

### Essay Plan (i)

**'In his play, *King Lear*, Shakespeare reminds us that the pursuit of power can lead to corruption and chaos.'**

**Note: It is a good idea to work out the possible coding and use it at the planning stage to ensure your essay stays on track.**

(Codes: PP = pursuit of power / CC = corruption and chaos)

### Introduction

- Shakespeare explores the destructive nature of power when it is selfishly pursued or carelessly wielded.
- In *King Lear*, PP frequently leads to CC in both the main plot and the subplot.
- However, not all characters are corrupted by power, and some remain loyal and honourable despite suffering.
- The play reminds us of the consequences of pride, ambition, and misjudgement.

### 1. Lear's reckless handling of power leads to disorder and chaos (PP → CC)

- Lear's desire to 'divest us both of rule' is motivated not by wisdom but by a need for flattery and control.
- He gives away 'all cares and business' but plans to retain 'the name and all th' addition to a king' and live 'by due turn' with Goneril and Regan, bringing 'an hundred knights'.
- His confusion of role and identity leads to political instability.
- 'See better, Lear' – Kent's plea highlights Lear's blindness in handing power to the wrong people.

- CC: Lear's decision unleashes a chain of cruelty and betrayal, particularly from his daughters. This mirrors the broader collapse of order in the kingdom.

## **2. Goneril and Regan's pursuit of power corrupts them morally and leads to personal and political chaos (PP → CC)**

- Goneril flatters Lear with exaggerated claims: 'I love you more than word can wield the matter' and Beyond all manner of so much I love you'.
- Regan competes: 'Only she comes too short' – revealing the transactional, performative nature of their declarations.
- Once in power, they 'must do something, and i' the heat' – Goneril's line shows their impatience and ambition.
- They conspire to manage him, eroding familial and state order.
- Their corruption extends to the unnatural as both pursue Edmund, breaking marital bonds and turning on one another.
- Regan claims, "Tis the infirmity of his age; yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself,' rationalising their betrayal of Lear.
- CC: The storm on the heath mirrors the breakdown in authority and the chaos of Lear's internal state.



## **3. Edmund's ruthless pursuit of power results in betrayal, deception and eventual downfall: (PP → CC)**

- Opening soliloquy reveals bitterness: ;Why 'bastard'? Wherefore 'base'?'

- Despises traditional values and claims: 'Now, gods, stand up for bastards!'
- His forged letter leads Gloucester to call Edgar an 'abhorred villain!' showing how PP has shattered family bonds.
- He betrays both his father and brother for inheritance.
- Takes advantage of the sisters' ambition, but ultimately destroys them and himself.
- Gloucester's fate is a direct consequence of Edmund's deception.
- CC: Gloucester's literal blindness reflects how PP has corrupted vision, judgement and trust.

#### **4. Chaos in the kingdom is reflected through powerful imagery: (PP → CC)**

- Lear speaks of 'the mysteries of Hecate and the night' and 'operation of the orbs' when he banishes Cordelia. This signals disruption in the cosmic order as well as in Lear's family.
- He rages against being 'more sinned against than sinning'.
- The storm is both external and internal: the chaos Lear unleashed returns to engulf him.
- Lear's references to 'pelican daughters' suggest unnatural inversion.
- The repeated motif of animals reflects the loss of human reason and compassion in a world ruled by ambition.



#### **5. The play ultimately punishes corruption and restores some order - (CC → consequences)**

- Goneril poisons Regan and then kills herself.

- Edmund attempts to repent: ‘Some good I mean to do despite of mine own nature.’
- Justice is delayed but arrives. The corrupt are destroyed, though the cost is tragic.
- Cordelia’s death shows that virtue does not always triumph, but her quiet dignity stands in contrast to the chaos around her.
- Edgar and Albany survive – figures of renewal and conscience.
- Kent’s loyalty remains intact, despite Lear’s furious insults.

#### **6. Another way of looking at it: Not all pursuit of power leads to corruption**

- Cordelia marries the King of France honourably. She says:  
‘I love your majesty / According to my bond; no more nor less.’
- Her refusal to flatter Lear shows integrity, not ambition.
- Edgar’s journey is one of transformation, not corruption.
- Kent, even when banished, returns in disguise to serve Lear loyally.
- These characters show that power, when rightly used or pursued without self-interest, need not lead to chaos.

