

THE WINTER'S TALE | FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Shakespeare's language can seem scary, but give it a try! *Go at your own pace, and have fun!*



SHAKESPEARE IN PRISON

DETROIT PUBLIC THEATRE'S
SIGNATURE COMMUNITY PROGRAM

Leontes and Hermione are king and queen of Sicilia. At the beginning of the play, they're hosting their friend Polixenes, who is the king of Bohemia. Suddenly, Leontes becomes jealous of Hermione, who is pregnant, thinking that she has had an affair with Polixenes and is carrying his child. Leontes tries to hide his feelings, but grows so suspicious that he publicly accuses them of adultery—and of conspiring to kill him! Polixenes escapes back to Bohemia, but Hermione is put in jail, where she gives birth to a daughter while awaiting her trial...

The Shakespeare

LEONTES

This sessions (to our great grief we pronounce) Even pushes 'against our heart—the party tried, The daughter of a king, our wife, and one Of us too much beloved. Let us be clear'd Of being tyrannous, since we so openly Proceed in justice, which shall have due course, Even to the guilt or the purgation. Produce the prisoner.

OFFICER

It is his Highness' pleasure that the Queen Appear in person here in court.

Enter HERMIONE (as to her trial), PAULINA, and LADIES attending.

OFFICER

Silence!

LEONTES

Read the indictment.

OFFICER (Reads.)

"Hermione, queen to the worthy Leontes, King of Sicilia, thou art here accused and arraigned of high treason, in committing adultery with Polixenes, King of Bohemia, and conspiring with Camillo to take away the life of our sovereign lord the King, thy royal husband; the pretense whereof being by circumstances partly laid open, thou, Hermione, contrary to the faith and allegiance of a true subject, didst counsel and aid them, for their better safety, to fly away by night."

HERMIONE

Since what I am to say must be but that Which contradicts my accusation, and The testimony on my part no other But what comes from myself, it shall scarce boot me To say "Not guilty." Mine integrity,

Being counted falsehood, shall (as I express it) Be so receiv'd. But thus, if pow'rs divine Behold our human actions (as they do), I doubt not then but innocence shall make False accusation blush, and tyranny Tremble at patience. You, my lord, best know (Who least will seem to do so) my past life Hath been as continent, as chaste, as true, As I am now unhappy; which is more Than history can pattern, though devis'd And play'd to take spectators. For behold me, A fellow of the royal bed, which owe A moi'ty of the throne, a great king's daughter, The mother to a hopeful prince, here standing To prate and talk for life and honor 'fore Who please to come and hear. For life, I prize it As I weight grief, which I would spare; for honor, 'Tis a derivative from me to mine, And only that I stand for. I appeal To your own conscience, sir, before Polixenes Came to your court, how I was in your grace, How merited to be so; since he came, With what encounter so uncurrent I Have strain'd t' appear thus; if one jot beyond The bound of honor, or in act or will That way inclining, hard'n'd be the hearts Of all that hear me, and my near'st of kin Cry fie upon my grave!

LEONTES

I ne'er heard yet That any of these bolder vices wanted Less impudence to gainsay what they did Than to perform it first.

HERMIONE

That's true enough, Though 'tis a saying, sir, not due to me.

LEONTES

You will not own it.

HERMIONE

More than mistress of Which comes to me in name of fault, I must not At all acknowledge. For Polixenes (With whom I am accused), I do confess I lov'd him as in honor he requir'd; With such a kind of love as might become A lady like me; with a love even such, So, and no other, as yourself commanded; Which not to have done I think had been in me Both disobedience and ingratitude To you and toward your friend, whose love had spoke. Ever since it could speak, from an infant, freely, That it was yours. Now for conspiracy, I know not how it tastes, though it be dish'd For me to try how. All I know of it Is that Camillo was an honest man; And why he left your court, the gods themselves (Wotting no more than I) are ignorant.

LEONTES

You knew of his departure, as you know What you have underta'en to do in 's absence.

HERMIONE

Sir, You speak a language that I understand not. My life stands in the level of your dreams, Which I'll lay down.

