

A Midsummer Night's Dream

by William Shakespeare

A Shakespeare In The Ruins Study Guide

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SHAKESPEARE
IN THE RUINS
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Time Line of Shakespeare's Life

- 1564** William Shakespeare is born to Mary and John Shakespeare.
- 1582** William Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway; he is 18 and she is 26.
- 1583** Daughter, Susanna Shakespeare, is born.
- 1585** Twins, Judith and Hamnet, are born.
- 1589-94 (circa)** Shakespeare's first plays, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *Henry VI* are written.
- 1592** Shakespeare makes a name for himself as an actor and arouses resentment from rival dramatists.
- 1593 (circa)** Shakespeare begins writing the Sonnets (he writes a total of 154).
- 1594** Shakespeare acts in several plays before Queen Elizabeth. His acting company, The Lord Chamberlain's Men, is formed.
- 1595 (or 96)** *A Midsummer Night's Dream* written and first performed.
- 1596** Shakespeare's only son, Hamnet, dies.
- 1597** Shakespeare's name first appears on printed plays. He purchases New Place, a large house that enables him to acquire a coat of arms and use the term *gentleman* after his name.
- 1598** A critic announces Shakespeare as the best author of both tragedy and comedy for the stage.
- 1599** Shakespeare becomes a stockholder in the new Globe Theatre.
- 1599-1608** The peak of Shakespeare's career. He writes many famous plays, including *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Twelfth Night*, *Othello*, and *King Lear*.
- 1603** Queen Elizabeth I dies, and James VI ascends the throne. Shakespeare's acting troupe establishes royal patronage and becomes The King's Men.
- 1610 (circa)** After writing at least 37 plays, Shakespeare retires to his home in Stratford.
- 1613** The Globe Theatre burns to the ground during a production of *Henry VIII*. It is eventually rebuilt on the same grounds.
- 1616** Shakespeare dies from mysterious causes and is buried at the Church of Holy Trinity.
- 1664** The clergy finally have their way; the Globe Theatre is torn down.

BEFORE THE PLAY:

1. Create an Anticipation Guide. Some discussion statements (true/false) might include:
 - Children should always obey their parents.
 - Parents should be allowed to choose their children's spouses.
 - Loyalty is owed first to a boyfriend or girlfriend rather than to an old childhood friend.
 - There is more to the natural world than meets the eye.
 - Lunatics, lovers and poets have much in common.
 - Magic exists.

2. Read and discuss the following sonnets:

LET me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come:
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

William Shakespeare (116)

If thou must love me, let it be for nought
Except for love's sake only. Do not say
*I love her for her smile--her look--her way
Of speaking gently,--for a trick of thought
That falls in well with mine, and certes brought
A sense of ease on such a day--*
For these things in themselves, Belovèd, may
Be changed, or change for thee,--and love, so wrought,
May be unwrought so. Neither love me for
Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheek dry,--
A creature might forget to weep, who bore
Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby!
But love me for love's sake, that evermore
Thou may'st love on, through love's eternity.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (14)

HOW do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints, - I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life! - and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (43)

3. A bit of oral history!

Have students interview their parents, grandparents, other relatives or family friends about how they met and fell in love with their "first love" or current spouse. These can be shared in class discussion, or turned into a writing project.

4. Read the original version of *Pyramus and Thisbe* (from <http://www.stjohns-chs.org/english/shakespeare/midsummer/dream.html>)

One of the important 'sources' for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is from the Fourth Book of Ovid's **Metamorphoses** concerning the tale of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Note the genre and form of the tale; then determine why Shakespeare chose it for the "play within the play." What changes did he make and why?

The Story of Pyramus and Thisbe

In Babylon, where first her queen, for state
Rais'd walls of brick magnificently great,
Liv'd Pyramus, and Thisbe, lovely pair!
He found no eastern youth his equal there,
And she beyond the fairest nymph was fair.
A closer neighbourhood was never known,
Tho' two the houses, yet the roof was one.
Acquaintance grew, th' acquaintance they improve
To friendship, friendship ripen'd into love:
Love had been crown'd, but impotently mad,
What parents could not hinder, they forbad.
For with fierce flames young Pyramus still burn'd,
And grateful Thisbe flames as fierce return'd.
Aloud in words their thoughts they dare not break,
But silent stand; and silent looks can speak.
The fire of love the more it is suppress'd,
The more it glows, and rages in the breast.

