King Lear Questions

1. *King Lear* has both personal and political dimensions, just as Lear himself is both a father and a king. How do the family struggles between Lear and his three daughters play out on a national scale?
2. Does the play suggest that families and nations encounter some of the same problems? What are they?
3. Lear calls himself "a man more sinned against than sinning" (3.2.59-60.1). Is this true? Is Lear an innocent victim of his daughters' cruelty? Or are some of the terrible things that happen to Lear his own fault?
4. From the opening scene, the characters in *King Lear* either call upon or make reference to the gods and divine power. How do their perspectives on the gods change during the play?
5. In King Lear, are the characters' prayers answered? What does it mean that Albany's prayer that the Gods preserve Cordelia is "answered" by the entrance of Lear carrying Cordelia's dead body?
6. Does *King Lear* ultimately suggest that the gods are cruel—or that they don't actually exist?
7. According to Colin Redgrave, who played King Lear in a 2004 Royal Shakespeare Company production of the play, "Lear is frightened of going mad, because madness is the passport to self-knowledge, self-knowledge being something denied to him all his life." In what ways does the King Lear we see at the beginning of the play lack self-knowledge?
8. Are there any moments in the play where *King Lear* seems as if it could have a happy ending? If so, how do these false signals affect the final impact of the tragedy?
9. Dr. Johnson, a famous Shakespearean scholar, was so upset by Cordelia's death that he stopped reading the play. Why does Shakespeare choose to kill Cordelia?
10. What impact does Cordelia's death have on the play?