

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Study Guide

Developed by the Education Department
of the Center for Puppetry Arts, Atlanta, Georgia

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Synopsis

A Midsummer Night's Dream takes place in Athens, Greece. Three separate story lines become entwined when a group of Athenian nobles and a group of working class tradesmen enter an enchanted forest ruled by fairies.

The story begins with Duke Theseus making plans for his upcoming wedding to a reluctant Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons. Egeus arrives with a dilemma: his daughter, Hermia is promised to Demetrius, but she prefers Lysander. Hermia would be happy to marry Lysander instead and leave Demetrius to her friend Helena. Unfortunately, Demetrius is not interested in Helena and, like Lysander, wants Hermia for his bride. When Theseus rules that Hermia should obey her father, she runs off with Lysander to elope in a distant town. Demetrius learns of their plan and sets out after the lovers with Helena close behind.

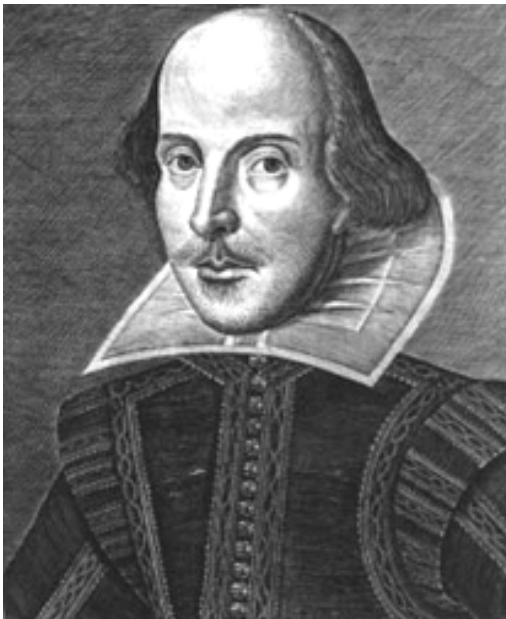
The four arrive in the forest where a small band of amateur performers, led by Nick Bottom, has gathered to rehearse "Pyramus & Thisby" (a tragic play similar to Shakespeare's own "Romeo & Juliet") for the Duke's wedding reception. Unbeknownst to any of the mortals, the forest is a magical place full of fairies including their king, Oberon, and queen, Titania who happen to be quarreling over who will raise an orphaned servant boy. Oberon orders his mischievous aide,

Puck, to pour a love potion on the eyelids of his sleeping wife so she will fall in love with whomever she first sees upon waking. That happens to be Nick Bottom, even though Puck has now given him the head of a donkey.

It is not long before Oberon overhears the lovesick Helena pleading with Demetrius who wants nothing to do with her. Oberon tells Puck to apply the potion to the eyelids of Demetrius, but he mistakes him for Lysander, who is awakened by a frantic Helena. Soon Lysander and Demetrius, originally pursuing Hermia, are now hopelessly in love with Helena, who is convinced that she is the victim of a cruel hoax. Oberon and Puck put the four to sleep once more, along with Nick Bottom and all of the foolish mortals leave the forest believing the whole experience was but a dream. In the end, the amateur actors are chosen to entertain at the combined wedding of three couples: Duke Theseus and Hippolyta, Lysander and Hermia, and Demetrius and Helena.

Style of Puppetry

The Center for Puppetry Arts' production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is performed with rod puppets and masks. The puppeteers perform their characters in full view of the audience, simultaneously portraying the supernatural beings that act upon the mortals in the story. The puppets were designed and built by the Center's resident puppet builder Katie George, a graduate of the University of Connecticut's Puppet Arts Program. Her designs are adapted from traditional rod puppets found in China. These rod puppets have three control rods. One is a direct connection to the head which also supports the puppet's body. The other two rods attach to the puppets' hands. The puppeteer controls the puppet's head and body movements with one hand, and both of the puppet's arms with the other.



About the Author

Although the exact date of his birth is not recorded, William Shakespeare was born in April 1564, in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, UK. At age 20, he moved 100 miles southeast to London to become an actor. This was at a time when laws prohibited groups of traveling "vagabond" performers, encouraging players to form acting companies in theaters like the Globe. In his lifetime he wrote and produced 38 plays. Shakespeare never published a collected edition of his works. In Elizabethan times, it was important for playwrights to market their plays as performances, not texts. Writing down speeches and plots might encourage piracy, jeopardizing the sale of such productions to theater companies. Shakespeare's plays generally fall into three categories: comedies like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, histories like *Richard II*, and tragedies like *Macbeth*. Four hundred years later, his plays are still performed on a regular basis and are frequently adapted for the cinema.

Activities

Middle School

Untangling Story Lines *GA QCC's covered:*

6th Grade Language Arts: 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 29

7th Grade Language Arts: 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 28

8th Grade Language Arts: 21, 22, 23, 25, 26

Three separate worlds collide in Shakespeare's comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Identify the three story lines and the characters involved in each. How are the story lines alike? How are they different? What motivates the characters in each case? By mixing elements of fantasy and reality, what does the author tell us about the nature of love?

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what does the author tell us about the nature of love?

Shakespeare's Globe *GA QCC's covered:*

6th Grade Language Arts: 32, 36, 53, 60

7th Grade Language Arts: 31, 32, 47, 55

8th Grade Language Arts: 31, 33, 47, 49, 55

Find a reference book about Shakespeare's Globe Theater or go online to answer these questions (see the *Bibliography* and *Online Resources* sections of this study guide).

