

# Lear: A Man More Sinned Against Than Sinning?

Points to consider when planning your essay

# Planning

- ✦ It is a good idea to jot down - briefly and as messily as you like - all the points that come to mind when you consider the title.
- ✦ Next, you should look at the points and see if it is clear on which side of the argument your sympathies lie.

# Introduction

- ✦ Lear has flaws but what he suffers as a result of his poor judgement and egotism is out of all proportion to these failings.
- ✦ He has sinned, certainly, but ultimately he is more sinned against than sinning.

# The Love Test

- ✦ Lear is vain, egotistical and needy in this scene.
- ✦ He has been praised and flattered for so long that he takes this as his due and confuses his office with his person.

# Humiliated and quick-tempered

- ✦ Lear banishes Cordelia and Kent in a matter of moments.
- ✦ His judgement here is very poor, but he is shocked and has been publicly humiliated.

# Slightly pathetic

- ✦ Lear's love test shows his vulnerability.
- ✦ He is unable to see General and Regan's flattery for what it is, and he is similarly unable to see the true depth of Cordelia's love and her distaste for this public show of affection.
- ✦ Lear displays poor judgement and rash temper here, but let us not forget that Cordelia is not blameless and Lear is a pathetic figure underneath it all. If such public displays of affection are necessary in order for him to judge his self-worth then he appears a rather misguided and pathetic figure.

# Treatment at the hands of Goneril and Regan

- ✦ Both his daughters torment and abuse him.
- ✦ They bully him and take advantage of his weaknesses.
- ✦ Lear soon realises that he has wronged Cordelia.

# The Fool

- ✦ Lear tolerates the Fool's criticism because he acknowledges the truth of what he is saying.
- ✦ The Fool articulates Lear's interior monologue.



# Regan's treatment of Lear

- ✦ He goes to her in search of better treatment
- ✦ She and her husband have left before he arrives
- ✦ Lear almost begs Regan to take him in
- ✦ The audience shares Lear's horror on seeing that Regan and Goneril are conspiring against their father
- ✦ Regan and Goneril's treatment of their father is unspeakably cruel

# Storm Scenes

- ✦ Important
- ✦ Show Lear learning through suffering
- ✦ Appreciates loyalty and realises the Fool has been right

# Humility

- ✦ Reunion with Cordelia
- ✦ Genuine remorse
- ✦ 'If you have poison for me, I will drink it'
- ✦ 'Pray you now, forget and forgive; I am old and foolish'

# Sorrow and Grief

- ✦ Just as we see Lear has been redeemed and does not deserve to suffer any more, Cordelia is hanged.