

THE STUDY OF SAINT LOUIS REPERTORY THEATRE GUIDE



BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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# WHO'S WHO

**Earl of Gloucester**, Lear's counterpart in the parallel sub-plot of the play, is the father of Edmund and Edgar.

**Edmund** is Gloucester's overly ambitious illegitimate son who successfully conspires against practically every other character in the play.

**Earl of Kent** is Lear's devoted nobleman who continues to protect his leader's interests even after Lear dismisses him in anger.

**King Lear** is the aging ruler of Britain whose pride and quick temper provide his greedy daughters with a powerful weapon against him.

**Goneril** is the oldest of Lear's three daughters and the instigator of the plot against him.

**Regan** is Lear's duplicitous middle daughter who locks him out of the castle gates in a raging storm.

**Cordelia** is Lear's youngest daughter whose honesty results in her estrangement from her father.

**Duke of Burgundy** is an insincere suitor of Cordelia who discards her when she is disinherited by her father.

**King of France** is first Cordelia's suitor and then her husband as he weds her even though she is without a dowry.

**Edgar**, Gloucester's rightful heir, remains loyal to his father even after being unjustly exiled but struggles to find his own peace.

**Oswald** is Goneril's zealous steward who does her bidding without qualm or hesitation.

**The Fool** is a loyal servant and guide to Lear and one of the few who speaks candidly to the king.

**Duke of Albany**, Goneril's husband, is oblivious to the depth of his wife's depravity until it is too late.

**Duke of Cornwall** is Regan's corrupt husband who joins her in the plot against Lear and maliciously blinds Gloucester.

# ✦ WORDS ✦ TO THE WISE

**Moiety**—When Gloucester speaks of Cornwall and Albany's moiety, he is referring to the portion of Lear's kingdom that they will each receive.

**Dowers**—As the sole unmarried daughter, Cordelia is the only of Lear's children who could jeopardize not only her own inheritance, but also her marriage potential by becoming estranged from her father. When she refuses to placate her father with excessive declarations of love, she loses not only the land and money that would have been her inheritance but also her dowry, or "buyer's guarantee" for marriage.

**Felicitate**—Regan uses this archaic term to convince her father that her love for him stands above everything and everyone else in her life.

**Propinquity**—When King Lear renounces Cordelia's propinquity, he is terminating her rights as a family member.

**Liege**—Characters throughout the play use this term to show deference and loyalty when speaking to a superior.

**Miscreant**—When Kent tries to reason with Lear, the king rejects his loyal nobleman and uses this word to declare him a traitor.

**Benison**—Lear casts Cordelia off without "benison," or his blessing.

**Choler**—In Shakespeare's time, it was thought that both the emotional and physical well being of people was controlled by four basic humours or fluids in the body: choler (yellow bile), blood, phlegm and melancholy (black bile). Each fluid, it was believed, held certain emotional properties and if that fluid got out of balance in the body, its accompanying emotion would become dominant. Too much choler in a person was said to result in an angry temperament.

**Foppery**—Much like it sounds, foppery refers to foolish or silly behavior.

**Tom O' Bedlam**—This is used both as a generic term for a madman and as Edgar's new name when he assumes the disguise of a lunatic.

**Cur**—Lear uses this insulting term to refer to Oswald, likening him to a mongrel dog.

**Nuncle**—Used throughout the play by The Fool and other servants, this is a contraction of "mine uncle" which is a more familiar version of "my liege."

**Forsooth**—This term of disbelief means "in truth" and in contemporary language might translate as "Get out!" or "No way!"

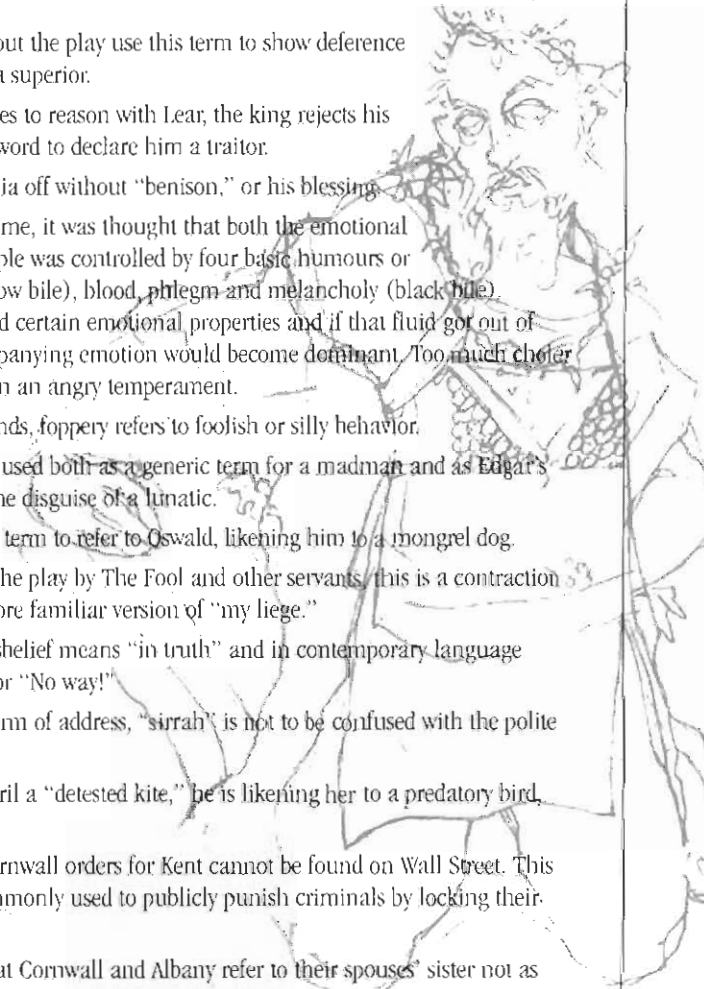
**Sirrah**—A condescending term of address, "sirrah" is not to be confused with the polite modern "sir."

