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# Accessible Lear: Teaching King Lear to Secondary-Education Students

Rachel McKenny  
*Iowa State University*

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**Accessible Lear: Teaching *King Lear* to secondary-education students**

by

**Rachel Elise McKenny**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS**

Major: English (Literature)

Program of Study Committee:  
Linda Shenk, Co-major Professor  
Susan Yager, Co-major Professor  
Amy Slagell

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Shakespeare in the Middle-School Classroom**

In 2010, the US Department of Education and President Barack Obama released the “Blueprint for Reform,” clearly defining weaknesses in the elementary and secondary education of American children. Its key priorities focused on raising standards for all students: creating better assessments and providing a complete education to help students “contribute in our democracy and thrive in a global economy” (US Department of Education 4). All these goals point toward the creation of college and career-ready students. Besides emphasizing the goals set forward in this study we as educators have many less easily measured criteria for success. We expect students, for example, to read and understand great books, to analyze, and to problem-solve in these books; however, some of these great texts, like William Shakespeare’s plays, have been removed from the middle-school classroom. Using standardized test results alone, we “know what we are,” as Shakespeare wrote in *Hamlet*, but “we know not what we may be” (4.5.43-44). Shakespeare’s plays provide ideal texts to challenge our students—of all ages—and to help them develop skills necessary to compete successfully, as the Department of Education expresses, in the global community.

My goal in this thesis is to create lesson plans and practical ideas for the inclusion of Shakespeare in the classroom, a guide for any teacher to support student learning with these texts. Shakespeare’s plays have always been foundational to the US educational system, yet now many middle-school teachers question whether the material is too far above, or too far removed, from their students to make the impact that more modern

literature can. Mike Roberts, one of the editors of the influential journal of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), summarizes this common opinion in his “letter” to Shakespeare begging him to “stay out of his classroom.” The lessons, the language: it’s all not at a middle-school level. “Simply put,” he writes, “I think there needs to be a stage (no pun intended) somewhere between the chapter books read in elementary school and the more complicated high school targeted plots contained within your plays” (“Dear Mr. Shakespeare” 103). Respectfully, I must disagree. I contend that Shakespeare’s lessons, and the lessons learned in the act of reading and performing Shakespeare, still provide an unbeatable preparation for life-long learning.

Some afterschool programs or touring theater organizations have bravely stepped forward to preserve the tradition of instructing children and young adults in the enjoyment and learning that can come from Shakespeare’s work. In the summer of 2011 I worked with the Nebraska Shakespeare’s summer education program, which uses full texts from Shakespeare to spark creativity and growth in children as young as five. Beyond the summer, the festival’s touring and teaching company was designed in alignment with the Nebraska educational benchmarks and, for five years running, has brought plays to urban and rural sections of Nebraska. In the 2011 season, however, director Sarah Carlson Brown noted a disturbing trend of being turned away from some educational institutions for seventh- and eighth-grade students because these plays are looked upon as “out of the reach of the students” (Brown n.pag). Ideally, Shakespeare should not be a special event, but a natural incorporation into the school day with the literature teacher.

In all classrooms, students must learn these skills to fall in line with national and state regulations. As of April 2012, all but five states have adopted the Common Core Standards, developed by the Council of Chief State School Offices and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices to prepare students more adequately for college and work environments based on worldwide research on student success (“Introduction” 1). All the lessons which follow build toward the reading, writing and communication goals laid forth by those standards. Shakespeare’s texts can be valuable in teaching the testable and intangible skills our society expects of middle school students. Students will learn to more deeply engage with any future text they might encounter by dissecting the plots and motivations of the characters, finding literary devices, even performing Shakespeare’s plays.

### **Methodology**

In each chapter, I will provide lesson plans and strategies to introduce Shakespeare in the middle school classroom to help students gain skills necessary to prepare them for the high school classroom and beyond. All the lessons which follow, of course, could be adapted for the high school classroom, but, in writing them with middle-schoolers in mind I hope to open the door to a new generation of students to *King Lear*, one of Shakespeare’s most famous tragedies. Rather than supplanting use of modern texts, a teacher can work Shakespeare as a pairing with newer books to help students learn vocabulary, literary devices, and writing skills. The lesson plans can, however, be taken singly or together, depending on how much time a teacher decides to spend on a Shakespeare unit. With only one day, for instance, a teacher might choose a lesson on

introducing language or performance. If studying the entire play, the lessons together support development of vocabulary, writing, reading, and oral presentation skills.

### *Description of Chapters*

The first chapter tackles the problem of how to introduce students to Shakespeare. Often students can be intimidated by the strange format and strange language in his plays. By using four mini-lessons, teachers can help any student can feel that the plays are not only approachable and understandable, but also fun. In facing head-on the challenges of an apathetic or nervous classroom with an exercise like an altered version of Rex Gibson's "Shakespearean Insults," for instance, any teacher will find a classroom more open to further study of the plays. While some may include examples from *King Lear*, these introductory lessons can be used by any teacher interested in including material from Shakespeare's plays or sonnets.

The second chapter treats how best to teach the rich language of Shakespeare to this age group. Within *King Lear* the rhetorical and literary devices, along with the complex and sometimes strange vocabulary, can place a wall between ignorance and comprehension for students. Students will learn language through performance of the first scene of the play, learning to become more comfortable with the phrasing as well as working to understand the character relationships. Further peering into all possible avenues for a diverse classroom experience, I will discuss how a nontraditional edition of a text, such as an uncondensed text of *King Lear* in comic book format, can assist modern students. Finally, students will learn by in-depth analysis of Shakespeare's animal



metaphors. In the production of letters including metaphors, students can explore their own creative voices while examining the examples Shakespeare has provided.

The third chapter contains a discussion of how to present *King Lear*'s themes to the students in interactive ways that will best connect with them. These sections contain natural places for writing-based exploration of Shakespeare's work, including opportunities for journaling and composing small essays. Writing skills, as one of the primary goals of the Common Core Standards, fit naturally into the space of the literature classroom in which Shakespeare is present. This chapter will discuss students writing journal entries in literature circles to help refine those skills. In viewing the ideas of madness, blindness, and fate, students can learn not just how to identify motifs and themes but also to see how these elements shape the play.

### *Generating Student Interest through Performance*

In all of the chapters, I offer strategies that take reading for comprehension beyond the page by introducing performance. Through my work with the Nebraska Shakespeare Festival I began to realize how to make these plays more accessible to students. Unlike the novels and poems that fill the middle school curriculum, Shakespeare's plays are performance pieces, and through reading and acting his words, students can learn in ways they never thought possible. One of the greatest outcomes that can come from performance is enjoyment of the text in a new way. For students to fall in love with reading, they must believe reading can be fun. One can talk about the text coming alive, but nowhere is this occurrence truer than in having the students read and embody the characters. As an actor and director myself, I am comfortable with the stage

and with teaching performance to assist those whose specialties (understandably) lay elsewhere. The performance techniques presented in the chapters for each play are ones any teacher can implement without fear.

## **Literature Review**

### *Shakespearean Educators*

As William Shakespeare's plays are typically introduced during high school, few practical guides exist for how to incorporate his work into the middle-school classroom. Maurice Gilmour as well as editors Lesley Aers and Nigel Wheale each made great progress in the 1990s in Great Britain working with students as young as first grade. Some programs they implemented used actors from the Royal Shakespeare Company, as well as other organizations to teach teachers new strategies. Similarly, Cambridge University's Dr. Rex Gibson entered Great Britain's educational system to mentor school systems on how to present Shakespeare to younger audiences. He focused especially on performance techniques and language. Finally, John Haddon in his language-focused guide *Teaching Reading Shakespeare* pushes toward a higher understanding of how students learn to read the language of these plays, including focus on long speeches, rhetorical devices, and some performance methods.

Though these British authors provide clear insights into education of younger students, American schools have their own hurdles and requirements. These authors, though extremely useful for perspective and ideas, do not address those particular challenges. In the United States, Mary Ellen Dakin presents lesson plans for the classroom, especially centered on writing and language analysis, but her research focuses

on high school students. Many teachers such as Danielle Bottinger, Ellen O'Brien, Claudia Felske, and Michael Milburn demonstrate some of the practicality of using Shakespearean plays in classrooms, including performance methods, vocabulary building, and journaling.

My work expands on the work of these educators, taking some of the tools that they provide and improving on them for use in a middle school classroom with *King Lear*. The lesson plans provided in the appendix contain variations of some of these educators. For instance, the "Insult Exercise" is a variation of a classic Gibson exercise, with an added visual element to help students learn. Many of the ideas for a "literature circle" exercise for better understanding come from ideas of Dakin. I have also devised many original lesson plans tailored specifically to meet the Common Core Standards, aid in performance and staging, and teach visual analysis.

### *Pedagogical Influences*

Middle-school pedagogy sets itself apart from that of all other age groups, and in this field I looked to a few primary authors teaching strategies geared toward middle school students. The first major pedagogical text I examined was Nancie Atwell's *In the Middle*, a popular, student-centered guide to an interactive classroom environment. In Atwell's classroom, the students decide what books to read and what vocabulary lists they should personally work on. In her classroom, journaling is a conversation between a student and teacher, and creating life-long readers is the goal. Atwell's idea of mini-lessons for structuring student learning is especially central to the "Meeting Shakespeare"

chapter, and her forward-thinking practical approaches to learning provide a new window into the possibilities available to middle-school teachers.

From a critical point of view, Kathy Latrobe and Judy Drury study how middle-school students learn in their book *Critical Approaches to Young Adult Literature*. By examining not only the psychological and developmental stages of development, but also ways to incorporate literary theory into the classroom, Latrobe and Drury lead the way in expecting a new generation of readers to flourish with a wider range of more challenging material. While not directly discussing Shakespeare's plays, the authors teach through such nontraditional formats as graphic novels, which I also employ in lesson plans. Similarly, Sarah Herz and Donald Gallo have published a unique guide that helps teachers mesh modern and non-modern young adult texts, by theme, subject, and genre. This book, *From Hinton to Hamlet*, creates a teacher's guide to pushing students with reading suggestions based on interests they may already have. Alternatively, this book allows teachers to easily link texts they may already use in the classroom with classical "tie-ins" such as Shakespeare. For instance, the authors suggest that due to the themes of alienation in Jerry Spinelli's *Star Girl*, *King Lear* might make a nice counterpoint to study next.

In designing plans for the middle school teacher, I strive to create somewhat of a conversation between scholars and teachers with a pragmatic focus. In preparation for writing this thesis I composed a panel of five middle-school teachers to survey. The teachers came from across the state, in both rural and urban communities. The survey contained questions on structuring class time, preference of text, use of common techniques like journaling, and others which tried to sense the goals in a diverse Iowa

classroom. While their voices do not appear throughout this document, by addressing their concerns and comments throughout the thesis, I demonstrate that students can succeed with these texts in building comprehension, engagement with the material, and a skill-set that can be taken with them to future tasks. My thesis provides practical lesson plans and information for seventh- and eighth-grade teachers, whether they have taught Shakespeare before or not, to help their students become “what they may be.”

### **Why Teach *King Lear*?**

Considered a “turning point” for young adult literature (YAL) in 1967, *The Outsiders* started a trend bringing more relevant social issues to a younger group. As former teachers and young adult literature critics Sarah Hertz and Don Gallo write, “Authors began to change the focus of YAL as more novels addressed the realities of teenage life and offered readers an honest view of the main characters’ hopes, fears, and dilemmas” (10). Young adults connect with these stories because of the hard-hitting impact of the narratives. Increasingly, contemporary books include plot elements of bullying, drugs, and sex—real issues middle- and high-school students experience in this age. The past fifteen years have brought these concepts even more to the forefront, even as Shakespeare has been steadily removed from the middle-school classroom. *King Lear* is one of the most popular of William Shakespeare’s dramas, though some teachers profess that the complex character relationships, difficult language, and stretches of “madness” can make the play an ordeal for students first encountering it.

Some of the most popular books recommended to eighth grade students in recent years have been *The Hunger Games*, *The Book Thief*, the *Harry Potter* series, and *The*

*Outsiders*. These four books all were on the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) website's Top Ten lists for their particular publication year, and all have topped the charts for copies checked out of libraries to young adults in the United States (YALSA n.pag.). Middle school teachers around the country have used these books and as recommended reading to their students because the narratives include tough issues like death, love, and family conflict.

These books, however, can work cooperatively with Shakespearean works like *King Lear*, whose characters struggle with these same themes. This play begins with the titular king deciding how best to divide his land between his three daughters. Lear proposes that each daughter, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia, have a chance to express how much they love him in order to help with his decision. While Goneril and Regan, the older sisters, play along with this request in flowery verse, Cordelia refuses to overstate her love, loses her dowry, and is banished to France with her new husband. Shakespeare writes a second pair of fathers and children in family crisis in this play, with the king's advisor Gloucester in the father role. Through clever tricks against Gloucester's own vanity, his legitimate son Edgar is undermined by the bastard Edmund. The play closely follows the political and social outcomes of family betrayal, ending in tragedy for all sides. Though in the end, Cordelia and Lear come to reconcile, he has gone mad in exile from his elder daughters' houses and tragedy is inevitable.

Why *King Lear* as opposed to all the other possible Shakespearean plays? Many choices exist for the teacher who intends to teach a Shakespeare play, and *King Lear* is not often considered because of its use of older characters, violence, and dark themes. My choice of *King Lear* might then seem a strange one for a class of thirteen- and

fourteen-year-olds, far removed from adult experiences. Still, age-old choices like *Romeo and Juliet* have had their day, and students can even tune out the familiar call of the love-lorn boy to his lady in the balcony. Likewise, though *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has charm and promise, so many lesson plans exist that little new ground remains to be discovered. Unfortunately, Cliffs Notes, whose study tools have become book replacements, recently even produced an animated version of this. "I love you but I really hate you sometimes!" screams Oberon eloquently. This 2011 web video also includes the words "crushing on," "barf," and numerous wacky sound effects. While humor can be a great way to get through to students, the bug-eyed animations are a poor substitute for the play. Cliffs Notes advertises that its videos allow students to "leave with basic knowledge of the plots, themes, characters, and the confidence to pass the test" (Cambio Videos n.pag.). Trivia will not help students in their lives and careers, but skills based on reading and interpretation will be a lifelong help to students, helping them gain confidence not just to pass the test, but to succeed in their future careers whatever they may have.

All too often, *King Lear* proves to be King Kong to many teachers and students: an out-of-control beast let loose in an otherwise-orderly classroom. Mayhem can ensue when students first confront the complex material. The language of the play can seem thorny, the characters petty and hard to empathize with, and the plot, violent. Robert H. Ray, along with other scholars, notes that *King Lear* can be a struggle for even college students to learn, since much of the pathos involved comes from the plight of an old man, and it can be hard "to comprehend fully the obligations of youth to age" (35). Themes of

aging and madness can feel removed from the ear-budded students in a classroom, most of whom worry about acne, not wrinkles.

A bit of mayhem can work to a teacher's advantage, however, bringing in the edgy themes that young adults prefer while expanding their skills of reading and understanding. Despite the aforementioned challenges, *King Lear* provides an excellent teaching text to instruct students as young as middle school in methods of reading, writing, and understanding a text to develop a rhetorical consciousness. Shakespeare allows students to perform and act out the issues in the text and to live the language. All students, regardless of ability, can find success when working in a classroom community striving to understand the text together. In the spring of 2012 I was able to work with a diverse cross-section of at-risk youth at the Youth Emergency Shelter & Services in Des Moines, Iowa. Partnering with the Iowa Shakespeare Experience, I worked with two classrooms of 6-12<sup>th</sup> graders on reading, performing, and understanding *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Though many of the students had heard of Shakespeare, through using many of the lessons provided in this guide, a class of diverse cultural, economical, and educational backgrounds found ways to connect to the language, themes, and characters of the play.

One key to using Shakespeare successfully, according to Gibson, is to take a "learner-centered" approach. He writes, "The Shakespeare teacher's task is to enable students to develop a genuine sense of ownership of the play" (9). Making the text relevant to the students will make them more excited to step outside of their normal reading habits to try Shakespeare. The ways to make this play more learner-centered



come through three key elements: the larger inclusion of edgy, brave female characters, the use of family themes and the play's inherent action and violence.

*Early Modern Complications: Women in Young Adult Literature (YAL)*

While before the 1980s, readers grasped onto the few and far between Nancy Drew-like characters of Young Adult Literature (YLA), modern teen books typically include more female characters than classic literature and give them more crucial roles. For instance, Ginny and Hermione in the J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series have inspired boys and girls alike to embrace their strengths and find what makes them happy. *The Hunger Games* has not only a "gripping storyline and action-filled plot," writes Mike Roberts, the anti-Shakespearean editor of *English Journal*, but also "uses a strong female protagonist to present a wide range of challenges, including physical, emotional, and mental battles" ("Acid-washed Jeans" 103). Katniss, the protagonist of that novel, struggles with not only love, but also war. Similarly, Liesel Meminger, the protagonist of *The Book Thief*, makes tough choices which affect her family and her community, and in her dilemmas, adolescent girls see themselves dealing with death and love, family and friendship. In her never-quite-fulfilled romance with the boy-next-door Rudy Steiner, all readers feel the ache of loss in her discovery of his corpse after an Allied bombing of Munich. All of these young women provide realistic models of the concerns of young adults, though on a dramatized scale.

In my own examination of the often-taught plays, I noted that more substantial female roles exist in *King Lear* than any other Shakespearean tragedy. By number of female characters, the traditionally taught *Romeo and Juliet* trumps this play by one, but

there is a far greater amount of speech by women in *King Lear*. *Macbeth*, another possible choice, contains one strong queen and then the minor characters of Hecate, a gentlewoman, and a seemingly endless supply of witches. Of course, the male characters still dwarf the women many times over for sheer number of lines in that play. The power balance in *King Lear*, on the other hand, includes three strong female characters, which allows a mixed-gender class more discussion points for questions about gender that come up when discussing any text. As Latrobe and Drury point out in their discussion on teaching about feminism using YAL, “Young people are not passive receptacles of everything they see or hear, and they appreciate when adults recognize their abilities” (187). We do not have to pretend with our students that gender inequality did/does not exist. Rather, by discussing character issues openly in the classroom, the students examine gender in the play as a jumping board to discussions of real life experiences.

Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia are forceful characters and they create an interesting space in the classroom to talk about the meaning of power, and of gender, in the play. While Goneril and Regan appear to be maniacal, an advanced class can have a discussion on whether different things are expected from women than from men, even when they hold similar positions of power. It may be easy to demonize the two older sisters as “monsters,” but literary critic Cristina León Alfar postulates that Goneril and Regan only follow the example provided to them by the “cultural and political notions of kingship” (80). They, like the jealous Lear, cast out anything that might threaten their rule.

Quite different from her sisters, Cordelia will attract students through many of the same characteristics of honesty, toughness, and insecurity that Katniss and Liesel demonstrate. Cordelia is not shy about stating her mind, she takes decisive action, and

she helps lead France against her own kingdom in the search for justice. According to a famous 1974 article by G. Robert Carlsen, one of the first to study young adults' reading habits, middle-school students usually fall into two of the five stages of reading: either living vicariously through action or fantasy or seeing themselves in the characters. Carlsen postulates that junior high students are more egocentric, focusing on their personal and social lives; at this age readers want to see themselves in the characters (cited in Herz and Gallo 18). Cordelia's underdog struggle through fantastic odds (ultimately ending in tragedy) connects to both stages. Students might live vicariously through either Cordelia or France in their attempt to take down the tyranny of the sisters' reign, or might fantasize about the fairy tale existence that has been shattered in their wake.

#### *Family Themes: Rivalry, Revenge, and Justice*

The relationship of fathers to daughters is only one of the many complex family themes in the play. Just as Carlsen points out, students in middle school are especially conscious of analyzing relationships in their own lives and those around them (cited in Herz and Gallo 18). A possible first day activity is to take the character list from the front of the edition and mapping these relationships on a big piece of poster board. Drawing lines of connection for different relationships in different colors, students can picture those lines connecting, disconnecting, and reconnecting throughout the play and can feel comfortable with what might seem like strange British names. In order to introduce the complex family relationship, teachers might choose to hand out a short questionnaire which makes students consider what they believe is fair. In a 2001 study of

pre-adolescents published in the *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, researchers found that children form their ideas about unfair rewards and unfair punishments relatively early and that many of the situations used to form those concepts revolve around events at home. Many of the stories that the children shared with the researchers included feelings that other siblings were receiving preferential treatment. The researchers summarized,

Although parents typically report that they make a special effort to ensure that they treat their children equally, it is likely that subtle differences in how adults interpret fairness, as well as more extreme differences in adults' intentions and their actual practices, result in children's experiences of life sometimes being unfair. (Evans, Galyer, & Smith 225)

These connections between intention and action resonate with the adult children of the parents in this play. Goneril remarks to Regan that she is bewildered at her father's behavior at the love test because "he always loved our sister most" (1.1.294). In the other parent-child plot, Edmund may be manipulative, but the Gloucester's extreme favoritism of Edgar from the first moment of the play will strike the class as unfair. When he declares triumphantly, "Edmund the base/Shall top th' legitimate" (1.2.21-22), readers, not knowing his later villainy, cannot help but cheer with him to "stand up for bastards!" (1.2.23) Students will have their own perspectives about what is fair and what is unfair in family life, and bringing those concepts to mind early in this class period can encourage discussion and help students feel more comfortable with Shakespeare's characters and the real struggles they are encountering.

Beyond familial themes, all of Shakespeare's familiar human relationships do not change over time. There have always been children arguing with parents, lovers

quarreling, and slaves speaking more wisely than their masters. With a novel, students might make connections with characters mentally and that connection stays between the page and the mind. Shakespeare, however, creates active, endless reinterpretation live in front of the classroom. As students read the lines, they feel connected to the relationships and characters in the play. Teresa Toomey Fox, a teacher of a seventh-grade classroom, cooperatively worked with a Shakespearean actor to put together a set of lessons for the play *Othello*. By the time her class performed the work, one student wrote, “I didn’t feel like I was reading something written by Shakespeare. I felt like I was reading something that was real. It was amazing. I eventually got to believe the characters weren’t just characters, they were people” (Landay 44-45). The ability of students to interact with, and even become, Shakespeare’s characters makes the reading of these plays fun. They are, as Gibson hopes, taking “ownership of the play” by becoming the characters.

### *Justification of Violence in YAL*

*King Lear* has a lot of action, and it can often be of a violent nature. This violence, however, fits into the normal amount of gore to which modern teenagers are accustomed. Written violence, like love, justice, and truth, is a means to an end: one way to move a plot forward, to prove a point, or to reveal character. These are the ways in which Shakespeare uses the violent moments in his plays.

In *King Lear*, rapid physical action is written into the text and staging certain scenes will help students understand the purpose of the violence and enjoy the play. Actor and teacher Maurice Gilmour presented a production of *Macbeth* with a class of 7-11 year olds. Though parents and teachers at the primary school initially expressed

concern at the play's gory content, Gilmour adamantly maintained his position that, "In hanging onto the belief in the innocence of children, we relegate them to a lesser sphere, denying them their true thoughts, feelings, and relationships" (75). Rather than denying that children have an innate curiosity or wonder, Gilmour denies that they should be shielded from the horror of the world. Young children, but most especially adolescents, watch and internalize the events going on around them. While concern has erupted from all forums about more violent content on television and in video games, psychologist Christopher Ferguson reminds us that this is an age-old argument, dating back to Plato cautioning that plays and poetry might poison the youth (69). In Ferguson's examination of the data trying to establish a correlation between violent crime and use of violent video games, however, no such connection could be made. Rather, he postulates that violence is one of the learning mechanisms in our society since before we began to farm. Using violence to our benefit, then, by showing the outrageous consequences of characters' actions, students can connect the play more vividly to things they might have heard on the news or other media outlets.

