

UNLOCKED

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM TEACHERS' PACK

Shakespeare Unlocked brings Shakespeare's most popular plays to life for young people by showing how actors and directors work to interpret and take ownership of Shakespeare's text.

There are 12 short films for each play: 3 scenes filmed in colour, in the theatre and 8 workshops, filmed in black and white, with actors and directors exploring those scenes. There is also a short film about this theatre production.

These films and the teachers' pack build on the approach developed in the RSC's [Stand up for Shakespeare manifesto](#). We know that children and young people can experience Shakespeare in ways that excite, engage and inspire them. We believe that young people get the most out of Shakespeare when they, like actors, experience and explore the plays actively. We want young people to: Do it on their feet, See it live and Start it earlier.



The Teachers' Pack is aimed at Key Stage 3 and 4 English. It can also be used for Key Stage 5 and Theatre Studies. It includes:

- An introduction to each of the three scenes
- Suggestions for ideas to consider with your students before and after watching each scene and workshop film.
- Activities to further students' understanding of the play. These require a cleared space to work in.

The [scene text](#) which is needed for several activities is on the BBC Shakespeare Unlocked web pages. bbc.co.uk/shakespeare

Curriculum targets

The activities in this pack support students' understanding of:

- Character and motivation
- Themes and ideas
- The author's craft
- Plays in performance
- Speaking and listening

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

This RSC production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Nancy Meckler, opened on 29 July 2011 in the newly transformed Royal Shakespeare Theatre, in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Shakespeare Unlocked focuses on the following scenes and characters:

Act 1 Scene 2
**THE
MECHANICALS**



Act 2 Scene 1
**OBERON AND
TITANIA**



Act 2 Scene 1
**HELENA AND
DEMETRIUS**



These three scenes were chosen because they show the three 'worlds' of the play: the 'Mechanicals', the 'fairies', and the court. These scenes are the first time we meet these characters together in the play. They allow us to explore the information Shakespeare gives us about the characters and their worlds, and how this information is open to interpretation.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Film title and chapters	Description	Pack page	Film duration
Act 1 Scene 2 <u>THE MECHANICALS</u>	A group of working men meet to put on play for the court. Quince tries to persuade each of them to take a part. When some of the Mechanicals object, Bottom suggests that he can play all the parts.	4	7'01
<u>MEET THE MECHANICALS</u>	The actors discuss how little information there is about the Mechanicals in Shakespeare's text. Through improvisation the actors explore back-stories and how their characters might feel about being in a play.	6	6'41
<u>QUINCE v BOTTOM</u>	Bottom and Quince battle to be the most important person present. Christopher Godwin and Felix Hayes, who play these characters, discuss insights gained through playing their characters as high and low status.	8	6'58
<u>CLOWNING AROUND</u> The language of comedy Comic timing Playing for laughs	The company discuss the language of comedy. They explore comic timing, playing for laughs and how to make Bottom funny.	10	6'23
Act 2 Scene 1 <u>THE FAIRIES</u>	The King and Queen of the Fairies meet for the first time. Titania tells Oberon that their argument over her changeling boy is having a disastrous impact on the natural world.	12	6'52
<u>FAIRYLAND</u> Magical fairies Being human Dream fairies	The director, Nancy Meckler, explores the possibilities of playing Oberon and Titania as magical fairies, as ordinary people or as dream versions of Theseus and Hippolyta.	14	6'14
<u>ECOLOGICAL DISASTER</u> Nature personified	Pippa Nixon and Jo Stone-Fewings explore how Titania shows Oberon the impact of their argument on the world. They discuss Shakespeare's use of language and imagery in Titania's speech.	15	6'56
<u>TITANIA CROSSES OBERON</u> Remembering the votress For the love of a child	The cast consider the importance of the child at the centre of Titania and Oberon's argument. They explore staging choices for conveying Titania's feelings and memories of the child's mother, the votress.	17	6'25
Act 2 Scene 1 <u>THE LOVERS</u>	Demetrius goes to the woods to find Hermia, with Helena in pursuit. Demetrius rejects Helena but she continues to declare her love for him.	19	4'30
<u>HELENA & DEMETRIUS</u> When Demetrius met Helena He's Just Not That Into You	Nancy Meckler helps the actors explore their characters through improvisation: How might Helena and Demetrius have met and how might their relationship have developed?	21	9'16
<u>PLAYING HELENA</u> Acting the victim Being reasonable Playing the temptress	Nancy Meckler and Lucy Briggs-Owen explore different ways of playing Helena: as victim, as temptress, or as a reasonable woman.	23	7'03

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Act I Scene 2: THE MECHANICALS

THE STORY SO FAR...

