

# NEARLY LEAR

Performed by Susanna Hamnett



## STUDY GUIDE

Developed by Susanna Hamnett in consultation with Pat McCarthy

# NEARLY LEAR

A one-woman adaptation of King Lear, using physical theatre, clown, storytelling, music, film, and Shakespeare's magnificent language.

Performed by	Susanna Hamnett
Directed by	Edith Tankus
Set Design by	Lindsay Anne Black
Sound Design by	Gavin Fearon
Film by	David Parker



**SUSANNA HAMNETT** is an actor, clown and artist-educator who has worked across England, Europe and Canada. *Nearly Lear* brings together Susanna's passion for Shakespeare and Clown. You can read more about her work at [www.susannahamnett.com](http://www.susannahamnett.com)

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Presented by Prologue to the Performing Arts

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# INTRODUCTION

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To the Teacher,

Thank you for bringing **Nearly Lear** into your school.

I look forward to presenting it to you and your students.

I have written a more detailed introduction in the **Teacher's Resource Section** at the back of this Study Guide. You will also find an extended synopsis of **King Lear** in this section.

I hope you enjoy the performance!

With thanks,

Susanna Hamnett

## HOW DOES NEARLY LEAR DIFFER FROM KING LEAR?

### KING LEAR

King Lear has three daughters. Growing old, he decides to divide his kingdom between them according to how much they love him. The two elder sisters, Goneril and Regan, make elaborate speeches, but the youngest, Cordelia, who loves her father truly, refuses to participate in what she sees as their insincerity. Unwisely and rashly, Lear casts her out and gives his power over to the other two daughters. They are ungrateful and greedy and treat him harshly, eventually throwing him out into a wild storm to fend for himself. He is helped by his fool, and his faithful friends, Kent and Gloucester. Gloucester pays a terrible price for his loyalty, and is blinded by Regan's husband. Grief and remorse drive Lear to madness, but his suffering also teaches him compassion and humanity, and he is reconciled with the true and loving Cordelia. But their joy is short-lived, as the treacheries of Goneril and Regan, plotting together with Gloucester's illegitimate son, Edmund, lead to Cordelia's murder, Lear's death from grief, and their own untimely deaths.

AND

### NEARLY LEAR

Nearly Lear follows the story of King Lear closely, but focuses on the central story of Lear and his three daughters. It is told by Noreen who, desperate for work, has (in good Shakespearean tradition) disguised herself as a boy named Norris in order to land the job of royal fool to the King. In this version of the story, there is no Kent, no Edgar and no Edmund. Instead we meet Osmond, the King's servant, who is bitterly disgruntled with his lot in life, and swears to use his intelligence and good looks as a way to manipulate his way to power and influence. He seduces the two elder sisters as he waits to see where the balance of power will ultimately land, and it is he who is responsible for the act of blinding faithful Gloucester.

At the end of the story, it is Goneril, unable to bear his relationship with Regan, who will fatally wound Osmond.

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"Shakespeare's King Lear is magnificent, appalling, soaring, banal, cruel tender, funny and complex: the virtuous are punished, justice is rarely served and its end is simply shattering – in other words, it's very much like life... But Lear's beauty remains—unforgettable, terrible, heart-shocking. Think of everything you're most deeply afraid of; it's here in Lear. Think of everything you couldn't stand to lose; you'll see it lost in Lear. And you'll see humanity survive nonetheless, the play rising above life's most devastating certainties to sing and burn."

A.L KENNEDY from his article "Madness and Insight," *The Globe and Mail*

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## PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES



## PREPARING THE STUDENTS FOR THE PERFORMANCE

Unless otherwise indicated, the activities in this guide are suitable for all levels: Junior, Intermediate, and Senior.

### OPTION 1: Form and Structure

- **Nearly Lear** is a one-person show. Have the students seen solo performances before? If they have, did the actor play one character or many different characters? What techniques did s/he use to tell the story? What are the differences between a solo and a full-cast performance? What are the challenges of a one-person show?
- **Nearly Lear** is an adaptation of an existing play. What do the students already know about adaptations of books and plays? What happens in adaptations? What might they expect to see? Discuss possible ways that the story could be presented (ie through narration, through the performer changing characters).
- Susanna, the performer, describes herself as an actor and also as a clown. What do the students know about clowns? What might the role of the clown be in a tragedy like *King Lear*?

