

Study Guide

for William Shakespeare's

The Winter's Tale



"A sad tale's best for winter."

Aspects to Consider

Story

Take a few minutes to acquaint your students with the plot and main characters of *The Winter's Tale*. A plot synopsis suitable for photocopying is included in this guide. Once you've read and/or seen the play, you might enjoy the 15-Minute Winter's Tale exercise included in the Activities section. This is fun exercise that allows students to perform a quick, condensed version of the play using improvisation and a handful of lines from the play.

Structure

You may want to let your students know something about the unique dramatic structure of *The Winter's Tale*. Technically, *The Winter's Tale* falls into the genre called **romance**. Identifying elements of Shakespeare's romances include: conflicts within family units and between generations; natural disasters; improbable adventures, magic and coincidences; and a completely unpredictable ending that stresses reconciliation and forgiveness.

But *The Winter's Tale* expresses these elements in a brilliant two-part structure. The play's first half, set in Sicilia, is a **tragedy**: King Leontes, seized with jealousy, sets into action a series of events that result in death. The second half, set in Bohemia, is a **comedy**: young lovers Florizel and Perdita find a solution to parental opposition and are allowed to marry. Shakespeare further extends the range of genres in *The Winter's Tale* by drawing on the **pastoral** tradition in his depiction of Bohemia. The pastoral is an ancient literary form that praises the simple joys of lives lived close to nature.

Character

A useful approach to character in *The Winter's Tale* is to get students thinking about how Shakespeare completely reinvents the stereotypes he draws on by creating characters of striking psychological depth and complexity. Leontes and Hermione, for example, are like the wicked kings and virtuous queens we might expect to see in fairy tales, where all we would ask is that the wicked king be wicked enough to embody pure evil and that the virtuous queen be virtuous enough to embody pure goodness.

But in *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare has something to say about the process by which good can eventually triumph over evil that requires wickedness and virtue to be embodied in recognizably human characters. Even if a character's situation in this play seems far-fetched in a fairytale way, Shakespeare's handling of the character's response is always psychologically accurate.

Hermione, too, moves beyond the stock figure of the chaste and long-suffering wife. The profound integrity and courage she displays during the trial scene are not merely emblematic of goodness personified: Shakespeare makes us recognize that they are virtues possessed by a truly remarkable individual.



Jean Pierre Simon - "*The Winter's Tale*, Act Two"

Social History / Gender

Two articles on Relevant Social History outlining the status of women and the Elizabethan / Jacobean figures of the cuckold and the scold are provided in this guide. You may want to use these to give your students quick background on aspects of the social history of Shakespeare's time that are particularly relevant to *The Winter's Tale*. A general discussion around these readings before viewing the show would help students better understand some key issues in the play, such as:

- Leontes' terror at the thought he may be a cuckold
- Hermione's quiet acceptance of her treatment at her husband's hands
- Paulina's connection to the comic figure of the scold
- society's expectation that fathers and husbands, like kings, were authority figures to be obeyed

Have your students watch for how Shakespeare uses the stock figures of the cuckold and the scold in creating Leontes and Paulina, respectively. This is one way Shakespeare creates a comic effect even in tragic situations.

Note, too, how Shakespeare's characters in *The Winter's Tale* challenge the gender stereotypes of his time. The psychological realism of Leontes' jealous passion transforms him from a comic cuckold to a tragically self-deceived husband who can't see the evil of his own actions until it's too late. Paulina's angry outspokenness and nagging criticisms of her king are completely inappropriate given the social expectations of female behavior at this time; but Shakespeare reinvents the "scold" in this play and shows Paulina's comments to be totally necessary and even heroic.

Themes

The themes of *The Winter's Tale* are similar to the themes in Shakespeare's three other final plays: *The Tempest*, *Cymbeline* and *Pericles*. All these plays are known as romances.

Time

Other critics stress the play's focus on regeneration and redemption to argue that Shakespeare exalts time as the necessary medium for human growth and healing. They point out that what seems to be a purely destructive movement of time is countered in the eventual triumph of the Perdita and Florizel generation. Shakespeare's main source for this play, *Pandosto*, was subtitled *The Triumph of Time*, and some see in *The Winter's Tale* the possibility that time is to be understood as an evolutionary force, patiently working from one generation to the next to perfect mankind.