The play opens at the court of Theseus, as he plans his wedding to Hippolyta. A courtier presents his daughter, Hermia, who is refusing an arranged marriage to Demetrius. Hermia explains that she loves someone else: Lysander. Theseus explains that unless Hermia obeys her father she must enter a convent or be sentenced to death. Later, in private, Hermia and Lysander plan to elope in secret. Hermia tells her friend Helena, who in turn tells Demetrius, with whom Helena is in love. Demetrius decides to follow Hermia and Lysander; Helena decides to follow Demetrius...

Immediately after the highly charged court scene, the Mechanicals enter the stage. Shakespeare's juxtaposition of comedy after tension is a regular feature of his plays, allowing the audience much needed respite.



WHAT HAPPENS?

This scene provides our first introduction to the Mechanicals, who provide much of the comedy in the play. Shakespeare chooses to give us very specific descriptions of their trade: Quince is a carpenter, Bottom is a weaver, Starveling a tailor, and so on. However, the text provides us with very little other information about who these people are. These characters provide stark contrast to everyone else in the play. Elsewhere we meet highly articulate characters, fully in control of the language that they use. By contrast the Mechanicals' language is basic; in fact the more they strive to be eloquent, the more their language becomes muddled – to great comic effect.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

IDEAS TO USE WITH:

THE MECHANICALS

Before watching the scene

- **Meet the Mechanicals**

As a group, discuss:

- Who the Mechanicals are
- What role they have in the text
- What purpose do they serve dramatically?
- What do we expect the Mechanicals first entrance to be like?
- How do they arrive on stage?
- How can it contrast to the previous scene?

After watching the scene

- **The lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe**

In pairs ask students to share observations on the Mechanicals' description of the play they are to perform. What are we the audience meant to think about this play? Are we meant to take it seriously? If not, why?

- **Choosing a setting**

Explain that Shakespeare provides no clues as to where this scene takes place. The stage direction merely states "Enter Quince..."

In pairs ask students to write a list of all the things they observed about the setting chosen for this production. What did the setting feel like? Who might it belong to? Is it a public or private space? Discuss with the class what the setting might tell us about the characters.

*"Nay, faith, let not me
play a woman: I have
a beard coming."*



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

IDEAS TO USE WITH:

MEET THE MECHANICALS

The actors discuss how little information there is about the Mechanicals in Shakespeare's text. Through improvisation, the actors explore back-stories and how their characters feel about being in a play.

Before watching the workshop

- **The Mechanicals and their trade**

The actor playing Bottom explains that very little is known about the Mechanicals, except for their job titles.

Ask students what they understand from the following job titles:

- Carpenter
- Joiner
- Weaver
- Bellows-mender
- Tinker
- Tailor

Which job titles are they familiar with? Can they guess what the others might mean? Are there modern equivalents?

In small groups ask them to brainstorm what sorts of people were likely to do these jobs. What might they look like? How do they know each other? Where might they meet?

After watching the workshop

- **Back-stories**

The company talk about how important it is for the actors to create lives for the characters they are to play. With the Mechanicals there is very little textual information so the company choose to create back-stories (things that might have happened to the character/s before the start of the play) for them.

Ask students what they noticed about the Mechanicals as a group. You might like to explain to them that in this production the Mechanicals were very much a team who all worked together on projects. What difference does this make to the way the scene is played? How might the scene be different if the Mechanicals worked separately?

"They are 'ordinary life' and they always come through in this earthy, approachable way. You know these guys when they come on."



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

ACTIVITY (30–40 MINUTES):

MEET THE MECHANICALS

In the workshop the actors and assistant director discuss how little is known about the Mechanicals. As a result, the actors took what they could find in the text and created their own interpretations. This activity allows the students to look for clues in the text, as the actors did, and then begin creating their own interpretation.

