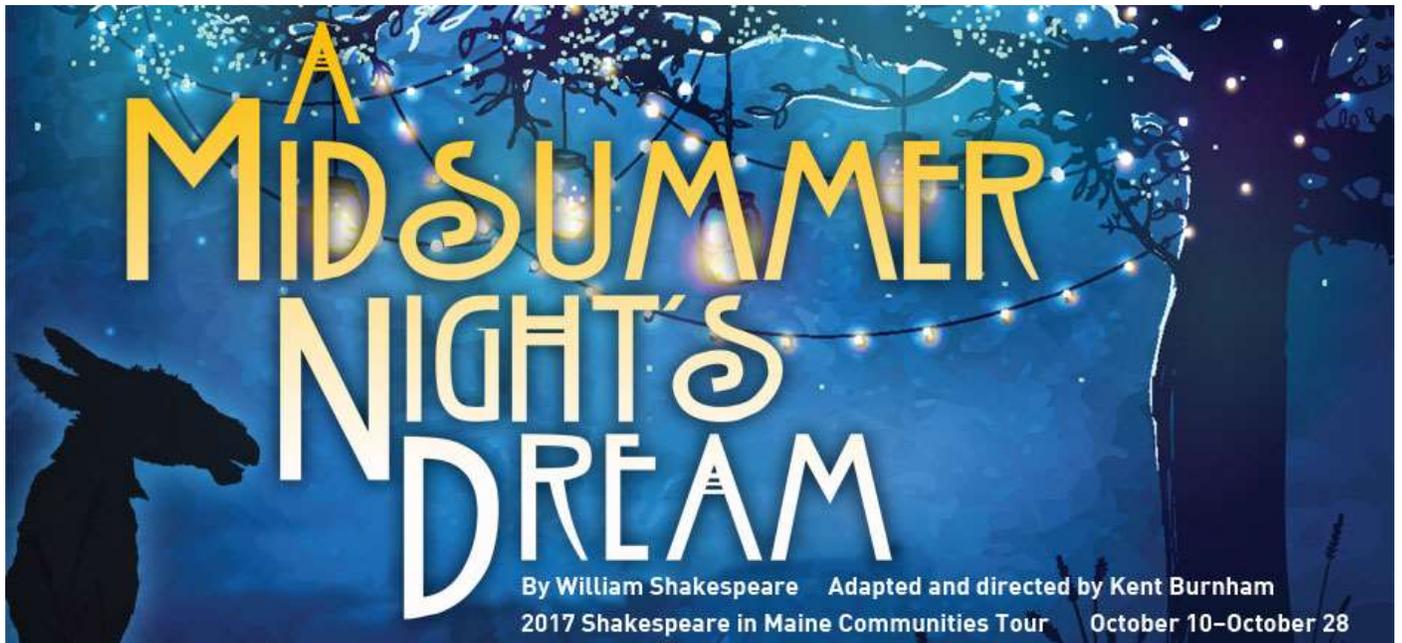
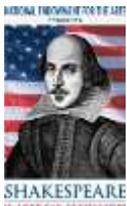


**Theater at Monmouth**  
**2017 Shakespeare in Maine Communities Tour**  
**Teacher Resource Guide**



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Theater at Monmouth's production is part of Shakespeare for a New Generation, a national program of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest.

**THE BETTERMENT FUND**  
CREATED BY THE WILL OF WILLIAM BINGHAM 2ND

The 2018 Shakespeare in Maine Communities Tour is funded in part by a grant from the Betterment Fund.

## FROM THE PAGE TO THE STAGE

This season, Theater at Monmouth's *Shakespeare in Maine Communities* Tour brings classic literature to students across Maine with an 80-minute version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The text was adapted to streamline the plot and help students connect more strongly to Shakespeare's verse, themes, and relevance to a modern audience. *Shakespeare in Maine Communities'* workshops and extended residencies offer students the opportunity to study, explore, and view classic literature through performance.



**Costume Design for Bottom's Transformation in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.**

TAM's Education Tours and complimentary programming challenge learners of all ages to explore the ideas, emotions, and principles contained in classic texts and to discover the connection between classic theatre and our modern world.

Teacher Resource Guide articles and activities were developed to help students form a personal connection to the play before attending the production; Common Core-aligned activities are included to explore the plays in the classroom before and after the performance.

The best way to appreciate Shakespeare is to do Shakespeare. That means getting students up on their feet and physically, expressively, and vocally exploring his words. Using performance-based activities will help students to build a richer understanding of the text and identify with the characters and conflicts in the plays.

Thank you for taking some of your classroom time to teach your students about *A Midsummer Night's Dream*! If you need more information to support your preparation for the production, please call 207.933.2952 or email [boxoffice@theateratmonmouth.org](mailto:boxoffice@theateratmonmouth.org).

Enjoy the show!

Dawn McAndrews  
Producing Artistic Director  
Theater at Monmouth

# The Course of True Love Never Did Run Smooth!

## A synopsis of what happens in the play



Hermia in the Woods

Theseus, Duke of Athens, is betrothed to Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons. In the midst of wedding planning, he is visited by Egeus, who brings his daughter Hermia and her two suitors, Demetrius and Lysander. Egeus has chosen Demetrius for his daughter but Hermia refuses because she loves Lysander. The Duke declares that Hermia must obey her father and marry Demetrius, or else face either death or the chaste life of a nun.

Hermia and Lysander's love will not be denied, so they decide to run away into the woods. They make the mistake of telling their friend Helena, who is in love with Demetrius, about their plan. Wanting to show Demetrius that Hermia doesn't love him (and get him alone in the woods), Helena blabs the pair's plan. As she hoped, Demetrius takes off in pursuit of the runaways, with Helena in pursuit of him.

