



HOUSTON
SHAKESPEARE
FESTIVAL

ONE ROLE, TWO ACTORS: *Olivia*

Is This What Falling in Love Feels Like?

Curriculum Authors: Laura B. Turchi, Abbey Bachmann, and Cori Stevenson
Approximate timeline: varies – see sequence

TEKS

E1.4 Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Drama.

Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of drama and provide evidence from text to support their understanding.

E1.25 Listening and Speaking/Speaking.

Students speak clearly and to the point, using the conventions of language. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to give presentations using informal, formal, and technical language effectively to meet the needs of audience, purpose, and occasion, employing eye contact, speaking rate (e.g., pauses for effect), volume, enunciation, purposeful gestures, and conventions of language to communicate ideas effectively

(5) Response skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing using multiple texts. The student responds to an increasingly challenging variety of sources that are read, heard, or viewed. The student is expected to: (A) describe the personal and emotional connections to a variety of sources, including self-selected texts; (B) write a response with accurate and relevant text evidence and commentary to compare texts within and across genres; (C) use text evidence to support an appropriate response; (D) paraphrase and summarize texts in ways that maintain meaning and logical order; (E) interact with sources in meaningful ways such as notetaking, annotating, freewriting, or illustrating; (F) respond using acquired content and academic vocabulary as appropriate; (G) discuss and write about the explicit or implicit meanings of text; (H) respond orally or in writing with appropriate register, vocabulary, tone, and voice; (I) reflect on and adjust responses as new evidence is presented; and (J) defend or challenge authors' claims using relevant text evidence.

(7) Multiple genres: listening, speaking, reading, and writing using multiple texts--genres. The student recognizes and analyzes genre-specific characteristics, structures, and purposes within and across increasingly complex traditional, contemporary, classical, and diverse texts. The student is expected to: (A) demonstrate knowledge of American, British, and world literature across literary periods; (B) analyze the effects of metrics; rhyme schemes such as end, internal, slant, and eye; and other conventions in poetry; (C) identify and explain the function of archetypes and motifs; (D) analyze characteristics and structural elements of informational texts such as: (i) clear thesis, relevant supporting evidence, pertinent examples, and conclusion; and (ii) the relationship between organizational design and thesis; and (E) analyze characteristics and structural elements of argumentative texts such as: (i) clear arguable claim, appeals, and convincing conclusion; (ii) counter arguments, types of evidence, concessions, and call to action; and (iii) identifiable audience or reader

(8) Author's craft: listening, speaking, reading, and writing using multiple texts. The student uses critical inquiry to analyze the authors' choices and how they influence and communicate meaning within a variety of texts. The student analyzes and applies author's craft purposefully in order to develop his or her own products and performances. The student is expected to: (A) identify and analyze the use of allusions and motif; (B) identify and analyze how the author's diction and syntax contribute to the mood, voice, and tone of a text; and (C) identify and analyze the use of rhetorical devices, including appeals, understatement, overstatement, parallelism, and shifts.

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Overview (notes for the teacher)

What is this scene about?

In *Twelfth Night*, Viola and Sebastian are twins who survive a shipwreck but are separated (and each fears that the other is dead). Viola disguises herself as “Cesario” and becomes a servant to Count Orsino – and falls in love with him. But Cesario/Viola is sent by the Count to woo Lady Olivia on his behalf. Lady Olivia is mourning for her recently dead brother and swears she wants nothing to do with men. Things get complicated when Lady Olivia falls for “Cesario,” in part because “he” is not her admirer (except on behalf of Count Orsino).

The aria performed in this video follows the scene where Lady Olivia has met Cesario for the first time. Cesario describes not only the love Count Orsino sends to her but how he (Cesario) would act if he were the Count and rejected by Lady Olivia. This speech makes quite an impression on Lady Olivia, and she is unexpectedly attracted to Cesario. In her confusion of sudden feelings, she blurts out a question “What is your parentage?” (what is your social status?) which isn’t very polite. Then she sends Cesario away, totally rejecting Count Orsino. This aria begins when she is alone and processing what has just happened.

If you’re teaching the whole play

This is a useful scene, and set of commentary and performances, to use to discuss the impact of “falling in love” and the challenge of expressing true love. Cesario’s “willow cabin” speech, just before the aria in this video, is one of Shakespeare’s most famous: the description of what a man would do if truly in love (and rejected). It goes right to Olivia’s heart. Students might discuss why she is so moved by Cesario, and whether the attraction is only to his speech. Students can also look to this scene and think about how Cesario chooses not to praise Olivia for her beauty – and why Olivia seems to be fine with that. In today’s society, is it the case that women also distrust direct flattery, but that everyone likes a compliment? Given the way the play turns on illusions of identity, students can consider situations where individuals might be willing to be fooled.

