

# king lear

chicago  
shakespeare theater  
on navy pier



teacher handbook

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## Acknowledgments

This Teacher Handbook grew out of a team effort of teachers past and present, Chicago Shakespeare Theater artists, interns, educators, and scholars. Education intern and doctoral candidate Stephanie Kucsera was the lead writer and editor of the *King Lear* handbook, with contributions from interns Allison Clayman and Sarah Tryon. Chicago Shakespeare Theater gratefully acknowledges the groundbreaking and indelible work of Dr. Rex Gibson and the Cambridge School Shakespeare Series, and The Folger Shakespeare Institute, whose contributions to the field of teaching have helped shape our own work through the years.

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# chicago shakespeare theater on navy pier

**Barbara Gaines** **Criss Henderson**  
Artistic Director      Executive Director

Chicago Shakespeare Theater is Chicago's professional theater dedicated to the works of William Shakespeare. Founded as Shakespeare Repertory in 1986, the company moved to its seven-story home on Navy Pier in 1999. In its Elizabethan-style courtyard theater, 500 seats on three levels wrap around a deep thrust stage—with only nine rows separating the farthest seat from the stage. Chicago Shakespeare also features a flexible 180-seat black box studio theater, a Teacher Resource Center, and a Shakespeare specialty bookstall.

Now in its twenty-eighth season, the Theater has produced nearly the entire Shakespeare canon: *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *As You Like It*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Cymbeline*, *Hamlet*, *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2*, *Henry V*, *Henry VI Parts 1, 2 and 3*, *Henry VIII*, *Julius Caesar*, *King John*, *King Lear*, *Love's Labor's Lost*, *Macbeth*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, *Pericles*, *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Tempest*, *Timon of Athens*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and *The Winter's Tale*. Chicago Shakespeare Theater was the 2008 recipient of the Regional Theatre Tony Award. Chicago's Jeff Awards year after year have honored the Theater, including repeated awards for Best Production and Best Director, the two highest honors in Chicago theater.

Since Chicago Shakespeare's founding, its programming for young audiences has been an essential element in the realization of its mission. Team Shakespeare supports education in our schools, where Shakespeare is part of every required curriculum. As a theater within a multicultural city, we are committed to bringing Shakespeare to a young and diverse audience of 40,000 students each year. Team Shakespeare's programming includes free teacher workshops, student matinees of main stage shows, post-performance discussions, comprehensive teacher handbooks, and an abridged, original production each year of one of the "curriculum plays." Team Shakespeare offers a region-wide forum for new vision and enthusiasm for teaching Shakespeare in our schools. In 2012, the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC, honored that vision with the prestigious Shakespeare Steward Award. The 2014-15 Season offers a student matinee series for three of Chicago Shakespeare Theater's full-length productions: in the fall semester, Shakespeare's *King Lear* and an adaptation of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, performed by South Africa's Isango Ensemble; and in the spring, Shakespeare's *Pericles*. Also this spring, a 75-minute abridged version of *Macbeth* will be performed at the Theater on Navy Pier and will tour to schools and theaters across the region. We hope that you and your students will enjoy our work—and Shakespeare's creative genius brought to life on stage.

**Marilyn J. Halperin** Director of Education  
**Jason Harrington** Education Outreach Manager  
**Molly Topper** Learning Programs Manager



Where do you go  
When it starts to rain  
Where will you sleep  
When the night time comes  
What do you do  
When your heart's in pain  
Where will you run  
When the right time comes  
These are the things  
That I want to know

— Sung by Frank Sinatra  
Lyrics by Arnold Sundgaard

**W**hen his decision to divide the kingdom among his three daughters turns into a catalyst for unimaginable catastrophe, an aging king finds himself without house and home. In a world now redefined by its unfamiliarity, foolishness is found in those meant to be wise—and wisdom resides in fools and madmen. As royal residences become places of treachery and danger, the ramshackle hovels of “unaccommodated man” now provide shelter and refuge.

What would we find at the end of the road after we've lost everything we know to belong to us? Just beyond its borders of desolation, Shakespeare's masterpiece unveils truths that are revealed in the darkest of times. Through moments of brutality and grace, of unbearable pain and untold empathy, the characters of *King Lear* embark upon personal journeys with no less at stake than their humanity. ♦



# KING LEAR

written by  
**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

directed by  
**BARBARA GAINES**

Larry Yando as King Lear, photo by Jeff Sciortino



## Art That Lives

**D**rama is a living art. It is written to be performed live before a group of people who form an audience and experience it together, just as you will here at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater. This tradition of performance and observance, of drama as *communication*, is an historically rich and

complex one that reaches far back in time. Textual evidence from Egypt and Mesopotamia—even art like cave paintings depicting men disguised as animals—reveals that since ancient times, impersonation and imitation have been used not only ritualistically but also as a means of expression and communication, a way to impart the knowledge of the community.

The beginnings of Western drama further developed in the religious ritual and festivals of the ancient Greeks, while their theater also took on new emphasis as a sophisticated mode of storytelling, especially as a way of communicating the history of a culture and imagining new heroic tales. The drama of Europe's Middle Ages was closely tied to forms of religious observance, but the medievals also used theater to teach biblical stories, present the lives of saints, and creatively communicate the moral ideals of the community. It is this long and varied tradition of community engagement and communication through drama that Shakespeare and the Renaissance playwrights inherited—and from which they would both borrow and imagine new possibilities.

Drama not only depicts human communication, it *is* human communication. But in the theater, unlike television or film, a two-way communication occurs between the actors and their audience. When you experience theatrical storytelling, you are not simply on the receiving end of this communicative process: the audience, as a community, is also a participant. We are quite used to thinking about the actors' roles in a play, but may find it strange to imagine ourselves, the audience, playing an important role in this living art. Because theater is art that lives, each performance is guaranteed to be different, depending in part upon an audience's response.

A live performance depends upon its audience. In the theater, the audience hears and sees the actors, just as the actors hear and see the audience. When the actors experience a responsive, interested audience, their work is at its best—full of animation and energy. When the actors sense disinterest, they too are distracted, and the play they create is less interesting. One actor described the experience of live performance as a story told by the actors and audience together. In this sense, you are

## How can you help us give you the best performance we can?

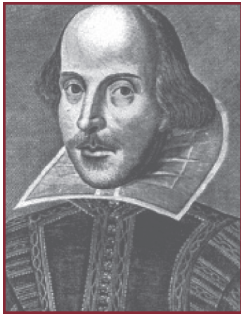
- ◆ **Please, no talking during the performance.** It distracts the actors as well as the people sitting nearby.
- ◆ **Respond naturally to our play.** Emotions are part of drama. We hope that you'll laugh, cry and even gasp—but as a natural response to the story, and not in order to distract attention from the stage.
- ◆ **Please leave all “noisemakers”—food, gum, cell phones, iPods, etc.—back at school or on the bus.** In a quiet theater, wrappers and munching are heard by all, the actors included.
- ◆ **No photographs of any kind, please.** Flashbulbs can make the actors lose their focus and can be dangerous. Digital cameras, along with all other kinds of recording devices, are prohibited, as is text-messaging.

also a storyteller when you experience live theater. We hope you'll enjoy your role—and will help us to give you a dramatic experience that you'll always remember.

*[Theatrical performance] is essentially a sociable, communal affair. This is important. To resist this is, I think, to ruin one of the very important parts of the theatrical experience. Let the play and let the fact that temporarily you are not your private self, but a member of a closely fused group, make it easy for the performance to 'take you out of yourself.' This, I suggest, is the object of going to a play...to be taken out of yourself, out of your ordinary life, away from the ordinary world of everyday.*

—TYRONE GUTHRIE, 1962





## Bard's Bio

**T**he exact date of William Shakespeare's birth is not known, but his baptism (traditionally held three days after a child's birth) was recorded on April 26, 1564. His father, John Shakespeare, was a tanner, glover, grain dealer, and prominent town official of the thriving

market town of Stratford-upon-Avon. His mother, Mary Arden, was the daughter of a prosperous, educated farmer. Though the records are lost, Shakespeare undoubtedly attended Stratford's grammar school, where he would have acquired knowledge of Latin and the classical writers, training in rhetoric and analysis of texts, and gained a smattering of arithmetic as well as instruction in the articles of the Christian faith. There is no record that Shakespeare acquired a university education of any kind.

At the age of eighteen, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior. They had one daughter, Susanna, followed by twins, Hamnet and Judith. Hamnet, Shakespeare's only son, died at age eleven. From 1585, the year in which the twins were baptized, until 1592, when he is first referred to as a dramatist in London, we know nothing of Shakespeare's life. Consequently, these seven so-called "lost years" are filled with legend and conjecture. We may never know what brought Shakespeare to London or how he entered its world of the theater. The first reference to Shakespeare as an actor and playwright appears in 1592 and was made by Robert Greene, a rival playwright and pamphleteer, who attacked Shakespeare as an "upstart crow" for presuming to write plays (when he was only a mere actor) and for copying the material of established dramatists.

By the early 1590s Shakespeare had emerged as a rising playwright in London, where he continued to enjoy fame and financial success as an actor, playwright, and part-owner of one of London's leading theater companies for nearly twenty years. Subsequent references to Shakespeare indicate that as early as 1594 he was not only an actor and a playwright, but also a partner in a new theatrical company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which soon became one of London's two principal companies. The company's name changed to the King's Men in 1603 with the accession of James I, and it endured until the Commonwealth closed the theaters in 1642.

During his career, Shakespeare wrote or collaborated on what most scholars now agree upon as thirty-eight plays. His earliest plays—including *Love's Labor's Lost*, *The Comedy of Errors*,

*Richard III*, *King John*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*—were written between 1589 and 1594. Between 1594 and 1599, Shakespeare wrote both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar* as well as other plays, including *Richard II*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *As You Like It*. His great tragedies—*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*—were composed between 1599 and 1607, and were preceded by his last play traditionally categorized as comedy, *Measure for Measure*. The earlier histories, comedies, and tragedies made way for Shakespeare's final dramatic form—the plays commonly termed "romances" or "tragicomedies" for their blending of the comic and tragic forms. Written between 1606 and 1611, the romances include *Cymbeline*, *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. These were the plays of a playwright no longer bound by the constraints of his earlier forms.

Although some quarto versions of the plays were printed in Shakespeare's lifetime, there is no definitive extant evidence to suggest that he directly oversaw their publication. It was not until 1623, seven years after his death, that his complete plays were published in the First Folio. However, we do know that Shakespeare did oversee the publication of three narrative poems and a collection of 154 sonnets during his lifetime. Shakespeare retired in 1611 to live as a country gentleman in Stratford, his birthplace, until his death on April 23, 1616.

***Shakespeare 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 learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards, and found her there.***

—JOHN DRYDEN, 1688

**N**ow faire Hippolita,  
Drawes on spares:  
Another Moon: but  
This old Moon waxes  
Like to a Step-dame, or a Dowd  
Long withering out a yong m  
Hip. Bourc daies wil quickl  
Boure nights wil quickl drea  
And then the Moone, like to  
Now bent in heauen, shal beh  
Of our solemnitie. " " "  
The, Go Philofraite,  
Stirre vp the Athenian youth  
Awake the pert and nimble sp  
Turne melancholy forth to Fe

## The First Folio

**T**hroughout much of the Renaissance, plays did not occupy the same high cultural status that we attribute to them today. In fact, theatrical texts were not viewed as “literature” at all. When a play was published (if it was published at

all) it was printed inexpensively in a small book, called a “quarto,” the sixteenth-century equivalent of our paperbacks. It was not until 1616, the year of Shakespeare’s death, when a contemporary English poet and dramatist, Ben Jonson, published his own plays in a large-format book called a “folio”—the format traditionally reserved for the authoritative texts of religious and classical works—with the intention of challenging this pervasive understanding of theatrical texts as holding low literary value, that plays began to be understood as literature worthy of publication. Jonson was still chided as bold and arrogant for his venture for many years.

During Shakespeare’s lifetime, only half of his plays were ever published, and those were printed as quartos. He did, however, oversee the publication of three narrative poems and a collection of 154 sonnets. It was not until seven years after the playwright’s death that two of his close colleagues decided to gather his plays for publication in a move of three-fold significance: as a gesture of homage to a long-time friend and colleague; as a promotion of the King’s Men as a theater company of the highest cultural prestige; and as a financial venture with lucrative potential.

In 1623, what is now known as the First Folio, a book containing thirty-six of Shakespeare’s estimated thirty-eight plays, was published. Modern textual scholars maintain that the First Folio was likely compiled from a combination of stage prompt books and other theatrical documents, the playwright’s handwritten manuscripts (no longer extant), and various versions of some of the plays already published. Shakespeare’s First Folio took five compositors two and one-half years to print. The compositors manually set each individual letter of type, memorizing the text line by line to increase efficiency, as they moved down the page. There was no editor overseeing the printing, and the compositors frequently altered punctuation and spelling. Errors caught in printing would be corrected, but due to the high cost of paper, earlier copies remained intact. Of the 1,200 copies of the First Folio that were printed, approximately 230 survive today, and each is slightly different. Chicago’s Newberry Library contains an original First Folio in its rich collections.

Chicago Shakespeare Theater traditionally utilizes the First Folio as the basis for its play scripts. The First Folio still serves as a

manual for many Shakespearean actors nearly 400 years after its publication because the plays as printed in the First Folio took theatrical documents as their basis for printing. Its punctuation, capitalizations, variant spellings, line breaks, and rhetorical structures all give clues to actors and directors about what words to emphasize and about what ideas are important—helping them to break open and examine the language. In Shakespeare’s own theater company, with only a few days to rehearse each new play, these built-in clues were essential and provided information for members of the entire company. Today, these textual clues still help modern actors make the language easier to break apart—even though they’re speaking language that’s 400 years “younger” than ours.

*This is the book that gave us Shakespeare (or most of Shakespeare) [...] But the way it presented Shakespeare was carefully calculated to make a collection of theatre works look plausible as what we would now call works of literature. The book not only gives us the texts; it gives us Shakespeare as a cultural icon.*

—JOHN JOWETT, 2007



## Shakespeare’s England

**E**lizabeth I—daughter of Henry VIII and his second wife Anne Boleyn—ruled England for forty-five years from 1558 to 1603 in a time of relative prosperity and peace. “Few monarchs,”

says Shakespearean scholar David Bevington, “have ever influenced an age so pervasively and left their stamp on it so permanently.” He maintains that “[h]er combination of imperious will and femininity and her brilliant handling of her many contending male admirers have become legendary,” and resulted in a monarchy that remained secure in the face of religious and political threats from many sides. In choosing not to marry, Elizabeth avoided allying herself and her throne with a foreign country or an English faction which may have threatened her broad base of power and influence.

Throughout early modern Europe—the period that spans the timeframe from after the late portion of the Middle Ages (c. 1500) through the beginning of the Age of Revolutions (c. 1800)—governments were centralized, assuming the power that once belonged to city-states and feudal lords, but the rule of monarchs like Queen Elizabeth I was still absolute, just as it had been understood in earlier historical periods. The monarch was seen as God’s deputy on earth, and the divine right of kings—the theory that the monarch derives from God (as opposed to the people or some other source) his/her power

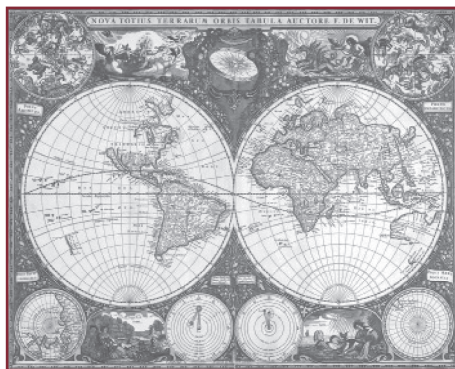
to rule and authority—was a cherished doctrine. It was this doctrine that condemned rebellion as an act of disobedience against both the state and God.

The politics of religion constantly threatened Elizabeth's reign, even though it was one of the most secure that England had known for hundreds of years. As the daughter of Henry VIII's marriage following his divorce from Catherine of Aragon, Elizabeth was regarded by many Catholics as an illegitimate child—and thus an illegitimate monarch. Upon her ascension to the throne, Elizabeth I inherited the rule of a country that, in the wake of the Protestant Reformation, was engaged in the process of attempting to make sense of its own history. Religious power changed hands during the early modern period with astonishing rapidity.

Stephen Greenblatt reminds us that within the possibility of living memory, England had been transformed: from a highly conservative Roman Catholicism (in the 1520s Henry VIII had fiercely attacked Luther and had been rewarded by the pope with the title “Defender of the Faith”): first, to Catholicism under the supreme head of the king; then to a wary, tentative Protestantism; to a more radical Protestantism; to a renewed and militant Roman Catholicism; and then, with Elizabeth and James, to Protestantism once again. The English were living in a world where few people had clear memories of a time without religious confusion. Since, under Elizabeth, England had returned to Protestantism, the Church of England's government was held under the direct authority of the crown (and England's conforming Protestant clergy) during this period.

In addition, Elizabethan England was a smaller, more isolated country than it had been previously or would be subsequently. It had withdrawn from its extensive empire on the Continent, and its explorations of the New World had barely begun. There was a period of internal economic development as Elizabeth ignored the counsel of her advisors and kept out of war until the attempted invasion by Spain and the Great Armada in 1588. England's economy was still based in agriculture, and its farmers were poor and embittered by strife with rich landowners who “enclosed” what was once the farmers' cropland for pastures. Uprisings and food riots were commonplace in the rural area surrounding Stratford-upon-Avon, where Shakespeare grew up. London, then the largest city of Europe, was a city of contrasts: the richest and the poorest of England lived there, side by side. While many bettered themselves in a developing urban economy, unemployment was a serious problem. As England eventually began what would be a long transition

from an economy based mostly in agriculture to one of increased reliance upon trade and the manufacture of goods, both cities and social structures would rapidly evolve—it was a time of change and social mobility. For the first time in English history, a rising middle class aspired to the wealth and status of the aristocracy.



As Elizabeth had no heir, the politics of succession posed a real threat to the nation's peace throughout her reign, and Elizabeth I finally died childless in 1603. The crown passed to her cousin James VI, King of Scotland, who became England's King James I. Ruling from 1603 to 1625 (Shakespeare died in 1616), James I was famously responsible for overseeing a new translation of the English bible—the 1611 King James Version—which, with its powerful syntax, remains a legacy of this fertile time, just as Shakespeare's canon has.

But national peace was never quite secured as the reign of James I was also troubled with political and religious controversy. It would be James's son, Charles I, who was beheaded in the English civil wars of the 1640s for tyrannically abusing what he believed was his divinely ordained power.

<sup>1</sup>Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*, (New York: Norton, 2004): 93-94.



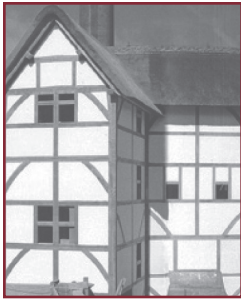
## Teacher Resource Center

**Teachers, looking for new ideas?** Check out our Teacher

Resource Center, located on the Theater's fourth level. In addition to its primary focus on teaching Shakespeare in performance, the collection includes a number of biographies, history books, scholarly criticism, periodicals and books for young readers about Shakespeare's life and times. The collection also includes reference materials and dictionaries that specifically target Shakespeare's language.

**Call the Education Department at 312.595.5678 to schedule a visit—on your own or with your colleagues.**





## The English Renaissance Theater

**A** time of historical transition, of incredible social upheaval and change, the English Renaissance provided fertile ground for creative innovation. The early modern period stands as the bridge between England's very recent medieval past and its near future in the centuries commonly referred to as the Age of Exploration, or the Enlightenment. When the English Renaissance is considered within its wider historical context, it is perhaps not surprising that the early modern period produced so many important dramatists and literary luminaries, with William Shakespeare as a significant example.

Because of its unique placement at a crossroad in history, the English Renaissance served as the setting for a number of momentous historical events: the radical re-conception of the English state, the beginnings of a new economy of industry, an explosion of exploration and colonialism, and the break with traditional religion as the Church of England separated from the Catholic Church. It is perhaps this last example of cultural upheaval—the changes brought from Continental Europe by the Protestant Reformation—that provides us with a useful lens to examine the culture of theater in England during this period, in particular.

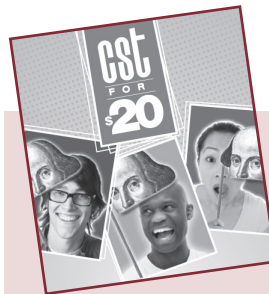
While we can see that Shakespeare lived through a transitional time, and we can understand that rapid change often fosters innovation, we may still be led to ask what could have influenced Shakespeare's dramatic sensibilities. What kind of theater did he encounter as a child or young man that may have made an impression upon him? It is commonly acknowledged by scholars today that Shakespeare may have developed his love for the theater by watching acting troupes that were still traveling from town to town during the middle decades of the sixteenth century—the early modern successors to a long heritage of English theater carried over from the Middle Ages. These traveling performers often enacted important stories from the Bible, staged tales of mystery and miracles, or presented their audiences with the stories of the lives of saints and heroes of the faith.

These traveling companies would move around the countryside in flatbed, horse-drawn carts, which did triple duty as transportation, stage, and storage for props and costumes. They would pull into a town square, into an inn yard or the courtyard of a country estate or college, and transform that

space into a theater. People gathered around to watch, some standing on the ground in front of the players' stage, some leaning over the rails from balconies above to view the action on the impromptu stage below.

But during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as the Protestant Reformation gained a surer footing in England, the English theater was caught between conflicting ideas about the value and purpose of drama. Many officials of the Protestant Reformation desired to squash these traveling performances for their strong Catholic sensibilities; and even as late as 1606 James I passed legislation to remove all treatment of religious matters from the English playhouses.

But as the stories enacted in the newly constructed public theaters became more secular, public officials scorned the theater as immoral and frivolous. The theaters just outside London's walls came to be feared as places where moral and social corruption spread. The authorities frequently shut them down during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries when the city was menaced by the plague and, frequently too, by political rioting. When the theaters were open, the Master of the Revels had to read and approve every word of a new play before it could be staged. But the practical enforcement of such measures was often sketchy at best, and playing companies themselves found plenty of ways around the strictures of the theatrical censors.



### CST for \$20

Chicago Shakespeare is committed to making our productions accessible for everyone, so CST for \$20 was designed to fit the budget of students. We have allocated thousands of tickets across the entire season, giving our friends under 35 the opportunity to see world-class theater at an everyday price. Anyone under 35 can buy up to two \$20 tickets per production. You and your students will be receiving information on CST for \$20 when you come to the Theater.

**You can find out more at**  
[www.chicagoshakes.com/cst20](http://www.chicagoshakes.com/cst20)



A man who would later become an associate of Shakespeare's, James Burbage, built the first commercial theater in England in 1576, in the decade prior to Shakespeare's own arrival on the London theater scene. Burbage skirted rigid restrictions governing entertainment in London by placing his theater just outside the city walls, in a community with the unglamorous name of "Shoreditch." Burbage was not the only one to dodge the severe rules of the Common Council of London by setting up shop in Shoreditch. His neighbors were other businesses of marginal repute, including London's brothels and bear-baiting arenas. Actors in Shakespeare's day were legally given the status of "vagabonds." They were considered little better than common criminals unless they could secure the patronage of a nobleman or, better still, the monarch.

Shakespeare and his fellow actors managed to secure both. They provided popular entertainment at Queen Elizabeth I's court as the Lord Chamberlain's Men, and they continued to enjoy court patronage after King James I came to the throne in 1603, when they became the King's Men. Their success at court gave Shakespeare and his fellow shareholders in the Lord Chamberlain's company the funds to build the new Globe playhouse in 1599. The Globe then joined a handful of other theaters located just out of the city's jurisdiction as one of the first public theaters in England.

All kinds of people came to plays at the Globe, and they came in great numbers—a full house in the Globe could see as many as 3,000 people. The audience typically arrived well before the play began to meet friends, drink ale, and snack on the refreshments sold at the plays. An outing to the theater was a highly social and communal event and might take half the day. It was more like tailgating at a football game, or going with friends to a rock concert, than our experience of attending theater today.

Affluent patrons paid two to three pence or more for gallery seats (like the two levels of balcony seating at Chicago Shakespeare Theater), while the "common folk"—shopkeepers, artisans, and apprentices—stood for a penny, about a day's wages for a skilled worker. The audience of the English Renaissance playhouse was a diverse and demanding group, and so it is often noted that Shakespeare depicted characters and situations that appealed to every cross-section of early modern English society. Audience appeal was a driving force for the theater as a business venture, and so during this period most new plays had short runs and were seldom revived. The acting companies were always in rehearsal for new shows and,

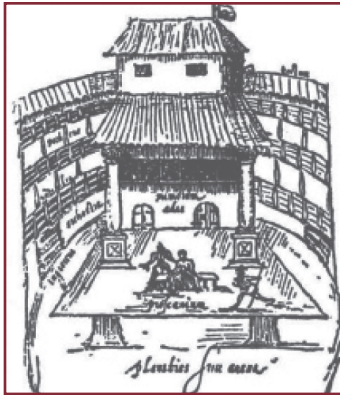
because of the number of ongoing and upcoming productions, most plays were rehearsed for just a few days.

There was, of course, no electricity for lighting, so all plays were performed in daylight. Sets and props were bare and basic. A throne, table or bed had to be brought on stage during the action since English Renaissance plays were written to be performed without scene breaks or intermissions. For example,

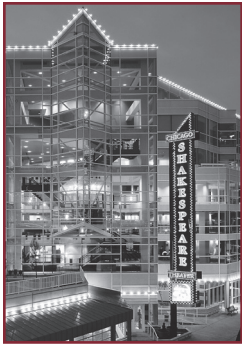
when stage directions in *Macbeth* indicate that "a banquet is prepared," the stage keepers likely prepared the banquet in full view of the audience. From what scholars can best reconstruct about performance conventions, Shakespeare's plays were performed primarily in "contemporary dress"—that is, the clothes of Shakespeare's time—regardless of the play's historical setting. Company members with tailoring skills sewed many of the company's stock costumes, and hand-me-downs from the English aristocracy often provided the elegant costumes for the play's nobility. Because women were not permitted to act on the English stage until 1660, female roles were performed by boys or young men, their male

physique disguised with elaborate dresses and wigs. The young actors were readily accepted as "women" by the audience.

After an extremely productive creative period spanning about 100 years—often called the "Golden Age" of the English theater—the Puritans, now in power of the government, succeeded in 1642 in closing the theaters altogether. The public theaters did not reopen until the English monarchy was restored and Charles II came to the throne in 1660. A number of theaters, including the Globe, were not open very long before the Great Fire of London destroyed them in 1666. The fire, combined with the eighteen years of Commonwealth rule—the so-called Interregnum ("between kings")—led to the loss of many of the primary sources that would have provided us with further evidence of the staging traditions of Shakespeare's theater. The new theater of the Restoration approached plays, including Shakespeare's, very differently, often rewriting and adapting original scripts to suit the audience's contemporary tastes. So it is left to scholars of early modern English drama to reconstruct the practices of Renaissance theater from clues left behind. ♦



An Elizabethan sketch of the original Swan



## Courtyard-style Theater

Chicago Shakespeare Theater's unique performance space reflects elements of both the first public playhouses in London and the courtyards of inns temporarily transformed into theaters, in which the young Shakespeare might first have acquired his love of the stage. The interior of the Globe playhouse, opened in 1599, was simple, and similar to that of Chicago Shakespeare Theater—a raised platform for the stage surrounded by an open, circular area, with seating on three levels, one above the other. Both theaters use a thrust stage with an open performance area upstage; basically, the entire performance space is in the shape of a capital "T." With the audience seated on three sides of the thrust stage, the play is staged in the middle of them. An architect for Chicago Shakespeare Theater describes the experience of theater staged in this way: "You're the scenery. You're the special effects. And the people you see performing this play are performing it in front, and out of, you."

If you think about a more traditional theater's proscenium arch "framing" what is (not literally) a two-dimensional stage picture behind it, the thrust stage by contrast creates a three-dimensional picture for an audience that surrounds it on three sides. The people sitting in the side seats have the closest interaction with the performers, and the performers with them. The play unfolds between the audience members seated along the sides, and the actors draw upon the responses of the audience (laughter, gasps, nervous shifting in chairs when tension mounts) as they perform. As an audience member, your facial expressions and body language serve both as the focal point of the actors' energy and the backdrop for the other audience members seated across from you. Architect David Taylor and his company, Theatre Projects Consultants, worked closely with Chicago Shakespeare Theater's leadership to design this courtyard theater. "It's important that we don't lose the performer among the faces, but it's essential to understand that every single face is a live piece of scenery reflecting and framing what's going on," Taylor explains. "That's the reason why the courtyard theater shape is such a wonderful historical springboard for modern theater design."

"The backdrop and the scenery for Shakespeare is the human race," Taylor notes, "so we're putting Shakespeare into its proper context by making human faces the backdrop for those sitting in any seat in the theater." According to Taylor:

"This close, close relationship with the performers on stage is the very essence of the courtyard experience. The courtyard experience was about leaning out of windows. It was about throwing open the windows in the courtyard when the stage was brought through on a cart and leaning out and interacting." Audience members seated in the galleries at Chicago Shakespeare Theater are encouraged to use the "leaning rails" to watch the players below—like those watching from an inn's balconies centuries ago when a traveling troupe set up its temporary stage.

The actors and the audience share the experience of seeing and interacting with one another. Taylor thinks that actors benefit tremendously from the courtyard design: "They're not looking at people sitting in straight rows, disconnected from everybody around them in big seats. There's a sense of community in the space, a sense of embracing the performer on stage." Actors are always fed by the energy generated from their audience. The design of Chicago Shakespeare Theater offers a feast of feedback to the actors on its stage.

Other theaters have been modeled upon the Elizabethan experience of courtyard theater, perhaps most notably the Royal Shakespeare Company's Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon. The Swan served as a model for Chicago Shakespeare Theater. Besides their deep thrust stages that were designed to create an intimate relationship between actors and audience, prominent architectural elements in both theaters are the brick walls that surround the audience and natural wood that creates a feeling of warmth. Brick is an aesthetic choice but, due to its particular design, it also serves as an acoustical choice. The angle of the bricks in the side walls helps diffuse sound, sending it in different directions throughout the theater. The sound, lighting, and rigging systems are all state-of-the-art. Chicago Shakespeare Theater's design accommodates a wide array of possibilities for structuring and using the performance space. ♦



Chicago Shakespeare Theater's Courtyard Theater

## Dramatis Personae

### THE ROYAL HOUSE OF BRITAIN

**LEAR** *King of Britain*

**EARL OF KENT** *a loyal nobleman, later disguised as "Caius"*

**FOOL** *Lear's jester*

**GONERIL** *Lear's eldest daughter*

**DUKE OF ALBANY** *her husband*

**OSWALD** *her steward*

**REGAN** *Lear's middle daughter*

**DUKE OF CORNWALL** *her husband*

**CORDELIA** *Lear's youngest daughter*

### THE GLOUCESTER FAMILY

**EARL OF GLOUCESTER**

**EDGAR** *his elder son and heir, later disguised as "Poor Tom"*

**EDMUND** *his illegitimate son*

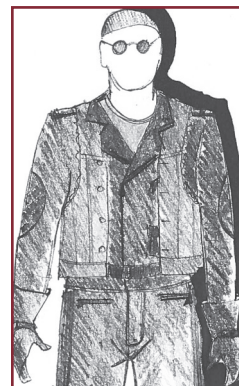
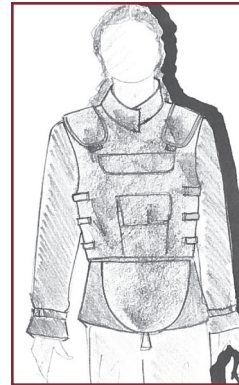
### OTHER CHARACTERS

**DUKE OF BURGUNDY** *suitor to Cordelia*

**KING OF FRANCE** *suitor and, later, husband to Cordelia*

**OLD SERVANT** *to Gloucester*

Captain, Herald, Knights, gentlemen, servants,  
soldiers, messengers, citizens



Sketches by Costume  
Designer Mark Bailey for  
CST's 2014 Production of  
*King Lear*.



