

Silly Shakespeare for Students



TWELFTH NIGHT

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with help from

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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The Story Behind Shakespeare's Twelfth Night

Twelfth Night, otherwise known as *What You Will*, was written by William Shakespeare in the early 1600s. It is a comedic tale of love, mistaken identities, and playful mischief. Set in the land of Illyria (now Croatia), it follows Viola, who disguises herself as a man, leading to a tangle of romantic pursuits. Themes of love, gender, and social class resonate, making it a timeless exploration of youthful passion and confusion, appealing to teenagers navigating their own relationships.

The History of Twelfth Night

The first recorded performance of the play was on the 2nd of February 1602 in London.

The title refers to the Twelfth Night of the Christmas season, a time of revelry and role reversal, reflecting the play's themes of chaos and celebration. Shakespeare often drew inspiration from folklore and classical stories, blending them into rich narratives.

The Plot of Twelfth Night

The story begins with Viola, who is shipwrecked in the fictional land of Illyria. Believing her twin brother, Sebastian, has drowned, she disguises herself as a boy named Cesario to find work. She ends up serving Duke Orsino, who is in love with the beautiful Countess Olivia.

Olivia, however, is mourning her brother and has sworn off love. But when Cesario (Viola) comes to woo her on Orsino's behalf, Olivia falls for Cesario instead, not knowing he's actually a woman.

Meanwhile, Sir Toby Belch, Olivia's uncle, and his friends play pranks on Malvolio, Olivia's uptight steward, who has ambitions of marrying her. Their schemes lead to hilarious misunderstandings and chaos.

Eventually, Sebastian shows up, causing even more confusion as everyone mistakes him for Cesario. The play wraps up with multiple weddings and the revelation of true identities, emphasizing that love can be unpredictable and sometimes a little crazy.

Major Characters

- 1. Viola:** The play's protagonist who disguises herself as Cesario. Her intelligence, resourcefulness, and emotional depth drive much of the plot.
- 2. Duke Orsino:** The lovesick duke who pines for Olivia. He represents the theme of romantic idealism, often oblivious to the feelings of those around him.
- 3. Olivia:** A wealthy countess mourning her brother's death. Her rejection of Orsino's advances sets off a chain of events that ultimately leads to her unexpected romance with Sebastian.
- 4. Malvolio:** Olivia's steward whose ambition and self-righteousness make him a target for ridicule. His subplot offers a critical look at social ambition and pretentiousness.
- 5. Sir Toby Belch:** Olivia's uncle, a reveller who embodies the spirit of festivity. He represents the carefree attitude of the lower gentry.
- 6. Sir Andrew Aguecheek:** A foolish suitor to Olivia,

he provides comic relief and highlights the theme of misguided ambition.

7. **Clown:** The fool, who offers wisdom and insight beneath his playful exterior. He serves as a commentator on the action and themes of the play.
8. **Sebastian:** Viola's twin brother, whose arrival complicates the love dynamics and ultimately resolves many of the misunderstandings.

Themes

1. **Love and Desire:** The play examines different kinds of love—romantic, platonic, and unrequited. The confusion and complexity of love are central, particularly with Viola's disguise complicating her feelings for Duke Orsino.
2. **Identity and Disguise:** Viola's cross-dressing as Cesario raises questions about gender identity and the nature of self. The play challenges societal norms and expectations regarding gender roles.
3. **Folly and Misunderstanding:** Many characters fall victim to misunderstandings and deception, leading to humorous situations. The folly of characters like Malvolio highlights the theme of social ambition and the foolishness of pride.
4. **Festivity and Celebration:** The setting during the Christmas season underscores themes of revelry, transformation, and the breaking of social norms.
5. **Social Class and Ambition:** Characters like Malvolio desire upward mobility, leading to comedic yet critical commentary on class distinctions and aspirations.

Playing Style

This version of *Twelfth Night*, although reduced to around a one-hour playing time, remains true to the original's plot, characters (with some small exceptions), and structure. When performed, this production should maintain a lively pace and exaggerated style. Technically, the production, as with the original, has a low level of technical requirements. The sets can be very minimal and the costumes simple. A musical score may be useful between scenes to cover changes where necessary and it would be natural that the character of the Clown is the musician.

