

KING LEAR

Act One

The play opens at Lear's court, where we meet the main characters. The opening scene is in itself shocking, as Lear forces his daughters to declare their love for him. The one who loves him the most will receive the largest part of his kingdom, which he intends to divide between the three. Lear himself wishes to hand over the ruling of the kingdom to his daughters, while retaining the 'Pre-eminence, and all the large effects / That troop with majesty' (Scene 1, Lines 131-2). Goneril and Regan acquit themselves well at this love test. Cordelia, however, dismayed by her sisters' ponderous words, refuses to take part in the 'contest' and tells Lear that she loves him as her duty instructs her. When Cordelia refuses to speak again, Lear casts her off without a moment's hesitation. Kent attempts to argue with the King, accusing him of 'hideous rashness' (Scene 1, Line 151). When Kent further warns Lear that his elder daughters are false flatterers, Kent too is banished. Lear invests Albany and Cornwall with power, and, after Burgundy refuses to take Cordelia as his wife, now that she is without dowry, France takes her for her virtues alone. Goneril and Regan complain, in private, about Lear's harsh judgement and unpredictable behaviour and worry that they too may be treated unfairly.

Edmund, Gloucester's bastard son, soliloquises about his own situation, revealing his devious intentions towards his brother. When his father enters, Edmund's trickery with a letter, supposedly written by Edgar, sets Gloucester against his legitimate son. Edmund further warns Edgar of their father's anger, and suggests that he go into hiding at his lodgings.

A short space of time follows, and Lear is staying with Goneril, who complains to her steward Oswald about the King's behaviour, and that of his retinue. She makes it clear that she wants to provoke a clash with Lear. When Lear returns, he finds Caius (Kent in disguise), a serving man seeking employment. As the King calls for food and his Fool, Oswald wanders in and out (as Goneril has instructed him to do) and enrages the King with his insolence. The King rages at Oswald, and strikes him, upon which the Fool comments on Lear's folly in riddles and songs. A lot of his lines refer directly to property, the implication being that without his property, Lear is helpless. The Fool also suggests that Lear has reversed the natural order.

Goneril and Lear argue, with Goneril's complaints about his knights' degeneracy shocking Lear. She further insists that he cut down his train, or she will. Lear is incredulous and curses her, saying he still has one 'kind and comfortable' (Scene 4, Line 303) daughter left to him. He again curses Goneril, with childlessness, and rushes out. Albany enters, shocked at this turn of events, however, Goneril appears unperturbed. Lear returns briefly, bewildered that fifty of his followers have already been dismissed, and threatens to take back the power he has given away. He refuses to weep and insists that Regan will help him. After he father leaves, Goneril sends Oswald to Regan with a letter, presumably describing the course she has taken with Lear and asking for her sister's support.

Lear also sends his servant, Kent (disguised still as Caius) to deliver a letter to Regan, announcing his arrival. The Fool continues to make barbed comments about Lear's predicament. Lear begins to realise he has wronged Cordelia. He fears that Goneril's ingratitude is driving him mad and wonders if he can reclaim his throne by violent means.

1. Does Lear's division of his kingdom in Act I, Scene 1 remind you of a fairy tale? How so? Ignore the word "tragedy" in the play's title for a moment, and describe your expectations about how the story might end based on its beginning.
2. What, if anything, is the problem with Lear's early division of his kingdom? Does his behaviour make sense? Why is he putting on such a public "show" in Act 1, Scene 1?
3. And what about "poor Cordelia" in Act 1, Scene 1 - is her bearing towards her father the king appropriate?
4. Is Kent's comportment towards Lear proper? How would you characterize his language? Is it very effective in allaying the king's wrath?
5. As for Regan and Goneril--when they confer in Act 1, Scene 1, Lines 280-98 about their father's actions, do they have a point?

6. The Edmund/Gloucester plot also begins in Act One. How are the Lear/Daughters and Edmund/Gloucester plots related?
7. Let's consider the Fool. What is the Fool's function? What does he do for Lear? How helpful to the king (or to us) are the Fool's "insights?" What sort of language does he use?
8. Oswald--observe how he behaves towards Lear after the latter has given away his kingdom. Why do we need to think about the actions of such a "three-suited, action-taking knave?"

Stagecraft

1. How does Shakespeare begin to build tension in this opening Act?

Language & Imagery

1. Find 3 references to 'Nothing' in Act 1.
2. Find 3 examples of animal imagery in Act 1.
3. Find 3 references to 'Sight and Blindness' in Act 1.

Themes

1. How is the theme of 'Madness' introduced in Act 1?
2. How well is the theme of 'Appearances and Reality' introduced to the audience?

Act Two

This Act opens at Gloucester's castle, where Cornwall and Regan are expected. There is gossip suggesting 'likely wars' between Cornwall and Albany, and Edmund determines to use the Cornwall and Regan's arrival to his own advantage. He manipulates the unsuspecting Edgar into believing that, not only is his father enraged against him, but Regan and Cornwall are too. Edgar is drawn into a mock fight with Edmund, and then flees. Gloucester, believing every word that Edmund speaks, sends servants in pursuit of Edgar. Edmund paints a very dark picture of his brother, claiming that he has plotted Gloucester's murder. Gloucester, horrified by this, vows to catch and punish Edgar, as well as any who help him in his attempted escape. He further promises to disinherit Edgar in favour of Edmund. Edgar, meanwhile, finds himself alone in the countryside. He knows he has been proclaimed criminal, and that the ports as well as the countryside are being hunted for him. He decides to disguise himself as a 'Bedlam beggar', tying knots in his hair, covering himself in dirt, and wearing only a blanket for protection.

Cornwall and Regan arrive. Lear has, as we know, left Goneril's castle to go to Regan's. Regan, having received the letter from her sister, has left her home for Gloucester's castle because she has no intention of allowing her father and his knights house room. When Kent (disguised as Caius) arrives, outside Gloucester's castle, he quarrels with Oswald, and insults him. Kent challenges Oswald to a fight, but Oswald, true to form, backs away, yelling for help. Edmund, Cornwall, Regan and Goneril come running, with Cornwall eventually managing to stop the fight. When questioned, Kent again insults Oswald and, unable to keep quiet, then insults Cornwall. He is placed in the stocks as punishment, despite his protestations that he is on the king's business and should not be treated in this way. Both his and Gloucester's pleas for leniency are swept aside. Alone on stage, he reveals that he has a letter from Cordelia. She intends to put right all the wrongs that have been done to Lear since she was banished.

When Lear arrives he is distressed to find Kent in the stocks, yet refuses to believe that Cornwall and Regan are responsible for this. He determines to find and talk to Regan himself, but returns, with Gloucester, furious and incredulous that she and her husband claim to be too weary to see him. After he questions himself over whether he is being deceived or not, Lear feels himself becoming hysterical and attempts to control himself as Cornwall and Regan arrive. Kent is released. Regan speaks to her father

cruelly, as *Goneril* did earlier, and *Lear* becomes increasingly more sympathetic. *Goneril* arrives and the sisters 'gang up' on the king, demanding that he reduce his retinue, to which *Lear* refuses. Eventually *Lear* is defeated, and rushes out into the storm, after threatening revenge on his elder daughters.

The sisters justify letting *Lear* leave because the house is too small to accommodate his followers. *Gloucester* follows *Lear* and returns with the news that the king is in 'high rage'. *Gloucester* is concerned about *Lear* and describes the desolate countryside *Lear* has gone out into, however, *Goneril* and *Regan* insist that *Lear* should be left to suffer the consequences of his actions. *Regan* instructs *Gloucester* to lock the doors, and *Lear* is left out in the storm.

1. Examine the theme of "nature" in Act 2, Scene 1. How do *Edmund* and *Gloucester*, respectively, understand this concept?
2. Why does *Kent* fail to placate *Regan* and *Cornwall* over his thrashing of their servant, *Oswald*?
3. What do you make of *Edgar's* speech (II.iii) in connection to the themes with which the play has been concerned so far?
4. Explore what leads up to *Lear's* frenzied "O, reason not the need!" speech (Act 2, Scene 4, Lines 256-78). What is the importance of all that haggling about the need for a certain number of servants? Why does *Lear* come unhinged at last?
5. A simple question: how does Act II advance the plots set up in Act I?

Stagecraft

1. *Kent's* verbal and physical attack on *Oswald* creates a moment of light relief, but is there a serious point to this incident?

Language & Imagery

1. Find three examples of animal imagery in Act 2.

Themes

1. How is Lear's loss of power emphasised in this Act?
2. How far does Lear's suffering in this Act prepare the audience for what is yet to come?

Act 3

The king is out on the heath, raging against the elements, with only the Fool for companion. We hear that Lear is tearing his hair and running about unprotected. Kent explains that France is preparing to invade England, and that some French troops have already landed secretly, along with Cordelia.

Lear's insanity grows worse, and Kent is concerned by the state of the king when he catches up with him, especially when the old king seems not to recognise Kent. Kent persuades Lear to take shelter from the storm in a nearby hovel, however, when they reach the hovel, Lear seems unwilling to enter. The Fool is startled by the presence of Edgar as Poor Tom, in the hovel, and his appearance makes Lear even more demented, as he instantly recognises himself in Tom.

Meanwhile, Gloucester frets about the 'unnatural dealing' of Cornwall, Regan and Goneril, who have warned him against helping Lear. Believing that Edmund shares his concern, Gloucester goes on to tell his son that Albany and Cornwall are set to clash and that France has begun an invasion to restore Lear, whom Gloucester proposes that he and Edmund should assist. Lear leaves to find the king, and as he does so, Edmund announces his intention to betray his father to Cornwall, which he duly does. We are left in no doubt that Cornwall seeks Gloucester's death.

In the hovel, Edgar constructs an account of himself as a degenerate servant, and, as Lear attempts to remove his clothing in admiration for Tom, Gloucester appears. Not recognising his chanting and rambling son, Gloucester is dismayed to see the king is such poor company, and urges Lear to go with him to a safe place, however his madness seems to have too much of a grip on him to allow common sense to prevail.

Once inside the hovel, Lear conducts a mock-trial of Goneril and Regan, using props to represent his daughters. This appears to have something of a cathartic effect on the king, as he agrees to Kent's pleas to rest shortly after this. Gloucester returns and says there is a plot to kill Lear, and explains that he has arranged a litter to transport him safely to Dover, where he will be met by friends (the French forces).

Back at the castle, Cornwall tells Goneril to return to her husband and show him Gloucester's letter (containing news of the French invasion). He expects Albany to join forces with him. He then instructs his servants to seek out Gloucester, whom Regan says should be hung immediately. Goneril however, suggests plucking out his eyes. Edmund is sent to accompany Goneril on her journey home, after Cornwall tells him that he should not be witness to the revenge that is planned for his father. Cornwall calls Edmund 'my lord of Gloucester', thus sealing the old earl's fate - Gloucester is not expected to survive his punishment. Just before Gloucester is brought in, Oswald brings news that Gloucester has helped Lear to escape to Dover with some of his last remaining retinue of knights.

Gloucester is treated cruelly by both Regan and Cornwall, culminating in Cornwall's plucking out of one of Gloucester's eyes. Regan then urges her husband to pluck out the other eye. Appalled by what he witnesses, one of Cornwall's servants steps in and, after a brief sword fight, wounds Cornwall, before being run through by Regan. In spite of his wound, Cornwall has the strength to pluck out Gloucester's other eye.

Gloucester hopes that Edmund will revenge himself, but Regan mocks this and informs him that his bastard son hates him. Gloucester finally 'sees' the error of his ways and appeals to the gods to protect Edgar, and forgive him for doubting his natural son.

Regan instructs the servants to put Gloucester out into the storm. Two servants decide to help Gloucester and fetch some medicine for his wounded eyes, before discussing how to get him to Poor Tom who can act as his guide.

1. Scenes ii, iv, and vi are concerned with the actions of King Lear and others during a raging storm. What is the significance of this setting? Is the storm metaphoric for one or more things?
2. What does the storm seem to mean to Lear himself? How does he "address" the storm in scene ii?
3. Can you make anything of the Fool's "prophecy" in scene ii.75-90?

4. In what sense is it ironic that Gloucester confides his good intentions in his illegitimate son, Edmund?
5. How is Edmund rewarded for his treachery?
6. How does the madness of Lear compare to the madness of Poor Tom (Edgar)?
7. What does Edgar (as Poor Tom) mean to the mad King Lear? Look at the various titles and descriptions that Lear accords him in scenes iv and vi.
8. One of those titles is apparently that of "judge" in scene vi. What is Lear trying to accomplish by putting his daughters on trial?
9. What are the judgments of mankind issued against Goneril and Regan in Lear's court?
10. Scene vii is downright ugly. Why does Regan pick this specific punishment for Gloucester? Does the punishment fit the alleged "crime?"
11. How is the blindness of Gloucester symbolic to the blindness of Lear?

Stagecraft

1. What has Shakespeare chosen to write this Act in very short, fast-paced scenes? What does it add to the unfolding of the plot?
2. To what extent can Scene vi be seen as a contrast to Scene v?

Language & Imagery

1. Find 3 references to 'Nature' in this act.
2. Find 3 references to 'Nothing' in this act.
3. How does Act 3 pave the way for Shakespeare's recurrent message of the restoration of the natural order in Act 5?

Act Four

Edgar comes across his blind, suicidal father and starts to lead him to Dover. Edgar is torn between continuing his disguise and revealing his identity, and is obviously shocked and appalled by what has happened to Gloucester. Gloucester promises Poor Tom money if he will lead him to 'the very brim', and we understand that Gloucester is so broken that he intends to commit suicide.

Edgar pretends to Gloucester that they are labouring up a steep hill, and asks his father if he can hear the sea. Gloucester, although unsure, is persuaded by Edgar, who informs us that he has deceived Gloucester in order to 'cure' him, that they are on the edge of a cliff. Gloucester's final thoughts are for his legitimate son as he prepares himself to jump from the cliff. This is followed by the bizarre sight of Gloucester throwing himself from an imaginary cliff and falling on the ground. Edgar assumes a new disguise and attempts to chase away Gloucester's still-gloomy thoughts, trying to convince him that a devil persuaded him to jump from the cliff and that the kindly gods have saved him.

Lear enters and a strange, cruel exchange ensues. Lear, still mad, mistakes Gloucester for Goneril and launches into a tirade against female sexuality. Gloucester, ever loyal, begs to be allowed to kiss the king's hand, despite the king's apparent cruelty towards him. Lear runs off in fear as Cordelia's attendants arrive, believing them to be hostile figures.

As they prepare to leave, Oswald comes upon Gloucester and Edgar, and is delighted because he will now be able to claim Regan's reward. Gloucester appears to welcome death, however, Edgar steps in, in another disguise, and fatally wounds Oswald. Reading the letters Oswald had been carrying to Goneril, Edgar discovers the plot against Albany's life, resolving to reveal this to Albany at an opportune moment.

Meanwhile, Goneril and Edmund return to Goneril's residence, where Albany accuses her of cruelty to her father. Albany appears to have undergone a radical change of heart, and is further appalled by Edmund's treatment of his father, and resolves to revenge Gloucester and support Lear's cause. Goneril offers herself to Edmund, telling him that she will shortly command him as his mistress, and Edmund pledges his loyalty to her. Goneril receives a letter from her sister, of whom she is becoming suspicious, and is

concerned that she will seek to marry Edmund, now that Cornwall is dead. The sister's are now rivals for Edmund's love.

We learn that Cordelia has arrived in England, and that Lear is too ashamed of himself to see her, despite her obvious and full forgiveness of him. Cordelia sends out soldiers (ironically, 100 knights) to find her father, and calls on the earth to help restore him. To further distance herself from her sisters, she asserts to the audience that she is here to defend Lear's rights; her motivation is love, not political advancement. Lear and Cordelia are eventually reunited.

Regan interrogated Oswald about a letter he is carrying to Edmund from Goneril. She tells him that it was a mistake to allow Gloucester to live, as people who have heard about her treatment of him have now turned against her. She then tries to stop Oswald's departure, however he insists and she becomes threatening. She claims that she and Edmund have talked and agreed on marriage, and that her sister must be warned off.

