

ON STAGE AT PARK SQUARE THEATRE  
November 9 - December 18 2015



# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

**Study  
Guide**

Written by WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE  
Directed by JEFF HALL-FLAVIN

**3M** STUDENT  
SERIES

  
**PARK SQUARE**  
THEATRE

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

## Contributors

### Park Square Theatre Study Guide Staff

#### CO-EDITORS

Marcia Aubineau\*  
Cheryl Hornstein\*

#### COPY EDITOR

Marcia Aubineau\*

#### CONTRIBUTORS

Marcia Aubineau\*, Amy Christensen,  
Peytie McCandless, Dr. Virginia  
McFerran\*, Tinne Rosenmeier\*, Lara  
Stauff\*, Jill Tammen\*

#### COVER DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Naomi Campion (Education Sales and  
Services Manager)  
& Emilie Moravec, Alicia Wiesneth (Former  
Education Sales and Services Managers)

*\*Past or Present Member of the  
Park Square Theatre Teacher Advisory Board*

### Contact Us

#### PARK SQUARE THEATRE

408 Saint Peter Street, Suite 110  
Saint Paul, MN 55102

EDUCATION: 651.291.9196

[education@parksquaretheatre.org](mailto:education@parksquaretheatre.org)

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

If you have any questions or comments about  
this guide or Park Square Theatre's Education  
Program, please contact

Mary Finnerty, Director of Education

PHONE 651.767.8494

EMAIL [finnerty@parksquaretheatre.org](mailto:finnerty@parksquaretheatre.org)

### Park Square Theatre Teacher Advisory Board

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University of St. Thomas, retired

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LEAP High Schools

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# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

## Study Guide

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# An Overview

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

**A** *Midsummer Night's Dream* is a play describing the comic misadventures of two pairs of lovers who become lost in a dark wood and fall under the power of sprites. To Shakespeare's audiences, the play's title was a clue that the play might be about romance, magic, and madness. Midsummer Night was thought to be one of the nights of the year when sprites were especially powerful. It was also a time when people dreamed of their true loves and sometimes went insane.

Although the play is about kings, queens, fairies, magic spells, and ancient Athens, Shakespeare's characters and themes still speak to today's audiences. For example, in the characters of the star-crossed lovers, Shakespeare skillfully illustrates the feelings and actions experienced by two people who are infatuated with each other. At the same time, he shows how silly and ridiculous those actions may seem to someone who does not share these feelings. He sums up the attitude of the outside observer in the often-quoted words of Puck, "what fools these mortals be!" (III, ii).

The plot is based on a classical model: a grumpy old father blocks the love affair between a young man and a young woman. Complications and confusions follow, until finally, after some dramatic reversals, the lovers are united.

This tale of frustrated love and mistaken identity makes audiences laugh at the ridiculous ease with which lovers change the object of their affection, while still believing that their feelings are completely sincere. Although it is a comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* also poses some profound and difficult questions: What is love? How and why do people fall in and out of love? How is love related to questions of identity – both of the lover and the beloved? Are lovers in control of themselves and their destinies? Which is more real, the "daylight" world of reason and law, or the "nighttime" world of passion and chaos?



Photo by P. Ytsma

Oberon played by Paul C. De Cordova\* and Puck played by Brian Sostek\*

\*Member of Actors' Equity



# An Act-by-Act Summary

## ACT I

The play takes place in ancient Greece where Theseus, Duke of Athens, is planning his wedding to the Amazon Queen, Hippolyta, whom he has defeated in battle. Egeus, one of his noblemen, appears with his daughter, Hermia, because Egeus wants the Duke to force Hermia to marry Demetrius, her father's choice. But Hermia loves Lysander, and the lovers plot to elope. Unfortunately, they reveal their plan to Hermia's friend, Helena, who is in love with Demetrius who does not return her affection. To win his favor, Helena tells Demetrius of Hermia and Lysander's plan. All four young people enter the forest that night: Hermia and Lysander eloping, Demetrius in pursuit of Hermia, and Helena in pursuit of Demetrius.

In another part of Athens, six working men meet to practice a tragedy they hope to perform at Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding; however, it is comically obvious that they have little dramatic experience. Directed by Peter Quince, a carpenter, two members of their troupe will play the star-crossed lovers Pyramus and Thisbe, another will play a lion, a fourth will play the moon, and the fifth will play a wall. Nick Bottom, the weaver, wants to play all the parts himself.

## ACT II

In the forest, Oberon, the fairy king, quarrels with his queen, Titania, over custody of an orphaned boy that he wants for a page. He decides to play a trick on her, so he tells Puck, a mischievous sprite, to put juice from a magic flower on Titania's eyes while she sleeps to make her fall in love with the next living thing she sees.

Demetrius appears looking for Hermia. He is followed by Helena who begs for his love, but he harshly rejects her. Oberon feels sorry for her, so he instructs Puck to put some of the magic flower juice on the eyes of Demetrius to make him fall in love with Helena. Puck follows his order, but he gets the wrong young man—he puts the flower juice in Lysander's eyes, and when Lysander awakes, seeing Helena, he forgets his past love, Hermia, and falls in love with Helena instead.

## ACT III

In another part of the forest Bottom and his friends meet to rehearse their play. Puck finds them close to where Titania lies asleep, so he transforms Bottom's head into that of a donkey, scaring all of Bottom's friends away. When Titania wakes, she sees Bottom and falls in love with him.

Puck tells Oberon how well his plan is working, but when Demetrius enters, still in pursuit of Hermia, Oberon realizes Puck's mistake. He tells Puck to find Helena, while he puts the flower juice on Demetrius' eyes himself. The juice works, causing both Demetrius and Lysander to be in love with the previously rejected Helena. When both young men profess their love for her, Helena thinks they are making fun of her. Hermia, now rejected, is stunned and angry causing her to insult Helena. The women bicker and so do the men; everyone is angry and quick to fight. Puck thinks it is all great fun, but Oberon has another flower that will set things right. This he instructs Puck to use on Lysander to make him love Hermia again.

## ACT IV

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# An Act-by-Act Summary

CONTINUED

Oberon watches the effects of his trick on Titania as she and her fairy attendants dote on the absurd looking Bottom. Eventually Bottom and Titania fall asleep. When Puck returns, Oberon has him break the spell on Titania, but Puck does not transform Bottom back to a human until Titania sees that she has been fawning over an ass. She and Oberon are reunited, and she agrees to give Oberon the boy to be his page.

As night wanes, Theseus, Hippolyta, and Egeus enter the forest to the baying of Theseus' hounds and discover the four young lovers asleep. When they awake, the four lovers are confused but happy to find that each is in love with someone who loves them back. Egeus is furious to find Hermia and Lysander together and demands a father's vengeance, but Theseus, upon seeing their joy and hearing that Demetrius no longer loves Hermia, declares that the two couples will be married the next day. This pleases Hippolyta whose uncertainty about their forthcoming marriage begins to soften.

Bottom also awakes remembering his fantastic night with the fairy queen, not quite certain if it has all been a dream. His friends find him and rejoice that he is himself again just in time to perform in their play for the Duke and his bride.

## ACT V

The newly married couples celebrate at Theseus's palace. Theseus is amused by the four lovers' stories about what has happened and is sure they have dreamed the whole thing. Bottom and his friends perform their tragic play for the Duke and his guests although their performance is so misguided that it becomes comic. When it is over and everyone has gone to bed, the fairies slip into the palace. Oberon and Titania bless the three marriages, but it is Puck who has the last word.

