

## Suggested Open-Ended Prompts to Develop a Thesis on *Macbeth*

- The eighteenth-century British novelist Laurence Sterne wrote, “Nobody, but he who has felt it, can conceive what a plaguing thing it is to have a man’s mind torn asunder by two projects of equal strength, both obstinately pulling in a contrary direction at the same time.”

From *Macbeth*, choose a character (not necessarily the protagonist) whose mind is pulled in conflicting directions by two compelling desires, ambitions, obligations, or influences. Then, in a well-organized essay, identify each of the two conflicting forces and explain how this conflict within one character illuminates a theme of the play.

- According to critic Northrop Frye, “Tragic heroes are so much the highest points in their human landscape that they seem the inevitable conductors of the power about them, great trees more likely to be struck by lightning than a clump of grass. Conductors may of course be instruments as well as victims of the divisive lightning.”

In *Macbeth*, the protagonist is a tragic figure who functions as an instrument of the suffering of others. Write an essay in which you explain how the suffering brought upon others by Macbeth contributes to the tragic vision (theme) of the work as a whole.

- A symbol is an object, action, or event that represents something or that creates a range of associations beyond itself. In literary works a symbol can express an idea, clarify meaning, or enlarge literal meaning.

Focusing on one symbol in *Macbeth*, write an essay analyzing how that symbol functions in the work and what it reveals about a theme of the play. Do not merely summarize the plot.

- In Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899), protagonist Edna Pontellier is said to possess “That outward existence which conforms, the inward life that questions.”

Identify a character in *Macbeth* who outwardly conforms while questioning inwardly. Then write an essay in which you analyze how this tension between outward conformity and inward questioning contributes to the meaning (a theme) of the work.

- From *Macbeth*, select an important character who is a villain. Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze the nature of the character’s villainy and show how it enhances meaning (a theme) in the work as a whole.