

2016 Study Guide for *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare

Before seeing/reading the play

1. *Twelfth Night* begins with a shipwreck. What do sea voyages and shipwrecks symbolize in Shakespeare's plays? What are the physical characteristics of a shipwreck? What might be the emotional characteristics of a shipwreck? Spiritual? Metaphorical? What other Shakespeare plays feature a shipwreck? These and other websites provide information:
<http://www.cummingsstudyguides.net/Guides4/Shakeships.html>
<http://theshakespeareblog.com/2012/03/shakespeares-shipwrecks/>
<http://www.english-lecturer.com/lecturer-blog/shakespeare-storm-imagery/>
2. What is the holiday Twelfth Night? What is the Feast of the Epiphany? What is the connection between Twelfth Night and the Twelve Days of Christmas? Who is the Lord of Misrule? These and other websites provide information:
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelfth_Night_\(holiday\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelfth_Night_(holiday))
<http://resources.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/customs/xmas/twelfthnight/traditions.html>
3. What is melancholy? What is the relationship between melancholy and love? Between melancholy and mourning? What is melancholia? What did these words mean to people in the Renaissance? This website provides more information:
<http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melancholia>
4. Who were the Puritans? What did they believe? What was their relationship to theatre and actors? What changes did they wish to make in Elizabethan and Jacobean society? To what extent did they succeed? These and other websites provide information:
<http://www.everything2.com/title/the+birth+of+the+Puritan+movement+in+Elizabethan+England>
<http://www.globe-theatre.org.uk/globe-theatre-puritans.htm>

5. What is dramatic irony? What is irony? What is the difference between dramatic irony and irony? This website provides more information:
http://www.tnellen.com/cybereng/lit_terms/irony.html

6. Why do people make fun of other people? When is it acceptable to make fun of someone? When is it unacceptable? At what point does teasing become cruel? What is a scapegoat? What is the purpose of a scapegoat? These and other websites provide information:
<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/scapegoat>
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scapegoat>

7. What is a steward? What are the responsibilities of a steward? These and other websites provide information:
<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/steward>
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stewardship>

8. What is love? What is being in love? What is infatuation? What are the differences between these three concepts – love, being in love and infatuation? These and other websites provide information:
http://www.diffen.com/difference/Infatuation_vs_Love
<http://shakespeare.about.com/od/shakespearebasics/tp/Love-in-Shakespeare.htm>

9. In the Elizabethan view of the world, what did music symbolize? What are the Elizabethan assumptions about music? What does music mean in a Shakespeare play? These and other websites provide information:
<http://www.elizabethan-era.org.uk/elizabethan-music.htm>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_in_the_Elizabethan_era

10. Consider these names: Viola, Olivia, Orsino, Malvolio, Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Feste. What does each name mean? What does it sound like? What might these names reveal about the character(s)? These and other websites provide information:
<https://suite.io/jem-bloomfield/cxn2k4>
<http://www.shmoop.com/twelfth-night/characterization.html>

11. What is grief? What effect can it have on a person physically, emotionally and psychologically? According to Elizabeth Kübler-Ross' theory, what are the five stages of grief? This website provides more information:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grief>
12. Read the first speech of *Twelfth Night*. What ideas are introduced in the speech? If this first speech is a keyhole through which you can view the entire play, what do you expect it to be about?
13. What are the elements of a Shakespeare comedy? These and other websites provide information:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespearean_comedy
<http://www.mccarter.org/education/twelfthnight/html/7.html>
http://www.shakespeare.about.com/od/thecomeries/a/Shakespeare_Comedy.htm
14. Research Shakespeare's fools and clowns. What is the difference between a fool and a clown? What is the difference between being a fool and being foolish? What is a wise fool? These and other websites provide information:
<http://www.enotes.com/topics/william-shakespeare/critical-essays/shakespeares-clowns-and-fools>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespearean_fool
15. The 2016 production of *Twelfth Night* will be set in the Golden Age of Hollywood. Research this time period. How did the Great Depression affect Hollywood? What technological advances contributed to the growth of Hollywood? These and other websites provide information:
<http://www.filmsite.org/30sintro.html>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1930s_in_film
<https://www.nssc.org/index.php?pid=10&bid=35&page=the-impact-of-hollywood-during-the-great-depression>
16. Research the studio system of the 1930s and the actors who became stars during this time period. How did the studios contribute to the reinvention of the everyday person? What disguises were used to create a star? How did they literally become somebody else? Look up Jean Harlow, Greta Garbo, Bette Davis, Gary Cooper, John

