

# Act 1: the nature of evil



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## Essentials

Update your character profiles for Gloucester and Edmund. Consider:

- Their beliefs in fate, chance, and the world's natural order
- How they interact with one another
- Honesty versus duplicity

Pay particular attention to aspects of nature – both human nature and the natural order – when you update your lists of language and imagery for this scene.

- How Does Edmund use the term nature?
- What does it tell us about him?
- How do his beliefs in the nature of humanity set him aside from other members of his family?
- Of the characters you have met so far, does anyone else seem to share Edmund's belief system? If so, how is this shown?

Update the remaining lists of language and imagery:

- Authority
- A child's responsibility to the parent
- Cruelty and violence
- Sanity and insanity
- Disguise
- The relationship between human beings and the gods
- The pagan world seen through Christian eyes
- Love and loyalty
- Age and aging
- Anachronisms between the time of Lear and Shakespeare

Discuss or make notes on the soliloquy.

- As a theatrical device, how effectively does it reveal a character's inner thoughts?
- To a modern audience, do soliloquies come across as genuine moments of insight or false and artificial?
- Can you think of other techniques used in TV or film that create the same effect? Give examples.
- Is our view of Edmund different when he's in dialogue with others than when he speaks a soliloquy? If so, how is our view altered and why?

Level 1

Level 2

Level 3



Why is Gloucester so ready to believe that Edgar plans to kill him? Consider:

- The effect Lear's decision has had on the nobility
- Gloucester's recent comments about his relationships with his sons



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Compare modern voice over and direct-to-camera dialogue with Shakespeare's soliloquies to consider the effectiveness of characters directly sharing their thoughts with the audience. Make detailed notes using the speeches on pages 3 and 4 taken from the movies *Blade Runner* and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, and Shakespeare's *King Lear*, *Othello* and *Henry V*. Consider how well each:

- Conveys information
- Establishes a character
- Engages the audience



Have the class work in pairs or small teams to write, direct and perform a soliloquy for Gloucester to deliver. The speech should clearly express:

- His feelings for his sons
- His fears for the country
- His attitude towards fate and the gods

Level 2

Level 3



Divide the class into groups to hotseat the character of Edmund. Allocate the role and have the other students question him, making sure to include:

- How he feels towards his father and brother
- What he believes his 'nature' to be
- Whether Gloucester has lost his loyalty and respect

Following the exercise, take a few minutes to feedback on how well Edmund responded. Consider:

- His opinion, use of language and demeanour

## Essay

It is less Edmund's manipulation, and more Gloucester's naivety that lead to Edgar being seen as the villain of this scene. Discuss?



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## Deckard from *Blade Runner*

I'd quit because I'd had a belly full of killing. But then I'd rather be a killer than a victim. And that's exactly what Bryant's threat about little people meant. So I hooked in once more, thinking that if I couldn't take it, I'd split later. I didn't have to worry about Gaff. He was brown-nosing for a promotion, so he didn't want me back anyway.

Tyrell really did a job on Rachael. Right down to a snapshot of a mother she never had, a daughter she never was. Replicants weren't supposed to have feelings. Neither were Blade Runners. What the hell was happening to me? Leon's pictures had to be as phony as Rachael's. I didn't know why a replicant would collect photos. Maybe they were like Rachael. They needed memories.

I don't know why he saved my life. Maybe in those last moments he loved life more than he ever had before. Not just his life, anybody's life, my life. All he'd wanted were the same answers the rest of us want. Where did I come from? Where am I going? How long have I got? All I could do was sit there and watch him die.

## Edmund from *King Lear*

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits of our own behaviour, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon and the stars, as if we were villains on necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves, and treachers by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in by a divine thrusting on. An admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition to

## Ferris from *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*

Incredible! One of the worst performances of my career and they never doubted it for a second. What a beautiful day!

Parents always fall for the clammy hands. It's physical evidence of illness. It's a good, non-specific symptom. Parents are generally pretty hip to the fever scams. And to make them work you have to go a hundred and one, hundred and two. You get a nervous mother and you end up in a doctor's office and that's worse than school.

Fake a stomach cramp and when you're doubled over, moaning and wailing, just lick your palms. It's a little stupid and childish but then so is high school. Right?

This is my ninth sick day with semester. If I go for ten, I'm probably going to have to barf up a lung. So, I absolutely must make this one count.

the charge of a star. My father compounded with my mother under the dragon's tail and my nativity was under Ursa Major, so that it follows I am rough and lecherous. Fut! I should have been that I am had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing.

Pat he comes, like the catastrophe of the old comedy. My cue is villainous melancholy, with a sigh like Tom o'Bedlam. – O, these eclipses do portend these divisions. Fa, sol, la, mi.



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## Iago from *Othello*

Thus do I ever make my fool my purse:  
For I mine own gained knowledge should profane  
If I would time expend with such a snipe  
But for my sport and profit. I hate the Moor  
And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets  
He's done my office. I know not if't be true,  
But I for mere suspicion in that kind  
Will do as if for surety. He holds me well,  
The better shall my purpose work on him.  
Cassio's a proper man: let me see now,  
To get his place, and to plume up my will  
In double knavery. How? How? Let's see:  
After some time to abuse Othello's ear  
That he is too familiar with his wife.  
He hath a person and a smooth dispose  
To be suspected, framed to make women false.  
The Moor is of a free and open nature  
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,  
And will as tenderly be led by th' nose  
As asses are.  
I have't, it is engendered! Hell and night  
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.

## King Henry from *Henry V*

O God of battles, steel my soldiers' hearts;  
Possess them not with fear. Take from them now  
The sense of reckoning, ere the opposed numbers  
Pluck their hearts from them. Not today, O Lord,  
O not today, think not upon the fault  
My father made in compassing the crown.  
I Richard's body have interred new,  
And on it have bestowed more contrite tears  
Than from it issued forced drops of blood.  
Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay,  
Who twice a day their withered hands hold up  
Toward heaven to pardon blood; and I have built  
Two chantries, where the sad and solemn priests  
Sing still for Richard's soul. More will I do,  
Though all that I can do is nothing worth,  
Since that my penitence comes after all,  
Imploring pardon.