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**By Lara Stauff and Jill Tammen**

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# Getting to Know the Characters

The characters of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* originate from three distinctly different backgrounds and worlds of experience. The parallels between these worlds and the similarities between the characters in each world are reinforced in this production by having actors transform into different characters from different worlds. The three worlds of the play are the Court, the Forest, and the Mechanicals.

## The Worlds of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

**The Court** – The nobility of Athens: Theseus, Hippolyta, and the lovers are all members of the ancient court of Athens. They live in a world of privilege and order.

**The Forest** – The fairies dwell in this untamed world. Oberon, Titania, and Puck embody the magical power of the forest and its transformative possibilities.

**The Mechanicals** – A weaver, a carpenter, a joiner, a tailor, and a bellows-mender are common folk from the town. Their world is concrete and straightforward, as are the characters themselves.

### **Theseus:** The Duke of Athens

Shakespeare often borrowed characters and plotlines from other stories. In this case Shakespeare took a character from Greek mythology, Theseus, to signal to his audience that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is set in a mythic Greek past. At the start of the play, Theseus has recently returned to Athens after conquering the Amazons (a race of warrior women), and he is about to marry their queen.



Theseus and Oberon played by Ansa Akyea\*

### **Oberon:** The King of the Fairies

Oberon begins the play at odds with his wife, Titania, because he wants a young Indian boy under her care to be his page. Oberon plans to get Titania to give him the boy by using the love juice to make her fall in love with a hideous beast or silly animal. He won't reverse the potion until she promises to give up the boy.



Hippolyta and Titania played by Andrea Wollenberg\*

### **Hippolyta:** The legendary Queen of the Amazons

Hippolyta, like Theseus, is a character from myths and legends that Shakespeare borrowed for his play. She must marry Theseus because he defeated her in combat.

### **Titania:** The Queen of the Fairies

Titania refuses to give up the Indian boy in her care because she promised his mother she would look after him. She has sworn to avoid Oberon completely until he stops asking her for the boy.

\*Member of Actors' Equity

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# Getting to Know the Characters

## CONTINUED



Egeus and Peter Quince  
played by Craig Johnson

### **Egeus:** A nobleman in Theseus' court

Egeus comes to Theseus with a complaint: under the laws of Athens, fathers have control of their daughters' marriages. Egeus' daughter, Hermia, refuses to marry the man her father has chosen. Egeus asks Theseus to impose the death penalty on his daughter if she won't marry Demetrius.

### **Peter Quince:** A carpenter

Quince is the leader of the Mechanicals, a group of craftsmen who have been selected to produce a play. He plays the Prologue in *Pyramus and Thisbe*.

### **Hermia:** Egeus' daughter, a young noblewoman of Athens

Both Demetrius and Lysander are in love with Hermia. She defies her father's wish that she marry Demetrius because she is in love with Lysander. Instead, she and Lysander plan to run away and get married.

### **Robin Starveling:** A tailor

He is chosen to play Thisbe's mother in the Mechanicals' play. He ends up portraying Moonshine.

### **Mustardseed**

One of the fairies whom Titania orders to wait on Bottom after she falls in love with him.



Hermia, Starveling and  
Mustardseed played by Hope Cervantes\*



Lysander, Francis Flute and Mote  
played by Ricardo Vázquez\*

### **Lysander:** A young nobleman of Athens, in love with Hermia

Lysander is in love with Hermia and won't let anything stand in the way of their love. He plots with her to elope and stay with his aunt where the laws of Athens won't prevent their marriage.

### **Francis Flute:** A bellows-mender

He is chosen to play the young lady Thisbe in the Mechanicals' play, much to his dismay, as he is starting to grow a beard.

### **Mote**

One of the fairies whom Titania orders to wait on Bottom after she falls in love with him.



# Getting to Know the Characters

## CONTINUED



### Demetrius: A young nobleman of Athens

Demetrius has previously wooed Helena, but now he is pursuing Hermia instead. Emboldened by Egeus' approval of him, Demetrius is undeterred by the fact that Hermia does not love him.

### Tom Snout: A tinker

He is chosen to play Thisbe's father. He ends up playing the part of the Wall dividing the two lovers.

### Peaseblossom

One of the fairies whom Titania orders to wait on Bottom after she falls in love with him.

Demetrius, Tom Snout, and Peaseblossom played by Dustin Bronson\*

### Helena: A young woman of Athens, in love with Demetrius

Demetrius wooed Helena and she fell in love with him. Now he says he no longer loves her. She decides to tell him of Lysander and Hermia's plot to run away, hoping he'll have a change of heart. Like Demetrius himself, she will pursue her love even if he doesn't love her back.

### Snug: A joiner

He is chosen to play the lion and worries his roar will frighten the ladies in the audience and get the group in trouble.

### Cobweb

One of the fairies whom Titania orders to wait on Bottom after she falls in love with him.



Helena, Snug and Cobweb played by Adia Morris\*

\*Member of Actors' Equity

CONTINUED...

# Getting to Know the Characters

## CONTINUED



Philostrate and Puck played by  
Dave Gangler

**Philostrate:** Master of the Revels in the court of Theseus

Philostrate is responsible for organizing the entertainment for the Duke's marriage celebration.

**Puck:** Also known as Robin Goodfellow, a mischievous fairy who delights in playing pranks

Puck is Oberon's assistant, and his antics are responsible for many of the complications that propel the plot. At Oberon's bidding, Puck sprinkles "love juice" in the eyes of various characters, causing them to fall in love with the first person they see. Puck makes mistakes and creates conflicts that Oberon never intended.

**Nick Bottom :** A weaver

Bottom is part of the Mechanicals who have decided to put on a play for Theseus' wedding celebration. Bottom is not the director, but he can't resist taking charge and offering to play all the parts himself, convinced he can play them better than anyone. In the Mechanicals' play, he portrays Pyramus.



Nick Bottom played by Terry  
Hempleman\*

By Lara Stauff, Peytie McCandless, and Jill Tammen

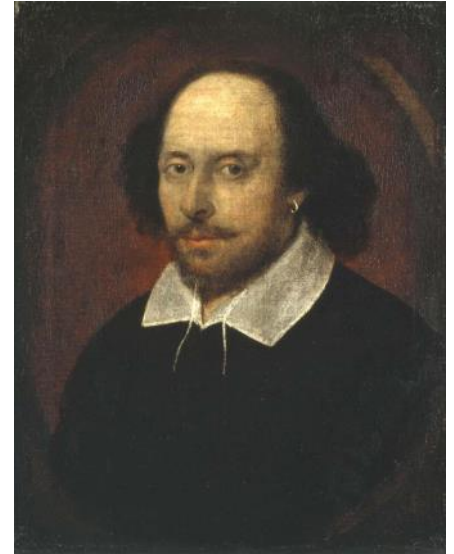
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# Shakespeare: Man of Mystery

*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.*

This startling epitaph of William Shakespeare both stirs curiosity about the world's best-known playwright and also discourages exhumation and scientific investigation of his remains. Did he foresee a time of DNA testing and forensic examination?

According to popular belief, Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564 and died on April 23, 1616 at the age of 52. During those years, Shakespeare wrote 38 plays, 154 sonnets, and 2 narrative poems that have survived. He is considered the greatest playwright in the English language, and unlike other great playwrights, Shakespeare excelled at both comedy and tragedy. His body of work includes not only famous tragedies such as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Othello*, but also wonderful comedies such as *Taming of the Shrew*, *Twelfth Night*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.



