



The Merry Wives

Education Pack



Northern Broadsides

Barrie Rutter & 'The Merry Wives'

Contents:

Page:

1. Introduction	pg 2
2. Merry Wives Synopsis	pg 3
3. Context	pg 4
4. Analysis	pg 6
5. Character Information	pg 7-10
6. Teachers Session Ideas	pg 11
• A Right Royle Treat	pg 12
• Understanding Act V	pg 14
7. Essay Suggestions	pg 22
8. Merry Wives Act Table	pg 23
9. Feedback Form	pg 24

Introduction:

This education pack has been written as a resource for Shakespeare's The Merry Wives. The contents are intended to be relevant for both those who are familiar with the play, those who know something of Shakespeare and those who have little or no knowledge of the playwright.

Because of this, we recommend that this pack is used selectively. Hopefully there is something for everyone, whether you are teaching, studying or simply have an interest in the play.

During the Merry Wives tour (March – June 2001), we are offering a variety of workshops on the play. (For more details on the tour, please visit www.northern-broadsides.co.uk). If you and your group are partaking in these workshops, we highly recommend that you make use of the contents of this pack. This will ensure that our practical workshops are taken up with practical work and we will have the time to really explore the text in greater depth.

The main aim of the sessions contained in this pack is to encourage participants to think about the text from a variety of approaches, practically, visually and dramatically. These skills are transferable and can easily be built upon during further work on Shakespeare or other dramatic texts.

We hope you find this pack of some use. Please fill in the feedback form at the end of the pack and send it to the address below to let us know your opinions – only then will we be able to provide what you require.

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Synopsis:

Here is a brief synopsis of *The Merry Wives*:

Falstaff is a knight down on his luck who devises a scheme to raise funds. He will seduce Mistress Ford and Mistress Page in an attempt to get at their husbands' money. Falstaff, however, has overestimated his ingenuity; the two women compare their letters, and - finding them identical - hatch a plan of their own to make a buffoon of the knight. They send him letters in return to encourage his advances.

In the meantime, Pistol and Nym, whom Falstaff has sacked, go to Ford and Page's husbands with the news. Ford, who is jealous and paranoid, disguises himself and meets Falstaff. He pretends to be an illicit lover who wishes to hire Falstaff to woo Mistress Ford on his behalf, to which Falstaff agrees.

As Mistresses Ford and Page pursue their sport, Falstaff is first hidden in a basket of dirty laundry and cast into a river, then later dressed as a woman and beaten. Finally, the women tell their husbands about their secret revenge, and all plot one last humiliation for the feckless Falstaff.

As this is going on, Page's daughter, Anne, is being courted by three suitors, only one of which she actually cares for: Fenton. Anne is included in the plans for Falstaff; she is to lead the children of the town - all dressed as fairies - in an attack on the knight as he waits in the woods for Mistress Ford and Mistress Page.

As they prepare for the final prank, the husband Page pulls Slender (one of Anne's suitors) aside and tells him to elope with her that evening; Mistress Ford pulls her favorite suitor, Doctor Caius, aside and says she wants him to elope with Anne. The two men are to recognize Anne by the color of dress she wears.

To add to this, Anne makes plans of her own to elope with her beloved Fenton. Falstaff, dressed as Herne (complete with antlers), is mercilessly tormented by the children dressed as fairies. The wives and husbands eventually reveal themselves to the much chagrined Falstaff, who is forgiven by all. In the midst of this resolution, Slender and Doctor Caius reappear. It seems that Slender thought Anne was to wear a white dress; Caius believed her to be wearing green. Both men, having erred on the colour of her dress, mistakenly ran off with boys instead of Anne. Fenton arrives with Anne in their wake; the two have married, and Anne's parents begrudgingly accept the fact.

Context: *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was written by William Shakespeare, who is likely the most influential writer in all of English literature, and certainly the most important playwright of the English Renaissance. Shakespeare died in 1616 at the age of fifty-two, the author of 154 sonnets and 38 remarkable plays, some of which were not only inarguably brilliant, but so influential as to alter the course of literature and culture forever.

Probably written in 1597-8, *Merry Wives* is Shakespeare's most middle-class play in setting, subject matter, and outlook. It's also one of his most farcical works, using physical gags and linguistic jokes to establish a comic tone that influence the play's ultimate spirit of reconciliation, after all the intrigues have been sorted out.

Merry Wives gives an impression of life in an English provincial town as it was lived at the time of the play's first performance. It refers to other, older plays; the main plot closely resembles *Il Pecorone*, a 1558 Italian play by Ser Giovanni Fiorentino. This plot and the primary subplot also draw on ancient Roman comedy and medieval farce. Though the play does contain characters both above and below the middle class, as well as culturally stereotyped foreigners, ultimately everything functions to demonstrate the assimilating power of the middle class.

