



American Players Theatre
Presents



William Shakespeare's
**THE MERRY WIVES OF
WINDSOR**
2015 STUDY GUIDE

American Players Theatre / PO Box 819 / Spring Green, WI 53588
www.americanplayers.org

***THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR* BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

2015 STUDY GUIDE

Cover photo: Colleen Madden, Brian Mani & Deborah Staples. Photo by Liz Lauren.

All photos by Carissa Dixon & Liz Lauren.

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If you have any questions or comments regarding the exercises or the information within this study guide, please contact Emily Beck, Education Coordinator, at 608-588-9207, or ebeck@americanplayers.org.

Who's Who in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

Character descriptions from *The Essential Shakespeare Handbook*



Frank Ford (David Daniel)

A citizen of Windsor. When he learns Falstaff is “in love” with his wife, he takes the alias “Brook” to gain intel from Falstaff.

Alice Ford (Deborah Staples)

One of Windsor’s “merry wives” who fools Falstaff to teach him and her jealous husband a lesson.



George Page (James Ridge)

A citizen of Windsor. When he learns Falstaff is “in love” with his wife, he is sure that the only thing the knight will get from Mistress Page is a reprimanding.

Margaret Page (Colleen Madden)

Another of Windsor’s “merry wives” who makes a mockery of Falstaff alongside Mistress Ford while trying to convince her daughter to marry Dr. Caius (even though Anne Doesn’t want to).



Anne Page (Aidaa Peerzada)

The Pages’ daughter, she intends to marry Fenton whatever her parents think.

Fenton (Nate Burger)

A young gentleman new to Windsor, in pursuit of Mistress Anne Page.



Sir John Falstaff (Brian Mani)

Known to audiences from the Shakespeare’s *Henry IV* and *V* series, the big lover-of-life is in pursuit of a rich mistress (or two) to pay his debts.

Sir Hugh Evans (Tim Gittings)

A Welsh parson who appoints himself the umpire in everyone else’s disputes.



Who's Who in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*



Dr. Caius (Jonathan Smoots)
A French physician and unsuccessful suitor to Anne Page.

Mistress Quickly (Sarah Day)
Dr. Caius' servant, she acts as the go-between for all the courting lovers.



Pistol (Jeb Burris)
A follower of Falstaff fired for refusing to deliver love letters to Mistresses Ford and Page.

Nym (Chiké Johnson)
A follower of Falstaff fired for refusing to deliver love letters to mistresses Ford and Page.



Bardolph (Wigasi Brant)
A follower of Falstaff who ends up serving beer for the Garter Inn.

Host of the Garter Inn (Chris Klopatek)
Host of the Inn where Falstaff lodges, he saves Sir Hugh and Dr. Caius from dueling by tricking them.



Robert Shallow (John Taylor Phillips)
A country justice who refuses to continue suffering Falstaff's abuses, he encourages his nephew, Slender, to pursue Anne Page.

Abraham Slender (Robert R. Doyle)
Shallow's kinsman and unlikely suitor to Anne Page.

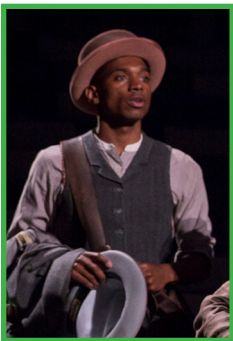


Who's Who in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*



Peter Simple (Eric Parks)
Slender's servant.

Robin (Marco Lama)
Falstaff's page.



John Rugby (Kyle Bullock)
Dr. Caius' servant.

**Robert & John (Danny Martinez
& Donovan Diaz)**
Servants to the Fords.



Windsor Kids / "Fairies"

Edward (Isaac Daniel), Robin (Marco Lama), Elizabeth Page (Svea Youngquist), William Page (Simon Ehlinger), Katherine (Lauren Knutson), Henry (Guidry Ridge)...



The children ultimately help to punish Falstaff with tormenting pinches as they pretend to be fairies.

About the Play

Though Windsor Castle resides in WINDSOR, ENGLAND, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is the only play Shakespeare ever wrote that's primarily about the Middle Class.

