

**GREAT  
LAKES  
THEATER**

# TEACHER PREPARATION GUIDE



## King Lear

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

DIRECTED BY JOSEPH HANREDDY

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Fall 2015

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Dear Educator,

Thank you for your student matinee ticket order to Great Lakes Theater's production of William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, which will be performed in rotating repertory with *The Secret Garden* in the beautiful Hanna Theatre at Playhouse Square from September 25th through October 31st.

A classic tale of love, loss and legacy, *King Lear*'s royal epic reigns supreme. When an aging monarch resolves to retire and divide his kingdom among three daughters, his sense of reason is suddenly shattered by the surprising emotional storm that ensues. Stoked by fierce winds of treachery, the tragic tempest plunges both king and kingdom into chaos. As his life hangs in the balance, a once proud monarch is forced to wrestle with morality as he confronts his own mortality.

This guide is designed – through essays, discussion questions and classroom activities – to give students both an introduction to, and a point of entry for, a personal exploration of *King Lear*. We offer special thanks to Madelon Horvath for her outstanding contributions to this guide.

Great Lakes Theater is proud to provide you with the finest in classic theater and the necessary educational resources to support your work in the classroom. We are thrilled that you will be coming to see us and we welcome your input on how best to support your classroom preparation for our work. Please let us know what you think!

Sincerely,

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## A NOTE TO STUDENTS: WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE THEATER

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You may or may not have attended a live theater performance before. To increase your enjoyment, it might be helpful to look at the unique qualities of this art form — because it is so different from movies or video.

The live theatrical performance not only involves the actors on the stage; it is meant to involve you, the audience, in ways that film and television cannot. In truth, although you are sitting in an auditorium and the actors are on stage, there is very little separating the audience from the performers. How you react to the play *deeply affects* the actors. Something as seemingly trivial as whispering or unwrapping a candy bar can distract them and disrupt the mood and tone of their performance. Due to the important relationship between actors and audience members, there are certain, perhaps obvious, provisions of live theater we wish to call to your attention.

In the Hanna Theatre, it is important to know that the taking of pictures, either with or without a flash, is strictly prohibited. Also, it is essential that all electronic equipment, including cell phones, music players (even with headphones), alarm watches, etc., be completely powered off once you have entered the

theatre. Even the glow from a silent cell phone (used for text messaging, or posting social network updates, for example) can be very distracting to fellow audience members, even if you try to mask it under your hand or an article of clothing. Our goal is to provide every person in the audience with the best possible theatrical experience, so we appreciate your respectful cooperation during the performance.

Other differences live theater provides: in film or video, the camera and editing define what we will see. In the theater, however, each of us works as a camera and editor, choosing his or her personal points of focus. And in the Hanna Theatre, you should know that often we do not use microphones. As audience members you'll need to actively listen and "tune in" to the sound of the unamplified human voice.

As for our lighting and scenery, it might surprise you to know that these are not necessarily meant to be realistic. In this production, for example, there are design elements that are abstract or metaphorical.

The theater's ability to focus on human experience — distilled through the dialogue and behavior of people on stage and enhanced by the scenery, costumes, lighting, music and dance — is a centuries-old tradition. Being part of the communal magic when performer and audience connect — whether at a baseball game, music concert or theater performance — cannot be duplicated.

The performance you will see at Great Lakes Theater will happen only once. It is unique and personal. Though this play will be performed more than a dozen times, the performance you see belongs only to you.

We hope you enjoy it, and we'd like you to share your response with us.

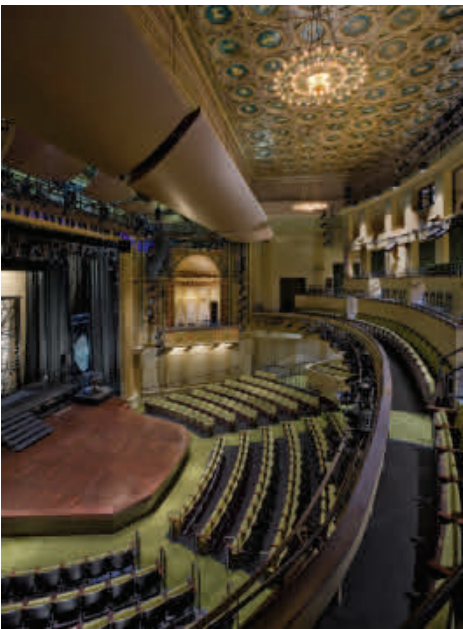
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# GLT: OUR HISTORY, OUR FUTURE

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Tom Hanks and fellow company member Bert Goldstein.



The beautifully renovated Hanna Theatre

Since 1962, Great Lakes Theater (GLT) has brought the world's greatest plays to life for all of Cleveland. In 1961, the Lakewood Board of Education president persuaded a Shakespeare troupe, led by Arthur Lithgow, to make Lakewood Civic Auditorium its home. The theater that opened its doors on July 11, 1962 as Great Lakes Shakespeare presented six Shakespeare plays in rotating repertory. In exchange for free rent, the company provided student matinee productions. The repertory was expanded in 1965 to include non-Shakespearean classics as a result of an exchange of productions with Princeton's McCarter Theater. The Company outgrew its original home at Lakewood Civic Auditorium and, in 1982, made the move to the Ohio Theatre in Playhouse Square, launching the revitalization of downtown Cleveland's Theatre District.

In 2001 the Company was searching for a new Producing Artistic Director, and the Board sought a candidate with well-established business skills as well as artistic leadership. Charles Fee was selected for his commitment to Shakespeare and his reputation for building Idaho Shakespeare Festival into a highly successful regional theater. GLT recommitted itself to its founding core values: Shakespeare, rotating repertory and an acting company of the highest caliber. During Fee's tenure, the company has been recognized for its artistic excellence, winning the *Northern Ohio Live Magazine Award* for excellence in Theater in 2005 after three years of being a finalist, as well as *The Free Times Reader's Choice Award* for Best Performing Arts Group in 2006, and for eliminating the inherited accumulated net deficit of over one million dollars.

The Company has also been a revolutionary producing model unlike any other in America to create cost efficiency and enhance our artistic product. We now exchange our repertory productions with Idaho Shakespeare Festival (ISF) in Boise, Idaho and Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival (LTSF) in Nevada. This deep collaboration between independent producing organizations is a first in American theater. With this visionary model now fully in place, GLT, ISF, and LTSF are able to deepen the artistic quality of the work on our stages, share our production costs, maximize our resources, and provide nearly year-round employment to our resident company of artists.

Now, GLT has entered into a new phase, making the historic Hanna Theatre in Playhouse Square the home of the Company. The renovation of the Hanna Theatre, as well as the creation of GLT's first endowment fund, is part of our *Re-Imagine A Classic* Campaign to ensure GLT's future. Our new home in the Hanna features a hydraulically operated thrust stage, a first for this region, and innovative and intimate seating where no seat is farther than eleven rows from the stage. We believe that this extraordinary theater experience will revolutionize the way Northern Ohio experiences classic theater.

Great Lakes Theater is one of only a handful of American theaters that have stayed the course as a classic theater. With a plucky history of bucking economic trends to strive for and nurture the highest artistic quality, it remains a distinctive and significant cultural resource in an extraordinary American city.

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# PLAYNOTES BY MARGARET LYNCH

““ While it is difficult to recover the significance *King Lear* may have had in the political landscape of the day, the play’s profound exploration of the human condition is universal. ””

We’ll never know how Shakespeare came to write *King Lear*. Without knowing the how or why, we can appreciate, with director Joe Hanreddy, that *King Lear* is “one of the theater’s greatest challenges.” But several backdrops can provide insight into Shakespeare’s towering achievement.

The first known performance of *King Lear* took place on December 26, 1606, at the court of King James. Shakespeare was 42 years old then and in full command as a playwright. In today’s parlance, he was a “playwright in residence” and also an actor and shareholder in the theater company known as “The King’s Men.” The company was already in the ascendant before James assumed the English throne in 1603, and the king’s patronage confirmed their dominance. By 1606, the King’s Men were performing at court at least 10 times a year or more, which was almost twice as often as they had performed for James’s predecessor, Elizabeth. Court performances helped the company to weather the vagaries of the box office at their outdoor Globe Theatre and their indoor Blackfriars Theatre, where *King Lear* was also presented in 1609.

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth, in the 1590s, Shakespeare had extensively explored the ways in which kings assumed and wielded power in the English history plays. Succession was a paramount political question during the reign of the unmarried and childless Elizabeth. James assumed the English throne peacefully in 1603; he was heir to Henry VIII’s sister through both his mother and his father and had already produced a male heir by then. But the threat of civil unrest remained.

Before he became King of England and Ireland, James had already been King of Scotland since 1567. Scotland and England were at that time independent nations—Ireland had already lost its sovereignty—and they were only united, uneasily, in the person of James. The conflicting hopes of religious factions also buffeted the King, whose mother, Mary Queen of Scots, had been a staunch Catholic and opponent of the Tudor march toward Protestantism. The foiled Gunpowder Plot of 1605 was initiated by Catholics who felt betrayed that James had not reversed the Tudor religious policies.

*King Lear* does not comment clearly on such topical events. But a play about a king who divides his kingdom among three children could have been particularly resonant at a time when James was struggling to hold together a kingdom of three political entities. The title given the play in the 1608 edition — *The True Chronicle History of King Lear* — reminds us that the chronicles Shakespeare raided for his history plays (Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Ralph Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, *The Mirror for Magistrates*, and Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*) named Lear a historical king of England. King Lear had already been the subject of an earlier anonymous play in 1594. A provincial acting troupe was arrested



Portrait of King James I of England, attributed to John de Critz, c. 1606



The title page to the 1608 quarto edition of *King Lear*



The roles that actor Robert Armin is thought to have played include the Fool in *King Lear*, Touchstone in *As You Like It*, and Feste in *Twelfth Night*.



The Coat of Arms used by King James I after his accession to the English throne in 1603 displayed the English Tudor rose, the Scottish thistle, and the Irish harp.

for performing several plays, including one about King Lear, whether Shakespeare's or the anonymous play, in 1610 in the home of a Catholic sympathizer.

