

SYNOPSIS – A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Celebrations are planned to mark the marriage of Theseus, Duke of Athens, and Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons. Egeus comes before Theseus with his daughter Hermia, who is in love with Lysander, although her father is insisting that she marry Demetrius. The Duke orders Hermia to obey her father, in accordance with Athenian law, otherwise she will either be put to death or forced to enter a convent.

Hermia and Lysander decide to elope that night. They reveal their plan to Hermia's best friend, Helena. Helena is Demetrius' former lover and she is still in love with him, although he doesn't love her anymore. Hoping to win back his affection, Helena tells Demetrius of the plan. That night, Hermia and Lysander steal away to the forest, with Demetrius and Helena in hot pursuit.

Oberon and Titania, fairy king and queen of the forest, have quarreled over Titania's refusal to give up an Indian boy – her foster child – to Oberon. Plotting his revenge, Oberon orders Puck to seek out a magic flower whose juice, squeezed on the eyes of someone asleep, will cause them to fall in love with the first creature they see on waking. Oberon sneaks up on the sleeping Titania and drops the juice of the flower in her eye. He hopes she will wake up when "some vile thing" is near.

Taking pity on Helena, Oberon also tells Puck to use the juice on Demetrius so that he will fall in love with her, but Puck, mistaking the two young Athenian men in the forest, uses it on Lysander instead. Lysander promptly falls in love with Helena, forgetting all about his love for Hermia. Trying to rectify his mistake, Puck puts the love juice on Demetrius' eyes and he too falls in love with Helena. Now both young men love Helena and "hate" Hermia.

Meanwhile, Bottom the weaver and a group of Athenian tradesmen are planning to perform a play, *The Most Lamentable Comedy and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe*, in celebration of the Duke's wedding. They decide to rehearse in the forest so that no one will see them and their performance will be a surprise.

Puck sees Bottom and the others rehearsing. He decides to have some fun with these "hempen home-spuns" and casts a spell, giving Bottom the head of an ass. When the other tradesmen see Bottom transformed, they run off in fear, leaving him alone in the forest. Just then, Titania wakes up, sees Bottom, and falls rapturously in love with him.

Eventually, all the enchantments are lifted, the human lovers are happily paired, Titania and Oberon are reconciled, and Bottom is returned to normal. Hermia and Lysander, and Helena and Demetrius, are given permission to marry. Along with Theseus and Hippolyta, a multiple marriage celebration takes place.

The three new couples watch Bottom's acting troupe perform their play at the wedding celebration. Finally, Puck appears on stage to let the audience know that if they didn't like the play, they should simply imagine it was all a dream.

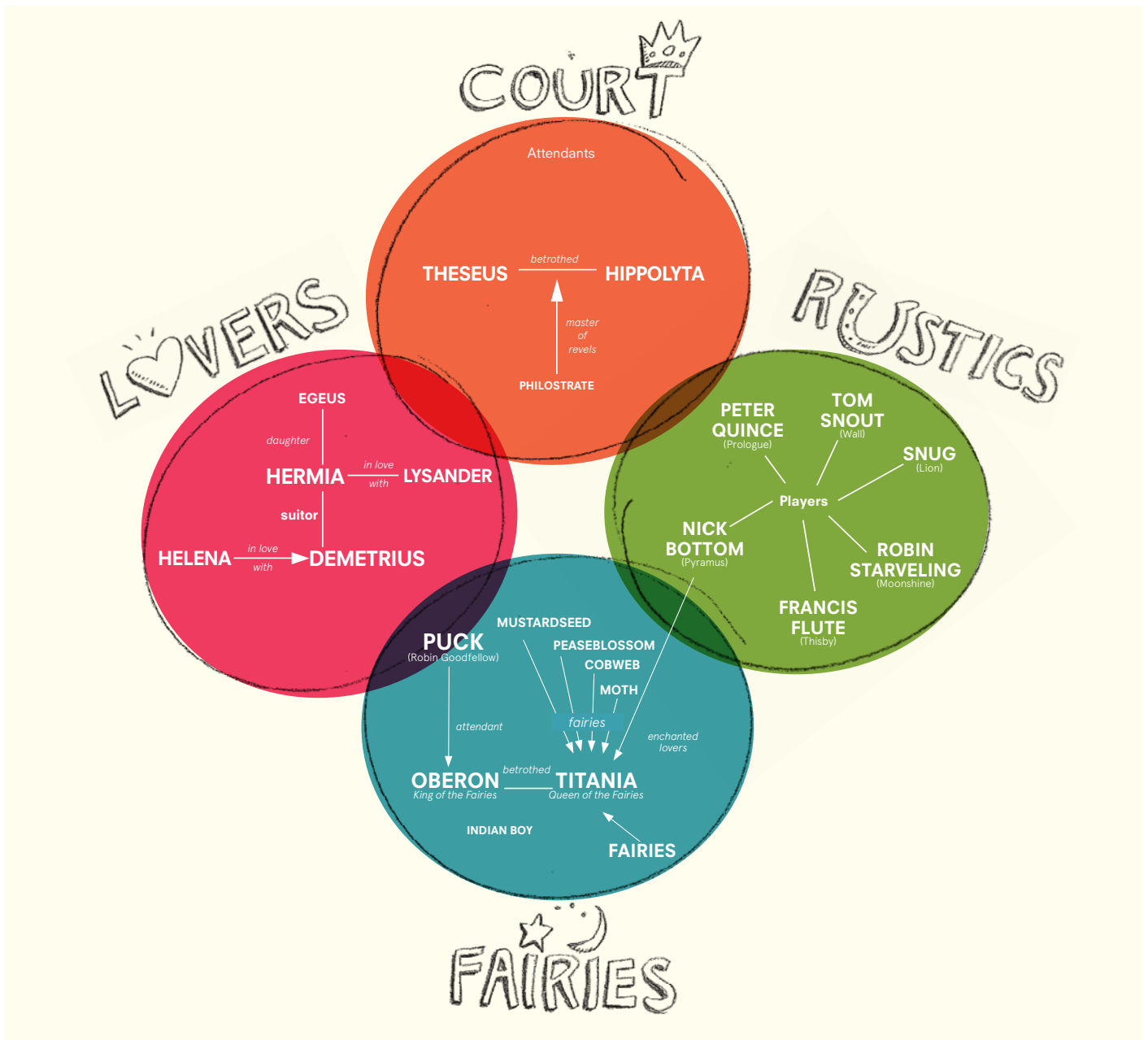
BACKGROUND TO THE PLAY

A Midsummer Night's Dream was written early in Shakespeare's career, probably between 1594 and 1596. It wasn't his first comedy; Shakespeare had already completed *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and possibly *The Taming of the Shrew*. This also seems to have been a transition time for Shakespeare – he had finished his major *Henry VI–Richard III* history series and had just started writing his first great tragedy, *Romeo And Juliet*.

