

A-level English Literature



Bridging Course - Week 1



Page Break



St Mary's Catholic School
A-level English Literature Bridging Course

Entry Requirements for Studying A-level English Literature?

- Students who are expected to achieve at least a grade 6 in GCSE English Literature.
- Students who have enjoyed their GCSE English Literature course, and who are keen readers.
- Students who enjoy the study of Shakespeare's plays as there are 2 plays to be studied: King Lear and Richard II.
- Students who love a lively debate and discussion in lessons, and who are willing, and able, to share their ideas.
- Students who enjoy planning and writing essays.

What to expect from A-level English Literature.

A-level English Literature is demanding and rewarding in equal measure. Texts that are studied are challenging texts, that will pose many questions. These questions are often philosophical, or contentious leading lessons to be filled with discussion and debate. Students are expected to complete substantial amounts of reading and preparation for lessons, in order to engage fully with class discussion. Students should expect to prepare and complete essays regularly, and these essays will often present some form of debate, asking students 'to what extent do you agree?' Therefore, engagement with class debate is essential in order to be fully prepared for the demands of writing academic and advanced level essays. English Literature will make you ask important questions about society, about morality, about religion, the nature of 'quality' literature, and about yourself.

This bridging course will provide you with a mixture of information about A-level English Literature, and what to expect from the course, as well as key work to complete. Students who are expecting to study English Literature at A-level, and are likely to meet the entry requirements, must complete the bridging course fully and thoroughly, to the best of their ability. You should complete all work on paper and keep it in a file, in an ordered way. You will submit it to your teacher in September. All of the work will be reviewed and selected work will be assessed, and you will be given feedback on it. This work will be signalled to you. If you do not have access to the internet, please contact the school and appropriate resources will be sent to you. If you are thinking about studying English Literature at A-level you should attempt this work to see whether or not you think studying a subject like this is right for you. If you later decide to study English Literature, you must ensure you complete this work in full. This work should be completed after you have read and completed the Study Skills work that all of Year 12 should complete.

Course outline

Paper 1 – Aspects of Tragedy worth 40%	Paper 2 – Elements of Crime Writing – worth 40%
▪ An exam lasting 2hours 30minutes.	▪ An exam lasting 3 hours.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Closed book. This means you won't have access to a copy of your texts in the exam. ▪ Section A – analyse an extract from King Lear exploring the elements of tragedy ▪ Section B – 1 question from a choice of 2 – a traditional essay, where a debate is set up and you will be asked to what extent you agree with it. ▪ Section C – 1 question from a choice of 2. This question will focus on an aspect of tragedy and you will answer it in relation to Shakespeare's Richard II and Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Open book. You will have access to a copy of your texts. ▪ Section A – you will explore the elements of crime in an extract from a crime text that is 'unseen'. ▪ Section B – 1 question from a choice of 3. This is a traditional essay, where a debate will be set up and you will be asked to what extent you agree with it. ▪ Section C – 1 question from a choice of 2. This question will focus on an element of crime writing and you will answer it in relation to two set texts. ▪ Set texts are likely to include: Atonement by Ian McEwan, selected poems by Wilde, Browning and Crabbe and Brighton Rock by Graham Greene
<p>NEA – a coursework folder of 2 substantial essays worth 20%</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ You will study a range of critical theory from an anthology ▪ You will devise a question for each essay, focusing on an area from the anthology, in relation to texts of your choosing, that you will agree with your teachers 	

The following work requires a lot of reading, and some of the ideas might be challenging to understand on first reading. Remember to take regular breaks, go back to any of the tasks after some time away, and try your best. Your English Literature will go over the following with you in lessons, early in Year 12.

1. You are now going to begin preparatory work relevant for Paper 1 of the A-level. Paper 1 is an exam that focuses on tragedy. You have studied Macbeth, which is considered a tragedy, so you have already begun to explore this genre at a general level.

i. As revision from your GCSE studies, what do you understand by the term 'tragedy'? What does it mean if a text is a 'tragedy'? Do you know any elements of the genre that we should expect to see/read? **Make a list.**

At A-level, you need to understand the elements of the tragic genre in detail. It is important to note that genre elements are not 'fixed'. Genre mutates and changes over time, and different critics have different ideas and theories. In your reading about tragedy, you will often read about Aristotle. He was an Ancient Greek philosopher who is still considered one of the greatest thinkers in politics and ethics. When Aristotle turned 17, he enrolled in Plato's Academy. In 338, he began tutoring Alexander the Great. In 335, Aristotle founded his own school, the Lyceum, in Athens, where he spent most of the rest of his life studying, teaching and writing. One of his most famous works was a piece called *Poetics*.

ii. **Watch this short YouTube clip and make notes:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGIQkaolfBI> What were the key ideas in Aristotle's *Poetics*? You should be including the following vocabulary in notes to capture the points: magnitude, serious, catharsis, plot/action, hero,

fall from grace / brought low, error, frailty/hamartia, peripeteia, anagnorosis, suffering.

Extension: If you want to read a translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* in full, you can find it here: <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.1.1.html>

2. Now, to develop your understanding of tragedy as a genre, read this article and **make detailed notes**. This article offers a view of key ideas about tragedy over time, including more modern ideas about tragedy.

Defining Tragedy - Drama from Classical to Modern Period

Here Carol Atherton introduces the idea of tragedy, exploring what makes tragedy in drama different from our everyday uses of the word and outlining some of the key ideas that have shaped it as a form, from the classical through to the modern period.

There was a time, a few years ago, when it was highly unwise for English teachers to mention a certain dramatic genre in class. The pop group Steps had just re-released the Bee Gees' 1979 hit 'Tragedy', and any use of this word was apt to bring about a little chorus from the back row. One of my colleagues made the mistake of asking his A Level group to give him a definition of tragedy, at the beginning of a revision lesson on Hamlet. 'Don't you know?' they replied. 'When the feeling's gone and you can't go on, it's tragedy!'

We're used to seeing the word 'tragedy' being used in a variety of different circumstances. An accident, a personal catastrophe, a missed goal at a penalty shootout ... Linguistically speaking, 'tragedy' has undergone an extensive period of broadening since its origins in ancient Greek drama. Its original meaning, bizarrely, was 'goat song' - a term whose precise meaning is unclear, but which might refer to the sacrifice of goats as part of early dramatic ritual, the wearing of goatskin costumes by actors playing the role of satyrs, or the awarding of a goat as a prize for songs or recitals. A quick look at the online archive of any national newspaper will indicate that the noun 'tragedy', and its adjectival form 'tragic', are now used in a huge number of ways: to refer to serious events such as natural disasters and sudden deaths, but also in a more hyperbolic manner, to describe sporting competitions and even people's taste in clothes. According to the Guardian, for instance, the recent earthquake in the Szechwan province of China was tragic, as is the political situation in Zimbabwe. But then, so is the fact that the Conservative leader David Cameron has apparently seen every single James Bond film three times.

If you're doing the AQA Specification B in English Literature, one of the things you'll learn during your AS course is that 'tragedy' has another, more specific, set of meanings. This specification requires you to write about 'the dramatic/tragic genre' with regard to two plays, one of which must have been written by Shakespeare. So, you'll need to learn what 'tragedy' is, and how these definitions relate to the plays you're studying. This article will give you an overview of the genre of tragedy, and some of the concepts that are central to it.

Aristotle on tragedy

One name you're bound to come across when you study tragedy is that of the Greek philosopher Aristotle. Aristotle lived in the fourth century BCE, and set out a famous definition of tragedy in his work *The Poetics*, a fragment of a longer treatise. His intention was not to prescribe a set of rules for dramatists to follow, but rather to describe the characteristics of the tragic dramas that he had seen, including works by the three great Ancient Greek tragedians Aeschylus, Euripedes and Sophocles. Nevertheless, his definition of tragedy has become a staple of literary criticism, and has been used and reinterpreted by writers through the ages. So what did Aristotle say?

For Aristotle, the power of tragedy rested on the relationship between plot, character and audience. Central to his definition of tragedy is the tragic hero, a man 'who enjoys prosperity and a high reputation.' Often, this hero was a king, or a man with the potential to achieve greatness. The action of the tragedy focuses on the hero's downfall from this initial high status, in a reversal of fortune that Aristotle termed peripeteia. Crucially, this downfall is not the result of chance or accident, but is brought about by an act carried out by the hero that sets in motion the chain of events that will lead to his eventual death. Aristotle's term for this act was hamartia. (Later writers, such as the critic A.C. Bradley, have interpreted the concept of hamartia slightly differently, as a

'fatal flaw' or 'fundamental tragic trait' within the hero's character: Macbeth's ambition, say, or Othello's jealousy.) What gives tragedy its particular power is that at some point before his death, the hero experiences a moment of insight or anagnorisis when he recognises what he has done and gains a new perspective on the truths of human existence. The effect on the audience is one that Aristotle termed catharsis - a purging of the emotions that draws out feelings of pity and fear. Critics have written eloquently about the effects of this process of catharsis. A.C. Bradley commented that in watching tragedy:

we realise the full power and reach of the soul, and the conflict on which it engages acquires that magnitude which stirs not only sympathy and pity, but admiration, terror, and awe.

There are two other aspects of Aristotle's theory of tragedy that will be important to your study of tragic drama. The first is that of the unities of plot, place and time - the notion that the effects of the tragedy are intensified if the action has one main focus, takes place in one location and happens within a restricted period of time. The second is that of the chorus, a group of people who appear onstage to interpret and narrate parts of the plot for the audience. In Greek tragedy, the chorus danced and sang, with its songs being divided into different sections according to the direction in which the actors danced. Later tragedies interpret the role of the chorus in different ways: in some plays you might be able to identify a single character who acts as the chorus, while in others this role is fulfilled by a number of minor characters who offer a commentary on the action.

