The Winter's Tale: (e)
The significance of the title

Lesson focus: To examine how an understanding of the title might affect our reading of the play.

Opening exercise: Collect any stories known to the students which have 'tale' in their titles.

Discussion ideas: What might be suggested by the choice of the word 'tale'? Does 'tale' mean anything different to 'story'? What are the connotations of 'winter'? Textual examination: Divide the class into five groups, each to research one of the following:

- The role of Time, and the use of narrators in drama. (See Synopses > Act IV scene i)
- The Bear and its effect (See Synopses > Act III scene iii)
- Autolycus (See Characterisation > Autolycus)
- The Pastoral (See Themes and significant ideas > The pastoral tradition)
- References to the theatre and acting in the play (See Themes and significant ideas > Plays and playing)

Groups should report back. Try to draw out how Shakespeare has deliberately fictionalised the play (and why?) Refer to teachers' prompt sheet (e)ii to help.

Re-read the final scene of the play (which is, after all, a 'performance') Assess it according to the information and ideas students have found in the research exercise. (See The structure of The Winter's Tale > The surprise ending) (Synopses > Act V scene iii)

Recreative task: Retell The Winter's Tale as a children's story, perhaps with some illustrations.

A more challenging task is to complete 'Mamillius' Tale' from II.i. This should incorporate some of the themes of the play. (See Characterisation > Mamillius)

Critical task: How believable do you find the final scene? How would you stage this scene in order to have an impact on the audience? (See Synopses > Act V scene iii)

Extension task: Find reviews of different productions of The Winter's Tale and watch filmed versions. How has the title of the play been used or interpreted in these performances? (See The context of The Winter's Tale > The theatre > Design of theatres)