

## **Mental Illness in Shakespeare's *King Lear* as Divine Madness**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Houston Teachers Institute seminar *Health Issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* provides a useful context for considering mental health issues that are as relevant today as in Renaissance England. In all my teaching, I argue that students must have a good understanding of contemporary life experiences to enhance their ability to understand portrayals of everyday life in the past. Additionally, whenever a teacher is able to provide a deeper context for the literature studied in class, the student's personal assimilation of information obtained through literary analysis is enhanced and retained.

Throughout the course of a high school student's journey through the timeless world of Shakespeare, I find that it is often the perceived flaws within a character that begin to make the character instantly dimensional and approachable for the student. The common denominator among individuals in general is typically the emotional bridge that is developed between individuals and not so much the specifically shared events. This holds true in literature, as in life. Readers of any piece of literature often find personal connections to the characters once they prove to be "flawed" or "damaged" in some way. As subjective and as judgmental as that designation may appear, the flaw does not have to be a fatal flaw, or one that mars the character beyond any possibility of empathy from the reader. It can simply be a characteristic or attribute that can be timelessly applied (or appreciated) by modern audiences. It is in this spirit that I have chosen *King Lear* to highlight this objective of universality. The personal flaws of King Lear coupled with Shakespeare's exceptional gift of language offers an ideal opportunity for the students to experience a personal connection to the text while honing their rhetorical analysis skills.

### **OBJECTIVES**

The objectives for this particular unit address the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) criteria set forth by the Texas Education Agency. I have matched this unit to the TEKS that are specific to English III; refer to Appendix A for the TEKS numeration codes. The activities I have provided in my lesson plans address the College Board's Advanced Placement requirements for the AP English Language and Composition course I teach to my gifted and talented students.

### **Writing**

The writing skills that are utilized in my unit are geared to the level of my students. I expect that my students will already be adept at communicating clearly and are specifically working in peer groups to refine their communications for a variety of audience members. I stress individual effort along with collaborative effort in the course activities. Some of the primary expectations are that the student will be able to originate, develop, and refine a persuasive stance on the concept of individual accountability and social responsibility. Students will apply their existing knowledge of rhetorical devices and literary analysis.

## Reading

Since one of the primary focuses of my course is on rhetorical analysis, the student will not only be conducting a language analysis of *King Lear*, but also the reading and reviewing of peer work. The students frequently collaborate in peer groups as the editing and revising process is paramount to their ultimate success. Students will also be asked to make their own personal connections to the literature and the thematic concepts we discuss in class. The connections made by the students will be the result of inferences which are the product of both the historical context for the early 17<sup>th</sup> century literature as well as their own personal life experiences.

## Research

The research aspect of the activities is expressed through visual and creative interpretations that are presented to the class. It is the development of a student's individual interpretation that is carried to the "publishing" phase as original products are created and presented for the audience. Also, the student will be incorporating the information that they gather into a graphic organizer so that they may make precise inferences from the accumulated information. Throughout these tasks, the students will demonstrate proficiency in their critical, empathic, appreciative and reflective listening skills.

## RATIONALE

The instructional rationale for this unit is to make the mental health issues of Shakespeare's time relevant to the specific audience of 11<sup>th</sup> grade, Gifted and Talented Advanced Placement students. In addition to connecting with the text on a personal level, my goal for the students is for them to continue developing their rhetorical analysis skills. With this in mind, I always try to make all the literature in this course relate to the daily lives, perceptions, and problems of my students. With Shakespeare, it is imperative to also instill the timelessness of his characters and their *oh-so-human* struggles. Upon an initial read, most literature can be consumed in one of two ways. First, the reader can be passive to the characters and the subsequent events as if they have occurred within a bubble and are in no way related to the reader's reality. The reader can also engage the material actively, as if the portrayal of the characters' struggles and the thematic elements are universally applicable to the innate experiences within humanity. When a reader picks up a text, any text, it is this fork in the road that they must consciously and self-consciously traverse. My desire is for my students to be able to determine how best to receive and respond to the texts that they will encounter in the future: from the corporate executive's business reports to the novels that they will read for recreational purposes. The mastery of readership skills will become an invaluable tool for them to draw upon regardless of what career path they choose in life.

