

The Orlando-UCF Shakespeare Festival  
presents a Study Guide for

*Merry Wives of Windsor*  
By William Shakespeare

**With grateful thanks to Harcourt School Publishers.**

## Meet the Characters

- Sir John Falstaff-** An old, fat, greasy knight. He cheats his friends out of money and tries to seduce Mistress Ford and Mistress Page so that he can get money from them as well.
- Fenton-** a young gentleman who loves Anne Page.
- Robert Shallow-** a country justice who is friends with Page.
- Abraham Slender-** cousin to Shallow. Shallow and Page want him to marry Anne Page.
- Francis Ford-** a gentleman of Windsor. He's jealous of his wife and disguises himself as Master Brook to find out what's going on between her and Falstaff.
- George Page-** a gentleman of Windsor. He wants his daughter to marry Slender.
- William Page-** a boy, Page's son.
- Sir Hugh Evans-** a Welsh parson with a thick accent.
- Doctor Caius-** a French Physician who wants to marry Anne Page. Mistress Page also wants him to marry Anne.
- Host-** runs the Garter Inn.
- Bardolph, Pistol and Nym-** followers of Falstaff.
- Robin-** Falstaff's page.
- Peter Simple-** Slender's servant.
- John Rugby-** Doctor Caius' servant.
- Mistress Alice Ford-** Decides to play tricks on Falstaff to make a fool of him after he sent her a ridiculous love letter.
- Mistress Margaret Page-** joins forces with Mistress Ford to make a fool of Falstaff.
- Anne Page-** daughter to Mr. and Mrs. Page. Wants to marry Fenton.
- Mistress Quickly-** servant to Dr. Caius. She acts as messenger between Mistress Ford and Falstaff. She's also Anne's close friend.

## Merry Wives of Windsor Plot Summary

### Act I

Justice Shallow, Slender and Hugh Evans enter discussing how Falstaff has offended Justice Shallow. He threatens to take the matter to the court of the Star Chamber. Evans offers to mediate between them. The conversation switches over to a desired marriage between Anne Page and Slender. They arrive at Page's house and confront Falstaff and his thieving friends, Bardolph, Nym and Pistol. Falstaff admits to beating Shallow's men and killing his deer. Slender accuses the other three of stealing his wallet but they deny it and everyone but Slender and Anne Page go inside to eat. He attempts to woo her but she is not impressed. After dinner, Evans sends Simple to Doctor Caius' house to ask Mistress Quickly to put in a good word for Slender to Anne.

At the Garter Inn, Falstaff tells his friends of a scheme to get money from Mistress Page and Mistress Ford. He has written a love letter to each of them and asks Pistol and Nym to deliver them. They refuse and he makes a serving boy do it instead. After Falstaff exits, Pistol and Nym plot to spoil his plan. They agree to tell Ford and Page what Falstaff intends with their wives.

At Doctor Caius' house, Mistress Quickly assures Simple that she will try to help Slender win Anne's hand. Doctor Caius enters, discovers the letter from Evans and writes his own letter to Evans, challenging him to a duel. He says he will have Anne Page for himself and storms out. Fenton enters and asks Mistress Quickly if she thinks it is likely that he will win Anne's hand for himself. Mistress Quickly encourages him.

### Act II

Mistress Page and Mistress Ford both read their love letters from Falstaff and rush to see each other. They realize they were given two identical letters and are appalled and disgusted that Falstaff would think they would be so foolish as to believe him. They decide to get revenge on him. After they leave, Pistol, Nym, Ford and Page enter discussing Falstaff's plan to seduce the women. Ford decides to disguise himself and find out the truth from Falstaff. Pistol and Nym leave. Mistress Page and Mistress Ford reenter. Mistress Quickly enters just after them and they pull her aside to ask her to help them get revenge. Shallow and the Host enter and ask the men to come see the fight between Doctor Caius and Evans. Ford asks the Host to introduce him to Falstaff under a false name and he agrees. Ford goes his separate way and the others leave to see the fight.

Mistress Quickly finds Falstaff at the Garter Inn and tells him that Mistress Ford loves him and wants him to come to her house between ten and eleven while her husband is out. He heartily agrees and she exits. Ford enters disguised as a man named Brook and gives him liquor. He tells Falstaff that he's in love with Mistress Ford and asks him to seduce her, saying that she would be more likely to give into him once she's already been unfaithful. Falstaff tells him he's already in the process of doing so and has an appointment with her that morning.

Meanwhile, Doctor Caius and Rugby are waiting for Evans to show up for the duel. Caius says he's a coward for not showing up. Page, Shallow, Slender and the Host enter to fetch him to Frogmore, telling him that Anne Page is there, but in actuality it is where Evans has been told to wait.

