

#ShakespearesaskLive 2022



Study Guide

Compiled by Angela Christie, BFA, BEd

The possibilities are numerous for using the elements of this workshop as a jumping off point for cross-curriculum and interdisciplinary study in your classroom. With activities that introduce Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* while incorporating drama, writing, and the visual arts, this study guide offers many chances to reach any number of curriculum goals for all grade levels.

Cymbeline



Synopsis

Cymbeline, king of Britain, is angry because his daughter, Imogen, has secretly married Posthumus, a poor but worthy gentleman. Cymbeline's evil second wife, Imogen's stepmother, would rather Imogen had married her own stepbrother, Cloten, the queen's son by an earlier marriage. The king banishes Posthumus, who goes to Rome where he meets the crafty Iachimo, who claims that no woman can be virtuous and wagers Posthumus that he can seduce his wife, Imogen. Iachimo goes to England but sees at once that she can never be won; so he hides in a chest which he has asked Imogen to safely keep in her bedroom.

That night, after Imogen is asleep, Iachimo steals out of the chest, takes careful notes of her room and her exposed person, and steals the bracelet on her arm, a bracelet her husband had given her. With this he returns to Posthumus, who is frantic over the apparently incontestable evidence of his wife's inconstancy.

In despair, Posthumus sends orders to his faithful servant, Pisanio, to kill Imogen. The good Pisanio, instead, persuades her to leave the court and escape death as well as the hatred of the queen and the advances of her son, Cloten. Disguised as a page, she comes to the cave where Belarius, a banished nobleman, lives as a peasant. Belarius is raising as his own sons the two children of Cymbeline whom he had stolen from their nursery twenty years before. They pity the solitary little page, for whom they feel an unaccountable affection.

Cloten, dressed in Posthumus's clothing, soon comes in pursuit of Imogen. Belarius has one of the sons cut off the prince's head. Meanwhile, Imogen, to calm herself, drinks medicine that Pisanio, thinking it a wonderful cordial, had innocently received from the queen. However, the queen intended to give Pisanio a deadly poison. Thus the brothers are horrified to find their beloved page apparently dead. Taking her tenderly to the forest, they lay her next to Cloten's body. Since the drug was really only a sleeping potion, Imogen soon wakes and, seeing the headless body she believes to be her husband, falls in a faint. The Roman ambassador approaches as she is recovering, and she takes service with him as a page.

Meanwhile, Cymbeline is preparing for war with Rome, and the noble brothers and their "father," Belarius, join the king's forces. In battle the three men rescue Cymbeline from the Romans and capture the Roman ambassador and his page. Posthumus is in despair over Imogen's supposed death and disguises himself as a Roman prisoner of war so Cymbeline will have him put to death.

The king learns that his wife has died and has confessed her treachery. Imogen then forces Iachimo to confess his treachery to her and Posthumus. She then reveals her identity to her surprised husband, who is quickly recognized and released. Next, Belarius reveals the two princes to their father, Cymbeline, who pardons the old man and the Roman ambassador and makes peace with Rome.

Did You Know?

Cymbeline is based on a historical British King?

Lovers of English history will feast on the history lessons rife in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*. While the play has little to do with British history, the very title of the play presents a scholarly lesson in literary history. Legend has it that Cymbeline lived and died in the first century a.d. The nephew of Cassibellaunus, king of the Britons, Cymbeline was taken hostage by Roman invaders and was raised a Roman. When he returned to England, Cymbeline conquered Essex and ruled southern England between 10 and 40 a.d.

During his reign, Cymbeline had more wealth and power than any other ruler in England at the time. He kept Roman advancement at bay by forging treaties with emperors Augustus Caesar and Tiberius. The real Cymbeline remained a loyal ally of Rome until his death in 41 a.d., when his kingdom was divided and was ruled briefly by his two sons. After its invasion by Claudius in 43 a.d., England became a Roman province known as Britannia.

