

**THEATRE
& DANCE
at WAYNE**

KING LEAR

by William Shakespeare

Hilberry Theatre
April 27 to May 13, 2018



**EDUCATOR'S
SHOW GUIDE**

GENERAL INFO

DEAR EDUCATORS,

Wayne State University is proud to produce plays for young people's enjoyment and to actively explore the beauty, diversity, complexity and challenges of the world around them through the dramatic arts. We wish to support the development of their creative voice, imagination, and understanding of drama and its role in our global society.

This play guide is designed to be a tool in helping you prepare your students for our performance as well as extend the production experience back into the classroom.

Activities presented assist in achieving the Michigan Common Core State Standards (MI-CCSS).

Your comments and suggestions about this guide, presentation and/or programming are greatly appreciated.

YOUR STUDENT'S ROLE

You may wish to have a discussion with your students before attending the play. Remind your students that they have an important role to play at the performance being the audience. It is because of the audience that the theatre exists. It will be their energy and response that will directly affect the actors onstage. Young audiences should be reminded that live theatre is not like watching TV, a movie or DVD; the actors cannot pause or be rewound, there are no commercial break for running to the bathroom, the volume cannot be turned up to hear better if someone other than the actors are talking.

Encourage your students to listen and watch the play. They can laugh and cheer for their favorite characters. At the end of the play, applause is appropriate and is the opportunity for your students to thank the actors while the actors are thanking you for the role you played as the audience.

INTRODUCTION

While *King Lear* is thought to be one of Shakespeare's more difficult works, the play is accessible to middle and high school students.

The topics of natural, unnatural, self-knowledge, public perception, written words, and spoken words are accessible to both levels of student. Whether we can express our opinions or not, each of us has a basic belief about each of those topics.

Sometimes the feeling is innate and inexpressible. Shakespeare questions this feeling and shows his Elizabethan audience what can happen if accepted belief is challenged. He turns events on their ear and plays out a tragedy that speaks as eloquently today as it did more than three centuries ago. Naturally, accepted beliefs came from Elizabethan philosophy; however, many of those beliefs persist in our culture. The much studied Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero express a particular view concerning appearances: a person's countenance and station of birth are relative to the inner person—the more noble the birth, the more noble the soul; the more fair the countenance, the more fair the soul. Shakespeare's world was no less interested with a person's appearance and the flattery by which one would play another. This yet is true, and often we define ourselves by our appearance or by what others say about us.

In *King Lear*, appearances, station, and how what others think influences our actions are examined through relationships found in family and service: father and child; nobleman and servant. Even though we believe that what we look like and what we say are reflections of who we are, Shakespeare, in *King Lear*, shows that appearances and words are ever deceiving and are not clear indications of the soul or the mind. Even though Goneril and Regan are of noble birth, they hardly show noble souls; and although Lear can hardly be considered to have a fair countenance, he does develop a most fair and loving soul. In a world dependent on words for communication, each of us comes to value the spoken and written word.

Students of all ages can readily identify with a child who "says what his parents want to hear." Older, non-traditional students understand the need to hear a child's expression of love. Communication between the generations is complicated by our perception of the elderly. At what age is one "old?" When should a person retire? Older students identify with the desires of children to be successful and supplant the older generation in the power structure; the young express an impatience to be in charge and free from the ideas of the "older" generations. Yet, in their desires and expressions, they do not "appear" as dutiful or respectful children. A related issue the play explores is the granting of the power of an office to a younger generation without releasing the largess that attends that office. Can one retire from the position of CEO and retain the respect and authority given to a CEO? Elizabethans, three centuries ago, struggled with the same type of questions. In *King Lear*, Shakespeare offers a world where the natural and unnatural are intertwined, appearances and self-perception are confused, and words—written and spoken—are deceptive.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in England on April 23, 1564. His precise date of birth and death are unknown. He was baptized on April 26, 1564, and over time April 23 has become the accepted date of birth. William Shakespeare is the grandest literary figure of the Western world. During England's Elizabethan period, he wrote dozens of plays with continued to dominate world theatres more than 400 years later. Shakespeare handled high drama, romance and slapstick comedy with equal ease. William Shakespeare is known as "the Bard of Avon" in recognition to his birthplace, and many of his plays were originally performed in the famous Globe Theater in London. Among his best-know plays of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*, he is also known for his sonnets and other poetry. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582, and their daughter Susannah was born in 1583. Their twins, Judith and Hamnet were born in 1585, but Hamnet died in 1596.