Since my students are all gifted and talented, I try to be sensitive to their specific social and emotional needs. As Plucker and Levy note in their article "The Downside of Being Gifted," in addition to "the most commonly cited intrapersonal challenges to giftedness and talent are depression and feelings of isolation" (75). In addition to their general anxiety over achieving perfection, the intensity of their feeling of isolation has been linked inextricably to "when they believe they need help" (Plucker and Levy 75). It is this characteristic that I believe makes the personal torment of Lear and Gloucester especially relevant to my student audience. Additionally, their "life choices are complex, and the affordances (opportunities) defining the environmental niches that people traverse are in a constant state of flux" (Lubinski and Benbow 76). By creating a contemporary connection to King Lear's triumphs and tribulations, the students will be given the gritty portrayal of an archetypal descent into despair and isolation and the ultimately satisfying conclusion of personal enlightenment.

## UNIT BACKGROUND

### *Shakespeare as a Timeless Resource*

The myriad of personalities and attitudes of Shakespeare's characters are certainly some of the most renowned in all Western literature. It is not enough for someone to simply study Shakespeare in school, never to be revisited again. It is, in fact, commonplace for people to retain an affinity for some of Shakespeare's most notable characters and allude to them when relevant to understanding their own lives.

Do people not think of Lady Macbeth in moments of private desperation? Do people not think of Hamlet when tormented with thoughts of revenge? The lasting effect of Shakespeare's *King Lear* is another good example. The depiction of mental illness (the paranoia and instability of Lear) and the corresponding treatment of madness (Lear's powerlessness creating his own exile) within Renaissance society are never more vividly depicted than in *King Lear*. The descent of King Lear into a perceived downward spiral from sanity to insanity is a direct result of his own actions.

### *Brief Summary of King Lear*

My course specifically emphasizes the "rhetorical analysis" of literature. Accordingly, I have chosen *King Lear* as a text that offers several dimensions that will complement the American Literature survey course. The language used by Shakespeare is deliberate and calculated. Through a close analysis of this play my students will develop a stronger sense of how an author's style is more than simply diction and syntax. Students will be cognizant of the tone that unfolds before them as the plot reveals itself.

In the opening, Lear is a tired and mildly misguided King readying for retirement. However, after the first two daughters profess intangible amounts of affection for their father, they are rewarded with the power to the kingdom. Just as Lear's paranoia forces him to banish his selfless and genuine third daughter, Cordelia, he soon ends up literally and figuratively battling himself. As Lear begins to realize that he has relinquished his power of the kingdom to his daughters, he angrily storms out into the severe weather. In the throes of a violent storm, Lear laments over his treatment of Cordelia. It is during his time in the storm that The Fool narrates his turmoil and represents the only voice of reason throughout Lear's transition. Lear desires to make amends, albeit too late in the end. As Lear overcomes his self-imposed obstacles, the Earl of Gloucester's transition from ignorance to insight (after the loss of his vision) exemplifies the social norms that were not only common but acceptable in Shakespearean society. The concept of retribution and unrequited love are highlighted as the social expectation of consequence for the doomed characters, a tragedy as true then as it is today.

Some of the noteworthy stylistic techniques that become evident upon closer inspection are the shift in the sophistication of language used in the opening scene in contrast to the close of the play. Emily Leider remarks that just as in *Romeo and Juliet*, the tragedy of King Lear's folly opens with all the pomp and circumstance of a distinguished ceremony (45). The characters in the presence of King Lear speak in blank verse, and "Lear's verse periods are long, his sentences reluctant to cadence, his rhythm flowing rather than staccato" (Leider 46). The verbose presence of the King symbolically matches the status of his character at the opening of the play. King Lear is not merely an individual; he represents a vast and sprawling kingdom along with all of the residents.