The first performance of this play was said to have occurred in London on April 23, 1597, at a feast of the Order of the Garter (an aristocratic fraternity), which Queen Elizabeth attended. According to theatrical legend, Elizabeth saw Henry IV, Part I and so liked the character of Falstaff that she asked Shakespeare to write another play about him, allegedly allotting him only 14 days. Shakespeare may have put aside Henry IV, Part 2 to complete *Merry Wives*, and he included several characters who reappear from both plays, including Pistol, Nim, Bardolph, Mistress Quickly, and Shallow. Falstaff and his entourage supposedly were good friends with Prince Henry, later Henry V, which lends a monarchical touch to the more suburban events of *Merry Wives*.

The text survives in two different versions, one in the First Quarto (1602) and another in the First Folio (1623). The Folio is printed from a manuscript that was based on either a playhouse promptbook or an authorial manuscript, and has a close connection with the first performance of the play. The Quarto is most likely a reconstruction from memory by actors who performed parts in the first performances. Half the length of the Folio version, the Quarto is probably a poorly remembered account, or a version trimmed down for provincial performances. Modern editions are based on the Folio edition, though the Quarto's stage directions and certain passages have been integrated into modern editions.

Analysis: *The Merry Wives'* farcical, comic intrigues create a jovial tone, which suspends hierarchies, reconciles upper- and lower-class characters, and draws them together into the burgeoning middle class.

The main plot surrounds the playful but virtuous behaviour of the title characters, Mistress Page and Mistress Ford, who are married to two prosperous men of Windsor. Their main point is that wives can be merry and faithful at the same time--that is, that they can lead boisterous, vivid lives without betraying their duties to their husbands--which Mr. Page understands but Mr. Ford doubts. The wives set out to dupe the sexually predatory Falstaff while curing Ford of his jealousy, bringing him to the same level of trust that Page feels. Meanwhile, the Pages' daughter, Anne Page, is married to Fenton, a man of higher birth but less money. This affirms romantic love as a kind of social assimilator, transcending class and enabling individuals to create new and inclusive social categories around their romantic relationships.

Merry Wives has a contemporary middle-class tone, emphasizing provinciality and kind of robust common sense, that is unique to Shakespeare's plays. The social network of the community takes a negative view of anyone with origins outside Windsor. Slender's pretensions make him look like a fool; Justice Shallow, whose authority is based in the monarchy, ends up much the same. Sir Hugh Evans, the Welsh clergyman, derives his authority from outside (the church) and is heartily mocked for his foreign accent. Caius, the French doctor, is similarly teased for his external roots and source of authority.

The hostility of the locals to the aristocracy appears offstage in Page's rejection of Fenton's request for Anne's hand; Page suspects Fenton of having only financial desires for Anne, which is untrue. Yet the most marked resistance to the aristocracy lies in the repeated abuse of the impoverished knight, Falstaff. By the end, Falstaff has become a scapegoat for the whole town to mock because of financially-motivated attempts to seduce the Mistresses. Yet by the end, Fenton's successful marriage to Anne marks the reconciliation of the middle class and aristocracy.

This play makes use of far more prose than any other Shakespeare play. As befits its middle-class tone, it reproduces many proverbs and clichés. Quickly also misunderstands and mishears words throughout the play, hearing sexual innuendo in Latin conjugations and declensions. Throwaway insults against foreigners show a kind of casual linguistic ethnocentrism, which reaches its heights in the ridicule of the fragmented English and unusual pronunciation of Evans and Caius.

The title of the play declares the primacy of the women's roles: the play is literally the story of the two merry wives. The conflicts in which Mistress Ford and Mistress Page are involved are, to an extent, related to gender--but what do they accomplish? Is their triumph over Falstaff's seduction attempts and Ford's

jealousy a victory for them as women, or as members of the middle class, or both? Mistress Ford proves that Ford shouldn't be jealous, but in a certain way he was right to be--if he had arrived home at the right moment, he would have found Falstaff, and nothing would have convinced him that his wife was merely playing a trick. And while Mistress Page is blessed with an unjealous husband, she too has problems; she and her husband have each chosen a different man for their daughter to marry. While the play celebrates the Mistresses' autonomy, the only woman who shows herself to be truly free is Anne, who manages to create a companionable marriage like that of her parents, but against their will.

A pattern of sexual allusion develops in events, as well as language. Falstaff has to escape his second visit to Mistress Ford's house in disguise as a fat aunt of a servant. Ford's hatred of this aunt brings him to beat Falstaff as he flees. This moment of transvestitism looks ahead to the conclusion, where Slender and Caius both elope mistakenly with young boys instead of with Anne, as they had intended. These silly suitors are punished for their behavior by finding themselves in scenarios that suggest a threat of homosexuality, which, like adultery or financially-motivated arranged marriages, falls outside the alleged norm of a happy romantic wedding at a comedy's conclusion.