Preparations are made for the forthcoming battle, and there is very obvious dissention in the ranks of the evil children. The rivalry between Goneril and Regan intensifies, and Edmund reveals himself to the audience in soliloquy. Edmund's machiavellian tendencies are highlighted here, as he decides to wait and see what happens before making his choice; clearly, he intends to choose whichever sister becomes most powerful.

Edgar, still disguised, appears and asks to speak with Albany, then gives him the letter he found on Oswald, telling him to open it before going into battle.

1. In Scene 1, why would Gloucester prefer to be led by the madman (Edgar) rather than by a faithful retainer?
2. Comment on the sexual innuendo and tension in the dialogue between Goneril and Edmund in Scene ii.
3. How does the emphasis on the sexual nature of Goneril and Edmund's relationship comment on or illustrate the disorder that Lear's abdication has created?

4. How does Goneril compound her sins against her family in Scene ii?
5. How does Albany perceive his wife, in this scene?
6. How does the vicious competition implied in Scene v between Regan and Goneril over Edmund comment on or illustrate the disorder created by Lear's abdication?
7. Why is it natural that Lear would not wish to see his daughter Cordelia, in Scene iii?
8. Does it make sense to compare Edgar's handling of Gloucester to his participation in Lear's madness (i.e. Act III. Scene vi)?
9. In Scene vi, as Lear rages, try to draw as much from his words as you can about the "causes" that Lear assigns to his troubles.
10. In Scene vi, Edgar catches our favourite 'worsted-stocking knave', Oswald, in the act of attempting to kill old Gloucester. Why does Edgar confront Oswald in rustic dialect?
11. How does Cordelia react to her father's words to her in Scene vii?

Stagecraft

1. In Scene vi, what is Edgar trying to accomplish with his artistic, but misleading, treatment of Gloucester?

Language & Imagery

1. In Scene vi, how does Edgar begin the process of righting the unnatural events that have occurred?
2. Find 3 examples of animal imagery in this Act.

3. Find 3 references to nature in this Act.

4. Find 2 references to nothing in this Act.

Act Five

Act V opens with preparations for the clash between the British and French armies. The first thing we are aware of is trouble within the English camp. Edmund complains that Albany keeps changing his plans. Regan and Goneril, when she arrives, are much more concerned with Edmund. Goneril claims that she would rather lose the battle than Edmund, while Regan is unwilling to leave her sister alone with him. Edmund speaks to the ever more sympathetic Albany alone, giving him the letter he found on Oswald and tells him to open it before going into battle. He asks Albany to have a trumpet wounded if Britain wins the battle, so that a champion may appear to prove the truth of the contents of the letter.

Left alone on stage, Edmund muses about his predicament. He has sworn his love to both sisters, and cannot decide which one to 'take'. He knows the sisters are so jealous that one will have to die in order for him to 'enjoy' the other. True to form, Edmund seems unconcerned that one of his 'lovers' must, and undoubtedly will, die. He decides to wait and see what happens in the battle before he makes his choice. He further informs us that Albany intends to show mercy to Lear and Cordelia if the British win. He, however, has other plans for them: they must die.

The battle rages as Edgar leads his father to a safe place. He leaves him there, then returns with the news that the French have been defeated and that Lear and Cordelia have been captured. Overcome by dismay, Gloucester refuses to leave with his son, who chides him. He implies that man should not sit and rot as Gloucester says he wishes to do. He must prepare himself for death and await the moment chosen for him, and so Gloucester allows himself to be led away.

Edmund leads his prisoners on to the sound of drums. He orders Lear and Cordelia taken away to prison. Cordelia's only thought is for her father, who is horrified when Cordelia asks if they will see her sisters again. Lear cannot bear the idea of seeing them again. He claims he is pleased to be going to prison with Cordelia, imagining it to be a time of happiness away from the troubles of court and state. As Lear and Cordelia

are escorted to prison, Edmund orders a captain to follow them and gives him a death warrant.

Albany enters with the sisters, demanding to see the prisoners and Edmund hedges. A quarrel ensues, and the sisters start to bicker in their defence of him. Albany insults Edmund and arrests him for treason, sounding the trumpet to call Edmund's accuser. We learn that Goneril has poisoned Regan, who is carried away sick. Edgar enters, armed but still disguised, and accuses Edmund of betrayal. Edmund agrees to fight his brother and falls, wounded. Goneril tries to destroy the incriminating letter before running offstage.

Edmund confesses his crimes, knowing that he is dying. Edgar puts off his disguise, and judges both Edmund and his father harshly, and Edgar, in a complete turnaround, admits the justice of Edgar's remarks and accepts his own death. Albany embraces Edgar, who recounts his own journey since the play began, and reveals that Gloucester has died, overwhelmed by the reunion with Edgar.

The final movement of the play begins when the Gentleman enters carrying the bloody knife, revealing that Goneril has killed herself and that Regan too is dead. Kent comes to see Lear, and this reminds Albany that he has forgotten all about Lear. He asks Edmund where he sent the prisoners, as Goneril and Regan's bodies are dragged onstage. A moment of panic ensues as Albany and Edmund try to establish how to repeal the death warrant.

As Edgar is carried offstage to die, a distraught Lear enters, carrying the dead Cordelia. We learn that Lear committed one last act of heroism in his daughter's defence: he killed her hangman. Lear seems to fall into madness again, his eyesight fails him, and his senses seem to give up the fight to live. Kent tells Lear that Goneril and Regan are both dead, but this has no effect on the grieving man. A messenger announces the death of Edgar.

Albany says that he intends resigning his power to Lear, and that Edgar and Kent will receive back their rights as earls, as well as receiving further honours. Lear continues to grieve over Cordelia's body, and begins to choke. Edgar rushes to his aid, but Kent tells him to let the old king be; Lear will welcome death after the suffering of his life. Sorrowfully, he adds that he too expects to die soon, and brushes off Albany's

suggestions about sharing power and ruling Britain. Lear dies, perhaps believing that Cordelia still lives. Edgar calls on everyone to speak plainly and honestly and acknowledge their grief, further suggesting that the lives of those who remain have been shattered by the events of Scene 3.

1. Where is the fool?
2. How is the division between Goneril and Regan, in Act 5, Scene iii, furthered?
3. On his way to prison with Cordelia in Scene 3, Lear lays out his vision of the "future" the two will share. What predictions or promises does Lear make? Is he making sense?
4. From Scene 3, lines 83-150, Edmund is forced to defend himself against the accusation of treason that Albany (on Edgar's evidence) has levelled against him. Why is it ironic that the fight with Edgar is Edmund's undoing?
5. Why does it seem, in Act 5, Scene 3, that Edmund has more power than any other character?
6. In what manner and under what authority does Albany reclaim any power that Edmund may have?
7. Under what circumstance may Edgar answer Edmund's challenge of Act 5, Scene 3?
8. Still in Scene 3, what one act would provide possible redemption for Edmund, and why is Edmund compelled to perform that act?
9. What do you think of the attitudes that Albany, Kent, and Edgar display towards the responsibility for the state?

10. What do you make of Edgar's last four lines (Scene 3, lines 324-27)? Do these lines "sum up" the play?

Stagecraft

1. Again in Scene 3, Regan and Goneril argue over Edmund. Where do they do so? Is this setting important?
2. How is tension built to an almost unbearable point in the final scene?

Theme

1. How is the power of the realm realigned at the end of the play, and why do we not have a feeling of completion or satisfaction from this realignment?

*KING LEAR***Act One**

1. Does Lear's division of his kingdom in Act I, Scene 1 remind you of a fairy tale? How so? Ignore the word "tragedy" in the play's title for a moment, and describe your expectations about how the story might end based on its beginning.

The old man with the three daughters is used often in fairy tale. Think of Beauty & the Beast, Cinderella etc. In these fairy tales, the two elder daughters are invariably selfish and arrogant, whereas the younger daughter is the sweet, loving and honest one. Even considering The Three Little Pigs, it is the last pig who is the most sensible; the two before him being too arrogant to survive the Big Bad Wolf. Taking these tales as a basis for King Lear, it is obvious that the King is making a mistake, and that the daughter he banishes is the one daughter whom he can rely on to be honest and dutiful; exactly what Cordelia claims herself to be. Again referring to the tales, the elder daughters will betray/sacrifice all to gain power, just as the two elder daughters in this case do.

2. What, if anything, is the problem with Lear's early division of his kingdom? Does his behavior make sense? Why is he putting on such a public "show" in Act 1, Scene 1?

Firstly, the division of the kingdom would have been incredibly alarming for the Jacobean audience, who would remember how the taxing question of the succession had loomed large during the reign of Elizabeth I. Lear attempts to divide power from responsibility, and this is the main problem with his division of his kingdom. To retain the power of kingship, yet hand over responsibility for the state, simply makes no sense. In dividing the kingdom, he opens the state up to corrupt rule, and the possibility of war between the ruling sisters. Lear wants to retain the trappings of majesty without the 'cares and business' of ruling. His desire to rely on Cordelia's 'kind nursery' (I.i.124) is selfish. He intends marrying her off in Act 1, Scene 1, but expects to be nursed while he crawls 'unburdened' (I.i.41) towards death. Lear is both tyrannical patriarch and demanding child at the start of the play.

Lear puts on a show because he is more concerned with appearances than with anything else at this point. This is made clear by his insistence on being treated as an important, royal personage after he has given away his kingdom, and is emphasised later in the Act by his determination to retain his retinue of 100 knights. He does not see beyond the appearance, hence his banishment of Cordelia, and his acceptance of Goneril and Regan's speeches. King Lear is a man who is full of his own importance, and is insistent on being treated with the respect and deference which he feels are his right. Those who do not respect and defer to his will are unworthy of his further attentions (Cornelia and Kent). Lear's tragic fall proceeds from his misuse of power in these respects.

In relation to the Elizabethan/Jacobean idea of the divine right of kings, Lear's behaviour is appalling. The choice of who should rule the kingdom is not his to make; that decision lies with God alone. In taking on this decision, Lear attempts to give himself Godlike powers, and so must be punished. This is further emphasised through the rest of the play: remember that a corrupt king (represented here by Goneril and Regan) means a corrupted state. If the throne is in danger, so too is the country. This can be seen in the frequent storms which rage through the country for much of the play.

3. And what about "poor Cordelia" in Act 1, Scene 1 - is her bearing towards her father the king appropriate?

The character of Cordelia, particularly in Act 1, Scene 1 has been problematic for many critics. She can be seen as stubborn and destructive (like her father in many ways) since she is the first of his daughters to rebel against him. In challenging her father, she perhaps opens the way for her elder sisters. Certainly her refusal to take part in the love-test leads to her banishment, and so to her sisters' domination over the state. Surely if she knows how evil her sisters are, her choice not to submit to her father's will is the wrong one? Some critics further interpret her refusal to speak flattering words to Lear as an act of direct defiance; compounded by her acceptance of France, despite Lear's plea to him "T'advert your liking a more worthier way" (I,i,213).

These are extreme views, however, and do not fit with the characterisation of Cordelia as she appears in Acts IV and V, or with the consistently high esteem in

which Cordelia is held by the good characters. Even her betrothal and marriage to the King of France argues the above views: France takes her, without dowry, for her virtues alone.

In Act 1, Scene 1, Cordelia, together with Kent, seeks to alert Lear to his poor judgement and so save him from doing any further damage to himself, and his state. They hope to point out to the King his false materialistic values. Cordelia's refusal to take part in the love-test can therefore be seen as a mark of her integrity. As the play progresses, we learn to distrust those characters who have an easy way with words, and with falsehoods. In light of this, Cordelia's 'Nothing' (I,i,87) looks increasingly honest.

Cordelia's bearing towards her father then, may not be entirely appropriate: it is certainly not the way to behave towards a father as arrogant as Lear is at this point. However, Cordelia's bearing is entirely necessary. Although she fails to point out her father's shortcomings to him, she has not compromised her integrity in the way that her sisters are willing, even eager, to do.

4. Is Kent's comportment towards Lear proper? How would you characterize his language? Is it very effective in allaying the king's wrath?

Kent's behaviour in Scene 1 is very similar to Cordelia's. His behaviour towards his King is not what it should be, however, he behaves in this way in an attempt to point out to Lear the error of his judgement. His behaviour towards the King in later Scenes (where Kent is in disguise) are wholly proper for a servant, although improper for a knight. Kent's willingness to behave in a manner well below his true station in life is a further indication of his uncompromising loyalty to his king.

His language in Act 1, Scene 1 is respectful, and it is only when these respectful interjections are ignored that he resorts to blunt language - "What would'st thou do, old man?" (I,i,145). Thereafter he reverts to his usual reverence, addressing Lear as 'my lord' and 'my liege'. Of course, by this time, Lear's wrath has been awakened by the disrespect shown to him, and so nothing Kent says at this point is likely to make Lear retract Kent's banishment. Kent's dogged determination to stick to the old language of Lear's court, however, especially when disguised as Caius, can be seen as a measure of Kent's loyalty, but may also be seen as an indication that he is a

conservative, backward-looking figure. There is further evidence which points to this assumption later in the play.

5. As for Regan and Goneril--when they confer in Act 1, Scene 1, Lines 280-98 about their father's actions, do they have a point?

In a word, yes. They sum their father up as an explosive, violent and unpredictable man; this is exactly the King Lear we have been introduced to. However, the audience has to wonder, given the ease with which they flattered Lear, how far can these two be trusted? Are they, at this point, simply deciding to defend their own positions, or do they seek to justify the intentions they already possess?

Given the treatment received by their younger sister, the one Lear "always loved...most" (I,i,293), Goneril and Regan are entirely justified in their complaints. Lear has behaved appallingly towards Cordelia, as well as towards the loyal Kent, and the sisters would do well to be prepared in case they should similarly fall out of favour. However, while we may sympathise with them momentarily at this early point in the play, their behaviour towards their father before the end of Act 1 ensures that we abhor them. Although they have a point in their concerns about their father's possible treatment of them, their reaction is one of attack, which very quickly leads them into committing some much worse tyranny than they themselves hoped to avoid.

6. The Edmund/Gloucester plot also begins in Act One. How are the Lear/Daughters and Edmund/Gloucester plots related?

The fathers in both cases are fooled by their devious children, and are easily turned from their honest, loving children. Cordelia and Edgar are both banished by their fathers for imagined slights; while Goneril, Regan and Edgar are rewarded for presenting the appearance of love and loyalty to easily flattered fathers. In both cases, the fathers will lose everything because of their trust of their evil children, and their mistrust of their honest children.

7. Let's consider the Fool. What is the Fool's function? What does he do for Lear? How helpful to the king (or to us) are the Fool's "insights?" What sort of language does he use?

The Fool has several functions. He is firstly a truth-teller. When he first appears in the play, the Fool is extremely critical of Lear: "Dost thou call me fool, boy? / All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with" (I,iv,146-8) This is typical of the Fool's interaction with Lear. His sarcasm is blunt and hard hitting, and he is the only character whom Lear allows to talk to him in this way. This is also typical of the Elizabethan/Jacobean idea of the Fool, who was traditionally kept by the sovereign not only as a form of entertainment, but also as a means of keeping the monarch grounded: the Fool was allowed to say what the court advisors dared not. This is further emphasised in much of the Fool's early speeches, which are designed to alert Lear to his daughters' true characters.

The Fool points out Lear's mistakes to him, often unnecessarily however, as it becomes clear as the play progresses that the King is very quickly becoming aware of his rash and mistaken behaviour. The Fool is never punished for his talk, as is traditional for a Fool, both in Elizabethan/Jacobean life and drama. In fact, the Fool often refers to the king as his 'Nuncle Lear', which shows a close and affectionate relationship between the two. Unflinchingly loyal, in a play where many children betray their parents abysmally, the Fool seems to play the role of the good son. If he does, he is the only son who has not been banished for his loyalty.

The Fool is also used as Cordelia's representative. His truth-telling can be seen to be similar to Cordelia's honesty. We are told that he has been pining away since Cordelia's departure to France, however, Lear snaps "No more of that" (I,iv,74); he cannot bear to hear his youngest daughter's name mentioned.

