EDUCATION DEPARTMENT CURRICULUM GUIDE
TO KING LEAR

About the Folger Shakespeare Library

The Folger Shakespeare Library houses one of the world’s largest and most significant collections of materials pertaining to Shakespeare and the English and Continental Renaissance. The Folger Shakespeare Library editions of Shakespeare’s plays are acclaimed throughout the world by educators, students, and general readers.

The mission of the Folger Library is to preserve and enhance its collections; to render the collections accessible to scholars for advanced research; and to advance understanding and appreciation of the Library and its collections through interpretive programs for the public.

About the Folger Shakespeare Library’s Education Department

“There is much matter to be heard and learned.”
As You Like It

Shakespeare’s audience spoke of hearing a play, rather than of seeing one. The Folger Shakespeare Library’s Education department believes in active learning, using a performance-based and language-centered approach to teaching Shakespeare. Drawing on the Folger’s abundant resources and incorporating opportunities provided by the Web, their activities and workshops present innovative ways to engage children, students, and teachers in Shakespeare’s work.

For a complete selection of curriculum plans from the Folger Shakespeare Library Education department, visit www.folger.com.
About the Folger Shakespeare Library's Publishing Program

For nearly 70 years, the Folger Shakespeare Library has been the most respected resource for the scholarship and teaching of William Shakespeare. Designed with everyone in mind—from students to general readers—these editions feature:

- Freshly edited text based on the best early printed version of the play
- Modern spelling and punctuation
- Detailed explanatory notes conveniently placed on pages facing the text of the play
- Scene-by-scene plot summaries
- A key to famous lines and phrases
- An introduction to reading Shakespeare’s language
- An essay by an outstanding scholar providing a modern perspective on the play
- Illustrations from the Folger Shakespeare Library’s vast holdings of rare books
- Biographical and historical essays

To receive a complete list of available titles, e-mail your request to folger.marketing@simonandschuster.com.

The Folger Festivals Workshops

Make meaningful learning fun. Folger Festivals workshops model a fresh approach for teaching Shakespeare in grades 3-12. Based on twenty years of best practices, the Folger method inspires teachers with proven activities that address national and local standards. Schedule a one-day workshop for 20-30 teachers at your school. If you teach in the Northeast, you may be eligible for funding from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. Contact the Folger at 202-675-0380 or by e-mail at jkachniasz@folger.edu for more information.

Turn the page for sample curriculum plans that you can find at www.folger.com. Additional plans and tools are available on the Web site.

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KING LEAR

Dear Colleagues,

Somewhere along the line, most of my students and probably most of yours have heard about William Shakespeare. Maybe they saw the film *Shakespeare in Love* or heard an answer on *Jeopardy*, but somehow, along with the ozone, they’ve breathed in that name: Shakespeare. In fact, to many kids Shakespeare is “sposed to be” a part of high-school education, and they expect to read one of his works. If we don’t give them that exposure, they feel vaguely cheated or assume we think they’re incompetent to meet the challenge of something important.

But when that anticipated moment comes and the teenage eye actually meets the Shakespearean page, then, unfortunately, that early interest too often is followed by . . . “Huh? What is this? Why are we reading this?”

The faces of the bored and defiant can make the best of us dread going into the classroom. It’s happened to me, and maybe it’s happened to you, but it doesn’t have to be that way. Incredibly, teaching Shakespeare can actually invigorate both your class and you. . . . You have an intimate knowledge of your teaching style and of the workings of your class. Use that knowledge to select the exercises [from this packet] that you think will provoke excitement, enhance learning, and help ease your students past the language barrier and into the wonder of the play.

Here’s to the magic in the play and to the magic in your classroom.

Judith Elstein
Adapted from *Shakespeare Set Free: Teaching Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, and A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

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Each of the five lesson plans in this packet includes:

- Step-by-step instructions
- Materials needed
- Standards covered
- Questions students should be able to answer when the lesson is over
- Suggested related lesson plans with directions on how to find them on the Folger Web site.

