



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1987 Volume II: Epic, Romance and the American Dream

---

## **A Guide to Teaching the Interpretation of Shakespeare's "As You Like It"**

Curriculum Unit 87.02.09  
by Dwight H. Inge

This curriculum unit on the study of William Shakespeare's play "As You Like It" involves a demonstration on how to relate the work to the lives of inner-city youth, although the unit will not be limited to this use exclusively. With proper consideration of grade level and the various ability levels within each, the unit can be used in Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth grades. Minor alterations and adjustments can be made effectively.

If "As You Like It" is to be considered a "romantic" comedy, then the term "romantic" must be identified. "Romance" is one of those words with which, over the centuries, the level of immediate association has become so significant that the word cannot be accurately decoded by a modern, twentieth-century youth, unless an adequate sociological heritage and historical development is presented to him first. That is to say, the distinction between "courtly" love and "romantic" love, which modern scholars so carefully observe in late 16th century Elizabethan drama, does not, for all practical purposes, exist for the modern adolescent. Rather, he finds before him a complex integration of both, or, of all aspects of sexual attraction. Romantic and/or courtly love (i.e., marriage and/or seduction) can and do exist both in the wealthy class and in the poor class.

This unit will concentrate on the acquisition of analytical skills through literature, composition, and language study. Students will be encouraged to think about what they have read, to be aware of the implications of what is being studied and to relate a wide range of feelings and ideas concerning the human condition; of their own environment. Using this method will increase comprehension skills and will give students a sense of background relative to this literature. Through this method, the students should gain a permanent knowledge of the play, or, the play might become a lasting, useful reference in the minds of the students.

Students will be able to:

1. develop the ability to interpret literature and complex ideas
2. develop vocabulary of literary terms
3. recognize, discuss, and write about universal themes in literature
4. compare and contrast characters and plays
5. develop a knowledge of how conflicts can be destructive
6. relate their own background and experience to literature
7. become familiar with Elizabethan English

8. demonstrate comprehension by paraphrasing or summarizing scenes and/or acts
5. develop positive attitudes toward literature that has stood the test of time.
10. make use of the imagination

Students will concentrate on the texts, and their own ideas. I choose to eliminate most of the secondary literature and study helps, which tend to obfuscate the students' interest.

A study will be presented to show the difference between a theatrical production of the play and the reading of them. Students will discuss the effects of the following, on a live performance:

1. Language
2. tone
3. mime
4. gesture
5. movement
6. makeup
7. hair
8. costume
9. decor
10. Lighting
11. sound effects
12. music
13. accessories, etc.

Students will discuss the importance of personality in the actor, and how, as readers, we must add personality to the parts assigned in class. This is accomplished by coaching students on voice, tone, volume, emphasis, gesture, movement, etc.

Vocabulary study will occur when unfamiliar words appear in the text. Students should be encouraged to look at the textual notes and to use context clues to deduce some meanings. Students will include those words of importance in their personal notes for future reference.

## LESSON I

---

The objective of the first lesson is to help the student become aware of the similarity between family problems in Shakespeare's play and those problems they find in their own lives.

Students will list a few personality traits beside the names of the characters in ACT I, i of "As you Like It" in their notes. The names and characteristics will be listed one by one, as they are introduced in the text. The

students should not be burdened with tedious volumes of introductory material, lest they lose interest in the play before they've even begun reading it.

Orlando—the disenchanted younger brother of Oliver, who suffers abusive neglect from his older brother Oliver

Adam—was the honorable servant to Sir Rowland de Boys' dead father; now servant of sons Oliver (chiefly), Jaques, and Orlando

Oliver—the older brother of Orlando, and executor of the deceased father's estate

Dennis—servant to Oliver

Charles—wrestler and friend of Oliver

Vocabulary words:

1. bequeathed
2. usurper
3. dominion
4. courtier
5. vicar
6. prodigal
7. penury
8. albeit
9. requite

An activity (or assignment) with the vocabulary words might involve the students' replacement of the unfamiliar word with a modern term or paraphrase worked into the text, e.g., "thou prun'st a dead tree" replaced by "you're wasting time:" Then, the students might practice putting the Shakespearian term into their daily conversational language.