In sharp contrast is the transformed version of King Lear at the close of the play. During the reconciliation scene with Cordelia, his "tone is familiar, the word-order conversational and prose-like" (Leider 47). Equally as profound as his shift in speech is his shift in perception. Leider elaborates to describe Lear's transformation through the simplest of observations: "for the first

time, he sees his dearest daughter at close range; he notices her tears (47).” This minute detail is as important as the change of his speech pattern to notate his new-found humility. After his trials and tribulations—and as he survives the storm—Lear evolves into a fallible citizen who “now wears lenses that allow him perspicacity” (Leider 47). Through the close rhetorical analysis of the language that Shakespeare uses throughout the play, students will actively feel the guttural shifts of Lear’s heart-wrenching transformation instead of passively skimming the plot. It is the detailed analysis that causes a sufficient pause which allows the timelessness of Shakespeare’s plot lines to genuinely resonate with my students.

### ***Historical Background: Mental Health up to and including the Renaissance***

In spite of the fact that “the association of creativity with clinical madness is a modern phenomenon that does not predate the 1830s,” there is an inextricable link between the composer of a work and the work itself (Becker 45). George Becker further argues that this assumption is a predominantly Western idea. However, he intricately traces the origins of the artist’s torments to traits inherited from the Greeks. From this inherent nature of the creative process is the origin of the behavioral characteristics that have become associated with the mannerisms of the stereotypical tortured literary soul. Becker notes that:

Self-admissions of mental anguish and actual manifestations of madness... may be seen as little more than adherence to what had become part of a role expectation deemed appropriate for artists, writers, and other creative individuals. (45)

The presumption of a literary artist’s expected role can at times influence the audience’s interpretation of his or her work. Even if a literary work is clearly fiction, there will always be a sort-of “connective tissue” binding the creator with his or her artistic product. In fact, this truism has been so prevalent throughout history that “it is argued, moreover, that evidence abounds that the expectation of ‘madness’ continues to be part of a professional ideology of what it means to be truly creative” (Becker 45). If this were not the case, would scholars still discuss Edgar Allan Poe’s addiction to opium or his tragic and mysterious demise, or even George Gordon Lord Byron’s affinity for illicit and scandalous behavior? I think not. The eccentricities of the most famous writers (or infamous, as the case may be) are what contribute to the indelible impression that they leave upon the literary world.

The Greeks believed that the creative process was affected by demonic possession and melancholia. The “demon” was considered a semi-deity and was believed to officiate over individuals and manipulate their individual destiny in a “positive or negative fashion” (Becker 46). The direct influence of the demon was considered to be essential to the fate of the creative individual. Additionally, the Socratic conception of the “demon” was that of a “divine gift granted to a few select individuals only” (Becker 46). In fact, scholars such as poets, priests, and philosophers communicated to the gods through their demons. For instance, Socrates and Plato subscribed to the concept that their personal demons were “benevolent agents of the gods” (Becker 46). Plato developed a philosophy of “divine madness.” This is the belief that the naturally untalented writer or artist is merely a vessel for the inspired message that is given to him or her by the gods. In order to be receptive to these divine messages, one would need to be in a particularly transcendent state of mind: such as following a loss of consciousness or from an altered state of mind (like from a severe illness, intoxication or spiritual possession). Socrates and Plato also clearly made the distinction between prophetic poetic activities and their perception of clinical insanity. It was said that “inspired madness” was revered as a virtue and as such was desired and coveted by the unaffected (Becker 46). Those woeful individuals without the provided inspiration from the divine were at an obvious deficiency from being entirely mortal. Plato has been quoted as stating that “sober sense is merely human” (Becker 46). The idea that

the unafflicted are at a disadvantage from being “merely human” reinforces the attitude that the gift of demon possession was a highly valued attribute among the scholarly sect.

