

Theater at Monmouth 2018 Shakespeare in Maine Communities Tour Teacher Resource Guide



Adapted and Directed by Michael Dix Thomas

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FROM THE PAGE TO THE STAGE



Jonathan Bailey as Edgar in Chichester Festival Theatre's *King Lear*. Photograph: Manuel Harlan.

This season, Theater at Monmouth's *Shakespeare in Maine Communities* Tour brings classic literature to students across Maine with a 90-minute version of *King Lear*. The text was adapted to streamline the plot and help students connect more strongly to Shakespeare's verse, themes, and relevance to a modern audience. *Shakespeare in Maine Communities'* workshops and extended residencies offer students the opportunity to study, explore, and view classic literature through performance.

TAM's Education Tours and complimentary programming challenge learners of all ages to explore the ideas, emotions, and principles contained in classic texts and to discover the connection between classic theatre and our modern world.

Teacher Resource Guide articles and activities were developed to help students form a personal connection to the play before attending the production; Common Core-aligned activities are included to explore the plays in the classroom before and after the performance.

The best way to appreciate Shakespeare is to do Shakespeare. That means getting students up on their feet and physically, expressively, and vocally exploring his words. Using performance-based activities will help students to build a richer understanding of the text and identify with the characters and conflicts in the plays.

Thank you for taking some of your classroom time to teach your students about *King Lear*! If you need more information to support your preparation for the production, please call 207.933.2952 or email boxoffice@theateratmonmouth.org.

Enjoy the show!

Dawn McAndrews
Producing Artistic Director
Theater at Monmouth

Nothing will come of nothing...

A synopsis of what happens in the play



Dominic Mafham as Albany, Ian McKellen as Lear, and Patrick Robinson as Cornwall in Chichester Festival Theatre's *King Lear*. Photograph: Manuel Harlan.

Lear, King of England, decides to give up the throne and divide his kingdom between his three daughters, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. Before he divides the country, he asks each of his daughters to tell him how much she loves him. The two older daughters flatter Lear, but when Cordelia refuses to make a public declaration of love for her father, she is disinherited. She marries the King of France, who accepts her without a dowry (i.e., without money or property). The Earl of Kent is banished by Lear for daring to defend her. The other two daughters, Goneril and Regan, and their husbands, the Dukes of Albany and Cornwall, inherit the kingdom.

The Earl of Gloucester, deceived by his illegitimate son Edmund, disinherits his legitimate son, Edgar, who is forced to go into disguise as a mad beggar to save his life. Lear, now without power, quarrels with Goneril and Regan about the number of attendant knights they allow him to keep. When they ask that he give up all his knights, he goes out in a rage onto a heath (a piece of land, usually level and sometimes considered a wasteland) in a storm. He is accompanied only by his Fool and by his former advisor, the banished Earl of Kent, who is now disguised as a servant. Lear, Kent, and the Fool encounter Edgar, Gloucester's legitimate son, who is still in disguise as a mad beggar.

Gloucester tries to help Lear, but is betrayed by his illegitimate son Edmund and captured by Lear's daughter Regan and her husband, Cornwall. They put out Gloucester's eyes and make Edmund an Earl. Lear is taken secretly to the port town of Dover, where Cordelia has landed with a French army to rescue her father. There, Lear and Cordelia are reconciled but in the ensuing battle are captured by the sisters' forces.

Meantime, Edgar encounters his father, Gloucester, and after preventing him from committing suicide, leads him to Dover as well. Goneril and Regan are both in love with Edmund, who commanded their forces in the battle. Discovering this, Goneril's husband Albany forces Edmund to defend himself against the charge of treachery. Edgar arrives, disguised as an anonymous black knight, challenges Edmund to a fight, and fatally wounds his brother. News comes that Goneril has poisoned her sister Regan and then committed suicide. Before dying, Edmund reveals that he has ordered the deaths of Lear and Cordelia. Soldiers are sent to rescue them, but arrive too late: Cordelia has been killed. Lear enters carrying her body, and then dies. Albany agrees to give the throne to Edgar.

WHO'S WHO IN THE PLAY

There are eight actors in TAM's 80-minute production of *King Lear*. To play all the roles written by Shakespeare, some of the actors will need to double—a convention also used in Shakespeare's time. In our production, four actors play the traitorous servant, Oswald. Here's how the doubling works in our production:



Wendy Way: King Lear

King Lear of Britain decides to divide his kingdom among his three daughters; each daughter's portion will be determined by her public exclamation of how much she loves him. Lear's anger at hearing his youngest daughter Cordelia's response causes him to disinherit and banish her from his sight. He then divides his kingdom between his older daughters, Goneril and Regan.



Katelyn Manfre: Goneril

Lear's eldest daughter, Goneril successfully declares her love to her father and gains half of the kingdom. She denies her father the ability to keep his 100 attendant knights and her actions overall seem to manifest a daughter more concerned about her own power and status than about her father's well-being.