**Kite**—When Lear calls Goneril a "detested kite," he is likening her to a predatory bird, not a child's toy.

**Stocks**—The stocks that Cornwall orders for Kent cannot be found on Wall Street. This wooden torture device was commonly used to publicly punish criminals by locking their hands and feet in place.

**Sister/Brother**—Note that Cornwall and Albany refer to their spouses' sister not as their sister-in-law, but simply as sister. Goneril and Regan make a similar substitution, using brother instead of brother-in-law. This grew out of standard marriage practices in Shakespeare's time which regarded those relations created by marriage equal with biological relations.

**Milk-livered**—As you may have guessed, this is a term of insult, but it is born out of the Renaissance belief that the liver, rather than the heart is the source of emotions. Therefore, someone who is milk-livered is baby-like or cowardly.



# WHAT'S THE STORY

## ⇨ ACT I

### Scene 1

As the Earl of Gloucester and the Earl of Kent await the arrival of King Lear, aging ruler of Britain, Gloucester introduces Kent to his illegitimate son, Edmund, but mentions that he has an older, legitimate son as well. When Lear arrives, he dispenses Gloucester and Edmund to entertain the unseen Duke of Burgundy and King of France and reveals his plan for distributing his kingdom among his sons-in-law, the Dukes of Albany and Cornwall, the respective husbands of his daughters Goneril and Regan and either the Duke of Burgundy or the King of France—whichever suitor marries his youngest daughter Cordelia. Lear announces that he will award the greatest portion of his domain to the daughter who “love[s] us most.” Goneril and Regan both proclaim their love in excess, but Cordelia, knowing that she will soon love a husband, tells the king that she loves him simply as a daughter should love her father—“no more nor less.” This frank response outrages Lear and prompts him to disinherit Cordelia entirely, dividing her portion of the kingdom between Regan and Goneril’s husbands. He declares that he will retain his title and retinue, but will convey all of his power to Cornwall and Albany and will live alternately in their homes. Kent tries to persuade him to reverse this rash action but only gains his own banishment.

Gloucester returns with the Duke of Burgundy and the King of France who respond to Cordelia’s actions in very different ways. Burgundy abandons the dowryless daughter, but France says: “She is herself a dowry,” and takes her back to France to be his wife. Left alone, Goneril and Regan voice concerns that their father is becoming senile and determine that they must take action soon or he may turn against them.

### Scene 2

Meanwhile, Edmund decides that he is tired of being a second-rate son and vows to unseat his legitimate half-brother, Edgar, from his role as inheritor. He initiates this plan by forging a letter from Edgar to himself, proposing that they murder their own father, to quicken their fortunes. He then allows Gloucester to find him reading the letter and tricks him into reading it himself. Initially, Gloucester does not believe that his son could have written such a thing, but with only a little manipulation by Edmund, he is decriing Edgar a villain and leaves Edmund with the charge: “Find out this villain.” Edmund has little work to do, as Edgar soon appears. With no knowledge of what has just

happened, he is confused when Edmund asks what he has done to offend their father. He says that he saw his father only a few hours earlier and parted with no harsh words, but Edmund insists that Gloucester is furious with Edgar and advises him to approach their father armed for protection.

### Scene 3

Goneril quickly grows tired of her father and his entourage and conspires to humiliate him by ordering her servant Oswald to treat Lear and his followers with disrespect. She expects that this will provoke him to flee to Regan, but tells Oswald that she will instruct her sister to receive him with the same treatment.

### Scenes 4 & 5

Kent, loyal to his king, disguises himself and joins Lear’s retinue at Goneril’s castle. When Oswald, under Goneril’s orders, disrespects the king, Kent comes to his defense. But he cannot protect Lear from his own Fool, who mocks him for relinquishing his power. Soon Goneril appears, reprimanding her father for his own conduct and that of his men, but Lear will take no blame for her anger and rails against her with the now famous line: “How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is/To have a thankless child.” In response, she demands that he reduce his men by half, but he refuses and declares that he will go to live with Regan, whom he is certain will be “kind and comfortable.” Albany protests his wife’s behavior but to no avail, as she sends Oswald with a letter to Regan, informing her of the approach to take with their father.

Lear, via Kent, also sends a letter to Regan and continues to be mocked by his own Fool for allowing himself to be so powerless against his own daughters.