SYNOPSIS

King Lear opens in ancient Britain, where King Lear, the elderly king, is about to retire and deciding how best to divide his power amongst his three daughters, Cordelia, Regan, and Goneril. His plan is to give the most power to the daughter who professes to love him the most, certain that this will undoubtedly be Cordelia, his favorite daughter. Goneril and Regan catch wind of his plan, and when the time comes, lie to their father about how much they love him in order to get the largest pieces of land. Cordelia is hurt by the game Lear has proposed and refuses to indulge him, stating only that she loves him as any daughter should. This enrages Lear and he disowns Cordelia completely, splitting up his power between the deceitful Regan and Goneril.

Since Lear is no longer king, he has decided to split his time living with his two daughters, Goneril and Regan. He starts with Goneril, but she treats him with disrespect and will not allow him to keep any of his knights or companions. Upset at this lack of respect by his own daughter, Lear decides to go live with Regan, but almost as soon as he arrives, Goneril also arrives, and Lear realizes his two daughters are working together to bring him to his demise.

Word gets out that Goneril and Regan are planning on murdering Lear, and they take off to Dover to find protection. Meanwhile, Cordelia, who has married the king of France, has raised an army that has also just landed in Dover with the hopes of taking down her sisters. Lear is alerted of Cordelia's return, with the hopes that they can reunite, however Lear is becoming increasingly more delusional and out of touch with reality. He sleeps through the battle of Cordelia and her sisters, and awakes to hear that Cordelia has been defeated, and she has been sentenced to death.

After their victory, Goneril and Regan turn on each other. Goneril ends up poisoning Regan, and then killing herself as well. The order to execute Cordelia is then reversed, but a minute too late, as Lear appears carrying her body. This is the last straw for Lear, and he too falls dead over the body of his daughter.

THINGS TO KNOW - WAYS TO GROW BEFORE AND AFTER THE SHOW

SPEAKING AND LISTENING

[Sharing of any writing project orally in class will also fit under the Speaking and Listening (SL) Standard]

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1, 8.1, [9-10.1, 11-12.1]

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in small groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade level topics and text, building on others; ideas and expressing their own clearly [and persuasively].

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.4, 7.4, 8.4

Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details: appropriate eye contact, adequate volume and clear pronunciation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4, 11-12.4

Present information, findings, and supportive evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience and range of formal and informal task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.6, 7.6, 8.6, 9-10.6, 11-12.6

Adapt speech to a variety of context and task, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

Pre-Show Questions:

1. How do you feel about the royalty and their power?
2. Do you think it is difficult for people to share power?
3. Do you think power struggles are heightened in monarchies, or do you think they are just as severe in other political situations (like America's democracy)?
4. What are some things you think people would do to keep their hold on power?
5. Are family ties important in deciding who gets to hold power?

READING/INFORMATIONAL TEXT

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.4, 7.4, 8.4, 9-10.4, 11-12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases in a text relevant to grade topic or subject area including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.

Have students split into 5 groups. One for each act of *King Lear*. Ask students to look up these words, draw an illustration, or use them in a sentence to understand the language used in the play. You could also have them create a short story with at least 10 of the words.

