

*The Teen Touring Company
proudly presents*



A Midsummer Night's Dream

by William Shakespeare

Directed by Gary Grossman

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Introduction to A Midsummer Night's Dream

Shakespeare's plays are full of magic. If you visit Forest Meadows for the mainstage plays at Marin Shakespeare Company this summer, you'll see exactly what I mean. In "Macbeth," the title character is visited by sinister witches and haunted by bloody ghosts. "The Tempest" tells the story of Prospero, a man exiled to a mysterious island who, along with some powerful spirits, uses magic to exact revenge on his traitorous brother. Both plays are filled with supernatural phenomena and powerful magical beings.

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" is Shakespeare's most magical play, and it is one of the most beautiful. While magic is used for vengeance and malevolence in the other plays mentioned above, its function is much gentler in *Dream*, and much more comedic. In *Dream*, magic is used to make people fall in love. (And occasionally to turn people into donkeys!) The play, in turn, casts a spell on the audiences who watch it, leading them to fall in love with its hilarious characters, ingenious plot twists and its very happy ending.

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" is a perfect fit for the Teen Touring Company, Marin Shakespeare Company's popular program where local teens rehearse and tour an 80-minute, professionally directed production of a Shakespeare play. With so many wonderful characters and rich, interwoven story lines, we knew that our Teen Touring Company actors would have a blast working on this play. We hope you enjoy it.

~ Sam Leichter, Education Manager

Things to look for in the play

- 1) Many people consider *Midsummer* to be Shakespeare's greatest comedy ever. One main reason is the flawless intertwining of four plots: a Duke or in our version a Mayor's wedding, four lovers in romantic entanglements, a war between the King and Queen of the Fairies, and amateur craftsmen rehearsing a play. Do you think that by the play's end, all four plots beautifully entwine together?
- 2) There are two different "worlds" in the play. The court of Theseus where the young lovers and Quince and the craftsmen live is the land of "civilization". The forest is the Fairy kingdom of Oberon and Titania, a world of magic and mystery. Watch how the characters develop as they travel farther and farther from home. What does the forest symbolize?
- 3) Shakespeare's plays are rich in language and poetry, and "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is one of the richest. Even if you don't understand what every single word means (and most adults don't), you can just listen and let the words fall on you as the sounds spark your imagination. Some of the words used often in this play include *Sweet, Night, Eyes, See, Play, Moon, Fair, True, Fear, Sleep, Follow, Know, Say, Wood, Moon, and Heart*. Also listen for the frequent use of rhyming couplets (consecutive lines of dialogue that rhyme) sometimes said by one character, and sometimes shared by two characters. How does the rhyme contribute to the magic of the play?
- 4) "A Midsummer Night's Dream" was probably written in 1595 or 1596 and is believed to have been specifically written to be performed at a wedding ceremony. Does the play seem good for a celebration of a marriage?

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ (Who's who in the play)

Theseus - Mayor of Athens, and soon-to-be husband of Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons.

Hippolyta - Queen of the Amazons, whom Theseus defeated in battle and is going to marry.

Egeus - Father to Hermia; wants her to marry Demetrius.

Hermia - Daughter to Egeus, beloved of Lysander and Demetrius.

Lysander - Hermia's Boyfriend.

Demetrius - Wants to marry Hermia, who hates him.

Helena - Best friend to Hermia, in love with Demetrius.

Peter Quince - A carpenter, and author of the play "Pyramus and Thisbe".

Bottom - A weaver playing the part of Pyramus.

Flute - A bellows-mender (in our version an A.C. repairman) playing the part of Thisbe.

Snout - A tinker (mender of pots and kettles) who plays the wall.

Snug - A joiner (fitter of furniture) who plays the lion.

Starveling - A tailor who plays moonshine.

Oberon - King of the Fairies.

Titania - Queen of the Fairies.

Puck - Oberon's servant and all around mischief-maker.

Peaseblossom, Moth, and Mustardseed - Fairies who serve Titania.