Contributing Editors:

Jeremy Ehrlich       Janet Field-Pickering       Julie Kachniasz
Curriculum Plan #1

“The World’s Asleep”: But Not Your Classroom
(A Lesson in Language and Imagery)
Developed by Darin Johnson

Students will get an introduction to *King Lear* by manipulating some of his lines and analyzing them for signs of the character's madness.

This activity will take one class period.

**NCTE Standards Covered:**

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

**What To Do:**

1. Photocopy the attached handout, with different quotations from *King Lear*. Make enough copies so each student will get one quotation. Cut out the quotations and paste them on construction paper or cardstock.

2. Put students into groups of seven and divide a set of the seven quotations among the group members.

3. Give each group a soft foam ball and have them form a circle. Each group member should toss the ball to a person who is not to his/her immediate right or left. The person receiving the ball should say his/her line out loud upon catching the ball. Repeat the process until students are familiar with all of the lines.
4. Next, announce a rule change. Instead of having the ball catcher say a line, have the rest of the group recite the line as the ball is caught.

5. Have the students look for images in the lines that will help them decide the appropriate order of the quotations. Have them look for two transitions that Lear makes during the play: from regal to more real, and from sane to mad.

6. Have the students order themselves in a line representing the order they believe these lines appear in the play. Have each group read out their order to the rest of the class.

7. Reveal Shakespeare's order for these quotes, as listed below. Discuss the activity. What patterns can the students find in these lines? What clues led to a successful sequencing of the quotations?

I think the world's asleep: 1.4.48-49.
Nothing can be made out of nothing: 1.4.136-137.
Who is it that can tell me who I am: 1.4.236
O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!...I would not be mad: 1.5.45-46.
'On my knees I beg that you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed, and food': 2.4.175-176.
Our basest beggars are in the poorest thing superfluous: 2.4.305-306.
Allow not nature more than nature needs, man's life is cheap as beast's: 2.4.307-308.

What You Need:

Handout of *King Lear* quotations (attached)
Soft foam balls

How Did It Go?

Were students able to learn the lines easily? Were they able to sequence the quotes appropriately? Could they explain their logic?

If You And Your Class Enjoyed This Curriculum Plan, You’ll Want To Try:

“[www.Lear](http://www.Lear)”: Students will use online resources in order to examine patterns of imagery in *King Lear*. By comparing these patterns to those of other Shakespeare plays, the students will draw conclusions about the different reasons Shakespeare uses imagery in the play.

Where Can I Find This Lesson Plan?

1. Go to the Web site address: [www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu)
2. Scroll down to “Teachers and Students”
3. In the menu that appears, choose “Resources for Teachers” and then “Teaching Shakespeare”
4. Click on “Archives”
5. Click on “Lesson Plan Archives”
6. Scroll down until you get to “King Lear”
7. Choose the lesson plan listed above or browse the other titles for more classroom ideas
Curriculum Plan #2

O, Lear’s Many Reasons
(A Lesson in Interpretation)
Developed by Maya McElroy

Students sometimes have trouble discerning Lear's intentions in this outburst. This performance exercise will help them identify his "darker purpose," and let them explore different styles for reading it aloud.

This lesson will take one class period.

NCTE Standards Covered:

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.

What To Do:

1. Give every student a copy of the attached handout: Lear's speech, 2.4.305-328.

2. Divide students into groups of four.

3. Give every group a tone to use when delivering the speech: sad, angry, violent, raging, quietly cold, physically sick, old and shaky, joyful, playful, or gently chiding. If your students are versed in the vocabulary of theater, give them an objective that might provoke one of these tones instead of the tone itself.
4. Have each group of the students divide the speech among themselves so everyone has roughly equal speaking parts. Instruct students to study their passage and highlight five words they want to emphasize when they read the passage. Give students time to practice delivering the speech as a group so their parts flow smoothly into each other and they create the desired single tone.