# TIMELINE

## 1300

- 1326** Founding of universities at Oxford and Cambridge
- 1348** Boccaccio's *Decameron*
- 1349** Bubonic Plague kills one-third of England's population
- 1387** Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

## 1400

- ca.1440** Johannes Gutenberg invents printing press
- 1472** Dante's *Divine Comedy* first printed
- 1492** Christopher Columbus lands at Cuba
- 1497** Vasco da Gama sails around Cape of Good Hope

## 1500

- 1501-4** Michelangelo's *David* sculpture
- 1503** Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*
- 1512** Copernicus' *Commentariolus* published, theorizing that Earth and other planets revolve around sun
- 1518** License to import 4,000 African slaves to Spanish American colonies granted to Lorens de Gominzot
- 1519** Ferdinand Magellan's trip around the world
- 1519** Conquest of Mexico by Cortez
- 1522** Luther's translation of the New Testament

## 1525

- 1531** Henry VIII recognized as Supreme Head of the Church of England
- 1533** Henry VIII secretly marries Anne Boleyn, and is excommunicated by Pope
- 1539** Hernando de Soto explores Florida
- 1540** G.L. de Cardenas "discovers" Grand Canyon
- 1541** Hernando de Soto "discovers" the Mississippi

## 1550

- 1558** Coronation of Queen Elizabeth I
- 1562** John Hawkins begins slave trade between Guinea and West Indies
- 1564** Birth of William Shakespeare and Galileo
- 1565** Pencils first manufactured in England
- 1570** Pope Pius V excommunicates Queen Elizabeth
- 1573** Francis Drake sees the Pacific Ocean

## 1575

- 1576** Mayor of London forbids theatrical performances in the City  
Burbage erects first public theater in England  
(the "Theater" in Shoreditch)
- 1577** Drake's trip around the world
- 1580** *Essays* of Montaigne published
- 1582** Marriage license issued for William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway  
Daughter Susanna Shakespeare christened
- 1585** Christening of son Hamnet and twin Judith

## SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

### ca. 1592-1595

#### Comedies

Love's Labor's Lost  
The Comedy of Errors  
The Two Gentlemen of Verona  
A Midsummer Night's Dream  
The Taming of the Shrew

#### Histories

1,2,3 Henry V  
Richard III  
King John

#### Tragedies

Titus Andronicus  
Romeo and Juliet

#### Sonnets

Probably written  
in this period

- 1587** Mary Queen of Scots executed
  - 1588** Destruction of the Spanish Armada
  - 1592** Shakespeare listed with the Lord Chamberlain's Men
  - 1593-4** Plague closes London playhouses for 20 months
  - 1595** Coat of arms granted to Shakespeare's father, John
  - 1596** Death of son Hamnet, age 11  
Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*
  - 1597** Shakespeare, one of London's most successful playwrights,  
buys New Place, one of the grandest houses in Stratford-upon-Avon
  - 1599** Globe Theatre opens, as home to the Lord Chamberlain's Men,  
with Shakespeare as part-owner
- 
- 1600**
  - 1602** Oxford University's Bodleian Library opens
  - 1603** Death of Queen Elizabeth, coronation of James I  
Lord Chamberlain's Men become the King's Men upon endorsement of James I
  - 1603-11** Plague closes London playhouses for at least 68 months (nearly 6 years)
  - 1605** Cervantes' *Don Quixote Part 1* published
  - 1607** Marriage of Susanna Shakespeare to Dr. John Hall  
Founding of Jamestown, Virginia, first English settlement on  
American mainland
  - 1608** *A true relation of such Occurances and Accidents of Note as hath passed  
in Virginia* by John Smith  
Galileo constructs astronomical telescope
  - 1609** Blackfriars Theatre, London's first commercial indoor theater,  
becomes winter home of the King's Men
  - 1611** "King James Version" of the Bible published
  - 1613** Globe Theatre destroyed by fire
  - 1614** Globe Theatre rebuilt
  - 1615** Galileo faces the Inquisition for the first time
  - 1616** Judith Shakespeare marries Thomas Quinney  
Death of William Shakespeare, age 52
  - 1618** Copernican system condemned by Roman Catholic Church
  - 1619** First African slaves arrive in Virginia
  - 1623** The First Folio, the first compiled text of Shakespeare's complete works published

## 1625

- 1625** James I dies, succeeded by Charles I
- 1633** Galileo recants before the Inquisition
- 1636** Harvard College founded in Cambridge, Massachusetts
- 1642** Civil War in England begins
- 1642** Puritans close theaters throughout England until following the Restoration  
of the Monarchy, 18 years later, with Charles II
- 1649** Charles I beheaded
- 1649** Commonwealth declared

## ca. 1596-1600

### Comedies

The Merchant of Venice  
Much Ado About Nothing  
The Merry Wives of Windsor  
As You Like It  
Twelfth Night

### Histories

Richard II  
1, 2 Henry IV  
Henry V

### Tragedies

Julius Caesar

## ca. 1601-1609

### Comedies

Troilus and Cressida  
All's Well That Ends Well

### Tragedies

Hamlet  
Othello

#### ♦ King Lear

Macbeth  
Antony and Cleopatra  
Timon of Athens  
Coriolanus  
Measure for Measure

## ca. 1609-1613

### Romances

Pericles  
Cymbeline  
The Winter's Tale  
The Tempest  
The Two Noble Kinsmen

### Histories

Henry VIII

# KING LEAR



## The Story

**T**he aging king of England chooses to abdicate his power and divide the kingdom between his three daughters—their shares to be determined by the depth of devotion each professes. His elder daughters, Goneril and Regan, lavish their father with empty words; his youngest, Cordelia, chooses silence. Enraged, Lear disinherits Cordelia, splitting the kingdom now between her sisters—then banishing his loyal advisor, the Earl of Kent, when he speaks out against a king's irrational impulsivity. Cordelia, without title, land or family, is embraced by the King of France as his wife and together leave her country behind.

Lear's counselor Gloucester cannot see into the hearts of his children any more than can his king. Deceived by his bastard son, Edmund, into believing that Edgar plots his father's murder, Gloucester disowns his elder son and heir. His position usurped by his brother, Edgar takes refuge in the countryside, disguised as a homeless madman, called "Poor Tom."

Goneril and Regan prove unworthy stewards of their father and kingdom, and Lear, with his Fool and entourage of knights, makes an unwelcome guest in their homes. Dispossessed and fearing insanity, Lear rages out into the night and a torrential storm. His Fool and Kent, disguised as a servant, follow Lear and upon the heath meet "Poor Tom." Vying for power—and for Edmund—the sisters soon turn upon each other. Betrayed by his son and mutilated at the hands of Regan and her husband Cornwall, Gloucester seeks out death.

France declares war upon a divided England, and Cordelia returns with troops to restore Lear's throne. Reunited, father and daughter are thrown into prison, and there sentenced to execution by Edmund. An unknown knight appears to challenge Edmund in combat, and the future of family, king and kingdom hang in the balance. ♦



## Act-by-Act Synopsis

### Act One

**K**ing Lear intends to distribute his power to his three daughters by dividing his land amongst them—but only after each publicly professes their love to him. **Goneril** and **Regan**, his two elder daughters, proceed to lavishly flatter Lear. When it is **Cordelia's** turn, however, his youngest answers honestly that she loves Lear only as a daughter should. Angered by her austere response, Lear denies his youngest daughter her dowry, and divides Britain between Goneril and Regan. Lear banishes the loyal Earl of Kent when the nobleman attempts to speak on behalf of Cordelia.

**The King of France** still wishes to marry Cordelia, despite her loss of entitlement. Having divided Britain and all of his possessions but for an entourage of 100 knights and servants, Lear plans to take turns visiting Goneril and Regan. He decides to travel first to Goneril's, bringing along his entire entourage. **The Earl of Gloucester's** illegitimate son, **Edmund**, plots to usurp the inheritance of his legitimate, elder half-brother, **Edgar**. Edmund shows his father a letter from Edgar that Edmund himself has forged, which solicits Edmund to unite with him in murdering their father. Gloucester initially doubts that Edgar could possibly conceive of such a plot, but Edmund eventually succeeds in arousing his father's suspicion. Edmund then convinces his brother that Gloucester is suddenly so enraged at Edgar that he may attempt to hurt him. Edgar, ignorant of any offense against his father, suspects that someone must be plotting against him. He decides to arm and protect himself.

Lear and his followers, living now with Goneril and her husband, the **Duke of Albany**, soon wear out their welcome. Goneril is upset that Lear struck her faithful steward, **Oswald**, for making fun of Lear's Fool. Goneril tells Oswald to be rude to her father and to inform Lear that she refuses to see him. Enraged, Lear packs up and heads for Regan's estate. Goneril writes a letter to her sister to warn her of Lear's arrival. Kent, still loyal to the king who banished him, disguises himself as a servant, and joins Lear's entourage. After chiding Lear for his foolish actions, the Fool offers the disguised Kent his fool's coxcomb for wanting to follow a man so down in his fortune. Kent is asked to travel ahead to inform Regan and her husband, the **Duke of Cornwall**, of Lear's arrival.



## Act Two

Edmund learns that Regan and Cornwall are heading toward his father's castle due to rumored difficulties between Cornwall and Albany. Convinced his brother that Gloucester's anger has progressed to a murderous rage, Edmund persuades his brother to flee for his life. As their father approaches, Edmund pretends to be chasing Edgar out of the castle. Wounding himself, Edmund claims that Edgar attacked him when he refused to join his brother's plot to kill their father. Witness to this staged fight, Gloucester is convinced of Edgar's villainy and makes Edmund his heir. Now a hunted outlaw, Edgar can be killed by anyone on sight. He disguises himself as a mad beggar named **Poor Tom o' Bedlam**.

Kent, still in a servant's disguise, meets Oswald at Gloucester's castle and harasses him for having been so rude to Lear. Cornwall orders Kent be set in the stocks. The Fool mocks Kent, then tells him that Lear's fortune is in decline. Nonetheless Kent and the Fool remain loyal to the King. Arriving at Gloucester's, Lear learns of his servant's humiliating punishment. He is enraged when Regan and Goneril refuse to speak with him. When his daughters finally appear, they inform Lear that if he wishes to lodge with them, he must dismiss his entire entourage. In a fury, Lear bolts out of the castle into a violent storm. Regan and Goneril close Gloucester's castle doors against the storm and their father.

## Act Three

Freed from the stocks, Kent hears from a stranger he meets that the King and his Fool are said to be wandering alone through the countryside. Kent tells the man about the mounting tension between Cornwall and Albany, and that Cordelia's husband, the King of France, is planning an invasion of England. Kent asks the stranger to seek out Cordelia and inform her of Lear's situation. When Kent does find Lear and the Fool, he finds an old man overcome by madness, desperately raging against a terrible storm. The Fool urges Lear to take cover. Retreating to a nearby shelter, they encounter Edgar, disguised as Poor Tom. The mad king seeks solace in the mad beggar, who now offers companionship more reassuring to him than his other more familiar caretakers.

At his castle, Gloucester informs Edmund of the mounting tension between Albany and Cornwall, and of the King of France's plan to invade England in order to restore Lear to power. Gloucester reveals to his son his plan to find and assist Lear. Gloucester asks him to remain silent about his absence when he is gone, but Edmund seizes the opportunity to expose his father's plan to Cornwall. Edmund is duly awarded with his father's title and position. Gloucester discovers Lear with his small entourage on the heath, including Edgar, whom he does

not recognize as his own son. He convinces them to follow him to a sturdier shelter. Lear holds an imaginary trial for Goneril and Regan, in which the Fool, Edgar and Kent must play the jurors. Gloucester tells them of plots against the King's life, and urges them to take Lear to Dover.

Gloucester returns to his castle to discover that he has been marked a traitor by Cornwall who, urged on by Goneril, gouges out Gloucester's eyes. Regan murders the servant who tries to protect his blinded master, but only after the servant deals a mortal blow to Cornwall. The sightless Gloucester is thrown out of the castle to "smell his way to Dover" just as he realizes Edmund's deception. Led by an old servant, Gloucester heads toward Dover in hopes of finding Lear.

## Act Four

Gloucester encounters Edgar along the way, still disguised as Tom. Gloucester asks the old servant leading him to turn over some of his clothing to the naked madman. He asks his servant to depart, wishing Poor Tom to guide him now, and tells Tom to lead him to the edge of the cliffs. Guiding his father to an open field, Edgar convinces the blind man that he is at the cliff's precipice. Gloucester leaps from what he imagines to be a fatal height. He faints, landing upon the flat ground. When Gloucester regains consciousness, Edgar pretends to be a spectator who, from the bottom of the cliff, witnessed the jump. Assuming a new, more refined voice and identity, Edgar tells his father that he saw Tom depart. He convinces Gloucester that only the gods could have preserved him from such a fall. Goneril returns to her home with Edmund. Oswald informs them that her husband, Albany, appeared pleased to learn that France was advancing and was angered by his wife's treatment of her father. Goneril voices her desire for Edmund, who expresses his devotion to her, then leaves to inform Cornwall and Regan of the French invasion. A messenger comes with news of Cornwall's death. Goneril realizes that her now-widowed sister is better positioned than she to win Edmund.

Near Dover, Kent learns that the King of France has been forced to return to his country to attend to business, and that Cordelia now leads the French invasion. When she hears that Lear is said to be wandering about nearby, she sends a search party for him. Lear is in a deep sleep when he is brought to Cordelia. He awakens disoriented, believing Cordelia an angel. When he fully regains consciousness, Lear recognizes his daughter, and humbly begs her forgiveness. Cordelia kneels before him, and replies simply that there is no cause to ask for forgiveness.

# KING LEAR

As they see Lear's sanity restored, Kent hears rumors that Edmund is now in charge of Cornwall's army. To her servant Oswald, Regan confides her anxieties about the relationship between Edmund and her sister. She professes her intent to marry Edmund, and asks that Oswald deter her sister from pursuing Edmund. She orders Oswald to kill Gloucester. Oswald finds Edgar and Gloucester, but in his attempt to murder Gloucester, Edgar intervenes, killing Oswald. Before dying, Oswald asks the still-disguised Edgar to deliver Goneril's letter to Edmund, revealing to him her plan to kill her husband, Albany.

## Act Five

**A**lban y agrees to join Edmund and Regan against the invading French army. Edgar secretly gives Goneril's treacherous letter to Albany, and promises to produce a knight who can prove the letter's validity. In private, Edmund reveals his indecision whether to accept Regan, Goneril, or neither, as his mistress. He talks of his intention to kill Albany after the defeat of the French, and of his plan to execute Lear and Cordelia. The French army is defeated. Lear and Cordelia are taken prisoner, and Edmund gives the order for their secret executions.

Regan and Goneril are in a heated argument over Edmund when Regan falls to the ground, poisoned by Goneril. Albany accuses Edmund and Goneril of treason, and summons the promised knight for proof. The trumpets are sounded. Edgar appears, disguised as the knight, exposing Edmund's treachery. Edmund denies the charges. In hand-to-hand combat, Edgar fatally wounds Edmund. Albany reveals to Goneril that he possesses her treacherous letter to Edmund. Goneril takes her own life. Edgar reveals his true identity, and recounts the story of his experiences as Poor Tom. He tells them that Gloucester, learning of his son's true identity was, so overcome by emotion, that he succumbed to death. Edmund orders a messenger to call off the executions of Lear and Cordelia. But the order comes too late, and Lear returns from the prison carrying Cordelia's body. Albany restores Lear to power, as the old king dies of grief, and Albany, Kent and Edgar are left as the rulers of Britain. ♦

## Shakespeare, Tragedy and Us

**W**e all know something about tragedy: we lose someone we love; we must leave a place we have called home; we make a decision that leads to consequences we never wanted. Tragedy is a part of our lives as humans, despite all of our attempts to keep it at arm's length. So why choose to read tragedy? We read tragedy for many of the same reasons we read other forms of literature—because we respond to stories that show us people who are somehow like us, versions of ourselves under other circumstances. When we feel that characters bear some resemblance to us—are relatable to us in some way, although they may be very different—we become interested and can sympathize with them. But when a story communicates a certain kind of emotional truth to us, it goes beyond touching our sympathy. As we come to understand the people in it, we can also reach some understanding about our world, about ourselves and the people we know, and about the tragedies we have to face in our own lives.

Where and how do we find *our* story in *theirs*? Just like our own experiences of life, Shakespeare's tragedies move in and out of joy and sorrow, farce and gravity—how often in the course of a single day do we experience emotional extremes? Or the characters will face some very difficult choice—as we sometimes must—and the story follows them as they wrestle with making their choices. In tragedy, it is common that the hero will face some “fearful passage”—a path traveled for the first time where old answers and old behaviors don't work. The stakes are very high, and the risk to the individual, to a family, and sometimes to an entire society, is extremely great.

As we follow the characters on their journey, critic Russ McDonald warns against our traditional hunt for the hero's “tragic flaw”—the character trait, or even error in judgment, that one may say leads to the hero's downfall. Labeling the hero as inherently weak and not up to the challenge, we're inclined to judge him critically, as someone who gets what he deserves. But the heroes of tragedy typically display great strengths, says McDonald. Their tragedy lies not so much in a weakness of character, but in a “kind of tragic incompatibility between the hero's particular form of greatness and the earthly circumstances that he or she is forced to confront.”<sup>1</sup> McDonald points out how differently the heroes of Shakespeare's tragedies speak, not only from us, but also from all the other characters around them. Their poetic language, he says, expresses their “vast imaginations.” They see the world more completely than do the rest of us.

The tragic hero imagines something out of the ordinary, seeking to transcend the compromises of the familiar. We both

admire that imaginative leap and acknowledge its impossibility. The contest between “world” and “will” that exists for those characters brings misery, sometimes insanity, and often death; however, it also produces meaning and magnificence. Through his journey, the tragic hero learns something about himself and about his life, but it is an understanding which comes from a great deal of loss and pain. It has been noted by some scholars that in Shakespeare’s earlier tragedies—such as *Romeo and Juliet*—that the hero and heroine do not gain insight from their fated tragedies. Instead, it is the suffering of those left behind who gain wisdom by facing the consequences of their own actions. In his later tragedies, such as *King Lear*, lessons are internalized into the consciousness of Shakespeare’s heroes and heroines through their tragic journeys.

*King Lear* may make us question what is truly tragic in life, what matters, and what deludes us into believing it matters. At the beginning of the play, Lear shows little sensitivity toward his own daughters, let alone the subjects under his rule. He is a powerful, wealthy, and self-important man. But as he is stripped of all material comforts, political clout, and family support on his subsequent journey, Lear is left with nothing; it is when he is cast out into the storm that he discovers the humanity of others, what it means to be human himself, and even the significance of humiliation and suffering. Through his own experience of suffering, Lear is able to cast off the blinders that prevented him from empathizing with others.

**The tragic hero imagines something out of the ordinary, seeking to transcend the compromises of the familiar. We both admire that imaginative leap and acknowledge its impossibility.**

While the tragic characters and events portrayed in *King Lear* seem larger than life, elements of the story may directly relate to each of us in different ways. Chances are, no matter how hard we might wish to the contrary, we will be forced to confront some of the experiences that characters in *King Lear* do. We may already know what it feels to be the child of a detached, self-absorbed parent. We probably know someone who is full of hatred or envy—toward a parent, brother or

sister. Perhaps we have had to face the consequences of our own deceit—or possibly of our too-blatant honesty. It is very likely that we will be required to go through some “fearful passage” of our own, where old ways of thinking and behaving

don’t work, or that we will have to accept the responsibility of choices we’ve made while wishing desperately that what’s done might be undone.

What makes theatrical art different from life is precisely its transient nature—the play, which exists for only a moment in time, will end. The damage that is permanent and irreversible to tragedy’s heroes is temporary for us as its viewers. But if we enter that world for a time and come to know its characters, we may really come to know ourselves more deeply—we learn. And when our own “fearful passage” comes along, something we have learned along the way about ourselves and the nature of others may help us make our choice. ♦

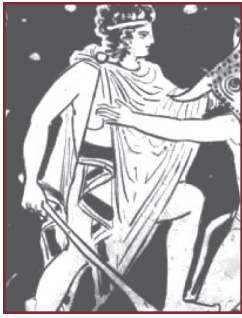
<sup>1</sup> Russ McDonald, “The Flaw in the Flaw,” *Shakespeare Set Free: Teaching Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, ed. Peggy O’Brien (New York: Washington Square Press, 1993): 9.



Photo by Jennifer Girard, Jr.

From left: Richard Kneeland as King Lear and Susan Hart as Cordelia in CST’s 1993 production of *King Lear*, directed by Barbara Gaines





## Something Borrowed, Something New...

### Shakespeare's Sources for *King Lear*

Throughout much of history in cultures around the world, stories were not understood in the same way in which we may think about them today. Because so few people were literate during the English Renaissance (the movable-type printing press was invented only a century before Shakespeare's lifetime), much of history and the tales that people knew were communicated via an oral tradition, passed from one generation to another through memory and recitation. Even after literature was being printed, there were no copyright laws and material was borrowed freely among writers—although conceptions of possessive authorship would begin to evolve soon after Shakespeare's death. Shakespeare stands at the crossroads of changing ideas about intellectual property—and even changing ideas about the power of the spoken and the written word. And so the creation and the preservation of his work come out of both this older oral tradition of communal storytelling and newly evolving concepts of the power of text and of authorial possession.

This rich cultural heritage of swirling intellectual influence is especially useful to bear in mind as we examine the likely sources for Shakespeare's *King Lear*. It is well known that the playwright relied heavily on the weaving together of historical, contemporary, dramatic, and poetic influences with narrative elements of his own imagining. *King Lear*, which threads together these many borrowings into one complex and masterful plot, is no exception to Shakespeare's common creative practice. The story of the old *King Lear* and his three daughters was actually conceived long before Shakespeare wrote his play—in fact, scholars have identified at least forty different versions of the basic plot.

Scholar R.A. Foakes maintains that it often seems to be taken for granted that Shakespeare never invented where he could borrow (searching for the sources of Shakespeare's plays has long been a minor scholarly industry), but that the word "source" is perhaps "too specific and too narrow in relation to most echoes of other works found in *King Lear*," in particular. Shakespeare read widely and had a "deep and lively engagement with the culture of his own and preceding ages."<sup>1</sup>

Because the philosophical, religious, social, and political issues interwoven in the play "can rarely be traced to a particular source," asserts Foakes, "for the most part it is more helpful to think in terms of influences or contexts."<sup>2</sup>

With its roots in Celtic legend, the story of Lear is considered a legacy of the mythology of ancient Britain. Because the origins of this story reach back so far, the distinction between legend and history is blurred, making it difficult to trace where legend ends and "factual" history begins. There is no hard-and-fast proof that a *King Lear* ever lived, short of his presence in tales passed along through oral traditions of storytelling that were eventually written down; however, it was not unusual for early historians to treat the legendary material of a nation as history. In the British imagination, the importance of the story of *King Lear* does not rest with provable facts: the story of Lear is significant because it helps establish a national identity extending beyond recorded history.

The earliest known written record of the Lear story is Geoffrey of Monmouth's medieval text *Historia regum Britanniae* (c.1136), a pseudo-historical account of Britain. It chronicles the lives of the kings of the Britons in a chronological narrative spanning a time of two thousand years, beginning with the Trojans founding the British nation and continuing until the Anglo-Saxons assumed control of much of the island around the seventh century. Although read uncritically into the sixteenth century, the story has been attributed little value as history<sup>3</sup> since the seventeenth century because Geoffrey's account can be, at times, wildly inaccurate. However, it remains a valuable piece of medieval literature—for us because it contains the earliest known written version of the story of *King Lear*, but also because it introduced non-Welsh-speakers to the legend of King Arthur. Another likely historical resource for Shakespeare's writing of *King Lear* was Raphael Holinshed's two-volume work, *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1577-1587), a collaborative work providing a large, comprehensive description of British history which would serve as a text Shakespeare frequently consulted in writing his history plays.

While Shakespeare was certainly influenced by the history of his nation, scholars generally agree that Shakespeare's most immediate theatrical influence was likely an anonymously written play, entitled *The True Chronicle History of King Leir* (written around 1594 but not published until 1605). In *The True Chronicle History of King Leir* many of the basic elements of Shakespeare's main plot are present. King Leir decides to hand over his power to his three daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordilla, but only after they each pass his test of love. Cordilla, the youngest, fails and is cast out. Perillus, the king's counselor, is banished when he tries to protect Cordilla from her father's rashness. Perillus, strongly resembling Shakespeare's

<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. R.A. Foakes (London: Arden Shakespeare, 1997): 92-93.

<sup>2</sup> Foakes, *King Lear*, 93.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Baron, "Fifteenth-century civilization and the Renaissance," *The New Cambridge Modern History*, vol. 1: The Renaissance, 1493-1520 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1957): 56.

Kent, later becomes Leir's only companion when Gonorill and Ragan turn their father out.

Similar motifs of fathers and ungrateful daughters can be found in the ancient folk-stories of European and Asian cultures, and provide another context for Shakespeare's work of blended storytelling. In the European story of the Goosegirl-Princess, for example, a father gives a love-test to three of his daughters. The two elder daughters pass the test, but the youngest, like Cordelia, fails. However, the Goosegirl-Princess tales conclude typically with the wedding of the youngest daughter, when the father gains appreciation for her response to his love-test, and father and daughter are reconciled.

Another fairy tale with parallels to the Lear story is the tale of Cinderella. Cordelia and Cinderella have obvious connections: both are viewed as pure, virtuous, and, as the youngest of three daughters, are both faced with the cruel and covetous behavior of their older siblings. The oldest European versions of the Cinderella story were likely influenced by the writings of Geoffrey of Monmouth. However, while many of Shakespeare's probable folk influences conclude in reunion and restoration, his poetic sources<sup>4</sup> offer the darker sorts of endings that Shakespeare later adopts. In John Higgins' *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1574)—a collection of poetry in which various authors retell the lives and the tragic ends of historical figures—the Cordelia character in fact commits suicide.

The idea for the subplot of Edmund, Edgar and Gloucester (featuring a similarly dark ending) is thought to have been inspired by another poetic source—a section of Sir Philip Sidney's poem, *Arcadia* (1590). In *Arcadia*, an outcast son and his blinded father meet while seeking shelter from a violent storm. This old, blinded father is the Prince of Paphlagonia who, like King Lear, is the victim of filial ingratitude and deceit. He has two sons—Leonatus and his bastard brother, Plexirtus. Plexirtus devises a scheme to usurp the throne, which prompts the Prince's order to execute Leonatus, who must then flee as a hunted outlaw. Plexirtus blinds his father before ostracizing him. He intends to kill Leonatus and his father, but reinforcements arrive and Plexirtus is exiled. The Prince and Leonatus return to Phalagonia, where Leonatus is given the crown by his father. Reminiscent of the deaths of Lear and Gloucester, the Prince of Paphlagonia dies from overwhelming emotion and grief.

Though *The True Chronicle History of King Leir* and *Arcadia* seem to be the most probable sources consulted by

Shakespeare, there are other possible sources suggested by scholars, too. One is another probable poetic influence is Edmund Spenser's epic poem, *The Faerie Queen* (1596), which tells a story of Leyr and his daughters. In *The Faerie Queen*, Cordelia hangs herself, perhaps inspiring Shakespeare's choice for Cordelia to be executed by hanging.

While there are many possible literary and historical influences that could have conditioned Shakespeare's writing of *King Lear*, historians also look to what would have been the current events of the early modern period for informing connections to the plays. For example,

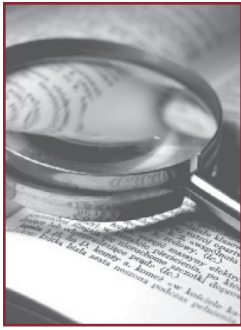
historians have noted a link between the Lear tale and a contemporary Elizabethan court case that helps to explain both the resurgence of *The True Chronicle History of King Leir* and Shakespeare's reimagining of it—in this case, contemporary events could have led to a renewed interest in the Lear story. In this case, a servant to Queen Elizabeth named Brian Annesley had three daughters, Grace, Christian and Cordell. In 1603, Grace, with the aid of her husband, attempted to have her father officially recorded as insane in order to assume responsibility of his estate. Cordell protested against her sister's intentions and managed to prevent her father from being declared a lunatic. In Annesley's will, Cordell inherited most of her father's property. Though there is no evidence that Shakespeare knew about the Brian Annesley case, the similarities are uncanny—and a reminder that life and literature are in constant dialogue.

"Identifying influences on Shakespeare's writing is a very uncertain business," writes Foakes, largely because it is difficult, "perhaps impossible, to have much sense of what literate persons absorbed as part of their educational and cultural environment, or what to them was common knowledge."<sup>5</sup> But while the specific sources or contexts for *King Lear* may remain elusive and to some extent conjectural, what seems to be of greater importance is recognizing the stunning effect that such a patchwork of influences creates. Shakespeare's extraordinary ability to "digest and put to use new elements from romance, folktales, morality plays, chronicles, and writings by his contemporaries"<sup>6</sup> assisted him in the writing of drama that is simultaneously a narrative belonging to his own imagination and the collective imagination of all Britain. ♦

<sup>4</sup> David Bevington, *The Necessary Shakespeare* (New York: Pearson, 2009): 656.

<sup>5</sup> Foakes, *King Lear*, 108.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.



## Sorting Out the Two-text Controversy

The *King Lear* script attributed to Shakespeare exists in two distinct printings—the First Quarto (Q1) and the First Folio (F), published in 1608 and 1623, respectively. Because Q1 and F are not identical documents, much critical debate has grown out of the study of their differences. One strand of the debate around this “two-text controversy” focuses on the attempt to determine which version best manifests “authorial final intent”—in other words, which version of *King Lear* is the one Shakespeare and the King’s Men intended to be the final version of the play? Furthermore, while most contemporary scholars recognize the highly collaborative nature of the Renaissance theater, some textual historians find the puzzle of attempting to pinpoint the exact words written by Shakespeare’s own hand an attractive one. Because both versions still exist in printed editions today, editors—and directors—are left with the difficult decision of choosing which text (or even how both texts) will inform their work on *King Lear*.

While the story of *King Lear* remains largely the same in both printed versions, they each feature substantive and accidental distinctions: “substantives” refer to “the words of the text as conveyors of meaning,” and “accidentals” are the “incidental features of the text such as spelling and punctuation.”<sup>1</sup> The reason for many of these differences is often attributed to the suggestion that the earlier and later editions of *King Lear* were both based upon two different “copy-texts,” or printing house sources: Q1 on Shakespeare’s “foul papers,” or handwritten manuscripts, and the First Folio upon the King’s Men’s performance prompt-book—a working copy of the play, used by an acting company, which included such information as the actors’ entrances and exits, script cuts, and music cues. There is evidence suggesting that F is a revised version of Shakespeare’s manuscript upon which the First Quarto was based, and many believe that Shakespeare made the revisions himself.

Nicholas Okes’ 1608 printing of Q1 was labeled “among Okes’s half-dozen worst-printed books of 1607-9.”<sup>2</sup> Two typesetters (called “compositors”)—and one likely an inexperienced apprentice—worked on the printing of Q1. Distinctively, Q1 lacks the stage directions present in F, and frequently displays Shakespeare’s verse as prose and vice-versa. One theory claims that Q1 was illegally printed from a stolen version of the playwright’s foul papers, and another theory suggests that

one or more of Shakespeare’s actors constructed the version from memory.

What *is* certain, however, is that the First Quarto contains about 300 lines not present in the 1623 First Folio, but lacks another 100 lines—discrepancies that help support the theory that each printing is likely to have been based upon a different copy-text. Examining the specific 300 hundred lines missing from F helps support the theory that Shakespeare may well have revised *King Lear* in collaboration with his company for performance sometime after the First Quarto’s 1608 publication. His changes might then have been recorded in the company’s promptbook, which may then have been used to print the First Folio later.

To scholar Richard Knowles, the revision of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* is “not the result of ignorant hostility to the theater, but of the closest personal experience of theatrical practice. The kinds of cuts in F *Lear* are mainly those for which it is easy to imagine purely theatrical motives.”<sup>3</sup> Knowles points out that the majority of the cuts from Q1 are in Acts 3 and 4, a logical place to target by a company member (Shakespeare himself?) intending to shorten the performance. Acts 1 and 2, introducing characters and plot exposition, cannot so easily afford to be cut; Act 5, with its carefully orchestrated resolution, is difficult to whittle down. Most of Q1’s additional lines are descriptive and, while providing useful insights and information, are not critical to the advancement of the action. With only 100 new lines, the most significant changes in the First Folio are cuts, as we have seen. Its additions are minor; many are exchanges of single words that may well have been altered by actors in performance. No new characters, plot lines or motives are introduced in F; the additional speeches of length are the Fool’s prophesy in Act 3 and three speeches given to Goneril and Regan in Act 1 and 2. The textual differences between Q1 and F, however, do affect both the overall mood and tone of *King Lear*, but these differences would ultimately have the most impact upon a reading audience for a printed *King Lear*, as opposed to a theatrical audience.

Starting with Alexander Pope in the eighteenth century, textual editors—and directors—have most commonly opted to conflate the texts of Q1 and F, incorporating from each text features that support their creative vision or academic theoretical commitments. In the production that you’ll see at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Artistic Director Barbara Gaines uses a script based on the 1623 First Folio, with the addition of a few brief sections from Q1. For example, one addition includes a short exchange between three of Gloucester’s servants immediately after his blinding (3.7). The servants show pity toward their master and make plans to help him; one makes a rude comparison between the natures of women and monsters. Another

<sup>1</sup> John Jowett, *Shakespeare and Text*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007): 191, 200. For more information, see also W.W. Greg’s “The Rationale of Copy-Text.”

<sup>2</sup> Peter W.M. Blayney, *The Texts of ‘King Lear’ and Their Origins*, Vol. 1: *Nicholas Okes and the First Quarto*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1982): 26-30, 184-187. Qtd. in William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. R.A. Foakes (London: Arden Shakespeare, 1997): 111.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Knowles, “Revision awry in Folio Lear 3.1,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 46: 1995: 32-46. Qtd. in William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. R.A. Foakes (London: Arden Shakespeare, 1997): 126.



addition Barbara Gaines makes to the F script takes place in the argument between Goneril and Albany (4.2). Lines between the two pulled in from the Q1 text increase tension and make harsher Albany's rebuke of his wife.

