“The Winter’s Tale”
William Shakespeare

Book:
The Winter’s Tale by William Shakespeare, Folger Shakespeare Library edition

Plot Summary and Organizational Pattern
There are 5 acts in this play, as is typical with Shakespeare. The first act introduces the characters and the trouble. The second act expands on the problem, and the third act is the climax of the problem. Time has passed between the third and fourth acts. The fourth act is, like usual, the longest, deepest, and most intense act and resolves the problem. The fifth act is the resolution and ending.

1st Act (2 scenes):
King Polixenes of Bohemia is wishing to return home after a long visit with his dear friend King Leontes of Sicily. Leontes can’t convince him to stay, so depends on his wife, Queen Hermione to do so with her wit and charm. She succeeds, but as she does, Leontes becomes jealous and suspicious that they are secretly lovers. His jealousy abounds irrationally and finally decides to have Camillo murder Polixenes. Camillo can’t go through with it, but helps Polixenes escape back to Bohemia.

2nd Act (3 scenes):
Hermione enjoys time with her only son until Leontes bursts in and has her arrested for adultery. She tries to swear to him that it is not so, but he won’t listen. While in prison, Paulina, a lady of her court, visits and asks after her new born daughter. Paulina is determined to prove to Leontes his own foolery by bringing his baby to him and showing him all the features the baby has from him and not Polixenes. He doesn’t believe her, sends her husband Antigonus to get rid of the baby, and hears that messengers from the Oracle of Delphi has returned with the answer to if Hermione was cheating on him.

3rd Act (3 scenes):
The messengers dearly hope that the answer they have from the Oracle will save the queen. Hermione is put on trial for adultery and tries to logically defend herself saying how much she loves Leontes. He doesn’t believe her, nor does he believe the Oracle when it says, “Hermione is
chaste, Polixenes blameless, Camillo a true subject, Leontes a jealous tyrant, his innocent babe truly begotten, and the King shall live without an heir, if that which is lost be not found” (2.ii.132-135). Leontes refuses to believe it until he hears that his sick son has just died. Hermione faints and Paulina says she has died. Paulina swears she won’t ever let Leontes forget what his stubbornness and jealousy caused to happen. Meanwhile, in Bohemia, Antigonus leaves baby Perdita for a Shepherd to find.

4th Act (4 scenes):
Time acts as a Chorus and tells that 16 years has passed and Perdita has grown up beautiful and Florizel, Polixene’s son has fallen in love with her. Polixenes tells Camillo that he suspects Florizel has fallen in love with someone and they should follow and watch in disguise. Autolycus is a conman who decides to con not only the Shepherd’s son, but as many people as he can during the pastoral festival. Florizel tells Perdita he will love her always, no matter her station. She hosts a festival in which many shepherds, shepherdesses, and Polixenes and Camillo (in disguise) attend. Polixenes begins to like Perdita as she uses her playful wit against him. The Shepherd gives his blessing to his adopted daughter and Florizel. Still in disguise, Polixenes tries to convince Florizel to talk this over with his dad, Florizel refuses, and Polixenes reveals himself, refusing to sanction the marriage and threatens that if Florizel doesn’t return with him to court, he will be disowned. Camillo, who has been longing for Sicily come up with a plan to help Perdita and Florizel elope to Sicily and ask for Leontes’ help. Then, he plans to tell the king and the shepherd so they will chase after them.

5th Act (scenes)
Paulina tells Leontes that he can’t remarry without her approval and she won’t give it until Hermione lives again. Leontes welcomes Perdita and Florizel with open arms and begs to make amends with Bohemia. They learn that Camillo and Polixenes have also arrived. Gentlemen explain that the shepherd and Camillo and Polixenes, after putting two and two together have discovered that Perdita is Leontes’ long-lost-daughter. Her marriage to Florizel is accepted as uniting the two kingdoms and forgiveness is accepted on all sides. They all want to see the newly commissioned statue of Paulina’s that looks like Hermione. Leontes’ regret comes back to him and after Paulina determines he is truly repentant, Hermione walks down and embraces him, not a statue, but living after all.

Big Question
What are the reasons for being jealous, how should you react to jealousy, what are the consequences of being jealous, and what is forgiveness? This seems to be a perfect compound question. High school students deal with this issue almost every day of their lives, especially when it comes to dating. By allowing them to see that even married couples 500 years ago dealt with the same issues, they can have a better appreciation for the past. This question can also be used from play to play and from novel to novel.

Background Knowledge
Shakespearean Plays and Elizabethan Age
Since this unit is for seniors, this background knowledge will be more of a review for them. But, we feel it is important for them to understand how
the Globe was set up, that only men acted in them, etc. We do want to emphasize the point of the words choice in Shakespeare’s plays. We will explain how Shakespeare made up words that we still use today, as well as making up a lot of phrases. Also, during the Elizabethan period, the use of wit and word play was paramount, which is reflected in Shakespeare’s plays.