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#### Teacher Talk

Here are two ways of introducing your students to this production. One focuses on **form and structure**, and the second on **themes**.

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You may choose to have the students record their thoughts for comparison and discussions after the show.

### OPTION 2: Themes

- What previous knowledge do the students have of the play? Discuss some of the themes and their relevance to the student's own concerns and world-view (ie. sibling rivalry, do children have a responsibility to look after aging parents?)
- What is an inheritance? Do the students have any previous knowledge or experience (from life, books or films) about inheritances, fights over wills ? Do parents have a responsibility to leave things (money, property) to their children?

#### Just a Thought:

If the Students do not yet know the whole story, it might be a good idea not to reveal the ending until they have seen the play!

#### Note

If your students are already well-acquainted with the play, then any of the following Post-Show Activities would be equally suited to pre-performance exploration.

# THINGS TO WATCH FOR DURING THE PERFORMANCE

## BEFORE

While the students are waiting for the performance to begin, have them look at the set and imagine how it might be used. Invite them to pay attention to the pre-show music and think about how it relates to the themes of the show they are about to see.

## DURING

- **CHARACTER.** How does the performer change character? What aspects of each character does she draw our attention to in particular? Can you identify different styles and/or gestures that are used for various characters?

- **MUSIC.** Listen for music and sound effects. How are they used to create specific atmospheres? How do they contribute to the telling of the story? Can you identify any of the music?

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Music in <i>Nearly Lear</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stormy Weather</li><li>• My Heart Belongs to Daddy<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• La Marseillaise</li><li>• Bad to the Bone</li></ul></li><li>• Zadok the Priest (Handel)</li><li>• Squilla il bronzo i Dio (<i>Norma</i>, Bellini)</li><li>• Dido's Lament (<i>Dido and Aeneas</i>, Purcell)</li></ul>
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- **SET.** Pay attention to the set. How is it used to create different locations? How many different locations can you identify? How else— and when— does the set suggest other things/objects/images to you?

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**Teacher Talk**

Divide your class into three groups.  
Give each group one of the above elements  
(character, music, set)  
to observe and report back on.

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## POST-SHOW DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES



## DISCUSSION

- Re-visit the list of things to watch for, and have the students report back on what they observed.
- Go back to the pre-show discussions and re-examine the questions in the light of having seen the show. What was different from their expectations? What new perspectives do they now have on the play, both in terms of performance and theme?
- Examine questions arising from the performance in greater depth, both in discussion and writing. (*An extensive list of level-appropriate questions is included in the Teacher's Resource Section.*)

## ACTIVITIES

Shakespeare's themes are themes that flow through our own lives. We face them now, too. He writes about all the most vital and important things that can ever happen to a human being.

## STORY



The following is an Almost Impossible Exercise! The goal can be achieved, but much of the learning and the fun lies in the attempt. It allows students a chance to grapple with the main themes, to try and grasp the bare essentials of story and character, and to be endlessly inventive as they figure out ways of communicating these essential elements in a fantastically short time!

This may be done as a solo exercise, or in groups of two or three.

You may wish to give the students a short amount of prep time, to figure out their approach or strategy.

### EXERCISE:

To re-enact the whole story of King Lear in three minutes.  
(You could also try one minute or five minute versions)

Here are a few ideas for adding to or adapting this exercise:

- Ask each student to bring in one or two costume pieces and a prop or object. The choice of what they bring should be fairly impulsive (ie. they should not think too hard ahead of time about how things will be used. The pile of props might end up including things as random as a saucepan and a baseball bat, for example.)
- Before beginning their 'speed version' of the play, each student can pick from the costumes and objects anything that they feel will help them with their storytelling and characterization.

### Intermediate/Senior Variation

- A good variation on this is to have other students dress the performers from the pile. This encourages the actors to wear costumes that they might not have picked for themselves, thereby avoiding 'safe' choices and potentially opening up new feelings and perceptions about the roles they are about to play. It is also a fun exercise that allows everyone to loosen up a little and remember that they are playing and are to have fun!

