

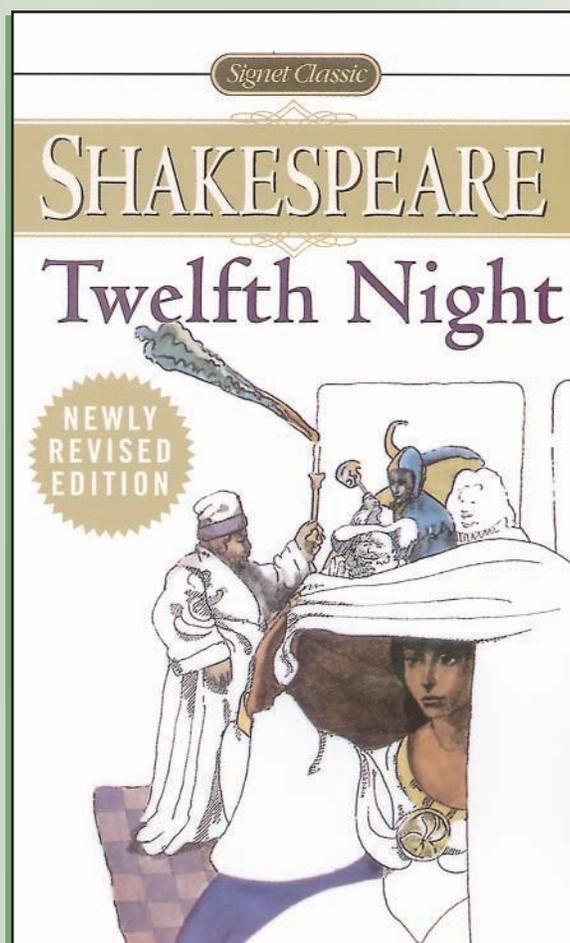
Signet Classic

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE SIGNET CLASSIC EDITION OF

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S

TWELFTH NIGHT

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INTRODUCTION

Twelfth Night or *What You Will* is an interesting blend of the sadness of separation between brother and sister, romance as each of them falls in love, farcical comedy filled with mostly gentle sarcasm and irony, and a bang-up happy ending for the brother and sister, re-united and also now loved by the one each loves. In between there is the intriguing complexity of mistaken identities, plots to fool foolish characters, and a couple of pompous characters who get what they deserve.

Thus, although some of the conventions of Shakespeare's time give the play a twist different from a similar comedy of our own time, there is much in the play that resembles a light and entertaining movie or television special. Handled in this way rather than as an icon to be paid homage to, *Twelfth Night* has much in it to appeal to the sentimental, the silly, and the critical in most modern high school students. And, of course, there is the character of Malvolio, exactly the type of pompous prig that teenagers especially seem to love to see put down by those he has picked on and preached to.

As the play progresses, one can almost hear teenagers yelling, "But he's a she! Can't you tell, you fool!" It is equally easy to hear them warning Sebastian and cheering when Sir Andrew and Sir Toby and especially Malvolio get their just desserts and as the mix-up of brother and sister and who's in love with whom is straightened out at the end. And throughout, these teenage readers laughing, jeering, sighing at romantic spots perhaps, expressing enjoyable disbelief that anything so mixed up could ever really happen or—if it did, be straightened out so conveniently in five acts—will be reacting to the play as its original audiences did.

The title of the play seems to refer to the last twelve days of Christmas, as in the song we hear so often during that holiday period. The last day—or twelfth night—was in Shakespeare's time a day of celebration and foolishness. The subtitle, *What You Will*, sounds suspiciously like the currently popular "whatever" used to say more or less, "I don't care"; or, as has been suggested, when asked for a title, Shakespeare may have said " *Twelfth Night* or call it what you will." If this is the case—and there are other, more complex interpretations—then perhaps Shakespeare is saying to us and to our students, "Well, here it is in all its sentimentality, foolishness, lack of realism, insight into the folly of humankind or whatever you want to make of it." If he is indeed giving us that freedom, then we and our students can sit back, laugh, make fun of characters, and see them as just like so and so—perhaps a teacher who is just like Malvolio—and make of it what we will.

What follows in this guide is a look at the play act by act. (For a more idiosyncratic yet lively reading of the play, try O'Brien's *Teaching Shakespeare*, pp. 26-28.) After the summary, the guide makes suggestions for ways to get students ready for reading the play, a few activities designed not to interfere with the natural flow of the events but to involve students more fully in those events and with the characters, and a couple of activities that can help students think about what they just saw and read and go on from there to take some stabs at creating from the raw material the play has given them.