Additionally, this cross-dressing gives Shakespeare a chance to poke fun at the theatrical conventions of his day. In Elizabethan times, young boys played the roles of women on-stage. So in fact Fenton, though he is leaving with the real Anne, goes off at the end with a boy who is dressed as a girl, because the actor who played Anne would have been a boy; Fenton is, in the eyes of the audience, in exactly the same position as Slender and Caius. The boy gets the girl in an audience-pleasing fashion, yet at that same moment Shakespeare reminds the audience that they have willfully believed the same falsehood accepted by some of the play's most foolish characters.

By the end of the play, the efforts of the main plot to humiliate and expose Falstaff have unraveled. The predatory character is not ejected from the unified town; rather, Ford and Page decide to humiliate Falstaff one more time, even though they believe he is already harmless, and then invite him to their wedding feast. The Pages have managed to humiliate Falstaff, but they too are humiliated in his presence when they find that Anne has married neither of their choices for her husband. The tricksters have been tricked, bringing about a kind of moral leveling. Hierarchies are resolved, ending in a universally inclusive conclusion. The middle class cheerfully absorbs all comers, despite the conscious efforts of most of the leading characters, and the final unity is felt to be more profound than the various conflicts throughout the play.

Merry Wives Character Breakdown:

Here is a brief description of the characters to be found in The Merry Wives. This resource may be used as material for an introduction session to the play before a visit to a performance, or in conjunction with certain workshop suggestions (see individual workshops for more details).

Dramatis Personae:

- **Sir John Falstaff**

- **Shallow**, a country justice
- **Slender**, cousin to Shallow
- **Simple**, servant to Slender

- **Ford**
- **Mistress Ford**
- **Page**
- **Mistress Page**
- **Anne Page**, her daughter
- **William Page**, son of Page

- **Fenton**, a gentleman

- **Sir Hugh Evans**, a Welsh parson

- **Doctor Caius**, a French physician
- **Mistress Quickly**, servant to Dr Caius
- **Rugby**, servant to Doctor Caius

- **Host** of the Garter Inn

- **Bardolph**, follower of Falstaff
- **Pistol**, follower of Falstaff
- **Nym**, follower of Falstaff
- **Robin**, page to Falstaff

Merry Wives Character Breakdown:

Mistress Ford ~ married to Ford

- ~ she is a friend of Mistress Page
- ~ she is one of the two women to be deceitfully wooed by Falstaff
- ~ she & Mistress Page receive an identical letter from Falstaff
- ~ they decide to lead him on and play a trick on him to humiliate him
- ~ Mistress Ford hopes to prove to her husband that she is entirely faithful
- ~ she hopes this will help him to get over his oppressive jealousy

Mistress Page ~ is married to Page and mother of Anne & William Page

- ~ is a friend of Mistress Ford
- ~ she and Mistress Ford receive a seductive letter from Falstaff,
- ~ they decide to lead him on and humiliate him
- ~ Mist. Page and her husband disagree about who should marry their daughter
- ~ she favours Caius, but her husband favours Slender; Anne herself likes neither
- ~ Mist. Page plots with Caius that he should marry Anne, but it all goes wrong
- ~ both mother & father must learn to listen to what their daughter really wants

Falstaff ~ a knight

- ~ he is also a scoundrel and occasionally a thief
- ~ in Henry IV, Part I, he was a drinking buddy of the young Prince Henry
- ~ Falstaff is boisterous, lively, cowardly, funny, and mischievous
- ~ he appears in several of Shakespeare's plays
- ~ he plans to seduce married women so he can get at their husbands' cash
- ~ he launches a plan to seduce Mistress Page and Mistress Ford
- ~ the two wives realise his plans when he sends them identical love-letters
- ~ the wives decide to retaliate & on three occasions humiliate him
- ~ the final time they humiliate him publically so everyone knows his schemes

Ford ~ husband of Mistress Ford

- ~ Ford is very jealous of his wife
- ~ he learns that Falstaff intends to try to seduce his wife
- ~ he is sure she'll fall for Falstaff and shame him
- ~ he puts on a disguise & calls himself Master Brooke
- ~ he hopes to fool Falstaff into telling him what's happening which works
- ~ Falstaff is fooled and Ford becomes more & more jealous
- ~ when Mist. Ford
- ~ at the end of the play, he realises that his wife has been faithful and
- ~ Evans tells him not to be jealous in future and Ford agrees