LEONTES

Your actions are my dreams. You had a bastard by Polixenes, And I but dream'd it. As you were past all shame (Those of your fact are so), so past all truth; Which to deny concerns more than avails; for as Thy brat hath been cast out, like to itself, No father owning it (which is indeed More criminal in thee than it), so thou Shalt feel our justice; in whose easiest passage Look for no less than death.

HEAR YE,
HEAR YE!
(ER... SPEAK YE!)

Leontes =
lee-ON-teez

Hermione =
her-MY-uh-nee

Polixenes =
puh-LICKS-ih-
neeZ

Paulina =
paw-LIE-nuh

moi'ty =
MOY-tee

fie = FYE
(rhymes with
"my")

Hint: Don't
forget that
contractions are
like subtraction
for syllables!

Whoa there!

Check out Hermione's
NINE BEAT pause!

Why does she need so much time
before she continues her sentence?

Well...

Grieving

Bewildered

ANGRY

Figuring out her
next move.

She could be... Exhausted (she JUST gave birth)

No matter
what, keep in
mind that
she's a queen.

This is a perfect example
of why we always want to
read the text aloud! Even
knowing what we know,
speaking the language is
what's gonna make it click.

The Translation

LEONTES

We call this session with great grief and heartache. The defendant is the daughter of a king, my wife, and one I have loved too much. Let me be cleared of acting like a tyrant, since I have been so open about this course of justice, whether it end in guilt or acquittal. Bring out the prisoner.

OFFICER

It is the king's request that the queen appear in person in the courtroom. Silence!

HERMIONE enters, guarded, PAULINA and LADIES come in with her.

LEONTES

Read the indictment.

OFFICER (Reads.)

Hermione, queen of the worthy Leontes, king of Sicilia, you are accused and arraigned for high treason, for committing adultery with Polixenes, king of Bohemia, and conspiring with Camillo to kill our sovereign king, your royal husband. Then, when the plot was accidentally discovered, you, Hermione, against the duty and faith of a loyal subject, advised them to flee by night for safety, and helped them to leave.

HERMIONE

Since what I'm going to say must contradict this accusation and the only testimony in my favor comes from me, it hardly helps to say "not guilty."

I'm believed to be a liar, so whatever I say will be considered false. But if the gods watch what we humans do, I don't doubt that innocence will win out against false accusation and tyranny. You, my lord, know that my past life has been faithful, pure, and true, though you seem to know this least of anyone. Those qualities are now matched by my unhappiness, which is greater than history has ever seen, even if it were created and performed to enthrall an audience. Look at me, who has slept in the royal bed, who owns part of the throne as the daughter of a great king, the mother of the prince who will one day take the throne, forced to defend my life and my honor in front of anyone who cares to come and hear. I care as much for life as I do for grief, which I could do without. Honor, though, is passed down from me to my children, so I will make a stand for that. I appeal to your conscience to remember how you held me in good graces before Polixenes came to court, and how I deserved to be regarded so. Since he came to court, think of what was so unacceptable about my behavior that I now appear on trial. If I have acted in any way dishonorably, or even seemed inclined to do so, may all that hear me harden their hearts, and may even my closest relatives curse my grave!

LEONTES

The same audacity that allows someone to perform a terrible deed also lets her deny it.

HERMIONE

That's true enough, but that has nothing to do with me.

LEONTES

You won't admit it.

HERMIONE

I take full ownership of my faults, but I won't acknowledge any faults that aren't mine. I confess that I loved Polixenes in the manner his honor required, and with a love that was befitting a lady like me—with such a love, even, as you yourself commanded. If I hadn't love him in this way, I would have been disobeying you and showing ingratitude to both you and your friend, who has loved you since childhood. Now, as for conspiracy, I don't even know what it is like, even if it is being aimed at me. All I know is that Camillo was an honest man, and the gods know as little as I do about why he left your court.

LEONTES

You knew that he was leaving, and you know what you have tried to do in his absence.

HERMIONE

Sir, I don't understand what you are saying. I'll give up my life, which is the target of your delusions.

