



In the latter part of the 19th century, Japan opened up for trade with the West. Merchant adventurers arrived from all over the world, many of them English. Some traded in silk and rice and lived in enclaves around the 'treaty ports.' They brought their families and their followers and created private mini-empires where they tried to embrace this extraordinary culture, its beauties and its dangers...

(On-screen text from opening scene)

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
AS YOU LIKE IT

TEACHERS' NOTES

This study guide is aimed at students of English, Film and Media at KS4, AS and A2 level. This guide provides an overview of the way in which Shakespeare's text has been adapted for the screen making a consideration of plot structure, genre and representation.



FILM SYNOPSIS

In late nineteenth century Japan, Duke Senior, his daughter Rosalind, her cousin Celia and the court are enjoying traditional Japanese entertainments when their comfortable world is turned upside down. Duke Frederick, the ruling Duke's brother, bursts onto the scene and, with his army of samurai warriors, takes power by force. Duke Senior and his attendants are banished; Rosalind, for the meantime, is allowed to remain with her cousin.

Further fraternal conflict exists between Orlando and Oliver de Boys. Oliver, the elder brother, has kept their father's inheritance for himself leaving Orlando furious. However, not content with disinheriting his brother, Oliver makes plans to do away with him altogether, setting him up in a wrestling match against a sumo champion. Fortunately, not only does Orlando triumph in the ring, he also succeeds in winning the love of Rosalind who sees his feat of bravery and strength.

Meanwhile, Duke Frederick's anxiety for his daughter is growing as he sees Rosalind as a threat to Celia's popularity at court. He shows his pitiless nature by banishing Rosalind; but Celia refuses to desert her cousin, and so the pair leave for the Forest of Arden in disguise. Soon after, Orlando discovers a further plot against his life and determines to leave court for the forest to escape his brother's murderous schemes.

As the courtiers meet with shepherds, and each other, in the forest of Arden, there unfolds a series of mistaken identities, reunions and amorous encounters as the forest seemingly works its magic on all the runaways.

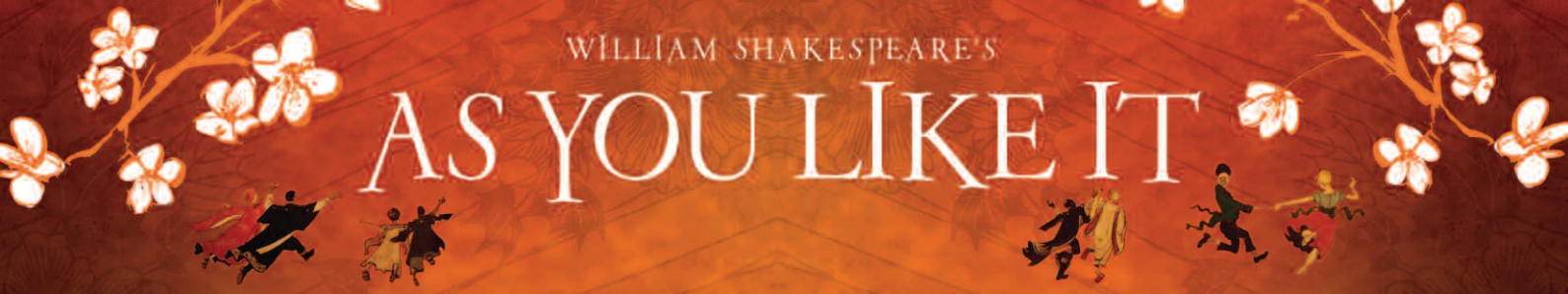
The action comes to a close in the time-honoured comedic tradition: thanks to Rosalind's matchmaking, lovers are paired and married in a joyous celebration and the usurping Duke relinquishes his court and all his worldly possessions.

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ADAPTING SHAKESPEARE

Creating a film version of a Shakespearean play is a complicated process. In the four hundred years since Shakespeare was writing, society has changed dramatically: our experiences of life and love are very different today to when the text was first performed. Directors must make decisions concerning the play's setting and context, and how to make this relevant to contemporary society. How do we cope with very different conventions of courtship and love? How true to the original text should the film remain, and if cuts are to be made, how will this be decided? Furthermore, how should distributors approach the marketing of the film when the wider audience may not know the original text?

In general, a director will begin with a concept for the play: a way of conveying key ideas to an audience through the 'look and feel' of the production. In the case of *As You Like It*, Kenneth Branagh has chosen to export the action to the Far East, and to the late nineteenth century. He has also made some changes to the way that the plot is conveyed, in order to help a modern audience to a fuller understanding of character and motivation.

