

Act Two



The Subplot

The plot thickens in the Gloucester family story in the opening scene of this act.

- Update your summary on the happenings thus far in the Gloucester-Edmund-Edgar triangle.
- Locate three quotes that support the notion that this subplot is acting as a mirror of the main 'Lear' plot.
- Reflect on how frustrating this plotline is. Consider the role of dramatic irony in this reflection.

Edgar to Poor Tom

Scene three consists only of Edgar's soliloquy, during which he sheds his identity as Edgar of house Gloucester and takes on the identity of 'Poor Tom'.

- Reflect on the value of a name. As “Edgar I nothing am” is spoken, what part of his identity is being lost? Is he still the same person? Ensure your reasoning is clear and well laid out.
- Edgar states that he will “take the basest and most poorest shape That ever penury, in contempt of man, Brought near to beast.” What does he mean by this? Comment on the connection to the Great Chain of being and also the animal imagery that is being developed throughout the script.
- In scene two, Cornwall introduces the idea that “A tailor make a man”. How is this continued in this soliloquy?

Kent (aka ‘no one’)

Kent’s experience in this Act is unpleasant. After confronting Oswald and smothering him in a barrage of Shakespeare’s best insults, he is locked in the stocks. Cue Lear’s intense displeasure.

- Kent reflects that “anger hath a privilege.” What is ironic about this moment? What does it also reveal about the way we should engage with one of the core concepts of the tragic hero?
- At the end of his soliloquy in scene 2, Kent speaks, “Fortune, good night; smile once more, turn thy wheel.” What is he referring to here? How could this foreshadow the coming events of the play?

Symbols Everywhere!

Like any good work of Shakespeare, the symbolism is rich and at times, blares out at us from the page. In scene four, we are made the acquaintance of 'the storm'.

- The only concrete indication we have that a storm is brewing comes from the stage directions which state: *Sounds of an approaching storm*. Read through the scene again and write down any reference that the characters make to this storm in their dialogue.
- Consider Lear in this scene (as we have already established that he is connected directly to this symbol). Describe his speech in this scene. Consider how it could be reflective of the approaching storm.

The Audience Connection

At this stage of the tragedy (the rising action), Aristotle believed that certain things would be happening to the audience in relation to the tragic hero.

The building of pity and fear for the central character is essential for creating a cathartic experience.

Write a short reflection on your emotional response to Lear's situation at this point in the script. Consider what 'natural human instinct' **should** be kicking in at this point for the audience, given the way Shakespeare has positioned the characters.