OVERVIEW

IDENTIFICATION OF CHARACTERS

Orsino, Duke of Illyria: Loves Olivia; loved by Viola; groom-to-be of Viola (at the end of the play)

Lady Olivia: A rich countess; loved one of the Duke; loves Viola (as Cesario); bride-to-be of Sebastian (at the end of the play)

Viola: Twin sister of Sebastian; Cesario; page to Lady Olivia; loves the Duke; bride-to-be of the Duke (at the end of the play)

Sebastian: Twin brother of Viola; Roderigo; one who is confused with his twin sister (as Cesario); groom-to-be of Olivia (at the end of the play)

Sir Toby Belch: Olivia's uncle; a drunkard; co-conspirator with Sir Andrew, Feste, and Maria

Sir Andrew Auguecheek: Suitor for Olivia's hand in marriage; a foolish man; co-conspirator with Sir Toby, Maria, and Feste

Feste: Clown; co-conspirator with Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Maria; occasional commentator on what is happening

Malvolio: Olivia's steward (Manager of Estate); a vain and pompous man; object of the conspiracy to humiliate him

Maria: Servant of Olivia; co-conspirator with Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Feste

Antonio: Sea captain; friend to Sebastian; old enemy of the Duke

Sea Captain: Friend of Viola

Valentine and Curio: Aristocrats in Olivia's court

Fabian: An aristocrat in the Duke's court

SUMMARY

ACT I, SCENE I

The play begins with what is one of its two most familiar passages (the other being Malvolio's sense of himself in Act II, Scene v), as the Duke of Illyria, Orsino, pining for the love of the Countess Olivia, says:

If music be the food of love, play on!
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.
That strain again! It had a dying fall.
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour. Enough! No more!
'Tis not so sweet now as it was before.
O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou,
That, notwithstanding thy capacity
Receiveth as the sea, nought enters there,
Of what validity and pitch so'er,
But falls into abatement and low price
Even in a minute! So full of shapes is fancy
That it alone is high fantastical.

As he finishes that lament, the gentleman Valentine enters to tell him that Olivia thinks only of her dead brother and no one else.

ACT I, SCENE II

On the seacoast Viola has confirmation that she also has lost a brother, her twin Sebastian. Now in Illyria, she learns from a sea captain that the Duke Orsino is the ruler of the country and—an important piece of information dropped into the conversation—that he is a bachelor who loves Olivia. Viola decides that she wants to serve as a page to the Countess. When the captain makes it clear that Olivia is in seclusion, Viola decides to disguise herself as a man and seek to serve as a page in Orsino's court.

ACT I, SCENE III

The action shifts to Olivia's home, where we meet her uncle

Sir Toby Belch, his friend Sir Andrew Aguecheek, and the Maria, a servant to Olivia. Sir Andrew, we will learn, considers himself a possible suitor for Olivia. In the foolishness that follows, Sir Toby persuades Sir Andrew to continue seeking the hand of Olivia, and each of them in slightly different ways show that they mostly love parties and festivities.

ACT I, SCENE IV

Having introduced us to most of the main characters directly or through references in the conversation, the play moves quickly ahead, as Viola enters, now dressed as a page and using the name Cesario. Viola as Cesario has become a favorite of the Duke Orsino. Still in love with Olivia, the Duke sends Viola on a mission to Olivia to tell her of his love. Speaking to herself, Viola reveals that she has fallen love with the Duke.

ACT I, SCENE V

Back at Olivia's we meet Feste, the Clown, who will, from time to time, comment ironically on the characters and action; and Malvolio, the head of Olivia's household and a pompous ass, appears with the Countess. Sir Toby, now drunk, wanders in. At this point, Olivia gives in to Cesario's (Viola's) messages that he/she must see her. After Viola unsuccessfully represents Orsino's love and leaves, the Countess discovers that she is falling in love with—not the Duke—but Viola as Cesario and sends Malvolio to carry a ring to Viola and ask her to return the next day.

ACT II, SCENE I

Back on the sea coast, Viola's twin brother, Sebastian, who has re-named himself Roderigo, considers himself cursed to suffer more bad luck, and sets off for Orsino's court with Antonio, a sea captain.

ACT II, SCENE II

On a street somewhere, Malvolio catches up with Viola, still disguised as a page, and delivers the ring, saying it must be hers left behind. After denying she left the ring, Viola realizes that the Countess is in love with her. The scene ends with Viola's version of the play's subtitle, "What You Will": "O time! Thou must untangle this, not I./ It is too hard a knot for me t'untie!"

