All’s Well That Ends Well

by William Shakespeare
directed by Michael Kahn

SHAKESPEARE THEATRE COMPANY

FIRST FOLIO:
TEACHER AND STUDENT RESOURCE GUIDE
Welcome to the Shakespeare Theatre Company’s production of
*All’s Well That Ends Well*
by William Shakespeare

Consistent with STC's central mission to be the leading force in producing and preserving the highest quality classic theatre, the Education Department challenges learners of all ages to explore the ideas, emotions and principles contained in classic texts and to discover the connection between classic theatre and our modern perceptions. We hope that this First Folio Teacher and Student Resource Guide will prove useful as you prepare to attend our production of *All’s Well That Ends Well*.

*First Folio Guides* are designed as a resource both for teachers and students. This Guide provides information and activities to help audience members form a personal connection to the play before attending the production. *First Folio Guides* contain material about the playwrights, their world and their works. Also included are approaches to explore the plays and productions in the classroom before and after the performance.

**Enjoy the show!**

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*The First Folio Resource Guide for All’s Well That Ends Well* was Developed by the Shakespeare Theatre Company Education Department.

ON SHAKESPEARE

For articles and information about Shakespeare’s life and world please visit ShakespeareTheatre.org, to download the file *On Shakespeare*.

Next Steps

If you would like more information on how you can participate in other Shakespeare Theatre Company programs, please call the Education Hotline at 202.547.5688 or visit our website ShakespeareTheatre.org.

Shakespeare Theatre Company’s production is part of *Shakespeare for a New Generation*, a national initiative sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts in cooperation with Arts Midwest.

Miles Gilburne and Nina Zolt are founding sponsors of the education programs at the Shakespeare Theatre Company.
After the death of his father, Count Bertram of Rossillion is called to Paris to serve the King of France. The King is deathly ill, and the physician who might have cured him has died, though not before leaving his medical secrets to his daughter, Helena. Bertram’s mother, the Countess, regards Helena as a daughter, and discovers that her recent melancholy has been caused by her unrequited love for Bertram. Hearing of the King’s illness, Helena decides to follow Bertram to Paris, where she will attempt to cure the King. The King learns of a war in Italy, and he gives permission to the young nobles of the court to join either side to gain experience.

When Helena arrives in the court, she offers to cure the King; if she fails, she will forfeit her life, but if she succeeds, the King must give her the husband of her choice. When she succeeds, she asks to be married to Bertram. Not wanting to marry a girl of low birth, Bertram protests, but the King commands Bertram to obey. After he reluctantly agrees, his soldier friend Parolles urges him to run away to the war. Bertram sends Helena back to Rossillion, promising to follow after.

In Rossillion, Helena receives a letter from Bertram asserting that they will never truly be married until she wears his ring and carries his child, two things which he will make sure never happen, for he has joined the Florentine army and vowed not to return to France while Helena lives. Determined not to lose Bertram, Helena follows him to Italy disguised as a religious pilgrim. While lodging at a hostel kept by a widow and her beautiful daughter Diana, Helena learns that Bertram has been courting Diana.

Helena offers Diana three thousand crowns to assist her plot against Bertram: Diana will only let Bertram come to her room if he first gives her the ring he wears. In the room, however, Helena will be the one waiting for the midnight liaison.

Several French officers in the Florentine army, determined to prove to Bertram that Parolles is a coward, capture and threaten Parolles, pretending to be the enemy. Bertram returns to camp, having spent the night with the woman he thought was Diana. The officers then bring in the blindfolded Parolles, who tells all he knows and goes on to insult his comrades. When the blindfold is removed, Parolles is embarrassed but undaunted.

Helena spreads a rumor that she has died on her pilgrimage. Saddened, the King visits the Countess at Rossillion, and agrees to forgive Bertram if he will marry the daughter of another lord. Suddenly, the King recognizes the ring on Bertram’s finger as the one the King gave to Helena. Bertram makes up a story that it was thrown to him by a lady in Florence; just then, Diana appears and, claiming that Bertram seduced her, demands that he marry her. Bertram denounces her as a prostitute, but Diana produces the ring he gave her. When she refuses to tell the King how she came to possess the ring, he orders her imprisoned. Diana sends for her “bail”: Helena, alive and pregnant with Bertram’s child. Thus Helena has fulfilled Bertram’s two conditions to become his real wife, and Bertram promises to love her faithfully.
Notes from the Director: Michael Kahn discusses *All’s Well That Ends Well*

