

# A Midsummer Night's Dream Workshop Study Guide

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## Who's Who in Midsummer

**Theseus:** Duke of Athens, about to be married to the Amazon Hippolita.

**Hippolita:** Amazonian Queen, engaged to Theseus.

**Egeus:** Father to Hermia, and an important man in Athens.

**Hermia:** In love with Lysander. Her father wants her to marry Demetrius.

**Demetrius:** Young man of Athens. He used to date Helena, but now he wants to marry Hermia.

**Lysander:** Young man of Athens. Also wants to marry Hermia. He is "as well derived" as Demetrius.

**Helena:** "Fair Nedar's daughter" and best friend of Hermia. She is in love with Demetrius.

**Bottom:** Workman of Athens. He is a weaver, and is "set down for Pyramus."

**Peter Quince:** Another workman, he likes theatricals!

**Snug, the joiner:** Workman of Athens, the name says it all.

**Francis Flute:** The bellows mender. He will assay Thisbe in the play.

**Snout:** The tinker.

**Robin Starveling:** The tailor.

**Oberon:** The King of the Fairies. He is arguing with his queen over a little foundling boy.

**Titania:** Queen of the Fairies. Her little page is the son of a "votress" of her order, or priestess.

**Puck:** Robin Goodfellow, Puck, Hobgoblin and servant fairy to Oberon. He is "that merry wanderer of the night."

**Peaseblossom, Mustard Seed, Moth and Cobweb:** Fairies.

**Philostrate:** Courtier/servant to Theseus.



## The Story

Theseus, Duke of Athens and Hippolita, Queen of the Amazons, are about to be married. Theseus says of their relationship "I woo'd thee with my sword, And won thy love, doing thee injuries: but I will wed thee in another key, with pomp, with triumph and with reveling." Egeus enters with Hermia, Lysander and Demetrius in tow. It seems that Lysander and Hermia want to wed, but Egeus wants Hermia to wed Demetrius, his choice. She will not and Egeus wants the Duke to command Hermia to obey her father. The punishment for disobeying is "to dye the death or to abjure for ever the sight of men." Lysander objects to the whole thing, since he is as worthy as Demetrius. Plus, Demetrius has "Made love to Nedar's daughter, Helena, and won her soul." Theseus sends everyone away and tells Hermia to consider well her decision. Lysander and Hermia decide to run away just as Helena shows up, lovesick for Demetrius. She says, "Sickness is catching, o were favor so." She wishes Demetrius would love her the way he seems to love Hermia, and wants to look like her, in case that will do it. After Hermia and Lysander leave she decides to tell Demetrius that Hermia, her childhood friend, and Lysander plan to run away that night.

In another part of Athens, a group of Athenian workmen, or "mechanicals" are met to practice their amateur play they hope to perform for Theseus' wedding celebrations. Peter Quince hands out parts to Bottom, Flute, Starveling and Snout. They begin to rehearse and have a hard

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getting the sense of the drama- “the most lamentable comedy, and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe.”

In the forest outside Athens, Robin Goodfellow, or Puck to some, meets a fairy, who sings “over hill, over dale, thru brush, thru briar” and “I do wander everywhere and I serve the Fairy Queen.” Oberon and Titania are both heading towards the same grove and fireworks are expected. Oberon wants Titania to hand over a little human boy she is raising as her own. The boy is orphaned and she will not part with him. They argue and Titania leaves. As she does, Oberon says, “Well, go thy ways: thou shalt not from this grove till I torment thee for this injury.” He asks Puck to find a purple flower, “love-in-idleness” because “the juice of it, on sleeping eyelids laid, will make or man or woman madly dote upon the next live creature that it sees.”

Meanwhile, in another part of the forest as night is closing in, Demetrius and Helena are looking for Hermia and Lysander. At the same time he is rejecting her girlish attempts to seduce him. He says, “I love thee not, therefore pursue me not.” Oberon, watching the whole scene and feeling sorry for Helena, orders Puck to take part of the magical flower and find this Athenian youth who has spurned her. Hermia and Lysander show up, lost and deciding to rest, sleep the rest of the night. Puck happens upon them and mistaking one Athenian youth for the other, puts the juice in Lysander’s eyes. Helena soon enters and sees Lysander asleep. Of course when she wakes him he magically falls in love with Helena, and as she runs away, he abandons Hermia to chase Helena. Hermia awakes alone and follows the other two, saying, “either death or you I’ll find immediately.”

Meanwhile, in another part of the forest, the mechanicals are holding another rehearsal. They are not satisfied with the text they are working with and decide to improve it with some additional characters and scenes. Puck

finds them and decides to spice things up. When he does so, he changes Bottom into a donkey and everyone runs screaming further into the forest.

Further into the forest, Titania is napping on “a bank where the wild thyme blowes.” Bottom shows up, ass head and all, and she, of course, wakes up and falls in love with him. She takes him off to her bower, for more merriment.

Puck reports back to Oberon that “my mistress with a Monster is in love.” While they enjoy this, Demetrius shows up still in love with Hermia, and Oberon realized Puck must have enchanted the wrong Athenian youth. Demetrius lies down to sleep and Oberon enchants his eyes with the love potion. Lysander and Helena enter, and Helena is very upset that Lysander has forsaken Hermia. Demetrius wakes and now he is in love with Helena too! Hermia soon finds her way to the other three lovers and much fun ensues as each one pursues someone who doesn’t love them anymore.

Oberon is furious with Puck for this fiasco and insists Puck make it right. He does so by leading the four lovers on a mad romp through the forest at night. Eventually they all collapse from exhaustion, quite near each other and Puck anoints the correct lovers eyes with the love potion. He says, “On the ground sleep sound, I’ll apply in your eye, gentle lover, remedy.”