Heather Irish: Regan/ Oswald

Regan is Lear's middle daughter. Like Goneril, Regan flatters her father in her declaration of love. The two sisters eventually leave their father outside to contend with the fierce elements of the storm. Oswald is steward to Goneril. Oswald is eager to please to get what he wants. Kent perceives him as false, flattering and disrespectful; Kent's outrage at Oswald lands Kent in the stocks.



Chloe Bell: Cordelia/ Fool

Cordelia is Lear's youngest and most beloved daughter. Too honest to flatter her father, she suffers her father's wrath as a result. The King of France, marries her in spite of being disowned. Once Lear loses his kingdom, the fool travels with him acting as a kind of conscience. The fool does this through riddles, songs, and humor.



James Noel Hoban: Duke of Albany/ Earl of Gloucester

Albany is husband to Goneril who eventually separates himself from the actions of his wife and attempts to aid Lear and Cordelia. Gloucester is Lear's court companion. Gloucester mistakes his sons' worth, choosing to favor his illegitimate son Edmund over his legitimate son Edgar. Edmund convinces his father that son Edgar is trying to murder him. Eventually Edmund seeks Gloucester's death.



Ardarius Blakely: Edmund

Edmund is the illegitimate son of the Earl of Gloucester. He manipulates his father into believing that Edgar seeks his life. Having successfully turned his father against his brother, Edmund then gains the title of "Earl of Gloucester" by betraying his father to Regan and Cornwall.



Jelani Pitcher: Edgar / Duke of Cornwall

Edgar is Gloucester's legitimate son who flees the kingdom at Edmund's urging—appearing guilty to his father. Edgar seeks refuge by disguising himself as Poor Tom—a bedlam beggar and madman. Husband to Regan, Cornwall is an equal partner in achieving their goals. He orchestrates the blinding of Gloucester and suffers a fatal wound as a consequence.



Paul Haley: The Earl of Kent

Lear's advisor and friend, Kent voices his disapproval of Lear's treatment of Cordelia and is banished as a result. Unwilling to abandon his king, Kent disguises himself and offers himself as a servant to Lear, thus enabling him to stay close by and attempt to aid him.

ABOUT THE PLAY

Sources and Background for *King Lear*



The first story about King Leir is in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* (c.1135). Leir, having been badly treated by his elder daughters and their husbands, the dukes of Cornwall and Albany, defeats them with the help of Cordeilla and her husband; however, after Leir's death, Cordeilla is defeated and imprisoned by her nephews, and kills herself. Geoffrey embedded the folktale motif in a 'historical' account, warning of the consequences of a divided kingdom. The *Historia* was not translated into English in the Elizabethan period, but versions of the story existed in verse, in John Higgins' *Mirroure for Magistrates* (1574) and Spenser's *Fairie Queene* (1590). The story was retold in Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*, whose description of Gonorilla saying she loves Leir 'more than toong could express'

may have inspired Goneril's line in *King Lear*, 'Sir, I do love you more than word can wield the matter'.

Like *Hamlet*, *King Lear* had a predecessor on the English stage. Published in 1605, *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and his three daughters; Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella* is thought to have been extant since 1594. In that year, a play called *The most famous Chronicle historye of Leire Kinge of England and his three Daughters* was entered in the Stationers' Register, and a play called *Kinge leare* was performed at the Rose by 'the Quenes men and my lord of Sussex to geather'. It is assumed that all of these references are to the same play.

Shakespeare's version was not entered in the Stationers' Register until 1607, and the First Quarto was printed in 1608. The *Leir* play is perhaps the most obvious immediate source for Shakespeare's play, yet it is much simpler than Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The daughters are called Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella. As the play begins, Gonorill and Ragan discover that Leir plans to test their love for him. They agree to flatter Leir so as to receive portions of the kingdom and marry the Kings of Cornwall and Cambria. They plot against Cordella, thinking that if she refuses to marry the suitor Leir favours, Leir will take this as evidence of a lack of daughterly love. Leir dispossesses Cordella, but is then rejected by Gonorill and Ragan, who plot to have him killed. Leir escapes and is reunited with Cordella. Along with Cordella's husband, the King of Gallia, Leir and Perillus (the equivalent of Kent in *King Lear*) journey to Britain to restore Leir to his throne. Although victorious, Leir relinquishes his kingdom to the Gallian King.

The subplot in *King Lear* involving Gloucester, Edgar and Edmund is missing from *Leir*, as is the tragic ending involving the deaths of Cordelia and Lear himself. The Gloucester subplot is thought to have been taken from Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (1590). Sidney tells of a king who has been deceived by his illegitimate son. Like Gloucester, he is blinded and cast out. He is led through a stormy winter landscape by his legitimate son, whom he has begged to lead him 'to the toppe of this rocke, thence to cast himselfe headlong to death'. In *Lear*, Gloucester asks Edgar to bring him to the brink of 'a cliff whose high and bending head/ Looks fearfully in the confined deep;/ [...] From that place/ I shall no leading need'. Lear's madness may have been inspired by the real-life case of Brian Annesley, whose two eldest daughters tried to have him declared insane in 1603, but whose youngest daughter, Cordell, appealed on his behalf. Samuel Harsnett's *Declaration of Egregious Popishe Impostures* (1603), contains vivid descriptions of mad and 'possessed' people wandering the countryside, which Shakespeare is thought to have adapted for *Lear*.

