

Handout 1

Primary Sources: The Window into Shakespeare's Plays

"What's in a name?" asked Juliet. "That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet . . ."

Before beginning *A Winter's Tale*, let's take a look at the names of the characters and try to determine what the play is about.

Working in small groups, use a dictionary with etymologies (The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary is best, the New American Heritage is also good), an atlas, and sundry other research tools to make guesses as to the personality of the listed characters. Also, what might be the plot of this play?

Ready? Set? Go-

Leontes - (Lee ON tees)

Hermione - (Her MI o nee)

Mamillius - (Ma MIL le us)

Perdita - (PER de ta)

Polixenes - (Pau LIX en ees)

Florizell - (FLOR I zel)

Camillo - (Ca MIL lo)

Antigonus - (An TiG o nus)

Autolycus - (Au TALL li cus)

Paulina - (Pau LIN ah)

Dictionaries with etymologies are great sources, but images and descriptions from primary sources from Shakespeare's time can also be very illuminating. What does Topsell's image and description of the lioness tell us about Leontes? About his wife? Care to speculate about their marriage? What happens to their children?

From Edward Topsell's 1607 edition of *The Historie of Foure-footed Beastes*:

There is no beast more desirous of copulation than a lionesse, and for this cause the males oftentimes fall forth, for sometimes eight, ten, or twelve males follow one lionesse like so many dogges one fault bitch: for indeede their naturall constitution is so hotte, that at all times of the yeare both sexes desire copulation, although Aristotle seemeth to be against it because they bring forth onely in the spring.

The lionesses (as we have shewed already) committeth adultery by lying with the Libbard, for which for which thing she is punished by her male if she wash not herself before she come at him, but when she is ready to be delivered, she flieth to the lodgings of the Libbards, and there among them hideth her yong ones, (which for the most part are males) for if the male Lion find them, he knoweth them and destroyeth them, as a bastard and adulterous issue, and when she goeth to give them sucke, she faineth as though she went to hunting.