#### *Violence as a Tool for Maintaining Interest*

Violence can aid a teacher in maintaining interest. Interestingly, a study done at Iowa State University proved that audiences exposed to violent television content often tuned out any commercials which followed that content (Bushman and Bonacci 562). A teacher can use the murder and gore of *King Lear* to keep student attention, especially when performing a scene or watching a performance as a class. One student in Gilmour's production of *Macbeth* wrote, "One of the reasons I like this play is because it doesn't

end with a happy ending. All the stories you usually see say things like, ‘and they lived happily ever after’ ... Personally I like a lot of blood and guts in a film, and I recommend this for anyone a bit like me, but if you don’t[,] I say stay as far away as you can!”

(Gilmour 75) Violence can be a draw for students who see themselves consumers of horror movies, *Goosebumps* novels, and video games. In fact, even many of the higher level or popular books that middle-school children most often opt to read for themselves include incredibly gruesome moments. *The Hunger Games* includes scenes which could easily disturb readers. Suzanne Collins’ heroine Katniss witnesses the deaths of several of her peers, including a girl attacked by deadly wasps: “The swelling. The pain. The ooze. Watching Glimmer twitching to death on the ground. It’s a lot to handle before the sun has even cleared the horizon” (Collins 191). Most of the memorable scenes of the book read like this one: clearly narrated, personal, descriptive, and slightly terrifying.

Some critics have argued against the recent trend in focusing on violence in teen and preteen literature. In a June 2011 article in the *Wall Street Journal*, parents expressed their dismay at the abundance of novels whose violent content made the texts “entirely too dark” for readers of this age group (Gurdon n.pag.). There was incredible backlash on this claim, however, since many parents and teachers laud modern young adult literature for its take on “real issues.” NPR blogger Linda Holmes refuted the *WSJ* claim, stating that she appreciated *The Hunger Games* and thought it a book that deserved attention (or would receive it from young adults whether parents “allowed” it or not.) She also wrote, “I also took an entire class in high school where we read books about killing your family, double suicide, drowning, being murdered in your bed ... it was called ‘Shakespeare,’ I believe” (Holmes n.pag.). Ignoring violence on the television or

in the newspaper will not make it disappear, just as not using troubling moments in plays as a place for discussion is a missed opportunity.

Because it has a more gender-diverse character list, focuses on family relationships as central, and emphasizes the crucial theatrical elements in the text, *King Lear* is a strong play for middle school students. Working with Shakespeare does not have to be scary if the experience is viewed through the lens of learner-centeredness. As a class, working on a play together, the students can develop more community in the classroom as well as feeling that they can “own” this part of our literary history.



## CHAPTER II: MEETING SHAKESPEARE

Michael Milburn, an eighth- and ninth-grade teacher in Connecticut, never considered teaching a Shakespeare unit to his classes. In fact, he assumed that those teachers who did force Shakespeare upon their students received the plaintive cry of “Can we read something fun now?” at the end of the week. Still, when a fellow teacher and friend expressed her interest in teaching *Macbeth* to her middle-school class, he found himself intrigued. He decided to try giving his students a taste of the rousing “St. Crispin’s Day” speech of *Henry V*. With a contextual lecture before reading it, glossed notes, and a comparison of the film versions of Lawrence Olivier and Kenneth Branagh, he found true excitement among his students. “I reasoned that the kids would thrill to the martial rhetoric,” Milburn writes, “familiar from contemporary movies such as *Gladiator* and *Braveheart*, and that the athletes among them would identify with the pep talk format” (77). And they did, leaving the classroom with more understanding and greater interest than before. Milburn knocked at the doors of his students’ expectations of Shakespeare and entered with a more interesting approach than they anticipated. Because he knew how to introduce difficult language to his students and engage them in the material, he states he would use this kind of activity again. In this way, he would happily produce an encore to give Shakespeare a stage, as it were, in his own classroom.

Milburn’s lesson to his students presents an excellent guide for how to approach Shakespeare for the first time: he took a single monologue, contextualized it, and let his students see it in action. These keys of limiting the scope of the language, clarifying it, and performing it allows students to find more comfort as they approach what can be a

difficult text. The key to beginning any Shakespeare study is getting students comfortable with the “strangeness,” or rather, the unfamiliarity of the language and context of the text. John Haddon, a British teacher and writer, notes that when presented with a text of Shakespeare, “Pupils will often say when asked what in particular they don’t understand: ‘Any of it!’ When bafflement turns to indifference and hostility, our troubles begin” (4). Without comprehending the text, students take on an outright dislike of anything tacked with the name Shakespeare. In fact, many might enter the classroom with preconceived notions of too-lofty language and theme. Older siblings, parents, or popular culture might have planted a seed that has grown into a full-sized tree of lit-distrust. The first item on the agenda, then, is to boost class confidence in their ability to read these plays. Without getting over this hurdle, students cannot begin to gain new skills in vocabulary, reading, or analysis that the plays present.

### *Preview of Lesson Plans*

The lesson plans that follow are based on the idea of educator and author Nancie Atwell’s mini-lessons. Mini-lessons are typically around twenty minutes long and include interactivity with the students, not just a scripted lecture. They help frame a new learning concept while allowing “kids [to] recapture and depict the worlds of their imaginations” (Atwell 149). Involving their imagination in the breaking down of barriers can occur with small mini-lessons: warming up with Shakespearian insults, gaining knowledge of the format of Shakespeare’s verse, learning about stage directions, and using the internet to put plays of this period in context. While some connections are written explicitly to *King Lear*, these mini-lessons can be applied as an introduction to

any Shakespearean text and take up minimal time at the beginning of a class period. Taken alone each provides a fun introductory activity; together, though, these lessons build confidence in the enjoyment of language, present enough context to understand the history, teach a bit about the verse structure, and provide interest in the performative aspect necessary in any study of Shakespeare.

### **“Thou Paltry Hare-Brained Bug”, or Shakespeare gets Mean**

(Lesson Plan: Appendix I:A )

If students have heard of Shakespeare before, it might be from his sonnets and love scenes, but they will be glad to learn that he wrote some of the best insults in literature, too. Students can ease into Shakespeare through an adapted use of Rex Gibson’s “Shakespearean Insult” exercise. The insult chart in the Appendix is from Gibson’s *Teaching Shakespeare*. Students use the interactive exercise and then directly connect it to the reading and viewing of a Shakespearean scene. After using this activity with my students at YESS, they did not cringe when I mentioned Shakespeare the next lesson, and even asked if we were doing the activity again. Young adults might be familiar with freestyle rap battles, where two rappers hurl insults back and forth. This activity provides some of the same heat but none of the blue language, while introducing students to the fun that Shakespeare’s prose offers.

#### *Activity Instructions*

Divide the class into two, lining up opposite each other in the classroom. Each student gets a copy of the sheet and must read through the columns of parts of

Shakespearean insults. Thinking about these columns as parts of a recipe, they concoct the one they think would most stir the person opposite them into a fight. Taking turns, each student taunts the student across from them with their newfound-favorite insult. Alternatively, Gibson suggests, students can stroll around the room provoking multiple students, or even work with a partner to create a conversation of insults (198). The result of this activity is an enjoyment in playing with Shakespeare's words. Besides realizing that though each particular word's meaning may be foggy ("What is an odiferous lascivious varlet?"), the intention of the words becomes clearer when they perform them, or when one sees them performed.

*Pronoun Problems: Thee and Thou.*

Gibson does not necessarily tie his lesson in with an introduction to the unfamiliar pronouns, but I find that this lesson makes a perfect place for that. When television shows parody Shakespeare, they often do so by using large vocabulary and a smattering of "thees" and "thous." In this way these pronouns become a way of cluing students in on how to read something which seems difficult. This activity presents a good opportunity to help make some of the unfamiliar pronouns clearer for the class, as the "thees" and "thous," rather than the use of "you," can seem confusing for students beginning to work with Shakespeare. John Haddon, a veteran teacher of thirty years, writes about the difference in these pronouns as a linguistic example of the marked (thou) and unmarked cases (you). "You" can be used respectfully in most occasions, and thus is unmarked. Alternatively, a marked form means that the pronoun draws attention to itself, signifying either a close relationship of two people or signaling when one character

speaks condescendingly to an inferior character. Students will hear that family members typically receive “thous,” as do close friends (Haddon 7). Enemies can receive this marked form as well, as will be explained later. This lesson, short though it is, is essential to understanding the character relationships in the plays. In a Shakespeare class I took with Iowa State University professor Linda Shenk, we looked closely at these moments of “yous” or “thous” between Romeo and Juliet in their first scene together. While Romeo is already jumping into the very personal “thou” and “thy,” Juliet keeps her distance replying after he makes his move, “You kiss by th’ book” (1.5.111). By enforcing this distance, Juliet proves herself not so dopyly enamored as her title-counterpart, and when she does begin to use the “thee” form, the transformation seems all the more important. She is ready to fall in love.

These nuances add greatly to the text, and they add to the fun of the exercise. The greatest thing for students to understand is that by using the form “thou” in this exercise, they are trying to create a connection (at this point, by condescending to or “insulting” one of their fellow classmates). The use of “thou” for our purposes is more like the fight between the lovers Demetrius and Lysander in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. While the women, too, argue in the famous lovers’ quarrel scene (3.2), though they are close friends normally, they maintain a cooler, icy anger by addressing each other in the “you” form. The men, however, speak forcefully and disdainfully with the marked form, even to the cast-off Hermia. Lysander tosses the adoring Hermia aside saying, “Hang off, thou cat, thou burr!” (3.2.260) This kind of angry closeness is what is meant by using the “thou” in this exercise. In class, we would point to those kinds of marked moments in the text of condescension or anger and say, “Ouch! She just got ‘thou’ed!” Students will

understand that this word, though unfamiliar, expresses something that can burn their classmates. They will be empowered by this knowledge to look with a keener eye at any scene.

### *Viewing Shakespearean Insults.*

The introductory connection of insults from the activity to the plays further deepens if teachers present some actual Shakespearean insults as a follow-up. Shakespeare proved time and again to be the master-insulter. Besides the lovers' quarrel in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, another example of this kind of bating exists in *Romeo and Juliet* with the Capulets and Montagues. The film choice does not make a difference; it should be the teacher's discretion to pick one which interests the students. Teachers might return to this film again and again for examples throughout lessons, or might show segments from multiple films to show different interpretations.

As for *King Lear* films, many options exist but few of them fit the purposes of a middle-school classroom. In his discussion of using Shakespearean films in the classroom Hugh Richmond finds two suitable choices for viewing in Peter Brook's BBC Shakespeare version and Michael Elliot's film starring Laurence Olivier (Ray 130). These two choices might be better adapted for older audiences, however, as Brook cuts much of the humor from the play, making the focus on the "violent, wintry, realism in grainy black and white" (132). A more recent version (easily viewed through PBS's *Great Performances* website) is Trevor Nunn's Royal Shakespeare Company production starring Ian McKellen. I highly recommend this production because of its clarity to modern audiences and use of familiar faces for a young audience (those who know

McKellen as Gandalf or Magneto will be surprised). While viewing the entire play might not be a good idea (sound quality is especially difficult to understand in many scenes later in the recording), if we use selected scenes this version proves itself accessible to all levels of understanding, and under Nunn's keen directing, humor and action mesh naturally into Shakespeare's poetry.

Two good scenes in *King Lear* present moments to show insults, depending on if you would rather demonstrate the use of the pronoun "thou" or the tempo which the poetic insult can have. To study the "thou," look to the wise jester in the King's court. The Fool speaks down to his master to jibe and joke with him, though sometimes the jokes are more serious and insulting. For instance, Lear, realizing that the Fool has stopped making jokes and started making fun of him, states, "Dost thou call me fool, boy?" (1.4.146). Answering a "thou" with a double "thou," the Fool responds to the newly crownless king, "All thy other titles thou hast given away; that/ thou was born with" (1.4.147-48). Claiming that the king's only inheritance now is his foolishness, the Fool insults Lear while speaking the audience's mind. The only problem with showing this scene as an example is that students may not have gotten into the plot of the play yet and might not make the connections necessary. If using this activity later in the lesson, though, teachers might discuss in viewing this scene how the Fool's tone changes from joke to jab to almost pity in the span of the scene. In Nunn's blocking of this scene, students will like the fart jokes and the silliness, but the fine-tuned acting of the Fool shines for the transformations mentioned above.

Another option to view is the moment when Kent releases a torrent of words on the unsuspecting Oswald in Act Two, displaying how tempo works and builds upon itself

with insults. The disguised Kent is approached by Oswald, who has come on his mistress's duties. When received rudely initially, Oswald declares that he does not know Kent. Kent declares he knows Oswald to be:

A knave; a rascal; an eater of broken meats;  
 a base, proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited,  
 hundred-pound, filthy, worsted-stocking knave; a  
 lily-livered, action-taking, whoreson, glass-gazing,  
 super-serviceable, finical rogue. (2.2.14-18)

Students reading this scene for the first time feel the pace pick up in Kent's insults, and can visually see the *asyndeton*, or lack of conjunctions, which can elevate the intensity of the prose. Shakespeare builds from simple insults ("a knave; a rascal") to long adjective-strung diatribe of Oswald's faults. The rapid-fire insults from Kent do not need much translation in their intention. Reading the monologue through together, the students can clearly sense the meaning, even if not all of the language is completely obvious. Luckily, the vocabulary can be clarified when students read the glossed material later. They might be amazed at how much they do understand: the idea of a hundred-pound weakling is still part of popular culture, for instance.

Humor comes easily from these insults, making the scene a likely choice for students to find Shakespeare more accessible. Laughter, as the old saying goes, is the best medicine, even when students are trying to swallow something new and more complicated than they are used to. Kent finishes his tirade against Oswald by acknowledging that he just put forth all of these insults. He calls Oswald "the son and heir of a mongrel bitch: one whom I will beat into clamorous whining, if thou deniest the



least syllable of thy addition” (21-23). Oswald is our beaten dog who by this point in Kent’s speech is nearly shaking. Kent’s long list of charges against Oswald is noted as “thy addition,” as though somehow Kent is presenting Oswald with some sort of royal title. Humor in this scene is built by the intensity of the insults that Kent can pile upon Oswald with such ease, and the lack of ability for Oswald to truly answer. In the physical battle which follows, as in the battle of wits, Oswald is “clamorous[ly] whining,” unable to defend himself.

Just as Milburn connected his reading of the monologue with the watching of a performance, this scene proves a good one to watch to get students interested in Shakespeare through film. Shakespeare places Kent, a character with so much verbal skill, in direct opposition to Oswald, a mumbling little yes-man, and in viewing this scene students will probably laugh. In Nunn’s scene with Oswald and Kent, though slightly reduced in length, the building energy of the insults is clear, as is the shock of Oswald (who is a really sympathetic character throughout, caught somehow in everyone else’s plans). After viewing the scene together, students might discuss when Oswald realized he was assaulted and how the addition of action intensifies the language.

Through the creation of insults, learning the meaning of the pronouns, and the viewing of professional actors engaged in verbal combat, students will start to feel the intense pleasure that can come with interaction with any text. Though Shakespeare’s language may seem distant from their own experiences, his characters have human emotions and goals just as they do. Starting to realize the connections between their lives and the text, as well as having some fun, is a great first step into facing what can seem like difficult material.

## **To Historicize or not to Historicize, That is the Question**

(Lesson Plan: Appendix I:B)

When I was in seventh grade, we read Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*. Before even getting to the first "mush," however, we had a quiz over all of the biographical intricacies of London's life. We were examined not just on his education and publications, but also on his marriages and the names of his multiple boats. Even then I knew that learning about great ship *Snark* made me snarky about the prospect of learning more and it soured my experience of the whole book. Reflecting on this experience now, I realize my dislike of London proved a case of providing too much context. The temptation to over-historicize can be an easy trap to fall into when teachers discuss a subject like Shakespeare. So many researchers have spent their careers seeking to prove he did or did not write these famous plays, for instance. Some teachers spend their Shakespeare lessons describing how his plays do or do not mirror his contemporary society. However, this kind of information should not be the focus of a beginning foray into Shakespeare. Instead, if teachers introduce enough history and context about the era, the players, and Shakespeare himself, students can supplement their learning while not feeling overwhelmed by the history lesson.

In *The Blueprint for Reform*, the U.S. Department of Education outlined greater use of technology as the way forward in the classroom to produce the future leaders of America (28). In this lesson, students use the internet to find research on distinct topics of Elizabethan life, learning how to identify a quality website and skills of group work as well as studying these historical facts. After breaking up into teams, the groups will do web searches as well as create posters to present to the class on these facts, helping their

classmates gain background knowledge to help them as they begin to study this time period. The five distinct topics that teams examine are Shakespeare's life, the Globe Theater, Shakespeare's plays, the life of an Elizabethan teenager, and Elizabethan fashion. Each group will be given a list of research topics (Appendix I:B) and some ideas of websites to begin their search for information. After collecting enough information, students create a poster of images and words to present to the class.

The research topics for each group all focus on practical information for the time period, not just trivia. Instead, the questions guide students not only to explore information about theater, politics, and society during Shakespeare's day, but also to find facts that they find fascinating. While the first four questions of each guide are prescribed, the final question allows students more exploration on their own. As Gibson notes, "The World Wide Web gives access to a wide range of Shakespeare databases (many provided free of charge) rich in pictures, sounds and scripts" (246). On the internet, students can find what original folios of Shakespeare's plays look like without setting foot in a museum. They can view clips from professional performances and see interviews with world-renowned directors. The key is utilizing the best websites; ones which are not only interesting and factual, but accessible to a younger age group.

The websites I suggest to answer the questions all follow these criteria, and two especially stand out in my research. The Folger Shakespeare Library has an excellent page called "Shakespeare for Kids" with information about the plays and Queen Elizabeth, and even introduces students to performers, directors, and artists who work currently on Shakespearean productions. The Foyer Library Theater Annex, likewise, has an excellent page group called "Shakespeare's Life and Times" by Michael Best,

with articles on the quality of life for women, fashion, food, sport, and theater in Elizabethan England. Between these two sites, students should be able to find all the information on their search-quests without resorting to *Wikipedia* use or the multitude of crudely created, often incorrect, websites about Shakespeare.

After giving students enough time to search for their answers with their group mates, students should prepare a poster with illustrations based on some of the images they saw and some short explanations about the information that they gathered. They will be able to show these posters to the class, and if space allows, the posters can be hung around the room as a reminder of the time period during the Shakespearean lessons. Atwell reminds teachers in her manual that children often become more aware of judgment as they grow older, and playfulness falls by the wayside (148). Allowing students to use artistic talents on a poster is one way of allowing that playfulness to reemerge, while still helping them to achieve new standards of learning with the facts they have acquired. Being in a team environment also helps support intellectual growth, since working with peers side-by-side makes the class cooperative, rather than competitive. Also, when it comes time to present the poster to the class, the tasks can be delegated so that each student has a part to say, rather than one student standing alone in the front of the classroom.

### **A Few Lines about Verse: Using Iambic Pentameter in the Classroom**

#### *Recognizing Blank Verse*

Shakespeare wrote his plays primarily in iambic pentameter, a verse form with five feet per line called iambs. An iamb is made of two syllables, the first of which is

unaccented and the second, accented. Unrhymed iambic pentameter is also called “blank verse,” and unfortunately, teaching blank verse can sometimes cause blank expressions. As only five of Shakespeare’s works contain more prose than poetry, however, students must start to understand how iambs affect the rhythm of the lines (Gibson 66). Overall, getting too tied up in the verse is not useful for an introductory lesson in Shakespeare. This is why a discussion which explains the principle of verse and shows students how to “read” a line of Shakespeare’s poetry is helpful.

Students might find it helpful to explain the general concept of iambic pentameter from a mini-lesson, while advanced students may find the concept fascinating and wish to explore it more. The rhythm of iambic pentameter can be heard in the first line of *The Merchant of Venice* when Antonio mournfully complains: “In *sooth* I know not *why* I am so *sad*” (my emphasis). The accent, here in italics, falls on many of the most important words in the sentence. For students, it may be helpful to ask how different would it be if the emphasized word ending the line were *glad* instead! It would receive just as much attention and completely shift the meaning of the sentence. Try replacing the word “sad” with “upset,” however, and the rhythm feels wrong though only a minor shift in meaning has occurred.

As I stated before, iambic pentameter can be tricky and should not be the focus of any beginning study in Shakespeare. However, this kind of background study helps students understand even why the play is formatted so strangely. For instance, sometimes iambic pentameter works by sharing the line between two or more characters, one picking off in the rhythm where the other left off. Typically, when the next character to speak has lines which are indented, an actor takes that cue to follow directly after the



language sound less naturalistic which is not the goal of the modern actor. The rhythms built into the lines do provide clues into the language and character, however, which can help an actor prepare in rehearsals and readings. According to John Barton, co-founder of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), blank verse is actually rather close to the way people speak normally, making it more naturalistic than any other set of stresses (27).

The rhythm is something that students can listen for when watching scenes of Shakespeare in the classroom, but more often students pick this cue up visually. In reading, students can be more aware of the verse and sense when the rhythms go awry, which can signal a change in the state of mind of a character. They can note places in *King Lear* when characters like Edmund switch from prose to poetry, showing how much of a chameleon he truly is.

Later on, when students read the verse aloud, they do not need to put heavy emphasis on each accented syllable, and they should also look for punctuation to help their reading, just as they would when reading a book, instead of focusing on the line breaks. As Shakespeare continued to write, he had fewer end-stopped lines, that is, lines ending with punctuation (Gibson 67). A common tendency when first looking at Shakespeare's plays to read aloud is to stop at the end of every line break, but instead the thought should continue naturally, even as the verse continues. For example, Lear storms in perfect blank verse:

Thou hast her, France. Let her be thine, for we  
 Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see  
 That face of hers again. Therefore begone  
 Without our grace, our love, our benison. (1.1.266-269)

The actor playing Lear continues through the line breaks. If there were a full stop at the end of the first line, for instance, it may sound as though Lear is saying, “She is yours, as a favor to us” and a full stop in the second line might make it sound as though Lear is going blind on the spot. Instead of using the lines as signals in themselves, readers should use commas as signals for short stops and periods for full stops.

Whether reading blank verse on the page or aloud, starting to understand how rhythm works in Shakespeare’s plays can help students feel less confused as to “why this is written so funny.” Beyond the strange vocabulary, because words were often reversed to fit into iambic pentameter the wording can seem strange. If nothing else, by the end of this lesson students will feel less like the format of the play is there just to frustrate them and will begin to understand the keys to reading verse.

### **Staging Simplified: A Down-and-Dirty Guide to Directing**

(Lesson Plan: Appendix I: C)

When we teach a Shakespearean play, performance is a necessary element to help student comprehension. As David Daniel, educational director with the American Players Theatre in Wisconsin, explains to the classes he visits, reading Shakespeare without seeing or participating in the performance of it is like trying to experience a song by just reading its lyrics (Felske 59). Many teachers may recognize a lack of interest in the classroom when they present students with just the written element, but may not feel comfortable introducing performance aspects. Learning a few “tricks” of the theater does not mean altering teaching skills; rather, incorporating performance will draw upon skills teachers already have. From instructing students to get in line, sit down, take out



materials, and close their mouths for just one minute, teachers do quite a bit of “directing” every day. Though perhaps not directly using the language of the theater, teachers have the ethos to incorporate theatrical activities in the classroom with no prior experience.

Incorporating staging helps students better understand the play. As Michael Kahn wrote, “Staging helps tell stories” (Riggio 27). As characters have reasons to move, each movement is important. Shakespeare included a lot of staging in the dialogue of his plays, and that, too, tells a story. In order to facilitate staging a scene in classes later on, I provide a lesson on blocking a scene, first explaining the terminology of the stage that Shakespeare used, then setting a guide to directing for the classroom. The two lessons in this activity are on the stage set-up and basic blocking terms, as well as a short demonstration on how to use blocking to tell stories.

### *Setting the Stage: Deciding from Two Stage Options*

Depending on the arrangement and size of a classroom, when working on directing activities teachers might have to “set” the audience in a different location by arranging chairs in a straight rows facing the front of the classroom, or in an arc around the room to make the center the playing area. Most modern stages are the former, called a proscenium stage. If teachers have less room in your classroom, it might be easiest to set up a distinct playing area for the students in the front of the classroom, especially since students’ desks may already be in rows set up like an audience. This proscenium arrangement is also nice in the ability to jump from desk to stage relatively quickly, but it

does not allow students in the back of the room to be able to see or participate in the action as easily since their classmates might be sitting in front of them.

