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Viewing Shakespeare through a Kaleidoscope: Creating Meaningful Connections for 21st Century Students

Leigh Ann Bellville
Skidmore College

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Viewing Shakespeare through a Kaleidoscope:

Creating Meaningful Connections for 21st Century Students

by

Leigh Ann Bellville

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Faculty Advisor/Reader: Sandy Welter
Second Appointed Reader: Kimber Foshe

THE MASTER OF ARTS PROGRAM IN LIBERAL STUDIES
SKIDMORE COLLEGE
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Abstract

"Viewing Shakespeare through a Kaleidoscope: Creating Meaningful Connections for 21st Century Students" emphasizes the importance of teaching literature using an interdisciplinary approach. By viewing literary works through a "kaleidoscope" of disciplinary lenses, students will increase their understanding of the content and demonstrate relevant connections to their own lives. An exploration of *King Lear* will demonstrate how utilizing an interdisciplinary approach while teaching the play will provide students with tools to access Shakespeare. The project will focus on two themes: family dynamics and betrayal versus loyalty, two defining forces in contemporary youth culture.
Viewing Shakespeare through a Kaleidoscope:

Creating Meaningful Connections for 21st Century Students

Literary works can be explored in such a manner that the author’s message can be accessed through multidisciplinary lenses and across disciplinary fields. Shakespeare’s *King Lear* will be examined employing “kaleidoscope teaching”. Comprehension of material and the overall appreciation of classic works will increase when the work is juxtaposed with other texts. In addition, meaningful connections are created between the literary work and modern day society. In truth, one question that should always be answered at the end of any required reading and teaching is: *How is this relevant to my life?* Students must make meaningful connections or find relevance between their lives and new learning or the deeper meaning of the author’s words will be lost.

Two themes that can be explored in Shakespeare’s *King Lear* are family dynamics and loyalty vs. betrayal. For example, Shakespeare’s plays are rife with symbolism, and here he manifests metaphorical blindness in several characters. Often, people can be blind to those who intend to deceive them as well as those who have honorable intentions. How does this metaphorical blindness impact the family dynamics? What do we learn about betrayal versus loyalty in this work? Students will identify with this sense of blindness, and describe situations of betrayal and loyalty from their own lives. These themes can be examined through the disciplines of philosophy, theology, psychology, and cultural studies.
The concept of juxtaposing as a teaching method is an effective tool for experiencing Shakespeare through a kaleidoscope. Analyzing the setting of *King Lear* through an environmental studies lens will demonstrate to students how human traits of love, fear, loyalty, responsibility, and compassion can be developed not only through Shakespeare’s characters but also through the inanimate forms of Shakespeare’s work, such as setting and mood.

By viewing Shakespeare through a kaleidoscope, students will increase their understanding of his works and his messages. Students will see that Shakespeare’s plays were created not only to entertain an audience, but also to teach valuable life lessons that continue to be relevant today. Thus, this method of teaching creates meaningful connections between the student and the literary work. Finally, by using filmic texts as part of the kaleidoscope approach, students who are visual learners will be able to more successfully access Shakespeare’s plays.

**Kaleidoscope Teaching Defined - Methodology**

A kaleidoscope consists of glass fragments that when turned, create a beautiful and intricate pattern for the viewer. Each time the kaleidoscope is turned, the fragments of glass move, and the pattern changes. The word “kaleidoscope” comes from the Greeks: “[Gk kalos beautiful + eidos form]” (“Kaleidoscope” def. 636). Scope “is an instrument (as a telescope or radarscope) for viewing”, from the Greek “scopos; akin to Gk skeptesthal to watch, look at...” (“Scope” def. 1044).
Literary works and filmic texts can be compared to the glass fragments within the kaleidoscope. An educational environment facilitated by teachers and influenced by students produces dynamic curricular patterns and connections. Each student brings different experiences and perspectives to these texts, and while the same pieces can be juxtaposed, the connections and patterns will change with each viewer, as will happen if the form or discipline from which they are presented should change. The juxtaposing of texts help students understand the material by facilitating meaningful connections; in fact, there seems to be a definite benefit if one can juxtapose the classics with modern literary works. By doing so, one creates relevance of the older works by offering a new perspective for students.

Filmic texts can lend themselves as supplementary materials for educators and can assist students in comprehending the material, and by establishing meaningful connections. Teachers need to analyze the effects of visual media on society and culture, understand how literary forms can be represented in visual narratives, apply a variety of criteria for the evaluation of informational media, and use a range of strategies to interpret visual media. As a result, teachers will impact students' learning positively. Especially important is that educators use films that foreground issues of social relevance in a secondary and post-secondary educational setting.

There are several considerations when selecting a film to include as a viewing in the classroom: 1) one should effectively deploy the filmic materials in a way that makes them as useful and intellectually stimulating as literary texts; 2) one should
identify films with significant social questions that are worthy of classroom
discussion; and, 3) one should present the films effectively for students whose
background in film is scant or non-existent. By creating guided viewing materials
for students in advance, the teacher can address these important elements during
curriculum development.

The guided viewing materials created for students to complete during and
after a classroom viewing will serve as an aid in comprehension and will appeal to
students senses in different ways. By creating guided viewing materials, the teacher
is both viewing the film in advance, and analyzing the filmic text to determine
whether it includes significant social questions worthy of discussion in the
classroom. The guided viewing materials should incorporate film terminology in
the questions being posed by the instructor, as they are presented on the guided
viewing packet or during classroom discussion. In this way, the teacher is assisting
students to learn the words that correspond with the techniques used by the
director. By reading these words in context in the guided viewing materials, and
when provided with a visual representation of the technique on screen, the students
will be increasing their confidence in identifying such techniques and be able to
discuss film critically. Thus, the teacher will be effectively presenting the film for
students whose background in film is scant or non-existent and introducing those
students to new academic vocabulary.

Important for educators to recognize is the national initiative to create more
common-based assessments as well as a common core of essential skills and
concepts that students will be expected to master before entering undergraduate studies. The rationale behind incorporating relevant filmic texts in the classroom is to move away from the expected compare and contrast between reading a piece of literature in the classroom and showing a film. High school students, and even middle school students, should not be asked to complete a Venn diagram to compare and contrast a written work and a film. This is a skill they were taught as elementary students. Educators need to push beyond this level and push their students as well. Teachers need to ask questions that will allow students to use higher order thinking skills, learn and practice new vocabulary, and analyze a film on a more meaningful level. For example, according to the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading, students who complete secondary education should be able to “integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words” (“English”).

The juxtaposing of other texts is essential to assist in creating meaningful connections for students and ensure that they are realizing the relevance of the author’s message to their own lives. Educators can incorporate other historical fiction or non-fiction; however, one of the most powerful ways to demonstrate modern day relevance is by incorporating current events in the classroom that correspond with the themes in classic works (e.g. articles from newspapers and magazines). A literary text as rich as Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, offers many layers to
explore while examining the human condition. This is a remarkable opportunity for teachers to help students discover events that mirror today’s complex issues.

One important goal is to establish a proactive, unified approach to literacy within schools of education. What is literacy and how does kaleidoscope teaching assist in meeting the goals set by members of the educational community, and the federal government? If one reads the dictionary definition of literacy, it seems rather simplistic: “The ability to read and write; quality or state of being literate...general understanding or competence” ("Literacy"). General understanding or competence is rather broad, however. The goal of the educator in the 21st century is no longer to teach students to be literate in the sense of just reading and writing. Students must gain competence in their ability to think analytically using literary as well as filmic texts.

In addition, teachers are no longer confined to a standard text. With the introduction of technology into the classroom, literacy now extends to a student’s ability to navigate through a seemingly endless shelf of information available on the web and determine what information to utilize when conducting research. There are also e-texts available and electronic devices that can be used as an effective means of teaching literature; however, teachers must also learn how to navigate the equipment and teach the students to be competent information users as well. When a creative teacher looks at the new curriculum and expectations, these changes can be viewed as an opportunity to expands one’s responsibility to share knowledge with modern youth culture.
Interdisciplinary teaching has proven successful, and by incorporating an interdisciplinary approach students will view their courses as interrelated strains of knowledge. One idea merges into another fluidly, creating circular patterns. The core curriculum promotes literacy for all students in relation to “English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects” (“English”). Emphasis has been placed on students acquiring 21st century skills in addition to the core knowledge acquired throughout their secondary education. The teaching should be interwoven or juxtaposed with the required core classes. In fact, the Iowa Department of Education has aligned the state’s core curriculum standards with those required nationally. The Department of Education also points out the following:

“The Framework for 21st Century Learning stated, ‘We believe schools must move beyond a focus on basic competency in core subjects to promoting understanding of academic content at much higher levels by weaving 21st century interdisciplinary themes into core subjects’ (2007). 21st century skills bridge the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of students from the core academic areas to real life applications.” (Iowa)

The following descriptions are not standards, but are meant to offer a portrait of 21st century students:

- They demonstrate independence.
- They build strong content knowledge.
• They respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline.

• They comprehend as well as critique.

• They use technology and digital media strategically and capably.

• They come to understand other perspectives and cultures.

While the above descriptors are meant to be an overall goal of the community in the secondary setting, and at the request of prospective employers (“English”), the methodology of kaleidoscope teaching can assist in making the portrait a reality by incorporating a diverse assortment of materials to assist teachers in increasing the level of engagement and assist students in meeting these goals. An analysis of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* (*Lr.*) will provide a model for the aforementioned curricular goals.

**Family Dynamics and Loyalty vs. Betrayal**

Shakespeare’s *King Lear* (*Lr.*) can be examined in terms of the theme of family dynamics. Unfortunately, King Lear asks his three daughters to describe the extent of their love for him before dividing his kingdom and confuses hyperbole with authenticity from his daughters Goneril and Regan. In Act One, Lear asks, “Which of you shall we say doth love me most? (*Lr.* 1.1.51); however, the question he asks is quite impossible to accurately measure or express. Poets have attempted to do just this, and while their attempts to elicit a description of love is often lovely,
does it ever do justice to the feeling? In Sonnett CXXX, Shakespeare admits a lover’s attributes do not compare to other worldly or unworldly things, for when taken apart, reality can pale by comparison: “And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare/ As any she belied with false compare” (Son.)

Consequently, Lear’s dreadful request sets the stage for unrest in his kingdom and the destruction of his family. Lear divides his kingdom into thirds and bestows upon Goneril and Regan each equal parts following their exaltations. However, they lied to their father to gain monetarily. Lear asks his daughter Cordelia, “…what can you say to draw/ A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.” (Lr. 1.1.87-88). Lear is prepared to award Cordelia with the best of the three parts of his kingdom, as he loves her most highly of his three daughters.

The discourse and events taking place in the play begin to unveil the emerging theme of loyalty versus betrayal that Shakespeare illustrates as he interweaves the theme throughout. Unfortunately, Cordelia, the daughter who truly loves her father, is unable to express her love for him to his satisfaction. She answers his question honestly and responds, “Nothing, my lord.” (Lr. 1.1.89). Cordelia explains truthfully that when she marries she will give half her heart to her husband and cannot love her father only. “Sure I shall never marry like my sisters,/ To love my father all” (Lr. 1.1.106-07). Lear is angered by what he believes is a lack of tenderness from Cordelia and casts her off; he divides her part of the kingdom between the other two daughters, Goneril and Regan.
Following the conflict between Cordelia and her father, the King recognizes the surprising worth of Cordelia, which is her honesty and strength of character. The King of France informs Burgundy, “She is herself a dowry.” (Lr. 1.1.263). France is resolute in his decision to marry Cordelia, who has been left without a penny, and informs all in attendance of his thoughts regarding her worth:

Thy dow’rless daughter, King, thrown to my chance,

Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France.

Not all the dukes of wat’rish Burgundy

Can buy this unpriz’d precious maid of me.

Bid them farewell, Cordelia, though unkind.

Thou losest here, a better where to find. (Lr. 1.1.279-84)

Cordelia bids farewell to her sisters, however not before revealing that she realizes they have been dishonest in their affections for their father. She is worried for her father as he is left in her sisters’ care; King Lear’s decision to cast her out cannot stifle her affection and loyalty for him. After Cordelia and her betrothed exit, even Goneril admits to her sister Regan, “He always lov’d our/sister most, and with what poor judgment he hath now cast her/off appears too grossly” (Lr. 1.1.314-16). The King of France and Cordelia both realize that Lear has allowed himself to be deceived by Goneril and Regan in exchange for their public adulation; however, they are not alone in their understanding.

