

# A Midsummer Night's Dream Preshow Workshop

## Essential Question

How do we understand Shakespeare's language?

## Objectives

Students will...

- Prepare for their student matinee experience at Alabama Shakespeare Festival
- Identify key features of Shakespeare's life and work
- Translate Shakespeare's poetry into modern speech
- Brainstorm questions to bring to the SchoolFest student matinee

## Materials

Video Guide: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZYMDMfzPcU>

Paper for students to translate verses on

Post it notes/Flash Cards for responses and Exit Slips

## Prologue:

- Prepare for the lesson by loading the video guide.
- Consider prefacing this lesson by working through the study guide at <https://asf.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ASF-A-MIDSUMMER-NIGHTS-DREAM-STUDY-GUIDE.pdf> in class or for homework.

### I. Intro to ASF, A Midsummer Night's Dream (10 minutes)

- Teacher Aside: Depending on your school or classroom's relationship to ASF, you may want to amend the introduction to remind students of prior field trips, or provide more information about their first trip to the theatre.
- On \_\_\_\_\_, our class is taking a field trip to Alabama Shakespeare Festival in Montgomery, Alabama.
- Has anyone seen a show at ASF?
- ASF is the State Theatre of Alabama and one of the largest Shakespeare Festivals in the world. It opened in 1972, and moved to Montgomery, AL in 1985. Despite the name, Alabama Shakespeare produces more than just plays by Shakespeare; they produce contemporary plays, musicals, and new works.
- The play we are going to see is *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
- Let's watch a quick video about the production you'll see at ASF.
- [VIDEO GUIDE](#)

### II. Who's Shakespeare? (10 Minutes)

- As you saw in the video, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written by William Shakespeare. What do you know about Shakespeare? Who was he? When was he alive? Why is he still important today?
- Teacher Aside: Use this as an opportunity to "take the temperature" of the room and assess how familiar your students are with both Shakespeare's work and his importance as a historical figure. You may want to have a few ideas prepared to start the discussion. Other plays he's written, life in the Elizabethan era, and common features across his work are all good places to start. List the students' answers on the whiteboard, or on a large poster board. After you've listed everyone's responses, you can unpack their answers, clarifying and expanding what they've come up with.

### III. Translating Shakespeare (10 minutes)

- Let's look at one of Shakespeare's verses from the play:
  - How happy some o'er other some, can be!  
Through Athens, I am thought as fair as she.  
But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so.  
Before Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyne  
He hailed down oaths that he was only mine.*How could we translate this into modern speech? Let's go through it line by line together.
- Teacher Aside: Have the verse written somewhere large and accessible so students can all view it at the same time. It might also be helpful to print out paper copies for students to make individual notes on as you go through translating. You may need to take the lead in this first example until students warm up to the structure of the language.

- c. Shakespeare's language is at times difficult to understand because it is written in verse, or poetry. What other characteristics do you notice in the language? What patterns does Shakespeare employ in his writing?
- d. Let's try another one. This time, form groups of 2 or 3 while I write the verse on the board. Work together to translate Shakespeare's text into modern language. We'll come back together after 5 min to share our thoughts.
  - i. *It is not night, when I do see your face.  
Therefore, I think I am not in the night,  
Nor doth this wood lack worlds of company.  
For you, in my respect, are all the world.  
Then how can it be said I am alone,  
When all the world is here to look on me?*
- e. Let's share out some of our thoughts. If you agree with what another student has said, you may rub your hands together.
- f. **Teacher Aside:** Be sure to list students' translations somewhere on the board so the class has a clear visual of what responses are most popular and what lines inspire wildly different responses.
- g. What translations seemed to come up most frequently?
- h. We spent a lot of time going through these verses word by word, but when we watch the play, actors will move through the language very quickly. Now that we are more familiar with the characteristics of Shakespeare's writing, what strategies can we employ to understand what's happening in the play? Do you think it is important to understand every word an actor says or just the overall idea of a speech? How do you think the actors and production elements will help us?
- i. **Teacher Aside:** Take this as an opportunity to reassure students that they do not need to understand every word in the play to follow the plot and enjoy the stagecraft. This production of *Midsummer* was directed with students in mind and designed to be accessible for audiences of all ages.

#### IV. **What Excites You?** (10 minutes)

- a. Shakespeare is known for his imaginative world-creation and vibrant characters. What excites you about seeing his play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, at ASF? Think about the actors, costumes, sets, and lights. What elements of a play most interest you? Write your response on a sticky note. When you are finished, you may place it on the board.
- b. **Teacher Aside:** Call on volunteers to come read off some of the sticky notes. Take this opportunity to clarify any misconceptions students may have about the theatre or expand on something students seem particularly interested in.

#### V. **Theatre Etiquette and Exit Slips** (5 minutes)

- a. I want to talk about how we show respect in the theatre. What kinds of behaviors are expected of audience members at a theatre performance?
- b. Let's review the list of Behavioral Expectations from ASF: <https://asf.net/education/schoolfest/theatre-etiquette/>.
- c. After the show, we'll have a talkback - an opportunity to ask actors and crew members at ASF about the themes of the show. What questions would you like to ask at this talkback? Write them down on a post it or flashcard, and remember to bring your note to the performance.