

Act 3 Scene 2

The Heath

Storm. Enter LEAR and the FOOL.

LEAR

Blow, wind, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!
 You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
 Till you have drenched the steeples, drowned the cocks!
 You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
 Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts, [5]
 Singe my white head; and thou all-shaking thunder,
 Smite flat the thick rotundity of the world,
 Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once
 That make ingrateful man!

FOOL

O nuncle, court holy-water in a dry house is better than this rain-water out [10]
 o' door. Good nuncle, in, and ask thy daughters blessing. Here's a night pities
 neither wise man nor fool.

LEAR

Rumble thy bellyful; spit, fire; spout, rain.
 Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire are my daughters.
 I task not you, you elements, with unkindness. [15]
 I never gave you kingdom, called you children.
 You owe me no subscription. Why then, let fall
 Your horrible pleasure. Here I stand your slave,
 A poor, infirm, weak and despised old man.
 But yet I call you servile ministers, [20]
 That have with two pernicious daughters joined
 Your high engendered battle 'gainst a head
 So old and white as this. O, 'tis foul!

FOOL

He that has a house to put his head in has a good headpiece.

[Sings] The codpiece that will house

Before the head has any,

The head and he shall louse,

So beggars marry many.

The man that makes his toe

What he his heart should make [30]

Shall have a corn cry woe,

And turn his sleep to wake -

For there was never yet fair woman but she made mouths in a glass.

LEAR

No, I will be the pattern of all patience. **Enter KENT**

I will say nothing. [35]

KENT

Who's there?

- 2 cataracts: floods from the skies
- 2 hurricanoes: waters shooting up from the seas
- 3 cocks: weather vanes
- 5 Vaunt couriers: forerunners

8-9 Crack ... man: Break up the pattern from which all life is created. Destroy the seeds (germens) from which ungrateful man is formed.

10 court holy water: the holy water (flattery) that one must throw around when one is part of a royal court

15 I task not you ... unkindness: It's not you, the elements, that I accuse of unkindness.

17 subscription: allegiance, obedience

17 Why then: So, go ahead

20 yet ... ministers: Yet I denounce you (the elements) as servile agents who have allied yourselves with my two wicked daughters and sent your heaven-bred forces into battle against a head as old and white as mine.

24 headpiece: brain

25 codpiece: a pouch added to a man's breeches to cover the genitals

25-28 The codpiece ... many: The man who finds a home for his penis before he has one for his head will infest his head with lice and poverty. In this way, beggars marry many (lice?).

29-32 The man ... to wake: The man who thinks more of the inferior parts of his body than he does of the nobler ones will lose sleep because of those inferior parts.

33 made mouths in a glass: made pretty faces in a mirror

FOOL

Marry, here's grace and a codpiece – that's a wise man and a fool.

KENT *[to Lear]*

Alas, sir, sit you here? Things that love night
Love not such nights as these. The wrathful skies
Gallow the very wanderers of the dark
And makes them keep their caves. Since I was man
Such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,
Such groans of roaring wind and rain, I ne'er
Remember to have heard. Man's nature cannot carry
The affliction nor the force.

LEAR

Let the great gods,
That keep this dreadful pother o'er our heads,
Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch
That hast within thee undivulged crimes
Unwhipped of justice; hide thee, thou bloody hand,
Thou perjured and thou simular man of virtue
That art incestuous; caitiff, in pieces shake,
That under covert and convenient seeming
Hast practised on man's life;
Close pent-up guilts, rive your concealed centres
And cry these dreadful summoners grace.
I am a man more sinned against than sinning.

KENT

Alack, bare-headed?
Gracious my lord, hard-by here is a hovel.
Some friendship will it lend you 'gainst the tempest.
Repose you there, whilst I to this hard house –
More hard than is the stone whereof 'tis raised,
Which even but now, demanding after you,
Denied me to come in – return, and force
Their scanted courtesy.

LEAR

My wit begins to turn.
[to Fool] Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy? Art cold?
I am cold myself. – Where is this straw, my fellow?
The art of our necessities is strange,
That can make vile things precious. Come, your hovel. –
Poor fool and knave, I have one part of my heart
That sorrows yet for thee.

FOOL *[sings]*

*He that has a little tiny wit,
With heigh-ho, the wind and the rain,
Must make content with his fortunes fit,
For the rain it raineth every day.*

LEAR

True, my good boy. *[to Kent]* Come, bring us to this hovel. **Exeunt**

37 here's grace and a codpiece: here's
a king (royal grace) and a Fool
(symbolised by a codpiece)

[40] 40 Gallow: frighten

41 keep their caves: stay in their caves

44-45 Man's nature ... force: Human
nature can't bear the physical hardship
or the terror that comes with it.