The individuals who were characterized as having a “melancholic temperament” were not presumed to be insane. Rather, this was seen as a personality descriptor based upon the “balance” of his “humors,” and they could be “either a sane person of distinction or a madman” (Becker 46). In sharp contrast, during the Roman era and the Middle Ages there was “little concern or fascination with uncommonly creative individuals” (Becker 46). The Italian Renaissance cultivated a “renewed interest in those persons esteemed most highly in the arts” (Becker 46). Very similar to the early Greeks, the Renaissance period provided a correlative connection between their gifted citizens and “melancholia” and “madness.” During the Renaissance age, some of the behavioral characteristics of those with a melancholic temperament included “eccentricity, sensitivity, moodiness and solitariness” (Becker 46). The day-to-day behavior of these individuals was often attributed to their affliction, or rather, their predisposition to these aforementioned indicators. However, during the period of the Enlightenment, exceptional creativity is attributed to achieving the intellectual status of “genius” as expressed through an artist’s “imagination,” “memory,” and “judgment,” according to the noteworthy icon Voltaire. The cerebral emphasis of these specific capacities was a clear separation from the focus of demonic possessions and eccentricities that preceded this period. The late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries saw a return of the distinguished status afforded to literary and artistic prowess, in terms of divinity. “The romantic artists... revived the classical notion of divine mania or inspiration and established it as a defining mark of the extraordinary individual” (Becker 48). It is this assertion that has been the basis for countless academic research studies. In fact, in a recently conducted study of prose authors versus poets, the research indicates that poets have higher levels of “disturbance” than fiction writers (Thomas and Duke 204). This concept is certainly not new in its development; however, Kay Jamison was able to provide a concrete description of the statistical anomaly to test “the theory of ‘the mad artist’” (Thomas and Duke 204). Jamison’s contemporary study revealed that “‘artists have been found to exhibit up to 18 times the suicide rate, eight to 10 times the rate of major depressive illnesses... and 10 to 40 times the rate of manic-depressive illness’” (204).

However, George Becker notes that proclamations made from self-proclaimed afflicted artists were most certainly not considered “sufficient to establish as a medical fact the connection between genius and madness” (50). It is evident that the literary community responded more absolutely to the claims of “divine madness” than the medical (and ever-growing psychological) community. Prior to 1700, “Western scholars attempted to understand the nature of the mind, learning, and creativity from a modified Aristotelian position” (Becker 50). Becker himself ultimately asserts that “it is not unreasonable to assume that even contemporary writers and artists, far from disavowing any connection to madness, may actually invite it and inadvertently volunteer evidence of madness in diagnostic and psychological examinations” (Becker 45). We may never know whether the connection between aberrant social behavior and eccentricities is irrefutable evidence of a creative affliction or a psychosomatic condition provoked by the evolution of Greek ideals. We do know that it is an undeniable element one must consider when assessing the creative components and lasting quality of any piece of art, written or visual.

### ***Shakespeare and Psychology in King Lear***

William Shakespeare is famous for countless contributions to the literary world, both poetic and theatrical. However, it is his portrayal of a foolish King that serves as a resounding example of the behavioral qualities attributed to melancholy and madness. Alexander M. Truskinovsky explains the fascination:

Shakespeare's plays, and in particular *King Lear*, have been a favorite source of clinical observation and diagnosis for psychiatrists for the past two centuries. Most authors agree that the description of Lear's mental symptoms is remarkably consistent and close to life. (343)

Shakespeare's uncanny ability to mirror life has been attributed to several possibilities. Some scholars suggest that Shakespeare himself had the gift of "divine inspiration" and was therefore able to achieve literary depictions to which other writers aspired. Others suggest that the bard simply was *that* detailed and adept at his observation and subsequent imitation of life. Finally, some suggest that he was one of the first documented "social scientists" as a result of both his first hand observations and his inferences of the impact that specific behaviors could have upon the self and the surrounding community. In Irving Edgar's article, "Shakespeare's Psychopathological Knowledge," a renowned scholar, Dr. J.C. Bucknill, was quoted in 1887 as saying that "Shakespeare not only possesses more psychological insight than all other poets but more than all other writers" (71). It is this extreme attention to behavioral details that has earned William Shakespeare the credentials he is credited for possessing.