The town of WINDSOR ENGLAND – including good friends and neighbors the Fords and the Pages – prepares for the Order of the Garter Celebration, where the Knights of the Garter visit Windsor to display the banner of their arms. But not all the knights are as noble as the town had hoped, and there's an argument very early in the proceedings, as Shallow (a local county justice), his nephew Slender and Sir Hugh Evans (a Welsh parson) are upset at SIR JOHN FALSTAFF'S behavior and that of his associates, Nym, Pistol and Bardolph.

Slender – who has been knocked in the head by Falstaff – is one of several suitors for the Pages' daughter Anne, and is Master Page's choice to marry her. Sir Hugh sends a message to Mistress Quickly, Dr. Caius' housekeeper and a friend of Anne's, asking her to talk to Anne on Slender's behalf. Dr. Caius is also a suitor for Anne, and is Mistress Page's choice, so when he hears of Sir Hugh's interference, he becomes angry and sends word that he wants to challenge the parson to a duel. Fenton, a third suitor who is new to Windsor (and who is Anne's favorite), also approaches Mistress Quickly asking for her help in seeking Anne's hand.

SIR JOHN FALSTAFF appears in four Shakespearean plays. A legendary comedic character, Sir John Falstaff is a lovable coward who enjoys the finer things in life. Rumor has it that Queen Elizabeth commissioned *The Merry Wives of Windsor* directly from Shakespeare because she wanted to see a play about Falstaff in love.

SACK was a type of fortified wine now known as sherry. At one point Falstaff refers to it as "Sherris Sack" in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Meanwhile, Falstaff is having money problems largely due to his love of food and SACK, and can't afford to pay his men. Having met Mistresses Ford and Page, and having a monumental ego, he imagines they're both interested in him. So Falstaff writes them each an identical love letter in the hopes of seducing them, and

sweet-talking them into giving him their husbands' money. But when he asks Nym and Pistol to deliver the letters to the ladies, they refuse. Falstaff's page, Robin, takes the letters instead, and Falstaff fires the men who refused him. Nym and Pistol decide to take revenge by telling Master Page and Master Ford about the letters. Page dismisses the matter, but Ford is suspicious of his wife's fidelity and decides to test it. He gets the Host of THE GARTER INN to introduce him to Falstaff disguised as "Master Brook" so he can use the Knight to spy on Mistress Ford. The Host then averts the duel between Dr. Caius and Sir Hugh by directing them to different places.

THE GARTER INN was a real pub in Windsor until it was torn down some time before 1900 and replaced with the Harte and Garter Inn.

Mistresses Ford and Page receive Falstaff's letters, and quickly discover that they're identical. They decide to teach the errant knight a lesson. Mistress Quickly brings Falstaff a message from Mistress Ford asking him to meet her. Shortly thereafter, Master Ford, disguised as Master Brook, arrives at the Inn and convinces Falstaff to act as a go-between to Mistress Ford on his behalf, saying that he's in love with her, but wants to test her fidelity. But when he learns Falstaff has already made an appointment to see Mistress Ford, he is furious and resolves to catch him in the act of wooing his wife.

A BUCK BASKET is another term for a laundry basket. And since Elizabethans didn't have a means to shower often, it probably was pretty ripe in there.

Falstaff arrives at the Fords' house at the appointed hour and immediately makes his move. He is in the middle of expressing his love to Mistress Ford when Mistress Page brings news of Master Ford's approach. Falstaff escapes by hiding in a BUCK BASKET where he is covered in dirty, smelly clothes and eventually dumped in a muddy river. Having searched everywhere for his wife's "lover," Master Ford is embarrassed in front of his friends for looking like a jealous fool.

Mistresses Ford and Page once again enlist Mistress Quickly to bring Falstaff another invitation to visit Mistress Ford, which he accepts somewhat more reluctantly. “Master Brook” once again meets Falstaff. After his initial relief that his wife appears to be faithful, Ford learns from Falstaff that he escaped the previous encounter in the basket, and that a second appointment has already been made. He offers Falstaff more money to continue as his go-between.

Once again Ford arrives during the meeting and looks around wildly for Falstaff, but this time the knight escapes when the women disguise him as the Old Woman of Brainford, the elderly aunt of one of the Fords’ servants. Ford, who hates the Old Woman and believes she’s a witch, chases the disguised Falstaff off, beating him all the way. Having had enough of Master Ford’s jealous rages, the ladies tell their husbands what has happened, and all four decide to punish Falstaff.