Lacking conclusive evidence, scholars and directors defend varying positions in the "two-text controversy" based on primary source archival research, comparative analysis, and informed judgment. In the business of theatrical production, directors must make difficult decisions about which script to use, and what cuts to make. There is little doubt that the versions (whichever text is used) of *King Lear* produced in the modern theater are the creation of Shakespeare and his company; however, the explanation of who made the changes, why they were made, and when they were made still provide fertile ground for both creative engagement and academic inquiry. ♦



## This Great Stage of Fools

**H**earing the word "fool," what comes to mind? "Don't be foolish!" "You're acting like a fool!" "Quit fooling around!" We may find "foolishness" entertaining, but we don't really associ-

ate it with wisdom, intellect, or insightfulness today. Fools in Shakespeare's plays, however, are anything but simple comic buffoons, and their dramatic reason-for-being serves a larger purpose than our laughter.

Jesters, clowns and fools appear throughout history, folklore and legend. They are one of the most common and widely recognized archetypal character types found in culture and mythology throughout world history. Jesters and fools performed a variety of functions as entertainers, social and political critiques and, perhaps most importantly, as agents of change. They used an array of skills including wit and humor to reinforce cultural and religious fundamental values and principles.

While the tradition of clowning goes back thousands of years and can be traced in cultures all around the world, the English clown descended from the Vice character of the medieval mystery plays—a buffoon and prankster who it was said could sometimes deceive even the devil. The fool or jester (a witty, professional clown) became a familiar sight in royal courts by the time of the Renaissance, with some jesters achieving considerable fame.

By Queen Elizabeth I's time, the professional, stage fool had become better known. Most European royal courts hired jesters to perform at palace parties and celebrations. They were paid well and often wore elegant costumes inspired by the patchwork of their poorer brethren. Added to their wit, most had developed additional performance skills. They played lutes and flutes, danced, juggled, told jokes, did acrobatics and pantomime, ropewalked, performed tongue twisters, yodeled, sang and did vocal tricks.

Court jesters often developed deep friendships with their royal masters and served as trusted confidants. Surrounded by the false compliments and praise of courtiers, royals would value a connection with these offbeat performers, who communicated valuable insight. The fool was traditionally given license to speak out where others had to be silent. Goneril in *King Lear*, calling the Fool "all-licensed," establishes for the audience that he is a "household servant whose address to his master is permitted a degree of freedom that would be considered slanderous in anybody else, because his purpose is to mend his master's follies." These "wise" fools could puncture the pride of their masters by telling them the bitter truth about their actions.

Shakespeare wrote key parts for many a jester in his plays. Appearing in most of Shakespeare's dramas, the clown or fool figure remains one of the most intriguing stage characters in the Shakespearean canon, and has frequently captured the interest of contemporary critics and modern audiences. While taking many forms, Shakespearean fools may be generally divided into two categories: the "clown," a general term that was originally intended to designate a rustic or otherwise uneducated individual, whose dramatic purpose was to evoke laughter with his ignorance; and the courtly "fool" or "jester," in whom wit and pointed satire accompany low comedy.

Clowns would most often parody the actions of other characters in the main plots of their respective plays and provide low humor for the entertainment of groundlings. For example, figures like Bottom of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Dogberry of *Much Ado About Nothing* are typically classified as clowns, their principal function being to arouse the mirth of audiences. Shakespeare's famous stage jesters—or fools—on the other hand, include Touchstone in *As You Like It*, the Fool in *King Lear*, and Feste in *Twelfth Night*.

Many commentators have observed the satirical potential of the fool, his verbal wit, and talent for intellectual repartee. Critics have acknowledged, too, the deeper, thematic functions of Shakespeare's fools, some of whom are said to possess a degree of wisdom within their apparent ignorance. Considered an outcast to a degree, the fool was frequently given reign to comment on society and the actions of his social betters; thus,

<sup>1</sup> Julian Markels, "Shakespeare's Confluence of Tragedy and Comedy: *Twelfth Night* and *King Lear*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15.2 (Spring: 1964): 75-88, 77.

<sup>2</sup> Carolyn S. French, "Shakespeare's 'Folly': *King Lear*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 10.4 (Autumn: 1959): 523-529, 526.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from <<http://www.enotes.com/shakespearean-criticism>>

# KING LEAR

some Shakespearean fools demonstrate a subversive potential, and may present a radically different worldview from those held by the majority of a play's characters. The concept of "wisdom," or of the "wise fool," is an important one for *King Lear*. Lear's Fool is a court jester who faithfully serves his king with his cynical sense of reality, and his wit laced with satire is intellectual and fully deliberate. The Fool offers Lear serious advice in palatable form as mere foolery or entertainment. But beneath his seemingly innocent jibes are plain warnings of the looming disaster that Lear blindly refuses to acknowledge. In a paradox familiar to Renaissance audiences—as other popular works such as Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly* or Cervantes's *Don Quixote*—folly and wisdom exchange places as the Fool's barbed words serve as a channel for many of the play's ironies and multiple perspectives.

Such figures can be construed as disrupting the traditional order of society through a disruption of the meanings of conventional language. In *King Lear* Shakespeare forces shifts in perspective on the very word "fool," at times making of it a blessing instead of an insult or a slight (all who sooner or later stand up for Lear are called "fool"). But the uses of this word continue to shift. The Fool, who always speaks true, calls Lear "fool" for giving up his kingdom, and Kent for getting into the stocks. When Lear wakes up in Cordelia's tent, he confirms this judgment: in his earned humility he calls himself a "fond and foolish" old man. Goneril says of her husband Albany that her "fool usurps her body." Edgar wills himself a fool in order to preserve his life. The Fool leaves the play when its other truth-speaker, Cordelia, re-enters the story. And when at last Lear comes on carrying her corpse, he cries that his "poor fool is dead."

Just as the word "fool" runs through a spectrum of meanings throughout *King Lear*, the function of the fool character also seems to shift with the action. In Act 1, the Fool is something of a "choric commentator, whose words and rhymes bring out the general significance of the particular events on stage"; in Acts 2 and 3, the Fool may be seen as more deliberately "needling Lear, and as a voice of social protest in the play." Critics have often noted that as Lear descends into madness by Act 4, he has less and less need of a fool—as "Lear himself in his madness takes on the role of the Fool, at once mad and rational"—and so the Fool disappears, unthought of until Lear's last speech in Act 5.

While the fool character of theatrical tradition is deeply rooted in cultural and literary history, how can this sort of character type be incorporated into a production of *King Lear* set in present day—like the production that you will see at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater? History may provide us with an example. An individual court jester in Europe could emerge from a wide



Photo by Liz Lauren

Scott Parkinson as the Fool in CST's 2001 production of *King Lear*, directed by Barbara Gaines

range of backgrounds: an erudite but nonconformist university dropout, a monk thrown out of a priory, a *jongleur* with exceptional verbal or physical dexterity, or the apprentice of a village blacksmith whose fooling amused a passing nobleman. Just as a modern-day, television stand-up comedian might begin his career on the pub and club circuit, so a would-be jester could make it big time in court if he were lucky enough to be spotted by someone with connections and the means to hire him.

In Chicago Shakespeare's 2014 modern-day production, the Fool is presented as just such a comedian. Just as the fools and jesters of history and literature were men who could "speak truth to power," many contemporary comedians attempt this same feat—even when addressing the most serious and delicate of subjects. Popular comedy figures like Stephen Colbert, Jimmy Kimmel, Conan O'Brien and John Stewart often critique figures of political authority, satirizing powerful persons with their wit and cynicism. And so as we absorb today's news through the lens of Comedy Central, we are viewing the modern descendants of the historical fool. ♦

<sup>4</sup> Foakes, *King Lear*, 58.

<sup>5</sup> Markels, "Confluence," 76.

<sup>6</sup> Foakes, *King Lear*, 137.

<sup>7</sup> Beatrice K. Otto, *Fools Are Everywhere: The Court Jester around the World*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001): 1-46.



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### True Too

"Why should not old men be mad?" asks William Butler Yeats at the start of a great late poem. It is, in its seeming reasonableness, a chilling question—as though the madness of the old might somehow make clear sense.

*King Lear* asks this question too, and answers it in many ways—beginning perhaps with Lear's own question to his three daughters, and the fevered rage that follows from it: "Which of you shall we say doth love us most ...?" The naked expression of need, the arrant appeal to greed (most "love"=biggest bequest), the power-addiction disguised as relinquishment—all these speak clearly of an old king's loosening grip not only on his past potencies but on reality too. "See better, Lear," urges his best adherent Kent, appalled that his liege is seeing so badly. ("Mad" did not yet also mean "angry," but Lear's relentless rage does open a gateway into madness.)

To Yeats's *Why*? Shakespeare adds a *When*?: When, if ever, can we say that the play's protagonist has gone mad? Shakespeare had posed this problem before. Hamlet's seeming madness has (as Polonius so quotably notes) plenty of "method in't." It is impossible from the playtext to tell for certain whether and when his feigning overflows into debilitating authenticity.

Lear's shift involves less method and more pain. One daughter remarks, after his first outburst, that he was always thus: "he hath ever but slenderly known himself." The Fool's counsel is riddled with questions of timing: "Thou shouldst not have been old before thou hadst been wise." Lear's reply muddles timing further: "Oh, let me not be mad, sweet heaven!" That "be" is ominous: "Go mad" would have thrust this fear wholly into the future; "be" registers, with a tremor, Lear's terror of the present tense, the possibility that he may have gone mad already.

To Yeats's stark question, the twenty-first century is developing its own useful though unpoetic answers. Increasingly doctors understand dementia (though not yet well enough) as a

physical affliction often triggered by old age. Yeats answers his own question differently. In his reckoning, old men are made mad not by loss of mind but by its overburdening. Having lived so long, they now know too much truth: "No single story [can] they find," Yeats writes, "of an unbroken happy mind."

*King Lear*, fixated on the mind's terrifying ways of breaking, combines Yeats's answer and the doctors'. Tracking the ordeals of Lear and Gloucester, Shakespeare shows much about the infirmity of age, but even more about the burden of deep knowledge, the pain of learning. Gloucester's son Edgar, who avoids madness only by feigning it, comes to understand knowledge as an endless descent into unanticipated horrors:

*I am worse [off] than e'er I was ...  
And worse I may be yet. The worst is not  
As long as we can say 'This is the worst.'*

The play proceeds with this remorseless logic, heaping worse on worse until at long last, and in many ways much too late, remorse arrives to trigger mercy not only for the characters but for the audience also. When Edgar reconciles with his father, he speaks calmly of acceptance, in tones again redolent of Hamlet ("The readiness is all"): "Men must endure / Their going hence even as their coming hither. / Ripeness is all." To which Gloucester answers in kind, "And that's true too."

"Too" is for Shakespeare perhaps *the* crucial word. He is the great orchestrator of what he once called the "too-much," undating us with word, thought, action, emotion—and of the "also," spellbound by more than one truth, capable (as Keats expressed it) of "being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason"—and convenient resolution.

*King Lear* is probably Shakespeare's mightiest exploration of the too and the too-much. (This holds true even of its play-scripts: he wrote at least two very different versions. In one Gloucester speaks this line, in the other he does not; almost every production, true to its own vision, is a hybrid of both



# KING LEAR

texts.) If too much knowing is the way to madness, then this play is built to make us mad. Shakespeare takes us from worse to worse, before delivering moments of calm that nonetheless entail unbearable, unfathomable loss.

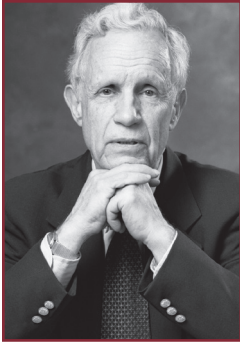
Why put ourselves through it? That's a mystery inbuilt into all tragedy, but maybe most powerfully into this one. "We must suffer into truth," wrote Aeschylus, the first known crafter of

tragedies. Yeats concludes that "Old men *should* be mad"; Lear at one point declares "I *will* go mad," as though it's his choice and a choice worth making, the proper price of knowing things. In *King Lear* we get to suffer several lifetimes' worth of truth in a single evening. We get a tantalizing chance to refute the Fool: to get past madness, and to grow wise before we all are too old. ♦



Photo by Liz Lauren

From left: Scott Parkinson as the Fool, Kevin Gudahl as Kent and Greg Vinkler as King Lear in Chicago Shakespeare Theater's 2001 production of *King Lear*, directed by Barbara Gaines



## David Bevington

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## Endurance

*King Lear* deals with one of life's most inevitable and often painful experiences, growing old and retiring. Shakespeare wrote the play when he was getting on himself, and when he was experiencing what it was to marry off a daughter to a younger man; Susanna, his eldest child after the death of her twin Hamnet, married Dr. John Hall at the age of twenty-four, shortly after the play was first produced in 1606-7. Lear has three daughters; Shakespeare had two.

Appropriately, then, Lear dwells, often bitterly, on the ingratitude and insensitivity of growing children. At the same time, the play contrasts the callous and inhuman behavior of Goneril and Regan with the longsuffering loyalty of Cordelia, the child whom he banishes. His doing so sets the play's main plot in motion, and raises crucial issues of interpretation: is Cordelia too stubborn in her unwillingness to flatter Lear in return for his intent to award her the best third of his kingdom? Her refusal strikes him as ungrateful, and yet she has a point in spurning the insincere cadences of her sisters, who are only waiting to receive their portions of the kingdom before they turn their backs on their old father. Lear soon comes to realize (as the Fool points out to him) that he has banished the best of his daughters and has left himself to the untender mercies of her hard sisters.

Does Cordelia really love her father? In one sense, of course, she does; she candidly acknowledges that he has given her birth and education, for which she returns a duty to him, obeys, loves, and honors him. She ultimately sacrifices her marital happiness and indeed her life by returning to England, technically as a traitor bearing arms against her native country, to save her father. She nurses him back to sanity, and gives him the precious love he fears he has lost forever. She even gives him a moment of true happiness when they are in prison together. He has learned at last that kingdom, power, wealth are all unimportant; if he no longer has any other identity than that

of loving father to a loving child, he can be happy. Yet Cordelia does not really share this moment of euphoria. She has done what she had to do. What she had tried to tell her father from the start is that she needs to have her own life, her own family. This is the lesson that Lear cannot bear to hear. At the last, Lear seems to have regained what he had asked of her, that he be the center of her life, and he is happy. Shakespeare's retelling of this old legend, however, will not let Lear keep that happiness. Cordelia dies in prison, in Shakespeare's most important recasting of his sources. The ending is so unbearably painful that for approximately two centuries the play was rewritten to allow Cordelia to live. Audiences could not stand what they saw as the cosmic injustice of her death.

Today, we are more apt to concur with Shakespeare's painful choice, and to see that the world is often the dark place Shakespeare imagines. Lear bargains with life to give him Cordelia, but discovers that we have no right to place such conditions on the gods. As Edgar wisely puts it, "Men must endure / Their going hence, even as their coming hither. / Ripeness is all." ♦



Greg Vinkler as King Lear and Lisa Dodson as Goneril in CST's 2001 production of *King Lear*, directed by Barbara Gaines

Photo by Liz Lauren

# WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

## 1600s & 1700s

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*I found...a Heap of Jewels unstrung, and unpolisht [sic]; yet, so dazling [sic] in their Disorder, that I soon perceiv'd [sic] I had seized a Treasure.*

**NAHUM TATE 1681**

*Shakespeare 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 anything, 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 learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards, and found her there.*

**JOHN DRYDEN 1688**

*The King and Cordelia ought by no means to have dy'd [sic], and... Mr. Tate has very justly alter'd [sic] that particular which must disgust the... Audience, to have Vertue [sic] and Piety meet so unjust a Reward.*

**CHARLES GILDON 1710**

*This drama is chargeable with considerable imperfections. The plot of Edmund against his brother, which distracts the attention, and destroys the unity of the fable; the cruel and horrid extinction of Gloster's eyes, which ought not to be exhibited on the stage; the utter improbability of Gloster's imagining, though blind, that he had leaped down Dover cliff; and some passages that are too turgid and full of strained metaphors, are faults which the warmest admirers of Shakespeare will find it difficult to excuse.*

**JOSEPH WARTON 1754**

## 1800s

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*But the play is beyond all art, as the tamperings with it show: it is too hard and stony; it must have love-scenes and a happy ending... A happy ending!—as if the living martyrdom that Lear has gone through,—the flaying of his feelings alive, did not make a fair dismissal from the stage of life the only decorous thing for him. If he is to live and be happy after...why torment us with all this unnecessary sympathy?*

**CHARLES LAMB 1808**

*To see an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick turned out of doors by his daughters on a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is painful and disgusting. The Lear of Shakespeare cannot be acted.*

**CHARLES LAMB 1808**

*It is then the best of all Shakespear's plays, for it is the one in which he was the most in earnest... We see at once the precipice on which the poor old king stands from his own extravagant and credulous importunity, the indiscreet simplicity of her [Cordelia's] love (which, to be sure, has a little of her father's obstinacy in it) and the hollowness of her sisters' pretensions.*

**WILLIAM HAZLITT 1817**

*In Shakespear the Forces of the two wicked sisters are victorious, Lear and the pious Cordelia are taken Prisoners, she is hanged in Prison, and the old King dies with Grief. Had Shakespear followed the Historian, he would not have violated the Rules of poetical Justice...in the Play one Fate overwhelms alike the Innocent and the Guilty, and the Facts in the History are wholly changed to produce Events, neither probably, necessary, nor just.*

**CHARLOTTE LENNOX 1754**

*Shakespeare has suffered the virtue of Cordelia to perish in a just cause, contrary to the natural ideas of justice, to the hope of the reader, and, what is yet more strange, to the faith of chronicles...Cordelia, from the time of Tate, has always retired with victory and felicity... And I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor.*

**SAMUEL JOHNSON 1765**

*Shakespeare's genius attended him in all his extravagancies... It seems therefore preposterous, to endeavor to regularize his plays at the expense of depriving them of this peculiar excellence, especially as the alteration can only produce a very partial and limited improvement, and can never bring his pieces to the standard of criticism, or the form of the Aristotelian drama.*

**HENRY MACKENZIE 1780**

*The modern practice of blending comedy with tragedy, though liable to great abuse in point of practice, is undoubtedly an extension of the dramatic circle; but the comedy should be as in King Lear, universal, ideal, and sublime.*

**PERCY B. SHELLEY 1821**

*The scene on the heath between Lear, Edgar, and the fool, has not its like, we may safely say, in the whole range of English dramatic literature. No less a genius than Shakespeare's would have ventured to bring together, face to face, three such different characters,—one actually mad, one falsely pretending to be so, and the third a fool; and yet...who can finish this scene, without feeling that he has read a new chapter in the history of mental disease of most solemn and startling import?*

**I. RAY 1847**

*The appearance of Edgar, ragged, forlorn, a miserable picture of wretchedness and woe...arouse the predominant idea in the mind of the madman; and filial ingratitude, nothing else, could have brought him to this state, and recognizing in him a counterpart of himself, his first question is, 'Hast thou given all to thy two daughters?'*

**A.O. KELLOGG 1866**



## 1800s continued

*Shakespeare (differing in this from the old play) placed the story in heathen times, partly, we may surmise, that he might be able to put the question boldly, "What are the gods?"*

**EDWARD DOWDEN 1875**

*Improvers upon Shakespeare banished the Fool in Lear from the stage, and in so doing they rendered it impossible...that the original nature of Lear should be understood. For it is the Fool who interprets to us the old man's sensitive tenderness lying at the bottom of his impatience; from the Fool he can bear to hear truth; his jealous pride is not alarmed; and in the depths of his misery, having scarcely anything in the world to love but the Fool, to him Lear clings.*

**FRANCIS JACOX 1875**

*A history of society in small is shown in the drama; we see how a period gets corrupt and perverted, then how it is purified... We notice that three men are left, the truly positive men of the play, Albany, Edgar and Kent, who are to build up anew the shattered social organism*

**DENTON J. SNIDER 1887**

*The poet does not deny a Providence,—he believes in a divine government of the world,—but he is content to worship in humility the mystery in which it enshrouds itself. He paints the world as he sees it, and it appears dark to him; but it is at night that the stars become visible.*

**BERNHARD TEN BRINK 1895**

## 1900s

*The improbabilities in King Lear surely far surpass those of the other great tragedies in number and in grossness. And they are particularly noticeable in the secondary plot... How is it, now, that this defective drama so overpowers us that we are either unconscious of its blemishes or regard them as almost irrelevant?*

**A.C. BRADLEY 1904**

*For any man of our time—if he were not under the hypnotic suggestion that this drama is the height of perfection—it would be enough to read it to its end (were he to have sufficient patience for this) in order to be convinced that...it is a very bad, carelessly composed production... But such free-minded individuals, not inoculated with Shakespeare worship, are no longer to be found in our Christian society.*

**LEO TOLSTOY 1906**

*Suffering does not here arouse a Promethean defiance, but it discovers and purifies human virtue.*

**ASHLEY H. THORNDIKE 1908**

*Let us now recall the moving final scene, one of the culminating points of tragedy in modern drama. Lear carries Cordelia's dead body on to the stage. Cordelia is Death... She is the Death-goddess who...bids the old man renounce love, choose death and makes friends with the necessity of dying.*

**SIGMUND FREUD 1913**

*[King Lear's] positive theme, as I understand it, is no less than the death of the Self and the birth of Divine Love.*

**JOHN MIDDLETON MURRY 1936**

*The entire plot depends on this division of the kingdom: the quarrels of Goneril and Regan, the disastrous French invasion, the madness and death of Lear, and the distraction of the whole commonwealth that cannot but ensue. Chaos from conflict of authority is the very essence of the play.*

**JOHN W. DRAPER 1937**

*The unnaturalness of Goneril and Regan is what Lear cannot bear, as Gloucester cannot understand the apparent unnaturalness of Edgar, and Lear's daughters are fittingly described in those animal images—tigers, wolves, vultures, serpents—which are...scattered everywhere through the play.*

**THEODORE SPENCER 1942**

*Before the purgatorial heath scenes Lear argues with Goneril that man's life is distinguished from beasts by just such privileges as having a superfluous number of retainers... Yet linked to this insistence is a blind indifference to the sufferings of others who lack the bare necessities of life.*

**BENJAMIN T. SPENCER 1944**

*It will be a fatal error to present Cordelia as a meek saint. She has more than a touch of her father in her. She is as proud as he is, and as obstinate, for all her sweetness and her youth.*

**HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER 1946**

*Throughout his plays the acute social critics, the people who are not taken in by accepted fallacies, are buffoons, villains, lunatics or persons who are shamming insanity or are in a state of violent hysteria. Lear is a play in which this tendency is particularly well marked. It contains a great deal of veiled social criticism—a point Tolstoy misses—but it is all uttered either by the Fool, by Edgar when he is pretending to be mad, or by Lear during his bouts of madness.*

**GEORGE ORWELL 1947**

*In this work of Night, no answer comes...no direct answer, only a few meaningless words, like dust from the ruins. But behind that huddle of meaningless words, lies the true answer: 'Man is nothing.' The sounds of the words 'Nothing' and 'Patience' reverberate through the play.*

**EDITH SITWELL 1950**

# WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

## 1900s continued

*Goneril, Regan and Edmund are the calculating, cool and unimaginative people who are incapable of 'creative' imagery. They have no relationship to nature, to the elemental powers. Their world is the world of reason; they live and speak within the narrow limits of their plans, within the limits drawn by the plot and the given moment of the action. Lear's language continually points beyond these limits.*

**W.H. CLEMEN** 1951

*With no male character in the drama does Lear have a good relationship, for Kent is banished and Gloucester does not seem close to him. All his affection is centered on his daughters and this appears to be linked with a latent incestuous orientation.*

**JOHN DONNELLY** 1953

*Lear at the depths of his disillusionment and wretchedness and with the first onset of madness deliberately assumes the symbolic state of the nude figure... The Christian analogy to Lear's psychological state and its relation to the use of the clothing motif provides familiar overtones. Man, in Nature, prepared for his heavenly salvation by casting off his garments.*

**THELMA NELSON** Greenfield 1954

*When one recalls Cordelia's qualities—wisdom, duty, measured affection, self-control, inner calm, her approval of the superiority of reason over will, her unwillingness to compromise her inner worth, ...her benevolence and endurance—she evokes a familiar moral pattern indeed. She is a stoic.*

**KEITH RINEHART** 1954

*The central theme of Lear, underlined again and again in the mercenary and in the schoolmaster images, is that a man who grossly overvalues material things and the outward trappings of state, virtue, and affection must be schooled by disaster and suffering into truer, more adequate, and more charitable assessment.*

**E.M.M. TAYLOR** 1955

*Lear is a universal allegory...and its dramatic technique is determined by the need to present certain permanent aspects of the human situation...In the scenes on the heath, for example, we...are caught up in a great and almost impersonal poem in which we hear certain voices which echo... each other; all that they say is part of the tormented consciousness of Lear; and the consciousness of Lear is part of the consciousness of human kind.*

**L.C. KNIGHTS** 1959

*The idea upon which the play rests is indeed the consequence of a grave error and abuse of justice by the king within whose powers justice lies.*

**C.J. SISON** 1962

*The theme of King Lear is the decay and fall of the world.*

**JAN KOTT** 1965

*Lear and his family are titans... We might view the actions of such gigantic creatures with a detached fascination...if the subplot characters and actions did not bridge the gap for us. This is one reason why Shakespeare evidently thought it vital to develop such close parallels between the two plots.*

**JOHN REIBETANZ** 1977

*Is Lear a Christian play?... Is Shakespeare a Christian writer?... I think that Shakespeare is a profoundly Christian writer, and I think that King Lear, based as it is on historical sources, is meant to depict the plight of man before the Christian era, that is, before the salvation of man by Christ's sacrifice was available.*

**THOMAS P. ROCHE** 1981

*The heath is both a real place and a place in the mind. It is what the human world would be like if pity, duty, and the customs of honour and due ceased to rule human behaviour. It is the realm of natural man, man beyond society, without clothes, retinue, pride and respect. But natural man has a terrible identity, Lear learns—the identity of life at degree zero, a hair's breadth from death. It is an equality of abjection that no man can endure.*

**MICHAEL IGNATIEFF** 1984

*The choice of staging the play in a small space where the actors are so close you can reach out and touch them, makes clear that the play is about the intimate violence of family life. It is about the anger held in check even in families which call themselves happy, about our inability as parents and children to love selflessly and the lessons which selfless love teaches us often too late. The play creates an antithesis between home and heath and stresses the razor-thin line, in our own lives, between safety and danger, between having it and having nothing.*

**MICHAEL IGNATIEFF** 1984

*The generalized character of Lear's and Albany's vision of chaos, and the poetic force with which it is expressed, creates the appearance of truthful universality... However, that vision is present in gendered terms in which patriarchy, the institution of male power in the family and the State, is seen as the only form of social organisation [sic] strong enough to hold chaos at bay.*

**KATHLEEN MCLUSKIE** 1985

*No, Lear is easy. He's like all of us, really: he's just a stupid old fart.*

**LAURENCE OLIVIER** on acting the play's title role, 1986

*The play's beginning is marked by the omnipotent presence of the father and the absence of the mother. Yet in Lear's scheme for parceling out his kingdom, we can discern a child's image of being mothered. He wants two mutually exclusive things at once: to have absolute control over those closest to him and to be absolutely dependent on them.*

**COPPELIA KAHN** 1986

*The play has two strands: one is the strand of optimism, the belief that there is a providence in the fall of a great man as in the fall of a sparrow; the other, the strand of rage against the dying of the light.*

**GERMAINE GREER** 1986

## 1900s continued

*As the play's tragic logic reveals, Lear cannot have both the public deference and the inward love of his children. The public deference is only as good as the legal constraints that Lear's absolute power paradoxically deprives him of, and the inward love cannot be adequately represented in social discourse, licensed by authority and performed in the public sphere, enacted as in a court or theater.*

**STEPHEN GREENBLATT** 1990

*Oswald is perhaps the most explicitly and thoroughly hybridized character, however, he is hardly the only one... Lear as the beggar-king, Edgar playing Tom o' Bedlam, and Kent in the stocks are only three of the play's more prominent and grotesque class hybrids. Oswald thus concentrates a more global phenomenon in the play: the collapse of sexual and class-boundaries.*

**RICHARD HALPERIN** 1991

*Tom is a more vivid and recognizable character than Edgar... He commits himself to the nakedness, and to the brutality of the elements, that the Fool cannot face. He is truly outside society. No family, no institution, no system of charity has a place for him.*

**ALEXANDER LEGGATT** 1993

*When unnatural sons and daughters have taken control of the technology of affect for their own manipulative purposes, there is, it seems, no possibility of articulation left for the naturally caring members of the family. This is the play's catastrophe—its darkly nihilistic message, not its resolution*

**LISA JARDINE** 1996

## 2000s

*Edmund is the most dangerous and treacherous of the characters. Yet, he begins from a cause that we cannot identify as unjust. By placing himself ahead of his brother, he is only rejecting the fate that law had dealt him. If there is no justice in Edmund's plan, neither was there any justice in Edgar's legal entitlement.*

**PAUL W. KAHN** 2000

*It is necessary that Cordelia die, so that what she affirms is not just another truism, not just a moral rule of thumb or code of feminine virtue. This is a play about affirmation, about huge lives of mythic status that are worth the living regardless of the return on investment, about heroic endurance in the face of irredeemable pain. [...] Virtue leads forthrightly to destruction, and yet demanded of us morally is goodness itself.*

**DOUGLAS BURNHAM** 2000

*Human love in this play begs to be inquired after and disclosed, but there seems little way to do either. Our own experience throughout the play is of waiting for demonstrations of love and their acknowledgment, for recognitions and proofs of who loves whom [...] The act of knowing whether you are beloved in King Lear [...] is a precarious combination of intimacy and estrangement, possession and rejection, ownership and alienation.*

**CLAIRE MCEACHERN** 2000

*It is all too easy to dismiss Regan and Goneril, King Lear's elder daughter, as mere emblems of female evil—the demonic opposites of their saintly younger sister, Cordelia. But Shakespeare's characters are seldom that simple... When women are tough and ballsy, and just as obsessed with power as men, they are called evil rather than, formidable. Regan and Goneril are formidable.*

**MARTHA BURNS** 1996

*Lear's speech clearly foregrounds both genuine Christian concern with the lowly, whose need must not be reasoned too closely, and secular concern with...dignity seen as symbolic—hardly material—necessities, in accordance with the overall dualism of Protestant thought. Intense sympathy for the intensely needy can coexist... Concern for the mistreatment of other humans can coexist with a firm sense of hierarchy.*

**JUDY KRONENFELD** 1998

*One should recall that Shakespeare's play is quite a recent discovery: only in this century has the text been played in anything like its entirety... What does this tell us about King Lear? Not merely that it is hard to stage but that it was too morally disturbing, too violently contradictory, too lacking in affirmation to be acceptable to either 18th century reason or the 19th century Christian ethic.*

**MICHAEL BILLINGTON** 1999

*King Lear depicts various nefarious effects of public life and companionship on the individual self [...] What is at issue is not Lear's 'dependency behavior': no one in the play disputes his legitimate need for assistance because of advancing age or his royal prerogative for assistants even after he has divested his authority. Instead, what is at issue is Lear's choice of companions, the number of companions, the activities encouraged by his companions, and most importantly, their moral fitness to accompany the king.*

**PHILLIP D. COLLINGTON** 2001

*King Lear must surely [...] be read in terms of the danger of a monarch cutting himself off from the people he rules, and so destroying what he has so carefully built up. The play does not represent a king who is ineffective or unimpressive, but one who has not taken enough care of his kingdom.*

**ANDREW HADFIELD** 2003

*If the freedom of the tragic hero is central to tragic theory, then the play is a very unusual tragedy indeed. Shakespeare theory, then understood as a meditation upon the limits and ethics of freedom, and therefore of the tragic genre... But the characters find peace not in choosing death, but in recognizing others.*

**SEAN LAWRENCE** 2005



# WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

## 2000s continued

*Shakespeare's tragedy asks us not to turn away from evil, folly, and unbearable human pain but, seeing them face-to-face, to strengthen our capacity to speak the truth, to endure, and to love.*

**STEPHEN GREENBLATT 2008**

*[I]s there any redemption in this play of love, power, deception, and loss, of "ripeness is all"? The play poses this question, but will not answer it. The question remains open: it is not foreclosed, even in the direction of nihilism. Ultimately, it is the same question Lear asks of Cordelia. Every production seeks its own response, according to the bond of theater.*

**MARJORIE GARBER 2008**

*Early modern drama can be seen as a secular re-enactment of a sacrifice ritual. The essential components are similar: each requires a participant audience, a visible reconstruction of human conflict, and a resolution of that conflict by the spectacle of group triumph in the death or expulsion of the ultimately vulnerable participant in the process. That subject or victim is always perceived in the drama to be the source of discord, dissension, and danger. His or her physical removal, by death or exile, is*

*a necessary precondition of the re-establishment of the cultural practices and norms that enable the supposedly peaceful continuance of social order. [In King Lear] every scapegoating, every cleansing in blood, is fraught with insoluble contradiction. Something, someone, must die for something else to be born and peace to be restored.*

**DEREK COHEN 2009**

*Perhaps the only way in which this tragedy can reclaim so much unhappiness is to suggest that, given the incurable badness of the world, we can at least choose whether to attempt to be like Cordelia and Edgar (knowing what the price may be for such courage) or to settle for being our worst selves, like Edmund, Goneril, and Regan. Overwhelmed as we are by the testimonial before us of humankind's vicious capacity for self-destruction, we are stirred nonetheless by the ability of some men and women to confront their fearful destiny with probity and stoic renunciation, adhering to what they believe to be good and expecting Fortune to give them absolutely nothing.*

**DAVID BEVINGTON 2009**



Photo by Liz Lauren

From left: Ana Sferruzza as Cordelia, Greg Vinkler as as King Lear, Celeste Williams as Regan and Lisa Dodson as Goneril in CST's 2001 production of *King Lear*, directed by Barbara Gaines

## A Look Back at King Lear in Performance

**C**elebrated in our time as one of the masterpieces of English literature, *King Lear* was rejected outright by critics and audiences in earlier centuries for what was understood to be an improbable plot, impossible-to-act characters, violent scenes, bleak message, and unjust ending. A drastically edited version, in which Cordelia lives happily-ever-after, claimed the stage for more than 150 years from the late 1600s to mid-1800s. The restoration of Shakespeare's script in the twentieth century suggests a dramatic shift in theatrical taste—and in audience acceptance of the darkness at the heart of *King Lear*.

