King Lear

Act I – V Questions

Act I

Scene I

1. Explain briefly why King Lear has called his family together in the first scene.

2. Which characters are involved in the subplot of the story?

3. Name one of the major themes of the play.

4. At what period in history does the play take place?

5. Why does Kent defend Cordelia when her father banishes her?

6. Why does the Duke of Burgundy reject the offer of Cordelia’s hand in marriage?

7. Who are the Duke of Albany and the Duke of Cornwall?

8. Who eventually marries Lear’s dowerless daughter? Where will she live after her marriage?

9. What advice does Cordelia give to her sisters as she leaves with the King of France?

10. What do Goneril and Regan do as soon as everyone is gone and they are alone together?

Scene II

1. In his soliloquy, what does Edmund want to take from his legitimate half-brother Edgar?

2. What is the piece of paper Edmund is supposedly hiding from his father? What does it say?

3. What is Gloucester’s reaction to the letter?

4. Give an example of alliteration in Edmund’s soliloquy.

5. What does Edmund think of his father’s view of nature?

6. What does Edmund tell Edgar about his father?

7. What does Edmund tell Edgar he must do if he intends to walk in public?

8. Where is Edgar instructed to go?

9. How will Edgar be able to talk to his father?

10. Why is Edmund gloating at the end of the scene?

Scene III

1. Where is the scene set?

2. What arrangement have Goneril and Regan made for the care of their father, the king?

3. Where has King Lear gone at the beginning of the scene?

4. What kind of servant is Oswald?

5. What does Goneril instruct Oswald to do in order to anger the king?

6. Why does Goneril pretend to be sick?

7. Where does Goneril plan to tell her father to go if he does not like it at her palace?

8. Why does Goneril decide to write to her sister?

9. What is the significance of the father/daughter relationship in this scene?

10. What would an Elizabethan audience of Shakespeare’s day have thought of Goneril’s attitude toward her father?

Scene IV

1. Why does Kent speak in verse and then change to prose in the beginning of the scene?

2. Why does the Fool offer his coxcomb to Kent?

3. Why is the Fool often referred to as the chorus?

4. What behavior does Oswald demonstrate to the King?

5. Why is Goneril angry at her father in this scene?

6. In Lear’s rage against his daughter Goneril, who does he think he can turn to?

7. How many of Lear’s followers does Goneril take from him?

8. What does Goneril do to warn her sister of Lear’s departure from Albany’s palace?

9. How does the Duke of Albany feel about his wife’s actions against the King?

10. What is Goneril’s response to Albany’s fears?

Scene V

1. Who is sent with a letter for Lear’s daughter Regan?

2. How does the Fool expect Regan to receive her father?

3. How does Lear feel about Cordelia at this point in the play?

4. What does the Fool mean when he says that a snail has a house to put his “head in, not to give it away to his daughters”?

5. What does Lear want to do to Goneril because of her ingratitude?

6. In what way is Lear’s illusory world disappearing?

7. What does the Fool mean when he says he is “old before his time?”

8. What evidence do we have that Lear believes in a higher being?

9. What is the purpose of the Fool in this scene?

10. What is the main purpose of this short scene?

Act II

Scene I

1. Why does Edmund ask Edgar to raise his sword against him?

2. Why is Edmund’s arm bleeding in this scene?

3.What does Gloucester propose to do after Edgar’s escape?

