

# As You Like It

## *Sample Analytical Paper Topics*

The following paper topics are based on the entire play. Following each topic is a thesis and a sample outline. Use these as a starting point for your paper.

### **TOPIC #1**

Fortune and nature are two of the central themes of William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Write an essay that discusses the role of these elements in the lives of Orlando, Oliver, Duke Senior, Duke Frederick, and Rosalind. Nature, in this instance, refers to human nature rather than to the natural world.

#### ***Outline***

**I. Thesis Statement:** *Fortune and nature play key roles in the lives of Orlando, Oliver, Duke Senior, Duke Frederick, and Rosalind.*

#### **II. Orlando**

- A. Fortune has deprived Orlando of his rightful inheritance.
- B. Fortune enables Orlando to win his wrestling match with Charles and earn the love of Rosalind.
- C. Orlando's relationship with Adam reveals that he is noble by nature.
- D. Orlando must leave his home after learning that his brother plans to kill him, but fortune rewards him when he woos and wins Rosalind in the forest.
- E. At the end of the play, fortune bestows gifts on the deserving Orlando: he marries the woman he loves and is named heir to a dukedom.

#### **III. Oliver**

- A. Fortune rewards Oliver with control over his late father's estate.
- B. Oliver is revealed by his words and actions as a villain by nature.
- C. Fortune prevents Oliver's murderous plots against his brother from succeeding.
- D. Oliver encounters ill fortune when his estate is seized by Duke Frederick and he is banished from the court until he finds Orlando.
- E. Fortune rewards the undeserving Oliver; Orlando saves his life when he is threatened by a snake and a lioness.
- F. Oliver's nature changes after he is rescued by Orlando; he is rewarded by fortune with Celia's love.

#### **IV. Duke Senior**

- A. Fortune has deprived Duke Senior of the dukedom to which he is the rightful heir.
- B. Duke Senior makes the most of his misfortune by establishing a happy life in the Forest of Arden; his optimistic nature enables him to find sweetness in his adversity.
- C. Duke Senior reveals by his words and actions that he is generous and kind; for example, he invites Orlando and Adam to share in his feast.

- D. Fortune rewards Duke Senior by restoring his dukedom and uniting his daughter in marriage with a man who is also noble in nature.

#### V. Duke Frederick

- A. Fortune has unfairly rewarded Duke Frederick with a dukedom to which he is not entitled.
- B. Duke Frederick is revealed as a villain by nature; he despises Orlando and Rosalind because they are virtuous and well-liked.
- C. Fortune miraculously thwarts Duke Frederick's plan to capture and kill Duke Senior when he encounters an old religious hermit on the outskirts of the forest.
- D. Duke Frederick, like Oliver, undergoes a sudden change in his nature and renounces his former ways.

#### VI. Rosalind

- A. Fortune has deprived Rosalind of her father and her status as daughter of the reigning duke; she describes herself as "one out of suits with fortune."
- B. In Rosalind's witty dialogue with Celia in Act I, Scene II, she comments that fortune's benefits are "mightily misplaced," and that the goddess Fortune is, by tradition, blind and bestows her gifts unequally.
- C. Rosalind is revealed as romantic and kind by nature; the people of the dukedom "praise her for her virtues."
- D. The apparent misfortune of Rosalind's banishment is, in fact, a stroke of good fortune, for Orlando has also arrived in the forest; Rosalind is granted the opportunity to test Orlando's love for her while she is disguised as Ganymede.
- E. At the end of the play, fortune rewards Rosalind with a reunion with her father, whose dukedom has been restored, and marriage to the man she loves.

**VII. Conclusion:** In *As You Like It*, many of the characters have just cause to "rail on Lady Fortune" and the caprices of human nature. By the end of the play, however, those who were of evil nature have changed for the better, and fortune's gifts have been fairly bestowed.

### TOPIC #2

In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare often contrasts city life and country life. The pastoral life is praised by a number of characters in this play, yet Shakespeare suggests frequently that it is not as ideal a life as many of the characters believe. In doing so, Shakespeare also satirizes the conventions of pastoral romance. Write an essay in which you discuss Shakespeare's portrayal of city life and country life in each of the play's five acts.