The first recorded performance of *King Lear* was in December of 1606 at the court of King James I and starred the famous actor Richard Burbage as Lear. The absence of information on early productions of *King Lear* in historical records—particularly a scarcity of contemporary commentary—has led many critics to believe that the play was not popular in Shakespeare's time. Then, for eighteen years between 1642 and 1660 throughout Cromwell's rule, theaters were closed and theatrical productions were outlawed; after the restoration of the monarchy and the reopening of the English theater, Shakespeare's *King Lear* was recorded in performance only twice (in 1664 and 1675) before being replaced by Nahum Tate's adaptation.

In 1681 Tate's radical revision, entitled *History of King Lear*, though keeping intact Shakespeare's language, drastically altered the nature of the play, transforming it with its additions and cuts into a moralizing melodrama. Tate cut out the Fool, eliminated Gloucester's blinding, and forged a romantic relationship between Cordelia and Edgar. Certainly most notable is Tate's happy ending, which preserves Cordelia's life and returns Lear to power.

Eighteenth-century audiences expected drama to conform to strict artistic rules. Influenced by the Neoclassical movement—which dominated the literary world and shaped the standards and taste for drama—audiences valued clear moral messages, unity of time and place, purity of genre, and the fulfillment of poetic justice. Unwilling to accept Shakespeare's violations of these rules, audiences continued to flock to Tate's adaptation. The eventual return to Shakespeare's *King Lear* began in 1742 with David Garrick's production. A famous eighteenth-century actor and director, Garrick replaced some of Tate's additions

with Shakespeare's original text, though still not restoring the Fool. In this particular adaptation, Garrick—known for his short stature and an ability to handle rapid emotional shifts on stage—played the title role himself, portraying a Lear who moved the audience to pity his madness and frailty. In preparation for his role, Garrick is said to have visited insane asylums to observe the mannerisms of their inmates—preparation that paid off when Garrick received critical acclaim for his realistic portrayal of Lear's madness.

Though Garrick began the process of reintroducing the text of Shakespeare's *King Lear* to the English stage, the play was not truly reassessed until the Romantic Movement at the turn of the nineteenth century. The Romantics rejected many of the ideas from their immediate past—including the Neoclassical models of drama. More concerned with a true representation of human character and poetic beauty than with coherent plot and conforming structures, the Romantic period embraced Shakespeare's *King Lear*, which had been dismissed for the past 150 years.

The Romantic period set the stage for the complete restoration of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, and William C. Macready, one of the great tragedians and producers of the time, played a key role. After performing in two separate versions of Tate's *History of King Lear* in 1820 as Edmund and in 1833 as Lear, Macready decided to present Shakespeare's *King Lear* as close to Shakespeare's text as possible. In 1834 Macready produced this revived version at London's Covent Garden, though the Fool was still not reinstated. The move away from Tate's adaptation was met with success and led Macready to a hesitant restoration of the Fool, whom he cast as a woman. Macready's concept

of the Fool was a "sort of fragile, hectic, beautiful-faced, half-idiot-looking boy."<sup>1</sup> He cast the pretty, impish nineteen-year-old Priscilla Horton, who was costumed in a knee-length tunic and a charming small coxcomb. Interestingly, when Kenneth Branagh's Renaissance Shakespeare Company

toured to Chicago with *King Lear* in the 1980s, he cast his wife, Emma Thompson, in the role of the Fool—fragile, hectic and beautiful-faced.

Nineteenth-century productions of *King Lear* were characterized by excessively dramatic renditions of the storm scene, which offered the opportunity to show off the latest developments in stage machinery technology. One critic called the scene a "Storm on Land," remarking that the "trees were made to see-saw back and forth, accompanied with the natural creak! Attending the operation...every infernal machine that was ever

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<sup>1</sup> Gamini Slagado, *King Lear: Text and Performance* (City: Publisher, 1984): 62.

# A PLAY COMES TO LIFE

able to spit fire, spout rain, or make thunder”<sup>2</sup> was wheeled in. Another critic poked fun at the elaborate lighting scheme: Lear “would one instant appear a beautiful pea-green, and the next sky-blue, and, in the event of a momentary cessation... his head would be purple and his legs Dutch-pink.”<sup>3</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, the interest in *King Lear* waned significantly. Productions were rare and the play dropped out of many theaters’ standard repertoire for nearly two decades. The play was staged primarily for nostalgic purposes by Elizabethan enthusiasts. Rather than staging productions that reflected or spoke to current realities and living audiences, productions of the early twentieth century tended to represent the play in detached historical terms. But the end of the 1920s saw a renewed popularity of the play that would continue through the next several decades. The influential British director, Harley Granville-Barker, staged *King Lear* a number of times in the mid-twentieth century, helping to reestablish the play as important and relevant to modern society.

In 1940 Barker directed the play at the Old Vic, with the respected Sir John Gielgud as Lear, in a production that was heroic and larger-than-life. Barker related his interpretation of Lear to Gielgud in a metaphor: “Lear is an oak. You are an ash. We must see how this will serve you.”<sup>4</sup> Gielgud’s costume and make-up was said to make him resemble an oak, and in the final scene he carried in Cordelia with one arm to demonstrate Lear’s strength and stamina. In 1950 Gielgud played the role again at Stratford-upon-Avon, and received great critical acclaim—despite criticism of the production’s overdone storm effects. Gielgud, complaining that he was forced to shout over the thunderclaps and loud gusts of wind, would have preferred a quieter storm.

In 1962 Peter Brook’s landmark production at the Royal Shakespeare Company created a *King Lear* unlike its predecessors. In contrast to the grand scale of Granville-Barker’s production, Brook set his play in no specific time, and upon a near-bare stage. Brook was influenced by Jan Kott’s critical essay, *King Lear or Endgame*, which compares Samuel Beckett’s bleak existential world view to Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. To help establish this bleak vision of *King Lear*, Brook aggressively cut certain scenes to make them more horrifying and tragic. (By cutting out Edmund’s repentant lines calling off the executions of Lear and Cordelia, for example, Brook aborts the possibility of any sympathy the audience may have had Edmund.) Such directorial decisions made Brook’s production stand in striking contrast to earlier centuries’ attempts to soften and humanize the play. Like Jan Kott, Brook’s interpretation of *King Lear* reflected the cruelty of life in an absurd, grotesque and cynical world. To avoid association with a particular time period, the costumes were

plain and basic. The set was comprised of three white walls and a sparse array of simple furniture. The wash of the stage lights was bright and uniform. The house lights stayed on throughout most of the production to discourage an audience immersed in their own emotional responses. The work of playwright Bertolt Brecht, believing that audiences lose the importance of the play’s message if they are overcome with pathos for the characters, inspired this technique of alienation.

Six years later, in 1968 the Royal Shakespeare Company produced *King Lear* again, staged by the eminent English director, Trevor Nunn. Barbaric golden costumes suggested a pre-Christian time in Britain. An entourage of torch-bearing servants in the opening scene carried Lear onstage in a huge tent. Cornwall was played by Patrick Stewart. As the twentieth century progressed, the theater as an art form with which to tackle the most serious political and social issues enjoyed a renewed prominence. In 1986 David Hare’s staging of *King Lear* at the National Theatre in London set out to demonstrate the chain of destructiveness caused by Lear’s tyrannical behavior. Anthony Hopkins played a stern, brutish Lear, who “spoke in a dark, throaty growl,” but portrayed still an “inner vulnerability”<sup>4</sup> to his audience. Hare memorably hung carcasses of meat and human corpses above an empty stage.

In 1993 Mac Stafford-Clark directed the play at London’s Royal Court, incorporating his socialist politics into the production. The opening scene was played by a bureaucratic Gloucester and a militant Kent urinating in the men’s bathroom as they delivered the play’s first lines. Refugees wheeled their belongings in grocery carts while they desperately sought shelter; blindfolded prisoners were led by soldiers in army fatigues; and armed men were scattered around the stage. The Fool appeared again in Act 5, spraying paint graffiti messages and speaking lines transposed from his earlier scenes.

Also in 1993, Chicago Shakespeare Theater produced its first *King Lear*, staged by founder and Artistic Director Barbara Gaines. The play was set in pre-Christian Britain: heavy furs and fabrics dominated the production design, and an enormous rawhide map of Britain hung upstage—which Goneril and Regan victoriously ripped down at the end of the opening scene. This production also invited the close interaction of actors and audience. In this same court scene, Lear, played by Richard Kneeland, was seated downstage with his back to the audience, placing focus on both the daughters who faced him and the audience behind him. Because of Lear’s close proximity to the audience, he directed lines casually to them over his shoulder as though all were members of his court. The Theater’s first production of *King Lear* was honored as Best Play of the Year in Chicago and earned awards for Best Director and Best Actor.

<sup>2</sup> Author, *Plays in Production: King Lear*, (City: Publisher, 1987): 28.

<sup>3</sup> Author, *Plays in Production*, 28.

<sup>4</sup> Benedict Nightingale, “Some Recent Productions,” *Lear from Study to Stage*, (City: Publisher, 1997): 237.

<sup>5</sup> Ottid, in “Performance History,” <www.kinglear.org/stage> 8 June 2014. Web.

<sup>6</sup> *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Stage*, *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Stage*, ed. Stanley Wells and Sarah Stanton, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002): 174–193.



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Ian Holm, in the 1997 National Theatre production directed by Richard Eyre, was humane and naked in the storm scene. As Eyre recalled, "He [Holm] carried Cordelia's body on - and instead of putting her down before he spoke, he stood with the body in his arms and howled at Kent, Albany and Edgar. The four 'howls' emerged as an order, a command, the indictment of a father - don't be indifferent to my suffering..."<sup>5</sup>

Productions in the first decade of the new millennium included Artistic Director Barbara Gaines's return to the play in Chicago Shakespeare Theater's new theater in 2001; Chicago acting veteran Greg Vinkler played Lear, supported by Ross Lehman as the Fool, Kevin Gudahl as Kent, Timothy Kane as Edgar and Timothy Gregory as Edmund. Kevin Kline played the title role at The New York Shakespeare Festival at the Public Theater in 2007. In 2007 and 2008, Ian McKellen's performances of *King Lear* for the Royal Shakespeare Company played to critical acclaim at Stratford, London's West End, and on Broadway. The staging was particularly notable for the storm scene, which McKellen played in the nude. Also in 2008, Pete Postlethwaite starred in *King Lear* for the Liverpool Everyman Theatre's contribution to the European City of Culture festivities.

Like other Shakespearean tragedies, *King Lear* has proved amenable to conversion into other theatrical traditions. In 1989, David McRuvie and Iyamkode Sreedharan adapted the play,

then translated it to Malayalam for performance in Kerala, in the Kathakali tradition—which itself developed around 1600, contemporary with Shakespeare's writing. The show later went on tour, and in 2000 played at Shakespeare's Globe, completing (in Anthony Dawson's words) "a kind of symbolic circle."<sup>6</sup> Perhaps even more radical was Ong Keng Sen's 1997 adaptation of *King Lear*, which featured six actors each performing in a separate Asian acting tradition and in their own separate languages. A pivotal moment occurred when the Jingju performer playing Older Daughter (a conflation of Goneril and Regan) stabbed the Noh-performed Lear, whose "falling pine" dead-fall, straight face-forward into the stage, astonished the audience, in what Yong Li Lan describes as a "triumph through the moving power of *Noh* performance at the very moment of his character's defeat."<sup>7</sup> In 2012, Peter Hinton directed an all-First Nations production of *King Lear* at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, with the setting changed to an Algonquin nation in the seventeenth century. Barbara Gaines's upcoming production, with Chicago veteran actor Larry Yando in the title role, will be the director's first *Lear* staged as a contemporary production, largely focused on family and issues of aging. (See "A Conversation with the Director," page 32.) ♦



Photo by Liz Lauren

Chicago Shakespeare Theater's 2001 production of *King Lear*, directed by Barbara Gaines

<sup>5</sup> Qtd. in "Performance History," <[www.kinglear.org/stage](http://www.kinglear.org/stage)> 8 June 2014. Web.

<sup>6</sup> *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Stage*, *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Stage*, ed. Stanley Wells and Sarah Stanton, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002): 174–193.

<sup>7</sup> Yong Li Lan, "Shakespeare and the Fiction of the Intercultural," *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, ed. Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen, (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing, 2005): 527–549.

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## A Conversation With the Director



As she began the rehearsal process, Artistic Director Barbara Gaines shared her thoughts with doctoral candidate and Education Department Intern Stephanie Kucsera about her production of *King Lear*.

**You have directed *King Lear* twice before—first in 1993, and again in 2001 at the Theater's new home on Navy Pier.**

Yes, but I remember on Opening Night back in 2001 thinking, I've missed something. One idea kept gnawing at me: that no one in his right mind would give away everything and assume that you'd be treated exactly as you were when you were rich and powerful. What *Lear* does at the beginning of this play no one would do—if they had their wits about them.

Then, in 2005 my mother had a massive heart attack, and moved here to live with me. Most of us know what the experience is of seeing someone you love being diminished by age. It's the natural order of things, and it hurts like hell. And though my mother didn't suffer from dementia, I remember watching someone, so witty and brilliant, be so changed by old age. I remember coming home from work, putting my key in the door and simply being unable to turn it in the lock, just trying to calm myself because the pain of watching her decline was so great that I wasn't sure I could live through it.

About a year before she died, Mom was watching TV in one room and I was in another when I hear a song on the radio I'd never heard before. It's Sinatra, and all I can think about is *Lear*, out on that heath. It haunted me and no one knew the song or title when I described what I recalled of it. Fast-forward to 2012. Dear friends, Bernie and Jane Sahlins—Bernie started Second City and Jane was the founder of the International Theatre Festival—invited me out to dinner, and along that night was Bill Zehme, who wrote the brilliant biography on Sinatra, *The Way You Wear Your Hat*. Did he know this song? He said yes! The first person in all of the people I had asked over those past four years since first hearing it. He couldn't recall the name of it offhand and he would write to me. The next morning, there it was in my email, a song from the album *No One Cares*, called "Where Do You Go."

*Where do you go  
When it starts to rain*

*What do you do  
When the nighttime comes  
Where do you go  
When your heart's in pain  
These are the things  
That I want to know...*

In *Lear*'s first scene he demands, Someone tell me who I am. I've always played those lines rhetorically: Will someone tell me who I am, goddammit. I'm the king. Bow down to me. But what if his question is real and, from the very beginning of the story, he is struggling with his dementia? That's when it exploded in my brain, and now I know that I'm directing *Lear* again—with Sinatra. I emailed Bill Zehme, asking if he would introduce me via email to someone at the Sinatra estate. He writes a heartbreakingly beautiful letter to them, and within days he hears back: Tell Barbara not to worry. She should do it.

**And how will you incorporate Sinatra's music into this production?**

This is a contemporary version, a modern-dress production with several songs interlaced because this *King Lear* is in love with Sinatra.

**Does the music serve as a spark to *Lear*'s memory?**

**What *Lear* does at the beginning of this play no one would do—if they had their wits about them.**

A spark to memory, or a spark to forgetting. Or a spark of insight or a spark of sheer depression and guilt. Or a spark of love. It is definitely ignition.

**Can you talk more about your decision to make this a contemporary *Lear*?**

They could be wearing costumes from 700 A.D. or 700 B.C. Everything would be the same because human emotion hasn't changed a whole hell of a lot. As theater artists, we search or we wait for ideas that will connect us with themes of the play. I hope that most people will connect with this production because so many of us have witnessed the tragedy of someone disintegrating as their mind gives way to dementia.

**How do you envision some of the historically specific elements, like the Fool, for example?**

He's a comedian and they've known each other forever. An old-time comic, a sad clown, someone who has been through it all with *Lear* and would never leave him, someone

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Photo by Liz Lauren

Timothy Gregory as Edmund in CST's 2001 production of *King Lear*, directed by Barbara Gaines.

who makes a very unhappy man laugh. He'll be in a modern costume with an old hat.

## **And how will you represent the royalty in a contemporary production?**

Simply. With art treasures and with elegant furniture pieces. In Lear's palace, a gold-framed family portrait will hang on the wall, suggesting all the pomp, tradition and legacy of the royal family. His red and gold settee will be a metaphor for Buckingham Palace—and it will eventually be dragged by Lear out into the storm for shelter. Regan's and Goneril's homes will display the contemporary art of sculptors—and an exquisite painting adorning the wall by David Hockney.

## **Barbara, is that what for you resides at the heart of this play?**

This play gets to with the core of who we are. It is a play about how blind we can all be. We witness literal blindness, but also the emotional blindness of characters who not only don't know themselves, but do not see the people right before their eyes. Insight, so different from sight, is a wisdom that comes from a profound sense of empathy. This is a tyrant, a man who has paid no attention to anybody in his country—not to his noblemen, to his military advisors, nor to his family—and certainly

not to the countless homeless people who also populate his kingdom. Then, he becomes homeless, and he sees them, truly sees them, for the first time. And he acknowledges that 'I have ta'en too little care of this.' To me, that revelation makes this no longer a tragedy. Lear sees: My God, look what I could have done when I had the power. That's a transcendent moment.

## **And so did you start your work with the same playscript that you used in your last production from 2001?**

No, I never go back because there will be different words and phrases that will be completely new to me this time, and I want them there. That past does not interest me.

## **This is one of the plays in the canon for which scholars consider at least two different editions as viable—the First Quarto, published in 1608, and the First Folio, published in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death. How have you devised your own playscript for this production?**

Yes, I always work from the Folio or Quarto, depending on what works theatrically. In *Lear*, specifically, you never want to leave those Quarto scenes out. They're brilliant. The Albany scene with Goneril when he says 'You are not worth the dust...' I don't believe in rules. If it doesn't work, it's out. If I need a word,



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a passage, a scene, from a quarto, it's in. Quite frankly, if I need to rewrite something, it's in. That's just what you do. It's theater. It's collaborative. It was in Shakespeare's own company among his actors and co-authors, and it remains a collaborative art, among artists working on it today.

## And why did Larry Yando immediately become so central to your vision for this production?

Because he's one of the greatest actors that I've ever worked with. Larry has done so much extraordinary work with us and throughout this city, and he has earned this opportunity to do *Lear*. His ability to play darkness and light, his immediacy as an actor, and his facility with language, are unparalleled. And paired with Robby (Ross Lehman) as the Fool, all that I wanted to communicate about this story fell into place. Robby was in our very first production of *Lear* back in 1993, and until Robby's audition, I didn't understand the Fool or the purpose of this character in the play. And so, though he had to leave our production early to play on Broadway next opposite Nathan Lane in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, I cast him. But last fall I told him, You owe me a run. The wonderful thing about casting Robby with Larry is that the two are very, very good friends. They take care of each other, and that's the relationship that we're looking for the Fool and *Lear*. And with Kevin (Gudahl) back in the room, as well, as Kent and our text coach, we have three great minds and artists, sharing years of experience working together with Shakespeare, sharing knowledge, friendship—and love. ♦

## Death and Aging in King Lear

### Shakespearean Themes and Production Concept

Situated at the heart of *King Lear* are concerns for the struggles and terrors of aging, dying, and death. *King Lear* does not, of course, hold an exclusive “claim” on these universal themes, when all tragedy in one way or another addresses the necessity of dying. That is, argues Shakespearean scholar Susan Snyder, “regardless of whether or not the tragic hero is dead at the end (Shakespeare's always are), tragedy's peculiar blend of dignity and defeat expresses our deeply paradoxical reaction to our own mortality”<sup>1</sup>—in other words, all tragedies force us to recognize the inevitability of death even as we resist its pull. But not only does the tragic genre broadly conceived address the themes of death and dying, other plays in Shakespeare's own canon—and the late plays, in particular—share a common concern with the tragedies about last things.

The playwright's late romances, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, have long been regarded as “a kind of summation and recapitulation of Shakespeare's artistic career and an extended dramatic statement about the coming of death,”<sup>2</sup> according to scholar David Bevington. So it is no surprise that *King Lear*, written ca. 1605 and on the threshold of the late romances, is no less obsessed with last things. But *King Lear* is not a romance, and it is not simply a tragedy in which many deaths occur, as is usual in the Shakespearean forms of that genre. *King Lear* is different from other Shakespearean tragedies and from the romances in its concern for the process of dying as Shakespeare portrays an old man who must navigate the stages of aging, suffering, and death.

It's helpful to our understanding of *King Lear* to recognize that Shakespeare's contemporaries understood the aging process differently than we do today. The early modern concept of the ages of man's life, like most thought of the period, was derived partly from the authority of the Classics and the Middle Ages, and partly from contemporary observation. The study of aging in early modern Europe was considered “a minor pseudo-science, and as such was linked, though somewhat diversely by different writers and not always quite consistently, with contemporary medicine and especially with the theory of the ‘humors’ and of bodily heat and moisture,” as indicated by Shakespeare scholar John Draper.<sup>3</sup> Elizabethan pseudo-science generally grouped the stages of life into three main parts: 1) infancy, childhood, and youth to about the age of twenty-five, 2) manhood and middle life to about fifty or slightly later, and finally 3) old age and dotage.<sup>4</sup> It is likely that an Elizabethan dramatist, trying to produce high

<sup>1</sup> Susan Snyder, “*King Lear* and the Psychology of Dying,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 33.4 (Winter 1982): 449.

<sup>2</sup> David Bevington, “Is This the Promised End?: Death and Dying in *King Lear*,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 133:3 (Sept. 1989): 404.

<sup>3</sup> John W. Draper, “The Old Age of *King Lear*,” *The Journal of English and German Philology*, 39:4 (Oct. 1940): 528.

<sup>4</sup> Draper, “Old Age,” 528.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 530.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 531.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 531.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 531.

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tragedy for an audience steeped in these ideas could not ignore these commonplace beliefs.<sup>5</sup> Shakespeare's most quoted treatment of the early modern understanding of the aging process is perhaps in *As You Like It*, in which he memorably attributed seven periods to human life. In *King Lear*, however, Shakespeare's reimagining of these popular beliefs is far more complex.

Some scholars have noticed that Lear's aging process seems to be rather unusual in terms of an early modern conception of aging: at the beginning of the play, Lear should be far gone in dotage—Goneril, Regan and Kent declare him “old,” he has “white hair.” Even Lear himself has some sense of his age: he confesses that he is “old,” he classes himself with “old men,” calls himself “a poor old man,” the “old kind father” of Regan and Goneril, and finally, as misfortunes rain upon him “a foolish, fond, old man, fourscore and upward.”<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless in the early scenes, he is, physically at least, still middle-aged—an age that ended by sixty-five or earlier, according to early modern understanding of the stages of a man's life. In these scenes, we learn that he can hunt and run, and, even in Act 5, can kill a man so that Kent may well express surprise that, even with all his miseries, Lear has “endured so long.”<sup>7</sup> But ultimately the king's burden of years can no longer support so strenuous a life, and he embarks upon a scheme for lightening his load, which, with supreme tragic irony, so aggravates him that in a short time both Lear's mind and body fail under the weight.<sup>8</sup>

Even more important for this tragedy than the physical effects of aging, however, are the psychological effects of this process. In the early modern period, old men were credited with bad memories, and Lear quickly forgets all that had made Cordelia dear to him; they were said to be talkative, and Lear does not spare words. He displays the wayward and confused disposition associated with senility. As early as the third scene of the play, Goneril calls her father an “idle old man” in his second childhood, then later blames his anger on his “dotage.” During Act 1, this changes to the emotional instability of “melancholy” and to madness in Acts 2 and 3.

The madness of King Lear has been read by many critics as a necessary transition because, as long as Lear remains sane, his response to the challenge of bodily and mental dissolution is one of denial, outrage, protest, self-pity, and evasion. Only in his madness can Lear begin to confront the reality of death. But madness also provides Lear with a detachment from his former seemingly rational and conscious self (a detachment previously provided by the Fool) in which he can begin to cope with the enormity of death.<sup>9</sup> In Act 4 he is temporarily “cured” and perceives his situation with clarity before in Act 5 he dies. In its historical context, *King Lear* gives us a vibrant picture of aging and death as understood by Shakespeare's contemporaries. Lear grows old,

succumbs to age by degrees in mind and then in body, and finally meets with death.

Shakespeare's play is no mere melodrama, but “a stupendous tragedy, coherent, significant and true to life,” as life appeared to the early moderns.<sup>10</sup> But what about life—and death—as they appear to us today? This question looms large for directors as they take on a piece of classic theater. How can this production of a 400-year-old text be made to speak to the present moment? What creative choices can be made to help this story be received by an audience with poignancy and immediacy? To these ends, directors frequently choose to move the setting of an historical piece into the contemporary moment. Director Harold Clurman has argued that while he deplores “a theater which neglects the patrimony of the past,” he confesses a “predilection for the newly created. Not because the latter is superior to the old [...] but because the art of theater, an art of *presence*, is also the art of the *present*.”<sup>11</sup> In the theater, Clurman asserts, classic dramatists “reveal their contemporaneity only when they are felt and projected in response to our innermost needs.”<sup>12</sup> For Clurman, making Shakespeare “new” was about making choices that could speak to a modern audience in the same way that Shakespeare's original staging spoke to his audiences: it was a practice of building equivalencies. Director Otto Brahm addressed the contemporaneity of the works we call classics are those creations that:

*achieve a never-ending, immediate effect across the centuries. They survive the ravages of time. This does not mean, however, that they have identical meaning for various generations. Shakespeare's impact on his century was different from his impact on our present-day audiences. Just because he [his art] lives, he too changes, along with human beings. As we have often seen, artistic impression from earlier periods evolve in us and with us [...] And what truer, more genuine, more striking impression can it make than if it is imbued with the same spirit as that which dominates its contemporary world?*<sup>13</sup>

Imbuing this 400-year-old drama with the same spirit in which it was received by its contemporary world, Chicago Shakespeare's 2014 production transposes the setting of Shakespeare's tale from an original setting in pre-Christian Britain to the present moment. In “A Conversation with the Director,” Barbara Gaines elaborates upon her directorial choice to stage *King Lear* today—a choice designed to highlight the play's thematic concerns of aging, loss and death, felt acutely by audiences today, as Clurman and Brahm explain. A director's choice of production concept may be prompted by the life experiences of the director herself, as is the case in this new staging of *King Lear* by the Chicago Shakespeare Theater. Barbara Gaines came to this production

<sup>9</sup> Bevington, “Promised End,” 411.

<sup>10</sup> Draper, “Old Age,” 539.

<sup>11</sup> Harold Clurman, *On Directing*, (New York: Fireside, 1972): 164.

<sup>12</sup> Clurman, *On Directing*, 165.

<sup>13</sup> Otto Brahm, “Style and Substance,” *Directors on Directing: A Source Book of the Modern Theater*, ed. Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1963): 105.

<sup>14</sup> Bevington, “Promised End,” 408.

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of the play with her own experience of the loss of her mother, and she used that insight to fuel many of her creative choices.

While any piece of theater opens many avenues for insight and exploration—and thus many choices for staging and production—what you will see on stage is one set of possibilities. It is hoped that these choices may provide contemporary audiences with a valuable access point to the ideas of the play because, just as the director brought her experiences to the theater, audiences come to *King Lear* with their unique and personal experiences and concerns, too: the healthcare system's capacity to care for the elderly, an experience of nursing a dying loved one, or their own professional background as doctor or nurse. These ideas and many more may press upon a contemporary audience's experience of *King Lear* and its story of an aging father. Theater is a living art, designed to touch those personal experiences and connections, and to provoke a thoughtful, authentic engagement with the play's themes. And while we may understand the processes of aging and dying in ways that are very different from our early modern ancestors, Lear's greatest challenge in the play is one that will always be relevant and universal: from the very first lines of the play, what Lear seems to be in need of learning is how to die, if possible, with dignity and wisdom<sup>14</sup>—a deeply human question that will keep directors and audiences returning to *King Lear* for many more centuries to come. ♦

## Frank Sinatra and His Music

Frank Sinatra once stated that “When I sing, I believe. I’m honest.” Perhaps it was this mass appeal to sincerity and the integrity of good music that earned the singer legions of fans throughout his long career. When he first rose to fame in the early 1940s, his introduced a nuanced, intimate singing style characterized by his smooth, yet dynamic voice, emotional depth, and story-telling, and soon earned his nickname, “The Voice.” This, coupled with America’s explosive mass media growth during the war years, led to his wild popularity, particularly with young teenage girls known as “bobby-soxers.” His career spanned over fifty years, and his many recorded albums left us with some of his most famous and popular songs, including “I’ve Got You Under My Skin,” “Fly Me to the Moon,” “Come Fly with Me,” “Angel Eyes,” “My Kind of Town (Chicago Is),” “My Way,” and “New York, New York.”

Francis Albert (“Frank”) Sinatra was born in Hoboken, New Jersey on December 12, 1915. After dropping out of high school when he was fifteen, the young Sinatra went to see Bing Crosby perform in Jersey City. The performance stirred Sinatra, and he decided to become a singer. Following the Crosby concert, Sinatra worked without pay for several radio broadcasts just for the airtime. After hearing him on the radio, bandleader Harry James signed Sinatra, who recorded his first hit, “All or Nothing at All” with James

and his band. Later, Tommy Dorsey saw Sinatra sing with James in Chicago, and immediately signed him to play with the Dorsey Orchestra. Sinatra started his solo career with the hit “Night and Day” after two years with the orchestra. The song launched him to stardom. Over the next fifty years, Sinatra recorded over 1,600 songs. Throughout his career, he insisted on his own style and musical arrangements with every song he recorded or sang.

During his life, Sinatra also acted in fifty-four films. Some of his most well-known movies include *On the Town*, *Anchors Away*, *The Man with the Golden Arm*, *Ocean’s Eleven*, *The Manchurian Candidate*, and *From Here to Eternity*. In 1953, Sinatra won an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for his role in *From Here to Eternity*. The award revitalized Sinatra’s career after a period of decline, and he recorded many of his legendary hits in the 1950s and 1960s.

Sinatra often modified songs that had been recorded before, and made them his own. For example, his popular song, “I’ve Got the World on a String,” was recorded by Louis Armstrong and Bing Crosby years before Sinatra sang the song in 1957. Similarly, Sinatra’s famous “Angel Eyes” (which *King Lear* audiences will hear as Lear recalls his youngest daughter Cordelia) was recorded by Nat “King” Cole and Ella Fitzgerald before Sinatra cut his version in 1958. When Sinatra “retired” in 1971 (he made a comeback in 1973 with the album “Ol’ Blue Eyes Is Back”), the final lyric of “Angel Eyes”—“Excuse me while I disappear”—was the last line he sang at each stop on what he intended as his farewell tour.

During a stint in Las Vegas, Sinatra became a member of the infamous group of actors known as the “Rat Pack.” The group, which had a reputation for heavy drinking and philandering, included Sinatra, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis, Jr., Peter Lawford, and Joey Bishop. They often made appearances at each others’ shows in Las Vegas, and attracted large, enthusiastic crowds.

Sinatra continued singing and acting through the 1990s, until he died on May 14, 1998. During his lifetime, Sinatra sold over 150 million records, won eleven Grammy awards, was married four times (including once to Ava Gardner for most of the 1950s, and later to Mia Farrow from 1966-1968), and had three children. Sinatra was a humanitarian, giving millions away throughout his life. He often donated to large causes, raising money for medical institutions and establishing, with his wife in 1986, the Barbara Sinatra Children’s Center—a haven for abused children. But he was also known to send money anonymously to individuals and families in need, and was an outspoken advocate for civil rights. Although younger listeners may not recognize every lyric or song title, Sinatra’s famous voice is recognizable in an instant and is part of our collective cultural consciousness. ♦



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From Chicago Shakespeare's 2001 production of *King Lear*, directed by Barbara Gaines (clockwise from top left):

1. Patrick Clear as Gloucester and Timothy Kane as Edgar
2. Greg Vinkler as King Lear and Patrick Clear as Gloucester
3. Patrick Clear (center stage) as the blinded Gloucester

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## Before You Read the Play

### AS A CLASS

#### 1. BARD BLOG: A TOOL FOR DISCUSSION

Create the beginning of a *King Lear* blog on your class website to which you can add as you read and discuss the play. (To the teacher: Don't yet have a class blog? Check out <http://www.kidblog.org>, a free and simple website for teachers to create class blogs. You may also want to explore <http://wordpress.com/classrooms/>, another resource for building a classroom website.)