Some people consider *All’s Well That Ends Well* one of the runts of the litter, but I happen to love it. If anybody asked me to describe it, I’d call it a very serious comedy. Sometimes it’s done as a fairy tale, but I think that is a way of avoiding the important issues it raises. First of all, it begins with two deaths and it ends with the possibility of a birth. So it contains some of the most beautiful themes in Shakespeare: forgiveness and regeneration. It’s also a play about opposites: it deals with age and youth, peace and war, true class and false class, true language and false language. It says a great deal about the position of men and women in society.

It’s also a play about education, and especially the education of a young man named Bertram. He has grown up in the country, but then goes to a city where everything is much more sophisticated, and he tries very hard to fit into that. And maybe he loses himself a bit because of that. So over the course of the play he must learn what true honor and true virtue are. Because he goes from being a kid to being someone who can lead a regiment into battle and win.

Bertram’s journey takes him from being the boy who runs away from Helena to becoming the man who accepts her and their child. You could do a production of this play where you think Helena and Bertram are just going to be miserable at the end, but why perform the play if that’s the truth? This extraordinarily intelligent, passionate, modest young woman isn’t just wasting her time. She knows that they are right for each other. The play is called *All’s Well That Ends Well*, and I don’t believe Shakespeare uses ironic titles. Along the way there’s tragedy, there’s parting, there’s grief, there’s unmasking, there’s cruelty and there’s a lot of fun, but I believe that all ultimately ends well.

Because the play is about soldiering, and also because of the strength of the women, I wanted to set it in a period that contained echoes of that. I’m not very big on setting plays in other periods, but I was looking for a period that was modern enough so that war would actually mean something to us, and one where you could see that women were educated and were on the cusp of a change in their social role. And so the years just before World War I seemed like a very good idea. The sense of male camaraderie is very strong in this time, and the sense of people testing themselves and learning in war. It’s far enough away to make the language work, and it’s close enough so that the men wear trousers. And I’ve found that the minute you put men in pants, the audience understands every word.
Who’s Who in *All’s Well That Ends Well*

**Helena**
The orphaned daughter of a great doctor, she now lives with the Countess of Rossillion. She is in love with the Countess’ son, Bertram. After Bertram denies her as his wife, she uses her resourcefulness and determination to win his love.

**Bertram**
Has just become the Count of Rossillion after his father’s death. He becomes an accomplished soldier but his behavior and attitude towards his wife, Helena, are looked upon poorly by many in Rossillion.

**Parolles**
A friend of Bertram’s and fellow soldier. He pretends to be brave and fearless, but when a prank is pulled on him by other soldiers, his cowardice is exposed.

**Diana**
The young woman who Bertram meets in Florence and tries to seduce. She helps Helena in tricking Bertram to accept Helena as his wife.

**Widow**
Diana’s mother and owner of the inn in Florence.

**Countess**
Bertram’s mother, Countess of Rossillion and Helena’s guardian. She is a strong woman who is happy when Bertram and Helena wed and disappointed by the way Bertram treats Helena after they are married.

**Mariana**
Friend of the widow.

**Lavatch (clown)**
A jester to the Countess who also acts as a messenger.

**King of France**
Deathly ill at the beginning of the play until Helena cures him with one of her father’s potions. He is so thankful to Helena that he allows her to choose any husband that she wants. He is extremely disturbed when Bertram refuses to marry Helena.

**Lafew**
A friend to the King of France and the Countess. He is a wise man and warns Bertram of Parolles’ cowardice.

**Duke of Florence**
The ruler of Florence. Bertram, Parolles and many other French lords volunteer to fight for him.

KEY

- = family
- = friend
- = soldier
- = servant

Photo of Miriam Silverman as Helena by Scott Suchman.
When Bertram challenges Helena to obtain a ring from his finger, he unknowingly sets into motion an amazing series of events involving mistaken identities and deception. This all-important ring is the key to Helena’s fate, ultimately deciding whether or not Bertram accepts her as his true bride. But why is the ring so important? Where does the custom of exchanging rings during the marriage ceremony come from?