Later ideas

Over the centuries, the genre of tragedy has been developed and adapted by other writers. The Roman tragedies of Seneca (1st century CE) were more violent and bloody than their Greek counterparts, with vivid images of hell and a strong sense of horror. Later writers focused on the plight of the tragic hero, looking at his situation from a more philosophical standpoint. The French dramatist Jean Racine (1639-99) saw the tragic situation as one in which the hero was doomed to be dissatisfied because he was constantly longing for something beyond his reach. Writers such as Georg Hegel (1770-1831), Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) proposed a tragic theory of life implying that all people exist in a state of anguish and despair, with these feelings being increased by our recognition of this situation. And in the twentieth century, a number of playwrights challenged the notion that the tragic hero should be a person of 'high degree', relocating the genre in the everyday lives of ordinary people. Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is perhaps the greatest example of the sub-genre of 'domestic tragedy': its hero Willy Loman exemplifies the sense of angst that is so crucial to modern definitions of the genre. (Notice, too, how his surname bears witness to his ordinariness and lack of status.)

Reading various views on tragedy will form a key part of this bridging course, but now you have the beginnings of an understanding of the elements associated with tragedy as a literary genre, it is important that you use them to shape your understanding of a literary text. It is important that you don't use the elements of tragedy as simply a 'check list', but you should use them to guide your reading and interpretation of the text.

3. You are now going to read/watch the play *King Lear* by William Shakespeare. You will watch a modern adaptation of the play, that remains pretty faithful to the text. This is a good starting point to begin to understand the plot. **Watch this version:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBonLhmJrQQ> There are subtitles, but these are not a distraction. It is also currently on BBC iPlayer.

To help you focus your attention, **answer the following questions** in brief note form, after you have watched the play. These questions are basic comprehension questions and should not require detailed analysis.

Question	Answer
1. What do you learn about Edmund at the very start?	
2. What has Lear decided to do?	

3. What do Goneril and Regan say?	
4. What does Cordelia say?	
5. What happens to Cordelia because of what she says?	
6. How does it become clear that Goneril and Regan are villains?	
7. What happens to Kent and why?	
8. How does Edmund trick Gloucester, his father?	
9. How do Goneril and Regan strip Lear of further power?	
10. What does Kent do after he is banished?	
11. What happens to Lear when he is locked out of Gloucester's palace?	
12. What happens to Gloucester for trying to help Lear?	
13. What happens to Cornwall, Regan's husband?	
14. Why do Goneril and Regan turn against each other?	
15. Who wins the war between England and France?	
16. What happens to Cordelia and Lear after the battle?	
17. What does Edmund demand?	
18. What happens to Edmund?	
19. Which characters die?	
20. Who is left in control of England by the end of the play?	

(Answers can be found later in this pack)

4. Now you will complete a detailed analysis of Act 1 Scene 1 of King Lear. You will access a copy of the play here: <https://genius.com/William-shakespeare-king-lear-act-1-scene->

1-annotated The following task is typical guided reading that you should expect in English Literature. **Answer the following.**

Close Reading

- a. According to the first line, who does King Lear supposedly prefer? What first impression do you get of Lear from this line?
- b. According to Gloucester, what has Lear decided to do?
- c. What relation is Edmund to Gloucester?
- d. How does Gloucester view Edmund?
- e. What does Gloucester say that is potentially humiliating for Edmund?
- f. Lear enters wearing a “coronet” and the following the “sound a sennet”. What is a coronet? What is a sennet?
- g. What are Lear’s reasons for dividing his kingdom?
- h. What does he ask his daughters to do? Why?
- i. What are Goneril and Regan’s responses?
- j. What is Cordelia’s response?
- k. What do you learn about how Lear felt about Cordelia?
- l. Why does Cordelia refuse to flatter Lear? What are her reasons?
- m. What does Lear do as a consequence of this refusal to participate in the love test?
- n. What does Kent try to do?
- o. What happens to Cordelia’s part of the country?
- p. Look closely at around lines 115-120. What are the terms that Lear makes for abdicating power?
- q. What does Kent do that sees him banished?
- r. What does Burgundy say when Lear offers Cordelia to him with no dowry?
- s. What the King of France say when he is offered Cordelia?
- t. When alone on stage, how do Goneril and Regan show disrespect towards Lear?
- u. What do Goneril and Regan plan to do?

(Answers found later in this pack)

If you find using the original text challenging at this stage, a translation can be found at: <https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/lear/>

Close Analysis – **answer the following in detail now**. Notes should be detailed, range around the scene and use close reference to the *original* text. The first answer is done for you, so you can see the level of detail expected of you.

- Why does Shakespeare begin the play with the short exchange between Kent and Gloucester? What does it reveal about Lear’s Britain?
 - Reveals Lear’s flawed nature as he is prone to favouritism
 - Lear favours Albany to Cornwall, according to the rumours.
 - There is an indication of a lack of order in Lear’s Britain.
 - There is some anxiety and speculation that Lear is to “divide” his kingdom, something that wouldn’t be expected of a king (who perhaps should keep a kingdom united rather than purposefully divide).

- Seems to some moral disorder too - Gloucester, though seeing Edmund as equal to his legitimate son who was born within marriage, boasts about the “good sport” at Edmund’s making.

- Speculation about Lear, his character, his imminent decision to divide the kingdom, built a level of anticipation ahead of Lear’s grand entrance, moments later.

- What is your first impression of Gloucester? How is he characterised by Shakespeare?
- Edmund says very little in this scene – why do you think that is?
- How does Shakespeare present Lear as powerful?
- How Shakespeare characterise Lear as a father? What kind of father is he?
- Cordelia’s asides show she is suffering. How is she suffering?
- How are Goneril and Regan presented as antagonists (or villains) in this scene? You will need to contrast the end of the scene with the love test to answer this question.
- Arguably, Cordelia is placed into a second ‘love test’ when she is put before two suitors. How is Cordelia presented as a victim?
- Kent is a very loyal character, and dedicated to Lear. How does Shakespeare present this loyalty and dedication?
- Applying what you have learnt so far about tragedy, and the specifically the tragic hero, how far does Lear adhere to these expectations?

5. At GCSE you were encouraged to explore ‘a lot about a little’ in order to achieve the highest marks. You should aim to do this at A-level too, aiming for depth and breadth of analysis. Therefore find as much evidence from Act 1 Scene 1 of King Lear as you can, to support the following views.

View	Evidence
Lear does not fulfil expectations of what a king should do / be like.	
Lear is shallow and materialistic.	

Lear is blind to loyalty and true love.	
Lear is characterised as a terrible father.	
Lear's flaw is his rash temper, that leads to rash decision making.	
Lear can be seen as a victim.	

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Answers and suggestions

From task 3

Question	Answer
1. What do you learn about Edmund at the very start?	He is illegitimate – born out of wedlock.
2. What has Lear decided to do?	Abdicate power and divide his kingdom between his 3 daughters.
3. What do Goneril and Regan say?	Goneril claims to love Lear “more than eyesight”, and Regan agrees, but says Goneril’s expression of love “comes too short”
4. What does Cordelia say?	She says the active word “nothing” in response to the love test.

5. What happens to Cordelia because of what she says?	She is disowned.
6. How does it become clear that Goneril and Regan are villains?	They are critical of their father, think he has always been rash, never really known what he's been doing and in fear they will suffer at some point in the future as a result of his nature, they plan to do something "in the heat" – quickly.
7. What happens to Kent and why?	He is banished for trying to get Lear to change his mind about dividing the kingdom, banishing Cordelia.
8. How does Edmund trick Gloucester, his father?	He claims his legitimate son Edgar is plotting against Gloucester's life, for inheritance.
9. How do Goneril and Regan strip Lear of further power?	Goneril has her servants ignore Lear, and between Goneril and Regan they say Lear must lose the knights that he has.
10. What does Kent do after he is banished?	He puts on a disguise as a man named Caius in order to stay close to Lear.
11. What happens to Lear when he is locked out of Gloucester's palace?	He goes mad, but recognises that there are "poor snaked wretches" in the kingdom who he has taken "too little care of".
12. What happens to Gloucester for trying to help Lear?	He has his eyes gauged out by Cornwall and Regan.
13. What happens to Cornwall, Regan's husband?	He is stabbed by a servant.
14. Why do Goneril and Regan turn against each other?	They both develop affections for Edmund.
15. Who wins the war between England and France?	England
16. What happens to Cordelia and Lear after the battle?	They are imprisoned
17. What does Edmund demand?	He sends an order for Cordelia's death
18. What happens to Edmund?	He is killed by Edgar
19. Which characters die?	Lear, Gloucester, Cordelia, Goneril, Regan, Oswald, Edmund, Cornwall, a servant, the Fool, possibly Kent.
20. Who is left in control of England by the end of the play?	Albany

From task 4

- a. According to the first line, who does King Lear supposedly prefer? What first impression do you get of Lear from this line?
 - Albany. Lear has favourites.
- b. According to Gloucester, what has Lear decided to do?

