



SANTA CRUZ SHAKESPEARE EDUCATION PROGRAM

TWELFTH NIGHT

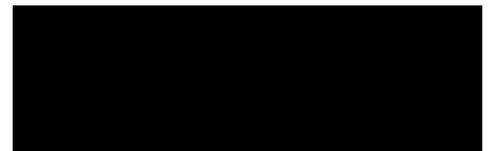
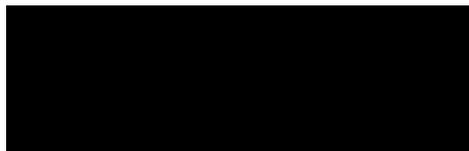
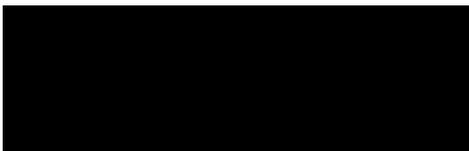
Twelfth Night, or *What You Will* is a romantic comedy that uses gender and performance to engage audiences with questions about the nature of love and desire. The contradictions between how characters present themselves and who they really are generate both comedy and pathos in one of Shakespeare's most popular plays. Below, you will find resources to examine this play with your students.

Changing Tradition

During Shakespeare's time the London playhouse did not allow women to perform female roles. Instead, these female roles were played by well-trained boy actors. In the all-male Globe Playhouse production in 2012 middle-aged men played the roles of Olivia and Maria; Mark Rylance, the Artistic Director, played Olivia.

Have your students watch a few scenes from the Globe production of *Twelfth Night* linked below and answer the following questions:

- What do you think of the casting? Do you find the costumes, make-up, and actions of the male actors playing female roles as an engaging part of the storyline, or distracting?
- How do you think this play would change if women were playing the male roles as well as the female roles? Check out these two resources to help with your answer: [National Theatre's production of *Twelfth Night* on gender](#) & [All's Well in All-Woman 'Twelfth Night' theater review from KQED](#).





Act I, Scene V



Act I, Scene V



Act III, Scene IV

Disguise & Deception

From the Royal Shakespeare Theater's online learning zone, we can look at their analysis on the theme of disguise and deception in *Twelfth Night*. When reading this play, keep these themes in mind while you find quotes that correspond with each of these deceptions:

- Although Viola is the only character in the play who is literally in disguise, many characters are disguising the truth by deceiving others and often themselves.
- Maria deceives Malvolio by writing the letter as though it comes from Olivia, as seen in Act 2 Scene 5. Sir Toby, Fabian and Sir Andrew are all part of this deception, watching it unfold for their own enjoyment. However, Malvolio is also deceiving himself when he believes that Olivia is interested in him as anything more than her steward. He is very quick to credit the letter, which is why the deception works so well. Viola deceives Olivia into believing she is a young man called 'Cesario', but Olivia is also deceiving herself in believing that Cesario loves her, but is too proud to admit it.
- Consider who is deceiving whom in *Twelfth Night* and what reasons they may have for their deceptions.



Feast of Fools



Twelfth Night is the last night of the twelve days of Christmas celebrations.

"In England, this holiday was associated with drinking, noise, revelry, feasting, dancing, cross-dressing, and topsy-turvy authority governed by a Lord of Misrule. The title of Shakespeare's play, *Twelfth Night*, offers the central metaphor for the play's action and themes . . . and the entire mood of frivolity and holiday that is so essential to the play." ~ Susan Willis, Alabama Shakespeare Festival Dramaturg

As a reading exercise, have your students read these two articles (linked below) about the Feast of Fools festival for some background information on the influences of Shakespeare's writings in *Twelfth Night*.

Article Links: [Festivity, dressing up and misrule in Twelfth Night](#) & [Madness and Folly](#)



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