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“Many of our habits today are about non-communication. Perhaps we don’t trust what we say or believe that others are listening. We’re often frightened of committing to any powerful idea or passionate feeling. This is not the energy at the heart of Shakespeare’s world. The world he creates is full of inquisitive speakers and attentive listeners. His characters use language to connect to the world, not to hide from it. They use it to survive, to probe, to explore, to quest. They are not afraid of profound expression. [To play Shakespeare] we have to learn to care about our voices, our words, our ears and our ability to communicate and not be ashamed of caring”

from “Speaking Shakespeare” by PATSY RODENBURG

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## LANGUAGE



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Shakespeare’s language is much more familiar to us than we might realize! We actually all speak Shakespeare every day! Here are some examples of phrases that Shakespeare invented

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- Every inch a king
- Wild-geese chase
- Eaten me out of house and home
- Neither rhyme nor reason
- The milk of human kindness
- For goodness’ sake
- Good riddance
- A tower of strength
- In my mind’s eye
- The be-all and the end-all
- Hot-blooded
- Swift as a shadow
- The crack of doom
- One fell swoop
- Bated breath
- Soft-hearted
- Pomp and circumstance
- Too much of a good thing
- We have seen better days
- A sorry sight
- It beggared all description
- There’s the rub
- Rue the hour
- To thine own self be true
- To be or not to be
- A dish fit for the gods

## Junior/Intermediate

### EXERCISE:

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- Look up the meaning of these expressions
- Maybe the students know or can find more quotes and expressions to add to the list
- In pairs, students pick one, two or more phrases/words and create a short scene that uses them in context. This can be a written or oral exercise.
- Have the students enact their scenes for the class

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Shakespeare demands commitment. You cannot speak Shakespeare and be cool and disinterested. That’s why it’s so much fun to play and speak. Feelings and actions take place in the same moment. These are characters with energy and passion. They are not afraid to speak and be heard. They need to communicate. To play these characters we have to connect the need with vocal energy.

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### Thought.

How is this different in our modern society? Do we use words and language in the same way? How hard is it to stand up and speak about how you feel and what you believe in to other people?

## Intermediate/Senior

### EXERCISE:

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Have the group stand in a large circle. One person in the centre.

The task of the group is be **disinterested** in the person in the centre. They may even talk quietly amongst themselves.

The student in the centre will use one phrase to gain the attention of the group, compelling their attention with the power of the words and the want and need to communicate.

S/he may repeat the phrase as often as needed until s/he is holding the focus of the whole circle. The group must understand that they must not willfully refuse to react to the energy of the player in the centre. Their job is to allow the words to compel their attention—to get their attention with a phrase.

As the students commit to the phrase—they will feel how much power there is in the movement of the words.

### HINTS FOR THE SPEAKER:

- keep your knees unlocked and your breath low
- make sure you are not locking your jaw
- make eye contact with the circle
- let the need and urgency of what you are saying bubble up and power your words and vocal energy

Here are a few suggestions of phrases from the play that may be suitable for this exercise, and of course, the students can themselves pick a phrase that catches their imagination:

- In such a night to shut me out? In such a night as this? O Regan, Goneril! Your old kind father whose frank heart gave all (*Lear*)
- I am a man more sinned against than sinning (*Lear*)
- I grow, I prosper; Now, gods, stand up for bastards! (*Edmund*)
- Better thou hadst not been born than not t'have pleased me better (*Lear*)
- O Goneril! You are not worth the dust which the rude wind blows in your face. (*Albany*)
- I shall see the winged vengeance overtake such children (*Gloucester*)
- What have you done? Tigers, not daughters, what have you perform'd? (*Albany*)
- I pray, weep not: if you have poison for me, I will drink it. (*Lear*)

### EXERCISE:

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Each student may choose a monologue (or part of one) from the play.

If possible the piece should be a minimum of eight lines, and the students should work towards learning it by heart.

In order to connect and engage with the language, the following exercises can be helpful:

- Make sure that the students find out what every single word means
- Have each student whisper the speech quietly to themselves under their breath
- Repeat. This time they must stop and find a picture in their minds for every image and description in the speech
- As they speak the speech quietly to themselves, have them just speak the vowels.
- Then do just the consonants (they will likely feel that this is silly, but encourage them to feel the quality of the sounds)
- If there is space, have the students speak their speech as they walk about. Each time their character has a change or shift in their thinking, the student should turn and change direction (without bumping into anyone else!). This allows them to experience how much movement there is in any given speech; how agile the character's thoughts are.

