The Guide

A Theatergoer’s Resource

Edited by Taylor Wallau with the Education & Community Programs department at Portland Center Stage

A Midsummer Night’s Dream
By William Shakespeare
Directed by Penny Metropulos

“Four days will quickly steep themselves in night; Four nights will quickly dream away the time.”

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William Shakespeare is widely known as England's national poet, and the “Bard of Avon,” as his plays have proven to be some of the greatest works in English literature. We know remarkably little about Shakespeare's personal life, considering that his plays are read with such frequency, and performed more than those of any other playwright. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon around 1564 to John Shakespeare, an alderman and glover, and Mary Arden, the daughter to an affluent landowning farmer. Although his exact date of birth is unknown, his baptism is believed to have taken place on April 26, 1564. In 1582, at 18, Shakespeare was married to Anne Hathaway, who was 26 at the time. Six months after their marriage, Anne gave birth to their first daughter, Susanna, and two years later, twins Hamnet and Judith followed her. Shakespeare’s only son, Hamnet, died of unknown causes at the age of eleven, in 1596.

Few historical records of Shakespeare’s life exist between the birth of his twins and his appearance in the London theater scene in 1592. Beginning in 1594, Shakespeare’s plays were performed by Lord Chamberlain’s Men, a playing company owned partially by the playwright himself, as well as other players. It soon became London’s most successful playing company, and in 1603, it was awarded a royal patent by King James I, changing the name of the company to the King’s Men. Then, in 1599, company members built the Globe theater, on the bank of the River Thames; many of Shakespeare’s plays were performed at the Globe, before it eventually burned down in 1613.

Although theater was a popular form of entertainment during Shakespeare’s life, scripts were considered merely the means to a performance, and not themselves a form of literary art. Therefore, the majority of his 37 plays were not published in anything beyond pamphlet form until after his death, in 1616. Thanks to the efforts of two members of Shakespeare’s company, these plays were all preserved in the First Folio, which was published originally in 1623. The plays are often divided into four categories: Comedies, Histories, Tragedies, and the debated genre of “Romances.” Flags were raised to indicate the respective genre of a performance at the Globe theater, so that the public could decide whether they were interested in viewing it. Shakespeare is probably more associated with his dramatic works, but he considered himself primarily a poet; it is believed that the artist initially embarked upon theater only as a means to support himself and his family. The 154 sonnets were not published as a collection until 1609, but Shakespeare probably wrote them throughout his career. Anyone who takes the time to study one of his plays would agree that Shakespeare must have breathed poetry in order to write verse as prolifically as he did.
Shakespeare’s Magical Comedy

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is one of the most commonly performed works of the Bard, and for good reason. It is a successful comedy, and therefore undoubtedly an audience pleaser, but it is also unique, not only from the rest of Shakespeare’s comedies, but from his entire collection of dramatic works. Although Shakespeare usually receives credit for the rich stories and interweaving plots that compose his plays, the vast majority of these are influenced by and borrowed from existing plays, narrative poetry, historical chronicles, or other primary source material. By contrast, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is a largely original work.

As one of Shakespeare’s early comedies, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* was probably composed in 1595 or 1596. Most scholars believe that it was the Bard’s original wedding play, and that it was written for entertainment to accompany a marriage celebration. Furthermore, despite the elusiveness of the specific day or month of the summer night, the title still suggests that the argument of the play is associated with two traditional English country festivals: May-Day, and summer solstice. The themes in the play generally accommodate the light-hearted merriment that is established by this setting, but there are of course layered intellectual influences, as well. For example, Chaucer’s “The Knights Tale” from *Canterbury Tales* was a prominent influence in the story. Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is also evident both in the overarching theme of transformation, and in the introduction of the story of Pyramus and Thisby, which is then butchered in a performance by the players in the final scene of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

