



**GUILDFORD  
SHAKESPEARE  
COMPANY**

GUILDFORD SHAKESPEARE COMPANY PRESENTS  
**BRIAN BLESSED** AS

**RUN EXTENDED TO 14 FEBRUARY 2015**

**KING LEAR**

Directed by CAROLINE DEVLIN | Designed by NEIL IRISH | Lighting by DECLAN RANDALL | Sound by MATT EATON  
**17 JAN - NOW UNTIL 14 FEB** | HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, GUILDFORD HIGH STREET  
Box Office 01483 304384 | [www.guildford-shakespeare-company.co.uk](http://www.guildford-shakespeare-company.co.uk)

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 YA GUILDFORD'S YOUNG AUDIENCE THEATRE

**EDUCATION PACK**

# INTRODUCTION



This education pack has been written by GSC to complement the stage production of Shakespeare's King Lear, staged at Guildford's Holy Trinity Church in Winter 2015.

The information contained in here can be used as preparation material before seeing the performance or as follow-up work afterwards in the class room. This pack is aimed at final year GCSE or A-level students (or equivalent).

This pack contains:

1. GSC: Our Approach to Theatre
2. The Cast and Creative Team
3. The History of King Lear
4. The Quarto and Folio
5. King Lear Facts
6. In Conversation with The Director

## School Workshops

Practical in-school workshops on Canterbury Tales can be booked, with actors coming into your school to work on the play.

For more details, please see [our website](#), [email us](#), or call [01483 304384](tel:01483304384).

# **GUILDFORD SHAKESPEARE COMPANY OUR APPROACH TO THEATRE**

***“One of the strongest and most consistent companies operating in and around London”***

PlayShakespeare.com, 2011

Guildford Shakespeare Company is a professional site-specific theatre company, specialising in Shakespeare and other classic texts. Our approach places the audience right at the heart of the action, immersing them in the world of the play, thereby demystifying the legend that theatre is for an elite few but rather is immediate and accessible to everyone.

***“...to be spellbound, amused and to follow every moment of text and to want the production never to end...one of the best evenings of theatre I have ever been privileged to attend.”*** Audience member 2011

We want our 21<sup>st</sup> Century audiences to experience the same thrill and excitement that Shakespeare’s original audiences must have felt when they first saw the Ghost appear in *Hamlet*, the rousing battle cry of Henry V, and edge-of-your-seat anticipation in *The Comedy of Errors*.

At GSC we use diverse and unusual non-theatre venues to create dynamic and challenging productions. From castles to lakes, churches to pubs, our approach merges the audience and acting space so that you’re given a visceral, stimulating and, above all, unique theatre experience.

***“I am so thrilled to be able to bring my grandchildren to such quality theatre right here on our doorstep. I also think that the proximity to the stage makes the action all the more real and compelling for youngsters”*** Audience member, 2011

GSC productions are fresh, fast and modern. Our interpretation of Shakespeare is always in the original text and NEVER dumbed down.

**We hope you enjoy these fabulous stories as much as we enjoy re-telling them.**

All best wishes

*Matt & Sarah*

**Joint Artistic & Executive Producers**

# THE CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

## Cast

King Lear	Brian Blessed
Goneril	Rosalind Blessed
Regan	Sarah Gobran
Cordelia/Fool	Emily Tucker
Gloucester	James Sobol Kelly
Edgar	Matt Pinches
Edmund	Ben Ashton
Cornwall	Richard Neale
Albany	Simon Hepworth
Kent	Noel White
Oswald/France	Timothy Allsop

## Creative Team

Director	Caroline Devlin
Designer	Neil Irish
Lighting Designer	Declan Randell
Sound Designer	Matt Eaton
Assistant Director	Richard Neale
Assistant Designer	Anett Black
Fight Director	Philip D'Orleans
Movement Director	Vanessa Cook
Voice Coach	Sarah Stephenson
Publicity Agent	Sue Hyman Associates
Producers	Sarah Gobran and Matt Pinches

## Stage Management

Production Manager	Tamsin Rose
Deputy Stage Manager	Dan Read
Assistant Stage Manager	Kate Wilson

# THE HISTORY OF KING LEAR

## The Real Lear

The story of King Lear and his daughters was inspired by an ancient British ruler called Lear. The tale appears in many different versions and would have been well known to Shakespeare's audience. One of the most famous versions of the story was by the poet Edmund Spenser who included the tale in his epic poem, *The Fairie Queen*. Printed in 1590, it would have been highly influential on Shakespeare when he began to write his play just over ten years later.

Spenser's account of the story is similar to Shakespeare's in many ways. He was the first to name the youngest daughter Cordelia, a change which Shakespeare kept. The subplot involving Gloucester and his two sons does not appear in Spenser's tale, but this was probably taken from another source, Philip Sydney's *Arcadia*. However, Shakespeare was the first to include some key features. The play ends with the death of Cordelia and Lear, when Cordelia traditionally restored Lear to the throne. Shakespeare also added the Fool who doesn't appear in any other version of the story.