The Earl of Kent is eternally loyal to his king and clearly has Lear’s best interest at heart. He attempts to advise Lear during the aforementioned family
conflict that he has wronged Cordelia. Kent recognizes it is Cordelia who loves her father and has spoken in truth, whereas his other daughters were insincere in the words. Kent is a loyal follower of the king; nevertheless, Lear also lashes out at him when he defends Cordelia and casts him off as well. However, like Cordelia, Kent’s loyalty and love for Lear are not easily changed; he refuses to leave and abandon the king for fear of his Lord’s demise. Thus, Kent disguises himself as “Caius” so he may continue to watch over and serve the king during a time of turmoil.

Following the reading of Act I, Scene I, a comprehension check becomes necessary where the learner can make meaningful connections with what has already occurred. If the electronic text of King Lear is being accessed by students, i.e. the full electronic text offered by OpenSource Shakespeare: An Experiment in Literary Technology, students should be instructed to save the e-text document to a hard drive or flash drive to make it accessible when offline as well. By doing so, teachers can take a break from the reading whenever necessary to discuss and reflect upon the material, without the worry of losing an Internet connection or the server going down. Students who do not possess a great deal of experience with technology will feel more comfortable using an electronic text they can save without printing. They need to be able to access it without using the Internet. To save this particular text, students will simply access the File menu, and then select “Save As” while online. It will save as a web page to a hard drive or flash drive, depending on the preference of the teacher. After saving the electronic text, students can disconnect from the Internet for the written response activity.
After pausing during the reading, teachers can ask questions to assist students in making meaningful connections to the characters and relevance to the theme. Questions can be asked such as the following: 1) Describe a time when it was difficult to put into words how you were feeling?; 2) Do you find it easy or difficult to tell your loved ones how you feel?; 3) Using your narrative imagination, how would it feel if you were in Lear’s situation and your daughter replied that she had nothing to say? Would you accept her explanation, or would it anger you? Now, flip the scenario. How would it feel if you were in Cordelia’s place? Would you have the courage to stand up for your principles?; and, 4) Lastly, if you were in a difficult position during a family argument, who do you think would come to your defense as the King of France or Kent did with Cordelia? Whom would you defend? Who would defend you? The aforementioned questions can assist students in making connections between the family dynamics in King Lear and their own. Students can relate to the characters and events in the play in some manner. By making these connections, the students should retain the information and find relevance in the classic work.

After returning to the reading, in Act I, Scene II, the reader will begin to recognize a sub-plot emerging within the play concerning the character Gloucester and his two sons, Edgar and Edmund. The sub-plot is of equal importance in addressing family dynamics and the concepts of loyalty and betrayal. Edgar is Gloucester’s legitimate son, who later disguises himself as “Poor Tom.” Edmund is the bastard son of Gloucester who deceives his father. However, Gloucester loves
both of his children and is unaware of Edmund’s lack of loyalty. Gloucester enters to discover Edmund who holds a letter he forged in his brother Edgar’s hand. The contents of the letter reveal a scheme to usurp Gloucester’s estate. Edmund claims to have found the letter “…thrown in at the casement of my closet” (Lr. 1.2.93). Gloucester is wounded by his son Edgar’s alleged attempt to seize control from him: “Go, sirrah, seek him. I’ll apprehend him. Abominable/villain! Where is he?” (Lr. 1.2.406-07). Shakespeare’s King Lear is set in a pre-Christian world; therefore, Gloucester attributes the events occurring as an outcome of nature’s cycles. He points out, “This villain of mine comes under the/prediction; there’s son against father: the King falls from bias/ of nature; there’s father against child…And the noble and true-hearted Kent banish’d! his/offence, honesty! ’Tis strange” (Lr. 1.2.434-41). Gloucester recognizes the error on the part of King Lear’s situation; yet, he is not aware of the treachery occurring right in front of him.

Understanding the events during the first two scenes in Act I of King Lear is imperative to comprehend how the rest of the play unfolds. It is wise to conduct another comprehension check before the reading continues. First, the definitions of loyalty and betrayal should be provided for secondary students as essential academic vocabulary. Students can either use classroom dictionaries, or if using Netbooks or laptops, they should be asked to locate the definition online. When using their library resources, another teachable moment presents itself and learners will navigate the Internet and utilize the resources available to them. Too often students automatically “Google” what they want to know and ignore other
educational resources that are far more valuable and reliable. Heartland AEA offers World Book Web, Specialty Sites, and Digital Libraries for students to use. Resources, such as World Book, can be valuable tools for English Language Learners who are literate in Spanish. After learning how to access the site, students can be guided in saving the online ID and password as well as placing the website on a favorites bar to make it readily accessible for quick reference in the future. Students learn how to retrieve this information, especially when using an online text or other electronic text. With a simple click, students can open a new browser window to educate themselves regarding unfamiliar terms and events rather than skipping over those important pieces necessary for comprehension of any given text. Another option is for teachers to ask students to develop a definition of these concepts together and based upon their own experiences.

Also important to note is that educational websites, such as World Book can assist all students in correctly citing information retrieved from the website; in fact, with the exception of the dictionary definitions provided by World Book, any articles or informational texts available on the website are followed by “How to cite this article” at the bottom of the page. Students can copy and paste the works cited information into their essay immediately when paraphrasing or quoting information, which will ensure accuracy and save time. If they are not ready to do so and need to save the article, there are other features that will allow students to save articles to their research and email copies of articles to themselves for reference at a later date.
Pointing out these important features while teaching a unit takes little time, especially when modeled by the teacher on a projector, and will ensure 21st century students are literate based upon today’s standards. Post-secondary students should already possess an understanding of the aforesaid academic vocabulary. However, resources should always be made available for obtaining such information, especially for adults who are English Language Learners.

When using World Book Advanced, the definition of loyalty is as follows: “loyal feeling or behavior; faithfulness: Loyalty, like love, cannot be forced. In its essence loyalty is love for a person, a group, a cause…” and the website offers synonyms as well: “fidelity, constancy” (“Loyalty” def.). One can point out that Lear’s anger at Cordelia’s response is due to his feeling that her words betrayed him and that she does not love him; however, he was forcing her to elicit that which cannot be adequately expressed. An antonym of loyalty is betrayal, having the opposite meaning. When defined by World Book Advanced, betrayal means “the act of betraying or condition of being betrayed; violation of trust or confidence” (“Betrayal” def.).

After defining the terms, all learners should create meaningful connections to help retain the material. For example, an educator can develop questions for the learner to answer questions for both scenes one and two in writing and then share orally. It is important to make connections between life experiences and the events and characters in the play. Some questions to consider regarding scene two are: 1) How would it feel to be betrayed by your own child?; 2) Describe an event that you
have experienced, read about, or witnessed regarding betrayal; 3) Explain how it would be worse to be betrayed by a blood relative than by someone unrelated; and, 4) Describe an example from your life where loyalty was misinterpreted as betrayal, and 5) Based upon the reading so far, is the line between order and chaos (i.e. disarray) definite or tentative? Explain your reasoning. Questions such as these will assist in building personal relevance and accessibility for students at any level of education. Teachers can discuss the concepts of order and chaos with students in relation to their lives and the work. 21st century learners will begin to appreciate the significance of King Lear in today’s society.

Back to the reading, Act I ends with Goneril angry with Lear. She asserts that his followers are riotous. She orders her servant Oswald to stand up to Lear. However, Kent, disguises himself as a poor man, Caius, and will not tolerate Lear being insulted. Therefore, Caius trips Oswald. Students will begin to recognize a theme of “What is reality?” People are not always as they appear. The Fool recognizes the wrong Lear has done to Cordelia and “hath much pined away” for her (Lr. 1.4.601). The Fool points out that Caius should take his coxcomb (i.e. jester’s cap); consequently, Caius questions the Fool as to why he would make such a suggestion. The Fool responds “Why? For taking one’s part that’s out of favour” (Lr. 1.4.630). King Lear has lost the respect of his daughters, which the Fool bravely points out. There is great significance in Lear learning from his Fool who identifies the king’s foolishness in that “All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast/born with” (Lr. 1.4.675-76). He ends his tête-à-tête with Lear by divulging, “I
had rather be any kind o' thing than a fool! And yet I would not be thee,/nuncle. Thou hast pared thy wit o' both sides and left nothing/i' th' middle. Here comes one o' the parings” (Lr. 1.4.707-10). The Fool is comparing Lear’s wits to Goneril as one of the parings and Regan as the other with Cordelia no longer in between the two to keep him on the level. Cordelia was his mainstay. Goneril enters the scene and confronts Lear regarding his followers:

As you are old and reverend, you should be wise.

Here do you keep a hundred knights and squires;

Men so disorder'd, so debosh'd, and bold

That this our court, infected with their manners,

Shows like a riotous inn. Epicurism and lust

Make it more like a tavern or a brothel (Lr. 1.4.762-67)

During the final scene of Act I, Lear is gradually stripped not only of his lands, but also his honor, title, half his followers, and eventually all three of his daughters. He will now face his own humanity. However, one must note that Lear is in charge of his own outcome. After her claims, Lear angrily disowns his daughter Goneril. She has cut him off from half of his entourage and denies him that which he is accustomed leaving him more exposed. However, one can pose the question, is there some truth in Goneril’s claim that Lear’s followers were acting in an uncivilized manner and excessive in their pursuit of sensual pleasure? Students should approach the circumstances objectively. Lear defends all his followers: “My train are men of choice and rarest parts,” (Lr. 1.4.789). Granted many of the men
who were followers of royalty were honorable and loyal followers, yet realistically
one hundred men is a great number to accommodate and would easily raise a
ruckus, no matter the time period, or occasion. Students can consider why is this
"incivility" important, and how does it connect to loyalty/betrayal?

The actions in Act Two demonstrate further a theme of what is real versus
what is deception, and the eyes can deceive. Scheming continues by Edmund who
has made public Edgar’s alleged desire to have his half-brother kill their father
Gloucester so he may take over his property. Edmund encourages Edgar to flee the
court within the Castle of the Earl of Gloucester, and after he exits, Edmund stabs
himself in the arm: “Some blood drawn on me would beget opinion/Of my more
fierce endeavour. [Stabs his arm.] I have seen/drunkards/Do more than this in
sport.- Father, father!-” (Lr. 2.1.961-64). Having seen the wound on Edmund’s arm,
Gloucester believes that Edgar is treasonous; he exiles Edgar. Gloucester informs
Edmund that he will take the following action against Edgar: “Besides, his picture/I
will send far and near, that all the kingdom/May have due note of him, and of my
land./Loyal and natural boy, I'll work the means/To make thee capable” (Lr.
2.1.1017-21). Upon this declaration, Edmund realizes his plan is working and
Gloucester will pass on his lands to him instead of the legitimate and loyal son,
Edgar. Regan and her husband Cornwall visit Gloucester to bring him up to speed
regarding Goneril’s dispute with Lear.

In Act II, Scene II, Oswald and Caius cross paths once more. Caius is still
angry with Oswald and urges him to duel. However, Edmund, Gloucester,
Cornwall, Regan, and servants intervene when they hear Oswald cry, “Help, ho! murther! murther!” (Lr. 2.2.1112). Cornwall becomes angry with Caius due to his frankness and familiarity to which Caius responds,

To go out of my dialect, which you discommend so much. I know, sir, I am no flatterer. He that beguil'd you in a plain accent was a plain knave, which, for my part, I will not be, though I should win your displeasure to entreat me to't. (Lr. 1178-81)

Cornwall commands that Caius be placed in the stocks, although he protests and shares that he is a servant of King Lear. His disclosure seems to anger Cornwall and Regan further. After they exit, Gloucester admits to Caius that he does not wish to keep him in the stocks. Caius finds comfort when reading a letter from Cordelia who knows what has transpired and intends to help her father.

In Act II, Scene 4, Lear discovers Caius, the Earl of Kent, in the stocks. Lear is upset that Cornwall and Regan would commit such an act: “They durst not do't;/They would not, could not do't. 'Tis worse than murther/To do upon respect such violent outrage.” (Lr. 2.4.1299-1301). The Earl of Kent assures him that they did so even after knowing that he is a messenger of the king. Lear demands to see his daughter Regan and is further agitated when she does not comply when he first asks to see her. Lear is asked by Regan to divide his followers in half yet again for a total of only 25 knights in his train. When Lear attempts to return to Goneril with her proposed 50 knights, she takes the side of Regan. Goneril informs Lear, “Hear, me, my lord./What need you five-and-twenty, ten, or five,/To follow in a house where
twice so many/Have a command to tend you?” (Lr. 2.4.1560-63). Regan adds, “What need one?” (Lr. 2.4.1564) to which Lear proclaims to seek revenge upon both of his daughters for their lack of loyalty.