When the division-wall was built, a chink

Was left, the cement unobserv'd to shrink.
So slight the cranny, that it still had been
For centuries unclos'd, because unseen.
But oh! what thing so small, so secret lies,
Which scapes, if form'd for love, a lover's eyes?
Ev'n in this narrow chink they quickly found
A friendly passage for a trackless sound.
Safely they told their sorrows, and their joys,
In whisper'd murmurs, and a dying noise,
By turns to catch each other's breath they strove,
And suck'd in all the balmy breeze of love.
Oft as on diff'rent sides they stood, they cry'd,
Malicious wall, thus lovers to divide!
Suppose, thou should'st a-while to us give place
To lock, and fasten in a close embrace:
But if too much to grant so sweet a bliss,
Indulge at least the pleasure of a kiss.
We scorn ingratitude: to thee, we know,
This safe conveyance of our minds we owe.

Thus they their vain petition did renew
'Till night, and then they softly sigh'd adieu.
But first they strove to kiss, and that was all;
Their kisses dy'd untasted on the wall.
Soon as the morn had o'er the stars prevail'd,
And warm'd by Phoebus, flow'rs their dew's exhal'd,
The lovers to their well-known place return,
Alike they suffer, and alike they mourn.
At last their parents they resolve to cheat
(If to deceive in love be call'd deceit),
To steal by night from home, and thence unknown
To seek the fields, and quit th' unfaithful town.
But, to prevent their wand'ring in the dark,
They both agree to fix upon a mark;
A mark, that could not their designs expose:
The tomb of Ninus was the mark they chose.
There they might rest secure beneath the shade,
Which boughs, with snowy fruit encumber'd, made:
A wide-spread mulberry its rise had took
Just on the margin of a gurgling brook.
Impatient for the friendly dusk they stay;
And chide the slowness of departing day;
In western seas down sunk at last the light,
From western seas up-rose the shades of night.
The loving Thisbe ev'n prevents the hour,
With cautious silence she unlocks the door,
And veils her face, and marching thro' the gloom
Swiftly arrives at th' assignation-tomb.
For still the fearful sex can fearless prove;
Boldly they act, if spirited by love.
When lo! a lioness rush'd o'er the plain,
Grimly besmear'd with blood of oxen slain:
And what to the dire sight new horrors brought,
To slake her thirst the neighb'ring spring she sought.
Which, by the moon, when trembling Thisbe spies,
Wing'd with her fear, swift, as the wind, she flies;

And in a cave recovers from her fright,
But drop'd her veil, confounded in her flight.
When sated with repeated draughts, again
The queen of beasts scour'd back along the plain,
She found the veil, and mouthing it all o'er,
With bloody jaws the lifeless prey she tore.

The youth, who could not cheat his guards so soon,
Late came, and noted by the glimm'ring moon
Some savage feet, new printed on the ground,
His cheeks turn'd pale, his limbs no vigour found;
But when, advancing on, the veil he spied
Distain'd with blood, and ghastly torn, he cried,
One night shall death to two young lovers give,
But she deserv'd unnumber'd years to live!
'Tis I am guilty, I have thee betray'd,
Who came not early, as my charming maid.
Whatever slew thee, I the cause remain,
I nam'd, and fix'd the place where thou wast slain.
Ye lions from your neighb'ring dens repair,
Pity the wretch, this impious body tear!
But cowards thus for death can idly cry;
The brave still have it in their pow'r to die.
Then to th' appointed tree he hastes away,
The veil first gather'd, tho' all rent it lay:
The veil all rent yet still it self endears,
He kist, and kissing, wash'd it with his tears.
Tho' rich (he cry'd) with many a precious stain,
Still from my blood a deeper tincture gain.
Then in his breast his shining sword he drown'd,
And fell supine, extended on the ground.
As out again the blade lie dying drew,
Out spun the blood, and streaming upwards flew.
So if a conduit-pipe e'er burst you saw,
Swift spring the gushing waters thro' the flaw:
Then spouting in a bow, they rise on high,
And a new fountain plays amid the sky.
The berries, stain'd with blood, began to show
A dark complexion, and forgot their snow;
While fatten'd with the flowing gore, the root
Was doom'd for ever to a purple fruit.

