



# ASL SHAKESPEARE PROJECT

## LESSON PLAN 8: *Twelfth Night*

SECTION *Twelfth Night*; SUBSECTION Introduction

### OBJECTIVE

To explore the historical context of revelry during the Twelfth Night after Christmas and to analyze the theme of revelry as a value.

### BACKGROUND

The play's title refers to the Twelfth Night after Christmas. In Elizabethan England, people celebrated with revels and festivity between Christmas and Twelfth Night (twelve days after Christmas, or January 6), the date marking the visit of the three kings to Bethlehem to worship the baby Jesus. During these celebrations, that included the performance of comedies in the court, the overturning of traditional hierarchical rule was permitted. This holiday period evolved from the Feast of Fools during which values and ways of life normally held sacred were mocked.

### THE LORD OF MISRULE

Twelfth Night was a part of the year-end festivities throughout the British Isles and France. These celebrations originated in the fifth century when French and English churches created the "Feast of Fools," during which values and ways of life normally held sacred were mocked. The Lord of Misrule was selected to be in charge of these festivities that usually included singing, dancing, and feasts. A cake was usually baked that contained a pea, or a coin, and then sliced and delivered to guests. Whoever received the piece of cake with the hidden coin or pea became the Lord of Misrule, who would be responsible for overturning of traditional hierarchical rule.

These celebrations provide a glimpse into the value of leisure activities that was pervasive in the culture of the time. In his essay about daily life in Elizabethan England, John Thirsk describes a lifestyle that included work mixed with pleasure. Pastimes included socializing, playing sports and games, dancing, singing, and listening to music.

### ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

*Shakespeare: An Oxford Guide*. Edited by Stanley Wells and Lena Cowen Orlin. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994

### WHAT TO DO

First, watch Act 2, Scene 3 (commonly called the Kitchen Scene) on the DVD of *Twelfth Night*, where revelry and drunkenness are displayed to comic perfection (some of this scene appears on the website under The Project section, Performance, Movie 3; Sign Play Example 1). The graph on the next page shows some examples of other comments about revelry from earlier in the play. Share this graph with the students before viewing the scene. Then ask them to do the same with Act 2, scene 3.

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Statements about the importance of enjoying life as a healthy way to toast the merits of his niece.	Act 1 Scene 3: Sir Toby Belch to Maria	I am sure care's an enemy to life.	Toby introduces the theme that it is important to enjoy life.
Drinking	Act 1 Scene 3: Sir Toby Belch to Maria	With drinking healths to my niece; I'll drink to her as long as there is a passage in my throat and drink in Illyria.	Toby sees drinking as a healthy way to toast the merits of his niece.
Dancing	Act 1 Scene 3: Sir Toby Belch to Sir Andrew	Referring to dancing and revels: "What shall we do else?"	Toby infers that they are fated, born to dance and celebrate.
Singing	Act 2 Scene 4: Feste to Orsino	No pains, sir: I take pleasure in singing, sir.	Feste says that he enjoys singing, even when the theme is sorrowful

It is the ultimate fate of the characters that determines the outcome of this theme.

- > Throughout the play, Sir Toby Belch praises Maria for her wit and trickery. How is she rewarded in the end of the play?
- > How is the wisdom of Feste recognized? By Olivia? By Viola?
- > How is Malvolio punished in the end of the play for his criticism of revelry and lack of humor?