

As You Like It

Activities for the classroom

The following exercises have been adapted with permission from *Shakespeare Set Free*. Please note: unless stated otherwise, the direction to read in the activities means participation by the full class, reading out loud, one student at a time with the reader changing with every semi-colon, colon, period or question mark.

All line citations refer to the New Penguin Shakespeare edition of *As You Like It*. Locations are listed as the numbers of Act.scene.line(s): for example: 1.2.34-36 would refer to Act One, scene 2, lines 34-36.

Exercise 1: Introduction by similes.

As You Like It seems to be full of smart, colorful people. Similes play a major part in conveying the sense that characters are very aware and possess vivid imaginations. Jaques, Touchstone, Rosalind and Celia are particularly fond of similes. Just for fun, and to impress the class with the potency of these images, write the following similes on separate index cards, distribute them among the class and ask students to introduce themselves using the following similes. See how many the class can remember.

EXAMPLES: "I'm _____ and I "live like the old Rob in Hood of England."

OR "My name is _____ and I "suite me all points like a man."

Similes:

"like the toad, ugly and venomous, wears yet a precious jewel in his head crow like Chanticleer"

"Like the wild goose flies"

"creeping like the snail unwillingly to school"

"sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad made to his mistress"

"under a tree like a dropped acorn"

"like a wounded knight"

"furnished like a hunter"

"speak to him like a saucy lackey"

"live in the skirts of the forest, like fringe upon a petticoat"

"married under a bush like a beggar"

"like green timber warp, warp"

"follow her like foggy south"

“ puffing with wind and rain”
“will laugh like a hyen”
“my affection hath an unknown bottom, like the bay of Portugal”
“defies me like Turk to Christian”
“bestows himself like a ripe sister”
“like the howling of Irish wolves against the moon”
“like two gypsies on a horse”
“furnishd like a beggar”
“Like a lusty winter, frosty but kindly”
“have a swashing and martial outside as many other mannish cowards have”
“as the icy fang and churlish chiding of the winter’s wind”
“true a lover as ever sighed upon a midnight pillow”
“suck melancholy from a song as a weasel sucks eggs”
“is plain as the way to parish church”
“as sensual as the brutish sting itself”
“as walled town is more worthier than a village”
“as the ox hath his bow...the hors his curb and the falcon her bells”
“as full of sanctity as the touch of holy bread”
“as concave as a covered goblet or a worm-eaten nut”
“dwells like a miser”
“as your pearly in your foul oyster”

If anyone seems unimpressed, ask your students to paraphrase a selection of these similes in as few words as possible without losing any aspect of the pictures Shakespeare’s phrases create.

Exercise 2: Inflection

Understanding the meaning of *As You Like It* beyond the bare bones of the play involves the ability to interpret subtext. The following exercise (originally crafted by Paul Cartier, a teacher from Classical High School in Providence, RI) explores this area and demonstrates its relationship to vocal inflection.

1. On the chalkboard, write: "I'm glad you're here this evening."
2. Ask students what the sentence means. After a brief discussion, have six students read the line, stressing a different word each time. Compare the meanings. For example: Stressing the word "I'm" may indicate that nobody else is glad you're here, while putting emphasis on "you're" implies that the others bore you.
3. Now try the same approach with *As You Like It*, 1.1.38: "Know you where you are, sir?"
4. After each new reading, encourage the class to discuss what the meaning is and to note the differences implied they stress different words.

Exercise 3: Subtext

Introduce the term "subtext" as a character's internal meaning of a line. Subtext is determined by the context of a particular situation; the character's objective in both the particular moment as well as in the larger scope of the play; and the obstacles that prevent the attainment of these goals. Note that there can be more than one valid interpretation of a particular line's subtext based on these influences.

Next, suggest that vocal inflection is a tool with which actors can convey the subtext they're trying to express. Give five students index cards with one of the following subtexts written on each one:

"How beautiful!"

"So What?"

"Look out!"

"Don't be such a jerk."

"I don't believe it."

Ask the students to say "Oh!" in such a way that it conveys the subtext written on their card, and ask the listeners to guess the meaning. (The same exercise can be repeated using the phrase "Good morning." To imply "Tell me everything that happened," "I'm in a hurry," "I caught you!" and "I'm just being polite.")

Finally ask the class to apply what they've learned about subtext and inflection to 1.1.27 – 49 (Orlando's first conversation with Oliver) or to 1.2.1-24 (Rosalind and Celia's first scene). Ask students to identify each character's objective before they begin to read the lines aloud. Students should support their ideas with information given in the text. Change readers often and discuss the different possibilities that the lines and situations will support.

Exercise 4: Subtext of the voice and body

A character's subtext or interior thoughts may be conveyed by stressing certain words, inflection, pausing and speech pacing and even body language. Applying several different scenarios to the same dialogue may illustrate this.

