

SYDNEY
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EDUCATION



ON CUE

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The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Hannah Brown is the Education Projects Officers for the Sydney Theatre Company. You can contact Hannah on

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ABOUT *ON CUE* AND STC

ABOUT ON CUE

STC Ed has a suite of resources located on our website to enrich and strengthen teaching and learning surrounding the plays in the STC season. Each show will be accompanied by an On Cue e-publication which will feature all the essential information for teachers and students, such as curriculum links, information about the playwright, synopsis, character analysis, thematic analysis and suggested learning experiences. For more in-depth digital resources surrounding the **ELEMENTS OF DRAMA, DRAMATIC FORMS, STYLES, CONVENTIONS and TECHNIQUES**, visit the STC Ed page on our website.

Such resources include:

- videos
- design sketchbooks
- worksheets
- posters

ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

In 1980, STC's first Artistic Director Richard Wherrett defined STC's mission as to provide "first class theatrical entertainment for the people of Sydney – theatre that is grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun."

Almost 35 years later, under the leadership of Artistic Director Andrew Upton, that ethos still rings true.

STC offers a diverse program of distinctive theatre of vision and scale at its harbourside home venue, The Wharf; Sydney Theatre at Walsh Bay; and Sydney Opera House, as its resident theatre company.

STC has a proud heritage as a creative hub and incubator for Australian theatre and theatre makers, developing and producing eclectic Australian works, interpretations of classic repertoire and great international writing. STC strives to create theatre experiences that reflect Sydney's distinctive personality and engage audiences.

Strongly committed to engagement in the community, STC's Education and Communities programs aim to inspire theatre appreciation and participation not only in theatres but also in schools, community halls; wherever people get together. STC offers an innovative School Drama™ program; partners with groups in metropolitan Sydney, regional centres and rural areas; and reaches beyond NSW with touring productions

throughout Australia. Through these partnerships and initiatives, STC plays a part in ensuring a creative, forward-thinking and sociable future by engaging with young people, students and teachers.

The theatre careers of many of Australia's internationally renowned artists have been launched and fostered at STC, including Mel Gibson, Judy Davis, Hugo Weaving, Geoffrey Rush, Toni Collette, Rose Byrne, Benedict Andrews and Cate Blanchett.

STC often collaborates with international artists and companies and, in recent years, the company's international profile has grown significantly with productions touring extensively to great acclaim.

STC is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, by its arts funding and advisory body, and by the New South Wales Government through Arts NSW.

sydneytheatre.com.au

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

SUITABLE FOR
Years 11 and 12

SUBJECTS

Drama
English



Robyn Nevin and Eryn Jean Norvill in rehearsal for STC's *King Lear*, 2015.
Image: Hon Boey. ©

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT - SHAKESPEARE

Born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, William Shakespeare was the son of Mary Arden and John Shakespeare. At age 18, he married Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children, one of whom died in 1596.

Up until 1592, very little is known about Shakespeare as a writer, though there is evidence that his plays were being performed in London by that time. In 1594, he became a founding member, actor, playwright and shareholder of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, working in Shoreditch. By 1603, they had acquired royal patronage and became the King's Men on the accession of James I.

The precise chronology of Shakespeare's plays is unknown. His earliest plays probably include *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Comedy of Errors*, the three parts of *Henry VI*, *Richard III*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Titus Andronicus*. The sonnets too were early examples of his writing, though they remained unpublished until 1609.

It is believed that *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It* and *Julius Caesar* were all completed before the turn of the century, with plays including *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night* and *Othello* coming in the very early 1600s.

Chronologically, *King Lear* is thought to sit alongside *Timon of Athens* and *Macbeth*, followed soon after by *Pericles*, *Coriolanus*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*. Having completed around 40 plays that we know of, Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616, at the age of 52.

(Sydney Theatre Company program, 2015.)