HERNE THE HUNTER is a figure from English folklore who haunts Windsor woods, and is likely based on a local historical figure named Richard Horne, a poacher from the 1500s.

The women persuade Falstaff to disguise himself as **HERNE THE HUNTER**, complete with a huge set of stag horns, and meet them at night in Windsor Park. There, the whole town is waiting to frighten him disguised as fairies. Master Page decides to take advantage of the occasion by having Slender elope with Anne, while Mistress Page makes a similar arrangement with Dr. Caius. Fenton and Anne have other plans, though, and arrange with the Host to run off together to be married.

Falstaff is terrified by the sight of the “fairies,” who pinch him mercilessly. At last they decide he’s had enough, and all reveal themselves to the somewhat humbled Falstaff. Fenton and Anne return as husband and wife, while Slender and Dr. Caius find that they have married men in disguise. The Pages accept Anne’s marriage, and Falstaff is forgiven and invited back to dinner.



American Players Theatre's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*



Mistress Ford (Deborah Staples) and Mistress Page (Colleen Madden) head up the hijinks in this light Shakespearean comedy.

Merry Wives is often dismissed by academics as all froth and no substance. Regardless of that opinion, it certainly has staying power, and is one of the most commonly performed Shakespearean plays. And it's fairly easy to see why: it's fun and funny. It's easy to understand without being condescending, partly because it's a play about the middle class and uses the Elizabethan version of middle-class vernacular (the play is comprised of 87% prose and 13% verse. Compare that to this season's other Shakespeare, *Othello*, which is only 19% prose and 81% verse). Add to that another chance to meet up with one of Shakespeare's most beloved characters, Sir John Falstaff, who was killed off in the play *King Henry V*, and you've got a story with a lot to like.

APT's production of *Merry Wives* has the town of Windsor at its heart. Starting with the Flower of the Garter celebration, where the Knights of the Order of the Garter come to town to display their vestments, the people of Windsor are obviously proud of the event, and use it as an opportunity to show off their town. Director Tim Ocel has a lot of respect for the people of Windsor, and is reminded of other iconic pop-culture pieces that offer similar characters.

"I'm such an introvert, when I was a kid, I never went outside. I read books and I watched TV. And Windsor reminds me of Mayberry on *The Andy Griffith Show*," said Tim. "I'm also reminded of such works as *Our Town*, *The Music Man* and *Meet Me in St. Louis*. These works contain people who are honest and forthright; hard-working and resourceful. When a problem arises they take it on themselves with an intelligent wit and a practical point of view. Because to them, life itself is interesting. Life itself is an adventure."

The adventure begins with the arrival of Sir John Falstaff and his men. Knights are expected to be chivalrous, brave and selfless. Such is the irony of Falstaff, who is basically the opposite of all of those things. A man of large appetites – for women, for food, for wine and money – his main purpose in life is to indulge himself. But in spite of (or because of) all that, he's an audience favorite.

APT's Mistress Page, Colleen Madden, says: "So Falstaff and the rest of the knights come to town. We only meet Falstaff and his small, ragged bunch of men. And we're quite proud of our town, and want to show our best face, right? But on the other hand, when we meet Falstaff we learn that perhaps he's not as noble as he seems to be. His ego. It's as big as his belly. But it's kind of lovely, because he *loves* his girth. He really does. And he assumes that women must just look at him and fall in love with him. Which makes him kind of lovable. He's not an evil creature by any means. He just doesn't really realize his own limitations."



Falstaff (Brian Mani) has a thing for wine, food and ladies - not necessarily in that order.

But the play is *Merry Wives*, not *Merry Knights*, and it's about two women and how they live, run their households and manage their very different families (in addition to doling out comeuppance to knights who stray from the straight and narrow). Director Tim Ocel wanted to draw very specific distinctions between the Ford and Page households.

“The first scene with Master Page and Master Ford really fascinated me,” said Tim. “The marriages started to fascinate me. And I realized the play is really about the marriages of these two very different couples, and how those marriages evolve over the course of the play.”