## ⇨ ACT II

### Scene 1

Edmund’s scheme moves to its next phase when he intercepts Edgar and tells him that he will help him escape from their approaching father by pretending to engage him in battle. Edgar agrees; they draw on each other and stage a short fight which ends with Edmund chasing Edgar away. As Edgar leaves, Edmund wounds himself with his own sword so that as Gloucester enters, he can claim to have been assaulted by his brother for trying to interfere with the contrived murder plot. Gloucester accepts this explanation without question and condemns Edgar. He dispatches servants to find and kill his son and promises to make Edmund



his legal heir. Cornwall and Regan arrive, seeking Gloucester's advice about Lear, and in the process are impressed by Edmund's seemingly noble actions and take him into their service.

### Scenes 2 & 3

Outside Gloucester's castle, Kent and Oswald arrive, both bearing messages for Regan. Kent rails against Oswald until Gloucester, Edmund, Cornwall and Regan arrive. When asked what he has done to merit such a beating, Oswald claims innocence and tells of Kent's earlier attack on him in defense of Lear. Cornwall responds by having Kent placed in the stocks, even though Gloucester protests.

Edgar, having overheard a proclamation declaring him an outlaw decides that the only way to escape is to disguise himself as a wild-haired lunatic, Tom O' Bedlam.

### Scene 4

Lear, in search of Regan, arrives at Gloucester's castle to find Kent in the stocks. The king is incredulous when he learns that his own daughter and son-in-law are responsible for this "violent outrage" and is determined to speak with them immediately. They are slow in responding though, which only angers Lear further. When they do arrive, they free Kent, and Regan defends Goneril's actions against Lear, urging him to return to her and beg her forgiveness. Lear refuses and instead rebukes Goneril when she arrives. Regan and Goneril alternately offer to house Lear, but always with the condition that he decrease the number of his followers until at last, they have reduced him to nothing. Overcome with rage and grief, Lear



declares that he would rather live outside than be treated this way and goes out into the night where a storm is underway. The Fool alone follows him, and Regan and Cornwall bar the doors behind them.

## ❖ ACT 3

### Scenes 1 & 2

While traveling, Kent meets a gentleman who informs him that Lear is raging in the storm with only The Fool to help him. Kent asks the man to take this news to Cordelia who has arrived in England with a French army. Meanwhile, Lear raves madly in the storm and curses his daughters until Kent arrives and persuades him to seek out shelter in a nearby hovel.

### Scene 3

Gloucester laments to Edmund that Cornwall has forbidden him to give Lear shelter from the storm but says that he has just received a letter promising revenge for the king from Cordelia's French forces. He entreats Edmund not to reveal this information to Cornwall, as it would endanger his own life. Gloucester leaves to find Lear, but

the moment that he is gone, Edmund decides to hasten his own inheritance by telling Cornwall about Gloucester's plan.



### Scene 4

Lear, Kent and The Fool arrive at the hovel, but Lear sends The Fool inside alone, saying that he prefers the storm to the thoughts that he would have if he took shelter. His own situation forces him to, for the first time, consider the plight of the poor and homeless. Shortly, The Fool returns, frightened by a madman who is in the hovel. Edgar, disguised as Tom

O' Bedlam follows him out and rants about being pursued by a "foul fiend." Lear consoles him, assuming that he has also been wronged by his daughters, but Edgar contends that his persecution is for sins that he has committed. Gloucester arrives to offer them shelter and warns Kent that Goneril and Regan seek to kill the king.

### Scenes 5 & 6

As he vowed he would, Edmund reveals Gloucester's correspondence with the French army to Cornwall, who orders Gloucester's arrest.

Having settled Lear, Kent, The Fool and Edgar indoors, Gloucester leaves them. Lear, still raging, holds a mock trial of Goneril and Regan and eventually exhausted, falls asleep. Moments later, Gloucester returns warning that they must leave immediately because he has overheard a death plot against the king. He sends them towards Dover, where he assures them that they will be met with "both welcome and protection."

### Scene 7

Cornwall, Regan, Goneril and Edmund plot Gloucester's demise, but Cornwall sends Goneril and Edmund back to the Duke of Albany because "the revenges... are not fit for [their] beholding." As they leave, servants enter with Gloucester under arrest and bring him before Regan and Cornwall. The pair interrogates their captured host to find out where he sent the king and why. Gloucester tells them that Lear has gone to Dover and vows that he will see "vengeance overtake such children" as Regan and Goneril. Cornwall gouges out Gloucester's eyes, and when a servant tries to stop the attack, Cornwall kills him. The servant draws also though and is able to give Cornwall a fatal thrust before dying. Regan has the blinded Gloucester thrown out of the gates saying, "Let him smell his way to Dover."

## ❖ ACT 4

### Scenes 1 & 2

Edgar comes upon Gloucester on the road and is horrified by what has happened to his father. Realizing that he is still an outcast though, he resumes his guise of Tom O' Bedlam and at Gloucester's request agrees to lead him to the cliffs of Dover.

As Edmund and Goneril approach her home, they are met by Oswald who tells them that Albany knows of Cordelia's French invasion and welcomes it. He also knows about Edmund's betrayal of Gloucester and is disgusted by it. Hearing this, Goneril sends Edmund back to advise Cornwall to marshal an army to meet Cordelia's forces, but not before exchanging lovers' goodbyes. Goneril even suggests that given her husband's new position, he may meet with an untimely death. As Edmund leaves, Albany enters and berates Goneril for what he sees as her treacherous behavior; but she is unmoved and calls him a coward. A messenger arrives with the news of Cornwall's death and Gloucester's blinding, prompting Albany to vow revenge for the wounded Earl. Goneril, however has other concerns as she worries that Regan, now a widow, may be interested in Edmund as a lover.



