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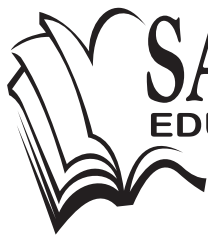
SHAKESPEARE

MADE EASY

King Lear



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To the Teacher

As any teacher or student who has read Shakespeare knows, his plays are not easy. They are thought-provoking and complex texts that abound with romance, deceit, tragedy, comedy, revenge, and humanity shown at its very worst as well as its very best. In short, to read Shakespeare is to explore the depths and heights of humanity.

The *Shakespeare Made Easy* Activity Guides are designed by teachers for teachers to help students navigate this journey. Each guide is broken into six sections of four activities and one review. At the end of each guide is a final test, a variety of culminating activities, and an answer key. The activities are meant to aid textual comprehension, to provide creative

opportunities for the reader to make personal connections with the text, and to help busy teachers gain quick access to classroom-tested and age-appropriate activities that make the teaching of Shakespeare an easier task.

Each regular activity, as well as each culminating activity, can be modified to be an individual or a group task, and the reviews and tests can be used as quick comprehension checks or formally scored assessments. The guides may be used in conjunction with the Barron's *Shakespeare Made Easy* texts or alone. Ultimately, the *Shakespeare Made Easy* Activity Guides are intended to assist teachers and students in gaining an increased understanding of and appreciation for the reading of Shakespeare.

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Introduction to the Play

Background to *King Lear*

King Lear begins in the same way as many fairy tales do: “Once upon a time, there was a great king who had three daughters. The two older daughters were ugly and mean, but the youngest daughter was beautiful and kind.” Shakespeare takes this story, however, and turns it into one of the most moving, horrifying, and despairing tragedies of the English language.

Shakespeare’s play follows an old Celtic legend about King Lear. He wishes to retire in comfort and so plans to disperse his kingdom among his three daughters, but he expects to keep his title and his knights. Before doing so in a royal ceremony, he asks each daughter to state how much she loves him. The two older daughters use flowery language to express their love and devotion to King Lear. The youngest daughter, Cordelia, makes a simple statement. Infuriated, the King disinherits Cordelia, and she moves to France to marry the French king.

King Lear visits his oldest daughter, Gonerilla, with sixty of his knights, but it is too much work for her, and she demands that he keep only thirty knights. Lear then goes to his middle daughter Regan. She, however, says he can only have five knights if he stays with her. Lear, humbled, goes back to Gonerilla but is now told he can only have one knight. Lear travels to France and is reunited with Cordelia and the French king. They gather an army and return to England, successfully overthrowing the rule of the two older daughters and their

husbands. Lear retakes the throne and rules successfully for three years. At his death, Cordelia rules for five more years. When her nephews come of age, however, they mount a rebellion against Cordelia and are victorious. She is put in prison, where she kills herself.

Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, while reuniting King Lear and Cordelia, ends not with King Lear on his throne, but with betrayal, suffering, madness, and death.

In addition, *King Lear* is enhanced with a subplot. This part of the play involves the Earl of Gloucester and his two sons, Edmund and Edgar. For this part of the play, Shakespeare adapted a story from Sir Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia* in which a king is betrayed by his illegitimate son and mistakenly exiles his true son. The true and forgiving son protects the father, who is blind, from falling off a cliff.

The two plots are linked by the common element of a father who misjudges and disinherits the true child. The father favors the false child, who seeks to destroy the father. Ultimately, the father is “saved” by the true child. When the father understands the mistake and the pride that led to his downfall, the reader sympathizes with the father and is agonized by the price the father has to pay to attain this new awareness. Also, in each story, the child readily forgives the father and is reunited with him. This level of forgiveness and restoration is truly amazing and inspiring.

Messengers: They bring news of the progress of the battle.

Doctor: Employed by Cordelia to help in the restoration and healing of King Lear

Two Captains: They lead the battles of France and England.

Herald: He sounds a trumpet so that Edgar will come forward and challenge Edmund.

Other Minor Characters: knights, attendants, servants, officers, soldiers, and trumpeters

Shakespeare and Stage Directions

The plays of Shakespeare are so well written that they seem to leap off the page and come to life. However, the plays themselves have very few stage directions. Perhaps this is because Shakespeare's plays were performed in large amphitheaters that were very simple.

This was a time before electric lights, so the plays needed to take place during the day to utilize the natural light. The average time for a performance was between noon and two in the afternoon. Theater historians report that there were typically no intermissions; plays ran from beginning to end without a break and took about two hours.

