

2011 Study Guide for *Love's Labor's Lost* by William Shakespeare

Before seeing/reading the play

1. *Love's Labor's Lost* takes place in the kingdom of Navarre, which no longer exists as an independent country. Find a Medieval map of France and Spain and locate the kingdom of Navarre on it. A map can be found in *Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare* by Isaac Asimov or at the following website:
<http://www.henri-iv.com/imap.htm>
2. One of the characters in *Love's Labor's Lost*, Don Armado, is Spanish. Research the relationship between England and Spain during the Elizabethan times, paying special attention to events surrounding the Spanish Armada. This and other websites provide information:
http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/spanish_armada.htm
3. In *Love's Labor's Lost* a pageant is staged which features the Nine Worthies. Find out who the Nine Worthies are and what they represent. This and other websites provide information:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nine_Worthies
4. What are the elements of a Shakespearean comedy? How do comedies generally end? These and other websites provide information:
<http://www.fathom.com/course/21701729/session4.html>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespearean_comedy
5. Research the Shakespearean clown. What is the function of the clown? What is the difference between a clown and a fool in a Shakespeare play? This and other websites provide information:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespearean_fool

6. What is rhetoric? What is its purpose? How was rhetoric used during Shakespeare's time? How is it used today? When is rhetoric effective? When is it ineffective? What rhetorical devices did Shakespeare use in his plays? This and other websites provide information:

<http://www.bardweb.net/grammar/o2rhetoric.html>

Learn more about Shakespeare's life and times at the following websites:

<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/index.html>

<http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=865&CFID=6230886&CFTOKEN=25420173>

<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare.html>

<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/life.htm>

<http://www.bardweb.net/man.html>

After seeing/reading the play

1. What is the significance of the title of the play? How would you define "love's labor?" How is it defined in the play? How is love's labor's lost?
2. Refer to your research on Shakespeare's comedies. What characteristics does *Love's Labor's Lost* share with a conventional Shakespearean comedy? How does it differ from them? Near the end of the play Berowne says, "Our wooing doth not end like an old play:/ Jack hath not Gill. These ladies' courtesy/ might well have made our sport a comedy." How does Shakespeare use this line to draw attention to one of the ways in which this comedy differs from his others?
3. The King of Navarre and his men have sworn an oath to live and study at the King's court for three years. For that period they are to see no women, eat only one meal a day, fast once a week and sleep but three hours a night. How do the strict rules of the King's Academe doom them from the start? After they have broken their oaths Berowne says, "To fast, to study, and to see no woman—/ Flat treason 'gainst the kingly state of youth." In what ways does their youth make them think they will be able to adhere to these rules? In what ways does their youth make them unable to adhere to them?

4. Refer to your research on rhetorical devices. Give examples of rhetorical devices used in the play and note their effect. How are characters able to persuade others through the use of rhetoric? Which characters use rhetorical devices most effectively? Which characters use rhetoric unsuccessfully?
5. Compare King Ferdinand, Berowne, Longaville, Dumaine. How are they similar? How are they different? Based on their speech and their actions, what words would you use to describe each of them? How do they refer to themselves? How do their actions match up with their words?
6. In Act I Don Adriano de Armado is accused of being a gentleman and a gamester. He responds, "I confess both; they are both the varnish of a complete man." What does he mean by this? What is he saying about the nature of man? How do the actions of the other men in the play support this statement?
7. Refer to your research regarding the relationship between Spain and England in the 1500s. What event is referenced in Don Armado's name? How might this event have effected Shakespeare's portrayal of Don Armado? How might Elizabethan audiences have responded to the character?
8. Shakespeare's cast of characters lists the King's name as Ferdinand, but throughout the play he is referred to only as "King." The Princess of France, who is given no name, is referred to by her title, "Princess" and later "Queen." Why might Shakespeare choose to refer to these characters by their titles rather than their names?
9. What distinguishes the King of Navarre and the Princess of France from the other characters? How much power do they appear to have? What actions do they perform that suggest a high status in comparison to the others? In what ways are they like the other characters?
10. Compare the speech and behavior of the different sets of people in the play – the nobles, the country folk and the scholars. How is the behavior of each group distinct? What behaviors are similar for each group? Which group's speech and behavior is the most natural? Which group's speech is the most affected? What are the different

kinds of learning and education represented? How do the kinds of learning the characters value in the play influence their speech and behavior?