Act 1: <https://www.vocabulary.com/lists/232262>

Act 2: <https://www.vocabulary.com/lists/233203>

Act 3: <https://www.vocabulary.com/lists/233419>

Act 4: <https://www.vocabulary.com/lists/233984>

Act 5: <https://www.vocabulary.com/lists/234332>

READING/LITERATURE

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.9

Compare and contrast the adventures and experience of characters in stories, in different forms or genres in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.7

Compare and contrast the experience of reading a story, drama, or poem to listening to or viewing an audio, video, or live version of the text, including contrasting what they "see" and "hear" when reading the text to what they perceive when they listen or watch.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.7

Compare and contrast a written story, drama or poem to its audio, film, staged or multimedia version, analyze the effects of techniques unique to each medium (e.g. lighting, sound, color, or camera focus and angles in a film).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.7

Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the

director or actors.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.7

Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g. recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry) evaluating how each version interprets the source text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.(6.2) 7.2, 8.2, [9-10.2, 11-12.2]

Determine (a theme) two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; [including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account: provide an objective summary of the text.]

A. READING THE PLAY

- a. All Ability Levels: Shakespeare's work is best appreciated when it is performed. The meaning of the words becomes clearer when heard. Emotional intent is more easily divined when other students listen to what is said. Reading out loud, performing the play, listening to an audiocassette, or watching a film version provides a rich context to reiterate word choice and to introduce denotation and connotation.

B. CRITICAL QUESTIONING

- a. Lower Ability Levels: Critical thinking questions ask a student to use insight and make connections between the plot of the play, the inference of the words, and what she or he knows of the world. Because this activity may be difficult for some students, utilize mixed ability groups to discuss the questions. Utilizing cooperative learning by assigning one or two questions per group and then having students teach the class should encourage them to extend themselves beyond obvious answers.
- b. Higher Ability Levels: Students may use the questions as a study guide before they make a closer analysis of the play with the teacher and their peers.

QUESTIONS WHILE READING

ACT I

1. Why does Lear favor Goneril's and Regan's professions of love over Cordelia's?
2. How is this favoritism related to the exiling of Kent?
3. Why does Edmund wish to overthrow Edgar's claim to his father's title?
4. In what manner has Lear offended Goneril and her household?
5. How is she justified in her anger?
6. According to the Fool's arguments, how has Lear "deserved" this poor treatment from Goneril?

ACT II

1. How does Edmund make himself appear to be the better son in Gloucester's eyes?
2. Why should the reader not be surprised at Regan's decision to side with her sister rather than her father?
3. List and discuss Edgar's reasons for playing the part of Poor Tom.
4. How do Goneril and Regan assert power over their father, thus driving him into a raging storm?

ACT III

1. How does the information that France sends troops impact the political strife that is beginning in England?
2. In what manner has Lear caused all the strife that occurs between himself and his daughters?
3. In what sense are the Fool's assertions true?
4. In what sense are the Fool's assertions false?
5. In what sense is it ironic that Gloucester confides his good intentions in his illegitimate son, Edmund?
6. Compare the madness of Lear to the madness of Poor Tom (Edgar).
7. How is Edmund rewarded for his treachery?
8. What are the judgments of mankind issued against Goneril and Regan in Lear's court?
9. How is the blindness of Gloucester symbolic to the blindness of Lear?

ACT IV

1. Why would Gloucester prefer to be led by the madman (Edgar) rather than by a faithful retainer?
2. How does Goneril compound her sins against her family?
3. How does Albany perceive his wife?
4. Why is it natural that Lear would not wish to see his daughter Cordelia?
5. How does Regan compound her sins against her family?
6. How does Edgar begin the process of righting the unnatural events that have occurred?
7. How does Cordelia react to her father's words?

ACT V

1. How is the division between Goneril and Regan furthered?
2. Why does it seem that Edmund has more power than any other character?
3. In what manner and under what authority does Albany reclaim any power that Edmund may have?
4. Under what circumstance may Edgar answer Edmund's challenge?