Master Ford's (David Daniel) jealousy threatens his marital bliss.



The Fords (Colleen Madden and James Ridge) are married both on stage and off, so they've had some practice as husband and wife.

Indeed, we learn fairly early on how different those couples are, simply through the men's reactions to hearing from Nym and Pistol that Falstaff intends to seduce their wives. Master Page knows immediately that it's not going to happen, while Master Ford is suspicious and jealous. As *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* journalist Mike Fischer put it: Even as [Actor David] Daniel conveys Frank's [Master Ford's] insecurities, he never lets us lose sight of this man's abiding love for his wife; Staples' Alice is so wounded by his frightening rages because she loves him right back...The Fords' makeup scene disgusts George Page, whose marriage to Margaret is usually presented as more steady and solid.”

Just as the Fords and Pages have very different ideas about what should happen in a marriage, so do Mistress Page and Master Page have different ideas about the perfect suitor for their daughter. Master Page prefers the political ties of the County Justice's kinsman, Slender while Mistress Page sides with the financially stable Dr. Caius. They even try to trick each other – and maybe more importantly, Anne – by secretly making arrangements to

marry their daughter off to their selected husbands to be. In the end, neither of their opinions on the subject matter much, as Anne and Fenton elope using her parents' own plot against them (even though Fenton admitted to only being interested in her money when he first began to pursue her). The takeaway is that Anne – like the Fords and Pages – is able to follow her heart and marry the man she finds most fitting, and her parents happily accept her decision — eventually.

Even with the varied relationships that make up the plots and subplots of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, perhaps the most important relationship is the one between Mistresses Ford and Page. After all, they are



Things get a little tense when no one in the Page family agrees on who Anne should marry.



It's helpful to have friends playing friends on stage.

at these women and realize there's a lot of depth to them. This play is squarely about the middle class, and about their morals and their wishes and their ideals. It's about men and women, but I love that it is very much about women.

Deborah: And they act independently of their men. Which is not something you find a great, great deal in Shakespeare. It's usually in reaction to, in conjunction with or about a man. And we kind of go our own way on that. It's really wonderful. They don't naysay each other, they're constantly building on each other's ideas. They really are fun.

Colleen: It's really charming to be in this relationship and, and to play these women. And it helps that we get along so well. And we really make each other laugh a lot, and so we're having a ball doing it.

the ones generally thinking, plotting and outsmarting the Windsor men.

In a recent interview, Deborah and Colleen had this to say about that relationship, and what it means to them (which is vital to APT's production):

Deborah: I love the relationship that these women have, and that they have their own particular marriages that are very different from each other. They have their own family situations. And it is incredibly rare that you have this middle-class girlfriend relationship in Shakespeare.

Colleen: They're so smart, these two women. I feel like we're asking the audience to look



THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

At APT, the productions begin more than a year in advance with directors discussing the plays with APT staff and designers. Ideas evolve during collaborative meetings where the people involved balance what they want to do with what is possible.

Nathan Stuber, the Scenic Designer for *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and also APT's Assistant Technical Director, says designing for an outdoor stage can be complicated.

"The biggest challenge is obviously the weather, as far as keeping things waterproof (water makes wood



Computer rendering of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* set by Nate Stuber.



A costume rendering of Sarah Day as the Bat Queen by Holly Payne.

expand and contract and makes metal rust), so sometimes you have to overbuild. A lot of the time, the designs might not balance because at the matinees you have to consider the bright light coming down on the set, so anything white or light-colored can blind the audience or the actors. At the same time, you don't want a lot of black things up there that absorb heat. So, it's a delicate process."

Weather plays a role in costume design, too. APT has heat and cold plans that include pockets for ice and heat packs built into the costumes, as well as layers that can be shed or added depending on the weather. But for all the thought that goes into how everything functions, it's incredibly important that the costumes are also visually appealing, and serve their purpose within the story.

Costume Designer Holly Payne says: "I think finding the characters' personalities in their clothing is very satisfying. It's a little bit of color coding - indicating a family or group with a specific color - but not too much. The focus was to make them look like real people that you'd meet on the street. In 1895."

