ACTIVITY ONE: Awake Your Faith in Fairy Tales

Reading and Writing

In the final scene of the play, when Paulina reveals the statue of Hermione to the Court, she instructs them, ‘It is required / You do awake your faith.’ (5.3.94-5). This line embodies the audience’s relationship with the play, as we must suspend our disbelief in order to accept the Romance world of The Winter’s Tale.

Hermione’s transformation from a statue into a live woman has caused much critical disagreement. Has she been hidden by Paulina for the past sixteen years? Or should the audience really believe that a statue has come to life? Have the students consider their initial reaction when they saw the production.

In the following passages from the final scene, Paulina uses her “magic” to bring the statue to life. She then explains the reaction she would have gotten if people thought Hermione was alive. Finally, Hermione alludes to her being in hiding.

**PAULINA**

Music, awake her; strike!

[Music]

[To Hermione] ‘Tis time; descend; be stone no more; approach.

Strike all that look upon with marvel. Come,

I'll fill your grave up. Stir – nay, come away;

Bequeath to death your numbness, for from him

Dear life redeems you. You perceive she stirs.

[Hermione steps down]

Start not. Her actions shall be holy as

You hear my spell is lawful. [To Leontes] Do not shun her

Until you see her die again, for then

You kill her double. Nay, present your hand.

When she was young, you woo'd her; now in age,

Is she become the suitor? (5.3.98-109)

...

**PAULINA**

That she is living,

Were it but told you, should be hooted at

Like an old tale. But it appears she lives,

Though yet she speaks not. (5.3. 115-8)

...
HERMIONE

You gods, look down,  
And from your sacred vials pour your graces  
Upon my daughter's head! Tell me, mine own,  
Where hast thou been preserved? Where lived? How found  
Thy father's court? For thou shalt hear that I,  
Knowing by Paulina that the oracle  
Gave hope thou wast in being, have preserved  
Myself to see the issue. (5.3.121-128)

Students should take the time to read the passages above, making sure that they know the meaning of all the words and the sense of all the phrases. Then answer the questions below using textual evidence...

1. How has power shifted at the end of the play? How do Paulina and Hermione create power as women?
2. How can Paulina’s ‘magic’ be interpreted by the audience? Is it symbolic of something else?
3. Paulina explains to Leontes that if he were told Hermione is alive, it ‘should be hooted at / Like an old tale’. How does this play into the theme of storytelling?
4. Does Hermione’s speech lend itself to the reading of her being alive all this time?
5. How does Hermione’s reawakening figure in the themes of the play? Could Shakespeare be making a metatheatrical comment about the nature of performance?
ACTIVITY TWO: Clowning About

Reading, Writing and Practical Drama

In most of Shakespeare's plays there is at least one 'fool' character. A Shakespearean fool, or a 'clown', was used by Shakespeare to inject humour into a scene. In the Shakespearean corpus, there are two types of fools: 'natural' and 'artificial' (as described by Robert Armin, the actor who played the fool during Shakespeare's time). A natural fool was a clown-like character who is funny because of their ignorance, whilst an artificial fool was defined by their wit. This is like the Clown and Autolycus in The Winter's Tale, as the audience laughs at the Clown, but with Autolycus.

The Clown and Autolycus are one of Shakespeare's strategies for creating comedy in the second part of the play. The Winter's Tale has within it a confluence of genres, which generates two very different sides to the story of the play. Why would Shakespeare contrast the tragic first half with a comic second?

1. Place students in pairs and designate who is to play the Clown and Autolycus in each pair.

2. Have each pair read out Act 4 Scene 3 to themselves. Encourage the students to try to read the scene to create as much humour as possible.

3. Once the students have read through the scene, have them answer the following questions using examples from the text…

   a. How does Shakespeare write these two characters in order to create comedy?
   b. Who is the funnier fool, and why?
   c. What were the functions of a fool in a Shakespeare play? How do the Clown and Autolycus fulfil these functions?
   d. How does the comic section of the play counteract the tragic first half?
ACTIVITY THREE: Opposing Points of View

Practical Drama and Critical Thinking

*The Winter’s Tale* is a play which lends itself to considering the potentially dangerous results of not being able to understand another person’s perspective. It is Leontes’ inability to understand the situation from a different point of view which sparks the tragedy of the play. In John Bell’s production, having a point of view becomes the directorial focus of the play, as Mamillius orchestrates the action through his imaginative perspective.