While it is difficult to recover the significance *King Lear* may have had in the political landscape of the day, the play's profound exploration of the human condition is universal. Every chronicler before Shakespeare had given the story of Lear a happy ending; while Lear's division of his kingdom threatened its stability, his loyal daughter Cordelia restored order in the end. Shakespeare found a parallel story of a father with a loyal son and a disloyal son in Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, and it provided the subplot in *King Lear* involving the Duke of Gloucester and his sons Edgar and Edmund. The tragic arc of Sidney's story—and the possibilities for counterpoint between the two story lines—may have influenced Shakespeare's decision to recast *King Lear* as a tragedy.

While Shakespeare had written tragedies throughout his career, four tragedies poured forth between 1604 and 1607 (*Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra*). Scholars have sometimes turned to the playwright's biography to ponder the bleakness of his tragic vision during those years. The inevitable deaths of loved ones often force a person to confront mortality. Shakespeare's son Hamnet died in 1596, and the playwright's father died in 1601.

Like Lear, Shakespeare seems to have been contemplating retirement by 1606. He bought a large house in his hometown of Stratford in 1597 and added substantial acreage in 1602 and 1605. Shakespeare editor David Bevington has noted that *King Lear*, like many of Shakespeare's mature works, turns on the fraught relationship between a father and a daughter ready for marriage. Shakespeare's daughter Susanna married physician John Hall in 1607, and his daughter Judith would marry in 1616. Shakespeare's own time of life and family situation may have led him to consider the complicated dance of generations. But, in the end, the scope and mastery of *King Lear* defy explanation.

Margaret Lynch has been a member of the Playwrights' Unit of The Cleveland Play House since 1996 and served as dramaturg for Great Lakes Theater (1984-2002). An Ohio Arts Council Fellowship recipient, she has written seven plays. Commissioned work includes *Gilgamesh on the Crooked River*, with composer Daniel Bernard Roumain.

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# FROM INSPIRATION TO DESIGN

BY MARGARET LYNCH

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This architectural detail of a window inspired director Joe Hanreddy and scenic designer Linda Buchanan.

Director Joe Hanreddy began the production process by asking himself and his design team, “What is timely about this play?” They decided that the play spoke to them of a very contemporary nightmare scenario in which “a series of man-made events escalate quickly to a tipping point.” Setting the play in a contemporary environment would forefront the play’s timeliness.

And yet, when they thought about contemporary hotspots for unrest, they decided that they didn’t want to direct the audience to focus on a particular crisis in today’s news in a way that would obscure the play’s universality. Seeking a balance between timeliness and timelessness, the production team turned to visual imagery.

Knowing that they wanted to start with an orderly environment that would subsequently collapse, they looked at images of “Brutalist” architecture, along with public buildings in Fascist Italy and Soviet-Bloc countries. These sources had in common, explains scenic designer Linda Buchanan, “large, simple forms, made of such harsh materials as concrete and steel, which conveyed power and control in a visual form.” The discoloration that attends the aging of such materials suggested a way to convey the corruption that riddles the seeming order.

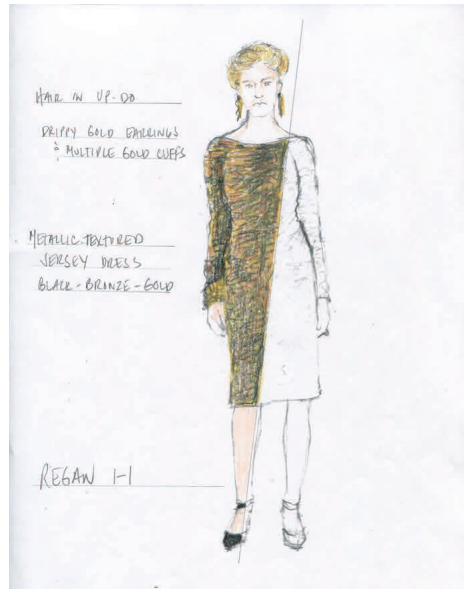


This image of a building commissioned by Mussolini in 1935 for the Sapienza University of Rome is one of many that the production team looked at during the design process.

A specific image of a large round, multi-paned window set into a concrete wall provided a focal element for the production’s scenic design. The round shape reinforced the many references in the play to Fortune’s wheel. The window panes suggested a way to accomplish the sense of disintegration gradually that would also open up space for the exterior scenes that increasingly dominate the action of the play.

With ideas for the space underway, attention turned toward the people moving within it. “What people choose to wear,” observes costume designer Martha Hally, “is a signal of how people want to present themselves to the world.” The contemporary setting, adds director Hanreddy, allows for a stylistic shorthand. Today’s audiences understand today’s stylistic references and can immediately interpret the significance of the differences





Costume design by Martha Hally.

between Goneril’s more conservative attire, Regan’s more “fashion-forward” look, and the simpler lines and fabrics that Cordelia prefers.

Actors provide the final dimension to the production. Hanreddy’s goal as director is to help the actors live with the contradictions in their characters. Lear and Gloucester, for example, are “misogynistic and paternalistic,” says Hanreddy, “but each is capable of love. We wouldn’t be interested in them if they weren’t.”



Just as images of cities in ruin inspired elements of the scenic environment for the production, so too did costume elements also derive from images of soldiers and fleeing civilians in conflict situations.

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# LADY SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE LESSONS

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If Lear or any of us are to indulge our narcissistic fantasies that we, and we alone, deserve all the love in the world, then we are also opening up the possibility that we deserve all the hate in the world. Grandiosity is grandiosity and when we break the boundaries, we unleash emotions that are beyond our control.

”

## By Lady Shakespeare



Lady Shakespeare, also known as Betsy Shevey, has been Great Lakes Theater's professional development keynote speaker and featured educational scholar for over ten years.

### Sailing to Byzantium By William Butler Yeats

That is no country for old men. The young  
In one another's arms, birds in the trees,  
—Those dying generations—at their song,  
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,  
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long  
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.  
Caught in that sensual music all neglect  
Monuments of unageing intellect.

II

An aged man is but a paltry thing,  
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless  
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing  
For every tatter in its mortal dress,  
Nor is there singing school but studying  
Monuments of its own magnificence;  
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come  
To the holy city of Byzantium.

*King Lear* is a play about loss. It is a tragedy of old age and the many things it has to teach us are sacred. It has many source materials, especially *True Chronicle History of King Leir, and his three daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella* (published in 1605, but acted much before that, in 1594) and the old folk tales about three sisters, with the youngest being the purest, from *Cinderella* to *Beauty and the Beast*. But here the lessons are more profound. The first scene of *King Lear* shows us the tragic errors of the King's ways. First of all, he tries to measure love. Love cannot be measured. The fact that Lear supposes and expects it to be measured is his grave error. He is already supposing and expecting the bleak universe of betrayal and greed which he brings into being.



“King Lear and the Fool in the Storm” by William Dyce (1806–1864).



Louis Bouwmeester as Oedipus in a Dutch production of *Oedipus the King*, c. 1896.



Former President Jimmy Carter

It is not that Shakespeare necessarily believed in a universe of unending love, although surely in the comedies and romances this is true. Universal love abounds in the comedies and romances. But in the tragedies, there is an order to love, a divine chain of being. Shakespeare inherited this from the feudal system where the bonds of love between God and man were reflected in those between King and subject, master and servant, father and son, or in this case, daughter. Cordelia tries to save her father and the situation by reminding him of this in a perhaps not too subtle way. She loves him as she should according to her bond as a daughter should love her father. She is reminding him that the world has boundaries for a reason. If Lear or any of us are to indulge our narcissistic fantasies that we, and we alone, deserve all the love in the world, then we are also opening up the possibility that we deserve all the hate in the world. Grandiosity is grandiosity and when we break the boundaries, we unleash emotions that are beyond our control. This is the Elizabethan world picture and it still holds truth for us today. We may see ourselves as the center of the universe as children, but as we grow up we learn that is a fantasy. An adult who contains within the rage of a child, it is a dangerous fantasy at that. It is the kind of fantasy that, in our time, can lead a man to enter a movie theater with a gun when he feels rejected or unloved. When Cordelia says “nothing” she is really saying “everything” but Lear doesn’t want to hear her. He chooses not to hear her because he is too self-absorbed.

What is he absorbed in? He is absorbed in avoiding the changes of old age. Let me be clear. It is not just old folks who are afraid of change. We all are afraid of change. Change means re-defining who we are in terms of the external world and we’ve already seen that Lear has trouble with that. He seeks to “crawl unburdened towards his grave” while holding on to all the privileges of power. Again, using the image of the Elizabethan world picture, this is upsetting the very bonds that make a society civilized. It is creating a topsy-turvy world. Who is the Fool and who is the King? In our own day, a President who expected to go on being President after he has lost an election or outlived his terms of election would be subverting the laws of the land as well as the laws of nature.

Shakespeare makes it clear that Lear has challenged nature in the scenes on the heath where the storm rages and threatens to drive Lear mad. In my opinion, Lear is not mad at the beginning of the play. He is grandiose, selfish, narcissistic and misguided, but not mad. His fear of going mad is very real. Unlike Hamlet, he is also not playacting at being mad. Scenes of nature in the comedies and romances are healing. Forests are places where the characters in *As You Like It* and *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, among others, go to transform. These transformations teach them about love and identity. They lose themselves in order to find themselves. The

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same is true of Lear, although the heath where the storm rages and roars is not the beautiful, blooming forest of the comedies and romances. But the storm, and his meeting with Poor Tom of Bedlam, teaches him about “unaccommodated man.” Unaccommodated man is the opposite of the grandiose Lear at the beginning of the play. He is the “bare, forked creature” who walks into this world with nothing and exits with nothing. This is exactly as Cordelia predicted when she says “nothing” when Lear asks her to love him best and in direct contradiction to Lear’s certainty that “nothing will come of nothing.” In fact, everything comes of nothing. One of the reasons change is so fearful for so many is the “nothing” period which comes in between the old and the new. Many of us fear that we will not survive this nothing. The scene on the heath teaches us that we will. Sadly, for Lear, he learns this too late. But happily for us, we do not.