The Fool often speaks in riddles, couplets etc. This is the correct form of speech for a Fool, as his main function is comedy. Lear's Fool is a more complex character than that. He fulfils several functions/roles in the play, and so his language changes according to the particular role he is playing. His language shifts between the ridiculous to the bitter to the cuttingly honest, becoming more like that of a true character as the play moves on.

In Shakespeare, the Fool is often used for comic effect, however, in *King Lear* there is very little of the witty fool in evidence; and more of the bitter one.

8. Oswald--observe how he behaves towards Lear after the latter has given away his kingdom. Why do we need to think about the actions of such a "three-suited, action-taking knave?"

Oswald is a minor character, however serves a number of useful functions. The bad qualities of his mistress are mirrored in his own warped nature, and his selfish opportunism reflects Goneril's ambitious rapacity. We must consider his actions because he represents a part of society. In giving over power to his evil daughters, Lear also gives over power to the Oswalds of society; the self-serving characters who will take any opportunity to further themselves, at whatever or whoever's cost. Oswald's behaviour towards Lear after the latter has given away his kingdom helps to emphasise for the audience how little power Lear now has. Not only has he lost his kingdom, his crown and his only loyal daughter, he has lost the respect and loyalty of his subjects.

Oswald also serves as a useful parallel with Kent. As Oswald is unflinchingly loyal to Goneril; Kent is unflinchingly loyal to Lear. As Oswald is self-serving and corrupt; so Kent is selfless and honest.

Stagecraft

1. How does Shakespeare begin to build tension in this opening Act?

The tension of the play is created almost at the very start of the action. We question Lear's use of his power almost immediately. His love-test is foolish, as is his desire to be treated as an important loyal personage after he has given away his kingdom. The audience are alarmed by his intention to break up his state. (In terms of the timing of the play, it was first performed very shortly after the ascension of James I (James VI of Scotland) to the throne, a time in which the Jacobean audience would have been very concerned about matters of state. For the audience of the day, then, the question of who would rule the country was of great importance). By the end of the very first scene, family and national harmony has been destroyed. Much of the tension created lies in the obvious need for the natural order to be restored.

Another point of tension comes from Edgar. His soliloquy at the beginning of Act 1,

Scene 2 is a huge surprise for the audience, as his changing behaviour throughout

this scene. He helps to exemplify the theme of Appearance being at odds with Reality. His plans against his brother are an obvious point of tension. Edgar is linked as early as this with the sisters, Goneril and Regan. His opportunism, energy and directness when he is alone on stage mirror Goneril and Regan's plain speaking at the end of Act 1, Scene 1: the evil children are gaining ground.

Goneril's treatment of Lear later in this Act helps to build the tension further. The action appears to moving swiftly, almost as swiftly as Lear's fall from power.

Language & Imagery

1. Find 3 references to 'Nothing' in Act 1.

As he loses everything - his status, his family, his mind - Lear learns the value of Cordelia's 'Nothing, my lord' (I, i, 87)

To Cordelia - "Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again." (Lear, I, i, 92)

These are contrasted ironically and alarmingly by Edmund's use of the same line 'Nothing, my lord' (I.ii.32) when asked by his father about the fake letter

To Edmund - "The quality of nothing hath not such need to hide itself. Let's see. Come, if it be nothing, I shall not need spectacles." (Gloucester, I, ii, 34-36)

"Find out this villain, Edmund; it shall lose thee nothing." (Gloucester, I, ii, 124-125)
(**ironically, it will lose Gloucester everything**)

The Fool taunts Lear with the word 'nothing', as he ridicules Lear's actions in giving away his kingdom and now being left with 'nothing'

Kent: "This is nothing, Fool." / Fool: "Then 'tis like the breath of a unfeed lawyer-- you gave me nothing for't. Can you make no use of nothing, Nuncle?" / Lear: "Why, no, boy. Nothing can be made out of nothing." (I, iv, 131-136)

"I had rather be any kind o' thing than a Fool, and yet I would not be thee, Nuncle; thou hast pared thy wit o' both sides and left nothing i' th' middle." (Fool, I, iv, 189-192)

"I am better than thou art now: I am a Fool, thou art nothing." (Fool, I, iv, 199-200)

"So your face bids me, though you say nothing." (Fool, I, iv, 201-202)

2. Find 3 examples of animal imagery in Act 1.

To Goneril "Detested kite..." (Lear, I, iv, 269)

Of Goneril "that she may feel/How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is/To have a thankless child." (Lear, I, iv, 294-96)

To Goneril "When she shall hear this of thee, with her nails/She'll flay thy wolfish visage." (Lear, I, iv, 314-315)

3. Find 3 references to 'Sight and Blindness' in Act 1.

To Lear - "I love you....Dearer than eyesight, space and liberty" (Goneril, I.i.58)

"...see better, Lear, and let me still remain / The true blank of thine eye" (Kent, I,I,160-61)

To Kent - "Out of my sight" (Lear, I,I,159)

Summing up Lear's folly - "So out went the candle and we were left darkling" (The Fool, I,iv,223)

Lear's refusal to weep at his own betrayal is also a dark reminder of the hideous maiming of Gloucester, still to come - "Old fond eyes...I'll pluck ye out" (I,iv, 308-09)

To Goneril "How far your eyes may pierce I cannot tell" (Albany, I, iv, 352)

Themes

1. How is the theme of 'Madness' introduced in Act 1?

This theme is introduced at the opening of the play, when Lear's rash actions may be viewed as political insanity. His arrogance and violent temper in his treatment of both Cordelia and Kent, may be viewed as a forewarning of his instability.

It is towards the end of Act 1, however, that King Lear's true descent into madness becomes evident. His confusion and outrage at the treatment he receives firstly from Goneril, then by Regan, indicates to the audience how fine the line between sanity and insanity is for the King. By Scene 5, Lear compares his madness to the torments of hell and struggles frantically to retain his wits: "O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!" (I.v.46).

2. How well is the theme of 'Appearances and Reality' introduced to the audience?

This is firstly introduced by the behaviour of Goneril and Regan. Their declarations of love towards their father are obviously overblown, and this is indicated to the audience by their discussion at the end of Act 1. Edmund, in Scene 2, also introduces this theme. He appears as the loyal son and brother towards Gloucester and Edgar, but reveals his true feelings and intentions in soliloquy to the audience.

It can be seen that the relationship between Cordelia and Lear is a further representation of this theme. Cordelia is honest in her love and duty towards her father, yet is banished for it. Lear does not see the value in his youngest daughter: her appearance is not at odds with her reality, as is the case with her elder sisters.

A further take on this theme is the case of Kent. A loyal knight, Kent is banished for speaking the truth. He is honest with Lear and points out his folly, but is punished for it. For Kent then, his appearance, as a loyal subject, is also the reality. However, when the arrogant Lear dismisses him, his loyalty is such that he returns in disguise as Caius. Although his appearance as a servant is at odds with his true place in society, the reality of Kent/Caius is unchanged: he is a loyal and loving subject of King Lear regardless of his appearance.

NOTE: In Shakespearean drama, when a character puts on a disguise, he/she is never found out until the disguise is removed by the character. No matter how flimsy the disguise may seem to the audience, to the characters in the play the disguise is complete and impenetrable. No character in disguise is ever recognised for anything or anyone other than what they wish to be seen as.

Act Two

1. Examine the theme of "nature" in Act 2, Scene 1. How do Edmund and Gloucester, respectively, understand this concept?

Edmund has already suggested to the audience that nature is a malevolent goddess who provides him with the bad nature necessary to challenge the status quo, therefore he sees his badness as entirely natural, arising from his illegitimacy. Whether one is good or bad is one's nature - it is unchangeable. In terms of the relationship between Gloucester and his sons, an illegitimate child is seen as unnatural, and so Edgar is favoured over Edmund. This makes Edgar's (supposed) betrayal of his father all the harder to bear; it also makes Edmund's (supposed) loyalty to his father all the more surprising and deserving. This makes Gloucester's comment to him of 'Loyal and natural boy' (II, i, line 83) highly ironic in two respects: most obviously, Edmund is not a natural boy, he is illegitimate; secondly, Edmund is being loyal, but loyal only to his bad nature. He is thus behaving exactly as his nature dictates but the irony lies in the fact that Gloucester does not know his bastard son's true nature.

Edmund sees nature as a force to be challenged, and as the force which keeps him forever as a secondary son, due to his bastardy. It is perfectly natural and acceptable then, in his eyes, to attempt to thwart that nature, and turn the 'natural' father against the 'natural' son - Edgar - in favour of the 'unnatural' one - Edmund.

Gloucester, on the other hand, sees nature as the force which ties father to son. When he believes the tale of Edgar's betrayal of him, he sees this as a betrayal of nature. The idea of turning against one's parent is abhorrent and unnatural. This explains why Gloucester is willing to have his legitimate son killed for his betrayal, but does not explain why Gloucester is so ready to accept Edmund's report (and remember, his is the only account of this) of Edgar's treachery.

2. Why does Kent fail to placate Regan and Cornwall over his thrashing of their servant, Oswald?

Kent's attack on Oswald in the first place is done because, in his current disguise, this is the closest he can get to any kind of revenge over his king's treatment. In attacking Oswald, Kent is symbolically attacking his mistress. There is more to this than simply Kent's memory of Oswald's treatment of Lear in Act 1. Remember too that Kent is a

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knight; a man of great honour and loyalty. It must be torturous for him to see his king treated in such a manner and to be unable to act in his defence.

Given this, when Regan and Cornwall appear on stage, for the crushingly honest Kent to hold his tongue is virtually impossible. He cannot limit his insults to Oswald and comments that 'I have seen better faces in my time / Than stands on any shoulder that I see / Before me at this instant (II, ii, 95-7). He possibly could have got away with this snide comment, but his comparison of Cornwall to Ajax (a braggart Greek warrior) is impossible for Cornwall to take.

However, it would have been common courtesy that Kent would not have been punished by Cornwall for this: he was the king's messenger after all; it should have been up to the king to punish him. However, in ignoring this point of etiquette, Regan and Cornwall further emphasise their disregard for Lear. This episode also helps to reinforce Lear's increasing loss of power: the disrespect shown to his servant is a precursor of the disrespect soon to be shown to him.

3. What do you make of Edgar's speech (II.iii) in connection to the themes with which the play has been concerned so far?

This is Edgar's decision to take on the disguise of Poor Tom, in order to evade capture. He has been reduced to nothing. In terms of nothingness as a theme, it can be seen that Edgar as Poor Tom is a visible link. He now has literally nothing - no family, no honour, no title etc. This will soon become visible to the audience, when Edgar casts off his clothes and assumes the disguise. Poor Tom has only a blanket to cover his nakedness. Ironically, Edgar disguises himself in nothing in order to hide everything. He ends this particular speech with the telling line 'Edgar, I nothing am.' (II,iii,21)

A similar theme in the play is clothing. Again, we can see how Poor Tom's nakedness links to this theme. Clothing is used in the play to show importance and wealth, imagined or otherwise. Lear wants to keep his 'trappings of majesty' while relinquishing control of his kingdom, thereby keeping a grasp of his importance. In Act 3 he will remove his clothes as he throws off his last grasp of kingship. Edgar's removal of his clothes here emphasises his final line (above): nothing of the original Edgar is recognisable.

An obvious link to theme would be Edgar's decision to adopt the guise of a madman. Later in the play, Poor Tom's feigned madness will be used as a foil for Lear's growing insanity, as well as the old king's growing empathy.

- 4. Explore what leads up to Lear's frenzied "O, reason not the need!" speech (Act 2, Scene 4, Lines 256-78). What is the importance of all that haggling about the need for a certain number of servants? Why does Lear come unhinged at last?**

The haggling over servants is a power struggle of sorts. Lear seeks to assert his authority and to remind his daughters of who he is. The sad fact is, however, that his daughter remember who he is; they simply do not care. They want to deprive him of his knights for two reasons. Firstly, they seek to remind Lear of just who is in charge. Whether he retains his knights or not is their choice, not the king's, and Regan and Goneril have to remind their father of this. Secondly, by denying him his retinue, they remove what chance he may have of regaining his throne through force.

This, however, is the last straw in a rapidly moving chain of events for Lear. Lear is unnerved at the start of this scene by the sight of his servant, Kent, in the stocks; proof that he continues to be treated with contempt. This point is further reinforced by Cornwall and Regan's refusal to speak with him. Interestingly, Lear seeks Regan out himself instead of sending a servant to fetch her. He is now reduced to conveying his own requests. His requests for information (about Kent's punishment) are repeatedly ignored, again emphasising his powerlessness.

Lear has now pinned all his hopes on Regan, believing that she would never 'oppose the bolt / Against my coming in' (II,iv,171-2). This is chillingly ironic in light of the events at the end of this Act. Goneril's entrance further agitates the king, and Regan's apparent siding with her sister ensures that Lear is forced to begin facing the consequences of his own rash actions in Act 1. In measuring out Lear's knights for him, we are reminded of the dangers of measuring love in words and numbers, and Lear's insistence that he will stay with the daughter who allows him to retain the greatest number of followers is as blind and foolish as his love test of Act 1. It is, however, far more desperate, showing the hugely reduced position of the king.

Lear finally becomes unhinged at this point then, because of the build up of contempt and disregard which he faces, not only from his daughters, but from all around him other than the few loyal subjects who will remain with him to the last. He is forced to accept that he, like Poor Tom whom Lear will meet in Act 3, has been reduced to nothing.

5. A simple question: how does Act II advance the plots set up in Act I?

Obviously the central plot of Lear and his daughters is advanced by Act 2. We now see Lear vastly reduced in standing, and on the brink of insanity. Regan and Goneril have been established as devious and uncaring, and clearly manipulative and determined. This forewarns the audience, but does not prepare them for, the cruelty to come in Act 3, as we begin to realise the lengths which these women are prepared to go to.

The sub-plots of Gloucester's sons are intertwined more clearly with the main plot in Act 2. Edmund decides to ally himself with Cornwall, leading the audience to wonder what on earth the bastard son has up his sleeve this time. Edgar has been completely cast out by his father, and has adopted the guise of a madman to evade capture. This links the son to the father - Edgar to Lear. Both have been cast out into the storm by those whom they should be able to rely on: Lear by his ungrateful daughters; and Edgar by his ungrateful father (and brother?). Both have been reduced to nothing: both are mad.

Kent reveals to the audience in this Act that Cordelia's part in the play is not yet over. She intends to return.

Stagecraft

1. Kent's verbal and physical attack on Oswald creates a moment of light relief, but is there a serious point to this incident?

Behind Kent's insults lies a serious point; the dangers of the bad servant. It is possible to argue that *King Lear* is full of bad servants, who subvert the order that they should be serving faithfully. Kent also makes a serious point when he says he does not like the faces he sees before him; unlike Lear, he is not fooled by appearances and recognises Cornwall, Regan and Oswald for what they are. He voices the concerns of the audience

when he insults Cornwall. However, Kent is punished again for his goodness and honesty, as Cordelia and Edgar have been punished, in spite of their virtues.

This incident then, while providing a little light relief, raises several serious points; not least is the question of justice. The tension of the play is raised, along with the question in the audience's mind - is there any justice in a world where the loyal and the trustworthy are punished, while the guilty and the deceitful are apparently rewarded?

Language & Imagery

1. Find three examples of animal imagery in Act 2.

"Such smiling rogues as these, / Like rats, oft bite the holy cords atwain / Which are too intrinse t'unloose; smooth every passion/That in the natures of their lords rebel, / Being
oil to fire, snow to the colder moods;/Reneg, affirm, and turn their halcyon beaks/With every gale and vary of their masters,/Knowing naught, like dogs, but following." (Kent, II, ii, 75-82)

O Regan, she hath tied/Sharp-toothed unkindness, like a vulture, here." (Lear, II, iv, 133-34)

"She hath abated me of half my train,/Looked black upon me, struck me with her tongue,/Most serpentlike, upon the very heart." (Lear, II.iv.158-160)

Themes

1. How is Lear's loss of power emphasised in this Act?

I would hope this is covered at Question 4 above. Lear's power is emphasised by the lack of regard shown him by his daughters and their servants; by the disrespect shown to his servant, Kent; by the way in which he asks about Kent's punishment several times before receiving an answer; by his daughters' reduction of his retinue; and by his being locked out in the storm.

