



THE WINTER'S TALE

**By William Shakespeare
Directed by Shana Cooper**

AMERICAN PLAYERS THEATRE STUDY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to APT's Study Guide, created to accompany the Student Matinee performances of William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. Use it however you see fit - before or after the performance, whatever is most valuable to your class.

In this packet, you'll find a number of resources designed to help your class better understand and engage with the play. Use them all, or select the sections that best suit your needs. We hope you enjoy APT's production of *The Winter's Tale*. Find **more information on the play and APT's education resources online at americanplayers.org**.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHARACTER GUIDE

PAGES 3-5

SYNOPSIS

PAGES 6-16

ACTIVITIES

PAGE 17-18

NEWS & MULTIMEDIA

PAGES 19-20

SPONSORS

PAGE 21

CHARACTER GUIDE

A list of actors and accompanying photos to help your class follow the plot and introduce them to the characters in the play. Royals and shepherds and bears...oh my!



Camillo played by **Gavin Lawrence**

Camillo is a lord from Sicilia who is loyal to King Leontes when the play begins. Soon, however, he disobeys the king and flees to the kingdom Bohemia.



Archidamus played by **Tracy Michelle Arnold**

Archidamus is a lord from Bohemia. He accompanies King Polixenes to Sicilia on their journey.



Leontes, King of Sicilia played by **Nate Burger**

Leontes is the king of Sicilia. At the start of the play, he is happily married to Hermione until he begins to have suspicions about her relationship with Polixenes.



Hermione, Queen to Leontes played by **Laura Rook**

Hermione is the Queen of Sicilia and a universally adored woman. She is a loving mother to their young son Mamillius and is pregnant with the couple's second child when the play begins.



Mamillius, their son played by **Elijah** and **Lilian Quigley** (pictured)

Mamillius is the young prince and heir of Sicilia.



Antigonus played by **Rasell Holt**

Antigonus is a Sicilian lord who is married to Paulina. He is loyal to King Leontes and follows his orders even when they are cruel.



Paulina, wife to Antigonus played by **Dee Dee Batteast**

Paulina is a friend and ally to Queen Hermione and stands up for her when the situation is dire.



Cleomenes played by **David Alan Anderson** and **Dion** played by **Nathan Barlow**

Cleomenes and Dion are Sicilian lords who are sent to Apollo's Temple at the request of Leontes. There, they learn the truth from an oracle and return with news about Hermione.



Emilia, a lady attending on Hermione played by **Sun Mee Chomet**



Polixenes, King of Bohemia played by **La Shawn Banks**

Polixenes is the King of Bohemia. At the start of the play, he is good friends with Leontes and Hermione. When he learns about Leontes's plan, he flees back to Bohemia with Camillo.



An Old Shepherd played by **David Daniel**

The Old Shepherd is a kind Bohemian peasant who discovers a baby abandoned on the shore. He raises her as his own daughter.



A Clown, his son played by Josh Krause

The Clown is the Old Shepherd's biological son. He is also present when the baby is discovered.



Time played by Sarah Day

Time, personified as a woman, acts as a narrator, transporting the audience through time and filling the audience in on what has happened over the 16 years between Act 1 and Act 2.



Autolycus, a rogue played by Marcus Truschinski

Autolycus is a charming thief who sells stolen goods and sings Bohemian ballads.



Perdita played by Molly Martinez-Collins

Perdita is the baby discovered on shore. She is raised by the Old Shepherd and the Clown and grows up and falls in love with Florizel.



Florizel, son of Polixenes played by Xavier Edward King

Florizel is the prince of Bohemia. He pretends to be a peasant shepherd named Doricles and falls in love with Perdita.



Mopsa and Dorcas, shepherdesses played by Samantha Newcomb and Sun Mee Chomet

Mopsa and Dorcas are two shepherdesses who compete with each other for the attention of the Clown, Perdita's adopted brother.

SYNOPSIS

A description of the play, from start to finish.



The play begins with Archidamus, an ambassador from the kingdom of Bohemia, talking about the warm welcome he and his fellow Bohemians have received in the kingdom of Sicilia. Camillo, a lord in the Sicilian court, talks with Archidamus about the life-long friendship between King Leontes (Sicilia) and King Polixenes (Bohemia).

Camillo and Archidamus also talk about King Leontes' son, Prince Mamillius, and how he will someday become a great leader.



