

King Lear Reading/Journal Questions (we are reading the introduction, pp. 2307-14, and then the conflated version of the play, which starts on p. 2479). **Big questions:**

1. This play both supports and challenges the idea that the individual is important--how?
2. This play also challenges our ideas about suffering and about justice--how?
3. How does this play define the human condition? (Are humans animals? In what sense is Nature "our goddess"?)

Act I

1. How does Lear typify some of the needs and desires of human beings as they age (as they get near retirement)? (Consider also how being a king has formed his identity and the way this contributes to his needs and desires.)
2. Take into account Cordelia's asides to the audience and her comments to her sisters at the end of the scene and discuss whether her refusal to say what her father wishes makes sense.
3. Look for parallels between Lear's and Gloucester's anxieties and their relations to their children. (Some critics say that these relationships depend partly on the way parental roles are divided up, the mother being the nurturer and the father being the disciplinarian and spiritual guide.)
4. What insight does the Fool offer Lear about Lear's behavior and why does Lear tolerate it when he doesn't tolerate Kent's criticism?
5. What can you tell about Lear's character or nature from the reactions and actions of Cordelia and Kent after they have been disinherited/dismissed?

Acts II-III

1. Reading Question only: not a journal question. How does the storm function symbolically? (try to think of several ways and support with particulars)
2. What is gained (in understanding the issues) by having the king talk to Poor Tom? by the trial scene in the hut?
3. Why is Lear's madness "appropriate"? Why is Gloucester's being blinded both "appropriate" and horrifying?
4. Find three quotes pertaining to the nature of the human condition and explore how particular actions within the play fit or don't fit.
5. Find three quotes by the fool. Explain their meaning (considering connotations), and then explore their truth judging by actions in this play.
6. Find three places the word "bond" occurs and what insights we get into the various meanings of this word. (Consider bonds of loyalty within a family and within a wider network; also the bond between body and mind; also the bond that attaches us to life.)

Acts IV-V

1. How do you see Edgar's actions toward his father (as representative of something meaningful or as presenting a problem)?
2. What problems associated with age does this play discuss? (Try to find some lines that bring this problem home.)

3. What problems associated with having power does this play discuss? (Again, try to find some lines that vivify the problem.)
4. Find some lines in the play that possibly summarize the play's definition of "the human condition" and explain why you think they do (or find lines relating to any one of those three "big" questions at the top of this sheet and explore what they contribute.)
5. Is the play misogynistic?