1. Give the following dialogue to several pairs of students:
Student 1: You're late.
Student 2: I know. I couldn't help it.
Student 1: Are you ready?
Student 2: Well...
Student 1: I understand.
Student 2: Is it time?
Student 1: Take this.
2. Assign a different set of characters and scenarios to each pair. Some possibilities may be spies exchanging information; siblings who have planned to run away from home; a teacher and a student who has scheduled a make-up text; the master of ceremonies and a performer backstage at a talent show.
3. Warn each pair to keep their characters and scenarios absolutely secret from everyone else, and give them 10 minutes to prepare their scene. Ask them to work at making their scenarios very clear both in the way they say their lines and the way they move.
4. Have the rest of the class watch the scenes performed. Can audience members identify each character and scenario? Discuss the clues they found in the actors' vocal and physical presentation.

Exercise 5: Subtext of the voice and body, part II.

Rosalind recognizes that characters' circumstances influence the way they behave when she describes to Orlando how time travels "in divers paces with divers persons" (111.2.299-322)

1. Have the class read Rosalind's description of the various characters. What can be gleaned about each of their goals or circumstances? Assign these characters and scenarios to three new pairs of students: a young woman and the priest just before her wedding; a rich man and a lawyer outside the courtroom just before the rich man's trial for \$100 speeding ticket; a priest and a thief at the foot of the gallows.
2. Give them five minutes to prepare to speak the "You're late" dialogue. Remind them to assume the circumstances which Rosalind suggested: the young woman is anxious to marry, the priest "lacks Latin", etc. Have them perform their scenes for the class.
3. Could the audiences identify the characters Rosalind described when they watched their classmates' performances? How did the subtext differ between the maid, the rich man and the priest as character #1? The priest, the lawyer and the thief as character #2?

Exercise 6: Living Pictures, Part I

This exercise offers a way to clarify the relationships between characters in particular scenes by visually demonstrating them.

1. After several readings of 1.2.139-278, discuss the content of the scene. Have the class list major occurrences in the story. The list might include: the wrestling match; Rosalind and Celia's attempt to dissuade Orlando from fighting; Duke Frederick's disapproval of Orlando's parentage; Rosalind and Orlando falling in love; Celia's attempt to make up for her father's unfairness to Orlando; LeBeau's warning to Orlando to flee; etc.
2. Pick two students to portray Rosalind and Orlando. Let other students arrange them in poses that suggest romantic interest in one another. Try several different poses. Next add a student for Celia. Have her pose reflect her discovery of the attraction between your cousin and Orlando.
3. While the students hold their poses, have others read 1.2.243-246. If the class feels any part of the Living Picture doesn't reflect what is said, adjust the pose and read the lines again.
4. Pick four other students to play Rosalind, Celia, Orlando and LeBeau. Pose them to suggest that the women are seeing Orlando for the first time and asking LeBeau for information about him. Try different poses, including some in which the women are openly curious and some in which they hide their interest from Orlando. Also try some in which Orlando notices Rosalind and some where he is more concerned about getting ready to wrestle.
5. When the class is satisfied with a pose for these four characters, freeze the Living Picture while students read lines 1.2.141 – 143. Poll the class to assure that they find the pose appropriate to the lines.
6. Next, add to the pose established for Rosalind, Celia, Orlando and LeBeau a fifth student to play Duke Frederick and a sixth to play Charles. Arrange them so that the Duke can speak to his daughter and niece, and also so that they and LeBeau can compare Orlando and Charles as opponents. Read beginning with line 141 again, but continue through line 150.
7. Ask students to set up Living Pictures of some of the other significant moments they listed that occur between the wrestling match and the end of 1.2. Encourage them to explain the reasons for particular choices in the poses.
8. List the plot and character elements that are most important for determining poses that work satisfactorily with the lines. Discuss the basic relationships that exist among Rosalind, Celia, Duke Frederick, Orlando, LeBeau and Charles. Ask students to pick one character and write a description of his or her relationships to the other five.

Exercise 7: Living Pictures, Part II

1. Have the class read through 11.7.140-167 – Jaques' famous "seven ages of man" speech – several times. Discuss the content, answering any questions about unfamiliar words.
2. Select seven pairs of students. Assign each pair one of the "ages" as described by Jaques. Give the pairs five minutes to prepare a pose which clearly reflects what the words describe.

Some Living Pictures may require two people, others may only need one person. In this case one partner to portray the character, in which case the other partner should direct the action. Have the class sit in a circle with the students who will actually present the Living Pictures sitting on the floor inside the circle.

3. Ask the students in the outer circle to read the speech again with the reader changing at every semi-colon or period. Cue each student posing for the seven ages to get up and strike his or her position as the appropriate section is read. Make sure they stage their Living Pictures inside the circle where everyone can see them. Have them hold their positions until the speech is finished and you tell them to sit down. After the end of the speech, and before anyone moves out of the Living Picture, allow spectators to suggest any changes that might make the poses more reflective of the words.
4. Have everyone sit down. How did the Living Pictures compare to the images the group had discussed or imagined as individual? Were there certain aspects of Jaques' description that could not be conveyed in a Living Picture? What words could not be captured by a simple body position? What sounds are suggested by the speech? What activities? What locations are suggested for the different "ages"? Ask volunteers to read sections of the speech in concert with the students who posed again if they think they can improve upon the first presentation.
5. Divide the class into groups and repeat this exercise to examine the First Lord's speech about Jaques and the deer, 11.1.26 – 63, and Oliver's story about being saved in the forest, IV.34.99 – 121 and 128 – 133. For the very inventive, Touchstone's description of the seven degrees of the lie, V.4.67 – 79 offers a real challenge in visual interpretations.
6. Make sure that in presenting the Living Picture, students coordinate the poses with reading the text aloud. Let them determine how many poses are necessary to show the whole story. After their presentation, discuss what aspects are most difficult to convey without movement, sound, sets or costuming. Can any of these images be made clear by a different pose or by accompanying the Living Pictures with different inflections or stresses in the reading?
7. Ask students to draw pictures or make collages illustrating the Lord's deer speech, the "seven ages of man", Oliver's story or the "seven degrees of the lie."

