Discussion

Plot synopsis helps to give students the whole picture in a better perspective. As they began to read the play in stages they get to participate in the ensuing action, but after reading they need to have that big picture in order to see and pronounce judgment on the play as a whole. Plot synopsis therefore helps them in this direction. It also serves as a kind of a summary to help keep the important changes in plot and character development.
ACT ONE
COMMENTARY ON ACT ONE (as sample)
ACT TWO
ACT THREE
ACT FOUR
ACT FIVE

Shakespeare pedagogy Five
Plot – Synopsis

Act 1

Orsino, Duke of Illyria, is in love with Olivia, a wealthy noblewoman. This is evident in the opening scene of the play. Unfortunately, Olivia is in mourning over the death of her brother. As such she would not admit anyone to her palace. So Orsino’s emissary cannot meet her. Olivia, who declares that she will mourn for seven years, lives with a servant, Maria, a drunken old uncle, Sir Toby Belch, her ill-tempered steward, Malvolio, and Feste her clown.

Maria and Sir Toby seem like a happy pair who love drinking and merry making. Sir Toby is a relic of the armed retainers who were the necessary defenders of the castle. Their drunken behaviour was tolerated in those days because their services were of first importance. In Elizabethan England, having lost their military importance, people like Sir Toby became only a nuisance. Sir Andrew Aguecheck an older nobleman is a foolish but affluent knight. He has been offered a place to stay at Olivia’s palace as a guest. He is in love with Olivia. Sir Toby the uncle of Olivia was to help Sir Andrew in his efforts to woo Olivia; something that did not quite happen. Sir Andrew is willing to concede defeat, but Toby persuades him to stay for another month. The drinking and merry making of these people late into the night was disapproved by Malvolio.
Viola and Sebastian the identical twins who were shipwrecked get separated. Each think that the other was already dead. Viola is washed ashore together with the captain at Illyria. She decides to disguise herself as a male youth and calls herself Cesario. She then becomes Orsino's personal attendant. The Duke who has taken Cesario with into his service asks the disguised Cesario to become the messenger to woo Olivia.

In reality, Cesario, as we know is the maiden named Viola. Therein lies the complication, that is, having decided to wear male attire and seek temporary employment with the Duke, she now finds herself in love with him. When Viola arrives to woo Olivia in the Dukes name, she gains entrance only with difficulty. Olivia again rejects the Duke's suit, but is so charmed by the youthful messenger that she invents a lame excuse for giving him her ring. It was Malvolio who was sent after this page with that ring.

**Examination and Commentaries of ACT ONE.**

The plays opens with music showing a scene in a palace of a rich young duke called Orsino. Elizabethans loved music. Around him stands courtiers and attendant lords like Curio. The audience get to know Orsino who displays the character of a melancholy man; a sighing figure, thinking about his fortunes as a lover. His
melancholy and brooding is reminiscent of another Shakespearean character, Romeo who is, at the beginning of the play Romeo And Juliet, in love with a girl (who he never see) who will have nothing to do with him. The Elizabethan audience were perfectly at home with a character like Orsino. He is a character in a rather vague pursuit of that which one had little real hope of catching was a suitable way of making time pass: other ways were by listening to music, or making stale puns on 'hart' and 'heart'. The opening scene also helps to set the mood of the play.

In the same instance we get to hear of a problem. A lady named Olivia who is refusing him. We also hear that she has gone into mourning for seven years because of the death of a brother. In those days mourning was more fully observed, and to look happy or to wear gay clothing or to marry within a period of a year after the death of a near relative was looked upon with contempt. The same conventions appear in "Hamlet". Hamlet is bitter to see that his mother waited only three months to remarry. However in this case, Olivia vows to mourn for seven years, something that looks ridiculous and funny. If she did so she would soon be putting herself out of the marriage market. In a society where girls married at fifteen and were elderly matrons before they were forty, it seems obvious that Olivia's idea not only looks silly but far-fetched.
To the Elizabethan audience, these characters were quite credible enough but certainly exaggerated. The lover who wants to seriously woo someone whom he has never met, and the mourning sister whose devotion to the dead is quite excessive.

Act 2

Sir Toby and Sir Andrew were enjoying a wonderful evening of drinking, feasting and laughter encouraged by Feste’s singing when Maria enters to complain about their “caterwauling.” Soon Malvolio enters and declares that Olivia had threatened to throw out Toby if he doesn’t learn to stop this nonsense. Very much annoyed by these remarks, Sir Toby demands, “Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ales?”