Mean-time poor Thisbe fear'd, so long she stay'd,
Her lover might suspect a perjurd maid.
Her fright scarce o'er, she strove the youth to find
With ardent eyes, which spoke an ardent mind.
Iready in his arms, she hears him sigh
At her destruction, which was once so nigh.
The tomb, the tree, but not the fruit she knew,
The fruit she doubted for its alter'd hue.
Still as she doubts, her eyes a body found
Quiv'ring in death, and gasping on the ground.
She started back, the red her cheeks forsook,
And ev'ry nerve with thrilling horrors shook.
So trembles the smooth surface of the seas,
If brush'd o'er gently with a rising breeze.

But when her view her bleeding love confest,
She shriek'd, she tore her hair, she beat her breast.
She rais'd the body, and embrac'd it round,
And bath'd with tears unfeign'd the gaping wound.
Then her warm lips to the cold face apply'd,
And is it thus, ah! thus we meet, she cry'd!
My Pyramus! whence sprung thy cruel fate?
My Pyramus!- ah! speak, ere 'tis too late.
I, thy own Thisbe, but one word implore,
One word thy Thisbe never ask'd before.
At Thisbe's name, awak'd, he open'd wide
His dying eyes; with dying eyes he try'd
On her to dwell, but clos'd them slow, and dy'd.

The fatal cause was now at last explor'd,
Her veil she knew, and saw his sheathless sword:
From thy own hand thy ruin thou hast found,
She said, but love first taught that hand to wound,
Ev'n I for thee as bold a hand can show,
And love, which shall as true direct the blow.
I will against the woman's weakness strive,
And never thee, lamented youth, survive.
The world may say, I caus'd, alas! thy death,
But saw thee breathless, and resign'd my breath.
Fate, tho' it conquers, shall no triumph gain,
Fate, that divides us, still divides in vain.

Now, both our cruel parents, hear my pray'r;
My pray'r to offer for us both I dare;
Oh! see our ashes in one urn confin'd,
Whom love at first, and fate at last has join'd.
The bliss, you envy'd, is not our request;
Lovers, when dead, may sure together rest.
Thou, tree, where now one lifeless lump is laid,
Ere-long o'er two shalt cast a friendly shade.
Still let our loves from thee be understood,
Still witness in thy purple fruit our blood.
She spoke, and in her bosom plung'd the sword,
All warm and reeking from its slaughter'd lord.
The pray'r, which dying Thisbe had preferr'd,
Both Gods, and parents, with compassion heard.
The whiteness of the mulberry soon fled,
And rip'ning, sadden'd in a dusky red:
While both their parents their lost children mourn,
And mix their ashes in one golden urn.
Thus did the melancholy tale conclude,
And a short, silent interval ensu'd.

READING THE PLAY

Nothing takes the place of actually reading the play, and the best way for students to do this is to get up on their feet! In some classes (my own included), students are assigned to one of five groups, and each group is assigned one complete act of the play. Students read the act and scene summaries to put their assigned section in context with the whole play, and then have several days in class to prepare their specific act. We start with Act I and read all the way through, stopping at the end of each scene for questions (often in the form of “hot seat”, explained below) and discussion. Some teachers also like to give a variety of quizzes during the reading to check comprehension.

Hot Seat: At the end of a scene, several students are assigned the role of a character within that scene. Teacher and other students ask questions to the selected students about what’s going on in the scene just read. These students must answer the questions in the persona of whichever character they have been assigned. In other words, the students must speak “in the shoes” of the selected character.