Mark Leonard Winter in rehearsal for STC's *King Lear*, 2015. Image: Hon Boey. ©

SYNOPSIS

King Lear decides to abdicate and divide his kingdom between his three daughters. The youngest, Cordelia, unlike her sisters, refuses to make a public declaration of love for her father. She is disinherited and, without a dowry, is married by the King of France. The Earl of Kent defends her and is banished by Lear. The two elder daughters, Goneril and Regan, inherit the kingdom together with their husbands.

The Earl of Gloucester, deceived by his bastard son Edmund, disinherits his legitimate son, Edgar, who is forced to go into hiding to save his life.

Lear, now stripped of power, quarrels with both Goneril and Regan about the conditions on which he is to stay with them. He goes out into a storm, accompanied by his Fool and by Kent, who has disguised himself as a servant to remain with Lear. They encounter Edgar, disguised as a mad beggar. Gloucester goes to help Lear but is betrayed by Edmund and captured by Regan and Cornwall who, as a punishment, put out his eyes.

Lear is taken secretly to Dover, where Cordelia has landed with a French army. The blind Gloucester meets, but does not recognise, Edgar, who leads him to Dover. Lear and Cordelia are reconciled but in the ensuing battle are captured

by Goneril and Regan's forces. Both Goneril and Regan are in love with Edmund. Discovering this, Goneril's husband Albany forces Edmund to defend himself against the charge of treachery. A mysterious figure appears to challenge Edmund and, after fatally wounding him, reveals himself to be Edgar. News arrives that Goneril has poisoned Regan and then committed suicide. Before dying, Edmund reveals that he has ordered the deaths of Lear and Cordelia.

(Sydney Theatre Company, 2015)



CHECK OUT OUR PRE-SHOW IN-THE-KNOW FOR MORE FAST FACTS ABOUT THE PLAY!



Alan Dukes, Geoffrey Rush and Colin Moody in rehearsal for STC's *King Lear*, 2015. Image: Hon Boey. ©

CHARACTERS

LEAR

Lear is one of Shakespeare's most complex characters, encompassing many guises including domineering monarch, headstrong father and perilous madman. He begins the play in control of his royal court and progressively loses everything he holds dear.

In the first scene of the play, Lear is the King of England, preparing for his retirement. He intends to allocate his kingdom equally between his three daughters – Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. Lear asks his daughters who loves him the most, and in so doing, reveals a tragic flaw in his character. He is susceptible to flattery and deception, and blind to everything but his own passions and affections. In this way, Lear is a classic tragic protagonist, defined by Aristotle as a person “who is not eminently good or just, yet whose fortune is brought about by some error or frailty”.

Lear's lack of insight, both into others and himself, is a recurring theme of the play. While the madness he succumbs to exacerbates this flaw, his daughter Regan says, “'Tis the infirmity of his age. Yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself” (King Lear, 1.1). When the deceit of Goneril and Regan becomes apparent to Lear, he begins his descent into madness and walks recklessly into a storm.

Although Lear's flaws trigger the many tragedies in the play, he is still a largely sympathetic character, as noted by Shakespearean scholar William Hazlitt: “It is his rash haste, his violent impetuosity, his blindness to every thing but the dictates of his passions or affections, that produces all his misfortunes, that aggravates his impatience of them, that enforces our pity for him” (Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, 1817). His character also inspires the devotion and loyalty of Cordelia, Kent, the Fool, and others throughout the play. Only when Lear has relinquished everything – his rule, his court and his sanity – can he see that Cordelia's love for him is true. However, by this point his impetuosity has already triggered the events that will lead to both their deaths.

FOOL

The Fool is a loyal friend, confidante, and the loudest critic of Lear and his flaws. Their relationship is characterised by a grim honesty, where the Fool can openly criticise Lear without consequence, unlike any other character in the play. The Fool keeps both the audience and Lear informed of each fall in the former King's status. The Fool bluntly tells Lear, “I am better than thou art now; I am a fool; thou art nothing” (King Lear 1.4). According to Robyn Nevin, who plays the Fool in STC's production, “His role is clear: he is the moral compass, he is the guide. He's the one who sees, who tries to bring sight to Lear” (STC King Lear program). Strangely, the Fool disappears after Act 3, Scene 6, without further explanation. An oblique reference in Act 5 – Lear says “And my poor fool is hanged” – suggests that whatever befell the Fool, his fate was always intertwined with that of his King (King Lear 5.3).