### Act III

Simple brings Page, Shallow and Slender to Evans and they are shortly after joined by Doctor Caius and the Host. Evans and Caius face off but the host talks them out of fighting. Caius and Evans converse privately and conclude that they have been deceived for the others' amusement. They decide to get revenge.

Mistress Page and Robin run into Ford in the street and say they are going to visit Mistress Ford. They exit and Ford comments to himself how this confirms Falstaff's words. He is joined by Page, Shallow, Slender, Host, Evans, and Caius. He enlists them to help him discover Falstaff and see justice done.

At Ford's house, Mistress Ford and Mistress Page tell the servants that when they receive the signal they are to carry the laundry cart out and dump its contents into the muddy river Thames. Mistress Page hides outside while Falstaff is brought in. Mistress Ford pretends that she's in love with Falstaff and he tries to woo her. Mistress Page rushes in saying that Ford is on his way. They tell Falstaff to hide in the laundry cart. The servants wheel it out just as Ford enters with the rest of the men. He accuses Mistress Ford of having a man in the house. They search and do not find anyone. Ford admits that he was wrong.

Fenton and Anne Page converse in secret about how Page thinks that Fenton wants to marry Anne only for her father's money. Fenton admits that initially he was interested in the money, but since he's gotten to know her, he's fallen in love with her. They are joined by Mistress Quickly, Shallow and Slender. Slender attempts to woo Anne but starts rambling about his father. Shallow tries to help him out but Anne asks him to let Slender woo for himself. Page and Mistress Page enter and Page is upset to see Fenton there. Anne asks her mother not to marry her to such a fool as Slender. Mistress Quickly tries to encourage Fenton.

Falstaff enters the Garter Inn and gripes about being thrown in the Thames. Mistress Quickly enters and apologizes on behalf of Mistress Ford. She says what happened to him was purely by accident and Mistress Ford feels horrible about it. She requests that he come back and try again. Falstaff agrees and Mistress Quickly exits. Ford enters disguised as Brook to find out what happened between Falstaff and Mistress Ford. He learns that Falstaff was at his house and escaped in the laundry cart. He also learns that Falstaff is going there again.

## Act IV

Mistress Page, her son and Mistress Quickly encounter Evans in the street, who says that he's cancelled school for the day. Mistress Page says her husband thinks that their son is not learning much so Evans quizzes him.

At Ford's house, Mistress Ford and Falstaff are talking when Mistress Page enters and says that Ford is coming. They convince him that the only way to hide is to disguise himself as the "fat woman of Brainsford". While he's dressing, Ford, Page, Caius, Evans and Shallow enter. The servants begin to push the laundry cart out, but Ford stops them and searches it. When he doesn't find anything, his friends call him paranoid. Falstaff enters disguised and Ford goes into a rage because he hates the woman of Brainsford. He beats Falstaff and chases him out.

At the Garter Inn, Bardolph borrows three horses from the Host for the German guests.

After Ford realizes he's been made a fool of, Mistress Ford and Mistress Page let the men in on their secret plan to humiliate Falstaff. For one final trick, they plan to lure Falstaff out to a supposedly haunted old tree and scare him with their children dressed up as fairies and evil sprites. Page wants his daughter, Anne, to dress up as the fairy queen and run off with Slender during the commotion. Mistress Page secretly plans to have Anne run off with Dr. Ciaus.

Bardolph meets up with the Host, Simple and Falstaff at the inn, and informs them that the Germans have run off with the horses. Evans and Ciaus run in, warning them that the Germans are not to be trusted. The Host gets very upset. Mistress Quickly enters and tells Falstaff that Mistress Ford was also beaten but that she wants to see him again.

Meanwhile, Fenton enters to speak with the Host. He reveals his plan to sneak off with Anne Page during all of the chaos with Falstaff and marry her. He asks the Host to obtain a priest.

## Act V

Falstaff tells Mistress Quickly he will meet with Mistress Ford again and she exits. Ford enters disguised as Brooke and confirms that Falstaff will go through with the meeting that evening.

Everyone prepares for that evening's events. Page tells Slender that Anne will be wearing white. Mistress Page secretly tells Caius that Anne will be wearing green. They all lead their children, disguised as fairies and sprites, to Herne's Oak.

According to plan, Falstaff enters dressed up as Herne with horns on his head. Mistress Page and Mistress Ford enter and Falstaff greets them happily. They hear a strange noise and the ladies run away. Evans, Mistress Quickly, Anne and all the children enter disguised as fairies. They chant and talk of magic. Falstaff is very afraid and tries to hide

but the fairies discover him before he can. The fairies start talking about Falstaff. They say that the way to tell if he is evil is to set him on fire and see if he burns. They poke him with sticks and burn him with candles. They decide he is evil and all of the children pinch him.