For example, at the end of I.i.: Helena, is it really worth jeopardizing your long friendship with Hermia for Demetrius? Demetrius, why do you want a girl who cannot even *stand* you? Egeus, would you really rather see your daughter put to death than marry the person *she* loves? Hippolyta, do you really love Theseus, even though he won you in battle?

Hotseat is an excellent technique for delving into the characters and plot, and it is also a way to deal with specific lines and to explore varying interpretations. For example, I.i.134: Lysander, what do you mean when you say, *The course of true love never did run smooth*? Do you really mean *NEVER*? What do you think, Hermia? And Puck, when you say *Lord, what fools these mortals be!* (III.ii.115), do you mean *ALL* mortals? What do you think about that, Theseus and Hippolyta?

SYNOPSIS: Act, Scene and Line numbers are from *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM. The Annotated Shakespeare*, Burton Raffel, General Editor, and with an essay by Harold Bloom. Yale University Press, 2005.

ACT I

The play opens with Theseus complaining that time just isn’t going quickly enough. He can hardly wait to marry Hippolyta, who, although he “wooed [her] with [his] sword/And won [her] love, doing ... injuries” (I.i.16-17), he will marry with great ceremony and celebration. Hippolyta seems quite a bit more patient than he [“Four days will quickly steep themselves in night...(I.i.7)], and we might wonder how excited she really is, having been “won” in what sounds like a battle; however, this is a comedy and we won’t go there now!

Egeus, another Shakespearean father who cannot abide a wilful daughter, interrupts the Duke and Queen to get some help with handling Hermia, who has chosen the young man Lysander for a boyfriend. Her father has chosen Demetrius for her

boyfriend, and would rather see her dead than allow her to marry her true love, Lysander. Because this poor dad obviously has no control over his daughter, he goes to the Duke for help. Unfortunately for Hermia, Theseus is immediately on her father's side and advises her that "[her] father should be as a god" (I.i.47) and she must obey him. Hermia begs the Duke to consider the situation from her point of view ["I would my father looked but with my eyes" (I.i.56)], but his response says it all: "Rather your eyes must with [your father's] judgment look (I.i.48). Crestfallen, Hermia asks what will happen to her if she refuses to marry Demetrius. The unhappy answer? To die, or to live like a nun, without the company of men (or possibly all other human beings) forever. The Duke says that she has just until the new moon, when he and Hippolyta will wed, to decide her fate.

Demetrius speaks up and begs Hermia to relent and marry him, and he tells Lysander to give up his claim on her. In return, Lysander suggests that since Demetrius has Egeus' love, he should marry him! The Duke asks Egeus and Demetrius to follow him out, leaving our two young and sad lovers a chance to talk in private. Lysander comes up with a great plan: they will sneak out of their houses at night and meet in the woods, then go to his aunt's house outside the city of Athens where the laws will not apply to them. They swear their love to each other and just as they're about to part, Helena shows up. She is lovesick because she loves Demetrius and Demetrius loves Hermia. Hermia tries to convince her that she definitely does NOT love Demetrius and that she's doing everything she can to discourage him. ["I frown upon him, yet he loves me still...I give him curses, yet he gives me love...The more I hate, the more he follows me (I.i.194-198).]. Poor Helena only wishes she had Hermia's problem! Because they have been friends for a long time, and trying to make her feel better, Hermia and Lysander tell Helena of their plan to leave Athens – this way Helena will have Demetrius to herself and not have to worry about his chasing after Hermia. But, alas, instead of keeping the plan to herself and waiting for him to come back to her, Helena figures that if she tells Demetrius what's up, he will be grateful to her for the information and at least she'll get to see him. Not a nice thing for a best friend to do, is it?

In scene ii we meet the "mechanicals" or, in some books, the "clowns." These guys are tradesmen who make a living in jobs like carpenter, weaver, and tailor. They are not sophisticated and neither are they brilliant. They are good, hard working, honourable men who have no idea how funny they are. We first meet them at Peter Quince's house, where they are getting together to organize a performance for the Duke and Queen's wedding. Quince works very hard to keep things organized and moving along, but Nick Bottom has lots of his own ideas which provide a good deal of laughter for the audience. When all the parts are finally given out, these "rude mechanicals" agree to meet next in, where else? The woods!