Students will be informed that Orlando is complaining about something and that they are to figure out what he

is saying in his speech that begins the play, ACT I,i,11.1-28. They will study the passage silently and will then write a summary of its contents. Class discussion will follow to incorporate the views of various students.

1. What does “to breed me well” mean?
2. What is Jaques’ profit?
3. What is the significance of the references to oxen and horses?
4. What is it that Orlando will no longer endure?

Students may discuss sibling rivalry. Is it normal behavior? How many have experienced it in their own family?

Students will now be assigned parts to be read aloud in class. The teacher will be taking a part.

In ACT I,i the following issues will be discussed:

1. the order of birth
2. threatening behavior
3. Adam’s mistreatment by Oliver
4. References to Rosalind’s plight
5. Why do people find Orlando attractive?

In “As You Like It” the reader can learn about the characters through dialogue: conversation between characters. Dialogue may be used to give insights into the personalities of the characters by showing how they think, or interact with each other.

Using the text, the students will cite and discuss an instance of conversation that clearly gives the reader facts or clues about the personality of a character.

1. What sort of a person is the character?
2. What parts of the dialogue lead you to this conclusion?
3. How do the characters feel toward each other?

For homework, students may write, for example, an analysis of the dialogue between Charles and Oliver, ACT I,ii,11.125-181. Students might discuss Oliver's plan to get his brother killed by Charles the wrestler, and the reasons for this plot, etc.

## LESSON II

---

Students will list a few character traits beside the names of the characters that emerge in ACT I,ii.

Celia—the play's heroine, daughter to Frederick (usurper of the real Duke's throne, and the Duke's brother), devoted friend of her cousin Rosalind

Rosalind—witty heroine and daughter to the banished Duke

Touchstone—the clown of Duke Frederick's court

Le Beau—a courtier attending Duke Frederick

Students will be assigned parts and will read aloud in class. Discussion or questions are invited and encouraged as the reading is in progress. Immediate clarification of any difficulty is essential for students. The following questions should be pondered:

1. What is the reputation of Charles as a wrestler?
2. What does Celia think of Orlando's appearance, and what counsel does she give him?

Students will discuss Orlando's speech, ACT I,ii,11.194-206.

1. What feelings are conveyed here?
2. Orlando seems to have a low opinion of himself.  
Give a few examples supporting this statement.
3. What are the results of the wrestling match?
4. Why has Duke Frederick's favorable opinion of Rosalind changed?

Vocabulary words:

1. withal
2. Lineaments (of nature)
3. Whetstone
4. foresworn
5. ere
6. quintain

## LESSON III

---

This lesson involves a test of knowledge. The objective is to provide the students with an opportunity to recall significant events or subjects, as significant enough to remember. Students will read ACT I,iii for homework, in preparation for the quiz:

1. Who is in love with Orlando? How did this come about?
2. What command does Duke Frederick Rosalind? Why?
3. How does Celia respond to her father's command? Why?
4. Which of the cousins displays an acute sense of intelligence or leadership qualities? Explain.

Following the quiz, students will divide into small groups to discuss answers. Students will also discuss the plan of Rosalind and Celia to seek the banished Duke, and will discuss the role of women in the 16th century. Group leaders will present summary answers to the entire class.

### ***Vocabulary words:***

1. curs
2. burrs

## LESSON IV

---

Students will read ACT II, i-iii to themselves, and will write a summary of the contents. They should be aware of the following:

1. the women, accompanied by Touchstone the clown leave the palace
2. Adam warns Orlando not to enter Oliver's house for fear of death
3. Adam offers Oliver the money he has saved for his old age and offers his accompaniment away from the court

Students will verbally analyze the statement by Orlando to Adam, "thou prun' st a rotten tree." (ACT II,iii,1.63)

### **Vocabulary words:**

1. venison
2. similes
3. sinewy

## LESSON V

---

In ACT II, iv & v, the shepherds Corin and Silvius will be introduced: Corin, an old, kind shepherd: Silvius, a shepherd who is in love with Phoebe. Students will be assigned parts and will be coached on the presentation of the lines in order to convey accurate meanings.