- In pairs. Have the students speak their monologue to their partner while keeping eye-contact and pushing against their partner's hands. The resistance that is offered in the pushing allows for a deeper connection with the abdominal muscles and the breath. They should feel much more power and vocal strength after pushing.

## CHARACTER



### EXERCISE:

Invite the students to cast King Lear. If they were to cast a film or a theatrical version, who would they have to play the various characters? They could choose from actors that they know, or from famous and well-known personalities from politics, music, television.

Questions for discussion:

- Why have you chosen each one?
- What are the characteristics that make you feel that they either resemble the characters in the play or that they would be able to play them well?

### EXERCISE:

**Hot-seating.** The students take on the role of a particular character in the play, and then are interviewed by the rest of the group. The important thing is for the student to stay in character to answer the questions.

The students may decide the context for the interview (ie.newspaper interview, TV show etc).

This exercise is a great opportunity to imagine reasons and backgrounds that could have given rise to the events in the play.

The students can put themselves in the characters' shoes and imagine what it was like to be them in the situations that happen in the play.

They can also imagine what their lives might have been like leading up to the events that we see.

Allow them to base their imaginative explorations on what they know from the play, but encourage freedom in coming up with ideas, feelings and motivations.

## Intermediate/Senior Variation

The above exercise could also be structured as an exercise in monologue or journal writing.

For example, each student may write a page from a character's journal at any given point in the story:

Here are a few ideas:

- Regan after Osmond has visited for the first time
- Cordelia after she has been banished and has arrived in France with her new husband
- Osmond after learning that Lear is dividing his kingdom and power between his two older daughters
- Gloucester after Lear has acted rashly and banished Cordelia
- Gloucester after the two sisters have come to stay in his house
- Goneril once she suspects that Osmond is lying to her and seeing Regan behind her back

These journal entries may then be read to the class, or performed, or filmed as a 'talking heads' presentation.

## MUSIC



In groups, students write a theme song for a character. If any of them play instruments, the song can be set to music, but it could also be a cappella or have a percussive accompaniment.

Let them choose a style before beginning:

Rap  
Musical  
Rock  
Country and Western  
Blues  
Opera  
etc.

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It can be most helpful to set a time-limit. For example, get the group to decide together on a style and a theme, and then give them maybe 10 minutes to **individually** come up with some verses and ideas, and then come back into the group for a further specified time to pull all their 'offerings' together.

As in the story exercise, the pressure of a restricted amount of time to create will invariably focus the mind and means that something does indeed get created!

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## DESIGN



### EXERCISE:

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Ask each student to design/make a poster that reflects what s/he feels and thinks is most important about the play. If possible allow the students to work with large sheets of paper and with access to paint and a range of colour.

This activity allows the student to express feelings and responses to the play in terms of visuals, colours and mood.

### Senior Extension:

#### EXERCISE:

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Place the student in the role of a designer who wants his/her design to be chosen for an up-coming production of 'King Lear.' The student must make a 'pitch' to the class (who here represent the theatre's Artistic Committee). S/he must explain how and why his/her design reflects the most important elements of the play and why her design should be chosen to be the poster for the production!

## TEACHER'S RESOURCE SECTION



Language and character are inextricably linked in Shakespeare. Language is character in action. It seems to me that there two fundamental 'ways in', both of which are essential if the student is to gain a resonant and revelatory personal experience of a play. The first (which I see as bringing the play **towards** the student) is through discovering what is contemporary about the play, discovering ways of making it accessible and relevant. This happens when students can put things in their own words, find contemporary parallels, issues and emotions that mirror their own lives and concerns. The second (which involves the student moving in the opposite direction – out of their own realm of experience **towards** the play) is about the students opening up to explore the language that Shakespeare uses in order to feel the emotional charge and power of speaking those words. It is about discovering what totally new understanding/insights can be revealed from going on this journey.

## NOTE TO TEACHERS

Thank you for inviting Nearly Lear into your school.

I am looking forward to presenting it to you and your students.

I hope that this study guide will be of use to you in some of your pre-and post-performance discussions and activities.