[45]

46 pother: commotion

47 Find out their enemies now: Discover
who it was who sinned against them
[These people will be made known by
their terrified reactions to the storm.]

[50]

49 Unwhipped of justice: not yet punished

51-53 caitiff ... man's life: Tremble, you
wretch, who have used a convenient
disguise to plot against someone's life.

[55]

54-55 Close pent-up ... grace: Carefully
concealed guilts, split open, revealing
your hidden cores, and then beg mercy
from those who bring you to justice.

58 hard-by: close at hand

[60]

60-64: I to this hard house ... courtesy: I'll
go to this nearby ('hard' as in 'hard-by')
house, whose occupants are harder than
the stone their house is made from.
Indeed, when I recently asked urgently
for you, they refused to let me in. Let's
go back and force them to display the
hospitality they're so mean with.

[65]

67-68 The art ... precious: It is strange how
our necessities use their magic to make
worthless things seem valuable.

[70]

71 wit: sense

[75]

Exploring the Scene



First Encounter

1. Lear wants rain to 'spout' until the entire world is flooded. How does he convey the extremity of this imagined flood?
2. Lear wants the round world to be squashed flat. How does he imagine this being accomplished?
3. What function is performed by the seeds and moulds referred to in line 8? What does Lear imagine happening to these seeds and moulds?
4. What does the Fool urge Lear to do? Suggest why Lear might be most reluctant to take this step.
5. Lear declares that the storm, unlike his daughters, cannot be blamed for tormenting him. What reason does he give for this opinion?
6. Lear's rant exhausts him, at least temporarily. What phrase indicates this?
7. Who or what, according to Lear, is responsible for the 'keeping' the storm raging overhead?
8. Consider the phrase: 'Man's nature cannot carry/ The affliction nor the force'. What does it suggest about the storm's ferocity?
9. **True or false:** Throughout his life, Kent has frequently seen such weather conditions.
10. Where does Kent propose to bring Lear in order to find shelter from the storm?



Character Study

11. **Class Discussion:** Lear famously declares that 'I am a man more sinned against than sinning'. What does Lear mean when he says this? To what extent do you agree with him? Can you identify any other phrases that express the self-pity Lear is experiencing at this stage of the play?
12. For the first time, Lear expresses concern for someone other himself. For whom does he express concern? Can you identify at least three separate lines where this occurs?
13. **Class Discussion:** 'There is a sense in which Lear almost wants the storm to end his existence'. Discuss this statement as a class.



Theme & Language

14. **Madness:** 'The external weather conditions reflect Lear's internal state'. Write a paragraph in response to this statement.
15. **Divine Justice:** What do you understand by the phrase 'undivulged crimes/ Unwhipped of justice'. Why, according to Lear, should those responsible for such crimes be fearful at this moment?

Scene Analysis



Kent, Lear and the Fool out on the heath

Lear longs for the world to be destroyed

Lear, as we learned in the previous scene, is out on the heath amid a violent storm, accompanied only by the Fool. He wanders about uncovered, making no effort to seek shelter of any kind, filled with demented rage at his daughters, himself and the entire world.

Lear calls out to the elements themselves, asking them to visit destruction upon the land.

- He calls on the ‘winds’ to blow with extraordinary force. (1) He thinks of the winds as gods with human faces, from whose mouths issue furious streams of air. He wants these gods to ‘Rage’ and ‘Blow’ with such extraordinary force that their very cheeks ‘crack’ with the effort. (1)
- Lear calls on the rain to fall so heavily that it will seem like ‘cataracts’ or waterfalls are gushing from the sky. (2) He wants this heavy rain to cause a flood that keeps rising until it has ‘drenched’ even the church steeples and drowned the ‘cocks’ or weathervanes that sit atop them, a flood so extreme that it wipes out all human life and all trace of human existence. (3)
- Lear calls on wave after wave of lightning bolts, which he thinks of as a kind of ‘sulphurous’ fire, to strike the earth and ‘singe [his] white head’. (6) Lear also wants the accompanying thunder to shake the earth so aggressively that the entire planet is squashed flat as a pancake. (6-7)

Lear imagines that human beings are created in ‘moulds’, like pieces of metalwork or pottery. (8) He also imagines that human beings, like plants, are grown from seeds or ‘germens’. Lear wants the storm to crack these moulds and spill these seeds so that they all go to waste, thereby wiping out humanity’s capacity for reproduction and ensuring that there will be no future generations of ‘ingrateful man’. (9)

The Fool urges Lear to seek shelter

The Fool urges Lear to return to the castle and ask his daughters for forgiveness: ‘Good nuncle, in, and ask thy daughters blessing’. (11-12) He says that this ferocious weather ‘pities’ no one. (12) It would be better for Lear to return and flatter his daughters than to endure these terrible conditions.