Students will discuss "love." Silvius says, in ACT II,iv,1.34, "If thou rememb'rest not the slightest folly/That ever love did make thee run into,/Thou hast not lov'd:"

### **Vocabulary words:**

1. folly
2. succour
3. churlish
4. melancholy

Students will be made aware that Celia and Rosalind have attempted to purchase a farm to set up residence in the forest regions.

Students will read ACT II,vi silently, and will decipher the information that Orlando presents to Adam. Here Orlando is going to seek food and asks Adam to hold on to life until he returns.

From reading ACT II,vi & vii, students will discuss the role of the fool or clown (Touchstone):

1. What is his purpose?
2. Why are fools allowed to say whatever they want?
3. Is this fool intelligent?
4. What is the fool trying to say about time?
5. Compare the professional fools (comedians) of today with inner-city environmental elements such as loquacious alcoholics, the mentally disturbed, drug abusers, etc.

Students will discuss Orlando's behavior when he confronts the duke when dining. For homework students will write an analysis of the following speech by Jaques: ACT II,vii,11.141-161

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players:  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many, parts,  
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,  
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.  
And then the shining school-boy, with his stachel  
And shining morning face, creeping like snail  
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover  
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad  
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,  
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,  
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,  
etc., etc.



Students should be aware that man goes through different stages of life. Certain changes are inevitable, within and without. Discussion on how to deal with certain unwanted but inevitable changes, e.g., aging and death in the immediate family, i.e., parent or sibling. Also, discussion of stereotypes of different stages, e.g., all teenagers are careless and disrespectful: all old people are bad drivers. Discuss the whole idea of identifying "age."

## LESSON VI

---

Reading ACT III,i, students should know that Duke

Frederick has commanded Oliver to find his brother or lose his life, and that Oliver has stated openly to the Duke Frederick that he has never loved his own brother Orlando. Students may discuss the following questions or issues as they may be related to the play:

1. How would they feel if an outside authority dictated to them how they should relate to members of their own family? Consider modern situations
2. Discuss role of modern social worker in family intervention situations. Also, abortion, divorce, custody, etc.

Reading ACT II,ii, students will be assigned parts and will stop periodically to discuss the paradoxical views of Touchstone concerning life in the court and life as a shepherd. Students will discuss how manners of the court might be ridiculous in the forest, and the converse.

Students will consider Rosalind's masquerade as a man:

1. Is it realistic?
2. What is Rosalind's intention?

Vocabulary words: 1. uncouth 6. traverse

2. libertine 7. athwart
3. wainscot 8. tilter
4. bawdry
5. tapster

## LESSON VII

---

Students will read ACT III,iii & iv, and discuss love, courtship, marriage, (dating), etc.: the ironic meeting of Rosalind as Ganymede with her father.

Students will discuss the use of critical, sarcastic humor as it functions in social relations. For instance, a student may suffer from being “ranked” upon, or “cut” on, because he happens to be wearing an inferior brand of sneakers. This “humor” is entertainment for the “cutters,” and serves to establish their superiority (or “rank”) to the one “ranked” upon. Also, the following elements should be noted:

- a. audience (i.e., impressing onlookers or friends at the expense of the one ranked upon
- b. behavioral influence/modification (e.g., the victim buys a better brand of sneakers, etc.
- c. verbal skills developed in competitive ranking

Students will discuss how humor functions in the entire play.

Reading ACT III, v, Phoebe is introduced. Phoebe falls in love with the transvestite Rosalind. Students will give their views on the sexuality alluded to, both in Ganymede and Phoebe. Discuss topics in the subject of sexuality:

- a. masculinity/femininity
- b. homosexuality

### ***Vocabulary words:***

1. chide
2. atomies
3. blank verse
4. fathom

## LESSON VIII

---

In ACT IV,i,11.21-24, Rosalind (Ganymede) observes the economic predicament of Jaque, and how he has apparently sacrificed one thing (his own property) to afford another (travelling, or, seeing others' property). Students will prepare written analysis of the principles of economic compensation in a personal or social (political) situation: e.g.,

- a. buying a car vs. going to college
- b. a mayor's decision to create jobs vs. welfare

Students will then discuss the accuracy of Rosalind's observation and the validity or necessity of Jaque's predicament, i.e., whether Rosalind's observation is appropriate, judgmental, prejudiced, etc., and whether or not Jaque's situation can be viewed from another perspective.

