

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM Study guide



By William Shakespeare

Directed by Rick Dildine

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DEAR EDUCATORS:

Welcome to Season 52 at Alabama Shakespeare Festival! The amount of effort it takes to coordinate a trip from the classroom to the theater is not lost on us. Thank you for recognizing the value of live theatre for your students! We at ASF believe in the transformative power of the arts and its ability to educate, entertain, and inspire.

ASF is committed to supporting educators in the classroom. By engaging with this play and all others in our regular season, teachers will be able to address several standards in the state and national curriculum. It is our hope that all study materials and lesson activities are useful for classroom educators, though not exhaustive.

Viewing a performance at Alabama Shakespeare Festival and participating in the post-performance discussion can serve as a powerful springboard for positive classroom discourse, detailed and specific writing, and rich individual student exploration. Below you will find just a few of the possibilities for aligning your study of our productions to National Core Arts and Alabama Course of Study literacy standards.

See you at the theater!

ALABAMA COURSE OF STUDY: ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

[ELA21.W.6.1] Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

[ELA22.W.6.2] Write informative or explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

[ELA15.RI.6.5] Analyze how a particular sentence, paragraph, chapter, or section fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the ideas.

[ELA16.RI.6.6] Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.

[ELA12.RI.9-10.3] Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

[ELA4.RL.11-12.4] Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

[ELA5.RL.11-12.5] Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS cont.

[ELA7.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 ANCHOR 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.

ASF's production of A Midsummer Night's Dream is part of Shakespeare in American Communities, a program of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest.



Brandy Blackburn, Graphic Designer Copy Editing by Leigh Owen, Marketing Manager



PLOT, CHARACTERS, AND SETTING

PLOT

"Lord, what fools these mortals be!"

- A Midsummer Night's Dream Act I, Scene I





Greta Lambert in ASF's A Midsummer Night's Dream 1983

One midsummer night, the royal and fairy worlds collide. Theseus, Duke of Athens, makes plans to wed Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons. Egeus interrupts, complaining that his daughter Hermia will not marry Demetrius, the man Egeus has chosen. Hermia protests that she loves Lysander, but Duke Theseus must enforce Athenian law and decrees that Hermia must choose to wed Demetrius, go to a nunnery, or die.

Lysander convinces Hermia to elope with him to his aunt's house beyond Athenian law. They tell their plans only to Hermia's best friend, Helena, but she tells Demetrius, who left her for Hermia, so she can follow him to pursue Hermia. Meanwhile, some Athenian tradesmen (known as the mechanicals) are planning to rehearse *Pyramus and Thisbe* secretly in the forest the next night.

Into the Forest

Deeper in the forest, the fairy king and queen, Oberon and Titania, argue over Titania's refusal to give up her changeling boy to Oberon. When Titania scorns Oberon, he swears revenge and decides to cast a spell on her, sending Puck in search of a magic flower. The juice of the plant, when squeezed onto the eyes of someone asleep, causes them to fall in love with the first creature they see when they wake up. Oberon uses the juice on Titania as she sleeps in her bower.

When the mechanicals begin their rehearsal, Puck finds them and, in jest, puts a donkey's head on Bottom, the leading man, a transformation that scares away the others. Bottom's singing then awakens the flower-charmed Titania, and she falls in love with him.

Invisible Oberon hears Demetrius scorn Helena and sends Puck to charm Demetrius's eyes, but instead, Puck finds Lysander and Hermia, so he anoints Lysander's eyes—and when he is awakened by Helena, he instantly falls in love with her. Oberon, annoyed by the error, anoints Demetrius's eyes himself, so both young men now love Helena and scorn Hermia, who attacks her friend for stealing her beloved.

Happily Ever After

Once Oberon gets the changeling boy, he releases Titania from the charm and they reconcile. He also releases the charm on Lysander's eyes, so the young couples end up happily paired when they are discovered the next morning by Theseus and Hippolyta.

Theseus overrules Egeus and allows Hermia to marry Lysander. The mechanicals perform *Pyramus and Thisbe* to entertain the newlyweds, and it proves to be an unintentionally hilarious version of the tragedy, ending with a bergomask dance. As the couples retire, Oberon, Titania, and the fairies perform a blessing, and Puck asks the audience for forgiveness and to applaud if they enjoyed the performance.