The set might be a tree canopy to illustrate whether the play was occurring in a forest or a town, for example. Sometimes the background was accompanied by a sign that indicated the place as well. Props were few and large: a table, a chariot, gallows, a bed, or a throne.

However, the audience in Shakespeare's plays expected a spectacle for the price of admission. Therefore, there were many devices to produce

a gasp from the audience. For example, a device in the loft of the theater could raise and lower actors so that they could play gods, ghosts, or other unusual characters. Additionally, a trapdoor in the stage offered a chance for a quick appearance or disappearance. The actors could suggest a beheading or hanging with various illusions on the stage. Sound effects suggesting thunder, horses, or war were common. Music was important, and drums and horns were often played.

Most important to the sense of spectacle were the costumes worn by the actors. These were elaborate, colorful, and very expensive. Therefore, they often purchased these outfits from servants who had inherited the clothes from their masters, or from hangmen, who received the clothes of their victims as payment for their services.

Though Shakespeare's stage directions are sparse, definition of a few key terms will be helpful for the reader. The following is a brief glossary of stage directions commonly found in Shakespeare's plays.

Selected Glossary of Stage Directions in Shakespeare's Plays

Above: an indication that the actor speaking from above is on a higher balcony or other scaffold that is higher than the other actors

Alarum: a stage signal, which calls the soldiers to battle; usually trumpets, drums, and shouts

Aside: words spoken by the actor so the audience overhears but the other actors on the stage do not. An aside may also be spoken to one

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Introduction to Shakespeare

A Brief Biography of William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was born in April 1564 to John and Mary Shakespeare in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. His birthday is celebrated on April 23. This is memorable because April 23 is also the day Shakespeare died in 1616.

Shakespeare was the eldest of nine children in his family, six of whom survived to adulthood.

William Shakespeare's father worked with leather and became a successful merchant early in his career. He held some relatively important government offices. However, when William was in his early teens, his father's financial position began to slide due to growing debt. After many years, John Shakespeare's fortunes and respect were restored, but records indicate that the years of debt and lawsuits were very stressful.

Historians assume that young Will went to school and took a rigorous course of study including Latin, history, and biblical study. In 1582, at the age of eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway, who was three months pregnant.

Studies of Elizabethan family life indicate that Anne's situation was not unusual since it was accepted that the engagement period was as legally binding as the marriage. The couple had a daughter, Susanna, followed by twins, Hamnet and Judith. Not much is known about Shakespeare during the next seven years, but his name is listed as an actor in London by 1592. This was a difficult time for the theater

because measures to prevent the spread of the plague regularly closed the theaters.

Between 1594 and 1595, Shakespeare joined the Chamberlain's Men as a playwright and actor. The acting company featured actor Richard Burbage, and they were a favorite of Queen Elizabeth I. During this time, Shakespeare was writing such plays as *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Even though Shakespeare was enjoying great success by the time he was 32, it was dampened by the death of his son, Hamnet, in 1596. Soon after, Shakespeare refocused on his home in Stratford where he bought an estate called New Place, with gardens, orchards, and barns in addition to the main home. He still maintained a home in London near the theater.

In 1599, Shakespeare wrote *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, and *As You Like It*. The Globe Playhouse was up and running, with Shakespeare a 10 percent owner. This means that he was able to earn 10 percent of any show's profits. This business position helped him solidify his wealth.

In 1603, Shakespeare's reputation earned his acting troop the sponsorship of James I, who requested one play performance per month. Their name changed to the King's Men. By this time, Shakespeare had written and performed in almost all of his comedies and histories. He was proclaimed the finest playwright in London.



ACTIVITY 1

Honesty Versus Flattery

Act one, Scene 1

Background In this scene, King Lear announces his plan to separate his kingdom into three parts. He asks his daughters to express to him how much they love him so that he may determine who deserves the most land in his kingdom. His two elder daughters, Regan and Goneril, lavish him with melodramatic sentiments of their love, and he gives them the second and third largest shares of land, saving the largest part for his youngest (and favorite) daughter. Cordelia disappoints the king with her straightforward sentiment; although the reader understands that she is the only one who truly loves her father with the utmost devotion, she is sincere and humble and not given to flattery. Her father is outraged, gives Cordelia's portion of his kingdom to Regan and Goneril, and disinherits Cordelia, banishing her from the kingdom.

Directions In modern-day speech, write three brief speeches that parallel what the three daughters say to their father. Immediately after each speech, write whatever "secret" thoughts each young woman may have been thinking either before, during, or after her speech. Use another sheet of paper, if necessary.