ACT II

While the city of Athens and especially the royal palace are central in the world of humans, the woods belong to the fairies and sprites, and it is here where we meet them all. First there is the mischievous Puck (aka Robin Goodfellow), who enjoys nothing better than causing chaos. He warns one of Titania's fairies to keep her away from this

part of the woods tonight because Oberon is planning a celebration there and he is enraged at her refusal to let him have her “sweet...changeling” child (II.i.23), one that he believes she “[stole] from an Indian king” (II.i.22). But before their conversation is done, Oberon and Titania both show up.

After some indignant name-calling and taunting, Titania blames Oberon for the current sorry state of the natural world. Because he will not leave her alone about her changeling child, she and the fairies have not been able to dance and sing and this has upset everything from the streams which are now overflowing and flooding the farmers’ fields, to the altering of the seasons. The world is all confused because of their quarrelling. Like somewhat of a spoiled child himself, Oberon suggests that everything can easily be set right. All Titania has to do is give him the boy. But Titania made a promise to the boy’s mortal, and now dead, mother, and she will not give him up.

Oberon plans his revenge in a way only a fairy king can: he sends Puck to get some magical “love juice” from a certain flower once touched by Cupid’s arrow. While waiting for him to return, Oberon observes Demetrius coming into the woods with Helena following close behind. Even though Demetrius is terribly mean to Helena [“Tempt not too much the hatred of my spirit,/For I am sick when I do look on thee” (II.i.211-212)], she continues after him [“And I am sick when I look not on you” (II.i.213)] without a shred of pride, vowing to “make a heaven of hell,/To die upon the hand [she] love[s] so well (II.i.243-244).

As soon as Puck returns, Oberon directs him to find “a sweet Athenian lady [who] is in love/With a disdainful youth” (II.i.260-261) and to put some of the “love juice” in his eyes so that he will fall in love with the first thing he sees, which Oberon thinks will be Helena. The man will be wearing “Athenian garments” (II.i.264), so Puck will know the right one...or will he?

In the meantime (Scene ii), Oberon sets off to find Titania and put some of the same magic liquid in her eyes, hoping that she will “wake, when some vile thing is near” (II.ii.38).

By now, Hermia and Lysander have had enough of walking through the woods and are ready to sleep. Lysander would like them to share the same piece of ground, but Hermia, obviously the more modest of the two, begs him to “lie further off, in human modesty” (II.ii.61). They vow their love and loyalty to each other and then drift off to sleep.

Enter Puck, who just about to give up on finding the Athenians, is delighted to see the two sleeping apart on the ground. He figures they must be the right ones, and so puts some “love juice” in Lysander’s eyes and then goes off to tell Oberon of his deed.

Demetrius and Helena arrive, but Demetrius is quick to leave, telling her to stop following him! Poor Helena, tired and feeling sorry for herself, finds Lysander lying alone

(she doesn't see Hermia) and tries to wake him, hoping he's not dead. The "love juice" is effective immediately and Lysander showers her with words of love. Sure that he's teasing her for cruel fun, Helena leaves, with Lysander following shortly.

When Hermia awakes, she is alone and has just had a terrible dream about "a serpent eat[ing her] heart away,/and [Lysander] ... smiling at his cruel prey" (II.ii.153-154). She's terrified that something dreadful has happened to Lysander, and the act ends with her vow that "either death or [Lysander] I'll find immediately" (II.ii.160).

ACT III

The act opens with Peter Quince and company meeting in the woods to practice their play and although Titania is sleeping near by, they cannot see her. There is much humour around mixed up word usage and this continues throughout the scene, especially related to Bottom and his magically appointed ass (donkey!) head. Puck, of course, is responsible for this, and he is delighted when Titania wakes up to Bottom's singing and immediately asks "What angel wakes me from my flow'ry bed?" (III.i.112). The hilarity continues as she and her fairies dote on Bottom, who, although he really has no idea what's going on, begins to enjoy the attention.