Nor does the new generation, symbolized by Edgar, the wronged brother of Edmund the Bastard and son of the blinded Gloucester. Edgar disguises himself as Poor Tom, the naked, poor creature whom Lear befriends on the heath. It’s rare in Shakespeare for there to be a subplot which so clearly echoes the main plot. It is mirrored by Gloucester and his two sons, one good, one bad; the latter of whom deceives him with false love and the former of whom is the good and truthful heir. The fact that the villainous son Edmund, is a bastard, once again proves the Elizabethan structure for true familial and social bonds. The physical blinding of Gloucester stands in for Lear’s symbolic blinding by his daughter’s false statements when his faithful servant Kent begs him to “see better.” Although the blinding scene is shocking, it is necessary. We must understand the chaos which comes from unmooring the standards of ourselves and our proper place in the world.

But the most important use of the subplot is to allow the stage world to continue with Edgar as the pilgrim who has lived through the stripping away of all of his outside and external attributes and to still live to tell the tale. When Lear strips himself of his clothes on the heath he is not going mad, but going sane. He sees finally who he is. He is mortal. He is not a god. Although the play is set in pagan times, there is a Christian sensibility here as well. Man must understand his humanity in order to inhabit the earth. The Greek tragedies which Shakespeare knew well, featured a self-blinded Oedipus, the king who tried to outwit the gods.

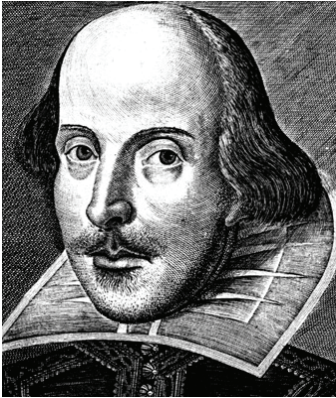
When Lear says, “Pray undo this button” as he holds the dead Cordelia, he is letting go of his last vestige of external investment. He is correcting the narcissism and grandiosity of the first scene with the humility and dignity of his last. Many of us were moved recently by the way Jimmy Carter, our former President, announced he has cancer. This was a truly Shakespearean moment with all the humility and dignity which Shakespeare sought in his ruler, King Lear. But Shakespeare makes clear with his comparison to Gloucester, that it is not only kings which can learn these lessons. We all must be careful about centering ourselves in the midst of a universe in which we dictate the ways in which we can be loved, or in which we attempt to measure love by external attributes or worldly possessions. We all must allow for the nothing in our lives which precedes change. And we all must greet change with the humility and dignity which it deserves; just as we must allow this humanity to others, whether family, friends, strangers, or poor creatures who wander into our lives.

*Betsy Shevey has been producing, directing and teaching theater for over thirty years. She has chaired theater programs at Bennington College, Goodman Theater, NYU and was the producing director of CAPPS, Lehman Center, Lighthouse Theater, Performing Arts Foundation, Stage South and Teatro Latino.*

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# ABOUT WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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William Shakespeare (1564-1616), English playwright and poet, is recognized in much of the world as the greatest of all dramatists. Shakespeare's plays communicate a profound knowledge of the wellsprings of human behavior, revealed through portrayals of a wide variety of characters. His use of poetic and dramatic means to create a unified aesthetic effect out of a multiplicity of vocal expressions and actions is recognized as a singular achievement, and his use of poetry within his plays to express the deepest levels of human motivation in individual, social, and universal situations is considered one of the greatest accomplishments in literary history.

A complete, authoritative account of Shakespeare's life is lacking, and thus much supposition surrounds relatively few facts. It is commonly accepted that he was born in 1564, and it is known that he was baptized in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire. The third of eight children, he was probably educated at the local grammar school. As the eldest son, Shakespeare ordinarily would have been apprenticed to his father's shop so that he could learn and eventually take over the business, but according to one account he was apprenticed to a butcher because of declines in his father's financial situation. According to another account, he became a schoolmaster. In 1582 Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a farmer. He is supposed to have left Stratford after he was caught poaching in the deer park of Sir Thomas Lucy, a local justice of the peace. Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway had a daughter, Susanna, in 1583 and twins—Hamnet and Judith—in 1585. Hamnet did not survive childhood.

Shakespeare apparently arrived in London about 1588 and by 1592 had attained success as an actor and a playwright. Shortly thereafter he secured the patronage of Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton. The publication of Shakespeare's two fashionably erotic narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594) and of his *Sonnets* (published 1609, but circulated previously in manuscript form) established his reputation as a gifted and popular poet of the Renaissance (14th century to 17th century). The *Sonnets* describe the devotion of a character, often identified as the poet himself, to a young man whose beauty and virtue he praises and to a mysterious and faithless dark lady with whom the poet is infatuated. The ensuing triangular situation, resulting from the attraction of the poet's friend to the dark lady, is treated with passionate intensity and psychological insight. Shakespeare's modern reputation, however, is based primarily on the 38 plays that he apparently wrote, modified, or collaborated on. Although generally popular in his time, these plays were frequently little esteemed by his educated contemporaries, who considered English plays of their own day to be only vulgar entertainment.

Shakespeare's professional life in London was marked by a number of financially advantageous arrangements that permitted him to share in the profits of his acting company, the Chamberlain's Men, later called the King's Men, and its two theaters, the Globe Theatre and the Blackfriars. His plays were given special presentation at the courts of Queen Elizabeth I and King James more frequently than those of any other contemporary dramatist. It is known that he risked losing royal favor only once, in 1599, when his company performed "the play of the deposing and killing of King Richard II" at the request of a group of conspirators against Elizabeth. In the subsequent inquiry, Shakespeare's company was absolved of complicity in the conspiracy.

After about 1608, Shakespeare's dramatic production lessened and it seems that he spent more time in Stratford, where he had established his family in an imposing house called New Place and had become a leading local citizen. He died in 1616, and was buried in the Stratford church.

Until the 18th century, Shakespeare was generally thought to have been no more than a rough and untutored genius. Theories were advanced that his plays had actually been written by someone more educated, perhaps statesman and philosopher Sir Francis Bacon or the Earl of Southampton, who was Shakespeare's patron. However, he was celebrated in his own time by English writer Ben Johnson and others who saw in him a brilliance that would endure. Since the 19th century, Shakespeare's achievements have been more consistently recognized, and throughout the Western world he has come to be regarded as the greatest dramatist ever.

*Shakespeare, William*, Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2001

**Contributed By:** A. Kent Hieatt, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of English, University of Western Ontario. Author of *Chaucer, Spenser, Milton: Mythopoetic Continuities and Transformations*.

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## DIRECTOR'S NOTE BY JOSEPH HANREDDY

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“*King Lear* is very much a story for the early years of the 21st century. The personal and political miscalculations, self-serving ambition, cruelty, paternalism, sexism, and emotional detachment portrayed in this 400-year-old play are shockingly contemporary in the context of such horrors as torture, genocide, subjugation of women and barbaric acts of terrorism that have grown to be an everyday part of our awareness.”



Lovers of Shakespeare may differ on which play stands as his finest artistic achievement, but gather a group of theater artists for drinks and shop-talk and they'll likely agree that *King Lear*, with its titanic range of emotion, vast physical landscape, dark ironic humor, and snarl of mysteries, contradictions, ambiguities and paradoxes, render it one of the theater's greatest challenges to realize in performance. From the opening moments, *Lear* is ferociously intense as family resentments and fragile egos ignite an ungoverned rant of rage that unleashes betrayal, barbarous cruelty and civil war. Every character, from monarch to lunatic beggar, is set on a struggle for sanity and survival in a ravaged kingdom.

There have been an abundance of notable productions of *Lear* in recent years and the play's current popularity is a testament, not only to its brilliance and theatricality, but also to its timeliness. *King Lear* is very much a story for the early years of the 21st century. The personal and political miscalculations, self-serving ambition, cruelty, paternalism, sexism, and emotional detachment portrayed in this 400-year-old play are shockingly contemporary in the context of such horrors as torture, genocide, subjugation of women and barbaric acts of terrorism that have grown to be an everyday part of our awareness. A modern viewing of the play can't help but invite comparisons between Shakespeare's Renaissance imaginings of devastation in a kingdom gone mad, and images of chaos and suffering on our computers and television screens that are burnt into our consciousness. Shakespeare's depiction of a "tipping point," a disastrous chain of events that ruptures the perilously fragile membrane separating civilized order from chaos—setting life as we know it hurtling down a slope to extinction with inexorable speed—

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is a frighteningly plausible outcome of any number of present-day conflicts. His investigation of the dilemma of the dispossessed and aged finds immediate resonance in our communities. His questioning of the elusiveness and mysteries of cosmic justice and the existence or absence of a heavenly plan for us on earth parallels our contemporary discord on matters religious, political and philosophical. And as theater, the play is uncannily modern in the way a master playwright allows language, thought, imagination and gut-wrenching emotional intensity to trump realism in the brilliantly simple and imaginative theatrical devices he constructs for his epic tale.

*King Lear*'s consistent thwarting of our impulse to draw a clear moral message from the story is yet another astonishing aspect of its modernity. Any "lesson" that we find in one part of the play is nullified somewhere else. For example: we learn through suffering and pain; or conversely: the randomness of suffering and pain proves the pointlessness of existence. Or supernatural powers have a plan for us, or no plan, or are just, or unjust, or are vindictive, or sadistic, or arbitrary, or not there at all. Ultimately, this restless questioning as to "what it's all about" rides tandem with Shakespeare's gripping story to create one of the most compelling combinations of thought and action in dramatic literature.

## Dramatis Personae

King Lear	Edgar, Gloucester's legitimate son
Goneril, Lear's eldest daughter	Edmund, Gloucester's illegitimate son
Regan, Lear's second daughter	Lear's Fool
Cordelia, Lear's youngest daughter	Oswald, servant to Goneril
Duke of Albany, husband to Goneril	King of France
Duke of Cornwall, husband to Regan	Duke of Burgundy
Earl of Kent	
Earl of Gloucester	

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# PRELIMINARY SCENIC DESIGN & INSPIRATION

BY LINDA BUCHANAN



Rendering of the set.



