



Single Parenting and Family Dynamics Then and Now: King Lear

Guide for Curriculum Unit 09.03.07, published September 2009

by Jane Upton Hall

The three thousand students who attend Westside High School in Houston, Texas study a work attributed to William Shakespeare for three years of their four-year tenure. As AP senior students, they will be responsible for three Shakespearean tragedies: *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*. This unit will use elements of Lear's and Gloucester's filial relationships in what we today call a single parent environment, so students can identify with specific issues they confront in their daily lives. By recognizing Lear's and Gloucester's familial situations as single fathers, students can easily compare how, in our current environment, the many students who reside within a single parent household live in conditions that are not much different those in Shakespeare's day that are depicted in *King Lear*. The interactions siblings experience among each other and their extended families will also be visited in this unit by studying Lear's and Gloucester's families and comparing/ contrasting students' family dynamics.

All of the three thousand students attending Westside — or any high school in the state of Texas — are exposed to various works of the Bard during their tenure: freshmen romance their way through *Romeo and Juliet*, sophomores clash with *Julius Caesar*, prep/grade level seniors muddle through *Macbeth*, and Advanced Placement seniors are immersed in *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. Westside's demographic includes approximately 30% African American, 30% Caucasian, 30% Hispanic, and 10% Asian/ Pacific Islander/Middle Eastern students. The school's classes consist of full inclusion for Special Education and 504-designated students; lessons and assessments for these students must have appropriate modifications or accommodations. Although this unit will be directed toward Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition students, it can certainly be adapted to address students in regular grade level classes, including those who are classified as Special Education or 504.

(Developed for AP English Literature, grade 12; recommended for English IV and AP English Literature, grade 12)

<https://teachers.yale.edu>

©2023 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University, All Rights Reserved. Yale National Initiative®, Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute®, On Common Ground®, and League of Teachers Institutes® are registered trademarks of Yale University.

For terms of use visit https://teachers.yale.edu/terms_of_use