That Cymbeline ruled a portion of England and had two sons is practically the only accurate connection between the play and the history upon which it was loosely based. Nevertheless, Shakespeare provides a story to rival any historical accounts. Based on *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* by historian Raphael Hollinshed (d.1580). The Bard may also have based Cymbeline loosely on Boccaccio's fourteenth century play, *The Decameron*. Written in 1609/10, *Cymbeline* was first performed in 1611 for then ruling King James; however, the play was not published until 1623, as part of the First Folio.

Symbols

Set in a world that is part Druid, part Roman, Cymbeline is rich in symbols. Shakespeare uses symbols to expose the spirituality of the play: the costumes, the animals, the names, and the stars reflect Elizabethan social manners, but are based on ancient beliefs about icons.

Bracelets and Rings as Symbols:

- According to The Mammoth Dictionary of Symbols, “In antiquity, rings, bracelets and necklaces were worn to preserve the link between the body and the soul . . . removed to facilitate their separation at the moment of death (which would explain why so many soldiers wore bracelets” (Nadia Julien, The Mammoth Dictionary of Symbols: Understanding the Hidden Language of Symbols [New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc. 1996], 350). Upon his banishment in act 1, scene 1, Posthumus prepares to leave Imogen by presenting her with a bracelet that would hold her his prisoner of love: “For my sake wear this. / It is a manacle of love; I’ll place it / Upon this fairest prisoner” (All references to the play are from David Bevington, The Complete Works of Shakespeare, third edition [Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman & Co. 1980]).
- The ring is by nature female and negative, as in the Druidic circles that might be obvious in the setting of this play. Shakespeare brilliantly uses circles to bind the lovers to the play’s antagonist. Imogen gives a cherished ring to her husband, to whom she has pledged her faithfulness saying: “This diamond was my mother’s. Take it, heart, / But keep it till you woo another wife / When Imogen is dead.”
- In spite of reports to the contrary, Imogen remains chaste in Posthumus’s absence and faithful to her young husband. The villainous Iachimo steals the bracelet from Imogen’s wrist as she sleeps unaware. This is in keeping with the traditional concept associated with ring symbols: the double bind is inherent in this symbol, which includes both domination and submission for the wearer.

Names as Symbols: Several names in Cymbeline have symbolic meanings.

- “Posthumus Leonatus”: post (after) + humus (mortality) = dead, and leo (lion) + natus (born) = Born of a Lion. This soldier has earned a title fit for a king—or at least fit for a king’s daughter’s husband. The name signifies one who is mighty in life and in death.
- Imogen chooses the name Fidele for her male alter-ego. Fidele = faithful one.
- Queen is the only name given to the king’s wife. She has no name in either the play or in history. Shakespeare’s use of the name Queen is less an attempt to symbolize her role than it is an attempt to avoid placing unnecessary importance on the office of queen, since Shakespeare wrote this play for King James.

Birds and Fowl as Symbols:

- Birds and fowls often symbolize freedom, intelligence, and spiritual quest. A reference to birds can also signal the dangers of obsessive thought, as when the duplicitous Iachimo first encounters Imogen. He finds her even more beautiful than he anticipated and lustfully describes her as unique as a phoenix: "If she be furnish'd with a mind so rare, / She is alone the' Arabian bird" (1.6.17).
- Eagles symbolize light, conquest, power, and consciousness with an all-seeing eye. The eagle was known to carry Jupiter's thunderbolt between his talons. The eagle was also a conveyor of the dead to their final rest. Shakespeare uses both these interpretations, when the spirits of Posthumus's parents rise to the balcony, followed by Jupiter on his eagle, saying "Mount, eagle, to my palace crystalline" (5.4.91).
- Shakespeare extends the use of birds to entice laughter from audiences. Cymbeline's rich comedy comes to life in Cloten, the overgrown dullard stepson of King Cymbeline. Cloten's mother, the evil Queen, is constantly scheming to gain the throne for him, perishing the thought. In act 2, scene 1, Cloten compares himself to a rooster, saying: "I must go up and down like a cock that nobody can match."
- Cloten's companions immediately add insult to injury by implying that Cloten is impotent both sexually and politically: "You are cock and capon too, and you crow, cock, with your comb on."