Shakespeare's deft reworking of chronicle, story, pamphlet, and play elements, plus his addition of a tragic denouement, creates a more nuanced and complex plot than is to be found in any of his individual sources. Even for him.

Shakespeare's Fools

The word 'fool' is rather loosely used these days but it is a technical term in Shakespeare's plays. The fool in Elizabethan Drama is someone employed to entertain a king or a duke or any other rich person who needs entertaining. The convention in Elizabethan drama is that the fool is the most insightful and intelligent person in the play. He is not to be confused with a clown: in Shakespeare's time 'clown' was a simple rural man—a rustic.

The fool is a very important character in a Shakespeare play fulfilling two important functions:

1. The Fool has license to speak truth to power with no holds barred and acts like the chorus in Greek drama—commenting on the characters and the action for the benefit of the audience.
2. The Fool is usually the wisest character in the play, often dismissed as just 'the jester'

Other Shakespearean characters are often referred to as fools including Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Launce in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* but while these characters may behave foolishly, they are not technically true Shakespearean fools. The three true fools in Shakespeare's plays are the following:



Feste in *Twelfth Night*

Feste is probably the most famous of Shakespeare's fools. His job is to entertain by singing and dancing, and making jokes, but he is an important member of Olivia's household because of her respect for him. He is highly intelligent with an extraordinary command of language. Olivia constantly asks his opinion. Apart from his jestering activities he plays a major dramatic role in the plot. Feste is both inside and outside the play, which makes him an almost postmodern character.

Touchstone, in *As You Like It*

Touchstone is Duke Frederick's court jester. He is quick witted and an astute observer of human nature. His commentary on the other characters runs continuously throughout the play. He is quite cynical and his comments on the characters are often quite caustic. He is notable for his facility with language; he can twist any argument and he loves to nitpick about everything. He is full of wise sayings and frequently talks about the wisdom of foolishness.



The Fool in *King Lear*

Lear's fool does not have a name and is called, simply, 'Fool.' He is Lear's constant companion and accompanies him on his journey into madness and eventually death when he, just before Lear's death, is hanged by those who have imprisoned Lear. In this play the fool functions as the consciousness of the king; the Fool is Lear's alter ego and constantly commenting on Lear's relentless folly. When Lear finally achieves a measure of understanding about how lacking in wisdom he has been there is no need for the Fool, who dies.

Madness in *Lear*



“Tom o’ Bedlam”, “poor Tom” and “mad Tom”, are all ways Edgar refers to himself in his disguise as an insane man. This name comes from the infamous Bethlehem Hospital in London, which was founded in 1247 as the first hospital for the mentally ill. This hospital, commonly called Bedlam, became known for its inhumane conditions and as a place of chaos, filth, and derangement where the madmen were chained up and nobles could even come and watch for their entertainment. “Tom o’ Bedlam” became a catchphrase in Shakespeare’s time for any

seemingly insane person. Today if someone says “it’s bedlam in here”, they mean a noisy, chaotic environment.

In Act III, Lear is definitely changing. From saying “Let me not be mad” in the first act, he now gives in to an assortment of caprices that his tortured mind comes up with. He mocks the traditions of the king by stripping off his rich clothing and crowning himself with flowers. By suffering tremendous losses of fortune, his mind seems to snap. When Lear meets Mad Tom, he gives in to what he now believes to be the truth—that there is no sense, no sanity, no identity to be had in the world anymore—saying “Is man no more than this?”

In the Renaissance, a traditional model of understanding human behavior was based on the four “humors”, or bodily fluids. If one had too much of a particular humor, it was expected that he or she would display certain qualities. The word “humour” occurs about 140 times across Shakespeare’s plays. It does not mean “funny” however, as in our modern sense of the word. The word “humour” describes the personality or mood of a character.

Melancholy or black bile: *sad, gloomy, sullen, depressed*

Choler (choleric) or yellow bile: *causes anger, rage and an excess of heat*

Blood (sanguine): *optimistic, passionate, courageous*

Phlegm (phlegmatic): *dull, indifferent, idle, apathetic*

The idea of the four humours was developed out of a Greek model of medicine of close observation of blood and other bodily fluids. This observation seemed to show four distinct compounds within the bodily fluid. Having no diagnostic tools to work inside the body, they invented this model based on external observations. They assigned a *physical* cause to certain *emotional* states, and then treated the physical cause.

Today we do not use the four humors as a model of our medicine, but we do base all of our medicine on detailed scientific observations, always searching if there is a physical (chemical, electric, muscular, bacterial) reason for our maladies. But the idea of the humours has proved long-lasting. We still use these words today to describe a person’s mood or character.

But also in the Renaissance, madness and divine inspiration were also closely tied, and it seems that Lear must go through intense suffering, perhaps of madness, (“bound to a wheel of fire”) to come to some new understanding of himself and others.

What about today? Do you think madness can serve as a means for people to realize a fundamental truth about themselves or the world? Or is madness only a chemical reaction or “imbalance” of our physical and chemical selves and therefore devoid of meaning?