ACT II, SCENE III

Back at Olivia's, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Feste wander in after midnight still deep in partying. Feste sings one of Shakespeare's most famous songs, "O mistress mine, where are you roaming?" and the others laugh and make friendly fun of his singing. Maria joins them, and then Malvolio shows up to tell them off for their drunken loudness. When he stalks out, the three plan revenge by forging a letter from Olivia that Malvolio will find and, thinking he is the subject of the letter, believe that Olivia's letter is about him and she's in love with him.

ACT II, SCENE IV

Back at the Duke's, Viola delivers the rejection from Olivia to the Duke. The two discuss love, its pain and joy; and Viola shares her own sadness, pretending it is the story of her sister. The scene ends, with the Duke sending Viola back to Olivia with a jewel and a new message of love.

ACT II, SCENE V

Having given the plot against Malvolio a chance to develop, Maria drops the forged letter in Olivia's garden, where Malvolio is bound to find it. Malvolio then enters and, as Sir Toby and Sir Andrew listen, talks of how things would be if he married Olivia, whom, we discover, he already suspects is in love with him. He finds the letter and reads it aloud. Completely taken in, he leaves, having resolved to smile and smile as the forged letter suggests he should and dress in a fashion the letter praises but, in fact, Olivia dislikes. The letter contains the famous passage, "some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em," which Malvolio will quote to Olivia shortly.

ACT III, SCENE I

The scene begins with an exchange between Viola, still masquerading as Cesario, and the Clown, that contains mostly joking but ends with a thoughtful passage by Viola about the Clown's insight into the people he mocks. Olivia joins them in the garden; and, when they are alone, Cesario attempts again to represent the Duke to Olivia. Olivia, however, tells Cesario that she has fallen in love with him, not the Duke. Still pretending to be Cesario, Viola tells her that "no woman has; nor never none/ Shall mistress be of it, save I alone," a statement with strong double meaning.

ACT III, SCENE II

Sir Toby and Fabian convince Sir Andrew, who still sees himself as a suitor for Olivia, to challenge Cesario to a duel. Maria joins them to let them know that the plot against Malvolio is working: he's dressed himself as they suggested, in what they know—but he doesn't—are clothes Olivia detests.

ACT III, SCENE III

Sebastian and the sea captain Antonio discuss Sebastian's problems, and the sea captain gives him money for a room. They plan to meet later, and one might guess that brother and sister will soon be mixed up by the others.

ACT III, SCENE IV

This scene rapidly moves ahead the several mistaken understandings that keep us wondering how and when it's all going to work itself out. Malvolio, now completely dressed in the clothes Olivia hates and acting with words and gestures that we know will offend her, speaks to her of the love he thinks she has for him.

Olivia, knowing nothing of the phony letter, thinks he has lost his mind. Then Olivia learns that Cesario is back and leaves, and Malvolio lets us know that he thinks he's done a great job of winning her and also leaves.

In come Sir Toby, Fabian, and Maria to move along the other plot, Sir Andrew's challenge of Cesario to a duel. When Sir Toby reads the letter challenging Cesario, he refuses to deliver it as too stupid to be believed, but, getting a chance to talk with the page, warns him that Sir Andrew is a bad guy and then warns Sir Andrew that Cesario is really tough. They then taunt Cesario and Sir Andrew, and the duel starts. But, as one might expect, it doesn't progress very far before something stops it: Antonio, the sea captain and friend of Sebastian, wanders in, thinks Cesario (Viola) is Sebastian and challenges Sir Andrew himself. That duel doesn't go very far either, because a couple of cops come in, recognize Antonio as an old enemy of the Duke, and arrest him. Naturally, Antonio asks Cesario for his money back. Cesario doesn't have a clue what he's talking about—but Antonio mentions rescuing "Sebastian" as he pleads for Cesario to do what is right and give him the money. That gives Cesario hope that his (her) brother lives.

ACT IV, SCENE I

The Clown runs into Sebastian on the street and, thinking he is Cesario, tries to get him to go back to Olivia. Sebastian, not knowing what the Clown is talking about, gives him some money to go away. Just then Sir Andrew, Sir Toby, and Fabian wander in, think Sebastian is Cesario, and attack him. Sebastian proves to be a much stronger fighter than Cesario; but Olivia also comes by, stops the fight, and takes Sebastian away with her.

ACT IV, SCENE II

Malvolio, thought to be mad by Olivia, has been locked up in a dark room. With the help of Sir Toby and Maria, the Clown, disguised as the parson, Sir Topas, makes fun of Malvolio.

ACT IV, SCENE III

In the garden, Sebastian worries about Antonio, who didn't meet him as planned, and wonders about Olivia's love for him. She, of course, still thinks he is Cesario. Olivia then enters with a priest, and she and Sebastian go into her chapel to be married.