The giving and receiving of rings dates back to the dawn of man. While cavemen did not use rings per se, they did tie knots of grass around their beloved’s arms, wrists, ankles and waists to indicate the union of two spirits. Ancient Egyptians also used plants and reeds (such as papyrus and hemp) to fashion rings that they, like many other ancient civilizations, believed represented eternity, as rings are circles without beginning or end. They were worn on the fourth finger of the left hand, as they are today – the guiding belief being that the vein running from this finger led straight to the heart (vena amoris or “vein of love”). Gems, jewels and precious metals did not come into play until much later and even then, their use had less to do with one’s emotional attachment and more to do with one’s status.

The Greeks and Romans adopted the ring tradition with some new cultural and practical “advances.” The rings were now shaped out of metals such as bronze and copper instead of reeds and grasses, and they were no longer merely expressions of love, but also signified “ownership.” A woman who accepted and wore the ring of a suitor signified to all other rival suitors that she was “taken.” But these rings also symbolized the woman’s shared ownership of her husband’s wealth and property, which was indicated by its design in the shape of a key, though more romantic types like to believe that it symbolized the “key to one’s heart.”

During Shakespeare’s time, the giving and receiving of poesy rings was quite popular. Usually made of silver, these rings carried inscriptions with sentiments of hope and faith – a tradition widely practiced today. Eventually, gold became the standard metal to craft wedding rings while silver was reserved for engagement rings.

Things to think about:

In the play, Bertram’s ring is precious to him: an item that is impossible to obtain because he never removes it, but one that he readily surrenders in the name of love.

♦ As the play unfolds, how does Bertram’s ring take on different qualities and significance?
♦ Why is the ring so important to Bertram? How does Diana convince him to give it to her?
♦ What does it mean when he discovers that Helena has the ring instead?
After finally agreeing to marry Helena, Bertram sends his new wife back to live with his mother in France and runs off to war in Florence. It is during war that the audience finally sees some of Bertram’s redeeming qualities. Bertram is viewed as honorable within the military. The Duke of Florence recognizes him as a great leader and promotes him to the position of General, and his soldiers have a deep respect for him as their leader. Is it possible to be viewed as honorable in the military but not as a regular citizen? The honor codes that exist today at the U.S. military academies require soldiers to live by these codes’ ethical standards at all times. So where would this leave Bertram? **Before seeing All’s Well That Ends Well, answer this question:** Is Bertram an honorable man? As you watch the performance, look for moments when Bertram does act honorably. Are there more than you thought when just reading the text? Does bringing the character to life allow you to see more honorable moments?

In Elizabethan times, it was considered honorable for women to remain virgins until marriage. Both Helena and Diana take this vow of chastity seriously because they know they need to remain pure in order to marry a respectable man. Parolles tries to convince Helena that she needs to lose her virginity while she is still young and fair; she should not wait until marriage. “Tis a commodity will lose the gloss with lying; the longer kept, the less worth. …” (act 1, scene 1). Helena defends her choice by explaining that she only wants to be with Bertram and she knows that won’t happen because of her social status; if she can’t have Bertram, “I die a virgin” (Helena, act 1, scene 1).

An interpretation of the events of the play is that both Helena and Diana use their virginity and sexuality as leverage to get what they want from Bertram. What examples from the text might support this view? **Are these women using their honor, their virginity, to act dishonorably?** Are their actions justified? Are there ways in which women still use their sexuality as a form of power?

The play presents two different opinions on chastity. Parolles and the men tend to hold a looser view of its value than do the women. In the play, Parolles tells Helena, “Virginity breeds mites, much like a cheese. Besides, virginity is peevish, proud, idle, made of self-love which is the most inhibited sin in the canon.” (act 1, scene 1) On the other hand, Diana explains to Bertram, “My chastity’s the jewel of our house, Bequeathed down from many ancestors, Which were the greatest obloquy i’t’h world In me to lose.” (act 4, scene 2) We still have these differing views with us today. Pop stars like Miley Cyrus wear a promise ring and pledge that they will remain pure until marriage while television shows like *Teen Mom* and *Sixteen and Pregnant* show that remaining a virgin until marriage is not the reality for many. **What are other examples of these two perspectives on remaining a virgin until marriage in pop culture today?**

**Things to think about:**
Is it possible to be honorable in only certain aspects of your life? How?
Do we still have different standards of what is considered honorable for men and women? If yes, why and what are the differences?
Below are a few key terms that are helpful to use when exploring Shakespeare’s text.

