THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

The Merry Wives of Windsor
By William Shakespeare
Directed by Antoni Cimolino

Grade Recommendation
Suitable for Grade 7 and up.

Content Advisory for Students
Contains some mature themes, including sexual innuendo.

Student Matinée Dates
May 13, 21, 23, 29; June 6, 18; September 18, 25; October 8, 17.

About the Play
The play is thought to have been written in 1597–1598. Said to be one of Shakespeare’s funniest comedies, it was the only one to be set in what was, at the time, contemporary Elizabethan England.

Synopsis
Attempting to mediate a quarrel between the country justice Robert Shallow and the fat knight Sir John Falstaff, parson Hugh Evans suggests that Shallow divert his energies into securing a marriage between his nephew, Abraham Slender, and Anne Page.

Though Anne’s father, George Page, is well disposed to such a match, her mother, Mrs. Page, favours the suit of the Frenchman Doctor Caius. Anne herself wants neither: her heart belongs to a young gentleman named Mr. Fenton.

Falstaff, meanwhile, has designs on both Mrs. Page and her friend Mrs. Ford, because both have access to considerable wealth. When Mrs. Page and Mrs. Ford receive identical love letters from Falstaff, they compare notes — literally — and plan revenge. Meanwhile, their husbands have been made privy to Falstaff’s plans, and the jealous Frank Ford begins setting a trap of his own.

The merry wives have their fun with Falstaff and Ford, eventually letting their husbands in on the game. During their ultimate prank — in which much of the community participates — Anne Page steals away with Fenton. When the two return to announce that they are married, all are reconciled to the inevitable, and Mrs. Page invites everyone to her home to “laugh this sport o’er by a country fire.”

Curriculum Connections

Global Competencies:
• Creativity
• Learning to Learn/Self-Awareness
• Communication
• Collaboration
• Critical Thinking

Grades 7–12:
• Language/English (listening to understand, speaking to communicate, reading for meaning)
• Drama, Music, Visual Art

Grades 7–12:
• Health and PE (conflict resolution, harassment, bullying, care for self and others, stereotypes and assumptions)

Grade 11:
• Introduction to Anthropology, Psychology and Sociology (explaining social behaviour)
• Gender Studies (power relations, sex and gender)
• Equity, Diversity and Social Justice (the social construction of identity, power and relations)
• Dynamics of Human Relationships (self-concept and healthy relationships, making decisions)

GRADE 12:
• Human Development throughout the Lifespan (factors affecting social-emotional development)
• Equity and Social Justice: From Theory to Practice (power relations)
• World History Since the Fifteenth Century (social, economic and political context)

THEMES
• Issues of Society and Class: Marriage and Wealth; Mistrust of Outsiders; Relationships
• Power and Gender: Marriage, Love and Courtship; Misogyny and Female Power; Language and Communication; Vice and Virtue
• Trust and Deceit: Humiliation and Shame; Lies and Disguise; Jealousy; Revenge

CLASSROOM WARM-UP
The play is full of rich, fun and colourful insults.
Precut the lines from the table below.
Give each student a line and have them walk around the room, reading their line out loud several times.
Once they are comfortable with the text, invite them to discuss with a partner what they think each of their insult lines mean.

Have students continue walking around the room, this time saying their lines to one another as they pass in various ways: as if they are at a cocktail party telling jokes to one another; as if they were 1930s newspaper sellers yelling out their headline; as if they were at their favourite sports game rooting for their team; as if they were three-year-olds at a playground; as if they were spies, giving each other coded messages; as if they were singing opera; etc.

Have the students suggest other scenarios. Encourage them to be creative and just have fun with the lines!

Leave your pribbles and prabbles.
You damned epicurean rascal
How now, Mephistopheles?
Froth and scum, thou liest!
Vanish like a hailstone!
You have a little whey face.
You hodge-pudding, you bag of flax!
You lascivious turtle!
O, odious is your name!
You jealous wittily knave!
You are a Castalian King Urinal.
You peaking cornuto!
Hang you, dishonest varlet!
You shall die a flea’s death.
You polecat, you runnion!

You have a world of vile ill-favoured faults.
You Banbury cheese!
You latten Bilbo!
Rogue, hence, avaunt!
Let vultures gripe thy guts!
You jackanapes!
You mechanical salt-butter rogue!
You are a curtal dog.
Lord, Lord, you’re a wanton!
Your guts are made of puddings.
You scurvy jac-dog!
You jealous rotten bell-wether!
O, you panderly rascal!
You rag, you baggage!
You superstitious idle-headed eld!

ENRICHMENT
Study Guide available at stratfordfestival.ca/studyguides
Prologues (interactive presentations on stage) at 11 a.m. before every student matinée except May 13, 23, 29; June 6; September 18; October 8, 17.
Workshops and post-show chats may be arranged by calling the Education Department at 519.271.4040, ext. 2354.
Festival Theatre and Costume Warehouse tours may be arranged by calling the Box Office at 1.800.567.1600.

BOOKING INFORMATION
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Tools for Teachers sponsored by

The Tools for Teachers program includes Prologues, Study Guides and Stratford Shorts

Production support is generously provided by Jane Petersen Burfield & family, by Dr. Desta Leavine in memory of Pauline Leavine and by Dr. M. Lee Myers