Use of mythology and legends
Shakespeare likes to use Greek mythology in his plays a lot, so a brief background of the myths that he uses per play are good. The most important legend to discuss is the Oracle of Delphi. She was a prophetess, usually under the order of the Sibylline, who supposedly received visions from Apollo at Delphi. She would then answer questions in ambiguous riddles. But, archeologists have discovered that were the Delphic Temple is, there is a hallucinogen gas that may have caused the “visions” for the Oracle.

Location of Sicily and Bohemia
Leontes, the King of Sicily and Polixenes, the King of Bohemia are best friends and strong allies with each other. To explain this, it would be important to show where Sicily and Bohemia are and talk about the proximity. Also a good discussion can arise when students discover that historically, Bohemia is landlocked, whereas the Bohemia in the Shakespearean play has a shore.

Greek chorus
At the beginning of Act 4, Time is the Chorus. This is a very interesting juxtaposition to discuss with the students. We will discuss the role of the Chorus in Greek plays—they were the narrator and explained different themes and motifs.

Issues Related to Study of Literature
Themes:

1) Consequences of jealousy
   This play focuses heavily on this theme. Leontes loses his son, daughter, and wife due to jealousy, Polixenes forces his son out of the country due to his love of Perdita. The problems and emotions in this play are all caused by jealousy. This theme is also good to discuss with high scholars because they go through a lot of jealousy issues as well.

2) Reuniting of family
   There are numerous reuniting of family in this play. In the end, Perdita and Florizel are married; Florizel is reunited with his father Polixenes; Polixenes and Leontes are friends again; and Leontes is reunited with both his wife and his daughter. This is another important issue because many high scholars may have divorced parents and talking about this could give them hope.

3) Sensationalism, appearance vs. reality
   There is a lot of sensationalism in this play, not only dealing with concepts of Greek mythology like the Delphic Oracle. The biggest scene of sensationalism that deals with appearance vs. reality is the last scene in which the “statue” of Hermione comes to life. But, a good discussion would ask if Hermione really was a statue or just pretending to be. Appearance vs. reality could also encompass whether or not Leontes’ jealousy had some real base to it. It could also include Florizel lying about Perdita and Polixenes dressing up to spy on Florizel, as well Autolycus scamming everyone.
4) Rebirth
   This is another big issue in the play—we can relate it to the motif of seasons, because the play begins in winter, but as Act 4 begins, Time (the Chorus) explains that it is now spring—the rebirth of the world. Hermione is also reborn in the ending scene as she comes back to life. This could also be correlated with repentance and forgiveness.

5) Love conquers all
   This is one of the biggest themes throughout Shakespeare’s plays as well as many other movies, plays, books, and poems. Love is strong, love perseveres, love conquers all. Perdita and Florizel’s love wins out, and Leontes is reunited with his wife Hermione.

Motifs:
   1) Seasons
      Seasons are seen often in this play. The play begins in winter and Mamillius, when asked to tell a story, says, “A sad tale’s best for winter” (II.i.25). The last two acts are placed in spring when everything is resolved. A great discussion based on this motif would be to discuss the meaning behind the title of the play.

   2) Times
      This can be paralleled with the seasons motif. The play takes place during two different times: when Perdita is a brand-new baby, and when she is about to be married. A good discussion would stem from the use of Time as the Chorus.

Setting:
The play is set in medieval Sicily for the first 3 acts, then medieval Bohemia for the last 2 acts. There are two different seasons: winter and spring, as well as a jump in time. For more information, see Bohemia and Sicily under Background Knowledge, and Seasons and Time under Motifs.

POV:
This is a play, so it doesn’t really have a narrator, except at the very beginning of the 4th act, when Time is the Chorus. Since it is a play, it is meant to be seen and heard, rather than read.

Characterization:
   1) Comic relief—Autocylus and the clown. (Shakespeare uses comic relief in his plays a lot and although they may not necessarily help the plot to move on, they do allow us a glimpse at Elizabethan wit and word play.)

   2) Witty, stubborn woman—Paulina. (Shakespeare always has a strong, powerful female character in his plays and this is portrayed by a Lady who won’t take no as an answer.)

   3) Stubborn old man—Leontes and Polixenes. (Shakespeare always has stubborn old men who are the root of the problems in the story. If it weren’t for their stubbornness, there wouldn’t be any problem.)