'Nearly Lear' is a re-telling of 'King Lear' through the eyes of a clown. At first sight this marriage of Shakespeare and Clown may seem an odd one. There is a danger that people will think that my intention is to somehow mock or 'send up' the story. Nothing could be further from the truth. This performance is born out of my deep love of Shakespeare, my awe at his genius, insight, humanity and timeless resonance, and a passionate desire to share this particular play, King Lear with audiences of all ages, particularly children and high school students.

It is also born out of the belief that laughter opens the heart and the imagination, and can often take us further along an emotional path than we might otherwise have been willing to go. When we laugh we become more open to the whole range of human emotions. It becomes less daunting to enter into the tragic heart of this story, although paradoxically its impact is not lessened.

And so the Clown—the open-hearted fool—seemed to me to be the perfect storyteller for this particular story. Not only is the Fool in Lear particularly and intimately associated with the King and the one character most privy to all aspect of Lear's journey, but the role of the clown, by his very nature is to boldly, foolishly—and ultimately wisely—play around in the most sacred and dark areas of the human heart, and find laughter—healing laughter—where we thought there were only tears. So as the director and I were creating this play, we allowed ourselves to be thoroughly steeped in the clown spirit—to bring to it equal amounts of respect and playfulness. After all, this is a play! And play is the best jumping-off place for exploration.

Whenever I work with students on Shakespeare, we start with the idea that what we have in our hands is a play, a script, a living-thing-in-the-moment, and that the more fun we can have exploring it, the more it will reveal to us and through us. We will bring our unique insights, feelings, responses to the play, and it in turn will waken and stir new impulses and discoveries in us.

So I hope that you will have fun, both with the performance and with all your explorations of the play. I believe that there is no end to what can be discovered if we jump in eagerly and openly, with respect for the greatness of Shakespeare's genius, but also with a healthy dash of mischief and a willingness to play and explore outside of the traditional box.

*Susanna Hamnett*

## SYNOPSIS OF KING LEAR

Shakespeare's play is the story of a fictional King named Lear, the ruler of England during an unspecified time in early English history. He has always been an impulsive and hot-headed man, and now in his old age, is growing increasingly rash and unwise. Deciding that it is time to relinquish the demands of leadership, he sets his mind on living out the rest of his days as King-in-name, with his three daughters taking care of all the political and practical concerns of the country. He plans to give the largest and best share of the kingdom to the youngest daughter—his favourite, Cordelia, counting on her to devote herself to looking after him in his old age.



In order to receive their share, Lear requires that the daughters make public declarations of their love for him: whoever loves him the best shall be given the most. Goneril and Regan flatter and win their apportioned thirds, but Cordelia, honest and proud, refuses to indulge what she sees as a humiliating charade, and so incurs the wrath of her hot-tempered father, and is banished. The King of France, who has been courting her, takes her back to France as his bride, without a dowry or Lear's blessing.

When Lear's faithful friend and advisor, the Earl of Kent, objects to this injustice, and points out that "thy youngest daughter does not love thee least", Lear banishes him too. Lear's Fool (who is wise) is likewise ignored when he chides the King for his foolishness. It is a testament to Lear's capacity to inspire loyalty, that Kent—although he has been threatened with death if he remains within the kingdom—disguises himself as a servant so that he may in

fact stay close to Lear. He fears the outcome of Lear's rash decision to now hand over all his power to the two older daughters, and his suspicions prove justified as the daughters' greed and ambition lead them to eventually dispossess their father entirely, turning him out of doors into a wild and brutally stormy night.

The Earl Of Gloucester, another old friend of Lear's, has been equally unwise. He has two sons, one born in wedlock, named Edgar, and one illegitimate son, Edmund. Edmund is mortally jealous of his legitimate brother's entitlement to Gloucester's lands and title, and he deceives his father into thinking that Edgar is plotting against Gloucester's life. Gloucester foolishly believes Edmund's lies and puts out a warrant for Edgar's death. Edgar goes into hiding in the surrounding countryside, disguising himself as 'Poor Tom', a homeless madman.

However, although Gloucester is blind to the true nature of his sons, he is not blind to the outrages that have been inflicted on the King, and he ignores the threats of Goneril and Regan and risks his life to go out into the storm to help Lear.