Wayne, Fatty Arbuckle, Bill “Bojangles” Robinson and director Erich von Stroheim. These and other websites provide information:

<http://www.filmsite.org/3osintro2.html>

<http://www.imdb.com/list/ls000353994/>

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/broadway/stars/bill-bojangles-robinson/>

<http://theredlist.com/wiki-2-24-525-527-973-view-1930s-3-profile-erich-von-stroheim.html>

Resources

Books and Films:

Thirteenth Night by Alan Gordon, the first in a series of medieval mysteries about the further adventures of Feste

Twelfth Night (2005) with Imogen Stubbs as Viola

Twelfth Night (1987), Thames Shakespeare Collection

Twelfth Night (1969) with Alec Guinness as Malvolio

Learn more about Shakespeare’s life and times at the following websites:

<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/index.html>

<http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=865&CFID=6230886&CFTOKEN=25420173>

<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare.html>

<http://www.bardweb.net/man.html>

After seeing/reading the play

1. Refer to your research on the holiday Twelfth Night. How are the events in the play related to the way this holiday was celebrated? The play is titled *Twelfth Night or What You Will*. What is the significance of the title?
2. Shakespeare was the father of a set of twins, Hamnet and Judith. Hamnet died in 1596 at age 11; *Twelfth Night* was written in 1601 or 1602. Knowing this information, how do you think events in Shakespeare’s life may be reflected in the play?

3. Describe the relationships that exist before the play begins. Describe the relationships that begin during the play. Which are acknowledged? Which are secret? How are the secret relationships disguised? How do these relationships feed the tensions and conflicts? Which take you by surprise, and why?
4. A theme in the play is excess, or having too much of something. Give examples of excess in the play in terms of attitude and behavior.
5. Compare the women: Olivia, Viola and Maria. In what ways are these women strong? In what ways are they weak? What are their masculine traits? What are their feminine traits?
6. Refer to your research on the Golden Age of Hollywood and the Elizabethan world view. What is the status of the characters at the beginning of the play? What is status based on in the beginning? At the end? Who gains status? Who loses it? Who behaves in a way that is inappropriate to his or her status? What are the consequences?
7. The names Viola, Olivia and Malvolio have a lot of the same letters in them. What relationship might Shakespeare be trying to draw among these three characters by choosing these names?
8. Refer to your research on Shakespearean clowns and fools. Olivia says, “There is no slander in an allowed fool. . . .” (Act I, scene V, ln. 90-91) What was an “allowed fool” in Elizabethan and earlier societies? What was his status? What were his obligations? What were the pitfalls of his profession? Who is the “allowed fool” in Illyria Studios? Who is a “wise fool”? Who is foolish? Who is a clown?
9. Refer to your research about Puritans. Which character is described as a Puritan? What “puritanical” characteristics does this individual display? Based on the way Shakespeare treats this character, what would you say is his attitude toward Puritans and Puritanism?
10. Olivia’s household is caught somewhere between cloister and chaos: Malvolio would have no revelry, Sir Toby would have nothing but revelry. What does Shakespeare

gain structurally in conflict, comedy and romance by comparing these two lifestyles? In what ways do Malvolio's restrictions cause disorder? In what ways does Sir Toby's disorder cause the restrictions? Describe the appropriate balance.