Youth and Age

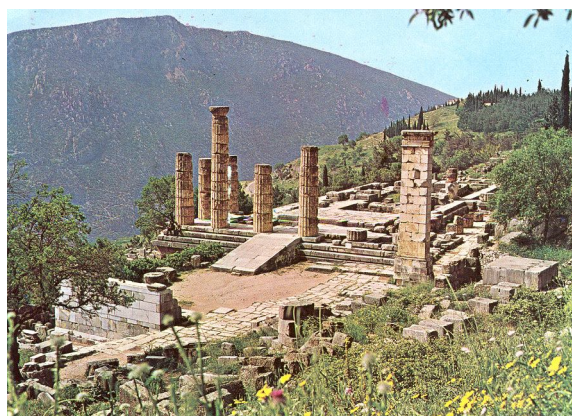
One theme is the power of youth to regenerate age. For example, it is the young people, Perdita and Florizel, who effect the reconciliation between the old kings, Leontes and Polixenes. This theme is struck in the very first scene, in which Camillo comments that young Mamilius is such a promising prince that he makes "*old hearts fresh*." (See also Polixenes' comments, Act 1, scene 2, lines 170-71.) Mamilius of course does not live to fulfill his promise, but Perdita does. There is a sense of human life renewing itself through the cycle of generations.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

The importance of forgiveness and reconciliation is another theme in the last plays of Shakespeare. Hermione forgives Leontes the wrong he inflicted on her, and they are finally reconciled. Polixenes forgives Leontes. Leontes must also try to forgive himself.

Supernatural Intervention

Supernatural or improbable events often feature in the Shakespearean romances. In *The Winter's Tale*, the god Apollo intervenes, through the oracle, when Leontes is blind to the truth and bent on injustice. The "resurrection" of Hermione is also presented as a supernatural event, a miracle. Paulina is anxious to avoid any implication that she is bringing Hermione back to life by the use of magical arts. Shakespeare's concern is not to produce a trick by magic, but to demonstrate in a symbolic way the power of life to regenerate itself.



The Temple of Apollo - where the famous Oracle was located.

Nobility of Woman

Another theme of the romances, prominent in *The Winter's Tale*, is the nobility, purity and resoluteness of woman. These qualities are embodied in Hermione, who is not only beyond reproach in her duties as queen, but also endures false accusation and condemnation with great dignity. Paulina is steadfast, loyal and persistent, and Perdita is the embodiment of the innocent regenerative power of nature. In no other play by Shakespeare does he present as many women of such admirable qualities. They stand in contrast to the appalling conduct of Leontes and, in Act 4, of Polixenes, who performs a function similar to that of Leontes in the first two acts. Man's belligerence and even madness is therefore contrasted with woman's quiet strength.

Nature and the Perpetual Renewal of Life

Perhaps the main theme is the triumph of life, as expressed through nature's perpetual powers of renewal. This is the "*great creating nature*" (Act 4, scene 4) that is shown in all its variety in the great sheep-shearing scene. The rhythms of nature are reflected in the structure of the play. The first three acts are tragic (decay; winter), the last two comic (rebirth and growth; summer). The two moods meet in the Old Shepherd, as he discovers the babe Perdita at the same time that Clown witnesses the death of Antigonus: "*Now bless thyself: thou met'st with things dying, I with things new-born*" (Act 3, scene 3). The structure of the play suggests that human life will be healed by nature and time, just as spring always returns to the earth. What time takes away it will ultimately restore. The miraculous return of Hermione (no one ever explains where she has been all those years) is simply part of the symbolic message that life has infinite restorative powers. Just as Perdita can be found, so can Hermione be restored.

Relevant Social History

The Status of Women

Women in Shakespeare's time lived in a male-dominated society. The right of fathers and husbands to rule over women and children at home was believed to reflect the same God-given order in human relations that gave the monarch the right to rule over the country. Women in this period had virtually no legal power and lost all right to own personal property when they married. Men were expected to be the heads of their households. Once a boy had turned 8, he was no longer considered a minor, and was no longer legally required to obey his mother. A popular rhyme summed up a wife's situation like this:



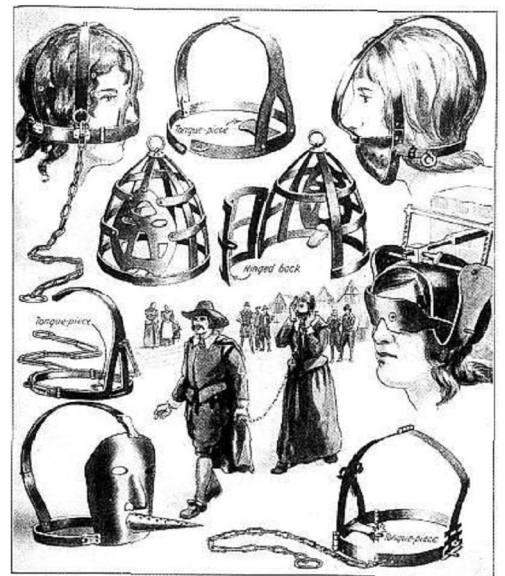
Engraving of a woman
in a brank.