During this time Edmund has been worming his way into the favour of Goneril and Regan, and their husbands, the Dukes of Albany and Cornwall. They are now the rulers of the kingdom—and Edmund is supremely ambitious. He betrays his father by revealing the help that Gloucester has shown to the outcast Lear, and he is rewarded for this by the Duke of Cornwall, who bestows on him the title 'Earl of Gloucester' which has been stripped from his father,

The Dukes of Albany and Cornwall begin to quarrel, each wanting the other's share of Lear's kingdom. They unite only to face a threatened invasion from France—whose troops are led by Cordelia, coming to rescue her father and restore him to his throne.

But by this time Lear's sufferings have driven him mad. Stripped of everything, alone with his Fool in the merciless storm, he begins to glimpse the extent of his foolishness and it is more than he can bear. Gloucester takes him to a wretched hovel where he can at least rest a little, but even



rest is not allowed him as it becomes clear to Gloucester that the elder daughters actually want their father dead, and he arranges for Lear to be taken to the port of Dover where he can rendezvous with Cordelia.



But no sooner has he sent Lear off, then he is arrested for aiding and abetting a traitor—Lear—and is punished by having his eyes put out by the Duke of Cornwall. He is then brutally turned out of his own house to wander blindly. Now it is his turn to recognize his mistaken judgement with regards to his sons. Despairing now, he plans to make his way to Dover where he can put an end to his life by jumping from a cliff-top. He is accompanied by Poor Tom—actually his loving son, Edgar,—still in disguise, who plans to take care of his father and restore his faith in life, without yet revealing to him his true identity.

The Duke of Cornwall is fatally wounded by one of his own servants who is outraged at his cruelty. Now Regan is a widow.

By this time both of the elder sisters have fallen in love with Edmund, and are jealous of each other. With her husband now dead, Regan makes it clear that she intends to marry Edmund, and this fans the fires of Goneril's jealousy. She despises her husband, Albany, who is horrified by the way that the two sisters have treated their father, and begins to plot to have Albany killed so that she can marry Edmund herself.

Cordelia arrives in England and finds her father. She has a Doctor with her who begins to tend to Lear in the hope of curing his madness. She prepares to do battle with the armies of her sisters.



Edgar leads his father to Dover, but frustrates his suicide attempt, trying to impart to him the need to keep faith with life and not give up even in the face of the terrible ordeals. Then Edgar saves his father's life a second time when Goneril's messenger, Oswald, carrying a letter from Goneril to Edmund, recognizes Gloucester and tries to kill him. Edgar kills Oswald and dreads the letter. Goneril is asking Edmund to murder Albany so that she and Edmund can be married. Edgar gives the letter to Albany, who now has proof of his wife's treachery.

Lear recovers from his madness for a short while and is joyfully reunited with his beloved Cordelia. They bless and forgive each other and it would seem as if all might be well, but there is a battle to be fought. The French troops led by Cordelia together with English forces still loyal to the King engage in battle with the armies of Goneril and Regan, headed by the two sisters and Edmund.

Cordelia's army is defeated and Cordelia and Lear are taken to prison. Although Albany plans for them to be given a fair trial, Edmund secretly arranges for them to be murdered—in a way that will make it seem as if they killed themselves in despair.

However Albany publicly denounces Edmund and accuses Goneril of treason. Edgar (again disguised) challenges his brother to a duel and fatally wounds him. As he lies dying, Edgar reveals his true identity to him and tells him the story of Gloucester (who has now died, with a measure of peace, having at last discovered that Poor Tom was his beloved son, Edgar).

Edmund also learns of the deaths of Goneril and Regan—Goneril having poisoned her sister in a desperate jealous rage, and then stabbed herself. Edmund makes a last-minute attempt to redeem some of his evil-doings and sends word to stop his death-sentence on Lear and Cordelia. But he is too late. Cordelia has been hanged. Lear carries in her body. The old warrior King had killed the soldier that was hanging her, but is too late to save her life. He cannot bear the grief and he too surrenders to death.

Albany yields the kingdom to Edgar.

# CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS FOR NEARLY LEAR

*Selected Curriculum Expectation relevant to the performance and the activities in this Guide*

<b>Language Arts</b>	
<b>Grades 5/6</b>	<b>Grades 7/8</b>
<p><b>Oral Communication</b> 1.6 extend understanding of oral texts by connecting, comparing, and contrasting the ideas and information in them to their own knowledge, experience, 1.9 identify a variety of presentation strategies used in oral texts and analyze their effect on the audience 2.5 identify a range of vocal effects, including tone, pace, pitch, volume, and a variety of sound effects,</p> <p><b>Text</b> 1.7 analyze oral texts in order to evaluate how well they communicate ideas, opinions, themes, 2.4 identify various elements of style - including voice, word choice, and the use of hyperbole, strong verbs, dialogue, and complex sentences</p>	<p><b>Oral Communication</b> 1.4 demonstrate an understanding of the information and ideas in increasingly complex and difficult oral texts in a variety of ways 2.3 communicate in a clear, coherent manner, using a structure and style appropriate to the purpose, the subject matter, and the intended audience 2.5 identify a range of vocal effects, including tone, pace, pitch, volume, and a variety of sound effects,</p> <p><b>Text</b> 2.4 identify a range of elements of style - including symbolism, irony, analogy, metaphor, and other rhetorical devices - and explain how they help communicate meaning and enhance the effectiveness of texts 3.3 read appropriate texts with expression and confidence, adjusting reading strategies and reading rate to match the form and purpose</p>
<b>Drama</b>	
<b>Grades 5-8</b>	<b>Grades 9-12</b>
<p><b>Demonstrate</b> an understanding of the principles involved in the structuring of works in drama</p> <p><b>Demonstrate</b> understanding of the appropriate use of the voice, gestures, and the level of language in different dramatic situations;</p> <p><b>Review</b> drama and dance performances, orally or in writing, critiquing the use of elements and techniques</p>	<p><b>Create</b> drama through research or the interpretation of a source.</p> <p><b>Create and perform</b> dramatic presentations, using knowledge of conventions, performance spaces, and audience perspectives..</p> <p><b>Demonstrate</b> an understanding of the elements and principles of dramatic expression. (e.g., voice, movement, production values).</p> <p><b>Describe</b> the process of creating a character (e.g., script analysis, character analysis, experimentation with movement and voice);</p>
<b>Visual Arts</b>	
<b>Grades 5-8</b>	<b>Grades 9-12</b>
<p><b>produce</b> two- and three-dimensional works of art that communicate a variety of ideas (thoughts, feelings, experiences) for specific purposes (e.g. poster design, set design)</p> <p><b>explain</b> how the effective use of the elements and principles of design contributes to an art work's ability to communicate feelings, convey ideas,</p>	<p><b>explain</b> how the elements and principles of design reflected in a specific work of art support the concepts and ideas expressed through that work;</p> <p><b>apply</b> the elements and principles of design to express a particular concept or idea; (e.g. a stage set)</p> <p>evaluate their choice and application of the materials and processes used in their work; (e.g.the design of poster or stage set)</p>

# STYLE, STRUCTURE and STORY IN NEARLY LEAR

## FURTHER QUESTIONS FOR WRITING AND DISCUSSION

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“The clown spirit, in fact the need for comedy, exists in every known culture.

Comedy is as old as humanity itself, older than recorded history. The theatre is believed to have originated in religious ceremonies, and most present day tribal people do not seem to feel, as we do, that clowning and capering are out of place in the midst of solemn ritual...

Among the Hopi and Zuni Indians of the American Southwest, the clown is an important member in the community, credited with special healing powers and a particularly close relationship with the forces of nature. In return, the clown is allowed the privilege of ignoring or deliberately violating ordinary social conventions; the clown may play the lowest pranks or mock the performance of the most sacred rites, without fearing retaliation, or even the loss of respect. The clown is permitted, even encouraged, to be profane, boastful, gluttonous and foolish to defy all the standards and customs of the community.

Clowning is really a skilful dramatic commentary that illustrates and interprets the laws and rituals the clown appears to ridicule.”

From ‘Here Come The Clowns’—LOWELL SWOTZELL

“By admonishing latecomers at the beginning of the show...I’m planting a hypnotic suggestion which says, you may be watching a play, but we’re watching you, and you are part of the dialogue now. If you do something it’s going to be part of the performance. You thought you could just come and sit and be the audience. No. You’re the audience, and you’ve got work to do.”

