

Act Four



The Subplot Thickens

- Update your description of the action that is occurring in the subplot. What has happened in this act to advance it?
- Reflect on the current similarities between the subplot and the main plot. Why do you think Shakespeare has included this additional plot line? What is the current effect on the audience?
- Consider the interactions between Gloucester and Edgar. What are they being used for in regards to tension? What do you think the role of this relationship, as it is now, is in regards to developing ideas around family relationships?

Key Quotes

For each of the quotes below, explain how they are significant in terms of character, theme, symbol or genre development.

- *“I have no way, and therefore want no eyes; I stumbled when I saw.”* A4 S1 L19
- *“And worse I may be yet. The worst is not So long as we can say, ‘This is the worst.’”* A4 S1 L28
- *“‘Tis the time’s plague when madmen lead the blind.”* A4 S1 L46
- *“Tigers, not daughters, what have you performed?”* A4 S2 L40
- *“Humanity must perforce prey on itself, Like monsters of the deep.”* A4 S2 L48
- *“In nothing am I changed But in my garments.”* A4 S6 L8
- *“When the rain came to wet me once, and the wind to make me chatter; when the thunder would not peace at my bidding; there I found ‘em, there I smelt ‘em out.”* A4 S6 L100
- *“O, matter and impertinency mixed! Reason in madness!”* A4 S6 L173
- *“...I am bound Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears do scald like molten lead.”* A4 S7 L44

King Lear's Position

In this act, Lear hits the height of his madness. His position as the tragic hero takes a new turn as he enters the anagnorisis phase.

- Locate Lear's 'piece of cheese' speech in scene 6. Evaluate the quality of his speech. Reflect on what this means in regards to his journey as the tragic hero.
- Locate three quotes which indicate Lear's entering the anagnorisis phase of the tragic hero. Explain how they reveal his 'recognition'.
- Reflect on the importance of the anagnorisis phase. What purpose does it serve?

The Window of Hope

Every tragedy has a moment towards the end of the story where it seems like things might be alright.

- Given that Lear is reconnected with Cordeila in this act, how are we encouraged to have hope that he may make it out of this in reasonable shape?
- Reflect on the function of this ‘window of hope’. Why position audiences to, at this moment of the text, believe that things could end with an HEA?

Symbolic References

- The storm ceases in this act and we are no longer given updates on how awful the weather is. Why is it easing now? How does this reflect the Lear's status as the tragic hero? In terms of the plot and the fact we are in the 'falling action' phase, why turn the storm off now?
- Discuss how the clothing symbolism is further developed in this act. In particular, reflect on Lear's weed-flower crown. Also check out the quote in A4 Sc L163-166 and discuss its significance.
- Locate three quotes that develop the 'eyes' symbol. Explain how they further the idea of humankind's tendency to be blinded by their ability to see.
- We have been discussing the idea that the 'devil' creature who haunts Poor Tom and then Gloucester could be interpreted as Edmund. Explain this theory.