The complexity of this play is in the truthfulness of Shakespeare’s imperfect characters. One cannot place the entire blame of what occurred on any one character, for many of the characters make mistakes throughout the course of the play. Although the villains come to light as Edmund, Goneril, Regan, and Cornwall; Lear is not blameless. He is premature in dividing his kingdom and rash in his decision to cast off Cordelia. Goneril and Regan are devious in their scheming throughout the play; yet, are they inherently evil? While one cannot condone their behavior, it is possible that preferential treatment toward Cordelia would cause jealousy and provide justification in their own minds. Edmund faces a similar situation, although his father loves both his sons. Edmund is jealous and angry that he is victim to the laws of nature. He is a bastard and cannot rise to a position of power unless he arranges for the destruction of his brother, Edgar. Edmund commits adultery with Goneril and Regan as a way to gain social status through marriage. Even Burgundy reveals his true character when he quickly discards Cordelia after Lear disowns her; his concern was monetary, rather than marrying for love and respect as France chose. Some can argue that Burgundy is foolish in his choice, however others can argue that he is practical.

It is at this point in the play where students should possess a fairly strong understanding not only of the events as they begin to unfold, but also the
complexities and depth of the characters. The teacher should allow her learners an opportunity to explore more fully the events in Acts III-V in order to assist them in understanding the remarkable study of human nature that Shakespeare creates in *King Lear*. We discover in the following three acts that truth will reveal itself to the characters, although sometimes too late, and students can make connections to the relevant themes, regardless of the culture and time period in which the play is set. In addition, symbolism is used as a literary device to illustrate the setting and metaphorical blindness of several of the characters, which will be examined in Act III. Metaphorical blindness impacts the family dynamics, yet it is through the actual loss of his eyes that one character will see more clearly than before.

**Setting and Symbolism:**

“Ultimately it was Jonson – perhaps his greatest and most constant critic – who gave Shakespeare his most enduring epitaph: ‘He was not of an age, but for all time.’” (Ben). Critics argue about Shakespeare’s works; some declare the works are revealing because the author adeptly pulls from other classical works more deeply rooted in history; at times, some brush off the works as antiquated and meant solely for the purpose of entertaining a specific audience; while others believe he wrote for a greater purpose as he incorporated lessons everyone can learn from. Criticisms are as numerous as they are varied. It seems likely there is some truth in all these opinions. Certainly Shakespeare draws on ideas from the past, which he alters at
times to suit his purpose. In this fact, educators can create an opportunity for peeling off a layer to expose a story even older still. Shakespeare writes to entertain and to survive as a playwright. True his plays were very successful with the masses. Strangely, the bard’s works continue to endure and intrigue people, which Jonson admitted following Shakespeare’s death. The themes within Shakespeare’s works and the lessons one can learn from the characters and development of the plot are as relevant today as with audiences during Shakespeare’s time, because people can relate to the subject matter.

The setting of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* illustrates different places of power. The action commences in King Lear’s palace, both within and in close proximity to Gloucester’s castle, and near Albany’s palace. The play ends near Dover between the French and British camps. By this point, the French army has crossed the channel to bring war to Britain. In Act One, Lear admits, “I’ll tell thee. [to Goneril] Life and death! I am asham’d/That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus;” (*Lr* 1.4.825-826). Noticeably, authority and power play an important part in the play. Upon Lear dividing his kingdom between his two mendacious daughters, Goneril and Regan, he loses his authority as a father, transferring power into their hands, both in the eyes of his family and that of the kingdom. Sadly, that is the beginning, Lear will be continue to be stripped of his power and reduced to a basic human existence.

In Act III, Lear is facing not only chaos in his kingdom, but also a tempest in the natural world. He is going mad while at the same time fighting against the
elements. It becomes too much for him and he loses his perception of who he is as a person. Meanwhile, we learn from the Earl of Kent that another powerful force, France, is aware of the division within Lear’s kingdom and plans to wage war against Britain: “…there comes a power/Into this scattered kingdom, who already,/Wise in our negligence, have secret feet/In some of our best ports and are at point/To show their open banner. (Lr. 3.1.1649-53). The setting of Act III is predominately on the heath with little shelter from the gales, aside from a hovel. The conflict surrounds man versus nature with nature clearly dominating. King Lear continues to lose what remains of his sanity. Noteworthy is Shakespeare’s writing of King Lear during pre-Christian times; the prominent belief was it is man’s responsibility to bring order to the chaos; however, Lear will call upon Nature to intervene.

The setting is important in Lear’s transformation process and should be discussed. 21st century learners can reflect on how those in power are also subject to nature’s fury. Also, they should think about how people can achieve personal growth and transcendence by first being stripped of their possessions. Has there ever been a time when after a great loss, they realized they had something or someone of much greater importance? How could losing control over one’s own life drive a person mad? Finally, why do people turn to a greater power to intervene on their behalf, and blame their demise on that same greater power?

When passing the reins to his two daughters, Lear places himself in a restrictive environment. Once Goneril asks her father to reduce his entourage Lear
begins an introspective process asking, “Doth any here know me? This is not Lear. Doth Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes?” (Lr. 1.4.748-49). Lear no longer recognizes himself and the process of disintegration begins, which escalates during the tempest. In this case, the setting in Act III acts as a mirror of the emotional havoc and turmoil that is occurring. Lear is attempting to break free from his situation; residing with Goneril or Regan within the confines of their walls would be stifling. It is understandable, even if only to Lear at the time, that barren landscape in the middle of a storm is preferable to their company. His escape from them is a spiritual catharsis as he becomes one with the eye of the storm.

Lear finds himself in the company of not only Caius, but also his Fool and Edgar who disguises himself as a madman. While proceeding through inevitable stages of senility, Lear begins to recognize that the well being of others is as significant as his own. He prays for those who have nothing as he has nothing:

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this! (Lr. 3.4.1831-36)

We enter the realm of philosophy as Lear dares to ask basic questions about human existence and no answers can he find outside of himself. The emotions he experiences are a direct result of these difficult questions. As Leslie Dunton-Downer
and Alan Riding confirm, all one can do at this point in time is to blame Nature, and eventually turn inward to search one’s own mind and heart, and begin taking responsibility for one’s own actions (Dunton-Downer et al. 357). The Fool predicts what is to occur in the near future with his king: “This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen” (Lr. 3.4.1876).

Lear must face his humanity and vulnerability. Gerd Haefner’s *The Human Situation: A Philosophical Anthropology* (1989), discusses the unity of human existence and it’s meaning: “The acceptance of my limits is, thus, the acceptance of myself, that is, the acceptance of a person” (Haefner 184). One must not attempt to dominate his or herself, as though taming a beast or a tempest, but rather befriend that part of ourselves seemingly so elusive and ethereal. Coming to terms with the unknowns and achieving self-acceptance is necessary to live a healthy life. In Lear’s case, he falls savage in his battle with his place in the universe. Haefner points out, “In normal experience it is the case that no one can really accept the human being who cannot accept himself (Haefner 186). Interestingly, Shakespeare allows Lear to achieve a purging of his suffering at the resolution of the play. It is quite remarkable when Haefner, a philosopher, speaks about whether we cease to exist at the point of death: “The inconceivable simple non-existence swallows us up, and when all human beings who might remember us or whose conditions of existence were created by us are dead, then it will be as if we had never existed” (Haefner 187). Remember, Shakespeare’s works are ageless as once described by his friend and critic. One can argue that the works exist for the reason of our edification. Even
fictitious Lear exists subsequently, as well as his children, for their stories live on through the reader.

The tempest and Lear’s confrontation with himself is an opportunity to allow students to make connections between the learning and their own humanity and vulnerability. By posing philosophical questions regarding man’s existence in the world, educators can make the content more meaningful to students. One example of a philosophical question of which most people are familiar and an educator can begin with is as follows: When a tree falls in a forest does it make a sound? Philosophy can use reason and argumentation to establish a point, which is often characteristic. Philosophy, when broken down etymologically means philo (fond) and sophia (wisdom). In Lear’s case, his Fool seems much wiser than the king in regards to his decisions. Certainly anyone can argue in terms of disagreeing; however, it takes wisdom to reason and explain one’s position. Students need to acquire the ability to understand life and death and the nature of human existence. Lear represents a human manifestation of these philosophical ideas. Teachers need to enter into discourse with students, so they can consider these ideas working in their own lives. Teachers can ask questions, such as: 1) Are we defined by the amount of money we have?; 2) Can someone have a kingdom without money?; and, 3) What are riches?

Philosopher and psychologist Thomas Powell shares “Ten Great Questions of Philosophy and Religion” and several of these questions are relevant and can be
related to the content in Shakespeare’s tragedies as well as other great works of literature:

1) What is the place of humans in the universe? Is the universe conscious or unconscious of humans? If it is aware, is it warm and friendly, or cold and indifferent, or even hostile? (Powell)

2) What determines the fate of each individual? Is a human a creator and mover of life, or does one live at the effect of forces over which one has little control? Does free will exist or are human lives determined by outside factors—and if so, what are those factors? (Powell)

3) What happens at death? Is death the end of everything or is there a human soul that continues to exist beyond death? If so, is that soul immortal or does it too eventually cease to exist? If the soul does continue to exist after death, what is the nature of that existence? (Powell)

Of course, there are numerous sources to assist in finding philosophical questions to prompt students’ thinking. The important point is that the students can make a connection to the field of philosophy. For many students, even at the undergraduate level, the activity and resulting discussion may be the first true exposure to the discipline of philosophy, unless they have already completed Philosophy of Human Nature, or a similar required course. Students will learn there are no finite answers to the aforementioned questions and may even feel frustration when debating with other students. The facilitator of such a discussion must point out that it is valuable to simply have the mental capacity to ponder such questions and must accept that
there are questions we may never answer in our current state. Students can agree to disagree.

It has been established that Shakespeare set King Lear in pre-Christian times; therefore, negative events in King Lear’s, or one’s position in society, is not due to a punishment or reward from God and is not considered predetermined. Although an important point to recognize is that characters often call upon Nature or place blame upon her so they have something to blame (Dunton-Downer et al. 357). Interestingly, the work still reveals an influence from the time in which it is written; whether the connection to theology during Christian times is intentional on the part of the playwright is a matter of opinion. Haeffner addresses the concept of the historicity of historical writing in his text stating, “the human world of the past always stands in an inner connection with the human world of the present, whether it be continuous or analogous” (Haeffner 84). Shakespeare’s depiction of the events of Lear and his daughter Cordelia differ from previous versions in history. It seems indisputable by scholars that the bard deliberately made the necessary changes to plot and the resolution to ensure God is not called upon to assist the characters with the tragic events occurring; rather man or woman must intervene! However, there are connections between certain points in the play and Christian theology. Haefnner points out the following regarding historicity:

Whether intended by historians or not, to a greater or lesser extent every historical work will prove to be an ideological exaggeration or the passionate biases of a class, a period, or an individual. Even the attempt of a conscious,
self-critical ascetic writing of history, even if it succeeds, will be influenced by
the times ideology against which the researcher fights. (Haefnner 84)

Shakespeare is writing a tragedy; therefore, the playwright has the luxury of
changing what he wishes to suit his purposes. Important to realize is that
Shakespeare’s present is also evident in the work.

Stephen Greenblatt, a Shakespeare enthusiast and expert, shares Haeffner’s
view that the present will impact a writer’s retelling of history. It seems
unavoidable, even for the best historians. Greenblatt is known as one of the
founders of New Historicism, a “school of literary criticism, which concentrates on
understanding works of literature within their historical, social, and anthropological
contexts” (“Greenblatt”). For writing to be meaningful and accessible, it must be
personal. It should grip the reader and cause an emotional response. Shakespeare’s
work is not an accurate historical retelling; however, he has creative license as a
playwright and achieves a deeply personal emotional response from his audience.
Haeffner asserts, “What makes the past comprehensible and interesting for us is that
it is always about us: about our people, our religion, the constant human condition
in all its diversity” (Haeffner 84).