Unlike many of Shakespeare's other plays, there is no direct source for the plot lines of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Shakespeare was, however, influenced in his writing by a number of pre-existing texts. Theseus and Hippolyta appeared in Plutarch's *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes* (translated by Thomas North in 1579). They were also characters in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. Ovid's *Metamorphosis* was an important source for Shakespeare, particularly the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. The character of Oberon may have been taken from the thirteenth-century French story *Huon of Bordeaux*, translated by John Bouchier, Lord Berners, in the 1530s, and the character of Puck was popular in English country stories of Shakespeare's time. Bottom's transformation into an ass is influenced by Lucius Apuleius's second-century magical tale, *The Golden Ass*.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is thought to have been written to celebrate the wedding of Elizabeth Carey, the daughter of an English nobleman. The bride's grandfather was Lord Hunsdon, the Lord Chamberlain, patron of Shakespeare's theatre company. The play was probably first performed at the London home of the Carey family and later at court. The first public performance of the play was likely at the Theatre, to the north-east of London, just outside the city limits. This was about three or four years before the Lord Chamberlain's Men lost the lease on that venue and built the Globe Theatre on the south bank of the Thames.

CHARACTERS



The Court

THESEUS, Duke of Athens, engaged to Hippolyta
 HIPPOLYTA, Queen of the Amazons, engaged to Theseus
 EGEUS, Hermia's father
 PHILOSTRATE, Master of Revels to the court

The Lovers

HERMIA, Egeus' daughter, in love with Lysander
 LYSANDER, in love with Hermia
 DEMETRIUS, in love with Hermia
 HELENA, in love with Demetrius

The Rustics (or Mechanicals)

NICK BOTTOM, a weaver, presenting Pyramus
 QUINCE, a carpenter, presenting the Prologue
 FLUTE, a bellows-mender, presenting Thisbe
 SNOUT, a tinker, presenting Wall
 SNUG, a joiner, presenting Lion
 STARVELING, a tailor, presenting Moonshine

The Fairies

OBERON, King of the Fairies
 TITANIA, Queen of the Fairies
 PUCK, or Robin Goodfellow, fairy servant to Oberon
 FAIRIES: Mustardseed, Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth and other Fairies

KEY CHARACTER PROFILES

THE COURT

Theseus

The lunatic, the lover and the poet

Are of imagination all compact. (Act 5, Scene 1)

As the Duke of Athens, Theseus is the most powerful of the courtly characters in the play. Although absent from Acts 2 and 3, he provides the impetus for Hermia and Lysander's choice to flee to the forest and for the Mechanicals to pursue their theatrical ambition of staging a play as entertainment for his royal wedding to Hippolyta. As the ruler of Athens he enforces the strict laws of Athenian society in regard to Hermia's behavior and disobedience towards her father. Although offering her options, the conflicted position in which he places Hermia confirms his role at the centre of Athenian power. Theseus sets out to present himself as a lover in the opening of the play by excitedly anticipating his "nuptial hour" with Hippolyta. However, he also boasts of "wooing" Hippolyta with his sword, suggesting that a gender struggle might be at the heart of the play or at the very least an acknowledgement of an established patriarchal rule.

Hippolyta

This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard. (Act 5, Scene 1)

Theseus' prisoner and his duchess-to-be, Hippolyta is a character from ancient Greek mythology. However, the Queen of the Amazons in this version of the story certainly lacks the female power that she is known for in other historical depictions. Although her history stems back to the story of Theseus' conquering of the Amazons, Hippolyta at this point represents suppression by male authority, a recurring theme in the play. She is nonetheless outwardly anticipating the wedding herself: "Four days will quickly steep themselves in night... And then the moon... shall behold the night of our solemnities." (Act 1, Scene 1)

THE LOVERS

Helena

How happy some o'er other some can be! (Act 1, Scene 1)

Although tall and attractive, Helena nevertheless feels inferior to her best friend Hermia, who seems to receive all the male attention in the play. One man in particular is causing Helena a lot of grief, Demetrius. Helena and Demetrius were once romantically linked, and she is still ardently in love with him. However, Demetrius is now in love with Hermia, despite Hermia's lack of interest in him. Helena reveals to Demetrius Hermia's plan to escape to the woods with Lysander, hoping that will win her some favour with her beloved. It backfires and Demetrius chases Hermia into the forest, with Helena in tow. Helena dotes on Demetrius so much that she tells him she is his "spaniel." Later, thanks to Puck's magical intervention, both Demetrius and Lysander suddenly declare their love for Helena. She thinks they are making fun of her and even accuses Hermia of being in on the joke. Once the charm is taken off Lysander's eyes, Hermia and Helena rekindle their friendship. At the end of the play Demetrius and Helena marry, with Helena unaware that Demetrius is still under a spell.

Hermia

I would my father looked but with my eyes. (Act 1, Scene 1)

Hermia is Helena's life-long friend and confidant. She is beautiful and well-loved by all. Hermia is in love with Lysander, but her father wants her to marry Demetrius instead. She decides to escape to the woods with Lysander and confides the plan to Helena. In the forest, Hermia has a falling out with Helena as a result of Puck's mischief. She claims that Helena has bewitched Lysander and the two girls fight furiously. Hermia is distraught to be scorned by Lysander, who pushes her away and says "although I hate her, I'll not harm her so." (Act 3, Scene 2) Order is eventually restored by Oberon, who orders Puck to reunite Hermia with Lysander in Act 4.

Lysander

The course of true love never did run smooth. (Act 1, Scene 1)

Lysander is in love with Hermia, but is denied the right to marry her by her father. He declares that “the course of true love never did run smooth”. He escapes with Hermia into the woods and, after a magical mix-up by Puck with the love potion, falls madly in love with Helena. Lysander fights Demetrius to win Helena’s hand while fighting off Hermia in her confusion. Once the mix-up is remedied, Lysander once again loves Hermia, and marries her in the final act of the play.

Demetrius

I love thee not, therefore pursue me not. (Act 2, Scene 1)

Demetrius is Helena’s former love, who has now fallen in love with Hermia. He wants to marry Hermia and has the support of her father. When Helena tells him that Hermia and Lysander plan to run away to the forest, Demetrius follows with haste. In the forest, he encounters Helena who proclaims her love for him. Demetrius reacts angrily and tells her to stay away from him and threatens to do her “mischief in the wood”. Puck’s love potion eventually makes him swerve away from Hermia and fall for Helena, which she now regards as a cruel trick. Demetrius remains enchanted with Helena and they marry at the end of the play.

THE RUSTICS, OR MECHANICALS

Nick Bottom

I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream — past the wit of man to say what dream it was. (Act 4, Scene 1)

Nick Bottom is the central character in the subplot of the craftsmen’s production of Pyramus and Thisbe. He plays an archetypal clown role in the play, yet he is unaware of this fact. He is a weaver and amateur actor, and is overly confident of his abilities as a tragedian. He volunteers for every part in the play including the Lion and Thisbe, the female lead. The climax of his foolishness occurs when Puck transforms his head into that of an ass or donkey. Bottom is unaware of his comical appearance and although confused, accepts the attentions of the bewitched Titania and her fairy attendants. He is eventually restored to normal and takes part in the performance of Pyramus and Thisbe, to the great amusement of Theseus, Hippolyta and the Athenian lovers.

Peter Quince

Here is the scroll of every man’s name which is thought fit, through all Athens, to play in our interlude before the duke and the duchess, on his wedding day at night. (Act 1, Scene 2)

A carpenter by trade, Quince has taken it upon himself to direct the amateur production of Pyramus and Thisbe in celebration of the Duke’s wedding day. He convinces Bottom that he should stick to the part of Pyramus, but has to keep a close eye on his blundering acting during rehearsals. On the day of the performance, Quince delivers the play’s prologue and is ridiculed in snide comments by Theseus, Hippolyta, Lysander and Demetrius.