Director Tim Ocel and his design team decided to update this production from Shakespeare's time (the 1500s) to the 1800s. A great deal of thought went into making that decision in order to ensure they could still accurately tell the story in a different century. "To really make the characters real, we thought updating the time period was a great idea," says Holly. "Since there is a war mentioned in the script - the war where Falstaff becomes a knight, actually - we looked at the Boer Wars of the late 1800s. And the period has a beautiful silhouette for ladies and a very trim, clean look for men.

"The process of designing costumes is always a narrowing of options," Holly continues. "By saying yes to red, you say no to purple, green, magenta, etc. So the whole process is actually a multitude of tiny decisions. We wanted the look of the costumes to be very real, tactile, be able to touch them with your eyes."

That's a lot of thought and effort (especially for a show Holly refers to as "sneaky big," with a lot of characters and special costumes), but designing fun costumes can be its own reward. Holly says "The fairies are my favorite part of the show. Once we decided on the time period, I started researching Victorian Halloween costumes. There

are some crazy ones! All of the fairies, even the dog, are referenced, in some way, in that research. And turning Sarah Day into a Bat Queen - fantastic fun!"

Here's some of the photo research Holly used to inspire the fairy costumes. Sweet dreams!



The Merry Wives of Windsor Photo Summary

1. The story unfolds with the middle-class town of Windsor preparing for the Flower of the Garter Celebration where the Knights of the Garter gather every year to display their vestments. But one Knight - Sir John Falstaff - has already gotten into an argument with the locals.



Shallow: Knight, you have beaten my men, killed my deer and broken open my lodge.

Falstaff: But not kissed your keeper's daughter.

- Act I scene 1

3. Falstaff is running out of money, and comes up with a plan to woo Mistress Ford and Page to get their husbands' money. His men refuse to deliver the letters, and Falstaff fires them.



2. Slender - who was injured by Falstaff and robbed by his men - is one of the suitors for Anne Page's hand. Though he is Master Page's favorite to marry his daughter, Slender is more than a little awkward around Anne, so the Parson Sir Hugh Evans sends Slender's man Simple to talk to Mistress quickly and get her to intervene on Slender's behalf with Anne.



Sir Hugh: Give her this letter; for it is a 'oman that altogether's acquaintance with Mistress Anne Page; and the letter is to desire and require her to solicit your master's desires to Mistress Anne Page. I pray you be gone.

- Act I, scene 2

Falstaff: [To Robin] Hold, sirrah, bear you these letters tightly; Sail like my pinnace to these golden shores.

Rogues, hence, avaunt! vanish like hailstones, go; Trudge, plod away o' the hoof; seek shelter, pack!

Falstaff will learn the humour of the age, French thrift, you rogues; myself and skirted page.

- Act I scene 3

4. Meanwhile, Mistress Quickly is busy with requests from three of Anne's suitors - Simple (on behalf of Shallow), Dr. Caius and Fenton (a newcomer to Windsor). She tells every one of them that she'll help.



[To Simple]: Tell Master Parson Evans I will do what I can for your master.

[To Dr. Caius]: Sir, the maid loves you, and all shall be well.

[To Fenton] I'll be sworn on a book that she loves you.
- Mistress Quickly, Act I scene 4

5. Dr. Caius is furious that Sir Hugh sent Simple to enlist Quickly's help in wooing Anne, and challenges him to a duel.



Dr. Caius: You jack'nape, give-a this letter to Sir Hugh; by gar, it is a shallenge: I will cut his troat in dee park; and I will teach a scurvy jack-a-nape priest to meddle or make. You may be gone; it is not good you tarry here. By gar, I will cut all his two stones; by gar, he shall not have a stone to throw at his dog:
- Act I scene 4



6. Mistress Page is the first to receive Falstaff's letter. She is upset, but becomes more upset when she realizes Mistress Ford received the exact same letter. They vow revenge on Falstaff.

Mistress Page: Let's be revenged on him. Let's appoint him a meeting and lead him on with a fine-baited delay, till he hath pawned his horses to mine Host of the Garter.



Mistress Ford: I will consent to act any villainy against him that may not sully our honesty.
Act II Scene 1



7. Also angry at Falstaff for firing them, Pistol and Nym visit Masters Ford and Page and tell them of Falstaff's plan to seduce their wives.

