

METRICAL EXPLORATION

Mend Your Speech: Shifting between Verse and Prose

As **Verse and Prose** (page 48) showed you, Shakespeare primarily wrote in iambic pentameter – lines of ten syllables, broken into five beats, in an unstressed-stressed pattern. As his career went on, however, he began experimenting with different forms more often, from the four beats of trochaic tetrameter in plays like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Macbeth* to the more prose-heavy plays like *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Much Ado about Nothing*. Even within iambic pentameter, the later plays tend to have more irregularities – six-footed lines, caesuras, shared lines, etc – than the earlier plays do. *King Lear*, written around 1606, falls towards the later end of Shakespeare's career, and it displays many variations on regular verse. It also includes a number of shifts between verse and prose in key scenes.

A quick search on Google shows that many scholars and teachers of Shakespeare adhere to the idea that high status characters speak in verse while low status characters speak in prose. While this pattern more-or-less holds in some plays, such as *Julius Caesar*, it is not broadly true. In many of Shakespeare's plays, high status characters speak in prose – large portions of *As You Like It* and *Much Ado about Nothing*, for example – and low-status characters such as Pistol in *Henry V* sometimes speak in verse.

Giles Block, Master of Words at Shakespeare's Globe, suggests that the difference has more to do with head vs heart than with high status vs low status. Block suggests that verse comes from the heart, the seat of emotion and passion, while prose comes from the head, the seat of logic and wit. This division can also pose some problems, however, as characters are certainly capable of being witty and logical in verse or of being emotional and passionate in prose.

In *Lear*, the change between verse and prose may have multiple connotations for a character's mindset, emotions, and even sanity. In the following activities, your students will explore the differences between prose and verse sections of *King Lear* and will investigate character clues based on those revelations.

Activity:

- Review how to scan and mark both iambic pentameter and prose sections of a Shakespeare play from **Verse and Prose**, page 48.
- Give each of your students one of **Handouts #11A-D**: a variety of verse-prose shifts in *King Lear*.
- Each student should scan the piece, paying attention to verse-prose shifts and other irregularities.
- Have your students choose a reason for the verse/prose shift – whether it relates to the character's status, to head vs heart, or to an emotional shift of some kind – and perform that shift using **Choices**, page 28.
 - For example: A shift from verse to prose may involve a change in speed, volume, or physical posture. Or, it might cause the actor to move from one kind of Laban movement to another, or from one part of the body (in Head/Heart/Gut/Groin) to another.
 - Make sure the shift is clear and distinct. Have your students try delivering their pieces more than once if necessary.

- Instruct your students to pay careful attention to classmates who are working with the same text as they are. Ask them to see if they can identify how their co-characters chose to key the verse-prose shift.
- You, a teaching aide, or another student may stand in to read the conversation partner in each passage.
- Discuss:
 - How easy was it to tell when each actor moved from verse to prose? Whose choices were the biggest? Whose were the subtlest?
 - For students working with the same text: Did they all make similar choices? What was different? Whose choices ended up telling different stories?
 - There is also the possibility that some of these verse-prose shifts were the result not of authorial intent or any acting reason, but because of errors in the print shop. Since printers set multiple pages at the same time, if they found themselves running short on space, they might put verse lines together to look like prose, or if they had too much space, they might break up them up, causing them to look like verse. Do your students have any lines they think might have been affected in that way?
 - You may wish to examine the facsimiles of the quarto and folio (see **Textual Variants**, page 88) to further explore this possibility.

Creative Writing Prompt:

Have your students choose a 10-20 line section of verse and turn it into prose, and a 10-20 line section of prose and turn it into verse. They should not simply add or delete line breaks; rather, encourage them to consider

Handout #11A – EDMUND, 1.2

EDMUND

Thou, nature, art my goddess; to thy law

My services are bound. Wherefore should I

Stand in the plague of custom, and permit

The curiosity of nations to deprive me,

For that I am some twelve or fourteen moon-shines

Lag of a brother? Why bastard? wherefore base?

When my dimensions are as well compact,

My mind as generous, and my shape as true,

As honest madam's issue? Why brand they us

With base? with baseness, bastardy? base, base? 10

Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take

More composition and fierce quality

Than doth, within a dull, stale, tired bed,

Go to the creating a whole tribe of fops,

Got 'tween asleep and wake? Well, then, 15

Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land:

Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund

As to the legitimate: fine word: legitimate.

Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed,

And my invention thrive, Edmund the base 20

Shall top the legitimate. I grow; I prosper:

Now, gods, stand up for bastards.

Enter GLOUCESTER

GLOUCESTER

Kent banish'd thus? and France in choler parted?

And the king gone to-night? Prescribed his power,

Confined to exhibition? All this done 25

Upon the gad? Edmund, how now? what news?

EDMUND

So please your lordship, none.

GLOUCESTER

Why so earnestly seek you to put up that letter?

EDMUND

I know no news, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

What paper were you reading? 30

EDMUND

Nothing, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

No? What needed, then, that terrible dispatch of
it into your pocket? the quality of nothing hath
not such need to hide itself. Let's see: come,
if it be nothing, I shall not need spectacles. 35

EDMUND

I beseech you, sir, pardon me: it is a letter from my

brother, that I have not all o'er-read; and for so

much as I have perused, I find it not fit for your

o'er-looking.

GLOUCESTER

Give me the letter, sir. 40

EDMUND

I shall offend, either to detain or give it. The

contents, as in part I understand them, are to

blame.

Handout #11B – KENT, 2.2

KENT

What a brazen-faced varlet art thou, to deny thou knowest me? Is it two days ago since I tripped up thy heels, and beat thee before the king? Draw, you rogue: for, though it be night, yet the moon shines; I'll make a sop o' the moonshine of you: draw, 5 you whoreson cullionly barber-monger, draw. [...]

OSWALD

Help, ho, murder, murder. [...]

CORNWALL

Keep peace, upon your lives:
He dies that strikes again. What is the matter?
What is your difference? speak.

OSWALD

I am scarce in breath, my lord.

KENT

No marvel, you have so bestirred your valour. 10
You cowardly rascal, nature disclaims in thee: a tailor made thee.

CORNWALL

Thou art a strange fellow: a tailor make a man?

KENT

Ay, a tailor, sir: a stone-cutter or painter could not have made him so ill, though he had been 15
but two hours at the trade.

CORNWALL

Peace, sirrah,
You beastly knave, know you no reverence?

KENT

Yes, sir; but anger hath a privilege.

CORNWALL

Why art thou angry? 20

KENT

That such a slave as this should wear a sword,
Who wears no honesty. Such smiling rogues as these,
Like rats, oft bite the holy cords a-twain
Which are too intrinse t' unloose; smooth every passion
That in the natures of their lords rebel; 25
Bring oil to fire, snow to their colder moods;
Renege, affirm, and turn their halcyon beaks
With every gale and vary of their masters,
Knowing nought, like dogs, but following.

A plague upon your epileptic visage; 30

Smile you my speeches, as I were a fool?

Goose, if I had you upon Sarum plain,

I'd drive ye cackling home to Camelot.

CORNWALL

Why, art thou mad, old fellow?

GLOUCESTER

How fell you out? say that.

KENT

No contraries hold more antipathy 35

Than I and such a knave.

CORNWALL

Why dost thou call him a knave? What's his offence?

KENT

His countenance likes me not.

Handout #11C – LEAR, 3.6

KING LEAR

It shall be done; I will arraign them straight.

Come, sit thou here, most learned justicer;

Thou, sapient sir, sit here. Now, you she foxes-- [...]

KENT

How do you, sir? Stand you not so amazed:
Will you lie down and rest upon the cushions? 5

KING LEAR

I'll see their trial first. Bring in the evidence.

Thou robed man of justice, take thy place;

And thou, his yoke-fellow of equity,

Bench by his side: you are o' the commission,

Sit you too.

EDGAR

Let us deal justly. 10

Sleepest or wakest thou, jolly shepherd?

Thy sheep be in the corn;

And for one blast of thy minikin mouth,

Thy sheep shall take no harm.

Pur! the cat is gray. 15

KING LEAR

Arraign her first; 'tis Goneril. I here take my oath

before this honourable assembly, she kicked the

poor king her father.

FOOL

Come hither, mistress. Is your name Goneril?

KING LEAR

She cannot deny it. 20

FOOL

Cry you mercy, I took you for a joint-stool.

KING LEAR

And here's another, whose warp'd looks proclaim

What store her heart is made on. Stop her there,

Arms, arms, sword, fire, corruption in the place,

False justicer, why hast thou let her 'scape? 25

KENT

O pity sir, where is the patience now,
That thou so oft have boasted to retain? [...]

KING LEAR

The little dogs and all, Tray, Blanch,

and Sweet-heart, see, they bark at me.