Portrait of William Shakespeare

Who was the mysterious man behind the work? Shakespeare was born and grew up in the small town of Stratford-upon-Avon about 100 miles from London. The son of a glove-maker, John Shakespeare, and his wife Mary Arden, William was the third of eight children. He received an excellent education in Stratford, but as far as we know, he never attended college. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582 at the age of 18. His first daughter, Susanna, was born in 1583, and twins, Judith and Hamnet, were born in 1585. Because so little is known about Shakespeare's private life, some refer to the next few years as his "lost years."

Shakespeare burst upon the London theater scene in 1590 and established himself as an actor and a playwright. He was a member of an acting company that often played before Queen Elizabeth I. During her reign, while Shakespeare was still in his twenties and thirties, he created his most popular comedies such as *Taming of the Shrew*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night*. After King James came to the throne in 1603, Shakespeare wrote some of his greatest tragedies including *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*. Even in his darkest tragedies, however, Shakespeare frequently included scenes of comic relief which allowed the audience to laugh in moments of high tension.

Shakespeare's plays were often performed in the Globe Theater. This magnificent theater could hold several thousand people who either stood on the ground or sat in balconies surrounding the open courtyard.

A prolific and popular playwright, Shakespeare wrote and produced some of the most remarkable plays the world has ever known. He enjoyed royal patronage and was both artistically and financially successful during his own lifetime because his productions appealed to people from all walks of life, not just upper class or literary types. His plays have been translated into many languages and today are performed on stages throughout the world.

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By Dr. Virginia McFerran

PERPICH CENTER FOR ARTS EDUCATION

# Conventions and Characteristics of Shakespearean Theatre

## Acting

- Broad, non-realistic style including direct address to audience
- Boys or young men played women's roles

## Audience

- Groundlings paid the least and stood in the pit or ground area closest to the stage
- Royalty and aristocrats in balconies
- Etiquette: Interruptions common



A sketch of Elizabethan costumes

## Costumes

- Elizabethan dress (clothes of the era) often owned by actors

## Financial Support

- Royal patronage plus box office revenue

## Poetic Language

**Blank verse:** Unrhymed iambic pentameter

**Pentameter:** Five beats to a line

**Iambic:** Each iambic foot begins with an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable:

*She **loved** me **for** the **dangers** **I** had **passed**  
And **I** loved **her** that **she** did **pity** **them**.*

**Couplet:** two rhyming lines with regular meter. In Shakespeare's plays, couplets often signal the end of a scene or act:

*Myself will straight aboard, and to the state  
This heavy act with heavy heart relate.*

**Soliloquy:** A monologue in which a character (usually alone on stage and not heard by other characters) reveals inner thoughts to the audience

**Asides:** Brief and short speeches of direct address to the audience which are not heard or noticed by other characters on stage

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# An Interview with the Director

**Interviewer:** *Your production has been part of Park Square Theatre's season for several years now. Is there anything you want to say about restaging or remounting the production for the new season?*

**Director:** I've worked on this show now six times. I'm amazed and inspired by it each time. So that to me is a true mark of a gifted playwright and a bottomless play. I'm thrilled to work on it again. Every time you remount a production, you have an opportunity to refine it. The good thing about a remount is you're not making all of the design decisions, and you find out what worked and what can be improved upon. Actors understand things better, it's deeper, they're not worrying about characters — they're working on nuances, and that's a lot of fun.

Shakespeare should never be a slog to get through. I want students to be aware they're not just seeing this play once. They will come back to this play throughout their lives. Like a song you hear for the first time, you don't get the whole thing, you may not hear all the words. So they should not challenge themselves to understand everything; they should just watch it and enjoy it. It's our job to make it clear.

**Interviewer:** *Your production is fascinating because almost all the actors play two or three roles, but Bottom doesn't. Why don't you have that actor double as well?*

**Director:** The reason Bottom doesn't double in the play is twofold. First, it's practical because he is already in scenes with the Lovers, the Fairies, and the Mechanicals. In this production, the Lovers double with the Mechanicals and with the Fairies. Bottom can't double. That was intentional.

Second, my idea about the play made it impossible for Bottom to double because of a thematic reason. My idea is about transformation. What makes us change as people? We meet someone and we change. We have a dream that gives us perspective. There are many, many ways that we change, but in this play, change is actually palpable. You see it happen right before your eyes. Bottom is the ultimate symbol of transformation in the play because he goes from being a person to being a donkey, right on stage. He embodies that idea of metamorphosis.

Bottom is peculiarly unafraid of things. If you look at the scenes with Titania, he doesn't question; he *sees* these fairies. He's the only mortal in the play who actually pierces the veil between the mortal world and the fantasy world.



Jef Hall-Flavin

Director of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

CONTINUED...

# An Interview with the Director

## CONTINUED

**Interviewer:** *You don't think Bottom can see them because he is under Puck's spell?*

**Director:** Even if it is because of a magic spell, Bottom accepts the supernatural. Puck simply sees a part of Bottom's personality and exploits it by turning him into an ass. By contrast, the Lovers are also under a magic spell, but they seem to fight against the supernatural world. Bottom is able to somehow transverse two different worlds. He's someone who can throw himself into five different roles at the drop of a hat. He has the ability to imagine himself – and therefore the world – in a different way. The power of his imagination allows him to see the fairies without question.

Imagination played a role in casting as well. We were looking for someone who's large-hearted, fun loving, and takes his work seriously, but perhaps not himself; so we're lucky to have Terry Hemplemann who embodies all that childlike wonder I was looking for and yet is still a consummate actor.

**Interviewer:** *Do you want the audience to see the play from Bottom's point of view?*

**Director:** No, Bottom is our touchstone; he's our lens. He's our way in, but not a narrator. We don't want to solely focus on him. We've got to love him though. We should look for connections between the worlds and ultimately for redemption through the lens of Bottom's dream because the connections are very deliberate. Look at it this way: we have two parallel tracks. We have this argument between Titania and Oberon about the changeling boy and an uneasy marriage planned between Hippolyta and Theseus. But what finally melts their argument into nothing is Titania's act of generosity. She gives the child over to Oberon even though she said she wouldn't. That has a ripple effect for the royals in the "real" world.

**Interviewer:** *You mention the two parallel tracks. How does your double and triple casting fit into the odd subplot about the changeling boy?*

**Director:** By having one actor playing both roles, you can see those threads much more clearly. Hippolyta doesn't want to marry Theseus. Who would? She's been conquered; she's the Amazonian warrior queen forced into an arranged marriage. I think because the actress also plays Titania, an alter ego of hers is Titania. She falls in love with Bottom in the woods, and her feelings in the argument with Oberon melt. As a result, Hippolyta is able to find something to love about Theseus.

In Act IV, *ii* Theseus and Hippolyta have a mundane little conversation about hunting dogs. In Act I, there was this icy difference between the two. It's a really interesting transition. It couldn't have happened without what happened in the woods with Bottom. A lot of directors cut the hunting scene, but you absolutely need to see them conversing like adults.

**Interviewer:** *So because Titania takes the journey to forgiveness, the ice between them can melt. She's not being mocked and totally manipulated by Oberon when he drugs her into falling in love with an ass?*

**Director:** In this production, she's the victor because through a sheer act of love, which is where generosity comes from, she forgives him. In our production, Oberon is surprised by that. You know, when you want to play a cruel joke on someone, and afterward you feel a little ashamed, especially if they've done something

CONTINUED...

