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| ***King Lear*** by William Shakespeare | **Key Quotations** | **Tragic Arc** | |
| Derived from the myth *Leir of Britain*, *King Lear* is a Shakespearean tragedy first performed on St Stephen’s Day 1606. It tells the parallel stories of Lear’s betrayal by two of his daughters and subsequent descent into madness and of his kinsman’s the Earl of Gloucester’s betrayal by his illegitimate son and subsequent rescue by his legitimate son. | Lear (1.1): “Which of you shall we say doth love us most?” | Exposition | Lear invites his daughter’s to profess their love for him in exchange for greater shares of his kingdom. Regan and Goneril flatter him while Cordelia refuses to speak. Regan and Goneril are each granted half of the Kingdom, while Cordelia is banished |
| Goneril (1.1): “Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter”. |
| Cordelia (1.1): “I cannot heave / My heart into my mouth”. |
| Edmund (1.2): “Now, gods, stand up for bastards!" |
| Lear (1.4): "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is / To have a thankless child." | Edmund tricks his father into legitimatising him and disinheriting Edgar. |
| **Key Characters** | Lear (3.2):"Blow winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!"  “I am a man / More sinned against than sinning”. | Building Action | Lear is hounded out of both his daughters’ households. He walks away onto the heath accompanied only by his fool and by Kent (a nobleman travelling in disguise). |
| Lear – The elderly King of Britain. Lear had planned to divide his kingdom between his three daughter but ends up giving it to just two after they profess their great love of him. He eventually reunites with Cordelia, having been betrayed by Regan and Goneril but not before he descends into madness. |
| Fool (3.2): "Here's a night pities neither wise men nor fools." |
| Edmund (3.3): "The younger rises when the old doth fall." | Hearing of the sisters’ treachery, Gloucester goes to help Lear. His son, Edgar is also on the heath disguised as a beggar (Poor Tom). |
| Edgar (4.3): "The younger rises when the old doth fall." |
| Lear (4.7): "I am a very foolish, fond old man." |
| Cordelia – Lear’s favourite daughter. Unable to put her love for her father into words, Cordelia is disinherited then married to the King of France. She fights to save her father and they are briefly reconciled before she is hanged. | Lear (5.3): "No, no, no life? Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life, And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more, Never, never, never, never, never." | Climax | Gloucester is blinded as punishment for trying to help Lear. He is turned out to wander the heath where he is met by his (still disguised) son Edgar and led to Dover, where Lear has travelled. |
| **Relevant Concepts and Terminology** |
| Regan and Goneril – Lear’s other daughters. They earn his favour by exaggeratedly professing their love for him. Then they betray him. | Storge – The Greek word for love between family members. Of the many types of love identified by the Greeks, storge pays the least attention to those characteristics deemed "valuable" or worthy of love and, as a result, is able to transcend and overlook flaws or slights. | Edmund becomes romantically involved with both Regan and Goneril. He conspires with Goneril to kill her regretful husband, Albany. |
| Gloucester – A loyal member of Lear’s court, Gloucester is tricked into disinheriting his legitimate son Edgar. He is later blinded but then saved by his forgiving son. | The French Army, led by Cordelia, arrives at Dover. |
| Primogeniture – the law which decreed that estates be passed directly from a father to his first-born (legitimate) son. | Falling Action | Lear and Cordelia are briefly reunited before Cordelia is hanged for rising against her sisters. Lear dies because of his grief. |
| Edmund – Gloucester’s illegitimate son, Edmund tricks his father into disinheriting his brother and naming him heir. Later becomes a significant member of Regan and Goneril’s regime. |
| Tragedy – the classification of drama in which a noble protagonist, who is flawed in some way, is placed in a stressful heightened situation. The plots of Shakespearean tragedy focus on the reversal of fortune of the central character(s) which leads to their ruin and ultimately, death. | Resolution | Albany and Edgar resolve to pick up the pieces, building a new world after the tragic events. |
| Edgar – Gloucester’s legitimate son, Edgar remains faithful to and ultimately saves his father. |
| The Fool – Lear’s court jester/ advisor / protector. |