

English

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Higher Level

2020-21

King Lear Essay Writing



Essay Writing Technique

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NOTES.COM



LEAR ESSAY WRITING



Understanding the marking scheme ensures that your hard work will be rewarded. It is vital that you understand how PCLM works.

**the
'purpose'
marks
control
everything**

The following advice is based on the requirements of State Examinations Commission's the marking scheme. The views expressed here are not necessarily my personal opinions, but are derived from discussions with examiners and close reading of the Chief Examiner's reports. It is very important that you take the time to download and read the Chief Examiner's reports which can be found on www.examinations.ie.

© Starting Point

Your essay must always contain a beginning, a middle and an end.

Essay
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Writing An Intro | Notes

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

THE CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

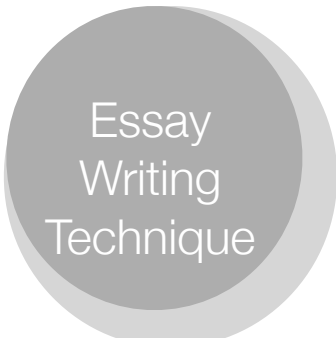
'Examiners reported that candidates generally seemed well prepared for answering on Single Text questions. Although most answers displayed a close knowledge of the studied texts, unfocused narrative remained a feature of the less successful attempts. Successful candidates avoided simple character sketches and wrote cogently, using focused narrative, on both aspects of the question. Quotations were used liberally, but not always accurately or judiciously. Examiners noted that the best answers in the Single Text Section were anchored in a careful and assured examination of all aspects of the question. While unfocused narrative remains a minor problem, most candidates displayed an admirable flexibility in adapting their knowledge to the demands of the question'...

Introductions

Apart from the C marks, which are awarded for how your essay is structured there are no marks per se in the marking scheme for the quality of your introduction. You will not be rewarded in the marking scheme for proof in your introduction that you have planned your essay. However, you must have an introduction and obviously it is best that your introduction looks planned. There are a number of relatively easy tricks you can perform to lend your intro the appearance of being highly structured. Try not to over-complicate your introduction or promise something that you cannot or do not fulfil in your essay; because, if you do, you could damage your "C" marks.

Your introduction should be short and should emphasise the question asked. One of the best pieces of essay writing technique that you can employ, is to ask yourself if someone could tell what the question asked was by simply reading my introduction. If the answer is no to this question, you need to start again. Generally speaking, it may be best to avoid mentioning a specific scene, act, or character unless these are asked in the question. In order to avoid mentioning irrelevant material, you must make a list of the key question words before you start to write your introduction. Bear in mind that it is entirely possible to

'Students should be aware of the dangers of unfocused narrative particularly in their response to a Single Text question. It is important to move beyond mere description of content'



Essay
Writing
Technique

EFFECTIVE PARAGRAPHS

prepare in advance the attributes of what an introduction to those key areas of play might look like.

● Sentences

The basic unit of any essay is the sentence. Remember to keep keep control over your sentences. When you first begin to write Leaving Certificate style essay you need to write in relatively short measured sentences. Only when you feel in control of your writing should you attempt longer sentences. Some of the most basic mistakes made by students include:

- ★ The unintentional repetition of words. Look at the following example where unintentional repetition has weakened the sentence:

‘Examiners noted that the best answers in the Single Text Section were anchored in a careful and assured examination of all aspects of the question. While unfocused narrative remains a minor problem, most candidates displayed an admirable flexibility in adapting their knowledge to the demands of the question’

**you must
ensure
that there
is a clear
and
obvious
focus to
your
paragraph**



Effective Paragraph Notes

[illegible]

The compulsory single text question

The single text question is worth 60 marks. This question is compulsory. You will be given a choice between two different questions on the day of the examination. Generally, there tends to be a choice between a character based question and a theme based one. However, this is not guaranteed and questions that deal with the technical aspects of the play can and do appear on the examination.

Apt use of quotation is vital to your ability to respond to the question. There is no escaping this fact.

Lear demands that a love test take place, because Lear wants to test his daughter's love.

- ★ Starting two consecutive sentences with the same words.
- ★ Using overused or misused adjectives such as good, nice, bad, brilliant etc...
- ★ Failing to make the verb and the subject agree.
- ★ Using unusual syntax that departs from normal word order.