Next is the portrayal of Lear himself. Several scholars insist that he exhibits his mental illness immediately from the opening of the play; whereas others insist that his circumstances and desperation exacerbate an underlying condition which manifests itself in his deterioration and perceived madness as the toll of the cataclysmic events catch up to him. Then the factor of his age must be considered when determining his mental state. Was Lear of sound mind and body? Are his early behaviors a result of senility? Alexander M. Truskinovsky also quotes J.C. Bucknill who is quoted as saying:

The willfulness with which critics have refused to see the symptoms of insanity in Lear, until the reasoning power itself has become undeniably alienated, is founded upon that view of mental disease ... that insanity is an affection of the intellectual, and not the emotional part of man's nature. (Truskinovsky 345).

The division between the intellectual and the emotional results in the ongoing debate over the origin of Lear's perceived madness. Irving Edgar describes an assertion made in 1928 by a critic well versed in pathological psychology, Dr. G.E. Price, in which he states that "in *King Lear*... Shakespeare gives the finest description of senile dementia" (74). Edgar continues to say that Lear's agitation and madness can be explained by Bucknill's assessment that it is Lear's "self-consciousness of gathering madness" as he battles his impending mortality and physical infirmity (75). The heightened emotional state of King Lear as he questions the love and loyalty of his daughters initiates his own paranoia and insecurities.

When considering the emotional aspect of his behaviors we must also consider one of the themes that dominates Lear's internal conflict: the driving force that is revenge. Lear is oblivious to the obvious value of unconditional love and seeks to humiliate and punish Cordelia, along with Kent, for their perceived betrayal. The effort to maintain his authority while simultaneously restructuring the power of the land according to ownership makes Lear's hold on reality and superiority sketchy at best. One such factor in the all-consuming impact of vengeance is that "in place of consciousness of honor and behavior true to principles, wealth and possessions are the determining factor for the reputation and influence of a member of the group" (Waldmann 441). Lear suffers the effects of his folly to an exaggerated degree and the audience is compelled to consider him a victim rather than a tyrant. It is not only Lear's journey that captures the audience's interest; Cordelia and Gloucester are also noteworthy characters in terms of the overall moral messages that Shakespeare inserts into every major theatrical piece. In addition, it is his uncanny ability to portray behavioral characteristics that are attributed to "madness" and sheer

desperation that makes *King Lear* a monumental piece of literature for both the original to the contemporary literary and scientific scholars.

### ***Mental Health Implications***

This curriculum unit is intended for my 11<sup>th</sup> grade, Advanced Placement “Gifted and Talented” students. I hope to make the relationship of mental health to society’s norms as relevant in Shakespeare’s portrayals as it is today in our own culture and treatment of present-day afflictions. We all too commonly place demeaning labels on people who are behaving in strange if not decidedly aberrant ways. That was as true during the Renaissance as it is in my community of GT students who are driven to succeed at all costs, especially in an age where “perfectionism” is a debilitating ailment that is afforded accommodations from academic personnel. One of the common characteristics among “gifted and talented” students is the compulsion to be perfect at a task before it is even begun. This characteristic is so debilitating in some of my students that the school administration has granted them accommodations or exceptions to compensate for any disadvantages or difficulties that a student faces in academic pursuits. These students are frequently overwhelmed to the point of complete inactivity. Plucker and Levy concluded from their study of gifted and talented students that they often experience “perfectionism brought on by a pressure to perform at consistently high levels, fear of failure, feelings of inadequacy outside their domains of expertise, and feelings of isolation” (75). “Perfectionism” is one of the primary issues frequently associated with my specific student population.

