

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

STUDY GUIDE



by William Shakespeare

directed by Greta Lambert

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COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5 Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2 Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.9-10.6 Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS *cont.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.9-10.3 Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.11-12.1-3 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.11-12.7 Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry); evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist)

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

TH.Re7.1 Perceive and analyze artistic work.

TH.Re8.1 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

TH.Re9.1 Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

TH.Cn10.1 Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

TH.Cn11.1 Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

PLOT

The fair Hermia is commanded by her father to marry Demetrius. Unfortunately, she loves a different young Athenian, Lysander. To make matters worse, Hermia's friend Helena is really in love with Demetrius, but he spurns her advances. Hermia and Lysander escape into the forest to elope and are pursued by a furious Demetrius and a love-stricken Helena. Meanwhile, the Mechanicals – a band of bumbling craftsmen – rehearse a production of *Pyramus and Thisbe* for Duke Theseus's wedding.

Deeper within the forest, Oberon, king of the fairies, sends his mischievous assistant Puck to fetch a magical love potion. He plans to use the potion to punish his tempestuous wife Titania after they've quarreled, but in the hands of Puck, the potion infects the unsuspecting Athenian lovers. Can true love sort out what magic has set awry?

CHARACTERS

THE ATHENIANS

- Theseus:** Duke of Athens, betrothed to Hippolyta
- Hippolyta:** Queen of the Amazons, betrothed to Theseus
- Egeus:** Hermia's father
- Hermia:** in love with Lysander, betrothed to Demetrius
- Helena:** in love with Demetrius
- Lysander:** in love with Hermia
- Demetrius:** betrothed to Hermia, pursued by Helena
- Philostrate:** Theseus's wedding planner

THE MECHANICALS

- Quince:** the playwright
- Bottom:** the weaver, plays Pyramus
- Snug:** the joiner, plays Lion
- Flute:** the bellows-mender, plays Thisbe
- Snout:** the tinker, plays Wall and Moonshine

THE FAIRIES

- Puck:** Robin Goodfellow, assistant to Oberon
- Oberon:** the fairy king
- Titania:** the fairy queen
- Fairy:** servant to Titania



A silhouette of Titania and Bottom, Albert Vogel 1814-1886

SETTING

A Midsummer Night's Dream is set in Athens. The action moves between Theseus's palace, Quince's house, and the surrounding forest.

ABOUT WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE AND THE ASF FELLOWSHIP COMPANY

ABOUT WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare is the most celebrated playwright in the English language, penning such famous works as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*. Born in 1564, he wrote at least 37 plays before his death in 1616. His plays were originally produced by his acting troupe, the Lord Chamberlin’s Men. The troupe later became known as the King’s Men when King James took over as its benefactor. Both companies performed in the Old Globe Theatre in London, England, before Shakespeare’s retirement to Stratford-upon-Avon. Shakespeare’s plays are known for their rich poetic language and insightful commentary on human nature – aspects that continue to keep his work popular and relevant in contemporary theatre.



The Chandos portrait of William Shakespeare hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in London, England.

ABOUT THE FELLOWSHIP COMPANY

Every year, eight young actors spend a season training at ASF. Through rehearsals and workshops, they learn skills in areas like text work, voice, and stage combat to prepare them for work in professional theatres. All of the characters you will see in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* are played by this season’s Acting Fellowship Company. In addition, the Acting Fellows will play leading roles in *And Then They Came For Me* and *Dr. Seuss’s The Cat in the Hat* and understudy for our larger mainstage productions. This fall, the Acting Fellows will be taking *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* on tour to middle and high schools all over Alabama.



The 2018-2019 Acting Fellows on tour with *As You Like It*

What excites you about directing Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?

I love this comedy about love and magic. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, there are many kinds of love – mature love, marital love, young love, forbidden love, parental love. The forest plays a huge role in many of Shakespeare's plays. It is a place of transformation and discovery. This forest is ruled by mischievous fairies who interfere with the foolish mortals who have lost their way (literally and spiritually). They learn hard lessons about themselves and the joys and realities of life and love.

Why is it important to introduce young audiences to Shakespeare?

Students read Shakespeare in school, so why not introduce them to live Shakespeare? Seeing the plays makes the work so much more accessible – the stories literally come to life for the students. Once students feel how human the stories can be, they can identify with the characters and enjoy the playful language. Shakespeare is a master storyteller, and it is vital to keep his work alive through these young people by letting them feel the joy of the live experience.



Greta Lambert, Director of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Shakespeare's language is often complicated and hard to understand. How do you make this show accessible to young people?

I use young adult actors, to whom the students readily identify. These young adults help me find contemporary ways to reach the students and their world. I also employ music, the universal language, to assist the story. The final production is only 75 minutes, so the story is streamlined, keeping focus on the central plot.

What is the rehearsal process for this show like?

Rehearsals always begin with text analysis and character exploration. Actors spend about three weeks in rehearsal discovering and embodying the language and the world of the play through improvisation and blocking. I encourage an atmosphere of fun and play so that the actors bring their own sense of joy to the experience. This is very important in a comedy because the actors must feel free to explore without censoring themselves. Toward the end of rehearsals, costumes and other technical elements are added. Finally, we "test the waters" with previews and final rehearsals. On tour, our program includes a workshop for the students. We spend time developing workshops that relate to Shakespeare's language and themes from the play.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-SHOW QUESTIONS

1. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of Shakespeare's most popular plays, but it was written hundreds of years ago. How could the play be reinterpreted for present day? How might this production be different from other performances you've seen or talked about?
2. The plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* relies on a series of misunderstandings. How do you sort out misunderstandings with your own friends and family? What tactics are helpful, and what tactics are hurtful? How do you think the characters will handle the misunderstandings in the play?

POST-SHOW QUESTIONS

1. In Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the powerful forces of true love and magic are often intermixed. Do you think all four of the young lovers (Hermia, Lysander, Helena, and Demetrius) have really wed their true love at end of play?
2. Throughout the play, power dynamics play a significant role in the actions of the characters. Who has the power at start of play? End of play? How does the power shift between characters over the course of the story? How does it affect their relationships?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. **At Your Desk:** *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ends very neatly with all the characters coupled up and all arguments resolved. Write an alternative ending for the play. How do the characters remember the events of the day before? How do the events affect their relationships? Who is free from the fairies' magic, and who is still under its control?
2. **On Your Feet:** Split into groups and select a scene from the play (different groups should choose different scenes). Work together to act out the scene using your own words. After you've taken time to rehearse the scene, take turns performing for your classmates. How does the scene differ when using modern language? How does it change the scene's effect on the audience?