5. Have each group perform their passage. The class can follow along, marking the words they feel have been emphasized.

6. As a group, discuss which tone the students felt Lear was using in each performance. Discuss which tones felt most and least appropriate at the different moments in the speech. Combine the most appropriate moments into one speech in which different groups contribute their tone at the proper time, to model a way an actor might try to present the speech.

7. Possible extension: have the four students in the group cast themselves in the roles of Lear, the two daughters, and the fool. Have the students create either a tableau or a staged performance of the scene. Discuss the contributions to the scene of the three non-speaking parts.

What You Need:

Copy of the handout, Lear's outburst, 2.4.305-328 (attached)

How Did It Go?

Did breaking the speech into parts and emphasizing certain words make the speech easier to understand? Were students able to make distinctions between the different possible tones in this speech? Were they able to select the most appropriate choices for delivering this speech? Did they understand Lear's motivations better after doing this exercise?

If You And Your Class Enjoyed This Curriculum Plan, You’ll Want To Try:

“King Lear’s Storm”: Students will study a pivotal scene in King Lear to understand the concept of ‘pathetic fallacy.’

Where Can I Find This Lesson Plan?

1. Go to the Web site address: www.folger.edu
2. Scroll down to “Teachers and Students”
3. In the menu that appears, choose “Resources for Teachers” and then “Teaching Shakespeare”
4. Click on “Archives”
5. Click on “Lesson Plan Archives”
6. Scroll down until you get to “King Lear”
7. Choose the primary source lesson plan listed above or browse the other titles for more classroom ideas
Curriculum Plan #3

“Who Is It that Can Tell Me Who I Am?”:
Performances of King Lear’s Speechs
(A Lesson in Performance)
Developed by Melissa Borgmann

The themes of love, transformation, redemption, and forgiveness are central to King Lear and to Lear's relationships with his daughters. Asking students to read, analyze, and perform two of Lear's speeches—one from the beginning of the play, and one from the end—is a provocative way to introduce these themes and to inspire questions about the character and the play.

This activity works as an introduction to the text, as a way to examine character midway through, or as a compare and contrast lesson at the end of the play.

This lesson will take 1-2 class periods.

NCTE Standards Covered:

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

What To Do:

1. Divide students into four groups. Hand out copies of Lear's speech from 1.4 (attached handout #1) to two groups. Give the copies of the speech from 5.3 (attached handout #2) to the other two groups.

2. Have students read through their speeches at least twice. The first time all of the students should read it aloud in a choral fashion. The second time through the students should take turns reading line by line. Ask students to identify words they don't know and find their definitions. Students should become familiar with the speech and begin to interpret what Lear is saying.
3. Instruct students that they will be performing their speeches for the class. One group with handout #1 and one group with handout #2 will perform their speeches using any significant props or symbols they can find or create. The symbols should help to convey the meaning of the most visual or significant words, and/or the words with difficult meanings. For example, students could find a picture of someone they hold in high regard for the "goddess."

The two remaining groups are responsible for rewriting and performing the speeches in contemporary vernacular. For example, students should consider how a television character would say the lines, or how a father might sound delivering them.

Give students 25-35 minutes to work.

4. Tell the students to begin rehearsing their speeches. Remind them that everyone in the group must participate aloud. Prompt students to consider setting. Who is Lear addressing? What time of day is it? What might have happened immediately before the speech? What might happen after? Will music or sound effects create the mood of the scene?

5. Ask students to take notes during the performances for a discussion afterwards. Have the two groups with handout #1 perform first, followed by the two groups with handout #2.

6. Discuss the scenes as a large group. What did students notice? Which words had more impact? What was the predominate feeling of each speech? Did the original speech match the contemporary translation? How did the symbols help clarify meaning?

7. For homework, ask students to write an essay on one of two topics. If they have just started the play, they can predict what happens between Acts 1 and 5. If they are in the middle or have finished the play, they can compare/contrast the Lear in the first speech with the Lear in the second speech. They should use lines from the speeches and examples from the performances to support their claims.

What You Need:
Assorted props
Dictionaries
2 Handouts (attached)

How Did It Go?