Start your class blog by posting images or words that represent any information you know or have already heard about *King Lear* or Shakespeare. As you study the play, add videos, headlines, articles, songs, etc. that remind you of characters, events, key objects, words, or anything else you feel is relevant to your reading. Give a short explanation about why your post is relevant to the play, or note the line or lines that prompted you to share it. You'll find more Bard Blog suggestions through this "Classroom Activities" section.

##### Guiding Questions:

- What words or images come to your mind when you hear *King Lear* or think about Shakespearean tragedy?
- What do you already know about this play?
- What words would you list to best describe Shakespeare?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS SL1, W6, W10

#### 2. TRAGEDY

Tragedy is part of the human experience, and certainly, Shakespeare recognized this when he wrote *King Lear*. But what exactly is tragedy? How do we define it in literature and drama? And why do we choose to read tragedy? Why do we willingly read or watch a play that may remind us of the darkness in our lives?

Explore these questions about the genre of "tragedy." Break into five or six small groups. As a group, think about the elements that you believe make a book or play truly tragic. When brainstorming your list, think about other Shakespeare plays you have read, like *Romeo and Juliet* or *Othello*. Also consider other books or contemporary stories that you have recently studied, such as *The Scarlett Letter*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Of Mice and Men*. Come up with a group definition of "tragedy" by listing four or five tragic characteristics.

After a few minutes, reconvene with your class. After every group has presented its list, work together to compile a master list of elements that define "tragedy."

##### Guiding Questions:

- What is "Shakespearean tragedy?"
- Why do we read tragedy?
- What elements make an event, plot, play, or work of literature truly tragic?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS SL1, W9

### IN SMALL GROUPS OR PAIRS

#### 3. IAMBIC PENTAMETER

Much of Shakespeare's verse is written in iambic pentameter, or ten-syllable lines with alternating unstressed and stressed syllables. The ten unstressed/stressed beats mirror the cadence of the English language. Say these everyday sentences out loud and listen for the iambic pentameter rhythm:

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

*I'm hungry and I want my dinner now.*

*It's sunny now, but later it will rain.*

*I really want to see my friends tonight.*

Now take a look at a passage from the play. In Act 1, scene 1, King Lear says to Cordelia:

LEAR      Let it be so; thy truth, then, be thy dower:  
             For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,  
             The mysteries of Hecate, and the night;  
             By all the operation of the orbs  
             From whom we do exist, and cease to be

Read these lines aloud, trying to overemphasize the meter. If you're having trouble, look at the example below, in which the meter is stressed:

LEAR      Let IT be SO; thy TRUTH, then, BE thy DOWER:  
             For, BY the SACred RADiance OF the SUN,  
             The MYSTerIES of HEcate, AND the NIGHT;  
             By ALL the OPerAtion OF the ORBS  
             From WHOM we DO exlST, and CEASE to BE

Say the passage above aloud and exaggerate the stress. Try tapping the rhythm out on your knee at the same time to feel the rhythm. Once you have the hang of the meter, experiment with writing a few of your own lines in iambic pentameter. Write your favorite children's story or nursery rhyme in ten lines, all in iambic pentameter. Use your new tools—exaggeration when speaking and tapping—to make sure you keep the meter. Share your verse-tale with the class.

## Guiding Questions:

- Can you come up with an everyday sentence in English in iambic pentameter?
- What is the effect in reversing the stressed and unstressed meter?
- Do you think iambic pentameter would work well with a different language you are studying or one that you speak at home?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R5, W3

## 4.

### PROBLEM SITUATIONS

In small groups, choose one of the following situations below that characters from *King Lear* face throughout the story. Discuss with your group the different options your character has and what you would do if you found yourself in that scenario. (A special thanks to Dr. Tim Duggan, a frequent instructor at CST Teacher Workshops, for this activity suggestion!)

- Your father or mother banishes you from your house because they say you don't love them as much as your siblings do. What are your options, and what would you do?
- You feel that your father unfairly favors your brother over you. What are your options, and what would you do?
- Your father is growing very old, and is much more volatile and vulnerable than he used to be. He may also be suffering from the beginning stages of mental decline. Although he is becoming increasingly difficult to care for, he insists that you welcome him into your home for a visit. What are your options, and what do you do?
- You and your sibling are attracted to the same person. What are your options, and what do you do?

## Guiding Questions:

- What personal experiences does your given scenario raise for your group members? How do these experiences help you to identify possible options to explore?
- What process did your group use to determine the most viable option for your given situation?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, SL1



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## 5. SOUND AND SENSE

(To the teacher: Excerpt from the play one line for each student. If helpful, see our suggestions below. Choose lines that are rich in Shakespeare's language or are descriptive of character. Distribute a line to each student on a slip of paper, not revealing the character who spoke it. Since the students have not yet begun to read the play, the focus here is not on the characters themselves but rather on the language that the characters speak.)

Here are some suggestions:

*Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter; / Dearer than eye-sight, space, and liberty; / Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare. (Goneril, 1.1)*

*Come not between the dragon and his wrath. (Lear, 1.1)*

*Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sound / Reverbs no hollowness. (Kent, 1.1)*

*But I will tarry; the fool will stay, / And let the wise man fly: / The knave turns fool that runs away; / The fool no knave, perdy. (Fool, 2.4)*

*Be-monster not thy feature. Were't my fitness / To let these hands obey my blood, / They are apt enough to dislocate and tear / Thy flesh and bones (Albany, 4.2)*

*I am a man / More sinn'd against than sinning. (Lear, 3.2)*

*We make guilty of our / disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars: as / if we were villains by necessity; fools by / heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and / traitors, by spherical predominance (Edmund, 1.3)*

*Our basest beggars / Are in the poorest thing superfluous: / Allow not nature more than nature needs, / Man's life is cheap as beast's. (Lear, 2.4)*

*Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow! / You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout / Till you have drenched our steeples (Lear, 3.2)*

*You have seen / Sunshine and rain at once; her smiles and tears / Were like: a better way,—those happy smilets / That play'd on her ripe lip seem'd not to know / What guests were in her eyes; which parted thence / As pearls from diamonds dropp'd. (Gentleman, 4.3)*

*Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear; / Robes and furr'd gowns hide all. (Lear, 4.4)*

*When we are born, we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools (Lear, 4.5)*

Look at your line(s), and as you begin to walk around the room, say it aloud again and again without addressing anyone. Let the nature of the line and the way you say it affect the rhythm and pace at which you walk around the room. Say your line for at least five other people, and listen closely as they share their line with you.

Continue walking around the room, silently, making eye contact with each person you pass. Now begin investigating different ways of moving with these prompts:

- Pick up and slow down pace. If “1” is slow motion and “5” is running, start at a “3.” Each time you take on a new pace, say your line to at least one other student. Slow down to a “2.” Speed up to a “4.” Back to “3.” Down to “1,” etc.
- Alter your posture. Walk upright with your chest out. Hunch your shoulders. Strut with swagger. Shuffle your feet. Fold your arms. Swing your arms freely by your side. Each time you explore a new posture, say your line to at least one other student.
- Change your status. If “1” is the lowest status in a society and “10” is royalty, begin walking at a “5.” Now change to a “10.” What does a “1” feel like? Continue repeating your line to a fellow student each time you switch your status.

Now regroup in a circle, each student in turn delivering his or her line to a classmate opposite him or her in the circle, at the pace, posture, and status level that feels best to you. Sit down as a group and discuss the lines. Remember that this is an idea or brainstorming session; begin to imagine the world of the play you've just entered.

### Guiding Questions:

- What do you imagine about the character who speaks your line?
- Are there lines that might possibly have been spoken by the same character?
- What pace felt best with your line? What size? What status?
- Did any sounds of the words you spoke aloud in your line tell you anything about the emotions of the character?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R4, SL1

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## 6. CREATIVE DEFINITIONS

(To the teacher: Excerpt several lines from the play and write them on the board, or create a handout with the lines written on it. See suggestions below.) It can be helpful to play with the sound of Shakespeare's language to discover the meaning of the words and thoughts. Begin by reading a couple of lines from the play as a class. Write down any words that may be unfamiliar to you. Sit in a circle. Say the lines one word at a time clockwise around the circle so that every student is responsible for one word. Once everyone knows what his or her word is, begin to play with the line. Start by turning your head to the right until the person before you says his or her word. Then turn your head quickly to the left and say your word loudly to the next person. Make your words sound different each time around, with the following prompts:

- Stretch out the vowel sounds.
- Exaggerate the consonant sounds.
- Speed through the line.
- Go in slow motion.
- Whisper the words.

After you get through the line a few times, discuss what you discovered as a class. If there are words that are still unclear, arm two to three students with "dueling" copies of lexicons to define words that are unfamiliar (David and Ben Crystal's *Shakespeare's Words* is recommended, or you can visit their online version at <http://www.shakespeareswords.com>). These dueling "lexicon masters" can turn tedious vocabulary searches into a competitive sport!

Here are some suggestions:

*I have no way, and therefore want no eyes; / I stumbled when I saw: full oft 'tis seen, / Our means secure us, and our mere defects / Prove our commodities.* (Gloucester, 4.1)

*Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound / Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears / Do scald like molten lead.* (Lear, 4.7)

*Men must endure / Their going hence, even as their coming hither: / Ripeness is all.* (Edgar, 5.2)

### Guiding Questions:

- How does saying a word various ways help you understand its meaning?
- How would you define your word differently after this activity?
- What influence do the sounds of the words have on their meaning?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L4, R1, R4

## 7. PICTURES INTO WORDS

(To the teacher: find about five images of different moments from various productions/movies of *King Lear* and give each group a set of pictures. Good go-to sites are IMDB, <http://www.imdb.com>, for films, and ADHS Performing Arts, <http://www.ahds.rhul.ac.uk/ahdscollections/>, for theater images—as well as CST's own site, of course! [www.chicagoshakes.com/about\\_us/production\\_history](http://www.chicagoshakes.com/about_us/production_history).)

In small groups, examine each of the five images in your packet. What's going on and what is the relationship between the people in the picture? Where does the scene take place? What is happening? Take turns looking at the photos and write your responses down by each picture. You can also respond to comments your other group members have already made. After you've all had a chance to look at each image, try to arrange the pictures in the order in which you think these scenes occurred.

### Guiding Questions:

- Did any of your classmates write something that helped you to make your own connection to a photo?
- How might these scenes be connected? Why does one picture come before another?
- How did your groups' decision about the order compare with other groups? Would you change your order after hearing the thought process of other groups?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R7

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## 8. FOCUSED FREE-WRITE AND COLLABORATIVE POEM

Before you begin to read *King Lear*, it's helpful to think about some of the play's central ideas as they may relate to your own life and personal experiences. Take a moment to free-write some of your thoughts about one of the following situations:

- Have you ever felt that you and your parents would never see eye-to-eye on an issue? Do you find it difficult sometimes to defend your side of the argument?
- How close were you to your siblings growing up? Did you face a lot of sibling rivalry or was there only friendly competition? Have you ever been incredibly angered by your sibling? How important is family in your life today?
- We live in a materialistic world where many define success and self-worth by what they own and can buy. But *King Lear* has a transformational experience when he loses all of his possessions. What item, of everything you own, could you truly not live without? What could you give up? How important are your material possessions to your identity?
- Do you believe that we are born exactly as we are, or that we shaped by our society, families, and cultures? In other words, do you believe in nature or nurture? Why?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you knew others were lying or exaggerating, and you chose to tell the truth? Why did you make the choice to tell the truth? Was it difficult not to succumb to the peer-pressure to lie?

In groups of three, read what you wrote to your classmates. After each reading, underline the words or phrases that stood out to your fellow classmates. Choose one of these underlined phrases to donate to a collaborative class poem. Sit in a circle or U-shape and speak the lines in turn, with a contribution from each student.

### Guiding Questions:

- What predictions can you make about the play based on this activity?
- Were there any repeated ideas or themes in the collaborative class poem?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, SL6, W10

## As You Read the Play

## 9. BARD BLOG

As you begin to enter Shakespeare's text, continue building on your Bard Blog. Use these ideas to get you started, or modify other activities in this section to a blogging format:

- Choose a character to follow throughout the play and write diary entries from that character's point of view. Share your thoughts and feelings as the character, incorporating quotations from the text whenever you can. Be creative! Rather than observing him or her from the outside, try to get at the heart of your character. Check out an example of one for the character of Hermia from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at <http://hermiasdiary.blogspot.com>.
- At the end of each act, list five of the major characters in *King Lear*. Write a single sentence for each that begins, "What I most want is..." Take a risk—there's not just one right answer! Then write a sentence for each character that begins, "What I'm most afraid of is..." (Is there ever a situation when what one most wants is also what one most fears?)
- Create a character discussion forum after reading Act 1, scenes 1 and 2 when a wide range of characters, from dukes and earls, to old men and young women, and villainous brothers and manipulative sisters are introduced. Post one or two lines that exemplify a character of your choice. Add an image that defines your character.

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, W3, W6, W10



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## Act I

### AS A CLASS

#### 10. IDENTIFYING THEMES

Shakespeare often introduces the themes of his play at the very beginning. After reading Act 1, scene 1, identify the main issues and themes that are discussed and use them to make predictions on the outcome of the play. Summarize your predicted story in three sentences.

**Guiding Questions:**

- What strategies do you use to identify main issues and themes of *King Lear*?
- How did identifying themes inform your predictions for the end of the play?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, W2

#### 11. BEGINNING, MIDDLE, END

Various characters participate in the bizarre action of the first scene of *King Lear*. Lear, Cordelia, Goneril and Regan, and Kent are all significant characters in this scene. In the following activity, work together to tell the story of the play's first scene from different perspectives.

Split your class into four groups, and have each group form a single file line. Each group should focus on one character: Lear, Cordelia, Goneril (or Regan), or Kent. Using the text as a reference, each group will narrate Act 1, scene 1 from their character's perspective. Speaking in first person, start on one end of group and move down each line, with each person supplying one line of the character's narration of the scene's events. Draw on the characters' lines as well as textual clues to guide your narration of the scene.

**Guiding Questions:**

- How does changing the perspective of the narration change your thinking about the first scene?
- What textual clues does Shakespeare leave his audience as possible indicators of what each character is thinking?
- What choices might an actor make to communicate their character's perspective?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3

### IN SMALL GROUPS

#### 12. SUBTEXT

Subtext is underlying or implicit meaning, a message that is not stated directly but can be inferred. A play's subtext is the underlying action or thoughts not explicitly stated in the characters' lines. When someone says, "Read between the lines," they're asking you to consider the subtext. Actors illuminate their own interpretation of what the characters are thinking and feeling through their performance of the subtext—that is, their interpretation of the subtext (since it is not written anywhere).

In Act 1, scene 1, several characters speak lines that may contradict what they truly feel or think. Read the scene aloud, with two people assigned to each part. As one reads Shakespeare's written text, the other will write the unspoken subtext. Then perform the scene, with one person acting out Shakespeare's written lines, and the other voicing the subtext for each character. Try playing different subtext choices with the same line and compare the interpretations. Finally, perform the scene only speaking Shakespeare's script, speaking the words in a way that allows the underlying meaning to be understood.

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## Guiding Questions:

- How do we know in real life when somebody is speaking with a subtext driving their words?
- How can you, as a reader or audience member, tell when there is “subtext” in a particular moment in a Shakespeare play? How do you know when a character feels different from what they are saying aloud?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, W3

## 13. INTERPRETING A CHARACTER'S POINT OF VIEW

In Act 1, scene 5, the Fool's words to Lear could be interpreted as particularly harsh, especially since Lear seems to be upset in this scene. In pairs, take clues from the script to decide what state of mind Lear is in and what affect the Fool is trying to accomplish with his sarcastic remarks. After making your decisions, read through the scene again using your interpretation of the characters' points of view in this scene.

## Guiding Questions:

- What is the Fool trying to do? Does he feel empathy towards Lear?
- Is Lear really afraid of going mad as he claims in the scene? Is he feeling guilty for his previous behavior or actions? What's another possible interpretation?
- What lines or phrases in the text help you to answer these questions and develop an interpretation of Lear and the Fool's perspectives?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6

## 14. RECOGNIZING DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

Shakespeare's compelling characters, intricate language, and stimulating plotlines have allowed actors and directors to interpret his plays again and again over the past 400 years. Leaving room for a vast array of possible interpretations of his characters and plays, the complexity of Shakespeare's characters has prompted scholars to approach his plays through specific frames of reference in mind. For instance, scholars may read Shakespeare from a traditionalist, historicist, political, or feminist perspective. Each angle garners a unique interpretation of the same play.

If you were a Shakespeare scholar, consider how you would read the first scene of *King Lear* from one of the following perspectives. If you were an actor, think about what choices you would make to communicate this interpretation; as a director, think about how you would “block” the scene (that is, physically stage the actors), or what advice you would give your actors. In groups of five or six, choose one of the following angles:

- A family drama—the problems of fathers and children
- A political drama—the struggle for power in a state
- A feminist interpretation—the story retold from a woman's point of view

Read the text of Act 1, scene 1. Revise the script: add blocking cues (at what point in the script do actors move and how), lines, notes about the set, etc. that help retell the events of Act 1 from your chosen perspective. Share your revised version of Act 1, scene 1 with the class.

## Guiding Questions:

- What techniques does a director use to help the audience view an event from a particular perspective?
- How does changing the perspective of a play affect your understanding of the characters?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6, W4

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## 15. DRAMATIC PROGRESSION THROUGH SCENE TITLES

One of the best ways to get at the “through-line,” or dramatic progression, in a play is to give each scene a name or title that captures the heart of the action. Directors often use this technique to help actors (and themselves) during the rehearsal process. In your small groups, give each of the scenes in Act 1 a name or title that you feel gets at the essence of the scene. Be as creative and specific as you can in naming each scene. Then share your titles with the other groups—which you might want to also consider creating a tableau to represent. (*To the teacher: Consider repeating this activity through each act as you read the play.*)

### Guiding Questions:

- How do the titles clarify and summarize the dramatic progression?
- What themes become more apparent when writing the titles?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, W10

### ON YOUR OWN

## 16. DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES

A soliloquy is a speech given by a character alone on stage in order to reveal his or her thoughts to the audience—who in essence becomes the actor’s scene partner, particularly when the play is directed on a thrust stage, like Chicago Shakespeare’s. *Hamlet*’s “To be or not to be” speech is one famous example of a soliloquy. In contrast, a monologue is a long speech given by a character to another character. It is similar to a soliloquy, in that it reveals a character’s thoughts.

In Act 1, scene 1, Edmund listens to his father describe his sexual adventures. Gloucester calls him a bastard and his mother a whore. Edmund does not respond in words, but presumably he thinks a response, which might be more or less emotional. Consider Edmund’s reactions to his father’s words, and write a monologue or soliloquy that expresses them and would fit in this scene.

### Guiding Questions:

- Why does Shakespeare use soliloquies to reveal characters’ thoughts?
- Why is it important that the character is alone on stage during the soliloquy?
- How might a soliloquy be delivered differently on a thrust stage versus a traditional proscenium stage?
- What effect, if any, does a monologue have on other characters?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, W3

## 17. INTERPRETING CHARACTER

Now that all of the major characters have been introduced to you, choose one to track throughout the play. Keep an actor’s journal about this character. Actors use information in the text to teach them about their characters. Often they keep track of the following:

- What do other people say about the character?
- What does the character do in the play? What motivates this action?
- What does the character want? Why? How do they go about fulfilling this “want”?

You might use the Bard Blog to record your journal entries and other information about your character. Look for clues in the text, and be sure to make note of lines and page numbers that support your journal entries. In addition to clues in the text, use your imagination to fill in the gaps about what your character looks like, or what they like to do in their spare time.

### Guiding Questions:

- Do you understand your character more through what other people say about them or through your character’s own lines and actions?
- How much of your character (his/her actions, thoughts, and feelings) does Shakespeare leave up to your interpretation?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, W6, W10



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## Act 2

### AS A CLASS

#### 18. CHARACTER MOTIVATION

Edmund, younger than Edgar and the illegitimate son of Gloucester, is not entitled to the same power or prestige as his brother. Merit was irrelevant in determining social status of royalty and the aristocracy in medieval England (when the story of Lear is originally situated) and in early modern Europe, when Shakespeare lived and wrote.

In Edmund's persona, write a letter of justification of his actions as convincingly as you can, using evidence from the text (feel free to look as far back as his very first speech in Act 1, scene 2, beginning with "Thou Nature art my goddess" to "Now, gods, stand up for bastards!"). Though Edmund's method of taking power is unjust, how does the injustice upon him factor into the equation? As a class, read some of the justifications aloud and allow the rest of the class to ask questions and challenge the character's rationale for their actions.

##### Guiding Questions:

- What textual evidence did you use to justify Edmund's actions? Did your classmates use the same or different parts of the text?
- How did hearing the justification for a character's actions affect your opinion of—or ability to empathize with—a character?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, W3

#### 19. CHARACTER CLUES

The study of character contributes much to our understanding of a play. More often than not, we learn about an individual character's personality and temperament by way of: (1) what the character says about himself or herself; (2) what others say about the character; (3) what the character does; and (4) what the character says about others. Look, for example, at Lear's lines at the end of Act 2, scene 4. In pairs, read the passage aloud beginning with "O, reason not the need" to "O fool, I shall go mad!" Underline or highlight any lines that offer new information about the character of Lear. Regroup as a class, and discuss what you discovered.

##### Guiding Questions:

- What does this speech help us understand about Lear?
- What literary devices does Shakespeare use to tell us about Lear's perspective and state of mind?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, SL2

### IN SMALL GROUPS

#### 20. EMOTIONAL APPEAL

Edmund attempts to persuade Gloucester of Edgar's patricidal intentions in the second half of Act 2, scene 1, by appealing to his father's fear. In groups of four, find words or phrases in Edmund's lines, beginning at "Persuade me to the murder of your lordship" to "Full suddenly he fled" and "When I dissuaded him from his intent" to "To make thee seek it," which would affect Gloucester. Consider which are true, and which are lies. While one person reads through the lines, two other group members echo chosen key words for emphasis. The final group member takes on the persona of Gloucester, listening and experiencing the effect of the emphasized words.

##### Guiding Questions:

- As you listen to other group readings, how does the emphasizing of certain words or phrases change your understanding of this moment and the character of Edmund?
- If you took on the role of Gloucester, what effect did this reading have on you? How might Gloucester react in this moment to help tell a clear story?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R4, L3

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## 21. MULTIPLE INTERPRETATIONS

In Act 2, scene 1, Edmund contrives to fool both his brother Edgar, and the Duke of Gloucester, their father. Edmund has already turned his father against Edgar. In the following speech, he would have Edgar believe he was on his side, and make the Duke believe he was attempting to capture Edgar:

EDMUND    I hear my father coming. Pardon me,  
              In cunning, I must draw my sword upon you.  
              Draw, seem to defend yourself. Now, quit you well.  
              Yield! Come before my father!—Light ho, here! —  
              Fly brother!—Torches, torches!—so, farewell. *Exit Edgar*  
              Some blood drawn on me would beget opinion  
              Of my more fierce endeavor.

*[Wounds his arm]*

              I have seen drunkards  
              Do more than this in sport. Father, father!  
              Stop, stop! No help?

Edmund hears his father coming and quickly devises a plan to stage a fight with Edgar. In the lines above, Edmund intends some words to be heard by Edgar alone, and some by the guards and Gloucester. An actor may even choose to make Edgar's line, "I hear my father coming," as a statement aimed at Gloucester. Other words the actor may choose to speak to himself, or to the audience. In small groups, explore different ways of speaking Edmund's lines. Try several different interpretations, directing lines to different characters. In each group, students who are not speaking Edmund's lines might participate as either Gloucester or Edgar, and react as those characters might to different interpretations. During each interpretation, there should always be at least one student observing the reading, who can get an overall picture of the speech as an audience member would.

### Guiding Questions:

- How does speaking Edmund's part in different ways affect your understanding of what he is saying? Which way makes the text clearest to you?
- How does changing the character to whom Edmund's lines are directed change their meaning?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R7, L3

## 22. SHAKESPEARE'S STRUCTURE

Shakespeare writes in iambic pentameter throughout much of the play, but certain characters speak exclusively in prose. It's visually easy to tell the two forms apart as they appear on the page: verse begins at the left margin each time with a capitalized letter and a raggedy right margin, while prose goes all the way across the page with normal capitalization and even "justified" margins on both left and right. Take a look at Act 2, scene 2. Who speaks in verse? Who speaks in prose—and why do you think they don't speak in verse? Sometimes when characters are speaking verse, they do so in shortened meter (fewer than ten syllables per line) for several lines. Find the places where this occurs. What do they have in common? Why do you think Shakespeare may have written these lines differently? Discuss your findings.

### Guiding Questions:

- What similarities can you find between characters who speak mostly verse in this scene and those who speak mostly in prose?
- Might the text structure suggest anything about a character's social status or their emotional state—or simply the situation he or she currently engaged in?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARD R5

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## 23. MOVEMENT AND TEXT

As a class, read through Edgar's speech that begins with "I heard myself proclaim'd..." in Act 2, scene 3. Underline the words that strike you most—one per line. (Actors call these "operative words.") After you've determined your words, decide on a gesture that connects a physical movement to the meaning and/or emotion behind each word you chose. Break into small groups, and once your group agrees upon the words and movements, practice saying the speech in unison. Try to match your voice to the meaning behind the word and gesture. Present your work to the class. Discuss what you learned from watching your peers. *(To the teacher: watch a video clip of this activity in action with an instructor and his students from the Royal Shakespeare Company at <http://tinyurl.com/rsctextandmovement>.)*

### Guiding Question:

- Why did a particular word strike you more than other words did?
- When you watched the other groups, did other words stand out to you? Did you understand any words differently?
- Do we use operative words in our conversations with each other?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, R4

## Act 3

### AS A CLASS

## 24. SETTING AND THEME

As you read through Act 3, identify which scenes Shakespeare intended to be staged outside and which inside. Then review your list and consider what the significance of "outside" or "inside" might mean for the scene. How does Shakespeare seem to be using inside and outside settings to express the play's themes? Compare all of the inside scenes; look for similarities and differences. Do the same for the outside scenes. Symbolically, what might "inside" and "outside" represent in the play?

### Guiding Questions:

- How does Shakespeare delineate the setting of a scene? Is it always explicitly stated? Or must you infer from the characters' dialogue?
- How can setting or scene express a theme of a play?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARD R2

## 25. RHYTHM IN SPEECH

King Lear, after being barred from his daughters' homes, rages against the storm in Act 3, Scene 2. His first speech in this scene, beginning with "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!" is a great example of how the rhythm of Shakespeare's language matches the emotional state of his characters.

Iambic pentameter, the rhythmic scheme of Shakespeare's verse, has the sound of a heartbeat. Each iamb, or foot, has an unstressed syllable and then a stressed syllable. (Say the word New York out loud—"York" is more accented than "New.") There are five of these feet in a line of Shakespeare's text. Try reading the following two lines from Regan's last speech in Act 2, scene 4, exaggerating the iambic pentameter. Read through the lines a few times so you have a chance to get used to the rhythm.

REGAN      The injuries that they themselves procure  
              Must be their schoolmasters. Shut up your doors.

Does the text still make sense if the piece is read aloud with the exaggerated rhythm? Can the reader accomplish the reading fairly comfortably?



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

Now, repeat Lear's speech in Act 3, scene 2 printed below. Move around the room as you repeat the lines. Try to really exaggerate each line and its rhythm. You can find the rhythm of the iambic pentameter by holding your hand over your heart, or by feeling your pulse.

LEAR        Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow,  
              You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout  
              Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!  
              You sulph'rous and thought-executing fires,  
              Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,  
              Singe my white head: and thou all-shaking thunder,  
              Strike flat the thick rotundity o'th'world,  
              Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once  
              That makes ingrateful man.

It's hard to do with this passage. The lines in this speech don't make sense if read in a rhythmic iambic pentameter. In many of Shakespeare's plays, the verse rhythm reflects a character's heightened anger, despair, madness, or other passion. The words Shakespeare's characters say to—and about—each other give actors clues as to their nature and their emotions, but so does the specific rhythm of their speech.

## **Guiding Question:**

- How does the rhythm of Shakespeare's verses convey the emotions of characters? What might an actor do when speaking irregular verse to convey a character's emotions to the audience?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, R5

## **26. STAGING TO CONVEY MOOD AND TONE**

At the end of Act 3, scene 5, King Lear and his entourage have been out all night in a wild storm as Lear, turned away by his two elder daughters, rages. Exhausted but not prepared to sleep, Lear refuses shelter:

"Thou think'st 'tis much that this contentious storm invades us to the skin: so 'tis to thee. But where the greater malady is fixed, the lesser is scarce felt."

Stage directors often end a scene with exits that express the mood that has been developed in that scene. As a class, read through the end of Act 3, scene 5, and decide how you would stage the exit of Lear and his followers. For each character, you should suggest the movements and expressions which you think convey their feelings most dramatically. With a few volunteers from the class, actually stage (or "block") the ending of the scene in front of the room. You may even try staging several different versions of your ending. As a class, discuss which staging resonates most with you.

## **Guiding Questions:**

- Are there clues in the character's words that indicate certain movements?
- What choices do actors and directors make that help to convey the mood or tone?
- How do different versions of the exit from this scene affect your reception of the play?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, SL1, SL4

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## IN SMALL GROUPS

### 27. PHYSICAL AND METAPHORICAL BLINDNESS

At the end of Act 3, Gloucester is savagely blinded, but throughout the play Shakespeare develops the theme of blindness metaphorically, as well. Based on what you've read, think about who is blind in the play. What blinds them (and keep in mind that feelings and relationships and personal qualities can "blind")? Are there any fully "sighted" characters? Do some characters learn to "see," and what prompts this sight? What does Shakespeare seem to say are the consequences of human blindness—in each of the forms it takes throughout the play?

In groups of three, choose one character's "blindness" to chart on your Bard Blog. Follow their journey through the play notating what the character knows and fails to see at any given moment. Keep track of the character's discoveries and incidents affecting them, which might change what they know and what they "see."

#### Guiding Questions:

- In your lives, what do you observe people turning a "blind eye" towards? Are there any parallels in the play?
- In what ways does Shakespeare convey blindness as a theme of *King Lear*?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, R3, W9

### 28. CONTEMPORARY FOOLS

Shakespeare's wise fools are funny, witty and sarcastic—and they are given unparalleled license to speak the truth through barbed humor. They sing, dance and poke fun at leaders and kings. As a group, brainstorm as many parallels in our contemporary world as possible. You may come up with fictional characters or historical figures, as well as those still living. Share your ideas with the class.

#### Guiding Question:

- Why has Shakespeare's idea of the fool character remained intact in our literature, entertainment, and drama today?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS SL1, SL4

### 29. STAGING A STORM

Throughout the centuries, directors have had very different ideas on how to stage the storm scene. Some productions, such as Granville-Barker's in 1950, opt to recreate an elaborate storm with sound effects, wind-machines, and technical set pieces. Other directors have rejected such grand reenactments of the storm, favoring an intense and quiet scene where the storm is mimed through stylized movement.

In small groups, reread the storm scene in *King Lear*. How would you stage the scene? Do you think that it would be more effective to have a larger-than-life storm, or a focused, imagined one? What factors contribute to your decision? Look at the lines of the play, and try to think about them spoken through loud thunder claps and elaborate lighting, or alternatively, by an actor who only imagines the power of the storm. "Score" your text precisely as a sound designer might. At which specific moments might you orchestrate thunder claps to punctuate the text—and yet not drown out your actors' voices? In other words, you will need to find passages that allow the actors to pause, despite the scene's propelling thrust forward.

#### Guiding Questions:

- What might be gained from staging an imagine storm? A more realistic storm?
- What might an imagined storm say about the character of Lear?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R7, W3

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## 30. TABLEAU

Gloucester's blinding scene is a difficult one to stage. Many directors opt to perform the savage act offstage, some in a blackout, and others in full, violent view of the audience. In small groups, brainstorm possible staging for the blinding, and discuss which might be most effective. Opting for an onstage blinding, cast the roles. Choose 5-7 places throughout Act 3, scene 7 that are key, and create a group tableau for each of them. A tableau is a wordless, still (or almost still) picture made by bodies in a group and in relationship to one another, assuming certain poses and conveying a particular mood or image. Ideally, the scene of the blinding will be understood strictly through the visual story portrayed in your tableau. Perform your scene for the rest of the class.

### Guiding Questions:

- As an audience member watching a production of *Lear*, what staging of this scene would be most effective for you?
- How does this savagely violent scene in *King Lear* affect your understanding of the play as a whole?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R6, SL1

## 31. PLAYING THE FOOL

Some directors, such as Nahum Tate in the seventeenth century, opt to completely cut the character of the Fool rather than attempt to explain the significance of his role. Other directors have used various creative ways to integrate the Fool, as well as explain his disappearance (see the essay "A Look Back..." page 27, for a few directorial choices). In small groups, create a detailed plan—as though you were the director—for the choices you would make for the Fool. Included in your plan should be ideas for casting (i.e. age, height, personality, etc.), the nature of the relationship between the Fool and Lear, costume specifics (i.e. traditional motley, peasant clothes, modern dress, etc.), and how you would stage the disappearance of the Fool. Discuss your plan with your classmates' ideas.