Robyn Nevin and Neil Armfield in rehearsal for STC's *King Lear*, 2015. Image: Hon Boey. ©

CHARACTERS (CONT.)

GONERIL

As Lear's eldest daughter, Goneril professes her love and devotion for her father at the beginning of the play in effusive language. She even expresses concern at his rash treatment of Cordelia. However, her intentions to dismantle Lear's last vestiges of power soon become clear, as does her desire for Edmund, Gloucester's illegitimate son. When Goneril's husband Albany confronts her about her betrayal of Lear and lust for Edmund in Act 4 Scene 2, she berates him as a fool who is leaving England vulnerable to France's invasion. While the thirst for power initially drove Goneril's actions, her desire for Edmund soon takes over, admitting "I had rather lose the battle than that sister / Should loosen him and me" (King Lear 5.1). Eventually, driven by mutual jealousy over Edmund, Goneril kills Regan and commits suicide rather than face justice for her actions.

REGAN

Regan is Lear's middle daughter and while she aligns herself with Goneril to destroy their father, she initially appears to be a gentler character. Lear remarks "Thy tender-hefted nature shall not give / Thee o'er to harshness" (King Lear 2.4). However, Regan is eventually shown to be as bloodthirsty as her sister, as she disrespects Gloucester by pulling his beard then goads her husband into taking out both of Gloucester's eyes. When Regan's husband is killed by a servant faithful to Gloucester, Regan's focus turns to marrying Edmund, as "more convenient is he for my hand / Than for your lady's [Goneril's]" (King Lear 4.5). This jealousy ultimately proves to be the downfall of both sisters.

CORDELIA

Cordelia is Lear's youngest and most treasured daughter ("He always loved our sister most" states Goneril in the first scene), who refuses to flatter him when he asks his daughters how much they love him. While Shakespeare allows Cordelia two asides to the audience in the first scene of the play, which makes clear her pure devotion to her father, when it comes to her turn to speak to him she simply says, "Nothing, my lord", followed by "I love your majesty / According to my bond, no more nor less" (King Lear 1.1). Cordelia's clear and plain language contrasts with that of her sisters. Her decision not to flatter Lear not only puts her relationship with her family in danger, it also puts at risk her marriage prospects. Cordelia has two suitors: the Duke of Burgundy and the King of France, and only the latter still wants to marry her after she has been disinherited by Lear. Cordelia appears later in the play in Dover, having raised an army to bring to Lear's defence. She is concerned for her now-ill father and hopes to restore him to health. Although Lear does eventually recognise Cordelia's love for him, they are both captured. At the end of the play, Cordelia is finally silenced – hanged under Edmund's orders, who intended her death to seem a suicide.

CHARACTERS (CONT.)

EDMUND

Edmund is the illegitimate son of Gloucester and from his first soliloquy in Act 1 Scene 2 announces himself as a villain, motivated by the social exclusion he has experienced as the illegitimate son of an Earl – “Why brand they us / With ‘base’? with ‘baseness’? ‘bastardy’? ‘base, base’?” (King Lear 1.2). He is both calculated and opportunistic in his manipulation of several characters: he charms both Goneril and Regan, betrays Edgar and deceives other key members of the royal court. His motivation is the humiliation of being a bastard child despite being loved by his father. Edmund is matter of fact and economic in his motivation saying “Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit” (King Lear 1.2). However, after hearing his half-brother’s story of their father’s death, Edmund repents and, too late, tries to save Lear and Cordelia. Even Edmund acknowledges this penitence is uncharacteristic – “some good I mean to do / Despite of mine own nature” (King Lear 5.3).