Think about it: Though the play ends happily, do you believe the balance of love and order is truly restored? Why or why not? Explain.



PLOT, CHARACTERS, AND SETTING cont.

CHARACTERS

The Athenians

Theseus - Duke of AthensHippolyta - Queen of the Amazons, engaged to TheseusEgeus - A lord at court, Hermia's father

The Lovers

- Lysander Loves Hermia
- Demetrius Engaged to Hermia
- Hermia Egeus' daughter, loves Lysander but is engaged to Demetrius
- Helena Previously engaged to Demetrius

The Fairies

Oberon - King of the fairies

Titania - Queen of the fairies

Puck, Robin Goodfellow - Oberon's jester

Additional fairies: Cobweb, Mustardseed, Moth, Peaseblossom, Cuckoo, Firefly, Poppy

The Mechanicals/Rustics

Peter Quince - Carpenter, director of the play Nick Bottom - Weaver, plays Pyramus Francis Flute - Bellows mender, plays Thisbe Tom Snout - Tinker, plays Wall and Moon Snug - Joiner, plays the lion



A royal court in Athens and a nearby forest. The present.



Bottom "as Pyramus" Rendering. ASF Costume Design by Dorothy Englis



Titania Rendering. ASF Costume Design by Dorothy Englis



THEMES IN THE PLAY

DREAMS

The title of the play alone provides an appropriate allusion to the central concept of the plot. The majority of the play takes place at night. The characters awaken from their confusion, believing all their misadventures to have been a dream. The term "midsummer" refers to a celebration of the summer solstice, the longest day of the year. This leads the audience to believe the events of this "midsummer night" will be wrapped up quickly. What better way to provide a beautiful denouement than for it all to have been a dream? A modern example of this device would be Dorothy's tale at the end of *The Wizard of Oz*. The idea that things are not necessarily what they seem is a dominant motif in the play. A dream, however complicated and visceral, is not real, even though it seems so at the time we experience it. Characters in the play are repeatedly put to sleep and wake up pleasantly surprised that what they'd just experienced was not reality—or so they think.

LOVE

So much of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is about relationships. The play begins with plans to celebrate a royal wedding. Egeus demonstrates his love for his daughter, Hermia, by fighting for what he believes is best for her, even though Athenian laws at the time would seem cruel and unusual by the standards of today. One famous line, "The course of true love never did run smooth," speaks to the difficulties of love in the play. Most of the conflict (internal and external) stems from complications with romance. Hermia risks all to flee to the forest with Lysander, proving love in this play has the power to dominate a person's actions and ability to think rationally. This point is further proven when a spell is cast over Titania, who falls in love with Bottom, who has been transformed into a donkey. The lovers quarrel over lost love and nearly come to blows. Though it seems everything has descended into chaos, the overall tone of the play leads the audience to believe that things will eventually end happily. Three weddings and a fairy blessing bring everyone together in the end, making it a classic "happily ever after" tale.



Think about it: What parallels could you draw between Cupid, the Roman god of love, and Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? Do you think this ancient figure gave Shakespeare any inspiration?

"Lord, what fools these mortals be." A Midsummer Night's Dream illuminates the fallibility of human beings. The fairies use their magic to mock and poke fun at the squabbling Athenians. Puck takes note of Bottom's arrogance and transforms his head into that of a donkey for his own enjoyment, which proves to be more than a little ironic. Magical flowers, a critical symbol in the plot, are used to make the lovers fall in and out of love with one another. In this way, magic gives the fairies power over the mortals who are exploring unfamiliar territory. Magic also serves as a device for the playwright to correct course near the end of the play and restore order to both the natural and fairy worlds.

🚸 NATURE

Shakespeare's plays include nearly a hundred different botanical references, including flowers, fruits, herbs, and seeds. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* references more than twenty plants and flowers alone. In Act III, Titania instructs her fairies to feed Bottom "apricots, dewberries, purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries." This suggests the forest is a mysterious place, but maybe not so dangerous. Nature, weather, and the power of the seasons are critical to Shakespeare's plays. That's all the more true in this story of comic misadventures and complications. The Athenians wander off and lose their way. Further into the forest (and into the night), there is mistaken identity and unrequited love. Unlike the Athenian court, the forest is dark and dense, but full of wonder and desire. The mechanicals chose the forest for privacy. The lovers run off into the forest to escape Athenian law. Order is restored between nature and civilization when the Athenians return home.