This comedy is perhaps the most fantastical of Shakespeare’s plays, and most scholars agree that, if it is not the product of his finest dramatic genius, the Bard certainly had a good time writing it. Despite its celebratory purpose, however, many of the fantastical elements of the play are both whimsical and strangely dark. The nearby woods that encompass the fairy kingdom are traditionally English, as well as mythological. The mysterious aspect of the kingdom and its mischievous creatures attribute an unfamiliar and potentially threatening aura to the world of the play. Of course, the enchantment of the audience and the perspective that we gain into the world of magical sprites primarily serves to satirize the classic conundrum of powerless lovers. In fact, the characters of the lovers are only slightly individualized, so that they may further the plot; their larger purpose, however, is to provide a generalized image of the unreason of love, and the fact that it is governed more by nature, and the seasons, than by the contents of the lovers’ hearts.

Synopsis

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* was written between 1594 and 1598. It has three interlocking plots, all involving marriages. The first is the planned marriage between Duke Theseus and the Amazonian queen, Hippolyta; the second involves a mad scramble between four young lovers who fall in and out of love with each other in the depths of the forest; and the third involves the marriage between Titania and Oberon, two fairies who reside in the forest of Athens.

The play’s first scene shows us Hermia, a spirited young woman who refuses to marry Demetrius, the man her father (Egeus) has chosen for her. Egeus calls on Athenian law, which states that a girl must accept her father’s choice of a suitor or else face death. Theseus
feels sorry for Hermia and gives her another choice—to live forever as a virgin and worship the goddess Diana.

Hermia is not fond of either choice, and decides to elope with her lover, Lysander, to the forest. She tells her friend Helena of the plan that she and Lysander have hatched; and Helena, recently rejected by the man of her dreams, Demetrius, decides to use the information to try to win him back. She reveals to Demetrius Hermia’s plans, but the information does not have the effect she plans: Demetrius, closely followed by a lovelorn Helena, pursues Hermia and Lysander into the forest.

Next is the storyline shared by Oberon and Titania, the King and Queen of the fairies in the forest. Titania has refused to give up to Oberon her Indian changeling boy, whom Oberon wishes to have as his henchman. To punish her, Oberon orders the fairy Puck to wipe a love potion from a purple flower on Titania’s eyelids while she is sleeping, so that when she wakes, she will fall in love with the first vile creature she sees. The two plots converge when Oberon witnesses Demetrius cruelly insulting Helena, who is still in hot pursuit of him. Oberon orders Puck to wipe the potion on Demetrius’ eyes while he sleeps, so that when he opens his eyes he will see Helena and fall in love with her. But Puck makes a mistake, putting the potion on Lysander’s eyes instead. When Lysander awakens, he happens to see Helena run by, and falls in love with her! Oberon sees this and commands Puck to put the flower potion on the right young man’s eyes. Puck finds Demetrius asleep, puts the love potion on, and sure enough he wakes up just as Helena arrives—pursued by Lysander—and, of course, immediately falls for her as well! Both young men are now in love with Helena, and Hermia can’t believe it, since neither young man wanted Helena at all before the night set in. In fact, Helena herself can’t believe it and thinks the boys are playing a cruel joke on her by only pretending to be in love. After enjoying the confusion for a while, Oberon orders Puck to undo his mistake, and, once the lovers fall asleep on the forest floor, he reapplies his potion so Lysander falls back in love with Hermia.

Things move from the sublime to the ridiculous when Titania awakens from a sleep in which she has been “treated” to Puck’s love potion. She falls in love with an ass! “Ass” is another word for a donkey or a foolish person, and in this case the ass is Bottom, one of the “rude mechanicals” who are busy rehearsing a play they want to perform at Theseus’ and Hippolyta’s wedding. Puck’s mischief has been getting out of control, and he has transformed Bottom’s head so that when Titania opens her eyes to the vision of Bottom, she is in love with an ass!

