



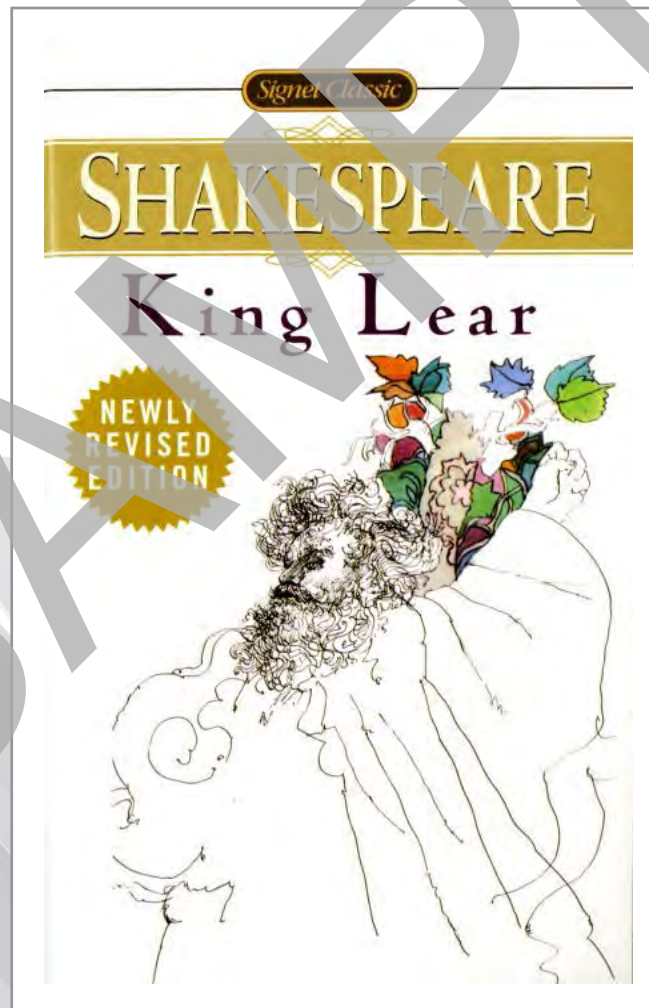
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

King Lear

William Shakespeare



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

King Lear

William Shakespeare

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Brainstorming, comparing
and contrasting, evaluating,
details

Literary Elements

Plot, setting, character

Vocabulary

Synonyms/antonyms,
context clues

Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing,
cause/effect, inference

Writing

Newspaper story, lists

Listening/Speaking

Participation in discussion,
participation in dramatic
activities

Summary of *King Lear*

Lear, elderly king of pre-Christian Britain, divides his kingdom between his scheming but flattering daughters, Goneril and Regan, while disowning his youngest daughter, Cordelia, for her failure to exaggerate her affection for him. When the Earl of Kent begs Lear to reconsider, Kent is banished. The King of France, recognizing Cordelia's angelic goodness, marries her and takes her off to France. Kent, intending to faithfully watch over his king, soon returns in disguise and secures employment as Lear's servant.

Lear soon realizes his error concerning his daughters: Regan and Goneril conspire to undermine Lear's authority. Angry and proud, Lear goes out into a raging storm, berating his "unnatural" daughters for their cruelty and disloyalty. Meanwhile, the Duke of Gloucester has been duped by his illegitimate son, Edmund, into thinking the worst of his legitimate son, Edgar, and Edgar has gone off to hide until things straighten out, disguising himself as a mad beggar. It so happens that Edgar is hiding in the same hovel where Lear, the Fool, and Kent take shelter, and Lear soon becomes fond of Edgar and enjoys their exchange of "philosophies."

Gloucester, still loyal to the king, discovers a plot to murder Lear and urges his removal to a safe place in Dover. Regan's husband, Cornwall, calls for Gloucester's arrest as a traitor and then puts out Gloucester's eyes, but not before being fatally wounded by a protesting servant. Word of dissension between Albany and Cornwall, who would each like the other's half of the kingdom, the scandalous treatment of Lear has reached France, and French troops have landed in Dover. There is trouble between the sisters, too, as Edmund, the new "Earl of Gloucester," has cleverly won the love of both women, though he really cares for neither.

