

# Maturita Card 46:

## William Shakespeare, King Lear

# Bridge

### ● Can you name any of Shakespeare's plays?

Shakespeare wrote plays and poems. His plays were categorized into comedies like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, histories like *Henry V* and *Richard III* and tragedies like *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth* and *Othello*.

### ● What do you know about Shakespeare's life?

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564. He had a wife, Anne Hathaway, and three children. By 1592 he was in London working as an actor and a playwright. He wrote about 37 plays and most were very successful at the time. When he retired from theatre, he went back to live in Stratford. He died and was buried there in 1616.

### ● What was theatre like in Elizabethan times?

Queen Elizabeth I was the ruler during Shakespeare's time. She enjoyed going to see Shakespeare's plays and was a supporter of the arts. During her time, going to the theatre was considered a big event. Back then, theatres were open-air and it was quite a lively affair. Before the show, there would be entertainment like jugglers, or even animal fights. During the show the audience would talk, eat and drink. Sometimes, if they didn't like a show, they would throw rotten potatoes onto the stage.

### ● What was it like being an actor during this time?

Acting was not a highly paid and respected profession. Actors were usually seen as troublemakers who didn't have real jobs, or as travellers, because many theatres travelled from town to town. Women were not allowed to be on stage so young men or teenagers often played the women's roles.

### ● Can you tell me about the Globe theatre?

The original Globe theatre was built in 1559 and William Shakespeare was part of the acting company that owned it. It burned down in 1613 and was rebuilt the following year, but was destroyed again in 1644. Now a replica of the original theatre is on the south bank of the River Thames in London. It was an open-air theatre where rich people could sit in one of the 3,000 seats; poorer people would stand. The Globe would advertise with coloured flags. A red flag meant there would be a historical play and a black flag meant there would be a tragedy.

### ● Why do you think Shakespeare was such an important English writer?

Shakespeare's plays are still enjoyed today by modern audiences because he wrote about universal themes like love, friendship, betrayal and vengeance, death,

good and evil. His work also greatly influenced the English language and today we use phrases and words that he wrote. For example, 'all that glitters is not gold' or 'brave new world' or 'gone full circle'.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON KING LEAR

### ● What themes are explored in the play?

There are lots of themes in *King Lear*. First, the relationship between love and family. Children betray their fathers: King Lear's daughters turn against him. Brothers also betray brothers: Edmund wants to get rid of Edgar. There are also themes of pride, greed and power. The play explores chaos and political unrest, and it looks at justice and authority.

### ● How would you describe King Lear's character?

King Lear wants to be treated like a king, flattered and loved. When one of his daughters won't do this he gets angry, then he is too proud to change. His reaction starts the tragic events in the play.

### ● What happens to his character throughout the play?

He struggles because he loses his power as king – his daughters take away everything and he is left with nothing. He becomes mad with emotion and anger, and his only way of dealing with this is to go insane. Slowly, he realizes his weakness. When he meets Cordelia again he has changed and become caring; his love for her is more important than anything.

### ● How would you describe Lear's daughters, Goneril and Regan?

They are clever at the beginning because they flatter their father to get what they want. They know how to be cruel, they have pride, they behave in a calculating way. They are greedy and will do anything to get power, including throwing their father out into a storm. But their greed and jealousy turn against them when they both fall for the same man, Edmund, which eventually leads to their deaths.

### ● Who are the good characters in the play and why?

Cordelia, Lear's youngest daughter, is honest and true, but this causes her problems. She refuses to take part in Lear's love test and this leads to her being sent away. Edgar is also a good character; he is true to the people around him and helps his father. In the end he defeats his evil brother and wins. Albany, Goneril's husband, ends up also being a 'good' character. He believes in Lear and doesn't want to fight him, but he is also weak and he never stands up to his evil wife.

