

# THE 2018 BALTIMORE CENTER STAGE MOBILE UNIT



TWELFTH  
NIGHT

## Shakespeare Who?

William Shakespeare is the most famous playwright in the Western world, but we know shockingly little about his personal life. He was born in 1564 in the rural English town, Stratford-upon-Avon where he built a family and by 1592 eventually made his way to London. In London he worked as both an actor and a writer, producing nearly 37 plays at a rate of two a year until 1611. Shakespeare was also a prolific poet, writing over 100 sonnets, many still popular today.

Playwrights in Elizabethan England used current political events and stories from the past to shape their work. Shakespeare's plays fell generally into three categories:

**Histories** were stories about England's past. Shakespeare wrote plays about King John, Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VI, Richard III, and Henry VIII.

**Tragedies** told unhappy tales which often ended in deaths, like Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, Othello, and Hamlet. The tragedies often contained lots of blood and gore to entertain the crowds.

**Comedies**, on the other hand, could be relied upon for happy endings, often weddings. Shakespeare's Two Gentlemen of Verona is especially happy; it ends with two weddings! Twelfth Night is one of Shakespeare's most popular comedies!

Shakespeare has stayed relevant even today with theaters around the world regularly producing nearly all of his plays. Some have been adapted into popular movies and musicals; for example, West Side Story, is an adaptation of Romeo & Juliet. The movie 10 Things I Hate About You, follows the plot of Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew. And The Lion King is based on the plot of his play, Hamlet.

## When?

1564: William Shakespeare is born

1567: First permanent English Theater building built

1598: William Shakespeare opens The Globe Theater

1616: Shakespeare is buried in Stratford-upon-Avon

## Facts from Elizabethan England

-No women were allowed to perform on stage; all parts were played by men or boys.

-The Black Plague raged across Europe, infecting thousands and shutting down theaters.

-Queen Elizabeth was the daughter of Henry VIII, who beheaded her mother Anne Boleyn.

-No one drank water in Elizabethan times, instead they drank beer or wine. Water was often contaminated.

## Our Production of Twelfth Night

In Baltimore Center Stage's production of *Twelfth Night*, we follow the story of a set of twins, Viola and Sebastian, who have been separated after a shipwreck. They wash ashore separately in a strange new country of Illyria, an island floating and existing in its own time. Viola disguises herself as a man in order to protect her identity but in doing so becomes the third point in a love triangle between a noble lady, Olivia and a duke, Orsino.

We are using only five actors to play over a dozen characters. All of the actors play both men and women, embodying many characters over the course of the play. Keep an eye out for quick costume changes to show when an actor changes characters! This script was crafted by Baltimore Center Stage's own Shakespeare expert, Gavin Witt. He used strategic cuts and reorganization to focus on character connections and relationships. Director Daniel Bryant identifies the heart of Twelfth Night as "the magnetic pull that passion has on love, ambition, and revenge."

## Who's Who in Twelfth Night

**Orsino** - The Duke of Illyria

**Valentine** - One of Orsino's servants

**Viola (aka Cesario)** - Shipwrecked, twin sister of Sebastian

**Sea Captain** - Saves Viola from the shipwreck

**Sir Toby Belch** - Olivia's drunken uncle

**Feste** - Olivia's jester/fool

**Sir Andrew Aguecheek** - Wealthy visitor to Illyria

**Antonio** - Foreign mariner, saves Sebastian from the shipwreck

**Sebastian** - Shipwrecked, twin brother of Viola

**Maria** - Olivia's lady-in-waiting

**Olivia** - Noble lady of Illyria

**Malvolio** - Olivia's chief steward

**An Officer, A Priest**

## Shakespeare's Language

Shakespeare's language may sound funny to us today, but he has had one of the greatest influences on the English language of any writer. Because his work is so widely read and performed, he helped standardize English grammar, spelling, and vocabulary. Shakespeare introduced over 1,700 original words and phrases that we still use today. Have you ever used "lonely," "gossips," or "break the ice?" You can thank Shakespeare for that!

Shakespeare famously wrote in blank verse—language that uses specific rhythms, or “metre” —similar to poetry and rap or spoken word that you know today. He was also famous for using rhyming verse and prose (conversational language) to make a point or to show different status of characters.

Shakespeare’s language can appear challenging, but with some practice it can be easy to understand. Here are a few quick translations to keep in mind as you watch the play:

**Thee, Thou, Thy, and Thine (You and Your)** Shakespeare sometimes uses the words “thee / thou” instead of “you” and the word “thy / thine” instead of “your.” Sometimes he uses both “you” and “thy” in the same speech. This is simply because in Tudor England the older generation said “thee” and “thy” to denote a status or reverence for authority. Therefore when addressing a king the older “thou” and “thy” would be used, leaving the newer “you” and “your” for more informal occasions.

**Art (Are)** The same is true of “art,” meaning “are.” So a sentence beginning “thou art” simply means “You are.”

**Ay (Yes)** “Ay” simply means “yes.” So, “Ay, My Lady” simply means “Yes, My Lady.”

**Would (Wish)** Although the word “wish” does appear in Shakespeare, like when Romeo says “I wish I were a cheek upon that hand,” we often find “would” used instead. For example, “I would I were...” means “I wish I were...”

**Give Me Leave To (Allow Me To)** “To give me leave to,” simply means “To allow me to.”

**Alas (Unfortunately)** “Alas” is a very common word that isn’t used today. It simply means “unfortunately,” but in modern English, there isn’t an exact equivalent.

**Adieu (Goodbye)** “Adieu” simply means “Goodbye.”  
Sirrah (Sir) “Sirrah” means “Sir” or “Mister.”

**-eth** Sometimes the endings of Shakespearean words sound alien even though the root of the word is familiar. For example “speaketh” simply means “speak” and “sayeth” means “say”

### Theater Etiquette

Although live theater and movies have a lot in common—action, comedy and romance—the guidelines for attending theater are a little different from viewing something on a screen.

**Before the show:** turn off cell phones, dispose of food and

drink, and remember that the people around you are also watching and listening carefully.

**During the show:** As playwright Dominique Morisseau says, “You are allowed to laugh audibly... This is live theater and the actors need you to engage with them, not distract them or thwart their performance... This is community. Let’s go.”  
After the show: Stick around for a post-show conversation with the actors and director to learn more about the show and their process.

### Discussion Questions

1. Does Love have the power to make people do crazy things?
2. Are the actions the characters take for love realistic? Can you see them in our world today?
3. Who do you relate with most from the play?