2. How far does Lear's suffering in this Act prepare the audience for what is yet to come?

The audience at this point is shocked by the cruel treatment of Lear. He is a broken man, only just holding onto his sanity. He has been cast out into the storm, and we can assume that the next scene will show him as more disturbed and insane than up to this point. As is said above, he has been stripped to nothing. The characters of Regan and

Goneril, as well as Cornwall, have been set up as ruthless evil doers. We know that they will stop at nothing to ensure their triumph. We know that Cordelia is planning to return, therefore we know that a battle is likely. We know that Edmund continues to plot against his brother and father, and we know that Edgar, as Poor Tom, is, like Lear, out in the storm, similarly stripped to nothing.

However, these points in no way prepare the audience for the incredibly disturbing scenes of Lear's utter insanity, and the descriptions of him raging at the storm. We are alarmed by the mock trial in the next Act, yet recognise it as Lear's acceptance of the absurdity of his earlier actions. We know that the evil children (Regan, Goneril, Edmund and Cornwall) plot against their fathers, but this in no way prepares the audience for Edmund's betrayal of Gloucester, or for the horrific and cruel retribution which is taken upon him.

King Lear is a play in which things start off badly, and go downhill. No amount of preparation in any Act readies the audience for what is to follow.

Act 3

- 1. Scenes ii, iv, and vi are concerned with the actions of King Lear and others during a raging storm. What is the significance of this setting? Is the storm metaphoric for one or more things?**

The storm is metaphoric for Lear's plight. As his mind storms and rages, so does the storm. The confusion and lack of control generated by the storm is symbolic of the confusion and lack of control in Lear's mind. The king attacks himself, his actions and his foolishness, just as the storm attacks him. In this sense then, the storm is a manifestation of his power, and the consequences of the loss of power.

The storm is also metaphoric of the chaos created in the state. The closely linked king and country are symbolised by the closely linked weather and land. As the king has brought chaos to the state, so the storm brings chaos to the land. The storm looks set to continue, just as the turmoil in the state looks set to continue with the arrival of the French forces, led by Cordelia.

2. What does the storm seem to mean to Lear himself? How does he "address" the storm in scene ii?

Lear seems to see the storm in two ways. Firstly, as he rages, he seems to taunt the gods, almost daring them to do their worst. He rants that the storm should attack the earth, destroying all life and thus destroying all 'ingrateful man'.

Secondly, and more obviously, Lear associates the storm with Regan and Goneril. He rages that although the storm does not own him anything (as his daughters do), and that he has never given it anything (as he has his daughters), still the elements join his daughters in their attack against him. He calls the storm and the elements agents of his elder children, joining forces with the daughters to attack 'A poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man'. Lear sees the storm as yet another force 'ganging up' on him, so to speak.

Lear addresses the storm as if it is a living breathing entity, a force behind which there is an intelligence. He sees the storm as an agent of the gods, or of Nature. This falls in line with the setting of the play in medieval England, when there was a deep seated memory of Druid and Pagan beliefs, rather than in Elizabethan/Jacobean England, when the beliefs of the people were largely Christian.

3. Can you make anything of the Fool's "prophecy" in scene ii.75-90?

The Fool's prophecy here provides a moment of relief, a pause in the action where the audience can gather their thoughts. In a play which moves so speedily, this is necessary. Remember too, that in drama of this time there was no curtain, and no regimented break between acts.

The first four prophecies are fulfilled already, and hence "confusion" has come to England. The priest does not suit his action to his words. The brewer adulterates his beer. The nobleman is subservient to his tailor (ie cares only for fashion). Religious heretics escape, and only those burn (suffer) who are afflicted with venereal disease.

The last six prophecies are Utopian, and as such may be taken ironically; they will never be fulfilled. The Fool seems to be suggesting that optimism about the future

is misplaced. The first four prophecies suggest that England is a state already in chaos, and that the only hope for the resolution of this chaos lies in situations which will never come to pass, such as 'No squire in debt nor no poor knight'.

Taken as a whole, then, the Fool's prophecy for England's future is grim; he sees no end to the unrest. This is emphasised by his final line, 'This prophecy Merlin shall make, for I live before his time'. He claims that Merlin will come after him and make the same claims. As we know, Merlin is a man lost in myth and legend, but he was also caught up in a struggle between king and state, and one where the state suffered because of the king's foolishness. This suggests that unrest within England is a never-ending clash of chaos and stability: certainly that would have been the experience of the Jacobean audience.

4. In what sense is it ironic that Gloucester confides his good intentions in his illegitimate son, Edmund?

To return to the theme of 'Nature', Gloucester's fretting about the 'unnatural dealing' of Cornwall and the sisters is highly ironic. Gloucester's concern for Lear's unnatural treatment at the hands of his daughters is all the more poignant for the audience since we know that he is already suffering the same abuse at the hands of his unnatural (bastard)/natural (loyal) son, and will very soon suffer much more than he could possibly imagine.

Confiding in Edmund is not only ironic, it is fatal. His blind trust of his disloyal son is a highly ironic contrast to his blind mistrust of his loyal son. Because he discusses his intentions with Edmund, he plays directly into his son's hands. This is a point of high tension for the audience as we know exactly what lengths Edmund will go to in order to fulfil his Machiavellian intentions.

5. How is Edmund rewarded for his treachery?

Edmund has set his sights on his father's title. His decision to betray his father is made without a moment's hesitation, befitting Edmund's ruthless nature. Gloucester's feverish fretting in Scene 3 mirrors the alarm the audience will feel at the end of this scene; we know that Gloucester is in great danger as evil continues to triumph, and good intentions are bound to be thwarted.

Edmund is rewarded by firstly being accepted into the 'evil circle' of Goneril, Regan and Cornwall. When Cornwall calls Edmund 'My lord of Gloucester', it becomes clear that Cornwall seeks Gloucester's death, and that Edmund will inherit his father's title. Edmund's reward for betraying his father is to be recognised as his father's natural son. This echoes the situation of Goneril and Regan; their betrayal and cruel treatment of their father has led to the advanced position which they now hold. In this play, as we have seen, honesty and loyalty are punished (as in the cases of Cordelia, Kent and now Gloucester) whereas betrayal and sacrifice of others in order to advance oneself is rewarded.

6. How does the madness of Lear compare to the madness of Poor Tom (Edgar)?

Unlike other Renaissance dramatists, who used 'mad scenes' for comic effect, Shakespeare seems intent on a serious portrayal of madness in *King Lear*. There are, as we have already discussed, several different examples of madness in the play, however the most obvious is Lear's madness, and Poor Tom's feigned madness.

Edgar's assumed madness manifests itself in crazed outpourings, which often make little sense. He jumps from subject to subject, barely stopping to catch his breath. His speech is interspersed with snippets of song, and with bizarre comments. This was the common interpretation of madness, as Edgar would have known it, and as such is obviously fake. However, his ranting reflects his own suffering as an outcast, and heightens the audience's sense of the king's very real madness. Tom's terrifying descriptions of physical and mental violence point to the inner turmoil of Lear, helping to build sympathy for the pathetic king. Even Edgar cannot keep up his disguise in the face of Lear's lunacy. During the mock-trial scene, Edgar's disguise slips as he listens to Lear's agony, and he exclaims 'Bless thy five wits' (line 56)

The comparison between the two characters is emphasised by the use of clothing during this act. Edgar's constructed story of himself as a degenerate servant has a huge effect on the king, who decides that man is really 'a poor, bare, forked animal' (III,iv, line 104); he wants to know what it means to have nothing, to be nothing. In his admiration for Tom, Lear wants to remove the superficial trappings that stand between him and 'Unaccommodated man' (III,vi, line 103). Tom is naked but for a

blanket, while the king is still in his robes - a sign of his royalty and importance. Lear's attempt to remove his clothing is a reminder to the audience that, under the trappings of wealth and position, all men are equal. This is a point which Lear has only just realised, and as such is a moment of awakening for the king, during which Lear recognises the need to look beyond appearances.

7. What does Edgar (as Poor Tom) mean to the mad King Lear? Look at the various titles and descriptions that Lear accords him in scenes iv and vi.

Upon first meeting Poor Tom, Lear's instant conclusion is that Tom has been mistreated by his own daughters; Lear is so blinkered by his own mistreatment that he interprets others in the same light as himself, therefore because he is in a reduced state because of his own evil children, he expects that Tom is in a similar position due to his own offspring. The irony is that Tom is in this situation because of a similar disloyal child, but in this case it is his brother rather than his child who has betrayed him (and, to some extent, his father). Lear sees in Tom a kindred spirit; another who is outcast from society, and who is hovering on the brink of sanity and insanity.

Philosopher - In Tom's ramblings, Lear sees some truth. Lear appears to be fascinated by this, and views Poor Tom as a wise person, and one who sees the truth where others fail.

Judge - Lear believes Poor Tom to be honest enough to act as judge during the mock-trial of Goneril and Regan. There is some suggestion about the honesty of fools in this choice. Clever men, such as his daughters and Cornwall, have let the king down badly. Foolish men, such as Poor Tom, his Fool, and Kent (disguised as a servant, and so an uneducated man) have been honest, loyal and trustworthy.

Knight - In Scene 6, Lear tells Poor Tom, 'You, sir, I entertain for one of my hundred'. This is a huge compliment since a king's knights were loyal, honest and trustworthy. Again, this suggests that Lear recognises that his trust was misplaced earlier in the play. The madman now places his trust in a madman.

Clearly, then, Lear recognises some nobility and integrity in Poor Tom, despite his circumstances. In madness, it seems, Lear sees more clearly than he did in sanity.

8. One of those titles is apparently that of "judge" in scene vi. What is Lear trying to accomplish by putting his daughters on trial?

The mock-trial is an obvious parody of the love test of Act 1. Lear is apparently trying to understand his daughters' behaviour in this trial. Ironically, however, Lear's judgement at this point of the play is no longer faulty. His madness has helped him to see his daughters clearly.

By putting his daughters on trial, Lear also shifts the responsibility for their actions onto Goneril and Regan themselves. It is clear to the audience that, although the sisters are undoubtedly evil and malicious, they are only in a position to indulge their corruption and ambition because Lear put them there. The trial scene, to some extent, exonerates Lear from the blame of this; although his madness allows him clearer sight, it is apparent that he does not see enough to accept fully his own responsibility for their behaviour.

9. What are the judgments of mankind issued against Goneril and Regan in Lear's court?

Goneril is accused of 'kick[ing] the poor King her father' (III, vi, line 48). This relates to the theme of Nature. Goneril here is accused of ill-treating her father, and of thus being an unnatural child. The crime against mankind is biblical in origin: Honour thy father and thy mother. Goneril breaks this commandment, and when she 'escapes', Lear curses her bribery of the court. This reminds the audience of her bribery of her father in Act 1; her promises of love were only made to ensure that she was rewarded by him.

A similar judgement of Regan is made. When Tom claims that his 'horn is dry' (III, vi, line 74), Lear tells him to 'anatomize Regan' - dissect her and use her heart as a horn. The charge against Regan then, is that her hard heart is unnatural; 'Is there any cause in nature that make these hard hearts?' (III, vi, line 76).

The judgement against both sisters is that they are unnatural children. They disrespect and betray their father; a crime against humanity, and a sin against God's law. While it is clear that their actions are a crime against mankind, Lear's focus is still on the crime against him. Although he is a changed man (not least in terms of

his sanity) from the king in Act 1, he still retains the vestiges of the arrogant King Lear who, after all, is largely responsible for his current predicament, and that of his country. The essence of the mock trial is that the daughters have betrayed their father; the crimes against humanity are secondary to that.

10. Scene vii is downright ugly. Why does Regan pick this specific punishment for Gloucester? Does the punishment fit the alleged "crime?"

The punishment itself has been suggested by Goneril, who leaves before the torture begins in earnest. This implicates her in the crime, even though she is not present at the time it is committed. One suggestion as to why Regan picks this particular punishment, over her own original suggestion of hanging Gloucester, is that she seeks to equal her sister in ferocity. Perhaps she seeks to make her mark, so to speak, since, up to this point, much of the actions taken against the king have been instigated by Goneril. Nevertheless, this does not explain the obvious delight Regan takes in the torture of the old earl. Nor does it explain her vicious attack on the servant who seeks to stop Cornwall's maiming of Gloucester.

When Gloucester explains his actions in helping Lear, 'I would not see thy cruel nails / Pluck out his poor old eyes' (III, vii, lines 57-58), the audience cringes. Regan chooses this punishment because this is the closest she can get at the moment to Lear himself: if Gloucester seeks to protect Lear from such an act, and in so doing foils the plans of the evil trio of Goneril, Regan and Cornwall, then it is a kind of reverse poetic justice that he suffer the fate he sought to protect the king from. In his attack on Regan, Gloucester seals his own fate.

11. How is the blindness of Gloucester symbolic to the blindness of Lear?

Gloucester's blinding is symbolic of Lear's metaphorical blindness in much of the earlier part of the play. This is compounded by the audience's awareness of Lear's mental anguish, still suffered by the old king out in the storm, as this brutal act is perpetrated on the earl. Gloucester suffers physically for his desire to aid his king; a king who is suffering mentally for his metaphorical blindness toward his daughters, and others. Sadly, Gloucester suffers mentally too in this scene. He too discovers

that he is the victim of an unloving and disloyal child. He shares Lear's agony when he discovers that he has been taken in by outward appearances.

The blindness of Gloucester is a manifestation of the blindness which both the earl and the king have been guilty of. Both men suffer heartache at the treatment dished out by their children, and both suffer additionally for their arrogance: Lear suffers madness; Gloucester suffers blindness.

Stagecraft

1. What has Shakespeare chosen to write this Act in very short, fast-paced scenes? What does it add to the unfolding of the plot?

This Act occurs in very swift short scenes to allow us to see Lear's dramatic descent into madness. We also learn what happens to Lear's mirror image, Gloucester. The Act plays out in such a way that the action on the heath takes place almost side by side, in the audience's perception, with the action back in the castle. No scene is long enough that we are given time to forget what is going on in the other setting. As Lear becomes more and more distraught and unstable, so Gloucester moves closer and closer to the vicious punishment meted out by Cornwall and Regan. There is a spiralling downwards for both characters, which culminates in the final, appalling scene. Lear and Gloucester, in Act 3, are both heroic, tragic figures throughout. The two fathers, in this scene, become inextricably linked in the mind of the audience.

The speed at which this Act plays out also helps to highlight the chaotic atmosphere of the play. We are never allowed to stop to assimilate all that has happened, and so the audience feels the turmoil of the characters' minds and situations.

2. To what extent can Scene vi be seen as a contrast to Scene v?

Scene iv is a very disturbing scene, full of isolation and suffering. Each character is oppressed by his own concerns. Kent is agitated because Lear suffers; the Fool shivers in the storm, uncertain and confused, in contrast to his earlier self; Lear's insanity is becoming more and more pronounced, and both he and Gloucester are

preoccupied by thoughts of filial ingratitude; Edgar's suffering is emphasised poignantly by his pleas of 'Poor Tom's a-cold', the cold he feels presumably being the metaphorical kind as well as the physical kind.

However, in spite of the madness and suffering of this scene, some hope remains. The characters sympathise with one another, although Kent is initially reluctant to allow Poor Tom to take shelter with the king. These characters, although in turmoil, are clearly good people, and the audience sympathises with them. They are punished for who they are (with the possible exception of Lear and Gloucester) rather than for what they are, but have not become inhuman because of it.

Poor Tom's reference to the 'dark tower' and the Jack the giant killer story in the final lines of the scene are ominous, and remind the reader of the fairy-tale type beginning of the play. The 'dark tower' is Gloucester's castle, which now houses four murderous predators, who are out for 'the blood of a British man', or in this case, men; Lear and Gloucester.

Scene v is a contrast to Scene iv simply because of the characters. Whereas the characters in Scene iv are compassionate toward each other, despite their own circumstances, the characters in Scene v are wholly self-serving and devious. Despite the fact that they work together, the audience is left in no doubt that they care nothing for each other. The evil Cornwall and Edmund lust selfishly and destructively for power; a sharp contrast to the characters of the previous scene, who only want justice and order.