#### **Conclusion**

- Shakespeare shows that when the pursuit of power is driven by pride, resentment or ambition, it leads to devastating consequences.
- Chaos in the family and the state reflects this imbalance.
- However, there is hope: some characters resist corruption, proving that power itself is not the problem – it is how it is used.
- In *King Lear*, Shakespeare warns of the dangers of ego and the illusion of control, but he also reminds us of the redemptive power of loyalty and truth.

**Sample Essay 'In his play, *King Lear*, Shakespeare reminds us that the pursuit of power can lead to corruption and chaos.'**

In *King Lear*, Shakespeare presents a world in which the pursuit of power results in moral corruption, family breakdown and widespread disorder. The play reveals how ambition, flattery, and an unhealthy desire for control can destroy relationships and disrupt the natural order. However, not all characters are corrupted by the search for power. Some remain loyal and selfless, even in the face of cruelty. Shakespeare explores both outcomes, but ultimately leaves the audience in no doubt that when power is pursued for selfish or dishonest reasons, chaos is inevitable.

At the centre of the play lies Lear's reckless decision to give up political authority while keeping its symbols. His motivation is not to retire humbly, but to divide power among his daughters in return for public declarations of love. He tells them: 'Know that we have divided / In three our kingdom', and that it is his 'fast intent / To shake all cares and business from our age', but he plans to retain 'the name and all th' addition to a king' and to live 'by due turn' with Goneril and Regan, bringing with him 'an hundred knights'. Lear wants to hand over the responsibility of kingship while keeping the trappings. This confusion between identity and role sets the stage for political and personal breakdown.

The love test itself shows how easily power can be manipulated by flattery. Goneril claims: 'Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter' and Regan says: 'Only she comes too short'. Cordelia, on the other hand, refuses to play the game: 'I love your majesty / According to my bond; no more nor less.' Lear is enraged and banishes her, stating 'nothing will come of nothing'. This rash rejection of his only loyal daughter shows that Lear has allowed his

need for control and ego to blind him to true affection. His failure of judgement destabilises both family and kingdom.

Once in power, Goneril and Regan quickly reveal the extent of their corruption. In private, they plot to manage him and Goneril says: 'We must do something, and i' the heat.' They are impatient to dominate Lear and remove any obstacles to their rule. Their selfishness leads them to betray their own father, insult his age, and strip him of his retinue. Goneril insists: 'How in one house / Should many people, under two commands, / Hold amity?' The bond between parent and child is destroyed, replaced by cruelty and calculation. As Regan coldly puts it: "Tis the infirmity of his age; yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself.'

Their pursuit of power leads not only to the humiliation of Lear but to the breakdown of order in the kingdom. Lear's descent into madness is mirrored by the storm that rages on the heath. Shakespeare uses this storm as a symbol of the chaos unleashed by political misrule and moral collapse. Lear cries out: 'Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow,' as his inner turmoil is reflected in the natural world. He speaks of 'pelican daughters' who feed on the flesh of their parents, an image that captures the unnatural nature of the betrayal he has suffered. Through this imagery, Shakespeare reveals the consequences of ambition and the breakdown of family and state.

A similar pattern unfolds in the subplot involving Edmund, Gloucester's illegitimate son. Edmund resents his position and uses deception to advance himself. In his opening soliloquy, he protests: 'Why 'bastard'? Wherefore 'base'?' and declares, 'Now, gods, stand up for bastards!' He forges a letter and tricks Gloucester into thinking that Edgar is plotting to kill him. Gloucester responds with horror: 'O villain, villain! His very opinion in the letter!' Like

Lear, Gloucester mistakes flattery and manipulation for loyalty, and disowns the child who truly loves him.

Edmund's ambition leads him to betray both his father and brother. He deceives Cornwall, conspires against Lear, and becomes involved with both Goneril and Regan, destroying the bond of marriage in the process. His rise is swift but short-lived. In the end, he attempts to repent: 'Some good I mean to do, despite of mine own nature', but by then it is too late. The sisters are dead, Lear and Cordelia have perished, and Gloucester dies with a 'burst smilingly' heart after learning the truth. Edmund's pursuit of power has brought tragedy to everyone.