THE TEXT 'OUT OF ORDER'

Some of the events in the film happen out of sequence with the order you will find in a text of the play. When transferring Shakespearean texts onto the screen, directors often make cuts and changes and there may be visual elements inserted to explain plot points or replace longer speeches.

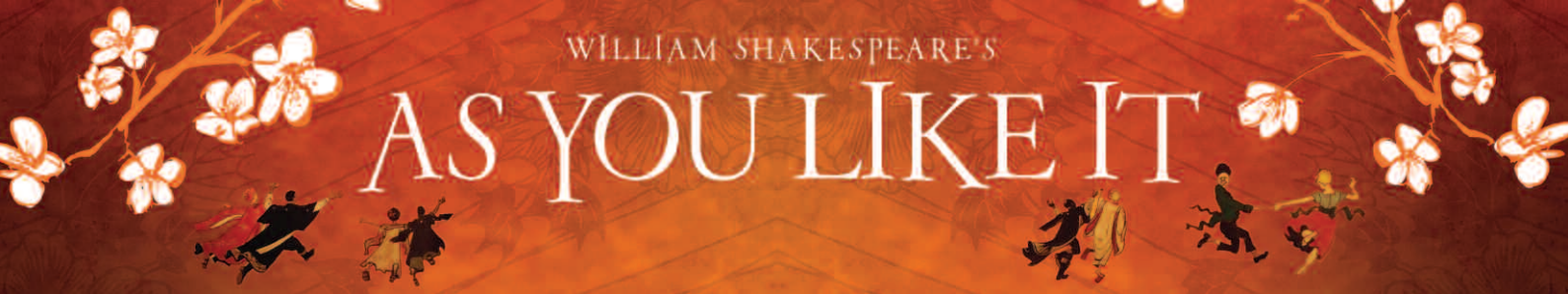
✦ Think about these comments by the director, Kenneth Branagh, taken from the production notes on the film:

'If someone responding to it at a particular point in time brings something different to the play, it simply proves what a classic it is and how available it is to different responses and different imaginations. When you start working on an adaptation like this, I think you have to find the nuts and bolts of the story and then meet the difference between a 400-year-old text and a contemporary medium.'

When you watch the film's opening scene, you may spot a key difference between the play and the film as Branagh has chosen to show the overthrow of Duke Senior visually rather than conveying it in reported speech as in the play text. You may also notice that the action in the forest is occasionally inter-cut with scenes of Duke Frederick at his court marking a conscious decision by the director to focus on the contrasts between the two brothers.

✦ As most exam and coursework criteria require students to consider different interpretations of Shakespeare's plays, you will find it useful to take detailed notes as you watch the film in order to compare Branagh's directorial decisions with your edition of the play text.





VISUAL REPRESENTATION

The director, Kenneth Branagh, chose to set his film adaptation in nineteenth century Japan. Read what he had to say about his inspiration for the film's setting and visual style in these quotations from the production notes:



'I visited Kyoto, Japan for the first time fifteen years ago and felt the sublime landscape and fascinating culture could be an inspiring setting for this quintessential romantic comedy. With sumo, martial arts and cherry blossom, I hope that the drama and the joy can combine to produce a wonderfully enjoyable film.'

'It seems to me that one of the central themes in this play is the idea of the effect that nature can have upon us, and that by relocating the Forest of Arden in Japan, it would be possible to get audiences to experience the story in a new, different and exotic way.'

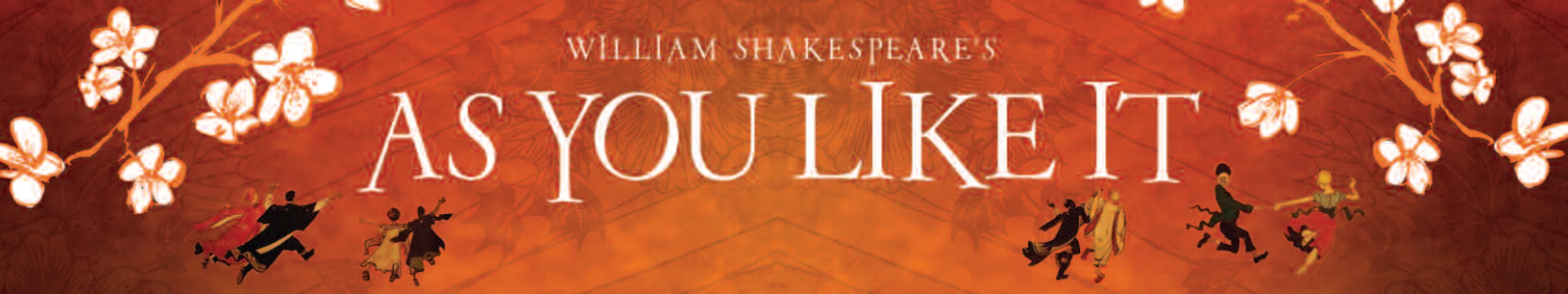
✦ Think about these statements before you view the film, and after watching try to decide how far you feel Branagh's visual concept (nineteenth century Japan) supports the key ideas of the play. Do you feel the setting helps modern viewers understand the plot and relationships?

