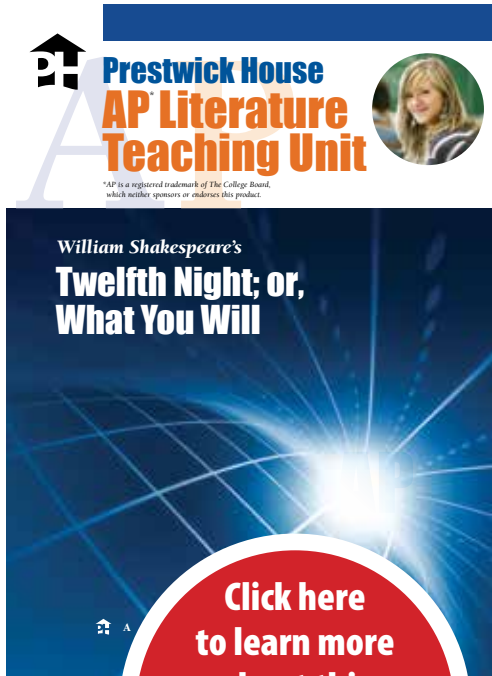




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Teaching Unit

**Twelfth Night; or, What You Will**

by William Shakespeare



**Prestwick House**

Item No. 302780

# Twelfth Night; or, What You Will

## 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, plocce, 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.

## 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.

# Twelfth Night; or, What You Will

## Act I, Scene I

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

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

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

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

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**Act II, Scene V**

1. In this scene, Sir Toby expresses admiration and affection for Maria. Compare Sir Toby's feelings for Maria with the Duke's love for Olivia.

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2. Sir Toby is frequently echoed by Sir Andrew in this scene. What does this mimicry reveal about Sir Andrew, and what effect does it have on the tone of the scene?

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3. Does Malvolio love Olivia? How does he react to the letter, and why?

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4. While imagining what he would do as Olivia's husband, Malvolio envisions telling his servants "I know my place as I would they should do theirs." What is ironic about this statement?

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**Act III, Scene IV**

1. How does Malvolio's situation in this scene reflect Olivia's own situation?  
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2. What new deception do Sir Toby, Fabian, and Maria devise against Malvolio in this scene?  
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3. This scene contains an instance of the motif of messages. Identify letters and messages from this and other scenes. Thus far in the play, what do all the messages have in common? How does this fit in with the play's main theme?  
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4. According to Viola, what does Olivia's passion have in common with the Duke's?  
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5. Identify each of the various situations of dramatic irony, in the order of their occurrence in this scene.  
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6. What might Antonio's brief appearance in this scene foreshadow?  
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