### Scenes 3, 4 & 5

Cordelia learns that Lear has been spotted wandering, wearing a crown of weeds and orders soldiers to find him. A messenger informs her that armies from Cornwall and Albany are nearing.

Oswald arrives in Cornwall and tells Regan that Albany's army will fight against Cordelia's forces. The servant also carries a letter from Goneril to Edmund, which makes Regan jealous. She adds

to the letter a token of her own in hopes of winning Edmund for herself and tells Oswald that if he finds and kills Gloucester, she will reward him.

### Scene 6

Gloucester, bent on ending his suffering by jumping off the cliffs of Dover believes Edgar when he tells him that they have arrived at these same cliffs. Gloucester offers him his purse in thanks and sends him away, planning to leap off the cliff. Edgar, knowing that they are actually on flat ground steps only a few feet away and watches as his father falls forward into the dirt. Edgar then approaches Gloucester, pretending to be an onlooker at the bottom of the cliffs. He tells Gloucester that he has fallen from the top of the cliff but was miraculously preserved and Gloucester, believing him, decides to accept his blindness. Then a crazed Lear enters wearing wildflowers and raving about his ill-treatment. Gloucester recognizes his voice and listens sadly to Lear's levy of injustices done to him. Members of Cordelia's search party arrive to take him to their mistress. Oswald enters and according to Regan's instruction attacks Gloucester. Edgar intervenes though and kills Oswald, who with his last breath requests that Edgar deliver the letters that he carries for Edmund. Edgar reads the letter from Goneril to find that she wants Edmund to kill Albany, her husband, and marry her.

### Scene 7

Lear rests under a doctor's care in Cordelia's camp, but when he wakes, he does not recognize Cordelia. Thinking that he is dead, he mistakes her for a spirit and only gradually comes to realize who she really is. When he is certain that she is his daughter, he

tells her that he will drink whatever poison she offers, for she has cause to hate him. She however, tells him that she has no cause against him.

## ACT 5

### Scene 1

Increasingly jealous of Goneril, Regan grills Edmund about their relationship but is interrupted by Albany and Goneril's return. Edgar, still in disguise, also arrives and speaks to Albany alone, showing him the letter from Goneril to Edmund. Edgar tells him that if he wins the battle, he should call for Edgar as a challenger to prove the contents of the letter in combat. Alone, Edmund contemplates his situation, realizing that he must choose between Goneril and Regan and that while he needs Albany for the battle, he cannot tolerate the Duke's sympathy for Lear and Cordelia.

### Scene 2

Edgar leaves Gloucester resting as he goes to join in the fight but returns quickly with the news that Cordelia's forces have been overrun and she and Lear captured. Gloucester is at first reluctant to leave, saying that he will go no farther, but when Edgar reminds him of his vow to survive, he agrees to flee.

### Scene 3

Edmund sends Cordelia and Lear to prison, but Lear is happy to be with his daughter, regardless of the circumstances. Edmund gives the guard written orders for their deaths and promises great rewards if the task is completed exactly as instructed. Albany, Goneril and Regan arrive and Albany arrests Goneril and Edmund for treason. He pledges that a challenger will arrive soon to support the claim in combat. Regan, feeling suddenly sick, is taken to her tent. Edgar arrives to challenge Edmund and goes unrecognized in his battle armor. He and Edmund fight viciously until Edgar delivers a fatal blow. As Edmund lies dying, Albany pulls out Goneril's letter to her lover and gives it to Edmund. Distraught, Goneril leaves and Edmund confesses that the accusations are true. With this, Edgar reveals his true identity and says that only moments earlier he saw his father die from the shock of learning who he was. A frantic gentleman euters crying that Goneril has confessed to poisoning Regan and then killed herself with a knife. When Kent arrives asking for the king, Edmund, near death, discloses that he has ordered Lear's execution and arranged for Cordelia to be hanged in her own cell, so that it would appear that she committed suicide. Albany dispatches someone to stop the executions, but it is too late. Lear enters with a lifeless Cordelia in his arms and slips again into madness, unable to recognize Kent. As an agonizing Lear claims to see Cordelia draw breath, he himself dies in grief. Albany appoints Kent and Edgar to rule the remnants of Lear's kingdom with him, but Kent says that he too will soon follow Lear.

This leaves Edgar to contemplate all that has happened saying, "The oldest hath borne most, we that are youug/Shall never see so much, nor live so long."



# KING LEAR: + A CRITICAL + OVERVIEW

*A play in which the wicked prosper and the virtuous miscarry may doubtless be good, because it is a just representation of the common events of human life; but since all reasonable human beings naturally love justice, I cannot easily be persuaded that the observation of justice makes a play worse, or, that if other excellencies are equal, the audience will not always rise better pleased from the final triumph of persecuted virtue.*

—Samuel Johnson

*We wish that we could pass this play over and say nothing about it. All that we can say must fall far short of the subject, or even of what we ourselves conceive of it. . . . It is then the best of all Shakespeare's plays, for it is the one in which he was most in earnest. He was here fairly caught in the web of his own imagination.* —William Hazlitt