Lear ignores the Fool, however, and calls once more for the storm to wreak havoc upon the earth. He wants the thunder to rumble, the fiery lightning to be spat out of the sky, the rain to continue spouting in great floods: ‘Rumble thy bellyful; spit, fire; spout, rain’. (13)

Lear compares his daughters to the storm

Lear compares and contrasts the ferocious elements of the storm with Goneril and Regan:

- The elements, like Goneril and Regan, are tormenting him and might possibly destroy him. But the elements, of course, are not his daughters: ‘Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire are my daughters.... I never.... called you children’. (14-16)
- He gave Goneril and Regan half his kingdom each. But he gave the elements nothing: ‘I never gave you kingdom’. (16)
- Therefore, the elements, unlike Goneril and Regan, owe him no loyalty or ‘subscription’. (17) He cannot accuse the elements of ‘unkindness’ for assaulting him: ‘I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness’. (15)

Lear, then, feels that he can’t complain if the elements choose to destroy him. In fact, he seems to welcome such destruction as if, in the wake of the wrongs that he has suffered, he can’t bear to live anymore.

Lear ‘finally’ presents himself as the storm’s ‘slave’, as its completely powerless plaything. (18) The storm, he says, is welcome to destroy him at its leisure. He imagines the elements combining to form a ‘battle’ or a battalion ‘engendered’ or created in the heavens above. (22) This ‘battle’ has swept downwards to the earth, joining his daughters in assaulting his head. (21-23) The elements lash the outside of Lear’s head, tormenting him physically. His daughters, meanwhile, have disordered the inside of his head, tormenting him psychologically.

This remarkable speech condemning the elements seems to exhaust Lear’s fury, at least temporarily. He sits down as if he’s physically and emotionally drained. He will put aside his rage, he says, and become the ‘pattern of all patience’, the very embodiment of calmness and serenity. (34) His ranting, he declares, will henceforth be replaced with silence: ‘I will say nothing’. (35)

Kent locates Lear and the Fool

Kent, we remember from the previous scene, ventured out into the storm to help Lear. Now he has finally tracked down his master. He is appalled to see Lear, who is after all a frail old man, sitting on the ground amid such terrible conditions: ‘Alas, sir, sit you here?’ (38)

Lear decides he’s been silent and patient long enough. He stands up and launches into another rage-filled bit of speechifying. The gods, Lear says, are responsible for the ‘pothor’ or tumult of the storm that rages over their heads. Lear calls on the gods to find and strike down their ‘enemies’, by which he means the various criminals and sinners who infest the land. (45-47) He imagines the gods as terrifying ‘summoners’ or officers of the court who are out to expose and punish secret crimes. It is time, therefore, for those who committed such crimes to ‘Tremble’. (47)

Kent once again expresses his horror that Lear is wandering around with no cloak or hat on such a terrible night: ‘Alack! Bare-headed!’ (58) Kent has seen a hovel that’s ‘hard by’ or very near their current location. (58) This hovel, he tells Lear, will provide him with some ‘friendship’ or comfort from the elements. (59) Kent tells Lear to remain on this section of the heath while he returns to the hovel to ask its occupants if they might be permitted to shelter there. (63-64)

Lear calms down and seems to notice, as if for the first time, the two companions who have chosen to join him out on the heath. He also suddenly realises that he is cold. It’s as if, until now, he was so consumed with rage that he didn’t really feel the elements. He agrees to go with Kent and seek shelter in the hovel. (68, 75)

ACT 3 SCENE 2: CHARACTER FILE



Lear

Descent into Madness

This scene marks a major step on Lear's descent into madness, as he is filled with an ungovernable and almost incoherent rage. His behaviour is unnerving, possibly even terrifying. He rages at the world, at his daughters, and arguably even at himself, offering himself as victim to the storm. He exposes himself, as Kent points out, to the most violent storm in decades without any cloak, hat or over covering. He doesn't even seem to care about his own health and well-being. In fact, as we've seen, he seems to welcome his own destruction.

In this scene, then, Lear could by no means be described as mentally stable. But he isn't quite insane yet either, for he still has a certain grip on reality. He's still aware, on some level, of what's going on around him. He seems to suspect, however, that this purchase on reality is fragile, that a complete psychotic break is imminent: 'My wits begin to turn'. (65)

Arrogant and Entitled

In Act 1 Scene 4, Lear suffered a terrible blow, being stripped not only of his knights but also of his dignity. He could no longer pretend that he had any real power and had to confront the fact that he was now at the mercy of his daughters. Lear's reaction to this reversal is nothing if not extreme. He calls for nothing less than a complete apocalypse, for the world to be drowned and flattened, for mankind and all its works to be utterly wiped out. It's as if Lear regards losing his power as the worst thing that has ever happened in the history of the world.

