

## Writing about *As You Like It*

Can you use this question as a starting point to explore your own, original ideas about the play?

### Essay question

To what extent does life in the Forest of Arden offer sweet adversity to those who find themselves there?

#### Act 2 Scene 1, lines 1–20

DUKE SENIOR    Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,  
 Hath not old custom made this life more sweet  
 Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods  
 More free from peril than the envious court?  
 Here feel we but the penalty of Adam,  
 The seasons' difference, as the icy fang  
 And churlish chiding of the winter's wind,  
 Which, when it bites and blows upon my body,  
 Even till I shrink with cold, I smile and say  
 'This is no flattery: these are counsellors  
 That feelingly persuade me what I am.'  
 Sweet are the uses of adversity,  
 Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,  
 Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;  
 And this our life exempt from public haunt  
 Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,  
 Sermons in stones and good in everything.  
 I would not change it.

AMIENS            Happy is your grace,  
 That can translate the stubbornness of fortune  
 Into so quiet and so sweet a style.

### Plan your essay

Work with the extract above and complete the table below as you explore your ideas.

<p><b>What is your interpretation of this part of the play?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is happening here and how does this relate to the rest of the play?</li> <li>• What does it show about Duke Senior's feelings and judgements?</li> </ul>	
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<p><b>What strikes you about Shakespeare's language?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does the Duke mean when he says 'Sweet are the uses of adversity?'</li> <li>• What vivid images or descriptions are used in this passage?</li> <li>• How does Duke Senior's language, in particular his extended use of simile and personification of the natural world, reflect the events of the play and his responses to them?</li> </ul> <p>E.G: Sweet are the uses of adversity, Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous, wears yet a precious jewel in his head...</p>	
<p><b>What strikes you about Shakespeare's dramatic craft?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would this scene be portrayed on stage?</li> <li>• What actions, tone of voice or gestures might be suggested in the language that Duke Senior and Amiens use?</li> <li>• How does Shakespeare use the forest as a place to contrast with the life of the court and a place to develop plot and character?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>How does this passage compare to other parts of the play?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What else happens in the play to either prove or disprove the Duke's words about the sweetness of adversity?</li> <li>• Describe the adversity faced by other characters and what happens through their time in the forest.</li> <li>• How does Shakespeare use the conventions of the pastoral tradition in <i>As You Like It</i>?</li> </ul>	

Complete this same table for a passage of your choice from another part of the play.

## Plan your essay

You will now have some concrete ideas that you can include in your essay. You might like to reorganise your ideas or add in other examples from the play to make a clearer plan. Use mind maps, bullet points or flow charts with words, images, sentences, thought bubbles and prompts that are intelligible to you. If you plan your essay or argument thoughtfully in detail before you begin writing, you will find that your ideas will be easier to structure and develop later.

## Structure your essay

You will need to follow certain rules to give your writing a clear structure. Your essay should have:

- an **introduction** (with a clear sense of the direction in which your argument will go)
- a **main body** to develop your argument (with each paragraph making a point of dramatic or thematic significance, and referring in close detail to the script)
- a **conclusion** (that declares where your argument has arrived).

## Write carefully

Your aim is to write clearly and concisely in the present tense and with sentences that are carefully punctuated. Remember to be specific in the points you make about the play and the references you use from the play, and in how you address the key points of the essay question.

## Remember Shakespeare's skill as a playwright and poet

Shakespeare made specific choices about language and the dramatic representation of character, plot and theme on stage. Remember to identify some of the literary devices and dramatic techniques that he has used and explain their effectiveness. A good way to remember to do this is to make sure that you mention Shakespeare's name in every paragraph as you comment on the techniques that he is using.

## Remember to use quotations!

It is important that you explain the dramatic or linguistic significance of the quotations you use. Try to unpack the quotation with detailed attention to specific words or phrases. Try also to comment on your ideas about stagecraft or the development of themes or characters.