5. How does Edmund justify or reconcile himself with his fall from grace?
6. What one act would provide possible redemption for Edmund, and why is Edmund compelled to perform that act?
7. How is the power of the realm realigned at the end of the play, and why do we not have a feeling of completion or satisfaction from this realignment?

WRITING

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3, 7.3, 8.3, 9-10.3, 11-12.3

Writes narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, descriptive details, and clear event sequence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.1, 7.1, 8.1, [9-10.1, 11-12.1]

Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence. [Write an argument to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or text, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence]

JOURNAL TOPICS FOR WRITING: Students should be more comfortable discussing difficult themes found in the play by writing about them in response journals. Take every opportunity to help students make connections between the play and the journals and invite students to relate their own experiences to that of the characters. Such comparisons between personal and fictional accounts make the play more accessible to students. The following topics can be used for journal writing and/or small group discussion:

1. Most people identify themselves by what they do—athlete, scholar, entrepreneur, accountant, doctor, waiter, etc. Does your vocation—a regular occupation, especially one for which a person is particularly suited or qualified—define you? Is that who you are? How do you decide who you are?
2. During your life you have either heard (or have said), “My parents/teachers just don’t understand.” What does this really mean? Explain how this type of “generation gap” affects or has affected you.
3. One of the more recent concerns of our nation is how to accommodate a growing senior citizen population, yet as individuals we tend to ignore the concerns of the elderly until we are counted among them. We seem to be overwhelmingly interested in being and staying young. When the time comes, how will you take care of the senior citizens in your family? What are your concerns about growing older?
4. Part of the fun of acting is dressing up and for a time being someone other than yourself. You experience the same type of fun if you dress up at Halloween, go to a costume party, or maybe even attend a prom or other formal occasion. However, clothes do not necessarily change who you are. How may appearances be deceiving?
5. In the check-out line at your local grocery you are assaulted by tabloid headlines blaring alien dogs, four-feet tall walking frogs, and a host of other oddities. You give these little credence, but most of us are influenced by advertising claims. How deceptive is the written word? How do you protect yourself from such deceptions? Describe a time that you have been deceived by written words or loved ones.
6. Find an article in a newspaper or a magazine that details an injustice. Respond to that injustice. How should the injustice be righted?
7. Think back to when you did something wrong and another person was hurt, emotionally or physically, by your error. Did you confess your error? Why or why not?

HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3

Evaluate various explanation for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6

Identify aspects of a text that reveals an author’s point of view or purpose (e.g. loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6

Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6

Evaluate author’s differing points of views on the same historical events or issues by assessing the authors’ claims, reasoning and evidence.

Pre-Show/Post-Show Research Project Ideas:

Elizabethan England was an extremely hierarchical society, demanding that absolute deference be paid and respect be shown not only to the wealthy and powerful but also to parents and the elderly. King Lear demonstrates how vulnerable parents and noblemen are to the depredations of unscrupulous children and thus how fragile the fabric of Elizabethan society actually was. Students should research the Elizabethan era and creatively express what it was like. How did they dress, and what was their roles? How is it different from other periods in English history?

DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

(modify as needed to meet the needs of your students)

YOU'RE THE CRITIC

(Middle and High School)

Give this production a rating of 1 to 5 stars. (One star is the lowest rating and five stars is the highest.) On a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph review of the play. In other words, describe why you gave it that rating. Give specific examples to support your reasons. On the same sheet of paper, reflect on the following questions:

1. How would you describe the character of Lear?
2. Is Lear justified in his actions?
3. Did you sympathize with King Lear? Do you think you are meant to?
4. Think about and describe:
 - a. The vocal and physical actions of the actors (characterization)
 - b. The set
 - c. The costumes
5. What do you think are some of the themes of the play?
6. Did the elements of characterizations, set, and/or costumes reinforce any of these themes?
7. Shakespeare writes about things that we all experience: Love, jealousy, death, anger, revenge, etc. Write a paragraph about one emotion in the play that relates to your own life at the moment.