- Divide his kingdom
- c. What relation is Edmund to Gloucester?
 - Illegitimate son
- d. How does Gloucester view Edmund?
 - As equal as his other legitimate son, Edgar
- e. What does Gloucester say that is potentially humiliating for Edmund?
 - It was “good sport” conceiving Edmund. Gloucester revealed here as a adulterer and shows a lack of shame /remorse for this despite it being morally reprehensible.
- f. Lear enters wearing a “coronet” and the following the “sound a sennet”. What is a coronet? What is a sennet?
 - Crown. Fanfare
- g. What are Lear’s reasons for dividing his kingdom?
 - Wants to “crawl unburdened” towards death.
 - Wants to avoid “future strifes” by giving power and strength to younger strengths.
- h. What does he ask his daughters to do? Why?
 - To say who loves him most
- i. What are Goneril and Regan’s responses?
 - They flatter him
- j. What is Cordelia’s response?
 - She refuses to participate in the test, and says she loves her father “according to her bond” meaning as a daughter should.
- k. What do you learn about how Lear felt about Cordelia?
 - He loved her most.
- l. Why does Cordelia refuse to flatter Lear? What are her reasons?
 - She loves him appropriately but will also want to take a husband who will require some of her love.
- m. What does Lear do as a consequence of this refusal to participate in the love test?
 - He is cruel towards her, disowns her.
- n. What does Kent try to do?
 - Intervene and get Lear to see the error of his ways. Lear pays no attention.
- o. What happens to Cordelia’s part of the country?
 - It is given to Goneril and Regan – they now have half the kingdom each
- p. Look closely at around lines 115-120. What are the terms that Lear makes for abdicating power?
 - He wants to keep 100 knights, wants “revenue” – money, and “sway” – political say. Essentially Lear wants to enjoy the luxuries of kingship but doesn’t want the responsibility of kingship.
- q. What does Kent do that sees him banished?
 - He is rude “what wouldst thou do Old Man?” and defiant of the king’s orders. He persists in trying to get Lear to ‘see’ that he is making a mistake.
- r. What does Burgundy say when Lear offers Cordelia to him with no dowry?
 - he rejects her.
- s. What the King of France say when he is offered Cordelia?
 - He sees her virtue and beauty in the way she responds to the harsh treatment. He takes her for his wife.
- t. When alone on stage, how do Goneril and Regan show disrespect towards Lear?

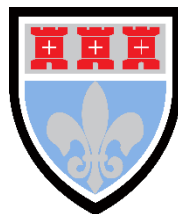
- They are critical of his old age, they say he has always “slenderly known himself” and they anticipate him to be difficult to manage.

u. What do Goneril and Regan plan to do? – plot against him so he cannot question or threaten their pursuit of power.



A-level English Literature

Bridging Course - Week 2



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St Mary's Catholic School

A-level English Literature Bridging Course

Recap

Last week, you were introduced to ideas about tragedy in Aristotle's Poetics. We are going to recap a few of Aristotle's key ideas before we move on.

Refer to your notes from last week on Aristotle's 'Poetics' and answer the following questions:

1. Why did Aristotle write 'Poetics'? Consider who was educating him and how they disagreed.
2. What kind of characters do tragedies tend to deal with, and why?
3. What plot elements feature heavily in Greek tragedy?
4. What is the name of the tragic element that describes the creation of pity and fear which results in the purgation of emotions for characters?
5. There is a debate between academics about whether tragedies should involve an emotional _____ for the audience, or whether it should trigger deeply _____ thoughts. Fill in the gaps.
6. Rank order the importance of the following elements of tragedy, according to Aristotle:
 - Diction
 - Character
 - Spectacle
 - Song
 - Plot
7. Who does the responsibility for the tragic action have to lie with in order for it to be truly tragic?
8. According to Aristotle, what kind of character needs to be the protagonist?
9. Is the following statement true or false? A tragic protagonist must have a significant vice, or be extremely depraved in some terrible way.
10. What is the name of the tragic term that means that a character misses the mark, or makes an error in judgement?
11. According to Aristotle, what are the three main elements of the end of a tragedy?
12. Define the following terms: peripeteia and anagnorisis. What key elements of tragedy do these produce?
13. Typically, what might a 'scene of suffering' include in tragedy?

This week, you will explore other theories of literary tragedy, to build a breadth of knowledge about the genre. Remember, you will use this knowledge to shape an interpretation of a range of literary texts. Also remember last week you were taught that genres are changing and evolving all of the time, they are not 'fixed'.

Other Approaches to Tragedy

Read the following ideas about tragedy. **Make notes, then complete the tasks that follow.**

According to A.C. Bradley (one of the most prolific academics on Shakespeare's tragedies), no-one really 'rivalled' Aristotle's view on tragedy until an immensely influential German philosopher called George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel wrote about tragedy in his book called *Aesthetics* (1820–29). Bradley, and many other academics criticise Hegel for his unwieldy and sometimes incomprehensible writing style, but simply put, he proposes that the sufferings of the tragic hero are a means of bringing together moral claims. The opposing moral forces are very powerful and effective in bringing about tragedy because of the fact that the tragic hero dies. According to Hegel's account of Greek tragedy, the conflict is not between good and evil but between goods that are each making too exclusive a claim. The heroes of ancient tragedy, by adhering to the one ethical system by which they molded their own personality, must come into conflict with the ethical claims of another. It is the moral one-sidedness of the tragic actor, not any negatively tragic fault in his morality or in the forces opposed to him, that proves his undoing, for both sides of the contradiction, if taken by themselves, are justified.

How is this different to Aristotle's view of tragedy?

Aristotle believes that tragic characters should represent not an extreme of good or evil but something between, whereas Hegel would have them too good to live; that is, too extreme an embodiment of a particular good to survive in the world. He also tends to dismiss other traditional categories of tragic theory. For instance, he prefers his own kind of catharsis to Aristotle's—the feeling of reconciliation.

You may have already realised this, but Hegel's system is not applicable to Shakespearean or Romantic tragedy. Such Shakespearean heroes as Macbeth, Richard III, and Mark Antony cannot be regarded as embodiments of any transcendent good. They behave as they do, says Hegel, now speaking outside of his scheme of tragedy, simply because they are the kind of men they are. In a statement pointing up the essence of uninhibited romantic lust and willfulness Hegel said: 'it is the inner experience of their heart and individual emotion, or the particular qualities of their personality, which insist on satisfaction.' This can be easily understood in the context of Macbeth, whose insatiable ambition and desire drives him to his tragic demise.

Hegel on Tragedy

Nietzsche on Tragedy

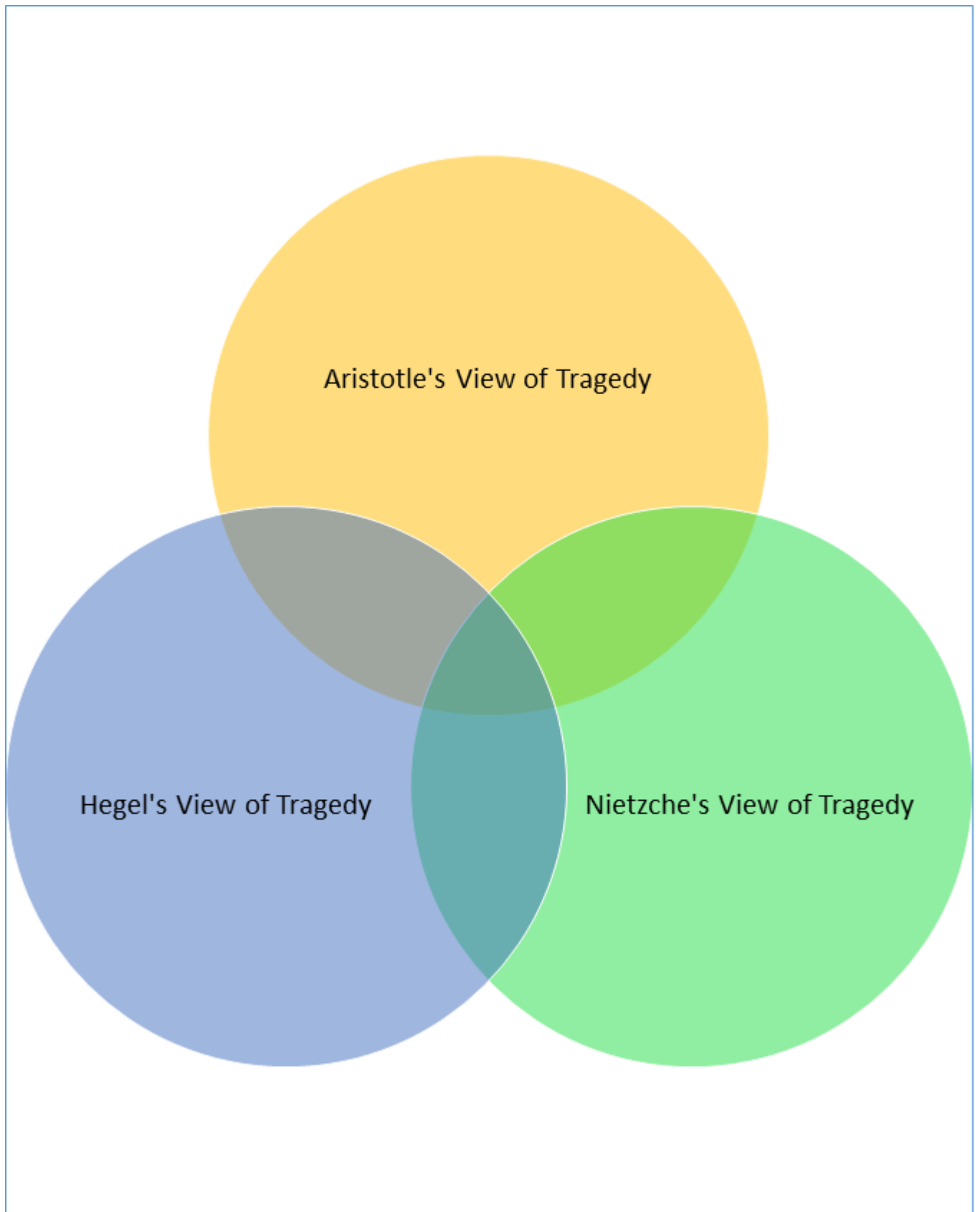
The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche saw tragedy as the product of a struggle between two opposing forces, which he termed the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The Apollonian was characterised by balance, order and reason, while the Dionysian was characterised by disorder, revelry and an abandonment of oneself to instinct and desire. Nietzsche saw Ancient Greek tragedy as breaking through the calmness of the Apollonian and giving access to the turmoil of the Dionysian. He claimed that tragedy offered its audiences an intense emotional experience that contrasted with the mundane routines of everyday life.