*Of all Shakespeare's plays Macbeth is the most rapid, Hamlet the slowest, in movement. Lear combines length with rapidity—like the hurricane and the whirlpool, absorbing while it advances. It begins like a stormy day in summer, with brightness; but that brightness is lurid, and anticipates the tempest.* —Samuel Taylor Coleridge

*The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual: the explosions of his passion are terrible as a volcano; they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom of the sea, his mind, with all its vast riches.* —Charles Lamb

*This is Shakespeare's vastest and most majestic drama. It is a vibrant, living thing, for it has been taken off the bookshelf and put on a stage where it belongs. The whole parable of the conflict between epic evil and futile good is set down in lyric magnificence and with theatrical power.* —John Chapman

*Even when a presentation of the play is less than completely satisfying, there is no doubt that it is a titanic masterpiece. The sheer monstrosity of the blind forces of evil in the world had surely never been dramatized so relentlessly. Everything in the play is on a giant scale and, while the Bard, who may have been prejudiced, saw youth as more cruel than age, he didn't leave the elders out when it came to sin and punishment. Lear paid the penalty for his blindness about Cordelia, and Gloucester certainly suffered for his thoughtlessness to Edmund. One thing is sure; this is one of the world's most fascinating plays.* —Richard Watts Jr.



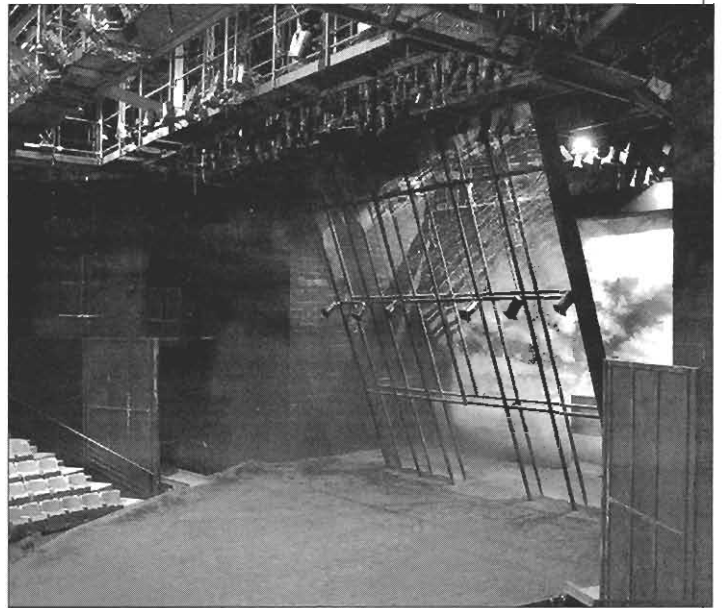
## ✦ SHOP TALK ✦

Six times a year the stage carpenters and scenic artists at The Rep transform the Loretto-Hilton Theatre into a new world, repainting the masonite decking to look like a brightly polished hardwood floor, a luxurious Persian rug or a weather beaten boardwalk and covering the thrust stage with a variety of materials ranging from carpet to Styrofoam lily pads to real water, but never before have they had a task quite like the one presented by this season's production of *King Lear*. For the first time, they will be piling dirt onto the stage rather than sweeping it off because the playing surface for Karen TenEyck's set design is exactly that: dirt.

For TenEyck and director Ed Stern, the primitive, tribal environment described by Shakespeare's play meant a raw, elemental world of fire, wind, water and earth. Stern speaks about the design concept and its role in the action of the play:

*The most difficult thing you have to decide early on as a director and then with the designers [is] "What's the world of the play?"... This is not a civilized world. This is a primal world. And so what you don't want is a kind of pretty-pictured Renaissance setting... The thing I knew all along—I needed a set which was comprised of dirt, that the floor had to be dirt. We have one chair in the entire production. It's the throne. There's no other chair in the entire production. If you want to sit down, I want people sitting in dirt. And a lot of people are seated in this production, and so they're part of the earth. This is a play about people wanting land and grabbing land, and so it seems to me, you've got to see that on the set. The Edmund/Edgar fight which is really down and dirty—two guys, one dagger—and they are physically tied by a rope one end to the other. So they can't get away from each other, and they're upstage when the fight starts and there's one dagger downstage. So it's pretty cruel stuff... I wanted something that was not two people with swords, very sort of polite, civilized—you would bite, scratch, claw, pull hair, whatever you need to get that dagger to kill the other person. So it is that. We never could have done this except on a dirt floor. When we rehearsed downstairs, they (the actors) were black and blue, even with pads. It had to be on a dirt floor.*

So, when audiences enter the theatre for *King Lear*, they'll find about 17 tons of dirt on The Rep's stage. It's anywhere from two to four inches thick weighing in at approximately 100 pounds per cubic foot. For comparison, it would be easier, and significantly lighter, simply to cover the stage with two to four



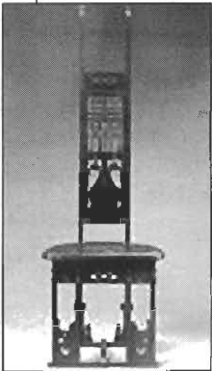
At left: A resource for the throne

Top: A massive steel structure rests on the dirt playing area.

