

Individual Learning Packet

**Teaching Unit**

**King Lear**

by William Shakespeare

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Item No. 201302

# King Lear

## Objectives

Note: All references come from the Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Classics edition of *King Lear*, copyright 2006.

*By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:*

1. trace the development of the main plot in the story and indicate how and where the subplot parallels the main plot.
2. identify and write a brief character sketch for each of the following characters:
  - Albany
  - Cornwall
  - Cordelia
  - Edgar
  - Edmund
  - Gloucester
  - Goneril
  - Kent
  - Lear
  - Oswald
  - Regan
3. write a short essay on the function of the fool in this play.
4. trace the development of the following themes in this play:
  - the foolishness of the aged and the ingratitude of the young
  - the roles of parent and child
  - the importance of nature and the natural order, and the consequences that occur when the natural order is subverted
  - man's fate viewed as a wheel of fortune
  - the consequences of unregulated passion
  - the corruption of power and redemption through suffering

# King Lear

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Point out how and to what extent Lear is an example of a “tragic hero.”
2. In three short paragraphs, identify and discuss three ways in which the Gloucester subplot mirrors the main plot.
3. Identify at least three comments made by the fool that reveal his opinion of Lear. In what way does the fool function as the Chorus does in a Greek play?
4. Write a short character analysis for each of the more important characters in the play. Identify their behavior and comment on their motivation.
5. Demonstrate how the following themes pertain to this play:
  - The foolishness of the aged and the ingratitude of the young.
  - The importance of nature and the natural order, and the consequences that occur when the natural order is subverted.
  - Fate, like a wheel, can spin spin out of control.
  - Punishment by the gods for evil acts.
  - Corruption of the individual by power.
  - Redemption through suffering.
  - The consequences of unregulated passion.
6. Describe the relationship between Lear and the Fool. How is it similar and dissimilar to the relationship of Lear and his daughters?
7. Identify the procedures of chivalry that are followed during the confrontational scene between Edgar and Edmund.

# King Lear

## Act I, Scene I

### Vocabulary

**Albany** – Scotland  
**alms** – charity  
**amorous** – full of love  
**appertains** – relates  
**attend** – serve  
**aught** – anything  
**begot** – fathered  
**clamor** – a loud outcry  
**conferring** – bestowing  
**dispositions** – tendencies  
**divest** – to strip  
**dominions** – a governed territory or country  
**dowry** – the property or money that a woman gives to her husband when they are married  
**fairest** – most lovely  
**flourish** – fanfare of trumpets  
**forbear** – hold off, stop  
**forsaken** – abandoned  
**fortune** – fate  
**gorge** – satisfy, overindulge  
**Hecate** – patron of witchcraft, associated with Hades and the underworld  
**hence** – away from here  
**infirmities** – physical ailments  
**liege** – lord  
**mar** – damage  
**miscreant** – wicked person  
**opulent** – characterized by abundance  
**pawn** – chess piece  
**perpetual** – lasting forever or for an indefinitely long time  
**plaited** – tightly woven  
**plight** – pledge  
**pre-eminence** – excellence above others  
**recreant** – a disloyal person; traitor  
**saucily** – rudely  
**Scythian** – notoriously savage inhabitant of European Russia, regarded as the home of barbarians  
**sojourn** – visit; to live somewhere temporarily  
**soundest** – healthiest  
**validity** – value  
**whoreson** – bastard son, meant affectionately here  
**wield** – convey

3. Gloucester's decrying of Edgar by calling him various types of "villain" could be an allusion to which other Shakespearean play?

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4. Who actually wrote the letter and why?

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5. According to Elizabethan beliefs, when nature (i.e., the natural order of the world) is upset, unusual, sometimes horrible, events may occur. In what way does Gloucester relate unusual natural events to human life?

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6. Gloucester is upset with Edgar, and Edmund says that he will seek Edgar out and get to the bottom of the letter. When he sees Edgar, though, what does Edmund tell him?

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7. How does Edmund sum up his father and brother?

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8. What subplot starts in this scene?

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**Act II, Scene I**

## Vocabulary

**attend** – await  
**auspicious** – cheerful; smiling  
**conjuring** – summoning  
**consort** – company  
**differences** – arguments  
**dullard** – dimwit  
**fly** – leave  
**intelligence** – communication  
**lanced** – cut  
**parricides** – those who murder their fathers  
**patron** – protector  
**ports** – entrances  
**roused** – raised  
**spurs** – incitements

1. Why does Edmund stab himself in the arm?

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2. What does Edmund say he and Edgar fought over?

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3. Why does Edmund describe Edgar's alleged suggestion as "unnatural"? According to Edmund, how does killing a father disrupt the world?

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**Act IV, Scene I**

## Vocabulary

**bending** – overhanging  
**brim** – edge  
**contemned** – despised  
**entreat** – ask  
**lamentable** – sorrowful  
**superfluous** – over prosperous  
**wanton** – reckless

1. Explain what Edgar means when he says, “The worst is not/So long as we can say ‘This is the worst.’ ”

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2. How does Gloucester return to the theme of blindness and lack of vision?

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3. What sentiment about fate and the gods does Gloucester express?

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4. At this point, why does Edgar not reveal himself to his father?

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5. What can you infer from Gloucester’s last comments? How do his comments amplify the theme of fate and mankind?

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7. After the sisters argue, of what does Albany accuse Edmund?

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8. What is the substance of Goneril's aside?

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9. Edmund calls for his soldiers, but what does Albany tell him?

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10. How does Edgar, still in disguise, make a dramatic entry?

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11. They fight, and Edmund falls, wounded. How does Goneril take up his side? How does Albany silence her?

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12. What prompts Edmund to say to Edgar, "Thou hast spoken right, 'tis true;/The wheel is come full circle"? What about Edgar's speech to Edmund strikes you as odd?

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13. Albany says that he loves both Edgar and Gloucester, and Edmund acknowledges this loyalty. What news does Edgar then give Albany and the audience? How is it ironic?

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