Francis Flute

Nay, faith, let me not play a woman. I have a beard coming. (Act 1, Scene 2)

Flute is a bellows-mender and reluctantly takes on the part of the female lead, Thisbe, even though Bottom offers to play both leads. Flute protests that he shouldn’t have to play the woman because he has “a beard coming”.

THE FAIRIES

Oberon

*Well, go thy way: thou shalt not from this grove
Till I torment thee for this injury.* (Act 2, Scene 1)

Oberon is King of the Fairies, master of the mischievous Puck and husband to Titania. He is jealous, quick-tempered and often argues with his queen, Titania. He wants to use Titania's adopted son, an Indian boy, as his henchman, but Titania denies his request. Oberon takes his revenge by making Titania fall in love with Bottom, a weaver and amateur actor, who has been given the head of an ass by Puck. Oberon also meddles in the affairs of the Athenian lovers, Demetrius, Lysander, Hermia and Helena, using magic to sort out their mixed-up relationships.

Titania

I am a spirit of no common rate. (Act 3, Scene 1)

Titania is Queen of the Fairies, wife to Oberon and in the magical, forest world of A Midsummer Night's Dream she is a power force to be reckoned with. At the beginning of the play, she is concerned that her constant arguing with Oberon is causing catastrophic climate change. She is attended by a number of fairies, including Peaseblossom, Moth, Cobweb and Mustardseed. After being enchanted by Oberon's magic flower she falls in love with Bottom. Oberon later wakes her from the spell and she thinks it was all a "vision". She then sees Bottom and says she "loathes" the face she was in love with. Titania eventually reconciles with Oberon.

Puck

*Thou speak'st aright.
I am that merry wanderer of the night.* (Act 2, Scene 1)

Puck is sometimes considered to be the most important character in the play. He is Oberon's attendant and in many ways plays his 'fool' or jester. His mischievous nature and quick wit permeate his speech, creating an atmosphere of magic and fun throughout the play. He triggers the play's action through magic. He plays pranks on the human characters, like transforming Bottom's head into that of an ass. He also mistakenly pours love potion on the eyelids of Lysander instead of Demetrius, making the wrong man fall in love with Helena. At the end of the play he delivers the epilogue, telling the audience that if they have not enjoyed the play, they should simply imagine they have been dreaming. Puck closes the play by asking for a warm round of applause.

THEMATIC CONCERNS – A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

LOVE

The course of true love never did run smooth

– Lysander (Act 1, Scene 1)

Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,

Therefore is winged cupid painted blind.

– Helena (Act 1, Scene 1)

Love in its many forms is the most important theme in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The romantic encounters and subsequent confusions are the cause of the conflict in the play. The tone of the play is so lighthearted that the audience never doubts that things will end happily, and is therefore free to enjoy the comedy without being caught up in the tension of an uncertain outcome.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the difficulty or imbalance of love is the asymmetrical love among the four young Athenians: Hermia loves Lysander, Lysander loves Hermia, Helena loves Demetrius, and Demetrius loves Hermia instead of Helena – two men love the same woman, leaving one woman without a man. This human love circle is matched with the tryst in magical fairyland between Oberon and Titania, with Bottom an accidental pawn in Oberon's magical whim. This play heads for a traditional outcome, with each pair of lovers correctly reunited and all misgivings forgiven.

The plot revolves around a balance in love reflected with contrasts and resolutions in nature, dreams and appearances. It resolves to a stable outcome, with each pair of lovers correctly reunited and all misgivings forgiven, but the sense of confusion still lingers. Helena still sees Demetrius as “a jewel, mine own and not mine own” (Act 4, Scene 1). Did the magic flower help Demetrius see the truth? But if so, what about what it did to Titania? The play asks us all to stop and think about how well we understand why, who and how we love. Love certainly appears to be presented as a kind of madness, but if there is one certainty about human beings it is that they will do the maddest of things for love.

MAGIC, ILLUSION, DECEPTION, TRICKERY

Fetch me that flow'r, the herb I showed thee once.

The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid

Will make or man or woman madly dote

Upon the next live creature that it sees.

– Oberon (Act 2, Scene 1)

Methinks I see these things with parted eye,

When everything seems double.

– Hermia (Act 4, Scene 1)

The fairies' magic brings about many of the most bizarre and hilarious situations in the play, and is central to the fantastic atmosphere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Shakespeare uses magic both to embody the almost supernatural power of love (symbolised by the love potion) and to create a surreal world. Misused, the magic causes chaos, but it ultimately resolves the play's tensions by restoring love to balance among the four Athenian youths. Additionally, the ease with which Puck uses magic to his own ends, as when he reshapes Bottom's head into that of an ass and recreates the voices of Lysander and Demetrius, stands in contrast to the laborious and graceless attempts by the craftsmen to stage their play.

Fairies in Shakespeare's England were above all thought of as tricksters, and Robin Goodfellow (Puck) as chief among them. Tricks create confusion, and so do doubles, which Shakespeare was obsessed with. And yet confusion is very often the only path to deeper understanding of who we really are. So are the fairies friends or foes?

DREAMS

I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was
- Bottom (Act 4, Scene 1)

Dreams are an essential theme in the play as they are linked to the world of the fairies and the magical mishaps that occur. In Act 4, Scene 1, Demetrius on waking says, "Are you sure that we are awake? It seems to me that yet we sleep, we dream." As the lovers and the mechanicals are affected by the fairies and their pranks, it is in sleep that the characters experience strange and hilarious things that only we as the audience see. As these characters awake and try and discover what has happened, they are confounded, "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," Bottom says.

Hippolyta's first words in the play are also evidence of the pervasiveness of dreams ("Four days will quickly steep themselves in night, / Four nights will quickly dream away the time"), and various characters mention dreams throughout (Act 1, Scene 1). Shakespeare is also interested in the actual workings of dreams and how time loses its normal sense of flow and the impossible occurs as a matter of course. He seeks to recreate this environment in the play through the intervention of the fairies in the magical forest. At the end of the play, Puck extends the idea of dreams to the audience members themselves, saying that, if they have been offended by the play, they should remember it as nothing more than a dream, imagining they have simply been asleep.

MAN AND THE NATURAL WORLD

*The human mortals want their winter here;
No night is now with hymn or carol blest;
Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,
Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
That rheumatic diseases do abound.
And thorough this distemperature we see
The seasons alter*
- Titania (Act 2, Scene 1)

One of the most constant thematic explorations in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is that of the civilized world of Athens vs. the natural (and supernatural) world of the forest and its fairy inhabitants. Sometimes the Athenians are part of the natural world and complemented by it, as the story often speaks of fertility during the midsummer festival, or that crops that respond to seasonal change. Then in contrast there is a sense of alienation due to the characters separation from nature and the strength of their ties to an urban existence. Part of the play's chaos occurs when the Athenians step foot into the magical world of Oberon and Titania's forest, with its own chaos and upheaval. Both the Athenian lovers and the Mechanicals seek escape from their urban lives. The lovers attempt to flee the structured rules and dominance of Athens and its rulers and the Mechanicals set out to find a place for rehearsal in a creatively liberating space, free from the distractions of city life. The natural world in the play is an escape for the characters, but an ultimate reminder of the comfort each of them prefer as the ultimately return to their Athenian world.