• **Paraphrasing** is a good way of making the text more accessible by putting it in your own words.

• **Operative words** are the words that are essential to telling the story. They are the most important words in a line of Shakespeare’s text. Operative words are generally in this order of importance: verbs, nouns (including title and names the first time they are mentioned), adjectives and adverbs.

• **Iambic pentameter** is the main rhythmic structure of Shakespeare’s verse. One line of iambic pentameter has ten syllables which are broken up into five units of meter called “feet.” Each iambic foot contains two syllables: the first syllable is unstressed and the second syllable is stressed. Therefore, five feet of iamb equal one line of iambic pentameter. See example below:

  ◁ ◁ ◁ ◁ ◁
  I will / tell truth, / by grace / itself / I swear.
  -Helena, act 1, scene 3

• Unlike iambic pentameter, **prose** is not in any verse structure. Shakespeare used prose to indicate familiarity between characters of all social classes as well as to express conversation between the lower classes.

  First Lord:  Art not acquainted with him?  Knows  he not thy voice?
  First Soldier:  No sir, I warrant you.
  -act 4, scene 1

Do a close reading of a four or five-line passage from the text. Read the lines aloud and paraphrase them, identifying any unknown words. Next, identify the operative words in the passage. Using the operative words as a starting point (hint: operatives are always stressed), scan the lines, using the symbol “U” for unstressed and “/” for stressed, and determine the meter.

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**Female Power**

Some believe that William Shakespeare was ahead of his time when writing *All’s Well That Ends Well*. The play features strong female characters who drive the plot from beginning to end. When first performed in the 17th century, audience members were uncomfortable with the behavior of the women in the play, especially Helena. Her desire to marry Bertram and willingness to pursue and deceive him was not the female behavior to which society was accustomed to. The play was not performed very often because audiences were not able to relate to the female power that was displayed on stage. Beginning in the 20th century, audiences were able to accept the play more because society was changing and there were modern examples of women gaining more power. When choosing a concept for his play, Artistic Director Michael Kahn chose the years just before World War I. He explains, “I was looking for a period that was modern enough so that war would actually mean something to us, and one where you could see that women were educated and were on the cusp of a change in their social role.”

**Next Steps:**
1. Research women’s rights before, during and after World War I and World War II in the United States and in England. How did war change the lives of women?
2. What other times in American and English history were significant for women’s rights? Research women’s rights in the 20th century and create a timeline with graphics showing the gradual progress.
3. Now it’s your turn! What other time period would have worked for the setting of this play? Imagine that you are directing *All’s Well That Ends Well*. Come up with your own concept for the play and present a creative representation of your design it to your classmates.
The Nature of Stubbornness

The term “stubborn” is often used as a negative word to describe someone’s behavior. It means “refusing to give in,” “difficult to handle,” and “persistent and dogged.” But is there a situation when being stubborn is a good thing? Both Helena and Bertram act stubbornly throughout *All’s Well That Ends Well*. For Helena, her persistence results in her dream coming true: she is married to Bertram. Bertram, however, acts stubbornly by trying to escape his marriage, but in the end accepts Helena as his wife.

Things to think about:

♦ Is being stubborn a positive or negative quality for Helena? For Bertram? Find clues in the text to defend your answer.
♦ Is being stubborn a good thing only when the end result is in your favor?
♦ Are there benefits to being stubborn even when you do not achieve the desired outcome? Give an example.

Deception vs. Lying...is there a difference?

Deception is defined as “to trick or mislead.”

Lying is defined as “intending to deceive, intentionally giving false information.”

Helena uses trickery throughout *All’s Well That Ends Well* in order to get what she wants: Bertram. Find three examples from the text when Helena is dishonest. For each of these examples, answer the following:

♦ Was Helena deceiving others or lying to them?
♦ Does the reason that people deceive or lie make a difference? If it’s for a good reason, is it OK? Give an example of when it’s OK.
♦ Do you think that there is a difference between lying and deceiving? If so, what do you think the difference is, and is one better than the other?

Is All Well that Ends Well?

When discussing the conclusion of the play, director Michael Kahn explains that “what should happen, happens...it all ends well.” Is that really true? Do you think that Helena and Bertram should have ended up together? Why? And if not, how should the play have ended differently?

