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KING LEAR



King Lear is one of Shakespeare's best known tragedies. In this pack are ideas for work with your students that has come directly from the rehearsal process for David Farr's 2010 production. A director and actors together make interpretive choices. These are negotiated through rehearsal and result in a unique interpretation of the story and characters - their motivations and relationships. We have created the following activities directly from our experience in the rehearsal room.

INVESTIGATING THE DESIGN OF THE 2010 PRODUCTION OF KING LEAR



David Farr, the director of the 2010 production has worked closely with the designer John Bausor to come up with the design of the production. This activity will help your students explore the process of design and the design of this production in particular.

The Director and Designer decided that the central theme of this play is a regime change. The new generation which inherits Lear's property has very different values to Lear's own. This theme links clearly to two possible changes in Shakespeare's own time that may have inspired him to write the play. The first is the Enclosure Riots. The second is the country's changing religious standpoint from Catholicism to Protestantism.



- Explain the design concept to the students – you might want to give them information about the societal changes in Shakespeare's time too, or set this as a research task for homework.
- Explain to the students that the Director and Designer decided to represent regime change using the First World War. They felt that this time period strongly represented a change of era from Medieval to Modern.
- The designer felt that the contrast of an army on foot fighting against a tank was the strongest symbol of this change of world.
- Within the play Lear inhabits a Medieval World (he is the army on foot) and Goneril and Regan and their husbands inhabit a more modern world.
- Explain that the students are going to take on the role of the designer and complete the design brief for the director.
- Divide the group into smaller groups of 4 and explain that they are going to look at the next stage of the process – choosing a location and costumes for the play.
- Give the students the 'Design Inspirations Sheet' (on page 3).
- Ask them in their groups to create a mood board based on their research to include the most striking images, any relevant facts or information about the period and any ideas about where the play could be set.
- Once they have a mood board ask them to devise a staging concept to include, Gloucester's study, the hovel and the heath as well as the Court, and design costumes for Lear, the Fool, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. They should use clues in the text to help them.
- Ask the students to present their ideas to the rest of the group.
- You might want to compare the design actual design of the show.
- Ask the students what this process revealed to them about the play? How hard was it to work with the play and the theme? Can they think of any other settings that might have worked?

DESIGN INSPIRATIONS SHEET

The Director and Designer sought inspiration from the following things. Pictures and examples can mostly be found on You Tube and Wikipedia.

HISTORY

- Factories creating wartime products – ammunition, tanks etc
- First World War Battles – Tanks against people

FILM

- Stalker –Tarkovsky film.

ART

- Goya – especially the Black Paintings.
- Chapman Brother's response to Goya : Hell Installation as reinterpretations of Goya based on Horror of First and Second World War.

COSTUME

- Similarity between medieval and First World War Armour
- Similarity in cut of women's clothing

Information about the Stage

- There is limited room beneath the stage although there are trap doors
- There are no curtains and you can see into the roof so everything is visible for scene changes
- The Courtyard is a thrust stage

USING LETTERS TO CREATE THE MISSING SCENES IN THE PLAY



David Farr worked with the actors to establish the story of the letters in the play. The volume and variety of the letters makes this task difficult but understanding the journey of the letters in the play can provide vital clues to the play. In this session your group will work to create the letters and string them together to create a behind the scenes story for the play. In the rehearsal room this was done as a discussion.



- Explain that the sending and receiving of letters is crucial to the plot in Lear.
- You might want to look at the example in Act 1 Scene 2 of Edmund's letter that he wrote pretending to be Edgar and Gloucester's reaction.
- Divide the students into small groups
- Give each group letter information (on page 5) – who is the letter to, who is it from, what is the action in response to receiving the letter
- Ask each group to work out the content of the letter using clues from the text at the point where it is written and the point it is received.
- Read the letters in the order that they are sent
- What new information does this reveal about the play?
- Does it give you any clues for how characters should be portrayed?

