

Context (background information)	Macbeth (the play) www.richardlindo.org
King James I of Scotland had a fear of witches after his wife-to-be, Anne of Denmark, was engulfed in a terrible storm on the North Sea in 1589	Shakespeare uses the three witches and their supernatural prophecy to Macbeth as a symbol of a belief and fear of the supernatural at the time.
In 1590, King James I of Scotland ordered large-scale witch hunts to rid the country of evil. He was also the first king to write a book on witches called <i>Daemonologie</i> .	Macbeth and Banquo's fear of the three witches when they first meet them is linked to the belief that witches were forces of evil and extremely dangerous.
The Gunpowder Plot (1605) was a failed assassination attempt on King James I. The plan was to blow up The Houses of Parliament.	Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's plan to kill King Duncan and seize power is similar to Guy Fawkes and his group trying to assassinate King James I.
Guy Fawkes (who was given responsibility for the explosives in the failed assassination plot) was brutally executed as a warning to other traitors.	Macduff's killing of Macbeth, and its brutality, is a symbol of how people were executed when they betrayed King James I during the Jacobean era.
Divine Ordination was the belief at the time that the King/ Queen had been chosen by God. It was seen as an offence against God (the ultimate sin) to challenge to king/queen.	Macbeth's worry that he will be punished by God for killing King Duncan is linked to the idea of Divine Ordination (i.e. that the King/Queen was chosen by God and killing them was going against God).
Jacobean England (i.e. England under the rule of King James I) was patriarchal (dominated by men). Women were expected to be passive and compliant.	Lady Macbeth's quotation "unsex me here" refers to the perceived feminine traits of kindness and compassion that she wants removed to become evil.
Plots to kidnap and imprison King James I were partly because of his broken promise to stop the persecution of Catholics: leading to The Bye Plot.	Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's plan to kill King Duncan in order to gain power by force is similar to plots to kidnap and kill King James I by his enemies.