

## 2011 Study Guide for *Measure for Measure* by William Shakespeare

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### Before seeing/reading the play

1. OSF's 2011 production of *Measure for Measure* is set in the United States during the 1970s. What was occurring in the United States during this time politically, socially and economically? Pay attention to the status of women during this decade. These and other websites provide information:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1970s>

<http://kclibrary.lonestar.edu/decade70.html>

2. The title of *Measure for Measure* may have been inspired by one or both of the following passages. Discuss the meaning of each. Given these passages, what do you think the play will be about?

“For with whatever judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with whatever measure you measure, it will be measured to you.”

– Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, Matthew, chapter 7, verse 2

“And above all, let the measure of your love to everyone be according to the measure of their virtue.”

– King James I’s views on kingship, *Basilikon Doron*, 1603

3. In *Measure for Measure*, there are examples of excessive leniency in government and excessive severity. Describe the dangers of each. The advantages. Describe the ideal.
4. What responsibility do public figures have to set a good example for the rest of society in terms of behavior? Why are they responsible and to whom? Who are some recent examples of public figures caught up in scandals? How did these figures deal with negative accusations? What was the cost of these scandals to their careers?

5. Discuss the proverb, "Let the punishment fit the crime." When is a punishment too severe for a crime? When is a punishment too lenient? Give examples from real life, literature, film and theatre.
6. In what way are justice and mercy linked? Is it possible to be just and unmerciful? Merciful and unjust? Give examples of when one existed without the other. What has been the result? What is the ideal balance between justice and mercy?
7. How is moral strength defined? What qualities does a person with ethical and moral conviction possess?
8. What options were available to women in Shakespeare's England? What was expected of a woman in terms of behavior? How important was it for a woman to get married? What alternatives to marriage were there? How dependent on men were women? How different is it for women today? These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.essentialshakespeare.wikispaces.com/Women+in+Elizabethan+England>  
<http://www.elizabethan-era.org.uk/elizabethan-women.htm>
9. In the play, the character Isabella wants to be a sister of the Poor Ladies religious order, otherwise known as the Poor Clares, founded by Saint Clare of Assisi. Who are the Poor Clares? Who was Saint Clare of Assisi? What is this religious order known for? These and other websites provide information:  
[http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poor\\_Clares](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poor_Clares)  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/o4004a.htm>  
[http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clare\\_of\\_Assisi](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clare_of_Assisi)
10. Define chastity. What does it mean to be chaste? In what contexts is chastity valued?
11. What is a vow? What does it mean to take a religious vow? How binding is it? What three vows do members of religious orders traditionally take? What is the difference between taking a religious vow and making a promise? These and other websites provide information:  
[http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious\\_vows](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_vows)  
<http://www.catholicdoors.com/faq/qu47.htm>

12. Research Elizabethan/Jacobean Era marriage customs. What is a betrothal? How do betrothals happen? What were the different stages of betrothal in England during Shakespeare's lifetime? These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.elizabethanenglandlife.com/elizabethan-england-marriage.html>  
<http://www.elizabethan.org/compendium/9.html>  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/o2537c.htm>
13. Research the elements of a Shakespearean comedy. How do Shakespearean comedies typically end? These and other websites provide information:  
[http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespearean\\_comedy](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespearean_comedy)  
<http://www.fathom.com/course/21701729/session4.html>

**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://shakespeare.palomar.edu/life.htm>
- <http://www.bardweb.net/man.html>

**After seeing/reading the play**

1. What is the significance of the title *Measure for Measure*? Refer to the passages (on page #1) that may have inspired it. How might these passages apply to actions of the play?
2. *Measure for Measure* is filled with references to weighing, measuring, balancing and scales. Find examples of these references in the text. How is balance explored in the play? How is Vienna out of balance? What are the ways in which balance is restored by the end of the play?
3. There is a conflict in *Measure for Measure* between restraint and liberty. Between justice and mercy. Between chastity and lust. Between life and death. Define each. What are the specific ways these ideas are explored? Who speaks for which extreme, when and why?

4. According to the Elizabethan World picture, the Duke is God's deputy on earth. In what respect is the Duke god-like? In what ways, if any, does he exceed his role and go too far? What other examples appear in the play of deputies or substitutes?
5. How is the city of Vienna characterized in the play? By whom? What exactly is the sorry state into which the Duke has allowed Vienna to sink? How has the Duke allowed this state to occur? How does the Duke take responsibility for remedying the state of Vienna?
6. What is the difference between covert and straightforward action? How would you characterize the Duke's activities in the play? Why is he called the Duke of dark corners? How would the Duke approach the repair of Vienna if he chose straightforward action?
7. List all the Duke's covert actions. Which ones do you approve of? Which ones startle you? What do you consider the worst thing that the Duke does? Why does he do it? What do you consider the best thing that he does? Why does he do it?
8. What are the different locations in the play? How are they similar and different? In what way are all the characters in the play imprisoned? Who is locked in and by what or by whom? Discuss the symbolism of keys.
9. Who are the other prisoners, in addition to Claudio, accused of a crime? What are their crimes? How do their crimes compare with Claudio's? Who is sentenced to death? Who actually dies? What does this tell you about the world of the play?
10. What is the attitude towards sexually transmitted infection in the play? How is it similar to our attitudes today about STIs, HIV and AIDS? How is it different?
11. At the convent in Act I, scene iv, Isabella states that she would desire "a more strict restraint/Upon the sisterhood." What does she mean? Why would she want the order of nuns she is joining to have more restrictions? What does this indicate about who Isabella is at the beginning of the play? How is she changed by the events of the play? What decisions does she face and how do those decisions affect her? Why, for instance, does Isabella decide to plead for Angelo's life?