Throughout the play, the heady reader will find many layers of meaning in Shakespeare's use of symbols, although only a few have been mentioned here.

Themes

Love and betrayal:

- the king and queen
- Imogen and Posthumus
- Posthumus and Iachimo
- the queen and Pisanio

Reunion and forgiveness:

- the reunion of the king to his lost sons
- the once-banished once-dead Posthumus returns to Imogen
- the bejeweled love tokens are returned to their rightful owners

All is not as it seems:

- the Queen utters hollow proclamations of love and loyalty
- Posthumus is deceived into believing that Imogen has been unfaithful even though she remains steadfast in her love for him
- Imogen disguises herself as a male page (Fidele) to join the Romans and return with them to Italy to find Posthumus
- after Imogen swallows a potion and goes into a stupor, Arviragus and Guiderius believe she is dead

- after Imogen awakens she mistakes the dead Cloten, who is wearing Posthumus's clothes, as Posthumus
- Belarius would appear to be a forest dweller, but disguises his true identity—a banished nobleman.

Characters

Cymbeline: King of ancient Britain. He attempts to marry his daughter to a worthless lout named Cloten.

Imogen: Daughter of Cymbeline by a former queen; Imogen defies her father and marries the man she chooses. Because of her nobility of character and fidelity to her husband and her ideals, she is the most appealing character in the play. She is the main character, or protagonist.

Posthumus Leonatus: Lower-class man who marries Imogen. Although he has many good qualities, he falters when the evil Iachimo persuades him that Imogen has been unfaithful. In this respect, he resembles Othello, the leading character in one of Shakespeare's great tragedies.

Queen: Wife of Cymbeline and Imogen's malevolent stepmother. She resembles an archetypal "evil queen" or witch who appears in fairy tales.

Philario: Friend of Posthumus.

Iachimo: Friend of Philario. Iachimo, the play's central villain, bets ten thousand ducats that he can seduce Imogen. Although he fails to do so, he persuades Posthumus that he succeeded. In this respect, he resembles Iago, the antagonist in Othello.

Cloten: Good-for-nothing son of the new queen by a former husband.

Pisanio: Servant of Posthumus.

Belarius: Lord who had fought for Cymbeline but was banished because he was falsely accused of being a traitor.

Guiderius, Arviragus: Adult sons of Cymbeline. They were kidnapped by Belarius when Guiderius was three years old and Arviragus two. Belarius kidnapped them to gain revenge against Cymbeline for banishing him. While they grow up in the wilds in the care of Belarius, he comes to love them. They believe he is their father. As the elder boy by a year, Guiderius is the rightful heir to Cymbeline's throne.

Helen: Attendant of Imogen.

Caius Lucius: General of the Roman forces.

Cornelius: Physician.

Roman Captain

Two British Captains

A Frenchman, friend to Philario

Two Lords of Cymbeline's court

Two Gentlemen of Cymbeline's court

Two Gaolers (Jailers)

Apparitions in Posthumus's Dream: Sicilius Leonatus, Mother, First Brother, Second Brother, Jupiter.

Minor Characters: Lords, ladies, Roman senators, tribunes, soothsayer, Dutchman, Spaniard, musicians, officers, captains, soldiers, messengers, other attendants.

For Discussion

(or ideas to be used as writing prompts)

Before your workshop:

- What qualities do you think make for a good ruler (King or Queen)? Imagine you were a King or Queen. What would your strengths or weaknesses be?
- In the play, Imogen marries Posthumus against the wishes of her father. In today's society is it still commonplace for parents to attempt to choose spouses for their children?
- Why does a person betray another? Why does a person remain loyal to another?

After your workshop:

- Which character in the play do you connect with the most? Which character do you least connect with?
- What are Cymbeline's strengths and weaknesses as a king?
- Explain the role birthmarks play in creating and resolving problems.
- After Iachimo dupes Posthumus into believing that Imogen has been unfaithful, Posthumus orders his servant, Pisanio, to kill her. In your opinion, do the subsequent actions of Posthumus redeem him for doubting Imogen and ordering her death?
- What similarities can you find between *Cymbeline* and other Shakespeare plays you've read/seen?