Shakespeare performed his plays not on a proscenium, but on a thrust (like a thumb sticking out, with audience on three sides). Even if students have seen productions of plays before, they probably have not seen a show on a thrust stage as a majority of American theaters are proscenium stages. If teachers use this stage set up, they may move all of the desks and chairs to the walls of the classroom for this activity so that students can see the playing area. Historically, a major benefit of the thrust stage is that the audience more easily can see the action and thus feel more involved in it (Riggio 80). If students thought that every person who went to Shakespeare's theater in his time was aristocratic and boring, seeing the thrust stage shows them more clearly how close the "groundlings" (the cheapest area) were to the action. People would stand around the thrust eating, drinking, and even yelling at the actors if they got bored! A proscenium stage distances actors from this kind of abuse, but Shakespeare's players had to entertain a group of rowdy patrons close to them at all times. While students will not throw things at their classmates, if the space allows, the arc set-up for chairs can help all students be closer to the performance taking place in the classroom.

Whether playing on a proscenium or thrust stage, in order to later perform a scene, students need to learn the basic words used for blocking (or movement on stage). This lesson takes five minutes and gets students acclimated to the language of directing a scene. You should instruct half of the class stand on the stage area, while the rest of the class remains in the audience. The standing group becomes the actors who will have to be directed by their classmates. Explain to the class that stage right is the actors' right,

not the audiences', and have all of the actors move two steps stage right. Next, have all the directors in the audience point stage left. They should all be pointing right at this point. Just as a compass points to magnetic north, identifying which area is stage right or left is important to the leading of any mission into the theater.

Next, it is time to start learning a little bit about the Greeks. In Greco-Roman society when outdoor theater was more popular, stages used to be raked, meaning they slanted downward toward the audience to be more easily viewed from the seats. Because of this tradition, all directing terms refer to the front of the stage as "downstage," since that was the lowest playing area. The highest area, on the other hand, was then the back of the stage, or "upstage." The middle of the stage is called "center," both in terms of left and right and in relation to the front of the stage. This vocabulary has remained common these days even though most modern stages are flat. Teachers can use this mnemonic to insert a story into students' minds to help them see why we have this terminology. Have half of the actors move downstage and half move upstage.

Finally, explain to the class that the directions for left and right are often combined with the directions for up and down (e.g. downstage right is the front left corner from the audience's perspective). Once students feel comfortable that they know the various regions of the stage, have directors in the audience yell out instructions one by one to specific actors on stage. Directors can even suggest the actors skip two steps downstage, or crabwalk stage right. If desired, the two groups can switch places, but typically by one demonstration both groups have learned the terms adequately. This activity allows the audience to visualize the stage area and participate, while it makes

actor-students demonstrate what they have just learned. Actors will move to their assigned spots and the class will decide if they made it to the correct area of the stage.

### *Tableaux and Tales: Making Staging Make Stories*

After learning the basic terminology, students need to see that staging helps tell stories. In order to demonstrate this principle, take volunteers to present some stage pictures in front of the class. Stage pictures, or tableaux, are freeze frames of one particular moment. These moments are typically active, as in one student is proposing to another or throwing a football (or a pretend punch). You will need eight or ten students to volunteer. Shenk suggests that while these volunteers pair up and prepare the tableaux, the other students in the class work on discussion questions or group work for another activity (n.pag.).

The volunteers work with a partner to demonstrate an activity or event that they can freeze to show the audience. Gibson notes that the term tableau comes from the French *tableau vivant*, or living statue, which is exactly what we would like students to be for this activity (192). The partners should not only pick the activity, but also decide who stands where relative to each other. For instance, if I were throwing a punch, I could stand on the same plane as the person I was punching, or, my victim could face away from the audience standing downstage while I was standing upstage. Many options exist for each possible activity. Let the students practice their poses in the hallway, deciding on a common wall to represent the audience. Look at their poses to make sure that each presents a different action and that you can guess what the action is. If the poses are too

subtle, have the students “ham it up” a bit so that it will be easier to guess. Once every pair is comfortable, invite the volunteers back into the classroom.

Each pair demonstrates their tableaux on the stage one at a time. They should pick where on stage they want to stand and should hold still for at least a minute (a hard thing to accomplish!). Students in the audience should guess what each pair is trying to do, seeing the “story” that each small action shows. After each of the groups has gone, ask the students to vote on what they thought was the most dramatic choice and the most subtle. Have those two groups stand on the stage in their poses again and compare how they are standing in relationship to each other. How did they know that this was a proposal scene? Ask them to explain, and you might be surprised at how much your class can pick up about staging from analyzing just these freeze frames. What did they look at first? Was it because one person was standing and one sitting? By sharing their reactions, they begin to see how directors create focus in a scene. They may realize they already know a lot about staging and will feel less intimidated by the concept of acting as they try out Shakespeare’s scenes later on.

Classically, various regions of the stage have been assigned with various emotions. This trend coincides naturally with the audience’s interpretation of that space. For instance, the downstage area is best for scenes of intimacy while the upstage area demonstrates scenes of royal decrees well. According to children’s theater directors Lenka Peterson and Dan O’Connor, downstage left is the “most interesting position” for the audience, and downstage right makes the best place for an exit (131). While these rules might seem random, some provoke emotional reactions that students will naturally feel when their classmates play scenes in different places. Did they feel more

emotionally distanced from the tableau when the scene was literally distanced from them onstage? You can ask the acting students to justify responses on stage placement, which not only helps them think about why they make the choices they do, but also helps them review the vocabulary they just learned on the staging concepts.

Using performance in the classroom enhances student understanding and student enjoyment. It can be easy for students first encountering the vast blocks of Shakespearean verse to forget that these plays are truly playful, active texts meant to be performed. Starting to see that staging helps them as readers realize character relationships and plot will encourage further work in theater activities in the classroom. These lessons are not meant to make the teacher into a Broadway director or the students into Lawrence Olivier. Rather, performance allows for creative imagining and physical interpretation of questions that students will naturally have about these plays and these characters. Understanding the basics of blocking and of how character relationships can be interpreted on stage can help students visually interpret the world around them, as well as prepare them for Shakespeare lessons to come.

### **A Final Note: Reading and Comprehending the Entire Play**

If you plan to read *King Lear* from beginning to end, three strategies will help you and your students feel more confident. First, an edited and reduced text, like Bottinger's version (see "Language", p. 62-63 for information), can help manage time constraints and keep students from feeling overwhelmed. You might find it more useful to choose an edition to work from, however, and pare it down as you go. Even theaters producing Shakespearean plays cut lines and scenes for brevity's sake, and many scenes might need

to be condensed to help students focus on the main plots, characters, and actions. They still work with Shakespeare's language, but focus on less of it. Good editions to begin with include the Folger Shakespeare Library Series, an excellent resource with many aids for secondary educators, or the Cambridge Schools Shakespeare, which is focused toward students in the United Kingdom but is aimed at younger learners. While I mention the comic book version of *King Lear* many times throughout this thesis, its use is most effective when taken in pieces, rather than using the entire publication. There are no glosses of difficult words in the comic, no line numbers, and sometimes the pictures could add to student confusion. Instead, using parts of this edition as a supplement will keep lessons fresh.

Secondly, students should keep word logs and journals as they work through Shakespeare's play. After every scene they read, they should write a "two sentence summary" about what happened. If reading *King Lear* one or two days a week for a few weeks, students might easily lose their place in the action. Having those summaries to look back upon helps them remember, in their own words, what just occurred in the story world. Keeping word logs also helps reinforce the vocabulary in the plays which comes up quite frequently.

Thirdly, these lessons can be an opportunity to see theater in action. If students can see a show, of any type, during the time you are studying Shakespeare it will only reinforce the magic that comes with live performance. Afterward, you can discuss with them how the actors moved on the stage and moments that excited and interested them. If you cannot get out of the classroom, many actors will volunteer to come into schools to help with a class period or to teach a bit more about theater. Theaters across the country

use education as a part of their grant funding, so they often are look for these open-door opportunities.

Finally, make these lessons your own. You know your classroom best and tailoring these ideas to your students will help the lessons be more interesting for them, less stressful for you, and more useful toward your learning goals. The lessons which follow discussing language and theme can be used together or separately, but each lesson tries to help students take skills from Shakespeare, all while enjoying one of Shakespeare's most dramatic stories of betrayal, family rivalry, and madness.



### CHAPTER III: LESSONS ON LANGUAGE IN *KING LEAR*

Teachers in middle school often use Lexile Measurements to help students find books that promote learning and aid in development of new skills. Developed alongside the Common Core State Standards for the classroom, the Lexile Range is a rating system of books to help students progress toward learning goals. One responder to my survey noted that, “Our district promotes student choice and matching students to texts within their individual Lexile ranges, so there are no whole-class assigned texts.” The same responder, when asked if they had ever taught a text of Shakespeare stated bluntly, “No. I do not plan to do so either.” In fact, Lexile offers no measurement for *King Lear* on its website, except for the *Illustrated Classics* version. The Core Standards, however, do recommend that classical works, including Shakespeare specifically, be included alongside contemporary favorites in the classroom:

Through wide and deep reading of literature and literary nonfiction of steadily increasing sophistication, students gain a reservoir of literary and cultural knowledge, references, and images; the ability to evaluate intricate arguments; and the capacity to surmount the challenges posed by complex texts. (“College and Career Readiness” 35)

Once students can get a handle on Shakespeare’s language, they possess incredible skills in dissecting metaphor and argument, analyzing point of view, and gain cultural capital in what is still acknowledged as a valuable thing to add to their “reservoir of literary and cultural knowledge” (35).

The language of Shakespeare poses a challenge, but not one that is insurmountable. John Haddon writes, “It’s the difficulty with language—among other factors—that has led to various strategies of delaying or minimizing encounters with it” (4). Often, students are so intimidated by the unfamiliar language of Shakespeare that they will not even try, so certain are they of failure. Both the lack of a Lexile Range and the difficulty of overcoming the language barrier might keep teachers from using *King Lear* to meet required goals in the classroom. Teachers pragmatically work toward skill development and use texts not to teach literature, but to help produce skills. Shakespeare can build those skills. The MetaMetrics Company, which produces the Lexile system, encourages use of more difficult texts for classroom learning,

Don't sacrifice content for readability's sake. Instead, use Lexile measures to gauge the comprehension gap and bridge that gap with instruction, such as background teaching or discussion. Higher-level books provide a great opportunity for reading growth. (“Reading Outside of Your Lexile Range”)

Teaching Shakespeare as a class can be a stepping stone to reading more difficult texts alone, and this opportunity for language growth can benefit all students. Teachers who use concepts of background teaching and discussion, as well as performance, can help an entire class of diverse learners learn a book and increase its readability. Just like an acting company working together on production of a play, the class can build community and understanding by working toward a common reading of the text.

One example of learning language skills through Shakespeare is in using close reading to help improve vocabulary. As many researchers have proven, contextual

guidance (such as clues or pre-reading activities) helps raise the typical possibility of definition by context from just 15% efficacy to something much higher (Savino 448). As stated in the Common Core Standards for Reading, students should be able to: “Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone” (35). As with any text, these skills are extremely relevant with language which can seem unfamiliar to students. Just as renowned educator Nancie Atwell helps her students grow with a personal spelling list, Jennifer Ann Salvino encourages her students to use Shakespeare to create a personal vocabulary log of words that trouble, inspire, confuse, and excite them (449).

For our purposes, many characters in *King Lear* expound their discourse by using words that mean similar things, or which can be better understood in context. For example, Cordelia often uses synonyms (or near synonyms) in her discourse. She declares to France that, “It is no vicious blot, murder, or foulness,/No unchaste action, or dishonour'd step” which put her out of the King’s favor (1.1.231-32). All these terms mean something slightly different, and more than half of the words above are ones which are easily recognizable to a typical student: “murder,” “action,” “step,” for instance. Once students identify unfamiliar words, they can begin to reason what is meant in each occurrence based on the words they do understand. Through this process, and by keeping a word log, students will truly learn the technical, connotative, and figurative meanings of the words.

### *Preview of Lesson Plans*

In the first lesson plan, students use performance techniques to understand the fairy-tale-like first scene in what Kathleen McEvoy describes a “contest among the sisters to prove—through speech—which loves her father best” (410). The language game of the King and his daughters in this scene frames the play with rhetoric and establishes the need to pay attention to the words of the characters versus their actions. To overcome their shyness with the language, students will experience the fun of Shakespeare in this section by acting out a scene in the classroom. In performing the scene, students listen to the words of Goneril and Regan, who successfully pass the test for their father’s land, and compare them to Cordelia’s simple, honest speech. Is King Lear fair? How would they stage this scene to demonstrate how these words work on the King and on the other sisters? Students understand more clearly after staged participation in Shakespeare’s language. Ellen O’Brien, a literature professor focused on performance, reminds teachers that, “Students who see themselves as passive receivers of packaged wisdom are likely to learn less than those who find themselves actively engaged in the process of discovery” (621-22). Discovery is the focus of the performance approach, as the teacher guides students through understanding how to stage action by reading comprehension, all while incorporating lessons on language learning.

In the second lesson, students learn how to dissect and close-read the language of the Fool, which is typically a stumbling block for young readers of *King Lear*. This limited focus on the most difficult character will prove to students that they can understand Shakespeare, and even enjoy the action and language. In this section, I particularly steer students through the cloudy language of the famous storm scene (3.2)

by looking at it in a new context: that of Ian Pollock's comic book format of *King Lear*. MetaMetrics writes on its website of the graphic novel that "the combination of art and text appeals to readers of all abilities but particularly motivates a struggling reader [to] engage with a text" ("Helping Struggling Readers"). By reading the words side-by-side with the illustrations, students achieve a new sense of visual performance in the words on the page. Second only to seeing a performance, this new style helps students acclimate to a new text in a familiar form, while directing close-reading exercises to build comprehension. Comic books, as the new century has proven, can encourage literacy in young people. Reading and viewing this scene in comic format helps teachers build vocabulary and thus improve student reading and writing. Finally, in close reading, the words and the motivations of the characters become clear to the students.

The last lesson in the language section will examine the idea of simile and metaphor, especially in the animal allusions throughout the play. Now that they have enjoyed the language of Shakespeare through reading and performance, students are ready to make strides in writing exercises of their own. The teacher can facilitate discussion on how animal metaphors and similes describe the perspective of Lear, thereby discussing not only a poetic concept, but also the characters and themes of the play. Thinking about how it would be wise to "come not between a dragon and his wrath," (1.1.122) students write their own metaphors and similes about characters in the play. These devices can be incorporated into letters that further examine questions they might have about character relationships in the play. In utilizing these similes and metaphors in a scene using modern language, students demonstrate their understanding

about how much language can frame a discussion or sway an argument. They are one step closer to developing a keener rhetorical consciousness.

Throughout the following sections, I refer not only to the play and outside sources, but sometimes to rhetorical terms as well. An index of the most commonly used rhetorical terms in Shakespeare appears in Appendix II. While these concepts may not necessarily be tied into a middle-school classroom, high school teachers may find this section beneficial in looking for ways to expand their class discussions. Just as identifying iambic pentameter, metaphor, and breaks between verse and prose sections can bring about new understanding in the language of Shakespeare, starting to look for rhetorical devices can give a clue into the text as well as give students new reading and writing strategies.

### **Archetypal Characters and Performance**

(Lesson Plan: Appendix I: D)

Because *King Lear* is a play, for students to learn from the text they must learn something about performance and experience the flavor of Shakespeare's language on their tongues. Haddon writes, "When we are sitting in a classroom reading Shakespeare it's easy to lose track—or even to be unaware—of [the] theatrical dimension, especially when we are struggling with the idea of language" (91). Drama is not just an afterschool activity: it can help students to read more carefully and focus on meaning while also becoming better speakers (an essential skill for the rest of their lives). Wilhelm notes that the switch students make from the "spectator stance" of reader to the "participant stance" of creator and actor assists in the interpretation and evaluation of a text in a literature

classroom (89). Studies have even shown that the more thoroughly curriculum includes connection to the arts, like performance, the greater the gains for students in test scores and other achievement standards (Landay 45). In this lesson plan, the theatrical dimension works hand-in-hand with the struggle toward language comprehension. As an introductory activity to *King Lear* and even to drama in general, acting an adapted version of the first scene (see Appendix I:F) is ideal because of the archetypal characters and themes, as well as the amount of simple staging that can be done in a small space. Gibson suggests discussing and blocking no more than 100 lines in a one-hour class period and the scene I edited for classroom performance is about 160. By dividing the task of staging, reading, and understanding the shortened version of the first scene into two class periods, the teacher achieves a good balance of active learning and discussion.

*Class Period One: "Setting the Scene"*

During the first class period of this lesson, three tasks must be accomplished: a read-through, discussion for comprehension, and writing down desired roles. After = each student receives a copy of the cut scene, the first step to staging a scene from Shakespeare is to do a "read-through" of the lines so that the students can begin to hear the language and sense the pace of the scene. Gibson suggests this technique since it echoes what "real actors" do when preparing for a performance (158). Officially nine speaking roles exist in the cut scene, though Albany and Cornwall say very little. In order to create chances for more speakers in this read-through, I suggest splitting major speaking roles like Lear, Cordelia, and Kent.

At this point, students are not “picking parts”; rather they read lines so that the entire class hears the script together. Some students will likely be nervous about reading or acting in front of their classmates. Teresa Toomey Fox helps allay this concern with her seventh graders by always putting the emphasis on learning. In the program for her class’s performance she writes, “The theater work we have done is not really about acting but about understanding and interacting with a difficult text” (Landay 44). The work done on this *King Lear* scene has an aim in line with the concept of process drama, which focuses on exploration of the dramatic experience and shared duties between student and teacher in directing and analysis. In process drama, students have no intent to perform for an audience (Weltsek 76). The advantage this technique provides, besides widening the opportunity for student ownership of the text, is that the experience allows students who may not know their skills to test them in a safe environment of their peers, all struggling with the same text. For instance, while students might have the impression that they have to read the text with some sort of British accent, this assumption is actually misapplied to Shakespeare often in the classroom and sometimes on the stage. In fact, Shakespeare’s English sounded much closer to American English than to modern British dialects (Barton 53).

Students should raise their hands when unfamiliar vocabulary comes up in the dialogue or if they struggle over a difficult word in the stage directions. Students will question, for instance, what an aside, a *sennet*, and *exeunt* might mean, as these words are new and, unlike unfamiliar words in the dialogue, have few context clues. Mary Ellen Dakin provides a helpful chart in her book with definitions of most common stage directions. Her definition for a *sennet*, or flourish, for instance, is a fanfare of horns to



announce the entrance or exit of someone important (5). With this definition in mind, students can feel themselves transported to the court of Lear, listening to trumpets announce his entrance. Since the scene will be examined multiple times over the course of two class periods, retention of this vocabulary is more likely. Sometimes it takes as many as forty encounters with an unfamiliar word before students can readily recall it (Savino 446). Still, this repeated exposure (especially orally) will help students move forward on the path to better vocabulary.

Checking comprehension is important after reading through the scene for the first time. Gibson's suggestion for debriefing students at this point is to discuss the scene with a set of questions: who, what, when, where, which they are familiar with from their earliest years in the classroom (159). While these might be simple questions, the answers students provide are enlightening for how the class might decide to stage this scene. In answering the question "Why do you think the characters say what they say, and behave as they do?" students begin to consider character motivation. This read-through and discussion activity also assures that all students understand the dialogue of the scene before moving onto other activities which will require them to demonstrate that comprehension.

### *Fairy Tale Connections*

In this discussion, the characters can be compared to others that students might recognize: the archetypal Cinderella stepsisters, for instance. Even David Bevington in his introduction to *King Lear* makes this possible connection clear (656). Students raised on Disney and Grimm's Fairy Tales will start to see ways to make connections with

Shakespeare's characters. Ann Imbrie suggests benefits exist in examining this text as a fairy tale, including "the advantage of encouraging participation among students of varying intellectual abilities and degrees of literary sophistication" (69). Few things could be better for assisting a diverse classroom than using stock characters provided by the fairy tale genre in the context of this tragedy. Examining the play from this angle, students who may struggle in discerning how all of the pieces of the family puzzle fit together will find more success. Within the first scene alone we have a competition between family members for property, a trial of allegiance, and a competition for love (all familiar themes in fairy tales). For discussion, it might be fruitful to ask the students' opinion of the three sisters. What are their expectations for the rest of the play? Which characters will win in the end? As this is an introductory activity, students may not know how the play ends and their attention will be stirred. Eventually the play falls out of the fairy tale ideal, and Bevington notes that Shakespeare's version of this story denies the happy ending of most of his sources. Shakespeare instead uses the archetypal elements to focus our attention on the relationships in the text before laying the "tragic misunderstandings" before the audience (658). Acting out these tensions can help students feel confident not only that they are understanding what can seem like a difficult text, but also in analyzing how the relationships in the play conform to or resist archetypal scenes or characters.

#### *Casting: How to Assign Roles in the Classroom*

The last activity on the first day is to have students write down their choices for characters to portray in the classroom staging of this scene. On a piece of notebook paper,

they should write down their top three choices of a character to play. Now that all the characters have been explored, students know which ones interest them the most. Later on, the teacher will assemble the cast list for the second class period of the project. Cox asserts that the process of casting the scene should be dependent on the personal choices of the students themselves. After trying many different ways of casting her scenes, she finally decided to try the approach of letting students pick their roles. “I learned very quickly,” she writes, “that children invariably want to play the part they feel they are most suited for and that is within their capabilities” (41). Students in the classroom understand what interests them and which skills they may or may not have. On the other hand, the Shakespearean dimension of strange language and strange lands can often cast a spell on students, leveling the field for those with prior skills in drama and those who may want to try it for the first time.

Every student might have written down a completely different preference and the casting process might take only a few minutes, but this situation is unlikely. Instead a systematic process can be undertaken to develop a cast list. First, stack the papers by the first choices, grouping the Cordelias, Lears, Gonerils, etc, together. Do your best to accommodate as many of these choices as possible. Some roles might decide themselves at this point, seeing that only one student might want the role of Burgundy, for example. Often, however, the teacher must make some decisions with the knowledge they have of each particular student’s strengths and weaknesses. If at certain points students have opted to play opposite gendered roles, this can create a whole new level of interest. Shakespeare’s plays often play with the idea of gender roles. Of course, in Shakespeare’s

day all the parts were played by boys and men, and no obstacle exists today if a boy wants to play the part of Goneril, or a girl, Lear.

Certain other difficulties might occur in casting a production from student choice, including needing to split roles or having certain students who do not want to a speaking role. The first issue might be the need to double, or even triple, a certain character for the scene. During my work with the Nebraska Shakespeare Festival's summer program, the casting for the middle-school scene of *Hamlet* occurred successfully in the manner of students listing their top three choices for the roles after reading through the scene together. As expected, many students wanted to play the characters of Hamlet, Gertrude, Ophelia, and Claudius, so the directors were able to divide those major characters into equal chunks. During the performance, the cast used unifying elements so that the audience could visually connect the different actors together. For instance, as there were four Hamlets, two girls and two boys, and the actors each had their own scene. In those scenes they passed off the same hat to wear, signifying that character. As this production brought a lighter side to Shakespeare, all of the Claudiuses were announced with a trumpet noise during each entrance. Visual or aural cues can easily be used in the classroom to satisfy that same feeling of continuity.

Another option for doubling parts might be having multiple students on stage for a character at the same time. To use this technique, certain lines are read like a chorus at the same time. The larger sound can be remarkably effective for some characters. For instance, splitting the character of Kent to two or three students makes the voice of dissent stronger in the scene and heightens the sense of drama. Certain lines could be assigned to one student and some could be said together. One advantage is that this

method creates the need for even closer group work among the actors, and giving them the decision on who gets which lines can create a greater sense of how each decision will change a performance.

The volunteering actors at the Avenue Junior School in Great Britain present a final option for splitting roles. While putting on a production of *The Tempest*, they quadruple-cast Prospero, dividing the part to three speaking actors and one mime role (Gilmour 37). This option also allows an ambitious student who may not want to have a speaking role the chance to take a very active part in the blocking of the scene.