# An Interview with the Director

## CONTINUED

nice? That's how Oberon feels in the end. And that's what melts the ice.

In the beginning of the fairy scene in Act II, *i*, we learn that the world is all topsy-turvy. The weather is terrible – too much rain and too much snow. It's June and "hoary headed frost falls on the fresh lap of the crimson rose." By the time that Titania gives Oberon the child and he gives up his anger, everything's fine and the couples can all be wedded. So, you need that generosity and forgiveness and love. You need what happens in the woods in order to finally make right what was wrong between the royals at the beginning of the play.

**Interviewer:** *How do you interpret the power relationships in the play and how are they overturned?*

**Director:** The first of those, and one the students will recognize, is the parent/child struggle. Simply because Hermia doesn't love the right boy, she is presented the choice of either being single and being a nun, or being put to death. Her father is fine with that. In fact, he supports the law.

In the very first scene, Hippolyta doesn't say much, but she doesn't need to because it's very clear how she feels about Hermia's plight. So part of the way that Theseus and Hippolyta get on the same page is because Theseus overturns the Athenian marriage law. Hippolyta has an effect upon Theseus. She is the ultimate feminist.

**Interviewer:** *Your focus on transformation and the imagination drives everything about the production. When you're approaching a text, where does that director's vision come from?*

**Director:** A play isn't a thing to be tamed; it's something with which to resonate or to harmonize. I read the play over and over again, and then I read it aloud to myself. I don't do that with every play, but with Shakespeare I want to hear the poetry.

Slowly, you begin to find what I call a handle on the play as if you were to pick up the play and carry it.

So I guess the simple answer is by reading it; a difficult answer is finding inspiration. It's in your mind. If you're living with a play, over time, as you have it in your imagination, you'll see something and you'll say, that's it! It could be a painting or a design, or you'll hear a song, or you'll meet an actor, or you'll find some kind of inspiration for that play. That's what happens with most of the things I direct, and that becomes my handle on it.

It's what Theseus is talking about; it's one of the most beautiful compact speeches:

And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes; It gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name. (v,i)

And that's what I'm doing with the play; I'm saying, OK, here I have this enormous, faceless entity to stage... how am I going to give it a place and a shape? That's what imagination does.

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**By Tinne Rosenmeier and  
Jill Tammen**

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# Tossing Lines

## A PRE-PLAY CLASS ACTIVITY

### Objective

The purpose of this activity is to familiarize students with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by exposing them to lines spoken in the play. Based on these lines, students are to make predictions about the play's characters and central conflicts and discuss these predictions. This activity helps students form questions, gain insight, and build excitement for seeing and hearing these lines acted out on stage. **"Tossing Lines" serves the students best if completed before they attend the play.**

### Time Allotted

20-30 minutes

### Materials

Tennis ball or hackey-sack

Slips of paper cut from Tossing Lines on the following page

### Procedure

Cut out the slips of paper printed on the following page and distribute them to volunteers. Give students a few minutes (or overnight, if appropriate) to practice or memorize their lines. When they're ready, have these students form a circle and give one student the ball. After she speaks her line, the student tosses the ball to another student who speaks his assigned line. Students toss the ball across the circle until all lines have been heard a few times. Encourage students to speak lines with varying emotions, seeking out a variety of ways to perform the lines. If there is time, reassign lines within the group or to other students in the class for another round.

### Writing/Discussion

After the lines have been tossed, allow students five minutes to write their ideas and questions about the content of the play. The following questions may be used to guide writing and/or discussion. You may wish to provide all the students with a copy of all the lines either as a handout or through the use of an overhead or document camera in order for them to examine the text more closely.

1. What are some different attitudes toward love expressed in these lines? What do these attitudes suggest about the relationships between the characters?
2. What types of characters might speak these lines? Can you guess the sex or age of who might say any of these lines?
3. What types of conflict might you expect in the play based on the lines? Which lines indicate possible conflicts?
4. The play contains both human beings and fairies. Can you guess which lines might have been spoken by each?
5. Which lines do you find most interesting? Most puzzling? Most musical? Most memorable? Explain.
6. Some of the lines are examples of Shakespeare's use of inversion where he shifts the word order of a sentence in order to adapt the line into the rhythm of iambic pentameter. Which lines exhibit a word order different from what we would usually hear or expect? Can we still understand them?

### Taking The Text Further

7. What appears from the lines to be a connection between dreaming and loving? What do you personally see as a connection between these two activities?

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Adapted from Peggy O'Brien's  
*Shakespeare Set Free* (1993)

# Tossing Lines Questions

## CONTINUED

8. Look at the following two lines and (1) explain the meaning, (2) agree or disagree, and (3) defend your point of view:

“Reason and love keep little company together nowadays.”

“Lovers and madmen have such seething brains.”

9. Now look at the line: “Now purple with love’s wound: /And maidens call it ‘love in idleness.’” This is a description of a magic flower.

Why do you think the flower is purple?

What might be wounding about love?

What might “love in idleness” refer to?

What might be the function of the flower in the play?

10. Explain the following two lines and state whether you agree or disagree and why:

“Love looks not with the eye but with the mind.”

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

Identify any other books, plays, or films which also have this theme. How was the theme handled in these other examples? Did those stories have a happy or tragic ending?

11. Speculate on the ending of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Identify the quotations which might support your choice.



# Tossing Lines

## A PRE-PLAY CLASS ACTIVITY: QUOTES FROM THE PLAY

### To the Teacher:

Cut these apart and distribute to students.



How purple with love's wound:/And maidens call it 'love in idleness.'

Reason and love keep little company together nowadays.

Jack shall have Jill, /Naught shall go ill.

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains.

Love looks not with the eye but with the mind.

You have her father's love, Demetrius; /Let me have Hermia's.

The course of true love never did run smooth.

I love thee not, therefore pursue me not.

My mistress with a monster is in love.

Thou has mistaken quite, /And laid the love juice on some true love's sight.

You juggler! You canker-blossom! You thief of love!

Lord, what fools these mortals be!

I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man.

And this weak and idle theme, /No more yielding but a dream.

# Exploring the Comic and Tragic Language of Shakespeare

## Introduction (to the Teacher)

Shakespeare created two plays about star-crossed lovers – one serious, one humorous. The tragic story of Pyramus and Thisbe provided Shakespeare with the plot and themes for *Romeo and Juliet*. However, a year later, as if laughing at his own tragedy, Shakespeare reworked the thwarted lover theme and included a hilarious parody of Pyramus and Thisbe in his comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. These two plays provide an excellent opportunity to examine his use of language, punctuation, and poetry to see how they change depending on whether he wants to invoke laughter or tears. This contrast in tone is apparent in the two plays' prologues and the passages examined in the activities below. These can be used together or independently.

## Activity I. Comparing Prologues (allow about 15 minutes)

On the following page is a handout for students to explore Shakespeare's language in two prologues: prologue A is from the Mechanicals' play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and prologue B is from *Romeo and Juliet*.

Hand out the sheet to the students and have them read the two prologues silently WITHOUT knowing which prologue belongs to which play. Then read the passages aloud, paying careful attention to the punctuation in prologue A from *Midsummer*. (These passages are best read by an experienced reader; an inexperienced reader may not make the contrast so apparent to listeners.)

