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Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Twelfth Night

by William Shakespeare

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Notes

It is believed this comedy was first performed in 1602. Well-received by audiences of the time, *Twelfth Night* is one of Shakespeare's more festive plays. It celebrates the fun parts of life and pokes fun at those who can not laugh at themselves.

Note: All quotations come from the Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Classics edition of *Twelfth Night; Or, What You Will*, copyright 2007. As such, they may differ slightly from other versions in punctuation, capitalization, or minor wording.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit the student should be able to

1. discuss the confusion between appearance and reality in this play and point out:
 - how words can be just as misleading as physical appearances;
 - the confusion between what some of the characters believes to be true about themselves and what is true;
 - Shakespeare's use of twins;
 - how the audience must willingly accept the deceptions on stage for the plot lines to work.
2. comment on the five forms of love and discuss how love makes the characters behave foolishly:
 - romantic, idealistic love which is usually unattainable due to some obstacle;
 - mature unselfish love;
 - the love between friends;
 - the love between family members;
 - self-love or vanity.
3. identify the characters who illustrate each of the five forms of love and cite incidents from the play to support your choice.
4. trace the development of the following motifs in the play:
 - foolishness is part of human nature;
 - people must be able to laugh at themselves;
 - the punishment for pride and vanity is embarrassment;
 - love can lead to excessive behavior.
5. identify the main romantic plots and the comic subplot and discuss the ways the comic plot merges with the romantic plots through the two practical jokes in the play.
6. point out examples of metaphors, similes, alliteration, hyperbole, litotes, and direct address.
7. discuss how Shakespeare uses prose and verse to distinguish the servants from the nobility, and cite examples of instances when the nobility speak in prose, explaining why the change is appropriate.
8. write a brief character sketch of Sir Andrew and the Clown; point out ways the Clown provides the audience with wise insights into the true motivations of the characters.
9. understand the irony in Viola's love for the Duke and the structural irony present in his advice to her.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. How does the first practical joke, which is played on Malvolio, help to illustrate the motif that the punishment for people who can not laugh at their own foolishness is embarrassment?
2. Which characters comprise the cast of the main romantic plot line? Which characters are part of the comic sub-plot? In what ways does the second practical joke, which is played on Sir Andrew, help Shakespeare to unite the main romantic plot line with the comic sub-plot?
3. Why does Sir Toby, who is a noble, speak in prose?
4. Write a brief character sketch of Malvolio. Why, in Shakespeare's time, do you think this play was sometimes referred to as "Malvolio" instead of by its title, *Twelfth Night*?
5. List the five forms of love in this play. Which of these five forms do each of the following characters illustrate? There can be more than one answer for a character: Malvolio, Viola, the Duke, Antonio
6. In what ways are Olivia and the Duke similar in nature? What is it ironic about Viola's love for the Duke?
7. In the end, the Duke marries Viola, Olivia marries Sebastian, and Maria marries Sir Toby. Shakespeare's comedies usually end with marriages. Do you think these matches are well made and the couples put together in the end are well suited to each other? Cite incidents from the play to support your conclusions.
8. In what ways must the audience be willing to suspend its disbelief for the plot of this play to be believable?
9. Discuss the confusion between appearance and reality in this play as it applies to: misleading words, what characters believe about themselves, and the use of twins.
10. What wise statements does the Clown make concerning "friendship" and "darkness"?
11. Does the character of Sir Andrew serve any purpose in the play other than to provide Shakespeare with a fool to add humor to his story? Support your answer with incidents from the story.

Twelfth Night; Or, What You Will

ACT I

Scene I - An apartment in the Duke's palace

VOCABULARY

abatement—a lessening
cloistress—a nun
fantastical—unreal, fanciful
handmaid—a female attendant
hart—a male deer
pestilence—disease
surfeiting—filling to excess

1. Define the words “surfeiting” and “hart.” What evidence is there that the Duke’s love for Olivia is idealistic and he is enjoying the idea of being in love with her?

2. One of the continuing motifs in this play is the idea of excess. The Duke seems to be carrying his desire to be in love to excess. What excessive behavior is Olivia pursuing? What is the Duke’s reaction to this behavior?

3. Where is the Duke going at the end of Scene I? Since he claims to be overcome with love for Olivia, why do you think he does not go to see her himself?

3. Discuss the relationship between Sir Toby and Sir Andrew. Why does Sir Toby want Sir Andrew to remain a guest in Olivia's house?

4. In Shakespeare's time there were basically only two classes of people: the nobility and everyone else; in his plays the nobility usually speak in verse, but the servants use prose. If this rule is generally true, why then do you think Sir Toby and Sir Andrew speak in prose, just like Olivia's servant Maria?

Scene III - Olivia's house

VOCABULARY

caterwauling—loud shrieking; unpleasant noise making
constrained—obliged, compelled
disposed—willing, inclined
epistles—letters
equinoctial—referring to the line that marks the midway point between the northern and southern poles
gait—a manner of walking
indignation—righteous anger
knave—a rogue or villain
mellifluous—smoothly flowing
mitigation—alleviation; lessening of intensity or severity

1. Define “catch.” What are Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and the Clown doing when Maria enters the room? What is Maria trying to do?

2. Malvolio comes into the room to deliver a message from Olivia. Why do you think Sir Toby and the Clown poke fun at Malvolio?