We realise, then, that we are dealing with a King, someone who from birth has been the most important person in every room he walked into, someone who is used to being feared and respected, who is used to having his every instruction instantly carried out. For a such a ruler to fall so low – to not only lose his power, but also to find himself wandering like a beggar on a storm-blasted heath – is an extraordinary reversal of fortune. Lear, we sense, can't quite absorb or comprehend this turn of events. To Lear, it seems as if reality itself has gone wrong in some fundamental way.

There is also a strong element of self-pity in Lear's speeches throughout this scene. Lear mentions criminals of every stripe: murderers, perjurers, con-men. His own misdeeds, he declares, are inconsequential when compared to the terrible acts carried out by such real criminals. Lear, in fact, thinks of himself more as a victim than as a villain: 'I am a man more sinned against than sinning'. (56) Lear presents himself as a feeble old man incapable of harming anyone: 'A poor, infirm, weak and despised old man'. (19) We know, of course, that this isn't really true, that only a few short scenes ago he was the 'dragon' who almost casually disowned his only faithful daughter.

Arguably for the first time in the entire play, however, Lear expresses concern for someone other than himself. He asks the Fool how he's faring in these terrible weather conditions: 'How dost my boy? Art cold?' (65) Seeing the Fool suffer fills his heart with sorrow: 'I have one part in my heart/ That sorrows yet for thee'. (69-70) He even praises one of the Fool's nonsensical but observant songs: 'True, my good boy'. (75) This is a small demonstration of compassion. But it represents the first step on Lear's painful journey towards redemption.

Edgar



Extra Resource
Material in
Teacher Book

Introduction

Edgar is the eldest son of the Earl of Gloucester, being a year or so older than his brother, Edmund. (1.1.13) As Gloucester's oldest and only legitimate son, Edgar is heir to the earldom. Gloucester, in Act 1 Scene 1, claims to love both his sons equally. (1.1.14) There can be little doubt, however, that Edgar is his favourite. (1.1.14-15) For the old Earl bears a great and uncomplicated love towards his eldest son: 'To his father, that so tenderly and entirely loves him – heaven and earth!' (1.2.79-80) The two, it seems, spend a great deal of time together. In Act 1 Scene 2, we learn that they talked for two hours only the previous night. (1.1.121-123)

Virtuous and Compassionate

Throughout the play Edgar comes across as an extremely compassionate and virtuous person. Edmund, at the very beginning of the play, notes Edgar's extremely 'noble' temperament. (1.2.142) Harming others simply isn't in his nature. (1.2.143) Edgar, then, is someone who consistently displays great compassion for the suffering of those around him. We see this, for instance, in his attitude towards Lear's insanity. In the farmhouse during the storm, he is so moved by Lear's condition that he worries that he might burst into tears, thereby compromising his disguise as Poor Tom the madman'. (3.6.53-54) In Act 4 Scene 6, Edgar is again moved by Lear's madness: 'my heart breaks at it'. (4.6.133) This sight, he says, is so painful to behold he feels like his side is being pierced by a spear. (4.6.85)

Edgar's virtue and compassion are also evident after he has bested Edmund and regained his good name. He forgives Albany when he apologises for believing that the charges against Edgar might have been true. (5.3.176) He is devastated when Lear appears with Cordelia's corpse, agreeing with Kent that this sight is so horrible that it must signal the end of the world itself. (5.3.265) He attempts to console the distraught and devastated Lear, telling him that Kent has come to be with him and say goodbye. (5.3.267) Edgar attempts to help Lear when the old King lapses into unconsciousness. (5.3.309-310) But it's obvious, by this stage, that Lear's race is run.

There is a sense, however, in which Edgar might be considered good-natured to the point of naivety. For Edgar's virtue and compassion make him vulnerable to manipulation. Edmund, at the beginning of the play, emphasises how Edgar's lack of malice makes it difficult for him to perceive malice in those around him: 'Whose nature is so far from doing harms/ That he suspects none'. (1.2.143-144) When we first meet Edgar, then, he is being expertly manipulated by his brother. Edgar is persuaded that Gloucester has become filled with rage against him. He is firstly persuaded to lie low and avoid Gloucester for the time being. (1.2.132-133) He is then persuaded that his hiding place has been discovered and that Gloucester's men intend to do him harm. (2.1.19) He is even persuaded to engage in a fake sword fight with his brother and to flee the castle immediately. (2.1.18-20) Edgar's decision to flee, of course, is a disastrous one, making him look guilty of conspiracy to murder.