EDGAR

Edgar is the elder son of Gloucester, and as he was born in wedlock he is the sole heir to Gloucester’s fortune. Edgar is a noble and loyal character who experiences a huge social descent exceeded only by that of Lear’s demise, as he transforms from a nobleman’s heir to the status of a runaway disguised as a crazed beggar. When Edgar encounters his father Gloucester, who has since been blinded and does not recognise him, he does not reveal his true identity straightaway. Instead, Edgar delivers his father safely to Dover, where he finally reveals his identity only for Gloucester to die of the conflict between passion, joy and grief. Edgar then confronts Edmund and wounds him fatally. Edgar is one of the few characters who survive the tragic events of the play and his final words indicate a desire that henceforth appearances and speech should be transparent and true, saying “Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say” (King Lear 5.3).

GLOUCESTER

Gloucester is an Earl and senior figure in Lear’s court. Like Lear, he is susceptible to flattery and tends to be overly concerned with appearances. He is also the father of two sons: Edgar, his heir, and Edmund, his illegitimate son. The secondary plot involving Gloucester and his sons acts as a counterpoint to that of Lear and his daughters: both fathers are deceived by their progeny and are initially unable to see their children’s motivations with clarity, both fathers are led to (temporary) safety by their faithful offspring (Cordelia and Edgar). Gloucester is metaphorically blinded by Edmund’s lies of Edgar’s betrayal, an accusation which he accepts unquestioningly. Later, Gloucester is literally blinded by Regan and her husband, the Duke of Cornwall. While being blinded appears to humble Gloucester, he is plagued by persistent suicidal thoughts.

PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

STC On Cue usually features analysis of key themes and ideas present in the world of the play. *King Lear* is a widely performed play with a plethora of information available analysing the intricacies of the text. Because of this, the focus in this On Cue will turn to Neil Armfield's *King Lear* as a production, rather than *King Lear* as a play text. In the following pages you will find an analysis of the elements of production and the reason behind the directorial and design choices.

'NOTHING' IN THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

Nothingness in STC *King Lear* refers to loss, absence and degeneration of the characters and the world of the play. *King Lear* has often been labelled a 'beast' as the world of the play moves from extremity to extremity; from a feuding family, to a storm, madness and political turmoil. Similarly, the emotional and psychological expectations of the actor playing King Lear have caused the title role to be described as 'unactable'. Therefore, to narrow the play down to the one theme of 'nothingness' and use this as the premise for the production could seem reductive. However, by using the idea of 'nothing' Neil Armfield, his team of creatives and the experienced cast, provide a blank canvas which open the audience up to the possibilities of what *King Lear* means and is about.

At the beginning of the rehearsal period the cast sat down to do a read through. They were asked to underline the word 'nothing', which is mentioned 48 times throughout the play. Below are two pivotal moments about 'nothing' featured in the play that drive the tension in *King Lear* – Cordelia's refusal to declare her love for her father and King Lear's loss of power.

In Act One when King Lear asks each of his daughters to convey their love for him in order to inherit a portion of his kingdom. King Lear asks his youngest daughter Cordelia "...what can you say to draw a third more opulent than your sisters? Speak." To which Cordelia says, "Nothing, my Lord" and her father replies "Nothing will come of nothing..." (King Lear 1.1) As a result Cordelia is banished. However, Cordelia's reply was not ungrateful words towards her father, but rather the depth of love she has for her father cannot be accurately articulated through words. She says: "I cannot heave my heart into my mouth" (King Lear 1.1) and "...I am sure my love's more ponderous than my tongue" (King Lear 1.1) anything that she could say to rival the sensationalised responses of her sisters would be insincere – "[Aside] What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent" (King Lear 1.1),

Cordelia is a measured woman and believes that her love for her father is exactly as a daughter should have for her father – "I love your Majesty according to my bond; no more nor less" (King Lear 1.1). She goes on to reveal her sisters declarations of love as false, saying that if they love her father and only her father then why do they have husbands? And if she was to marry, her love would be halved between her husband and her father, as would her care and duty. When Lear banishes Cordelia in Act One, Kent begs him to "see better, Lear", as Cordelia is the more noble daughter.

