

The Comedy of Errors

PLOT

Egeon, a merchant of Syracuse (in Italy), is condemned to death in Ephesus (in Turkey) for violating the ban against travel between the two rival cities. He explains that he has returned to Syracuse to find his wife and one of his twin sons that he lost in a shipwreck 25 years ago. Conveniently, the twin sons share the same name: Antipholos. Each Antipholos has a servant who also happen to be twins, who also happen to share the same name: Dromio. Antipholus of Syracuse grew up with his father but has not seen him in 7 years. Antipholus of Syracuse (S. Antipholus) is searching for his twin brother, while their father is searching for both of them. S. Antipholus and Egeon arrive separately in Ephesus where the other Antipholus (E. Antipholus) and Dromio live. The plot then becomes a series of mistaken identities, complicated by the confusion of E. Antipholus' wife, Adriana, and her servant, Luciana. The situation is resolved by the Abbess, Emilia, who just happens to be the mother of the twin Antipholi. In the end E. Antipholus and his wife reunite, Egeon is pardoned, S. Antipholus pursues Luciana, and the two Dromios embrace.

THEMES AND ISSUES

- 📖 Family – Separation, long lost family, what makes a family, siblings, parents
- 📖 Blood – Is it the tie that binds?
- 📖 Danger of the sea
- 📖 Marriage and Fidelity
- 📖 Loyalty, service, and the law
- 📖 The importance of a name
- 📖 Coincidence and Irony
- 📖 Communication and Distance

LANGUAGE AND STRUCTURE

- 📖 1st comedy & shortest (1,777 lines) – are characters & plot thorough enough?
- 📖 One of the most preposterous plots, is it at all possible?
- 📖 Physicality of two actors playing identical twins with same name, are their lines written to sound the same?
- 📖 Twins, identity, shipwreck: an introduction that is explored in later plays
- 📖 Based on Greek playwright Plautus' play "Menaechmi", stolen structure & plot?
- 📖 End is sweet and logical not comical.
- 📖 Undertones of tragedy – shipwreck, family separation, death

EXTENDED RESOURCES

Play: *The Comedy of Errors* by Shakespeare, *The Applause First Folio of Shakespeare* by Neil Freeman.

Wide Reading: *Separated at Birth?* by Spy Magazine Editors, *Twelfth Night* by Shakespeare, *Little Novels of Sicily* by Giovanni Verga

Film: 1983 BBC by Jones; 1974 RSC by Casson & Nunn; *Twins* by Reitman, *Twelfth Night*, *Twin Stories* by Golding, any of the Olsen Twin movies!

Music: "Who are you?" by the Who, The Thompson Twins, "Looking for a Stranger" by Pat Benetar, "I still haven't found what I'm looking for" by U2, the "O Brother Where Art Thou?" soundtrack

Current Affairs: Search internet for Adriana Scott and Tamara Rabi: identical twins adopted from Mexico who grew up in New York State and just met at college; www.twinsmagazine.com.

Teaching Resource: "Shakespeare for Dummies"

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Legend: All activities have been categorized using the following information. The bold letters represent the abbreviations. **R**eading, **W**riting, **L**istening, **S**peaking, **W**riting / **F**ormal, **I**nformal / **S**mall **G**roup, **G**roup, **I**ndividual / **A**ssessed, **N**ot **A**ssessed

- W&S/F/SG/A** 1. *Mini Shrew!* Working in small groups re-write the play into a 5 minute modern English version to memorize and perform in class. Focus on the main events only.
- L&W/I/SG/NA** 2. **There are many appropriate songs that could enhance a reading or performance of the play. Choose a song to introduce each scene in the play and write one line explaining what it contributes to the text.**
- V/In/I/NA** 3. Using S. Dromio and S. Antipholus' lines from Act III, Scene II, lines 107-143 where they describe a woman as a globe with each different body part representing a different country, create an illustration as you picture this woman.
- W/F/I/A** 4. **Create a new act that precedes the play to explain how the family came to be on a ship in a storm and what they did upon initial separation. Write notes and one key speech for your act to describe the story.**
- R/F/SG/A** 5. In a small group, research other Shakespearean plays involving either twins, mistaken identity, or shipwrecks. Write a list to post in class for comparison to the *Comedy of Errors*.
- W/F/I/A** 6. **Antipholus of Ephesus' wife, Adrianna, is unable to tell her husband and his twins apart. If you were an identical twin who would you like to play a trick on? How might you have used it to your advantage when you were younger?**
- W/In/I/NA** 7. There has not been a film version of the *Comedy of Errors* for many years. If you were the director who would you cast in each role? For the two sets of twins would have one actor play both parts, or cast twins, or two look alike actors?
- R&W/In/I/NA** 8. **A recent story from New York state reported identical twins meeting for the first time in college. Research this story on the internet and find one other similar story from any point in history. Write a one paragraph summary of the events.**
- V/In/SG/NA** 9. As a group, create a 3D plan of the town of Syracuse with all the details & characters from the play.
- V/In/SG/NA** 10. **Read the scene where Luciana scolds S. Antipholus for hitting on her (3.2.1-70). Find a classmate of the opposite sex and together create a similar scene but in a different location under different circumstances. What needs to be done to bring the humour to the scene? Be prepared to show all or part of your scene to the class!**
- R&V/In/G/NA** 11. As an entire class, determine the most important event in each act and create a tableau to represent it. Remember everyone has to be something, but not necessarily someone!
- R&V/In/I&G/NA** 12. **It's Jerry Springer and we are doing a show called "Surprise! You have a twin brother and he's hitting on your sister! I will assign you each a character. Become familiar with this character's personality and history. We will create a talk show, with me as a host (Jerry), where you will be a guest and be asked personal questions.**
- W/F/I/A** 13. *Shakespeare ties up all the pieces very quickly at the end of the play but the reader is dying to know what happens next – write Act VI in your best Shakespearean English.*
- W/In/I/NA** 14. **Complete the chart (found in "Shakespeare for Dummies") to track who loves who, who is mistaken for someone, who is reunited, captured, escapes, arrested etc.**
- V&W/F/I/A** 15. Memorize a speech from the text (minimum 15 lines, you can cut and paste), dress up as the character and perform your speech in front of the class. Write a modern English version of the speech to aid in your and the class' understanding.
- V/In/I/Na** 16. **Create a collage on a poster board for the play. Focus on location, or theme, or character. Play with different mediums. Place one thing that you deem most important in the centre as a focal point.**
- V&W/F/SG/NA** 17. In a small group create a small local newspaper for the town of Syracuse. The paper's date is one day after the last scene. You may write stories, include photographs, cartoons, editorials, etc. about the events.
- R&W/F/I/A** 18. **The play's title refers to "errors" or misunderstandings that occur in the play. Using specific references to the text (line #s), site all the errors that occur in the play. Do you conclude that the play was appropriately titled? What else could you have called it?**
- W/In/I/A** 19. In Shakespeare's time people of the upper class often hired members of the lower class to be their attendants or servants. If you could hire one what would they do for you? Create a list of job duties for them.
- R&V/F/I/A** 20. **The Comedy of Errors is actually a play about family lost and found. Research your family tree back 3 generations to see if there are any lost members. Create a family tree back as far as you can.**