Above and right: Backdrops used to create the timelessness of the set



inches of water. To achieve the precise look and feeling wanted for the play, the technical staff couldn't use just any dirt though. The type used for *King Lear* is super soil that has been shredded and grated to remove major impurities, such as rocks or sticks that could hurt the actors in the play. Then it was specially treated to create its dark black color and sterilized for safety. Because shredded mushrooms help contribute to the soil's dark color, the stage will have to be sprayed with Lysol nightly to prevent the growth of new mushrooms. As director Ed Stern says: "It's the cleanest dirt you'll ever see in your life."



## READ MORE ABOUT IT

We encourage you to examine these topics in-depth by exploring the following books, Web sites and videos.

*The History of King Lear* [adapted from Shakespeare by] Nahum Tate; edited by James Black. University of Nebraska Press, 1975. Nahum Tate's 1681 Disney-esque version of Shakespeare's *Lear*, this play alters the plot to allow Lear to regain his throne at the end and brings the "good" children, Cordelia and Edgar, together in marriage.

*Ian Pallock's Illustrated King Lear: Complete and Unabridged* by Ian Pallock. Workman Publishing, 1984. For a lighter approach to *Lear*, read this fully illustrated comic book style version with the complete text of the play.

*A Thousand Acres* by Jane Smiley. Knopf; distributed by Random House, 1991. A contemporary retelling of the *Lear* story, this modern classic shifts the scene to mid-America where an aging farmer, Larry Cook, decides to divide his 1,000 acre "kingdom" among his three daughters, Ginny, Rose, and Caroline.

[http://www.cc.emory.edu/ENGLISH/classes/shakespeare\\_Illustrated/Shakespeare.html](http://www.cc.emory.edu/ENGLISH/classes/shakespeare_Illustrated/Shakespeare.html)  
To see how artists through the centuries have portrayed *Lear*, and several other Shakespearean works, browse the galleries of this unique site.

[www.folger.edu/education/getarchive.cfm](http://www.folger.edu/education/getarchive.cfm)  
This is an excellent site for teachers, offering a number of lesson plans specific to *Lear* as well as several general introductions to Shakespeare.

<http://www.netexplor.com/kinglear>  
Visit this extensive site dedicated strictly to *Lear* for an on-line quiz, a variety of links or to participate in the discussion forum.

*King Lear* [videorecording] based on the play by William Shakespeare, directed by Richard Eyre BBC/WGBH Boston/Anchor Bay Entertainment, 1998. A critically acclaimed BBC production, this film version of *Lear* stars Ian Holm as the deposed king.

*Ran* [videorecording] by Akira Kurosawa. Greenwich Film Production; Herald Ace Inc.; Nippon Herald Films. Fox Lorber Home Video, 1997. A classic adaptation by a classic filmmaker, this version of *Lear* is set in 16th century Japan, where an aging ruler attempts to divide his kingdom among his three sons, rather than three daughters.

# BIO AND BEYOND

As prolific as William Shakespeare was during his own lifetime and as renowned as he is today, we have remarkably few facts about the details of his existence. We do know that he was born in Stratford-on-Avon, Warwickshire in late April of 1564. Public records indicate that he was baptized on April 25th, but his birthday is typically celebrated on April 23rd, which is also the date of his death 52 years later. His father, John, was a successful tradesman and became Chief Alderman of the town in 1571. The extent and quality of William's early education varies from source to source, but the general consensus is that he attended the Stratford Grammar School. There he is believed to have studied primarily Latin literature, in Latin until he was fifteen. Most likely, at this point, he took a job to help alleviate some of his father's financial pressures. Since he had no further formal education, some critics find it difficult to accept that Shakespeare could write with the level of sophistication and extensive knowledge that his works clearly exhibit. However, supporters argue that the Latin training that he received at the Stratford Grammar School would have been equal to that of most contemporary British universities. Although there is no conclusive evidence, it also commonly thought that much of his knowledge may have grown out of first hand experience in a variety of jobs, including assistant school master, law clerk, gardener and assistant to his father.

The next known milestone in his life is his 1582 marriage to Anne Hathaway who was eight years his senior. Only six months later, their first child, Susanna was born and twins Hamnet and Judith followed in 1585. Outside of this, little is known of Shakespeare's activities or whereabouts until 1592. Rumors abound though with one of the most interesting theories being that Shakespeare was caught poaching by Sir Thomas Lucy, a local nobleman, and forced to flee to London. Another story that grew out of the 17th century reported that

he was a butcher during these years because there was evidence that he was known to "kill a calf." However, this deduction was based on a misinterpretation of the phrase "kill a calf," which in Elizabethan slang referred to a comedy routine. What this confused anecdote does reveal is that at some point during the "dark years," Shakespeare entered the theatre. While there were touring companies that visited Stratford at the time, it was not standard practice for them to hire members on the road, so Shakespeare probably had to move to London to start his career.

The exact timetable of events is unclear, but he was at least known in London by 1592, when playwright Robert Greene called him an "upstart crow." In addition, he had written *3 Henry VI* at this point because Greene quotes from it in his writings. It is also thought that *The Comedy of Errors*, *Titus Andronicus*, the remaining *Henry VI* plays, *Richard III* and *The Taming of the Shrew* were written in these early years. The earliest definite proof of his career as an actor is a 1594 document which lists him as a principal member of the acting company, the Chamberlain's Men. In his first few years with this troupe, he is credited with writing *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II* and *King John*. His productivity continued for the next 15 years, with *King Lear* most likely being written in 1604 or 1605. He spent his last few years in his birthplace, Stratford, and by the time of his death in 1616, he had written nearly 40 plays, 154 sonnets and two narrative poems.