Helena used trickery in order for Bertram to accept her as his wife, but do you think that they end up happily ever after? If so, does it matter how they got there?

Find a partner and choose who will agree with the statement that “all’s well that ends well” and who will disagree and have a debate over Michael Kahn’s statement “what should happen, happens.” Use examples from the text to support your view.
Dear Abby

Now that you have seen All’s Well That Ends Well, what advice would you give to Helena? Imagine that you are the relationship specialist for the Washington Post and you receive this inquiry:

Dear Abby:

In my religion, it is traditional for parents to arrange the marriage for their children. I was to marry Bert, the boy I have had a crush on for five years. He wanted nothing to do with me, but because he is a religious man, he eventually gave in and we exchanged vows. Shortly after, Bert took a job overseas and left me in America. In an e-mail, Bert explained to me that he would not consider me to be his wife until we had a child together. I love Bert so much and I do not know what to do. Should I go after him and show him how much I love him? Or should I stay here and let him live his own life overseas? Please help!

Sincerely,
Helen

In Disguise: How do people construct their own identities?

Helena chooses to disguise herself as a traveling pilgrim when she leaves France and pretends to be Diana in order to sleep with Bertram. Do these new identities allow her to have more freedom? Would she have acted the same way if she were not in disguise?

Discuss the various reasons people choose to disguise themselves in contemporary society. How do people construct their own identities in online communities, and do our online identities differ from ourselves in real life? How has the anonymity of online communities changed the way we relate to other people both online and off?

Have students debate the pros and cons of online communities. Has the world of online anonymity impacted personal connections and relationships? Identify three examples of both positive and negative ways that the online community has affected humanity.
Resource List and Standards of Learning

Shakespeare Dictionaries


Books on Shakespeare


Books on Teaching Shakespeare


Websites

- *In Search of Shakespeare: Shakespeare in the Classroom* — pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/ - The companion website to Michael Wood's four-part PBS series *In Search of Shakespeare*, this site includes extensive research about Shakespeare’s life and works, as well as interactive features.
- Folger Shakespeare Library — Folger.edu - Includes excellent resources for further reading about Shakespeare, as well as fun games and information designed specifically for students and teachers.

STANDARDS OF LEARNING

The activities and question sequences found in the Folio supports grade 9-12 standards of learning in English and theatre for the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia. Primary content areas addressed include but are not limited to:

- Classical Literature
- Argument and persuasive writing
- Questioning and Listening
- Analysis and Evaluation
- Vocabulary and content development
- Research
- Inference
- Stagecraft
- Performance

Specific examples include:

Activity: Is All Well that Ends Well?

Debate over the validity of Michael Kahn’s statement about the conclusion of the play: “What should happen, happens”

DC—content strand: Media 10.M.3
MD—content strand: 2.1.4
Theatre Etiquette:
A Guide for Students

Above all, it is important to remember that the actors on stage can see and hear you at the same time you can see and hear them. Be respectful of the actors and your fellow audience members by being attentive and observing the general guidelines below.

The phrase “theatre etiquette” refers to the special rules of behavior that are called for when attending a theatre performance.

Here are some important things to do before you go inside the theatre:

♦ Turn off your cell phone and any other electronic devices (iPods, games, etc.), or better yet, leave them in coat check. It is very distracting, not to mention embarrassing, when a cell phone goes off during a performance. The light from cell phones and other electronic devices is also a big distraction, so please, no text messaging.

♦ Spit out your gum.

♦ Leave all food and drinks in the coat check. NO food or drinks are allowed inside the theatre.

♦ Visit the restroom before the performance begins. Unless it is an emergency, plan to stay seated during the performance.

During the performance:

♦ React to what’s happening on stage: Please feel free to have honest reactions to what is happening onstage. You can laugh, applaud and enjoy the performance. However, please don’t talk during the performance; it is extremely distracting to other audience members and the actors. Save discussions for intermission and after the performance.

Thoughts about the importance of being an audience member from Shakespeare Theatre Company Artistic Director Michael Kahn

“When you go to the theatre, you are engaging with other living, breathing human beings, having an immediate human response. In the theatre you sense that all of this may never happen again in this particular way.

As a member of the audience, you are actually part of how that’s developing—you have a hand in it … You are part of a community where you are asked to be compassionate, perhaps to laugh with or grieve as well as to understand people, lives and cultures different from your own.”