



## Discovery Guide 2012



# A Midsummer Night's Dream

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[www.marinshakespeare.org](http://www.marinshakespeare.org)

## **INTRODUCTION**

William Shakespeare from Stratford-Upon-Avon, England, lived from 1564 to 1616. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was probably written in the year 1595 and is considered to be Shakespeare's finest comedy. It was first printed in 1600 in a single edition known as a "Quarto" and is also included in the 36 plays of the "First Folio" (the first printed collection of Shakespeare's plays) printed in 1623. Shakespeare used ideas from Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* and Roman writers Ovid and Apuleius but the main plot is Shakespeare's own invention. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is really four plays in one: 1) the marriage of Theseus, Duke of Athens to his captive Queen of the Amazons, Hippolyta; 2) the romantic entanglements of four young lovers; 3) a fight between the King and Queen of the Fairies; and 4) the rehearsing of a play called *Pyramus and Thisbe* by a group of tradesmen called "mechanicals" to be performed at Theseus' wedding.

## **Why Hawaii?**

Just like the ancient Greeks, the ancient Hawaiians believed in many powerful gods and goddesses who could control nature. Hawaii is a dream-like place full of dense forests where magical creatures like fairies might live. Hawaii is also a romantic destination for lovers on honeymoon where music and dance (the "hula") fill the air. Honolulu is a major hub of industry with many tradesmen or "mechanicals" and is also the birthplace of President Obama. He went to the Punahoa School, a place much like the young lovers in the play might have attended. Hawaii is a wondrous, beautiful and mysterious place where non-natives are warned to stay away from sacred places on the island, lest they be cursed by the gods; in the play, Puck causes mischief for the mortals when they stray too far into the magical forest. Hawaii is an exotic location where anything can happen which is why Marin Shakespeare Company has chosen this magical spot for our play. Aloha!



## The Story of the Play

Here the Duke, Theseus, is preparing for his wedding to Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons. Theseus is looking forward to his wedding day...and night!

**" ...four happy days bring in another moon -- but O, methinks, how slow this old moon wanes!"**

Hippolyta, on the other hand is less eager to marry Theseus, who has captured her in battle. So Theseus decides to send an assistant to "**stir up the Athenian youth to merriments**" in hopes that a good party will put Hippolyta in the marrying mood. He tries to sweet talk her by saying:

**"Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword, and won thy love doing thee injuries; but I will wed thee in another key, with pomp, with triumph, and with revelling."**



**"Full of vexation come I, with complaint against my child, my daughter Hermia."**

Egeus wants Hermia to marry Demetrius, but she wants to marry Lysander. Egeus believes that Lysander has "bewitched" Hermia. Egeus gives his daughter a choice:

**"I beg the ancient privilege of Athens; as she is mine, I may dispose of her; which shall be either to this gentleman or to her death, according to our law..."**

Thinking that death is a little extreme, Theseus tries to convince Hermia to obey her father and marry Demetrius. She responds by asking:

**"I beseech your grace that I may know the worst that may befall me in this case if I refuse to wed Demetrius?"**

Theseus adds a third choice to Egeus' unpleasant list: marry Demetrius, be put to death, or remain a virgin forever by becoming a nun. She continues to refuse Demetrius, saying:

**"So will I grow, so live, so die, my lord, ere I will yield my virgin patent up unto his lordship..."**

Seeing that Hermia is very upset, Theseus tells her to take a few days to think about it. She will have to make her final decision on his wedding day. Lysander tries to argue his case -- not only is he as "**well-possessed**" as Demetrius, but he is "**beloved of beauteous Hermia.**" Seeing this as his chance to make some points, Lysander adds:

**"Demetrius, I'll avouch it to his head, made love to Nedar's daughter, Helena, and won her soul..."**

Even though Theseus has heard these rumors, he still feels that Hermia should obey her father. He leaves with Hippolyta, Egeus, and Demetrius, to discuss some wedding business. Alone, Lysander and Hermia discuss their situation, and the plight of all lovers. Lysander sums it up:

**"The course of true love never did run smooth..."**

Finally, Lysander comes up with a plan -- the two crazy kids decide to meet the next night in the woods to run off and elope! Suddenly, Helena enters, and Hermia quickly changes the subject:

**"God speed, fair Helena! Whither away?"**

Well, Helena isn't too sure about this whole "fair" business -- considering Hermia stole her boyfriend! Helena asks Hermia to teach her how **to "sway the motion of Demetrius' heart."** Hermia, in an effort to convince Helena that she doesn't like Demetrius, tells Helena of her plans to elope. The two love birds wish Helena luck and leave. Alone, Helena says:

**"How happy some o'er other some can be!"**

She reflects on the nature of love a bit, and then decides to fight for her man!

