

English Department Key Stage 5 Knowledge Organiser – King Lear Paper 1

King Lear			
Key Concepts	AO3: Context	Key characters:	Tragedy Terminology
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fate and inevitability Storge Death Religion Familial love New order vs. old order Nature Rota Fortunae Symbolism of the storm Injustice of existence Paganism Masculinity Primogeniture Justice Appearance vs. reality Power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jacobean England and King Lear: Shakespeare wrote <i>King Lear</i> around 1605, between <i>Othello</i> and <i>Macbeth</i>. The setting of <i>King Lear</i> is as far removed from Shakespeare's time as the setting of any of his other plays, dramatizing events from 8th Century BC. Setting it in ancient land deflected accusations that Shakespeare might have been criticising London society and kept James I as a supporter – without whom The Globe and Shakespeare would not have survived. Contemporary issues with inheritance: Shortly before the play was written, the eldest of three sisters tried to have her elderly father, Sir Brian Annesley, declared insane so that she could take control of his property. Annesley's youngest daughter, Cordell, successfully defended her father against her sister. William Allen, a mayor of London, was treated very poorly by his three daughters after dividing his wealth among them. The Political landscape: By the time Shakespeare was writing <i>King Lear</i>, the English had survived years of civil war and political/religious upheaval. Considerable turmoil followed the death of Henry VIII, and under his eldest daughter's rule (Mary I), the country experienced both civil and religious chaos with the conflict between Catholicism and the Church of England, resulting in much bloodshed. After Mary's death, Elizabeth I assumed the throne leading to an extended period of peace. In spite of their contentment with Elizabeth's rule, the populace worried significantly about England's future because Elizabeth was unmarried, and she refused to select a possible heir. No citizen wanted a repeat of the events that marked the earlier transfer of power. Thus the lack of an heir created fears about a possible successor to the throne. This was finally resolved in 1603 when Elizabeth appointed James IV of Scotland to be her heir and eventually, the new King of England. Shakespeare's sources: Derived from the myth Leir of Britain, <i>King Lear</i> is a Shakespearean tragedy first performed on St Stephen's Day 1606. It tells the parallel stories of Lear's betrayal by two of his daughters and subsequent descent into madness and of his kinsman's the Earl of Gloucester's betrayal by his illegitimate son and subsequent rescue by his legitimate son. In the original source, Cordelia does not die. Bedlam beggars: 'Tom O Bedlam' is the name of an anonymous poem in the 'mad song' genre. The terms 'Tom O Bedlam' and 'Bedlam Beggar' were used in Early Modern Britain and later to describe beggars and vagrants who had a feigned mental illness. You may wish to also consider the term 'Abraham-men'. Edgar in <i>King Lear</i> disguises himself as mad 'Tom o' Bedlam'. The Nature of Tragedy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Aristotle: According to Aristotle's <i>Poetics</i>, tragedy should be a single serious, complete action with ornate language and the evocation of pity and fear should be central. The audience should be brought to the realisation that justice has been served: though it may be rough and there may be surprises along the way, these heightened the moral evaluations we make. ➤ Hegel: Hegel presented the view that a tragic hero is one whose spirit is discordant. The tragic conflict arises due to the hero's singular devotion to an ethical principle, stubbornly refusing to engage with the opposing views. In <i>King Lear</i>, it is because of Lear's actions and attitude that order and balance are threatened. ➤ A.C. Bradley: According to Bradley, a Shakespearean tragedy evokes pity, fear and mystery (mystery at how life can be wasted). A Shakespearean tragedy focuses on one person – the 'hero' who is in conflict with himself. The hero must have important social status so that the effects of his downfall can be seen to have wide-reaching consequences. Seeing the punishment in terms of justice is unhelpful as the suffering is clearly disproportionate to the initial sin/ flaw/error of the hero. 	<p>Lear – The elderly King of Britain. Lear had planned to divide his kingdom between his three daughter but ends up giving it to just two after they profess their great love of him. He eventually reunites with Cordelia, having been betrayed by Regan and Goneril but not before he descends into madness.</p> <p>Cordelia – Lear's favourite daughter. Unable to put her love for her father into words, Cordelia is disinherited then married to the King of France. She fights to save her father and they are briefly reconciled before she is hanged.</p> <p>Regan and Goneril – Lear's other daughters. They earn his favour by exaggeratedly professing their love for him. Then they betray him. Gloucester – A loyal member of Lear's court, Gloucester is tricked into disinheriting his legitimate son Edgar. He is later blinded but then saved by his forgiving son.</p> <p>Edmund – Gloucester's illegitimate son, Edmund tricks his father into disinheriting his brother and naming him heir. Later becomes a significant member of Regan and Goneril's regime.</p> <p>Gloucester – A nobleman loyal to Lear. He is an adulterer and has a bastard son, Edmund. His fate parallels Lear's; he misjudges which of his children to trust. He appears weak and ineffectual but later demonstrates he is capable of great bravery.</p> <p>Edgar – Gloucester's legitimate son, Edgar remains faithful to and ultimately saves his father. The Fool – Lear's court jester/ advisor /protector.</p> <p>Kent – A nobleman the same rank as Gloucester who is loyal to King Lear. He spends most of the play disguised as a peasant, calling himself 'Caius' so that he can continue to serve Lear.</p> <p>Albany – Husband of Goneril. He is good at heart and eventually opposes the cruelty of Goneril, Regan and Cornwall. However, he is indecisive and lacks foresight, realising the evil of his allies quite late in the play.</p> <p>Cornwall – The husband of Regan. Unlike Albany, Cornwall is domineering, cruel and violent and works in conjunction with his wife and her sister to persecute Lear and Gloucester.</p>	<p>Heroine Status Flawed / Resolution Hamartia Pride Antagonist Tragic arc Inevitable Peripeteia Wheel of fortune/Rota Fortuna Choric function Aristotelean pattern Hegelian tragedy Catharsis Ekkyklema Anagnorisis</p>

