

Writing about *King Lear*

Essay question

How does this part of the script relate to themes of madness and betrayal in the rest of the play?

Act 3 Scene 2, lines 26–40

KING LEAR	Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow! You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks! You sulphurous and thought-executing fires, Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts, Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder, Smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world! Crack nature's moulds, an germens spill at once, That make ingrateful man!
FOOL	O nuncle, court holy-water in a dry house is better than this rain-water out o' door. Good nuncle, in, and ask thy daughters' blessing: here's a night pities neither wise man nor fool.
KING LEAR	Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! Spout, rain! Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters: I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness; I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children, You owe me no subscription: then let fall Your horrible pleasure: here I stand, your slave, A poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man: But yet I call you servile ministers, That have with two pernicious daughters join'd Your high engender'd battles 'gainst a head So old and white as this. O! O! 'Tis foul!

Plan your essay

Work with the extract above and complete the table below as you explore your ideas.

Remember, Lear has just confronted Goneril and Regan and they have demanded that he reduce his train of followers if he wants to stay with them. Lear has been locked out of Gloucester's castle and a great storm has erupted.

<p>What is your interpretation of this part of the play?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is happening here and how does Shakespeare make this dramatic and interesting? • How does this contribute to plot development? 	
<p>What strikes you about Shakespeare's language?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What vivid images or descriptions are used in this passage? • What is the effect of Lear's use of personification on your understanding of his character and his experiences? • What role does the Fool have in his relationship to Lear and in the drama of the scene? 	
<p>What strikes you about Shakespeare's dramatic craft?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might this part of the script be portrayed on stage? • What noise movement and atmosphere would you expect to see and experience if you saw this play at the theatre? • What clues do you find in the passage to suggest how Lear might be portrayed on stage? <p>E.G: You owe me no subscription then let fall Your horrible pleasures here I stand your slave A poor infirm weak and despised old man But yet I call you servile ministers</p>	
<p>How does this passage compare to other parts of the play?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you refer to another part of the play which explores similar themes of madness and betrayal? For example you might like to think of Edgar who disguises himself as Poor Tom 	

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you describe the way Shakespeare provides a dramatic experience for the audience as well as an interesting story? | |
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You will now have some concrete ideas that you can include in your essay. You might like to reorganise your ideas or add in other examples from the play to make a clearer plan. Use mind maps, bullet points or flow charts with words, images, sentences, thought bubbles and prompts that are intelligible to you. If you plan your essay or argument thoughtfully in detail before you begin writing, you will find that your ideas will be easier to structure and develop later.

Structure your essay

You will need to follow certain rules to give your writing a clear structure. Your essay should have:

- an **introduction** (with a clear sense of the direction in which your argument will go)
- a **main body** to develop your argument (with each paragraph making a point of dramatic or thematic significance, and referring in close detail to the script)
- a **conclusion** (that declares where your argument has arrived).

Write carefully

Your aim is to write clearly and concisely in the present tense and with sentences that are carefully punctuated. Remember to be specific in the points that you make about the play and the references you use from it, and in how you address the key points of the essay question.

Remember Shakespeare's skill as a playwright and poet

Shakespeare made specific choices about language and the dramatic representation of character, plot and theme on stage. Remember to identify some of the literary devices and dramatic techniques that he has used and explain their effectiveness. A good way to remember to do this is to make sure that you mention Shakespeare's name in every paragraph as you comment on the techniques that he is using.

Remember to use quotations and include analysis of the script

You will want to be a thoughtful reader of *King Lear* so that you can explore the implications of words and ideas in the script. Your analysis should show that you are aware of metaphors, similes and other literary features, and that you consider the implications of genre, audience and context. Your close analysis of words and phrases from the script must be connected to the big issues raised by the play. Try to think in terms of relating your detailed analysis to the major ideas that the play explores.

Learn from others

Although you should endeavour to be as original as possible, your critical voice is inevitably going to be strongly influenced by others: your teacher, other members of your class and film versions, as well as the views of actors and critics. Learning from others adds to the effectiveness of your argument – it does not dilute it – but remember to give credit where it is due.