You will need:

- [Copies of Act 1 Scene 2](#)
- A cleared classroom or hall

Structure of the activity:

1. Divide students into six groups and explain that each group will look at one of the Mechanicals.
2. Ask them in their groups to read through the scene and stop every time their character speaks, or is spoken about.
3. Ask each group to agree on one line of text said by or about their character which they think is particularly relevant in terms of understanding their character.
4. Now ask the groups to come together and, in turns, share the information they have discovered, the line of text they have chosen, and why.
5. Ask for one volunteer from each group and explain that they will help to create a still image of how these characters might be physically represented, individually and in relation to each other.
6. First ask the student playing Quince to stand in an empty space. Ask the group who looked at Quince to make suggestions about Quince's positioning – where in the space should he be? Centre? To the side? Nearest the audience? Standing? Sitting? When Quince's group has agreed on their choices the student playing Quince should take up and hold that position.
7. Now ask the student playing Bottom, and their group, to go through the same process, but this time also take into consideration where Bottom should stand in relation to Quince.
8. Repeat this process with each character in the order that they appear in the scene.
9. By the end you will have an image that should provide the audience with some clues about each character and their relationship to each other.
10. Now ask the students playing the characters to say, in turn, the line of text chosen for their character by their group.
11. Ask students for feedback on how this activity helps with understanding the Mechanicals individually and collectively. What clues in particular does Shakespeare give us about these characters? What impact does Shakespeare want these characters to have on the audience?

*"I've written this piece.
We're going to perform
it for the Duke on his
wedding day."*



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

IDEAS TO USE WITH:

QUINCE V BOTTOM

Bottom and Quince battle to be the most important person present. The actors discuss insights gained through playing their characters as high and low status.

Before watching the workshop

- **Exploring status**

In small groups ask your students to discuss what they understand from the word 'status'. What does high or low status mean? How might a person with high status talk, walk, behave? What about a person with low status? Can they think of any familiar examples of someone with high status? Low status? Ask groups to share their ideas with the class.

Ask students to look out for what the actors say and do with regards to status in the following workshop.

After watching the workshop

- **Exploring status**

In small groups ask your students to discuss what they observed when the actors played around with status. What did they notice about how the actors moved, spoke and behaved with each other?

What happened when Quince played low status and Bottom played high status? What happened when the situations were reversed? What worked or didn't with each interpretation?

The actors were asked who they thought carried the higher status within the scene, Quince or Bottom. One actor felt that, on balance, it was Quince.

Ask your students: Which character do they think has the higher status? Why?

"I'm at the top and then there's Quince and then there's everyone else."



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

ACTIVITY (30–40 MINUTES):

EXPLORING STATUS

In the workshop, the actors explore playing different status and how it affected the interpretation of a scene or a character. In this activity students are offered the opportunity to explore the effect of playing status for themselves.

Structure of the activity:

1. Ask students to walk freely around the space without bumping into each other.
2. Now ask students to walk around as if they are the highest possible status they can imagine: a king, queen, superhero and so on. Repeat as if they are the lowest possible status.
3. Explain to them that 1 is the lowest status; 10 the highest; a 5 is average, and so on. You will call out a number from 1 to 10 and ask them to demonstrate that status as they walk around the room greeting each other by saying hello and shaking hands.
4. Ask students what they observed about changes to their bodies and voices when they played high, low or middle status.
5. In correct order, lay out numbered A4 sheets on the longest stretch of floor you have available. Explain that the numbers represent the same status levels as before.
6. Ask for two volunteers, one to play Bottom, one to play Quince. Give the actors a copy of the scene and ask them to stand on or behind the sheet numbered 5 – middle status. Ask them to read aloud the dialogue between them, as if each is a middle status character.
7. When they've finished ask for feedback, both from the students playing the characters and the rest of the class. Did anything work with this version of the scene? What didn't?
8. Now ask for four new volunteers: one to play Bottom, one Quince, one to be Bottom's guide and one to be Quince's.
9. Ask the students playing Bottom and Quince to stand behind the number 5, with their respective guides standing behind them.
10. Explain that this time, as Bottom and Quince say their lines, their guides are to gently move them up and down the numbered line according to what status they think the character might be as the scene develops. The students playing Bottom and Quince should alter their voice and posture according to the status number they are on.
11. At the end of the exercise ask for feedback from the students about what this exercise tells us about the characters Bottom and Quince and the relationship between them.

