

Twelfth Night
By William Shakespeare

DIRECTIONS: Choose any ONE of the following essay topics to write about. It is due some time before 5/7. If you turn in the finished assignment early, there will be a small grade incentive (+3 points). If you miss the midnight deadline but turn in the assignment before eight hours have elapsed, there will be a small point deduction (-3 points). If you turn in the assignment between eight and twenty-four hours late there will be a larger point deduction (-10 points). If you turn in the assignment at any point after that, there will be a substantial point deduction (-20 points; this is a flat deduction, not a cumulative one based on the number of days late). If you turn in the essay late but do not want late points deducted, write two essays instead of one.

I have used old Q3 prompts for the essay choices, though I've written a word or two about the approach in each case. In terms of evidence, I expect VERY specific paraphrase. As on the test, if you aren't discussing particular episodes (in detail) at some point in the essay, you are talking in generalities. Quotation may be used (but is not necessary). If you utilize quotation, use it sparingly, since I do not want the essay to turn into a close reading exercise (in the manner of a Q1 or Q2 prompt), as I am more interested in you being able for you to be able to intelligently use the play for Q3 essays (which are more focused on the structures of long works and why certain elements are used by their authors).

Though the prompts say you may choose what work to engage, you are obviously limited to *Twelfth Night*.

CHOICE ONE

Original Wording of the Prompt:

Often in literature, a character's success in achieving goals depends on keeping a secret and divulging it only at the right moment, if at all. Choose a novel or play of literary merit that requires a character to keep a secret. In a well-organized essay, briefly explain the necessity for secrecy and how the character's choice to reveal or keep the secret affects the plot and contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole. You may select a work from the list below, or you may choose another work of recognized literary merit suitable to the topic. Do NOT write about a short story, poem, or film.

Notes:

Focusing on Viola's reasons for her disguise is a less fruitful approach than engaging in why there are thematic reasons that she be perceived as a man. In other words, if I were choosing this topic, I would write about the role of disguise as a plot device to develop themes, rather than trying to justify it in terms of whether Viola's motivations here actually make sense (something Shakespeare isn't trying to do in the first place).

CHOICE TWO

Original Wording of the Prompt:

The eighteenth-century British novelist Laurence Sterne wrote, "No body, but he who has felt it, can conceive what a plaguing thing it is to have a man's mind torn asunder by two projects of equal strength, both obstinately pulling in a contrary direction at the same time."

From a novel or play choose a character (not necessarily the protagonist) whose mind is pulled in conflicting directions by two compelling desires, ambitions, obligations, or influences. Then, in a well-organized essay, identify each of the two conflicting forces and explain how this conflict with one character illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole. You may use one of the novels or plays listed below or another novel or work of similar literary quality.

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Notes:

Your obvious choices here are Viola, Orsino, or Olivia. A less obvious choice would be Malvolio, who is simultaneously drawn toward preserving the “natural” order, even as he is temporarily tempted into an attempt to subvert it.

CHOICE THREE

Original Wording of the Prompt:

Novels and plays often include scenes of weddings, funerals, parties, and other social occasions. Such scenes may reveal the values of the characters and the society in which they live. Select a novel or play that includes such a scene and, in a focused essay, discuss the contribution the scene makes to the meaning of the work as a whole. You may choose a work from the list below or another novel or play of literary merit.

Notes:

This prompt allows you to talk about the happy ending at the end of the play for the characters in the high plot in terms of its overall function in illustrating Shakespeare’s thematic design. However, this is a good example of a prompt where the more you narrow your approach, the better your essay is likely to be. Focusing on a single plot line, for example (or even a single character in a plot line), will allow you to develop an idea in depth rather than speaking in generalities. You could also contrast the endings for two characters (giving you a ready made essay structure). As an alternative to the obvious wedding essay, you could also focus on the late night revels of Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Feste.

CHOICE FOUR

Original Wording of the Prompt:

“The true test of comedy is that it shall awaken thoughtful laughter.” Choose a novel, play, or long poem in which a scene or character awakens “thoughtful laughter” in the reader. Write an essay in which you show why this laughter is “thoughtful” and how it contributes to the meaning of the work.

Notes:

This is an interesting choice because it asks you to consider both the author’s use of a *manner* of writing (as opposed to a specific *element* of writing-- much more common in these prompts) and its intended effect on the audience (again, something the Q3 prompts almost never ask you to consider). This prompt seems tailor made for Malvolio, and if I were writing this essay I would either restrict myself to a single episode or contrast a pair of episodes. Whatever evidence I chose to include, though, I would examine the way cruelty lurks beneath the surface of comedy and what this implies in terms of Shakespeare’s view of the world. One thing you should not do, however, is to write about your *personal* reaction to the material. You should always focus on the *intended* effect, not whether it happened to evoke that response in you (which is largely irrelevant in any type of writing other than a personal review-- which will never be the task on the AP exam).