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S AS YOU LIKE IT

EXPLORING GENRE:

KEY CONVENTIONS OF SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY



Shakespeare's comedies often involve frustrated courtships, mistaken identities and cross-dressing. They may begin with conflict and end with the resolution of any disputes and (at least one) marriage. Often there are several interconnected plot-lines that come together as the play draws to a close. Character types usually include pairs of lovers (in this case, we have 'courtly' love as well as the more 'rustic' lovers); members of a family in conflict with one another; clowns or fools and servants to the higher-born characters. Some comedies also contrast the sophistications of life at court and the simplicity of a rural existence, with characters returning to nature during the course of the action. This is an important theme in *As You Like It*: in the setting of the Forest of Arden, courtly refinements and status quickly become irrelevant.

EXTENSION TASK

As You Like It is sometimes considered a 'green' play, with the forest itself playing an integral part in the resolution of conflict and the creation of new possibilities for characters.

Do you believe the play has greater relevance for modern audiences as a result of the increasing importance of environmental issues in the media?

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CHARACTERS AND RELATIONSHIPS

The film focuses on the complicated relationships between characters: love and hate are strongly felt at various points in the action of the play. In order to help you understand these relationships at a glance, the names of key characters and their relationships to one another are shown in the table below:

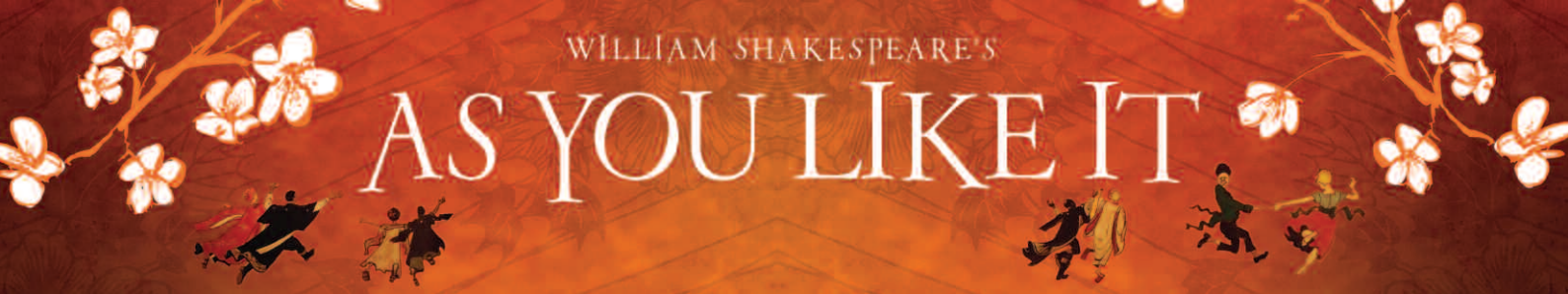
Duke Senior	brothers	Duke Frederick
Celia	cousins	Rosalind
Orlando	brothers	Oliver
Duke Senior	father/daughter	Rosalind
Duke Frederick	father/daughter	Celia
Orlando	lovers	Rosalind
Oliver	lovers	Celia
Touchstone	lovers	Audrey

✦ As you view the film, think about how costumes are used to emphasise characters' status and aspects of their personality.

PLOTTING SYMMETRY

Use the above table and your knowledge of the play to help you answer the following:

- ✦ What do you think is the main story/plot and which are sub-plots?
- ✦ How do the different plots link to one another, and where does Shakespeare include examples of symmetry in the plot structure?
- ✦ Once you have watched the film, can you think of any ways in which Branagh's film emphasises this symmetry?