Themes to Explore in *King Lear*

King Lear is considered one of the masterpieces of world literature and one of the most challenging roles an actor can play. It is a story of royalty and power and yet will be familiar to anyone who has had parents. It is set in a distant pre-Christian age and yet feels relevant today. *King Lear* deals seriously with some of the fundamental themes of human life such as family, ambition, justice, and compassion. It has scenes of horrific cruelty and heartbreaking tenderness but also moments of black comedy which wouldn't be out of place in the plays of Beckett. It is a play about the meaning of life and a gripping story of one man's search for who he really is and what really matters. George Bernard Shaw, seldom prone to overstatement, claimed that "no man will ever write a better tragedy than *King Lear*."

Fathers and Daughters: Critics have long recognized the centrality of family relationships in Shakespeare's drama, but the shifting affections of fathers and daughters has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention only in recent decades. The focus of the critical literature has primarily centered on a few early romantic comedies, the late romances, and *King Lear*, in which daughters struggle to negotiate a passage into adulthood and marriage with their fathers' blessing, while the fathers struggle to relinquish these young women to other men—their future husbands.



Nature: *King Lear* has repeated references to something or someone being unnatural, against nature, or an insult to nature. This brings about musings of nature and whether human beings have a nature of good or evil. Is it our nature to be generous and forgiving or is our nature greedy and power hungry? What defines our nature and can it be changed? If our nature is culturally defined or affected by the environment in which we live, then what is our inherent nature? Another way in which the natural order of things is defied in *King Lear* occurs when parents and children betray each other in order to gain power.

Loyalty: There are several characters in *King Lear* that exhibit significant amounts of loyalty toward Lear and Gloucester. Are they deserving of this level of loyalty? Kent in particular is banished from the kingdom after having spent his life serving Lear. He is not related to Lear and has no obligation whatsoever to continue being so loyal. And yet he does. What motivates Kent's loyalty? Cordelia is banished and forced to marry the King of France and yet she remains loyal to Lear, even returning with French troops to battle her sisters. Edgar, after spending his life as a loyal son to Gloucester, is believed to have betrayed him and must disguise himself. And yet he also remains loyal to his father, staying in disguise in order to continue his loyalty. The loyalty is rewarded for Edgar and Kent but Cordelia dies in the end.



Betrayal: There is a lot of betrayal in *King Lear*. Lear betrays Cordelia when he reacts to her honesty by banishing her. Regan and Goneril betray their father by casting him into the storm to potentially die. Edmund betrays his father and brother as he manipulates them both to gain power and prestige. Gloucester betrays Edgar when Edmund insists that Edgar desires to do him harm. Betrayal is probably one of the most powerful themes in the play.



Madness: As Lear is trapped in the storm, he begins his descent into madness. The betrayal of Lear's daughters and the loss of his sense of self literally drive him crazy. At this point, the fool goes on a tirade of seemingly senseless babble, and yet, the "crazy talk" seems to make perfect sense. Madness is chaos and Lear himself is in the middle of it. As he begins to make sense of his world and himself, Lear sinks deeper into the madness of his own making. Another example of wisdom through madness is found in Edgar's portrayal of Poor Tom. Lear calls poor Tom the philosopher. The theme of madness allowing for self-discovery remains

constant throughout the play.

Blindness: While Lear and Gloucester are blind to the reality of their situations; Gloucester is literally blinded. When Gloucester loses his eyes and Lear loses his sanity, both characters are finally able to see the truth. They meet, near Dover, at the end of the play and admit how much their blindness has cost them. In the play, Shakespeare uses the words: "See" 46 times, "eyes" 36 times, "eye" 10 times, "sight" nine times, "eyeless" six times and "blind" five times. Lear and Gloucester are surrounded by loyal friends, servants, and family, and yet they are both incapable of recognizing it. They are also incapable of self-reflection, an ability to see themselves for who they really are. In the moment when Gloucester is blinded by Cornwall and Regan, this concept becomes literal and the consequences are horrific. The theme of blindness is probably the most prominent in *King Lear*.



Justice: Is the universe just? Does good overcome evil? If *King Lear* is a reflection of the universe, then justice is cruel and inconsistent. While the "evil" characters all die by the end of the play, they have left behind Edgar and Albany to rule the kingdom. Both are left alone without family. Is this justice? Although justice seems to be served, nothing about the ending can be called happy.

Discussion Questions

King Lear is unique from many of Shakespeare's plays in that it has a similar main and subplot. By having similar plots, Shakespeare is able to underscore his themes and propel the main plot forward. How is Lear's relationship to his daughters similar to that of Gloucester and his sons? How do these men view their children? How and when do these views change? Discuss examples from the text that support your thoughts.

COLLABORATING ON DESIGN CONCEPT

This activity will provide your students with insight into theatrical design and practical experience in the creative process that stage designers use when establishing the world of a play.

Essential Question: How can we communicate the specific world of a play to an audience using characterization and analysis of the text?

