

# Concept Design with Shakespeare's *AS YOU LIKE IT*

Claudia Zelevansky

## Exercise: Concept Design

(This exercise is related to design slam, but its agenda is different: to get to the essence of the students' imagined production-- and in getting to the essence of the production, to understand the world of the play more deeply. While both exercises can accommodate different levels and learning styles, it is fair to say that Design Slam is better for younger students and Concept work more easily suited to older ones.)

Here's an example of working with *As You Like It* and concept exploration. Because AYLI has two very distinct environments, the court and the Forest of Arden, it could be very helpful to use an excerpt from a scene in each location.

- Have the group read-through Act II, sc i (Arden) and Act II, sc ii (Court).
- Divide the group into smaller groups (maybe split the groups between the court scene and the forest scene) and ask each group to find THE FACTS of the scene, which should include:
  - Imbedded stage directions (separate the ones specific to acting from the environmental ones)
  - Imbedded props
  - Indications of time of day, place, season, any sensory information
  - You can include other basic facts if you think that's useful, including characters names, etc.
- Come back together and make a comprehensive list. Look at the info gathered for both places side by side.
- Ask the group to identify words in the scene that feel the most operative, juicy, or essential to the story of the scene. (Hint: could be words or phrases which are repeated, typically nouns or verbs). Make a master list of those, and, if there are a lot, have the group vote it down to the strongest 6.
- Ask the group to make a final list that uses their imaginations, filling in the phrases:
  - If this scene were a smell, it would be \_\_\_\_\_
  - If this scene were a sound, it would be \_\_\_\_\_
  - If this scene were an image, it would be \_\_\_\_\_
- Ask the group to land on one or two key ideas from this final list for each environment and use that as the launch for the scenes concepts. "This scene is going to be like a rotting peach in the sun"- non-literal, but based on text! And ripe (pun intended) for imaginative work for directors, actors, and designers.
- ADD ON: if you have the time and inclination, have the students divide into jobs (designers, actors, directors, etc.) and stage the scenes with this concept in mind. The primary question for each of them would be "How does this choice support our conceptual vision?"



Here is a page from each scene, as an example, with some keywords, images, and given circumstances highlighted or marked, including repeated phrases:

After my flight. Now go we in content<sup>o</sup>  
To liberty, and not to banishment. *Exeunt.*

**ACT 2, SCENE 1<sup>o</sup>**

*Enter Duke Senior, Amiens, and two or three Lords, [dressed] like foresters.* *location weather*

**DUKE SENIOR:**

Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,  
Hath not old custom<sup>o</sup> made this life more sweet \*  
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods  
More free from peril than the envious court?  
Here feel we not the penalty of Adam, 5  
The seasons' difference,<sup>o</sup> as<sup>o</sup> the icy fang  
And churlish chiding of the winter's wind,  
Which when it bites and blows upon my body  
Even till I shrink with cold, I smile and say  
"This is no flattery; these are counselors 10  
That feelingly persuade me what I am."  
\* Sweet are the uses of adversity,  
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,  
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;<sup>o</sup> 15  
And this our life, exempt<sup>o</sup> from public haunt,<sup>o</sup>  
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.

**AMIENS:**

I would not change it. Happy is Your Grace  
That can translate the stubbornness of fortune  
Into so quiet and so sweet a style. 20  
\*

122. Leave . . . him: Leave it to me to persuade him. 126. content: contentment. ACT 2, SCENE 1. Location: The Forest of Arden. 2. old custom: long experience. 5-6. feel . . . difference: we don't mind the consequences of Adam's original sin — the hardship of the seasons. (*Not* is often emended to *but*.) 6. as: such as. 13-14. like . . . head: (Alludes to the widespread belief that the toad was a poisonous creature but with a jewel embedded in its head that worked as an antidote.) 15. exempt: cut off. haunt: society.



FIRST LORD:

I cannot hear of any that did see her.<sup>o</sup>  
 The ladies, her attendants of her chamber,  
 Saw her abed, and in the morning early  
 They found the bed untreasured of their mistress.

SECOND LORD:

My lord, the roinish<sup>o</sup> clown, at whom so oft  
 Your Grace was wont to laugh, is also missing.  
 Hisperia, the princess' gentlewoman,  
 Confesses that she secretly o'erheard  
 Your daughter and her cousin much commend  
 The parts<sup>o</sup> and graces of the wrestler  
 That did but lately foil the sinewy Charles,  
 And she believes wherever they are gone  
 That youth is surely in their company.

DUKE FREDERICK:

Send to his brother. Fetch that gallant hither.<sup>o</sup>  
 If he<sup>o</sup> be absent, bring his brother<sup>o</sup> to me;  
 I'll make him find him. Do this suddenly,<sup>o</sup>  
 And let not search and inquisition quail<sup>o</sup>  
 To bring again<sup>o</sup> these foolish runaways.

ACT 2, SCENE 3<sup>o</sup>

*Enter Orlando and Adam, [meeting].*

ORLANDO: Who's there?

ADAM:

What, my young master? Oh, my gentle master,  
 Oh, my sweet master, oh, you memory<sup>o</sup>  
 Of old Sir Rowland! Why, what make you<sup>o</sup> here?  
 Why are you virtuous? Why do people love you?  
 And wherefore are you gentle, strong, and valiant?  
 Why would you be so fond to<sup>o</sup> overcome

language of spies  
 search  
 orders  
 hierarchy

orders

Exeun