Page ~ husband of Mistress Page & father of Anne & William Page

- ~ Page is not jealous of his wife
- ~ he hears of Falstaff's plan to seduce her but doesn't mistrust her
- ~ in comparison to Ford, his relaxed attitude makes him look like a good husband
- ~ he and his wife disagree about who should marry their daughter Anne

- ~ neither are able to choose a suitor she likes, namely Fenton
- ~ he must learn that he should listen to his daughter's opinions

Sir Hugh Evans ~ is the local clergyman

- ~ he's Welsh, so he speaks in an accent
- ~ the other English characters find his speech very amusing
- ~ they make fun of him constantly for it
- ~ finally he and Caius plot to humiliate the Host after he makes fools of them

Caius ~ the local doctor

- ~ Caius is Mistress Quickly's master
- ~ he is French and speaks with a broken English
- ~ he suffers the same humiliation as Evans because of his accent
- ~ he hopes to marry Anne Page, and Mistress Page favours him
- ~ Page doesn't, and their conflicting schemes disrupt his marriage plans.
- ~ he and Evans also make plans to get back at the Host for making fun of them.

Anne Page ~ daughter of Page and Mistress Page

- ~ Anne is sought for marriage by Fenton, Caius and Slender
- ~ Mist. Page arranges for her to marry Caius, Mr Page, Slender
- ~ Anne chooses Fenton, rejecting the other two suitors
- ~ she tricks her parents by plotting to elope with him in the final Act
- ~ she returns from her wedding and persuades her parents to accept her choice
- ~ they do so, and everyone has a happy ending

Fenton ~ a suitor for Anne Page's hand,

- ~ high-born but poor
- ~ Page denies his suit because he fears that Fenton's interest is purely financial
- ~ Fenton admits he felt this way at first, but he fell in love with Anne
- ~ she likes him best, and the two marry at the end

Slender ~ the third suitor for Anne Page's hand

- ~ he is in love with her, though he denies it
- ~ Slender is urged on by Shallow in trying to seduce her
- ~ he is unable to speak anything but nonsense to Anne and she doesn't love him
- ~ Page favours him as a good match for his daughter
- ~ in the end he is fooled by Anne & Fenton's plan & doesn't get to marry her

Shallow ~ a figure of the law

- ~ nevertheless he is a foolish character of misplaced authority
- ~ he urges Slender to try to seduce Anne Page, even speaking for him at times

Bardolph ~ one of Falstaff's men

- ~ Bardolph takes over as the bartender of the Garter Inn
- ~ he can then pay for Falstaff's entourage's room and board

Nim ~ one of Falstaff's men

- ~ Nim wants to stay honest, and he refuses to deliver Falstaff's seductive letters
- ~ instead, he and Pistol decide to let the husbands know of Falstaff's scheme

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- ~ Pistol wants to stay honest, and he refuses to deliver Falstaff's seductive letters
- ~ instead, he and Nim decide to let the husbands know of Falstaff's scheme

Mistress Quickly ~ Caius's servant

- ~ she becomes everyone's messenger
- ~ she goes to Falstaff for Mist. Page and Mist. Ford as part of their plan
- ~ she speaks to Anne Page on behalf of all three of her suitors
- ~ in the end, she prefers Fenton and supports his suit most readily
- ~ she chronically misunderstands or mishears other people
- ~ she hears sexually charged conversations where there are none

Host ~ Host of the Garter Inn

- ~ the Host makes fun of Evans and Caius's broken and accented English
- ~ so they decide to get back at him by tricking him
- ~ their ploy results in the loss of three of the Host's horses

William Page ~ Page's son

- ~ he meets Evans, who gives him an impromptu Latin lesson
- ~ Mistress Quickly entirely mishears the class as sexual innuendo.

Simple ~ Slender's servant

- ~ seems to end up getting in scrapes quite innocently

Teacher's Session Suggestions:

Introduction:

These sessions have all risen directly from our work during the rehearsal period of *Merry Wives*. I have tried to make them accessible to those who have little or no experience of Shakspeare's work and tried to include as much stimulus material without the need for buying expensive copies of the play.

Most of the sessions are designed to be run before you & your group make a visit to see our production of *Merry Wives* in order that they are already beginning to think about the play and the experience will hopefully resonate more productively for them. You may find it useful to go through the material on the previous pages before you begin a session. You will find specific requests for this in the descriptions of individual workshops.

I hope you find these sessions useful.

Contents:

A Right Royle Treat:

A session using well-known settings to familiarise students with Shakespeare. Looking at Act II scene ii, the conversation between Mistresses Ford and Page.

Understanding Act V:

Taking a closer look at the language as a means of getting to grips with the act as a whole.

A Right Royle Treat:

You will find the material for this session below. The exercise can be done with or without prior knowledge of the text, but you may find it useful to have a look at the synopsis.