Objectives:

- Examine the plot, characters, and themes of the play
- Explore *what happens in the play* and *what the play is about* to inform design choices
- Analyze design choices based on playwright's intentions and relevancy to a modern audience

Overview: The job of theatrical designers is to support the director's vision and interpret the playwright's intentions by using costumes, sets, lights, and sound to create the world of the play for a modern audience. Each designer's work should:

- Evoke the mood and tone of the production
- Specify the time and place
- Clarify relationships between characters

Designers read the play many times searching for clues contained in the text about the look and feel of the play. They research the period in which the play was written as well as analyzing the plot and characters for visual motifs. The design team meets with the director to brainstorm a specific concept or approach to the play. The designers collaborate to ensure that all of the elements come together in a cohesive manner.

Activity:

1. Divide students into teams of five with each member assuming the role of one of the artistic team for the production: director, sets, costumes, lights, and sound. Ask students to discuss the plot, character, time and place, and overall concept for the production.
 - a. Determine the mood of the production from beginning to end. How might it influence the design?
 - b. Decide where to set *King Lear* to make it the most relevant for your audience? (Coaching) Remind students that the concept must work for the entire play—not just certain scenes.
 - c. What images or motifs occur repeatedly throughout the play? How would you show these onstage? What are the different locations of the play?
2. Once a setting is decided, ask each group to research the time period in order to be as authentic as possible in creating the world of the play.
3. Each member of the team should produce a creative representation of their design (a poster, sound clips, a collage, fabric swatches, and so on).
4. Ask each group member to write a design/director statement in support of the concept, including the historical research that supports their decisions.
5. Display the concept boards as a team and have each team present their concept to the class.

Reflection: After students see the production, ask them to reflect on the design choices made by the TAM team. Compare and contrast TAM's production concept with the students' vision for the play. How were the designer choices similar or different? How did they serve the play?

Creating a Scene or Kicking Up a Ruckus

Activity

Supplies: Each student will need a copy of the below passage.

Background: Lear is caught outside in a storm after he angrily departs from his treacherous daughters. His fury turns to madness and he rails against the storm. Have students explore the vocal and physical power of Shakespeare's language using the text below.

Instructions: The activities should be done quickly and with lots of energy.

1. Standing in a circle, the entire class reads the speech aloud in one strong voice.
2. Read again together loudly, sharply pronouncing every word and elongating vowels to explore sound.
3. Each student chooses one line to focus on. Altogether, students boldly read their lines aloud, finding an exaggerated physical movement for each word. Clarify the meaning of any unknown or unclear words.
4. Read the full speech aloud together, asking students to use their physical gestures. Encourage bold choices and loud voices to punctuate words.
5. Try the speech again, this time quietly and intensely.

**Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drenched our teeples, drowned the cocks!
You sulph'rous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Strike flat the thick rotundity o' the world!
Crack nature's molds, all germains spill at once
That make ingrateful man!**

5. Finally, divide the class into groups of four or five; ask them to choreograph their scene and present it for the class.

Reflection

Ask students to consider the following questions about the scene:

- What do you think is happening in the play at this point? How do you think Lear is feeling? What words provide specific clues to Lear's mental state?
- What are some of the images in the speech?
- What do you think is more effective: having Lear rail loudly or speak quietly and intensely? Why?

ON SHAKESPEARE

No man's life has been the subject of more speculation than William Shakespeare's. For all his fame and celebrity, Shakespeare's personal history remains a mystery. We know a man named William Shakespeare was baptized at Stratford upon Avon on April 26, 1564, and was buried at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford on April 25, 1616. Tradition holds that he was born three days earlier, and that he died on his birthday—April 23—but this is perhaps more romantic myth than fact.

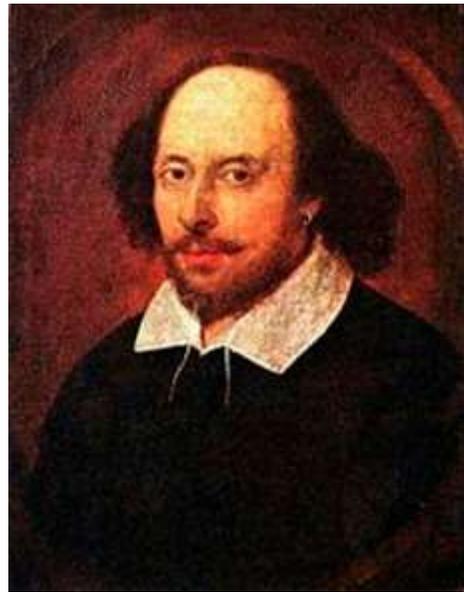
Scholars assume that Shakespeare went to grammar school, since his father was first a member of the Stratford Council and later high bailiff. A grammar school education would have meant that Shakespeare was exposed to the rudiments of Latin rhetoric, logic, and literature.

Church records tell us that banns (announcements) were published for the marriage of a William Shakespeare to an Ann Whatley in 1582. On November 27 of the same year a marriage license was granted to 18 year old William and 26 year old Anne Hathaway. A daughter, Susanna, was born to the couple six months later. Twins, Hamnet and Judith, were born soon after. We know that Hamnet died in childhood on August 11, 1596. We don't know how the young Shakespeare came to travel to London or how he first came to the stage.