Now when thou art become a wife,
And has an husband to they mind,
See thou provoke him not to strife,
Lest haply he do prove unkind.
Acknowledge that the is thine head,
And hath of thee the governance,
And that thou must of him be led,
According to God's ordinance.

- from *The Voyce of the Laste Trumpet* (1549) by Robert Crowley

Much literature in this period focused on the idea that women were naturally inferior to men, justifying the need for men to govern women's behavior. Early Christian scholars connected all women to the biblical figure of Eve. Like her, they claimed, all women could be easily seduced into evil-doing. The Adam and Eve story also proved to them that God had intended women to be dependent on and serve men. God had created the male first, as the perfection of humanity, and only later created the female out of the male to be his helper. A related argument saw the female as an imperfect or unfinished version of the male, inherently his inferior in the masculine virtues of intelligence, strength, courage and self-control.

At the time Shakespeare was writing, the ideal woman was believed to be chaste (a virgin or a sexually modest and faithful wife), patient, humble, forgiving and obedient. The virginity of daughters born into wealthy and noble families was of vital importance to their marriage prospects. Property passed from father to first-born son; the virginity of brides and sexual fidelity of wives was insisted on to guarantee the legitimacy of the children. In this society, the mere suggestion that a woman had had sexual experience with anyone other than her husband did serious injury to her reputation. Female honor and social respectability were tied so closely to sexuality that death was often presented as preferable to the loss of a woman's chastity, even in cases of rape.



A variety of branks - devices used to bridle
scolding wives.

When Marriage Goes Wrong: The Cuckold and The Scold

Appropriate behavior for men and women in Shakespeare's day was determined by a rigid set of cultural expectations. This male-dominated society believed the balance of power in a marriage naturally rested with the husband. It was both his right and his duty to keep his wife under his control. It was the wife's duty to submit to her husband's authority without argument. Husbands and wives who deviated widely from this norm could quickly become the object of gossip and ridicule.

The cuckolded husband and the scolding wife are stereotypes of the period that express the culture's fears about marriages where the traditional power structure gets turned upside down. For a husband, a wife's sexual infidelity was the most shameful and emasculating loss of control imaginable. The husband of an adulteress was called a cuckold. This weak and ludicrous creature was often symbolized as a man with horns growing out of his forehead. A man whose wife was thought to be unfaithful to him was said to "wear the horns," i. e., to have become a cuckold.



Engraving of a cuckold.



Engraving of a scold.

A wife who refused to quietly submit to her husband's authority ran the risk of being called a scold or a shrew. Women who nagged or argued with men – or just spoke out in public too much or too often – threatened to disrupt the traditional social order based on male dominance. A husband who failed to control his wife's scolding tongue was usually assumed to have failed at controlling her sexuality as well; the husband of a scold was presumed to be a cuckold. Here's a list of some of the many ballads popular in Shakespeare's day that focused on sexual infidelity and the balance of power in marriages:

- *The Patient Wife Betrayed; or, The Lady Elizabeth's Tragedy* – a wicked woman seduces another woman's husband.
- *The Catalogue of Contented Cuckolds* – ten men get together in a tavern to swap stories about their adulterous wives.
- *The Scolding Wives Vindication; or, An Answer to the Cuckold's Complaint* – a wife explains how she was driven to adultery by her husband's inability to perform sexually.
- *All Such As Lead a Jealous Life* – a jealous husband murders the young wife and servant who he mistakenly thinks have cuckolded him.
- *My Wife Will Be My Master* – a husband does all the housework to keep his scolding wife quiet.
- *A Caution for Scolds; or, A True Way of Taming a Shrew* – a husband suffers his wife's constant scolding until he finds a doctor who cures her by extracting a gallon of blood from her offending tongue.

Ballad titles and synopses are taken from Elizabeth Foyster's article *A Laughing Matter? Marital Discord and Gender Control in Seventeenth Century England*. *Rural History* 4 (1993).

This study guide has been adapted from materials provided by the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada and the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC. We thank them for their generosity.

Synopsis

Polixenes, King of Bohemia, visits his longtime friend Leontes, King of Sicilia. Leontes, unable to convince Polixenes to stay longer, asks his wife, Queen Hermione, to persuade him. Her success in this causes Leontes to believe that she has been unfaithful. In anger, Leontes instructs Camillo, one of his courtiers, to poison Polixenes. Camillo is reluctant, but finally agrees to kill Polixenes on the condition that Leontes restore his trust in Hermione. Leontes agrees. Camillo, however, cannot do the deed and flees with Polixenes to Bohemia. Leontes is enraged and orders Hermione to be arrested for treason, declaring that her unborn child is illegitimate. He ignores Antigonus and the other lords' protestations, but offers to send ambassadors to bring back judgment regarding Hermione's fidelity from the god Apollo's Oracle at Delphi. Meanwhile, the queen has given birth to a baby girl. Paulina, Antigonus' wife, takes the princess to Leontes hoping to soften him. He refuses to accept the baby as his and orders Antigonus to leave the baby in the wilderness to die.

