

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

A PLAY IN ONE ACT ADAPTED BY
Lindsay Price

FROM THE ORIGINAL BY
William Shakespeare



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a comedic love adventure written by William Shakespeare. Four young lovers end up lost in the woods along with a group of amateur actors. They each unknowingly come into contact with a band of fairies — the king and queen of which are in a feud. Mix in a little love juice and magic happens!

Background

This is an annotated and edited version of the original text by William Shakespeare. It uses Shakespeare's language but is cut so that it can be performed in about an hour.

Shakespeare Fast Facts

- ★ His parents were John and Mary Shakespeare.
- ★ He was born in 1564 and died in 1616.
- ★ He went to school at the King's New School in Stratford.
- ★ He married Anne Hathaway when he was 18 and she was 26 in 1582. Their first child was born six months later.
- ★ There is no documentation that Shakespeare went to university.
- ★ His daughter Susanna was born in 1583 and twins Hamnet and Judith were born in 1585. Hamnet died in 1596.
- ★ 1585 to 1592 are often called "the Lost Years" as there is little known about what Shakespeare did during this time.
- ★ He spent time as an actor. There is evidence he acted in Ben Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour* in 1598 and was still acting by 1605.
- ★ The first known play produced in London was *Henry VI Part II* perhaps in 1590-1591.

- ★ Quatro of *Titus Andronicus* appears in 1594.
- ★ In 1596 he applied for a Coat of Arms.
- ★ In 1597 he bought the largest house in Stratford and bought three more properties over the next eight years.
- ★ Quatros of his plays with his name on the title page start appearing in 1598.
- ★ He became a shareholder of the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1599. This company was renamed The King's Men when they received royal patronage from King James I.
- ★ His plays were performed in The Globe Theatre.
- ★ He wrote at least 37 plays and poems and a collection of Sonnets.
- ★ He probably retired and returned to Stratford in either 1610 or 1611.
- ★ He died in April 1616.

Shakespeare Oddities

- ★ There is no proof that Shakespeare's wife or children ever joined him during his time in London.
- ★ In his will, Shakespeare left most of his estate to his daughter and left his wife his "second best bed." Is this an insult? Is this the bed they always slept in with the best bed kept for company?
- ★ There is a curse on his tombstone: *"Good friend for Jesus sake forbear, to dig the dust enclosed here. Blessed be the man that spares these stones, and cursed be he that moves my bones."*

Editor/Annotator Bio

Lindsay Price has been involved with theatre education for over 25 years as a playwright, adjudicator, workshop instructor, resource writer, curriculum supervisor, professional development creator, and keynote speaker. Her plays have been performed in schools all over the world with over 1000 productions a year.

Synopsis

A wedding is about to take place between Theseus, the Duke of Athens, and Hippolyta, the Queen of the Amazons. Egeus, an Athenian man, demands that Theseus force his daughter Hermia to marry Demetrius. But Hermia doesn't want to marry Demetrius; she loves Lysander. They plan to run away and share their news with Helena, who loves Demetrius. Helena decides to tell Demetrius.

Meanwhile, a group of workers are dividing up the parts for a play they are rehearsing for the Duke's wedding. They plan to meet in the forest for their next rehearsal.

Also in the forest are a group of Fairies. The King and Queen of the Fairies, Oberon and Titania, are fighting because Oberon wants a changeling boy from Titania and Titania refuses to give him up. Oberon plans to punish Titania by dropping love juice onto her eyelids while she sleeps. She will fall in love with the first thing she sees when she awakes.

Hermia and Lysander run away into the forest. Demetrius chases them, and Helena chases Demetrius. Oberon sees Demetrius treat Helena poorly, and he tells his servant Puck to put his love juice on Demetrius' eyes as well. But Puck mistakenly puts the juice on Lysander's eyes, causing him to fall in love with Helena. In trying to fix the mistake, Demetrius also gets the love juice and now both men chase after Helena, who thinks they are trying to trick her. Hermia has no idea why Lysander has abandoned her, and blames Helena. Puck confuses the lovers until they fall asleep and when they wake, Demetrius loves Helena, and Lysander loves Hermia.

