



SOUTHWEST
SHAKESPEARE

COMPANY

FEB 9-24

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S

*A Midsummer
Night's Dream*

STUDY GUIDE

Created by Breona Conrad
Helena in the February Production!
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Southwest Shakespeare Company



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM



quick facts



PURE POETRY

...well, 81% verse. Beautiful, lyrical, stunning verse. And the prose is equally well crafted.

The lovers' speeches, specifically, have led many people in the literary world to consider *Midsummer* a more rich experience to read than to watch for generations. In fact, 19th century critic William Hazlitt argued that *Midsummer* was a "closet drama" or a play written not intended to be staged.

IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME...

So in 1934, renowned director Max Reinhardt had a brilliant idea: remove the shell of the Hollywood Bowl in L.A., bring in a ton of dirt, plant a forest, and put on an all star production of *Midsummer*. And it was a HUGE success. It was such a success that Warner Brothers signed on Reinhardt to direct a film version making *Midsummer* the first Shakespearean play to get the film treatment in upwards of a decade.

Scholars are confident that *Midsummer* was written in roughly 1595. Know what else Will was working on then? *Romeo and Juliet*. It is believed that the play within a play in *Midsummer* is Shakespeare writing a parody of his own tragedy. So meta.

PARODY

THE FAB FOUR In the midst of Beatlemania, the Fab Four were everywhere- especially on TV spots and specials. One such special was called *Around the Beatles* and was originally recorded in England in April and aired in America in November of 1964. During this special, the group appeared in a performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* with Paul as Pyramus, John as Thisbe, Ringo as Lion, and George as Moonshine alongside a few other actors. YouTube it. Ringo's Lion roar is priceless.

WHAT A DROLL

So there was a point in English history called the Interregnum. During this period between 1642-1660 theatres were closed. As a way to keep the art alive and their skills sharp, actors would take portions of Elizabethan plays and perform them in between performance acts; think of a variety show with acts like juggling, singing...and short comedic performances. These short comedic pieces were known as Drolls. One of the most popular? The substory of Bottom and the mechanicals. When the Restoration began in 1660 the theatres were reopened and these drolls could be seen in their original form of full length plays. *Midsummer*, though popular as a droll was not received well in long form. Samuel Pepys, an Englishman who kept extensive journals of his life for a decade took in a performance of *Midsummer* in 1662 and thought the play was "...the most insipid, ridiculous play that ever I saw ..."

Quick science lesson: **TO THE MOON** did you know Uranus has 27 moons? Well, it does! If you knew that, did you know this: 25 of those 27 moons are named after Shakespearean characters. What?! That's right, Shakespeare's influence reaches all the way across the universe. The first two moons were discovered by William Herschel in 1787 and were named Oberon and Titania. No one is exactly sure where the names came from; Herschel, a well known composer, had no affinity to Shakespeare. It is believed his son, John, named them and a tradition began. Fast forward to the 1980s. NASA's Voyager 2 discovers 10 new moons around the planet. All but one got a Shakespearean name. The first name used? Puck.

Music is a must in any Shakespearean comedy. Composer Felix Mendelssohn was commissioned by his employer King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia in 1843 to score a production of *Midsummer* in Potsdam, Germany. Part of that score included The Wedding March. Yep, the most iconic tune associated with marriage in the history of weddings began as incidental music for a production of *Midsummer*.

IT'S YOUR WEDDING DAY!

AN ANEC-DOTE

"Dote" makes more appearances in *Midsummer* than in any other play in the canon. It comes from the German word *dotten* meaning "to be foolish, imbecilic, or deranged."

INSPIRATION IS EVERYWHERE

Even though the actual plot of *Midsummer* unfolds over the course of most likely 4 or 5 days, this play was the inspiration director John McTiernan needed to make the events of *Die Hard* unfold over the course of one night.

TIME FOR THE BOUQUET TOSS

Wedding receptions didn't always have a dance floor. Wedding guests were treated to entertainment like brand new plays. Though there is no concrete evidence of any performance of *Midsummer* during Shakespeare's life (which is impressive considering this play was written in 1595ish and Will died in 1616), it is believed the play was commissioned for an important wedding and was first presented in Court months before it opened to general audiences.

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A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

dramatis
personae



(Hold on! That is Latin for "the masks of drama" or cast of characters as we know it.)

THE COURT

they're
getting
married!

THESEUS
Duke of Athens

HIPPOLYTA
Queen of the Amazons

HERMIA
in love with Lysander

LYSANDER
in love with Hermia

DEMETRIUS
Hermia's suitor,
Helena's ex.