Most essay writing problems originate from poorly thought out sentences. Remember, effective sentences work to create effective paragraphs that are focused on the question asked. How you organise your paragraphs is vital to the success of your essay. The marking scheme is designed in such a manner as to reward students who arrange their answer to the question in an ordered manner:

"The syllabus requires that, all students will be expected to be assiduous in their attention to paragraphing, syntax, spelling and punctuation. Candidates at both Higher and Ordinary Levels benefited when they



exhibited an ability to structure their writing, organise paragraphs, spell accurately and correctly employ punctuation."

A paragraph is a self-contained unit of a thought in writing dealing with a particular point or idea. There must be a clear and discernible focus to your paragraph. And that focus must be question linked. If the essay were about the Edmund, then one of your paragraphs might have as its focus, the way in which Edmund appears honest. A paragraph must never have two competing ideas. If you cannot say, what aspect of the question your paragraph is dealing with then your paragraph is not focussed. Remember, paragraphs that deal with more than one idea at one time tend to be confused and do not exploit the marking scheme in the most effective and time efficient fashion. For the first three essays that you write, it is a good idea to write the focus of the paragraph down the side of the page. This will help you to think about where your essay is going. The best paragraphs contain at least three obvious references to the question asked. For example, if the question were centred on the word 'deceit', then your paragraph should use

According to the chief examiner's report 2008

Less successful responses to questions on the Single Text occurred when candidates (i) had some difficulty with recall (ii) were unsure as to the precise information asked for or (iii) wrote extensive summaries of the plot ...

the word deceit in an obvious way, but should also contain words and phrases like 'appearance and reality', 'lies', 'indirections' etc. Remember, that you should indent the beginning of each paragraph and it is good practice to leave a few lines between each paragraph.

"Quotations"

Every paragraph you write must contain **STRONG** quotations that make thematic, character or technical points. Using strong quotation will allow you to avoid paraphrasing the text. Paraphrase weakens your answer and is not rewarded in the marking scheme. Look at the following example:

Lear chooses to compound his crimes by calling on the "operation of the orbs from whom we do exist, and cease to be" to bear witness to his defilement of friendship, family and throne.

Provided that it doesn't fragment your essay, block quotation can be a very useful tool in strengthening your point. When using block quotations you should drop down a line and move to the centre of the page. However, it is important to remember that quotation is only useful in so far as it is supporting a point that is completely relevant to the question asked.

Remember the question is everything there is no such thing as mark by impression in the English exam...

Take a look at the following example of how to use block quotation:

As we prepare ourselves for the play's tragic ending, we are forced to agree with Gloucester that in this cruel world, the weak are:

EFFECTIVE PARAGRAPHS

*As flies to wanton boys, [...] to the Gods;
They kill us for their sport.*

Although the block quotation stands on its own, it still follows the logic of the previous sentence. When the paragraph resumes, the question focus should still very clear. In fact, the next sentence should justifies the use of the block quotation in relation to the question. You must avoid dropping the quotation onto the page as if it arrived from nowhere. You will never be rewarded simply for using quotation. Your use of quotation must be justified by its connection to some aspect of the question. And that connection should always be: **thematic, character and or technical**.

© The Length of Paragraphs

It is of course impossible to prescribe the length of paragraph that you should write. However, in an examination situation most paragraphs will consist of sixteen to eighteen lines of exam booklet or 14 to 18 sentences. Keeping this in mind, you should make sure that you practise writing essays on examination style booklet. Well written essays tend to contain paragraphs of even length. If you think about this for a moment, it is entirely logical. If the question contains three parts, then, in order to obtain full marks, you must deal with each of these three parts more or less evenly. One paragraph containing four sentences and another containing twenty-four sentences tends to indicate a poorly structured essay. It is important that you get into the habit of approaching each paragraph in a structured well thought out fashion. The best paragraphs nearly always contain:

- More than one clear reference to the question asked.
- At least three quotations delivered in a developed PQE (Point Quote Explain) sequence.
- Apt use of technical vocabulary such as; **atmosphere, dramatic irony, motif of sight, soliloquy** etc

Think Before You Write!

