



— SANTA CRUZ —
SHAKESPEARE

EDUCATION PROGRAM

King Lear - Week 2: Astrology

- DISCUSS!

King Lear is a play interested in the extent to which we are born for a purpose, with a role to play. What role do you think you were born to play? What expectations do your parents or your community put on you and to what extent should you meet those expectations? When should you rebel against the role you're "supposed" to play in this world? Think about a time you felt burdened by the expectations of your family. What emotions did you feel?

Another way to think about this topic is through astrology. What is your star sign and its traits? Do you think the horoscope or "sign" you were born under shapes your life? Why or why not? Do you believe in fate and if so, to what extent do you think you can control your fate?

Act I. II.

GLOUCESTER

These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend
no good to us: though the wisdom of nature can
reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself
scourged by the sequent effects: love cools,
friendship falls off, brothers divide: in

cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father. This villain of mine comes under the prediction; there's son against father: the king falls from bias of nature; there's father against child. We have seen the best of our time: machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders, follow us disquietly to our graves. Find out this villain, Edmund; it shall lose thee nothing; do it carefully. And the noble and true-hearted Kent banished! His offence, honesty! 'Tis strange.

EDMUND

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune,--often the surfeit of our own behavior,--we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars: as if we were villains by necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and treachers, by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on: an admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of a star! My father compounded with my mother under the dragon's tail; and my nativity was under Ursa major; so that it follows, I am rough and lecherous. Tut, I should have been that I am, had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing.



Image credits: Jim Broadbent as Gloucester and John MacMillan as Edmund in the 2018 film of *King Lear*.

→ DISCUSS!

What are Gloucester and Edmund saying about astrology here and how do their views differ?

- WRITE!

In this play, like many other Shakespeare plays, there is a parallel subplot to the main plot. Shakespeare juxtaposes the story line with Gloucester and his two sons, Edgar and Edmund with the main story line about Lear and his three daughters.

At the very beginning of the play, Gloucester explains, in front of Edmund, that he is his illegitimate son and calls him a “knave that came something saucily into the world before he was sent for.” How is Edmund’s situation and narrative here both similar and different from Cordelia’s?



SOCIAL JUSTICE!

- Do you think your star sign has anything to do with your personality?
 - What is meant by class structure? How do people who feel powerless try to find meaning?
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