4. Who does Gloucester ask to help him find Edgar and bring him to justice?

5. Who does Regan blame for Edgar’s alleged problem with his father?

6. What will the King find when he and his followers reach Regan’s house?

7. Why have Cornwall and Regan come to Gloucester’s castle? What do they wish to discuss with him?

8. Why does Cornwall commend Edmund?

9. Whom does Gloucester call his “loyal and natural boy”?

10. Why does Gloucester intend to publish Edgar’s picture throughout the kingdom?

Scene II & III

1. Why is Kent violently angry at Oswald, Goneril’s steward?

2. Does Oswald pretend that Kent is a total stranger to him? What proves him wrong?

3. Why is Kent placed in the stocks?

4. What does Regan think would be worse than putting her father’s servant in the stocks?

5. What is Cornwall’s response to Kent’s statement that he serves the King?

6. How does Gloucester feel about Kent being placed in the stocks?

7. Why does Kent speak in verse when he is alone in the stocks and in prose earlier in the scene?

8. Whose letter does Kent read before he falls asleep?

9. Where has Edgar been living since he fled from his father’s castle?

10. How will he disguise himself in order to save his life?

Scene IV

1. Why is the King puzzled when he arrives at Gloucester’s castle?

2. Whom does the King see in the stocks? Why was he put in the stocks?

3. Which metaphor does the Fool use to foreshadow the storm?

4. What excuse do Cornwall and Regan give for not greeting the King when he arrives at Gloucester’s castle?

5. Why has Lear come to Regan’s house?

6. Why does Lear fall on his knees to Regan?

7. How many of Lear’s men has Goneril dismissed when he arrives at Gloucester’s castle?

8. How many men does Regan want him to have in his train?

9. Whom does Lear refer to as “unnatural hags”?

10. Where does Lear go after his daughters reduce his train of followers to nothing?

Act III

Scene I

1. Where is the King at this point in the play?

2. Who has stayed with the King to give him comfort?

3. What are the rumors concerning Cornwall and Albany?

4. Who are the spies sent to England by the King of France?

5. What news do France’s spies bring regarding King Lear?

6. Where does Kent think Cordelia will be staying?

7. What does Kent tell the Gentleman to show Cordelia as proof of Kent’s identity?

8. Before the Gentleman goes to Dover, what does he do?

9. What does the French Army intend to do in England?

10. What is Cordelia’s purpose for her temporary stay in Dover?

Scene II

1. How does Lear set the scene at the beginning?

2. How does Lear compare his daughters to the elements?

3. What does the Fool beg Lear to do to get out of the storm?

4. Who later joins Lear and the Fool in the storm?

5. Where does Kent finally lead Lear to shelter him from the storm?

6. What does Kent plan to do after he finds shelter for Lear and the Fool?

7. How does Lear express his compassion for his Fool?

8. What does Lear wear on his head when he goes out into the storm?

9. Whose prophecy does the Fool recite?

10. According to the King, who has sent the terrible storm on the heath?

Scene III

1. Why do Cornwall and Regan refuse to grant Gloucester the use of his own castle?

2. How does Edmund feel about the abusive treatment of the King?

3. What news does Gloucester’s dangerous letter contain?

4. What powers are “already footed” in this scene according to Gloucester?

5. Where does Gloucester keep the letter?

6. What does Edmund decide to do about the news his father has given him?

7. Why does Edmund betray his father’s trust in him?

8. What does Gloucester tell Edmund to say to Cornwall if he asks for him?

9. What will be the penalty if Cornwall discovers Gloucester’s intentions?

10. In what way does this scene function as an interim scene?

Scene IV

1. What does the storm on the heath symbolize?

2. Who is Edgar in disguise?

3. What type of clothing does Tom o’ Bedlam wear?

4. According to Lear, who are the three sophisticated ones?

5. Who does Lear say is the “thing itself”?

6. Whom does Lear pity in his prayer on the heath?

7. What is Gloucester carrying as he enters the hovel?

8. What does Edgar call Gloucester when he approaches the hovel?

9. How does Gloucester’s situation compare to Lear’s?

10. Why has Gloucester come out into the storm?

Scene V

1. What does Edmund produce as evidence of Gloucester’s treason?

2. What important information does the letter contain?

3. How does Cornwall reward Edmund for being his informant against Gloucester?

4. Why does Edmund call upon the heavens?

5. What will Cornwall do to Gloucester for his crime of treason?

6. What is Edmund’s main ambition?

7. What does Cornwall think might have been the cause of Edgar’s plot to murder his father?

8. What does Cornwall promise to do to replace Edmund’s loss of his father?

9. What is Cornwall’s attitude as a Duke in this scene?

10. How will Cornwall search for the Duke of Gloucester?

Scene VI

1. Who are the defendants in Lear’s mock trial?

2. Who is chosen by Lear as the “justicer” in the mock trial?

3. Why does Lear refer to Edgar as a “robed man of justice”?

4. What is the Fool’s position in the mock trial?

5. How does Kent respond to his position as one of the judges?

6. Whom does the King arraign first in the mock trial?

7. What is Goneril’s crime in the trial?

8. What does the King wish to do to Regan?

9. What does Gloucester tell Kent to do with the King? Why?

10. What is significant about Edgar’s actions at the end of the scene?

Scene VII

1. Who accompanies Goneril on her way to see her husband, the Duke of Albany?

2. What news does Oswald bring to Cornwall and Regan?

3. Why does Cornwall advise Edmund to leave?

