

## 2016 Study Guide for *The Winter's Tale* by William Shakespeare

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### Before seeing/reading the play

1. What are the elements and conventions of a Shakespearean romance? How is the structure different from his tragedies, histories and comedies? In the 1700s, when this play was designated a romance, what did the word “romance” mean? This and other websites provide information:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespeare%27s\\_late\\_romances](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespeare%27s_late_romances)  
[http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Shakespeare\\_s\\_late\\_romances](http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Shakespeare_s_late_romances)
2. Research the 1606 law, known as the Act to Restrain Abuses of Players, which prohibited the playwrights of Shakespeare’s time from referring to the Christian god in their plays. Who instituted these laws? Why? How did the playwrights work around them? This and other websites provide information:  
<http://ise.uvic.ca/Library/SLTnoframes/literature/censorship.html>
3. In Shakespeare’s romances and a few other plays, a god intervenes. What purpose does it serve to have a god present in a play? The gods in *The Winter’s Tale* are Apollo, Demeter (or Ceres), Persephone (or Proserpina) and Autolycus. Research the myths of each, especially as they apply to the changing seasons. These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.pantheon.org/areas/mythology/europe/greek/articles.html>  
<http://www.pantheon.org/areas/mythology/europe/roman/articles.html>
4. What is an oracle? What does an oracle contain? Who was the oracle at Delphi (also known as Delphos)? This and other websites provide information:  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oracle>.

5. Look up the definition of the word tale. Discuss different kinds of tales (i.e. fairy tale, tall tale, folk tale.) What are the elements of a tale? How is a tale different from other stories or plays?
6. Research the bear in folk myths. What does the bear represent in these stories? These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.bears.org/spirit/>  
<http://www.crystalinks.com/bears.html>
7. What is the meaning of the names of the following characters in *The Winter's Tale*: Leontes, Hermione, Mamillius, Camillo, Antigonus, Perdita, Autolycus? Given your research on the meaning of the names of the characters, what do you think the play might be about? These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.babynamespedia.com/meaning/Leontes>  
<http://www.sheknows.com/baby-names/name/hermione>  
<http://latinlexicon.org/definition.php?p1=2034410>  
<http://www.babynamespedia.com/meaning/Camillo>  
<http://www.whatisthemeaningofname.com/what-is-the-meaning-of-the-name-antigonus-17544/>  
<http://www.sheknows.com/baby-names/latin-baby-names/browse/p/page:6>  
<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/autolycus>
8. What does it mean to be a good ruler? What characteristics does a good ruler possess? What is a tyrant? What characteristics does a tyrant possess?
9. What is a courtier? What are his or her responsibilities and duties to the king? If the king asks a courtier to do something immoral, what choice does the courtier have? These and other websites provide information:  
<http://research.uvu.edu/mcdonald/britquestions/rencourtiers.html>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Book\\_of\\_the\\_Courtier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Book_of_the_Courtier)
10. Research the difference between the use of “thou” and “you” in Shakespeare’s time. This and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.bardweb.net/content/thou.html>

11. Research the Han Dynasty in China. These and other websites provide information:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Han\\_dynasty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Han_dynasty)  
<http://thehandynasty.com/han-dynasty-achievements.html>  
<http://www.britannica.com/topic/Han-dynasty>

**Learn more about Shakespeare's life and times at the following websites:**

- <http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/index.html>
- <http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=865&CFID=6230886&CFTOKEN=25420173>
- <http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare.html>
- <http://www.bardweb.net/man.html>

### **After seeing/reading the play**

1. Refer to your research on tales. What is the significance of the title of the play? In what way is it a tale? Which parts of the play seem to belong to winter? Spring? Summer? Fall? What moods and actions and portions of human experience are traditionally assigned to each season? Which characters in the play do you associate with which seasons? Why?
2. Refer to your research on the meanings of the character names in the play. In what ways does the name fit the character?
3. Refer to your research on the prohibition of using the name of the Christian god and myths of the gods in the play: Apollo, Demeter (or Ceres), Persephone (or Proserpina) and Autolycus. How are these myths enacted in the play? Why is Apollo called on to judge Hermione? In what ways do Christian and pagan worlds interact in the play? How is that a sign of the times Shakespeare is writing in?
4. In what ways is this play a tragedy? A comedy? Historical? Pastoral? A tragicomedy? How is it two plays rather than one? How is it like a fairy tale? What generic designation might be given this play and why?