Of course, one of the major differences between this version and the original is the simplification of the text. On some occasions, in performance, you will find the rhyming scheme helpful to the playing, in which case the actors should just 'stand back,' enjoy the words and help the audience do the same. On other occasions, the rhyming scheme will seem stifling and restrictive, in which case, do not be afraid to improvise a little, add your own occasional lines, or do not emphasise the rhymes so much. Overall, this version should be fun to play and watch. It can be produced with a small budget and should be performed in an 'over the top' manner which can give you a chance to play with your own ideas of theatricality.

Cast of Characters

ORSINO, *Duke of Illyria*
SEBASTIAN, *brother to Viola*
ANTONIA, *a sea captain, friend to Sebastian*
A SEA CAPTAIN, *friend to Viola*
VALENTINE, *gentleman attending on the Duke*
CURIO, *A gentleman attending the Duke*
SIR TOBY BELCH, *uncle to Olivia*
SIR ANDREW AGUECHEEK
MALVOLIO, *steward to Olivia*
FABIAN, *servant to Olivia*
FESTE, *a clown, servant to Olivia*
OLIVIA
VIOLA
MARIA, *Olivia's woman*
Lords, priests, sailors, officers, musicians,
and other attendants

Act I

SCENE I

Duke Orsino's palace

['The Wild Rover' music is playing as DUKE ORSINO and CURIO are waiting outside the gate of a fancy house.]

CLOWN

[As narrator, singing to the tune of 'The Wild Rover']

Twelfth Night is a famous Shakespearean play!
So lend me your ears, and we'll get underway!
It's a story of yearning, of love, and disguise,
Of ambition, and gender deceiving your eyes
It's the best play ever. *[clap, clap, clap, clap]*
But I'll sing now no more.
We will join our first lovebird
As he waits at a door!

DUKE ORSINO

[Aside] I love the fair Olivia
And all my love I give to her.
But she will not reciprocate.
That's why I'm waiting at her gate.
I sent my servant, Valentine,
To ask the lady to be mine.
Without her love, I'll surely die.
I'm hoping for a swift reply!

[Enter VALENTINE from the house]

VALENTINE

My noble lord, Duke Orsino,
The lady wanted you to know
That, having lost her little brother
She definitely can't take a lover.
Her voice it shivers, her eyes have tears.
She said, 'Come back in seven years!'

[Exit VALENTINE into the house]

DUKE ORSINO

[Aside] How strong that woman's love must be
To keep herself away from me.
Of course the lady she must grieve.
But seven years! I can't believe
That she can resist me for that long.
If music's the food for love, play on!

[Romantic music]

Until that lady's heart I've won.
I don't give up so easily.
I'll come back when I have plan B.

SCENE II.

The seacoast

[VIOLA and a Sea Captain lying on a beach]

CAPTAIN

No soul than mine is wearier.

We've landed in Illyria.

VIOLA

Well more like crashed than landed.

CAPTAIN

My ship was wrecked . . .

VIOLA

and we are stranded.

CAPTAIN

But stranded on a lovely isle.

I suggest that we should stay a while.

VIOLA

We are very lucky to be alive.

My brother Sebastian did not survive!

CAPTAIN

He may be in the neighbourhood.
I saw him drifting on some wood.
With a friendly wind and helpful tide,
He may yet join you by your side.

VIOLA

Your words, dear Captain, ease my fear.
Do you know Illyria?

CAPTAIN

Duke Orsino does rule this place.
He loves Olivia, but she hides her face.
She still does mourn her brother's dispatch
And is not in the mood for a romantic match.

VIOLA

I understand the sister's pain
But she should learn to love again.
[Decisively standing] In Orsino's court, I'll play my part
And help him win Olivia's heart.
I'll help the lord the lady to woo.
I've now got nothing better to do!

[Beginning to disguise herself]

But as these men they don't hire girls,
I'll tie up all my ladies' curls.
I'll play a man with the pronoun 'he'.
Cesario I'll pretend to be!

CAPTAIN

This plan will help you much recover
From losing Seb, your dearest brother.