This idea is key when teaching Shakespeare’s King Lear as well as any other
literary work with its roots in history, whether classical or modern. It shall make no
difference to the reader that the ending of King Lear changes because it is beautiful in
its tragic, pure, and honest depiction of human nature regardless of society and
culture. King Lear is art in its purest form. Notably, Greenblatt shares a view similar
to that of Haeffner’s regarding meaningful connection between the literature and the reader: “I am constantly struck by the strangeness of reading works that seem addressed, personally and intimately, to me, and yet were written by people who crumbled to dust long ago (“Greenblatt”).

Readers also explore human traits through the inanimate forms of Shakespeare’s work, such as setting and mood. The tempest and Lear’s instability are inextricably linked within the work. An opportunity for educators to turn the kaleidoscope and view Act III through the discipline of psychology presents itself. When the Fool suggests they may all turn mad before the night’s end, he is referring to the entire group. According to psychologists Robert C. Carson, James N. Butcher, and Susan Mineka in *Fundamentals of Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life* (2002), there was an emergence of “mass madness—the widespread occurrence of group behavior disorders that were apparently cases of hysteria” (Carson et al. 15). The early Greeks and Romans believed evil spirits were not to blame for mental disorders, but instead it was due to natural causes. In addition, there exists an interesting parallel between “Dancing manias (epidemics of raving, jumping, dancing, and convulsions)” and Lear’s own internal battle with the storm (Carson et al. 15). The Gentleman describes Lear’s animalistic dance with Nature:

> Contending with the fretful elements;

> Bids the wind blow the earth into the sea,

> Or swell the curled waters 'bove the main,
That things might change or cease; tears his white hair,
Which the impetuous blasts, with eyeless rage,
Catch in their fury and make nothing of;
Strives in his little world of man to outscorn

The to-and-fro-conflicting wind and rain. (Lr. 3.1.1621-28)

Carson and his colleagues also attribute the mass madness of the Middle Ages predominately to the Black Death; however, most important is the fact that fright appears the underlying issue as people struggled with the prospect that catastrophes, such as the plague, “could have natural causes and thus could be within human power to control, prevent, or even create” (Carson et al. 15). In addition, the Greeks served to influence Shakespeare as well as playwrights before him. A prominent Greek physician, Galen, “believed that psychological disorders could have either physical causes, such as injuries to the head, or mental causes, such as disappointment in love” (Carson et al. 14). In Lear’s case, it is his emotions that cause his mental instability and eventually his tragic end.

Shakespeare achieves intimacy between his characters and the reader. For example, the reader follows Lear throughout his journey during the play. First, one reacts with disbelief to his poor decision during the first Act as he turns out Cordelia. Then, we empathize with Lear, who is no longer a powerful king, but rather an elderly man left defenseless in the elements by his two daughters. Meanwhile, readers continue to follow the story of Gloucester and his two sons. Edmund proves to be villainous and conspiratory in his greedy nature while Edgar
must disguise himself as a madman and brave the elements alongside King Lear. Edgar is undeserving of such treatment from his brother Edmund; hence, the audience begins to empathize with Edgar. It is at this time when Edgar's father enters the scene, obviously unaware that the feigned madman is his son.

Edmund learns from Gloucester that France is declaring war on Britain, for Lear has been wronged by those he had hoped would tend to his needs in his advancing years. Although Gloucester asks Edmund to speak nothing of this exchange to anyone else, his son decides to use this information to further his plan to usurp Gloucester and take over his lands. Gloucester decides to extend his hand further and come to the aid of Lear and his followers. Gloucester admits to Caius that similar to Lear, both the turmoil in the kingdom and his personal life affects him mentally as well: “I had a son,/Now outlaw'd from my blood. He sought my life/But lately, very late. I lov'd him, friend-/No father his son dearer. True to tell thee,/The grief hath craz'd my wits. What a night 's this!” (Lr. 3.4.1959-63).

Meanwhile, the Duke of Cornwall’s desire is to rise to a position of power now that Lear is out of the way. When Cornwall learns of Gloucester possessing the letter containing information regarding “the advantages of France” (Lr. 3.5.1992), he is angry and informs Edmund that the letter, “True or false, it hath made thee Earl of Gloucester./Seek out where thy father is, that he may be ready for our/apprehension” (Lr. 3.5.1997-99). Edmund agrees to apprehend his father at Cornwall’s request stating, “I will persever in my course of loyalty,/though the conflict be sore between that and my blood” (Lr. 3.5.2002). Cornwall reassures
Edmund, “I will lay trust upon thee, and thou shalt find a dearer/father in my love (Lr. 3.5.2003-04). Cornwall’s statement is important as it demonstrates his desire to rise to a higher position and transform into the father.

Act III Scene 7 is one of the most powerful in Shakespeare’s play. Gloucester whose son plots and schemes against him, shall be wronged further still. The awful mistreatment of Gloucester affects the audience emotionally. Cornwall, who is now the acting king, declares Gloucester a traitor and informs Goneril that she must make haste to notify her husband Albany of France’s intention to wage war upon Britain. Regan wants to see Gloucester hanged and Goneril suggests they “Pluck out his eyes” (Lr. 3.7.2126). Cornwall asks Edmund to leave with Goneril before punishing Gloucester for treasonous acts against them by aiding Lear and his followers. After they exit, Gloucester is bound by Cornwall’s orders and Regan proceeds to first pluck his beard. When they question him as to why he sent Lear to Dover, Gloucester stands his ground and demonstrates his loyalty and compassion to his king: “Because I would not see thy cruel nails/Pluck out his poor old eyes; nor thy fierce sister/In his anointed flesh stick boarish fangs” (Lr. 3.7.2185-87).

Gloucester ends by saying, “I shall see/The winged vengeance overtake such children” (Lr. 3.7.2195), to which Cornwall responds, “See’t shalt thou never. Fellows, hold the chair./Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot” (Lr. 3.7.2196-97).

The plucking out of Gloucester’s eyes is symbolic as well as emotionally powerful to the reader who already empathizes with Gloucester’s situation, who has been betrayed by his blood. When Gloucester calls for help and one eye is plucked
out, he calls the gods cruel. When he refers to the gods rather than Nature, it is a
noticeable transition from earlier in the play. He also says gods, indicating
polytheistic beliefs rather than monotheistic. However, it is not the gods or Nature
who offer assistance. A servant stands up to Cornwall and gives his life to attempt
and save Gloucester, demonstrating that there are still those loyal to Gloucester,
even those who are outside the family circle. Immediately following the altercation,
Cornwall continues his vicious treatment of Gloucester; indeed, it is as though in
Cornwall’s mind he will rid the man of his evil ways as he plucks out the remaining
eye: “Out, vile jelly! / Where is thy lustre now?” (Lr. 3.7.2216-17). Cornwall refers to
Gloucester’s eye as “vile,” meaning evil, base, or wicked. The “lustre” of his eye can
also symbolize Gloucester’s power as Cornwall dominates him and demonstrates
his authority now in Lear’s absence. Notably, Gloucester cannot see the wicked
ways of his son Edmund until it is too late; in fact, similar to the idiom of which
most are familiar, he turns a blind eye to the deceit going on around him.

Gloucester transitions back to his desire for Nature’s intervention rather than
the gods. He asks, “Where’s my son Edmund? / Edmund, enkindle all the sparks of
nature / To quit this horrid act” (Lr. 3.7.2218-20). It is only then that Cornwall and
Regan reveal Edmund is the one who told them about Gloucester’s treason.
Gloucester realizes his error and admits to the gods then, “O my follies! Then Edgar
was abus’d. / Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him!” (Lr. 3.7.2225-26).
Gloucester’s blindness is metaphorical in the beginning of the play when he does not
realize that Edgar is innocent and it is Edmund who is the villain. It is only now that he is physically blind that he can see the truth.

Throughout *King Lear* metaphorical blindness manifests in the characters. Students can take note of various references to eyes and blindness during the reading. If one refers back briefly to the first two acts, Lear admits, “Old fond eyes,/ Beweep this cause again, I’ll pluck ye out,/ And cast you, with the waters that you lose,/ To temper clay” (*Lr.* 1.4.830-33). In addition, the Fool states, “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 (*Lr.* 2.4.1324-25). Another powerful example is when the Fool teaches the following lesson to Lear regarding loyalty:

We’ll set thee to school to an ant, to teach thee there’s no labouring I’ th’ winter. All that follow their noses are led by their eyes but blind men, and there’s not a nose among twenty but can smell him that’s stinking. Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill, lest it break thy neck with following it; but the great one that goes upward, let him draw thee after. When a wise man gives thee better counsel, give me mine again. I would have none but knaves follow it, since a fool gives it.

That sir which serves and seeks for gain,
And follows but for form,
Will pack when it begins to rain
And leave thee in the storm.

But I will tarry; the fool will stay,

And let the wise man fly.

The knave turns fool that runs away;

The fool no knave, perdy. *(Lr. 2.4.1345-60)*

The Fool stays by Lear’s side and does not take flight during the storm and chaos in the kingdom. He points out that those who follow and flatter will not stay during inclement weather. When the Fool speaks of those who “Will pack when it begins to rain,” *(Lr. 2.4.1355)*, it reminds one of the term ‘fair-weather friend’ that many students are familiar with and they can make meaningful connections to permeable relationships in their lives. On the opposite side, those who stay loyal during tumultuous times will also speak the truth and want what is best for their friend.

The inclusion of such a gruesome act as the plucking out of eyes serves various purposes. One purpose is to illustrate for the reader the concept of metaphorical blindness and another as entertainment. Brander Matthews in *Shakspere as a Playwright* (1913), suggests that it is possible the “episode took shape as it did partly because of the well-known delight the Elizabethan playgoers had in beholding ghastly spectacles of mutilation and torture -- a violent delight which Shakspere again procured them by the plucking out of Gloucester's eyes” *(Matthews 99)*. Important also is when Howard Bloom points out in *William Shakespeare's King Lear* (1987) that the human traits Shakespeare is examining, “hatred and revenge are a plucking-out of the human imagination as fatal to man's power to find his way in
the universe as Cornwall's plucking out Gloucester's eyes was to the guidance of his body on earth” (Bloom 42). The act also serves as evidence of Shakespeare’s present time and one can explore the work through a theological lens.

Students should have the opportunity to examine the similarity between the scene of Cornwall plucking out Gloucester’s eyes and the reference in the bible to plucking out one’s eyes. In the 1611 version of the *King James Bible* the verse from Matthew 5:29 is as follows: “And if the right eye offend thee, plucke it out, and cast it from thee. For it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell” (*King James Bible*, Mat. 5:29). The verse can be read using the King James Bible Online website. It is not the only time that a reference to one’s eye is made in the Bible, and students can search to explore the numerous verses that include a reference to the eye. One can discuss the fact that Cornwall does not want Gloucester to “see” any more evil that is being done in Lear’s absence. Cornwall convinces himself that Gloucester is the one who is treasonous and evil. He feels that he is ridding Gloucester of sinful, wicked eyes. In fact, it is Cornwall who is committing the act of evil.

The reference in the Bible regarding one plucking out his eye if it offends can be read as either metaphorical or literal. Today’s society has different viewpoints in that regard. One should not attempt to suggest the best choice, as opinions differ on the matter, but rather point out that Shakespeare’s inclusion of this point can lift a veil from the struggle of humankind to come to terms with our place in the universe and the resulting questions. Many Christians during Shakespeare’s time would feel
a connection to this act due to the numerous references in the Bible, and references that would have been communicated during religious services for those who were illiterate. Shakespeare sets the play as Pre-Christian, subtly suggesting none in the audience would commit such a barbarous act themselves. Many Christian writers today refer to the verse as metaphorical. The message is meant to communicate the necessity of following Jesus’ warning to people and guard against a human being’s ugliest traits. Wayne Jackson of the Christian Courier points out, “mere amputation of hand or foot, or the removal of an eye, does not alter the condition of the heart. Such actions, therefore, drastic though they are, would not provide sufficient motive for a transformed heart...surgery is spiritual, not physical.” (Jackson). His point is a valid one, especially when juxtaposed with Shakespeare’s text and Gloucester’s dismal situation. The removal of Gloucester’s eyes was physical; however, it was symbolic in that through the physical transformation by the hand of another and the words of truth that follow, Gloucester undergoes a spiritual transformation.

