

## 2013 Study Guide for *Cymbeline* by William Shakespeare

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### Before seeing/reading the play

1. Research the historic King Cymbeline of Britain. Who were the emperors of Rome during his lifetime? What other significant figures lived at the same time? These and other websites provide information:  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cunobeline>  
<http://www.bard.org/Education/studyguides/Cymbeline/cymbelegend.html>
2. Research the relationship between Britain and Rome at the time of King Cymbeline's reign. These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.britannia.com/history/romantime.html>  
<http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ac71>
3. What is tribute? Who pays it and to whom? What are the purposes of paying tribute? This and other websites provide information:  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tribute>
4. Research Elizabethan and Jacobean stage conventions, particularly boys playing the female roles. How could this be especially interesting when the female character, played by a boy, disguises herself as a boy? These and other websites provide information:  
<http://eng.1september.ru/1999/eng16-1.htm>  
<http://www.globe-theatre.org.uk/globe-theatre-female-roles.htm>
5. What is dramatic irony? Why is the audience necessary for dramatic irony? What is its effect on an audience?
6. What elements characterize the Shakespearean form we commonly call romance? How do romances incorporate aspects of both comedy and tragedy while being

neither? Why do romances demand that the playgoer suspend the need for logic? What emotional effects does a romance produce? These and other websites provide information:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Shakespeare's\\_late\\_romances](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare's_late_romances)

<http://cla.calpoly.edu/~dschwart/engl339/romance.html>

7. Research deus ex machina. What do the words mean? Describe the theatrical technique that goes by that name. How did it come about? This and other websites provide information:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deus\\_ex\\_machina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deus_ex_machina)

8. Research the god Jupiter. What are his emblematic tree, bird and token of power? What are his powers? Of what countries was he the special protector? These and other websites provide information:

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/j/jupiter.html>

<http://www.bartleby.com/196/26.html>

9. Research the Machiavellian figure or “Machiavel” as he appeared in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. How did the name come to be applied to individuals who carried out their villainy by indirect methods? This and other websites provide information:

<http://www.answers.com/topic/machiavel-2>

10. Research the concept of the “noble savage” and the “nature versus nurture” debate, ideas which influenced Shakespeare, although neither term had been coined in his time. What are the fundamental premises? These and other websites provide information:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noble\\_savage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noble_savage)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nature\\_versus\\_nurture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nature_versus_nurture)

**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. Refer to your research on the relationship between Rome and Britain at the time of Cymbeline and on tribute. To what extent is there peace between them? Why are the British paying tribute to Rome? What repercussions might follow if they refuse to pay?
2. The play explores relationships on many levels. Identify the individuals involved in each, and describe how their relationships are manifested as the play begins: parent and child, husband and wife, siblings, master and servant, nations, the gods and humankind. Track how these relationships become alienated as the play progresses and how they resolve by its end.
3. Trace the actions of Cymbeline that cause him to lose first his two sons and then his daughter. What erroneous beliefs does he act upon? At the play's conclusion, on whom does he want revenge and why? What revelations turn him from revenge to forgiveness?
4. Refer to Act II, scene iii. What do the King and Queen intend for Cloten? What is Cloten's objective? What tactics does he use to move toward it? What is Imogen's objective? What tactics does she use? Consider the language Imogen uses to make Cloten comprehend her meaning. Which of her words have the greatest effect on him and why?
5. Refer to your research on the Machiavel. What are Iachimo's Machiavellian traits? What motivates him to deceive Posthumus? To deceive Imogen? What strategies does he use that ultimately prove effective, and what does this reveal about Posthumus and Imogen?
6. Cite instances when Imogen takes care of herself instead of waiting to be rescued. What resources does she have? Who are her helpers? In what circumstances does she wish for death and what causes her to choose life? Describe how she changes when she disguises herself as a boy; what is she able to do that she couldn't before? What might be the meaning of the "boy" name she chooses, and how does it reflect her personality?