PLAY SYNOPSIS - A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

ACT I

In Athens, Theseus is preparing for his wedding to Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons. Theseus won the hand of Hippolyta by defeating her in battle. In comes Egeus, father to Hermia, along with two men who wish to marry her, Lysander and Demetrius. Explaining to Theseus that his daughter has been “bewitched” by Lysander, Egeus demands that Hermia marries the man of his choice, Demetrius, or else be put to death for her disobedience, bringing up an old Athenian law which states so. Theseus, thinking this is a little extreme, offers Hermia a choice: death, marriage to Demetrius, or life in a nunnery. Lysander points out that Demetrius has already pledged love to Helena, the best friend of Hermia. Theseus gives her until his own wedding day to make her choice. As Theseus, Demetrius and Egeus leave to discuss wedding plans, Lysander and Hermia make plans of their own -- to sneak off into the woods and elope in secret. Just then, Helena enters moping about her unrequited love for Demetrius. Hermia tells her to relax, since she is leaving town with Lysander to get married. With Hermia out of the picture, Helena is clear to pursue Demetrius. The lovers wish her luck and leave. In typical Shakespearean logic, Helena decides to tell Demetrius of this secret marriage, thinking that any excuse to get near Demetrius is a good one.

Elsewhere in Athens, a group of workers (also known as mechanicals) meet to prepare a play for the Duke's wedding. The group is led by Quince the carpenter (and author of the play). The other members of the acting company are Bottom the weaver, Snug the joiner, Flute, Snout the tinker, and Starveling the tailor. Quince tells them the name of the play: “The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe.” Bottom is the star actor of this group, which isn't saying much. Bottom is assigned the lead male role of Pyramus, a romantic hero and great lover. Bottom would rather play a bad guy, but Quince convinces him to take the role that is offered, as it calls for a "sweet faced youth". The youngest member of the group, Flute, is assigned the female lead role, Thisbe, because he has no facial hair, and can realistically appear to be a girl. Bottom thinks he can play every single part, but Quince sweetly talks him into sticking with Pyramus and the cast agrees to meet in the woods the following evening to rehearse.

ACT II

Meanwhile, in the woods outside Athens, some fairies meet up with Puck (also named Robin Goodfellow). We learn that the fairies serve Titania, the Queen of all the Fairies. Puck tells them of a marital spat between Titania and his master Oberon, King of the Fairies. Titania has “stolen a lovely boy from an Indian king” and is keeping him for herself. Oberon wants the boy to be his henchman but Titania won't give him up.

Puck brags about himself, boasting of all the tricks he plays on humans and animals. Oberon and Titania enter into the clearing, and accuse each other of infidelities: Oberon with Hippolyta, and Titania with Theseus. Titania calls these accusations “the forgeries of jealousy”, and describes to Oberon how their argument has disrupted the weather, causing the seasons to change. Oberon tells Titania that she could restore everything by simply giving up the boy. Titania refuses and storms off. An angry Oberon vows revenge, and summons his servant Puck to fetch him a magic purple flower that will make “man or woman fall madly in love with the next live creature it sees.” As Puck leaves to get it, Oberon plots to use this flower on Titania so that she will be so in love with another creature, that she will give up the boy. Hearing some voices, Oberon makes himself invisible, and decides to eavesdrop. Helena enters, literally following Demetrius like a puppy-dog. She tries to woo him, but Demetrius refuses her love, and breaks away from her trying to find Hermia. Naturally, Helena follows.

Oberon vows to help Helena, and when Puck returns with the flower, Oberon orders Puck to squeeze some drops on the “disdainful youth” wearing Athenian clothes, so he will fall in love with Helena who -- never leaving his side -- will obviously be the first thing Demetrius sees. Elsewhere Titania goes to sleep after a lullaby from her fairies. When she’s asleep, Oberon squeezes the love juice on Titania’s eyes.

Lysander and Hermia find themselves lost in the woods at night and go to sleep. Puck finds Lysander thinking he has found Demetrius because of the “Athenian garments” he has on. The humans all look alike to Puck. He squeezes the flower on Lysander. Helena, still chasing Demetrius, sees Lysander on the ground and wakes him. When he sees Helena, he falls in love with her immediately. Helena, thinking that Lysander is mocking her, runs off, followed by the lovesick Lysander. Hermia awakes from a nightmare and finds herself alone. She is certain that something horrible has happened to Lysander, and she runs off to find him.