Edgar's Loss of Identity

Edmund's deceptions, we should note, cost Edgar his very identity, making him an outlaw and a wanted man. He loses his home and his family, having been betrayed by his brother and disowned by his father. He loses not only his possessions and his comfortable lifestyle, but also the inheritance that was rightfully his. Perhaps worst of all, Edgar loses his good name, having been 'proclaimed' a criminal throughout the land.

Edgar, son of Gloucester, therefore, might as well be dead. In Act 2 Scene 3, Edgar movingly expresses this loss of selfhood: 'Edgar I nothing am'. (2.3.21) In pretending to be Poor Tom, then, Edgar does more than don a disguise. He creates a replacement identity that he can inhabit. This is why he imbues the crazy old 'Bedlam beggar' with complex emotions, a plausible personality and a fully realised background. At the end of Act 3 Scene 6, Edgar declares that he cannot or will not 'betray' or reveal his true identity. (3.6.100) He will do so only when the 'false opinion' that 'defiles' his good name has been dismissed by 'just proof' of his innocence. (3.6.101-102) Only when his reputation has been restored and when all charges against him have been dismissed will he be able to speak as Edgar once again.

A Stoic Attitude to Suffering

Edgar, throughout the play, displays what might be called a stoic attitude to suffering. He believes that we must remain philosophical about our problems and put them in perspective. We must never give up. We must, above all, never contemplate ending our own lives, no matter how bad things get. We first see this attitude during his soliloquy in Act 3 Scene 6. Edgar notes that he and Lear suffer in a similar fashion, both having been betrayed and cast aside by members of their own families. (3.6.99) But Edgar, as a young man, is better equipped to endure such suffering. His own misery, therefore, seems 'light and portable' compared to that of King Lear. (3.6.97-98) A similar philosophical attitude is evident in Act 4 Scene 6. Edgar, at this point, is the 'worst'. (4.1.2) He is a hunted and penniless fugitive, surviving by pretending to be a crazy beggar man. He is, therefore, the lowest of the low. (4.1.3) But this gives him a strange kind of 'esperance' or hope. (4.1.4) At least his situation can't get any worse, and surely from now on things can only get better. (4.1.6)

Edgar's stoical philosophy is most pronounced when he stages a 'miracle' in order to overcome his father's suicidal thoughts. Edgar is reunited with his recently blinded father. Still playing the role of Poor Tom, he starts to lead Gloucester across the countryside towards Dover. (4.1.76-77) Once there, he executes his plan to fake a miracle. Edgar stresses that he 'trifles' or messes with his father only for Gloucester's own good. His goal, he says, is to 'cure' the despair that has made Gloucester want to end it all. (4.6.33-34)

Edgar pretends to the blind Gloucester that they are climbing a 'Horrible steep' path to the cliffs of Dover. In reality they are only climbing a hillock or a small incline. The blind Gloucester falls for Edgar's ruse. He asks Edgar to position him on what he believes is the very edge of the cliff. (4.6.24) Then he prays briefly and casts himself forward from what he believes is a towering cliff edge. In reality, of course, he only falls down a small incline. Now Edgar executes the final stage of his plan. He pretends that Gloucester has fallen off the cliff edge only to float miraculously downward to the beach below. (4.6.50-54) He pretends that Gloucester has now landed safely on the beach. In reality, of course, Gloucester isn't on any beach. He's only a metre or two from where he was when he fell forward.

Edgar pretends to be a local peasant who was walking along the beach and witnessed this miraculous occurrence. In the guise of this fictitious peasant witness, Edgar talks about how astonished he was when he saw Gloucester float from 'the dread summit of this chalky bourn' high up above. (4.6.59) Edgar, in his new guise as a local peasant, stresses that Gloucester's survival of this 'fall' was a miraculous occurrence. The gods themselves, he maintains, intervened to save Gloucester. In fact his whole life, from now on, is a 'miracle' and must be treasured as such. (4.6.56) Gloucester is convinced and is persuaded to embrace Edgar's philosophy. He will keep living, keep bearing whatever affliction comes his way, until it's time for him to die of natural causes. (4.6.76-78)

Edgar's stoical attitude is also evident when he praises his father for praying 'Well' in Act 4 Scene 6. (4.6.206) Gloucester, at this moment, commits to avoiding suicidal thoughts in future, calling on the gods to 'take his breath' in their own good time. (4.6.203-205) We also see this stoical outlook in Act 5 Scene 2 when Edgar chides his father for again allowing 'ill thoughts' to get the better of him. (5.2.9) Edgar rejects Gloucester's desire to simply lie down and rot away, insisting that we must keep living until we die of natural causes, enduring the agony that comes with life's late stages, just as we endure the agony of birth. (5.2.10) We must let fortune, or the gods, determine when we are 'ripe' or ready for death: 'Ripeness is all'. (5.2.11)

King Lear in Performance

There have been many wonderful performances of *King Lear* in recent decades, both on stage and screen. Let's take a look at some of the more celebrated performances and compare the different approaches the actors took when performing some of the play's memorable scenes.



