

KING LEAR STUDY QUESTIONS

1.1

Imagine yourself as Shakespeare's intended audience, that is, as an aristocratic male who likely disapproves of giving monarchs too much power but strongly believes in keeping power centralized around a monarch. How would you view Lear's decisions? Explain.

How do you think Edmund must be feeling? What old prejudice is he a victim of?

What makes the match between Cordelia and the king of France (England's old enemy) ironic?

How might the references to sight and blindness become important for the rest of the play?

What do the sisters say about their father near the end of the scene?

1.2

What are the two views of nature contrasted in the action and dialogue of this scene?

What parallels do you see between this scene and the first one?

1.3

A couple of months have now passed; what is bothering Goneril at this point and what does she instruct her servant Oswald to do about it?

1.4

Why does Kent wish to serve Lear? What does he discern in Lear's countenance and how is this ironic?

What is Kent's reaction to what Oswald's servant does to Lear?

Why is what the knight says about the Fool's pining away "since my young lady's going into France" important?

What is the Fool's function in this part of the play and what are at least three examples of how he fulfills this function?

2.1

How does Edmund trick his brother Edgar into fleeing?

2.2

How do Kent's actions with Oswald characterize him as a "plain dealer"?

How might Kent's line "Nothing almost sees miracles/But[except] misery" serve as a motto for the play?

2.3

How is Edgar's disguising himself as a bedlam beggar an example of social criticism in the play? Why is Edgar's comment, "Edgar, I nothing am" important to the meaning of the play?

2.4

Why is Lear so angry that his servant Kent has been put in the stocks by Regan and Cornwall?

What is Regan's first response when Lear complains of his treatment at the hands of her sister?

Before this scene is over, what have the two sisters stripped Lear of?

3.1

How does the storm that Lear endures on the outside mirror his emotional state?

3.2

What is Lear's comment about people who have suffered social injustice in his kingdom and why might it signal the beginning of his transformation?

What does Lear say to the Fool that suggests a further step in his transformation?

3.3

What mistake does Gloucester make with his son Edmund, and what significant word does he use?

3.4

Why are Lear's lines about the "poor naked wretches" in his kingdom important?

When Lear encounters Edgar, how does Edgar's condition mirror his own?

What does Lear mean when he calls Edgar, "unaccommodated man," and how does he now actualize the nothing motif of the play?

3.6

What does Lear do now to his three daughters in the hovel that indicates how mad he has become?

3.7

How might this scene be asking the question: "Just exactly where are the really mad people in this play, on the inside or the outside?"

4.1

What does Gloucester mean when he says in this scene: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods/They kill us for their sport"?

4.6

What transformation seems to result from Gloucester's attempt at suicide? What does Edgar mean when he tells his father, "Thy life's a miracle."

How is the stage direction, "Enter Lear, fantastically dressed with wild flowers" related to his transformation?

4.7

When King Lear recovers in Cordelia's arms, what does he mean when he says, "I am a very foolish fond old man"?

5.2

In the midst of the battle, when Cordelia's forces are losing, Edgar comments: "Men must endure/Their going hence, even as their coming hither: /Ripeness is all." How is this comment important to the meaning(s) of the play?

5.3

What does Lear say to Cordelia that might indicate that he has not experienced a complete transformation?

Just before he dies, King Lear tells those gathered to "look on her, look, her lips": Does this mean that he dies in exultation, thinking that his daughter is breathing? If so, is he not still a blind, gullible old man?