

Explanation of assignment:

Senior students were tasked with creating a scholarly journal of *Macbeth*, incorporating several assignments into their journal. One of those assignments is an academic summary, also called a precis. Students were given a criticism of *Macbeth* to read and analyze. They then had to follow a rhetorical precis format of at least eight sentences that analyzes the author's argument. Students had to follow MLA format in their response.

In the following writing sample, the article and the precis format are attached.

## Rhetorical Precis

In the article, “What’s a Thane to Do? A Story of a Thane to Placate a King”, Amanda Caraway explains the way Shakespeare uses elements of King James I’s life and times to structure *Macbeth* in order to entertain and appease him. The author’s purpose is to take historically accurate names and events then slightly change them to gain financial help for his theater company, The King’s Men. For example, Caraway references how Shakespeare “centers on many of the King’s beliefs and interests” (Caraway). She states how Shakespeare incorporates witchcraft as a way of explaining evil phenomena because it is something that King James I is very passionate in learning about. Another way that Caraway points out how Shakespeare reaches out to the king directly in his play is by assuring him that he is protected and that any tyrants, like Macbeth, will be taken down since they are “unfit to rule” (Caraway). This is demonstrated by Macbeth’s gory beheading which contrasts what will happen to a bad king versus King James I who is seen as a virtuous king. Finally, Caraway explains how King James’s healing power is mirrored in King Edwards in *Macbeth*. The purpose of this was to further show his allegiance to the king; “Shakespeare was able to show his allegiance to the court and gain favor for himself and The King’s Men” (Caraway). Amanda Caraway makes it clear that the main point of this article reveals how King James I is the intended audience of *Macbeth*, which she wrote for anyone who is interested in knowing more on the background of this particular Shakespearean play.

## Appendix: Supplementary Materials

### **A: Essay Outline Template**

- I. Thesis statement that sets forth main argument by answering prompt questions.
- II. Topic Sentence of first body paragraph. [Not a plot point, but a provable claim that supports your main argument.]
  - a. Evidence [Blended quotations and/or paraphrases with citations]
  - b. Evidence [Blended quotations and/or paraphrases with citations]
  - c. Evidence [Blended quotations and/or paraphrases with citations]
  - d. Analysis/Connection/Explanation [Link evidence to paragraph's claim. How do these examples support your argument?]

**READ THIS! ==>\*\*\*Repeat body paragraph process for at least three or four total supporting claims.\*\*\***

### **B: Historical Criticism of *Macbeth***

“What’s a Thane to Do? A Story of a Thane to Placate a King” by Amanda Caraway, Utah Shakespeare Festival, 2013

William Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Macbeth* is unique in both story and presentation. Shakespeare was a great entertainer who knew his audience, and the primary audience member for *Macbeth* was King James I. This young and energetic King of Scotland took the English throne in 1603, and Shakespeare’s company was renamed the King’s Men that year in honor of James.

Throughout *Macbeth*, Shakespeare pays tribute to the king’s homeland, his people, and his beliefs. Some of the characters in the play are thought to be direct relatives of the king, and a number of situations in the play mirror the king’s own life experiences. *Macbeth* is also a product of its setting as Shakespeare wrote the play in a frightening political climate.

*Macbeth* is set in Scotland during the reigns of Duncan and Macbeth, who were kings of Scotland between 1037 and 57 C.E. Shakespeare alters the historical accounts in order to write a story that will flatter King James. *The Chronicles of Holinshed*, Shakespeare’s primary source for *Macbeth*, links Banquo to the Stuart line of Kings, from which James I is descended (Evans, G. Blakemore, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd edition [Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997], 1356). In the play Shakespeare glorifies Banquo and his son Fleance, founder of the Stuart line.

While Macbeth and his lady are barren, much is made of Banquo’s seed, and his lines are filled with images of fertility. In act one, scene three, Banquo addresses the witches with “If you can look into the seeds of time, / And say which grain will grow, and which will not, / Speak then to me” (1.3.58–60). The witches respond that Banquo’s sons will be kings, an idea that haunts Macbeth and prompts him to murder Banquo. When Banquo converses with King Duncan, who calls him “noble” and “valiant,” their language is filled with the imagery of healthy growth. The king speaks of his wish to enfold Banquo to his heart and Banquo replies with “There if I grow, / The harvest is your own” (1.3.32–33). By contrast Macbeth wears a “fruitless crown” and holds a “barren scepter” (3.1.60–61).