EDGAR

Tom will throw his head at them. Avaunt, 30
you curs. [...] Tom will make them weep and wail:

For, with throwing thus my head, dogs leap the

hatch, and all are fled, loudla doodla, come, march

to wakes and fairs and market-towns. Poor Tom,

thy horn is dry. 35

KING LEAR

Then let them anatomize Regan; see what breeds

about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that

makes these hard hearts? You, sir, I entertain for

one of my hundred; only I do not like the fashion

of your garments: you will say they are Persian 40

attire: but let them be changed.

KENT

Now, good my lord, lie here and rest awhile.

KING LEAR

Make no noise, make no noise; draw the curtains:

so, so, so. We'll go to supper i' he morning.

Handout #11D – LEAR, 4.6

KING LEAR

Nature's above art in that respect. There's your
press-money. That fellow handles his bow like a
crow-keeper: draw me a clothier's yard. Look,
look, a mouse: Peace, peace; this piece of toasted
cheese will do 't. There's my gauntlet; I'll prove 5
it on a giant. Bring up the brown bills. O, well
flown, bird: i' the clout, i' the clout: hewgh.

Give the word. [..]

GLOUCESTER

I know that voice.

KING LEAR

Ha! Goneril, with a white beard? They flattered 10
me like a dog; and told me I had white hairs in my
beard ere the black ones were there. To say 'ay' and
'no' to every thing that I said--'Ay' and 'no' too was
no good divinity. When the rain came to wet me
once, and the wind to make me chatter; when 15
the thunder would not peace at my bidding; there
I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out. Go to, they are
not men o' their words: they told me I was every
thing; 'tis a lie, I am not ague-proof.

GLOUCESTER

The trick of that voice I do well remember: 20
Is 't not the king?

KING LEAR

Ay, every inch a king:

When I do stare, see how the subject quakes.

I pardon that man's life. What was thy cause?

Adultery? 25

Thou shalt not die: die for adultery? No:

The wren goes to 't, and the small gilded fly

Does lecher in my sight.

Let copulation thrive; for Gloucester's bastard son

Was kinder to his father than my daughters 30

Got 'tween the lawful sheets.

To 't, luxury, pell-mell, for I lack soldiers. [..]

There's hell, there's darkness, there's the sulphurous

pit, burning, scalding, stench, consumption; fie, fie,

fie; pah, pah; Give me an ounce of civet, good 35

apothecary, to sweeten my imagination: there's

money for thee.

GLOUCESTER

O, let me kiss that hand!

KING LEAR

Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality.

GLOUCESTER

O ruin'd piece of nature, This great world 40
Shall so wear out to nought. Dost thou know me?

KING LEAR

I remember thine eyes well enough. Dost thou

squiny at me? No, do thy worst, blind Cupid; I'll

not love. Read thou this challenge; mark but the

penning of it. 45

Teacher's Guide – Verse and Prose

EDMUND, 1.2

EDMUND

Thou, na|ture, art | my god|dess; || to | thy law
 My ser|vices | are bound. || Wherefore | should I
 Stand in | the plague | of cus|tom, and | permit
 The cur|iosity | of na|tions to | deprive me,
 For that | I am | some twelve | or four|teen moon-shines
 Lag of | a broth|er? || Why bas|tard? || where|fore base?
 When my | dimen|sions are | as well | compact,
 My mind | as gen|erous, and | my shape | as true,
 As hon|est mad|am's iss|ue? || Why brand | they us
 With base? || with base|ness, bas|tardy? || base, base? 10
 Who, in | the lust|y stealth | of na|ture, take
 More comp|osit|ion and | fierce qual|ity
 Than doth, | within | a dull, | stale, ti|red bed,
 Go to | the crea|ting a | whole tribe | of fops,
 Got 'tween | asleep | and wake? || Well, then, 15
 Legit|imate Ed|gar, I | must have | your land:
 Our fath|er's love | is to | the bas|tard Edmund
 As to | the legit|imate: || fine word: || legit|imate.
 Well, my | legit|imate, if | this let|ter speed,
 And my | invent|ion thrive, | Edmund | the base 20
 Shall top | the legit|imate. || I grow; | I prosper:
 Now, gods, | stand up | for bastards.

Enter GLOUCESTER

STOP Could this line open with a regular iamb? Could it end with a pyrrhic-spondee combination? Try it a few different ways.

STOP Notice the strange double elision in this line, turning "cur-ee-ah-si-tee" into "cur-yaws-tee". Is there another way to scan this line without those elisions?