I have also had GT students who are completely uninterested in the learning process and want to know only enough to skip ahead to their perfectly finished final product. These GT students rob themselves of the appreciation for the step-by-step process that is necessary to achieve depth within an assigned text. It is not just GT students who are susceptible to the paralysis created by the extreme pursuit of perfectionism. The individual responsibilities of the students in our classrooms are growing as fast as their personal preparation measures for acceptance into college. We cannot forget these students who must, or feel that they must, work to help support their families take on yet another task that they must juggle along with their homework responsibilities. Also, as noted by Plucker and Levy, “there appears to be a great pressure for people to be ‘normal,’ with a considerable stigma associated with giftedness or talent” (75). The goal of this unit is to combat this problem by bringing Lear’s plight to life in a dimensional way so that our teenage audiences could relate to it. By creating a personal connection to the literature and giving the students something to invest themselves in, the overall objectives will transcend *King Lear* and become a lasting life lesson about self-perception and reality.

### **LESSON PLANS**

(Designed for approximately 1 – 2 class periods of 50 minutes per lesson)

#### **Lesson Plan One: Introduction to “Divine Madness”**

##### ***Objectives***

The 11<sup>th</sup> grade students will meet the following guidelines as described in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for English III (refer to Appendix A): 1C, 2B, 3D, 4F, 15B.

##### ***Materials and Resources***

For each student group: The teacher will need 8 ½ x 11 images of infamous artists, members of royalty, and writers that could be considered “afflicted” with divine madness (such as Henry VIII, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Vincent Van Gogh, etc.). To accompany each image, the teacher should have prepared ahead of time 5 - 7 facts about each individual’s artistic or historical accomplishments and 3 - 5 examples of his or her most notorious examples of aberrant behavior

on index cards. Each group should be given one medium to large poster board or section of crate paper, a glue stick (or tape) and a marker.

### ***Procedures and Activities***

The teacher should divide the students into small peer groups. For best results, try to have at least three and no more than five students per group. The teacher will introduce the class to the concept of “divine madness” along with behavioral characteristics and talents that are typically associated with it. The teacher will discuss the origin of this concept from the Greeks, as well as how and why it has been linked directly to the divine decree of God. Each student group will be asked to review the selection of the historical figures that they have been given and discuss both their contributions and their behaviors. The teacher will instruct each group to create an original “public awareness” poster for the historical individual that they choose to warn the public about.

### ***Assessment***

After they have adequately familiarized themselves with each figure, the student groups will work to achieve a consensus regarding which historical figure is clearly the “most afflicted” with divine madness. They will paste or tape the historical figure’s photo to the poster provided and use the marker to create a public awareness-style advertisement. The student groups will present their final product to the rest of the class and explain their reasoning with a verbal explanation of their poster board.

Each poster must include the historical figure’s name and general biographical information (as provided by the teacher). On top of the poster board, the student groups will have created a tagline to catch the attention of their intended audience. [Teachers are encouraged to provide a copy of the “Wanted” posters from the Old West as a reference for this style of poster advertisement.] The poster must include a clear description of the erratic behaviors that this poster is warning the general public about for this particular individual. The poster must also include fictionalized contact information about what organization is providing the advertisement to the public.

After each group has presented their poster to the class, the teacher is encouraged to hang the posters up in the classroom for the duration of the instructional unit.

## **Lesson Plan Two: “Divine Madness” Debate**

### ***Objectives***

The 11<sup>th</sup> grade students will meet the following guidelines as described in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for English III (refer to Appendix A): 1C, 2B, 5B, 7B, 11E, 14C.

### ***Materials and Resources***

The teacher will provide a list of prepared open-ended questions for the students to answer regarding the previously introduced concept of divine madness. Each student needs one blank index card per question asked by the teacher for recording his or her individual answers.