Whatever the facts may be, it is clear that in the years between 1582 and 1592, William Shakespeare became involved in the London theatre scene as an actor and playwright. By 1594, Shakespeare was listed as a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, one of the most popular acting companies in London. He was a member of this company for the rest of his career, which lasted until 1611. When James I came to the throne in 1603, he issued a royal license to Shakespeare and his fellow players, inviting them to call themselves the King's Men. In 1608, the King's Men leased the Blackfriar's Theatre in London. This theatre, which had artificial lighting and was probably heated, served as their winter playhouse. The famous Globe Theatre was their summer performance space.

In 1616 Shakespeare's daughter Judith married Thomas Quiney, the son of a neighbor in Stratford. Her father revised his will six weeks later; within a month he had died. The revised version of William Shakespeare's will bequeathed his house and all the goods to his daughter Susanna and her husband Dr. John Hall, leaving Judith and Thomas only a small sum of money; his wife, who survived him, received the couple's second best bed.

In the years since Shakespeare's death, he has risen from obscurity to the most read, adapted, and translated writer of all time. In the 1800s, his plays were so popular that many refused to believe that an actor from Stratford had written them. To this day some believe that Sir Francis Bacon or Edward De Vere, the Earl of Oxford, was the author. Still others prefer to believe that Walter Raleigh or Christopher Marlowe penned the lines attributed to Shakespeare. While most people are content to believe that genius can spring up in any social class or setting, the gap between the known facts and the myths that surround Shakespeare's life leaves ample room for speculation.



William Shakespeare

ON ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND



Portrait of Queen Elizabeth by George Gower

The age of Shakespeare was a great time in English history. During the reign of Elizabeth I (1558—1603), England emerged as the leading naval and commercial power of the Western world, consolidating this position with the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. During this time, Elizabeth I firmly established the Church of England (begun by her father Henry VIII after a dispute with the Pope). London in the 16th century underwent a dramatic transformation; the population grew 400% between 1500 and 1600, swelling to nearly 200,000 people in the city proper and outlying region by the time an emerging artist from Stratford came to town. A rising merchant middle class was carving out a productive livelihood, and the economy was booming.

During Shakespeare's lifetime, England also experienced a tremendous cultural revival. This so-called English Renaissance found expression in architecture, music, literature, and drama. Shakespeare both drew inspiration from high and popular culture of the English Renaissance. Popular entertainment during the 16th century tended to be boisterous and often violent. Many men, women, and children attended public executions of criminals that took place on a regular basis, and persons of all social classes and genders attended theatre performances. The trade of bookmaking flourished during the period as public education fueled the appetite for great works in print.

During the years 1590-1593, England suffered from an outbreak of terrible proportions; the bubonic plague or "Black Death" claimed so many lives that English society stood on the verge of collapse. Many businesses, including theatres, closed, in part to keep people from spreading the disease and in part because of the labor shortage that resulted from such widespread illness and death. Once the epidemic subsided, the theatres reopened and quickly regained their former popularity.

This explosion of commerce and culture lasted throughout Elizabeth's reign and into that of her successor, James I. James' rule brought many changes to English life; the two most pivotal were a bankrupt economy and an intense dissatisfaction from a minority religious group—the Puritans. In September 1642, the Puritan Parliament issued an edict that forbade all stage plays and closed the theatres; an act that effectively brought to a close the Elizabethan Renaissance. Theatres rapidly fell into disrepair and neglect until the Restoration in 1660.

In writing his plays and sonnets, William Shakespeare drew ideas from many different sources. His eye for detail and his understanding of human nature enabled him to create some of the most enduring works of drama and poetry ever produced. But his work also provides an insightful commentary on 16th-century English values, life, history, and thought.



PERFORMANCES IN SHAKESPEARE'S TIME

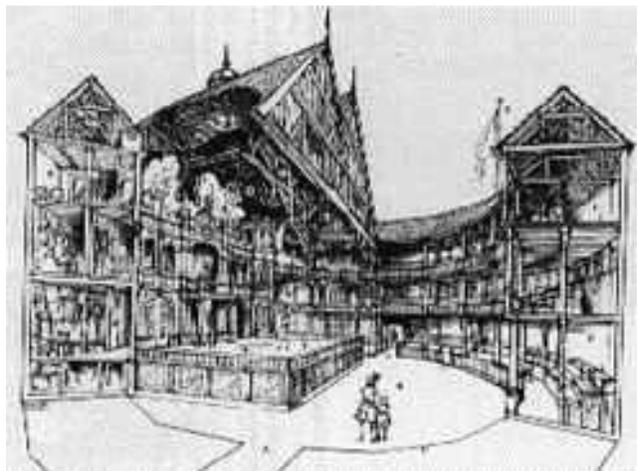


In Shakespeare's day theatre was the most popular form of entertainment. The theatre district was located in Bankside, just outside of London across the Thames. Bankside was a seedy part of town known for its taverns, brothels, gambling houses, and bear baiting arenas. Playhouses were built to accommodate an audience of almost 3,000 people sitting in boxes, benches on the stage, or standing in the pit directly in front of the actors. As there was no electricity for lighting, performances started at 2:00pm to make the most of daylight.