So before, during and after you put pen to paper you should ask yourself the following questions:

- ✓ Is the paragraph focused on one aspect of the question?
- ✓ Does my paragraph have at least three strong quotations?
- ✓ If the paragraph were taken out of the essay would one be able to tell what the question asked was?
- ✓ Are the paragraphs evenly distributed?
- ✓ Have you written roughly four pages or between 1000 - 1400 words?

If the answer is no to any of these questions, the chances are that your essay is flawed and needs to be reworked. **From now on, please do not write an essay without reading this handout through.** Make sure you follow the check-list above. Don't be afraid to ask tough questions of your own writing. For further advice on the PCLM marking scheme why not click on our

short explanatory video <http://studyzone.ioe.ie/exam-times-supplement-3-english/>

Below, you will find two sample essays to past Leaving Certificate questions. These may help you to place the advice given above and the information contained in the online explanatory video into a clearer context.

LEAVING CERTIFICATE 1989

“Shakespeare’s vision of the world in *King Lear* is not essentially pessimistic.”

Discuss this view, supporting your answer by reference or quotation from the play.

Introductions

- *Introductions should always be short clear and concise. Remember, there are no marks per se in the P C L M marking scheme for the quality of your introduction. Given that an introduction will not contain developed points it is very unlikely that it will be coded.*
- *Consequently, there is no need to overthink your introduction.*
- *The litmus test for a good introduction is: could someone tell what the question asked was from simply reading your introduction?*
- *If the answer is no to this question, you need to rethink your introduction.*

In the essay below, which is colour coded, red is used for a topic sentence, green for a question link and pink for a simple or complex continuity link.

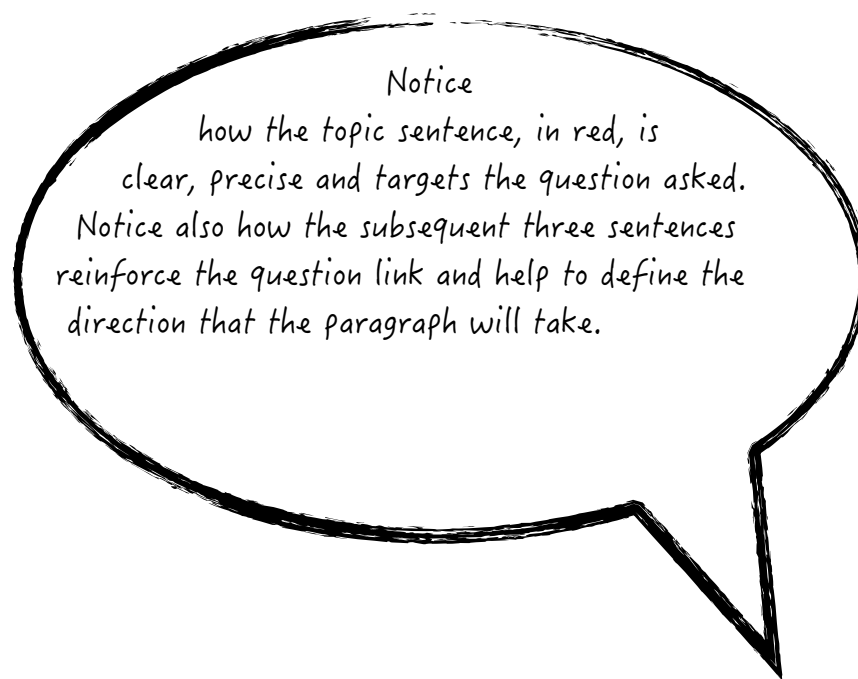
Despite the pain and suffering that dominates so much of “*King Lear*”, Shakespeare’s vision of the world in the play is not essentially pessimistic. The play balances its undeniably darker moments by ❶ demonstrating clearly that change and growth are possible, ❷ that evil can be opposed and ❸ by emphasising the redemptive power of love.