PRODUCTION ELEMENTS (CONT).

After Lear has divided his kingdom between Goneril and Regan, he has relinquished his power and status as King. Lear's Fool tells him he is nothing without his crown and therefore has no power. "Now, thou art an o/ without a figure. I am better than thou art now. I/am a Fool, thou art nothing" (King Lear 3.5). Lear's reduction to 'nothing' is not merely the result of passing the control of his Kingdom to his daughters, although it was the starting point. The emotional ingratitude of his daughters, coupled with his metaphorical 'blindness' which prevents him from seeing the honest intentions of those around him cause Lear to have nothing and descend into madness as even his sanity is gone. The relationship between Lear's state of mind and his loss of status is portrayed when he appears wearing a floral crown of wildflowers around his head instead of a real crown. What is worn on top of Lear's head is symbolic of what is going on inside. Similarly, Lear's descent into 'nothingness' is symbolically portrayed by the storm. The thunder and lighting is symbolic of inside Lear's head. The storm also signals the kingdom's fall into chaos under the rule of Goneril and Regan. Lear's nakedness is symbolic of how he has been reduced to 'nothing.' Lear has lost everything that made him as a man – his kingship, his kingdom, his daughters, and now, his sanity.

After the storm, Lear experiences a 'renewal' and his sense of reality that was once embellished by royalty is replaced with an improved understanding of humanity – "You must bear with me. Pray you now, forget and forgive" (King Lear 4.7). STC's production is book-ended with the ensemble cast presenting themselves on stage to the audience. The cast parade out at the beginning and then again at the end of the playsignaling to the audience that the story is not one of fickle domesticity incited by a feuding family turf war, but rather a story about humanity and the high stakes and often volatile political landscape of our time. Theatre critic Alison Croggon relates Lear's everlasting relevance to "... Ezra Pound's truism that art is "news that stays news" allowing King Lear to galvanise our present. Gloucester is a prisoner in Abu Ghraib; Lear is a bereaved father in Chechnya or Lebanon. The loss, the grief, the cruelty and the love are all of our own time" (Croggon, 2010).

TAKE YOUR CUE

- What is the turning point in the play when King Lear stops being 'nothing'?
- What do the characters who are reduced to 'nothing' gain at the end of the play?
- At the beginning of the play, Gloucester asks Edmund what he is reading, to which he replies 'nothing'. Why is Edmund's reply significant for Gloucester's journey in the play?

THE AESTHETIC

STC's *King Lear* begins at Lear's birthday party. The Fool – Robyn Nevin, dressed as Marilyn Monroe, sings happy birthday to Lear into a microphone, just as Marilyn Monroe did to American president John F. Kennedy in 1962. The Fool then throws off the Marilyn wig and Lear takes the microphone to deliver his 'birthday speech' which is his intention to divide the kingdom. Armfield's decision to begin the play with this introduces the aesthetic and world the STC production is set in. This world conjures a feeling of old-school Hollywood glamour created through the ritzy costumes, gold glitter and streamers which acts in contrast to the black, then white set. This is captured by the reference pictures hanging in the rehearsal room that act as a kind of mood board. Further to this, at the start of the play Lear's birthday is celebrated using canons that spurt confetti and streamers all over the stage. During the storm scene horizontal rain and wind is created using a giant industrial fan that is wheeled on stage in full view of the audience.