Pistol: Hope is a curtal dog in some affairs: Sir John affects thy wife.
- Act II scene 1

8. Master Page laughs the warning off, but Master Ford has a nasty jealous streak, and vows to test his wife's fidelity.

Master Ford: Though Page be a secure fool, and stands so firmly on his wife's frailty, yet I cannot put off my opinion so easily: she was in his company at Page's house; and what they made there, I know not. Well, I will look further into't: and I have a disguise to sound Falstaff. If I find her honest, I lose not my labour; if she be otherwise, 'tis labour well bestowed.
- Act II scene 1



9. After conferring with our merry wives, Mistress Quickly visits Falstaff to offer him a rendezvous with Mistress Ford in response to his love letter. Falstaff takes the bait.



Falstaff: But what says she to me? be brief, my good she-Mercury.

Mistress Quickly: Marry, she hath received your letter, for the which she thanks you a thousand times; and she gives you to notify that her husband will be absence from his house between ten and eleven.
Act II scene 2



10. Master Ford visits Falstaff disguised as Master Brook. He tells the knight he's in love with Mistress Ford, but that he knows her husband and wants Falstaff to test her fidelity so he knows if he has a shot with her or not.

Master Ford: When I have told you that, I have told you all. Some say, that though she appear honest to me, yet in other places she enlargeth her mirth so far that there is shrewd construction made of her. Now, Sir John, here is the heart of my purpose: you are a gentleman of excellent breeding, admirable discourse, of great admittance, authentic in your place and person, generally allowed for your many war-like, court-like, and learned preparations.
- Act II scene 2

11. When Falstaff tells "Brook" that he already has an appointment with Mistress Ford, he is furious and heartbroken.

Master Ford: My heart is ready to crack with impatience. Who says this is improvident jealousy? my wife hath sent to him; the hour is fixed; the match is made. Would any man have thought this? See the hell of having a false woman! My bed shall be abused, my coffers ransacked, my reputation gnawn at.
- Act II scene 2



12. Dr. Caius and Sir Hugh each shows up for his duel in the wrong location, not realizing that the Host of the Garter has tricked them in order to keep them from fighting.

Dr. Caius: Vat be all you, one, two, tree, four, come for?

Host: To see thee fight, to see thee foin, to see thee traverse; to see thee here, to see thee there; to see thee pass thy punto, thy stock, thy reverse, thy distance, thy montant. Is he dead, my Ethiopian? is he dead, my Francisco? ha, bully! What says my AEsculapius? my Galen? my heart of elder? ha! is he dead, bully stale? is he dead?

Doctor Caius: By gar, he is de coward Jack priest of de world; he is not show his face.

Act II scene 3 15

13. The Host of the Garter comes clean about tricking them, and Dr. Caius and Sir Hugh reluctantly agree to stop fighting to save face.



Sir Hugh: [Aside to Dr. Caius] Pray you let us not be laughing-stocks to other men's humours; I desire you in friendship, and I will one way or other make you amends.
- Act III scene 1

14. The time arrives for Falstaff and Mistress Ford to meet. He is trying unsuccessfully to seduce her when Mistress Page arrives and informs Mistress Ford that her husband is on the way. They hide Falstaff in a wash basket and cover him with dirty clothes, the plan being to have servants dump him in a creek.



Mistress Page: Look, here is a basket: if he be of any reasonable stature, he may creep in here; and throw foul linen upon him, as if it were going to bucking; or - it is whiting-time - send him by your two men to Datchet-mead.
- Act III scene 3

15. Master Ford arrives with several townsmen and makes a fool of himself looking for Falstaff. He doesn't find him, and the servants carry the wash basket away as the ladies planned.

Master Ford : Well, I promised you a dinner. Come, walk in the park. I will hereafter make known to you why I have done this. Come wife, come Mistress Page.
I pray you pardon me; pray heartily, pardon me.
- Act III scene 3





16. Anne Page and Fenton have fallen in love, but they worry about Anne's parents refusing to accept them. Anne convinces him to talk to her parents, but they refuse the match.

Mistress Page: Good Master Fenton, come not to my child.



Master Page: She is no match for you.