LIMINAL SPACE

*Half sleep, half waking: but as yet, I swear,
I cannot truly say how I came here.*

- Lysander (Act 4, Scene 1)

*Ay me, for pity! what a dream was here!
Lysander, look how I do quake with fear:
Methought a serpent eat my heart away,
And you sat smiling at his cruel pray.*

- Hermia (Act 2, Scene 2)

Liminal literally means 'threshold'. It is the space between, the area of transition from one thing to another. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the Athenians have left the orderly world of the city for an unruly space ungoverned by any familiar laws. This play takes people out of the built, structured world where the rules are obvious, and into a no-man's-land. Court/forest, day/night, waking/sleeping, love/abuse – most of the characters spend the play unsure of what space they are occupying between these various kinds of opposite states.

Hermia has a dream that she is being attacked by a snake. This is the only time in the play that someone has an actual, real dream, and yet characters are constantly plagued with the suspicion that they are dreaming. Hermia's dream tells her something very real about what is happening around her; the dream is true, the waking is illusion. Hippolyta's first words in the play are also evidence of the pervasiveness of dreams ("Four days will quickly steep themselves in night, / Four nights will quickly dream away the time"), and various characters mention dreams throughout (Act 1, Scene 1). Shakespeare is also interested in the actual workings of dreams and how time loses its normal sense of flow so that the impossible occurs. He seeks to recreate this environment in the play through the intervention of the fairies in the magical forest. At the end of the play, Puck extends the idea of dreams to the audience members themselves, saying that, if they have been offended by the play, they should simply think of it as a dream, and that they have been asleep.

In Act 4, Scene 1, Demetrius on waking says, "Are you sure that we are awake? It seems to me that yet we sleep, we dream." As the lovers and the mechanicals are affected by the fairies and their pranks, the characters cling to the idea of sleep to account for the strange and hilarious things they experienced, but it is an inadequate explanation. Sleep is actually only the transitional space that gets them from the world of magic back to the reality they know. As these characters awake and try and discover what has happened, they are confounded: "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," Bottom says. "My Oberon! What visions have I seen! / Methought I was enamour'd of an ass," says Titania. But Bottom's dream and Titania's vision were true, as far as we, the audience could see. Theatres, of course, are the ultimate liminal spaces, neither reality nor pure illusion.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

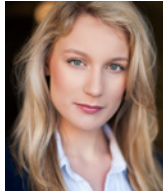
CAST



Felix Gentle
Flute/Theseus/Oberon



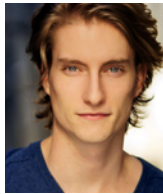
Jess Loudon
Quince/Hippolyta/Titania



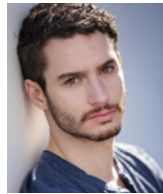
Eleanor Stankiewicz
Starveling/Helena



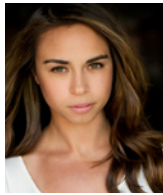
Emily Havea
Snug/Hermia



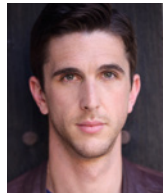
Jack Crumlin
Mechanical/Lysander



Rhys Keir
Snout/Demetrius



Abbie-lee Lewis
Puck



Owen Little
Bottom/Egeus

CREATIVES

Director **James Evans**
Lighting Designer **Verity Hampson**
Composer and Sound Designer **Nate Edmondson**
Movement Director **Nigel Poulton**
Voice Coach **Jess Chambers**
Original Production Director **Peter Evans**
Original Production Designer **Teresa Negroponte**

CREW

Stage Manager **Todd Eichorn**
Assistant Stage Manager **Katie Hankin**
Head Electrician **Andrew Hutchison**
Head Mechanist **Dion Robinson**
Head Of Audio **Robin McCarthy**
Head Of Costume **Rosie Hodge**
Costume Assistant **Jacqui Schofield**
Production Assistant **Liam Murray**
Set Built by **MNR Constructions**
Freight Provided by **ATA Logistics**

RESOURCES

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BECAUSE A WORLD WITHOUT SHAKESPEARE
WOULD BE A REAL TRAGEDY

FOXTEL

INTERVIEW WITH MOVEMENT DIRECTOR NIGEL POULTON

Paul Reichstein, Bell Shakespeare Arts Educator, in conversation with Nigel Poulton, Movement Director of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He speaks in detail about the physical training of the actors for this production, in Biomechanics.

What is your job as a creative in this production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?

To train the actors in movement, help develop the physical language of the production, develop and set the choreography as required and honor the artistic vision of the director.

Meyerhold created a very rigorous and disciplined system of physical expression in the form of Biomechanics. Could you describe what Biomechanics is and how it is unique as a form of actor training and as a performance technique?

I personally steer away from describing Biomechanics in terms of performance technique as I believe that detracts from an understanding that it's a process. At its basic level, Theatrical Biomechanics is about the composition and structure of movement and gesture. It is a system that equips the actor through process with a physical and intellectual understanding of movement, as articulated through the principles of Otkas, Posyl, Toichka, Stoika, Tormos, Rakurs and Gruppirovka.

Meyerhold was influenced by many things throughout the development of his system, including the motion economy research being done by Aleksei Gastev, the study and research into reflexology by Vladimir Bekhterev, and the physical culture and education movement of Pytor Lesgalt. These were all formative influences on the system which utilises an adherence to form and structure to internalise the above mentioned principles. It is only through diligent training in form and structure that one can understand and begin to express movement with consistency, control and in a free and 'natural' way.

Meyerhold believed that "all psychological states are determined by specific physiological processes, by correctly resolving the nature of (their) state physically, the actor reaches the point where (they) experiences the excitation which communicates itself to the spectator and induces (them) to share in the actors performance: what we used to call 'gripping' the spectator. It is this excitation which is the very essence of the actor's art. From a sequence of physical positions and situations, there arise those points of excitation which are informed with some particular emotion" (Braun, 1969: 199).

Meyerhold and his work existed in a very different time and place to Shakespeare's. You've spent a lot of time in the past melding the two worlds. What can Meyerhold's techniques and approaches to performance bring to a production of a Shakespeare play?

For me, there is no distinction in genre and style – there is only the process. The process is what trains and equips the actor with a methodology and an ability to express their craft in the most versatile way they can. The training teaches the actor how to inhabit their body more fully, make physical choices, bring awareness to the composition of the space and a relationship between the language and form. While this may seem very general, or even vague, it is made apparent when you look at training in the system in terms of four interrelated phases:

- i. Development of the principles to understand the form
- ii. Strength and conditioning to be able to support the form
- iii. The Etudes to internalise the form
- iv. Development of a theatrical philosophy and mindset to express the form in motion

What does Biomechanics do for the actor specifically?

Specifically it develops precision, balance, coordination, efficiency, rhythm, expressiveness, responsiveness, playfulness and discipline – all qualities that should be an inherent part of the actor training process. The Theatrical Biomechanics training process is most clearly manifested in the Etudes, which require intricate skills, a sense of rhythm and timing, holistic body engagement, physical strength, stamina, endurance and precision to the task.

