

Dear Educator:

Youth Media International, in cooperation with Fox Searchlight Pictures and Regency Enterprises, is pleased to present a viewer's study guide to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, one of Shakespeare's most beloved comedies. This new production, *William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream*, treats the viewer to an enchanted world in which nymphs and fairies, royalty and common folk, all bump heads in their frantic search for love—with outrageous results.

The film, directed by Michael Hoffman, stars Christian Bale, Rupert Everett, Calista Flockhart, Kevin Kline, Sophie Marceau, Michelle Pfeiffer, David Strathairn and Stanley Tucci. Set in Tuscany at the end of the nineteenth century, *William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream* depicts a world of mysterious woods, glorious terraced hillsides and noble courts in which young lovers race from place to place on bicycles. Your students will enjoy the antics of a cast of characters whose preposterous behavior is best described by the play's chief mischief-maker, Puck, when he says, "Lord, what fools these mortals be!"

This study guide will help students appreciate the universality of Shakespeare's characters and the poetic richness of his language. In addition, it offers opportunities for gaining insights into the challenges and possibilities posed by the media of film and live theater. The film will open in early May across the country. Check with your local newspaper for dates and times.

We hope you will share this kit with your colleagues. Although the material is copyrighted, you may make as many photocopies as you need. We also hope you will choose to remain on our mailing list; to ensure that you receive future mailings, please fill out and return the enclosed reply card. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

Sincerely,

Roberta Nusim

Roberta Nusim, Publisher



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

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Teacher's Guide

Program Components

1. This teacher's guide.
2. Three reproducible student activity sheets.
3. A four-color poster for classroom display.
4. A response card for your comments.

Target Audience

This program has been designed for students in English, literature, Shakespeare, drama, film and theater arts classes.

Program Objectives

1. To enhance students' appreciation for and understanding of the universality of Shakespeare's characters and themes, and the richness of his language.

2. To sharpen students' analytical skills through an examination of the complexities of plot and theme.
3. To engage students in an exploration of the differences and similarities between two performance media.
4. To offer students practice in research as well as in oral and written communication skills.
5. To help students discover the compelling nature of myth and legend.

How To Use This Guide

Viewing the film *William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a group with your class in a theatrical atmosphere will enhance your students' appreciation for its messages and their understanding of the questions posed in this guide. The film, the activities in this guide and Shakespeare himself will afford your students a rich learning experience.

Introduction

The action begins at the noble court of Theseus, the reigning Duke, where preparations are underway for his marriage to the beautiful Hippolyta. But Hippolyta, the queen of the vanquished Amazons, is not entirely pleased with the idea of becoming the wife of her nation's conqueror. Meanwhile, Egeus, a wealthy member of the court, comes before the Duke to complain that his daughter, Hermia, has refused to marry



Demetrius, her father's choice. Instead, she has lost her heart to Lysander. To complicate matters further, Demetrius, although he is really in love with Helena, Hermia's friend, has given Helena up in order to marry Hermia. Now, according to the law of the land, Hermia must marry Demetrius; if she does not, she must choose between death and life as a virgin priestess. The deadline for deciding her fate? The Duke's wedding day. Hermia and

Lysander decide to rendezvous in the woods to plan their elopement. Helena offers to help, but the plot thickens when Demetrius, with whom Helena is in love, attempts to thwart the elopement.

Across town, a band of laborers led by the carpenter Peter Quince—including Bottom, Flute, Tom Snout and some others—congregate to prepare the play they are to perform at the Duke's wedding. They agree to meet in the woods the following night, Midsummer's Eve, to rehearse. But Midsummer's Eve also happens to be the occasion for great celebration for the fairies who make the woods their home.

The fairies are ruled by King Oberon and Queen Titania, who are at odds over a young child. To triumph over the queen, Oberon orders his clever and faithful servant, Puck, to make good use of some magic nectar. Dropped into the eyes, the magic nectar causes the victim to fall in love with the first one he or she sees. The trickster Puck drops the nectar in the eyes of his victims at all the wrong times, causing complete confusion: the two pairs of lovers fall in and out of love with breathtaking speed and, worst of all, Titania falls in love with Bottom, whose head has been turned into that of an ass.

