



— SANTA CRUZ —  
SHAKESPEARE

EDUCATION PROGRAM

***King Lear - Week 1: Introduction***

- DISCUSS!

- *King Lear* is a play that questions where power and authority come from. What do you think makes a leader powerful? Why are some leaders more respected than others? Where does authority come from? Why do some teachers, for example, seem more authoritative than others? What makes some presidents more powerful than others?
- Should you ever disobey your parents? If so, in what circumstances might it be ok to disobey them? How important is it to be loyal to your parents?



## The main characters in *King Lear*

**KING LEAR** King Lear is the elderly King of Ancient Britain. He divides his kingdom up, intending to give it to his three daughters to rule so that he can enjoy his old age hunting and drinking with his knights.

**GONERIL** The oldest daughter of King Lear, married to the Duke of Albany, with no children. Her marriage is not a happy one, and she later falls in love with Edmund and plots to get rid of Albany so she can marry him instead.

**REGAN** The second eldest daughter of King Lear, Regan is married to the Duke of Cornwall. She follows Goneril's lead in refusing to allow Lear's knights into her home and encourages Cornwall to do violence against Gloucester.

**CORDELIA** The youngest and favorite daughter of King Lear, she is unmarried at the opening of the play. She leaves with the King of France to marry him and is absent for most of the play. Lear disinherits her for refusing to make a flattering speech expressing her love for him.

**ALBANY** Husband to Goneril, the Duke of Albany is loyal to King Lear and dislikes the way Goneril treats her father.

**CORNWALL** Husband to Regan, the Duke of Cornwall dies from a wound inflicted on him by a servant, while torturing Gloucester.

**GLOUCESTER** The Earl of Gloucester is a wealthy and loyal subject to King Lear, and the father to Edgar and Edmund. He is superstitious and gullible, believing Edmund's lies that Edgar is plotting against him.

**EDGAR** Edgar is the legitimate son to Gloucester and will inherit his father's lands. He is tricked by his half brother Edmund into running away, and creates a disguise as the beggar "poor Tom."



Ian McKellen as King Lear, dividing up his kingdom in the 2018 National Theatre production in London.

**EDMUND** Edmund is the younger and illegitimate 'bastard' son of the Earl of Gloucester. He resents that he will not inherit his father's lands, and that he is treated differently to his older, legitimate half-brother Edgar, who he secretly plots against.

**THE FOOL** The Fool is a court jester, who has been away because of his sadness over Cordelia's departure. He is Lear's loyal companion and uses his wit to try to make him see the mistakes he has made with his daughters. He remains with Lear during the storm.

**KENT** The Earl of Kent is another wealthy and loyal subject to Lear. When he speaks up for Cordelia, however, Lear banishes him. Kent returns in a disguise as a working class servant called Caius, who swears allegiance to the King, and who the King uses as a messenger.

-READ! Read over the opening scene, concerning Lear's **division of the kingdom** and think about the following questions in pairs:

- What are Lear's reasons for dividing up his kingdom? Is he right to do so?
- Is Lear at fault for demanding performances of love from his daughters and requiring them to make an oath?

- WATCH! Use this link to watch [King Lear: National Theatre Live \(2018\)](#).

Watch from 8.00 minutes in - Cordelia's response to Lear, which you can also read in the excerpt below. Why is Cordelia so obstinate? Is she right to behave this way? If Cordelia were to have an aside to the audience or an interior monologue at this point, what would she say?

- WRITE! Write a modern day interior stream of consciousness of Cordelia's thoughts in which we get to learn how she is feeling inside about her father and her sisters behavior.

**Act I. I. 82-125**

**CORDELIA** Nothing, my lord.

**KING LEAR** Nothing!

**CORDELIA**            Nothing.

**KING LEAR**            Nothing will come of nothing: speak again.

**CORDELIA**            Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave  
My heart into my mouth: I love your majesty  
According to my bond; nor more nor less.

**KING LEAR**            How, how, Cordelia! mend your speech a little,  
Lest it may mar your fortunes.

**CORDELIA**            Good my lord,  
You have begot me, bred me, loved me: I  
Return those duties back as are right fit,  
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.  
Why have my sisters husbands, if they say  
They love you all? Haply, when I shall wed,  
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry  
Half my love with him, half my care and duty:  
Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters,  
To love my father all.



### **SOCIAL JUSTICE!**

- Is it possible to own land and if so, who do you think has the right to own land and divide it up or sell it?
- How should leaders be chosen? What qualities should a good leader have? What are the consequences of people in power taking for granted that people will listen to them?