Visual Art Prompts

A European World

Cymbeline takes place in 3 distinct settings:

- London
- Wales
- Italy

In the 2016 Royal Shakespeare Company's production, the director was keen to treat the events in each of these locations as a different story, creating a 'collage' of different events and places when brought together, so the audience would feel the transitions. Posthumus is forced to Italy by exile and in different ways Imogen is forced to Wales as she goes in search of Posthumus so the changes from place to place were emphasized.

One of the key ways that this was achieved was through music, with each place having a very different feeling on stage. London, for example, featured classical music and operatic singing where Italy is represented by more modern and electronic music and Wales using less familiar instruments made out of unusual objects to create unknown sounds. In the below images you can see some of the sets for the three worlds of the play, which are very different in terms of historical setting as well which also creates a disconnect between the stories and places.



Activity: In response to the images above, ask students to think about how they would show the differences between the different settings. How could they create worlds that were different enough that the characters would feel uncomfortable and out of place moving between them? Ask students to work in pairs to create a mood board for each of the three settings. Remind them that they don't need to be part of the same world, they can be in different time periods, different languages and with different music.

- A mood board can be a simple collection of images, drawings, colours, textures pulled together as a simple collage. Designers will often start this way when collecting inspiration and ideas for their sets.

Encourage students to think about what needs to happen in that world as they create their mood boards, as well as thinking about the contrast between them. For example:

- Britain needs to be a kingdom in collapse or disarray that owes money to another country.
- Italy needs to be a setting where characters from different cultures mix – like the Frenchman and Iachimo – and there is, possibly, a culture of gambling or wagering.
- Wales needs to be a place where Belarius can have raised his 'children' to hunt and live in the wild with no one seeing them or recognising them for twenty years.

Invite students to share their mood boards for each of the settings, discussing the ways they have tried to create contrast between them.

Drama Activities

Using the “Story in Ten Scenes” below, or creating your own 10-point plot summary, complete the following Drama activities.

The Hot Seat: Gaining Perspective

A story can change depending on who tells it. People see the world from different viewpoints. A group of people might see the same event from completely different perspectives and tell about the event in very different ways.

Objective: Students will analyze events from the play through the perspective of different characters.

Step 1: Set up the “hot seat”: a single chair in front of your classroom.

Step 2: Have students or a group of students choose one of the characters from the story.

Step 3: One by one, each student or group of students takes the “hot seat.” Have them introduce themselves in the voice and manner of the chosen character.

Step 4: Using the “Story in Ten Scenes” outline, or your own list of important events in the story of *Cymbeline*, ask the “characters” in the “hot seat” questions about how these events affect them.

Step 5: After the class has interviewed several “characters,” discuss how the characters’ viewpoints differed. How were they alike? Was there a point in the story when most of the characters’ viewpoints were the same?

Writing Extension: Describe 5 of the characters in the play: write down 10 adjectives describing them then use your adjectives to write a paragraph description of each character. Now write about one of the characters, describing them as another character sees them. Describe one character from the perspective of a different character.

Conversations for Two

This improvisational activity will help you to begin thinking about the themes of the story. With a partner, students brainstorm different scenarios that would fit each of the plot points, or scenes from “Story in Ten Scenes”. They then carry out a conversation. If comfortable, students can share their conversations with the rest of the class. Discuss the different choices made by pairs working with the same scenario.

Revisiting the Story through Tableaux

1. In small groups, using the “Story in Ten Scenes”, students create and present a series of tableaux depicting each of these scenes that summarize the story of *Cymbeline*.
2. Students can then expand their scenes by bringing the tableaux “to life”, adding dialogue and action.

The Story in Ten Scenes

1. Cymbeline and Imogen argue. Cymbeline has banished Posthumus after finding out that Imogen and Posthumus have married in secret. Cymbeline wants Imogen to marry Cloten instead, who is the son of his second wife the Queen. Meanwhile the Queen pretends to support the young couple but is secretly plotting against them. Imogen and Posthumus vow to be faithful to each other and Posthumus gives Imogen a bracelet as a symbol of their vows.