**"I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight..."**

She thinks that ratting on her friend will win her some brownie points with Demetrius.



Elsewhere in on the island, a group of workers (also known as the Mechanicals) meet to prepare a play for the Duke's wedding. The group is lead by Quince the Carpenter. The other group members include Bottom the Weaver, Snug the Joiner, Flute the Bellows-mender, Snout the Tinker, and Starveling the Tailor. Quince tells the others that the play is:

**"The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe."**

He has assigned the role of Pyramus to Bottom. Quince tries to assign the remaining roles, but Bottom seems to think he can play every single character! Quince and Bottom finally agree that he is suited for no other part but Pyramus, and the cast agrees to meet in the forest the following evening to rehearse.



Meanwhile, in the woods outside of town, some fairies meet. Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, is a loyal subject of King Oberon, and he warns Queen Titania's fairies that:

**"Oberon is passing fell and wrath, because that she as her attendant hath a lovely boy stol'n from an Indian king..."**

It seems that Oberon wants the Indian boy for himself, but since Titania won't give up the child, the two are constantly arguing. Puck who starts bragging

about all the tricks he has played on humans and animals. Just at that moment King Oberon and Queen Titania enter explosively into the clearing.



"I met by moonlight, proud Titania!" says Oberon.

15) "What, jealous Oberon?"

she replies. Titania accuses Oberon of being attracted to the mortal, Hippolyta. Oberon, in turn, accuses her of being in love 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. He tells her she can restore the natural order of things if she simply gives him the changeling boy.

**"Set your heart at rest -- the fairy land buys not the child of me!"**

Titania explains how the boy's mother had been her dear friend who died during childbirth. She says she will never part with the boy, and she storms away with her fairies. Oberon promises to "**be revenged for this injury.**" He calls his servant Puck, and orders him to fetch a magic flower called "**"love-in-idleness."**" Oberon wants the flower because:

**"The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid will make or man or woman madly dote upon the next live creature that it sees."**

After Puck leaves to fetch the flower, Oberon reveals a plan to use the flower's juice on Titania so that she will give him the Indian boy. When left alone, Oberon hears voices and makes himself invisible. Demetrius and Helena enter arguing. Demetrius shouts:

**"I love thee not, therefore pursue me not."**

Unfortunately for her, Helena's plan didn't work as well as she had hoped. She throws herself at Demetrius' feet proclaiming her undying love, but he won't have any of it. She continues to try and 'woo' him, but he runs off into the woods in search of Hermia, and Helena must chase after him. Oberon vows to help Helena, saying:

**"Ere he do leave this grove thou shalt fly him, and he shall seek thy love."**

When Puck returns with the flower Oberon instructs him to use the love juice on the eye of **the "disdainful youth"** that just left the clearing. While Puck is searching for Demetrius and Helena, Oberon plans on finding Titania.

Elsewhere in the woods, Titania's fairies sing her to sleep. When she is asleep, Oberon sneaks in and squeezes the magic flower juice on Titania's eyes. He hopes that she will:

**"Wake when some vile thing is near!"**

Lysander and Hermia enter and decide to go to sleep for the night -- since they are lost! Lysander tries to sleep right by Hermia. She stands up for her modesty and makes him sleep "**further off.**" Puck finds Lysander, and thinking he has found Demetrius because of the garments he's wearing, enchanting the wrong man's eyes with the juice from the flower. He leaves to find Oberon. Demetrius runs past. Helena can no longer keep up, so she stops to rest. She sees Lysander on the ground and wakes him. Due to his love juice state, Lysander immediately falls in love with Helena, saying:

**"And run through fire I will for they sweet sake!"**

Lysander tells Helena he repents the "**tedious minutes**" he spent with Hermia, and that he now loves her. Helena is not happy with Lysander's little game:

**"Is't not enough, is't not enough, young man, that I did never, no, nor never can deserve a sweet look from Demetrius' eye but you must flout my insufficiency?"**

She runs off and Lysander follows her. Hermia awakes from a nightmare and finds herself alone. She is certain that something horrible has happened to Lysander, and so she runs off to try and find him.

