



— SANTA CRUZ —
SHAKESPEARE

EDUCATION PROGRAM

King Lear - Week 3: Sight and Blindness

- DISCUSS!

Eyes and sight are mentioned repeatedly throughout *King Lear*. We often use words of sight to mean understanding (“see what I mean?”) The play is interested in the challenges that come from our inability to really know the world, to see it for what it is. What kinds of challenges come from this problem of poor vision in the play? Which characters do not see clearly?

Look at some of the examples below in which characters are referencing eyes or eyesight in the play and consider the symbolism of each extract.

GONERIL Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter;
Dearer than eye-sight, space, and liberty

KING LEAR Out of my sight!

KENT See better, Lear; and let me still remain
The true blank of thine eye.

- CORDELIA** The jewels of our father, with wash'd eyes
Cordelia leaves you:
- KING LEAR** Doth any here know me? This is not Lear:
Doth Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes?
- KING LEAR** Old fond eyes,
Bewep this cause again, I'll pluck ye out,
And cast you, with the waters that you lose,
To temper clay.
- GENTLEMAN** ...tears his white hair,
Which the impetuous blasts, with eyeless rage,
Catch in their fury
- GONERIL** Pluck out his eyes.
- GLOUCESTER** I would not see thy cruel nails
Pluck out his poor old eyes
- CORNWALL** Lest it see more, prevent it. Out, vile jelly!

→ WRITE!

Now pick one of these examples and focus on the word choice. How are eyes or eyesight described in the short passage? Pick a word that stands out and look it up in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Here is an example:

- **Pluck**

A sudden sharp pull, esp. of something of which one has just taken hold (formerly †*spec.* in wrestling or manual combat); a tug, jerk, or snatch.

Why do both Gloucester and Goneril use the word “pluck” when talking about gouging out eyes? What does this word choice tell us about their characters?

- WRITE!

Staging the blinding of Gloucester

Look at this photo from a 2016 Royal Shakespeare Company production of *King Lear*. In this production, the director chose to stage the blinding of Gloucester inside a glass box, so that the blood squirted onto the glass and an eyeball popped out onto the floor, provoking strong reactions from people in the audience. How would you stage this scene if you were directing it? Would you use props such as fake eyeballs and stage blood to make it more violent and dramatic? Would you choose for the action to take place offstage? Reading over the scene again, write a description of how you would stage this.



David Troughton as Gloucester, and Kelly Williams as Regan in RSC's 2016 production of *King Lear*.



SOCIAL JUSTICE!

- Why are insight and vision so important in politics?
- Why do you think the characters are so fixated on sight in this play? Why is Gloucester blinded? How do you relate to this topic of sight and blindness?