You will need:

- [Two copies of Act 1 Scene 2](#), with a line through all speeches except Quince and Bottom's
- Ten A4 sheets of paper, numbered 1 to 10
- A cleared classroom or hall

"Quince needs Bottom because he needs a leading actor, but Bottom needs a script and a play to be in."



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

IDEAS TO USE WITH:

CLOWNING AROUND

The company discuss the language of comedy. They explore comic timing, playing for laughs and how to make Bottom funny.

Before watching the workshop

- **What makes us laugh?**

Ask students in small groups to brainstorm what they find funny.

Explain that in the following workshop the company discuss examples of verbal and visual humour. Ask them to jot down any examples they notice in each category. In particular, what examples do they notice of characters getting words and meanings muddled?

After watching the workshop

- **Juxtaposing comedy and tension**

The actors comment on the fact that the scene beforehand is quite serious: Hermia has been condemned either to death or a convent unless she agrees to marry the man her father wants her to. And then Shakespeare gives us this scene...

In small groups, ask students to discuss why Shakespeare might put two such contrasting scenes so close together. Ask them if they can think of any other examples in Shakespeare where this happens? (e.g. the porter scene after the murder of Duncan in *Macbeth*).

"As soon as we come out of the trap, the door slams and people are uproarious with laughter."



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

ACTIVITY (45 MINUTES):
MAKING IT FUNNY

You will need:

- [Copies of Act 1 Scene 2](#)
- A cleared classroom or hall

In this activity students will have the chance to explore opportunities for humour within this scene, just as the actors did in the workshop.

Structure of the activity:

1. Ask students to recap possibilities for humour: e.g. visual; verbal; comic timing.
2. Ask students to reflect on what they've seen the director and assistant director do. What do they think are the main responsibilities of a director? Explain that in the following activity some of the students will be directors, and will need to shape the way the scene is played and possibly, like Peter Quince, persuade their 'actors' to play the scene in certain ways.
3. Assuming you have a class of 30, divide students into four groups of between seven and eight.
4. Within each group, ask them to decide who will play each of the Mechanicals and who will be the director.
5. Explain to the director(s) that they need to take overall control of how their group approaches the scene. Ask them to guide the rest of their group through:
 - The allocation of a part to each person in the group;
 - Reading the scene aloud up to line 51, with students taking on a character each;
 - Discussing how each of the Mechanicals might be played, exploring how they might each respond to the idea of the play and their allotted part (for example, are they excited about the play? reluctant? nervous? suspicious?);
 - 'Rehearsing' the scene, trying out different interpretations for each character;
 - Putting forward ideas for where there are opportunities for humour. For example, in the film they watched, Bottom is given a substantially larger script than anyone else, while Snug gets nothing. Can the directors come up with other opportunities for humour that are based on the text?
 - Finally, if/when there is no consensus in their group, the director must make any final decisions.
6. Ask each group to share their version of the scene. What different interpretations were there? What similarities?
7. Ask the 'directors' what they thought about the experience of directing. Have they gained any insights into what it might be like to be Peter Quince?

"I think what makes that speech funny is the attempt to do it as well as you can."



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Act 2 Scene 1: THE FAIRIES

THE STORY SO FAR...

After having met the two other 'worlds' of the play, we now meet the third world of the Fairies. The lovers, Lysander and Hermia have run away into the forest to escape the edict of Theseus; following them are the unrequited lovers Helena and Demetrius. In this scene we leave the world of the court and enter the magic of the forest. We meet the King and Queen of the Fairies, Oberon and Titania, for the first time. It is a highly charged scene as Oberon and Titania battle over the changeling boy, who Oberon wants as his page-boy.



WHAT HAPPENS?

The scene comes soon after a similarly charged scene at court, with only the Mechanicals offering a comic interlude in between. Comparisons are often made between the world of the court and the world of the fairy kingdom, and between Theseus and Hippolyta, and Oberon and Titania. This is explored in this production with the actors doubling the parts: Titania being the alter ego of Hippolyta and Oberon the alter ego of Theseus.

In a speech rich with imagery, Titania demonstrates how powerful she and Oberon are, and the effect they have on the fairy and mortal worlds. In 37 lines Titania describes the devastating impact their argument is having on the seasons and the natural world. In a second highly descriptive speech full of images, Titania explains how she acquired the boy at the heart of her battle with Oberon: a battle that is not resolved until the end of the play.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

IDEAS TO USE WITH:

THE FAIRIES

Before watching the scene

- **A couple at war**

In pairs ask students to read aloud the first four lines of this scene with one reading Oberon's lines, the other Titania's. Ask them to write down what Oberon says about Titania (for example, 'proud', 'rash'), then what Titania says about Oberon ('jealous', 'forsover his bed').

