

King Lear

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Act 1

The Inciting Incident

Within the first several pages of the script, we are introduced to the inciting incident of the tragedy.

What is the action that Lear takes that becomes the incident that this tragedy will deal with? Explain your answer (why is THIS the serious incident that will have flow on effects). Provide quotations from the text to support your answer.

Remember, Aristotle believed that the incident should be ‘serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself’.

The action Lear takes that becomes the Inciting Incident is when he announced he would give his Kingdom and Land to the daughter that loves him the most. This then triggers Cordelia, Lear, Kent, Goneril, Regan and many more characters in the story to react to Lear’s proclamation. This is the event/decision that every other event/decision in the story flows from.

“Tell me, my daughters—
[Since now we will divest us both of rule,
Interest of territory, cares of state—]
Which of you shall we say doth love us most,
That we our largest bounty may extend
Where nature doth with merit challenge. Goneril,
Our eldest born, speak first.” (1.1.52-59)

*“Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
That we our largest bounty may extend...”*

This line from Lear sets off warning bells for the reader.

We are exposed to his **hubris** in this moment.

Explain how we are alerted to Lear’s hubris by this line. Explore the view that Lear holds of himself and how this is revealed by his statement.

- This quote shows how Lear understands that his position is of high power, and how he wants to let everyone know about it. It also shows his not so humble personality. He is very cocky and so sure of himself and believes everyone worships him, when one of his daughters doesn’t he is utterly shocked and loses his marbles.

Dramatic Irony

The play begins as it means to continue with the use of dramatic irony in this opening scene.

In on a Secret? That's Dramatic Irony!

Identify three moments in the first Act that Shakespeare uses dramatic irony to create tension and give power to the audience.

1. Edmund's soliloquy , how he is plotting against his brother

“edmund the base shall top the legitimate;I grow;i prosper.Now ,gods,stand up for the bastards!”

2. Cordelia delivering her aside, she wont give into lears game and we know she is being honest. An aside is delivered only to the audience. The other characters within the play cannot hear the aside, meaning that the audience has more information than the characters on the stage.
3. Dialogue between Goneril and Regan talking about Lear in a negative way and kinda plotting

“Pray you let's hit together”

Symbolic References- The Eyes

People have said that eyes are the window to the soul. In *King Lear*, eyes represent something else and will become an important symbol in the play.

When we discussed the play Oedipus, an important event occurred that involved the lead characters eyes. What was it? *Oedipus clawed his eyes out after learning the truth about himself.*

Note down the times when characters discuss sight, eyes or seeing in this first act. What pattern is emerging that hints at the symbolic meaning of eyes in the script? Support your answer with a minimum of three quotes from the script.

Eyes are an important symbol, they are associated with seeing the truth, or being entirely blind to it. When a character refuses to see the bigger picture, or is fooled/ lied to, they are BLIND to the truth. At points of conflict or foolishness, the theme of eyes, eyesight and blindness are all referred to.

- *“See better, Lear; and let me still remain
The true blank of thine eye.” - Kent*
- *“Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty; A
still-soliciting eye, and such a tongue” - Cordelia*
- *“Let's see: come, if it be nothing, I shall not need
spectacles.” - Gloucester*
- *“The jewels of our father, with wash'd eyes” - Cordelia*
- *“Doth Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his
eyes?” - Lear*
- *“How far your eyes may pierce I can not tell” - Albany*

Animal and Creature Imagery

Throughout the first act, many characters use animal or creature metaphors to describe each other. This imagery reveals a lot about each character's personality and also the way in which other characters view them.

Scan the script for Act One and note down the different animals or creatures associated with each character. Explain any pattern that emerges.

Dragon - Lear, Fox, Cuckoo - Goneril, Wolf - Regan.

Each of these animals represent certain traits for each characters. With King Lear, he say's that he is like a dragon, which indicates the view he holds of himself (more powerful than the rest). The daughters are described by animals that would indicate smart and cunning creatures who are going to prey on Lear.

The Great Chain of Being

A few lessons ago, we discussed the Elizabethan world view that is The Great Chain of Being.

Provide a summary of this concept.

The great chain of being is a power hierarchy which represents how an individual object is perceived or valued. At the top is god and then at the bottom is Blake, lesser than a gumboot and then in between from most valued to least are the angels, kings, queens, nobles, commoners, animals then plants.

Identify how the chain is beginning to be broken in Act

When Lear divides his kingdom he gives up a lot of his power to his daughters, who are women and lesser in the great chain. Therefore the chain begins to be broken. He gives up his power, thinking he is unable to handle such responsibility due to old age, to his youthful but wicked daughters. This unnatural change to the chain then starts chaos. “Meantime we shall express our darker purpose... know that we have divided in three our kingdom, and ‘tis our fast intent to shake all cares and business from our age.. Our daughters’ several dowers, that future strife may be prevented now.”

The Divine Right of Kings

Explore what the “Divine Right of Kings” is and provide an explanation here.

- Is a political and religious doctrine of royal and political legitimacy. It asserts that a monarch is subject to no earthly authority, deriving the right to rule directly from the will of God.
- Nobody can challenge the king, but another KINGGGG !!!!
- The king has absolute power over their kingdom meaning they ‘are’ the church so they control religion. Also they have total veto power over anything that happens within their borders meaning they have the final say in everything.
- All taxes and everything go to the the king and into their treasury meaning that they become more powerful all the time because money is power.
- This concept means that Lear has total authority in the play until he gives over the power of his role to his daughters meaning that he gives away his rights to power and to being obeyed. This explains why he is so surprised when he is being ignored because he has always been obeyed throughout his life as that is the male influence and the king’s influence on the great chain of being. This rule however is not obeyed in this script because Lear gives away his power and therefore his right to rule in all but name, meaning that his daughters are above him in the great chain of being which goes against the way that it has always been in life.