Video 6

Watch **Video 6** which features two versions of Lear's confrontation with Goneril in Act 1 Scene 4, the first featuring Laurence Olivier, the second featuring Anthony Sher:

1. The issue of Lear's hundred knights is an important one in this scene. In which production, in your opinion, do the knights most come across as an uproarious and disruptive presence in Goneril's home?
2. Which performance, in your opinion, best conveyed Lear's disbelief and anger?
3. In which performance, in your opinion, did Lear seem more like someone whose sanity might be under threat?
4. In which performance did Goneril seem more sympathetic and relatable?
5. Which of these productions would you most like to see in its entirety?



Video 7

Watch **Video 7** which features extracts from Act 3 Scene 2 starring first, Jonathan Pryce and then Paul Scofield:

1. Which actor makes Lear seem most vulnerable and human?
2. Which performance, in your opinion, best conveys that Lear is someone on the brink of complete insanity?
3. Comment on how both performers use their hands. Which actor, in your opinion, does this to greatest effect?
4. What does Jonathan Pryce's performance convey about Lear's attitude toward himself, toward human life in general and toward the Fool, who remains with him amid the storm?
5. Paul Scofield's performance in this scene has been described as a 'masterpiece of understatement and contained rage'. Write a paragraph in response to this statement.





Video 8

Watch **Video 8**, which features two very different performances of an extract from Act 4 Scene 6, the first featuring Jim Broadbent and Andrew Scott, the second featuring David Troughton and Oliver Johnstone:

1. Which version, in your opinion, best conveys Edgar's concern for his father's well-being?
2. Which version, in your opinion, best conveys Gloucester's determination to end his own life?
3. 'The actor playing Edgar, in this scene, must in a sense take on three different roles'. Write a paragraph in response to this statement.
4. Does Andrew Scott, in the first version, or Oliver Johnstone, in the second, best rise to this challenge in your opinion?
5. 'The David Troughton version, though filmed in a rehearsal studio, is clearer in its presentation of the trick that Edgar plays on Gloucester'. Write a paragraph in



Video 9

Watch **Video 9**, which features two different interpretations of Cordelia's death in Act 5 Scene 3, the first featuring Michael Horden, the second featuring Laurence Olivier:

1. Comment on how both actors deliver the famous phrase: 'Howl, howl, howl!'. Would you agree that they each use this phrase to convey a different emotional state?
2. In which version did Lear seem most relatable in his grief?
3. Which version, in your opinion, best conveys Lear's inability to comprehend or come to terms with Cordelia's passing?
4. Which of these productions would you recommend to a modern audience? Give a reason for your answer.
5. Laurence Olivier declared that an actor's body is his or her instrument. Comment on how he uses movement and physical gesture in this performance of this harrowing scene.



SAMPLE ANSWER 5 (2016)

“Throughout the course of the play, both Lear and Gloucester are tragic characters, but Lear develops into the more heroic figure.” To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

I fully agree with this statement. Both Lear and Gloucester fit the classical definition of the tragic hero, one outlined by Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher. Both are powerful, esteemed individuals who exhibit fatal flaws that brings about their downfall. And though both gain a measure of redemption, it's clear that Lear emerges as the more heroic of the two.

As soon as we meet King Lear, we realise that we are dealing with a most powerful and esteemed individual. This is someone who exercises absolute authority. He can have those who displease him, like Kent, sent into exile: ‘And on the fifth to turn thy hated back/ Upon our kingdom’. He can even have them killed: ‘Kent, on thy life, no more!’ Indeed, his power is so absolute that he can decide, on a whim, to divide the entire kingdom and gift it to his daughters: ‘Know we have divided/ In three our kingdom’. But Lear, it's important to note, also commands the respect of those who know him. Although, Cordelia Lear disowns her and casts her out of his sight, Cordelia returns to Britain and risks everything to help him. Gloucester, too, remains faithful to Lear, his ‘old master’, and takes the king's side against Goneril and Regan's new regime. Kent remains loyal to the very king who banished him, returning in disguise so he can continue to serve Lear's ‘authority’. When we meet him, Lear is perhaps past his best, having become subject to ‘inconstant starts’ of mental instability. But it's clear that he is – or at least was – a very great man indeed.