## The Quarto and Folio

King Lear was first printed in 1608. This first edition was known as the First Quarto (referring to the size of the manuscript). Another Quarto was printed in 1619, before the Folio edition was introduced in 1623.

The Folio contains around 100 new lines, while around 300 had been removed from the original Quarto. These changes affected the play in subtle ways, increasing the wickedness of Goneril and Regan, creating a bleaker ending and questioning the sympathy an audience should have for Lear and Edgar.

The current printed editions of the play tend to include all lines from both the Quarto and the Folio.

## Practical ideas

Taking another King or Queen as inspiration, can you create your own dramatic story? You could include dramatic moments from King Lear (betrayal, evil daughters, going mad, being blinded) or come up with your own.

## THE QUARTO AND FOLIO

Compare this passage from Act 2 Scene 4 of King Lear. Kent has been explaining why he has been placed in the stocks.

[The text in brackets is only found in the folio]

### KENT

... Meeting here the other messenger,  
Whose welcome, I perceived, had poison'd mine,--  
Being the very fellow that of late  
Display'd so saucily against your highness,--  
Having more man than wit about me, drew:  
He raised the house with loud and coward cries.  
Your son and daughter found this trespass worth  
The shame which here it suffers.

### FOOL

Winter's not gone yet, if the wild-geese fly that way.

[Fathers that wear rags  
Do make their children blind;  
But fathers that bear bags  
Shall see their children kind.  
Fortune, that arrant whore,  
Ne'er turns the key to the poor.  
But, for all this, thou shalt have as many dolours  
for thy daughters as thou canst tell in a year.]

### KING LEAR

O, how this mother swells up toward my heart!  
Hysterica passio, down, thou climbing sorrow,  
Thy element's below! Where is this daughter?

### Practical ideas

What does this new piece of text mean?

How does it change the meaning of the scene?

If you were performing the play would you keep it in or remove it?

## KING LEAR FACTS AND ODDITIES

**The play was performed on St Stephan's Night** (Boxing Day) as part of King James I's Christmas celebrations in 1606.

**The first printed account of King Lear is in *Historia Regium Britanniae*.** This book was written by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

**A 1603 court case had strong parallels to King Lear.** Two daughters claimed their rich father's will was invalid because he was senile. The main beneficiary was the youngest daughter, Cordell, who protected her father's wishes.

**Shakespeare's play is the only version of King Lear that ends in tragedy.**

**Cordelia and the Fool never appear on stage together.** They may have been played by the same actor in the original production (which might be why Lear confuses them in the final scene).

**The only version of the play performed between 1681 and 1838** was Nahum Tate's '*The History of King Lear*'. This curiously happy adaptation cut the Fool, married Cordelia to Edgar and let Lear and Gloucester survive.

**All performances of King Lear were banned from 1810 to 1820** to save the blushes of 'Mad' King George III.

**Kent's insult, '*Thou base football player*'** is one of only two references to the sport in Shakespeare's work (The second is in *A Comedy of Errors*).

**The Beatles mixed lines from a *King Lear* radio play into '*I Am the Walrus*'.** John Lennon was listening to BBC radio during recording when it happened to air.

**The youngest professional to play Lear is Nonso Anonzie.** He was 23 when he took the role for an RSC production in 2002.

### Practical Exercise

Find reviews for recent productions of King Lear. What decisions did the companies take when choosing how to portray King Lear, his family and his country?

## IN CONVERSATION WITH THE DIRECTOR

### CAROLINE DEVLIN

*The following is an extract taken from the official King Lear programme.*

**The play is often described as 'unremittingly severe' in its treatment of its characters. Would you agree?**

"Unremittingly severe" is a fair enough assessment, and does present certain challenges, especially in relation to "who" Lear is. There is much about him that is tyrannical, egotistical and downright cruel and yet we have to care about him, we have to yearn for a reconciliation with Cordelia, so perhaps the unremitting cruelty can be seen as divine justice, meted upon a man who has failed his Kingdom in his duty as a King.

As Lear himself states after observing the poor wretched creatures who are also his subjects and under his care "I have ta'en too little care of this". Shakespeare clearly wished to portray a society that had injustice at its heart and we must ask, what society doesn't? It is all too easy to look around the world at some of the terrible deeds committed every day, but Shakespeare presents us a family drama, which makes for much more uncomfortable viewing, makes it harder to disassociate from, we are forced to ask, what have we "ta'en too little care of"?

**Would you say that the play is about families or about kingship...or both?**

Well, it is certainly about both, and it's important that both elements are present. For a start, this is about a Royal family and its dysfunction, and it is dysfunction on an extraordinary level.

Lear and his daughters manage to destroy themselves through pride, madness, greed and sexual deviancy (beat that EastEnders), whilst the family Gloucester also takes a terrible punishment, so it is as if a whole upper echelon of society is being judged. However, I would also argue not by God but by us, the punter, the man on the street.

As evidenced by another line which resonates so strongly with me, Gloucester's line "Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man...that will not see because he doth not feel, feel your power quickly; So distribution should undo excess and each man have enough." These are revolutionary words and for a world that was still strictly tied into the belief that the King was God's representative on earth and God decreed one's position in life, pauper or prince, seriously dangerous.