Meanwhile, in another part of the woods, the King of the Fairies, Oberon, is so mad at his Queen, Titania (over her refusal to give him a young changeling boy), that they have messed up the seasons and the weather. To teach her a lesson, Oberon sends his mischievous fairy, Puck, to find a magical flower. Its juice, when squeezed into the eyes of someone sleeping, will cause the victim to fall in love with whomever or whatever he or she next sees. Oberon hopes Titania will fall for a wild beast when he doses her with the flower's nectar.



The Fairy Lovers  
Theodore Von Holst, 1840

With Puck adventuring for the flower, Oberon amuses himself with the Athenian lovers and catches Demetrius abusing the love-sick Helena. When Puck returns, Oberon orders him to use the flower's juice on a young man, dressed in "Athenian garments," unaware that Lysander is also roaming through the woods. So when Puck runs into Lysander and Hermia, lost and sleeping, he believes Lysander to be his target and doses the wrong Athenian. Helena wanders into the same clearing, and fearing the sleeping Lysander dead, shakes him awake. The potion's effects are immediate, and the love-struck Lysander leaves Hermia to follow the new object of his affection, Helena, who runs away, thinking Lysander mocks her.



Puck or Robin  
Goodfellow.

While the lovers are sorting out their broken hearts, a group of laborers, or mechanicals, are rehearsing, a play to entertain the revelers at the Duke's wedding. Puck happens upon their theatrical escapades, and decides to have a bit of fun with the most bombastic among them, Bottoms. Puck casts a spell, turning Bottom's head into that of an ass. Frightened by his monstrous appearance, the other members of the company run off. Titania, napping nearby, awakens and falls for Bottom the ass, charging her fairies to pamper him.

Oberon realizes Puck's mistake and sends him to dose Demetrius, leaving both Hermia's suitors in love with Helena and not her. The young lovers get in a big fight. Oberon checks on Titania, wins the changeling boy, cures her unnatural obsession, which she believes to have been a dream, and gets Puck to return Bottom to his human form. Bottom is greeted by his friends with much joy.

Theseus and Hippolyta, out hunting with Egeus on the morning of their wedding, like you do, discover the four young lovers asleep on the ground together. Relieved that all is as it should be, the royals invite the crazy kids to join in a triple wedding followed immediately by a ridiculous rendition of *Pyramus and Thisbe* by Bottom and company.

## WHO'S WHO IN THE PLAY

There are seven actors in TAM's 80-minute production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. To play all the roles written by Shakespeare, some of the actors will need to play multiple parts—a convention also used in Shakespeare's time. Here's how the doubling works:



**Bibi Mama: Hippolyta / Helena / Snug / Fairy**

**Hippolyta** is Queen of the Amazons, defeated by Theseus, and now betrothed to be his bride. **Helena** is a young woman of Athens and closest friend to Hermia. She is in love with Demetrius. **Snug** is one of the mechanicals cast as the Lion and by profession a joiner, or a builder of furniture. As **Fairy** one of Titania or Oberon's train.



**Zach Shotwell: Theseus / Quince / Fairy**

**Theseus** is Duke of Athens, and betrothed to Hippolyta. **Peter Quince** is a carpenter and the self-appointed director of the Mechanicals' play. As **Fairy**, one of Titania or Oberon's train.



**Ardarius Blakely: Demetrius / Flute / Fairy**

**Demetrius** is a young man of Athens who has been chosen by Egeus to marry his daughter, Hermia. Previously, he was in a relationship with Helena. **Francis Flute** a bellows-mender, who is cast as Thisbe in the play despite his protest. As **Fairy**, one of Titania or Oberon's train.



**Ashil Lee: Puck / Philostrate**

**Puck** is also known as Robin Goodfellow and is the prankster henchman to Oberon. **Philostrate** is the principal servant to Theseus and the court.



**Hannah Daly: Hermia / Titania / Snout**

**Hermia**—A young woman of Athens who falls in love with Lysander against her father's wishes. **Titania** is the queen of the fairies and wife to Oberon. **Tom Snout** is a tinker, cast as Wall in the Mechanicals' play.



**George Colligan: Lysander / Oberon / Starveling**

**Lysander** is a young man of Athens who is in love with Hermia; he plots their escape from Athens. **Oberon** is the king of the fairies, and husband to Titania. **Robin Starveling** is a tailor and plays Moonshine in the Mechanicals' play.



**Jamie Beth Weist: Egeus / Bottom / Fairy**

**Egeus** is a noble Athenian and father to Hermia; preferring Demetrius for her husband. **Nick Bottom** is a weaver with great aspirations of being an actor; he is cast as Pyramus in the Mechanicals' play. As **Fairy**, one of Titania or Oberon's train.

# ABOUT THE PLAY

## When was *Midsummer* Written?

Dates are tricky when it comes to Shakespearean history. The records that exist today are, well, kind of random. For example, we know that Queen Elizabeth had 40 pairs of velvet shoes, but we don't actually know when *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was first performed. We do know that it was entered into the Stationer's Register in 1600 and that it was probably written at least a few years before that. So many plays were written and performed in Elizabethan England that it would often take years for a publisher to determine that a play was popular enough to be printed. We also know that the first performance couldn't have been before 1594, because the theatres had closed down due to an outbreak of plague. It seems most likely that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written and performed sometime in 1595-96, one year after the first performances of *Romeo & Juliet*. Given the frivolity, theme, and dances in the play, it's likely that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was commissioned as a wedding play to celebrate the nuptials of an important aristocrat and then performed by Shakespeare's company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men.

## Where did Shakespeare Get the Idea for *Midsummer*?

It's no secret that most of Shakespeare's plays are based on pre-existing stories were popular during his lifetime. The Bard's contemporaries shared the same source material and sometimes they attended each other's productions to steal dialogue for their own plays. From which stories did Shakespeare borrow to create *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? One of the most likely was the work of Edmund Spenser, who wrote about sprites in *The Faerie Queene* and the *Epithalamion*, which is an ancient Greek-style poem about weddings. Shakespeare also pulled from Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*, which describes two men fighting over a woman, forcing Theseus to intervene, as well as Ovid's *Metamorphoses*—from which Shakespeare plucks the entire *Pyramus & Thisbe* story. The important thing is that while Shakespeare did use parts of other people's stories, he combined them in a way that was entirely his own. By using a familiar story (or two), Shakespeare was able to avoid exposition and get straight to the meat and fun of the plot.

