

A Midsummer's Night Dream

Viewing Guide

Introduction

The purpose of a curriculum guide is to provide you, as an audience member, a resource to utilize before and after attending the performance.. The guide contains background information on Shakespeare and the history of the play as well as suggestions for viewing and reflective questions. Please let us know how we can improve future viewing guides and your thoughts on this one. You may email us at amandarudolph73@gmail.com. Your thoughts and ideas would be greatly appreciated.

William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. His parents were John and Mary, a glover and a descendant of farmers. In 1582, Shakespeare married Ann Hathaway and by 1585 they had three children. Around 1591, Shakespeare moved to London to work as an actor. He was involved with the Lord Chamberlain's Men company. Although Shakespeare is well known for his plays, he also wrote sonnets and poems. He was successful and had many sources of income from acting, writing, directing and stock in The Kings Men company.

Shakespeare died in 1616. In 1623, Shakespeare's first folio was published including 154 sonnets, 37 plays, and 2 poems.

Summary of A Midsummer's Night Dream

In Athens, Duke Theseus is preparing for his wedding to Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons while Egeus arrives with his daughter, Hermia and two gentlemen, Lysander and Demetrius. Egeus implores Theseus to compel Hermia to marry Demetrius although she is in love with Lysander. He does so by telling Hermia if she does not obey her father, she can either die or live out her life as a nun. Unhappy with the events of the day, Hermia and Lysander plan to elope and escape to the woods where they are lost. Demetrius follows the couple and Helena, deeply in love with Demetrius, follows him into the woods. At the same time, a troupe of performers are preparing to play the story of Pyramus and Thisbe for Theseus wedding day.

Oberon, King of the Fairies, and Titania, his wife have been arguing in the woods over a magical child. Aggravated by his wife for not doing as he says, Oberon sends Puck to find a purple flower whose juice will make the person who ingests it fall in love with the first character they see. Meanwhile, Oberon hears the argument of Helena and Demetrius and he takes offense to way Demetrius treats Helena. Oberon tells Puck to pour the purple flower's juice in the eyes of the Athenian. Puck errs and puts the drops of juice in the eyes of Lysander instead. Lysander awakes and falls in love with Helena. Oberon then puts the juice in Demetrius eyes while he sleeps and as he wakes he falls in love with Helena, too.

Puck overhears the rehearsal of the players and amuses himself by giving Bottom a head of an ass. Bottom nears the sleeping Titania, who Oberon has also doused with the magic flower juice, and upon waking she falls in love with Bottom. In other parts of the woods, Demetrius and Lysander both pursue Helena. Hermia becomes jealous and Oberon has Puck get the two men away and as they all fall asleep, Puck removes the magic from Lysander.

While Bottom sleeps beside Titania, Oberon restores her to herself and awakens her. She does not appreciate Bottom's head and in thanks, gives Oberon the magical child. Bottom's head returns to normal

and he joins the players for the play. The lovers awake and Lysander falls in love with Hermia again. All reunited and back to themselves, all get married and the players perform their play while Puck and the fairies grace the palace with magic.

Essential Questions Related to A Midsummer's Night Dream

- What is love?
- Is there love at first sight?
- Should we always believe what we see?
- What is chaos?
- Is it “better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all?”
- Why do we love a “happily ever after” story?
- Are marriage and love the same?
- In today’s world, how do we trick each other into believing unreal things?

These questions may be used to guide the investigation of the play. Students should be able to answer them with some examples of support by the end of the unit. Their answers should vary.

Pre-Viewing Activities

1. Consider the quote: The course of true love never did run smooth (Lysander, Act I Scene 1). Think about if this is true or not. This can lead to discussion of possible themes.
2. Explore the essential question: Should we always believe what we see? Keep it in mind while viewing the performance.

Post-Viewing Activities

1. Design a logo for the play. Think of themes and discuss different perspectives. Then create an abstract logo for the play that could be used on t-shirts or playbills. How does your design represent the play? .
2. Write reviews of the play through short form videos. Post your review video on social media using #tsf2026 or @texasshakes.

Useful Websites

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

<https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/shakespedia/shakespeares-plays/midsummer-nights-dream/>

<https://www.rsc.org.uk/a-midsummer-nights-dream/learning>

Useful Reference Sources

Gibson, R. (2016). Teaching Shakespeare. Cambridge University Press.

Banks, F. (2014). Creative Shakespeare: The Globe education guide to practical Shakespeare. The Arden Shakespeare.

Dakin, M.E. (2009). Reading Shakespeare with young adults. National Council of Teachers of English.