ACT V, SCENE I

This act has only one scene, but what a scene it is! Starting with Fabian and the Clown, each of the characters enter in front of Olivia's home. Duke Orsino arrives with his page Cesario (Viola) to try once more to win Olivia. The cops bring in Antonio, who speaks angrily of Sebastian's lack of gratitude, thinking that Cesario (Viola) is Sebastian. Then Olivia appears and tells the group that she and Cesario (Viola) are married since she still believes that Sebastian is Cesario. Cesario (Viola) clearly doesn't understand and claims that he (she) isn't married to Olivia; but the angry Duke rebukes

him (her) and fires him. At this crucial moment, Sir Andrew and Sir Toby arrive to complain that Sebastian has attacked them and hurt them. Sebastian comes in right behind them, wanting to apologize to Olivia for hurting her uncle. And there they are, the twins. All is resolved when Olivia decides she is happy with Sebastian as her husband and Duke Orsino realizes that he is in love with Viola, formerly Cesario. The clown brings a letter from Malvolio that begins to reveal the plot that has landed him in the dark room, and the Duke and Olivia have him brought before them. Malvolio has kept the letter he thinks was from Olivia and hands it to her. Then all is revealed as Fabian and the Clown confess. Malvolio rushes out vowing revenge; the Duke sends the rest after him to try to talk out his anger. The Clown, left alone, ends the play with a slightly cynical song.

TEACHING THE PLAY

Twelfth Night, like Shakespeare's other plays, is usually treated with a kind of reverence, much like standing in a gallery and looking in awe at a statue—looking with awe but with no other feelings. Wade and Sheppard in their study, "How Teachers Teach Shakespeare," make the point that "it is futile for teachers to impose their own experiences upon students, because, at best, responses will be uniform and diluted. Establishment of a personal relationship with the text must be the first step, and students' own responses and interpretations must be considered valid and worthwhile" (p. 23). They go on to conclude that "first-hand, dramatic experience leads to personal response and...exploration of a text through performance is an enjoyable way of illuminating communication between Shakespeare the playwright and his audiences" (p. 23). After an analysis of what a group of teachers indicated on a questionnaire, they conclude, "Despite recent changes, our findings are that for this sample of English teachers the most popular teaching methods remain the traditional and transmissional ones. The danger is that an elitist, high-culture, purely literary model of Shakespeare is presented through play-reading, literary critical analysis and scene summarizing" (p. 27).

Yet Shakespeare meant *Twelfth Night* to be a romance that is funny in itself because of the many mistaken identities: Olivia falls in love with Viola, thinking she's Cesario, and then marries Sebastian, who has been using the name Roderigo, because she thinks he is his twin Viola disguised as Cesario. And Cesario (Viola) has fallen in love with the Duke but, of course, being disguised as a man, can't admit her love. All this confusion and mistakes makes us feel superior to these dense characters and, so, we laugh at them. The play is meant to be a true comedy as defined by incongruity; that is, a character like Malvolio, so full of self love, falls into the humiliation of being duped and treated as insane, exactly the opposite of the lofty state he sees for himself.

Consequently, students should come to the play seeing it as a comedy where they laugh at the silly behavior of some characters with sympathy, like the Duke and Olivia, and others with none, like Malvolio and, to a lesser extent, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew. As suggested earlier, if they can see the play as a modern mixed-up, slightly crazy movie in Elizabethan dress, the play is likely to succeed with them.

BEFORE READING THE PLAY

The following activities should help students get into the mood for the play by looking at the plays they enjoy on television and in movies. Since the play was meant to be seen, not read and studied, looking at it as the script for a TV romantic comedy and trying to figure out how it might be adapted to TV will probably make sense to many students. So, adapting it — and that could mean cutting out some of the slower moving scenes — is an approach that can involve and intrigue students in a creative way.

These activities should also prepare students to make connections between the various sources of humor in *Twelfth Night*, the light romantic humor and the more sarcastic humor, and the television shows they laugh at every day. The activities also might help them look at their world, if not critically, at least more objectively.

1. Ask students to take notes on an episode of their favorite TV comedy, marking especially places where they—and their friends, if they were watching it in company—laughed a lot. In class in small groups, ask them to make a list of especially funny parts and then try to figure out why they were laughing. Have the groups share the funniest episodes and the reasons why they thought they were funny. Look at the results and ask, "So what makes something funny?" As there is surely no one right answer, anything from the sentimental to the cruel should be allowed to stand. One question that should be explored is, "Can you care about people you're laughing at?"
2. Ask students, "What causes people to fall in love?" Suggest that they think about people they know, characters in TV programs, movies, and stories as well as their own experiences—if they want to include the personal—and try to write down at least three different reasons why people fall in love. Then have them make a list of the reasons for falling in love

and put the most frequently mentioned each on a sheet of paper and post the sheets around the room. Next ask the students individually to put a number on how long it took in each of the cases for the people involved to fall in love and put those numbers on the sheet under the appropriate cause. Then ask, "How long does it take to fall in love?" Again, there's no right answer, of course.

