Discussion Questions for *Twelfth Night*

**Act I:**

1. "*If music be the food of love, play on...*” Discuss this famous line: Why do you think people find the comparison between music and love appropriate? What song would you equate with love? Ask your parent(s) this question. Ask a grandparent or other person of this generation.

2. **Conflict:** Identify all the conflicts that have arisen in this act. Identify them as internal or external. Predict possible resolutions to several.

3. Sir Toby is the dramatic stereotype of the “drunk”. Discuss how this humour is portrayed. What modern actor would you cast in this part?

4. Feste’s kind of humour, called satire, is used today by many comedians. Identify several who use this type of humour. How or what are often targets of their criticism?

5. Dramatic Irony occurs when the audience knows something of which some or all of the characters on stage are unaware. In Scene iv, there is dramatic irony in Orsino’s praise of ‘Cesario’s’ feminine qualities. Find another example in this scene.

6. Consider each of these characters: Olivia, Orsino, Sir Andrew, Feste. What role does each play? What value(s) does each seem to have? (or seem to not have?)

7. How do the situations determine the role we play? How important are the expectations of others in determining our role(s)? How important are our values? What happens when values are in conflict with the role we are expected to play?

**Act II:**

1. A soliloquy is a speech in which a character thinks aloud while alone on stage. It is intended to reveal the thoughts and feelings of the speaker to the audience. Reread Viola’s soliloquy (II,ii,16-40). What does it reveal about her thoughts and feelings? Rewrite the speech in modern language.

2. Love triangles are a common device in fiction and drama. Brainstorm examples of love triangles in books, movies, and television. How is this one with Orsino, Olivia, and Viola/Cesario typical; how is it unusual?

3. Sir Toby and Malvolio represent opposite extremes in their attitudes towards life, and each is intolerant of the other’s point of view. What point of view does each character represent? Which can you most related to? Why? What do you think about the practical joke played by Sir Toby and his friends on Malvolio? Share any true life practical jokes you have done or had done to you. Would you do it again? Why?

**Act III:**

1. "*They that dally nicely with words may quickly make them wanton*” (III,i, 14-15) How does this warning apply to the scene? How does it apply today? Consider the use of
words by politicians and advertisers. Pitch this play to a specific target audience using words which would appeal to the values and prejudices of that audience.

2. "We cannot fight for love, as men may do:
We should be woo'd and were not made to woo."
Olivia clearly rejects this convention of her times. What do you think about the traditional roles of males and females in dating and courtship. Compare them to your generation. How do they compare with that of the generation before. What changes are for the better? What changes you would like to see made now?

3. Toby claims that "report of valour" or an act of bravery is the best way for a man to impress a woman. Make a list for each of the following: What a woman looks for in a man; What a man looks for in a woman.

4. How does Malvolio’s soliloquy (III, iv, 62-81) reveal that he deceives himself as much as the others have deceived him?

5. In Scene iv, Viola is forced to defend her honour according to an unwritten code of male behaviours. What values, attitudes and actions does this code require? What similar codes are there today for males? For females? Would you change these if you could? How?

6. Shakespeare uses both poetry and prose. Compare the dialogue between Viola and Olivia at the end of Scene i, and Sir Toby’s speech (III, iv, 168-174). Discuss the subjects discussed, the mood, the audience’s attitudes to the characters and Shakespeare’s choice of words and images.

**Act IV:**

1. Disguises are common in Shakespeare’s plays. Discuss the use of disguise in scene ii. What do you think is Shakespeare’s purpose in disguising Feste?

2. Feste’s portrayal of a clergyman pokes fun at the assumed solemnity and pomposity of some churchmen. What other figures of authority or persons of importance are frequent targets of satire?

3. Describe the character of Sebastian as he appears in scenes I and iii of this act.

4. At this stage of the play, what are the chances for a happy ending? Consider the following: Sebastian’s presence; Sebastian’s character; Sir Toby’s presence in Olivia’s household; remaining problems to allow everyone to live “happily ever after”.

**Act V:**

1. Indignation, the feeling of being wronged or unjustly treated, is one of the strongest human emotions. What motivates Antonio’s indignation in this scene? Orsino is another character who feels betrayed by someone close to him. Discuss his emotions, and which, if any, are justified? Sir Toby also expresses his sense of indignation? Why does he blame his injury on Sir Andrew? What does this reveal about him?

2. “I’ll be revenged upon the whole pack of you” How does Malvolio’s promise introduce a “sour note” into the otherwise harmonious resolution of the play? Why do you think Shakespeare included this story line, with this conclusion?