PERFORMING DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES

1. Have the students discuss the possible reasons why John Bell interpreted *The Winter’s Tale* through Mamillius’ perspective.

2. Students should read Act 1 Scene 2 and then discuss the different points of view present. Who are the characters that would have different perspectives in this scene?

3. Divide the students up into five groups of five and assign a character from this scene to each group from whose perspective they will play the scene (Leontes, Hermione, Polixenes, Mamillius and Camillo). Each student in a group will play the role of one of the five characters. Have the groups consider how the scene would be performed according to the perspective of their assigned character. For example, how would the scene play out through Polixenes’ eyes?

4. Give the students some time to devise a wordless performance of the scene through their character’s point of view. Ask them to try and show how different perspectives are created by body language and without words (which is what Leontes bases his perspective on).

5. Have each group perform their scene to the class.

6. At the end of the performances, ask the students to consider how Shakespeare creates opposing points of view in the play and what the effect of this is.
ACTIVITY FOUR: Trial and Tribulation

Critical Thinking and Speaking

When the play opens, the audience is presented with the ideal family situation: two loving parents, a son, and another child on the way. However, it soon becomes clear that this family will be broken apart by jealousy. Leontes' seemingly inexplicable rage is what dominates the first part of the play and results in the tragic loss of the family unit. He believes that Hermione has had a long affair with his childhood friend Polixenes, who he thinks is the true father of Mamillius and Hermione’s soon-to-be born child. This leads him to conclude that Hermione is guilty of high treason and that, ‘There is a plot against my life, my crown’ (2.1.47).

After Hermione is put in jail under suspicion of adultery and high treason, Leontes tries her in a kangaroo court, having already determined that she is guilty. In Act 2, Scene 3 Hermione defends herself to the Court and is even shown to be innocent by the Oracle of Apollo at Delphos. Despite this, Leontes still believes in her guilt. It is up to the classroom to put together a more legitimate trial in order to ascertain whether Hermione is truly innocent or guilty.

CLASSROOM DEBATE

1. Divide the class into four groups:
   Group 1 will act as the prosecutors of Hermione on behalf of Leontes
   Group 2 will act as Hermione’s defence lawyers
   Group 3 will act as Polixenes’ defence lawyers
   Group 4 will act as the Jury

2. Give some time for each group to work on a strong case using evidence from the text in order to convince the Jury. The aim is to prove whether Hermione and Polixenes are guilty or innocent of adultery and high treason.

3. Hold a debate in the classroom, with one member of Group 4 elected to judge the proceedings. Each group will present their case, be questioned by the Jury, and then give a final statement. Encourage all members of the group to speak on the matter.

4. Group 4 will then weigh up the arguments and summarise them for the class. They should put forward the most convincing points of each group. They will then present their findings to the class and announce whether Hermione and Polixenes are guilty or innocent. If found guilty, they should give them an appropriate sentence.
ACTIVITY FIVE: Ballad Peddling

Creative Writing

In *The Winter’s Tale*, music takes on the special role of a motif. Many scenes, especially the comic, incorporate musical elements. Autolycus is a ‘ballad pedlar’, a travelling seller of songs. Ballads during the Jacobean era were narrative verse set to music, which would be sold cheaply on paper sheets known as ‘broadsides’. Ballads were especially popular with the ‘groundlings’ at the Globe Theatre, who would sing a round of ballads at the tavern after a show. This explains why Mopsa and Dorcus are so excited by Autolycus’ appearance.

Ballads are a part of the play’s theme of storytelling, as many ballads told tall tales. Autolycus explains what one of the broadsheets he has is about,

\[
\text{a fish that appeared upon the coast on Wednesday the fourscore of April forty thousand fathom above water, and sung this ballad against the hard hearts of maids. It was thought she was a woman and was turned into a cold fish for she would not exchange flesh with one that loved her. The ballad is very pitiful, and as true. (4.4.273-9)}
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Choose a well-known pop song that everyone in the class would know (such as The Beatles’ *Yellow Submarine*) and have each student write a ballad to that tune. Their ballads should tell the story of *The Winter’s Tale*. The taller their version of the tale, the better.