At the same time, the workers rehearse in the forest and end up near a sleeping Titania. Puck plays a trick on them and changes Nick Bottom's head into that of a donkey. He has no idea what has happened, but his friends run away in fear. The commotion wakes Titania, who falls in love with the first thing she sees — Bottom with

the donkey head. She is so in love with Bottom that she no longer cares about her feud with Oberon and gives him whatever he wants.

Everything and everyone goes back to normal. Puck removes the donkey head from Bottom, the workers reunite and present their play to the Duke, Lysander is able to marry Hermia and Demetrius marries Helena, and Oberon and Titania stop fighting.

Puck speaks to the audience at the end and suggests that if anyone is offended by the play, to think of the whole thing as nothing but a dream.

Characters

THESEUS: Duke of Athens

HIPPOLYTA: Queen of the Amazons

EGEUS: Hermia's Father

PHILOSTRATE: Servant

HERMIA: In love with Lysander

LYSANDER: In love with Hermia

HELENA: In love with Demetrius

DEMETRIUS: In love with Hermia

NICK BOTTOM: A Weaver

PETER QUINCE: A Carpenter

FRANCIS FLUTE: A Bellows-mender

TOM SNOOT: A Tinker

ROBIN STARVELING: A Tailor

SNUG: A Joiner

OBERON: King of the Fairies

TITANIA: Queen of the Fairies

PUCK: (aka Robin Goodfellow) Oberon's attendant

PEASEBLOSSOM: Attendant to Titania

COBWEB: Attendant to Titania

MOTH: Attendant to Titania

MUSTARDSEED: Attendant to Titania

Themes

Love, Relationships, Jealousy, Appearance vs Reality, Order vs Disorder

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ What is your definition of love?
- ★ Why do people fall in love?
- ★ Do you believe in love at first sight?
- ★ Do you believe in soul mates?
- ★ Should children listen to their parents when it comes to relationships?
- ★ What would happen if you wanted to date someone against your parents' wishes?
- ★ What would you do if your parents refused to let you date someone?
- ★ Have you ever been jealous of someone's relationship?
- ★ Do you like it when things are ordered, or chaotic? Explain your answer.
- ★ Do you believe in the supernatural? Why or why not?

Pre-Read Activities

Love Tableaux Series

- ★ In groups, students will identify and discuss three words that demonstrate the word “Love.”
 - » Alternatively, you could have a class discussion to create a list of words, and then groups can choose three words from the list.
- ★ Groups will then create a tableau for each of those words.
 - » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?
- ★ Lastly, groups will create transitions between each tableau to form a series.
- ★ Groups will present their series to the class. Those watching should try to identify the words each group chooses to visualize.

Order vs Disorder Tableaux Series

- ★ In groups, students will identify and discuss how they would visualize order and disorder. What images demonstrate order? What is your definition of order? What images demonstrate disorder? What is your definition of disorder? Is order necessarily a good thing? Is disorder necessarily a bad thing?
- ★ Groups will create three tableaux:
 - » The first image will show different versions of order.
 - » The second image will show different versions of disorder.
 - » In the third image, students will choose order or disorder. Which is your preferred state?
- ★ Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?
- ★ Lastly, groups will create transitions between each tableau to form a series.

- ★ Groups will present their series to the class. Discuss the third image. What do the majority of students choose? Discuss as a group: Is order necessarily good and is disorder necessarily bad?

Shakespeare's Language

- ★ Divide students into groups and give each group five words from the play that aren't used in a modern context.
- ★ Each group will discuss and decide on the definition of their words and then use the words in a one-minute scene.
 - » If they have no idea, tell them to make an educated guess based on the how the word looks and sounds.
- ★ Share with students the definition of their words. How close did they get?
- ★ Some suggested words: apace, vexation, filched, betwixt, lodestar, extempore, changeling, perforce, quern, perchance, roundel, pard, troth, swoon, ousel, rend, sooth
 - » The definitions of all of these words are found in the notes section of the play.

Love Potion Discussion & Original Scene 1

- ★ Divide students into groups. Groups will discuss and decide on the following: If you had access to a love potion that caused someone to fall in love with the first person they see, would you use it? Why or why not?
- ★ Groups will create a one-minute scene that demonstrates their decision.

