Daily Bard

LESSON PLANS

King Lear: three lesson plans

Three lessons that follow Lear from the throne to the heath to the final scene, asking at each stage what he can see and what it has cost him. Each is built on one named passage and ends in writing.



LEVEL
Ages 14-18 (GCSE, A-level, AP Lit, IB); adaptable for first-year seminars

SEQUENCE
3 lessons of 60 minutes

FOCUS
Language and power in the love test, Lear's change on the heath, and competing readings of the ending

YOU WILL NEED
Copies of the play (1.1, 3.2, 3.4, 5.3), the printed worksheet, highlighters, mini whiteboards or paper

Overview

This sequence picks three moments that mark the arc of the play: the division of the kingdom, the night on the heath and the last entrance. It assumes students know both plots; if not, set the act summaries in the King Lear study guide as homework first.

- Students will be able to analyse how language reveals power and its loss in the opening scene.
- Students will be able to explain how Lear's speech on the heath marks a change in what he sees.
- Students will be able to evaluate hopeful and bleak readings of the ending and argue for one.

Assessment focus. Lessons 1 and 2 concentrate on analysis of language, form and structure (the AO2 idea). Context (AO3) appears where it explains a choice: ideas of kingship and natural order, and the fact that Shakespeare altered a story his audience knew. Lesson 3 builds a sustained argument (AO1) and, for older students, weighs critical interpretations against the text.

Lesson 1: The love test

Key question: What does the opening scene show about how Lear understands love and power?

- Compare the language of Goneril and Cordelia in Act 1, Scene 1.
- Analyse what Lear's responses reveal about him.
- Explain why the division of the kingdom would alarm Shakespeare's first audience.

TIME	ACTIVITY	WHY
0-8 min	**Starter.** Display Lear's question, *"Which of you shall we say doth love us most"*. Pairs list what is wrong with asking it in public, with land as the prize. Take answers.	Students see the flaw in the test before they meet the answers.
8-18 min	**Teaching input.** Read Goneril's reply beginning *"Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter"*. Model annotation: hyperbole, the list of valuables, words used to say that words fail. Context in a sentence: a king dividing Britain, staged for a king who wanted it united.	Sets the annotation standard and plants the idea of love as currency.
18-35 min	**Main task.** In threes, read the exchange from *"Now, our joy"* to *"Thy truth, then, be thy dower"*, one voice each for Lear, Cordelia and a director who asks "How is that said?". Then annotate: every use of "nothing", Cordelia's aside *"Love, and be silent"*, and the meaning of *"bond"*.	Performance makes tone a matter of evidence.
35-47 min	**Discussion.** (1) Is Cordelia honest or stubborn when she says *"no more nor less"*? (2) What does *"Nothing will come of nothing"* show about how Lear measures love? (3) Kent says *"See better, Lear"*. What can Lear not see?	Shows Cordelia can be read two ways; introduces the sight motif.
47-56 min	**Writing.** One paragraph: "In the opening scene Shakespeare presents Lear as … . The word … suggests …". Success criteria: one embedded quotation from Lear, one from a daughter, one named method.	Turns discussion into assessed form.
56-60 min	**Plenary.** Whiteboards: who is most to blame for the breach, Lear or Cordelia, and one word of evidence.	Quick check of interpretation backed by text.

Differentiation

- **Support:** provide the exchange with a paraphrase and three quotations to choose from.
- **Core:** annotate independently and write to the success criteria.
- **Stretch:** read Edmund's soliloquy opening 1.2, *"Thou, Nature, art my goddess"*. How does his idea of what children owe differ from Cordelia's *"bond"*?

Assessment and homework

Look for paragraphs that analyse a specific word, not a general impression of Lear as proud. Homework: reread 2.4 from *"O, reason not the need!"* to Lear's exit and summarise in three sentences why he leaves.

Lesson 2: The storm and the hovel

Key question: What changes in Lear between raging at the storm and praying outside the hovel?

- Contrast Lear's language in Act 3, Scene 2 with his language in Act 3, Scene 4.
- Analyse how the "Poor naked wretches" speech presents a shift in perspective.
- Link the speech to ideas about kingship and responsibility.