Language & Imagery

1. Find 3 references to 'Nature' in this act.

To the Gentleman: "making just report/Of how unnatural and bemadding sorrow/the King hath cause to plain." (Kent, III, i, 37-39)

About Poor Tom: "Death, traitor; nothing could have subdued nature/To such a lowness but his unkind daughters." (Lear, III, iv, 70-71)

To Cornwall: "How, my lord, I may be censured, that nature thus gives way to loyalty, something fears me to think of." (Edmund, III, v, 3-5)

About Lear: "Opressèd nature sleeps." (Kent, III, vi, 96)

Misguidedly threatening Regan with his son's revenge: "Edmund, enkindle all the sparks of nature/To quit this horrid act."

(Gloucester, III, vii, 87-88)

2. Find 3 references to 'Nothing' in this act.

About Lear: "tears his white hair,/Which the impetuous blasts, with eyeless rage,/Catch in their fury, and make nothing of" (Gentleman, III, i, 7-9)

"No, I will be the pattern of all patience,/ I will say nothing." (Lear, III, ii, 37-38)

To Edmund: "Go to; say you nothing." (Gloucester, III, iii, 8)

To Poor Tom: "Couldst thou save nothing?" (Lear, III, iv, 64)

About Poor Tom: "Death, traitor; nothing could have subdued nature/To such a lowness but his unkind daughters." (Lear, III, iv, 70-71)

3. How does Act 3 pave the way for Shakespeare's recurrent message of the restoration of the natural order in Act 5?

Act 3 breaks down all remaining natural order completely, leaving the way open for the denouement of the play to restore it. By the end of Act 3:

- Children have betrayed their fathers, subverting nature
- Loyalty is punished, especially horribly in the blinding of Gloucester
- A king has been reduced to the status of a beggar, highlighted by Lear's companionship with Poor Tom
- Women are no longer womanly, as shown by the behaviour and actions of Goneril and Regan
- Servants turn on their masters, as happens to Cornwall
- The entire state is in turmoil; it will take Act 4 and 5 to repair the damage done, and restore the natural and true order.

Act Four

1. In Scene 1, why would Gloucester prefer to be led by the madman (Edgar) rather than by a faithful retainer?

Firstly, Gloucester does not want to endanger the old retainer who has been so kind to him. This reminds the audience that it was Gloucester's pity for and kindness towards Lear that has led to his current position; he does not want the old man to be similarly punished.

Secondly, Gloucester tells us that when he met Poor Tom the previous night, he was reminded of his missing son, Edgar. The irony of this is not lost on the audience. "I'th'last night's storm I such a fellow saw,/Which made me think a man a worm. My son/ Came then into my mind, and yet my mind was then scarce friends with him." (Act 4, Scene 1, Lines 32 - 34). It seems then that Gloucester finds the company of such a lunatic beggar as Poor Tom comforting in some way. Gloucester, like Lear, is ashamed of himself and his behaviour towards his, as he now knows, loyal son. Perhaps in travelling with Poor Tom, he will not have to think about his previous actions.

Thirdly, Gloucester recognises the chaos of the state: "'Tis the time's plague, when madmen lead the blind." (Act 4, Scene 1, Line 46). He sees his being led by a lunatic entirely just and fitting with the disorder which he has been witness to. Ironically, Gloucester does not seem to realise that by being physically led by a madman, he mimics the metaphorical leadership of the now mad king.

Lastly, Gloucester gives Poor Tom money to guide him. He appears to have suffered the same awakening of conscience in regard to those of a lesser station than himself which Lear did in Act 3; "So distribution should undo excess," (Act 4, Scene 1, Line 72). In other words, Gloucester feels that the man with too much wealth should distribute it among those with too little.

If Gloucester is, as is alluded to in the play, being punished for his lustful, adulterous ways, then here he attempts to make amends. In allowing Poor Tom to lead him rather than the old man, Gloucester does the old man a good turn by saving him from the fate which he himself has suffered; and he does Poor Tom a good turn in making payment to him for his guidance.

2. Comment on the sexual innuendo and tension in the dialogue between Goneril and Edmund in Scene ii.

The disregard which Goneril obviously has for her husband, Albany, is distasteful to say the least. She promises Edmund that she will shortly command him as mistress. The sexual innuendo here is obvious: not only will she be his mistress in the sense of social order, but she will also be his mistress in the sexual sense. The plans which she makes clear - to make Edmund her husband and lover - remind the audience of Edmund's being addressed as Earl of Gloucester before the previous earl, his father, was dead, and again shows that these evil children will stop at nothing to get their own way.

When she asks Edmund to kiss her in Act 4, Scene ii, Line 22 onwards, the sexual connotations of her promise are blatant. She tells him that the kiss would "stretch thy spirits", and he responds "Yours in the ranks of death". The innuendo here refers to the sexual act: their references to death are not to death in the literal sense of the word, but in the French sense of 'le petit mort': the little death, a term for sexual orgasm. There is no doubt at this point that both Goneril and Edmund have full intentions of consummating their unholy alliance.

3. How does the emphasis on the sexual nature of Goneril and Edmund's relationship comment on or illustrate the disorder that Lear's abdication has created?

Most obviously, Goneril's willingness to commit adultery helps to illustrate the disorder of the state, since the foundations of a state lie in the strength of the alliances within the state. In this sense then, the broken relationships between Goneril and her husband, not to mention her father, as well as the broken relationship between Edmund and his father, point to the broken relationships within the state. Broken marriages lead to disorder within the family, just as broken alliances lead to disorder within the state.

Goneril's femaleness is an obvious issue here too. She acts as no woman should. She is vengeful, aggressive and, as we now see, sexually immoral. Renaissance models of femininity required women to be quiet and submissive, and so Goneril's (and, as we shall soon see, Regan's) behaviour subverts all the accepted codes of feminine behaviour, as they set out to destroy family and state. Again, Lear's abdication handed power to

these predatory women, and so the disorder that they have caused is a direct result of Lear's behaviour.

4. How does Goneril compound her sins against her family in Scene ii?

Not only has Goneril turned on her father, she prepares for war with her younger sister (Cordelia) and taunts and attempts to humiliate her husband. As if this were not enough, she begins to doubt her partner in crime, Regan. Goneril's ally in all that has gone before was Regan, however, having both behaved appallingly, Goneril cannot trust the one person who understands her completely, and the last person, other than Edmund, to stand by her side in all that she has done. In her distrust and plotting against the other evil sister, Goneril betrays the last member of her family. She has now tied her banner with Edmund - all her aspirations now depend on him.

5. How does Albany perceive his wife, in this scene?

Albany sees his wife as she truly is, and in so doing, voices the audience's concerns about his wife. He calls her a devil and says that the sisters have behaved like "Tigers, not daughters" (Act 4, Scene 2, Line 40). This is another example of the theme of blindness - Albany has apparently been blind to his wife's actions up to this point. His sudden understanding and realisation of her true nature suggests that the influence of the evil characters will no longer go unchecked. Albany becomes a figure of justice and morality in this scene, condemning his wife's behaviour, however, she is unabashed, and is more concerned with the danger Regan may pose to her desire for Edmund. We are presented with a clash between good and evil in this scene, which points towards the forthcoming battle between the French and the British forces.

6. How does the vicious competition implied in Scene v between Regan and Goneril over Edmund comment on or illustrate the disorder created by Lear's abdication?

Similarly to Question 3, the divide between the sisters points to the division in the state. When families become divided, so the state becomes divided. Regan's preoccupation with her own selfish lust is very similar to that of Goneril's in Scene 2. It is clear that neither sister will give up Edmund without a fight. Sexual rivalry, for the Jacobean audience, was something played out between men, certainly it was not an

acceptable mode of behaviour for women and so, again, the sisters behave as no woman should, which is, again, a sign of chaos and disorder.

7. Why is it natural that Lear would not wish to see his daughter Cordelia, in Scene iii?

We know from Kent's explanation that Lear is deeply ashamed of his behaviour and that this is the reason he will not see her. However, Lear's reasons run deeper than that. His daughter's return from France to 'rescue' her father from her evil sisters confirms and compounds Lear's guilt and foolishness in banishing Cordelia. Cordelia's reappearance in England is living proof that Lear was wrong. Remember the arrogant and vain Lear of Act 1; Kent tells us that he is regaining some of his wits, he cannot blame everything that has occurred since Cordelia's departure on his elder daughters anymore. Cordelia represents an old man's folly, however, a king's folly has far-reaching consequences. If Lear sees Cordelia, he will have to accept his own foolishness in the whole affair - something which he has not yet done.

8. Does it make sense to compare Edgar's handling of Gloucester to his participation in Lear's madness (i.e. Act III. Scene vi)?

Edgar's reasons for continuing in his disguise, despite Gloucester's assertion that he longs to be reunited with his 'natural' son, are not explained fully. There can, however, be several reasons why he chooses to remain disguised at this point. Edgar may think that to guide his father without revealing his identity is the best way of reconciling Gloucester to living. He may think that to reveal that the son his father cast out so cruelly had been compelled to disguise himself as a Bedlam beggar would have increased Gloucester's shame at his own foolishness. Edgar may wish to prove his own manhood and avenge both himself and his father by defeating Edmund. There are several other explanations, however the most important reasons for Edgar's concealment of his identity are dramatic and thematic. On the one hand Shakespeare could extract some powerful ironies from Gloucester's ignorance, as when Edgar uses the ambiguous title 'father'. Shakespeare was able to keep the audience in suspense, wondering when Edgar would confess. On the other hand, the thematic importance of the madman leading the blind, the poor and outcast exemplifying compassion and teaching the lesson of patience and endurance is clearly of great significance.

To return to the question, however, yes, it makes perfect sense. Like Lear, Gloucester is learning from his sufferings, and the paradox here - which is central to the play - has equal relevance to both. When they could 'see', when Lear had his kingdom and Gloucester his eyes, they were 'blind' to the things that mattered, incapable of judging accurately. Insight and true understanding come in the wake of pain and deprivation and suffering. Gloucester understands now that comfort and possessions serve us less well than need.

Edgar, disguised as a madman, leads Gloucester - the mad lead the blind. However, the madman here, and in the scenes on the heath with Lear, 'cures' blindness. As Edgar was a catalyst for Lear, promoting new insights into the human condition, so now he has a similar effect on Gloucester. In becoming the object of Gloucester's generosity, he gives shape to a new concept for which the old man is reaching out - that there is too much inequality and that wealth should be shared.

The piercing clarity of this understanding is matched only by Gloucester's distaste for the insensitivity of the rich and gluttonous. The presence of the mad beggar is instrumental in generating this new perspective, just as it was for Lear. We must also consider the impact of the foul behaviour that Gloucester has witnessed and been victim to - as has Lear - among the great and mighty, set against the goodness of the old man who led him and the servants who soothed his ravaged face. We should not the parallel between Gloucester's sympathy for the impoverished and the strikingly similar sentiments expressed by Lear in his 'Poor naked wretches' speech of Act 3, Scene 4, Lines 28-36.

9. In Scene vi, as Lear rages, try to draw as much from his words as you can about the "causes" that Lear assigns to his troubles.

Even as Lear rages insanely, startling flashes of awareness break through. Lear understands that he was manipulated by his daughters - "They flattered me like a dog" (Act 4, Scene 6, lines 96-7). He judges the storm as a turning point which brought understanding -

'When the rain came to wet me once and the wind to make me chatter; when the thunder would not peace at my bidding; there I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out'
(Act 4, Scene 6, lines 100-03).

He learned not only the deceitfulness of flatterers, but the limits of his own power - "They told me I was everything; 'tis a lie - I am not ague-proof" (Act 4, Scene 6, lines 104-05). As Lear's speech shifts to the rhythmic emphasis of verse there is an insistent message: evil, particularly sexual debauchery, is everywhere. What is the point in virtue, when his own self-restraint brought only anguish:

Let copulation thrive; for Gloucester's bastard son	Was
kinder to his father than my daughters	Got 'tween
the lawful sheets. (Lines 114-116)	

His estimation of the 'bastard son' is false, but we see the persistence of his pained obsession with his daughters, which accounts for the next compelling theme, the hypocrisy and hidden lustfulness of women. This is linked with Lear's earlier threat to divorce himself from the tomb of Regan's mother because it sepulchres an adulteress (Act 2, Scene 4) This, of course, is not the case, but is linked to the theme of nature - Lear cannot believe that 'natural' daughters could behave in such an 'unnatural' way. Lear's comments on adultery might be read as an attempt to come to terms with his own sexual union with his daughters' mother - did he cause those hard hearts? Further, he may truly believe his dead wife to be an adulteress - it would certainly explain his daughters' unnatural behaviour towards their father.

This also links with the mincing affection of virtue, the assumed prudishness of Goneril in her attacks on the riotous behaviour of Lear's knights. As the audience has observed the lecherous rivalry between the sisters for Edmund's favours, unknown to Lear, the attack on the animalistic nature of women will come with additional force.

Again then, the causes for Lear's downfall are his ungrateful, unnatural daughters.

10. In Scene vi, Edgar catches our favourite 'worsted-stocking knave', Oswald, in the act of attempting to kill old Gloucester. Why does Edgar confront Oswald in rustic dialect?

In assuming a rustic dialect, Edgar also assumes something of an 'everyman' disguise. Here he is not punishing Oswald as Kent would; as a servant of the old king. Nor is he punishing Oswald as Poor Tom would; as a companion of the old king, albeit a mad one. Nor does he punish Oswald as any of the other good characters would; as a force on the opposite side of the evil force of which Oswald is a servant. He punishes Oswald as a

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representative of the people of the state, showing that the common man will not tolerate the evil behaviour of Oswald, his mistress and her cohorts. This helps to emphasise the approaching restoration of the natural order. Men like Oswald will no longer be allowed to behave as they have done, because men like the common rustic Edgar impersonates here will not allow it. Remember too that in a play such as this, which deals with royalty, politics, and the running of the state, the audience in the groundlings would have delighted in Edgar's role as the muscular peasant giving short shrift to Oswald, the conniving royal steward.

11. How does Cordelia react to her father's words to her in Scene vii?

This scene is the most serene in the play. The music is significant, representing peace and harmony, and recalling Cordelia's recent metaphor of the unturned instrument ("Cure this great breach in his abused nature./ Th' untuned and jarring senses, O, wind up" , lines 16-17). As the modulation is from discord to harmony, so it is from cruelty to the sympathy of Cordelia. As Lear wakes, Cordelia addresses him as 'my royal Lord', 'your Majesty', and 'Sir'. In every way she seeks to reassure him. We feel the poignancy of his delusion that he is a soul racked in hell and Cordelia 'a soul in bliss'. Lear's fumbling bewilderment is echoed in the hesitant and broken structure of lines 52-57.

The blessing which Cordelia seeks - "O, look upon me, sir,/ And hold your hand in benediction o'er me (lines 57-8) offsets the vile curse hurled at her in the first scene of the play. There is supreme pathos as each kneels to the other, and in Lear's humble sense of vulnerability. This speech, beginning 'I am a very foolish fond old man' (lines 60-70), is a marvel of tentative and submissive hesitancy, especially when we consider who is making this speech. How Lear has changed from the egocentric monarch. His plea for forgiveness moves not only Cordelia, but the other characters on stage, revealing by their gestures and expressions that they, like us, are moved by this almost sacred reconciliation.

Cordelia's response to all this is unbelievably generous. When Lear begs her forgiveness, she replies "No cause, no cause" (line 76). This shows that she too has changed. There is no sign here of measured weighing of affection, only the amplitude of reassuring love.

Her response is, of course, necessary from the point of view of character. Cordelia must be completely good and kind. She must be all forgiving of the cruelty her father subjected her to earlier. She must be willing to accept everything that has happened, without apportioning blame to her father. If not, how could she be seen as an opposite to her sisters? How could she be the balance which the state lost and suffered for? How could she be the balance which the state needs to reform? And how could she be the good, last daughter of the fairy tale, if she were not so completely virtuous?