Aled Davies as Lear, Idaho Shakespeare Festival.





# PRELIMINARY COSTUME DESIGN & RESEARCH

BY MARTHA HALLY



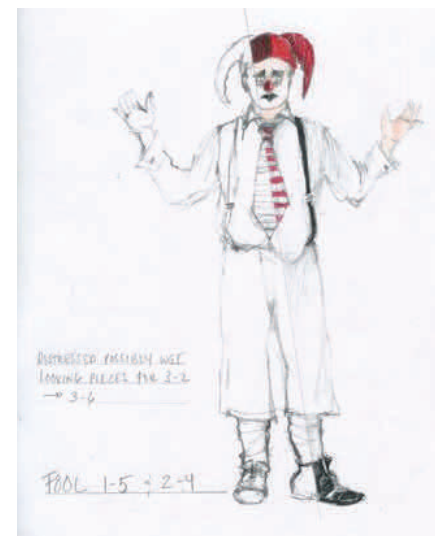
Photo Credit: DKM Photography), Idaho Shakespeare Festival

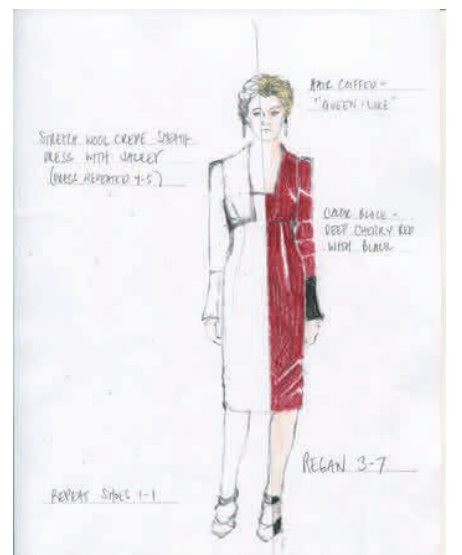
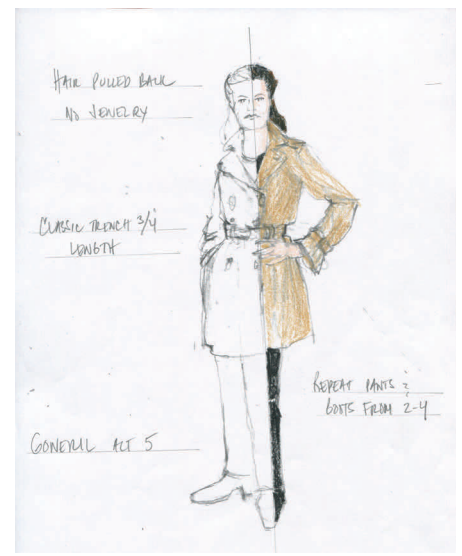


Dustin Tucker, Aled Davies, Dougfred Miller and Stephen Mitchel Brown



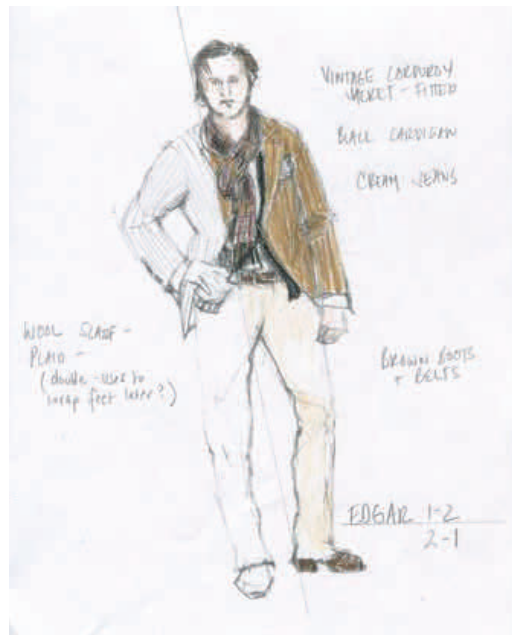
Dougfred Miller and Tom Ford



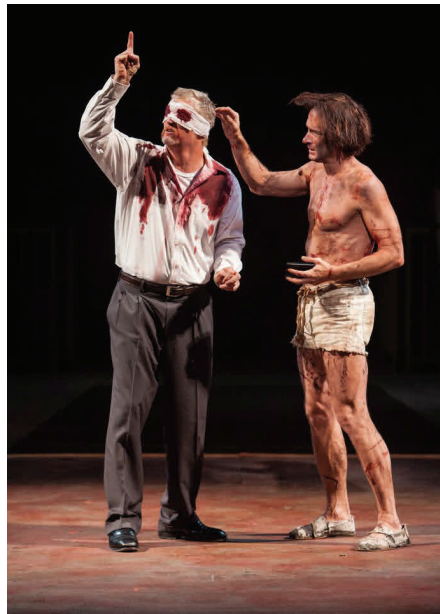
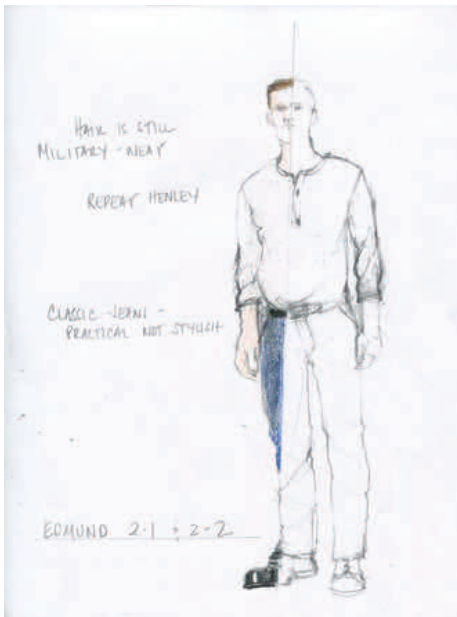


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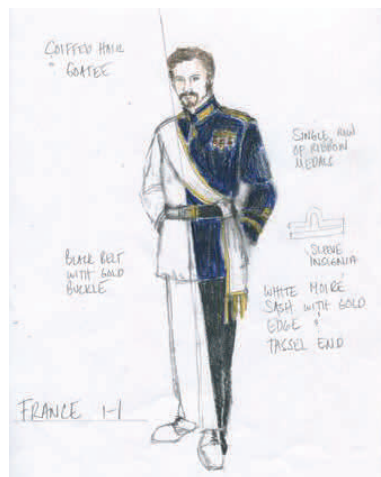
Photo Credit: DKM  
 Photography, Idaho  
 Shakespeare Festival



J. Todd Adams



David Anthony Smith and J. Todd Adams



# IDAHO SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL'S PRODUCTION OF *KING LEAR*, NOW PLAYING AT GLT'S HANNA THEATRE



Dustin Tucker, Robyn Cohen and David Anthony Smith



Dougfred Miller and David Anthony Smith.

Tom Ford and Aled Davies.



Robyn Cohen, Dustin Tucker and David Anthony Smith



Robyn Cohen, Dustin Tucker and David Anthony Smith

Aled Davies

Aled Davies



Aled Davies and Cassandra Bissell

Photo Credit: DKM Photography, Idaho Shakespeare Festival

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# SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

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King Lear announces his intention to abdicate his power to his three daughters. His eldest, Goneril, is married to the Duke of Albany, his middle child, Regan, to the Duke of Cornwall. The Duke of Burgundy and the King of France are at the Court, both to woo Lear's youngest daughter, Cordelia. Before revealing the details of the division of the kingdom, Lear asks each of the daughters to tell how much she loves him, intimating the largest share will go to the daughter who expresses the most affection. Goneril speaks an embellished expression of endearment and Regan does her best to follow suit. Cordelia remains silent, and when pressed, offends both her father and sisters, saying that it is only natural that her future husband will have half her love. Lear flies into a rage; he disowns Cordelia, leaving her share of the kingdom to Cornwall and Albany to "digest." He banishes his faithful ally, the Earl of Kent, for coming to his daughter's defense and does his best to discourage her suitors. The King of France refuses to be dissuaded, and agrees to marry Cordelia without a dowry and they leave for France.

The Earl of Gloucester's illegitimate son, Edmund, deceives him into believing that Gloucester's legitimate son, Edgar, is laying a plot to kill their father in order to come into his inheritance early.

Lear and his knights visit Goneril and Albany's estate on a hunting trip. When she criticizes the behaviors of the knights and Lear's Fool, Lear lays a hurtful and devastating curse of infertility upon her and storms off to stay with Regan.

Fleeing the manhunt his father has set for him, Edgar disguises himself as a religious beggar, calling himself "Poor Tom."

Regan and Cornwall visit the Earl of Gloucester, hoping to secretly enlist him in a civil war against Goneril and Albany. Lear, accompanied by the Fool, tracks Regan to Gloucester's estate and is angered to find his messenger (Kent in disguise) placed in stocks on Cornwall's order. Goneril arrives and the daughters join forces to demand that Lear dismiss his Knights. Lear flees into a freezing thunderstorm, accompanied by the Fool and the disguised Kent.

Cornwall and Regan arrest Gloucester for his aid to Lear; they accuse him of treason before Cornwall savagely blinds him. Cornwall receives a mortal wound from a servant who comes to Gloucester's defense. Edgar, in the disguise of "Poor Tom," discovers his father being led by a faithful servant. At Gloucester's request "Poor Tom" leads him toward the cliffs of Dover, where the old man intends to take his own life.

Edmund and Goneril, having become lovers during the journey, arrive at her estate. Albany castigates his wife for her cruelty to her father.

A French army, led by Cordelia in an effort to rescue her father, lands at Dover.

Regan, newly widowed and jealous of Goneril's intentions towards Edmund, tries to entice her sister's servant to let her read a letter Goneril has written to him.