Whichever option sounds most attractive for your particular situation, being able to describe it immediately to the actors at the beginning of the second class period session will help the day run more smoothly. Time spent discussing the options will only lead to less time acting.

Though every student should be offered a speaking role, some may not want that opportunity. Even in a low-pressure environment such a classroom with no outside performance, some young adults will not want to participate at the same level of speaking as others. Shy students or students with disabilities such as stuttering can still benefit from nonspeaking, or low frequency speaking, roles. Many students in the Nebraska Shakespeare program opted to play very minor roles, but in the staging of the scenes those characters were often given interesting actions to perform. One young man had a stutter, but loved the idea of physical performance. For his role as Osric, he enjoyed playing with the physicality of this unlikeable and foolish courtier. He brought creativity to his death in the final scene, crying out and falling to the stage floor with such relish, it could be argued that he upstaged Hamlet's more modest death. Still, the audience loved

it. For working on a classroom scene of *King Lear*, during times when the major speakers in the scene are being blocked, non-speakers can explore other essential dramatic roles, such as costume, set, or props designer. Their designs still use textual information and language to comprehend the scene, but visual interpretation might fit their own particular skills better.

*Class Period Two: Putting the Scene “On Its Feet”*

Before entering the second class period, it would be helpful to jot down notes of particular blocking that you imagine for your class space. Though much of the blocking will be interactive on the spot with student input, fitting twenty moving bodies in a small room can be intimidating. Sketching out the “entrance” and basic setup of the imagined throne room will help the next day’s work to flow more smoothly, as will choosing which type of stage you prefer for this blocking activity: thrust or proscenium (see “Introduction to Shakespeare”, p. 37-38). Whether you pre-block the entire scene in the margins of your copy is your choice; some classes may be advanced enough to want to help with the process of blocking. As Weltsek reminds us, the student voice is essential to developing a true class understanding of the text as performance (76). Being flexible with pre-blocking is important, but it may be better to think through the basic movements in the scene before being barraged with the mob of eager students in class, all ready with their own ideas.

The first items on the agenda during the second class period are to look at the cast list and review blocking terms. Students will be eager to see their role in the scene. If parts are split among multiple students, tell them the role has been divided and have them

mark it in their scripts to avoid confusion later. You may wish to review blocking terminology before beginning. A good way to do that is to play a type of Mother-May-I game, breaking the class into teams of four. Then you might say, “Team One, take two steps down stage left.” If they do it correctly, then they continue. Since you may not have time for a game, it might be better just to remind them that stage right is actor’s right, not director’s (something helpful to keep in mind as you are setting up your blocking, too).

The rest of the class period is spent on blocking the scene roughly, and if time allows, running it once through. Each student needs a pencil, their script, and a little patience. Arrange the room in such a way that the class can gather together near the front of the room, pointing out the entrance(s) into the “throne room.” Explain to students three chunks of action in the scene: the love test, the banishment of Kent, and meeting Cordelia’s suitors. Students without speaking roles during these parts will play lords and ladies in the background, or, if you use the nonspeaking design role alternative, some can sit in the audience to listen and design essentials for the scene. The lesson plan (Appendix I:F) includes not only an explanation of the design role, but also questions to help spur student-assisted blocking of the scene and suggestions for the nonspeaking lords and ladies to think about during this scene.

Progressing page by page, students should read their lines, and then, if movement is necessary, reread the line after adding in the action so they can feel the change. As far as stage positions go, remember from the introductory blocking activity that upstage locations are places of power and control, while downstage locations signify vulnerability. Cordelia, for instance, might be delivering her asides downstage as to

show her nervousness and better connect to the audience while Lear stands upstage making declarations. The physical and emotional distance of the two characters works to heighten the tension when they finally come into contact with each other.

When deciding on blocking, you may be tempted to add more than five crosses, or movements, to each page. Once students feel the fun of acting, they will want more to do on stage. Be careful, however, since scenes can start to look congested if students move too often. Students should always think: why am I moving right now? If they cannot think of a language or character-motivated reason, then this movement is probably unnecessary. Two easy rules are that if students move while speaking, they need to make sure to cross in front of other characters, and if one character is speaking or moving, no other actors should be (Peterson and O'Connor 134). This thought process makes students more conscious of the words of the scene. Rather than just reading through the play, they have to piece lines together into movement and meaning.

As this is process drama, the students' input matters and the lack of audience looming in the future means that many options can be tried, vocally and physically, with no fear of looking silly in front of adults. If possible, try to run through the scene that day at the end of class, or during another class period with an extra ten minutes. This repeating of blocking cements the ideas better in students' heads, and the repetition of the words adds more confidence to their understanding of Shakespeare's language. No longer will they look at this scene, or indeed, at the entire play in the same way. Ellen O'Brien writes of performance in the classroom, "When asked to think of the text in an actor's terms... students find themselves inside the plays, gradually taking possession of the characters" (623). Rather than being detached eighth-grade students, the young adults



will now read the play as Cordelia, as Kent, as the on-looking and disapproving lord.

Taking on the persona of a character helps them connect to the language and the plot in a way no other activity can.

As every activity requires assessment, an excellent way to test students' understanding is to have them write about the difference between the first time they read the scene the first class period and the performance reading. Multiple pedagogical studies (such as Wolf, 1997; Wilhelm, 1997; and Landay, 2004) found that students who participated in dramatic readings of texts better understood the perspectives of the various characters in the scene. Some researchers even note more student confidence in expression of all opinions after working with scenes of this kind (Sperling, et al. 77).

Questions to answer in a journal might be: What did your character do on stage? What did acting the scene change from reading it? What was your favorite part of this activity and why? Each student will process the experience in a different way, and through explaining their perceived difference, will reflect on the activity and be able to appreciate their own growth in the understanding of the language.

Whether Lear or lord, Cordelia or costumer, all students find comfort in Shakespeare's language by connecting with the performance roots of the text. Many professors and scholars, including O'Brien, attest to the fact that becoming performers, even if only for a day, makes students better readers (622). Though possibly reluctant at first, students who actively participate in blocking a scene make real progress with Shakespeare's language while having fun at the same time. Saying the words makes one curious about them. Besides, who, when asked about what they accomplished at school, would not love to say, "I was a king today"?

**“Jesters do oft prove Prophets” (5.3.73): The Storm, Language and Image in *King Lear***

(Lesson Plan: Appendix I:E)

Teacher Danielle Bottinger thought much along the same lines I have, claiming that too often middle-school teachers teach more standard Shakespeare plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and *Macbeth*. She, conscious of the limitations of time and the difficulty of the language, edited a text of *King Lear* for her classroom. In doing so, she made a few decisions to help clarify things for her students, such as removing the “thou”s and “thee”s and defining more clearly the basic character relationships and scene locations in glossed footnotes. However, she also made the decision to remove the Fool character, citing that, “The Fool’s lines, so often made of puns and clever wordplay, require more explanation than I can offer my students... students will meet their Fool when the time is right” (Bottinger 1). I agree completely that the Fool can be a difficult character for even adults to grasp. The wordplay and puns can fall flat on the page, let alone taken more than 400 years removed from context. While I recommend a text with a minimized use of the Fool for teaching this play to a younger class, cutting him out altogether leaves some scenes slightly bare. Students, perhaps not ready to be friends with the Fool, should be allowed to meet him, shake his hand, and begin to converse with him for the sake of understanding the implications of his character in the play. For instance, Bottinger’s cut version of the storm scene, one of the most famous in the play, contains only one line from the King’s “Blow, winds, blow” speech (39). This revision of the text removes not only the character of the Fool, but much of the development of Lear’s character as well.

Use an edition which is faithful to the text, and you will find more resources as a teacher and more growth in your students (for more on edition choices see “Introduction to Shakespeare,” p. 42-43). More and more often, reduced versions of Shakespeare’s plays pass muster as “acceptable substitutes.” In England, teachers would offer drastically reduced versions as the curriculum required a certain amount of Shakespeare each year. However, students failed to benefit from these heavily altered versions, making a journalist quip that often students were getting *A Small Ado About Nothing*, *A Midsummer Night’s Nap*, or *As You Might Have Liked It* rather than the satisfaction of the bard (Mansell n.pag.). Though joking, these titles speak to the concern that too much condensation can do more harm than good. This is not to say that eighth-graders should have to suffer (and it would feel like suffering) through every line of *King Lear*, but some flavor of each character should be left intact to maintain the integrity of the text. Bottinger admits that removing the Fool was a choice “made after a great deal of agony,” since she loves the text and struggles with his omission as well (1). With the greatest respect to the wonderful work she has accomplished, in this section I propose going about the “problem” of the Fool in a different way, through pairing a student-friendly medium like the comic book with the challenging language of Shakespeare.

### *Repositioning the Fool as Central*

In the play, the Fool provides some comic relief, but mostly he acts as an emcee who guides the King further into madness and helps deepen our understanding of the other characters’ intentions and feelings. Literary scholar Hiliary Gatti points out that the Fool’s breakdown of language with puns and reversals makes Lear realize his mistaken

choices (151). Famously in Shakespeare's plays, fools speak the truth and in Lear's case, as quoted in *A Few Good Men*, he "can't handle the truth." In his first scene, the Fool reveals his clear-sighted view of the rash choices of the King with the division of his land. After Lear nearly repeats the "nothing will come of nothing" (1.1.190) cued to Cordelia to prompt a new response of love and affection, the Fool flips Lear's words back again by stating that "nothing" will be the rent, or value, of Lear's lands from that day forward (1.2.32-33). Some of this play of language, so direct and clear, can be of use to students of any age.

As the Fool counsels the King as often as Kent does, we see two sides of the King: the formerly glorious patriarch and the fool. Both are essential to understanding Lear's character. The Fool brazenly calls Lear a "bitter fool," claiming that "All thy other titles thou has given away; *that* thou was born with" (my emphasis, 1.4.147-48). Besides again reminding Lear of his mistake, the "that" means this foolishness is an inherent part of Lear's nature, a flaw, and one which will eventually lead to his madness and downfall. In the disguised Kent's discussions with Lear, few such brash remarks are steered toward the fallen ruler. Instead, Kent knows that in order to stay in his Majesty's good graces he must be near and polite. Unlike Kent, who was exiled for his brashness, the Fool is adored for his wit, called "my boy," "pretty knave," and "sirrah." Again, unlike Kent, the Fool has no station with which to be concerned. Without the Fool to reveal Lear's other self to us, cloaked in joke and rhyme, the trail to Lear's loss of himself would be less clear. As a character removed from the hierarchy of the situation, the Fool can get away with more (something that students might admire about him).

The Fool illuminates the action of the play, reflecting mirror-like the characters' truest intentions and creating a parallel with Cordelia. For instance, his jests are the first thing to rile Lear's eldest daughters. Goneril's first remark after taking power refers to the Fool. She asks Oswald, "Did my father strike my gentleman for chiding his fool?" (1.3.1) The Fool makes the first move in this chess game, upsetting the rest of the tokens on the board. His mouth, constantly moving, riles the other characters. Similarly, most other characters in the play do not challenge Lear in the same way, often either directly, almost condescendingly, denying his requests (Goneril and Regan) or supporting him almost constantly (Albany, Kent). The only other character to push against Lear lovingly, as it might be argued the Fool does, is Cordelia. No wonder, then, that these two characters are often played by the same actor as neither appears in the same scene together (Gatti 150). Even in the final act when Lear cries that, "And my poor fool is hang'd" (5.3.17) the audience can see the doubling of that role quite naturally.

#### *Comic Relief and Comic Books: A Natural Pairing*

Shakespeare's language has often inspired famous artists to draw his characters, and in this age, he has inspired comic artists to make these plays accessible to a new generation. Ian Pollock's comic book version of *King Lear* can be a valuable tool for understanding the language of the Fool and the other characters in the play. In 1984 Pollock illustrated an unabridged version of *King Lear* with the Cartoon Shakespeare Series from Oval Projects in London. The innovative series allows artists to escape older, stilted illustrated editions of Shakespeare (such as *Classics Illustrated*), and to truly meet Shakespeare with their individual style of art. Unfortunately, as the Director of Oval

writes, “It is a great pity that these books were ahead of their time and were not appreciated” (Jensen 4). While they might have been underappreciated in their time, as educators we can use this great comic book to visualize performance outside of the theater. In fact, using a scene from this version of *King Lear*, students can more easily picture the character and the language of the infamous Storm scene, thereby better understanding the role and language of the Fool.

Pollock’s style in this comic book is cinematic and sometimes dark. Marion Perret, in her article about comic book versions of Shakespearean plays, lauds the visual medium as it offers new interpretations by the artist and adapter (73). Perret writes that this comic book is truly one of the only on the market which “illuminate[s] as well as illustrate[s]” a Shakespearean play in its reinterpretation of the material (89). While other comic books in the Cartoon Shakespeare Series try to take on a pseudo-realistic, “Prince Valiant” style, Pollock implements the more stylized and abstract style which made him famous in publications like *The New Yorker* and *Esquire*. The backgrounds, for instance, are not intricate tracings of castles and fens, but are swathed in bands of color and shadow to set the characters in a world that feels incomplete and cold.

The lack of realism is helpful in our role as educators. As Scott McCloud, renowned “comic bookologist,” points out, “When we abstract an image through cartooning, we’re not so much eliminating details as we are focusing on specific details. By stripping down an image to its essential ‘meaning’, an artist can *amplify* that meaning in a way that realistic art can’t” (30). In this adaptation, each evil character is easily recognizable by specific physical abnormalities: Goneril’s too-red, almost bloody, lips; Edmund’s gaunt pale face and jutting chin; and Oswald’s washed-out lack of color.

Cordelia, on the other hand, is angelically blonde. The inked costume of each character helps the reader immediately identify the character's motives. Details of lips, chin, and coloration prompt a gut reaction to the characters. When actors stand on stage, they express emotion with their entire bodies. They hold tension in particular ways and their faces emote continuously, and as an audience we have unending levels of interpretation to draw from their performance. Sometimes, however, this level of detail can complicate a text more than necessary for a beginner working with Shakespeare's language. The benefit of a comic book is that on the page, we become accustomed to "reading" particular parts of the characters. In this version, for instance, King Lear's eyes and beard tell the story of his madness. The progression of drawing throughout Pollock's comic book based on these two elements alone makes it easy to see the change from sanity to madness (see "Themes in *King Lear*"). Ambiguously, however, the Fool is drawn as alternately snarling and smiling, making him a mixture of the other characters' expressions in this text. This portrayal aligns with the somewhat binary role that the Fool plays: truth-teller, but not trusted; smart, but obscured by intricate language.

#### *The Storm Scene: A Lesson Plan*

The characters of the Fool and Lear take center stage in the infamous storm scene. Lear has left his daughters, realizing they have banded together against him and have truly removed any remains of power that he had in the land. With the fool following, Lear runs out into the stormy night and dares the elements to tear him apart. The Fool tries to persuade Lear to re-enter his daughters' good graces, but Lear refuses. As the wet pair wander, Kent finds them and begs them to find a shelter in a nearby hovel. This

moment presents a turning point in the play, when Lear first admits, “My wits begin to turn” (3.2.67). Emotionally wrought and storm-beaten, Lear follows Kent, beginning his process of following, rather than leading, for the rest of the play.

When teachers present this scene to a class, the first step is to recall the action immediately before it. Remind students of Lear’s state of mind, as he has just fled the castle yelling, “Oh, Fool, I shall go mad” (2.4.288), foreshadowing the action that takes place in the storm. Kent, too, has shared his intention to go searching for Lear as no one else seems motivated to do so. Students can then have this fresh in their minds as they dissect the language before them.

The language in this scene is dense, for the brief 95 lines it contains are rich in rhetorical technique. In order to overcome this hurdle, a punctuation-reading method can be used. Students take turns reading lines aloud, switching off at each period, exclamation point, or question mark. Not only will this have them speak the language to add focus on the words, but also, trading at the ends of sentences lets students hear how disjointed Lear’s mind is in this scene. While it is not important for students to note that Lear is using the rhetorical device *apostrophe*, addressing an inanimate object, students can feel his agony as he calls, “Spit, fire! Spout, rain!/ Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire are my daughters” (3.2.14-15). This moment also overlaps with the device of *exclamatio*, the intertwining of emotion into those short petitions to fire and rain. Without knowledge of these rhetorical devices, students innately sense them by reading them aloud and hearing the pace of this frenzied scene. If the teacher uses instructs a high school class or an advanced class, students can benefit from the application of rhetorical figures. Often, just



like knowing the parts of speech, students will begin to see these figures everywhere and use them to evaluate arguments and other texts they come across.

The densest language in the scene, though, is that of the Fool. While reading, students should circle words or phrases they do not understand to add to vocabulary logs. Often, the entire class will circle the Fool's sections far more than Lear's or Kent's. After reading through the scene together, you might discuss the overall plot of the scene and define some key words. The Fool's prose sections can be explained somewhat clearly, but the lines in verse (3.2.27-34 and 81-94) have entire paragraphs of explanation in the Bevington text. Reading through it aloud in the class, students may have no idea even what some of the vocabulary means, and the first section of poetry has rather raunchy connotations (of bawdy women and genital lice) that probably do not need to be explained to a young adult class. The second verse section is a "parody of a pseudo-Chaucerian prophetic verse" and reflects much of Shakespeare's contemporary political atmosphere (Bevington 685). This obscurity means that students will naturally feel that these sections are not worth the trouble of understanding. Often, when I first read Shakespeare, if things took too much time to puzzle through I would simply skip them. Reading these sections out loud as a class experience for the first time will make it easier for students to feel they can approach it in small groups later. Also, recognizing that no one has the complete answer for what this second passage means will open the gates for discussion.

After reading through the short scene together, divide the class into five groups. Hand each group one page of Pollock's comic book page of the storm scene (excluding page 68, which will be the example). Then, if possible, project the sample page with an

ELMO or overhead projector and demonstrate the second part of the activity. Each group is given a section of Shakespeare's scene accompanied by Pollock's version with graphics. Together, students must "translate" the section into language that makes sense for their group. Using the pictures and a dictionary as their guide, they must come up with a translation on which the group agrees. The Fool's first response provides a suitable example, with "translation" in parenthesis and italics:

O nuncle, court holy-water in a dry

house is better than this rain-water out o' door.

*(Uncle, nothing's worse than this storm)*

Good nuncle, in, and ask thy daughters' blessing:

*(We need to go inside. Just ask for forgiveness from them already)*

here's a night pities neither wise man nor fool.

*(This storm won't stop for you just because you're a king.) (3.2.10-13)*

Students might not be able to figure out every word or line, which is part of the learning process. The important part is reasoning through the language using context and visual clues. They should be amazed at realizing how many pieces of the puzzle do come together. According to Bevington, the phrase "court holy-water" refers to flattery, something that students would not be able to guess or look up in a dictionary, but from examining the phrases around it, the basic meaning can be deciphered (684). The Fool's verse is put into better context in Pollock's imagining, as well, as he adds visual definition or a fresh perspective with interesting visual division. Some moments, such as the idea of a fair woman who "made mouths in the glass" (3.2.35) are explicitly drawn by the artist, which can aid in translation.

The prophetic verse, on the other hand, is not visually imagined, but instead divided into circular balls of text, as though thrown up from the Fool's hand to be juggled. The balls can be almost read in any order. The introductory and closing comments of the Fool's speech are deemphasized, placed at bottom left and bottom right, giving the verse a visual shape different than in Shakespeare's play. The effect of this division, much like the act of reading aloud, is the clearer ability to notice rhetorical patterns for new readers. All of the phrases in the Fool's prophesy begin with either "When," "Then," or "This," creating parallel structure that sets the pace of this verse. Using *anaphora*, repeating these words at the beginnings of clauses, makes this rhythm clear. Visually, Pollock's version emphasizes this structure, as well as providing a greater emotional charge than the static text on the page might for the reader. McCloud comments that the comic book format can be a beautiful place to marry a worthy text and striking art. He writes, "Pictures can produce strong feelings in the reader, but they can also lack the specificity of words. Words, on the other hand, offer that specificity but can lack the immediate emotional charge of pictures" (135). Together, the reader gets the best of both words and the language can impart its immediate power and specificity, while still allowing for the emotional performance of art on the page.

After working in teams on their small section of the scene, students should orally present their findings to the class. If possible, project the page so that the entire class can see it as they explain. They should describe the new translation they put together, pointing to specific language or pictorial clues that helped them decipher the action. They should then say what they still had questions about (lines or words), and the class can work through these remaining difficult moments together. Did they find the character

interactions clearer? What do they think about each of the characters in the scene? Each group should present for about three minutes: enough time to hear a summary of their findings and have each group member say something about the project.

Pollock's highly innovative comic book might be overwhelming to use as a sole text for a class-reading of *King Lear*, but using it for a focused discussion of one of Shakespeare's most famous scenes provides new angles from which to view Lear, as well as the Fool. Yoking together the visual art form for students in this age of the graphic novel age can help them improve their reading skills, realize that Shakespeare can be more accessible, and meet their Fool comfortably in person.

**“Tigers, not daughters, what have you Performed?” (4.2.41): A Lesson on Writing Metaphors with *King Lear***

(Lesson Plan: Appendix I:F)

Thirteen year olds, as any parent will profess, are complex individuals. While emotional growing pains cause struggle in their relationships, these changes also present a great period of intellectual growth. Atwell notes an advantage that adolescents have over their younger counterparts: “They’re powerfully attracted to metaphorical language and layers of meaning. They glimpse shades of gray amid all the black and white that surrounded their childhoods” (60-61). This new-found appreciation for imagistic language and for deeper shades of meaning makes adolescence the perfect age at which to examine Shakespeare’s metaphorical language for the first time. Metaphor implies that two dissimilar things are the same, or at least share the same characteristics (Gibson 52). Shakespeare’s metaphors, though, while enriching, complicate the process of

reading his plays through their varied syntax, grammar, and sometimes unfamiliar comparisons. In order to better connect to the deeply metaphorical language of Shakespeare, students examine Shakespeare's animalistic metaphors and create their own in order to understand how such imaginative language can add to their own writing.

By the time they complete a few scenes of *King Lear*, students will start wanting to know what happens next. They are, as Wilhelm suggests, entering the story world. Since this particular text is a play, they will also most likely be closely associating themselves with a character in the play whether or not they choose to admit it. This natural reader response is one that teachers can build upon with activities discussing building blocks like metaphor and simile. Without even realizing it, in a novel, poem, or play, students take part in "perspective-taking," aligning themselves with or against certain characters (Wilhelm 59). Half of the reason that they align themselves is their own experiences, while the other half is the perspective from which the story is told. In this lesson, both angles will be discussed in terms of how the metaphors make us like or dislike characters in *King Lear*.

In this lesson, students are put in groups of three or four to analyze animal metaphors from the play. They will be given a sheet of metaphors (Appendix I:G) and discuss what they think of the character being talked about in each metaphor. What does the metaphor make the character sound like? Why do they think the animal relates to that character? After discussing these issues, the class decides why metaphors are useful in reading. As a take home assignment, students create their own animal metaphors by writing letters, helping to develop their own voice.

*Putting Metaphor under a Microscope*

Putting such an emphasis on metaphor has many advantages. First, students still anxious about the poetic format of the plays have smaller sections to work with, typically just a line at a time. While Shakespeare does provide us with extended metaphors, many of the animal comparisons in this play are brief. These more manageable sections help those less confident working with the play have an understanding of the text. Secondly, metaphor allows for more student interpretation than just the act of figuring out what Shakespeare is saying in his vocabulary. Finding out what the vocabulary definitions of words, or denotations, is something that many texts provide, but students can invent many of their own reasons for why the metaphor fits, or does not fit, the character in their opinion.

Students will be amazed at how much can be gleaned from one metaphor. For instance, when Lear shouts at Kent in the first scene of the play to “Come not between the dragon and his wrath” (1.1.121), students can imagine immediately what Lear looks like at that moment. Even saying the phrase aloud can help them determine the feeling, even if they might not understand what “wrath” means. The fact that Lear refers to himself as “the dragon” instead of “a dragon” demonstrates how singularly focused his state of mind is on maintaining complete power. In my “Acting Shakespeare” class at Creighton University, we discussed how this line was written to give the actor a chance to roar, as the word “wrath” stretches itself out when spoken. The “a” sound is forced out and the face automatically snarls, almost as if about to breathe fire. The image in the line, as well as the ability to hear it aloud (as lines are meant to be spoken) can help

students better interpret the characters as they read the play and enjoy making connections within it.