The popularity of his plays—on the stage and in the library—has not only continued through the centuries, but seems to have actually increased in recent decades. The success of films such as *Chuelless*, *Shakespeare in Love*, *10 Things I Hate About You* and the newly released *O*, testify to the fact that Shakespeare is undeniably "hip." This only confirms Ben Jonson's now famous assessment of the bard: "He was not of an age, but for all time."



These questions and activities are designed to help students anticipate the performance and then to build on their impressions and interpretations after attending the theatre. The activities and questions are divided into “**Before the Performance**” and “**After the Performance**” categories. While most of the exercises provide specific instructions, please feel free to adapt these activities to accommodate your own teaching strategies and curricular needs. To assist you in incorporating these materials into your existing curriculum, we have provided the numbers of some of the corresponding Missouri Knowledge Standards and Illinois Learning Standards.

## COMMUNICATION ARTS

### Before the Performance

**1** The full title of the play, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, automatically signals the sort of action that an audience can expect, but the term tragedy is used to cover a wide variety of literature. To gain a better understanding of how it applies specifically to Shakespeare’s writing, you will need to explore several different sources. The first critic to address tragedy as a genre was Aristotle in his fourth century BC, *Poetics*. In this work, he introduced the following ideas which are considered by many to be the essential elements of tragedy: hamartia (error), catharsis (purging), mimesis (imitation), and the more recognizable fear and pity. A later philosopher, Seneca, was also recognized for his theories on tragedy, and Shakespeare’s works relied heavily on concepts from both of these tragic forms. Work with a partner to research both Aristotle and Seneca’s thoughts on the nature of tragedy and outline for yourselves the basic principles of each school of thought. Then save this outline for later use.

(MO: CA1, CA2, CA3, CA4, CA5, FA2, FA3, FA5  
IL: 1, 2, 3, 5, 25, 27)

**2** Most of us at one point or another have probably either said or at least heard the complaint: “My parents just don’t understand!”, and the idea of a generation gap that inevitably separates children from their parents is a common one. Is this simply a natural part of family interaction, or is it something that can be resolved? Think about your own experiences. Then talk to one or both of your parents about their relationship with their parents. Try to



determine whether or not there are any common issues or themes that were particularly difficult or easy in both generations. Share your findings with your classmates.  
(MO: CA1, CA4, CA5, CA6, CA7, SS6 IL: 1, 3, 4, 5, 18)

**3** People are sometimes intimidated by the language of Shakespeare when they are first exposed to it because it may seem foreign and outdated. However, much of the confusion comes not from the words themselves, but from their order. Our ears and brains are accustomed to hearing certain word orders, and when those orders are broken, it takes us a little bit longer to process what is being said. For example, take the sentence: “How far your eyes may pierce I cannot tell.” This may sound odd to you at first because the subject is at the end of the sentence and we more typically place it at the beginning. If we rearrange the word order, the sentence will be much more familiar: I cannot tell how far your eyes may pierce. In time your brain will start to do this automatically as you listen to or read Shakespeare’s works. To give yourself some practice, change the word order of the following sentences in as many ways as you can, without changing the original meaning.



*Talk this way also Yoda does.*

1. It is sunny and warm today.
2. I have a kind and generous brother.
3. We wish that you could stay longer.
4. I have not finished my breakfast yet.
5. She will not move from that spot.

(MO: CA1, CA2, CA4, CA7, FA1, SS2 IL: 1, 2, 4, 5, 25, 27)



# FINE ARTS

## Before the Performance

**1** Read “Shop Talk” on page 7 of your study guide. Notice that scenic designer Karen TenEyck and director Edward Stern have chosen to make the setting for this production “timeless.” Why do you think this is a significant choice? If you had the opportunity to create your own setting for the play, when and where would you stage it? When making your choice, look at the universal elements of the play rather than focusing on the fact that Shakespeare wrote during the Renaissance. For example, Lear is a once powerful ruler with three daughters who stand to inherit that power. This scenario could be played out anywhere, anytime. Once you have determined what your “world” will be, create a visual representation of that world by making a collage, rendering or set model. Then present your design to the class, explaining why you made the choices that you did.

(MO: FA 1, FA2, FA3, FA5, CA1, CA2, CA5, CA6, SS2, SS6  
IL: 1, 2, 4, 16, 18, 25, 26, 27)

## After the Performance

**2** In *King Lear*, there is no portrayal of Regan, Goneril and Cordelia’s mother. Why do you think this is the case? Shakespeare made other alterations in the original story, so why did he not also add a mother figure? Based on the production that you saw at The Rep, how do you think the action and message of the play might have been different if a mother character had been included? Take the rare opportunity to rewrite Shakespeare and create your own

version of the tale by adding a mother to this dysfunctional family. When you have completed your rewrite, exchange with your classmates. (MO: FA1, FA2, FA4, CA1, CA2, CA4, CA5, CA6 IL: 1, 3, 4, 5, 25, 26, 27)