At this point, give students copies of the Duke's first commentary on love—"If music be the food of love, play on" etc. (p. 3), perhaps written out as an essay rather than laid out on the page as a poem, and ask them what they think of it as something someone wrote when asked about LOVE. Corny? Well, that may not be too far from the reactions of some members of the audience and who knows what the Bard meant it to be.

3. If students can handle the question, ask them to consider why people make fun of other people? Have some examples—the comic strips are a good source as are incidents you've heard in school or that have happened to friends—in hand. Then ask them to write a scene in which someone makes fun of someone else in an especially nasty way. Share the results. Then ask them to consider the emotions of the person on the receiving end and ask, "When is it OK to make fun of someone else?" and "How far is it OK to go?"
4. If these activities are too analytic for the students who are about to study *Twelfth Night*, follow up Activity One by playing in class one of the funny episodes identified by a number of students and asking them, "Well, what did you think? Was it funny? If you thought so, why?"
5. *Twelfth Night* follows a fairly conventional pattern in effect for drama in Shakespeare's time and for several centuries thereafter. It has five acts and a number of scenes in each act. The characters are introduced at the beginning of the play, and the comic action begins. Through the next couple of acts the comic action becomes more involved (similar to the rising action of a tragedy), and then in the last act all the mess that has been created earlier is suddenly worked out. There are also commentaries by an observer (here Feste), misunderstandings that led to conflict, and so forth. Again, students can prepare themselves for dealing with these conventions by looking at the romantic comedies they watch on TV or in the movies. And, again, the conventions of plays like *Twelfth Night* are remarkably similar to the conventions of those TV programs and movies. To prepare students for reading the play, a look at how TV sitcoms are structured can give them a pattern that will be familiar to follow.
6. The text of the play contains a "Cast of Characters," as do most popular TV programs and movies. A discussion of each of the characters with a limited amount of information about each provided in contemporary terms by the teacher may be helpful. For example, the Duke of Illira is a really rich guy who wants to fall in love and has picked a woman who doesn't care for him or want to fall in love with anyone. So, who might play the part? The eventual cast (or casts) of actors from the popular media might be blown up to poster size and mounted on a board for future reference. Changes in casting aren't unusual in TV or the movies, and they certainly should be made as the producers (students) move through the production.

WHILE READING THE PLAY

The activities suggested during the reading of the play are intended to be carried out as preliminary to decisions about how the play might be dealt with as a modern movie or TV romantic comedy. Therefore, for example, students who are speaking lines from the play or carrying out the actions of characters should see what they are doing as if deciding what's being said and done and how it fits into the idea of a modern counterpart, rather than trying to become trained Shakespearean actors.

1. Consider the title. What can twelfth night mean? Many, perhaps most, students won't know about the Feast of the Epiphany, but they certainly will have heard the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas." Knowing that *Twelfth Night* is the last of the days of the song probably won't help them much, so they'll have to be told that in earlier times twelfth night was a time of wild celebration. Comparing it to Mardi Gras should help.

The subtitle *What You Will* has provoked much speculation. Ask students to consider when they might say, "What you will." One possible meaning is similar to the currently popular "whatever," which seems to mean "I don't care" or "it doesn't matter," that is, a kind of dismissal.

Scholars have suggested that it is tied to the concept of the will as in willpower, willful, willing, etc. Ask students to look for as many words as possible that contain the prefix "will." From their list, ask them to think about the various meanings of "will" and hold those meanings in mind as they read the play.

2. As is suggested in a number of the works in the Bibliography, a play is a play; that is, a play is meant to be performed, its words meant to be spoken, not read silently. Gibson, in his excellent book *Teaching Shakespeare*, points out, "Shakespeare was essentially a man of theatre who intended his words to be spoken and acted out on stage. It is in that context of dramatic

realisation that the plays are most appropriately understood and experienced. The consequence for teaching is clear: treat the plays as plays, for imaginative enactment in all kinds of ways" (p. xii). Consequently, producing the play should be the goal of the class activities. Students should consider each scene in terms of how it should be spoken and what physical actions should accompany it. To determine how the lines should be delivered, students should consider what tones and actions they might use if they were saying a modern version of the words: loud, quiet, angry, loving, upset, shocked, etc. They should attempt to use those same intonations when reading Shakespeare's lines. These activities can be done in pairs or small groups. Students should never be asked to read passages that they have not had the opportunity to prepare.