When the Mechanicals enter to rehearse their play, Puck decides to play a trick on them.

**"What hempen homespuns have we swaggering here so near the cradle of the Fairy Queen?"**

When Pyramus (Bottom) steps offstage and then re-enters he is surprised that all his friends begin yelling "O monstrous! O strange!" Puck has used his magic to put an ass head on Bottom! Bottom thinks his friends are playing a trick on him, so he shouts to Snout:

**"What do you see? You see an ass head of your own, do you?"**

Bottom is so certain that they are trying to make an "**ass**" of him, that he decides to sing. He will prove to them that he isn't afraid! His singing wakes Titania, and she, in her enchanted state, immediately falls in love with him. She is so in love with Bottom that she won't let him even think about leaving the woods. Instead, she calls four of her fairies -- Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed -- to wait on Bottom.



**"Be kind and courteous to this gentleman..."**

Bottom greets each of the fairies, and then they lead him to Titania's bower. Puck finds Oberon, and tells him about the trick he played on Bottom, and how, in that moment,

**"Titania waked, and straightway loved an ass."**

Oberon is very pleased . . . until Demetrius and Hermia enter. As the two argue, it becomes clear that Puck has smitten the wrong Athenian. Hermia is certain Demetrius has killed Lysander. Demetrius assures her that he hasn't; Hermia leaves in a huff; and the arrogant young man falls asleep. Oberon is not a happy camper! He orders Puck to find Helena and bring her to Demetrius. Puck runs off to find Helena and Oberon puts the love juice on Demetrius' eyes. Puck announces that Helena is approaching, with Lysander in hot pursuit. Puck is really enjoying the mess he has created and says:

**"Lord, what fools these mortals be!"**

Lysander enters with Helena. He tries to convince her that he really does love her, but Helena believes Demetrius has joined with Lysander to humiliate her. When she stumbles on Demetrius, he wakes and tells Helena how beautiful she is and how much he loves her. By this point, Helena is really upset:

**"O spite! O Hell! I see you all are bent to set against me for your merriment."**

Off in the woods, Hermia hears all the commotion and follows the voices. When she spots Lysander she runs to her love and asks him why he left her. Lysander tells her that he hates her now and loves Helena. Well, that is the final straw for Helena. She is now certain that they are all ganging up on her. Hermia doesn't understand what is going on; she runs after Lysander as he leaves to fight Demetrius for Helena. She clings to him -- even as he tells her how much he now hates her. When Hermia finally gets the picture, she turns on Helena:

**"O me, you juggler, you canker-blossom, you thief of love! What, have you come by night and stol'n my love's heart from him?"**

Hermia tries to fight Helena but the boys hold Hermia back. They finally leave to settle their own dispute, Helena runs away, and Hermia follows in bewilderment. Oberon demands that Puck fix his mess. So Puck overcasts the night and prevents a serious fight between Demetrius and Lysander, leading each astray as he imitates the sound of the other's voice. Confused, exhausted and bewildered, all four lovers collapse together in a heap and sleep. Puck puts the antidote on Lysander's eyes so he will love Hermia again and leaves to find Oberon.

In another part of the wood, Titania and her fairies are pampering Bottom as Oberon watches. Titania finally tells her fairies to go away so she and Bottom can go to bed. Puck enters, and Oberon tells Puck he now has the Indian boy,

so he will release Titania from this curse. He orders Puck to remove the "head of this Athenian swain" so that:

**"All to Athens back again repair, and think no more of this night's accidents but as the fierce vexation of a dream."**

Oberon removes the spell from Titania. She wakes and wonders:

**"How it came this night that I sleeping here was found with these mortals on the ground?"**

As day breaks, Theseus, Hippolyta, Egeus, and their hunting party enter. They see the lovers on the ground and wake them. Lysander tries to explain the situation, and Egeus is furious that Lysander and Hermia were going to elope. Egeus wants Lysander punished. After Demetrius declares that he now really loves Helena, Theseus decides the lovers will be married along with himself and Hippolyta in a triple wedding. After the hunting party leaves Demetrius says:

**"It seems to me that yet we sleep, we dream."**

The lovers don't know what to think about the night's events. They head back to town to get married! Bottom wakes up, and describes his dream! He also heads back to town to find his friends and get ready for the play.