TIME	ACTIVITY	WHY
0-7 min	**Starter.** Half the class reads *"Blow winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!"* in chorus. The other half lists the kinds of word they heard (commands, hard consonants). Swap.	Students hear the imperatives of the storm speech.
7-17 min	**Teaching input.** In 3.2 Lear commands the weather and judges himself *"More sinned against than sinning"*. Ask: who is at the centre of these speeches? Define pathetic fallacy and imperative. Then set the scene for 3.4: the hovel, the Fool sent in first.	Provides the "before" for the worksheet's "after".
17-37 min	**Main task.** Worksheet questions 1-6 in pairs. Circulate and press: "Who is he talking to now? Which word tells you?"	Moves from comprehension to analysis.
37-47 min	**Discussion.** Take answers to questions 4 and 6. Then: is this a real change in Lear, or a moment that passes? Minutes later he meets Poor Tom and calls him *"the thing itself"*.	Prevents a too-tidy redemption reading and prepares Lesson 3.
47-56 min	**Writing.** Begin the worksheet writing task; aim for the first paragraph.	Independent practice while the passage is fresh.
56-60 min	**Plenary.** Exit ticket: "In 3.2 Lear ..., but in 3.4 he ...", with one quoted word for each half.	Checks every student can express the contrast with evidence.

Differentiation

- **Support:** gloss *"bide"*, *"looped and windowed"*, *"physic"*, *"pomp"* and *"superflux"* on the sheet; answer questions 1-4.
- **Core:** all questions and the full writing task.
- **Stretch:** compare Gloucester's parallel speech in 4.1, where he gives his purse to Poor Tom. Why does Shakespeare give the same insight to both fathers?

Assessment and homework

Collect exit tickets and the writing task; look for comment on who is addressed and on the turn at *"O, I have ta'en / Too little care of this"*. Homework: finish the writing task. As a low-stakes reading habit alongside it, students with an iPhone or iPad could read the day's page in **Daily Bard**, one Folger-verified passage a day with a plain-English reading on the back, and note one word they would comment on.

Lesson 3: "Is this the promised end?"

Key question: Does the ending of *King Lear* offer any consolation?

- Analyse the language of Lear's last speeches in Act 5, Scene 3.
- Understand hopeful and bleak critical readings and test each against the text.
- Construct and defend an argument in speech and writing.

TIME	ACTIVITY	WHY
0-8 min	**Starter.** In older versions of the story Cordelia wins and Lear is restored, and for about 150 years theatres performed Nahum Tate's adaptation with a happy ending. Pairs: why might Shakespeare have refused that ending?	Makes the ending a decision to be explained.
8-20 min	**Teaching input.** Read from Lear's entrance, *"Howl, howl, howl!"*, to his death. Annotate together: the repeated monosyllables, the line *"Never, never, never, never, never"* (a falling, trochaic rhythm), the small request *"Pray you undo this button"*, and the final *"Look there, look there!"*.	Gives every student the same evidence, including rhythm.
20-30 min	**Two readings.** A. C. Bradley: Lear has been changed by suffering and dies in a moment of joy, believing Cordelia lives. Jan Kott: the play resembles absurdist theatre, with suffering that teaches nothing and no gods to answer. Students mark their position on a line between the two.	Presents interpretation as a debate with evidence.
30-46 min	**Main task: structured debate.** Split by position. Each side finds three quotations from 5.3 (six minutes), presents (two) and rebuts (one). Offer as shared evidence Albany's *"The gods defend her!"*, spoken just before Lear enters, and the closing couplet's *"Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say"*.	Forces selection of evidence and attention to the scene's order.

TIME	ACTIVITY	WHY
46-56 min	**Writing.** Paragraph: "The ending presents … . Although … might suggest …, the line … shows …". Success criteria: a clear position, a counter-view, two short quotations, one comment on rhythm or staging.	Captures the debate in balanced, evaluative writing.
56-60 min	**Plenary.** Students move their mark if they have changed their mind and tell a partner why.	Makes thinking visible.

Differentiation

- **Support:** provide six quotations from 5.3 to sort into "hopeful" and "bleak".
- **Core:** find evidence independently and write the paragraph.
- **Stretch:** Kent asks *"Is this the promised end?"* and Edgar replies *"Or image of that horror?"*. What are they comparing the scene to, and what does that add?

Assessment and homework

The paragraph shows whether students can hold two readings and choose. Homework: an essay on "How far does Lear's suffering lead to understanding?", planned with the essay planner and drawing on all three lessons.

Student worksheet: “Poor naked wretches”

Lear has been shut out by his daughters and is on the heath in a storm with Kent and the Fool. They have reached a hovel. Read the passage twice.