In order to assist learners in making connections to society today, one can pull in current events to juxtapose with Shakespeare’s *King Lear* and the Bible previously discussed. Short articles are available online, containing high interest national news stories, that mirror Shakespeare’s characters and coincide with themes. For example, an article by Jamie Burch entitled “Man Plucks Out His Uncle’s Eyes With a Spoon” and available online through WKRG.com News 5. The article is brief, yet intriguing and demonstrates the relevance to modern society. The article discusses a gruesome act in which a man from Pritchard, Alabama removed
his 79 year-old uncle’s eyes with a spoon and left them in the garbage can. The motive is not included in the article, yet one can certainly pose questions regarding possible motives: 1) Did the man believe his uncle committed an act of wickedness requiring what he believed the removal of his uncle’s eyes in order to reach the kingdom of Heaven?; 2) Was the man acting out of revenge and hatred; or, 3) Did he believe that he was doing what was necessary to ensure his uncle’s salvation? The expository writing prompts can precede discussion regarding individual opinions.

A second example demonstrating relevance is a news article regarding a prisoner in Grayson County, Texas in 2004. An article entitled “Man plucks out own eye, quotes Bible” is available online by WorldNetDaily. The article is relatively short; when juxtaposing with the other works, the article can prompt discussion regarding literal translations and create meaningful connections to student learning. In this case, the prisoner is awaiting trial for the murder of his family by mutilation; the act of plucking out his own eye was an exhibition to the police where he follows by sharing the same bible verse (“Man”). Questions one can pose for readers are: 1) If the verse is to be taken literally, would the act of self mutilation and removal of one eye transform his heart and ensure his salvation for removing the hearts of three victims?; 2) If he is given the death penalty, would it be an appropriate punishment for taking the lives of three human beings; and, 3) Would life in prison be a better choice?

The juxtapositioning of Shakespeare’s King Lear, the Bible verse, and the two current events articles can not only assist readers of all levels in making meaningful
connections, but also provides an example of how to meet one of the essential skills outlined in the Common Core at the secondary level. For example, one of the reading standards for grades 9-10 is to “Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare)” (“English”). Of course, there are other reading standards as well that one can fulfill by the exploration of Shakespeare through Kaleidoscope teaching. By juxtaposing classic works with other works, especially current events and more modern works of fiction or non-fiction, teachers can assist students in making connections to their other coursework, their prior learning, and their own lives in an engaging and effective way.

The final two acts of *King Lear* can be discussed in terms of how the transformation progresses for the characters. 21st century learners can reflect upon these changes and their emotional responses to the actions. Gloucester and Lear are similar because they both learn their mistakes and seek forgiveness for those mistakes. Edgar recognizes that his father’s transformation cost him his eyes, and Gloucester realizes which son truly loves him and who does not. Albany seeks revenge for Gloucester’s suffering, which is due to Edmund’s disloyalty. Lear’s disgrace due to his previous actions against his daughter Cordelia prevents him from seeking her assistance and forgiveness, while at the same time, she is urgently trying to locate him and assist him. He tells the Gentleman who has come to retrieve him, “Let me have a surgeon;/ I am cut to th’ brains” and Lear will exit by
running away in shame (Lr. 4.6.2798-99). When Lear meets Cordelia again, he first believes that he is seeing a spirit. However, once he recognizes her he states, “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.” (Lr. 4.7.2993-95). However, Cordelia assures her father that she does not. Both Lear and Gloucester demonstrate their similar transformations i.e. Gloucester asking his son Edgar to assist him in committing suicide by jumping off a cliff and Lear asking Cordelia to poison him. Both fathers feel remorse for their actions and hope to compensate by offering their lives. Of course both Edgar and Cordelia forgive their fathers for the mistakes they have made and do not wish for their deaths. Their love and loyalty is evident.

The resolution of King Lear is powerful for the audience. The tragic ending is emotionally affecting, yet there is a light within the darkness. Cordelia and her father are prisoners and Edgar arrests Edmund for treason. In addition, Regan and Goneril’s scheming is brought to light by the end. Edgar tells Edmund, “Draw thy sword,/That, if my speech offend a noble heart,/Thy arm may do thee justice.” (Lr. 5.3.3274-76). The two brothers duel and Edgar is victorious. Edgar shares the story with his brother of their father’s transformation and how his heart “Burst smilingly” (Lr. 5.3.3358) when he learned that the man was his son. Edmund admits to Edgar, “Th’ hast spoken right; ’tis true./The wheel is come full circle; I am here.” (Lr. 5.3.3331-32). Goneril and Regan commit suicide before punishment is given for their crimes. Before Edmund dies he reveals that orders were given previously to murder
Cordelia; consequently, Lear enters with his daughter’s lifeless body in his arms as he declares, “She’s gone for ever!” (Lr. 5.3.3436).

It is important to note that the discourse between Lear and those present following the death of Cordelia makes a comparison between the action taking place and the final judgment of humankind, similar to the book of Revelation. For example, the Earl of Kent exclaims, “Is this the promis’d end?” (Lr. 5.3.3441) and Lear professes, “A plague upon you, murderers, traitors all!” (Lr. 5.3.3450). Kent reveals himself to Lear and shares that he is also Caius who has remained loyal to Lear through his trial. Albany shares with all those present that Lear’s power is now restored: “For us, we will resign,/During the life of this old Majesty,/To him our absolute power; [to Edgar and Kent] you to your rights;” (Lr. 5.3.3486-89). Both Edgar and Kent have been given back their honor as well, proving themselves to be loyal indeed. Honor and loyalty are themes running throughout the play as mentioned earlier. However, Bloom points out, “King Lear also exhibits and demonstrates something else. It shows that there is a mode of seeing as much higher than physical eyesight...an insight that bestows power to see ‘things invisible to mortal sight’” (Bloom 42). An example Bloom provides is when Lear sees Cordelia’s lips move, for the reference is in relation to heaven sending down “visible spirits” (Lr. 4.2.2390) during judgment and Lear must see the spirit in order to gain entry into heaven: “Do you see this? Look on her! look! her lips! Look there, look there!” (Lr. 5.3.3499-500). Lear’s transformation is complete and he reaches a resolution by his own doing. The deaths of Cordelia, Gloucester, and Lear are tragic; the effect is haunting
in its realistic depiction of the vulnerability of human beings, which is a constant theme. A small light in the darkness remains in that Edgar and Albany will no doubt rule with honor.

Shakespeare’s works are still relevant to readers of all ages due to the lessons he teaches. In fact, the Iowa Department of Education emphasizes the bard’s relevance today as well when they include Shakespeare as quality literature in their “Note on range and content of student reading,” which is as follows:

To become college and career ready, students must grapple with works of exceptional craft and thought whose range extends across genres, cultures, and centuries. Such works offer profound insights into the human condition and serve as models for students’ own thinking and writing. Along with high-quality contemporary works, these texts should be chosen from among seminal U.S. documents, the classics of American literature, and the timeless dramas of Shakespeare. Through wide and deep reading of literature and literary nonfiction and thoughtful exposure to visual media of steadily increasing sophistication, students gain a reservoir of literary and cultural knowledge, references, and images; the ability to evaluate intricate arguments; and the capacity to surmount the challenges posed by complex texts. (“English”)

The notes provided by the Iowa Department of Education present educators with a clear rationale for continuing the teaching of Shakespeare’s works, which are described above as “timeless”. The explanation coincides with that of the
playwright’s friend and critic, Jonson—Shakespeare’s works are ageless. Specifically, today readers can make connections to their own lives and will continue to do so in the future due to Shakespeare’s relevant themes of family dynamics and loyalty versus betrayal.

One of the final pieces an educator should implement to meet the requirements set forth in the common core is to incorporate visual media. Specifically, the above notes provided by the Iowa Department of Education point out that teachers should allow time in their units for “thoughtful exposure to visual media of steadily increasing sophistication” (“English”); fortunately, the opportunities for incorporating analysis of filmic text are abundant when reading Shakespeare and certainly worthwhile to explore with students.

Analyzing Filmic Text

The common core emphasizes the importance of including dramas, such as Shakespeare, and there is an increasing emphasis on using technology as a means to facilitate learning and to engage students. Teachers can use these guidelines as ways to improve upon their teaching practice. Educators who include analysis of filmic text, must possess the basic knowledge and experience necessary to select films that are worthwhile for students and offer social relevance. As a profession, teachers need to move beyond simply showing a film as reinforcement, or for the sake of compare and contrast. As stated earlier, most students master the
completion of a Venn diagram in elementary school. A Venn diagram consists of three circles that students use to record similarities and differences between two topics. Of course, teachers need not discard the Venn diagram completely, but rather think about using it as a tool for ELL students whose English language development is still minimal. In fact, teachers can incorporate visuals into a Venn diagram to assist English language learners with comparing and contrasting the two works and offer reinforcement of the material.

Students who are proficient in English should reach a much higher level of analysis through the materials provided by their teacher. For example, educators can develop a guided viewing packet prior to showing the film to their students, which will assist learners in analyzing the filmic text and teach film terminology in the process. One can ponder questions regarding the director’s purpose and choice of camera angles. For the educator who has not completed any previous film courses, there are resources available that can assist them in asking higher-level questions. These resources are developed by experts in the field, and are specifically designed to analyze filmic text in relation to the content students are learning. One example is the Hartwick Humanities in Management Institute. The Institute has developed an effective teaching system for a variety of works that can be incorporated into diverse interdisciplinary settings. Cases include teaching notes, background information, and a “a survey and description of management and leadership theories which students often find helpful in analyzing the leadership dynamics in the case study.” (“Hartwick”).
The case also includes ready-made discussion questions with sample answers that educators can utilize to assist them in facilitating dialogue regarding the work. In addition, “the teaching notes conclude with a carefully selected bibliography.” (“Hartwick”). An example is the Hartwick Classic Film Leadership Case® regarding *Henry V* where students focus on “conflict, succession, and above all, redemption. Students observe as Henry V grows in stature and ability, developing skills and credibility in the eyes of his followers” (“Hartwick”). If the teacher chooses a film to juxtapose with the text that is not currently included as an option by Hartwick, the website also includes downloadable samples of the teacher notes; therefore, educators can learn by example to develop their own individualized guided viewing packets and questions for discussion.

It is helpful if the teacher builds a website where all of the valuable resources can be accessed by the learners and parents outside of the school day. For example, one can create a Google website where both students and colleagues can access important information regarding the curriculum and valuable resources that can be utilized by both students and teachers to ensure success and enrich the curriculum (Bellville). All students have different backgrounds and experiences entering into the learning and while some may have previous knowledge regarding film, for others their background may be scant to non-existent. Additional bibliographic resources may be necessary for students to be successful, especially if they will be asked to compose a reaction paper to the film as a form of assessment. The additional resources should be up to date and easy to locate on the teacher website.
Two current websites that are beneficial in learning terminology and definitions is also available to peruse online for free. First, the “Basic Glossary of Film Terms” compiled by Springhurst is a printer friendly and fairly simplistic list of general terms necessary to analyze filmic text (“Basic”). There are additional sites that will provide these basic terms that teachers can choose from. Notably, a second website developed by American Movies Classics is ideal for educators, especially to assist visual learners; it provides visual representations of concepts presented and is also interactive at times; for example, when one scrolls down to “audio” there is an option to click on the corresponding audio image and hear an example of an audio clip from a film (“Film”). A third list that is frequently referenced in other websites regarding film analysis and should be noted is referred to as Rosebud: an evolving digital resource site for film studies (Robinson et al.); unfortunately, the site is currently under construction, hence, the appropriate description for the site as “evolving”. However, the aforementioned site would be beneficial to check periodically because the list is both exceptionally detailed for advanced learners and printer friendly for teachers who may not have access to computers at all times for their students.

Selecting a film to incorporate into the curriculum should begin by determining what the purpose is for viewing and analyzing the filmic text. One must consider whether it is necessary to show a film that strictly follows the same plot, time period, and setting as the original literary piece. For example, if the students demonstrate comprehension of the plot, character, and dominate themes of Shakespeare’s drama King Lear through their writing and discussion that may also
serve as formative, non-graded assessments, then is it necessary to reinforce the exact same learning? Alternatively, would it be more advantageous to the learners if teachers guide them to cross cultural barriers and spans of time to find similar themes and life lessons? 21st century students can recognize the relevance of a classic work of literature in their own lives by exploring the themes in more modern works. In truth, some conflicts people face are not always due to the culture or time period, but simply because we are human.