Extension: **Listen to the 'Philosophy Bites' podcast by Aaron Ridley on 'Nietzsche on Art and Truth.'** What connections can you make between Nietzsche's view of tragedy and the texts that you have studied?

http://philosophybites.libsyn.com/aaron_ridley_on_nietzsche_on_art_and_truth

Bringing it all together

You have now looked at three theoretical interpretations of tragedy. **Use the Venn diagram note the main elements of each theoretical interpretation of tragedy.** The Venn diagram will also allow you to find similarities between each interpretation. Note differences between the views on tragedy outside of the Venn diagram.



Sean McEvoy on modern approaches to tragedy

Sean McEvoy teaches literature in Brighton and Cambridge, and writes books and articles on the theatre. He has written *Tragedy: The Basics*, published in 2016. Here he introduces some

theories of tragedy from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Reading this will help you to understand how to apply ideas about tragedy to texts. It discusses some texts that you will not study, but it is a useful analysis that brings together all three ideas about tragedy. **Add notes to your Venn diagram about each of the views about tragedy, focusing particularly on Nietzsche's ideas about 'King Lear.'**

Aristotle's ideas about tragedy don't take into account the fact that the world changes and that we live in changing societies. Shakespeare's England, for example, was in transition between the mediaeval and the modern world. Othello is an outsider in Venice who talks and behaves like a feudal warrior, or a hero out of knightly romance – as he says, these are the qualities that make Desdemona love him. But Venice is a very modern place, and its individualism, self-interest and ruthlessness are nowhere better embodied than in the figure of Iago. The German philosopher Hegel (1770–1831) locates tragedy where people are caught between two historical forces pulling in different directions. No matter how heroic or pitiable an individual might be, there is no escape because their world-view is out of joint with historical change – a force which Hegel thought was ultimately progressive. For him there is something positive in tragedy.

In Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949), the salesman Willy Loman has inevitably ended up selling himself, as Raymond Williams wrote in 1979, and has become an economic commodity to be discarded like any other: 'he brings down tragedy on himself, not by opposing the lie, but by living it'. In living the false dream of American capitalism Willy unwittingly shows to at least one of his sons that the dreams of some are built on the nightmares of many. But perhaps tragedy need not teach anything. *King Lear* (1606) depicts a whole society in meltdown, a world in which both feudal values (as represented by Kent, Albany and Lear) and modern individualism (Edmund, Cornwall, Goneril, Regan) do not so much conflict as both fail utterly. In 1964 Jan Kott wrote that the play showed life to be absurd, bleak and grotesque, devoid of hope, likening *King Lear* to Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* (1957). The German philosopher Nietzsche (1844–1900) had suggested that tragedy can offer a kind of thrill in contemplating death and destruction (and by implication our own), as if the shaping of suffering into art is what validates why we enjoy watching tragedy. Another German, the dramatist Brecht (1898–1956), condemned tragedy as a kind of smokescreen put up by those whose wealth and power depends on the suffering they cause, making it appear mysterious by calling it 'tragedy'. But British tragedy still refuses to find the world as irremediable. Edward Bond's reworking of Shakespeare in *Lear* (1971) shows how revolutions against tyranny produce tyranny, but endorses the continued resistance of the powerless. Even the bleakest of Bond's successors, Sarah Kane (1971–99), suggests the saving power of love in her work.

Extension: **Listen to the BBC Radio 4 Programme called 'In Our Time'** where Melvynn Bragg and his guests examine Shakespeare's 'King Lear.' It is 45 minutes long and it provides an

excellent exploration of the play in relation to tragedy:
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qykl/topics/King_Lear

Further Extension: **Listen to the Podcast by a leading Shakespeare scholar called Emma Smith.** The podcast focuses on King Lear and is part of the 'Approaching Shakespeare' series by Oxford University: <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/king-lear>

How to analyse a dramatic text: looking at dramatic methods

As part of your GCSE studies, you studied a play as a 'Modern Text.' It was either 'An Inspector Calls' by J.B. Priestly, 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time' by Simon Stephens or 'DNA' by Dennis Kelly.

As part of this you will have begun to look at dramatic methods that are used to elevate and heighten the drama, whether that be the Inspector's dramatic entrance in 'An Inspector Calls', Stephens' intelligent use of staging and props in 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time' or the interview-style sequences in 'DNA.' **Make a list** of all of the dramatic methods that you can remember.

In King Lear (and also Richard II when you come to study that play), you need to analyse the dramatic methods chosen by Shakespeare to convey meaning. Below is a list of dramatic methods that you should **learn, know off by heart**, and look for when and comment on when analysing a play.

Some dramatic methods and some possible things to consider

"All that is on stage is a sign"

Entrances and exits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When characters enter or exit – does this shift the dramatic focus? If so, from what to what?
Who dominates the dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who is speaking? Who is dominating? Does this suggest anything about what is going on? Ideas about power?• Is there particularly dramatic imagery used within speech?• What is the tone of the lines – and how do you know?• Does the playwright use soliloquys? Monologues? Asides? To what effect?

Who is on stage?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important to consider who is on stage – perhaps also who is on stage but doesn't speak. Why are they there?
Is there an indication of action?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions say a lot about a character. In tragedies, actions, and what characters do is important.
Dramatic setting – where is the scene set?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where is the scene set? What can be read into this?
What does the scene / moment come after? Before?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writers make decisions about structural placement of scenes and ideas. Consider this carefully.
Is there any indication of props?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there symbolic meaning attached to dramatic props?

Look at the following still taken from the 2018 Royal Shakespeare Company production of 'King Lear.'

Make notes on the following:

- a. What is the dramatic significance of opening the scene in the Royal Court, in Lear's Palace?
- b. How does the setting link to the classical nature of the tragedy; it being a play about the fall of a public figure, the King, and the magnitude of the consequences this will potentially bring?

Use this image to help you to consider your response to the first two questions:

Now look at a copy of the text, focusing again on Act 1 Scene 1

c. Analyse the significance of the play's first line and the duologue that takes place between Kent and Gloucester: 'I thought the King had more affected the Duke of / Albany than Cornwall.' What does this suggest about the King? How would you describe the tone of this opening?



d. What is the dramatic significance of Edmund's presence on stage? Consider the fact that he says very little at this point.

e. What is the dramatic significance of Gloucester describing Edmund as a 'knave'? He uses the word meaning 'boy' but a Shakespearean audience will have also known the word to mean 'villain.'

f. What conflict is established in the main plot (the division of the kingdom between Lear's daughters)?

g. Analyse the dramatic significance of Cordelia's 'asides'. What do they reveal?

Key points about analysing a dramatic text:

- Note that the questions focus on the play, rather than upon productions of the play. When looking at the image, it is *not* relevant to analyse the symbolic significance of Cordelia's white dress, for example, because this was the director's choice, not Shakespeare's. An analysis of dramatic methods stays true to the original text. Stagecraft

therefore incorporates an analysis of setting, the characters on stage, significant entrances and exits, asides, for example. It does not include an analysis of props or costume.

- It is important to analyse the structure of the play, considering the order in which events occur. The grand, regal setting of the opening scene emphasises Lear's tragic fall, for example.
- The introduction of a sub-plot is a dramatic method, contributing to the wider theme of the consequences of the unfair treatment of children. Note that Gloucester loves each of his sons equally, but Elizabethan society does not permit an illegitimate child the same rights as a legitimate child.
- Language is a significant dramatic method. Looking at the double-meaning of 'knave' is very revealing, for example.
- Shakespeare's tragedies contain some of his most poetic verse. Understanding and appreciating this shows an understanding of dramatic methods. This is a particularly important dramatic method in charting a character's tragic fall.
- Dramatic characterisation is very important, and in 'King Lear', charting the change in Lear's characterisation is the most obvious example of this. It is also important to analyse the role of the tragic adversary, noting their role in exposing the flaws of the tragic hero.

The BIG Question: How is Lear presented as a tragic protagonist in Act 1 Scene 1?

You are going to focus on King Lear directly in Act 1 Scene 1. Looking at how he is presented as a tragic protagonist. **You will create a poster or mindmap that captures your ideas.**

- Refer to the notes that you made last week and highlight all notes that focus on King Lear's presentation in Act 1 Scene 1.
- Use the guiding questions on the following page to plan your response to the task. If you require any help with the questions, refer to this summary and analysis of the scene:

<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/k/king-lear/summary-and-analysis/act-i-scene-1>

Before we start, match up the following conventions of tragedy:

Tragic Convention	Definition
Conflict and Chaos	A typical flaw in the personality of a character who enjoys a powerful position
Blindness	Where the tragic consequences of actions are clear to see.
Hubris	Acting in a way that shows a complete lack of awareness or foresight as to the consequences of actions.
Hamartia	The protagonist's error or tragic flaw that leads to a chain of plot actions culminating in a reversal from felicity to disaster.
Tragic Inevitability	Where the actions of a character bring about turmoil and devastation. This can be on an epic scale, where the whole country is affected, or on a domestic scale, where family life is uprooted.