Love Potion Original Scene 2

- ★ Divide students into pairs. Pairs will write a short scene in which two guys have been given a love potion to fall in love with the first girl they see. They both fall in love with the same girl, who thinks the boys are teasing and mocking her. How will the scene resolve?

Parents vs Teens Original Scene

- ★ Divide students into groups. The groups will discuss typical conflicts between parents and teens. How do parents try to control teens? How do teenagers try to resist being controlled?
- ★ Based on their discussion students will create a one-minute scene to demonstrate their findings.

Research Exercise

- ★ Divide students into groups and give them a limited amount of time to research an aspect of William Shakespeare. Some suggestions include:
 - » Early Life
 - » As an actor
 - » One of Shakespeare's contemporaries
 - » Member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men
 - » The Globe Theatre
 - » His first/last play
 - » Writing style
 - » Whether or not he wrote his plays
- ★ Decide how students will share their knowledge. Will they create a scene based on what they've learned? An oral presentation with a visual component? Will they create a quiz? Give students a way to demonstrate what they learned.

Jealousy Reflection

- ★ Students will write a reflection about how they deal with jealousy. Consider the following questions:
 - » What is your definition of jealousy?

- » Are you a jealous person? Describe a jealous moment.
- » Do you have friends/family who are jealous? How do they behave?
- » Is jealousy always a negative thing? Why or why not?

Close Reading Analysis Questions

Close Reading is an analysis tool. Students read a text multiple times for in-depth comprehension, striving to understand not only **what** is being said but **how** it's being said and **why**. Close reading takes a student from story and character to drawing conclusions on author intention. Close reading prompts students to flex their thinking skills:

- ★ It teaches students to engage with a text.
- ★ It teaches students to be selective. We can't highlight everything in the text, only the most important elements.
- ★ It teaches students to make educated decisions. All conclusions and opinions have to be backed up with a text example.

Have students analyze *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in groups, using the following text dependent questions.

Read One: What is happening?

1. What does Egeus threaten Hermia with, if she doesn't marry Demetrius?
2. What do Hermia and Helena decide to do?
3. Who does Helena love?
4. What is Snug's occupation?
5. What part does Quince give to Bottom?
6. Why is Oberon mad at Titania?
7. What is Puck's other name?

8. What will the juice do when it's dropped on the eyelids of someone while they're sleeping?
9. Who does Puck mistakenly use the love juice on?
10. What is the result of this mistake?
11. What does Puck do to Bottom?
12. What happens when Demetrius gets the love juice on his eyelids?
13. Who does Hermia call a "canker blossom"?
14. How does Puck fix the mix-up between the lovers?
15. Who does Theseus decide Hermia should marry in the end?
16. What is the name of the play that the workers present?

Read Two: How does it happen?

1. This is a cut version of the original Shakespeare text. What are the benefits of performing a cut version? What are the disadvantages?
2. In the full version of the play, the workers are referred to as the "rude mechanicals." What does this phrase mean? What's the definition of the word "rude" in this context? Once you learn the definition, how does it fit the worker characters?
3. Bottom uses words incorrectly and mixes up meanings. Find three examples of Bottom's language mix-ups. What does this tell you about his personality? Why do you think the playwright demonstrates Bottom's personality through language?
4. The Fairies mostly speak in verse while the workers speak in prose. Why did the playwright choose to give these two groups a different language form?
5. Compare and contrast the way Oberon speaks to the way that Bottom speaks. What are the differences? Cite the text to support your answer.

6. Based on his language, how would you costume Puck? Cite the text to support your answer.
7. What mood does the language create in the play? How is the mood different between the scenes in the Athenian court and the forest?
8. What is significant about the line, "Be advised, fair maid. To you your father should be as a god"?
9. What is significant about the line, "But I will aggravate my voice so that I will roar you as gently as any nightingale"?
10. What is significant about the line, "You draw me, you hard-hearted adamant, but yet you draw not iron; for my heart is true as steel"?

Read Three: Why does it happen?

1. In your opinion, why is the play called *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?
2. In your opinion, does the play have a happy ending? Why or why not?
3. What is the playwright trying to say about love? Cite the text to support your answer.
4. What is the playwright trying to say about relationships? Cite the text to support your answer.
5. What is going to happen next to Demetrius and Helena? Will they remain in love? Why or why not?
6. Why does the playwright include Puck's final speech? In your opinion, why would the audience be offended? Why would it be important to the playwright that the audience "be friends"?
7. How does the playwright want you to respond to this play?