Edgar, still disguised, leads his blind father to Lear, who is raving insanely in a field. With the help of Cordelia's doctor, Lear's sanity is mostly restored and he and Cordelia are reconciled, but they are taken off to prison when the French army falls. Meanwhile, Edgar has delivered to Albany a letter incriminating Edmund. Edgar kills Edmund in a duel, and Goneril, who has poisoned Regan, kills herself. Edgar reports that his father, Gloucester, died of a heart attack near the battlefield.

Lear appears with the dead Cordelia, a victim of a feigned suicide ordered by Edmund, in his arms. Albany, who never really understood the evil plot he was a part of, declares Lear the rightful ruler of Britain, but Lear dies of a broken heart, and Kent vows to follow his king in death. It is now up to Edgar to restore order and rule the realm.

About the Author

Shakespeare's exact birthdate is unknown, but he was baptized on April 26, 1564, in Stratford-on-Avon, England. His father, John, was a prosperous wool, leather, and grain merchant as well as a town official. His mother, Mary, was the daughter of a prosperous landowner. It is probable that young William attended school in Stratford, where he would have studied Latin and literature. On November 27, 1582, he married Anne Hathaway, a woman eight years his senior. They had three children: a daughter, Susanna in 1583, and twins Hamnet and Judeth in 1585.

Vocabulary Activities

The lists of vocabulary words for each reading section are divided into three “types:”

- A. Words that sound something like words that are in use today, and are somehow related in meaning. For example, “*reverb*” is used for “*reverberate*” and “*sequent*” means “*subsequent*.” Encourage students to look for these kinds of connections. It will make it easier for them to read more lines without having to look constantly at footnotes.
- B. Words that look exactly like modern words—but whose meanings are different. For example, “*and*” means “*if*,” “*latched*” means “*wounded*.”
- C. Words that look like modern words and have the same meaning, but which may be difficult enough to need clarification. Examples: *sojourn*, *retinue*, *epicurism*.

Have students set up pages in their journals for the three types of words. For **A words**, the page heading might look like this:

Words that look something like today's words	Our related words	Shakespeare's meaning:

For **B words**:

Words that look exactly like today's but have different meanings:	Shakespeare's meaning:

For **C words**:

Words that look exactly like today's and have the same meanings:	meaning:

Act One, Scene i

Summary: We are introduced to Edmund, the Earl of Gloucester's bastard son, whom the Earl claims to love as dearly as his legitimate son. Lear, King of pre-Christian Britain, arrives and announces that he is old and wants to retire from the responsibilities of managing his large kingdom. Before dividing his kingdom between his three daughters, he asks them to profess the depth of their love for him. The first two, Goneril and Reagan, are expressive and flattering and receive their portions, to the satisfaction of their respective husbands, Albany and Cornwall. The youngest daughter, Cordelia, refuses to exaggerate for material gain, and this enrages Lear, who disowns her. One of Cordelia's suitors, the Duke of Burgundy, promptly withdraws his suit, but the King of France is happy to marry Cordelia for her innate goodness. The Earl of Kent, a longtime loyal courtier, tries to make Lear see the error of his ways but succeeds only in getting himself banished from the kingdom.