Gloucester, though not a king, is also a powerful and esteemed individual. His position as earl places him near the top of British society, making him the owner of vast estates that generate vast incomes. Gloucester is obviously highly regarded within the kingdom. It is he, for instance, who is charged with tending to France and Burgundy, two highly esteemed foreign visitors. Regan, in Act 2 Scene 2, celebrates Gloucester as one of the kingdom's wise old heads, a figure whose wisdom she greatly needs at this difficult time: ‘Our good old friend ... bestow/ Your needful counsel to our business’.

Lear, like all tragic heroes, exhibits a fatal flaw, or more accurately, in his case a set of three interrelated flaws. First, he is arrogant, entitled and conceited. Second, as Goneril points out, he has an inbuilt tendency toward rashness and mental insatiability: ‘The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash’. Finally, he has disastrous tendency for self-delusion.

These flaws, of course, combine to bring about Lear's downfall. His rashness and self-delusion lead him to believe that he can retire from active kingship while maintaining the status of a king. His arrogance and entitlement, meanwhile, cause him to disown Cordelia simply for refusing to engage in the love test. This sense of arrogance and entitlement, aided by a large dose of self-delusion, causes him to behave terribly during the early weeks of his retirement, never

realising, of course, that his remaining authority is slipping away. And all three flaws, we might argue, contribute to the descent into madness that he suffers in Acts 3 and 4.

Gloucester, too, possesses a set of fatal flaws. The first and most glaring of these is reflected in his poor treatment of Edmund. For Edmund's illegitimacy, we quickly learn, is a source of great shame to Gloucester. ‘I have so often blushed to acknowledge him’. Gloucester refers to his son in the most derogatory terms, describing to him as a ‘knave’ and a ‘whoreson’. Gloucester's, second flaw is his gullible or ‘credulous’ nature. For he is all too easily convinced that a conspiracy is afoot against him, that his beloved son Edgar, is actually an ‘Abhorred villain’ who wants him dead, Gloucester's third and final flaw is his lack of moral conviction: he is unwilling to pick a side and nail his colours to the mast. Instead, he tries to help and support the troubled King while simultaneously demonstrating loyalty to the new regime.

It's clear, then, that Gloucester's blinding is caused by a combination of these three flaws. Gloucester, through his poor treatment of Edmund, helps to create a monster who readily betrays him to the new regime. Gloucester's gullibility also plays a role here, for it has caused him to drive away his trustworthy son, while bringing his treacherous son into his confidence. Gloucester's moral compromise, of course, also leads him to his bleak fate: by returning to the castle, by trying to remain on good terms with both sides, he places himself directly in harm's way.

Both Lear and Gloucester, it must be noted, gain a measure of redemption. But Gloucester's redemption is decidedly low-key and depressing in nature. It mainly consists of resisting the suicidal despair that fills him after his blinding. He accepts Edgar's claim that ‘Ripeness is all’, that we must keep going until the bitter end, until we are ‘ripe’ and ready to die of natural causes, rather than ending our lives prematurely. Gloucester is rewarded for this stoicism when he is granted the longed-for reconciliation with his beloved son. But the intense emotions that this reconciliation triggers are too much for his greatly weakened body to endure and his heart gives out.

Lear's redemption is far more radical and transformative. For Lear, we realise, undergoes an extraordinary journey towards humility and acceptance. We see this when he finds the idea of being imprisoned with Cordelia an acceptable prospect, perhaps even an enticing one. He imagines that now he will have all the time in the world to seek and, perhaps, even earn Cordelia's forgiveness: ‘I'll kneel down/ And ask of thee forgiveness’. He believes that he and Cordelia, in their cell, will be like two birds in a cage as they spend their days entertaining each other with songs and stories: we'll ‘pray, and sing, and tell old tales’. He and Cordelia will spend ‘goodyear’ after ‘goodyear’ together in prison, allowing time itself to ‘devour’ their enemies. No other revenge is necessary.

Both Lear and Gloucester, then, fit the classical mould of the tragic hero, being great men brought low by their own flaws and failings. But whereas Gloucester's redemption is passive and neutral, Lear's is much more active and positive in nature. We might even venture that it is heroic.

SAMPLE ANSWER 6 (2001)

What, in your view, are the most important changes that take place in the character of Lear during the play *King Lear*? Support your points by reference to the play.

Lear is a character who experiences a profound and very moving character arc. For we follow him from relative sanity to out-and-out madness and back to sanity again. He goes from being a monarch of absolute power to being a crazed outcast, wandering 'Unbonneted' with only the Fool for company. Finally, when reunited with Cordelia in Dover, we see him gain a measure of redemption. Without doubt, then, Lear's character undergoes a number of major changes. Here I will focus on three of them: his developing concern for other people, his dawning remorse, and his newfound sense of humility.