All classes came to the theatre; in one audience you could see nobleman, court dandies, and young apprentices. To pack the audiences, playhouses undersold all other popular entertainment—which included bear baiting arenas. A day at the Elizabethan theatre cost just one penny—

equivalent to the price of a movie ticket today. For twopence or threepence more a patron could purchase a seat in the gallery and rent a cushion.

In a typical season a theatre company might play six days a week, forty-nine weeks a year, and perform more than forty plays, over half of them brand new. Shakespeare's company, The Lord Chamberlain's Men (renamed The King's Men after James I took the throne), was considered the most talented company of the time. Acting was not a well-respected profession at this time, and women were not allowed to perform on stage; boys performed all female parts, including Juliet and the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. In a day when acting paid enough for the average actor to just get by, the Lord Chamberlain's Men did so well one or two company members became prosperous middle-class citizens. Shakespeare was writing for the stage in an exciting time where theatre was a fast paced popular form of entertainment attended by courtiers and whores, lawyers and cutpurses, tradesmen, and servants.



VERSE AND PROSE

Iambic Pentameter

Shakespeare wrote much of his dialogue in a form of poetry, following the rules regarding rhythm and meter that were commonly used in his time. The form he used is called iambic pentameter [call out]. “Iambic” means a line of iambs; iambs are two syllables together, the first one is unstressed and the second is stressed. For instance, say the word ‘today’—notice how the ‘day’ seems stronger than the ‘to’? Try reversing the stresses and see how it sounds. “Pentameter” refers to the number of iambs in the line. Penta is the Greek word for five—think about the Pentagon and how many sides it has—so there are five iambs in each line.

So iambic pentameter feels like a heartbeat: Short, **Long**; Short, **Long**; Short, **Long**; Short, **Long**; Short, **Long**. An actor uses scansion to interpret the meter of a piece of verse. It can tell the reader, the actor, and the audience important information about the character.

ROMEO

But **soft**, what **light** through **yonder window breaks**?

Actors use the notation “u” for unstressed syllables and “/” for stressed:

u / u / u / u / u /
But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?

Actors use the meter as a clue to discover what Shakespeare's characters are feeling. The stressed words are usually the most important (or “operative”) words in a verse line. But sometimes the iambic pentameter lines are “irregular” (meaning they don't have 10 unstressed and stressed syllables) giving the actor another clue. For example, from *Hamlet*:

HAMLET

To be, or not to be: that is the question,

u / u / u / u / u / u /
To **be**, or **not** to **be**: that **is** the **question**,

Shakespeare could easily have had the line end with “quest” instead of “question” making it a regular line of verse. However, to show Hamlet's state of questioning and imbalance Shakespeare gives the actor a line with an extra beat—11 syllables—to emphasize how he is feeling. This is called a feminine ending (because it ends unstressed and is therefore weaker). An actor might also choose to flip the stresses after the full stop in the center of the line (called a caesura), creating a trochee (a stressed/unstressed foot).

Prose

Shakespeare wrote his plays using two styles—verse and prose. Verse, the style used most by Shakespeare, is text written with a meter or rhythm. Prose is text written without meter or rhythm. Prose is a more common form of speech, sounds more natural, and does not follow the rules or form of poetry. Prose is most often found in the comedies where servants or lower classes (or character's talking about “lewd” subjects) speak in prose. Shakespeare often uses the switch from verse to prose (or back) to indicate a change in emotion or mood within a scene. In *Romeo and Juliet* Mercutio switches from verse to prose and back again in the scene where he is killed. Shakespeare's shift from verse to prose provides a new and different way to convey not only wit and humor but also great depth of feeling and character.

BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

1. Line at a Time

Using a section of the text, type each line on a separate slip of paper and distribute so each student has one line. Working independently students walk around the room reading their line aloud, experimenting with different inflections or ways of speaking. Regroup in a circle and ask each student to read her/his line aloud. Discuss questions about language or word choice. Ask students:

- What might this play be about, based on the lines you heard?
- What images came to mind when reading or hearing the line(s)?
- What type of person do you imagine spoke the line(s)?

2. Understanding the Tragedy of Tragedy

Research the elements of Shakespearean Tragedy. What characteristics are necessary for a play to be classified as a tragedy? What are your expectations of a play that is called a tragedy? Based on reading the play or a synopsis, ask students to discuss whether or not *King Lear* fits the characteristics of a tragedy. Check out these websites for definitions:

<https://www.thoughtco.com/introducing-shakespeare-tragedies-2985293>

<https://owlcation.com/humanities/Shakespeares-Plays-Comedy-Tragedy-History>

3. Dramatizing Violence On Stage—Then and Now

Shakespeare's actors were trained in swordplay and could perform rapier and dagger or broadsword battles on stage. In today's theatre, violence is safely staged through techniques of modern stage combat; actors create physical storytelling that simulates violence without putting them at risk. Search the text of *King Lear* for instances of violence. Then discuss each, how it might have been staged during Shakespeare's time and how it might be staged today. What is different or the same about how we view violence today as compared to Shakespeare's time? How do we handle violence in the media today?