Eventually, however, all the plots untangle and everything works out. Oberon gets the changeling boy he wants and all is well between the fairies. When Theseus and Hippolyta come to the forest for a morning hunt, they awaken the four young lovers. Since Demetrius no longer loves Helena, Theseus overrules Egeus’ edict and declares that Lysander should marry Hermia and Demetrius should marry Helena. The lovers decide that they must have been caught in a dream, and, at the wedding feast, they all sit merrily and watch the ridiculous version of the tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe put on by the rude mechanicals.
Below are some commonly used, but unfamiliar, Shakespearean words.

- **addition**  
- **affined**  
- **alarum**  
- **anatomize**  
- **ancient**  
- **anon**  
- **arrant**  
- **assail**  
- **attend**  
- **aye**  
- **baffle**  
- **balk**  
- **barm**  
- **belike**  
- **belov’d** – **beloved**  
- **blank**  
- **bolted**  
- **brach**  
- **brave**  
- **bum**  
- **caitiff**  
- **cousin**  
- **chuck**  
- **clout**  
- **cog**  
- **coil**  
- **cousin**  
- **descant**  
- **dispatch**  
- **e'en**  
- **enow**  
- **fare-thee-well** – **goodbye**  
- **fie**  
- **fustian**  
- **got**  
- **grammarcy**  
- **halter**  
- **honest**  
- **heavy**  
- **housewife**  
- **impeach**  
- **list**  
- **mayhap**  
- **mess**  
- **mew**  
- **minister**  
- **moiety**  
- **morrow**  
- **nay**  
- **ne’er**  
- **office**  
- **oft**  
- **passing**  
- **perchance**  
- **perforce**  
- **politician**  
- **post**  
- **power**  
- **prithee**  
- **quest**  
- **recreant**  
- **resolve**  
- **b t soft**  
- **soundly**  
- **stale**  
- **subscription**  
- **tax**  
- **troth**  
- **teem**  
- **thee**  
- **thou**  
- **thy**  
- **tucket**  
- **verge**  
- **verily**  
- **villain**  
- **want**  
- **well-a-day**  
- **wherefore**  
- **yea**  
- **zounds**
**Shakespeare Insult Kit**

Combine one word from each of the three columns below, prefaced with “Thou”:

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<th>COLUMN 2</th>
<th>COLUMN 3</th>
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<td>base-court</td>
<td>apple-john</td>
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<td>codpiece</td>
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<td>earth-vexing</td>
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<td>ill-breeding</td>
<td>lout</td>
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<td>ill-nurtured</td>
<td>maggot-pie</td>
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<td>knotty-pated</td>
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<td>milk-livered</td>
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<td>measle</td>
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<td>minnow</td>
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<td>plume-plucked</td>
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<td>pottle-deep</td>
<td>moldwarp</td>
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<tr>
<td>ruttsish</td>
<td>pox-marked</td>
<td>mumble-news</td>
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<td>reeling-ripe</td>
<td>nut-hook</td>
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<tr>
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<td>rough-hewn</td>
<td>pigeon-egg</td>
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<tr>
<td>spongy</td>
<td>rude-growing</td>
<td>pignut</td>
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<tr>
<td>surly</td>
<td>rump-fed</td>
<td>puttock</td>
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<tr>
<td>tottering</td>
<td>shard-borne</td>
<td>pumpong</td>
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<td>sheep-biting</td>
<td>ratsbane</td>
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<tr>
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<td>spur-galled</td>
<td>scut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>venomed</td>
<td>swag-bellied</td>
<td>skinsmate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>villainous</td>
<td>tardy-gaited</td>
<td>strumpet</td>
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<tr>
<td>warped</td>
<td>tickle-brained</td>
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<td>vassal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weedy</td>
<td>unchin-snouted</td>
<td>whey-face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yeasty</td>
<td>weather-bitten</td>
<td>wagtail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Woods as Heterotopia in
*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (excerpt)