After the weddings the group gathers at the palace to watch the play. And what a play it is. Bottom, Flute, Quince, Snout, Snug and Starveling, perhaps the six worst actors ever, make every possible mistake. They miss entrances, get their lines wrong, and overact shamelessly. But *Pyramus and Thisbe* is a huge success because of the great passion, joy and love for the theatre that Bottom and his friends bring to the three pairs of lovers. When the play is over, everyone heads off to bed. Oberon and Titania and the fairies bless the three couples and Puck is left to talk to the audience:

**"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 but a dream!"**



## Characters in A Midsummer Night's Dream

**Duke Theseus:** Kind and generous. He must enforce the law, but talks privately with Egeus and Demetrius to get them to relent. He appreciates the effort that goes into the Mechanicals' play and the sincerity of the ordinary people. He lets his imagination turn good people's sincere effort into a good performance.

**Hippolyta:** A woman forced to marry a man she may not love. When Duke Theseus agrees to let Hermia marry the man she wants, Hippolyta's respect and love grow for her future husband.

**Egeus:** Hermia's father, who wants her to marry Demetrius.

**Hermia:** In love with Lysander. A prep school kid. Short, dark beauty. Spunky and likable.

**Lysander:** In love with Hermia, then Helena, then Hermia. A prep school kid. Sweet and with a sense of humor.

**Demetrius:** In love with Helena, then Hermia, then Helena. A prep school kid. Can be mean at times.

**Helena:** In love with Demetrius. A prep school kid. A tall, light beauty. Verbal abuse from Demetrius has made her think she's ugly. We have to hope that the love juice never wears off Demetrius, or she is in trouble.

**Peter Quince:** Playwright for the amateurs.

**Nick Bottom the Weaver:** Enthusiastic. Wants to play all the roles. A real ham.

**Francis Flute:** A young man. Really doesn't want to play Thisbe, the girl's part, in the play.

**Snug the Joiner:** "I am slow of study." Actually Snug does learn a few lines.

**Tom Snout the Tinker:** Literal-minded. Plays the part of the wall.

**Robin Starveling the Tailor:** Plays the part of the moon. Tough and not really much of an actor.

**Titania:** Queen of the Fairies. The natural world is greatly affected by her moods. She is the embodiment of feminine beauty and fertility.

**Oberon:** King of the Fairies. Romantic, powerful and likes to get everything he wants. He is the embodiment of male power and personality.

**Puck:** Oberon's servant. Loves to cause mischief.

**Fairies:** Loyal to Titania.

**A Changeling Child:** An orphan boy stolen from an Indian king. Both Titania and Oberon want him to be in their entourage.



# **For Teachers: Introducing A Midsummer Night's Dream**

## **Discussion Questions**

Things to think about when watching the play.

1. Consider the two courts--the Greek court of Duke Theseus and the Fairy court ruled by King Oberon and Queen Titania. What are the major characteristics of each? How do they differ and how are they the same?
2. What is Puck's role or function in the play?
3. What is the point of the Mechanicals' play, the play-within-the-play?
4. The title of the play is "A Midsummer Night's Dream": whose dream is it and what is the dream?

Things to think about after watching the play.

1. What was the most memorable part of the play for you?
2. Who was your favorite character and why?
3. Why do you think Theseus eventually allows Hermia to marry Lysander?
4. What would you have done had you been in Hermia's situation?
5. In your opinion, what is the most important theme of the play?

## Theatre Exercise

### Objectives:

- To introduce *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to students.
- To experience the text.
- To identify key characters in the play.
- To have fun and play.

### Materials:

Xerox each four-line dialogue, making a copy for each of four students. Objects to identify the characters (i.e.; scarves, caps) if possible remind students they are playing a part and help free students to act; they are not required but help make the exercise more fun.

### Activities:

Four groups of students will present four scenes from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that illustrate the relationships between the four lovers (Lysander, Demetrius, Helena, and Hermia). Assign a student to play each of the four roles. Give students 2 minutes to practice in groups of four. Students should memorize their line. They should 'act' it as fully as they can, freezing at the end of the line. Students should try to end in frozen poses that show their character's feelings towards another character. At the end, each group of four students will have created a tableau or "human sculpture." Have the first groups hold their poses until all four groups have created their human sculptures. After all groups have gone the class will begin to tell the story of the lovers' plight in their own words.