## Who's Actually Dreaming in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?

The play is called *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but what part of the story is actually a dream? There are times when people sleep but the action continues around them. Is the dream simply the events that happen to the characters under the influence of flower juice? Are all of the events in the forest a dream? After all, when the lovers tell their tale to Theseus, he is quick to dismiss the whole thing as a dream, though Hippolyta points that all the stories match up. Maybe the dream starts when we enter the woods with Puck at the beginning of Act II. Maybe we need to go all the way back to the beginning. Theseus tells the Master of the Revels to, "Stir up the Athenian youth to merriment; Awake pert and nimble spirit of mirth." Almost immediately, Hermia, Lysander, Helena, and Demetrius arrive, caught in a Gordian Lovers' Knot. It almost seems like Theseus magically invokes the rest of the play. But then, at the end, when all is resolved including the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta, and the stage is completely empty except for Puck, he turns to the audience and says "If we shadows have offended, think but this, and all is mended, that you have but slumber'd here whilst these visions did appear." So maybe the audience are the dreamers.

## Slapstick and Physical Comedy in Shakespeare

Though Shakespeare did not include stage directions, it is almost certain that he employed physical comedy, particularly with his famous clowns, such as Touchstone, Feste, and Costard. In Shakespeare's time, clowning was influenced by the old Greek clowns, as well as the Italian Commedia Del'Arte movement. Following the departure of his first major clown actor, Will Kempe, Shakespeare began writing different kinds of clowns. He began to create wittier, more cerebral clowns for his new actor, Robert Armin, creating a clown persona that was more idiot savant than buffoon.

## The Magic of Fairies in *Midsummer*

Shakespeare's audiences, regardless of social class, believed in magic. The three main forms of magic that were practiced were astrology, alchemy, and sorcery. They also believed in mythical creatures like ghosts and fairies and deeply feared witchcraft. These beliefs are reflected in many of Shakespeare's plays, but are central to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Most of *Midsummer* takes place within the world of the fairies. In collusion with the midsummer season, the moon, and the flower-rich woodland, the fairies act as agents and incubators of changes undergone by the play's mortal characters. It should be noted that, in this play, unlike in previous accounts in literary and folk tradition, the fairies are essentially wholly helpful to mortals—or, at least to the play's aristocratic mortals. At the same time, just as English fairies traditionally were said to do, these fairies take an interest in the erotic and reproductive life of humans, especially that of young women.



Arthur Rackham's *Fairy Song*

The Elizabethans had a very different image of fairies than we do today. When modern audiences picture fairies (under the influence of the Victorians and especially J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*), they are most often tiny winged creatures, glowing with magic, but frail, beautiful and kind to humans. This was far from the Elizabethan idea of the Fairy Kingdom, although Shakespeare's play itself played a significant role in creating this more romantic and benevolent image of fairies.

For centuries, fairies were a source of fear and anxiety for many communities. These beings were believed to be forces of nature, fiendish creatures that were sometimes seen as little different from the demons of hell. Fairies were blamed for all kinds of mishaps, from a freak storm that destroyed the crops to a "spooked" horse that threw its rider. At best, their behavior towards humans was prankish, at its worst, malicious and frightening, such as the belief that fairies would steal human babies away by night and replace them with grotesque "changelings."



*Midsummer Eve* Robert Hughes 1908

The Elizabethan fairies evolved from several traditions: Celtic tales of nature spirits and "little people," Germanic legends of kobolds, gnomes and dwarves, and the Greco-Roman myths about satyrs, fauns and nymphs. These remnants of Pagan mythologies survived particularly in folktales and oral traditions, but the belief in them, especially in the countryside (such as Shakespeare's native Stratford) was often real and intense.

With his plays Shakespeare changed the way the world viewed fairies. His fairies owe as much to courtly Italian romances as to the traditional spirit lore in England. Unlike the solitary fiends of lore who lived from moment to moment, his fairies are structured in a court system with a king and queen. Plays like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* show fairies that invest in mortals and take sides in non-spirit world politics. Like the mortals, their actions are based in a sense of justice and their own emotions and desires. Fairies are still tricksters, but no longer intend harm to humans. Instead they are celebratory and deeply tied to nature through song and dance. Shakespeare even changed their physical appearance—in his plays fairies are tiny and incredibly swift. Without Shakespeare's influence, many of the fairies we know today probably wouldn't exist.

# The Wisdom of Nick Bottom

by Emi Parker on the blog, *A Cheery Beggar*



**Phylicia Rashad and Danny Burstein as Titania and Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

One of Shakespeare's most poetic speeches is spoken by a character who spends half the play turned halfway into a donkey. The play is *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the character is the very foolish Nick Bottom. Always pay attention to Shakespeare's fools. Often, they possess wisdom which escapes the wits of more refined men.

The main plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* involves four young people having troubles with love. In defiance of the authority figures, they run off to the forest and, unknowingly, into

the realm of the fairy king and queen. The fairies try playing matchmakers and merry madness ensues. Meanwhile, in the ordered world of the city, the duke's wedding night approaches. And as a comic sort of sideshow, Shakespeare adds a band of rustics to the mix who are preparing a play in honor of the duke's marriage.

The workers have chosen to act out the tragedy of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. This is an absurd choice for the duke's wedding party: *Pyramus and Thisbe* are star-crossed lovers who both end up committing suicide. Shakespeare pokes fun at himself and his playwriting profession in his portrayal of these lovable fools. If Peter Quince is the bumbling ringleader, then Nick Bottom is the main attraction in the whole silly circus.