*Ran* is a 1985 film directed by Akira Kurosawa. The film is rated R and thus appropriate for either secondary learners with parental permission, or for analysis at the post-secondary level. The name *Ran* will translate as “chaos”, which is fitting for a *King Lear* film adaptation. The director, Kurosawa, incorporates the themes of Shakespeare’s tragedy *King Lear* and sets the film in 15th-century Feudal Japan.

According to David Jenkins, a writer and critic of *Time Out London* magazine in his literary piece entitled “World Gone Wrong: An Introduction to Akira Kurosawa’s *Ran,*” the film *Ran* “has since earned a reputation as being among the greatest – if not the greatest – works in the director’s esteemed back catalogue” (Jenkins 5).

When juxtaposing the film *Ran* and *King Lear*, one will find similarities relating to the family dynamics and conflict that result from the decisions made by the patriarch of the family. In the film, it is Lord Hidetora Ichimonji, played by Tatsuya Nakadai, who will divide his land and fortune among his three children. One difference is that he bequeaths his lands and castles among his sons, rather than
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Lear who has daughters. The switching of genders is necessary due to the fact that women could not own property; however, the struggle remains consistent.

Hidetora’s eldest son is Taro Takatora Ichimonji, played by Akira Terao. Jinpachi Nezu stars as the middle son, Jiro Masatora Ichimonji. Finally, Hidetora’s youngest and most loyal son is Saburo Naotora Ichimonji. Kurosawa remains faithful to Shakespeare’s plot; the youngest son is similar to Cordelia in his loyalty and honesty to his father. Saburo will not shower his father with compliments; it is not due to any lack of loyalty or love for his father, but instead due to his realistic feelings and knowledge that Hidetora has been imperfect in his duties as both a leader, and a father. Similar to Lear, Lord Hidetora feels as though his youngest has shown him disrespect due to his honesty. Unfortunately, the gift Lord Hidetora bestows upon his sons will turn into a bloody battle between the brothers, who similar to Goneril and Regan in King Lear, will exhibit some of the worst of human traits, including greed, lust, and deceit.

Students will note that Lord Hidetora is driven mad just as King Lear; however, a significant difference is in the resolution. The end of Kurosawa’s film offers no forgiveness for Hidetora. Shakespeare graciously offers Lear an opportunity to transform and achieve redemption, while Lord Hidetora will be tormented throughout the play and his death demonstrates nothing more than an end to his suffering on an earthly world; tragically, the viewer is left to assume chaos continues for Hidetora after his death as a tormented soul, or worse that there
is nothing at all after death. One can also speculate that the end is retribution for all of Hidetora’s sins that he faces throughout the course of the film.

Lord Hidetora’s plan is unsuccessful and he has a disturbing vision foreshadowing his demise and feeling of aloneness in the world. Jenkins points out in the setting of Ran, there are “visions of desolations, of stable societies laid waste and barren by man-made cataclysm that would have resonated...with widespread anxieties over nuclear warfare in post-Hiroshima Japan” (Jenkins 10). An interesting film to analyze following Ran in undergraduate studies would be Hiroshima, Mon Amour (1959) to reflect upon the themes and attitudes of different people regarding the war and their place now in the world.

It is important to begin the film analysis by offering background information regarding the director, Kurosawa. He is a forerunner for color cinematography. Remarkably, it is due to his ability to create “detailed color story-boards for all the film’s key scenes” (Jenkins 14) that assisted him in receiving the necessary funding to finish the production of Ran during a time when producers were backing away from expensive and major motion pictures. Jenkins describes the importance of this accomplishment and Kurosawa’s talent:

These elaborate illustrations – which bore close stylistic comparison to the work of painters such as Gauguin, Cézanne and Van Gogh – would appear to be almost impossible to emulate on film. But remarkably, the vivid richness of Kurosawa’s original sketches makes it to the screen: rival armies are
decked out in primary-colored plate armor; quivering lime-green mountainsides slowly segue into parched red wastelands; Hidetora’s peachy complexion turns green, white, grey and blue during the course of the film to represent his descent into hell. (Jenkins 13-14)

Kurosawa’s filmmaking techniques strongly influenced many of our modern directors. For example, Zack Snyder’s forceful 300, or Quentin Tarantino’s unforgiving Kill Bill, with which 21st century learners are familiar today (Jenkins 5).

The battle scene during the middle of the play includes haunting music by Tôru Takemitsu. The score matches the lingering pans in a provocative way. Jenkins describes the chaotic battle where, “aggression has been favored over clemency as a means of recourse” (15). Takemitsu’s score is emotionally affecting to the viewer, which he created after his visit to the set on the black slopes of Mount Fuji. In fact, director Chris Marker points out during his feature-length documentary “A.K.” regarding the director Akira Kurosawa, that the day Takemitsu visits the set it is overcast, the sky is gray, and the castle seems to sit atop a haunted mountainside, with a ghost of Lear, Lord Hidetora, who scurries from castle to castle in a chaotic and mad state. It is the picture he captures in his mind of his visit to Mount Fiji that Takemitsu commits to his memories before returning to compose his brilliant musical score. (Ran)

Kurosawa believes that “To create something it must be based on memories.” (Ran). There must be a familiar story, perhaps about someone who is loyal and is
shunned, while others who mean to deceive are given positions of authority. The human characteristics of love, greed, and lust are all familiar traits. People identify with these traits, as well as the feelings of helplessness and aloneness in the world – the familiar questioning of one’s place in the universe, even more so during times of chaos, betrayal, and/or the division of one’s family. Students can make connections to their own lives. For example, teachers can ask for examples of when students have experienced these same human characteristics and feelings of helplessness.

The battle scene is deeply personal for Kurosawa. In fact, he models for the viewer his firm belief that one’s history guides his creative process. It has been established that Shakespeare’s work is a product not only of his present, but also of his past. The concept of historicity has been discussed in relation to Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, and one must point out that it is equally relevant during the analysis of filmic text. Marker shares with the viewer that when the director was young a terrible earthquake took the lives of many in Japan, and “then came fires and a night of horror – a date in the history of human stupidity” (*Ran*).

The event that resonates with Kurosawa occurred on September 1, 1923 when a massive earthquake shook Japan killing thousands of people. The shock from the horrific events prompted the government to declare martial law to help sustain order. Unfortunately, rumors began to circulate that Koreans would take advantage of the situation. Eventually, some Japanese people took it upon themselves to murder hundreds of Koreans. Marker describes the event as the “‘final solution’ for
immigration before its time” (Ran). Ultimately, the people of Tokyo placed blame on the Koreans for the devastation to the Japanese coast, the event is comparable to Hitler blaming the Jews for crimes they did not commit. Following the massacre, 13-year-old Kurosawa, is taken to witness the mutilated corpses by his older brother, a day that affects him for years to come:

He wanted to close his eyes to the swollen, disfigured bodies in the Sumida River, but his brother made him keep his eyes open. In his autobiography, Kurosawa recalled his brother’s words: “Shut your eyes to scary things and you’ll be more frightened. Look directly at them and nothing will scare you again.” (Ran)

A lesson students can learn from Kurosawa’s film Ran and Shakespeare’s King Lear is that people should not turn a blind eye on human cruelty; accept that it is a part of our human history and learn from it. Teachers can ask students to describe an event in their lives that was powerful and haunting to assist them in creating meaningful connections. Captivatingly, the Kurosawa paints a ghastly picture of the truth behind human cruelty in his war scenes – a horrifying sight, which can be juxtaposed for students with Picasso’s artwork depicting the tragic events in Guernica in 1937:
The two massacres of innocent people are similar and we can view the work through a different lens to create meaningful connections. A teacher can display an image of the famous painting depicting the scene of destruction following a Nazi bombing of the Basque Town of Guernica, Spain using the Internet. One can then juxtapose this image with the battle scene in the film *Ran*. It is important to point out that rather than dismissing the battle scene in the film as overly graphic, think about the scene in terms of the director’s own experiences and interpretation of war. The teacher can pose questions to assist students in evaluating both works. For example, using the narrative imagination, how would it feel to be a witness to the shocking events of war? Would someone who has witnessed the horrors of war feel a moral obligation to depict it in a realistic manner? What is the purpose of Pablo
Picasso’s artistic work Guernica and what is he trying to convey? What is the purpose of Kurosawa’s battle scene and what is he trying to convey? Is either one of greater or lesser value? Finally, do you consider both battle scenes as works of art?

After recording written responses to these questions, teachers can facilitate a class discussion regarding the students’ responses before moving on to other important aspects of the film.

One must add that while Kurosawa pays close attention to detail and depicts reality during war, he is also as brief and precise as possible during the filming of these scenes. He hopes to prevent the cast and crew from becoming consumed by the violence, or take away from the integrity of the film and the themes woven throughout the script. He draws from his memories and experiences, thus, creating a remarkable work that is relevant and meaningful to people of all cultures – anyone who experiences war, division of family, chaos, and other common conflicts. In addition, the Samurai warriors assist in creating a powerful and emotionally evocative battle. Learners will also benefit from knowing that while it was a different time and culture, the samurai warriors were not barbarians; in truth, the writings prove otherwise. These men were well-educated men with as much relevance and substance as scholars today. One must humanize these men whose lives were lost, often too soon, for the sake of honor and loyalty. (Ran) At the same time, teachers should point out that even educated, scholarly people can act barbarically as demonstrated in both Ran and King Lear.
Remarkably the director uses three cameras to ensure three different shots amidst a natural setting. As a director, Kurosawa both battles and embraces the elements as he films on the steep, dark slopes of Mount Fuji. Using predominately natural lighting is difficult for directors. At times during filming, it would be overcast when the director needed more light, or the opposite would happen, too much light during times when he prefers a darkness or shadows. The overcast sky creates a sense of metonymy necessary for this dark film. Most of the crew are loyal followers of the director and therefore understand his directions so well, that they can create powerful angles and capture intense moments with such speed under difficult circumstance relating to the location and/or unpredictable weather. Kurosawa, or “Sensei” as his crew respectfully calls him, “hacks his film out of the weather like a sculptor” (Marker).

In one particular scene, Sensei’s artistic side emerges. He draws a moon for a night tracking shot. He instructs the crew to cover a stretch of grass in gold spray to stand out while the Fool leads his Lord Hidetora on horseback. The combination of natural and artificial light, and resulting shadows, seem to dance creating an emotionally affecting and arresting scene. Sadly, the scene was cut during editing (Ran). However, the director’s artistic techniques are evident in other parts of the film as well as he plays with the stories embedded within his adaptation: “In a modern context, Kurosawa shows us human atrocities painted with cold, direct strokes, and the pain that can be brought about with the insouciance of a swiped blade” (Jenkins 15).
In the beginning of the film, Kurosawa attempts to teach a lesson to his sons. Lord Kurosawa asks his three sons to each use their hands to break one single arrow. Jenkins points out that the lesson he is teaching is loosely autobiographical. True, a man once existed in the 16th century by the name of Mōri Montonari, who also taught this lesson. Each individual arrow is broken successfully. The difference is that when Montonari bundles three arrows together and asks his sons to break them with their bare hands, they are unsuccessful. In this lesson, Montonari teaches “collective strength trumps individual endeavor” (Jenkins 6). However, a teacher must point out to her students that the director uses the story of Montonari to suit his own purpose. It ends with one of Kurosawa’s sons taking the bundle of three arrows. He breaks them over his knee to prove to his father that “combined strength is all very well, but it also has its limits – and its breaking point” (Jenkins 6).

There are similarities and differences between the *Ran* and *King Lear* that can be addressed during a discussion of the teacher-designed guided viewing materials. Students will be able to easily identify the similarities. For example, the sons strip their father of his retinue similar to Lear’s daughters gradually reducing the numbers of his entourage. In addition, Taro will usurp his father and strip him of not only his authority, but also his title that Lord Hidetora believes he will maintain after his decision to divide his lands among his sons. The theme is also consistent regarding an aging patriarch who hopes to relinquish his duties prematurely and expects to continue his current lifestyle until his death – to be cared for by children who will deceive him. Concerns regarding power and who has that power over the
people is as relevant during the time it was directed as in the 15th - 16th centuries, and continues to be relevant today. Hidetora is blind to those who will betray him and those who have his best interest at heart, just as Lear’s metaphorical blindness in Shakespeare’s work. However, “Ran digresses from Lear, with Kurosawa presenting Hidetora as both tactless and wicked, in subtle contrast to Lear’s benign fool who in the play, has fewer past demons to reconcile” (Jenkins 16). Notably, due to the relentless taunting of Kurosawa for his past sins, the audience will begin to feel empathy for the Lord Kurosawa as with King Lear.