1. In what city was the original Globe built? What year did it open?

2. What year did the Globe burn down? What started the fire?

3. What year did the Puritans permanently close the Globe?

4. What was the name given to audience members that stood in front of the stage for the duration of a performance? What was the price of admission to this area?

5. Who was the American actor that started a trust to rebuild the Globe?

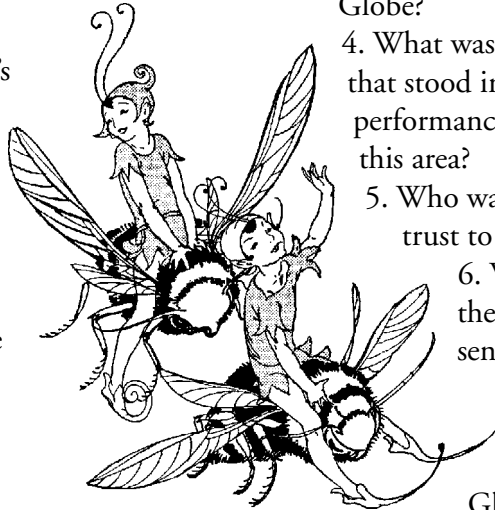
6. What does the part of the stage where the signs of the zodiac are painted represent?

7. What does the area underneath the stage represent?

8. Why does the thatched roof of the Globe cover only certain sections of the building, leaving a hole in the center?

9. What year did the newly reconstructed Globe theater open?

10. Approximately how far away from the original location is the new building?



Answers: 1. London; 1599 2. 1613; a cannon fired during a performance of Henry VIII 3. 1642 4. Groundlings; one penny 5. Sam Wanamaker 6. The heavens 7. The underworld 8. Natural light needed to illuminate the stage 9. 1997 10. 200 yards

High School

Why Do Fools Fall In Love?

GA QCC's covered:

9th-12th Grade Language Arts, Core Skills: 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 25

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, all of the characters fall in and out of love at a dizzying pace. Write an essay about Shakespeare's attitude toward love. Quote lines from the play to support your answer. What evidence can you find in the popular culture of today - 400 years later - that love still makes fools of people?

William Shakespeare in the New Millennium

GA QCC's Covered: 9th-12th Grade Language Arts, Core Skills: 7, 18, 19, 20, 22, 25

When he died, Shakespeare left behind an awesome legacy. Every day, one of his 38 plays is being performed somewhere around the world. Shakespeare's work is often reinterpreted for present-day films such as the 1996 *Romeo and Juliet*.

Write an essay that addresses these questions: Do you think that reinventing a classic work of English literature damages its integrity? Do you think Shakespeare's work has stood the test of time? Why or why not?

Selected Bibliography

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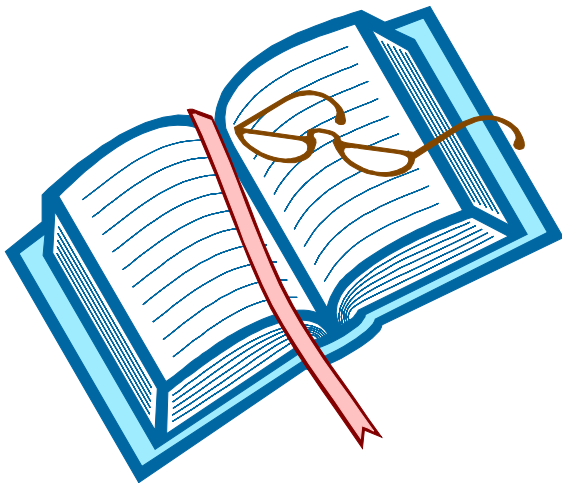
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*“Captain of our fairy band,
Helena is here at hand;
And the youth, mistook by me,
Pleading for a lover’s fee.
Shall we their fond pageant see?
Lord, what fools these mortals be!”*

*“If we shadows have offended,
Think but this and all is mended,
That you have but slumber’d here,
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream.”*

Online Resources

<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/>

The official website of The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-upon-Avon, UK.

<http://www.shakespeares-globe.org/>

Visit the homepage of the meticulously reconstructed Globe Theater in London, UK.

<http://www.shakespearetaVERN.com/>

Show schedules, times and prices for Atlanta’s own Shakespeare Tavern.

<http://www.ulen.com/shakespeare/>

Let’s go Surfing with the Bard! A comprehensive online classroom for all things Shakespearean. Features a free, downloadable study guide to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

<http://www.shakespearemag.com/>

The homepage for Shakespeare Magazine - a publication for English teachers and Shakespeare enthusiasts published by Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.

<http://daphne.palomar.edu/shakespeare/>

Mr. William Shakespeare and the Internet. A complete annotated guide to the scholarly Shakespeare resources available on Internet.

<http://tech-two.mit.edu/Shakespeare/works.html>

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare online. This site has offered Shakespeare’s plays and poetry to the Internet community since 1993.

[http://www.cc.emory.edu/ENGLISH/classes/](http://www.cc.emory.edu/ENGLISH/classes/Shakespeare_Illustrated/MidsummerPaintings.html)

[Shakespeare_Illustrated/MidsummerPaintings.html](http://www.cc.emory.edu/ENGLISH/classes/Shakespeare_Illustrated/MidsummerPaintings.html)

Emory University’s Shakespeare Illustrated, explores nineteenth-century paintings, criticism and productions of Shakespeare’s plays and their influences on one another. View 22 paintings inspired by *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

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