At her trial, Hermione expresses her desperation that the three things she cares for most - Leontes' love, her son Mamillius, and her newborn daughter - have all been taken from her. The ambassadors return from Delphi and proclaim Hermione's innocence. They also deliver a prophecy that Leontes "will live without an heir if that which is lost be not found." A servant rushes in, bringing news of Mamillius' death. Hermione faints. Leontes, stricken by grief, promises to make amends to all whom he has wronged, when Paulina enters saying the queen has also died. The King admits his wrong-doing and vows to do penance everyday for the rest of his life.

Antigonus reaches Bohemia with the baby, whom he has named Perdita. He sets her down, along with some gold, but is then chased away and killed by a bear. A shepherd discovers the baby, and his son witnesses Antigonus' demise. The shepherd takes the baby home to raise as his own.

Sixteen years pass. Polixenes is concerned because his son, Prince Florizel, has been spending time among the shepherds. At a sheep-shearing festival, Florizel and Perdita profess their love for each other. However, his princely status concerns her. Polixenes and Camillo, at the party in disguise, converse with Perdita and notice an unexpected nobility in her bearing. Florizel asks Perdita to marry him. Polixenes advises Florizel to ask his father for permission, but Florizel refuses. Polixenes then reveals his identity, and orders Florizel never to see Perdita again. Camillo advises the couple to flee to Sicilia and present themselves to Leontes. The couple sets off, disguised. Autolycus, a former courtier and con-man, tricks the Old Shepherd and his son into following Florizel and Perdita on their journey.

In Sicilia, several lords comfort Leontes in his grief. Florizel and Perdita arrive in Sicilia, and the lovers receive Leontes' blessing. Polixenes and Camillo arrive shortly thereafter, and Leontes advocates to a furious Polixenes on behalf of the young lovers. When the shepherd reveals how he found Perdita as a baby, the kings realize that she is in fact Leontes' daughter and is now a perfectly suitable marriage partner for Florizel. The reunited Polixenes and Leontes marvel at the fulfillment of the Oracle's prophecy and promote the shepherd and his son to the status of gentlemen.

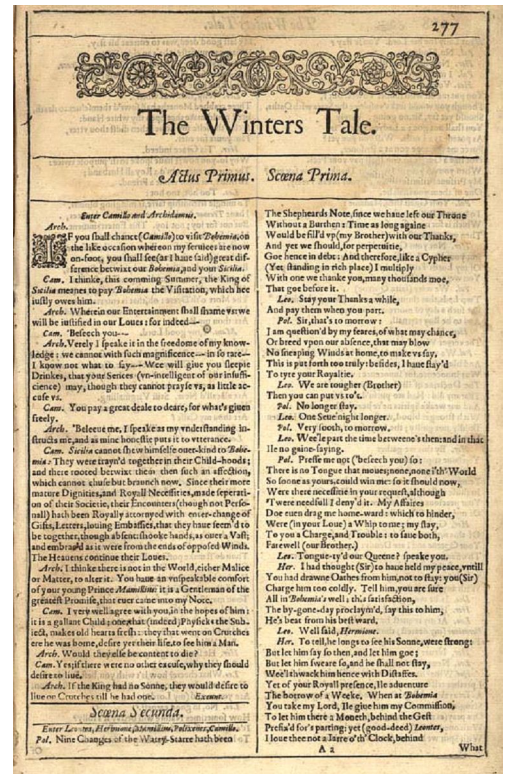
The reunited royal family goes to Paulina's house to see the lifelike statue of Hermione that has just been finished. Leontes is moved by her beauty, and Perdita asks her blessing. Miraculously, Paulina summons the statue to life. Hermione steps down from the pedestal into Leontes' arms, and welcomes her long-lost daughter.

Promise Lost, Hope Found

THE KING SHALL LIVE WITHOUT AN HEIR IF THAT WHICH IS LOST BE NOT FOUND (3.2.144-146)

In this production, Shakespeare's Sicilia is portrayed as a well established kingdom bursting with wealth and majesty. Leontes is a good king, extravagant in his affection towards his family and friends; Hermione, his queen, is ever-obedient and honorable; and Prince Mamillius (unlike Hal in 1 Henry IV) is unanimously recognized as "a gentleman of the greatest promise" (1.1.36-37). The expectation of Sicilia's success and prosperity rests so much in the Royal Family that, "if the king had no son, [Sicilians] would desire to live on crutches till he had one" (1.1.47-48). Unfortunately, the tragic events that ensue strip the kingdom of its potential and leave it devoid of legacy. Promise is replaced with a fear of what Leontes' "fail of issue may drop upon his kingdom" (5.1.34-35).