by Laurel Moffatt

What have the woods to do with Athens in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*? For the lovers, the woods represent an escape from Athens and, hence, from the certainties and constraints of the “sharp Athenian law” (I.162-3). Although the woods are immediately valued by the lovers as a means of escape, their notion of its worth differs from what the woods truly offer. It is by traveling in the woods that the lovers are able to reconcile with one another and Athens, and many, not illicitly, but rather, in an Athens renewed by what has happened in the woods.” And it is upon entering the woods, so to speak, that the audience sees the rich reality of this shadowy place and its role in engendering the harmony at the play’s end. The woods are an antithesis of sorts to Athens, the place of philosophy, law, constancy and absolutes. In this way the woods function as what Michel Foucault terms a heterotopia. According to Foucault, heterotopias are real places that function “like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted Utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.”

The woods serve as an escape from Athens, yet, simultaneously, the woods and the events occurring within them (namely the workings of the fairies and their effect on the imagination) have much to do with Athens. The concord experienced in Athens at the end of the play is a direct result of the fairies and their magic, both of which bring health to the lovers’ love.

When the scene shifts from Athens to the woods, the fairies are the first onstage. Just as the first act is set in Athens with mortals and their ruler, Theseus, so the second act begins in the woods with the fairies and their rulers, Oberon and Titania, The duke of the very concrete Athens has as his counterpart the woods’ “king of shadows” (III.i.348), Although described as merely shadows. Puck, Titania and Oberon emphasize to the audience the substantial existence and effect of the fairies on mortals. Puck, for example, says to a fellow fairy that he is a “merry wanderer of the night” who takes on the likeness of other things in order to “jest” with Oberon and fool mortals (III.i.43-50), So protean but substantial a shape-changer is he that “The wisest aunt telling the saddest tale/ Sometime for three-footed stool mistaketh me” (I.1.51-52).

Critics have interpreted the fairies in a wide variety of ways. Some have seen Puck and the fairies as non-existent (except within naive imaginations);” others have argued that the fairies are malicious characters who bring darkness and deviance to the play;” and still others have viewed the fairies as tools of popular culture used by “subordinated subgroups.”” None of these views seems adequate. For a start, those who define the fairies as malign do not take into consideration the blessings the fairies give to the mortals at the end of the play. Further, those who understand the fairies to be non-existent, or existing only as tropes (the first and last critiques) neglect the fact that Puck describes his jests in full view of an audience: to the audience, that is to say, he is not just a figment of the imagination but seemingly alive and well and capable of speaking onstage. The words that determine the sense of Puck’s existence are, of course, “beguile” and “likeness.” They rather clearly suggest that Shakespeare goes beyond common fairy lore by emphasizing at once the existence of Puck within the play and his ability to take on the likenesses of other objects in order to beguile both fairies and mortals. He entertains Oberon with his imitation of other things and, as well, fools mortals by tricking them through his self-transformations.

What, then, is the role of Shakespeare’s fairies in the Athenian woods? At first, they seem only to cause disorder. Following Puck’s description of the harmless pranks he plays on mortals, Oberon and Titania reveal their greater impact on the natural world. Chaos is come again, it seems, because of the quarrels between the fairy king and queen. While it has been argued that the nature of their disagreement is essentially a political power struggle, it is nonetheless true that the disagreement is familial rather than political.” The royal pair war with one another over the matter of a being described as both a “little changeling boy” and also the son of a mortal,” This Indian boy has characteristics of both the mortal and the spirit world. Like the changeling of ambiguous being who is both fairy and mortal, the woods are a place of shadows and
harsh reality. The consequence of Titania and Oberon’s argument is a world where “rheumatic diseases do abound” and “the seasons alter” (II.i,90,92). Frosts fall on roses in full bloom and all the seasons war with one another so that “the mazed world/ By their increase now knows not which is which” (II.i.97-98). The discord in the fairy world displays itself in the mortal and natural worlds (II.i.115-117). Whereas Puck’s effect on mortals is cause for laughter, the effect of the fairy discord is cause for distress. The disaster in the natural world described by Titania would have brought to the minds of Shakespeare's original audiences the events of the early 1590s when similar hardships occurred in England. It is as if Shakespeare's audience is allowed to glimpse the secret causes for events such as everyday domestic incidents (failed recipes and general clumsiness) as well as the stranger and more disastrous disorder in the natural world that results in sickness of both body and land.” The rivers flood their banks, crops fail, disease spreads, and frost graces the boughs where blossoms should.