DIRECTING *KING LEAR*

DIRECTING

Director Neil Armfield has a considered and text based approach to the creation of scenes inside the rehearsal room of *King Lear*. When rehearsing each scene, Armfield has the actors read the scene up on their feet and watches for the instincts, reactions and offers of the actors in their roles. The scene is then plotted around what is offered by the actors in the read through which is then layered with gestures and details by the actors and Armfield. When there are moments of contention, the discussion turns to Shakespeare's language and a dramaturgical solution is sort by looking at the actions and consequences of characters and whether a solution would be true to the character's personality and journey.

INSIDE THE REHEARSAL ROOM

There are many different approaches used by actors in the creation of character and performing scenes and each actor has their own technique. A period performance of Shakespeare's *King Lear* would feature realistic scenery from scenes in the play such as King Lear's castle, a battlefield and a forest, with actors in Elizabethan costumes (gowns, cloaks, doublets and ruff collars!) When on stage, the visual world of the play created by set and costumes undoubtedly assist in the actors being 'inside' the dramatic action in order to deliver a consistent performance. Rehearsing scenes and discovering a character when working with the concept of 'nothingness' on a white and then black box set in contemporary costumes is an exciting challenge for the experienced actors in *King Lear*. The actors in the rehearsal room have relied on the rich, layered and symbolic text of the play to establish their character intensions and objectives to bring the play to life.



Eryn Jean Norvill, Jacek Koman, Geoffrey Rush and Helen Buday in rehearsal for STC's *King Lear*, 2015. Image: Hon Boey. ©

SET

Neil Armfield's aesthetic in his recent productions is one that removes theatrical spectacle in order to make space for the essential idea at the heart of the productions. In 2013, Armfield directed Wagner's *The Ring Cycle* for Opera Australia. Traditionally this opera of epic proportions (it runs for 15 hours, spread out across three weeks!) is full of opulence and vast gestures. Armfield removed all elements of operatic decoration found in traditional operas in order for the audience to focus their attention on what lies at the heart of the opera – the story of a father and daughter. This 'stripped back' approach was pioneered by Peter Brook, one of the world's most famous theatre practitioners. In 1971 Peter Brook directed a film of *King Lear* which was one of the first productions to focus on the story and not the spectacle of Elizabethan England. Until this point, many productions of *King Lear* had bordered on melodramatic. Armfield has acknowledged that Brook's production resonates with him greatly in his direction of STC's 2015 production.

Neil Armfield describes his *King Lear* as a kind of anti-production. He states that by stripping back the play, using a desolate set as the primary focus, the "wrongful varnish" that after the play has acquired through centuries of performance is revealed (Sydney Theatre Company program, 2015). This then changes the focus to Shakespeare's writing allowing the meaning to be revealed by the experience of the language alone, as opposed to deciphering meaning from superfluous production elements or contexts. Armfield says that it could be in danger of tipping into a presentational form however the representational acting and extremities of the dramatic action allow the play to remain a representational Shakespearean tragedy.

The set, designed by Bob Cousins, is a black box that sits inside the proscenium arch stage of the Roslyn Packer Theatre. Following the storm at the end of Act Three, the black box is dismantled to reveal a white box. The corners of the white cyclorama are curved (like a skate ramp) which together with the white paint and lighting effects create the illusion of a horizonless white void that stretches out into an abyss. Sitting inside the tall, large stage of the Roslyn Packer theatre, the large white wall has an unexpected 'wow' factor that contributes to the idea of 'nothingness.' Interestingly, the void evokes an overwhelming feeling for the audience, which when coupled with the unfolding tragedy of Lear's world is emotionally devastating.

White box and black box stages have become popular for designers in recent years as directors favour focusing on text and the story. In 2009 Benedict Andrew's directed Shakespeare's *War of the Roses* at STC starring Cate Blanchett using a similar aesthetic. The set for this production was also designed by Bob Cousins and was a large black box that used the theatrical gesture of gold and then black confetti continuously raining onto the stage. This also allowed the audience to focus on the epic story of the play.



CHECKOUT OUR CLASSROOM HANDOUT FOR MORE
INFORMATION ABOUT PLAYS DIRECTED BY NEIL ARMFIELD!