Hope is ultimately restored when the once-abandoned princess finds her way to Sicilia. Her virtuous qualities stimulate great possibility for the latent nation. However, the responsibility of a brighter future does not depend solely on her, but rather, it rests in her union with Florizel. Their marriage will unite the strengths of two kingdoms. This tale ends with the prospect of a whole new world. Can you think of characters from other stories that are similar in personality to Leontes? Hermione? Mamillius? And Perdita?



The First Folio edition of *The Winter's Tale*.

The source of *The Winter's Tale* was a novel by Robert Greene entitled *Pandosto*, first published in 1588. In the novel, the main character is motivated by passionate jealousy to drive his friend away and banish his baby daughter. As a result of this, Pandosto's wife and son die. The main differences between Greene's novel and Shakespeare's play are that Pandosto's jealousy is more progressive and substantiated, whereas Leontes' behavior is sudden and irrational. Shakespeare also adds the sheep-shearing scene, the statue scene, and numerous characters including the figure of Time. Finally, Shakespeare gives the play a happy ending with Hermione and Perdita both returning to Leontes. Greene's novel ends as a tragedy.

If you were the author of *The Winter's Tale*, how would you write the ending?

The Winter's Tale is one of Shakespeare's later plays (written around 1611) and is usually categorized as a romance. Shakespeare's romances typically share the following features:

- A combination of rural and court scenes
- A plot line that often involves the reuniting of long lost family members
- An extensive use of lyrical poetry
- A magical or fantastical occurrence
- A mixture of tragedy and comedy
- A masque element (A masque is a form of dramatic entertainment usually involving pantomime, dancing, dialogue, and song. Masques were popular in England in the 16th and 17th centuries and were presented as elaborate productions.)

Jealousy and Repentance

PAID DOWN MORE PENITENCE THAN DONE TRESPASS (5.1.3-4)

Though all of his trusted courtiers vehemently disagreed with his allegations, and despite the fact that the oracle absolved Hermione, Polixenes, and Camillo of the crimes of which they were accused, Leontes remained implacable in his convictions. Only when Mamillius is reported dead does the king immediately associate this tragedy as his punishment:

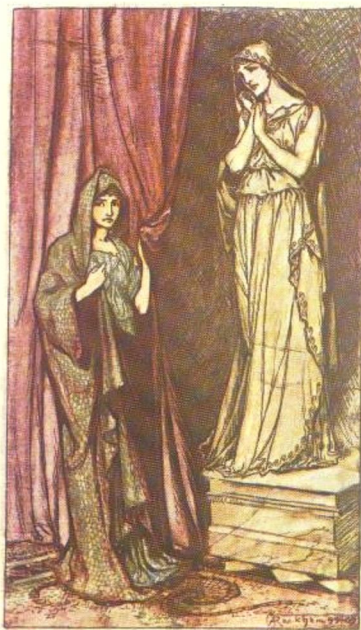
Apollo's angry, and the heavens themselves Do strike at my injustice. (3.2.160-161)

He confesses his error, “*I have too much believed my own suspicion*” (3.2.167), and asks for forgiveness, “*Apollo, pardon my great profaneness 'gainst thine oracle*” (3.2.170-171). Leontes immediately devises a means to reconcile his crime. But the news of Hermione's death puts an end to his plans and sets the remorseful king on a pilgrimage of redemption.

*Prithee, bring me
To the dead bodies of my queen and son.
One grave shall be for both. Upon them shall
The causes of their death appear, unto
Our shame perpetual. Once a day I'll visit
The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there
Shall be my recreation. So long as nature
Will bear up with this exercise, so long
I daily vow to use it.* (3.2.260-268)



French engraving by F. Wentworth for an 1870 edition of the play.



PAULINA DREW BACK THE CURTAIN WHICH CONCEALED THE DEAD BODIES OF HERMIONE

Illustration by Arthur Rackin for a 1909 children's novelization of *The Winter's Tale*.

He spends sixteen years in penitent isolation. Despite the fact that Cleomenes believes Leontes has:

*... done enough, and have performed
A saintlike sorrow. No fault could you make
Which you have not redeemed - indeed, paid down
More penitence than done trespass. At the last,
Do as the heavens have done: forget your evil;
With them forgive yourself.* (5.1.1-6)

Paulina continues to remind him of his crime making it difficult for Leontes to forgive himself. This guilt-ridden state causes him to commit to a continual life of seclusion and mourning unless he finds someone who is exactly like Hermione, a promise which is seemingly impossible.

