

King Lear Presentations

Possible Topics for Literary Talks

Lear and tragic joy – awakenings/ Oates

Fools in Shakespeare's plays – Some quotes/ examples

Fools and Foolishness. What kind of fool is the Fool? What does he teach us? How are we to understand Lear's foolishness? Is Cordelia a fool (see the last scene)? If so, why?

Local color – a sense of time and place

Pathetic fallacy in Shakespeare

Importance of the subplot: parallels and differences

Aging as reflected in Lear. For research, did Lear have Alzheimers or mental illness? See John Mark ministries. Was it chronic melancholy?

Chaos or Order – What is reflected her

Fairy tales

Madness. In the play Lear talks about his fears of approaching madness before he goes over the edge. What makes Lear mad? How does Edgar's feigned insanity function in contrast to Lear's actual madness? What do we make of Edgar's list of demons? Do we need demons in this world?

Nothing. For the Elizabethan's "nothing" could mean a whole lot of things. One of these was the idea of women as possessors of nothing (they had no thing) and as nothing themselves. How does the word nothing function symbolically and actually in the play? What comes from nothing? Notice how often the word is used.

Words. The beginning of the play centers around Lear's division of his kingdom through a game of words. His false daughters speak very well, while his only true child is unable to participate. Later both Edgar and Lear speak nonsense. In light of these events, what value can be placed on words? Is there truth in them at all? How does Lear's language change?

Kingship and Humanity. In the beginning of the play Lear is very much a king. During the storm sequence he speaks of being stripped down to the essence of manhood. What kind of view of humanity is this? Does the play ever step back from this darkness and madness to some kind of redemption? What is true nobility? What do we make of Edgar's closing speech?

Legitimacy. One of the themes of the play revolves around legitimacy and illegitimacy in regards to children and the line of succession. What do these words mean in the context of the play?

Consider Edgar and Edmund as well as Lear's three daughters. How are Regan and Goneril illegitimate women and daughters?

Nature and the Unnatural. Along with the legitimacy and illegitimacy of offspring (in birth or action) a question also arises around the role of nature and nature's effect or lack thereof on our lives. Edmund addresses Nature as his goddess. Lear conjures the storm. What does nature have to do with our lives?

Sex and Violence. Again here we find sex and love tied up with violence, war, and politics. In a darker version of Antony and Cleopatra, Regan and Goneril bring their own downfall through lust and jealousy, rather than militarily. How do sex and violence function together? Some scholars (I'm not exactly with them on this) imply that Lear has an incestuous relationship with his daughters, and this is the angle that a modern remake of Lear, The Thousand Acres, takes. What do you think of this idea? Does it help explain the characters more? Do we want this explanation?

Vision. A point is made in the play about seeing clearly and understanding. Gloucester claims he sees better, understands the truth, without his eyes than with them. Several characters are in disguise for all or part of the play (Kent and Edgar physically, Edmund, Regan, and Goneril in their character). Why is sight fallible? How do characters come to see the truth in the play?

Blindness in Shakespeare

What seems vs. what is: the use of disguise to obfuscate the truth and be "invisible."

Death. Another tragedy more death. What do the various characters die for and what do their deaths mean? If Cordelia is the innocent, how are we to take her loss? What about the fool?

Animal imagery: kite, vulture, pelican, tiger

Memorable quotes and why

WEB English teacher: Challenges of playing Lear

Parent – Child issues and entitlement. Children parenting. Parents losing it. Dealing with it. *Relationship between one generation and the next.*

Any other ideas – give them a try!