Vocabulary

A	B	C
felicitate scene i, line 77	affected i, 1	sojourn i, 49
haply i, 102	sue i, 3	divest i, 51
reverb i, 156	publish i, 45	perpetual i, 69
unfriended i, 205	validity i, 83	opulent i, 88
strangered i, 206	nursery i, 126	dominions i, 179
	prefer i, 276	infirmity i, 295

Discussion Questions

1. What does Gloucester have to say about his son? (*Although Edmund is illegitimate, Gloucester loves him as much as his legitimate son.*) Does Kent seem shocked? (*No; he is quite accepting of Edmund and tells him he'd like to know him better.*) What is your first impression of Edmund?
2. What is Lear saying in his first long speech, lines 38-56? (*He has decided to divide his kingdom between his three daughters; the decision as to who gets which portions will depend on who "loves him best." The eldest, Goneril, is to speak first.*)
3. Why is Cordelia so concerned during the speeches of her older sisters? (*They indulge in gross flattery and exaggeration; Cordelia loves her father, but does not plan to ingratiate herself for material gain.*) How does Lear react to Cordelia's speech? (*At first he tries to give her a second chance to say something more to his liking; then he becomes angry because of her apparent lack of feeling, and disowns her.*)
4. What happens to the part of the kingdom that was to have been Cordelia's? (*It is divided between Reagan and Goneril: "With my two daughters' dowers digest the third."*)
5. Who tries to get Lear to reconsider his rather harsh decision? (*the Earl of Kent*) Why does he say, "Thinks't thou that duty shall have dread to speak when power to flattery bows"? (*Kent is saying that he can't keep himself from being honest with Lear even if Lear is his superior; Lear is foolish to be influenced by flattery.*) What happens to him? (*He is banished.*)
6. What can you tell about the time this story takes place from Lear's expression, "Now by Apollo—" and Kent's "The gods to their dear shelter take thee..."? (*It takes place in pre-Christian times.*)

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7. Who are Albany and Cornwall? (*Albany is Goneril's husband; Cornwall is Regan's.*) Who is the Duke of Burgundy? (*one of the two men who has come to ask for Cordelia's hand in marriage.*) Why does he change his mind? (*He is not interested in marrying a woman with no dowry.*) Who is the other suitor? (*the King of France*) Do you think Cordelia is better off with him?
 8. What does Cordelia have to say to her sisters before she leaves with the King of France? (*She expresses the hope that they will take care of their father, but adds that time will probably show their true characters.*)
 9. How do Regan and Goneril really feel about King Lear? (*They see the ease with which he cast off Cordelia as a sign of encroaching senility, and decide to join forces to prevent him from using his authority to act rashly.*) Do you see these two sisters as evil—or are they just concerned about their father? Do they seem to feel at all badly for Cordelia? (*Regan tells Cordelia not to give them orders; Goneril tells her she's just lucky the King of France is willing to marry her.*)
 10. **Prediction:** Cordelia says, "Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides/ Who covers fault at last shame them derides" (lines 282-283). Paraphrase this quote. What do you think it has to do with forthcoming events?

Supplementary Activities

Literary Analysis: Pun

The **pun**, of which Shakespeare was extremely fond, is a play on a word that has different meanings. Point out the play on the word "conceive," lines 12-13. ["I cannot conceive (understand) you," followed by "Sir, this young fellow's mother could" (i. e., conceive, become pregnant).] Have students keep lists in their journals of other puns they find in the play.

Writing Ideas

1. Over the next few days, look for opportunities to make **puns** in your daily conversations with friends. Write down the conversations and share them by enlisting a fellow classmate to play the other person's role.
2. The Duke of Burgundy quickly decided Cordelia was not the woman for him after she lost her dowry. Mothers used to tell their daughters, "It's just as easy to fall in love with a rich man as a poor one." Explain how you feel about this issue. Are you the practical type or the romantic type?

Act One, Scenes ii-v

Summary:

At the Earl of Gloucester's castle, we witness Edmund's resentment of his legitimate brother, Edgar. Edmund easily convinces their father that Edgar plans to murder Gloucester, then warns Edgar that he is out of their father's favor. At Albany's castle, Goneril's steward, Oswald, complains that Lear struck him and that his knights are rude and boisterous. Goneril tells Oswald he can forget about treating the king with respect, and to tell Lear she is sick if he asks for her. Kent returns in disguise and secures employment with Lear. When Oswald is insolent to Lear, Kent trips the steward. The Fool enters and