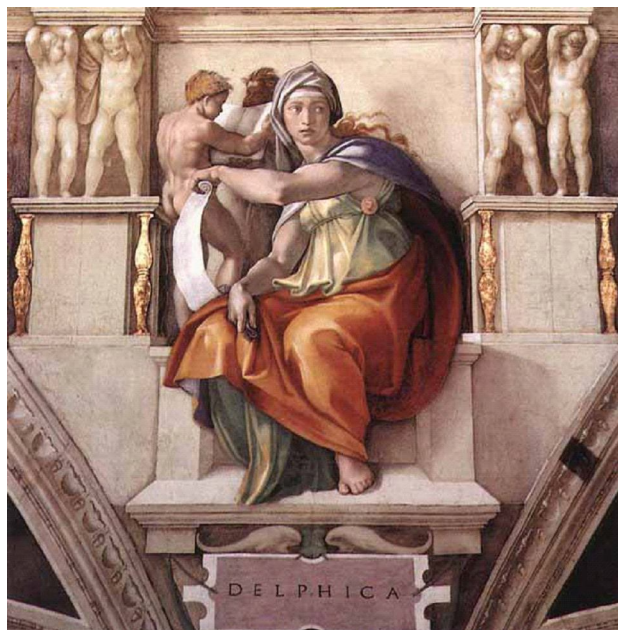
Do you feel that Leontes' punishment fits the crime?

Only Time Will Tell

It is not unusual to find non-realistic characters in Shakespeare's romance plays. In *The Winter's Tale* the Oracle - a holy prophet - is consulted to determine Hermione's innocence, and Time makes an appearance to bridge the gap of sixteen years between the play's beginning and end.

The Oracle belonged to the Greek god Apollo and was consulted for truths and insights to the future (though the prophecies might often be more confusing than helpful). The Oracle in *The Winter's Tale* offers both the truth and a warning to Leontes: "*the King shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found.*" The Oracle clears Hermione and cautions Leontes against his rage; Leontes does not heed the warning, however, making the Oracle's prophecy come true.

Time heals all wounds, so the saying goes. Even Leontes' harshness and melancholy could be soothed by the passage of time; however, that would take longer than can be shown on stage realistically. Shakespeare added the character of Time to act as a chorus and apologize for leaving Leontes' part of the story, but he promises to make all well by moving forward sixteen years. He "*turn[s his] glass*" to introduce Florizel and Perdita as the main characters of the second half of this story.



Painting of the Oracle at Delphi - Shakespeare mistakenly places the Oracle on the island of Delphos, and also attributes a booming voice to the speaker, which suggests a male, when in fact, the oracle was always female.

Shakespeare often used the names of characters to give insight into their personalities or situations. Based on what the Oracle tells Leontes, what do you think Perdita's name might mean? The answer may be found at the bottom of the last page of this study guide.



In Renaissance art, the hourglass is a symbol for Youth or Age, depending on how much sand is in the top half. By turning the hourglass so that the top is full, Time is now turning his focus to the youthful Florizel and Perdita, rather than the aging Leontes.

Activities

SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE

Shakespeare often gave us hints about his characters by selecting a particular type of speech for them to use. As a general rule, prose, or every day speech, is used by more lowly or ordinary characters whereas verse, often written in iambic pentameter (a common meter written with ten syllables and five accented beats), is spoken by characters of higher birth. Look at the three excerpts below and try to answer the following questions for each excerpt.

1. What kind of language is this (prose, verse, rhyming or iambic pentameter, etc.)?
2. Even if you cannot identify the character by name, what type of character is speaking (low-birth, high-birth, etc.)?
3. Look up the references to find out who is speaking. What do you think Shakespeare is trying to convey about this character through his/ her language?

Excerpt 1

*I have too much believ'd mine own suspicion.
Beseech you, tenderly apply to her. (3.2.167)*

Excerpt 2

He could never have come better; he shall come in. I love a ballad but even too well, if it be doleful matter merrily set down; or a very pleasant thing indeed, and sung lamentably. (4.4.220)

Excerpt 3

*How often have I told you 'twould be thus!
How often said my dignity would last
But till 'twere known! (4.4 562)*

There are often exceptions to the rule. For example in the opening scene, two courtiers exchange compliments in very elegant prose. Later in 4.2 the second part of the play begins with a scene between Polixenes and Camillo written in prose.

Why do you think Shakespeare chose to use prose instead of verse in these scenes?