1

2

A triadic expression, or a grouping of three can be a good way of organising your thoughts in a clear and efficient manner

3



Even in the play's darkest moments Shakespeare's vision of the world is not entirely pessimistic. The blinding of Gloucester is one of the most shocking scenes in all of literature. However, even here, in the midst of the most depraved cruelty, Shakespeare gives us reasons for hope. In the face of Regan and Cornwall's threats Gloucester's commitment to his principles is uplifting. He reminds them that they are his "guests", lectures them about the wrongs they have done their father and assures them that there will be consequences for their actions:

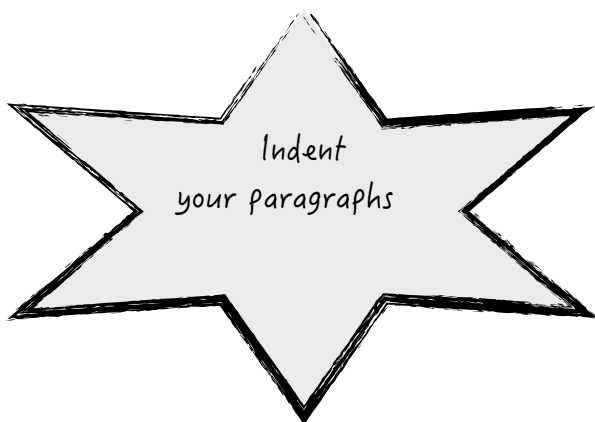
[...] but I shall see

The winged vengeance overtake such children.

Such courage from an old, frail man deserves our admiration and, in the process, balances the undeniable cruelty of this scene. We rightly feel that the savagery that Edmund, Goneril, Regan and Cornwall represent can and will be opposed. And Shakespeare confirms this when a lowly servant of Cornwall's intervenes:

*Hold your hand, my lord:
I have served you ever since I was a child;
But better service have I never done you
Than now to bid you hold.*

The audience is uplifted to learn that there are men in the world willing to risk their lives for what is right. Although when Gloucester is eventually forced to “smell his way to Dover,” we are of course deeply disturbed by his suffering, we are also heartened to witness the kindness of two more of his servants. At great risk to their personal safety, they apply “flax and whites of eggs” “to his bleeding face.” Their genuine concern counters the cruelty that we have just witnessed and does much to show us that the play’s outlook, although deeply depressing in places, is not essentially pessimistic.



However, perhaps the most uplifting aspect of Gloucester's painful journey is the change that takes place in his character. He displays empathy for those helping him and, for the first time in the play, is fully aware of just how foolish and blind he has been:

*[...] bring some covering for this naked soul, [...]
I have no way, and therefore want no eyes;
I stumbled when I saw:*

Furthermore, he realises that he has wronged his son and he expresses sorrow for his behaviour,

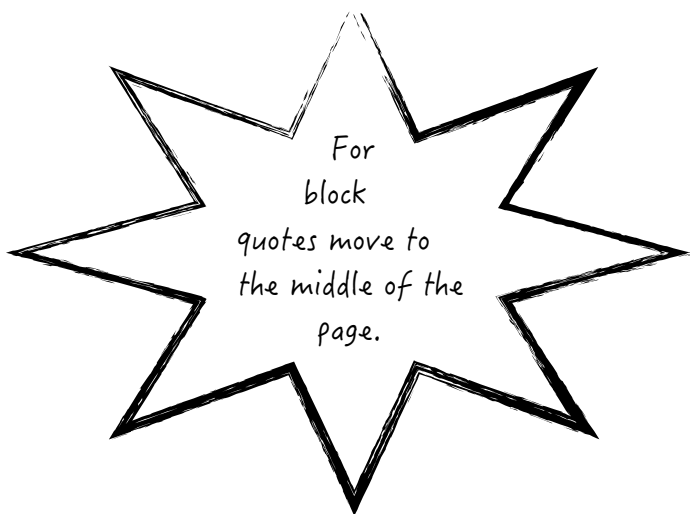
*O dear son Edgar,
Might I but live to see thee
I'd say I had eyes again.*

The word "however" in the topic sentence provides a small but very necessary link to the previous paragraph. Once again, the topic sentence is very question orientated. At the same time, it highlights the direction this paragraph is going to take.

Finally, Gloucester expresses his desire that he now perceives as inequality in society. For the first time in the play, Shakespeare offers us a vision of the world where those in power seek to "undo excess".