The discipline required to train in the system enhances an actor's concentration and focus, this manifests itself on stage as an essence and presence, a command of space and movement that enhances the story telling potential of the production. The actors must work in a state of concentration and process throughout the training and retain only what is essential. It is the great intrigue then that only through this adherence to form and structure that freedom and true expression can be experienced. I find this no different to any other movement system or martial art of integrity that I have been involved in.

Given that Biomechanics requires developing a discipline and a commitment to a challenging process, how does Biomechanics feature in the daily rehearsal schedule? How much time do the actors spend working on his methods each day and why is this important?

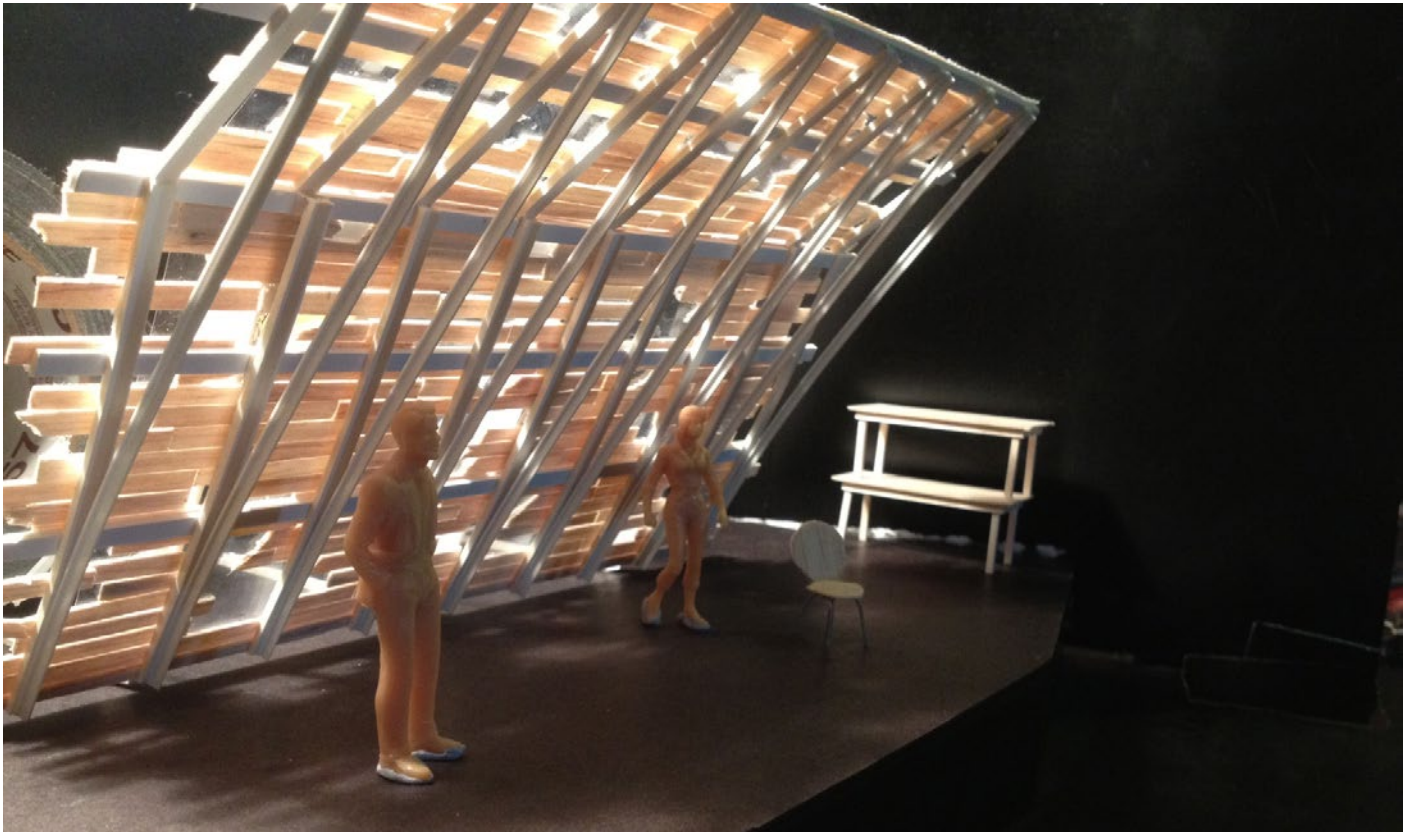
90-120 minutes a day, then on the floor for the rest of the day with Peter. The actors ability to embrace the key concepts is a major determinate here, and therefore time must be spent blueprinting the form and developing the actors physical and intellectual understanding of the system. Then the training starts to influence the work on the floor as the actors start to be informed by the training.

Is *A Midsummer Night's Dream* specifically suited to the employment of Meyerhold's approach to physical theatre, or can it be used for any play?

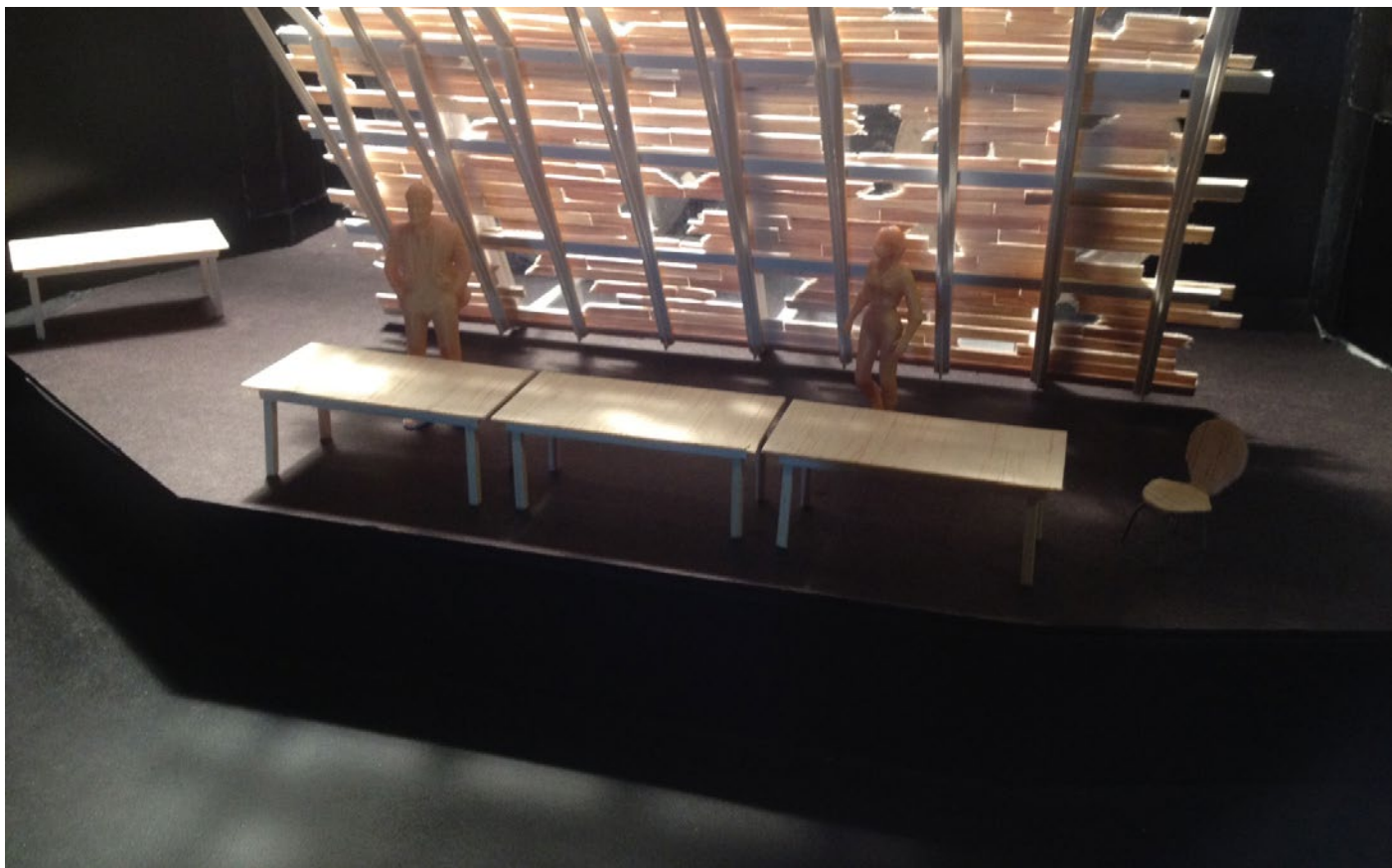
Any play.