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Tragic Arc	AO2 Formal and Structural Features / Language
<p>Exposition Lear invites his daughter's to profess their love for him in exchange for greater shares of his kingdom. Regan and Goneril flatter him while Cordelia refuses to speak. Regan and Goneril are each granted half of the Kingdom, while Cordelia is banished Edmund tricks his father into legitimatising him and disinheriting Edgar.</p> <p>Building Action Lear is hounded out of both his daughters' households. He walks away onto the heath accompanied only by his fool and by Kent (a nobleman travelling in disguise).</p> <p>Hearing of the sisters' treachery, Gloucester goes to help Lear. His son, Edgar is also on the heath disguised as a beggar (Poor Tom).</p> <p>Climax Gloucester is blinded as punishment for trying to help Lear. He is turned out to wander the heath where he is met by his (still disguised) son Edgar and led to Dover, where Lear has travelled.</p> <p>Edmund becomes romantically involved with both Regan and Goneril. He conspires with Goneril to kill her regretful husband, Albany.</p> <p>The French Army, led by Cordelia, arrives at Dover.</p> <p>Falling Action Lear and Cordelia are briefly reunited before Cordelia is hanged for rising against her sisters. Lear dies because of his grief.</p> <p>Resolution Albany and Edgar resolve to pick up the pieces, building a new world after the tragic events.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Structure – immediately focused on Lear's hamartia and peripeteia. You could look at Aristotle's tragic arc. * Subplot – Gloucester, Edmund and Edgar. The details of the sub-plot serve to draw our attention to the details of the main plot, amplifying and intensifying the emotional reaction provoked in the audience. This is the reverse of Greek tragedy – they avoided sub-plots, attempting to intensify through concentration on a single action (the Unity of Action). * Variety of settings – where do certain scenes take place? Significance of the heath/storm? * Staging – on-stage acts of violence. These range from low level stirring, tripping and sword fights to the horrific gouging of Gloucester's eyes. The use of music/sound effects to fanfare Lear's entrance. * Use of asides – reveal the character's true intentions/thoughts. * Use of costume – emphasises Lear's madness. * Use of imperatives. * Use of prose – used for bawdy conversations between Kent and Gloucester. Goneril and Regan discuss their true purpose in prose at the end of Act One. Shakespeare alternates between prose and verse for Lear in Act Three. The Fool and Poor Tom are given only prose because of their lower social status. * Repetition – to intensify emotions/distress/defiance. * Animal imagery * Snake/serpent imagery * Religious Imagery

KEY QUOTATIONS

Lear (1.1): "Which of you shall we say doth love us most?"

Goneril (1.1): "Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter".

Cordelia (1.1): "I cannot heave / My heart into my mouth".

Edmund (1.2): "Now, gods, stand up for bastards!"

Lear (1.4): "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is / To have a thankless child."

Lear (3.2): "Blow winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!"

Lear (3.2): "I am a man / More sinned against than sinning

Fool (3.2): "Here's a night pities neither wise men nor fools."

Edmund (3.3): "The younger rises when the old doth fall."

Edgar (4.3): "The younger rises when the old doth fall."

Lear (4.7): "I am a very foolish, fond old man."

Lear (5.3): "No, no, no life?"

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never."