3. Expecting students both to speak lines and carry out the physical actions that go with them is often to expect too much. One technique that has been successful in producing a play is to give each role to two students, one to speak the lines and the other to perform the actions of the character. Scenes that would work well for this approach might be:

Act I: scene iii, scene iv, scene v

Act II: scene iii, scene v

Act III: scene iv

Act V: scene i.

4. The events of the play, while not earth-shattering or tragic, are fairly complex. Directors of TV programs and movies have chronologies that track the action of what they are directing. One group of students might be asked to serve as recorders of the action. As the play progresses, they are responsible for recording what has happened — somewhat as the "Overview" earlier in the guide has done. At the start of each day's rehearsal, they review the action of the previous day, as they might for the cast and support staff for a TV show. Then the next act/scene is rehearsed.
5. Characters are very important in all drama, and the characters of *Twelfth Night* make the play by their foolish actions, the love they feel for each other, their romantic dreams, and their relations to each other. One way a director can track the episodes of the play is to assign one or more staff members to teams to record what a single character said and did and a description of that character's mood, feelings, relations to other characters. These reports can be shared with the entire class each day as they would be with the cast and support staff of a production.
6. The names of the characters in the play carry a great deal of meaning. Students can consider the following question: What would you think of a person named like these?

Sir Toby Belch — perhaps vulgar, disgusting

Sir Andrew Aguecheek — after looking up "ague" perhaps weak, sickly, twitchy

Malvolio — with a bit of help with "volio" perhaps someone who wishes evil or finds evil because he wishes to

Feste — perhaps festive, causing a festival, lively and ready for a party.

Then students can look for similarly suitable names for the other characters: Sebastian = Braveheart, or Olivia = Aloofisha. They can surely find better examples. Then they can examine names in the TV programs they've been using as reference points and see if any of the names fit the characters in the same way.

7. To help students visualize the characters, once they have been introduced by the end of Act I, they can look for magazine pictures that seem close to representing each of the characters as they see them. The collection of pictures of each character can be gathered together and secured to large sheets of paper. As the reading of the play and consideration of similar modern drama continues, students can refer to the pictures to help them see the characters as if they were in a TV comedy.
 8. Although individual in many ways, the characters in *Twelfth Night* are also stock characters. As students observe more about each character in action, they might try to categorize the characters by reference to characters of the same type in modern plays. Sir Toby, for example, fits into the category of a slapstick character; the Duke, a lovesick dolt. Examining how modern versions of these character types are portrayed will, of course, help both in staging the play and in considering what modern version it might be like.
 9. Shakespeare's language, though wonderful, is a problem for modern young readers. As a part of the production of a TV show or movie, a task force can be assigned the responsibility of watching for words and expressions that might not be familiar to the audience. A group of students — especially those interested in language — can be assigned the role of "Language Watchdogs" to catch such words and expressions, decide how crucial the understanding of them is to the audience, and suggest alternatives. The task force might also propose replacements, and the class can decide which replacements would still work in the overall language of the play.
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10. There are several scenes in the play that are crucial to understanding and appreciation:

Act I, scene iv — Viola reveals that she, pretending to be a he, has fallen in love with Duke Orsino.

Act I, scene v — Countess Olivia reveals that she has fallen in love with Cesario, really Viola.

Act II, scene iii — The conspirators plan revenge on Malvolio after he reprimands them.

Act II, scene v — Malvolio finds the forged letter and is taken in by it.

Act III, scene iv — Malvolio makes a fool of himself before Olivia; Sir Andrew starts his duel; and Viola/Cesario, seen as Sebastian, refuses to return money to the sea captain, thus giving Viola hope that her brother lives.

Act IV, scene iii — Olivia marries Sebastian, thinking he is Cesario/Viola

Act V — The deceptions are discovered and the plot resolved.

Students can identify the scenes they think are crucial and discuss why and what would have happened if that scene had never taken place. Since there are no “right” answers, the discussion can, at any time, be left on hold until the end of the play and then re-visited.

AFTER READING THE PLAY

Once students have finished reading, acting, and discussing the play to its concluding scene, they can look back at what has happened, as they might when leaving a movie theater. In some cases, a “So what did you think?” may be enough. The following activities, however, are designed to help them think about characters and plot, and especially comedy and romantic love.

1. This guide has given an act-by-act, scene-by-scene overview of the play. With all the complexities of plot and character, summarizing *Twelfth Night* isn't easy. Students can pretend that they've just seen it as a TV program or movie and a friend asks, “What was it about?” They can write what they would say — record it — without using acts and scenes since movies and TV rarely resort to such divisions. Then they can exchange papers with another student, each student trying to play the role of the friend who made the mistake of asking, “What's it about?”
2. Many people in the play are in love with almost none of that love being returned until the end of the play. Students can look back at each of those relationships and ask:
 - Was he really in love with her or did he just think he was?
 - How did he feel when he learned that she didn't love him?
 - How did she feel knowing he loved her but she didn't love him? And especially when she loved someone else who didn't love her?