Think about it: William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* have striking similarities; there's an abundance of mystery and magic. What parallels could you draw between Puck in *Midsummer* and Ariel in *The Tempest*?



ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare was a prolific writer who lived during the English Renaissance. His works have survived more than four hundred years. Of those surviving works are approximately thirty-seven plays, one hundred fifty-four sonnets, and several narrative poems. William Shakespeare is touted as one of the most significant literary figures of the English language. Shakespeare was born in April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon. He married Anne Hathaway, a woman eight years his senior. The couple had three children. The exact date of Shakespeare's birth is not verified, but it is most often celebrated around the world on April 23, which coincidentally is the exact date of his death in 1616.

Shakespeare's known work was produced between 1589 and 1613. *The Tempest* is widely regarded by literary scholars as Shakespeare's final original play, though he would go on to collaborate on other works. William Shakespeare retired to Stratford-upon-Avon, having enjoyed great wealth and success and claiming the adoration of both Queen Elizabeth I and James I. His works have survived more than four hundred years in public knowledge.

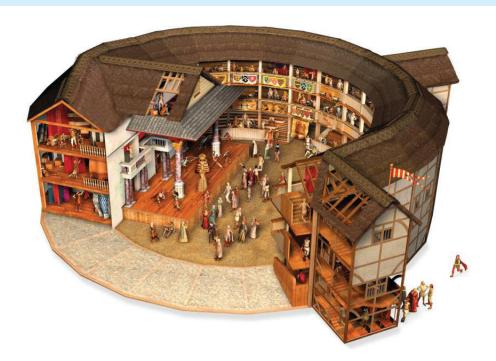


The Chandos portrait (held by the National Portrait Gallery, London)

Shakespeare's Theater: The Globe

Shakespeare produced his plays at the Globe, a donut-shaped amphitheater in London, England. The theater was built in 1599, and could seat up to 3,000 spectators. Most of Shakespeare's plays were produced during the day with limited ability to create special effects.

Think about it: Knowing what you know now about the Globe, how do you think Shakepeare physically separated the fairy world from the royal world in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?





SHAKESPEARE'S CANON OF PLAYS

THE COMEDIES

The Taming of the Shrew c.1580 - 1590 The Two Gentlemen of Verona c.1590s The Comedy of Errors c.1594 A Midsummer Night's Dream c.1595 - 1596 Love's Labour's Lost c.1595 - 1596 The Merchant of Venice c.1596 - 1597 The Merry Wives of Windsor c.1597 - 1601 Much Ado About Nothing c.1598 As You Like It c.1599 Twelfth Night c.1601 Troilus and Cressida c.1601 - 1602 All's Well That Ends Well c. 1603 - 1606 Measure for Measure c.1604 Pericles, Prince of Tyre c.1608 Cymbeline c.1610 The Winter's Tale c.1611 The Tempest c.1611

THE TRAGEDIES

*Titus Andronicus c.*1591 - 1592 *Romeo and Juliet c.*1595 - 1596 *Julius Caesar c.*1599 *Hamlet c.*1600 *Othello c.*1604 *Timon of Athens c.*1604 - 1606 *Macbeth c.*1606 *King Lear c.*1605 - 1606 *Antony and Cleopatra c.*1606 - 1607 *Coriolanus c.*1608

THE HISTORIES

King John c. 1595 - 1597 Richard II c. 1595 - 1596 Richard III c. 1592 - 1594 Henry IV, Part 1 c. 1596 - 1597 Henry IV, Part 2 c. 1597 - 1598 Henry VI, Part 1 c. 1592 Henry VI, Part 2 c. 1591 Henry VI, Part 3 c. 1595 Henry V c. 1599 Henry VIII c. 1613



William Shakespeare. Universal History Archive. Getty Images.



By ASF Dramaturg, Dr. Susan R. Willis

Professor Emerita of English, Auburn University at Montgomery

The magic that fills the fairy kingdom can wreak havoc on mortals, revealing its nightmarish aspects, but it can also elicit wonder — and all that magic has a rich context culturally and psychologically.