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
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LESSONS IN LOVE

As highlighted earlier, one of the key aspects of Shakespearean comedies is the idea of disguise, often involving cross-dressing. In the film we see Celia disguise herself as Aliena, shedding her courtly refinement, and Rosalind adopting men's clothing as she takes on the role of Ganymede, sister to Aliena.



Rosalind's disguise allows her to set up a test of Orlando's love for her. As Ganymede, she claims the ability to tell true love from false, and to 'cure' a man of the affliction of love. Orlando must come to meet Ganymede in the woods, where Ganymede will 'pretend' to be Rosalind and show him all the worst elements of a lover's behaviour. Unfortunately her disguise and her useful advice on matters of the heart lead the shepherdess Phoebe to fall in love with Ganymede also...

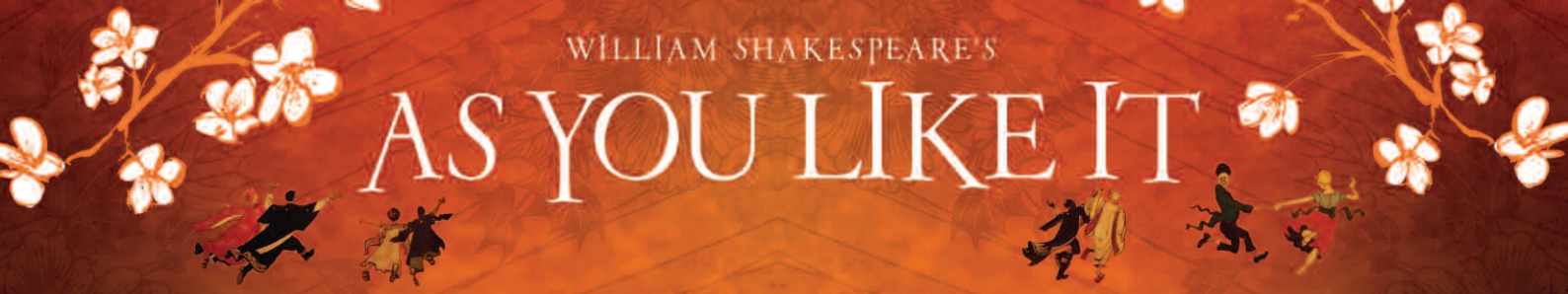
- + After watching the film, can you remember what the different characters say about love and marriage? Do you think Rosalind is wise or foolish in her disguise as Ganymede?
- + How important is status, beauty or virtue in the various relationships in the film? Do you think a modern audience can relate to the relationships shown in the film?

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FILM FOCUS: THE OPENING SCENE

Read Kenneth Branagh's comments on the play taken from the production notes on the film:

'In a story that can so often seem like a romp, where everything happens in a kind of separate, lovely place, we wanted to keep that danger alive and to keep a kind of disturbing energy underneath the comedy and the romance.'

+ When you view the opening scene, look carefully at the following aspects. You may want to work in groups for this task, with each group combining their ideas after watching the film.

CHARACTERS:

What is implied about status and relationships?

- ~ costumes
- ~ shot composition
- ~ music and sound
- ~ set and props
- ~ camera movement

+ Once each group has shared its ideas, think about the impression that this first scene gives the viewing audience. Discuss your ideas.

+ How far would you agree that this first scene demonstrates 'danger' and 'a kind of disturbing energy'?

When you watch the opening scene of the film you may notice that there is little dialogue: Branagh has chosen to represent the overthrow of Duke Senior through action rather than reported speech, as it is conveyed in the play text. In the production notes for the film Branagh comments on the challenge of converting words into images:

'How do you tell the story with pictures? And how do you strike the balance between presenting the story and finding a visual language that lets the words that remain sing out?'



+ Using your notes from the discussion on the first scene, evaluate its effectiveness in conveying Duke Senior's overthrow by his brother through actions rather than words.



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HAPPILY EVER AFTER: THE ON-SCREEN ENDING

Before you view the marriage scene at the end of the film, look at the promises Rosalind makes to each of the lovers.

+ Do you believe she will be able to fulfil all of these promises? How?

When you watch the final scene, think about what sort of mood is conveyed, as well as how each of the plots are drawn to a close.



After viewing and discussion, look back over your notes on the film's opening scene, and discuss your responses to the following questions:

+ How does the opening compare to the closing scene of the film?

+ What do you take away from the film after the final scene? What messages do you think the play and Branagh's choices in adapting it for the screen, give to a modern audience?

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