### Guiding Questions:

- What excerpts from the text did you use to make decisions about your interpretation of the Fool?
- How would you as a director make sense of his disappearance after Act 3?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, W9

## 32. SPEAKING LINES

Gloucester's lines below—from Act 3, scene 3—are a disjointed succession of short sentences and broken phrases. Divide into small groups, and read the lines around the group, changing the reader at each punctuation mark.

*(To the teacher: As they read, the students should try to make the passage flow as if one person were speaking the lines. The students should work through the passage two or three times, striving for fluidity.)*

Repeat the reading, trying to bring out the urgency of the situation by adding gesture and different tones of voice. You might want to get up on your feet during this part of the activity. Talk together about the different ways of speaking the lines and what the choices suggest about Gloucester's state of mind.

**GLOUCESTER** Go to, say you nothing. There is a division between the dukes, and a worse matter than that. I have received a letter this night –'tis dangerous to be spoken—I have locked the letter in my closet. These injuries the king now bears will be revenged home. There is part of a power already footed. We must incline to the king. I will look him and privily relieve him. Go you and maintain talk with the duke, that my charity be not of him perceived. If he ask for me, I am ill and gone to bed. If I die for it—as no less is threatened me—the king my old master must be relieved. There is strange things toward, Edmund; pray you be careful.



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## Guiding Questions:

- Does any part of Gloucester's speech become clearer when you read to punctuation marks?
- How might varying ways of speaking his lines convey different interpretations of Gloucester's state of mind?
- Why might Shakespeare have written this passage in prose?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, R7

## ON YOUR OWN

### 33. CHARACTERIZATION

In Act 1, scene 1 of *King Lear*, both Cordelia and Kent are sent away from Lear's court. Cordelia is sent to France to marry the king, and Kent is banished for questioning Lear's judgment of Cordelia. In Act 1, scene 2, Edmund convinces his half-brother Edgar that he should leave the kingdom because their father is angry with him. Lear departs his daughters' shelter in Act 2, scene 4 because they will not give him duty as their father, and the Fool goes out into the world with him. Gloucester is maimed by Cornwall and Regan in Act 3, scene 7, and, now blind, he leaves his home behind.

For each of these characters, imagine the moments before they leave their homes. Make a list of the things each character would take in his or her backpack. To expand the activity, collect the items one of the characters would take from home, and present his or her backpack to the class, describing each item as if you were the character telling why they chose to bring their items.

## Guiding Questions:

- How does thinking about possibly important possessions of a particular character help to deepen your understanding of them?
- Does thinking about your character outside of their dialogue make you more empathetic toward them? Does it help you understand their point of view?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, SL4

### 34. CREATING A BACK-STORY

Often, actors will imagine the life of their character outside of the play in order to get into the role. They call this "creating a back-story." It is hypothetical, but hopefully well informed by a thorough understanding of the text and its character.

Choose a character. Pretend that you have been cast in this role, and write an autobiography for the character. How old is your character? What hobbies does he have? What was she like as a child? Has she led a difficult life, or a relatively easy one? Is he cynical or optimistic? What factors have led to her outlook on life as reflected in the play? Root your work as much as possible in clues from the play. Discuss the profile that you develop with the rest of the class.

## Guiding Questions:

- What textual clues tell you about a character's "back-story?"
- What other devices, besides a character's lines, tell you about a character, their personality, and their motivations?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, W3, W9

### 35. REPORTING ON THE DRAMA

Pretend you are a newspaper journalist who stumbles upon a hot story inspired by the play. So far in *King Lear*, you'd have plenty of leads—King Lear and his ungrateful daughters, the mad king wandering with a fool and a disguised servant, the blinding of Gloucester, and the bastard Edmund and his outcast brother. Choose one lead and write a short article like one you'd find in a newspaper or magazine. Look at printed or online articles as models. Most have a catchy title that hints at the content, vividly described details, and a distinct angle. Write your article and read for the class.

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

*(To the teacher: Once students choose a lead, ask half the class to write their articles as a news report and half as editorials. When completed, compare similar articles with different points of view. As a more extensive project, students could piece the articles together into a class newsletter. Students could be responsible for covering different stories, and be required to participate in the project in various ways, such as editing, newsletter design, artwork, etc.)*

## **Guiding Questions:**

- What writing style, including word choices and tone, did you use as a reporter?
- What are the differences between news and editorial? What's the function of each?
- What textual details can you find to support your article and lend it validity?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, W9

## **Act 4**

### **AS A CLASS**

## **36. ALIENATION OR ENGAGEMENT?**

Director Bertolt Brecht would use various techniques to “alienate” his audience, discouraging them from becoming too comfortable or wrapped up in the story. Brecht wanted his audience to intellectually engage with the issues in the play in a critically rigorous way, and believed that pathos and empathy would hinder them from doing so. Similarly, director Peter Brook used house lights and edited scenes to distance the audience.

As a class, try staging Gloucester’s blinding in two different ways. In the first, include the sympathetic ending with the servants. In the second, cut the servants’ lines and play them as indifferent and unkind. Afterwards, discuss the different effects of each version, and which you prefer as a staging choice.

## **Guiding Questions:**

- What is the value of such a “Brechtian” philosophy of story-telling?
- Do you think that an emotionally detached audience will be more likely to critically examine the issues raised by a play?
- What is lost when directors purposefully estrange their audience from the story unfolding on stage?
- Can you think of any films or TV shows that apply a Brechtian-like approach?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6

## **37. STAGING MOTIVATION**

If a character moves toward another on stage, both actors think about what specifically “motivates” the move. In Act 4, scene 5, King Lear manages to elude the attendants. Think about what specifically might prompt Lear to run away, then work out how his escape might be staged. As you are working on this activity, remember that King Lear is an old man, and the soldiers are probably young and fit. A discussion of what physical or mental frailties Lear might have in this scene may be helpful.

Actors always try to be as specific and detailed when they consider the physical characterization they will work with on stage. Consider the “playing space” you have on your stage. Different stages present different boundaries—and staging challenges. Compare your staged scenes to what director Barbara Gaines stages on Chicago Shakespeare’s thrust stage.

## **Guiding Questions:**

- How do the physical qualities of a character—and the actor playing that character—affect how his movement on stage is choreographed?
- How do your staging ideas compare to Barbara Gaines’ staging in her production of *King Lear*?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R6

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## IN SMALL GROUPS OR PAIRS

### 38. QUARTO OR FOLIO?

It's perhaps a bit surprising to think about the existence of multiple—and different—versions of Shakespeare's plays. Chances are, the edition you're studying is different from one that a high school class in another town is reading, or that Chicago Shakespeare will be putting on its stage. Since there are no manuscripts in Shakespeare's own hand, and because half of his plays were never even published until seven years after his death, there's a lot of debate among Shakespearean scholars as to which texts are authentic. Adding to the confusion is the fact that, in performance, these scripts have always been what scholars call “unstable” or “mutable”—meaning that artists, even in Shakespeare's day, saw them as living, breathing texts that changed somewhat from performance to performance. In the case of *King Lear*, there are two versions—the First Quarto and the First Folio—which are both considered good texts, and scholars and artists frequently do some kind of combining (“conflating”) the versions when they edit or direct the play. (See “The First Folio” on page 4 and “Sorting Out the Two-text Controversy” on page 18 for more.)

In pairs, look at both the First Quarto of *King Lear* (<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Annex/Texts/Lr/Q1/default/>) and the First Folio (<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/Texts/Lr/F1/scene/1.1>) versions of *King Lear*. Look at one of the following scenes: 1) Act 4, scene 2 between Goneril and Albany, or 2) the end of Act 3, scene 7, right after Gloucester's blinding. Compare and contrast the differences that you discover. Then, take a look at the edition you're using in class, and see what your editor decided to include!

#### Guiding Questions:

- What is gained or lost by certain cuts or additions? In which version is the scene more powerful, dramatic, or sympathetic?
- If you had to decide between the two texts, which version would you choose? Why? Would you wish to include some of one and some of the other (in other words, to “conflate” them)? If so, why?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R5, R9

### 39. “THE WISE FOOL”

Many of Shakespeare's plays have a character who is a “wise fool.” *Twelfth Night* has Feste, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* has Speed, and *As You Like It* has Touchstone. Each of these characters has a purpose to play in the story. Some argue these characters help to move the story along by informing the main characters through comic verse; some would say the fool offers a foil to one of the main characters in the story. *King Lear*'s Fool speaks some lovely sections of verse in this play. It is often difficult to determine the purpose of the fool character right from the get-go, since their focus tends to be on the other people rather than on themselves.

Look at Act 1, scene 4, from the Fool's entrance to Goneril's entrance. In this scene, try to determine what kind of fool he is. Does he jump around and sing loudly? Does he recite poetry and strum a lyre, or is he like a modern-day, stand-up comic? What is his relationship with Lear—how long have they known each other, does Lear speak to the Fool as an equal?

In pairs, one person reads Lear as one person reads the Fool. Decide what kind of fool he seems to be and then compare the different interpretations amongst your classmates.

#### Guiding Questions:

- Which interpretation seems to work best within the scene? Why?
- What led you to interpret the Fool a certain way?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R7, SL2



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## 40. ASIDES

An aside is a theatrical device used frequently by Shakespeare. Throughout Act 4, scene 1, Edgar has five asides—which an actor might address to the audience, to some higher power, to himself, or perhaps to another character on stage. In pairs discuss two questions: Why might Shakespeare have decided to include these asides? What do they expose to the audience? How would you stage the asides? Once you've come to some agreement, perform one or two of the asides for your class. Your partner should react or ignore the aside depending on what you previously discussed. Also, experiment with speaking the aside as though to oneself and, alternatively, to the audience, intimately drawing them in as confidants.

### Guiding Question:

- What effect do these different ways of approaching the aside have upon the audience (i.e. the rest of the class)?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS SL1, R5

## 41. READING BETWEEN THE LINES

In the beginning of Act 4, scene 1, Edgar first learns of his father's blinding when he encounters Gloucester and the old servant on their way to Dover. For the first nine lines, Edgar seems calm. Between the line "I have no way..." to "I'd say I had eyes again!" he hears his father discuss his love for him. Two people read these lines, while the third person acts out or speaks aloud Edgar's unspoken reactions.

### Guiding Questions:

- What do you believe Edgar was thinking during Gloucester's speech about him? What in the text led you to believe this?
- Why do you think that Shakespeare might have chosen to not dramatize (in words...) Edgar's reaction?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, L5

## Act 5

### AS A CLASS

## 42. CHANGING FATE

The fate of Cordelia has drastically varied from version to version of the story of Lear. Cordelia is executed in Shakespeare's play, kept alive and happily married in Tate's rewrite, and commits suicide in Spencer's version. In small groups, discuss the significance of each ending. Think about how the different endings might change the meaning of the play. Then, take a class vote to see which ending is preferred and be prepared to discuss/support your own position.

### Guiding Questions:

- Does our perception of Cordelia's character change depending on how her story ends?
- How do you imagine that the audience might react toward each ending?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6, SL

## 43. STAGING AND MEANING

At the beginning of Act 5, scene 1, just after Edgar's entrance, Edmund leaves the stage. The stage directions in Shakespeare are often a matter of interpretation by directors—sometimes as much as the lines of text are. Sometimes directors choose to ignore the stage direction that indicates Edgar exits before Edmund returns to stage.

Try this scene, or parts of this scene—both ways. Discuss the effect the different stagings might have on an audience.

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

Address the history of the brothers' relationship and how this might impact the feelings they have for each other.

## **Guiding Questions:**

- Given the brothers' contrasting characters traits and motivations, what effect on the audience might be achieved by having both brothers onstage at this point?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6, SL1

## **44. ANTITHETICAL SCENES**

Shakespeare structures his play to great dramatic effect. *King Lear* offers us a good example of how Shakespeare uses antithesis—whether it is contrasting images in the language of one line or the juxtaposition of full scenes—to increase the emotional impressions of his characters. The tone of the meeting in Act 5, scene 3, when Albany, Goneril and Regan join Edmund onstage, is different from the emotional exchange between the captive Lear and Cordelia, seen minutes earlier in the same scene.

In small groups, imagine you are directing one part of this scene, either Lear and Cordelia's moment together (from the beginning of the scene to their exit) or Albany, Goneril, and Regan's entrance. As a director, identify how and where you would emphasize the emotional moments in this scene. For instance, where you would emphasize the formal courtesy breaking down between Albany, Goneril and Regan? It will be helpful to try reading selections from the scene out loud, using different levels of sarcasm and antagonism in certain moments. Try playing the scene once very forced and formal and once sarcastically.

After you have discussed among yourselves, watch a few interpretations of each moment—the Lear and Cordelia moment, and the Albany, Goneril and Regan section. Discuss the choices made by your classmates.

## **Guiding Questions:**

- Is it more effective to play the scene with just one tone or to choose tonal shifts from line to line?
- Where in the text did groups choose different interpretations? Can more than one interpretation be justified?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, L5, SL2

## **45. TIMING AN ENDING**

The ending of *King Lear* is shaped by timing. In Act 5, scene 3, the play unravels in its final catastrophe. Read through the scene and note the major actions in the text (entrances, exits, fights). Read through a second time while one person uses a stopwatch to record each section of the scene from major action to major action.

Once the timing has been recorded, try “overlapping” some scenes. That is, change the timing so that one section begins a little earlier, or a little later. This may result in some of the text being cut off, which is fine. Experiment with how this might change the ending of the play—its meaning, its effectiveness, its ultimate outcome. Discuss the importance of timing in the effect of the tragedy.

## **Guiding Questions:**

- How does changing the timing of this final scene of *King Lear* affect the ending's meaning, outcome, and effectiveness?
- Could a change in timing move the audience towards a certain emotional response?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6, SL6

## **46. STAGING, LIGHTING AND MOVEMENT**

This activity can help you share the intensity of Lear's words at the death of Cordelia. You could try it in the hall or a gym or studio, but it can be just as effective in a classroom, especially if you have the capacity to moderate the lighting as a means to create mood.

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

*(To the teacher: Identify all the phrases or sentences in Act 5, scene 3 that express grief or sympathy for Cordelia or Lear. Write them on pieces of paper, and distribute them to everyone except one student playing Cordelia and one student playing Lear.)*

Each person memorizes his or her phrase or sentence of mourning. As an entire class, make a tableau—a stage picture or snapshot—of Lear and the dead Cordelia surrounded by a circle of sympathetic onlookers. Use line, levels, shape and the relationship between the two characters to create an emotional impression for an audience.

Stage the tableau again. This time, speak your phrases and sentences as a soundtrack to the picture. Use lamps and, at low volume, add music for atmosphere. Next, try introducing movement. For example, each mourner could, in turn, step into the circle moving close to Lear and Cordelia, adding gesture to emphasize his or her words, before returning to the circle of mourning.

## **Guiding Questions:**

- How are certain pictures—perhaps from a magazine or from your school yearbook—orchestrated to elicit a certain emotional response from the people looking at them? How can you use your understanding of this in the construction of your tableau?
- How do the staging, lighting, and movement affect the emotional intensity of a scene, and an audience's reception to it?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6, SL2, SL6

## **IN SMALL GROUPS**

### **47. RE-WRITING THE FOOL**

Imagine that Shakespeare decided to write the Fool into Act 4 and 5. In small groups, go through the last two acts of *King Lear* and identify scenes where the Fool might naturally fit. Can you find places where the nonsense of the Fool might be effective or appropriate? If so, mark these passages and write lines for the character. Include the Fool's entrances, exits and stage directions.

## **Guiding Questions:**

- Was it difficult to write the Fool into the last two acts of the play? Why or why not?
- Why might Shakespeare have chosen not to include the Fool in the final acts of the play?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, W3



## **Teacher Resource Center**

If you have an activity or lesson plan that was a classroom success with your students, we want to hear about it! Consider donating your lesson plan to the Teacher Resource Center, and become part of our ever-growing, permanent collection! Need inspiration? If you are looking for the perfect activity or “proven” lesson plan, visit the Center to access hundred of teaching resources.

**Call the Education Department, 312.595.5678, to make an appointment.**

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## 48. WRITING LINES

Edmund is interrupted while saying “She and the duke her husband—” by Albany’s entrance (Act 5, scene 1). Work in pairs to finish Edmund’s statement. Write two or three lines for Edmund to say to the suspicious and jealous Regan.

### Guiding Question:

- Based on what you know about Edmund’s relationship with Regan and the context of the rest of the scene, what can you infer about what Edmund might have said here? What in the text supports your ideas?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, W3

## 49. OFFSTAGE ACTION

In Act 5, scene 3, Edgar recounts the story of his journey as Poor Tom. He says that Gloucester’s “flawed heart” burst, killing him, when he heard the truthful tale. The death of Gloucester occurs offstage, so the audience does not experience the reconciliation between Edgar and his father. Using clues from the text, work in groups of three to write this missing scene. Share your scene with the class, and afterwards, discuss the effectiveness of your scenes and how it might be staged for an audience.

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, W4

## 50. SEEING FROM ANOTHER CHARACTER’S PERSPECTIVE

In Act 1, Goneril proves to be very impatient with her father. She tells her steward, Oswald, to be rude to Lear and to tell him that she refuses to see him. She expresses to Oswald that Lear can go elsewhere for all she cares. In Act 5, Goneril poisons Regan so that she no longer has any competition for Edmund’s affection. Is Goneril being unreasonable and ungrateful in her relationships with her father and sister? Or do Lear and his unruly entourage, and Regan, deserve such disdain? Three people who volunteer to play Goneril, King Lear, and Regan will sit at the front of the class, responding in character to questions from the class. Justify their feelings, attitudes, and behavior.

*(To the teacher: some preparation before this activity will be helpful—for Lear, Regan, and Goneril, thinking through their defense, and for the rest of the class to articulate their best questions.)*

### Guiding Questions:

- What, if anything, in the text justifies Goneril’s, *King Lear*’s, or Regan’s actions? Who do you think is actually justified?
- How might actors convey each character’s different perspective on stage?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R3, SL3

## ON YOUR OWN

## 51. BORROWING FROM SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare often drew from various sources, including folk tales, and other works of literature, to develop his plots. Can you think of any stories, myths, songs, television shows, movies, or historical occurrences which reflect similar plots, characters, relations, or issues that are found in *King Lear*? Bring in your findings as homework, and in small groups, try to generate additional stories. Then, share all of the discoveries as a class.

### Guiding Questions:

- How does taking note of contemporary examples of similar plots, characters, or issues that are found in *King Lear* change how you view Shakespeare and his work?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R7, R9



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## After You Read the Play

### AS A CLASS

#### 52. TRAGIC DEBATE

Based on the title of this play, one could assume that the story would be about the tragedy of King Lear. Though this is certainly true, one could argue that the play is also about the tragedy of Cordelia, Edgar, Gloucester, Regan, Goneril, and Edmund. Are we supposed to accept Lear as the most tragic figure, even though his poor decisions and rash actions are the catalyst for the tragic outcome? Might we consider Cordelia's death resulting from telling the truth and trying to help her father more tragic, for instance?

Break into debate teams; each will be assigned a different character. Each team will be responsible for justifying and supporting why your character is the "most" tragic in the play. Use evidence from the play, and be prepared with passages from the script to support your argument. Hold the debate in a traditional format with time for the presentation of defense, rebuttals, and closing statements. And though you're debating about tragedy, have some fun with it!

##### Guiding Questions:

- What makes one character more tragic than another?
- What textual evidence can you use to prove that a character is "tragic?"
- What might be the possible counter-arguments to your stance? What can you prepare as a rebuttal?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, SL1, SL3

#### 53. PARALLEL PLOTS

Many critics point out that the play's subplot serves both to mirror and to contrast *King Lear's* main plot. Lear and Gloucester can be considered parallels. Both men are ignorant of their children's natures, leading first to loss of power and eventually to their own tragic deaths. As a class, see how many parallel connections can be made between the subplot and the main plot. In small groups, select two parallel scenes and cast the roles. Intertwine the lines from the scenes so that the ideas from each scene reinforce and work off of each other. You may choose to cut some of the lines.

##### Guiding Questions:

- Did you notice the parallels between the main plot and subplot while you were reading the play? Looking back, how does it affect your understanding of Gloucester and King Lear?
- What might be the purpose of writing parallel plotlines, like Shakespeare has in *King Lear*?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, R5

#### 54. SIBLING DYNAMICS, THEN AND NOW

Goneril, Regan and Cordelia are three of the most famous, and unhappy, sisters in literature. Given the research on birth order and its effects on the personality of children, discuss the possible implications that the birth order of Lear's daughters may have had in determining the outcome of the play.

This discussion can be particularly meaningful if put into the context of how families function now as opposed to how families functioned then. The most interesting resource you'll have for this kind of discussion is your own experience, but one good site for some reference on family life during Shakespeare's time is <http://lepg.org/family.htm>. One interesting contemporary article on this topic can be found at <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/ruled-by-birth-order/?page=2>.

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## Guiding Questions:

- Consider your own experience—What was it like to be the oldest daughter? What are your experiences with being a younger sister, or an older brother? How do you perceive your siblings and the different dynamics each has with your parents?
- Relating your own experiences to *King Lear*, how do Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia's relationships with each other and with their father affect the action of the play?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R9, SL1

## IN SMALL GROUPS OR PAIRS

### 55. “FEARFUL PASSAGES”

In small groups, choose one of *King Lear*'s characters, and isolate what led them down their “fearful passage.” (The essay, “Shakespeare, Tragedy and Us,” on page 14 discusses this concept.) Consider how actions, words and behavior contributed to their tragedy. Locate critical scenes and lines where serious shifts in your character's destiny were changed or shaped. Elect one person to play the role of your chosen character in front of the class and address the following: How would you define your tragedy? What specifically led to your tragedy? How could it have been averted? What advice can you give us to avoid a similar fate? Use textual evidence to support your answers.

## Guiding Questions:

- What led to your character's tragic ending? Could their “fearful passage” have been avoided?
- What textual evidence supports the conclusions and inferences you made regarding your character's tragedy?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R3, SL4

### 56. RE-WRITING AN OLD STORY

The story of *King Lear* is based upon legend and myth, much like the fables and fairy tales you read as a child. Now that you are familiar with the story, in groups of three or four re-write it in a short version that reads like a children's tale—albeit a dark one! Your story needs to be easy to follow, interesting, age-appropriate, and relatively short. After writing and revising your story, you might choose to create a children's book with illustrations.

## Guiding Questions:

- How did you decide which parts of *King Lear* were essential to keep in your shorter, children's version of the story?
- How did your consideration of your audience affect your language and tone?
- What do you understand more clearly about the story after creating your children's version?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS W3, W4

### 57. VERSE OR PROSE?

In his plays, Shakespeare often shifts between verse and prose. It's easy to differentiate on the printed page: lines of verse begin with capital letters, and prose looks like an unbroken paragraph of text. Such shifts might signify a character's class, an emotional change, or even if he is lying or telling the truth! In Act 1, scene 1, Goneril and Regan talk in verse while flattering their father, which might suggest that they are being dishonest or exaggerating. Then, at the end of the scene, they talk to each other in prose, suggesting a more informal, honest and direct conversation. In pairs, locate other scenes that switch between verse and prose, and consider the significance of such a switch. It will help to read the lines aloud. You may also want to trace one character throughout the play to see when and speculate why they make shifts between speaking in verse and prose.

## Guiding Questions:

- What are the possible reasons a character might shift between verse and prose? Keep a running list as you search the play!
- Do some characters speak completely in verse, or completely in prose? Why do you think this is?

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, R5

## 58. CONDENSING KING LEAR

In small groups, look through the script to choose the most important lines (up to twenty!) that tell the story of *King Lear*, making sure to illustrate the major aspects of the plot. What scenes must be represented by a line to move the story along? Prepare a script connecting your selected lines with brief narration in the style of a movie trailer. Act out your trailer for your classmates, or consider filming a montage of clips or still photos to play under the recorded sound of the trailer. (To the teacher: For a visual example of this activity, check out this movie trailer for another Shakespeare play performed by students at Taft High School in Chicago: <http://www.tinyurl.com/taftmovietrailer>)

### Guiding Questions:

- What are some strategies you can use to select lines?
- What are the most important elements of the story? What are the least important?
- What becomes clearer in the plot when selecting only twenty lines to tell the entire story?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, SL1, SL2

## 59. REPEATED WORDS

Choose one of the following words that appear several times in *King Lear*: fool, natural, unnatural, or nothing. Visit <http://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/> and enter your work in the “Text Search” field in the right column of the page. Read the *King Lear* passages that come up and using the questions below, discuss them. Share your findings with the class.

### Guiding Questions:

- Is Shakespeare using the word in a consistent way throughout the play? If so, how, and if not, what are some of the differences you detect?
- How does your word connect to the themes or characters in the play, as your group interprets them?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L4, L5, R4

### ON YOUR OWN

## 60. COSTUMING THE THREE SISTERS

The three sisters, Goneril, Regan and Cordelia, are very different characters, but are often looked at as a group, particularly when we’re reading, not seeing, the story. In reading the play you might have a vision of the sisters that is somewhat generic, because it is difficult to see how the three women might be very different—raised in the same household, with the same parents and, in Goneril and Regan’s case, with some of the same character traits.

If you were the actor playing one of these sisters or the costume designer dressing the three sisters, how might you imagine the women dressed? Using any information from the text, draft a sketch of each sister. Try to use color, shapes and textures to indicate the characters’ personalities and how they are different from each other. For example, a red dress might indicate a fiery temper while a blue dress may indicate a cooler patience.

### Guiding Questions:

- How might a character’s personality influence their costume?
- What specific parts of the text did you use to make your costume choices for each sister?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R6

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## The Performance: Preparing and Reflecting

### AS A CLASS

#### 61. BARD BLOG: A TOOL FOR DISCUSSION

Before and after you see the performance, continue adding to your Bard Blog. Use these ideas to get you started, or modify other activities in this section to a blogging format:

- Select one of the quotations from the “What the Critics Say” section of the handbook. Do you agree with the writer? Blog an argument about this quotation. Cite specific examples from the play to support your assertions. Does your argument still hold up after seeing the performance?
- Each actor brings his or her own unique quality to a character. They make specific choices based on the director’s vision, chemistry with the ensemble of other actors and their own interpretation of what motivates their character to action. Choose a character to follow closely when you see CST’s performance (if you already began a character diary, you might want to stick with your same character.) As you watch the actor playing your chosen character, note the acting choices he or she makes through voice, movement and “subtext”—the inner feelings beneath the spoken words. Compose a free-write of your thoughts on the actor’s interpretation of the character. How does the actor in CST’s production differ from what you had imagined? What choices did the actor make that enhanced your understanding of the character?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6, W6, W10

### AS A CLASS

#### 62. THE STORY IN SHORT

If you have not read *King Lear* in class, use these resources to become acquainted with the story and follow the performance more easily:

- Refer to the *dramatis personae* and the synopsis on pages 11 and 12 of this handbook.
- Watch *Video SparkNotes: Shakespeare’s King Lear* at <http://www.sparknotes.com/sparknotes/video/lear>
- Use the “Before You Read the Play” activities in this handbook to become more familiar with the story, setting, characters, themes and language.

**L.I.N.K.** to activate any prior knowledge you may have about *King Lear*.

- **L**ist the information you already know about the story of the play before you watch the Sparknotes video or review the handbook sections.
- **I**nquire about other information you would like to know.
- After you watch the video and review the handbook sections above, **N**ote new knowledge and connections between known information.
- Finish by writing what you **K**now about the story including setting, characters, and themes.

Discuss what else you would like to learn about the play before going to see the performance at Chicago Shakespeare Theater. In groups, list all questions you still have about the story on large chart paper and hang them around the classroom. As you explore the play further, fill in the answers to the questions. Listen and watch closely during the performance to be able to respond to any of the unanswered questions when you return to the classroom.

#### Guiding Questions:

- What images come to mind when you hear *King Lear*?
- What do you already know about Shakespeare’s plays or plays in general?
- What questions do you still have about the story as you anticipate attending CST’s production?



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, R7

## 63. INTERMISSION DECISIONS

When a director thinks about a play, particularly a full-length Shakespeare production, she must think about when an intermission best suits the play. In deciding where to place the intermission, a director must not only think about practical matters (the length of time before a bathroom break, whether there be concessions offered, and how long is needed for set and costume changes), but also about the artistic function of a well-placed break in the action.

In *King Lear*, the tragic structure of the play must be taken into account. When can an intermission help the rhythm of the play? Is it useful to put the intermission directly in the middle of the climax? How should the sets and lights be left for the best effect? How should the last moment before intermission look? How should the first image after intermission look? Should there be music at intermission? If so, what kind?

Decide where in the sequence of events of *King Lear* you think an intermission would best be placed. Then, illustrate the moment just before their intermission, the way the stage should look during intermission, and the moment the next act begins. Use any medium you wish to create these illustrations, taking into account set, lighting and sound.

### Guiding Questions:

- What are the practical and artistic functions of an intermission?
- Which line prompts the intermission and which line opens the play again?
- After you see CST's production: where was the intermission placed and what effect did it have?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6, SL5, W9

## 64. CHARACTERIZATION

Regan and Goneril on the printed page can easily seem like the same "evil" character. In groups of four, look for and write down the sisters' actions and key words: two people searching for Regan's behavior and language and two for Goneril's. Compile your lists. Can you begin to distinguish the two sisters? How do their personalities differ? Is one sister more cruel? As a director, how would you translate the two women into physical characters? How would you choose to cast them? To clothe them? How much do they look the same? How similar do one or both look to Cordelia? When you come to see *King Lear* at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater, consider how the director and actresses decided to make the distinctions between the sisters.

### Guiding Questions:

- If you were a director or actor, how would you distinguish Regan and Goneril for your audience?
- What in the text prompted you to make certain choices regarding the characterization of Regan and Goneril?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1

## 65. REACTIONS

In Act 2, scene 2, Kent directs his blunt manner of speaking to everyone present ("his countenance likes me not" means "I don't like his face"). Reading the text, characters' unspoken responses remain invisible, but on stage, physical responses tell us as much as the spoken words. Consider in turn Kent, Cornwall, Regan, Edmund and Gloucester. Suggest ways that each might react as Kent speaks the following:

KENT            Sir, 'tis my occupation to be plain.  
                    I have seen better faces in my time  
                    Than stands on any shoulder that I see  
                    Before me at this instant.

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

Cast this moment in the play among your classmates so that the rest of the class can study the other characters' reactions.

## Guiding Questions:

- How might each character physically react to Kent's blunt lines?
- Does Shakespeare give any textual clues that might suggest how these characters react to Kent?
- How does seeing the silent characters' reactions affect your understanding of this moment?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, R7

## IN SMALL GROUPS OR PAIRS

### 66. DESIGN PRESENTATIONS

*(To the teacher: Place the act and scene numbers for each scene, or a number of selected scenes, in the play on slips of paper, and mix them up in a hat. Divide your class into groups of four. One person from each group picks one scene out of the hat.)*

In your groups imagine that you are designing a production of *King Lear*. What does your scenic design look like? What kinds of costumes are your characters wearing? What is the lighting like? Some questions to get you started:

- Where does the scene take place? Inside or out?
- What time period is the play set in?
- What props are helpful in setting the mood?
- What is the weather like?
- What time of day is it?
- What is the overall tone of the scene?
- Who is in the scene? Where are they from?

You may want to make a designer's board—that is, a large piece of poster board with swatches of fabric, copies of paintings or photographs that have an element of what you envision, and anything else that illustrates the scene for you. Magazines and art books provide a good source for ideas. When you've finished your collage, pick the line or lines from the scene that are essential to your design concept. As a class, share your concepts in order of scenes (designers often do this for the cast on the first day of rehearsal).

## Guiding Questions:

- What factors must you take into account when designing a set?
- After you see the play, think about its scenic design compared to what you saw in class. Are there similar elements to some of the designs you saw in class?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R6, SL5

### 67. DOUBLING ROLES

Theater companies in Shakespeare's day (as well as today) often "doubled." Double-casting means that one actor will play two or more roles. The three servants who appear briefly at the end of Act 3, scene 7, are examples of roles that might be double-cast.

You are the casting director for *King Lear*. In groups of three, work through the *dramatis personae* and develop a list of parts that could be doubled. Remember: there must be sufficient stage time in between the appearance of doubled characters to allow the actor playing them to change costumes, if necessary, and they can't be on the stage at the same time! (Many scholars believe that the Fool and Cordelia were double-cast since the two never appear on stage together!) Also consider when a double casting might draw a helpful comparison between two characters.

When you see CST's production, see if you notice actors playing multiple roles. What did they do to differentiate the

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

parts? Check your observations against the play program. Were there any performances so convincing that you did not even notice the actor was the same?

## Guiding Question

- How do directors and costume designers differentiate parts when an actor plays more than one role?
- After you have seen the play, think back: were there any parts that were double-cast that you did not expect to be doubled?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R9

## AS A CLASS

### 68. VIOLENCE: PAST AND PRESENT

In the past, audiences have found the savage scenes in *King Lear* too horrible to experience and inappropriate to witness. However, since the mid and late twentieth century, audiences and critics have not shied away from the violent events of the play. Having seen a stage production of *King Lear*, consider what your own reactions were—to Gloucester's blinding, to the murder of Edmund, or to Cordelia's execution. Discuss your reactions with the class.