4. Family Relationships

"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child" Act 1, Scene 4
Have students pay close attention to how the relationships between fathers and children inform the play. How do the fathers (Lear and Gloucester) treat their children? How does Edmund feel about being Gloucester's illegitimate son? How do each of the children (Regan, Goneril, Cordelia, Edgar, and Edmund) react to their parents?

5. Nature and the Natural Order

"Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!" Act 3, Scene 2

In Shakespeare's time, there was a specific belief in natural order, or the Great Chain of Being. At the top of the chain was God; appointed by God was the king. When Lear gives up his kingdom, he upsets the Great Chain of Being. Nature plays a huge role in *Lear*. As the world around Lear begins to crumble, nature seems to follow suit. Shakespeare's audience would have understood that Lear's abdication of the throne would have upset the Great Chain of Being.

AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

1. Playing Lear

For most actors, playing Lear is considered the ultimate acting challenge. Ask students to watch a few of the following clips to see some of the famous actors who have tackled the part of King Lear: 1953 Orson Welles, 1974 James Earl Jones, 1984 Laurence Olivier, 2009 Ian McKellen. Have them take notes as they watch: what are the differences between these portrayals? What are the similarities? After the show, have them compare the clips to Wendy Way's interpretation citing specific examples.

2. Two Worlds Both Alike in Dignity

Ask students to write a response to the follow essay prompt (adapted from the 1991 AP Exam): Many plays and novels use contrasting places (for example, two countries, two cities or towns, two houses, or the land and the sea) to represent opposing forces or ideas that are central to the meaning of the work. How, in *King Lear*, does Shakespeare contrast two such people, Gloucester and Lear? Discuss how their situations differ, how their response to their children differ, how the language each uses in the play differs, and how their contrast contributes to the meaning of Shakespeare's work.

3. Grief and Forgiveness

"When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down and ask of thee forgiveness" Act 5, Scene 3
Much of *King Lear* deals with loss: loss of kingdom, loss of self, loss of life. Ask students how the characters in Lear deal with grief? Who in the play is able to forgive and who is not? What point do they think Shakespeare was trying to make?

4. The Many Faces of Lear

King Lear can be thought of as a tragedy in which an otherwise great man falls from power and loses status and respect because of a tragic flaw in his character; or a moral tale about aging and about the relationship between the old and the young in society; or a play of social realism about parents and children and the consequences of those relationships breaking down; or a political play about decision-making power and the relationship between the public and the private. Ask students to discuss Lear's abdication of power and the division of his kingdom in the context of one of the possibilities above. Ask them to find examples from the performance or the text to support their contextual view of the play.

5. Suit the Action to the Word

The director and design team for TAM's *King Lear* had a concept, or artistic vision, for this production. Have students write a review of *King Lear* describing what they thought the story of the play was, and how the set and costumes helped to tell the story. In their reviews, students should select a particular scene that exemplifies their opinions. Share the reviews in class and discuss the similarities or differences of opinion. Collect all the reviews and send to the Theater at Monmouth Education Department.

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Books on Shakespeare and *King Lear*

- Asimov, Isaac. *Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare*. Doubleday, 1978
- Cahn, Victor L. *The Plays of Shakespeare: A Thematic Guide*. Greenwood Press, 2001
- Gibson, Janet and Rex Gibson. *Discovering Shakespeare's Language*. Cambridge University Press, 1999
- McDonald, Russ. *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare*, St. Martin's Press, 1996
- Pritchard, R.E. *Shakespeare's England*. Sutton Publishing Limited, 1999
- Bradley, Lynne. *Adapting King Lear for the Stage*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010
- Halio, Jay L., editor. *Critical Insights: King Lear*. Pasadena, CA.: Salem Press, 2012
- Rosenberg, Marvin. *The Masks of Lear*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972
- Shapiro, James. *The Year of Lear: Shakespeare in 1606*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015

King Lear on DVD

- 2008 *King Lear* directed by Trevor Nunn. RSC production. Ian McKellen as Lear.
- 1998 *King Lear* directed by Richard Eyre. BBC. Ian Holm as Lear.
- 1984 *King Lear* directed by Michael Elliott. Granada TV. Laurence Olivier as Lear.
- 1971 *King Lear* directed by Peter Brook. Paul Scofield as Lear.
- 1953 *King Lear* directed by Andrew McCullough. Orson Welles as Lear.

Books on Teaching Shakespeare

- Gibson, Rex. *Teaching Shakespeare*. Cambridge University Press, 1998
- Reynolds, P. *Teaching Shakespeare*. Oxford University Press, 1992
- Rosenblum, Joseph. *A Reader's Guide to Shakespeare*. Salem Press, Inc., 1998

Websites

- PBS's *In Search of Shakespeare* <http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/>
- Folger Shakespeare Library <http://www.folger.edu>
- MIT Shakespeare: Complete Works, <http://the-tech.mit.edu/Shakespeare/>

Common Core Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy addressed in the Guide: Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening

- Comprehension and Collaboration
 - Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas, and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
 - Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
 - Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
- Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
 - Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
 - Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
 - Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.