The collapse of order in both main plot and subplot is reflected in the play's imagery of animals, nature, and madness. Lear refers to Goneril as 'detested kite' and to Regan as 'a wolfish visage', emphasising their inhuman behaviour. Edmund speaks of the 'lusty stealth of nature' as he rejects social rules in favour of personal gain. These images of wildness and disorder suggest a world turned upside down by greed and betrayal. As Gloucester bitterly remarks: 'As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods. / They kill us for their sport.' Shakespeare shows a world in which justice and fairness have been replaced by chaos.

However, not all characters are corrupted by the pursuit of power. Cordelia refuses to flatter Lear, and instead marries the King of France honourably. She speaks plainly and acts with dignity, telling Lear's court: 'I am sure my love's / More ponderous than my tongue.' Edgar, too, remains loyal to Gloucester despite being falsely accused. He adopts the disguise of Poor Tom, saying: 'The basest and most poorest shape / That ever penury, in contempt of man, /



Brought near to beast.’ His suffering allows him to grow in understanding and strength. In the end, he defeats Edmund and stands as a symbol of renewal and hope.

Kent is another example of a character who resists corruption. Though banished, he returns in disguise to serve Lear, risking his life to protect the king. He urges Lear to ‘see better’ and challenges his rash decisions, remaining loyal even when insulted and threatened. These characters prove that power can be used justly, and that integrity and compassion can survive even in a corrupt world.

*King Lear* is a powerful exploration of how the pursuit of power, when driven by pride and ambition, can lead to devastating consequences. Shakespeare presents a world in which authority is misused, family bonds are broken, and chaos reigns. The tragic ends of Lear, Gloucester, and Edmund show that justice eventually returns, but at a terrible cost. However, through the loyalty of Kent, the honesty of Cordelia, and the courage of Edgar, Shakespeare also offers a vision of hope — a reminder that not all who seek power are corrupted by it.

## Essay Plan (ii)

**'Shakespeare uses Gloucester's complex relationship with his sons, Edgar and Edmund, to explore a variety of central issues in his play, *King Lear*.'**

(Codes: CR = complex relationship / CI = central issues)

### Introduction

- Shakespeare's use of the subplot involving Gloucester, Edgar and Edmund mirrors and amplifies the themes of the main plot.
- Through this CR, the play explores CI such as legitimacy and inheritance, deception and truth, blindness and insight, justice and injustice, loyalty and betrayal.
- Gloucester's evolution, Edmund's ambition, and Edgar's loyalty help us to understand the emotional and moral landscape of the play.

### **1. The relationship begins with prejudice, humiliation and inequality. (CR → CI: legitimacy, identity, injustice)**

- Gloucester introduces Edmund to Kent by joking crudely about his illegitimacy: 'there was good sport at his making, and the whoreson must be acknowledged'.
- Though Gloucester claims to care for Edmund, he also says he will send him away again.
- Edmund is present during this conversation and says little, but it is clear this public humiliation stings.
- Shakespeare introduces the CI of legitimacy and inequality — Edmund resents society's view of him and his father's treatment.
- This grievance drives his ambition: 'Now, gods, stand up for bastards!'

## **2. Edmund's manipulation drives the action of the subplot and reflects deception in the main plot: (CR → CI: appearance vs reality, betrayal)**

- Edmund stages the hiding of a forged letter to trick Gloucester into believing Edgar is plotting patricide: 'Unnatural, detested, brutish villain'.
- Gloucester leaps to conclusions without giving Edgar a chance to defend himself. This mirrors Lear's rash banishment of Cordelia.
- Edmund wounds himself and claims:  
'With his prepared sword he charges home / My unprovided body.'
- Gloucester believes him, despite Edgar being a son 'that so tenderly and entirely loves him'.
- Gloucester's blindness to reality echoes Lear's poor judgement.
- CI: Misplaced trust, lack of insight, and manipulation by those who understand how to exploit appearances.

## **3. Gloucester's punishment reflects the moral blindness that has led to disorder in both plotlines -(CR → CI: justice, suffering, cruelty)**

- Gloucester is blinded by Cornwall and Regan in a grotesque parody of justice:  
'Out, vile jelly! / Where is thy lustre now?'
- His response is deeply moving and shows instant remorse:  
'O my follies! Then Edgar was abused. / Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him!'
- The blinding literalises Gloucester's failure to 'see' the truth earlier.

- CI: Suffering as a form of moral reckoning. Parallels Lear's descent into madness, as both men are punished for earlier mistakes.
- Gloucester's physical blindness leads to insight:  
'I have no way, and therefore want no eyes; / I stumbled when I saw.'