LEONTES

My "delusions" are made of your actions. You had a bastard child with Polixenes—maybe I just dreamed it! You are past any shame, as women like you are, or any truth. Just as I've cast out your brat, whose lack of a father is more your fault than the child's, I'll devise a punishment for you, the least of which will be death.

Right after this scene, Hermione gives a powerful speech, but it doesn't work—she is executed. Sadly, what brings Leontes to his senses is the accidental death of his son, but it's too late to save his wife. But this isn't a tragedy, and there's a twist in the last part of the play! Stay tuned...



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You can respond to these in any way you choose:

Write **ACT IT OUT** Talk about it
Draw **THINK ABOUT IT**
... up to you!



SHAKESPEARE IN PRISON

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This scene takes place in a "courtroom" and looks a lot like a trial—there's an indictment and everything. But Sicilia is not a democracy—it's a monarchy—and this scene takes place at the palace. Leontes is the king, and the king can basically do what he wants. So why would Leontes have a trial in the first place? If he wants to get rid of Hermione, why not just do it? He's the king, after all. What is the point of saying all of this in public?

Leontes is insanely jealous of Hermione from the beginning of the play. The first time he's alone on stage, Leontes gives an angry, paranoid speech about how Hermione is being unfaithful to him. (She's not, though.) His fears only get worse: Leontes becomes more and more consumed with paranoia during the first half of the play, leading up to this scene. He never has any evidence or justification for his suspicions—he even says that he may have "dreamed" up Hermione's infidelity—but it makes no difference.

What would drive someone to be as suspicious and paranoid as Leontes? Why would he believe something that he has no evidence for? Can anything or anyone get through to someone in Leontes' state—if so, what?

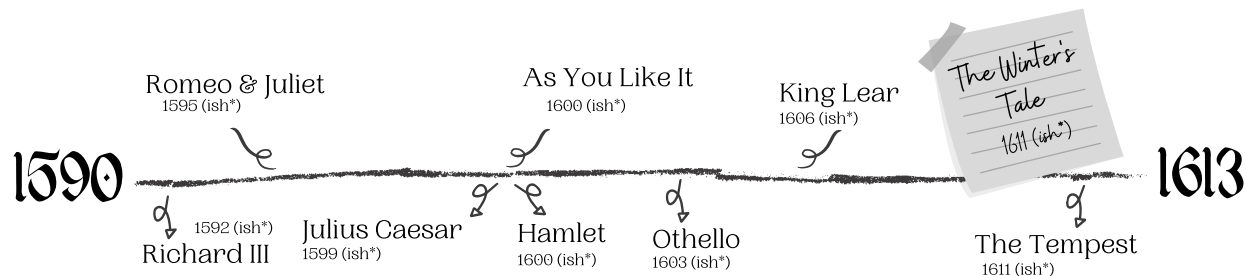


All right. You knew it was coming. And here it is:

This was written in 1611 (ish*), when a modern day courtroom would probably have seemed kind of bizarre. But these days, the setting Shakespeare intended for this scene would seem pretty foreign to most people. So...

If you were the director, how would you stage this scene?

THIS IS ONE OF SHAKESPEARE'S LAST PLAYS.



The *Winter's Tale* is Shakespeare at the height of his powers as a writer. That doesn't mean you have to like the play (a lot of people don't), but you've got to respect the dude's skill!

Read the whole scene again, and forget about the plot. Just look for the clues Shakespeare leaves in the language. You'll see every trick we've told you about in these packs:

Some lines have sounds that flow freely, which allow you to speak quickly.

Some have sounds that force you to slow down.

Some are full of "open" vowels, like "O" and "A", indicating BIG emotions.

Others are full of sounds that make you spit or grumble or speak through clenched teeth.

Sometimes, characters "share a line" of verse, meaning that there is no pause—or even that one is interrupting the other.

What else can you see? There's so much going on!

QUESTION

There is one bit in this whole scene that's in prose: the text of the indictment (read by the Officer).

Take a look at that. What's going on there?

Is it straightforward or complex? What is the language like?

Why do you think it's written that way?