(To keep the questions as simple as possible, the guide uses only one pronoun where “he/she” fits most of the references in the questions. Some of these questions will apply to more than one character and not all will apply to every character. Answering them, however, does force students to consider — perhaps reconsider — the different aspects of romantic love displayed in the play.)

3. Since the approach suggested in this guide is to treat the play as an Elizabethan TV comedy, students can reflect on the various events of the play and create a plan to present it in a year or less as a TV series. What would the fall premier be? Would it start the way Shakespeare started his play? What would happen in each half-hour episode? What would the season finale be?
4. Students can look back at the TV series and movies they considered before reading the play and look for ways that *Twelfth Night* resembles one or more than one. They previously considered what makes a TV episode funny; now they can use the results of that consideration when discussing what makes *Twelfth Night* funny or at least, what funny elements are included.
5. Working from a list of the significant characters, students can select the one they would like to play in a production of *Twelfth Night* and explain why by referring to events involving the character and the words the character speaks. As an alternative, they might choose the character they wouldn't want to have to play.
6. Students can vote for the silliest, wisest, meanest, and most likable character in the play (much like class yearbooks have Class Clown, Cutest Couple, etc.) and then discuss why they selected each, referring to specific actions and dialogue of the characters.

- The character of Malvolio fascinates both scholars and actors. They argue that he is the perfect “pompous prig” and a character meant to be seen as getting what he deserves. They see Shakespeare as having created a character we can despise because of his undeserved high opinion of himself, be angry with for his domineering behavior toward others, and gain satisfaction from when the plot works to reveal all that is wrong with him. Others, however, have seen him as a sympathetic character, especially at the end of the play, when they believe he displays dignity in a very humiliating situation. Actors have often played him that way.

Students can look closely at what Shakespeare has Malvolio do and say and try to come to their own conclusions. A useful source is the Adams and Gould book *Into Shakespeare*, listed in the Bibliography, as is Coursen's *Teaching Shakespeare with Film and Television: A Guide*, which, in Chapter 7 focuses on Act IV, scene 2, in which Malvolio is locked in darkness because he is thought to be mad.

- Some scenes in the play are filled with action related to the development of the plot (Act III, Scene iv, for example), and other scenes seem less so (Act IV, Scene ii, for example). Some scenes merely introduce one important character (Act II, Scene 1, for example). Students can review Shakespeare's approach to including introduction of characters, direct action, revelation of a fact important to the play, etc. and consider other ways in which he might have accomplished the same purpose.
- Many of the events of the play are difficult to impossible to believe could actually happen. Indeed, the term “willing suspension of disbelief” applies to what one must do to enjoy this play. Students can examine what they do when faced with stories, TV programs, or movies that intentionally include things that almost surely could never happen by considering the following:

Sometimes writers or movie directors present situations and characters that you are supposed to understand are unbelievable yet with which you are supposed to go along for the fun or some other reason. How do you recognize when this is what is expected of you? When do you know that the writer or movie director thinks you will believe in something that only a dummy would? What is the difference?

- Shakespeare wrote a number of other comedies, of course; a few students might like to read one or more of them. Especially interesting after a study of *Twelfth Night* are *Much Ado about Nothing*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *As You Like It*.
- There is much information, commentary, and other material about Shakespeare and his works on the internet. Students can form teams to explore different sources on the web related to Shakespeare and look for material that presents ideas about the relationship of his works to modern beliefs, culture, and entertainment. Carol Schuetz's *Shakespeare Goes Online* is a good starting place.
- Peggy O'Brien's *Teaching Shakespeare* (pp. 46-50), provides an interesting plan for studying characterization in *Twelfth Night*. She poses questions such as “Is [Malvolio] the only character in love with himself?” and devotes considerable attention to the importance of masks, real and figurative, to the play.

EXTENDED LEARNING

Going beyond the conclusion of a work of literature allows for speculation and creativity that requires an understanding of what happened in the work, the characters as they were at the end, and how the characters changed during the work. Doing so is also a natural part of reading literature and responding to it. Readers typically ask themselves the simple sounding question, “I wonder what happens next,” as do people leaving a playhouse or movie theater.

