



 Prestwick House

Activity Pack

KING LEAR

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Item No. 201297

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Research and Presentations

Objective: Researching and presenting background information

Activity

A little background information on both *King Lear* and the conventions of Shakespeare's time will provide a good foundation to our study of the play. Each group will be assigned one of the below topics to research and educate the class about. You may use print sources or the Internet in your research.

Presentations should be 5 – 7 minutes long. You are encouraged to make use of props, posters, or any other visual aids that will assist your audience in understanding your subject. On the day of your presentation, you must, as a group, turn in a one-page summary of what you have learned from your research.

PRE-READING RESEARCH TOPICS FOR KING LEAR

1. Shakespeare crafted the plot of *King Lear* using bits and pieces of other works of literature. Research Shakespeare's sources for *King Lear*, and tell us a bit about them.
2. Research the role of the Fool in Shakespearean drama.
3. In Shakespeare's time, playwrights could not directly mention a reigning monarch in their plays. There is some speculation, however, that Shakespeare is poking fun at King James I in parts of *King Lear*. Research James I, including how he came to power, how he was popularly viewed, the length of his reign, and things that were accomplished under his reign.
4. Research the way in which Shakespeare's plays were staged, the Globe Theatre, who comprised a typical audience, and how audiences generally behaved at the theatre.
5. Research the conventions of society in Elizabethan England. How were parents and the elderly expected to be treated? How much mixing went on between members of different economic classes?
6. Give us an overview of Shakespeare's life, including pertinent dates, the conditions he lived in, and his reception by the public in his day.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Acts I – V**Headlines**

Objective: Writing newspaper headlines for each act

Activity

Journalists strive to make newspaper headlines both informative and intriguing. The idea is to create a balance between capturing the main issue of a story and compelling readers to continue on and read the entire article.

Imagine that you are an undercover journalist for *The Daily Eclipse*, Ancient England's premiere news source. A master in your field, you are so successfully sneaky that you manage to eavesdrop on every event and conversation that takes place in *King Lear*. It is in your best interest, of course, to come up with scandalous scoops that everyone will want to read.

As you read *King Lear*, compose three newspaper headlines for each act. Remember that headlines are brief; yours should be no longer than eight words long. An example is provided below.

Act I: Headline #1: FAVORITE DAUGHTER DOESN'T LOVE HIM, SHOCKED KING LEARNS

Name: _____

Date: _____

Acts I & II**Apostrophe**

Objective: Recognizing apostrophe

Activity

Shakespeare uses apostrophe extensively in *King Lear*. Complete the chart by recording at least six examples of apostrophe from Acts I and II. Make sure to fill in the act and scene numbers for each. An example is provided for you. After your chart is complete, answer the question that follows.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Act II**Motivation****Objective:** Understanding characters' motivations**Activity**

Is it possible to sympathize with Regan and Goneril? Can we imagine what has motivated their inhospitality to their father? From the sisters' point of view, write a letter to "Anne of Landers," an advice columnist, detailing the trouble you are having with your father, explaining your feelings on the matter, and asking for guidance. When you have finished writing the letter from Regan and Goneril, compose a response from Anne of Landers.

Below is a sample beginning for the sisters' letter. You may continue on from it, or write your own beginning and proceed from there.

Dear Anne of Landers,

Our elderly father, while generous, is beginning to tax our patience. A retired king, he insists on keeping a full retinue of rowdy knights with him. Moreover, he expects *us* to house them! What part of "retirement" does he not understand? What...

Name: _____

Date: _____

Act III

Dramatic Interpretation

Objective: Understanding drama through performance

Activity

Plays such as *King Lear* are written for the stage. Reading a play without watching it sometimes omits elements that only a physical performance can introduce.

With your group, select a single scene from Act III to act out for the class. Members of each group will assign themselves roles. If necessary, divide the scene to accommodate everyone; for example, two people might act the first half of a scene, two others the second half.

Discuss your chosen scene and settle on the details that staging will require. Will you use props or sound effects? Where will each character stand? Will characters move around during the course of the scene? Will some characters speak more rapidly or loudly than others?

In considering these and other questions, be sure to record the *reasons* behind your decisions. Why is your dramatic interpretation of your scene an apt one? How does your performance capture the essence of and accentuate the key issues in *King Lear*? Why would Shakespeare, if he could see it, appreciate the way you have staged the scene?

Each group will write a one-page explanation of their staging decisions and the reasoning behind them, to be turned in after performing the scene for the class.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Act IV**Metaphor and Simile****Objective:** Understanding metaphor and simile**Activity**

Act IV contains many instances of simile and metaphor. To complete the following chart, find and quote at least six examples. In the second column, record the number of the scene in which you find each example; in the third, explain the metaphor or simile, including a mention of the tone it sets. One is done for you as an example.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Act V**Language**

Objective: Understanding and working creatively with Shakespeare's English

Activity

Below is a short scene written in contemporary language. Translate the scene into language that would make sense to the characters in *King Lear* or, for that matter, a Globe Theatre audience attending one of Shakespeare's plays. The first few lines have been done as an example for you.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Wrap-Up

Synthesis

Objectives: Assessing the play
 Creating a new cover for the book

Activity

It's said that you shouldn't judge a book by its cover, but there's no denying the power of an intriguing cover to drive us to pick up a book. Imagine that *King Lear* is about to be reissued, and that you are in charge both of developing the cover art and the descriptive "blurb" on the back.

Fold a sheet of paper so that you can provide both a front and a back cover. For the front cover, you may use images collaged from elsewhere, draw the artwork, or make the art on a computer. You might depict a key scene from the play that can stand for the entire story; you might simply use a few well-chosen images that evoke the play's mood. Be sure to include the title and the author's name.

On the back cover, write a brief review of the play. Address such topics as

- what you learned from the play
- what the play's key themes seem to be
- whether you would recommend this play to others
- why you do or do not think this is a good play to teach in schools
- why the play remains relevant to contemporary readers

Be prepared to say why you think your cover design might attract more readers than the current design.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Wrap-Up

Creative Writing

Objective: Writing a new ending for the play

Activity

King Lear may be the most “tragic” of Shakespeare’s tragedies. It is rife with heartbreaking misunderstandings, brutal images, and a sense that redemption is almost impossible and, when achieved, meaningless. For much of the 18th and 19th centuries, productions of the play featured a different ending from the one that Shakespeare intended. In order to protect audiences from Shakespeare’s bleak vision, companies performed a fifth act in which Lear was happily restored to his throne, and Cordelia and Edgar—the “good” children—were married.

Most of us would be highly reluctant to tamper with Shakespeare’s ending now. Imagine, though, that a well-known Hollywood producer is interested in shooting a film version of *King Lear* and has commissioned you to write a “Hollywood ending” for the play. The producer has specified one thing: in this version, Lear, Cordelia, and Edgar will end up happy; instead, *all* of the main characters are still alive in Act V must find contentment.

Devise an ending that will please this demanding producer. In about a page, sum up what will happen and how the stipulations will be met in your new, “improved” Act V. Be prepared to share your vision with the class.