Goneril's speech:

Goneril's secret thoughts:

Regan's speech:

Regan's secret thoughts:

Cordelia's speech:

Cordelia's secret thoughts:

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ACTIVITY 2

Deception Everywhere

Act one

Background There is much deception in this act, and no one seems to do anything for pure motives except Cordelia.

Directions Describe the deception that each character is planning in this act. Though we cannot confirm the King of France's deception, carefully consider what the King of France could gain by marrying Cordelia, even if she is initially cast off by her temperamental father. For each character, list the approximate lines in which you discovered the deception.

King of France (speculate):

Edmund:

Goneril and Regan:

Kent:

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ACTIVITY 3

Goneril and Regan Deal with Dad

Act one, Scenes 3–5

Background After lavishing him with compliments to get a better inheritance, Goneril and Regan are now forced to live with their father and his one hundred knights. There is much friction between Goneril and her father, and this will carry over to Regan. Goneril claims that the knights are badly behaved, but Lear disputes this. Who is to blame here? Is Goneril wrong to feel frustrated with her father's large entourage? You decide.

Directions Reread Scenes 3–5 and examine Lear's attitude toward Goneril and her servants and Goneril's attitude toward Lear and his knights. Then

1. Decide who is to blame for the conflict, and try to cite at least three quotations per character.
2. Write one of the following letters from your chosen character's perspective:
 - a. a letter from Goneril to Regan telling Regan what has happened with Lear and what she has done about it
 - b. a letter from Lear to Regan complaining about his treatment at Goneril's castle
 - c. a letter from Regan to Lear expressing her frustration

Use another sheet of paper for your letter.

Part 1: Who is to blame/Character Quotations:

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Part 2: Letter from _____ to _____



ACTIVITY 4

The Jester Who Told the Truth

Act one, Scene 4

Background In King Lear's day, court jesters were comedian-entertainers, or simply dim-witted persons kept as objects for entertainment. Lear's jester (or Fool) is privileged in that he is allowed to speak the truth to the King, which he often does comically, sarcastically, and with use of irony.

Directions The Fool frequently insults King Lear in this scene, yet the King does not punish him for it. Write the following insults/insinuations by the Fool about or to Lear in your own words. Use another sheet of paper, if necessary.

1. "Why, this fellow has banished two on's daughters, and did the third a blessing against his will: if thou follow him thou must needs wear my coxcomb."
2. "Leave thy drink and thy whore/And keep in-a-door,/And thou shalt have more/Than two tens to a score."
3. "That lord that counselled thee/To give away thy land,/Come place him here by me;/Do thou for him stand:/The sweet and bitter fool/Will presently appear;/The one in motley here,/The other found out there."
4. "When thou clovest thy crown i' th' middle, and gavest away both parts, thou borest thine ass on thy back o'er the dirt: thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou gavest thy golden one away."

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ACTIVITY 5

Review

Directions Answer the following questions. Write the letter of the correct answer in the space provided. For 8, write true (T) or false (F) in the space provided.

- ___ 1. King Lear is king of what country?
 a. Italy
 b. France
 c. Britain
 d. Denmark
- ___ 2. Who is Gloucester's illegitimate child?
 a. Edgar
 b. Edmund
 c. Kent
 d. Cornwall
- ___ 3. Why does King Lear disown Cordelia?
 a. He has run out of money.
 b. She deceived him earlier.
 c. Her answer about how much she loves him displeases him.
 d. She conspired behind his back for a greater inheritance.
- ___ 4. Who tries to defend Cordelia, only to get in trouble himself?
 a. Oswald
 b. Kent
 c. Gloucester
 d. Regan
- ___ 5. Who says that he wants to marry Cordelia, despite the fact that she is disinherited?
 a. Duke of Burgandy
 b. King of France
 c. Kent
 d. Edmund
- ___ 6. Does Cordelia love her father less than her sisters do?
 a. Yes
 b. No
- ___ 7. How does King Lear punish Kent?
 a. execution
 b. banishment
 c. revoking his title
 d. taking his land
- ___ 8. True or false: Regan and Goneril are plotting to take Lear's power (throne) from him.
- ___ 9. How does Edmund scheme against his brother?
 a. He shows his father a letter that he forged in Edgar's handwriting.
 b. He has hired someone to kill him.
 c. He is planning to kill him.
 d. none of the above
- ___ 10. How many knights does Lear insist on keeping when he divides his kingdom?
 a. ten
 b. fifty
 c. one hundred
 d. two hundred

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