Was comprehension evident? Did students engage in performance? Did they choose appropriate symbols or create accurate translations? Did students cite examples from the text and their performances in their essays?
If You And Your Class Enjoyed This Curriculum Plan, You’ll Want To Try:

“Reader’s Theater”: King Lear, and the Language of Gesture: In groups, students will work with small sections of 3.4 *King Lear* and perform these passages as Reader's Theater—a performance technique that can allow students to delve into a text through preplanned and choreographed movements. These movements can work on a symbolic as well as a literal level.

Where Can I Find This Lesson Plan?

1. Go to the Web site address: [www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu)
2. Scroll down to “Teachers and Students”
3. In the menu that appears, choose “Resources for Teachers” and then “Teaching Shakespeare”
4. Click on “Archives”
5. Click on “Lesson Plan Archives”
6. Scroll down until you get to “King Lear”
7. Choose the lesson plan listed above or browse the other titles for more classroom ideas
And We All Sit Down: Status in *King Lear*  
(A Lesson in Character Analysis)  
Developed by Kathy Dobronyi

Determining status is an important way for students to understand the relationship between characters. This lesson plan uses two simple status games to allow students to explore the relationships between Lear, his three daughters, and his court.

The lesson plan will take one class period.

**NCTE Standards Covered:**

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

**What To Do:**

1. Students will need to have covered Act 1 before beginning this lesson. Prepare 35 slips of paper labeled 1-10. (The number of slips of paper should equal the number of students in the class.) Have each student draw a number out of a hat. Tell the students that the number 10 indicates high status, the number 1 indicates low status, and the other numbers indicate gradations in between.

2. At the front of the room, establish the position for the head of a line. Then ask all the students, without talking, to place themselves in the line according to their numerical status, with the 10's at the head of the line, proceeding on down to the 1's. When the students are finished placing themselves, have them count off, starting with the 10's, to
reveal their status. The students should be surprised to discover that they have been fairly accurate in determining their positions.

3. Discuss how and why the students lined up the way they did. What is status? How do you express status without using language? How does status apply to daily life? Discuss jobs and careers and assign the status of 1-10 to specific jobs. Explore assigning numbers to different family members, and discuss these choices. A discussion about status can get pretty lively, but see if you can engage your students in thinking about and maybe even questioning the role that status plays in students' lives.

4. Ask five students to choose a character card, a 3 x 5 card with a character from King Lear written on it that you have prepared prior to class. (See “what you need” section below.)

5. Tell the five students to imagine that they have been invited to a formal dinner. Brainstorm with the whole class about how people are seated at a dinner table according to their rank or status. Who sits at the head and foot of the table? Who sits next to whom for conversation and courtesy? Why would it be impolite of the host to place enemies next to each other?

6. After this discussion of basic protocol, ask the five students to find their character's place at the table according to their status. They should do this without speaking or asking questions. When they are finished, discuss with the class where the guests are sitting and how the choices were made.

7. Collect the character cards, reshuffle, and choose five other students. Continue playing the dinner party game until the last 10-15 minutes of class.

8. Then have the students write five things they learned about status and five things they learned about their character. Assign a short character analysis of this character for homework.

Extension Activity: Play the dinner party game at the end of key scenes or at the end of each act to allow the students to explore how the characters in King Lear experience shifts in status. Then ask the students to write a longer essay in which they explore how shifts in status affect character development throughout the play.

What You Need:


Strips of paper numbered 1-10 and a hat

3x5 character cards: King Lear, Goneril, Albany, Regan, Cornwall, Burgundy, Cordelia, King of France, Kent, Gloucester, Edgar, Edmund, Fool, Oswald
How Did It Go?

Did this lesson plan get your students thinking about the role that status plays in fiction and in real life? Were they able to discover how status relates to the relationship between the characters of the play? How well did they incorporate their discoveries about status in an analysis of a character in *King Lear*?