Stagecraft

1. In Scene vi, what is Edgar trying to accomplish with his artistic, but misleading, treatment of Gloucester?

The mock suicide of this act is often regarded as a prime example of the grotesque element in the play, an example of the absurd, and it is assumed that the audience would regard this episode as comic. 'Comic' in a sense it may be, yet it is incredibly unusual for an audience to find this in the least bit funny. Gloucester is protected both by the pathos of the situation and by the deep concern of Edgar lest his experiment should fail.

Edgar, in misleading Gloucester into believing he stands at the top of Dover cliffs, is attempting to rekindle his father's self-worth. Edgar allows his father to 'jump' from the cliffs, and uses this opportunity to adopt yet another disguise, as well as to persuade Gloucester that the Gods have not turned against him. He convinces the old man that Gloucester has been tempted to commit suicide by a fiend, or by one who was possessed by devils - Poor Tom. Gloucester would have found this easy to believe of Poor Tom, since a popular assumption for madness was that one had been possessed. Edgar persuades Gloucester that he did indeed fall from the cliffs, but that his survival was obviously at the hand of the Gods, who have stepped in at the last minute to save the man fooled by demons.

The effect of this on Gloucester is that he moves farther away from the cruel father of Act 1, and even closer to the kindly man of Act 4 and 5. Edgar's trickery of his father is done in good intentions; to help Gloucester heal himself spiritually. This is a sharp contrast with Edmund's trickery of Gloucester, done for his own personal advantage;

this also shows Gloucester again as Lear's mirror - he is tended to lovingly by his banished son, just as Lear is tended to lovingly by his banished daughter, Cordelia.

From the point of view of the audience, one can imagine Edgar, leaning over his father as he lies unconscious, feeling gently and touching the old man in wonder. This striking and poignant visual image is complemented by language which is also very visual, and the breathless astonishment of the characters is emphasised by staccato structure:

Hadst thou been aught but gossamer, feathers, air,
 So many fathoms down precipitating,
 Thou'dst shivered like an egg: but thou dost breathe;
 (Act 4, Scene vi, Lines 49-52)

Language & Imagery

1. **In Scene vi, how does Edgar begin the process of righting the unnatural events that have occurred?**

Edgar challenges Oswald. In so doing, he defends his father, and this, together with Cordelia's arrival in England to defend her father, begins a move toward a restoration of natural order. Until now, the fathers in the play, Lear and Gloucester, have been manipulated, lied to, and treated exceedingly cruelly by their offspring. In duelling with Oswald, Edgar begins to show that natural feelings and behaviour will overcome unnatural, and Cordelia's absolute forgiveness of her father echoes this.

Edgar's role from here on in is pivotal to the outcome of the play. In discovering the letters which Oswald carries on behalf of his mistress, Edgar discovers what will prove to be the downfall of the evil children. He resolves to inform Albany of the contents of the letter *when the time is right*. Edgar too, has developed over the course of the play: he is no longer the innocent young man, easily manipulated, but has become something of a manipulator himself. Luckily however, he is one of the good guys.

His energetic goodness at this point offers the audience hope. His dispatching of Oswald, and the revelation of the incriminating letter constitutes further setbacks for the evil ones, to set alongside out growing optimism that suffering will be eased and virtue will be rewarded.

2. Find 3 examples of animal imagery in this Act.

Remembering Poor Tom - "I' th' last night's storm I such a fellow saw,/Which made me think a man a worm." (Gloucester, Act IV, Scene i, Lines 32-33)

To his wife, Goneril - "Tigers, not daughters, what have you performed?" (Albany, Act IV, Scene ii, Line 40)

Of his daughters - "They flattered me like a dog, and told me I had white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there." (Lear, Act IV, Scene vi, Lines 97-99)

3. Find 3 references to nature in this Act.

To his wife, Goneril - "I fear your disposition:/That nature which contemns its origin/Cannot be bordered certain in itself;/She that herself will sliver and disbranch/From her material sap, perforce must wither/And come to deadly use." (Albany, Act IV, Scene ii., Lines 31-36)

As he rants insanely - "Nature's above art in that respect." (Lear, Act IV, Scene vi, Line 86)

Of Lear - "O ruined piece of nature!" (Gloucester, Act IV, Scene vi, Line 136)

"I am even/The natural fool of fortune." (Lear, Act IV, Scene vi, Lines 192-93)

To Lear, reminding him of Cordelia - "Thou has one daughter/Who redeems nature from the general curse/Which twain have brought her to." (Gentleman, Act IV, Scene vi, Lines 208-210)

4. Find 2 references to nothing in this Act.

Of himself, to the Gods - "The wretch that thou has blow unto the worst/Owes nothing to thy blasts." (Edgar, Act IV, Scene i, Lines 8-9)

To Gloucester - "Y'are much deceived: in nothing am I changed/But in my garments." (Edgar, Act IV, Scene vi, Lines 9-10) {Edgar has been given clothes by the old retainer who was escorting Gloucester when they met on the beach}

Act Five

1. Where is the fool?

The Fool is gone because he is no longer needed. As already discussed, the Fool is important as a *function* rather than as a *character*. His basic role is that of a chorus, commenting on the action and adding point to our perceptions. In this context, for all his facetiousness, he joins Cordelia and Kent as a third voice of commonsense and sanity in the wake of Lear's aberration. Throughout the play he draws attention to the chaos Lear has caused in the kingdom by making his daughters his mothers. The implication of many of his speeches is that Lear has wronged the country as well as himself, and this was one of the main roles of the court jester: to keep the monarch grounded and to remind the monarch of the common man. He must also be appreciated for his role as a jester, with his babblings, cavorting and snatches of song. He is of particular dramatic importance during the crazed trial scene of Act 3, where he draws the audience's laughter to himself and away from Lear. Throughout this third act, however, the Fool is overshadowed and gradually supplanted by Poor Tom, and when Lear has lived through the climax of his agony and is able to sleep, he is in effect embarking on his recovery. There is no need now for a wise and caustic Fool to keep re-opening the wound. His job was to make Lear see more clearly, and now that he does, the Fool is no longer needed.

A further suggestion is that it would be highly inappropriate to have a comic character (however dark his humour) cavorting and singing during the bleak final acts of the play. Finally, it is possible that the same actor played the Fool and Cordelia, and therefore they could not be on stage at the same time. This idea depends on the physical presentation of the Fool: he has been played by women (though not always as female), as a music hall clown, as a waif in ragged clothes, as a worn out old man, as a young drag queen, and as a traditional court jester. In each case the director seems to be choosing to emphasise a particular aspect of the relationship between Lear and his Fool, and something of his or her vision of the world of *King Lear*. Which version of the Fool do you feel adds most to your understanding of King Lear, the man, and *King Lear*, the play? The choice is purely subjective.

2. How is the division between Goneril and Regan, in Act 5, Scene iii, furthered?

The division between the sisters has been caused by their own ambition and selfishness. Each set out to win Edmund in exactly the way they set out to further their own standing: with deviousness and with ruthlessness. The determination of these two women has been exploited and demonstrated throughout the play, and the audience knows that neither woman will accept defeat in this. The division is furthered, however, when Goneril raises the stakes. Unwilling to risk losing this battle, she poisons her sister, hoping that through her death, Edmund will be hers. Regan however, in Scene 3, claims Edmund, announcing her intent to marry Edmund, something which Goneril cannot do since her husband is, for now, still alive.

The sisters, who, it must be said, have achieved a huge and terrifying rise to power, are divided and defeated by their lust for Edmund. Their strength throughout the play was in each other. However, their individual greed and determination to win in all things separates them, and ultimately destroys them. The sisters as an entity were a force to be reckoned with: were it not for this division, it is not outwith the realms of possibility that they would have returned.

3. On his way to prison with Cordelia in Scene 3, Lear lays out his vision of the "future" the two will share. What predictions or promises does Lear make? Is he making sense?

The captivity of Lear and Cordelia, amidst the trapping of military power, calls poignantly to mind the white garments and soothing music of not so long ago. Now it has all been soured. The formality of Cordelia's lines (Act 5, Scene iii, Lines 3 - 6) reveal a woman struggling for control. The contrast with the joyous affirmation of Lear; confident of her love now, he is the bringer of reassurance. Lear reveals the fullness of his redemption, for at last he has grasped the important things in life - to love openly, to accept love in return, to rejoice in simple pleasures. They will smile at the world of 'gilded butterflies', of 'court news' - the world of pomp and status which once meant so much. Now Lear sees its shallow superficiality.

Lear and Cordelia feel very differently here. Cordelia seems to be afraid of what will happen, but she is not afraid for herself, but for her father. Lear, on the other hand,

seems to see this as a second chance. He will have no responsibility, no court, no throne to concern himself with, and he will have Cordelia. This is reminiscent of his wishes in Act 1. He wanted to relieve himself of the trappings of kingship, and hoped to spend his time with his youngest daughter. He suggests that Goneril and Regan will eventually be ruined by their own evil. Again, Lear's arrogance raises its ugly head. He is happy to have his daughter back, happy to relinquish his throne yet again, and happy to hope that someone or something else will take care of his elder daughters. Where is his concern for his state? Lear may have learnt compassion over the course of the play, but he has learned little about his own responsibility to his country.

4. From Scene 3, lines 83-150, Edmund is forced to defend himself against the accusation of treason that Albany (on Edgar's evidence) has levelled against him. Why is it ironic that the fight with Edgar is Edmund's undoing?

Edmund has been caught out, by a letter passed on to the injured party by his brother Edgar. The audience cannot help but be reminded of the letter passed to Gloucester by Edmund, apparently revealing Edgar's betrayal of his father. Edmund here is discovered in exactly the same way that he arranged for his brother's banishment, the difference being of course that Edmund is guilty, while Edgar most definitely wasn't.

The irony here then, is that we have come full circle. Edmund's undoing is his brother, his first victim, and one that the evil brother had assumed was well taken care of. In his destruction of Edmund, Edgar regains all that he lost; his name, his title, and his place in society. He avenges his father, and helps to ensure the safety of the state.

In terms of sub-plot, as this duel plays out the audience are still uncertain as to whether Lear and Cordelia will be saved. During the duel, the wronged, natural son has his revenge on the usurping, unnatural son. This contrasts with the main plot, in which the wronged, natural daughter has been defeated by the usurping, unnatural daughters. It is not until the end of the scene, however, that the audience discovers how thoroughly defeated the royals have been. The plots here separate: Lear's royal line is completely destroyed; Gloucester's line survives.

5. Why does it seem, in Act 5, Scene 3, that Edmund has more power than any other character?

Edmund has plotted to achieve the position he now finds himself in. He has made himself indispensable to Regan, Goneril and Albany, who admits that he fought bravely during the battle. Edmund also, remember, has taken his father's title, and so is now a general and a duke. The characterisation of Edmund also adds to the effect of power. Edmund has, throughout the play, seen what he has wanted and has simply taken it, whether by force or by deviousness. He has seen his power grow so quickly and to such an extent that he has become even more arrogant within the untouchable position he now sees himself as holding. Together with this, he is still ignorant of the letter now in Albany's possession; he believes his father and brother to be dead, or at the very least, in hiding; as far as he is concerned he has nothing to fear, and so assumes the behaviour of a man in the favourable position he believes himself to be.

He further knows that one or the other of the sisters will be his, and that the other will be dead. We don't know what his plans are in regard to Albany, but we can assume Edmund intends that the Duke will not survive for very much longer. Edmund sees the throne in his sights, and settles himself into the powerful position he is sure he will very shortly achieve.

6. In what manner and under what authority does Albany reclaim any power that Edmund may have?

Albany's authority comes, ironically, from his wife. Although a duke in his own right, Albany is married to the 'monarch'. This gives him power over Edmund. Albany is, however, a diplomat, and attempts to make his position clear, without undermining Edmund.

Albany begins by undercutting his admission that Edmund fought bravely by adding that he was also lucky. He requests the prisoners brought before him, but Edmund tries to wriggle out of producing them, and explains very plausible reasons for their imprisonment. Albany is polite but firm and makes it clear that he holds Edmund as a subordinate, not an equal. Matters are brought to a head by Regan's intervention. When she claims him as her future husband, Albany is forced to produce the letter and refuse her Edmund, since he is already promised to his (Albany's) wife.

Albany here has the moral high ground, and as such acts in a manner according to his rank and station. He reveals a surprising black humour in his accusation of Goneril,

making himself a more sympathetic character to the audience as well as distancing himself from the sordid behaviour of Edmund and the sisters. Whereas Edmund tries to assume the mantle of power, see above, Albany has the character and the morality to deserve it, and so reclaims any power that Edmund has with ease.

7. Under what circumstance may Edgar answer Edmund's challenge of Act 5, Scene 3?

Edmund throws down a glove even before his challenger appears, so sure is he that he can manoeuvre his way out of the situation he finds himself in. The throwing down of a glove was seen as a challenge to fight, and Edmund, in his arrogance, accuses his accuser of lying; a challenge to mortal combat. However, Edmund knows that he is not obliged to fight any who is of a lesser rank than he. He accepts his opponent and fights, despite the fact that Edgar is still in disguise; this time wearing a battle helmet. There is a suspicion that Edmund may indeed know who the challenger is simply by Edgar's claim that he is as noble as Edmund, and his knowledge that Edmund had been false to his brother.

So, Edgar may only answer Edmund's challenge to fight if he is of equal rank. Edmund's acceptance of his challenger as such is tricky. If he did not know who the challenger was, then why fight him? Why take his word for it that he was of equal rank to him? Perhaps Edmund is already feeling the pangs of conscience that seem to prick him as he lays dying. Or perhaps Edmund simply knows he has been duly caught, and chooses a quick death in combat over a prolonged death by execution. If he did know who the challenger was, he had little choice but to fight. Had Edgar removed the helmet upon Edmund's refusal, then Edmund would have been forced to fight, and to perhaps face his guilt. Edmund's acceptance of the unknown challenger's rank suggests that he realises that all his machinations of earlier in the play have finally caught up with him.

8. Still in Scene 3, what one act would provide possible redemption for Edmund, and why is Edmund compelled to perform that act?

Saving Lear and Cordelia. Edmund, despite his wickedness and lack of humanity throughout the play, reacts unexpectedly to Edgar's story. His claim that it '...shall perchance do good' makes the audience expect that Edmund will relent and that this is the good to which he refers. For the next 140 lines, while Edmund remains silent, the

tension builds, so that when the Gentleman arrives with the bloody knife, we may jump to the conclusion that it is Cordelia who has been stabbed.

Several explanations have been offered for his delay in speaking about the sentence of death on Lear and Cordelia. Some critics have blamed Shakespeare for what they regard as the improbable delay, and have concluded that in his determination to have a tragic ending, he did not worry about this improbability. Others argue that although the deaths can no longer advance his career, he had refrained from speaking out of loyalty to Goneril, who had signed the death-warrant. Once she was dead, his lips were unsealed. This does not quite fit his earlier hint that Edgar's narrative might produce good effects. Another suggestion is that the delay was caused by his slowly activated repentance, set in motion by the realization that he was about to die, and the process completed by the deaths of Goneril and Regan. His realization that he had been 'beloved', if the violent passions of the sisters could be euphemistically so described, released him from his obsession. Is this the final realization of the unwanted, deprived child; that he was worthy of love? Or is it a characteristically wry and arrogant observation? Whatever the case he is able at last, but too late, to act morally.

9. What do you think of the attitudes that Albany, Kent, and Edgar display towards the responsibility for the state?

Throughout the play, Kent has made it very clear that his priority was Lear. He has gone to extraordinary lengths to remain in his company. He has been humiliated for his defence of the king. Yet it all seems to have been for nothing. At the end of the play, Kent is a poignant figure. All that he has worked for is to reveal himself to Lear, to be united with his master once more, and at the moment of consummation, everything is snatched away. Suddenly we are aware of his age: a saddened man, crushed by the death of Lear and now sombrely contemplating his own. Of course he feels no loyalty or responsibility to the state. For Kent the state **was** Lear; now that the king is dead, Kent is again following him. The state has no meaning for Kent without Lear.