Lady Kaede is the quintessential femme fatale of the film. As femme fatale, she will not follow the traditional norms for women during her time. She is fiercely independent and will use her sexuality to seduce men and bend them to her will. Lady Kaede seeks revenge and feels hatred toward the Ichimonji family. After the death of her husband Lord Taro, she seduces his brother Lord Jiro, and orders the beheading of his wife Lade Sue; she explains to him that she cannot be his concubine and they will be free to marry. Secretly she vows to seek justice for all the atrocities that occurred in her past and to her own family. The power of this female character and her motive will not be immediately clear to the viewer. Interestingly, no introduction to her character is necessary; eventually her background and motive is clear. Her complex character is best left to unravel for the viewer as the director see fits with no hints from a teacher as to Lady Kaede’s motives. As a result, the reaction from the viewer will be stronger. Although her past does not justify her wicked actions, one cannot help feeling empathy for what she faces.
A significant point that one should address prior to viewing, is that there is no tug of war and indecisiveness occurring between man blaming Nature for what happens versus calling upon God’s help. In fact, God is truly one of the characters in *Ran*. For example, Kyoami is Hidetora’s fool and loyal to his Lord throughout the duration of the film. Kyoami angrily yells to God in the heavens, “You ease your boredom in heaven by crushing us like worms” (Jenkins 17). Interestingly, while God is ever-present in the film, the director also manages to pull the characters away from the idea of God intervening on the character’s behalf, and denies the characters the opportunity for spiritual transcendence. An example that should be fully discussed following the viewing of *Ran* and after students complete a guided viewing packet occurs during the resolution. Tsurumara, a man whose eyes have been gouged out during Hidetora’s rule, stumbles on the edge of a cliff. He accidentally drops a scroll into a ravine that was given to him by Sumé; the scroll contains an image of Buddha that is meant to protect him. The audience is left with a dark idea, which Jenkins describes as the following: “Hope is futile, salvation is a myth, we are all one step away from a grisly death, and in our darkest hour, God will most certainly not be there to guide, teach and absolve us.” (Jenkins 17).

Students can reflect upon the two tragic endings. Is there a feeling of unfulfillment? Do we as a society need the small light in the darkness that Shakespeare offers through Lear’s transcendence? Is this director’s vision unsettling? Students will create meaningful connections between other films they have viewed that may leave them, or those around them, uncomfortable due its
harshness. For example, *Kill Bill* is an example mentioned by Jenkins that can leave the audience squirming in their seats due to the content. In fact, some cannot watch it all the way through, because the stories included are so unfathomable and traumatic to the characters (Jenkins 5). Another modern example is the book and film *Lovely Bones*, which many secondary students will be familiar. Of course, there are numerous other films students may make connections with.

The guided viewing packet should begin by including relevant information regarding the film and director. Film terms should be incorporated into the questions and any other points or observations shared with the viewer by the instructor. The terms should be used appropriately in context to provide practice for the students and elaborated upon when necessary. The viewer will increase their understanding of the term by watching the film, which provides them with a visual representation of the concept. Enough space should be provided following each question for students to brainstorm their ideas on a reproducible copy. The instructor should practice answering the questions to ensure the space necessary is provided and will create a key in the process; a key is helpful when collaborating with other teachers, sharing resources, and creating common assessments.

The guided viewing packet can serve as an ideal formative and non-graded assessment of the student’s learning prior to summative assessment. Important to note is that with the new emphasis on common assessments between teachers, the summative, graded assessment can take any number of forms and should be agreed
upon between the teachers who will be utilizing the common assessment in their classrooms. The key is to incorporate the learning from the formative assessments thus far. If students have already completed the discussion questions during the reading of *King Lear* and were held accountable for participating in the classroom discussions, and now they are asked to do the same using a guided viewing packet while analyzing the filmic text, their success on a summative test regarding these concepts is assured. Therefore, those who are creating the summative assessment can choose any form they desire with the understanding that they ask questions students have already had the opportunity to practice. In this way, English instructors are implementing best practice for 21st Century learners and meeting the essential skills and concepts necessary for their particular content area as well as across several other important disciplines.
RAN (1985) – Guided Viewing Packet

Ran (1985) was directed by Akira Kurosawa and is now considered one of his greatest works. The film is based on Shakespeare’s King Lear, however there exist notable divergences by the director. Viewing and analyzing Ran allows us to cross over into a distinctly different time and culture. However, one will recognize universal themes emerging in the filmic text that are as relevant in 15th-Century Feudal Japan as in Shakespeare’s King Lear, and continue to be significant for all societies in the 21st Century.

3:37: During the opening sequence, following a hunt, Lord Hidetora Ichimonji begins with a metaphor. He compares himself to the old boar whose hide is too tough to eat and foul. He asks them, “Would you eat me?” How is this an example of foreshadowing?

**Answer:** Lord Hidetora is comparing himself to the boar due to his advancing age and own uncleanness due to sins and wicked ways. He is contemplating dividing his lands among his children, however there is clearly a shred of doubt in his mind as to whether this is a wise decision; will his sons devour him?

A similarity exists between the play in film in that two daughters are offered in marriage to Saburo to demonstrate an act of friendship to Hidetora. In King Lear two men offer their hands in marriage to Cordelia before she is cast off.

5:40:00: Kyoami, the Fool, entertains the guests and says, “On that far mountain there” and the camera cuts to the landscape, and then back to the group of men. “On that near mountain there…” and the camera cuts back to the landscape. “Whose that?” Kyoami looks at the two Lords who offer their daughters in marriage: “It’s ears up in the air as is its habit…a little rabbit.” Saburo questions Kyoami, “Only one hare, Kyoami? I think there were two…hopping here, to be eaten by father.” Who is Saburo actually referring to and what comparison is he making?

**Answer:** The two men who offer their daughters in marriage are like two old rabbits that will be cooked in a stew, “a tasty dish for father to chew.” The comparison is insulting the two Lords, who laugh it off as the Fool is allowed certain liberties others would be killed for sharing as with Shakespeare’s Fool; however, Hidetora reprimands Saburo.

The Lord falls asleep during the discourse dropping his plate to the ground. The action emphasizes the patriarch’s advancing years in preparation for the events soon unfolding. How does Saburo demonstrate his loyalty and love for his father…by what action?

**Answer:** Saburo places branches with foliage by his father to provide him shade from the hot sun while he sleeps, whereas the eldest brothers just walked away and left him.

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9:45:00: What is the vision that Hidetora describes when he wakes, and how is it significant to the story? What can we infer he is feeling during the close-up shot?
Answer: His vision is of a strange land—a vast wilderness. He is alone in the vision with no one there. The vision is significant as it predicts what will happen to him as he goes mad and runs about the harsh land of Mount Fuji, often with no roof over his head for protection. We can infer from his expression that he is fearful about the vision.

Why does Hidetora begin to laugh after describing the vision to his sons?
Answer: He feels it is ridiculous and says, “Taro’s voice pulled me back.” He suddenly feels shame regarding his vulnerability; he is then grateful for the love of his children.

10:49:00: Why is Saburo upset by affection his father shows his sons, especially when Saburo’s actions demonstrate his love and loyalty for his father in the previous scene?
Answer: Hidetora’s affection is out of character; it makes Saburo aware of his father’s deteriorating condition, and of the metaphorical blindness to the truth. Hidetora is foolish in believing his other sons are loyal or capable of the real love he now desires in old age.

11:38:00: Lord Hidetora calls a meeting where he describes the wars waged and blood shed between the clans; what sounds do we hear and how do they contribute to the mood? How are the sounds symbolic of what will occur due to Hidetora’s decisions?
Answer: We hear thunder in the background, the harshness and rumble of energy that can be compared to the harsh leadership throughout the years—a reflection of the Feudal system. Hidetora wants to end these wars and we hear birds chirping briefly, then as he mentions that he wants to cede total authority over all his dominions to his eldest son Taro, and the thunder rumbles in the background as he declares, “Taro is now the head of the Ichimonjis.” This decision is the beginning of a storm that will rage in his lands and will bring chaos and disorder to his family. He mentions that he will keep the title of Great Lord as well as an entourage of 30 men. The birds begin to bicker back and forth with each other, much as those in attendance at his meeting did before he silenced them.

14:30:00: Hidetora bequeaths the second and third castles as well as their attended lands to Jiro and Saburo. Taro and Jiro share honeyed words with their father as Goneril and Regan in King Lear. Saburo calls them out on their flattery, which disturbs Hidetora.

16:30:00 Jiro promises to shield their father from the bitter arrows of life. Hidetora attempts to teach them a lesson with arrows—What is this lesson and what goes wrong?
Answer: To break a single arrow is easy, not to break three; thus, respect Taro’s authority and unite your forces, and then the house of Ichimonji will be safe. Saburo demonstrates when the arrows are bundled and meet with a strong opposing force they can be broken (Provide background information regarding Mōri Montonari’s life).
18:20:00: *What kind of world do they live in as Saburo points out to his father? How is it connected to Hidetora’s dream?*

**Answer:** Saburo points out that they all live in a world barren of loyalty and feeling. Hidetora has spilled blood in this land in his lust for land and power; the boys have been raised in this manner, yet he now expects their fidelity. Saburo believes this is unwise.

19:00:00: *What prediction does Saburo make to his father?*

**Answer:** He points out that like the arrows, the brothers will be split.

21:50:00: *Who comes to Saburo’s defense and can be compared to Kent?*

**Answer:** Tango attempts to advise his Lord honestly, then is banished as Kent.

23:00:00: *Who comes to the aid of Saburo and his companion Tango, and why?*

**Answer:** Lord Fujimaki shares he will rejoice in Saburo becoming his son-in-law, even penniless. He respects him for his honesty with his father and honorable character, which is similar to France in *King Lear* who marries Cordelia out of respect.

**Why does Tango refuse to accompany Saburo and the Lord any further, and how is his decision similar to Kent’s?**

**Answer:** Tango shares that he will disguise himself to protect his Lord Hidetora no matter what the cost. Kent does the same in *King Lear* out of loyalty.

26:20:00 Conflict – man vs. man: Taro’s wife, Lady Kaede, demands Hidetora’s concubines make way for her to enter. *What does Lady Kaede demand Taro retrieve from Hidetora’s entourage and why is it significant?*

**Answer:** The banner is a symbol of Lord Hidetora’s leadership and authority; she claims Taro is nothing more than a shadow without it. However, Hidetora clearly asked to retain his title; therefore, by asking for the banner, Taro is disrespecting his father’s wishes and it spurs the their men to fight each other. Hidetora shoots an arrow into one of Taro’s men who attempts to assault Kyoami.

32:12:00 Conflict: *Why is Lord Hidetora upset during the family gathering and ask if the Great Lord is dead already, and if they have forgotten who he is?*

**Answer:** Hidetora is asked to sit below Taro and even his wife; he is angry by the fact that Taro is stripping him not only of his retinue, but also his authority and title. He is being asked to seal with his own blood that all authority is being transferred to Taaro as though he will not honor his word.

36:04:00: *What is the meaning behind “The hen pecks the cock and makes him crow”?*

**Answer:** Hidetora is referring to Taro being hen pecked by his wife, Lady Kaede. The description is common for a man who is dominated by the female.
A long and quiet take shows both Taro and his wife in the frame saying nothing. **What does Taro’s expression reveal about his feelings after his father left?**

**Answer:** Taro is reflective about his decision, and one can infer that he is unsure whether he made the right decision; he is clearly influenced by Lade Kaede.

**37:30:** Taro’s wife reveals what to Taro after their moment of silence?

**Answer:** Lady Kaede’s family was murdered by Hidatora to gain property; she once lived in the castle bequeathed upon Taro for them to reside. In her mind, she is restoring what is rightfully hers; she admits longing for this day. Taro realizes too late that she has an ulterior motive for the demands she placed upon him.

We begin to realize Lady Kaede is the femme fatale of the film, meaning she does not conform to the traditional norms of women in this time period. She is independent, strong-willed, and will stop at nothing to ensure she will achieve her goal.

**38:50:** Advisors to the brother Jiro tell him that Taro is a weakling and it should be Jiro who inherits all the lands as well as Lady Kaede, his brother’s wife.

