

Character Notes

Goneril

- Unlikeable from the moment she is first introduced in Act 1 Scene 1. Her exaggerated attempts to flatter her father are repulsive and instantly cause me to develop a dislike towards her, “I love you more than words can wield the matter”.
- Feel somewhat sorry for her as she is aware that her father loved Cordelia the most, “He always loved our sister most”. It is likely that the lack of love she received is what has caused her to develop into a cold-hearted woman.
- Our disapproval of her actions is further contributed to when she immediately starts plotting against her father after receiving her inheritance. However, she is also revealed as clever as she is the first to notice Lear’s deteriorating health, “You see how full of changes his age is”.
- Is evidently power hungry and fears losing her newly gained control over the Kingdom. She is only concerned about her father’s health due to the fact that it may cause him to forget he has relinquished his power, “this last surrender of his will but offend us”.
- Plots against her mentally unstable father, immoral, “We must do something, and i’ the heat”. Takes advantage of him
- Ungrateful for what her father has given her, “By day and night he wrongs me; every hour”.
- Speaks badly of her father behind his back, “Idle old man”.
- No loyalty to anyone – will send Lear to Regan if he doesn’t behave as she sees appropriate. Will let her sister endure the struggle of looking after her father instead of doing it herself, selfish, “If he distaste it, let him to our sister”.
- Controlling, hatches plans and expects others to follow her lead, “I’ll write straight to my sister/ To hold my very course”.

- Criticises her father's ruling of the Kingdom, no respect for the man who gave her life, "By your allowance; which if you should, the fault/ Would not 'scape censure"
- Insults and angers her father by refusing to allow him to keep his knights. This deliberate attempt to offend him shows her cruel and heartless nature, can't but detest her, "A little to disquantity your train", "Men so disordered, so deboshed and bold".
- Lear describes her as "Ingratitude, thou marble hearted fiend", "Detested kite!"
- Albany refuses to stand up to her. Shows control she has over others, "My Lord, I am guiltless, as I am ignorant".
- Tells Lear she thinks he is going mad, "let his disposition have that scope/ That dotage gives it".
- "A hundred knights! / 'Tis politic and safe to let him keep".
- Keeps reducing Lear's train of knights, "What need you five-and-twenty, ten or five"
- Anger at her father "Tis his own blame"
- Demands Gloucester's eyes be removed, "Pluck out his eyes!"
- Entranced by Edmund's power, but has no respect for her own husband, "I marvel our mild husband/ Not met us on the way!".
- Albany insults her, showing he can finally see that she is an evil character, "You are not worth the dust which the rude wind/ Blows in your face". He informs her that she has committed a terrible act in the cruel treatment of her father, "Tigers, not daughters".
- She cannot see the error in her ways, completely self-absorbed, "Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile".
- Albany calls her "devil", she calls him "O vain fool!".
- She fears her sister will win Edmund's heart, "But being widow, and my Gloucester with her,/ May all the building in my fancy pluck", no consideration for others.
- Edmund appears to be the only thing she cares about, evil drawn to evil.
- Poisons her own sister so that she can be with Edmund, shockingly cruel, "If not, I'll ne'er trust medicine".

- Goneril kills herself when Albany reveals her treachery by producing her letter to Edmund, in which she reveals her involvement with Edmund and asks him to kill Albany. Too cowardly to face the consequences of her actions.

Regan

- Unlikeable from the beginning, copies her sister in falsely flattering her father, “I am made of the self-same mettle that my sister is”.
- Thinks her father has gone mad, uses this to her advantage, “Tis the infirmity of his age”. Prepared to act against her father, “We shall further think of it”.
- Follows her sister’s lead. Refuses to let Lear’s knights stay with her, “I have this present evening from my sister/ Been well informed of them”.
- Puts Kent in the stocks in order to please her sister and anger her father, “Till noon! Till night, my Lord, and all night too”.
- Doesn’t want to let Lear stay with her, wants him to return to Goneril, “Return you to my sister”. Uncaring, heartless.
- Suggests her father reduces his train of knights even further, eager to anger him. Implies they cost a lot of money to keep, “so many, sith, that both charge?”. “What need one?”.
- Ungrateful to Lear, who says, “I gave you all”. Portrays a sense of entitlement, “And in good time you gave it”.
- Lear swears revenge on both Goneril and Regan, but they don’t care, “you unnatural hags,/ I will have such revenges on you both”.
- Can see that Lear is the architect of his own downfall, although she contributed to this, “The injuries that they themselves procure/ Must be their schoolmasters”.
- Refers to her father as “the lunatic King”, insulting.
- Eager to outdo her sister in evilness, demands Gloucester’s other eye be gouged out, “One side will mock another – the other too!”.

- Reveals to Gloucester that Edmund is against him, “Thou call’st on him that hates thee. It was he/ That made the overture of thy treasons to us”.
- No sympathy for Gloucester’s misfortune, “let him smell/ His way to Dover”.
- Competes with Goneril for the affections of Edmund, “She gave strange oeillades and most speaking looks/ To noble Edmund”.
- Questions Edmund on his relationship with Goneril, jealous, “I am doubtful that you have been conjunct/ And bosomed with her”.
- Asks Edmund to fight Albany.
- Poisoned by Goneril and dies.

Cordelia

- Refuses to engage in her father’s love test, strong woman who knows her own mind, “Nothing my Lord”.
- Lear takes offense at her silent stance, rather than seeing it as a symbol of her true love for her father, “Love, and be silent”, “My love’s more ponderous than my tongue”, “I cannot heave/ My heart into my mouth”.
- Questions the truth in her sisters’ words. How can they love Lear more than anyone, when they are both married, “Why have my sisters husbands, if they say/ They love you all”. Only character with insight into the true nature of Goneril and Regan.
- Lear’s favourite, “I loved her most”, yet he banishes her, “Hence and avoid my sight”.
- Sticks by her decision not to give into her father’s childish whims, “As I am glad I have not, though not to have it/ Hath lost me in your liking”.
- Doesn’t have a good relationship with her sisters, can see through them, “Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides”.
- Lear realises his mistake in banishing Cordelia, “

- Despite being banished, comes to her father's aid when she hears of his deteriorating health. Cries, "an ample tear trilled down/ Her delicate cheek", shows she still loves Lear.
- Tends to be reserved with emotions, shows strength, "Sorrow would be a rarity most beloved".
- Lear embarrassed to see her, knows he made a mistake in banishing her, "A sovereign shame so elbows him".
- Hasn't come to fight, has come to save Lear, "No blown ambition doth our arms incite/ But love, dear love, and our aged father's right". Love is stronger than anything for Cordelia.
- Grateful to Kent for helping her father, good person, "O thou good Kent, how shall I live and work, To match thy goodness?".
- Recognises the harm her sisters have caused Lear, "this child-changed father".
- Readily forgives her father, cares about his health, "let this kiss/ Repair those violent harms". Her love is stronger than her sisters' evil.
- Lear scarcely believes she has returned, her goodness is almost unbelievable, "I think this Lady/ To be my child Cordelia".
- Has insight, knows the world isn't a fair place, "We are not the first/ Who, with best meaning, have incurred the worst".
- Edmund orders Cordelia and Lear to be killed but calls this off at the last minute in order to save himself. However, it is too late for Cordelia, "O, you are men of stones!/ Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so/ That heaven's vault should crack. She's gone forever!".