Then ask the students to complete the questions about the two prologues alone, in pairs, or in small groups. When they have finished, bring them back together to discuss their discoveries and conclusions.

## Activity II. Comparing and Contrasting Comic Language and Tragic Language

(allow about 40 minutes)

For a closer look at Shakespeare's contrasting language, print out the cards with the numbered lines from three sets of passages from the Mechanicals' play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and from *Romeo and Juliet*. (These are provided on page 19 of the guide.)

Have students practice one numbered set of lines, and then read the parts in groups, alternating and comparing each section. Finally, have groups perform for each other.

Then discuss the passages. The following questions may be projected or simply asked orally. (You may want to clarify poetic terms— couplet, alliteration, concrete imagery, simile, metaphor, blank verse, and tone— which are defined on page 12 of this guide.)

1. Which of the passages uses the most formal or difficult language? Are there words that were unfamiliar to you? Which passages use the most common language?
2. Which passages rhyme? Which use couplets? What is the effect of these techniques?
3. Which passages use alliteration? How does that affect the tone of the passages?
4. What concrete images are used in each selection? Cite a few examples. What sort of mood do these images create?
5. What comparisons (similes and metaphors) are present? Which comparisons seem humorous? Which ones do not?
6. Which passages use blank verse? How does the use of blank verse contrast with the use of end rhymes? Which seems more serious?
7. How can language choice actually make a death scene humorous?

CONTINUED...

# Exploring the Comic and Tragic Language of Shakespeare

## CONTINUED

### Student Handout: Comparing Prologues

The following prologues from two of Shakespeare's plays prepare the audience for what will happen in each play and feature regular rhyme and rhythm patterns. However, one is a spoof on poetic form, while the other is a serious and eloquent sonnet. Through his use of language, Shakespeare prepares his audience for two very different plays.

*Read and listen carefully to each prologue. Then answer the following questions:*

1. What information about the play does each prologue provide? Is one prologue more specific than the other? If so which one?
2. Circle words in each prologue that are unfamiliar to you. Does one of them use simpler words? If so, which one?
3. What do you expect in the plays which follow each prologue? Adventure? Tragedy? Romance? Comedy? Violence? Something else?
4. Circle words in each prologue with emotional connotations. What sort of emotions do they evoke?
5. How is punctuation used to indicate pace in both passages? How many sentences are in each prologue? Which prologue has the shorter and more simply constructed sentences? What might the sentence construction tell you about the speaker or the type of play to follow?
6. Does either prologue lead you to expect a humorous or serious play to follow?
7. What themes might be explored in either play?
8. How would you describe the author's tone in each prologue?

#### **Prologue A**

If we offend, it is with our good will.  
That you should think, we come not to offend,  
But with good will. To show our simple skill,  
That is the true beginning of our end.  
Consider then, we come but in despite.  
We do not come, as minding to content you,  
Our true intent is. All for your delight,  
We are not here. That you should here repent  
you,  
The actors are at hand; and by their show,  
You shall know, all that you are like to know.

#### **Prologue B**

Two households, both alike in dignity,  
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,  
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,  
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.  
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes  
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;  
Whole misadventured piteous overthrows  
Do with their death bury their parents' strife.  
The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,  
And the continuance of their parents' rage,  
Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,  
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;  
The which if you with patient ears attend,  
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

By Dr. Virginia McFerran and Jill Tammen

PARK SQUARE THEATRE TEACHER ADVISORY BOARD

## Exploring the Comic and Tragic Language of Shakespeare

**MSND SCENE 1: Lovers meet secretly****FLUTE/THISBE**

1. O Wall, full often hast thou heard my moans,  
For parting my fair Pyramus and me!
2. My cherry lips have often kissed thy stones,  
Thy stones with lime and hair knit up in thee.

**BOTTOM/PYRAMUS**

3. I see a voice; now will I to the chink,  
To spy and I can hear my Thisbe's face.

**R&J SCENE 1: Lovers meet secretly****JULIET**

1. How camest thou hither, tell me, and wherefore?  
The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,
2. And the place death, considering who thou art,  
If any of my kinsmen find thee here.

**ROMEO**

3. With love's light wings did I o'er-perch  
these walls;  
For stony limits cannot hold love out,

**MSND SCENE 2: "Death" discovery****PYRAMUS**

4. But stay, O spite!  
But mark, poor knight,  
What dreadful dole is here!
5. Eyes, do you see?  
How can it be?  
O dainty duck! O dear!
6. Thy mantle good,  
What, stain'd with blood!
7. Approach, ye Furies fell!  
O Fates, come, come,
8. Cut thread and thrum;  
Quail, crush, conclude, and quell!

**R&J SCENE 2: "Death" discovery****ROMEO**

4. Ah, dear Juliet,  
Why art thou yet so fair? Shall I believe  
That unsubstantial death is amorous,
5. And that the lean abhorred monster keeps  
Thee here in dark to be his paramour?  
For fear of that, I still will stay with thee;
6. And never from this palace of dim night  
Depart again: here,
7. ...here will I remain  
With worms that are thy chamber-maids;
8. O, here/ Will I set up my everlasting rest,  
And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars

**MSND SCENE 3: Death scene****THISBE**

9. Asleep, my love?  
What dead, my dove?  
Speak, speak! Quite dumb?
10. Dead, dead?/A tomb/Must cover  
thy sweet eyes.
11. These lily lips/This cherry nose,
12. Those yellow cowslip cheeks  
Are gone, are gone  
Lovers make moan;
13. His eyes were green as leeks...
14. Tongue not a word!/Come  
trusty sword,
15. Come my breast imbrue!

**R&J SCENE 3: Death scene****JULIET**

9. What's here? a cup, closed in my  
true love's hand?  
Poison, I see, hath been his timeless end:
10. O churl! drunk all, and left no friendly drop  
To help me after?
11. I will kiss thy lips;
12. Haply some poison yet doth hang on them,  
To make die with a restorative.
13. Thy lips are warm...
14. Yea, noise? Then I'll be brief. O  
happy dagger!
15. This is thy sheath/There rust,  
and let me die.

# On Their Feet:

## SUGGESTIONS FOR READING AND PERFORMING SCENES ALOUD

There is general agreement among teachers and scholars of Shakespeare that the best way for students to engage in his plays is “up on their feet,” acting out scenes followed by discussion of ideas and meanings. The Folger Library’s *Shakespeare Set Free* series promotes this approach to studying the Bard. The following procedure is adapted from an article by Michael Tolaydo in *Shakespeare Set Free, Teaching Twelfth Night and Othello*.

### Materials

1. Class set of copies of one scene enlarged with glossary and footnotes removed. (For scenes to use from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, see “Scenes to Read Aloud,” pages 34-42 of this guide.)
2. A dictionary.
3. A good Shakespeare glossary or edition of the play with notes for looking up words or phrases the class gets stuck on.

### Part I: Getting to Know the Language

#### Reading #1

*Purpose: To get the words right and practice listening for understanding.*

1. Distribute a copy of the scene to each student.
2. Select readers without considering gender or who the best actors or readers are. Keep in mind the emphasis is on figuring out what the scene is about, not who can play the parts best.
3. Assign different readers for each page of dialogue. Tell readers not to worry about pronunciation, but to do their best with unfamiliar words. Stress that they don’t need to worry about acting, but to read for understanding. (It is, however, important for readers to read loudly enough to be heard by the rest of the class.)
4. Instruct students who are not reading to LISTEN, not to follow along in their copy, but just to listen carefully to what is being read.
5. When the scene is finished, thank the readers and allow a few questions from the class about unfamiliar word pronunciation or word meaning. NOTE: Save in-depth discussion of the scene’s meaning until after the second reading. The emphasis is on LISTENING for understanding.