10 Questions about the scene:

1. How is Lear initially presented as a strong and wise leader?
2. Why does Lear decide to divide his kingdom?
3. Consider the context of the scene – what political and historical events had occurred which relates to the division of a country?
4. Lear asks Cordelia 'what can you say to draw / A third more opulent than your sisters?' What does this suggest about his character?
5. What qualities does Cordelia possess that Goneril and Regan lack? What faults does Lear demonstrate, here?
6. Describe Lear's reaction to Cordelia.
7. Why does Kent intervene?
8. How does Lear react to Kent?
9. What is the dramatic significance of the King of France's defence of Cordelia?
10. What does the final discussion between Goneril and Regan reveal about Lear's decisions?

What should you include in your mindmap / poster?

- A range of clear ideas about what makes Lear appear to be the tragic protagonist.
- Use close reference to the text to support your ideas – remember it's a closed book exam so you'll need to know the play really well.
- Integrate relevant terminology from your reading on tragedy as a genre.
- Consider the drama of the scene – look at the dramatic methods used in the opening scene, how do these help to highlight or diminish the audience's sense of Lear as a tragic protagonist?
- Can Lear be seen to be anything other than the protagonist in this scene? Are there any other tragic roles he appears to take? Where do these ideas come from exactly?

Extension:

Ian McKellen is a revered Shakespearean actor, and has played the role of King Lear. Watch this clip on Youtube. McKellen is sharing his interpretations of the character:

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=ian+mckellan+king+lear+youtube&docid=608011122214964005&mid=BE53CA9CCB667620A60ABE53CA9CCB667620A60A&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>

- Make detailed notes on the way McKellen interprets the character
- Evaluate his interpretation, given what you know about him from the opening scene, and staying close to the text.

A-level English Literature



Bridging Course - Week 3



Page Break



St Mary's Catholic School
A-level English Literature Bridging Course

Gender in Shakespeare

Throughout your school studies of Shakespeare, you have built a bank of knowledge about Shakespeare and gender. You will know that:

- Shakespeare wrote at a time when patriarchy ruled. You know that this meant that daughters were subservient to their fathers and that society had clearly defined roles for women and men.
- Male actors played the roles of female characters.
- The majority of his plays – especially his tragedies – have male characters in central roles.

Yet, despite this knowledge about societal norms at the time that Shakespeare was writing, his female characters seem to subvert the norm.

Watch the following clips (Parts 1, 2 and 3) called 'Shakespeare: Feminism and Gender' and make detailed notes on the role of women in Shakespeare's time. Part 2 discusses his play called 'The Winter's Tale' but the idea of women and independence are very relevant for your study of King Lear.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcz8nRW-i84>

Consider the female characters that you have met in your study of Shakespeare thus far that appear to challenge these defined roles of women. Make bullet point notes for each of the characters.

Gender in 'King Lear':

Read the following excerpt from an article called 'Shakespeare: dreams, duty and defiance' by Kim Ballard from the British Library website. Consider the implications of the article in light of your knowledge about Gender in Shakespeare.

Daughters in Shakespeare: dreams, duty and defiance

- Article written by: [Kim Ballard](#), published: 15 Mar 2016 on the British Library Website

A number of Shakespeare's plays show daughters negotiating the demands of their fathers, often trying to reconcile duty with a desire for independence. Kim Ballard considers five of Shakespeare's most memorable literary daughters: Juliet, Desdemona, Portia, Katherina and Cordelia.

When we consider that Shakespeare lived in an age when all actors were male and the subject matter of serious drama focused heavily on the exploits of men, it's hardly surprising that female characters are in a minority in his plays. And yet Shakespeare created many complex and engaging female roles for his young male actors to perform. Parent-child relationships feature heavily, and a significant number of these involve fathers and daughters. Interestingly, mothers are often absent from the drama, throwing the daughter/father relationship into sharp relief. A father of two daughters himself, Shakespeare's dramatic daughters make a formidable line-up of young women, most of them at a transitional stage between the protection of their childhood home and an adult life beyond it. The transition is rarely a smooth one: in both comedies and tragedies, tension rises as daughters go in search of love, adventure and independence.

Cordelia: 'this unpriz'd precious maid'

The tragedy of *King Lear* is a play about the love between a father and his youngest and favourite daughter, Cordelia, the one he hopes will look after him in his old age. At the play's opening, Lear has devised a game of flattery in order to divide the kingdom he no longer wishes to rule between Cordelia and her two older sisters, Goneril and Regan. Refusing to compete with the 'glib and oily art' (1.1.224) of their speeches, and pressed by Lear to say something more than 'nothing', Cordelia opts for simplicity and honesty in expressing her affection for him:

Good my lord,
You have begot me, bred me, lov'd me. I
Return those duties back as are right fit,
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.
Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you all? (1.1.95–100)

Unlike other daughters in Shakespeare, Cordelia's defiance of her father is not about marriage, but about a principle. Lear's disappointment with her speech earns her not land, but banishment.

Cordelia doesn't reappear until the closing stages of the play, when she returns to Britain to rescue her father from madness and the cruel neglect meted out by her older sisters. In a moving reconciliation scene, Lear admits he was wrong to treat Cordelia as he did:

LEAR If you have poison for me, I will drink it.
I know you do not love me, for your sisters
Have (as I do remember) done me wrong:
You have some cause, they have not.

CORDELIA No cause, no cause. (4.7.71–74)

In his final speech to her, after Cordelia's forces have been defeated, he imagines the closing years of his life with the daughter he loves:

Come let's away to prison:
We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage;
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
And ask of thee forgiveness. So we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies.
(5.3.8–13)

Lear is not alone among Shakespearean fathers in regretting the rash and foolish way he has treated his daughter. From a psychological point of view, the tyrannical behaviour of fathers seems to stem from their fears of facing old age alone, as well as from the hopes and strong feelings they have for their daughters. Despite Lear's earlier treatment of her, Cordelia's kindness towards him and her willingness to risk her life in order to save his, is testament to the unbroken bond that exists between this particular father and daughter.

Consider what you know about the plot of 'King Lear.' In what ways do the female characters subvert these defined roles of women?

Consider Act 1 Scene 1 of King Lear. In what ways does Shakespeare subvert / adhere to gender roles? Write your response in the table, below:

Subvert:	Adhere to

Articles on Tragedy

- Read the following articles on tragedy, and highlight any key information.
- You can also add quotations from the articles to your notes on tragedy from the previous two weeks.
- The first article is written by John Peck and Martin Coyle, who are academics who have written several books on tragedy.
- The second is a chapter written by Richard Gill, focusing on the conventions of tragedy.

Tragedy. The simplest definition of tragedy is that it is a play that ends with the death of the main character. There are two main types: the type written by Shakespeare and his contemporaries (and by classical dramatists, such as Sophocles) in which we witness terrible disorder in a society, and a narrower type of tragedy, established by Ibsen and Strindberg in the nineteenth century, which focuses on the breakdown of a family.

It is the most ambitious form of drama. Indeed, because a tragedy can carry such a weight of meaning, students sometimes shy away from a particular tragedy's full implications, creating a simplified version of what the play is about. The most common reductive approach is one which concentrates on the tragic hero or heroine, stressing his or her nobility in suffering; this is a way of making sense of tragedy in reassuring and coherent human terms. The fortitude of the hero or heroine is important, but far more central is the impression tragedy conveys of how chaotic life becomes when the established social order is destroyed. Tragedies begin with some alteration in the existing social order, and this change leads to a shocking destruction of human life. Comedy laughs at the folly of people, but tragedy asks fundamental questions about the nature and purpose of existence in a world where, if the conventional social bonds are broken, the most appalling violence and vicious self-interest become dominant. It is the tragic heroes and heroines who usually pose these large questions about life in the speeches they make as they experience the full horror of what the world can be like.

We can see all of this in Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1605). Lear abdicates as ruler of the country, a clear alteration in the social order. His good daughter, Cordelia, is banished, and Lear hands over his responsibilities to his evil daughters Goneril and Regan. A vicious power struggle develops and Lear is driven out of doors into a storm. He confronts a chaotic universe in which the state, the family, nature and reason have all been thrown into confusion. He asks whether there is any justice or order in the world, whether there is anything that distinguishes the behaviour of human beings from that of beasts. Lear goes mad, but in many ways is clear-sighted for the first time in his life.

There is also a subplot focusing on another old man, Gloucester, whose eyes are ripped out as a punishment for helping the King. The subplot increases our awareness of a world falling apart. The two old men, one mad and one blind, struggle towards Dover: in their plight we have an image of the state of humanity struggling through a terrifying world, and at the end of the journey is death.

This sense that we live in a world that is governed not by reason but by more animal-like instincts is present in both classical and Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy. The plays raise fundamental questions about the meaning of existence in such a world. The vision is pessimistic, yet not totally so: tragedy provokes terror and pity at the plight of human beings, but alongside this there is the positive fact that both the tragic hero and the dramatist have confronted the worst that the world has to offer. The challenge in studying a tragedy is to delay grasping at this positive element in the text and to appreciate first the forceful way in which tragedy creates an impression of the frightening disorder of life.