King Leontes laughs with his pregnant wife Hermione and their friend, the visiting king of Bohemia, Polixenes. Polixenes has been in Sicilia for 9 months on a royal visit and Leontes attempts to convince his childhood friend to stay longer. He regrettably declines.



When Polixenes says he must go, Leontes playfully asks Hermione to convince him to stay. When she good-naturedly orders Polixenes to stay, Polixenes relents and agrees to extend his visit.

King Leontes becomes suspicious that Polixenes and Hermione may be closer than he had thought.

As the evening continues, Polixenes and Hermione continue to warmly chat, further convincing Leontes that Hermione has been unfaithful to him.

Prince Mamillius observes his father. Leontes becomes outwardly disturbed at the idea of Hermione's infidelity.



Leontes calls Camillo over to discuss his suspicions. Though Camillo attempts to reason with Leontes, the king becomes irate and orders Camillo to murder Polixenes before he can return to Bohemia.

Camillo, feeling trapped between disobeying the king's orders and killing an innocent man, decides to tell Polixenes of the murder plot set in place by Leontes. Both men fear for their safety and decide to flee back to Bohemia that night.



King Leontes discovers that King Polixenes, Camillo and the rest of the Bohemians have fled Sicilia. He becomes enraged.

He accuses Hermione of being unfaithful to him. He claims that the child she is pregnant with is not his own, but Polixenes's. Hermione tries to combat his claims, but is arrested for adultery and treason at the order of her husband.



Leontes explains that he has sent two Sicilian lords, Cleomenes and Dion, to seek out the shrine of Apollo. There, he hopes Cleomenes and Dion will receive divine advice on the situation.

Hermione's friend Paulina goes to visit Hermione in the prison. There, Paulina talks with Emilia, Hermione's lady in waiting, about how the queen is doing.

Emilia shares that Hermione has had her baby while in prison. The newborn - a baby girl - has been good for her spirits, though she still can't believe her husband would punish her for something she didn't do.



Paulina has an idea. She asks Emilia to let her take the princess to show to Leontes. She hopes that when the king sees his daughter, he will start to be reasonable again.

Emilia and the jailer agree and go to fetch the baby.



Leontes is still extremely distraught at the idea of Hermione's infidelity.

Paulina enters with the baby princess. When she advocates for Hermione's innocence, Leontes becomes even more furious. The two fight.

King Leontes calls up Antigonus, Paulina's husband, and orders him to abandon the baby and leave her to die. Though Paulina objects, Antigonus shows his loyalty to Leontes and takes the princess away.



When Antigonus leaves, Leontes learns that Cleomenes and Dion have returned after their 23 day journey to the shrine of Apollo.

Leontes decides to put Hermione on trial for her treason. He plans to shame her with the sentence Cleomenes and Dion have returned with.

On their way back to the castle, Cleomenes and Dion discuss what they've experienced on their trip to Delphos. Following Leontes orders, they consulted with an oracle who has sent a judgement on the whole situation. Both Cleomenes and Dion hope that what the oracle has shared will mean Hermione will be released.





Hermione is on trial for infidelity and treason. She attempts to defend herself to Leontes and the court, but he is not moved.

When the ruling from the oracle is read and declares Hermione and Polixenes innocent, Leontes refuses to believe it and says it must be false.

Just then, a messenger arrives with sad news. Prince Mamillius, the son of Leontes and Hermione, has died.

Leontes immediately comes out of his rage. He believes Mamillius's death is all his fault for testing the gods.



When Hermione hears that Mamillius is dead, she faints. Paulina rushes to Hermione's side. Leontes, now filled with regret, calls for help and the guards take Hermione off followed by Paulina.

Paulina returns. She tells Leontes that Hermione has died. Leontes is disgusted with himself and his action and promises to spend the remainder of his life grieving for his family.





Antigonus, still on his mission, abandons the baby princess on the shores of Bohemia. Before he leaves the baby, who the audience learns is named Perdita, he gives her some gold in the hope that someone will find the baby and raise her.

Suddenly, a storm blows in and wrecks Antigonus's ship. He hears a noise from the wilderness and is chased and eaten by a bear.



A Bohemian shepherd appears and spots the baby abandoned on the shore. The shepherd is joined by his son who shares that he has witnessed the death of all the sailors and Antigonus.