#### Reading #2

*Purpose: To become more familiar with the text.*

1. Select a new group of readers to read the same scene.
2. Non-readers should again LISTEN, making note of any different or new information observed in this reading.
3. After the reading, begin a discussion with a few questions about what happens in the scene. It is vital that all the answers to the questions are contained in the scene. Encourage students to support their ideas with lines and ideas from the text. Possible questions:
  - a. Where does the scene take place? Look for clues in the text.
  - b. Where are the entrances and exits? Who makes them? Where do they come from? Look in the text to find out.
  - c. Who is the most powerful person in the scene? Does this change? If so, when does it change? How does the change affect the characters and the outcome?

CONTINUED...



# On Their Feet:

## SUGGESTIONS FOR READING AND PERFORMING SCENES ALOUD

## CONTINUED

- d. What are the relationships between the characters?

### Reading #3

*Purpose: To read fluently through the scene, involving the whole class as readers.*

1. Form a circle and choose a student to begin. Read in order around the circle.
2. Each reader should stop at the first punctuation mark they encounter (whether it is a period, colon, comma, semicolon or an exclamation point), and the next reader begins.
3. Students should read as smoothly and evenly as possible in order to make sense of the scene.

### **Part II: Getting the Scene on its Feet**

*After the readings and discussions, it's time to put the scene "on its feet."*

1. Select a cast by asking for volunteers.
2. Ask for two or three volunteers to work as a team of directors.
3. Using ideas raised in the discussion after reading #2, the directors give advice about how the cast will depict decisions made during the earlier discussions about characters, situations and relationships.
4. The cast performs the scene once (first run-through).
5. This is followed by a class discussion about how it went and what changes should be made for the next presentation.
6. Repeat the scene (second run-through) with the same cast or a new one using the suggestions given during the discussion.
7. Ask students to comment on the process of putting a scene on its feet. Stress the various viewpoints and possibilities that were raised:
  - a. What were your favorite moments in the scene?
  - b. Did the scene make sense? To the audience? To the actors?
  - c. Were the character relationships visible?
  - d. What did you learn about each character from seeing the scene acted out?
  - e. Did this process help you to better understand Shakespeare's language?

### *Follow Up.*

1. Assign groups to prepare the scene using some of the other suggestions raised for locations and characteristics.
2. Repeat this process for other scenes as students study the play.
3. Have students write about observations made during the process.

### Resource:

Tolavdo, Michael. "Up on Your Feet with Shakespeare: The Wrong Way and the Right." *Shakespeare Set Free: Teaching Twelfth Night and Othello*. Washington Square Press: New York, 1995.

# Pre-Play Text Analysis

## SCENE TO READ ALOUD #1

In this scene the two young women show both their rivalry and their friendship. Hermia and Helena share their secret thoughts and wishes.

*(Enter HELENA)*

**HERMIA**

God speed fair Helena! Whither away?

**HELENA**

Call you me fair? That fair again unsay.  
Demetrius loves your fair: O happy fair!  
Your eyes are lode stars; and your tongue's sweet air  
More tunable than lark to shepherd's ear.  
Were the world mine, and Demetrius being bated,  
The rest I'd give to be to you translated.  
O teach me how you look and with what art  
You sway the motion of Demetrius' heart.

**HERMIA**

I frown upon him yet he loves me still.

**HELENA**

O that your frowns would teach my smiles such skill!

**HERMIA**

I give him curses yet he gives me love.

**HELENA**

O that my prayers could such affection move!

**HERMIA**

The more I hate, the more he follows me.

**HELENA**

The more I love, the more he hateth me.

**HERMIA**

His folly, Helena, is no fault of mine.

**HELENA**

None but your beauty, would that fault were mine!

CONTINUED...

# Pre-Play Text Analysis

SCENE TO READ ALOUD #1

CONTINUED

**HERMIA**

Take comfort: He no more shall see my face.  
Lysander and myself will fly this place.  
Helena, to you our minds I will unfold.  
Tomorrow night, through Athens' gates we have devised to steal  
And in the wood where often you and I were wont to lie  
There my Lysander and myself shall meet  
and thence from Athens turn away our eyes  
To seek new friends and stranger companies.  
Farewell sweet playfellow; And good luck grant thee thy Demetrius!  
Pray thou for us.

**HELENA**

I will Hermia.

**HERMIA**

Helena, adieu. As you on him, Demetrius dote on you.

*(Exit)*

# Questions for Text Analysis #1

## Questions for Writing or Discussion

1. What guesses can you make about the ages of these two women? About the ages of Demetrius and Lysander? What might their ages have to do with their behavior?
2. What is Helena's problem?
3. Demetrius has been talking about Hermia to Helena. Identify two things he has said about Hermia to her friend.
4. What does Helena mean when she says, "Were the world mine, and Demetrius being bated/ The rest I'd give to be to you translated"?
5. What does Helena want Hermia to do at the end of her first speech?
6. Speculate on what may have been the previous relationship between Helena and Demetrius. What may have caused a change?
7. How has Hermia responded to Demetrius's advances? Find two examples.
8. What has been Demetrius's reaction to Hermia's responses?
9. How does Hermia say the problem will be resolved? Who is Lysander?
10. What is Hermia's final wish for Helena?
11. Does the situation presented in the excerpt seem to you to be realistic? Explain.
12. How do you think Shakespeare wanted the audience to feel toward these characters?
13. This discussion takes place in Act I. What do you think might happen as the play progresses?

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By **Marcia Aubineau**

UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, RETIRED

# Pre-Play Text Analysis

## SCENE TO READ ALOUD #2

The Mechanicals' play about Pyramus and Thisbe is based on the myth of two lovers in the city of Babylon who live next door to each other, but are forbidden by their parents to be wed. The fathers have built a wall between the houses, but through a crack in the wall, Pyramus and Thisbe whisper their love for each other. They arrange to meet one night near Ninus' tomb to state their feelings. The following scene is from the rehearsal of the play. These rustic tradesmen are entering in a competition to choose the main entertainment for the Duke's wedding. They are unaware they are being observed by Puck.

### **QUINCE**

Come, sit down,  
every mother's son, and rehearse your parts.  
Pyramus, you begin: when you have spoken your  
speech, enter into that brake: and so every one  
according to his cue.

*(Enter PUCK behind)*

### **PUCK**

What hempen home-spuns have we swaggering here,  
So near the cradle of the fairy queen?  
What, a play toward! I'll be an auditor;  
An actor too, perhaps, if I see cause.

### **QUINCE**

Speak, Pyramus. Thisbe, stand forth.

### **BOTTOM**

Thisbe, the flowers of odious savours sweet,--

### **QUINCE**

Odours, odours.

### **BOTTOM**

--odours savours sweet:  
So hath thy breath, my dearest Thisbe dear.  
But hark, a voice! Stay thou but here awhile,  
And by and by I will to thee appear.

*(Exit)*

### **PUCK**

A stranger Pyramus than e'er played here.

*(Exit)*

CONTINUED...