ACT III

As the mechanicals find a clearing in the wood to begin rehearsing their play, it becomes clear that Bottom, Flute, Quince, Snug, Snout and Starveling are not the best actors in the world. In fact, they are quite inept. They worry that the swords and the lion (played by Snug) are too scary, so Bottom has Quince write a prologue assuring the audience that the violence is not real. The play calls for moonlight and a wall, so Starveling will carry a lantern to signify the man in the moon, and Snout will play the wall himself. Once the problems are solved, they begin to rehearse. Bottom steps offstage where Puck uses his magic to put an ass’s head on him (which may be seen as merely bringing out Bottom's true inner self)! When he re-enters, Quince, Snout, Starveling, Flute, and Snug all freak out and run away, which is quite the natural reaction to seeing your friend’s head turn into that of a donkey. Bottom, now alone in the forest, starts singing to prove that he’s not afraid. His singing wakes Titania, and in her enchanted state she falls in love with him, keeps him in the woods, and orders her Fairy servants Peaseblossom, Moth, and Mustardseed to attend on him. Titania then leads Bottom to her bower, where she rests and sleeps amidst the flowers.

Puck tells Oberon about the trick. Oberon is very pleased, but the merriment ends when Demetrius enters, stalking Hermia. It quickly becomes clear to Oberon that Puck has squeezed the flower on the wrong eyes. Hermia escapes, and in frustration and exhaustion, Demetrius falls asleep. An angry Oberon orders Puck to find Helena and bring her to Demetrius. As Puck leaves, Oberon squeezes the juice on Demetrius’s eyes. Puck announces that Helena is coming with Lysander in hot pursuit. Puck is obviously enjoying the mess he is making, and watches the chaos. Helena stumbles onto Demetrius, who falls in love with her. So now both Lysander and Demetrius love Helena. A confused Hermia enters, wondering why her Lysander has left her. He tells Hermia that he now hates her and loves Helena. All heck breaks loose, as everyone starts threatening and fighting one another, with Hermia threatening to scratch out Helena’s eyes, and the boys going off to fight for Helena. As everyone runs around the forest, Oberon demands that Puck fix things by “overcasting the night” and disorienting everyone until all four lovers collapse into a heap and fall asleep. Puck can then put the antidote on Lysander’s eyes so he will love Hermia again, and “all shall be well.”

ACT IV

Titania and her fairies are pampering Bottom as Oberon watches. As they fall asleep, Oberon takes pity on Titania and, since he now has the boy, releases Titania from the spell. Titania is not very happy about having fallen in love with a monster. Oberon has Puck restore Bottom's head. Now peace is restored in the Fairy kingdom. As day breaks, Theseus, Hippolyta, Egeus and their hunting party enter and see the lovers on the ground. Egeus is furious at Lysander and Hermia and orders them to be punished. But Demetrius interrupts and tells Theseus that he now loves Helena. The Duke decides no harm has been done, and declares a triple wedding. The lovers have a happy ending, although no one is sure if what happened was real or a dream. Bottom wakes up alone, and doesn't know if he can believe the dream he had. He reunites with Quince and the gang, and they get ready for the play.

ACT V

The post-wedding entertainment is under way. Theseus and Hippolyta kick back with the other married couples and as luck would have it, Theseus chooses "Pyramus and Thisbe" as the night's entertainment. Bottom, Flute, Quince, Snug, Starveling and Snout prove themselves to be perhaps the worst actors in Athens. They miss entrances, get lines wrong, and overact ridiculously and shamelessly. Bottom even breaks character during the play to address the audience and explain the plot. But the play is a great success, because of the passion, joy, and love for theatre that the group brings to the evening. Puck, all alone, ends the play by telling the audience that if they didn't like the play, they can pretend it was all a dream. But if you did like it, please applaud now!