#### **4. Edgar's disguise and loyalty highlight the contrast with Edmund and reinforce the play's moral vision (CR → CI: loyalty, redemption, disguise)**

- Edgar assumes the role of Poor Tom: 'the basest and most poorest shape'.
- His disguise not only protects him but also allows him to grow in understanding.
- The subplot mirrors Lear's story. Edgar says: 'He childed as I fathered.'
- This line shows that both Lear and Gloucester were betrayed by the children they trusted and mistreated the ones who truly loved them.
- Despite being wrongly disowned, Edgar remains loyal and protects his father, saving him from suicide and guiding him to safety.
- Gloucester's blessing when he believes Edgar to be a beggar is poignant:  
'Might I but live to see thee in my touch, / I'd say I had eyes again!'

#### **5. The subplot reinforces the play's exploration of human suffering and the fragile nature of justice (CR → CI: fate, despair, human endurance)**

- Gloucester reflects on the cruelty of the world:  
'As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods. / They kill us for their sport.'
- He believes that there is no moral order in the world and prepares to die.
- Edgar tricks Gloucester into thinking he has survived a fall to restore his will to live. Gloucester then vows:

‘Henceforth I’ll bear / Affliction till it do cry out itself ‘Enough, enough,’ and die.’

- The subplot invites the audience to reflect on whether justice is served.
- Gloucester is reunited with Edgar, but the emotional revelation is too much: his ‘flawed heart’ breaks under the weight of ‘joy and grief’, and he ‘Burst smilingly.’

#### **6. The relationship deepens our understanding of the play’s central themes and moral structure(CR → CI: reflection of main plot, theme reinforcement)**

- The Gloucester/Edgar/Edmund triangle reflects and deepens the Lear/Cordelia/Goneril/Regan plotline.
- Both Lear and Gloucester fail to recognise true love and loyalty. Both are punished. Both reach moments of self-knowledge and redemption through suffering.
- Edgar, like Cordelia and Kent, is an example of goodness and constancy in a corrupt world.
- Edmund, like Goneril and Regan, is a product of bitterness and ambition.
- The CR between Gloucester and his sons allows Shakespeare to repeat, reflect, and reinforce the play’s darkest and most powerful ideas.

#### **Conclusion:**

- Shakespeare uses Gloucester’s CR with Edgar and Edmund to highlight many of the CI in *King Lear*, including legitimacy, justice, loyalty, and human frailty.
- This subplot reflects the main narrative in structure and theme, adding emotional weight and moral depth.

- It reminds us that the errors of judgement and blindness in both plots are not limited to kings and kingdoms — they are deeply human flaws.
- The journey from blindness to insight, from betrayal to reconciliation, gives the play its tragic power and philosophical resonance.

### Sample Essay:

**‘Shakespeare uses Gloucester’s complex relationship with his sons, Edgar and Edmund, to explore a variety of central issues in his play, *King Lear*.’**

