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Teaching Unit™

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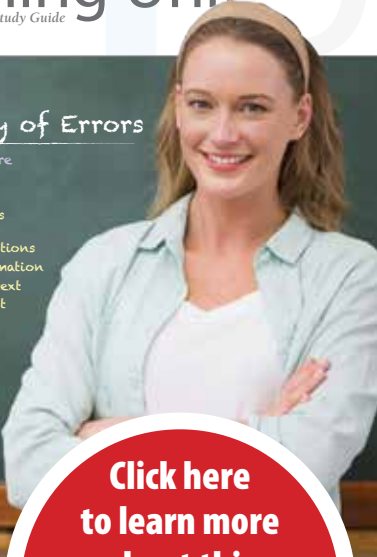
Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Comedy of Errors

by William Shakespeare

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938
www.prestwickhouse.com
800.932.4593

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The Comedy of Errors

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. give a synopsis of the plot of the play.
2. discuss literary terms relating to plays.
3. cite characteristics of *The Comedy of Errors* that mark it as an early Shakespearean play.
4. define the terms “comedy” and “farce” and identify markers of farce as a subset of comedy.
5. evaluate how Shakespeare used stock characters to reinforce the farcical nature of the play.
6. discuss the dramatic uses of the monologue in this play.
7. discuss the range of roles for women in Ephesus based on the characters of Adriana, Luciana, the courtesan, and the abbess.
8. evaluate how a production of this play could be made easy to understand.
9. choose two scenes and show how they are pivotal to the plot of the play.
10. develop a character sketch of Adriana or Antipholus of Ephesus.
11. discuss the rule of law under the Duke.
12. show how the political tensions among Syracuse, Ephesus, Corinth, and Epidamnum are important to the play.
13. discuss the role and power of superstition in *The Comedy of Errors*.
14. evaluate the life and treatment of slaves in the play.
15. cite an incident or conversation and show what event it foreshadows.

The Comedy of Errors

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. How does Shakespeare depict differences in social class in the play?
2. How does the use of stock characters, such as the kitchen maid or the courtesan, make the play more interesting?
3. Identify Shakespeare's use of irony in the play. Explain how it contributes to the play.
4. Write a biography of the abbess, detailing her early life, explaining the choices she made, and evaluating her success.
5. Why does Shakespeare use so many physical beatings in this play?
6. How does the political system of the independent city state affect this play?
7. This play is called *The Comedy of Errors*. Discuss elements of comedy in the play, and then discuss the range of errors occurring.
8. The leading characters are twins who have grown up separately and with different kinds of lives. Make a table comparing the qualities and characteristics of Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse.
9. Two sisters are also featured in the play. Compare the lives, characters, and characteristics of Adriana and Luciana.
10. Discuss the life of a slave in this play, using both Dromio of Syracuse and Dromio of Ephesus as examples.
11. What is life like in the city of Ephesus under Duke Solinus?
12. What can you infer about the status and life of a courtesan at this time?
13. Choose one monologue from the play, and re-write its sentiments either in poetry of your own or in prose.

The Comedy of Errors

Act I, Scene I – A Hall in the Duke’s Palace

Vocabulary

adverse – opposing
burthen – burden, load
confiscate – taken away
dilate – to enlarge; tell more about
Exeunt. – Latin for “they exit.” The word is followed by a period because it is abbreviated from the phrase “*exeunt omnes*,” meaning “they all exit.”
factor – agent or business manager
Gaoler – a jailer or other law-enforcement officer
guilders – Dutch currency; Shakespeare’s audience would understand the term to mean money in general
hap – luck or fortune; chance or happenstance
importuned – begged
intestine jars – the jars used to store the intestines of the dead
league – a distance measured over water; 2-4 statute miles
meaner – lower in class, poorer
rancorous – mean-spirited, angry
reft – been bereft of, stripped of
seditious – traitorous
synods – the councils or committees that make policy
Syracusa – Syracuse, a commercial city on the east coast of Sicily

1. Why is Ægeon, the merchant of Syracuse, condemned to die?

2. Why did Ægeon set out from Syracuse to Ephesus, knowing of the feud between the cities?

Act II, Scene I – The House of Antipholus of Ephesus

Vocabulary

bespew – a wish of bad luck to (in this case) his master’s hand

bridle – strap used to steer animals

defeatures – marred or damaged features

football – soccer ball

homage – praise

lash’d – punished; beat with a lash or whip

loureth – threatens

minions – chosen ones, pets

pale – a fence piece

prating – foolish or gibbering

prithe – pray tell; let me know

spurn – reject, or in this case, kick away

voluble – wordy, fluent

1. Adriana, the wife of Antipholus of Ephesus, shows some feminist spirit when she says, “Why should their liberty than ours be more?”. She is complaining about having to wait for her husband to return before eating. However, Luciana, her sister, sees the situation differently. What is Luciana’s viewpoint?

2. Luciana is not married, although she gives her married sister advice on handling a husband. What explanation for the advice does Adriana give, and how does Luciana explain her spinsterhood?

3. When Dromio of Ephesus arrives at home and says that his master is “at two hands with me, and that my two ears can witness,” what does he mean?

3. What Antipholus of Ephesus and Balthazar discuss?

4. Why is the conversation between the host and Balthazar ironic?

5. Dromio of Ephesus is locked out, and Dromio of Syracuse is acting as the porter at a house he has never seen before. What is the content of their conversation? How does this ironic situation contribute to the farce?

6. Luce is a servant at the home of Antipholus of Ephesus. Why does she not let him in when she hears his voice outside the gate?

7. What do Angelo and Balthazar say about the argument at the gate?
