

THE
Merry Wives of Windsor.

Actus primus, Scena prima.

Enter Justice Shallow, Slender, Sir Hugh Evans, Master Page, Falstoffs, Bardolph, Nym, Pitoll, Anne Page, Mistress Ford, Mistress Page, Simple.

Shallow.

Sir Hugh, persuade me not: I will make a Star-Chamber matter of it, if hee were twenty Sir *Iohn Falstoffs*, he shall not abuse *Robert Shallow* Esquire. (Coram.

Slen. In the County of *Glocester*, Justice of Peace and *Shal.* I (Cosen *Slender*) and *Cust-alarums*.

Slen. I, and *Rato lorum* too; and a Gentleman borne (Master Parson) who writes himselfe *Armigero*, in any Bill, Warrant, Quittance, or Obligation, *Armigero*.

Shal. I that I doe, and haue done any time these three hundred yeeres.

Slen. All his successors (gone before him) hath don't; and all his Ancestors (that come after him) may: they may giue the dozen white Luces in their Coate.

Shal. It is an olde Coate.

Evans. The dozen white Lowfes doe become an old Coat well: it agrees well passant: It is a familiar beast to man, and signifies Loue.

Shal. The Lufe is the fresh-fish, the salt-fish, is an old Coate.

Slen. Inay quarter (Coz).

Shal. You may, by marrying.

Evans. It is marring indeed, if he quarter it.

Shal. Not a whit.

Evans. Yes per-lady: if he ha's a quarter of your coat, there is but three Skirts for your selfe, in my simple coniectures; but that is all one: if Sir *Iohn Falstoffs* haue committed disparagements vnto you, I am of the Church and will be glad to do my beneuolence, to make attonements and compromises betweene you.

Shal. The Councell shall heare it, it is a Riot.

Evans. It is not meet the Councell heare a Riot: there is no feare of Got in a Riot: The Councell (looke you) shall desire to heare the feare of Got, and not to heare a Riot: take your viza-ments in that.

Shal. Ha: o' my life, if I were yong againe, the sword should end it.

Evans. It is better that friends is the sword, and end it: and there is also another deuice in my praine, which peraduenture brings good discretions with it. There is *Anne Page*, which is daughter to Master *Thomas Page*, which is pretty virginity.

Slen. *Mistress Anne Page*? she has browne haire, and speaks small like a woman.

Evans. It is that ferry person for all the world, as iust as you will desire, and seuen hundred pounds of Moneyes, and Gold, and Siluer, is her Grand-fire vpon his death-bed, (Got deliuer to a ioyfull resurrection) giue, when she is able to ouertake seueenteene yeeres old. It were a goot motion, if we leaue our pribbles and prabbles, and desire a marriage betweene Master *Abraham*, and *Mistress Anne Page*.

Slen. Did her Grand-fire leaue her seauen hundred pound?

Evans. I, and her father is make her a petter penny.

Slen. I know the young Gentlewoman, she has good gifts.

Evans. Seuen hundred pounds, and possibilities, is goot gifts.

Shal. Wel, let vs see honest *Mr Page*: is *Falstoffs* there?

Evans. shall I tell you a lye? I doe despise a lyer, as I doe despise one that is false, or as I despise one that is not true: the Knight Sir *Iohn* is there, and I beseech you be ruled by your well-willers: I will peat the doore for *Mr Page*. What hoa? Got-plese your house heere.

Mr Page. Who's there?

Evans. Here is go's plesing and your friend, and Justice *Shallow*, and heere yong Master *Slender*: that peraduentures shall tell you another tale, if matters grow to your likings.

Mr Page. I am glad to see your Worships well: I thanke you for my Venison Master *Shallow*.

Shal. Master *Page*, I am glad to see you: much good doe it your good heart: I wish'd your Venison better, it was ill killd: how doth good *Mistress Page*? and I thank you alwaies with my heart, la: with my heart.

Mr Page. Sir, I thanke you.

Shal. Sir, I thanke you: by yes, and no I doe.

Mr Pa. I am glad to see you, *Slender*.

Slen. How do's your father?

Mr Pa. It could say he was out-run on

Slen. You'll

Shal. That 'tis a good do

Mr Pa. A

Shal. Sir

be more said heere?

Mr Pa. S

good office b

Evans. It is

Shal. He ha

Mr Pa. Sir, he

On The Merry Wives of Windsor

A
Resource for
Grades K - 12
About the Play
The Merry Wives
of Windsor

Shakespeare Festival St. Louis' Education Tour offers a fine opportunity for live performance to become a part of the rich fabric of learning within your classroom. Watching a play or becoming an actor helps develop engaged students who enthusiastically take part in a comprehensive learning experience. Spending a little time introducing your class to Shakespeare and the play they will see will increase your student's ability to be an active, thoughtful and entertained audience member.