EXIT PURSUED BY A BEAR

Shortly after the stage direction, exit pursued by a bear, the Shepherd's Son recounts the bear's treatment of Antigonus as well as the storm that sank Antigonus' ship. As a class, act out the stage direction and the account of the Shepherd's Son in 3.3.93-107, first seriously and then comically. Which seems to work the best? Do you think this is a serious or a comic moment? How do you think it will be staged at Actors Ensemble?

Exit pursued by a Bear is one of the most famous of Shakespeare's stage directions. Many Elizabethan theaters were used for bear-baiting activities, which is the practice of setting dogs to fight a chained bear and betting on which would win, so in early productions a live bear may actually have been used to chase Antigonus off the stage. This line also traditionally marks a shift in the structure of the play. Up until this point, the play is serious and even tragic, whereas from this point on, there is a real sense of a comedy.

ACT THE PART

Read the following passages spoken by Leontes:

*Too hot, too hot!
...But to be paddling palms and pinching fingers,
As now they are, and making practiced smiles
As in a looking glass, and then to sign, as 'twere
The mort o' th' deer... (1.2.139, 146-149)*

*Is whispering nothing?
Is leaning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses?
Kissing with inside lip? Stopping the career
Of laughter with a sigh? ... Horsing foot on foot?
Skulking in corners? (1.2.346-352)*

Discuss what Leontes may have seen in Hermione and Polixenes' actions that would spark his jealousy and prompt him to speak the above passages (look for clues in his lines). As a class, perform this scene. Choose one student to play the part of Leontes and read his lines, and two students to act out the silent scene between Hermione and Polixenes. Play the scene in two ways: first, where the silent action clearly looks innocent and then where the action could be suspicious. How do the two interpretations affect your view of Leontes' jealousy?

BE THE ORACLE

Act as the Oracle for another character in *The Winter's Tale*. What would you tell him/her about him/herself? What warning might you give to this character? Do you think this character would heed the advice of the Oracle? Why or why not? Write a paragraph from the perspective of the Oracle and share it with the class.

IN HERMIONE'S WORDS

The Winter's Tale ends with a joyous reunion of Leontes with Hermione and Perdita, both of whom were thought to be dead. Leontes is amazed to see Hermione alive and asks her pardon for the wrong he has done to her. Throughout the scene, however, Hermione never directly addresses Leontes. As a class, read from 5.3.125 to the end of the play and discuss what Hermione might say to Leontes in this moment. Then, individually write a speech for Hermione and decide where in the scene the speech should be placed. Act out the reunion scene with the class a number of times. Take turns reading your speeches as the character of Hermione. Does Hermione addressing Leontes change the scene? If so, how?



Engraving by Linton (1870) of Perdita kneeling before the Hermione's statue.

RESOURCES

INTERNET:

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare
<http://shakespeare.mit.edu/works.html>

Mr. William Shakespeare and the Internet
<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/>

Shakespeare's Life and Times
<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/intro/introsubj.html>

A More Detailed Study Guide - w/Character Breakdowns, etc.
<http://www.gradesaver.com/the-winters-tale/study-guide/>

PRINT:

Into Shakespeare: An Introduction to Shakespeare Through Drama by Richard Adams and Gerard Gould
London: Wardlock Education Publishers, 1977

Shakespeare A to Z: An Essential Reference to His Plays, His Poems, His Life and Times, and More by Charles Boyce
New York: Roundtable Press, 1990

Shakespeare: The Basics by Sean McEvoy
New York: Routledge, 2000

Teaching Shakespeare by Rex Gibson
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998

15 MINUTE WINTER'S TALE

The Fifteen Minute Play is a plot summary intermingled with quotations from the play. It is typically used to introduce students to the play or to prepare them to see a production. You can alter it as you see fit, invent a version of your own for a different play, or have your students create one. Try to keep it as short and simple as possible.

- Create cards for the quotations and the corresponding number.s The cards should be large enough for three to five people to read simultaneously.
- Divide the class into groups and distribute the cards. Each group may have multiple cards.
- Give the groups five to ten minutes to prepare dramatic renditions of their line(s). They can read the line(s) as a chorus, individually, or in sub-groups, but everyone must speak part of the text. Encourage students to physicalize/dramatize the line(s) in some way. Using props is acceptable, but not necessary.
- When the rehearsal period is over, ask everyone to stand in a circle.
- The leader (you, or a student) stands in the circle, too, and reads aloud the script of the story, calling out the numbers of quotations where indicated and pausing for the group responsible for that quotation to come quickly into the center and perform it. The leader should keep a quick, steady pace—the activity is much more fun when it moves right along.