Needless to say, all is resolved to everyone's satisfaction. The Duke decrees that Hermia may marry Lysander, Helena and Demetrius reconcile, Titania and Oberon work out their problem—as do the Duke and his betrothed—and the laborers present their hilarious version of the play "Pyramus and Thisby" at the triple wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta and the two sets of young lovers. Bottom, although he has at times behaved like an "ass" through the course of the play, is returned to his normal state. With mischievous Puck's last word, one is left to wonder—has it all been a dream?

Activity One *Quiet—Genius at Work*

Part A. Shakespeare's genius is evident in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as in the way he introduces what seems at first a bewildering variety of characters and plots and then proceeds to manipulate them deftly to convey coherent themes. Explain to the students that this activity will help them to untangle the three main story lines.

(The story lines are: (1) the complications among the four young lovers—Hermia and Lysander, and Helena and Demetrius; (2) the upcoming marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta—the occasion for the performance by Bottom and his friends of the play about Pyramus and Thisby, and (3) the relationship between Oberon and Titania, the king and queen of the fairies, and the maneuvering of the fairies in the lives of the other characters.)

Part B. Ask students to consider the similarities and differences in the three plots. The activity will lead students to see that the behavior of almost all the characters, regardless of their class or stature, is irrational and unrealistic, and that all the characters are swayed by feelings of love, whether real or imagined.

Part C. Conduct a classroom discussion about the "foolish" behavior of the characters. Help the students to understand that, since Puck's mischief has no logic, it is fitting that a magic potion in the hands of this mischief-making and antic fairy controls much of the action of the play. It is also fitting that Puck speaks the line that best describes the mortal characters, "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" and suggests at the play's end that it has all been a dream—a midsummer night's dream.

After they have had a chance to record an act of foolishness of their own, ask if they would like to share their scenes, monologues or short stories with the rest of the class.

Part D. This activity familiarizes students with the important literary tool of imagery and the ways in which Shakespeare's references to animals throughout the work highlight the illogical thinking and behavior of his characters. Explain to your students that imagery has to do with the senses. This is a good opportunity to examine the text for examples of Shakespeare's animal imagery, so students will understand why Shakespeare has Titania fall in love with Bottom, although he has the head of an ass.

Examples of animal imagery:

(Puck) *I jest to Oberon, and make him smile
When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,
Neighing in likeness of a filly foal:
And sometimes lurk I in a gossip's bowl,
In very likeness of a roasted crab.*

(Helena) *I am your spaniel; and Demetrius,
The more you beat me, I will fawn on you:
Use me but as your spaniel,....*

Additional Activities

Have students research the source of some of Shakespeare's characters. For example, Pyramus and Thisby are derived from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Theseus from Plutarch and Chaucer, and the nymphs and fairies from English fairy lore. Ask students to discuss how the Pyramus and Thisby story fits into the overall plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Suggest that students design a large, colorful poster suitable for classroom display illustrating the connections among the characters. They could use drawings or cutouts of figures representing the characters, with lines drawn from one to another. They might want to use some of the imagery from the play to reveal the antic foolishness of the mortals.

Pyramus and Thisby

Like Romeo and Juliet, and Hermia and Lysander, Pyramus and Thisby are kept apart by their parents. They arrange to meet at a tomb. On her way to the meeting, Thisby is frightened by a lion returning from a kill. She drops her cloak and runs off; the lion mouths the cloak. Pyramus finds the blood-stained cloak and, assuming Thisby has been killed, kills himself. Then Thisby finds his dead body and kills herself.

Quiet—Genius at Work

Part A. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* contains three main plots and a large cast of characters who move in and out of the play's different worlds. In the space below, briefly summarize each of the three plots. List the characters who are central to each.

Plot #1 _____

Cast of Characters	1. _____	4. _____
	2. _____	5. _____
	3. _____	6. _____

Plot #2 _____

Cast of Characters	1. _____	4. _____
	2. _____	5. _____
	3. _____	6. _____

Plot #3 _____

Cast of Characters	1. _____	4. _____
	2. _____	5. _____
	3. _____	6. _____



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Part B. Although there are three different plots in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, are there certain characteristics they have in common? How are the three plots similar?