2. Posthumus arrives in Italy where he has been exiled to. While there his friend Philario introduces him to lots of different people including an Italian called Iachimo. Iachimo and Posthumus argue about women; Iachimo claims any woman can be persuaded to betray her husband and Posthumus claims that Imogen would never betray him. Iachimo wagers that he can seduce Imogen and convinces Posthumus to agree.

3. The Queen asks the court Doctor, Cornelius, to make her a poison but Cornelius is suspicious and gives her a sleeping potion instead. When Pisanio comes in the Queen accidentally drops the poison and tells Pisanio to keep it. The Queen lies to Pisanio and telling him it’s helped her feel ‘restored’ several times before.

4. Iachimo arrives to see Imogen. At first she is excited to have news about how Posthumus is and whether he’s okay but as they talk and Iachimo tries to seduce her she asks him to leave. He apologizes and asks if she will look after a trunk which contains presents that Posthumus helped to buy, promising he will leave in the morning. She agrees to protect it and keep it in her room overnight. Iachimo then hides in the crate and comes out while Imogen is asleep. He then makes a note of exactly what her room looks like, takes her bracelet and also notices a mark on her breast which he believes will convince Posthumus he managed to seduce her.

5. Iachimo convinces Posthumus that Imogen betrayed him and Posthumus is furious. He sends two letters home. One to Imogen asking her to meet him at Milford Haven, saying he is coming home, and one to his servant Pisanio ordering him to murder Imogen. Both letters get to London and Pisanio and Imogen set off to Milford Haven. Meanwhile Cloten is frustrated that Imogen thinks

Posthumus' clothes or garments have more value than he does, and dresses in Posthumus' clothes before following Imogen and Pisanio to Milford Haven.

6. Pisanio does not think Imogen has been unfaithful so while on the road, he shows the letter to Imogen and explains what Posthumus ordered him to do. Unable to go back to court, Imogen dresses as a boy and agrees to stay away while Pisanio returns. Imogen then gets lost in Wales before finding a cave which clearly belongs to someone. She waits there and is eventually found by a man called Belarius who lives in the cave with his children Guiderius and Arviragus. They accept Imogen, who tells them her name is Fidele, and feel very close to her. Belarius doesn't know that Imogen is the Princess but he confesses to the audience that his children are actually Cymbeline's children and that he stole them when he was banished by the King.

7. Imogen feels unwell and so stays in the cave while the others go to hunt. Cloten appears, in search of Imogen, and fights with Guiderius while the brother and sister are out hunting and Guiderius kills him by cutting off his head. Meanwhile, Imogen takes the sleeping potion that Pisanio had, thinking it will make her feel better but it sends her to sleep and makes her appear dead. When Belarius and his children come back, they find Imogen and think that Fidele is dead. They lay her body down next to the dead body of Cloten, who is headless and leave. When Imogen then wakes up she finds herself next to the headless body of Cloten, wearing Posthumus' clothes. She despairs, thinking Posthumus is dead.

8. The Roman army arrives in Britain because Cymbeline is refusing to pay tribute to them. Posthumus and Iachimo have traveled from Italy with the army. When they arrive in Wales Imogen becomes a page to one of the Roman officers, still dressed as Fidele. During the fighting Posthumus switches sides and fights for the Britons; he hates himself for what he has done and thinks Imogen has been killed on his orders, so he fights wildly in the hope he'll be killed. With the help of Belarius and his children the Romans are defeated and taken prisoner. Posthumus switches back to the Roman side and is imprisoned with them.

9. While Posthumus is in prison, the god Jupiter promises Posthumus' ancestors that he will protect him from harm. In the morning Cymbeline is with his court, including Belarius and his children who he doesn't recognize. The Queen is revealed to have died horribly but confessed on her deathbed that Pisanio had a deadly poison for Imogen and that she had plotted to kill Cymbeline as well. Cymbeline laments that he listened to the Queen's lies rather than his own daughter. The Roman prisoners then arrive to hear his judgment, including Posthumus, Iachimo and the disguised Imogen, who looks like a Roman page boy.