#### Outline

**I. Thesis Statement:** *In As You Like It, Shakespeare presents multiple views of city life and country life.*

#### II. Act I

- A. The court is shown to be a place of corruption and villainy through the actions of Oliver and Duke Frederick.
- B. Courtly manners are satirized as "affected" in the character of Le Beau.
- C. The banished Duke Senior's life in the Forest of Arden is idealized when Charles describes the Duke and his men as fleeing the time carelessly "as they did in the golden world."
- D. Celia comments that she and Rosalind, in leaving the court for the countryside, are going "To liberty, and not to banishment."

#### III. Act II

- A. Duke Senior praises the virtues of the pastoral life, which is also celebrated in Amiens' songs; life in the forest seems far removed from life at the "envious court."
- B. Jaques comments on the irony of the Duke and his men killing and frightening the animals in the forest, which they have usurped just as Duke Frederick has usurped his brother's dukedom.
- C. Duke Senior and Amiens reveal that country life has its hardships: winter and rough weather.

### 2 As You Like It

- D. Touchstone comments wryly that “When I was at home, I was in a better place,” and Jaques remarks that a man is a fool to “leave his wealth and ease” to live in the forest.
- E. Corin remarks that the landowner he serves is “of churlish disposition” and unlikely to get into heaven; unjust behavior is not confined to the city.
- F. Adam almost starves to death in the forest, where food isn’t readily available.

#### IV. Act III

- A. Touchstone praises some elements of the pastoral life, but he also remarks that it is tedious and austere.
- B. Corin extols the virtues of his simple life as a shepherd and makes fun of the formal manner of the court.
- C. Orlando remarks on the timelessness of the forest—a departure from the regimentation of the court.
- D. Audrey is revealed as a simple, unsophisticated rustic who does not understand Touchstone’s witticisms as the “city” characters do.
- E. Silvius is disclosed as miserable and comically extreme in his passion, while Phebe is depicted as vain and petulant; Shakespeare satirizes the conventional view of idealized shepherds living in a harmonious pastoral world.

#### V. Act IV

- A. The deer killed by the Forest Lords is another reminder that the pastoral life has its harshnesses.
- B. Oliver reveals that the forest can be a dangerous place; wild beasts—a snake and a lioness—lurk as a threat.

#### VI. Act V

- A. The character of William again reveals that the country dwellers are often unsophisticated and “unlearned.”
- B. The song sung by the two Pages, with its images of green cornfields and singing birds, celebrates the virtues of a country spring.
- C. Touchstone’s speeches about courtly manners and the “rules of quarreling” at court are reminders of the “painted pomp” and affectation of city life.
- D. The forest is shown to be a magical place; Duke Frederick need only arrive at its outskirts to be converted.
- E. Duke Senior, who has praised the pastoral life, decides to return to the city at the first opportunity; only Jaques, a critic of life in the forest, chooses to remain.

**VII. Conclusion:** Shakespeare, in *As You Like It*, often seems to be praising the virtues of the pastoral life at the expense of city life, yet ultimately he offers a more balanced view. Both city life and country life are shown to have their advantages and disadvantages.

### TOPIC #3

*As You Like It* offers a number of differing perspectives on the forms that love can take. These range from love at first sight (with resulting complications) to unrequited passion to frank desire to satisfy one’s physical needs. Write an essay that describes and analyzes the courtships of the four couples who are married at the end of the play.

#### Outline

**I. Thesis Statement:** *In his depiction of the four couples—Orlando and Rosalind, Silvius and Phebe, Oliver and Celia, and Touchstone and Audrey—Shakespeare offers four differing perspectives on love and its many aspects.*

#### II. Orlando and Rosalind

- A. Rosalind falls in love with Orlando at first sight at the wrestling match.
- B. Orlando falls in love with Rosalind at first sight but he is speechless to thank her when she gives him a chain as a reward for his victory.
- C. Orlando expresses his love for Rosalind by writing poems to her and carving her name on trees.
- D. Rosalind panics when she learns Orlando is in the Forest of Arden and wonders how her Ganymede disguise might

complicate matters, but she turns her disguise into an advantage when she decides to test the extent of Orlando's love for her.

- E. In her conversations with Orlando while she is in disguise, Rosalind punctures Orlando's conventional notions of how a lover should act; she gets him to adopt a realistic attitude toward the woman he loves.
- F. Orlando proves to the disguised Rosalind that he is truly in love, and Rosalind realizes how deeply she loves Orlando, thus allowing Rosalind to abandon her disguise and marry him.