LETTERS SENT IN KING LEAR

Written / first mentioned in Scene	Reaction in Scene	Written by	Written To
Act 1 Scene 4	Act 2 Scene 2	Oswald (Regan)	Goneril
Act 1 Scene 5	Act 2 Scene 2 Act 2 Scene 3	Lear	Goneril
Act 2 Scene 2	Act 2 Scene 2	Cordelia	Kent
Act 3 Scene 3	Act 3 Scene 5	Cordelia	Gloucester
Act 3 Scene 7	Act 4 Scene 2	Cornwall	Albany
Act 4 Scene 3	Act 4 Scene 3	Regan	Goneril
Act 4 Scene 4	Act 5 Scene 1 Act 5 Scene 3	Goneril	Edmund
Act 5 Scene 3	Act 5 Scene 3	Edmund	Lear and Cordelia's prisoner
Act 5 Scene 1	Act 5 Scene 3	Edgar	Albany
Act 5 Scene 1	Act 5 Scene 3	Edmund	Albany
Act 5 Scene 3	Act 5 Scene 3	Edgar	Lear and Cordelia's prisoner

EXPLORING STAGING CHALLENGES IN ACT 1 SCENE 4 OF KING LEAR



Act 1 Scene 4 contains many of the central themes and issues within the play. It also presents a number of challenges for performance.

The 100 Knights

One of the biggest challenges Shakespeare gives us in *King Lear* is representing 100 Knights on stage. In the rehearsal room David Farr explored different ways to show the impact of the 100 Knights despite only using eight men to play them. In early rehearsals this scene began with servants holding piles of clean clothing which are disturbed and made muddy by the Knights returning from the hunt leaving a mess behind them. Other early design ideas included a pile of 100 pairs of boots that need cleaning to give a physical representation of the number. Having worked through these ideas the company finally decided to use sound effects and the eight men on stage drinking and dragging their catches from the hunt through the house.

The Fool

The Fool's role is a challenging one as he oscillates from being madcap to being very caring and speaking the most truthfully of all the characters. However, the Fool is much lower status than the rest of Knights so his relationship is quite tricky to play. Also in this production the decision was made to cast a woman, Kathrynn Hunter, as the Fool. It was decided that Kathryn would play the role as a woman dressed as a man.

This series of activities will help you explore the scene in the same way the actors did in rehearsal.



Exploring the 100

- To contextualise this scene remind the group that Goneril has just told Oswald that she will ignore the King and that the servants should no longer look after the Knights as she is fed up with the noise.
- Explain that representing 100 Knights on stage is difficult.
- Divide the group into smaller groups of eight
- Give them some limited props and basic instruments like drums and chime bars.
- Remind them that the Knights in this scene have returned from hunting.
- Give the groups some time to work out how with sound and movement they can represent 100 knights.
- Ask each group to share their ideas with the rest of the class.
- Reflect on what the successful strategies were
- Get each group to merge with another group.

- Choose one group to stay as the Knights, the others will be named roles in the scene and directors.
- Pick one person to be Lear and one to be Oswald the Steward.
- Ask the Knights to start their sound and movement sequence.
- Give out the first section of the scene (to the Fool's entrance) which can be found on page 9
- Ask them to establish which Knight responds to Lear when and add the words to their movement sequence. Those students that aren't yet participating can direct or feed lines.
- Ask the groups to show their pieces.
- Reflect on: Are there times that everyone stops and listens to Lear? What state of mind is Lear in? Is the Knight's movement indicative of this?