### ***Procedures and Activities***

The teacher will begin by asking the students general questions regarding their own interpretation of insanity and whether it is inextricably linked with creativity or divinity. [Examples of questions are: 1) Can social standards be used to declare a person insane? 2) What makes something abnormal? 3) Is madness the same as insanity? 4) Do you believe that divinity plays a role in the skills and talents of individuals? 5) Can the aberrant behavior of the extremely gifted be connected to their talents? 6) Can erratic behavior be blamed on an individual that has already proven to be “mad?” 7) Do you think that exceptional talents or abilities are a blessing or a curse? 8) How can one’s abilities be connected to his or her specific mental state? 9) Is it worth

is to be considered a “genius” if your life is doomed or short-lived? 10) Is any price worth whatever it takes to be remembered?, etc.]

As the teacher asks each question on the list, he or she must allow several minutes for students to record their responses on the blank index cards. The students will answer each question on a single index card.

The teacher will divide the classroom into two halves based upon their predominant views of divine madness. One group of students should generally agree that the creativity of exceptionally gifted artists and historical figures can possibly be attributed to their “madness.” The other group should generally agree that an individual’s creative aptitude is not related to his or her mental state.

Once the students are divided into two separate groups, the students should take turns sharing the answers that they put on their index cards. The students will compare the ideas of each group member and ultimately choose one index card per question that best represents the ideals of that peer group.

**Assessment**

After the students compare the ideas of each group member and ultimately choose one index card per question they will indicate to their teacher that they are ready to present their answers to the questions.

Each group will use one index card per question (that best represents the general opinion of that group) to present their response as the teacher re-reads each of the questions.

After the teacher has read all of the questions again, and the two groups have presented their answers to the other side, each group will be given 3-5 minutes of rebuttal so that they can respond to any of their peer’s arguments directly.

**Lesson Plan Three: Collecting the Evidence**

**Objectives**

The 11<sup>th</sup> grade students will meet the following guidelines as described in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for English III (refer to Appendix A): 4B, 4F, 6F, 8C, 13C, 12A.

**Materials and Resources**

Students will need a copy of the text (*King Lear* by William Shakespeare) and a copy of the literature textbook (or a literary terms hand-out provided by teacher). Students will also need 2-4 sheets of notebook paper folded in half and stapled together to make a miniature booklet. Students will need a ruler and a pen.

**Procedures and Activities**

The teacher will begin by giving instructions to the class on how to fold their notebook paper in half (like a book) and staple the pages together down the spine. Using a ruler and a pen, the students will create a dialectical journal with three columns on each page. At the top of each page, the student will label the columns: Quote (Scene #/Act #), Figurative Language or Rhetorical Device, Intended Effect/Meaning. (See Provided Example)

Quote (Scene #/Act #)	Figurative Language or Rhetorical Device Used	Author’s Intended Effect or Meaning

In the first column, Quote (scene #/ act #), the student will clearly identify the location of the word or phrase that they are showcasing as pertinent to the understanding of Lear's erratic behaviors as madness. In the second column, Figurative Language or Rhetorical Device, the student will clearly assign the specific technique with the appropriate term label. In the third column, Intended Effect or Meaning, the student will explain in his or her own words how the extracted word (or words) is an example of the deliberate stylistic technique of William Shakespeare for the specific effect that it will have upon the audience. The student will connect the language of Shakespeare to the narrowed focus of King Lear's characterization throughout the play. The student will be specifically focused on Lear's surprising or aberrant behaviors and how they indicate his mental state of madness.

The students will work independently to pull direct quotes from *King Lear* to demonstrate how his madness defined him. Students will be directed to find dialogue that describes or depicts Lear's personal torment. Students will also be asked to retrieve any other examples or references to madness throughout the play. [As per the teacher's discretion, student could also incorporate symbolic portrayals of Lear's madness, like the storm.] Students will use the original text along with a supplemental text of literary terms in order to conduct a thorough rhetorical analysis of Shakespeare's characterization through dialogue.

Depending on the time permitting, the teacher will likely guide the students by limiting their search to a designated portion of the play, rather than the entire play; however, this project can certainly be extended to encompass the entire play if preferred.