7. Chart the life story of Posthumus Leonatus, from before his birth through the end of the play. How do people describe him? When does he match these descriptions and when does he contradict them? Why does he make a wager on Imogen's constancy? Why is he susceptible to Iachimo's accusations against her and why, later, does he repent of condemning her even though he still believes her unfaithful? Why does he fight on the side of the Romans, then the Britons, and again the Romans? What is there in Posthumus that makes him worthy to be saved by the god Jupiter? Why does Imogen forgive him?
8. Describe the tokens that Imogen and Posthumus exchange. What do they signify? What happens to each in the course of the play? How do the adventures of the tokens parallel the adventures of their owners?
9. What values distinguish Wales from Britain and Rome? In what respects is it superior to Cymbeline's "civilized" court? What lessons do people learn in the wilderness that they bring back to heal and enrich the spiritual life of the court? Contrast the varieties of love, both negative and positive, that Imogen experiences at court and in the forest of Wales.
10. Find examples in the play of the uses made of nature and natural things, such as plants and flowers. Who puts nature to distorted uses? Who uses nature to heal and renew? Distinguish between nature in Cymbeline's court and nature in Wales. In each case, what are the virtues and what are the limitations? Which characters are compared to plants and in what circumstances? What is the effect of nature's presence within the play?
11. Find references to birds and other animals. What animal qualities are mentioned, and whom are they used to describe? What is the effect of the evocation of so many creatures, both wild and tame?
12. Refer to your research on the "noble savage." What qualities do Guiderius and Arviragus have because they have been brought up in the wilderness, away from the corrupting influences of civilization? Which qualities result from their noble birth? In isolating them from civilization, how does Belarius protect himself? The young men? What are their ambitions?

13. The play contains songs as well as numerous references to music. What is the purpose of each song? How does each create harmony or dissonance with the events of the scene where it occurs? How do people regard the uses of music? What occasions call for music? How is harmony restored to the world of the play?
14. What fairy tale parallels are contained in the play? What do these elements do to the story: do they set us at a distance or bring us into the story? Why or why not?
15. Describe Caius Lucius. With whom does he interact and for what reasons? How does he treat people in each case? What is the effect, in a play about Britons, of emphasizing the nobility of the Roman enemy?
16. Describe the wickedness of the play's three villains: the Queen, Cloten and Iachimo. What does each want? What is each willing to do to achieve it? How do they manage to deceive their victims? Explain the dislike the other characters feel for them and, if applicable, the attraction.
17. Consider the characters as emblematic figures and explain what each personifies: Cymbeline. The Queen. Cloten. Imogen. Posthumus Leonatus. Pisanio. Iachimo. Belarius. Guiderius. Arviragus.
18. Find instances in which a character is assessed on the basis of his or her appearance. Which characters are unaware that they are not who they appear to be? Which characters deliberately alter their physical appearance or their personality and for what purpose? Both Posthumus and Cymbeline fail to see through Imogen's disguise; what else about her do they fail to recognize? List the moments in the final scene when outward appearance and inward reality come into harmony.
19. List the different lies that are told within the play and the people who tell them. In each case, what circumstances prompted the lie? What did the liar hope to achieve? To what extent is the lie successful? How necessary are the lies to the progress of the play's plot? Distinguish between lies for a good purpose and malignant lies.
20. Refer to your research on deus ex machina and Jupiter. Why is Jupiter the appropriate deity for this play? What truths does Jupiter convey to Posthumus that might not be

believed in the everyday world? Why has he chosen to allow Posthumus to suffer for so long? How does the device of the deus ex machina impact the play's ending?

21. Refer to your research on dramatic irony. What plot contrivances are necessary to bring all the principals from the distant locations of Rome and Wales to one place in the final scene? List at least ten facts that the audience knows but not the people onstage. What chances does Imogen give Iachimo and Posthumus to redeem themselves? Why does she delay revealing herself? Who forgives whom and for what? Who cannot be forgiven and therefore is excluded from the last scene? Whose deaths are necessary for the play's ending? List all the reconciliations and acts of forgiveness that take place during the final act of the play.
22. If you are seeing *King Lear*, *My Fair Lady*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *The Taming of the Shrew*, compare the daughters in the plays with Imogen. How is each daughter valued and by whom? How much power does each daughter have? Which daughters find power by defying the societal expectations of their role as women? Which by conforming? How much choice does each have about whom she will marry?
23. If you are seeing *King Lear*, *My Fair Lady*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *The Taming of the Shrew*, compare the relationship between love and marriage in the plays with *Cymbeline*. On what factors do the fathers decide who will marry their daughters? How much influence do the daughters' wishes have? What attributes other than love do the fathers value?

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