At the beginning of scene ii, Puck can hardly wait to tell Oberon that Titania "with a monster is in love" (III.ii.6). Oberon is quite pleased with the news and just as he asks whether Puck has wet "the Athenian's eyes/With the love juice" (III.ii.37) as instructed, Demetrius and Hermia enter. Puck admits that "this is the woman, but not this the man" (III.ii.42). They watch the two mortals argue until Hermia runs off, leaving Demetrius tired and ready to sleep. He lies down right there. Oberon is no longer pleased and he sends Puck to find Helena and bring her to the spot. He is trying to fix things so now puts some love juice in Demetrius' eyes. Puck returns quickly with the news that "Helena is here at hand" (III.ii.111), and Lysander is right behind. He and Oberon await the human drama that is about to ensue, Puck obviously enjoying the chaos he has helped to create.

And chaos it is! When Lysander and Helena arrive, Demetrius wakes up and is immediately smitten with Helena, now calling her "goddess, nymph, perfect, divine" (III.ii.137), quite a change from his earlier nastiness. Helena is certain that the two men have joined together "against [her] for [their own] merriment" (III.ii.146) and she is "sure [they] hate her with [their] hearts" because, after all, they "both are rivals, and love Hermia" (III.ii.154-155). Enter Hermia, tired and confused, happy to see Lysander, but wondering "why unkindly didst [he] leave [her] so" (III.ii.183). There is a great deal of humour at the expense of all four young people, and Oberon holds Puck accountable for the turmoil and confusion. Demanding that Puck "overcast the night" (III.ii.355), Oberon leaves him to put things back in order, making sure that the right men end up with the right ladies, and that "when they next wake, all this derision/Shall seem a dream and fruitless vision" (III.ii.370-371). Oberon, at the same time, goes off "to [his] queen [to] beg her Indian boy" (III.ii.375) before he takes the spell off her eyes.

The Duke was here, and bid us follow him?

Hermia Yea, and my father.

Helena And Hippolyta.

Lysander And he did bid us follow to the temple.

Demetrius Why, then we are awake. Let's follow him,
And by the way let us recount our dreams (IV.i.192-199).

And as they exit, Bottom wakes up, still believing he is rehearsing the play, but quickly realizing that he is alone. Like the young lovers, he tries without success to understand and explain his experiences of the previous night: "I/have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit/of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass, if he go/about to expound this dream. Methought I was – there is /no man can tell what. Methought I was – and methought I/had – but man is but a patch'd fool, if he will offer to/say what methought I had" (IV.i.203-209).

We are back in Athens at Peter Quince's house for scene ii, and just as the men wish for the return of their "sweet bully Bottom" (IV.ii.18), he walks in promising "to discourse wonders" (IV.ii.25). But they'll have to wait, because "the short and the long is, [their] play is preferred" (IV.ii.33) and there is much preparation to be done.

ACT V

This act is all one scene which takes place in Theseus' palace after the weddings of all three couples. It opens on Hippolyta and Theseus discussing the strange story told by the young lovers after their night in the woods. In attempting to explain logically what happened, Theseus gives a wonderful discourse on "lovers and madmen," both having "such seething brains" (V.i.4). This is his speech about "[t]he lunatic, the lover, and the poet" (V.i.7) whom he claims are all composed of or linked together by imagination. Hippolyta, perhaps somewhat more practical than he, wonders at the probability of it being only imagination since "all the story of the night told over, /And all their minds transfigured so together" (V.i.23-24). Her thoughts are interrupted when "the lovers, full of joy and mirth" (V.i.28) enter the room.