Post-Read Questions

- ★ What is one question that you still have about the play?
- ★ What's one word that you don't understand?
- ★ Which character resonated with you the most and why?
- ★ Do you recognize yourself in any of the characters?
- ★ If you could change the ending, what would you change?

Post-Read Activities

Compare and Contrast

- ★ Divide students into groups and have them compare and contrast the first scene in the original text to the cut version that they have just read. What are the differences? What's been cut? Why would the editor make the choices that they did?
- ★ Groups will share their findings.

Set Design

- ★ The play takes place in two places, Athens and a forest. How would you create a set design to accommodate two very different locations? Have students describe or draw a set for the play which incorporates aspects of both locations.

Shakespeare's Language

- ★ Divide students into groups and have them find three words in the script which we use today but had a completely different meaning in Shakespeare's time.
- ★ Groups will create a short scene in which they use their chosen words with the modern definition and the definition from Shakespeare's time.

Helena and Hermia Original Scene

- ★ In the play, Helena is despondent over the fact that Demetrius has fallen out of love with her and fallen in love with Hermia. Hermia must choose between marrying Demetrius or being forced to join a convent. Write a modern scene in which two friends discuss how a boy has fallen in love with one girl, and out of love with another.

Character Interpretation

- ★ The great thing about the fairy characters is that they're wide open to interpretation.
- ★ Have students do a Google image search on the character of Oberon. Look at the different interpretations, the different actor types playing the character, and the different costumes.
- ★ Students will then write a reflection on their findings. What conclusions can you draw based on the different portrayals of the same character?

Slapstick Pyramus and Thisbe

- ★ There is a lot of room for slapstick humour with the mechanicals.
- ★ Divide students into groups and have them research examples of slapstick (e.g., Three Stooges) and then have each group stage the Pyramus and Thisbe scene in that style.

Character Costume Design

- ★ Have students choose a character and design their costume.
 - » Based on their personality, what would they wear? What pieces of clothing defines them? What colours and textures would they choose?
- ★ Students will draw a colour costume rendering.

Love Discussion & What happens next Scene

- ★ Discuss the notion of love in the play. Are any of the characters really in love?
 - » Does Hippolyta love Theseus, and if she doesn't, what does that mean for their marriage?
 - » Why doesn't Egeus care that Hermia loves Lysander?
 - » What kind of person is Demetrius that he can switch his feelings from Helena to Hermia so easily? Did he ever truly love Helena?
 - » Are Oberon and Titania in love? What does it say about their relationship that Oberon wants to trick Titania into falling in love with a creature?
 - » Is it fair to put people under a spell to make them fall in love?
 - » Does the Pyramus and Thisbe scene in Act V mock love?
- ★ Based on the discussions, divide students into groups and have them create a "what happens next" scene for a relationship in the play. Will they remain in love? Why or why not? What's going to happen next?

Staged Scenes

- ★ Divide students into small groups and assign each group a scene from the play, or a short moment within a scene.
- ★ Give students time to rehearse.
- ★ Each group will present their moment.
- ★ Discuss the scenes afterward.
 - » How did seeing the scenes acted out differ from reading them?
 - » Why is it important to act a scene as well as read it?
 - » Did any of the presentations offer a different interpretation of the characters than yours?

Character Physical Action

- ★ As a class, discuss the personality traits of each group of characters — the lovers, the fairies, and the rude mechanicals. What are the differences between the groups?
- ★ Ask students: How do we physicalize personality? Use one character as a model.
- ★ For example, how would you describe Oberon? He's a King, and he always wants to be in control. Based on that, how would Oberon stand? How would he move? How would he gesture?
- ★ Divide students into groups and give each group a character, without letting the other groups know.
- ★ Each group, using the personality trait list for their character, must discuss and decide upon a stance, a walk, and a gesture for this character.
- ★ Each group will present. Each person in the group will enter the space with their walk, take a stance, gesture, and then walk off.
- ★ Those watching must guess the character simply by looking at the physical action.
- ★ Ask students: Why do we need to give characters a specific physical action?