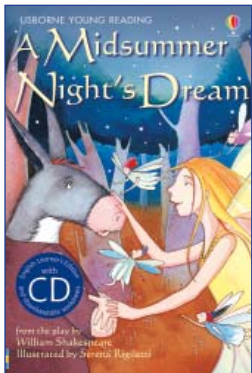


A Midsummer Night's Dream • Teacher's notes



Author: William Shakespeare, adapted by Lesley Sims

Reader level: Advanced

Word count: 2564

Lexile level: 490L

Text type: Adapted classic

About the story

This famous tale of confused love and fairy tricks begins with preparations for the marriage of Theseus, Duke of Athens, to Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons. An old man bursts in with his daughter, Hermia, and her two suitors. Hermia loves Lysander, but her father Egeus wants her to marry Demetrius. Ordered to obey her father, Hermia and Lysander run away to the forest instead. They confide in a friend, Helena, who then tells Demetrius, hoping that Hermia's elopement will make him take an interest in her instead.

Meanwhile, six workmen are putting on a play for the Duke's wedding. It's supposed to be a tragedy, but their amateur approach is more comic. They go to rehearse in the forest. Elsewhere in the forest, Oberon and Titania, the fairy king and queen, are arguing. Oberon decides to play a trick on Titania, and sends his jester, Puck, in search of a rare plant for a love potion. Then he overhears Demetrius rejecting Helena, and tells Puck to use the potion on him too. Unfortunately Puck enchants Lysander by mistake, and makes him fall in love with Helena. Then he magically sets a donkey's head onto one of the actors, Bottom, and when the spellbound Titania wakes up, she sees the donkey-headed man and falls madly in love.

Helena is pursued by Lysander and Demetrius, believing they have conspired to make fun of her, while Hermia is rejected and furious. At last, Oberon and Puck restore Lysander and take pity on Bottom and Titania. Theseus and Hippolyta and the two young couples are married together, and Bottom and his friends get to present their play while the fairies watch, and Puck sprinkles everyone with fairy dust.

About the author

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, and became famous as an actor and writer when he moved to London. He wrote hundreds of poems and almost 40 plays, loved worldwide for their dramatic range, dazzling use of language, complex characters and enduring stories. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of his most successful and frequently performed comedies.

Words and phrases of interest, and unfamiliar words

Help your students to develop strategies for unfamiliar words, so that you don't have to interrupt the flow of the story often to explain vocabulary. You might suggest they make a quick note of words as they read, or mark their place on the page with removable sticky notes or index tabs. Encourage them to deduce meanings: are they familiar with any part of the word (e.g. "horror" in "horrified")? Can they guess from the context (e.g. "plead" followed by "Let me marry her")? You could look at different strategies for learning new vocabulary, such as making word clouds or thematic lists.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|------------|-----|-------------|-----|----------------|-----|----------------|--------|------------|
| p2 | characters | p13 | bustle | p26 | glee | p38 | to take (good) | puppet | |
| | engaged | p14 | craftsman | p27 | lullaby | | care of | p48 | dawn |
| | enchanted | p19 | rehearse | p29 | cast his spell | | something | p51 | miserable |
| p6 | fit for a | p21 | nagging | p30 | gloom | p40 | delight | p53 | cuddling |
| | queen | | page [a boy | p31 | teasing | p41 | sound asleep | p54 | bless |
| p9 | plead | | servant] | p33 | audience | p42 | groaned | p56 | shrugged |
| p10 | nun | p23 | jester | p34 | clearing | p45 | in on the joke | p57 | outrageous |
| p11 | dismayed | | mischievous | p37 | shield | p46 | furious | p60 | fanfare |



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Before reading

Write the words MIDSUMMER NIGHT on the board. What does this mean to your students? Countries further from the Equator have more pronounced seasons. In summer, the days are longer and warmer. Midsummer Day has the longest daylight hours and the shortest night. There's a long tradition of celebrating this. In some countries' folklore, Midsummer Night is when the fairies get up to mischief...

Now show your class a picture of Shakespeare. [There's a small picture of him holding a quill at the end of this book.] Does anyone know who he is? What's the feather (quill) for? Write WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE on the board, at the top. He wrote a play about a Midsummer Night. Can anyone name it? Change MIDSUMMER NIGHT into A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

Can the students name any more Shakespeare plays? List comedies on the left (*Twelfth Night, All's Well that Ends Well, Much Ado about Nothing*, etc.) and tragedies on the right (*Hamlet, Macbeth, Romeo & Juliet*, etc.) Ask the class if they know why you've put the plays into lists. Explain if necessary that comedies are plays that have happy endings and tragedies have sad endings. Which elements would you expect to find in which kind of play: weddings, death, true love, quarrels, jealousy, misunderstanding, magic? You'll find they all occur (including Bottom/Pyramus' stage death) in A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Reading or listening

You can listen to the story on CD or read it aloud to the students, take turns to read or read together silently. Each double page spread in the book is one track on the CD, so that you can pause between tracks or repeat tracks if your students need it. The first reading is in a British English accent, and it is followed by an American English reading. The words are exactly the same.

During reading: you might like to ask some of these questions.

- p5 What can we tell about Theseus already? [He's rich, important, happy, etc.]
- p9 Do we have the same law today? Do fathers choose who their daughters marry?
- p10 Why would they make Hermia become a nun? [Nuns aren't allowed to marry because they devote themselves entirely to religious life.]
- p13 Why is Helena so sad?
- p14 Do these names sound like the other names, classic and heroic? Why not, do you think – is Shakespeare trying to tell you something about the characters?
- p17 Is it strange for a man to play a girl's part? [It wasn't in Shakespeare's time, or in Classical times either, since actors were always men.]
- p18 How would you describe Bottom? [Over-excited, silly, funny, vain, etc.]
- p23 What's a jester? [Kings used to have jesters to entertain them and make them laugh.]
- p25 How would you describe Helena's love? [Desperate, hopeless, intense, etc.]
- p33 Do you think Bottom really needs to tell the audience it's just pretend?
- p35 What do you think Puck's brilliant idea is?
- p38 Is Bottom enjoying Titania's attention?
- p43 Why doesn't Helena believe Lysander?
- p47 How might Helena and Hermia feel now?
- p48 Why does it matter that it's almost dawn? [Perhaps their magic only works at night?]
- p50 Imagine how this might look on stage, with everyone running in different directions...
- p58 Was it all a dream?
- p59 Does it seem odd that the audience are enjoying the sad tale? Is it sad... or funny?

After reading

What do the class think of the story? Did they find any of it confusing? Do you think Shakespeare made it confusing on purpose? Perhaps that helps the audience to sympathize with the characters and enjoy the resolution at the end.

What does the story tell us about love? Can we help who we fall in love with? Does love make us behave kindly, fairly and reasonably? Is all the confusion purely comic? Could it ever tip over into tragedy?

Why do you think this story is still popular today? You could search for pictures of different interpretations. Some are classically fairytale-pretty, others can be more modern and edgy. Which do students prefer?