> LEAR Prithee, go in thyself. Seek thine own ease.
> This tempest will not give me leave to ponder
> On things would hurt me more. But I’ll go in.
> In, boy; go first. You houseless poverty -
> Nay, get thee in. I’ll pray, and then I’ll sleep.
> Poor naked wretches, wheresoe’er you are,
> That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
> How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
> Your looped and windowed raggedness defend you
> From seasons such as these? O, I have ta’en
> Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp.
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
> That thou may’st shake the superflux to them
> And show the heavens more just.
>
> KING LEAR · ACT 3, SCENE 4

1. Whom does Lear send into the hovel first, and what does he say he will do before he sleeps?
2. Who are the *“Poor naked wretches”*? Are they on stage?
3. Explain in your own words what Lear admits in *“O, I have ta’en / Too little care of this”*.
4. Look at *“the pelting of this pitiless storm”* and *“looped and windowed raggedness”*. How do sound and imagery make the suffering of the poor vivid?
5. *“Take physic, pomp.”* Who or what is being given an order, and what is the “medicine”? What is the effect of the short sentence?
6. In Act 3, Scene 2 Lear gave orders to the storm. To whom does he give orders here? What does the change suggest?
7. Lear wants the rich to *“shake the superflux”* to the poor and so *“show the heavens more just”*. Does this mean the heavens are just, or that people must make them appear so?

Writing task

How does Shakespeare present a change in Lear in this passage? Write two or three paragraphs.

- Begin each paragraph with a clear point about what has changed.

- Use short, embedded quotations.
- Name at least two methods, such as apostrophe, alliteration, imperative or metaphor.
- Compare one detail with Lear's language earlier in the play.

Teacher notes and indicative answers

1. The Fool (*"In, boy; go first"*). He will pray. The king puts a servant's comfort before his own.
2. The homeless poor of his kingdom. They are absent: this is an apostrophe, an address to people who are not present.
3. That as king he neglected the poor. It is his first admission of a fault that is not about his daughters.
4. Plosive alliteration in *"pelting"* and *"pitiless"* imitates beating rain. *"looped and windowed"* pictures rags so full of holes that they are like a building with openings, a bitter metaphor for people who have no house.
5. *"pomp"*, meaning the powerful, including Lear himself, is personified and told to take medicine: exposure to what the poor feel. The three-word imperative is blunt after the long question before it.
6. To himself and his own class. The imperatives have turned inward, from commanding nature to correcting power.
7. Open. The conditional phrasing suggests that justice is something humans must supply; the heavens have shown little sign of it.

Model paragraph

Shakespeare presents the change in Lear through a change of address. In the previous scenes his imperatives were hurled at the storm; here he speaks to the absent *"Poor naked wretches"* of his kingdom, an apostrophe that turns his attention outward for the first time. The plosive alliteration of *"pelting"* and *"pitiless"* makes him feel the weather on their behalf. The admission *"O, I have ta'en / Too little care of this"* falls across a line break, as if forced out, and the curt command *"Take physic, pomp"* is aimed at himself. A king who divided his realm by flattery now measures kingship by care for those with nothing.

Extending the sequence

For a fourth lesson, set the blinding of Gloucester (3.7) beside his *"I stumbled when I saw"* in 4.1 and map the parallels between the two plots. The **King Lear study guide** has the context and critical perspectives to support it, and the **quotation sheet** is useful for retrieval starters. Our essay on **"Blow winds, and crack your cheeks"** goes further into the storm speech used in Lesson 2, and the **close reading toolkit** and **guide to Shakespeare's language** give students a reusable method. The **assessment map** shows in general terms how this work is credited, and these plans are available as a **printable PDF**. The **Othello lesson plans** follow the same pattern.



A simple starter for any lesson: project today's page from **the Daily Bard app** *and give the class two minutes to paraphrase the passage before you turn the leaf to compare.*



A page of Shakespeare, every day.

This resource comes from Daily Bard, an app for iPhone and iPad. Each morning it shows one engraved plate and one passage, exactly as Shakespeare wrote it, with a plain-English reading on the back of the leaf.

Free to download. The Full Edition is a one-time US$11.99: no subscription, no account, no ads, no tracking.

Get it on the App Store: **apps.apple.com/app/id6792967225**

More free study guides, lesson plans and close readings: dailybard.app