How are the three plots different?

Part C. Think about the character of Puck. Why do you think Shakespeare chose him to pull all the parts of the play together? It is Puck who is given one of Shakespeare's most famous lines: "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" Discuss with your classmates what is foolish about the "mortals" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Then think about an act of your own that might be viewed as foolish. On a separate piece of paper, compose a scene, monologue or short story that dramatizes your act of foolishness.

Now, list some examples of imagery from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Part D. The language of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is full of animal images. Define imagery in literature.

Imagery is _____

In the space provided below, explain why imagery is a good device, or conceit, to use in poetry. Then, on a separate paper, write a short poem using an image pattern of your own choice. Try to make the images strengthen the idea or mood you want to convey in your poem.

Imagery is a good device for poetry because _____

Love's Labor's Lost—and Won

Activity Two

Part A. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is all about love. But what does Shakespeare's attitude toward love seem to be? Find some lines in the play that help you define his position (for example, "Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,/And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind."). Then, briefly explain what the lines suggest about Shakespeare's attitude.

Examples from the play:

Shakespeare seems to believe that love is:

Part B. Have attitudes toward love changed over time? What do you make of the expression "falling in love"? Or to be "crazy" or "mad" about someone? What are some contemporary expressions or song titles that echo Shakespeare's attitude (for example, *Why Do Fools Fall in Love?*)?

1.

2.

3.

Write your own definition of love:

Love is



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Now, using contemporary language, compose the lyrics for a love song that might be sung by one of the characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Use a separate piece of paper.



Part C. Hermia's father gave her several choices after she told him she wanted to marry Lysander. Not one was acceptable. She wanted to marry for love. Historically speaking, marrying for love is a relatively new convention. Research to find out how and why marriages took place in the past. Work in teams to prepare a report on how different cultures, in the past and in the present, view marriage. Present your findings to your class. You then might want to debate the topic—Resolved: Arranged marriages are preferable to marrying for love.

All the World's a Stage

Activity Three

Part A. Over the years, productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* have been astonishingly varied—proof of Shakespeare's continuing universal appeal. Considered the foremost playwright of his day, in 1599 he was listed as one of the owners of the Globe Theatre, where his plays were performed. In 1608 or 1609 he and his colleagues purchased the Blackfriars Theatre as their winter location. During Shakespeare's time, there were no separate acts and scenes, nor were there sets. Women were not permitted to appear on the stage. All the parts were played by males and, in some cases, by young boys. In our own time, Shakespeare's plays have been produced on the stage, for TV and the movies, in traditional theater settings and outdoor parks, by all-male and all-female casts. They also have been adapted for opera and ballet.

Imagine you have been asked to turn *A Midsummer Night's Dream* into a film. Think about the differences between the movies and the live stage. Then, in the space below, list some areas you would have to consider in making your adaptation from stage to screen and explain how the particular qualities of each of the two media would direct your thinking. After viewing the film, compare your ideas with what the filmmakers actually did in their version. You have been given an example to help you start.



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Area	Stage	Screen
1. <u>setting</u>	<u>must be fixed, artificial</u>	<u>can move from one place to another, be "real"</u>
2. _____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____
4. _____	_____	_____

Part B. What if the makers of the film had decided to change the time of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to our own time? Imagine a scene between one of the two sets of young lovers and on a separate piece of paper write the dialogue, using everyday, contemporary language.

Select a play, story or film you know and like. Choose another time and setting and explain your decision. Outline the changes below:

Story _____ Time and setting _____

New time and setting _____

I chose this time and setting because _____

How is the play/story changed? _____

Part C. Shakespeare wrote this play soon after he wrote *Romeo and Juliet*. Is he poking fun in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at anything he treated with seriousness in *Romeo and Juliet*? Shakespeare dealt with the same themes in many of his works—sometimes with humor in his comedies, sometimes with great seriousness in his tragedies. Often there is a thin line between tragedy and comedy. First, look up and define tragedy and comedy.