~ Group 1 ~

**Lysander:** (to Demetrius) "You have her father's love, Demetrius; let me have Hermia's."

**Demetrius:** (to Hermia) "Relent, sweet Hermia -- and, Lysander, yield thy crazed title to my certain right to marry Hermia."

**Hermia:** (to Theseus, the King) "But I beseech your grace that I may know the worst that may befall me in this case if I refuse to wed Demetrius."

**Helena:** (to Hermia) "Demetrius loves your fair: O Happy fair! O teach me how you look and with what art you sway the motion of Demetrius' heart."

~ Group 2 ~

**Lysander:** (to Hermia) "Fair love, you faint with wandr'ing in the wood; we'll rest us, Hermia, if you think it good, and tarry for the comfort of the day."

**Demetrius:** (to Helena) "I love thee not, therefore pursue me not. Hence, get thee gone, and follow me no more."

**Helena:** (to Demetrius) "I am sick when I look not on you."

**Hermia:** (to Lysander) "Good night, sweet friend: Thy love ne'er alter till thy sweet life ends!"

~ Group 3 ~

**Lysander:** (to Demetrius) "Demetrius be not so -- For you love Hermia. In Hermia's love I yield you up my part: And yours of Helena to me bequeath, whom I do love, and will do till my death."

**Demetrius:** (to Helena) "O Helen, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine! To what, my love, shall I compare thine eyne?"

**Helena:** (to Demetrius) "O spite! O hell! I see you all are bent to set against me for your merriment. If you were civil and knew courtesy, you would not do me thus much injury."

**Hermia:** (to Helena) "O me, you juggler, you canker-blossom, you thief of love! What, have you come by night and stol'n my love's heart, Lysander's heart, from me?"

~ Group 4 ~

**Lysander:** (to Hermia) "And, which is more than all these boasts can be, I am beloved of beauteous Hermia."

**Demetrius:** (to Helena) "And all the faith, the virtue of my heart, the object and the pleasure of mine eye, is only Helena."

**Helena:** (to Demetrius) "And I have found Demetrius like a jewel, mine own."

**Hermia:** (to Lysander) "Lysander has planted the blossom of love in my eye once again."

## Online Resources

[www.absoluteshakespeare.com](http://www.absoluteshakespeare.com)  
[www.hulaon.org](http://www.hulaon.org)  
[www.shakespeare-online.com](http://www.shakespeare-online.com)  
[www.shakespearewords.com](http://www.shakespearewords.com)

## Memorable Quotes from A Midsummer Night's Dream

“The course of true love never did run smooth.” 1.1 -- Lysander

“So quick bright things come to confusion.” 1.1 -- Lysander

“Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind, and therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.” 1.1 -- Helena

“The most lamentable comedy, and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe.”  
1.2 -- Quince

“Over hill, over dale, through bush, through brier, over park, over pale, through fold, through fire.” 2.1 -- Fairy

“I'll met by moonlight, proud Titania.” 2.1 -- Oberon

“I'll put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes.” 2.1 -- Puck

“I know a bank where the wild thyme blows, where oxlips and the nodding violet grows, quite overcanopied with luscious woodbine, with sweet musk, and with eglantine.” 2.1 -- Oberon

“You spotted snakes with double tongue, thorny hedgehogs, be not seen.  
Newts and blindworms, do no wrong, come not near our Fairy Queen.” 2.2 --  
Fairy

“Lord what fools these mortals be.” 3.2 -- Puck

“And though she be but little, she is fierce.” -- Helena

“My Oberon, what visions have I seen! Methought I was enamored of an ass.”  
4.1 -- Titania

“The lunatic the lover and the poet are of imagination all compact.” 5.1 --  
Theseus

“...That is the true beginning of our end.” 5.1 -- Quince [prologue]

“The iron tongue of midnight hath told twelve. lovers, to bed; ‘tis almost fairy  
time.” 5.1 -- Theseus

“If we shadows have offended, think but this and all is mended...” 5.1 – Puck



Aloha!

We hope you enjoyed the show!!