



SOUTHERN SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

King Lear Read-Along Activities

These activities were developed by SSC as part of a social media “Community Read-Along” series designed to engage the community in a fashion similar to that of an online book club. Each week 3-4 scenes were “assigned” and SSC’s Facebook Page facilitated a dialogue around the text – providing thought points, discussion questions, and activities for theatre students.

King Lear – ACT 2, SCENES 3-4

It’s time to finish up the second Act of *King Lear* with Act 2, Scenes 3 and 4! Scene 3 is made up entirely of a soliloquy from the condemned Edgar, who reveals to the audience that he will investigate the charges against him while disguised as a beggar called “Poor Tom”.

During his soliloquy Edgar describes one odd habit of the beggars of Shakespeare’s time:

“The country gives me proof and precedent
Of Bedlam beggars, who with roaring voices
Strike in their numbed and mortified bare arms
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary”

During the 1600’s beggars and the mentally unwell were believed to be evil, possessed, and completely immune to pain – therefore, characters of this type were often depicted with horrible injuries or wounds inflicted by self-mutilation as described by Edgar.

As you read these next two scenes, pay close attention to the way the play treats madness and look for clues that indicate Lear’s descent into it!



Dorothy in the Twister from The Wizard of Oz

Discussion Questions:

- At the end of Edgar’s monologue in Act 2, Scene 3 just before turning into Poor Tom he exclaims, “Edgar I nothing am” – what do you think he means by this? How does this echo Cordelia’s “nothing” in the first Act?

In Act 2, Scene 3 of *King Lear*, incensed at his treatment by Goneril and her servants the King arrives at the home of Gloucester, in search for his other daughter Regan. There he is driven further into a rage by the discovery of his servant Kent in the stocks, Regan and Cornwall’s refusal to speak with him in a timely manner, and finally by the

arrival of Goneril and Regan’s siding with her sister in the matter of her father’s knights.

- What do you think his following of knights represents to Lear? Why is he so insistent on maintaining their numbers?
- At the end of Lear’s monologue in Act 4, as he rails against his treacherous daughters – a storm breaks out. Refusing to be rejected once again, Lear chooses to reject his daughter’s company and brave the weather. What other plays, epics, or stories can you think of that make use of storm imagery as symbolism?



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Student Activities

Watch the video below: a modern portrayal of King Lear's rant against his daughters from Act 2, Scene 4 set in a modern-day Elderly Care Facility. As you watch, make note of the new meaning pulled from the text through the use of a modern setting.

<https://youtu.be/SIXseJwmWWI>



For this activity – choose one scene or monologue from Act 1 of 2 or King Lear and re-envision the scene in your own way! Choose a new setting, visual theme, theatrical style, or change the language! Ask yourself the following questions:

- How can I better communicate the themes of this scene?
- Are there any current social issues or topics that fit with this scene?
- Do the changes I made allow for the plot of the scene to still make sense?