If you’re teaching just this excerpt

Consider how this scene can be usefully compared and contrasted with Romeo and Juliet’s famous love speeches (both of which are in this Two actors one role series).

Romeo’s Act 2 Scene 2 description of Juliet as he stands below the balcony (without her seeing him, at least for awhile) focuses mostly on her eyes. Students can think about why seeing and being seen seems to be so important in romance.

Juliet’s “Wherefore art thou Romeo?” (Why do you have to be named Romeo? – especially Romeo Montague) speech is about Romeo’s identity. Juliet, like Olivia, is thinking about her reaction to a man and convincing herself that loving him is perfectly okay.

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Page 3

Key vocabulary

Parentage:	class and wealth
Blazon:	a coat of arms or a shield – physical virtues*
Soft:	hush, or quiet

*In Elizabethan poetry, a blazon was written by a male poet to praise a woman for her beauty, comparing each part of her body to something beautiful. Note that this is Olivia speaking – a woman, but (unknown to her) describing a woman.

OLIVIA “What is your **parentage**?”
 “Above my fortunes, yet my state is well. 295
 I am a gentleman.” I’ll be sworn thou art.
 Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions, and spirit
 Do give thee fivefold **blazon**. Not too fast! **Soft, soft!**
 Unless the master were the man. How now? 300
 Even so quickly may one catch the plague?
 Methinks I feel this youth’s perfections
 With an invisible and subtle stealth
 To creep in at mine eyes. Well, let it be.—
 What ho, Malvolio!

Materials needed for this lesson

Scripts (see below)
 Access to HSF video

LESSON SEQUENCE

1. Opening discussion or student writing on an awkward first encounter and the idea of a “Meet Cute”

Originating in the films of the 1930s, the “meet cute” is a term that writers use for a scene where two people who will become a romantic couple meet for the first time. This is especially true for romantic comedies, but whether its film, or television, or even theater, a meet cute usually follows one of four patterns:

- Instant mutual attraction
- Instant mutual dislike or clear disinterest
- One character is instantly attracted and the other is repelled or disinterested
- One character is oblivious/uninterested and the other is interested/attracted but tries to hide it.

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Page 4

LESSON SEQUENCE *continued*

No matter how the relationship starts, it will end in romance (but not necessarily a happy ending). Students may be able to come up with examples from films or television they have watched. Perhaps they know stories about how their parents met, or aunts/uncles other couples that they know. Imagining the meeting of characters using one of the four patterns can help the students think about tone and how a writer sets up not only a relationship but also a direction for the plot to take. This is what they will see in Twelfth Night (or in Romeo and Juliet).

If the class is positively inclined toward creative writing, consider challenging the students to write a meet cute for characters in a short story or novel the class has read. For instance, if the class has studied *To Kill a Mockingbird*, can they imagine the meeting of Atticus and the woman he would eventually marry (Scout and Jem’s mother)? Or can they imagine the meeting of Mary Maloney and her husband Jack in Roald Dahl’s “Lamb to the Slaughter” (Mary will eventually murder her husband with a leg of lamb from the freezer). Students can also experiment with irony with these writings: what details can they include that can hint at what will eventually happen? Remember: The character we see in this aria falling in love (Olivia) focuses on what she has seen in “Cesario” – and of course we know that she is really seeing Viola.

2. Recognizing the “meet cute” between Lady Olivia and Cesario.

After the teacher has described what is happening in Twelfth Night and the lead up to the scene, it is time for the students to try some drama-based pedagogy, using the excerpt from Act 1 Scene 5 (provided). This interaction between Olivia and Cesario/Viola takes place prior to the aria that will be performed by the two Olivias in the HSF video.

In this part of the scene, Lady Olivia puts on a veil to hide her face and agrees to see Cesario (the disguised Viola) to hear what he will say on the behalf of Count Orsino.

- In trios, students should read this scene aloud. They can assign characters and choose a director (and note taker).
- Together, the small groups should highlight or underline the key words – the compliments and criticisms between the two.
- Each group can also block the scene, at least by determining how far apart the two characters should stand (where and why).
- Following the “meet cute” description, for each line, the group should determine who is attracted and who isn’t, and what words indicate what’s happening between the two characters.

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Page 5

LESSON SEQUENCE *continued*

A further challenge can be to revise the scene to a different “meet cute” pattern. What needs to be changed and why?

3. Small performances and discussion: Is Lady Olivia as much in control as she acts?

4. Now it’s time to use the video to think about how Olivia really feels about Cesario – and what she reveals after “he” leaves.