While most students learn what metaphors are in middle school, Professor Kathleen McEvoy discovered that even some college students cannot articulate what purpose metaphors serve. More than just comparing dissimilar objects, metaphors convey ideas that are difficult to put into words and reveal underlying meanings of a text (416). It could be said that rather than being window-dressing, metaphors are the windows through which we see the true character of Shakespeare's tragic figures.

In McEvoy's class, she used the transition of animal metaphors to show the shifts of power in the play: Lear's transition from dragon in the first scene to being pursued with Cordelia as the British forces "fire us hence like foxes" (5.3.22-23). Lear has turned from the hunter to the hunted in a matter of five acts. Linda Mitcheli writes that though compared to a cornered beast, Lear never acts this part: "Neither frantic or enraged, he uses animal figures forcefully, vividly, simply" (qtd. in McEvoy 418). This idea of showing a change in self-image is perhaps too complex for middle-school students; for our purposes we will see how humans take on animal characteristics and what that means to young adults in their beginning study of the metaphor. In its essential state, the metaphor study in this lesson is based on perspective and how imagery can color student reading and writing.

Atwell says that when we ask questions focused on the craft of a piece of writing, such as how a particular element like metaphor works with the whole, this kind of examination stretches into not just students' reading experience, but also their own writing. She writes, "We teach them how to go beyond plot, stop letting stories happen

to them, and start making decisions about what is and isn't working in pieces of their reading" (284). This idea of not just letting a story, or in our case a play, *happen* to them makes students take a more active role in examining why metaphors work, not just noticing that they exist.

### *Examination of Lear's Metaphors and Reader Response*

Students examine a worksheet with many examples of metaphors and discuss what they think about the characters based on those animal metaphors. In this activity the concept of appreciating the "gray areas" as noted in Atwell comes into play. Students discussing these quotes might fall on opposite sides in the same group depending with which character they have been associating themselves. In Wilhelm's discussion of the dimensions of adolescent reader response, he lists the characteristics of evocative, or emotional, responses from readers to include entering the story world, showing interest in the plot, relating to the characters and creating a mental picture of the story world (46). In analyzing how they view each character from the perspective of the speaker of the metaphor and from their personal place as reader, students draw upon each of these dimensions to fully engage in the world they have created for themselves.

One of the main categories students examine is insults Lear brings against his daughters. Discussing these metaphors reveal clues to the reader about some of the character of the sisters, as well as about Lear's character. In one scene, after Goneril threatens to remove his knights for their rowdy behavior, Lear compares her face to a "wolvish visage" (1.4.307) as well as to several other predatory animals. Rather than keeping his metaphors consistent, he provides several violent images, each molding itself



into our impression of Goneril so that can picture Lear's version of his daughter as an "unnatural hag" (2.4.280), not fitting in any natural order. Readers, without having a director visually make an interpretation for them, must decide whether they believe Lear in his characterizations of Goneril or pity Goneril for having her father insult her in this manner.

In this same scene, Lear remarks to Goneril, "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is/ To have a thankless child!" (1.4.286-87). Lear creates a similar comparison with his daughter Regan, saying she strikes with her tongue "most serpentlike upon the very heart" (2.4.161). When students study these metaphors in which both daughters are compared with snakes in reference to their mouths, they might note how this comparison works because the two women are unfaithful with their words, or how they charm before they poison.

Finally settling on an animal metaphor for both, Lear condemns them after the storm saying, "'Twas this flesh begot/Those pelican daughters" (3.4.74). Bevington notes that in Shakespeare's time people commonly believed that young pelicans killed their mothers in order to feast upon her blood for sustenance (687). This image of the sacrificial parent was a symbol Shakespeare's audience would have recognized as a Christ metaphor. This final comparison places Lear into the metaphor as the selfless parent, sacrificing all for the greed of the children, but this metaphor blames Lear for the creation of such beasts, as he begot them. Just as Lear plays the parent pelican, sacrificed for bloodlust of the children, as the play progresses he paints himself in metaphor more and more as the prey in the sport of his eldest daughters. To argue the other side of the question, however, did not the parent pelican once feed upon its own parents? In her

examination of a new perspective for Goneril and Regan in her book *Fantasies of Female Evil*, scholar Cristina León Alfar notes that the two women in their rule as queens rule in a perfect imitation of their father's authoritarian regime (97). Some students may be able to explain why they feel injustice on behalf of Goneril and Regan in examining the negative metaphors about them (especially if they have not finished the play). They might be realizing the imperfection of Lear, the flesh which begot his daughters, which causes his own downfall.

Near the end of the play, Lear abandons all negative metaphors for his eldest daughters and turns in upon himself again, creating a new kind of animal metaphor. After Lear is reunited with Cordelia in the French camp, the pair is taken captive by the English forces. At this point Lear seems ready to dissolve any connection he once had to his former life and power, if only Cordelia can be by his side. When Cordelia suggests they attempt to bargain for their freedom, Lear resists, saying,

No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison.

We two alone will sing like birds i'th' cage.

When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down

And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh

At gilded butterflies. (5.3.8-13)

Unlike the sound of his early threat to Kent to “Come not between a dragon and his wrath” (1.1.121) when Lear controls his emotions perfectly in verse, the iambic pentameter does not begin to become regular until after reference to caged birds, which seems a calming thought which puts Lear back into his sane mind. The *epizeuxis* (repetition of same word over and over) of “no” begins this passage almost as

rhythmically as a bird song, like small chirps. Then, almost childlike, he uses *polysyndeton*, the repetitive use of a conjunction like “and,” to create an image of laughter and old stories, so unlike the story in which he is currently participating. The “gilded butterflies,” so inherently different from, as Albany suggests, the “gilded serpent” of Goneril (and presumably her sister), further alienates the then-British audience from the British cause into the French camp (5.3.86). For a modern audience, most students will empathize with the newly captured jail-birds Lear and Cordelia in Lear’s metaphorical language.

After students have ten minutes to justify their choices of what each metaphor means in its context, you should raise the question of what purpose these metaphors play. What is the point of looking at how Lear and other characters use these metaphors? In asking this, we direct students to examine the title of the play. Students are familiar with the terms protagonist and antagonist, and this is a good time to refresh their memories of these terms. Who do they think is the protagonist in this play and what does that mean for the audience? While some students may have already sided with the less-favored parties based on their interaction with the evocative dimensions of the book, but even more would favor the non-Lear characters if he had not been the protagonist. If the play were called *Servant Oswald*, perhaps he would not be referred to as a sniveling dog by Kent. Perhaps if the play were called *Queen Goneril*, we would see even more clearly the heartache that comes from having a senile, dismissive father and a lover-stealing sister. In fact, ideas like this spurred author Jane Smiley to write a Pulitzer Prize-winning retelling of this story, *A Thousand Acres*, which is set in Iowa and is narrated from an updated position of Goneril, the eldest daughter.

*Student Voice and Metaphor in Letter-writing*

In this activity, while students will not write novels rewriting Shakespeare's work, they practice the use of animal metaphor and simile by constructing a letter from one character to another reacting to one of the scenes in which they participate. Rather than showing Lear's perspective, students should choose another character's point of view that they find interesting or underexplored. They should draft a letter in modern English including five metaphors describing their chosen character and other characters in the play using animal descriptions. Students must decide whether the metaphor will describe each character positively or negatively, since each of the devices should use perspective. Also, the students should give explanation in the letter for why they chose a particular animal. The completion of the metaphor paints the clearest image for the reader, and also gives a teacher a perspective into the students' thoughts.

Perhaps the most poignant animal metaphor in the play comes from the blind Gloucester, who mournfully proclaims, "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods;/ They kill us for their sport" (4.1.37-38). Though this metaphor is uncommonly depressing, McEvoy points out that it makes a great model for students struggling to put together a metaphor (418). The structure has three parts, like a simple math problem. The first part includes an animal relationship with something, the second includes what the relationship represents, and the third is an explanation of why that works. Students might like another example you make up, something like, "As our dog is to the cat next-door, so is my mother to me on Saturdays, trying to get me to do chores." In the image,

as long as students explain why the metaphor makes sense in their minds, they are doing the work of a writer.

Inside the letters students should develop their ideas and personal voice in writing. As adolescents, students are trying on the language of their peers, their parents, and the media to find the best way to express themselves. This does not mean that they parrot language, but rather as primary school educator A.H. Dyson writes, they use others' writing and speech as "rich resources for composing and performing" (qtd. in Sperling et al. 75). Reading Shakespeare as an example does not mean trying to rewrite his poetry in students' journals. By dissecting his metaphors, students gain better understanding not just of the characters or the image created and they also build toward the Core Standards of understanding point of view and the function of figurative meanings ("Reading Standards 6-12" 36). They can then, in their own voices, justify choices of animals for characters and truly use the metaphorical device they have just learned.

Alternatively, instead of creating a letter using Shakespeare's characters, students can use the idea of animal metaphors to create a narrative letter in their voice to another person they know. This kind of true personal expression allows them to take inspiration from the characters they know best: the people around them every day. Reading researcher Melanie Sperling and her team claim that this kind of writing activity can be extremely beneficial in the classroom: "Narratives[...] offer children a vehicle for exploring experiences and a space for invoking and orchestrating voices. Doing so, children are able to try on varied identities to explore the issues that they deal with in their everyday lives" (76). Young adults struggle to reason out their worldview in their

writing and promoting exploration of a more personal kind in this activity can work well to build understanding of metaphor and their voice. Depending on your class focus, one choice might take priority over another, but either activity will permit practice with the device and better understanding of the purpose and perspective that comes with using imagery in writing.

As adolescents begin to appreciate the “gray areas” of literature, studying the purpose behind metaphors can deepen their appreciation of all texts they might encounter in the future. From *The Outsiders* to political speeches, imagery is created to move emotion and try to bring people to a more common perspective. By reading and writing metaphor in middle school, students may gain an understanding that will grow with them as they grow into adults.

## CHAPTER IV: LESSONS ON THEME IN *KING LEAR*

Students comfortable with the language of *King Lear* are ready to dive deeper into the interpretation of themes and motifs in the play. Students who can decipher thematic elements can better engage with not just the play, but also the modern world. By being text detectives, sniffing out the concepts of madness, blindness, and fate in the text, students practice good reading and writing skills, and also key critical thinking and creative skills that translate into other fields.

### *Preview of Lesson Plans*

In the exercises that follow, students decipher key parts of the *King Lear* puzzle. In the first lesson, students watch the progression of the title character from sanity to madness by using selected pages from Ian Pollock's comic book version of the play. Visual interpretation leads to creation of their own panels to explain key parts of the play, especially parts which seemed initially unclear.

The second lesson follows the common theme of sight and blindness in the play. Beginning with discussion in literature circles of the "cliff scene" with Gloucester and Edgar, students work through the idea of physical blindness. While blindness can be literal, in this play students pick out moments of emotional blindness too, when characters cannot face the truth about themselves.

The final lesson of the *Lear* unit should be used at the conclusion of the play, after students have read the ghastly deaths of so many of its players. Students play the role of either "prosecutor" or "defense" for these characters, trying to establish that they were or

were not responsible for their actions. Discussing the medieval concept of fortune, all the students in the class play jury to decide whether the deaths were fate, caused by another character, or their own fault.

### **It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World of the Story**

(Lesson Plan: Appendix I: G)

King Lear goes mad. This sad fact is one which must be faced in the classroom. When Lear pleads, "Oh, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!" (1.4.45), we know as an audience that this line forebodes exactly the opposite. In his article "On Teaching the 'Madness' in *King Lear*," professor Neils Harold states that viewing the play through the lens of madness has led teachers down strange paths in the past, into all sorts of cultural and politically critical routes which ignore the text just to force implications upon it (261). The well-traveled route of study including all of these cultural and political implications laid out by teachers of *King Lear* will not work for this theme, so we must find connections for adolescents. For many middle-school students, this play may be the first text they read which confronts the difficult issues of age and madness, and rather than further alienating them from the world of the story, we need to find ways to study the phenomena in the text without making explanations too vague. In this lesson, students see visual interpretations of the madness, as well as create them in order to better understand this difficult topic.



### *Visualizing Madness: Performance*

Studying this theme means keeping an open mind to what madness looks like and showing a few clips of different actors' interpretations can help students think about the idea of madness. Morris Carnovsky's interpretation of Lear is considered one of the most important performances of Shakespeare in the twentieth century. About the extraordinary "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks" speech (3.2.1-9), he writes, "Consider the energy required for that outburst. In performing it, I felt almost as if I had expended as much energy on the first speech of the scene as I could summon up for the rest of it" (Carnovsky and Sander 146). His Lear yelled these mad lines to the heavens. While a video of this particular performance is almost impossible to track down, many actors have taken this route and clips of the raving Lear by wonderful actors like Olivier and McKellan are accessible from YouTube.

Alternatively, in RSC director John Barton's interviews *Playing Shakespeare*, actor Donald Sinden analyzes the moment of Lear in the storm from a perspective of quiet madness, rather than over-the-top passion. Remarking on the same moment, he says, "I do think here that Lear is asking for a storm, actually, rather than shouting at one that's already there" (144). Instead of shouting the speech, Sinden performed this monologue at almost a whisper, as if it were an incantation. The *Playing Shakespeare* video is easily acquirable from libraries or Amazon, and is worthwhile for these kinds of explorations and honest discussions with actors. Showing pieces of it to the class throughout the lessons can make language and meter issues clearer. For this lesson, Sinden's insight that madness can mean more than obscene fits of temper in playing the mad king helps us realize the complexities of Lear's madness in the play.

*Visualizing Madness: Comic Books*

While comparing multiple interpretations of scenes like this one is a valuable exercise, students next need a jumping off point for the creation of their own ideas. In this activity, students view images from Ian Pollock's comic book *King Lear* which show the transformation of the king from powerful ruler to childlike supplicant. Viewing transparencies of pages from the book, the entire class can make observations about each picture. Begin with the most sane scenes when discussing madness in the play. In the first scene of the play, Pollock sketches the king high above his courtiers, pointing a confident arm to give directions with the other characters in the frame turned toward him (Pollock 2). In this picture, Lear's eyes are open and focused, his beard combed, and his clothing in place. When students look at this picture, they see a man in control of himself. Though Pollock's stylized drawings make caricatures of the characters, the exaggeration of the features helps interpret their emotional and mental state.

Each picture projected shows Lear's descent into madness and despair. After the "storm scene" his descent quickens and in each picture, his beard becomes less orderly, he becomes less clothed, and his eyes become at first unfocused, then finally ringed with dark circles. By the final scene of the play, Lear's eyes are dark, his clothing simple, and his hair blowing long in an imaginary wind (Pollock 135). From the first scene to the last, the transformation is incredible. His once shouting mouth is a thin line of despair. He is alone in the frame except for the corpse of his daughter. His arms support the body and his hand lovingly cradles her head. Gone is the sense of control and propriety, of royal decrees and pronouncements. He speaks almost to himself, repeating the *anaphora*, "Never, never, never, never, never!" (5.3.314) Students can discuss whether Lear has

returned to his senses at this moment, or what kind of new madness this expression might mean. Just like comparing the performances of Lear, viewing the continuum put forth by Pollock proves a valuable activity for encouraging class discussion and for closely examining texts.

As a final step in the activity, students make independent creation to portray a moment of madness in the text: how do they view King Lear, or perhaps Edgar, or even the Fool? Do all characters have moments when they lose their senses? One useful connection from Harold's article is the suggestion that we cannot understand Lear's madness without viewing it on a continuum of pretending to madness. Kent is sane, though disguised, and speaks reason, while the disguised Edgar speaks madness. On the furthest edge is Lear, mad and completely uncovered (often literally, as he is viewed as naked in many interpretations). In Edgar, audience and reader are provided a view inside the madness, but somehow apart from it (Harold 268). All the characters lie on this continuum somewhere, and perhaps students would like to draw a moment in which Regan loses control of her senses, including the blinding of Gloucester.

Having the freedom to choose a troublesome or favorite moment in the play to illustrate helps students make the play their own. Wilhelm notes that less proficient readers can especially benefit from projects which connect art to text:

Once these students were given the support to create a concrete visualization of the story, then they often became excited about reading that particular piece, and became capable of empathizing, connecting, and reflecting upon the literary experience. (65)

Producing their own representations of the story of King Lear helps students empathize, connect, and reflect upon one of the most difficult themes for any reader, let alone a young one: madness. In many ways, madness feels to the reader like a senseless crime, as the victim loses control as the story progresses. Still this theme is vital to understanding the characters and plot of the play, and through using art to help realize these concepts, students can make true connections.

### **Sight and Blindness: Edgar, Gloucester, and the Cliff**

(Lesson Plan: Appendix I: H)

In *This Great Stage*, one of the most influential pieces of scholarship on *King Lear* in the twentieth century, Robert Heilman writes about the image and structure of the play by focusing on “patterns” which appear within the lines. He identifies motifs of nakedness, madness, and also of the idea of blindness throughout the play. Though physical blindness is one possible interpretation in Gloucester’s case, Heilman argues that the theme runs much deeper. He writes,

Lear and Gloucester are blind to the meaning of those phenomena which betoken the presence of evil; Edmund, Goneril, and Regan to the existence of moral barriers to the consummation of their ambitions. But the blind man cannot be tricked by his eyes; whereas those who pride themselves on clear sight may be misled both by the world they seem to control and by the appearance of well-being within themselves. (63)

The older generation, Lear and Gloucester, ignore the signs of betrayal around them and fail to see their control fading from them. The younger generation, on the other hand,

cannot see the possible consequences to their bad decisions and choose instead fall into selfish habits: taking lovers, evicting the King, and waging a war over personal matters.

Perceptive students might note how often visual terms are used in *King Lear*. In the first scene of the play, for instance, Lear threatens to disown his youngest daughter and Kent argues for her case. The angered Lear shouts at Kent, “Out of my sight!” (1.1.158) to which Kent replies, echoing the theme, “See better, Lear, and let me still remain/ The true blank of thine eye” (159-60). In sharing this language, Kent proves that he understands Lear’s concerns, but he undermines Lear’s anger with his wit. The “blank,” or white part of the target, corresponds to the true intent which Kent has on Lear’s behalf. From the first moments of the play, characters misperceive the world around them. Lear himself realizes his loss of perception and control, stating, “This is not Lear./ Does Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes?” (1.4.224) Using *synecdoche*, the part representing the whole, Lear uses his eyes to stand for his consciousness and mental prowess, which are slowly slipping away. The theme of seeing, eyes, and blindness continues to reappear as the play progresses, reaching its climax in Act 4.

#### *Introduction of 4.6*

By the time the class is working with Act 4, the students will be comfortable with the ideas of Shakespeare’s language and with performance. This lesson meshes both close-reading and performance to reveal the complicated events of the famous “Dover Cliff” scene. In one of the most surreal moments of the play, the disguised Edgar leads his newly blind father to the cliffs of Dover. Edgar knows that his father intends to kill

himself and leads the old man not to the edge of the cliff, but instead to a clearing where he fools him into believing a miracle has taken place. Because Gloucester is blind, he believes the scene his son imagines for him, coming away with no more plan on self-hurt. Heilman calls this the “ultimate act of love,” as Edgar protects his father from injuring himself and guides him in his despair and pain (52). This dense scene provides an excellent opportunity for close reading and discussion based on character self-awareness, as well as the concept of dramatic irony.

David Bevington and Gavin Witt write that scene posed so many theatrical and theoretical problems for readers and directors in the nineteenth century that often it was cut from productions completely (Riggio 180). The scene is troublesome theatrically in the number of times Edgar switches his voice and in how much reliance is put into Edgar’s description of the landscape. Even Gloucester doubts that they are at the edge of a cliff, as Edgar says he hears ocean noises. Which character to believe? The audience, without the script in front of them, would have been unaware whether Edgar was truly painting the scene for them as they had come to expect or was lying to Gloucester, which was the actual case. The same problem can happen with readers in the classroom, so a quick discussion of the set up of the scene is important. Talk about how Gloucester had promised to kill himself, saying after Edgar leads him to the cliff, he will no longer need to be led (4.1.76-77). Edgar cannot allow this to happen, so he concocts the imaginary cliff to save his father’s life.

This scene is lengthy, including not only the section with Gloucester and Edgar, but also entrances of Lear, the imposition of gentlemen and attendants from Cordelia’s camp, Oswald’s death, and the reading of a letter intercepted from Goneril. A teacher

who uses this abbreviated version of the scene with Edgar, Gloucester, and Lear allows for a clearer opportunity to discuss the theme of blindness, the staging of the scene, and ideas of dramatic irony involved. Much like earlier scenes in the appendix, some of the more difficult vocabulary is defined in the margin. As this is an abridgement, the line numbers do not match up to Shakespeare's, but they allow for easy reference especially when the performance aspect is introduced. While in its full length the scene might take multiple class periods to discuss, the abridgement permits a balance of reading and performance in a single class period, as well as more focus on the theme of blindness itself.

*Literature Circles: Divide and Conquer*

Literature circles are a popular pedagogical tool in the middle school classroom and can easily be adapted to Shakespearean study. Working to help her struggling readers better succeed on standardized tests, Mary Ellen Dakin approached the problem by using shorter passages from Shakespeare to enforce reading skills. Working with other educators at her school, Dakin built a new system for enhancing comprehension of any scene, passage, or poem. In small groups, students form literature circles to work together on selected passages. The key to this is that each student had specific role on this team to examine something different in the passage. Each role specifically responds to the kinds of questions used on standardized tests and allows practice in examining scenes which might be used for standardized exams in the future (Dakin 103). Working together in teams students not only find meaning in the passage, but also become teachers to the other group members, asking for their answers and responding to their ideas.

While Dakin and the teachers she worked with experimented with many roles in literature circles, roles can be adapted and created to fit your classroom. Having these particular roles divided will help students develop reading strategies over time (Dakin 105). A few suggestions that Dakin and her colleagues put forth are the Summarizer, Questioner, Clarifier, Prophet, and Director (114). The Summarizer's goal is clear: to summarize the plot of the scene, while the Questioner interrogates why things are occurring. Clarifiers dissect difficult lines and passages to make sense of them, almost like a translator, and Prophets try to guess what the impact of the scene will be. What will happen next? Directors might be the visual thinkers, putting together the pieces of what this might look like in performance. Having at least four roles allows enough



difference of opinion and role to investigate the scene fully, but you can decide how large to make the groups.

The first goal, then, is to get students into small groups and discuss the various roles. Terenzi, one of the educators working with Dakin, put out a “classified ad” for each of the roles before the literature circle day so that students could view the various options open to them for the next day. Then they “put in applications” for the roles that interested them (Dakin 115). Especially if using a role like the Director, which takes a certain type of performance-interested student, this method can be helpful. If time allows, applying for roles lets students work to their strengths, and thus be better teachers to the fellow students in their groups. Otherwise, random choice by picking a card with the roles on it on the class day can work well, forcing students to think differently than they might otherwise. If you use this technique, the “Director” role might be left out and be used as a class discussion point near the end of the day.

In order to make the most of class time, the literature circle activity is highly structured. Students break into groups and read half the passage aloud, work on their roles individually for ten minutes, and then meet back to discuss their results. The process will be repeated with the second half of the scene after Lear’s entrance. By dividing the reading and analysis in this way, the half of the scene which addresses physical blindness sets itself apart from Lear’s discussion of true sight with Gloucester. At the end of the class period, students should write a journal response comparing their particular thoughts from the point of view of their “role” about the idea of blindness in the play so far.

*Utilizing the Groups: Read and Report*

After introducing the scene by reminding students of the prior action, have all the groups work up to the first half of the scene. Each group begins by reading the scene aloud together, and members can either read specific roles or switch the reader at each terminal punctuation mark (period, exclamation mark, etc). During the reading, students should jot down notes which could help them with their group roles and circle parts which are unclear. After the first half has been read, students can answer each other's questions and hypothesize about what is going on.

