

**“Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.”—Edgar**

**“Who is it that can tell me who I am?”—King Lear**

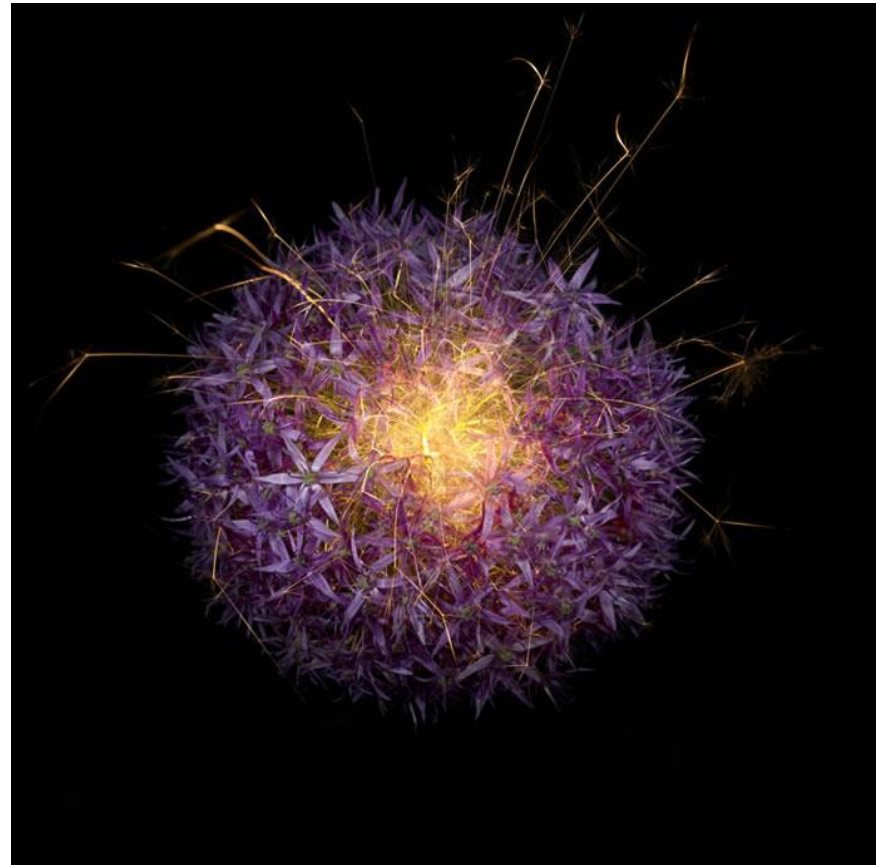
**“Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again.”—King Lear**

# Shakespeare's King Lear



# Destructive Situations

- Which would cause the most destruction in your life?
  - Family fight
  - Committing murder
  - Being murdered
  - Aging
  - Insanity
  - War
  - Being thrown out
  - A thunderstorm
  - Dying
  - A parent having an affair





# The Context

- A **tragedy** about the decline and fall of a dysfunctional royal family...filled with **destructive situations!!**
- Shakespeare 's first performance of *King Lear* was in 1606.
- James I, who was also the king of Scotland, took the throne in English in 1603.
- Scots & Englishmen = ENEMIES!!!
- It was illegal to portray a reigning monarch on stage during Shakespeare's time.
- Queen Elizabeth & King James censored plays!
- Shakespeare might have been making a comment (however subtle) about King James.
- **Brief synopsis:** Lear is an old, successful warrior king. He wants to retire and is going to divide his spoils among his three daughters He stages a ceremony where each daughter must affirm her love for her father. This is where conflict boils to the surface...



# The Characters

- **King Lear** – don't forget that, as a tragic character, he possesses a tragic flaw.
- **Goneril & Regan** – Lear's daughters, who possess less-than-virtuous traits
- **Cordelia** – The beloved and honorable third daughter of Lear
- **Duke of Burgundy** – Cordelia's suitor
- **King of France** – wants to marry Cordelia
- **Duke of Cornwall** – Regan's husband
- **Duke of Albany** – Goneril's husband
- **Earl of Kent** – Lear's loyal companion and supporter
- **Earl of Gloucester** – a loyal friend of Lear
- **Edgar** – the legitimate (and banished!) son of the Earl of Gloucester who will inherit his father's title
- **Edmund** – the illegitimate son of the Earl of Gloucester
- **Fool** – a good fool can cure a king's foul mood and is respected and beloved by his monarch



# Juxtapositions & Motifs

- What is **juxtaposition**? A contrast between two things.
- And a **motif**? A recurring idea or concept in a piece of literature.
- Here are some juxtaposed motifs to explore in *King Lear*:
  - Sanity/madness – Don't forget that there's a "fool" in this play...
  - Loyalty/betrayal – Lots of blatant betrayal and subtle acts of loyalty.
  - Natural/unnatural – Notice any animal imagery? Any symbolism in the storm?
  - Legitimate/illegitimate – Keep in mind the power in being "legitimate"...
  - Justice/injustice – Do people get what they deserve? Or is it unfair?
  - Sight/blindness – Pay attention for sight words, like *eye*, *sight*, and *see*.
  - Reality/appearance – Are things always what they seem? Or is it simply *nothing*?
  - Stability/instability – When do things start to fall apart?
  - Authority/anarchy – Look for the struggle for control, not just with characters but also within Britain.

# A Few Handy Resources

- Can't understand Shakespeare's language? Use *No Fear Shakespeare*: <http://nfs.sparknotes.com/lear/> - A side-by-side translation of the text. You can even download an app to read this on your smart phone!
- Want to hear a recording of the play while you read along? Check out [http://archive.org/details/king\\_lear\\_lib\\_rivox](http://archive.org/details/king_lear_lib_rivox).





# As You Read...

- Write down powerful and memorable quotes – this will come in handy for the Explain a Passage assignment.
- Review the King Lear Presentation directions; keep track of examples for the motifs listed on the Juxtaposition & Motifs slide.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help...reading Shakespeare can be tricky!
- When you are finished reading, watch a movie version of the play.
  - If you have Netflix, you'll find a PBS version to Watch Instantly.
  - YouTube also has several versions to watch (in 10-minute segments, of course!).
  - Or, visit your local video store and see what they have in store!

# Questions?

- Just ask me...that's what I'm here for!
- Use the "Resources" button...you'll find lots of helpful tips for this and other assignments.







# Works Consulted

Cardona, Debra. "King Lear: Study Guide." *The Classical Theatre of Harlem, Inc.* Web. 13 Aug. 2012.

<<http://www.folger.edu/documents/CTH%20Lear%20Study%20Guide1.pdf>>.

Friedlander, Ed. *Enjoying "King Lear" by William Shakespeare.* 2003. Web. 13 Aug. 2012.

<<http://www.pathguy.com/kinglear.htm>>.

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