Still in pairs, ask them to jot down initial ideas about this couple:

- What have they learned about them?
- Who are they?
- How long have they known each other?
- Is this the first time they've argued or do they often behave like this?

Ask students to share their ideas with the rest of the class.

After watching the scene

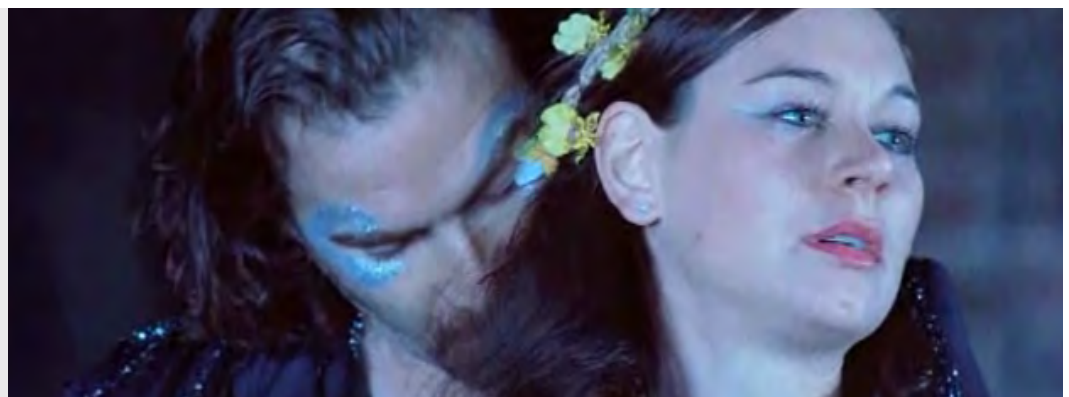
- **Royal couples**

In pairs, ask students to read aloud the exchange between Titania and Oberon from line 9 'Why are thou here...' to line 17 'Knowing I know thy love to Theseus'.

Ask students to brainstorm what they learn from this exchange about Titania and Oberon and their respective relationships with Theseus and Hippolyta, the royal couple at court.

Is the fairy world a place where characters can be free in terms of what they say and do? How does the text suggest the greater freedoms that Titania and Oberon enjoy, compared to Theseus and Hippolyta?

*"Set your heart at rest:
The fairy land buys
not the child of me."*



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

IDEAS TO USE WITH:

FAIRYLAND

The director, Nancy Meckler, explores the possibilities of playing Oberon and Titania as magical fairies, as ordinary people or as dream versions of Theseus and Hippolyta.

Before watching the workshop

- **A power struggle**

Ask one student to read aloud the following from Titania:

*"Fairies, skip hence.
I have forsworn his bed and company."*

As a whole class discuss Titania's strategy for dealing with Oberon – to avoid his bed and his company. Why might she do this? What might she be hoping to achieve? How much power over Oberon might this strategy give her?

Now ask one student to read aloud this from Oberon:

"Tarry, rash wanton! Am not I thy lord?"

What is Oberon trying to do? What power is he trying to exert over Titania? Does he succeed? What does this small exchange tell us about these two characters?

Ask students to look out for how the actors demonstrate this power struggle during the workshop they're about to watch.

After watching the workshop

- **A power struggle**

Ask students to share their observations about how the actors playing Titania and Oberon demonstrated the power struggle between them.

- **Different interpretations**

In small groups ask students to brainstorm what they liked, or didn't, about the two different versions shown of Oberon and Titania: as fairies; then as modern day couple.

*"It's a man and woman
having an argument and
there's a history there."*



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

IDEAS TO USE WITH:

ECOLOGICAL DISASTER

Pippa Nixon and Jo Stone-Fewings explore how Titania shows Oberon the impact of their argument on the world. They discuss Shakespeare's use of language and imagery in Titania's speech

Before watching the workshop

- **Titania's speech**

In pairs ask students to go through Titania's first long speech in this scene, from lines 22 to 58. Ask students to take it in turn to read aloud the last word only of the speech ('jealously', 'spring', 'mead' and so on). Based only on these last words what do they think Titania's speech is about? Ask them to write down their ideas.