In the play, Fleance escapes Macbeth’s clutches, and is able to avenge his father by siring a long line of kings. The Show of Kings in act four, scene one represents the posterity of the Stuart line, which stretched to King James. In the scene, the eighth king enters holding a glass, which was thought to reflect the image of James



seated in the audience: "and yet the eight appears, who bears a glass / Which shows me many more" (4.1.119–120).

In addition to the identifiable characters from Scottish history, Macbeth's story of ambitious and murderous Scottish lords was relatable for James I. Ruthless nobles repeatedly threatened the king's mother, Mary Queen of Scots, and his father, Lord Darnley. When his mother was six-months pregnant with James, her secretary was murdered by Scottish nobles in the queen's presence in her own apartments (Fraser, Antonia, *Mary, Queen of Scots* [New York: Delacorte Press, 1969], 252–253). Within a year after James's birth, Scottish earls murdered his father and the king's house at Kirk o'Field was destroyed with gunpowder (*Mary, Queen of Scots*, 302–303). Shortly after, Mary was abducted and raped by one of her noblemen (*Mary, Queen of Scots*, 315–316). Scottish lords imprisoned her until she was able to flee to England, never seeing her son again.

The play also centers on many of the king's beliefs and interests. James thought of himself as a fighter of evil and a true man of God with the Divine Right to Rule. He is remembered for ordering a new translation of the Bible, known as the *King James Version of the Bible*. He considered himself to be a "scholar of witches and witchcraft," (Garber, Marjorie B, *Shakespeare After All*, 1st ed. [New York: Pantheon Books, 2004], 697), and he authored the book *Daemonologie*, which was driven by his concern to explain evil phenomena. James had Parliament replace the 1563 act against "Conjururations, Inchantments, and Witchcraft" with harsher laws (Lee, Christopher, 1603: *The Death of Queen Elizabeth I, the Return of the Black Plague, the Rise of Shakespeare, Piracy, Witchcraft and the Birth of the Stuart Era*, 1st Edition [New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004], 247). Under the new law, people accused of witchcraft faced execution rather than imprisonment, and simple intent to use sorcery was punished as well. During James's rule, hundreds of men and women were put to death for witchcraft.

In addition to curing the land of witchcraft, King James also thought he could cure disease. He believed he could cure scrofula, also known as "the king's evil," by touching the victim (*Shakespeare After All*, 718). Edward the Confessor, the English King in *Macbeth*, was the first to practice this "cure." In *Macbeth*, the Doctor says heaven has given King Edward's hand "sanctity" (4.3.144), and Malcolm tells Macduff that there is "miraculous work in this good king" that has a "heavenly gift of prophecy" and is "full of grace" (4.3.141–159). King Edward is a strong foil to King Macbeth who is described as a tyrant unfit to rule.

Although Shakespeare was prohibited from writing about modern politics and religion, *Macbeth* is filled with concealed political and religious concerns of the time. Take for example the language of equivocation that fills the script. The word was a "technical term used to describe mental reservations of Jesuits who could tell untruths or partial truths under interrogation without breaking their word to God" (*Shakespeare After All*, 699). Throughout the play the language of the three witches, who speak in charms and riddles, is dominated by equivocation. It is seen in the famous phrase "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (1.1.11), and in their prophecies to Banquo: "Lesser than Macbeth, and greater / Not so happy, yet much happier / Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none" (1.3.65–68).

The Porter talks much of equivocation in his monologue in act two, scene three, and Macbeth speaks of equivocation when he finally recognizes the deceit of the witches and his eminent doom: "th' equivocation of the fiend, / That lies like truth" (5.5.42–43).

The issue of equivocation in England came to a head in 1606 with the famous Gunpowder Plot. The English Roman Catholics planned to blow up Parliament as well as the king's family on Nov. 5, 1605 to protest the King's stance on religion (*Shakespeare After All*, 699). The plot was uncovered in time, and those involved were tortured and executed. Lennox's speech in act three, scene four talks of a court in turmoil just like James's court at the time the play was written. Lennox prays that a swift blessing will come from the court of England to help their "suffering country" (3.4.45–49). This speech also serves to link England and Scotland as a compliment to James who was king of both.



