Active Introduction: Twelfth Night



Shakespeare's plays and characters can be brought vividly to life for children using a variety of interactive, energetic and engaging storytelling techniques. The following active introduction provides a great first encounter with Shakespeare and offers the opportunity for large groups of children to play several different roles.

How it works

As the teacher, you are the storyteller and the whole class should sit in a circle for this activity. You will need to chose a particular action word or sound to use as a command. You could also choose a phrase or word from the play you are introducing, for example: 'here lies your way' means leave this way in 'Twelfth Night'. The command signifies a change in the action and controls the pace of the storytelling. It is used to return the children quickly to their places in the circle after acting in each 'scene'. Everyone will have the opportunity to join in with the telling of the story, by becoming a character or an object in the tale.

Start telling the story and as soon as a character or an object is mentioned, indicate the first child to step into the circle. Encourage the child to strike a pose or make a shape. If two or more characters are introduced then they can step in at the same time to act their part of the story. When you call out the action word or blow the whistle/beat the drum the children should sit down. Continue telling the story with the next child/children from the circle.



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As more characters or objects are introduced, move around the circle so that all the children are given a chance to take part. Explain to the children that it does not matter if the character they have been chosen to be is male or female. Using this technique means that different pupils get to play the same character at various times and everyone gets a chance at acting several roles, regardless of gender.

Continue telling the story, introducing more characters or actions, making sure all children are given a chance to take part. Props can also be introduced although this is not essential. The story continues to be told to the end.

You may choose to adapt the text for your class; you may prefer to use quotations from Shakespeare or encourage children to use their own words. For ease of storytelling, new characters in each 'scene' are highlighted in red. The story needs to be visual, fast moving and energetic so that it is fun, meaningful and driven.

Twelfth Night

The story begins with Duke Orsino and his musician. Orsino is in love with Lady Olivia.

Orsino says, 'If music be the food of love, play on'.

The musician plays for him but then Orsino tells him to stop and says '…enough no more, tis not so sweet now as it was before'. He sends the musician away.

A servant appears and says 'Lady Olivia wouldn't let me in. She is mourning for her dead brother and won't see any men for seven years.'

Orsino is very disappointed.

- action sound -

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Not far away, a group of sailors, (choose as many children as you want) their captain and a girl, Viola, wash up on the shore after their ship has been destroyed by a storm. Viola thinks her twin brother Sebastian was drowned in the storm and is very upset.

She says, 'What country, friends, is this?'

The captain says, 'This is Illyria and it is ruled by a Duke called Orsino'.

Viola says, 'I will go and ask him if I can work for him while I work out what to do.'

She thinks for a minute then says, 'I know! It would be easier if I was a man so I will disguise myself.' Viola asks the captain for help and says 'conceal me what I am'. The captain helps her dress like a man and she calls herself 'Cesario'.

- action sound -

Orsino lets Viola/Cesario work for him and tells him all about his trouble with Olivia.

Orsino says, 'Will you go to Olivia on my behalf and tell her how much I love her? You are so fresh-faced and young she will believe your honest face.'

Viola/Cesario says, 'I'll do my best to woo your lady'

But she has fallen in love with the Duke and wants to marry him herself!

- action sound -

At Olivia's court her uncle, Sir Toby Belch is talking to Maria, Olivia's servant.

Maria says, 'Lady Olivia was complaining about the knight you brought to court her.'

Sir Toby says, 'But he is very tall and very rich!'

Maria says, 'And he is a fool!'

Sir Andrew Aguecheek enters looking miserable and says 'She'll have none of me. I'll go home tomorrow.

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Sir Toby convinces him that he has chance and Sir Andrew agrees to stay for another month.

- action sound -

Olivia is in her garden with her servant, Malvolio, who is always grumpy and sour faced. Feste, the fool, comes to join them.

Olivia looks cross and says, 'Take the fool away!'

Feste is very quick witted and replies, 'You heard her; take the lady away.'

Olivia is intrigued and says, 'Why are you calling me a fool?'

Feste replies, 'Because you are mourning for your brother even though he is in Heaven. You are a fool!'

Lady Olivia laughs but Malvolio looks grumpy. They see Viola/Cesario come to the gate and Olivia tells Malvolio to make him leave if the Duke has sent him. Malvolio goes to tell Viola/Cesario to leave but she refuses to go.

Lady Olivia sighs and says, 'I'll go and see him.'

Viola/Cesario tells Olivia, 'I have a message from Orsino, he loves you with all his heart'.

Olivia says, 'I cannot love him, let him send no more.'

Viola/Cesario leaves but Olivia asks Malvolio to give a ring to the boy as he goes.

Viola/Cesario is confused for a minute then realises, 'Oh no, Lady Olivia loves me! What a mess! It is too hard a knot for me to untie'.

- action sound -

On a different part of the island, Sebastian and a captain named Antonio have been washed ashore. Sebastian is very sad as he believes his twin, Viola, drowned. Antonio is a wanted man for piracy against Duke Orsiono.