After watching the workshop

- **Titania's speech**

Working in the same pairs, ask students to add to their ideas by writing down any images that stood out from Titania's speech.

- **Personification**

The actors and director discuss the way Titania personifies features of the natural world. Ask students to pick out any examples of this in the text.

*"I want to awaken him.
I want to shake him."*



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

ACTIVITY (30–45 MINUTES):

EXPLORING IMAGERY

In the workshop the actors discuss Shakespeare's use of imagery to bring to life the description of the disasters occurring in the natural world. In this activity students explore this use of imagery.

Structure of the activity:

1. Ask students to stand in a circle with their copy of Titania's speech. As a whole class read the speech aloud together. What words or images particularly stood out as students said the speech aloud?
2. Divide the class into small groups of between four and six.
3. Assign each group one or two sections of the text. For each extract ask them to find some characteristic of the disasters occurring within the natural world that they will demonstrate as a still image. Ask them also to choose a word or words, up to one line of text, which they will say aloud to support their image.
4. Once they have had time to rehearse, bring all the groups back together.
5. As leader, read out Titania's first seven lines to introduce the extracts.
6. Ask each group to share their image and word(s) in speech order.
7. As leader, read out Titania's last three lines.
8. Ask students to discuss what they have learned about Titania and Oberon from this activity and their power over the natural world.
9. Finally, ask students to consider the last three lines you read out. Why might Titania change from blaming Oberon at the beginning, to accepting joint responsibility at the end?

You will need:

- [Copies of Act 2 Scene 1](#): Titania's speech from lines 82 to 118
- A cleared classroom or hall

"You get through to him by making him think of the seasons and the corn as human beings."



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

IDEAS TO USE WITH:

TITANIA CROSSES OBERON

The cast consider the importance of the child at the centre of Titania and Oberon's argument. They explore staging choices for conveying Titania's feelings and memories of the child's mother, the votress.

Before watching the workshop

- **Who is the changeling boy?**

Ask students to jot down what they've already observed about the changeling boy.

- What facts do they recall about him?
- Who is he?
- Why is he important to Titania?

After watching the workshop

- **For the love of a child**

What have the actors and director said about the changeling boy?

What ideas do they have for why he's so important to both Titania and Oberon?

Why might Shakespeare give Titania a speech like this at this point?

What effect would a speech like this have on Oberon?

How did the actors choose to portray the baby in the workshop?

What effect does this have on Oberon?

"I like to think she has, through her imagination, conjured up this beautiful votress that walks across the stage."



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

ACTIVITY (30 MINUTES):

POSSESSION OF THE CHILD

In the workshop the director talks about the changeling boy representing love and how this makes Oberon jealous. This activity looks at how Shakespeare's language suggests the boy's importance and provokes Oberon's jealousy.

You will need:

- [Copies of Act 2 Scene 1](#): Titania's speech about the child
- A cleared classroom or hall

Structure of the activity:

1. In small groups ask students collectively to read aloud Titania's speech from line 123 to 139.
2. Now ask them to read the speech again but this time stopping and underlining every use of a personal pronoun: you, your, me, my...
3. Now ask students to collectively read aloud the underlined words.
4. What does the frequency of personal pronouns tell us about this speech?
5. Ask for one volunteer per group to be Titania. Ask the students playing Titania to read aloud the whole speech while the others in the group echo all the personal pronouns.
6. Ask for one group to repeat this in front of the whole class. Ask one student from another group to be Oberon. Ask the student playing Titania to direct the speech at the student being Oberon.
7. Once the group has performed the speech, ask students for their impressions. What have they learned about the speech? How did the student being Oberon feel?
8. What does this activity tell us about Shakespeare's use of language?

"We talked about the idea that the child represents love and Oberon wants Titania to love him the way she loves the votress."



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Act 2 Scene 1: THE LOVERS

THE STORY SO FAR...

In the previous scene we have met two warring lovers: Titania and Oberon. Now we meet another pair of lovers: Helena and Demetrius. They are mortal, unlike the King and Queen of the Fairies, but they are similarly at war. Demetrius has gone to the woods to find Hermia, who he loves, with Helena in pursuit. Demetrius tries to reject Helena but she persists in declaring her love for him, explaining why he should return her love. Demetrius runs away from Helena, but she follows him further into the woods.