4. What happens to Gloucester after the servants bring him back?

5. Where does this scene take place?

6. Why does Gloucester say he took the King to Dover?

7. Who gouges out both of Gloucester’s eyes? Who encourages him?

8. Who draws his sword on Cornwall and wounds him?

9. Who kills the servant of Cornwall by stabbing him in the back?

10. Which characters appear to be the only good ones in this scene?

Act IV

Scene I

1. Who is leading the blind Duke as the scene opens?

2. Who leads Gloucester to Dover?

3. What is Edgar’s mood in his soliloquy?

4. How does Edgar feel when he sees his blind father?

5. What does Gloucester tell the old man to bring for Edgar?

6. How does the old man respond to Gloucester’s request for clothes?

7. Why is it difficult for Edgar to keep up his disguise?

8. Why does Gloucester give Edgar his purse?

9. In this scene how does Gloucester feel about the distribution of wealth?

10. Where does Gloucester want Edgar to lead him near Dover?

Scene II

1. Why does Goneril send Edmund away when they arrive at Albany’s palace?

2. In what ways has Albany’s disposition changed?

3. To what does Goneril attribute Albany’s change?

4. What does Albany accuse Goneril of doing?

5. What news does Goneril bring to her husband, Albany?

6. In what way does Goneril compare Edmund with Albany?

7. How does Albany describe Goneril’s personality?

8. What important news does a messenger bring to Goneril and Albany?

9. What is Goneril’s reaction to Cornwall’s death?

10. Why does Albany want revenge?

Scene III

1. Where has the King of France gone?

2. What letters does Kent ask the Gentleman about?

3. What is Cordelia’s reaction to Kent’s letters about her father?

4. What reason does Kent give for the differences in Lear’s daughters?

5. Why does Lear refuse to see his daughter Cordelia?

6. Who will watch over the King in Kent’s absence?

7. Is Kent aware that Cornwall has died?

8. What does the “holy water” represent in this scene?

9. Who are the “dog-hearted daughters” whom Kent refers to?

10. Where is Lear in this scene?

Scene IV

1. As Cordelia enters, what has she heard regarding the King?

2. What does Cordelia instruct her officer to do?

3. Who does Cordelia depend on to heal her ailing father?

4. What will the doctor use in his treatment of the King?

5. What kind of treatment does the doctor prescribe?

6. In what way will Cordelia’s tears aid the King’s treatment?

7. Why is Cordelia anxious to find her father very soon?

8. Why does Cordelia’s army invade Britain?

9. What is this scene’s main function?

10. What was the King wearing when Cordelia last saw him?

Scene V

1. Has Albany raised an army to fight France?

2. Who is a better soldier than Albany? Why?

3. What does Regan think Edmund has set out to do?

4. Why does Regan want Gloucester out of the way?

5. Who sent Oswald with a letter for Edmund?

6. Why does Regan want to read Goneril’s letter to Edmund?

7. Does Oswald know what the letter contains?

8. According to Regan, what are the obvious signs of Goneril’s love for Edmund?

9. What does Regan ask Oswald to do to Gloucester?

10. How does Oswald feel about his instructions to kill Gloucester?

Scene VI

1. How is Edgar dressed in this scene?

2. Where is Gloucester standing when Edgar tells him he is at the edge of the cliff?

3. Who does Gloucester think has saved him when he supposedly jumped off the cliff?

4. What does Edgar call Gloucester after he has jumped?

5. How does Gloucester say that he can see without eyes?

6. What is the “great stage of fools”?

7. Who is Oswald’s “proclaimed prize”?

8. Who kills Oswald to protect Gloucester?

9. What are Goneril and Edmund plotting against Albany?

10. What is the Gentleman’s news to Edgar about the war with France?

Scene VII

1. Why does Kent prefer not to reveal his true identity to anyone except Cordelia?

2. In what way has the King’s attire been changed?

3. Why is the King able to sleep so well?

4. How long has it been since Cordelia has seen her father?

5. When Lear awakens, where does he think he has been?

6. Is Lear angry at Cordelia in this scene?

7. How does Cordelia feel when her father finally recognizes her as his daughter?

8. Why does the doctor want Cordelia and the others to leave the King alone after they have spoken with him for a while?

9. What news does the Gentleman tell the disguised Kent about Edgar and Kent?

10. Who has taken the former Duke of Cornwall’s place as the leader of the people?

Act V

Scene I & II

1. Why is Albany concerned about the battle with France?

2. How does Albany finally resolve his dilemma about fighting the French?

3. To which sister has Edmund sworn his love?

4. Who joins Albany in the tent to talk about the upcoming battle with France?

5. Who delivers Goneril’s letter to Albany?

6. What information does the letter contain?

7. Why is Goneril the better choice of mate for Edmund?

8. How does Edmund plan to treat Lear and Cordelia if Britain wins the battle with France?

9. Where does Edgar place his father during the battle?

10. What does Edgar tell his father when he does not want to flee to safety after the battle?

Scene III

1. Who has taken Lear and Cordelia captive after the French have lost the battle?

2. Who delivers Goneril’s letter, intended for Edmund, to Albany?

3. Who answers the Herald’s third trumpet sound?

4. How does Gloucester die?

5. How do Goneril and Regan die?

6. How does Edmund react to being stabbed by Edgar?

7. What have Goneril and Edmund planned to do to Albany?

8. How does Lear feel about going to prison with Cordelia?

9. What becomes of Cordelia in prison?

10. Who is left to rule the kingdom at the end of the play?