Antonio says, 'I am sorry about your sister. If I can help you, I will.'

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Sebastian says, 'I will go into the Illyria and try to find work.'

Antonio replies, 'Even though I have many enemies there, I will come with you and give you my purse of money.'

- action sound -

Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Feste are up late singing songs and drinking ale. They are being very loud even though the rest of the household are in bed.

Maria rushes in and says, 'You are too loud! Malvolio will come and throw you out in a minute if you don't stop making so much noise!'

Malvolio enters and says, 'My lady says stop making noise or leave' and to Maria he says, 'And you should stop encouraging them.'

Maria is very cross and says 'Go shake your ears'.

Malvolio leaves and the others all decide to play a trick on him. Maria writes a letter pretending to be Lady Olivia saying she is in love with Malvolio.

- action sound -

The next day Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Maria leave the letter lying on the ground and hid behind a hedge to see what happens.

Malvolio finds the letter, reads it and says, 'My lady loves me and here is the proof! She says if I love her too, I should wear yellow stockings with cross garters and then smile at her.'

Malvolio puts the garters on and goes to see Olivia with a huge smile on his face.

Olivia looks very shocked at the odd sight and says, ' Why are you wearing those?'

Malvolio says, 'I read your letter' and he wiggles his legs at her.

Olivia replies, 'Are you mad? Someone please take him away and lock him in the cellar!'

- action sound -

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Meanwhile, Sir Andrew is with Sir Toby and decides to challenge Viola/Cesario to a duel. Sir Andrew is offended that Olivia shows Viola/Cesario more affection even though he is just the Duke's messenger.

Viola/Cesario is terrified and cries, 'I haven't done anything wrong! I don't want to fight!'

Antonio is walking by and, mistaking Viola/Cesario for Sebastian, offers to fight Sir Andrew instead. However, at the moment, a group of guards recognises him and arrest him.

Antonio says to Viola/Cesario, 'If you give me back my money, I can pay them instead of going to prison.'

Viola/Cesario looks confused and says, 'What money?'

Antonio is very upset and says, 'I can't believe you won't give it back!' He is dragged off to see Duke Orsino. Viola/Cesario follows him.

- action sound -

Sir Andrew and Sir Toby are about to follow them both when Sebastian walks by. Sir Andrew challenges him again - not realising this is a different person!

Sebastian and Sir Andrew fight. Sebastian wins and Sir Andrew is hurt.

Olivia arrives and is very cross with Sir Toby and Sir Andrew. She invites Sebastian (thinking it is Viola/Cesario) into her house.

Sebastian can't believe his luck and says 'I am mad, or else this is a dream. If it is a dream, I don't want to wake up!'

Olivia thinks that Viola/Cesario has changed his mind about loving her and so she suggests they get married.

After the wedding, Sebastian says, 'I must go and find my friend, Antonio, as I need to give him back his money,'

- action sound -

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Viola/Cesario goes to see Orsino to ask him to release Antonio as he saved her.

Olivia arrives and asks Viola/Cesario to go with her (thinking it is the man she has just married!). Viola stays with Orsino and Olivia calls out, 'Husband, stay with me!'.

Orsino is very surprised and angry and says to Viola/Cesario, 'Are you her husband?'

Violo/Cesario is very confused and says, 'No, of course not!'

Olivia is heartbroken and doesn't understand what is going on.

Sir Andrew and Sir Toby arrive. Sir Andrew points at Viola/Cesario and says, 'This is the villian that hurt me!'

Viola/Cesaro is now even more confused and says 'I didn't touch you!'. Olivia and Orsino are also both confused as they know how gentle Viola/Cesario is.

Sebastian arrives and doesn't see Viola. He walks up to Olivia and says, 'I'm sorry for hurting that man but he attacked me first.'

Everyone is now very confused looking between Viola/Cesario and Sebastian.

The Duke says, 'One face, one voice, one habit and two persons. How can this be?'

Sebastian sees Viola/Cesario and says, 'I never had a brother but I did have a very dear sister. Who are you?'

Viola says ' I am Viola!' The twins hug and cry tears of joy. She then says, 'I am in love with Orsino!'

Orsino says he loves her too and they agree to marry.

- action sound -

Olivia goes to see Malvolio who is feeling very sorry for himself after being locked up in the cellar.

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He says to Olivia, 'You have treated me very badly. You wrote this letter than called me mad for doing what it says.'

Olivia reads the letter then says, 'This isn't my handwriting, it is Maria's. They have played a trick on you.'

Malvolio is very angry and says, 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!'

- action sound -

Olivia, Sebastian, Viola, Orsino, Sir Toby, Feste and Maria all have a big celebration. Sir Toby even asks Maria to marry him. They all go to bed happy leaving Feste behind.

Feste sings one last song:

A great while ago the world begun,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
But that's all one, our play is done,
And we'll strive to please you every day.

And so the story of Twelfth Night ends!



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