HELENA
still in love with
Demetrius

EGEUS
Hermia's dad

PHILOSTRATE
Master of Revels



THE MECHANICALS

NICK BOTTOM
a weaver and the
"best" actor

PETER QUINCE
the playwright
and a carpenter

SNUG
a joiner and not
very bright

TOM SNOOT
a tinker and the
reluctant one

FRANCIS FLUTE
a bellows-mender,
young and excited

ROBIN STARVELING
a tailor and the sweet one

THE FAIRIES

OBERON
the King

TITANIA
the Queen

PUCK
a.k.a. Robin Goodfellow
mischievous and
Oberon's right hand

PEASEBLOSSOM
MUSTARDSEED

**THE
CHANGELING**
Titania's ward

COBWEB
MOTH
the fairy
servants of
Titania



MECHANICAL MOMENT

Take a look to the left. Notice anything? How about the fact that Snug is the only Mechanical without a last name? That's because he's the dim-witted one in the group. In fact, all of names of these manual laborers, or MECHANICALS, have a connection to their professions:

The name **QUINCE** comes from the word "quoins" which are corner blocks used in building construction

A tinker is basically a metalsmith and **SNOOT** refers to the spout of a kettle which is a common tinker product.

A **BOTTOM** is the wooden spool upon which a weaver spools thread.

A joiner refers to an ornamental woodworker: a person who uses **SNUG** joints instead of nails to make delicate pieces like chairs.

Tailors were usually quite poor and therefore underfed- known as **STARVELINGS**.



← These are a form of bellows: a thing that blows air. Know what other kinds of bellows that occasionally need mending? Organ pipes and **FLUTES**.

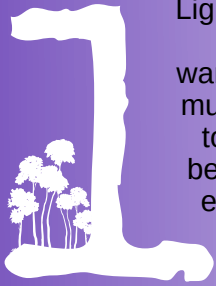


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THE STORY

Though it wasn't published until 1600, scholars place the writing of *Midsummer* in roughly 1595 or 1596 because of the similar writing style to other plays written during that time like *Romeo and Juliet* and *Richard II* along with evidence of well known critics praising the play in 1598. The woods play an important role: when characters of the court go into the woods, it's as if all the rules go away. It's an opportunity to explore the whimsy side of life. Perhaps that's why 81% of the dialogue is written in verse (you know, the ba-bum ba-bum ba-bum).



Lights up on Athens. It's four days until the happy wedding day of Theseus and Hippolyta, but, being the Duke, he must do his Duke duties and field the Athenians' problems. Egeus brings his problem: he wants his daughter, Hermia, to marry Demetrius, but she only has eyes for Lysander. The solution? She must obey the Athenian law: either marry according to the wish of the patriarch or die. Hermia's solution to *that* problem? Run away into the woods with Lysander. So they do. This should also solve Hermia's bestie, Helena's problem: Helena is in love with Demetrius, but he only has eyes for Hermia. Demetrius ends up running into the woods upon learning Hermia has run away, so Helena runs into the woods to run after Demetrius. Meanwhile, a group of mechanicals gather to dole out parts for their upcoming performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* at the Duke's wedding festival.

Where do *they* choose to rehearse? Into the woods, of course!



The fairies were in the midst of planning revels for the night in the woods, but Oberon and Titania are fighting; mostly about the child Titania had just adopted. Oberon hatches a plan with his sidekick, Puck, to seek out a flower which has juice that basically has the power of "love at first sight." After Puck returns, Oberon instructs the sprite to use the juice on the young Athenian he saw reject the lady (Demetrius and Helena). Puck sets off to do so. After she falls asleep, Oberon uses the flower juice on Titania. Meanwhile, Puck finds a young Athenian couple asleep in the woods so he uses the flower juice on the young man as instructed; problem is, he just stumbled upon Lysander and Hermia. Demetrius runs past the sleeping couple and Helena stops by them to rest, waking up the bewitched Lysander who instantly falls in love with Helena. Confused, Helena runs off with Lysander chasing after her.

Hermia wakes up alone, and now she's confused, too.



Puck happens upon the actors in the woods. They're in deep debate over the content of the play and, while alone in the bushes, Puck turns Bottom's head into a donkey. When Bottom returns to the group, they run away scared. Sad, Bottom starts singing which wakes up Titania who instantly falls in love with the donkey headed Bottom and takes him into her pampering care. Pleased with the work, Puck reports to Oberon success all around, but then the fairies discover the wrong Athenian was enchanted. Long, hilarious, story short: both men become enchanted and enamored with Helena to the point of calling for a fight. Helena is convinced the two, along with Hermia, are all just pulling a big, mean prank on her. Hermia is completely dumbfounded; first she had two men dotting after her, now there are none. Puck keeps the boys from fighting and successfully undoes the spell on Lysander so he will think everything he just experienced was just a dream.