Lear and the Fool

Fooling Warm-up

- Ask the students to get into pairs
- Give them the challenge to make the other person laugh, they can use any strategy they want without touching the other person.
- Then set them the challenge of telling the other person some bad news but disguising it with jokes.
- Reflect on what mood this sets. Explain that the Fool is an unsettling presence in the play, telling the hardest truths but in a comical way.
- The Fool enters what is already a fairly chaotic scene. We have already discovered that they are pining for Cordelia.
- Individually ask students to stand how they think a Fool would stand. Remind them that the Fool is low status and is paid to make people laugh.
- Ask the students to explore how the Fool might move. Then add the first line of text that the Fool speaks – what would his entrance be like?
- When they have tried a range of possibilities get the students back into their groups of 14 and cast a Fool.
- Explore from the Fool's entrance to Goneril's entrance using the following rules:
 - Every time the Fool speaks he has a choice to move towards or away from Lear.
 - Lear must turn away from the Fool every time he feels that he is no longer being funny
 - The Knights and Kent react to the Fool – when they feel what the Fool is doing is inappropriate they must stop what they are doing and show their disapproval in some way.

Lear and Goneril

The scene finishes with a confrontation between Lear and Goneril. Reflect with your group on what impact the scene that has gone before will have on this confrontation.

- How will Goneril react to the Fool's teasing?
- Will she try and be reasonable or be angry straight away?
- What are her intentions for her father, does she want him to leave or stay and modify his behaviour.
- Try this scene considering:
 - When is Goneril at her most angry – what is the thing that tips her over the edge?
 - How do the Knights and Fool react to Goneril? How do they show their support for Lear? They cannot be too rude as she has the money and the power to change their status so their support must be subtle.
 - What is Lear feeling? How does he approach the situation? Do his daughter's accusations come as a complete surprise?

ACT 1 SCENE 4 (EDITED)

LEAR Dinner, ho, dinner! Where's my knave? My fool? Go you and call my fool hither.

Exit a Knight

Enter Steward [Oswald]

You, you, sirrah, where's my daughter?

OSWALD So please you— *Exit*

LEAR What says the fellow there? Call the clotpoll back.—

[Exit another Knight]

Where's my fool? Ho, I think the world's asleep.—

[Enter a Knight]

How now? Where's that mongrel?

KNIGHT He says, my lord, your daughter is not well.

LEAR Why came not the slave back to me when I called him?

KNIGHT Sir, he answered me in the roundest manner, he would not.

LEAR He would not?

KNIGHT My lord, I know not what the matter is, but to my judgement your highness is not entertained with that ceremonious affection as you were wont.

LEAR Ha? Sayst thou so?

KNIGHT I beseech you pardon me, my lord, if I be mistaken, for my duty cannot be silent when I think your highness wronged.

LEAR Thou but rememb'rest me of mine own conception: I have perceived a most faint neglect of late. I will look further into't. But where's my fool? I have not seen him this two days.

KNIGHT Since my young lady's going into France, sir, the fool hath much pined away.

LEAR No more of that, I have noted it well.— Go you and tell my daughter I would speak with her.—

[*Exit a Knight*]

Go you, call hither my fool.—

[*Exit another Knight*]

Enter Steward [Oswald]

O, you sir, you, come you hither, sir. Who am I, sir?

OSWALD My lady's father.

LEAR 'My lady's father'? My lord's knave: you whoreson dog, you slave, you cur!

OSWALD I am none of these, my lord, I beseech your pardon.

LEAR Do you bandy looks with me, you rascal? *Strikes him*

OSWALD I'll not be stricken, my lord.

KENT Nor tripped neither, you base football player. *Trips him*

LEAR I thank thee, fellow: thou serv'st me and I'll love thee.

KENT Come, sir, arise, away! I'll teach you differences: away, away! Have you wisdom? So. *Pushes Oswald out*

LEAR Now, my friendly knave, I thank thee. *Gives money* There's earnest of thy service.

Enter Fool

FOOL Let me hire him too: here's my coxcomb. *Offers Kent his cap*

LEAR How now, my pretty knave, how dost thou?