11. Trace the power shifts between the men and women in the play. What tactics do the women employ to get power? Which group appears to have more power by the end of the play?
12. How does Shakespeare highlight the differences between men and women in this play? What are the attractive qualities of the men? What are their unattractive qualities? What are the attractive qualities of the women? What are their unattractive qualities? In what ways are the men more idealistic, romantic, immature? In what ways are the women more realistic, balanced, mature?
13. Many actions in the play are not completed (e.g., the men swear to spend three years in study and immediately break their vow). What are the other actions and how is each interrupted? What is the emotional effect of a play in which every action is interrupted?
14. Why do the King and his lords choose to mask their true feelings for the women? What makes each of them reveal their true feelings and intentions? What risks do the men take for love? How does the men's behavior compare with the behavior of the women?
15. Read Berowne's speech in Act IV, scene iii, lines 286-362. Describe the argument he offers in support of the position that love is the true source of education. How does he convince his friends that they must break their oaths? What does he say they will gain?
16. Many things in the play are taken to extremes: the rules for Navarre's Academe, the learning of Holofernes and Sir Nathaniel, the foolishness of Don Armado, the year-long trials required by the women. What is Shakespeare telling us about extremes?
17. Why do the four women doubt the sincerity of the love offered by the men? What actions by the men cause the women to doubt their love? In what ways are the men in love with the individual women they are courting? In what ways are they in love with the idea of love? How much do the men really know about the women they profess to love?

18. Compare the behavior of the four men and the four women during the Pageant of the Nine Worthies. When do the men take their fooling too far? What do we learn about the men from their behavior? What do the ladies learn?
19. Compare Don Armado's love of Jaquenetta to the other men's love of their ladies. What are the differences and similarities in their behavior? The King and his men enjoy making fun of Don Armado's foolishness; describe theirs.
20. *Love's Labor's Lost* begins with Navarre talking about the death of himself and his three friends. The play ends with Marcade telling the Princess of the death of her father. Why does this play begin and end with death? How does the discussion of death at the beginning differ from the discussion of death at the end? How do the vows at the beginning of the play differ from the vows at the end of the play?
21. Refer to your research on the Nine Worthies. Which character plays which Worthy? How is each character's casting appropriate to his/her nature and opinion of her/himself?
22. Letters play a large role in the play. Which letters provide clarity? Which letters create confusion? When would it have been better to speak rather than to write a letter?
23. Which characters speak in rhyme and which do not? Why?
24. The play ends with two songs, celebrating spring (the cuckoo) and winter (the owl). What is the significance of the placement of the songs? What do the birds symbolize?
25. Write the next act. What is the result of a year of hard living for the men? Do they keep their oaths? What is the result of a year of separation for the men and women?
26. Describe the future for each of the relationships. Which couple appears most suited to each other? Why?
27. If you are seeing/reading *Measure for Measure*, compare the extremes, or excess, in both plays. What are the consequences of excess? How is balance achieved? How is balance not achieved?

28. The play begins with denial of Nature. If you are seeing/reading *Measure for Measure* and/or *The Imaginary Invalid* compare the way in which love and nature is dealt with in these plays. How and in what characters does Nature reassert herself?
29. Refer to your research on the Shakespearean clown. If you are seeing/reading *Measure for Measure*, compare the clown Costard with the clown Pompey. How are they similar? Different?
30. If you are seeing/reading *Measure for Measure* and/or *The Imaginary Invalid*, compare the use of masks in these plays. What is the purpose of wearing a mask for characters in these plays? What is the effect?

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