### ***Assessment***

The objective of this activity is completed when the students have completed their dialectical journals to the specification of their teacher. If a student was asked to cover a particular act or scene, the journal will be far shorter than if the student were asked to go through the entire play looking for examples. The primary goal of this assignment is to assess the connection that students are making between the language of Shakespeare and his deliberate depiction of "divine madness."

### **Lesson Plan Four: Trial by Jury**

#### ***Objectives***

The 11<sup>th</sup> grade students will meet the following guidelines as described in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for English III (refer to Appendix A): 10A, 10B, 13E, 14C, 15B, 18C.

#### ***Materials and Resources***

Students will need the dialectical "evidence" journals that they created in the previous activity. Depending on the assigned role, students will also require a blank legal pad and a pen for taking notes. Students will also need a copy of the text (*King Lear* by William Shakespeare).

#### ***Procedures and Activities***

The teacher will describe to the students how the general participants in a jury-based trial operate. The teacher will explain the role of the judge (the teacher) and the prosecution and defense attorneys. The teacher will also describe the roles of the defendant, the witnesses, and the jury. After explaining the basic procedure of a trial, the teacher will designate roles to the students in the classroom. [The teacher may wish to assign roles completely randomly through drawing slips of paper, or the teacher may want to assign the dramatic roles to the extroverts in the classroom.]

The recommendation is that the attorneys be represented by peer groups of two to four students. The teacher will need to designate 12 (preferably) members for the jury, as well as the

individual characters: King Lear, Goneril, Regan, Cordelia, Earl of Gloucester, Edgar, Edmund, Oswald and The Fool.

Ideally, this is at least a two-day lesson so that the students can prepare for their specific role in Lear's trial. However, as they have completed a dialectical journal which provides examples of Lear's characterization, this assignment could easily be done as an impromptu trial.

It is important that the attorneys be able to cite or refute the impact of Lear's behavior and its implications. The most important thing for the attorneys is that they are able to support their claims with examples from the text.

While the trial is taking place, the individual characters and the jury need to be taking notes on what is said on the stand. Characters need to be able to comment on what has already been said by the other characters, and the jury needs to have concrete examples of what was said to support their ultimate verdict.

### ***Assessment***

The jury will review their notes in a brief deliberation period. The jury must decide Lear's guilt or innocence of the proposed charges laid before the court, as well as the punishment if applicable. Once their decision of "guilt" or "innocence" is made, they must decide if Lear's behaviors should be celebrated and embraced by the community as a whole, or if he should be "locked up" for the good of the community.

The jury must cite specific examples provided by the attorneys to support the decision that is rendered to the classroom court. And, if time permits, the courtroom can openly receive the responses of the other trial members to the verdict that has been delivered by the jury.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Unit Objectives**

Student skill-based accomplishments based upon the English III TEKS (from the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills):

#### ***Writing***

The student will demonstrate the following skills:

- 1C – organize ideas in writing to ensure coherence, logical progression, and support for ideas
- 2B – develop drafts both alone and collaboratively by organizing and reorganizing content and by refining style to suit occasion, audience, and purpose
- 3D – produce error-free writing in the final draft
- 5B – respond productively to peer review of his/her own work

#### ***Reading***

The student will demonstrate the following skills:

- 6F – discriminate between connotative and denotative meanings and interpret the connotative power of words
- 7B – draw upon his/her own background to provide connection to texts
- 8C – read American and other world literature, including classic and contemporary works
- 10A – respond to informational and aesthetic elements in texts such as discussions, journal entries, oral interpretations, enactments and graphic displays

- 11E – connect literature to historical contexts, current events, and his/her own experiences
- 12A – analyze the characteristics of clearly written texts, including the patterns of organization, syntax and word choice

### **Researching**

The student will demonstrate the following skills:

- 13C – use text organizers to locate and categorize information
- 13E – draw conclusions from the information gathered
- 14C – demonstrate proficiency in critical, empathic, appreciative, and reflective listening
- 18C – present interpretations such as telling stories and performing original works for a variety of audiences

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