On the Screen

**A Midsummer Night’s Dream (1909)**
Director: Charles Kent
Starring: Charles Chaplin
A silent short film based on the classic.

**A Midsummer Night’s Dream (1935)**
Directors: William Dieterle and Max Reinhardt
Starring: James Cagney and Mickey Rooney
A black-and-white film set in traditional Renaissance times.

**A Midsummer Night’s Dream (1967)**
Directors: George Balanchine and Dan Eriksen
A filmed ballet focusing on the characters of the lovers and the fairies.

**A Midsummer Night’s Dream (1968)**
Director: Peter Hall
Writer: William Shakespeare (play)
Stars: Derek Godfrey, Barbara Jefford and Nicholas Selby

**A Midsummer Night’s Dream (1999)**
Director: Michael Hoffman
Starring: Kevin Kline, Michelle Pfeiffer, Stanley Tucci, Rupert Everett, Calista Flockhart, and Christian Bale
A 20th-century interpretation using Shakespeare’s language.
Discussion Questions / Group Activities

1. Think about the representation of the fairies and the fairy kingdom in the play. How are they portrayed as foreign and supernatural? Is there anything about the fairies that appears to be more human than the mortal characters in the play?

2. The fairies obviously meddle in the lives of the mortal lovers, but is their mischief portrayed as malicious or simply playful? How does this mischievous behavior then affect the portrayal of human nature in the play?

3. Why do you think that Shakespeare included a “play within a play”? What purpose does the story of Pyramus and Thisby serve?

4. Who appears to have the power in the play? Men or women? Humans or fairies? Or is the power struggle more dependent on opportunity than predetermination?

5. How is identity treated in the play? Are the identities of the characters mutable, or do any of them appear to be consistent? What can you observe about the characters that have consistent identities in the play (if there are any)?

Local Connections

**Pacific Northwest’s fairy world**

**Washington Park - Rose Garden**
Or, if you happen to be near Washington Park on a summer evening, just stop by Portland’s premier rose garden to witness some real magic in bloom. http://www.rosegardenstore.org/thegardenoverview.cfm

**Portland Art Museum**
You can also visit the Portland Art Museum for further “other worldly” enlightenment.
1219 SW Park Avenue
Portland, OR 97205
503-226-2811
http://portlandartmuseum.org/

**Tea Chai Te- Dream Blend**
If you dare to enhance your own dreams, stop by a popular teahouse to try the “dream blend,” infused with mugwort, a natural dream intensifier.
NW 23rd Ave / Nob Hill Tea Shop
734 NW 23rd Ave - Portland, OR 97210
(503)228-0900
http://www.teachaite.com/product_p/herbal92-1.htm
The following pages contain activities to help students explore themes found in Portland Center Stage’s production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream by William Shakespeare. We encourage you to choose the most appropriate activities for your group and adapt as needed.

**Goals:**
1. To encourage personal connections between the students and the major themes of the play.
2. To excite students about the story and introduce the theatrical elements of the production.
3. To engage students using the actors’ tools (body, voice, imagination).