At the beginning of the play, Lear is a monster of ego, consumed with arrogance, conceitedness and entitlement. Later in the play, even as his life falls apart, Lear starts to develop a new kindness, a new concern for others. We first see this in Act 3 Scene 2, when he asks the Fool how he's faring during the storm: 'How dost my boy? Art cold?' Seeing the Fool suffer, he declares, fills his heart with sorrow. This is the first time in the entire play, we note, that Lear expresses a concern for someone other than himself.

Similarly, in Act 3 Scene 4, Lear shows a new awareness of the kingdom's homeless, the 'Poor naked wretches' who must endure the 'pelting of this pitiless night'. He wonders how their 'houseless heads and unfed sides' could ever protect them from such conditions. Lear realises that he hasn't done enough for the peasantry during his time as king: 'O, I have ta'en/ Too little care of this'. He declares that he and the rest of the kingdom's nobility must 'shake' off their 'superflux', their excess wealth, and give it to the poor, thereby creating a more just and equal society. Lear, during a moment of lucidity in Act 4 Scene 6, expresses a similar concern with social justice, lamenting how society is rife with hypocrisy and corruption. So prevalent are these vices, he insists, that even a blind man like Gloucester can perceive them and their effects: 'A man may see how the world goes with no eyes; look with thy ears'.

Another aspect of Lear's journey towards redemption is the remorse he begins to feel for his misdeeds. This comes across most strongly in Act 4 Scene 4, after Kent has carried Lear all the way to Dover. Kent tells us that Lear, during his more coherent moments, is too ashamed to face Cordelia and flatly refuses to see her. Kent says that Lear experiences a 'sovereign shame' due to the great 'unkindness' with which he treated his faithful daughter. He is ashamed of how he 'stripped' her from his 'benediction' or good wishes, of how he let her take her chances abroad, of how he gave what was rightfully hers to his 'dog-hearted daughters'. These shameful acts, we're told, 'sting/ His mind so venomously'.

This new-found sense of remorse informs Lear's reconciliation with Cordelia in Act 4 Scene 7. We see it when he kneels before

her and when he movingly asks for her forgiveness: 'Pray now, forget and forgive'. It is especially evident when he declares that he is willing to do anything to atone for his wrongdoing, even take his own life by drinking poison.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Lear's journey toward redemption is his dawning sense of humility. Lear realises that as a king, he was surrounded by courtiers who flattered him constantly: 'They flattered me like a dog'. These courtiers agreed with everything he said and told him exactly what he wanted to hear, irrespective of the truth: 'They told me I was everything'. Lear, however, comes to understand that far from being 'everything', he is ultimately just an ordinary man. He realises that he, like other men, is subject to disease: 'I am not ague-proof'. He realises that he, like other men, is doomed to die, that his hand 'smells of mortality'.

Lear's new-found humility is especially evident even when he loses the battle and finds himself taken prisoner. He finds the idea of being imprisoned with Cordelia an acceptable prospect, perhaps even an enticing one. He imagines that he will now have all the time in the world to seek and, perhaps, even earn Cordelia's forgiveness: 'I'll kneel down/ And ask of thee forgiveness'.

Lear, then, undergoes an extraordinary journey towards humility and acceptance. In Act 1, as we have seen, he is desperate to be flattered before his court, staging the love test to garner praise from his three daughters. By the time of his capture in Act 5, however, Lear recognises flattery for the empty, meaningless thing that it is. He intends to spend the rest of his life laughing at the 'gilded butterflies' who practise such empty courtly politics.

Lear, in Acts 2 and 3, was desperate for revenge on Goneril and Regan. He wanted to see Goneril's visage flayed, or Regan devoured by dogs or the two of them assaulted with red hot pokers. By the time of his capture in Act 5, however, Lear realises that the best revenge is living well. He and Cordelia will spend 'goodyear' after 'goodyear' together in prison, allowing time itself to 'devour' their enemies. No other revenge is necessary.

Lear, in Acts 1 and 2, was desperate to retain his authority, symbolised by his retinue of knights. By the time of his capture in Act 5, however, he realises that political power is a ridiculous concept. Different great ones are always coming and going, almost with the regularity of the monthly tides: 'That ebb and flow by th' moon'. Each 'wave' of powerful people enjoys office for a brief moment, before being replaced by the next. Lear, then, intends to turn away from the transitory, shallow world of politics and spend his years in prison contemplating the deeper mysteries of the universe.

Lear's journey, then, is as paradoxical as it is extraordinary. For it's only in losing everything – his power, his crown, his very freedom – that he finds contentment and equilibrium, something we might almost call happiness. It is one of the great tragedies in literature that this brief moment is so cruelly snatched away. The sight of Lear carrying Cordelia's corpse, after she has been hanged on Edmund's orders, is a brutal one. But our knowledge that Lear, just moments before, had finally gained happiness, humility and acceptance makes it almost unbearable.