Edgar deceives the despairing Gloucester into believing that he is on the precipice of the cliffs of Dover, rather than on level ground, and convinces him that he has survived his attempt at suicide. Lear, wandering the countryside in his madness, stumbles upon Gloucester and Edgar. As Cordelia's army prepares to meet the English forces she is reconciled with her father, who begs her forgiveness. The English, led by Edmund, defeat the French. Lear and Cordelia are captured and Edmund secretly gives a command that they be executed. Edgar kills Edmund in a duel and tells Albany of his father's death. Goneril, jealous of Regan's romantic and political alliance with Edmund, poisons her. Goneril commits suicide after Albany exposes a plot between her and Edmund to kill him. Cordelia is executed in prison and Lear dies from grief at her passing. Kent, broken from the many sorrows, leaves to die and it is left to Edgar to lead the country out of a cloud of sorrow and regret.

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# IF YOU HAVE ONLY ONE DAY TO PREPARE

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With Shakespeare it's crucial to give students a synopsis of the play before they see it, so be sure to have them read the synopsis included in this guide. With *King Lear* it's also especially important to carefully explain some of the extra characters. Things happen very quickly in this play, Kent and Edgar take on disguises, and Goneril (married to Albany – who is against her treatment of her father) and Regan (married to Cornwall, who is “bad to the bone,”) both lust after Edmund. The following list would be handy to refer to while studying the play.

## **Characters:**

### The Royal House of Britain

Lear - King of Britain

Goneril - his eldest daughter

Regan - his second daughter

Cordelia - his youngest daughter

The Duke of Albany - married to Goneril (does not agree with her treatment of Lear)

The Duke of Cornwall - married to Regan (is just as corrupt as Regan)

### The Gloucester family

Gloucester - the Earl of Gloucester

Edgar - his elder son and heir / disguised later as Poor Tom

Edmund - his illegitimate son

### Other Characters in the play

Fool

The Earl of Kent (later disguised as Caius)

The King of France - suitor to Cordelia (marries her in spite of her loss of dowry)

The Duke of Burgundy - suitor to Cordelia (leaves her when she is disinherited)

Oswald - Goneril's steward (a servant who is in charge of the household)

Other servants, gentlemen, attendants, messengers

Here are some interesting thoughts/overviews of this play:

1. *King Lear* is thought by many to be the greatest of Shakespeare's plays. It has everything: sibling rivalry, parent-child conflict, love, hate, greed, ambition, good versus evil, illegitimacy, adultery, suicide, compassion, fortune, questions of fate and faith, politics, poverty, deprivation, madness, vanity, senility, cruelty, loyalty, devotion, ageism, dignity and the loss of dignity, and examples of the best and worst of humankind. Perhaps this is why so many people find it daunting.

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2. In *Shakespeare's Tragedies* (1951), G. B. Harrison explains why *King Lear* might be unpopular and gives us a warning: "It is too moving and there is no escape from its terrors. Indeed, inevitability is another quality necessary to deep tragedy, which can only perform its cleansing function when the author is utterly merciless with his audience. Weaklings should avoid the ruthless purgation of deep tragedy."
  3. *King Lear* has been called a "sublime tragedy" and "[Shakespeare's] greatest meditation on extreme old age; on the painful necessity of renouncing power; on the loss of house, land, authority, love, eyesight, and sanity itself."
  4. You can think of *King Lear* as
    - a tragedy in which an otherwise great man falls from power and loses status and respect because of a tragic flaw in his character.
    - a moral tale about aging and about the relationship between the old and the young in society.
    - a play of social realism about parents and their children, and about the terrible consequences of those relationships souring and breaking down.
    - a political play about decision-making power and the relationship between the public and the private. Lear's abdication of power and the division of his kingdom would have been seen as acts of political madness by Shakespeare's contemporaries. By tearing up his country, Lear sets off a chain of social frenzy that results in cruelty, blindness, madness and death.

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# PRIOR TO ATTENDING THE PERFORMANCE

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## Anticipatory Questions to discuss:

T-F It is natural for parents to expect their children to care for them in old age.

T-F Our lives are ruled by Fortune and by Fate.

T-F Good will always triumphs over evil.

T-F Good people will prosper.

T-F A Fool can also be wise – and vice versa.

T-F True love lasts forever.

## Things to watch for as you read/see the play:

- Each thing that Lear loses as the play progresses: material things and emotional things
- How others treat him, good and bad
- What Lear says he thinks of himself
- Gloucester's problems with his sons and how that compares with Lear's difficulties with his daughters.
- How the father/daughter relationships change throughout the play

## Characters to watch carefully:

### Lear

Question: is Lear so far out of the students' experience that it's impossible to relate to him? The answer at first glance seemed to be "yes." Lear is "fourscore and upwards"– that is, 80 years old plus, an age much more than what most of us now teaching and studying this guide have reached.

Laurence Olivier, in his book *On Acting*, says of playing the part of King Lear: "When you've the strength for it, you're too young; when you've the age, you're too old. It's a bugger, isn't it?"

Why is Lear so angry at the beginning of the play? With only the slightest hesitation, he disowns his most loved daughter. He says, *I loved her most, and thought to set my rest/ On her kind nursery. Hence, and avoid my sight! So be my grave my peace, as here I give /Her father's heart from her!*

### Edmund

Why does Edmund decide to become a villain and betray his father and brother? Look at the way his father talks about him. Does he have good reason to be as angry as he is?

*Edmund: Why bastard? Wherefore base?  
When my dimensions are as well compact,  
My mind as generous, and my shape as true,  
As honest madam's issue? Why brand they us  
With base? with baseness? bastardy? base, base?*



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## Goneril and Regan

Why do Goneril and Regan refuse their father and his retinue of the hundred knights shelter? Thinking about adult children with their parents, is it reasonable to expect to house not only the parent, but his rowdy, rude friends as well?

**Goneril:** *I think our father will hence tonight.*

**Regan:** *That's most certain, and with you; next month with us.*

**Goneril:** *You see how full of changes his age is... he always loved our sister most; and with what poor judgement he hath now cast her off appears too grossly.*

**Regan:** *'Tis the infirmity of his age...such unconstant starts are we like to have from him as this of Kent's banishment.*

**Goneril:** *Pray you, let us hit together; if our father carry authority with such disposition as he bears, this last surrender of his will but offend us.*

Goneril talks about Lear's knights being rowdy at her house. Modern audiences think that characters may speak ironically or exaggerate things like this – but this is not part of Shakespeare's view. If Goneril says this, we may believe it really happened. Yet Lear dismisses it off-hand. Is there any reason to justify Goneril's feelings about all of these rowdy knights who are part of her father's retinue?

## The Fool

The tradition of fools and jesters in royal courts is as old as royalty itself. When we think of the jester, we often think of a person dressed in many bright colors, with a pointed hat with bells, and indeed, this traditional European court fool was very much in favor during Shakespeare's time. Elizabeth I and James I, the rulers during Shakespeare's lifetime, had favorite fools that were much admired and celebrated.

However, a fool was not just an entertainer in the court, although most had some performance skill such as singing, playing an instrument, dance or athletics. The fool, above all, had the king's ear, and was allowed, by virtue of his role as a joker, to actually tell the king the truth. He was the opposite of a "yes-man", and was able to give the king advice, defuse a potentially violent or difficult situation through his humor, and tell the king not what he wanted to hear, but what he needed to know. Through all, the fool was protected by the status of his wit and entertainment value.

## Modern Day "Fools"

Since we don't have royalty or fools around in our country today, it is difficult to imagine that sort of person or role. But we do know who the class clown is, and we know the person in our lives who can always make us laugh no matter how bad we feel.

Think of some comedians who fulfill this role today. Discuss their impact on their audiences. Does the ability to laugh at a situation make that situation easier to deal with? Think about some examples of political or other social humor that would illustrate this.

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# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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## STATUS GAME WITH PLAYING CARDS

This activity is quick and easy, and gets students involved physically for a few minutes.

**MATERIALS:** a deck of playing cards. Based on student numbers, sort the cards so that there are very few “face” cards.

Have students talk for a minute about how “high status” people move/ behave (i.e. direct eye contact, high straight back, lifted chin, etc.) Give each student a card and, tell them to (without looking at it), hold it at their forehead so that others can see it. Now have them mill about the room and treat each other according to the “status” of the card they are holding. The person who is being shown their status should take on those behaviors.

After a few minutes call stop or freeze, then have them sort themselves into a line with Kings first, going down to Aces. Once everyone is in line, reveal the cards.

**REFLECTION:** Was it clear what status you were? Did you meet people of similar status – how did you know? Did you end up in about the right place in the line? Why or why not?

Name the different characters in *King Lear* and put them in the order of their status. Does it change throughout the play?

**FURTHER REFLECTION:** Do you recognize these behaviors from life? Can you name certain characters in movies or certain actors that play one status or another? (Keanu Reeves plays very high in *The Matrix* and extremely low in *Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure*.) Which kind of status behavior lends itself to drama or comedy?

## EMPATHY THROUGH PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

This works well as an “anticipation guide” before reading or attending the play, and is also a good wrap-up for after reading or attending the play. The classroom leader should lead the students through this exercise verbally, using the provided text below. Frame this as an imaginative exercise but using real life feelings.

List eight things you really value or love most and that are truly important to you. They should not be in any particular order. They can be material things, or emotional things, or people or animals, but it must be something you honestly feel is a valuable part of your life.

Now go step by step in this exercise and allow yourself to answer the questions honestly.

- What would you choose to give up? Write down three things from your list that you think you could do without.
- What do you think would be foolish to give up? Write down three things that you think you could not live without.
- Now we’re going to take away some random numbers. Cross off the thing next to the number as I call it out.
- Take away number 7.
- Take away number 1.
- Take away number 4.
- Write down your first reaction to losing these things. Does your feeling match what you predicted you could or could not lose?

- Now take away numbers 2, 8, 3, 5, 6.
- How do you feel?
- Is there something you lost that you didn't think you would miss?
- Do you regret any of your choices?
- Do you feel you could survive without all of these things? What would help you to do that?
- If you could have one thing back, what would you choose?

REFLECTION: After completing this exercise on paper, ask the students to reflect on their experiences. Do not ask the students to share their personal choices unless they are willing. Using more general questions will help them share without having to reveal anything specific, such as:

- How did it feel when everything was taken away?
- How was it when you could choose one thing to get back?

After reading/seeing the play, ask students to refer to their notes, and then to list the things Lear loses in the play.