10. The Roman soldier Imogen had been serving asks Cymbeline to spare his page, Fidele. When Imogen steps forward Belarius and his children recognize her as the boy they knew in Wales but they keep quiet. Meanwhile, Imogen asks Iachimo to explain how he came by the ring he wears and Iachimo then confesses that he lied about seducing Imogen in order to win the ring from Posthumus. Once Iachimo has confessed Posthumus reveals himself and so does Imogen. After this, the full story is explained and Belarius reveals that Guiderius and Arviragus are actually Cymbeline's lost children, Imogen's siblings. Cymbeline then frees the Roman soldiers and agrees to pay the tribute.

Writing Prompts

Point of View Questions

Example point of view questions:

- Use clues from the play and your own ideas to identify (character's name) point of view. How might the story be different if it was told by (another character's name)?
- Identify the main point of view or perspective in the play by using details and your own background knowledge. Explain another point of view or perspective that could exist.
- How might (character's name) point of view differ from your own? Use three details from the play in the explanation of your thinking.
- How might your background, experiences and perspectives have influenced the way you understood the play?
- Using evidence from the play and what you can infer about the character's point of view, explain how it is similar or different from your own perspective.
- What does the character's decision mean to you and how might it affect other characters in the story?

Monologue Writing

Objective: In the exercise, students will map out the character traits of several of the characters in the play. Then they will write a short monologue from the perspective of one of the characters. Students will demonstrate an understanding of character traits, recall facts, characters and events from the story.

Discussion Outline:

1. Use the character of Imogen. This could be either a whole class or small group discussion.
 - First plot out the main points of what happens to Imogen in the play.
 - Discuss what Imogen does in each section.
 - Discuss how Imogen acts and interacts with different characters in each section.
 - Make a list of words that describe Imogen during each section.
 - Choose four words from the list that best encompass her whole character.
 - Discuss where in the play these character traits reveal themselves. (At this point, students are acting like detectives to find evidence to back up the character traits they have chosen. What the character does or says in the play is the proof that this word helps describe him/her.)
2. Then, have students choose one of the characters from the play and on their own complete the character analysis process used above. Students fill in a character analysis diagram for their character. In the middle of the diagram is written their character, then the four character traits are drawn in circles flowing out of the center, then come out the proof is drawn in circles coming out of the traits. An example of what this diagram looks like is at:
<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/graphicorganizers/cloud/43.shtml>
3. Students think about what their character wants in the play. It should be expressed in the form of a "to" verb. This is the character's objective. Their objective should encompass what drives them through the whole play.
4. Students write: My name is _____ (Fill in name of character.) I want to_____. (Fill in what the character wants in the overall play.)
5. Students use the character's objective as a jumping off point to write a short monologue from their character's point of view. The monologue should start with their completed sentence, I want_____. The rest should tell how they go about getting what they want or not. Or why they want it so much and why is it important to them.

Drama Extension: Students perform their monologues for the class.

Additional resources/ Sources for this study guide and extra resources

Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan: www.shakespearesask.com

Royal Shakespeare Company, *Cymbeline* Teacher Pack:
<https://cdn2.rsc.org.uk/sitefinity/education-pdfs/teacher-packs/edu-cymbeline-teacherpack-2016.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

Royal Shakespeare Company, *Cymbeline* Education:
<https://www.rsc.org.uk/cymbeline/education>

SparkNotes, *Cymbeline*: <https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/cymbeline/>

No Sweat Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*:
<https://nosweatshakespeare.com/play-summary-2/cymbeline/>

Shakespeare Study Guide, *Cymbeline*: <http://shakespearestudyguide.com/Cymbeline.html>

Utah Shakespeare Festival, *Cymbeline* study guide:
<https://www.bard.org/study-guides/cymbeline-study-guide/>

Stratford Festival: <https://www.stratfordfestival.ca/>