WHAT HAPPENS?

We have met the other pair of young lovers, Hermia and Lysander, and witnessed their mutual adoration and devotion to each other when they agree to run away together. Previously we've been told that Helena and Demetrius were once a couple, and that Demetrius once declared his love for Helena. However, subsequently Demetrius has fallen in love with Hermia while Helena continues to 'dote' on Demetrius. It is this disparity that creates the dramatic tension and opportunities for comedy within this scene.

We witness the character of Demetrius using language which is direct and harsh. This contrasts with the earlier poetic language of Lysander. Later, when under the spell of Oberon's potion he too starts to use verse to declare his love for Helena but his poetry is clunky and clumsy. This shows us that perhaps being a lover isn't the most natural state for him.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

IDEAS TO USE WITH:

THE LOVERS

Before watching the scene

- **Design choices**

If students have watched the other films on *Shakespeare Unlocked: A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ask them in pairs to make a list of what they've noticed about the settings for other scenes:

- What have they seen or heard in terms of what's on stage?
- What sound effects have they noticed?
- What sort of costumes have they seen?
- Are they modern? Set in a particular historical period? Magical?
- What sort of world(s) do these design choices create?
- How do these design choices affect the way we, as audiences, respond to what's happening on stage?

As they watch the scene, ask them to write a list of what they notice about the design choices under the following headings:

- Sound effects
- What's on the stage
- Costumes

After watching the scene

- **Design choices**

Ask students to share their observations about the design choices for this scene. What impact do these design choices have on us as the audience?

- **The 1960s**

Ask students if they know what period of time the costumes might represent. Ask them what they know about the 1960s.

- **Helena as spaniel**

Ask students to discuss the portrayal of Helena and Demetrius' relationship, especially where Helena offers to be Demetrius' 'spaniel'. What did the staging, with Helena 'fetching' Demetrius' shoe, add to the interpretation of the characters and their relationship?

"Use me but as your spaniel: spurn me, strike me, Neglect me, lose me; only give me leave, Unworthy as I am, to follow you."



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

IDEAS TO USE WITH:

HELENA AND DEMETRIUS

The director helps the actors explore their characters through improvisation: how might Helena and Demetrius have met and how might their relationship have developed?

Before watching the workshop

- **Helena and Demetrius**

During this workshop we find out more about Helena and Demetrius in terms of facts and possible interpretations. As they're watching the workshop, ask half the class to especially focus on Demetrius and what the actor says about him. Ask the other half focus on Titania.

After watching the workshop

- **Helena and Demetrius**

Ask students to share what they've found out about Helena and Demetrius in terms of facts and ideas for interpretation.

- **Helena and Demetrius improvisations**

This workshop contains two improvisations which explore possibilities for how Helena and Demetrius' relationship might have developed before they end up in the wood.

Ask half the class, in small groups, to discuss the first improvisation. What additional insights into Helena, Demetrius and their relationship did this improvisation provide? Could they imagine other possibilities for how Helena and Demetrius might have met?

Ask the other half of the class, in small groups, to discuss what insights the second improvisation gave us into the possibilities for interpreting the characters and how their relationship has developed.

Ask the groups to share their insights.

"I always assumed that she fancied me because I was a bit of rough – I was aloof and a bit nasty."



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

ACTIVITY (20-30 MINUTES):

WHO ARE HELENA AND DEMETRIUS?

In the workshop the actors and director look at what clues there are in the text that tells us about Helena and Demetrius. This activity allows students to discover this for themselves.

Structure of the activity:

1. Divide the class into six groups. Tell three groups they are going to focus on three things to do with Helena and label them group A, B and C;
2. Repeat with the other three groups who will focus on Demetrius.
3. Ask each group to read through the scene and, as they do so, capture the following on sticky notes:
 - Group A: Facts
List facts about their character that emerge in this scene and any other facts they know about their character from reading/seeing other scenes from the play;
 - Group B: What they say
List key things that their character says about themselves; key things that their character says about the other;
 - Group C: Key lines
List two or three phrases or lines that their character says in this scene that feel particularly important in terms of telling the audience about this character.
4. When everyone has finished show them the large pieces of paper and ask each group in turn to place their sticky notes in the relevant place.
5. Share with students what is said on the sticky notes and ask students to reflect on what they've learned.

