

## King Lear context

- 👤 King James I, who attended one of the first performances of *Lear*, was trying to *unite* England and Scotland under his rule when he was crowned King of England in 1603, so the very idea of the *division* of Britain would have been troubling to Shakespeare's contemporaries – the division of the kingdom reflect contemporary fears due to the Elizabethan crises of succession that lead to the Jacobean era.
- 👤 Inheritance issues was also a matter of national concern for the audience as Elizabeth the first was unmarried and childless.
- 👤 During the same period that Shakespeare wrote 'King Lear' he also wrote 'Measure for Measure' which questions ideas about authority and justice.
- 👤 Some believe Kent and Cordelia's action in act 1 could have served as a warning to James the first not to be taken in by flattering courtiers and advisers. Like his predecessor, Elizabeth the first, James gained a reputation for indulging his Favourites.
- 👤 The first recorded performance was a court on the 26<sup>th</sup> of December 1606. Boxing day was an apt choice as the play consisted of a sovereign who was reduces to a beggar and so the day was significant as Boxing Day was traditionally associated with hospitality to the poor and homeless.
- 👤 The recent transfer of power from Elizabeth I to James I occurred in 1603. Elizabeth had produced no male heir, and the anxiety about who her successor would be

### SOURCES:

- Shakespeare would have been familiar with two "real life" Lear stories.
- During his life in London, a former mayor – Sir William Allen – divided his property between his 3 daughters and this was disastrous as he was treated badly by all of them.
- Another was in 1603, Sir Brian Annesley's eldest daughter and her husband tried to have him certified as a senile lunatic so that they could take over his property. His youngest daughter, Cordell, saved the day by challenging her sister in court.