

HIGH SCHOOL | BLUE VALLEY DISTRICT NOVEL RATIONALE

***King Lear* by William Shakespeare**

English Language Arts, 12th Grade

WHAT'S THE STORY?

This classic Shakespearean play manifests a three-fold approach to the essential Advanced Placement Literature curriculum, including critical-thinking of themes and meanings through the study of a classic; Shakespearean tragedies and tragic heroes; and literary techniques, especially the use of language, style, syntax, tone, and diction. In *Lear*, the sense of compassion that exists in many of Shakespeare's other plays is exhausted. Lear's fall from power and glory is a fall from the highest elevation into the deepest abyss of misery, where humanity is stripped of all external and internal advantages, and he is given up to helplessness. Lear's threefold dignity of a king, an old man, and a father is dishonored by the cruel ingratitude of his two daughters; the old king, who out of a foolish tenderness, has given away everything, is driven out into the world a homeless beggar; the childish imbecility to which he was fast advancing changes into the wildest insanity, and when he is rescued from the destitution to which he was abandoned, it is too late. Shakespeare combines the two main parts of the plot, Lear's demise and Edmund's plot. The pity felt by Gloucester for the fate of Lear becomes the means whereby his son Edmund effects his complete destruction and affords the outcast Edgar an opportunity of being the savior of his father. Cordelia, with her heavenly beauty of soul, reminds the reader of Antigone. Few lines are assigned to her; yet, throughout the five acts, the reader can never forget her. At the close, she lingers in the reader's recollection as if the reader had seen some being more beautiful and purer than a thing of earth. In tragic pathos, in dramatic force, in grandeur of sentiment and diction, *Lear* has no superior in all the wide range of the world's drama. The language is sublime, and this Shakespearean tragedy has the advantage of dealing with human beings, human passions, and human frailties, especially those of the continuing complexities of the family, sibling rivalries, greed, aging, power, and love. Repeatedly listed in the open-ended novel question in the Advanced Placement Literature test, *King Lear* continues the study of the classic tragedy with added themes of aging and complex family structures that apply to students in today's society more than ever.

CONNECTIONS TO CURRICULUM*

The following are some, but not all, of the connections to curriculum for this novel.

- **Unit 3: Personal Responsibility**
 - Essential Question: "How does personal responsibility affect not only the individual but also the world as a whole?"
- **Unit 4: Universal Human Experience**
 - Essential Question: "How can reading reveal universal truths about the human experience?"

KEY STANDARDS ADDRESSED

- Read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems. RL.12.13
- Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. RL.12.2
- Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging. RL.12.5
- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. RL.12.1
- Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 11–12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies. RL.12.11
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. RL.12.12