10 STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1) Love. What does Shakespeare say about the nature of love in this play? Does Puck's line "what fools these mortals be" serve as a description of how people in love behave? Is the magic flower symbolic of the way people behave when infatuated? Do Hippolyta and Theseus love each other? when? Why does Lysander, in loving Helena, have to also hate Hermia? Notice that Demetrius is still under the spell of the flower at the end of the play. He will now go through life as an illusion. Is all love an illusion? Is the forest truly magic, or does it just allow characters' true selves to emerge? Is the final "Pyramus and Thisbe" play a mockery of love, or an example of an honest labor of love of actors wanting to do a good job? Do Oberon and Titania love each other?
- 2) Happy Ending? The play begins with couples in conflict: Theseus won Hippolyta after defeating her in combat, Hermia and Lysander love each other, but her father wants her to marry Demetrius, who loves Hermia, but hates Helena, who loves him. (Got it?) Oberon and Titania are fighting as well. At the end everything is resolved apparently. Does everyone truly live "happily ever after?" Are there still unresolved issues that the play never answers?
- 3) Fairies and Magic. Most of what is believed today about Fairies comes from Shakespeare. Why did Shakespeare's Fairies stick with us? Why did he use them in the play? What modern books and movies use supernatural characters or worlds? (*Lord Of The Rings*, *Harry Potter*, etc.)
- 4) Bottom and the Mechanicals. Bottom, Quince, Flute, and Company are the clowns of the play, incompetent and amateurish. Bottom in particular is egotistical, foolish and clueless. Yet many audiences find them endearing. Why do audiences relate well to them? Are they the funniest characters in the play? Do they have an innocence and simplicity absent from other characters in the play? Are they they most "real"?
- 5) Puck. What purpose does Puck serve in the play? What does his love of trouble-making say about him? Is he an inept messenger or does he mess things up "accidentally on purpose?" Is he Cupid gone bad? Whose side is he really on?
- 6) Women. What is the role of women in the play? Hippolyta is a spoil of war; Titania is made an object of ridicule by falling in love with an ass; Hermia is forced to choose between a nunnery, death, and a man she hates; and Helena feels ridiculed by the men. How are these women different and the same as modern women?
- 7) Favorites. Who is your favorite character? What was your favorite scene? What was your favorite part of the production you saw? What was your favorite line in the play? Why?
- 8) Heroes. Who is the hero or main character of the play? Is there one?
- 9) Production Elements. Shakespeare gives few stage directions and little advice on how to perform his plays. What choices did the production make to tell the story? Did the actors make interesting, unusual or unexpected choices? How did the designers' work enhance the world of the play? If you were putting on a production of this play, what choices would you make?
- 10) The Dream. The play is called "A Midsummer Night's Dream." What is the dream? Whose dream is it?

Games and Exercises

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Purpose: To familiarize the class with the plot of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in a way that is fun, participatory, and interactive.

Day 1: Have the students form a standing circle. Assign each student a character from the *Dramatis Personae*. Let the group know that you'll describe the characters momentarily. Let every student know that they need to each come up with a vocalization and physical gesture that embodies each character, or a vocal and physical icon. (Example: a macho character can flex his muscles and go "Grrr". An extremely foolish character can smack the palm of his hand against his forehead and do a Homer Simpson "D'oh!".)

Describe each character in a few broad strokes. (Bottom is foolish and loud, Oberon is elegant with a temper, and Helena is lovesick and possessing low self-esteem.) The students should start thinking about what their vocal and physical "icons" for those characters are going to be. Gestures and vocalizations should be swift, direct and broad. Then go around the circle again, and have each student show his/her icon to the rest of the group. Make sure to accept whatever icon a student invents, but feel free to encourage the execution to be louder, bolder, or more succinct.

Tell the group that you are going to read the plot of the play out loud. Whenever you read the name of the character, the student playing the role steps forward and performs his or her icon, so that the entire group tells the story. The story of "Midsummer" is long, so don't be surprised if the students need help focusing. You can help by making your reading as clear and energetic as possible.