## Guiding Questions:

- Do you think that the violence in *King Lear* functions differently from the violence in our films and television?
- As the twentieth century progressed, what might have contributed to our decreased sensitivity toward violence?
- How is it different seeing violence on a screen compared to onstage? Has movie violence desensitized us toward violence, or has it heightened our desire to see the most "realistic" and graphic violence both in film and onstage? Are there other reasons involved?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R7, SL2

### 69. SOUND AND SENSE: FRANK SINATRA IN KING LEAR

After you see the play, consider the musical choices that director Barbara Gaines made for her production of *King Lear*. Recall the specific moments in the play where her choice to use Frank Sinatra songs became an integral part of the performance, and affected your interpretation of the play. As a class, listen to the Sinatra song, "Where Do You Go?" in full here: <http://tinyurl.com/sinatrawheredoyougo>.

Discuss how the inclusion of Frank Sinatra in Gaines's *King Lear* affected you as an audience member. Did it affect your interpretation of a specific moment or character? Did it prompt you to think about the play in a new way? Think about the sound and music choices you would make if you were directing *King Lear*.

## Guiding Question:

- How did music, a design element not written into Shakespeare's script of *King Lear*, affect your understanding of the play?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R7

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## 70. THE AUDIENCE EXPERIENCE

Chicago Shakespeare is a courtyard-style theater, similar in its architectural structure to the theaters in Elizabethan England. With its thrust stage surrounded on three sides (and on three levels) by the audience, the relationship between the audience and the actors is central to the experience. Scenery by necessity on the thrust must be sparse—otherwise, it blocks the audience's sightlines. The audience's faces become part of the scenery, in fact. You're not just watching *King Lear*, you're watching other people's responses too. Discuss the following with your class members: when during the performance did you become aware of the other audience members? Why then? Did their responses in any way affect your own?

### Guiding Questions:

- How does the audience experience at a play compare to a sporting event? A movie?
- How did the actors interact with the audience? Which characters specifically? At what moments—and why?
- What other art forms are performed live before an audience? In what ways, despite obvious differences, are they similar to theater?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS SL1

### IN SMALL GROUPS OR PAIRS

## 71. ASK THE AUTHOR

Generate five questions that you would ask William Shakespeare about this play if he were still alive. After everyone has finished, pass your group's work to the right so that you have another group's questions. Now, each group will role-play William Shakespeare, and attempt to answer another group's questions. Of course, your answers will be purely speculative, but you should root your answers in the text or historical fact as much as possible. Share the two most interesting questions and answers from each group with the rest of your class.

### Guiding Questions:

- What questions do you wish you could ask William Shakespeare about this play, his writing process or its connections to his own life?
- How can you use Shakespeare's texts to speculate how he would answer your questions?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, SL6

### ON YOUR OWN

## 72. A LETTER TO THE EDUCATION TEAM AT CST

Write a letter to Chicago Shakespeare Theater expressing your opinions about the play. What was your favorite part? What part, if any, didn't "land" for you—and why? Share your experience.

### Guiding Questions:

- Did seeing the play performed affect your understanding of any of the characters or scenes?
- How did you feel about the choices the director and designers made about the time period, which influenced costumes, set, and music in the play?
- Were there any interpretations of characters or scenes with which you especially agreed or disagreed? Why?
- What surprised you about the performance?
- How does seeing the play performed live compare to reading a play in class?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R7, W2, W4



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## A “Read-and-View” Teaching Strategy Explained

**MARY T. CHRISTEL** taught AP Literature and Composition as well as media and film studies courses at Adlai E. Stevenson High School from 1979 to 2012. She has published several works on media literacy including *Seeing and Believing: How to Teach Media Literacy in the English Classroom with Ellen Krueger (Heinemann)* as well as contributing articles to *Teaching Shakespeare Today (NCTE)*, *Teaching Shakespeare into the Twenty-First Century (U of Ohio)*, *For All Time: Critical Issues in Shakespeare Studies (Wakefield Press)*. Ms. Christel has been recognized by the Midwest Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences for promoting media literacy education.

### SETTING THE STAGE WITH READING AND VIEWING

Before attending a performance of any of Shakespeare's plays, students should be primed with basic information about setting, characters and conflict. A brief summary of the play certainly would suit that aim, but a summary does not help to tune up students' ears to Shakespeare's language and cadences, so critical to understanding the actions onstage. Reading and studying the entire play might be ideal, but limits of time, demands of the established curriculum—and sheer stamina—may make this unabridged option less than optimal.

Screening a film version instead saves class time and helps students both see and hear the play, but the viewing experience might not allow students to linger over the more challenging scenes and speeches or to engage in more participatory activities with the text. A happy medium approach marries the study of key scenes and speeches with viewing of the rest of play in a recommended film version in order for students to understand both the dramatic arc of the comedy, tragedy, history or romance, as well as tackle the signature scenes and speeches of that play in greater depth and detail. Those select scenes can be explored through “active Shakespeare” strategies.

This reading/viewing approach had its genesis early in my teaching career when I methodically took students through Act 1 of *Romeo and Juliet* while they listened to key speeches on a recording of the play. Even though I thought reading and listening would enhance their understanding, students glazed over as the speeches were declaimed on a scratchy, worn record in particularly plummy British accents in the style of rather melodramatic “radio acting.” Since it was the spring of 1980, I had access to some new A-V technology, a VCR and a VHS copy of Franco Zeffirelli's film of *Romeo and Juliet*—the school's first VHS tape purchase.

I decided to combine reading the play and watching the film incrementally act by act. After students read and discussed Act 1, I screened the equivalent of that act in the film to promote discussion of difficult aspects of character, plot and language that we encountered during the reading process. For example, Mercutio's witty banter was difficult for students to fully grasp until they both read the text and viewed one actor's interpretation of the language and the resulting onscreen characterization. Seeing one visual interpretation of the characters, their actions and the world of the play gave my students the ability to create a movie in their heads as they continued to read the play.

I extended this methodology when I taught plays by Molière and Ibsen, sometimes showing shorter excerpts to help students understand costumes and manners that informed character behavior and the overall “look” of an era that a few photos in a textbook don't effectively convey. Though this approach is billed as a way to preview a theatrical performance of a play, it could be adapted to the study of any challenging play or work of fiction, like nineteenth-century works by Austen, Dickens or the Brontë sisters.

### SELECTING THE SCENES FOR CLOSE READING AND STUDY

Though a range of scenes is suggested below for previewing *King Lear*, pulling back the pedagogical curtain on how the scenes and speeches are selected can help in applying this approach to any play. First, consider which scenes and speeches are the “signatures” of the play: “To be or not to be” in *Hamlet*, the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, the St. Crispin's Day speech in *Henry V*.

Once those scenes are identified, select the ones that might prove most difficult to fully understand when viewing the play in the “real time” of the stage performance and the scenes truly crucial to fully grasping the arc of the conflict or the development of key characters. If there is a particular theme that a production will emphasize, scene and speech selec-

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

tion might focus on how that theme is developed throughout the play and in the production. For example in approaching *King Lear*, some productions or film adaptations might focus on kingship, justice or aging.

An effective tool to understand how a play can be boiled down to its essential scenes is evident in Nick Newlin's series *The 30-Minute Shakespeare*, with eighteen abridgments of Shakespeare's plays currently available. Newlin's adaptations focus on the continuity of plot and provide a narrator to link the selected, edited scenes together. If a teacher's goal is to have students grasp the arc of the conflict (inciting incident, basic conflict complications, climax, essential falling action and resolution) then Newlin's approach will suit that aim. These texts are available for download as PDFs as well as in traditional print forms.

If investing in copies of a text like *The 30-Minute Shakespeare* is not possible for a single use, Shakespeare's plays are available online in the public domain at:

Folger Library Digital Texts (<http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/>)

The Complete Works at MIT (<http://shakespeare.mit.edu/>)

Downloading the complete play for students who have access to computers or to tablets in the classrooms allows students the freedom to use the text beyond the scenes and speeches studied in class. Some students might be motivated to read the play in its entirety or "follow along" in the text with the selected scenes from the film version. The only drawback in allowing students to follow along with any film arises when they discover that directors and screenwriters/adapters make subtle or massive cuts to the original text, which can disrupt students' viewing.



Photo by Liz Lauren

From left: Lisa Dodson as Goneril, Mark L. Montgomery as Cornwall and David Perkovich as Oswald in CST's 2001 production of *King Lear*, directed by Barbara Gaines

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## READING SCENES AND SPEECHES FROM *KING LEAR*

The first set of scenes and speeches emphasize the arc of the play's narrative by examining the inciting incident (the division of the kingdom), characters who must disguise themselves physically (Kent), psychologically (the scheming Edmund) or both (Edgar), Lear's relationship with his Fool, the betrayal and despair of wronged fathers (Lear and Gloucester), and the redemptive power of reconciliation and forgiveness (between Lear and Cordelia).

The Division of the Kingdom & Love Test	1.1.31-114*
Kent Challenges Lear's Actions	1.1.114-181
Edmund's Treacherous Ambitions	1.2.1-22
Wit and Wisdom of Lear's Fool	1.4.82-148
Edgar's Disguise	2.3.1-21
Lear in the Storm	3.2.1-76
	3.4.1-36
Gloucester's Despair	4.5.1-79
Reason in Madness	4.5.101-127
Lear Reunites with Cordelia	4.6.22-82
Lear's Grief	5.3.231-269

\*Cambridge School Shakespeare edition (2009)

Activities to explore these scenes through text analysis, speech and movement can be found in this handbook and easily applied to suit students' experience with active Shakespeare techniques.

Students who will not struggle with understanding the basic elements of plot and character of *King Lear* could preview the play through the lens of a theme or motif, such as aging. Encourage students to tease out the implications of what "aging" can embrace as one of the play's central themes or motifs. Lear cites his advancing age as his primary motivation for dividing his kingdom in his opening speech, but his old age is later used as a weapon against him as Goneril and Regan assert their authority over Lear's demands to enjoy lavish hospitality with a king's retinue in tow. When Lear is finally reunited with Cordelia, he equates his age with foolishness, which harkens back to advice the Fool gives that Lear "shouldst not have been old till [he] hadst been wise" (Act 1, scene 2). The play ends with Edgar noting that his generation will probably not experience what Lear and his father endured.

Lear	1.1. 31-49*
Goneril, Regan	1.1.277-297
Lear, Fool	1.5.6-38
Lear, Regan	2.4.120 -156
Lear, Fool	3.2.1-23
Lear, Cordelia	4.6.48-82
Edgar	5.2.297-300

\*Cambridge School Shakespeare edition (2009)

When students examine a play through the lens of a single theme or motif, they need to take care that they are not reducing a play like *King Lear* to a single note and might focus on other themes or motifs that emerge in viewing a film version or attending a performance. Students could be assigned a particular focus ("nothing", sight/blindness, kingship, justice) to trace and analyze.

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## SELECTING A FILM VERSION

The “Film Finder” feature of this handbook provides a list of films (both theatrical releases and television broadcasts) commonly available in a variety of formats (VHS tape, DVD, streaming online). Two versions of *King Lear* will be recommended here, but they can easily be substituted by other more available or age/classroom appropriate versions. For example, Roman Polanski's film of *Macbeth* is a powerful, visceral adaptation of the play, but its R-rated violence and nudity would not make it a wise choice for many classrooms. Versions that have played on PBS are usually classroom safe but it is incumbent upon any teacher to fully screen a film before bringing into the classroom to ensure that there is no objectionable content in the rendering of Shakespeare's text. It has been a trend in several televised productions of *King Lear* to include some full or partial nudity in scenes involving Lear's descent into madness in the storm scenes and Edgar's feigned deranged state to replicate the approach to those moments in the original stage production. Generally the television camera frames the nudity in a manner that makes it “safe” for PBS broadcasts, but again it might prove distracting for some younger viewers.

Some plays have a rich range of film versions, while others have a scant few. Some have only been staged and shot for the BBC Shakespeare series. Fortunately *King Lear* offers many options. If there is a choice of films, what then should be the criteria for selecting one for the read/view pairing? You might choose to select one version with a design concept that situates the play in its expressed time period or in Elizabethan costumes so that students recognize the visual style as Shakespearean. If the design concept is too avant-garde, that approach might prove too distracting and confusing for some students.

Choosing films with actors familiar to students can offer both advantages and disadvantages depending on students' ability to move beyond their preconceived notions of that actor's range or signature roles (or off-screen antics). Finally, the running time of a film might determine how it fits into classroom use. Obviously if a film runs two hours, it has eliminated a fair amount the text which might lead to greater clarity for a Shakespeare novice. Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* runs a lean two hours but it does not sacrifice characterization or plot in the cuts to the text relying on effective visuals to replace dialogue. Conversely, Ian McKellen's *Richard III* (1995) eliminates the character of Queen Margaret and reassigns many of her lines to Queen Elizabeth or to the Duchess, which could prove confusing if a similar approach to Margaret is not observed in the theatrical production.

## SELECTING A FILM VERSION OF *KING LEAR*

CST's 2014 production of *King Lear* will use a contemporary setting for its design concept. Viewing a film production, therefore, in medieval or Renaissance period costuming, students will have a means of comparison to discuss how *King Lear* makes that transition to another time and place. The 1984 Thames Television version starring Laurence Olivier, Diana Rigg and John Hurt offers a very traditional, workable adaptation for this purpose, and it features an actor well known for his performances of Shakespeare great roles in theater and on film. This production sets the play in its historical “ancient” or “prehistory” period. The RSC production starring Ian McKellen was broadcast in 2008 as part of PBS's *Great Performances* series and mixes various periods from Renaissance details in some of the women's gowns to nineteenth-century military regalia for the men in its costume design. This version features performances that are well suited for the camera, while the Thames version might feel more theatrical and less immersive than the RSC production for students not used to watching Shakespeare “up close” on film or video.

Both versions follow standard student print editions of the text and present the action in a straightforward manner that make the play's language truly accessible and clearly illustrated through the actors' behavior. The RSC production does present an interesting solution to the disappearance of the Fool after his final appearance in Act 3 by depicting his hanging on stage that offers an interpretation for Lear's later line, “my poor fool is hanged,” in Act 5, and Kent reveals an gun in a holster when he says, “I have a journey, sir, shortly to go.” This production clearly is committed to matching the language to the action in surprising ways.



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

	<b>McKellen Version</b>	<b>Olivier Version</b>
<b>Act I</b>	0 - 42:25	0 - 45:18
<b>Act II</b>	42:26 - 70:10	45:20 - 71:38
<b>Act III</b>	70:11 - 97:17	71:36 - 93:38
<b>Act IV</b>	97:18 - 128:45	93:40 - 130:10
<b>Act V</b>	128:46 - 155:00	130:11 - 155:00

Choosing between the McKellen and Olivier versions of *King Lear* really comes down to teacher preference regarding production design and acting style. Both productions are readily available on DVD.

## COMBINING THE READING AND VIEWING EXPERIENCE

To read first or to view first? Is that the question? It really depends on students' comfort level and experience with reading and viewing Shakespeare. I recommend viewing any film adaptation act by act to facilitate previewing the highlights of action and character development in each act. This strategy can focus on the structure of play since Shakespeare's works tend to present the inciting incident in Act 1, complications to escalate the conflict in Act 2, the climax or turning point in Act 3, falling action in Act 4 and the resolution in Act 5.

For *King Lear*, reading and applying “active Shakespeare” techniques to the “Division of the Kingdom and Love Test” scene might offer a good place to start, rather than screening the first act for all students—regardless of their experience and comfort with any Shakespearean text. Not only does this scene establish Lear's audacious strategy to allocate portions of his kingdom to his daughters based on their flattering responses, it focuses on the banishment of Lear's most sincere and loyal subjects, his daughter Cordelia and Kent, a member of the court, both refuse to pander to Lear. This scene sets up two key factions: those willing to exploit Lear for their own gain and those suffering harsh consequences for their veracity. It also establishes the motif of virtue in disguise since Kent will later return as “Caius” to serve and protect his sovereign. That device will be extended when Gloucester's wrongly maligned and loyal son, Edgar, adopts a new identity as “Poor Tom” to remain in the kingdom and to join with Kent/Caius on the heath caring for Lear—and later, for his blinded father.

How students handle “reading” both before and after viewing Act 1 will help inform a teacher's choice in handling reading/viewing sequencing for the rest of the play. Students could be assigned specific characters to follow closely in reading/viewing activity and when they see the production at CST. Teachers could be highly selective just focusing on the early acts of the play allowing students to discover what becomes of the characters and the central conflict when they see the production at CST. The aim of any version of this previewing strategy is to prime students with just enough information and level of challenge to place those students on a firm foundation to not just follow the action but to appreciate the approach taken by the director, designers and actors to make *King Lear* fresh and relevant.

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## Strategies for Using Film to Teach Shakespeare

**MARY T. CHRISTEL** taught AP Literature and Composition as well as media and film studies courses at Adlai E. Stevenson High School from 1979 to 2012. She has published several works on media literacy including *Seeing and Believing: How to Teach Media Literacy in the English Classroom* with Ellen Krueger (Heinemann) as well as contributing articles to *Teaching Shakespeare Today* (NCTE), *Teaching Shakespeare into the Twenty-First Century* (U of Ohio), *For All Time: Critical Issues in Shakespeare Studies* (Wakefield Press). Ms. Christel has been recognized by the Midwest Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences for promoting media literacy education.

Given that Shakespeare as a playwright in Elizabethan England found himself at the epicenter of popular culture, one can't help but wonder if he wouldn't be writing screenplays if he were alive today. He would likely be pleased that his legacy is not only perpetuated on stages like CST but also on the silver—and now digital—screens. It is up to the savvy teacher to determine how to help students “read” Shakespeare in the three ways Mary Ellen Dakin suggests: as text, as performance and as film.

Mary Ellen Dakin's recently published a book entitled *Reading Shakespeare Film First* (NCTE 2012), which might seem a bit contradictory to the approach many English/Language Arts teachers take. How can one “read Shakespeare” if one places film first? Film might be considered an enemy when helping students to read and appreciate Shakespeare's work. For most teachers, film generally follows the reading of a play and functions as the “dessert” at the unit's end. The strategies that follow are intended to help teachers reconsider how and when film can be used in order to motivate, clarify and enrich students' engagement with any play.

### FILMS CAN BE USED BEFORE READING...

#### ...to preview the story, characters and themes

Many of the stories that Shakespeare dramatized were familiar, even well known, to his audience, so providing students with a broad outline of the action of a play prior to reading it would be consistent with the knowledge that Renaissance audiences brought to many of the plays they saw performed on stage. Previewing can be accomplished in the classroom in one of two ways.

First, twelve of the plays were adapted into thirty-minute animated films, which aired in the 1990s on HBO and now are distributed on DVD by Ambrose Video. These “Shakespeare in short” adaptations retain the play's original language and present the essentials of the story in an abbreviated form. This activity acquaints students with the major characters, incidents and themes, providing a “road map” for students who might get mired in sorting out who's who and what's what as they adjust themselves to the language and structure of play.

A second method requires the teacher to select key scenes from a film that takes a relatively conventional approach to the play. For example, Franco Zeffirelli's version of *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) would be preferred over Baz Luhrmann's film (1996), while Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996) is a rare “full text” version and useful in this context, whereas Zeffirelli's adaptation (1990) reduces the text to two hours on screen. The BBC filmed all of Shakespeare's plays for television in the 1970s and '80s; these versions are faithful to the texts, with relatively traditional staging and the full text intact. Like the animated films, the teacher's scene selection should provide students with a broad outline of the play, as well as introduction to key events, main characters and crucial soliloquies. Students can use these scenes as reference points in their discussion of the play as they read it.

#### ...to create context

Film can be utilized as an introductory element of a unit to provide a context prior to reading a specific play. A&E's Biography series provides students with Shakespeare's biographical details and a survey of the times in *Shakespeare: A Life of Drama* (1996), a conventional approach to delivering contextual information. (Materials to frame the use of this fifty-minute program can be located at [http://www.aetv.com/class/admin/study\\_guide/archives/aetv\\_guide.0550.html](http://www.aetv.com/class/admin/study_guide/archives/aetv_guide.0550.html).) Historian Michael Wood takes viewers on a lively tour of various locations throughout contemporary England to explore Shakespeare's life, times, and plays in this acclaimed four-part series, *In Search of Shakespeare* (2004). (An episode guide is available at <http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/theshow/> to facilitate selection of the most appropriate segments from this comprehensive work.)

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Context can be built by viewing a commercially released film that “sets the stage” for the Elizabethan era, enabling students to get a sense of the politics, social customs, and “look” of the times. A film like *Elizabeth* (1998) starring Cate Blanchett has little to do with Shakespeare, but it provides a vivid glimpse into the monarch’s struggle to claim and maintain the throne. *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) and *Anonymous* (2011) provide glimpses into the world of early modern theater practice and Shakespeare himself, but the liberties these films take with conventional historical fact may create more confusion than clarity for many students. Excerpts, however, could be used to help students visualize the time and the occasion of attending the theater, but contextual information is required to help students sort out historical accuracy from bias, poetic license or pure invention.

Al Pacino’s documentary *Looking for Richard* (1996) provides an ideal way to contextualize the study of *Richard III*, but it should not be overlooked as a viewing experience to help students of any play understand what makes the study and performance of Shakespeare invigorating for actors, directors, scholars, readers and audiences. Pacino’s passion for the hunchback king is infectious and the film is effectively broken up into sections: a visit to Shakespeare’s birthplace, Shakespeare’s Globe rebuilt in contemporary London, brief conversations with modern Shakespearean scholars and directors, and actors in rehearsal tackling the meaning of particularly dense passages of text. The film may not be practical in most cases to screen in full, but it certainly helps to build anticipation and knowledge prior to diving into a full text.

Films that document students interacting with Shakespearean texts can also generate enthusiasm for reading, and perhaps performing, a selected play. *Shakespeare High* (2012) showcases California high school students who annually compete in a Shakespeare scene contest. Students, who are both likely and unlikely competitors, are followed from scene selection, casting, rehearsal, through the final competition. *The Hobart Shakespeareans* (2005) features fifth-graders, whose home language is not English, performing scenes with uncommon poise and command of the language as a result of a dedicated teacher’s commitment to offering his students the rigor of studying Shakespeare. These films shared, in full or in part, can provide motivation to not only read and understand the text but to take it to the next level of student engagement: performance.

Films Media Group (formerly Films for the Humanities and Sciences) has an extensive catalogue of films useful in providing context; many titles are available as streaming video, allowing teachers to “sample” a film without that “lifelong commitment” to purchasing a DVD that can cost several hundred dollars and sometimes not be the proper fit for students’ interest or abilities.

Many of their offerings have been produced in the UK or by the BBC and cover the gamut of plays and approaches to Shakespeare in performance and on the page. (That search can start at <http://ffh.films.com/>.)

## FILMS CAN BE USED DURING READING...

### ...to clarify understanding

For students who are having difficulty visualizing the action or fully comprehending the language, it can be beneficial to watch a faithful adaptation incrementally, act by act. Again, Zeffirelli’s version of *Romeo and Juliet* works well. The film is easily broken down act by act with all the critical incidents and speeches intact. Students should be given a focus for their viewing, through the lens of their own questions and quandaries that they retain after reading an act, along with thoughts on how the film might address them. As students become more comfortable with the reading/viewing rhythm as they work through the play, they can adopt a more “critical” attitude toward examining later acts to discuss choices made by the screenwriter/adaptor, director, designers and actors.

When working with students who are really struggling with the language and where listening to a recorded version of a play isn’t particularly helpful or engaging, film can also be used in a “read along” fashion for the exposition and key scenes or speeches. Students follow in their own printed text while the film is running, and are coached to follow in their book while taking “peeks” at the screen when they need the support of the image to clarify their understanding of the language. Staged versions of a play with close adherence to the script (BBC, for example) are better choices for this application. More cinematic versions tend to be so visually rich that students have a hard time reading rather than watching. For example, the RSC filmed version of *Macbeth* (1979) featuring Ian McKellan and Judi Dench in the leading roles follows the

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standard text fairly closely in most of the interactions between *Macbeth* and Lady *Macbeth*. This strategy is best used for the analysis of short scenes or at moments of crisis in students' understanding. It is essential for teachers to prescreen scenes to make sure that they closely follow the edition of the play being studied as much as possible.

## **...to make comparisons**

Just as the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries adapted Shakespeare's scripts to fit the fashion and tastes of the theatergoing audiences (as susceptible to trends as the fashion industry), once Shakespeare's work entered the multi-media performance space of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the text is often transformed to support the spectacle of the cinematic image. Every cinematic adapter of a complex dramatic text must consider the balance of "showing" versus "telling," sometimes choosing to emphasize the visual over the verbal. These adapters struggle with the question: What can the art of cinema reveal visually through a close-up, crosscut, or a montage that effectively augments or replaces the text? In the past thirty years, Shakespeare's comedies, tragedies, histories and romances have been transported to modern settings that maintain the broad outlines of plot and character but replace Shakespeare's blank verse with contemporary language and colloquialisms. A sample list of adaptations includes:

*Zebrahead* (1992)..... *Romeo and Juliet*  
*Ten Things I Hate About You* (1999) ... *The Taming of the Shrew*  
*O* (2001) ..... *Othello*  
*She's the Man* (1996) ..... *Twelfth Night*  
*My Own Private Idaho* (1991) ..... *Henry IV*  
*Tempest* (1982)..... *The Tempest*  
*A Thousand Acres* (1997)..... *King Lear*  
*Scotland, PA* (2001)..... *Macbeth*  
*Men of Respect* (1990) ..... *Macbeth*

Additional adaptations of plot, characters and setting include four plays in the BBC series, entitled *Shakespeare Re-Told* (2005): *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Macbeth*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. A second type of adaptation shifts the plot and characters to another genre, such as the musical (*West Side Story/Romeo and Juliet* or *Kiss Me Kate/The Taming of the Shrew*), science fiction (*Forbidden Planet/The Tempest*) or the Western (*Broken Lance/King Lear*). *Royal Deceit* (aka *Prince of Jutland*, 1994) tells the story of the "historical" Prince *Hamlet* using Danish source material to differentiate the story from Shakespeare's approach. Akira Kurosawa produced the best-known adaptations of Shakespeare's plays placing them in a different cultural context with his films *Throne of Blood* (1957) based on *Macbeth*, and *Ran* (1985) based on *King Lear*. Soviet filmmaker Grigori Kozintsev adapted both *Hamlet* (1964) and *King Lear* (1991), which have been restored and released recently on DVD. For film historians and real curiosity seekers, a collection of adaptations, which run from a few minutes to over an hour, showcase the earliest eras of cinema, entitled *Silent Shakespeare*. Sharing these adaptations, in part or in full, can facilitate the discussion of the relevance of Shakespeare's themes, conflicts and characters across time, cultures, and cinematic traditions.

## **FILMS CAN BE USED AFTER READING...**

### **...for culminating projects and summative assessment**

Students can successfully engage in their own film production as a collaborative project. A movie trailer can tout an imagined film adaptation of the play they have just studied. The necessary steps involved can be found in *Lesson Plans for Creating Media-Rich Classrooms* (NCTE 2007), which includes Scott Williams's lesson, "Turning Text into Movie Trailers: The *Romeo and Juliet* iMovie Experience." Creating a trailer requires that students: first focus on the essential elements of plot, character and theme in order to convey excitement; and second, develop an imagined version in a highly condensed and persuasive form, which comes to life in a minute or two.



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## TERMS TO EXAMINE THE PAGE-TO-SCREEN PROCESS

(adapted from *Film Adaptation*, ed. James Naremore)

### **Fidelity:**

Much discussion in film adaptation criticism focuses on how faithful a film is to the source material. Obviously, film and literature use very different narrative strategies and tools of composition. A fruitful way to have students approach the question of fidelity is to ask them to list the scenes, characters, motifs and symbols that are essential to telling the story of the source text. Then as they watch a film adaptation, they can keep track of how those elements are handled by the film version.

### **Film as Digest:**

This concept acknowledges that the written text is far more detailed and comprehensive in its ability to set a scene, develop a character, reveal a narrative point of view, or create a symbol. Film works best in developing plot and showing action.

### **Condensation:**

Due to the “film as digest” phenomenon, characters and events need to be collapsed or composited in order to fit the limitations and conventions of the film adaptation. Students can explore this term by determining which characters can be combined based on their common functions in the text.

### **Immediacy:**

Viewing a film is a far more “immediate” experience cognitively than reading a book. We decode visual images much faster and more readily than the printed word.

### **Point of View:**

The camera can express a point of view, just as the narrator of a written text can and does. Voice-over narrators are seldom used in film, since it seems artificial and intrusive. Point of view in film is visual and subtle.

Here are three ways to express or describe the point of view in a film:

- Neutral: the camera is merely recording events as they happen in a reportorial fashion.
- This is the most common shot in filmmaking.
- Subjective: the camera assumes the point of view of one of the character so the viewer sees what the character sees.
- Authorial: the director very deliberately focuses the camera on a feature of a sequence or shot to comment on the action or reveal something.

### **Shot and Sequence:**

As defined by *Basic Film Terms: A Visual Dictionary*, a “shot” is the “basic unit of film structure or an unbroken strip of film made by an uninterrupted running of the camera.” Think of a shot as a “still” image that is combined with other still images to create a moving picture. A shot captures its subject from a particular distance and angle. The camera can be stationary or moving as it captures its subject. Individual shots then are joined together by the editing process to create a sequence of action.

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## KEY QUESTIONS FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

### Prior to viewing:

- In order to maintain fidelity to Shakespeare's play, what are the essential scenes that must be included in an adaptation to cover the basic plot? Considering that film is a digest of the original play, what constitutes the exposition, inciting incident, central conflict, complications, climax and resolution to represent and streamline the central action?
- What point of view dominates the play? Who is the central character? Which character has the most soliloquies or asides and might have the strongest relationship with the reader/viewer as a result? How could the viewpoint of the central character or the character that has the most direct connection with the audience be represented through the use of the camera? Or, should the camera maintain a neutral position to reveal the story and the characters?
- What details does the play provide to guide the casting of principle actors for the central characters? Looking at the text carefully, which details regarding physical appearance, class or behavior should be embodied by an actor to make an immediate impression on the viewer?
- Which supporting characters are essential to the development of the plot and main characters? Which characters serve the same functions in the story? How might several of those characters be composited in order to condense the story in helpful and necessary ways considering a film will normally be shorter than a stage production?
- Which central images, motifs, symbols or metaphors are central to the literary source? How could one or two of these literary techniques be translated into visual or sound techniques to make their impact more immediate in order to support or to replace the play's language? How would they be represented on the screen or through the musical score?

### During viewing:

- How much of the actual dialogue from the play itself is used in a scene?
- To what extent does the camera work seem unobtrusive, natural or obvious, stylized?
- Which character(s) appears mostly in one shots?
- At what point in the scene are two shots used? What is the effect of their use at that point?
- What is the typical distance (close, medium, long) of the camera to the subject of the shots? To what extent does the manipulation of camera distance make the scene an intimate one or not?
- To what extent are most of the shots at eye level, slightly above, or slightly below? How do subtle changes in angle influence how the viewer perceives the character in the shot?
- To what extent does the scene make use of extreme high or low angles? To what effect?
- To what extent does the camera move? When? What is the effect of the movement?
- To what extent does the sequence use music? If it does, when do you become aware of the music and how does it set a mood or punctuate parts of the dialogue?

### After viewing:

- Which choices made to condense the events of the play by the screenwriter are the most successful in translating the original text to the screen? Which choices are less successful or satisfying?
- Which narrative elements (events, characters, key speeches) omitted from the screen adaptation of the play shift the focus of the comedy, tragedy or history in comparison to the original text?
- If any characters were composites of two or more characters, what was gained or lost by reducing the number of characters or altering the function of a particular character?
- Which actors performed their roles in expected and/or unexpected ways? How did the original text dictate how roles such be performed?
- Which visual elements of the film made the strongest impression upon you as a viewer?
- How did the visuals help draw your attention to an element of plot, a character or a symbol that you might have missed or failed to understand when reading the play?
- As a reader of the play, how did viewing the film help you to better understand the overall plot, particular character, or specific symbol/theme?

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## **KING LEAR FILM FINDER**

### **Top Five Films to Invite into Your Classroom**

1. Isn't that Gandalf Playing King Lear?

#### ***King Lear* (2008, 155 min.) starring Ian McKellen**

Directed by Trevor Nunn

Royal Shakespeare Company/*Great Performances*

*Great Performances* website: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/episodes/king-lear/introduction/475/>

Watch View online: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/episodes/king-lear/watch-the-play/487/>

2. Isn't that an Aging Bilbo Baggins Playing *King Lear*?

#### ***King Lear* (1998, 100 min.) starring Ian Holm**

Directed by Richard Eyre

National Theater Production/*Masterpiece Theater*

Theatrical production site: [http://king-lear.org/king\\_lear\\_film\\_-\\_eyre\\_holm](http://king-lear.org/king_lear_film_-_eyre_holm)

*Masterpiece Theater* site: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/archive/programs/kinglear/about.html>

View online: <http://www.ovguide.com/king-lear-9202a8c04000641f800000000ba3f18b>

Both of these televised productions of *King Lear* feature actors in the title role recognizable to student audiences for their roles in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Both rely on approaches that illuminate the play's characters, conflicts and themes. Either version is easy to screen in full or in excerpted forms with extensive educator's support on the PBS website. The Ian Holm/Richard Eyre production has significant cuts to the text that bring the performance to a running time of 100 minutes.

