

KING LEAR STUDY GUIDE

version 1.0

This guide focuses primarily on discussion questions and activities that relate to my graphic novel version of *King Lear*. Some of them may also be useful for analyzing other adaptations of Shakespeare (including movies and other media as well as graphic novels).

There are a lot of other free study guides for *King Lear* available online. A simple search will yield at least a dozen. Most of them include such elements as a summary of the plot, analysis of the characters, sample quiz, essay questions about the themes of the play, and bibliography of further reading. It seems unnecessary for me to duplicate these items since they are so readily available (and it might be a bit inappropriate, since I'm not a particular authority on the text of the play.)

This guide is a work in progress. If you have corrections, suggestions for additional material you'd like to see included, or other feedback, please write to me at gareth@garethhinds.com.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ADAPTATION -

Think about the character designs: how does the character's appearance affect the way you perceive their personality? Has the artist made any choices you find unusual, or that you disagree with, in designing the characters? Try drawing alternative versions of the characters (see activities below).

How realistic are the drawings? How might it have changed the feeling of the play if they were, for example, photo-realistic or very simple and cartoony?

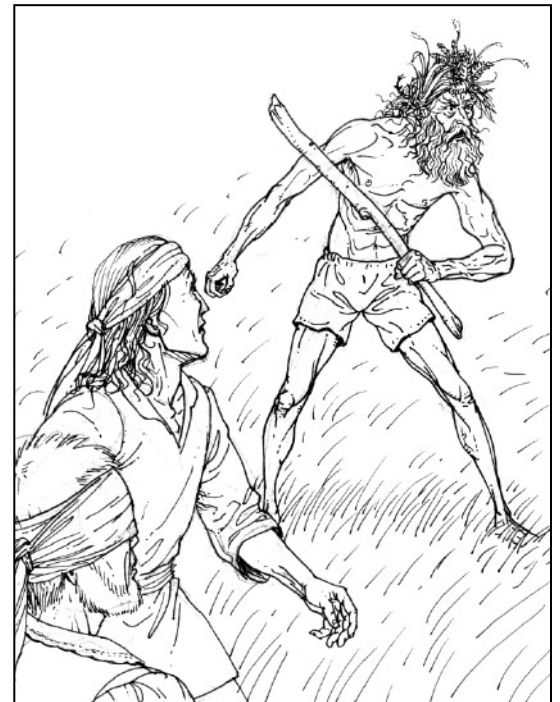
The style of the art varies in different parts of the book (for example, the artist uses different drawing tools or styles of coloring). Identify some of these changes and think about the artist's intentions – what effect or feeling might the artist have been trying to create?

In most comics, the pages are divided into panels (with the occasional full-page "splash"). However, in this book many of the pages are not divided into panels at all, or are partly in panels and partly not. Why might the artist have done this? Are there certain types of scenes (or transitions) that are consistently shown in panels and others that are not?

This book uses about half the text of the original play. How might the book be different if the artist had used more or less? If you wanted to make the book shorter, what would you cut?

What are the similarities between a graphic novel and a performance of a play? What are the differences? Expand your comparison to include books (that is, the play printed in book form) and movies. What is unique about each of these media?

Are there things in this graphic novel that would be very difficult or impossible to enact on stage? How might you handle them if you were putting on a performance of the play? (watch some performances and see what directors have done in the past). Why do you think Shakespeare put such things into his plays?



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The illustrator chose to set this book in an ambiguous, rather than specific, time and place. Can you identify some examples (of costumes, architecture, etc.) that do not belong together (anachronisms)?

Can you imagine ways of drawing or performing this play that would make the older sisters seem less evil and Cordelia less pure? How might you justify some of Regan and Goneril's actions?

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE TEXT -

What would you say this play is really about?

Why does King Lear divide his kingdom?

Is the King of France a good guy?

What do you think Lear was like before the beginning of the play?

Which of Lear's daughters is most like him? Why?

What does Shakespeare say about eyesight in this play?

Do you think, in the end, that justice is done? Why or why not?

What effect do you think the play's events have on the common people of Lear's kingdom?

Shakespeare rewrote the ending to this story.* Why do think he chose to end it the way he did (instead of, say, happily)?

ACTIVITIES -

Try to redesign/redraw the characters. What might they look like in modern times? In a science-fiction future? In another culture or time period?

Using your redesigned characters, draw a short scene in comics form. It could be serious or silly. Make sure you show enough of the dialog and action that your readers can tell what's going on.

Try to summarize the play in words as briefly as you can. Think in terms of a blurb for the back cover of the book, or for a catalog advertisement. See if you can make it sound interesting with just a few sentences.

See if you can tell the whole story of *Lear* in just a few panels. Try starting with the first and last panels, then draw only as many panels in between as you need to convey a basic outline of the story. Can you do it in 12 panels? 8? 5 or less?

Try replacing some of the Shakespearian language with modern language. In particular, see if you can come up with new jokes for the fool.

Draw a new cover for *King Lear*, using either my character designs or your new ones. What image would you use to best capture the gist of the play?

(*see the original *The Chronicle History of King Leir* - <http://shakespeare.about.com/library/weekly/aa010201a.htm>)

