, have an impact on characters such as Lady Macbeth and Macduff. The candidate shows adequate knowledge and understanding of the text by explaining that ambition, having defeated his conscience, commits him 'to the path of evil, causing him to change and end up 'upsetting and hurting others.

Paragraph 2 begins with an assertion that, in order to understand how ambition changes him, we must first examine 'how Shakespeare characterises him at the beginning' and there follows a possibly unnecessarily long examination of Macbeth as he appears early in the play. This includes textual evidence to support the candidate's line of thought, but it seems to be slipping towards narrative. The candidate comments on: Macbeth's initial violent nature being 'channelled correctly' during wartime; the battle between conscience and ambition; the influence of the witches; the idea to kill the king being 'only a thought at this point'. These comments are accurate, revealing adequate knowledge of the play, but the essay is veering away slightly from the focus of the question.

In paragraph 3, the candidate considers the role of Lady Macbeth, beginning with how Macbeth's decision not to proceed with the murder makes her angry. Again we see adequate knowledge and understanding, as well as an adequate evaluative stance shown in, for example: description of Lady Macbeth as the stronger character; identification of the murder of Duncan as a 'turning point' which 'triggers the downfall of both' characters; and there is awareness of the irony that, 'although Macbeth secures his position as King he is not safe'. There are implicit references to the question when the candidate mentions Macbeth's actions, such as plotting Banquo's murder alone, which distances him from his wife, and hallucinating during the banquet scene, which influences the lords' opinion of him: 'he is no longer "noble" and "brave"'.

Paragraph 4, beginning 'The lords and thanes...' is more explicitly focused on the question. The candidate makes adequate use of textual evidence, referring to Macbeth's murder of Macduff's 'innocent wife and children' and the consequences which follow: Macduff's quest for revenge. There is an accurate comment on how Lady Macbeth's emotions have been affected by Macbeth's actions: she has 'become depressed due to the guilt' following the murders and he has failed to support her. The underlying cause of Macbeth's negative actions is again, as throughout, identified as his ambition and we see an adequate

evaluative stance in the comment on the link between this tragic flaw and his downfall: 'he got so greedy over power that he did not care who he hurt'.

The final paragraph is a concise, focused conclusion which links the key action of Duncan's murder with Lady Macbeth's emotional downfall and ends on a thoughtful comment, again suggesting understanding, on: 'the destructive force of ambition...if left unchecked'. Overall this is an essay characterised by adequacy: we see this in the candidate's knowledge and understanding in comments on, for example, the conflict between conscience and ambition and the murder of Duncan as a 'trigger' for the downfall of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Textual evidence and evaluative stance are also adequate, for example the reference to Macbeth's hallucination and admission of guilt during the banquet scene, and the impact this has on the lords. The essay has been adequately structured, with the idea of ambition running through it, a flaw which causes Macbeth to act in various destructive ways and provoke negative emotions in the other characters. The essay's focus on the demands of the question is just adequate – this could have been clearer at a number of points – and this puts the essay at the lower end of Band 12-10: it is awarded **10 marks**.