12. How many different views of femininity are presented in *Measure for Measure*? What are the differences between the women – Isabella, Mariana, Juliet, Francisca, and Mistress Overdone? Based on the play, what does it mean to be a woman? What options are available to women? How do they take advantage of their options? What choices do they make that give them strength? Weakness? What is strength in women related to? What is weakness related to?
13. What does it mean to have grace? Find examples of the use of the word in the play. What are the different ways the word “grace” is used and in what context? What might the frequent use of this word reveal about the play’s themes?
14. Angelo says in Act II, scene i, line 17-18, “Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus,/Another thing to fall.” Who is tempted? What tempts them? Who falls? What are the consequences of falling? Who is tempted and doesn’t fall? How is it that these characters are able to resist temptation?
15. Escalus says in Act II, scene i, line 38, “Some rise by sin, and some by virtue fall.” Who rises by sin? What sins do they commit? Who falls because of their virtue?
16. Which character(s) in *Measure for Measure* have a strong sense of ethics and morality? Describe each character’s value system. Who behaves most honorably in the play? Who behaves dishonorably? Which characters take responsibility for their actions? Which characters avoid taking responsibility for their actions? Whose behavior do you abhor? Why? Whose behavior do you applaud? Why?
17. Refer to your research on Elizabethan and Jacobean Era marriage customs. What is the difference between Claudio and Juliet's contract and Angelo and Mariana's? How about Isabella and Christ's? Why are Claudio and Juliet punished for their behavior? Why are Angelo and Mariana not punished, but rather, encouraged to engage in the same behavior as Claudio and Juliet?
18. Why does Mariana agree to the Duke’s plan? What does she gain? What does she lose? How does she benefit from regaining Angelo? How is Angelo affected by the Duke’s plan? What does he gain or lose?

19. Write the scene that occurs offstage between Isabella and Mariana in which they discuss the plot against Angelo. How do they justify their deception and covert behavior?
20. What is the significance of the names of Pompey, Lucio, Mistress Overdone, Elbow, Abhorson, Ragozine, Juliet, Angelo, Mariana?
21. Lucio slanders the Duke, both when the Duke is in disguise as a friar and when the Duke is revealed as himself. Who else in the play is slandered? How do they clear their names? Why is it important to clear one's name? Why isn't it important?
22. Who commits an act that you consider to be unforgivable in the play? Why is this act unforgivable? What should be the punishment for this act? Which acts in the play are forgivable? Why are they forgivable?
23. Which characters get what they deserve at the end of the play? Which characters get better than they deserve? Which get worse than they deserve? Why may Lucio's sentence by the Duke be considered just? Why may it be unjust? Why is his sentence merciful? When else is marriage a punishment in the play? Why is marriage a punishment for the character(s)? When is marriage a reward?
24. What statement might this play be making about the nature of power? Who is powerful in the play? How do they wield their power? How is power abused?
25. What does the Duke learn? How is he changed by the events of the play?
26. Write the next act of *Measure for Measure*. What happens after the play? Does Isabella marry the Duke? If so, why? If not, why not? How happy is each of the couples? What problems is each couple likely to face?
27. What one sentence of advice would you give to each of the characters at the end of the play? Who seems most in need of advice? The least in need of advice?

28. Who has the greatest powers of persuasion in the play? Who makes the best case for his or her behavior? Who makes the worst case? If you are seeing/reading *To Kill A Mockingbird* and/or *Julius Caesar*, compare the tools of persuasion used. What rhetorical devices are employed? What devices are most effective? Least effective? Whose version of events do you believe? Why?
29. If you are seeing/reading *Henry IV, Part Two* and *Julius Caesar*, compare the rule of the Duke with King Henry and Julius Caesar. What strengths does each of these men possess that make them good rulers? What are their weaknesses? How would you describe the rule of each man? Who rules most effectively? Whose subjects remain most loyal to them?
30. Define comedy. Define tragedy. Categorize *Measure for Measure*. What play genre would you apply to it? Refer to your research on the Shakespearean comedy. In what ways is this play a conventional comedy? In what ways is it not?
31. Some consider *Measure for Measure*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *Othello* to be “problem” plays, in the sense that they question many accepted values and assumptions. What values are questioned in *Measure for Measure*?

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