Now, imagine you are the director of King Lear, and use a new sheet of paper to create your new production.

- Cast the characters of Lear, Goneril, Regan, Cordelia, the Fool and Gloucester with famous actors.
- Would you set the play during the Great Depression in America as in this production? What other setting could you place the play in that would make sense? Why?
- How about costumes? Imagine how the characters in your new production would be dressed that would illustrate the kinds of characters they are and what setting you have put the play in.

BLIND OBSTACLE COURSE

This is fun to try in a large space, with many objects that can be used to create an "obstacle course". This is for an adventurous group that has the ability to work with a lot of noise.

Goal: to guide a blind partner safely through a maze of obstacles.

Materials: A large open room, and many different sized objects (desks, chairs, books, etc.) that will not be dangerous to step on or touch to use to create the obstacle course.

How to Play:

- First, safety is paramount. Establish a signal that will indicate an immediate Freeze to every participant if necessary. For this game, a very loud sound works best – a crash on a cymbal or piano, or even a dustpan, for instance.
- Have the students pair up, and decide who is Partner A and who is B.
- The pairs will then stand opposite each other across the room – so all the A's are on one side of the room standing directly opposite from their Partner B on the other side. The B's will close their eyes and the A's will use any available materials in the room – desks, chairs, backpacks, etc. to create a difficult passage across the room. B's keep their eyes closed. (You may wish to use blindfolds if they are available; older students generally can stick to the "eyes stay closed" rule in the spirit of the game.)
- On the leader's command, the A's will begin to call out instructions to their partners to get them to move through the course. They may say anything they wish to help their partner. B's may also talk but their primary job is to listen and

respond.

- Once the partner B reaches A, they may open their eyes and survey the course they just traveled. You may play again reversing the roles of A and B. They will have learned a lot from the first time through.

Coaching for this game: Emphasize this is not a race, but is about communicating clearly. Encourage the A's to be excellent leaders, putting the emphasis on creating safety for and trust in their partners. Encourage the B's to communicate with body language and for the A's to be good observers of that language and adjust their leading style accordingly.

Talk about the results: Did you have misunderstandings? How much did you trust what your partner was saying? What is your reaction to not being able to see what you were trying to do? Did you think of ways to communicate to overcome the difficulties built into this game?

REFLECTION:

- What kind of communication problems did Lear have with his daughters?
- Why do you think this happened? (For example, were problems caused by the fact that he was a king and expected to have everything go his way without listening to anyone else? Or because daughters in that time weren't allowed to express their opinions? What else?)
- What can a person do to communicate better with friends and family? Did Lear do any of those things?

SPECIAL THANKS

Thank you to LaWanda Smith for her assistance in the development of this study guide.

THEATRE ETIQUETTE

The phrase "theatre etiquette" refers to the special rules of behavior that are called for when attending a theatre performance.

Above all, it is important to remember that the actors on stage can see and hear you at the same time you can see and hear them. Be respectful of the actors and your fellow audience members by being attentive and observing the general guidelines below:

Before you go:

- Please help us create a respectful environment for your fellow audience members and for the actors by turning off your cell phone and other electronic devices (iPods, games, etc.). Not only will it be historically inaccurate, but it can be very distracting, not to mention embarrassing, when a cell phone goes off during a performance. The lights from cell phones, iPads, and other electronic devices are also a big distraction, so please turn them off.
- We're sure that you would never stick your gum underneath your chair or spill food and drinks, but because we try to keep this theatre beautiful, we ask that you spit out your gum before entering the theatre and leave all food and drinks in the lobby.
- We don't want you to miss out on any of the action of the play, so please visit the restroom before the performance begins.

During the performance:

- Please feel free to have honest reactions to what is happening on stage. You can laugh, applaud and enjoy the performance. However, please don't talk during the performance; it is extremely distracting to other audience members and the actors. Save discussions for intermission and after the performance.