Modern tragedy, as produced by dramatists such as Ibsen, Strindberg, Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller, can, in comparison with earlier works, seem unambitious. Whereas Shakespeare and his contemporaries focus on the whole state of humanity, modern tragedy focuses on the family. It still has the power to disturb, though: the family is the central unit in society, and if family life is presented as diseased and corrupt it can undermine our confidence that there can ever be any coherent order in society. This is evident in Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* (1884): the play concerns a girl who is going blind through inherited syphilis and who kills herself to win back her father's love. The child is destroyed by the sins of her forefathers and by an adult world of deceit and illusion. Ibsen's plays might appear to be works with a social message, but they are correctly described as tragedies because of the fullness of their sense of a disordered and corrupt world. The same is true of Strindberg's plays, for example *The Father* (1887), which presents a father and mother vying for control of their child. In Strindberg, however, the emphasis is not only on something rotten in the very fabric of society and family life, but also on the disorder of the individual mind.

More recent tragedies, such as O'Neill's *A Long Day's Journey into Night* (1941) and Arthur Miller's *The Death of a Salesman* (1949) also focus on family life and continue Strindberg's psychological emphasis. What modern tragedy has in common with earlier tragedy is that it

explores the painfulness of a world where fictions of a rational social order can no longer be maintained. Yet there is a difference. It has something to do with the fact that the central characters of modern tragedy are fairly insignificant figures: they are **anti-heroes**, meaning that they are just ordinary people as opposed to the great men and women who feature in earlier tragedies. This links up with the whole question of scale: earlier tragedies look outwards, asking questions about the position of human beings in the universe. Modern tragedy centres itself in the family, and then tends to look inwards: the emphasis is on the disorder of the mind as much as on the disorder of the wider world. The heroes or heroines are as likely to be confronting the worst elements in themselves as confronting the worst elements in the world.

20 Tragedy

20.1 The place of Tragedy

Tragedy has an important place in English literary discussion. It is the custom for A-level examiners to set one of Shakespeare's tragedies, the implication being that each student must study at least one tragedy. The centrality of Tragedy is an indication of the way our literary culture has been formed. There must be a strong element of trying to justify the subject against the Classics: Greece had its tragedies, so also must English Literature.

A rare and broad genre

The mention of the Classics – the literature of Greece and Rome – leads to another point: historically, Tragedy is rare. It appears in Greece from the fifth century BC (Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripedes are the chief playwrights) and then in Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Kyd and William Shakespeare in late-sixteenth-century London. There was another phase of tragic writing in the nineteenth century, Johan von Goethe and Henrik Ibsen being, albeit very different, examples.

Tragedy is a good example of a term consisting of a number of 'family resemblances'. We use the word in a non-literary way to mean an accident, a failure, a death, or even a missed goal. In literature the word has been used more precisely, but, nevertheless, the term is still broad. What follows, therefore, are some of the characteristics found in some of the plays we usually call tragedies.

Summary

Tragedy has a place of honour in literature. Although it is discussed frequently, it is a rare thing. It is a term with a broad usage.

20.2 Philosophical issues

In *The Republic* (c. 375 BC), Plato's discussion of knowledge, morality and the life of the state, poets are banned, because they show that the good man can be hurt and, possibly, because tragedies show that the gods send evil as well as good. The focus of tragedy is also disturbing. We are asked to look away from comforting generalities such as the ennobling nature of suffering to the sheer irreducibility

with his other intellectual interests, Aristotle concentrates on problems of definition and literary form. This is a translation of his definition of Tragedy:

A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious, has magnitude, and is complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the various parts of the work; in a dramatic, not a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.

Three immediate comments are required.

- Tragedy is action of a particular kind. 'Serious' means it is about those experiences that demand deep reflection.
- Because the subject is serious, the action arouses pity and fear in the audience. (Aristotle thinks of Tragedy as a theatrical genre.)
- The experience of viewing Tragedy has a 'cleansing' effect on the audience. Their emotions are aroused, then calmed and settled. As John Milton says at the close of his play in the style of a Greek tragedy, *Samson Agonistes* (1671), those viewing it depart with 'calm of mind all passion spent'. Whether we do feel this, and if we do, what is the significance of the experience, are matters that people still debate.

Aristotle said that Tragedy has six elements: spectacle, character, plot, diction, melody and thought. The most important of these are plot, character and thought, and of these three, plot is the most significant. One of his arguments for the centrality of plot was that two very important dramatic effects are functions of the plot. These are, to use their Greek names, *anagnorisis* and *peripeteia* (see also Chapter 4, section 4.5).

Anagnorisis

Anagnorisis is the crisis of a plot, the moment when the central figure sees what before has been hidden. The term is usually translated as 'discovery' or 'recognition'. Plots are about knowledge. The plot works to dispel ignorance, but in Tragedy knowing the truth is devastating. Aristotle's example is the moment in *Oedipus the King* (c. 430 BC), when a messenger, bringing what is thought to be glad news, in fact discloses the terrible news of Oedipus's identity. Oedipus has

He was not setting down a set of rules. His aim was to describe what he found in the plays of his time. Later, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (and particularly in France), his remarks were turned into prescriptions. In particular, the remark about the action of Tragedy being complete in itself has become the basis for the idea of the three unities – unity of time, unity of place and unity of action. Unity of time was interpreted to mean that the action should be complete within twenty-four hours, and unity of action required that there be no sub-plot. No one is obliged to accept such rules, and, historically, Aristotle only spoke of unity of action.

Summary

Tragedy makes an audience ask questions about the nature of human life. Because of this, it has attracted philosophical comment. Aristotle stressed the way it engaged the audience and the manner in which tragic plots moved. He stressed the moment of recognition, which often leads to a reversal of the plot and the fortunes of the central character.

20.3 Tragedy and judgement

Those who watch plays and read books do so because they enjoy the way art is shaped and how the artist uses language. People who enjoy art also have beliefs about politics, religion or morality. To have a belief is to hold something to be true. People live by their beliefs. They argue political points, they attend public worship and they choose to act in very particular ways.

Art and belief

What is the relationship between art and belief? In many cases, the answer is: not much. For example, it is hard to see that the enjoyment of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1594) depends on our political or religious beliefs.

But Tragedy is a different matter. It is worth asking:



remain
'undiscovered' country to

Summary

Tragedy is a way of coming to terms with our mortality. We know that things end in death, but there is a pressure to see human struggles as noble. Critics have debated whether Tragedy is compatible with a Christian understanding of life.

20.5 Hero

Characters apart

The central tragic figure is usually referred to as the hero. The hero is an incomparably outstanding individual. Other characters cast light on him and he on them. There is a mutual process of definition in *Othello* (1604); his magnanimity reveals the banal littleness of Iago, and the trust of Desdemona shows how Othello has fallen into corrupting suspicion.

The tragic figure is often, but not always, a man: the central figures of John Webster's two most celebrated plays – *The White Devil* (1612) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (1623) – are very formidable women.

Tragic figures are lofty and elevated. There are a number of ways in which they rise above the common ranks of mankind.

Energy

Tragic figures are distinguished by drive and ambition; they are disturbingly single-minded. Listen to Hamlet's zealous commitment to revenge:

Haste, haste me to know it, that I with wings as swift



Grandeur

Grandeur is not an easy quality to define exactly, but what the use of the word gets at is the superiority of the tragic figure over the other characters. In their personal qualities – their integrity, sincerity, commitment, devotion – they outshine others. Webster's Duchess rises above her torturers in the darkness of a prison. They are attempting to drive her mad, but she asserts: 'I am Duchess of Malfi still' (4.3. 139). In that simple statement she shows herself to be superior to all those who have power over her.

Summary

The tragic hero is an outstanding figure who surpasses all others. He or she has apparently inexhaustible energy, an unshakeable will, a natural authority, a committed seriousness, a rare nobility, a towering imagination, courage and grandeur.

20.6 Fall

The inner fall

The outstanding figure falls. The fall can be of various kinds: moral disintegration as in *Othello* (1604); mental derangement as in *Death of a Salesman* (1949), and the diminution of human life in *Doctor Faustus* (1591). In these examples, the tragedy is chiefly inward. The mind or soul falls from reason and grace into wildness and triviality. Perhaps this is why sixteenth- and seventeenth-century playwrights dwelt in such disturbing detail on madness. Lear in the storm (and possibly Hamlet in his rantings at Ophelia) epitomize the depths to which a noble figure can fall. Ophelia speaks for the audience when she says 'O what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!' (3.1. 153).

The public fall

(the inwardness) of Tragedy is



Women in 'King Lear': Goneril, Regan and Cordelia

Answer the following questions focusing on Goneril:

1. Why does Goneril speak first?
2. How does Goneril feed Lear's egotism? What persuasive method does Shakespeare use to achieve her goals?
3. Analyse Goneril's language in the following quotation: "no less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour" How would you describe Shakespeare's language use?
4. In Goneril's speech, find an example of tragic foreshadowing. Consider this in relation to the tragic convention of blindness.
5. Analyse Goneril's presentation at the end of the scene. How is she shown to be duplicitous? Find a quotation to support your response.
6. At the end of the scene, how does Goneril show a seeming lack of care for her aging father?
7. What are Goneril's concerns about her father?
8. At the end of the scene, Goneril says 'we must do something and l'th'heat.' This is obviously a significant dramatic device on which to end the scene, but what does it also represent?

Answer the following questions focusing on Regan:

1. In what ways is Regan's declaration to her father similar to Goneril's?
2. Which line suggests that there is a strong bond and unity between Goneril and Regan?
3. At the end of the scene, Regan joins Goneril in being scathing of Lear. Analyse Regan's criticisms of her father.
4. Analyse the dramatic significance of the fact that Goneril and Regan exit the stage together.
5. Why might Shakespeare have changed the end of the scene from verse to prose? What does it suggest about the sisters?

Before you move on to analyse the character of Cordelia, we are going to take some time to reflect on the characters of Goneril and Regan.