The actors go off to practice in the woods where they, too, get caught in the fairies' mischief-making. In the middle of rehearsal, a fairy named Puck enters and decides to turn Bottom's head into the head of a donkey. Bottom's friends flee from him in fright, but poor Bottom has no idea why. He cannot see his donkey's head, nor can any of us (except rarely) see our own absurdities. Bottom concludes that his friends must be playing a trick on him. "I see their knavery: this is to make an ass of me," he says, unaware of how truly he speaks.

Abandoned in the woods, Bottom sings a song to himself and happens to wake the fairy queen. Earlier, the fairy king cast a spell to make the queen "madly dote upon the next live creature" she sees. Consequently, Bottom—donkey's head and all—finds himself swept through the midsummer night with the queen of the fairies doting on his every utterance. Bottom's comical sort of union with the fairy queen is more than mere farce. Shakespeare describes the scene with beautiful language that suggests something almost magical in the meeting of the low, earthly nature and the high, spiritual nature. It recalls an historical account of when the low earthly nature and high spiritual nature met in a town called Bethlehem, and that, too, was attended by rough beasts and uneducated men.

As with most comedies, the dreams and revels of the night give way to dawn and the daylight of reason. The four young people resolve their troubles and return to the ordered society of the city, the fairy king frees his queen from the love spell, and Puck restores Bottom to his natural state. But before everything returns quite to normal, as Shakespeare shifts us from the wild wood to the

structured city, in the misty morning twilight hours where distinctions remain a bit hazy, Bottom awakes. He is back to his old self, and yet he is not quite his old self. He says:

[Awakening] When my cue comes, call me, and I will answer: my next is, 'Most fair Pyramus.' Heigh-ho! Peter Quince! Flute, the bellows-mender! Snout, the tinker! Starveling! God's my life, stolen hence, and left me asleep! I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was: man is but an ass, if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was—there is no man can tell what. Methought I was,—and methought I had,—but man is but a patched fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream: it shall be called Bottom's Dream, because it hath no bottom; and I will sing it in the latter end of a play, before the duke: peradventure, to make it the more gracious, I shall sing it at her death.



**Kevin Kline as Bottom and Michelle Pfeiffer as Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

In the beginning of the play, we hear Bottom brag about his abilities. But now, after he has been treated like royalty by the queen of the fairies herself, Bottom curiously refrains from boasting. Or if he boasts, he boasts about the “most rare vision” and not about himself. Bottom concludes that it is past the wit of man [including himself] “to say what dream it was,” and that man [including himself] “is but an ass, if he go about to expound this dream.”

Bottom feels the urge to explain his experience, yet cannot find the right words. His speech captures the dilemma between experience and expression which is the dilemma of the human condition. As C.S. Lewis put it: “as thinkers we are cut off from what we think about; as tasting, touching, willing, loving, hating, we do not clearly understand. The more lucidly we think, the more we are cut off: the more deeply we enter into reality, the less we can think.” Bottom demonstrates the humor in this, and we chuckle when he interrupts himself and confuses the sense organs, but this humor is tinged with tragedy. A sense of loss attends every attempt to speak about experience. How often do you begin to tell your friends some story and end by throwing up your hands and saying “you just had to be there?”

Bottom realizes he cannot fully relate his experiences; he also cannot help but try. And so it is with us: we know we'll never be able to explain everything. After struggling to say what he means, Bottom says that perhaps Peter Quince can capture the vision in a ballad. Bottom concludes that art can help connect us to the mysteries of experience. We turn our wonder and our confusion into songs and stories and poetry and paintings. We carve huge chunks of marble out of the mountains to try to communicate some human emotion. We compose symphonies to try to capture a sense of the seasons passing. Perhaps this makes us, as Bottom says, patched fools. But true wisdom begins with humility and accepting the position of the fool.

Shakespeare gives other characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* sharp wits and keen eyes. But he gives the most profound vision to one of the dullest characters (Bottom is the only human character who sees the spirit world of the fairies), and he speaks the most profound truths through one of the simplest voices. This suggests that the conclusions Bottom reaches are not reserved for intellectuals in ivory towers. They are fundamental truths of human experience.

## History of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*



Costume Design for Oberon

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* was first published in 1600 but the exact date of the first production is uncertain. Scholars presume it was written for the wedding of Elizabeth Carey, granddaughter of Queen Elizabeth's Lord Chamberlain, in 1596. Whenever it was first performed, it is clear that *Midsummer* has been in almost constant production since, interpreted with a wide variety of styles and techniques. *Midsummer* is unique, not only from the rest of Shakespeare's comedies, but from his entire collection of dramatic works. Shakespeare is given credit for the rich stories and interweaving plots of his plays but we also acknowledge that the vast majority of his works are influenced by and borrowed from existing plays, narrative poetry, historical chronicles, or other primary source material. By contrast, *Midsummer* is a largely original work. And though it has continued to be popular, it wasn't always produced exactly as Shakespeare intended.

In the late 17th century, Thomas Betterton produced Purcell's opera *The Fairy Queen*. Rather than working from Shakespeare's text, Purcell used a new libretto, most likely written by Betterton, very loosely based *Midsummer*. Operatic versions remained the model for productions of *Midsummer* for the next hundred years. Until 1840, when Madame Vestris, a London-born actress who ultimately managed her own theater, returned Shakespeare's original text accompanied by Mendelssohn's now famous incidental music. In the latter half of the 19th century productions became grand spectacles featuring choruses of children as fairies and women playing the roles of Puck and Oberon, a tradition begun by Madame Vestris, who played the part of Oberon in her 1840 production. These sumptuous productions included blankets of flowers and real thickets—one 1905 revival included live rabbits.