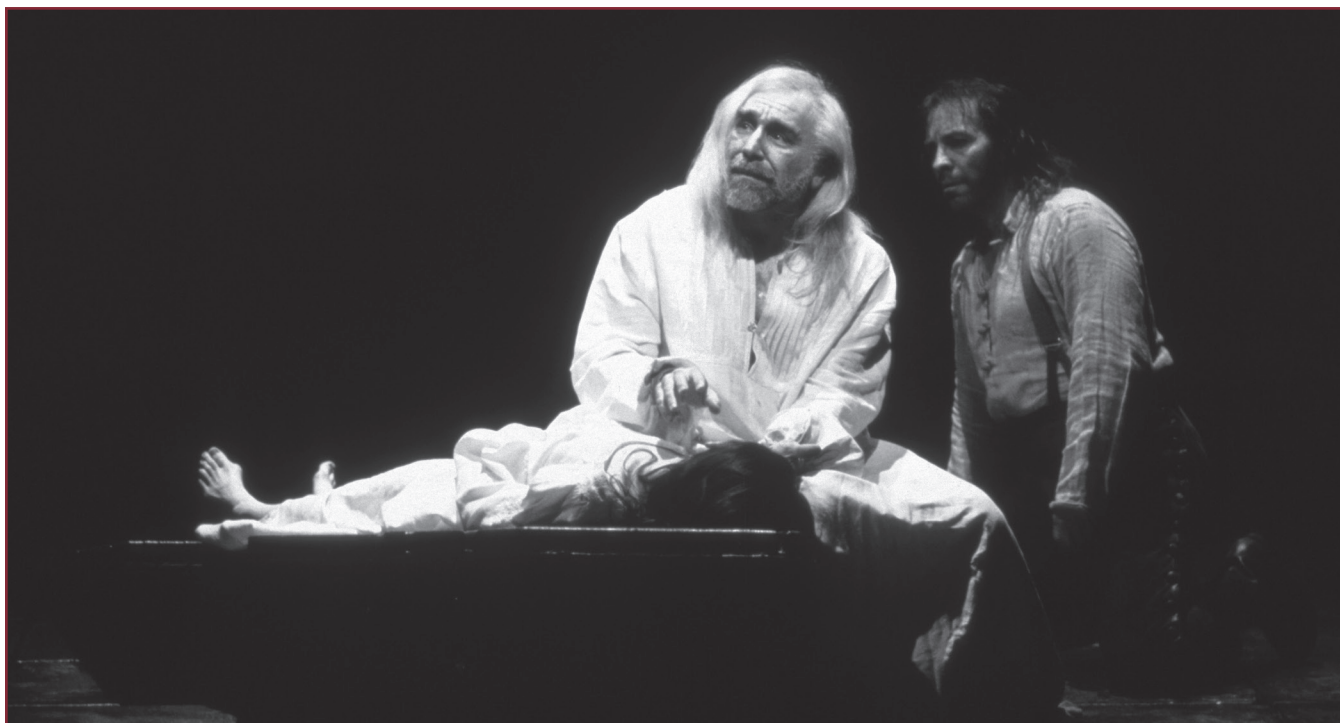


Photo by Liz Lauren

From left: Ana Sferruzza as Cordelia, Greg Vinkler as King Lear and Kevin Gudahl as Kent in CST's 2001 production of *King Lear*, directed by Barbara Gaines

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## 3. King Lear as Samurai Warlord

### **Ran (1985, 162 min. R for violence, implied sexuality)**

Directed by Akira Kurosawa

The title means “rebellion” or “chaos,” and the master filmmaker Kurosawa combines elements from Japanese cultural legends with *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. In this adaptation the cruel warlord Hidetora divides his kingdom between three sons thinking that he will strengthen the clan by this strategic measure. The youngest son is banished for not accepting the division of the kingdom as a sound strategy to strengthen the clan’s power. The eldest son Taro is married to Lady Kaede who goads her husband to strive to control the entire clan and force his father into exile. She is motivated by revenge. Hidetora killed her family and is married her to his son. Under pain of death, a small faithful band of supporters follow an increasingly mentally unhinged Hidetora into the wilderness. Ultimately the political and personal treachery leads to battles that seal the clan’s downfall and extinction.

The film features spectacular epic sequences demonstrating the pageantry and brutality of warfare with intimate scenes of political maneuvering and familial treachery.

Reviews and analysis:

- <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-ran-1985>
- <http://shakespeare.edel.univ-poitiers.fr/index.php?id=116>
- <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/03/AR2010060301454.htm>

## 4. Lear as Tyrannical Theatrical Actor/Manager

### **The Dresser (1983, 118 min. PG)**

Starring Albert Finney, Tom Courtenay, James Fox, and Eileen Atkins

Directed by Peter Yates, Screenplay by Ronald Harwood (based on his play)

The relationship between a senile and tyrannical actor-manager referred to as “Sir” and his dresser Norman mirrors the relationship between Lear and his Fool. The film, based on Harwood’s play, traces Sir’s struggles to keep his touring company afloat as they perform rag tag productions of *King Lear* and *Othello* among others across Britain during the thick of WWII. Norman alternately cajoles and bullies Sir into performing as younger men in the company, seizing control of the company and ushering it into a new order. Oscar-nominated performances by Albert Finney and Tom Courtney are deeply moving and illuminate the relationship between Shakespeare’s Lear and the Fool in this modern context. The more viewers are familiar with Shakespeare and his works, the more they will enjoy Sir and Norman playfully and poignantly quoting lines from numerous plays as part of their banter and evidence of Sir’s encroaching dementia.

Reviews:

- <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-dresser-1983>
- <http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9806EFDE1F39F935A35751C1A965948260>

Trailer: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDkMB9Y\\_4nk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDkMB9Y_4nk)

## 5. A Soviet Marxist *King Lear*

### **Korol Lir (1971, 139 min. Unrated, Russian with English subtitles)**

Directed by Grigori Kozintsev, Screenplay by Boris Pasternak

Russian film adaptations of Shakespeare are not as widely known and appreciated as those of Japanese director Kurosawa. Kozintsev filmed both *Hamlet* and *King Lear* over his career in Soviet Russia and applied Marxist sensibilities to explore how the caprices of the ruling class deeply impact the kingdom’s poorest and most vulnerable subjects. As portrayed by actor Yuri Yarvet, Lear seems more childlike and simple-minded in his momentous decision, and as he sinks into despair and madness. A viewer watching a scene out of context actually might mistake Lear for the Fool. The black-



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and-white photography adds to the bleak, unforgiving universe in which Korol Lir situates himself and his kingdom. The score by Shostakovich adds greatly to the epic scale of the tragedy.

Background info: [http://king-lear.org/king\\_lear\\_film\\_-\\_kozintsev](http://king-lear.org/king_lear_film_-_kozintsev)

## Other Actors, Other Lears

The *Great Performances* website offers a useful overview of *King Lear* on film. The adaptations noted below are the most well known and readily available on DVD or accessed online: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/episodes/king-lear/king-lear-film-and-print-editions/king-lear-films/563/>

Orson Welles (1953, 75 min.), directed by Andrew McCullough & Peter Brook  
Paul Scofield (1971, 137 min.), directed by Peter Brook  
James Earl Jones (1974, 180 min.), directed by Edward Sherin  
Patrick Magee (1974, 120 min.), directed by Tony Davenall  
Michael Holdern (1982, 185 min.), directed by Jonathan Miller, BBC Shakespeare  
Laurence Olivier (1984, 158 min.), directed by Michael Elliott  
Brian Blessed (1999, 190 min.), directed by Brian Blessed and Tony Rotherham

## Other Times and Other Places for *Lear*: Film and Television Adaptations

1. In the American Heartland

### ***A Thousand Acres* (1997, 105 min. R for language and adult situations)**

Directed by Jocelyn Moorehouse Screenplay by Laura Jones  
Starring Michelle Pfeiffer, Jessica Lange, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Jason Robards, Jr.

Based on Jane Smiley's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, this adaptation of *King Lear* focuses on the Cook family and the repercussions of the patriarch's decision to retire and transfer the management of the family farm to his daughters. The conflict surrounds the youngest daughter's rejection of her father's offer in order to lead a career as lawyer in the city rather than in the farming community of her youth. The family conflict escalates with revelations of the childhood sex abuse of the two older daughters by their father and those adult daughters' attraction to the same man, who is loyal to their father.

2. On the Western Frontier

### ***King of Texas* (2002, 95 min.)**

Directed by Uli Edel, Teleplay by Stephen Harrigan  
Starring Patrick Stewart, Marcia Gay Harden, Lauren Holly, Roy Scheider

Set in the 1980s, the plot clearly follows *King Lear* with the imposition of a love test as a cattle baron divides his land and holdings among his three daughters with the youngest resisting. Rejection, escalating conflict and tragedy ensue.

Trailer: <http://www.imdb.com/video/screenplay/vi1704198425/>

### ***Broken Lance* (1954, 96 min.)**

Directed by Edward Dmytryk, Screenplay by Richard Murphy  
Starring Spencer Tracey, Robert Wagner, Jean Peters

A looser application of the character, plot and themes conventions of *King Lear*, this film is based on a novel by Jerome Weidman, which served as the basis for an earlier film version, *House of Strangers* (1949). To complicate matters, this patriarch has three sons by a first marriage and a fourth mixed-race son whom he favors over the older three, creating a tragic rift in the family and threatens their empire.

Trailer: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dN\\_z0v8Zfmo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dN_z0v8Zfmo)  
TCM overview: <http://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/title/69764/Broken-Lance/>

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## 3. Stranded in Africa, An Impromptu Staging of *King Lear*

### ***The King Is Alive* (2000, 110 min. R for sexuality and language)**

Directed by Kristian Levring, Scenario by Kristian Levring and Anders Thomas Jensen  
With Bruce Davison, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Janet McTeer

Once a group of tourists become stranded in the desert when their bus breaks down, one member, a theatrical manager, encourages his fellow travelers to stage a haphazard version of *King Lear* based on the manager's recollection of the play as a means of surviving their desperate circumstances. The dynamics among these strangers gradually parallel the relationships and conflict in Shakespeare's tragedy. As noted by film critic Roger Ebert, the film resembles the work of Samuel Beckett perhaps more than Shakespeare's tragedy, but it is suitably compelling as a companion for Shakespeare, and bleak enough to evoke Beckett.

Roger Ebert review: [http://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo\\_magazine/issue-30-spring-2012-godard-is/king-lear/](http://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo_magazine/issue-30-spring-2012-godard-is/king-lear/)

## 4. Lear as Mob Kingpin

### ***My Kingdom* (2001, 117 min. Unrated)**

Directed by Don Boyd, Screenplay by Don Boyd and Nick Davies  
Starring Richard Harris and Lynne Redgrave

In this version, a brutal mobster divides his underworld holdings between two scheming daughters in modern Liverpool.

Clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnDgi2XIMhY>

## Film Curiosities

### **1. *King Lear* (1987, 90 min. PG)**

Directed by Jean-Luc Godard, Script by Peter Sellars and Tom Luddy  
Starring Burgess Meredith, Molly Ringwald

Despite being directed by a renowned Frenchman, this film is in English. But don't let the title mislead: it is not strictly a rendering of the characters, events and themes of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The central character is a descendant of Shakespeare who is attempting to reposition his ancestor's body of work in a world teetering on oblivion in the wake of the nuclear devastation. This film presents a very challenging and postmodern reimagining of *King Lear*.

An appreciation of a much-maligned film on its twenty-fifth anniversary:

<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/movies/2012/12/godard-king-lear-at-twenty-five.html>

Some context provided at *Vertigo Magazine* online by James Norton:

[http://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo\\_magazine/issue-30-spring-2012-godard-is/king-lear/](http://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo_magazine/issue-30-spring-2012-godard-is/king-lear/)

View online:

<http://www.veoh.com/watch/v15919996dq5d2hF5?h1=King+Lear+%281987%2C+Jean-Luc+Godard%29>

### **2. *King Lear* (1916 36 min.)**

Directed by Ernest C. Warde, Adaptation by Philip Lonergan

*King Lear* actually got the "silent treatment" five times. The first tribute was a five-minute German film made around 1906. The first American version ran ten minutes and crammed as much plot as possible into that short time span. French and Italian versions appeared on screen by 1911. The second American version, starring Federick Warde, debuted in 1916 at two hours long. It even features a battle scene! The surviving version of that film lasts a mere 36 minutes.

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

View online: <http://vimeo.com/20529036>

These films can be licensed for streamlining or purchased in DVD format.

**1. *King Lear: Young Actors in Training* (15 min.)**

<http://ffh.films.com/ItemDetails.aspx?TitleId=19287>

Part of the series *Training for Shakespeare: Young Actors' Workshops at Shakespeare's Globe*, this segment focuses on student actors working through Act 4, scene 7.

**2. *King Lear: Text and Performance* (3 hours)**

<http://ffh.films.com/ItemDetails.aspx?TitleId=4328>

This film focuses on actors in rehearsal and in performance under the direction of acclaimed actor Fiona Shaw. This is a film that can be easily excerpted to discuss key scenes, characters and themes as well as challenges the play presents to actors, designers and directors.

**3. *King Lear: A Critical Guide* (29 min.)**

<http://ffh.films.com/ItemDetails.aspx?TitleId=9703>

Noted Shakespearean scholars examine the characters, situations and themes addressed by what some consider Shakespeare's greatest and most challenging work.

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

## Theater Warm-ups

Unlike many of the classic works studied in the English classroom, Shakespeare's plays were written to be spoken out loud and heard by an audience. Introducing drama-based activities into the classroom can be a powerful tool for increasing fluency and comprehension, encouraging empathy, building community, and exploring character perspective and choices. Learning to read Shakespeare can be compared to learning music, sports or other "learning by doing" classes. How does a music class usually begin? With a warm-up. How does one start a physical class? With a warm-up!

A brief physical and vocal warm-up—approximately five to seven minutes—can help students move from a "classroom mode" to a "studio mode." It sets the tone for a student coming to understand Shakespeare as a living script, as well as a piece of great literature. And you will find that after the first couple of times, your students' trepidations—and yours—will be unseated by energy and focus. If this is your first time incorporating warm-ups with your students, a few rehearsals in the privacy of your own home can do a lot to bolster your courage! You might also want to check out this video of actors practicing through physical and vocal warm-ups shared by the National Theatre in London at <http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/video/vocal-warm-up-1-breathing>. Every actor develops his/her own set of physical and vocal warm-ups. Warm-ups help the actor prepare for rehearsal or performance not only physically, but also mentally. For the actor, warm-ups create a mental and physical space to focus on the work at hand, forgetting all the day-to-day distractions of life, and to begin to assume the flexibility required to create a character.

### PHYSICAL WARM-UPS

#### Getting Started

- creates focus on the immediate moment develops body awareness helps reduce tension
- Push desks aside to create an open area where students can spread out and move. Begin by taking a comfortable stance with feet shoulder-width apart, toes pointing straight ahead, knees relaxed, and arms down by your sides. Inhale deeply through your nose, filling your lungs deep into your abdomen, and exhale through your mouth. Repeat this a few times.

#### Warm-up from the top of the body down (approximately seven to ten minutes)

- increases circulation, flexibility, and body readiness through gentle movement
  - increases physical and spatial awareness
- a) Begin by doing head-rolls to the left and to the right, about four times each way, very slowly. Then do a series of shoulder rolls to the back and to the front, again very slowly, and emphasizing a full range of motion.
  - b) Stretch each arm toward the ceiling alternately, and try to pull all the way through the rib cage, repeating this motion six to eight times.
  - c) Next, with particular care to keep knees slightly bent, twist from the waist in each direction, trying to look behind. Again, repeat six to eight times.
  - d) From a standing position, starting with the top of the head, roll down with relaxed neck and arms until the body is hanging from the waist. Ask the students to shake things around, making sure their bodies are relaxed. From this position, bend at the knees, putting both hands on the floor. Stretch back up to hanging. Repeat this action about four times. Then roll back up—starting from the base of the spine, stack each vertebra until the head is the last thing to come up.
  - e) Repeat the deep breathing from the beginning of the warm-up. Ask the students to bring their feet together, bend their knees, and keeping their knees together ask the students to rotate their knees in a circle parallel to the ground six to eight times. Repeat in the other direction. Return to standing.
  - f) Pick up the right foot, rotate it inward six to eight times, and then do the same with the left foot. Repeat with outward



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

rotation of the foot. Take a few moments and shake out the entire body.

## VOCAL WARM-UPS

Vocal warm-ups can follow your physical warm-up. Some of these exercises may seem strange, but can be made silly and fun, while accomplishing the necessary vocal warm-up. Once students see their teacher looking completely foolish going through the vocal warm-ups, they are much more likely to smile and go along with it. So take a risk! Go for it. They will get on board and begin to embrace the silliness when they see you can too.

- helps connect physicality to the voice
  - begins to open the imagination to performance possibilities
- a) Begin by gently massaging your jaw muscles in a downward motion on either side of your face. This will help wake up the facial muscles.
  - b) Stick your tongue out as far as possible—repeat this with the tongue pointing up, down, and to each side. Repeat this exercise once or twice.
  - c) Ask students to put their lips gently together and blow air through them, creating a “raspberry.”
  - d) Next, hum - quietly, loudly, and across the entire vocal range. The vocal instrument loves to hum. Humming helps to lubricate the vocal chords.
  - e) Create the vowel sounds, overemphasizing each shape with the face –A, E, I, O, and U—with no break.
  - f) Choose two or three tongue-twisters—there are some listed below. Again, overemphasize the shape of each sound with the lips, tongue, jaw, and facial muscles. Begin slowly with each tongue-twister, and gradually increase speed, repeating until the speed is moving along so quickly that the enunciation is lost.

## Tongue Twisters

Tongue twisters and other drama-based activities provide a great forum for us to help shy adolescents and those who struggle with articulating aloud in the classroom to build self-confidence in public speaking. Foster a safe and encouraging environment to cultivate this life skill that will benefit them beyond their adolescence.

- Red leather, yellow leather
- Unique New York
- Rubber baby buggy bumpers
- Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers
- The lips, the teeth, the tip of the tongue, the tip of the tongue, the teeth, the lips
- I carried the married character over the barrier toy boat, toy boat, toy boat

Guiding Questions for Physical and Vocal Warm-ups:

- Why is a warm-up important for actors before a rehearsal or performance?
- Why is breathing included in a theater warm-up?
- As we begin to explore this play in class through performance, what do we need to do vocally to be understood by our audience—and by our classmates?
- What other activities/professions require a warm-up to begin?
- How might those activities be similar to acting?
- How is acting a physical activity? How is it a mental activity?

## COMMUNITY-BUILDERS

Each of these exercises is meant to open and expand our imaginations, increase our sense of “ensemble” or teamwork, and encourage being “in the moment.” These are some of the most fundamental and crucial elements of an actor’s training—and, of course, they are fundamental, too, to the learning process in the classroom. Incorporating community-build-

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

ers into your classroom routine builds the trust and safety needed for risk-taking and creativity. Allow five to ten minutes to include one or two of the exercises suggested below to follow a physical and vocal warm-up.

## Four Up

- helps the ensemble/classroom work together
- helps to slowly introduce physical activities in the classroom
- brings focus to the classroom

For this exercise, everyone stays seated at desks. The goal is to have four people standing at all times. There are a few rules: anyone can stand up whenever they want, but only four can be standing at a time and they can only stand up for a maximum of five seconds. Everyone should participate and try to stand with a group of four.

A sense of community and having a strong focus can be the keys to a successful production (and classroom). This exercise can help to establish those norms in a fun way, which also gets the students up on their feet.

## Zounds! Ball

*(This exercise requires a soft ball about 8-12 inches in diameter.)*

- helps the ensemble/classroom grow together
- helps the students let go of their internal “censor” and begin tapping into their impulses
- brings together the physical and the vocal actor tools

Many actors will tell you that learning the lines is the easy part; making it come out of their mouths as if they’re saying it for the very first time is the hard part, especially with Shakespeare. Shakespeare can sound like a song, but how do you make it sound like real people talking to each other? Actors listen to each other and try to respond to what they hear in the moment of the play. Listening is a very important part of acting; it keeps the moment real—and the characters believable.

Stand in a circle facing in. *(To the teacher: explain to your students that the ball carries energy with it. This energy is like a feedback loop that increases the energy, speed and focus of the entire group by the amount that each actor-student puts into the ball.)* The goal is to keep the ball moving in the circle without letting the energy drop. There should be no space between throw and catch. There should be no thought as to whom you will throw next. To keep the intensity of the energy, as the ball is thrown, make eye contact with the person you are throwing the ball to, and at the moment of release, call out “Zounds!”

“Zounds,” a frequent expletive on the Shakespearean stage, rhymes with “wounds”—and was, in fact, a contraction for “God’s wounds.” The 1606 “Act to Restrain Abuses of Players” prohibited the use of the word “God” on the secular stage of the playhouse.

Experiment with the way you say “Zounds!” It could be loud or soft, in a character voice, or in whatever way they wish, as long as it is impulsive and with energy. Shakespeare has love scenes, sword fights, betrayals and all sorts of relationships in his plays. Actors—in the classroom and on stage—must be able to experiment, follow impulses, and create character without the fear of failure.

## Zounds! Ball (without a ball)

- encourages students to make their imagination specific and clear to the ensemble
- focuses the students on physical detail

This exercise builds on Zounds! Ball. Take the ball out of the circle and set it aside. Take an imaginary Zounds! Ball out of your pocket. Grow this ball from a tiny rubber ball into a huge balloon. Using “Zounds!” toss the ball to someone in the circle, who must catch it with the same weight and speed with which it was thrown. Whoever holds this imaginary ball must create the ball into a different weight and size, making it clear to the rest of the circle how they’ve changed it. As

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

in Zounds! Ball, work around the circle. The wide range of vocabulary in Shakespeare's plays can often be intimidating as one reads the scripts. The actor's job is to make the language clear, and this is often accomplished by very specific physical gesturing.

## Zip Zap Zop!

- facilitates mental focus
- encourages eye contact and team work
- builds a sense of rhythm and pace

*(To the teacher: For a demonstration of this community builder, watch this video, <http://www.tinyurl.com/zipzapzop>, for a demonstration and instructions.)* Stand in a circle, facing in. Bring your hands to your chest in a prayer pose. Make sure everyone can see each person in the circle. Eye contact is going to be very important! Point your hands like a laser, make clear eye contact at another person in the circle, and say "zip," "zap" or "zop," picking up your cue from the person before you. While maintaining the word sequence of zip, zap, zop as well as the rhythm, start slowly and eventually build speed.

## Wah!

- facilitates physical awareness and risk-taking
- encourages vocal projection
- helps actors increase their sense of timing and decrease their response time

*(To the teacher: Want to see Wah! in action with a group of students? Watch this brief video, <http://www.tinyurl.com/wahwarmup>.)* Stand in a circle, facing in. No one in the circle is a student or teacher any longer, but rather a fearsome warrior. Press the palms of your hands flat together to become a sword. To begin the game, one warrior raises his or her sword straight up, then brings it down, pointing at another warrior in the circle. Warriors must make excellent eye contact to avoid confusion. As the warrior brings down his or her sword, he or she utters a fearsome battle cry, by saying, "Wah!" (Be wary, warriors, of shouting, which comes from the throat and leads to laryngitis, a warrior's worst enemy. Using the good support and deep breathing from your vocal warm-up will help you keep your vocal chords in top fighting condition.) When you become the recipient of "Wah!," raise your sword up above your head. While your sword is raised, the warriors on either side of you slash towards her stomach, as they cry "Wah!" in unison. Then make eye contact with someone else in the circle, slash your sword towards them with a final defiant "Wah!" Each "battle" should therefore include three cries of "Wah!" As the group becomes familiar with the game, work to increase your speed and volume. This is a silly game; remember that warriors don't care about "looking cool" because they're too busy fighting unending battles. When a warrior misses his or her cue, stop the round and start it again until everyone is comfortable being loud and making big physical choices.

## What Are You Doing?

Form two parallel lines, and enough room in between for "action" to take place. The first student in one line, Student A, steps into the empty space between the two lines and begins miming any action (ex. bouncing a basketball). The first student in the opposite line, Student B, steps out and addresses Student A, saying their first name (a good name reinforcer!) and asking, "[Name], what are you doing?" Student A then states any action that is not what they are miming (e.g. "baking a cake"). Student B then begins miming the action that Student A has just stated, and the next student steps out to continue the exercise. *(To the teacher: Once students feel confident with the exercise, ask students to choose actions found in a chosen text. For instance, if you are teaching King Lear, students might say, "I'm dividing my Kingdom" or "I'm disguising myself.")*

Guiding Questions for Community-Builders:

- Why is a sense of trust and community important in theater?
- Are there other activities where an ensemble is important? How might they be similar to theater?
- How is acting in a play similar to being on a sports team? Or a classroom?
- Why might mental focus be important in acting?

# TECHNO SHAKESPEARE

## Chicago Shakespeare Theater

### **Chicago Shakespeare Theater's website**

<http://www.chicagoshakes.com/education>

Access articles and teacher handbooks for eighteen of Shakespeare's plays, as well as information on introducing your students to Shakespeare in performance.

## Comprehensive Link Sites

### **Shakespeare in Europe Sh:in:E**

<http://shine.unibas.ch/metasite.html>

Access an array of web links categorized into criticism, theater and film, music, adaptation, education, and more. Website created and maintained by Basel University in Switzerland.

### **Touchstone Database**

<http://touchstone.bham.ac.uk>

This website database identifies and maps significant UK Shakespeare collections. Created and maintained by University of Birmingham in the UK.

### **Absolute Shakespeare**

<http://absoluteshakespeare.com>

Access a comprehensive collection of Shakespeare's work, including full texts and summaries, a timeline, and lists of film adaptations.

## Teaching Shakespeare

### **The Folger Shakespeare Library**

<http://folger.edu/education>

This website features lesson plans, primary sources and study guides for the most frequently taught plays and sonnets.

### **Teaching Shakespeare with Technology—PBS**

<http://pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/technology>

Learn more about incorporating digital media into your Shakespeare units.

### **The History of Costume by Braun and Schneider**

<http://siue.edu/COSTUMES/history.html>

View costume illustrations of different social classes and cultures from various historical times.



## King Lear

### A Teacher Guide to the Signet Edition

<http://penguin.com/static/pdf/teachersguides/kinglear.pdf>

This teachers' guide provides summaries of each act in addition to study questions to consider while reading the play and follow up writing prompts.

### SparkNotes Video Summary

<http://tinyurl.com/ptvvcxa>

An animated summary of the play lasting about ten minutes.

### Folger Library Educational Resources

<http://tinyurl.com/mkmz4qq>

Prepared for a production by the Classical Theater of Harlem, this study guide provides information on key plot points, historical context, themes and imagery within the play.

### National Theatre Video Interview

<http://tinyurl.com/nb7ncuw>

From a series of interesting discussions and interviews from the 2014 National Theatre production, this video explores the dichotomy of sanity and insanity within the *King Lear*.

### Shakespeare Online

<http://shakespeare-online.com/plays/learscenes.html>

The full text of the play is provided with accompanying activities and information.

### King Lear Film–PBS

<http://tinyurl.com/ow2yb8s>

This website provides short discussions of many of the major film adaptations of *King Lear*.

### Absolute Shakespeare Art

[http://absoluteshakespeare.com/pictures/king\\_lear.htm](http://absoluteshakespeare.com/pictures/king_lear.htm)

Paintings depicting scenes from *King Lear* are linked to relevant excerpts from the text.

### Royal Shakespeare Company

<http://www.rsc.org.uk/explore/shakespeare/plays/king-lear/>

This resource from the RSC provides a wealth of information on the play, including reviews of notable productions.

# TECHNO SHAKESPEARE

## Shakespeare and Elizabethan England

### **The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust**

<http://shakespeare.org.uk>

Learn more about Shakespeare's life and birthplace through an extensive online collection of Shakespeare-related materials.

### **The Elizabethan Theatre**

<http://uni-koeln.de/phil-fak/englisch/shakespeare>

Read a lecture on Elizabethan Theatre by Professor Hilda D. Spear, University of Dundee, held at Cologne University.

### **King James I**

<http://luminarium.org/sevenlit/james/>

Learn about the life of King James I and his own literary canon.

### **Queen Elizabeth I**

<http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/eliza.htm>

Learn more about Queen Elizabeth and the people, events and concepts relevant to the study of the Elizabethan Age.

### **Elizabeth I: Ruler and Legend**

<http://newberry.org/elizabeth/>

This web-based exhibit is a companion to The Newberry Library's 2003/2004 Queen Elizabeth exhibit.

### **Encyclopedia Britannica's Guide to Shakespeare**

<http://www.brittanica.com/shakespeare>

An excellent resource for non-fiction companion pieces, find encyclopedia articles on Shakespeare, his works, and the Elizabethan period.

## Texts and Early Editions

### **The Complete Works of William Shakespeare**

<http://shakespeare.mit.edu/>

Access the first online web edition of the complete works, created and maintained by Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

### **Treasures in Full: Shakespeare in Quarto**

<http://bl.uk/treasures/shakespeare/homepage.html>

A copy of the quartos, available to compare side-by-side, as well as background information. This website was created and is maintained by the British Library.

### **The Internet Shakespeare Editions**

<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Foyer/plays.html>

This website has transcriptions and high quality facsimiles of Shakespeare's folios and quartos, categorized by play with links to any articles written about the play that can be found on the website.

### **Furness Shakespeare Library**

<http://dewey.lib.upenn.edu/sceti/furness/>

This collection of primary and secondary texts and images that illustrate the theater, literature, and history of Shakespeare. Created and maintained by University of Pennsylvania.

## **Shakespeare's First Folio?**

<http://bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/landprint/shakespeare/>

This page from the British Library provides an easy to understand introduction to the First Folio.

## **Words, Words, Words**

### **Shakespeare's Words Glossary and Language Companion**

<http://shakespeareswords.com>

Created by David Crystal and Ben Crystal, this site is a free online companion to the best-selling glossary and language companion, Shakespeare's Words.

### **Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary**

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.03.0079>

Part of Tufts University's Perseus Digital Library and created by Alexander Schmidt.

### **Words Shakespeare Invented**

<http://shakespeare-online.com/biography/wordsinvented.html>

This list compiled by Amanda Mabillard has some of the many words Shakespeare created; when you click on the word it directs you to the play in which it first appeared.

## **Shakespeare in Performance**

### **The Internet Broadway Database**

<http://ibdb.com>

This online database of Broadway plays is a great place to search for 'Shakespeare' and learn about some of the different productions of the Bard's works. (Note: this will only give you information about shows performed on Broadway.)

### **The Internet Movie Database: William Shakespeare**

<http://imdb.com>

Similar to IBDB, utilize this online movie database to search for "Shakespeare" and learn about the different cinematic versions of his plays.

### **Shakespeare's Staging: Shakespeare's Performance and his Globe Theatre**

<http://shakespearestaging.berkeley.edu>

This website catalogues stagings (with images!) from the sixteenth century to today.

### **Designing Shakespeare Collections**

<http://www.ahds.rhul.ac.uk/ahdscollections/docroot/shakespeare/playlist.do>

This index page once connected to a now-defunct Arts and Humanities Data Service in the UK. While much of the original site (<http://www.ahds.ac.uk/performingarts/>) is no longer searchable, this single link offers a treasure trove of production photos focusing on design practice at the Royal Shakespeare Company, along with many other British theaters. The photos can be enlarged and used for a myriad of classroom activities and research.

# TECHNO SHAKESPEARE

## Shakespeare in Art

### **Shakespeare Illustrated**

[http://english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare\\_Illustrated/Shakespeare.html](http://english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare_Illustrated/Shakespeare.html)

Harry Rusche, English professor at Emory University, created this helpful website that explores nineteenth-century paintings that depict scenes from Shakespeare's plays. Most plays have at least two works of arts accompanying them; you can search for works of art by both play title and artist name.

### **Absolute Shakespeare**

[http://absoluteshakespeare.com/pictures/shakespeare\\_pictures.htm](http://absoluteshakespeare.com/pictures/shakespeare_pictures.htm)

View examples of paintings based on Shakespeare's works and features examples of text believed to have inspired the painting.

### **The Faces of Elizabeth I**

<http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/elizface.htm>

Access a collection of paintings of Queen Elizabeth spanning her lifetime.

### **Tudor England: Images**

<http://marileecody.com/images.html>

Peruse paintings of royalty from the Tudor Era.



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Additional support perennially funded by:

The Malott Family Student Access Fund and The Pritzker Foundation Team Shakespeare Fund

PRINCIPAL ANNUAL SUPPORT FOR TEAM SHAKESPEARE IS ALSO PROVIDED BY

Baxter International Inc., the Helen Brach Foundation, The Brinson Foundation, The Crown Family, Dover Corporation, The Lloyd A. Fry Foundation, James and Brenda Grusecki, The Grover Hermann Foundation, Illinois Tool Works, K&L Gates LLP, Mazza Foundation, Northern Trust, Nuveen Investments, The Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust, Sheila G. Talton and Anonymous donors.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING IS COURTESY OF Joyce Chelberg, Connie and Don Patterson, People's Gas, Dr. Scholl Foundation, Charles and M.R. Shapiro Foundation, Dick Simpson, The Siragusa Foundation, Stefani's Children's Foundation and Anonymous donors.

This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

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Lead individual and foundation support provided by Eric's Tazmanian Angel Fund, Raymond and Judy McCaskey, Burton X. and Sheli Z. Rosenberg, Timothy R. Schwertfeger and Gail Waller, and Donna Van Eekeren Foundation.