- Continuing the idea of the play being the script for a season of a TV sitcom, students can develop the second season using many of the same characters, introducing new ones, following up on the final episode (act V of the play).
- Each student can select a character as he or she is at the end of the play and, using the situation existing then, speculate on what would happen the next day, the next week, or the next year in that person's life. Of course, one cannot do that without a pretty good understanding of who the character is and what the situation surrounding him or her is at the end of the play. Who is Olivia now that she is married to Sebastian? What kind of revenge will Malvolio seek and on whom? Will Malvolio gain insights into himself from his humiliation?
- The English language is filled with expressions that are brief quotations from the works of Shakespeare. Many, perhaps most of us, don't recognize them as coming from his plays and poems. Book titles, such as Faulkner's *Sound and Fury*, taken from Shakespeare's works are especially numerous. *Twelfth Night* contains several such phrases and proverbs, such as “cakes and ale,” “if music be the food of love, play on,” and the several times repeated, “some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust [or “thrown,” as the Clown says at the end] upon them.” The latter, used for comedy in the play, is often quoted as a serious and insightful view of human achievement.

Students interested in language and language history can go beyond this play to research expressions that come from Shakespeare, reviewing both where in his works they appear, what they mean in context, and how they are used today.

4. *Twelfth Night* is written in a version of the English language now 400 years old and by a poet-playwright drawing on an extraordinarily large and varied vocabulary reflecting common usage, legalisms, terms from medicine and warfare, and words and phrases from nearly every other aspect of Elizabethan life, culture, and society. It is no wonder that most modern readers and those attending performances of Shakespeare's plays struggle with the play's language. Likewise, conventions of drama employed by Shakespeare, the structure of the theaters in which his plays were performed, and many other factors keep the play from being as approachable as we would like it to be for students.

Students who have studied *Twelfth Night* can extend both their understanding of the language of Shakespeare and the conventions, characters, and events of the play by attempting to rewrite the play using today's language, society, and humor. Individual students can rewrite one act or several scenes from several acts, or a group of students can attempt a collaborative effort to rework the entire play. Those who have complained during class, "Why couldn't he just say it in ordinary English?" can be challenged to put it into "ordinary English" within contemporary society.

5. Comic love relationships are a common theme of many TV programs, movies, and contemporary literature, including works for young adults. Students can look at today's media for events and characters that seem a lot like those in *Twelfth Night* and prepare analyses of the similarities and differences of those characters.
6. Some students might develop an interest in the theater of Shakespeare's time. They can research how plays were delivered to the people of England at that time and compare that delivery system to today's multi-media delivery of drama.
7. Other students might wonder about comedy in Elizabethan times and want to look at other comedies by Shakespeare and by other authors of the time. They can try to determine what was funny then, what is funny now, and whether Elizabethan and contemporary theater have anything in common.

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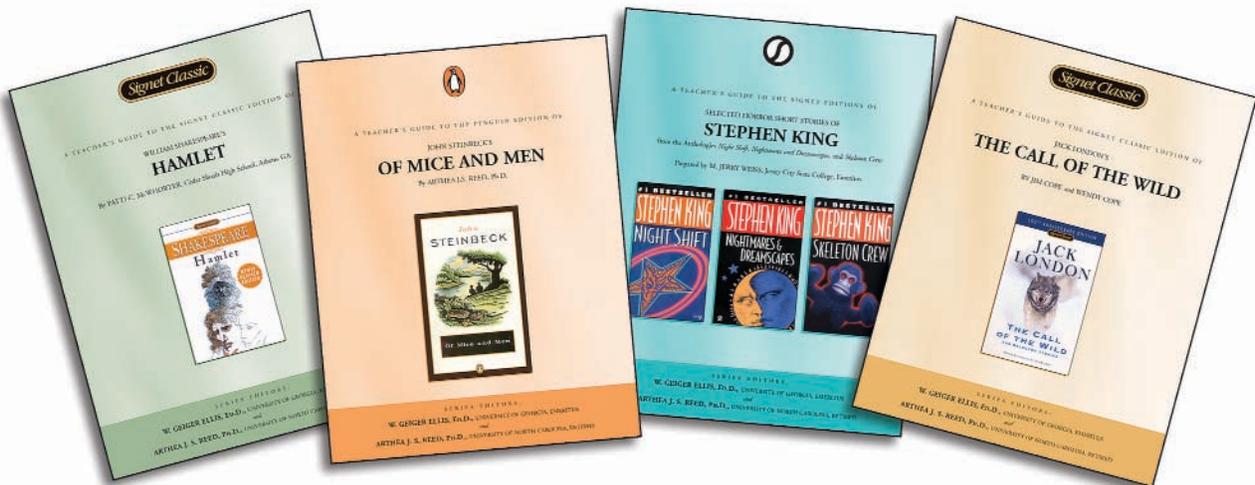
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