Rosalind (as Ganymede) says she can cure Orlando of his lovesickness for Rosalind if he will verbally act out his affections for Rosalind, as if Ganymede WERE Rosalind. To Orlando's knowledge, Ganymede is, of course, a shepherd boy. Rosalind feels that Orlando needs instruction in the art of romance. Topics of discussion or written assignment:

- a. one's source of instruction in courtship, i.e., who is the appropriate instructor, when, how, and where does one, should one, learn to court?
- b. Shakespeare's use of transvestite-ism
- c. graffiti (Orlando's tree carving) as an expression of romantic affection, i.e., permanency and visibility.  
Cf. "risk" involved if affair terminates

In ACT IV,ii & iii, Silvius is in love with Phoebe (who is in love with Ganymede). Silvius is used by Phoebe to carry her love letter to Ganymede (Rosalind). Ganymede tried to discourage Phoebe's love by denying Phoebe's authorship of the letter in the presence of Silvius. Silvius reports Ganymede's reaction to Phoebe's letter, to Phoebe.

Students should analyze the aspects of the triad romantic relationship of Phoebe, Silvius, and Rosalind (Ganymede).

- a. role of the go-between
- b. use of deception (malignant and benign)

- c. compare the experience of rejection in Phoebe and Silvius, i.e., why the rejection, and how it effects the affair
- d. Silvius' blind, servile love, which leads him to do anything for Phoebe, even to be used as the agent in promoting a competitive affair.

**Vocabulary words:**

- 1. swaggerer
- 2. antiquity

Also, in ACT IV,iii, Oliver has been sent to find Orlando, Oliver encounters an angry lion. Orlando saves Oliver's life, and is wounded in the process. Orlando sends Oliver to Ganymede for help. Ganymede swoons (like a woman) at news of Orlando's wound. Students will consider the topic of reconciliation, forgiveness, between Orlando and Oliver, as it relates to the inheritance, and, the dramatic circumstances which, perchance, bring about this more or less forced, crisis reconciliation.

Students can compare such crisis reconciliations as they may occur in the following circumstances:

- a. funeral gatherings
- b. weddings
- c. reunions, family or school
- d. automobile accident with former enemy

Consider a forced, circumstantial reconciliation with a premeditated design to be reconciled. Can both be genuine? Can both be insincere?

## **FINAL ASSIGNMENT**

---

The final task will consist of an expository essay. students will write a review of "As You Like It," based on the following steps of pre-writing, writing, and post-writing:

- 1. Brainstorming, listing of ideas, topics, etc.
- 2. Outline
- 3. Rough Draft
- 4. Completed essay: each student selects two other students to read his or her essay and receives constructive criticism

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

French, Marilyn. *Shakespeare's Division of Experience* New York: Ballantine Books, 1981.

A collection of essays offering a feminist's perspective on each of Shakespeare's plays, providing insight into attitudes toward men, women, love, and power.

Halio, Jay L. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "As You Like It."* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968.

Harbage, Alfred. *As They Like It* . New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947.

This book deals with issues of morality in relation to the plays.

Meader, William G. *Courtship in Shakespeare* . New York: Columbia-University Press, 1952.

This book explains the process of courtship as conceived by Shakespeare in his plays.

Muir, Kenneth. *Shakespeare/The Comedies* . Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965

A collection of contemporary critical essays on Shakespeare's comedies.

Ornstein, Robert. *Shakespeare's Comedies* . Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1986.

A comprehensive view of Shakespeare's achievement in the comedies.

Pettet, E. C. *Shakespeare and the Romance Tradition* London: Staples Press Limited, 1949.

A series of essays discussing the treatment of the romance convention.

Smith, Hallett. *Shakespeare's Romances* . San Marino: The Huntington Library. 1972.

A discussion of Shakespeare's imagination and the romantic traditions.

Trump, Lloyd J. Milier, Delmas F. *Secondary School Curriculum Improvement*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc. 1979.

---

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>