Titania and the fairies continue to pamper the donkey-headed Bottom. While this is happening, Oberon successfully takes possession of the coveted child and then removes the spell from Titania. The two make peace and the fairies can finally enjoy their revels. Theseus is in the woods with a hunting party when they happen upon the lovers. None of them can quite explain what had happened except Demetrius no longer loves Hermia and is now madly in love with Helena. Theseus declares the two couples shall be married. Elsewhere in the woods, Bottom, back to his regular self, awakes and is bewildered by the strange dream he had. Meanwhile, back at the home of Peter Quince, the actors are worried that their show is ruined because they can't find Bottom. But then Bottom returns!

They prepare to head to the palace of Theseus.



The lovers amaze Theseus with their magical wood story at the reception of the triple wedding. The Duke then chooses, against the Philostrate's suggestion, to see the "brief scene" of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. What transpires is a thing of wonder that I will not spoil here other than saying there is a lot of over explaining and overacting on all fronts. When the spectacle ends, Bottom offers an epilogue, but Theseus wants to dance. The party ends at midnight so the "fairy time" can begin. Puck enters to begin the task of sweeping the floors of the palace while Oberon and Titania bless the house. Puck ends the play suggesting the audience had just experienced a dream.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FAIRY LORE

...and how Shakespeare changed it using A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

WHERE DID FAIRIES COME FROM?

Like any fantastical creature, fairy history has evolved over time. Fairy stories took root in Celtic and Gaelic lore, as well as in the medieval French and Germanic peoples. The creatures did not start off as the mischievous, lighthearted sprites we think of today. They had a much darker beginning:

FAIRY TYPE: PUCK

ALIASES: PWCA
Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, illustration from Robin Goodfellow, his mad pranks and merry jests, 1628



- PHOUKA Irish
- POOKA Irish
- PUCA Old English
- PUKI Old Norse
- PUKE Swedish
- PUGE Danish
- PUKS Low German

MEANING:

All derivatives of the word *pouk*, a medieval word for devil.

CHARACTERISTICS:

No matter the spelling, a Puck was a nasty creature. Pucks are evil demons that are shape shifters; throughout history they've been described as grotesque as a half chicken and as human as a child; usually described with an animal feature, commonly antlers. Found mostly in the woods, a Puck loves to play tricks on humans like blowing out lanterns in the dead of the night or in dangerous terrain and riling up livestock.

ONE MORE THING:

A common belief held that a sudden death was punishment for kidnapping a fairy. So, why kidnap a fairy? After it's death, a fairy would turn into a wooden statue- with **MAGICAL POWERS.**

FAIRY TYPE: ROBIN

GOODFELLOW

ALIASES: Hobgoblin
Brownie

MEANING:

Robin was a nickname for the devil in medieval times.

CHARACTERISTICS:

Though considered a mischievous devil a Rob could be quite helpful. A Brownie was known to do tasks for specific families like sweeping the floors, sewing, tidying up. Offend one of these fairies by trying to pay them, offer new clothes, or, above all, keep an untidy home and the kindness of a Rob will quickly turn to misfortunes like serious illness or poor crops.

FAIRY TYPE: CHANGELING

CHARACTERISTICS:

The child of a fairy that can be used to swap out for a human child as a punishment for neglectful parents.

BUT WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?

Depends on who you talk to. Fairies are thought to be:

- fallen angels who got stuck between heaven and hell when both gates shut after a revolt against God
- souls of the dead in purgatory: not bad or good enough for heaven or hell
- a lost race of people who now live in hiding
- a higher level of being than a human with powers over the elements of the earth

THE SHAKESPEARE TREATMENT

So the image painted above isn't quite what you think of when you think of a fairy, is it? The fairies of our time are generally benevolent, yet mischievous, helpful, and loyal. Why? A lot of credit can go to Will himself. The fairies of Midsummer are all fun and no sinister. Take Puck, for example: the character Shakespeare created is a beautiful blend of all the good stuff from the lore of Pucks and Robin Goodfellows. Puck is always up for a good jest in the name of laughter, keeps after the house of Theseus, enjoys a good song and dance, and likes to dabble in the craft of shape shifting. In fact, the mischievous fairy is called both Puck AND Robin Goodfellow in the play. It's thought that growing up in the country town of Stratford upon Avon, Will heard a lot of fairy lore and latched onto the whimsical aspects of the stories. The fun, music loving, merry wanderers of the night in Midsummer had a big impact on fairy lore transitioning from dark, malevolent stories into the fanciful fairies of today. Case in point: loyal sidekick of Peter Pan, the iconic Tinkerbell was inspired by none other than Puck, loyal sidekick to Oberon.



May Day or Midsummer's Eve: WHEN is A Midsummer Night's Dream?

The play is called **A MIDSUMMER Night's Dream**, so what's the big debate? Midsummer's Eve is the centuries old celebration of the longest day of the year: the summer solstice. It is a celebration of the land and the upcoming harvest; original festival traditions included ritualistic ceremonies to ensure a hearty harvest. Therefore, this play is obviously set in late June and the wedding festivities are centered around the Midsummer's Eve celebration. Case closed.