   4) Unallowed lovers—Perdita and Florizel. (Shakespeare likes this type of characterization and his most famous pair is Romeo and Juliet.)
Literary Terms:
Since the students are seniors, most of these literary terms would be a review for them, but we have chosen some that would be good to focus on due to their prevalence in the “A Winter’s Tale.”
1) Connotation
2) Foil
3) Synecdoche
4) Metonymy
5) Synthesia
6) Enjambment
7) Caesura
8) Aside
9) Homonym

Affective Issues Related to the Work
The Winter’s Tale deals a lot with the irrational power of one individual over another, such as Leontes and Polixenes. Because of this students are most likely to relate to the characters that are being abused by someone else’s power, such as Hermione, Paulina, Camillo, and Florizel. Students will be able to relate to these characters because they have probably also felt that someone had unfair power over them. It would be particularly interesting to talk about how each character individually reacts to the power put over them, are they submissive like Hermione or loyal like Camillo? Students can then decide which character they would most be like and how they would react in a similar situation.

The play also has a main theme of forgiveness and redemption which students could relate to. Ask students whether they think Leontes deserves forgiveness. Do they believe that the end of the play really is happy, or are their other implications about whether Leontes has truly been forgiven (such as whether Hermione really is alive, how many years were wasted, and how Leontes’ son is still dead). Then talk about how students personally view forgiveness.
Connection with unjust accusations. Have the students ever accused someone without proof, or have they ever felt like they have been accused unjustly?

Vocabulary Issues
Because The Winter’s Tale is a play by Shakespeare there will be several words that students may not be familiar with (you could talk about how Perdita means “little lost one” in Spanish). Besides choosing individual words for students to be aware of (based on each class’s ability), talk with students about the way Shakespeare uses language. Talk to students about Shakespeare’s use of iambic pentameter, prose, and rhyme and what implications are made by the use of each (such as a representation of class or the state of mind of the speaker i.e. Leontes and the Clown). Also discuss Shakespeare’s use of puns and how he created many words. He also uses a lot of Renaissance colloquialisms which could be brought up in class discussion. Also talk about how Shakespeare uses many different figures of speech, such as alliteration, simile, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, assonance, etc. Also point out how Shakespeare changes syntax and word order. Many passages in the play would make good examples of what makes successful writing. Show students how to use the footnotes in order to understand word definitions and word connotations.
Implications for Students of Diversity
When discussing *The Winter’s Tale* with a diverse group of students, you could talk about the issues of social class brought up in the work, from royalty to peasants. Ask students how Shakespeare characterizes these groups? (Such as the tyranny of royalty and the simplicity of peasantry). Talk about Autolycus, who is obviously of a lower class but very intelligent. What could Shakespeare be saying by creating such a character? Talk about the differences and similarities between the two countries (two different cultures).

When using *The Winter’s Tale* to teach students with special needs or with disabilities, make sure to give students many front loading activities to prepare them for the work. Also, give the students hand outs or create activities, such as acting out a scene of the play that will allow students to have a better understanding of what is happening in the work. Creating activities that teach through multiple senses can help these students learn. Have students who understand the work, help those who may have special needs.

Gender Issues
*The Winter’s Tale* is a great work to talk about gender issues. Specifically discuss the characters of Hermione, Paulina, and Perdita. Ask students what stereotypes they think of for each of these characters? Talk about how Hermione may seem submissive, but defends her position till the very end, which could be comment on her strength and loyalty. When talking about gender issues Paulina is a great example of a strong woman. She openly defies the king, Leontes, and is a power at the end of the play to bring Hermione back. What might Shakespeare be saying about gender by including Paulina in the play? Also, discuss the contrast between the more forward thinking females, Paulina, and the more traditional ones, Perdita. You could also discuss the different types of wit each of the women use (example of Perdita giving the flowers). You could also talk about Leontes and how he uses his power over his wife. Ask students if this is a comment on gender, or whether Leontes is tyrannical by nature, not gender?

Research Issues/Project Ideas
- Break students into groups and have them perform the play.
- Have students write an extra scene to the play using what they have learned about the characters and Shakespearean vocabulary.
- Exam
- Paper
- Have students write what they would do if they were to produce the play. They can choose to do a different time period or setting. Students can include images of settings and costumes they would use. Students must justify why they choose each aspect of the play.
- Rewrite a section of the play in modern day language.
Text Sets and Enrichment Resources
Sleeping Beauty, Romeo and Juliet, Sinbad (movie scene when Sinbad talks about how he was friends with the other prince), “The Chaser” by John Collier, map of Bohemia and Sicilia, Photos of the Globe and Shakespeare’s time, articles about Shakespeare’s life and times (The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare by Russ McDonald, painting Perdita by Anthony Frederick Augustus Sandys, 1967 movie adaptation with Laurence Harvey or the BBC 1981 production directed by Jane Howell, photos of Delphi (oracle), mythology about the oracle, Painting of Hermione as Statue by W. Hamilton R.A.