- Can you see any times in the play when King Lear expressed the same kinds of feelings that you described? Did he have different reactions?
- Are you more sympathetic to Lear's situation?
- Which thing do you think Lear would choose to have back? Why?

### PERSONAL CONNECTIONS WORKSHEET

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_

3 things I would give up: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

3 things that would be foolish to give up: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

I have lost 3 random things: how do I feel? Do I feel like I thought I would?

I have lost all the things: how do I feel?

Is there something I lost that I didn't think I would miss (but I do)?

Do I regret any of my choices about what I thought wasn't as valuable? Do I feel I could survive without all

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of these things? Why or why not? If I could have one thing back, which would it be?

## **BLINDNESS AND SIGHT**

In *King Lear*, Shakespeare uses the following words: “see” 46 times, “eyes” 36 times, “eye” 10 times, “sight” 9 times, “eyeless” 6 times, and “blind” 5 times. Shakespeare tends to repeat words in his plays that illustrate the ideas he is exploring, and it is clear statistically that Shakespeare is fascinated with the concept of seeing, both literally and metaphorically.

We might think to ourselves: why wouldn’t Lear just say, “Wow, I’ve made a terrible mistake, I must act differently?” But, there are only rare moments of self-reflection, and even rarer of self-criticism. He does not seem to see himself. And, as we see most obviously in the first scene of the play, he does not see Cordelia’s real love for him as opposed to her sisters’ professed affection.

It is interesting to note that in the storm Lear is in the company of Kent, Edgar, and the Fool, who are good and loyal men. Even though Kent and Edgar are disguised, Lear is surrounded by faithfulness, humor, truth and honor – but he cannot recognize them. So it is not the world that lacks goodness, but rather the king’s inability to see it. Madness results. Since Lear cannot understand what is happening to him, he appears to break rather than bend.

Now, to consider blindness in the literal sense, Gloucester is the character who has his actual eyes put out, and must rely on his other senses to try and understand the nature of the world around him. This is one of the most violent scenes in all of Shakespeare (and for many years, this scene, along with much of the other tragedy in the play, was simply cut out). Many critics feel that the idea the author is driving home, through the literal blindness, is the absolute importance of being able to see situations clearly, the ability to make wise judgments, and the consequences of not “seeing” the truth.

**MATERIALS:** Drawing paper and various kinds of markers, crayons, pencils, etc.

**HOW TO PLAY:** Choose partners and sit back to back. Player A draws a picture of anything he or she wishes. This picture can be abstract or specific, but encourage the players to use many kinds and colors of markers. When Player A has finished, their task is to describe to Player B exactly how to draw their picture on their side to recreate A’s picture. Player A may use any kind of words or descriptions to communicate, but they may not turn around and show B anything visually (using gestures, draw in the air, etc.). When Player B thinks they have completed the picture accurately, their partner can turn around and reveal Player A’s original picture.

Talk about the results: Did you have misunderstandings? How much did you trust what your partner was saying? What is your reaction to not being able to see what you were trying to do? Did you think of ways to communicate and overcome the difficulties of not being able to see?

What kind of communication problems did Lear have with his daughters?

Why do you think this happened? For example, were problems caused by the fact that he was a king and used to having his way? Or because daughters in that time weren’t allowed to express their opinions? What else?

What can a person do to communicate better with friends and family? Did Lear do any of those things?

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## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT: LEAR AND OLD AGE

Many first world countries are “aging.” That is, the number of older people is increasing faster than the number of young people. Sometimes the generations have difficulty understanding each other. This activity can help students connect with the elderly.

- Each student finds one elderly person who is willing to be interviewed about his or her life. It can be a family member, a friend of the family, or someone in a local nursing home, etc.
- If the students have access to a recording device (iPad, smart phone, etc.), it can be very informative to record the interview.
- Give students the interview question sheet (below) and go over the questions. Have them add some questions of their own.
- Discuss interview techniques with students: ask “open-ended” questions, encouraging the interviewees to elaborate.
- Each student completes an interview and writes a report summarizing the interview. If recorded. . . the class can make a video montage of the interviewers’ most interesting answers. Otherwise, students give oral reports to the other students. We suggest you DO NOT use this as a graded written project, but as a way to get better acquainted with an older person.
- It’s fun to have a culminating activity: invite the elderly interviewees and the students’ parents to the classroom to look at the video and reports and celebrate with cake and ice cream.

### REFLECTION:

Ask the students the following questions to help deepen their understanding of the experience.

- Did interviewing an elderly person help you to understand what Lear was going through as he became old and tired and worried about losing his mind? Why or why not?
- Did you find any similarities between your interview subject and Lear?
- Do you think Lear would like the person you interviewed? Would they get along? Why or why not?

### **Record the interview on a separate piece of paper.**

Interviewer’s Name:

Interviewer’s Age:

Classroom Teacher’s Name:

Interviewee’s Name:

Interviewee’s Date of Birth:

Where born:

1. What was it like when you were my age? Describe:

Food

Clothes

School

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Vacations

Games

Jobs

Favorite activity

Friends

Family

2. What did your parents expect of you?
3. What did they do when you disobeyed or ignored them?
4. When you were my age, what gave people high status? For example, did your family have to be rich? Did you have to have certain clothes or be good at certain activities?
5. What is the biggest change you have seen in your lifetime?
6. What is the worst thing about getting older?
7. What is the best thing about getting older?
8. What advice would you give to a young person?
9. (Insert your questions here)

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# VOCABULARY

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1. opulent: rich and superior in quality.  
*What can you say to draw /A third more opulent than your sisters?*
2. propinquity: the property of being close together.  
*Here I disclaim all my paternal care, / Propinquity and property of blood, / And as a stranger to my heart and me / Hold thee from this forever.*
3. wrath: intense anger, usually on an epic scale.  
*Come not between the dragon and his wrath.*
4. infirmity: the state of being weak in health or body.  
*'Tis the infirmity of his age: yet he hath ever / but slenderly known himself.*
5. benison: a spoken blessing.  
*Therefore begone /Without our grace, our love, our benison.*
6. choleric: easily moved to anger.  
*then must we look to receive from his age, / not alone the imperfections of long-engrafted / condition, but therewithal the unruly waywardness / that infirm and choleric years bring with them.*
7. discord: strife resulting from a lack of agreement.  
*love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide: in / cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in / palaces, reason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son / and father.*
8. malediction: strife resulting from a lack of agreement.  
*as of unnaturalness between the child / and the parent; death, dearth, dissolutions of / ancient amities; divisions in state, menaces and / maledictions against king and nobles*
9. dissipation: breaking up and scattering by dispersion.  
*needless / diffidences, banishment of friends, dissipation / of cohorts, nuptial breaches, and I know not what.*
10. breach: a failure to perform some promised act or obligation
11. upbraid: express criticism towards.  
*His knights grow riotous, and himself upbraids us / on every trifle.*
12. wont: an established custom  
*My lord, I know not what the matter is; but, to my / judgment, your highness is not entertained with that / ceremonious affection as you were wont;*
13. abatement: an interruption in the intensity or amount of something  
*there's a great abatement of kindness appears as well in the /general dependants as in the duke himself also and / your daughter.*
14. bandy: exchange blows  
*Do you bandy looks with me, you rascal?*
15. sovereignty: royal authority; the dominion of a monarch or state  
*I would learn that, for, by the / marks of sovereignty, knowledge, and reason, I should be false persuaded / I had daughters.*
16. dotage: mental infirmity as a consequence of old age  
*He may enguard his dotage with their powers*
17. manifold: many and varied; having many features or forms

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*But that I told him the revenging gods / 'Gainst parricides did all the thunder bend, / Spoke, with how manifold and strong a bond / The child was bound to the father*

18. knave: a deceitful and unreliable scoundrel

*A knave; a rascal; an eater of broken meats; a / base, proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited, / hundred-pound, filthy, worsted-stocking knave; a / lily-livered, action-taking knave, a whoreson, / glass-gazing, super-serviceable finical rogue; / one-trunk-inheriting slave; one that wouldst be a / bawd, in way of good service, and art nothing but / the composition of a knave, beggar, coward, pander, / and the son and heir of a mongrel bitch*

19. base: of low birth or station

*A knave; a rascal; an eater of broken meats; a / base, proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited, / hundred-pound, filthy, worsted-stocking knave*

Other definitions of “base” are: not genuine, illegitimate, and immoral. These definitions could also fit, but most of the insults in the example sentence focus on Oswald’s low birth.

20. rogue: a deceitful and unreliable scoundrel

*a lily-livered, action-taking knave, a whoreson, / glass-gazing, super-serviceable finical rogue*

21. clamorous: conspicuously and offensively loud

*one that wouldst be a bawd, in way of good service, / and art nothing but the composition of a knave, beggar, coward, pander, / and the son and heir of a mongrel bitch: / one whom I will beat into clamorous whining, if thou deniest / the least syllable of thy addition.*

22. brazen: face with defiance or impudence

*What a brazen-faced varlet art thou, to deny thou / knowest me!*

The definition is for “braze” as a verb but the example sentence is using the word as part of a hyphenated adjective describing the noun “varlet” (which is a synonym for “knave”).

23. ruffian: a cruel and brutal fellow

*This ancient ruffian, sir, whose life I have spared / at suit of his gray beard*

24. renege: fail to fulfill a promise or obligation

*Renegé, affirm, and turn their halcyon beaks / With every gale and vary of their masters, / Knowing naught, like dogs, but following.*

25. visage: the human face

*A plague upon your epileptic visage!*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.1.A

Apply the understanding that usage is a matter of convention, can change over time, and is sometimes contested.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5

Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5.A

Interpret figures of speech (e.g., hyperbole, paradox) in context and analyze their role in the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5.B

Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.



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# WRITING PROMPTS & POST SHOW

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Compare one of the poems listed above to a theme or motif in *King Lear*. Which is more powerful or more true? Why?

