

Discussion Questions  
*King Lear*

1. This is the first of the great Tragedies we've seen that is set in England. What might we make of this? Why are we no longer in the far off lands of Denmark, Venice, or even Vienna? What do you make of the fact that so many of the secondary characters are called by place names (Albany, Cornwall, Gloucester, Kent, France)?
2. How could a familial (or psychoanalytic) reading be expanded by adding a New Historicist perspective? Given that this isn't just any family—it is, after all, the royal family—what socio-political readings can you do of these relationships?
3. Shakespeare's version of this story differs quite a bit from his source, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain (Historia Regum Britanniae)*. In Geoffrey's version Lear eventually goes to France to stay with Cordelia; Regan and Goneril both have sons who eventually try to take the throne from Cordelia; Cordelia rules over her father's kingdom, once he dies, for a period of five years; Cordelia is eventually imprisoned by her nephews and grieves so much over the loss of her kingdom that she kills herself. Why do you think Shakespeare changed the story? What, if anything, gets foregrounded in Shakespeare's version that doesn't emerge as central in Geoffrey's? Is this important?
4. Why does Lear make his daughters prove themselves? Why does he divide the kingdom between them?
5. What are the connections between the main plot and the subplot?
6. What is the role/significance of the fool?
7. What is the significance of insanity in the play?
8. What is the significance of "nothing" in the play?
9. Why does Edgar choose to disguise himself as a madman? Why doesn't he reveal himself to his father until so much later? Why does Gloucester "jump" off the cliff?
10. What is the significance of Nature in the play?
11. Why doesn't Lear go into the hovel at first?
12. What roles do Albany and Cornwall play? Why is there a conflict between them?
13. What is the function of Oswald and the "Gentleman"?

14. Why must Cordelia die?