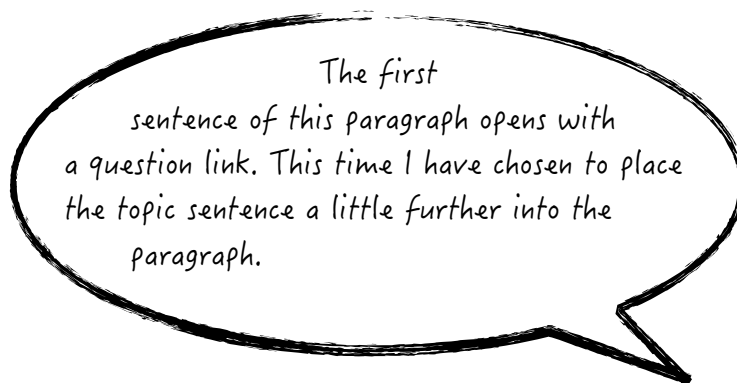
The first sentence of this paragraph provides a link to the previous paragraph and thereby creates greater cohesion. The latter part of this sentence acts as the topic sentence.

Of course, Gloucester's painful journey towards redemption is matched by the profound changes that take place in Lear's character. And while there is no denying that Lear's suffering is every bit as shocking as Gloucester's, his journey towards enlightenment is equally uplifting; because, he also demonstrates that real change for the better is possible. When Goneril attempts to emasculate him by taking away his knights, Lear counters with a profound and thoughtful assessment of the human condition:



*O, reason not the need: our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous:
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life's as cheap as beast's [...]*

For the first time in the play, Lear speaks wisely. And as he rushes into the storm we are right in feeling that he is ready to accept whatever lessons are to be learnt from this painful experience.



There is no denying the suffering that Lear experiences once exposed to force of the storm. Although he revels in the savagery of the natural forces that he himself has set into motion, it is precisely in this abject and unsheltered state that his spiritual blindness is lifted. **The changes in Lear's character counter much of the undeniable pessimism caused by his suffering;** because, what transforms Lear after his painful experience on the heath is his acceptance of his own natural limitations, of his place within, and not above, the natural world. Much like Gloucester, Lear learns to place others ahead of his own needs. And for what we rightly suspect is the first time in his life he shows concern and empathy for the suffering of others:

Prithee, go in thyself: seek thine own ease:

As Lear begins to feel the suffering of those around him, he suddenly appreciates there are many “Poor naked wretches” in the world that:

[...] bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,

He worries for their safety and is concerned that their:

“houseless heads and unfed sides,”

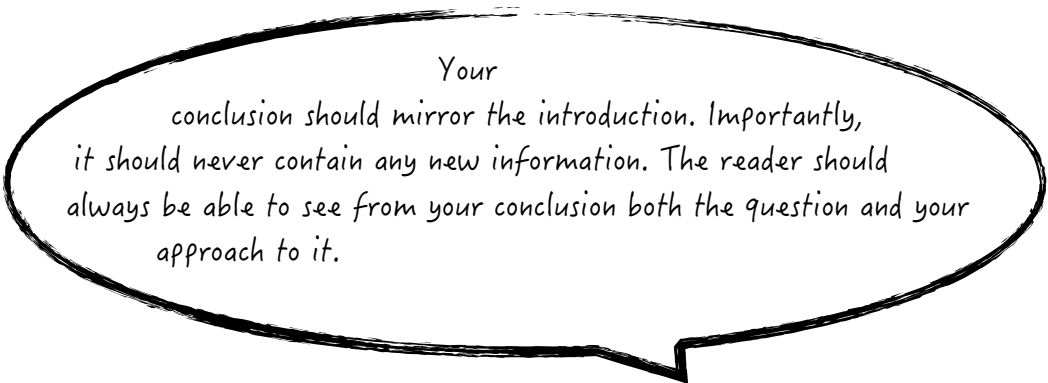
will cause unnecessary hardship. Importantly, he acknowledges his culpability in having “taken too little care of this” when he was in a position to do so. The tenderness of Lear’s concern for the Fool and Kent, his growing understanding of the bond of empathy that joins him to his fellow human beings and his acceptance of how he has neglected his duty to those worse off than him does much to balance the pessimism of this scene.