“Much Madness is Divinest Sense” - Emily Dickinson

“An Old Man’s Winter Night” - Robert Frost

“Fire and Ice” - Robert Frost

“What are Years?” - Marianne Moore

“Dirge Without Music” - Edna St. Vincent Millay

“Love is Not All” - Edna St. Vincent Millay

“The End of the World” - Archibald MacLeish

“you shall above all things be glad and young” - e.e. Cummings

“My Papa’s Waltz” - Theodore Roethke

“The Unbeliever” - Elizabeth Bishop

“Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night” - Dylan Thomas

2. Shakespeare aficionado, Ed Friedlander, on his outstanding website, suggests: “Shakespeare has retold [this] old story as a vehicle for a strikingly modern message. Many people consider *King Lear* to be his finest work. Whether or not you agree with his vision of a godless universe in which our only hope is to be kind to one another, you will recognize the real beliefs of many (if not most) of your neighbors.” Shakespeare took a story which had a happy ending, and gave it a sad ending. He transformed a fairy-tale about virtuous and wicked people into something morally ambiguous. He took a story of wrongs being righted, and turned it into the story of painful discovery. He included passages which deal with ideas instead of advancing the plot. Write an essay in response to any of the above ideas and explain why you liked or did not like this play.
3. In *Shakespeare’s Tragedies* (1951), G. B. Harrison explains why *King Lear* might be unpopular and gives us a warning: “It is too moving and there is no escape from its terrors. Indeed, inevitability is another quality necessary to deep tragedy, which can only perform its cleansing function when the author is utterly merciless with his audience. Weaklings should avoid the ruthless purgation of deep tragedy.” Respond to this quote in an essay and explain why you think this play is or is not a great piece of literature. Is a deep tragedy simply too much for most people to deal with?
4. Give this production a rating of 1 to 5 stars. (One star is the lowest rating and five stars is the highest.) Write a review of the play. In other words, describe why you gave it that rating. Give specific examples to support your reasons, using the one or more of the questions below as considerations.

How would you describe the character of Lear?

Is Lear justified in his actions?

Did you sympathize with King Lear? Do you think you are meant to?

Think about and describe:

the vocal and physical actions of the actors (characterization)

the set

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the costumes

What do you think are some of the themes of the play? Did the elements of characterizations, set, and/or costumes reinforce any of these themes?

Shakespeare writes about things that we all experience: Love, jealousy, death, anger, revenge, etc. Write about one emotion in the play that relates to your own life at the moment.

5. Imagine you are the director of *King Lear*.

Cast the characters of Lear, Goneril, Regan, Cordelia, the Fool and Gloucester with famous actors. Use solid examples and quotes from the play and from these actors' other work to support your choices.

Discuss the setting of this play as presented in this production. Did you agree with this choice, or would it be better to keep the production in Shakespearean times? Does setting a play in a different time period help the audience to understand meaning and themes? What other setting could you place the play in that would make sense? Why?

How about costumes? Imagine how the characters in your new production would be dressed that would illustrate the kinds of characters they are and what setting you have put the play in.

6. What do you think of Lear, the character? Some people say he's just an old man, set in his ways, who does not quite realize even at the end what his actions have cost him. Some see Lear as very sympathetic: without his family, property, and title, he has been forced to suffer inhumane conditions. Would you condemn him for his actions? Why/why not?
7. What kind of picture do you think Shakespeare is trying to paint? Is Shakespeare telling us kings should be respected and should not relinquish their position as head of state even when old: i.e. when the king or father is in power, all is right with the world? Or is he saying kings should have more in common with their subjects, to suffer and know the life that they know?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.2

Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.6

Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

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# HOW TO WRITE A REVIEW

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## MORE HOW AND LESS WHAT

A theater review is not a book review, you do not need to summarize what happens. Provide the necessary background so the reader knows the name of the play and the basics of what kind of play it is, and then move into your commentary. You do not need to explain WHAT the play is, instead write about HOW successfully it was presented.

## THE ACTOR NOT THE CHARACTER

You can disapprove of the decisions a character makes, but how well did the ACTOR perform the role? Was their behavior appropriate to the part as written? Feel free to share your opinions, comparing or contrasting their work with other actors with whom you are familiar.

## WHAT IS DIRECTION?

Maybe you have heard of a “director” in theater or film, but do you know what they do? It is not a director’s job to tell the actors how to say every line, but they are the person responsible for creating the general mood and concept for the production. What was your impression of the production as a whole? Was it too funny for a serious play? Or not amusing enough for a comic play? Use words to reflect back to the director how successful the production is as a whole.

## DON’T FORGET THE DESIGN

The set you see and the sounds you hear are also unique to this one production of this play. Describe what you see and hear, but also be sure to make clear how successful these designs are in telling the story of the play.

## IN CONCLUSION ...

While it is not necessary to give a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” your concluding sentence should summarize your impression of the production as a whole.

## THEATER REVIEWS IN THE NEW MEDIA

Reviews in news websites may be 1000 words, they may be as brief as 300 words. Can you write a one-page review? Can you write a 100 word review, to post on Facebook? Do you think you could create a 140-character review that sums up the production for posting on Twitter?

A sample review written by a student follows this page.

— *David Hansen, Education Outreach Associate*

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# A SAMPLE REVIEW WRITTEN BY A STUDENT

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## **"Gambit": More Poetry Than History** — Mark Wood

If Aristotle was correct when he said that poetry “is a higher thing than history,” then “Royal Gambit,” which opened Friday night at Pentacle Theater, is, I suppose, on the right track.

For those who were expecting a representational treatment of the life of England’s Henry VIII, “Royal Gambit” was a shock, if not a disappointment. Those who sought poetry got it, although of a very dogmatic and simplistic sort.

This unusual, highly presentational play by Hermann Gressieker, directed by Ed Classen, is an indictment of modern man as a ruthless opportunist. The Tudor king is a representative of a rationalizing, shifty society which has become “superior to the highest” while “wallowing in the depths.”

As Henry uses the banners of “reason” and “humanism” to obtain then dispose of his six wives, so modern man uses them for his own pleasure and glorification, uses them to wage war in the name of peace, to hate in the name of love.

Such is the grim theme pleasingly presented by a company of seven actors, who performed their roles energetically, if unevenly. The presentational acting style employed here is difficult to perfect. It should be theatrical, yet believable; aimed at the head, yet acceptable to the heart.

Louise Larsen was a standout as Catherine of Aragon, Largely because she utilized this presentational approach and was not afraid of open theatricality. Her flamboyant stage presence, which needed to be toned down in her recent role in “Last of the Red Hot Lovers,” found full vent here.

Henry's fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, was portrayed by Gale Rieder, who quickly became an audience favorite. Her thick accent was letter-perfect and her direct humor was a welcome contrast to the bitter satire of the rest of the play.

The other four actresses—Kathy Stratton, Marcia Engblom, Polly Bond and Patricia Sloan—each had their exceptional moments. However, they generally seemed tied to more conventional, representational acting styles.

Ron Fox was superb in the role of Henry. Tuxedoed, leering with the look of a demonic marionette, the vacant stare of a deranged orator, Fox dominated the stage fully, commanding both in voice and stage presence.

The technical elements of the play were more than adequate. Musical accompaniment was appropriately sparse and simple.

At one point the play, King Henry roared, “In my realm I decide what constitutes tragedy!” Ironically, Gressieker strips modern man not only of his possibilities as a tragic figure worthy of any sympathies at all. In the final moments of the play, Catherine of Aragon announces the death of modern man and the birth of a new era. It is a scene of great hope, but it is not as profound as her earlier pronouncement to her husband that “the ways of the world are not so cut and dried!”

For my own part, I wish that “Royal Gambit’s” statement were not so cut and dried. By making man out to be such a simple monster the play defeats its own purposes and turns poetry into scathing dogma, which is probably even less interesting than, say, history.

<http://faculty.chemeketa.edu/jrupert3/eng105/Annrev.html>

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# QUIZ

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## Act I

1. Why has King Lear called his family together in the first scene?
2. Which characters are involved in the subplot of the story?
3. Why does Kent defend Cordelia when her father banishes her?
4. Why does the Duke of Burgundy reject the offer of Cordelia's hand in marriage?
5. Who are the Duke of Albany and the Duke of Cornwall?
6. Who eventually marries Lear's dowerless daughter? Where will she live after her marriage?
7. What advice does Cordelia give to her sisters as she leaves with the King of France?
8. What do Goneril and Regan do as soon as everyone is gone and they are alone together?
9. What is the piece of paper Edmund is supposedly hiding from his father? What does it say?
10. What arrangement have Goneril and Regan made for the care of their father, the king?
11. Why does the Fool offer his coxcomb to Kent?
12. Where does Goneril plan to tell her father to go if he does not like it at her palace?
13. How does the Duke of Albany feel about his wife's actions against the King?
14. How does the Fool expect Regan to receive her father?
15. What is the purpose of the Fool in these scenes?

## *Answers*

1. King Lear calls his family together in order to divide his kingdom among his three daughters.
2. Gloucester and his illegitimate son Edmund and his legitimate son Edgar are the characters involved in the subplot.
3. Kent defends Cordelia because he feels it is his duty to keep the King from making a "rash" decision.
4. The Duke of Burgundy will not accept Cordelia because she has no dowry to bring into the marriage.
5. The Duke of Albany is Goneril's husband, and the Duke of Cornwall is Regan's husband.
6. The King of France marries Cordelia in spite of her banishment and lack of a dowry. He will take her to France.
7. Cordelia asks her sisters to treat their father well.
8. Goneril and Regan immediately begin to plot ways in which to usurp the power of the King, their father.

- 
9. The piece of paper is a forged letter supposedly written by Edgar plotting his father's murder.
  10. Goneril will keep her father first. Then she and Regan will alternate each month.
  11. The Fool offers his coxcomb because he thinks Kent is a fool for following Lear.
  12. Goneril will tell Lear to go and live with her sister Regan.
  13. Albany is troubled by his wife's actions.
  14. The Fool thinks Regan will be exactly like her sister.
  15. The Fool acts as an honest commentary on the King's fears.