From a list of possible entertainments, the Duke chooses, of course, "A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus/And his love Thisbe, very tragical mirth" (V.i.57-58). Philostrate tries his hardest to convince the Duke otherwise, telling him "It is not for you. I have heard it over,/And it is nothing, nothing in the world" (V.i.79-80). However, Theseus insists that "[he] will hear that play" and Quince, as the Prologue, begins "If we offend, it is with our good will" (V.i.110), bumbling his words from the start. Everyone has a part: Bottom (Pyramus), Flute (Thisbe), Snout (Wall), Starveling (Moonshine), and Snug (Lion). We, along with the wedding party, are in for some jolly good fun as our "rude mechanicals" continue to butcher lines, over-act, and respond to remarks made by their audience. And when it is over, Bottom jumps up to assure us that no one is *really* dead. A Bergomask (clownish dance) follows and when it ends, the players exit, leaving Theseus to send the rest to bed, as "'tis almost fairy time" (V.i.352).

Once the mortals are clear, Puck prepares the way for the Fairy King and Queen who, along with their train, “will...sing, and bless this place” (V.i.388) as well as “the issue, there create” [all of their children to come] (V.i.393).

The final speech is Puck’s, who holds out an olive branch to us all:

“If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended:
That you have but slumbered here,
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend.
If you pardon, we will mend.
And as I am an honest Puck,
If we have unearned luck,
Now to ‘scape the serpent’s tongue,
We will make amends ere long –
Else the Puck a liar call.
So good night unto you all.
Give me your hands, if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends (V.i.411-426).

And so we leave the theatre, once again, feeling even better than we did upon our arrival.

AFTER THE PLAY

1. **Reflect on the experience** of the theatre production. Was it what you expected? Were the characters as you imagined they would be? What did you think of the unusual double-castings? What did you think of the promenade experience, both indoors and out (unless it rains!)? If you had a chance to act in this production, which character(s) would you have liked to play? Why? If you were directing, would you have anything differently?

2. **Revisit the text** to find lines which include the following images and motifs:

Human nature and Natural forces

Crossovers of the Fairy and Mortal worlds

Music and dancing

Night and day

Parent-child relationships

Shadows and dreams

Fools/Clowns

Nothing

Magic

3. **Explore more deeply some of the play's poetry.** There are some fabulous lines, filled with figurative language and imagery that you'll want to spend more time with. Here are just a few:

*Lysander: Helen, to you our minds we will unfold.
Tomorrow night, when Phoebe doth behold
Her silver visage in the wat'ry glass,
Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass –
A time that lovers' flights doth still conceal –
Through Athens' gates have we devised to steal.*

*Hermia: And in the wood, where often you and I
Upon faint primrose beds were wont to lie,
Emptying our bosoms of their counsel sweet,
There my Lysander and myself shall meet,
And thence from Athens turn away our eyes,
To seek new friends and stranger companies.
Farewell, sweet playfellow. Pray thou for us.
And good luck grant thee thy Demetrius.
Keep word, Lysander. We must starve our sight
From lovers' food till morrow deep midnight (I.i.208-223).*

*Titania: These are the forgeries of jealousy.
And never, since the middle summer's spring
Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead,
By paved fountain or by rushy brook,
Or in the beached margent of the sea,
To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,
But with thy brawls thou hast disturbed our sport.
Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,
As in revenge have sucked up from the sea
Contagious fogs which, falling in the land,
Have every pelting river made so proud
That they have overborne their continents (II.i.81-92).*

(This goes on for another 22 lines – and it's all wonderful!)

*Oberon: I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk roses and with eglantine.
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,
Lulled in these flowers with dances and delight.
And there the snake throws her enamelled skin,
Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in (II.i.249-256).*

*Lysander: O take the sense, sweet, of my innocence.
Love takes the meaning, in love's conference.
I mean that my heart unto yours is knit,
So that but one heart we can make of it.
Two bosoms interchainèd with an oath.
So then two bosoms and a single troth.
Then by your side no bed-room me deny.
For lying so, Hermia, I do not lie (II.ii.49-56).*

Be sure to include the entire last speeches of Puck beginning with *Now the hungry lion roars* (V.i.359), Oberon and Titania, and back to Puck until the very end. I can't imagine a better ending than this!