BUT WAIT! If this play is set in late June, then why does Theseus think the lovers are in the woods to "observe the rite of May" in Act 4? And why does Lysander mention having been in the woods with Hermia and Helena once before for that very same reason in Act 1? Oh, and also,

WHAT IN THE WORLD IS THE RITE OF MAY?! (a.k.a. May Day)

May Day is a celebration to bring in the beginning of spring. Observed worldwide on May 1, celebrations include gathering flowers and twigs to weave into garlands and crowns in celebration of the earth and to ensure fertile earth for the planting season. Other festivities included big feasts, dancing around the maypole and naming a king and queen of the festival.

MAYING: The act of gathering blooming tree branches in the woods early in the morning for decorations during May Day festivities.

(During the Elizabethan era, the king and queen of May Day were known as Robin Hood and Maid Marian.)

GREENWOOD MARRIAGES

On the eve of May Day, young couples would spend the night in the forest to greet the sunrise. They would return to the village on May Day morning with flowers and twigs to add to the decorations.

Looking for a new skin care treatment? It was believed that rubbing the May Day morning dew on your face would help beautify your skin.

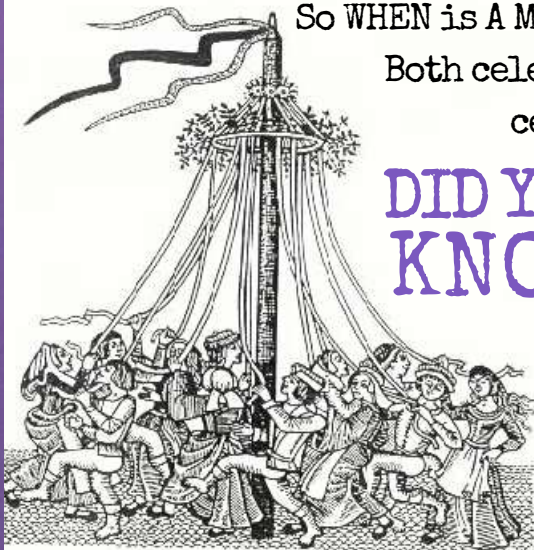
In Ireland, old Celtic traditions for May Day began on April 30. Large "need-fires" would be lit on the tops of hills by Druids and were thought to have healing properties. People were known to jump through the flames to increase the healing properties.

So WHEN is A Midsummer Night's Dream? Whenever you want it to be!

Both celebrations have similar traditions and May Day celebrations once continued into June.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Puritans who sailed from England to America believed the May Day celebration was immoral and it was forbidden to be observed. That's why celebrating May Day never really became a thing here in the U.S.



What's the purpose of a maypole? Fun! The pole itself can be decorated with garlands and is a great place upon which lights can be strung. Along with this, men and women could perform traditional dances around the pole, weaving long ribbons in and out of various patterns.

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S

A Midsummer Night's Dream

final
thoughts

So why should you care about a play written over 400 years ago? For the same reason we're still reading the works of Shakespeare 400 years later in the first place: he wrote stories about human nature. Sure, we may not be under strict

Athenian rule in a city next to an enchanted wood, but these characters go through some stuff that will continue to be relatable for generations to come:

1. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written around the same time as *Romeo and Juliet* and have a lot of similarities yet the latter is considered the greatest tragic love story ever told and the former one of Shakespeare's best comedies. Both stories focus on similar aspects of love: a father trying to enter a daughter into an arranged marriage though the daughter has found true love elsewhere, the night is seen as a time of growth and transformation while the day is filled with rigidity and law, and the lovers use similar stereotypical language of young love like "Ay, me!" What does this show? Love is...complex and complicated. It spans the breadth of human emotion and is both blissfully happy and tragically heartbreaking. Have you ever been driven by your heart? It can drive you in a multitude of directions.



2. Bottom and Puck are the only characters who interact with other characters in all three story lines: the fairy world, the court/lovers, and the mechanicals. Status was very important during the Elizabethan era. One's social standing would inform what a person could wear, eat, and even pay in fines. There are very similar qualities amongst the players in each of the worlds of *Midsummer* and each world effects the other two, yet the three worlds do not directly interact (speak) save the two characters previously mentioned. Some scholars think Shakespeare was trying to make a statement about society. But it's human nature. Have you ever thought about going rogue and sitting at a different table at lunch? And disrupt the natural order? Are you kidding me?! That is a small example of our modern social constructs: parallel storylines all orbiting one another, occasionally crossing over. Just like in the play, sometimes the most exciting moments are when the worlds meet. And when worlds collide, it's usually uncanny how similar "different" worlds really are.