## **Act II**

True or False

1. Edmund ask Edgar to raise his sword against him in order to avenge his father's honor. (F)
2. As a result of Kent's insults towards Oswald, Kent is put in the stocks. (T)
3. Edgar disguises himself as Caius and becomes a servant to Lear. (F)
4. Lear goes to Regan in order to apologize for his rowdy knights. (F)
5. Regan and Goneril turn Lear out into a raging storm. (T)

## **Act III**

1. The raging storm is a metaphor for Lear's anger with his daughters. (T)
2. Although the storm rages, Lear is not worried because he is with his friends. (F)
3. Gloucester begins to realize that Edmund may be dishonest, so he leaves without confiding in him. (F)
4. The storm rages, and Lear becomes afraid of Gloucester, who arrives carrying a torch, which he takes to be a foul fiend. (T)
5. Gloucester tells Kent of the plot to kill Lear and suggests they take him to Cordelia, in Dover – to find protection. (T)
6. In one of the most brutal scenes in Shakespeare's plays, Gloucester's eyes are "plucked out" by Cornwall. (T)
7. Gloucester asks for and receives help from Edmund. (F)
8. It looks as though there will be a war for the kingdom of Britain. (T)

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## Act IV

1. Why does Gloucester ask Edgar (who is disguised as Poor Tom) to take him to the brim of Dover's high cliffs?
2. T-F Even though he is disgusted by her actions, Goneril's husband stands by her.
3. How is Cornwall killed?
4. T-F After Cornwall's death Regan begins to doubt her treachery and wants to make amends to her father.
5. Disguised now as a peasant, Edgar convinces Gloucester that he has survived a high fall, and that his life is a "miracle."
6. "You ever-gentle gods, take my breath from me; Let not my worser spirit tempt me again/To die before you please." Paraphrase this line from Gloucester after his attempted suicide.
7. T-F Oswald comes upon Gloucester and is gleeful at the thought of being able to kill him, but he is stopped by Edgar.
8. T-F Lear and Cordelia are brought together, but he doesn't recognize her at first.
9. T-F Lear asks Cordelia's forgiveness, but she cannot forgive him after all he has done to her.

## Answers – Act IV

1. Gloucester wants to commit suicide by jumping from the cliff.
2. (T)
3. He is accidentally stabbed during the torture of Gloucester.
4. (F)
5. (T)
6. Gloucester addresses the heavens, asking for inner strength and a death other than suicide.
7. (T)
8. (T)
9. (F)

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## Act V

1. T-F Edmund clearly loves Goneril the best, and wants to make sure Albany is killed. (F)
2. T-F Goneril poisons Regan out of jealousy over Edmund. (T)
3. T-F Goneril also kills Albany so that she can have Edmund. (F)
4. T-F Edmund finally is able to kill his brother and become the next King. (F)
5. Lear finds Cordelia and they flee to France to be together until he dies happily in her home. (F)

Guide compiled by Madelon Horvath

Sources:

- California Shakespeare Theater
- Cambridge School Shakespeare
- Folger Shakespeare Library
- Goodman Theater, Chicago
- Shakespeare in the Ruins, [shakespeareintheruins.com](http://shakespeareintheruins.com)



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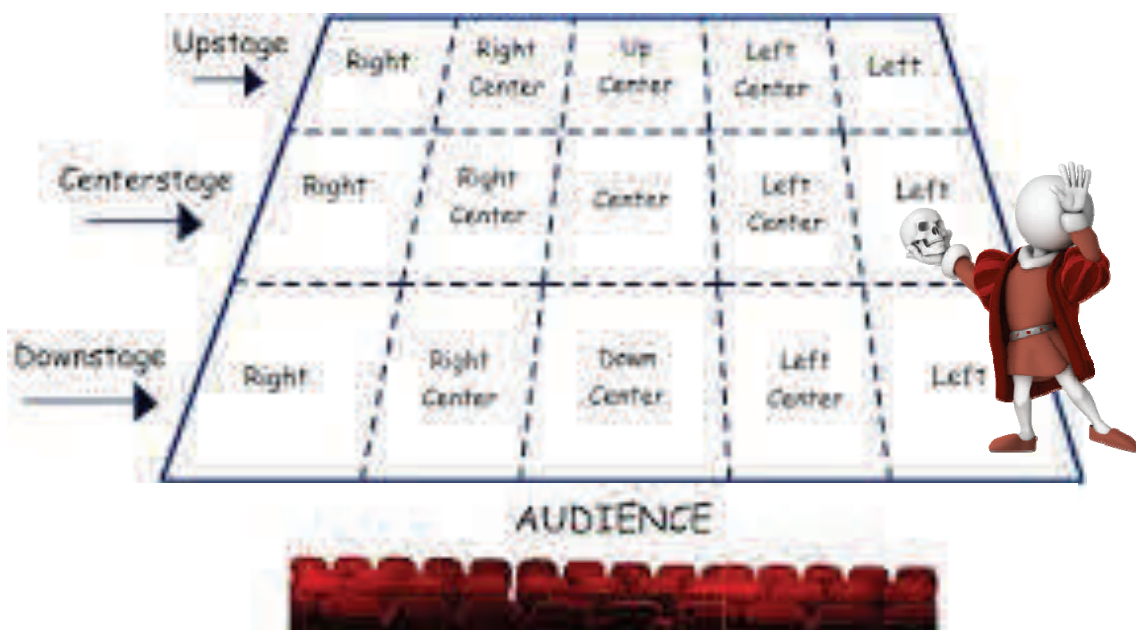
# A BRIEF GLOSSARY OF THEATER TERMS

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<b>Apron</b>	The part of the stage in front of the curtain
<b>Auditorium or House</b>	Where the audience sits
<b>Beam Spread</b>	The area a single light covers
<b>Blackout</b>	Turning off all the lights in the theatre at once
<b>Board</b>	The control center for lights, sound, or both
<b>Book (The)</b>	A copy of the script containing all notes and blocking
<b>Box Office</b>	Where the audience buys tickets
<b>Box Set</b>	A set in a proscenium with three walls
<b>Call</b>	The time certain members of the production need to be at the theatre
<b>Cheat</b>	When an actor takes a realistic action and modifies it for the audience to see
<b>Cloth</b>	Scenery painted on fabric
<b>Cue</b>	A line or action that immediately leads to another action by the actor (for them to speak) designer or stage manager (to change the lights or sound)
<b>Curtain Call</b>	The bows at the end of the show
<b>Dimmer</b>	Equipment that controls the brightness of a light
<b>Director</b>	The creative head of a production. They create a vision for the show and work with actors, designers, and crew to bring that vision to life
<b>Flat</b>	A frame covered with canvas, cardboard, or some other light material which is then painted as part of the set
<b>Floodlight</b>	A light that has a wide unfocused beam covering most of the stage
<b>Fly</b>	A system used to raise set backgrounds, set pieces, or potentially actors
<b>Follow-spot</b>	A spotlight that can follow an actor as they move across around the stage
<b>Footlights</b>	Floodlights on the floor at the front of the stage.
<b>Gel</b>	A piece of plastic placed over the light to change its color
<b>Greenroom</b>	A room where the company can relax, eat, or potentially watch the show if a TV and a camera has been rigged
<b>Notes</b>	The director's notes on the performance or rehearsal
<b>Pit</b>	An area between the stage and the audience where an orchestra can sit (typically below audience level)
<b>Producer</b>	The person responsible for all logistical and financial aspects of a production (as opposed to the creative head, the director).

<b>Properties or Props</b>	Items used by actors in a show (such as swords, plates, watches, etc)
<b>Proscenium</b>	A type of stage defined by a proscenium arch. Proscenium theatres typically distinctly separate the audience and stage by a window (defined by the proscenium arch). The stage typically will not go far past the proscenium arch (the Ohio Theatre, for example).
<b>Raked Stage</b>	A stage that is angled (upstage is the top of the hill and downstage the bottom) so that the audience can see the action more clearly
<b>Set</b>	The scenery used in a scene or throughout the play
<b>Set Dressing</b>	Parts of the set that don't serve a practical function but make the set look realistic.
<b>Spotlight</b>	A type of light that is focused so that it can light a very specific area
<b>Strike</b>	Taking apart and removing a set from the theatre
<b>Thrust</b>	A stage that goes beyond the proscenium arch so that the audience is sitting on three sides of the set - in front, and on either side (the Hanna Theatre, for example).
<b>Tracks</b>	The rails on which curtains (tabs) run,
<b>Trap</b>	A hole in the stage covered by a door where actors or set pieces can exit or enter
<b>Understudy</b>	An actor who learns all of the lines and blocking of another actor (typically one of the actors in a lead role) who can perform in case the main actor cannot go on
<b>Upstage</b>	The rear of the stage
<b>Wings</b>	The sides of the stage typically blocked off by curtains where actors and crew can stand and wait for their cues

## STAGE DIRECTIONS



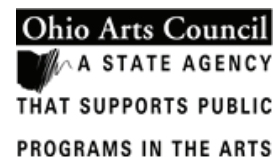
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# ABOUT GREAT LAKES THEATER

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## **Charles Fee, Producing Artistic Director**

The mission of Great Lakes Theater, through its main stage productions and its education programs, is to bring the pleasure, power and relevance of classic theater to the widest possible audience.

Since the company's inception in 1962, programming has been rooted in Shakespeare, but the company's commitment to great plays spans the breadth of all cultures, forms of theater and time periods including the 20th century, and provides for the occasional mounting of new works that complement the classical repertoire.

Classic theater holds the capacity to illuminate truth and enduring values, celebrate and challenge human nature and actions, revel in eloquent language, preserve the traditions of diverse cultures and generate communal spirit. On its mainstage and through its education program, the company seeks to create visceral, immediate experiences for participants, asserting theater's historic role as a vehicle for advancing the common good, and helping people make the most joyful and meaningful connections between classic plays and their own lives. This Cleveland theater company wishes to share such vibrant experiences with people across all age groups, creeds, racial and ethnic groups and socio-economic backgrounds.

The company's commitment to classic theater is magnified in the educational programs (for both adults and students) that surround its productions. Great Lakes Theater has a strong presence in area schools, offering an annual series of student matinees and, for over 30 years, an acclaimed school residency program led by teams of specially trained actor-teachers.

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[greatlakes theater.org](http://greatlakes theater.org)