Teacher notes from the arias in performance:

- Remind students that Olivia first speaks the lines that Cesario has just spoken to her (about who Cesario is, in answer to Olivia’s parentage question).
- Note how both actors use “soft” as a way to reign themselves in, get control – after all, Olivia is not hushing anybody else. What words might students say to themselves today in order to calm themselves down?
- Note that Constance Swain adds in the words “stupid! Stupid! Stupid! Perhaps to clarify that Olivia’s ashamed/embarrassed at her reaction to Cesario’s monologue about love (what love would be).
- If students are confused by “the master for the man” line, it can be helpful to remember that Cesario has been wooing on behalf of Count Orsino
- Encourage students to notice the gestures each actor makes: for instance, covering the mouth in self-horror, or pounding on the couch, etc. Again, the question of Lady Olivia’s self-control is worth discussing.

5. Further/follow-up discussion might also include whether love is a plague that is caught, and what definition of “gentleman” seems to be in Olivia’s mind. Students might also speculate on the potential meanings of “Let it be.”

6. Casting – Constance Swain describes playing to two different actors playing Viola (and thus playing Cesario) at approximately 4:50 in the video. Students can discuss casting and its impact on the audience as well as the actors. In this play about switched identities, what difference does it make if Lady Olivia is played by an actor of color?

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Page 6

VIDEO TIMELINE

0:33 TITLE The venues

Meg Rodgers 2017 HSF Miller Theater

The hugeness of the venue: hundreds in front, and then “the hill” – Thousands of people watching and picnicking. The stage itself is so much wider and deeper than typical.

An actor has to be very very aware of gestures and speech that need to be so much larger to reach people “at the back of the hill” – it’s a lot of fun!

Constance Swain at ASC BlackFriars Playhouse – The world’s only recreation of the indoor Shakespeare stage. A thrust stage, which is a very intimate space.

The audience is an arm’s length away, and an actor can look into their eyes (and vice versa).

Very unique contrast to larger spaces to perform.

2:25 TITLE the Production, the setting, the concept:

Meg Rodgers:

The production at Miller wanted the show to “live in the music” from the start. Twelfth Night doesn’t really make sense unless it is carried along by the music.

Set the play in the 70s – most of the music was by Lyle Lovett, and Olivia was inspired by Stevie Nicks: gorgeous, flowy, flowery, long dresses. The stage was set in a large, intricate garden.

Constance Swain at ASC:

The production was set in Napoleonic / French revolutionary era (for costuming). The greatest challenge was that the production happened during the pandemic. The production was designed to let the audience leave the cares and the worries of the world behind – even if it was just for 90 minutes. The audience stepped into this unique, eccentric world with all these kookie characters and went on their journeys with them. A lot of music: folksy, acoustic – ASC is totally unplugged in that space, so all of the music that was in the show was done by the actors.

Notes the word plague and how it hits the ear differently, during a pandemic. It was an opportunity for the audience to see themselves and recognize “hey we’re not too far off from where Shakespeare was writing” – but also give the audience a chance to tap into their childlike imaginations and go on this ride with us.

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Page 7

VIDEO TIMELINE *continued*

4:47 TITLE: What launches this, what inspires Olivia to say this?

Constance Swain at ASC

Worked with two actors, who at the beginning of each performance would flip a coin to decide who would play Viola and who would play Sebastian. So, depending on who was in the role, the scene that leads up to this aria was a very different experience.

Depending on which actor she got – either one who was “tongue in cheek” (sarcastic/ironic) vs. one who was “kind of nerdy” – the scene was a different experience with each actor, and that would inform how I would move forward with this aria. It would depend on my take-away from each of them. If actor A was really “tongue in cheek” I would take a step back and say, “who do you think you’re talking to?” But that’s kind of hot (for Olivia) – “I’m” not used to people challenging me. But then if it was actor B, who was kind of fumbly and goofy: [Olivia thinks] I don’t get to see this all the time, and there’s something very genuine, and very unique about you. I’ve never seen that in a person like you, and someone who makes me laugh like you make me laugh, and think about things, and I’ve only known you for a minute.

7:30 That was pretty cool, because I never knew what I was going to get either night, because even though we had set the scene, they would still change, and throw different curve balls at me, and I would take that and run.

The thing that pops out to her [about this speech]: How now! Even so quickly can one catch the plague? Which is to say: My God! Is this the thing called love that everyone’s been talking about that I’ve never experienced? And it’s summed up in such a nice, succinct kind of way that anybody, no matter who you are, if you’ve been in love, you get it. The first moment, when you’ve been kind of dumbfounded, and went, Oh God! Is THIS love? How now!