In 1914, Harley Granville-Barker dispensed with the spectacle for his production at the Savoy Theatre. His highly-stylized set was composed of slate gray flats and a forestage that brought the action closer to the audience. Granville-Barker also substituted English folk songs for Mendelssohn's music and developed a unique, mechanical style of movement for his gold-painted fairies.

In the 20th century, *Midsummer* was produced in a wide range of styles and forms, from the expressionistic, romantic production by Max Reinhardt in 1935 to a psychedelic production in the 1960s directed by Peter Hall and featuring green fairies, go-go boots, and leather mini-skirts. Perhaps the most influential production in the 20th century was Peter Brook's featuring a white box for the set and fairies on trapeze. Brook's production was also important for his introduction of doubling Theseus/Oberon and Hippolyta/Titania. Rather than contrast a "bouncing Amazon" and a frilly fairy queen, Brook's idea draws attention to Hippolyta's silence in the opening scene and then enables the mortal couple to work out their problems and tensions as Titania and Oberon. Brook's production paved the way for many diverse new ways of approaching and exploring one of Shakespeare's most popular comedies.



Alan Howard as Oberon, Sara Kestelman as Titania and John Kane as Puck in Peter Brook's 1970 *Midsummer*.

## Fearless Females in *Midsummer*



The Fearless Females from Theater at Monmouth's 2015 Summer Rep production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a play about women busting patriarchal norms. Okay, maybe that wasn't Shakespeare's original intention because it is also about many other things—like fairies, Amazons, workers, and love—but the agency of the female characters is perhaps most relevant to a modern audience. *Midsummer* contains scene after scene where women say “no” to men at almost every turn.

First off, the court (Athenian and Fairy): Theseus and Hippolyta meet on the battlefield (spoiler alert—he wins), and their relationship continues to stumble

over who will lead. The King and Queen of the Fairies, Oberon and Titania, change the weather over his fixation with her changeling child. Hermia refuses to obey her father (or Theseus) and wed the man of their choosing, preferring to follow her own heart. Helena refuses to accept Demetrius's rejection of her, following him into the woods at her own peril. And because this is Shakespeare and comedy (and he was a man way ahead of his time), none of these women are rebuked for their “transgressions” but instead they reorient the rules of love and marriage. In this new “society,” a man and a woman can be partners in leadership; young women can choose, chase, and catch their own mate without parental consent; and fairies, male or female, can be endowed with characteristics of either gender—unsettling Athenian (and perhaps Elizabethan) societal norms and toppling the patriarchy.

Like many Shakespearean comedies (*Taming of the Shrew*, for example), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* dramatizes gender tensions that arise from complicated familial and romantic relationships. When the play opens, a young woman fights her father for the right to choose her own spouse, a duke is set to marry a woman he recently conquered in battle, and the King and Queen of Fairies are at war with each other, a battle of the sexes so intense that it disrupts the natural world. We think it's awesome that Shakespeare wasn't afraid to poke fun at the absurdity of gender roles so many centuries ago.

At the start of *Midsummer* the men expect to take the lead in most areas of social decision-making. It is Egeus who invokes the Athenian law that will condemn his daughter to death if she doesn't obey him; Theseus who prescribes for her another (very limited) “choice”; Theseus who has defeated Hippolyta at war and been granted her hand in marriage; and Demetrius and Lysander who radically change their affections under the spell of the love potion. In response, Helena, Hermia, and Titania display an inventiveness that makes change possible. Hermia refuses to obey Athenian law; Helena hatches the plot by which to “win” Demetrius; and Titania is steadfast on resisting the control that Oberon insists upon. They were warrior women just like Queen Elizabeth, the reigning monarch.

Queen Elizabeth defied all expectations of her age. She never married because she realized early that marriage meant loss of power. Even though the general opinion of the time was that women's minds were weak and that a female head of state was “an offense against nature,” she ruled with great political skill and cunning. So, in the end, in that all-inclusive way of his, Shakespeare took his audience into the mystical woods of change, only to bring them again to their present, where a new world order was being shaped before their eyes, and a warrior woman wielded power.

# COLLABORATING ON DESIGN CONCEPT

This activity will provide your students with insight into theatrical design and practical experience in the creative process that stage designers use when establishing the world of a play.

**Essential Question:** How can we communicate the specific world of a play to an audience using characterization and analysis of the text?

## Objectives:

- Examine the plot, characters, and themes of the play
- Explore *what happens in the play* and *what the play is about* to inform design choices
- Analyze design choices based on playwright's intentions and relevancy to a modern audience

**Overview:** The job of theatrical designers is to support the director's vision and interpret the playwright's intentions by using costumes, sets, lights, and sound to create the world of the play for a modern audience. Each designer's work should:

- Evoke the mood and tone of the production
- Specify the time and place
- Clarify relationships between characters

Designers read the play many times searching for clues contained in the text about the look and feel of the play. They research the period in which the play was written as well as analyzing the plot and characters for visual motifs. The design team meets with the director to brainstorm a specific concept or approach to the play. The designers collaborate to ensure that all of the elements come together in a cohesive manner.

## Activity:

1. Divide students into teams of five with each member assuming the role of one of the artistic team for the production: director, sets, costumes, lights, and sound. Ask students to discuss the plot, character, time and place, and overall concept for the production.
  - a. Determine the mood of the production from beginning to end. How might it influence the design?
  - b. Decide where to set *Midsummer* to make it the most relevant for your audience? (Coaching) Remind students that the concept must work for the entire play—not just certain scenes.
  - c. What images or motifs occur repeatedly throughout the play? How would you show these onstage? What are the different locations of the play?
2. Once a setting is decided, ask each group to research the time period in order to be as authentic as possible in creating the world of the play.
3. Each member of the team should produce a creative representation of their design (a poster, sound clips, a collage, fabric swatches, and so on).
4. Ask each group member to write a design/director statement in support of the concept, including the historical research that supports their decisions.
5. Display the concept boards as a team and have each team present their concept to the class.