VIOLA

Now help me with my keen disguise
That I may fool Illyrian eyes!

SCENE III.

OLIVIA'S house

[Enter drunk SIR TOBY BELCH and MARIA]

MARIA

Sir Toby please try not to shout.
Olivia's light has just gone out.

SIR TOBY BELCH

Maria! Is that a final warning?

MARIA

Your niece, my Lord, she is in mourning.

SIR TOBY BELCH

I tried mourning once but I ended up thinking
It just gets in the way of drinking!

MARIA

Your drinking pal who came last week . . .

SIR TOBY BELCH

You mean Sir Andrew Aguecheek?

[Referring to his height] He's *longing* for Olivia.

MARIA

That fact is nought but trivia.
She *longs* for men to leave her be!

SIR TOBY BELCH

Talk of the devil, here is he!

[Enter SIR ANDREW]

SIR ANDREW

Sir Toby Belch, you sly old rake!

MARIE

Oh please be calm, for goodness's sake!

SIR ANDREW

Oh that I could keep my calm,
When I see Olivia's charm!

MARIA

With my mistress you have no chance!

SIR ANDREW

Just wait until she sees me dance!

SIR TOBY BELCH

He kicks a caper, skips a jig.

[SIR ANDREW dances wildly and stumbles.]

MARIA

You fall again you'll lose your wig!

SIR ANDREW

I'll have you know this hair's all mine.

SIR TOBY BELCH

Bought and paid for, from a swine!

MARIA

Now listen, boys, be good and sleep.

[Maria EXITS]

SIR TOBY BELCH

Those who are deaf won't hear a peep!

SIR ANDREW

I will not stay a second more.

Your niece she hates me, that's for sure!

SIR TOBY BELCH

You should stay and take your chances.

You know she spurns the dukes' advances.

She doesn't go for brains or style!

SIR ANDREW

Then maybe I *will* stay a while!

SCENE IV.

Duke Orsino's palace

[Enter VALENTINE with VIOLA in man's clothing]

VIOLA

[Aside] Three days I've been in the duke's employ,
And he thinks of me only as a boy.

[To VALENTINE]

Duke Orsino has lovely eyes.
He's serious, kind, witty, and wise.

VALENTINE

You sound like you do fancy him!

VIOLA

Oh no, no, no, I like wo-men.

[Enter DUKE ORSINO]

DUKE ORSINO

Cesario, now where is he?

VIOLA

I'm here, my lord.

DUKE ORSINO

Here's my plan B!

Olivia will not see my face

So you will see her in my place!

Tell her how I love her mind.

And body, and face, and how she is kind.

I'm sure you know the things to say

To make Olivia fall my way.

Just flash your eyes and pucker your lips.

VIOLA

Thank you, sire, for the tips!

DUKE ORSINO

I'll leave you now with Cupid's task.

VIOLA

My Lord, I'll do whatever you ask!

[DUKE ORSINO exits.]

[Aside] As an honourable girl, I'll do it, see!

But I wish that he was wooing me!

SCENE V.

Olivia's house

[Enter MARIA and Clown]

MARIA

Oh Fool, you're back. Where did you go?
Olivia will have you hung, you know!

CLOWN

Where I went it doesn't matter.
I'll calm her down with my clever patter.

MARIA

If you're so smart, then why a fool?

Clown

I didn't get good marks at school.
A man must do what he knows best.
I'm smart enough to joke and jest!

MARIA

When Olivia comes, your head she'll smack!

Clown

And here she is . . .!

[Enter OLIVIA with MALVOLIO]

... your fool is back!

OLIVIA

Remove the fool who's acting shady.

Clown

[To MALVOLIO] Did you not hear? Take away the Lady.

OLIVIA

Why am I the fool? Do tell!

Clown

Your brother's soul does lie in hell!

OLIVIA

It lies in heaven I'll have you know!

Clown

Then why are you still mourning so?

OLIVIA

[A modest smile] Not bad. Malvolio, what do you say?

Shall we let the rascal stay?

MALVOLIO

A fool, at least, should make me smile.

This one has no wit or style.

I saw him lose a bout of wits

To no more than a group of twits.

OLIVIA

If to fools you are unkind

Then you've really lost your mind.

The feeblest mind has not the jester
But the man in which his jibes do fester!

CLOWN

Your comments, ma'am, do warm my heart.

OLIVIA

Don't overplay your little part!

[Re-enter MARIA]

MARIA

A young man waits to speak to you.

OLIVIA

Duke Orsino?

MARIA

I know not who.
He's fair of face and fine in robe,
And speaking with your Uncle Tobe.

OLIVIA

Go spare him what my uncle thinks.
No doubt he's had a couple of drinks!

[Exit MARIA]

Malvolio, do now all you can
To get the lowdown on that man.
If he comes from Orsino,
Tell him that he's got to go!

[Exit MALVOLIO]

[Enter SIR TOBY BELCH]

OLIVIA

Uncle Toby, what a surprise!

You were late to bed?

SIR TOBY BELCH

But early to rise!

OLIVIA

Are you drunk, Sir Toby?

SIR TOBY BELCH

What a suggestion!

[Belches] It's just a little indigestion

CLOWN

Good Sir Toby! Why are you here?

[Pause] The man outside . . . ?

SIR TOBY BELCH

[Pause] I've no idea!

Must be a little memory lapse!

OLIVIA

Take him, Fool, for one of his naps.

[Exit Clown and SIR TOBY BELCH]

[Re-enter MALVOLIO]

MALVOLIO

The boy is from Lord Orsino.

I told him that he had to go.
I said that you were feeling peaky.
He said I lied!

OLIVIA

That's very cheeky!

MALVOLIO

He's ill of manner but not uncouth.

OLIVIA

And how old is he, this roguish youth?

MALVOLIO

Not yet a man, but not a boy
With silver tongue and strangely coy;

OLIVIA

Very well, I am keen to see
This messenger.

[Exit MALVOLIO]

[Calling] Come here, Marie.

[Re-enter MARIA]

OLIVIA

Put a veil upon my eyes
To give my person some disguise.

[Enter VIOLA]

VIOLA

Please show me where's Olivia?

OLIVIA

[Veiled] I am standing in for her.

VIOLA

Please show me her, I do beseech
It took me hours to learn my speech!

OLIVIA

Tell me from where did you arise?

VIOLA

I'm not allowed to improvise.
I have my lines. Now, where is she?

OLIVIA

Oh very well, the lady's me.

VIOLA

My master will be very happy!

OLIVIA

Just start your speech and make it snappy!

VIOLA

Just one more thing . . . a little space?

[To MARIA who moves away]

MARIE

I'll just be over here, your Grace.

OLIVIA

From where come the words of the speech you will start?

VIOLA

From me to you . . . via Orsino's heart.
I'm told to say them to your face.
Could you lift the veil, your Grace?

OLIVIA

You know it's me, no need to hide

[Unveiling]

You like the look of what's inside?

VIOLA

Well that, my dear, was worth the wait.
Your beauty explains Orsino's fate.
He sighs, he moans, he must be seen.

OLIVIA

He's nothing but a drama queen!
He knew my answer long ago.

VIOLA

Your cruel words will hurt him so.
If I got such a cruel reply,
I'd lie awake each night and cry.
I'd pitch a tent outside your gate
And evermore I'd sit and wait
For you to leave your icy heart.
All other plans I'd tear apart!

OLIVIA

You'd do all that?

VIOLA

I have no doubt!

OLIVIA

Just take this money and get out!

VIOLA

I did not come here for a fee.

I could not buy such cruelty

That you do show my suffering Duke!

OLIVIA

That's a pretty strong rebuke.

Now strongly tell him, we are done!

VIOLA

I will, my Lady, but it won't be fun!

[Exit VIOLA]

OLIVIA

His master I will see no more.

But that young man I do adore.

[Removing a ring from her finger].

Malvolio, my stoic aide.

[Re-enter MALVOLIO]

Do a favour for this maid.

That boy he dropped this ring, you see?

[Gives the ring to MALVOLIO]

So track him down and say from me
To come tomorrow with his views
On how his master took my news.
And don't be angry, just be calm!

MALVOLIO

Forever at your service, Ma'am!

[Exit MALVOLIO]