State the extent to which you agree with the following statements about them. Complete the mindmaps that follow, adding quotation to support each point that you make:



Answer the following questions focusing on Cordelia:

1. What dramatic device does Shakespeare use to convey the strength of Cordelia's true feelings toward her father?
2. How does Cordelia convey her love for her father? What does she say?
3. In what ways is Cordelia characterized as being moral and principled? Use the word 'disingenuous' in your analysis.
4. What does Cordelia mean when she explains that she loves her father 'according to [her] bond; no more, no less'?

5. Lear is tragically blind in the opening scene. Find quotations which demonstrate that Lear is unable to 'see' Cordelia's qualities.
6. Lear refers to Cordelia as being "untender", meaning 'unbending'. How can this actually be seen as a quality of Cordelia's?
7. In what ways does Cordelia quickly take the role of tragic victim?
8. Despite her cruel treatment, Cordelia can be seen as being reverent and respectful. Find a quotation to support this.
9. How does Lear cruelly taunt Cordelia when he takes away her dowry?
10. Cordelia is presented as having foresight. Analyse the imagery used in her language which shows this.
11. Cordelia's exit is significant to emphasise her status as a tragic victim, but what does it also signify for Lear? Who is left on stage?

State the extent to which you agree with the following statement about Cordelia. Complete the mindmap, adding quotation to support each point that you make:



The tragic convention of Order and Disorder

Last week, you were introduced to the tragic convention of disorder. It can be defined as the following:

Where the actions of a character bring about turmoil and devastation. This can be on an epic scale, where the whole country is affected, or on a domestic scale, where family life is uprooted.

Of course, 'King Lear' is both an epic and domestic tragedy; it charts the upheaval of a kingdom and the total destruction of a family.

To gain a sense of order in 'King Lear' you also need to understand that in Shakespeare's plays, order and disorder have ties with superstitious beliefs about the natural world. In your study of 'Macbeth', you will have noted that upon the murder of King Duncan and the disturbance of the *natural* Chain of Being, nature itself became disorderly: as the characters wait for Macduff to return following the discovery of the murdered King, Lennox describes the terrible storm that raged the previous night and sounded like 'strange screams of death.' As the natural order of the socio-political world disintegrates, so does the natural world to the extent where even 'rheumatic diseases do abound' and the 'mousing-owl' kills the 'falcon'.

In Act 1 Scene 1 of King Lear, disorder quickly takes over and the play charts the descent into chaos on an epic and a domestic scale.

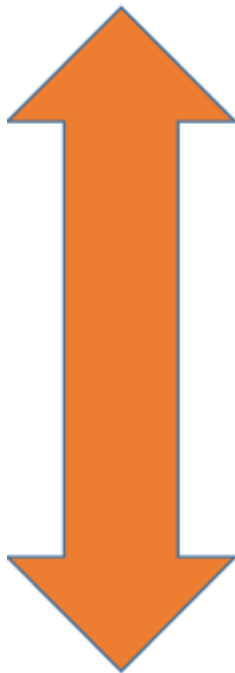
Skim and scan through Act 1 Scene 1 and note down all references to 'nature.' Note how they are connected to ideas of order and disorder.

Extension: analyse these references to nature in view of the creation of chaos and disorder.

Place the following quotations in the correct order in which they appear in the scene, and add them to the diagram below that charts the scene's descent into chaos and disorder. Add any additional quotations that suggest disorder that you have found from the scene. Make notes on what you think they reveal about ideas to do with order and disorder.

Quotation:
Lear: Know that we have divided / In three our kingdom'
Lear: "For, by the sacred radiance of the sun [...] Here I disclaim all my paternal care'
King of France, about Cordelia: 'her offence / Must be of such unnatural degree'
Cordelia: 'Nothing, my lord'
Lear, about Cordelia: 'Than on a wretch whom nature is ashamed / Almost to acknowledge hers'

Order



Disorder

A-level English Literature



Bridging Course - Week 4





Recap – Knowledge of Act 1 Scene 1 in King Lear

Remember, Paper 1 of the A-level is closed book. This means you need to know the text really well, and be able to use text references. Therefore, complete the following quotations from Act 1 Scene 1. Try to complete them without the text, but if you get really stuck, look up the quotation and try to learn and remember it.

1. "I though the king had more _____ the Duke of Albny than Cornwall".
2. "There was good _____ at his making."
3. "Meantime we shall express our _____ purpose."
4. "Which of you shall say doth love us _____?"
5. "I love you more than words can _____ the matter."
6. "Now, our _____"
7. "_____ will come of nothing. Speak again."
8. "Here I disclaim all my _____ care."
9. "Unfriended, new adopted to our _____"
10. "Better thou hadst not been _____ at all"
11. "Thee and thy _____ I seize upon."
12. "You see how full of changes his _____ is"
13. "He will but _____ us."
14. "We shall thinkg _____ on it."
15. "We must do something and in the _____"

Essay Planning and Writing

Now that you have spent three weeks analysing Act 1 Scene 1 in detail, you are ready to write an essay about what you have learnt.

To recap, you have:

Week One:

- Considered ideas that you have already learnt about tragedy when studying Macbeth at GCSE.
- Learnt about the genre elements in more detail. You were introduced to Aristotle's 'Poetics' and you learnt that there are a range of ideas about tragedy as a genre. You have learnt that tragedy as a genre has changed over time.
- Watched King Lear to get a sense of the whole play and then read the opening scene from King Lear. You answered questions on the play to test your understanding, and more challenging questions to secure your understanding.

Week Two:

- Recapped and consolidated ideas on Aristotle's Poetics.
- Learnt about other ideas associated with tragedy, including those by Hegel and Nietzsche.
- Learnt about how to analyse a dramatic literary text.
- Applied what you know directly to Act 1 Scene 1 of King Lear, focusing specifically on a detailed and close analysis of how Lear is presented as the tragic protagonist in the opening scene.

Week Three:

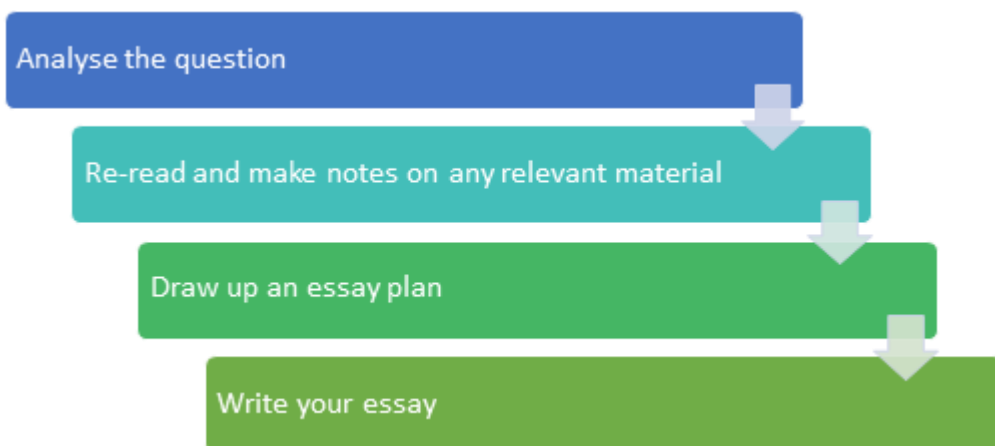
- Learnt about contextual ideas about gender.
- Read articles on tragedy – Peck and Coyle, and Richard Gill to continue to consolidate understanding of tragedy as a genre in relation to Shakespeare.
- Closely analysed how Cordelia, Goneril and Regan are presented in the opening scene.
- Learnt about the concept of order and how this is presented and then subverted in scene 1 of the play, turning to chaos and disorder.

This week, you will learn how to plan and write an essay on Act 1 Scene 1 of 'King Lear.' The question is:

“In the opening scene of the play, it is impossible to see Lear as a great king or a great father.” To what extent do you

agree? Remember to analyse Shakespeare's dramatic methods.

Approaching an essay at A Level is never as simple as just writing your response immediately. It is a staged process, whereby you should follow these steps:



Analyse the Question

You will have already developed ways of approaching this in your GCSE studies, such as

- highlight the relevant words from the question
- ensure that you understand what the question is asking
- respond directly to the question by referring to it frequently in your response.

At A Level, you need use this as a starting point, then go further.

The question that you have been asked to complete is a question that would feature in Section B, Paper One. This question always sets up a debate by asking the **extent** to which you agree with the question. This means that the question is expecting you to set up a **line of argument** that you develop throughout your essay. You can take a number of approaches:

- 1) Agree with the view entirely.
- 2) Disagree with the view entirely.
- 3) Half your essay can focus on agreeing, and half can focus on the other side of the argument.

Any way you decide to tackle the essay from the three approaches above, you can access the mark scheme and achieved 25 out of 25.

In terms of the question, you should also define any complex or potentially ambiguous terms. We refer to this as *interrogating the terms of the question*. A-level questions are big! There is a lot to them, so you should spend a significant amount of time reading the question carefully and thinking about each aspect of the question and debate.

Working through an example:

Imagine this was your question: "In Act 1 Scene 1, Cordelia is an entirely innocent tragic victim." To what extent do you agree? Remember to analyse in detail Shakespeare's dramatic methods.