If You And Your Class Enjoyed This Curriculum Plan, You’ll Want To Try:

“Dear Regan”: Students discover differences in the interpretation of characters and motivations that define personality traits and family dynamics throughout Act I of *King Lear*.

Where Can I Find This Lesson Plan?

1. Go to the Web site address: [www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu)
2. Scroll down to “Teachers and Students”
3. In the menu that appears, choose “Resources for Teachers” and then “Teaching Shakespeare”
4. Click on “Archives”
5. Click on “Lesson Plan Archives”
6. Scroll down until you get to “King Lear”
7. Choose the lesson plan listed above or browse the other titles for more classroom ideas
Curriculum Plan #5

Questions of Kingship in King Lear
(A Lesson in Cultural Exploration)
Developed by Victoria Rondeau

This lesson takes an interdisciplinary, research-based approach to understanding King Lear in its cultural context. Students will use the Internet to access historical primary source materials on King James I of England and the title page of the Quarto edition of King Lear. They will learn about King James I's opinions about the divine right of kings and then relate that information to King Lear and its portrayal of kingship.

This lesson will take one to two class periods.

NCTE Standards Covered:

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.

7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., databases,
computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

**What To Do:**

1. Make arrangements for the class to meet in the computer lab. Students should bring their pens and notebooks and pair up at computers.

2. Give the following background for the assignment:

Shakespeare wrote *King Lear* in 1608, when James I was king of England. King James I was already king of Scotland when he took the throne of England in 1603. The Scots had been long time enemies of the English, and James' succession to the throne was disputed by some.

3. Give the students the attached handout. They will work together to understand the Internet texts of James's speeches and to answer the discussion questions. Allow students to work through the information at their own pace, and make sure everyone is taking notes while they read and discuss.

4. Once everyone has worked through the King James information, ask the class to join you in viewing the title page of the 1608 *King Lear* Quarto at the following Website (project it for them if possible):
   

   What do they notice about the page? What is interesting about the title? Who went to see the play?

5. Some scholars believe that Shakespeare used *King Lear* as a means of commenting on James I and his rule. Explain to students that it was against the law to portray a reigning monarch on stage in Shakespeare's day, and both Queen Elizabeth and King James I censored plays. If Shakespeare wanted to make a statement about the king's behavior, it couldn't be an explicit one. Not only could the play be censored, but since King James was a patron of Shakespeare's company of actors (the King's Men), he could also revoke his support of the company.

6. Begin a class discussion comparing and contrasting King Lear and King James I. Assuming that Shakespeare was aware of what was going on between James and Parliament, what might *King Lear* say about aging, paternal kings? Ask students to describe Lear's relationships with his daughters. How does Lear react to the loss of power? to aging? Does Lear feel he has a "right" to be king?
7. Assign an essay for homework. The students must argue one of two points: Shakespeare wrote *King Lear* as a commentary on James I, or *King Lear* has little or no relationship to the reign of James I. Students should review their notes and focus on examples from the texts they've read online and from the play. Each student should choose at least one specific topic (i.e. parenthood as metaphor, aging rulers, differences between Lear and James I, or loss of power) to reinforce their arguments.

**What You Need:**

Handout (attached)
A computer lab
The title page of the *King Lear* 1608 Quarto (found online at http://dewey.lib.upenn.edu/CETI/Furness/index.cfm?TextID=lear_q2&PagePosition=1)

The King James I primary source site (found online at http://campus.northpark.edu/history/Classes/Sources/JamesI.html)

**How Did It Go?**

Did students see parallels in Lear's behavior in the play to James' belief in his right to rule? Did they argue differences? Could they identify scenes in the play to support their arguments? Did their essays show analytical thought?

**If You And Your Class Enjoyed This Curriculum Plan, You’ll Want To Try:**

“Of Passions Sundry and Strange”: Students will examine online primary sources to gain an understanding of Elizabethan attitudes toward different character traits.