STOP This caesura seems to take the place of a stressed beat. Is there another option?

STOP How does this stressed pronoun help to underscore Edmund's point?

STOP Could this final foot be a spondee?

STOP Could the first foot of this line be a trochee? How does it change the focus of the line if the stress is on "who" instead of on "in"?

STOP The rhythm of this line is stress-heavy. Considering Edmund is talking about a marriage bed being dull and boring, what could an actor do with those stresses?

STOP Several of Edgar's lines have mid-line trochees or pyrrhic-spondee combinations. What might these frequent irregularities indicate about his emotional state?

STOP This line is one foot short. Should an actor use that caesura to pause?

STOP This is the only time that Edmund pronounces all four syllables without slurring the word together with another. What kind of an acting clue might that provide? Also: Could the preceding "fine word" be a spondee?

STOP If you *don't* elide "legitimate" into "legit'mate", the stress might fall on the "I"s instead of or in addition to the verbs. Try saying the line this way. What do you gain? What do you lose?

GLOUCESTER

Kent banish'd thus? and France in choler parted?
And the king gone to-night? Prescribed his power,
Confined to exhibition? All this done 25
Upon the gad? Edmund, how now? what news?

EDMUND

So please your lordship, none.



Could this line still be in verse? Gloucester seems to switch to prose in the next line. Is he following Edmund's lead, or leading Edmund to prose?

GLOUCESTER

Why so earnestly seek you to put up that letter?

EDMUND

I know no news, my lord.



Notice how often Edmund includes parenthetical terms of address in his statements to his father.

GLOUCESTER

What paper were you reading? 30

EDMUND

Nothing, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

No? What needed, then, that terrible dispatch of
it into your pocket? the quality of nothing hath
not such need to hide itself. Let's see: come,
if it be nothing, I shall not need spectacles. 35



Discuss: Why might Edmund speak verse to the audience and prose to his father? Does he respect the audience more? Is it an attempt to be informal and "friendly" with his father (even though he addresses him as "my lord")? Is it because we get his inner truth (from the heart) in the verse and his scheming mind (from the head) in the prose? Explore different possibilities.

EDMUND

I beseech you, sir, pardon me: it is a letter from my
brother, that I have not all o'er-read; and for so
much as I have perused, I find it not fit for your
o'er-looking.

GLOUCESTER

Give me the letter, sir. 40


EDMUND


I shall offend, either to detain or give it. The
contents, as in part I understand them, are to
blame.

KENT, 2.2

KENT

What a brazen-faced varlet art thou, to deny thou
knowest me? Is it two days ago since I tripped up
thy heels, and beat thee before the king? Draw, you
rogue: for, though it be night, yet the moon shines;
I'll make a sop o' the moonshine of you: draw,
you whoreson cullionly barber-monger, draw. [...]

 Notice how Kent's questions go unanswered. Why? Does Oswald refuse to answer them? Is he prevented from doing so by Kent's actions?

 Rhetoric (see page 61) is often helpful for finding rhythm in prose. What sort of hook do Kent's repeated "draw"s give an actor?

OSWALD

Help, ho, murder, murder. [...]

CORNWALL


Keep peace, upon your lives:
He dies that strikes again. What is the matter?
What is your difference? speak.

OSWALD

I am scarce in breath, my lord.

KENT

No marvel, you have so bestirred your valour.
You cowardly rascal, nature disclaims in thee: a
taylor made thee.


 Kent also often breaks his speech with parenthetical terms of address, but in a quite different way from Edmund. How do these insults affect Kent's rhythm?

CORNWALL

Thou art a strange fellow: a tailor make a man?

KENT

Ay, a taylor, sir: a stone-cutter or painter could
not have made him so ill, though he had been
but two hours at the trade.

 Notice the short beats followed by a longer sentence.

CORNWALL

Peace, sirrah,
You beastly knave, know you no reverence?

KENT

Yes, sir; but anger hath a privilege.

CORNWALL
Why art thou angry?

20

KENT

That such | a slave | as this | should wear | a sword,
 Who wears | no hon|esty. || Such smi|ling rogues | as these,
 Like rats, | oft bite | the hol|y cords | a-twain
 Which are too | intrinse | t' unloose; || smooth ev|ery passion
 That in | the na|tures of | their lords | rebel; 25
 Bring oil | to fire, | snow to | their cold|er moods;
 Renege,| affirm, | and turn | their hal|cyon beaks
 With ev|ery gale | and var|y of | their masters,
 Knowi|ng nought, | like dogs, | but foll|owing.
 A plague | upon | your ep|ilep|tic visage; 30
 Smile you | my speech|es, as | I were | a fool?
 Goose, if | I had | you up|on Sar|um plain,
 I'd drive | ye cack|ling home | to Cam|elot.