When the reading is over, have the students sit down and review the story. Solicit plot points: "Who is in love with who?," "Why are the fairies fighting?," "What is Pyramus and Thisbe?" This alone will probably take up most of your class time, but if it doesn't, do the icon exercise again, reassigning roles.

Day 2: Do the icon exercise again if you only had an opportunity to do it once yesterday. Make sure that roles get reassigned. Pass out copies of the plot synopsis. Then divide the students into groups of five, and have each group be responsible for staging one act of the play.

Each act must be under four minutes and have no dialogue. Students may play more than one role. The goal is to cover the most important plot points and to tell the story as clearly as possible using actions, not words. Emphasize the need for teamwork in this exercise. Beyond that, there are no rules. This exercise can be a great deal of fun and produce highly imaginative and silly results.

Let the students know how much time they have, and call out "3 minutes!," "Two minutes!," as appropriate. Then gather the group together and stage the entire play.

STATUS EXERCISE

Status plays a huge role in Shakespeare's world. The Elizabethans believed in a "chain of being" which was basically a rank and pecking order of importance in the Universe. God was at the top, then the heavens, the earth and sea, down to humans, below that animals, and lower still to dirt and insects. People were born into their status socially. Once a peasant, always a peasant. This concept may be difficult to understand at first, especially in our culture where we are taught "anyone can be President." You will need a deck of playing cards for this exercise.

Lead a discussion with the students on status. Who has high status in our society - music and film stars, politicians, CEOs, etc. Who has low status - homeless, disabled, unattractive people, etc. Is status usually socially decided? Keep in mind that it's not a value judgment. A rich person is not "better" than a poor one per se, but the status in society can't be denied. How do we act around someone whose status is perceived to be lower or higher than us? Who are the high and low status people at your school - principal, janitor, students who are in certain clubs?

Select 7-10 students and tell them that they are going to play a status game. They are to pretend that they are at someone's birthday party and improvise conversations and actions. Remind them of the actions that take place at a birthday party (opening presents, eating cake, etc.) Tell them that you're going to give each one of them a status of 1-10 with 1 being the highest and 10 being the lowest, and they are to act accordingly. It might help to give the birthday boy or girl the highest status. Set up a front door and ask the students to come out one at a time. Coach them to keep the scene going and to share what they're doing with the audience. Coach the audience to observe what's going on and try to figure out who is what status. After five minutes or so, or when you think the exercise is winding down, stop and ask the audience to guess the characters' status. Why did they think a person had a certain status? What did the person do to make them think that? Then, without discussing it, ask the students involved in the game to put themselves in a line, and guess without talking, with the highest status person on one end and the lowest status person on the other end. See how accurate they are. Ask the students how they felt about being a certain status.

Then select another group of 7-10 and improvise a place in the play (The forest, Theseus's palace, Quince's house, etc.) Assign each of them a profession in that world and talk to them about their job. Then select a playing card (either at random or picked yourself) and give each student a card, but ask them not to look at it. Have them hold the card to their forehead. Instruct the players that they are going to treat each character to a combination of their job (which everyone knows) and their status (which everyone but the player can see from their card. Ace is highest, King next, and all the way down to the lowly two.

Remind them of events or make up an occasion like the birthday party game, and coach the students to subtly treat people with high and low status, rather than just going to the most obvious ways of treating them (which they will probably do at first) - just as in life when we don't want people to know that we're sucking up to them! Try to also coach them not to react immediately when they see someone's status so they don't give it away. After you feel that the scene has gone on long enough, ask the students once again to arrange themselves in a line based on what status they think they are. Have the players discuss why they made their choices and get audience feedback.

If there's time, rank the status of characters from "Midsummer" and give opinions on what card they would be.

ACTING AND ACTIVATING SHAKESPEARE

Pass out a copy of the quotes at the end of this study guide to the students. Have them identify who says each quote, what the words mean, and what's going on in the play when they say it.

They can also underline the words that are most important in communicating the character's idea. In other words, what is the "telegram" of the meaning of the speech if you cut away the flowery or extra words? Usually we find those words are verbs and nouns. Notice that the last word in a line is also the most or next to most important one, and for actors to act effectively, they push through to the end of the line to keep the energy and the audience's interest up.