5. In the opening scene, Archidamus says, “. . . you shall see, as I have said, great difference betwixt our Bohemia and your Sicilia.” What are the differences between Sicilia and Bohemia?
6. Compare and contrast Leontes and Polixenes and their journeys in the play. What kind of a king is Leontes? Find clues in the text that tell us about him as a ruler and about life in his court. Why do the courtiers think they are free to speak their minds to him? Reason with him? Why does Paulina call him a tyrant? How and when does he deserve the title? How does he change? What kind of a king is Polixenes? Find clues in the text that tell us about him as a ruler and about life in his court. How and when is he a tyrant? How does he change?
7. Discuss, using textual evidence, the exact moment when Leontes becomes jealous. What might be the reasons for Leontes’ jealousy?
8. Who are affected by Leontes’ jealousy? What is the effect on each? In what ways does Leontes deserve to be forgiven for his actions? In what ways does he not deserve to be forgiven?
9. Refer to your research on Shakespeare’s use of “thee” and “you”. What is the difference between “you” and “thou” or “thee” in Elizabethan times? When Paulina speaks to Leontes, at what points does she refer to him as “you” and at what points does she call him “thee” or “thou?” What is she telling him by her choice of words?
10. Refer to your research on the duties and responsibilities of a courtier. What are the virtues and shortcomings of the following courtiers: Camillo, Antigonus and Paulina? What dilemmas face Camillo, Antigonus and Paulina? What are the consequences of the actions they take to handle the dilemmas?
11. Referring to the characteristics and duties of a courtier, describe how the Old Shepherd meets and fails to meet those standards.
12. What is the role of loyalty in the play? To whom is each character loyal? What forms does the loyalty take?

13. When a storm occurs in Shakespeare's plays, a life-changing event usually follows. What happens in *The Winter's Tale* after the storm? If you are seeing *Twelfth Night*, compare the shipwreck and storm at the beginning of the play to the storm in *The Winter's Tale*. What life-changing events follow each of the storms? How do the storms set the tone for the rest of the play?
14. Refer to your research on the bear in folk myth. Keeping (or bearing) in mind the mythic dimensions of the bear, what is the significance of the bear in *The Winter's Tale*?
15. Leontes says in Act III, scene ii, lines 238–240: "Once a day I'll visit/ The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there/ Shall be my recreation." How is Leontes recreated?
16. What are the false accusations in the play? Who accuses whom and of what? How are the false accusations similar? How are they different? How is each instance resolved? Who must forgive whom? What must be forgiven?
17. What happens during the 16 years that pass in the play? What happens to Hermione? What is Paulina's connection to Hermione during this period? What does Leontes do? What does Polixenes do? What does Camillo do?
18. In the second half of the play, there is a change of time, a change of seasons and a change of world view. What is the significance of Time? Why must 16 years pass? In what ways does time heal? What is the significance of the passage of the seasons? What is the significance of this symbolic regeneration? What do the older characters learn from the younger ones?
19. What is the significance of the action's shift from court life to country life? What changes does the new location bring about?
20. Who is the mythical Autolycus? What is the function of Autolycus in the play? Compare him to each of the other characters; e.g., how is he like and unlike Camillo? How is the forgiveness of Autolycus like and unlike the forgiveness of Leontes?

21. Paulina says to Leontes in Act V, scene iii, “It is required/You do awake your faith.” What faith must awaken in Leontes? Faith in what or in whom? Who else is required to “awake their faith”? What does this awakening contribute to the ending of the play?
  
22. Refer to your research on the Han Dynasty. Director Desdemona Chang, was inspired by dynastic China for the setting of Sicilia. In contrast, Bohemia was inspired by the American West of the 1850s-1900s. Compare the Sicilia and Bohemia of the play and of the production. What does the Han Dynasty reveal about Sicilia? What was revealed about Bohemia by setting it in a world inspired by the American West? What effect does the combination of the two settings have on the play as a whole?

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