The father and son decide to take the baby in and raise her as part of their family. Before they leave with the baby, the son says that he will attempt to bury what is left of Antigonus once the bear is done with him.





The character of Time appears and informs the audience that 16 years have past since the events of the previous scene. Perdita is now a young shepherdess who has grown up in Bohemia.

Camillo misses his home country of Sicilia and requests permission to return from King Polixenes. Polixenes denies his wish and instead asks Camillo to help him spy on his son, Prince Florizel.

Florizel has been sneaking away to spend time with a young shepherdess (Perdita). Polixenes and Florizel dress up as shepherds to spy on him.



Autolycus is a con man and petty thief. He tricks the younger shepherd and steals his money before deciding to attend a sheep sheering festival happening in the town nearby. He hopes the festival will give him more chances to steal.

Prince Florizel and Perdita are in love. Perdita is nervous that if Florizel's father, King Polixenes, discovers his son is in love with a shepherdess, he will order them to stop seeing one another. Florizel tells Perdita not to worry about what his father thinks.





The sheepshearing festival and feast are about to begin. Shepherds come from all over to partake in the celebration, including Camillo and King Polixenes in disguise. Perdita's adopted father encourages her to be a good host and welcome everyone, especially the strangers (Camillo and Polixenes).

While the celebration is happening, Autolycus arrives. He flirts with shepherdesses Dorcas and Mopsa, feasts on the party food and sings songs.



Also during the celebration, Florizel (who goes by Doricles to disguise his royal identity to the other shepherds) asks Perdita to marry him. She accepts!

Perdita's father, the Old Shepherd, is just about to marry the couple when King Polixenes reveals himself. He calls for the wedding to stop on the basis that Perdita is a shepherdess and too lowly for the Prince to marry.





After King Polixenes leaves, Perdita's father, the Old Shepherd, feels tricked by Florizel and Perdita and refuses to marry them. Perdita is crushed and tells Florizel she knew their difference in social class would keep them apart.

Camillo reveals himself to the distraught young couple. Florizel and Perdita make plans to run away together. Camillo suggests they consider traveling to Sicilia and seeking asylum there. The three of them make plans to leave Bohemia.



The Shepherd and his son want to speak to King Polixenes to let him know they were unaware of Florizel and Perdita's relationship. They ask Autolycus to help lead them to the king.

Back in the Kingdom of Sicilia, King Leontes has been mourning his wife, son and daughter for the last 16 years. His advisors encourage him to move on, but Paulina says that his grief is justified.





King Leontes learns that Prince Florizel has arrived in Sicilia with his princess, looking for an audience with him. At first, he is surprised since he hasn't spoken to King Polixenes (Florizel's father) in 16 years, but then invites the young couple in.

When Florizel and Perdita meet King Leontes, Florizel explains that they have fled in order to be together. They soon learn that King Polixenes, Camillo, the Old Shepherd and his Son have all followed them to Sicilia. King Leontes offers to make peace between Florizel and Polixenes.



Autolycus learns from members of the royal household that King Leontes's daughter has been found and the oracle's vision fulfilled! Perdita and Leontes have reunited as daughter and father at long last.

After Autolycus finds out the news, he talks with the Old Shepherd and his Son, who have been rewarded for raising Perdita with titles and money. At first, the Son teases Autolycus and makes him promise to reform his rascal ways, but then promises to put in a good word for Autolycus with the Kings.

Then they all leave to go look at a newly unveiled portrait of the late Queen Hermione.





Leontes takes Perdita to see a statue of Queen Hermione. Paulina unveils this very life-like statue to the amazement of everyone in the room.

Leontes and Perdita each have a moment with the statue. Leontes apologizes for his actions 20 years ago. Perdita expresses her love for the mother she never knew.