Purpose:

The ideas behind this session is to contextualise Shakespeare in a familiar place. Shakespeare's language is not only rich, but tends to spring up in the most unusual places. Through exploring different ways of presenting Shakespeare, this exercise will not only enable students to feel more in control of the text but hopefully allows them to have some fun with the language.

Estimated Time:

30-45mins + discussion time

Task:

Give students a copy of the sections following. Firstly, do a read-through as a group. Don't worry too much if people find themselves stumbling. Ask them to pair off or get into groups of three.

Assign each group with a different well-known programme. Obviously, the ones closest to our hearts are things like Coronation Street and The Royle Family as they tend to reflect the sounds of language which we work in. You can choose any though, EastEnders, X-files, whatever you think may catch their imaginations. Allow them to work on performing the text in the styles of these programmes.

When they have done this, have them perform their section in front of the rest of the group. This tends to become a light-hearted 15mins and can be a relief after trying to decipher some of the language.

Points of Discussion:

- How does the setting of a scene affect the method of performance?
- The Merry Wives is actually called The Merry Wives of Windsor, but we have chosen to leave out the Windsor as our play is not set there. Where would you set the play and why?
- Think about the time setting of the play. How would the performance of the play be affected by placing it in different time settings?

Measuring The Success:

Did the students respond creatively to the given stimulus? Were they able to place Shakespeare in a more familiar context and if so, were they able to relate to the text in a more familiar way?

Mrs. Ford. Mistress Page! trust me, I was going to your house.

Mrs. Page. And, trust me, I was coming to you. You look very ill.

Mrs. Ford. Nay, I'll ne'er believe that: I have to show to the contrary.

Mrs. Page. Faith, but you do, in my mind.

Mrs. Ford. Well, I do then; yet, I say I could show you to the contrary. O, Mistress Page! give me some counsel.

Mrs. Page. What's the matter, woman?

Mrs. Ford. O woman, if it were not for one trifling respect, I could come to such honour!

Mrs. Page. Hang the trifle, woman; take the honour. What is it? dispense with trifles; what is it?

Mrs. Ford. If I would but go to hell for an eternal moment or so, I could be knighted.

Mrs. Page. What? thou liest. Sir Alice Ford!

Mrs. Ford. We burn daylight: here, read, read; perceive how I might be knighted. How shall I be revenged on him? I think, the best way were to entertain him with hope, till the wicked fire of lust have melted him in his own grease. Did you ever hear the like?

Mrs. Page. Letter for letter, but that the name of Page and Ford differs - here's the twin brother. I had rather be a giantess, and lie under Mount Pelion. I will find you twenty lascivious turtles ere one chaste man.

Mrs. Ford. Why, this is the very same; the very hand, the very words. What doth he think of us?

Mrs. Page. Nay, I know not: it makes me almost ready to wrangle with mine own honesty. For, sure, unless he know some strain in me, that I know not myself, he would never have boarded me in this fury.

Mrs. Ford. Boarding call you it? I'll be sure to keep him above deck.

Mrs. Page. So will I. Let's be revenged on him: let's appoint him a meeting; give him a show of comfort in his suit, and lead him on with a fine-baited delay, till he hath pawned his horses to mine host of the Garter.

Mrs. Ford. Nay, I will consent to act any villainy against him, that may not sully the chariness of our honesty. O, that my husband saw this letter! it would give eternal food to his jealousy.

Mrs. Page. Why, look, where he comes; and my good man too: he's as far from jealousy, as I am from giving him cause; and that, I hope, is an unmeasurable distance.

Mrs. Ford. You are the happier woman.

Mrs. Page. Let's consult together against this greasy knight. Come hither. [*They retire.*]
(Act II, scene I)

Understanding Act V:

Introduction:

It's the old, yet faithful, method of really getting to grips with the play by 'translating' sections of it. During rehearsals, you will often find Barrie or one of the actors doing just this whilst they walk through certain movements.

Purpose:

If the students have the confidence to really get into their own language, this exercise can almost be a method of 'reclaiming' Shakespeare. By speaking the lines as one would normally speak, students will be able to realise that actually, Shakespeare is not so 'difficult' and is really very accessible.

Estimated Time:

60-90mins + discussion time

Task:

You may have already picked this up, but basically, give students a section of text (see below). Firstly, do a read-through as a group. Don't worry too much if people find themselves stumbling. Then ask them to 'translate' their sections into language which they would normally use in everyday life. You may need to press this point home, as generally, students tend to place a certain amount of distance between their own language and that which they would use in a classroom situation.

Don't worry about 'translating' every word - the aim is to be as direct as possible in conveying the meaning.

When they have done this, have them perform their section in front of the rest of the group. This tends to become a lighthearted 15mins and can be a relief after trying to decipher some of the language. If you have time, try reading through the original again and see what difference this has made on the impact of the meaning.