SET DESIGN – A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

SET DESIGN BY TERESA NEGROPONTE



**BELL
SHAKESPEARE.**



**BELL
SHAKESPEARE.**

LEARNING RESOURCES *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*

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PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY ONE: FULL OF VEXATION

CURRICULUM LINKS

English: ACELT1620, ACELT1622, ACELT1625, ACELY1725, ACLEY1721, ACELT1627, ACELT1632, ACELY1732, ACELY1810, ACELA1552, ACELA1553, ACELA1770, ACELT1771, ACELT1635, ACELT1636, ACELT1773, ACELY1739, ACELY1742, ACELY1743, ACELY1744, ACELY1745, ACELY1746, ACELA1565, ACELT1640, ACELT1812, ACELT1643, ACELT1644, ACELY1749, ACELY1752

Drama: ACADRM040, ACADRR045, ACADRR052.

DRAMA AND ANALYSIS

ACT 1, SCENE 1

A Midsummer Night's Dream opens with the Duke, Theseus, and his wife-to-be, Hippolyta, talking happily about their upcoming wedding. Egeus, Hermia's father, enters at line 20, complaining about his daughter and making demands of the Duke.

1. Read lines Act 1, Scene 1, lines 20-127. Describe what happens in this scene and which characters are involved.
2. The scene instantly turns from happiness to a more serious tone. Why do you think Shakespeare has done this?
3. Read on to line 179. Who are the two characters and what do they decide to do?
4. How does this decision impact the rest of the play?

Creative writing and performance

Act 1, Scene 1 is set in motion after two characters are not allowed to do something they feel is right, because the rules of the world they live in declare it wrong.

5. Create a story outline for a fictional movie, play or novel. Make sure you do the following:
 - Decide on a time period or setting for your story that is in a world with definite restrictions and rules
 - Create two characters who are in a close relationship (could be partners, friends, brother and sister, etc.)
 - Decide what these two characters want most in the world that goes against the rules of the world
 - Decide whether the two characters fight the rule or agree to it
 - What happens after this point?
 - What could be a possible climax and ending for the story?
6. Choose one of the following moments in the story and write it in your chosen form:
 - The moment the characters are told they would be going against the rules of their world if they do what they want to do
 - The moment they either decide to fight against or agree to the rule
 - A private moment between the two characters where they discuss why they want to break the rules of their society.

PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY TWO: METAPHORICAL LANGUAGE

CURRICULUM LINKS

English: ACELA1537, ACELT1621, ACELT1623, ACELT1627, ACELT1767, ACELY1730, ACELY1733, ACELA1552, ACELA1553, ACELT1771, ACELT1635, ACELT1636, ACELY1739, ACELY1740, ACELY1742, ACELY1743, ACELY1744, ACELT1640, ACELY1749, ACELY1752

READING AND WRITING

In the scenes presented in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare's choice of words and phrases highlights the love and the magic that obsesses the characters.

Helena loves Demetrius but in this scene (overleaf) he does not reciprocate her feelings. This is a scene full of comparisons. (Act 2, Scene 1)

After reading the scene, ask students the following questions:

1. 1) Where and why does Helena compare herself to a dog? What does she mean by this?
2. Find examples of where she takes Demetrius' words and reverses them to exaggerate her love.
3. Explain the conceit (extended metaphor) Helena establishes in her speech beginning "You draw me, you heard-hearted adamant".
4. Who were Apollo and Daphne, and what does this reference mean?
5. What does Helena mean when she says "I'll follow thee and make a heaven of hell, / To die upon the hand I love so well."
6. Find the meaning of the following:
 - Impeach
 - Adamant
 - Wood within this wood
 - Fawn
 - Cowardice
 - Valour

DEMETRIUS

I love thee not, therefore pursue me not.
Where is Lysander and fair Hermia?
The one I'll slay, the other slayeth me.
Thou told'st me they were stolen unto this wood;
And here am I, and wood within this wood
Because I cannot meet my Hermia.
Hence, get thee gone, and follow me no more.

HELENA

You draw me, you hard-hearted adamant;
But yet you draw not iron, for my heart
Is true as steel: leave you your power to draw,
And I shall have no power to follow you.

DEMETRIUS

Do I entice you? do I speak you fair?
Or, rather, do I not in plainest truth
Tell you, I do not, nor I cannot love you?

HELENA

And even for that do I love you the more.
I am your spaniel; and, Demetrius,
The more you beat me, I will fawn on you:
Use me but as your spaniel, spurn me, strike me,
Neglect me, lose me; only give me leave,
Unworthy as I am, to follow you.
What worser place can I beg in your love,
And yet a place of high respect with me,
Than to be used as you use your dog?

DEMETRIUS

Tempt not too much the hatred of my spirit;
For I am sick when I do look on thee.

HELENA

And I am sick when I look not on you.

DEMETRIUS

You do impeach your modesty too much,
To leave the city and commit yourself
Into the hands of one that loves you not;
To trust the opportunity of night

**BELL
SHAKESPEARE.**

And the ill counsel of a desert place
With the rich worth of your virginity.

HELENA

Your virtue is my privilege: for that
It is not night when I do see your face,
Therefore I think I am not in the night;
Nor doth this wood lack worlds of company,
For you in my respect are all the world:
Then how can it be said I am alone,
When all the world is here to look on me?

DEMETRIUS

I'll run from thee and hide me in the brakes,
And leave thee to the mercy of wild beasts.

HELENA

The wildest hath not such a heart as you.
Run when you will, the story shall be changed:
Apollo flies, and Daphne holds the chase;
The dove pursues the griffin; the mild hind
Makes speed to catch the tiger; bootless speed,
When cowardice pursues and valour flies.