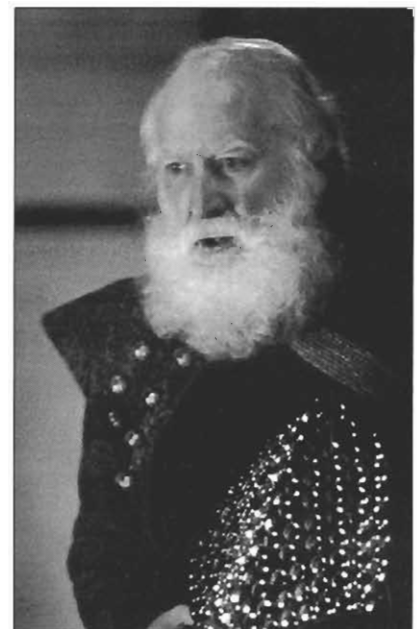


**3** Director Edward Stern made a choice in the staging of *King Lear* that is not typical of most productions. If you are familiar with the text of the play, you will know that after Act III, The Fool disappears, with no real explanation of what happens; he simply does not appear again. However, in The Rep’s production, you will notice that Lear kills The Fool. While this is not directly stated in the text, it is a solution devised by the director to remedy what he saw as an unanswered question. What do you think is the impact of this directorial choice? Would you make the same choice or would you explain The Fool’s disappearance differently? Find a partner and assign yourselves pro and con standpoints on this question. Then take turns with your classmates debating the

issue. Be sure that your argument is grounded in logic, not emotion. (MO: FA1, FA2, FA3, CA1, CA2, CA5, CA6  
IL: 1, 2, 4, 5, 26, 27)



**4** We gather a great deal of information about people based on the way that they dress. Throughout the course of the play, Lear undergoes a significant change in character. In addition, Edgar takes on an alternate identity. How are these actions reflected in their clothing? Track the emotional evolution of these two characters through Susan Tsu’s costume designs for them. For every significant change of status that each of these characters undergoes, try to recall what he was wearing and how that helped to indicate his development or decline. (MO: FA1, FA2, FA3, FA4, CA2, CA5  
IL: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 25, 26, 27)



# SOCIAL STUDIES

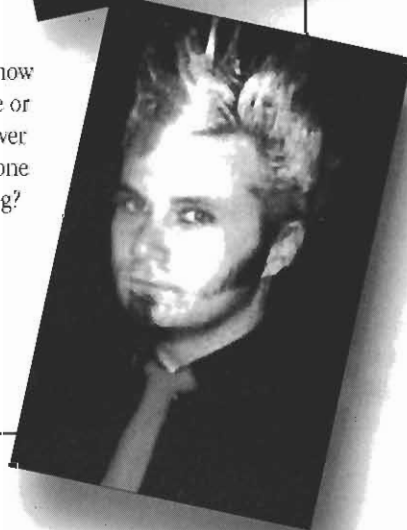
## Before the Performance

**1** In this culture, one of the first questions that people ask when meeting one another is “What do you do?”, meaning “What is your job?” We, as a society, often allow our jobs or vocations to define who we are and how we behave. For example, as small children, we grow up thinking of fire fighters and police officers as heroes, even though we may never have met anyone in these jobs. We allow their professions to shape our perceptions of who they are as people. When is it to our benefit to identify ourselves and others by profession, and when is it a problem to do so? Does your job as a student define who you are? If not, who are you: a son, a daughter, a singer, a dancer, an athlete or someone else? How do you determine who you are? Respond to one or more of these questions in a journal entry of at least three hundred words. Then watch the characters in *King Lear* to see how their jobs or positions affect who they are. (MO: SS2, SS6, CA1, CA4, CA7 IL: 1, 3, 4, 5, 18, 26)

**3** The Old Testament concept of “honoring your father and mother” is a familiar one to most people, regardless of religious belief or background, but what exactly it means is more challenging. How do you think a person can or should honor his or her parents? Why do you think this is an important idea? Does this directive apply to adult children as well as young people? Gather your thoughts on this topic into a “how to” pamphlet for children, explaining the essential steps of honoring your parents. Like any good “do it yourself” guide, your pamphlet should give clear, specific instructions and explain why each step is necessary. Your booklet should be typed and may include graphics if you choose. When the project is complete, exchange guides with your classmates and compare opinions. (MO: SS2, SS3, SS6, CA1, CA3, CA4, CA6, CA7 IL: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 18)

**2** Clothing and appearance play a major role in this society and in many others. We “dress up” for special occasions such as proms, weddings and funerals and enjoy disguising ourselves for Halloween or for plays. It is fun, for a little while, to pretend to be someone else. Nonetheless, we probably all know that clothes cannot really determine or change who a person is. Have you ever made a false judgment about someone based on what he or she was wearing? How can appearances be deceiving? Discuss these ideas in a group of no more than five classmates.

(MO: SS2, SS6, CA1, CA5, CA6 IL: 1, 4, 5, 18)



## After the Performance

**4** Although the focus of The Rep’s production of *King Lear* is on the domestic struggles of Lear and Gloucester, there is certainly an element of political strife as well, which manifests itself in a battle for ultimate power. Think about the production that you saw and use “What’s the Story” to help you track the shift in power from one scene to the next. For each scene, determine who is in control, who wants to be in control and what they each do to get what they want. (MO: SS2, SS3, SS6, CA1, CA2, CA5 IL: 1, 2, 4, 5, 14, 16, 18, 26)