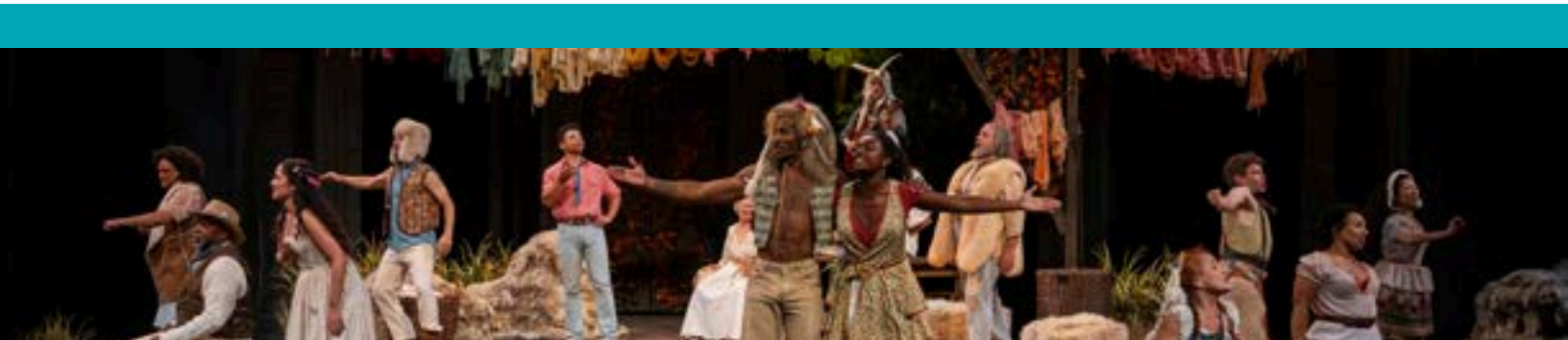
Paulina instructs the "sculpture" to come down off her mantel and reveals that it was the real Hermione all along! Paulina has helped hide her for all these years until the oracle's prophesy came true.



Queen Hermione and King Leontes embrace at long last. Hermione and Perdita reunite. Peace is restored in across the kingdoms.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITIES TO GET YOUR CLASS CHATTING



Creative Writing Assignments

- **Write an alternative plot line or ending to the play.** What would happen if Leontes had listened to his advisors? What if Antigonus had made it back to Sicilia? Track the plot - what is the point of no return?
- **Write an recap of the 16 years between Act 3 and Act 4.** What do you think happened in Sicilia and Bohemia over the past decade and a half? How did the characters develop and change?
- **Build a character diary.** Write a letter or note from the perspective of your character to another character in the play. What would they write about? How would they write about it?

Video and Audio Assignments

- **Build a character diary.** Write a letter or note from the perspective of your character to another character in the play. What would they write about? How would they write about it?
- **Turn the scene into a meme or comic.** Put your artistic skills to use! Pick a scene or act from *The Winter's Tale* and illustrate the action using your own artistry or building a digital collage.
- **Make a Get Ready with Me or Fit Check** from the perspective of one of the characters in *The Winter's Tale*. What would they say? How would they get ready?
- **Design the worlds of Sicilia and Bohemia.** What ways do you choose to show their similarity vs their differences? Make sure to incorporate all senses into establishing these settings.

Put Yourself in the Action

- **Go to Court.** Imagine you are Hermione's lawyer. What points would you bring up in court against Leontes to attest to your client's innocence? Or reverse it: help build Leontes' case against Hermione using points from the play.
- **Present a scene from the play in a modern context.** Use contemporary settings, words and ideas.
- **Present** a prepared reading of a speech of a single character, between two characters, or of an entire scene. What do you notice about the words and how they feel from character to character and moment to moment?
- **Dramatize a missing scene** related to the characters and situation in the play. What does Shakespeare decide to show the audience and what does he choose to have us learn through exposition? What would happen if he gave a scene to a moment we learn happened off-stage?
- Shakespeare makes many allusions throughout *The Winter's Tale* to heighten his characters' dramatic language. **Find an allusion with words you don't recognize** and research the phrase's origin and what it means for the character saying it.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever made a mistake because you were certain you were right only to realize later how wrong you were? How did that change you?
2. When Hermione stood silently as she was accused, how did you feel watching her? Have you ever had to stay silent in a moment when you wanted to speak?
3. Perdita was raised far from where she "belonged." Have you ever felt like you lived in two worlds, or that people expected you to be someone you're not?
4. The play explores jealousy, forgiveness, and time. Which of those themes hit you the hardest and why?
5. What does the play say about second chances? Do you think everyone deserves one?

FIND MORE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON THE VIRTUAL STUDY GUIDE

NEWS & MULTIMEDIA

Videos, Playlists, Interviews and more!