**Key Concepts:**
- Shakespeare’s Literary Legacy
- Fantasy v. Reality
- Love and Marriage

**Theater Etiquette**

*Please share the following points with your group of students. Encourage the students to practice these points throughout the workshop. Feel free to remind and review the points as many times as is needed.*

Going to see a play is very different from going to the movies. During live theatre, the audience is as important a part of the experience as the actors. The following are things that most experienced audience members know:

- **Live response is good!** If you’re telling a story to a friend, and they really respond or listen, it makes you want to tell the story better—to keep telling the story. So, the better an audience listens, laughs and responds, the more the actors want to tell the story. In this way, the audience (as well as the actors) can make a performance great.

- **The actors can hear you.** Even though actors are pretending to be other characters, it is their job to “check in” with the audience in order to tell the story better. This is another way in which theatre greatly differs from the movies. Film actors can do a take over and over to try to get it right. Theatre actors have one chance with an audience and want to make sure they are communicating clearly. Imagine trying to tell a group of fellow students something only to see them slouching, pretending to be bored, or sitting with their eyes closed in attempt to seem disinterested and “too cool” for what you had to say. Think about it...

- **The actors can see you.** The actors can hear you talking. If an audience member is not paying attention, the actors know it. Have you ever had a conversation with someone and felt that they’d rather be someplace else? This is the EXACT feeling actors get when people in the audience are talking.

- **Cell phones, beepers, candy wrappers, loud gum smacking.** Please turn off all cell phones and do not eat or chew gum inside the theater. These things disturb the people around you as well as the actors. As much as you might be tempted to text a friend how cool the play your watching is, please wait until after it is over to send any texts.

*Thank you Montana Shakespeare in the Parks for these excellent etiquette suggestions.*
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM

ACTIVITY I: Warm Up

“Shakespeare Insult Generator”

Shakespeare is credited by the Oxford English Dictionary with the introduction of nearly 3,000 words into the language. Share some of these sayings and words attributed to Shakespeare.

Sayings attributed to Shakespeare

Pomp and circumstance
Neither rhyme nor reason
It smells to heaven
A laughing stock
As dead as a doornail
Eaten out of house and home
Fair play
Wear my heart upon my sleeve
In a pickle
In stitches
In the twinkling of an eye
Mum’s the word
Neither here nor there
Send him packing
Set your teeth on edge
There’s method in my madness
Too much of a good thing
Vanish into thin air
Foregone conclusion
Full circle
One fell swoop
Seen better days
A spotless reputation
The world’s (my) oyster
A sorry sight

Words attributed to Shakespeare

arch-villain
bedazzle
dauntless
embrace (as a noun)
fashionable
go-between
honey-tongued
inauspicious
lustrous
nimble-footed
outbreak
pander
sanctimonious
time-honored
uneathly
vulnerable
well-bred

ACTIVITY II: The World of the Play Discussion/Brainstorm

Who was this Shakespeare guy anyway?

Though Shakespeare is regarded as the world’s most famous playwright/poet, the fact is we don’t know all that much about him.

5 Facts about Shakespeare (1564-1616):

1. No one knows his real birthday, but he is said to have born and died on the same day (April 23).
2. He never published any of his plays. Most of his 37 plays and 154 sonnets were published 7 years after his death.
3. Shakespeare performed as an actor.
4. If you Google Shakespeare, you get about 40 million results!
5. His vocabulary is estimated at 20,000+ words. Your average Elizabethan person knew about 500 words.

What was it like to be an audience member in Shakespeare’s time?

Shakespeare’s plays are complex, but were written to be entertaining to every class, color and creed. If you feel like you aren’t catching the meaning of every single word, you are not alone! Better that you focus on characters and relationships that you like than to try and understand how each character relates to every other character. One of the reasons why Shakespeare continues to draw audiences after hundreds of years is because you may see the same play ten times in your life, but associate with different characters each time.

