**AO2 Mastery Therapy**

**Finding language and structural features in unseen extracts**

While it may be easy to identify and make simple inferences about language features within a text, it may not always be easy to link these ideas to structure and your wider knowledge of the text. This can be especially difficult within Shakespeare’s plays.

Let’s start by looking at language features within the extract below. Read the extract from Act 5, Scene 5 of *Macbeth*. In this section, Macbeth has just discovered that his wife is dead.

**MACBETH**

Wherefore was that cry?

**SEYTON**

The queen, my lord, is dead.

**MACBETH**

She should have died hereafter;  
There would have been a time for such a word.  
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time,  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more: it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

Identify three metaphors that Macbeth uses to describe death.

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To achieve a high level response for AO2 on this task, you need to show more critical interpretations of the text. This means really considering why the writer has done certain things and what deeper meaning they are trying to show the reader. It is always good to try and link your ideas about language to some of the larger themes and ideas within the text.

Macbeth is a soldier, not a poet or a scholar. Using 2 examples of metaphors (as identified above) explain:

* Why Shakespeare chooses to not have Macbeth focus more on a bloody description of death.
* Why Macbeth only mentions the word death once (considering he has just killed several of his friends)
* The emotions, or lack of emotions, that you see in this section. Why is Macbeth portrayed in this way?

*E.g. Macbeth uses a plethora of metaphors to illustrate his feelings about death. The first thing that strikes the reader is the absence of more bloody imagery in this soliloquy. Instead, the character avoids any mention of death whatsoever by using phrases such as “brief candle” and “life’s but a walking shadow”. Ironically, Macbeth focuses more on the fragility of life by likening it to the flame of a candle, something which is short lived and easily extinguished. This is the opposite of our expectations from the character and shows how he has gained a more philosophical understanding of life, and death, through his own role in the murders that have occurred during the play. The focus on the “shadow” of life also focuses our attention on the darker aspects of life and death. Shakespeare chooses to again draw our attention to the theme of desire within the play as he focuses on these metaphors; Macbeth becomes more moral here as he ponders whether his constant desires for more were ever worthwhile. Thus, Shakespeare is able to deliver a powerful message to the reader about the meaning of life and a warning to those who would try to change their own fate.*

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Now let’s practise your ability to combine language and structure analysis to create a stronger argument. Find evidence of the following types of structure within the extract.

Repetition

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Iambic pentameter

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Sibilance

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Shakespeare famously uses much iambic pentameter within his plays. However, his use of iambic pentameter is not consistent within the extract given. Give two interpretations as to what iambic pentameter could represent within this extract.

E.g. The reader can read the iambic pentameter in lines such as “And all our yesterdays have lighted fools” as the ticking of a clock rather than the heartbeat. With this reading we could also comment on the foreshadowing of Macbeth’s death, which may be hinting at his own impending doom through Shakespeare’s message about the fragility of life. Macbeth shows fear for his own life in this quote, along with fear that the witches’ prophecy might not be true.

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Let’s begin to draw together your ideas to improve your initial response. Answer the question below using the extract above and all of your notes so far. Use both your language and structure evidence to give a developed response with more than one interpretation.

How is the theme of death presented in Macbeth?

* Describe how death is presented in the extract.

*E.g. The theme of death is portrayed through the use of iambic pentameter within the extract. Macbeth has just discovered that Lady Macbeth has died and his first reaction is not what the audience would expect - “she should have died hereafter; there would have been time for such a word”. In this line we can infer that Macbeth does not really care for Lady Macbeth as he says that he almost doesn’t have time to deal with his grief. However, later in this soliloquy Macbeth also says “And all our yesterdays have lighted fools” which is written in iambic pentameter. Shakespeare often uses this structural technique when he is showing deep affection between two characters. While Macbeth outwardly does not show sadness at his wife’s death, we can also see that from the heartbeat rhythm of his speech, Macbeth actually does feel great sadness for his loss. The reader may feel empathy towards Macbeth at this point as we are reminded of the love he had for his wife at the beginning of the play. Macbeth faces a moral dilemma at this point as he is now in the same position as Macduff, having just lost his wife. Shakespeare clearly illustrates the effect that death and grief can have on the individual through these two characters: Macduff’s immediate reaction is revenge whereas Macbeth is more philosophical and withdrawn showing the overall impact that death has had on Macbeth; life has become a “shadow” to him of what it once was, again foreshadowing his own death.*

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