Tragedy is _____

Comedy is _____

Then take a basic situation and act it out in two ways, first as a tragedy, then as a comedy. Was it easier to retain the basic idea by acting it out as a tragedy or as a comedy? Explain below:

Activity Two

Love's Labor's Lost—and Won

Part A. “Love makes the world go round,” according to the old adage, and in this activity students have the opportunity to talk about love and lovers. First, they should explore Shakespeare’s attitudes toward love. Here are some passages from the play you might want to discuss:

*(Theseus) The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,
Are of imagination all compact:*

...the lover, all as frantic,

Sees Helen’s beauty in a brow of Egypt:...

(Lysander) The course of true love never did run smooth.

(Demetrius)...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.

(Bottom)...and yet, to say the truth,

Reason and love keep little company together

Now-a-days.

Part B. Ask students to discuss the questions on the activity sheet. Should love be based only on sound, rational principles? You also might ask: What does Shakespeare appear to believe

about the role of physical appearance in love? Should age be a factor in determining the validity of a relationship? Should marriage be based on love and love alone?

You might want to post the lyrics of the love songs the students write.

Part C. This activity encourages students to think about marriage as a family institution. Ask the students to work in teams to prepare their reports on marriage. Ask each team to present their findings to the class.

An alternate debate topic could revolve around the issue of whether Egeus has the right to punish Hermia as he does. Ask students whether Theseus’s attitude toward the family conflict and his final decision about Hermia tell us what side Shakespeare himself is on. Remember that Theseus lets Hermia off the hook and gives her permission to marry the man of her choice.

Additional Activities

Have students as a class compose a list of their favorite love stories from fiction and nonfiction, film, TV and theater. Then take a class vote on the list. Use the results of the voting as the basis for a class discussion on what has been revealed about their attitudes toward romantic love.

Ask students to discuss how such stories as *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Frog Prince* teach us lessons about “real love.”

Lysander says, “The course of true love never did run smooth.” Students may want to debate the validity of this observation and use it as the theme of a short story or poem of their own.



Activity Three

All the World’s a Stage

Part A. Through this activity students can appreciate the universality of Shakespeare’s works and the infinite possibilities they offer for creative production. Students also can think about the differences between the medium of the theater and that of film. Encourage them to compare the movie camera, which allows for

close-ups, multiple scene changes and realistic, in fact, “real” settings, with the stage and its live performers, and to recognize that each medium presents its own strengths and limitations. Remind them that film permits the viewer to “travel” at will and the director to repeat a scene until it reaches his or her ideal of perfection, and that the camera focuses greater attention on the physical characteristics of the actors and requires a different kind of acting from that of the live stage. Have students discuss the issue of reality: If films take place in actual settings, and theater is composed of live people on the stage, is one medium more realistic than the other?

Part B. Help students to think about the universality of Shakespeare’s characters and their ability to fit into a variety of times and settings.

If students choose a setting in the past for their play or short story, encourage them to do some research on the time they have chosen in order to ensure accuracy and learn about an era or world different from their own.

Part C. In doing research on the distinctions between tragedy and comedy and trying their own hand at each of the genres, students can come to understand that the two are closely related. Ask them to interpret the expression, “I didn’t know whether to laugh or to cry.” Help them to see that at times the degree of exaggeration throughout a comedy, along with its “happy ending,” distinguishes it from a tragedy. Students who are familiar with *Romeo and Juliet* should note strong parallels between it and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, most notably in the family conflicts and in the feigned deaths of the lovers.

Additional Activities

Have students use the library to discover what theater was like in Shakespeare’s time. Assign a group to make a model of the Globe Theatre for classroom display and try to discover how the physical aspects of the theater determined important characteristics of the plays that were performed in it.

Ask students to research the theory of comedy and the history of slapstick comedy. Why do we laugh when we see someone slip on a banana peel? Ask them to make lists of their favorite TV and movie comedies and compare their lists with one another. Then, hold a discussion on what comedic qualities appear to be most popular with the class as a whole.