These study materials offer an entry point for stimulating interest and providing a context through which your students will have a deeper and enjoyable time watching the Shakespeare Festival touring production.

The materials are also helpful as a guide to learning about their role as the audience - and THAT is the key! Without an audience, the theatre does not exist. Shakespeare Festival Education Tour provides the performance, but only you and your students can complete the "Shakespeareance."

Without you, Shakespeare's brilliance is merely words on a page. Together we bring his plays alive, allowing his genius to inspire the audiences of the future!

Christopher Limber
Education Director
Shakespeare Festival St. Louis



Students at City Academy enjoy Education Tour 2007's *A Midsummer Night's Dream...In the Wink of an Eye!* Photo © J. David Levy.

"On The Merry Wives of Windsor" Table of Contents & "Show Me" Standards

About the PlayPages 1 & 2
Show Me Standards CA2, 5 6&7; FA1-5

Plot SynopsisPages 2 & 3
Show Me Standards CA2, CA5; FA2 &3

The CharactersPage 4
Show Me Standards CA2&5; FA 2&3

National Standards

Kennedy Center ArtsEdge Theatre Content Standard 2-8:

2. Acting by developing, communicating, and sustaining characters in improvisations and informal or formal productions
3. Designing and producing by conceptualizing and realizing artistic interpretations for informal or formal productions
4. Directing by interpreting dramatic texts and organizing and conducting rehearsals for informal or formal productions
5. Researching by evaluating and synthesizing cultural and historical information to support artistic choices
6. Comparing and integrating art forms by analyzing traditional theatre, dance, music, visual arts, and new art forms
7. Analyzing, critiquing, and constructing meanings from informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions
8. Understanding context by analyzing the role of theatre, film, television, and electronic media in the past and the present

Standards for the English Language Arts Sponsored by NCTE and IRA (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12)

National Standards for History 5-12: Era 6, Standards 3, 4, 6

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In Shakespeare's time a "merry wife" was a woman who betrayed her husband.

The Merry Wives of Windsor is Shakespeare's lighthearted account of the emerging middle class in Elizabethan England. G. R. Hibbard, in his introduction to *Merry Wives* states "The play could

be considered the Bard's recounting of his world as it was lived in a small country town in 1600." Elizabeth was Queen, and in Shakespeare's play, Mistress Page and Mistress Ford rule their suburban domestic empires with wit, wisdom and strength. In this way these women portray the power of the Elizabethan female during a century where men were assumed dominant.

Mistresses Ford and Page protect their marriages and household fortunes by outsmarting the overfed opportunist Falstaff. This lecherous knight of the court is so full of himself that he imagines both women are attracted to him. He schemes to steal their affections and in turn, obtain their husbands' money.

In Shakespeare's time a "merry wife" was a woman who betrayed her husband.

Conventional plays of the day poked fun at middle class women assuming they were easily swayed to be unfaithful by men of wealth and position. Shakespeare's "merry wives," Mistress Ford and Page, make a fool of Falstaff and remain faithful to their husbands. The title is thus a play on words: the mirth of these "merry wives" is caused by outsmarting the presumptuous Falstaff, just like the audience in Shakespeare's time might imagine their strong and influential role model Queen Elizabeth would do. Convention is turned upside down.

Mistress Quickly says of Mistress Ford:



SFSTL 2003 production of *Macbeth*.
Pilar Witherspoon as Lady Macbeth.
Photos on this page © J. David Levy.



SFSTL 2007 Education Tour production of *Much A Doo-Wop About Nothing*. Chrystal Stone and Michael B. Perkins.

Do what she will, say what she will, take all,
pay all, go to bed when she list, rise when she
list—all is quiet she will.
And, truly, she deserves it...

(*Merry Wives*, Act 2, Sc. 2)

Thus describes the everyday duties of home-manager Mistress Page:

Now the report goes:
She has all the rule of her husband's purse.
He hath a legion of Angels.

(*Merry Wives*, Act 1, Sc. 3)

Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, created between 1597-8, is written mostly in prose. It contains characters both above and of the middle class, culturally stereotyped foreigners, and a character named Pistol whom some think Shakespeare created as an in-joke for the amusement of his own theatre buddies in London. Pistol often speaks in flamboyant verse. His flowery formal manner of expression is marked by some historians as Shakespeare's attempt to poke fun at a prominent Elizabethan actor who worked for a competing acting company. G.B. Harrison explains, in his notes to Shakespeare's *The Complete Works* in 1952, "Pistol was created to be a walking parody of the great actor Edward Alleyn, chief of the rival company, the Lord Admiral's Men. Alleyn was the chief exponent

About the Play & Plot Synopsis



SFSTL 2007 production of *Much Ado About Nothing*. Jenny Mercein, Gregory Wooddell. Photo © J. David Levy.

of the older style of heavy, robustious rant."