PROPS

Armfield maintains that anything that is then put into the blank space must be essential to the production to prevent distracting from the story and the effect of the empty space. The world of the play is evoked through the creation of atmosphere using a few simple but bold theatrical gestures.

MICROPHONE

Throughout the play a microphone on a stand is used by several characters. For example, Lear speaks into the microphone when dividing his kingdom and Edmund uses it when his plan to trick his father is revealed. These are pivotal speeches that set the events of the play in motion, so by using the microphone Armfield is making key moments of the play clear to the audience. The booming of the microphone contributes to the intensity of the story and the foreboding mood. When letters are delivered and read the characters who wrote the letters read it aloud over the microphone.

The voices over the microphone create a presidential like effect that is mandated by Lear as a King – at the beginning of the play, when he speaks, everyone listens. The microphone is a symbol of power. As the play continues and Lear has lost his status as King, characters who speak into the microphone do so in fits of rage and anger heightening the tense mood. This is seen when Edgar booms into the microphone his plan to betray his brother and father – “Now, Gods, stand up for Bastards.”

At the end of the play when all the characters, both alive and dead, walk onto the stage, the Fool is dead and has the microphone cord wrapped around his neck showing that he had been hung. At the beginning of the play the Fool uses the microphone as a joke to sing happy birthday, so it is ironic that he has been hung by it at the end. The microphone also represents the royal court, so the Fool being hung by the microphone represents the chaotic and disordered state of the court at the end of the play.



Mark Leonard Winter and Geoffrey Rush in rehearsal for STC's *King Lear*, 2015. Image: Hon Boey. ©

PROPS (CONT).

THE STORM - FAN, GLITTER AND STREAMER CANON

The severity of the storm is created through the grand gesture of horizontal rain that thrashes against the characters using a giant industrial fan on the side of the stage. The wind pushes the remnants of gold glitter from the party around the stage and over the actors, who, already wet and wind-swept, become completely dishevelled at the height of the play's tension before interval. Together these elements allow the audience to see and feel Lear's madness and the chaos and disorder of the kingdom under Goneril and Regan's merciless reign.

BLACK PAINT

When Gloucester has his eyes pulled out the actors smear black paint across each of Max Cullen's eyes. The use of black paint as opposed to realistically extracting his eyes (through the magic of theatre!) and the use of fake blood on stage gives the illusion that Gloucester's eye sockets are hollow and empty. Symbolically the removal of Gloucester's eyes is a cruel epitome of Gloucester's blindness to the truth about Edmund's deceit.

When other characters are killed on stage, they smear black paint over their faces and stand still in the space. This symbolises their death and them becoming 'nothing.' At the end of the play all the actors enter the stage again and stand still, staring out at the audience, as they did at the beginning. This time, as most of the characters are dead, the stage is littered with faces smeared with black paint, making the death-toll of the play and the vast tragedy of the story apparent to the audience.

SOUND

The music and sound featured in the play are created by a trumpet player and a percussionist that sit in a box in the audience. Throughout the play when the Fool cracks a joke, Robyn Nevin points to them to signal a comic sound effect. The percussionist and trumpeter also create music and sound to complement the action, evoking atmosphere in the world of the play.

COSTUME

The costumes, designed by Alice Babidge, are a reflection of contemporary society. Babidge says that she has been inspired by the members of the cast who are deeply inventive and thoroughly investigated all facets of the play. She also believes that the notion of 'contemporary' is a culmination of everything that has historically come before it. Alice's inspiration was also drawn from her work with Neil Armfield on *The Ring Cycle* as she believes the two worlds have many parallels. With the men dressed in dapper black and white suits, and the women in ball-gowns, the opulence and regal grandeur of Lear's kingdom is created. Edgar's nudity when in the forest is a symbolic representation of his rebirthing and casting off of his trauma into his reconciliation with his father in the second half of the play according to Babidge. It also represents his degradation into nothing after the betrayal of his brother Edmund.