Midsummer Setting & Characters

The bulk of the story takes place when our main characters go into a dark, mysterious forest. This world is a fantastical place run by the fairies, where anything can happen. When the characters come out of the forest, they have been greatly changed.
A Midsummer Night’s Dream

**Character Muddle’**

**FAIRIES IN THE WOODS**

- Oberon: King of Fairyland
  - Gives love potion to Titania
  - Married to Titania

- Puck: Troublemaking fairy
  - Serves Oberon
  - Loves Titania’s fairies
  - Turns into an ass via love potion

**ATHENIANS IN THE WOODS**

- Lysander: Hermia’s dreamy beau
  - Loves Hermia
  - Rivals Demetrius

- Demetrius: Egeus’ pick for Hermia
  - Loves Hermia

- Hermia: The short one
  - Loves Lysander
  - BFF Helena
  - Father Egeus
  - Daughter

- Helena: The tall one, recently dumped by Demetrius
  - Loves Demetrius

- Nick Bottom: Weaver, actor (Pyramus), ass
  - Loves Titania’s fairies

- Peter Quince: Carpenter, playwright and director of mechanicals’ play Pyramus and Thisbe
  - Loves Titania’s fairies

- Mechanicals/Players: Tradesmen by day, actors by night
  - Flute (bellows-mender), Snout (metal smith), Snug (carpenter), Starveling (tailor)

**ATHENIANS IN ATHENS**

- Egeus: Wants Hermia to marry Demetrius
  - Asks help from Theseus

- Theseus: King of Athens
  - Engaged to Hippolyta

- Hippolyta: Former Queen of the Amazons, defeated by Theseus
Activity III: Synopsis Slideshow
The story of A Midsummer Night’s Dream may be best explained by dividing it into its three basic units: the Royals and Lovers, the Mechanicals, and the Fairies.

Provided at the end of this curriculum is a synopsis of A Midsummer Night’s Dream. These plot points are listed as to be cut with a paper cutter into three sections. The instructors will split the workshop students into three roughly equal groups assigning each group one of the synopsis sections. Taking approximately 20 minutes, each group will create a tableau, or “frozen picture” for each item on their sheet of paper. It is encouraged that the instructor rotate through the groups to provide guidance, and even to have each group assign a “director” from within their group to lead in the creation of each tableau. At the end of the 20 minutes, the groups will present their series of frozen pictures with the “director” reading through the synopsis point describing each tableau.

Connections and Classroom Questions: Are there plot devices in A Midsummer Night’s Dream that you recognize in other plays? Movies? Are there other stories with love, mistaken identity, or magic that come to mind? Which plot points are you most interested or excited to see in the show?

Activity IV: Stand Up If...
“Stand Up If” exercise exploring the themes Love, Magic, and transformation.

*note: this can easily be adapted to “raise your hand if”

The instructor chooses from the list of sentences below and asks the students to “stand up if . . .”. Students return to neutral between each sentence.

Stand Up If...
• you have ever wanted to run away
• your parents told you you couldn’t do something
• you have ever felt ‘sick in love’
• you liked someone who didn’t like you back
• you have had something magical happen to you
• you had a dream that seemed real

The teacher asks follow up questions to individuals.

Sample follow up questions: “What did it feel like when you found out they liked you back?”
“How did you know it was just a dream?”

Activity V: Fairies, Greeks, & Workers
This activity uses the actors’ tools to highlight the three different social groups in the story:

• the mysterious Fairies of the forest
• the Workers, or Rude Mechanicals
• the Greeks, or Athenians

Each class of characters is represented by a different stance: the Fairies are the highest physicality, perhaps represented as a tree looking down on the humans. The pose for the Greeks should be something stately using the ‘mid’ level. The Workers should be represented by a kneeling down, laborers pose.

How to Play: The group splits in two and lines up facing each other. The game is played like a large, physical realization of Rock, Paper, Scissors. Each team huddles and decides on which character they will present, and on a count of 3 both teams strike a pose simultaneously. The following relationships between the groups:

• Fairies beat Greeks
• Greeks beat Workers
• Workers beat Fairies

The team that wins that round must chase the other team back to their safe zone and tag as many members of the opposite team as they can. If both teams end up with the same character then they must shake hands with the opposing team and go back to the drawing board. The team that ends up with all of the members wins.