Merry Wives sports many opportunities for physical slapstick, clever staging with surprise appearances, farcical chases, slamming doors and costume gags, all of which played well in Shakespeare's time and are equally appreciated today. Puns, bawdy innuendo and clever word-play support an

unmistakable tone of light farce that ultimately lays a foundation of high-jinx to contrast and inform the play's concluding theme of reconciliation.

Many of Shakespeare's plays utilized familiar plots and wove into them observations and reflections of his immediate world. *Merry Wives* is influenced by and loosely based on older plays and closely resembles *Il Pecorone*, a 1558 Italian play by Ser Giovanni Fiorentino from which Shakespeare draws the story. This main plot and the primary subplot also emulate ancient Roman comedy. Shakespeare's farcical plot of tricking the trickster can be traced all the way back to the Roman playwright Titus Maccius Plautus (254 - 184 B.C.E.), in particular to his 205 B.C.E. play *Miles Gloriosus* ("ME lez Glor e OH sus"). This play, written in Latin, is about a boastful but stupid Greek soldier named Pyrgopolynices, who is tricked by his slaves.

The first performance of *Merry Wives* was said to have occurred in London on April 23, 1597, at a feast of an aristocratic fraternity, the Order of the Garter, with Queen Elizabeth in attendance. Theatrical legend says that after Elizabeth saw *Henry IV, Part I*, she was so tickled by the character of Falstaff that she instructed Shakespeare to write another play featuring him. She supposedly gave Shakespeare a brief 14 days to complete it. Some assume Shakespeare might have put aside *Henry IV, Part 2* to finish *Merry Wives*, founding this assertion on several characters that appear in both

plays, including Pistol, Nym, Bardolph, Mistress Quickly, and Shallow. Falstaff and his entourage supposedly were good friends with Prince Henry, later Henry V, which lends a touch of royalty to the middle class suburbanites of *Merry Wives*. But, this play is differentiated from Shakespeare's previous works by focusing on "real" suburbanite folks and not just on the court, kings, soldiers or royalty. Foreigners are made fun of, high class men try to seduce middle class women, different groups of colleagues try to trick and embarrass and make fun of others. Gossip abounds and everyone is out to fool someone. The ending is lighthearted and non-violent, no sword fights or death, just marriage and forgiveness. All are invited to a wedding and the boundaries of class and competition seem to melt into virtuous and good humored celebration.

Plot Synopsis

The Merry Wives of Windsor, written mostly in prose, follows the scheming exploits of Sir John Falstaff, a knight of the court. He is seeking mischief and money in Windsor, a typical middle-class community of Elizabethan England. Sir John finds his match and is held hilariously accountable by two smart townswomen, Mistress Page and Mistress Ford. The play opens as Justice Shallow, a respected Windsor community figure, complains to his friends about injuries received at the hands of Falstaff. Falstaff is interrogated, but assumes no guilt, giving the audience a clear picture of his character from the very first scene.

The Merry Wives of Windsor follows the scheming exploits of Sir John Falstaff, a knight of the court.

Anne, the beautiful and rich daughter of Page and Mistress Page (and the center of the play's major sub-plot), is being courted by many.

Slender, one of her suitors, has been nudged into courting Anne. Young Fenton declares his intention with willing abandon, and the ridiculous Doctor Caius and Sir Evans also fancy and pursue her. Dr. Caius and Sir Evans discover their mutual interest in Anne, and become miffed. The owner of the Garter Inn fools them into a duel for her hand and when they realize they have been duped, plans are made to take revenge on the host. Falstaff falsely assumes Mistress Page and Mistress Ford fancy him and egotistically decides he will seduce them both. He

Plot Synopsis



The English actor Samuel Phelps as Sir John Falstaff.

tells Robin, his page, to deliver messages to each inviting them both to rendezvous with him. Both are indignant at his overt propositions and immediately plan to expose Falstaff and render him a fool. Mistress Quickly, Dr. Caius' servant, agrees to serve as messenger for them.

Meanwhile, Falstaff's cronies Nym and Pistol inform the husbands Page and Ford of Falstaff's intentions to pursue their wives. Ford becomes exceptionally jealous and angry. Page wisely shows complete trust in his wife. In disguise as Brook, the hot-tempered Ford tracks down Falstaff,

who does not recognize him. Falstaff boasts about his plans for Mistress Ford. Now Ford is even more mad and suspicious of his wife.

Falstaff meets with Mistress Ford, and to avoid being discovered by her husband is hidden in a basket of filthy laundry and dumped into a muddy river. During their second meeting, again interrupted by Ford, he is disguised offstage as an old woman whom Ford gives a sound beating. Diligent Falstaff agrees to meet Mistress Ford a third time, but now, both husbands have been let in on the plan. Ford, ashamed of his suspiciousness and foolish assumptions about his wife, enthusiastically agrees to help humiliate Falstaff.