More suggestions for writing and discussion

"Wit" is mentioned in *As You Like It* more than 20 times, suggesting that Shakespeare thought it was an important concept in reference to the characters and the situation of the play.

1. Find the following moments in which wit is mentioned:

Nature has given us wit to flout at Fortune [1.2.45]

You have too courtly a wit for me, I'll rest. [III.2.66]

Or else she could not have the wit to do this. [IV.1.1601]

Make the doors upon a woman's wit, and it will out at the casement; shut that, and 'twill out at the key-hole; stop that, 'twill fly with smoke out at the chimney. [IV.1.150-53]

And what wit could wit have to excuse that? [IV.1.1581]

He uses his folly like a stalking horse, and under the presentation of that he shoots his wit. [V.4.1041]

2. Determine the speaker and to whom each is addressed. Explain the meaning of the word in each situation, based on its usage. How does the meaning of wit change in these different contexts?
3. Considering all these instances, write a complete definition of the word that might satisfy Shakespeare.
4. Select two characters from among Rosalind, Celia, Touchstone and Orlando and explain how their stories would change if "wit" did not exist.

Why doesn't Rosalind identify herself to Orlando in the forest? Explore this question by considering two very different ideas about Rosalind: one from Orlando's point of view and one uttered by Rosalind disguised as Ganymede. Read both Orlando's poetic description of her which Celia discovers (III.2.137 – 50), and Rosalind's forecast of herself as Orlando's wife in IV.1.138 – 145.

1. Define the attributes of the classical heroines which Orlando feels have been "distilled" in Rosalind. Under what circumstance does Orlando write this description? Why does he write it? Who does he expect to read the poem?
2. Paraphrase the animal images Ganymede predicts in Rosalind in your own words. Under what circumstances is this description spoken? To whom is it addressed?
3. Write a paragraph describing any problems that Rosalind might encounter in a marriage to Orlando if he expected her to be as his poem describes. Write another paragraph explaining any disappointments Orlando might endure in a marriage to Rosalind if she behaved the way Ganymede warns.
4. Describe how Shakespeare uses the friendship that grows between Orlando and Ganymede to reduce the potential for misunderstandings in the marriage of Orlando and Rosalind. Cite specific instances where the two "guys" were able to air their ideas more honestly than two avowed lovers could.

"Love" appears in the text of *As You Like It* over one hundred times, and references to marriage abound. Shakespeare offers many different views of love.

1. Find the following statements in the play, identify the speaker of each quotation and write a brief interpretation of what is meant and why it is said.

...love no man in good earnest, nor no further in sport neither, than with safety of a pure blush thou mayst in honour come off again. I.2.26 – 28.

If thou rememberest not the slightest folly that ever love did make thee run into, thou hast not loved. II.4.29 – 31.

The worst fault you have is to be in love.

'Tis a fault I will not change for your best virtue. III.2.274-276

Dead Shepherd, now I find they saw of might, who ever loved that loved not at first sight? III.5.81 – 82.

...men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them, but not for love. IV.1.96 – 98.

...that thou didst know how many fathom deep I am in love! But it cannot be sounded; my affection hath an unknown bottom, like the Bay of Portugal. IV.1.190 – 194

I press in here, sir, amongst the rest of the country copulatives, to swear and to forswear, according as marriage binds and blood breaks. V.4.53 – 56.

2. What effect has Shakespeare created by presenting such a variety of views on love in one play?
3. Describe how the structure and content of these moments in II.7 and III.2 foreshadow Orlando's relationship with the Duke in V.4.1 – 33. Consider also their influence on your interpretation of V.4.166 – 167.

Touchstone also imitates other's speech and attitudes. Examine his exchange with Rosalind in III.2.84 – 112.

1. Read the passage aloud noting the very regular and choppy rhythm of the verse. Why would Shakespeare make use of such an odd, halting beat?
2. Be certain that you completely understand the many images. Touchstone's are bawdy. Does Rosalind appreciate his imitation of love poetry? Touchstone normally speaks only prose in the play. How does this influence the effect of his impromptu poetry?
3. Interpret Shakespeare's purpose in Touchstone's response to Orlando's poem in praise of Rosalind. What does it imply about the quality of Orlando's verse? What does it reveal about Touchstone's opinion of this mode of wooing? What does it lead you to expect from Touchstone when he falls in love? Do you think it encourage Rosalind to be more critical of Orlando's approach to wooing?