For many agrarian cultures folk celebrations and holiday indulgence marked the times of planting, ripening, and harvest—the annual cycle of fertility. The "rites of May" that Theseus ironically mentions in 4.1 are associated with planting. Midsummer—the summer solstice—is the apogee, the limit of the year's bloom and burgeoning, after which the focus turns to ripening and harvest. (Where are we in this play? Do we sense such a turning in the shift from wooing to wedding?) Such festivals associated with nature's fertility often involved not only eating and drinking but celebrating human fertility as well, as the fairies do at the end of the play.



➤ NIGHT

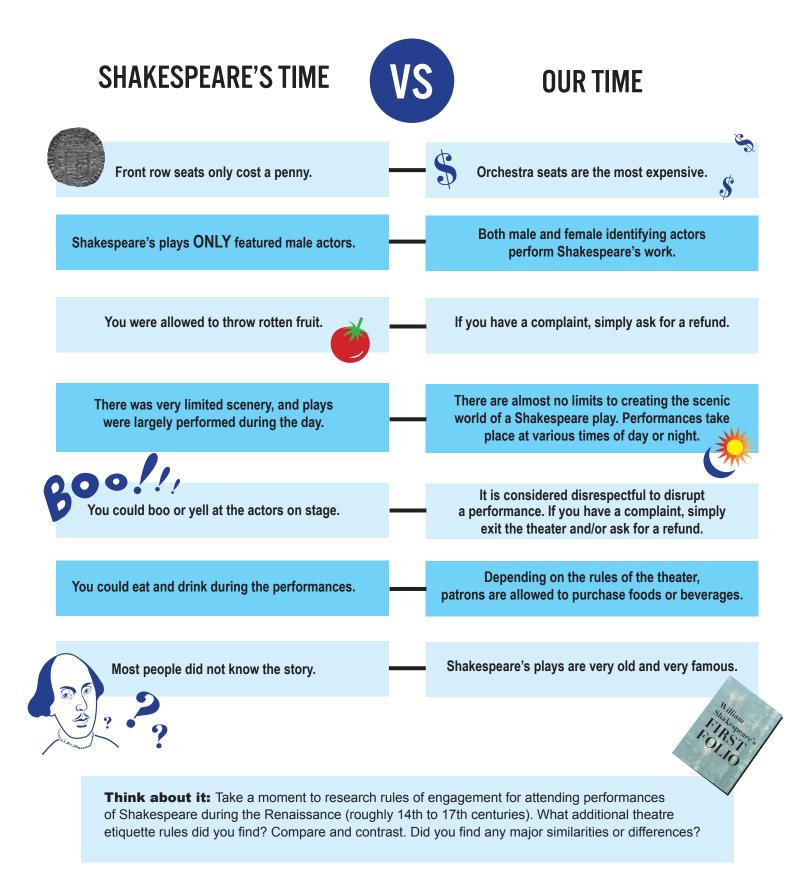
Much of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* occurs at night. Arguably the first scene is at night, since they discuss the current phase of the moon. Certainly the entire action in the forest is during the night and early dawn, and the wedding feast and after-dinner entertainment are again at night, awaiting bedtime. Likewise, the working men can only rehearse their play at night, on their own time. Both darkness and being in nature rather than the city play into the power of the forest scenes, for the supernaturals are at home in the forest, but the young lovers and amateur actors are changed out of their urban context. Night also takes on a psychological power in the play; darkness reveals hidden urges, strange apprehensions, and alterations, not to mention how often a bush is supposed a bear. Nothing is clear to the mortals at night, for they are tired, in a strange place, and misled in the dark.

C DREAM

If night is psychologically destabilizing, dreams are even more psychologically revealing. The disorientation, absurdity, exquisite pleasure, terror, and confusion of the dream state well defines the mortals' experience through the middle of the action. Bottom the weaver, the most fortunate mortal in the play, enters the fairy kingdom and is embraced by it, for he finds himself in the arms of the fairy queen. He has never had a dream like this before! For the lovers, however, the nocturnal forest experience is a nightmare in which love becomes a torment of denial, mockery, or betrayal. Titania's experience is likewise part dream and part nightmare (especially if donkey braying is not her favorite melody). Love may be a dream, but dreams are quickly-changing psychic flickers, and the truths they tell us may not always be what we expect.