DEMETRIUS

I will not stay thy questions; let me go:
Or, if thou follow me, do not believe
But I shall do thee mischief in the wood.

HELENA

Ay, in the temple, in the town, the field,
You do me mischief. Fie, Demetrius!
Your wrongs do set a scandal on my sex:
We cannot fight for love, as men may do;
We should be wood and were not made to woo.

Exit DEMETRIUS

I'll follow thee and make a heaven of hell,
To die upon the hand I love so well.

Exit

**BELL
SHAKESPEARE.**

PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY THREE: MAKING MAGIC

CURRICULUM LINKS

English: ACELA1537, ACELT1621, ACELT1623, ACELT1627, ACELT1767, ACELY1730, ACELY1733, ACELA1552, ACELA1553, ACELT1771, ACELT1635, ACELT1636, ACELY1739, ACELY1740, ACELY1742, ACELY1743, ACELY1744, ACELT1640, ACELY1749, ACELY1752

COMPREHENSION AND VISUAL MEDIA

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Oberon sends Puck to collect contents for a potion to make characters fall in love. Consider the words of Oberon (2.1.155–75):

OBERON

That very time I saw, but thou couldst not,
Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
Cupid all arm'd: a certain aim he took
At a fair vestal throned by the west,
And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow,
As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts;
But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
Quench'd in the chaste beams of the watery moon,
And the imperial vot'ress passed on,
In maiden meditation, fancy-free.
Yet mark'd I where the bolt of Cupid fell:
It fell upon a little western flower,
Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound,
And maidens call it Love-in-idleness.
Fetch me that flower; the herb I shew'd thee once:
The juice of it on sleeping eye-lids laid
Will make or man or woman madly dote
Upon the next live creature that it sees.
Fetch me this herb; and be thou here again
Ere the leviathan can swim a league.

Answer the following:

1. Oberon refers to Cupid. Who is Cupid and why would Oberon refer to him?
2. Oberon uses the word 'fiery.' Why? What does fire suggest?
3. What is a leviathan? Why does Oberon use this sentence? What does he mean to say to Puck?
4. Ask students to artistically illustrate this scene as a comic strip.

PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY FOUR: INSIDE THE DESIGNER'S MIND

CURRICULUM LINKS

English: ACELA1529, ACELA1531, ACELT1619, ACELT1620, ACELT1621, ACELT1622, ACELY1719, ACELY1720, ACELA1547, ACELT 1626, ACELT1627, ACELT1630, ACELY1730, ACLEY1808, ACELA1560, ACELT1771, ACELT1634 , ACELT1635, ACELT1637, ACELY1742, ACELY1745, ACELA1565, ACELA1567, ACELA1572
ACELT1639, ACELT1640, ACELT164, ACELT1812, ACELY1749, ACELY1752

CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING

Take a look at the set images for the production by Designer Teresa Negroponte, and answer the following questions.

SET DESIGN

Look at Design Diagrams.

1. What is your first impression of the set?
2. What elements or features of the set design stand out?
3. What mood do you think the designer is trying to create with this set?
4. How do you think a director might tell the story of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* on this set? Choose one section of the story and write your thoughts on how you might stage it using the design.
5. Describe the textures and features of the design in model box form.
6. Think about the world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. How do you think the set design might be symbolic of the play?
7. What other design elements will be added to the production in addition to the set design? How do you think these elements may be used with this set?

DESIGN THE COSTUMES

Now play the role of costume designer, once you have analysed the set design.

8. List all the elements of a costume that designers must take into account.
9. List all the key characters in the play, then:
 - Describe the character making reference to social status, personality traits, personal relationships, their role in the story, and any other important aspects.
 - Design the costume for each character. How do you think the character's costume will communicate these aspects of their personality?
 - What skills do actors use to transform into a character? Describe as many as you can think of.
 - How would you expect the actors performing as the characters in the designs to embody their characters, using these skills?

PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY FIVE: THE PLOT SUMMARY

CURRICULUM LINKS

English: ACELA1782, ACELT1619, ACELT1622, ACELY1719, ACELY1723, ACELT1627, ACELT1807, ACELY1730, ACELY1742, ACELA1572, ACELY1749, ACELY1752, ACELY1754

Drama: ACADRM040, ACADRM041, ACADRM044, ACADRR045, ACADRM048, ACADRM051, ACADRR052,

WRITING AND PRACTICAL DRAMA

A good way to help students keep the whole story in mind is to use simple physical drama activities to recount the plot of the play.

After taking students through the synopsis for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, divide them into groups of 4–6 students.

Each group needs to:

1. Divide the play into key moments and list these.
2. Represent each of these moments as a tableau using each person in their group.
3. Present the series of tableaux to the rest of the class.
4. The students watching each presentation should note the differing view of key moments and how different groups present each moment.

EXTENSION

1. Ask students to consider the status of each character in each scene or follow the status of one character through a series of scenes.
2. Ask students to repeat their tableaux but to assign the levels of status to the number of people in the group (i.e. six people will have six status levels from 1 the highest to 6 the lowest or vice versa).
3. After assigning status to characters within a scene, students return to the text and identify a line of speech from the scene for each character. Students consider how to present this line to maintain the assigned status and to create meaning within the tableau.

PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY SIX: CHARACTER MATRIX

CURRICULUM LINKS

English: ACELA1529, ACELA1531, ACELT1619, ACELT1620, ACELT1621, ACELT1622, ACELY1719, ACELY1720, ACELA1547, ACELT 1626, ACELT1627, ACELT1630, ACELY1730, ACLEY1808, ACELT1771, ACELT1635, ACELY1742, ACELY1743 , ACELY1744, ACELY1746, ACELY1747 , ACELY1748, ACELT1639, ACELT1640, ACELT1812, ACELT1642, ACELT1774, ACELT1814, ACELT1815, ACELT1644, ACELY1749, ACELY1754, ACELY1756, ACELY1757, ACELY1776

READING AND WRITING

Create a character matrix, whilst reading the play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This is easy to do using an Excel chart or a Word document. For each character, have students write the nature of the relationship between the two characters, identifying the effect they have on one another. The matrix below has only eight of the main characters, however adding in others such as Theseus, Hippolyta and Egeus, would add to the complexity and challenge of the activity. Another version of this task could be completing such a table for each act of the play to ensure student understanding of the play's plot and characters.

	Hermia	Lysander	Helena	Demetrius	Bottom	Puck	Titania	Oberon
Hermia								
Lysander								
Helena								
Demetrius								
Bottom								
Puck								
Titania								
Oberon								

POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY ONE: INSIDE THE DESIGNER'S MIND

CURRICULUM LINKS

English: ACELA1529, ACELA1531, ACELT1619, ACELT1620, ACELT1621, ACELT1622, ACELY1719, ACELY1720, ACELA1547, ACELT 1626, ACELT1627, ACELT1630, ACELY1730, ACLEY1808, ACELA1560, ACELT1771, ACELT1634, ACELT1635, ACELT1637, ACELY1742, ACELY1745, ACELA1565, ACELA1567, ACELA1572, ACELT1639, ACELT1640, ACELT1641, ACELT1812, ACELY1749, ACELY1752

CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING

After seeing the performance, reflect on assumptions made based on the costume design and the production choices made. Answer the following questions.