11. With the exception of Viola, Sebastian, Antonio and the sea captain, the characters in the play are contracted by Illyria Studios. How are these outsiders different from the Illyrians? What do they bring to Illyria? How do they change the world of Illyria?
12. The sea is often seen as a symbol of transformation and rebirth. Which characters are associated with the sea and how? What transformation and rebirth do they bring? What is the significance of Sebastian and Viola coming to Illyria from the sea?
13. A major theme in *Twelfth Night* is love and its power over those in love. Describe the love relationships in the play: Who loves whom? What is the nature of the love? On what is it based? To what extent is it reciprocated? What actions are the characters compelled to take because of love? Where do they end up?
14. Refer to your research on dramatic irony. Give examples from the play of dramatic irony. What is the effect of dramatic irony for the audience?
15. Several characters conspire to play a trick on Olivia's steward, Malvolio. In what ways does he deserve the treatment he receives? In what ways does he not deserve that treatment?
16. How does Shakespeare highlight the difficulties of love? Maria says that Olivia is "addicted to melancholy." Who else expresses melancholy? Why? Who is cured of his or her melancholy? If you are also seeing *Hamlet* and/or *Timon of Athens*, how would you compare the melancholy expressed by the characters in all of these plays? How are characters cured of their melancholy?
17. When does Orsino discover the difference between being in love with love and being in love? When does Olivia stop grieving and start living?

18. Refer to your research on the stages of grief. What stage is Olivia in at the beginning of the play? How has grief affected her? Who else is experiencing grief? How does it affect him or her?
19. Compare the relationships of Viola and Orsino, Olivia and Sebastian, and Maria and Sir Toby. How are these relationships similar? How are they different? Which couple or couples have the best chance for lasting happiness? What does Shakespeare reveal about the nature of love by comparing these relationships?
20. If you are also seeing *Hamlet*, compare how Shakespeare deals with the different aspects of madness and love in both plays. Who in each play is mad? Who pretends to be mad? What is the difference between madness and love? In what ways are characters ruled by madness and love? What does madness and love cause people to do?
21. In *Twelfth Night*, love is often described as a kind of suffering, illness or a curse. Find instances in the play when love is described in these terms. Why does Shakespeare portray love in this way? How does love lead to suffering for some characters? How does love lead to joy for others? Who behaves absurdly because of love, and how?
22. Who wins at love? Who loses? What is each character willing to do for love? What is each not willing to do? Why do you think Shakespeare has written a play where love has winners and losers?
23. Track the letters, messages and tokens sent to and from characters. What is the importance of each to the plot? How do these objects help the characters? How do they hinder them?
24. What is the role of clothing? What motivates characters to change their dress? How do the clothing changes reflect changes in status, in class or in gender? How do other characters react to the clothing changes?
25. Which characters are trying to be something they are not? How is each disguised (physically or otherwise)? Why do they choose that disguise? What do they gain from the disguise? What do they lose?

26. Chart the instances of mistaken identity. What do these instances provide in terms of moving the plot forward? What do they provide in terms of comedy?
27. In what ways do the twin's, Viola and Sebastian, actions reflect each other? How are they similar in personality? How are they different? Why do you think it is possible for Olivia to so easily accept Sebastian as a replacement for Viola? Who or what is Olivia in love with?
28. All of the characters in the play are, in a sense, searching for their twin, or someone who is missing. Chart all of the sets of twins, both actual and metaphorical. Who is a twin of whom? How do they reflect each other? How are they similar? How are they different?
29. Where does Malvolio go at the end of the play? What happens to him? How might he get revenge on the others?
30. How is music described in the play? Listen to all the songs in *Twelfth Night* and study the lyrics. What is the tone of each song? How does each one propel the action in the scene? How does the song reflect or contrast with the mood of the scene? Why is music important in the play? Referring to your research on the significance of music to Elizabethans, explain what spiritual, or metaphysical, condition each song is reflecting or commenting on.

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