

Writing about *As You Like It*

Essay question

'The Forest of Arden is a setting where simple, natural love is able to develop' To what extent do you agree with this view?

Act 5 Scene 2, lines 26–40

ROSALIND ...for your brother and my sister no sooner met but they looked, no sooner looked but they loved, no sooner loved but they sighed, no sooner sighed but they asked one another the reason, no sooner knew the reason but they sought the remedy; and in these degrees have they made a pair of stairs to marriage which they will climb incontinent, or else be incontinent before marriage: they are in the very wrath of love and they will together; clubs cannot part them.

ORLANDO They shall be married to-morrow, and I will bid the duke to the nuptial. But, O, how bitter a thing it is to look into happiness through another man's eyes! By so much the more shall I to-morrow be at the height of heart-heaviness, by how much I shall think my brother happy in having what he wishes for.

ROSALIND Why then, to-morrow I cannot serve your turn for Rosalind?

ORLANDO I can live no longer by thinking.

Plan your essay

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

Remember as you write that your understanding of dramatic method and literary form is important in your exploration of plot, character and themes. Try to analyse the dramatic qualities of this play and the ways in which Shakespeare crafted the stories and characters you will discuss in your essay.

<p>What is your interpretation of this part of the play?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is happening here and how does this relate to the rest of the play? • What does it show about Rosalind and Orlando, their relationship and the main themes of the play? 	
<p>What strikes you about Shakespeare's language?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What vivid images or descriptions are used in this passage? • How does Orlando's language reveal his feelings and does it relate to his behaviour in other scenes? E.G: By so much the more shall I tomorrow be at the height of heart-heaviness, by how much I shall think my brother happy in having what he wishes for. 	
<p>What strikes you about Shakespeare's dramatic craft?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might Rosalind's description of the lovers, with its carefully constructed list building up to a crescendo, be portrayed on stage? • What actions, tone of voice or gestures might be used by both characters uses? • What role does Rosalind's disguise have in furthering the themes and drama of this scene? 	
<p>How does this passage compare to other parts of the play?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where else in the play are similar themes of love and loyalty explored? • How does Shakespeare provide a dramatic experience for the audience as well as a representation of love that is requited and unrequited? 	

How does your interpretation compare with other interpretations?

- What alternative interpretations of this play have you encountered?
- What critical opinions or performances (on stage or screen) have you agreed with or disagreed with?
- Remember to evaluate other interpretations by incorporating them into your discussion.

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 that you make about the play and the references you use from it, 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 and include analysis of the script

You will want to be a thoughtful reader of *As You Like It* so that you can explore the implications of words and ideas in the script. Your analysis should show that you are aware of metaphors, similes and other literary features, and that you consider the implications of genre, audience and context. Your close analysis of words and phrases from the script must be connected to the big issues raised by the play. Try to think in terms of relating your detailed analysis to the major ideas that the play explores.

Learn from others

Although you should endeavour to be as original as possible, your critical voice is inevitably going to be strongly influenced by others: your teacher, other members of your class and film versions, as well as the views of actors and critics. Learning from others adds to the effectiveness of your argument, it does not dilute it: but remember to give credit where it is due.