1. Re-read your answers to Part 1 of this task, where you made assumptions about the production and performances based on Teresa Negroponte's designs. Did you discover any key similarities or differences in your interpretation, compared to the actual production in terms of:
 - The set design?
 - Costume design?
 - Actor performances?
 - Directorial choices?
2. Describe the use of lighting design in the production. What effect did this have on the mood and the world of the play?
3. Choose one moment in the story where lighting was used to powerful effect. Describe this part of the story, and how the lighting was utilised.
4. Describe the use of sound design in the production. What effect did this have on the mood and the world of the play?
5. Make a list of the props used in the show. How did these props fit into the overall design of the show?
6. Where do you think this production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was set in terms of location and time? Why?
7. You be the Designer. Imagine you are the Designer for a new production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Decide on the:
 - Setting for the production (past, present or future, location, etc.)
 - Overall design concept
 - Set design (draw your design if possible)
 - Costume designs
 - Prop design
 - Lighting design
 - Sound design
8. Once you have decided the key elements of your production, select one scene from the play.
9. Describe what happens in this scene and which characters are involved.
10. Using your design concept and ideas, describe in detail how this scene might be staged.

POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY TWO: THREE WORLDS COLLIDE

CURRICULUM LINKS

English: ACELA1782, ACELT1619, ACELT1622, ACELY1719, ACELY1723, ACELT1627, ACELT1807, ACELY1730, ACELY1742, ACELA1572, ACELY1749, ACELY1752, ACELY1754

ANALYSIS AND CREATIVE WRITING

A Midsummer Night's Dream centres around the three very different worlds that Shakespeare sets up – the worlds of the Lovers, the Mechanicals and the Fairies.

1. For each of the three worlds answer the following:
 - Which characters are part of this world?
 - What is the setting for the world?
 - What kind of people live in this world?
 - What is important in this world?
 - Are there any rules in this world?
 - What is possible in this world?
2. Once students have detailed each world, answer the following:
 - What are the similarities between the three worlds?
 - What are the differences between the three worlds?
3. At several points in the story, the worlds and their characters collide with disastrous results.
 - List the key plot points where one world and its characters collide with another.
 - Choose one of these key points and replace one of the characters involved with one from another world (ie. Instead of Titania falling in love with Bottom, she spots Lysander with the love potion on her eyes).
 - Write a scene in contemporary language of what might happen in this imagined situation.
 - If time allows, perform each scene for the class.

POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY THREE: THE DIRECTOR'S SEAT

CURRICULUM LINKS

English: ACELT1620, ACELT1622, ACELT1625, ACELY1725, ACLEY1721, ACELT1627, ACELT1632, ACELY1732, ACELY1810, ACELA1552, ACELA1553, ACELA1770, ACELT1771, ACELT1635, ACELT1636, ACELT1773, ACELY1739, ACELY1742, ACELY1743, ACELY1744, ACELY1745, ACELY1746, ACELA1565, ACELT1640, ACELT1812, ACELT1643, ACELT1644, ACELY1749, ACELY1752

ANALYSIS AND CRITICAL THINKING

Now that students have seen *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, they will be able to compare the written text to the play in performance. Take time to explain the role of Director in a production, and how they are responsible for guiding the actors' performance, and shaping the way we perceive the play.

Answer the following:

1. Was there anything in the performance that you had imagined differently? (A character, a moment, a setting)
How did the performance differ with your view?
2. Was there anything in the performance that was how you imagined it? What was it and how was it similar to your view?

A Midsummer Night's Dream blends comic scenes with more serious elements as part of the same story.

3. Choose a comic scene from the performance and answer the following:
 - Describe what happens in the scene
 - Describe the mood or tone of the scene
 - How did the actors use their bodies, voices and facial expressions to convey the mood of the scene and the character's situation
 - Are there any elements that have been added to the scene by the director? (Props, costume, song, etc.)
For each, why do you think the decision was made to include them?
 - Imagine you are a director. How might you direct the scene differently? Explain your choices with reference to how you want to audience to react.
4. Choose a more serious scene from the performance and answer the following:
 - Describe what happens in the scene
 - Describe the mood or tone of the scene
 - How did the actors use their bodies, voices and facial expressions to convey the mood of the scene and the character's situation
 - Are there any elements that have been added to the scene by the director? (Props, costume, song, etc.)
For each, why do you think the decision was made to include them?
 - Imagine you are a director. How might you direct the scene differently? Explain your choices with reference to how you want to audience to react.
5. Why do you think Shakespeare has decided to use more serious scenes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which is predominately a comedy?

POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY FOUR: PROLOGUE

CURRICULUM LINKS

English: ACELT1620, ACELT1621, ACELT1622, ACELY1723, ACELA1543, ACELA1548, ACELT1630, ACELT1767, ACELY1730, ACELA1552, ACELA1553, ACELA1561, ACELT1771, ACELT1637, ACELT1752, ACELY1743, ACELY1744, ACELY1745, ACELY1746, ACELY1748, ACELA1571, ACELT1640, ACELT1642, ACELT1644, ACELY1754, ACELY1757

Drama: ACADRM040, ACADRM042, ACADRM044, ACADRR045, ACADRM048

CREATIVE WRITING

Look at Shakespeare's other play about love, *Romeo And Juliet*. Examine the opening prologue (below) and explain to students what it means, in reference to the entire plot of this tragedy.

Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
Do with their death bury their parents' strife.
The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,
And the continuance of their parents' rage,
Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

Using the *Romeo And Juliet* prologue as a model, in small groups (or independently) students create their own prologue for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

If in groups, extend the task by asking students to perform it.

POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY FIVE: INNER MONOLOGUES

CURRICULUM LINKS

Drama: ACADRM040, ACADRM041, ACADRM042, ACADRM043, ACADRM044, ACADRR045, ACADRM048, ACADRM050, ACADRR052

ENGLISH/DRAMA

Students examine the following scene, Demetrius and Helena, Act 2 Scene 1:188-244

In a group of four, allocate two students for each character. One student reads the character's lines the other plays the character's conscience and creates the inner monologue – a kind of running commentary of the character's thoughts. Try the example below. This can be done with other scenes as well.

HELENA

And even for that do I love you the more.
I am your spaniel; and, Demetrius,
The more you beat me, I will fawn on you:
Use me but as your spaniel, spurn me, strike me,
Neglect me, lose me; only give me leave,
Unworthy as I am, to follow you.
What worser place can I beg in your love,
And yet a place of high respect with me,
Than to be used as you use your dog?

DEMETRIUS

Tempt not too much the hatred of my spirit;
For I am sick when I do look on thee.

HELENA

And I am sick when I look not on you.

DEMETRIUS

You do impeach your modesty too much,
To leave the city and commit yourself
Into the hands of one that loves you not;
To trust the opportunity of night

INNER MONOLOGUE

I'm not going to give up. He will love me again.
Anyway, I'd rather be with him and treated badly than
not be with him at all.

She is driving me crazy, I can't stand this girl.

I'm not leaving this forest until he's mine again.

Oh for goodness sake, she is nuts.
Why doesn't she get it? – I am NOT interested.