<p>In <i>King Lear</i>, Shakespeare uses the tragic story of Gloucester and his two sons to mirror and reinforce the central ideas at work in the main plot. The subplot does not simply repeat Lear’s story — it adds depth and variation. Through Gloucester’s complex relationship with Edgar and Edmund, Shakespeare explores themes such as legitimacy, justice, loyalty, deception, suffering and redemption. Gloucester is blind to the truth and too easily led by appearances. One son betrays him; the other saves him. The family is torn apart by ambition and healed, at least in part, by compassion.</p> <p>When we first meet Gloucester, it is clear that he shows little sensitivity towards Edmund. He thoughtlessly jokes about his illegitimacy in front of Kent, saying that there ‘was good sport at his making’ and referring to him as a ‘whoreson’. While he claims to care for Edmund and treats him as his son, he also dismissively says that</p>	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Thesis identifies key themes</p> <p>Legitimacy and inequality. The relationship is flawed from the start</p>
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<p>Edmund 'shall away again'. This public humiliation helps explain Edmund's deep resentment. From the very beginning, then, the relationship between Gloucester and Edmund is marked by inequality and hurt, setting the stage for betrayal. Shakespeare introduces the theme of legitimacy and shows how resentment can fester in a family where one child is valued above the other.</p> <p>Edmund's ambition quickly takes shape. He opens his first soliloquy by rejecting the social order: 'Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law / My services are bound.' He forges a letter and tricks Gloucester into believing that Edgar is plotting patricide. Gloucester reads the letter and reacts with horror: 'O villain, villain! His very opinion in the letter!' Just like Lear, Gloucester makes a catastrophic error of judgement, casting out the loyal child and putting his trust in the wrong one. Edmund then wounds himself and falsely claims, 'With his prepared sword he charges home / My unprovided body. The trick is successful. Gloucester now believes Edgar to be an ungrateful son and Edmund the victim of his brother's cruelty. This scene highlights the destructive power of deception and the dangers of judging by appearances. Shakespeare again explores the theme of appearance versus reality and the failure of those in authority to see what is right in front of them.</p> <p>Gloucester's story becomes increasingly tragic. When he helps Lear, Cornwall and Regan punish him brutally. In one of the most shocking scenes in the play, Gloucester is</p>	<p>Deception and misjudgement. Edmund manipulates Gloucester with ease.</p> <p>Blindness and insight – Gloucester's</p>
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<p>blinded. Regan says: 'Hang him instantly!' and Cornwall gouges out his eyes, cruelly taunting him: 'Out, vile jelly! / Where is thy lustre now?' The violence of the scene underscores the chaos that has been unleashed in the kingdom. Gloucester, like Lear, pays a heavy price for his poor judgement. However, the blinding also leads to clarity. He immediately realises his mistake: 'O my follies! Then Edgar was abused. / Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him!' The motif of sight and blindness — both literal and metaphorical — is central to the play. Shakespeare suggests that insight often comes only through suffering.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Edgar — the son who has been wronged — chooses to remain close to his father in disguise rather than seek revenge or escape. He takes on the role of 'Poor Tom', describing himself as: 'the basest and most poorest shape / That ever penury, in contempt of man, / Brought near to beast.' He saves his father from suicide and gently guides him to safety. Edgar's loyalty contrasts sharply with Edmund's ruthlessness. His disguise allows him to protect Gloucester while also learning about his own strength. This disguise mirrors Kent's and reinforces the idea that those who appear lowly may in fact be noble and true. Gloucester blesses Edgar, wishing he could see him again: 'Might I but live to see thee in my touch, / I'd say I had eyes again!' This moment is deeply moving. Gloucester at last recognises the goodness of the son he wronged.</p>	<p>punishment leads to self-awareness</p> <p>Loyalty and disguise – Edgar protects his father in secret.</p>
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<p>As the subplot reaches its end, Gloucester dies as his heart 'burst smilingly' when Edgar finally reveals his identity. The reunion is so powerful and overwhelming that it proves too much. Edgar tells us that his father died torn between 'joy and grief'. His story, like Lear's, is a tragedy of recognition too late. Yet it is not without dignity. Gloucester dies in the arms of the son who remained loyal, even when disowned. The play invites us to ask whether justice has truly been done or whether suffering is simply part of the human condition.</p>	<p>Redemption and tragedy – The emotional climax and Gloucester's death.</p>
<p>The relationship between Gloucester, Edgar and Edmund is not just a story of family conflict. It reflects and deepens the concerns of the entire play. Both Lear and Gloucester misjudge their children. Both banish the good and trust the wicked. Both are punished and both, in different ways, are saved. Edgar's observation - 'He childed as I fathered' - captures this parallel exactly. Just as Lear is betrayed by Goneril and Regan, Gloucester is deceived by Edmund. Just as Lear is comforted by Cordelia, Gloucester is protected by Edgar. Shakespeare does not simply use the subplot for variety; he uses it to reinforce the emotional, moral and thematic structure of the play.</p>	<p>Parallels with Lear – The subplot reflects and reinforces the main themes.</p>
<p>In <i>King Lear</i>, the complex relationship between Gloucester and his sons allows Shakespeare to explore a range of central issues: legitimacy, justice, loyalty, betrayal, blindness, insight, and human suffering. Gloucester's journey is a painful one. He begins as a flawed, insensitive</p>	<p>Conclusion draws together key ideas and</p>

<p>man who is easily tricked and too quick to judge. By the end of the play he is a remorseful father, guided by the son he once rejected. Through this subplot, the audience is invited to reflect on the nature of family, the limits of authority, and the possibility of redemption — however brief. Like the main plot, it is tragic, but it is also filled with moments of deep emotional truth. In the end, it is not power or status that matter, but loyalty, honesty, and love.</p>	<p>echoes the introduction</p>
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