However, while the profound changes that take place in Lear’s character are genuinely uplifting, it is the manner in which he is redeemed during his loving reconciliation with Cordelia that is most heartwarming. When he meets her again, we are presented with a man who is no longer demanding and arrogant. He accepts that he is ‘a very foolish

***fond old man'* and realises that he is '*not of perfect mind*'. When he greets Cordelia, he does so with extraordinary simplicity and modesty:**

*Do not laugh at me,
For, as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia.*

As he kneels before her and explains that he is "*a very old foolish fond old man.*" and that he "*fear[s he is] not in his perfect mind.*" The act of kneeling down is one of real enlightenment, indicating the extent to which he has changed and his deep need to be forgiven by his daughter. For her part, Cordelia is sensitive to his vulnerability. She asks for him "*to hold your hand in benediction o'er me*", she denies that she has cause to sit in judgement on him - "*no cause, no cause, and will not let him humble himself before her, you must not kneel.*" She refers to him with respect and sets about restoring his dignity and his self-esteem. She calls him "*your Majesty*" and "*my Lord*", attributing to him the title and the respect that others have denied him. She re-establishes his status as king and his sense of self-worth as a man. As he exits, his parting have a spiritual quality to them that would have been unthinkable at the beginning of the play: '*You must bear with me. Pray you now, forget and forgive. I am old and foolish*'. **This is so utterly different from anything in the first scene of the play that it validates Lear's suffering and counters so many of the feelings of pessimism caused by it.**



Your
conclusion should mirror the introduction. Importantly,
it should never contain any new information. The reader should
always be able to see from your conclusion both the question and your
approach to it.

There can be no denying that “*King Lear*” presents the reader with scenes of unimaginable suffering. However, Despite the undeniable pain and darkness that dominates so much of the play, Shakespeare’s vision of the world in “*King Lear*” is not essentially pessimistic, because in the play he demonstrates the redemptive power of love, he shows us that change and growth are possible and of course that evil can be opposed.

King Lear Past Leaving Cert Questions

2010

- I. “In *King Lear* honour and loyalty triumph over brutality and viciousness.”

Write your response to this statement supporting your answer with suitable reference to the text.

OR

- II. “In *King Lear* the villainous characters hold more fascination for the audience than the virtuous ones.”

Discuss this statement with reference to at least one villainous and one virtuous character. Support your answer with suitable reference to the text.

2006

- I. "In the play, *King Lear*, the stories of Lear and Gloucester mirror one another in interesting ways."

Write a response to this view of the play, supporting your answer by reference to the text.

OR

- II. "Reading or seeing *King Lear* is a horrifying as well as an uplifting experience."

Write a response to this view, supporting the points you make by reference to the text.

2001

- I. What, in your view, are the most important changes that take place in the character of Lear during the play, *King Lear*? Support your points by reference to the play.

OR

- II. "Scenes of great suffering and of great tenderness help to make *King Lear* a very memorable play."
Discuss this statement, supporting your answer by reference to the play, *King Lear*.

1997

- I. "Our initial disapproval of Lear in Shakespeare's *King Lear* develops ultimately into a profound sympathy for him."

Discuss this statement, supporting your answer by quotation from or reference to the play.

OR

- II. "The tendency to take pleasure in torture, in deceit and in the abuse of power is vividly dramatised in the play *King Lear*."

Discuss this statement, supporting your answer by quotation from or reference to the play.

1993

- I. "The importance of self-knowledge and forgiveness is strikingly evident in the play *King Lear*."

Discuss this view, supporting your answer by reference or quotation from the play.

O

R

- II. "Evil is vividly and frighteningly depicted in the play *King Lear*."

Discuss this view, supporting your answer by reference or quotation from the play.

1989

- I. "Shakespeare's vision of the world in *King Lear* is not essentially pessimistic." Discuss this view, supporting your answer by reference or quotation from the play.

Or

II.

"In the course of the play Lear embarks on a harrowing journey through suffering to self knowledge. At the end he is a better and wiser man." Discuss this view, supporting your answer by reference or quotation from the play.

1985

- I. 'Love as a redemptive force is a major theme in *King Lear*' Discuss this view, supporting your answer by reference or quotation from the play.

Or

- II. 'Images of animals, of the tortured human body, and of clothing/nakedness, are common in *King Lear*.' Discuss the part played by such imagery in the play, supporting your answer with appropriate quotation or reference.