Fenton: Sir, will you hear me?

Master Page: No, good Master Fenton.
- Act III scene 4

17. The wives and Quickly have set up another meeting for Mistress Ford and Falstaff. Master Ford shows up at the Inn disguised as Brook and discovers how Falstaff eluded him the first time. He asks Falstaff to visit Mistress Ford again, and finds out a meeting is already scheduled. Falstaff asks for more money due to being dumped in the muddy river and buried in smelly clothes, and "Brook" agrees.

Ford: In good sadness, I am sorry that for my sake you have suffered all this. My suit then is desperate. You'll undertake her no more?

Falstaff: Master Brook, I will be thrown into Etna, I have been into Thames, ere I will leave her thus. Her husband is this morning gone a-birding. I have received from her another embassy of meeting.

'Twixt eight and nine, Master Brook.
- Act III scene 4



18. Falstaff and Mistress Ford meet again, and are again interrupted by Mistress Page saying the men are on the way. This time they disguise Falstaff as the Fords' servant's aunt, the Old Woman of Brainford.

Mistress Ford: I would my husband would meet him in this shape! He cannot abide the Old Woman of Brainford; he swears she's a witch; forbade her my house and has threatened to beat her.



- Act IV scene 2





19. Master Ford arrives again, and throws another jealous fit looking for Falstaff. The wives announce the arrival of the Old Woman of Brainford and Ford, already frustrated, chases her (actually Falstaff) out, beating him all the way.

Mistress Page: Come, mother Prat, come, give me your hand.

❖ Master Ford: I'll prat her! (beats him) Out of my door you witch, you hag, you baggage, you polecat! Out, out! I'll conjure you! I'll fortune tell you!
- Act IV scene 3

20. The ladies have had enough of this, and decide to tell their husbands what's been going on with Falstaff. Master Ford is embarrassed and apologetic, and the four of them plot one last prank for Falstaff - getting him to dress as Herne the Hunter while having the Windsor children to dress as fairies to pinch and torment him.

Mistress Ford: Let the supposed fairies pinch him sound and burn him with their tapers. ❖

Mistress Page: The truth being known, we'll all present ourselves, dis-horn the spirit and mock him home to Windsor.

Master Ford: That will be excellent. I'll go buy them vizards.
- Act IV scene 4



21. Both Mistress and Master Page plan to use the fairy disguises to allow their preferred suitors to marry Anne, knowing her by the color of her dress.

❖ Master Page: That silk will I go buy - (Aside) and in that time shall Master Slender steal my Nan away and marry her at Eton.

Mistress Page: I'll to the doctor: he hath my good will, And none but he, to marry with Nan Page.
- Act IV scene 4





22. Falstaff arrives in the woods dressed as Herne the Hunter. But not long after meeting the wives, the “fairies” arrive and pinch him relentlessly.

Mistress Quickly (disguised as a fairy): Fairies black, grey, green and white, you moonshine revellers and shades of night, you orphan heirs of fixed destiny, attend your office and your quality.
- Act V scene 5

23. When they feel Falstaff has had enough, they reveal that they tricked him. Anne and Fenton reveal that they have tricked the Pages and eloped with help from the Host of the Garter Inn, and that Dr. Caius and Slender have actually married boys who were disguised as Anne. The Pages finally accept Fenton as Anne’s husband.

Master Ford: Here is no remedy. In love the heavens themselves do guide the state; money buys lands, and wives are sold by fate.
- Act III scene 5



24. Everyone happily goes back to eat dinner - Falstaff included - and Master Ford gets one last dig in to the Knight about his wife.



Master Ford: Let it be so. Sir John, To Master Brook you yet shall hold your word For he tonight shall lie with Mistress Ford.
- Act III scene 5

The Truth Of It

Classroom activity for Othello and The Merry Wives of Windsor.

Summary

This exercise is designed to parallel the search and desperate need for truth that both Othello (*Othello*) and Master Ford (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*) experience as potential cuckolds as well as the submersive fun that comes from the lies and manipulation of Iago, and (arguably) Mistress Ford and Page.

In essence you will divide your class in half. The first half will know 'the answer' while the second half asks their classmates who may respond truthfully or not.