### III. Silvius and Phebe

- A. Silvius' love for Phebe is unrequited, leaving him in agony.
- B. Phebe, a "poetic shepherdess," is disdainful of Silvius, spurning his advances.
- C. Silvius uses the conventional language of love; like Orlando he claims he will die if the woman he is obsessed with does not love him.
- D. Rosalind chastises Phebe for her pride, but Phebe falls in love with Rosalind in her Ganymede disguise.
- E. Phebe, now in love with Ganymede, is more charitable toward Silvius, but she deceives him by making him deliver a poetic love letter.
- F. Rosalind employs a ruse to bring Silvius and Phebe together; her folly exposed, Phebe falls in love with Silvius and agrees to marry the shepherd who adores her.

### IV. Oliver and Celia

- A. Celia, perhaps feeling left out after her best friend has fallen in love with Orlando, takes the lead in questioning a stranger who arrives in the forest.
- B. Oliver, having learned to love his brother after years of hatred and resentment, tells Orlando that he has fallen in love with Aliena.
- C. Orlando is incredulous that his brother has fallen in love at first sight, but he realizes his brother is sincere in his affections.
- D. The love of Oliver and Celia seems as sudden as Oliver's "miraculous" conversion, but it is in keeping with the play's conventions; Orlando and Rosalind also fell in love at first sight and Phebe had the same experience when she met Ganymede.

### V. Touchstone and Audrey

- A. Touchstone and Audrey are an odd couple from the first; the unsophisticated Audrey does not understand Touchstone's witticisms.
- B. Touchstone is certain that Audrey will make him a cuckold after they are married, but he still resolves to marry her.
- C. Touchstone confesses candidly to Jaques that he is marrying Audrey because "man hath his desires."
- D. Touchstone wants Sir Oliver Martext to perform the wedding ceremony because the marriage might not be legal, thus leaving him free to eventually abandon his wife.
- E. Touchstone deliberately puts off the marriage, but when William appears, Touchstone asserts his claim to Audrey, who has eyes only for her sophisticated "man of the court."
- F. At the wedding festivities, Jaques predicts that Touchstone and Audrey's marriage will last only two months.

**VI. Conclusion** In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare provides a comic glimpse at the foibles of love through the disparate romantic experiences of four couples. Three of the marriages at the end of the play promise to be happy ones, yet the fourth is unlikely to last.

### TOPIC #4

Role playing is one of the central themes of *As You Like It*. Jaques remarks that "one man in his time plays many parts" and the action of the play reveals this to be true. *As You Like It* also contains a number of additional theatrical analogies. For example, Duke Senior remarks that "This wide and universal theatre/ Presents more woeful pageants than the scene/

Wherein we play in.” Later, Corin invites Rosalind and Celia to witness a “pageant truly played” in Silvius’ courtship of Phebe, and Rosalind replies, “I’ll prove a busy actor in their play.” Write an essay in which you discuss the character of Rosalind and the many roles she plays.