Albany tries to hand over the state to Lear, and when he dies he begs Kent and Edgar to rule. He does not want to rule: this is clear when he tries to hand the kingship over to Edgar, an earl, while Albany's own rank, that of duke, clearly outranks his. Is this because he does not feel capable of the task? He certainly has acted like a true and honourable monarch in the final act. Perhaps he fears for himself, after all, who would

want to be a king after seeing the chaos and turmoil caused by the king in recent days? The answer, most probably, is that he does not feel worthy of ruling men such as Edgar and Kent. Kent has been unflinchingly loyal to Lear and it would be easy for Albany to confuse that loyalty to Lear with loyalty to the state. He may simply feel that Kent is the better man for the job. As for Edgar, in him Albany sees a man who survived his own banishment, and still managed to find and protect his injured father, foil the machinations of Goneril, Regan and Edmund, not to mention avenge both himself and his father on his evil brother. Edgar is an honourable man, he has proved this time and again, and Albany recognises this, aware that the state needs a man of such selfless motives to calm the chaos and restore the order. Edgar accepts his responsibility heavily. He accepts the horror of recent events, and silently acknowledges the role of ruler.

Albany and Edgar accept that someone must accept responsibility for the state which has been so troubled and abused by the actions of others. The responsibility for the state is not one which either of them take lightly, however it is clear that it is not a responsibility which either relishes. Hardly surprising, given the circumstances.

10. What do you make of Edgar's last four lines (Scene 3, lines 324-27)? Do these lines "sum up" the play?

The weight of this sad time we must obey,	Speak what
we feel, not what we ought to say.	The oldest hath borne
most: we that are young	Shall never see so much, not live
so long.	

These closing lines provide a characteristic ending. The agony is over, evil has been purged, there is some hope for the future. The anticipated rule of Albany and Edgar bodes well for a realm which has been convulsed. After his moralising throughout the play, it is appropriate that Edgar's rhyming couplets should conclude it. At the end of a tragedy in which patriarchal age has been so abused, there is reassurance in his reverence for the old and in the self-effacement which is counselled to the young.

All one can do, these lines suggest, is seek to honour one's own deepest feelings about the drama we have witnessed. At such times whatever our moral framework of belief

(what "we ought to say") must give way before the genuine expression of our imaginative sympathies, which may well be difficult to formulate clearly.

These lines do appear to sum up the play to a certain extent. They are a plea to accept what has happened, grieve, then move forward. Edgar also asks that those who remain should speak what they feel, not what they think the listener wants to hear; a reminder of the lies and platitudes which started the whole crisis. It is also a plea to the young to respect their parents. A simple sentiment perhaps, but a hard lesson has been learned by the remaining characters of what happens when that respect is lost.

Stagecraft

1. In Scene 3, Regan and Goneril argue over Edmund. Where do they do so? Is this setting important?

This takes place in the English camp, at the end of a triumphant battle. This setting is significant because it is the culmination of Goneril and Regan's 'conquest'. They are all powerful in England; the French forces led by Cordelia were the only obstacle in their way. Their triumph in this battle should have led to celebration. This setting is extremely important. Equally important are the characters who surround them. Goneril's husband, Albany, is witness to their absurd bickering, and if he was not sure of his wife's betrayal at this point, then surely this would compound the suspicion. Edmund, the subject of their infatuations, is also present, argued over as if he were a trophy rather than a man. This argument would be comic if it were not for the sisters' venom and for the fact that Regan is taken ill, poisoned by Goneril.

The function of this setting is to show how powerful the sisters have become, and to show how easily they lose everything. They have become so strong because of their single-mindedness and their ruthlessness, the way they have rode roughshod over everyone who has stood in their way. Here, however, they both determine to have the same thing, Edmund. Since they cannot both have him, they behave towards each other exactly as they have behaved throughout the play; by destroying their enemy.

At this point, Shakespeare has this sniping match set in this particular setting to show how easily their power is destroyed, not by anyone else - they have shown themselves to

be unstoppable - but by themselves, or rather, by their own lustfulness. He shows that, despite the great power they have, the land they now have, the battle they have won, their own natures will save the good characters and the state. Sexually predatory women were unacceptable to the audience of the day, and by having the sisters argue in this setting, he shows, by his language and by his presentation, that women who put their own sexual gratification before all else, will sacrifice all that they have.

2. How is tension built to an almost unbearable point in the final scene?

In this final scene, we in the audience know that a death warrant has been issued for Lear and Cordelia. However, so much is going on in the final scene that their plight has been forgotten about. Only Edmund knows that they are about to be murdered. The tension in the final scene is almost unbearable; the knowledge that Lear and Cordelia are fast approaching death, coupled with all that is going on onstage makes this final scene one of the most tense in Shakespearean drama. The audience tries to keep track of the action, while desperately hoping that someone will remember the old king and his daughter. Tragically, even with Edgar's eventual willing assistance, they are too late: Cordelia is hung, and Lear dies, heartbroken.

Incidentally, the form of their deaths is an insult in itself. Hanging was only used as a form of execution for thieves, murderer etc; common criminals. Royalty and aristocracy, at this time, were always beheaded. Even those found guilty of treason against the sovereign were beheaded. In choosing this form of death, Edgar literally adds insult to injury, showing just how contemptuous he has become. Shakespeare, of course, understood this very well, but it is difficult to be sure if he chose this form of execution to emphasise this insult, or simply because if he had had Cordelia beheaded, he would have robbed himself of the final image of Lear with his dead daughter in his arms.

Theme

How is the power of the realm realigned at the end of the play, and why do we not have a feeling of completion or satisfaction from this realignment?

Much of the answer to this question has been covered in Questions 9 and 10, above.

The power of the realm has been transferred to Albany and Edgar; it is strongly implied

that they will accept responsibility for restoring order to the chaotic state. We do not feel entirely satisfied by this realignment because it is clear that Edgar only accepts responsibility because he feels he must. Albany has made it clear that he does not want the responsibility, so for him, he accepts out of a feeling of duty and nothing else.

The second point to note here is that the audience is left without a feeling of satisfaction from the outcome because there is little to be satisfied about. Yes, the bad characters have been punished. Yes, justice has been served. Yes, natural order will be restored. But consider the other punishments dished out. Lear and Cordelia are dead; where is the justice in that? Gloucester has been hideously betrayed, tortured and is now dead; where is the justice in that? Edgar, for all his disguises, failed to save his father. Kent, for all his good intentions, failed to save his king. There is simply too much unfairness in *King Lear* for the audience ever to leave feeling satisfied with the outcome of the play.

Main Themes

Nature (Natural / Unnatural)

The Elizabethans believed, or pretended to believe, that the natural world reflected a hierarchy that mirrored good government and stable monarchy. This is a common enough idea in old books from various cultures. Even our scientific age talks both about "laws of nature" and "good government through good laws", although of course we know the essential difference.

Shakespeare's era contrasted "nature" and "art" (i.e., human-made decorations, human-made luxuries and technologies, human-made artistic productions), just as we talk about "essential human nature" contrasted to "culture". Shakespeare's era also contrasted "natural" and "unnatural" behaviours; the latter would include mistreating family members, opposing the government, and various sexual activities not intended for procreation.

King Lear deals with how children and parents treat each other, whether human society is the product of nature or something we create so as to live better than animals do, and whether human nature is fundamentally selfish or generous. Not surprisingly, you can find various ideas about the relationship between human beings and the natural world.

- You already know that 57 different animals are mentioned in the play. These images are hugely important. Consider the type of animals used, particularly in reference to Goneril and Regan. Predatory animals emphasise their predatory natures.
- Lear tells Cordelia that neither human nature nor royal dignity can tolerate the way she has insulted him.
- Lear tells the King of France that "nature is ashamed" to have produced a child like Cordelia, whose lack of love is so contrary to nature. King Lear expects people to be naturally virtuous, in other words, to tell him the lies he wants to hear.
- The King of France suggests that Cordelia has a "tardiness in nature", i.e., that sometimes it's natural to be inarticulate. France sees nature as the source of human frailties, rather than vice.
- Edmund begins, "Thou, Nature, art my goddess." Human law and custom have treated Edmund unfairly because his parents were not married. Edmund intends to look out for himself, like an animal. Edmund sees nature as the opposite of human virtue.
- Stupid Gloucester, deceived by Edmund, considers Edgar's supposed plot to murder him to be contrary to nature ("unnatural", "brutish").
- Gloucester believes in astrology. Gloucester thinks that the eclipses, which result from natural causes, still have unnatural effects, causing the breakdown of human society. Edmund doesn't believe in astrology. He says he was born rough and self-centered, and that the stars had nothing to do with it. Later, Kent believes the stars must account for the inexplicable differences in people's attitudes. Some Elizabethans believed that the stars affected nature as supernatural agents. Others believed that they were powerful natural forces.
- Edmund remarks that Edgar's nature is gentle and naive, and (at the end) that he will do one last good deed "in spite of mine own nature." This reminds us of the ongoing scientific and political controversies over how much of an individual's behaviour is genetically programmed, how much is learned and conditioned, and how much one is responsible. ("Nature vs. nurture"; "innate vs. cultural", and so forth.)
- King Lear, thinking of Cordelia's "most small fault", laments the way it scrambled his mind ("wrenched my frame of nature from its fixed place").

- King Lear also calls on "nature" as a goddess, to punish Goneril with infertility, or else give her a baby which grows up to hate her ("a thwart disnatured torment").
- Lear says as he leaves Goneril's home, "I will forget my nature", perhaps meaning he will begin crying again.
- Gloucester jokes that Edmund is "loyal and natural". The latter means both "illegitimate", and that he cares for his own flesh-and-blood as a son should. Regan's husband speaks of Edmund's "nature of such deep trust", i.e., his trustworthy character is inborn.
- Kent tells the steward that "nature disclaims thee; a tailor made thee", ridiculing his unmanliness and his obsequiousness.
- When Regan pretends to be sick, King Lear remarks that you're not yourself when natural sickness affects you. "We are not ourselves when nature, being oppressed, commands the mind to suffer with the body." There's a foreshadowing here.
- Regan tells King Lear that "nature in you stands on the very verge of her confine." In other words, you're getting too old to make your own decisions, and Regan's behavior is only that of a good, natural daughter.
- We've already seen ("allow not nature more than nature needs...") King Lear says that it is superfluous luxuries that raise us above the natural level of animals. He will soon change his mind.
- Kent and the other basically good characters see the treatment of Lear and Gloucester as unnatural. Albany says to Goneril, "That nature which condemns itself in origin cannot bordered certain in itself" -- i.e., if you mistreat your own parent, what kind of person must you be? Writers who talk about the Elizabethans believing in cosmic hierarchy and so forth will see a moral warning against deviating from nature: If you have violated nature by being less than generous to your parent, your self-centeredness will grow and you will become morally worse than an animal.
- King Lear calls on the storm to "crack nature's moulds" and end the human race.
- Kent urges King Lear to seek shelter, since "man's nature cannot carry the affliction nor the force" and "the tyranny of the open night's too rough for nature to endure."
- King Lear, crazy, asks whether Regan's hard-heartedness is the result of natural disease or chemistry or something perhaps cultural or perhaps supernatural. "Is there any cause in nature that makes this hardness?"

- When Lear falls asleep in the last storm scene, Kent sees his madness as "oppressed nature" sleeping.
- The physician calls sleep "our foster-nurse of nature." Readers may remember Macbeth, who after committing the "unnatural" crime of killing a king, becomes an insomniac.
- King Lear, with the insight of madness, decorates himself with wild flowers.

Further themes to consider include:

Clothing / Nakedness - are you more yourself with your status/culture's clothes and the dignity they confer, or naked, owing nothing to anyone?

Fortune/Fate - is what happens to us dumb luck, predestined, or whatever?

Justice/Injustice - Is everything that happens in the play connected to this theme? How much of the play is taken up with simply events, and how much is taken up with characters being punished or rewarded, for deeds both good and bad?

Eyesight / Blindness / Hallucination - a blinded character and a hallucinating character both perceive things more clearly; the play asks "Does human nature make us care only for ourselves, or for others?", our natural eyes may not give us the best answer.

Appearance/Reality - how many of the characters in the play are everything they appear to be? Many are much more (Cordelia, for example), and many are much less (Edmund is much less than the loyal and devoted 'natural' son that Gloucester believes him to be).

Nothing/Something - how often, in this play, does nothing actually mean something, such as Cordelia's 'Nothing, my lord', which in fact shows her love; and something means nothing, such as the elder sisters' declarations of something - their great love for their father - which is revealed to be truly nothing?

You should also be considering how many of these themes are two-sided. This is reflective of the nature of this play: good children as opposed to evil children; real madness as opposed to feigned madness; Lear's wish to be at once king and child (Act 1, see notes); order as opposed to chaos; love as opposed to hate.

17th Century Criticism of Shakespeare

Timber, or Discoveries by Ben Jonson (1640), with the famous section on Shakespeare: *De Shakespeare nostrat.*

I remember, the Players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing, (whatsoever he penn'd) hee never blotted out line. My answer hath beene, would he had blotted a thousand. Which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this, but for their ignorance, who choose that circumstance to commend their friend by, wherein he most faulted. And to justifie mine owne candor, (for I lov'd the man, and doe honour his memory (on this side Idolatry) as much as any.) Hee was (indeed) honest, and of an open, and free nature: had an excellent Phantsie; brave notions, and gentle expressions: wherein hee flow'd with that facility, that sometime it was necessary he should be stop'd: *Sufflaminandus erat*; as Augustus said of Haterius. His wit was in his owne power; would the rule of it had beene so too. Many times hee fell into those things, could not escape laughter: As when hee said in the person of Cæsar, one speaking to him; Cæsar thou dost me wrong. Hee replied: Cæsar did never wrong, but with just cause: and such like; which were ridiculous. But hee redeemed his vices, with his vertues. There was ever more in him to be prayesd, then to be pardoned.

- *Of Dramatic Poesie by John Dryden (1668)*. For example:

To begin then with Shakespeare; he was the man who of all Modern, and perhaps Ancient Poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the Images of Nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily : when he describes any thing, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learn'd; he needed not the spectacles of Books to read Nature; he look'd inwards, and found her there.

THE CRITICS

THE MESSAGE OF KING LEAR

...the theme of King Lear may be stated in psychological as well as biological terms. So put, it is the destructive, the ultimately suicidal character of unregulated passion, its power to carry human nature back to chaos....

The predestined end of unmastered passion is the suicide of the species. That is the gospel according to King Lear. The play is in no small measure an actual representation of that process. The murder- suicide of Regan-Goneril is an example. But it is more than a picture of chaos and impending doom. What is the remedy for chaos? it asks. What can avert the doom? The characters who have mastered their passions give us a glimpse of the answer to those questions.

Harold C. Goddard, The Meaning of Shakespeare, 1951

ON LEAR

The initial act of the hero is his only act; the remainder is passion. An old and weary king, hungry for rest, banishes the one daughter who would give it to him and plunges at once into the long, loud night of his catastrophe. An early recognition of his error does not save him. The poet does not wish to save him, for his instinct is to develop a catastrophe as none has been developed before or since.

Mark Van Doren, Shakespeare, 1939

Lear's progress- dramatic and spiritual- lies through a dissipation of egoism; submission to the cruelty of an indifferent Nature, less cruel to him than are his own kin; to ultimate loss of himself in madness.

Harley Granville-Barker, Preface to Shakespeare, 1946

THE SECONDARY PLOT

The secondary plot fills out a story which would by itself have been somewhat thin, and it provides a most effective contrast between its personages and those of the main plot, the tragic strength and stature being heightened by comparison with the slighter build of the former.

A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, 1983

...the subplot simplifies the central action, translating its concerns into familiar (and therefore easily apprehensible) verbal and visual patterns. The subplot is easier to grasp because its characters tend to account for their sufferings in traditional moral language; it also pictorializes the main action, supplying interpreted visual emblems for some of the play's important themes.