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Program notes contributed by Shana Cooper, Director of *The Winter's Tale*

"It is required you do awake your faith." -Paulina, *The Winter's Tale*

As Mamillius, the young prince in *The Winter's Tale*, says, "A sad tale's best for winter." And in the first half of *The Winter's Tale*, a sad tale is exactly what Shakespeare gives us. A beautiful family is destroyed in the blink of an eye by a sudden and inexplicable rush of jealousy and rage that overwhelms Leontes—the father, husband and king of this sad tale. In *The Winter's Tale* the health of our family units is inextricably tied to the health of our larger societies. This is a world in which men as leaders are given power from an early age, but not the tools to regulate their emotions. When Leontes and later Polixenes are faced with their greatest fears (seeming betrayal and exclusion by those they love most: Leontes' wife Hermione and Polixenes' son Florizel) they lash out in rage and marshal their power for destruction. But can we blame them? After all, as men bred from boyhood to rule, it seems their domestic and civil societies have given them few other emotional tools to employ when they perceive a threat. But fortunately, they are not alone...in both the structured and sophisticated world of Sicilia and the more communal, rural world of Bohemia there are people like Hermione, Paulina and Camillo who believe in the hard work of change and the redemptive power of forgiveness. They have faith that Leontes and Polixenes are capable of this work, and that not simply Hermione, but the entire community can do the mysterious internal work to find forgiveness so that the tragic half of *The Winter's Tale* is simply the beginning of the story. And a new future and a new way of being together, as a family and as a society, can be the sequel.

Over the past few months, a different title for *The Winter's Tale* has occurred to me as our daily headlines about the unchecked power of our leaders, combined with unruly passion, leads to devastating consequences for our society. I would propose: *The Winter's Tale* or *Shakespeare's Recipe for Combatting Tyranny*. The first and most essential ingredient is community. Without that we are lost. Then we have to add the hardest of work towards actual change, combined with faith that over Time (perhaps 16 years?) forgiveness of each other and ourselves will be possible. With *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare seems to suggest that if each of those ingredients is honored as deeply as we can, then we're able to manifest the greatest miracle of all: redemption. A way forward, in spite of all of our mistakes and failures, becomes possible. It is a gift to be telling this story about the unique and vital power of community in one of the most potent communities of artists and audiences I've ever experienced. It awakens my faith that whatever unfolds in tomorrow's headlines, we'll find our way through it together.

SEASON SELECT: THE WINTER'S TALE

An APT blog series for more info about current productions

Fast Facts on THE WINTER'S TALE

Playing: Hill Theatre | August 8 - September 4, 2025

Featuring: David Alan Anderson, La Shawn Banks, Dee Dee Batteast, Nate Burger, David Daniel, Sarah Day, Josh Krause, Gavin Lawrence, Laura Rook

Genre: Shakespeare Romance

Last Seen at APT: 2009

Go If you Liked: *The Virgin Queen Entertains Her Fool* (2024), *Cymbeline* (2021), *Pericles*, *Prince of Tyre* (2017)

Ah, *The Winter's Tale*. The winding fable about jealousy, rebirth and yes, one very famous line about a bear.

Exit, pursued by a bear.

Sure thing, Shakespeare. That might have been easier to accomplish during the era where bears were as popular entertainment as the plays themselves. We'll just leave it at that until *summer*. For those who remember your 9th grade Shakespeare unit, you may be familiar with the classifications of comedy and tragedy in the canon's collection. The general rule of thumb is if ends with a marriage (any marriage), it's a comedy. Finishing the night with a funeral? Tragedy. And then, there's the histories. Henrys, Richards, John. Battles, betrayal and the occasional Falstaff cameo.

But *what* is a Shakespeare "romance," then? A big mash-up combination of the histories, comedies and tragedies? Basically.

FIND THIS POST ON THE APT WEBSITE AS PART OF OUR SEASON SELECT SERIES!

VIDEO AND MORE!

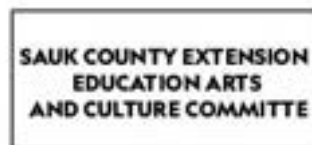
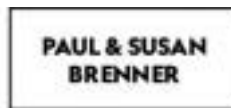
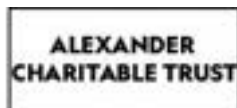
The merriment has just begun! Find educational videos, play trailers, interviews and more on APT's YouTube channel that the whole class will love! Scan this QR Code for more!



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