Points of Discussion:

- How did the students feel about their reading of the piece before and after they had 'translated' it?
- Did they feel the piece was more accessible once they had spent some time deciphering it?

Measuring the Success:

Did the group make use of their own language when exploring the piece? Were they able to present a convincing performance after they had completed the task?

Glossary:

nayword = password

horns = disguise also ref. to the devil

couched = hidden

lewdsters = rude people

Trib, trib = walk spritely

watch-ords = signal

makes a beast a man = transforms a dull man into a witty one

a man a beast = transforms a wise man into a fool or lusty animal

scut = the tail of a deer

potatoes = Spanish potatoes were meant to have aphrodisiac qualities

kissing-comfits = sweet meats that sweetened breath

eringoes = roots of sea holly that had aphrodisiac qualities

provocation = sexual temptation

brib'd buck = stolen deer (chopped up to hide from owners)

haunch = buttock

woodman = hunter / womaniser

restitution = compensates for what was withheld previously

shades = spirits

oyes = an old French word for 'hark ye'

pinch the maids blue = usual punishment of fairies

wink and couch = close the eyes

Rein up the organs of her fantasy = grant her sweet sleep

man of middle earth = i.e. not a fairy

piece of cheese = usual joke about the Welsh fondness for cheese

o'erlook'd = bewitched or given the evil eye

tainted in desire = made unclean by lust

fantasy = desire

bloody flame = fire in the blood

mutually = all together

watche'd you = caught you in the act

serve your turn = do for you

yokes = antlers

become = suit / adorn

arrested for it = impounded till moneys be returned

meet = i.e. make love

coxcorn of frize = a fools cap made of coarse wollen cloth

Seese is not goot to give putter = it is unhealthy to add cheese to butter

makes fritters of English = chops the English language into bits to make fritters

hodge-pudding = pudding with mixed ingredients

metheglins = strong spiced drink

start of me = advantage over

eat a posset = drink a night-cap

raise all Hell = call to arms

amaze = bewilder

proportion held = reciprocation

contracted = betrothed

unduteous title = breach of duty

evitate = avoid

guide the state = rule

1.

Enter **PAGE, SHALLOW, and SLENDER.**

Page. Come, come; we'll couch i' the castleditch till we see the light of our fairies. Remember, son Slender, my daughter -

Slen. Ay, forsooth; I have spoke with her and we have a nayword how to know one another. I come to her in white, and cry, 'mum;' she cries, 'budget;' and by that we know one another.

Shal. That's good too: but what needs either your 'mum,' or her 'budget?' the white will decipher her well enough. It hath struck ten o'clock.

Page. The night is dark; light and spirits will become it well. God prosper our sport! No man means evil but the devil, and we shall know him by his horns. Let's away; follow me. [Exeunt.]

Enter **MISTRESS PAGE, MISTRESS FORD, and DR. CAIUS.**

Mrs. Page. Master Doctor, my daughter is in green: when you see your time, take her by the hand, away with her to the deanery, and dispatch it quickly. Go before into the Park: we two must go together.

Caius. I know vat I have to do. Adieu.

Mrs. Page. Fare you well, sir. [Exit **CAIUS.**] My husband will not rejoice so much at the abuse of Falstaff, as he will chafe at the doctor's marrying my daughter: but 'tis no matter; better a little chiding than a great deal of heart break. **Mrs.**

Ford. Where is Nan now and her troop of fairies, and the Welsh devil, Hugh?

Mrs. Page. They are all couched in a pit hard by Herne's oak, with obscured lights; which, at the very instant of Falstaff's and our meeting, they will at once display to the night. **Mrs. Ford.** That cannot choose but amaze him.

Mrs. Page. If he be not amazed, he will be mocked; if he be amazed, he will every way be mocked.

Mrs. Ford. We'll betray him finely.

Mrs. Page. Against such lewdsters and their lechery, Those that betray them do no treachery.

Mrs. Ford. The hour draws on: to the oak, to the oak! [Exeunt.]

2.

Fal. The bell hath struck twelve; the minute draws on. Now, the hot-blooded gods assist me! Remember, Jove, thou wast a bull for thy Europa; love set on thy horns. O powerful love! that, in some respects, makes a beast a man; in some other, a man a beast. O omnipotent love! When gods have hot backs, what shall poor men do? For me, I am here a stag; and the fattest, I think, i' the forest: send me a cool rut-time, Jove, or who can blame me to piss my tallow? Who comes here? my doe? (*Enter MISTRESS FORD and MISTRESS PAGE.*)

Mrs. Ford. Sir John! art thou there, my deer? my male deer?

