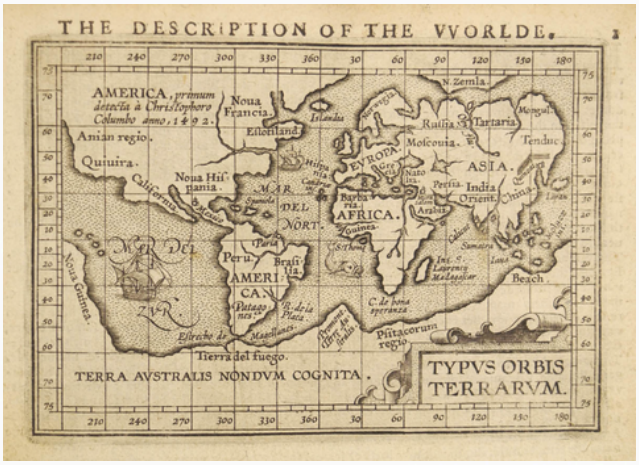
Twelfth Night
Geography

‘What country, friends, is this?’

The Elizabethan age was a time of overseas exploration and discovery as sailors set off on long and often dangerous journeys to explore the world. Notable explorers included Sir Francis Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh who both undertook voyages of discovery during Shakespeare’s lifetime.

As explorers charted the globe maps were drawn up showing new countries and places. The map of the world (below) was published in 1603 in a book by Abraham Ortelius who was a cartographer and geographer and widely recognised as the creator of the first modern atlas.



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With this new age of discovery, it is not surprising that Shakespeare includes a shipwreck in his play ‘Twelfth Night’. This happens right at the start of the play and provides the opportunity to separate the twins Viola and Sebastian, adding to the confusion in the play.

Viola’s experiences on a ship would have meant she was aware of the words and phrases used on board. In Act 2 Scene 2, Viola describes the love triangle as a knot, perhaps a mariner’s knot, which she declares she will leave to fate to sort out.

In Act 3, Scene 1, Viola says “westward ho!”. Shakespeare would have been familiar with this phrase as in Tudor times boatmen travelled up and down the River Thames and were regularly heard calling “Eastward Ho!” and “Westward Ho!” to identify which way they were going.

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Activity

The shipwreck in 'Twelfth Night' supposedly takes place somewhere in the Adriatic Sea close to Illyria. When Shakespeare wrote the play, Illyria referred to a region of land on the coast of the Adriatic Sea, north of modern central Albania, which was under the control of the Venetian Republic.

As well as 'Twelfth Night' Shakespeare set a lot of his plays in other parts of the world.

Can you match the plays below with the places they are set in?

Plays	Places
• Macbeth	• Athens, Greece
• Romeo and Juliet	• Elsinore, Denmark
• Twelfth Night	• Verona, Italy
• A Midsummer Night's Dream	• Alexandria, Egypt
• Anthony and Cleopatra	• Inverness, Scotland
• The Comedy of Errors	• Balkan States, Adriatic Coast

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