Specifics

Separate your class into three groups. For the sake of ease, I will name these three groups Writers (group 1), Questioners (group 2), and Witnesses (group 3). If there are 'extra' students place them in the Witness group only. Once the class has been divided, approach each group and give instructions secretly. We have found the exercise works best when each group understands only their function.

Instructions to Writer (group 1):

*In a moment I will ask you to get a piece of paper and place a mark on it. The mark can either be an "X" or an "O". The mark can **only** be one of these two letters. Once the mark has been made, please fold the paper so there is no indication from the outside to help identify the mark. You will then be assigned to a partner in the second group (Questioners). With the piece of paper between you, the Questioners will then ask you questions to try to identify what it is you have written. You may respond truthfully, you may lie, and you may change your answer at any time. The paper is not to be revealed or touched during exercise. Are there any questions? Please retrieve a piece of paper, secretly make your mark, fold it up, and wait for instructions.*

Instructions to Questioner (group 2):

In a moment I will pair you up with someone from the first group. They will have a piece of paper with them. Inside this piece of paper they have made a mark. It will be your job to determine the mark by asking questions and observing their behavior. At no time will you be allowed to touch the paper or see what is inside. You may ask any question you care to, and as often as you wish until either you are satisfied you know the answer or I indicate time is up.

Instructions to Witness (group 3):

After some time I will partner you up with someone from the second group. There will be a piece of paper in front of them. Without letting your partner see what is inside, open the paper and look at the mark. Once you have seen the mark, please fold the paper again and place it between you. Your partner will then ask you what is written on the paper. You may tell them the truth, you may lie, and you may change your answer at any time. Are there any questions? Please wait for a few minutes while the other groups complete their part.

Once all three groups have received their separate instructions the exercise is ready to get underway. Pair individuals from Writer (group 1) with Questioner (group 2). Instruct the groups to keep the folded paper between them. Group 2 (Questioner) may now begin to ask questions. Questioning can take 3-5 minutes or more as needed.

When time is called, ask the first group (Writer) to move to another area where they may observe the next phase. Pair the third group (Witness) with someone from the second group (Questioner). Once everyone is settled, ask the second group (Questioner) to look away as the Witness (group 3) looks inside the paper. Once the Witness (group 3) has seen the mark, ask them to fold the paper again and place it between them. Group 2 (Questioner) may now ask questions of the Witness (group 3). Questioning can take 3-5 minutes or more as needed.

Once the questioning has been completed, separate group 2 (Questioners) from the rest of the class. Ensure that they keep the folded paper with them, but are still not peeking. Questioners may stand at the front of the class or grouped in the center of the classroom.

Ask each Questioner for the percentage of their surety in their answer (0% - 100%). Ask each questioner what is written on the paper. Ask them how or why they arrived at their answer. Choose one of the Questioners and ask them for their answer again. Ask for the folded paper, open it, and look inside without letting them see the mark. Ask them for their answer. Ask them if they would like to see the answer. If the answer is “no” then give them back the paper to hold. If a Questioner says “yes”, begin to hand them the paper and then take it back before they can have it. Tell them you will not let them see the answer. Then give them back the paper.

The Heart of the Matter

At this moment, most students will be desperate to see what is inside the paper. Keeping the answer within their reach (literally, in their hands) heightens the tension, desperation and desire to know the truth.

Ask the Questioner how they feel about not knowing the truth....especially when it is so close. Draw their attention to the fact that this is an exercise of “X’s” and “O’s”. Ask them to imagine if it was about theft, cheating on a test, cheating on a boyfriend or girlfriend. Ask the Writer and Witness how they felt either, as they spoke the truth but weren’t believed, or as they lied and were trusted. Was it fun? Powerful? Hurtful?

These questions, and more of the like, deepen the emotional connection between the student and the themes of the play. This emotional connection can be referenced and explored as it appears within the play.

Othello (Act 3, Scene 3): By the world,
 I think my wife be honest, and think she is not;
 I think that thou art just, and think thou art not.

So many of Shakespeare’s characters search for truth. At APT, we strive to create educational experiences that stimulate and increase the depth of connection between a student’s own life experiences and those of Shakespeare’s works.

Personal, practical, and provocative.