Shortly, in another part of the forest, Titania is entertaining her donkey lover, Bottom. She says, “Come, sit thee down upon this flowry bed, While I thy amiable cheeks to coy, And stick musk roses in thy sleek, smooth head.” They enjoy entertainment and a snack, and then take a nap. Oberon enters and charms Titania back to herself. Once she sees Bottom with his asses head, she flees with Oberon saying, “Oh, how mine eyes doth loath his visage now.”

Now, the forest is waking to the dawn, and Theseus, Hippolita, Egeus and the Athenian court are out hunting. They come upon the four lovers who wake up very confused! All

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appears to be well, and Demetrius disavows his former love to Hermia. Instead he asks to marry Helena, and Theseus proclaims, “Egeus, I will over-bear your will; for in the temple by and by with us, these couples shall be eternally knit.” They all go off to get married and watch the entertainment.

Bottom awakes and remembering his amazing “dream” says “I had a dream, past the wit of man, to say, what dream it was.” Peter Quince and his friends find Bottom and rejoice his return. They return to Athens to perform their play for the wedding festivities.

The three newly married couples, Egeus and the rest of the court gather to enjoy entertainment. When it is apparent that Bottom and his compatriots are not the most experienced actors in Athens, Theseus says, “for never any thing can be amiss when simpleness and duty tender it.” Soon, it is time for the entertainment to end and the day draws to an end.

Oberon, Titania, Puck and their cohorts return one last time, to bless the Duke and his Lady, the lovers and all Athens, saying, “Hand in hand, with fairy grace, will we sing and bless this place.” The play closes with Puck’s entreaty “Give me your hands if we be friends, and Robin shall restore amends.”

#### **Before a workshop:**

**Read “the lover’s fight” scene, Act III, scene ii, from Demetrius line “Oh, Helena, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine” to Demetrius’ line “Follow! Nay, I’ll go with thee cheek by jowl”**

Circle any words that sound like an “action” or “emotion.” What do the majority of “emotion words” tell you about what everyone is feeling and thinking in this scene? Example: Hermia says to Helena “*I am amazed at your passionate words*”

Then, note “action” words- is someone doing something physical on those words? Example: Lysander’s line “*Stay, gentle Helena*”

In Elizabethan England playgoers demanded a different play every day, which prevented actors from rehearsing a lot. Why might the playwright include stage direction and emotional clues to performance right in the play text itself? Does the scene become clearer to your modern ear once you find clues for action and emotion in the language?

Find the definitions of:

Poetry

Iambic Pentameter

Rhymed Couplets

#### **During a Workshop:**

Every time you hear a rhymed couplet (look that one up) raise your hand! Does the playwright use rhymed poetry for a reason? What do you think his reason was?

Help your fellow “actors” to imagine the lover’s scene as a big wrestling match.

Every time you hear an insult, raise your hand. How does the playwright make the insults funny, and not hurtful? Or does he mean them to hurt and why?

#### **After a Workshop, Talk About This:**

##### **Doubling the roles in Midsummer:**

Scholars know Shakespeare’s actors doubled in roles- they played more than one character in the play. How does doubling work in this play? Did you notice any really quick changes during the play? How would you double a role?

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### **Writing and Exploring:**

Pair off with another student and “interview” each other as if one of you were Hermia, Helena, Lysander or Demetrius and the other was a gossip columnist. Write a persuasive essay about what each character thinks and feels about the others and why they do or do not make such a good couple!

Design your own costumes for Oberon and Titania. Cut out magazine pictures, draw or find real clothing that you think they might wear. Research in books or online what English Renaissance clothing looked like, or pick modern clothes that you think fit both characters. Remember, they are fairies- how might that influence your design choices?

### **Words Invented by Shakespeare and Used for the First Time in This Play:**

Beached  
Bedroom  
Eyeballs  
Mimic  
Moonbeam  
Premeditated

Find for yourself where they appear in the play! Can you spot them in performance? Do they mean what you thought they meant?

### **For Further Information/Exploration:**

#### **Websites:**

Our website has a great “ask Jeanette” section-email us questions about the show you saw, and get an answer back!!<http://www.shakespearetavern.com/BTC/btcaskjeanette.html>

Mr. William Shakespeare and The Internet: <http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/> this site contains excellent resources and is a great metasite.

The Shakespeare Globe Centre USA: <http://www.shakespeareglobeusa.org/>

#### **Books:**

Midsummer Night's Dream Arden Edition

Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human by Harold Bloom

Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare by Isaac Asimov

Staging In Shakespeare's Theatres by Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa

Shakespeare A to Z by Charles Boyce

Spark Notes

#### **Our performance text is:**

The Applause First Folio of Shakespeare in Modern Type, Neil Freeman

For more information on the First Folio of Shakespeare go to:

<http://web.uvic.ca/shakespeare/Annex/DraftTxt/index.html>

#### **Movie Versions:**

A Midsummer Night's Dream- The Kevin Kline/ Michelle Pfeiffer version sets the story in a Victorian daydream world.

The 1935 Max Reinhardt directed version features a young Mickey Rooney as Puck, James Cagney as Bottom, and the music of Mendelssohn.

#### **Definitions**

Beached- having a sandy shoreline

Bedroom- room or space within a bed

Eyeballs-organ for vision

Mimic- performer skilled at imitating or aping

Moonbeam-ray of reflected light from the line

Premeditated-contemplated beforehand

Answers: What play features an arranged marriage? Romeo and Juliet. How does it end- very, very badly!

Stichomythia: dialog with short lines that toss back and forth like a tennis match.