**Reflection:** After students see the production, ask them to reflect on the design choices made by the TAM team. Compare and contrast TAM's production concept with the students' vision for the play. How were the designer choices similar or different? How did they serve the play?

## ON SHAKESPEARE

No man's life has been the subject of more speculation than William Shakespeare's. For all his fame and celebrity, Shakespeare's personal history remains a mystery. We know a man named William Shakespeare was baptized at Stratford upon Avon on April 26, 1564, and was buried at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford on April 25, 1616. Tradition holds that he was born three days earlier, and that he died on his birthday—April 23—but this is perhaps more romantic myth than fact.

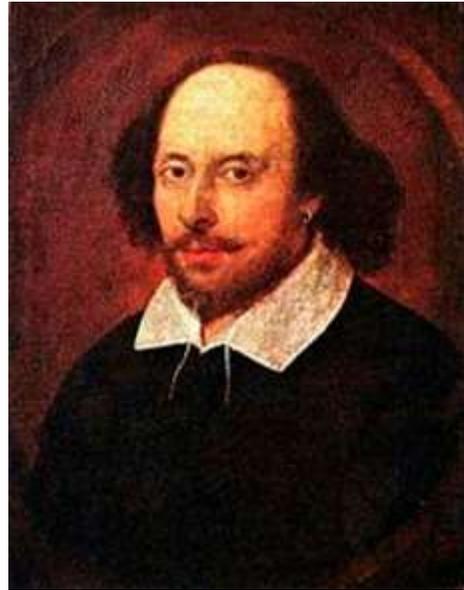
Scholars assume that Shakespeare went to grammar school, since his father was first a member of the Stratford Council and later high bailiff. A grammar school education would have meant that Shakespeare was exposed to the rudiments of Latin rhetoric, logic, and literature.

Church records tell us that banns (announcements) were published for the marriage of a William Shakespeare to an Ann Whatley in 1582. On November 27 of the same year a marriage license was granted to 18 year old William and 26 year old Anne Hathaway. A daughter, Susanna, was born to the couple six months later. Twins, Hamnet and Judith, were born soon after. We know that Hamnet died in childhood on August 11, 1596. We don't know how the young Shakespeare came to travel to London or how he first came to the stage.

Whatever the facts may be, it is clear that in the years between 1582 and 1592, William Shakespeare became involved in the London theatre scene as an actor and playwright. By 1594, Shakespeare was listed as a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, one of the most popular acting companies in London. He was a member of this company for the rest of his career, which lasted until 1611. When James I came to the throne in 1603, he issued a royal license to Shakespeare and his fellow players, inviting them to call themselves the King's Men. In 1608, the King's Men leased the Blackfriar's Theatre in London. This theatre, which had artificial lighting and was probably heated, served as their winter playhouse. The famous Globe Theatre was their summer performance space.

In 1616 Shakespeare's daughter Judith married Thomas Quiney, the son of a neighbor in Stratford. Her father revised his will six weeks later; within a month he had died. The revised version of William Shakespeare's will bequeathed his house and all the goods to his daughter Susanna and her husband Dr. John Hall, leaving Judith and Thomas only a small sum of money; his wife, who survived him, received the couple's second best bed.

In the years since Shakespeare's death, he has risen from obscurity to the most read, adapted, and translated writer of all time. In the 1800s, his plays were so popular that many refused to believe that an actor from Stratford had written them. To this day some believe that Sir Francis Bacon or Edward De Vere, the Earl of Oxford, was the author. Still others prefer to believe that Walter Raleigh or Christopher Marlowe penned the lines attributed to Shakespeare. While most people are content to believe that genius can spring up in any social class or setting, the gap between the known facts and the myths that surround Shakespeare's life leaves ample room for speculation.



The Chandos portrait of Shakespeare, painted 1601-1610.

## ON ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND



Portrait of Queen Elizabeth by George Gower

The age of Shakespeare was a great time in English history. During the reign of Elizabeth I (1558—1603), England emerged as the leading naval and commercial power of the Western world, consolidating this position with the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. During this time, Elizabeth I firmly established the Church of England (begun by her father Henry VIII after a dispute with the Pope). London in the 16th century underwent a dramatic transformation; the population grew 400% between 1500 and 1600, swelling to nearly 200,000 people in the city proper and outlying region by the time an emerging artist from Stratford came to town. A rising merchant middle class was carving out a productive livelihood, and the economy was booming.

During Shakespeare's lifetime, England also experienced a tremendous cultural revival. This so-called English Renaissance found expression in architecture, music, literature, and drama. Shakespeare both drew inspiration from high and popular culture of the English Renaissance. Popular entertainment during the 16th century tended to be boisterous and often violent. Many men, women, and children attended public executions of criminals that took place on a regular basis, and persons of all social classes and genders attended theatre performances. The trade of bookmaking flourished during the period as public education fueled the appetite for great works in print.

During the years 1590-1593, England suffered from an outbreak of terrible proportions; the bubonic plague or "Black Death" claimed so many lives that English society stood on the verge of collapse. Many businesses, including theatres, closed, in part to keep people from spreading the disease and in part because of the labor shortage that resulted from such widespread illness and death. Once the epidemic subsided, the theatres reopened and quickly regained their former popularity.

This explosion of commerce and culture lasted throughout Elizabeth's reign and into that of her successor, James I. James' rule brought many changes to English life; the two most pivotal were a bankrupt economy and an intense dissatisfaction from a minority religious group—the Puritans. In September 1642, the Puritan Parliament issued an edict that forbade all stage plays and closed the theatres; an act that effectively brought to a close the Elizabethan Renaissance. Theatres rapidly fell into disrepair and neglect until the Restoration in 1660.

In writing his plays and sonnets, William Shakespeare drew ideas from many different sources. His eye for detail and his understanding of human nature enabled him to create some of the most enduring works of drama and poetry ever produced. But his work also provides an insightful commentary on 16th-century English values, life, history, and thought.