During the commotion Caius grabs a boy dressed as a white fairy and exits, Slender leaves with a boy disguised as a green fairy and Anne and Fenton slip away. The children eventually leave Falstaff alone and Page, Ford and their wives enter. They accuse him of pursuing their wives. Ford tells him that he was Brooke. Falstaff understands that he's been made a fool.

Evans instructs Falstaff to pursue God rather than pleasure. He also instructs Ford to trust his wife. Ford agrees. They all scold Falstaff and put him in his place. He gives up and they say they will punish him by making him repay the money he owes. Page invites him to celebrate his daughter's wedding with them that evening.

Slender enters very upset. He tells everyone that the Anne Page he ought to have married turned out to be a boy. Then Dr. Caius enters with a similar complaint. Finally, Anne Page and Fenton enter and ask her parents' forgiveness for deceiving them. They are surprised at first but then Page congratulates Fenton and welcomes him.

This LEARNING PLAN is designed for grades 9 through 12.

**Objective:** To teach students the use of tactics in acting.

**Materials needed:** Each student needs a copy of the Anne/Slender scene below.

**Standards and Benchmarks:** TH.A.1.4

**Introductory Information for students and teachers:** No matter what scene they are in, actors are always trying to achieve a goal. For example, in Act I, scene I of the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, Anne's goal is to bring Slender in for dinner, while his goal is to impress or charm Anne. The way that actors pursue their goal is by using a variety of tactics. Their tactic influences the intonation of their voice, their manner and body language.

**Suggested Lesson Plan:**

- 1) Pair up students in twos and make sure each of them have a copy of the Anne/Slender scene provided below.
- 2) Have them each pick a different tactic and, without telling each other what it is, read through the scene using that tactic.
- 3) Have them try to guess what the other person's tactic was.
- 4) Then have them pick different tactics and try it again.
- 5) Once the exercise is over discuss which tactics were most effective and why.

**Assessment:** Students will learn one of the most important tools of acting: the use of tactics.

### Tactics

To charm.	To flatter.	To take charge.	To overpower.
To inspire.	To push.	To pull.	To flee.
To comfort.	To belittle.	To embrace.	To motivate.
To lure.	To command.	To impress.	To mother.
To hurt.	To amuse.	To love.	To condemn.
To accuse.	To challenge.	To worship.	To calm.

### **Anne/Slender Scene**

Anne: Will it please your worship to come in, sir?

Slender: No, I thank you, forsooth, heartily; I am very well.

Anne: The dinner attends you, sir.

Slender: I am not a-hungry, I thank you, forsooth.

Anne: I may not go in without your worship;  
they will not sit till you come.

Slender: In faith, I'll eat nothing. I thank you as much as though I did.

Anne: I pray you, sir, walk in.

Slender: I had rather walk here, I thank you. I bruised my shin the other day with playing at sword and dagger with a master of fence and I cannot abide the smell of hot meat since.

This LEARNING PLAN is designed for grades 6 through 9.

**Objective:** To teach students how environment and setting influence a play.

**Materials needed:** Each student needs a copy of the Anne/Slender scene provided above.

**Standards and benchmarks:** TH.A.1.3, TH.A.1.4

**Introductory Information for students and teachers:** One of the great things about Shakespeare is that it can be set in just about any time period and any environment. When rehearsing a play, the actors and director have to constantly keep in mind their location, time period, the weather, etc. These facts influence their accent, their attitude, their posture and manners.

**Suggested Lesson Plan:**

- 1) Pair off the students and make sure each of them has a copy of the Anne/Slender scene provided above.
- 2) Have each couple choose one of the interior locations listed below and rehearse separately for a few minutes trying to allow their location to influence how they read the scene.
- 3) Then have each group come and perform their scene one at a time and have the other students try to guess what they chose. Discuss what choices they could have made to make their location more clear.
- 4) Repeat the exercise with an exterior location and add in weather conditions.

**Assessment:** Students will become more aware of their surroundings and how weather and locations affect a play.

**Locations**

The beach.	The school cafeteria.	The Mall.
At the office.	A kitchen.	Baseball park
At a dance.	A high-class restaurant.	On the moon.
An ice-skating rink.	Army barracks.	In a medieval castle.
Jedi training school.	Hogwarts	On a farm.

**Weather**

Rain	sleet	snow	balmy
Hot and sunny	windy	overcast	mild