Fal. My doe with the black scut! Let the sky rain potatoes; let it thunder to the tune of 'Green Sleeves;' hail kissing-comfits and snow eringoes; let there come a tempest of provocation, I will shelter me here. [Embracing her.

Mrs. Ford. Mistress Page is come with me, sweetheart.

Fal. Divide me like a brib'd buck, each a haunch: I will keep my sides to myself, my shoulders for the fellow of this walk, and my horns I bequeath your husbands. Am I a woodman, ha? Speak I like Herne the hunter? Why, now is Cupid a child of conscience; he makes restitution. As I am a true spirit, welcome!

Mrs. Page. Alas! what noise?

Mrs. Ford. Heaven forgive our sins!

Fal. What should this be?

Mrs. Ford, Mrs. Page. Away, away! [They run off.

Fal. I think the devil will not have me damned, lest the oil that is in me should set hell on fire; he would never else cross me thus.

Enter SIR HUGH EVANS, PISTOL, MIST. QUICKLY & others as fairies

Quick. Fairies, black, grey, green, and white,
You moonshine revellers, and shades of night,
You orphan heirs of fixed destiny,
Attend your office and your quality.
Crier Hobgoblin, make the fairy oyes.

Pist. Elves, list your names: silence, you airy toys!
Cricket, to Windsor chimneys shalt thou leap:
Where fires thou find'st unrak'd and hearths unswept,
There pinch the maids as blue as bilberry:
Our radiant queen hates sluts and sluttery.

3.

Eva. Where's Bede? Go you, and where you find a maid
That, ere she sleep, has thrice her prayers said,
Sleep she as sound as careless infancy;
But those that sleep and think not on their sins,
Pinch them, arms, legs, backs, shoulders, sides, and shins.

Quick. About, about!
Our dance of custom round about the oak
Of Herne the hunter, let us not forget.

Eva. Pray you, lock hand in hand; yourselves in order set;
And twenty glow-worms shall our lanthorns be,
To guide our measure round about the tree.
But, stay; I smell a man of middle-earth.

Fal. Heavens defend me from that Welsh fairy, lest he transform me to a piece of cheese!

Pist. Vile worm, thou wast o'erlook'd even in thy birth.

Quick. With trial-fire touch me his finger-end:
If he be chaste, the flame will back descend
And turn him to no pain; but if he start,
It is the flesh of a corrupted heart.

Pist. A trial! come.

Eva. Come, will this wood take fire?

Fal. Oh, oh, oh!

Quick. Corrupt, corrupt, and tainted in desire!
About him, fairies, sing a scornful rime;
And, as you trip, still pinch him to your time.

SONG. Fie on sinful fantasy!
Fie on lust and luxury!
Lust is but a bloody fire,
Kindled with unchaste desire,
Fed in heart, whose flames aspire,
As thoughts do blow them higher and higher.
Pinch him, fairies, mutually;
Pinch him for his villany;
Pinch him, and burn him, and turn him about,
Till candles and star-light and moonshine be out.

4.

Mrs. Page. Why, Sir John, do you think, though we would have thrust virtue out of our hearts by the head and shoulders, and have given ourselves without scruple to hell, that ever the devil could have made you our delight?

Ford. What, a hodge-pudding?

Shall. A bag of flax?

Mrs. Page. A puffed man?

Page. Old, cold, withered, and of intolerable entrails?

Ford. And one that is as slanderous as Satan?

Page. And as poor as Job?

Ford. And as wicked as his wife?

Eva. And given to fornications, and to taverns, and sack and wine and metheglins, and to drinkings and swearings and starings, pribbles and prabbles?

Fal. Well, I am your theme: you have the start of me; I am dejected; I am not able to answer the Welsh flannel. Ignorance itself is a plummet o'er me: use me as you will.

Ford. Marry, sir, we'll bring you to one Master Brook, that you have cozened of money, to whom you should have been a pander: over and above that you have suffered, I think, to repay that money will be a biting affliction.

Page. Yet be cheerful, knight, be cheerful! thou shalt eat a posset to-night at my house; where I will desire thee to laugh at my wife, that now laughs at thee. Tell her, Master Slender hath married her daughter.

Mrs. Page. [Aside.] Doctors doubt that: if Anne Page be my daughter, she is, by this Doctor Caius' wife.

5.

Enter **SLENDER**.

Slender. Father Page!

Page. Son, how now! how now, son! have you dispatched?

Slender. Dispatched! I'll make the best in Gloster-shire know on't; would I were hanged, la, else!

Page. Of what, son?

Slender. I came yonder at Haworth to marry Mistress Anne Page, and she's a great lubberly boy: a postmaster's boy.

Page. Upon my life, then, you took the wrong.

Slender. What need you tell me that? I think so, when I took a boy for a girl. If I had been married to him, for all he was in woman's apparel, I would not have had him.