- Your focus here is a specific scene (this is unlikely to be the case in the real exam, it is likely to be across the play.)
- The focus of the question is Cordelia.
- The word 'entirely' is not insignificant.
- Innocent – this provokes thought about the level of Cordelia's innocence. You might be thinking she is innocent. She is treated cruelly by her father, she cannot lie, she is put into a humiliating situation where she has to publicly declare her love for Lear, she is humiliated again when she is put before Burgundy and France without a dowry. She is disowned. She is banished. And all for remaining principled and telling her father the truth. She loves him as a daughter should - "no more or less".
- The idea of her as a victim is important – you need to think about write in relation to what you know about tragic victims: they suffer, their suffering is often not a result of their own doing, victims suffer some change of fortune etc. Is this the case for Cordelia?
- You need to think about the word 'entirely' though remember. So you might want to argue that YES, she is ENTIRELY innocent. But there could be another side of the argument to consider.
- She refuses to take part in the love test despite being told that she risks everything: "nothing comes of nothing, speak again."
- Goneril and Regan disclose that Lear has always been known to have a temper – we can assume he has been 'wrathful' in the past, and yet Cordelia still chooses to act in a defiant way – this could be seen as humiliating for Lear. She challenges her father. She challenges the king's authority. She says she knows Goneril and Regan for what they are, but still acts as defiant as she does, antagonizing Lear who banishes her, leaving him at the mercy of Goneril and Regan who quickly become clear antagonists acting against Lear.

With all of this in mind, what might an A grade A-level essay look and sound like?

“In Act 1 Scene 1, Cordelia is an entirely innocent tragic victim.” To what extent do you agree? Remember to analyse in detail Shakespeare’s dramatic methods.

In Act 1 Scene 1, Cordelia can be seen as a tragic victim because she suffers excessively at the hands of her father, despite doing nothing wrong, and behaving in a virtuous way. However, it cannot be said that she is 'entirely' innocent, because Cordelia's actions are shown to defy her father, and the king, which could be seen as both dishonourable and disruptive of the social order.

Cordelia can be seen as a tragic victim because she begins the scene being regarded by Lear as the favoured child, the king's "joy", but as a result of Lear's "dragon-like" temper, ends the scene disowned, banished from England and left with no dowry. As a result of this, she appears to experience a significant reversal of fortune. Shakespeare sets the opening scene in the public setting of Lear's court, and on stage are a number of attendants. It is a formal, courtly scene indicated by the formal entrance of Lear, indicated by the sennet and Lear wearing coronet, a crown, and then the focus of the scene being stately: Lear's "darker purpose." Given the public nature of the setting, asking his daughters to publicly tell him who "loves [him] most", could be argued to be humiliating for all three daughters. Whilst Goneril and Regan are disingenuous, Cordelia

remains virtuous as she remains truthful. Shakespeare uses the dramatic technique of the aside to show how morally torn she is: "What shall Cordelia do?" In this aside, it is clear that Lear has put Cordelia in a difficult position: does she tell her father she loves him as a daughter should, and risk that doesn't flatter his ego or does she lie. Remaining principled, her decision to say the very active word "nothing" shows how principled she is. She is characterized as a virtuous figure who will not lie for any gain or any favour. It is at this point that Cordelia's fate is sealed, however. In a highly dramatic speech, which almost sounds like a curse, Lear calls to "the mysteries of Hecate, and the night" to bear witness as he "disclaims all paternal care" which dramatizes and exaggerates Lear's new found hatred for Cordelia. Very quickly, she has fallen from the daughter that Lear "always loved the most", to a "sometime daughter", who is "unfriended, new-adopted to our hate", all for simply telling the truth. For the audience, this may seem like a terrible injustice. However, Shakespeare then exaggerates Cordelia's suffering by having put before Burgundy and France in another sort of love test. With no dowry, Lear offers Cordelia to both men. Without any value, Cordelia suffers further humiliation as Burgundy rejects her. Tragic victims typically arouse sympathy from readers and audiences, and Cordelia's character certainly does that. We pity the

fortune she loses, despite her claim of love for her father, it is simply not enough in Lear's eyes.

However, that being said, there is some debate about whether Cordelia is 'entirely' innocent. As a young woman in a patriarchal society, Cordelia does challenge social order as she defies her father and challenges the authority of the king. This is a choice that Cordelia makes consciously, again, shown by the aside. Not only that, at the end of the scene, Cordelia tells Goneril and Regan: "I know you what you are" and therefore the audience might be critical of Cordelia, for making a choice that antagonizes Lear which results in her punishment. Cordelia does not put up much resistance as she is banished, leaving Lear vulnerable to the evil and duplicitous machinations of Goneril and Regan who end the scene plotting against their father. In addition, whilst some tragic victims appear to lose everything, Cordelia, although she loses her father and sisters, she gains a husband in the King of France. France sees Cordelia's value as being "rich, being poor...thee and thy virtues I seize upon." As such, some good comes of Cordelia's suffering; there is a positive that emerges from the breakdown of her relationship with her father. In this way, Cordelia might not 'entirely' be regarded as a victim.

So, back to your question.

In relation to YOUR question, what exactly would you define as a 'great king'? What exactly is a 'great father'? The best answers will engage with all aspects of the question – so the word 'impossible' is important in this debate. Is it really impossible? Think about what the word *impossible* really means. Also, the question reminds you of the need to explore the methods Shakespeare uses. Don't overlook this reminder.

Look at the following ideas about what a 'great king' might entail and consider them in relation to King Lear in Act One Scene One:

- King Lear is a good role-model
- He has clear and rational goals
- King Lear rules with integrity
- King Lear leads by example
- King Lear has a moral purpose: benefits for the greater good
- King Lear is supportive
- King Lear is decisive, but not rash
- King Lear inspires others
- King Lear motivates and support others
- King Lear accepts responsibility

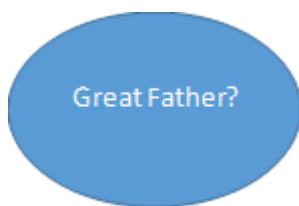
Complete the spider diagram using quotation from Act One Scene One to consider the extent to which Lear is a 'great King', in light of the characteristics listed above. You might want to use a page of A4 if you would like more space. As you plan, refer frequently to the scene:



Now, make your own list of the characteristics that constitute a 'great father.' Some have been started for you:

- King Lear is fair
- King Lear shows love and compassion
- King Lear has a good relationship with his daughters and knows them well
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-

Complete the spider diagram using quotation from Act One Scene One to consider the extent to which Lear is a 'great father', in light of the characteristics listed above. You might want to use a page of A4 if you would like more space. As you plan, refer frequently to the scene:



Re-read and make notes on any material:

First and foremost, this refers to the text. You make close reference to the text throughout your essay. The best reference can be in the form of quotation, which are short, precisely selected and are integrated into the main body of your sentences.

In your A Level course you will be given a copy of the texts that you can annotate. If you can print Act One Scene One and annotate it, that is advisable.

If not, read the text online at <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/lear/full.html> and make a note of each of the quotations that might be useful for this question.

Note: the question focuses on the King himself, but as a measure of how 'great' a king and father he is, it is useful to look at the opinions and actions of the other characters. Bear this in mind when you are gathering quotations; it is not advisable just to solely focus on what Lear says.

References to Tragedy

At this stage, it is useful to look back at all notes that you have made about tragedy, and the notes that you made on the critical reading that you have done.

In a debate about the extent to which Lear is a 'great' king and father, it is imperative that you understand this in relation to tragedy.

Look at the conventions of tragedy that you have gathered over the last three weeks. Note down which are relevant to Lear in this scene and consider how they influence your argument.

Planning your Essay:

Your response needs to be structured into clearly marked paragraphs that each have different topics in relation to your argument. These paragraphs should flow and should include clear topic sentences that underpin your argument at the beginning of each paragraph.

Therefore, it makes sense to me to plan your response by separating and grouping your ideas into paragraphs.

You can do this by:

1. Using five or six different colours, group the notes that you have made into different arguments.
2. Divide a page of A4 into 6 paragraphs (see the following page), OR
3. Draw a spider diagram that is sectioned into five or six different arguments. For each argument, ensure that you have separate sections that refer to quotations that you have planned for your essay, analysis of dramatic methods and references to tragedy.

Please note that essays at A Level are more fluid and there are no precise 'rules' about how many paragraphs you should include, for example. Six is a guide but it's fine if you have five, and sometimes even four long, detailed and developed paragraphs.

"In the opening scene of the play, it is impossible to see Lear as a great king or a great father."

To what extent do you agree? Remember to analyse Shakespeare's dramatic methods.

Paragraph One Argument: Quotations: Dramatic methods: References to Tragedy:	Paragraph Two Argument: Quotations: Dramatic methods: References to Tragedy:
Paragraph One Argument: Quotations: Dramatic methods: References to Tragedy:	Paragraph One Argument: Quotations: Dramatic methods: References to Tragedy:

Paragraph Five Argument:	Paragraph Six Argument:
Quotations:	Quotations:
Dramatic methods:	Dramatic methods:
References to Tragedy:	References to Tragedy:

Writing Your Essays at A Level:

- Unpack and plan all elements and aspects of the question.
- No need for introductions / conclusions.
- Answer the question head-on. No implied view / skirting around the topic / general introductions. Be specific and clear.
- Bring every point explicitly back to the question. Use the words from the question frequently.
- Ensure ideas are specific – avoid any sort of generalisation.
- Try not to be too verbose or flowery in expression. Be precise, succinct, accurate and specific.
- Use the text well – refer to specific moments / textual references to support all ideas.
- Integrate comments on methods.
- Use terminology accurately.
- Use language synonymous with the genre of tragedy – connect ideas to genre throughout, relevant to the question.
- Aim for grammatical clarity and accuracy. Be clear, precise and focused in expression. Avoid brackets.

Now to write your essay.

Good luck, and try to enjoy the debate.