SIGNS OF THE TIMES: THEATRE ETIQUETTE THEN & NOW





AN INTERVIEW WITH MIDSUMMER'S SCENIC DESIGNER: JEFF BEHM

Jeff Behm is a Los Angeles-based lighting designer, lighting director, and production/scenic designer who specializes in a variety of genres including multicamera television, live events, concerts, and theatre. Recent credits include *The Academy of Country Music Awards, The Academy Awards, The NFL Pro-Bowl,* and *Adele: One Night Only.* Jeff recently designed both the lighting for The Tempest, as well as the lighting and scenic design for *Cabaret* at ASF. Jeff is a proud member of USA 829. www.jbehmdesign.com

Q. What attracted you most to working on this very well-known play [A Midsummer Night's Dream]?

A. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a classic. It is one of Shakespeare's most well known comedies and I have always wanted to do this show since I was young. Having read the play in school and then working as an assistant multiple times on productions in the past, I jumped at the opportunity to design the set. It is full of magic, fairies, donkey heads, and love triangles. How could I not want to be involved in creating this world!



Q. What was your inspiration for this design process? How did your conversations with Rick Dildine, the director, inform your choices?

A. The inspiration for this design centers around the world of a young boy from "our world." In order to escape the conflict in his own life, he finds an abandoned ambiguous space that is a cross between a hayloft, clock tower, and attic. The boy has made this space his home with a bean bag chair and piles upon piles of lamps. With the help of his imagination and story book, the space magically transforms into Athens and the adjacent forest.



ASF's 2023 production of *Cabaret*. Scenic Design by Jeff Behm



ASF's current production of A Midsummer Night's Dream. Scenic design by Jeff Behm

Q. You've designed other work here at ASF. Are there any differences in crafting the world for a Shakespeare play as opposed to something more contemporary, like your brilliant design for our past production of *Cabaret*?

A. Designing shows under the perimeters of historical context have different needs and boundaries compared to designing a Shakespeare. Classical work is conceptualized and open to interpretation. The architecture in *Cabaret* is deeply rooted in realism. Whereas a Shakespeare comedy—like *Midsummer*—can have a more timeless and magical existence.

Q. What do you hope audiences, particularly young audiences, will take away from the environment you've created on stage and beyond that, the overall message of this play?

A. The way we have presented this piece allows all audience members to re-engage their inner child. Young viewers can connect with this show through the power of their own imagination. Even though Shakespearean work holds more complicated adult themes, every audience member can leave this show with their own sense of joy, playfulness, and a positive outlook on the world around us.



CLASSROOM RESOURCES

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is in part a play about unrequited love. What might be wounding about a profession of love that is not returned? Is it fair to play with people's hearts for jest or comic satisfaction?
- 2. In thinking about the title, what role do you think magic will play in the production? How might it be presented? How will it complicate and/or simplify the circumstances of the characters?

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Compare and contrast the mechanicals with the royal elite in the play. How were the differences in social class portrayed throughout? Think about physicality, language, clothing, etc. Explain.
- 2. Compare and contrast the story of *Pyramus and Thisbe* to what you know about *Romeo and Juliet*. What do the stories have in common? What makes *Pyramus and Thisbe* comedic? What makes *Romeo and Juliet* tragic? What are the similarities or differences in language and tone?
- 3. Think about Puck's epilogue. Why do you think the playwright chose to have one of the fairies address the audience directly in this manner? Does Puck's speech give a proper resolution to the play? Explain.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. On your feet: Turf Wars! Divide students into 3-4 even groups. Write down the four "worlds" of characters (Royals, Lovers, Mechanicals, Fairies) on index cards and place them in a hat or bowl. Have a student from each group choose a card. Allow the students to establish their "turf" by creating a tableau or power pose that best represents the characters in their "world." Then, using craft supplies, create a Coat of Arms that highlights symbols of their spirit and values. Lastly, have the students create a group chant, catchphrase, or cheer that best fits the characters in their world. Allow each group to "battle" by sharing their creations and claiming their turf! Discuss.

Variation: Add additional tasks for each turf group. Ex. What meal might they have for dinner? What's your group's favorite leisure activity? Etc. Encourage students to use clues from the play.