Once everyone seems to understand the premise, individuals should investigate the half of the scene using their particular roles. For the first half of the scene, students should work individually for at least ten minutes to create their discussion points for their role. The role sheets have specific directions about the assessment created from this activity for each student. Students who are Questioners, Summarizers, or Clarifiers, for instance, need to look at the text to compress, analyze, and create discussion questions for their peers. They spend a lot of time working on the language skills they developed in earlier lessons, as well as being able to deeply study how Gloucester's blindness creates irony in the scene. The Prophet might try to guess how the physical blindness will come into play later, or what Edgar's next moves will be in the play. Trying to analyze future action shows a deep understanding of the underlying plot structure. The Director should be thinking about the layout of the scene, but also about its tone: is it funny? Is it sad and serious? Many options are on the table for mapping the action in this scene.

Regrouping, students should each share one question they created with the group about

the first half of the scene. On the individual worksheets, some of the questions specifically steer students toward the idea of physical blindness in this section.

Then, the process is repeated with the second half of the scene, beginning with reading this part aloud. By alternating reading, solo work, and group discussion, students are less likely to get distracted during the class period. In her classroom, Atwell uses a similar strategy of creating an environment for productive individual exploration in workshop of student writing, carefully structuring blocks of time in which students know exactly what is expected of them (140). Having each student responsible for a particular role maintains the democracy of the group discussion. Each student has a chance to speak about their particular findings without one voice becoming dominant in the conversation.

Finally, as an assignment at the end of the class period students should write a journal entry or short response paper discussing the scene. In this entry, they should write the things they focused on with their role, their findings, and the idea of blindness as it shows itself in the play. What kinds of things is Lear talking about? What is true sight? How does this relate to other characters or scenes, or other books they have read? Making connections inter- and intra-textually enforces the ideas that books' themes are meaningful, not simply decoration.

Gloucester's blinding makes unable to be tricked by his eyes any longer. He remarks, "I stumbled when I saw. Full oft 'tis seen/ Our means secure us, and our mere defects/ prove our commodities" (4.1.19-21). As Heilman states, however, in the moments of true physical blindness often the characters learn more about their place in the world as in the case of Gloucester, where "the blind man has come to insight" (45).

We as readers gain insight, too, watching the characters progress through the difficulties in the play. As Lear has clear insights even in his madness, and Gloucester realizes the truth only when blind, students can sense the dramatic irony involved in this famous scene. Through individual roles and group discussion, students become more watchful about what themes and motifs do in the play, beyond just being able to recognize them.

### **Fate and Free Choice: The Ending of *King Lear***

(Lesson Plan: Appendix I: I)

The death toll by the end of *King Lear* includes Cornwall, Goneril, Regan, Cordelia, Edmund, Gloucester, and Lear, ignoring all of the nameless courtiers and soldiers and even ignoring the inferred death of the Fool. This dire ending does not exist in all versions of the ancient story from which the play is based. Versions earlier than Shakespeare allowed Cordelia to live, and even after Shakespeare's published edition, playwright Nahum Tate "united Edgar and Cordelia in marriage, placing Lear once again on his throne" (Bevington 656). Can we imagine a sunnier ending than the rightful king restored and our favorite lady united to our hero? Perhaps not, but Shakespeare was not trying to lift the spirits of his audience. Instead, the ending of his version very much speaks to the choices of the characters throughout the play, as well as to Fortune's hand shaping the plot.

### *Introducing Lady Fortune*

A popular motif in the Medieval and Renaissance periods was the idea of the Fortune's Wheel, forever spinning the fates of humans from glory to the gutters. Fortune

was often portrayed as a beautiful woman in charge of the destinies of all people, high and low. Often, she depicted with a “wheel” to which people were cosmically attached. The top of the wheel meant riches and happiness, while those at the bottom met with hardship. It might help to imagine that if this wheel were spun, the face of the person moving from the top of the wheel to the bottom and back up again would look like a flipbook of a person moving from raucous laughter to uncontrollable crying and back again. The equalizing force of fate meant that if Lady Fortune decided to spin that wheel, even kings could lose everything. Shakespeare inherited this concept of the wheel of fortune from earlier writers, and of the six mentions of it in his plays, half are in *King Lear* (Soellner 275). The theory of Fortune’s Wheel was that no person stayed in good or bad fortune, and just when it was least expected, change would come. For most characters in a tragedy, this means a divine humbling. For instance, by the end of *King Lear* the character Edmund has risen from his bastard state to gain power, only to be confronted by the brother he betrayed to gain that power. When Edgar reveals himself, Edmund cries, “The wheel is come full circle” (5.3.177). He has moved from bottom to top to bottom again and dies in disgrace.

In this lesson, students discuss if they think a supernatural reason exists for characters dying in this play or whether the characters are responsible for their falls from grace. Middle-school literature expert Don Gallo in his list of characteristics of good fiction for young adults writes that stories in which the outcomes depend on characters’ actions work well for this age group (Herz and Gallo 10). The reasoning behind this goes that students are at an age where they see the consequences of their actions beyond the immediate future. They begin to plan more concretely and see the way their decisions

shape their lives. Though often the characters in *King Lear* blame their misfortunes on fate, students will make connection to the plot to see that most downfalls in the play are caused by choice, not by fortune. However, that is up for the students to decide as they collect the textual evidence.

Judging character decisions is a useful way to study plot with adolescents. According to the Core Standards, young adults should be able to take evidence from the texts they read to help draw inferences and find explicit themes (36). After reading the play in its entirety, or at least a summation of the parts that were not read, students will be able to apply the concept of Fortune's Wheel by putting a character on trial to determine whether the character deserved what happened or the character's ending had more to do with fate than their actions. The idea of the trial is in this play and will seem familiar to students, as they have read the mock trial put on by Lear, the Fool, Edgar, and Kent in Act III. Lear assigns the roles of the trial, though he himself ends up playing the "prosecutor, judge, and inventor of the scene," acting out a fantasy which describes his mental condition (Lockhart 471).

#### *Wheel of Fortune and Free Choice: The Trial of Lear*

Jeffrey Wilhelm spends much of his teaching guide *You Gotta BE the Book!* focusing on how to help struggling adolescent readers engage with reading material. A problem for many young adults is that they cannot visualize anything when they read. Instead, they read to pick up word clues that help them answer summary questions at the end of a lesson. When Wilhelm asked a student what he "saw" when he read, the young man replied, "See? I don't see anything, man, nothin' but words!" (98). The way to

combat this overwhelming problem, in Wilhelm's opinion, is to include "story drama," which uses theatrical techniques to help students explore character as well as the situations of the story (99). In this lesson, students use the reading they have done not to answer fill-in-the-blank questions, but to interrogate the characters about their motives and condition. By doing this, students will leave the text of *King Lear* with a final, clear understanding not just of the characters and plot, but of how the story world can become real through story drama in a trial. What makes this activity story drama rather than typical classroom performance is that Shakespeare is not writing the words for this activity, but rather students produce their own arguments in modern English to act out prosecution and defense of a character.

In this exercise the class is split into groups of six, with each group choosing a different character from the play (choices include Lear, Edmund, Gloucester, Albany, Regan, Goneril, or Cordelia). While Gibson, as well as other non-Shakespearean educators, have created exercises putting characters on trial, this activity includes the option of including blaming Lady Fortune, another character, or the characters themselves for what happens at the end of the play. Gibson writes that different students should have roles as defending or prosecuting lawyers, witnesses, jury members, and even the defendant (206). In order to help encourage teamwork and to simplify the activity, the only two roles for each group are "prosecution" and "defense." In our case, the groups act out the trial in five minutes in front of the class, who become the jury for the case.

Before that can happen, however, students need class time to prepare their arguments by using information from the play. In my example, the team has King Lear

as their choice. In the trial, the prosecuting team will speak first to bring negative evidence against the character and they should collect at least three moments to highlight. For Lear, students may talk about his personal decision to give up the kingdom, for which the Fool rightfully scolds him about, saying that all his troubles began “since thou mad’st thy/ daughters they mothers; for when thou gav’st them the/ rod and putt’st down thine own breeches...” (1.4.169-71). Here the Fool’s emphasis is on the words “thy,” “thou,” and “thine,” reinforcing that this loss of control was the king’s personal choice. Students might also draw upon Lear’s angry outbursts as moments to support the prosecution, as in these moments adolescents might recall angry arguments they have had with their own parents, or scenes from movies in which the angry character is the villain.

The defendant team needs to think of at least three moments in the play which can be used as evidence to prove that the character had the best intentions at heart. For the king, students might point to his regret after yelling at Goneril. He admits to the Fool, “I did her wrong” (1.5.24), making us feel more sympathy for the king who is trying at this point to remember his fatherly affection. The defense should decide whom to blame, if not the character. Should they blame the daughters? Or did Lady Fortune make Lear go mad? A good guide for finding these moments for the defense is to have students reflect on when they felt sympathy for the characters. This reflection on their perception of the “story world” helps reinforce the good reading behavior of becoming emotionally involved with the text. Students can look back through their journals for summary moments which may include those kinds of emotions. For students who did not make initial connections to the characters, because they are allowed to work in teams someone on their side may have an opinion to draw from, and by further reflecting upon their



teammates' opinions, they might find their own. The defense can write down particular passages and quotes, collecting evidence to present to the class.

On the day of the “trials,” students sit with their defense and prosecution teams. Each character is discussed separately, first by the prosecution and then by the defense. They list the various moments in the play which make them believe the character is guilty of their own crimes, or, in the defense’s case, blame the crimes on either another character or Lady Fortune. Then, both sides can make some short closing remarks to restate their points. The “jury,” meaning the other classmates, vote by secret ballot without discussion. This way, students will vote for their gut reaction to the presentations without being further influenced by non-group members. Students either vote “guilty” or “innocent.” If they vote “innocent,” they should put in parenthesis who they believe is to blame for the crime. All of the votes are tallied at the end of the class period, when all the results for the characters will be read.

*Placing the Blame: Fools by Heavenly Compulsion?*

While in the play Gloucester blames the celestial beings for souring relations between families, Shakespeare gives the evil, though level-headed, Edmund a soliloquy on the subject. Responding to his father’s complaint against the heavens, he says,

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that when we are sick in fortune—often the surfeits of our own behavior—we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and stars, as if we were villains on necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion. (1.2.121-25)

Not even Edmund, who by rights might blame fortune for his bastard birth and lack of land, takes aim at the very thing which will damn him: personal choice. Students, though given the option of blaming Fortune for her mistakes, may find it difficult to get the jury to vote that way. The keen adolescent eye, just like Edmund's, can see that there is no "villain on necessity" or "fool by heavenly compulsion," though they might word it differently. While every class will vote differently based on the evidence collected, do not be surprised if you have a room full of guilty verdicts.

#### *Outside Connections: Discussing Other Books*

This lesson also creates a good place to connect to other texts students might have read in the year, allowing them to make connections across literature despite the differences in time period. For instance, in *The Outsiders*, how much does being a greaser or a Soc determine the future of the characters? Are there characters who control their destinies, or do they all feel trapped? Ponyboy seems to believe a little of both. Before the big rumble he talks to one of the rival gang members who has decided not to fight, and after this conversation the protagonist realizes, "Socs were just guys after all. Things were rough all over, but it was better that way. That way you could tell the other guy was human too" (Hinton 118). Being able to make the decision to fight meant that Randy, the Soc, had free will, but the pressures he felt were beyond his control. Something larger than him, call it fortune, was part of the problem as well. In the end, Ponyboy is literally put on trial for being at the scene of the death of a rival gang member. He is acquitted, as the audience feels he should be, though Ponyboy continues

to suffer feelings of remorse attached to the incident. Readers are glad that Ponyboy is not jailed and feel that ending is justified.

On the other end of the spectrum, Liesel Meminger in *The Book Thief* loses every family member and her best friend Rudy Steiner in the bombing of Munich. Though she does get adopted and seemingly finds peace in her life, readers cannot feel that losing everyone she loves fits her crime of stealing books. The math does not add up in this case, seeming to push against Gallo's characteristic of the ending fitting the actions in the novel. The narrator, Death, helps us to see that each decision by characters in the story did lead up to this ending, even if the decisions were not selfish or cruel ones. When Rudy turns down the chance to leave his family to go to the elite Nazi institution, Death says that things might have changed if he had made the opposite decision: Rudy "just maybe... would have lived" (Zusak 411). While protagonist Liesel loses her real and adoptive family, as well as her friend Rudy, the Jew Max Vandenberg whom her family protected lives through the horror of his work camp to be reunited with her. Without the collective decisions of the Meminger family, Max would not have lived to that point. Though students must look closely to see how the web is woven, Gallo's proposition that character decisions which impact the outcome of the story remains true, and *The Book Thief* holds constant with the middle school literature ideals.

While these are just two brief examples, connecting texts that students already know and love helps solidify the idea that learning comes in all forms. Analyzing the decision-making process from start to finish in a book is essential to more complex processes which students will learn later in their education.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CLOSING REMARKS

### ***Exeunt: A Final Encouragement***

Secondary education has greatly progressed to the point at which each student receives individualized instruction based on their Lexile level. Particular books now help particular learners. Educator Alan Purves writes, “At the center of the curriculum are *not* the works of literature... but rather the mind as it meets the book” (Atwell 30). The text is a means to an end. In our case using Shakespeare to meet traditional class goals in reading and writing is not for some lofty, elitist goal. I believe a place still exists for the whole-class text, and working together on *King Lear* creates places for teamwork, discussion, and oral presentation. Working with Shakespeare does not mean denying all of the progress made in young adult literature in the past fifty years, but Shakespeare does not need to be tossed in the corner until students reach AP English.

Just as the Globe wasn’t built in a day, you might find varying levels of success with each lesson in this teacher’s guide. The ultimate goal of merging lessons involving reading comic books, performing scenes, writing letters, and close reading this old play is truly the creation of skills which will help students as they progress in their educational development. While *King Lear* might seem like an ambitious choice for young adults, the characters within its pages are suffering through family issues and questions of identity just as adolescents do. Not every student comes away from *King Lear* wanting to be a Shakespeare scholar; that is not the goal. Instead, every student can come away with the knowledge that they know better how to decipher hard vocabulary in context. They should have more confidence with every text they encounter, having taken into their

hands the mission of finding motivations and themes in this play. They will remember the class work on performance and how it stretched them to try something new. They chewed Shakespeare's words in their mouths and found that they did not actually taste too bad.

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## APPENDIX I: LESSON PLANS

### APPENDIX I: A

TITLE: Insults and Shakespeare

GRADE LEVEL: 6-12

TIME REQUIRED: 30 minutes

OVERVIEW: Students create a “Shakespearean insults” to share with their classmates, read and view a scene of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*.

#### PURPOSE:

1. Students begin to feel more comfortable speaking the language of Shakespeare.
2. Students have fun creating insults, while also seeing how they tie into the plot and character of two of Shakespeare’s characters.
3. Students analyze a short scene for content and pacing.

OBJECTIVES: At the end of this lesson students will feel more confident in the nature of Shakespeare’s poetry as the interaction of characters and will have less fear of the difficulty of the material in front of them. They will see how tone can show the intent of a line in performance, even if not all of the vocabulary is clear.

#### MATERIALS:

For each student: copy of Rex Gibson’s insult sheet at the end of this lesson  
 For activity: overhead of Kent’s speech to Oswald (2.2.14-23), video of *King Lear* (available to stream on this website:  
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/episodes/king-lear/watch-the-play/487/>)

#### ACTIVITIES AND PROCEDURES:

1. Write the words “thou” and “you” on the board and give a short lesson on the difference in usage in Shakespeare. Explain why “thou” can be so insulting as it refers to someone less than you in some situations.
2. Divide class into two, lining up the students across from each other.
3. Hand out the insult sheets and explain the purpose and directions of the activity:
 

“Imagine it is the 1600s. You’re on the street and the person across from you is giving you the stink eye. You have to come up with an insult to get him to fight. Using the words on this page, think of your insult. It should

start with “Thou...” and then pick one item from column one, two, and three. An example might be “Thou paltry hare-brained bug!”. Make the insult as crazy as you want. Even if you don’t know what the words mean, when you get a chance to say it to the person across from you, say it like you know what it means with the intention of getting them to fight.”

4. Give students two minutes to memorize one item from each column, reciting it over to make sure they have it solidly in their minds.
5. One by one, students should loudly and tauntingly say their made up insult and the person across from them will respond with theirs. After pair of students goes, the class can vote on which insult was more effective (if desired).
6. Progress down the line, alternating sides until the entire class has given their insult.
7. Watch a segment of a Shakespearean play when insults take place in order so that students can see that even if you do not know 100% of the language, you can still understand a lot about the situation and relationship of characters.
  - a. Options include the Fool and Lear (1.4) or Kent and Oswald(2.2) from *King Lear*, the first meeting of the Capulets and Montagues (1.1) from *Romeo and Juliet*, or the lovers’ quarrel (3.2) from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.
  - b. Ask follow-up questions about what they noticed about the characters’ interactions in these scenes. Did they hear the “thee” or “you” forms of pronouns. How did the body language show how the characters were feeling? What was the best part?

**Instructions:** Take one word from each column to create a great insult, starting with the word “thou”. Try to make the best sounding one you can.

Example: “Thou paltry, glass-gazing shrimp!”

| Column One      | Column Two        | Column Three     |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Simpering       | Languageless      | Block            |
| Painted Notable | Wasp-stung        | Drone            |
| Threadbare      | Lack-brained      | Lubber           |
| Decayed         | Mad-headed        | Patch            |
| Flattering      | Shotten-herring   | Fancy-monger     |
| Shallow         | Nimble-footed     | Shoulder-clapper |
| Capering        | Puppy-headed      | Fragment         |
| Embossed        | Fell-lurking      | Varlet           |
| Revolted        | Marble-hearted    | Popinjay         |
| Superfluous     | Glass-gazing      | Mad wag          |
| Meddling        | Outward-sainted   | Promise-breaker  |
| Counterfeit     | Lascivious        | Pander           |
| Twangling       | Strangely visited | Coxcomb          |
| Juggling        | Lily-livered      | Hilding          |
| Viperous        | Cream-faced       | Mountebank       |
| Venomous        | Super-servicable  | Puke-stocking    |
| Wretched        | Frosty-spirited   | Basilisk         |
| Slovenly        | Egregious         | Ticklebrain      |
| Manifest        | Smooth-faced      | Bubble           |
| Scurvy          | Whore-son         | Whey-face        |
| Odoriferous     | All-changing      | Horse-drench     |
| Abominable      | Cony-catching     | Shrimp           |
| Malicious       | Hard-hearted      | Boggler          |
| Juggling        | Long-tongued      | Time-pleaser     |
| Unpolished      | Pigeon-livered    | Flibbertigibbet  |
| Insinuating     | Fustillarian      | Whoremonger      |
| Paltry          | Hare-brained      | Bug              |
| Execrable       | Logger-headed     | Candle-maker     |
| Testy           | Iron-witted       | Double-dealer    |
| Giddy           | Foul-spoken       | Pantaloon        |
|                 | Stretch-mouthed   | Boil             |

(Chart from Rex Gibson’s *Teaching Shakespeare*, 199 )

## APPENDIX I: B

**TITLE:** Internet Quest for Shakespeare

**GRADE LEVEL:** 6-8

**TIME REQUIRED:** 20 minutes day one (computer lab), 15 minutes day two (presentations of poster)

**OVERVIEW:** Working in groups, students learn about a particular aspect of Elizabethan culture or Shakespeare's life and then present that material to their classmates.

### PURPOSE:

1. Students gain research skills by using reputable computer sources to find information about Elizabethan England.
2. Students work creatively in teams to accomplish a goal.
3. Students improve their oral presentation skills by introducing their findings to the class.

**OBJECTIVES:** By the end of this lesson, students will have a greater knowledge of the attitudes and situation of the people in Shakespeare's day, without being deluged with too much information. They will have a chance to search for the material themselves at well-researched websites which can connect to their interests as well. Working as a group, they will create posters which creatively display the information, and as they present that information in a short oral presentation they will gain more confidence for informative public speaking.

### MATERIALS:

For each student: a copy of the search guide for their team, access to a computer

### ACTIVITIES AND PROCEDURES:

#### *Class Period One:*

1. Students are split into six teams and are seated with their groups in the computer lab. Each team a research topic to explore: Shakespeare's life, Shakespeare's plays, The Globe Theater, Elizabeth I, Fashion of Elizabethan England, or Life of an Elizabethan Teenager.
2. Students are instructed to find information about each of the questions of their groups from one of two websites: The Folger Library website for children (<http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=588>) or Foyer Library Theater Annex (<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/intro/index.html>).

3. Students should take notes on the material now, and then take the information home to work on a poster that will be displayed in the classroom. (If students are unable to do much group work together outside of school, each student could work on their answers on a separate sheet of paper and then paste onto a poster board at school.) The posters should include some sort of illustration, whether printed or drawn.

*Class Period Two:*

1. The students will present their group's findings one by one, and each group member should present one item from their poster to share with the class. Each group should get three to four minutes to share some of the facts, and students from the audience can ask questions. As the researching students are not expected to be experts on the topic, these questions can be written on the board and explored as the class continues to learn about Shakespeare during other lessons.
2. The posters can be hung up around the room to help the class get "in the mood for Shakespeare" as they get further into the plays.



## Search Topics:

**Shakespeare's Life:**

1. Where was Shakespeare born and what did his parents do?
2. When did Shakespeare move to London and which acting groups did he work with?
3. Whom did Shakespeare marry and how many children did they have?
4. What words did you find that Shakespeare made up?
5. What is the coolest thing you learned about Shakespeare on one of your sites?

**The Globe Theater:**

1. When was the Globe built?
2. What strange event happened in 1613? What happened afterward?
3. What were the major parts of the Globe Theater and what kind of stage did it have (proscenium, thrust, or theater in the round?)
4. Without electricity, how did they light the Globe Theater? How did they show storms or battles without special effects?
5. What is the weirdest thing you learned about the Globe Theater?

**Shakespeare's Plays:**

1. What were the three types of plays that Shakespeare wrote? How did the Globe Theater show which type of play was going on that day?
2. Which plays didn't get published until after Shakespeare died?
3. What are some famous lines we might recognize from Shakespeare's plays?
4. Who played the women's parts in Shakespeare's plays?
5. What is the weirdest thing you learned about one of Shakespeare's plays?

**Life of Elizabethan Teenager**

1. How much education did the average person have in Elizabethan England?
2. What kinds of jobs did most peasants get? What are some jobs we don't have any more?
3. What kind of sports did the courtiers play? What did common people do for fun?
4. What was life like for women in the home and family?
5. What is the weirdest thing you learned about society in Elizabethan England?

**Fashion of Elizabethan England:**

1. What are Sumptuary Laws and what did that mean for the people in England in the 1600s?
2. What meanings did certain colors have for clothing? What did red signify? White? Blue?
3. What were some of the layers of clothing men and women had to wear?
4. What were the costumes like for Shakespeare's plays? Where did they come from?
5. What is the coolest thing you learned about fashion in Elizabethan England?

## APPENDIX I: C

TITLE: Staging a Story

GRADE LEVEL: 6-12

TIME REQUIRED: 30 minutes

OVERVIEW: During this lesson, students will learn basic vocabulary about the stage, as well as see in the use of tableaux how staging a scene can tell a story.

### PURPOSE:

1. Teach students about stage directions and other language used for directing
2. Have students create their own frozen scenes, or tableaux, to show how stories can be told through staging.

OBJECTIVES: By the end of this lesson, students will better understand how to move on a stage by following stage directions and being conscious of the audience placement. Students will also become more comfortable with the idea of acting by displaying and describing *tableaux*, which show how effective stage pictures can be in storytelling and can lead to further stage work later on.

### MATERIALS:

For each student: a worksheet of the stage setup, pencil

### ACTIVITIES AND PROCEDURES:

1. Arrange the desks into an audience space to free up a performing area. You can either place the desks in an arc to create a thrust stage or create an open area in front of the room and move the desks backward.
2. Divide the class into two groups. Have one group remain seated while the other stands on the “stage.” Explain the basic blocking vocabulary terms: stage center, right, left, upstage and downstage. Have the group move together to these parts of the stage to demonstrate as you point them out.
3. Let audience members raise their hand and specifically direct one of the standing students to a spot on the stage. For example, “Skip downstage right.” Once each audience member has had a chance to move an actor, progress to the next activity.