# Pre-play Text Analysis: SCENE TO READ ALOUD #2

CONTINUED

**FLUTE**

Must I speak now?

**QUINCE**

Ay, marry, must you; for you must understand he goes but to see a noise that he heard, and is to come again.

**FLUTE**

Most radiant Pyramus, most lily-white of hue,  
Of colour like the red rose on triumphant briar,  
Most brisky juvenal and eke most lovely Jew,  
As true as truest horse that yet would never tire,  
I'll meet thee, Pyramus, at Ninny's tomb.

**QUINCE**

'Ninus' tomb,' man: why, you must not speak that yet; that you answer to Pyramus: you speak all your part at once, cues and all. Pyramus enter: your cue is past; it is, 'never tire.'

**FLUTE**

O,--As true as truest horse, that yet would never tire.

*(Re-enter PUCK, and BOTTOM with an ass's head)*

**BOTTOM**

If I were fair, Thisbe, I were only thine.

**QUINCE**

O monstrous! O strange! We are haunted.  
Pray, masters! Fly, masters! Help!

*(Exit QUINCE, SNUG, FLUTE, SNOUT, and STARVELING)*

**PUCK**

I'll follow you, I'll lead you about a round,  
Through bog, through bush, through brake, through briar:  
Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound,  
A hog, a headless bear, sometime a fire;  
And neigh, and bark, and grunt, and roar, and burn,  
Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire, at every turn.

CONTINUED...

# Pre-play Text Analysis: SCENE TO READ ALOUD #2

## CONTINUED

### Questions for Writing or Discussion

1. In the Mechanicals' production, Bottom is playing the part of Pyramus. What is his misreading of "flowers of odours savours sweet"? Why is his substitution of "odious" for "odours" funny? How does he unwittingly change the meaning of the line? What is he actually describing? How does the aspect of Thisbe, his love, which he's describing add another layer of humor? Would you expect a description of this sort from someone talking about his girlfriend?
2. Flute is playing the role of Thisbe. What contradiction can you find in the description of the "radiant Pyramus"? According to Renaissance scholars, "juvenal" and "Jew" are references to Pyramus's youth. Beyond saying he is young, what simile does Thisbe use to describe Pyramus? Taking into consideration that she is talking about her boyfriend, why might this figure of speech be considered humorous? What is Quince's criticism of the way that Flute actually speaks his lines?
3. What trick does Puck play on Bottom? And why might he have chosen the head of a donkey (ass) instead of some other animal? What is the reaction of the other actors to Bottom's transformation? What does Puck say he will do to the fleeing players? What will he change himself into? To what purpose?
4. This scene takes place in the woods, and in the Renaissance, the word "wood" was one synonym for "mad" (i.e. insane, irrational). The forest in the play is the realm of the fairies. What does this excerpt suggest about the following? Cite lines to defend your answers.

The power of the fairies versus humans?

The relationship between the worlds of the fairies and the Mechanicals?

The character of Puck?

The morality of the fairies?

5. How might this scene foreshadow future events in the play?

---

**By Marcia Aubineau**  
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, RETIRED

# Pre-Play Text Analysis

## SCENE TO READ ALOUD #3

Oberon, king of the fairies, has quarreled with his wife Titania, and to punish her, he has squeezed the juice from a magic flower onto her eyelids while she slept. The result will be that, upon awakening, she will fall in love with the first thing she sees—which will be Bottom with the ass's "nole" on his head. Oberon has also ordered Puck to squeeze the same juice on Lysander's eyes, but Puck has made a mistake and anointed Demetrius' eyes instead.

### **OBERON**

I wonder if Titania be awak'd;  
Then, what it was that next came in her eye,  
Which she must dote on in extremity.  
Here comes my messenger. How now, mad spirit?  
What night-rule now about this haunted grove?

### **PUCK**

My mistress with a monster is in love.  
Near to her close and consecrated bower,  
While she was in her dull and sleeping hour,  
A crew of patches, rude mechanicals,  
That work for bread upon Athenian stalls,  
Were met together to rehearse a play  
Intended for great Theseus' nuptial day.  
The shallowest thick-skin of that barren sort,  
Who Pyramus presented in their sport  
Forsook his scene, and enter'd in a brake,  
When I did him at this advantage take:  
An ass's nole I fixed upon his head...  
When in that moment, so it came to pass,  
Titania wak'd, and straightway lov'd an ass.

### **OBERON**

This falls out better than I could devise.  
But hast thou yet latch'd the Athenian's eyes  
With the love-juice, as I did bid thee do?

### **PUCK**

I took him sleeping—that is finish'd too—  
And the Athenian woman by his side,  
That when he wak'd, of force she must be ey'd.

*(Enter Demetrius and Hermia)*

### **OBERON**

Stand close: this is the same Athenian.

CONTINUED...

# Pre-Play Text Analysis

SCENE TO READ ALOUD #3

## CONTINUED

**PUCK**

This is the woman, but not this the man....

**OBERON**

What hast thou done? Thou hast mistaken quite,  
 And laid the love-juice on some true love's sight;  
 Of thy misprision must perforce ensue  
 Some true love turn'd, and not a false turn'd true....  
 About the wood go swifter than the wind,  
 And Helena of Athens look thou find;  
 All fancy-sick she is, and pale of cheer  
 With sighs of love, that costs the fresh blood dear.  
 By some illusion see thou bring her here;  
 I'll charm his eyes against she do appear.

**PUCK**

I go, I go, look how I go!  
 Swifter than the arrow from the Tartar's bow.     *(Exit.)*

**OBERON** *(Squeezing the juice on Demetrius' eyelids.)*

Flower of this purple dye,  
 Hit with Cupid's archery,  
 Sink in apple of his eye.  
 When his love he doth espy,  
 Let her shine as gloriously  
 As the Venus of the sky.  
 When thou wak'st, if she be by,  
 Beg of her for remedy.

*(Enter Puck.)*

**PUCK**

Captain of our fairy band,  
 Helena is here at hand;  
 And the youth, mistook by me,  
 Pleading for a lover's fee.  
 Shall we their fond pageant see?  
 Lord, what fools these mortals be.

CONTINUED...

# Pre-Play Text Analysis

SCENE TO READ ALOUD #3

CONTINUED

## Questions for Writing or Discussion

1. What is Oberon's reaction to Puck's news that Titania has fallen in love with an ass? What might this indicate about his character? Are you surprised at his reaction to the degradation of his wife?
2. Puck has made an error, confusing one Athenian man for the other, and anointing Demetrius instead of Lysander. What does Oberon mean when he states that Puck's mistake has "some true love turn'd" instead of "a false turned true"?
3. Oberon sends for Helena and then anoints the sleeping Demetrius' eyes so that he will fall in love with her instead of Hermia when he wakes up. Unpack Oberon's speech as he squeezes the flower's "purple dye" on Demetrius' eyelids.
  - \*What does the allusion to "Cupid's archery" refer to?
  - \*What might be the literal "apple" of a person's eye?
  - \*What does Oberon mean when he says he wants Helena to "shine as gloriously/ As the Venus of the sky"?
  - \*How does Oberon appear to feel about the lovers in the woods? (Point out the lines which indicate his attitude.) How does his view toward the humans compare/contrast to his behavior toward his queen?
  - \*What is Demetrius to do when he sees Helena?
4. Puck suggests that he and Oberon watch the "fond pageant" of Demetrius and Helena's reunion. Look up the various definitions of the word "fond." Which definition fits the line best? What does his speech indicate about his view of the humans? Do the fairies feel superior or inferior? Which words give you clues?
5. What observations can you make about the power hierarchy within the fairy world itself? Cite lines to back up your examples.
  - \*Do the king and queen of the fairies have equal power?
  - \*How does the power of Puck compare/contrast with the power of Oberon?
6. With whom do you think Shakespeare wants the audience to sympathize—Titania? Bottom? Oberon? Puck? With whom do you sympathize? Why?
7. This excerpt takes place in Act III, mid-way through the play. What do you think will happen to Titania, Bottom, Oberon, and Puck?
8. Based on this scene, what conclusions can you draw about the fairy world in general and the fairies who populate it? Cite lines to defend your answers.