When Malvolio had left, Maria who calls him as ‘an affectioned ass’ decide to get together with the others and work out a scheme that lead him to believe that Olivia is in love with him.

In the meantime Sebastian who had been rescued by another sea captain decides to pay a visit to Orsino’s court.
Duke Orsino however has still not given up hope on Olivia. He asks Cesario to renew his suit. By now Cesario (Viola) has come to realise that Olivia is actually in love with her.

In the garden scene Sir Toby and his fellow conspirators can barely hold their anger when they overhear Malvolio consider the possibility of marrying Olivia and become master of the household so that he can also lord over her uncle. Just then he comes across a love letter that looks as though it has been written by Olivia, but by Maria. He convinces himself that he is the unidentified man to whom it is addressed and resolves to follow its instructions for winning Olivia's heart: to be surly with the servants, to smile in her presence, and to wear yellow stockings cross-gartered. Maria's group who were actually hiding and eavesdropping on Malvolio were chuckling away because Maria points out that Olivia loathes yellow and will surely find Malvolio's smiles a little out of place with her mood of sadness and melancholy.

**Act 3**

Viola still disguising as Cesario pays another visit to Olivia, who now declares her love openly. This actually makes Sir Andrews jealous. Sir Toby and Fabian, another of Olivia's servant goad Sir Andrew to challenge the youth. Sir Toby however believes that
neither Sir Andrew nor Cesario has enough courage to fight each other.

A smiling Malvolio, clad in yellow stockings, appears before Olivia and with such pride quotes passages from her letters. Olivia seeing her steward smiling and behaving in such odd manners concludes that he is mad. Sir Toby who had goaded Sir Andrew to write a letter of challenge takes matters into his own hand. He expresses the knights displeasure himself. Viola is naturally puzzled by the challenge and protests that she is no fighter. Sir Toby, however reports that Cesario is a skilled swordsman, causing Sir Andrew to regret his challenge.

Meanwhile, Viola’s twin brother, Sebastian, who was saved from drowning by Antonio, makes his way to the court of Duke Orsino. Though Antonio is sought by the Illyrian authorities for fighting a duel with Orsino, he not only insists on going to Illyria, but also gives him his purse for safe keeping.

Antonio was wandering in the city when he chanced upon the duel about to take place between the unwilling Cesario and the timid Sir Andrew. Antonio, thinking that Cesario was Sebastian quickly goes to his rescue. Just as the reluctant duelists have drawn their swords Antonio appears and tries to end the duel. And in the process he is arrested by Orsino’s officers. Antonio mistaking Viola for Sebastian, asks for his money and is puzzled and dismayed when she replies that she does not know him.
Act 4.

The scene opens on a street before Olivia’s place. Sebastian (the real one) is followed by Sir Andrew who strikes him. The surprised Sebastian was about to retaliate when Olivia appears and invites him into her home. She later appears with a priest so that they can be secretly married. Despite all the bewilderment he agrees.

Meanwhile, Feste pretending to be good Sir Topas the curate, interrogates Malvolio, who has been locked in a dark room. However because of Olivia, Toby proposes that they end their prank. Feste then brings some writing materials to Malvolio.

Act 5.

The officers who were escorting Antonio happen to pass by Olivia’s house at the same time when the Duke and Cesario were waiting for an interview with Olivia. Upon seeing Cesario, Antonio accuses her of the basest ingratitude. The Duke defended Cesario of being unfaithfull. The priests also supports Olivia’s assertion that Cesario is her husband. Now the Duke too spurns Cesario. Sir Andrew and Sir Toby run in calling for a surgeon. Next they to accuse Cesario of thrashing them. Soon Sebastian enters to apologize for this attack on Olivia’s kinsman. He and Viola(Cesario) soon realize that they are brother and sister. The Duke seeing that his page is actually a lady asks her to dress again in feminine attire.
She explains that her clothes are with the sea-captain who has been put into prison under the orders of Malvolio. Olivia then releases Malvolio who shows her the letter that has been the cause of his predicament. Upon seeing the handwriting, Olivia realises that Maria was the author of the letter. Fabian explains that it was he and Sir Toby who had incited her. He also informs that Toby had married Maria. Malvolio leaves promising revenge but the Duke hopes he can be pacified. To Viola he predicts that when he sees her in feminine clothes, she will become “Orsino’s mistress and his fancy’s queen.” The play however ends with the feeling that Malvolio’s nature will never change, that his human qualities will remain just as we had seen him in the play.