**44:21:** When Lord Hidetora arrives at his son, Jiro’s castle, he approaches Sué (Jiro’s wife). **Why does Hidetora ask Sué to hate him?**

**Answer:** She has suffered greatly by his hand, just as Lady Kaede. Hidetora killed her family, yet she bears him no hatred. She only has a look of sadness upon her face that she carries with her. She confides in him that she does not hate him and believes their lives are pre-destined, and Buddha controls what happens to them.

**What does Hidetora share with Sué about Buddha?**

**Answer:** We cannot depend upon his mercy; there is a hopelessness he feels evidently.

**46:14:** At a high angle, we see Hidetora’s men pushed outside the large, heavy gates of the castle. The men look small by comparison as the director achieves a feeling of power and the exertion of authority by the shutting of the castle gates. The exterior setting coincides with the shutting off of Lord Hidetora’s own authority and power as he is now divided from his men at his son’s command.

**47:21:** The son and father are now in the frame together. The son looks down briefly from his father’s gaze – **What does his expression and actions tell us he is feeling?**

**Answer:** One can infer that Jiro realizes he has wronged his father; however, he then proceeds to shield himself by justifying his decision to reduce his father’s entourage as following his father’s original order that he must obey Taro’s instructions.

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49:40:00: Lord Hidetora is atop a mountainside, and a close-up shot reveals he is beginning to deteriorate mentally. *How do the sound effects and squealing sounds affect the mood in this scene?*

**Answer:** The sound effects provide an eerie feeling, revealing a sense of chaos and urgency raging within Lord Hidetora as well as in his lands.

The men ride in to exclaim that the villagers have left and taken their supplies to the mountains. The director cuts from one angle to another capturing Lord Hidetora’s angst as he comes to terms with all that is occurring and we can see the inner turmoil.

55:16:00: Tango shares with Lord Hidetora that Taro has banished his own father and the peasants fled rather than disobey Taro’s orders and helping Hidetora. *How would it feel to Hidetora to learn his son banished him from the land that he had given him?*

**Answer:** Lord Hidetora would feel betrayed, and also helpless to do anything.

56:35:00: *Why does Hidetora refuse to seek help from his son Saburo?*

**Answer:** Hidetora feels shame for his behavior and not listening to Saburo’s warnings.

1:00:20: The mise-en-scène, or the placement of the actors and their movement within the setting of the third castle, is a powerful design by the director. It is a fast paced movement to contrast with the slower movement and barrenness of the previous scene. On one side of the tower Hidetora sees troops approach out a window that frames his anxious countenance. Then, with a cut from the troops and back to Hidetora we see him run to the other side to witness the other troops approach, trapping Hidetora and his entourage. *Why are the arrows such an important part of this scene?*

**Answer:** We first see arrows shoot past the window where Hidetora has minimal shelter – arrows that in the beginning the sons claim they will protect their father from. We see an onslaught of arrows claiming the lives of men, who are now painted red. All but Hidetora who is unmercifully spared and unable to take his own life, instead he will remain to suffer and be tormented further.

1:01:31: The scene transitions to darkness; *how does the director’s choice of lighting and color punctuate the mood?*

**Answer:** The darkness of the buildings and sky causes the red to stand out as a visual of death and chaos of war. The red and yellow flags stand out against the exterior landscape. The director literally paints a picture of war using red to rain down upon the victims.

1:07:40: We learn Lord Taro is slain. When Jiro asks about his father, he is told, “He’ll commit ‘seppuku’.” *When placed in context, what can we infer he means by this?*

**Answer:** They believe he will commit suicide due to his grief and madness, which is in fact the accurate translation – Japanese “seppuku” is a ritual disembowelment.
1:12:00: When Hidetora exits the burning building to descend the staircase; he walks barefoot upon the wasteland. The director chooses a medium shot where the human torso is visible from the top of his head to his waist. *What do you see in his expression and what feeling does the director evoke in this scene?*

**Answer:** Hidetora appears more like a ghost of himself; now he is stripped down completely to his basic human state and also faces demons from his past.

1:16:06: We see Lord Hidetora standing alone on the mountainside and the winds blow as he gathers flowers. *What do you notice immediately by his expression and manner?*

**Answer:** He is mad.

1:22:00: *Why does Tsurumaru say he has no need for lights?*

**Answer:** Lord Hidetora gauged out his eyes, and is now being forced to face his sins.

*What is the gift Tsurumaru bestows upon Lord Hidetora who has taken away from him all other pleasures? Why does this gift upset Hidetora and incite him to leave?*

**Answer:** Tsurumaru gives a gift of music; Hidetora feels shame and cannot bear to listen.

1:30:00: Lady Kaede presents her dead husband’s helmet to Lord Jiro and shows her ability to play the femme fatale; she accuses Jiro of killing her husband, and laughs at his weakness. *What does Lady Kaede reveal to Jiro?*

**Answer:** She does not care about her husband’s death, only what happens to herself. She proposes that she will not reveal Jiro’s crime to the people, if she can retain her family’s estate. She then seduces Jiro and insists they marry as she will not be his concubine.

*What does their exchange reveal about the time period and the rights of women? How does Lady Kaede stand apart from the other women?*

**Answer:** Women did not have equal rights, and in most cases they would have no financial security on their own. Other women would have accepted his proposition to be a concubine for the financial security and due to Jiro being already married to Sué; however, Lady Kaede is relentless in her revenge and demands that Jiro kill Sué, making him believe it was due to her inability to imagine him with another woman. Lady Kaede is the exact opposite of his wife, Sué, who is kind and gentle. Lady Kaede will do whatever is necessary to destroy the family of Ichimonji, including using her sexuality.

1:45:00: *Lady Kaede shows her hunger for revenge when she orders Kurogane to do what to Lady Sué?*

**Answer:** She demands that after Lady Sué is killed to salt her head and bring it back to her for inspection. She explains that the heat will cause Sué’s head to be unrecognizable otherwise; she justifies it by explaining that Sué is so beautiful that it would be ungracious to do otherwise.
1:52:00: *What does Kurogane bring back to Lady Kaede?*

**Answer:** Kurogane brings back a fox’s head in salt.

*Who is Lord Jiro’s follower Kurogane referring to when he says that he heard the fox has recently taken residence nearby?*

**Answer:** Kurogane is referring to Lady Kaede – that she is a fox in disguise that will destroy Lord Jiro with her scheming.

2:00:00: Saburo has come to rescue his father from Asuza-Plain and by using a long-shot the director reveals there are numerous reinforcements available to assist Saburo. *Why is Lord Jiro afraid of Saburo finding and taking their father?*

**Answer:** He is afraid of being brought up on charges of treason.

2:05:45: The director chooses a remarkable low angle where the camera is placed below the plane of action being filmed and points upwards to demonstrate a shift in Lord Hidetora’s power when we see Sué atop a cliff that Hidetora just jumped off. He is now below Sué who is atop the ruins to pray for the loss of her family. *Hidetora asks if this is a vision that he sees Sué above him praying, and what does he determine? Why?*

**Answer:** Hidetora determines, “This is Hell, the lowest depths of Hell,” because he is tormented relentlessly by his past. Hidetora is now facing his sins and own vulnerability. He descends lower and into madness as he runs into the barren landscape.

2:17:40: When Lord Saburo finds his father, Hidetora is gazing at the sky, which he describes as terrifying. Hidetora believes himself to be dead. However, he begins to remember Saburo is his son and then runs away. *Why does he run?*

**Answer:** Hidetora runs in shame and asks for poison to end his life, but Saburo says there is nothing to forgive. Saburo has unwavering loyalty to his father, similar to Cordelia who is also loyal to Lear.

2:28:51: *How is the resolution of Ran similar to Shakespeare’s King Lear? What happens to our protagonist and to Lord Hidatora?*

**Answer:** Saburo is killed after rescuing his father. Hidetora exclaims that it is unjust that all are alive when Saburo is not. Lord Hidetora is overcome with grief and his heart breaks resulting in death. Hidetora and Saburo are not there to share in the victory.

2:32:00: The Fool curses God and Buddha for their lack of help...for allowing the deaths of Hidetora and Saburo. *What is similar here regarding theology in these two works?*

**Answer:** Man often blames outside forces, for what happens in life, whether it is Nature, God (monotheistic), the gods (polytheistic), or Buddha. This is easier than recognizing that man’s poor decisions can also play a part.
### 2:35:00: What happens to Lady Kaede when she reveals her motive to avenge the destruction of her family by destroying the family of Ichimonji? Was she successful in her plan?

**Answer:** Lady Kaede is killed by decapitation. In reality, she seems to be the only one truly victorious in that she is successful in tearing apart the family. She is certainly part of the opposing force that breaks Lord Hidetora’s three arrows.

### 2:38:20: What is the director’s purpose when Tsurumaru stumbles, dropping the scroll with the image of Buddha down the ravine?

**Answer:** Sue was murdered, so no one will return to help him and he has now dropped the token she gave him that was meant to protect him from harm. Tsurumaru is left alone as in Hidetora’s own vision at the beginning of the film – not even a higher power can save him; he is completely alone in a harsh, unforgiving world. Being left alone again was Tsurumaru’s greatest fear that he had expressed to his sister, Sue before she left him.

### How does the exterior setting of Tsurumaru on the cliff enhance the director’s purpose?

**Answer:** The sharp peaks and shadows of the exterior setting evoke a feeling of an unforgiving world and we realize that in the director’s vision, we are but men stumbling blind through the wilderness.

### What are your final thoughts regarding the film? Which version is more unsettling to you and why?

**Answer:** Answers may vary – Sample: The film can be far more unsettling than Shakespeare’s original play due to the feeling of hopelessness at the end. Shakespeare offers a light in the darkness in that there are two men who remain that can rule the kingdom in a just manner and the fact that Lear achieves forgiveness for his sins and transcendence. Both works are equally tragic in that the child who loves and honors the parent, Cordelia and Saburo, both die. We are left with an uncertainty in Ran whether chaos will continue beyond Hidetora and Saburo’s deaths. It seems apparent that it will continue due to the closing sequence when the blind man is left alone in such a harsh environment with none to guide his steps.

### Resources:

The analysis of filmic text can be helpful for students to assist them in making meaningful connections between the concepts and their everyday lives. Students will recognize that themes from classic works, such as Shakespeare, are relevant regardless of the time period and culture in which the story is set. Another excellent film adaptation of Shakespeare's *King Lear* (2002) can be explored at an intermediate level or higher, called the *King of Texas*, which is directed by Uli Edel. Patrick Stewart stars as Edel’s version of Lear. It is another example of a remarkable adaptation of Shakespeare’s tragic work. In addition, the content is age appropriate and follows the plot closely, offering excellent reinforcement. *King of Texas*, like *Ran*, will assist students in recognizing Shakespeare’s universal and ageless themes.

**Impact of Kaleidoscope Teaching for 21st Century Students:**

“You cheapen my profession by oversimplifying it. In other words, unrestrained top-down direction, however necessary it appears in the short run, is a recipe for mediocrity or worse in the long run” (Sizer). The common core spreading throughout public schools nationally is inevitable. It is in the process of implementation and alignment with current standards and benchmarks in schools. The core may not fit the ultimate vision of Theodore Sizer who embraces the concept of clustering, small class sizes, and privatized curriculum. However, the upside to implementation of a common core in public schools is that educators will no longer question what essential skills and concepts must be mastered. In addition, Sizer
would almost certainly add that it is important for teachers to realize that they continue to have a voice in how those essential skills and concepts are taught.

The common core is not dictating curriculum materials but rather offers a framework for educators regarding age appropriate content. Therefore, now is the time for educators to band together in determining the materials they feel are worthwhile and relevant to their students. Sizer admits that there are no two schools exactly alike and what works for one school may not necessarily work for another. Before he passed away in 2009, Sizer influenced many educators and advocated an interdisciplinary approach to education, time for collaboration among teachers, professional learning communities, and depth versus breadth (Coalition). These principles will continue to guide teachers and administrators in creating curriculum that will meet the needs of their individual school’s population.

Shakespeare’s *King Lear* is only one work of many that can be utilized by educators to ensure they meet the requirements set forth by their individual institutions today. Classic, well-written works juxtaposed with other relevant and modern works can be exactly what is necessary for students to achieve the soaring literacy standards of the 21st century. When educators use a kaleidoscope approach to teaching as demonstrated with *King Lear*, they can move their curriculum across various disciplines and assist students in creating meaningful and deeply personal connections between their courses. Throughout this process, students will also have the opportunity to identify universal themes and concepts that can be applied to other works in the future and in their own lives for years to come.
Works Cited


Springhurst. Web.