You will need:

- [Copies of Act 2 Scene 1](#)
- Sticky notes
- Two large sheets of paper, one with Helena written at the top, one with Demetrius at the top. Each sheet should be divided into four columns, with headings:
 - Facts;
 - What they say about themselves;
 - What the others say about them;
 - Key lines
- Space for students to work in groups

“She’s fighting for something that was there. She’s not completely bonkers. They’d had a love.”



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

IDEAS TO USE WITH:

PLAYING HELENA

Nancy Meckler and Lucy Briggs-Owen explore different ways of playing Helena: as victim, as temptress, or as a reasonable woman.

Before watching the workshop

- **Helena as victim?**

From what your students know of the character, ask them in pairs to discuss whether they think Helena could be perceived as a victim. Ask them to explain their reasons.

Ask them to write two lists:

- 1) Things which suggest Helena is entirely a victim.
- 2) Things which suggest she is not entirely a victim.

After watching the workshop

- **Helena's use of language**

Divide the class into six groups. Ask each group to look at one exchange between Helena and Demetrius (with the first being lines 1 to 11; the second being lines 12 to 24, and so on).

In these exchanges Demetrius is constantly coming up with reasons to reject Helena; in turn Helena comes up with objections to Demetrius reasons.

Ask students to read the exchange and first analyse what reason Demetrius gives for rejecting Helena and then how Helena deals with the rejection.

What arguments does she use? What strategies does she use?

Can they see any examples of word play? What does all of this tell us about Helena?

Ask each group to share their findings with the rest of the class.

- **Interpretational choices**

In small groups ask students to discuss one of the following interpretive choices:

- Helena as victim
- Helena being reasonable
- Helena as temptress

After discussing these, and watching the workshops, ask students which interpretive choices worked for them and why. Discuss as a whole group.

"She's fighting against being a complete sobbing victim. So I think it's really good to play that, so that you know it's there, simmering away."



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

ACTIVITY (30 MINUTES):

TRYING THE SCENE IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS

You will need:

- [Copies of Act 2 Scene 1](#)
- A cleared space

The actor playing Demetrius talks about the value of exploring different ways of doing a scene *'...in every line you say and in every new thought you have, to know that there are infinite possibilities within it is a very useful thing.'* This activity allows students to explore different interpretations of Helena and Demetrius.

Structure of the activity:

1. Ask students to work in pairs, with one as Helena and one as Demetrius.
2. Ask them to stand and read aloud the scene, from lines 1 to 57.
3. Ask them to choose an exchange (first one speech of Demetrius' and then a speech of Helena's) and discuss possibilities for playing the scene. If they like, they could start by repeating one of the choices the actors played, for example Helena as victim. But then ask them to come up with their own ideas (for example, Demetrius bored, Helena angry, and so on).
4. Ask them to try and find at least two new ways of doing the exchange, and then decide which they think works best.
5. Ask as many pairs as you have time for to share their version with the rest of the class.
6. What insights do they gain from these different versions?
What works best? What perhaps doesn't? Why?

"What would it be like if she really was thinking, 'Well, the only way to get a boy is to offer yourself sexually?'"



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

ABOUT THE 2011 RSC PRODUCTION

The cast discuss the ideas behind this production; Titania and Oberon as dream versions of Hippolyta and Theseus and the court as a 1960s London East End gangster club.

Before watching the clip

- **Dreams**
Ask students to look out for what the actors and director say about dreams. In particular, ask students to note what is said about Oberon and Titania being dream versions of Theseus and Hippolyta.

After watching the clip

- **Royal couples**
Ask students to discuss in small groups what they noticed about the contrasts between the appearance of Theseus and Hippolyta, and Oberon and Titania. How do these differences support the ideas that the latter are dream versions of the former?
- **The 1960s**
Ask students to discuss in small groups what the actors and director said about choosing the 60s as the setting for their production. How does setting it in the 60s, support the themes in the play?
- **Dream world**
Ask students to consider the notion of Oberon and Titania as dream versions of Theseus and Hippolyta. Ask them to look again at the text and differences between the way Theseus and Oberon speak. What can Oberon say and do that Theseus can't? What about Hippolyta and Titania? With older students you might want to explore the sexual repression of the first exchange with the liberalism of the second.

"In rehearsal, we shared our dreams with each other and physicalised our dreams. The rehearsal room was full of props."