By **Marcia Aubineau**

UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, RETIRED

# Post-Viewing Discussion Questions

## Characters/Relationships

1. Which character do you most sympathize with? Why? What do you like most about his/her personality, situation, and perspective?
2. Who do you think is the most important character in the play? Is s/he the protagonist?
3. How do power and status affect how characters interact? For example, how does Oberon interact with Puck and how is that different than the way he interacts with Titania? What about the other characters? How did you see power relationships portrayed in the production?
4. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is about walls and overcoming them. There is an actual wall between the houses of Pyramus and Thisbe, but consider the imaginary and metaphorical walls in the play separating characters: parents from children, lovers from each other, present (and future) husbands from wives, and different social classes. Identify as many examples as you can of each type of wall. Then explain how each of these walls is brought down by the end of the play.
5. Shakespeare contrasts the court (a place of order) with the forest (a place of confusion and chaos). How do the characters reinforce this contrast? Where are they the most content and happy?
6. Which romantic relationships in the play are the most likely to be successful? Why do you think so?

## Three Worlds

1. How are the worlds of the fairies, the nobles, and the Mechanicals different? How are the inhabitants of those worlds different?
2. How are the three worlds similar? In what ways are they parallel? Are there parallel characters in each of the three worlds?
3. How do the three worlds intersect or collide with each other? What happens when they bump into each other?
4. What point does Shakespeare make by representing these three distinct worlds?
5. What does it mean that Nick Bottom is the only character who participates in all three worlds? How does he connect them? Why is he the one in this unique position?
6. How did the actors transform themselves from one role to another?
7. How were the three worlds contrasted through sound, set and lighting?
8. Two of the play's five acts take place in the woods.
  - \*What do the woods symbolize in the play?
  - \*In Renaissance parlance, "wood" could also mean "madness." How would that definition relate to occurrences and characters in the play? Be specific.

## Nature of Love

1. Do you agree with Hermia's decision to run away with Lysander against her father's wishes? Why or why not?
2. The love potion causes characters' romantic feelings to change suddenly. Do you think Shakespeare represents love accurately? How and why?
3. What outside influences other than "potions" can affect how two people love each other?
4. Which romantic pairings are the most comical? What might Shakespeare be spoofing by including them in the play?
5. Do you think this play demonstrates that love is necessary for happiness? (Consider Theseus and Hippolyta.)

CONTINUED...

# Post-Viewing Discussion Questions

## CONTINUED

6. How does the story of Pyramus and Thisbe function as a symbol of, metaphor for, or parallel to the play's other relationship situations? How does the tragic ending of the mythical story relate to the end of this play? Why do you think Shakespeare included this "play within a play" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?
7. What makes the tragic love story of Pyramus and Thisbe so funny? Is this fine line between tragedy and comedy true in real love? Can you think of any examples?

### Dreams

1. Why does the play have "dream" in the title?
2. How many movies, TV shows, books, or plays can you think of about dreams and love?
3. How many different definitions of "dream" can you think of? Which of those definitions best apply to this play? What kinds of dreams are portrayed here? Are there nightmares portrayed here as well?
4. Midsummer's Eve is still celebrated at the time of the summer solstice. It was originally a fertility festival and was associated with magic affecting all aspects of nature—plants, animals, and humans. In the play, Shakespeare conflates it with another fertility rite—May Day, a festival of rebirth, revelry, enchantment, magic, merry-making, love, and marriage. How many of these associations can you make with the characters and events of the play?
5. Whose dream might this play be?
6. Whose nightmare might this be?

### Use of Symbols

1. The magic flower: The flower whose juice Oberon uses to enchant Titania and the lovers is named "love in idleness." At the time Shakespeare wrote the play, "idleness" had more definitions than it does now:
  - \*Vanity; "in idleness" meant "in vain"
  - \*Groundlessness, worthlessness, triviality, futility
  - \*Light-headedness, imbecility, delirium; also folly, foolishness, silliness
  - \*State or condition of being idle, unoccupied; habitual avoidance of work, inactivity
 How many of these definitions fit the characters in the play who received the juice of the flower? How many of these definitions fit other characters and events of the play? Give specific examples.
2. The moon: The moon is referred to many times during the play. It is present in all the settings and in all the separate stories, and it is significant to all the characters in some way. (It is even a character itself in the Mechanicals' play.)
  - \*List as many references to the moon as you can remember. How was it important to the characters who mentioned it?
  - \*The moon itself has had many symbolic characteristics from ancient times. It has represented inconstancy because it's always waxing or waning. It also has symbolized chastity as it is related to the virginal goddess Diana (who was also the goddess of the hunt). Moonlight transforms a landscape and at night no one sees clearly. How might these symbolic associations relate to the characters and events of the play?

By Marcia Aubineau

UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, RETIRED

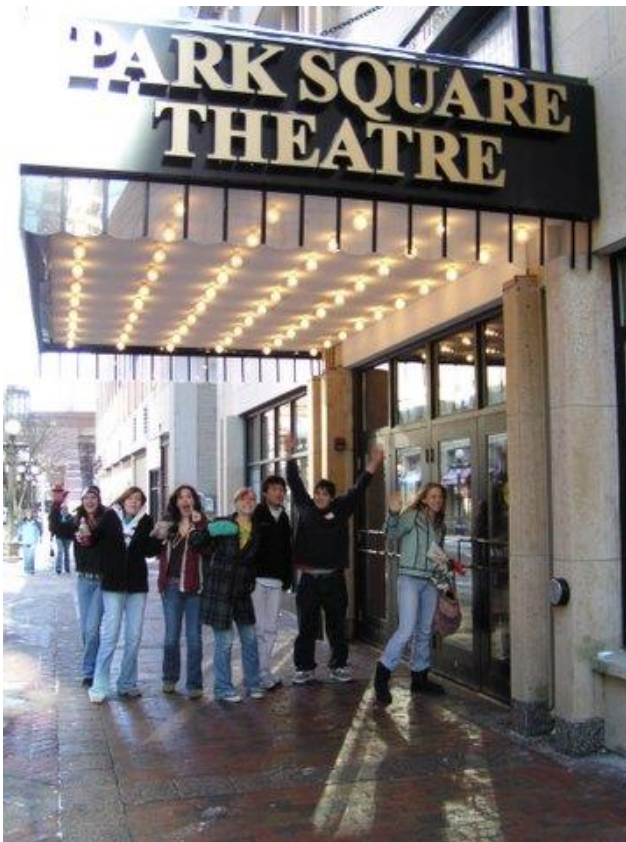


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To Our Teachers,

Thank you for giving the gift of theatre to your students, and the gift of your students to our theatre.

Yours sincerely,  
The Staff at Park Square Theatre