Interestingly, Alice Babidge does not believe that what is worn by the actors in a play should be labelled as costumes. Instead, she says she designs the clothes for a play. A costume is something that someone wears when they are playing 'dress-ups' or pretending to be someone else – a costume is endowed upon an actor and "wears them" according to Babidge. Whereas clothes are an honest expression of the self that does not feel fake. Theatre is grounded in the concept of truth and aims to bring the world of a play to life truthfully, with the actors delivering truthful performances – performances that are true to the world and their character. The actors aren't 'pretending' they are 'being' their character. Therefore the word clothes, is a more appropriate choice as people wear clothes, not costumes.



Nick Masters, Wade Briggs, Neil Armfield and Geoffrey Rush in rehearsal for STC's *King Lear*, 2015. Image: Hon Boey. ©

ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

CHARACTER

Characterisation is the process of developing from a role to build a complex personality and background for a particular character. Intention, status and attitude are integral ingredients for a character's motivation and belief. Complexity in character can be developed through interaction and relationship with others.

TENSION

Tension is the force which drives all drama. It creates a powerful and complex form of energy on stage which, in turn, generates a level of excitement in the audience. Tension strengthens audience engagement as it motivates the audience to continue watching while influencing them to question the ideas in the play



TAKE YOUR CUE

- The character of King Lear goes through a myriad of emotional and psychological states. Choose two of these, what causes them and how Geoffrey Rush conveys them through his acting.
- Helen Thomson, who plays Regan, has said that Goneril and Regan's actions are motivated by the fact that they are born to rule and raised to believe that power must be maintained at any cost. What are your thoughts on this?
- What is the purpose of the Fool? How does Robyn Nevin achieve this? Does the fact that the Fool is played by a woman – Robyn Nevin, change your understanding of the character?
- Cordelia is notably different to her sisters Goneril and Regan. How would you describe Cordelia's character? How has Eryn Jean Norvill portrayed this through voice and movement choices?



TAKE YOUR CUE

- What type of tension drives the narrative in King Lear?
- What is King Lear's tragic flaw that incites tension in the play?
- The structure of the five act tragedy means that the tension is established, rises, climaxes, falls and then concludes. Describe each of these in relation to King Lear.

ELEMENTS OF DRAMA (CONT).

ATMOSPHERE

Atmosphere is the feeling or mood that is created by, and emerges through, dramatic action. It is closely linked with tension: as the tension in a drama builds so too does the mood and this strengthens the tension. Drama appeals to the senses to evoke the atmosphere and the emotions to intensify the mood.

MOMENT

Moments in the drama are fundamental to the pacing of the dramatic action. The tempo which refers to the management of time in a broad sense, is often punctuated by the moment. The control and manipulation of key moments affects the audience's engagement and understanding of the performance.

DRAMATIC MEANING

Dramatic Meaning is created through the manipulation of the elements of drama which are interrelated and interdependent. Dramatic Meaning is what is communicated between the performers and the audience to create an actor-audience relationship.



TAKE YOUR CUE

- How was a particularly moment of a foreboding atmosphere created on stage?
- What was an atmosphere in the play that was in contrast to a foreboding mood? How was this created?
- How did atmosphere effect you at the end of the play as an audience member? What was your response to Geoffrey Rush's moment with Cordelia?



TAKE YOUR CUE

- What moment of the play was the most visually interesting to you as an audience member?
- Which moment in the play was the most moving for you as an audience member and why?
- Which moment in the play provoked a sense of "nothingness" for you the most? How?



TAKE YOUR CUE

- Devise what you believe to be the Dramatic Meaning of King Lear based on the play text.
- Thinking about Neil Armfield's aesthetic, what do you think the Dramatic Meaning could be?
- How does King Lear relate to audiences in 2015?

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OTHER RESOURCES

- Classroom poster about Neil Armfield's Australian plays at STC
- Pre-Show In-the-Know handout for fast facts and what to look for in the performance.