When the play begins, Archidamus and Camillo are discussing how magnificent a visitation Leontes, King of Sicilia, has provided for Polixenes, King of Bohemia. Camillo, Leontes' courtier, explains that the friendship between the two kings is so strong **(1. Sicilia cannot show himself over-kind to Bohemia.)** They praise the young Prince of Sicilia, Mamillius, and Archidamus adds that Mamillius **(2. ...is a gentleman of the greatest promise that ever came into my note.)**

Leontes, unable to convince Polixenes to extend his stay in Sicilia, asks the Queen, Hermione, to persuade him. She does, but without rhyme or reason Leontes becomes jealous **(3. Too hot, too hot!)** Polixenes and Hermione are confused by Leontes' sudden change in temperament **(4. What means Sicilia? He something seems unsettled.)**

Leontes confides to Camillo **(5. My wife's a hobby-horse....)** and insists that Camillo poison Polixenes **(6. ...and thou, his cupbearer...mightest bespice a cup to give mine enemy a lasting wink.)** Camillo replies **(7. I cannot believe this crack to be in my dread mistress so sovereignly being honorable)** but ultimately agrees to do it.

However, Camillo can't execute the deadly deed and divulges the plot to Polixenes **(8. I am appointed him to murder you.)** Polixenes is shocked **(9. For what?)** Camillo urges Polixenes to flee presently and vows, **(10. For myself, I'll put my fortunes to your service.)** They leave Sicilia rather hastily. Leontes is enraged. He takes Mamillius away from Hermione, proclaims before the court that **(11. She is an adultrass),** and orders for her to be imprisoned. The Lords of the court protest **(12. Beseech your Highness, call the Queen again.)**

While imprisoned Hermione gives birth to a daughter. Paulina, her lady in waiting, is convinced that the sight of the babe will soften the King so she decides to **(13. show't the king and undertake to be her advocate to the loudest)**. But Leontes swears **(14. this brat is none of mine.)** and makes Antigonus, Paulina's husband, take the baby **(15. to some remote and desert place...where chance may nurse or end it.)**

At her trial, Hermione pleads her innocence. Leontes replies **(16. Look for no less than death.)** Cleomenes and Dion bring a proclamation from the oracle which absolves Hermione, Polixenes, and Camillo; declares Leontes to be a jealous tyrant; and decrees that **(17. the King shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found.)** Leontes retorts **(18. This is mere falsehood.)**

A servant reports that Mamillius is dead. Hermione faints. Leontes repents **(19. Apollo, pardon my great profaneness 'gainst thine oracle)** and promises to **(20. reconcile me to Polixenes..., new woo my queen)** and **(21. recall the good Camillo.)** But all too late because Hermione is also dead. Grief stricken, Leontes vows **(22. once a day I'll visit the chapel where they lie and tears shed there shall be my recreation.)**

Antigonus delivers the baby, Perdita, to Bohemia. Then, according to the stage directions, **(23. He exits, pursued by a bear)** that apparently was hungry. Perdita and a bag of gold are found lying in a box by a shepherd and his son.

Sixteen years later, Camillo is ready to return to Sicilia. Polixenes protests. He is worried because his son, Florizel, has been hanging out with a shepherd **(24. who hath a daughter of most rare note.)** Polixenes convinces Camillo to go with him in disguise to spy on his son.

Polixenes is impressed with Perdita **(25. this is the prettiest lowborn lass that ever ran on the greensward.)** When Florizel confesses his plans to marry her, Polixenes is no longer impressed **(26. ... thou fresh piece of excellent witchcraft.)** Polixenes takes off his disguise, forbids the union, threatens Perdita, **(27. I will devise a death as cruel for thee as thou art tender to't)**, and storms off. Camillo suggests Florizel and Perdita go to Sicilia and present Perdita as a princess.

Leontes welcomes the young couple until a servant reports that Florizel has **(28. fled from his father... and with a shepherd's daughter.)** Florizel begs Leontes to speak on their behalf to his father, **(29. at your request, my father will grant such precious things as trifles.)** Leontes is softened by his memory of Hermione, and agrees to help the lovers. Later it is discovered that **(30. the king's daughter is found)**, revealing that Perdita is Leontes' lost princess!

The reunited royal family goes to Paulina's house to see a lifelike statue of Hermione. Leontes is moved by her beauty **(31. O, thus she stood... when I first woo'd her)** and Perdita attempts to kiss the statue's hand, but Paulina warns **(32. patience! ... the colour's not dry.)** Paulina proclaims that she can make the statue come alive **(33. Music, awake her, strike!)** Hermione steps down from the pedestal into Leontes' arms, and welcomes her long-lost daughter. Leontes joins Camillo and Paulina **(34. this is a match)**, and, thus paired, they each agree to **(35. answer to his part performed in this wide gap of time.)**

Perdita means "lost" and comes from the same Latin word that gives us the modern word "perdition."