Within one minute’s time, within just meeting a person, I am already in love? That to me was the big deal/discovery. The ah ha moment. Alright! Well, I guess I’m in love!

Meg Rodgers HSF Miller Theater:

Cesario/Viola has just left Olivia. Cesario/Viola is trying to win Lady Olivia’s love for Count Orsino. Cesario/Viola has just spoken a beautiful monologue that’s about loving – and it’s Viola talking about how she would love Count Orsino, if she could. Lady Olivia hears this as one of the most genuine and honest speeches about love that she’s ever heard, and she falls in love with Cesario, then and there. And then he has to leave.

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Page 8

VIDEO TIMELINE *continued*

Meg Rodgers HSF Miller Theater:

And she was so stunned by that monologue [Cesario's "willow cabin" speech], that the first thing she says is, "what is your parentage?" and that's a really silly thing to say. She's embarrassed because that's the first thing that came out of her mouth, and she's trying to work out her feelings.

9:13 TITLE The Big Discovery

Meg Rodgers HSF Miller Theater:

Olivia discovers that she is... she's caught the plague.

She's falling in love with this person that has just suddenly arrived and really gone straight to her heart. She doesn't understand how quickly it happened: she has been very unimpressed by men thus far. And here comes this beautiful, heartfelt human that is everything that she didn't know she wanted.

And the decision that Olivia makes is to go after him! Without anything holding her back. She does that: she pursues him relentlessly.

One of my favorite moments that can encapsulate her mindset is that (later on) she runs out in a full wedding dress, and she is ready to go – like a preteen with a prom dress, a young woman who has fallen in love for the very first time, and she is going after it full force. It's really fun and beautiful thing to be reminded of as we get older and perhaps a little more jaded.

That feeling: seeing someone, meeting someone for the first time, and that person can turn you upside down. What is that? And, do you let go of it? She chases it.

Constance Swain at ASC:

Olivia discovers that she's in love. She's. In. Love. She's neck-deep in love. And she will do whatever it takes to conquer that love. No matter how many "no's" she gets, no matter how many ways Cesario and the gang is trying to shift her down another path, she's like "no no no no no" I'm going down this one because I'm committed to you [Cesario].

The beauty of Shakespeare: whether it's love, or revenge. We see these characters taking on this emotion with a depth that a lot of us are afraid to go down.

Shakespeare shows us these emotions in their rare and raw genuine form. And Olivia is experiencing love for the first time. And because she is in love, she's going to do whatever it takes so that Cesario (Sebastian ultimately) is the person that she will end up with. Even though she's experienced nothing but sorrow up to this point, but she's choosing happiness, and she's choosing joy, and she's choosing love, and that is what her new purpose in life is: to seek out love. That's really really awesome, and a great lesson.

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Page 9

VIDEO TIMELINE *continued*

Aria:

13:27 Constance Swain at ASC:

14:20 Meg Rodgers HSF Miller Theater

15:30 Mutual Admiration Society

Constance Swain about Meg Rodgers:

Really appreciated the stillness –

When we're overwhelmed – we have to take a step back, and physically – go over what happened. And that is exactly what Olivia is doing.

The sex joke – stealing that!

Olivia does feel the “youth's perfection” in other places (not just her eye)

And she really heard the “eye” in this way for the first time –

“Ho ho ho open the floodgates, shall we?”

Awesome: Shakespeare didn't just write dirty jokes for his male characters – all characters.

And we get to see this character, who's so often surrounded by other characters, alone – and talking about something very intimate, and talking about it with the audience. And they're talking about sex, and about love, and the “youth's perfections” and I am stealing that.

So awesome.

And this is what we (Constance and Meg) need to do – we need to keep swapping, going back and forth. Learning from each other.

Meg Rodgers on Constance Swain:

She also saw Constance Swain in that Blackfriars production with the two different actors. And so funny! Watching this video – she [Constance] – responds with her entire body – everything.

In the monologue, watching her fall in love.

I said “eye” instead of “eyes” – which the director had corrected in performance, but to which she'd reverted!

[peer review] – That is why you should check your work with other actors!

I think we should hang out!

19:16 Photos of the two (but now, not from professional headshots)

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Act 2, Scene 2

OLIVIA “What is your parentage?”

“Above my fortunes, yet my state is well.

I am a gentleman.” I’ll be sworn thou art.

Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions, and spirit

Do give thee fivefold blazon. Not too fast! Soft,
soft!

Unless the master were the man. How now?

Even so quickly may one catch the plague?

Methinks I feel this youth’s perfections

With an invisible and subtle stealth

To creep in at mine eyes. Well, let it be.—

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