

Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Twelfth Night; or, What You Will

by William Shakespeare

Written by Magedah Shabo

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Objectives

By the end of this Unit, students will be able to:

1. trace the development of the main plot and subplot.
2. analyze the following characters and their relationships to other characters:
 - Olivia,
 - Duke Orsino,
 - Viola/Cesario,
 - Sebastian,
 - Malvolio,
 - Sir Toby,
 - Sir Andrew,
 - Maria, and Feste.
3. identify the conventions of Elizabethan comedy, as illustrated in *Twelfth Night*.
4. analyze Shakespeare's use of language, including:
 - blank verse and prose
 - figurative devices such as metaphor, simile, allusion, personification, place, etc.
 - dramatic conventions such as aside, soliloquy, subplot, etc.
5. trace the following themes in the play:
 - appearances do not always reflect reality
 - role-playing is a part of social life
 - love often resembles madness
6. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that appear on the Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition Exam.
7. respond to writing prompts similar to those that appear on the Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition Exam.
8. offer a close reading of *Twelfth Night* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text.

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Lecture Notes

SHAKESPEARE AND HIS TIMES

William Shakespeare was born in the town of Stratford-on-Avon, England in 1564. Born during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, Shakespeare wrote most of his works during what is known as the *Elizabethan Era* of English history. As well as exemplifying the comedic conventions of the era, *Twelfth Night* also reflects elements of Elizabethan culture.

One important element of Shakespeare's culture to note in interpreting *Twelfth Night* is the nature of the holiday for which it is named. The holiday of "Twelfth Night," signifying the twelfth night of Christmas, is also known as the Feast of the Epiphany. This day commemorates the gifts of the Magi to the infant Jesus and is, ostensibly, the day of his baptism. The feast of Twelfth Night was the most significant holiday of the year, in Elizabethan England—even more important than Christmas. In Shakespeare's time, this holiday was celebrated with excesses of every sort and with role-playing and role reversal. Indulgence in food, drink, and licentious pursuits were commonplace, with a "Lord of Misrule" appointed to organize the festivities. Thus, Shakespeare's play, fraught with role reversals and revelry, is an appropriate tribute to this festive occasion, with Sir Toby Belch a fitting Lord of Misrule.

SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF LANGUAGE

Blank Verse:

In all of his plays, the predominant rhythmic and metric pattern Shakespeare uses is *blank verse*—unrhymed iambic pentameter. The following lines, taken from a speech by Duke Orsino, exemplify Shakespeare's use of blank verse:

If music be the food of love, play on;
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.

When a particular character or scene does not use blank verse, it is an important clue to interpreting the character or scene in question. For example, the use of prose may indicate a character's base nature or inferior social rank. Alternatively, changes in verse or meter may signal a shift in plot or atmosphere or simply emphasize important ideas or passages in the play.

For example, in *Twelfth Night*, subordinate characters like Maria, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and the Clown do not speak in blank verse, and Malvolio does only on occasion. Their dialogues are generally written in prose, signifying their inferior social standing and debased natures.

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Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. In the opening lines of the play, the Duke describes music as “the food of love.” Discuss the extension of this metaphor throughout the play, identifying and analyzing the variety of ways in which love is associated with music.
2. On the Elizabethan stage, comedies often include a “clown” or “fool” who is, in reality, quite clever. Analyze the character of Feste, using specific examples from the text that demonstrate whether he fulfills this role.
3. Discuss the commentary *Twelfth Night* makes on love, identifying the various perspectives on the subject espoused by the different characters.
4. Compare and contrast Olivia and Viola. With which character does the audience identify more closely? How does Shakespeare achieve this effect?
5. Compare and contrast Viola and the Duke. Which stereotypes of male and female behavior do they fulfill, and which do they defy?
6. Discuss the ways in which *Twelfth Night*’s subplots mimic or comment on the main plot’s themes.
7. By the end of *Twelfth Night*, many of the characters either have been suspected of madness or have doubted their own sanity. How does the motif of madness relate to other major themes in the play?
8. In what ways does Shakespeare establish the pragmatic, level-headed nature of Sebastian, prior to his falling in love with Olivia?
9. How does *Twelfth Night*’s subtitle, *What You Will*, relate to the content of the play?

Twelfth Night; or, What You Will

Act I, Scene I

1. What does this scene demonstrate about the Duke's view of love?

2. Assess the Duke's love for Olivia based on the information provided in this scene.

3. Is there anything unusual about Olivia's reaction to her brother's death?

4. Do Olivia and the Duke appear to have any personality traits or views in common?

Act II, Scene I

1. How does this scene contribute to the motifs of illusion and disguise?

2. In Act II, Scene I, Shakespeare establishes several similarities between Sebastian and his sister, Viola. Identify and explain these similarities.

3. What might the appearance of Sebastian and his similarity to Viola foreshadow, based on what has been revealed of the plot up to this point?

Act III, Scene I

1. Identify and explain a form of word play that appears in the dialogue between Viola and the Clown at the beginning of the scene.

2. Identify a dramatic technique Shakespeare employs in this opening dialogue and what it reveals.

3. Identify and explain two allusions used in this opening dialogue.

4. In previous scenes, the Clown has proved to be a very perceptive character. Does he recognize the fact that Cesario is really a woman in disguise?

5. Why does Viola refer to herself as Olivia's "fool"? What do she and the fool have in common, as emphasized in this scene?

Act IV, Scene I

1. What is the Clown trying to communicate with the speech that ends in “Nothing that is so is so,” and what literary device does he use?

2. What does Sir Andrew do upon meeting Sebastian? Why does he react thus?

3. Upon discovering Sir Toby’s treatment of Sebastian, Olivia’s requests of the latter, “let thy fair wisdom, not thy passion, sway...” What is ironic about this statement?

4. How does this scene suggest a resolution to one of the play’s main conflicts?

Act V, Scene I

1. Identify the literary device(s) the Duke uses in the following passage. What does the Duke mean?

I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love,
To spite a raven's heart within a dove.

2. How do the Duke's feelings towards Olivia vacillate in this scene, and why?

3. How is the letter that appears in this scene different from previous messages and letters in the play? What function does the letter serve, in terms of plot development?

4. What Elizabethan conventions does Shakespeare employ in resolving the plot?