Another Variation: Have the students write modern translations of one scene from their "world," then perform and discuss. It may be helpful to assign the scene for the students. These variations are a great way to introduce script analysis!

2. At your desk: Imagine A Midsummer Night's Dream as a big blockbuster film—like Barbie or Oppenheimer! What famous actors would you have play the Athenians, Mechanicals, and Fairies? Create a production poster to promote the premiere. Include the actors you've chosen (billing and/or images). Capture our attention! Think about what symbols or quotations you might include. Be sure the poster has the title, the writer's name, the date of its premiere, where it will be playing, and the time. You may use a computer to create a graphic or you may simply use a piece of paper and markers or a pencil. Get creative!

Teachers: You will find additional classroom activity sheets attached below! Use them however you like. Please let us know if you find these helpful or have other ideas for additional resources.



ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Anticipation Activity

Barbs from the Bard: Shakespearean Insults & Compliments Sheet

Responding to Live Theatre: A Midsummer Night's Dream Critical Response

ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES

William Shakespeare's Life www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-life/

The Life of Shakespeare in Seven Minutes https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-P3kPsnsPRo

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust www.shakespeare.org.uk



Before you see the show, respond to the following statements as honestly as possible by circling your response. Then, explain your answer with an example.

SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, D – Disagree, SD – Strongly Disagree

STATEMENT #1: True love is never complicated.			
SA	А	D	SD
Explain your answer with an example:			
STATEMENT #2: The real world is governed more by appearance than reality.			
SA	А	D	SD
Explain your answer with an example:			

STATEMENT #3: Beauty is only skin deep.			
SA	А	D	SD
Explain your answer with an e	xample:		

STATEMENT #4: If you want something, you should chase it no matter the cost.				
SA	А	D	SD	
Explain your answer with an example:				

Teachers: A variation of this activity: "Four Corners." Make signs with the SA, A, SD, and D labels. Then, ask the students to stand in the middle of the classroom. Repeat each question aloud (or create new ones) and allow them to move to the corner of the room that best represents their opinion. Discuss.



BARBS FROM THE BARD: SHAKESPEAREAN INSULTS

Instructions: Master Shakespeare's language by setting up your own insults match! Choose one word from each column, add "thou"at the beginning, and insult away!

Example: "Thou rank evil-eyed hedge-pig!"

COLUMN A	COLUMN B	COLUMN C
Peevish	clay-brained	canker blossom
Grizzled	dog-hearted	clot pole
Greasy	evil-eyed	hedge-pig
Jaded	lily-livered	dogfish
Waggish	mad-bred	egg-shell
Purpled	onion-eyed	nut-hook
Rank	paper-faced	pantaloon
Saucy	rump-fed	rabbit-sucker
Vacant	shag-eared	snipe
Yeasty	white-livered	younker

ELIZABETHAN COMPLIMENTS

Instructions: Smooth things over with a compliment for your friends! Use the same formula as above! It's all in good Shakespearean fun.

Example: "Thou delicate well-wishing valentine!"

COLUMN A	COLUMN B	COLUMN C
Rare	honey-tongued	smilet
Sweet	well-wishing	toast
Fruitful	fair-faced	cukoo-bud
Brave	best tempered	nose-herb
Sugared	tender-hearted	wafer-cake
Flowering	tiger-booted	pigeon-egg
Precious	smooth-faced	Welsh cheese
Gallant	thunder-darting	song
Delicate	young-eyed	true-penny
Celestial	sweet-suggesting	valentine

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM CRITICAL REVIEW

Directions: Imagine you are the official theatre critic for this production at ASF! For each area of the production, give thoughtful and honest feedback. Be specific and answer each prompt using complete sentences. Use the back of the page if necessary.

I. Playwright/Story

Use the space below to discuss elements of the story. What worked well? Did anything strike you negatively?

II. Performance/Acting

Use the space below to give constructive feedback about the actors' performances in the production. Was there a performer whom you particularly enjoyed? What could have been better?

III. Directing

Use the space below to discuss the overall direction and interpretation of this production. Remember, nothing happens by accident. Did anything surprise you?

IV. Technical Elements

Use the space below to discuss the lighting, sound, scenery, and costumes for this production. Were you transported to a different time/place? Did these elements effectively serve the story? Explain.