You can also have the students pick a quote and "perform" it for the class in several ways:

- First in mime, using gestures and body (For example, Oberon's "I know a bank where the wild thyme blows" could be conveyed in the body by standing up powerfully like Oberon, arms up in the air summoning the elements, and looking off at the windy bank)
- Say the line in nonsense gibberish, still conveying the meaning of the line through body and vocal inflection, not literal word meaning.
- Paraphrase the line in Modern English ("I know this windy place by a river with sweet-smelling plants.")
- Say the line as written, using your body and voice.

This exercise is effective in illustrating that the body is a tool in performing Shakespeare effectively. We look up the words to make sure we know what we are saying, we emphasize the most important words to tell the story, and use our bodies to be in synch with our thoughts and words.

CHARACTER COLLAGE

This requires scissors, cardboard or poster board, glue or tape, and picture books like magazines that can be cut up. Have the students make a collage of a character from the play, or a place (Athens, the Woods) or an abstract word that describes a theme of the play (magic, love, dreams). They cut out pictures of people, things, and words, that support their character, place, or theme, and glue or tape them to a poster board. Some professional designers use collages in preparing for a play. At the end they can be hung in a special "Midsummer gallery".

MIDSUMMER QUOTES

- 1) "Hippolyta, I woo'd thee with my sword.
And won thy love doing thee injuries."
- 2) "Full of vexation come I with complaint
Against my child, my daughter Hermia."
- 3) "The course of true love never did run smooth."
- 4) "Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind;
And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind."
- 5) "Nay, faith, let me not play a woman;
I have a beard coming."
- 6) "We will meet, and there may we rehearse most obscenely and courageously".
- 7) "I am that merry wanderer of the night;
I jest to Oberon, and make him smile--"
- 8) "These are the forgeries of jealousy:
And never, since the middle summer's spring,
Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead,
By paved fountain, or by rushy brook,
Or in the beached margent of the sea,
To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,
But with thy brawls thou hast disturbed our sport."
- 9) "I'll put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes."
- 10) "I am your spaniel, and Demetrius,
The more you beat me the more I will fawn on you."
- 11) "I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where oxslips and the nodding violet grows."
- 12) "What thou sees't when thou dost wake,
Do it for thy true love take."

- 13) "O monstrous, O strange! We are haunted!"
- 14) "Reason and love keep little company together nowadays,
the more the pity some honest neighbors will not make them friends."
- 15) "Lord what fools these mortals be!"
- 16) "You juggler! You canker-blossom! You thief of love!"
- 17) "Fie, Fie, you counterfeit, you puppet you!"
- 18) "How low am I, thou painted Maypole? Speak!"
- 19) "Your hands, than mine, are quicker for a fray,
My legs are longer though to run away!"
- 20) " I am feared in field and town,
Goblin, lead them up and down."
- 21) "If we offend, it is with our good will."
- 22) "O, kiss me through the hole of this vile wall!"
- 23) "This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard."
- 24) "The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse,
if imagination amend them."
- 25) (Roaring) "O-"
- 26) "Tongue lose thy light,
Moon take thy flight,
Now die, die, die, die, die!"
- 27) "If we shadows have offended,
Think but this and all is mended,
That you have but slumbered here,
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding than a dream."

ANSWER KEY

- 1) Theseus
- 2) Egeus
- 3) Lysander
- 4) Helena
- 5) Flute
- 6) Bottom
- 7) Puck
- 8) Titania
- 9) Puck
- 10) Helena
- 11) Oberon
- 12) Oberon
- 13) Peter Quince
- 14) Bottom
- 15) Puck
- 16) Hermia
- 17) Helena
- 18) Hermia
- 19) Helena
- 20) Puck
- 21) Peter Quince (as prologue)
- 22) Bottom (as Pyramus)
- 23) Hippolyta
- 24) Theseus
- 25) Snug (as lion)
- 26) Bottom (as Pyramus)
- 27) Puck