## PERFORMANCES IN SHAKESPEARE'S TIME

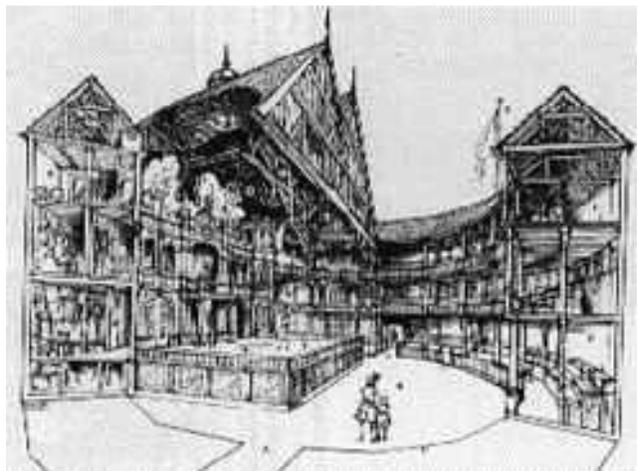


In Shakespeare's day theatre was the most popular form of entertainment. The theatre district was located in Bankside, just outside of London across the Thames. Bankside was a seedy part of town known for its taverns, brothels, gambling houses, and bear baiting arenas. Playhouses were built to accommodate an audience of almost 3,000 people sitting in boxes, benches on the stage, or standing in the pit directly in front of the actors. As there was no electricity for lighting, performances started at 2:00pm to make the most of daylight.

All classes came to the theatre; in one audience you could see nobleman, court dandies, and young apprentices. To pack the audiences, playhouses undersold all other popular entertainment—which included bear baiting arenas. A day at the Elizabethan theatre cost just one penny—

equivalent to the price of a movie ticket today. For twopence or threepence more a patron could purchase a seat in the gallery and rent a cushion.

In a typical season a theatre company might play six days a week, forty-nine weeks a year, and perform more than forty plays, over half of them brand new. Shakespeare's company, The Lord Chamberlain's Men (renamed The King's Men after James I took the throne), was considered the most talented company of the time. Acting was not a well-respected profession at this time, and women were not allowed to perform on stage; boys performed all female parts, including Juliet and the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. In a day when acting paid enough for the average actor to get by, the Lord Chamberlain's Men did so well one or two company members became prosperous middle-class citizens. Shakespeare was writing for the stage in an exciting time where theatre was a fast paced popular form of entertainment attended by courtiers and whores, lawyers and cutpurses, tradesmen, and servants.



# VERSE AND PROSE

## Iambic Pentameter

Shakespeare wrote much of his dialogue in a form of poetry, following the rules regarding rhythm and meter that were commonly used in his time. The form he used is called iambic pentameter [call out]. “Iambic” means a line of iambs; iambs are two syllables together, the first one is unstressed and the second is stressed. For instance, say the word ‘today’—notice how the ‘day’ seems stronger than the ‘to’? Try reversing the stresses and see how it sounds. “Pentameter” refers to the number of iambs in the line. Penta is the Greek word for five—think about the Pentagon and how many sides it has—so there are five iambs in each line.

So iambic pentameter feels like a heartbeat: Short, **Long**; Short, **Long**; Short, **Long**; Short, **Long**; Short, **Long**. An actor uses scansion to interpret the meter of a piece of verse. It can tell the reader, the actor, and the audience important information about the character.

### ROMEO

But **soft**, what **light** through **yonder window breaks**?

Actors use the notation “u” for unstressed syllables and “/” for stressed:

u / u / u / u / u /  
But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?

Actors use the meter as a clue to discover what Shakespeare's characters are feeling. The stressed words are usually the most important (or “operative”) words in a verse line. But sometimes the iambic pentameter lines are “irregular” (meaning they don't have 10 unstressed and stressed syllables) giving the actor another clue. For example, from *Hamlet*:

### HAMLET

To be, or not to be: that is the question,

u / u / u / u / u / u  
To **be**, or **not** to **be**: that **is** the **question**,

Shakespeare could easily have had the line end with “quest” instead of “question” making it a regular line of verse. However, to show Hamlet's state of questioning and imbalance Shakespeare gives the actor a line with an extra beat—11 syllables—to emphasize how he is feeling. This is called a feminine ending (because it ends unstressed and is therefore weaker). An actor might also choose to flip the stresses after the full stop in the center of the line (called a caesura), creating a trochee (a stressed/unstressed foot).

## Prose

Shakespeare wrote his plays using two styles—verse and prose. Verse, the style used most by Shakespeare, is text written with a meter or rhythm. Prose is text written without meter or rhythm. Prose is a more common form of speech, sounds more natural, and does not follow the rules or form of poetry. Prose is most often found in the comedies where servants or lower classes (or characters talking about “lewd” subjects) speak in prose. Shakespeare often uses the switch from verse to prose (or back) to indicate a change in emotion or mood within a scene. In *Romeo and Juliet* Mercutio switches from verse to prose and back again in the scene where he is killed. Shakespeare's shift from verse to prose provides a new and different way to convey not only wit and humor but also great depth of feeling and character.

# BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

## 1. Line at a Time

Using a section of the text, type each line on a separate slip of paper and distribute so each student has one line. Working independently, students walk around the room reading their line aloud, experimenting with different inflections or ways of speaking. Regroup in a circle and ask each student to read her/his line aloud. Discuss questions about language or word choice. Ask students:

- What might this play be about, based on the lines you heard?
- What images came to mind when reading or hearing the line(s)?
- What type of person do you imagine spoke the line(s)?

## 2. The Merry Wanderer of the Night

In Act 2, Scene 1, a fairy meets Puck in the woods and addresses him by some of his many names: Puck, Robin Goodfellow, Hobgoblin. Discuss the many faces of Puck as a class; is he simply a trickster or mischievous spirit? Does he have any redeeming qualities? Ask students to research the many images of Puck available online and select a few that represent Puck during three or four specific moments in the play. Encourage them to look up the meaning of each of the names the fairy calls Puck. Label each image with the “name” that best reflects each definition.