Message of the activity: This game is designed to warm up the group and also to get them comfortable with the ideas and themes from the play. It demonstrates the power the characters have over one another in the story. The size of the character does not necessarily determine who has more power over another.
The play can be repeated as many times as needed, and a score can be tallied for each team.

Wrap-Up: As you watch the play, think about the different power relationships between the characters. What are the fairies trying to do? Are they playful or malicious? What do the lovers learn after they go through the forest?

SYNOPSIS in THREE SECTIONS

ONE: The Athenians— As Theseus, the Duke of Athens, and Hippolyta prepare for their wedding, Egeus, a nobleman of the town, comes before them to ask for help with his disobedient daughter, Hermia. Egeus wants her to marry Demetrius, but she wants to marry Lysander. According to the law of Athens, she must marry the man her father chooses or die. Theseus gives Hermia a choice of either marrying Demetrius or becoming a nun. Lysander and Hermia decide to run away and to marry far from Athens. Before they leave, they see Helena, Hermia’s best friend, and tell her of their plans. Helena is in love with Demetrius, and, in hopes of proving her loyalty to him, tells him of Hermia’s escape. As Lysander and Hermia travel through the woods the following night, Demetrius attempts to track them down with the love-sick Helena close in tow. While in the woods, fairies play tricks on the young lovers. Through magic, Demetrius and Lysander both suddenly fall madly in love with Helena. This confusion leads to a quarrel, which Oberon, King of the Fairies, stops. Oberon then has his henchman restore the relationships to their rightful state: Demetrius is in love with Helena, and Lysander is in love with Hermia. When they wake the next morning, the Duke overrides the law, and decides to allow Lysander and Hermia to marry. Demetrius, transformed by the evening in the woods, proclaims his renewed love for Helena. They joyously return to Athens and are married alongside Theseus and Hippolyta.

TWO: The Mechanicals— Several of the workers of Athens have decided to perform a play for the Duke on his wedding day. Peter Quince, a local carpenter, gathers the five craftsmen thought best skilled to perform the play; Nick Bottom, Francis Flute, Robin Starveling, Tom Snout and Snug. Bottom, a weaver with great aspirations to be an actor, is cast as Pyramus, a noble young man. Flute, a young man with a high voice, is cast as Thisbe, the girl that Pyramus loves. The group decides to rehearse in the woods outside town so that they won’t be disturbed. When they meet to rehearse, they too are subjected to fairy pranks. Puck, a very mischievous spirit, replaces Bottom’s head with that of a donkey. This sight frightens the other craftsmen so badly that they run home to Athens, leaving Bottom alone in the forest. Titania, who has been sleeping nearby, awakes and, through a spell cast by Oberon, falls madly in love with the donkey-headed Bottom. Later, when Titania and Bottom are released from the fairy spells, Bottom believes that he has simply had a wonderful dream and rushes off to find his friends. Reunited once again, the Mechanicals hurry off to the palace and perform their play, Pyramus and Thisbe, for the Duke and Duchess.

THREE: The Fairies— When the play begins, Titania and Oberon, Queen and King of the Fairies, are feuding because Titania refuses to give Oberon a human child (a changeling boy) left in her care. Oberon, furious that Titania will not give him the boy, uses a magical flower to place a spell on her. The spell will make the Fairy Queen fall in love with the first creature that she sees when she wakes, no matter how hideous it might be. When she awakes, the first creature she sees is Nick Bottom, a mortal on whom Puck has placed a donkey’s head. She falls madly in love with the transformed man, and orders her fairies to be wait on her new love, feeding and entertaining him. Before releasing her from his spell, Oberon takes custody of the changeling boy. No longer fighting, Titania and Oberon then go with the rest of the fairies to celebrate Duke Theseus’ wedding day.