STOP Why does Kent suddenly break into verse? Notice that Cornwall questions him several times before he gives this answer. Is it more true than his previous statements? More heartfelt?

STOP Could this second foot be a spondee? If so, would the first foot need to turn into a pyrrhic?

STOP Notice that this line is an alexandrine. Why might Kent go on longer than is typical?

STOP Is it possible that Kent's disguise is slipping here? Does anyone on-stage suspect something or seem to start to recognize him?

STOP Notice this mid-line trochee. Does it call attention to the fire-snow contrast?

STOP This line is a foot short. Is there any different way to scan it?

STOP What exactly does Oswald do to incur Kent's wrath at this moment?

CORNWALL
Why, art thou mad, old fellow?

GLOUCESTER
How fell you out? say that.

KENT

No con|traries | hold more | anti|pathy 35
 Than I | and such | a knave.

STOP The word "contraries", as a noun, has a different stress pattern than the adjective "contrary" that your students may be familiar with.

STOP Notice the stressed pronoun. How can an actor use that for emphasis?

CORNWALL
Why dost thou call him a knave? What's his offence?

KENT

His coun|tenance likes | me not.

STOP Though Kent's lines are short, Cornwall does not share them. Are there some awkward pauses here? What else might those unshared lines indicate?

STOP Notice the stressed "not".

LEAR, 3.6

KING LEAR

It shall | be done; || I will | arraign | them straight.

Come, sit | thou here, | most learn | ed just | icer;

Thou, sap | ient sir, | sit here. || Now, you | she foxes-- [...]

KENT

How do you, sir? Stand you not so amazed:
Will you lie down and rest upon the cushions? 5

KING LEAR

I'll see | their tri | al first. || Bring in | the ev | idence.

Thou rob | ed man | of just | ice, take | thy place;

And thou, | his yoke | -fellow | of eq | uity,

Bench by | his side: || you are | o' the | commission,

Sit you | too.

EDGAR

Let us deal justly. 10
Sleepest or wakest thou, jolly shepherd?
Thy sheep be in the corn;
And for one blast of thy minikin mouth,
Thy sheep shall take no harm.
Pur! the cat is gray. 15

KING LEAR

Arraign her first; his Goneril. I here take my oath

before this honourable assembly, she kicked the

poor king her father.

FOOL

Come hither, mistress. Is your name Goneril?

KING LEAR

She cannot deny it. 20

FOOL

Cry you mercy, I took you for a joint-stool.



Lear begins this segment of his madness in verse. Ask your students: Does this seem appropriate? Does his madness come from the heart or the head? Or, is he, even in madness, trying to regain his dignity and formality? (See page 153 for more).



Notice the stressed on "here" and on other direction words in this and his next speech. What sort of physical clues do those words give? To whom (or what) is Lear speaking? Kent and Edgar? Inanimate objects? Audience members?



Does the fourth foot have to be a trochee? It certainly can be, particularly with the strong verb "bring" following the caesura, but try the iamb, too. What changes when you place the emphasis on "in"?



Who is this stressed "you"? Edgar, who speaks next? Kent? The Fool? Lear himself? An audience member?



Lear lapses into prose here. What might the reason for the shift be?



The Fool may be giving us an important clue about what Lear has designated as "Goneril" – a stool, perhaps one taken from an on-stage gallant.

KING LEAR

And here's | anoth | er, whose | warp'd looks | proclaim

What store | her heart | is made | on. | | Stop | her there,

Arms, arms, | sword, fire, | corrupt | tion in | the place,

False just | icer, | why hast | thou let | her 'scape? 25

KENT

O pity sir, where is the patience now,
That thou so oft have boasted to retain? [...]

KING LEAR

The little dogs and all, Trav, Blanch,
and Sweet-heart, see, they bark at me.

EDGAR

Tom will throw his head at them. Avaunt, 30
you curs. [...] Tom will make them weep and wail:
For, with throwing thus my head, dogs leap the hatch,
and all are fled, loudla doodla, come, march to
wakes and fairs and market-towns. Poor Tom,
thy horn is dry. 35

KING LEAR

Then let them anatomize Regan; see what breeds
about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that
makes these hard hearts? You, sir, I entertain for
one of my hundred; only I do not like the fashion
of your garments; you will say they are Persian 40
attire; but let them be changed.

