In-Class Essay for Macbeth

You will write a well-reasoned essay with detailed support from the play. Your essay will be written in class in blue or black ink; write on only one side of the paper, and briefly proofread your essay before turning it in. During the exam you may have a copy of the novel and you may either have a list of page/line numbers for examples you plan to use in your answer or mark the pages in your novel if you own your copy of the novel.

The key to a good essay (and thus a good grade) is to support your thesis with details. This proves you’ve read and understood the novel and you fully understand your answer. Your full essay should include at least eight specific examples from the novel that support your answer. Examples can include plot events, characters’ traits and motivations, or (especially) direct quotations from any of the characters. Remember: Every point you make in your essay must have an example, and every example you give must contribute to making a point.

However, keep plot summary to a minimum. You can presume I have read the novel, so any reference to plot events should be less than a sentence. For example, “Even though Macbeth learns in Act 5 that he isn’t safe from Macduff, he still continues to fight.”

Direct quotations must be cited by act, scene, and line number; try to use slash marks to show where line breaks are (unless the quotation is in prose). For example, “It is a tale/ Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/ Signifying nothing” (5.5.29-31).

Your essay must be in paragraph form; the introductory paragraph may consist of only the thesis statement if you wish, and the conclusion may also be very short. Do not refer to yourself or the reader. Instead, present all of your opinions and interpretations as fact.

You will have the entire class period on the test date to complete your essay. This is ample time, so no further time will be allowed if you’re not finished. Make sure you understand the prompt and all terms and words in it before the test date.

Your essay will be graded according to the AP Writing Rubric described briefly in your syllabus. A fully explained version of the rubric is on the AP English 11 Honors page of my website. You will then receive a score out of 100 points based on your AP Rubric score.
Essay Prompts

Choose one of the following topics for your in-class essay.

1. How and why is the contrast between appearance and reality so important in the play? Include the role the witches play in affecting the play’s events.

2. What is Shakespeare saying about the nature of prophecy and fate? Just because the witches predict things doesn’t mean they’re able to see the future…right?

3. What is Shakespeare saying about what it means to be a man? Which character(s) do you think Shakespeare believes is the best example of a man?

4. Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth change dramatically over the course of the play, and their marriage changes, too. What are these changes, what causes them, and how and why is their relationship in the end so different from their relationship in the beginning?

5. At the end of the play, is Macbeth’s death a good or bad thing, i.e., are we satisfied to see Macbeth defeated or upset to see a potentially great man fall? Finally, is Macbeth a tragic hero? [Most tragic heroes before Shakespeare’s characters were primarily evil by the end. Consider Othello.]

Your introductory paragraph may follow this pattern:

1. A TAG sentence (Title, Author, Genre) that states what topic from the novel you’re addressing
2. Your thesis statement, which includes the theme you’re articulating
3. If you want, very brief descriptions of the major examples you’ll be using as support

These are models for your introduction; you do not have to use either one:

William Shakespeare’s play Macbeth addresses/focuses on the topic/subject of ___________, making it clear that __________ insert theme here ___________.

The topic of __________ permeates/defines/forms the story in the play Macbeth by William Shakespeare, illustrating/demonstrating/exhibiting that __________ insert theme here ___________.
Generic Scoring Guide for AP Test Essays

9-8 – well-focused and persuasive/convincing analysis of [all parts of the topic covered in question]. Using apt and specific textual support, these essays analyze [the topic] for the work as a whole. Although these essays may not be error-free, they make a strong case for their interpretation and discuss the literary work with significant insight and understanding. Essays scored a nine (9) reveal more sophisticated analysis and more effective control of language than do essays scored an eight (8).

7-6 – These essays offer a reasonable analysis of [all parts of the topic covered in question]. These essays analyze [the topic] for the work as a whole. While these papers have insight and understanding, their analysis is less thorough, less perceptive, and/or less specific in supporting detail than that of the 9-8 essays. Essays scored a seven (7) present better developed analysis and more consistent command of the elements of effective composition than do essays scored a six (6).

5 – These essays respond to the assigned task with a plausible reading, but they tend to be superficial or thinly developed in analysis. They often rely upon plot summary that contains some analysis, implicit or explicit. Although the writers attempt to discuss [the topic], they may demonstrate a rather simplistic understanding of [all parts of the topic covered in question], and support from the text may be too general. While these writers demonstrate adequate control of language, their essays may be marred by surface errors. These essays are not as well conceived, organized, or developed as 7-6 essays.

***This is the lowest passing score, but it used to be a failing grade.

4-3 – These lower-half essays fail to offer an adequate analysis of [all parts of the topic covered in question]. The analysis may be partial, unsupported, or irrelevant, and the essays may reflect an incomplete or oversimplified understanding of [the topic]. They may not develop an analysis of [the topic] for the literary work as a whole, or they may rely on plot summary alone. These essays may be characterized by an unfocused or repetitive presentation of ideas, an absence of textual support, or an accumulation of errors; they may lack control over the elements of college-level composition. Essays scored a three (3) may contain significant misreading and/or demonstrate inept writing.

2-1 – Although these essays make some attempt to respond to the prompt, they compound the weaknesses of the papers in the 3-4 range. Often, they are unacceptably brief or incoherent in presenting their ideas. They may be poorly written on several counts and contain distracting errors in grammar and mechanics. The writers’ remarks may be presented with little clarity, organization, or supporting evidence. Essays scored a one (1) contain little coherent discussion of the text.

0 – These essays give a response with no more than a reference to the task.

- (a minus sign) – these essays are either left blank or are completely off-topic.