AVNER THE ECCENTRIC, performer. (Modern-day clown)

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### Questions For All Levels:

- What do we gain by having Noreen the storyteller tell us the story?
- Why do you think that Kings had a fool or jester?
- What role does Noreen fulfill in the play?
- What is the role of laughter in *Nearly Lear*?
- Who are our clowns today and why do we need them?
- How did the performance make you feel?
- What did it make you think about?
- Could you see any of your own personal concerns mirrored in the story?
- What do you think that Shakespeare wanted us to think and feel when we watch this story?
- Is it a ‘good story’? Why?
- What do you like about the story?
- What don’t you like?
- How is this performance different from watching a movie or TV production?
- How is it different from watching a play with the traditional ‘fourth wall’?
- What happens when Noreen addresses the audience directly?
- How do you feel when you know that Noreen might involve and include you in the performance?

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The *fourth wall* is an imaginary screen or wall that some performances create between the actors and the audience. The actors pretend that the audience is not there, and the audience is not in any way involved with the performance. Clown as a theatrical form is largely characterized by the absence of the fourth wall.

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## Questions for Intermediates and Seniors:

- From your knowledge of the play and Nearly Lear, write a review of Nearly Lear and explain what you feel has been gained and what has been lost in this retelling.
- Does having Noreen as the storyteller alter our emotional involvement with the characters?
- What is lost and/or diminished by shrinking the story down and losing the story of Gloucester and his sons?
- Does humour distract us from the tragic nature of the story?
- What is universal about this story?
- What themes and issues do we face today?( Ie sibling jealousies and unfairness. Aging parents. Rulers who are blinded by too much power and cannot see fairly or justly. Why people turn to cruelty and torture.)
- The nature of forgiveness.
- What does Lear learn through his suffering?

## FURTHER RESOURCES

### Books:

*Teaching Shakespeare*, by Rex Gibson (Cambridge University Press)

*Speaking Shakespeare*, by Patsy Rodenburg (Palgrave)

*Evoking (and forgetting!) Shakespeare*, by Peter Brook (Nick Hern Books)

### Film:

*King Lear*, directed by Peter Brook (1971)

*King Lear*, directed by Richard Eyre (BBC 1997)

### Film Adaptations:

*Ran*, directed by Akira Kurasawa (1985)

*A Thousand Acres*, directed by Joelyn Moorhouse (1997)

### Web Links:

[www.rsc.org.uk/lear/teachers](http://www.rsc.org.uk/lear/teachers)

[www.globelink.org/resourcecentre/kinglear2001](http://www.globelink.org/resourcecentre/kinglear2001)

# STUDENT PAGES



# CINQUAIN POEM

A cinquain poem has five (cinq) lines

Line 1 is a NOUN

Line 2 is TWO ADJECTIVES that relate to the noun

Line 3 is THREE VERBS (can be in any tense)

Line 4 is a SHORT PHRASE OF 4 WORDS

Line 5 is a SYNONYM of the first NOUN

Here is an example of a cinquain poem about Goneril:

Goneril  
Lonely, unloved  
Hating, wanting, needing  
Blind as her father  
Eldest

Now compose your own cinquain poem about one of the characters in King Lear;

Line 1 (Noun) \_\_\_\_\_

Line 2 (Adjectives) \_\_\_\_\_

Line 3 (Verbs) \_\_\_\_\_

Line 4 (Short phrase) \_\_\_\_\_

Line 5 (Synonym) \_\_\_\_\_

# THE SECRET THOUGHTS OF CHARACTERS

Imagine that the characters in King Lear really existed. Imagine that someone followed them around secretly wherever they went with a tape-recorder so that the words that they speak are really their own. Imagine that they were once children and young people just like you, that they went to school, had best friends and favourite toys and activities. That they had dreams of what they wanted to do and be. Put yourself in the shoes of one character that you are really like OR really dislike, and write about the following. Write as much as you can. Follow your imagination and let it explore the secret thoughts of your character.

When I was a child, my favourite thing was....

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The thing that made me the *saddest* when I was growing up was.....

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The thing that made me the *maddest* was.....

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When I was growing up I always dreamed that I would.....

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Now that I am older, I wish that my life were.....

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The things that I would change about my life are.....

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When I am alone I dream about.....

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My favourite things to do now are.....

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I wish that.....

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