KENT

Now, good my lord, lie here and rest awhile.

KING LEAR

Make no noise, make no noise; draw the curtains:
so, so, so. We'll go to supper i' he morning.



Lear has switched back to verse. Why?



The heaviness of the consonants and vowels in "warp'd looks" suggests a pyrrhic-spondee combination here.



Do these stress-heavy lines suggest a change in Lear's demeanour? What physical or vocal choices might an actor use to show that shift?



In this line that is more or less nonsense, Lear switches back to prose. Why?



Lear remains in prose here. Compare the length of his thoughts in both the verse and the prose. Where are the thoughts longer and where are they shorter? What sort of effect do the shorter, choppier thoughts have? What sort of a clue might they provide an actor for motion?




Again, to whom is Lear speaking? What is the effect in this scene of engaging the audience? Does it cause some inappropriate humor? Some awkward laughter? Or could it be frightening?

LEAR, 4.6


KING LEAR

Nature's above art in that respect. There's your
press-money. That fellow handles his bow like a
crow-keeper: draw me a clothier's yard. Look,
look, a mouse: Beade, peade; this piece of toasted
cheese will do't. There's my gauntlet; I'll prove 5

 Lear is in prose again at the start of his actions in this scene. His thoughts have become even shorter and choppier. What might that indicate to an actor?

A read-around (page 22), changing speakers at every punctuation mark, will help your students hear the choppiness of his thoughts.

it on a giant. Bring up the brown bills. O, well
frown, bird: 't the clout, i' the clout: hewgh.
Give the word. [...]

 Ask your student-actor what he wants to do with this odd noise. Is it a hacking cough? A sneeze? A howl? A whoop?


GLOUCESTER
I know that voice.

KING LEAR

Ha! Gonefil, with a white beard? They flattered 10
me like a dog; and told me I had white hairs in my
beard ere the black ones were there. To say 'ay' and
'no' to every thing that I said--'ay' and 'no' too was
no good divinity. When the rain came to wet me
once, and the wind to make me chatter; when 15
the thunder would not peace at my bidding; there
I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out. Go to, they are
not men o' their words: they told me I was every
thing; 'tis a lie, I am not ague-proof.

GLOUCESTER
The trick of that voice I do well remember: 20
Is 't not the king?

KING LEAR
Ay, ev'ry inch | a king:

 Gloucester speaking in verse seems to trigger Lear to do the same. What character reason might there be for this? Does seeing Gloucester make him remember himself somewhat? Is he responding to Gloucester's formality?

When I | do stare, | see how | the sub|ject quakes.

I par|don that | man's life. || What was | thy cause?

Adul|tery? 25

Thou shalt | not die: || die for | adul|tery? || No:

The wren | goes to 't, | and the | small gil|ded fly

Does lech|er in | my sight.

Let cop|ula|tion thrive; || for Glouc|ester's bas|tard son

Was kind|er to | his fath|er than | my daughters 30

Got 'tween | the law|ful sheets.

To 't, lux|ury, | pell-mell, | for I | lack soldiers. [...]

There's hell, there's darkness, there's the sulphurous

pit, burning, scalding, stench, consumption; he, he,

fe; pah, pah; Give me an ounce of civet, good 35

apothecary, to sweeten my imagination: there's

money for thee.

GLOUCESTER

O, let me kiss that hand!

KING LEAR

Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality.

GLOUCESTER

O ruin'd piece of nature, This great world 40

Shall so wear out to nought. Dost thou know me?

KING LEAR

I remember thine eyes well enough. Dost thou

squiny at me? No, do thy worst, blind Cupid; I'll

not love. Read thou this challenge; mark but the

penning of it. 45



This line is three feet short? Why might that be? Consider if Lear might be speaking to the audience. If he asks an audience member a question, might that indicate the space to pause for a reply?



Another short line. What might the reason for this one be? Is there any opportunity for other noise or action?



This line is an alexandrine. What is the reason for the caesura in the middle? The thought could run straight through. What can an actor do with that mid-line break?



Lear switches back to prose in the middle of his speech. What might the reason for that be? Does the change produce an audible effect?



Lear's speech becomes very choppy here. What effect does that have on his speed?



This is after Gloucester's blinding. Make sure your student actors know that.