4. **Related Poetry and/or Music:**

Have students find poems and/or songs related to some of the themes and images of the play. You can read and study the poems or lyrics as well as listen to the songs. For songs, discuss how the music complements the lyrics. What kind of music would you use as background for various scenes of the play?

5. **Malapropisms and other word play.** Have students find out what a malapropism is and where that term came from. Revisit the scenes with the mechanicals, and with Bottom alone and with Titania to find examples.

6. **Explore related mythology.** Some of the people and places mentioned or related to these characters include:

Athens
Crete
Thebes
Sparta
Thessaly
Theseus
Hippolyta
Oberon
Titania
Hercules
Diana
Cupid
Phoebe
Apollo
Ariadne
Antiopa
Daphne
Cadmus

7. Compare this play to Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale* (in *The Canterbury Tales*) and Plutarch's *Life of Theseus*.

RESOURCES ON THE WEB

<http://www.leasttern.com/Shakespeare/Midsummer/Dreamhome.htm>

HUGE variety of resources within a web study guide.

<http://www.webenglishteacher.com/midsummer.html>

Consistently interesting in offering resources and lesson plans for English teachers at a variety of grade levels.

<http://www.folger.edu/>

FOLGER Shakespeare Library: "A Lively Place for Learning and the Arts"; special areas for students and K – 12 teachers; resources, lesson plans, workshops, more!

<http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/>

PBS, in partnership with Folger, offers resources on a number of the plays, including this one.

<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/default.htm>

"Mr. William Shakespeare and the Internet"; resources like timelines, history, genealogy, study guides, additional resources.

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

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust: "for the world's Shakespeare heritage."

http://www.english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare_Illustrated/MidsummerPaintings.html

A list of paintings (and links) which deal with the fairy world and their king and queen, Oberon and Titania.

<http://www.ez-tracks.com/getsong-songid-471.html>

Free download of Felix Mendelssohn's music for AMND.

<http://www.shakespeare-online.com/index.html>

(©1999-2006 Amanda Mabillard. All Rights Reserved.) Excellent site which includes lots of interesting ideas, background, FAQ's, etc.

<http://www.stevehackett.com/albums/midsummer.html>

Website for former (rock band) Genesis guitarist Steve Hackett's original music for A Midsummer Night's Dream with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. You can listen to 4 tracks through a provided link. An interesting contrast to Mendelssohn.

<http://www.stjohns-chs.org/english/shakespeare/midsummer/dream.html>

This website takes a comparative approach to the play, suggesting we begin with the *Book of Job*, Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Chaucer's *General Prologue to the "Canterbury Tales"* and, later, other works by Shakespeare.

http://www.funtrivia.com/quizzes/literature/shakespeare/midsummer_nights_dream.html

You and your students can take online quizzes on the play, submit your answers and get your score almost instantly. Some even have more information along with the answers. I tried it – it's educational and fun!

<http://www.pathguy.com/mnd.htm>

Consistently one of my favourite sites for Shakespeare, "The Path Guy" (as pathologist Ed Friedlander calls himself) is at once intellectual, funny, ironic, creative and most of all helpful.

He begins this section of his site with this:

Warning: Some people have claimed that "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is full of "adult", "immoral", and/or "occult" content. I disagree strongly, but ultimately you need to decide for yourself. If you want something totally non-controversial, **please leave now.**

This day my oaths of drinking wine and going to plays are out, and so I do resolve to take a liberty to-day, and then to fall to them again. To the King's Theatre, where we saw "Midsummer's Night's Dream," which I had never seen before, nor shall ever again, for it is the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life. I saw, I confess, some good dancing and some handsome women, which was all my pleasure.

-- Samuel Pepys, Diary, Sept. 29, 1662

You are always insane when you are in love.

-- Sigmund Freud

<http://absoluteshakespeare.com/index.htm>

Lots of categories to follow for interesting information.

<http://www.shakespearehigh.com/library/surfbard/index.htm> "Surfing with the Bard: Your Shakespeare Classroom on the Internet"; Amy Ulen provides separate areas for students & teachers. Her focus is on performance, and she offers lots of useful information and ideas.