Bridget Gellert Lyons, "The subplot simplification in King Lear," from Some Facets of King Lear, Essays in Prismatic Criticism, edited by Rosalie L. Colie and F. T. Flahiff, 1974

THE STORM

The third act of King Lear, which covers the storm and its counterpart in human behaviour, is a marvellous example of poetic elaboration for dramatic ends. At the centre of it, at once the main protagonist and symbol of the spiritual state of a humanity exposed to fundamental disorder, wrenched out of its "fixed place" in the "frame of nature," stands the figure of an aged king. The intimate dovetailing of personal conflict with external convulsions has often been noted, and is indeed an essential part of the conception. The storm which has broken out in Lear's mind, the result of his treatment at the hands of his children, is admirably fused with the description of the warring elements mainly entrusted to his lips; the external storm, while exercising upon his aged physique the intolerable strain under which it finally breaks, is itself a projection of his inner state, being fused with it as a single poetic reality.

D. A. Traversi, An Approach to Shakespeare, 1969

ON RELIGIOUS VALUES

The play is not, as some of our grandfathers believed, pessimistic and pagan: it is rather an attempt to provide an answer to the undermining of traditional ideas by the new

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philosophy that called all in doubt. Shakespeare goes back to a pre-Christian world and builds up from the nature of man himself, and not from revealed religion, those same moral and religious ideals that were being undermined. In a world of lust, cruelty and greed, with extremes of wealth and poverty, man reduced to his essentials needs not wealth, nor power, nor even physical freedom, but rather patience, stoical fortitude, and love; needs perhaps, above all, mutual forgiveness, the exchange of charity, and those sacrifices on which the gods, if there are any gods, throw incense....

Kenneth Muir, 1972

To me, the clairvoyance of King Lear is hardly distinguishable from religious insight. It is not only our profoundest tragedy; it is also our profoundest expression of an essentially Christian comment on man's world and his society, using the terms and benefiting by the formulations of Christian tradition.

John Danby, Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature, A Study of King Lear, 1964

ON WOMEN

Men's behaviour matters. But women's behaviour is of the essence. Cordelia "redeems nature from the general curse/which 'twain' have brought her to" (my italics ['twain']). The twain are, of course, Goneril and Regan. Cordelia redeems nature; Goneril and Regan are responsible for its "curse." In the rhetoric of the play, no male is condemned as Goneril is condemned. A woman who refuses to uphold the inlaw [benevolent] feminine principle completely topples the natural order and plunges the world into chaos.

Marilyn French, Shakespeare's Division of Experience, 1983

ON LANGUAGE

There is, indeed, in King Lear, a kind of irony which is not, to any important extent, to be found in any other play: the irony which lies in the contradiction between the rightness of what is said and the wrongness of its being said by that particular character, or in that particular situation, or in that particular manner.

Arthur Small, "Character and Society in Lear," from Shakespeare: The Tragedies, edited by Alfred Harbage, 1964

Suggested Essay Topics

1. Is Lear a sympathetic character? What about Gloucester? How do our impressions of them change during the course of the play?
2. Analyze the function that the Fool serves. Why does he disappear from the action?
3. Discuss the relationship between Cordelia and Lear, and compare it to the relationship between Edgar and Gloucester.
4. Of the three villains—Edmund, Goneril, and Regan—who is the most interesting? Why?
5. Discuss the significance of old age and death in King Lear.
6. How does order break down in Britain during the course of the play? Who is to blame?
7. Discuss Edmund. Are we meant to find him sympathetic?
8. Compare and contrast Lear and Gloucester.
9. Compare and contrast Cordelia, Goneril, and Regan.
10. Compare and contrast Edmund and Edgar.
11. Compare and contrast Albany, Cornwall, and Kent.
12. How is Lear's descent into madness also what leads him to redemption?
13. Describe the role and function of the Fool in "King Lear." Why does he disappear long before the end of the play?

14. Why is the play a tragedy?
15. Explain the hope that exists at the end of the play.
16. Describe how the symbolic plot of good vs. evil is developed in the play.
17. Discuss the theme of filial ingratitude in the play and Lear's contribution to it.
18. How is the storm used to intensify Lear's agony?
19. Discuss Cordelia's attachment to the King. Why is she so forgiving of Lear's misjudgment of her? Is her forgiveness believable?
20. Why does Edgar not reveal himself to his father after Gloucester has admitted how he has wronged his son?
21. How do the subplot and the main plot work together in the play?

There are several common links between Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Hamlet*. You should consider the following points:

Madness

Madness is hugely apparent in both plays. In both *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, we are presented with a character who is truly mad, and with a character who pretends to be mad for their own purposes. Each contrast emphasises the other.

In *Hamlet*, the prince feigns madness in order to disguise the true reasons for his troubled mind. There is some suggestion in the play that Hamlet is genuinely losing his mind, but the general assumption is that his lunacy is assumed. Contrasted with Ophelia's very real insanity, Hamlet's madness is little more than capering, whereas Ophelia's confusion is both pitiful and believable.

In *King Lear*, Edgar, disguised as Poor Tom, feigns madness to protect himself and to escape his father's anger. There is never any suggestion that Edgar is anything but completely in control of his own mental faculties in any part of the play. Lear, however, loses his mind very quickly and very dramatically. It may be argued that Lear is losing his mind from the very beginning of the play, however, it is generally taken that his true descent into madness comes at the end of Act 2, when his daughters cast him out into the storm. Contrasted with Poor Tom, Lear, as with Ophelia, is so bewildered and so lost that the audience cannot help but sympathise with him.

So, Hamlet and Edgar are both young men, confused by events that they do not truly understand. Both are victims of others' machinations. Both are separated from their fathers, through no fault of their own. Both are good, natural sons. Both adopt the persona of madness for a legitimate purpose (doubtful in Hamlet, but in his own mind it is for a legitimate purpose). Both achieve their aim by the end of the plays: Hamlet has his revenge on his father's murderer, and Edgar is reunited with his father (albeit temporarily) and regains his rightful place in society.

Ophelia and Lear are both driven mad by circumstances. Ophelia has been protected and guarded by both her father and by her brother, and was in love with Hamlet. However, her lover rejects her and her sanity begins to slip. The death of her father at Hamlet's hands is too much for her frail sensibilities to cope with, and she is driven mad. However, it is not simply Hamlet's murder of Polonius which drives her to madness, but also the lack of anyone to guide her. She is the loving obedient daughter, she does what her father tells her, and to a lesser extent, what her brother tells her. However, she finds herself with her father gone, her brother away, and she simply cannot cope. With no-one to guide and support her in this, she lacks the skills to guide herself. Her life is no longer the structured existence it once was. This lack of control in her life, and the fear of the unknown or unexpected is what drives her mad.

With Lear, the cause is much the same. A culmination of things drives the king insane. His daughters' treatment of him is the main reason, however it is several points which arise out of this that cause his madness. He is stripped of his power; he is stripped of the respect and deference due to him; and he is forced to accept his own foolishness in both splitting his kingdom and in banishing the only daughter who was truly loyal to him.

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Although Regan and General are largely blamed for Lear's madness, it is the consequences of their cruelty towards him which drives him out of his mind. As with Ophelia, the true reason for Lear's insanity is the lack of control in her life, and the fear of the unknown or unexpected. As with Ophelia, his life no longer has any structure.

Interesting to note is the depiction of true madness in Shakespeare. Both Ophelia and Lear, when in the grip of insanity, are presented as singing, and carrying/wearing weeds and/or flowers. In these plays, the mad appear to find some link to nature. Also interesting to note is that both characters, although deranged, speak a great deal of truth, often truth which has evaded them when sane. Shakespeare seems to be suggesting that these crazed characters have more insight into truth when unhinged than when lucid.

A Troubled Throne Equals a Troubled State

In *Hamlet*, the Danish throne is held by Claudius, a man who has earned his crown not through the fair means, but through foul: the murder of his own brother. This is compounded by the new king's 'incestuous' marriage to his dead brother's wife, Gertrude. These are the points on which Hamlet's rage and desire for revenge rest, although it is rarely clear-cut which of the two Hamlet feels most aggrieved by. The state itself suffers because of the wrongness of Claudius' reign, and throughout the play this is referred to by the disease imagery, and the recurring theme of Denmark being like "an unweeded garden". The blame for the troubled state is set clearly on Claudius' shoulders as he is described as "a canker" which blights the state.

In *King Lear*, the throne is again troubled, and this again filters down to mean trouble for the state. The true king no longer sits on his throne, and is instead driven to madness by his own foolish and arrogant behaviour and by his elder daughters' cruel and selfish treatment of him. The chaos of the state is here symbolised by the storm into which the old king is thrust; by the disorder exemplified by the characters (children turn on their parents, servants turn on their masters, the king strikes up an unlikely friendship of sorts with the beggar); and by the threat of war which looms over the country after Cordelia returns from France to defend her ousted father.

It can be seen then, that in both plays the subject of kingship is central to the plot. For the audience of the time, this would make for much more tense viewing than for the audience of today, where the subject of who is or is not sovereign has very little bearing on our day-to-day lives. For Shakespeare's audience, the sovereign could have a great deal of influence over the lives of the citizens, even to the extent of life or death. In both plays, Shakespeare's message is clear: a good king means a safe, healthy state; a bad king means a weakened, troubled state.

The Women

Shakespeare, due to the nature of theatre at the time, wrote very few parts for women. This means that the roles which are there are very important to the plays.

Let us first consider the 'bad girls' of these plays. *Gertrude*, *Regan* and *Goneril* are all described as, and depicted as, lustful, sexually aware women. Then behave as no woman should, and are punished for it by the end of their respective plays. *Gertrude's* main crime appears to be that she has betrayed her first husband's memory by marrying his brother, not to mention his murderer. However, it is important to remember that there is no suggestion that *Gertrude* knew about the murder of the dead king whatsoever. There is however, some suggestion that she was committing adultery with *Claudius* before the death of *Hamlet's* father. This coupled with the very short interval between her husband's death and her remarriage marks her behaviour as unacceptable.

Goneril and *Regan*, however, are much worse than *Gertrude* could ever be. Completely amoral, sexually predatory, and coldly cruel, they have no redeeming features. In her favour, it may be said that *Gertrude* clearly loves her son: *Regan* and *Goneril* have very little to be said in their favour and much to be said against them. They behave as no one should. They lie to their father, then betray and dishonour him. They inflict horrific cruelties on many, *Gloucester*, in particular. *Goneril* plans her second husband while her first is very much alive. They murder with abandon and relish, culminating in the murder of each other, due to their wanton lusting after *Edmund*. This last is what seals their doom: their only allies were each other, however, their sexual rivalry and predatory natures destroyed them. By looking at these three women it becomes clear that for the Elizabethan / Jacobean audience, the worst crime a woman could commit

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was lascivious in nature. These three women are brought down by their lustfulness and are duly punished for it.

Turning to the 'good girls', both Ophelia and Cordelia are representative of the ideal of womanhood. They are gentle, kind, honourable, chaste and they respect their fathers. Ophelia is driven mad by the loss of her father. Cordelia is clearly distraught by the loss of hers. When Cordelia and Lear are reunited, there is no chastisement from Cordelia, simply a wish for her father to be whole again. These women never question their fathers' behaviours or wishes; they simply accept them. Ophelia goes so far as to become 'bait' for one of Polonius' plots, against her lover. She never questions this. She is told to avoid Hamlet's company, and again she never questions this. She simply does as she is told. Cordelia shows a bit more backbone when dealing with her father, but she certainly doesn't fight her corner. She accepts his decision, and returns to his rescue when he needs her. However, Ophelia and Cordelia end the plays just as dead as Gertrude, Regan and Goneril do, so what exactly is Shakespeare attempting to say here? Is it better to be destroyed by your own behaviour, as Gertrude, Goneril and Regan are? Or is it preferable to die by some other's behaviour, as Cordelia and Ophelia do? The answer lies in the plays. Gertrude, Goneril and Regan are simply dead. Ophelia and Cordelia have scenes after their deaths. They are not simply dismissed. Ophelia's funeral scene is tragic in many ways, however, we are more or less assured by the play that Ophelia has found her way to peace, Heaven and God. The scene in *King Lear* where Lear comes on stage carrying his dead daughter is equally tragic, and again we are assured of Cordelia's place in Heaven. Remember how important religion, the soul, and Heaven and Hell were to the Shakespearean audience: although dead, Cordelia and Ophelia's souls are safe. We are given no such assurances about Gertrude, Regan and Goneril. Shakespeare was not concerned with punishment or reward for these women in this life, but in the next.

Restoration of Natural Order

Both plays end with a ridiculous number of dead characters. By the end of *Hamlet*, the only character left standing is Horatio, Hamlet's loyal friend and companion. Claudius is dead, and this is necessary for the play and for the state: as above, a corrupt ruler weakens the state. Claudius was also a murderer and an adulterer (questionably), and so was not fit to rule. Gertrude is dead, justly punished for her lustful ways. Secondary Copyright © 2004 FRET's English Teaching Resources, Lesson Plans & Schemes of Work. www.englishteaching.co.uk + www.english-teaching.co.uk

to this, had she lived what would be her place in the restored order under Fortinbras? Laertes is dead, at Hamlet's hand. This is also just, since he was a willing participant in Claudius' plot against the prince. Laertes' willingness to betray his prince and childhood friend, not to mention betraying his own honour in so doing, shows that he is, or was, representative of the corrupt state, and so there is no place for him under the new rule. Hamlet himself is dead, and again this is just; Hamlet would have been a weak king. Although he acted in what he thought were his country's best interests, he simply took too long to do it. His fatal flaw, his procrastination, shows that he does not have the strength of will to be a good king.

By the end of *Hamlet* then, the weak and immoral characters have been destroyed, leaving the way clear for Fortinbras to take the throne, and restore the state of Denmark to the healthy, strong state it was under the rule of Hamlet's father.

By the end of *King Lear*, the main 'bad elements' have been destroyed. Regan and Goneril are dead, killed by their own rivalry. This is just since they have caused much of the chaos in the state. Cornwall, Regan's husband has been dead since Act 3, again justly. Gloucester is dead, punished not only for his willingness to reject his natural son, but also for the lustful ways which led to the existence of Edmund in the first place. Edmund, the unnatural son, had to be destroyed, not only for his Machiavellian tendencies, but for his contribution to the chaos which surrounds the state. Oswald, the insolent servant, is dead, punished for his betrayal of the crown.

Lear dies, heartbroken over the loss of Cordelia. This too is necessary since the chaos and turmoil of the play has all stemmed from Lear's original behaviour in Act 1. Lear is not a tragic hero with a single tragic flaw which causes his downfall; he is a particularly complex character. However, although he learns a great deal over the course of the play, doubts remain about the depth of his understanding. His actions in Act 1, and his subsequent instability compound his inability to rule. Cordelia's death is much harder to explain. Possibly, she proved in Act 1 that she was too weak to rule. Possibly, she proved in Act 1 that she had the strength of will necessary, however, she is married to the King of France and so could not rule England completely. Possibly, she is killed simply to ensure Lear's complete destruction. With his 'best thing' gone from him, Lear has nothing left to live for, thus clearing the way for restoration. Even Kent, Lear's loyal subject, hints that he feels death approaching. With Lear gone, there is no place

for Kent, and so, although we are no witness to his death, we are left in little doubt that he will soon be gone.

Edgar and Albany are left standing. Edgar because it is largely due to him that events unfolded in the way in which they did. He has suffered so much over the course of the play that he deserves his inheritance of his father's titles. Albany survives as the last link to the royal line, and so he, together with Edgar, is left to find some way forward. It is his and Edgar's responsibility to restore order to chaos.

However, while *Hamlet* leaves the audience with some feeling of hope for the restoration of the state and the restoration of order, *King Lear* does not. Fortinbras, as a stronger mirror of Hamlet, is a promising monarch. Horatio's survival of the slaughter at the end of the play is also promising. His vow to tell the story of Hamlet's fall is a positive note that he will be a living reminder that the same mistakes will not be made. *King Lear's* characters do not appear to have that hope. They are unable to restore order in the way that they wish. Albany's offer to resign power might be seen as an ill-timed and futile gesture, slightly reminiscent of Lear's wish to hand over power to someone else at the beginning of the play. In spite of his bravery, Edgar has been unable to preserve his father's life. In contrast to *Hamlet*, the final doleful lines of *King Lear* do not provide a sense of hope for the future. Despite this, order is restored in both plays. How well that order is restored, and for how long, is debatable.