The final meeting is set in the forest, and Mistress Page has instructed Dr. Caius, her choice for Anne's husband, to take away her daughter, who will be dressed in green. Page has instructed Slender, *his* choice for Anne's husband, to take her away and adds that she will be wearing white. Anne, however, has no intention of going with either Caius or Slender. She is in love with

Fenton and they have made their own plans.

In the final forest scene, Falstaff is made to dress up as Herne the Hunter, a character from local folklore, and local children are disguised as fairies. The fairies attack Falstaff, torturing and tormenting him with their tapers until he confesses his naughty character.

Slender, seizing his opportunity, whisks away a fairy in green. Dr. Caius takes a fairy in white. Both of them realize later they have seized the wrong person, not Anne. In the meantime, Anne and Fenton have accepted the host's help and are married by the vicar. Seeing the happily married couple, the parents accept them gracefully.

The play ends with the Fords and Pages finally revealing themselves to the much chagrined Falstaff, who is forgiven by all. Slender and Dr. Caius reappear, both furious, and both dragging boys instead of Anne! Fenton and Anne appear, married and happy, and the Pages happily accept their new son-in-law. All go off to celebrate, including the unsuccessful knight.

“We'll leave a proof by that which we will do, Wives may be merry, and yet honest too.”

The Merry Wives of Windsor,
Act 4, Scene 2



SFSTL 2004 production of *As You Like It*. Alison Moritz and Clinton Zugel. Photo © J. David Levy.

List of Characters in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

Sir John Falstaff is familiar to Shakespeare's audience from the history plays. He's a well fed knight with a scheming mind and a puffed up ego. Motivated by greed, Falstaff plots to seduce Mistress Ford and Mistress Page.

Fenton is a young gentleman in love with Anne Page, who eventually wins her heart.

Shallow is a country justice, who has been wronged by Sir John Falstaff. He convinces Slender, his nephew, to court Anne Page.

Abraham Slender, Shallow's kinsman, who becomes one of Anne Page's suitors. He is preposterous when he tries to appear romantic.

Frank Ford, husband to Mistress Ford. He believes his wife is carrying on with Falstaff. In order to spy on her he disguises himself as Brook.

George Page, husband to Mistress Page; father of Anne Page. Unlike Ford, completely trusts his wife. A member of the middle class, he opposes the penniless Fenton and wants to his daughter to marry Slender.

Sir Hugh Evans is a parson who often speaks in the Welsh dialect. He becomes caught up in Slender's courtship of Anne and later joins with Caius in fooling the host of the inn.

Doctor Caius is yet another suitor of Anne Page. This French doctor (like Evans) uses English marked by foreign words. He and Evans, after becoming brief rivals, join forces against the host.

Mistress Quickly is Dr. Caius' servant who is continuously called upon to pass secret messages between all the other characters; also has a tendency to humorously mangle the English language.

A
Most pleasaunt and
excellent conceited Co-
medie, of Syr *Iohn Falstaffe*; and the
merrie Wiues of *Windsor*.

Entermixed with sundrie
variable and pleasing humors, of Syr *Hugh*
the Welch Knight, Iustice *Shallow*, and his
wife Coufin *M. Slender*.

With the swaggering vaine of Auncient
Pistoll, and Corporall *Nym*.

By *William Shakespeare*.

As it hath bene diuers times Acted by the right Honorable
my Lord Chamberlaines seruants. Both before her
Maiestie, and else-where.



LONDON

Printed by T. C. for Arthur Iohnson, and are to be sold at
his shop in Powles Church-yard, at the signe of the
Flower de Leufe and the Crowne.
1 6 0 2.

Title page of the first quarto of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Anne Page has very few lines but is most important to the plot. The beautiful Anne is desired by all the single men around her. She proves as smart and independent as her mother, for she defies both her parents and chooses the man she marries.

Mistress Ford, Ford's wife, is profoundly offended by Falstaff's lettered invitation to rendezvous and vows to teach him a well-deserved lesson.

Mistress Page, Anne's mother, also receives a letter from Falstaff and aids Mistress Ford in her plan to humiliate him.

The Host owns the Garter Inn. He tries to make fools of Evans and Dr. Caius but is outwitted by them in the end.

William Page is the Pages' son, a promising scholar, who later helps to humiliate Falstaff.

Bardolph, **Pistol**, and **Nym** are Falstaff's peeps. They admit their true nature when they refuse to help Falstaff chase after Mistress Ford and Mistress Page.

Robin is Falstaff's page, who helps out whenever possible.

Simple is Slender's servant, who often serves as a messenger.

Rugby is Doctor Caius' manservant. He goes along with the Doctor to meet Sir Hugh Evans for their duel.