## 3. Gender Roles in *Midsummer*

Choose one of the scenes from the play that has both male and female characters in it and perform it out in class three times: once with an all-male cast (like in Shakespeare’s time), once with an all-female cast (like in many productions in our time), and once with the roles assigned according to gender. How does the casting affect your interpretation of the scene? Is one version inherently funnier or more tragic or more emotional? Discuss the various versions of the scene in light of the fact that, in Shakespeare’s time, all the female roles in the play (Hermia, Helena, Titania and Hippolyta) would have been played by boys since it was illegal for women to appear on stage.

## 4. The Fifteen-Minute *Midsummer*

Divide into five groups, and have each group take one act of the play. Your task is to create a three-minute version of your act, using only Shakespeare’s words. Choose carefully the lines from your act that carry the most important information and advance the story. When each group is done, you will have a 15-minute version of *Midsummer* which you can perform for one another.

## 5. Fairies in Visual Art

Shakespeare has left much room for interpretation in how the Fairies can be portrayed. 19th-century artists inspired by Shakespeare put scenes of his play on canvas. Visit this site and view paintings depicting Bottom, Titania, Puck, or Oberon from *Midsummer*.

([http://www.english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare\\_Illustrated/MidsummerPaintings.html](http://www.english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare_Illustrated/MidsummerPaintings.html))

Have students compare expectations of these characters with the artists’ rendering. Keep these images in mind when attending the production and compare all interpretations.

# AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

## 1. Critics' Corner

Write a review of this production of *Midsummer*. Be sure to include specific information and your own reactions to both the acting and the design elements (like set and costumes). Explain what you liked about the production and what you would have done differently, and support your opinions. Then submit your review to Theater at Monmouth, or see if it can be published in your school newspaper.

## 2. Manga Me This

Ask students to brainstorm the key scenes in *Midsummer* and list them in order. Divide students into groups and assign each group a scene (or two) and ask them to create a tableaux that communicates the major plot point of the scene. Take digital photos and post on the board. Next assign each group a scene to turn into one page of a *Midsummer Manga*. Ask students to select roles within their groups: Illustrators, Copy Writers, Researchers, and Editors. Each job should focus on developing their part of the page while continuing to collaborate on the whole. For the dialogue they can select lines from the original play or write their own. Students should select an overall artwork style for their Manga and they can use computer software or color by hand to create the page. Assemble them all into one book. Add a title page, credits, and send a copy to Theater at Monmouth!

## 3. (Re)Making History in Modern Times

Shakespeare's plays are continually adapted into other media and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is no exception. Check out this list of film adaptations of the work: <http://www.signature-reads.com/2015/06/joyous-bard-the-5-best-film-adaptations-a-midsummer-nights-dream/>. Discuss how artists transform ideas from literature into their own original work. Have students create their own work of art based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Possibilities include a drawing, a poem, a short story, a video of a scene, or a piece of music. Work can be shared and displayed as students discuss their responses to the play. Create a class webpage, post the artworks, and share with TAM.

## 4. Alert the Media!

Big events are afoot in the course of *Midsummer*. Theseus and Hippolyta have a royal wedding, Hermia and Lysander try to elope, a troupe of amateur actors get their first big gig, and Bottom has a very strange night in the woods, and so on. Assign the big events of the play to members of the class as if they were reporters. Using text from Shakespeare's play as much as possible, have each student create a news story. Bring the pieces together and create a complete newspaper, television newscast, or blog post news coverage.

## 5. Words, Words, Words

Shakespeare used at least 15,000 different words in his plays and poems (some think it is closer to 30,000); the King James Bible used only 8,000. And when he couldn't find the right word, he made up some of his own. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) credits Shakespeare with introducing over 500 original words. Check out the list of Shakespeare's "Frequently Encountered Words" at <http://www.shakespeareswords.com/FEW>. Then have students make up a few words of their own including definitions!

We would love to read student writings or view the artwork they create in response to the play. Please send to: Theater at Monmouth, P.O. Box 385, Monmouth, ME 04259.

# RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

## Books on Shakespeare and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

- Asimov, Isaac. *Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare*. Doubleday, 1978
- Briggs, K.M. *The Anatomy of Puck*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Will in the World*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004.
- Hall, Peter. *Shakespeare's Advice to the Players*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2003.
- Wells, Stanley and Sarah Stanton, Eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Stage*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Williams, Gary Jay. *Our Moonlight Revels: A Midsummer Night's Dream in the Theatre*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997.

## Midsummer on Film

- 1909 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. A Silent Short Film. Director: Charles Kent. Featuring Charlie Chaplin. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yjlc-8RRJ2c>
- 1935 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Directors: Dieterle and Reinhardt. Featuring: James Cagney and Mickey Rooney. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c18-FtBWbno>
- 1999 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Director: Michael Hoffman. Featuring: Kevin Kline, Michelle Pfeiffer, Stanley Tucci, Rupert Everett, Calista Flockhart, and Christian Bale. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWQkD-Clk58>
- 1968 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Directed by Sir Peter Hall. Featuring Helen Mirren, Judi Dench, and Ian Holm. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RD-7aRcxmA&oref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3D4RD-7aRcxmA&has\\_verified=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RD-7aRcxmA&oref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3D4RD-7aRcxmA&has_verified=1)

## Websites

- PBS's *In Search of Shakespeare* <http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/>
- Folger Shakespeare Library <http://www.folger.edu>
- MIT Shakespeare: Complete Works, <http://the-tech.mit.edu/Shakespeare/>

## Common Core Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy addressed in the Guide: Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening

- Comprehension and Collaboration
  - Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas, and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
  - Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
  - Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
- Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
  - Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
  - Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
  - Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.