**Where Can I Find This Lesson Plan?**

1. Go to the Web site address: www.folger.edu
2. Scroll down to “Teachers and Students”
3. In the menu that appears, choose “Resources for Teachers” and then “Teaching Shakespeare”
4. Click on “Archives”
5. Click on “Lesson Plan Archives”
6. Scroll down until you get to “King Lear”
7. Choose the lesson plan listed above or browse the other titles for more classroom ideas
Also Available from the Folger Shakespeare Library

Shakespeare wrote more than twenty plays*, and many are terrific for students. Whether tragedy or comedy, all will teach students about the age of Shakespeare, about the subtle manipulation of language and image, and about the dramatic construction of character in a new and exciting way. Additional titles include:

Macbeth (ISBN: 0-7432-7710-3)
Romeo and Juliet (ISBN: 0-7432-7711-1)
Othello (ISBN: 0-7432-7755-3)
Julius Caesar (ISBN: 0-7432-8274-3)
The Taming of the Shrew (ISBN: 0-7432-7757-X)
The Merchant of Venice (ISBN: 0-7432-7756-1)

*For a complete list of available titles, please e-mail your request to folger.marketing@simonandschuster.com
KING LEAR QUOTATIONS

I think the world's asleep.

Nothing can be made out of nothing.

Who is it that can tell me who I am?

O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!...I would not be mad!

'On my knees I beg that you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed, and food.'

Our basest beggars are in the poorest thing superfluous.

Allow not nature more than nature needs, man's life is cheap as beast's.
KING LEAR, 2.4.305-328

LEAR
O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous.
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man’s life is cheap as beast's. Thou art a lady;
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear’st,
Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But, for true need—
You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!
You see me here, you gods, a poor old man
As full of grief as age, wretched in both.
If it be you that stirs these daughters’ hearts
Against their father, fool me not so much
To bear it tamely. Touch me with noble anger,
And let not women’s weapons, water drops,
Stain my man’s cheeks.—No, you unnatural hags,
I will have such revenges on you both
That all the world shall—I will do such things—
What they are yet I know not, but they shall be
The terrors of the earth! You think I’ll weep.
No, I'll not weep.
I have full cause of weeping, but this heart
Storm and tempest.
Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws
Or ere I'll weep.—O Fool, I shall go mad!
Exit

© 2001 Folger Shakespeare Library
Lear: Hear, Nature, hear, dear goddess, hear!  
Suspend thy purpose if thou didst intend  
To make this creature fruitful.  
Into her womb convey sterility.  
Dry up in her the organs of increase,  
And from her derogate body never spring  
A babe to honor her.  If she must teem,  
Create her child of spleen, that it may live  
And be a thwart disnatured torment to her.  
Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth,  
With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks,  
Turn all her mother’s pains and benefits  
To laughter and contempt, that she may feel  
How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is  
To have a thankless child.  – Away, away
Lear: No, no, no, no. Come, let's away to prison. We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage. When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down and ask of thee forgiveness. So we'll live, and pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh at gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues talk of court news, and we'll talk with them too - who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out - and take upon 's the mystery of things, as if we were God's spies. And we'll wear out, in a walled prison, packs and sects of great ones that ebb and flow by th' moon.
Questions of Kingship in *King Lear*

**King James I handout**

Visit [http://campus.northpark.edu/history/Classes/Sources/JamesI.html](http://campus.northpark.edu/history/Classes/Sources/JamesI.html)

Read through the first speech: “True Law of Free Monarchies.”

1. What is James trying to convey? What is his conception of the role of a king?
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

2. If you were a member of Parliament, how would you react to this speech? Is James using some sort of “spin” in his speech? If this were a press conference, what questions would you ask?
   ________________________________________________________________
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Read through the second speech: “A Speech to Parliament, 1610.”

3. In the first paragraph, James talks about his idea of “the divine right of kings.” Judging from his speech, what does that phrase mean?
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4. What does the phrase “parens patriae” mean? Does James think of the Parliament and his subjects as equals?
   ________________________________________________________________
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5. James uses his age as a persuasive device in the last paragraph. How does he get mileage out of being an old king?
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