### Outline

- I. Thesis Statement:** *Jaques’ observation that “one man in his time plays many parts” is particularly appropriate in the case of Rosalind, the main character of the play.*
- II. Rosalind’s role at court**
  - A. The royal princess lamenting for her banished father.
  - B. The loyal friend to her cousin Celia.
  - C. The young woman falling in love with an attractive young man after his heroic victory.
- III. Decision to adopt the role of Ganymede**
  - A. Rosalind comments on the disparity between “a hidden woman’s fear” and the “swashing and marital outside” of the disguise she will adopt.
  - B. Rosalind’s new role is necessary to assure her safety (and Celia’s) in the countryside.
- IV. Arrival in the forest**
  - A. Rosalind, now disguised as Ganymede and weary after her journey, comments that she could find it in her heart to “disgrace my apparel and cry like a woman”; she will continue to play the role of a woman to those aware of her true identity.
  - B. Rosalind’s disguise as Ganymede passes its first test when Corin calls her “gentle sir”; she plays the role of a young man to those unaware of her disguise.
- V. Act III, Scenes II, III, and V**
  - A. Rosalind responds to Orlando’s presence in the forest like a woman, and she wonders what to do with her doublet and hose; when she is with Celia she plays a woman in love.
  - B. Rosalind decides to “play the saucy lackey” when Orlando enters, using her disguise to her advantage.
  - C. Rosalind pledges to play the role of “psychologist/physician” to cure Orlando of his lovesickness.
  - D. Rosalind attempts to play the role of matchmaker with Silvius and Phebe, but her efforts backfire when Phebe falls in love with Ganymede.
- VI. Act IV, Scenes I and III**
  - A. Rosalind, as Ganymede, confidently plays Rosalind for Orlando; she first plays “Rosalind” as a skeptic.
  - B. Ganymede then plays a second Rosalind, this time in a more receptive mood.
  - C. Ganymede plays the role of a bride in the mock marriage ceremony while Celia plays the priest.
  - D. Rosalind again plays matchmaker for Silvius and Phebe.
  - E. Ganymede reacts as a woman at the sight of Orlando’s blood; she faints and makes the excuse to Oliver that it was a result of playing a woman’s role too well.
- VIII. Act V, Scenes II and IV; Epilogue**
  - A. Rosalind promises to play the role of a sorceress to solve Orlando’s problems.
  - B. Rosalind again plays the role of matchmaker/problem solver for Silvius, Phebe, and Orlando.
  - C. With everyone’s problems solved, Rosalind realizes her male role is no longer necessary and resumes her female role.
  - D. Rosalind adopts new roles as both crown princess and wife at the end of Scene 4.
  - E. Rosalind drops character in the Epilogue to admit what Shakespeare’s audience knew all along; “she” is now a male actor who has played the role of a woman impersonating a man.

- IX. Conclusion:** In keeping with the many theatrical analogies in *As You Like It*, the character of Rosalind does indeed “play many parts.”

## TOPIC #5

Time is one of the many themes in William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*. Write an essay in which you explore Shakespeare’s references to time in the play.

### Outline

- I. Thesis Statement:** *In As You Like It, Shakespeare explores the theme of time in many different ways.*

### II. Act I

- A. We learn that Duke Senior and his court-in-exile “fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world.”
- B. Court life seems far more regimented than the description of life in the forest.

### III. Act II

- A. Adam’s faithful nature is underscored by the fact that he has served the household of Sir Rowland de Boys from the age of seventeen “till now almost fourscore.”
- B. We hear that Touchstone withdrew a sundial from his pocket and commented comically on time, and that Jaques laughed an hour by his dial.
- C. Orlando comments that the Duke and his followers “lose and neglect the creeping hours of time.”
- D. Amiens’ songs evoke the changing of the seasons.
- E. Jaques’ “Seven Ages of Man” speech charts man’s progress from infancy to death.

### IV. Act III

- A. Duke Frederick commands Oliver to find Orlando within a year or he will forfeit his lands and goods.
- B. One of Orlando’s poems, read by Celia, comments, “How brief the life of man.”
- C. Orlando remarks to Ganymede that “There’s no clock in the forest,” and Rosalind replies that true lovers are prompt.
- D. Rosalind comments that “Time travels in diverse paces with diverse persons” and gives several examples.

### V. Act IV

- A. Orlando, careless about time, arrives nearly an hour late for his meeting with Ganymede.
- B. Rosalind again reminds Orlando that true lovers arrive on time and chides him for being as slow as a snail; she warns him that his next lateness will be his last.
- C. Rosalind tells Orlando that the world is six thousand years old and in that time no one has ever died for love; she tells him to be realistic and asks him not to promise he will love her “for ever and a day.”
- D. Orlando promises to return in two hours, and Rosalind cautions him to be on time.
- E. Orlando is again late for his appointment, setting up potential complications, but this time he has a good excuse.

### VI. Act V

- A. Touchstone has delayed his marriage to Audrey but tells her “we shall find a time.”
- B. Oliver, like Orlando, Rosalind, and Phebe, falls in love in an instant.
- C. The song sung by the two Pages contains references to time, and Touchstone comments that the moment he spent listening to it was “time lost.”
- D. Jaques predicts that the marriage of Touchstone and Audrey will last only two months.

- VII. Conclusion:** The theme of time, present throughout the play, has both serious and comic implications. In the end, time has healed all wounds, and most of the principal characters look forward to a happy future.