4. While the rest of the class is working on filling in their stage direction sheets, take eight audience members (or volunteers from the class) aside from the group and explain the idea of *tableaux*. In pairs, have them consider some sort of freeze frame that they can display in front of the class to have them guess. In the hall, let them practice the poses and make sure that it is obvious what their actions are. If not, encourage them to “ham it up.”
5. As soon as the groups are ready, have them display their *tableaux* one by one. Let the audience guess what the action is and explain how they could figure it out. Then, ask them which person they looked at first. This means that this person has more power in staging and maintains the focus. Discuss which of the *tableaux* was clearest and discuss why. Explain that staging helps tell stories this way by adding stage pictures to words.

#### OUTSIDE CONNECTIONS

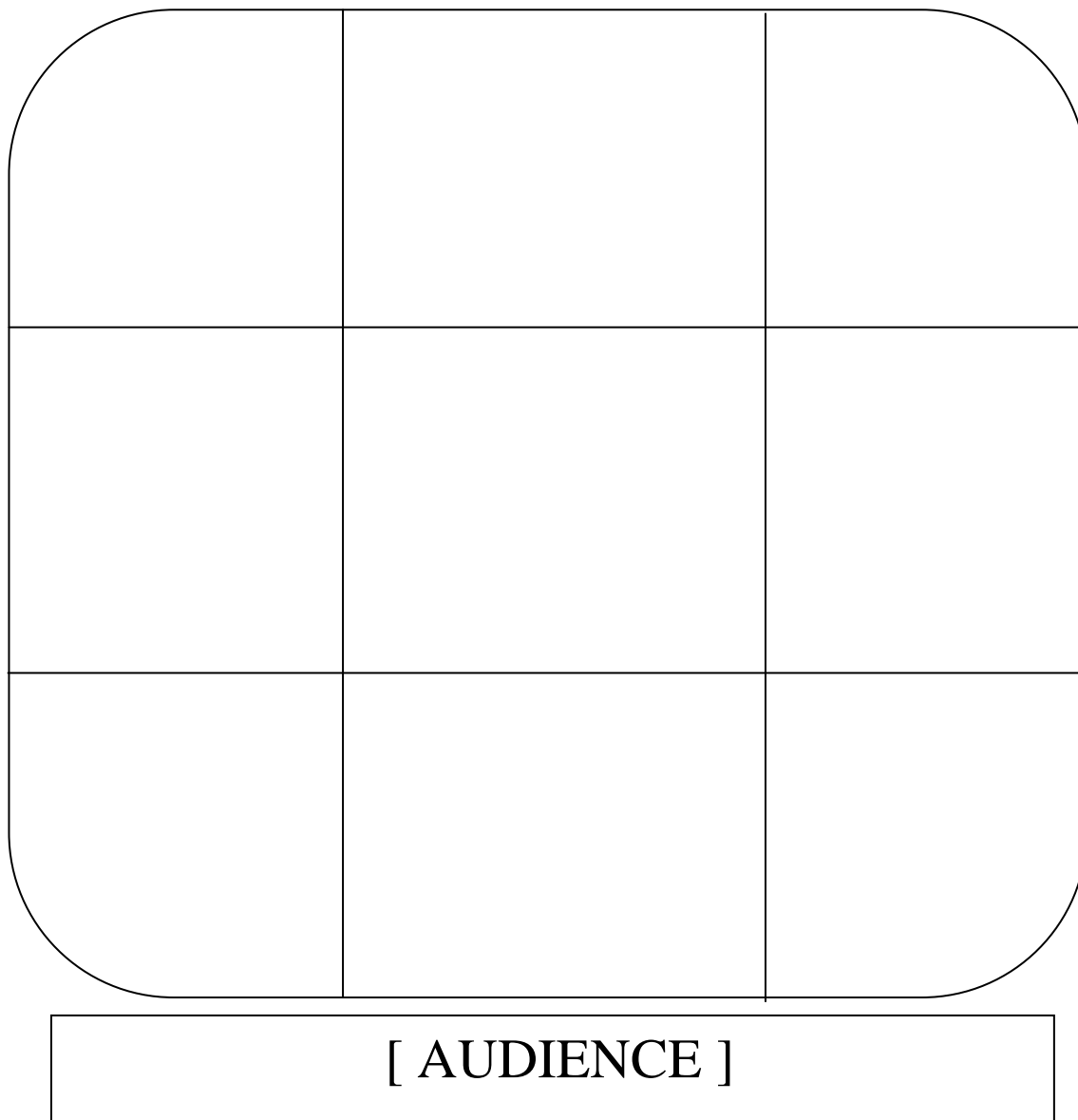
Students can bring in their favorite books and try to reproduce a stage picture from a scene they especially enjoy. This can be another option for producing *tableaux* in the exercise.

#### ASSESSMENT:

Stage direction handout and participation in the activity

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### The Parts of the Stage



Which place is a good place to put people in control? Why do you think?

## APPENDIX I: D

**TITLE:** Fairy Tales and Performance—King Lear

**GRADE LEVEL:** 6-12

**TIME REQUIRED:** Two 50 minute class periods

**OVERVIEW:** Students use the idea of “process drama” to learn how to block a scene of Shakespeare to better understand the language and the character relationships.

### PURPOSE:

1. Students gain better understanding of the nature of the dramatic format through use of stage directions and blocking.
2. Students use creativity to express their ideas of the text in a fun and nonthreatening environment.
3. Students are challenged to direct the action of the scene and see how action changes meaning.

**OBJECTIVES:** At the end of this lesson students will have better understanding of the text presented and participate in the classroom community. Students speak the difficult language of the text.

### MATERIALS:

For each student: copy of script, pencil

For activity: kazoos, road map, marker, crown, several “swords” (long paper towel tubes), paper, pencils, markers

### ACTIVITIES AND PROCEDURES:

#### *Class Period One:*

1. Hand out copy of script for each student and have them write their name on the top.
2. Have students volunteer for roles (split up the larger roles—Lear, Cordelia, Kent—if need more parts to read). Students without roles can read the scene-setting items in italics and read the stage directions.
3. Read through script together as a class, stopping when there are questions on terminology. Examples to discuss include stage directions:
  - a. Aside: a remark made to the audience, not loud enough for other characters on stage to hear

- b. *Sennet/Flourish*: a fanfare of trumpets to announce entrance or exit of an important person
  - c. *Exeunt*: more than one person exits
  - d. *Attendants*: Might be gentlemen or ladies who assist the people on stage
4. Discuss with the class using the journalist's question ("who what when where") of the scene.
- a. Who are these characters? How do they relate to one another?
  - b. What are they doing? What changes as the scene goes on?
  - c. When does this take place? How can you tell?
  - d. Where does this take place? How does this relate to the action of the scene?
5. Compare this scene to fairy tales. Do students see similarities between Cinderella's stepsisters and Goneril and Regan? Are there any other familiar connections? What do they think will happen later in the play? This helps build student interest in reading more into the play itself.
6. Explain what will happen the next class period: the staging of the scene. Explain that there will be roles of actors, non-reading actors, directors, and others. Take out pieces of paper. Each student will write their top three choices for a character they would like to be (cross-gender casting is fine, and in fact, historical!), or have a nonspeaking acting role. If they chose that last option, they can then pick if they would rather design costumes, sets, or props as well (see VARIATIONS).
7. These pieces of paper can be looked through by the teacher to assign who can do what in the class setting. If more than a few students want the same roles and

those roles would be difficult to divide, have those students read two lines at the beginning of the next class and their classmates can vote by secret ballot who gets the role.

*Class Period Two:*

1. Assemble the class together to look over the “cast list.” If necessary, “audition” for the roles which have a tie. Students with roles that are split will see which pages/lines they speak and mark those lines for themselves.
2. Review the blocking terms<sup>1</sup> (stage left, right, up, down, center) and set up the front of the classroom to prepare for staging by clearing obstacles. Have students name which actors need to enter first (i.e. everyone except Kent, France, and Burgundy).
3. The scene is in three chunks of action: lines 1-61 (through the end of the love test of the King), lines 62-96 (through the banishment of Kent), and lines 97 to the end. Roughly block the scene page by page with student input or use your prior choices for blocking.

Things to consider or suggest:

- a. Some actions Shakespeare builds into his dialogue (such as Lear ordering the map to be handed over or for Kent to back down). When do students notice these?
- b. Do the sisters move forward as the King addresses each of them? Does everyone in the scene bow or curtsy before they speak to the King? If everyone is polite in doing these actions, then if Kent ignores that ritual it will stand out even more.

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<sup>1</sup> See APPENDIX I:C

- c. How is everyone situated on stage? Is Cordelia near her sisters or away from them?
  - d. What are the attendants doing and how do they react to the King's rulings and changes of mood? How do they enter and exit when they are following his instructions?
  - e. Do France and Burgundy move in different ways? How does Cordelia react differently to each of her suitors? Does she like France right away or does she not care at all?
4. Have students write a reflection/journal entry on the choices made in the scene and how they affect their reading of the text. This will vary by how your individual classroom decides to stage this particular scene. Did their views of characters change? Who had power in the scene?

#### VARIATIONS:

##### “Nonspeaking Design Role”

(Depending on how large the class is, these extra roles and jobs may not be necessary or appropriate, but they also offer alternatives to students who learn in different ways or may have trepidation about speaking that they cannot overcome.)

To have nonspeaking actors involved, include them in the staging and discussion, but during the major sections of blocking they can have other tasks to help analyze the scene. Students who have more interest in drawing will learn from designing a costume for the actor, based on some of the language they use. Students who like to create things might like to build a prop list for the scene by analyzing what is involved on stage (or what



could be). During the post-blocking discussion, these students can share how their designs also could aid the scene.

#### OUTSIDE CONNECTIONS:

This activity could easily translate from a “process drama” to “product drama” with the addition of more rehearsals. The class could perform this scene for a parents’ night or other presentation. If using the “Nonspeaking Design Role” variation, the costumes and scene design drawings could be displayed in the hallway, and selected props could be used in performance.

#### ASSESSMENT:

Points for participation, creativity, and the written reflection.

**ACT I****SCENE I. King Lear's palace.**

*Sennet. Enter KING LEAR, CORNWALL, ALBANY,  
GONERIL, REGAN, CORDELIA, KENT and Attendants*

**KING LEAR**

1 Give me the map there. Know that we have divided

2 In three our kingdom: and 'tis our fast intent

2: fast intent: plan now

3 To shake all cares and business from our age;

4 Conferring them on younger strengths, while we

5 Unburthen'd crawl toward death.

5: unburthen'd: unburdened

6 Tell me, my daughters,--

7 Since now we will divest us both of rule,

7: divest: give away, reassign

8 Interest of territory, cares of state,--

9 Which of you shall we say doth love us most?

10 That we our largest bounty may extend

11 Where nature doth with merit challenge. Goneril,

11: nature: can mean both the nature of the sisters' characters and the nature of being related in blood

12 Our eldest-born, speak first.

**GONERIL**

13: wield: describe, carry

13 Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter;

14 Dearer than eye-sight, space, and liberty;

15 As much as child e'er loved, or father found;

15: "as much as any child ever loved a father, or any father was loved by a child"

16 A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable;

17 Beyond all manner of so much I love you.

17: "more than words can ever say how much I love you"

**CORDELIA**

18 *[Aside]* What shall Cordelia do?

19 Love, and be silent.

**LEAR**

20 Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,

21 We make thee lady. What says our second daughter,

22 Our dearest Regan, wife to Cornwall? Speak.

21: thee: you (very personal)

**REGAN**

23 In my true heart  
 24 I find my sister names my very deed of love;  
 25 Only she comes too short: that I profess  
 26 Myself an enemy to all other joys.

**CORDELIA**

27 *[Aside]* Then poor Cordelia!  
 28 And yet not so; since, I am sure, my love's  
 29 More richer than my tongue.

**KING LEAR**

30 To thee and thine hereditary ever  
 31 Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom;  
 32 No less in space, validity, and pleasure,  
 33 Than that conferr'd on Goneril. Now, our joy,  
 34 Although the last, not least;  
 35 what can you say to draw  
 36 A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

30: thine: your (personal),

heredity: children

31: ample: large and fruitful

33: conferr'd: conferred,  
 given to

36: opulent: impressive,  
 grand

**CORDELIA**

37 Nothing, my lord.

**KING LEAR**

38 Nothing!

**CORDELIA**

39 Nothing.

**KING LEAR**

40 Nothing will come of nothing: speak again.

**CORDELIA**

41 Good my lord,  
 42 You have begot me, bred me, loved me: I  
 43 Return those duties back as are right fit,

42: begot: produced, fathered

44 Obey you, love you, and most honor you.  
 45 Haply, when I shall wed,  
 46 That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry  
 47 Half my love with him, half my care and duty:  
 48 Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters,  
 49 To love my father all.

**KING LEAR**

50 So young, and so untender?

**CORDELIA**

51 So young, my lord, and true.

**KING LEAR**

52 Let it be so; thy truth, then, be thy dower:

53 Here I disclaim all my paternal care,

54 Propinquity and property of blood,

55 And as a stranger to my heart and me

56 Hold thee, from this, forever.

**KENT**

57 Good my liege,--

**KING LEAR**

58 Peace, Kent!

59 Come not between the dragon and his wrath.

60 Hence, and avoid my sight!

61 Call France; who stirs? Call Burgundy.

*Exeunt some attendants*

62 Cornwall and Albany,

63 With my two daughters' dowers digest this third:

64 Let pride, which she calls plainness, marry her.

65 I do invest you jointly with my power,

66 This coronet part betwixt you.

46-47: "The man who takes on all of my troubles, takes half my heart and half my work with him."

50: untender: cruel

52: thy: your, dower: inheritance given to a groom by the bride's father

53: disclaim: renounce, stop associating with

54: propinquity: close relation

69: wrath: extreme anger

60: hence: get away

61: stirs: moves

63: "split Cordelia's land to give to her sisters"

65: invest: entrust, give

66: coronet: crown, betwixt: between

*Giving the crown***KENT**

- 67 Royal Lear,  
 68 Whom I have ever honor'd as my king,  
 69 Loved as my father, as my master follow'd,--

**KING LEAR**

- 70 The bow is bent and drawn, make from the shaft.

**KENT**

- 71 Let it fall rather, though the fork invade  
 72 The region of my heart: be Kent unmannerly,  
 73 When Lear is mad. What wilt thou do, old man?  
 74 Reverse thy doom; answer my life my judgment,  
 75 Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least;  
 76 Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sound  
 77 Reverbs no hollowness.

**KING LEAR**

- 78 Kent, on thy life, no more.

**KENT**

- 79 My life I never held but as a pawn  
 80 To wage against thy enemies; nor fear to lose it,  
 81 Thy safety being the motive.

**KING LEAR**

- 82 Out of my sight!

**KENT**

- 83 See better, Lear.

**KING LEAR**

- 84 O, vassal! miscreant!

*Laying his hand on his sword*

68: honor'd: honored

69: follow'd: followed

70: "the arrow of your word is pulled back in the bow, so let it loose"

71: fork: tip of the arrow

72: unmannerly: rude

73: wilt: will

74: "I swear on my life, take back your decree about Cordelia."

77: reverbs: echoes back

79: pawn: as in chess, an unimportant piece

85: vassal: slave, miscreant: wrong-doer

**ALBANY and CORNWALL**

85 Dear sir, forbear.

**KENT**

86 Do: Revoke thy doom;

87 Or, whilst I can vent clamor from my throat,

88 I'll tell thee thou dost evil.

**KING LEAR**

89 Hear me, recreant!

90 Turn thy hated back upon our kingdom:

91 If thy banish'd trunk be found in our dominions,

92 The moment is thy death. Away! by Jupiter,

93 This shall not be revoked.

**KENT**

94 Fare thee well, king: sith thus thou wilt appear,

95 Freedom lives hence, and banishment is here.

*Exit*

*Flourish. Enter KING OF FRANCE, BURGUNDY, and*

*Attendants*

**KING LEAR**

96 My lord of Burgundy: what, in the least,

97 Will you require in present dower with her,

98 Or cease your quest of love?

**BURGUNDY**

99 Most royal majesty,

100 I crave no more than what your highness offer'd,

101 Nor will you tender less.

86: forbear: hold off, stop

87: revoke: undo

88: vent: release, clamour: noise, loud shouts in this case

89: dost: do

90: recreant: troublemaker

92: banish'd: banished, or kicked out of the kingdom

93: Jupiter: one of the ancient Roman Gods, supposed to be the king of thunder

95: sith: since, wilt: will,

96: hence: away

99: cease: stop, end

101: offer'd: offered

102: tender: give

**KING LEAR**

102 Right noble Burgundy,  
 103 When she was dear to us, we did hold her so;  
 104 Sir, there she stands  
 105 And nothing more. She's there, and she is yours.

**BURGUNDY**

106 I know no answer.

**KING LEAR**

107 Will you, with those infirmities she owes,  
 108 Take her, or leave her?

108: infirmities: illness,  
 meaning flaws in this case

**BURGUNDY**

109 Pardon me, royal sir;  
 110 Election makes not up on such conditions.

111: election: the act of  
 choosing

**KING LEAR**

111 Then leave her, sir;

*To KING OF FRANCE*

112 For you, great king,  
 113 I would not from your love make such a stray,  
 114 To match you where I hate.

114: "I wouldn't lose your  
 friendship"

**KING OF FRANCE**

115 This is most strange,  
 116 That she, that even but now was balm of your age,  
 117 Most best, most dearest, should in this trice of time  
 118 Commit a thing so monstrous, to dismantle  
 119 So many folds of favor.

117: balm: something that  
 soothes

118: trice: short amount,  
 moment

**CORDELIA**

120 I yet beseech your majesty,--  
 121 It is no vicious blot, murder, or foulness,  
 122 No unchaste action, or dishonor'd step,  
 123 That hath deprived me of your grace and favor;

121: beseech: humbly ask

123: dishonor'd: dishonored

124 But even for want of that for which I am richer,  
 125 Hath lost me in your liking.

**KING OF FRANCE**

126 What say you to the lady? Will you have her?  
 127 She is herself a dowry.

**BURGUNDY**

128 Give but that portion which yourself proposed,  
 129 And here I take Cordelia by the hand,  
 130 Duchess of Burgundy.

**KING LEAR**

131 Nothing: I have sworn; I am firm.

**BURGUNDY**

132 I am sorry, then, you have so lost a father  
 133 That you must lose a husband.

**CORDELIA**

134 Peace be with Burgundy!  
 135 Since that respects of fortune are his love,  
 136 I shall not be his wife.

136: "since he loves money,  
 not me"

**KING OF FRANCE**

137 Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor;  
 138 Most choice, forsaken; and most loved, despised!  
 139 Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon:  
 140 Be it lawful I take up what's cast away.  
 141 Thy dowerless daughter, king, thrown to my chance,  
 142 Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France:  
 143 Bid them farewell, Cordelia, though unkind:  
 144 Thou lovest here, a better where to find.

138: art: are  
 139: forsaken: left,  
 abandoned; despised: hated

141: cast: thrown

143: us: France is using the  
 "royal we" here, since he is a  
 King he speaks for his whole  
 country as a "we"

**KING LEAR**

145 Thou hast her, France: let her be thine; for we  
 146 Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see

145: lovest: leave



148 That face of hers again. Therefore be gone

149 Without our grace, our love, our benison.

150: benison: blessing

*Flourish. Exeunt all but KING OF FRANCE, GONERIL,  
REGAN, and CORDELIA*

**CORDELIA**

150 I know you what you are;

151 And like a sister am most loath to call

152 Your faults as they are named. Use well our father:

152: loath to: hate to,  
unlikely to

153 To your professed bosoms I commit him.

153: use well: treat kindly

154 So, farewell to you both.

**REGAN**

155 Prescribe not us our duties.

154: professed bosoms:  
claimed hearts full of  
devotion and love

**GONERIL**

156 Let your study

157 Be to content your lord, who hath received you

155: “don’t tell us what to  
do”

158 At fortune's alms.

157: be to content your lord:  
work to make your husband  
happy

**CORDELIA**

159 Time shall unfold what plaited cunning hides:

160 Who cover faults, at last shame them derides.

158: fortune's alms: in  
fortune's pity, as if a  
consolation prize

161 Well may you prosper!

**KING OF FRANCE**

159: plaited: disguised

162 Come, my fair Cordelia.

160: “Whoever lies will be  
shamed in the end.”

*Exeunt Severally*

## APPENDIX I: E

**TITLE:** Comic Books: Image and Language in “The Storm”

**GRADE LEVEL:** 6-12

**TIME REQUIRED:** One class period

**OVERVIEW:** Using a few pages of Ian Pollock’s *King Lear*, students can analyze language and character with the visual performance in a comic book format.

### PURPOSE:

1. Students gain better understanding of the language of the characters in this scene.
2. Students learn skills for building vocabulary in context and summarizing passages.
3. Students analyze artistic pictures to find meaning in them.
4. Students read the same material several times to find layers of meaning within the scene.

**OBJECTIVES:** Demonstrate understanding of the text presented and be able to analyze the visual aspect of the comic book. Make the text more approachable by showing it in a different format that might be more acceptable to students.

### MATERIALS:

For each student: paper, pencil, copy of *King Lear* 3.2 (Appendix II: A)

For activity: copies of the pages of Pollock’s storm scene

### ACTIVITIES AND PROCEDURES:

1. Introduce the scene. Set up the situation before:

“Both of King Lear’s daughters have taken control of his life, kicked out his knights, and imprisoned his faithful servant (Kent in disguise) in the stocks. Now he finally sees that they are ganging up against him to rule the kingdom without his input. After cursing them both, he runs out into the storm, upset, with only his Fool at his side.”

2. Discuss the role of the Fool in a court and in the play. Things to talk about: Fool can say what he wants and get away with it. Fool speaks in riddles. Fool stays with Lear when no one else does. Why?

3. Read the script together. Have every student read around the room, passing off the duty at the end of every sentence (not line). Have students circle words or lines they don't understand.
4. Discuss what students think is happening in the scene. Who are these characters? Where are they? What are they doing? Then, progress into more specifics about the action and tone of the scene. What lines or moments are clear to them? What words/characters are difficult to understand?
5. Break the class into five groups. Give each team a page of Pollock's comic book version of the scene to dissect and make sense of (excluding page 68). Using the illustrations of the characters and action as a guide, have students "translate" Shakespeare's language, one new sentence for each one of Shakespeare's. They can guess at the meanings but should try to use context to decipher hard words or use the pictures for guidance. Give this example (pg. 68) (synopsis in italics)

### **Fool**

O nuncle, court holy-water in a dry  
house is better than this rain-water out o' door.

*(Uncle, nothing's worse than this storm)*

Good nuncle, in, and ask thy daughters' blessing:

*(We need to go inside. Just ask for forgiveness from them already)*

here's a night pities neither wise man nor fool.

*(This storm won't stop for you just because you're a king)*

6. Have the groups present their synopsis of their page to the class. Each member should present at least one item from the page. If an ELMO is available, project the pictures to show to the class.
7. Discuss how the pictures helped or didn't help. Are there still things that are unclear?
8. Collect the scripts from the group by the end of the period for assessment.

#### OUTSIDE CONNECTIONS/FURTHER OPTIONS:

If students seem to enjoy the format of the comic book, they can make sense of a difficult speech by adding their own illustration. If each student is assigned a different few lines, a book can be compiled of an entire speech or scene.

#### ASSESSMENT:

##### 20 Points:

5 points for participating in group work and discussions

5 points for class presentation

10 points for synopsis and summary in their own words

**ACT III: SCENE 2. Another part of the heath. Storm still.***Enter KING LEAR and Fool***KING LEAR**

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!

You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout

Till you have drench'd our steeples, drowned the cocks!

You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,

Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,

Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,

Smite flat the thick rotundity o' 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 o' door.

Good nuncle, in, and ask thy daughters' blessing:

here's a night pities neither wise man nor fool.

**KING LEAR**

Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! spout, rain!

Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters:

I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;

I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children,

You owe me no subscription: 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,  
 That have with two pernicious daughters join'd  
 Your high engender'd battles 'gainst a head  
 So old and white as this. O! O! 'tis foul!

**Fool**

He that has a house to put's head in has a good head-piece.  
 The cod-piece 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  
 Shall of a corn cry woe,  
 And turn his sleep to wake.  
 For there was never yet fair woman but she made  
 mouths in a glass.

**KING LEAR**

No, I will be the pattern of all patience;  
 I will say nothing.

*Enter KENT*

**KENT**

Who's there?

**Fool**

Marry, here's grace and a cod-piece; that's a wise  
man and a fool.

**KENT**

Alas, sir, are you here? things that love night  
Love not such nights as these; the wrathful skies  
Gallow the very wanderers of the dark,  
And make 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 never  
Remember to have heard: man's nature cannot carry  
The affliction nor the fear.

**KING LEAR**

Let the great gods,  
That keep this dreadful pudder o'er our heads,  
Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch,  
That hast within thee undivulged crimes,  
Unwhipp'd of justice: hide thee, thou bloody hand;  
Thou perjured, and thou simular man of virtue  
That art incestuous: caitiff, to pieces shake,  
That under covert and convenient seeming  
Hast practised on man's life: close pent-up guilts,

Rive your concealing continents, and cry  
 These dreadful summoners grace. I am a man  
 More sinn'd 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; while I to this hard house--  
 More harder than the stones whereof 'tis raised;  
 Which even but now, demanding after you,  
 Denied me to come in--return, and force  
 Their scanted courtesy.

**KING LEAR**

My wits begin to turn.

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 in my heart  
 That's sorry yet for thee.

**Fool**

*[Singing]* He that has and a little tiny wit--  
 With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,--



Must make content with his fortunes fit,  
 For the rain it raineth every day.

**KING LEAR**

True, my good boy. Come, bring us to this hovel.

*Exeunt KING LEAR and KENT*

**Fool**

This is a brave night to cool a courtezan.

I'll speak a prophecy ere I go:

When priests are more in word than matter;

When brewers mar their malt with water;

When nobles are their tailors' tutors;

No heretics burn'd, but wenches' suitors;

When every case in law is right;

No squire in debt, nor no poor knight;

When slanders do not live in tongues;

Nor cutpurses come not to throngs;

When usurers tell their gold i' the field;

And bawds and whores do churches build;

Then shall the realm of Albion

Come to great confusion:

Then comes the time, who lives to see't,

That going shall be used with feet.

This prophecy Merlin shall make; for I live before his time. *Exit*

## APPENDIX I: F

TITLE: Perspective and Metaphor: Letter-writing

GRADE LEVEL: 6-12

TIME REQUIRED: 30 minutes

OVERVIEW: Students will draft letters from one character in *King Lear* to another, writing about reactions to a plot event or relationship in the play. They will use imagery in the form of metaphor or simile to describe characters as animals in the letter.

### PURPOSE:

1. Students understand not only what the metaphor is, but how it can be used effectively in their own writing.
2. Students learn to do critical reading of character relationships.
3. Students study how perspective changes the way that we observe a play: antagonist, protagonist, etc.

### OBJECTIVES:

Students will learn how to use metaphors effectively and how to analyze perspective in a play.

### MATERIALS:

- Overhead of quotes from *King Lear* (or individual worksheets)
- Copy of assignment sheet for each student

### ACTIVITIES AND PROCEDURES:

1. Introductory activity: Ask students to compare and contrast which statement is better as you read the two: “Mario is hyper when he eats too much candy” or “Mario is like a dog chasing his tail when he eats too much candy”
2. Why do they think one is more effective than the other? Most students will say the second one is better because of the image it puts in their head when they hear it. Write the terms metaphor and simile on the board and explain (or review) them. Both of these are used commonly in poetry and stories because they help readers imagine things.
3. In groups of three or four, have students examine the quote sheet from *King Lear*. Each quote is said about a character and makes us think of the character in a

- different way, either good or bad. Working for about ten minutes, have students put the quotes in the positive or negative column, depending on which way they think the quotation works.
4. Together, discuss their results. Did they see themes emerge from the quotes? Did they notice all of them compared people to animals? Could they find a place for all of the quotes? Note for them, unless someone brings it up, how much the perspective of the speaker makes the metaphor either positive or negative. Metaphors are not neutral statements and they always change how we perceive an object, situation, or person.
  5. Describe their homework assignment, either option a or b, and assign a due date:
    - a. Students should write a letter from one character in the play to another. They should write from the perspective of another character than Lear and should include at least five animal metaphors describing other characters in the play. Students should note when in this play the imaginary letter is sent (during which Act) and refer to events from that Act. This option is a great choice for advanced students with a firm understanding of the play.
    - b. Students can write a journal entry or letter which utilizes animal metaphor to describe people from their lives or other books they have read. This option allows for a bit more expression from students who are struggling with the text.

Look at the quotes below from *King Lear*. Is the person the quote is about portrayed positively or negatively? Put the number of the quote in the column for positive, negative, or neutral and be prepared to talk about why you picked that choice. What do you think they each mean and say about the character?

1. "Come not between the dragon and his wrath!"(Lear about Lear) (1.1.121)
2. "Detested kite<sup>2</sup> thou liest!" (Lear to Goneril) (1.4.264)
3. "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is/ To have a thankless child!" (Lear to Goneril) (1.4.287-88)
4. "Such smiling rogues as these,/ Like rats, oft bite the holy cords atwain<sup>3</sup>..." (Kent about Oswald) (2.2.74-75)
5. "Oh, Regan, she hath tied/ Sharp-toothed unkindness, like a vulture, here." (Lear about Goneril) (2.4.133-34)
6. "She... struck me with her tongue/ Most serpentlike upon the very heart."(Lear about Goneril) (2.4.161)

| Positive | Negative |
|----------|----------|
|          |          |

---

<sup>2</sup> Kite: a bird of prey

<sup>3</sup> Bite the holy cords atwain: break the bonds of loyalty in two

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**In the space below or on a separate sheet of paper, write a letter from one character in the play to another character, reflecting on a weird moment, relationship, or surprise in the play. What would this character think about it? The letter should be 300 words and should:**

- **Include 5 animal metaphors describing the letter writer or other characters in the play**
- **Show something new about the perspective of the letter writer**
- **Be in modern English... Even Shakespeare didn't write his letters in poetry!**

## APPENDIX I: G

**TITLE:** Imagining Madness

**GRADE LEVEL:** 6-12

**TIME REQUIRED:** 40 Minutes

**OVERVIEW:** Students compare two performances of King Lear's storm scene and visually analyze comic book images to see the transition from sanity to madness. They have an opportunity to create their own comic book pages for assessment.

### PURPOSE:

1. Better understand the theme of madness in the play by using visual and aural methods of learning.
2. Improve skills of observation and description in analyzing the performances and pictures.
3. Use art as a way to engage less-skilled readers into higher engagement with the text.

**OBJECTIVES:** By the end of the lesson, students will be more comfortable with the plot and characters of the play. They will make the play their own with illustrations of difficult scenes.

### MATERIALS REQUIRED:

For the class: Images from Pollock's *King Lear* (p 2, 75, 85, 105, 135) made into transparencies, projector or ELMO,

For each student: paper, pencil

### ACTIVITIES AND PROCEDURES:

1. Choose two versions of the storm scene to view (consider using the RSC *Great Performances* and the studio clip from John Barton's *Playing Shakespeare*).  
Compare how each King Lear interpreted the idea of madness. What were ways that actors played the scene similarly? How did they differ?
2. View the pictures one by one on the ELMO or projector. For each image, prompt students with the part of the play in which this scene takes place. Ask them to shout out ways that they can visualize the mental state of Lear in each frame (Look at the captions for the pictures below for discussion points).

3. Have students create comic book panels of their own. A few options exist for this lesson:

- a. They can illustrate a particularly puzzling passage or monologue (limit to 25 or less lines)
- b. They can illustrate a moment of madness of another character
- c. They can work with a group to do freeze frames for an entire scene or act, and then choose specific lines to act as captions for the pictures.

Discussion points for each Pollock page:

(Pollock 2)—Discussion points: Lear’s position above the crowd; every character focused on Lear, crown on head, pointing arm, mouth open shouting instructions

(Pollock 75)—Discussion Points: Lear is scared-looking, frazzled beard, lines in forehead, attention focused on Kent, Lear hugs the Fool tight

(Pollock 85)—Discussion points: Lear is naked, frazzled beard and hair, eyes are unfocused, crawling around, the dogs he “sees” are imaginary, fuzzy background makes us think mind is foggy

(Pollock 105)—Discussion points: Lear has dark circles around his eyes, eyes are wide and look in two different directions, beard and hair blend into the frame and are disordered, can barely make out the form of his body, he wears a crown of flowers, his mouth is in a grimace

(Pollock 135)—Discussion Points: Lear’s eyes are two dark lines, his hands look frail and support his dead daughter, his mouth is sad and mournful; Is he sane again?

## APPENDIX I: H

TITLE: “I see it feelingly: Close-Reading of 4.6”

GRADE LEVEL: 6-12

TIME REQUIRED: 50 minutes

OVERVIEW: Students use particular roles in small groups to dissect themes and plot in 4.6 of *King Lear*. Using discussion and journal writing students explore the theme of blindness in this scene.

### PURPOSE:

1. Students will focus on one particular skill to improve the close-reading skills needed for exams.
2. Students see how dramatic irony and theme function in a particular scene.
3. Students will lead and participate in small group discussion, each creating their own questions.

OBJECTIVES: By the end of this lesson, students will be more confident in analyzing a scene for theme, irony, and plot. Working toward individual strengths, they will gain insight into the play from aspects of close-reading and journaling.

### MATERIALS REQUIRED:

For each student: journals, pencils, copy of scene

For class: copies of assignment explanation, copies of duty sheets for each role

### ACTIVITIES AND PROCEDURES:

1. Explain to students the five roles which they can choose from. Let them know that they will be able to analyze a scene using whichever role most interests them. Have them apply for a role, placing a top choice, second choice, and third choice so that each role will be used within a group.
2. Divide students into groups of four, including four different roles within the group. For the first ten minutes, students will read through the first half of the scene (before Lear’s entrance). They can either assign people to play the role on each page or switch off around the circle at punctuation marks. At the end of reading through the half, make sure that students understand the basic action.



3. Individually, students will get ten minutes to work on their particular assignment for their journal entry. They should create questions which can be asked in their small group.
4. Discuss the questions around the circle, having each student take turns leading the conversation.
5. Students repeat the reading step with the second half of the scene (from Lear's entrance to the end of the scene).
6. Students complete their assignments for homework by journaling the rest of the questions on their assignment sheets.

*Roles Explanation*

|   |
|---|
| <p><b>Summarizer:</b> Are you a “big picture” person? What’s going on in this scene? What are you noticing?</p> |
|---|

|   |
|---|
| <p><b>Questioner:</b> Have you been told you ask too many questions? Use that skill here to question why characters are doing what they do!</p> |
|---|

|  |
|--|
| <p><b>Clarifier:</b> Are you a word master? Love learning languages? Find and decipher vocabulary and metaphors.</p> |
|--|

|   |
|---|
| <p><b>Prophet:</b> Are you good at guessing the ends of movies? Without a crystal ball, see if you can tell what will happen next! Why do you think that?</p> |
|---|

|  |
|--|
| <p><b>Director:</b> Got bit by the drama bug? Visualize how actors should move in the space and what the scenery looks like.</p> |
|--|

|            | Pt. I: In Class  | Pt. II: Assignment  |
|------------|--|---|
| Summarizer | <p>Write at least two sentences about each of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What happened right before this scene? What is Gloucester trying to do?</li> <li>2. What happens in this scene?</li> </ol> <p>Write one question for your classmates about the basic action of the scene.</p>   | <p>In your journal, write a thirty-word summary of Lear's words to Gloucester.</p> <p>What is dramatic irony? How is Gloucester's blindness irony when he is talking to Lear or Edgar?</p>  |
| Questioner | <p>Write at least two sentences about each of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is Edgar thinking in this scene? What is he trying to do to his father?</li> <li>2. What would happen in this scene if Gloucester weren't blind? What would they talk about?</li> </ol> <p>Write one question for your classmates to think critically about this scene.</p>                                | <p>Since Lear has gone crazy, in your journal write why you think he does what he does. What things does he say that make more sense to each character?</p> <p>How does the theme of blindness work in this scene? What is true sight?</p>  |
| Clarifier  | <p>Write at least two sentences about each of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dissect and analyze two of the metaphors used in this scene. What are they trying to say?</li> <li>2. Find two places where the motivation of the character becomes clear and explain how.</li> </ol> <p>Write one question for your classmates which makes them understand the hardest part of this scene.</p> | <p>In your journal, make a list of all of the difficult words in this scene and define them. Use two of them in new sentences.</p> <p>What metaphors are used for sight in this scene and how do they function? What are eyes compared to?</p>  |
| Prophet    | <p>Write at least two sentences about each of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Why doesn't Edgar reveal to Gloucester that he is his lost son? Do you think he ever will?</li> <li>2. Gloucester is a wanted man on the run from the law. Will he be caught? How about Edgar?</li> </ol> <p>Write one question which gets your classmates thinking about the future in the story.</p>          | <p>In your journal, write a prediction for the very ending of the play for these three characters: Lear, Gloucester, Edgar. What do they want and will they get it?</p> <p>What is foreshadowing? What makes you feel like the events you listed above will happen?</p>                                 |
| Director   | <p>Write at least two sentences about each of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is the tone of this scene? Is it funny? Serious? Explain why.</li> <li>2. How would you show the moment where Gloucester "falls" and Edgar changes his voice? How do you make that believable?</li> </ol> <p>Write one question for your classmates about the staging of this scene.</p>                   | <p>In your journal, describe the scenery you would create for this scene and any music or sound effects you might utilize. How and why would these work?</p> <p>How would you portray Lear as crazy here? What kinds of actions does Shakespeare write into the script to help you block the scene?</p> |



18 The crows and choughs that wing the midway air  
 19 Show scarce so gross as beetles: the murmuring surge  
 20 Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more;  
 21 Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight  
 22 Topple down headlong.

**GLOUCESTER**

23 Set me where you stand.

**EDGAR**

24 Give me your hand: you are now within a foot  
 25 Of the extreme verge.

**GLOUCESTER**

26 Let go my hand.

27 Bid me farewell, and let me hear thee going.

**EDGAR**

28 Now fare you well, good sir.

**GLOUCESTER**

29 With all my heart.

**EDGAR**

*(aside)*

30 Why I do trifle thus with his despair

31 Is done to cure it.

**GLOUCESTER**

32 [Kneeling] O you mighty gods!

33 This world I do renounce, and, in your sights,

34 Shake patiently my great affliction off.

35 If Edgar live, O, bless him!

36 Now, fellow, fare thee well.

*He falls forward*

**EDGAR**

18: choughs: another type of crow called a "jackdaw"

19: the murmuring surge: the ocean waves

21: deficient: failing

25: extreme verge: the edge of the cliff

30: trifle thus: pretend this way, fool him

33-34: "I give up my life, and loosen myself from all of my pain"

37

38 *(in a different voice)* Alive or dead?

39 Ho, you sir! friend! Hear you, sir! speak!

40 Thus might he pass indeed: yet he revives.

41 What are you, sir?

**GLOUCESTER**

42 Away, and let me die.

**EDGAR**

43 Thou dost breathe;

44 Hast heavy substance; bleed not; speak; art sound.

45 Ten masts at each make not the altitude

46 Which thou hast perpendicularly fell:

47 Thy life's a miracle. Speak yet again.

**GLOUCESTER**

48 But have I fallen, or no?

**EDGAR**

49 From the dread summit of this chalky bourn.

50 Look up a-height; the shrill-gorged lark so far

51 Cannot be seen or heard: do but look up.

**GLOUCESTER**

52 Alack, I have no eyes.

53 Is wretchedness deprived that benefit,

54 To end itself by death?

**EDGAR**

55 Give me your arm:

56 Up: so. How is 't? Feel you your legs? You stand.

**GLOUCESTER**

57 Too well, too well.

**EDGAR**

58 This is above all strangeness.

59 Upon the crown o' the cliff, what thing was that

60 Which parted from you?

40: "The way he fell made it seem like he would die, but he opens his eyes"

44: heavy substance: are still skin and bones, are not a ghost  
45-46: "You fell the length of ten ship masts at least"

49: chalky bourn: boundary with the sea, where the sand is chalk textured  
50 shrill-gorged: shrieking

53-54: "Am I so forsaken that I cannot even end my own life?"

59: crown o' the cliff: the edge of the cliff

**GLOUCESTER**

61 A poor unfortunate beggar.

**EDGAR**

62 As I stood here below, methought his eyes  
 63 Were two full moons; he had a thousand noses,  
 64 Horns whelk'd and waved like the enridged sea:  
 65 It was some fiend; therefore, thou happy father,  
 66 Think that the clearest gods, who make them honors  
 67 Of men's impossibilities, have preserved thee.

**GLOUCESTER**

68 That thing you speak of,  
 69 I took it for a man; often 'twould say  
 70 'The fiend, the fiend!' he led me to that place.

**EDGAR**

71 Bear free and patient thoughts. But who comes here?

*Enter KING LEAR [mad, fantastically dressed with wild  
 flowers]*

**KING LEAR**

72 Nature's above art in that respect. Look,  
 73 look, a mouse! Peace, peace; this piece of toasted  
 74 cheese will do 't.

**GLOUCESTER**

75 I know that voice.

**KING LEAR**

76 Ha! Goneril, with a white beard! They flattered  
 77 me like a dog; When the rain came to  
 78 wet me once, and the wind to make me chatter; when  
 79 the thunder would not peace at my bidding; there I  
 80 found 'em, there I smelt 'em out. Go to, they are

64: whelked: twisted from his head; enridged: ridged, referring to the waves

70: fiend: devil

72-74: King Lear has lost his mind at this point in the play.

79: "the thunder wouldn't obey my commands"

81 not men o' their words: they told me I was every  
82 thing; 'tis a lie.

**GLOUCESTER**

83 The trick of that voice I do well remember:

83: trick: sound

84 Is 't not the king?

**KING LEAR**

85 Ay, every inch a king:

86 When I do stare, see how the subject quakes.

**GLOUCESTER**

87 O, let me kiss that hand!

**KING LEAR**

88 Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality.

**GLOUCESTER**

89 O ruin'd piece of nature! Dost thou know me?

**KING LEAR**

90 I remember thine eyes well enough. Dost thou squiny at

90: squiny: squint

91 me?

93: penning: handwriting

*Hands Gloucester a letter*

92 Read thou this challenge; mark but the

93 penning of it.

**GLOUCESTER**

94 Were all the letters suns, I could not see one.

**KING LEAR**

95 Read.

96: case of eyes: empty eye  
sockets

**GLOUCESTER**

96 What, with the case of eyes?

97 I see it feelingly.

**KING LEAR**

98 What, art mad? A man may see how this world goes

99 with no eyes. Look with thine ears.

**GLOUCESTER**

100 Ay, sir.

**KING LEAR**

101 Get thee glass eyes;

102 And like a scurvy politician, seem

103 To see the things thou dost not. Now, now, now, now:

104 Pull off my boots: harder, harder: so.

**EDGAR**

105 (*Aside*) O, matter and impertinency mix'd! Reason in

106 madness!

**KING LEAR**

107 If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes.

108 I know thee well enough; thy name is Gloucester:

109 Thou must be patient; we came crying hither:

110 Thou know'st, the first time that we smell the air,

111 We wawl and cry. I will preach to thee: mark.

**GLOUCESTER**

112 Alack, alack the day!

**KING LEAR**

113 When we are born, we cry that we are come

114 To this great stage of fools.—This is a good block.

115 It were a delicate stratagem to shoe

116 A troop of horse with felt. I'll put it in proof,

117 And when I have stol'n upon these son-in-laws,

118 Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!

102-103: "Like the lying politician, pretend to see what you don't"

105: matter: truth;  
impertinency: nonsense

109-111: Lear is referring to entering the world crying out as infants

114: block: Lear might be referring his to head or his crown of flowers

115-116: "It would be a smart strategy to shoe horses going into battle with felt to deaden the sound. I should test that."



## APPENDIX I: I

**TITLE:** Placing the Blame: Fate or Foolishness

**GRADE LEVEL:** 6-12

**TIME REQUIRED:** 50 Minutes

**OVERVIEW:** Students will put characters on trial, taking the side of the prosecution or the defense to show that they deserved or did not deserve what happens to them in the end of *King Lear*.

### PURPOSE:

1. Students learn about and analyze the idea of Lady Fortune in Renaissance thought.
2. Students review and dissect key passages to prove claims about the plot, theme, and character.
3. Students work in groups to come to a common understanding of crucial moments in the play and devise an argument.
4. Students use oral presentation to persuade their classmates, and practice the role of listening and deciphering arguments.

**OBJECTIVES:** By the end of the lesson, students will have analyzed the action of the play from one character's perspective. They will have to pick specific passages as evidence, practicing skills of close reading, recall, and analysis. Presenting their ideas to the entire class, they will learn skills of oral presentation and argument.

### MATERIALS:

For each student: copy of *King Lear*, their reading logs or journals

For class: slips of paper, pencils, picture of Lady Fortune

### ACTIVITIES AND PROCEDURES:

1. After finishing the play as a class, students divide into teams of six. Explain the concept of the wheel of fortune and explain how often characters were thought to be following their destinies. Ask them if they think this explains the ending of *King Lear*, where everyone seems to die!
2. Explain the activity as putting these characters on trial for their actions in the play. Students will get to choose whether or not they believe that the character they are representing deserved the ending they received. Write down all of the

- character options on the board: Cordelia, Lear, Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Gloucester (and others, if you desire). Let each team choose a character they want to discuss.
3. Tell them that their group will be splitting in half: one team to defend the character and explain that they didn't deserve to end so unhappily, and one team to prosecute, or prove that their actions did lead to their downfall. The defense can try to blame either Fortune or another character for their person's downfall. Explain that each team will get a chance to speak for or against the character at the end of the class period, when the jury of their classmates will decide if they were guilty or not based on evidence.
  4. Working in their groups of three, students will have twenty minutes to create a case for their character. They should find quotes and examples from the play using their reading logs and the play. Each team should get at least three pieces of evidence to bring to show their side of the case.
  5. At the end of the twenty minutes, begin the trials. Have the prosecution for each character speak first, and then the defense. After both sides have spoken for the character, the jury should vote whether the character is guilty, another character is guilty for their death, or it is fortune's fault. The votes should be taken by secret ballot on note cards with the character's name written on top. Repeat the process so that all of the characters have been put on trial.
  6. At the end of class, count the votes for each character and write them on the blackboard. Discuss the consensus. How does this reflect the action in the play? Were more characters guilty or not guilty?

## APPENDIX II: PARTIAL LIST OF RHETORICAL DEVICES

Since ancient times, the study of rhetoric has allowed students to analyze why speeches, stories, and poems have so much dramatic effect. I use them in these chapters to be able to succinctly explain how certain passages of Shakespeare's plays function. Below is a short definition and example of each of the types of rhetorical devices I have mentioned in this thesis. Many more are available through the Silva Rhetoricae Page sponsored by BYU (<http://rhetoric.byu.edu/>).

Anaphora: repetition of the same word at the beginning of many lines

Example: "How many books must I read? How many pages must I write? How many points is this worth? How many questions can I ask you?"

Apostrophe: very emotional figure, when speaker turns to addressing an object

Example: "Oh death! You come too soon for my dear hamster!"

Asyndeton: (opposite of polysyndeton) use of no conjunctions between phrases

Example: "I came; I saw; I napped."

Epizeuxis: saying the same word multiple times in a row, used for emphasis

Example: "Under no, no, no circumstance should gremlins be fed after midnight."

Polysyndeton: use of a conjunction to connect many phrases, usually creates a hurried, breathless sound

Example: "I wanted to run and play and see all of the sights in Disneyworld, but I didn't have a ticket."

Synecdoche: using a part to represent the whole

Example: "The long arm of the law"