Page. Why, this is your own folly. Did not I tell you how you should know my daughter by her garments?

Slender. I went to her in white, and cried, 'mum,' and she cried 'budget,' as Anne and I had appointed; and yet it was not Anne, but a postmaster's boy.

Mrs. Page. Good George, be not angry: I knew of your purpose; turned my daughter into green; and, indeed, she is now with the doctor at the deanery, and there married.

Enter **DOCTOR CAIUS**.

Caius. Vere is Mistress Page? By gar, I am cozened: I ha' married un garçon, a boy; un paysan, by gar, a boy; it is not Anne Page: by gar, I am cozened.

Mrs. Page. Why, did you not take her in green?

Caius. Ay, by gar, and 'tis a boy: by gar, I'll raise all Hell. [Exit.

Ford. This is strange. Who hath got the right Anne?

6.

Enter **FENTON and ANNE PAGE.**

How now, Master Fenton!

Anne. Pardon, good father! good my mother, pardon!

Page. Now, mistress, how chance you went not with Master Slender?

Mrs. Page. Why went you not with Master Doctor, maid?

Fent. You do amaze her: hear the truth of it.
You would have married her most shamefully,
Where there was no proportion held in love.
The truth is, she and I, long since contracted,
Are now so sure that nothing can dissolve us.
The offence is holy that she hath committed,
And this deceit loses the name of craft,
Of disobedience, or unduteous title,
Since therein she doth evitate and shun
A thousand irreligious cursed hours,
Which forced marriage would have brought upon her.

Ford. Stand not amaz'd: here is no remedy:
In love the heavens themselves do guide the state:
Money buys lands, and wives are sold by fate.

Fal. I am glad, though you have ta'en a special stand to strike at me, that your
arrow hath glanced.

Page. Well, what remedy? Fenton, God give thee joy!
What cannot be eschew'd must be embrac'd.

Fal. When night dogs run all sorts of deer are chas'd.

Mrs. Page. Well, I will muse no further. Master Fenton,
Heaven give you many, many merry days!
Good husband, let us every one go home,
And laugh this sport o'er by a country fire;
Sir John and all.

Ford. Let it be so. Sir John,
To Master Brook you yet shall hold your word;
For he to-night shall lie with Mistress Ford. [Exeunt.

Essay Suggestions:

Here are some essay ideas. They do require knowledge of the play and may be useful as a follow-up exercise after seeing the performance. You may find it useful to look at the information on the play and the characters that are in this pack as an additional resource.

- 1.** What flaw does each husband (and one wife) have, that they must overcome by the conclusion of the play? What are the negative implications of these flaws? How do they learn their lesson?
- 2.** Does the conclusion affirm or disavow the various schemes that took place during the scope of the play? Why or why not?
- 3.** What kind of representation of England are we given by this play?
- 4.** Consider the role of social class in this play. How are characters marked as lower, middle, or upper class? What happens to this hierarchy as the play progresses? Is class dealt with differently here than in other Shakespeare plays you have read?
- 5.** Consider nationality in this play. How are some characters marked as being different than others? How are they treated? Is the distinction fair? How is nationality dealt with differently than in other Shakespeare plays you have read?
- 6.** Comment on trickery in this play. Does every schemer win one round, only to lose another one later? Does any scheme really pay off? Does any scheme always fail?
- 7.** Discuss the women in this play, including Mistress Ford, Mistress Page, Mistress Quickly, and Anne Page. What kind of freedom or autonomy do they have? What do the "merry wives" teach us?
- 8.** Consider marriage as it is portrayed in this play. Discuss the range between proposals of marriage to long-standing relationships. Is there an overarching theme to the idea of marriage here represented?
- 9.** Think about instances of cross-dressing and gender confusion in this play. What role do you think these scenes play in terms of themes of the play?

Feed-back Form:

We would find it more than useful if you could take a few minutes to complete the form below and return it to : Jude Wright, Northern Broadsides, Dean Clough, Halifax, HX3 5AX. In doing so, you will help us to continue to provide you with a dynamic and stimulating resource.

1. Have you been to see our production of The Merry Wives? If so, where and when?
2. How did you find out about our Education work?
Reviews Advertising Local Theatre Other
3. Did you make use of the teacher's session ideas? If so, which ones?
~ A Right Royle Treat
~ Understanding Act V
4. Did you find them useful? Please give details:

5. Did you take part in any Northern Broadsides Education work – visiting workshop, talks, in-house workshops? If so, when and where?

6. Would you take part in future education programmes run by Northern Broadsides?

7. Did you download the education pack from our web site? If so, would you say that the ease of availability and lack of cost made you more inclined to take part in our education programme?

Comment [NBT1]:

