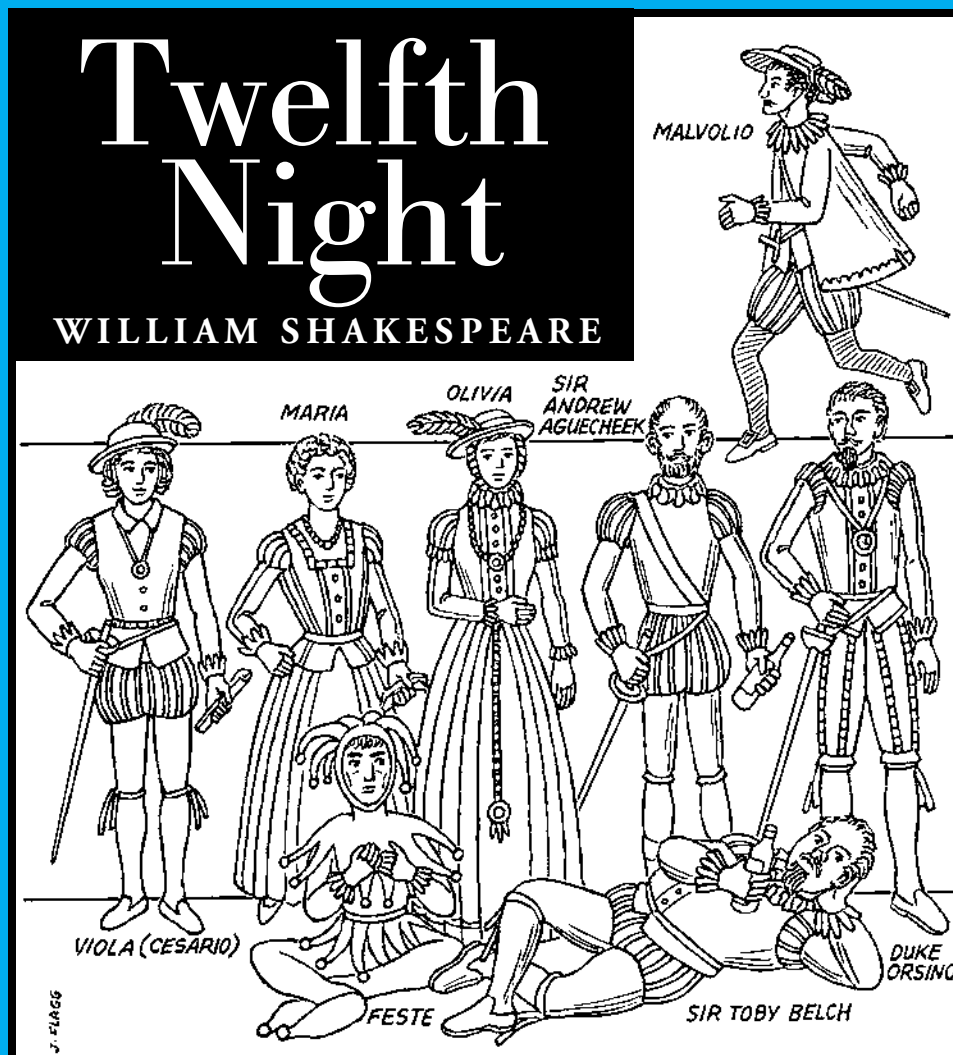


Novel·Ties



A Study Guide

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LEARNING LINKS

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For the Teacher

This reproducible study guide consists of instructional material to use in conjunction with a specific novel. Written in chapter-by-chapter format, the guide contains a synopsis, pre-reading activities, vocabulary and comprehension exercises, as well as extension activities to be used as follow-up to the novel.

NOVEL-TIES are either for whole class instruction using a single title or for group instruction where each group uses a different novel appropriate to its reading level. Depending upon the amount of time allotted to it in the classroom, each novel, with its guide and accompanying lessons, may be completed in two to four weeks.

The first step in using NOVEL-TIES is to distribute to each student a copy of the novel and a folder containing all of the duplicated worksheets. Begin instruction by selecting several pre-reading activities in order to set the stage for the reading ahead. Vocabulary exercises for each chapter always precede the reading so that new words will be reinforced in the context of the book. Use the questions on the chapter worksheets for class discussion or as written exercises.

The benefits of using NOVEL-TIES are numerous. Students read good literature in the original, rather than in abridged or edited form. The good reading habits formed by practice in focusing on interpretive comprehension and literary techniques will be transferred to the books students read independently. Passive readers become active, avid readers.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

William Shakespeare was born on or about April 23, 1564, in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. The parish record kept by Trinity Church shows that he was baptized on April 26; it was customary to baptize infants two to three days after birth. His father, a tanner, later became a tenant farmer and a local official. The family lived comfortably, young William attending Stratford's grammar school. There he studied Latin, history, rhetoric, logic, drama, and poetry. He also studied the English chronicles that later became the basis for his historical plays.

At eighteen, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, a twenty-eight-year-old local woman who was carrying his child. The marriage took place on November 27, 1582. A daughter, Susanna Shakespeare, was baptized on May 26, 1583. In 1585, Anne gave birth to twins, Hamnet and Judith, baptized on February 2nd. Shakespeare probably supported his young family by teaching. He may then have engaged in trade, like his father; some evidence suggests that he also served as a law clerk and a soldier or sailor. Since there are no hard facts about this period of his life, what Shakespeare did for the next eight years is conjecture.

In the late 1580s, Shakespeare abandoned the schoolmaster's life and went to London to try his hand at performing and writing. A pamphlet from that period mentions William Shakespeare as a popular actor and writer in the city. He fraternized with Ben Jonson and Christopher Marlowe, other leading playwrights in Elizabethan London. This was an exciting time for the young writer until the plague, a highly infectious and fatal disease, forced the closing of the theaters from 1592 to 1594.

During the years away from the stage, Shakespeare returned to Stratford and his family. The publication of two popular poems, "Venus and Adonis" and "The Rape of Lucrece," brought him fame as a poet; the poetry earned him more money than did the performance of his plays. By 1594, when the theaters were allowed to reopen, he was a shareholder and a leading member in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, a prestigious acting company. At least six of Shakespeare's plays had been produced by that time.

He suffered a great personal loss when his young son Hamnet died in 1596. According to some literary historians, Shakespeare's grief inspired him to write *Hamlet*, his best known tragedy. After Hamnet's death, the writer spent more time with his family, purchasing several houses in the country. Having authored thirty-eight plays, Shakespeare retired from professional life at age forty-eight and died four years later, in 1616. He was buried at Trinity Church in the town where he was born.

In *Twelfth Night*, the doubling of characters and obvious mistakes in identification are just the starting point for an examination of the play's central themes. Slapstick is reserved for minor characters such as Sir Toby and Sir Andrew and is balanced by the poetic musings of Orsino, Viola, and Olivia. Even Malvolio, a figure of fun, has a pathetic aspect and is not a mere buffoon. Naturally, the doubling of male actors to play female roles, as was practiced in Elizabethan theater, added to the humor. When Viola changes into her dress and so prove her womanhood, the action occurs offstage, better leaving this to the imagination of the audience.

The title of the play refers to January 6th, the twelfth night after Christmas which marked the end of the Christmas holidays, a solemn, devotional period in Shakespeare's time. At the end of this period a season of universal festivity, of masques, pageants, feasts, and traditional sport began.

The comedies all contain the elements of pun, parody, witty dialogue, nonsense, allusion, and pedantry. The juxtaposition of high and low language shows that the serious and comic aspects of life are forever joined. That is why the plays usually include a Fool figure who comments on the unfolding action. The Elizabethan audience was comfortable with this overlapping of the profound and nonsensical, which occurs even in the tragedies. These threads come together in the recognition scene in Act V, when brother and sister are deeply moved upon finding each other at last. To counter the poignancy of this meeting, Shakespeare has Sebastian gently tease his new wife:

You would have been contracted to a maid;
Nor are you therein, by my life, deceived:
You are betrothed both to a maid and a man.

[V, i 253-255]

All comedy is based on disorder, the overturning of what is proper and accepted. The conclusion of a comedy must restore order; in Shakespearean comedy, order is restored in the nick of time. So the Lady Olivia has not after all stooped to woo a mere page but finds herself wed to a true nobleman. So too the Duke, who has been duped by Viola/Cesario into manly confidences, recovers his pride quickly and proposes an appropriate marriage. Malvolio is released from his prison and given an explanation of his cruel humiliation. On the other hand, the Fool has the final lines and the last laugh in his song at the end of Act V.