FOOL Sirrah, you were best take my coxcomb. *To Kent*

LEAR Why, my boy

- FOOL** Why? For taking one's part that's out of favour. Why, this fellow has banished two on's daughters and did the third a blessing against his will: if thou follow him, thou must needs wear my coxcomb.— How now, nuncle? Would I had two coxcombs and two daughters.
- LEAR** Why, my boy?
- FOOL** If I gave them all my living, I'd keep my coxcombs myself. There's mine: beg another of thy daughters.
- LEAR** Take heed, sirrah: the whip.
- FOOL** Truth's a dog must to kennel: he must be whipped out when the Lady Brach may stand by th'fire and stink.
- LEAR** A pestilent gall to me!
- FOOL** Sirrah, I'll teach thee a speech.
- LEAR** Do.
- FOOL** Mark it, nuncle:
Have more than thou shovest,
Speak less than thou knowest,
Lend less than thou owest,
Learn more than thou trowest,
Leave thy drink and thy whore
And keep in-a-door,
And thou shalt have more
Than two tens to a score
- KENT** This is nothing, fool.
- FOOL** Then 'tis like the breath of an unfee'd lawyer: you gave me nothing for't.— *To Lear* Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?
- LEAR** Why, no, boy: nothing can be made out of nothing.
- FOOL** *To Kent* Prithee tell him, so much the rent of his land comes to: he will not believe a fool.
- KENT** This is not altogether fool, my lord.
- FOOL** Nuncle, give me an egg and I'll give thee two crowns.
- LEAR** What two crowns shall they be?
- FOOL** Why after I have cut the egg i'the middle and eat up the meat, the two crowns of the egg. Thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou gav'st thy golden one away. Fool's had ne'er less grace in a year, for wise men are grown foppish, And know not how their wits to wear, their manners are so apish.
- Enter Goneril*
- LEAR** How now, daughter? What makes that frontlet on? You are too much of late i'th'frown.

FOOL Thou wast a pretty fellow when thou hadst no need to care for her frowning: now thou art an O without a figure. I am better than thou art now: I am a fool, thou art nothing.— (*To Goneril*) Yes, forsooth, I will hold my tongue, so your face bids me, though you say nothing.

Mum, mum, *Sings*

GONERIL Not only, sir, this your all-licensed fool,
But other of your insolent retinue
Do hourly carp and quarrel, breaking forth
In rank and not-to-be endured riots, sir.
I had thought by making this well known unto you
To have found a safe redress, but now grow fearful,
By what yourself too late have spoke and done.
That you protect this course and put it on
By your allowance, which if you should, the fault
Would not scape censure, nor the redresses sleep.

FOOL For you know, nuncle,
The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long,
That it's had it head bit off by its young.
So, out went the candle, and we were left darkling.

LEAR Are you our daughter? *To Goneril*
GONERIL I would you would make use of your good wisdom —
Whereof I know you are fraught — and put away
These dispositions which of late transport you
From what you rightly are.

FOOL May not an ass know when the cart draws the horse?
Whoop, Jug! I love thee.

LEAR Does any here know me? This is not Lear.
Does Lear walk thus? Speak thus? Where are his eyes?
Either his notion weakens, his discernings
Are lethargied — Ha! Waking? 'Tis not so?
Who is it that can tell me who I am?

FOOL Lear's shadow.
LEAR Your name, fair gentlewoman?

GONERIL This admiration, sir, is much o'th'savour
Of other your new pranks. I do beseech you
To understand my purposes aright:
As you are old and reverend, should be wise.
Here do you keep a hundred knights and squires,
Men so disordered, so debauched and bold,
That this our court, infected with their manners,
Shows like a riotous inn: epicurism and lust
Makes it more like a tavern or a brothel
Than a graced palace. The shame itself doth speak
For instant remedy. Be then desired
By her, that else will take the thing she begs,
A little to disquantity your train,
And the remainders, that shall still depend
To be such men as may besort your age,
Which know themselves and you.

LEAR Darkness and devils!—
Saddle my horses, call my train together.— *To a Servant*
Degenerate bastard! I'll not trouble thee. *To Goneril*
Yet have I left a daughter.

GONERIL You strike my people, and your disordered rabble
Make servants of their betters.