



King Lear To See or Not to See

One of the central motifs in *King Lear* is sight and blindness (either literal or figurative). Characters who have their sight are often blind to truth, and often those who are blind “see”—or understand—the most. It is an archetypal motif.

In column 1: Read the quotes from the play. Study the specific words and phrases about sight set in bold.

In column 2: Record the speaker of the quote.

In column 3: Provide the context of the quote as well as the literal meaning of the boldfaced term as it is used.

In column 4: Provide the connotative meaning of the quote and term.

In column 5: Explain the boldfaced term's importance in the play. Review your responses in columns 3–5 and underline any words that relate to the idea that those who have vision are blind, and those who don't have their vision “see” more.

In the last two rows, add two more quotes of your own choosing, with citations.

Finally, use the details and your interpretations to answer the question.

Evidence	Speaker	Context and Literal Meaning	Connotative Meaning	Importance in the Play
See better , Lear, and let me still remain The true blank of thine eye (No Fear: 1.1.162–163)	Kent	Lear has just told his loyal servant, “Out of my sight.” Kent is asking that Lear <u>perceive</u> the truth, that he trust an objective (blank) advisor, and not be blinded by the <u>illusion</u> of his daughters’ false praise.	Kent is the wise one here, not Lear. He can see a <u>reality</u> that Lear refuses to acknowledge. Lear is blind to his older daughters’ intentions.	This line sets up the conflict between Kent and Lear that leads to Kent’s <u>disguise</u> and his re-entrustment with Lear. He ends up as one of the only characters of integrity and <u>reality</u> in the play, and he’s in disguise most of the time!

Does any here know me? Why, this is not Lear. Doth Lear walk thus? Speak thus? Where are his eyes? (No Fear: 1.4.212–213)				
Lest it see more, prevent it.—Out, vile jelly! Where is thy luster now? (No Fear 3.7.86–87)				
Gloucester, I live To thank thee for the love thou showered'st the king, And to revenge thine eyes.—Come hither, friend. Tell me what thou know'st. (No Fear: 4.2.97–99)				

What, art mad? A man may see how this word goes with no eyes. Look with thine ears. (No Fear: 4.5.141–142)				

How does Shakespeare use the motif of sight and blindness to reveal themes in *King Lear*?

RL.11-12.2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

RL.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.